

University Theatre

presents

Richard Cavalier
1 S Locust St Apt 160C
Inglewood, CA 90301

Winner Ronald Williams Playwrighting Competition

RICHARD CAVALIER'S

Speaking of Charlie

directed by DAVID F UNUMB

designed by ROBERT G. SMITH

MARCH 25, 26, 31. APRIL 1, 2, 7, 8, 9

7:30pm

Admission: \$5.00
special rates for Students/Seniors

UNI Stage Center
583-4050 Ext. 3750 Bryn Mawr/Central Park



NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

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NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY THEATRE PRODUCES PRIZEWINNING PLAY

The University Theatre of Northeastern is pleased to announce the Premiere performances of the winner of the First Annual *Ronald Williams Playwriting Competition, *SPEAKING OF CHARLIE*, by Richard Cavalier of Chicago. *SPEAKING OF CHARLIE*, directed by Speech and Performing Arts Department Chairperson, Dr. David Unumb, will preview on March 24 with a Benefit Performance for the Ronald Williams Scholarship Fund.

SPEAKING OF CHARLIE is a contemporary drama exploring the ethics of a topic rarely examined in literature. Unlike many plays, it deals, not with the morality of sexual behavior, but the responsibility of it. In *SPEAKING OF CHARLIE*, a seemingly traditional family confronts a member's bisexuality. The crisis resulting from this confrontation provokes the family to question the validity of--and damage done by--arbitrary rules that dominate our society's view of the values of love.

SPEAKING OF CHARLIE explores the relationships between a father, mother, their young adult daughter and her fiance. The play begins by being an apparently typical "bringing the boy home to meet the parents" drama. The father perpetuates this by behaving as the typically skeptical parent. But as the play unfolds, deeper more complex relationships among the four are revealed, resulting in confused moral values and questioning Moral Responsibility.

SPEAKING OF CHARLIE argues that sexual realities must be dealt with rationally; and the resolution of the dramatic conflict addresses this. Given the present AIDS crisis, the play offers a moral for our times.

In addition to the March 24 Benefit, *SPEAKING OF CHARLIE* begins its regular run Friday March 25 and will play Thursday through Saturday evening, March 25-26, March 31-April 2, and April 7-9, 1988 in Northeastern's Stage Center. Curtain is at 7:30 p.m. Admission is \$5.00, with special rates available for Northeastern students, faculty/staff, and seniors. For further information, contact the Box Office, 583-4061, ext. 3750.

-more-

*Ronald Williams was the immediate past president of Northeastern Illinois University, recently deceased.)

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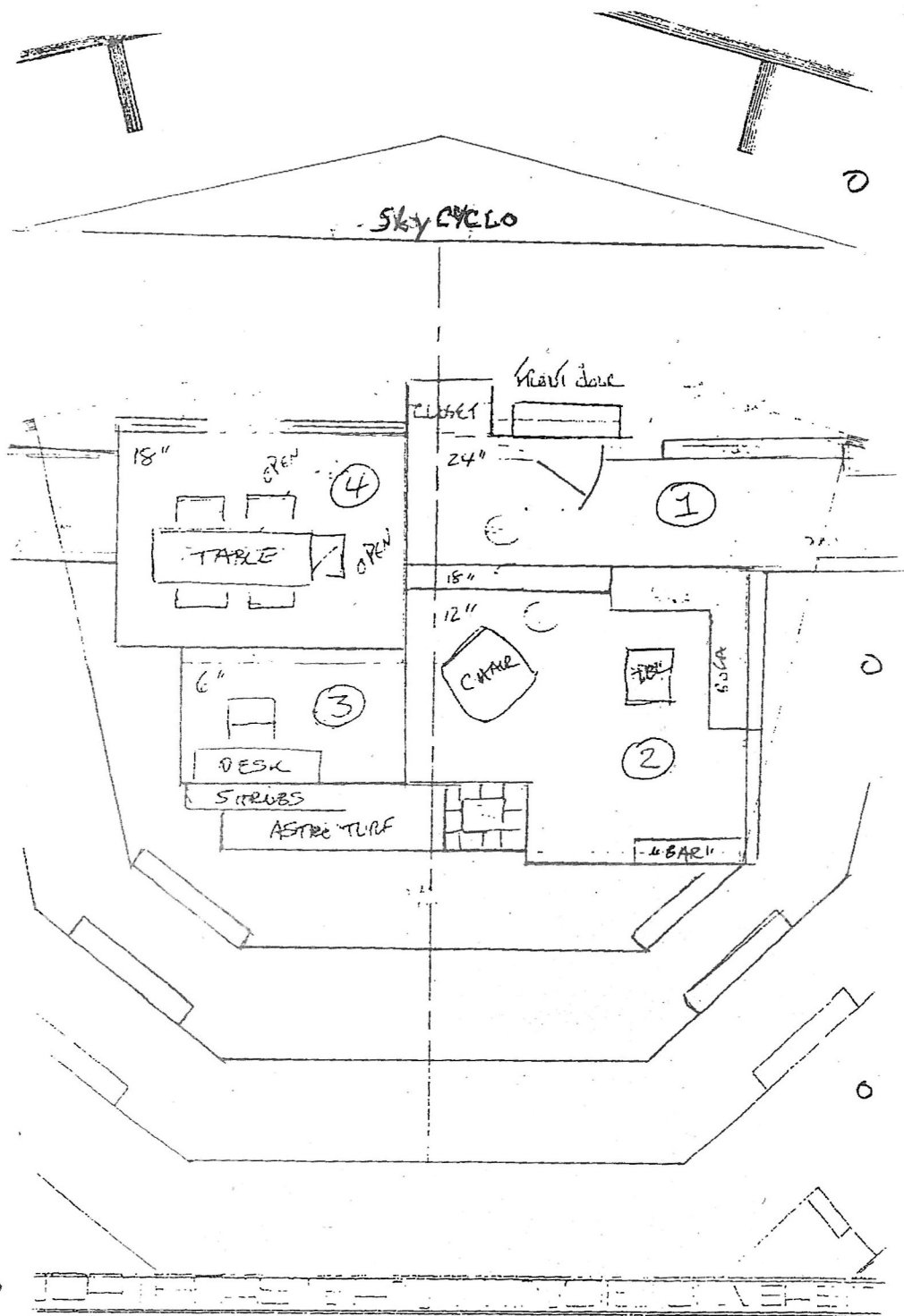
"SPEAKING OF CHARLIE"

A drama by

Richard Cavalier

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"SPEAKING OF CHARLIE"

3/4 thrust stage

NOTE: All B-C-D script pages were developed in rehearsals and were delivered as printed here. Two obviously-computer remakes reflect damaged pages replaced for the site. Three additional pages found at the end of the 'considerCharlie' ^{script} site are based on information known only after the first production.

"SPEAKING OF CHARLIE"

by Richard Cavalier

The Characters:

Martha--wife and mother; age, mid-forties; petite and still as striking as she must have been; a bustling, efficiency-plus type; tastefully--almost fashionably--dressed to receive guests.

Calvin--husband and quintessential pater-familias despite his relative youth and smallish family; age, late forties; tall, masculine, not bad looking; the cautious, look-before-leaping type. Dressed carelessly at curtain, he returns later very conservatively dressed in vested suit, rep tie, and wing-tip shoes.

Alison--their daughter; age, early twenties; trim, striking; the slightly world-weary-innocent who know they understand more than they can; contemporary taste would dictate a silk print blouse and slacks.

Thurston--Alison's new boyfriend cum fiance; age, late-twenties; muscled sports-frame hulk with a brain, giving the feeling of reined-in power; casually dressed in turtleneck, tweed sport coat, and loafers.

The Setting:

The living room of the Welt family's commuter-countryside home. Very comfortable in the traditional mold, with classic furniture and no garish artwork. Dining table visible to the side is partially set; beyond it lies the kitchen hall; kitchen is off-stage. Another door (or stairs) leads to the bedrooms.

