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# True Love

by CHARLES L. MEE

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Lights come up on Edward's bed,  
set in front of an abandoned gas station.

Surrounded wall to wall by red clay stained with oil and gas.

A bright orange and yellow gas pump,  
surreally supremely beautiful.

Nearby, a motel, the "Mo el Aph it ".

A kids' inflatable plastic swimming pool is to one side.

To one side, an abandoned Lincoln Town Car  
that just broke down and was left there,  
its hood up, its wheels off, splattered with dried mud.

A keyboard.  
An electric guitar with amp.  
A set of drums.  
A microphone on a stand.

Elsewhere, a dog house.  
A chain, with a dog no longer there.

We hear a love song on the radio.

Edward, age 13 or 14—or the youngest possible legal age  
for the youngest-possible-looking actor to play this role—  
is roller blading around his bed,  
lost in the music and the pleasure of movement,  
luxuriating in his cool moves,  
naked from the waist up.  
He is a handsome WASP adolescent  
with the coolest rollerblades and the best athletic clothes.

Polly, age 34, enters—as though with a purpose,  
but then stops, and, standing silently, watches him.  
She wears Armani, with some rips and stains.

Edward doesn't notice her;  
and they don't speak.  
She watches him.  
She doesn't move.

This opening moment of the piece—  
first Edward alone on stage,  
then Polly watching him,  
is meant to establish the two principals of the piece,  
and their relationship,  
so that this relationship—and plotline—  
is stated clearly enough at the top of the piece  
that we have noted it, attached our attention to it,  
and can track it through the confusion that follows.

The song ends.  
He sits on the bed to adjust his rollerblades.

RADIO TALK SHOW HOST  
That was SINGER, with NAME OF SONG.  
And we were talking about love  
with our guest Bobby Beausoleil.  
What is love, Bobby?

BOBBY ON THE RADIO  
That's what I'd like to know, Tim.

[they both laugh]

But I mean, basically,  
I guess you'd have to say  
that the Greeks, pretty much anticipated everything  
western folks have thought and felt for 25 centuries.

HOST

Well, I'd have to agree with that.

[JIM enters, looks at Edward, looks at Polly,  
looks back at Edward,  
turns,  
lifts the hood of the Lincoln Town Car,  
and goes to work on it.]

BOBBY

You'd be talking here,  
for instance,  
about love as friendship,  
which the Greeks called *philia*,  
benevolence towards guests  
which would be *senike*,  
the mutual attraction of friends,  
or *hetairike*,  
and then sensual love of course,  
or *erotike*.

HOST

Let's talk about that.

BOBBY

Fundamentally,  
what the Greeks thought  
was that love is not just a sentiment  
but is actually the physical principle of the universe itself  
the very stuff that unifies the universe  
you know, binds the universe together.

[PHIL enters, carrying a wrench and a rag,

looks at Polly, at Edward,  
back at Polly,  
drags a garbage bag full of something to the edge of the stage,  
stands,  
looks,  
hesitates,  
throws the garbage bag off the edge of the stage  
and then joins Jim at work on the Lincoln.]

HOST  
Unh-hunh.

[silence;

Bonnie, a nasty, slatternly girl, enters,  
looks at Edward, at Polly,  
back at Edward,  
takes a lunch box, hands it to Phil,  
takes out a magazine and reads.]

2ND TALK SHOW GUEST

You know, I have to say, as an Italian,  
I grew up in a family where people just hugged each other all the time.  
All the time.  
If you were Italian you'd know what I mean.

HOST  
I know what you mean.  
I know what you mean.

2ND TALK SHOW GUEST

I don't think you do.  
Of course you do.  
But I don't think you do.  
I mean, the other night I went to this cocktail party,  
and someone handed me this glass of gorgeous ruby red wine.  
And I'm, you know, something of a wine freak.

HOST

I don't mind a glass of wine myself.

2ND TALK SHOW GUEST

And just as I put out my hand to take the glass,  
someone came up behind me and shouted  
"Leo!"  
and grabbed me.

[Shirley, a librarian, enters,  
checks out the others present,  
looks confused.]

HOST

People do that all the time.

2ND TALK SHOW GUEST

Right. And the wine flew into the air.

HOST

God.

2ND TALK SHOW GUEST

And everyone screamed,  
even though, in fact, the wine landed only on me.  
And I said what the Italians always say when you spill wine.

HOST

What?

BOBBY

What does this have to do with love?

2ND TALK SHOW GUEST

You want to know what I said?

HOST

Sure. Sure.

2ND TALK SHOW GUEST

I said: Allegria!

HOST

Right.

2ND TALK SHOW GUEST

which means

joy!

[Edward rises to test his rollerblades,  
sits to fix them again.]

Because what I saw,  
which I have to say I don't think any of the others really saw;  
was that the wine added color to my evening!

HOST

Right.

2ND TALK SHOW GUEST

And this is how it is to be human.

HOST

Right.

2ND TALK SHOW GUEST

I mean you have to bump into walls.

HOST

Don't I know it?

2ND TALK SHOW GUEST

You have to celebrate your craziness and your humanness.

HOST

That is so true.

[Red Dicks enters;  
she is a transvestite, accordion-playing hairdresser.  
S/he goes straight to Bonnie,  
and begins to fix her hair  
using Coke cans as rollers.

Shirley still looks confused,  
finally sits on a crate.

They are all motionless,  
listening to the radio.

CASTING NOTE:

Ideally, Phil, Jim, and Jim all play musical instruments  
and have formed a garage band.  
And/or Shirley and/or Bonnie might fill in or play with the band  
depending on their musical talents.

Red Dicks will play the accordion.

Polly will sing.

The garage band will have a number of opportunities to play  
at various points during the piece—either the entire band  
or a single instrumentalist with a singer.

Shirley takes out her cell phone and dials.]

2ND GUEST

Because, the fact is,  
we're dying of loneliness,  
all of us.  
Just dying of it.

HOST

Well, now. we have a caller here on line one.  
Hello, there, you're on the air.

SHIRLEY

Hello?

HOST

Hello, you're on the air.

SHIRLEY

Hello?

HOST

Hi, doll.

What's your name?

SHIRLEY

Shirley. My name is Shirley.

HOST

OK! Well, it's your nickel, Shirley!

What'd you want to say?

SHIRLEY

Well, what I wanted to say is  
what I think is— what love is:  
Love is how you relate to people  
or, if your love is channeled in some other way  
it is how you are cold or indifferent or hurtful  
to another person.

And so love is who you are  
and how you are  
what kind of person you are  
it's the most factual thing about how you are.

You can't talk your way around it,  
make it come out some other way.  
It remains the deepest fact about you.

I mean, you can say,  
oh, I'm really a nice sensitive person  
I treat people with dignity.

But the only way you really know how you relate to other human beings  
is in the most secret, secret place

where you are most vulnerable  
most open to your private self  
when you are making love  
you don't even know what you're doing  
until you're doing it  
and then you see what sort of person you are  
whether you are making love with someone else  
or you are the president of the united states passing a welfare bill  
then you've done it  
it's not talk any more  
you've acted out your most private deepest self  
and lodged it in the flesh of another human being  
so that another person feels pain or pleasure  
and then you know:  
this is who I am.  
This is what I do.  
And who I am  
what I want to do  
what feels hot to me  
the person or the behavior I can't keep myself from  
is so strange  
so idiosyncratic  
is so odd  
so that usually I repress it  
if I find myself drawn irresistibly to a man  
with bushy eyebrows  
or a comforting voice  
or something even stranger  
muscular thighs  
or hair on his chest  
or a certain weakness  
a vulnerability  
so that I sense I can hurt him in a certain way  
and then take him to me like a wounded animal  
and comfort him  
if these are the things that make me weak and shaky with desire  
I know this is my truest self  
what makes me break out in a sweat.  
the kind of thing that makes me a little sick to my stomach

it feels so incredible to me  
and of course, I feel embarrassed by it  
because people will think I am a sick person  
and I am a sick person

and you think: I don't even know where this comes from.  
You think back through your childhood:  
could it have been this or that?  
But the thing that makes you crazy with desire  
is too exact and too  
strange  
to have come from anything you can remember.  
You have touched the real mystery of human beings  
the thing beyond any knowing  
the thing that comes from so deep down  
no one can tell you where it comes from

This has nothing to do with sex.  
Of course, I am talking about sex  
about having sex with another person  
but it has nothing to do with sex  
it has to do with who I am  
at such a deep and secret place  
no one could explain it.

And this is why people don't want to talk about sex  
or think about it  
because if they do  
they see so deep down into themselves  
they see such a strange creature  
such a hungry animal  
so uncivilized  
they don't want to hear about it.

And so they repress the thing that is deepest in them  
and most unique  
I, for instance,  
I might become a person who thinks  
I am attracted to nice, gentlemanly men

or men who are well-groomed and considerate  
I try to forget who I really am  
by loving some approximation of what I hope for  
or, even worse, by loving someone who has nothing of what I want.  
Because I want to think I am a good person.

I think:

what is it to be really, freely who I am  
would that be just to follow my urges  
and not repress them  
or is that just to become enslaved to my urge  
and not be free at all  
Am I free only when I repress what I freely feel?

And then I think:

well, finally, none of us is free.  
We all repress what is most deeply true about us  
otherwise we can't go on.

[silence]

RADIO HOST

Right.

Well.

No one could disagree with that.

2ND TALK SHOW GUEST

I don't know.

Frankly I think I could disagree with it.

I mean, when you're talking about  
civilization and....

[Edward turns off the radio  
and roller blades on out.

Polly, riveted by him, watches him go,  
looks after him for a few moments.

Shirley, confused, turns off her cell phone  
and puts it away.

One of the mechanics riffs on his electric guitar,  
taking off on the love song we heard at the top of the piece,  
through the following dialogue.]

POLLY

Oh.

[She moves slowly downstage,  
in a reverie.]

POLLY

Oh.

[She pulls a chair up next to the kids' plastic swimming pool,  
puts her feet into it.  
Red Dicks eventually comes over and gives her a pedicure  
while she sits with her feet in the pool.]

Oh.

RED DICKS

So.

He's at loose ends, I think.

POLLY

Edward.

RED DICKS

Yes.

POLLY

Oh. Well.

He's just a boy.

RED DICKS

At his age, a boy needs his father.

POLLY

Yes.

RED DICKS

I don't say he doesn't need his mother.

SHIRLEY

Or his step-mother.

