

HETEROPHOBIA

a play by Tom Baum

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LIZZIE, 30s-40s, owns her own ad agency
MARCUS, 30s-40s, a restaurant critic
JEMMA, 30s-40s, a socialite, Lizzie's closest friend
TAL, late 20s, an aspiring chef
SHELBY, 30s, Lizzie's husband, a painter

The play is set in a restaurant, Lizzie's apartment, and Marcus's apartment. All minimally suggested.

ACT I**Scene 1**

(Lights up on LIZZIE and MARCUS at a restaurant table. They're both a little high on wine.)

LIZZIE: Ohmigod, you don't know how glad I am to hear you say that. I am so not a locavore.

MARCUS: Ugly word.

LIZZIE: Such an ugly word.

MARCUS: Ridiculous fetish.

LIZZIE: And what's up with Jidori chicken?

MARCUS: I know.

LIZZIE: There's no other kind of chicken in the world? Only Jidori?

MARCUS: Tastes just like chicken.

LIZZIE: Heirloom tomatoes!

MARCUS: Meyer Lemons!

LIZZIE: Burrata cheese! Enough already!

MARCUS: What's the best cookie in the world?

LIZZIE: Chocolate chips?

MARCUS: Oreos.

LIZZIE: Oreos!

MARCUS: Processed foods may kill you...but their engineers sure make them taste great.

LIZZIE: Ohmigod, I loved that post. But you caught so much flak!

MARCUS: I'm paid to have silly opinions.

LIZZIE: Your modesty, I love it. So tell me, Marcus: What would you do with this restaurant?

MARCUS: This place? I'd close it down. Put it out of its misery.

LIZZIE: That's just what I plan to do.

MARCUS: Whoa. You own this restaurant?

LIZZIE: God no. Why? You thought I brought you here for the food? I'm so embarrassed!

MARCUS: So what are you saying, you're buying the place?

LIZZIE: Uh-huh. That shocks you?

MARCUS: OK, then I have to ask: Why?

LIZZIE: I've always wanted to have a restaurant. My dad tried to start one, back in Greenwood, Indiana, chicken fried steak place. Didn't really work out....But he was so sweet. Totally into food. Whenever I was sick in bed, he wrote out menus for me.

MARCUS: How much can you spend?

LIZZIE: Things should clarify very soon. Two weeks from Friday. That's when my divorce becomes final.

MARCUS: Oh I see.

LIZZIE: No no, I'm the solvent one, not my husband.

MARCUS: Because if you're asking me to—

LIZZIE: No, ohmigod, I'm not asking for your money, no. But here's the thing. I have a dear dear friend. Her name's Jemma, she's gorgeous, she's brilliant, and she's superrich. Old Newport family. We were roommates at Sarah Lawrence, friends for life, but we've kinda lost touch lately...I've been going through this divorce, she has this...this wall-to-wall social life. I want her totally involved in this restaurant. For her sake. She needs a purpose in life, she needs to prove to her mother she's more than a party girl, or the family fortune goes to the Foundation. She's never worked a day in her life, so she'll need convincing.

MARCUS: You need me to persuade her?

LIZZIE: Yes, and give us a rave review. I'm kidding. I'm sure you're incorruptible.

MARCUS: No, I can be bought.

LIZZIE: So far I'm only buying you lunch. But yes, I'm going to need you to impress her with some expert counsel.

MARCUS: (*lightly*) Is that code for free advice?

LIZZIE: Absolutely not. Whatever you charge for consulting, plus a share of the profits. I want us to be close as well.

MARCUS: (*hint of unease*) OK.

LIZZIE: Is that a problem?

MARCUS: No, it's fine. So...you're in an alley here, which means you don't get much walk-in business. Make that your brand. No sign, just a neon arrow. Make it an adventure just to find the place.

LIZZIE: Ohmigod, that's so brilliant! Like a speakeasy!

MARCUS: And brick the walls. The louder the restaurant, the more liquor you sell.

LIZZIE: Really? Doesn't seem to be working here.

MARCUS: What, you call this loud?

LIZZIE: Yes, I know, how weird is that. There's a fancy word for what I have: hyperaesthesia. Sounds are louder, colors are brighter. Ever since I was a kid, and I never grew out of it.

MARCUS: Sounds trippy.

LIZZIE: Especially smells. My nose is my most sensitive organ. That I can mention to a man I just met. (*hears herself, puts aside her wine*) Sorry. That was crude.

MARCUS: No problem.

LIZZIE: You smell wonderful, by the way.

MARCUS: Thank you.

LIZZIE: It's you, I can tell. Not an additive.

MARCUS: I'm anti-additives. So...do you have a chef in mind?

LIZZIE: You must know some up-and-comers.

MARCUS: I know one or two.

LIZZIE: Could you draw me up a list? For the next time we meet?

MARCUS: I could do that, sure.

LIZZIE: Great.

MARCUS: Let's see what I come up with.

LIZZIE: I'm excited, Marcus.

MARCUS: (*slightly uneasy*) Oh yeah. Definitely. So am I.

(*Blackout.*)

Scene 2

(Lights up on LIZZIE and JEMMA in LIZZIE's apartment.)

LIZZIE: Ohmigod, this man was so fantastic! He'll give us an awesome review, and Jemma, he was so handsome! And totally brilliant. He was on the Food Network, and he had a weekly column in the Sunday *Times*.

JEMMA: "Had"? What about now?

LIZZIE: He blogs. He lectures.

JEMMA: He's unemployed.

LIZZIE: No! He totally monetized. Gets tons of hits.

JEMMA: Is he married?

LIZZIE: That's not an issue. *(then)* I didn't see a ring.

JEMMA: Careful, Lizzie.

LIZZIE: Oh please.

JEMMA: You know how you "make them up."

LIZZIE: Not this time.

JEMMA: You're already doing it.

LIZZIE: Because he's the real deal! He's already given me fabulous advice.

JEMMA: Well, don't have him up to your country house.

LIZZIE: Please, we're not there yet.

JEMMA: I'm tired of watching you get hurt.

LIZZIE: Oh good. And I thought you'd stopped caring.

JEMMA: Men are more pissed off than ever. Especially at rich successful women.

LIZZIE: Oh you and your grand theories. You have sex with so many men so often, how can you even tell things are changing?

JEMMA: That's how I know.

LIZZIE: I mean you never have time for me, what's the last time we saw each other?

JEMMA: Let's wait till Shelby's out of your life.

LIZZIE: He's already out of my life. I bought him an apartment, we only see each other with the lawyers. Forget Shelby, let's do this restaurant together. The two of us. Fifty-fifty.

JEMMA: Plus what's-his-name.

LIZZIE: Marcus. He's not putting in a dime.

JEMMA: Because he doesn't have a dime. Sweetie, I don't know, I'd just drive you crazy. Make you do all the scutwork and sit back frowning at the menu and the décor and complaining about the waitstaff.

LIZZIE: We wouldn't let you. We'd make you front of the house. All those men you've slept with, they'd come flocking.

JEMMA: You really want this thing to happen.

LIZZIE: More than anything.

JEMMA: You know I'd love to see more of you...

LIZZIE: What's stopping you?

JEMMA: Why not just sleep with this guy? Why do you have to pretend he's a genius?

LIZZIE: I didn't say he was a genius.

JEMMA: You'll get around to it. Like with Shelby: "The next Damien Hirst."

LIZZIE: I never called him that.

JEMMA: When he put a live cat and live rat inside a Plexiglas box with a window between?

LIZZIE: That was genius.

JEMMA: And PETA trashed the gallery and you had to pay for all the damage. How much has Shelby cost you overall?

LIZZIE: Counting the divorce? Low seven figures.

JEMMA: Same thing happens with Marcus, we're done.

(JEMMA starts out. The downstairs buzzer rings. LIZZIE picks up the phone.)

LIZZIE: Yes....*(tightens)* Right...Thanks for the heads-up.

JEMMA: Oh don't tell me.

LIZZIE: I asked the doorman to warn me. You'd better go.

JEMMA: And leave you alone with Shelby? No way.

LIZZIE: Please, Jemma? He sees you, it'll just rev him up more.
Take the service elevator.

JEMMA: Nope. Don't trust you for a minute.

(Sound of a lock turning.)

JEMMA: You didn't change the locks?!

LIZZIE: My lawyer told me not to.

(SHELBY enters. He's wired.)

SHELBY: Well, look at this, my lucky day, a gorgeous twofer. Hey, Jemma. *(to LIZZIE)* Hi, sweetheart.

JEMMA: Shelby, you shouldn't be here.

SHELBY: Lizzie, tell her it's all right.

JEMMA: You're about sign divorce papers. It's like seeing the bride before the wedding.

SHELBY: We have private matters to discuss. You're free to eavesdrop.

LIZZIE: Jemma was just leaving.

SHELBY: (*to JEMMA*) You're looking so amazing—both of you. Mind if I take a picture?

JEMMA: Yes, we mind very much.

SHELBY: (*taking out his phone*) Come on, I want to paint you as a couple, I don't have any shots of the two of you. (*snaps a picture*)

JEMMA: Hey. Not cool. I said go.

LIZZIE: Jemma? It's all right, I'll be OK.

JEMMA: You sure?

LIZZIE: (*sotto*) I'll give him five minutes.

JEMMA: All right. But I'm calling a locksmith.

(*JEMMA heads for the door.*)

SHELBY: Bye, Jemma!

JEMMA: Goodbye, Shelby.

(*JEMMA exits.*)

SHELBY: OK, I'll start at the beginning. I was coming out of Wasserman's office—by the way, I'm seeing him three times a week now—and I was crossing Central Park West and all of a sudden it hit me. I suddenly realized what people mean by "All men are brothers." I felt this incredible connection with everybody I passed on the street, I had all I could do not to grin at everybody, which as you know, in this city, can be really risky. And this is the great part, this feeling, it didn't go away, you remember that portrait I did of you, eating mayonnaise out of a jar? Well, I did three more of you, different foods, peanut butter, cottage cheese, and lemon curd, and you know what, why not? De Kooning painted the same woman over and over, though of course they got more *vagina dentata* the more he lost his mind.

LIZZIE: Shelby...this isn't in lieu of medication, is it?

SHELBY: I didn't flush my meds, if that's what you're asking.

LIZZIE: Seeing Wasserman three times a week.

SHELBY: No. Wasserman's all about the meds. Don't worry about me. I'm auto-correcting as I go.

LIZZIE: You should stay on your meds.

SHELBY: Oh I will. Once I'm back—definitely.

LIZZIE: Back where?

SHELBY: Sublet my apartment and move back here.

LIZZIE: Listen to me. Are you listening? This is not going to happen.

SHELBY: You need me, Lizzie. You're an awesome lady, but you need looking after.

LIZZIE: You're just getting cold feet.

SHELBY: Cold feet, warm heart.

LIZZIE: Every divorcing couple goes through this.

SHELBY: Except the ones who hated each other. And you know that's not us.

LIZZIE: No, we never hated. And I hope we never will.

SHELBY: It's not your fault I stopped performing.

LIZZIE: That was never the issue, Shelby.

SHELBY: Wasserman says it's an epidemic. All the new doctors are women, the lawyers, the pop stars, even the math scores are leveling out. All that female success, men are going limp in droves. It's like a mass phobia.

LIZZIE: You'll get it back, don't worry.

SHELBY: I know, but here's the thing. I need to go to Thailand. For the brothel cure? Thailand has the sweetest, least threatening hookers in the world. Cheaper than a year's supply of Viagra, and that's counting the plane fare, a luxury hotel, and a week's worth of three-star meals. Trouble is, neither of us is allowed to splurge right now, but see, if we didn't go through with this divorce, then I could afford the trip. And you could come with me. Cash in on the cure.