The Time:

An early evening of a Saturday in the present.

Now: Set in 1980s.
(Performance time: 125 min)

NOTE TO DIRECTOR: These characters (excepting Alison) cannot be played strictly by The Method of one dominant motivation. Complex, conflicting motivations (as in real life) move their responses: four faces for Martha; two for each male. However, each face is consistent in its role. For instance, Martha speaks variously as wife, mother, haus-frau, and self. For The Method, she is four individuals played by one actress. Cheers! RC

SPEAKING OF CHARLIE

ACT I:

THE CURTAIN DISCOVERS CALVIN, ALONE. HIS AGITATION IS EVIDENT AS HE PACES OR TOUCHES FAMILY PHOTOS. HEARING MARTHA, HE SITS BEHIND A NEWSPAPER. MARTHA ENTERS FROM THE KITCHEN, CARRYING MORE TABLEWARE. THEIR OPENING CONVERSATION IS PLAYED AS MINDLESS BANTER, NOT AS A CUTTING EXCHANGE. THEY ARE STILL FOND OF EACH OTHER, AND THE UNDERLYING MOTIVE THROUGHOUT IS LOVE, NOT RETRIBUTION.

MARTHA: Calvin, aren't you going to clean up--even a little?

CALVIN: No. I look all right, Martha.

MARTHA: That's debatable. After all, your daughter is far more demanding than I. (BUSINESS HERSELF AT TABLE) Besides, a shower might perk you up. (PAUSE) You just missed a cue, you know.

CALVIN: I didn't notice. Was it a good one?

MARTHA: You bet. If you really wanted to rib me (and I haven't been given notice of late that you don't) your clean-up response was, "I haven't a thing to wear."

CALVIN: I've heard the line once or twice. I don't use it.

MARTHA: Always the composed professional. I don't think we need an image between us, do we?

CALVIN: Any little buffer will do. Anyhow, Alison might call at any minute, and I should pick them up at the station.

MARTHA: That's a switch. Until this moment you haven't seemed overly enthusiastic about meeting Alison's new beau. (PAUSE) Well, if she can't call ahead, they deserve to wait. Or walk. It's not that far, after all. (PAUSE) I hope we like him.

CALVIN: He's not the first. Probably not the last.

MARTHA: Alison seems to think he might be.

CALVIN: (SNAPPING PAPER DOWN) Did she say that?

MARTHA: Not in so many words. . .but it's quite understood in our recent conversations. Not that I'd pry. . . .

CALVIN: Then why haven't we seen him sooner? (PAPER UP)

MARTHA: They've been on different schedules, I take it. And trying to be very low keyed about it, since it seemed too good to last.

CALVIN: That kind of romance always does.

MARTHA: (IRRITATED) What kind? Always does what?

CALVIN: Whirlwinds always fade.

MARTHA: Indeed! Just because you can find a box for every occasion in accounting doesn't mean you can do the same with life.

CALVIN: Doesn't it? I hadn't noticed.

MARTHA: Who said it was a whirlwind romance?

CALVIN: Why else would you be so breathless in the telling?

MARTHA: Because I'm not jealous of her and her boyfriends.

CALVIN: (CRUMPLING PAPER) Another lecture on possessive fathers?

MARTHA: No. But you haven't been overly eager to let go.

CALVIN: I want to be sure she's getting somebody who's. . .solid. And there have been a couple of hare-brains in the warren over the years. (PAPER BACK UP)

MARTHA: Just because I happen to like the stuffy type. . .

CALVIN: Really?

MARTHA: Yes, really. My father liked you because you were (DRAWS UP) serious-minded about getting a good job and all.

CALVIN: You see: fathers all think alike.

MARTHA: But you and I were Depression children, and Alison isn't.

CALVIN: So?

MARTHA: So we had to fit in, and she has to make waves. It's a very different world, I'm afraid.

CALVIN: Only on the surface. Way down deep--

BOTH: . . .People don't change all that much!

MARTHA: If fact, they almost never change way down deep. They just adjust their superficial habits to suit their neighbors' ideas of propriety. It's called the Protestant Ethic.

CALVIN: Thank you, Dr Freud.

MARTHA: That's not his thesis; it's mine.

CALVIN: Well, don't claim it too loudly. You're a better cook than psychologist.

MARTHA: Male chauvinism certainly dies hard.

(MARTHA MOVES CLOSER TO CALVIN: SITS ON ARM OF COUCH)

MARTHA: Oh, yes. Guess what I found.

CALVIN: Alison's baby pictures?

MARTHA: Of course, silly. But that's not what I'm talking about.

CALVIN: Martha, I sometimes feel I'll never know what you're talking about.

MARTHA: Well, would you like living with somebody who's totally predictable?

CALVIN: I wouldn't mind trying it. Who do you have in mind?

MARTHA: Nobody at the moment, but I'll keep my eyes open.

CALVIN: I'm available any time.

MARTHA: Don't I know that! (PAUSE) Strangely, I've never met anybody I'd be willing to trade you off for.

CALVIN: I don't blame you.

MARTHA: Not that you're all that great, mind you. It's just that you're not nearly so bad as some I've heard tales about.

CALVIN: I thought you didn't like gossip.

MARTHA: Who's talking about gossip? I'm talking about faults and foibles.

CALVIN: Next discussion, could I have a written agenda?

MARTHA: You wouldn't pay attention, anyhow.

CALVIN: Then how could I know you still haven't told me what you found today?

MARTHA: That's just for show, I'd guess, because I don't think you have ever shown any interest whatsoever in Charlie.

CALVIN: Charlie? Who's talking about Charlie?

MARTHA: I was. I ran across the pictures we took of him that day I found him. . .all caked in mud and shivering. Poor, loveable pup.

CALVIN: He was a mongrel.

MARTHA: Well, I loved him. He had personality and absolute fidelity.

CALVIN: True, he never bit the hand that fed him. He was clever enough for that, at least. But--

MARTHA: (INTERRUPTING) And affectionate.

CALVIN: But he was dumb and ugly and an embarrassment in every other way.

MARTHA: (EXASPERATED) Because he wasn't a blooded hound you could brag up to your University Club pals? Well, the hall of mirrors leading to the executive suite was your chosen route, not mine.

CALVIN: You didn't return the sable wrap last Christmas. Or the emerald earrings the year before.

MARTHA: They were partly for me; partly for the hall of mirrors.

CALVIN: That's absurd!

MARTHA: Consolation prizes. . .overdue, at that. Don't you think your model family of wife, son, daughter, and dog--albeit a mongrel--could have used more of your time and fewer of the sacrificial gifts marking those endless trips?

CALVIN: Martha, haven't we already settled that?

MARTHA: I'd have thought so; but you brought it up.

CALVIN: How?

MARTHA: By counting your money aloud. There are things I value more.

CALVIN: Like Charlie.

MARTHA: Exactly. (PAUSE) Speaking of Charlie, do you remember those crazy phone calls I used to get from people who wanted to talk to him? You were convinced it was my lover.

CALVIN: Well, wasn't it? (PUTS PAPER DOWN. STANDS)

MARTHA: (SWEETLY) Not mine. But at first I was convinced that you had deliberately put somebody up to it to torment me for keeping that mutt. You'll admit you're capable. . . .

CALVIN: I've never tried to torment you, about anything.

MARTHA: That reassurance is comforting.

CALVIN: It should be. Didn't we keep Charlie?

MARTHA: Yes. Nine years, poor thing.

CALVIN: I think I'll go clean up. (STARTS ACROSS TO BEDROOM WING)

MARTHA: And what if Alison calls?

CALVIN: (PLAYBACK) "If she can't call ahead, they deserve to wait or walk."

MARTHA: Didn't someone say that earlier?

CALVIN: Weren't you paying attention? (PATS MARTHA ON THE BUTT)

MARTHA: I couldn't. I was too busy writing an agenda.

CALVIN: You win. As usual.

MARTHA: I think you cheat. . .just a little. . .to help me along.