RED DICKS

Or his step-mother, right, sure.

JIM

It's true, you can talk all you want about mother love,  
but for a boy, really, he needs his father.

BONNIE

[with some rancor]

And maybe not, by the way, a man who just takes off  
when the car breaks down,  
leaves his wife and son wherever they happen to be  
because he has business.

POLLY [in a reverie still]

He'll be back  
when he's finished.

BONNIE

Isn't that just what he would say?

I mean:

what kind of man would just leave his wife wherever his car broke down?

SHIRLEY

And no mechanic for 50 miles.

PHIL

A woman like you  
stranded in the boondocks.

BONNIE

And what he really had in mind probably was to cat around with some woman in  
Utica!

POLLY  
Excuse me?

BONNIE  
Or not.  
Or not.

SHIRLEY  
Doesn't he love his son?

RED DICKS  
Men should ask themselves:  
What about all these images of fathers and sons  
and other men and boys as pals and buddies?  
Why are they so popular in books and movies?  
Why are they encouraged in Boy Scouts and Big Brothers.  
Maybe boys and men need this.

BONNIE  
Especially during puberty.

RED DICKS  
When a boy is entering the grown-up world,  
maybe a boy needs a sense of apprenticeship,  
or just going fishing,  
and a lot more gentle touching from a father figure.

SHIRLEY  
Or you might ask yourself:  
is it dangerous for men to have a role in the socialization of boys?  
Will men just teach boys to be pigs?

BONNIE  
But women can't do this all by themselves.  
Boys have testicles and ejaculation and beards and erections,  
and women can't be expected to understand these things as well as men!

RED DICKS  
We need to recognize there's nothing wrong with this.

SHIRLEY

What the women should be doing  
is directing their efforts toward advocating  
anti-sexist socialization  
within the existing man/boy and woman/girl relationship model,  
while continuing to encourage cross-sex interactions as well.  
Because love is not just a thing  
that has to do with men  
or men and women.  
Love is a whole weltanshaung.  
Or gestalt.  
And you can't leave all this to boy scout leaders.

BONNIE

Because what you have now are jerks.

SHIRLEY

The way it is now:  
dogs are better than men.

BONNIE

For sure.  
At least dogs miss you when you're gone.

SHIRLEY

Dogs look at your eyes.

BONNIE

And they feel guilty when they've done something wrong.

SHIRLEY

You can force a dog to take a bath.

BONNIE

Dogs mean it when they kiss you.

SHIRLEY

Dogs understand if some of their friends can't come inside.

BONNIE

Dogs are already in touch with their inner puppies.

SHIRLEY

How can you tell a man's sexually excited?

BONNIE

He's breathing.

SHIRLEY

What should you give a man who has everything?

BONNIE

A woman to show him how to work it.

SHIRLEY

What do men have in common with floor tiles?

BONNIE

If you lay them right the first time,  
you can walk all over them forever.

SHIRLEY

What is a man, really?

BONNIE

A man is a vibrator with a wallet.

A man is an unresponsive lump of flesh

obsessed with screwing,

incapable of empathy,

love,

friendship,

affection,

or tenderness—

a half-dead isolated unit that will swim a river of snot,

wade nostril-deep through a mile of vomit

if he thinks there'll be a friendly cunt waiting for him at the other end.

A man

is a creature who will fuck mud if he can.

JIM

Oh.

Oh.

And then these women wonder why  
a man would prefer masturbation to marriage.

PHIL

I know some guys who like electronic masturbation.

JIM

What?

PHIL

You know, you take some electrodes  
and some low-power, carefully controlled electric current,  
run that through your genitals  
and you'll get some very interesting tingling and  
throbbing sensations.

JIM

And why do you want to do that  
when you can masturbate with your hand?

PHIL

You ask that because you've never done it.  
You'll get something very different with electronic stimulation.  
You get yourself a stereo audio amplifier,  
with 1 to 5 watts per channel of output power.  
A tone generator of some sort.  
An electronic music synthesizer like Casio or Yamaha.  
You don't want to use an electric guitar,  
which could put a current through your whole torso.

You set the amp control to MINIMUM.

Set your tone source to produce a continuous tone of about 440 Hz:  
that's the "A" above "middle C" on a musical keyboard.  
Insert the small loop electrode just inside your urethra.

SLOWLY turn up the amplifier's volume control.  
Then you can play the "A above middle C" on the left channel,  
and play the "A" an octave lower on the right channel.  
Or play "C" on one channel  
and the adjacent "C sharp" on the other channel.  
Play a steady  
tone on the left channel  
and do a downward "glissando" on the right channel.  
You know: fool around.  
It's just like any other kind of sex:  
it's not always the same.

[A big macho explosion of a performance piece:  
one of the mechanics does a heavy macho drum solo  
while the others strut and preen  
and behave like guys—  
in a performance piece that goes on for several minutes at least  
before the guys calm down  
with just a few little aftershocks of dirt kicking and bicep inspecting.]

RED DICKS

What do you think caused your heterosexuality?

JIM

What?

RED DICKS

What do you think caused it?

I mean, for example,  
when did you decide you were a heterosexual?

JIM

I don't know.

RED DICKS

Or do you think your heterosexuality is just a phase  
that you'll grow out of.

JIM

I hadn't thought about it.

RED DICKS

Well, think about it.

Do your parents know you're straight?

What do men and women *do* in bed together?

SHIRLEY

These men

they talk sex

always nothing but sex.

BONNIE

Right.

And I am looking for love.

I am looking for a relationship

with warmth

and soul

and humanness.

PHIL

So am I!

It's not easy!

POLLY

I miss my husband.

I miss having him hold me when we sleep at night

his arms around me

his stomach pressed against my back

his face nestled in my hair

and when I turn in my sleep

I turn within his embrace

his arms around me still  
my head on his shoulder  
his leg between my legs

For him, making love is the most important thing,  
for me, being held.

A mature man—  
not a boy,  
not a randy young man  
who doesn't know yet who he is  
or who you are  
or how to be together with another person—

holding you in the palm of his hand  
keeping you safe  
knowing when he holds you  
this is where your home is.

A lot of men you think are bad  
or  
insensitive or cold  
are really just suffering from touch deprivation.  
You know, touching  
is just as important for human beings as eating.  
Babies, sometimes, will wither and die if they're not touched.  
You've seen these stories on television.  
But men, now,  
men are raised to be tough and independent  
and taught to avoid touching.  
And for many men,  
the only time they're touched at all  
is when they make love with their wives.  
And so they develop a craving to be touched,  
that's why it is a man might even touch a child in the wrong way  
but if he does  
he can't be blamed for it.

Or he can be blamed  
but I understand  
just how he feels.

It's like they say  
sometimes  
you hear people talking on the radio:  
Sometimes a woman will see someone, she'll think:  
Oh.  
Oh.  
I could imagine myself being attracted to him.  
But no.  
You stop yourself  
because you think:  
this is what it is to be a civilized person.  
Not just a creature subject to any kind of urge  
but that, as a married woman,  
you have made a different choice  
of your own free will.

For example,  
you could say, the thing about *incest* is,  
the reason incest is the only thing forbidden in every society everywhere—  
is that the *incest* prohibition is the step  
by which human beings make the transition  
from nature to culture.  
Because this is what it is to be human,  
to make this transition:  
Because the human being  
is the animal that *became* human.  
And how was that?  
By denying its animal needs.  
The human being is the only animal  
who obliterates the very traces of nature as we leave it.  
Because we are sorry we came from life,  
from meat,  
from a whole warm, bloody mess.  
We are *ashamed* of the nature that we come from.

For instance,  
for instance, no one would say that excrement  
is a substance like any other.  
although for animals that is exactly what it is;  
and some of these animals will just *eat* excrement  
because they just don't care; they just don't think it is any big deal  
or different from any other natural element;  
and those animals that don't positively eat excrement  
nonetheless, they show no particular revulsion for it.  
But the shame *people* feel for the excremental orifices  
testify to the separation between human beings and nature  
and it is clear, too,  
that nothing will prevent this shame  
from rubbing off  
on the nearby genitals.  
This is human nature.  
We don't want to hear about it.  
We like things to be nice.  
We like these things to be full of warm human compassion,  
feeling, soul,  
we don't want to talk about excrement  
unless we can put it in some human,  
psychic context  
so that it's not just *pornography!*

And nothing could be more horrifying to a woman  
than the love she may feel for someone  
she can't resist—  
because then she knows  
suddenly she's become the unwilling subject  
of the uncontrollable,  
indiscriminate excitement of just pure animal sex.

And so of course we seek out marriage  
where we are able to have sex  
and at the same time  
we can have the denial of sex  
—with those other than our husbands  
and sometimes, even, with our husbands, too—

because  
nothing is more common  
than the *innocent* love a woman has  
for a man she is entitled to love,  
the infinite sense of peace and wellbeing  
that can come of that  
the sense of civility  
so that at last she may settle down,  
and not keep living in the daily fear of the beast  
that is settled deeply in her heart.

And so I e-mailed my husband today,  
and I said:

[Polly goes to the microphone  
and speaks into it.]

Dearest Richard,

Autumn has finally come here.  
Less than ten days ago,  
it was close to 100 degrees in the afternoon.  
Now the house is cold when I wake up in the morning.

This morning  
I had on my pale pink thermal leggings  
and a matching long-sleeved shirt,  
with tiny buttons up the front.  
And when I woke up I was  
rubbing myself with one hand without thinking about it.

I don't think I'll ever get enough of you.

And I began to think  
about you loaning your latest tape of me to a couple of friends,  
and I could see them watching it, enjoying it,  
admiring me,  
and finally having to take their cocks in their hands  
while they watched me come.

I thought: well,  
I love watching *your* hands—  
moving up and down your cock so slowly.  
And seeing you come makes me so greedy for you  
I feel like screaming.

I imagined you picking up the phone at your office,  
and hearing my voice:

"Hi, Richard, are you having a nice day?  
Are you busy right now?"

I'd say:  
"I'm in bed right now,  
and very very naked  
and I've been thinking all about you.

Just the sound of my voice  
would make your cock start to swell.

Then would you  
—without even realizing it—  
move your hand down to feel your hardness?

You would hear my breath growing ragged,  
as I tried to keep talking to you  
my other hand pressing deep inside me,  
to come again for you.

Is it okay for me to talk to you like this, Richard?  
I like it.  
I love you so much.  
You make me so crazy,  
I hope you never stop.

So. Well.

