

**STONE**

A play by  
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## CAST

RACHEL: 30's-50's, attractive, energetic, emotional, optimistic

DEBORAH: 30's-50's, her sister, attractive, business-like, acerbic

BENJAMIN: Same age as women, cynical, self-aware, with a certain animal charm.

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 small 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 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.

BENJAMIN  
I love her.

DEBORAH  
Uh-huh.

Deborah crosses towards Front Door, Benjamin follows.

BENJAMIN  
I do, I love her.

At the door Deborah turns, faces Benjamin and SLAPS HIM, HARD and EXITS. After a pause 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.

(more)

RACHEL (cont'd)  
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...

RACHEL  
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

Who doesn't 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 think it's important to be open and honest.

BENJAMIN

I'm honest only because I don't have the memory to keep my lies straight. 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

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

I commit to them, they don't  
commit to the work. It's like  
sucking on a clogged straw,  
nothing comes through...

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

But I'm not afraid of work. Could  
I show you something, at least?  
It's a piece I'm doing  
now...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 you could suggest?

Benjamin clears his throat as he considers his answer. He does this generally when trying to think of a diplomatic response.

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 your 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

Well, you're a little raw.

RACHEL

Can you do anything with me?

BENJAMIN

What do you have in mind?

RACHEL

I mean, will you take me as a student? I'll do anything you say...it's terribly important to me right now.

BENJAMIN

Sculpture is no substitute for anything wrong in your life.

RACHEL

I didn't mean that. It's just...

BENJAMIN

Teaching is a distraction, it saps energy I need for my own work. I'm not a shrink.

RACHEL

(offended)

I know what a shrink is, believe me.

BENJAMIN

I don't want to waste your time, or mine.

RACHEL

I won't waste your time, I promise.

BENJAMIN

It's a brutal business.

RACHEL

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

BENJAMIN

Everyone starts that way but 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 get better. I commit to whatever I do, Mr. Friedman, just like you. And of course I'll pay you whatever you want...

He gestures to indicate the opulence of the surroundings.

BENJAMIN

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.

RACHEL

I just don't want you to underrate me.

BENJAMIN

I think I rate you properly...

RACHEL

Why did you come, if you knew you wouldn't take on a student?

BENJAMIN

I thought maybe it was a--social--invitation. I dressed for the occasion.

RACHEL

I'm flattered.

BENJAMIN

Your emails were--candid. And then you sent me your picture.

RACHEL

I hope you didn't misinterpret that.

BENJAMIN

It didn't seem strictly relevant to a discussion of Grecian sculpture, but lovely.

RACHEL

...I wanted you to come. I thought if would make me more of a person.

BENJAMIN

It certainly did that. Then you said we'd be alone, you made it clear your husband wouldn't be around...

RACHEL

I was trying to put you at ease...

BENJAMIN

I lead the social life of a razor clam so I blunder towards any thing remotely promising. My mistake, sorry.

RACHEL

...You think I'm lovely?

BENJAMIN

I should leave.

RACHEL

Please. Teach me. I'll pay for the "indignity".

BENJAMIN

I'll overcharge you.

RACHEL

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...Do  
you feel the pulse?

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 (cont'd)

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... 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; groggily)  
 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.

Benjamin ENTERS from Kitchen.

RACHEL  
 Oh!

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  
 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  
He had the usual pair, or did I  
miss something?

RACHEL  
The whole time we were talking I  
couldn't take my eyes off of them.

DEBORAH  
So there was *some* talking involved.

RACHEL  
Oh, so much more...What are you  
doing here? I didn't expect you.

DEBORAH  
Just taking a little time off from  
Milton.

RACHEL  
I'm sorry.

DEBORAH  
No more than I.

RACHEL  
...When he put his hands on me, he  
turned me into a living statue.

DEBORAH

I assume we are no longer talking about my husband.

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 is he like that? You know him as well as I do.

DEBORAH

Hey, come on.

RACHEL

Sorry.

DEBORAH

You said it was over.

RACHEL

Sorry.

