"WOMEN OF MANHATTAN" was first presented by the Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Managing Director) at the City Center Theatre in New York City on May 13, 1986. It was directed by Ron Lagomarsino; the sets were by Adrianne Lobel; the costumes were by Ann Emonts; the lighting was by James F. Ingalls; the sound was by Stan Metelits; the production stage manager was Tom Aberger.

The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

Billie................................................. Nancy Mette
Rhonda............................................. J. Smith-Cameron
Judy................................................. Jayne Haynes
Bob.................................................... Keith Szarabajka
Duke................................................... Tom Wright

This play is dedicated to women, women, women, women, women, women, women, women, women, women, women, women, women, women, women, women, women, women, women.

AND

a guy named Larry Sigman

CHARACTERS

Rhonda Louise: 28, hails from the Deep South, speaks and moves in a very deliberate way, and is slender and slow to react. Her frizzy dark brown hair frames a delicate, sensitive face. She is, by nature, always a trifle weary and a trifle solemn, or very weary and very solemn.

Billie: 30, has a high, melodious voice and a dramatic view of her life. When she broods, she sees and hears nothing but her own inner dialogue. Her honey blond tresses surround her great big eyes in her pretty face. She's an exotic, high-strung bird.

Judy: 30, is an independent Connecticut Yankee who has been overtaken by her own cynicism.

These three women love each other.
SCENE I

Rhonda Louise's apartment. The background is a drop depicting Manhattan apartment buildings at night, all of their windows lit, à la the old The Late Show. Up Right, suspended in the air of an imaginary sidwall, are some lace curtains establishing a window. Down Left is a white doorframe in an imaginary sidwall.

Down Right is a white dining table. On the table are the remains of dinner and a bottle of ruby red wine.

Up Center is a white pine bench with a polyurethane finish. On one end of the bench is a single black pillow. To the bench's front is a coffee table with brass legs and a glass top. On the table is a large glazed kiwi custard pie and a glass of ruby red wine.

Left is a straight-backed chair with a white lacquer finish. Down Center are a pair of large red sneakers sitting on the floor; they are beat-up and the laces are awry.

At Rise, Judy lies on the bench, pillow under her head, eyes closed. Her steady breathing suggests sleep. She is wearing a white, man-tailored dinner jacket, a white blouse with a red bow tie, black trousers, white socks and black oxfords.

Rhonda Louise and Billie sit at the dining table, each holding a glass of ruby red wine. Rhonda Louise is wearing a jade green blouse, a black patent leather belt, a white pleated skirt, and black patent leather high heels. Her earrings are red plastic. Billie wears a tight golden blouse with a revealing neckline, a tight black skirt with a slit, white high heels, a silver and topaz bangle, and long and glittering rhinestone earrings. Billie is in her cups. Rhonda Louise is basking her in a fiery attention.

Billie: We are all, all of us, doing very well.
Rhonda: Yes. That is true.
Billie: And terrible. At the same time we are doing terrible.
Rhonda: Wait. I wouldn't say we're...
Billie: We're doing terrible. The moneys good. I mean, we've all got money.
Rhonda: I wouldn't say I'm rich.
Billie: None of us are rich yet.

Rhonda: You're close.
Billie: But none of us are starving to death.
Rhonda: No. We're doing great.
Billie: And terrible! Look at this place. It's beautiful.
Rhonda: Thanks.
Billie: It's like a fucking palace.
Rhonda: Well. I put some sweat into it.
Billie: It's like oysters.
Rhonda: Come again?
Billie: You know how really good oysters are just presented like...The yellow lemon, the red sauce, the bed of ice. The presentation. It's like a Chagall - poor Chagall, fare thee well! It's like a Chagall with these spaces left in it for these salty shiny little creatures. Your apartment is like that. Like a wonderful wonderful painting with spaces left in it for us.
Rhonda: Good.
Billie: You know what's so interesting about you?
Rhonda: What?
Billie: You're really kind of European.
Rhonda: I don't think so.
Billie: You have a something. You have an Other quality.
Rhonda: Maybe it's that I'm not wholly integrated into New York.
Billie: Who is?
Rhonda: You seem to be.
Billie: Me? I do the illusion.
Rhonda: In Europe, I read in this book, the way they advertise American movies is Kiss, Kiss, Bang Bang.
Billie: That's reductive.
Rhonda: Well. It's advertising.
Billie: Don't we look great?
Rhonda: You look beautiful.
Billie: You look beautiful! You look like a firefly in a nightclub. What does that mean?
Rhonda: It was your remark.
Billie: It was a compliment of some kind, Rhonda Louise. Trust me. But here we are. And I'm stumped, sister, stumped, I really truly am. Cause you are stunning and I am stunning, and this room is just ideal to show how stunning we really are...
Rhonda: Like the oysters.
Billie: Exactly! But where are the men?
Rhonda: You told me not to invite any men.
Billie: I know. I know I did that. But where are the men?
Rhonda: That was the whole point.
Billie: I know. But where are they?
Rhonda: The three of us would just deck out and look great for each other and fuck the men.
Billie: I know, I know, but don't you feel we're wasting our gorgeousness on each other?
Rhonda: No.
Billie: Just a little?
Rhonda: No.
Billie: I understand why you're saying that, but come on.
Rhonda: Wait. I know what you're hinting at. That ain't what's going on. Anyway, you're married.
Billie: So what?
Rhonda: So you're here without a man cause your husband's out building buildings somewhere.
Billie: So what? You're here alone, I mean, without a man, because you threw Jerry out.
Rhonda: Stop. Right there. That's a black lie. I'm here alone tonight cause you knew your husband whadn't gonna be around tonight and you don't cheat so you suggested this girls' night which is fine with me, but don't you then turn around and tell me I don't have a date cause I threw this one guy outta my life. That's just a detail.
Billie: Sorry.
Rhonda: If I wanted a guy here tonight there'd be a guy here tonight. I'm dressed up cause you wanted me to dress up. I'll tell you why you're cryin' out Where's the men? It's cause we're dressed for men. These clothes evolved outa a situation where observations were made about which kinda garments are effective to wear to attract the male of the species. It's really like female fashion's premier designer is Mister Charles Darwin. The point is these kinda clothes are bait. We're wearin' bait. These clothes are just like worms only there's no fish to bite.
Billie: Worms!

Rhonda: Bait.
Billie: It's weird to think of my clothes as a worm.
Rhonda: And you yourself as a hook.
Rhonda: Well, that's cause you gotta keep in shape.
Billie: What do you mean?
Rhonda: You gotta know, if it came to that extreme, that you could catch another gentleman. My father use to practice fly-fishing in the living room. He'd be casting this fly in and about a sewing hoop to the consternation of my mother. He was practicing outwitting the trout. It's the comparable same thing to happily married women who flirt. They're casting flies in the living room.
Billie: Is that what you think of me, Rhonda Louise?
Rhonda: Well. Billie. You are one of the worst flirts I know.
Billie: Do you honestly think I flirt to keep in shape in case Bob leaves me?
Rhonda: Yes. Fear! I think that's one of the reasons. But I think you do it too cause you'd like to screw the socks off the lot of'em.
Billie: Is that what ...
Rhonda: Yes! Horniness! Definitely! And I think you do it too as a sorta check you run to make sure you still exist. That's the most existential reason. I flirt therefore I am. And I think you do it too ...
Billie: I'M GOING TO TELL YOU WHY I FLIRT.
Rhonda: Why?
Billie: Habit.
Rhonda: Oh.
Billie: There was probably a dozen reasons why, at one time, but they're all dead now. Still standing up but dead. Like stuffed birds in the Museum of Natural History. Like me.

Billie starts to cry.