Enjoy the rest of your day, my love,  
my one true, and only love,  
you know I'll be thinking about you.

Your,

Polly

[Edward enters again.]

EDWARD  
Mother.

POLLY  
Oh!  
Edward.

You've come back.

EDWARD  
Come back?

POLLY  
Didn't you just  
go out?

EDWARD  
Oh.  
Right.

POLLY  
I didn't know you were coming right back.

EDWARD  
I came to play with you.

POLLY  
Play with me?

EDWARD  
I'm feeling....

SHIRLEY  
At a loss.

BONNIE  
Without his father.

EDWARD [distracted first by Shirley then by Bonnie]  
Yes.

RED DICKS  
He needs someone to play with him  
the way boys play.

POLLY  
I know some games for boys.  
I know  
Smugglers and Spies.

RED DICKS  
Smugglers and Spies?

EDWARD  
That's a Cub Scout game.

POLLY  
Is it?

EDWARD  
Yes.

POLLY  
Is that bad?

EDWARD  
Mother....

BONNIE

He calls her "mother."

RED DICKS

Why not?

POLLY

You're too old for a Cub Scout game.

EDWARD

Well, yes.

POLLY

What would you like to play?

EDWARD

I don't know.

Some games we play in school.

POLLY

What do you play in school?

EDWARD

I don't know.

Like,

Car Wash.

POLLY

Car Wash?

EDWARD

You know,

one person is the car

and the other person is the car wash.

And the car goes through the car wash.

POLLY

Goes through the car wash?

EDWARD

I'll show you.

You be the car wash.

POLLY

Okay.

POLLY

I'll be the car wash.

EDWARD

And I'll be the car

and I'll go through the car wash.

[Edward gets down on his hands and knees  
and moves forward.]

POLLY

Right. OK.

EDWARD

And you wash me and you know

you be the rollers and the stuff in the car wash.

POLLY

OK.

RED DICKS

Don't forget to roll up your windows.

BONNIE

And put it in neutral.

[Edward moves up to Polly,  
who begins to lightly pat and rub his back.]

SHIRLEY

Not much of a car wash if you ask me.

EDWARD

But you really have to get into this game,  
you know,  
you've really got to wash me  
if you really want to play the game.

SHIRLEY

This is a school game?

RED DICKS

Not when I was in school.

SHIRLEY

They don't play: spelling contest, or something?

RED DICKS

This is a pathetic game.

[Polly works more vigorously.]

EDWARD

But hey, hey, but no tickling!

POLLY

Tickling is allowed.

Tickling is always allowed.

BONNIE

Especially in this—

[his hands in the air, fingers flailing]

this is the—you know—

that part of the—

where you have all the little, uh—

[She goes for him with hands and arms flying,  
to his hair, his ribs, his butt.]

EDWARD

Hey, what are you doing?

POLLY

I can't—

I don't know.

[She puts a hand between his legs—  
everyone else is silent and motionless—  
and she massages him with pleasure.

Suddenly, she stops.

She stands up.

He stands up uncertainly, slowly—  
having enjoyed it.

Then, not knowing what to do about it,  
he turns and runs out.

Polly looks stunned.

Silence.

One of the mechanics plays a low, easy saxophone or keyboard solo.

Shirley stands, turns, walks to the margin, facing away from the others.

Bonnie, too, turns away, looks off.

Red Dicks works out with free weights  
made of a car axle and spare parts.

Phil puts a tire in the kids' plastic swimming pool  
and checks it for leaks.

We hear the hissing sounds of the hydraulic hoist,  
the thumping, banging sound of the tire machine.

Jim gets a cellophane bag of peanuts, opens it,  
pours it into a Dr. Pepper,

and drinks the Dr. Pepper and eats the peanuts at the same time one-handed,  
leaving the other hand free to scratch.

More awkward silence.]

POLLY

Sometimes you see a man doing something  
thinking about nothing else except what he's doing  
he's completely unconscious really  
maybe he's chopping wood in the backyard  
and it just stops you from breathing  
and it brings tears to your eyes  
he's so beautiful  
so much himself  
you find him irresistible.  
You love him, that's all.

BONNIE

Right. We see how you look at him.

POLLY

Who?

BONNIE

Edward?

POLLY

Just now, you mean?

SHIRLEY

Well. For a while.

POLLY

For a while.

Did I look at him like this before?

[silence]

It's not my fault.

RED DICKS

Nobody's like, blaming you, you know.

It's just,

well:

he's your son.

POLLY

My step-son.

BONNIE

So it begins:

the lying to yourself,

putting a good face on it.

Isn't that just always the way?

PHIL

This is a boy.

You're talking about a boy

who loves you

JIM

and counts on you

to take care of him

whatever your relationship might be

you're the grownup

POLLY

I know that.

SHIRLEY

I need an older man

because I don't know

because I need a man I can count on

I remember when I met my husband

he asked me on a date

and we went out to shoot pool at Mickey's

and when he walked me home

I asked him if he wanted to come in.

So he did, and we had a drink

and then we went to bed  
I don't remember how  
in those days it was not such a big thing  
and I don't remember anything about it  
except in the middle I suddenly felt very sick  
and I yelled at him to stop  
he thought, probably, I was going to say something like  
this is just our first date or something like that  
but instead I said, I think I have to throw up,  
and he just started laughing  
and I thought: oh, he's okay,  
he's got a sense of humor  
and the rest of the night he just took care of me  
which is, you know, a lot more than most people would do on a first date  
so I married him  
and I don't think I was wrong  
we had a good marriage  
and I miss him still  
he was good in bed in every way.

#### RED DICKS

Not all men are bad.

#### BONNIE

I just needed to be tied up until I learned my place  
and this guy I lived with knew that.  
Not all men know that.  
I just need to be bent to the will  
of an insatiable man.  
I need shackles, ropes,  
stuff to keep me submissive and obedient.  
I need leather,  
I need it, that's all  
and I need to be flogged, pretty hard and pretty often.  
You know,  
some people like to be dominated.  
Sometimes you would be better off asking a person:  
how is it for you?  
Because sometimes a person will tell you:

much better than the life of vanilla sex I used to have!  
My husband and I  
we just don't do any of that vanilla sex any more.

I need to be alternately fondled and beaten.  
And then I need to be cuffed and forced to masturbate  
until I'm completely humiliated by my own nastiness and  
insatiability.  
I need my master to comment on what a nasty, slutty bitch I am.

And then I need relief from my pent-up desires.  
That's how it is for me.  
I need a man who will hold me and comfort me  
and then rub me, and lick me, and finger me  
and fuck me to as many orgasms as each of us can have.  
I need to be taken to a state of complete exhaustion.  
I'm not saying this is for everyone.  
I'm just saying this is how I am.

JIM

Some people like feet  
this is simply how they are  
or toes  
They like to touch them and feel them and kiss them  
they can't be blamed  
some people like to suck on someone else's toes,  
but they can't just go around doing it all the time.

PHIL

I don't understand it.

JIM

I can understand it.  
Like sometimes I like to rub my buttocks on someone else's buttocks.

BONNIE

I like to strip search a guy,  
like make him face the wall with his hands in the air,  
pat him down with my hands on the outside of his clothes,

make him take everything out of his pockets  
and put it on the table,  
then take off all his clothes.  
I look at everything for drugs,  
microfilm, bugging devices, weapons, or sex toys.  
He has to stand there all the time,  
naked,  
with his hands behind his head.  
And then I search his body,  
I search every opening, very thoroughly,  
and then, if he's clean, I release him.  
That's all.  
I just release him.  
To me: that's sex;  
that's all there is,  
that's how it is for me.  
I'd say, a lot of what passes for my sexuality goes on invisibly  
inside my head,  
and I think it would be safe to put me  
in the addicted slut category.

#### SHIRLEY

Sometimes when you're with a man,  
you can cut a hole in a paper plate  
and put it over his genitals,  
and then  
put some lukewarm spaghetti and meatballs on the plate,  
and then, when you eat the spaghetti,  
you wrap each strand around his penis  
and suck it up into your mouth.  
I knew someone,  
that was the only way she could have sex.

#### PHIL

There was this guy I heard of once  
who shaved the hair from the heads of Barbie dolls  
and swallowed their heads to get excited,  
and one time he felt sick and went into the hospital,  
and the x-rays showed he had six Barbie heads stuck in his intestines.

JIM

I like to have people put pies in my face.  
You know, and smear them around.  
In restaurants or parties, wherever.  
I'll see some guy I kind of like and I'll go up to him  
and ask him to pie me, and, you know,  
most men will.

PHIL

Really.

JIM

You get all these feelings of anticipation,  
the fear of rejection,  
the thrill of acceptance, humiliation...

PHIL

Right.

JIM

the wish that a partner will say  
or do something you don't expect...

PHIL

Right.

JIM

sharing an intimacy with someone  
who might not otherwise even notice me,  
doing something that sexual and unacceptable  
right out in public.  
I guess maybe I've been pried as many as  
150 times a month when I've really been,  
you know,  
unable to stop.  
And sometimes I'll say to a man, you know,  
I'd really like it if you'd do it to my crotch.  
Sometimes they're scared,  
but usually they'll do it.

SHIRLEY

That's incredible.

POLLY

I like to sleep with someone with all my clothes on.

It can be like the olden days,

with a board in between us,

or even with my legs tied together so penetration isn't possible.

Or we can sleep together naked,

just looking at each other for hours at a time,

letting our eyes go up and down each other

for three or four hours,

taking each other in,

but I can't, you know,

make love any other way.

Mostly I just like to be held and touched and cared for,

you know,

loved.

RED DICKS

We should all embrace love, because

this is a good thing.

we need to be touched

we need to be felt

we need nurturing

we need some sort of manifestation of love

because life is a process of becoming

and once you are involved in that

you're lost

lost forever

but what a fantastic journey!

Every day is new.

Every flower is new.

Everything in the world!

Every morning of your life!

In Japan, even the running of the water is a ceremony!

You have to ask yourself:

when was the last time you listened to the water?

People take showers and run water in their sinks every day of their lives  
and they never hear it!  
You should go home tonight  
and turn on the faucet  
and listen to the water!  
Because:  
it's beautiful!

And how many people these days are intimidated when someone says:  
I want to touch you.  
Everybody has got to be loved!  
Sometimes I have to throw oranges at young people  
just to get them to pay attention and listen!  
I was talking with a little boy once,  
and I said: what can you do, David.  
And he said: lots of things.  
And I said: like what?  
And he said: I can spit.  
Yes! He could spit! Can you top that?

