

# **203 Brentwood Court**

A play in one act

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## **CHARACTERS (In order of appearance)**

**Harvey Geller:** The Narrator. Divorced, Late thirties, humorous, highly intelligent.

**Elsa King:** early 30's, highly intelligent, writer-editor for a software company, facially unattractive but with a very sexy body.

**Roger Warshaw:** mid-30's, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Hungarian Jew, civil engineer, unconventional.

**Bekin's Man:** 35+, brusque, sure of himself.

**SETTING:** The upstage area is split between the living rooms of Elsa's and Roger's apartments. Doorways to the two apartments are in the furthestmost downstage right and left walls. The hallway between the two apartments is downstage at the apron to the stage. Upstage right and left respectively are archways leading to their kitchens and bedrooms. Each apartment has a small couch, side chair and coffee table. They are decorated differently, reflecting feminine and masculine tastes respectively. At rise, the couches, chairs and tables are at the back wall, as far upstage as possible. They are moved into place prior to Scene 3.

The midstage and downstage areas provide playing areas for different scenes. In the opening scene we see the common gathering area for the apartment complex. There are several good looking poolside lounge chairs.

The downstage left area will be used for the laundry room in the complex' common area. Simulated washer and dryer on on the downleft wall. A clothes folding table and a bench are brought on and off for Scene 2. Downstage right is the area for the coffeehouse exterior table, which is also brought on and off for Scene 4.

**STAGE DIRECTIONS:** These are often explicit, to convey the writer's intentions concerning the emotions and images of the moment. The director and actors are free to ignore the details as long as the sense of the moment is maintained.

## Scene 1: Brentwood Court Common Area

*(At rise, stage is barely lit. Elsa is standing downstage left in silhouette so that we see her sexy body. Her face is turned away from the audience. She is frozen. Light comes up on Harvey downstage center.)*

### HARVEY

(To audience) Welcome to Brentwood Court! The best singles apartment complex in all of West Los Angeles. Great facilities -- pool, tennis courts, and a big common area with a community barbecue pit. Every Sunday afternoon the guys and gals grill their turkeyburgers or chicken, or steaks, pass the wine and get ready for the scene at the Brentwood Inn. Sunday is singles night there, and the piano bar is four deep. Of course, I haven't quite got the hang of that yet, the singles scene, I mean. It's difficult, having been out of it for so long. But in trying to find my way, I have made some friends here, and learned about their stories. In this building, every apartment is its own story. For example, take 203: Elsa King.

*(Elsa turns toward the audience, closely focused lights come up and reveal her face, which is extremely unattractive. She has a prominent, very old scar on her left cheek, and (through makeup) her mouth appears slightly misshapen.)*

We don't date, we've just become good friends. But even if I felt attracted to her, which frankly I don't, she wouldn't go out with me anyway. She makes it quite clear she won't date anyone in this complex. I guess I understand, but I do love talking with her, and we've gotten pretty close.

*(Lights up on full stage. Elsa sits on one of the lounge chairs. Harvey goes over and sits next to her.)*

### HARVEY

Hi, Elsa. It's good to see you out here this afternoon. Can I get you a glass of wine?

### ELSA

No, thanks, Harvey. I've got too much to do tonight.

### HARVEY

Is there ever a time when you don't?

### ELSA

I like to keep busy. Keeps my mind off things.

### HARVEY

You should try going up to the Brentwood Inn some time. I would be happy to accompany you.

### ELSA

You're so sweet, but you know that place isn't for me.

**HARVEY**

I sometimes wonder if all of Brentwood Court isn't for you.

**ELSA**

To tell the truth, I am beginning to wonder that myself. I just realized that it is almost three years since I signed that lease. I don't know what possessed me. I guess it was just a clear warm Sunday in July. I saw the group over by the pool, the barbecue party going strong. Maybe I thought I would magically become one of them. Three years later I am still in 203 and far from the poolside crowd.

**HARVEY**

I guess I don't understand why you don't just join them.

**ELSA**

Come on, Harvey. I'm not like those people. But I do think about it, though. I even have a dream about them.

**HARVEY**

Really?

**ELSA**

Yes. In the dream I am a lone silver perch, gliding slowly by a school of brightly colored carp. The beautiful fish don't even see me. All we share are the ferns and rocks through which we move.

**HARVEY**

That's just in your mind.

**ELSA**

Oh, Harvey! Be real! Surely you see my...situation.

**HARVEY**

What situation are you talking about? People really like you.

**ELSA**

Which people? The truth is, beautiful fish only want to play with other beautiful fish. Over the years, I've come to accept my ... personal ... situation. Here, let me see if I can get the point across. Do you find me sexy?

**HARVEY**

Of course, but what has that got to ...

**ELSA**

But you're not attracted to me, right?. I know that.

**HARVEY**

*(Hesitates.)* Yes, but that doesn't necessarily mean that....