LIZZIE: Shelby? Please get this through your head: We are not reconciling.

(Pause.)

SHELBY: OK. Then we're still both frozen.

LIZZIE: Until Friday the 7th.

SHELBY: Friday the 7th?

LIZZIE: That's when we're all meeting. To finalize. Unfreeze all our assets.

SHELBY: Friday the 7th. Yeah. Wow. Sounds lucky for somebody.

LIZZIE: I'll see you then.

SHELBY: Do I get a hug?

(LIZZIE obliges with a hug.)

LIZZIE: Bye, Shelby. Take your meds.

(SHELBY tries to hang on to the hug. LIZZIE breaks the hug, opens the door.)

SHELBY: I so loved seeing you again.

LIZZIE: *(generously)* Yeah, me too. Take care.

(SHELBY exits. LIZZIE closes the door. Quickly puts the chain-lock on. Blackout.)

Scene 3

(Lights up on MARCUS's apartment.)

TAL: Where exactly did you meet this Lizzie person?

MARCUS: At the Y, a week ago Tuesday.

TAL: Tuesday. Ohmigod, did I actually flake out on your lecture?
Oh, Marcus, will you ever forgive me. Tuesday, yes, I remember, I
couldn't get my shift at the restaurant covered. They fired Carlos,
they caught him snorting cocaine through a piece of penne. So tell
me.

MARCUS: She's made a ton of money in advertising, owns her own
agency, now she wants to open a restaurant.

TAL: And what does she want from you?

MARCUS: Advice.

TAL: A paying gig? No, that would be too much to hope for.

MARCUS: She'll hire me as a consultant.

TAL: For how much? Enough to pay our cable bill?

MARCUS: If the project goes forward.

TAL: If. You like this woman?

MARCUS: I can work with her.

TAL: Married?

MARCUS: Divorcing.

TAL: Is she, um, attractive?

MARCUS: Not to me.

TAL: Marcus?

MARCUS: What do you want me to say? She's a good-looking
woman.

TAL: Did you talk chefs?

MARCUS: In a general way.

TAL: Did my name come up?

MARCUS: Not yet.

TAL: "Hey, my partner just happens to be a chef."

MARCUS: Yes, and there's another problem.

TAL: What problem?

MARCUS: Her old Sarah Lawrence roommate. She's dead set on teaming up with her. Financially, and emotionally.

TAL: Are they lovers?

MARCUS: I don't get that vibe from Lizzie. This Jemma I haven't met. Some kind of trust-fund girl, with a right-wing family.

TAL: They'll never approve me. Oh God. My last chance to pay you back my student loan.

MARCUS: Do me a favor, don't go to the bad place yet.

TAL: We're already there. If you hadn't paid my way through cooking school, we wouldn't be flat broke today.

MARCUS: We're not flat broke.

TAL: Stop lying to me! I looked on Quicken, we're a month behind on the rent. What are we gonna do about Tabitha and Laurie's wedding? Do we have any miles?

MARCUS: Not nearly enough.

TAL: And we don't want to show up jet-lagged, so that means a three-night hotel bill. Would we want those gargoyles at our rehearsal dinner?

MARCUS: Let's not get ahead of ourselves, OK?

TAL: It's so hopeless. My golden opportunity.

(Pause.)

MARCUS: Unless, of course, we've never met.

TAL: What? No.

MARCUS: Just a thought.

TAL: Then how do you know I can cook?

MARCUS: I ate at the restaurant. Half the menu is yours.

TAL: Well, maybe three entrées. And two starters.

MARCUS: That's almost half.

TAL: (*pause*) Could you really bring that off?

MARCUS: I don't know.

TAL: I couldn't. (*pause*) I mean, OK, what if I do get the job and nobody comes and the reviews are terrible and you blame me and that ruins us forever? Is that a risk worth taking?

MARCUS: Not when you put it that way.

TAL: You know I'm a terrible liar.

MARCUS: No one's asking you to lie.

TAL: Just cook.

MARCUS: We know you can do that. Better than half the chefs in this city.

TAL: And leave the dirty work to you.

MARCUS: That's usually how it goes. I don't know about you, but I'm tired of waiting for our ship to come in. We may never get another opportunity.

TAL: We definitely won't.

MARCUS: Can you think of an alternative?

TAL: There's no alternative.

MARCUS: There's no alternative. (*patiently*) So what do you think we should do?

(*Blackout.*)

Scene 4

(Lights up on LIZZIE and MARCUS, at the restaurant.)

MARCUS: I made up a short list of chefs. In rough order of preference.

LIZZIE: This Tal person—

MARCUS: Head of the list. By far.

LIZZIE: Man or woman?

MARCUS: Man.

LIZZIE: How old?

MARCUS: No idea. I'm guessing young.

LIZZIE: You've never met him?

MARCUS: Never laid eyes on him. I've only eaten his food.

LIZZIE: What's his orientation?

MARCUS: His orientation?

LIZZIE: French? Italian? Fusion?

MARCUS: Oh. Right. He's very eclectic. Skews Moroccan. I've had three meals where he cooks, and they've all been superb.

LIZZIE: Moroccan. I think I like that.

MARCUS: When you cook, what do you cook? Assuming you do.

LIZZIE: Basic American, I guess. I don't cook for myself, just for dinner parties. And our company retreat, a hundred people, at my country house.

MARCUS: Impressive.

LIZZIE: Oh you'll have to come, you'll love the place. I have an egret and an owl and a family of deer who eat all my hydrangeas. It's practically a petting zoo. Do you have kids?

MARCUS: No, no kids.

LIZZIE: Me neither. Neither of my husbands wanted kids. My first husband had enough to handle with the cows and the goats...not to mention the chicks. Of both species.

MARCUS: You married a farmer?

LIZZIE: Stockbroker-turned-farmer...turned cockroach.

MARCUS: And the second one?

LIZZIE: He's a painter. Brilliant, actually. You ever been through a divorce?

MARCUS: Only once.

LIZZIE: Was it difficult?

MARCUS: Cut and dried. We even had the same lawyer.

LIZZIE: Then you have no idea. Shelby's stopped the clock.

MARCUS: Meaning what?

LIZZIE: Well, basically it means neither of us can spend anything beyond the ordinary...no big expenditures until the divorce is final.

MARCUS: So this restaurant's on hold.

LIZZIE: No! Am I giving that impression? But Jemma's gonna have to front us. Until I can pay her back.

MARCUS: So she's already on board.

LIZZIE: Well...not completely. So here's what we're going to do. I'll give an intimate dinner party, this Tal person will cook, and this will be a test of his talent and my hyperaesthetic taste buds.

MARCUS: How intimate a party?

LIZZIE: Well, Jemma. Without a date. I want her to be focused on the food. But a plus-one for you, if you want.

MARCUS: There's no plus-one.

LIZZIE: You're not in a relationship?

MARCUS: Does it matter?

LIZZIE: It might. I'm teasing.

MARCUS: I'm not in a relationship.

LIZZIE: Do you mind if I say something?

MARCUS: You were glad to hear me say that.

LIZZIE: You're so intuitive! I am glad. I'm very very glad.

(Blackout.)

Scene 5

(Lights up on MARCUS, LIZZIE, and JEMMA, finishing up a meal in Lizzie's apartment.)

MARCUS: —Why do people have so many opinions? Why do they value their opinions so much? Why do people pay me to have opinions? Has anyone, in the history of the world, ever wanted to be a critic when they grew up? See, little kids don't have opinions. They're too busy learning about the world. Until you hit puberty, everything tastes good.

JEMMA: Except olives, sour cream, and liverwurst.

MARCUS: Food is the exception that proves the rule.

LIZZIE: Which is why we need restaurant critics.

JEMMA: No, he's saying his job is superfluous.

LIZZIE: That's not what he's saying.

JEMMA: Excuse me, he said no one ever wanted to be a critic.

LIZZIE: That doesn't mean we don't need critics.

MARCUS: If you'll let me finish—

JEMMA: Sorry, I thought you were finished.

LIZZIE: He's not finished. Go on, Marcus, this is awesome.

MARCUS: Food criticism began in the Stone Age. Is this mushroom poisonous or is it edible? We're all hard-wired to make consumer judgments. That's why people take their opinions so seriously—these used to be life-or-death questions.

LIZZIE: Ohmigod, that's genius! *(catching herself; to JEMMA)* It is. *(to MARCUS)* No wonder your blog gets so many hits.

JEMMA: But now you're looking to move into the spotlight.

LIZZIE: He's already in the spotlight. I told you, he lectures at the Y—

JEMMA: Brilliantly, I'm sure.

LIZZIE: So brilliantly. Where's Tal gotten to? I want to congratulate him on the dessert. Tal?

(TAL enters, in chef's garb.)

TAL: I'm here. Anybody want more coffee? Was the crème brûlée a little scrambled-eggy? (to LIZZIE) Your torch was on the fritz.

LIZZIE: No, Tal, it was fabulous, not eggy at all. I loved the Moroccan touch, the orange blossom water? Sometimes that gets a little perfumey, but this was perfect.

TAL: Oh God, your sensitive palate. It's so scary.

JEMMA: It's a curse. Whenever we go to the theater, the guy sitting next to her has B.O.

TAL: (to JEMMA) And how was it for you?

JEMMA: Frankly? I found this dessert a little bland.

TAL: Even with the cinnamon?

LIZZIE: Don't listen to Jemma. If a spice doesn't scorch her mouth, she doesn't even taste it. She loved the halibut, didn't you, Jemma?

JEMMA: The halibut was...nice.

LIZZIE: Oh it was way more than nice.

JEMMA: I was going to say...tolerable.

LIZZIE: Don't listen to her, she's had too much of this lovely Syrah.

TAL: (to JEMMA) You know...I keep thinking we've met before.

JEMMA: Sorry, don't recall.

TAL: Was it the Plaza?

JEMMA: I haven't been to the Plaza in years.

TAL: Did you ever hire me as a caterer?

JEMMA: I never give catered parties.

TAL: I could swear I saw you there.

JEMMA: You're confusing me with someone else. And I would like more coffee, thank you.

TAL: I'm sure it will come to me.

(TAL *exits.*)

LIZZIE: Why was he quizzing you?

JEMMA: God knows. Did he seem a little hostile to you?

MARCUS: Hostile? No.

JEMMA: Gays usually take to me right away.

LIZZIE: How do you know he's gay?

JEMMA: Marcus, you want to weigh in here?

MARCUS: Sorry. My gaydar isn't that finely tuned.

JEMMA: (*to LIZZIE*) Trust me, darling, gay as paint. (*to MARCUS*) So I'm told you're unattached.

LIZZIE: Jemma! Seriously.

JEMMA: Ever been married? I'm betting not.

MARCUS: Why would you say that?

JEMMA: Just a hunch.

MARCUS: Sorry, you guessed wrong.

JEMMA: How long ago were you married?

MARCUS: It's been about ten years.

JEMMA: Tried it once, didn't like it?

MARCUS: I liked it while it lasted. You?

JEMMA: Never been tempted.

MARCUS: Standards too high?

LIZZIE: Way too high.

JEMMA: Unlike our Lizzie.

LIZZIE: Jemma, please. You are drunk.

JEMMA: Very pleasantly drunk, thanks for noticing. My doctor says I have the liver of a 60-year-old woman who never took a drink, so that puts me one-up on my alcoholic mother. Lizzie, you mind hunting up a cigarette? Marcus, is smoking among your vices? I hate to smoke alone.

MARCUS: Can't help you, sorry.

JEMMA: (*to LIZZIE*) Would you please, darling?