I said: what else can you do, David?  
And he said: I can put my finger up my nose.  
And I said: you bet you can!  
Isn't it some sort of miracle  
that you can raise your hand whenever you want to  
and want to put your finger in your nose  
and it gets there!  
We should celebrate our wonder!  
Everyone!  
You've got to have people who are interested in your tree!  
And not the lollipop tree!  
And you've got to be interested in their tree!  
You've got to say:  
show me your tree, Johnny.  
Show me your tree,  
and then we'll know where we can begin!

BONNIE

You can't blame people for how they are.

JIM

Right.

RED DICKS

I could agree with that.

SHIRLEY

I could agree with that.

PHIL

What's the argument here?

[JIM suddenly begins to sing a song made famous by the castrato Farinelli, perhaps Handel's "Pena tiranna" from Amadigi.

The others listen to the heartbreaking song.

At the end of the song, there is silence for a moment.

And then:

PHIL

So, you remember when  
this teacher stuck the fork in your hiney?

JIM

What?

PHIL

You remember,  
you were saying about when she stuck the fork in your hiney?

JIM

Who?

PHIL

What do you mean who?  
You told me, when you were in third grade. Or Second grade.  
When did she stick a fork in your hiney?

JIM

I don't remember.

PHIL

What did she do to your hiney?

JIM

I forgot.

PHIL

What did she do to your hiney?

[silence]

Did she ever make you kiss her vagina?

JIM

I forgot.

PHIL

Come on.

JIM

I forgot.

PHIL

Did you have to kiss her on the butt?

JIM

I forgot.

PHIL

What did you have to do with the knife?

JIM

Okay, okay, right.

Put the peanut butter on her.

PHIL

And the jelly?

JIM

And the jelly on her mouth and on her eyes.

PHIL

You put jelly on her eyes and her vagina and her mouth.

JIM

On her back, on her socks.

PHIL

This was in second grade?

JIM

First grade.

PHIL

And how did everybody take the peanut butter and jelly off?

JIM

We ate her and licked her all off.

PHIL

You had to lick her off?

JIM

And eat her all up.

PHIL

Was that scary?

JIM

It was fun. I thought it was funny.

[Awkward silence.]

PHIL

Of course, you get into an area like this  
it's hard to judge.

[A very quiet, gentle conversation follows.]

I mean:

your daughter was, how old,  
nine?

JIM

How do you mean?

PHIL

When you had incest with your daughter.

JIM

Three.

PHIL

She was three?

JIM

From the time she was three  
until she was ten.

PHIL

From the time she was three?

BONNIE

Is this true?

Did I know this?

Did everyone know this?

JIM

And, well, it started when she was three.

I was in the bedroom and I was standing in my shorts and a T-shirt,

and she walked up to me and she pulled the edge of my  
my shorts,  
and I just had this overwhelming desire to have sex with her.  
And....

PHIL

And this is your daughter.  
She is three years old.  
Whatever.  
And,  
and,  
but wouldn't your first instinct be to just move away and say,  
"geez."

JIM

It was.  
It was.  
But it, it, I, I guess my, my instincts to,  
to move against this, to—to guard against that,  
to not do that  
were just not strong enough.  
I had a determination not to  
but that,  
you know.

PHIL

How did you feel?

JIM

Like a piece of garbage.

Basically.

[silence]

PHIL

And then  
when did you do it again?

JIM

It was probably a few weeks later.

PHIL

And this kept going on when she was four?

JIM

Right.

PHIL

And did she ever tell her mom?

JIM

Well, yes, she did.

When she was nine.

PHIL

When she was nine.

And what did your wife say?

JIM

She, uh, she confronted me on it.

And—and I made promises that—

PHIL

Had you thought about

how that moment would be before it happened?

JIM

Oh, sure.

I'd, you know, had visions of the police pulling up  
and hauling me off.

PHIL

Did you love your daughter?

JIM

Yes, I—

I love her now.

PHIL

You love her now?

JIM

Of course, yes,

I do.

If—

if I answered your question in the negative,

then I would be in denial,

and I would be in a more dangerous place than I am by saying,

"Yes, I am."

And, in being aware of that

and having the tools that I have gained in therapy

there are strategies I have for now—

for dealing with that that I did not have before.

There's learning strategies to deal with that.

Sometimes a moment will come in a child's life

when you will realize:

oh, this child loves me;

she

she's beginning to know me,

to recognize me,

to smile every time I come near her;

when I sing songs to her in my terrible voice

she loves to listen to them;

she doesn't cry or pucker up her face when I kiss her;

she stopped crying when I picked her up.

If anything were to threaten her

I would trade my life for hers.

PHIL

Sometimes you think,

oh,

men's lives.

JIM

Right.

PHIL

But then you think:  
well, I mean: women's lives, too.

JIM

For sure.

PHIL

But when you think about men  
I think part of it is  
that men don't like their jobs.

JIM

Unh-hunh.

PHIL

I mean, if you'd ask them,  
probably 90% of men would tell you  
they are feeling this incredible sense of bitterness  
and  
and frustration about their wives and families.

JIM

I think this is true.

PHIL

They don't feel appreciated.

JIM

This is so true.

PHIL

It makes a man angry the way everyone just  
takes for granted the things his earnings buy for them  
and sort of come to expect it as their due.  
And then his kids put him down  
for being this materialistic middle class jerk—  
and he'd like to tell them,  
okay,

okay,  
why don't you just get someone else to support you!  
But he holds himself back  
because  
because  
he thinks: that's what it is to be a man.

[Silence.

Phil gets an axe and demolishes a wooden crate.

Polly wanders offstage, distracted.

And then JIM begins to throw himself, loose-limbed, to the ground,  
over and over again,  
collapsing to the ground like a sack of loose bones,  
his head lolling over and thumping on the ground,  
then rolling over, as though convulsively, several times,  
his elbows and knees and head thumping on the ground.

Then he gets up and repeats the action,  
gets up and repeats the action.

PHIL joins JIM, synchronously, in the same set of repeated actions.  
So, it is a dance for two men.

Then RED DICKS joins the other two,  
so the three of them are going through the same repeated actions,  
and adding some additional synchronized choreography  
with break dancing moves on the ground,  
and a sort of ground slam dancing  
with spins and twirls and twirling headstands,

and finally a recording of a loudly barking dog joins in

until everyone hears the barking dog, and gradually stops dancing.

Polly wanders back in  
with a chicken on a leash;  
she is in her bathrobe;  
she sits at a table and smokes a cigarette,  
drinks a cup of coffee,  
and does her nails.]

POLLY

I should leave town.

[silence]

Probably—  
what?  
I should just leave town.  
I should go,  
you know:  
somewhere.  
I mean, where no one could find me—  
and,  
if I were lucky,  
I'd forget how to find my way back.  
I'd get lost.

[she picks up a dry bagel,  
picks it into pieces as she talks,  
and, as she talks, tries to choke down the occasional dry piece.  
She picks up the newspaper and reads:]

"Wanted: gas station attendant with five to ten years experience to clean pool in  
exchange for swimming privileges. Must have own snowplow."

I could do that.

"Wanted: Dark room manager with experience in stripping. Professional wrestling  
background preferred."

I could do that.

"Wanted: Chiropractic assistant for night shift. Must play the flute."

I could do that.

You know, they say the reason the Lord's Prayer goes

"lead us not into temptation"

is because human beings can't resist temptation.

The prayer is not:

"lead us not into sin."

Just into temptation—that's enough for it to be too late.

That's how bad human beings are.

And then, if you fall in love,

what can you do?

[In frustration,

Polly picks up the chicken,

takes the chicken by the feet and swings it around violently in circles,

apparently killing it (though really only knocking it unconscious),

and putting the apparently dead chicken quietly on the ground.

The garage band pick up their instruments and launch in to a big love song—  
full out—

and Red Dicks goes to the trunk of the Lincoln Town Car

and gets his accordion out of the trunk and joins in with vocals and accordion

—and Polly steps up to the microphone

and sings.

At the end of the song,

Alicia enters.

She is 11 years old—or the youngest possible legal age  
for the youngest-possible-looking person to play this role.

.

Edward enters at the same moment.

They both stop short,

on opposite sides of the stage.

The grownups all watch.]

ALICIA

Oh.

I'm sorry.

I didn't know you would be here.

EDWARD

That's OK.

[They both move toward his bed at center.]

ALICIA

I know you  
just think of me as  
a kid.

EDWARD

No.

Well, yes.

But

I think you're pretty grown up for your age.

ALICIA

I'm eleven.

EDWARD

Right.

ALICIA

Almost twelve.

EDWARD

Right.

ALICIA

Probably you're embarrassed to be seen with me.

EDWARD

No. Not at all.

ALICIA

Do you think it's wrong of me?

EDWARD

Wrong?

ALICIA

I mean, do you think I'm bad?

EDWARD

What for?

ALICIA

To be in love with you?

EDWARD

Oh, I don't think you're really....

ALICIA

Yes, I am.

I know.

I think it's wrong.

Probably you think I should be spanked.

EDWARD

No, not at all.

ALICIA

I do.

[she starts almost to weep]

Sometimes I think I'm so evil,  
the things I think

[she starts to bite her wrist]

EDWARD

Hey, what are you doing?

What are you...

are you biting yourself?

Don't do that.

Hey.

Hey!

Don't do that.

[he takes hold of her, tries to wrest her forearm out of her mouth]

Cut it out.

That's crazy.

Hey!

[he pulls her down on the bed on top of himself,  
across his lap,  
and spans her;  
she stops biting herself.]

That's kind of crazy

you know that?

ALICIA

I feel better now.

EDWARD

I don't think I do.

ALICIA

Did you like spanking me?

[silence]

Well, did you?

EDWARD  
I don't know.  
I think  
probably  
I've got to go.

ALICIA  
Hey, Edward!  
Edward!

[With longing, she watches him go.]

RED DICKS  
I guess you have to wonder sometimes  
what catches a guy's eye.

ALICIA  
Yeah.

PHIL  
I think a guy likes a pretty face.

JIM  
That's the first thing I always notice.

PHIL  
And great hair.

JIM  
Great hair, that's true.  
Great hair.

PHIL  
I don't like a woman with messy hair.

JIM  
Or too much spray.  
If it looks too stiff, that's not good.

PHIL

Do you like wavy hair?

JIM

Yes.

PHIL

I do.

