

ARIA

By

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SET

A single unit set, with areas suggesting an alley behind an opera house; a large, cluttered artist's studio; an elegant apartment; a park area and a stage.

TIME

The Present

CHARACTERS

FERGUS McMANNUS.....sensitive, arty-looking man, late 30s

CHELSEA RHINEHART....plain looking, quick witted woman, 20s

JAMES.....Femine, Gay man, in good physical shape, 40s

HANK.....Macho man, good physical shape, 30s

SAM.....Elegant, Somewhat masculine woman, 30s

SCENE 1

SETTING: An alley behind the rehearsal hall of an opera house. There's a dumpster, trash and the mess usually found in such places.

Libiamo, ne'lieti calici from La Traviata is heard, sung by a tenor and soprano accompanied on the piano. Fergus McManus, a man in his 30s, is sitting in the entranceway to an alley with his back against the wall of a building. Dressed in a T-shirt and blue jeans, splattered with paint, he drinks the final sips from a plastic Coca-Cola container and closes his eyes, smiling, lost in the music. A very loud fire engine goes screaming by. Fergus is oblivious to it.

As the music ends, Chelsea enters, carrying long-stemmed roses wrapped in paper. She's in her 20s and looks very innocent. She is not a pretty woman and wears unstylish clothes. She is startled and a little frightened seeing Fergus leaning against the wall. But there is something about him, probably the contented look, that makes her sympathetic to him. Tentatively and with distaste, she drops a few coins in the cup. Fergus' eyes spring open at the sound of the coins. He sees Chelsea rushing off.

FERGUS

(hearing the coins)
Wait!

She hurries away.

FERGUS (CONT'D)

Stop, I said.

He rushes after her.

FERGUS (CONT'D)

Goddamn it, will you stop?

She stops, turns.

CHELSEA

What do you want?

He advances on her

FERGUS

I'm not going to take this from you.

CHELSEA

Stay back.

FERGUS

Someone's got to teach you a lesson.

CHELSEA

Back, I said. This is Mace and I know how to use it.

She whips out a canister from her handbag, but loses her grip. The canister drops between them. Fergus picks it up.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

No.

FERGUS

You've got to learn that everyone sitting on the sidewalk is not a bum or someone to be feared. Even if his eyes are closed and there's a plastic cup next to him.

He hands her the canister and the coins she had dropped into the cup. A fire siren is heard. She tenses,

CHELSEA

You aren't a street person?

FERGUS

I'm a pedestrian, so I guess you could say I'm a street person. But I don't sleep on the street, if that's what you mean.

CHELSEA

With all the bums in this city, it's a natural mistake to make. Maybe I owe you an apology.

FERGUS

Maybe you owe all street people an apology.

CHELSEA

I really am sorry. And embarrassed.

FERGUS

We accept your apology. You've just moved to New York?

CHELSEA

How can you tell?

FERGUS

You seem a bit nervous.

CHELSEA

I'm ultra-sensitive to loud noises. I grew up in Columbus, Ohio. There aren't any loud noises in Columbus, Ohio.

A fire engine goes screaming by.

FERGUS

What's wrong?

CHELSEA

That fire engine.

FERGUS

What fire engine?

CHELSEA

(shaking her head in disbelief)

What music were you listening to?

FERGUS

Verde. Over there. From the rehearsal hall. Do you like opera?

CHELSEA

If you like opera so much, why don't you buy a ticket and listen inside instead of sitting in this awful alley?

FERGUS

Awful alley? This isn't an alley. It's a concert hall, with the most beautiful music in the world. Look around you. Don't you see the red velvet, the brass rails, gold gilt?

CHELSEA

I see a dumpster. And some broken-up boxes.

FERGUS

When the music begins, you'll see what I mean.

(becoming interested in her)

Do you like Italian food?

CHELSEA

Yes.

FERGUS

Do you like anchovies?

CHELSEA

Does your wife like opera?

FERGUS

Two types of people in the world -- anchovy lovers and anchovy haters? What are you?

CHELSEA

I love anchovies.

FERGUS

That's wonderful. People who hate garlic and anchovies are very difficult to engage, certainly impossible to eat dinner with.

CHELSEA

Does your wife like anchovies?

FERGUS

I'm not married. Never have been.

CHELSEA

A-ha.

FERGUS

Are you married?

CHELSEA

You live alone?

FERGUS

I share a studio with another guy.

CHELSEA

A-ha. I assume you live in Greenwich Village.

FERGUS

I used to.

CHELSEA

A-ha.

FERGUS

What's with all these a-ha's?

CHELSEA

People from Columbus aren't as provincial as you New Yorkers think we are. We know about these things.

FERGUS

Who are the flowers for?

CHELSEA

A friend.

FERGUS

A tall man, I wager, with a rich beard.

CHELSEA

My friend isn't much taller than I am. And Sam doesn't have a beard.

FERGUS

I guess I was wrong on that one.

CHELSEA

Yes, you were wrong on that one.

FERGUS

I bet you're a fashion designer.

CHELSEA

I'm practically the opposite of a fashion designer.

FERGUS

Sumo wrestler? I'll be serious. Let's see. What other clues are there? Well manicured fingernails. Perky smile. Outgoing personality. Questioning mind. Supremely confident. Welcoming demeanor. You're a concierge in a Four Season's Hotel.

CHELSEA

I'm a reporter.
(with pride)
For the New York Times.

FERGUS

I thought you were a girl from Columbus, Ohio.

CHELSEA

A woman from Columbus, Ohio. And a very talented journalist.

FERGUS

You must be a very talented journalist to get on the New York Times.

CHELSEA

It was just a coincidence that my uncle is managing editor of the Times.

FERGUS

He is?

CHELSEA

Actually only one of the two things I just said is true. My uncle is superintendent of schools in Columbus, Ohio.

FERGUS

A dry sense of humor. I like that. I bet you're a fashion reporter.

CHELSEA

I'm a feature writer. I write about New Yorkers. I write about the rich, the famous, the powerful.

(OOPS: Chuck Golly is running for president even though his mother, the former First Lady, thinks he is incompetent and would be a disaster as the commander in chief.

She remains silent until it looks like he will win and intends to use nuclear weapons in negotiating with terrorist regimes. him speculatively)

And the odd.

FERGUS

What are you writing about today.

CHELSEA
The rally.

FERGUS
What rally?

CHELSEA
For gay marriage. Surely you've heard about it.

FERGUS
I guess I missed it.

CHELSEA
It happens tomorrow.

FERGUS
Oh. Where?

CHELSEA
Love Park.

FERGUS
You think gays should be allowed to get married?

CHELSEA
You can't ask me that.

FERGUS
Why not?

CHELSEA
Because I'm a reporter, covering this story.

FERGUS
So?

CHELSEA
Reporters don't have opinions about the stories they're covering. We're objective,

FERGUS
What's your opinion as a human being?

CHELSEA
Why are you asking me this?

FERGUS

I'm trying to get to know you better.

CHELSEA

I just dropped some coins in your cup. I wasn't looking for a long-term relationship.

FERGUS

I wasn't proposing marriage. As a human being. How do you feel about this thing?

CHELSEA

It's not a thing. It's a vital issue to thousands, maybe millions of people. And as a human being I think it's a disgrace that gays in this country are denied the rights every heterosexual has. And you should be out there protesting with all the other people. It's your responsibility. As a human being.

Police car siren is heard. Chelsea tenses. Fergus has no reaction.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

You didn't hear that?

FERGUS

Hear what?

She shakes her head, dismayed by the filters New Yorkers have.

CHELSEA

I've got to go.

The sound of the rehearsal starting up again is heard.

FERGUS

It's beginning again. Can you see the gold brocade curtain rising? Alfredo is taking Violeta in his arms. She's dying.

(translating aria)

From Paris, my love, we shall go. Just us two. We shall spend the rest of our lives together.

(speaking for himself)

He knows she's dying and still he tries to give her hope. Didn't I tell you the alley would disappear?

CHELSEA

It's still a brick wall.

FERGUS

Do you always see things in such black and white terms?

CHELSEA

It has nothing to do with black and white. It has to do with brick and mortar. That is a brick wall.

FERGUS

You are a realist.

CHELSEA

There's something wrong with being a realist?

FERGUS

Not if it makes you happy. Does it make you happy?

CHELSEA

Reality sucks. Don't you read the newspapers? But you can't find happiness in a fantasy world.

FERGUS

Why not?

CHELSEA

That's a stupid question.
(looking at her watch)
I really have to go.

FERGUS

What's your name? So I can look for it in the newspaper.

CHELSEA

What's your name?

FERGUS

Fergus. Fergus McManus.

CHELSEA

(thinking he could be the subject for a story)
You come here every day?

FERGUS

If they're rehearsing and it's not raining.

CHELSEA

So long, Fergus McManus, nice talking to you.

Chelsea exits.

FERGUS

Yeah, me, too. Nice talking to you. Hey, you didn't tell me your name.

(calling out)

Lady, what's your name?

Fergus settles, lost in the music.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 2

Sam's loft a bit later. It's dimly lit by candles that illuminate a small table with an ice bucket and two champagne glasses. Chelsea enters.

CHELSEA

I have arrived. Sam?
(seeing the glasses)
What's going on here?

Sam enters. She is a strikingly beautiful and stylish woman in her early 30s.

SAM

Happy anniversary.

CHELSEA

What anniversary?

SAM

Today is Oct. 4. It's been three months, exactly.

CHELSEA

What happened three months ago? September fourth. August fourth. July fourth. I can't remember anything special happening that day. An awful Fourth of July party.

SAM

(disappointed)
Oh.

CHELSEA

And the day I met my best friend in New York. Happy birthday, Sam.

Chelsea offers her the flowers.

They hug.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

A toast. To our friendship.

SAM

To our love.

CHELSEA

I haven't felt this good since I came to New York.

SAM

(teasing)

Or when you were with Hamilton?

CHELSEA

I felt awful living with that man. He refused to take responsibility or make a commitment.

SAM

Raphael?

CHELSEA

Not only was he lousy in bed, he thought he was the best.

SAM

Or that guy you met in Madrid?

CHELSEA

(playfully attacking her)

No, Sam, not even the Spanish poet. Or the boy who took me to my high school prom. Or the guy in college who just took me. Or the first guy I ever lived with.

SAM

My, you did sleep around, young lady.

CHELSEA

I've had it with straight men. I want nothing more to do with them. All the good men are gay. It's as simple as that.

Sam hands Chelsea a CD. Chelsea rips open the package and reads the words on the CD cover.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

The Girl That I Marry. They Say It's Wonderful. There's No Business Like Show Business. They're all here.

SAM

(singing)

Anything you can do, I can do better. I can do anything better than you.

CHELSEA

(singing)
No, you can't.

SAM

(singing)
Yes, I can.

CHELSEA

(singing)
No, you can't.

SAM

(singing)
Yes, I can.

CHELSEA

(singing)
No, you can't.

SAM

(singing)
Yes, I can. Yes, I can. Yes I can.

Break up laughing, delighted with the shared moment.

CHELSEA

I thought you didn't like musicals.

SAM

I don't. But I know you do. So I memorized this one song in honor of our third anniversary. It was the easiest one to remember.

CHELSEA

I will teach you to love musicals. The curtain goes up. A lone figure, a woman, churning butter. The backdrop -- a huge expanse of light blue. And off stage, a man's voice. Oh What a Beautiful Morning. That, my friend, is a magical moment. What I wouldn't give to see Oklahoma one more time. But they've stopped doing it.

SAM

I've lived in New York all my life and have never been to a Broadway musical. We used to sneer at all the tourists lined up at T.K.T.S., waiting for tickets to the musicals while we got tickets to important drama.

CHELSEA

You're a snob.

SAM

You're right' And I probably missed a bunch of great evenings at the theater.

CHELSEA

To think you've lived in New York all your life.

SAM

I always knew that if something wonderful was going to happen to me it had to be in this city.

