

101 Brentwood Court

A play in one act

by Herb Isaacs

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CHARACTERS

Leads

Harvey Geller: The Observer. Divorced, Late thirties, humorous, highly intelligent, Mark's closest friend.

Mark Gardner: Attorney, Late thirties, tall, athletically built, attractive but not handsome in a classical sense; however he exudes confidence and is sexually appealing to women.

Katherine Greene: Late 20's. Natural beauty, brunette or chestnut hair, elegant bearing, infectious smile.

Ensemble (* roles can be doubled)

***Angie:** Late 20's, single, attractive blonde, bubbly, attracted to Mark.

***Waitress:** French accent, snooty, know-it-all

Jeanne: Late 20's, single, attractive redhead, sensuous, attracted to Mark.

Steve: Thirty-something, handsome, confident, Mark's colleague at work.

Danny: One of three thirty-something men on the make.

Sherman and Robert: The other two.

SETTING

The stage is divided into three areas. The upstage area is the living room of Mark's two-bedroom apartment at Brentwood Court. A large couch is against the upstage left wall. Immediately downstage of the couch is a coffee table. Up right is an exit to the kitchen; up left is an exit to the bedroom. There is a small dining table for two, flush with the upstage right wall. A rolling cart with bar fixings is stage left. On the side and back walls are hung tastefully selected prints, and against the left wall is a large house plant in good condition. The entire atmosphere has the feel of a successful professional with excellent taste.

Two other playing areas are downstage. Down center and left is the common area of Brentwood Court. The apartment set pieces should be moved as far upstage as possible during the common area scenes. The down right area will be used in the Cafe and oceanside scenes, and is initially unpopulated with set pieces.

Scene 1: Brentwood Court Common Area

(At rise, stage is barely lit. We see the common gathering area for the apartment complex. The portable bar on wheels is in place stage left. Bottles of wine, fresh wine glasses and cocktail napkins are on the bar. Mark is behind the bar. Angie and Jeanne are in their typical sexy poses leaning on the bar. Danny, Sherman and Robert are in a little group center-left. All are frozen. Light comes up on Harvey downstage center.)

HARVEY

Over there is my good friend Mark Gardner, the attorney. He's Apartment 101 Brentwood Court. That's the corner two-bedroom, split level at the rear with its own private entrance, a choice unit. Signed up for it when this place was being built. He's the reason I wound up here, actually. He knew I was trying to figure out where to begin my new life, and he told me about an apartment that was available. So I moved in, frankly, with great expectations. Mark told me about The Brentwood Inn and encouraged me to try my luck. But I could never quite get it. The Inn has always been Mark's kind of action. It always amazes me how he does it. I remember one night I was at a table at the back when I spotted this lovely blonde sitting alone at the bar. I turned to take a sip of my drink and try to figure out what I was going to say to her. When I turned back, she and Mark were laughing like they were old friends. Only thing is, he had never met her before.

ANGIE

Will we see you up at the Inn this evening?

MARK

Depends on how dark it is. *(The girls laugh.)*

JEANNE

Can you ever be straight with us?

MARK

(Double Entendre.) Are you kidding? I'm always happy to give it to you straight.

ANGIE AND JEANNE

(Overlapping ad libs.) Oh Mark! You are so naughty! You are so funny!

(They continue to talk animatedly. Lights up on full stage, Mark and the girls take their drinks and head off.)

HARVEY

Mark will be back soon. We're having our quarterly mixed singles event and he never misses one. It's a party of course, not a tennis tournament, but the idea is that people are free to play with anyone or, if they prefer, everyone. This particular night is when Apartment 101's story begins.

(The other actors on stage come to life. We hear soft disco music. Mark enters from stage right and Harvey goes to meet him.)

HARVEY

Hi, Mark. What's your pleasure tonight? Angie and Jeanne look lovely. Should we go over and say hello?

MARK

Not yet. I need a change. I'd like to wait and see who else might come by.

HARVEY

Looks like you won't have long to wait. Wow! Who is that with your buddy Steve?

(Harvey nods his head in the direction of stage left where Katherine and Steve are entering. Steve takes her hand and brings her upstage, introducing her to Danny, Sherman and Robert.)

MARK

(Affected by first sight of her.) I don't know but I'm sure going to find out.

HARVEY

(A little disappointed) Okay, I'll just hang out with the femme fatales. Go work your magic.

MARK

Haven't you gotten anything I've been trying to teach you about single life? I'm not going to just walk over there and join that group. Remember, when a beautiful girl is surrounded by a crowd, she usually peeks over the top to see who else is around. You never want to be part of the crowd.

HARVEY

I can buy that. But I've never seen you hesitate before.

MARK

Well, first I need to figure out how deeply Steve is into this. She just doesn't seem like his type. He always goes for the budding ingénues with self-conscious hair styles.

HARVEY

Yeah. And they last with him about as long as their hair spray. But I know you...it's more than just Steve, isn't it?.

MARK

You're right. This one is definitely different. I even hear my inner voice telling me I need to be careful and not screw up. *(Thinks about it.)* This is strange... I haven't felt this way since I was a pimply high school kid, afraid to ask a girl to dance.

HARVEY

I can't imagine you ever being nervous like that.

MARK

Oh I was then, but not anymore. Getting older helped. But mostly I learned that you just have to trust your reflexes. *(No more hesitation)* And that's exactly what I'm gonna do right now..

(Steve has gone to the bar to get wine for himself and Katherine. Angie and Jeanne have moved away from the bar and are talking together. Mark moves quickly and appears at Steve's elbow.)

MARK

Hey, Steve.

STEVE

Hey, Mark! How ya doin'?

MARK

Not as good as you, obviously.

STEVE

Oh, you noticed the new chick? Big surprise, there isn't one you ever miss.

MARK

Where'd you find her? *(Nonchalantly pouring his own glass of wine.)*

STEVE

I've still got a few sources you haven't tapped.