Rhonda: What's the matter, Billie?
Billie: I feel dead. I feel dead.
Rhonda: You're not dead, honey.
Billie: Yes, I am.
Rhonda: No, you're not. You just feel dead.
Billie: The other night, Bob asked me to marry him.
Rhonda: But ... you are married to him.
Billie: He forgot!
Rhonda: He what?
Billie: Oh, it was sweet, really. We had this dinner and we drank some champagne and he'd brought me these pink pink roses, and the moment was just so. He got carried away and proposed.
Rhonda: But that's just so dear.
Billie: Oh, it was precious, it really was. But it was also just exactly what it is about my marriage that drives me insane. I mean, I could kill!
Rhonda: I don't get it.
Billie: It's the courtship. He can't give it up. We can't give it up. It's been three years and we're still on the balcony, if you know what I mean. I thought that marriage was supposed to lead somewhere, not just be some frozen terrific moment. I thought it was supposed to be this great adventure. Like death.
Rhonda: It's hard for me to sympathize, Billie.
Billie: Oh, I'm sure it is. Nobody ever sympathizes with me. Their troubles are always worse.
Rhonda: Well, you've always done well that I could see.
Billie: And terrible!
Rhonda: You've always had money.
Billie: Yes, I have.
Rhonda: And some guy that adored you.
Billie: Almost always.
Rhonda: And you're good-looking and you have nice clothes and you've always lived in some place that was great...
Billie: But it's always been like photographs! And I want to be in a movie! An adventure movie where half my clothes are torn off by a gorilla and I marry the chief and I'm thrown in a volcano but I survive and become a Hollywood star and give it up and become a nun in an insane asylum in France and learn about being silent and unknown, and I invent something... useful and good... that the government and the corporations want to steal and twist for evil...
Rhonda: Billie! Billie! Billie!
Billie: What?
Rhonda: What are you talking about?
Billie: I just wish that my existence was more... picturesque.

Rhonda: And for this you want my sympathy?
Billie: No, not for that, Rhonda Louise. I want your sympathy for an ache in me that knows no name.
Rhonda: Alright. For that you have got my sympathy. Ready for dessert?
Billie: What is it?
Rhonda: Kiwi custard pie.
Billie: Did you make it?
Rhonda: No. I got it at The Eclair. It's on the coffee table if you want to look.
Billie: I must, I must look at all desserts. Oh, it's so pretty.
Rhonda: Wanna slice?
Billie: Not yet.
Rhonda: Me neither. I'd just like to be baked into a pie, some pie like that. Sleep down in the custard like deep in a downy downy bed of feathers, under a comforter of kiwi slices, sit outside the conversation with not a thing to say, the last best thing, the thing that's saved to be relished, the dessert.
Judy: Sorry, but that's me.
Rhonda: I thought you were asleep.
Judy: No. I'm just stretched out with the peepers shut. Breathing.
Judy sits up.
Billie: What do you mean, you're the dessert?
Judy: I identify with the pie is all. Maybe because everybody admires it but nobody wants a piece.
Rhonda: You know, Judy, you are a terrible guest.
Judy: Sorry, I just like listening to you and Billie. It's funny the things that become apparent when your eyes are closed that you might not notice if you had 'em open.
Rhonda: Such as?
Judy: Such as: When you two have a talk, Billie spills her guts and then when it's your turn, Billie spills her guts again.
Billie: That doesn't sound very attractive.
Judy: Oh, whatever you do, it's attractive, Billie. You're just an attractive person. But Rhonda Louise, what is going on in your mind? Do tell us.
Rhonda: A truly terrible guest.
Billie: God, Judy, I wish I could be like you.
Judy: Those big red sneakers for instance. What are those big red sneakers doing shambling around on your nice neat floor? Might those be Jerry’s shoes?
Rhonda: Yes. They are Jerry’s shoes.
Judy: But doesn’t Jerry not live here anymore? Was he not shown the door some time since?
Rhonda: I threw him out. Which you know.
Judy: I knew you’d thrown him out of the apartment and your life and so on, but I had no idea that you’d thrown him right out of his red sneakers!
Rhonda: Don’t be smart.
Judy: I wouldn’t know how.
Rhonda: He left the sneakers. Or they fell out of a bag. I don’t know which. But there they are.
Billie: Do you really think I spill my guts?
Judy: Yes, but hold on to them for a minute. (To Rhonda.) I came to dinner. I ate dinner. It was passable. A little fatty for my taste, but I don’t think it’s right for a guest to speak out.
Rhonda: You could’ve fooled me.
Judy: I saw the sneakers when I walked in. Said nothing. The soul of whatever. You’ve said not a word. I know you’re troubled about this character Jerry. That you loved him or were enslaved to something about him or something. I’ve lain here like a monk on a cot waiting for you to speak. But all I’ve really gotten is that Billie wants to be in some movie with an awful plot. We’re getting to the shank of the evening. When are you going to unveil your pain?
   *A long pause.*
Billie: All I meant by the movie thing …
Judy: Billie! Hush!
   *Billie complies. A long pause.*
Rhonda: I miss him.
Judy: That’s it?
Rhonda: I miss his smell.
Judy: He had a smell?
Rhonda: Yes.
Judy: Do his sneakers contain this smell? Is that why the little devils are still here?
Rhonda: I don’t know. Maybe. I hate those sneakers.
Judy: Then why don’t you send them back to him?
Rhonda: I don’t know where he is.
Judy: Why don’t you throw them out?
Rhonda: I don’t know. They’re too nice to throw out.
Judy: They’re too nice? Please.
Rhonda: I know what you think this is, but it’s not. I don’t keep the sneakers because I love him.
Judy: Uh-huh.
Rhonda: I didn’t love him. Not in a way that led anywhere. I mean, I loved him but it was like trying to hug a wall. How do you hug a wall?
Judy: I don’t know.
Rhonda: I guess my big mistake was I revealed myself to him. That’s where I really went wrong. You know, that thing that most people can’t do? That thing that’s supposed to be like the hardest thing to get to with another person? It took me time, but I struggled and strove and succeeded at last in revealing my innermost, my most personal soul to him.
Billie: And what is that?
Rhonda: Never you mind.
Judy: And what did he do?
Rhonda: Nothing. Zip. Nothing. He just sat there with a coke in his hand like he was watching television, waiting for the next thing. Like that was a nice stop on the way to WHAT I CAN’T IMAGINE! The whole thing with him was such a letdown. But why am I surprised? You know? I mean, here I was congratulating myself on being able to show myself, show my naked self to a man. But what’s the achievement? I chose to show myself to a wall. Right? That’s why I was able to do it. He was a wall and I was really alone, showing myself to nobody at all. How much courage does that take? Even when I got it together to throw him out, and I made this speech at him and got all pink in the face and noble as shit. He just said alright and left. What did I delude myself into thinking was going on between us if that’s how he could take it ending? “Alright. Just lemme get my tools together, Rhonda Louise, and I’ll get on to the next thing.” You know how
in that one school a thought you’re the only thing real in the world, and everything else is just a dream? All these people and things, the stars in the sky, are just sparks and smoke from your own lonely fire in a big, big night. I always thought what a lot of intellectual nonsense that was until Jerry. I mean, to tell you the naked truth, I’m not even sure there were a Jerry. It seems impossible to me that there was. Sometimes I think I just got overheated, worked myself into a passion and fell in love with that wall right there. It must’ve been! It must’ve been that wall and me, crazy, loving it cause I needed to love. And not a human man. I couldn’t have poured everything out to a really truly human man, and him just stand there, and take it, and give nothing back. It’s not possible. But when I get too far gone in that direction of thinking—and alone here some nights I do — at those times it does me good to look and see these sneakers there sitting on the floor. His sneakers. He was here. It happened.

Billie: If that had been me, I would’ve doubted that I existed.
Rhonda: Well, Billie, maybe that’s the difference between us.
Judy: If that had happened to me, I think I would’ve been glad.
Rhonda: How do you come to that?
Judy: At least something would’ve happened for me to brood over.
Rhonda: You wanna brood?
Billie: What do you brood about now?
Judy: We’re not doing me now, we’re doing Rhonda Louise.
Rhonda: Forget that. With me you’re done. What do you brood about?
Judy: Sex.
Billie: Me too!
Judy: But you’re married.
Billie: All the more!
Judy: Oh, I’m sure. But what I mean is, since you’re married, correct me if I’m wrong, you have sex.
Billie: Well, yes I do.
Judy: Well, I don’t. Or anyway I haven’t in a goodly while. So the way I brood about sex is different. It’s a darker, more perverse, Scandinavian kind of deep deep festering stew.