CHELSEA

This city is a bit scary for a kid from Ohio. The dirt. The bums. The sirens. I know. You don't even hear them.

SAM

I love the sirens. They make me feel secure. Because they mean help is on the way to someone in need.

CHELSEA

Everyone is rushing. They never say hello, let alone look at you.

SAM

Eye contact is an iffy proposition in this town.

CHELSEA

You're about the only real friend I've made since I got here. That's more than six months.

SAM

(suddenly realizing)

All of this must be overwhelming for you. I was scared when I moved into my first apartment in Manhattan.

CHELSEA

You were?

SAM

But this city isn't so scary once you get to know it. I'm going to help you get over these fears. By taking you all over New York and showing you my favorite things. Like the rowboat lake in Central Park and the sailboat pond.

CHELSEA

They sail sailboats in Central Park?

SAM

Not real sailboats. But beautiful miniatures, with working sails and rigging. I want to take you up in the high-speed elevator to the Rainbow Room high on top of Rockefeller Center. At night you can see a galaxy of lights stretched out below you, each one marking a little drama.

CHELSEA

I read about the Algonquin Hotel. And the Round Table where Dorothy Parker and George S. Kaufman traded insults. Is it still there? Was it ever really there?

SAM

It certainly was. And still is. The Algonquin has this wonderful lobby with old stuffed chairs and couches. They've got this big, white fluffy cat that roams about with a disapproving expression. Dorothy Parker reincarnated. At night the lobby is filled with beautiful people in deep conversation. Probably all tourists from Columbus, Ohio, but I like to pretend they are modern day members of the Round Table.

CHELSEA

I love the skyscrapers and the apartments of famous people I've interviewed. They're huge. Just like this one. My studio apartment could fit in your bathroom.

SAM

Move in with me, Chelsea.

CHELSEA

What?

SAM

I've got plenty of room.

CHELSEA

I've got a lease.

SAM

Break it.

CHELSEA

I'd be in the way, when you had friends over.

SAM

You'd be more than just a roommate.

CHELSEA

Oh.

SAM

(seeing Chelsea's look of concern)
We enjoy being together, don't we?

CHELSEA

Yes.

SAM

So, we'd be together more.

CHELSEA

We've only known each other for three months.

SAM

The time comes when you have to fish or cut bait.

CHELSEA

What the hell does that mean?

SAM

Eventually you must make a decision.

CHELSEA

I've got to take this one step at a time. My life is changing so much. I always thought there would be a man in my life. Now all I want is to become a self-sufficient woman dependent on nobody.

SAM

Don't change a thing. I love you just the way you are.

CHELSEA

I met an interesting character today. This guy who sits in an alley behind the opera house, listening to the music.

SAM

You just said you were through with guys.

CHELSEA

He's gay.

SAM

How do you know?

CHELSEA

He used to live in Greenwich Village.

SAM

That's the sign he's gay?

CHELSEA

And he lives with another guy.

SAM

This is New York City. To make the rent, you'll live with whomever you have to.

CHELSEA

And he likes opera.

SAM

That is a little suspicious.

CHELSEA

And he's sensitive.

SAM

You're right. He's gay.

CHELSEA

He lives in a crazy fantasy world. He might make a good story. But I don't want to talk about him. When do you take me to the Algonquin?

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 3

Fergus' studio, a bit later. It's a converted factory loft with two easels. One is surrounded by opera memorabilia. The other easel is surrounded by paintings of different parts of nude women, exercise equipment and the head of a bear. A large window leads to the roof. Hank, a muscular man in his 30s, is on the phone. Fergus is going through newspapers, noting names on a pad.

HANK

(into the phone)

I was just sitting here, thinking about you. Last night was, I don't know, unbelievable. It was a great game... What's wrong, Monica? You sound disappointed.

(Hank listens to a long harangue)

Then let's try again. What are you doing tomorrow night?... What about Wednesday? The Mets are... I understand. This is a pretty busy week for me, too. Let's keep in touch.

(hangs up)

FERGUS

You were really counting on this one, weren't you?

HANK

Yeah.

Fergus hums.

HANK (CONT'D)

Son of a gun. You're falling in love again.

FERGUS

This could happen

HANK

A good-looking woman?

FERGUS

Not good-looking. Incredibly beautiful. Very sophisticated. Stylishly dressed. Obviously a woman of the world. But underlying the glitter and glamor is a simple innocence that is simply captivating. She needs me.

HANK

Why? Sounds like she's doing pretty well on her own.

FERGUS

She is preoccupied with reality. She's a newspaper reporter.

HANK

Good trait for a reporter to have.

FERGUS

I will introduce her to the joys of fantasy.

HANK

And then she'll fall in love with you like all the others do.

FERGUS

But this time I think I will want it to happen.

HANK

That's what you always say. Why the hell do all women fall for you? Why do I end up with all the losers?

FERGUS

What do you talk about when you're out on a date?

HANK

I don't know. Whatever I'm interested in at the time. The ballgame. My CD collection. My paintings. What do you talk about?

FERGUS

Life, death, love.

HANK

Opera stuff. I was thinking that maybe you and I could arrange for a swap. I want you to teach me how to attract women.

FERGUS

And what will you do for me?

HANK

I'll teach you how to socialize with men.

FERGUS

I know how to socialize with men.

HANK

You don't have any male friends, except for me.

FERGUS

And James.

HANK

James doesn't count.

FERGUS

Why doesn't he count?

HANK

Come on, you know why James doesn't count. You don't know how to bond with real men. You don't walk the walk or talk the talk. You're standing at the urinal and there's a guy on the left and a guy on the right. What do you talk about?

FERGUS

I'm otherwise occupied.

HANK

You meet a guy at a dinner party. You want to get to know him better, but you don't want to reveal anything about yourself. So what do you talk about?

FERGUS

Why don't I want to reveal myself?

HANK

Real men don't reveal themselves.

FERGUS

So what should I talk about?

HANK

Sports. Teach me opera and I'll teach you the guy stuff.

FERGUS

Are you coming with me tomorrow?

HANK

What are you talking about?

FERGUS

The rally.

HANK

What rally?

FERGUS

For gay marriage.

HANK

You want to go to a thing like that?

FERGUS

It's not a thing. It's a vital issue to thousands, maybe millions of people. It's a disgrace that gays in this country are denied the rights every heterosexual has. And you should be out there protesting with all the other people. It's your responsibility. As a human being.

HANK

My responsibility as a human being?

FERGUS

That's right.

HANK

We're not gay.

FERGUS

So what?

HANK

The rally has nothing to do with us.

FERGUS

Neither does the fight for women's rights, but we support them.

HANK

Fish have a right to swim. But you don't hang out in aquariums.

FERGUS

We should support a good cause.

HANK

You never talked about this good cause before.

FERGUS

I never thought about it before. But now I'm thinking about it. And it bothers me. Gay people have a right to marry.

HANK

Why are you thinking about it now? It's because of that woman. Isn't it?

FERGUS

She's a woman of principles.

HANK

And she's hot.

FERGUS

That, too.

James burst into the studio, dressed in a tight-fitting, spangled dress.

JAMES

(finally)
Well, what do you think?

HANK

Oh shit, James.

JAMES

Not James. Jasmine. Tonight, I am Jasmine.

FERGUS

Why are you all dressed up Jame... Jasmine?

JAMES

The Triple B.

FERGUS

The Big Bad Ball isn't until next month.

JAMES

I want to be sure that the people who matter most to me approve of my dress. If you don't, I'll rip it up, cry buckets of tears and do it over.

(turning to Hank)
So, what do you think?

HANK

I think you look kind of stupid in that dress.

James stares pointedly at Hank's biking costume.

HANK (CONT'D)

I'm a biker. That's the way we dress.

JAMES

(To Fergus)

So what do you think of my dress?

FERGUS

It's stunning.

JAMES

What about you, Hank, do you like it?

HANK

Did you make it?

JAMES

I did.

HANK

(carefully examining the dress)

The needlework on this is amazing.

JAMES

I didn't know you were into needlework.

HANK

I'm into art. And this dress is a work of art.

JAMES

I want you to take me to the ball, Hank.

HANK

I think I'll pass.

JAMES

You'll like it. The ball has everything a sexy guy like you wants. Musky music. Fabulous food. Lots of liquor. Sensuous souls sharing sensuous sounds.

HANK

That kind of party doesn't turn me on.

JAMES

Then you've been to the ball before?

HANK

Come on, Jimmy, do I look the type to go to a ball like that?

JAMES

Does Brad Pitt look the type?

HANK

He's been to that ball?

JAMES

What can I say? To say more would be indiscreet. Come to the ball, Hank. You don't have to be gay to be gay, though it helps.

HANK

I have no intention of spending an evening being groped at.

JAMES

No one's going to grope at you.

(sizing up Hank's fine figure)

Well, not everyone. But I'll protect you.

HANK

I'm out of here.

Hank exits.

FERGUS

Why do you do that? You know how he hates it.

JAMES

I want him to take me to the ball.

FERGUS

For God's sake why?

JAMES

I'm really not at liberty to say.

FERGUS

All right.

JAMES

I think I'm in love with him.

FERGUS

What?

JAMES

He's a very sensitive guy, in his own macho way. And I think he likes me.

FERGUS

But not in the way that you like him. Hank's homophobic. You know that.

JAMES

Hank is my mission. It's a horror movies ball and the theme is "come with a monster." A bit crude, if you're into double entendres, but it does get your attention. My secret goal is to cure the monster of his homophobia and make him fall in love. To know us is to love us, or at least most of us.

FERGUS

You see yourself as a missionary and Hank as a...

JAMES

Primitive savage. Everyone will be so jealous when I arrive with a monster like that at my side.

FERGUS

Swishy is not Hank's thing. You have to talk to him in his own language.

JAMES

Verbal or
(assuming a masculine pose)
Body language?

FERGUS

Hank is all male, straight male, through and through. He is obsessed with women, sports and all things male.

JAMES

Me thinks he protesteth too much.

FERGUS

You think Hank's gay?

AMES

You live with him. You tell me.

FERGUS

No one is less likely to be gay.

JAMES

If prince charming likes women so much, what's he doing living with you?

FERGUS

You think I'm gay?

JAMES

No, sad to say.

(Inspecting Hank's nudes)

That's why you don't need stage props. Have you ever wondered why your... why our Don Juan here is always so disapproving of the women you go out with?

FERGUS

He's never made a pass at me or any other man.

JAMES

You can't come out of the closet if you don't know you're in it.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 4

The alley, two days later. Fergus is sitting on an empty box, drinking a Coke. Chelsea enters.

CHELSEA

So you really do come here every day.

FERGUS

My favorite inquisitor. I didn't see you at the gay marriage rally.

CHELSEA

I was off. You went to the rally?

FERGUS

Hey, gays have a right to be married like everyone else.

CHELSEA

After we talked the other day, I bought an opera CD. Traviata. It's kind of nice.

FERGUS

(enthusiastically)
It's wonderful.

CHELSEA

I think I understood it even though it's sung in Italian. What everyone was up to was pretty obvious.

FERGUS

(even more enthusiastic)
Yes.

CHELSEA

But it's a little hard for a feminist to take -- Violeta giving up Alfredo just because Alfredo's father told her to.

FERGUS

They get together in the end.

CHELSEA

She dies.

FERGUS

But in his arms. Nothing in the world is so beautiful, absolutely nothing, as Violeta's death scene.

CHELSEA

Not even a sunrise or sunset or a misty morning over a mountain lake?

FERGUS

Not even the smell of wet concrete on a city sidewalk after a spring rain.

CHELSEA

You like the smell of wet concrete?

FERGUS

Yes.

CHELSEA

So do I. I love walking down Park Avenue early in the morning, just after they've...

FERGUS

(enthusiastically)
Hosed down the sidewalks.

CHELSEA

Yes. Do you like musicals as well as operas?

FERGUS

I love musicals.

CHELSEA

What's your favorite?

