

PSYCHOPATHIA SEXUALIS

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Ellie, in a chic dressing gown, is sitting at a breakfast table, drinking her coffee and writing on a pad. A cheerful rock and roll song is playing on the stereo. Howard enters in his bathrobe with his newspaper. He is English. He takes in the scene and calls out:

HOWARD Controls. (*Ellie hands him a remote control. He immediately clicks off the music, pours himself coffee and starts to read the paper.*)

ELLIE I was listening to that.

HOWARD So was I. And there we have the dilemma of marriage.

ELLIE Good morning, Howard.

HOWARD Good morning, Ellie.

ELLIE You've been preoccupied.

HOWARD I don't think so.

ELLIE Cranky.

HOWARD I have my sensitivities. For instance, now I'm trying to read the *Wall Street Journal*.

ELLIE The *Journal!* I thought you'd sworn off?

HOWARD Nothing is forever.

ELLIE Sleep well?

HOWARD Reasonably.

ELLIE Are you having an affair?

HOWARD What? No!

ELLIE Just checking.

HOWARD Talk show tactics.

ELLIE Sorry. I smell a problem and I'm a problem solver.

HOWARD What's that you're writing?

ELLIE I'm taking a course at the New School. Creative writing.

HOWARD Well, I suppose it's better than destructive writing. Always trying to improve yourself.

ELLIE Or you.

HOWARD You try to improve me?

ELLIE Oh, you're my project.

HOWARD Am I? How am I going?

ELLIE There's something on your mind.

HOWARD How do you know that?

ELLIE You're a column of numbers. I add them up.

HOWARD Not exactly flattering. My husband the deficit.

ELLIE So? Are there beans to spill?

HOWARD I don't care to share. What kind of thing are you writing?

ELLIE A poem.

HOWARD A poem? Poetry! You?

ELLIE We're supposed to mimic an assigned poet.

HOWARD Who were you assigned? Omar the tent maker?

ELLIE Kipling. Rudyard Kipling.

HOWARD The jingoist? I wouldn't think he'd suit you.

ELLIE I don't mind him.

HOWARD "And if you can keep your lunch, when all about you are losing theirs..." So what did you write?

ELLIE Just a, you know, it's a little fictional ditty.

HOWARD Read it.

ELLIE It's fictional.

HOWARD Read the fiction.

ELLIE When my mother was a mother

Her course was set
Or so it seemed to me.
First you beguile
And then you beget
And then you're a family.

HOWARD Very nice.

ELLIE But as I make my way
Through capricious seas
'Cross the nights and days of now
What seemed so right
Has spun from sight
I cannot answer how.

HOWARD It's getting darker.

ELLIE I could stop.

HOWARD No, don't stop.

ELLIE I'm a second wife
An afterthought
A spouse in this house of show
How I come to this
Through a careless kiss
I really do not know

But do not disregard me
As a decorative green card joke
Though my marriage springs

From ridiculous things

It's turned out okedoke.

That's as far as I got.

HOWARD Thank god. Fiction, huh?

ELLIE Not a word of truth in it.

HOWARD Sometimes I don't think I know you.

ELLIE Sometimes I don't think I know you.

HOWARD You were right before. There is something on my mind. But to tell you would certainly be a betrayal of trust.

ELLIE Oh come on! What's marriage for?

HOWARD It will go no further?

ELLIE *Après moi, le Déluge.*

HOWARD Stop it. French. All right. Last Saturday... The dinner party was over... Well, let me set the scene. You'd excused yourself and gone to bed.

ELLIE Goodnight. *(Ellie exits. Howard speaks after her, as if she's still there. He picks up the remote control.)*

HOWARD The room still smelled of your fabulous osso bucco. *(The lights change, Arthur enters and sits in the indicated chair. Howard takes off his bathrobe and he's fully dressed.)* I had the fire going. Arthur was sitting in the slipper chair and I was playing him a piece of music. *(Howard clicks on the music and conducts the finale of Beethoven's Ninth with great commitment. He's moved down into the hearth area. A fire is burning in the invisible fireplace. Arthur is sitting in the slipper chair. Howard, when he sits, will sit in the wing chair.)* Nine times, but he finally got it right. My father's god. Ludwig van Beethoven.

ARTHUR That was your father's favourite part of the symphony?

HOWARD Always. The climax. That was IT for him.

ARTHUR My father believed in guilt. He'd say you have to *earn* a climax.

HOWARD My father believed in results. Even when he read the Bible. He always turned right to the Apocalypse.

ARTHUR Revelations. Speaking of which...

HOWARD We must drink. This was a gift from Ellie. A very good single malt.

ARTHUR None for me, thanks.

HOWARD The glasses are Japanese. They've got an incredible tactility. Just feel this glass.

ARTHUR You're such a salesman.

HOWARD Oh, come on, have a taste. To make more temperate the vexatious climate of a troubled age.

ARTHUR All right, but just a taste. I'm on a bit of a health kick. I mean I'm trying to get up a show and...

HOWARD Anyway, this is the sort of best part of the evening, isn't it? Good dinner, fire, a drink. Get to talk about, you know, moonlight.

ARTHUR Moonlight. There's a topic...

HOWARD This is intimacy. This is real intimacy!

ARTHUR This is? Oh, good. Good.

HOWARD So you're working hard, huh?

ARTHUR Well, I've been trying to put up a show, as I said. The gallery's being very nice about it, but... Look, I don't want to talk about work.

HOWARD Well, you know, that's fine with me. I hate work.

ARTHUR You're the hardest working guy who hates work I've ever met.

HOWARD Not now.

ARTHUR This is good Scotch. Who's running the Fund now?

HOWARD Jerry somebody. He calls me, you know. He gets nervous. It's a lot of money to manage and he's terrified he might blow it. He won't. But you don't want to talk about work, and I certainly don't want to talk about money. The pursuit of money is a carcinogenic lunacy.

ARTHUR It's amazing how you changed your life.

HOWARD Is it? Even bugs can metamorphasize.

ARTHUR But to give up such an important job.

HOWARD It wasn't that important.

ARTHUR Was it hard to give up?

HOWARD No. That job was part of an external reality. My real journey began afterwards. You know we took that cruise. Three months. After a few days at sea I got frantic. It was like I was being attacked by a swarm of bees. I started writing these notes. Different ideas for what to do with the rest of my life. I wrote six hundred pages of notes in three weeks.

ARTHUR Jesus.

HOWARD Then I started screaming at Ellie. Just mad abuse. Really angry. She was... She fought me, you know. On whatever demented point I happened to be making. Then she realized it was just... That this was just an outpouring, that there was no point in trying to stop it. So she took aerobics. Then the nightmares started. You know, you sleep in this deep, deep way on the ocean. And your dreams, at least my dreams, started to get very big. I dreamed the house I grew up in was gone, and the spot where it had stood was just a scorched black place on the earth. I dreamt that I had murdered someone, and I was racked with guilt and fear of discovery. I dreamt that I had wronged various celebrities, murdered them, stolen from them, lost their children that had been left in my care. I dreamt about you.

ARTHUR Me?

HOWARD I dreamt that you were the Fool and I was King Lear.

ARTHUR I was...?

HOWARD And then I had this sort of pivotal dream, where I was a Roman, and a Greek was in charge of me. This Greek was to supervise my suicide. I was supposed to plunge this dagger into my own heart. I was very afraid. I was crying and calling out to God for the courage to kill myself. And in such a difficult and painful way. Why did it have to be so difficult? But the Greek just waited for me, the Roman, to do it. To kill myself.

ARTHUR Man. What was that about?

HOWARD Well, I think I know. See, to me, the Greeks were contemplative, artistic, complex. The Romans were simpler, much less artistic though they appreciated art, and pragmatic. Powerful. They conquered the Greeks. They were organizers, administrators, warriors. I think my dream was about my own unbalanced personality. I'd used the Roman side of myself to manage a huge international stock portfolio. To become rich, successful. Powerful in the world of men. But now the Greek side of me, more complex, more contemplative, artistic, was dictating that the Roman in me must make way, step aside. Die. And that's what my anger and anguish and confusion was about on that boat. The Greek in me was supervising the suicide of the Roman in me. And the Roman didn't want to die.

ARTHUR Did he die?

HOWARD Sort of.

ARTHUR I mean, that wouldn't be good, would it?

HOWARD Well, he didn't completely die. If he completely died, I'd be horribly imbalanced in a different way. But the Greek is definitely having his day.

ARTHUR And how come I was the Fool and you were King Lear?

HOWARD Well, me, Lear, power, power misused. Fall from power. You, the Fool, the wise one. And Art. The Artist. And maybe my only friend.

ARTHUR We are friends, aren't we? I mean I guess we are friends.

HOWARD I don't know, Arthur. I think we are.

ARTHUR I've got a reason for wanting to know.

HOWARD I mean, of course, absolutely we are.

ARTHUR Because I've got it in mind to ask you something. But it's predicated on an assumption of friendship.

HOWARD Yes. We're friends. We're friends.

ARTHUR Because I wanted to ask you something. Well, to tell you something, and then ask you something, and then ask you something else.

HOWARD I'm all aflutter.

ARTHUR I've asked Lucille to marry me.

HOWARD You have!

ARTHUR Yes.

HOWARD Well, that's great! Wow! You married! I don't even know what that means! Congratulations!

ARTHUR She said yes.

HOWARD Right. I didn't mean to jump the gun, but I assumed... Who wouldn't marry you?

ARTHUR Lots of people.