**ELSA**

Harvey, I really understand. To put it bluntly, men leer at me from behind but veer away from the front. Oh sure, sometimes a particularly brave or audacious one stays around long enough to bolster my ego a little. And I get excited about it...perhaps too excited. But after we have sex a few times, the ending is always the same.

**HARVEY**

Elsa, not all men are like that.

**ELSA**

Right, and the ones that aren't fly, just like pigs do. Sorry, Harvey, you're a sweet guy and I really like you. But you're a man just like all the others.

**HARVEY**

I'm really sad that you feel that way.

**ELSA**

Just chalk it up to a lifetime of experience. And now, while you head up the street to the Brentwood Inn, I'll just pick up my things and go back to 203 for a quiet dinner and some last minute laundry. Night.

*(She gives him a peck on the cheek and heads off, leaving him standing there as the*

**LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK**

**Scene 2: Laundry room**

*( As lights come up on the laundry area, we see Roger sitting on a bench against the wall, deeply engrossed in his book, his feet propped up on an empty laundry basket. We hear the sound of a dryer rotating. Another laundry basket is sitting on the table. A pile of folded, clean, dry towels is next to it. Elsa enters, ignores the table and goes right to the dryer. She sees that the clothes tumbling around in it aren't hers. She looks behind her, and goes to the table. She starts to sort through the pile of towels. They are all hers. Her back is to Roger, and she is wondering if he is noticing her in the usual way. He is still reading. Suddenly, the dryer comes to a loud halt and he realizes Elsa's presence.)*

**ROGER**

Oh, excuse me, please. This was very rude of me, but I was so involved in my book I didn't hear you come in.

*(Roger gets up and starts toward her. Her back is still turned to him. She hesitates, then finally turns to face him, expecting the worst. He doesn't miss a beat.)*

Hello, my name is Roger, Roger Warshaw.

*(He holds out his hand. She carefully places hers in his and he gently shakes it.)*

**ELSA**

Elsa King. I've not seen you around here. Are you new?

**ROGER**

Not brand new. I'm just a bit tarnished, I'm afraid. *(She laughs in spite of herself.)* Actually, I moved in on Friday. And you? Surely you are not one of the oldtimers?

**ELSA**

Oh, I've been around for a few years, but I'm not in the Brentwood Court history books just yet.

**ROGER**

Well, I'm sure you will be some day. *(He looks around the room.)* I must admit this is a very nice facility, and convenient.

**ELSA**

Oh yes, and it's used a lot. The people here are pretty nice, too. You can leave your machine going and if you don't get back in time, they'll empty your stuff out on the table for you. See? Like this, though they've never folded my laundry for me before.

**ROGER**

I hope you don't mind. Your towels were dry, and I thought I ought to at least fold them if I was going to use your machine.

**ELSA**

Oh, no. That was very nice of you. I was gone just a little too long. Actually, in the future, you could just leave your own things drying and do your reading in the comfort of your own place.

**ROGER**

But then I'd miss the chance to meet someone such as you.

**ELSA**

If you're looking to meet someone, you'll find plenty of opportunities at the poolside.

**ROGER**

Yes, perhaps, but I find that scene a little too ... congested. I think deep down inside I am more of a laundry room person. And besides, I really go for the intelligent woman who does her own wash.

*(An awkward moment for Elsa. She turns back to the basket and places the towels carefully in it, picks it up and turns to leave.)*

**ELSA**

Well, it was nice meeting you.

**ROGER**

Wait a minute, I'm leaving as soon as I unload. Let me walk you.

**ELSA**

That's all right. I'm really in a hurry. I left something in the oven. *(She exits quickly).*

**ROGER**

*(Shouts after her.)* See you around then.

*(He grins, shrugs his shoulders and picks up his empty basket. He turns toward the dryer as the*

**LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK**

**Scene 3: Hallway between apartments**

*(It is Saturday during the daytime. Elsa enters from stage right going toward her doorway at stage left, carrying two big bags of groceries against her chest. Roger enters from stage left going toward his doorway at stage right, head down, carrying a briefcase. They almost bump into each other.)*

**ROGER**

Oh, excuse me! You caught me deep in thought again.

**ELSA**

No, my fault. I didn't see you over these bags.

**ROGER**

Can I help you carry them to your door?

**ELSA**

No, thanks. I can manage.

**ROGER**

Which is your door, by the way?

**ELSA**

I'm over there ... 203.

**ROGER**

We're neighbors! *(He points)* I'm 204.

**ELSA**

I wondered who was going to move in there.

**ROGER**

Now you know. I am pleased to have such a nice neighbor.

**ELSA**

That's kind of you to say. Now, if you'll excuse me, my ice cream is starting to melt. I need to put these things away.

**ROGER**

You sure I can't help you?

**ELSA**

No, I can do it. I have years of experience.

**ROGER**

Well, then. After you take care of your ice cream, perhaps you'd like to come knock on my door. I make a great cup of coffee!