Billie: God.
Judy: It’s not really sex at all. It’s too black for that. It’s more like a kind of exquisite exasperation. A sullen, slow, galling exasperation having to do with men.
Rhonda: Why you mad at men?
Judy: Because they’re all gay.
Billie: They are not!
Judy: They’re all faggots!
Rhonda: Maybe the men you meet.
Judy: Definitely the men I meet! The men I meet are all faggots! Some of them know they’re faggots, and they’re bad enough. But a lot of them aren’t sure, so they go out with me for clarification. We go back to my place. Maybe we even get to bed before he bursts into tears and starts telling me about his Confusion. He’s all mixed up. I’m like his sister. He’s like my sister! These fucking sensitive guys out there sniffing flowers in their designer sweaters, I could just spit! And there’s only so much you can accomplish alone. At least me. I have a real problem with my ability to fantasize. Because I can only imagine sexual encounters that I feel are plausible. You know, I have to have at least experienced some small bubble of chemistry between me and the guy in order to imagine the rest. These days that limits me to guys I ran into so long ago that they’re too young for me to get really excited about. I lie in bed with my eyes clamped shut trying desperately to age some eighteen year old with a skin problem up to the requisite thirty. And then I see myself lying there in the bed, my face all scrunched up like some numbskull telepath trying to communicate with a dolphin, and I think: The faggots have done this to me! This, anyway, is the course that my brooding sometimes takes.
Billie: Well. Hmm. Well, it’s your own fault, Judy.
Judy: How do you figure that?
Rhonda: Uh-huh.
Billie: I meet straight guys all the time.
Rhonda: Me too.
Billie: You’re asking for it.
Judy: I’m asking for fags to come home with me and reveal their fagginess to me?
Billie: Basically, yes, that’s what you’re doing.
Judy: I'll take a piece of pie now.
Billie: What are you wearing?
Judy: You can see what I'm wearing.
Billie: That jacket.
Judy: What's wrong with my jacket?
Billie: It's MAN-tailored.
Judy: That's right.
Rhonda: And those shoes. E.G. Marshall could be in those shoes.
Judy: Well, what are you getting at?
Rhonda: Go on, tell her.
Billie: Alright. I will. Because I'm her friend. You're a Fag Hag, Judy! That's right! You march around with that efficient priss, and you wear a woman's version of a man's clothes, and you're arch... as an arch. Do you think that turns straight guys on?
Rhonda: It makes them nervous.
Billie: If you wanna get in a straight man's pants you've gotta make him think he's getting into yours. I've seen how you deal with straight guys. You look them over like you wanna give them an enema!
Judy: How can you talk to me this way? I'm not a stone! I have feelings!

*Judy cries.*

Billie: I'm sorry. I forgot. But you see? That's how it is. You get treated like you ask to be treated. And you ask to be treated like, I don't know ...
Rhonda: Like a fag.
Judy: What?
Billie: I don't know. No, I know. I just know I'm on thin ice with you with this. The only people who treat you nice are fags cause they think you're one of them.
Judy: What about you?
Billie: And Rhonda and me treat you nice because we love you. We see through you like you see through us and that's love.
Judy: I don't want to talk about this.
Billie: Talk about it.
Judy: I don't want to.

Rhonda: Maybe that's why you should.
Judy: Oh. I'm so lonely!
Rhonda: Me too.
Judy: But you miss Jerry. With me it's not even that. I'm not lonely for anyone, I'm just lonely in myself. I wish I could meet some nice guy, get involved with some nice guy.
Rhonda: There are no nice guys.
Judy: Then somebody who was screwed up in a way that complemented what's wrong with me. I wanna be an active heterosexual again! Sounds like volcanoes. "Watch out, Judy's active. Better evacuate the village."
Billie: It's not so great.
Judy: That's easy for you to say.
Billie: Oh, you have to have it, I'm not saying that. All I'm saying is it doesn't undo the big problem.
Rhonda: What's the big problem, Billie?
Billie: Oh, you know. It's like food. Appetite. I mean, people who have a problem with food will always have a problem with food. You can't throw food out of your life. Appetite. I don't know. If you aren't getting sex, you hunger for sex. If you do get sex, you hunger for different sex. Or a good book. Or combat. Or stardom. Do you know what I mean? It's the appetite that's under everything, that's inside everything. Whatever you're doing that's good, inside it is the little appetite mouse with his big teeth hollowing it out. Making whatever dreams you've managed to happen seem silly and empty and nothing. That's the big problem, I think. That appetite that's under just everything. Ruining it.
Rhonda: You think that's the big problem?
Billie: Don't you?
Rhonda: No.
Billie: What do you think the big problem is?
Judy: Can I say something?
Rhonda: Sure.
Judy: We were talking about me.
Rhonda: That's right. Sorry. So go on.
Judy: Now I feel self-conscious.
Billie: Listen, Judy. We love you. We're sitting here. Just spill it!
Judy: Alright. I feel so strong and everything's out of my reach which makes me feel deluded about my strength, which makes me feel paranoid about my ability to divine what the fuck is really going on!
Billie: So what are you saying?
Judy: Just that I'm really stuck.
Billie: But what's sticking you?
Judy: It's hard to say!
Billie: Jump off Judy, say it, say it!
Judy: ALRIGHT. I'M PROUD OF BEING AN ASSHOLE.
Rhonda: Oh.
Judy: There. I said it.
Billie: Yes, you did.
Judy: I can feel this puss on my face. My mother's puss. This face is her hatchet. I'm proud of being an asshole. I loathe myself.
Rhonda: I think you're good.
Judy: What good does being good do?
Billie: Would you like me to help you, Judy? I can help you if you want.
Judy: I didn't ask for help.
Rhonda: You coulda fooled me.
Judy: Oh, screw it anyway. Sure! Help! You think you can help me, help me. I need help, who am I kidding?
Billie: Listen to me carefully, Judy. I can only help you if you let me help you.
Judy: What exactly are you talking about?
Billie: This isn't going to be easy. There's a few things you don't know, I think ...
Judy: And you do?
Billie: That's right.
Judy: For instance what?
Billie: There's a few things about you that you don't know.
Judy: You know things about me that I don't know.
Billie: That's right.
Judy: Well, I know tons about you that you don't know.
Billie: I'm sure you do. That's my point, really. Because I'm not you, because I'm out here, I can see things.
Judy: Well, of course.

Billie: I know we're all intelligent enough to admit that other people know things about us that we can't see ourselves, but, I think very often we don't really believe it.
Judy: What are you driving at?
Billie: You must've had the experience, at a party or something, of seeing somebody, maybe even a total stranger, and thinking that you knew something about that person. Something they didn't even know themselves.
Judy: Sure.
Billie: And you probably didn't tell them. The thing. Because you knew they wouldn't hear you. Not really hear you.
Judy: Why don't you just tell me, Billie?
Rhonda: You are dragging it out.
Billie: Some things have to have a certain extent to take hold. There's a very basic thing that has to happen before I can say something to you, Judy.
Judy: I'm listening.
Billie: I was listening to you. I'm your true friend. I love you. I don't want anything from you except your friendship. Do you believe me?
Judy: Sure.
Billie: Before I can say the thing I have to say to you, you have to stop being proud of being an asshole. (A long pause.) Can you do that?
Judy: I thought I could say some things to you without having it thrown back in my face.
Billie: That's not what I'm doing. And you know that. You're just afraid.
Judy: I'm not afraid! Say what you have to say!
Billie: You're afraid of being a humble asshole. Sometimes you think I'm stupid, don't you? Don't you?
Judy: Yes.
Billie: Maybe you thought I didn't know that. I knew that. And that hasn't stopped me from being your friend. Do you know why?
Judy: No.
Billie: Because I'm grateful.
Judy: Why are you doing this?
Billie: I'm returning the favor. One humble asshole to another. Will you please, please, please accept my help?
Judy: Alright. I’ll try.
Billie: I want to arrange a date for you.
Billie: I want to arrange a date for you.
Judy: With who?
Billie: Someone you don’t know.
Judy: A blind date?
Billie: Yes.
Judy: A blind date and I’m thirty years old.
Billie: I know. We’re the same age.
Judy: A blind date. I haven’t been on a blind date since I was sixteen.
Billie: That has nothing to do with it.
Judy: It was a catastrophe! He was a Mormon.
Rhonda: I feel like I’ve taken a fistful of LSD.
Billie: Judy, what could be more of a catastrophe than your life as it is right now? Judy, I love you.
Judy: I know that! But I do feel like just like punching you.
Billie: Why?
Judy: Because a blind date is humiliating!
Billie: I don’t disagree. But think about it. To be humiliated is like being detoxed. Humiliation is the road you’ve got to travel to become humble. If it’s your pride that’s crippling you, humiliation is how you get rid of pride. I get humiliated all the time.
Judy: But you deserve to!
Billie: And you don’t? If you’re proud of being an asshole, and you’re the one that told me that’s what you are, then you should be humiliated! It’s just what the doctor ordered. But watch out! Don’t make that the thing I’m offering you. Your pride is just what’s stopping you from even trying something new. It’s the new thing that I want you to try.
Judy: What new thing?
Billie: This guy I have in mind.
Judy: What’s he like? No, don’t tell me!
Billie: I’m not going to tell you.
Judy: You’re not going to tell me anything?
Billie: No.
Rhonda: In my life, this may be my favorite insane moment.