I'd have to say, probably that's my favorite.

Wavy hair.

JIM

Right.

PHIL

Most guys will like a natural look

or soft

not too much makeup

JIM

a great smile.

PHIL

You know, I think these are the basics.

ALICIA

How can you tell when he's your boyfriend?

I mean, say you've been together, you know,

hanging out

maybe hanging out a lot,

when do you say to your friends, like, "we're together."

BONNIE

Does he call you "kiddo?"

ALICIA

I don't know.

I guess he might.

BONNIE

Right.

That's not a good sign really.

SHIRLEY

Or, if you're going somewhere together,  
do you break into a sweat trying to keep up with him?

ALICIA

We haven't exactly gone anywhere together.

[silence]

BONNIE

You know, there are things you can do to get a guy's attention.

[silence]

Like, say you're having a conversation with a guy:  
while you're talking to him, you could  
put your hand on his knee

SHIRLEY

Lightly.

BONNIE

You could unbutton a button on your sweater

JIM

I don't know.

BONNIE

What?

JIM

These are things that might be a little scary to a guy.  
You could listen to him when he talks.  
You could move a little closer to him.  
I don't think you should unbutton any buttons.

BONNIE

Okay.

Say you are walking down the street  
and you see a cute guy walking a dog.

Do you

pet the dog and smile at the dog

pet the dog and smile at the guy

touch the guy on the arm and wink at the dog?

ALICIA

Pet the dog and smile at the guy.

PHIL

What has this got to do with it?

JIM

He doesn't even have a dog.

RED DICKS

What's his favorite color?

ALICIA

I don't know.

RED DICKS

It's worth knowing. You can tell a lot from that.

ALICIA

Like what?

RED DICKS

Well, a guy who likes grey  
is going to be your indecisive kind of guy.

Yellow, he's kind of passive,  
maybe gay, you know,

I'm not saying necessarily,  
just could be.

Your pink man is a philanderer  
and a flirt.

But red:

a guy who likes red is going to be easily aroused  
he likes sex every way you can imagine  
he's going to be a tiger in the sack.

JIM

This is maybe not what we're talking about here  
a tiger in the sack  
this is a girl you're talking to.

ALICIA

I'd like a tiger in the sack.

RED DICKS

Really?

Have you ever taken the purity test?

ALICIA

I don't think so.

RED DICKS

Have you ever:

held hands with someone?

ALICIA

Sure.

RED DICKS

photocopied parts of your body, such as your face, hands or feet

ALICIA

Uh, no.

[At some point in here, the chicken will come "back to life;"  
one of the grownups can put the chicken in the car  
and close the door.]

RED DICKS

been on a date?

ALICIA  
Of course.

RED DICKS  
been on a date past one a.m.?

[as the test goes on,  
she responds more slowly or hesitantly  
or with difficulty or embarrassment  
at the increasing intimacy of the questions]

ALICIA  
Of course.

RED DICKS  
worn a strapless gown?

ALICIA  
Yes.

RED DICKS  
slow danced?

ALICIA  
Yes.

RED DICKS  
necked?

ALICIA  
Yes.

RED DICKS  
French kissed?

ALICIA  
Yes.

RED DICKS  
hot tubbed in mixed company?

ALICIA  
Yes.

RED DICKS  
in the nude?

[silence]

ALICIA  
Yes.

RED DICKS  
had someone put suntan lotion, cocoa butter, or baby oil on you?

ALICIA  
Yes.

RED DICKS  
played doctor?

[more hesitantly now]

ALICIA  
Yes.

RED DICKS  
played Twister?

ALICIA  
Yes.

RED DICKS  
played Naked Twister?

ALICIA  
Yes.

RED DICKS  
been picked up?

been picked up?

ALICIA  
Yes.

RED DICKS  
picked someone up?

ALICIA  
Yes.

RED DICKS  
had a one night stand?

ALICIA  
Yes.

RED DICKS  
I think she's ready.

POLLY  
If you don't mind my saying,  
I think you could use a little help with your makeup.  
I think if you want to go for this dewy look  
you're going to need some powdery, shimmery products  
instead of these creamy moisturizing ones.  
You're going to want to give your T-zone some extra blotting power  
with a sweep of loose powder.  
Go for the glitter on the eyes.  
Loose sparkle eye powders, blush powders.  
Forget the frosts on the lips,  
go for clear gloss. Clear gloss.  
Or else you could use

"Honey Rose"  
or  
"Tulip"  
or "Tea Rose"  
or "Oyster Pink"

RED DICKS  
Or "Almost Kissed"

BONNIE  
Or "Baby Kiss"

SHIRLEY  
Or "Sweet Nothing"

POLLY  
"Desert Rose"

BONNIE  
"Positively Pink"

POLLY  
"Blush Rose"

BONNIE  
"Dusty Rose"

SHIRLEY  
"Cinema Pink"

RED DICKS  
"Pink Champagne"  
Or "Balla Balla"

BONNIE  
"English Rose"

RED DICKS  
"La vie en Rose"

SHIRLEY  
"Peony Peach"

POLLY  
"Belle de Jour"

PHIL  
"Baby Lips"

[silence;  
the others look at Phil]

POLLY  
Well, you have a lot of choices.

ALICIA [overdosed]  
I ,  
you know,  
sometimes  
I can't stop thinking about  
cutting myself  
on my arms and legs, you know,  
with razors,  
not killing myself  
or anything  
but just  
cutting myself  
and then I guess I'd wear  
long-sleeved shirts  
or something  
because I know that  
hurting myself  
isn't really  
solving anything  
but I can't seem to stop  
thinking about it.

[she turns and runs out at full speed;

Polly gets into the back seat of the Lincoln Town Car  
and shuts the door.

Shirley takes up the brushes next to the drums  
and does a quiet, contemplative solo with them.

JIM takes off his shirt,  
lights the outdoor barbecue grill with lighter fluid,  
then puts a trail of lighter fluid along the ground  
and suspends himself horizontally above the flames  
on two saw horses  
and roasts himself like a hog on a spit.

or else he has picked up the lighter fluid  
and managed to get it on his hands,  
and lit his hands on fire;  
he turns front with both hands burning,  
looking awkwardly, but calmly, from side to side,  
looking for something to put out the fire.  
Finally, he goes over to the kids' swimming pool,  
and extinguishes his hands.

PHIL, meanwhile, has been standing in the kids' pool,  
fiddling with a radio, which explodes, giving him an enormous electrical shock,  
and then something else also explodes with a huge ball of fire and smoke  
as JIM climbs down from his rotisserie and puts his shirt back on.]

SHIRLEY

A lot of people think  
that they're entitled to happiness.

I never thought that.

I always wished for happiness  
but I never thought I had a right to it.

I thought happiness was something I had to make for myself,  
not something like manna that fell from on high.

I have some friends who get indignant at the least obstacle to their happiness  
as though it were an outrage.

I always thought you had to win your happiness,  
under conditions some of which were burdensome  
others favorable.

#### BONNIE

When I first met Walter  
he would talk and talk about the most boring things  
on and on  
not quite "how to get up in the morning," but almost.  
He would burst into tears on my shoulder.  
He was—well, obviously, he was afraid of his father.  
The house he grew up in  
it was just draped in black.  
He never remembered any nursery rhymes from his childhood  
or songs he learned.  
And then, when I had to put him in Manhattan State Hospital  
underneath the Triborough Bridge,  
and I called his mother and begged her to help  
his father got on the phone and said  
"stop it, you're upsetting Walter's mother,"  
and he hung up on me.  
And they never came to visit him.  
The last time I saw him  
when I was leaving after a visit  
I told him I loved him, and he cried.  
He was so fat from the drugs they were giving him.  
He walked like a fat man.  
And his hair was turning gray.  
And they had him at work there  
making those ugly, clumsy ashtrays.  
And he had been such a beautiful boy.

[The garage band plays

#### A COUNTRY LOVE SONG

while all those on stage sing along

and Polly opens the window of the Town Car

and sings vocals from the front seat under a spotlight.

As the song comes to an end, Edward enters, sits on the edge of his bed, takes off his rollerblades.]

RED DICKS

A guy like you  
you're growing up.

EDWARD

I guess I am.

RED DICKS

Do you have a girlfriend?

EDWARD

No.

How come you ask?

RED DICKS

Guys your age, usually they do.

EDWARD

I like girls okay.

But for me, I don't know,

my idea of a good time is listening to the radio

playing a little air guitar

roller blading

if I had my choice finding out a little more about women

or doing something else

I think I'd rather

learn the secret of cartooning

how to identify different kinds of airplanes

the fundamentals of Greco Roman wrestling

how to build a business

the secrets of Jiu Jitsu

how to train a dog.

And frankly, if you want to know what I think  
I'm getting a little sick of seeing sex dragged through the dirt,  
glorified  
misrepresented in every way, shape, and form  
I read through postings I find on the Internet  
these so-called personal experiences that are so outrageous and far out that only a  
fool would believe what he is reading.  
Or on the television set  
all these bikini clad women parading across the screen  
holding Brand X Beer or breakfast cereal.  
What kind of message does this send out?  
Everyone else feels fat and ugly by comparison  
everyone is insecure and angry  
so all the men go out and rape someone  
And is sex all that big a deal in the first place?  
I'm not so sure.  
I myself vowed a long time ago  
to wait for someone very special,  
to share that part of myself  
with the one woman I fell in love with  
and spent the rest of my life with.  
And now, after almost 14 years of waiting,  
masturbating to hold myself together sexually,  
what do I find?  
That adults are trying to get me involved in  
pre-marital sex.  
Don't you people realize  
that sex is a distraction from the real world,  
that what the politicians want is for you to think about sex all the time  
and if that's all you think about  
everyone will soon be reduced to poverty  
without any health care or social security or pensions  
because you haven't even been paying attention?  
Yes.  
Yes.  
It happens that I did break my vow  
and I did have sex with someone  
I went with this girl for two months,  
both of us getting very serious about the relationship

and expressing our wishes to remain virgins until our wedding  
and then it started with a touch here,  
a stroke there,  
and then one night,  
we talked for almost three hours  
about whether or not we should make love.  
and so we did  
and pretty soon I was moving my penis towards her vagina,  
and in a half a second,  
I had an orgasm.  
All the buildup  
all the excitement of finally having sex—  
it all rushed out as fast as it could,  
and I spent the next hour feeling horrible  
about ruining her first time with such a poor performance.  
and all my years of hard work down the tube.  
And it wasn't even that wonderful  
what I did feel was nothing more than masturbating without my hands.  
The oral sex we'd been having for months  
had been far more satisfying.  
Suddenly I understood  
how so many guys out there  
wanted to have sex with as many women as possible.  
Maybe they all felt as cheated as I did  
Now I knew sex for what it was.  
And now I have no interest in sex.  
None.  
Forget it.