**ELSA**

Some other time, perhaps.

**ROGER**

Is there something about me that bothers you?

**ELSA**

No, you seem like a perfectly nice man. *(Decides to level with him.)* Look, I hardly know you and I make a point of not going into strange men's apartments.

**ROGER**

*(Amused.)* So, you think I'm strange.

**ELSA**

I didn't mean it that way ... look, I've got to get going.

**ROGER**

Okay, as long as you don't think I'm some sort of ogre.

**ELSA**

No, I don't. I said, you seem nice.

**ROGER**

I like to think I am nice. Well, I'll tell you what. You seem to me to be an interesting person. I would really love to know more about you. How 'bout if we have our coffee in a more public place?

**ELSA**

I don't know...

**ROGER**

Do you have plans right now?

**ELSA**

No, but...

**ROGER**

Then why not? Think of it as a chance to greet your new neighbor.

**ELSA**

You don't give up easily, do you?

**ROGER**

I think it's good to be a straight shooter, don't you?

**ELSA**

Depends on who the target is.

**ROGER**

You have me there ... well, what do you say?

**ELSA**

All right, but just coffee!

**ROGER**

Of course. Just coffee. How long will it take you to unload the groceries?

**ELSA**

Give me about thirty minutes...I need to freshen up.

**ROGER**

Thirty minutes it is. I'll come knock on your door and we can walk up the street to that little croissant shop on Barrington Place.

**ELSA**

That sounds fine. *(Turns and walks toward her door.)*

**ROGER**

See you in a while then. *(Stands there and watches her as the*

**LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.**

**Scene 4: Coffee house**

*(A small round table with two chairs is downstage right. Elsa and Roger are seated, coffee and pastries in front of them. They sip their coffee and each take a bite of their pastry.)*

**ROGER**

So, the ordinary first question: What do you do?

**ELSA**

I'm surprised. I would have thought you'd take pride in not being ordinary.

**ROGER**

Well, the truth is I really would like to know. I've already made up quite a few stories about you, and I want to see which one is right.

**ELSA**

How do you know any of them is right?

**ROGER**

I don't, of course, but I'm usually a pretty good judge of character.

**ELSA**

Well, I will tell you the real story, but I want to hear your best version first!

**ROGER**

All right, then. (Peers at her intently.) What I see is a well-spoken, intelligent young woman with a slight hint of sarcasm in her repartee -- no, not sarcasm -- irony, perhaps. She tends to keep to herself, but has the potential for loving children and dogs.

**ELSA**

Not bad for a start, but you haven't guessed what I do.

**ROGER**

Well, you're definitely not CIA. I don't think you have either the ability or the inclination to dissemble. No, I'd say you work a nine-to-five job in some office, but really aspire to be an artist of some sort.

**ELSA**

And you must make your living as a Psychic!

**ROGER**

So I am right?

**ELSA**

Perhaps the only difference is that my nine-to-five job does involve some creativity -- I'm a technical writer... for a software company.

**ROGER**

And in your spare time you are writing the next Pulitzer Prize-winning novel.

**ELSA**

Something like that. And you? Is the Psychic business lucrative?

**ROGER**

See. There's that ironic streak again! No, my business is not quite as exotic as that. I'm just a mundane Civil Engineer, I'm afraid.

**ELSA**

Why is that so mundane?

**ROGER**

After you've calculated the size of steel rods in a retaining wall a few thousand times, you'll understand.

**ELSA**

Surely there must be more to it than that.

**ROGER**

Certainly. Lucky for me, there is the occasional suspension bridge over San Francisco Bay.

**ELSA**

Now who's being ironic!

**ROGER**

Just a metaphor, really.

**ELSA**

I must say you do surprise me. I thought engineers were all dull and monosyllabic. You seem to be pretty articulate and insightful.

**ROGER**

Probably my career choice was a mistake, but I always need to finish what I start, so once I had completed my second year I just plugged on to the end. Now here I am, in it and probably too late to get out.

**ELSA**

Seriously, is your professional life not that fulfilling?

**ROGER**

Love the analysis, hate the clients.

**ELSA**

That surprises me.

**ROGER**

Perhaps I should explain. I'm relatively young, but I have old values. My parents escaped from Hungary in 'fifty-seven. You know, the older generation of Hungarian Jews had fierce ethical standards and I must have liked what I saw growing up.

**ELSA**

That doesn't surprise me.

**ROGER**

No? Well those values sometimes stifle me in my business dealings. I can't tell you how many jobs I have walked away from because I couldn't handle the people's deviousness or their unwillingness to take responsibility for their decisions.

**ELSA**

Actually, I admire you for that.

**ROGER**

That's nice to know. So am I breaking through the "strange man" barrier?

**ELSA**

Yes, but the coffee here is just fine, thank you.

**ROGER**

Okay, okay. One step at a time.

**ELSA**

What do you mean by that?