Billie: This is my proposition. I will arrange this date for you. It will take place within the next few days at a spot I pick. All I ask is, when you meet this guy, that you’re as open with him, with your heart and your mind, as you know how to be. That’s all. Seriously, Judy, what have you got to lose? Will you do it?
Rhonda: Now, wait a minute! I’ve gotta hear how this turns out or I’ll go mad! You’ve both gotta promise me... Listen! We’ll have brunch! Next Sunday! I invite you both. I’ll make something just incredibly good! And then you’ll tell the tale. Okay?
Judy: Okay.
Billie: Okay.
Rhonda: Then it’s a pact.
Judy: Now that I’m compliant and completely humiliated, now can I have a slice of that pie?
Rhonda: Absolutely! But be careful how you cut it. I got this idea that I’m sleeping in there.

The lights go down.

SCENE 2

John Patrick Shanley

Bob and Billie are sitting in two beach chairs, separated by their Hibachi. On the Hibachi are two hamburgers. It’s nighttime. They are sitting on their co-op’s balcony, which is decorated with little electric plastic Chinese lanterns. They are sipping Tom Collins out of witty glasses.

Bob is wearing a good but wilted white shirt, a neo-expressionist tie, tan pants, and sandals.

Billie’s wearing a peach silk blouse, tight white jeans, and tennis sneakers without socks.

Bob and Billie are looking out over the city, which is the audience.

Bob: You know, Billie. You know I’m so happy I’m almost suffering. It’s like ... exquisite. I’ve always felt the word exquisite like had a little sliver of pain in it. Exquisite. Exquisite.
Billie: Bob. Darling. You’re the sweetest man I’ve ever known. But I don’t exactly comprehend your ... drift.
Bob: I’m feeling happy. How ‘bout you?
Billie: How long till the hamburgers are ready?
Bob: About thirty-five minutes.
Billie: Isn’t that an awfully long time to cook a hamburger?
Bob: It’s this way I’ve always wanted to do ‘em up. I let the coals go past the height of their heat. I got this chopped sirloin I watched the guy grind it not a flake a fat. It’s the fat dripping on to the coals that makes ‘em flare up so’s the temperature’s all over the place. I don’t want that for the coals in my barbecue. So I lit ‘em, and I let ‘em burn at their own pace, and when I put the burgers over ‘em to cook, the burgers have no fat to drip down and upset the ecology. The heat is what it is, the burgers are what they are. The meat cooks, the coals smolder and die their steady death. At the moment that the coals are through with the subject of fire, the meat is cooked. That’s what I’m after. And it should take about thirty-five minutes.
Billie: Wow. When did you think all that out?
Bob: I’ve been thinking about this for a while, and now I’m doing it. There are these things in life, these few basic things. Eating, Sleeping, Walking. And I’ve always been thinking about something else when I was doing them. So I never was doing what I was doing. When I was a kid, my brother Marty was a sleepwalker. I found him in the hall one time doing this motion with his hands. I said, What are you doing, Marty? And he said, I’m playing basketball. He thought he was playing basketball. He’s standing there in his pajamas in this hallway in the dark, and he thinks he’s playing basketball. I think I’ve been like that a lot. I think I’m playing basketball or something, but I’m really in the dark. Sleeping. Standing up. They say that people who sleepwalk are really upset about something.
Billie: Are you upset about something?
Bob: No, I’m happy. But that’s what this whole elaborate dance is I’m doing with the hamburgers. I’m trying to think about what I’m doing more. Appreciate it more while it’s going on. Make something out of it. It’s the process of doing—that’s life. It’s not just eating the thing, stuffing it in your mouth and swallowing it. What’s that? That’s just missing this freakin point of life, walking around in a dream with your arms out so you don’t bump into things like, like Frankenstein’s poor dumb monster. This thing made outta eighteen different kinds of death. This sleepwalker who isn’t truly sleeping and isn’t truly walking. I mean, Billie, don’t you wish sometimes, I mean think sometimes—or have you ever had this experience, some other time in your life—that you’re asleep or drugged. In some kind of dream you can’t get out of. Don’t you sometimes feel like this hostage or addict or victim—or have you ever, maybe in the past sometime—felt or thought, even for a second—won’t somebody, somebody free me, slap me, save me from this sleep. I’m stuck in. While my life’s still lit?
Billie: Are you criticizing me, sweetheart?
Bob: No! No! Don’t misunderstand me, baby. This is really about me. It isn’t even really about me. It’s about cooking the hamburgers and I got off on a tangent.
Billie: Is everything alright at the office?
Bob: Oh yeah. Business is booming. I gotta desk fulla contracts and people waiting to see me. But there’s an interesting thing.
Billie: What?
Bob: When things were rough, when things were really rough, when there were no contracts on the desk and I was waiting to see people who didn’t want to see me, you know I was really worried.
Billie: Me too.
Bob: I know. I know you were. We were worried. And we had a good reason to be worried. I was reaching like a madman but I couldn’t get the work. I couldn’t get to the work. And I knew I could do great with the contracts if I could only get my hands on ‘em, but I was swipin’ at the air. There was this network of work, and I wasn’t in it, and I couldn’t get into it, and I was clawin’, man. I was clawin’ at the freakin’ wall cause how the hell was I gonna support you—and I wanted to do that! And have a decent place to live. And I only consider this a decent place to live. I mean, a two-bedroom apartment with a rinkydink balcony is nice and it’s enough, but it is not, to my mind, a house. Like my father’s house was a house.
Billie: This cost four times what your parents’ place did.
Bob: Money don’t fool me. Money don’t fool me one bit.
Billie: You really are a Victorian.
Bob: I come from Victorian stock. But what am I going to make
of myself? What kind of stock am I going to buy into? I think I might like to end up a certain kind of ancient Greek. Only modern. I don’t wanna wear a toga. But to go on. I was worried back then. That’s my point. I was worried cause it looked like I might completely fail and not make a living and not be able to live someplace decent. I was really worried. But then I solved that problem, that problem got solved. Business is good now. But this is the interesting thing. I’m still worried. I worry all the time. It eats me up. Only now I don’t have anything to worry about. So when I lie down, or I eat, or whatever, I guess outta habit, I summon the usual goblins and invite them to torment me with their little worryforks. I worry about money and I have enough money. I worry about the business and the business is fine. And I worry about you, and we’re still like on our honeymoon.

Billie: Oh, Bob.
Bob: I don’t wanna live like this. Where I’m worried about stupid shit and miss my whole life. That’s why I’m trying to make a ballet outta cooking the hamburgers. I figure it will make me pay attention to what’s going on in front of me, and stop with this stupid sleepwalking Frankenstein ... That was the really tragic thing about the monster. Little children playing, nice people having dinner, a wedding, wherever he showed up, wherever he went, that place became a scene in a horror picture. Cause even when he didn’t know it, even when he was trying to be a nice guy, he was carrying around this nightmare of who he was. And that infected everything and made it a horror picture. It’s a beautiful night. I feel good. I love you very much.

Billie: I love you, too, Bob. I really do. You always turn out to be more...complicated. I think you’re more complicated than I am.
Bob: I don’t. I think you’re a real maze. I’m not gonna lie to you. I’m attracted to other women. I see a nice ass, I turn around and look. But I never play around. I’ve thought about it, but I would never do it.

Billie: Never say never.
Bob: I would never do it!
Billie: Okay.
Bob: You believe me?
Billie: Yes. Oh, sweetheart, what would I do without you? I don’t feel courage. I feel courage in you, but not in me. This may sound crazy, but I don’t think I could even be pretty without you to see me and make me pretty.

Bob: Well, that’s stupid. Even if I died, you’d be pretty.
Billie: No, I don’t think so. Why do you keep talking about death? What, do you think you’re going to die or something?
Bob: Well, yeah I’m gonna die. That’s a given.
Billie: [Don’t talk like that. I’m going to die before you and you’re going to have to bury me.]
Bob: I hope not.
Billie: [That’s what I want. And I want a closed coffin. I don’t want people seeing me dead. I mean that. I think anybody looks good when they’re dead. And I don’t want to outlive you because then I would just wither up and die of depression, and I can’t even live with the little depressions I get now.

Bob: You get depressed?
Billie: Sometimes.
Bob: Why?
Billie: Maybe I fantasize you dead sometimes, and get depressed over it now, and start to wither and die. In advance. I’m so afraid of losing me, I mean, you. I mean you. [Do you ever fantasize me dead?]