CALVIN: If I cheated on you, Dear, I'd never tell a soul. . . not even you. (EXIT)

MARTHA: (QUIETLY) You win. As usual. (CALLING) Towels are fresh. And clothes in the hamper, please.

(MARTHA BUSIES HERSELF AT THE TABLE WHILE OFFSTAGE SOUNDS LEAD QUICKLY TO THE SOUND OF THE SHOWER. ALMOST IMMEDIATELY, THE PHONE RINGS)

MARTHA: (CHEERFULLY) Hello, Luvy. . . .What do you mean, "Only you"? That was meant for you. Easy trip? . . .Well, your sense of timing is terrific; your father just jumped into the shower. Is the town cab around? . . .Well, see. You could probably walk home faster than your father can get dressed. . . .Oh, yes; the bags. Well, call me back in a couple of minutes if the cab doesn't show. . . .Yes, all's well here. . . .Bye.

(MARTHA HANGS UP, SURVEYS THE ROOM, AND DOES A QUICK STRAIGHTENING UP, WITH MUCH NEWSPAPER-FOLDING, LAMP-SHADE ADJUSTING, PLANT-FLUFFING, AND OTHER NON-ESSENTIALS. SHE IS KILLING TIME RATHER THAN REALLY ACCOMPLISHING. AFTER AN APPROPRIATE INTERVAL, PERHAPS SIGNALLED BY A BRIEF DIMMING OF STAGE LIGHTS, THE DOORBELL RINGS. MARTHA OPENS THE DOOR. TWO FIGURES ARE SEEN, WITH BAGS AND UMBRELLA.)

MARTHA: Alison. It's so good to have you home! (EMBRACES)

ALISON: It's been barely a month, Mother.

MARTHA: The message is the same, Luvy.

THURSTON: Alison, you didn't tell me you have a sister.

ALISON: Mother, that's the normal Thurston.

MARTHA: I gathered. Well, Thurston, I've heard that "Miss, is your mother at home?" routine from every traveling salesman who's ever come to my door. You'll have to work a little if you expect to flatter me.

THURSTON: You'll admit it's no worse an opening than "Alison has told me all about you."

MARTHA: Has she?

THURSTON: Everything. But now that we've met, I think I'm going to like you anyway.

MARTHA: (LAUGHS) Thurston, Welcome!

(THURSTON STARTS TO SHAKE HANDS, BUT MARTHA DOESN'T PICK UP FAST ENOUGH. HE STARTS TO LOWER HIS HAND AS MARTHA RAISES HERS. THEN THEY GET IT TOGETHER. HE SETS UMBRELLA ON A DOORHANDLE)

MARTHA: I'm not ready for hand-shakes, Thurston. Alison is the family's only militant feminist. Personally, I don't think an occasional curtsy saps a woman's strength. (LEADS THEM INSIDE)

ALISON: You see, Thurston?

MARTHA: My fame precedes me. . .my progeny see to that.

THURSTON: Minor personal notoriety. . .made tolerable and even memorable by a couple of fine recipes. I have a traditional stomach. Too bad I met Alison first.

MARTHA: Are you the kind that switches loves every few days?

THURSTON: Certainly not. I'd stay through your whole recipe box.

MARTHA: Thurston, we're going to get on just fine.

ALISON: I figured.

MARTHA: Alison's father is freshening up. . .but I pour a rather respectable drink. What'll you have?

THURSTON: A soft drink would be fine.

MARTHA: Really? Or are you trying to impress me?

THURSTON: Really.

MARTHA: I'm impressed. (TO ALISON) The usual?

ALISON: I'll pass.

MARTHA: What are you doing to my daughter?

THURSTON: Are we talking generalities or specifics?

MARTHA: Generalities, please. I'm not a voyeur. And you?

THURSTON: Nope. I couldn't care less what any two people do in private--as long as they shower first.

MARTHA: You're incorrigible. (DISAPPEARS INTO KITCHEN)

ALISON: How right she is.

THURSTON: Just the right touch of the wild life for you, right?

MARTHA: (CALLING) Cola or not?

THURSTON: (CALLING) Not. . .preferred.

MARTHA: None of the common kicks. How virtuous.

THURSTON: A body needs some kind of virtue.

MARTHA: Bully for you!

ALISON: (TO THURSTON) You're short a few installments.

THURSTON: (TO ALISON) I'm saving up for you.

MARTHA: I'm sorry, I missed that.

ALISON: He was talking to me, Mother.

MARTHA: (ENTERING) How nice. Young people should be able to talk together, too.

ALISON: (REPROVINGLY) Really, Mother.

MARTHA: (IMITATING) Really, Daughter. (CROSSES. SERVES SOFT DRINK)
Alison said you two met during one of our Cape Cod summers. Have we met your family?

THURSTON: I don't think so. At least not while I was around. That would have been six/eight/ten years ago. Who knows? Actually, we saw each other a couple of summers. . .without sparks.

MARTHA: To everything a season. Still, you look familiar. Changed from a teen, of course. But familiar. . .

THURSTON: I guess I was memorable--the scourge of the Cape, my sister said.

MARTHA: How so?

THURSTON: My long hair, scroungy jeans, terrible T-shirts, and other complaints too numerous to mention. After it was fashionable.

MARTHA: That's it! Thurston, did you ever have a rhinoceros T-shirt?

THURSTON: (FEIGNING SHAME) You remember. They must have sold a couple million of those shirts, but the whole Cape remembers only me .

MARTHA: It was charming. (PAUSE) I hope you're going to feel at home here, Thurston. You're my kind of people.

THURSTON: That's an offer difficult to resist.

ALISON: When did you ever resist?

THURSTON: When did I need to?

MARTHA: A match for you, Alison. You'll learn.

THRUSTON: No, I've learned.

MARTHA: They say even new dogs can learn old tricks.

THURSTON: This dog will never learn to roll over and play dead.

ALISON: Such independence of spirit!

THURSTON: When we disagree, it's called stubbornness, isn't it?

MARTHA: Don't pay any attention to that. We all do a lot of bantering around here. Anything is fair. It passes the time and keeps you on your toes.

ALISON: Not my favorite position.

MARTHA: (REPROVINGLY) Really, Alison.

ALISON: (IMITATING) Really, Mother.

MARTHA: (TRIUMPHANTLY) You see, Thurston? (PAUSE) Is "Thurston" your given- or family-name?

THURSTON: My given name. It's my mother's surname. Ours is "Clark."

MARTHA: Thurston Clark. Mrs Thurston Clark. Alison Clark.

ALISON: Don't push, Mother.

MARTHA: Who's pushing? I'm just thinking aloud.

THURSTON: It's not as if the thought hadn't occurred to us, Alison.

ALISON: If you're going to take my mother's part in every dispute, you can find a different Mrs Clark.

MARTHA: I'm too old for you Thurston. It would never work. Stick with Alison.

ALISON: Besides, she's fickle, Thurston. And I'm forever.

THURSTON: In a world of opportunity, that's a dubious advantage.

ALISON: You two deserve each other.

MARTHA: I hope so!

CALVIN: (ENTERING) What are we hoping for this time, Martha?

MARTHA: Tranquility, Dear, as always. Calvin, this is Thurston Clark. Thurston, this is Alison's father.

(AN INSTANT'S SHOCK OF RECOGNITION IN BOTH MEN IS VISIBLE TO THE AUDIENCE, BUT MARTHA IS THEN FACING CALVIN AND SEES ONLY HIS RESPONSE. A CLUE, NOT A TELEGRAM. AUDIENCE ACCEPTS MARTHA'S VIEW:)

THURSTON: How do you do, Mr Welt.. (OFFERS HAND)

CALVIN: (SHAKES HANDS WITH RESTRAINT) How do you do.

MARTHA: So you recognize him, too.

CALVIN: Recognize?

MARTHA: He's that marvelous boy who came to church on the Cape in that rhinoceros T-shirt.

ALISON: Would someone fill me in?

MARTHA: Alison is right--you are a sweetie!