MARK

I've got a few new ones myself. Maybe we can work a trade.

STEVE

What kind of trade--a bird in the hand for a future draft choice in the bush? Not a chance. I know you too well.

MARK

Sounds like you 're holding back on this one. Could it be you're getting hooked?

STEVE

(Enjoying the mystery) No, I just have to protect my sources. Why, are you interested?

MARK

As a matter of fact, yes, But, you've clearly cornered the market. I guess I'll have to take my business elsewhere. *(He starts to walk away)*

STEVE

Hold on a minute! If I really believed you were sincere, I might just arrange for this package to be available.

MARK

Now, I'm suspicious! Is this some defective product you're trying to unload?

STEVE

On the contrary, my friend. A perfect specimen, recently imported from the Big Apple. She just isn't quite my type.

MARK

Really?

STEVE

Yeah. *(The game is over)*. We're kind of related. My sister married her brother. She's only been in L.A. a few weeks. I brought her here so she might meet a few people. Come on over, I'll introduce you.

(Steve takes his two glasses of wine and starts to wander back to the little grouping around Katherine. Mark is left standing there for a moment. Harvey comes over.)

HARVEY

A direct introduction! Can't beat that.

MARK

Maybe yes, maybe no. It would be natural to just trail along and meet her. But I wonder how Steve's intro would rate with her? Would I be viewed as just one of the crowd? *(Decides)*. Only one way to find out!

(Mark grabs his glass of wine and heads after Steve. The three guys have surrounded her, vying for the top spot. The music fades out.)

DANNY

...so, a week after I arrive in LA I realize I need to buy a car. A buddy of mine takes me down to Downey and I get me a used Chevy from Silent Sam Framm. It sure was a good buy, but as soon as I drove it off the lot, the muffler fell off!

(Everyone laughs, dutifully. Steve cuts in deftly and hands Katherine the glass of wine.)

STEVE

Katherine, meet a good friend I bumped into at the bar. Mark Gardner, Katherine Greene. With an 'e'.

(Katherine looks Mark squarely in the eye for a second, holds out her hand and smiles.)

KATHERINE

Hello, Mark, I'm always delighted to meet a friend of Steve's.

(Mark grasps her hand in the two of his and gives her his most princely bow.)

MARK

May I take the liberty of kissing your hand, milady?

(So it was to be a fairy book approach. The other suitors hold their breath to see if this dumb technique will actually work.)

KATHERINE

Certainly, milord. I would expect nothing less from any gentleman.

(She flashes him the smile again. He bows once more and lightly touches his lips to her hand. The frustrated suitors seem to be still holding their breath. Katherine senses their unease).

KATHERINE

Mark, have you met these fellows? Danny, Sherman and Robert.

(The men all grunt conventional syllables at each other. Suddenly, the disco music starts again, but with a rocking beat. Mark moves alongside Katherine and offers her his arm.)

MARK

Would milady care to minuet?

(She links her arm with his and smiles again.)

KATHERINE

I was hoping you'd ask, milord

(As they glide off together, still holding their wine glasses, Mark glances back at Steve and winks. Steve laughs, the rejected suitors groan and go off toward Angie and Jeanne.

On the dance floor, Mark is about to go into his most sensuous dance movements when he realizes he is still holding his wine glass. Katherine looks at him, giggles, and then holds up her own. Mark reaches over and takes her glass with exaggerated delicacy, and sets them both down on the bar.)

MARK

We certainly don't want wine spilled on milady's gown.

KATHERINE

Actually *(breaking the spell)* I wanted to see what kind of moves we could make without spilling any.

MARK

I had no idea you were so adventurous.

KATHERINE

Well, I don't especially go off seeking adventure, but I won't shy away when it's spilled in my lap, so to speak.

MARK

Lucky for me.

(They have still not yet started dancing, and the number is coming to a close).

KATHERINE

Don't be too sure of yourself just because I let you kiss my hand. I can always go back to the three musketeers.

MARK

No, you wouldn't like them, they all have bent swords.

KATHERINE

And am I to believe yours is straight as an arrow?

MARK

I'm going to show a bit of restraint in responding to that, as I don't feel I know you well enough.

KATHERINE

You are sheathing your sword.

MARK

Well, I don't think I should wave it about in public, do you?

KATHERINE

No, certainly not here! *(She is gasping from laughter.)*

(A new disco song starts.)

MARK

Have you noticed how this dancing interferes with our ability to enjoy ourselves?

KATHERINE

Yes, but what else do you have in mind?

(They walk over to the bar where they left the two wine glasses.)

MARK

How adventurous can I get this evening?

KATHERINE

What are my options?

MARK

Well, plan A, the dullest, is to pick up our drinks, go attack the buffet and take our spoils to some quiet corner where we can talk until the musketeers return to try their hand again.

KATHERINE

You're right, that is dull.

MARK

Plan B, moderately interesting, is to quietly disappear into the night, and go for a drive along the ocean, winding up at a little crepe place I know in Malibu.

KATHERINE

Mmm, that is interesting, but has a few complications. I'd have to think about how to handle that with Steve. Go on, any more?

MARK

Plan C, most interesting, is to forget the drive along the ocean and go up to my place where I will fix you a gourmet omelette, with an outstanding bottle of a little-known California chardonnay, put on corny records of Les Brown and Frank Sinatra, and we can dance slow dances and talk 'til morning.

KATHERINE

Now that, that has complications!

MARK

Yes, but it is the most interesting.

KATHERINE

Well, as I am a moderate person, I opt for the moderately interesting Plan B. Now, I'd better go find Steve and handle that problem. Where shall I meet you?

MARK

(Amazed). Hold it. Don't you want me to say a few words to Steve?

KATHERINE

No, I can do it. Why don't you just bring your car around to the front and I'll be out in a minute.