FERGUS

Can there be any question? Oklahoma, of course.

CHELSEA

That's my favorite, too.

They look at each other long and hard with growing warmth.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

(continuing; finally)
Have you always loved music?

FERGUS

My mom and dad sang in opera choruses. When I was a kid, I dreamed about becoming a famous opera singer, not just someone in the chorus like my folks, but the lead tenor.

CHELSEA

Most little boys want to be baseball players or astronauts.

FERGUS

I guess I was different.

CHELSEA

(knowingly)
Yes.

FERGUS

Let's have lunch.

CHELSEA

Where?

FERGUS

Right here. We're sitting in a wonderful restaurant. A wonderful Chinese restaurant.

CHELSEA

Here we go again.

He jumps up and arranges the boxes into a table.

FERGUS

Poof, a table loaded with mouth-watering Chinese food. Listen, do you hear it? The gentle tinkle of wind chimes. The smell of enticing odors from the kitchen. And before us, a feast.

Fergus ceremoniously offers her imaginary food.

FERGUS (CONT'D)

Sweet and sour chicken.

She resists sharing the fantasy.

FERGUS (CONT'D)

It's still not a fine Chinese restaurant for you, is it?

CHELSEA

Sorry.

FERGUS

Have you ever acted in a play?

CHELSEA

I did some acting in college.

FERGUS

Here's your chance to be a thespian again.

(He reaches out to her with empty hands as though he is holding a bowl.)

Improvise.

She thinks about it for a second and decides to accept the challenge. She reaches into the imaginary bowl and pulls out something. She reaches into the bowl.

CHELSEA

A fortune cookie.

FERGUS

Read me your fortune.

CHELSEA

(reading the imaginary slip of paper)

It says "You will meet a very strange man who will share all his secrets with you."

FERGUS

That's me.

CHELSEA

(offering him the imaginary bowl)

Tell me what your fortune cookie says for you.

FERGUS

(cracking open an imaginary cookie and reading his fortune)

You will meet a beautiful woman who wants to know everything about you.

They break up laughing.

CHELSEA

OK, so maybe a little play acting is fun. How long have you been coming here to the alley to hear opera?

FERGUS

Ever since college.

CHELSEA

Have you ever listened to an opera sitting inside?

FERGUS

In this country, only the rich can afford opera.

CHELSEA

Have you ever studied singing?

FERGUS

For years, but it didn't work out.

CHELSEA

Why not?

FERGUS

Are you interviewing me?

CHELSEA

Your voice wasn't any good?

FERGUS

How long have you been a reporter?

CHELSEA

Is that why you gave up singing?

FERGUS

Do you like being a reporter?

CHELSEA

How do you make your living?

FERGUS

I sing. In an Italian restaurant. Opera. I'm a singing waiter.

CHELSEA

So you make your living from singing.

FERGUS

I make my living from waiting on tables. You never told me your name.

CHELSEA

Chelsea

FERGUS

Chelsea Rhinehart.

CHELSEA

You know my last name?

FERGUS

I went through the Times, looking for the names of all the women feature writers. If you didn't show up, I was going to call each one of them until I found the one who liked to befriend lonely music lovers on the streets of New York. Was your boyfriend impressed with the flowers?

CHELSEA

Sam was very impressed. She loved the flowers.

Fergus is startled to learn that Sam is a woman.

FERGUS

(less joyous)
Sam's a good friend?

CHELSEA

A very good friend.

FERGUS

(with disappointment)
Of course. You don't give flowers to just anyone.

CHELSEA

Don't you ever give flowers to the guy you live with?

FERGUS

Hank's not exactly the flower-receiving type. Do you date men?

CHELSEA

Aren't you getting a little personal?

FERGUS

Yes.

CHELSEA

Men turn me off.

(responding to Fergus' hurt look)

Straight men. Does that sound prejudiced?

FERGUS

Only if you'd said that about gay men. But let's just suppose a straight man -- a nice, sensitive, artistically inclined, straight man -- suggested going to a movie he knew you'd like and maybe dinner afterwards.

CHELSEA

I would say no.

FERGUS

What if he said I'm not looking to date you or get you into bed? I just want to share a good movie with you.

CHELSEA

Like the guy who says let's lie down side by side in bed nude? I don't want to make love. I just want to hold you and feel your warmth.

FERGUS

(laughing a lot)

No woman would fall for a line like that.

(sees that Chelsea isn't laughing)

This has happened to you?

CHELSEA

Maybe.

FERGUS

OK, what if this guy said let's have dinner but only dinner.

CHELSEA

No.

FERGUS

A drink.

CHELSEA

I'll walk out the moment I think any straight man is coming on to me. I can't believe I'm talking about things like this with someone I've just met.

FERGUS

Why are you so distrustful of straight men?

CHELSEA

Most men are nice at first. They look into your eyes over dinner. Talk about things you care about. The sex is good. But after a while, they stop looking into your eyes, only talk about sports and sex becomes wham, bam, thank you ma'am.

FERGUS

Oh my.

CHELSEA

What was it like for you, coming out of the closet?

FERGUS

My God, do you think I'm...

(catching himself)

Coming out of the closet is a hard thing for someone like me to describe.

CHELSEA

You don't want to talk about it?

FERGUS

It would be very painful.

CHELSEA

Consider the matter closed.

FERGUS

You're very sensitive.

CHELSEA

When can I come to your studio and see your paintings?

FERGUS

Any time you want.

CHELSEA

Tonight.

FERGUS

That's too soon. I mean, I don't know what Hank is doing.

CHELSEA

You don't strike me as an appointment-book kind of guy. Tomorrow night?

FERGUS

Yes, I can have everything ready by then.

CHELSEA

Don't go to any trouble.

FERGUS

I want everything to be just right for you. They're about to start the rehearsal again. It's going to be Violeta's death scene.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 5

Fergus's studio the next night. Hank is on the phone and Fergus is waiting patiently to play a CD.

HANK

(on the phone)

S W M, 35... I'm an artist. Oil paintings... Actually I'm not exhibiting anywhere right now. I'm more interested in art than making a lot of money... Hello. Hello, are you there?

(hangs up)

Goddamnit.

FERGUS

One more aria and we're finished for today.

HANK

I don't know how much more rejection I can take.

FERGUS

Mozart is the composer.

HANK

The women who might turn me on run away.

FERGUS

He's considered...

HANK

And I lose interest in the women I do date. The chemistry's just not there. I don't know what's wrong.

FERGUS

...one of the greatest...

HANK

It's really hurting, Fergie. It's hurting like hell.

FERGUS

(suddenly sympathetic)

I know. You've really been taking a beating.

HANK

Nothing in my life is working. Not women. Not my art. I can't sell a painting. I can't get into a gallery.

FERGUS

It takes time. Let's get back to the lesson.

HANK

People look at my paintings and the best they can say is "very interesting." That's what you say when you don't want to hurt someone's feelings.

FERGUS

The hell with what they say. Don't let them control you.

HANK

They don't understand the concept behind the paintings. These paintings are expressions of some very deep felt feelings. But no one can see that.

FERGUS

Wanting their recognition gives the bastards too much power.

HANK

You don't want to be successful?

FERGUS

Success is knowing you've done your best.

HANK

You don't need outside verification like normal people?

FERGUS

This is something we should talk about, Hank. But let's do it tomorrow. We've got to finish up here.

HANK

What's the hurry?

FERGUS

I'm expecting someone.

(putting on a CD)

This is an aria from the Marriage of Figaro. It's being sung by Cherubino. He's a page.

He starts the CD. The voice of a female singer is heard.

HANK

I thought you said the page was a he.

FERGUS

The page is a he but the singer is a she.

HANK

So the plot of this opera is a girl pretending she's a boy.

FERGUS

She's not pretending. Cherubino, the page, is really a boy. But the singer is really a woman.

HANK

What's the story about?

FERGUS

The page is going to dress up as a girl.

HANK

What?

FERGUS

I think we're finished for today.

(hopefully)

You going out tonight?

HANK

Why are you asking?

(realization)

It's that girl who tripped over you in the alley. She's coming here.

FERGUS

She didn't trip over me. But it is that woman. I was hoping that maybe she and I could be here alone.

HANK

Way to go.

FERGUS

Jesus Christ, Hank, does everything have to be sex with you?

HANK

This isn't about sex?

FERGUS

No.

HANK

Wanting me out of here when you don't expect to have sex is pretty insulting. You ashamed of me or something?

FERGUS

You're too masculine. She thinks we're gay.

HANK

Where the hell did she get that idea from?

FERGUS

I told her we live together.

HANK

And you let her think that we're living together like that?

FERGUS

That's what she wants to believe.

HANK

That's disgusting.

Hank goes to his 50-pound weight and can barely lift it to the height of his chest.

FERGUS

It may be awkward, but it's certainly not disgusting.

HANK

So, you don't want this woman to come up here and find out that I'm obviously not gay. Though you had no trouble fooling her.

FERGUS

Chelsea is heterophobic.

James enters. He's dressed in leather, with spikes and chains. His moves are a caricature of John Wayne walking into an old west saloon. He puts his face up to Hank menacingly.

JAMES

What'd you think of the game last night, stud?

HANK

What the hell?

JAMES

Manko shouldn't have thrown the damn ball like that with only a few damn minutes on the damn clock. Dumb bastard.

He lifts the 50-pound weight easily over his head.

JAMES (CONT'D)

What's the score?

HANK

The game hasn't started yet.

JAMES

So the score is still tied. Want to go to the ball?

Hank breaks up laughing. James is at first surprised, but then joins in.

HANK

So that's what this is all about. It was a wonderful impersonation. But not of me, I hope.

He laughs. James doesn't.

HANK (CONT'D)

I don't think that's so funny.

JAMES

Come to the ball with me. You might get lucky.

HANK

That kind of luck I don't want. I'm out of here.

JAMES

You always do that when we're about to have meaningful intercourse.

HANK

You used that word on purpose.

JAMES

I use all my words on purpose.

HANK

(angrily to Fergus)
You want to be alone? Be my guest. No problemo.

Hank exits angrily.

JAMES

Oh, dear, am I interrupting a lovers' quarrel? What are you fighting about? Or is it something private?

FERGUS

He's pissed off because I wanted to be here alone tonight. Some woman's coming to see my paintings. She thinks we're gay.

JAMES

You're pretending to be gay?

FERGUS

I don't want to frighten her away by being too masculine. She's a heterophobe.

JAMES

I knew the world would come to this, but not so soon.

FERGUS

Hank is not the type of person who'd be mistaken for a gay lover. Maybe I could introduce you to her as my friend. No names or anything so I wouldn't be lying. I can't help it if she assumes you're the guy I'm living with.

JAMES

The irony of this is so delicious.

(sudden realization)

No, I can't do this. It's wrong to support you in this kind of deception.

FERGUS

I'm trying to save her from her own prejudice against straight men.

JAMES

That's not prejudice, that's insight. No, it's wrong for me to help you pass.

FERGUS

Gay men have been passing for years.

JAMES

That's different. We're members of the oppressed.

FERGUS

Opressors have no rights?

JAMES

I would like to help you, Fergus, but it's quite impossible. I'm a man of principles. Nothing you say can make me go against what I believe in. I'm sorry.

FERGUS

Do this for me and I'll get Hank to go to the ball with you.

JAMES

I'll be your gay lover.
(acting out the choices)
Swishy or leather?

FERGUS

Can't you just be yourself. That will be more than enough. She'll be here any minute.

JAMES

Then we've got to get busy. We can't have these things on your walls when she arrives.
(looking at the paintings)
My God, all these bits and pieces of the female body. It's like the chicken counter in the supermarket.

They hide all of Hank's paintings, but forget a nude breast.

FERGUS

Hank's not going to like this.

JAMES

(taking the head down from the wall)
I'll put his head on the roof.

FERGUS

What about the basketball hoop?

JAMES

(handing him a potted plant)
Hang this in the basket.