DEBORAH

Milton was being more awful than usual, you were sick...

RACHEL

I know, I know, sorry...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 him 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

Don't worry, I won't give you up.

RACHEL

I know, but you don't need to worry about me all the time, you know.

DEBORAH

Who should I worry about, Milton?...What on earth was he wearing? It seemed to be moving on its own.

RACHEL

It's stone dust. I think.

DEBORAH

You always did like them poor but  
dirty. 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

I don't want to guilt him into it.

DEBORAH

Whatever works.

LIGHTS DOWN.

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

RACHEL  
Deb 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  
Not that kind of thing. Besides,  
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--  
unless I want them off.

RACHEL  
Why do you always take your shoes  
off out here?

BENJAMIN

If I kick them off in the heat of the moment, there's no telling where they'll end up. This way I can just grab them on the way to the nearest exit.

RACHEL

Is that what your life with women has been like?

BENJAMIN

I'm not the lingering type. If I'm dressed, it's easier to defenestrate myself.

RACHEL

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

BENJAMIN

(Sincerely)

Not in this department. 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 me. It's never been like this for you either, has it?

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. 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.

RACHEL

(Defensive)

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

BENJAMIN

I teach art history at a community college, once in a while I teach someone like you. I sell my work through third-rate dealers, if I'm lucky enough.

RACHEL

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

BENJAMIN

(giving up)

Okay. I misspoke. Sorry.

RACHEL

You have to trust 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's no divine judge selecting "good" work. It's luck and politics and influence.

(more)

BENJAMIN (cont'd)

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. 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 in our love.

BENJAMIN

We're not in love.

RACHEL

Of course we are.

BENJAMIN

Rachel, love is like that excrescence hanging on the wall, it's a mess, sloppy and uncoordinated and in itself absolutely meaningless, you can read anything you want into that, into love, there's no clean line, I see no clean line, I need a clean line, I can't find the essence of the thing.

RACHEL

Do you think we could be the way we are when we're together if we weren't in love, so natural and flawless and effortless...

BENJAMIN

If I were in love I wouldn't leave my shoes out here. I've learned a technique that you respond to, that's all.

RACHEL

Could you be more insulting? Next you're going to say you play me like a violin! If anyone is playing anyone, I am playing you.

(more)

RACHEL (cont'd)  
I am letting our passion in, I'm  
the gateway because I'm open to  
loving you completely.

BENJAMIN  
(chuckling)  
And here I thought all that  
screaming was because I was doing  
something right.

RACHEL  
Don't be so smug. You'll see. You  
may be teaching me your craft as  
an artist, but not how to love.  
Between art and love, I choose  
love.

BENJAMIN  
I think you may have more natural  
aptitude in that department than  
the other.

RACHEL  
(hurt)  
I have talent as an artist.

BENJAMIN  
Um.

RACHEL  
Don't I?...Don't I?

BENJAMIN  
You're fine.

RACHEL  
No, no, tell me the truth. You're  
an honest man.

BENJAMIN  
I'm not honest. I'm outspoken, I'm  
frequently obnoxious about it but  
I'm not honest. There are no  
honest men, we all lie to get by.

RACHEL  
Tell me the truth. What do you  
think of my work I'm doing now?  
You know it's promising.

BENJAMIN  
Never ask someone what they think  
of your work.  
(more)

BENJAMIN (cont'd)

Either they'll say it's great and look uncomfortable or they'll take it as an invitation to criticize and nitpick you to death. Judge your own work, an artist has to please himself.

RACHEL

Don't be a coward, tell me.

BENJAMIN

Are you sure you want to insist on this?

RACHEL

I want your opinion. I won't hold it against you.

BENJAMIN

You're a better man than I am, in that case.

RACHEL

Tell me.

Benjamin takes her hands.

BENJAMIN

Listen, Rachel, I care about you...

RACHEL

You care about me.

BENJAMIN

I'm fond of you.

RACHEL

Fond.

BENJAMIN

What do you want me to say?

RACHEL

You know what I want you to say.