Bob: No.
Billie: Good. And I get depressed sometimes maybe because I feel cut off from my body a little bit. Sometimes. Maybe because I have so many clothes. I have so many clothes. It makes me feel like a dummy. It makes me feel like Barbie Doll. And sometimes I do too much shopping, you know? I just shop and shop and shop and shop, and it makes me feel great that I can do that. I feel strong. It almost gets me high. But then sooner or later I like collapse. And I feel so bad. Ashamed. Like I’ve sinned. And like nothing. Like I was nothing. And I’m in bed. And you’re out there working somewhere. Working at a big fat job. And I just feel so weak from that idea that I can’t get up. I have to call somebody on the phone. I have to call everybody I’ve ever known on the phone. From my bed. Like I was a little spider weaving a web out of telephone wires. Just to stand up and walk.]

Bob: I didn’t know you got depressed.
Billie: Just a little bit. And just sometimes.
Bob: Maybe we're doing something wrong.
Billie: What do you mean?
Bob: I know we're basically really pretty happy, but it sounds like there's something wrong.
Billie: What?
Bob: I don't know. I know I've been selfish. Wanting to do everything. Like my Dad. Be the hero of the marriage. Maybe you should get a job? Or have a baby?
Billie: I'm not ready to have a baby.
Bob: Okay.
Billie: I'm not finished understanding myself. Enough. Ahm. Are you... I don't even want to ask that.
Bob: What?
Billie: There's some things you don't know about me. You probably don't know how superstitious I am. I read astrology books, you know.
Bob: No, I didn't know that.
Billie: I read them on the sly. And then I quit reading them. When I read them, I believe everything they say. And then I have to quit reading them because I believe them so totally that it isn't right. I was just going to ask you something, but I'm so superstitious that I believe if I say something out loud, that could make it happen.
Bob: Say what out loud?
Billie: Are you losing interest in me?
Bob: No.
Billie: Are you sure?
Bob: Yeah.
Billie: Okay.
Bob: I love you.
Billie: I believe you.
Bob: I really do love you, Billie. But I am beginning to think that you're not showing me everything.
Billie: I feel so scared.
Bob: Why?
Billie: Cause I said it out loud.
Bob: Don't be scared.
Billie: I'm not really. It's just this superstitious thing I do. It'll pass in a minute. Bob?
Bob: Yeah?
Billie: I'm going to try to let go. I'm going to try to show you everything.
Bob: That's good enough for me.
Billie: Bob?
Bob: Yeah?
Billie: I know it's important to you. And I hesitate to even say anything about it. But it must be time to at least turn over those hamburgers.
Bob looks at Billie, and then looks down on the hamburgers, to appraise them. The lights fade.

SCENE 3

The backdrop remains the same, except now just a few of the windows in the buildings are lit, and Mister Quarter Moon has appeared in the sky; he has a smile and a broad wink.

The only pieces of furniture are a round table, Center, covered with a red-and-white checkered tablecloth, and two wooden chairs which bracket the table.

Downstage is a lit sign suspended aloft; the legend reads: MARIA'S CIN CIN HOME OF THE PURPLE MARTINI. (Pronounced: Chin Chin.)

At Rjisse, Duke is discovered at the table. He's dressed in a dark and elegant suit. He's very handsome and he's black. On the table is a bottle of dark red wine, two glasses, and a lit candle. Duke's glass is full; the other is empty. He's gazing off Left, smoking a pipe, steeping in a cool tranquility. In the distance, romantic Italian accordion music plays. A moment passes.

Judy enters from Right. She's dressed in a breathtaking, fairytale-blue evening gown. Duke rises. They're both slightly taken aback by the other. Judy because he's black. Duke because of her gown. Both are secretly pleased by what they didn't expect.

Duke: Hello?
Judy: Hello?
Duke: Judy?
Judy: Duke?
Duke: Isn't this funny? Please. (He pulls out her chair. She sits.)
Judy: Thank you.
Duke: May I pour you a glass of wine?
Judy: Thank you. I didn't know this place, Maria's Cin Cin, huh?
Duke: Known as the home of the purple martini. (He pours her a glass.)
Judy: Quite a handle for a ... Well, it seems straightforward spaghetti and meatballs.
Duke: I do hope you aren't hungry? They tell me the kitchen's already closed.
Judy: I always eat well before midnight.
Judy: What?
Duke: I don't know. The mystery of it all, I haven't been on a blind date since I was sixteen.
Judy: Me either!
Duke: I didn't expect you to look like you do.
Judy: I didn't expect you to look like you. Look.
Duke: You mean black?
Judy: Yeah!
Duke: Does it bother you?
Judy: No!
Duke: Frankly, it's not that you're white that threw me.
Judy: It wasn't?
Duke: No.
Judy: Then what was it?
Duke: The way you're dressed.
Judy: Oh, this? I know it's like really inappropriate ...
Duke: It's stunning! You're completely beautiful. When you walked in, it actually knocked the wind out of me. It's as if you walked out of one of the storybooks I was addicted to as a boy, the princess I dreamed of saving from heaven knows what. You know, in my whole life no woman has ever walked in and made an impression on me like that. I have to congratulate you. And thank you.
Judy: You're welcome.

Duke: Do you always dress like that?
Judy: Never. I mean, I had this conversation with some friends ... Oh, well one of them was Billie.
Duke: How do you know Billie?
Judy: College. How do you know Billie?
Duke: We had an affair.
Judy: Really!
Duke: But you were in the middle of saying something.
Judy: Oh. Yes. Anyway, my friends got on me for the way I dressed, they said I was too tailored or something. Anyway, this outfit is my overreaction to what they said. You had an affair with Billie?
Duke: Yes.
Judy: When? Oh, I'm sorry, I'm being so rude!
Duke: A few months ago.
Judy: A few months ago? But Billie was married a few months ago.
Duke: I think she's been married for about three years.
Judy: I know that. What I mean ... Billie had an affair with a black named Duke ... You a ... She never said a word to me!
Duke: Well, maybe this date's her way of telling you?
Judy: I guess it is. I can't believe that you a, I don't know, that you've confided in me so quickly. I mean, does her husband know?
Duke: I don't think so.
Judy: Well, why did you tell me? I'm a total stranger.
Duke: That has to do with a rather extraordinary conversation I had with Billie a couple of days ago.
Judy: I had an extraordinary conversation with Billie, too!
Duke: She got me to agree that when I met you for this date I would be completely candid with you.
Judy: I agreed to the same thing! Are you still having an affair with Billie?
Duke: No, it's been over for some time.
Judy: How did it end?
Duke: We got bored with each other. Sexually.
Judy: Really!
Duke: Is that so unusual?
Judy: No. But this conversation is making me feel so exhilarated!
Duke: Why?
Judy: I guess because you’re a man and you’re not lying to me. 
Duke: Sounds like you have a pretty low opinion of men. 
Judy: No, not really. YES! For the most part I have just the lowest opinion of men! Oh, that felt good to say! Listen, let me ask you something. Are you straight? 
Duke: You mean, am I a heterosexual? 
Judy: That’s what I mean. 
Duke: I just told you I had an affair with Billie. 
Judy: Right, right. But are you a complete, unadulterated heterosexual? 
Duke: Yes. 
Judy: What would you do if a guy like put his hand on your leg and gave it a squeeze? 
Duke: Well, frankly, I’d probably punch him in the mouth. 
Judy: Really? 
Duke: Yes. 
Judy: I like you, Duke! 
Duke: Well, I like you, too, Judy, even though I don’t know you very well. Yet. 
Judy: What do you mean? 
Duke: Well, we just met a few minutes ago. 
Judy: No. I mean, what did you mean by that ‘Yet’? 
Duke: I don’t know. 
Judy: Did you mean that later on you think we’ll sleep together? 
Duke: I didn’t say that. 
Judy: Forget what you said. Is that what you were thinking? 
Duke: Well, maybe we will. What do you think? 
Judy: I don’t know if I’m up to this. 
Duke: What? 
Judy: This telling the truth. It’s not important to me. Other things are more important to me than whether we sleep together or not. There’s conversations I want to have with a man. 
Duke: So let’s talk. 
Judy: Alright. What should we talk about? 
Duke: I guess we should have these conversations you want to have with a man. 
Judy: Right. God, I feel like such an American! 
Duke: What do you mean?
to learn to talk differently than my parents and my friends.

Judy: Why?

Duke: Because nobody in my storybooks talked like them.