(Katherine picks up her glass and downs her wine. Then she gives Mark's hand a quick squeeze, puts the glass in it, and exits briskly. Mark stands there with his mouth still open, realizes it and swallows the rest of his wine. He wanders off.)

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

Scene 2: Cafe

(A corner table in Suzette's, on the Coast Highway. Mark and Katherine are sitting side by side on a bench seat. A French waitress in a very short dress is standing there, waiting. Mark is perusing the wine list.)

MARK

We'll have a bottle of the Freemark Abbey Chardonnay.

WAITRESS

(With contempt) Very well, Monsieur.

KATHERINE

What's she upset about?

MARK

Suzette always expects her patrons to choose one of her great French wines. The Freemark Abbey is the only good California white she condescends to include in her parochial cellar.

(They inspect the menu together.)

KATHERINE

What do you recommend, Mark?

MARK

The crepes are all excellent. Would you like me to order for you?

KATHERINE

I'm in your hands.

MARK

(Starts to respond with a smart remark, then stops.) No, I won't say it. You are obviously a good influence on me. *(He turns deliberately back to the menu.)* How about splitting an order each of the Beef Burgundy and the Ratatouille?

KATHERINE

That sounds delicious. I really like this place. Checkered tablecloths and candlelight...just like the Left Bank. I had no idea Los Angeles could have such charm.

MARK

I'd like to show you a lot more.

KATHERINE

(She smiles and touches his hand.) I think I'd like that.

MARK

(Squeezing her hand back.) Katherine, you do something to me!

KATHERINE

I'm glad.

(The waitress reappears just in time. Mark authoritatively tastes the wine, approves.)

MARK

We're going to split the beef burgundy and ratatouille crepes.

WAITRESS

Oui, Monsieur. And you wish nothing more? Salade, perhaps? *(Mark looks at Katherine. She shakes his head, Waitress exits.)*

MARK

I need to know more about you. Who are you, anyway?

KATHERINE

Katherine Greene...

MARK AND KATHERINE

With an 'e'. *(They laugh together.)*

MARK

I know that. I mean where do you come from, what makes you tick? On the drive out here you learned more about me than my mother knows, and the only thing I've found out about you is that you have the potential for driving me mad!

KATHERINE

Well, one thing must be pretty clear. I like to listen more than talk.

MARK

Not like me, you mean.

KATHERINE

No, I didn't really mean that. I admire someone who knows where they're going in life and isn't ashamed to say it. I just have trouble talking about myself very much.

MARK

Suppose I just ask you some questions.

KATHERINE

Kind of like interrogating a hostile witness? No thanks! I don't think I want to be cross-examined.

MARK

No, no, more like leading my star witness through her story so we can win the case.

KATHERINE

(She thinks it over). That might work. Let's try it.

MARK

Where were you born?

KATHERINE

New York City...Manhattan.

MARK

Have you always lived there?

KATHERINE

No, actually I grew up in Connecticut.

MARK

No New York City schools?

KATHERINE

Nope. Went to a finishing school in New England.

MARK

What did they finish you in?

KATHERINE

History and literature.

MARK

Where did you go to college?

KATHERINE

I didn't. (*Crisply*). Does that matter?

MARK

No, of course not. But I am surprised...you're so sophisticated. I just assumed...

KATHERINE

Look, I'm pretty bitter about that phase of my life, but I don't mean to take it out on you. It's not your fault. I certainly wanted to go, at some level.

MARK

Katherine, I really wish you would let me in on some of that.

KATHERINE

I told you I don't like to talk about myself.

MARK

How about my leading you?

KATHERINE

No, you're too good at that. Four questions and you got right to my sore spot.

MARK

Instead of direct questions, I could use multiple choice.

KATHERINE

(Laughs and hugs his arm) You certainly are persistent.

MARK

As the man said, 'You ain't seen nothin' yet!'

KATHERINE

(Amused but cautious). Okay, how does it work, this multiple choice?

MARK

To begin with, there are prizes for the correct answer.

KATHERINE

Prizes?

MARK

Yes. First prize is a one-minute kiss on the lips.

KATHERINE

What's the second prize? No, don't tell me...a two-minute kiss on the lips!"

MARK

You guessed it! That entitles you to one first prize. *(He reaches over but she holds him off.)*

KATHERINE

"I'll collect it some other time, if you don't mind."

(She nudges him... the know-it-all waitress is standing there with the crepes. The waitress carefully sets down the plates).

WAITRESS

Don't burn yourselves.

(She walks quickly away, hips swaying. Katherine splits up the crepe dishes and Mark pours more wine. They eat silently for awhile. Mark places a hand on the seat, next to her thigh).

MARK

I really would like to hear what happened.

KATHERINE

I know. *(She takes his hand).* I've been sitting here thinking how I could get into it. I do want to tell you, Mark, but I'm afraid of how you'll react.

MARK

Not a problem. If you like how I react, you'll be happy you told me. If you don't, you'll be happy you found out about me."

KATHERINE

True, but you left out one possibility. I could be apathetic.

MARK

Then, happily, you will have found out about yourself. And besides, nobody is ever apathetic toward me!

KATHERINE

So I've noticed.

MARK

Okay, okay. I get your point. But, whatever happens, you can't get hurt.

KATHERINE

I'm sure of that. Anyway, your logic overwhelms me.

MARK

It's about time.

KATHERINE

Yes. *(She grips his hand.)* Mark, did Steve tell you anything about me?

MARK

Only that you were newly arrived from New York.

KATHERINE

He didn't say why I left.

MARK

No, why did you leave?

(She looks down at their intertwined fingers and gently withdraws her hand.)

KATHERINE

I was married. *(Beat)*.

MARK

Was?

KATHERINE

I just recently got unmarried, and needed to make a clean break. My brother convinced me I should try L.A., and Steve being here made it easier. So I sold off my half of the empire and got on a plane. Now here I am, having a great time with you.