HOWARD You should have brought her to dinner! We could've...

ARTHUR I wanted to talk to you first.

HOWARD Oh. Okay.

ARTHUR You know another reason you might've dreamed I was the Fool is maybe just as simple as that. Maybe I am a fool, Howard. Maybe I know for a certainty I am a fool. A very big fool.

HOWARD What are you talking about? What's the matter, Arthur?

ARTHUR So I wanted to ask you, will you be my best man?

HOWARD Oh, oh.

ARTHUR I mean, if we are friends. And I don't really know if we are. I mean we've known each other for a long time...

HOWARD Since that ghastly pub across from the Tate.

ARTHUR I was so drunk.

HOWARD You were hilarious.

ARTHUR I don't really make friends with men.

HOWARD Neither do I.

ARTHUR We've talked a lot, but we don't know each other very well.

HOWARD We know each other a tad bit more than a little.

ARTHUR When you quit your job, changed your whole life, I had no idea that was coming. How well could I really know you and I didn't even have a suspicion such a big thing in your life was about to happen?

HOWARD I didn't really know it myself.

ARTHUR That I can understand. Sometimes a person can get so caught up in living their life, they can't see what's coming. But other people sometimes can. At least sensitive friends should be able to notice. But I don't know if that's what I am! I'm too subjective. I'm trapped in here, looking out through this slot.

HOWARD Arthur. Arthur. I'd be delighted to be your best man.

ARTHUR You would?

HOWARD Of course I would, Arthur.

ARTHUR You're sure?

HOWARD I'm absolutely sure.

ARTHUR That's great. That's great.

HOWARD So you're going to marry Lucille.

ARTHUR Yeah, that's the plan. In ten days.

HOWARD In ten days! Wow! Quick.

ARTHUR I've been waiting my whole life.

HOWARD Arthur, you're a wild man!

ARTHUR Lucille loves the idea. It's still a secret 'til she tells her parents.

HOWARD Won't say a word. You and Lucille. Husband and wife.

ARTHUR Yeah. That's the plan.

HOWARD She's a beauty.

ARTHUR Yeah, she's a looker.

HOWARD She's like the sun coming up in the morning. She's like... Mexico!

ARTHUR Yeah, she's like Schliemann's Agamemnon mask.

HOWARD That's a bit esoteric. I mean, I don't know if you want to hear my impression of Lucille, but...

ARTHUR Sure.

HOWARD She's got gargantuan energy. She's like a hillbilly Aztec Evita.

ARTHUR I know. She's got scale!

HOWARD Alaska! I mean she's an American girl!

ARTHUR Times Square!

HOWARD She's like Texas or something.

ARTHUR Well, she's from Texas.

HOWARD Right, well, that might go a long way toward explaining it. Her father is certainly a force of nature.

ARTHUR I know. I met him. Yosemite Sam in a Versace suit.

HOWARD Good customer. Formidable little fellow. And you know what you were saying before? My life suddenly took a big left hand turn and you hadn't even expected it was in the works? Well, we're even, because I didn't even have a clue that you were about to be married! And to Lucille.

ARTHUR Well, I'm secretive. So you'll be my best man?

HOWARD Absolutely!

ARTHUR Well, that's great. I do appreciate it.

HOWARD What's the matter?

ARTHUR We all have our secrets.

HOWARD Something on your mind?

ARTHUR Yes.

HOWARD Let me freshen that.

ARTHUR No, thank you, Howard. This is hard for me. I really need a friend right now. It's funny, I'm painting, I don't need a friend. I don't know the depth of our friendship. If Fate hadn't ... asserted my acting, I would never want to know.

HOWARD What is it?

ARTHUR It occurred to me... Are you still reading psychiatric books?

HOWARD That's all I've been doing ... since we got back from the cruise. It's getting to be two years.

ARTHUR What got you up to reading all those books? I mean, why didn't you go to a psychiatrist?

HOWARD I didn't like the idea of it. I didn't like the idea of paying somebody. I'd had enough financial transactions, I guess. And I didn't want to come up against just one point of view. And I wanted to, you know, read the really big guys like Freud and Reich and Jung. I wanted to come up against them directly, fell their personalities. And also, I'm not the most trusting person. After what I've seen of human nature why would I be. I was at a very important moment in my life. I didn't want to entrust my soul to a stranger.

ARTHUR You're smart.

HOWARD That's not smart. That's a shortcoming.

ARTHUR I've been going to a psychiatrist.

HOWARD You have? When did you start?

ARTHUR I've been going to a psychiatrist for six years.

HOWARD Six years! You've been going to a psychiatrist for six years and you never mentioned it?!

ARTHUR I told you, Howard, I'm secretive. I wouldn't have told you now if I could see a way around it.

HOWARD But all this time when I've been talking about my ideas about the psyche and psychology, you've acted like it was all news to you.

ARTHUR I was interested in what you had to say.

HOWARD But you must've thought so much more than you said!

Arthur Perhaps.

HOWARD I mean, you were in the midst of having the experience of therapy!

ARTHUR Yes, I was.

HOWARD I would've been so interested in what you thought of my ideas in the light of your experience!

ARTHUR I'm sorry.

HOWARD It's all right. I'm sure you had your reasons.

ARTHUR I did.

HOWARD Boy, it's hard to know anybody.

ARTHUR Have you ever thought of becoming an analyst yourself?

HOWARD Me? Never! Doesn't interest me.

ARTHUR Why not?

HOWARD It's too toxic. All those unhealthy personalities, all that unhappiness. Those guys should wear protective clothing.

ARTHUR True.

HOWARD Thin I'd be any good at it?

ARTHUR I think you'd be good at anything you put your hand to. That's why I'm broaching this topic with you.

HOWARD What topic?

ARTHUR I want you to see my psychiatrist for me.

HOWARD Come again?

ARTHUR I want you to go to my psychiatrist.

HOWARD You think I'm in trouble?

ARTHUR No. Not you. Me. I know that I'm in trouble. This is very, very difficult for me.

HOWARD Well, goddamnit, Arthur, you're gonna have to start talking a little more plainly.

ARTHUR I know.

HOWARD So?

ARTHUR I have a problem.

HOWARD You have a problem.

ARTHUR I have a sexual problem.

HOWARD You have a suh ... sexual problem.

ARTHUR Yes.

HOWARD So you want me to go to a psychiatrist.

ARTHUR Yes. My psychiatrist.

HOWARD What' your sexual problem

ARTHUR I'm a fetishist.

HOWARD I see. You're a fuh... What kind of fetishist? *(No answer)* What's your fetish?

ARTHUR Socks.

HOWARD Socks? Hose?

ARTHUR You know, foot socks. Socks on feet.

HOWARD So. Let me backtrack. You're getting married to Lucille?

ARTHUR Right.

HOWARD You want me to stand up for you?

ARTHUR Yes.

HOWARD You're a fetishist.

ARTHUR Yes. Socks.

HOWARD Socks on the feet. And you want me to go to your psychiatrist.

ARTHUR Yeah.

HOWARD All right, go on.

ARTHUR Well, my psychiatrist is a strict Freudian.

HOWARD A Freudian. Jesus, my god, I mean well, if I'm anything, I'm a Jungian, but... Arthur. Socks?

ARTHUR I can't make love without these socks!

HOWARD What?

ARTHUR I can't make love without these socks!

HOWARD What socks? You mean there's some specific socks?

ARTHUR My father's socks.

HOWARD You can't make love without your fathers socks?

ARTHUR But with the socks I'm fine! I have no problem at all! I just need the socks.

HOWARD I'm speechless.

ARTHUR I just need the socks.

HOWARD Does Lucille know about this?

ARTHUR No..

HOWARD Yow.

ARTHUR I don't have to have them on. It's not like I have to have them on.

HOWARD No?

ARTHUR I just have to know where they are. Be able to touch them. At the crucial moment.

HOWARD Ah shit!

ARTHUR This is hard.

HOWARD I feel ashamed.

ARTHUR You? How do you think I feel?

HOWARD You... How can I put this? You risk so much in telling me this.

ARTHUR I have no choice.

HOWARD You know what this? This is intimacy.

ARTHUR I guess so.

HOWARD No! This is real intimacy. Now it's my turn.

ARTHUR What?

HOWARD A year ago, I tried to get my job back.

ARTHUR Are we talking about you?

HOWARD They didn't want me.

ARTHUR But I thought...

HOWARD That's what I wanted you to think. That it was all my choice. It was at first. Then I changed my mind. And I found out they were glad I was gone. They like the new guy. Jerry. He's cheaper than I was and does just as well. Maybe better.

ARTHUR Why didn't you tell me?

HOWARD I was humiliated. I didn't want anyone to know. I'm very proud.

ARTHUR Nothing wrong with pride.

HOWARD Yes, there is. I didn't even have the courage to go to therapy.

ARTHUR No, with you it was a choice.

HOWARD Oh, I put the best face on everything!

ARTHUR But you've done a good job on yourself, read all those books. Figured out your...

HOWARD I helped myself, yes. But that just fed my pride, and it's my pride that's become entrenched. I still don't know what to do with the rest of my life, and I'm never able to let that question alone. I have this energy in me like a tiger and it tears at me. I don't know what to do with it. You telling me this incredibly personal sexual detail, it makes me ashamed of how I've been unwilling to show you my weakness.

ARTHUR That's all right.

HOWARD No, it's not all right! I just wanted to posture at being superior to you! I'm Lear and you're the Fool. It's insulting! I'm setting myself up as a King and calling you names while I'm at it! I'm the one who should be in therapy all this time, not you! You're a good man. A good man and no more than a man, but then you don't pretend to be!