Judy: Storybooks again. What was with you and these storybooks?

Duke: I don't know, you know it was some silly thing.

Judy: Tell me.

Duke: Well, I guess it was my name. Duke. I saw that dukes were in these stories, so I figured I should be in them, too. That's why I like this whole thing. Meeting at midnight. A mysterious woman. Strange conditions imposed. And the way you're dressed. I guess what I'm saying is I'm a black guy who talks like Robert Wagner and smokes a pipe, which means there's no really comfortable place for me in the world. Except in some situation like this. But even here, it seems, I'm not trusted. Too bad.

Judy: Do you go through a lot of women?

Duke: Like a hot knife through butter. Do you go through a lot of men?

Judy: No.

Duke: I think you're very sweet.

Judy: I wish I knew how to do this.

Duke: What?

Judy: I don't know. I'm lonely. I think you're lonely, too. We're sitting here together. Maybe I should have one of those purple martinis.

Duke: Don't do it. It'll kill you.

Judy: You've had one?

Duke: Yes.

Judy: Then you've been here before?

Duke: Yes, I have.

Judy: With Billie?

Duke: Among others.

Judy: Oh. So this is like your den. I didn't realize I was sitting here among the bones of your previous meals.

Duke: Are you going to start a fight with me?

Judy: Maybe.

Duke: Have I done something to offend you?

Judy: Maybe I'm just sensing if I really knew you I'd hate your guts.

Duke: If you really knew me. If you really knew me, Judy—and I'm not sure that's possible—but if you really could, I think you'd like me.

Judy: This seems like a very weird date to me.

Duke: Listen! Maybe I'm not doing a very good job, but I am trying to talk to you!

Judy: Okay.

Duke: This is very hard for me! I've been going from woman to woman for the last two years. I sleep with them, I get bored with them, I go on! Do you know what that's like?

Judy: No.

Duke: It's like if they dusted my body it'd just be nothing but fingerprints! If they dusted my soul, well, that's when the women wore gloves. There's a bitterness in my mouth. I'm trying not to let it make me talk bitterly. To you. Because it is true what you say. I am lonely. But I wonder if you know what that means. When I say I am lonely. That is peculiar and special to me. My loneliness is not your loneliness. Do you understand?

Judy: Yes.

Duke: I have this personal world. I live in there. It's not much, but it's all I have. I have to be sure, if I let you in, that you're not going to wreck it! You seem very angry to me.

Judy: You seem pretty angry to me.

Duke: I am angry. You're angry. We walked in like that. From other situations. I don't know what to do about that. God, I'm so nervous. I'm sorry. I don't know what you must think of me. I've really been having a great time. In my life. It's just, at the moment...

Judy: I understand.

Duke: No, you don't! Oh, I'm sorry. Boy, what brought this on?

Judy: Maybe I've done something wrong?

Duke: No, I don't think so. It's just...

Judy: Can I do something?

Duke: What?

Judy: (Taking a hankie from her sleeve.) There's this little white mark on your face. I think it's a little powder or something. Can I wipe it off?

Duke: Sure.

_She touches the hankie to her tongue, and reaches across to him._
Judy: I don’t know why I want to do this so much.
    She takes a lot of time and tenderness removing the invisible
    mark. He’s awkward and cooperative.
Duke: Is it coming off?
    She doesn’t remove her hand.
Judy: It’s gone.
    He takes her hand gently.
Duke: I think maybe you just removed one of those finger-
    prints I was talking about. Nice hand.
Judy: Thank you.
Duke: I’m starting to feel romantic.
Judy: This is a romantic place.
Duke: I wonder what would happen if we actually both
    relaxed?
Judy: I don’t know.
Duke: We’d probably stop talking.
Judy: Oh, no. At least, I don’t think I would. There’s these con-
    versations I would just love to have with a man. And I think if I
    were really relaxed maybe I could have them.
Duke: What the hell are these conversations?
Judy: Well, this is probably one of them. I guess. I don’t know.
    I’ve never had these conversations so I don’t know what exactly
    they would be.
Duke: Would they be about love?
Judy: Oh yeah.
Duke: Sex?
Judy: Oh yeah, definitely sex. And they wouldn’t be about my
    family.
Duke: No?
Judy: No, I’d like to leave that behind. Everything about my
    family. I’d like to finally leave that behind.
Duke: Sounds good to me.
Judy: There are certain things that a man needs to know,
    though, sort’ve as a basis. Like that family stuff. My personal
    almanac. But I’d like him to get it from, I don’t know, my doctor
    or something. Like when you go to certain countries, you’ve got
    to get inoculated. Like you go to my doctor and say, I’m going to
    have a conversation with Judy, so you’d better give me that
    Judy’s Almanac Shot. Then we could just leap over that stuff
    when we talk. Like conversational moon gravity. Wouldn’t that
    be great?
Duke: Yeah.
Judy: And maybe if we talked long enough, we could stop
    being afraid and we could talk about just anything at all. Would
    that be love then?
Duke: No.
Judy: What would it be?
Duke: I don’t know. Sympathy?
Judy: That’s right. We’d be in sympathy.
    A long pause.
Judy: What?
Duke: I think we should sleep together.
Judy: Why?
Duke: Because I can’t think of anything else, left, that comes
    before.
Judy: You can’t? I can. I can think of loads of things.
Duke: Such as?
Judy: Such as why would you want to?
Duke: I find you very attractive.
    about me do you find attractive enough ... No! So compelling
    that you would want to have me naked in your arms and physi-
    cally pass within my walls, broach me, that you would want to
    possess me, be possessed, lose yourself?
Duke: If you think it’ll be that good we should definitely get to it.
Judy: No, I don’t think it would be that good. You approach the
    whole thing too casually.
Duke: Maybe you approach it a little too seriously.
Judy: I don’t think so.
Duke: How long’s it been since you last shared your favors?
Judy: That’s none of your business.
Duke: That long.
Judy: Maybe you’re halfway right. I think we may have some-
    thing to teach each other. Maybe you sell too cheap and I sell too
WOMEN OF MANHATTAN

John Patrick Shanley

dear. You know what my friends tell me my problem’s been?

Duke: What?

Judy: They say I’m a fag hag. One of those women who ...

Duke: I know what a fag hag is.

Judy: I don’t want to be that sexually stupid anymore. I want to move on.

Duke: Make some mistakes.

Judy: That’s right.

Duke: So, comon, make one with me.

Judy: No! I mean, don’t you be so American either. My doctor doesn’t have a shot to give you. There are some things that you should know about me, that I should know about you before ...

Before.

Duke: Why before?

Judy: Because that does not come first in my mind.

Duke: Even if it doesn’t come first, why should things happen in order? Real life doesn’t happen in order. Don’t be so American yourself.

Judy: You’re right. But we shouldn’t do it that way anyway because it’d just be more of the same rut you’re in.

Duke: But what about you? Not doing it is just more of you being in the same rut you’re in. Why do you put my problem ahead of your problem? The way I understand it, that’d be love, and I know we’re not in love yet. As far as I can make out, we’re not even in sympathy yet!

Judy: Then we shouldn’t sleep together!

Duke: I don’t even know why I’m arguing with you! I don’t even want to go to bed with you!

Judy: Yet!

Duke: What do you mean, yet?

Judy: If you knew me better, you’d kill to sleep with me!

Duke: Dream on, Judy!

Judy: I will! I will dream on. Because that is exactly what I am talking about. My dreams. Which you do not know. And which you don’t think are important enough to know. Do you think this body is something? What a joke! Any great poet the last three thousand years will tell you what a joke that is! This stuff, this heavy breathing ... We have this aptitude in our hearts and brains and souls to arrive at something so rich and inflamed and unspeakable and sacred and New! Not this tired shit you want to foist on me. That’s not what I want. I won’t give up my standards! I know what I know. If I tried to live on the kind of thing you’re offering me, I’d starve to death. You’ve got to dig for treasure, Duke! Not settle for the stuff just lying out on the ground. You could sleep with me if you weren’t so god damn lazy and narcissistic and were willing to exert yourself a little and show some interest in the actual core of another human being! But you will not sleep with me because I will not perform a stupid mechanical pantomime, like I was trying and failing to remember something fine, something from a better world, something alien and beautiful and lost! What, you look vacant, don’t you get it? I’ll give it to you in a nutshell. I’ll give it to you in basic modern American: I’m not interested in the hardware without the software. Look, let’s just let this fall apart, okay? Don’t hang around for the sake of neatness. I’ll get the check. It was worth that much to me to have my say.