**ROGER**

Elsa, surely you have noticed that I like you.

**ELSA**

And I like you...as a person I mean. But, as I said before, you're a nice man -- warm and friendly, and apparently with high moral standards...standards I hope I can count on.

**ROGER**

Meaning?

**ELSA**

*(Not ready to discuss it)* Meaning ... that I could possibly see us becoming good friends some day.

**ROGER**

Good friends?... as in brother and sister?

**ELSA**

Something like that.

**ROGER**

So, do I take it that you are not physically attracted to me?

**ELSA**

My, you are direct, aren't you?

**ROGER**

Nice technique -- answering a question with another question. Yes, I'm direct. How about you being direct with me?

**ELSA**

Roger, I have just met you.

**ROGER**

So? Does that mean you have no gut feelings, no reactions, nothing?

**ELSA**

*(On the spot.)* All right, I do have some "gut feelings", as you put it. I told you I think we might grow to be friends some day. More than that I can't say.

**ROGER**

But you are repulsed by me physically.

**ELSA**

No, I didn't say that.

**ROGER**

Okay, then. How about going to dinner with me, say, next Saturday night?

**ELSA**

No, thank you.

**ROGER**

You're busy. Okay, Friday night? *(No response)*. Sunday, an early evening, six o'clock?

**ELSA**

No.

**ROGER**

You're busy then too?

**ELSA**

No.

**ROGER**

Then why...? Oh, I get it. You have a boyfriend.

**ELSA**

No.

**ROGER**

Then damn it! Why won't you go out with me? Tell me the truth! I can take it.

**ELSA**

*(Thinks it over.)* Look, Roger. You certainly seem very different from the typical males around here...in a good way, I mean. But my experience tells me that dating someone from Brentwood Court is a mistake I'll live to regret. I'm sorry, but it's a firm principle I've established, and I live by it with no exceptions. Kind of like your old Hungarian values.

**ROGER**

Let me see if I understand this. If I lived in Sherman Oaks and had met you in a UCLA extension course on how to do better laundry, that would be okay...you'd go out with me?

**ELSA**

If it had happened that way, I might have accepted your dinner offer, yes. But it didn't. I'm in 203 Brentwood Court, and you are in 204, and the only thing I will let you do is buy me an occasional croissant, right here.

**ROGER**

*(Rising.)* Okay, let me walk you home at least. After that, I've got to go lie down.

**ELSA**

I'm sorry if I tired you out.

**ROGER**

Not you, just your twisted logic. I need somehow to figure it out, and I've learned that I do my best analysis lying flat on my back.

**ELSA**

Well, let's go then. I wouldn't want you to lie down right here.

**ROGER**

*(Leaves a tip, takes the last sip of his coffee.)* Oh, I wouldn't do that. Floor's way too hard. Shall we? (He gently guides her by her elbow as the

**LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.**

**Scene 5: Apartment doorways**

*(We see a man dressed in a Bekins mover's uniform enter from stage right. He goes to Elsa's door and knocks. She comes to the door but doesn't open it.)*

**ELSA**

Who's there?

**MAN**

Bekins man.

**ELSA**

*(Still behind the door.)* Excuse me?

**MAN**

It's the moving man, miss. Apartment 203, isn't it?

**ELSA**

*(She cautiously opens the door.)* Yes this is 203, but you must have the number wrong. I am not moving.

**MAN**

No, ma'am. I know that. *(Consults his papers.)* It's Mr. Warshaw, Roger Warshaw, 203 it says here.

**ELSA**

Well, to begin with, Mr. Warshaw doesn't live here. He is in 204. But he just moved in a few weeks ago. There must be some mistake.

**MAN**

Oh, no, ma'am. No mistake. I got the order right here, see? They just gave me the wrong apartment number. Thanks for your help. *(He starts to go down the hall, crossing to the other apartment door. Elsa follows him.)*

**MAN**

*(Knocks on the door to 204.)* Moving Man!

**ROGER**

*(Comes to the door and opens it.)* I expected you an hour ago!

**MAN**

Sorry, traffic was really backed up on the 405.

**ROGER**

Well, you can start in the bedroom. But let's get a move on. *(Bekins Man goes off to the bedroom.)* Oh, Elsa! I didn't see you. What are you doing there?

**ELSA**

Never mind that. *(She barges into the apartment.)* What's going on here?

**ROGER**

Isn't it obvious? I'm moving out.

**ELSA**

I don't understand. I thought you liked it here, and you only just moved in!

**ROGER**

Oh, I love this place. Spacious apartment, great facilities, nice neighbors. *(He grins.)*

**ELSA**

So why are you leaving?

**ROGER**

It has a bad address.

**ELSA**

What are you talking about? It is the number one singles complex in all of Brentwood.

**ROGER**

True, but the street address has a fatal flaw.

**ELSA**

*(Still doesn't get it.)* What's that?

**ROGER**

It is exactly like yours.

