

FEMMES PARFAITES

A Full-Length Play in Two Acts

**By
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CAST OF CHARACTERS

STUART: He is 50, worn down from too much of everything

DYNA: She is 26

FRANCINE: She is 53

LYNDSEY: She is 40

CÉLINE: She is 35, French

EVELYN: She is 75

KATHY: She is 38, tall, blonde, American

Location: Stuart's Apartment

A large one room loft, replete with copious books stacked on wooden bookshelves. A large bed is jammed in the far right corner. There is a writing table stage front left, and a partially built IKEA cabinet. Around the apartment are drawers and other pieces from the IKEA in various states of completion.

Time is now

For Michelle, who deserves better than this

ACT 1, SCENE 1

Stuart's Apartment. STUART is air sleep in his bed. All the women characters stand next to various parts of the apartment that fit their character. DYNA near the night stand, KATHY near the bed, CELINE near the bookcase, EVELYN near the table with the liquor bottle, etc

Each talks from their first back position initially, but as they speak to tell their stories, each moves forward in stages until eventually all, at the end of the scene, stand strongly in a line facing the audience together..

LYNDSEY

I was actually at a cocktail party in Chelsea with my Ex husband the first time I met Stuart.— My husband wasn't my ex husband then, he was merely my *future* ex husband. My future thief and torment and nightmare.....*But* I didn't know that then. Then I was just a perfectly happy wife with a budding practice living a wonderful dream of matrimony.

EVELYN

The first moment my eyes settled on Stuart in my arms I knew right then I was done with childbirth. One was to be more than enough, thank you very much and I was determined to make mine damn special. Every one of them is a miracle, and if I could make miracles happen in nine months, imagine what I could do with a human being over a lifetime.

DYNA

Stuart was sitting at the prof desk I'm pretty sure mightly hungover when I first saw him. It was the first class of the semester and I'd taken it because I knew the Theatre teachers would be so much easier than the Philosophy ones. Those yackety-yacks tread happily in guilt and ontological questioning. Not theatre people. Theatre people just want to get laid.

FRANCINE

Of all people my husband introduced me to Stuart when we first met. He was hired to write promotions for my husband's PE firm and I was stressed to finish a 3rd unfinished play. It was our 7th wedding anniversary. We'd just survived him catching me cheat the first time and were working through it the usual way, shopping.—I needed nothing. He needed a Porsche.

CÉLINE

It seemed like Stuart emerged from somewhere inside me when I first meet him. *Ouais, c'était comme ça*, it was like that. One moment he wasn't there on the platform, *et puis soudain*, doors of a train opened and after he was everywhere for me.—We slept together the first night. It was right, we knew. We were a tight bond immediate.—*C'était paranormal*.

KATHY

Stuart wasn't an absolute mess yet when I met him at one of his play readings. I was teaching one-off art classes for all the PS's in New York that'd have me. Music, painting, writing, I'd travel the city talking to eight-year olds about the *joys* of art.—He knew by heart his favorite Baudelaire poem, *Be Drink*, and had the best parts of No Exit dog-eared....I swooned.

LYNDSEY

My husband and I were the couple everyone envied, or so I thought to myself. Then I became the wife everyone pitied, where everyone talks until you enter a room, then after, it's only polite smiles in the direction of the Magnolia Bakery red velvet cake.

EVELYN

I used to say I married “*fectively*” For affect and effect. Men were necessary then. I wanted to see Rome, I had a man. I wanted sex, I wanted a child—men....I achieved with great *affect* the exact *effect* I wished.—It's a skill rarely recognized these days, even less rarely praised.

DYNA

I legally changed my name when I was 18 and finally old enough to over my parents objections. *Marie*, always felt foreign to me. Like an exchange student with a good accent and practiced vocabulary, but someone who never really gets the inner feelings of words.

FRANCINE

Some women unhappy in marriage, cheat. I wasn't unhappy, I was elated! I figured, share it with others! Unhappy women cheat a little and feel guilty. Elated women cheat happily 'til the cows come home.—At the start, I thought of myself as a cattle rancher.

CÉLINE

My imagined super hero power *quand j'étais un enfant* was to make myself invisible then visible again. Disappearing, reappearing when it suited me. It seemed a wonderful way to live. Visiting lives when it was right and pleasurable.—Leaving for good when it was not.

KATHY

I had failed at four arts forms by that time. My physical arts lacked imagination, my verbal ones skill. After each failure, I'd walk down by the river to escape, past the broken-up piers sticking out of the Hudson, crying down to where the Trade Centers had been.

LYNDSEY

The speed of life surprises you when you are falling down. Not the quickness, but how excruciatingly slow life it is, hitting every block and brick.—Gravity has amazing accuracy.

EVELYN

Time with men is merely sex and death. When you're older it's too much one, not enough the other. Ten thousands years, they're still the same. Evolution didn't improve —it crystallized.

DYNA

I'm *experientially precocious*, my latest shrink says. I experience things to form my world around me. I engage men and the experience is formative. They're so easily controlled.

FRANCINE

Cheating doesn't feed you the same as time goes on. The game rolls different with the years.— In time, you miss when excitement was a call away. The pull and pleasure of that.

CÉLINE

We all use what we are given in this world, *n'est-ce pas?* The strong, the tall, the smart and beautiful. *En fait*, it's amusing to do what you're good at, what's natural.

KATHY

You're susceptible when you're weak, and you're doubting all you know and are.—But failure is a great teacher, they say. It hardens you for the struggles to come.

LYNDSEY

I guess the lambs enjoy the grass and the sun and the breeze on the day of the slaughter.

EVELYN

God willing, women'll learn to take advantage of men. Then it'll be our time.

DYNA

I take comfort in their compliance. Solace even. It's rare, something so consistent.

FRANCINE

Few men offer what excites when you get older. The old talents fade away.

CÉLINE

We never know before the *after* of actions, the response of others and ourselves.

KATHY

So you can make decisions that hurt, but are right.

LYNDSEY

Life, if it is nothing else, it's a great reminder of that.

EVELYN

It's still my time. And this world would work better if I ran it.

DYNA

I'll miss the attention when it's gone.—I'll miss the surety of knowing.

FRANCINE

I hope I can get that happy again. I hope something can make it so.

CÉLINE

C'est dangereuse parfois. We do what we must, then things happen we don't control.

KATHY

Is it better to walk besides what you can't be....than to walk alone?

Lights Down

SCENE 2

STUART's apartment. STUART lies on his side in bed. He rolls over and rises up against the bed board. He is wearing no shirt. He inhales heavily, reaches to the bed stand for his cell phone. He opens it and looks.

STUART

Fuck.

(he closes it and puts it back on the night stand. He waits, staring out about 10 seconds. He reaches to grab the cell again, opens it again, looks again)

Fuck fuck.

(he closes it again and puts it back again. He waits again equally long. He opens it again but this time dials and listens until the message comes on)

Fuck!

(he waits for the message to end)

Kathy, it's me again. It would be *really* nice if you returned my calls, there've been *ten* by now! How many times can I say sorry? I am Kathy, I'm so sorry. Did you hear what I said?

(pause, calming with a deep breath then troubled)

I can't write.—I have the Balmorial due this week but nothing comes...I can't write, not a word. And the Balmorial...I bought you a copy of No Exit....I'm falling apart without—

(he hangs up and sighs. He waits a long moment, then puts the phone back on the table and stares out ahead blankly)

Fuck.

(a long moment. DYNA walks in in underwear. She carries a cupcake with a lit candle. She starts to sing Happy Birthday)

DYNA

Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday to you.

STUART

Dyna.

DYNA

Happy birthday dear Stuart—

STUART

Dyna please.

DYNA

Happy birthday to you.

(she stands besides the bed waiting for him to blow it out. He doesn't move. She holds it out further. He stares at her. She ups the ante)

DYNA

(singing)

How old are you now?

STUART

Dyna stop.

(she holds it out closer to him. he turns his head away)

DYNA

How old are you now? How old are you dear old Stuart—

STUART

Dyna!

DYNA

Blow out the *candle!*

STUART

No.

DYNA

Blow out the candle or so help me God, I'll let it burn down on my fingers.

STUART

I don't care.

DYNA

I'll drop it. The bed'll catch fire. Then the apartment, the building, the whole street'll go.

STUART

Same answer.

DYNA

Lives'll be lost. Teddy bears and chihuahuas, baseball gloves, little pig-tailed girls. The damage will be tremendous. The cost— Ow-ow-ow-*ooow*, my fingers!

STUART

God dammit!

(he rushes up to blow it out. DYNA shakes off the pain, pulls out the candle and places the plate on the night table)

DYNA

Whew, thank you. That was beginning to hurt.—

STUART

You're insane.—

DYNA

I mean *really* hurt.—

STUART

Demonstrably, certifiably.

DYNA

Psychologists at the inquest concluded differently who am I to believe. They're professionals.

(she holds out half of the cupcake to him)

Happy birthday Stuart! Happy 50th birthday!

(STUART immediately takes it, puts it down on the night table)

STUART

It's not my birthday.

(STUART gets out of bed completely naked. He searches around for pajama bottoms and finally puts them on)

DYNA

It's November 1st.

STUART

That is true. But it's not my birthday.

DYNA

Yes it is. You told me it many times.

STUART

I think I would know. And since when does my saying something make it true?

DYNA

You always say "My birthday is November, I fete all thirty days. Like Black History month!"

(she moves to the cupcake, breaks it further and eats it)

I always ask guys I'm sleeping with what their birthdays are. I'm doing an informal study to see if astrological signs affect sexual proclivities. You're my Scorpio.

STUART

You wonder if the position of Saturn in relation to the moon on the day you were born affects your abilities in the sack?

DYNA

Don't you?!—Can something invented thousands of years ago explain how we live today.

STUART

I don't know, ask the pope.

DYNA

Well you said your birthday was November. Today's November 1st—so Happy Birthday!

STUART

It's *not* my birthday!

*(angrily he finishes with his pajama bottom, then looks at her.
His anger fades, he softens, moves to her conciliatorily)*

Thank you Dyna for remembering. It's terribly sweet of you—I doubt anyone else will.

(he kisses her tenderly on the forehead and caresses her hair)

And thank you for last night.

DYNA

Oh don't mention it. I like having sex with really older guys.

STUART

I take it back.

*(STUART picks up a glass of liquor and moves to the IKEA.
DYNA gets on the bed on all fours, bounces like a child)*

DYNA

No, I'm serious.

STUART

That's the problem.

DYNA

You're *experienced*, that's fun for a change. It's nice to be with someone who knows his button from a lip. Boys my age fumble around down there like a lost tourist trying to refold a map. To them, labia is a Baltic country near Serbia.—Older guys are *so* much better.

STUART

That's the best birthday present I've ever received.