ARTHUR Therapy's not so great. I've been going for six years, and I still need the socks.

HOWARD So how did you ascertain you were ready for marriage?

ARTHUR I made a decision. I accepted my shortcomings.

HOWARD Were you going to tell Lucille?

ARTHUR No. I accepted them privately.

HOWARD What does your psychiatrist think?

ARTHUR Dr Block still thinks I can be cured.

HOWARD But you don't think so?

ARTHUR No.

HOWARD And this Dr Block, is he good?

ARTHUR He's more than competent.

HOWARD He's the psychiatrist you want me to see?

ARTHUR I'd really appreciate it.

HOWARD Why?

ARTHUR Well, this may sound strange and maybe even paranoid. I'm worried that my psychiatrist may be Evil.

HOWARD You don't mean 'evil'?

ARTHUR Yes. It could be something else. He says it's something else, but I don't believe him.

HOWARD What do you base this on?

ARTHUR Well. He's taken my socks.

HOWARD What?

ARTHUR He's taken my socks and he won't give them back.

HOWARD Why not?

ARTHUR He asked to... You know, I've been talking about them, and he asked to see them, and now he's got them and he won't give them back.

HOWARD You're kidding.

ARTHUR No, I'm not kidding. Now I'm supposed to be getting married and I need those socks. I didn't know who to talk to about this. I don't want Lucille to know. I can't really go to the police.

HOWARD You've confronted him yourself?

ARTHUR He threatened to destroy them.

HOWARD No.

ARTHUR He had a cigarette lighter. I became hysterical and backed off. Howard, I asked you to be my best man because you're the only man I know I consider may be a friend. I wanted to enlist you in the cause of my marriage. You're a drive man, I know that. So is this Dr Block. If I go to psychiatric association or something, I can't help but think their bias is going to favour one of their own over a pathetic fetishist who wants his socks back.

HOWARD But they'd have to understand that this guy's in the wrong.

ARTHUR He's very clever! What I need is someone to go in there, under the guise of being a patient, take this guy's measure, maybe get the socks back. I need you.

HOWARD I don't know...

ARTHUR What are you going to do, read those books 'til you go blind? Or are you going to apply what you've learned to save a man's life? My life. I'm in jeopardy! Listen, Howard, if this engagement goes bust, I'll fall to pieces. There won't be enough glue in the world. I have nothing to induce you. Friendship. Lucille said she'd marry me. I hold that like a golden lantern in a dark would. If that lantern goes out, and it will go out if I don't get those socks back, it all goes dark for me. You're my last hope, my best man. Say you'll do it. I'm a beggar! Please! Please!

HOWARD All right I will.

ARTHUR You will?.

HOWARD Yes, I'll do it. I'll go. And guess what? I'll get the socks.

ARTHUR Do you think you could?

HOWARD Arthur, you can take it to the bank.

ARTHUR God bless you, Howard.

HOWARD Say no more about it. His name is Dr Block?

ARTHUR Yes. He's got my future like a hostage.

HOWARD He's a Freudian.

ARTHUR Yes.

HOWARD Why do you go to a Freudian?

ARTHUR I don't know. I was in a hurry.

HOWARD No, everything's for a reason. I've been sitting here reading these books on the human mind for two years. I didn't realize it, but I've been preparing for something. Sharpening my sword for a confrontation. Dr. Block.

ARTHUR I think he may really be evil.

HOWARD We'll see. We'll see.

FADE TO BLACK

Scene 2

Dr Block's office. The leather wing chair appears again, now with an oriental pillow. In this chair sits Dr Block. He's a powerful man with a Bronx accent. There's the classic couch for therapy. Howard stands initially. Both men are edgy, like wrestlers looking for an advantage.

BLOCK So how do you care to be addressed?

HOWARD Howard.

BLOCK They call me Dr Block.

HOWARD You're not German.

BLOCK Am I supposed to be German?

HOWARD I associate Freudian psychiatry with Germans.

BLOCK You seem more sophisticated than that assumption suggests, Howard.

HOWARD Perhaps I'm not.

BLOCK I was born and raised in the Bronx. My father was in fact German, my mother English, and I guess I'm very much the American. We'll start with your childhood.

HOWARD No, we won't. *(Pause)*

BLOCK All right, where do you want to start?

HOWARD What do you think of Jung's split with Freud?

BLOCK Oh Christ crucified! Your unconscious is completely contaminated by some half-baked exposure to psychoanalytical literature! Isn't it?

HOWARD No.

BLOCK You've read things?

HOWARD Yes.

BLOCK I hate that in a patient! I can see you're testing me.

HOWARD That's true.

BLOCK I intuit that you'd like to know if I'm intuitive because that would demonstrate sensitivity, a trait that you hold very highly. Correct?

HOWARD Correct.

BLOCK All right, I can do that for you. To a point. You're a power devil. Before you could trust me, you'd have to pass a piece of emotional legislation longer than the Magna Carta. You think you know better. You're insular. Probably have a wife like an orbiting satellite. If you don't discover it for yourself, a concept doesn't exist. If it's forced on you that someone else does have an insight or construct that goes beyond the borders of your ruminations and yet has validity, you have to choke back garbage cans of rage. Most likely you'll avoid such people and then wonder aloud where they are?! Where are your peers? You exist in lonely splendour. But! But! Something's gone wrong. In the words of your precious Carl Jung, enantiadromia's set in. That is the reversal of a man's fortune. Always a horrible dilemma and spiritual crisis for a man who's held sway over a small, self-created kingdom. Why are the plants dying in my precious terrarium? The confident corner of your mouth sags under the weight of new, unwanted knowledge. You don't even believe you're here for yourself. You had to fool yourself into it somehow. That it was for someone else's good. Your wife? No, it would have to be a man. Because that's who you're in competition with. The race of men. That's the reverse side of the coin. Tails. The tales you tell yourself. But the obverse side of the coin is your longing for the love of a man. True love! So unattainable! The bluebird you chase in your private dreams. A true friend. A man you could talk to. Now all is in ruins. The side of yourself that longed for a male confidant is still inexpressibly disappointed by your experience of friendship. Why? Because you will not choose a peer and lose your precious superiority! And the bold dragon slayer in you that succeeded so in the world has become the prisoner of his own armour. Trapped in his rusting jail in the rain, while others. Lesser men all, divide the loot that is rightly his. Have I named you, Howard?

HOWARD I don't agree with all of that!

BLOCK Well, my God man, why would you?! That would be a terrible admission indeed. The man I've described is little more than a giant bleeding ego in a vacuum of his own creation. Tell me one of your dreams. Come on! I've risked a lot something easier. Tell me your recent history.

HOWARD All right. I managed a large and extremely successful mutual fund ...

BLOCK But not anymore.

HOWARD I quit two years ago.

BLOCK Why?

HOWARD I felt like I was missing the experience of life.

BLOCK I'm sure you were. Who replaced you?

HOWARD Why do you ask that? Someone named Jerry something.

BLOCK Oh, we don't like him, do we? You can't remember his last name?

HOWARD No.

BLOCK Then your emotions went haywire.

HOWARD Yes.

BLOCK Did you try to get your job back?

HOWARD Yes.

BLOCK And you couldn't get it back.

HOWARD No.

BLOCK That must've been a jolt.

HOWARD Yes.

BLOCK Now look, Howard, if you feel awful and you want to feel better, tell me a dream. (*He lays down on the couch.*) I dreamed I was a Roman, and I was supposed to commit suicide. With a dagger. And my suicide was being overseen by a Greek. I was very emotional, kneeling, calling out to God to give me the courage to stab myself. The Greek looked on coolly

.BLOCK Now I know, because you're a complete power devil, that you told me a dream that you already feel you've analyzed very well. So tell me your interpretation.

HOWARD Well, I feel it's a dream about my personality being out of balance. I think my Roman side, the business side of myself, the road builder if you will, has been overused in my job...

BLOCK I see. And the Greek side, your artistic, non-linear side, was stepping and demanding equal time.

HOWARD Something like that. *(Block laughs.)* What's funny?

BLOCK I'm sorry. Forgive me. It's just that sometimes the relentlessly self-serving analysis of the eager amateur tickles me in my aching bones. God, I bet you've read a lot of books!

HOWARD Yes. I have. Is that a bad thing?

BLOCK Yes, it is! Mostly by Carl Gustav Jung I imagine.

HOWARD As it happens.

BLOCK You know, Carl Jung's ghost came to me one night. Came to my bedroom and woke me out of a profound slumber.

HOWARD Are you serious?

BLOCK Yes, I'm serious.

HOWARD But I thought you were a Freudian?

BLOCK I'm a man, Howard. Utterly different from you. And I've had experiences. Of which you know nothing. This dream is a homosexual revenge fantasy.

HOWARD *(Jumps off the couch)* What!

BLOCK The Roman whom you identify as you is in fact the man who replaced you. Jerry. He is the one who has usurped your Roman identity and towards whom you bear a murderous rage. The Greek, who we know historically was subjugated by the Roman, is seen here in the dominant position. What else are the Greeks known for?

HOWARD Their art.

BLOCK Come on! Christ crucified! In my neighbourhood they used to say, if you drop something, don't bend over to get it if a Greek is around.

HOWARD That's just ignorance.

BLOCK The Greek is standing, *(He kneels before Howard)* the Roman is on his knees, holding a dagger before him. If I looked at this pictures without my glasses on, what do you think I'd see?

