

STONE

A play by

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CAST

RACHEL: 30's-40's, attractive, energetic, emotional,
optimistic

DEBORAH: 30's-40's, her sister, attractive, business-like,
cynical

BENJAMIN: Same age as women

ACT ONE

PROJECTION: Four projections fade from one to the other. First, a long distance photo of the mountain that houses the Carrara quarry. Second, a solid piece of marble, ready to be removed from the quarry. Third, sculptor's tools, hammer, chisels. Fourth, Michelangelo's statue of David in its breathtaking size and beauty. It, too, fades away at curtain.

(N.B. The projections are optional)

SCENE ONE

TIME: The Present.

SCENE: The living room of an expensive urban apartment. A Front door to the outside, a Kitchen door, a Bedroom door. A veiled object which we will learn is a statue sits on a table. A large modern art painting is on a wall.

AT RISE: We HEAR the sound of an AMBULANCE SIREN pulling away from the house and receding. LIGHTS UP on BENJAMIN and DEBORAH, somewhat disheveled and in a state of shock. LIGHTS are on only them initially before widening to illuminate the whole set.

BENJAMIN
(unconvinced)
She'll be all right

DEBORAH
(unconvinced)
She'll be all right.

BENJAMIN
I think so, don't you?

DEBORAH
I think so.

BENJAMIN
I'm sure she will.

DEBORAH
I'm sure.

BENJAMIN
(pause)
Christ, what if she isn't?

Pause, pause.

BENJAMIN
She'll be all right...Don't you think so?

DEBORAH
She has to be.

BENJAMIN
Christ, yes.

DEBORAH
I couldn't live with myself...

BENJAMIN
Me either...

DEBORAH
I would think not.

He starts to protest but thinks better of it. Deborah EXITS through Front Door.

BENJAMIN
(Soliloquy)
I never said I loved her, that's important. I said I love being here, I said I love making love to her. I called her "my lovely"... She had a troubled marriage; I let her know, by my actions if not exactly by words, that I was here for her--in a very limited way. I offered her the feeling, for an hour at least, that, in a very specific, physical, way, she was desirable, and desired and... that's not enough to build a divorce on...She was unrealistic from the beginning...It's not my fault...I kept a cautious distance. I was determined not to be seduced by a distraction...I don't know how it happened. It crept up on me.

Benjamin Exits.

LIGHTS UP FULLY

MONTHS EARLIER.

ENTER RACHEL, through Bedroom Door. She rushes in, hurriedly tries to straighten things in expectation of a visitor.

DOORBELL. She opens Front Door and ENTER Benjamin, habitually disheveled.

She is nervous, excited. He is wary.

RACHEL
Come in, come in. Welcome to my
sister's humble...Such as it is.

BENJAMIN
Thank you.

He takes in the relative opulence of the surroundings while she chatters on.

RACHEL
I'm so pleased to actually meet
you. I'm, well, you know who I am
because I invited you...Rachel
Blum.

She shakes his hand.

BENJAMIN
People actually live here?

RACHEL
Only part time. It's my sister's
pied a terre when she comes in
from Connecticut. But I have the
use of it. It's nice, isn't it?

BENJAMIN
It's very large.

RACHEL
Not all that large.

BENJAMIN
It's really big.

RACHEL
I never thought of it...I guess it
is at that.

BENJAMIN
I live in a garage in Brooklyn.

RACHEL
Oh.

BENJAMIN
A one-car garage.

RACHEL
I see.

BENJAMIN
Not over the garage. *In* the garage.

RACHEL

Well...

BENJAMIN

What do you pay for a place like this?...Sorry, I was born poor but covetous. It's none of my business.

RACHEL

I really couldn't say. It belongs to my sister...well, my sister and her husband. Is that why you didn't want me to come to your studio?

BENJAMIN

If you came in, I'd have to move the car outside first.

She laughs, then realizes he's at least half-serious.

RACHEL

Sorry, I thought you were...

BENJAMIN

I was...But it's almost true.

RACHEL

I would have had you to my apartment but my husband might be there.

BENJAMIN

Ah, the wild card.

RACHEL

No, it's just...it's not important. We won't be interrupted here, it's so much better than a coffee shop. Please, sit down. I'm so glad you came.

She sits on a sofa, clearly intends that he should sit beside her. He sits, tentatively, on the arm of the sofa.

RACHEL

I just love your work. The statue of Alexander Nursed By Bagoas is just...superb. I don't have the words but I had to tell you in person.

BENJAMIN

Without the words?

RACHEL

What?..I couldn't say it strongly enough in an email. Smiley faces convey only so much. You are so talented, I don't know how you do it. I'd give anything to make even one piece of sculpture like you do, and you've done so many.

He stands.

RACHEL

Are you all right?

He sits.

BENJAMIN

Talking about my work makes me uncomfortable.

RACHEL

Some people don't take praise well.

BENJAMIN

I love it...but at the same time I feel I need to argue with it.

RACHEL

Why? You're so good.

BENJAMIN

I have a certain facility--I can fake it pretty well.

RACHEL

You can't fake what you do. Your artistry reveals your emotions so clearly...

BENJAMIN

You can fake emotions, too. That's how we get by, isn't it?

RACHEL

(tentatively)

Is it? I don't *think* so.

BENJAMIN

Okay.

RACHEL

It's important to be honest and open and...isn't it?

BENJAMIN

I'm honest only because I don't have the memory to keep my lies straight. And I tend to clear my throat before I lie. People can see it coming...But then there's nobody I have to hide my emotions from, either. That simplifies things.

RACHEL

But you're honest artistically.

BENJAMIN

I'd use the word integrity rather than honesty.

RACHEL

Yes, integrity is very important in art, isn't it?

BENJAMIN

(cynically)

If you don't have success or money, integrity is the only thing to hide behind.

Indicates the large painting.

BENJAMIN

Doesn't that make you want to throw something at it?

RACHEL

You don't like it?

BENJAMIN

It looks like the backside of a mandrill.

RACHEL

I don't know what that is, exactly.

BENJAMIN

The baboon with the red and purple ass? I can't imagine anyone actually looking at that all the time...Maybe if you squint...Nope.

RACHEL

My brother-in-law paid a lot of money for that. Is it that bad?

BENJAMIN

You can't say it's bad, because you can't say what it is. It's a perfect example of itself. It has no connection with history, with understanding of craft, perspective, chiaroscuro, art, artists, or anything living or dead. The guy who did this has a very good supply of squirt bottles, and that's about it.

RACHEL

I won't tell my brother-in-law.

BENJAMIN

Sorry. A pet peeve. I think art should resemble something.

RACHEL

I love your insistence on the discipline of the classic tradition. You must be an inspiration to your students.

BENJAMIN

Mostly they get inspired to quit.

RACHEL

Really? Why?

BENJAMIN

Too hard, no patience, no talent. Instructing the occasional dabbler is one of the indignities you put up with if you want to make a living in art.

RACHEL

You must get very frustrated.

BENJAMIN

It's like sucking through a clogged straw, no matter how hard you work, nothing comes through...I commit to them, they don't commit to the work.

RACHEL

I'm just a fledgling sculptor myself, well, more of an intermediate, but my sister tells me I have talent.

BENJAMIN

She would know.

RACHEL

I see your point, but could I show you something, at least? It's a piece I'm working on...People probably do this to you all the time.

BENJAMIN

Well, yeah. Usually proud parents.

She crosses to covered object.

RACHEL

You don't have to look at it this if you don't want to.

BENJAMIN

(Ambiguously)

Okay.

She unveils the object. It is a clay statue of a nude woman, 3-4 feet tall.

RACHEL

I know it's not very good.

BENJAMIN

If you know it's not very good, why are you showing it to me?

RACHEL

(of statue)

It's my sister. She and I are very close. It's just my clay working model before I go to the marble. I've done a few other pieces but they weren't quite right. The stone resists me. I don't have your magic.

He studies it judiciously. Rachel chatters nervously while waiting for his judgment.

RACHEL

Isn't she beautiful? She could have been a model. She had such a gorgeous body.

He glances at Rachel.

BENJAMIN

A family trait.

RACHEL
 She doesn't look like that now, of course.

BENJAMIN
 Pity.

RACHEL
 What do you think? Is there anything there you can work with?

Benjamin clears his throat.

RACHEL
 (Notes it)
 Oh.

BENJAMIN
 (Carefully)
 Well...Hands are hard. Feet are even harder.

RACHEL
 Oh.

BENJAMIN
 Some of the old masters kept the feet out of the frame entirely.

RACHEL
 But did I catch her spirit?

BENJAMIN
 Spirits are the hardest of all.

RACHEL
 Am I that awful?

BENJAMIN
 (Kindly)
 No, no, no.

RACHEL
 I don't want you to lie to me.

BENJAMIN
 You'd be the first...You're not awful...Have you thought of contrapposto?

RACHEL
 I'm not sure what...

He prepares to move her body.

BENJAMIN

May I?

He maneuvers Rachel into the classic pose of Michelangelo's David, most of the weight on one foot.

BENJAMIN

The David...Feel it? Just that weight shift and suddenly the body's alive.

RACHEL

(surprised)

I can feel it.

He contorts her to the Venus de Milo pose to demonstrate the S-curve.

BENJAMIN

S-curve, Venus De Milo...With arms.

RACHEL

That's amazing.

He stands her more or less straight-legged and straight up.

BENJAMIN

Tighten your buttocks, pelvis forward.

He indicates her statue.

BENJAMIN

This is her pose...Looks like someone made her a rude proposal from behind.

RACHEL

I didn't realize. I guess I'm one of the clogged straws.

BENJAMIN

Not at all.

(clears throat)

You're just a little raw.

RACHEL

Can you do anything with me?

BENJAMIN

Pardon me?

RACHEL

Take me as a student.

BENJAMIN

Is that why you invited me?

RACHEL

What did you think?

BENJAMIN

I thought it was a--social--visit.
Some people are attracted to
artists, god knows why.

RACHEL

I'll do anything you say...I need
this right now, I can't tell you
how much, it's terribly important
to me.

BENJAMIN

I don't know...teaching is a
distraction, I put too much in it,
it takes energy away from my own
work. I don't want to waste your
time, or mine.

RACHEL

I won't waste your time, I promise.