ALISON: Don't flatter him, Mother. He becomes unbearable.

MARTHA: He's a man, isn't he? Now, will somebody please make small talk? And we'll put this behind us.

(SILENCE)

MARTHA: Very well. (WITH TV TALK SHOW ENTHUSIASM) Alison, tell us all about your/^{commuter}train trip. Was it exciting? Crowded? Educational?

ALISON: (RAPIDLY, IN MONTONE) It left on time; almost empty; it arrived on time.

MARTHA: And did you find it equally stimulating, Thurston?

THURSTON: More equal than you can imagine. It had the classic air of stuffiness; the hardy bare-bones jounce of the early frontier; and imperceptible service. In all, singularly and memorably underwhelming.

MARTHA: Bravo!

(A BRIEF SILENCE. THEN:)

CALVIN: What do you think of our recent key reformer--Reagan?

THURSTON: I'm hoping we won't ultimately find his outstanding performances preserved on old celluloid. But I'm not a historian.

CALVIN: Isn't that a little harsh?

THURSTON: Maybe generous, considering what's on the celluloid.

CALVIN: I take it you'd not vote for him, given a chance. . .

THURSTON: That would have to be un-American.

CALVIN: Interesting. . .explain?

THURSTON: He was instrumental in creating the Hollywood un-American witchhunt of the 'Fifties. . .the most un-American event in our history. And then he's put in charge of my Constitutional liberties? Strange. . .

CALVIN: Some would say he's simply protecting our way of life.

THURSTON: Someone will always defend any king. Our current "way of life" started very late in our history--this century. It's a corruption of our historical ^{people doing for themselves in}privatism:/responsible inter-dependence. But some corporations became a mechanism for avoiding responsibility. So putting the have-nots at the mercy of the market is also un-American.

(MARTHA IS SEEN GIVING SILENT APPLAUSE)

CALVIN: The 'Sixties live on. What do you do?

THURSTON: I'm a sociologist.

CALVIN: That's nice. What do you do?

THURSTON: I study the effects of the society on people. . .and vice versa.

CALVIN: Where do you do all that?

THURSTON: In the streets. In the libraries. In the computer room.

CALVIN: Are you employed?

MARTHA: I knew it.

THURSTON: Yes--

MARTHA: (INTERRUPTING) Thank God!

THURSTON: . . .With Northeastern Power. I do environmental studies.

CALVIN: Why didn't you just say so? I think that goes by the heading of protecting the public interest, doesn't it?

THURSTON: If you're naive, it does. It really gives the corporate public relations department the jump on the public's objections.

CALVIN: Then is Thurston Clark indirectly harming the public?

THURSTON: I'm not sure. But if I find I am, I'll quit.

CALVIN: Is quitting the best way to provide for a family?

THURSTON: I don't have a family.

CALVIN: Do I misunderstand the purpose of this visit?

ALISON: That's not necessary, Daddy. He has the right to follow his conscience.

CALVIN: And what happens to my daughter as a consequence?

ALISON: That's our concern, his and mine.

CALVIN: And my grandchildren ?

ALISON: I'm not pregnant. Neither is my brother.

CALVIN: Don't be flippant with me.

ALISON: If we ever ask for help, then you can criticize. Since it has some bearing on the topic, you might want to know that Thurston hasn't proposed. He might never. That's his right, too.

CALVIN: Well. Maybe I should have stayed at home.

MARTHA: (LAUGHING) Bravo for you, too, Dear. I think it might be a fun visit after all.

ALISON: Actually, we had hoped to mix a little business with all this abundant pleasure.

MARTHA: You mean it wasn't filial piety alone that inspired the trip? Oh, the heartbreak of it.

ALISON: Daddy, we've been thinking of buying a condominium apartment.

CALVIN: Isn't that a little premature?

ALISON: As a hedge against inflation. An investment.

CALVIN: Buying it together?

ALISON: Sure. Why not?

CALVIN: To rent out or live in?

ALISON: To live in, naturally. Tenants destroy things.

CALVIN: I thought you said Thurston hadn't proposed.

ALISON: I'm more worried about destructive tenants.

CALVIN: You can be very trying, Alison.

ALISON: (COOLY) Now, Daddy. Don't be that way.

CALVIN: You're leaning on me, Alison.

ALISON: If I sit on your lap, will it be all right?

CALVIN: It's no more acceptable for you to flout convention than it is for him.

ALISON: I'm not flouting it, Father. I'm ignoring. Convention is simply a lot of gossipy people looking over your shoulder. And I really can't be bothered.

CALVIN: Convention is also respect paid to customs that prove they work over the centuries.

ALISON: There's never been a century like this.

CALVIN: That's what they say in every new century.

ALISON: And any convention will survive if you methodically kill its alternatives. The only valid test of a social standard is, "Does it make life better?"

CALVIN: From a perspective of how many days?

ALISON: Father, you're an anachronism.

CALVIN: I fit with my time.

ALISON: You did once. It's my time, now.

MARTHA: With a nice turn of phrase, Luvy, you've put back all the years my Elizabeth Arden facials took away.

ALISON: Daddy, we'd like some advice--on condominiums only.

CALVIN: What do you want to know?

THURSTON: How do we calculate the true value of a property?

CALVIN: New or converted?

THURSTON: Converted. Alison's apartment.

CALVIN: That's a waste. They're overpriced.

THURSTON: How do we know?

CALVIN: The historical value of investment property is seven to eight times the annual income. At the high end, that's eight years times twelve months. So true value is not more than one hundred times the monthly rental. What are they asking?

THURSTON: About two-hundred-thousand.

CALVIN: Against what monthly rental?

ALISON: Nearly 12-hundred dollars.

CALVIN: Any remodeling or upgrading involved?

ALISON: Not if I keep my own apartment.

CALVIN: Then it's overpriced according to historical investment rules.

THURSTON: How do you calculate based on the condo craze? These things are selling, overpriced or not.

CALVIN: Because your net after taxes is similar, and people haven't learned to ask the embarrassing questions.

THURSTON: I think I've missed something. . . .

CALVIN: Developers are calculating your tax deductions in advance and are adding your deductions to their asking price. In Alison's case, they're asking more than 150% of true value--for shuffling papers.

ALISON: Sounds like a rip-off to me.

CALVIN: That's free enterprise.

ALISON: Cheating people is free enterprise?

CALVIN: Nobody's forcing you to buy.

THURSTON: Oh, yes they are! Buy or get out. Those are her alternatives.

CALVIN: Then she has some hard choices ahead.

ALISON: You mean I get nothing in return for taking on the landlord's risks and responsibilities?

CALVIN: Not immediately. You've hedged against inflation.

THURSTON: Not if we're paying more up front. Any other landlord would have paid less and gotten the same tax deductions and hedges.

CALVIN: True. What it comes down to is, "Do you believe in the economy?" Since nobody wants to lose on resale, values will probably hold.

THURSTON: Sure I believe in the economy. Along with Santa Claus, the Easter bunny, and something-for-nothing.

CALVIN: I don't think the future is that cloudy. You don't suppose the banks can afford to have all their loans go bad?

THURSTON: You mean a national collapse needs the bankers' permission?

CALVIN: They control the Federal Reserve System, don't they. Own it, is more accurate. The bankers won't just stand around.

ALISON: So much for the myth of public interest at the Fed.

CALVIN: Alison, we didn't raise you to be naive about money.

ALISON: Only sexual naiveté was actually promoted.

MARTHA: Never by me.

CALVIN: Would you stop playing brat?

ALISON: I'm not playing, Father. I am. I need to solve a problem, and I need your help to do it.

CALVIN: I'm trying to help.

ALISON: No, you're trying to straddle the fence. Again.

THURSTON: She'd like you to tell her yes or no. Good deal or bad.

CALVIN: So would you, Thurston. But don't expect a free ride from me. You'll have to take the risks of decision-making or forget about it.

ALISON: Don't pay any attention to Father. It's his corporate instinct surfacing--don't take a position you can be blamed for later.