MARK

And wondering how I'll react.

KATHERINE

Well, how do you react? I can't tell. Maybe it's you that's apathetic.

MARK

Apathetic? About you? Not a chance. No, I just need to hear a little more.

KATHERINE

Well, for me the tough part is over. Why don't you ask your direct questions?

MARK

How long were you married?

KATHERINE

Six years, just long enough to put Ben...my ex-husband...through medical school and residency.

MARK

Oh, one of those deals.

KATHERINE

Yes. I worked as a clerk-typist at first, but there wasn't enough money in it. So I went to night school and learned to be a court reporter. That was at age twenty, or 2nd year Med school, however you want to measure how I was maturing.

MARK

Children?

KATHERINE

No, one of my more sensible decisions.

MARK

Did he leave you for a blonde?

KATHERINE

No, actually it wasn't any specific girl. He just wanted to be "free of constraints" as he put it.

(Katherine looks at Mark, waiting. He takes her hand and raises it to his lips.)

MARK

Well, here's my reaction, Katherine Greene with an 'e'. I think what Ben did was very wrong. If he wanted to be free of constraints he should have stayed single. And I feel sad about your being hurt like that. But on the other hand, I'm kind of happy he walked out on you, because now there's some room for me. If you can keep from being pathetic about me, I think we could be very good for each other.

KATHERINE

Can I get my prize now?

(He leans over again to kiss her, but is interrupted again by the French waitress clattering a plate.)

WAITRESS

Will you be having dessert, Monsieur?

(Mark looks over at Katherine who answers with a slight move of her head.)

MARK

Yes, but not here.

WAITRESS

I thought so.

(She lays the check down on the table. Mark inspects the check carefully, lays some money on the table, smiles broadly at the waitress and the couple exit arm-in-arm.)

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

Scene 3. A Roadside Spot Overlooking the Ocean

(In the downstage right area the café table is gone. Mark and Katherine are sitting on the bench seat. You hear the surf rolling in and the occasional car passing by.)

KATHERINE

This really is a beautiful spot.

MARK

I found it a few years ago. The neat thing is that it's angled off the road enough so we don't see the lights of the oncoming cars.

KATHERINE

That has some advantages and some disadvantages. Is this where you take all the girls you meet?

MARK

No, just the very special ones.

KATHERINE

And how many of those are there?

MARK

Only one, and she's right here with me.

KATHERINE

And wondering what's next.

MARK

Here, let me show you.

(He reaches out for her. She moves toward him at the same moment, and they hold each other in the unmatched intensity of the first embrace. They kiss, softly at first, then with ever-increasing passion, their hands beginning to explore each other. Suddenly, Katherine pulls back, disengages his hands and breaths deeply.)

KATHERINE

Mark, I'm sorry.

MARK

Nothing to be sorry about. A quick plunge in the 60-degree surf and I'll be good as new.

(She reaches over and gently strokes his face, then moves her fingers through his hair.)

KATHERINE

Look, I'm not a prude, and I'm not a silly little virgin either. I just need some time to absorb everything that's happened to me tonight. Do you understand?

MARK

(Lovingly). Yes, I understand very well.

KATHERINE

Oh, Mark! *(Rubs at her eyes.)* If I give you a big hug and kiss, do you promise to be good?

MARK

Look, there's a limit even to my capabilities. But for one more kiss like that first one, I'll promise you anything.

(They clinch again. Once more it starts slowly, lovingly, until in a moment they are pawing at each other with impatience. Then, Katherine pulls her head back and looks at him, kisses his ear and presses her cheek against his. They hold each other like that for several beats.)

KATHERINE

Mark, when I'm ready I will make a special night for you, and I promise it will be worth waiting for.

(They separate, although she stays close. He puts his arm around her and reaches out to turn on the ignition. We hear the car starting up as

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

Scene 4: Poolside

(Harvey and Mark are dressed in tennis gear, sprawled on the poolside lounges with beers in hand.)

HARVEY

So?

MARK

So, what?

HARVEY

So, what's going on with you and Katherine?

MARK

It's been a crazy week. I'm exhausted.

HARVEY

I thought you took time off from the office.

MARK

I did, so that she and I could be together every day. I decided I was going to show her my Los Angeles, the reasons I love this place.

HARVEY

Seems like that should take more than a week.

MARK

Not at the pace we've been going! I've driven her along Mulholland from the Hollywood Hills to the West Valley, and on Sunset Boulevard from downtown to the beach. One day we hiked in the hills behind Mount Wilson. The next day we sailed out of Newport Beach. We've eaten corndogs below the Santa Monica Pier and carnitas in Olvera Street. We've ridden the bike path down to Redondo Beach and walked up and down La Cienega looking at over-priced art.

HARVEY

And of course you made love every night.

MARK

Not really. Frankly, by the time the days were over, I haven't had any energy left for sexual conquest games. Besides, she says she's not ready.

HARVEY

Maybe she's not attracted to you.

MARK

I can't believe that. We walk through the days like new lovers, touching and holding each other...

HARVEY

And the evenings?

MARK

Well...we finish the evenings with a big hug and a goodnight kiss.

HARVEY

This is not like you, Mark. Sounds like witchcraft to me.

MARK

I know. I've never felt like this with any other girl.

HARVEY

Oops! Maybe you're in love.

MARK

That's scarier than witchcraft. But I'm having fun, even if I am exhausted by it all. Tonight, at least, we're staying in.

HARVEY

Where?

MARK

In my apartment. As we were saying goodnight last night, Katherine told me that she wanted to make the plans for tonight. It's our 'weekaversary' she said, and she has decided to make dinner for us here.

HARVEY

That's an interesting development.

MARK

Relaxing, anyway. And I saw a new side of her. We did the marketing together this morning. Wine selections were generally up to me, but champagne with the hors d'oeuvres was mandatory. Once we got home, she told me to disappear until six o'clock when I could come back and dress for dinner, suit and tie, cufflinks optional.