HOWARD But I was the Roman!

BLOCK 'Til you were replaced by Jerry.

HOWARD But I was the Roman in the dream!

BLOCK Come on, work for me a little. What is Jerry's last name?

HOWARD I know it's weird, but I can never seem to remember.

BLOCK And yet you must know. Have you spoken to him since then?

HOWARD Oh yes, he calls me fairly often.

BLOCK Why?

HOWARD For advice. On the management of the portfolio.

BLOCK And do you give him good advice?

HOWARD Moderately.

BLOCK What's Jerry's last name?

HOWARD Pulaski. No. Polansky. That's it.

BLOCK Jerry Polansky.

HOWARD Yeah, that's his name. Well, that's a relief.

BLOCK Does it ring a bell? Polansky?

HOWARD No.

BLOCK Can you think of anyone else you know by that name?

HOWARD No.

BLOCK Have you ever heard of anyone else by that name?

HOWARD No. Well. Roman Polanski ... but –

BLOCK Roman. Polanski.

HOWARD Roman Polanski.

BLOCK So, you see your dream is not a noble struggle toward balance and artistry. It is a dream in which Jerry the Roman Polanski is on his knees before you, where you super vise and participate in his sexual humiliation for the purpose of destroying him. Your rival. The man who bested you.

HOWARD I know that's not what the dream is about!

BLOCK They drove Roman Polanski out of the country! Would that satisfy you?

HOWARD Yes! No!

BLOCK Do you feel angry.

HOWARD Yes!

BLOCK Good. I'm glad you know how you feel. If that's not what the dream's about, why couldn't you remember his last name?

HOWARD I don't know!

BLOCK It's the key to the dream. You repressed the name because it was a clue. A clue that identified the Roman in the dream not as you, but as Jerry. And if Jerry is the Roman in your dream, and his murder's being supervised, then who shall we suppose is the supervisor? But you. Revealed not to be a saint, or wise old Aristotle, but a mean-spirited little rat. Fantasizing revenge. To sum up. Listen closely. The dream is a sexually based wish fulfillment.

HOWARD You've attacked my pride, which I feel needs to be attacked, so I'm reluctant to defend myself.

BLOCK How noble of you! And yet we know from your dream that your true face is not so kingly.

HOWARD I admit that your interpretation...

BLOCK Don't waste my time and this session aping the demeanour of a generous man. It's laughable and boring. So I gather that you're feeding this Jerry character bad advice hoping that he will fall on his face? You're not really helping him with these phone calls, am I right?

HOWARD I withhold the best of my analysis.

BLOCK But your tone, I'm sure, is very helpful/

HOWARD Yes.

BLOCK You pretend to be rooting for this... What do you think of him as? A jerk?

HOWARD I just think he's not as sophisticated as I am.

BLOCK Well, who could be? He's a jerk! He's a moron! You wish he was dead! You'd like to kick him in the throat and watch him choke! Wouldn't you?
WOULDN'T YOU?

HOWARD I wouldn't go as far as that.

BLOCK Oh yes you would, Howard, rhymes with Coward, if you thought nobody would know. Wouldn't you love to open the paper and see Jerry's dead body there. Stabbed to death in a cheap hotel by a male hustler let's say?

HOWARD What're you ... if you ...

BLOCK Did you catch that story in the paper by the way? I mean what happened a while ago?

HOWARD What?

BLOCK The male hustler upright businessman cheap motel scenario did play out for some unlucky somebody.

HOWARD I think I did see something about it.

BLOCK Before or after your dream?

HOWARD GO TO HELL!

BLOCK And I'd watch that over-innocent, foolish Jerry if I were you. Those advice-seeking phone calls of his. Sounds to me like he's a bit of a sadist giving you a bit of the knife.

HOWARD What do you mean?

BLOCK Your bad advice doesn't seem to be losing him his job.

HOWARD He doesn't always take it.

BLOCK Well, that must be smart.

HOWARD It's to be expected.

BLOCK Sounds to me like he's your cat and you're his birdy lunch.

HOWARD Maybe there's a bit of that about the calls.

BLOCK So now who referred you to me? (*Looks at notepad*) Oh. Arthur. Arthur. Well, that makes sense.

HOWARD He's getting married.

BLOCK So he says.

HOWARD He's asked me to be his best man.

BLOCK And you agreed of course.

HOWARD I agreed.

BLOCK Even though you're not close enough, truly close enough, to be his best man. But you agreed because you're so hungry for an outward show of the qualities that you do not, in fact, possess.

HOWARD Such as?

BLOCK Can you hear yourself? Your hollow tone of, what, invulnerability.

HOWARD I can hear myself. So what qualities do I not, in fact, possess. Such as?

BLOCK Being a good friend. So I began to tell you how Carl Jung's ghost came to my room. For several months, I had been reading and rereading Jung. I kept feeling that I was getting close, frustratingly close, to understanding the man. But something was missing. A mystery at the core of his being. He kept referring to his experience of the numinous, the holy, but he would never allow me to have that experience. It was an erroneous longing on my part in that sense that, well, get your own! I needed to have my own experience of the Godhead or the living universe, but I wanted Jung's. In a way, he created that desire in me, the way a rock star creates an unquenchable fervour in the breast of his groupie. Jung was a seductor. To be fair, as was Freud. They let you glimpse something golden and wonderful, but there was no way to acquire it for yourself. Neither stuck to the *Ding Han Sich*, the thing in itself. I'm speaking German! I'm getting more Freudian for you!

HOWARD Thank you. Are you a seductor?

BLOCK Quite the contrary. So I'd been reading Jung to the point of saturation, and thrilled by the direction of his mind. Frustrated but thrilled. And I went to bed one night, and I had the dream. I dreamed that Carl Jung and I were supposed to get on this train. And we got on this train. And just as it was leaving, I stepped off. And Jung went choo-choo, away. And then I woke up. I was in a hypnogogic state, that is a state of hypnosis induced by sleep, in which the eyes are open, and the unconscious sees. And I could feel Jung's ghost in the room. Like a heavy, Teutonic uncle. I could feel him. I could feel his presence. And I didn't like it!

HOWARD Why?

BLOCK He felt evil. He felt evil to men.

HOWARD Is this therapy?!

BLOCK Jung described therapy and the interaction of a healthy and an unhealthy spirit.

HOWARD Which one are you?

BLOCK Arthur has a problem. Are you aware of his problem?

HOWARD My God. Dr Block, you're not about to betray Arthur's confidence?! You are a professional, aren't you?!

BLOCK So you do know.

HOWARD Yes.

BLOCK So of course then it's Arthur. Arthur is the excuse you're using to seek out help for yourself.

HOWARD You think that Jung might be evil. Arthur thinks that you might be evil.

BLOCK I have no doubt. Tell me another dream.

HOWARD Are you?

BLOCK I'll leave that to you to decide. Tell me another dream.

HOWARD I dreamed that I was King Lear and that Arthur was The Fool. That's all I remember.

BLOCK *Your* Fool. But you do see how you're up to your old tricks.

HOWARD What do you mean?

BLOCK You switched.

HOWARD What?

BLOCK You switched them again, the characters in your dream. To avoid understanding. Arthur's the King, not you. You're The Fool. His fool. One man's fool is another man's stockbroker.

HOWARD No, I was Arthur, I mean, I was Lear. In the dream.

BLOCK I believe they call that a Freudian slip. So how long have we been at this and we have a wish fulfillment of a sexual nature and a Freudian slip. Are you sure you don't want to start with your childhood, Howard? Never mind. Yes. You are The Fool and Arthur, as we all know, is the King. King Arthur. It's always King Arthur. It's never King Howard. In your relationship with Arthur, it's you perhaps who see the more clearly, but it's Arthur who has the power. It's Arthur who rules. The monarch.

HOWARD But that's not our relationship.

BLOCK No? You think you have the upper hand? Well, of course you believe you have the upper hand. Otherwise, you wouldn't be friends with Arthur. It would be too threatening. But is that the reality? It was Arthur who asked you to come to see me, right?

HOWARD Yes.

BLOCK And you're here. Has your wife ever suggested that you see a psychiatrist?

HOWARD Yes.

BLOCK Did you go?

HOWARD No. I wanted to cure myself.

BLOCK Egomaniac. *(Pause)* But when Arthur asked you to see a psychiatrist, you came.

HOWARD He was asking me as a favour! He was in trouble!

BLOCK You're in trouble!

HOWARD You violate everything I understand to be the therapeutic process, Dr Block!

BLOCK Of course I do, Howard! I'm a quack! I'm a crackpot!

HOWARD You admit it?

BLOCK I'm the only one who can help you, and I don't know if I care to!

HOWARD I'm not here for your help!

BLOCK Oh, I forgot! You're above it all! You understand the value of submitting to therapy *for others*, but you can take care of yourself!

HOWARD If I did want psychiatric help, I would go to somebody reputable!

BLOCK But that's obviously untrue! You have gone to someone, ME, and I'm a quack!

HOWARD You're actually calling yourself a quack?

BLOCK I stole Arthur's socks!

HOWARD You admit it?

BLOCK Yes! I stole his precious socks! I must be a quack! And you, obviously, are on the side of the angels. Arthur's wedding night approaches and his bride-to-be is in the dark about his problem...

HOWARD That's none of your business!

BLOCK And you, ever anxious to prove that you have a heart, that you are a friend, and that you're not impotent *in the world*, are here to save the day! Well, save it!

HOWARD Is there something that I'm missing?