Duke: Hey, this is just you and me talking. This isn’t Inherit The Wind.

Judy: What do you mean?

Duke: I mean, you’re running on a little bigger than life.

Judy: Maybe your life.

Duke: You’re like a genius at not getting laid.

Judy: Don’t be vulgar.

Duke: Did you have a bad experience or something?

Judy: I’ve had a lot of bad experiences.

Duke: So have I. Have you wondered why Billie fixed us up? She must’ve been thinking of something.

Judy: I guess so.

Duke: I mean, I don’t know about you, but I feel like we’re natural enemies.

Judy: Do you really?

Duke: Yeah. Like the mongoose and the cobra.

Judy: Which one are you?

Duke: Take your pick.

Judy: I figure you for the snake.

Duke: I find you very attractive.
WOMEN OF MANHATTAN

Judy: Wait a minute! Wait a minute! What did I miss? I thought we were natural enemies.
Duke: That’s exactly what I find so hot!
Judy: That’s sick!
Duke: Call it what you want!
Judy: You’re like a wall!
Duke: That’s right, Judy! Like the Great Wall A China. You can’t get by me. Lean forward.
Judy: Why?
Duke: I’m going to kiss you.
Judy: I really don’t understand how we got to this point.
Duke: People don’t end up in bed by logic.
Judy: Are we going to bed?
Duke: Lean forward!
She leans forward. They kiss. She gets caught up in the kiss. It ends. She leans back, looking at him. She’s surprised.
Judy: That was good.
The lights go down as Duke smiles wolfishly.

SCENE 4

We’re back in Rhonda Louise’s apartment. It’s the following Sunday, in the early afternoon. The backdrop now shows the apartment buildings flooded with sunlight, and Old Sol smiling in a blue sky.

On the dining table are the remains of brunch.
At Rise, Rhonda Louise and Judy sit at the dining table, each holding a bloody mary garnished with a wedge of lemon and a large slick of celery. Rhonda Louise is in a white cotton nightgown and a maroon silk robe. Judy’s in jeans and an orange sweatshirt.

Rhonda Louise is bathing Judy in a fiery attention.
Rhonda: So? What happened then?
Judy: About twenty-six hours of very primitive, passionate lovemaking.
Rhonda: You’re kidding!
Judy: We went at it like the primordial forms. There were plateaus, upheavals, ditches. We got so deep into this bed it was like dinosaurs wrestling in a tarpit. At one point my tongue had a spasm that made me squawk like a parrot being electrocuted.
Rhonda: Did you have an orgasm?
Judy: I think so.
Rhonda: Good.
Judy: So where the hell is Billie?
Rhonda: I can’t imagine. I’d call again, but I just keep getting that machine.
Judy: You’d think she’d be dying to know how it came out.
Rhonda: Maybe she found out from Duke?
Judy: Can you believe that? Billie cheating on Bob with some black guy named Duke?
Rhonda: I know! What an image! And then you end up shakin’ with the same guy!
Judy: Yeah.
Rhonda: It’s almost Gothic! And it was kind of — is this the right word? — generous of Billie.
Judy: I don’t know if I’d call it generous. I don’t know what I’d call it. I’m all mixed up.
Rhonda: If you ask me, you’re all stirred up. Look at you.
Judy: I wish Billie would get here. I’d like to quiz her about a thing or two. Do you assume that this whole saga I told you, that this was a happy story?
Rhonda: Well. It’s news.
Judy: I don’t know how I feel about it. Something hurts. I gave something up!

Judy cries.
Rhonda: Hey. What’s this?
Judy: I had this idea. Of who I was. Of what I believed. This guy, he wasn’t … He didn’t love me!
Rhonda: Of course he didn’t, honey. He just met you.
Judy: I made these speeches. Told him that I wouldn’t sleep with him because I had standards. Hardware, software. He even admitted, said, we were enemies! And then he told me to lean forward, and I did!
Rhonda: You leaned forward?
Judy: Yes!
Rhonda: Well, that doesn’t seem so bad.
Judy: I just went right against everything that’s supposed to be me. And he knew I would! He knew it!
Rhonda: What did he know?
Judy: That I was a big liar, even though I was supposed to be telling the truth! I don’t know how to tell the truth! I don’t know how to be a humble asshole! I’m so humiliated!
Rhonda: Why?
Judy: Because I’m an animal! No, worse! I can’t even admit what I am. He had me pegged right off. I don’t want a nice guy. Nice guys bore me to tears! I wanted some stranger to see through me and be mean to me and just tell me what to do! You! Slut! Lie down and get ready!
Rhonda: Judy, Judy, Judy, Judy. You are some case.
Judy: I know.
Rhonda: Did this guy call you a slut?
Judy: No.
Rhonda: Of course he didn’t. If he’d called you a slut, that would’ve been that. You would’ve given him the boot.
Judy: You don’t know that.
Rhonda: Yes, I do. But hey, you know what it must’ve been? You must have a thing like that, in your mind? A fantasy.
Judy: I don’t know.
Rhonda: Maybe you got a touch of it from this guy? A little whiff. And maybe he picked up on it too, went with it a little bit.
Judy: I don’t know.
Rhonda: That’s what it sounds like to me. And him! From what you tell me about him, he certainly had that kind of thing happen from you.
Judy: I don’t follow.
Rhonda: All that stuff about the storybooks. He had some fantasy, too! You wheeled in in that Cinderella gown, and it got to him.
Judy: You mean we were both just deluded?
Rhonda: A bit. So what?
Judy: That’s grotesque.
Rhonda: Oh, what are you talking about? No, it’s not. That’s how people get started with each other. Anyway, a lot of the time. They make up a lot of stuff to start, and then, as they go on,

they replace it with real things. That’s how people go from romance to love.
Judy: Then I don’t want romance. It’s sick.
Rhonda: Now you’re just lying and wrong. You want it and that’s how it should be. You need the romance. It’s like a local anesthetic the heart supplies during the painful beginnings of knowing a man. The trick is to let it wear off in its natural time, and go on and let that open tender place be touched. Don’t shrink back every time you feel a little pain. If you do, you’ll end up with nothing. (The doorbell rings.) Come in! It’s open! (Enter Billie in a white windbreaker, tight green jeans, splendid western boots, and a black turtleneck. She’s got a big black eye. She walks in slowly. We see the eye before they do.) Hey, Billie.
Judy: Billie, where have you been?
Rhonda: Oh my Lord, look at your eye!
Judy: Oh God!

 Billie starts to cry, lightly at first. Rhonda goes to her and holds her. The sobs get deeper. Rhonda holds her drink to Billie’s eye.
Rhonda: What happened, baby?

 Billie pulls herself together enough to answer.
Billie: Bob.

 Billie goes back to crying.
Judy: Bob?
Rhonda: Bob? Bob what? Bob did this to you?
Judy: No!

 Billie pulls herself together.
Billie: Yes!

 She goes back to crying.
Rhonda: But how? Why? I don’t understand!

 Billie pulls herself together.
Billie: I’m so happy!

 She goes back to crying.
Judy: (To Rhonda.) She’s happy?
Rhonda: That’s what she said.

 Billie pulls herself together, and addresses Rhonda.
Billie: Don’t you understand? The honeymoon’s over! The
WOMEN OF MANHATTAN

great adventure has begun!

Rhonda: Oh, I see.

Judy: He hit you?

Billie: Yes!

Judy: And you think this is good news?

Billie: It's what I've been praying for!

Judy: Well, Rhonda Louise advises: Don't shrink back every
time you feel a little pain.

Rhonda: I wasn't talking about this kind of thing. Why did he
hit you?

Judy: Did he find out about the Duke?

Billie: What do you mean?

Judy: Did he find out that you had an affair with Duke?

Billie: Duke told you?

Judy: Yeah.

Billie: That bastard!

Judy: What are you talking about? You told the guy to be
completely truthful.

Billie: I meant about himself! I don't see why he had to drag me
into it. Anyway, it's over. It's been over for a while.

Judy: I know. He told me.

Billie: What else did he tell you?

Judy: That you got bored with each other. Sexually.

Billie: Stop!

Rhonda: Why did Bob hit you?

Billie: Is it very black?

Rhonda: Among other colors, it is also black, yes.

Billie: Can I have a sip of your drink?

Rhonda: Here, take it. I don't need liquor anymore. I have you.

Billie: Thanks. (She takes a drink.) Bob hit me because I wet the bed.

Judy: You know what I thought you just said?

Rhonda: You didn't.

Billie: I wet the bed.