HARVEY

And that's why you played tennis with me this afternoon.

MARK

You got it.

(Harvey gets up.)

HARVEY

This seductive witch is up there all alone, and you're laying around with me? Are you crazy? Get out of here!

(Mark looks at his watch.)

MARK

She said six. It's not six o'clock yet.

HARVEY

Well, I'm gonna go home and take my shower, and buddy, when you do go in, if you're planning on continuing that close relationship, you'd better take one too!

(Mark laughs, Harvey leaves. Mark lies there and thinks about it all, as the

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

Scene 5: The Apartment

(As the lights come up, Katherine is setting an elegant table. Frank Sinatra's "Songs for Swinging Lovers" is playing softly in the background. She is wearing a silk dress with a short apron tied around her waist. She brings Champagne in an ice bucket over to the coffee table and returns with two tall champagne glasses and a white linen cloth. She then brings over a pate', some guacamole and a bowl of fresh shrimp and sets them down, carefully examines their placement, and rearranges them in perfect composition. Then she sits demurely on the couch and waits. Mark enters in his dark suit, dress shirt and tie. He takes in the scene.)

MARK

Everything looks and smells delicious, especially you.

KATHERINE

(She becomes aware of his cologne.) So do you. Now you can kiss me.

MARK

You only kiss guys in a suit? I am the same person I was in my tennis shorts.

KATHERINE

It was the tennis shirt I had the problem with. Come here.

(He sits down beside her and takes up the invitation, a loving, unhurried moment. When their lips finally part, he speaks in a hoarse voice.)

MARK

Champagne?

(She nods. He rises to retrieve the bottle, wrapping it in the white linen and ritually pops the cork, pours some wine and tastes it with approval. Then he fills both glasses and sits next to her. They raise their glasses in a silent toast, clink them together and link arms as they drink.

Mark refills the glasses and they link arms again and gently kiss. Then they both set their glasses down and come together on the couch in a moment of passion. Mark stands up, takes off his jacket and yanks off his tie. He reaches down and lifts her into a standing position, reaches over and unties the apron and removes it. Katherine does not resist. Then he reaches around and undoes the hook on the back of her dress, then the zipper. Still no objections. Now she reaches over and begins to unfasten the buttons on his shirt, slowly, one by one. His shirt comes off. Her dress follows. She starts to undo the clasp on his belt when suddenly he stops her.)

MARK

Katherine!

What?
KATHERINE

We can't do this, not now!
MARK

Why on earth not?
KATHERINE

The dinner!
MARK

What about it?
KATHERINE

MARK
I don't want to spoil it. I mean you worked so hard getting it ready, and the table and everything is so nice. I don't think it's fair. I mean, a special gourmet meal like this should be served the time it's planned for.

(Katherine continues to unhook his pants and begins to work on the zipper.)

Don't worry, it will.
KATHERINE

MARK
How can that be if we continue this way?

KATHERINE
(She smiles.) Easy, silly. I planned the dinner for ten o'clock!

BLACKOUT

Scene 6: The Poolside

(Light comes up on Harvey isolated down right.)

HARVEY
Mark and I have always been best buddies, and he has never held back a single detail about his sexual affairs. Not that I'm a voyeur or anything, but I admit it...I did get a vicarious thrill out of his stories. Since I've been single I've also had a few highly erotic encounters, but comparing my sex life to his is like putting up an Oreo cookie against a chocolate soufflé.

But his relationship with Katherine was very different from anything in his past, including his willingness to tell me about their sex together. All he would say about that night was that it was the opening sequence of the most fantastic love affair he had ever had. She stayed with him for the rest of that weekend, and it wasn't long before they were spending every weekend together, along with several other nights, depending on their work schedules. Whenever we talked about her, he was always on a high. But after six or eight months like that, Mark called and said he wanted to bounce some ideas off me.

(Mark enters and takes his place on a lounge. Harvey comes over and sits on the other lounge.)

HARVEY

So what's up?

MARK

I'm not sure. That's what I wanted to talk with you about. I'm feeling all jumbled up.

HARVEY

Katherine the problem?

MARK

No, she's steady as ever. It's how I feel that's jumbled.

HARVEY

About what?

MARK

The situation. You know this has all been so new to me. We've spent so much time together, no problems, just a constant loving warmth wrapping around me. The situation quickly got to the point where I had no real desire to be with any other woman. Frankly, when I first realized that, it scared me a little, because it's a feeling I never had to face before.

HARVEY

Like not being in control?

MARK

No, not that. Katherine hasn't tried to take control in any way. I've always felt I was in charge. Yet somehow, more and more, I've found myself feeling like I'm under some kind of spell...you know, that witchcraft thing you talked about. And when she looks at me and gives me the crinkle eyes, I want to fall over like a puppy in love.

HARVEY

There it is, that word again.

MARK

Yeah, Love. That's another thing that's worried me. I've always consciously avoided that word, while most women I've been with have used it freely. Not Katherine. Throughout these eight months she has held back, just as I have.

HARVEY

So in all this time, you've never discussed your feelings for each other?

MARK

Oh, we've talked some about how much we enjoy each other. She knows I'm not dating anyone else now, and that I haven't set foot in the Brentwood Inn since the day we met.

HARVEY

Why do you suppose she's holding back, then?

MARK

Well, she's opened up a lot more about her marriage to Ben and where that left her. She's still got a bleeding wound or two, and it's clear she's being very careful not to get another. And that's been fine with me. I haven't been ready to take on any more than I already have. We have a great time being together, and sexually she's all I can handle and then some. As far as I'm concerned, we could go on like this indefinitely.

HARVEY

Is that realistic?

MARK

No, and that's been worrying me lately. My gut has been telling me there's a problem. For one thing, the situation is too good. No pressure, all fun and sweetness -- there's got to be something wrong somewhere.