DYNA

Besides I am using you. You know this right?

STUART

Yes Dyna. You don't need to keep reminding me.

DYNA

It helps stop any deep feelings from developing. This way no one gets hurt.

STUART

I've never married or lived with a woman longer than a Stanley Cup. I wouldn't worry.

(he refills the glass from the bottle on the table and begins tinkering the IKEA. She begins dressing)

DYNA

That's just it, I don't worry with you. Longing for commitment pari-passu a pact between two consenting parties. It's more compulsory than enforceable, don't you think?

STUART

How many times have you been in court?

DYNA

As a defendant?

(she shrugs and smiles innocently)

You help me with my writing, you're getting my body in return. It's fair and equitable. Speaking of which, I need you to fill-out that questionnaire on the writing desk.

STUART

Is it about astrological sex?

DYNA

Don't be diminutive. It's about men's view of women. Please do it soon. I need it Monday for credit. Grades matter for my self-esteem.

STUART

Dyna you know I'm not writing. You know I've got the Balmorial entry due Friday.—

DYNA

Please please please—

STUART

I'm not getting anything on the page! It's been weeks now. I haven't got the tiniest to share.

(she stares imploringly. He picks up the pages on the desk)

For Christ's sake, they're pink! They're pink and they've got Heart stickers on them!

(he looks to her again pleadingly. She flashes him her breasts)

I'll do it.

(a long exhale then he moves back to the IKEA cabinet)

You're getting taken. I'm not some highly-regarded mentor. All I have for twenty years is ten off-off Broadway shows and a form letter from Arthur Miller saying "keep your chin up."

DYNA

I know all that, but I don't care. I think you're talented in *both* areas. The world hasn't found you yet. I want to be there when it does. Besides, those who can't, teach.

STUART

And those who teach, corrupt.

DYNA

And those who teach corruption, succeed.

STUART

Are we talking about sex or theatre?

DYNA

Both.

STUART

How old are you?

(she answers with a laugh. CELINE moves in slowly, STUART watches her unsurprised. DYNA speaks, it brings him back)

DYNA

Does your other girlfriend bring you cupcakes in bed?

STUART

First of all, you're not my girlfriend. Second of all, what other girlfriend?

DYNA

The one you're always thinking about when we have sex—

STUART

I'm not thinking—

DYNA

Don't bother denying it. I can always tell when you're thinking about her. Your mind goes far away like a worn-out bank teller fantasizing about coin-counting machines. It's trippy.

STUART

That's the bourbon kicking in.

(he grabs a pill bottle off the table, opens it, takes one pill and puts it in his mouth and washes it down with his drink)

DYNA

Why do you take those?

STUART

They're *organic*.

DYNA

Klonipin isn't organic. It's a bio-neural reactor innervating the brain's pleasure centers.

STUART

Six months pre-med?

DYNA

Three months pharmacist's assistant.

STUART

Just three?

DYNA

Some older men take it too far....You're moodier when you snap out of it. Not like you're mad or anything—it's just like the world really disappoints you. A calculus teacher spending a life teaching students he knows will never use it....It makes me sad.

(CELINE leaves the scene and STUART watches her go)

Then I remember we're having sex. I get over it. Everything's better when you're having sex.

(she finishes dressing as he takes in what she's said)

STUART

Dyna come here

(she moves over to him, he takes her hands)

You are an amazing girl, a force that ford rivers. I'm a mistake! Something you'll regret later like Uggs or a Hello Kitty tattoo. We must stop. You're too important to me to continue this.

(she smiles, takes his hands, talks to him like he's an infant)

DYNA

I hear you. I understand and thank you for your concern.—But we're not going to stop. You'll continue to edit my plays and advise me, and you'll continue to have sex with me, when, where and how I like.—Am I understood?

STUART

But but, but Dyna this, this is, this is wrong!

DYNA

I know! That's why I love it!

STUART

But I have no respect for you.

DYNA

That's the best part!

STUART

And I'm involved with another woman!

DYNA

So am I!

STUART

Dyna I—I....

(off stage, we hear a female voice call out)

FRANCINE

Hello?....Stuart, hello?!

STUART

Oh fuck.—

FRANCINE

Stuart?!—

STUART

Oh fuck fuck fuck.

(FRANCINE enters, is struck seeing them intensely engaged)

FRANCINE

Am I interrupting something?

Lights Down

SCENE 3

STUART is now wearing jeans, but still no shirt. He tinkers with IKEA. FRANCINE, her back to the bookcase, stares at his back. He doesn't turn to her when he speaks. Long pause.

STUART

I'm not going to feel guilty Francine.

FRANCINE

Did I ask you to?

STUART

Your *stare alone* conveys your condemnation.

(he stops, backs away from the IKEA, still doesn't look at her)

FRANCINE

You're making progress. Still can't find the instructions?

STUART

Those Swedish quislings design it to make you question your sanity. I know how the rider works now and how the drawers fit together..

FRANCINE

Why don't you just call them?

STUART

Where's the fun in that?

(they share a look for the first time. She turns to the books)

FRANCINE

You don't feel even a little bit guilty about my finding you with this young girl?

STUART

I think your having a husband negates any guilty feelings.

(he moves to pour himself drink)

FRANCINE

My husband is a technicality. What we have is special and I'm committed to it.

STUART

Franny, he calls and talks to me in that dead animal, monotone voice of his like I'm Judas and he's Bella Lugosi hectoring me from the grave.

FRANCINE

He's Hungarian, they talk like that! That's why I cheat on him!....What do you say?

STUART

I tell him if he'd stop talking like that you'd sleep with him again.

FRANCINE

Fat chance. You'll handle those duties until further notice.

STUART

I tell him to act tough with you.

FRANCINE

He wouldn't dare, the pathetic Magyar. I know of his Cayman accounts.—So you lie to him.

STUART

I ease his mind.

FRANCINE

By lying to him.

STUART

Of course, I have a responsibility to him. I'm sleeping with his wife.

(he downs the drink and moves studying the IKEA)

FRANCINE

I admire you your guilt free life. My husband, me. *This child.*

STUART

She's college age.

FRANCINE

You could have a daughter that old.

STUART

I have underwear that old. Wanna see?

(he grabs the rim of his pants as if to drop them)

FRANCINE

No....Not yet.

(they smile. He pours another drink, he returns to the IKEA)

STUART

That *child's* twenty-four going on Madame Defarge. If only I had her drive and all her balls.

FRANCINE

How would you walk?

(STUART smiles in response and fiddles)

STUART

All women need a man ten years their senior. They'll be a treasure he'll never wander from. Ten in America. Twelve in Europe. Fifteen in Italy. What, must I date *mature* women now?

FRANCINE

Watch yourself.

STUART

Women who've survived the wars, but now oxidize like wine in a castle keep.—What a vile task, loving men. I wouldn't wish it on an adversary. And for that what?—Scarred, empty stares at night recalling what was saved at great cost and what was lost.

(pause as they stare at each other seriously)

FRANCINE

Might do you some good. Save you from yourself. Resolve can do almost anything it wants.

STUART

Jealousy does not become you Francine. It brings out your antiquarian side.

FRANCINE

You are cruel.

STUART

I'm poor and unsuccessful.

FRANCINE

Can I help that the hands of fate have afforded me their kindness?

STUART

You can thank the Gods for their well-documented lust.

FRANCINE

Not all my success is attributable to my *immaculate* breasts.

STUART

Yes, true, you do give a great blow job.

FRANCINE

You resent my success.—And thank you.

STUART

I *present* your success. My notes, my jokes, my unique perceptions.

FRANCINE

I credit you as my dramaturge.

STUART

You could give me royalties.

FRANCINE

Don't be crass.—Does it help you to be mean to me?

STUART

Endlessly.

(STUART stops working on the IKEA and stares off)

FRANCINE

It's your affection shinning through. It's how I know I'm a rung higher than the others. A little boy kicking sand at crushes. It's cute actually. Stuart in his natural habit—

STUART

Franny....the plot twist I suggested, the one for your third act...I need it.

FRANCINE

What do you mean you may *need* it? You gave it to me.

STUART

I know I did, but now I may need it—

FRANCINE

It's not a riding mower, one doesn't take *back* these things. I'm building a third act around it.

STUART

You don't *have* a third act yet. You don't have a second act.

FRANCINE

But I will. And a second before it. And it'll be smashing.

STUART

If you like grey-haired theatre.

FRANCINE

They pay to see my plays Sugar. Except for Friday nights, bless their hearts. Otherwise two hundred butts in seats and all the jug wine they can drink. And don't kid yourself, it runs solid for three full—

STUART

I need it!....I'm sorry.

(she studies him carefully a long moment)

FRANCINE

May I remind you....

STUART

Franny.

FRANCINE

Of the small but important matter—

STUART

Francine if you want to walk out the door instead of defenestrated through that window—

FRANCINE

Of our loan.

(he reacts, head down, shoulders slumped, pained)

STUART

I fixed the fan belts on the Benzs. I painted the *guest* bathroom in the *guest* house. I wrote the only *funny* jokes in your last full length.

FRANCINE

We each help each other with our writing Stuart.

STUART

Paying an assistant to type the drunken pages I've scrawled?

FRANCINE

(pronounced exaggeratedly)

Puh-tay-to and puh-tah-to.

STUART

Aren't those supposed to be different?

FRANCINE

Funny boy.—Save it for my next play.

(they stare at each other intensely)

STUART

Shall we begin? I already have my shirt off.

FRANCINE

I have to wash first.

STUART

How bourgeois.

FRANCINE

(pause)

Do you ever feel like gravity is beyond your world, that you're sleeping through your life?

(he drinks before answering)

STUART

I *am* sleeping my way through life.—It's the only serious response to it.

(she moves to the bathroom but just before it turns to him)

FRANCINE

You take it Stuart, your plot twist.—It was yours anyway. I hope it helps with....I couldn't pull it off anyway. Twists always seem like falling rocks in my hand, landing hard and breaking toes....Talents lie in different aspects for different writers. I know where the line falls and how the breaks come....Write it well.

(he nods. It's appreciation, not condescension)

We take care of each other, no?...Oh, I almost forgot—Happy Birthday.

(no visible response from him, she moves off. Soon as she is out of sight, he calmly digs into his pocket for his cell phone)

STUART

Kathy I'm dying without you. I can't write, I can't finish the play. This is the one, I know it, but I just stare at unfinished pages....I've only got a week until the Balmorial deadline.—This is my one chance and I'm getting nowhere with it....Kathy I'm ready to be the man—

(he squeezes the phone, releases, then calms. He moves to the desk, picks up a pen, leans over to write)

She enters the room balleting like a snow angel in wind and says to him....and says to him....