FERGUS

Already the place looks...
(having trouble finding the word)
... sensitive.

JAMES

I've never seen you go to so much trouble for a visitor. Maybe this woman is special?

FERGUS

She likes anchovies and the smell of wet concrete. What more is there to say?

Hank enters.

HANK

Jesus Christ, what have you guys done with my stuff.

JAMES

Doesn't it look nice?

HANK

Where's my bear head?

JAMES

What bear head?

HANK

The head of the bear I risked my life to kill.

FERGUS

Oh, that bear head. It's on the roof.

HANK

That's no way to treat my bear's head.

JAMES

We treated that bear a lot nicer than you did.

HANK

(indicating James)

If he can be here tonight, what's wrong with me being here?

JAMES

Fergus won't let you pretend you're gay because that would be dishonest. I don't have to pretend.

HANK

I don't want to be gay. I want to be straight.

JAMES

(brightening)

You mean you're not?

HANK

Where the hell are my nudes?

JAMES

In a far, far better place than they were, hanging up there on the wall for all to see. The world is not ready for the Purdue School of Art.

The doorbell rings.

FERGUS

It's Chelsea. Who's going to be Hank?

JAMES

I'm going to be Hank.

HANK

I'm going to be Hank. I mean, I am Hank.

Fergus opens the door and is startled to see Sam with Chelsea. Hank rushes to Sam and grabs her hand, holding it longer than she likes.

HANK (CONT'D)

And this must be Chelsea. How do you do?

CHELSEA

I'm Chelsea.

Hank and James can't believe that Fergus is interested in the less attractive of the two women.

HANK AND JAMES

(looking at each other in disbelief)
Huh?

CHELSEA

(reaching out to James)
And you must be Hank. So good to meet you, Hank, you're just as I imagined you.

HANK

(seductively)
Hi, I'm Hank.

CHELSEA

(disappointed)
Oh. Sam is an art dealer. When I told her that I had discovered this wonderful new artist, she begged to come along.

SAM

It wasn't quite like that.

CHELSEA

(firmly to her)
Yes, it was.

HANK

Where's your gallery?

SAM

SoHo.

Sam moves about the studio, checking out the paintings.

CHELSEA

This place is huge. When you said studio, I thought you meant studio apartment.
(coming across Fergus' CD collection)
Do you like opera, too, Hank?

HANK

I live for it.

He hums the Mozart aria.

HANK (CONT'D)

Once you get a Mozart tune in your head, it's there for good. It's my very favorite aria from my very favorite opera.

SAM

What opera is that?

HANK

What opera?

FERGUS

(to the rescue)
Marriage of Figaro is always on the CD. I can't get Hank to stop playing it. And Voi Che Sapete, he's always humming the damn thing.

HANK

A wonderful opera. It's about this lesbian who pretends to be a gay man who wants to go drag.

FERGUS

Oh, Jesus.

JAMES

An opera before it's time.

SAM

(to James)
Are you also an artist?

JAMES

I am a costume designer.

Chelsea is impressed by one of the paintings.

CHELSEA

(seeing a painting of Central Park)
It's my boulder in Central Park.

FERGUS

You know my boulder?

CHELSEA

It's my boulder. I've spent so much time in that very spot, thinking big and little thoughts.

FERGUS

I was there yesterday.

Sam is eavesdropping with some jealousy.

CHELSEA

So was I. What time?

FERGUS

After the rehearsal. Three-thirty, I guess.

CHELSEA

I was there at four.

Sam turns angrily and is startled to come face to face with the nude breast they failed to remove.

HANK

That's one of mine.

SAM

(moving on with disinterest)
Very interesting.

Hank's hurt by the comment. Fergus sees this and goes to his rescue.

FERGUS

Incredibly interesting. The concept behind these paintings.

HANK

My paintings are an expression of that first moment, when you're physically attracted to someone. It's not the whole person you're seeing but a part of them. A smile. Twinkling eyes.

FERGUS

You see?

HANK

Beautifully shaped breasts. A nice ass.

FERGUS

School's out.

HANK

That's what I'm trying to capture with my work. The excitement of that initial attraction to whatever woman's part that caught your eye.

Fergus exits onto the roof and adjusts a telescope.

SAM

That's very interesting, Mr... Just what is your name?

HANK

Call me Hank.

SAM

I prefer that we remain on a last-name basis, Mr....

HANK

Hellman.

SAM

Mr. Hellman.

Chelsea joins Fergus on the roof.

CHELSEA

What are you doing?

FERGUS

We're standing on the moon, watching the earth rise.

CHELSEA

That looks an awful lot like the moon to me.

FERGUS

Look more carefully. See that great empty expanse on the right side. It's an ocean. And to the left, another great ocean. They were discovered by the two famous Italian astronomers -- Antonio Atlantic and Pietro Pacific.

CHELSEA

Yeah, sure, and between those two oceans is a land mass discovered by the American brothers, North and South.

FERGUS

(appreciating her sense of humor)
That was very good.

Chelsea trips over the bear's head.

CHELSEA

(screaming)
My God, what's that? It's a bear's head. What's that thing doing here?

The sound of Hank's uproarious laughter is heard from the studio.

FERGUS

That doesn't sound good.

CHELSEA

Your friend Hank is a very colorful character.

FERGUS

No affectations there. What you see is what you get, though he's frequently misjudged. He's a great satirist. Like right now, he's impersonating John Wayne. Your friend Sam is tolerant.

(probing)

I can see why you love her.

CHELSEA

I never said I loved her.

FERGUS

(brightening)

You don't?

CHELSEA

I do love her.

FERGUS

Oh.

CHELSEA

But I never told you I did.

FERGUS

I guess I just assumed it...

(probing)

...what with you two living together.

CHELSEA

We're not living together.

FERGUS

Why not, if you love her?

Sam bursts onto the roof.

SAM

It's time to go.

CHELSEA

What?

I said I want to go.

SAM

But...

CHELSEA

I want to go, Chelsea, please.

SAM

All right.
(to Fergus)
I'm sorry.

CHELSEA

She follows Sam to the door.

It was nice meeting...
(realizing she never got everyone's name)
...everyone.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

Are you coming?

SAM

OK. OK.

CHELSEA

Sam and Chelsea exit.

What the hell was that all about?

FERGUS

I thought she was coming on to me.

HANK

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 6

Central Park, the next day. Chelsea is sitting on the boulder. Fergus enters. He has a canvas bag with French bread sticking out of it.

FERGUS

I was hoping you'd be here.

(Taking items from the bag)

French bread. Camembert. And a bottle of wine. Kindred spirits should feed each other.

CHELSEA

Is that what you think we are, kindred spirits?

FERGUS

You're here sitting on our boulder, aren't you? Camembert?

CHELSEA

No, thank you.

FERGUS

You can't say no to Camembert?

CHELSEA

I try not to eat cheese. Cholesterol.

FERGUS

Surely you'll have wine.

CHELSEA

I never drink in the daytime.

FERGUS

Then breathe in deeply and celebrate such a beautiful day.

CHELSEA

I try not to breathe in too deeply. Pollution.

Fergus looks at her in amazement.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

Just kidding.

FERGUS

Again, that wonderful dry sense of humor.

He eats the bread and cheese

FERGUS (CONT'D)

One day they will discover that everyone in the little village of Camembert lives to be 100, all because they eat the local cheese and drink wine in the daytime. And they never jog. Cheers.

He toasts her and takes a swig of wine.

FERGUS (CONT'D)

Are you sure you won't have some Camembert?

CHELSEA

How can I resist you?

She starts to cut the bread with a knife.

FERGUS

No, that's not the way to do it. French bread and lettuce must always be ripped.

She cuts off a piece of cheese and starts to spread it onto the bread.

FERGUS (CONT'D)

No. Eat the cheese off the knife. Then eat some bread and swallow wine.

CHELSEA

Always in that order?

FERGUS

Always in that order. Each thing has a wonderful, distinct taste and you want to savor each one. Are you not passionate about food?

CHELSEA

I'm very passionate about food. I am a gourmet chef. Well, I'm in the process of becoming a gourmet chef. And we gourmet chefs always cut the French bread and spread the cheese on the bread.

FERGUS

That's not passion. That's polite.

CHELSEA

I like your way better.

FERGUS

Refinement. When creative thinking ceases to be.

CHELSEA

So, you come here every day. You can't get much work done if you spend all your time sitting on rocks and in alleys.

FERGUS

Work seems to be very important to you.

CHELSEA

Isn't your work important to you?

FERGUS

Of course it's important. But so's this.

CHELSEA

Americans work too much.

FERGUS

Do you work too much?

CHELSEA

Probably. But I love my work.

FERGUS

Then you don't work too much.

CHELSEA

Why'd you decide to become whatever it is you've become?

FERGUS

Never decided anything. Just started singing and painting and it felt good so I kept on doing it. Did anyone ever tell you that you have beautiful, riveting eyes during an interrogation?

CHELSEA

You really thought you sang good enough to become a professional?

FERGUS

My father told me that anything is possible if you want it enough and work hard to get it. The thing I wanted most was to stand on the stage of the Met and sing my heart out. When my voice coach entered me in the Pavarotti competition, I stopped everything, dropped out of high school and spent all my time getting ready. My dad was sure I'd win. He was telling everyone that one day we'd all be appearing in the same opera. My parents in the chorus and me the lead tenor.

CHELSEA

So what happened?

FERGUS

It didn't work out.

CHELSEA

What do you mean?

FERGUS

(firmly)
It didn't work out. That's all.

CHELSEA

You don't want to talk about it?

FERGUS

All they care about in those damn competitions is picking someone for first place.

CHELSEA

(intensely, quietly, playing with him)
There is only one place in my game and that is first place.

FERGUS

That's pretty limiting.

CHELSEA

I believe in God, and I believe in human decency.

FERGUS

I believe in human decency.

CHELSEA

But I firmly believe that any woman's finest hour -- her greatest fulfillment to all she holds dear -- is that moment when she has worked her heart out in a good cause and lies exhausted on the field of battle -- victorious.

FERGUS

My God, what was that?

CHELSEA

Vince Lombardi. Edited.

FERGUS

Who's Vince Lombardi?

CHELSEA

Oh, come on. You don't know who Vince Lombardi is? He's just the greatest and most inspiring coach who ever lived.

FERGUS

Sounds like he had a problem.

CHELSEA

Are you playing with me?

FERGUS

The trouble with Americans is they don't give a damn about the people who come in second. The second astronaut who walked on the moon worked just as hard and took just as many risks as the guy who got there first. But no one remembers him. It's like he never tried. Not fair. People who come in second should be honored, too.

(lifting his glass in toast)

To all the people who come in second.

CHELSEA

So what happened when you sang in the competition?

FERGUS

You won't give up, will you?

CHELSEA

You came in second?

FERGUS

I don't want to talk about this any more.

CHELSEA

So let's talk about your painting. You don't seem that interested in selling your paintings.

FERGUS

I'm an artist. Not a merchant.

CHELSEA

Sell a few paintings and you could be in Paris now instead of sitting on this rock in the middle of New York.

FERGUS

Who says we're not in the south of France. Breathe in that air. What do you smell? Go ahead. Do it. What do you smell?

CHELSEA

(playfully)
Dog shit.

FERGUS

Camembert. You smell camembert. And look out there over the fields. What do you see?

CHELSEA

Central Park West.

FERGUS

No, the fields of France. Listen. The sound of little French children playing. Do you speak French?

CHELSEA

Not a word.

FERGUS

Je suis decouvrant que je t'aime.

He's saying: I'm falling in love with you.

CHELSEA

I don't know what you're saying, but it sounds nice.

FERGUS

Cette fois, tu n' serai pas triste avec un homme.

He's saying: This time you will not be disappointed with a man.

CHELSEA

It's such a romantic language. May I have more wine? This is lovely. A wonderful moment in a great park in an exciting city.

She laughs.

FERGUS

You're particularly beautifully when you laugh.

She grabs him and kisses him deeply and then pulls away in shock and shame.