BLOCK There's a lot you're missing. As you've already admitted. The experience of life itself.

HOWARD Oh. Oh. I don't know. I feel disturbed. (*Block opens a drawer and takes out an old pair of argyle socks.*)

BLOCK Here. Boom. Nothing. The socks. (*Howard doesn't take them.*)

HOWARD You'd give them back?

BLOCK Yes.

HOWARD Just like that?

BLOCK Just like that.

HOWARD I won't deny that the things you've said about me contain some elements of truth...

BLOCK I don't care what you'll admit or deny. I have no respect for you. I have no interest in you. Take the socks and go.

HOWARD How did you get your low opinion?

BLOCK You came into my office under false pretenses. You have a man you call a *friend*. He has a severe neurotic symptom. You enjoy an unequal relationship with this man. He appeals to your vanity and you rise to the bait like a self-satisfied, soon-to-be-fried catfish! You want to give a man a crutch so he'll limp forever. I want to kick the crutch away and exhort him to walk! Who is this man's friend? Who is this man's enemy? Do you want the socks or not? (*Howard doesn't reach for them. Block continues to offer. Howard begins to cry.*)

HOWARD No. No. Take them away.

BLOCK Your reasons are still too disgusting! Now you want my approval! It's all about you! You just want to be the best man! You don't give a damn about the bride and groom!

HOWARD I don't know how you've done it, but you've made me feel very ashamed.

BLOCK The shame was there. (*He lowers the socks.*) You've done things for which you should feel shame. And like all people who do mischief, you prefer to do it

in the dark. Where mirrors do not function. Where you're not forced to see the ugliness of your deeds. (*Block puts the socks away.*)

HOWARD I'm sorry.

BLOCK Are you?

HOWARD I am sorry.

BLOCK Don't tell me. Tell Arthur. (*Strikes a gavel.*) End of session!

BLACKOUT

ACT TWO

Scene 1

The sitting room of a Park Avenue apartment done up Texas style. High Texas style, on the order of Giant. There's a gold-framed picture of a young John Wayne. Lucille, in a fabulous wedding dress, is on the phone. She's eating a banana.

LUCILLE Sunflowers! Sunflowers, that will be my bouquet! I will not be contradicted! Daddy, he's not a deadbeat, he's an artist! No, that does not mean vagrant. I don't know if he's any good! I don't know about such things. But he is going to be my husband. That's what you have to deal with. What's Mommy say? Well, you listen to her. I'm wearing it now. It's not bad luck for me to see it! What's she saying? Put her on. Mommy, how do you keep him off the furniture? White. It's white. Pure white. Well, what was I going to do? Put the approximate number of dots on it? I don't know what you'd call the style other than just classic. It's a beautiful dress. Well, I couldn't very well do that, could I? Your dress is fifty years old. It's yellow. It's yellow like an old man's teeth is yellow! *(Knocking comes to the door)* I'm coming, Ellie! *(To phone)* It's Ellie. I gotta go. YOU take care! Get that old crank to take you to the Crescent Court for lunch! Make him buy you a Bloody Mary. You tell him I said! I'll be back on with you tonight. *(A sweet doorbell rings. Lucille opens the door. Ellie is standing there in a blue dress.)* Ellie!

ELLIE Lucille!

LUCILLE On, my people are driving me nuts!

ELLIE Look at you.

LUCILLE I mean, they're happy. Wedding bells. But it's all higgledy piggledy quick.

ELLIE I know. Can we talk about what you're wearing? Is this...

LUCILLE Tra-la-la-la-la.

ELLIE My God! You're in your wedding dress.

LUCILLE Do I look like a big napkin?

ELLIE Is this the actual dress?

LUCILLE This is the very dress. Maybe. If I continue to like it. What do you think?

ELLIE It's fabulous. It's a fabulous dress.

LUCILLE The dressmaker tacked it together for me so I could, you know, make war with myself over it. Do you really think that it's... Do I look like a fool?

ELLIE No. You look like a gift. A wonderful gift.

LUCILLE I was going to go to this place on Madison. Mommy asked her friends in Dallas and said that this Tommy King's on Madison was *the* place for a wedding dress. So I made an appointment and went to Tommy King's. Sit down, you look pale. I show up to the sound of gunfire!

ELLIE Oh God. This was on the radio!

LUCILLE Two local pistoleros held the place up!

ELLIE Wasn't a man shot?

LUCILLE Yes. Want some tea? I have some tea here.

ELLIE Sure.

LUCILLE They shot a bridegroom in the armpit and took a woman in a wedding dress as a hostage! I'm standing... I can't remember this minute, do you take sugar?

ELLIE I will today.

LUCILLE I'm standing on Madison Avenue. Gunshot. Window busts out. I see this maniac holding a thirty-two under the chin of this bride he's dragging into the street.

ELLIE I don't know how much longer I can live in New York.

LUCILLE Dallas isn't any better. They mugged my mother in a parking lot and she knows karate. Anyway, I looked at that hostage and I don't care what they say. I did NOT like the dress.

ELLIE You're too much.

LUCILLE So I found out about this dressmaker, she came to me, and do you really think it's all right?

ELLIE It's great. You look like a swan.

LUCILLE I can't drink any more of this. Tastes like shellac! I know it's wrong, but would you mind if I had a beer?

ELLIE You're safe with me.

LUCILLE You're a doll, baby.

ELLIE I love your makeup!

LUCILLE It's just base! (*She's gotten a beer.*)

ELLIE Then it's your face!

LUCILLE No, it's the base! It's just lots and lots of base! Later I'll sketch in some details.

ELLIE I can't believe you're going to give this place up. It's so you.

LUCILLE That's the urban dance we do. The guy who lived here before me was a painter. Like Arthur. This is northern light. He told me northern light is the best light.

ELLIE Why?

LUCILLE Because it's constant. You can depend on northern light. Other light is fickle.

ELLIE Well, I'm going to jump in. I bring news.

LUCILLE What kind of news?

ELLIE Howard is seeing a psychiatrist!

LUCILLE You mean a head doctor? What for?

ELLIE Well, don't be parochial, Lucille. People do go to psychiatrists. It's not a stigma.

LUCILLE It's not a bonus.

ELLIE It's a common thing.

LUCILLE So's curvature of the spine. Come on, what does Howard need with that? He's home free.

ELLIE Well, it was Arthur. Arthur got him to go.

LUCILLE Arthur? My Arthur?

ELLIE Yes, your Arthur! Arthur got Howard to go to his psychiatrist.

LUCILLE Arthur goes to a psychiatrist?

ELLIE You didn't know that?

LUCILLE No.

ELLIE I was hoping you knew that.

LUCILLE Why would Arthur go to a psychiatrist?

ELLIE Why?

LUCILLE Why?

ELLIE Well, you know, for his problem.

LUCILLE Which problem is that?

ELLIE That he's a... What's the word?

LUCILLE I don't have the word.

ELLIE That he's a fetishist.

LUCILLE What's that?

ELLIE You don't know what a fetishist is?

LUCILLE I guess I sort of do. But I didn't know I was about to marry one.

ELLIE Oh my God. I'm sorry, Lucille.

LUCILLE What's his fetish?

ELLIE Maybe you should talk to Arthur.

LUCILLE WHAT'S HIS FETISH, ELEANOR?

ELLIE Socks.

LUCILLE Thank you. I've known you the better part of eight years, Eleanor. I value our friendship. Socks.

ELLIE I thought you knew.

LUCILLE No, you didn't. But I suppose there's no graceful way into that one.

ELLIE No, there isn't. Listen, everybody has something wrong with them.

LUCILLE Socks.

ELLIE Yeah.

LUCILLE You know, Arthur and I, we've had experiences. I've never seen these socks.

ELLIE I know.

LUCILLE What do you mean, you know? Well, what else do you know? Am I blushing? Goddamn it, I'm blushing!

ELLIE I...

LUCILLE I what? Yes I'm listening.

ELLIE Oh God, Lucille, I'm sorry! I might as well come at this straight! Howard told me this just awful stuff about Arthur! That he's a pervert! That he needs these socks to perform! That he's kept you completely in the dark! Through six years of desperate, dead-end therapy! He still needs these dirty little argyle socks secreted on or about his person or he cannot do the deed! You know I love you, Lucille! Despite my natural competitive ambivalence. You know I want good things for you! Howard and Arthur have been trying to handle this themselves, but we both know that when it comes to matters of the heart, or even more, matters of sex, men are cartoon characters.

LUCILLE Why did Howard tell you? Why didn't Arthur tell me?

ELLIE Shame.

LUCILLE Shame indeed! And fear for his life! Oh God, look at me in this dress! I'm a travesty of myself! What am I going to tell my mother? What am I going to tell my father? What am I going to do? I can't marry him now.

ELLIE I admit it looks problematic.

LUCILLE I can't marry him under these circumstances! The whole thing's purple!

ELLIE We might as well get it all out. The circumstances are worse than you know. Arthur's socks have been stolen and he's no longer a man!

LUCILLE Maybe I'll try the tea again.

ELLIE Arthur's psychiatrist is a nut. He took Arthur's magic creepy socks and he won't give them back. There. That's the news. And that's the problem. If this gets out...

LUCILLE BUT IT'S NOT GOING TO GET OUT!

ELLIE Of course not.

LUCILLE Who knows?

ELLIE Me. The shrink. Howard.

LUCILLE Howard's afraid of you, right?

ELLIE And with good reason.

LUCILLE All right then, first of all. You tell Howard, if he speaks of this, he's dead.