LIZZIE: Are you trying to get rid of me?

JEMMA: Absolutely. I want to talk to Marcus.

LIZZIE: (*doubtfully*) All right. I'll try to remember where I stashed them.

(LIZZIE *exits*.)

JEMMA: I thought we should get to know each other.

MARCUS: Isn't that what we were doing?

JEMMA: Without Lizzie leaping to your defense.

MARCUS: I can take care of myself, don't worry. So when did you and Lizzie hook up? First year? Second year?

JEMMA: At orientation.

MARCUS: L.U.G.?

JEMMA: Lesbian Until Graduation? Are you serious?

MARCUS: Always a possibility.

JEMMA: Lizzie's from Indiana.

MARCUS: (*wryly*) Of course that explains it.

JEMMA: In Lizzie's case it does. So what are your intentions here?

MARCUS: My intentions? To help start a restaurant. She seems to want that pretty desperately.

JEMMA: That's not all she wants. Or thinks she wants.

MARCUS: Sorry, you've lost me.

JEMMA: Lizzie always needs a man to admire. Whether he's worthy of admiration or not. She's a fantasist, our Lizzie. That's what makes her so fragile.

MARCUS: Fragile? I don't get that at all.

JEMMA: Believe me. Lizzie comes on strong, but she collapses like a bad soufflé. When she was eleven years old her dad went bankrupt. Lost all his money on a greasy spoon. Two weeks later—fatal car accident. Lizzie was devastated. She adored her dad. Thought he was God. Never admitted he had feet of clay, and she's been blind as a bat about men ever since. And I've suffered through them all, two husbands, five lovers, all disasters. If it hadn't been for me, she'd still be with the farmer.

MARCUS: That's sort of your role, isn't it?

JEMMA: My role?

MARCUS: To undo her mistakes.

JEMMA: If only she wouldn't make them.

MARCUS: Well...you needn't worry about me.

JEMMA: Can I ask why?

MARCUS: It's a business relationship.

JEMMA: Doesn't rule out romance. Unless...

MARCUS: Unless what?

JEMMA: Unless you want to tell me something.

MARCUS: Not sure what you're implying.

JEMMA: Don't you?

MARCUS: I find Lizzie very attractive, OK?

JEMMA: But?

MARCUS: I might have to answer to you.

(Sound of a key rattling unsuccessfully in a lock.)

SHELBY: *(other side of door)* What?! Oh come on. Lizzie?

JEMMA: Oh shit.

MARCUS: What's wrong?

JEMMA: It's all right. I'll take care of this. Excuse me.

(JEMMA heads for the door. Sound of a doorbell. Again. Again.)

SHELBY: *(other side of door)* Sweetheart, please let me in.

JEMMA: *(through door)* What do you want? How did you get past the doorman?

(Pounding on the door. JEMMA puts on the chain lock, opens the door a crack.)

JEMMA: Would you please go away? We have guests.

SHELBY: Who's we? I'm we. Was it your idea to change the locks?
That's a serious legal breach.

JEMMA: That's bullshit and you know it's bullshit.

SHELBY: Fine. I'm texting my lawyer as we speak.

(Pause.)

JEMMA: Stop. If I let you in, will you promise to behave yourself?

SHELBY: Haven't I always behaved myself with you? No matter how often you insulted me?

JEMMA: Are you going to be quiet or not?

SHELBY: Like a mouse. A giant mouse.

(JEMMA closes the door on SHELBY, unchains it, opens it.
SHELBY enters.)

SHELBY: Where's our Lizzie?

JEMMA: In the kitchen. What do you want with her?

SHELBY: Don't tell me she's cooking again. Where are we, Morocco? (to MARCUS) Whoa, hello. I'm Shelby. Lizzie's husband.

MARCUS: How are you.

SHELBY: I'm doing great. Wait, don't I know you? That face, where do I know it from? Didn't you use to be on TV? The Food Network, yes, when they were first getting started. Tell me your name again.

JEMMA: Never mind what his name is. What do you want with Lizzie?

SHELBY: That's between me and my wife. (to MARCUS) What happened to that column you used to do for the *Times*? Did the *Times* fire you too?

(LIZZIE has entered.)

LIZZIE: Shelby, that's enough. What are you doing here?

SHELBY: What am I supposed to do? You haven't answered any of my texts.

LIZZIE: We're not supposed to be texting. How did you get in?

SHELBY: I threatened your keeper with legal action. What if I had to sleep on the street?

LIZZIE: You don't have to sleep on the street. You have an apartment.

SHELBY: I hate that apartment. I can hear everything that goes on in the building. (to LIZZIE) Can we please talk?

LIZZIE: When our lawyers are in the room. You really should go. I'm in the middle of something here.

(TAL has entered, still in his chef's hat.)

TAL: (to SHELBY) Oh, hi. If you've come for dinner, I'm afraid you're late, but I can probably scare up a dessert. Or maybe just coffee? We have regular, decaf, and Moroccan spiced.

SHELBY: Jesus Harvey Christ.

TAL: Sorry. Didn't mean to be forward.

SHELBY: (*pointing to* MARCUS) You. (*pointing to* TAL) And you.

TAL: (*alarmed*) What about us?

SHELBY: I get it. Oh wow.

TAL: What do you get? There's nothing to get.

SHELBY: You're a chef.

TAL: Yes, I'm a chef, what about it?

SHELBY: And this guy's a critic, what are you, old friends?

MARCUS: We're not friends.

LIZZIE: They're not friends.

SHELBY: Something must have brought you together.

LIZZIE: Marcus is advising me on a restaurant.

SHELBY: No way.

LIZZIE: And Marcus knows Tal's food.

SHELBY: Is that right. Knows his food. (*to* JEMMA) What about you, you know these guys?

JEMMA: Never met them in my life.

TAL: Maybe in passing.

JEMMA: Never.

SHELBY: (*to* JEMMA) Are you funding this enterprise? Well, yeah, you'd have to be. Lizzie can't put in a penny until we settle.

JEMMA: But that's imminent, isn't it. (*to* LIZZIE) Isn't it?

SHELBY: Wow, and I thought you told each other everything. Listen, good for you, Lizzie, your childhood dream, count me in.

JEMMA: Forget it, Shelby.

SHELBY: I'm talking about artistically. Check out my new website: orgasmsfakeorreal.com. I've nailed down the domain, now I've got to find some porn girls who'll work on spec. But hey, once the site's up and running, screenshots on the walls, doesn't that sound awesome?

JEMMA: Can't happen, Shelby.

SHELBY: Who asked you? Might get us a spot on the Food Network.

LIZZIE: Sorry, Shelby.

SHELBY: OK. Your loss.

JEMMA: And now it's time to leave.

SHELBY: *(to JEMMA)* Why? So you can say poisonous things about me behind my back?

MARCUS: Hey. You heard the lady.

SHELBY: Butt out, foodie face.

MARCUS: Sorry. You're the one who's in the way.

SHELBY: I'll tell you who's in the way. You and people like you. Who made that kitschmeister Picasso synonymous with art? Critics. Lizzie, can I please have a moment?

MARCUS: *(taking him in tow)* Come on, out you go.

SHELBY: Whoa, strong grip, brother. You work out? Easy does it, easy does it, fuck—

LIZZIE: Marcus, it's OK, leave him alone. *(takes SHELBY aside, leads him toward the door)* We'll talk on Friday.

SHELBY: I'm just looking out for your welfare.

LIZZIE: I know you are.

SHELBY: (*sotto*) I don't have your nose, but I definitely smell a rat.

LIZZIE: You're sensing a lot of things these days. Please don't worry about me, OK? I'll see you at the lawyers'.

SHELBY: Yeah, right, the meeting.

LIZZIE: You promised to be there.

SHELBY: Yeah, I know.

LIZZIE: Keep your promise. Be there.

SHELBY: Sure sure. Bye, sweetheart.

(SHELBY *hugs* LIZZIE *and exits*.)

JEMMA: You didn't tell me he was threatening to hold up the divorce.

LIZZIE: It's a medication issue.

MARCUS: What about a restraining order?

LIZZIE: God no. Rubbing his nose in it...I couldn't. Once he takes his meds—

JEMMA: He won't.

LIZZIE: He will. Eventually.

JEMMA: Meanwhile, I'm the bank?

LIZZIE: No. Well yes, but no worries, I'll reimburse you, once the divorce is final. (*to* MARCUS *and* TAL) We shouldn't be talking about this in front of you guys. (*to* JEMMA) Um, here's your cigarette.

JEMMA: I'll smoke it in the cab, if they'll let me. So I gather we're done with the culinary demonstration?

TAL: I have *petits fours*.

JEMMA: Moroccan?

TAL: Yes.

JEMMA: I'll pass. Lizzie, let's get to the washing up before we both collapse.

LIZZIE: Oh don't bother, Marcus and I can handle that.

(Pause.)

JEMMA: *(to MARCUS)* You're sticking around.

MARCUS: Looks that way.

JEMMA: I see. In that case, thank you for your efforts, Tal.

TAL: Thank you for being here. Um, I'll clear.

(TAL clears the table, then exits, during:)

JEMMA: *(to LIZZIE)* Bye, darling. Enjoy the rest of your evening.
(to MARCUS) Pleasure meeting you.

MARCUS: The pleasure was all mine.

(JEMMA exits.)

MARCUS: Well. I see what you're up against now.

LIZZIE: I know. I've never seen him quite this wired.

MARCUS: I didn't mean your husband.

LIZZIE: You mean Jemma? Why? She was very taken with you.

MARCUS: I can't say I felt the love.

LIZZIE: Oh absolutely. I know the signs.

MARCUS: You don't think she might be jealous.

LIZZIE: Jealous of who?

MARCUS: Is she gay?

LIZZIE: Ohmigod, she is so not gay! She's famous for sleeping around. She slept with Jude Law and Clive Owen on the same day.

MARCUS: But not in the same bed.

LIZZIE: No, not in the same bed. You are so cute! Oh, and don't worry about Shelby's "screenshots." If Jemma's family ever saw porn on the wall? They'd cut her off without a cent.

(TAL enters.)

TAL: Where did Jemma go?

MARCUS: Jemma left.

TAL: She hated everything, didn't she.

LIZZIE: No. Come on.

TAL: I knew this was a one-off.

LIZZIE: Shh, give her time. Tal, this was so amazing. (to MARCUS) Wasn't it?

MARCUS: Spectacular.

LIZZIE: You did us both proud. Try and be patient.

TAL: What was that thing with that guy?

LIZZIE: My soon-to-be-ex? Nothing to worry about.

TAL: Then why do you sound worried? Sorry. That was rude. Does the china go in the dishwasher? Probably not, it has gold leaf.

LIZZIE: Tal, don't bother, we'll clean up. You've already done so much.

TAL: (to MARCUS) Are you sure?

MARCUS: We're sure.

TAL: It's a disaster area in there.

MARCUS: We can handle it.

TAL: Well. OK. Thank you both for this opportunity, even if nothing comes of it.

LIZZIE: It's happening, Tal. Believe me.

TAL: Until that guy plants a bomb in the restaurant.

LIZZIE: And thank you for being so gifted.

MARCUS: Hear hear.

TAL: Right. Well. *(to MARCUS)* Nice to see you. In person. Is the B train still running? *(pointedly)* I hate being alone on the platform this time of night.

LIZZIE: We're happy to call you a cab.

TAL: No, don't bother, you've done enough. I'll leave you two...alone. If I never run into you again... either of you...thanks for the audition. Ciao.

(TAL exits.)

LIZZIE: He's not the sunniest person in the world.

MARCUS: But so talented. Didn't you think?