CHELSEA

Oh, God. Please forgive me.

FERGUS

It's OK.

CHELSEA

I'm so sorry.

FERGUS

There's nothing to be sorry about.

CHELSEA

It's all wrong. You being who you are and what you are. And me being who I am.

FERGUS

I am really not offended by what you did.

CHELSEA

You're so kind.

FERGUS

Believe me, it's not a matter of being kind.

CHELSEA

You're a kind, loving, sensitive, empathetic gay man.

FERGUS

Chelsea, there is something I should...

CHELSEA

(standing to leave)

It's wrong being on the fence like this. It's hurtful to Sam. I know what I have to do.

FERGUS

Damnit, Chelsea. I am not hurt by what you did. In fact, I thought it was...

CHELSEA

Goodbye, Fergus. It was a lovely picnic.

FERGUS

What are you doing?

CHELSEA

I've stopped cutting bait.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

END OF ACT I

SCENE 7

Sam's loft, several weeks later. Sam and Chelsea come struggling into the space with a huge, decrepit, leather swivel chair.

CHELSEA

Push. Push harder.

SAM

It won't fit.

CHELSEA

Push.

SAM

Your chair is too fat.

CHELSEA

Your door is too thin. Try it sidewise.

Huffing and puffing, they get the chair repositioned and push.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

Push.

SAM

It just won't fit.

CHELSEA

Push.

SAM

(laughing uncontrollably)
Stop saying push.

CHELSEA

Push.

SAM

You sound like a midwife.

CHELSEA

It's a breech birth. Let's turn this baby around.

They finally get the chair into the room and collapse on the floor in laughter.

SAM

This chair is one big mother.

CHELSEA

It's the most wonderful chair in the world. Sitting in it, I get the best ideas for stories.

Chelsea sits down in it. Sam plops down besides her.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

I've never shared this chair with anyone before.

SAM

Are you sure there's nothing else you want to bring from your apartment?

CHELSEA

I'm putting the rest of the stuff in storage.

SAM

Why don't you just sell it?

CHELSEA

I'm not ready to part with it.

SAM

You think you're going to need it again?

CHELSEA

I brought all my spices. Do you have a lot of spices?

SAM

I always eat out.

CHELSEA

Well, that's about to change. Every night I will have a feast waiting for you when you come home from the gallery, providing I don't have a deadline, of course. Do you like fresh garlic?

SAM

Not really.

CHELSEA

Anchovies?

SAM

I hate anchovies.

CHELSEA

After I got the job at the Times and knew I was coming to New York, I decided I had to become a different person.

SAM

Is life in Columbus really that much different than here?

CHELSEA

(you've-got-to- be kidding look)

On the plane, I wrote out a list of all the changes I would make. First I would cut my hair and get a stylish hair-do.

(proudly indicates her short hair)

I would stop going to church every Sunday. I would stop setting goals for myself and organizing everyone around me. I would stop going to bed early and getting up early. I would stop making up my bed every morning when I got up. And I would stop making lists. The list I was in the process of making would be my last.

SAM

Some wine to celebrate your new life and moving in.

CHELSEA

(toasting)

To us.

SAM

I'm looking forward to my first good home-cooked meal.

CHELSEA

Tomorrow night.

SAM

Whatever happened to the story on Fergus?

CHELSEA

(uneasy)

I got interested in other things.

SAM

You are going to write it, aren't you?

CHELSEA

I don't know.

SAM

That's not like you. I've never seen you give up on a story.

CHELSEA

To do the story right, I would have had to spend a lot of time getting to know him better.

SAM

Isn't that what you do with all your stories? Get to know the people real well?

CHELSEA

I try to.

SAM

So how's this different?

CHELSEA

It just is.

SAM

You still think it's a good story, don't you?

CHELSEA

Yes.

SAM

Then you must write it.

CHELSEA

Why do you care?

SAM

If I'm going to show his paintings, I could use all the publicity I can get.

CHELSEA

All right. I'll do the story. But I don't want to talk about him now.

SAM

(snuggling into Chelsea)

You're right about this chair. You get a lot of good ideas in it.

CHELSEA

Are you getting a good idea?

SAM

Yes.

Sam starts to give Chelsea a passionate kiss but stops when Chelsea tenses. Overcoming her apprehension, Chelsea brings Sam close and kisses her. Sam starts caressing Chelsea's breast. Chelsea tenses again but then relaxes.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 8

Fergus studio, the day Chelsea moved in with Sam.
Fergus is sadly listening to an opera and Hank is painting.

HANK

Have you given up painting? You haven't done any painting for weeks.

FERGUS

Her phone's been disconnected.

HANK

She's one of those people who only has a land line? I didn't know they still existed.

FERGUS

She doesn't answer her cell.

HANK

That's a bad sign, if she has caller I.D.

James enters and senses the sad mood.

JAMES

Oh, dear. Has someone died?

HANK

I'm counseling Fergie on failed love affairs.

JAMES

He couldn't ask for a more experienced counselor.

HANK

She's not that pretty, Fergie.

JAMES

Some times you say the most horrid things.

HANK

He's gone out with a lot prettier women.

FERGUS

She's beautiful.

HANK

Sure she's beautiful. And the sun sets in the East.

FERGUS

Everything was going so great and then all of a sudden she's gone. Never were we so close.

JAMES

That's what did it. She found out you were straight.

FERGUS

I never said a word. But I didn't have to. I kissed her. Goddamn, it was too soon. Why did I let it happen?

HANK

Gay men kiss women.

FERGUS

Not like I did.

HANK

What about her kiss? Sisterly?

FERGUS

(savoring the memory)
No.

HANK

Was it a good kiss?

FERGUS

It was a wonderful kiss.

JAMES

I think all this has happened for the best. You can't build a relationship on a lie.

FERGUS

You can't build a relationship if your love isn't there.

JAMES

Go to her. Tell her the truth. Tell her that heterophobia is just as bad as homophobia. And let the chips fall where they might.

FERGUS

I needed more time to prove that all straight men aren't that bad.

JAMES

If her kiss was as good as you said it was, she might be running away from the truth.

FERGUS

What truth?

JAMES

Deep down inside, she still wants a straight man. And that could be you.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 9

Sam's apartment, the next morning. Chelsea is making breakfast. She is uneasy. Sam enters in a bathrobe, drying her hair after a shower.

SAM

You made up the bed.

CHELSEA

Oh damn. I keep forgetting.

SAM

(hoping she will agree)
Last night was wonderful.

CHELSEA

I'm definitely not going to make up the bed tomorrow.

SAM

I will not ask you the insecure-lover question.

CHELSEA

I hope you like oatmeal. I brought it with me.

SAM

OK, I'll ask it.

CHELSEA

Seemed like a shame to throw away a box that was still half full.

SAM

Was it as good for you as it was for me?

Chelsea smiles.

SAM (CONT'D)

Was it?

CHELSEA

I loved falling asleep with your arms around me.

SAM

Well, I'm not going to pursue that question any more.

They start eating breakfast. There is an awkward silence.

SAM (CONT'D)

Why would the Times hire a reporter from a dinky little paper in Columbus, Ohio?

CHELSEA

I guess it was because of the two Pulitzers.

SAM

You won two Pulitzer Prizes?

CHELSEA

Yes.

SAM

And never mentioned it to me?

CHELSEA

I couldn't find a way to work it into the conversation.

SAM

I thought Pulitzer Prizes were won by tough, hard-bitten investigative reporters.

CHELSEA

That's one way to get information.

SAM

There's another way?

CHELSEA

Some people are much more revealing to reporters who don't scare them.

SAM

Son of a bitch. You're not an innocent after all.

CHELSEA

What a nice thing to say.

SAM

All these places I've been taking you to, my favorite spots. You knew more about them than I did.

CHELSEA

I Googled them before I we went. But it wasn't until I saw them with you that I realized how wonderful they were.

(whipping out a pen and pad)

I think this would be a good time to get organized.

SAM

Living with you is going to be very interesting.

CHELSEA

Since I'm going to be doing most of the cooking, I thought you could wash the dishes and clean up afterwards. That's what my father did. He also took out the garbage and took care of the car. You could do that, too.

SAM

(amused by her compulsion)

We don't have a car.

CHELSEA

But we do have garbage. So I'll put you down for that. Then there's the matter of the laundry and getting groceries. It would make sense for me to get the groceries, since I will be doing the cooking. That leaves you for the laundry.

SAM

Is this what your parents did the morning after they moved in together?

CHELSEA

They didn't move in together. They got married first.

SAM

(persisting)

That first day in their new apartment.

CHELSEA

House.

SAM

The first day they had breakfast in the house they moved into after they got married, this is what they did? Negotiated chores?

CHELSEA

They didn't have to. My dad knew he would do all the male things and my mom knew she would do all the female things. Because we're both women, it's not so simple.

SAM

Is that what you want -- butch fem?

CHELSEA

I don't think we have any candidates for butch.

SAM

(taking the pad and pen from Chelsea)

You won't need this because you're changing your life and won't be making any more lists. And we won't have assigned chores. Whenever a chore needs to be done, whoever wants to do it will do it. You're starting your new life.

CHELSEA

Thanks. I needed that.

SAM

Two Pulitzer Prizes. Son of a bitch.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 10

Fergus' studio, a few days later. Fergus has just opened the door and Chelsea is standing in the doorway.

CHELSEA

Hi.

FERGUS

Chelsea.

CHELSEA

It's been a while.

FERGUS

I've been trying to get hold of you all month. Your phone's been disconnected.

CHELSEA

I'm living with Sam now.

FERGUS

(with disappointment)
Oh. After our picnic, I thought you might be moving in the other direction.

She goes to the Central Park painting.

CHELSEA

This is such a lovely painting.

He takes the painting down from the wall and offers it to her.

FERGUS

It's yours. A house-warming present.

CHELSEA

But I can't. It's too valuable.

FERGUS

It's priceless. I want you to have it.

CHELSEA

You'll be getting a call from Sam. She wants to put your paintings in her gallery.

FERGUS

Damn. It's so good to see you Chelsea.

CHELSEA

You should be very pleased. It's not easy to get into Out of the Closet.

FERGUS

What's that?

CHELSEA

One of the most exciting galleries in SoHo.

FERGUS

Sounds like a thrift shop.

CHELSEA

Only gay artists can exhibit. It's the in way to out yourself.

FERGUS

Chelsea, there's something you should know about me. I wanted to tell you that day in the park, but you left so suddenly.

CHELSEA

I guess you're wondering what happened to the story.

FERGUS

What I wanted to tell you...

CHELSEA

I had to put it on the back burner while I was moving.

FERGUS

...is that I am not...

CHELSEA

But now I'm ready to finish it.

FERGUS

Damn it, Chelsea, are you going to let me speak my piece?

CHELSEA

What happened in the park that day... what we said and what we didn't say... I'm very confused and I don't want to talk about it. You must exhibit your paintings. They're beautiful paintings. They belong in a gallery so people can see them. And maybe buy them.

FERGUS

There is nothing confusing about what happened because...

CHELSEA

(firmly)

I don't want to talk about it.

Fergus heads toward the roof.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

Do you always run out to that damn roof when you don't like the direction of the conversation? Fergus, it's OK to get paid for the hard work you've done.

Fergus gets up on a chair like a street corner orator.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

Oh, God, not another fantasy.

FERGUS

Ladies, gentlemen. Please, everyone, give me your attention. We're all in terrible danger. What threatens us is not terrorists or nuclear bombs or global warming. It's the people whose only interest is the bottom line. Beware of the slipper slope.

He gets off the chair.

CHELSEA

Selling your paintings doesn't mean you're slipping down a slope.

FERGUS

When you jump off a tall building, you can't try to fall carefully.

CHELSEA

Did you hear what I said?

FERGUS

Look, it's a beautiful full earth.

(offering her the telescope)

See if you can find the Atlantic Ocean.