BENJAMIN

Look, it's a brutal business.

RACHEL

I don't care about the business
part, I just want to create.

BENJAMIN

Everyone starts wanting to create
and once you've created you want
to be seen and once you're seen
you want to be appreciated, and
then it wouldn't hurt if you sold
a few...

RACHEL

I don't need to be famous, I just
want to learn. I commit to
whatever I do, Mr. Friedman, just
like you.

He gestures to indicate the opulence of the surroundings.

BENJAMIN

But I don't have a choice. Not to
be biblical, but a rich man and a
camel and the eye of the needle
and all of that...

RACHEL
(Angry outburst)
I'm not a dabbler! I have talent!
I do! Anybody who doesn't
recognize that is an idiot!

BENJAMIN
Ho!

RACHEL
Sorry...

BENJAMIN
Give me a little warning next time.

RACHEL
I just don't want you to underrate
me.

BENJAMIN
I think I rate you properly...You
have *some* talent.

RACHEL
Why did you come, if you knew you
wouldn't take on a student? You're
not exactly "social".

BENJAMIN
I thought your emails were
interesting. And then you sent me
your picture.

RACHEL
I hope you didn't misinterpret
that.

BENJAMIN
I guess I did. It didn't seem
strictly relevant to a discussion
of Grecian sculpture. You said
we'd be alone, without
interruption, you made it clear
your husband wasn't here...My
mistake, I'll leave.

RACHEL
I was just trying to make
contact...Please. I want to learn.
I'll pay for the "indignity",
whatever your fee.

BENJAMIN
You don't even ask?

RACHEL
Whatever it costs. I'll work like
a demon.

Pause. Benjamin studies her for a moment.

BENJAMIN
Hard work is important but you
also need the touch...Here...

He puts her hands on her statue.

BENJAMIN
Close your eyes. Now feel it as if
you were blind.

Rachel closes her eyes, feels the statue.

BENJAMIN
Touch the clay like a newborn.

Rachel opens her eyes.

RACHEL
I can't...What am I trying to
do...?

BENJAMIN
It should come alive.

Rachel closes her eyes, tries again.

RACHEL
I think...maybe...

BENJAMIN
Takes practice.

RACHEL
What does that have to do with art?

BENJAMIN
Nothing, that's just craft. Craft
catches the eye, art captures the
heart. First you master craft then
you chase art in vain the rest of
your life.

RACHEL
I know I can do it...Please. I
don't know how else to ask you.

Pause. He decides.

BENJAMIN

You were trying too hard...Like
this. It's a mist, not a torrent.

He runs his fingers, oh so gently, on her arm, the back of her hand, her palm, her face, her neck, her ears, all with the tenderness of a lover.

Rachel gasps, loses her balance a bit, then rights herself.

BENJAMIN

All right?

RACHEL

Yes, please.

BENJAMIN

You try.

She puts her hands on his face, he keeps his hands on her face. Pause. They Kiss. They are locked in the kiss for a moment, then Rachel **Swoons** in his arms.

BENJAMIN

(Panicked; to her)

Hello? Hello?

She's dead weight, slips out of his arms, ends up half on and half off the sofa. He kneels, tries to find her pulse, tries to find his own pulse, can't find either.

BENJAMIN

(to Rachel)

Hello? Hello!

ENTER DEBORAH through Front Door, carrying groceries. She stops and watches Benjamin lift her legs and position her on the sofa.

BENJAMIN

(to Rachel)

Hello-ello?

DEBORAH

Are you introducing yourself, or
have you already met my sister?

Benjamin is startled.

BENJAMIN

I didn't do anything, honest. We
kissed, but it's not my fault.

DEBORAH
 Oh, give yourself *some* credit...
 She has vascovagal syncope.

(N.B. Pronounced *sin-co-pee*)

DEBORAH
 She passes out occasionally when
 she gets too excited. Not all that
 often.

She checks Rachel.

DEBORAH
 She'll be all right in a
 minute...I'm Rachel's sister. This
 is my apartment. In case you're
 wondering what I'm doing here.

BENJAMIN
 I guess you're not wondering what
 I'm doing here.

DEBORAH
 I'm a married woman...I scarcely
 remember. You must be the poet
 she's been talking about.

BENJAMIN
 Sculptor.

DEBORAH
 Same difference.

Deborah notices Rachel's statue.

DEBORAH
 This more of your handiwork?

BENJAMIN
 Hers.

DEBORAH
 (slightly impressed)
 Hunh.

She gives the statue a second look. Rachel stirs. Deborah
 hands the groceries to Benjamin, indicates the kitchen.

DEBORAH
 Make yourself useful.

BENJAMIN
 Shouldn't I be here when she wakes
 up?

DEBORAH

Haven't you done enough already?

Benjamin EXITS into kitchen with groceries.

RACHEL

(coming to)

Oh, Deb. You're here.

DEBORAH

Everything's fine, Rache. Just take a minute.

RACHEL

(groggy)

I love you, Debs.

DEBORAH

I love you, too, Flopsy.

RACHEL

Did I...?

DEBORAH

You had one of your time-outs. Don't worry, nothing's broken, you didn't knock any candles over, you didn't fall on the pets.

RACHEL

What was I...?

DEBORAH

You may have been spared a fate worse than death.

RACHEL

Oh!

Benjamin ENTERS from Kitchen.

DEBORAH

If by that you mean him, you're correct.

BENJAMIN

How are you? Are you all right?

RACHEL

(to Benjamin)

I'm so sorry. You just floored me.

BENJAMIN

(False modesty)

Well, I try...

DEBORAH

Don't get too excited. She also
passes out at the sight of snakes
...I can take it from here.

BENJAMIN

Should I stay and help?

DEBORAH

And do what, Doctor?

BENJAMIN

Pardon me while I slink away.

RACHEL

No, wait...

DEBORAH

No, don't.

Benjamin EXITS through Front Door.

RACHEL

Isn't he amazing?

DEBORAH

He leaves on cue, that's
refreshing.

RACHEL

Did you notice his hands?

DEBORAH

Only that he had some.

RACHEL

He has the hands of a sculptor.
The whole time we were talking I
couldn't take my eyes off of them.

DEBORAH

So there was *some* talking involved.

RACHEL

We had the most amazing exchange
of emails... Debbie, that is such
a *seductive* medium. I was
shameless, I wrote things I
wouldn't say out loud if I had my
head under the covers. I asked him
here to talk about teaching, I
thought, but maybe I was kidding
myself...What are you doing here?

DEBORAH

Just taking a little time off from Milton.

RACHEL

I'm sorry.

DEBORAH

About Milton?

RACHEL

Well, that too...He put his hands on me, he turned me into a living statue.

DEBORAH

I assume we are no longer talking about Milton.

RACHEL

Then he touched my face. He said mist but it was fire. His fingers scalded me. You can't imagine...

DEBORAH

I *am* having a little trouble.

RACHEL

Something inside me exploded.

DEBORAH

This isn't payback to Aaron, is it?

RACHEL

You don't think I'm that cold-blooded, do you?

DEBORAH

I think a successful marriage requires a strategy.

RACHEL

Oh, Debbie...

DEBORAH

I know, honey, I know.

RACHEL

He says it's just work, but how can I believe him when she's still in his office, she's still his assistant...Why do we marry the men we marry?

DEBORAH

Because we don't know the men we don't marry. You may not really be crazy about the chicken Caesar but it's on the menu and it's mealtime.

RACHEL

Is that why you married Milton?

DEBORAH

He's rich, he's a Jew, who else should I marry?

RACHEL

That is so unromantic.

DEBORAH

Sorry, thought we were talking about marriage.

RACHEL

You won't tell Milton about this, will you?

DEBORAH

I tell Milton everything...that he needs to know.

Rachel gives Deborah a kiss.

RACHEL

You're the best sister in the world.

DEBORAH

It then follows logically that you are not...Just teasing...Do you plan to see Torch Hands again?

RACHEL

He must think he nearly killed me. He *has* to teach me now, doesn't he?

DEBORAH

I think he's already started.

RACHEL

Oh, I hope so.

Rachel EXITS through Front Door.

DEBORAH
(soliloquy)

She's always been a slave to her enthusiasms, but all this from a touch? If her husband put his hands on Rachel more often she wouldn't be exploding all over the place like a seed pod when someone else touches her. It's like Milton...Well, let's just say it's not uncommon...She'll hurt herself with this. This sudden explosion of passion like a flash in the brain...I don't, I literally do not know what she means. Excitement? Watch your child sing a solo at school and not miss a note, that's excitement, that will make you jump up and down and cheer. No man can do that for you.

Deborah EXITS through Front Door.

END SCENE ONE

SCENE TWO

LIGHTS UP. One month later.

ENTER Benjamin from Bedroom. He is barefooted and puts on his shoes and socks which are positioned by the sofa.

ENTER Rachel from Bedroom, dressed in a bathrobe.

RACHEL
Are you all right?

BENJAMIN
Nothing a prolonged rest and a saline drip won't cure.

RACHEL
Did I do something wrong?

BENJAMIN
God, no. You were wonderful.

RACHEL
You got out of bed so soon. You always get out so fast.

BENJAMIN

Free-floating paranoia. I never know who's going to walk in...

RACHEL

Only Deborah.

BENJAMIN

She seems to pop in with fair frequency.

RACHEL

It's her place.

BENJAMIN

Still. Couldn't you put a necktie on the doorknob or something?

RACHEL

Deb doesn't care. She understands these things.

BENJAMIN

Well, it's not that complicated.

RACHEL

We're very close, we tell each other everything.

BENJAMIN

Feeling a little exposed now.

RACHEL

She's not judgmental, being married to Milton. He has an--interesting--approach to things.

BENJAMIN

And this is the stern, librarian type sister we're talking about?

RACHEL

She's not really like that at all. She seems cool but she has a kind of smoldering warmth underneath.

BENJAMIN

I wouldn't have guessed. Still, I feel better with my pants on. Easier to defenestrate myself.

RACHEL

Oh, don't do that. I have so much yet to learn.

BENJAMIN
(Sincerely)
You were wonderful.

RACHEL
Really?

BENJAMIN
Really. Always, every time.

RACHEL
You're not just saying that?

BENJAMIN
Trying to. I don't seem to be
getting through to you. Wonderful.