LIZZIE: Are you kidding? Every course was a gem! And you, you were scintillating at dinner. That's probably what got Jemma's nose out of joint. She's used to being the alpha cynic. I hope she is jealous.

MARCUS: Why?

LIZZIE: Well...you know...if she thinks there's anything between us...

MARCUS: I wouldn't worry about it.

LIZZIE: You mean there's no reason to be jealous?

MARCUS: I didn't say that. *(pause)* On the contrary.

LIZZIE: Wow. So. She'll just have to learn to love you. Seriously, she'd better. I'm actually sick of her dissing the men in my life.

MARCUS: I don't blame you.

LIZZIE: Not that she hasn't been right from time to time. "Feckless Men and Where to Find Them." That's the book I'll write, if I ever write a book.

MARCUS: Where does that leave me?

LIZZIE: Nowhere. Ohmigod, feckless, you? No. Definitely not in the book.

MARCUS: That's a relief.

LIZZIE: *(cozying up)* Who knows? You might even be my happy ending.

MARCUS: *(uneasily)* So to speak.

(Pause. Suddenly LIZZIE kisses him. MARCUS freezes for a moment. Doesn't kiss back.)

LIZZIE: Ohmigod. I'm so sorry.

MARCUS: What? Don't be sorry.

LIZZIE: Was it my breath? Sometimes I get this reflux thing. Shut up, Lizzie, you're making it even worse.

MARCUS: Don't be sorry. It wasn't your breath. Why are you sniffing?

LIZZIE: I could swear I'm picking up something. What? What's that look? Ohmigod, my stupid nose.

MARCUS: Shh. It's okay.

LIZZIE: This was all a horrible mistake. I'm so embarrassed.

MARCUS: Lizzie...come here.

(MARCUS kisses her. Passionately.)

LIZZIE: Oh...thank God.

(They start to make love as the lights fade.)

Scene 6

(Lights up on TAL and MARCUS, in MARCUS's apartment. MARCUS has just entered.)

TAL: You fucked her, didn't you?

MARCUS: What would you like to hear?

TAL: Do what comes easy. Lie.

MARCUS: What if it's part of the deal?

TAL: Oh I see. You fucked her for my sake.

MARCUS: For both our sakes.

TAL: I may vomit.

MARCUS: There was no other way to go.

TAL: Oh sure.

MARCUS: We were sitting side by side...never mind.

TAL: She made a move.

MARCUS: She did. I didn't.

TAL: And you just had to follow through.

MARCUS: She was starting to get suspicious.

TAL: Oh come on. She couldn't even tell I'm gay.

MARCUS: She's a whirlwind. She plays her part and mine, and my part was to go to bed with her.

TAL: And play the hero with her crazy husband. Did you enjoy that bit of horseplay, by the way? I wish I liked to wrestle as much as you do. Do you find him attractive? Not really your type. You like them worried and compliant.

MARCUS: OK, you really want to know why I fucked her?

TAL: Yeah, let's hear it.

MARCUS: That rich bitch Jemma, she's got her gaydar trained on both of us. I don't want her jumping to any conclusions.

TAL: So you jumped on Lizzie instead. And people wonder why I'm such a pessimist.

MARCUS: You think I don't know how you're feeling? I'm not a heartless idiot.

TAL: Fine, then fuck Lizzie bareback and we'll raise the kid. What? I'm trying to look on the bright side, since this restaurant thing is never gonna happen. How was it with her? Forget it, who am I kidding? I don't want to know. I can't even watch straight sex on TV. Did she enjoy it at least?

MARCUS: Let's not go there, all right?

TAL: No trouble for you? No performance anxiety?

MARCUS: What do you want me to say?

TAL: The truth. I'll only imagine something worse.

MARCUS: She said...never mind what she said.

TAL: Tell me!

MARCUS: She said she came as close as she's come in years.

TAL: Wow. Nice work, Marcus.

MARCUS: You bet it's nice work. It's keeping us in the game.

TAL: You're like those people who are terrified of heights, so they take up rock climbing.

MARCUS: And now and then they actually enjoy it.

TAL: Go ahead, twist the knife. Are you in love with this woman?

MARCUS: Please. She's a nice girl. She means well.

TAL: You didn't answer my question.

MARCUS: I'm not in love with her. I'm in love with you.

TAL: No, you're not. You wouldn't torture me like this. Fine, go back in the closet, it's practically empty, except for a few sad jocks and the odd Republican, so you might be lonely in there. And I don't want you to be lonely, Marcus, I've always wanted the best for us, and I desperately want to cook for people. But I can't be waiting for you to come home smelling of Lizzie. That is way too much to ask. I'll just have to find some other place to live.

MARCUS: OK. You've postured, you've vented, now settle down.

TAL: Who's posturing? You're the one who's lying to himself. Does Lizzie remind you of your ex?

MARCUS: They're completely different.

TAL: Same physical type as Linda.

MARCUS: Buh-linda. How do you know what type Belinda was?

TAL: Because you never deleted her.

MARCUS: Whoa...you looked through my photos?

TAL: I was curious, who wouldn't be? And there she was...in a fucking thong!

MARCUS: Yeah, and I look at that picture every day.

TAL: I wouldn't put it past you.

MARCUS: It must be so great to be you. You never have to worry about having nothing to worry about.

TAL: Then why didn't you delete Linda, Belinda, whatever her fucking name is?

MARCUS: Because I didn't know how! I barely know how to take a picture with that fucking phone!

TAL: Oh, now she's going to be all self-effacing. I've had it with you, Marcus. You call me insecure? You don't know what you want, you never have and you never will, you're...you're a fucked-up bisexual slut, or am I being redundant?

MARCUS: Stop it. Come here. Don't go, where are you going?

TAL: Who knows. A cheap hotel.

MARCUS: You can't afford a cheap hotel.

TAL: I'll go on Grindr again. Find myself a rich guy for a change.

MARCUS: I know you don't mean that. Come here.

(MARCUS enfolds him, starts to lift TAL off the ground.)

TAL: Take your hands off me. I said let go!

MARCUS: All right, then leave.

TAL: You think I won't.

MARCUS: That's right.

TAL: Well, watch me, motherfucker!

(TAL exits, slamming the door. Blackout.)

Scene 7

(Lights up on LIZZIE and TAL, in Lizzie's apartment.)

LIZZIE: Tal, I'm thrilled to see you, but I'm actually expecting Jemma any moment.

TAL: Perfect. I'll cook you both something from your fridge. No shopping allowed.

LIZZIE: I love that idea, but shouldn't Marcus be here?

TAL: Why? He's not a chef.

LIZZIE: He's part of the team.

TAL: Are we? A team?

LIZZIE: Of course we're a team. And we have to close the deal with Jemma.

TAL: Then you definitely don't want Marcus here.

LIZZIE: Why? Jemma likes Marcus.

TAL: She's got a funny way of showing it.

LIZZIE: That's just her way of flirting.

TAL: So when she insulted my cooking, she was flirting with me?

LIZZIE: Oh she didn't insult it, you're so glass-half-empty.

TAL: OK, so between us we're a full glass, what else do we need?

LIZZIE: We need Jemma. And we need Marcus.

TAL: You think Marcus is essential.

LIZZIE: Well, of course he's essential, he's been fantastic. Why?

TAL: I mean, if Marcus wasn't involved, would you still go ahead? With me as chef, I mean?

LIZZIE: Why, what did he say to you?

TAL: Nothing. He didn't say anything. I hardly know the man.

LIZZIE: Tal...the truth...did you and Marcus have a meeting I don't know about?

TAL: No. Why would we have a meeting?

LIZZIE: Tal...please tell me, I have to know...is Marcus getting cold feet?

TAL: No! Forget I said anything. This is me being a worrywart. About Jemma. Not liking my cooking. And your husband.

LIZZIE: Don't worry about my husband.

TAL: He signed the papers?

LIZZIE: No.

TAL: Weren't you supposed to be meeting—

LIZZIE: He didn't show.

TAL: I knew it.

LIZZIE: It's not going to hold us back.

TAL: But your money's still frozen.

LIZZIE: For now.

TAL: So Jemma really has to pitch in.

LIZZIE: That's why I invited her here.

TAL: You need to seal the deal.

LIZZIE: Hello. Yes. With your help.

(Pause)

TAL: OK. Right. I can do that. I'll be the convincer. Which way is the kitchen?

LIZZIE: Tal, I love that you're being so...proactive. But I do have something on the stove.

TAL: It's about to be garbage.

(Sound of a doorbell.)

TAL: Is that her?

LIZZIE: *(calls)* Jemma? It's open.

(JEMMA enters.)

JEMMA: Well. I didn't know we were three.

LIZZIE: Tal's just offered to give us another demonstration.

JEMMA: Where's Marcus, is he polishing the silverware?

LIZZIE: Tal came by himself.

JEMMA: Without Marcus?

TAL: Why would Marcus have to be here?

LIZZIE: Come on, it'll be fun. He's cooking from the fridge.

JEMMA: Well, don't bother making anything Moroccan. I've already made my decision.

TAL: *(to LIZZIE)* I don't like the sound of that.

LIZZIE: Shh. *(to JEMMA)* What have you decided?

(Sound of a buzzer, off.)

JEMMA: Oh I see. You already have something on the stove.

TAL: That's her pasta.

JEMMA: *(to LIZZIE)* Darling, why don't you go check it out. I'd like to have a word with Tal.

LIZZIE: No, but tell me what you're thinking.

JEMMA: I'm thinking I need to talk to Tal.

LIZZIE: Why?

JEMMA: Please, darling?

LIZZIE: I don't really understand—

JEMMA: I know you don't. Please.

LIZZIE: All right. (*wryly*) Let me know when it's all right to come back.

(LIZZIE *exits.*)

JEMMA: You really shouldn't have come here.

TAL: I don't intend to stay, if I've read you correctly. Enough foreplay, in or out?

JEMMA: The boy has grown a pair. Are you sure you want to hear?

TAL: Yes.

JEMMA: Out.

TAL: Why?

JEMMA: Darling, please don't play dumb.

TAL: That guy Shelby.

JEMMA: Shelby is the least of it.

TAL: What else? My food? You pretended not to like it, but I watched you inhale the *crème brûlée*.

JEMMA: Yes, I was a little brusque with you that night. I apologize.

TAL: It was the ambience, not the food. You couldn't stand to see Lizzie with Malcolm.

JEMMA: Malcolm?

TAL: You know who I mean. You're so jealous, it's heartwarming.

JEMMA: Oh, and you're not jealous?

TAL: Why would I be jealous of what's-his-name?

JEMMA: His name is Marcus and you know it. How long have you known each other?

TAL: What do you mean? I met him the night I met you.

JEMMA: Marcus never came to your restaurant?

TAL: Never.

JEMMA: Then how did he know to recommend you?

TAL: Well, yes, he came to the restaurant, but we never spoke. We don't speak now.

JEMMA: Why, did you two have a fight? Come on, darling, your secret is safe with me.

TAL: What secret? You're not making any sense.

JEMMA: Oh stop, you're the worst liar in the world. Lizzie and Marcus went to bed, didn't they? Did Marcus confess or did you have to drag it out of him? Can you possibly think I'd let you get away with this? Lizzie's had her heart broken too many times already. Get out of her life, or I blow the whistle on both of you.

(Pause.)

TAL: You know, Jemma...I hate to push it, but we really did meet before.

JEMMA: Never.

TAL: Where I said. The Plaza.

JEMMA: Not a chance in the world. You would have been five years old.

TAL: I was 25 and it was a fundraiser for Sudan. I was on the catering staff. You loved my cooking that night, you actually asked me about the crab-stuffed mushrooms.

JEMMA: Couldn't have been me.