BENJAMIN

The point is, don't get so involved in this business, don't thrust yourself into it.

RACHEL

I'm already into it, I'm fully committed.

BENJAMIN

Don't do this to yourself, don't take this on. If you don't need the pain, don't take this on.

RACHEL

I feel no pain, I'm getting stronger and better at it every day.

BENJAMIN

...Rachel, you have some 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, but don't tell me I don't have talent.

BENJAMIN

That's the spirit, ignore me.

RACHEL

Don't you dare patronize me! You're just a hopped-up stone mason.

BENJAMIN

That's your sister talking.

RACHEL

And she's usually right about people. I have the soul of an artist! I think you must be jealous of my potential.

BENJAMIN

You're also a little nuts.

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

There is a sudden charged silence from Rachel. He has hit a dangerous sore spot.

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

There she is, my champion...I  
didn't see you come in.

DEBORAH

You were too busy belittling her.

BENJAMIN

Your sister is a woman of  
enthusiasms.

DEBORAH

Yes. Her choices are 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 "A Thing of Beauty."

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 much maligned. A man of taste and discernment. 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

I think that's been done.

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, you're hooked. 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 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

I'm not a full-bred Philistine, you know, just because I don't care about the visual arts. I have sensibilities too. I used to write poetry.

BENJAMIN

Really?

DEBORAH

Wouldn't have guessed, huh? Because I dress too well?

BENJAMIN

How did it go?

DEBORAH

No one noticed. Or they were too embarrassed to comment.

BENJAMIN

What did your husband say about it?

DEBORAH

Let's just say he prefers William Blake to subtlety. All that ecstasy and the divine, that's his dish.

BENJAMIN

Rachel must have liked it.

DEBORAH

She said it was cold. It wasn't cold, the heat was masked...  
(ruefully)  
for artistic purposes.

BENJAMIN

White lies don't seem to run in your family. I'm surprised she wasn't supportive. Rachel has nothing but praise for you.

DEBORAH

Everyone in a family has her role. Rachel's the artiste. Maybe she thought I was impinging.

BENJAMIN

What's your role in the family?

DEBORAH

Helpful older sister.

BENJAMIN

A thankless task, I imagine.

DEBORAH

Well, they probably saved me from making an ass of myself in public. I was going to publish the classic Edwardian "slim volume of verse."

BENJAMIN

I'd love to see it.

DEBORAH

Why? Do you like failed poetry?

BENJAMIN

Only if it rhymes. And then I'm good for about two lines. 'The boy stood on the burning deck'...

DEBORAH

And?

BENJAMIN

He got singed, I imagine. I don't know the rest.

DEBORAH

'The boy stood on the burning deck/  
Whence all but he had fled;/  
The flame that lit the battle's wreck/  
Shone round him o'er the dead./  
Yet beautiful and bright he stood,  
As born to rule the storm;  
A creature of heroic blood,  
A proud though childlike form./'  
...Want the rest of it?

BENJAMIN

Rousing, but mustn't overdo.

DEBORAH

Totally fatuous. Stick to your stone cutting.

BENJAMIN

Do you still write?

DEBORAH  
(self-mocking)  
I am hiding my light under the  
proverbial bushel, don't want to  
cause a disturbance with my  
brilliance.

BENJAMIN  
You have my sympathy.

DEBORAH  
I'd rather have a discerning  
critic.

BENJAMIN  
Sort of an oxymoron, and I do mean  
moron. You're the only judge that  
matters. If you like it, keep at  
it.

DEBORAH  
Why do you care about my poetry?

BENJAMIN  
Reading it might help me to know  
you better.

DEBORAH  
Why is that necessary?

BENJAMIN  
I don't know. Create a false sense  
of camaraderie?

DEBORAH  
Why?

BENJAMIN  
You lit up when you were reciting.  
I think you're interesting.

DEBORAH  
Well, you're right about that. I  
am...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. 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 the undeserving?

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

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

It must be hard for you.

DEBORAH

Are you being facetious?