RACHEL
My husband has *never* said that to
me.

BENJAMIN
I don't really want to talk about
your husband.

RACHEL
I don't either...Of course I don't
have the reaction to him that I
have with you.

BENJAMIN
That's sort of like talking about
him.

RACHEL
...I thought it was extraordinary.

BENJAMIN
(slightly puzzled)
It was. It is. Always. I'm not
sure why.

RACHEL
It's never been like this for you
before, has it. Not emotionally
and not physically.

BENJAMIN
How do you know that?

RACHEL
Has it?

BENJAMIN
Well, no.

RACHEL

You see, I knew because I couldn't feel this way if you weren't feeling this way, too.

BENJAMIN

Sort of a team effort.

RACHEL

It's like your work. You couldn't do it so beautifully if you didn't lose yourself in what you're doing. And the stone wouldn't respond to you the way it does if your spirits didn't speak to each other the way ours do.

BENJAMIN

Not to quibble, but my work is really a matter of craft. I'm just applying a learned skill to the material at hand.

RACHEL

But there's a deeper, emotional contact you have with what you're sculpting. You become part of it, you meld.

BENJAMIN

I'm always outside of my work when I'm doing it, I'm very aware of what I'm doing. It would be a mess, otherwise.

RACHEL

Beauty doesn't come from craft, it comes from art. If you made a footstool, it would be a thing of beauty because you invest it with yourself.

BENJAMIN

Rachel, I'm not a beautiful person.

RACHEL

Like it or not, your soul is beautiful. That beauty would go into whatever you make.

BENJAMIN

When Michelangelo made the David he wasn't communing with the soul of a shepherd boy.

(more)

BENJAMIN (cont'd)

He was *commissioned* to make a 17 foot statue out of a very expensive, structurally flawed hunk of marble that someone else had already started whacking on.

RACHEL

They say he saw the David in the stone before he began.

BENJAMIN

That just means he knew what he wanted to do before he did it. He made sketches, took measurements, the torso starts so many inches from this edge of the block and so many from that edge, the left knee will be here...He planned every stroke of the chisel. You don't suddenly get inspired and take a different turn when you're chipping at Carrara.

RACHEL

And yet he found the very soul of the David.

BENJAMIN

The real David, if there was a real David, was a short, squat, hairy, desert Hebrew. The David in the museum is a slender, attractive, curly-haired Florentine with huge hands. And he's uncircumcised, which is odd in a Jew, don't you think?

RACHEL

It's a sublime work of art, why do you reduce it to something mundane?

BENJAMIN

Because that's how it's made, with daily sweat.

RACHEL

You're an artist, you should know better.

BENJAMIN

I'm uncomfortable when you call me an artist in that worshipful way you do.

(more)

BENJAMIN (cont'd)

I teach art history at a community college, once in a while I teach someone like you. I sell my work at craft fairs, if I'm lucky enough.

RACHEL

(Defensive)

It's not worshipful. I don't know why you would say that.

BENJAMIN

(giving up)

Okay. Sorry.

RACHEL

It's not *worshipful*. I'm not a schoolgirl.

BENJAMIN

I mispoke. Sorry. You're probably right.

RACHEL

Don't withdraw like that, I want you to *engage* with me. I can be your muse.

BENJAMIN

I don't think that's a position you can volunteer for.

RACHEL

Keep teaching me and we'll do it together. Just tell me what I can do to help you. I can do the sanding with the emery stone. And I can clean the tools, I love those names, Lo Sabbia and Lo Scapezzatore and Lo Scapello and L'Unghietto. "Little fingernail", what a beautiful name for a tool.

BENJAMIN

It's La Subbia, not Lo Sabbia.

RACHEL

(Lovingly)

La Subbia.

BENJAMIN

Rachel, no one should get involved in the whole messy nonsense of "art" unless she **has** to. It's a long, pitiless grind and there's no reward except the work itself and endless, screaming despair and frustration. You must be obsessed, you must use anything or anyone who can help you, dump anyone or anything that stands in your way.

RACHEL

I'm not afraid of it, we're so good together. We'll both be famous, we'll be famous together.

BENJAMIN

Van Gogh got famous because he cut his ear off and killed himself...AND, AND, his brother was an art dealer who worked tirelessly on his **posthumous** behalf. Nobody liked his work when he was alive, nobody. And the truth is, he lacked craft. His paintings are crude and rough and unskilled.

RACHEL

But your work is so good.

BENJAMIN

There is no prize for "good", there's no pay-off for virtue. There's no divine judge selecting superior work. It's luck and politics and influence. You're making an item of no intrinsic value that no one asked for and no one wants...and hoping to be praised and rewarded for it. It's insane; you might as well write poetry. Unless something in your masochistic spirit tells you you **must** do it, you'd be better off digging ditches. Everyone needs a good ditch.

RACHEL

Why are you trying to frighten me off? Let me help you. We'll be as wonderful in our art as we are with each other, natural and flawless and effortless...

BENJAMIN

Effortless? Sex is a matter of craft just as much as anything else worth doing. I've learned a technique that you respond to. I note your reactions, your breathing, your movements...

RACHEL

Could you be more insulting? Next you're going to say you play me like a violin! How humiliating. If anyone is playing anyone, I am playing you. I am letting our passion in, I'm the gateway because I'm open to it.

BENJAMIN

(chuckling)

I didn't realize it was a cosmic deal. Bigger than both of us, that sort of thing?

RACHEL

Don't be so smug. Something magical happens when you caress the clay and something magical happens when we make love, because we are *In* love, and you're too blind to know it.

Deborah ENTERS, unnoticed. She carries a wrapped object. She stands and listens.

BENJAMIN

What are you getting so worked up about? I admit that being with you is wonderful...but you are a little nuts.

There is a sudden charged silence from Rachel. He has hit a nerve.

RACHEL

I'm not nuts! I'm sick and tired of people telling me I'm crazy, I'm not crazy, I'm damned smart and if you're not smart enough to see it, you must be crazy.

Rachel EXITS, storming into Bedroom.

DEBORAH

Her husband calls her crazy every time she accuses him of cheating on her...If I could think of a way to get away with it, I'd kill him.

BENJAMIN

I didn't see you come in.

DEBORAH

You were too busy belittling her.

BENJAMIN

Your sister is a woman of enthusiasms.

DEBORAH

Yes. It can be a little embarrassing, sometimes...You're her current enthusiasm.

BENJAMIN

I'll take that as an oblique insult, as intended.

DEBORAH

How do you find her?

BENJAMIN

A bit more robust than I'm accustomed to, since you ask, but then, why do you ask?

DEBORAH

I don't want details.

BENJAMIN

Sorry.

DEBORAH

I meant, how is she?

BENJAMIN

A bit more robust than I'm accustomed to...do you note a circular quality?

DEBORAH

I mean her health, as you know. Has she been fainting, does she lose consciousness?

BENJAMIN

No...Well, only at those moments when it's appropriate.

DEBORAH

Well, aren't you just a big old
jolt of electricity?

BENJAMIN

You asked.

DEBORAH

I worry about her, I'm her sister.

BENJAMIN

Maybe you should ask her.

DEBORAH

She lies to me.

BENJAMIN

Really?

DEBORAH

We used to be very close.

BENJAMIN

She thinks you're still very close.

DEBORAH

I know.

(shrugs)

Life becomes a hoard of secrets.

Deborah unwraps the object and puts it in a prominent place.
It is a free form non-representational statuette, two or
three feet high.

BENJAMIN

Well, now, that's ugly.

DEBORAH

I didn't want it in my Greenwich
house so I brought it here.

BENJAMIN

And you're putting it where I have
to look at it?

DEBORAH

Squatter's rights don't extend to
interior decorating.

BENJAMIN

It's a piece of pounded tin. I
could make that with a soup can
and a hammer.

DEBORAH
It's called "Last Best Hope."

BENJAMIN
Well, that's not pretentious. Did you get it from a dumpster?

DEBORAH
Milton bought it.

BENJAMIN
Your husband would seem to be an idiot.

DEBORAH
Rachel showed him photos of your little things, too.

BENJAMIN
My little elfin things, scuttling through the underbrush.

DEBORAH
He really liked them.

BENJAMIN
Your husband is often misunderstood. Why didn't he buy one of mine instead of this disgrace?

DEBORAH
He considered it. The dealer told him this would have better resale value.

BENJAMIN
Sell it immediately.

DEBORAH
It's ugly and meaningless, but the artist has a biggish name. You don't really have a name, do you?...

BENJAMIN
Only a few private ones I use when flagellating myself.

DEBORAH
This is in vogue. He said your style is too accessible.

BENJAMIN

That means it resembles something
in nature.

DEBORAH

I'm not criticizing your stuff.

BENJAMIN

My stuff. My little things.

DEBORAH

I'm just telling you what the
dealer said. Do you want me to lie
to you?

BENJAMIN

Only if you mean it.

She indicates ugly sculpture.

DEBORAH

Why don't you make something like
this, get yourself a name?

BENJAMIN

It's shit! It's absolute shit!

DEBORAH

It's what people like.

BENJAMIN

This is a turd! Deposited by a
fraud! Would you like to see me
piss in a bottle and call it art?

DEBORAH

Might make for a change.

BENJAMIN

It's vomit, it's a public display
of hemorrhoids.

DEBORAH

You get quite passionate when
discussing art, don't you?

BENJAMIN

This isn't art, it's not even
decoration. Art engages us
emotionally because it's about a
fellow human and not some warped
geometry created by a blacksmith
like this farshtinkener dreck. No
one responds to this.

DEBORAH

But they buy it.

BENJAMIN

They buy pork belly futures, too,
but they don't put them on display.

DEBORAH

Maybe you should have chosen a
career of art criticism instead of
sculpture.

BENJAMIN

You don't choose sculpture as a
career, you indulge it for a
while, and then it's too late.
Your mother praises some deformed
clay pig you made in grade school
and it's all down hill from there.
The pig gets better--but you never
get praise that gratifying
again...God, it's all so
depressing.

DEBORAH

Milton is thinking of buying your
little thing. Alexander Nursed by
Bagoas.

BENJAMIN

Don't tease me, it's too easy.

DEBORAH

Rachel thinks it's wonderful.