TAL: Maybe you remember my colleague, she's the one who walked in on you in the Ladies' getting head from who was it? Lesbian choreographer...I always blank on her name....

JEMMA: Your colleague's mistaken.

TAL: Now who's playing dumb. Wow, I thought women like you were extinct. Right-wing family, is that the problem? Keep your nose clean, or they write you out of the will? You weren't keeping your nose clean at the Plaza. But my God, how is it Lizzie doesn't know? You were roommates, for fuck's sake.

JEMMA: Please keep your voice down. Did Marcus put you up to this?

TAL: No, as you so disgustingly observed, I've grown a pair. Solid steel.

JEMMA: Don't tell me you broke up.

TAL: That's none of your business.

JEMMA: I'm actually sorry. How could he do that to you?

TAL: You mean, how could Lizzie do that to you? I feel for you guys—you and Marcus, playing for both teams. So much more temptation. So much more jealousy. But poor Jemma, you never really get in the game, do you, you hardly ever leave the bench. So very sad.

JEMMA: For Marcus too. He must be agonizing.

TAL: Please. He couldn't wait to prove himself again.

JEMMA: You weren't woman enough for him?

TAL: Oh don't ask me about bis. If I live to be a hundred.

JEMMA: Whose idea was it to swindle Lizzie?

TAL: We weren't "swindling" anybody. Everybody stands to make out.

JEMMA: And Marcus took it to the limit, and now you can't forgive him.

TAL: You'll just have to forgive him for both of us. Unless you're determined to save Lizzie from Marcus, and to hell with the restaurant. But that might cause me to lose my temper, blurt things out you don't want Lizzie to know. Or your gay-hating family to know—

(TAL *breaks off as* LIZZIE *enters.*)

LIZZIE: What's going on? What are you two whispering about?

TAL: (*sotto, to* JEMMA) Ball's in your court, bench warmer.

LIZZIE: I saved the pasta, but it needs a better sauce.

TAL: Some other time. I'm going to let you two confer.

LIZZIE: Why, where are you going?

TAL: Later, ladies.

(TAL *exits.*)

LIZZIE: What happened all of a sudden? Did you say something to upset him?

JEMMA: Oh, he's a bundle of nerves, that child. (*pause*) By the way, I was dead wrong.

LIZZIE: Wrong about what?

JEMMA: He's not gay.

LIZZIE: Really? You were so positive.

JEMMA: Not hard-core, anyway.

LIZZIE: How do you know—ohmigod. Don't tell me he made a move.

JEMMA: Not exactly.

LIZZIE: Tell!

JEMMA: Well, all right...when I told him I was going to invest in your restaurant...our restaurant...he gave me the biggest longest hug....and I definitely felt some...tumescence.

LIZZIE: "Our restaurant"?

JEMMA: And then he went all red in the face. Like a horny teenager.

LIZZIE: "Our restaurant"!

JEMMA: Just tell me what account you've set up. I'll call my manager and have her transfer the money.

LIZZIE: Jemma, that's so fantastic!

JEMMA: Will you forgive me for not saying yes right away?

LIZZIE: Of course I'll forgive you.

JEMMA: So long as Shelby doesn't interfere.

LIZZIE: I'll make sure he doesn't. Oh I can't wait to tell Marcus. But why did Tal rush off? Why didn't he stay behind to celebrate?

JEMMA: Well, you know these OCD types—he was afraid of jinxing it.

LIZZIE: Poor baby. He obviously has a thing for you, that's great, that will inspire him to even greater heights. Jemma, I'm so relieved. Relieved? I'm ecstatic! And you know what? I knew all along you'd come around.

JEMMA: Yes, darling. So did I.

(LIZZIE hugs JEMMA. A light on JEMMA as she hugs back. Slow fade. END OF ACT I.)

ACT II

Scene 1

(Lights up on LIZZIE and MARCUS at the restaurant. No tables, no chairs. An empty space. MARCUS has just arrived.)

MARCUS: You know I'll have to recuse myself. I can lean on some colleagues, but there's no way now I can write a review.

LIZZIE: You can blog about it, though. Without committing yourself?

MARCUS: If I'm not too obvious about it.

LIZZIE: I've been pondering your blog.

MARCUS: I was afraid of that.

LIZZIE: No, seriously, it needs a major rethink. Branch out. Review movies about cooking, novels about cooking—I mean really, you could be any kind of critic. But that was smart of you to focus on food. I mean come on, movies are getting worse, who reads novels anymore, classical music is gone, drama is dead, poetry is dead, jazz is dead—

MARCUS: Sounds like the dead people are having all the fun.

LIZZIE: Oh, that's hilarious! How could the Food Network let you go? Don't worry, when this restaurant opens? They'll come begging. You could be such a star! I see you touring the world! Of course you'd have to take me with you—

(TAL has entered, unseen by LIZZIE at first, mocking her enthusiasm behind her back.)

LIZZIE:—I wonder, is the critical gene dominant?

MARCUS: I doubt if there is a gene, why?

LIZZIE: If you ever had children, I'd want them to have wonderful snarky thoughts just like their dad. Oh damn.

(LIZZIE's cell is ringing. She looks.)

LIZZIE: It's Jemma. I have to take this. *(into phone)* Hi, darling, we're all here, where are you? Oh. Yikes. *(to MARCUS)* Excuse me, I have to deal with this. Tal, why don't you tell Marcus your thoughts about the floor plan?

(LIZZIE moves off, talking on the phone.)

LIZZIE: —I don't know if he's been stalking me, just keep walking, don't let him follow you if you can help it—we have so much to deal with today—Tal says we have to revamp the kitchen...

(MARCUS and TAL talk privately.)

MARCUS: Looks like we're on. Care to tell me how you worked it?

TAL: I don't care to tell you anything.

MARCUS: That's all right, I have a pretty good idea. But now you're stuck with me, aren't you?

TAL: I'll find some way to get rid of you.

MARCUS: I know you don't mean that. I miss you.

TAL: Now what do you miss about me? My unconditional love? Sorry, that's over. Because I see you for what you are, not what some poor deluded girl needs you to be? She's so overbearing, isn't she? And I was such a pushover. Well, no more Mr. Nice Guy. I hate the floor plan. I don't want an open kitchen. I don't like to be gawked at by civilians while I work.

MARCUS: I know. You can't cook and chew gum at the same time.

TAL: Oh, are you going to keep on insulting me? That's a wonderful way to win me back. Go away, Lizzie's looking.

MARCUS: We're allowed to talk, you know.

TAL: I've said all I ever want to say to you.

(TAL exits as SHELBY enters. LIZZIE sees him.)

LIZZIE: (on phone) —Forget what I said, he's here.

SHELBY: Are you talking to Jemma? Tell her I wasn't following her, I went on Yelp, figured it out. This used to be some crappy trattoria. Kind of out of the way, isn't it? You're not gonna get much walk-in business. I do like these walls.

MARCUS: We're bricking them.

SHELBY: Was I talking to you? (*to LIZZIE*) Don't brick the walls. My screenshots won't look good on brick. And the noise will drive away the couples.

MARCUS: She's not interested in your art or your suggestions. (*to LIZZIE*) We need to hose Tal down about the open kitchen.

SHELBY: Yeah, and I'd like a look at the oven. If we're still thinking Moroccan.

MARCUS: Did you hear what I said? You're not invited. She doesn't need you to put in a penny.

SHELBY: Well, of course she does. I thought that was clear to everybody. Lizzie gets her restaurant, I get a reprieve on the divorce.

MARCUS: Time to go, pal.

(*MARCUS starts to grab SHELBY. LIZZIE stops him.*)

LIZZIE: No, hey, it's OK. I'll be right with you guys.

MARCUS: You sure?

LIZZIE: Yes. Go talk to Tal.

(*MARCUS exits.*)

SHELBY: Don't tell me Jemma actually came around.

LIZZIE: Please—no more fights.

SHELBY: What changed her mind?

LIZZIE: You did, Shelby. She didn't want you standing in the way.

SHELBY: Stand in the way? I want to be involved!

LIZZIE: You can't. I'm sorry.

SHELBY: Be such a great platform for my work.

LIZZIE: Can't happen.

SHELBY: Are you saying you don't believe in my work? You used to. Meant everything to me.

LIZZIE: I know. It meant too much.

SHELBY: Wasserman agrees with you. He doesn't think I'm a fraud.

LIZZIE: Neither do I. Neither does anyone else.

SHELBY: Maybe a talented fraud? This city is crawling with talented frauds. Including your new best friend—nah, he's pure fraud. I don't care what Jemma thinks she's doing, she can't protect you from him. Not this time.

LIZZIE: Shelby, I'll be fine.

SHELBY: I still love you.

LIZZIE: I know you do.

SHELBY: I should have "I love you" more often. You—you used to say it all the time.

LIZZIE: I still care about you, Shelby.

SHELBY: You never gave up on me. Even when Jemma told you to.

LIZZIE: Nobody's giving up on you. I really have to go now, Shelby.

SHELBY: I'm not gonna let this rejection depress me.

LIZZIE: Don't think of it as a rejection. It's not. But if you miss another meeting, I'm going to be very angry with you, you understand?

SHELBY: Yeah, yeah, I know.

(LIZZIE gives SHELBY a quick hug, starts toward the kitchen.)

SHELBY: I'll try and stay positive!

(LIZZIE exits. SHELBY stares after her as JEMMA enters.)

SHELBY: If you're looking for your business partner, she's checking out the kitchen.

JEMMA: Yes, well, I'm sorry you lost your leverage.

(JEMMA heads for the kitchen. SHELBY gets in her way.)

SHELBY: I know why you caved. You want to keep an eye on Lizzie. And that jumped-up restaurant reviewer. In case they get hot and heavy. They are, aren't they?

JEMMA: I really have no idea. If you'll excuse me—

SHELBY: Are you planning to move on this guy?

JEMMA: Oh give me a break.

SHELBY: Why? It's your pattern.

JEMMA: You're fantasizing.

SHELBY: Not about that. You and Lizzie together—that's my fantasy. Yours too, I'm guessing.

JEMMA: You're out of your mind.

SHELBY: Takes one to know one. Hey listen, if I were in your place—if I ever had myself reassigned? I'd be into both sexes too. You never get over your teen years, do you? I'd see these packages on these hairy guys and I'd feel like a girl around them. Not that I ever sucked dick. No. I was basically into girls. Especially girls I didn't stand a chance with.

JEMMA: Great, Shelby. Good share. Go home.

(MARCUS *enters*.)

MARCUS: (*to* SHELBY) Hey. Weren't you asked to leave?

SHELBY: Fuck you.

MARCUS: That's it. Out you go.

(MARCUS *grabs* SHELBY. LIZZIE *enters*.)

LIZZIE: Marcus, no, don't hurt him.

SHELBY: He can't hurt me. I'm incapable of pain. All my natural opiates are kicking in—

MARCUS: Leave. Don't come back. And stay out of Lizzie's fur unless you really want to deal with me.

(MARCUS escorts SHELBY roughly to the door.)

SHELBY: Whoa, take it easy, dude, I'm going. Bye, Lizzie. I'll dream of you tonight. If I ever get to sleep.

(SHELBY exits. LIZZIE watches him go.)

LIZZIE: (to JEMMA) What was he saying to you?

JEMMA: I couldn't make it out. He was too crazed.

LIZZIE: He breaks my heart.

JEMMA: I know, darling. (with a look at MARCUS) They always do.

MARCUS: Can we get back to business now?

LIZZIE: Sure. Yeah. Let's talk ovens!

(Blackout.)

Scene 2

(Lights up on LIZZIE and JEMMA, having drinks in LIZZIE's apartment.)