HARVEY

Maybe Katherine's been playing games with you.

MARK

I thought of that. Talk about spells! One night I dreamed she was weaving this intricate hooked rug with me as the centerpiece. But then I woke up and she was just holding me, and the covers were all tangled up!

HARVEY

So is it a game, then?

MARK

Definitely not. She is too direct and honest. I just don't have a good explanation for it at all. Then a few days ago I got that feeling again. We were on the phone talking about our plans for tonight.

(Lights crossfade. Harvey freezes as lights go down on the poolside area. Mark moves downstage left and takes out his phone. Katherine appears downstage right with her phone. They are isolated in separate lights.)

MARK

...I think we should get all dressed up and go out on the town. Bring over that red silk thing. We can have dinner at Pinot and tango at the Pasión.

KATHERINE

Normally that would be great, but we've been running around a lot the last few weeks. Would it be okay if we just fix some chicken, and sit around and talk.

MARK

Sure, if that's what you want. I'm a little tired too. It might be nice to have a quiet dinner, and go to bed. Or, on second thought, go to bed and then have a quiet dinner.

KATHERINE

Can we start with the dinner just this once? I really would like to talk awhile.

MARK

Whatever you say.

KATHERINE

I appreciate that. Do you want me to pick up anything?

MARK

Maybe dessert. I've got everything else.

KATHERINE

Okay. See you in a bit.

MARK

I can't wait. Bye.

KATHERINE

Bye.

(Lights out on Katherine. She exits. Mark stands looking at the phone for a moment, and moves back to sit on lounge. Lights up on the poolside.)

HARVEY

So she's coming over tonight.

MARK

Probably on her way.

HARVEY

You don't sound too happy.

MARK

I told you...I just have this feeling.

HARVEY

What's the worst that can happen?

MARK

That she's decided it's over...No, I don't even want to think about that.

HARVEY

Then I suggest you go upstairs and take a hot shower and a close shave and try to relax. I'm gonna go catch up on the news of the day. A few sound bytes never hurt anybody. *(Harvey gets up and starts to go off. Mark rises also.)*

MARK

Depends on what they have to say. *(They exit in opposite directions as the*

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

Scene 7: The Apartment

(As lights come up, Mark is sitting quietly on the couch. The doorbell buzzes. He gets up and opens the door, framing Katherine in the doorway, wearing slacks and a comfortable sweater. She is carrying a cake box)

KATHERINE

Hello, Mark.

MARK

Katherine. I am really glad to see you.

KATHERINE

Me, too. *(She takes the cake box right into the kitchen and reenters.)*
I brought dessert.

MARK

Yes, I see.

KATHERINE

The chicken looks terrific but I didn't notice any salad.

MARK

I didn't make it just yet. I wanted to see what you wanted to do...first.

KATHERINE

That's very thoughtful, you sex fiend. *(She gives him a wet kiss on the nose.)*

MARK

Who are you calling a sex fiend? I got the idea from you, remember?

(Mark pulls her close and they cling to each other, as he backs her toward the couch. He reaches around, going for the zipper on her slacks. She pushes him away.)

KATHERINE

Not now. First I have to get some food in me. And then I'd like to just relax with you for awhile and talk. Come on, I'll fix the salad while you set the table.

(She heads right into the kitchen without giving him a chance to respond. Mark begins to set the table, churning inside.)

KATHERINE

(From the kitchen.) I really did have a tough day today. And to top it off, there's something happening with my car.

MARK

Uh-huh.

KATHERINE

Yes, there is. I can hear it sputtering when I turn off the ignition. What do you think that could be.

MARK

Umm.

KATHERINE

I wonder if I should think about trading it in...Mark?.....Can you hear me?

MARK

Huh? Oh sure. Sure I can hear you.

KATHERINE

So what should I do?

MARK

Do? About what? Oh, your car.

KATHERINE

Yes, my car.

MARK

I don't know. Let's take it in to Charlie and have him look it over.

(She enters with the salad plates and sets them down. She goes back to the kitchen and returns with the chicken. Mark opens a bottle of wine and pours. She goes up to him, and looks at him closely, takes a napkin and dabs his forehead)

KATHERINE

Mark, you're perspiring something awful. Are you getting a cold? Do you want me to get your sweater? It's a little chilly in here.

MARK

(Feeling mothered.) I'm fine.

KATHERINE

(She senses what happened.) Sorry...May I serve you?

MARK

Sure.

(They sit down. She gives them each salad and chicken. Mark pours the wine. They make their silent toast. The silence hangs on for awhile but it is not sexually charged this time.)

MARK

What's up?

KATHERINE

What do you mean?

MARK

Look, you know very well what I mean. Something's going on here tonight. First you say you're too tired to go out. You just want to relax. Okay, I can handle that. But then when I try to relax you a little, you jump away from me like it was our first date. That's never happened before.

KATHERINE

Well, I am a little nervous tonight, yes.

MARK

What on earth for?

(She put down her knife and fork, and brushes her lips with the napkin.)

KATHERINE

Well, I'm not exactly sure. I guess it's because I want to tell you something, and -- well, it's like that first time with you after the party. I'm not sure how you'll react.

MARK

What is this thing you want to talk about?

KATHERINE

I can't do it now, not while we're eating. That's not the way I planned to do it.

MARK

How did you plan to do it, as you were leaving? Damn! I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. It just slipped out.

KATHERINE

Oh, Mark. You're really angry with me. You think I'm going to leave you? *(She gets up from her place, sits down in his lap and kisses him hard on the mouth.)* Oh, sweetheart, that's the last thing I would do.

MARK

(Feeling good again after the kiss.) How did you plan it, then?

KATHERINE

(Smoothing his hair.) I just wanted to sit around on the couch with you so we could touch and hug when I had trouble getting the words out.

MARK

Okay, so much for dinner. Let's sit around on the couch. I might start a little touching and hugging myself.