BENJAMIN

And what do you think of it?

DEBORAH

I have no opinions on art. I like
pictures of kittens. They make me
smile.

BENJAMIN

That's art to you, a ten second
diversion?

DEBORAH

Who is Bagoas?

BENJAMIN

Alexander's Persian eunuch, and
probably his lover.

DEBORAH
His lover? Can eunuchs...

BENJAMIN
Everything but get you pregnant.

DEBORAH
Milton will be interested in that.

BENJAMIN
What does your husband *do* with all these interests?

DEBORAH
He doesn't do anything, he had the good sense to inherit his wealth. Milton is a seeker.

BENJAMIN
What does that mean?

DEBORAH
My husband is a misogynistic, solipsistic, narcissistic fool. Said with love.

BENJAMIN
Whoa!

DEBORAH
Fool?

BENJAMIN
Solipsistic.

DEBORAH
Self-involved.

BENJAMIN
Who isn't, these days?

DEBORAH
He's looking for a transcendent experience under every rock he can turn over. He wants to find the meaning in life.

BENJAMIN
Oy.

DEBORAH
He's trying to tap into the great Om in the sky.
(more)

DEBORAH (cont'd)

He's floated in an isolation tank like a rubber duckie. He's been to an ashram and can stand on his head if I hold his legs. He's dabbled in the Kabbala and the Pentecostal stuff--I drew the line at snake handling. Now he's investigating the Suffis.

BENJAMIN

The whirling Dervishes?

DEBORAH

He made a place for himself in the basement where he can spin. He tends to get motion sickness so he throws up occasionally.

BENJAMIN

And you think castration is his next great adventure?

DEBORAH

Don't get my hopes up...That was a joke.

BENJAMIN

Castration is probably funnier to a woman.

DEBORAH

He's decided it's easier to *buy* transcendence than to achieve it so now he's dabbling in art, that's Rachel's influence. He isn't quite rich enough to buy a wing at a hospital so he's going to establish the Rosenthal Prize for Fine Art.

BENJAMIN

Never heard of it.

DEBORAH

You will. The Rosenthals never give to philanthropy without putting their name on it. I think they even sign their dollar bills. But he hasn't started yet. One piece at a time. Start small then hype like crazy. Keep telling everyone you're the greatest until they believe it.

BENJAMIN

It worked for Picasso and Warhol.

Benjamin indicates the ugly piece.

BENJAMIN

What about that horse dropping?
Your husband's first step to
immortality?

DEBORAH

He knows it's no good, Rachel told
him. It was a way to pick the
brains of some dealers. He wants
to be the patron of a genius and
chip in on immortality that way.

BENJAMIN

Why does money always go to those
who don't deserve it?

DEBORAH

It's God's joke on the good and
pure...Rachel says you're the
undiscovered genius my husband's
looking for.

BENJAMIN

I'm sure as hell undiscovered...If
he's really interested in the
Alexander, he can negotiate
directly with me, no dealer
involved, if that will make it
easier. If price is an object, I
can take less...I hate when I
grovel, it looks like religion.

DEBORAH

I'll tell him. Maybe he'll drop in
during your next assignation with
Rachel.

BENJAMIN

Visitors always welcome. You, too,
of course. Come one, come all. The
more the merrier.

DEBORAH

(pause; icily)

What do you mean by that?

BENJAMIN

Just an expression.

DEBORAH
Has Rachel been talking to you?

BENJAMIN
Only when I can't stop her...

DEBORAH
(Dangerously)
I have license to say what I want
about my sister. You don't.

BENJAMIN
It was a joke.

DEBORAH
You're a fool, too, aren't you?

BENJAMIN
A cruel but accurate assessment.

DEBORAH
Milton's interest is due to
Rachel's enthusiasm. Nothing else.
You understand that.

BENJAMIN
I seem to have given offense, I
didn't mean...

DEBORAH
My sister has fallen short of
everything she tried in life, just
by a little. She sings, almost
well enough. She paints, almost
well enough. She's brushed it all
with her fingertips, but can't
quite grip it. And I've helped her
pull herself together and try
again, and again, and again. She
strives, she reaches. You think
she's silly because of her
enthusiasm--don't deny it, I can
see it--I think she's a hero.

BENJAMIN
Well, I...

DEBORAH
I give you warning. Value her.

BENJAMIN
I'm very fond of Rachel.

DEBORAH
Fond falls just short.

BENJAMIN
I think I'd better go now.

DEBORAH
I'll arrange a meeting with Milton.

BENJAMIN
Thank you.

DEBORAH
Because I told her I would. Thank
her.

BENJAMIN
I will.

He crosses to Front Door.

DEBORAH
Benjamin...I make a bad enemy.

He EXITS Front Door.

END SCENE TWO

SCENE THREE

Several days later.

ENTER RACHEL from Bedroom. She is dressed in sexy negligee. During her soliloquy she covers the offensive sculpture with a cloth. It then looks as if it awaits unveiling.

Deborah ENTERS through Front Door. She carries a very large arrangement of flowers.

RACHEL
(disappointed)
It's you.

DEBORAH
I know. Some excitement, huh?

RACHEL
You said you weren't going to be here today.

DEBORAH

I just stopped by to give you these.

She puts down the flowers.

RACHEL

They're beautiful.

DEBORAH

I stole the centerpiece from a banquet Milton dragged me to last night. I thought they might add a romantic touch...

(of negligee)

...although I see you've taken care of that yourself.

RACHEL

Is it too much?

DEBORAH

You look very sexy. I notice your boy friend never brings flowers-- or anything else.

RACHEL

All I want is him.

DEBORAH

He ought to give you *something*, that's part of the social contract.

RACHEL

He lets me watch him in his studio, he talks to me about what he's doing. Sometimes.

DEBORAH

Wow!

RACHEL

You don't know. Just to touch the things he's touching, it's like having his hands on me. The marble flows under his touch, it's like watching water dancing over stones.

(more)

RACHEL (cont'd)

To see that rock yield to him, the slightest touch, a tiny tap, and there's a crease in the garment, a hair in the eyebrow...I swear, Debbie, the marble comes to life for him...if I could create life like that with my own work... Just watching him has inspired me to start a new piece.

DEBORAH

Rache...are you sure that's what you want?

RACHEL

It's past wanting. I have to.

DEBORAH

Is it him or the art you're crazy about?

RACHEL

They're the same, you can't separate them without destroying them both.

DEBORAH

You look so radiant when you talk about it. I wonder if we're even thinking about the same thing.

RACHEL

We're an absolute miracle together, Deb. When he's gone, I can't think of anything else, I can't work, I can't concentrate, I feel him still with me. I feel his lips on my neck, his breath on my ear, I feel his hands on my skin, he's still with me for hours.

DEBORAH

I'd take a shower.

RACHEL

I ache for him.

DEBORAH

Does he look you in the eye?
Milton never looks directly at me.

RACHEL

Oh, Debbie. I'm sorry. I never thought how this might affect you.

DEBORAH

I was just curious...Milton usually laughs a little when he's finished, too, like he's pulled a fast one on someone. Me, I guess.

RACHEL

You've never known real passion, have you?

DEBORAH

Do you mean claw his back and bite his cheek? No.

RACHEL

I mean enfolded in love kind of passion. You've never know that rapture, have you?

DEBORAH

I've never had God speak directly to me, either, so here I am, still an atheist.

RACHEL

I'm sorry.

DEBORAH

I'm doing fine, thanks.

RACHEL

You aren't staying, are you? I promised him you weren't coming today.

DEBORAH

Why? What did he say about me?

RACHEL

Nothing. He didn't say anything.

DEBORAH

Rachel, what did he say?

RACHEL

I just get a sense you make him a little uncomfortable.

DEBORAH

Well, pardon me, but it's *my* apartment. *He* makes *me* uncomfortable.

RACHEL
Don't be mad at him, he didn't say anything.

DEBORAH
Hand gestures?

Deborah notices that the ugly sculpture has been covered up.

DEBORAH
(knows better)
Probably the cleaning lady. Must not have art appreciation classes in Uruguay.

She vengefully removes the cloth from the ugly statue.

RACHEL
Debbie...

DEBORAH
I arranged for Milton to meet him here, you know. Or would that make him too uncomfortable?

RACHEL
Debbie, please, don't take it out on him. I'm the one who's uncomfortable, he's never said anything but nice things about you.

DEBORAH
Name five.

Rachel is stumped.

DEBORAH
Are you sure you want to wear that particular nightie?

RACHEL
(alarmed)
Does it look bad?

DEBORAH
He won't notice. They don't care if we're dressed in burlap, as long as it's easy to get off.

RACHEL
Look at my knees. Oh, god.

Rachel EXITS into Bedroom.

DEBORAH

(soliloquy)

Well, well. My little sister feels sorry for me. Instead of an habitual mess she's now the Queen of Passion. Her husband is doing it with his assistant practically on the office desk and she feels sorry for *me*...She thinks I don't know passion. *I'm* the one who writes poetry. Well, used to. I showed one of my poems to Milton once. He said it was dry. Not in the sense of witty. Dry. *I'm* not dry. There could be a subterranean river in flood stage right under my skin for all he knows. For all Rachel knows, too. We confide in each other daily, tell each other such things, yet she knows nothing about me...The whole world is aswim with excitement for her. I wish I could see her mirages, they make her so happy.

Deborah crosses to the sculpture, studies it, winces at how ugly it is, and covers it up with the cloth. She picks up the flowers and takes them with her as she EXITS through Front Door.

END SCENE THREE

SCENE FOUR

ENTER Benjamin through Front Door. He now has a key for the door. He sits on the sofa and removes his shoes and socks during the soliloquy.

BENJAMIN

It's the strangest thing. I come here to burn in this woman's embrace. I tremble, I shiver in anticipation. I choose to do so in the sense that an alcoholic chooses to drink. It's troubling, complicated, but not really a choice. The flesh makes its own demands...And yet the moment I kiss her lips, soft as a cloud, I find myself melting, I could dissolve onto the floor, not from passion but from this sense of having finally arrived home. I find such comfort there...I have to withhold some portion of myself or I am gone...I don't think she notices...I leave my shoes out here so I have an excuse to get away. Otherwise she'll consume me...And yet here I am.