LIZZIE: I was so nervous, I thought I was going to have to fake it.
And then suddenly...ohmigod.

JEMMA: Fireworks?

LIZZIE: Well definitely sparklers. I sincerely can't remember the last time.

JEMMA: So did Marcus spend the night?

LIZZIE: No, we're not at the toothbrush stage, but guess what.

JEMMA: I can't imagine.

LIZZIE: We did an encore!

JEMMA: *(dryly)* And otherwise how are things going?

LIZZIE: What do you mean, how are things going? You know how they're going We're meeting with the contractor tomorrow, aren't you going to be there?

JEMMA: I don't think so. I feel like a fourth wheel.

LIZZIE: Are you kidding? Marcus loves having your input. We were trying to think of names and the three of us came up empty. It should be something that says you and me.

JEMMA: How about Jizzie? In honor of your orgasm.

LIZZIE: You know what? I actually like that.

(JEMMA starts to pour wine into LIZZIE's glass.)

LIZZIE: No thank you, I've past my limit. *(pause)* I just love his smell. I love to bury my face in his neck.

JEMMA: Darling, will you please stop selling me? You realize you've never said one bad thing about him?

LIZZIE: Doesn't that mean I'm in love?

JEMMA: Who knows with you. Maybe you don't even like him.

LIZZIE: That's absurd.

JEMMA: Don't you find him a little pompous?

LIZZIE: Why, just because he's super smart and doesn't try to hide it?

JEMMA: Super smart? Come on.

LIZZIE: You come on. You've slept with half the men on the upper East Side, what's the last time you had anything good to say about any of them?

JEMMA: Yes, let's make this all about me.

LIZZIE: "Men are pissed off, all men are misogynists"? Maybe if you were kinder to yourself, you wouldn't be so down on men.

JEMMA: If you could see the look on your face right now.

LIZZIE: What look? I'm being honest with you.

JEMMA: Try being honest with yourself. You don't just make up men. You make up everything. Other people don't really exist for you, that's why men leave you, you make them feel totally unreal.

LIZZIE: Ohmigod...where is this coming from?

JEMMA: It's true, darling.

LIZZIE: Do I make you feel unreal?

JEMMA: Let's not go there, all right?

LIZZIE: Please. I need to hear this.

JEMMA: OK, yes. You do. I'm in your movie, and your movie is the only one that's playing. Your whole life is a fantasy. I can't believe you have a career. Oh wait. I forgot. You're in advertising.

LIZZIE: Are you saying I don't care about you?

JEMMA: I didn't say that.

LIZZIE: That's so ridiculous. You know I love you.

JEMMA: The way you love everybody. The way you loved your perfect dad.

LIZZIE: All right, so, I loved my dad. What's wrong with that?

JEMMA: Because now you always pick losers!

LIZZIE: Daddy wasn't a loser. And Marcus certainly isn't.

JEMMA: He's worse than a loser.

LIZZIE: What do you mean? That's ridiculous. How can you even judge? You hated your dad.

JEMMA: I didn't hate him.

LIZZIE: Oh come on.

JEMMA: I avoided him.

LIZZIE: Yeah, 'cause he was so available. Don Juan of Newport. Maybe he's the reason you're a Donna Juanita.

JEMMA: You know what, I'm going to go before I get really really angry.

LIZZIE: Wait, I'm sorry, please don't go. OK, so maybe Marcus isn't a genius, but can't I enjoy what I have? Can't you be happy for me, this one time? What? You were about to say something.

JEMMA: Nothing. Forget it.

LIZZIE: Please forgive me. Let's not fight.

(LIZZIE *hugs* JEMMA.)

LIZZIE: I'm sorry I opened up at you.

JEMMA: All right. I'm sorry too.

LIZZIE: We shouldn't drink so much.

JEMMA: "Jizzie." It could work.

LIZZIE: You're right about my career. Whenever I had to write an ad, I fell head over heels with the product. The staff used to kid me all the time.

JEMMA: The innocent in the corner office.

LIZZIE: I know you think I'm stupid.

JEMMA: Only about men.

LIZZIE: We're both stupid about men. That's why we're soulmates.

JEMMA: I knew there was a reason.

LIZZIE: Do you remember, back in college, we used to stand naked before that full-length mirror?

JEMMA: I remember.

LIZZIE: Remember what we used to say?

JEMMA: "Who's the lucky guy who's going to get all this?"

LIZZIE: Little did we know. (*posing*) Look at us. We still look great.

JEMMA: You've never looked better.

LIZZIE: You too! Maybe that's why you never married. You never found anyone worthy of your perfect body.

JEMMA: Darling, I don't think I'm that shallow.

LIZZIE: Whereas I priced myself too low.

JEMMA: I still have those pictures we took of each other.

LIZZIE: For Spalding's photography course.

JEMMA: I look at them sometimes.

LIZZIE: Oo, I'd love to see them. Can you print those out for me?

JEMMA: Happy to.

LIZZIE: Friends again?

(LIZZIE gives JEMMA a kiss on the cheek. JEMMA pulls away.)

LIZZIE: What's the matter?

JEMMA: Nothing. I'm OK.

LIZZIE: Ohmigod, you're still upset about that Donna Juanita thing. I didn't mean it. Please forgive me.

JEMMA: OK. You're forgiven.

(JEMMA puts her arm around LIZZIE, starts stroking her hair. LIZZIE draws back a touch. Her nose has started to twitch.)

JEMMA: What's the matter, babe?

LIZZIE: I don't know. Something. Nothing. It's OK...I'm feeling a little ill suddenly. I'm sorry...

JEMMA: Seriously, what's wrong?

LIZZIE: No, it's me. It's my fault. I drank too much. I'm a little woozy, I have to go lie down.

JEMMA: I'll come with you.

LIZZIE: Where? No. You can't.

JEMMA: Darling, you're acting weird.

LIZZIE: It's this nose of mine.

JEMMA: What about it?

LIZZIE: Nothing. Forget I said that.

JEMMA: You're getting wrought up over nothing. Come here.

(JEMMA draws her close again and kisses her. For several moments LIZZIE lets her. Then pulls away.)

LIZZIE: No. Please. You don't want to do this.

JEMMA: Come on. Relax.

LIZZIE: Oh God.

JEMMA: Lizzie, shh, it's not the end of the world.

LIZZIE: What isn't? No. Stop. This isn't happening.

JEMMA: Just let it happen.

LIZZIE: No. I can't. Why now?

JEMMA: Oh Lizzie. As long as we've known each other.

LIZZIE: No. You? No.

JEMMA: Stop being so...yes.

LIZZIE: Ohmigod. Why?

JEMMA: Why what?

LIZZIE: Why keep me in the dark? All those years.

JEMMA: Darling, you live in the dark.

LIZZIE: Were you afraid I'd tell your mom? Is that why you never said anything? Because of my big mouth?

JEMMA: Darling, I always loved your mouth...

LIZZIE: Eesh, don't.

JEMMA: ...but yes, you don't know how to keep it shut. (*as LIZZIE pulls away*) Shh, calm down. You're making me angry again—

(*JEMMA tries to draw LIZZIE closer again.*)

LIZZIE: No! Stop! Leave me alone!

JEMMA: Don't be such a hypocrite. Come here.

(*LIZZIE grabs her bag and flees.*)

JEMMA: Come back, where are you going? This is your apartment!

(*LIZZIE exits, slamming the door after her.*)

JEMMA: Lizzie!

(No answer. JEMMA stands frozen for a moment. Then picks up her bag, hurries for the door and exits. Blackout.)

Scene 3

(Lights up on LIZZIE, having just burst into MARCUS's apartment.)

LIZZIE: —I should have called, I'm sorry, I just had to talk to somebody, not just somebody, you.

MARCUS: Slow down. What happened?

LIZZIE: Nothing. Nothing happened. I'm sorry, do you want me to go?

MARCUS: Sit down.

LIZZIE: If I tell you something weird, something disgusting, will you promise not to...

MARCUS: What?

LIZZIE: I'm sorry. I'm being idiotic. It's me who's disgusting.

MARCUS: Tell me. I won't judge you.

LIZZIE: Why do people always say that? Of course you'll judge me. Everybody judges everybody.

MARCUS: Fine. Then don't tell me.

LIZZIE: We were having this horrible fight.

MARCUS: You and—

LIZZIE: Jemma. Jemma and me.

MARCUS: About what?

LIZZIE: About you, me, her, everything. But it was over, the fight was over, and we were sitting together on the couch, I mean it's not like we're never affectionate with each other, we are, we always have been, but this was different. Jemma was drinking, I was drinking...and all of a sudden, this is how it started, the whole room filled up with....with...I'm sorry, I just can't say it...

MARCUS: Her odor?

LIZZIE: Yes.

MARCUS: And it's not a small room.

LIZZIE: I'm telling you what happened.

MARCUS: Sorry. Go on.

LIZZIE: She kissed me...more than the usual kiss.

MARCUS: On the lips.

LIZZIE: Well, we've always kissed on the lips.

MARCUS: But this was more.

LIZZIE: And I kind of let her.

MARCUS: You were startled. You didn't know how to react.

LIZZIE: I knew you'd understand! But stupid me....how could I be so naïve? At Sarah Lawrence I was surrounded! And people like Jemma, who have all these sex partners, one after the other, and they can never settle down, isn't that like a total red flag? Like they're really phobic about the opposite sex and they spend their whole lives fighting it, never been married, never even came close? She called me a hypocrite, why did she say that, does she think all women are lesbians under the skin? There, I've finally said the word.

MARCUS: It wasn't your first fight.

LIZZIE: Please. We're like an old married couple.

MARCUS: You'll patch it up. She'll come around.

LIZZIE: No. It's irreparable. She said such horrible things.

MARCUS: What things?

LIZZIE: About you. She said things about you.

MARCUS: What sort of things?

LIZZIE: She said you were...worse than a loser.

MARCUS: Meaning what?

LIZZIE: Meaning nothing. Meaning she's sick with jealousy.
Marcus, will you marry me?

MARCUS: Whoa.

LIZZIE: I don't know why I said that. Don't listen to me, I'm just feeling so alone.

MARCUS: Hey. You're a charming, wonderful woman, who's had some bad luck with men.

LIZZIE: And now with women. I'm so hopeless!

MARCUS: Not hopeless. Anything but. Jemma's totally wrong about you.

LIZZIE: I am not a lesbian.

MARCUS: You're not a soufflé.

LIZZIE: Jemma called me a soufflé?

MARCUS: You're a powerhouse. You're totally self-sufficient.

LIZZIE: Am I? Is that my problem? Is that why I can't stay married?

MARCUS: It's your blessing and your curse. You exaggerate other people's virtues, just to convince yourself you need them.

LIZZIE: Oh believe me, I am needy. I need you. I needed Jemma. I was trying to bring us closer, I just drove us farther apart, what am I supposed to do about the restaurant?

MARCUS: Well...you could go to bed with her.

LIZZIE: What?!

MARCUS: Kidding.

LIZZIE: I could never.

MARCUS: I wasn't really suggesting—

LIZZIE: I mean you're right, how bad could it be? What if I enjoyed it? I probably would. I've had lovely massages from women. I've shivered, I've moaned, I think women give better massages than men, don't you? Or don't you let men massage you?

MARCUS: I'm not really in the market for massages.

LIZZIE: I mean if I got really hammered, I could get to that place, you know, where you don't care where you are, a man's hand or a woman's hand, not that I've ever been to that place, but come on, men haven't exactly worked out for me...until you. But wouldn't you be jealous?

MARCUS: Of course I'd be jealous.