(he waits there a long pause)

Give me a line. Give me a line! Give me a line! *Give me one fucking line!*

(he violently sweeps the notebook from the desk suddenly, then inhales and exhales again to calm himself.)

Whew!—I don't know about you, but I feel better.

(FRANCINE returns from the bathroom without her shirt on)

Why Francine, you've washed off your shirt.

FRANCINE

Oh did I? Huh? Is that a problem?

STUART

No. I rather like the way you wash.

FRANCINE

I thought you would. It's best for us to start clean.

STUART

Shouldn't I wash?

FRANCINE

Morning sex for you starts *after* noon and is merely picking up the stripped off clothes from the night before.—Besides, two times with that girl would be the end of you.

STUART

Because of my advanced age you mean.

(she nods exaggeratedly)

Even though I'm younger than you.—However will we go on?

FRANCINE

My reservoir of boundless energy will see us through.

STUART

We're two peas in a pod Franny. Half depravity, half skill to make it happen. I guess that's why I love you so.

FRANCINE

(pause)

Say that again—please. Just that last little bit. It's not true—but I don't care.

STUART

(pause)

I love you Franny girl.

(she moves slowly towards him. Just before they meet, the door opens and LYNDSEY walks in)

LYNDSEY

Stuart....Oh I'm sorry. Am I interrupting something?

Lights Down

SCENE 4

STUART's apartment. Two living room chairs are placed upstage in which STUART and LYNDSEY sit staring at each other stoically. There is a long pause before they start.

LYNDSEY

You forgot our session.

STUART

I did not.

LYNDSEY

It's this time on every 3rd Thursday of the month.

STUART

And has been for a very long while.

LYNDSEY

I interrupted you.

STUART

You saved me.

LYNDSEY

You planned it?

STUART

Let's just say there were several possible outcomes and the most preferable occurred.

LYNDSEY

Another construct of your making.

STUART

Oh please Lyndsey, don't start—

LYNDSEY

What will happen, what will be said.—

STUART

Not again with this shit about—

LYNDSEY

How it will end, how it will be decided.—

STUART

Can you please just, *please*—

LYNDSEY

The remains, the effects of words on feelings, *emotions*—

STUART

Christ!

(STUART bursts from the chair, focuses on IKEA. Pause)

LYNDSEY

Your preferred mode of playing—feeling in control, sensing powerful over life.

(she waits, he doesn't respond, merely fiddles with the cabinet)

And you're paying me to start with you.

STUART

Well *that's* bullshit, I haven't paid you in a year. You keep coming to see if I've gone under like a Warner Brother's cartoon raising his fingers above the waterline. One. *Twooooo....*

LYNDSEY

I'm merely pointing out—

STUART

I know *exactly* what you're doing. And I'm telling you it's not true.

LYNDSEY

That you mentally construct these states of *affair*.

STUART

Ha! Nice one.—

LYNDSEY

Orchestrating them through every detail, what you'll say, what you'll do, what others will say and do. Then proceed to make it all come about in real life exactly as you composed it.

STUART

I don't *compose*—

LYNDSEY

This seems a step further. Half-naked woman, waiting, wanting, a therapist enters to disrupt.

STUART

Therapist interruptus.—

LYNDSEY

Rather Machiavellian really. Devious even.

STUART

In an etymological sense—

LYNDSEY

Almost monstrous really.—

*(he stops with the cabinet, moves in her direction with a
whatchamacallit in his hand waving it around demonstrably)*

STUART

That's what you don't get and you've *never* gotten. It's *far* more *devious* than you think.—I put myself in these *states*, not as some bet with myself to see if I can *compose* it—I do it to see what I'll *actually* say and do when faced with the real situation and moment. But here's

STUART – cont'd

the kicker, the *real* shitty thing—I do it when I need a line. When what I've written isn't true or genuine and I can't fix it, I manufacture life to fulfill *needs* in my play, conjuring scenarios and maneuvering people for my *art*. I use people as *puppets* when I ain't got the juice!.... That's *totally* different, and far more fucked-up and devious than scheming little Niccolo's Prince....And well—as for being monstrous, even Frankenstein had a bride.

(he goes back to the cabinet. a long pause)

LYNDSEY

What's happening with Kathy?

STUART

Do we have to?

LYNDSEY

I think it'll be beneficial.

STUART

There isn't going to be anything beneficial, you just like to hear how I'm dying over her.

(he looks at her, she just stares back until he begins)

She won't return my calls even when she knows I can't *answer* her returning calls to tell me *why* she won't return my calls. *Précis fini*. You're current. Dredge another lake for bodies,

(she just stares as he angrily plays with then drops a drawer)

I can't write without her!—I can't hear what my characters are saying. She keeps me grounded to this life. I can't finish for the Balmorial.

LYNDSEY

What's that?

STUART

A writing competition for the National Theatre's season. Playwrights of a certain *stature* are invited to vie for it.—It's my first time being included. My last if I don't perform.

LYNDSEY

Congratulations.

STUART

This piece's good. It's everything I've learned and failed at before.—But I can't finish it.

LYNDSEY

What's the topic?

STUART

There's only ever one topic. Women and the *baboons* they love. How we fight over bananas, sex and god just to impress....The play's good, I know it is....but I don't know how it ends.

LYNDSEY

In happiness?

STUART

Oh yes, it's a cracklin' good time. Perhaps there's only one death.

LYNDSEY

What's it called?

STUART

All These Things....Yeah ok, I need an ending *and* a title.

(he drinks a long swig then tinkers a cabinet drawer)

LYNDSEY

You're turning 50 some day soon.

STUART

I'm turning 50 someday soon.

LYNDSEY

Don't you care?

STUART

About what, my hair graying, my pot belly, my penis not working?

LYDNSEY

Are those your worries? Is that why you sleep with all these woman?

STUART

Seems reason enough.

LYNDSEY

You'll survive. That's what's Dyna's for.

STUART

Christ, she's like Mussolini. Except Il Duce was sweeter.

LYNDSEY

She too will pass.

STUART

Like a carrion bird picking the carcass clean.—When I was young and a female friend would be in love with an older man, I was always the one saying, “Forty and never married? Something wrong with him.”—Fifty was unthinkable then.—And I was right too. There was.

LYNDSEY

Did you ever think of marrying?

STUART

Once. Not for love, god no, I thought it'd be easier to date.—It says “I've committed, I'm capable.” I may've buried her in the backyard, but somehow after I'm more eligible.

LYNDSEY

Your father killed himself at 50.

STUART

(pause)

That should tell you about marriage. How's it everybody remembers my birthday, but nobody remembers their last firm poop.

LYNDSEY

It's a sign we care.

(CÉLINE delicately ballets into the room)

STUART

People cared about my father, it's overrated....He accused me of killing him in the first act of every play I wrote. Even plays where there wasn't a father, he *assumed* I killed him before the play began....Then he killed himself in the first act of my real life—and I couldn't help thinking—how fitting. Tragic, but fitting.

(he finishes what's left in his glass)

To honor him, I kill him off in the first thirty minutes of every play I've ever written since.

(he looks at his watch, nods to himself, goes for another pill)

Our minds imagine so many chimera that aren't there.—Concrete things never stand a chance.

LYNDSEY

Like with Céline.

(he stops short, then moves to fill his glass. LYNDSEY stands)

STUART

It's a shame you're not a Freudian, I'd be so easy for you then.

LYNDSEY

Who's to say that you aren't?

STUART

You wouldn't've had to *sleep* with me to elicit all my secrets.

LYNDSEY

I didn't sleep with you for that.

STUART

Yes of course. Your renaissance.

(he plays with the glass in his hand watching her now)

LYNDSEY

You were good for me Stuart. After what my husband did—the embezzlement and forgery—the under-aged girls—I was lucky to meet you then. You were kind and patient. Fun, funny, so intelligent and so screwed up all at the same time. A therapist's *fantasy*. Every other woman's too if we're honest with ourselves....You told me to follow you, that it would be ok.

STUART

It was.

LYNDSEY

(pause, nodding)

Yes.—When a woman stops believing, each step forward is planted in marsh. Maybe there's land there, maybe just water. When you're not sure, you can never stand firm—so you decide it's better not to step at all....So I repay you a debt you well earned, every third Thursday.

(she exhales heavily, releasing. They stare a brief moment)

STUART

I was younger then, and more philanthropic. I'm turning 50, time to put away childish things.

LYNDSEY

So I understand these women, your allure for them. What attracts, what adheres, what catches hold and doesn't let go.—I've been them.

(he moves to the opposite chair intensely bearing in on her)

STUART

Then answer the questions I have. Can you explain it to me, can you do that?—Why can't I stop? Hmm? Why can't I choose and accept and be satisfied?—*Why can't I finish my play?!*

(he awaits hungrily; she stares at him hard)

LYNDSEY

Céline. Céline is your answer and has always been.

(incredulous, speechless at first, he backs deep into the chair)

STUART

Oh.—It's that simple. Here's your answer. It's Céline, Céline's your answer. Hmph. Mother will be so disappointed.

(he rises from the chair)

LYNDSEY

Mock it all you want.

STUART

Oh but I will, I'm going to mock the shit out of it. It's very mock worthy.

LYNDSEY

It doesn't change the truth. Céline is the reason for Kathy. And for Dyna and for Francine—

STUART

And for *you*?

(she evinces the hit, then continues)

LYNDSEY

And for all the others we don't name or talk about—because they fell and loved but gave up or left without leaving a mark on you.

STUART

The one or two....I need to finish the play.

LYNDSEY

(pause)

You see—you *are* that easy for me.

(CELINE continues dancing)

Lights Down

SCENE 5

STUART's Apartment, an earlier time. There is no IKEA nor its paraphernalia. He and CÉLINE are post coital, wearing boxers and t-shirts. She is on the couch, he stands mid story. She is laughing hard. He watches her very happy about it.

STUART

And you don't *blame* him?! You don't?!

CÉLINE

(through laughter)

But it's so funny. The words are so close.

STUART

Céline, he's waving a meat cleaver over his head like he wants to chop my head off, or something else I hold more dear down below.

CÉLINE

I *don't* blame him, non. Bien sûr que non! Canard et connard, the words are so close Stephen. It's an easy mistake.

STUART

Yes but who orders *asshole* in a butcher shop! I mean it's not like you walk in and say, "I want asshole please. Do you have some good asshole?"

(she is laughing so hard, she is waving at him to stop)

No you don't, you don't do that. And I'm standing right there in front of the raw duck breasts mind you so yeah, the words are close, but I think connard is close enough.

CÉLINE

Canard. Ca, ca.

STUART

Yeah I get that now!

CÉLINE

It's funny. Vraiment, c'est très drôle. So what did he do?

STUART

He started cursing me in French, waving his arms around like a madman!

CÉLINE

Like the newscaster in your movie!