ENTER Rachel from Bedroom. She is dressed in a more modest nightgown than previously. She stands in the doorway for a moment, then lifts her hands slightly to beckon him.

BENJAMIN

(still soliloquy)

And just like that the nerves, the shivers. I tremble and ache to burn again.

(to Rachel)

Don't say anything, just let me look at you. Don't say a word. I don't want to talk about anything, I don't want to think about anything but you.

He crosses towards her.

RACHEL

I've arranged for Milton to meet you here.

BENJAMIN

Well, tell me, tell me, talk to me.

They EXIT into Bedroom.

END SCENE FOUR

SCENE FIVE

A week later.

Projection: **The sculpture of The Dying Gaul is shown for a few moments, then fades.**

ENTER Deborah through Front Door. She wears a skirt or dress that reveals her bare legs, and carries something covered by a cloth. She puts it down next to the ugly sculpture which is also covered by a cloth. The two objects are about the same size and now look interchangeable. She picks up the ugly sculpture and EXITS with it into Kitchen. She ENTERS from Kitchen without the ugly sculpture.

A KNOCK on Front Door. Deborah opens door, Benjamin ENTERS. Benjamin has made an attempt to look like a serious man of business. He wears an old sports jacket and a very poorly knotted necktie. The more formal clothing only makes him look scruffier.

BENJAMIN
(disappointed)
Oh. It's you.

DEBORAH
Contain yourself.

BENJAMIN
I was expecting your husband.

DEBORAH
I know...What are you wearing?

Deborah reties his tie in a proper knot.

DEBORAH
You look like a failed attempt at hanging. Milton never wears neckties, he thinks they choke him...He has a few phobias and a tic or two.

BENJAMIN
You must have fun.

DEBORAH
I'm one of his phobias...I think that was a joke. Close.

BENJAMIN
When is he coming?

DEBORAH
He's not coming.

BENJAMIN
(deflated)
I knew it was too good to be true.

DEBORAH
He sent me to tell you.

BENJAMIN
(bitterly)
Do you want to kick me standing
up, or shall I lie down for it?

He spreads his legs, puts his arms in the air.

BENJAMIN
Is this easy enough for you?

DEBORAH
Crude, but tempting...You seem to
be taking the news somewhat
negatively, or am I misreading
your posture?

BENJAMIN
Nothing is crueller than hope. Just
keep your face in the mud where it
belongs.

DEBORAH
What are you going on about now?

BENJAMIN
This dismal life!
(contemptuously)
Art! It's poverty and unending
public embarrassment. You
lickspittle like a dog if
strangers give you a kind word,
but despair when some well-meaning
moron calls your work "nice", or
"cute."

DEBORAH
Why put yourself through it, if
it's so awful?

BENJAMIN
You wouldn't understand.

DEBORAH
Too dumb, am I?

BENJAMIN
No...

DEBORAH
Too dry, perhaps?

BENJAMIN
Too normal.

DEBORAH
Let's not condescend, I'm too good at it, you wouldn't stand a chance. How do you feel about the actual process? Do you like that, at least?

BENJAMIN
When I'm working I want to cradle it to my chest like my child. Every wrinkle, every arch and angle, I put it there, it's my doing. I can't share the excitement with anybody, they don't understand, but for that intense time it's my joy, the meaning of my life...And then it's done and suddenly it's a poor inadequate thing misshapen in ways I can see but can not fix.

DEBORAH
Do you ever think of making one of your pieces over again, having a second chance at it?

BENJAMIN
Sometimes...until the futility overcomes me. Nobody cares.

DEBORAH
How about this one?

Deborah removes the cloth from the statue. It is Alexander Nursed by Bagoas.

BENJAMIN
That's my Alexander! You bought it?

DEBORAH
Milton has it on loan from the dealer.

BENJAMIN

He's *not* going to buy it.

DEBORAH

He might buy it, it's up to you.
He has some conditions.

BENJAMIN

Do I plead and abase myself now or
later?

DEBORAH

You might want to hear his
conditions.

BENJAMIN

He wants to pay less? Surprise,
surprise. I'll take it.

DEBORAH

No. He wants you to change it.

BENJAMIN

Change it? It's finished.

DEBORAH

He thinks you can do better.

BENJAMIN

Do you know how hard it is to
start with nothing but a damned
rock and a bad idea and create
something very like life, only
cleaner? It's torture and it's
never, NEVER, good enough.

DEBORAH

Shall we pause while I feel sorry
for you or push on through my
tears?

BENJAMIN

(a beat)

I'm thinking.

DEBORAH

Milton sees your work a little
differently than you do and it's
really all a matter of perception
anyway, isn't it?

BENJAMIN

Does he want me to tart it up in
some way? Paint it? Lipstick,
maybe?

DEBORAH

What do you see when you look at it?

BENJAMIN

Months of labor, the best I've done, maybe the best I can do. My life. Nothing much.

DEBORAH

What if you could make it into something that would sell immediately, a collector's item?

BENJAMIN

What if you gave me a couple million dollars so I could publicize my work and turn myself into a media darling?

DEBORAH

You think that's all it takes?

BENJAMIN

I know it takes many decibels of promotion. I could wear my hair funny, get tatoos on my face and pretend a great disdain for it all. They seem to like a poseur. I could hold huge parties and invite all the sycophants on the East Coast. Maybe I could get a patron.

DEBORAH

Let me tell you what I see. I see a sick man lying on a bed. A servant type stands next to his head holding a bowl. The sick man is reaching towards the servant in a plaintive gesture. You captured it very well.

BENJAMIN

Thank you.

DEBORAH

As Milton points out, however, I was directed to that view by the fact that you have named it "Alexander Nursed by Bagoas."

BENJAMIN

That's what it shows.

DEBORAH

He says that I am seeing Alexander's weakness and gesture for supplication and Bagoas's compassion because it's all implied in the title. He thinks it could be interpreted in a different way.

BENJAMIN

He's an idiot.

DEBORAH

He wants to give you a commission.

BENJAMIN

What does he want me to make, a stone with a hole in it to put in the garden? Some nice cement doodad to hold water for the birds?

DEBORAH

He says--now this is Milton, not me--he says why is Alexander's hand touching Bagoas's thigh?

Deborah maneuvers Benjamin where she wants him then reclines on the sofa as if she were Alexander on his palanquin and demonstrates with an open, upward-turned hand at the end of a partially extended arm. It is a plaintive gesture. Benjamin is next to her and her hand is almost touching his thigh.

DEBORAH

I'm Alexander, you're Bagoas.

BENJAMIN

So?

DEBORAH

Why not leave the hand in the air, why is it touching Bagoas's tunic?

BENJAMIN

For support. You can't have anything as heavy as a man's limb free-standing in a horizontal position, it will snap off, there are flaws in the marble. This is one solid piece of marble from the leg to the shoulder, running through the back of his knuckles. If the hand weren't attached, the whole arm would be vulnerable... Oh, Christ, that isn't what you mean, is it?

DEBORAH

Milton says it isn't what you mean. He did some research on Alexander and his time in Persia.

BENJAMIN

He's worse than an idiot, he's informed. This is a study in compassion. The great conqueror, the most powerful man on earth, is dying at the age of 33, he's reduced to the attentions of a servant boy, a slave.

DEBORAH

Milton says without the title it's a scene of passion.

BENJAMIN

So he wants me to change the title to what?

DEBORAH

Not just the title. He wants you to make an addition. Just where his hand touches Bagoas's thigh.

She demonstrates again, this time with her hand actually touching Benjamin's upper thigh.

BENJAMIN

(A beat to comprehend)

No!

DEBORAH

He says it will make the true meaning clear to everyone.

BENJAMIN

No!

DEBORAH

They tell him it can be done.

BENJAMIN

It can be done. It's not right.

DEBORAH

He's willing to pay twice what the gallery is asking for.

BENJAMIN

No.

DEBORAH

Once Milton owns it you'll get the Rosenthal prize, all the publicity, he'll promote it like crazy. He's the patron you're looking for.

BENJAMIN

By the age of 30 Alexander had conquered most of the world, he'd made Greece into an empire, he'd changed the nature of warfare, hundreds of cities were named after him, he solved the Gordian Knot, he studied with Aristotle and spread the virtues of civilization...They called him The Great for a reason. And your husband wants him to be remembered as a dying man looking for a quickie?

DEBORAH

He says he'll hire someone else to make the addition if you won't.

BENJAMIN

I'll smash it to pieces first!

DEBORAH

All right. I tried. I'll tell him you don't want to be famous and no amount of money will change your mind.

BENJAMIN

No amount?

DEBORAH

His opening offer is twice what you're asking for. I'm sure you can get him to go higher. My husband's nothing if not unreasonable.

BENJAMIN

Why is it important to him to ruin my work?

DEBORAH

Oh, he's not thinking about you at all. He wants to believe he's creating something.

BENJAMIN

Any child with a crayon can
"create" something on the nursery
wall.

DEBORAH

Milton thinks he has something
special to offer. He thinks he has
good taste.

BENJAMIN

Don't we all?

DEBORAH

Money reinforces the belief...So
I'll tell him no, at any price?

BENJAMIN

(beat)

That's right.

DEBORAH

For what it's worth, I admire your
pig-headed determination not to
succeed. I'm sorry, I meant to say
your integrity. Why did you make
this piece if not to sell it?

BENJAMIN

I want to sell it, I *need* to sell
it, not debase it.

BENJAMIN

Do you really care this much?

BENJAMIN

(angrily)

Care? I've ruined my life for it.
I used to be a normal person, I
had a wife, I got regular
haircuts, I ate off plates. Now I
live in a converted garage and eat
condensed soup straight from the
can. Do you think I gave up
everything to suit the peculiar
taste of men like your husband?

DEBORAH

Peculiar is in the eye of the
beholder, isn't it?

BENJAMIN

No. *Junk art* is in the eye of the beholder because it has no meaning in itself. The inspiration of art about *humans* lies in the marble, put there by the sculptor. The Greeks displayed things like The Dying Gaul to remind people of their humanity. Have you ever seen The Dying Gaul?

DEBORAH

It's something beautiful, I suppose.