CHELSEA

We're back, here on earth, in the real world, where there is gravity. And there are clouds. And rain. I just came here to tell you that I was working on the story again and that I've moved in with Sam.

FERGUS

There's an eclipse next month. It's a spectacular thing to watch.

She is taken by his romantic enthusiasm but is fighting it.

CHELSEA

I have some questions to ask you. For the story.

FERGUS

Come here and watch with me.

CHELSEA

How do people treat you in the alley?

FERGUS

We can make a party of it. Just you and me.

CHELSEA

I'm not up to doing the interview right now. I'll call you later.

Chelsea hurries off the roof and heads for the door. She's about to exit when she remembers the painting. Grabbing it, she exits. James enters a few second later.

JAMES

My God, what did you do to that woman? She was crying.

FERGUS

She was?

JAMES

I'm very disappointed with you. We made an agreement and I expect you to live up to it. I have it here in writing. It's almost a legal document.

(getting the IOU from his pocket)

"I will deliver to bearer one macho male for the Big Bad Ball." Signed Fergus McManus. Hank's nowhere to be found.

FERGUS

It's the hunting season.

JAMES

What if he doesn't get back in time for the Triple B?

FERGUS

If he doesn't, I'll go to the ball with you.

JAMES

You're a very nice man, Fergus, but a macho male you're not.

FERGUS

What the hell do you mean by that crack?

JAMES

You're not a proper homophobe. I want Hank. He's the man I love. A deal's a deal.

FERGUS

You didn't fill in for Hank. Hank was Hank.

JAMES

I fulfilled my part of the bargain. I was here. I redecorated this mess. Gave you technical advice. Now I expect you to do the right thing.

Hank enters.

HANK

Any word from her?

FERGUS

Who?

HANK

The art dealer. Sam. I called her. She agreed to take another look at my paintings. She said she'd try to stop by some time today. I have some other paintings to show her, if she's not ready for "Female Parts."

FERGUS

I don't think you want to exhibit in her gallery, Hank.

HANK

Of course I do. Why don't I?

FERGUS

She exhibits only gay artists.

HANK

That's discriminatory.

JAMES
My friends don't think so.

HANK
It's unfair to straight people.

JAMES
Isn't it wonderful?

HANK
Don't gloat.

JAMES
I'm not gloating. I'm gay.

HANK
I'm not going to sit back and just let this happen. I'm a straight guy. I'm proud of it. And I'm an artist.

JAMES
Who can't get an exhibition.

FERGUS
This might be your big chance, Hank.

JAMES
This might be your only chance.

FERGUS
Van Gogh died broke.

JAMES
He would have jumped at a chance like this.

HANK
OK, I'll do it.

FERGUS
You'll do what?

HANK
I'll be gay.

JAMES

You can't do that.

HANK

She already thinks I'm that way.

FERGUS

You'd do that, just to show your paintings?

HANK

I'll do what it takes. I'm an artist.

FERGUS

That's the most cynical thing I've ever heard of, gaining advantage by pretending to be gay.

JAMES

Be careful Fergus. Stones and glass houses?

HANK

We live in a world of awful prejudice.

JAMES

We do?

HANK

The art world is not kind to straight painters.

JAMES

Oh, poor baby. After all these years, is the straight, white, Anglo Saxon male thing discovering that life is not always fair?

HANK

I'll do anything to sell my work.

FERGUS

Anything?

HANK

Short of a capital crime. Well, maybe a small capital crime.

FERGUS

All right. I'll convince Chelsea's artistic friend to let you exhibit, if you'll help me.

HANK

You name it.

FERGUS

Go to the ball with James.

HANK

You didn't just say what I think you just said.

FERGUS

If you do that, I'll get you an exhibition.

HANK

Would I have to stay all night at the ball?

FERGUS

James?

JAMES

And breakfast.

HANK

Oh, come on.

FERGUS

All right, forget it. Just trying to help you out.

HANK

OK, I'll go to breakfast, but I'm coming right back here, by myself.

JAMES

You might meet someone nice.

HANK

If anyone takes a grab at me at the ball, I'm out of there.

JAMES

What do you have to grab? Let me see.

HANK

I'm not kidding.

JAMES

I should be so lucky that anyone would still want to grab at me.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 11

Late that night, Sam's apartment. Sam and Chelsea are playing scrabble.

SAM
Your move.

CHELSEA
I'm thinking.

SAM
Your mind is somewhere else.

Chelsea puts down several tiles.

CHELSEA
There.

SAM
(spelling it out)
C. O. N. J... You can't use that word.

They have a playful debate.

CHELSEA
Conjugal is a perfectly good word.

SAM
The words have to involve love, commitment or intimacy. That's what we agreed to.

CHELSEA
Conjugal is all those things.

SAM
It's only sex.

CHELSEA
Is not.

SAM
What else do you think they're doing on those conjugal visits in prison?

CHELSEA

There's more to conjugal than conjugal visits.

SAM

Like what?

CHELSEA

Like intimacy between two people.

SAM

Nonsense.

Sam looks it up in a dictionary.

CHELSEA

So? What does it say?

SAM

(reading from the dictionary)

Of or relating to marriage or the relationship of spouses.

CHELSEA

(counting out the panels)

Two, six, eighteen, thirty-two.

SAM

You play pretty good...

CHELSEA

(correcting her grammar)

Petty well.

SAM

Screw you. You play pretty well for someone who gets paid for rearranging letters into words.

CHELSEA

(depressed)

When I don't have writers' block.

SAM

You've been under so much stress with that story.

CHELSEA

Well, it's almost finished.

Chelsea goes to the window.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

Ever since you told me about the lights and thousands of little dramas, I fantasize about what's happening in all those apartments. This is the best thing about living here.

SAM

The best thing about living with me?

CHELSEA

The second best thing. The first best thing is making dinner and waiting for you to come home. We're like husband and wife.

SAM

Yes, we are, aren't we?

CHELSEA

God is such a hell of a playwright, all the twists and turns he writes for his characters.

SAM

He?

CHELSEA

She. When I was a little girl in Columbus, I used to dream about having a house full of children and a husband who carved the Thanksgiving turkey and put the star on top of the Christmas tree. That's not going to happen now. Have you ever wanted to have children?

SAM

I almost did have one. When I was with Sarah.

CHELSEA

What happened?

SAM

We were beginning to drift apart. Sarah thought a baby would bring us closer together. We broke up while she was trying to get pregnant. She never got the baby. We had talked so much about the baby that it felt like a death in the family.

CHELSEA

All my life I assumed the day would come when I would have a baby.

SAM

We never question the trajectories of our lives. Like all the doctors and lawyers who would be poets now if they had stopped to think about it for a moment.

CHELSEA

I spent a lot of time thinking about this little life that would be growing inside of me.

SAM

While Sarah was thinking about the little life that would be growing inside her, I was thinking about all the things we'd be giving up. Our lives were exploding with opportunities. Out of the Closet was finally making money. We were going to shows every night and taking wonderful vacations in Europe. Once, on the spur of the moment, I talked Sarah into flying to France for a weekend just to drink wine at a street-side cafe and watch lovers walking by.

CHELSEA

You don't have to give all that up just because you have children.

SAM

You don't think so?

CHELSEA

Children give your life meaning.

SAM

What a terrible burden to place on your children. Hey, kid, make my life meaningful." My work and my friends are what make my life meaningful. It wasn't until I started adding up all the things I'd be giving up for the baby that I appreciated what a wonderful life I already had.

CHELSEA

What would you do if I started talking about having children?

SAM

I'd show you all that we already have.

CHELSEA

And if I still wanted a baby? What would you say?

SAM

(finally)
I'd say OK.

Sam goes to her briefcase and brings out an envelope.

SAM (CONT'D)

It's funny we should be talking about this now.

Sam gives her an envelope, which she opens.

CHELSEA

Plane tickets?

SAM

You'll love Florence.

CHELSEA

I can't afford to do something like this.

SAM

My gallery is doing great and it's going to do even better with this wonderful artist you've brought to me. Consider it a finder's commission. There are so many things in Florence that I want to share with you. I want to show you the Duomo, of course. You see the dome the minute you walk out of the train station. It dominates the city. And the facade is breathtakingly beautiful. And I want to show you the Palazzo Vecchio, and the Pitti Palace and the Campanile di Giotto and the Basilica of San Lorenzo. And David, of course.

CHELSEA

I'm going to read up on it before we go.

SAM

We'll read up on it, together.

CHELSEA

Since we're so fancy free, let's go to a movie.

SAM

When?

CHELSEA

Now. I never went to a movie on the spur of the moment in Columbus.

SAM

It's one o'clock in the morning.

CHELSEA

So.

SAM

There aren't any movies at one o'clock in the morning.

CHELSEA

But this is New York City.

SAM

We could go dancing. But I have a better idea. Let's go to bed.

CHELSEA

Are you tied?

SAM

I wasn't thinking of going to sleep.

CHELSEA

Oh.

SAM

We haven't done it for a while.

CHELSEA

I've got a bit of a headache tonight.

SAM

Another headache?

CHELSEA

I'm sorry.

SAM

Is that what your mother said to your father?

CHELSEA

What do you mean by that?

SAM

You've been having a lot of headaches lately.

CHELSEA

I just don't seem to have much of an interest in that right now.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 12

Fergus' studio, a few days later. The phone is ringing. It's ignored and finally stops ringing. James enters with a tuxedo on a hanger.

JAMES

I thought the article about you and Hank was just lovely.

He goes to the stove and lights the burner under a tea kettle.

FERGUS

I didn't know she was going to say we were gay.

JAMES

I thought that was the best part.

The phone rings. Fergus ignores it.

FERGUS

The phone hasn't stopped ringing since the story came out.

JAMES

(delighting in this)
What are your friends saying?

FERGUS

They're saying they weren't surprised.

JAMES

What a lovely compliment.

FERGUS

My father didn't like being the last to know.

JAMES

That's just how my father felt.

FERGUS

Old girlfriends were glad to finally understand why I couldn't make a commitment.

JAMES

Did Hank like the story?

FERGUS

I don't know. He's been gone all weekend. Deer hunting.

JAMES

Oh, dear, is he out there killing those darling, little animals again?

FERGUS

That was his plan.

JAMES

They're all little Bambi's as far as I'm concerned. How anyone can get pleasure out of killing is beyond me. I brought the tuxedo over to make sure it fits.

FERGUS

I thought it was a costume ball.

JAMES

It is. This is a special kind of tuxedo, which I designed myself. It has Spandex in all the right places. Every one of Hank's lovely bulges will show.

FERGUS

Hank won't wear something like that.

JAMES

He'll love it. And what about you? Are you excited?

FERGUS

Why should I be excited?

JAMES

Tonight's the opening of your exhibit. You are going, aren't you?

FERGUS

It's not my kind of thing.

JAMES

You should see someone about this, Fergus. This is not normal.

James starts preparing coffee. The doorbell rings.
James opens the door. Chelsea enters.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Chelsea. Hello, my dear.

CHELSEA

I came over to wish Fergus luck.

(to Fergus)

I know how hard this exhibition is for you.

FERGUS

Where have you been? I haven't seen you for a while.

CHELSEA

Sam's been taking me around the city. Yesterday she took me to the Algonquin Hotel. I saw the Round Table.

JAMES

Only tourists can afford to drink in a place like that.

CHELSEA

It must have been wonderful to be a writer back then. Not like today. The dot-com world doesn't give a damn about print journalism. I see you got the paper already.

Fergus keeps painting without responding.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

Lot of good stories in the paper today.

(still no response)

Did you get a chance to read the paper yet?

FERGUS

From cover to cover.

CHELSEA

That's nice.

(waits, but no comment)

Well, what did you think? My story, you read it, didn't you?

JAMES

Of course he read it. I thought it was lovely, Chelsea, and so insightful.

CHELSEA

Thank you, James. Fergus?

FERGUS

I don't know how Hank is going to react but... Actually I do know how Hank is going to react. You're a very good writer.