STUART

But with a meat cleaver! Screaming "*Pédé! Tantouse!*" I don't even know what that means.

CÉLINE

Homo. He was calling you homosexual.

STUART

Fine. *Homo*. You homo!

CÉLINE

What did you do?

STUART

I got the hell out of there. The hell with the duck breasts. Putain *canard*.

CÉLINE

Connard!

STUART

Whatever!

(her laugh infects him so that they both laugh together)

Oh laughing *at me* makes you happy, makes you smile does it?

CÉLINE

Yes, much. I love when you tell your stories. I tell my whole family. They're très drôle.

STUART

Céline are you serious? You tell your family these things?

(she nods happily then rises excitedly dancing)

I'm a laughing stock to your family. The family at Christmas after the *magret de connards* laugh at Stephen lost in the 15th, Stephen threatened with a *meat* cleaver for ordering asshole.

CÉLINE

Stephen fighting with the old woman at Charles de Gaulle.

STUART

You did *not* tell your parents that. *Céline no!*

(she is nodding, laughing and dancing. he falls on the couch)

Here I'm trying to *woo* you and impress your family when actually I'm just playing your fool.

CÉLINE

Don't be silly, my family loves you. They think you are très charmant. Et très beau. And you have wooed me.

STUART

Wooed you, I have *wooed* you. *Wooed* you is what I did before over there.

(she plows into him, hugging full, remaining buried in his chest)

CÉLINE

You have, you have, I am totally wooed by you. Now and forever. Et toujours plus.

STUART

And forever more like in a fairy tale I'd write....A couple walks with nothing but love towards the horizon into futures unknown.

(she releases from the hug, then looks at him a long time, her mood fading growing dark, frightened. She nears tears)

STUART

Hey....Hey hey what?—

(she hides herself in his lap)

STUART – cont'd

Céline what, what's wrong? What is it?

CÉLINE

Stephen I'm scared.

STUART

Why? What about? What's happened?

(she pulls away from him, backs away on the couch)

CÉLINE

I don't know, I don't know but I am, I so very am.—

STUART

Okay, it's okay. Talk to me? Tell me what you're feeling?

CÉLINE

I told you! *Scared!*

STUART

But of what? What specifically? I can't help you if don't tell me—

CÉLINE

I don't want your help! I don't need your help!

(they stare then she dives into his arms desperately. He, confused, doesn't hug back at first but eventually does)

I'm sorry Stephen, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I do want you to help me, I do need you to help me. I don't know why I said that. I don't know why anything anymore.

(he envelopes her in his arms, she grabs on to him desperately)

STUART

All right, it's all right, it's okay. We'll talk. We'll figure it out together.

(eventually they disengage and she moves away)

It's starting again. Is it?—Céline—

CÉLINE

This will end. I'm afraid this will end.

STUART

What are you talking, it won't end. Nothing's going to—

CÉLINE

Something will come take this from us. What we mean, what we share that no others share. I don't want it to ever end. *Promets moi.* Promise me you will never let it end.

STUART

I won't.

CÉLINE

Say it! Promise me!

(he takes her face in his hands)

STUART

I promise you. I will never let this end.

CÉLINE

I told you. From the beginning I told you.—

STUART

Ssshhh, stop—

CÉLINE

I did, I told. "Don't. You'll regret it. You'll regret loving me."

(he reaches for her but she backs away from him)

STUART

Come on now, none of that—

CÉLINE

You know I did. I did. Say it.

STUART

Ssshsh.

CÉLINE

“How can you love me? Why would you try?” I told. Say I did.

(he moves to her again, wraps her in his arms and rocks her)

STUART

You told me, yes....And I told you that the world is sick in six billion ways.—The secret was just finding someone you’re immune to. You remember?....We’re immune to each other.—For that, we can be together forever.

CÉLINE

(pause)

It’s black.—It’s black and it drapes me. It drapes everything I think and feel. This lead veil that lies on me. I can’t escape it, I’m chained in like a suit of armor.

(they disengage and she rises, drifts away)

For a while I push against this veil, to get from under, find its edge and pull myself free. I do, I try! But I can’t!....For awhile I keep on, I claw—but finally I stop. I give.—*Et je l’accepte entièrement.* I accept all.—It has been and will always be. A sentence on my life.

(he moves to her, but she moves even further away)

Then I pull the veil over me for it’s mine now. I fill it in parts, wrap it round my feet, my legs, over my head. *C’est mon esprit maintenant.* —It is me.—Then I live in *my veil* of black.

(a long pause, he just looks at her helpless)

STUART

Did you start taking them?....You didn’t.—You promised me, you said you would.

CÉLINE

I’m afraid to.

STUART

Don't be. This's what they're for.

CÉLINE

How do you know?!

STUART

It's what the doctor said. It's what we researched and read in the articles.

CÉLINE

They lie! They all lie to get you to take them! To make their money!

STUART

In a week or two, you'll feel a change. They'll help.

CÉLINE

Tu es idiot, un imbécile! I don't know what I saw in you! You're fake! A liar like everyone!

(she turns away fiercely. A pause)

I'm sorry. I don't mean that. I really don't.

STUART

I know.

(she remains looking away)

CÉLINE

You'll forgive me. You always do.

STUART

I already have.

CÉLINE

Because you want sex with me.

STUART

It's not that and you know it.

(she turns to him, looks at him firmly)

CÉLINE

I love when we have sex.—I love the first moment you enter me. It's so wonderful to be with you then.—It rushes through me, energy, a nerve through my body and I am feel fully fully alive!...I love too the moments after. The time we share in bed. The afternoon fades and we share the same but now in shadow. *Plus dévêtue que nu...*What we say in those moments, it is what I am most.—Then I am truly captured. Sensations in darkness...I need you Stephen.

STUART

I'm here.

CÉLINE

All the world except you, it's too much.

STUART

I'm not going anywhere.

(she rushes to his arms, hugging desperately)

CÉLINE

Drape me Stephen, drape me. I feel the blackness.

STUART

I am Céline, I am all around you.

CÉLINE

I can't feel you Stephen, I can't. Drape me.

STUART

I am Céline. I am.

(they hold long, desperate moment)

Lights Down

SCENE 6

STUART stands staring at the half completed structure of the IKEA cabinet. He studies it, starts to move towards it and stops multiple times. He takes another long look, sighs deeply. Then violently, with both hands, gives it the finger, shaking them at it furiously. He takes his cell phone from his pocket, calls.

STUART

Kathy, it's me again. As if you couldn't tell by my voice. As if you couldn't tell by my phone number on your caller ID, as if you couldn't tell by the fact that I call every day at this same time and *have* called every day at this same time for *the last seven days!*

(he exhales several times to calm himself)

So if you would kindly, or at this point even if you would not so kindly—oh *goddamn it!*

(he closes the phone angrily and makes to throw it against the wall, even winds up and makes the throwing motion, but never lets it go. He stands for a moment then picks up a drawer but disgusted, he throws it back down.

He moves to the writing table, sits, and picks up the pen, straightens the pages before him. He makes a motion as if to begin to write, hovering over the pages, but nothing comes and he stays there frozen a long moment. He backs into the chair, sighs heavily. A long moment pause. Then he shuffles the pages again and leans in again to write.

STUART

She ballets into the room like a snow angel in wind and turns to him and says....She says....

(long pause)

She dances into the—she, she ballets in like a snow angel, she turns to him says....

(yet again, nothing. He lets out a scream of frustration and rises from the chair in an angry rush.

After a long moment he drifts back to the table and looks down at the pages and then sees DYNA's Pink pages. He looks at them quizzically, then picks them up and realizes what they are)

STUART

Oh Jesus, this fucking thing.

(he drops it back down on the table, waits a moment, then picks it up again. He reads the title stentorianly)

“What do you love about women? Why are you thankful for them?”

(he stares blankly into pace)

“What do you think makes them special?”

(he begins to laugh sardonically)

Are you fucking kidding me? Does that mean Special Ed? Cause that's where they're special.

(holding the pages, he moves around before he begins)

I'll tell you how they're special. They're special in that *decisions*, made and contracted and set in stone to the *Nth* degree are in actuality only *temporary* arrangements, limited time offers subject to change thirty minutes hence depending on the direction of the wind and the flow of Minerva. They're special in their *incapacity*, *preternatural* I assure you, to keep a secret! For they *are not* secrets at all, oh no, there *are* no secrets, because to tell one is to tell all, because not a one of them to the last femme fatale can keep a damn thing *to themselves!* Privacy! Secrecy! Silence! They do not exist in the female mind. No matter how sensitive, no matter how confidential, they'll broadcast it *live* to the entire planet, to the universe if technology would allow! Your guarded confidences, your innermost emotions they'll share on a whim, with righteous justification, and moreover full indignation! As a statement, as the culmination of all that is holy because if it was told in private to just *one* then all as a result must know!

(he nods furiously receiving reassurance on his statements)

And they'll make you feel *guilty* about their *having* to tell *all* your secrets to everyone. In their Feminine *logic*, becalm dear Aristotle with that phrase, it is *our* fault and failing! We *forced* them to share our secrets with the world, they really had no other *choice* because *our* actions made them do it! Our attitude or behavior or misogyny, because the selfish, self-centered, miserable bastards that we are!

(angrily, he picks up the cell phone. He starts to call but stops, closes the phone and squeezing tightly, letting out a scream)

STUART – cont'd

Fuck you Balmorial, fuck you in the heart!

(he roves manically)

You're better off! You're better off my good man! You're so so much better off!

(he's struck cold by a thought. Long pause)

But then they cry.—Then they cry, they do....And their eyes fill slowly, from the bottom up, rising like a painful sea in a telegraphic tube—becoming this thing so raw, so perfectly hurt.—Blues and greens and browns, such colors so full we're left wondering how hues as beautiful could ever exist on this shitty little planet.

(pause, extremely calm now)

And immediately it's gone. It's gone entirely. Whatever it was you were angry at, whatever you were annoyed with, that you were....it's gone....And all you want to do then is stop it. Stop the hurt. Stop the pain. Stop those eyes from filling and creating those magnificent colors you caused you selfish, self-centered, miserable bastard.

(long pause as he struggles with the thoughts. CÉLINE enters, delicately balleting into the room. He makes no notice)

I know. I know....And then you remember what women are and what they do for you. It all comes rushing back, how amazing they all are. Truly the work of *the Gods*. The only endlessly interesting, endlessly fascinating, beguiling, endearing and enchanting thing in this whole fucked-up world.—“*There ain't nothing but a dame?*”

(he rushes to the table, grabs the Pink pages quickly, eventually begins to write)

Mmn, off key again....And where would we be without them? Where would we bloom, where would we shine—if we did not have them to shine for?....What would be the point of shining anyway if not for them to see.