BENJAMIN

It's horrifying, it's piteous. A man is dying before your eyes. You can see the weakening pulse, you can feel the pain of the bleeding gash in his side that will kill him. A man wounded in combat twenty-five hundred years ago and dying right *now*. You can't look at him and not be moved by his suffering humanity. It's a frozen, breathing moment captured in marble and it evokes the deepest emotion. I want to touch him, I want to run my hands across his battered limbs to give him comfort. It's a miracle of compassion.

DEBORAH

And that's your inspiration?

BENJAMIN

(angrily)

Genius doesn't inspire me, it scares the hell out of me. When I look at the Pieta, I feel like Moses confronted by the burning bush; I'm awed, petrified, moved to the soles of my feet, and I'm terrified of touching that flame, but, hey, it's god, how can you *not* reach toward god?...

DEBORAH

To be that moved by a pretty piece of stone. Amazing. How does Rachel put up with such goop?

(more)

DEBORAH (cont'd)

I can just imagine the two of you writhing under the sheets and calling out for Michelangelo.

BENJAMIN

Interesting that you're imagining your sister in that way, but I never talk about this with Rachel.

DEBORAH

Why not?

BENJAMIN

If you blow into the nostril of a new born buffalo, it will follow you as if you're its mother.

DEBORAH

Must come in handy for you, out there on the Great Plains.

BENJAMIN

I don't encourage anyone with false hope or sentimentality about trying to make art. I have to stay at one remove from Rachel or I'll be gone, I'll sink like a brick. I have to keep something for myself.

DEBORAH

I don't know why, but she trusts you.

BENJAMIN

I haven't asked her to.

DEBORAH

I'd trust you more if you were married. Then at least I'd know what you were up to. What do you want with her? We both know you're not good for her.

BENJAMIN

I'm not convinced of that yet. What makes you so sure?

DEBORAH

I've spent most of her life trying to keep her from hitting anything sharp when she fell. Now it looks like she's going to hit her head on you.

BENJAMIN

Am I so bad?

DEBORAH

You are absolute stone. I think you care more about your Dying Gaul than you do about people. ...I'll tell Milton you're too noble for his money. I can find a much better use for it.

He sinks onto sofa, puts his head in his hands. Deborah is standing close.

BENJAMIN

(Tortured)

Wait.

She makes as if to move. Benjamin reaches out and grabs her leg to stop her. The tableau has some resemblance to the Alexander statue.

DEBORAH

Who would have guessed?

Pause. He struggles with himself, still gripping her bare leg.

BENJAMIN

I'll do it for three times what he's offering.

DEBORAH

I'll tell him to make it four. He'll respect you more.

BENJAMIN

Then make it five.

DEBORAH

What changed your mind?

BENJAMIN

(Wearily)

Integrity is exhausting.

DEBORAH

You can remove your hand now. You've made your point.

He does Not remove his hand. She does Not pull away.

BENJAMIN

How did it get there?

DEBORAH

Why do I get the feeling you're negotiating?

BENJAMIN

It went there on its own. What does it mean?

DEBORAH

Think harder.

BENJAMIN

But we don't like each other, do we?

DEBORAH

...that might be an asset.

(pause)

You have the same expression on your face as Alexander. Are you dying?

BENJAMIN

In a way.

DEBORAH

She's right about your hands. Move it a little, it's beginning to burn.

Benjamin moves his hand slightly farther up her leg.

BENJAMIN

Shouldn't we think about this first?

DEBORAH

No.

BENJAMIN

If Rachel finds out?

DEBORAH

Adultery is easy. You just have to be smarter than your spouse is curious.

Pregnant pause. Lights Dim.

DEBORAH

(a demand)

Make me *feel* something.

Lights Out.

END SCENE FIVE

SCENE SIX

Projections: **A series of statues: Bernini's David, Michelangelo's Pieta, Danielle D'Anjou's Prometheus, Fraser's End of the Trail, concluding with Picasso's deformed Femme Debout and Henry Moore's hollow rocks and a couple of garden "sculptures", frogs and kittens.**

A few days later. No statue is on display in the room.

Rachel paces, angrily, glancing now and again at her watch.

ENTER Benjamin through Front Door.

RACHEL
(Sternly)
You might knock.

BENJAMIN
And hello to you, my lovely.

RACHEL
Don't call me that.

BENJAMIN
Whether I call you that or not,
you remain my...What? What have I
done now?

RACHEL
Did you think I wouldn't find out?

BENJAMIN
Uh...

RACHEL
We talk, you know. My sister and
I still talk.

BENJAMIN
Oh.

RACHEL
How dumb do you think I am?

BENJAMIN
I don't...

RACHEL

You are vile. That's all I can say to you. You are vile.

BENJAMIN

Look, it just...

RACHEL

After all I've meant to you. After all I've given you.

BENJAMIN

It really had nothing to do with you.

RACHEL

How insulting.

BENJAMIN

Well, actually, you didn't come into it all that much. I mean, you were mentioned.

RACHEL

Mentioned! That's what you call it? I was *mentioned*?

BENJAMIN

Okay, it shouldn't have happened. We both knew better. It just, I don't know, it just...

RACHEL

Do you care for me at all?

BENJAMIN

Of course.

RACHEL

Did you ever care for me?

BENJAMIN

See, this is what women have trouble understanding.

(more)

BENJAMIN (cont'd)

There's no real connection between caring for one person and...Look, I'm like a rag in the wind, I'm a rudderless ship, I go where the current...I count on women being smarter than I am, I count on them seeing through all the fog I generate, but when they're not, when they don't...I stutter forth this stuff, I don't know where it comes from, I don't know why--well, I do know why, but I'm not responsible, women have got to...

RACHEL

Oh, shut up. I don't want to hear one of your stupid theories about the difference between men and women or the difference between art and schlock, or how you perceive things versus how I perceive things. Such a load of crap, you are so full of it, so pretentious, all you do whenever you open your mouth is deny, deny, deny the obvious truth. All I want from you is the answer to one question. One simple question, yes or no.

BENJAMIN

The answer is yes. It was a mistake, it shouldn't have happened, it was certainly a lapse of taste, if nothing else, well, it was worse than that, although, remember, it's not as if we have a commitment or anything.

RACHEL

We have no commitment? Are you out of your mind? You can't mean that, even you can't believe that.

BENJAMIN

Was it discussed? Have the words ever been spoken, has it ever come up?

RACHEL

Are you crazy? This is so hurtful. I can't believe you'd say that.

BENJAMIN

It doesn't mean I don't, uh, it just, uh, we never talked about it.

RACHEL

It was implicit in every touch.

BENJAMIN

Well, technically a commitment isn't possible...you're married.

RACHEL

Don't start that! Don't! Do you know I love you? Do you not know that? Haven't you heard me say so? Can't you tell by the way I treat you?

BENJAMIN

Yes, I know you love me. But...

RACHEL

No buts. Keep your garbage to yourself. If you know I love you then how on earth can you tell my sister that I don't understand you?

BENJAMIN

Ah...Is that what she said?...Did she say anything else?

RACHEL

Isn't that enough? Why would you say such a thing to her?

BENJAMIN

That's what you're mad about?

RACHEL

Wouldn't you be? Well, no, of course you wouldn't, because you *don't* understand *me*. You don't even want to, you don't even try.

BENJAMIN

Why would she tell you a thing like that? What was the, uh, context?

RACHEL

The context was, we were talking about you. We're always talking about you.

BENJAMIN

Really?

RACHEL

Ooo, now he's interested. You're only the most important thing in my life. You honestly think I don't understand you? You're self-centered and pig-headed and totally concerned only with yourself. What's so hard to understand about that?

BENJAMIN

You've hit the highlights but there's so much more.

RACHEL

Why did you say it? Were you trying to be hurtful?

BENJAMIN

Well...I was disappointed that she was here, I thought I was going to meet with her husband...

RACHEL

What, exactly, did you tell her about me?

BENJAMIN

I think I said that when dealing with art I don't always allow myself to indulge my most fervent feelings in front of you because, BOOM.

RACHEL

I have no idea what you're talking about.

BENJAMIN

When I'm talking about art with someone who doesn't respond to it, I get very excited and go overboard in defense of it. And when I'm talking to someone who does respond to it the whole thing threatens to become artsy-fartsy and I pull back from it.

RACHEL

Do you think I don't know how passionate you are?

(more)

RACHEL (cont'd)

I love that about you. It's the most wonderful thing about you, how you can love, how you can burn with love, how you can be on fire with it but still stay whole, you don't go up in flame, you just keep *burning*. You sustain the fire, it sustains you. I've learned how important it is to feel that way from you, it's why I can't live my life without it anymore. Aaron doesn't begin to understand it.

BENJAMIN

What does Aaron have to do with it?

RACHEL

I saw a lawyer yesterday.

BENJAMIN

No.

RACHEL

We'll meet again tomorrow and discuss details.

BENJAMIN

No, no, no.

RACHEL

I'll be free of him and all his whoring around.

BENJAMIN

Is there some disconnect here? Aren't you doing the same...?

RACHEL

What you and I have is very different, and you know it.

BENJAMIN

Don't do this for *me*.

RACHEL

I'm not doing it for you. I'm doing it for myself. It's about living with passion.

BENJAMIN

Don't do that. Passion is lethal.

RACHEL

I'm going to love you forever, get used to it.

BENJAMIN

Don't!

RACHEL

I don't think we should get married.

BENJAMIN

God, no.

RACHEL

I don't need that. I trust you.

BENJAMIN

Stop it! I don't want to be trusted. I'm a failure as a person, I'm a worthless human being.

RACHEL

I know. We'll work on that. But you're a brilliant artist.

BENJAMIN

Don't make it about art. You'll be wasting your life.

RACHEL

You've done it.

BENJAMIN

Rachel, you have many excellent qualities, but you're not an artist. I'm sure you'll do many fine things in the future...but maybe not in sculpture. You have no talent.

RACHEL

(defensively)

I have talent. I have to learn your craft, you've convinced me of that, but don't tell me I don't have talent. I work at it every day.

BENJAMIN

I don't love you.

RACHEL
 (dismissive)
 Oh, please.

BENJAMIN
 You found how good sex can be, we
 found it together. It was
 serendipity, it was zippity-doo-
 dah, but it was, it is, just
 carnal, it's not love.

Rachel screams, for one long, full breath.