CALVIN: I don't think your mother and I have made such bad economic decisions over the years.

MARTHA: They were good decisions, Dear. But they weren't mine. Never.

ALISON: What are the chances of losing if we buy?

CALVIN: That depends on the duration of occupancy. Unless the market firms considerably, you could need five or more years to gain anything. Do you like the place enough to stay that long?

ALISON: I've been there two years already. And nobody leaves a decent apartment in New York except to die.

MARTHA: That should give the building an air of country-stability.

CALVIN: Enough space to get you through five years?

ALISON: Two bedrooms. We shouldn't outgrow it too soon.

CALVIN: We?

ALISON: Thurston and I.

CALVIN: After marriage, of course.

ALISON: Whenever.

CALVIN: No, not "whenever." It's one thing to plan a joint purchase in anticipation of marriage. It's quite another to plan cohabitation in anticipation of residual benefits.

ALISON: I think that's my decision, Father.

CALVIN: But you asked my opinion on the wisdom of buying; so you shall have it: No, Thurston, I would not recommend your purchasing an apartment to share with my unwed daughter.

ALISON: Thank you for your opinion, Father. We shall treasure it.

CALVIN: I find your attitude increasingly offensive, Alison. Why do you trample every value we hold?

ALISON: Because you didn't question or choose any of them. You just swallowed the bait whole, exactly as the society cast it to you. Then you wonder how you got hooked. . .

CALVIN: I've never said that.

ALISON: You'd rather die than admit it. But you're dangling on the line, and you can't cut yourself free. Well, your values are your trap, not mine.

MARTHA: (QUIETLY) Your father and I grew up in a different age, Alison. Can't you try to understand?

ALISON: Can't he try to understand me?

MARTHA: You haven't made it simple.

ALISON: I'm not simple-minded.

CALVIN: That's open to question.

MARTHA: Thurston, is this proposed living arrangement--I'm assuming it's proposed and not a done deed. . .

THURSTON: In argumentation, assume nothing.

MARTHA: Is that arrangement based solely on monetary and incidental personal benefits? No long-term expectations apart from capital gains?

THURSTON: How many incidental benefits do you suppose would outweigh the hazards of life with Alison?

ALISON: See! You are romantic. You lied to me.

MARTHA: Do you share some special attachment?

THURSTON: To me it seems very special. For want of a better term, we've been calling it love.

MARTHA: And in case of accidental pregnancy?

THURSTON: Already agreed on.

CALVIN: For crissakes, Martha. You sound like you're checking the marble in the beef down at the butchers.

MARTHA: I think the proposal deserves a rational examination.

CALVIN: Well, I don't. And there the matter will rest.

MARTHA: I don't think you'll rest at all, Calvin, until you've had your full say. So let's just clear the air, shall we?

CALVIN: I've just had my say. Their living together is unacceptable, and that's the end of it.

MARTHA: No, Dear; I suspect that's just the beginning. We had speculated on the situation--forgive us, Alison, that we are still parenting--and you hadn't seemed nearly so upset about it then.

CALVIN: That was speculation; this is fact. And don't encourage her.

MARTHA: Alison, why don't you and Thurston take your bags upstairs? He can use your brother's room; we'll make it up later.

ALISON: Sure. Come-on, Thurston. That's the family signal for private adult consultation. The kids get lost until the bickering stops.

CALVIN: Is nothing sacred around here?

ALISON: No, Father. Only holy--and holier-than-thou! (GRABS BAG) We'll give you five minutes. That should be plenty long considering how little intellectual content the topic has.

(ALISON AND THURSTON EXIT WITH BAGS INTO BEDROOM WING)

CALVIN: It's your fault she's so snippy, Martha. You always thought it was cute.

MARTHA: Not cute--useful. A woman spends so much of her time defending herself, she needs all the practice she can get. And if you're going to defend yourself by attacking, at least make it a good attack.

CALVIN: Why wasn't Thurston's room made up?

MARTHA: Isn't that obvious?

CALVIN: Overly.

MARTHA: Is public decorum the issue again?

CALVIN: No. Socially unsanctioned behavior is.

MARTHA: On which topic you're an authority? Besides, they're synonymous terms. Most social logic is based on tautology, isn't it? We should believe what we believe because everybody already believes it?

CALVIN: Have you so little regard for marriage?

MARTHA: Could I have remained married to you for twenty-five years if I'd had none?

CALVIN: Twenty-four-and-a-half. It only seems longer.

MARTHA: Unless you've been keeping a few complaints in reserve, my list of grievances might be somewhat more substantial than yours.

CALVIN: For instance. . .

MARTHA: For instance, your shameless dishonesty.

CALVIN: My professional reputation is based on my honesty, Martha. And I have prospered. Proof enough?

MARTHA: For fiduciary matters, only, Dear. On ethical matters you have been something of a company whore. And in your personal life. . .

CALVIN: You're going ding-bat in your old age!

MARTHA: Am I? Then explain how those illegal company political contributions were ethically and legally accounted for on your books. Or deny the machinations surrounding Osgood's loss of partnership. How did he take away so little?

CALVIN: If you knew, you're an accessory after the fact.

MARTHA: I didn't know. I guessed--this moment. It's always the people with something to hide who are most concerned about their public image. It's the curse of our Puritan heritage: everything for show, including conformity. That it kills the spirit is piously overlooked. That's un-Godly. What else are you hiding, Calvin?

CALVIN: Why not guess again?

MARTHA: Because I might not want to live with the result.

CALVIN: Now who's being dishonest?

(A QUIET MOMENT)

MARTHA: (QUIETLY) How can we find such rancor in a test of contemporary morality?

CALVIN: Like every test case, it has ramifications outside itself.

MARTHA: Agreed. So let's explore those ramifications like rational people. Is that so unthinkable?

CALVIN: Where do you want to begin?

MARTHA: With your attitude toward this boy.

CALVIN: You've said often enough that I'm jealous of Alison. What's the surprise?

MARTHA: You've carped privately about this boy or that one--but privately. You've never been impolite toward any of them. Yet today you've been so vicious.

CALVIN: I don't want them moving in together.

MARTHA: She's threatened to move in with more than one of the others. She never has. It's pro-forma. She's worried about her image, too.

CALVIN: This time it's serious. Can't you recognize a disguised request for parental approval? The apartment question is a ploy.

MARTHA: If you wouldn't lecture her continually, she'd be even more traditional than you. Lord knows how I've gone so wrong as a mother. But your forbidding it will cause her both to do it and to flaunt it.

CALVIN: You seem resigned to the worst in her personal life.

MARTHA: You mean the fact of her sexual life? (MOCK ASTONISHMENT)
Do you suppose she has one?

CALVIN: I don't want to have to watch.

MARTHA: Who invited you? Has it occurred to you that your little girl might not be a virgin? And while we're on the subject, there's a better-than-even chance that your mother isn't, either.

CALVIN: You secretly dislike my mother. You'd accuse her of anything.

MARTHA: (LAUGHING) Your point, Dear. But how could I dislike a mother who scored 87% in her prime project? That's a passing grade in any school system.

CALVIN: Only 87%?

MARTHA: I'm not complaining. It could have been a lot worse. After all, you wear your galoshes when it rains; wipe you feet when you come in; chuck your soiled linens in the hamper--usually.

CALVIN: Sounds like 100% to me.

MARTHA: Only in deportment.

CALVIN: What else is there?

MARTHA: Character, naturally. You've seen enough report cards to know that.

CALVIN: I'd have been afraid to take your reports home. Eighty-seven percent would have called for an explanation in my home.

MARTHA: In character, Dear, you score 74%. I believe that's failing.

CALVIN: What happened to my 87?

MARTHA: Any CPA should be able to figure the average of 100 and seventy-four, Dear. Luckily you don't wipe your nose on your sleeve.

CAVLIN: How did I fare on my exams?

MARTHA: By all standard measures, you've done well. You're an achiever. There's no doubt about that.