(pause, nodding)

Yes I am, I am thankful.—I am so very thankful for them.

(he continues writing.. CÉLINE continues dancing)

Lights Down

ACT II, SCENE 7

Stuart's Apartment. EVELYN stands alone perusing the book case. She moves to the table and sees the Pink pages that STUART wrote in the previous scene. She stares down at them as she pours herself a drink from the bottle on the table. She takes a sip. She picks up the pages and begins to read.

EVELYN

Hmmpf. A topic of which he knows precious little.

(long pause)

Preternaturally?

(she continues to read as STUART walks in. He is not silent and she is aware of his entrance, but she does not flinch from her reading. Pause)

STUART

Interesting reading?

EVELYN

A perfect topic for you, don't you think?

STUART

I'd've thought you would've said it was a topic of which I knew precious little.

(she drops the pages on the desk)

EVELYN

I always enjoy reading your work. It helps me get to know you.

STUART

I've always thought I write to find out how I feel about you.

(she turns to him finally. He finds another glass around the apartment and moves to pour himself from the Scotch bottle)

EVELYN

How flattered I am.

STUART

Wait until you read it.

EVELYN

You wouldn't write anything that hurts me—even if you could.

STUART

Playwrights have a long and proud tradition of trashing their mothers. Long Day's Journey, Glass Menagerie. *Oedipus*. "Mothers, don't let your children grow up to be playwrights."

EVELYN

I didn't.

(they share a knowing look)

STUART

No you didn't.—Oh well. The best laid plans....

(they cheers glasses as she walks by the bookcase again)

EVELYN

My best laid plans indeed.—Even as a little boy, your imagination consumed you. Real life never interested you half as much as the life you created in your head.

STUART

It was far more peaceful. And more caring.

(pause as she moves on)

EVELYN

One can only imagine the disappointment human beings are for you. Their weakness and failings. No one has ever been able to live up to your ideal.—Even you.

(she turns to him and they stare a moment)

STUART

What brings you here Evelyn? I need to write.

EVELYN

Ah directness, our family trait. Well—*my* family trait.

STUART

Gratitude overwhelms me. You were answering....

EVELYN

It's time to settle down and marry Stuart. It's time to sell your soul to an accommodation and bear it mightily for the years you have left. You are turning fifty this month.

STUART

Evelyn, you've remembered my birthday. How touching.

EVELYN

I always remember the big ones. Birth, being legal to drink, your bar mitzvah year.

STUART

It's a shame we're not Jewish.

EVELYN

Still a *fine* marker in a young man's life.

(he moves to the IKEA and he pours himself another drink)

STUART

I need to settle down do I? How quaint. Have you made a *match*? Is it with a Cabot-Lodge?

EVELYN

I don't know the words you kids use today.

STUART

Kids don't use words anymore. They just flash hands signals that connote surrender.

EVELYN

Parry all you want with that precious mind I gave you, you can't ignore my point. You're old. You're getting older. You need someone to care for you, you're not capable of it yourself.

STUART

More of your family trait. I bet Father misses it, wherever he is.

(she finishes her drink and moves for another)

EVELYN

Your father was the most *innocent* elegant man I ever knew. That's why I married him, that combination. All the *savoir faire*, none of the deceit accompanying it. It was very alluring.

(she pours herself the refill)

He didn't have the courage to face the years. Few men do. It is we women who bear brunts well. Don't get me wrong, he was dealt a bad hand which he played poorly as was his nature.

STUART

His family's trait.

EVELYN

Indeed.—Adversity was the only ill-fitting suit he ever wore. He was too graceful to conduct something so *tawdry* as real life. And when the time came to fight, he tried elegantly.

Elegance is no plan for a street fight, and life is nothing if not that. Fortunately, I had enough deceit for both of us—and more than enough fight.

(he raises his glass to her)

So he died elegantly. No mess, nothing to clean, just a pill bottle to pick up off the grass under the hammock between two sycamores.—I appreciated the thoughtfulness.—Efficiency. That's contrary to the universe. The universe demands battle.

(she sips fully from her glass)

The species would've died out long ago if men had to give birth.

(she raises a glass back to STUART)

STUART

Thank you Mother, I'm aware of my age.

EVELYN

Stuart—

STUART

And I will give your words all the due consideration they deserve after my bubble bath.

EVELYN

Stuart you're a libertine.

STUART

I'm a hedonist.

EVELYN

What's the difference?

STUART

More fat in the diet.

(he moves by her but she stops him grabbing his arm)

EVELYN

You've saved nothing for the race's end. When the road narrows, it gets cruel. Choices for those who haven't planned are somewhere between shit and something less than shit.

(she releases him and moves away)

STUART

You've become downright philosophical in your old age Ev. I see where I got my talent.

EVELYN

I've become *frightened* in my *old* age. I never thought it would be so. I never thought anything would scare me....Everything scares me now. Everything challenges what I established. Crossing streets, buying food, plugging in the hairdryer....Living is *terrifying*.

(pause as he watches her refill her glass)

STUART

Don't you worry. Fear still fears you. It still quakes in your trail.

EVELYN

Not as before.—Not as I wish it did.

(she turns to him firmly)

I want you to choose one Stuart. I don't care which. I want you to choose and commit to her.

STUART

Kathy left me.

EVELYN

Can you blame her?

(he drains his drink and moves to the table to refill)

STUART

I'm trying to, yes. Though it's a little difficult.

EVELYN

Are you writing?

(no response, just a pained look of failure meets her eyes)

And the Bowlmore?

STUART

Balmorial, Mother. It's a writing competition, not a bowling alley.

EVELYN

Is it bad?

EVELYN – cont'd

(he doesn't respond, but takes a pill which he swallows with a long draught of the refilled glass)

I have seen it. You must fight it.

(again no response, he just turns to her)

You look like crap.

STUART

The good news is I feel worse than I look. And I have chosen someone Evelyn so you can stop your worrying.

EVELYN

You have?! Is it Kathy? I like Kathy.

STUART

You don't like Kathy.

EVELYN

No I don't but I can *tolerate* Kathy!—But you've found someone? Someone to be with?

STUART

Don't sound so surprised Mrs. Caldwell. Or excited. You won't like her.

EVELYN

Why? What is she? Jewish? I like Jews.

STUART

Worse.

EVELYN

Black?

STUART

French.

EVELYN

Communist?!

STUART

French!

EVELYN

Yes!

(they stare a good moment)

I don't care. I don't care, I don't. I want you to do this. I want you to. You must do this.

(she is visibly upset. He moves to her, but can only take hold of her upper arm. It is not unaffectionate. It settles her slightly.)

Give yourself to her. Give her all you have. Before it's too late, before fear sets in and you no longer can.—I don't want you to face everything alone. I don't want that for you.

(he holds tightly onto her arm as she stares off not facing him)

LIGHTS DOWN

SCENE 8

STUART's Apartment. STUART, DYNA, FRANCINE are in the apartment.. All are holding pages from STUART's latest script. STUART has a glass in his hand and the bottle is nearby which he refills throughout.

STUART

All right, I want to move to the final scene. I want to hear it from “You allow me to write.”

FRANCINE

Stuart I don't think I can do that scene with her.

DYNA

I don't *want* to do that scene with her.

STUART

We're going to do the scene. It's going to be fine. The both of you just focus—

FRANCINE

Really Stuart it's not really fair of you.

DYNA

How am I really to do it with her?

FRANCINE

She's a child for Christ's sakes!

DYNA

She's your well-older lover!

FRANCINE

What can she *know* about this topic?!

DYNA

Can she even remember passion?!

(long pause. STUART, head down, his barely controlled rage quiets them. Eventually he speaks with forced calm)

STUART

We're going to do the scene....You're to find the meaning in the words, and the impulse behind those meanings. And you're going to do it spectacularly.—Understood?

(he raises his head, looks to each. Silent acceptance. To DYNA)

STUART cont'd

You. I want *indignation*. I don't want pissed, I don't want bitchy, I want indignation.

DYNA

What's the difference?

STUART

More Cher, less Madonna. You know what's he's done. It's not the first time, it's not *fifth*.

DYNA

How can she be indignant if he's done it so many times? Does she even have proof ?

STUART

You've caught him *again* and again and he's handing you the same bullshit lines. "We're just friends. We just kissed. I didn't stick it in!"

FRANCINE

Cocksucker.

(he nods and points emphatically to her remark)

STUART

There! That! OK?....And she doesn't need proof, she's a woman, she has intuition.

DYNA

Don't knock it, it works.

STUART

So does leeching.

(to FRANCINE)

And you.—He dances fast. It's not waltz, one two three, one two three. It's Rave.

(imitating a drum beat from a nightclub)

Doush doush doush doush. He relies on grandiloquence to get him through. Get them to ride the rollercoaster and they'll always buy the cotton candy. Got it?

(she nods)

And give me that *fucking* line right.

FRANCINE

I *hate* that fucking line. Why do I have to say that line?

STUART

Because I wrote it. All right now, let's go, let's go! From "You allow me to write."

(they move into position directly opposite each other. He moves away to refill his glass and takes a pill)

DYNA

With the pages?

STUART

Do you suddenly know all the words without them?

DYNA

With the pages.

STUART

Lovely. OK, when you're ready.

(FRANCINE takes a moment to set herself, then launches in)

FRANCINE

You *allow* me to write. You're my muse!

DYNA

I'm not your *muse*. I just make you feel decent enough to write.

FRANCINE

No, it's not that. It's not, it's more.

(she takes DYNA's hand, rubs it)

When you're near me Kathy, I see things differently. The whole world, my characters, they come into stark relief. Colors, details, distinct and clear. It's *all* because of you.

(DYNA pulls away her hand and turns. FRANCINE pursues)

DYNA

It's not my job to be your muse. I have a life.

FRANCINE

I know you do. I've tied it together with mine. In a mesh, in a woven reliquary.

STUART

Aaagh Christ!—Not you. Continue.

DYNA

My life is a target for your creativity Stephen. You find ways to dismiss it as insignificant.

FRANCINE

I'm trying to do something bigger here. To write something eternal, something that *lasts* and is *standing*. To be there at that ultimate moment with Shakespeare and Williams and Chekov, to be a part of that. *They* are my competition.

STUART

You arrogant fuck.

DYNA

No. That isn't what you want.

FRANCINE

No? What then?

(DYNA moves aggressively towards FRANCINE)

DYNA

You want to sleep with girls! Lots of 'em! You want to sleep with them and still have me love you anyway despite it. You want me to be there to catch you when you fall, when they let you down and leave. You want too much Stephen.

(DYNA moves to leave. FRANCINE grabs her by the arm)

FRANCINE

I want *everything*. I want the universe!

(this is the line she hates and makes a face. He gives her the finger)

DYNA

Well you can't have everything. No one gets everything.