LIZZIE: I wouldn't want you to be jealous. What am I saying... I couldn't do it. Not a chance. I think I'm losing my mind.

MARCUS: Shh, you're OK.

LIZZIE: No. I definitely am. On my way here I was trying to get Shelby on the phone, he didn't show up again at the lawyers', and I was on 81st and Central Park West, and I hear this phone ring right behind me and when I turn around there's this guy flying down the subway stairs and it looked like some homeless guy but at the same time it was Shelby. I can't trust any of my senses anymore.

MARCUS: (*distracted*) You think Jemma will come out to her family?

LIZZIE: What?

MARCUS: She wouldn't, would she? I mean, now that she's come out to you.

LIZZIE: No, are you kidding? And lose her inheritance?

MARCUS: Because, you know, there's a lot on the table here...the future of the restaurant...our future...

LIZZIE: I love you for putting it that way.

MARCUS: I mean I'm sure you guys can get over this bump.

LIZZIE: Oh God, I don't know.

MARCUS: You will. Trust me. You've been friends too long.

LIZZIE: I wish I could believe that.

MARCUS: Believe it.

LIZZIE: I'll try. You're right. I can get past this. Thank God for you, Marcus.

(LIZZIE hugs MARCUS. *Sound of a key turning in a lock.*)

LIZZIE: What was that?

(*A door opens and closes. LIZZIE disengages.*)

LIZZIE: Marcus...somebody just came in.

MARCUS: I know. I heard.

LIZZIE: Someone else has a key to your apartment?

MARCUS: Yeah, I should have told you.

LIZZIE: Told you what? Ohmigod.

(TAL *has entered.*)

LIZZIE: Tal? What are you doing here?

TAL: (*taken aback*) Hey, Lizzie.

LIZZIE: What's going on here?

MARCUS: I guess we'd better come clean.

LIZZIE: Yes, I guess you'd better.

MARCUS: OK, here's the thing. I gave Tal a key, so he could use my kitchen whenever he wanted. He's been trying out some new dishes.

LIZZIE: You could have used my kitchen.

MARCUS: We wanted to surprise you.

LIZZIE: Surprised? I'm shocked.

MARCUS: (*to TAL*) We really should have warned her.

TAL: But we didn't. Sorry.

LIZZIE: So what have you come up with?

MARCUS: What have we come up with? Tal?

TAL: Yes, OK, what did we come up with?

MARCUS: Well...there was, um, chewbakkia with mahoond and balboa seeds.

LIZZIE: I've never heard of those ingredients.

MARCUS: It's a rare and special dish. For Ramadan.

LIZZIE: Sounds intriguing.

MARCUS: It'll look great on the menu.

LIZZIE: I do like that you're working together. When can I sample it?

MARCUS: Sample what?

LIZZIE: Chewbakkia with mahoond.

TAL: And balboa seeds.

LIZZIE: When can I try it?

MARCUS: We have a few kinks to work out.

TAL: Quite a few.

(Doorbell.)

MARCUS: *(calls)* Who is it?

(Doorbell again.)

MARCUS: I said who's there?

JEMMA: *(other side of door)* It's Jemma.

LIZZIE: Ohmigod. I'm so not ready for this.

TAL: Why, what happened? Did you two have a fight?

(Door pounds.)

JEMMA: Marcus, please let me in.

LIZZIE: (*hides herself*) Don't tell her I'm here. She'll be furious I came to see you.

JEMMA: (*other side of door*) Marcus, open up, I have to talk to Lizzie!

MARCUS: Sorry, Jemma, she's not here. Have you tried her place?

JEMMA: (*other side of door*) Don't give me that crap, I saw her go into this building.

MARCUS: OK. I'm just following orders. She's very upset.

JEMMA: (*other side of door*) She'll be twice as upset if you don't open this door.

(MARCUS *opens the door*. JEMMA *enters*.)

JEMMA: Where is she? How much did she tell you?

MARCUS: About what?

JEMMA: Oh don't bother lying, you know what I'm talking about. (*calls*) Lizzie?

(LIZZIE *emerges from hiding*.)

LIZZIE: I told him everything.

JEMMA: Of course you did.

LIZZIE: I'm sorry.

TAL: I wish someone would tell me.

JEMMA: Well hello, Tal. Fancy meeting you here.

LIZZIE: Tal's here to try out some dishes. He and Marcus wanted to surprise us.

JEMMA: They're full of surprises, trust me.

MARCUS: You know what, I think we should call it a night—

JEMMA: (*to LIZZIE*) Did Marcus calm you down? Did he offer soothing words of wisdom?

LIZZIE: Jemma, please don't be angry with me. I feel so horrible. I mean come on, how could I miss the signals all those years?

TAL: Signals! Oo, wow, I get it.

LIZZIE: You know what I remembered on the way over? That night we drove to Cambridge? And we had to stay in that horrible motel with the nicotine smell? And the only bed they had was a double, and in the morning remember, I found you on the floor, with a pillow under your head?

JEMMA: Of course I remember.

LIZZIE: You said it was because the mattress smelled of cigarettes. And I totally bought it. Can you ever forgive me for being so blind? I mean now that all our cards are on the table, can we put all my stupidity behind us?

MARCUS: Why don't you guys sleep on it. Give us all a chance to calm down.

TAL: I wouldn't mind hearing some details.

MARCUS: You don't need to hear the details.

TAL: You did.

MARCUS: It's not your affair, it's not really mine, so why don't we get back to business—tomorrow. Should we meet here? Or at the restaurant? We still have some design issues to go over—

(A pounding on the door.)

MARCUS: Oh Jesus. Yes? Who's there?

SHELBY: (*other side of door*) Marcus, let me in, I need my wife.

LIZZIE: Ohmigod, that was him!

MARCUS: (*calls*) Not a good time, buddy—I don't think she really wants to talk to you—

SHELBY: Come on, I'm dying out here, I need to talk to her.

MARCUS: Well, you'll just have to wait, we're winding up something... Jesus, Lizzie, don't.

(LIZZIE has gone to the door, opens it. SHELBY looks a mess, as though he's slept for days in his clothes.)

LIZZIE: Why are you dressed like this?

SHELBY: Like what? This is my favorite shirt.

LIZZIE: Shelby...what's the last time you were home?

SHELBY: Which home? The one we used to share or my home on the subway? Oh you mean the apartment. Yeah, I lost the key. *(to LIZZIE)* I need to know something. Tell me honestly. You don't think I'm Jesus, right?

TAL: I'm calling 911.

SHELBY: Because all the songs are about me.

LIZZIE: OK. Did you leave your meds at the apartment?

SHELBY: Yeah, but listen, I had an epiphany. God's not a painter.

MARCUS: Pal, we don't have time for this.

SHELBY: Quiet, this is important. God only works in three dimensions. He's a sculptor. I don't want to compete with God. That means you think you're better than God. From now on, no more installations.

MARCUS: All right, you've said your piece. Time for everybody to go home.

SHELBY: Yeah, what are you all doing here?

MARCUS: Business meeting.

SHELBY: At one in the morning? No way. What happened? I'm sensing something here. I'm getting a very weird vibe.

MARCUS: Yeah, and it's coming from you.

LIZZIE: Marcus, that's not fair. Jemma and I had a fight.

SHELBY: Over what? (*re* MARCUS) Him?

LIZZIE: No, not over Marcus. It's not important.

SHELBY: Jemma didn't hit on Marcus.

LIZZIE: Of course not.

SHELBY: Ohmigod. (*to* JEMMA) Did our fantasy finally come true? But she stiffed you. And that pissed you off. (*to* LIZZIE) And what, you fled? And she came after you? I'm right, right? Wow. Hallelujah.

JEMMA: Shut up, Shelby.

SHELBY: Well look, Jemma's always had the hots for you. That's why she kept hitting on me, to break us up.

JEMMA: Oh don't be ridiculous.

LIZZIE: When did Jemma hit on you?

SHELBY: Doesn't matter. Blood under the bridge.

LIZZIE: No, what did you mean?

SHELBY: OK, the first time? Was that night at the country house, when we all got totally wasted. Every time I got up from a chair, Jemma sat down on it. That's like a foolproof sign of sexual attraction.

JEMMA: Yeah, to a guy with bipolar disorder.

SHELBY: What about that little tongue kiss on New Year's Eve? And all those winks you gave me? And waving your legs back and forth, every time we sat opposite each other?

JEMMA: (*to* LIZZIE) You know he's making all this up, don't you?

SHELBY: And don't get me started on the farmer.

LIZZIE: What about the farmer?

SHELBY: Tell me you didn't sleep with him.

JEMMA: Never. (*to LIZZIE*) Don't listen to this.

SHELBY: That's not what he said. He came to my cat-and-rat show, we had a nice long share.

LIZZIE: Jemma?

JEMMA: What? He's insane.

LIZZIE: He's been right up to now.

SHELBY: Who knows what else she got up to. With the ones you didn't marry.

LIZZIE: Jemma?

SHELBY: And the ones she didn't hit on, she trashed to the skies. (*to MARCUS*) You know what I'm talking about. Love the apartment, by the way. Great window treatments. Who picked out the blinds? (*to TAL*) Had to be you. You're the one with talent.

MARCUS: That's enough crap out of you. Tal's been trying out new dishes, that's why he's here.

SHELBY: Really? Lizzie, you smell anything?

LIZZIE: (*distracted*) Tal just got here. Jemma, look at me: Did you actually hit on Shelby? And all those other guys?

JEMMA: Never. Come on. Who are you going to believe?

LIZZIE: I don't know what to believe. Ohmigod, I can't breathe—

MARCUS: Please, can we all stop freaking out? Tal, let's save that Ramadan entrée for the next time we meet.

SHELBY: I don't think Tal wants to do that, do you? Tal would rather spend the night, wouldn't you, buddy?

MARCUS: Right, I remember, you don't like to take a subway late at night. I'm sure Lizzie will share a taxi—

LIZZIE: I'll be happy to share a taxi. (*to JEMMA*) Really? The farmer too? (*heads out*) Never mind. I'm sorry to be such an avoider, I just can't deal right now. Tal, are you coming?

(TAL *hasn't moved.*)

LIZZIE: Tal?

SHELBY: Do you want to tell her or should I?

LIZZIE: Tell me what?

SHELBY: Come on guys. Man the fuck up. Oh for Christ's sake.
Sweetheart, isn't it obvious? They live here.

LIZZIE: Who does?

SHELBY: Marcus and Tal.

LIZZIE: (*to* MARCUS) Both of you?

MARCUS: OK, I can explain—

TAL: Marcus, I can't take it anymore! Yes, we both live here.

SHELBY: For years, am I right?

LIZZIE: Omigod. So all this time...

SHELBY: Yes.

LIZZIE: (*to* MARCUS) When you told me you never met...

TAL: He was lying.

LIZZIE: You rat bastards!

TAL: Total rat bastards.

LIZZIE: You're just a pair of lying, scheming...ohmigod.

SHELBY: See, the good ones aren't all taken. The bad ones are taken too.

LIZZIE: Jemma, did you know? Why am I even asking? Of course you did.

JEMMA: Darling, it was blackmail.

LIZZIE: Marcus threatened to tell your family?

TAL: Actually, I did.

LIZZIE: And that's a reason to lie and cheat and fuck me over?

SHELBY: What are friends for?

MARCUS: Just for the record...I never threatened anybody.

LIZZIE: Were you ever going to tell me? Or wait till we were up and running and a howling success?

MARCUS: Probably wait.

TAL: Definitely wait.

LIZZIE: (*to* MARCUS) Was I the first?

TAL: The first what? Oh. No. Marcus was married. That was no lie. To Linda.

MARCUS: Buh-linda.