BENJAMIN

No. Sympathetic. You prop her up.  
Columns do all the work, the  
pediment is what people look at.  
That's why I like caryatids.

DEBORAH

Remind me.

BENJAMIN

Those female statues holding Greek  
buildings on their heads. Strong,  
supportive and beautiful.

DEBORAH

I don't know what to make of you,  
half the time.

BENJAMIN

What about the other half?

DEBORAH

Then you're a man, with all the negatives that implies.

BENJAMIN

I'll take as a qualified endorsement.

DEBORAH

I give you warning. Value Rachel.

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.

BENJAMIN

Keep up the poetry.

DEBORAH

Benjamin...I can make a good friend. Or a bad enemy. Your choice.

He EXITS Front Door.

END SCENE TWO

## SCENE THREE

Several days later.

ENTER RACHEL from Bedroom. She is dressed in sexy negligee. 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 fingers like water  
dancing over stones. The slightest  
caress, a tiny tap, and there's a  
crease in the garment, another  
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.

(more)

RACHEL (cont'd)

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, his hands on my skin, he's still with me for hours.

DEBORAH

I'd take a shower. 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

If you mean claw his back and bite his cheek, no.

RACHEL

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

Deborah notices that the ugly sculpture has been covered up.

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

She vengefully removes the cloth from the ugly statue.

RACHEL  
Debbie...

DEBORAH  
I arranged for Milton to meet him, 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 (cont'd)  
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 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

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...

BENJAMIN

A larger shirt collar might help.

DEBORAH

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

You seem to be taking the news somewhat negatively, or am I misreading your posture?

BENJAMIN

There's nothing as cruel as hope.

DEBORAH

I thought artists live on  
inspiration.

BENJAMIN

We live on poverty, beans and  
public embarrassment. We pant like  
a dog if strangers give us a kind  
word, then despair if some moron  
dismisses our work as "nice".

DEBORAH

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

BENJAMIN

You wouldn't understand.

DEBORAH

Too dumb, am I?

BENJAMIN

No...

DEBORAH

Lacking in passion, 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 doing a piece 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  
...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 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 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

He's an idiot-savant. 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  
something as heavy as a man's limb  
free-standing in a horizontal  
position, there are flaws in the  
stone, it will snap off. 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. Good Christian  
prudes put fig leaves on half the  
statues in America, but it's not  
right. It will be a patch job, if  
you look close enough it will show.

DEBORAH  
It won't show in the copies, the  
bronzes, the miniatures. That's  
where the money is...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  
Alexander studied with Aristotle  
and spread the virtues of  
civilization throughout the world,  
he changed the nature of warfare,  
hundreds of cities were named  
after him, he...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.

DEBORAH

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.

(more)

BENJAMIN (cont'd)

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? 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

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 had a wife. 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. 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 granite. 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

Surprise, surprise.

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

All right...

Pause. Deborah looks at his hand, still on her leg. She gives a small reflective laugh.

BENJAMIN

You find this amusing?

DEBORAH

Your hand actually burns.

BENJAMIN

Should I apologize?

DEBORAH

I'm not familiar with the sensation.

BENJAMIN

Want me to move it?

DEBORAH

(pause)

It's *your* hand.

BENJAMIN

Where should I put it?

DEBORAH

You're the artist, use your imagination.

Benjamin puts his hand a little higher on her leg. It clearly has an effect on Deborah.

BENJAMIN

I think maybe our relationship got off on the wrong foot.

DEBORAH

Milton's hands are as clammy as a wet tea bag.

BENJAMIN

Why do women always talk about their husbands?

DEBORAH

Sometimes he uses deodorant to dry them up.

BENJAMIN

Does that work?

DEBORAH  
They don't smell.

BENJAMIN  
What an interesting man. I'm so glad I never met him.

Benjamin puts his other hand on her other leg and slides off the sofa to his knees, looking up at her.

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

BENJAMIN  
No, coming to life.

DEBORAH  
Do we like each other now?

He slides both hand higher under her skirt.

BENJAMIN  
I hold you in the highest esteem.