ELLIE Okay. That's fair.

LUCILLE And as for you, Ellie. You know I love you.

ELLIE And I love you, Lucille.

LUCILLE I respect you. I've learned a lot from you. If you ever speak of this, even though it would break my heart, I will rip your throat out.

ELLIE Okay. That is also fair.

LUCILLE I know it's good gossip.

ELLIE The best I ever came across in my life.

LUCILLE But if you succumb to the temptation, I will drive you out of the universe.

ELLIE Okay, I understand.

LUCILLE I had to choose an artist.

ELLIE He's good looking. He's straight. Sort of straight.

LUCILLE He's about as straight as the number eight. How could I get taken in like this?

ELLIE You really didn't know at all?

LUCILLE We talk about what we read in the magazines, the ins and outs among our friends. Do I seem savvy to you?

ELLIE Savvy. Texas savvy. But very savvy.

LUCILLE I always thought I was a good study. When it came to human nature. Who's in the photograph. Who sits with who. Who's a social climber. I can look at a woman's shoes and know if she's a hypocrite. I believe I can.

ELLIE I know you can.

LUCILLE Arthur doesn't know any of this stuff. Ellie, how did he take me in?

ELLIE I don't know. Women get fooled.

LUCILLE I feel like my cake just fell.

ELLIE You're still the greatest.

LUCILLE No, you pity me now. I'm one of those women with one of those men.

ELLIE Oh, I can't stand to see you this way.

LUCILLE I'm gonna be pathetic. I might as well move to Texarkana and become a Baptist.

ELLIE Now come on, get a hold of yourself.

LUCILLE That's easy for you to say. You've got Howard.

ELLIE Well, yes I do.

LUCILLE You're set up like a queen in her cake shop with her king on the throne.

ELLIE I have my problems.

LUCILLE Come on, you've told me about your life. It's good.

ELLIE I have my problems. But problems can be solved. You have Arthur. I have Howard.

LUCILLE So?

ELLIE Do you recall that cruise Howard and I took?

LUCILLE The cruise? The fabulous cruise?

ELLIE Of course I told you it was fabulous, but, no, it was not fabulous.

LUCILLE It wasn't.

ELLIE No, it was horrible.

LUCILLE But you told me ...

ELLIE Yes, I told you it was wonderful, **BUT I WAS LYING**. Isn't that the point? We all want to look good. As you just demonstrated, now woman worth knowing wants her significant man perceived as a calamity. I have to appear to have the winning hand or how can I socialize? But you can't build a life on just appearance. Howard had a nervous breakdown.

LUCILLE He did not!

ELLIE Lucille, like a house of cards. He started raving, writing these crazy notes, breaking down sobbing on the Stairmaster. I mean, three months of ... hell.

LUCILLE You mean both our men are crazy?

ELLIE No. I mean both our men are **MEN**. This fetish thing is not the worst thing and it's not going to be the last thing. Men unravel ever further. Howard's histrionics on the high seas were just the first stop on a downward spiral. Howard found these psychological books and started talking this mythical stuff and just everything was a myth! He went to the dentist, it was a myth. Two guys started a deli, they were Romulus and Remus. He consulted the cabala. He read a passage for the Book of Genesis at our co-op meeting. Howard went to his company, tried to get

his job back. No soap. That night he called the Psychic Hotline and tried to find the Future I guess. Ran up quite a bill. MEANWHILE. We were the first ten steps down the road to destitution.

LUCILLE So. You're broke and I'm a fool.

ELLIE I'm not broke.

LUCILLE You've got private money?

ELLIE I've got potash.

LUCILLE Pot what?

ELLIE Potash. I had a problem. I found a solution. Potash. It's a natural resource. A fertilizer for fruit. You can invest in it. I did. I invested in some other things as well. Howard reads his books, and I took over the management of our assets. Turns out I have a knack for commodities.

LUCILLE Here all this time I thought Howard was supporting you.

ELLIE We'd be in the street. (*Looks at the Wayne portrait.*) John Wayne.

LUCILLE Did you think about leaving him?

ELLIE Howard? Never! Yes. But I decided that I would be just as wrong about the next man I married, so I might as well continue down my own boulevard of surprises. I think we're in the middle of finding a kind of happiness. And you can find happiness, too, Lucille. That's what I'm telling you. That's my point. You can forge happiness with almost anybody. It's just a long-term kind of excavating pet project. Did you hang this picture of John Wayne?

LUCILLE Would a decorator do that? Of course I hung it. Ellie, what am I gonna do?

ELLIE You have a problem. There's a solution. You're going marry Arthur.

LUCILLE I can't marry Arthur.

ELLIE Yes, you can!

LUCILLE Oh, the whole thing's tainted now! What's the point of a wedding if it's not perfect? Here's my father against Arthur anyway, and how am I gonna look him in the eye with conviction and say Nay?! My mother's just gonna eat lemons over this. I have a sister in Michigan who'll be pleased. Damn it! Damn it! I want a big, strong, confident, take-charge man!

ELLIE You want John Wayne.

LUCILLE I don't know. I'd take John Wayne, I'll tell you that.

ELLIE But you didn't choose John Wayne. You chose Arthur. You chose an obscure, penniless painter who's kind of difficult to read.

LUCILLE He conned me into thinking he was somebody else!

ELLIE But the point you made before was true, Lucille. You're not naïve. You're savvy.

LUCILLE Oh, don't repeat me back to me.

ELLIE You must've known what he was.

LUCILLE Did you know what Howard was?

ELLIE I still don't know what Arthur is. I only know the dance we do. But I chose him! I certainly did! And you chose Arthur!

LUCILLE But why? Why would I do a thing like that? I'm not one of these New York girls. I like to be happy! (*As if she heard somebody say it.*) And I'm not my mother, either!

ELLIE I didn't say you were

LUCILLE Well, forget it 'cause I'm nothing like her. And Arthur is nothing like my father! I will not have another madman for the next chapter of my life! If my mother had been raised like I was raised, among good healthy fun-loving, hard-working people, instead of that House of Usher she escaped in Indiana, she never woulda married a maniac like my father!

ELLIE But your father's done very well.

LUCILLE At the expense of practically everybody in the western world.

ELLIE And your mother's still married to him.

LUCILLE Well, they worked it out. Finally.

ELLIE *Exactement.*

LUCILLE He should kneel down and thank God for her.

ELLIE Maybe he does.

LUCILLE It's unlikely. It'd make him even shorter.

ELLIE You've got to think of this as an opportunity.

LUCILLE An opportunity to what?

ELLIE Do you have an open mind?

LUCILLE It's open. But it ain't off the hinge.

ELLIE Listen to me, Lucille. You can make this work.

LUCILLE I should've married that osteopath Daddy hated.

ELLIE Listen. I don't think you want to marry John Wayne, Lucille. I think you want to *be* John Wayne.

LUCILLE Huh?

ELLIE I mean, if I had to choose, cast, from the casting pool of you and Arthur, the role of John Wayne, that's you! You've got the part! Arthur's like, I don't know, Walter Brennan, Gabby Hayes, but no way is he the Duke! That's you! No! You know who Arthur is? Maureen O'Hara! Maureen O'Hara in *The Quiet Man*. Perfect!

LUCILLE Arthur is Maureen O'Hara?

ELLIE That's right. He set up a situation. He's in a jam! You can't consummate your marriage. Don't you get it? *You're* supposed to save Arthur! He's waiting to see. You're not supposed to stay home and blow your nose and wait for news. This bizarre evil psychiatrist character has stolen Arthur's socks. I mean, the set-up is there! Arthur is testing you! Or probably better yet, Arthur is fulfilling your prophecy, the reason that you chose Arthur! You're too strong, Lucille! You're too gorgeous and too strong and too smart to stay home while somebody else goes out and kicks down the door between you and a vigorous marriage!

LUCILLE Arthur is Maureen O'Hara?

ELLIE Think of it this way. If you already knew what your marriage to Arthur will be, you might as well not marry him! It's boring to know! So you're getting pushed into this situation from a funny angle. That's interesting! Maybe your husband-to-be is a sexual deviant. So what? What's the harm?

LUCILLE But you're telling me Arthur's impotent.

ELLIE Well, you're going to have to get those socks back. That goes without saying. It falls to you. Arthur tried to get 'em. Howard tried to get 'em. I'd go, but who the hell am I?

LUCILLE The Thing that spooks me to the bone is who the hell is Arthur? He's a different man than I thought he was!

ELLIE He is different, but so what?

LUCILLE I thought I knew what story I was in, but if this is the story, I don't know it. And I don't know how it turns out.

ELLIE So that means it's a real story. Not just one you're telling. It's one that's being told from out there to you, and you're hearing it for the first time. (*The intercom buzzer rings.*)

LUCILLE Who's that? Oh, it's the dressmaker. She's Norwegian. (*Answers the intercom.*) *Ga donka day.* Hi. Come on up. (*Hangs up, says to Ellie.*) It's Arthur! He's coming up!

ELLIE Should I go? I should go.

LUCILLE Help me out of this dress! It's bad luck! (*Ellie helps Lucille, who's wearing a strapless white bodysuit underneath*)

ELLIE Did you know he was coming?

LUCILLE No.

ELLIE Is there a back door to this place by any chance?

LUCILLE No, and it's too far to jump. I'm afraid you're trapped in the bottle with the bee. (*A knock comes at the door.*) Coming! Stow it in the closet, would you?

ELLIE My God. I wish I had your figure!