RACHEL
 ARRRRRRRHHHHHHHHHHHHH! You are in
 such denial! How much of this do
 you expect me to take?! Stop
 analyzing things and admit how you
 feel!

BENJAMIN
 Christ, what's the matter with you?

RACHEL
 You're what's the matter with me!
 You are so completely stupid! How
 can you be so expressive as an
 artist and so tender in bed and so
 constipated emotionally? Let
 yourself admit it! You need me as
 much as I need you. Even more,
 because you're so stupid!

BENJAMIN
 I guess we've established that I'm
 stupid.

RACHEL
 Why on earth do you think you
 still come to see me every week if
 it's just sex?

BENJAMIN
 Now, see, women just don't get
 it...

RACHEL
 ARRRRRRRRRHHHHH! You love me! Say
 that's why you're here! Say it!

BENJAMIN
 I'm not going to be bullied into
 this.

RACHEL
 (Sweetly)
 It won't hurt at all, I promise.
 Just say it.

BENJAMIN
 Stop telling me what I feel!

RACHEL
 I have to, you don't know, but I
 do, I know absolutely...

Benjamin emits a Scream of frustration of his own.

BENJAMIN
 (screams)
 Haaaaa!

Benjamin grabs her by the throat with both hands, not quite
 choking her.

BENJAMIN
 You're so fucking irrational!
 What's the matter with you?! Why
 don't you listen to me!

Rachel Slaps him. He releases her.

BENJAMIN
 You're crazy! You're crazy!

He takes a pillow from the sofa and kicks the sofa and pounds
 it with the pillow until he has exhausted his fury.

BENJAMIN
 (flailing away)
 Why don't you listen to me! Why!
 Why! Why! You are--so--damned--
 frustrating!

He stops pounding the sofa. His composure returns with his
 breath. After a pause:

BENJAMIN
 Is that enough emotion for you?

RACHEL
 That's quite a display for someone
 who doesn't care.

BENJAMIN
 Rachel. Rachel, listen to me.
 Please.

(more)

BENJAMIN (cont'd)

What we have is extraordinary,
I've always said that. When I'm
away from you, I can't wait to see
you again.

RACHEL

I know it. I can feel the pull...

BENJAMIN

But when I walk out this door, if
a young attractive woman...if a
plain, middle-aged woman...if
anything even female gives me the
slightest suggestion that she's
available, I'll follow her through
the streets like a hound. I may
not like it, I may feel ashamed
and stupid afterwards, but I'll do
it anyway.

RACHEL

What does that make me, your whore?

BENJAMIN

Don't take it personally.

RACHEL

You're lying, if you were doing
that, I'd know it.

BENJAMIN

You wouldn't know.

RACHEL

A woman can always tell.

BENJAMIN

Women give themselves far too much
credit. I could have a harem and
you wouldn't know it.

RACHEL

If I thought that were true, I'd
kill myself. I would kill myself
on the spot.

BENJAMIN

What's more, it wouldn't change by
one iota how I feel about you.

RACHEL

You're a liar.

BENJAMIN

I have never lied to you. Don't say that.

RACHEL

You are a liar!

BENJAMIN

That's one thing I'm not.

RACHEL

How many others are you sleeping with right now? Tell me the truth.

BENJAMIN

Never mind.

RACHEL

Tell me the truth, you liar!

BENJAMIN

Leave it.

RACHEL

Tell me, you liar!

BENJAMIN

Counting your sister, only two.

RACHEL

(stunned)

Ohhh!

BENJAMIN

I didn't mean that.

Rachel has been seriously hurt by this.

RACHEL

Ohhh. She would, too.

BENJAMIN

Hey, I was joking, you made me angry. I'm not sleeping with anybody else, why would I when you're so wonderful?

RACHEL

I knew it. She's so beautiful.

BENJAMIN

No, she's not. You are, you're beautiful.

Rachel starts to cry.

BENJAMIN

Don't do that, don't cry. Please
don't cry.

RACHEL

Go away.

BENJAMIN

Crying isn't fair!

He tries to embrace her. She pushes him away, violently.

RACHEL

Go Away! Leave me alone!

BENJAMIN

I made it up, honestly, I just
said it, it's not true.

RACHEL

She is such a bitch!

He tries again to embrace her, she hits him.

RACHEL

Out! Out!

BENJAMIN

Just calm down.

RACHEL

Do you want to watch me kill
myself, or will you please let me
do it alone?

BENJAMIN

Such a geschrei, come on, I was
joking...

Rachel takes a vial of pills from her purse and opens them.

RACHEL

For God's sake, let me do this in
peace.

BENJAMIN

Don't be silly. You're not going
to do anything.

Rachel puts a pill in her mouth, swallows, **then faints.**

BENJAMIN

Oh, for god's sake.

He checks on her.

BENJAMIN

You pick the damndest times,
Rachel.

Convinced she's all right, he turns away, pacing the room.

BENJAMIN

Pity only lasts so long, you know.
I don't have an inexhaustible
supply. It's a deep trap, you
don't want to put me in it.

Rachel comes to herself, groggily she puts another pill in
her mouth while he's not looking.

BENJAMIN

Don't overuse it...Look, I hate
emotional displays. They're taxing
and they're stupid and they don't
accomplish anything.

He sees she's awake.

BENJAMIN

Are you all right? Do you want
anything?

RACHEL

Water.

BENJAMIN

It was just a joke.

She nods. Benjamin exits into kitchen for water.

Rachel sits up, pours pills into her hand, pops them into her
mouth.

Benjamin returns from Kitchen with a glass of water.

BENJAMIN

I just said it because you kept
yammering at me. You can't force
me to be in love with you. I mean,
I like you a lot, I'm very fond of
you...

Rachel drinks, swallows all the pills.

BENJAMIN

Okay, that sounds a little
inadequate. Like you're my cousin
or something, I don't mean it that
way. The vocabulary is limited for
this kind of thing.

Rachel holds out the glass.

BENJAMIN

More?

RACHEL

Please.

Benjamin EXITS into the Kitchen.

Rachel puts the pill bottle to her mouth, takes the rest of them. Benjamin returns from Kitchen with more water. Rachel drinks, swallows the pills.

BENJAMIN

Let me try to explain this to you while you're calm. I can't work if I'm worried about you and our relationship and so forth. It's just too taxing, I can't concentrate on the stone. It takes all I have...I count on you, I mean I count on our stability, I've been very productive since you're been "helping" me. I admit that, but it's like anything, enough is just right and too much is ruinous.

She looks at him, smiles beatifically.

RACHEL

You've wasted me. I'm the best thing that ever happened to you and you've wasted me.

BENJAMIN

What do you mean?

RACHEL

You'll be all right. You don't really need me. I thought you did, but you don't.

BENJAMIN

What are you talking about? I'm trying to tell you that I do need you--in a way. Not maybe the way you want it, but...

RACHEL

Just remember that once in your life somebody loved you completely.

BENJAMIN

What are you talking about? You going somewhere?

Rachel leans back, drifting off.

RACHEL

I don't blame you. It's not your fault. She's always wanted what I have.

Benjamin notices the pill bottle, sees that it's empty.

BENJAMIN

Jesus Christ!...Right in front of me? You did this right in front of me? How could you?

RACHEL

(slight giggle)
I didn't think you'd notice.

BENJAMIN

Why do you have to overdo everything?...Stay awake, stay awake, stay awake! I love you, okay? I love you, goddamit, what more do you want?

He gets her cell phone from her purse and dials 911.

BENJAMIN

I love you! I love you!...Oh, god help me, I do.

LIGHTS DIM SLOWLY. We HEAR sirens that began the play. LIGHTS COME UP SLOWLY. Benjamin and Deborah together, as at opening.

BENJAMIN

(unconvinced)
She'll be all right.

DEBORAH

She'll be all right.

BENJAMIN

I think so, don't you?

DEBORAH

I think so.

DEBORAH

I couldn't live with myself...

BENJAMIN
Me either...

DEBORAH
I would think not.

BENJAMIN
I told her I loved her. I think
she heard me.

Deborah crosses towards Front Door.

BENJAMIN
(to her back)
I'm not to blame...
(to himself)
It's not my fault.

END SCENE SIX

SCENE SEVEN

Two weeks later.

Deborah ENTERS through Front Door. She carries flowers. She puts them in vase, fusses.

Rachel ENTERS from Bedroom. She has been sleeping and looks it. She wears an old t-shirt, cut-off sweat pants.

DEBORAH
She rises!

Rachel stretches, yawns.

DEBORAH
Did I wake you?

RACHEL
I heard someone out here. I
thought maybe he'd come in.

DEBORAH
Do you want anything? Coffee?
Something to eat?

RACHEL
You're not going to hover now, are
you?

DEBORAH

This is just a fly-by.

RACHEL

You don't need to worry about me any more. The crisis is over. You're going to have to let me take my chances with life.

DEBORAH

I know.

RACHEL

If I can just stay here until we manage to get Aaron out of my house.

DEBORAH

Whatever you need.

RACHEL

(beat)

I realize he's not good for me, you know. I do realize that.

DEBORAH

Definitely not.

RACHEL

You never liked him, did you?

DEBORAH

His charm eluded me.

RACHEL

All he did was talk about himself.

DEBORAH

Did you ever know one who didn't?

RACHEL

I had no idea artists complained so much.

DEBORAH

Whining in lieu of conversation.

RACHEL

And he didn't even try to see me in two weeks...Did he?

DEBORAH

He made a pro forma call once. I told him you didn't want to see him.

RACHEL

Good. I never want to feel that way again. I was so out of control...I'm sorry I put you through it.

DEBORAH

Don't be silly. I'm always here for you.

RACHEL

I have so much more in my life now. I can be grateful to him for that, at least. I have my freedom, I have my work. I have you.

DEBORAH

Always.

RACHEL

You're so good to me.

DEBORAH

Not really.

RACHEL

He released me, though. I mean he set my energies free, I know what it is to live with passion. I won't go back on that. I'll just redirect it.

DEBORAH

To something more important than a man, I hope.

RACHEL

My work.

DEBORAH

Your work? Really? I thought you might give that up now that he's gone.

RACHEL

I don't do it for him. I do it for my soul.

DEBORAH

Are you sure that's a good idea? You get so involved in things...