DEBORAH  
So that's what you call it.

BENJAMIN  
What about Rachel?

DEBORAH  
Sibling relationships are complicated...Let's let my sister take care of herself for once in her life...Don't I deserve a little heat, too?

Lights Out.

END SCENE FOUR

SCENE FIVE

**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.**

The following day. No statue is on display in the room. Rachel is in the kitchen, puttering.

Outer door opens, Benjamin Enters partway, key still in hand.

BENJAMIN  
(tentatively)  
Can I come in?

RACHEL  
Silly question.

BENJAMIN  
(sheepishly)  
Maybe not so silly.

RACHEL  
What's the matter? You look like  
something awful happened.

BENJAMIN  
Have you spoken to your sister yet?

RACHEL  
Not for a couple of days. She's  
coming in from Connecticut today.  
Did you want to talk to her?

BENJAMIN  
God no, she makes me itch. I want  
to tell you something before she  
does, then I'm going to leave  
before she gets here.

RACHEL  
What is it?

BENJAMIN  
I met with her last night.

RACHEL  
You met with her? Where?

BENJAMIN  
Here.

RACHEL  
She didn't tell me she was here.

BENJAMIN  
Something happened.

RACHEL  
Is she all right?

BENJAMIN  
Is she ever all right?

RACHEL

I know you don't like her, but you have to try. She's so good to me.

BENJAMIN

Rachel, I need to confess something.

RACHEL

You're scaring me.

BENJAMIN

She told me I won the Rosenthal Prize for Fine Art.

RACHEL

Oh, Benjamin, that's so great...What is it?

BENJAMIN

I don't know. It's something your brother-in-law is funding. He's also buying my Alexander for a lot of money.

RACHEL

I knew he wasn't as bad as Deborah paints him...You must be so pleased.

BENJAMIN

I hate it--but it's a chance, I need a chance, some damned straw to hold on to...it can all change in a minute if somebody important would just point at me and say "look at the emperor's new clothes, aren't they beautiful!"

RACHEL

I think you're beautiful.

BENJAMIN

No, I'm not. I just needed someone to make an offer before I sold out.

RACHEL

You have more integrity than anyone I know.

BENJAMIN

Bless your innocent heart.

RACHEL

I don't know what you're thinking,  
but I know you wouldn't do  
anything to compromise yourself.  
That's one of the things I love  
about you.

BENJAMIN

I wish I was the man you see.  
You're the only one in the world  
who believes in me.

RACHEL

But Benjamin, this is wonderful  
news. Deborah said something was  
going to happen but I had no idea  
it would be this good.

BENJAMIN

You knew about this and didn't  
tell me?

RACHEL

I didn't want to get your hopes up.

BENJAMIN

Why not? I can live for a year on  
one false hope...Did you arrange  
it?

RACHEL

No. I didn't even know what...

BENJAMIN

Tell me the truth.

RACHEL

I would never lie to you.

BENJAMIN

Because if it's just charity...

RACHEL

No. No. No. Milton asks my advice  
about quality, but that's all. I  
don't know what he's up to.  
Deborah doesn't know, half the  
time.

BENJAMIN

She knows this time.

RACHEL

You see, she's on your side too.

BENJAMIN  
Yeah...Well...There were some  
strings attached.

ENTER DEBORAH through Front Door.

DEBORAH  
Hello.

RACHEL  
Benjamin's here.

DEBORAH  
I see. He's the one cowering  
behind you with the lean and  
hungry look. Or hungry, anyway.

BENJAMIN  
I was just leaving.

RACHEL  
He's the beautiful and talented  
man standing by my side.

DEBORAH  
That must be what I meant to say.

RACHEL  
Debbie, I didn't know you were  
here last night. Why didn't you  
tell me?

DEBORAH  
Just a flying visit.

RACHEL  
Well, you're just in time. We have  
to celebrate Benjamin's triumph.

DEBORAH  
Done something good, have you,  
Benjamin?

BENJAMIN  
I got lucky.

DEBORAH  
That's what they call it.