LUCILLE I like it. Where's that beer? (*Takes a slug, puts it down.*) Fortified. Come in, Arthur, the door's open. (*Arthur enters. He's wearing mildly paint-spotted clothes and a leather jacket over them. He's in an emotional state.*)

ARTHUR Lucille! I've got to talk to you. What are you wearing?

LUCILLE I'm Victoria's Secret. Peek-a-boo!

ARTHUR Yes. Lucille, I've got to talk to you. You're not alone. Hello, Ellie.

ELLIE Hello, Arthur.

LUCILLE Excuse my appearance. I had my wedding gown on. It's supposed to be bad luck... (*But she stops speaking.*)

ELLIE Should I leave? I could leave. I'll leave.

ARTHUR No. Stay. Maybe it's better this way. All my life ... (*He suppresses a sob.*)

LUCILLE Ellie, maybe you should got.

ARTHUR No. Stay. All my life I've been a secretive person, Lucille, and I guess I've got to change.

LUCILLE Arthur.

ARTHUR I'm weak. I've hidden things from you. I can't believe you'd love me if you knew.

LUCILLE Arthur.

ARTHUR I didn't trust you or anybody. Now my secrets have fallen into the wrong hands and I may be destroyed.

LUCILLE Arthur, stop.

ARTHUR Please don't stop me! You don't know what it's like to be me. Nobody knows what it's like. But that's my fault. There's other things that I had no control over, but I could've been more honest at least. Taken the chance. And that's what I'm going to do. Now. Lucille, I'm a –

LUCILLE I know.

ARTHUR What?

LUCILLE I know. Howard told Ellie and Ellie told me.

ELLIE Sorry.

ARTHUR I don't even want you to look at me! Don't look at me. What must you think of me? What must you...

LUCILLE It's not so bad.

ARTHUR I lied. I lied to you. And I can't make love anymore. I can't stand being seen like this!

LUCILLE It's okay.

ARTHUR How can it be okay?

LUCILLE It has to be okay, doesn't it?

ARTHUR How can that be?

LUCILLE That's the way it is.

ARTHUR If you can know everything about me, and love me, then I'm saved.

LUCILLE We'll see about that. First things first. What's the name of this psychiatrist?

ARTHUR Dr Block

LUCILLE You want me to go to him for you, don't you?

ARTHUR I would never ask you to, but would you?

LUCILLE I'll go.

ARTHUR Are you sure?

LUCILLE Yes, but I feel like I don't know you now.

ARTHUR The real truth though is that you didn't know me before. I'm sorry I deceived you. Habit of a lifetime. I'm sorry. (*Kneels down.*) And I beg your forgiveness. Forgive me. Forgive me.

ELLIE Lucy.

LUCILLE You give me too much power.

ARTHUR No. You have this power. Please. Forgive me.

ELLIE Southern light's the best light, Lucy. Everybody knows that. Northern light is steady. Southern light changes all the time, but everybody wants their light from the South.

LUCILLE I forgive you, Arthur.

ELLIE Lucy. Yes.

LUCILLE Stand up, be a man, and I'll love you.

ARTHUR I don't know if I can.

LUCILLE Yes you can. (*Kisses him heartily. Finishes. Wipes away the kiss.*) All right! Yes. Well! And now for Dr Block.

BLACKOUT

Scene 2

Dr Block's office. The same as before, except now there's a vase of sunflowers. Dr Block is on the phone.

BLOCK All the Greek Islands. Oh, I'll go for the suite. With a nice window. Two. Leeward side of the ship. Good. (*A knock on the door.*) Hold on. (*Calls*) Come in. (*Back to the phone*) Peter says what? (*Lucille comes in. She's wearing a lovely suit. Block waves to her pleasantly and wraps up his call.*) That's fine. I'll walk the deposit over to you later. Thanks, Jeff. Thank you. (*He hangs up the phone.*)

LUCILLE Dr Block?

BLOCK Lucille? Your picture doesn't do you justice. Call me Henry.

LUCILLE I prefer to call you Doctor, thanks.

BLOCK As you please. Make yourself comfortable.

LUCILLE Those flowers.

BLOCK Sunflowers. Your favourite, right?

LUCILLE I forget. You know a lot about me.

BLOCK Well, you've been filled in about me, too, right?

LUCILLE Right.

BLOCK But did you know I'm the founder of the Psychiatric Syndicalist Movement?

LUCILLE No, I didn't.

BLOCK I should add that I'm the founder and the only member.

LUCILLE How much do you charge?

BLOCK The philosophy of the Movement is, when it comes to the patient, all the force necessary.

LUCILLE What made you start a movement with no one in it but you?

BLOCK Psychiatric Sydicalism would be a disaster if it was actually practiced for any length of time by anybody. It presumes a ruthless certainty that I know something and you don't. It's a kind of emotional fascism. I only cooked it up for Arthur.

LUCILLE For my Arthur?

BLOCK Let's say eighty dollars for the session. *(She immediately holds out a bill.)*

LUCILLE Cheap! Well, you get what you pay for. Can you break a hundred? *(He takes the bill.)*

BLOCK I see that you're trying to set a certain tone. *(He gets a twenty out of his wallet and hands it over.)*

LUCILLE Where I come from we pay our bills. *(She sits.)*

BLOCK Arthur suffers from a horrible paternalistic scar. As do many men, in different ways.

LUCILLE He showed you my picture?

BLOCK Oh yes.

LUCILLE What did you think?

BLOCK I thought, you're a beautiful woman.

LUCILLE You're damn right I am. But that's not all I am. He mentioned I liked sunflowers?

BLOCK Yes.

LUCILLE Mentioning's one thing, you going out and buying a bunch is another. It's not very doctorly.

BLOCK That's true.

LUCILLE Maybe I shouldn't have come.

BLOCK Oh, you had to come!

LUCILLE It couldn't be that you've set your cap for me?

BLOCK In a way. *(She stands.)* Sit down. I said, sit down! *(She continues to stand.)*

LUCILLE I don't care what you said.

BLOCK You know Arthur's friend Howard?

LUCILLE You know I do.

BLOCK It's an unequal friendship where Arthur was held down by Howard. Howard wanted to lord it over somebody, some MAN, to assuage his own damaged self-esteem. Arthur willingly was that man. This is what men do to each other. It makes me sick.

LUCILLE Me, too. *(She sits.)*

BLOCK First Arthur's father usurped his manhood, then other men who fit the bill filled the role. Arthur's only known competition and cruelty from men, and yet he needs to be a man and to be sexually competent.

LUCILLE That is the pickle.

BLOCK I can give you back the socks, but...

LUCILLE I want the socks.

BLOCK But it won't exactly solve the problem.

LUCILLE I'm not leaving here without the socks.

BLOCK So you heard about how I held the socks out to Howard and convinced him not to take them out of my hand?

LUCILLE Yes. (*Block laughs.*)

BLOCK That was good!

LUCILLE Was it?

BLOCK But! The fix was in. I knew Howard didn't really want to help Arthur. Howard doesn't really want to help any man. But you, Lucille, you're different.

LUCILLE You're not going to snow me, Doctor.

BLOCK You see the only hope for most men is women. The feminine antidote. That's why I'm quitting the business.

LUCILLE Why don't you just give them to me?

BLOCK Patience! I've had to be patient! Six years I've been trying to cure Arthur of a simple fetish, and I haven't been able to do it. Six years! Seven hundred and ninety-seven fruitless sessions. So finally, I started my movement, my resolve to violate my own ethics. I conned Arthur into bringing in the socks, and I stole them! I JUST COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO LET HIM GO AND GET MARRIED WITH THOSE SOCKS! Call me unethical, unscrupulous, a crackpot! Whatever you call me, I've called myself worse! My only defence is I swore I'd quit the business if I could cure this one man. And I can cure him! I will cure him! But of course I can't cure him. Alone.

LUCILLE Well, you are a piece of work, aren't you?

BLOCK I am driven by obscure propulsions of my own, my dear. Arthur was driven to Art. This is my Art. Arthur is my subject, and I must get him right! And I can! But only through you.

LUCILLE What's your point?

BLOCK You are beautiful. I am charmed. Arthur is fortunate.

LUCILLE Thank you. What's your point, Dr Block?

BLOCK What's your relationship with you mother and father?

LUCILLE It'll do.

BLOCK You don't care to talk about it?

LUCILLE I'm not going to talk about it! I'm not going to vary from my purpose here. You know what I think? I think that Arthur beat you at your own game. I think anybody takes this job you've got likes to sit behind the glass and feel smug.

Something in Arthur beat you four-square and completely. Six years of trying and you came up empty and you can't live with it! So now you've broken your own rules and reached across the legal line and snatched his socks! He sees that as you having the strength, but I see it for what it is. Defeat. He has defeated you. So now you're trying one last gambit, somehow, through me, to ace him. Well, good luck!

BLOCK I never get people like you in my office.

LUCILLE No surprise there.

BLOCK Not that I shouldn't.

LUCILLE You're pitiful. You're like an old dog don't wanna get off the foot of the bed. You oughta get out more.

BLOCK I intend to.

LUCILLE Don't wait too long. Give me the socks, Block.

BLOCK You don't like me?

LUCILLE No.

BLOCK You don't like my company?

LUCILLE You're not company. I don't pay for company. And if I did pay for company, you ain't it.

BLOCK What don't you like about me?

LUCILLE You're boring.

BLOCK You're seeing me within a certain context.

LUCILLE I see you fine. You're a gold-plated snooze.

BLOCK Heard it all before, seen it all before, eh?