TAL: I used to think he was just getting his ticket punched. To deflect suspicion later on. But I was wrong. He's an equal-opportunity slut.

LIZZIE: Will Clueless Lizzie be the last?

TAL: Don't put Marcus on the spot. It pisses him off.

LIZZIE: Were you faking it? What am I saying, of course you weren't. Unless you were thinking of him.

MARCUS: I was thinking of you the whole time.

TAL: Well, maybe not the whole time. We never know with Marcus.

LIZZIE: Good luck finding out. (*to* MARCUS) Well. I guess I've had as much fun as I deserve—given my total, incurable ignorance about anything to do with love, sex, or marriage. Marcus, I've enjoyed your deep-dish ruminations, and your sexual technique, which is quite remarkable, considering—

TAL: Oh gag—

LIZZIE: —and Tal, you're a brilliant cook, I hope I never taste your food again. Or see you again. (*to* MARCUS) Or you. (*looks at* JEMMA, *says nothing*) Shelby, I'll leave your apartment key with the doorman. Do you need any Trazodone? I can messenger some.

SHELBY: No, yeah, I'm good. I'll see you at the lawyers'.

LIZZIE: Do you really mean that, Shelby?

SHELBY: If that's what you really want.

LIZZIE: Wear something suitable.

SHELBY: I'll wear a suitable suit.

LIZZIE: And the meds?

SHELBY: I'll be meek as a lamb. And I don't mean the Lamb of God. I've sacrificed enough. Thailand, here I come.

LIZZIE: Well...that's great...thank you, Shelby.

SHELBY: Can I see you home? Never mind. Forget I said that.

LIZZIE: I'll see you Friday. Be careful in the meantime, OK?

SHELBY: Hey. I'm lucid as a goose. Don't worry about me.

LIZZIE: You make it so hard not to. (*quick hug*) Goodbye, dear.

(*LIZZIE starts out the door.*)

JEMMA: Lizzie?

(*LIZZIE stops, looks at JEMMA, then exits without a word.*)

SHELBY: What a pair of assholes.

MARCUS: Stipulated.

SHELBY: (*to JEMMA*) Sorry, didn't mean to leave you out. Make that three assholes. You really don't remember that New Year's kiss, or were you stonewalling?

JEMMA: How much of that crap did she believe?

SHELBY: What crap? All of it was true.

JEMMA: I never hit on the farmer.

SHELBY: Right. When you were nuzzling his arm with your tits, that was strictly accidental. (*taps skull*) I have a telepathic memory for sex. (*to* MARCUS) Don't look so glum, my friend. We can't all be winners.

MARCUS: (*to* TAL) What made you come back?

TAL: Believe me, I tried not to.

MARCUS: You might have picked a better time.

TAL: Maybe I was hoping to catch you in the sack.

MARCUS: We never spent the night, OK?

TAL: Oh, that's so reassuring. If you knew how many times I've walked up and down this street, telling myself I was crazy, forget the man, throw away the key, he doesn't deserve you. Oh what am I saying, you never gave me a moment's thought.

MARCUS: I thought of you constantly. I didn't know you were staking out my apartment.

TAL: Your apartment? I thought it was our apartment.

MARCUS: It's ours till they evict us.

TAL: Well, you can hate me for it, but I'm not sorry.

MARCUS: I'm sorry enough for both of us. Jesus.

SHELBY: Marcus, lay off, the boy loves you. And you love the boy. You'd do anything for him. Lie through your teeth. Sleep with women. I respect that.

MARCUS: Thanks for your support. (*to* TAL) I mean I'm happy to have you back, but Christ, we're so fucked.

TAL: Oh cheer up, we're fine.

MARCUS: Are you kidding, we're penniless! We've lost our funding, it's all down the tubes, we're done!

TAL: Marcus...you're such a worrywart.

MARCUS: Yeah? Where else is it coming from?

SHELBY: Don't look at me, dude. I'm all about my art.

TAL: Jemma? Can you calm this man's jitters?

JEMMA: Yes, Marcus, stop crying in your beer.

TAL: You hear that, Marcus?

JEMMA: Speaking of which, we are going to get a liquor license? I have a friend in Gracie Mansion who can help speed things along.

TAL: See? I knew I could count on this girl.

MARCUS: (to JEMMA) Can I ask why?

JEMMA: Lizzie had a dream. I did my best to fuck it up. (*grandly*) I owe it to the Cosmos.

MARCUS: Well thank you. That's noble of you, Jemma.

JEMMA: Breathe a word to my mother, I'll kill you both.

(*Blackout.*)

Scene 4

(Kitchen clatter. Piped-in music. Meager restaurant chatter. Lights up on MARCUS and TAL, in a room off the restaurant kitchen. JEMMA enters, dressed as a hostess.)

JEMMA: —I swear I can't deal with this. Table six asks me to turn down the music. Table seven asks me to turn it up and turn the thermostat down. And that table of ladies, the eighty-somethings? They claim they're all dying of frostbite.

TAL: So what have we got coming in?

JEMMA: That's it. That's the last of the bookings, those ladies.

TAL: I thought your family was coming tonight.

JEMMA: They canceled.

MARCUS: All of them?

JEMMA: They must have heard we're tanking. Hostess in an empty restaurant? I might as well have gone on Dykes We Like.

TAL: *(peers)* Uh-oh.

MARCUS: What?

TAL: The eighty-somethings are leaving.

MARCUS: No way.

JEMMA: Without dessert?

MARCUS: Or coffee.

TAL: They didn't even wait for the *petits fours*. No bookings, no walk-ins, what's happening to us? I thought we decided God was gay.

MARCUS: That's Jesus. God's a dad.

TAL: And he had his son killed. I guess he hates fags after all.

(SHELBY has entered.)

SHELBY: Who hates fags? I'll wring his fucking neck.

(SHELBY, *all spruced up, is wearing a woman's hat and carrying a small canvas.*)

SHELBY: (to TAL) The brochette of beef was awesome tonight. Loved the artichoke salad.

TAL: You're the one. What's up with the hat?

SHELBY: Political statement. Women can wear men's hats, men find that sexy, but women don't like men in women's hats, where's the justice? (*showing the canvas*) I brought you something to hang. One of those ladies offered me two hundred bucks for it. I'm holding out for five. You notice they all look like shrimp? One was actually eating your shrimp with coucous, how great is that?

MARCUS: Yeah, wonderful. You said you'd stay on your meds.

SHELBY: What meds? I'm taking krathom. [CRATE-um] Brought back a year's supply from Thailand. Psychosis is unknown in that beautiful country.

MARCUS: Go back on your meds or you can't eat here.

SHELBY: Bounce me, dude.

JEMMA: Shelby, settle down.

SHELBY: Come on. Try and throw me out. Settle this once and for all.

(SHELBY *takes a wrestling stance and circles* MARCUS.)

TAL: Guys...

SHELBY: Come on, dude. I know you love to grapple.

TAL: Guys!...We have a walk-in.

(LIZZIE *has entered, unseen until now.*)

LIZZIE: Hi, Tal.

TAL: Hi, Lizzie.

LIZZIE: Hello, Marcus.

MARCUS: Hey.

LIZZIE: Don't let me break up the fight.

MARCUS: We're just horsing around. I'm...surprised to see you, Lizzie.

TAL: Totally. Aren't we, Jemma.

JEMMA: Very surprised.

MARCUS: When you didn't come to the opening....

LIZZIE: You thought I was nursing a grudge?

MARCUS: We kind of assumed.

LIZZIE: You assumed correctly. Not really humming here, is it?

MARCUS: We're having some growing pains.

LIZZIE: This poor couple, they were trying to find the place and I had to help them out. No name on the door, you went ahead with that.

MARCUS: We're rethinking that decision.

LIZZIE: And you bricked the walls. How much liquor are you selling?

TAL: Not enough to pay for the bricks.

LIZZIE: The reviews, my God. Why are people so nasty?

MARCUS: A lot of that is payback.

LIZZIE: (*softens; to SHELBY*) I didn't expect to see you here.

SHELBY: They've been hanging my paintings. (*shows painting*) Check out my latest.

LIZZIE: You're doing people again.

SHELBY: Back to basics.

LIZZIE: What happened to the faces?

SHELBY: A lot of the greats couldn't do faces. Andy could only do shoes.

LIZZIE: (*re hat*) So...are you transitioning?

SHELBY: Yeah, the brothel cure worked like a charm. One chick massages you while the other one fellates you, and from there it only gets better. Wish you could've been there. You'd have married me again on the spot. Oh wait, you meant the hat. Just trying to level the playing field. You're looking amazing, by the way.

JEMMA: Are you here alone?

LIZZIE: You know I can't be in a restaurant alone.

JEMMA: (*peers out*) The pale girl with the purple lipstick?

LIZZIE: No such luck. The corner banquette.

JEMMA: How old is he? He looks about fifteen.

LIZZIE: Oh he doesn't, he's more than half my age. And so easy to be with! His guy friends, they're used to making less money than their girlfriends, so it's a happier group than usual. And you should see his photographs, he only works in black and white, you know what he said? "How else can you get a metaphor?" I don't even know what that means, but isn't that genius? (*pause*) Yes, see, I'm completely unrepentant. I sell for a living, and I'll keep right on selling, until I find out he's got a girlfriend in Denmark he visits half the year or he's contemplating suicide or he's flying to Alabama to blow up an abortion clinic. Why not? Why not have my head in the clouds? It's lovely up there, the view is fantastic, and it sure beats being alone on a Saturday night or any other night. (*sniffs*) What do I smell? Chicken tagine with almonds?

TAL: Almonds and apricots.

LIZZIE: Sounds yummy. And guys—I'm going to have my next company retreat here in the city, so I'll need every table that Saturday night. Can you accommodate?

TAL: Are you kidding?

MARCUS: Bring it on.

LIZZIE: Wouldn't want you to go belly up so soon. After all the work we put in.

SHELBY: Make your people buy my paintings too.

LIZZIE: I don't think I have to do that, Shelby.

SHELBY: Yeah, I've sold a few things lately.

LIZZIE: It was only a matter of time. *(to JEMMA)* And you. You've got an actual job. I hope it makes you happy.

JEMMA: I'm working on it.

LIZZIE: So it hasn't been a total loss.

MARCUS: You've done us all some good, Lizzie.

LIZZIE: I saw the wedding announcement. Good luck with that. Well...mustn't keep my gorgeous date waiting.

JEMMA: Will you call me?

LIZZIE: Will I call you? Eventually. Maybe. Who knows. Cheers, everybody. I can't help it, I still love you all!

(LIZZIE starts out, then doubles back to give JEMMA a hug. JEMMA tries to prolong it. LIZZIE breaks the hug, squeezes SHELBY's arm, and exits. The others watch her take her seat.)

MARCUS: He is gorgeous.

JEMMA: Some genius. I saw that boy at the Met. He was handing out programs.

TAL: Ohmigod, they're kissing. Eew, how can you watch? Never mind. I forget who I'm talking to sometimes. *(to MARCUS)* Go ahead, feast your faithless eyes. I have useless work to do.

(TAL exits toward the kitchen.)

SHELBY: Yeah, me too, I'm late for my nude drawing class. *(re canvas)* Don't hang that in Siberia, OK?

(SHELBY exits. JEMMA is staring into the distance.)

MARCUS: *(to JEMMA)* Want me to work the front of the house? You look like you've had it for tonight.

(JEMMA doesn't answer. Spotlight on LIZZIE, drinking, laughing, happily flirting with her unseen date. MARCUS stops to watch, then exits. Spotlight on JEMMA, staring hopelessly at LIZZIE. The spotlight on JEMMA fades down. Blackout. END OF PLAY.)