**ELSA**

Oh, no!

**ROGER**

Yes. The problem was really quite simple once I analyzed it.

**ELSA**

Lying flat on your back, you mean.

**ROGER**

Yes. You see, if you won't go out with me because I live here, then all I have to do is not live here, and voila! The problem is solved.

**ELSA**

Assuming I would go out with you under those conditions.

**ROGER**

Well, would you?

**ELSA**

*(Caves in.)* I guess I'd have to.

**ROGER**

There, you see? Problem solved.

**ELSA**

But this is going to cost you a lot of money isn't it?

**ROGER**

Let's see. Security deposit forfeited along with the last month's rent. Bekins moving van for six hours. Hotel for two weeks while I look for a new place. And don't forget dinner for two at Jimmy's. But, you are worth every penny.

**ELSA**

Okay, you got me.

**ROGER**

What do you mean?

**ELSA**

Is it too late to change your mind?

**ROGER**

Yes. I will not give up my quest for a legitimate date with you.

**ELSA**

That is not what I meant. Is it too late to cancel these moving plans?

**ROGER**

Why should I do that?

**ELSA**

Because you have just shown me what an idiot I am! Don't move out, please. I will swallow my principles and go out with you even if you still live down the hall.

**ROGER**

How about tonight, then? Eight o'clock.

**ELSA**

Um...Okay.

**ROGER**

It's a deal! Hey, Bekins Man. Cancel the order.

**MAN**

*(Enters from bedroom.)* What did you say?

**ROGER**

Cancel the order. I'm not moving.

**MAN**

Hey, I came all the way from Northridge. This is gonna cost you!

**ROGER**

That's all right. *(Puts his arm around Elsa's shoulders)*. Think of what I just earned.

*(Elsa smiles up at him as the*

**LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.**

**Scene 6: Hallway, his apartment**

*(Roger and Elsa have just come back from their date. He is wearing a tweed jacket and she has a stylish, light sweater over her dress. He escorts her to her door.)*

**ELSA**

Roger, I must tell you, this was the nicest date I've had in years. I'm glad you are so persistent...and so good at solving problems!

**ROGER**

I hate for the evening to end. Would you consider coming over to my place for a very chaste nightcap?

**ELSA**

*(Considers the dangers, including her own feelings.)* I guess you're not a strange man to me anymore.

**ROGER**

As I recall, that was the only principle involved.

**ELSA**

That's true... Very well, but just one.

**ROGER**

I promise to be good.

**ELSA**

*(Almost to herself.)* I think I'd better promise the same thing.

*(He takes her arm and guides her gently to his door which he unlocks and then ushers her in before him.)*

**ROGER**

Make yourself comfortable on the couch. I'll get the drinks. What would you like...I have all kinds of liqueurs.

**ELSA**

What are you going to have?

**ROGER**

I have a great old cognac.

**ELSA**

That sounds like just what I need.

**ROGER**

*(Pours the drinks.)* So the evening with me was that tough, was it?

**ELSA**

No. I already told you how much I enjoyed it, and you. It's just that I'm feeling a little tingly right now, and I need something to steady my nerves.

**ROGER**

Tingly? *(He hands her the drink and sits down).*

**ELSA**

Yes, but I'll be fine in a moment. *(She toasts him silently...they clink glasses.)*

**ROGER**

To good neighbors.

**ELSA**

Yes, to very good neighbors. *(They sip the cognac)* Did the Bekins man give you a lot of trouble when you canceled?

**ROGER**

No. My cousin Joe is very even-tempered.

**ELSA**

No, I was asking about ...*(She gets it)* What! The Bekins Man was your cousin?

**ROGER**

Yes, and he was so pleased he could help me out. I thought he did a really good job, don't you?

**ELSA**

*(She smiles in spite of herself and playfully punches him.)* You devil! You made all that up just to get me to change my mind?

**ROGER**

Yes, and it worked, Thank God, or else I would have been out on the street.

**ELSA**

I don't know if I will ever forgive you for that. I'm going to have to figure out a good way to get even.

**ROGER**

Well, at least I'm forewarned. I'll be particularly cautious around the first of April.

**ELSA**

What other lies have you told me?

**ROGER**

That was it...but you mustn't think of it as a lie, merely a problem-solving exercise.

**ELSA**

And I was the problem.

**ROGER**

No, no, no. Only the question of whether you would go out with me, and now, that question has been answered.

**ELSA**

Yes, but there's a second question.

**ROGER**

What's that?

**ELSA**

Will I go out with you again.

**ROGER**

And the answer is...?

**ELSA**

I'm not telling. Besides you haven't asked me.

**ROGER**

All right. How about tomorrow? 11 AM. Brunch at the beach and a walk on the sand.

**ELSA**

*(Teases him with a long delay.)* I'll have to think about it.

**ROGER**

I can wait. Another cognac?

**ELSA**

*(She looks down at her drink.)* The answer is yes.