STUART

More indignation!

DYNA

You can't *have* everything! No one *gets* everything!

STUART

Good. Better

FRANCINE

Why can't I?—We get just seventy *good* years, why can't I have everything?! We put up with such shit. Failure and disappointment. Loss. Growing *old!* Knowing from early on, you lose, and it's not some noble defeat, some grand gesture of fortitude. It's small and it's petty and it humiliates, leaving you a potted plant watered, fed and shat upon for the last—

DYNA

Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!

(she throws her pages in anger)

No more of that. Not this time, no more words.—I have heard them. I have heard your words and been mesmerized and lost in them. They're your passage back in....But not this time.

STUART

More hurt. More pain.

DYNA

I don't want to *suffer* because you think *everyone needs* to suffer. That anyone not in *anguish* is not really alive. And I won't believe that Life is just sorrow and sex.

STUART

Subtle as a goddamn hurricane.

FRANCINE

Kathy—

(DYNA stretches out, standing to her full posture)

DYNA

I'm your blissful fool Stephen. I'm the ones you are mad at, the ones you're jealous of. Who deep down inside you despise because we live without reason.

STUART

Take it deeper.

DYNA

I'm happy and I don't care anymore. So no more of your words. From now on I focus on *love* and *joy* and *simplicity*, all the things you fear because if they're right, you're wrong. You're wrong! All of this is wrong! All these things you hate and shun and destroy. All these things!—*I will focus on all these things! I will focus on me!*

(DYNA ends with a flourish with arms high and wide. A pause)

STUART

OK scene....*Wow*, that sucked!

(they respond physically in disappointment)

It's not you, it's me, all me! Just shitty overwriting on my part. Suicidal Christmas jingles.

(he takes a big swig of his drink)

OK. Let me hear it again one more time.—From, "I don't want to be your muse." And this time with feeling.

(he pops another pill as he sets himself for the scene)

Lights Down

SCENE 9

STUART's Apartment, IKEA cabinet absent. STUART walks around furiously moving books from one side of the room to the other. Standing stationary, CÉLINE watches him carefully.

CÉLINE

But why does it matter?

STUART

I don't know, it just does. I don't want it to, but like so many things I don't want, they happen. It marks the time, it marks the clanging of the sands.

CÉLINE

I don't know what that means.

STUART

Those grains hitting the bottom of the hourglass, resounding louder in my head. "Time's running out! Get moving! You've done nothing!"...It starts with a whisper, moves to incessant chattering, and eventually ends screaming in my skull.

CÉLINE

What do you do then?

(he stops a moment, exhaling from the intense work. he turns to her slowly, serious)

STUART

I daydream of you.

(he moves to her, fondles her hand exactly as FRANCINE did to DYNA in the previous scene)

CÉLINE

I love your kindness. You don't show the rest of the world, but I see.

(he releases to take a pill, swallowing with a swig of his drink)

Will you stop?

STUART

It will stop me.

(he goes back to the moving)

Have you thought about it more?

CÉLINE

À quoi?

STUART

You know.

CÉLINE

Oui je sais....No. I have not thought.

STUART

Why not?

CÉLINE

Stephen you know why.

(he moves angrily back to moving the books)

STUART

You tell me. Because frankly, I don't understand. Explain it to me slow. I'm not very bright.

CÉLINE

I have told. Your refusing to accept is not the same as my not telling.

STUART

You're perfect. You're everything a man could want. Everything *I* want.

CÉLINE

But I'm nothing to have.

STUART

You're fun and funny, thoughtful and considerate. Exquisitely beautiful.

CÉLINE

Pff, arrête.

STUART

You say and do these crazy things and I love when you do them. You know things I don't and share so I can understand. You see a better me than I see in myself. You're forthright even when I don't want you to be.

CÉLINE

Oui I am that. C'est ma force.

STUART

Then it makes no sense!

(he stops, throwing an armful of books down and turns to her)

So explain it. I'm here listening.

CÉLINE

I can't Stephen! I am not made for these things!

(she turns away as he moves to her)

STUART

No one's made for marriage, it's aberrant in the Animal kingdom! Those chimpanzees are *laughing* at humans for getting married! "You're so advanced with your large brains and opposable thumbs yet you lock in yourself with one mate for your life! You morons."

CÉLINE

Charmant.

STUART

I'd do it too if I was them! Lie about all day, sleep with *all* the females in the tribe or pride and *laugh my ass* off at humans for marrying.

CÉLINE

Then why do you want it?!

STUART

Because I found you!....I didn't think I would, but I did! And I fell and opened and fired with everything I had. So much I didn't even know I had.

CÉLINE

Oui, c'est vrai.

STUART

For you only.

(they stare hard at each other)

CÉLINE

You look tired. You're not sleeping.

STUART

I'm not writing. I'm told it's because of you.

CÉLINE

Do you believe?

(he pauses to respond, but only registers a pained expression)

You must finish the play.

STUART

I don't know if I can. I don't know what'll happen if I do....Marry me.

(she turns away from him)

CÉLINE

Je ne suis pas faite pour ces choses-là.

STUART

No one is. But we alter and adjust. We become what we never knew we could be.

CÉLINE

But I can't!

STUART

But *why*?!

CÉLINE

Stephen please! You know this. You've always known this about me.

(he kicks a book across the room)

STUART

It's always the same! The same answers, the same evasion. You remain this nymphalid in amber. Beautiful, perfectly precious, but dead.

CÉLINE

But it can't change!

STUART

Why?!

(she just stares at him wordless. He waits for an answer)

I can't take this. I can't. I can't take this.

(he starts gathering outwear to leave. She follows him)

CÉLINE

No don't.—

STUART

I gotta get out of here.—

CÉLINE

Stephen don't go—

STUART

I need to get away from all this.—

CÉLINE

Don't leave now. Please stay. I want you to stay.

(he turns abruptly to her)

STUART

Then share what's in your head? Make me a part of it!

CÉLINE

It can't be shared! It can't be imparted! *I'm not complete! I'm not whole! I'm shadow!*

(she moves away from him)

You know what I can tell, it is all I know myself. These thoughts and words, they are outside, they lead to places I don't choose....*I am drawn!* I am drawn, tu comprends?!....

What you think, what you feel—I am drawn—but do not draw myself.

(she turns to him)

Dangerous things little girls believe. Men of dreams one day coming to them out of *espoir*, hope!....There is no French word for hopeful. Such form seems wrong from our mouths. To us optimism is too dirty to feel....There is a price for loving too much in one's imagination.

(they stare at each other a moment)

But I would.—I would share with you, all and everything if I could. Everything I am, I would, if I knew how.—Baudelaire said the world only goes round by misunderstanding.—You and I live our misunderstanding as we make it our own.

(pause, then he backs away slightly)

STUART

I don't think you would.—You'd never let me in. You *love* this little game of intrigue.

CÉLINE

That's not true!—

(he moves again to put on the outwear angrily)

STUART

It makes you mysterious and seductive. Keep me at a distance, from getting close, getting in. Something I want, something I *need* but never capture. I'm *Tantalus*, forever bending for water as it recedes. I back away, you approach. I reach in, you retreat.

(he puts on his coat to leave)

CÉLINE

Ce n'est pas vrai! N'est pas vrai!—

STUART

I can't live this way. I can't. I don't want to.—

CÉLINE

Stephen! Ne pars pas! Please!

STUART

I can't be near you right now. *Anywhere* near you—

CÉLINE

Please Stephen! A little while more!

(he grabs her roughly about the shoulders, surprising her)

STUART

You think you can pull this on me?! You think I'm that guy?! You think I'm my father?!

(he releases her and they stare for a long moment. Then he moves for the scarf and the door)

CÉLINE

Please don't go now!

(no response from him as he keeps hurriedly readying to leave)

You can't leave Stephen!

(again no response as he continues his actions)

STEPHEN PLEASE!

(her desperate tone stops him, facing the door. A long pause)

STUART

It's the first time. The first....

CÉLINE

Oui.

STUART

At this late stage....Did I wait too long? Has my chance passed?—Am I deficient?

CÉLINE

Non Stephen, tu n'es pas.

(he turns to her and they stare)

STUART

You make that seem true. You make it seem I was right to have waited until you came....It seems that way for a while, a long moment....But that moment fades....When you say you can't be mine, soon there's no trace it was ever there.

CÉLINE

But you know. You've always known your choice.—Tu savais toujours, n'est-ce pas?

(he turns away from her partially)

STUART

I know so many things—and I don't know anything at all.

CÉLINE

Don't leave Stephen. S'il te plaît. Stay. I cannot be alone. Don't leave me alone.

(he looks at her a long moment, then turns and goes out the door. She stays looking at the door after he has gone)

Lights Down

SCENE 10

STUART's apartment. DYNA, dressed only in underwear, is riffling through papers on the desk. She finds the Pink pages, begins reading them. FRANCINE enters with excitement that fades on seeing DYNA. They regard each other a long moment. FRANCINE enters further as DYNA goes back to the pages.

FRANCINE

We have to stop meeting like this. I always feel like I'm disturbing your sunbathing.

DYNA

Do I look disturbed?

(DYNA turns slowly to FRANCINE and they stare a moment until each returns to what they were doing before)

FRANCINE

It needn't be this way between us. We aren't each other's competition. I'm not going to bite.

DYNA

That's disappointing. Stuart will tell you I'm quite fond of biting.

(FRANCINE peruses the moved books before responding)

FRANCINE

You do realize what's happening here, don't you? Let me explain, I've seen this movie before.—Neither of us *wins* this Battle Royale. In fact, it ends badly for us with unanswered texts and soggy scenes though ultimately we'll put on our stoic faces and never let on we even cared.—We're the necessary *other* combatants that give the eventual winner a sense of accomplishment. We're the collateral damage not mentioned in the news coverage.

(DYNA, putting down the Pink pages, turns to her)

DYNA

I don't accept your core premise.—We *are* each other's competition. Not in this little skirmish, Stuart's a nice fella, but he's not the high rung. But out *there*, it's our war zone. I'm everything you fear, you're everything I'm trying not to become. In the boardroom, the bedroom, the bathroom mirror most of all, our battle rages fierce and unceasing.—I'm your replacement. You're my road block.

FRANCINE

(pause)

Put your shirt on.

DYNA

Take yours off.

(they stare a moment, then FRANCINE laughs it off, moving)

FRANCINE

Oh my dear, rookie mistake. Your breasts don't give you power here. Never confuse what works on men with what works on women. The first time mine were done, you were in daddy's arms.

DYNA

Or only a gleam in his underwear.

(FRANCINE acknowledges the line with only a nod and smile. She then moves towards her coat as to leave)

FRANCINE

Tell Stuart when he comes back I was here. And when he wishes to see me—

(she turns to DYNA for the effect)

And he *will* wish to see—he knows how to find me.