RACHEL  
It wasn't luck, it was talent.

DEBORAH  
I'm sure he had something to do  
with it.

RACHEL  
Why didn't you tell me?

DEBORAH  
Milton didn't want me to mention  
it in case Benjamin refused.

RACHEL  
Why on earth would he refuse a  
prize?

DEBORAH  
He's a complicated man. You never  
know what's in his mind.

BENJAMIN  
Not all that complicated.

RACHEL  
Just ask him, he'll tell you what  
he's thinking, won't you Benjamin?

DEBORAH  
What's on your mind right now,  
Benjamin?

BENJAMIN  
I'm thinking I should go.  
(to Rachel)  
I'm beginning to get that itch.

DEBORAH  
I'll go.

RACHEL  
I don't want either one of you to  
go! We have to celebrate. I'll get  
some wine.

Rachel Exits into Kitchen. Deborah and Benjamin confront each  
other awkwardly.

BENJAMIN  
You're not going to say anything.

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

BENJAMIN  
Yes.

DEBORAH  
Don't.

BENJAMIN

(lamely)

It was--uh--wonderful, by the way,  
it meant a great deal to me.

DEBORAH

(Sarcastically)

Yeah, wow and oh boy...You  
streaked out with what they call  
precipitous haste.

BENJAMIN

Just left to get my shoes.

DEBORAH

How a girl can be so misled by a  
little heat...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 wasn't *my* idea. If you recall,  
you put your hands on my high  
esteem.

BENJAMIN

This isn't funny.

DEBORAH

I had a good laugh. You didn't  
stick around long enough for any  
'*tristesse*'.

BENJAMIN

I realized I'd left my shoes out  
here. Look, a man is like a ship  
without a rudder, if the wind  
blows me into port...

DEBORAH

Work on your imagery.

BENJAMIN

If you tell her...

DEBORAH

It was a bad idea, poorly executed. The only thing hurt is my dignity.

BENJAMIN

Poorly executed?

DEBORAH

Only in comparison to others.

BENJAMIN

Now that's cruel.

DEBORAH

Not your fault you lack a rudder. How do I know you're not going to feel guilty and confess?

BENJAMIN

It had nothing to do with her.

DEBORAH

It didn't have much to do with me, either. The important thing is that she never finds out.

BENJAMIN

God yes.

DEBORAH

Not to worry. The secret to cheating is to be smarter than your spouse.

BENJAMIN

I thought a woman could always tell. Isn't that the myth?

DEBORAH

A woman doesn't want to know, so keep it to yourself. If you have the urge to be noble, pay all your taxes.

BENJAMIN

I would never hurt her for no good reason.

DEBORAH

There is no good reason.

BENJAMIN

That's what I mean. She's very important to me...I love her.

DEBORAH  
Are you just realizing that now?

BENJAMIN  
...maybe so.

Enter Rachel from Kitchen, carrying a bottle of wine and glasses. Deborah and Benjamin separate guiltily and Rachel notices.

RACHEL  
(happily)  
What did I catch you two up to?

DEBORAH  
I was just saying how happy you seem...He was talking about himself.

BENJAMIN  
I was about to tell her how much I love you.

RACHEL  
Oh.

Benjamin crosses to her.

BENJAMIN  
I do love you.

RACHEL  
I know.

BENJAMIN  
Remember that. Remember I love you.

RACHEL  
Do you think I'll forget?

BENJAMIN  
No matter what...I've got to go.

RACHEL  
Not now!

BENJAMIN  
I've got to.

Benjamin crosses to front door.

RACHEL  
We're going to celebrate your prize.

BENJAMIN

You and I can do it later. Sorry.

Benjamin Exits through Front Door.

DEBORAH

Let him go.

RACHEL

But I want him to stay.

DEBORAH

He knows what he needs.

RACHEL

That's the first time he said he loves me.

DEBORAH

Interesting timing.

RACHEL

I mean, I always knew it...but *he* didn't.

DEBORAH

Quite the boy, your Benjamin.  
Quite the boy.