**ROGER**

To the cognac or the date? *(He gets up and brings over the bottle.)*

**ELSA**

*(She smiles coyly.)* To both, I suppose.

**ROGER**

Well, then, that's settled. *(He grins and refills the glasses.)* I knew you couldn't refuse me.

**ELSA**

*(Just a little serious.)* Don't be so smug.

**ROGER**

I'm not smug at all. Just glad I don't have to solve that problem again.

**ELSA**

*(Very serious this time.)* Please don't take me for granted.

**ROGER**

What makes you think I would do that?

**ELSA**

Nothing. I just want to be clear about it, that's all.

**ROGER**

I would have thought you had a better opinion of me than that.

**ELSA**

I'm sorry. Of course I do. It was silly of me. By the way, didn't we agree -- just one drink?

**ROGER**

You're right!. *(He reaches for her glass.)* I'll take it back right now.

**ELSA**

Well, I did say yes to it. *(She holds on to the glass.)*

**ROGER**

No. A deal is a deal. It is one of my strongest principles. *(He takes the drink from her.)*

**ELSA**

Old Hungarian ethics?

**ROGER**

Yes. I may not agree to sell you my grandmother, but if I do, I will deliver!

**ELSA**

That certainly is a high moral standard.

**ROGER**

I can't really decide if that is irony or sarcasm.

**ELSA**

*(She rises and gets her things.)* You can tell me your decision over brunch tomorrow.

**ROGER**

Eleven AM. Beach clothes.

**ELSA**

Yes, sir! Any other orders, Captain?

**ROGER**

I didn't mean it that way.

**ELSA**

I don't really mind, as long as I agree with the orders. *(She smiles at him and heads for the door.)*

**ROGER**

I get your point. I'll be more careful next time. Here, let me walk you to your door.

**ELSA**

That's all right. The criminals at Brentwood Court are all in their beds by now. Good night, Roger. I had a wonderful evening. *(She makes herself available for a good night kiss, but he reaches out and takes her hand in his.)*

**ROGER**

Me too. Till tomorrow then. *(He lightly kisses her hand. She turns and goes out the door, leaving him standing there as the*

**LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.**

**Scene 7: Poolside**

*(Lights come up on Elsa seated on a lounge chair reading. Harvey enters and approaches her. She looks up.)*

**HARVEY**

I always like to see you sitting by the poolside. It means you are finally getting your money's worth.

**ELSA**

*(She laughs.)* Yes, I love the late afternoons. It's the only quiet time around here. I try to take advantage of it whenever I can.

**HARVEY**

I've noticed. Would it disturb you if I joined you?

**ELSA**

Not at all. I always enjoy your company. *(She motions for him to sit. He does.)*

**HARVEY**

Actually, I've been wanting to talk with you. There's a rumor going around that you're dating someone from here.

**ELSA**

Apparently, it's a very unusual rumor --- it happens to be based on fact.

**HARVEY**

Wow! I'm stunned. I thought that was against the rules.

**ELSA**

It's a long story.

**HARVEY**

Well I can only conclude that he must be someone special. Do I know him?

**ELSA**

I don't think so...his name is Roger Warshaw and he is fairly new.

**HARVEY**

I think I've seen him around. How long has this been going on?

**ELSA**

I don't exactly know what you mean by "this", but we've been going on dates for about three months now.

**HARVEY**

That's an interesting way to put it: "going on dates".

**ELSA**

Well, we haven't slept together if that's what you're asking. We haven't even done any serious kissing.

**HARVEY**

I don't understand.

**ELSA**

Me neither! Roger has been my companion for the last three months. We take weekend outings together...to the beach, the museums, symphony, theatre. He sometimes lets me hold his hand as we walk, and sometimes I get a quick goodnight kiss, but that's all. I'm very attracted to him, and he does like me, I think.

**HARVEY**

So things are progressing...maybe you just need to be patient.

**ELSA**

I'm trying to be, but he is starting to occupy my thoughts all the time. I dreamed last night that I was the silver perch again, swimming through the familiar ferns and rocks. Only this time, a large golden Koi was following me wherever I went, not in a threatening way, more like a protector. When I awoke, of course, I was thinking of Roger.

**HARVEY**

You see him as your protector?

**ELSA**

I suppose there's a little bit of that, but we seem to be getting more comfortable with each other every day. It's a new experience for me, feeling that close to a man.

**HARVEY**

That's good!

**ELSA**

No, maybe not so good. I'm beginning to get this intense desire for him, and it's building up more and more every day. I keep telling myself to be careful. I don't want to get hurt again.

**HARVEY**

Elsa, maybe that's just a risk you have to take.

**ELSA**

What do you mean?

**HARVEY**

Look, we talked before about finding a special man. And you didn't believe you ever would.

**ELSA**

I still worry about that.

**HARVEY**

Well, along comes a guy who seems to be different from the rest, someone you can feel close to. Isn't that what you always wanted?