[He lies down and falls instantly asleep,  
like a narcoleptic.

Silence.

A very quiet conversation follows  
with Phil and Jim sitting on opposite sides of the bed,  
talking over Edward.]

JIM

You forget how it is to be a kid.  
Sometimes I look back at the family photograph album,  
and it comes back with such a rush.  
You remember these moments exactly the way they were  
as though it was yesterday.  
Do you ever do that?

PHIL

Well....  
Sure.

JIM

You don't?

PHIL

Sure.  
Sure.

JIM

But not as though you like to.

PHIL

Unh-hunh.  
Did your father ever take pictures of you nude?

JIM

What?

PHIL

Did you father take pictures of you nude?

JIM

Well, no.  
I mean, I guess when I was a baby  
you know,  
in the bathtub,  
yeah, sure.  
Did your father take pictures of you nude?

PHIL

Yes.

JIM

Where?

PHIL

In the bedroom mostly.

JIM

What was he doing in the bedroom?

PHIL

Well, taking pictures and  
having sex with me.

JIM

When you were a boy?

PHIL

Yes.

JIM

He did?

PHIL

Yes.

JIM

How did he do that?

Was he nice to you?

PHIL

He was gentle.

JIM

Were you thinking it was wrong?

PHIL

That what was wrong?

JIM

That your father was having sex with you.

PHIL

Well, he wasn't having sex with me at that time.  
He was just massaging me.

JIM

Oh. I thought you said...

PHIL

That was later.

JIM

But when he massaged you,  
did you think that that was wrong?

PHIL

No.

JIM

You never did?

PHIL

When he massaged me with his mouth,  
I thought that was wrong.  
But, you know,  
I thought I'd get used to it, and I did;  
and eventually it made me feel warm.

JIM

Oh.

Did you like it?

PHIL

Sometimes.

JIM

Why did he do that?

Did you ask him why he did that?

PHIL

He told me that it was a way to release the tension  
and the

knots in your muscles

when you got worked up from sports and anxiety,

and it was

just a way to relax.

[Phil begins to shiver uncontrollably,  
hugging himself to keep from shivering.]

JIM

Did you ever massage him?

PHIL

Yes.

JIM

Did he give you directions?

PHIL

He just said no.

JIM

No, meaning

what?

PHIL

Meaning if I skipped over his penis, he said no.

JIM

So, what did you do?

PHIL

I started to touch his penis and  
massage it in the way he did me.

And then, one time

he took my hair in his hands

and wanted me to massage his penis with my mouth.

JIM

How old were you?

PHIL

I was seven.

JIM

Were you afraid of your father?

PHIL

Yes. When he

gave me swimming lessons,

he would

grab my

hair and

dunk me under the water and hold me down for 20 or 30 seconds,

and then he

would lift me up; and

I would cry out,

and then he'd

dunk me under again.

JIM

Was this, like, playful?

PHIL

No.

He wanted me to

struggle,

and he wanted me to  
fight.  
And I was afraid he would  
kill me  
accidentally.

[Polly, emerging from the Lincoln Town Car,  
goes to Edward's bed, wakes him up gently.]

POLLY  
I'm sorry things didn't work out with your girl friend.

EDWARD  
It's okay.

POLLY  
These things do happen, you know.  
So many times, for most people,  
the first time is so bad,  
and they think they never want to make love again  
or that it was wrong  
and yet  
love  
love is the most wonderful thing we have as human beings  
this closeness to others  
caring  
compassion  
and these feelings of empathy and caring for another  
this is the whole basis for society  
for civilization.

And if you were ever to get together again  
with the girl you cared for  
there are things you can do  
that will give her happiness  
or simply fun

there's nothing wrong with that  
pleasure: that you give her as a gift  
selflessly  
because you care for her

For instance, you know, talking  
you can't do enough talking with a woman  
or reading her a book in bed  
women like this  
or when you're making love  
not to carry on a whole discussion  
but just to say how much you love her.

EDWARD  
Yeah?

POLLY  
And taking off a woman's clothes  
you need to treat her with the care  
well  
with the care of the person you love most in the world  
and very slowly  
and in a dim light  
because a lot of women are self-conscious about their bodies  
and as each new part of her body is revealed  
kiss her there softly

EDWARD  
Unh-hunh.

POLLY  
And touching  
touching needs to be gentle  
a lot of guys will just grab a woman's breast, you know,  
and that hurts  
a really gentle caress  
just gently brushing over a nipple  
or even just holding her breast  
this is a real trigger

EDWARD

It is?

POLLY

And

a woman likes to be touched all over her body  
before she makes love because  
when she is really excited  
her whole body feels like a penis.

EDWARD

It does?

POLLY

Of course, if you're making love with an experienced woman  
she will know some things to make you feel more at ease  
and some other things you will like  
tickling you with her eyelashes  
on your cheek and neck and stomach  
rubbing her nipples over your chest and stomach  
and thighs  
taking you into a bath with her  
soaping you all over  
up and down  
reading an erotic story to you in the bath  
and afterwards  
taking you to bed and giving you a massage  
and then guiding you inside her  
so that before you know it  
having done nothing yourself  
she is holding you gently, tightly inside  
kissing your neck, your cheek  
holding you  
her arms around you  
you've forgotten entirely where you are  
all you feel is  
complete love  
safe and warm  
forever

[silence;  
Edward looks around;  
no one speaks;  
he gets up slowly, uncertainly from the bed,  
and leaves, slowly, not running,  
looking back and around from time to time in confusion,  
and then he is gone.]

POLLY

Probably I should kill myself.  
I mean, I've lost my bearings altogether.  
I suppose I could identify a picture of a spoon  
or a sailing ship  
if I were given a test  
I could identify a duck, a mushroom, a horse, a cherry  
but I would only think I was fooling  
the examiners  
thinking I had my wits together just because  
I could tell a bucket from a coffee mill  
and repeating sentences:  
The dog fears the cat because it has sharp claws  
repeating:  
The dog is afraid of the cat but only because of its claws  
and that would be wrong  
that would count against me  
they wouldn't even know what should count against me  
and who did this to my fucking hair?  
Did you do this?

RED DICKS

No.

POLLY

Look how it is  
you did this when I wasn't paying attention?

RED DICKS

I didn't touch your hair.

POLLY

How am I supposed to manage  
when I have nothing to wear.  
I don't have any top to put on  
unless I take some skirt and pull it up around my neck  
and then what is it?

Something cream with something brown?  
Do you know someone who would put that on?  
I go to Saks and say to the saleslady  
do you have thongs?  
She pushes her eyeglasses up her nose and says  
for underwear?  
Right, I say, for underwear.  
No, she says, we don't have thongs,  
we have bikinis.  
Well, let me see your bikinis  
and she says,  
these are 100% cotton

[she is pacing frantically back and forth]

Cotton! I say.  
Ugh!  
Who would wear a cotton bikini?  
What has happened to civilization for god's sake  
it's all downhill from here on out.  
They come in a package of three, she says.  
I don't want a package of one, I yell at her.  
And pretty soon, they're calling over the store detective  
telling me to pipe down  
Pipe down, I say,  
I'm a fucking shopper!  
The reason you have a job is because I am here  
demanding things!  
And so the next thing I know  
I'm being manhandled,  
I find myself back out on Fifth Avenue  
and I'm supposed to count myself lucky that I'm not in jail—  
that's what happened to me

the last time I tried to shop at Saks!  
And now I have this crap to wear!  
And nothing to eat but this goddam bagel!

[she throws the bagel across the stage]

Would someone just get me something to eat  
a cup of coffee and a cigarette

[yelling]

I'm a frantic person!  
Someone!  
I'm just a little bit out of control!

I need a friend here.  
Could you help me with this?

What the fuck ever happened to style?  
Oh, sure, you say,  
why don't they just lock her up  
sure, lock her up.  
A nice mental hospital in the country.  
And then the same crazy people would just come around:  
[in a different voice:] did you see Philip Blum.  
Philip Blum? Who the fuck is Philip Blum?  
[in a different voice:] Did you see him?  
No, I did not.  
[in a different voice:] Last night or this morning?  
Where would I see Philip Blum?  
[in a different voice:] Walking around the ward.  
I did not. What was he doing, walking around?  
[in a different voice:] Just walking through the ward. Did you see him?  
Oh, I don't know. Maybe I did.  
[in a different voice:] Was he carrying anything?

[One or two of the others  
is just pacing back and forth  
as a reaction to all the frantic stuff that's going on.]

What would he be carrying?  
[in a different voice:] A syringe perhaps.  
Yes, he was carrying a syringe.  
[in a different voice:] For what purpose?  
You're asking me. To give injections I suppose.  
[in a different voice:] Did he give an injection to you?  
Yes. Yes, he did!  
[in a different voice:] And did you fall asleep?  
Yes. But not for long.  
[weeping now]  
Not for long.  
I begged him: put me to sleep forever.  
I'm worn out  
and I don't know what I might do next.  
I don't think of myself as a bad person  
am average person, sure,  
not a saint  
I'm the first to know it  
but not an evil person  
who fucks her own children!

[Edward enters,  
having returned, obviously,  
because he is interested.]

EDWARD  
Sometimes  
things move so fast  
it makes me dizzy.

POLLY  
I know.  
What do you wish I would do?

EDWARD  
I don't know.

POLLY  
Maybe you should come with me.

EDWARD

Where?

POLLY

Come with me.

Don't worry.

I'll take good care of you.

[she takes his hand  
and leads him over to the Lincoln Town Car,  
opens the back door.]

Let's get in back.

[He gets in,  
she follows,  
and closes the door behind her.

Bonnie turns on the radio  
and we hear

BIG MUSIC.