RACHEL

Everything at once! I'm so happy!

She grabs Deborah and spins around once or twice.

DEBORAH

Don't get too worked up.

RACHEL

I'm calm, I'm calm.

She clearly is not calm.

RACHEL (cont'd)

I knew he loved me. I knew it...but I didn't really *know* it. It was more, I wanted it so much he just *had* to...And because he never said it, I...I wondered, was it all in my head, what would he be like with another woman, would there be the same kind of magic?

DEBORAH

I doubt it.

RACHEL

And I know you made Milton buy the Alexander and give him the prize.

DEBORAH

I thought you needed it.

RACHEL

You're always so good to me.

DEBORAH

It evens out.

RACHEL

How was he last night?

DEBORAH

What do you mean?

RACHEL

When you were with him here. How did he take it?...The news. The prize. How did he react?

DEBORAH

Surprised.

RACHEL

Was he happy?

DEBORAH

I don't think he does happy very often, does he?

RACHEL

He's happy when he works, he's happy with me...I must say, you were very secretive about it all.

DEBORAH

Not really.

RACHEL

You drove in at night from Connecticut to see him then turned around and drove back. Why didn't you tell him today and save yourself the trouble?

DEBORAH

Oh, it wasn't any trouble, I didn't mind.

RACHEL

It's not as if you like him.

DEBORAH  
If you like him, I like him.

RACHEL  
I love him. And he loves me.

DEBORAH  
I'm sure.

RACHEL  
It must have been exciting being  
alone with him all night...He's  
very attractive, isn't he?

DEBORAH  
Matter of taste, I guess.

RACHEL  
What did you do all night?

DEBORAH  
It wasn't all night, we talked and  
I went home.

RACHEL  
What did you talk about?

DEBORAH  
Business, just business.

RACHEL  
Did you sleep with him?

DEBORAH  
What?

RACHEL  
Was that part of your business?

DEBORAH  
Why would you ask that?

RACHEL  
Did you?

DEBORAH  
You're being ridiculous.

RACHEL  
He's afraid to be around you for  
five minutes.

DEBORAH  
He said he had somewhere to go.

RACHEL

No, he just said he had to leave.

DEBORAH

That proves nothing.

RACHEL

A simple "no" would have convinced me.

DEBORAH

No, no. Of course no.

RACHEL

Oh, Deborah. I forgave you for the other time...

DEBORAH

That was years ago...

RACHEL

...but not this one.

DEBORAH

I swear...

RACHEL

You know how much me means to me.

DEBORAH

Nothing happened, you're making this up...

RACHEL

You are such a bitch.

DEBORAH

Calm down. I can explain.

RACHEL

Oh, God.

DEBORAH

It's not what you think.

RACHEL

I can't believe it!

DEBORAH

He's aggressive, he's insistent...

Rachel SWOONS and collapses.

DEBORAH

Don't do that!...

Rachel does not move. Deborah kneels beside Rachel.

DEBORAH  
You make it difficult to hold a  
conversation, you know.

Rachel still does not move. Deborah takes it more seriously.

DEBORAH  
Come on, Rache.

Growing alarmed, SHE SLAPS Rachel. Rachel does not react.

DEBORAH  
Rachel...Rachel!

SHE SLAPS Rachel, Hard. No response.

Deborah finds her cell phone and jabs 911.

LIGHTS OUT  
END SCENE FIVE

#### SCENE SIX

LIGHTS UP 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 love her.

DEBORAH  
Uh-huh.

Deborah crosses towards Front Door, Benjamin follows.

BENJAMIN  
I do, I love her.

At the door Deborah turns, faces Benjamin and SLAPS HIM, HARD and EXITS. After a pause Benjamin EXITS.

END SCENE SIX

SCENE SEVEN

One week 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? I'm all right, really.

DEBORAH  
I know.

RACHEL  
I'm not depressed any more.

DEBORAH  
I know.

RACHEL  
I'll go back to my apartment as soon as Aaron moves out.

DEBORAH  
There's no rush. Consider this a man-free environment.