CHELSEA

You liked it, then?

FERGUS

My phone hasn't stopped ringing.

CHELSEA

I'm so glad you liked it. I'm taking you out to dinner tonight. My treat. There's this little restaurant near the Met, where a lot of the opera singers hang out.

FERGUS

We're celebrating your story?

CHELSEA

Something more important than that.

James gives Chelsea coffee.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

Thank you, James. Fergus, you're about to get...

JAMES

The trick is not using too much water. American coffee is almost like tea.

CHELSEA

(annoyed with the interruptions)

It's very nice coffee, James. Fergus, Rudolph Bennington called me at work today about the story. You do know who he is, don't you?

He shakes his head.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

He's the artistic director of the opera, for God sakes. He said he never knew you were out there in the alley all these years, listening to rehearsals.

FERGUS

I didn't know he was in there doing whatever he does.

CHELSEA

He wanted to know if you really could sing opera. The gay division of the Opera Guild is sponsoring a benefit concert and competition called Broken Dreams. Aspiring singers who never made it compete for an all-expense-paid trip to Verona for the opera festival.

FERGUS

What's that got to do with me?

CHELSEA

I told him every opera lover in New York has read about you and is wondering if you can really sing. Bennington is going to audition you. Wednesday. At 4 o'clock.

JAMES

Your chance to sing at the Met, Fergus.

Fergus shakes his head.

CHELSEA

You're shaking your head.

JAMES

You're shaking your head?

FERGUS

I don't want to do it.

JAMES

She's talking about the Met.

CHELSEA

You've been dreaming about this all your life.

He shakes his head.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

I wish you'd stop shaking your head like that. Bennington isn't expecting a great voice. He just wants to make sure you can sing a little bit so you won't make a fool of yourself.

FERGUS

I'm a very private person.

CHELSEA

You're exhibiting your paintings.

FERGUS

That's different.

CHELSEA

How's it different?

JAMES

Chelsea, dear, don't you know why he's letting Sam show his paintings?

FERGUS

There's nothing more to tell.

JAMES

Tell her about Hank.

CHELSEA

What's about Hank?

FERGUS

He's got nothing to do with this.

JAMES

Fergus agreed to the exhibit only if Sam also showed Hank's pictures.

CHELSEA

Is that true, Fergus?

FERGUS

The earth rise is about to begin.

JAMES

(reacting to growing tension)

Oh dear, I think I better leave.

(heads for the door)

Don't forget to tell Hank about the tuxedo when he gets back from the slaughter.

James exits.

CHELSEA

Then it wasn't because of our talk that you agreed to this?

FERGUS

Hank needs to be recognized.

CHELSEA

You don't need it, too?

FERGUS

No.

CHELSEA

Everyone needs verification. And everyone tries to get it unless they're...

(sudden realization)

You're afraid. You're afraid to compete.

(Fergus doesn't respond.)

Is that it?

(He turns away from her.)

Fergus, you can't spend your life sitting in an alley, pretending it's a concert hall. You can't live your life so afraid of losing that you never try.

FERGUS

My life is fine.

CHELSEA

Maybe Vince Lombardi is a little extreme. But damnit, he's going in the right direction.

FERGUS

I don't want to talk about this.

CHELSEA

You have no passion.

FERGUS

I'm passionate to a fault.

Fergus goes onto the roof.

CHELSEA

I'm getting to hate that fucking moon.

He focuses the telescope.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

Passion is wanting something so badly that you'll do whatever it takes to get it, even take chances and do things you're terrified of doing. Because you want something so much.

FERGUS

I didn't know the other kids in the competition would be so good.

CHELSEA

But you tried.

FERGUS

I dropped out. My parents were...

(too painful to say)

My parents were disappointed. It was years before I sang again.

CHELSEA

(with feeling)
And you're still afraid. It's ruining your life.

FERGUS

God damn you. Where the hell do you get off, coming into my life like this and telling me what to do?

CHELSEA

You could be happier.

FERGUS

I'm happy enough.

CHELSEA

Then there's nothing more to talk about.

(realizing she's been too hard on him)

I don't hate the fucking moon. The moment I saw you I thought you were a character. In my business that's a compliment.

FERGUS

Thank you.

CHELSEA

Seeing you sitting there in the alley, I felt there was something special about you.

FERGUS

I knew there was something special about you.

They look at each other with growing warmth.
Chelsea is confused by the feelings she is having.

FERGUS (CONT'D)

Are you crying?

CHELSEA

What makes you think that?

FERGUS

I can see the tears on your cheeks, glistening in the moonlight.

(touching her cheek)

Here.

CHELSEA

I guess I'm all emotional thinking about the moon.

FERGUS

Then why are my cheeks getting all wet like that, too?

CHELSEA

You're crying?

He kisses her gently. Then they kiss each other with passion.

FERGUS

I've been waiting so long to do that.

CHELSEA

I don't understand.

FERGUS

I'm not gay.

CHELSEA

What!

FERGUS

I'm not.

CHELSEA

I don't understand.

FERGUS

It's a little complicated.

CHELSEA

You came out of the closet. But now you think it's better to go back in. Is that what you're saying?

FERGUS

It's not that complicated. I'm not going back into the closet. Because I never came out of the closet.

CHELSEA

You never told anyone you were gay?

FERGUS

I'm straight. I am now, always have been and always will be straight.

CHELSEA

You said you were gay.

FERGUS

No, I didn't.

CHELSEA

You lied to me.

FERGUS

No.

CHELSEA

You said... I mean, you were sitting there in the alley and... All that talk about living with a man. Introducing James as though he was your lover. You were talking about emotional things. You said you liked opera.

FERGUS

You assumed I was gay.

CHELSEA

You should have told me the truth.

FERGUS

I wanted to show you how wrong your prejudice was.

CHELSEA

I am not prejudiced.

FERGUS

Thinking that all straight men are insensitive and arrogant is just as bad as thinking all gay men are swishy and bitchy.

CHELSEA

That's why you deceived me? Because you wanted to give me a lesson in tolerance?

FERGUS

I wanted a chance to show you that I was the kind of person you could trust.

CHELSEA

By deceiving me?

FERGUS

Now that you know I'm straight, we can have a relationship.

CHELSEA

I thought we had a relationship.

FERGUS

I mean a boy/girl relationship.

CHELSEA

Lovers?

FERGUS

Yes.

CHELSEA

(laughing)

I'll be damned. All you want is to get laid.

FERGUS

Don't talk like that.

CHELSEA

Sucked in by the bullshit again.

FERGUS

Don't be mad at me.

CHELSEA

(seething underneath, eerily calm)

I'm not mad. I'm impressed -- by your acting skills.

FERGUS

I wasn't acting.

CHELSEA

You were doing what comes naturally to men. Lying and cheating to get what you want.

FERGUS

You're getting hysterical.

CHELSEA

I will be calm. I must achieve a new understanding of what it means to be male.

FERGUS

Now you're making fun of me.

CHELSEA

You have a genetic defect. All men have this defect. I accept this and feel sorry for you as I do for all the defective people in the world. I don't make fun of defective people.

FERGUS

I'm not defective.

CHELSEA

(losing it and yelling)
You lied to me you son of a bitch.

She goes to the door.

FERGUS

We were going to have dinner.

CHELSEA

I've lost my appetite. Goodbye, Fergus.

Chelsea exits. At first Fergus is bewildered. Then he rushes to the window and yells out.

FERGUS

Chelsea, I love you.

Hank enters, waving a newspaper.

HANK

My, God, did you read this story?

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 13

Sam's loft, later that night Chelsea is taking down the Central Park painting. The intercom buzzer sounds.

VOICE #1 (ON INTERCOM)

Hello, darling. We're down here, waiting.

Sam rushes in and goes to the intercom

SAM

I'll be down in a minute, Peter.

(to Chelsea)

I hope those awful pictures of nude parts don't scare people away. The Village Voice might be sending a critic.

(surprised to see Chelsea removing the painting.)

You just put that picture up.

CHELSEA

So now I'm taking it down.

She climbs down the ladder with the painting, which she almost throws against the wall. She sits down dejectedly on the couch.

SAM

What's wrong?

CHELSEA

What makes you think something's wrong?

SAM

I'm good at picking up subtle clues.

VOICE #1 (ON INTERCOM)

Sam, we're double parked. I do wish you'd hurry. You're going to be late for your own show.

SAM

(into the intercom)

I'm moving as fast as I can.

(sitting down next to Chelsea)
He didn't like your story?

CHELSEA

Who the hell cares if he liked it or not? I'm on to other stories. He's your problem now. You're representing him.

SAM

Why don't you come with me to the opening and get out of this place for a while?

CHELSEA

I really don't feel like it.

VOICE #1 (ON INTERCOM)

There's a policeman coming. We'll drive around the block and come back. Will you please hurry?

SAM

You don't have to worry about running into him at the show. He's not coming, you know.

CHELSEA

That sounds like the son of a bitch.

SAM

What happened, Chelsea?

CHELSEA

They're waiting for you downstairs.

SAM

It's OK. This is more important.

CHELSEA

(finally)
He lied to me about being gay.

SAM

Yes.

CHELSEA

That doesn't piss you off?

SAM

I never thought he was gay.

CHELSEA

You didn't?

Sam shakes her head.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

Why didn't you tell me?

SAM

It wasn't important.

CHELSEA

All he wanted was sex.

SAM

That's like getting made at him for having a penis. They're programmed that way to keep the species going.

VOICE #1 (ON INTERCOM)

We're back. But we don't see you here.

Sam marches over to the intercom.

SAM

(into intercom)

I'm coming, god damn it. Will you be patient?

VOICE (ON INTERCOM)

That wasn't very nice.

SAM

(reaching out to her)

Come here.

(hugging Chelsea)

Forget about that guy.

CHELSEA

I hate him.

SAM

We have so much to be happy about. We have each other. And a lot of wonderful things to look forward to.

CHELSEA

All goddamn men are the same.

SAM

We're making a lovely home together. I love your cooking.

CHELSEA

I'm such a fool.

SAM

It's terrible the way he's hurt you.

VOICE (ON INTERCOM)

Sam!

Sam charges at the intercom and yells into it.

SAM

(into the intercom)

I'm walking out the door now.

(to Chelsea)

I hate to leave you when you're feeling like this.

CHELSEA

I'll be all right. Your friends are waiting.

SAM

I love you.

She starts to leave.

CHELSEA

Sam. I hope your show is a wonderful success. We'll have our own private champagne party when you get back. I'll have a chilled bottle waiting.

SAM

Yes, it is time to celebrate, isn't it?

Sam exits. The phone rings.

FERGUS (ON ANSWERING
MACHINE)

Hello, it's me again. Didn't you get any of my messages? I know you're there getting ready for the show. Please pick up the phone. I'm going to keep calling until you talk to me. This is too important for me to let...

She disconnect the machine and collapses on the couch with the drink, which she sadly drinks.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 14

Fegus studio, two days later. Hank is painting a breast and James is sewing a costume. A dozen identical breast paintings are lined up on the floor.

JAMES

I knew you'd love the ball.

HANK

It was a wonderful ball. What is it with Fergie. He finished watching that beloved eclipse of his and then stormed out mad as hell.

JAMES

He's having love problems.

HANK

That's why they call it "falling in love." You get hurt. He should dump that woman.

JAMES

He loves her.

HANK

She doesn't really exist. She's not beautiful. She's not sophisticated. She's another one of his fantasies.

JAMES

All romance is part fantasy. Don't you know anything?

Lights come up on Sam's darkened apartment as Hank continues to paint and James continues to sew his costume. Chelsea enters the apartment, dumps her stuff on a chair and puts on the telephone answering machine.

VOICE #2 (ON ANSWERING
MACHINE)

Sam, you sly little thing. Just read the rave reviews of your counter-culture exhibit. What a brilliant idea to do a heterosexual satire. Bravo. Or should I say brava.

Machine shuts off and then comes on again.