Bonnie pulls her skirt half way down her butt  
and does a dance to the music  
that is half-wantonly flirtatious towards the men  
and half-hostile and half three or four other things;

Phil and Red Dicks, meanwhile, engage in a "roughhouse" dance,  
throwing each other to the floor,  
and jumping on each other's stomachs and butts,  
one pulling the other upright and then throwing him down to the ground again,  
jumping on him,  
grabbing his head or hair and hurling him to the ground,  
kicking his legs out from under him,  
both of them screaming with horror and delight  
as the violent dance goes on and on,  
neither really hurting the other;

Shirley just walks around during all this  
with her shirt pulled up to her neck;

and Jim tops everyone with a wild, licentious striptease,  
twirling his shirt round and round before tossing it across the stage,  
shimmying with a sock between his legs,  
lots of wild stuff  
stripping all the way down to a fig leaf.

Then the music comes to an end,  
and Jim is the only one who had been dancing till the end;  
he is naked and feels instantly embarrassed;  
in silence, with no one else moving or speaking,  
he retrieves the items of clothing he had thrown wildly in the air,  
trying to cover himself with the clothes as he picks them up,  
finally coming to his cowboy boots,  
getting one of them on after a struggle,  
getting the other one half on,  
when Red Dicks comes at him for a pas de deux,  
and Jim partners with Red,  
one boot halfway on,  
holding Red up in the air,  
then dipping Red's head toward the floor,  
finally releasing Red and resuming picking up his clothes.

A cellular phone rings.  
It rings over and over.

Everyone looks at the cellular phone  
that lies in the middle of Edward's bed.  
No one moves.

Finally, Shirley picks up the phone—  
and hands it to Bonnie.  
She hands it to Phil  
who hands it to Jim.  
Jim stands with it uncertainly.  
Red Dicks snatches it out of his hand and answers it.

RED DICKS

Hello....

Richard!

Yes.

Yes.

No.

He's not...uh...here.

No, she's not here.

They're not here.

[everyone looks at the car as he says this]

You're coming home.

Good!

Good!

I'm sure they'll be....

Yes.

I'll tell them.

See you soon.

Bye.

[silence]

JIM

You know

I think what a man wants most when he comes home

is just a little time to himself

like a dog circling on the rug before he lies down

just a little space to get acclimated

read his mail, check out the game on TV

PHIL

I don't know.

A man comes home

the first thing he feels is tension.

He's thinking, right:

I remember where I am

Home, this is where the female always makes the rules.

Where the rules are subject to change at any time

without prior notification.

Where no male can possibly know all the rules.

Where, if the female suspects the male knows all the rules,  
she must immediately change the rules.

Where the female is never wrong.

Where, if the female is wrong,  
it is due to misunderstanding  
which was a direct result  
of something the male did or said wrong.

Where the female may change her mind at any time.

Where the male must never change his mind  
without the express written consent of the female.

Where the female has every right to be angry or upset at any time.

Where the male must remain calm at all times  
unless the female wants him to be angry and/or upset.

Where the male is expected to mind-read at all times.

Where if the female has PMS all the rules are null and void.

Where the female is ready when she is ready.

Where the male must be ready at all times.

Where the male who doesn't abide by the rules  
can't take the heat, lacks backbone  
and is a wimp.

JIM

Oh, I think you've just got some differences here  
between men and women, and I say,  
vive la difference.

PHIL

I think I see him coming.

BONNIE

What?

PHIL

Richard.

I think that must be him.

You recognize that car?

[All look off to one side.]

JIM

No.

JIM

No.

PHIL

I think that must be him.

JIM

Right.

[Phil takes off in the opposite direction.

After a moment, Jim follows him,  
then Bonnie, then Shirley, then Jim and Red Dicks.  
The stage is empty.

The radio miraculously lights up and comes on

and we hear, at maximum, blasting volume:

Screamin Jay Hawkins sings "I Put a Spell on You"

and after a few moments

Edward and Polly get out of car  
and slow dance naked to the music.

Richard enters.

He is in his fifties.

He stands, lit by a spot,  
and watches them dance.

After a long, long while

Polly sees Richard,  
turns  
and runs out.

We've entered a state of suspended animation,  
as though we have gone into slow motion.]

RICHARD

What are you doing?

EDWARD

I...

I should get dressed.

[He moves towards his bed,  
to get a sheet.]

RICHARD

I leave  
my wife with you  
and ask you, like a man, to take care of her,  
and all you can think to do is to  
is to get naked with her?

EDWARD

Did anyone know you were ever coming back?

RICHARD

This is your explanation?  
Is this how it is for you to be my son?

EDWARD

Your son?  
Is that how you think of me?  
You never had anything for me but orders.  
Do you remember  
one weekend,  
driving to the country  
I was six years old  
you got so angry at me  
for something I had done I don't remember what  
you pulled the car off onto an exit road  
and got out and pulled me out of the car by my hair

and took me around to the front of the car  
in front of the headlights  
and I tried to pull away  
and you knocked me to the ground  
in front of the car, in the headlights  
and I was crying  
do you remember anything of this?

RICHARD

No.

This is not what I remember.

EDWARD

and one afternoon in the country  
you left me playing with a friend  
and you went off for tea with Mrs. Perry  
but you didn't come back until after dark  
and I was waiting for you beside the road  
I saw you driving toward the house  
and I waved to you  
and you drove right past  
because you still had Mrs. Perry in the car with you  
and you kept on driving  
and then you came back an hour later  
I was still waiting for you by the road

RICHARD

I'm sorry.

If you say it was true, I believe you.

I'm sorry.

EDWARD

You were always exploding  
always angry  
cursing at the other drivers  
calling them sons of bitches  
so that I was always afraid of you

RICHARD

I'm sorry.

EDWARD

Always afraid you would turn on me  
I thought you might kill me  
push me out of the car  
or crush me.

RICHARD

Oh, no. No.

I couldn't have done that.

EDWARD

How did I know?  
You were in such a rage  
or else silent, thinking,  
holding your jaw, covering your mouth with your hand  
so sad and discouraged  
we all made you feel your life had been worthless.

RICHARD

No. No.

I'm just a person, too, you know.  
I always felt your hatred of me.  
I thought, well, okay,  
leave him alone,  
don't force yourself on him  
maybe one day he'll come around  
see something in you that he likes  
when I explained things to you  
it made you squirm  
I talked too much  
it always turned into a lecture  
I couldn't help myself  
and I would see your attention drift off  
I could see you wanted to get away  
I didn't know how to get you back

the best I could do was try to be cheerful  
wrap up what I was saying  
let you go  
and then, playing catch  
I could tell,  
you'd rather be playing with a friend  
tossing a ball back and forth with me  
it was nothing but your filial duty  
you remember we went on a fishing trip together  
one time to Canada.

EDWARD

Yes, one time.

RICHARD

Yes.

EDWARD

It was fun. I had a good time.

RICHARD

So did I.

I never knew what else to do.

EDWARD

So I've become a cold person, like you.

Usually I don't even know what I feel.

RICHARD

I loved you.

EDWARD

No, you didn't.

I loved you.

RICHARD

I don't think so.

[Edward runs out.

Richard sits on Edward's bed,  
his head in his hands.

After a few moments,  
Jim enters uncertainly.]

JIM

Is there something  
maybe  
I can do?

RICHARD

I can't say  
that I've been a perfect person.  
I abandoned the mother of my son  
and I abandoned my son himself  
to pursue another woman.

Other women really.

When I was a boy my son's own age,  
I slept once with the mother of a boyhood friend of mine  
who lived just down the road,  
a woman in her forties  
Well, I slept with her more than once.  
I slept with her the whole summer long,  
going over early every morning  
after her son had gone off to his summer job,  
a divorced woman  
and I was just a boy.  
I remember her still,  
I think of her still almost every day

[Polly enters.]

RICHARD

Polly.

POLLY

Yes.

JIM

Excuse me.

I'll just be....

[he leaves]

RICHARD

Was I gone so long?

POLLY

Yes.

RICHARD

You've always been my one true love.

POLLY

Oh.

RICHARD

You didn't know that?

POLLY

No.

RICHARD

When I first saw you

I thought

there couldn't be

a more pure vision

of absolute beauty.

POLLY

When we first met

you were happy to be with me all the time.

RICHARD  
It's my fault?

POLLY  
No.  
It's just the way you were.

I remember  
when we first arrived in St. Remy  
the tall ceilings in our hotel room  
with blue sky painted there,  
and birds;  
we made love,  
and lay next to one another,  
the summer breeze coming in through the open windows  
cooling our bodies,  
I felt so dizzy from jet lag  
and making love  
and the summer breeze coming from the garden,  
I thought: I've gone to heaven.

RICHARD  
I remember that.

POLLY  
And I thought at the time  
I could never leave you.

RICHARD  
I felt  
such sympathy for you.  
I thought: I could care for you forever.  
I thought: I see deep inside you  
your most secret self  
and I will always care for you.  
I will always wish you well.  
I will always hope for your happiness.  
To keep things away from you  
that bring tears to your eyes

that cause you grief  
that make you feel small or hurt  
unfairly treated  
those things in your past  
your mother's goodness—but still, as good a person as she was  
as much as she loved you,  
you always felt her distance  
her coolness toward you  
I thought: you will never feel that again.  
Situations in your life  
ordinary things, not knowing where the money would come from  
for your rent  
I thought: you will never feel that fear again  
that sense that things were so hard  
and you didn't know where the answer might come from  
that sense of vulnerability  
I'll hold you in my arms all night  
my stomach pressed against your back  
my face nestled in your hair  
holding you the whole night, every night,  
no harm will ever come to you  
not ever.

POLLY

But then, do you remember when our bedroom ceiling was falling  
and you said,  
"Polly, that ceiling has been up there for a hundred and forty years  
it's not going to fall now."

And I said, "Yes, but it's falling now."

And you didn't believe me until it fell  
and you said you would believe me from then on.

RICHARD

Yes.

POLLY

Do you remember when I woke up one night  
more than four and a half years ago  
and I was sitting in the armchair in our bedroom  
awake and sobbing  
because it had been a year of you not getting divorced...  
six months after the time when you promised me it would be over  
and it was far, far from being over  
and you gave me excuses like  
"it doesn't mean anything...our marriage is over..."  
and "Divorce will happen, like the sun rises and sets,  
the divorce will happen"  
nothing made sense to me  
I felt horrible to have people ask me  
"so, are you and Richard going to get married?"  
a question that should have made me happy or coy or blushy  
or giggly or secretive  
and it made me sick to my stomach and humiliated  
and I was faced with the choice to either tell people  
that you were married  
still with no divorce in sight  
or I could lie—  
both options made me sick and resentful  
I knew you had seen that this was painful to me  
you had seen it  
and dismissed it as trivial, wrongminded, petty, insignificant  
I showed you over and over that it was painful...truly painful  
I sat in the chair sobbing, loudly  
you woke up and saw me  
you looked at me  
and said with such contempt in your voice  
"Boy, you've really worked yourself up over this haven't you?"  
and you rolled over  
to go back to sleep

RICHARD

Yes, I remember that.