CALVIN: I've tried to be a responsible provider, Martha.

MARTHA: You have been that, Dear. You have. But we've paid the price: estrangement. The little lies you have to hide--like the political contributions--take their toll. Drop by drop the reservoir of unspoken conflict fills. . .overflows. . .and washes out the foundations of trust.

CALVIN: I've really let you down.

MARTHA: Not so much with what you've done as for the implied insult in not trusting me to understand. . .and help. That hurts.

CALVIN: I was working to preserve the marriage.

MARTHA: Was it ever in danger?

CALVIN: Might it have been?

MARTHA: If? . . .

CALVIN: If something untoward had happened.

MARTHA: How well do you know your wife?

CALVIN: Sometimes I wonder.

MARTHA: And that, too, hurts.

(A LONG SILENCE)

CALVIN: Now that we've refloated our battleship, how do we deal with the situation upstairs?

MARTHA: By ignoring it. It's simply outside our control. And I think that's proper.

CALVIN: I don't.

MARTHA: Lucky you thought to tell me. (PAUSE) Don't blame that boy. Alison doesn't seem unmistakably reluctant, does she? Can you protect her against her own will? Moreover, I'm not convinced she needs any protection. Thurston is warm and thoughtful and apparently highly responsible. And fun. Ethical, even? What more do you want in a prospective son-in-law? So he's not rich--so what? You're the image-conscious Puritan, not I.

CALVIN: Why the "Puritan" lecture today?

MARTHA: Because you don't seem to understand how deeply those principles have colored your reactions today.

CALVIN: For instance.

MARTHA: Two key tenets of the faith: First, that material wealth is the mark of God's favor (against all Biblical injunctions, mind you)--

CALVIN: (INTERRUPTING) When was that an issue?

MARTHA: Moments ago, when you were excusing your dishonesty. And second, that the appearance of goodness is tantamount to goodness. They were hypocrites, those Puritans. But we love the fairy-tale version of our origins, don't we? And we're paying the price.

CALVIN: All right, Martha. Truce.

MARTHA: Then stop picking on Thurston. You haven't shown me one tangible shortcoming. If your objections are purely subjective, your opinion is less relevant than Alison's own. Case closed.

CALVIN: Are we staying in tonight or suggesting movies for all?

MARTHA: Don't change the subject.

CALVIN: You said, "Case closed."

MARTHA: You know that's the signal to trot out the substantial arguments. . .if any.

CALVIN: No further arguments.

MARTHA: (DISAPPOINTED) Oh.

CALVIN: Do you mean you wanted me to have substantial arguments?

MARTHA: Of course not. But substantial arguments reveal motives. And I'm not sure of yours.

CALVIN: What's that supposed to mean?

MARTHA: It was a simple declarative statement.

CALVIN: It didn't sound so simple to me.

MARTHA: Really? What did it sound like?

CALVIN: Fishing.

MARTHA: You know I don't like fishing, Dear. Hot; sticky; mosquitoes.

CALVIN: So you say. But you do it well.

MARTHA: Really? I never seem to have a catch to photograph, as you do.

CALVIN: Which is not to say there isn't a catch somewhere.

MARTHA: You're onto me! When did it happen?

CALVIN: About half a life-time ago.

MARTHA: Your life-time, or mine? I'm younger, you know.

CALVIN: Only in chronology, Martha.

MARTHA: Oh? I was quite innocent when you found me.

CALVIN: How you've grown!

MARTHA: (FEELING HER HIPS) That's the price of an easy life.

CALVIN: It hasn't been so bad, has it--really?

MARTHA: Of course not. How often must I say so? In fact, it's been mostly good. But you can't expect me to admit that in the middle of an argument, can you?

CALVIN: I don't see why not.

MARTHA: It's too distracting. . .too far from the topic.

CALVIN: Which was. . .

MARTHA: Your daughter's impending marriage. Why the problem, Calvin?

CALVIN: It doesn't feel right.

MARTHA: Cohabitation? How sensible. If I'd have known in advance how you are in the morning. . .

CALVIN: I made you the offer.

MARTHA: Invitations to over-night at the college dances? With all my family and friends at the keyhole?

CALVIN: If you had wanted to, you would have.

MARTHA: Wrong. I wanted to. I was afraid.

CALVIN: Of what?

MARTHA: Of my neighbors. . .my reputation. What were the names of those people who so influenced my early decisions? When have they helped since? Would they approve of me now? Ridiculous.

CALVIN: Would they approve of your daughter?

MARTHA: That doesn't matter to me. I approve of my daughter. I so want her to think for herself! And if I am sometimes hoist on my own petard--well, that's one of the hazards, and I accept it gladly.

CALVIN: Free-thinking doesn't have to include free-love.

MARTHA: Because you choose to believe in hellfire and brimstone? That's a Nineteen Twenties concept, Calvin--from your mother's time. And even in the 'Twenties, love was never free. The price is high. The price is intimacy. . .the removal of constructed emotional barriers . . .the accessibility of the soul. No, love is never free.

CALVIN: Then why encourage Alison to expose herself?

MARTHA: Because we best learn to love by loving. Our society has taught us to fear openness. To fear our bodies. To fear our best and warmest human impulses. Then, when we're paralyzed with fear and paranoia and guilt, we're told to marry some stranger and trust and be happy. Happy? Without removing those socially-instilled barriers--how? If Alison is going to make a mistake, let her make it without all the shackles of marriage and children. That's all these young people ask.

CALVIN: You could make Armageddon sound unobtrusive.

MARTHA: Well, if we're going to speak of love, let's concentrate on understanding and giving and forgiveness and sharing. Those seem to come only after pain. And what have they to do with crotch behavior? If our Alison has learned to make those distinctions, she is blessed, whether or not the preachers acknowledge it.

CALVIN: Do you want her to marry this boy?

MARTHA: I want her to be happy, and she knows better than I who and what offer the best prospects. We made up our own minds, didn't we? Your mother didn't want us to marry.

CALVIN: You see! I should have listened. (GIVES MARTHA A PECK ON CHEEK)

MARTHA: It's settled then? Alison's decision. . . .

CALVIN: Let's wait and see.

MARTHA: (IMPATIENTLY) The classic, conservative cop-out. Will you ever change?

CALVIN: I hope not. That would make things too easy for you. . . and you've grown quite enough.

(ALISON AND THURSTON APPEAR AT DOOR.)

MARTHA: Here's our little Return on Investment, now.

ALISON: (ENTERING) Are you still talking about our apartment?

MARTHA: As a matter of fact, we're not.

ALISON: Too bad. I'd have hoped to have a decision this trip.

CALVIN: You've already had it. Don't badger me.

ALISON: Now, Daddy. . .

THURSTON: He's stated his opinion, Alison. Respect it.

ALISON: Whose side are you on?

THURSTON: Isn't that beside the point? The issue is apparently more complicated than you and I had realized.

ALISON: Oh, shit! Not you, too.

THURSTON: Not me, too--what?

ALISON: Fence-straddling. It's Father's one undeniable talent. I don't know how my mother has endured it all these years.

MARTHA: Why, Alison. I didn't know you cared!

CALVIN: Is that what you believe?

ALISON: You've never, ever taken a stand on anything of consequence without being sure which way the political winds were blowing. Any weather vane has a good a sense of direction.

MARTHA: Not too far, Alison.

ALISON: Maybe you should have gone farther, Mother. I hate the limbo you've made a part of your life.

MARTHA: I think that's my decision.

ALISON: Until it impinges on mine. What's the hang-up, Father? We're asking for economic advice--that's your field. We have all the numbers. . . why can't you say it's a good or bad investment at those figures? Can't you figure it out? Or can't you make unemotional choices?

CALVIN: I don't know. (GLANCES AT THURSTON) I'll have to think about it.

ALISON: For crissakes, what's to think about?

MARTHA: Your father doesn't want to encourage his little girl to move into a man's apartment without benefit of clergy.

ALISON: So we'll throw a benefit dance for the clergy.

CALVIN: In my home, please respect my values.