Judy: What do you mean you wet the bed? You didn't wet the bed.

Billie: Yes, I did.

Judy: How humiliating!

Billie: Oh, I don't feel humiliated.

Judy: Not you, me. I took advice from you?

Billie: Oh, how did that go?

Rhonda: Billie, how did you come to wet the bed?

Billie: Oh, you know how these things are. It's complicated.

Rhonda: Speak to me.

Billie: It came out of an atmosphere.

Judy: You came out of the atmosphere.

Billie: You know, like lightning. There's this long tense same-
ness in the air. And it just gets more so and more so. Till zap. This
big white bolt across the sky.

Rhonda: Be more specific.

Billie: There's a thing that can happen in marriage. It's a kind
of incredibly boring endless Mexican standoff over some idiot
shit. You're in your trench and he's in his. Years can go by. Noth-
ing changes. It just gets more and more deeply the same. I can't
tell you how profoundly this kind of existence bites the big one.
Anyway, last night, I was thinking. I was thinking, If I could just
let go. If I could just completely let go, what would I look like?
Would Bob find that attractive? And while I was thinking this, I
came to realize that I was just flooding the bed! I mean, Cats and
Dogs. I thought I was dreaming. I saw Bob's face over me, like a
big stormcloud. I got very cold. Like Bob was blocking the sun or
something, even though it was the middle of the night. I felt very
small, like I was shrinking down into a dot. He grabbed me by
the shoulders and pulled me up. He said, Listen! I don't give a
fuck what you do! You can lie down and die for what I care! But
Nobody, Nobody pisses in my bed! And then he punched me
right in the eye...I saw stars, just like you're supposed to. And
through the stars, I could hear him crying.

Rhonda: I'm having trouble with my reaction to this.

Judy: Did you leave him?

Billie: I just made love to him, and made him breakfast.

Judy: I never saw this side of you before.

Billie: What side?

Judy: The victim.

Billie: Oh comon, lighten up. I'm no victim.

Rhonda: Well, the man did hit you. Don't ignore that.

Billie: Oh, you weren't there. Either of you. Not just for the
punch. For the whole thing. Bob and I became brutes. We had to.
We'd gotten to the point where there was no civilized way for us to save ourselves. So I pissed on him, and he punched me in the eye.

Rhonda: Quite a transaction.
Billie: I did bite him, too. But that was more of an afterthought.
Rhonda: Why didn’t you just shoot each other?
Billie: It’s harder to make up.
Judy: Promise me, Billie. If he ever lays a hand on you again, you’ll leave him.
Billie: Why would I make a stupid promise like that? Look, my father didn’t hit my mother, and I’ve never shown any particular hunger for getting hit. I don’t think I’m in line to become a battered wife. What’s a battered wife, anyway? I mean, you see me, and my husband hit me, so I’m a battered wife? Please. Save that deep thought for a TV movie. I thought that my marriage was dead, or I was dead, or both. Now, somehow, I’ve got ‘em back again, and me, in my personal heart of hearts, I don’t give a shit to judge the means good or bad. I just want to understand. It’s funny. Here I am, closer to my husband than I’ve been in a long time, a long long time. But I feel free. I feel like I can do anything I want.
Rhonda: Maybe you can and maybe not.
Billie: I don’t really know. I’m just describing how I feel.
Rhonda: But what if you couldn’t be violent?
Billie: I don’t know. Then you lose, I guess.
Rhonda: Then it’s a game?
Billie: Maybe. If it is, it’s not one I learned in advance. All I know is when the moment came for me, I did what I had to do.
Are you alright?
Rhonda: I think so, sure.
Billie: But, so, Judy, for Godsakes tell me, how’d it go with Duke? Ain’t he something?
Judy: I don’t want to talk about it.
Rhonda: They spent the night together.
Billie: Bingo!
Judy: Nobody likes a squealer.
Rhonda: It was apparently very explosive.
Billie: Bingo, bingo!
Judy: That guy is a total shit.
Billie: Did you think so?
Billie: Yeah?
Rhonda: You'd been cheating on Bob.
Billie: Yeah?
Rhonda: You didn't tell me.
Billie: Right.
Rhonda: Then you were lying.
Billie: About what?
Rhonda: Your ache. You knew the name of it.
Billie: I did?
Rhonda: You felt bad cause you were cheating on your husband.
Billie: No.
Rhonda: No? God, I feel like I'm looking at y'all from miles away.
Billie: Why?
Rhonda: I don't know. Kiss, kiss, bang, bang. I listen to what's gone on with you and Judy. Kiss, kiss, bang, bang. Is this it?
Billie: You can't stand outside these things and hope to figure them, Rhonda Louise.
Rhonda: Maybe so. Probably no big thing. Probably just my problem. But now to step onto firm ground. Billie, you are aware you missed my brunch?
Billie: I know. I'm sorry. I turned on the machine, and then I turned on Bob. And then how could I not make the man an omelet?
Rhonda: Well, it's just like I always said. You are a terrible guest.
Billie: I see the sneakers are still here.
Rhonda: Oh yes.
Billie: Maybe you should let me fix you up on a little date?
Rhonda: No.
Billie: No? Just no?
Rhonda: Yes.
Billie: Yes meaning no?
Rhonda: Yes.
Billie: You can't hold off forever.
Rhonda: It hasn't been that long.
Billie: It's been a few months.
Rhonda: Yeah. That's not that long.
Judy: It is harder the longer you wait.
Rhonda: We're different.
Billie: She's still right.

Rhonda: Then it'll just be harder is all.
Judy: You've both given me so much advice. Rhonda, can I give you some?
Rhonda: Sure.
Judy: Sleep with somebody. It really... puts you back in touch.
Rhonda: Trust me. We are different.
Judy: I just want to help.
Rhonda: I know. But I don't want any help.
Judy: Alright then, the hell with you! You're on your own. But it makes me mad!
Rhonda: Don't be mad.
Judy: Why not? Billie gets to fix me up on a date, you tell me how I should feel about my life, it's not fair that I don't get to help you! What am I? Do you think you're better than me?
Rhonda: No.
Judy: I think you do. You're damn right I'm mad! It's a big cheat to give and then turn around and not take when it's your turn. It's arrogant! I had to step on my pride to take something from you and that was hard for me, but I did it because I trusted you!
Rhonda: You needed to!
Judy: Well, what do you need, Rhonda?
Rhonda: Nothing.
Judy: Don't say that, I'm standing here trying to give you something, tell me what you need!
Rhonda: Nothing.
Billie: Oh, comon!
Rhonda: YOU CAN'T HELP ME!
Billie: Hey, take it easy.
Rhonda: How can you help me? What, you think I should go on a date and everything would be hunky dory? Sleep with some man I don't want? Maybe get pasted one to have a spiritual awakening? I don't buy it. It happens to you, okay. Try to deal with it, make sense of it. I'm not in the mood to go out and clobber the world with my idea of how it should be. This guy left me, okay? I feel like shit about it. I feel like I'm not worth thirty-five cents. Now I could run out that door and try to find somebody to plug that hole I feel in me, but I've done that before and I'm not going to do that again. I'd rather shrink down to my natural size,
whatever that is, than get pumped up again. What do I need, Judy? Esteem. True self-esteem. Can you give that to me? Billie, can you give that to me?

Billie: No.

Rhonda: Thank you. So I'll wait. I'm not waiting for Jerry to come back. I'm not waiting to die. I'm waiting for me. And I may take awhile. I haven't even thrown out his sneakers yet. You tell me these things about your lives and I try to be a good friend and sympathize and not judge. But I've got to draw the line at mistaking us all for being the same. We're all three of us in different places. Billie's married. You're going into something. I'm coming out of something. There. There. And there. Like three stars in the sky, I don't deny your friendship. I love you. But respect me.

Judy: Okay.

Billie: Okay.

Rhonda: When I was a little girl, and I was having fun, I would yell at my sister. Be like me! I meant I wanted her to play with me, feel the pleasure I was feeling. But she wouldn't. Cause she wasn't me. That was what I found troubling and didn't understand. That I couldn't just open my arms, like the gates of heaven, and let another soul enter my paradise. I need to be alone. I've been alone all my life. I've been alone with a man beside me in my bed. I need to be truly alone now. So I can admit it. And think about it. And, I guess, so I can come up with a better invitation. Be like me ain't gonna get it. That's just an invitation to loneliness.

Judy: You know what Duke said?

Rhonda: What?

Judy: He said my eyes were like water. He said my eyes made him want to go for a swim.

Billie: He never said anything like that to me.


THE END