**ELSA**

Yes, of course.

**HARVEY**

That dream you had? That's your intuition talking! Listen to it, trust it. If you keep holding back, waiting and waiting until you're perfectly sure, you'll never find the love you want.

**ELSA**

*(She gets up from the chaise.)* Come here, you.

**HARVEY**

*(He gets up and goes toward her.)* You going to smack me?

**ELSA**

Yes, on the lips. *(She kisses him, sweetly.)* You are such a good friend, and your advice feels right. I will do it.

**HARVEY**

Great! I can hardly wait to get the next installment.

**ELSA**

Me neither! *(She gathers up her things and waves to him as she goes off, as the*

**LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE TO BLACK**

### **Scene 8: Roger's Apartment**

*(Elsa and Roger are returning from a date. They are laughing as they enter the hallway.)*

**ROGER**

My place for coffee this time?

**ELSA**

Yes, if your coffee has some of that cognac in it.

*(He unlocks the door and ushers her in.)*

**ROGER**

You can just have the cognac straight if you like.

**ELSA**

Good idea.

*(She removes her jacket and waits on the couch as he brings the drinks. He hands her the cognac and sits down beside her. They clink glasses. He raises his in a toast.)*

**ROGER**

*(Smiling.)* To the good neighbor policy.

**ELSA**

*(She raises her glass.)* No ... to the Bekins Man!

**ROGER**

I agree. That was a great start to a beautiful friendship.

**ELSA**

*(Teasing.)* Like brother and sister, you mean?

**ROGER**

Oh, no. Besides, that was your prediction of the future, remember?

**ELSA**

*(Takes it a little further.)* That's true, and it seems like that's the way it has worked out, wouldn't you say?

**ROGER**

No, I wouldn't say. Do you really think that's the kind of relationship we've developed?

**ELSA**

*(Committed, now.)* It defines itself. How long have we been dating... three months? And we haven't even necked on the couch once.

**ROGER**

And that's the sole definition of a brother and sister relationship?

**ELSA**

I would think that's the key factor.

**ROGER**

But you're the one who made the prediction! Does that mean that if we necked on the couch tonight, you might consider us to be in a different kind of relationship?

**ELSA**

*(No way out, now.)* There's a good chance I might.

**ROGER**

Well, let's put it to a test.

*(He pulls her close and kisses her, carefully. She becomes more and more passionate, but as things start to heat up, he pulls back and holds her off. She is consumed by old feelings of rejection...she pushes him away, gets up quickly from the couch, grabs her purse and heads for the door).*

**ELSA**

I thought you would be different, but you're not! You're just like the rest of them!

**ROGER**

What are you talking about...what on earth have I done?

*(She leaves and slams the door, runs down the hall, fumbles in her purse for her keys, opens the door, locks it behind her and collapses on the couch in tears. He gets up and goes after her. He arrives at her door just as she has locked it. He knocks carefully and speaks in moderate tones so no one will hear.)*

**ROGER**

Elsa, open up. I don't understand this. You have to talk to me. Let me in, please.

*(No response. He knocks again.)*

Elsa, please, it's not right for you to treat me like this! Please talk to me.

*(No response. He thinks a minute.)*

Okay, then. If you won't talk to me, I will just have to shout. I think your other neighbors might like to know what is going on. I am prepared to stay here till morning, shouting out the whole story. I will count to five...three would be too short, I think, so I will give you a good five before the whole world hears about this. One... Two... Three... Four... Okay here goes...

**ELSA**

*(She opens the door.)* Shhh, shhh! All right, come in, but you can stand by the door.  
*(She goes back to the couch.)*

**ROGER**

Fine, as long as we talk.

**ELSA**

I have nothing to talk about.

**ROGER**

That is silly! We were having a perfectly wonderful evening and all of a sudden you tell me I'm just like a bunch of people I never met, and you run out the door.

**ELSA**

Not people, men.

**ROGER**

I have not behaved like most men. I have been a gentleman throughout. I have done nothing to take advantage of you. Why are you so angry at me?

**ELSA**

When I kissed you, you pulled away from me in disgust. Am I that unattractive?

**ROGER**

What are you talking about? You are a wonderful person to whom I am very attracted.

**ELSA**

Just not physically.

**ROGER**

You are wrong. I am attracted to you physically.

**ELSA**

Sure, to my body.

**ROGER**

*( He starts to approach the couch.)* Elsa, listen to me. Physical attraction is a very complex phenomenon, and different for every person. For me, a woman's mind is just as important as her body or her facial features. Please believe me, it is true. I am very attracted to you. *(He sits next to her.)*

**ELSA**

Right. That's why you kiss me so carefully. You're so attracted to me you pulled away when I started kissing you!

**ROGER**

I pulled away because it was exciting me too much.

**ELSA**

Oh, please!