LUCILLE No sir. I wouldn't do this twice.

BLOCK You are beautiful.

LUCILLE More beautiful than you'll ever know, Frankenstein. You can kiss my foot.

BLOCK How can you say that? You don't even know me.

LUCILLE I'm a witch. *(Smiles)* You're a certain brand of ballbreaker and a very particular kind of lech. I have a sister in Michigan who might fall for our jabber, but eve she probably couldn't get past your mediocre looks. If you want to street fight with me, baby, you'd better get yourself a knife. Now I suggest, before I say

something that sticks in you bile duct for the rest of your life, you surrender the footwear!

BLOCK A fabulous macho display.

LUCILLE You should see me sit a horse.

BLOCK I'm sure you would dominate.

LUCILLE You think there's something wrong with me?

BLOCK Yes.

LUCILLE You say what it is.

BLOCK All right, I will. Where is the yielding side of you, Lucille?

LUCILLE In my closet. With many pairs of shoes.

BLOCK Where's the softness, the silence? Where is a man to lay his head with you stomping around like the world was your bunkhouse and you were a spur-jangling buckaroo? You took after your father. You took after him a long time ago, but you'll never catch him. The degree to which you succeed in being your father is that exact degree to which you shall fail in your womanhood.

LUCILLE Are you saying I'm not a woman?

BLOCK You've got a ways to go.

LUCILLE Why you... You are not a gentleman!

BLOCK But enough. I didn't bring you here for treatment. The curtain rises. Lucille, do you want to run off with me, take a cruise to Greece? The islands are beautiful I hear.

LUCILLE Are you serious?

BLOCK Yes..

LUCILLE Are you crazy?

BLOCK Probably. But I'm getting out of the racket. I can do what I want. What's your answer?

LUCILLE No!

BLOCK Please reconsider!

LUCILLE No!

BLOCK You're sure? This is a real offer now.

LUCILLE Yes, I'm sure! Have you been dippin' into the pharmaceuticals there, Henry?

BLOCK Now stop! Very good! This was a scene and the scene is over. The curtain falls.

LUCILLE Don't touch me!

BLOCK Be quiet! I have not the slightest biological interest in you. Attend me. Your happiness and a man's true health are in the balance. Do what I tell you. Tell Arthur I bought you the sunflowers, commented on your beauty. Tell Arthur I asked you to run away with me. But you never wavered.

LUCILLE You mean? What do you mean?

BLOCK Even if I had succeeded in curing this man of his fetish, he still would've been in the power of a man. That was my dilemma right along. He still would've owed his manhood to a man. His problem would've remained, at root, the same. No. His salvation is a woman. You.

LUCILLE Forgive Salvation for being slow, but am I to pull together from this that you are a good guy?

BLOCK That's right. I am a good guy.

LUCILLE That sticks in my craw.

BLOCK You marry. My prediction: Six months, his need for the fetish dissolves. Here are the socks. Have a wonderful honeymoon.

LUCILLE IF I marry. Keep the gall-blamed socks, I'll be damned.

BLOCK What do you mean, IF you marry. You've got to marry him. What's your reservation?

LUCILLE You.

BLOCK Me? What do I have to do with it?

LUCILLE I don't wanna do a damn thing you want me to do.

BLOCK Why not?

LUCILLE You're impolite.

BLOCK You're not serious.

LUCILLE Why should I please you after you bad-mouthed me?

BLOCK Because I'm right.

LUCILLE That answer lacks charm. You have mortally insulted my femininity and I am not going to do anything you want, INCLUDING MARRYING ARTHUR, until you mend that fence.

BLOCK What do you mean? An apology?

LUCILLE You're gonna have to do better than that. I am beautiful, I am charming, Arthur is fortunate. Make me believe it!

BLOCK What do you want me to say?

LUCILLE I don't know. You broke it, you fix it.

BLOCK You mean speak in a complimentary way about your...

LUCILLE With conviction.

BLOCK What if I don't have conviction?

LUCILLE You've got it.

BLOCK So you feel certain I have some actual...

LUCILLE That's right, Egghead. Admit it! Your body temperature's been all over Laredo since my perfume took over this room! Just 'cause I stomp around a little bit don't mean I ain't a dewy little thing. Do you feel me in this room or not?

BLOCK Yes, but...

LUCILLE Then say something to pluff me up to where I was when I walked into this office, or the wedding is off.

BLOCK All right. You look good.

LUCILLE People say that about the dead.

BLOCK You have a nice forehead.

LUCILLE Shakespeare can sleep tonight.

BLOCK All right. I wish I could kiss you.

LUCILLE That's better. But you can't!

BLOCK I have no desire to!

LUCILLE Strike two!

BLOCK You're oxymoronic!

LUCILLE But I'm supposed to be IRRESISTIBLE! Now maybe these men patients you get need to be abused, but I am a woman AND BY GOD I NEED AFFIRMATION!

BLOCK Very well. You're a charismatic, deeply fetching woman. Every minute with you is poignant torture because I am racked with jealousy that Arthur gets you and I don't.

LUCILLE Much better.

BLOCK I feel like you've taken my senses to the rodeo.

LUCILLE Okay, I'm satisfied.

BLOCK I feel roped and thrown and unable to free my horns from the grip of attraction.

LUCILLE I believe you.

BLOCK I wish I'd met you in some other world, unfettered by obligation and history.

LUCILLE The curtain falls.

BLOCK And I must once, to honour and acknowledge something in myself, hold you in my arms and blow on your hair! *(Block picks her up and blows on her hair. Lucille reacts to this by yelling.)*

LUCILLE Help! *(The door flies open. It's Arthur and Howard.)*

ARTHUR LUCY!

LUCILLE ARTHUR!

HOWARD BLOCK!

ARTHUR I knew it. Put her down! *(Block drops Lucille on the couch.)*

BLOCK I can explain!

HOWARD Oh no you don't! No more talking!

ARTHUR Are you all right?

LUCILLE Yes, Arthur. You saved me!

ARTHUR I guess I did.

BLOCK I can explain.

HOWARD None of your tricks, Svengali!

ARTHUR GIVE ME THOSE SOCKS!

BLOCK Very well. *(Block hands the socks to Arthur. Arthur hands them to Lucille.)*

ARTHUR Hold these for me, will you?

LUCILLE Sure thing, sweetie.

ARTHUR Don't you ever take anybody's socks again.

HOWARD And I was the Roman in the dream! *(Arthur is locked in a loving gaze with Lucille.)*

ARTHUR I didn't want you alone with him.

LUCILLE Why not?

ARTHUR Because I love you! *(They kiss.)*

LUCILLE Arthur?

ARTHUR Yeah?

LUCILLE I am fortunate.

ARTHUR Six years. Come on. Let's get out of here.

HOWARD That's fine with me. This place gives me the willies.

BLOCK Wait! I want to explain.

LUCILLE Make it quick.

BLOCK All right, I will. I'm a man.

LUCILLE Word of advice. Don't try to hide behind your penis. It won't provide enough cover. *(Now she addresses Arthur and Howard)* Come on, boys! I'm getting married! Here comes the Bride! *(They go. The Wedding March begins to play. Block gets up and dusts himself off.)*

BLOCK Seven hundred and ninety-seven sessions. Case closed. *(Distant bells are heard.)* Ahh. Wedding bells. That old familiar theme. Man and woman. The archetypal picture. Society refrains from the ordinary and returns to the grand ritual.

LUCILLE'S VOICE Ellie! Ellie! *(Block disappears. Arthur and Howard float into view in silhouette, dressing and singing.)*

ARTHUR & HOWARD Buffalo gal won't you come out tonight?

Won't you come out tonight?
Won't you come out tonight?
Buffalo gal won't you come out tonight,
And dance by the silvery moon?

(They disappear.)

ELLIE *(Entering)* I have the bouquet! I have the bouquet! I am the maid of honour and I have the bouquet! *(Lucille enters.)* Sunflowers. In the best sense of the word, you look perfect.

ARTHUR *(Entering in a tuxedo)* Lucille! Did you get the socks?

LUCILLE I've got 'em, baby!

ARTHUR Saved by the Texas belle! Where's my best man? *(Howard enters, also in a tux.)*

HOWARD Right here! This is intimacy. We are friends, aren't we?

ARTHUR Sure we are. You got the ring?

HOWARD Got it! *(Block, who has become the minister, enters.)*

BLOCK We are gathered together...

LUCILLE We certainly are.

ELLIE God, you're beautiful.

BLOCK To celebrate the holy sacrament of matrimony ...

ARTHUR Lucy, the socks?

BLOCK Will you take this woman?

ARTHUR Yes.

BLOCK Will you take this man?

LUCILLE Yes.

ARTHUR Lucy, the socks?

LUCILLE What will you give me for them?

ARTHUR Howard, the ring! *(Howard gives him the ring.)*

HOWARD Presto!

ARTHUR I'll give you this ring.

LUCILLE It's a deal! *(She hands him the socks. He stuffs them in his pocket and places the ring on her finger.)*

ARTHUR With this ring...

LUCILLE & ARTHUR I thee wed.

BLOCK And so I officiate
And bring to conclusion
This tale of love
And a lover's delusion.

But I ask you to note
As you laugh and dismiss
The terms of this fellow's
Relation to bliss.

We all of us need
Some yeast in the bread
To link up the heart
And the soul and the head.

So forgive him
His foolish fantastic connection
It's a roundabout road
'Tween sex and affection!

ALL Amen. *(The music swells.)*

THE END