(she begins towards the door)

DYNA

Why would I do that?

(FRANCINE stops, thinks a good moment, then turns and moves right up very close to DYNA)

FRANCINE

Because we're competing.—And *you like* the competition.

(FRANCINE pulls DYNA in and plants a big forceful closed-lipped kiss on her. She releases then moves towards the door to leave. The door opens and LYNDSEY enters. Everyone is dumb-struck for a long moment)

LYNDSEY

We have to stop meeting like this.

DYNA

And Stuart needs to give his keys to fewer women.

FRANCINE

I was just leaving.

LYNDSEY

No please don't. I came on purpose. I was hoping to catch one, or more of you here.

FRANCINE

Who is the one, who is the more?

DYNA

I think we know—

(FRANCINE is about to responded, but LYNDSEY gets in first)

LYNDSEY

I think we're all the "more".—And I think we know that.

(no response comes from them but they are calmed)

LYNDSEY – cont'd

Our Stuart has his many charms. He must, look at us! How amazing each of us is. More than enough for *ten* men—let alone one....He has many charms. Fidelity isn't among them.

DYNA

Nor is lasting long in bed.

(they all start to laugh)

FRANCINE

He's not without skill mind you, it's just....

LYNDSEY

Longevity seems to present some difficulty.

DYNA

He always tells me it's a sign of—

(they all join in)

How turned on he is.

(they all laugh more)

FRANCINE

At least he sells it well.

DYNA

I buy it every time.

(they all nod in agreement somewhat sadly)

LYNDSEY

Isn't that what he does best of all? Makes us *believe*. Convinces us that perhaps *we can be the one*. To change and settle him....to save him.

FRANCINE

You feel you're special even when everything he says tells you you're not.

DYNA

When he's silent, he's his most compelling.

LYNDSEY

Because it's in there. He shows just enough of it, the heart, the soul—

DYNA

The love.

FRANCINE

To leave us hoping on his start.

LYNDSEY

(pause)

It's the most cruel thing he does.

FRANCINE

He's a Devil Boy, that one. Nowhere near the Anti-Christ, so far from an angel.

LYNDSEY

And we fall in love with him for it.

(again, they all nod thoughtfully)

DYNA

I love when he goes down on me, he's so passionate. He truly enjoys it.

FRANCINE

Sometimes he doesn't even want me to reciprocate. As if my pleasure was all he needed.

(the door opens and EVELYN walks in. All are silent for a long moment wondering and staring at each other and at her)

EVELYN

The Mother.

(all are relieved and express it with nervous sounds and nods of agreement. EVELYN moves into the room removing her gloves)

EVELYN

Stuart's tastes ran the gamut, but everything has its outer limits. Septuagenarians are a day he hopes never arrives. But then again, I'm sure you are all far more aware of his tastes than I.

(she moves imperiously to sit at the desk)

So, tell me—what were we discussing?

LYNDSEY

(looking for help)

Uhm, I don't really uh....

FRANCINE

I think it was, that, em....

DYNA

Stuart's oral sex prowess....How happy he gets when we orgasm.

(EVELYN looks around the room at the three women)

EVELYN

My, how well I raised him! Who are great lovers? The ones raised by strong mothers! They learn to please a woman is their responsibility. I taught him that. I drilled it into his head.

(to the entire room)

You're welcome!

(she pours herself a drink from the bottle on the table)

It's always strong-mother men who make the best lovers. Attentive, thorough, absorbed.

(they all look at her shyly and no one responds)

What what, no commentary?....That's the problem with young women today, they think they invented sex. As if *they* were the first liberated girls of womanhood. Before them no fun was had, no one did it "just for the *fuck* of it."....I'm here to tell you, all existed long before you.

(she raises a glass to them)

So please, continue. I've always been curious. I know what *I* love about Stuart, but I could never quite be certain what it was for others.

(all three women are speechless, uncomfortable. STUART enters the apartment and stops, seeing everyone. A long pause)

STUART

Am I dead?

(he looks for reassurance, then moves into the apartment)

EVELYN

Not yet Stuart. Though you'd be so lucky to face eternal rest so well populated. But we were just discussing you. Don't worry, all the fun parts, none of the truth.

STUART

Is there anything less relevant?

LYNDSEY

Stuart I came, I guess we all came because—well to tell the truth, I'm not quite sure why I came. And I doubt the rest do either.

EVELYN

I know.

DYNA

So do I.

EVELYN

(pointing at DYNA)

I like this one.

(STUART acknowledges the comment with an agreeing nod and moves to pour himself a drink into a glass waiting there)

STUART

It doesn't matter why you've come. Ladies, I love you, I love you all. But right now, I need you to leave. I need all of you—

EVELYN

I'm doing no such thing.—

FRANCINE

Neither am I.—

LYNDSEY

Stuart really I think we should talk about what's going on with you.

(they all look to DYNA who hasn't spoken yet)

DYNA

I thought it was understood I'd be staying.

STUART

You all need to go now! I need peace, I need quiet, I need to write. *I need to write! I need to write, I need to write goddamn it!*

(he looks around anxiously at them. They look back, placid, unmoved. He calms quickly into a sardonic laugh)

It was worth a shot.

(he calms, moreover accepts it admiringly)

So what is this then, a feminine intervention? A broad frontal assault?—Super.

(he looks around the room)

So tell me mes mesdemoiselles, what is it I can answer for you? Huh? The things you're you've always wanted to know. With the last limits of my foggy mind, ask me, I will.

(pause, no one speaks)

Stone cold silence....I thought so. You see, you don't really *want* answers, you don't want facts and certainty. *You want enchantment and mystery!....*Truth ruins that. Facts and truth destroy everything magical. Blissful fools die happy while suckers who think and know pay the price wasted on lost causes and unworthy relationships.—Chosen ignorance is the key to what I have with each of you. Things you don't know, things deep inside you don't admit to yourself—*they* make it possible! That keeps it alive!....In *that*, are the endless possibilities.

(he cheers with EVELYN then downs the glass)

It's been thus since time immemorial. "He who increaseth knowledge, increaseth pain."

(pause as he pours himself and EVELYN refills)

STUART – cont'd

And when faced with a chance to ask and the prospect of knowing, you choose not to. You choose ignorance....What *incredible* taste I have—my bright beautiful, my perfect women.

(pause, then each next line comes fast, on top of each other)

DYNA

Why do you keep your eyes closed when we make love?—

FRANCINE

Why do you need to hold me before falling asleep?—

EVELYN

What do you hope to get from all of this?—

LYNDSEY

Why her?....What was it about her?

(intimating all the women)

Why not us?

*(they all indicate with nods they want this answer most of all.
STUART thinks a long moment, starts to mutter a few answers)*

STUART

I....it isn't....it....

(he is speechless a good moment. Then KATHY enters)

KATHY

Excuse me. I'm sorry. I didn't realize that you were with uh....

EVELYN

Hello Kathy.—Your timing is impeccable.

ALL THE OTHER WOMEN

She met your mother?!

(as they all look at him, but STUART just stares at KATHY)

KATHY

Hello Evelyn. It's nice to see you again.—I'm sorry, I'm disturbing something. I should go.

STUART

You need to leave.

(believing this is to be to her, KATHY moves to leave)

All the rest of you, you need to leave. Now....*NOW!*

LIGHTS DOWN

SCENE 11

Stuart's Apartment. STUART and KATHY stand in the room alone looking at each other. A long pause. She notices IKEA.

KATHY

A pale replacement to its predecessor.

(she moves towards IKEA)

You're making progress with it.

STUART

I'm getting nowhere.

KATHY

I was being polite.

STUART

Why start now?

(she looks at him, then turns back to the IKEA)

I've been calling everyday. Several times everyday in fact. *In fact—*

KATHY

*Yes—*cell phones work in Brooklyn.

STUART

Can they be heard over the cappuccino machines?

(she moves about the apartment seeing the moved books)

KATHY

That was quite an entourage I walked in on.

STUART

It's not what you think it was.

KATHY

I think it was a gathering of women you slept with while we were dating. And your mother. And of that, I've always had my suspicions.

(he drifts to pour himself a drink)

STUART

She wouldn't have me. She needs more vitality in her men.

(she turns, smiles wanly at him then goes back to the moved books. He puts down the drink forcefully without drinking it)

I can't live without you.

KATHY

You seem to be doing quite well.

STUART

That isn't living, that's functioning.

KATHY

Most men would love to live as you function.

STUART

I can't write without you!

KATHY

That's more to the point.

STUART

It's all I do well and I don't even do it that well.—When I can't write, all the thoughts, the rants and screams, they stay in my head. I can't live with those things there.

KATHY

It sounds like you can't live without writing.

STUART

But you make it *possible* for me to write. You liberate me. You allow it to release.

KATHY

I'm not interested in being your release valve. Sorry.

STUART

No, no, it's not that. It's not.

(he reaches to take her hand but she pulls away defiantly)

KATHY

Don't.

(she moves away and he remains still)

STUART

When you're near me, I see things differently. The world, my characters, they come into relief. Clouds fade and I can see. Colors, details.—It's because of you.

KATHY

It's not my job to be your muse Stuart. I have my life. I made room in it for you. I asked you to make room for me in yours.—But it was too crowded there.

STUART

I carved out what I had to give!

KATHY

(pause)

Carved is a very apt verb. Wrought, for each little whittle that came off.

STUART

I tried. I supported when capable. Your project, the scheme, the kid painting art fairs, I came.

KATHY

It started at ten, you arrived at two with your flask. By three, half the children were crying.

STUART

They were too in love with their projects! All great artists learn early to kill their beloveds.

KATHY

They were nine!

STUART

That's two years too late!—Children can get very attached at that age. See what can happen!

(he reaches down, grabs the liquor bottle, waves it at her. they stare; he serious, she incredulous. She turns away)

Kathy—I am trying to do something bigger. To write something eternal, something *lasting*—

KATHY

Do you practice what you preach Stuart?...Hm? Have you killed all your beloveds?

STUART

I think about killing my Mother every day!

(she turns, drifts towards the IKEA cabinet)

KATHY

Your work. *Your* beloveds there, your characters. Have you killed them?

STUART

Like in a *Tarantino* film. You've read my plays, you know.

(STUART looks at her as she fingers the IKEA cabinet)

KATHY

I loved that old cabinet you used to have.

STUART

Chifferobe.

KATHY

It was big and beautiful. One had the sense you had had it in your family for decades.

STUART

It was in my father's nursery.

(she nods approvingly)

KATHY

When I came in that day and saw that you had busted it up....I wondered what could've possibly pushed you to do that to that beautiful cabinet.

STUART

Chiffero—

KATHY

Calling it a chifferobe doesn't make you Harper Lee.