ALISON: I respect those values that come from the gut, even if I don't agree with them. But you've never been in touch with your gut, Father. That's why you're so out of step with your own life.

MARTHA: Alison? Is that you talking?

ALISON: Yes, Mother. And it's overdue. You tolerate his worst trait as if it doesn't exist. . . as if I hadn't heard you cry yourself to sleep in night after night of his endless trips. Because he had to do what his peers expected of him, whatever the cost to family and self. Father, you've sacrificed yourself to your own graven image.

THURSTON: Alison, why don't we have dinner back in New York?

ALISON: No. I'm not going to see our first major decision as a couple turned into a game of "What Will the Neighbors Think?"

CALVIN: If you were a couple--in actuality.

ALISON: Then would the apartment be a good purchase?

(SILENCE)

MARTHA: Alison, you're becoming quite trying.

ALISON: (TO CALVIN) Well, would it?

THURSTON: Drop it, Alison. We can noodle it out for ourselves.

ALISON: I won't drop it. We're going to complete an economic feasibility study and decision right now.

CALVIN: No, we're not. There are too many ramifications.

ALISON: Not really. You' don't want me to move in with Thurston, right?

CALVIN: Need you ask?

ALISON: Well, I did that months ago. I'm not moving out.

THURSTON: But twin beds, Sir. If the good Lord had intended two people to sleep together, a couple would have only three arms.

MARTHA: (SHARPLY) Not to mention a mutual commitment of some sort.

THURSTON: (GENTLY) Would I even be here without that?

ALISON: We are not asking for a loan, Father. We have our down-payment. So your total involvement is related to rent-versus-purchase. Shall we get back to the facts?

CALVIN: Alison, I don't like your attitude.

ALISON: That doesn't change the facts.

CALVIN: It changes my willingness to explore them with you.

ALISON: If you have to use that ploy to avoid endorsing the project, I'll have to consider the figures viable. Thank you, Father. I think we'll buy.

MARTHA: I'd prefer a more direct recommendation if I were you, Alison.

ALISON: He can't bring himself to make one. (MELODRAMATICALLY) Oh, the shame of it! Father gives most of his unendorsed information via body language--or whatever else you can call his moralistic postures. I can read him pretty well by now.

MARTHA: Well, Calvin, are you going to let that reading stand?

CALVIN: (COLDLY) Why not? If economic viability is the crucial factor, of course it will work today. But don't ask me to guarantee the economy for tomorrow. After all, the prices of properties in Harlem only recently reached the highs set before the Depression. Considering inflation, we might never reach the old prices in constant dollars. Now, consider that scenario in Midtown Manhattan. If they have to wait fifty years to protect their money, so what? They're young, aren't they? And so much in love that nothing else matters. Well, I've learned that what will endure can be measured only after the fact. I observe, and I avoid predictions. And that to me is far more realistic than your gut theories, Alison. And it works!

ALISON: Nice speech, Father. But we're buying.

MARTHA: Are you sure, Alison? Is the building sound? Is the property free and clear of liens? Is that neighborhood going to survive? Do you want to rear children in those surroundings?

THURSTON: Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. No.

MARTHA: No?

THURSTON: No, thank you. No children. Not yet.

MARTHA: Dear boy, let me tell you the facts of life.

CALVIN: Considering the circumstances, I think he can teach you.

ALISON: (GENTLY) Daddy, grow up. You're getting old without ever being a contemporary of any period you've lived through. What a loss. Where is your sense of adventure? Your old respect for a conflicting viewpoint? Your old passion for calculated risk?

MARTHA: From my viewpoint, it would seem that your father risked all his old passions on conflicting adventures in the company ledgers and doesn't want to calculate the loss.

CALVIN: Don't encourage her, Martha.

MARTHA: Her words, not mine. But she's a better observer than we realized. That's not all bad.

THURSTON: I don't suppose anyone would welcome my opinion,

MARTHA: Probably not. . .but that has never stopped any of us from giving ours. So. . .

ALISON: It's a family squabble, Thurston. Stay out.

THURSTON: I'm already in. Deep. So: Alison had expected opposition; and I didn't think she should have to face it alone. Therefore the arrival of the not-quite son-in-law. Yes, we had supposed an approval of the purchase plan would be tacit approval of the liaison--

CALVIN: You see, Martha.

THURSTON: . . .But we do in fact value the financial advice. Those documents are not just a ploy. Yes, we have discussed marriage, but we met while headed in directions which could become mutually excluding if we choose to pursue them. So we've decided to see whether the personal bond will prove more worthwhile than either career plan. If so, we'll marry. If not, should we have an acrimonious divorce in place of a fond goodbye?

CALVIN: Wait-and-see arrangements were not unknown in the past, Thurston. They were simply called engagements.

ALISON: And the engaged pretended not to have a sexual relationship. We've opted not to pretend.

CALVIN: And what's your time frame for all of this?

THURSTON: Two, maybe three, years.

CALVIN: Will it last?

THURSTON: (POINTEDLY) Other of my relationships have! I doubt that we could have forseen the personal complications.

MARTHA: (MISSING THE POINT) Our personal attitudes are not necessarily complications, Thurston. The objections could have been met much more directly by beginning with the living arrangement in theory and going on to the apartment in particular. It's a matter of forthrightness.

THURSTON: I was dealing with strangers. I miscalculated. I apologize.

MARTHA: Accepted. But if accepted, not necessarily without misgivings. No parents want to see their daughter used and discarded.

THURSTON: A bad marriage is just as using. And if it breaks up, any residual compensation is purely monetary--true?

MARTHA: True.

THURSTON: Then how much money would make it worthwhile to put your daughter through a formal divorce?

MARTHA: You drive a hard bargain. . . .

THURSTON: We are providing for our possible future cash needs by investing jointly. And if we decide to make it official and procreate, our down payment for a house in the suburbs is assured. Now, how can you term any of that irresponsible? Or undesirable, for that matter?

CALVIN: I didn't say "irresponsible," I said "unacceptable."

ALISON: And I said that's my decision. So either we talk about the property, or we change the subject entirely.

MARTHA: Have you seen any good plays lately, Luvy?

ALISON: Yes. The best was a Shakespeare. "Merchant of Venice." I hadn't read it since freshman lit. Old Will really nailed the politicians and the racists, didn't he?

MARTHA: Part of the problem of civilization, I'm afraid, is that every new generation feels it has the inside track on Truth. Shakespeare has said a lot, but I suspect he was cribbing from Socrates.

THURSTON: Amazing what education can do. You know they were cribbing from each other, and I didn't realize those two guys even knew each other.

MARTHA: (LAUGHS) Thurston, what am I going to do with you?

THURSTON: I don't care. . . as long as you wait until after dinner.

MARTHA: We're getting there. Is that your whole commentary on the Bard?

THURSTON: I can watch it performed. It's too much work to read.

ALISON: Criticism straight from the jock.

MARTHA: Curious. For me it's the opposite. There's a sense of discovery when you're alone with the author. You're just a face in the crowd when the whole theatre breaks up. But at least you go. Calvin, here, thinks theatre is a waste of valuable evening hours. I had to browbeat him into leaving his briefcase upstairs for today.

CALVIN: Martha, haven't we had enough baring of souls?

MARTHA: I've said not one public word of criticism to you.

ALISON: The critic is over here, Daddy. And you are an old fuddy-duddy, sometimes. But I managed to drag Super Jock to the Met; and we intend to take you both next season.

CALVIN: Thanks for the thought, but I have an out-of-town trip scheduled that week.

(ALL LAUGH)

THURSTON: That's the way I felt until I'd been through a couple of operas. Now I feel comfortable there because I know the plot.

MARTHA: Which plot?

THURSTON: (FEIGNING SURPRISE) Why, all of them, of course.

MARTHA: All? You're not serious.

THURSTON: Sure. Listen.