POLLY

and I thought  
My God, I'm a complete idiot  
I'm the little blond bimbo  
the great fuck with the hot little dresses and the fun  
and it's all so sexy and fun  
and we'll travel to the south of France and all around the world  
and we'll show everyone how well we shop  
and how in love we are and how romantic it all is  
but don't you dare fuck with my family  
and what's really important...  
don't you dare ask me to rush getting a divorce  
from the mother of my children  
because this is serious and real  
and someone real might get hurt  
You showed me over and over again how insignificant my pain was  
You told me flat out that you would not get a divorce one day faster because I  
wanted it  
than you would without my insistence...  
that it had to be on your schedule and not mine  
And I had to decide then...  
am I willing to be this person?  
This bimbo, this loved thing, this doted upon object,  
on the outside of "real" "important" "significant" stuff—  
like potentially upsetting wives and children—  
am I willing to be that in exchange for having Richard.  
And I said "yes"  
And I was wrong  
And I came up for air a few more times over the years  
I called you from Louisville and I told you  
"I cannot do this for another year,  
I can't do this for a few more months, I can't, I can't. I can't."  
I made that call after sitting in the bathtub  
for the fifth night in a row  
crying for hours and slamming my head against the tiled wall.  
Spurred on by the sad fact of meeting new people  
who saw we were in love and asked me the dreaded questions  
"will you and Richard get married?"  
I made the call to let you know that I had a definite limit.  
A time beyond which I could not continue.

I called to tell you that the ceiling was falling  
and I guess you thought  
"that ceiling has been up there for a hundred and forty years  
it's not going to fall now"  
The ceiling fell  
I fell  
As I had predicted I would  
As I told you I would  
As I tried not to as hard as I could  
That's what happened to me

RICHARD

So it doesn't matter now  
that I am finally really about to be divorced  
because I have said this for years  
over and over again  
and it never happened and the damage has been done  
it's too late

POLLY

Right.

RICHARD

Because a person needs to be first in another person's heart  
and know it  
and know it absolutely  
or it is just too corrosive.  
It's just poisonous, finally  
poisonous

POLLY

Yes.

RICHARD

You know,  
you never wanted so much to make love with me  
You were interested sometimes  
and sometimes, I think, took real pleasure in our making love  
but you never found me irresistible

the way I found you  
you didn't want me more and more and more  
the way I wanted you  
you could wait to make love with me  
or not make love for days and days and not care about it at all  
and I often thought  
of course, it could be I'm not so appealing  
I'm not so hot or so exciting to make love to  
but maybe even more than that  
it's simply that I'm not the right kind of guy for you at all  
not even the category of person who thrills you.

Or maybe you're just not carried away by love of me  
the way I am by you.

Which came first, do you think,  
the rejection I always felt from you  
or the disrespect you felt from me?

Every night you rejected me  
and every time you returned from taking a trip out of town you rejected me  
so that I came to dread your coming back  
because your coming back  
meant not that you would return  
but that you would say you couldn't return  
and I would feel your rejection again in the biggest way  
you would come back and savage me

[silence]

But really after what you've just said now  
there's nothing more for me to say  
except again and again how sorry I am  
for hurting you, the best and only true love of my life  
the whole point of living  
was to find you and love you  
and take care of that love  
pay attention to it  
and make sure I never lost it

and so I haven't done the one thing in life I should have done  
and without you  
the whole point of life is over  
and I feel my life has ended  
and I see that I'm the one who is responsible for that  
so I feel a grief beyond anything I've ever felt  
for myself and for the pain I've caused you  
I'll never ever forget the picture of you in the bath in Louisville  
crying and hitting your head on the tiles  
never  
and to know I did that

I wish you could see through the pain I've caused you  
so that you might still be able to understand something of me  
and see that I have loved you completely and still do  
and somehow find your way back to me  
and, if that turns out not to be possible  
at least for you to know  
in spite of the terrible mistakes I made  
how much you were truly loved  
what a precious person I always felt you are

POLLY

I can't see that.

RICHARD

You thought I thought of you  
as a bimbo outside of anything  
"real" or "important" or "significant" to me?

Everything I've done and felt and known and lived for these past five years  
was about you  
was filled with your spirit  
and your tastes and your hatreds and your loves  
and your humor and your idiosyncracies  
and your whims  
your sudden turns and your steadiness  
your confidence in me  
the depth of your feelings

and the ferocity of them  
everything I did was about you  
and now without you my life is over.

You thought I thought of you as the great fuck  
in the hot little dresses  
You never were a great fuck  
You were the worst fuck I ever had  
I loved to make love with you  
because I loved you  
and I loved who you were  
and I cared for you  
and I always wanted to be close to you  
as close as I could be  
You were inhibited and frightened and closed off to adventure  
repulsed and I don't know what else  
and I always thought it was because you had been sexually abused  
as a child  
by a grownup  
or by the other kids in the woods  
that you always used to joke about  
and say how tough you were and you didn't care what they did  
but I've never known a woman  
so averse to just opening up and having a good time sexually  
and experimenting and trying things  
and seeing where it might take you

No  
only because I loved you so much  
did I live with what I always thought was  
a frustrating and unsatisfying sex life  
for you as well as me, I'm sure,  
that I only thought maybe, maybe one day  
if you ever came to love me and trust me enough  
you might overcome whatever trauma of the past  
had made you this way  
and if you never did  
I loved you so much  
that a great fuck was way way down the list of important things

to me about you  
the biggest thing was always that I loved you completely and forever

I loved your brains and your sensibility  
we were soulmates  
we felt and thought the same things in the same ways  
all the little subtle things in life felt the same to us  
the same things were funny and stupid and heartbreaking  
the same things were pretty  
the same things were good to eat  
we liked the same light in the sky in Provence  
we liked the same roads  
we liked the sounds of the cicadas  
we liked the same room in the hotel  
we felt the same about Nostradamus's house  
and about the people who ran it  
and about the little stone pool back away from the house  
we liked the same things when you decorated the living room  
we liked the same scenes in the same plays  
ten thousand million little things held us together  
like no one I've ever known  
I wanted to be inside you  
inside your love  
inside your feelings  
inside your thoughts and how you felt the world  
I wanted to feel things as you felt them  
I wanted to be in your heart  
and so often I felt I was  
I felt we were together in that way  
and in that way  
you were the greatest fuck I ever had  
but not the great fuck in the hot little dress  
the great fuck because of who you were in your heart  
and how I loved you more than life itself

I remember  
when we went to see the Greek play  
The Danaids  
in the abandoned marble quarry

and I thought:  
we are connected to this human life  
and to one another  
for all eternity.

[They sit looking at one another  
while we hear the Handel Sarabande from Suite No. 11 for Harpsichord.]

Then Richard shoots Polly.

She is shot in the head, and astonished.

He shoots her again.

She is open-mouthed with surprise and anguish  
and slips slowly to the floor.

He shoots her again.

She jerks involuntarily and lies still.

He puts the pistol into his mouth  
and blows his brains out.  
Brain and blood splatter behind him.]

RADIO TALK SHOW VOICE

Usually, in life,  
we're so busy doing things,  
we don't stop to look at each other any more.

2ND VOICE

That's so true.

TALK SHOW VOICE

But you won't be here forever.

2ND VOICE

No.

Right.

TALK SHOW VOICE

You won't even be the same person tomorrow.

Things go by so fast,  
and then they're gone.

Your children grow up  
and get married  
and you never took the time to look at them.

2ND VOICE

Like that couple in upstate New York.

TALK SHOW VOICE

Who's that?

[While the radio talk continues,  
Phil and Jim come in and pick up Richard and carry him out;  
Shirley and Bonnie carry out Polly.]

Red Dicks picks up the odd Coke can,  
bit of clothing as the radio show continues.]

2ND VOICE

You heard that:  
this man who shot his wife;  
she was sleeping with their son,  
near Utica.

TALK SHOW VOICE

Oh. Oh. Right.  
Well, not their son.  
His son. Her stepson.

2ND VOICE

That's the one.  
He shot her  
and then he shot himself.  
And then it turned out they weren't married after all.

TALK SHOW VOICE

Right.

2ND VOICE

He died. But she lived.

TALK SHOW VOICE

I understood he lived, too.

2ND VOICE

He lived? I didn't know that.

TALK SHOW VOICE

Yeah, he lived.

I guess, you know, he sort of lobotomized himself  
but he was still able to pump gas  
so they gave him a job there  
and I guess he does okay.  
They say that he seems happy.

2ND VOICE

I didn't know that.  
But I did know that she  
even though he shot her a couple of times—  
once in the head—  
she lived;  
and she recovered,  
well not completely, I guess—  
she had a little trouble with her memory,  
but otherwise she was okay.

TALK SHOW VOICE

And she moved into a trailer  
with the stepson

2ND VOICE

Right.  
In the trailer park off the old Route 32.  
And they lived there together

raising pit bulls.  
I heard they have thirteen pit bulls  
living with them there in the trailer.  
And the husband's in the trailer next to theirs.  
I guess you could say  
they lived happily ever after.

TALK SHOW VOICE

Right.  
Well.  
That's a love story.

2ND VOICE

Yeah. That really is.

[silence]

TALK SHOW VOICE

Okay!  
Well,  
here's some more music  
a familiar old song.  
This is Hank Snow singing "I Don't Hurt Anymore."

2ND VOICE

I like this song.

TALK SHOW VOICE

I've got to say,  
I love this song.

[The garage band picks up the Hank Snow piece  
and drowns out the radio

as Red Dicks straightens up,  
throwing things into the kiddie pool.

END

*True Love* was composed, in collaboration with Tom Damrauer, for Laurie Williams as Polly. It was written with the dramaturgical assistance of Greg Gunter. The piece was inspired by Euripides's *Hippolytus*, and the works by Seneca and Racine based on the same story, and incorporates texts from those writers as well as from Leo Buscaglia, Kathryn Harrison, the letters of Simone de Beauvoir, Andy Warhol, Valerie Solanas, Wilhelm Reich, the transcript of the trial of the Menendez brothers, Gerald G. Jampolsky, M.D., Jean Stein's biography of Edie Sedgwick, and texts posted on the Internet, among others.

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