FERGUS (ON ANSWERING
MACHINE)

Chelsea, the eclipse is beginning. It's a...

Chelsea angrily snaps off the machine, gets a drink and sits down in the darkened apartment. Hank starts humming as he finishes the painting, puts it against the wall with all the others and starts a new one.

JAMES

My aren't we happy today? Aren't you glad I talked you into going to the ball?

HANK

You didn't tell me there'd be so many beautiful people. I really liked Martha.

JAMES

I couldn't drag you away from Martha at breakfast.

HANK

I was hoping that Martha would dump that swishy guy she was with.

JAMES

I was so embarrassed the way you two were making out in the restaurant. You were very drunk.

HANK

Martha sure does know how to kiss. Great ass. Loved feeling it.

JAMES

Martha has very big hands, don't you think?

HANK

I didn't notice.

JAMES

And Martha's shoulders. They're very broad, for a woman.

HANK

I suppose.

JAMES

And what a deep voice.

HANK

Kind of sexy.

JAMES

Hank, I've got to tell you something. And I'm savoring what I'm about to tell you. Martha is a man.

HANK

I know.

JAMES

You do?

HANK

One thing led to another so I said what the hell.

JAMES

Are you going to see him again?

HANK

We do have a lot in common.

Lights on the studio fade to black but Sam's apartment remains lit. Chelsea replays the telephone message.

FERGUS (ON ANSWERING
MACHINE)

Chelsea, that eclipse is beginning. It's a shame you're missing it. Damnit, woman, I love you.

She rewinds part of the tape and plays it again.

FERGUS (ON ANSWERING
MACHINE) (CONT'D)

Damn it, woman, I love you.

Sam enters.

SAM

The phone's been ringing all day. The reviewers liked Hank's stuff better than Fergus'. Can you believe that? No wonder van Gogh committed suicide. What are you doing, sitting here in the dark?

Sam puts the lights on.

SAM

Are you OK?

Chelsea shakes her head.

SAM (CONT'D)

I think maybe you could use a massage.

Sam starts massaging Chelsea's neck.

SAM (CONT'D)

Your neck muscles are like iron cables. I've never seen you like this.

CHELSEA

People are always lying to reporters. Now one million people in New York City think that Fergus McManus is gay.

SAM

This is what's bothering you -- journalistic accuracy?

CHELSEA

I've got to stop thinking about him.

SAM

Why don't we have a nice, long bath, and then we'll go to bed.

CHELSEA

You go ahead. I'll be up in a bit.

SAM

We will have bubbles tonight and candlelight in the bathroom.

Sam exits but sticks her head back in.

SAM (CONT'D)

I'll be waiting.

The doorbell rings. Chelsea calls through the door.

CHELSEA

Yes, who is it?

(She listens.)

I can't hear you.

Chelsea opens the door a crack.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

What are you doing here?

FERGUS

I want to talk to you.

CHELSEA

People are sleeping. It's late.

FERGUS

It's only 8 o'clock. I just want to talk to you for a minute.

CHELSEA

No.

She starts to close the door. He stops her.

FERGUS

You want me to yell through the door?

CHELSEA

Oh, all right. But be quick.

She lets him in. He looks for a chair.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

You said you were going to be quick.

FERGUS

(sitting down)

You called what I did deceit. I call it letting people believe what they want to believe.

CHELSEA

Shhh, not so loud.

FERGUS

People do that all the time. They pretend to like presents they hate. They say "fine thank you" when they feel like hell.

CHELSEA

We're not talking about white lies.

FERGUS

I wanted to start our discussion by challenging the basic tenet that all lying is bad.

CHELSEA

Start our discussion? How long is this going to take?

FERGUS

The doctor knows the man is going to die in a few weeks, but evades his questions, saying he can't predict the future.

CHELSEA

Sam is going to walk in here any moment.

FERGUS

That's OK. She can join the discussion.

CHELSEA

I don't think that's necessary.

FERGUS

A gay man gets a job and he knows his employer thinks he's straight. He doesn't correct the misconception.

CHELSEA

Because he could get fired.

FERGUS

But this guy did the same thing I did. He didn't correct the misconception.

CHELSEA

Business and personal relations are different.

FERGUS

Deceit in personal relations is not good, but deceit in business is OK?

CHELSEA

That's not what I meant.

FERGUS

Sometimes it is acceptable to be deceitful in a personal relationship. That's why I didn't make a fuss when you were deceitful with me.

CHELSEA

I was never deceitful with you.

FERGUS

What about the flowers that first day we met? You knew I thought you were taking them to some guy? But you didn't correct me, did you?

CHELSEA

I never thought I'd see you again. I told you about Sam the next time we talked.

FERGUS

Why did you come back?

CHELSEA

I really wish you'd get the hell out of here.

FERGUS

So why'd you come back?

CHELSEA

You seemed interesting.

FERGUS

You came back because you thought I'd be a good story for your newspaper. I thought you were being friendly, but all you really wanted was a story.

CHELSEA

In the beginning that's true.

FERGUS

Why didn't you tell me from the start that you wanted a story?

She doesn't respond.

FERGUS (CONT'D)

You were afraid the truth would scare me off and you wouldn't get your story, that's why.

SAM (O.S.)

Chelsea, are you coming?

CHELSEA

(calling out)

I'll be right up.

(to Fergus)

A lot of people think reporters can't be trusted. I wanted to show that I wasn't like that.

FERGUS

By being dishonest with me?

CHELSEA

But I finally told you.

SAM (O.S.)

Chelsea, is there someone there?

CHELSEA

Please, will you go? I don't want her to find you here.

(calling out)

It's all right, Sam. No one's here.

FERGUS

Oh, now you're deceiving her.

SAM (O.S.)

Chelsea, who is that?

CHELSEA

Get out of here, I said.

FERGUS

It's OK. I understand why you can't be honest with her.

CHELSEA

Please.

FERGUS

I've said what I came to say. Think about it, when you get off your high horse. My regards to Sam.

Fergus exits. Sam enters.

SAM

What was that all about?

CHELSEA

It was Fergus.

SAM

I thought you were through with him.

CHELSEA

I am through with him.

SAM

He's obviously not through with you.

CHELSEA

I can't believe that guy. He comes here late at night to give me a lecture on what constitutes acceptable deceit. He said gays are deceitful by pretending to be straight to get jobs and keep from getting fired.

SAM

That's not deceit. It's survival.

CHELSEA

Fergus let me think he was gay.

SAM

That's deceit of the worst kind.

CHELSEA

It's kind of what gays do in reverse.

SAM

Exactly. What gays do is not deceitful. What Fergus did is the reverse. So it's deceitful.

CHELSEA

Maybe I was too harsh with him.

SAM

Are you in love with that man?

CHELSEA

Don't be ridiculous. He's a bum. He doesn't know how to live in the real world. That's why he spends all his time in alleys. He's afraid to take chances, to reach out and grab what he wants.

SAM

You are in love with him.

CHELSEA

I'm in love with you.

SAM

We haven't made love in a month.

CHELSEA

Everything's been so hectic. You with the exhibit and me with that damn story.

SAM

That's not the reason, is it?

CHELSEA

I love holding you. I love you holding me.

SAM

I need more than that from the woman I love. And the woman who says she loves me.

CHELSEA

I want to be there for you like that. But.

SAM

But you can't.

CHELSEA

Please be patient with me.

SAM

Maybe it was a mistake asking you to live here.

CHELSEA

We have so many things going for us. I love going around the city with you, seeing all the things you love. And meeting your friends. Being in a community of women is wonderful. And I'm ...

SAM

It's not enough.

CHELSEA

Maybe after a while I won't be so uptight.

SAM

It doesn't work like that. It hurts so much having you so close when you are so far away. There's a saying. When there's doubt, there is no doubt.

She exits. The phone rings and the answering machine picks up the message.

FERGUS (ON ANSWERING
MACHINE)

Oh, by the way. I auditioned for Bennington. I guess he didn't think I'd make a fool of myself. He wants me to sing at that benefit. I told him I would... Chelsea?... I know you're listening. Please pick up the phone... Chelsea... I'll just call back again if you don't...

Chelsea picks up the phone.

CHELSEA

(into the phone)

That's wonderful and you'll be wonderful... I can't come to the concert... Because I can't, that's why. Good-bye, Fergus.

She hangs up and starts crying again.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 15

Fergus' studio, one month later. Hank is struggling to do sit-ups while James holds down his legs.

JAMES

(counting)
Two hundred and three. Two hundred and four.

HANK

(barely able to talk)
You did 500 of these?

JAMES

Yes.
(counting)
Two hundred and five.

HANK

You're in better shape than I am.

JAMES

I go to the gym every day.

HANK

I have all this equipment.

JAMES

Which you never use.
(counting)
Two hundred and six.

HANK

I can't do any more. Martha called me. He thought it would be fun to go up to his ski lodge next week.

JAMES

(annoyed)
That's nice.

HANK

I said I'd go.

JAMES

Bully for you. It's almost time for Fergus' concert.

He abruptly leaves Hank, who falls backward without the counter-weight, and turns on the radio. The sound of applause.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Fergus said he was going to sing an aria tonight that has a lot of personal meaning for him.

FERGUS (O.S.)

Tonight, I would like to sing for you, La donna e mobile from Rigoletto.

HANK

Make it louder.

James turns up the music and they listen to Fergus' singing for a few seconds. James turns the music down.

JAMES

You're staying over night in that awful ski lodge?

HANK

Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

JAMES

That's a long time to be with someone like Martha.

HANK

I thought you liked Martha.

JAMES

I used to.

HANK

But now you don't? Why?

JAMES

(turning up the music)
I'm listening to Fergus.

James turns up the music and they listen. After a few seconds. James turns down the music.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Truth be known, Martha has a very unsavory reputation.

HANK

She's hot all right.

JAMES

My, haven't we changed our orientation.

HANK

We're not going to do any of that kind of stuff.

JAMES

And just what kind of stuff do you think you'll be doing high up in a mountain in a tiny, unheated ski lodge when there is no snow on the ground.

HANK

Take long hikes and photograph birds.

JAMES

And at night, when it's too dark to take long hikes and photograph birds?

HANK

We'll...

JAMES

(turning up the music)
Can't you see, I'm trying to listen to the music?

They listen some more. James turns down the music.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Spending three nights doing god-knows-what with someone you hardly know is a bit much, don't you think?

HANK

At night we'll talk.

JAMES

Martha doesn't like to talk about sports.

HANK

We'll talk about...
(trying to come up with something)
...relationships.

JAMES

That will be a first for you.

HANK

We thought it would be nice if you came up with us.

JAMES

You did?

HANK

I think the three of us could have a lot of fun.

JAMES

You do?

HANK

Yes.

JAMES

I suppose we could have fun, drinking hot toddies, in front of a roaring fire in that cozy little cottage....

(facetious)

...talking about relationships.

HANK

Then you'll come?

JAMES

(smiling at the double entendre)

Come? Of course I'll come. Who wouldn't come? Whose idea was it? To invite me. Martha's?

HANK

Actually, it was my idea.

He turns up the music and they settle back to listen to Fergus, both with contented smiles.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 16

Several days later, Sam's apartment. Chelsea's chair has been put into the hallway near the front door, preparatory to being move out. There's an envelope on the hallway table.

SAM (O.S.)

(calling out)
Hello. I'm home.

Sam enters with packages. She sees the envelope leaning against a lamp. She nervously opens the envelope and reads the letter. Grief is replaced with anger. She crumples up the letter and throws it on the ground. Regaining her composure, she sits down, picks up the letter and rereads it. This time she is able to appreciate the love that is also in the message. The letter reminds her of good times she and Chelsea had had. She smiles sadly.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 17

One month later, the boulder in Central Park. Fergus is sitting on it, eating cheese and bread and drinking wine. Chelsea enters. Finally he sees her. They look at each other cautiously. Chelsea smiles. Finally, Fergus smiles, too.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

CURTAIN

END OF PLAY