(he nods to her stare, appropriately chastised)

It all lay there shattered into pieces like a tornado ran through it. I kicked through the remnants looking for survivors, something I could use, useful timber, copper hinges. It had those carved corner pieces and post beams fashioned like Ionic columns. You remember?

(she turns for acknowledgement. He just stares)

But you had done good work. There wasn't much left intact.—But there was this little hidden shelf, this hinged slip that separated the upper and lower sections. Did you know?

(he stares at her deadly serious)

Yes of course.—That slip was still attached to the top though the top was in tatters, just dangling off it like a loose leaf notebook sheet still attached by one ring.

STUART

Kathy.

KATHY

So I slid it off, that thin slip, and I found paper there. Pages, notebook pages, torn from an 8½ by 11 pad. Fifty, a hundred maybe, I don't know, there were so many.

STUART

What did you do?—

KATHY

I didn't count them, but there were a lot, held together in a stack by a paper clip that was—

STUART

What did you—

KATHY

I read your pages Stuart....I read your pages hidden there in that hidden slip.

(STUART moves about agitatedly. Her words pursue him)

They were right there in my hand, *found treasure*, so I read them one after another for hours.

STUART

You had no right.

KATHY

You should be proud, they're amazing. All of them, really. *She's* amazing! The best character you've ever created.

STUART

You had *no right*.

KATHY

You've answered the eternal question that's always asked. Can a male writer write a real woman? The *perfect* woman? Can he capture us as we actually are?

STUART

You had no right!

KATHY

Fully individual and complex. Completely incomplete. Capable of anything, constrained by everything. *Especially* our hearts. A *real* woman Stuart. Real and true—but imaginary.

STUART

You had no right—

KATHY

Should I call you Stephen? Isn't that what you call yourself in them? Stephen? And she's Céline right? French and charming. Balleting delicately into rooms, quoting your favorite movies and authors. She's damaged, she needs you to save her.

STUART

They were mine!

KATHY

How does it work? Do you read them aloud? Do you act them out, play them over and again in your mind?

STUART

They were—

KATHY

I had every right!—My life was in the balance! I had every right!

(he kicks over the IKEA and paces furiously)

I understand creating her, creating your perfect woman, it must be every writer's dream! The ultimate challenge and fantasy. How do you not?...But why recreate yourself?—Why change yourself? If you needed recreating, why there?! Why in those pages?!

STUART

They are mine!—

KATHY

Why not change here? In this life, in this world?!

STUART

She is mine!

KATHY

Why not change for this life?!

STUART

BECAUSE I CAN'T!

STUART – cont'd

(he grabs her in a fit of anger, his hands firmly around her neck. She is defiantly unafraid)

She's all I've ever done in this whole fucking life!—The only thing of me worth anything!

(he holds her firmly still, his hands around her neck)

I created her! She exists! As sure as a *God*, I created her and she exists!

(he loosens his grip)

And it's there, in *there!*...If I can love fully anywhere, then in there....

(he lets go of her fully but stares at her)

She deserves better. Better than I am, better than I can be!....Someone *better* must be there for her.

(he turns, sees the IKEA cabinet. He takes it in his hands and violently smashes it to pieces. When he is finished, he falls exhausted besides it, exhaling heavily. A long pause)

KATHY

Did she ever exist?

STUART

What is existence?

KATHY

Do you think I'm looking for a metaphysical discussion?

(he stays on the floor without responding. She looks down on him and the broken IKEA cabinet)

Since I read them, since I learned of her—I couldn't be myself anymore. Everything we said, everything we did and discussed—came through the prism of Céline. I would think you were looking for her when you were looking at me. Or that you were looking how you could change me into her like I was a mannequin you were designing in her fashion.

(he rises slowly from the floor and looks at her)

STUART

I never was.

KATHY

I began to do it *too*. Trying to be her, to think like I thought she would think, look and act like she would act. It was maddening.—Forever at a costume ball, and the music I'm dancing to is your imaginary lover.

STUART

I would never ask that of you.

KATHY

Men never say the words, they're too cowardly.—But you wrote them.

STUART

I need you.

KATHY

I know.....And I don't know if you'll survive without me. If you can keep up this tethering you've strung yourself up with.—Perhaps you'll hang yourself with it, I'm not sure....But I've seen your love, I've seen what it can be.—It's all over those pages.

STUART

It exists.

KATHY

Not in this world. Not when that other world exists in your pen and your mind.—I fell in love with you because of your characters. They're all *you*. Fragments and elements. Destructive men, fallen women. Winners, losers, some surviving, most not.—All faint variations of you.

(CÉLINE ballets into the room. Nobody notices her)

STUART

We all create the people in our lives. Our many selves most of all. Some are greater than we are. Some, we just want them to be.

(she nods knowingly, reaches out and plays with his hair)

KATHY

There can't be two women you are committed to, one in this world and one you create in your mind. She is your perfect defense. A wall so high no real woman could ever scale it.

(they stare plainly at each other. CÉLINE continues flitting around, stops at the moved books and analyses them)

You must choose. You can choose to live here, in this world—but you must write it.

(he stares at KATHY confused, not understanding)

Kill her Stuart. Kill her.—Write it.

(KATHY moves to his desk, grabs some clean sheets of paper, places them in the center of the desk)

I don't care how, car crash, suicide, an attack. A tragic disease, you'd do that well. Strangle her neck as she rests in your arms as Othello killed Desdemona, I don't care. It doesn't matter.

(KATHY grabs a pen off the desk, pulls out the chair and holds the pen out to him)

But do it. Finish her.

(a long pause just stares at her pen)

STUART

He smothered her—Othello. He didn't strangle her...He *should* have, it'd have been more powerful. His hands forcefully gripping her neck, slowly firmer, ever tighter.

(KATHY pushes the pen out further to him)

KATHY

Write it...Live it through your writing. Let it be in your mind.

(he pauses a long moment. Then moves slowly to the chair, takes the pen from her. They stare. He sits slowly, straightens himself to the desk. He plays with the pen a moment then starts downward to the pages as if about to write then stops, looks out. CÉLINE reaches out and takes a book from the shelf)

Lights DO NOT Fade down

SCENE 12

This scene continues directly from the previous scene without interruption. STUART is sitting at the desk with the pen in hand staring out ahead. KATHY stands behind him. CÉLINE studies the book she holds in her hand.

CÉLINE

But why do you love them?

(no response as STUART just stares out)

And all of them? Roth and Woody Allen. Faulkner, Fitzgerald. At least not Hemingway. *Quel misogynes*. These rows are filled with them.

(she turns to him, but there is no response at all, just a slight turn ever so slightly to the sound of her voice)

The way they write women, the way women are treated in their work, it's sad. *C'est très triste*. Anormal if you ask me. Yet you love them.

STUART

I don't uh....

(KATHY backs away from him as he doesn't write)

CÉLINE

All they write, all these terrible things these women accept. *Elles sont seulement des objets*. Yes, that's it. They are objects, acted on by men. As prey.

STUART

I don't love their misogyny.

CÉLINE

No?

(he turns partially in the chair to CÉLINE, for the first time engaging with her)

STUART

No. And I don't think they're misogynists.

(he rises from the desk and stares directly at KATHY)

They love women. They're obsessed with them....It may not be healthy love—but in this world you get what you can....It's an honest reflection. Those men, those women, they exist.

(KATHY turns away from him)

Cruelty, depredations, acts of humiliations. Things beyond our control and conception. It's the artist's duty to capture nature as it is.

(KATHY pauses a moment, then leaves. He watches her go)

Especially the vile parts. We among all the others must not look away.

(CELINE turns back to the books)

CÉLINE

Especially the sex parts. I just think you like all the pussy talk.

(he remains a moment looking after KATHY's disappeared figure. He turns as she moves towards him)

STUART

Excuse me?

CÉLINE

Oui, c'est ça. That's what you would call it, isn't it?

(he moves to her but stops at the IKEA, staring down at the pile)

STUART

Perhaps in my more gifted moments.—But I'd like to think with more subtlety.

(he turns to CÉLINE again)

Though it sounds so much more sexy coming out of your mouth.

CÉLINE

Oui, you think?

STUART

Oui I think. Oui I always think. Come here. Come here you.

(as she is walking by, he grabs her playfully. She squeals and squirms to escape his grasp)

Say something to me. Say something in that accent of yours.—Let me hear some of “your puzzy talke.”

CÉLINE

(giggling with him)

Arrête. Arrête Stephen, arrête.

STUART

Let me hear it from zaht pairfait mouze of yourz. Wiz your pairfait ‘air an your pairfait eyez. And your pairfec coooorrrrps.

(he squeezes her and she squeals even louder, finally wriggling from his grasp)

CÉLINE

Ei yee!

(she stands off smiling at him, and he views her very happily)

Tu es fou!

STUART

Oui, je suis fou. I am completely crazy.—And you are perfect.

CÉLINE

Non, arrête.

(he takes in the room a good moment)

STUART

This’s perfect. This, this moment, this time—it’s absolutely perfect.

CÉLINE

You and I have very different opinions of parfait.

STUART

Oh do we? Oh do we?

(he reaches out and grabs her again, pulling her down with him on the couch. They settle together affectionately)

That's because you're French, you don't believe in perfection. To you it's merely some silly idyll only Americans believe in.

CÉLINE

Ouais. C'est vrai.

(she moves in front so he can give her a massage, he does)

STUART

But I'm American, perfection is possible in our delusion of the world.

(he begins to massage her neck. She stretches it out for him)

Moments in time and space so rare and special, they stand out from all the others in our lives. A quasar. Brief, instantaneous, incredibly brilliant, blinding everything before and after.

(he continues to massage her neck, now with both hands firmly)

CÉLINE

Et après quoi?—What happens after your flash of perfection?

STUART

Et après you say pretty French girl? And then what?

(she leans her neck out further as his massaging intensifies)

CÉLINE

Ooooh, that's hard, I like that.

(he massages harder)

Oui, ça....Après quoi?

STUART

Well I guess we go on looking for the next great moment until....

CÉLINE

Oui, until.

(he continues massaging. CÉLINE emits a slight pained sound)

C'est dur.... And what is happening with your play?

STUART

(pause)

I've put it away for a while....I couldn't figure out the end.

CÉLINE

Oh non, *quel dommage*.

STUART

Yes, it is a shame.

(he massages harder; a more pained sound from her)

CÉLINE

Ooowwww.

STUART

But I *have* found a new title for it.

CÉLINE

Oui?—What is it?

(CÉLINE looks up, straight out ahead, extending her neck to the fullest as STUART intensifies the massaging of her neck)

STUART

Perfect Women.

(they continue: CÉLINE looking out, STUART massaging hard)

Lights Down

End Of Play