RACHEL

I need it now, more than ever. But I understand that it's a craft, I can stay detached. I think I can do this, Deb, I really do.

DEBORAH

Uh-huh.

(pause)

We have a small problem today. Purely logistical. He's coming over pretty soon.

RACHEL

He's coming here?

DEBORAH

Milton doesn't want to have to actually talk to him, so I'm stuck with the job. He's coming to deliver his statue.

RACHEL

The Alexander?

DEBORAH

He made a small change in it.

RACHEL

Really? It's so beautiful.

DEBORAH

Nothing much. Milton thought it mattered. Maybe you could go out for awhile, it would do you good to get some air. I know you don't want to see him.

RACHEL

No, I don't. I'll just go to the bedroom, I could use some more sleep.

DEBORAH

It might be easier for you if you weren't physically here. You could go shopping or something.

RACHEL

I'll just go back to bed.

DEBORAH

And stay there?

RACHEL

Of course. I don't want to see him. Maybe in a few months for a handshake.

DEBORAH

Wear gloves.

EXIT Rachel into Bedroom. Deborah thinks for a moment then EXITS into Kitchen.

Front Door opens, ENTER Benjamin, with key in hand. He carries the Alexander statue, covered with a cloth.

BENJAMIN

Hello, hello?

Deborah ENTERS from Kitchen, carrying something covered with a cloth. She places it where the other statues have been.

DEBORAH

Shhh!

BENJAMIN

I know I'm early, but I couldn't wait...

DEBORAH

Shh!

Deborah indicates the bedroom.

BENJAMIN

(hushed)

She's here?

Deborah nods impatiently.

BENJAMIN

You haven't told her anything about us...

DEBORAH

Try not to be an ass.

BENJAMIN

You're right, I must try to avoid that.

DEBORAH

Habits of a lifetime are hard to break, I suppose. I managed to convince her that you just lied to hurt her.

(more)

DEBORAH (cont'd)
She's sleeping, or was before you
came in, baying like a wolf.

He places statue where it usually goes, now next to the one
Deborah just put there.

BENJAMIN
I want to see her.

DEBORAH
No.

BENJAMIN
Every time I asked you said no. I
need to see her.

DEBORAH
Again; no.

BENJAMIN
I mean I really need it.

DEBORAH
Let's hope this one's the charm;
No. You've done enough to her.

BENJAMIN
I love her.

DEBORAH
One laughs.

BENJAMIN
(spilling out)
I mean it. Something profound has
happened. When I thought I lost
her and said I loved her,
something burst open inside me
right then, it was *saying it out*
loud...love is a toxic word, it
has consequences, that's why I
never ...to have someone willing
to kill herself for me, or, okay,
because of me, no one's ever cared
that much for me, no one's ever
cared that much about me, you
can't imagine what that feels
like, to be that important...

DEBORAH
Suicide is good for your ego, is
it?

BENJAMIN

Does she want to see me, does she ask about me?

DEBORAH

She did it in front of you, remember? Right in front of you. What does that tell us?...Now if you have business with me, let's do it...or is that a bomb?

He unveils his statue.

BENJAMIN

I finished it.

DEBORAH

Huh.

BENJAMIN

I want to show it to her before you show it to Milton. Do you want to see it?

DEBORAH

Why?

BENJAMIN

Because I value your opinion, that's why.

DEBORAH

Why do you care if I approve? I'm not your mother.

BENJAMIN

Good. That's at least one sin I've avoided.

DEBORAH

Ah, you refer, so discreetly, to...

BENJAMIN

Yes.

DEBORAH

Don't.

BENJAMIN

(lamely)

It was--uh--wonderful, by the way.

DEBORAH

(dryly)

Yes...I was transformed.

BENJAMIN

Really? Me, too.

DEBORAH

Very chivalrous of you. I know exactly what it meant to you. You were hoping it would ensure my support with my husband.

BENJAMIN

Not at all.

DEBORAH

Why else would you do that to my sister?

BENJAMIN

Why would you?

DEBORAH

It's complicated. Well, congratulations. You are a Rosenthal Prize winner.

BENJAMIN

Really?

DEBORAH

Of course, you worked for it, you paid the price.

BENJAMIN

Not to be crass, but how much is it?

DEBORAH

First prize is \$50,000.

BENJAMIN

Christ, that much?

DEBORAH

That's how people will know it's good.

BENJAMIN

I can't believe it. Fifty thousand...

DEBORAH

Of course the honorable mention winners will receive--honorable mention. Roughly akin to a pat on the head. And in your case the cost of your expenses.

BENJAMIN

What do you mean, my case?

DEBORAH

You have won honorable mention.

BENJAMIN

What?

DEBORAH

It's a nice thing, shows someone noticed you.

BENJAMIN

You said I won! You said he would promote my work, all I had to do was change it, I did, I changed it! I did what you asked, I finished it. See? Look. Look!

Deborah refuses to look.

DEBORAH

Don't care.

BENJAMIN

Look at it, it's what you wanted!

DEBORAH

You're not listening. I..don't ..care. I don't understand art, I just pick the winners. I told you, my taste runs to kittens, Milton is twisted towards pornography. So? It seems to me both of those positions are just as valid as your Alexander, with or without recent enhancement.

BENJAMIN

You can't do this!

DEBORAH

Something more deserving came along.

ENTER Rachel from Bedroom. She moves warily in Benjamin's presence, her arms folded over her breasts. However, she is fully dressed, unlike earlier.

RACHEL

Hello, Benjamin.

BENJAMIN

Rachel. I tried to get in touch with you so many times but she wouldn't let me.

RACHEL

I'm sure. Oh, you brought the Alexander. Deborah said you changed it, I can't imagine how, it is so beautiful...

She starts to run her fingers over it, then stops, arrested by the change in the statue.

RACHEL

(Puzzled)

Did you do this?

BENJAMIN

It, uh, Milton thought...

RACHEL

How could you do this?

BENJAMIN

As I say, Milton...

RACHEL

It's wrong.

BENJAMIN

A case can be made that a man's virility survives to the very end of his life...

RACHEL

I hate it.

BENJAMIN

Don't say that.

RACHEL

I hate it. It's an obscenity.

BENJAMIN

Rachel, please, don't say that.

RACHEL

Debbie, you can't approve of this. Tell him.

BENJAMIN

She hasn't even looked at it.

DEBORAH

It means nothing to me.

RACHEL

How could you do it? How could you ruin your beautiful work?

BENJAMIN

It's just a little protrusion, a bump in the tunic. I'll change it back, I'll do it again.

RACHEL

After all that talk about meaning and integrity and compassion to do this...

BENJAMIN

Is it so wrong to want some success for a change?

RACHEL

This is a complete betrayal. You're not the man I thought you were. If you show this to the public...

BENJAMIN

I don't have any public! I never will.

RACHEL

The prize will give you some.

BENJAMIN

I didn't win it.

RACHEL

Deb, I thought that was all set up...

DEBORAH

Something better came along. The prize is intended to encourage young talent.

(to Benjamin)

You're really too well established for it.

BENJAMIN

Established!? I'm living in a garage!

Deborah removes the cloth from the other statue.

DEBORAH
This is the winner.

BENJAMIN
(reflexively)
This is crap, this is absolute...

Leans in, studies it, temporarily arrested. The statue is a bust of a man.

DEBORAH
Narcissus staring into the pool.

BENJAMIN
Is this supposed to be me?

DEBORAH
Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

BENJAMIN
Who did this?...
(incredulous)
Rachel?

DEBORAH
My, you're quick.

BENJAMIN
And you're giving the prize to her?

DEBORAH
Yes.

BENJAMIN
That's nepotism.

DEBORAH
Gee, that doesn't happen very often.

RACHEL
Me? You're giving it to me?

DEBORAH
Not giving it to you. You won it on merit.

BENJAMIN
Merit!

RACHEL
Do you really think I'm that good?

DEBORAH

Absolutely.

BENJAMIN

She doesn't know anything! She likes kittens! Rachel, don't, don't...

RACHEL

I won?

BENJAMIN

You didn't win! You're connected!

RACHEL

...It doesn't seem really fair, he worked so hard.

DEBORAH

This is art. Fair doesn't enter into it, he'll tell you that.

BENJAMIN

Rachel, please. If you love me...

RACHEL

Can't you do something for him, his work is so good?

DEBORAH

Good has nothing to do with it, either.

(of Alexander)

You think this is good?

RACHEL

(reluctantly)

No, not now.

BENJAMIN

Rachel, don't abandon me. I can't keep on doing this without some support, I can't keep pushing the boulder up the hill.

RACHEL

It seems...Do I really deserve it?

DEBORAH

I think you do. When everyone learns you've won the Rosenthal Prize for Emerging Artists, they'll think so, too...

BENJAMIN

Doesn't talent count for anything?!

DEBORAH

I showed it to a dealer. He said it's technically flawed but it has such *passion* it's wonderful. Of course I haven't told Milton what his decision is yet. He'll do what I say...Rachel, it's your great opportunity. Do you want it?

Pause.

BENJAMIN

I'll die if this happens, I'll die.

RACHEL

We say that, but we don't.

BENJAMIN

Why do I do it, why do I keep trying!

RACHEL

You have to do it for the work itself. You told me that.

BENJAMIN

I just bastardized the work. I tried to sell out and no one will have me.

RACHEL

You'll do many fine things in the future, I'm sure.

DEBORAH

Up to you, Rachel.

RACHEL

(to Deborah)

Do you really think I deserve it?

DEBORAH

Rachel, look at it, look what you've done. It's just amazing and I'm so proud of you...Your work is as good as anybody's.

Pause.

RACHEL

I'll try to be worthy of it.

With a roar, Benjamin grabs the Alexander, raises it over his head. It looks as if he will bring it down on the head of one of the women. Deborah recoils in fright but Rachel puts herself over her own sculpture to protect it. Benjamin **smashes the Alexander to the ground**. He crumples to the floor, cradling it like his child, totally distraught.

Rachel kneels beside him sympathetically.

DEBORAH

Rachel.

RACHEL

(to Deborah)

He's lost his child.

DEBORAH

(beat)

We should discuss publicity.

Rachel looks at Deborah, torn for a long moment over her loyalties.

She rises.

RACHEL

You really like it?

CURTAIN

END OF PLAY