KATHERINE

As long as you keep it within bounds. I can't handle too many distractions.

MARK

Agreed.

(She gets off his lap and they go over to the couch. She sits down at one end and he stretches out with his head in her lap.)

KATHERINE

This is very difficult for me.

MARK

Look, Katherine, we've hit a lot of tough subjects, and we handled them all, didn't we?

KATHERINE

(She smooths his hair again.) Yes, and that is one of your best qualities...the way you listen to me and help me think things through. But this is a little different. It's been hard enough to talk about the past. This is about the present, about you and me, in a live situation, not a dead one.

MARK

I should hope not!

KATHERINE

Yes, I do understand that now. *(She smiles and leans over to give him a quick kiss.)*

MARK

So, what's this about you and me?

KATHERINE

Well, first, I need to tell you why I'm doing all this to begin with. When I was married to Ben, I never could really talk to him, you know, about how I felt about things. Part of that was his fault. No, I don't mean 'fault', I mean it was the way he was as a person. He never did understand how much I wanted to go to the university, mainly because I never told him. And I never told him because feelings weren't something you could talk about with Ben.

MARK

But you don't have that problem with me, do you?

KATHERINE

No, of course not. You've made it very easy for me to unload on you. But that has all been about feelings during another lifetime. Until tonight, you and I have carefully avoided talking very much about this lifetime, about now, about us.

MARK

(Dangerous territory for Mark, but he measures his words.) I still don't understand what this has to do with Ben.

KATHERINE

It's not Ben himself, so much as who I was when I was with him. I was the supportive wife who deferred my needs to satisfy his. I was the good sport, the quiet companion who didn't want to rock the boat. And in the end, I was the remorseful, guilt-ridden inferior who didn't realize she'd gotten screwed!

MARK

(Hurt) And you think I'm going to screw you like Ben did?

KATHERINE

No, Mark, I don't mean it that way at all. I'm not comparing you and Ben. I'm just trying to describe the changes I've been going through. I don't want to make the same

mistakes again. If you and I are going to have any kind of decent relationship, I've got to be able to say what I feel, when I feel it, and know that you will be listening.

(He reaches up and pulls her head down toward him. They kiss for a long time, but with affection, not passion. He releases her and they break for air.)

MARK

Katherine, say what you want to say. I'm listening.

KATHERINE

That was tough going for me. I need a short break. How about some dessert?

MARK

Great idea, but you stay there. I'll get it and bring it to you.

KATHERINE

That's sweet.

(Mark exits to the kitchen. Katherine retrieves a tissue from her purse and dries her eyes. She takes out a hairbrush, quickly puts the stray strands back in place and replaces the brush. Mark brings in two cakes servings and a carafe of coffee on a tray and sets them down on the coffee table. They fool around with cake and coffee for just a minute. Katherine takes a last sip from her cup, shakes her head at his offer of a refill, and pulls her legs up under her on the couch. Mark positions himself at the other end, facing her, shoes off with his toes gently digging in beneath her bottom.)

KATHERINE

Mark, you and I have been together now for about eight months. When we first started dating, I told myself that it was very dangerous to take up an intense relationship so soon after my divorce.

MARK

Why? I thought it was the best thing you could do, to forget him and start fresh.

KATHERINE

That's true, if I didn't fall for someone so hard that I wouldn't be able to tell if it was a rebound number, or the real thing. Anyway, I wasn't out here two weeks when I met you and all hell broke loose shortly thereafter.

MARK

You call it hell, I call it heaven.

KATHERINE

Stop interrupting me. As I was saying...as soon as I realized we were going to have more than a casual date or two, I decided to do nothing with my feelings for at least six months. Then I would be in a better position to judge where I stood with you.

MARK

So, where do you stand?

KATHERINE

It depends.

MARK

Now there's a direct answer! Hey, I thought you were going to say how you feel when you feel it.

KATHERINE

Well, I'm still not sure how you'll react, and a lot of how I could feel depends on how you do.

MARK

In other words, you want to be sure of me before you can be sure of yourself.

KATHERINE

Ouch. That's true, isn't it? Now that you put it that way, I see exactly how it is. It's the old Katherine all over again. *(She squirms around a little and adjusts her legs. Mark re-buries his toes.)* Okay, Mark. Here's how it really is. We have been together almost constantly now for eight months. I've learned an awful lot about you and I like it all. You are sweet and bright and warm and generous and supportive and you make me feel alive again. Unless there is something about you that you've been carefully hiding from me, I think I know you very well. And I've agonized over my feelings for you to the point where I know it's not a rebound. It's a direct hit, and I just want to be with you all the time.

(Now it is his turn to declare, but he can't speak.)

KATHERINE

Well, now I know your reaction. *(She sits up straight and so does he.)*

MARK

Hey, wait a minute. You hit me right in the gut with that. I haven't been thinking about it like you have. I'm entitled to a little time to catch my breath, aren't I?

KATHERINE

I don't want you to prepare a brief, for God's sake. Look, Mark. I've let you get very deep inside me. I just want to know how you feel, unrehearsed, now.

MARK

I'll tell you how I feel, I'm scared.

KATHERINE

God, at least that's a real reaction. But scared of what?

MARK

Scared of getting trapped. No, scratch that! I don't know what I'm saying. I'm all mixed up inside.

KATHERINE

Go slow. Let's try one thing at a time. You don't have to ask me to marry you. I just want to know where I stand.

MARK

Why is it necessary to verbalize it? Can't you tell how I feel about you?

KATHERINE

Sure. You love my breasts and my legs and my ass. You love to kiss me anywhere, anytime. And by the way, we have a lot of fun even when we're not making love. How's that for starters?

MARK

Is that all you can see in this? Eight months of being together for hours on end. Walking all over the city, sleeping under one cover, sharing inner thoughts. I wasn't kidding when I said you knew more about me than my mother. Why do you think I've been putting so much of myself into this? For a quick screw, and out? I can do better across the street at the Inn, if that was all I wanted. And I wouldn't have all the excess pain that goes with this."