**ROGER**

Look, Elsa. I am telling you the truth. Our relationship has been growing steadily, just as my feelings for you have. But I have specifically held back sexually. I want you to be sure of me before you make love with me. This has happened to you...to us...very quickly. I have had strong feelings very early on, but it's clear you have some

reservations and I don't know how long we could have kissed like that without my hormones kicking in.

**ELSA**

Obviously mine already were.

**ROGER**

I know, and I wanted to go slow for both of us. But, I didn't do too good a job at communicating that.

**ELSA**

No, not your fault. At that moment I couldn't hear anything anyway, with all the rage pounding in my head... It's the old problem I can never get away from.

**ROGER**

The old problem?

**ELSA**

Yes.

**ROGER**

*(He carefully puts his arm around her.)* Will you tell me about it?

**ELSA**

*(She leans against him.)* It hurts just to think about it.

**ROGER**

Was it something that happened when you were young?

**ELSA**

The scars, yes. But people's reaction to my face...I can't recall when it wasn't happening to me. Over the years I've finally learned to accept it and just deal with the consequences.

**ROGER**

What consequences?

**ELSA**

Let's be honest, right? I have a very nice body and a not so nice face. Most men respond to my body really well. No one ever responds to my face, except to push me away.

**ROGER**

And that's what you thought I was doing.

**ELSA**

Yes.

**ROGER**

I was just like the others, isn't that what you said?

**ELSA**

That's what I thought, then, yes. Now... I'm still not sure.

**ROGER**

Did you ever see Tootsie? The movie.

**ELSA**

Nice change of subject. Isn't that your line?

**ROGER**

Elsa, it's definitely not a change of subject. Try to hold onto your sarcasm for a moment and listen to me.

**ELSA**

All right. I'm listening.

**ROGER**

Do you remember who played Tootsie?

**ELSA**

Yes, Dustin Hoffman.

**ROGER**

Correct. Did you ever read his interview about how he felt under that dress and makeup?

**ELSA**

No.

**ROGER**

What he said was this...I'm paraphrasing, of course.

**ELSA**

*(Sarcastically.)* Of course.

**ROGER**

Will you listen!

**ELSA**

All right, all right.

**ROGER**

Thank you. Hoffman said that when he was dressed up as Tootsie, he realized from people's reactions what an unattractive woman she was on the outside. But he knew that underneath the frowsy dress and excess makeup it was still him...intelligent,

interesting and sensitive. He said that feeling, that understanding, changed his whole life, his whole attitude about the importance of looks. From that time on, he always searched for the person beneath the makeup.

**ELSA**

And you?

**ROGER**

Dustin Hoffman had a profound effect on me. At one time I had a pretty active bachelor life, including my share of one-night stands with Hollywood starlets. But I always wondered why I felt so empty the next day. After the Tootsie story I knew.

**ELSA**

So when we first met, you didn't notice...

**ROGER**

Of course I noticed, but it didn't matter. When we first met, I felt drawn to you...not to your looks or to your body... No, there was something sweet and intelligent and humorous about you. That's what attracted me. And that is why I pursued you.

**ELSA**

*(She moves closer to him.)* Somehow, now I believe you.

**ROGER**

Finally.

**ELSA**

If I kiss you now, will you not pull away.

**ROGER**

Yes. But just one kiss, and then I have to go.

**ELSA**

Certainly, just one kiss.

*(She begins it, he finishes it strongly. Then they break for air.)*

**ROGER**

See I didn't pull away.

**ELSA**

Shows I'm gaining on you.

**ROGER**

But now I must go. A lot has happened tonight. I want you to think about it and we can talk tomorrow. *(He gets up.)*

**ELSA**

Yes, sir. But I need to ask you a question first.

**ROGER**

All right. Ask.

**ELSA**

*(She gets up and advances toward him.)* This idea you had, about not going to bed with me as long as I had reservations. Is that based on some kind of principle?

**ROGER**

Of course. I consider myself a gentleman, and I would never take advantage of a lady, especially in a vulnerable moment.

**ELSA**

*(Gets close to him.)* And do you ever violate one of your principles?

**ROGER**

Certainly not.

**ELSA**

Even with good reason? *(Closer.)*

**ROGER**

*(Flustered.)* Certainly.....not.

**ELSA**

It seems to me that your principle is just like the one you convinced me to violate.

**ROGER**

No, the two are very different. And I found a way to prove to you that yours was just a foolish, arbitrary rule that had ridiculous consequences.

**ELSA**

*(Reaching behind him and locking the door.)* Well, I'll tell you what. I need to find a way to prove to you that your principle is just a foolish, arbitrary rule that has ridiculous consequences. Follow me. *(She takes his hand and leads him toward the bedroom door.)*

**ROGER**

*(Following her, caught up in the analytical possibilities.)* And how do you propose to find such a solution?

**ELSA**

Well, just like you, I do my best analysis lying flat on my back!

*(She pulls him offstage.)*

**BLACKOUT.**  
**END OF PLAY**