RACHEL  
(beat)  
I realize he's not good for me, you know. I do realize that.

DEBORAH  
Definitely not.

RACHEL  
All he did was talk about himself. I had no idea artists whined so much.

DEBORAH  
You're an artist, you don't.

RACHEL  
Oh, Debbie, I'm no artist. I'm not even a craftsman yet...He made that pretty clear to me.

DEBORAH  
You're much better off without him.

RACHEL  
...You haven't seen him, have you?

DEBORAH  
Of course not. It was just a crazy, stupid...he was so desperate...

RACHEL

I know, I understand, let's not go into it any more.

DEBORAH

You're much better off now.

RACHEL

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

DEBORAH

Don't be silly. I know how you are, I know how hard you take things.

RACHEL

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

DEBORAH

Really? I thought you might give that up now that he's gone and try something else.

RACHEL

I don't do it for him.

DEBORAH

Are you sure you want to start climbing another mountain? You get so involved in things...

RACHEL

I need it now, more than ever. But I can stay detached. I think I can do this, Deb, I really do.

DEBORAH

Okay, if that's what you need.

RACHEL

I do.

DEBORAH

(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. Maybe you  
could go out for a while, it would  
do you good to get some air.

RACHEL

I think I'll just go back to bed.

DEBORAH

You could go shopping or something.

RACHEL

I could use some more sleep, the  
pills make me so drowsy.

DEBORAH

Will you stay in the bedroom?

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 waits a moment then EXITS  
into Kitchen.

Front Door opens, ENTER Benjamin. 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  
I want to see her.

DEBORAH  
Try not to be an ass.

BENJAMIN  
You're right, I must try to avoid  
that. Habit of a lifetime.

DEBORAH  
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  
I *need* to see her.

DEBORAH  
Again; no.

BENJAMIN  
I mean I really need it.

DEBORAH  
You've done enough to her.

BENJAMIN  
Then let her tell me face to face.

DEBORAH  
I know what's best for her.

BENJAMIN

Does she ask about me?

DEBORAH

Only in the sense of "is he gone at last?". 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 Rachel before you show it to Milton...You might want to look at it.

DEBORAH

Why?

BENJAMIN

You chose it. Don't you want to see what I did?

DEBORAH

You don't need my approval, I'm not your mother. Now that you've delivered it, congratulations. You are a Rosenthal Prize winner.

BENJAMIN

Thank you, Jesus.

DEBORAH

You worked for it, you did what was asked.

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 as well.

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!

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, you never returned my calls. I wanted to explain. There's no connection between loving one person and...if a situation presents itself it's like it's my duty as a man even though I don't really *want* to...

RACHEL  
Oh, shut up. I don't want to hear any more of your asinine theories.

BENJAMIN  
I'm a rudderless...I'm like a rag in the wind..I expect women to know better, I count on their good sense...you don't know what it's like to be a man.

RACHEL  
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, try to understand.

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 bump in the tunic. I'll change it back, I'll do it again.

RACHEL

After all that talk about integrity to do this...If you show this to the public...

BENJAMIN

I don't have any public!

RACHEL

The prize will give you some.

BENJAMIN

I didn't win it.

RACHEL

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

DEBORAH

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

(Of Benjamin)

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, you're  
my muse.

RACHEL  
I never asked for the job.  
(to Deborah)  
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 but he'll do  
what I say...Rache, it's your  
great opportunity. Do you want it?

Pause.

BENJAMIN  
I'll kill myself.

RACHEL  
We say that, but we don't.

BENJAMIN  
Why do I keep trying? I can't even  
sell out.

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

BENJAMIN  
Don't let her do this to us.

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

It really is good, isn't it? I struggled with the eyes but I think I got them just right. They make the whole expression work. You see the eyebrows? That's where you use the little L'Unghietto...

She indicates her little finger nail.

RACHEL (cont'd)

It makes these tiny cuts and you don't think they add up to anything until suddenly, there it is, exactly what you wanted...

CURTAIN

END OF PLAY