KATHERINE

Pain, what pain? What have I been doing all of sudden to hurt you?

MARK

It's not what you're doing. I told you, I'm confused. I'm pulled in two different directions, and I'm afraid of either.

KATHERINE

Tell me about the two directions, at least.

MARK

I haven't really worked it all out like you have. I just know that in one way you're something unique for me. Katherine, I'm thirty-four years old, and I've never had a steady girl friend. I've always kept a string going, and loved the challenge that presented. I just haven't been a one-woman man till you popped into my life.

KATHERINE

So you want to be together with me. That's the same way I feel.

MARK

Not exactly. Because I've got this other pull that says 'Lookout for the trap!' What happens if I get carried away, and later I find out it's not for me after all. Then I can't get out, you see.

KATHERINE

No, I don't see. I'm living proof that a man can get out anytime he develops a little whim.

MARK

Oh, sure, if he's a bastard like Ben and doesn't care who he hurts. But that's not me. If and when I ever make a commitment, it will be for real. Until then, I can't give up my options.

KATHERINE

Do you know what you are saying? You're saying a woman doesn't get hurt unless you've made a commitment and then reneged on it. That's just too neat for words! Don't you think it hurts to get the big buildup that never turns into a commitment?

MARK

You mean like us?

KATHERINE

You bet I mean like us!

MARK

Well, I'm not stringing you along. You know exactly where you stand. The future is still open, but I am just not ready to commit. So, at this stage, nobody can get hurt.

(A long silence.)

KATHERINE

Mark, I came here tonight to propose something to you. I'm still not sure what your reaction will be. After the discussion we just had...well, the old Katherine would just curl up in a quiet little ball.

MARK

Say what you have to say. I'm still listening.

KATHERINE

I know. Okay. Mark, I want to move in with you.

(Another long silence.)

MARK

I need to know more about this. What do you think that's going to do for us?

KATHERINE

We're together four or five nights a week as it is. We're on the phone half the time the other nights. You told me you're not seeing anyone else now, so it wouldn't interfere. But it would be really nice to see how we like each other when we're living together. Besides, I don't like to sleep alone.

MARK

How would the arrangement work?

KATHERINE

What do you mean?

MARK

What roles do we play? Is it like being married, or are we just roommates sharing expenses, or what?

KATHERINE

To be honest, I haven't given much consideration to the details. I just thought we could work that out as we go. All I want is to be with you on a daily basis, any way you think it ought to be. Provided that you feel as deeply about me as I do about you.

MARK

Katherine, you really put me on the spot. Somehow I've got to measure up to your standard of how deeply I should feel.

KATHERINE

That's not fair! You can feel as deeply or as superficially as you please. But I'm not going to put myself into a situation that's going to take a lot of giving on my part unless I get something in response.

MARK

Look, I told you how I feel about you. To me that's a separate question from whether I'm ready to live with you!

KATHERINE

All right, Mark. What does it take for you to be ready?

MARK

I told you, I don't know. You've really laid a big one on me tonight. I need some time to think about it.

(Katherine gets up deliberately and smooths her slacks. She retrieves her purse and fishes out her brush. She runs it through her hair a few times and drops it back in the purse. Mark stands also. She takes a step toward him and looks directly into his eyes)

KATHERINE

I made a mistake tonight, Mark, and I apologize. I was hoping I had read the signs correctly, and that your immediate response would be to grab me and carry me off to your room. I guess it was just wishful thinking. The old Katherine all over again.

MARK

Hey look, I'm not saying never. I just need some time to work it out.

KATHERINE

Yes, I heard you. I guess I'd better go home and work some things out myself. Let's talk tomorrow. Call me, will you?

(She crosses to him and brushes his lips with hers. Then she turns and goes out the door leaving Mark standing and looking after her.)

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

Scene 8: Poolside

(Harvey and Mark are seated on the lounges.)

HARVEY

So have you talked to Katherine since last night.

MARK

Yeah. A little while ago I went into the apartment and called her. It wasn't a long conversation. I wanted to see her tonight, but she's not ready, she says. I'm supposed to call her later in the week and maybe we'll go out next Saturday night. At least she's still talking to me

HARVEY

And you? How do you feel?

MARK

Terrible! I don't know what to do. Each choice is scarier than the other.

HARVEY

What was that story you told me once about how you handled choices growing up?

MARK

Oh, you mean the ice cream.

HARVEY

Yeah, tell me again.

MARK

As a kid I could never decide between my favorite ice cream flavors. I loved chocolate, but I also wanted strawberry. So, I would always choose vanilla.

HARVEY

Yeah, that's it.

(The young men and women start to drift in, wine glasses in hand They wave at Mark and Harvey.)

MARK

Hey, look at the time. It's almost 5PM.

HARVEY

Yeah, everyone's getting ready to walk up to the Inn. I hear there's a terrific new pianist starting tonight.

MARK

I haven't talked with the gang in a long time. Maybe I'll just wander over and be more social...maybe go across the street and just have a drink with them...maybe listen to a little music. It might do me some good.

HARVEY

Yeah. Too bad Katherine's not available tonight.

MARK

Yeah. Well, maybe we can get together next weekend.

(Mark wanders over to the group and they begin to talk animatedly. Harvey comes downstage and addresses the audience.)

HARVEY

Single life. Almost two years, now, and I'm still not used to it. Do the stories I see help? I don't know. It seems like the more I learn, the more I question what single life holds for me. Will I ever absorb Mark's teachings? Will I find the answer at Brentwood Court? Perhaps another Sunday evening, another story or two... *(He sees Mark and the others start to exit.)* For now, I guess, it's just off to the Brentwood Inn. *(He runs off after them.)* Hey, Mark, wait for me!

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.