(THE FOLLOWING MONOLOG MUST BE PERFORMED WITH FORMAL, MIME-LIKE EXAGGERATION, BUT NOT TO SLAPSTICK EXCESS. USE UMBRELLA FOR SWORD)

THURSTON: The orchestra leader bows. The music starts. The curtain goes up on the First Act, which begins with the chorus singing. Then the soprano sings. Then the tenor sings. She sings again. He sings again. They see each other across the square, and they sing together via long distance. Then she sees the Captain of the Guard coming; so she runs away, because she doesn't want the Captain to think she's working the streets. She drops her handkerchief, and the Tenor picks it up and hides it. Then Mezzo, her girlfriend, tells her what happens, and Soprano comes back and sings at him to give it back. He sings back that he won't. So they're fighting over the handkerchief as the curtain falls. All the important people take bows. Second Act: Soprano is singing in her room. Her maid says that the handkerchief still hasn't come. Blackout. Then Tenor sings. He's in jail, and that's given him a change of heart, because now he's willing to return her handkerchief. So he smuggles it out of jail. Blackout. Soprano gets the handkerchief from the messenger. It must be expensive because she's so happy to get it back again that she sings for ten minutes. Anyhow, she goes to the jail to say thanks. Since there's nothing to do, they both sing for a while. When they get tired, the chorus takes over until the director can get the curtain down. More bows.

MARTHA: Thurston, this is obscene!

THURSTON: (SIGNALS SILENCE) Third Act. It's night. They both sing a while to kill time. Suddenly (SCURRYING) another messenger arrives. (READING SCROLL) The king is going to have Tenor executed. . . which is a pretty stiff penalty for smuggling handkerchiefs. Soprano thinks so, too; and she gets into a real singing snit. He sings that she should relax, already. She sings, It's easy for him to say. So they sing

(THURSTON) insults back and forth until (STRUTTING) the Captain of the Guard comes in to complain about the foul language. He sings at her. Loud. She's insulted; so she steals his sword and kills the Captain. Now, both Soprano and Tenor are in trouble. The chorus makes such a big to-do about it that Soprano's song is drowned out. She starts to cry so hard she can't sing. So the curtain comes down. Fourth and last Act: Soprano is still crying because the curtain came down in the middle of her main snit. Tenor sings her a little sympathy. She sings that it's hopeless and that she intends to kill herself. He sings that he forbids it. She sings that he's not her boss. So she stabs herself with the Captain's sword (FALLS). . .and starts to die. But she keeps on singing so you know she isn't dead yet. Then Tenor starts singing.(CHANGES PLACES) If Soprano is macho enough to die, so is Tenor. So he stabs himself with the same sword, which is getting (WIPE\$ HIS HAND) kind of sticky by this time. He keeps singing so you know he isn't dead yet, either. They both sing together again. (LIES IN "HER" POSITION) She starts to cough, which is opera-ese for getting close. But poor Tenor has to keep singing because the orchestra won't stop. She gets slightly better, however (SITS UP) and sings a little. Then she fades again; (FALLS BACK) Tenor tries to hold her head up (LIFTS OWN HEAD WHILE RECLINING) but her wig is too heavy for him to hold because he's lost so much blood, and she slips out of his grasp (HEAD FALLS), which is opera-ese for "she's dead." (CHANGES PLACES) So Tenor sings how unfair life is; and when the chorus comes in to sing at him for getting blood all over, he gives them the fickle finger and dies for the last time. The chorus cheers, because both of them have been a real pain. The curtain falls. The End. Very sad. More bows. And it's over.

(WHEN THURSTON FINISHES, ALISON IS ENJOYING; MARTHA IS IN PAROXYSMS; AND CALVIN IS WONDERING WHAT'S GOING ON)

MARTHA: Smashing, Thurston! When did you work up that routine?

THURSTON: Routine? No routine. I made it up.

MARTHA: Extemp? I don't believe it.

ALISON: Believe it, Mother. And be glad it wasn't a five-act opera.

(CALVIN PICKS UP UMBRELLA AND HANGS IT AGAIN)

CALVIN: It was sophomoric and distasteful.

MARTHA: (WARNING) Calvin. . . ?

CALVIN: You'd mock anything and anybody, wouldn't you, Thurston?

THURSTON: (HOPING TO DEFLECT WITH HUMOR) I'm not mocking the tenor, Sir. If you knew opera heroines, you'd know it's wiser to die with them for twenty minutes than to live with them for twenty years. Especially the sopranos.

CALVIN: If Alison is going to be a social worker, and if you expect to quit your job any excuse now, how do you intend to support my daughter, Thurston? With street shows?

THURSTON: (GENTLY) I gave you that answer. . . a half hour ago: Northeastern Power, Inc. And if something follows, it will be because I have grown; and we can't know in which direction, can we?

(SILENCE)

MARTHA: We agreed to explore only objective matters, Calvin.

(SILENCE)

MARTHA: Your father's been making the traditional fatherly fuss, Alison, but don't dismiss him. In truth, your living with Thurston--or anybody else--is not something we had planned for the little girl with the pink ribbon in her braids and the unshakeable faith in the Tooth Fairy. I imagine we'll get used to it. But Manhattan. . . the crime. . . the dirt. . . the perennial danger. That worries me.

ALISON: The marks of an unjust society, Mother. But it's exciting, and you know that because you helped me to learn that. How often did we go the theatre and the opera and the tourist lookouts and the museums? You helped to hook me, and now you ask "Must I?"

MARTHA: Maybe I didn't intend to do so good a job of weaning you away from this town. I wanted you to have scope, yes--

CALVIN: You make this place sound like Sing-Sing, Martha.

MARTHA: Certainly we have more freedom to come and go, but the folk keep almost as good a watch over you.

THURSTON: I know the feeling.

MARTHA: (DOUBTING) Do you, Thurston? Can any of the free and young know the tyranny and claustrophobia of small-town morality?

THURSTON: Sure. We lived in Backwoods, Mass, for so many years I didn't know there could be life after sundown.

MARTHA: Why would backwoods people vacation on the Cape? That seems like more of the same.

THURSTON: With a sea breeze. And fewer mosquitos.

MARTHA: I'm not too sure about the mosquitos.

THURSTON: Besides, my grandparents had a cottage, and all the family took turns. It was economical.

MARTHA: Did you enjoy it?

THURSTON: I suppose. You don't both^e much with the inevitable. The beach was nice. But so dull. I often thought I'd be willing to go to hell to escape the damnable backwoods-and-beach circuit.

MARTHA: But. . .

THURSTON: But I went to New York instead.

MARTHA: And Alison says that's not the same.

THURSTON: Not for me. I was barely eighteen the first time I visited the Big Apple. It was incredible. I'd never seen a city, except for Boston. And those days, to love Boston you had to be masochistic. But New York. . . .It was fall. All the way in on the train, I watched the wind strew the hillsides with rusts and scarlets and enough gold to refill Fort Knox. Then the tunnel. It was like the lights going down in a theatre. And when the train finally stopped, I ran off and up the ramp into Grand Central Station. Curtain up! I didn't know where to go first. I threw my bag in a lock^o and charged through the nearest exit. And there I was: (DEJECTED) Forty-Second Street. What a let-down! I'd have gotten back on the train, I think, if I hadn't promised to meet a friend. Anyhow, after a half-dozen people took my cabs, I learned to grow extra elbows. I went to Times Square and gawked and felt terribly worldly--all at the same time. Then I went to Central Park and looked up at the hole in the sky where all the towers leaned together. (LOST IN HIS LITANY) I was giddy. How incoherent is the forest rebuked by the buildings. How refreshing the randomness of the park against the philistine commercial grid. I loved it. Instantly. and I made three trips in that first short weekend. The captive trees

(THURSTON) were less colorful than their country cousins, but the brilliance of the day gave them a sheen only Corot could surpass. To explore the little paths was to make them mine. What a coup to climb from the dip and round the brambles to stumble on the Tavern-on-the-Green. It was tinsel-town in the twilight. Charlie, do you remember? (SUDDENLY AWARE)

ALISON: Who's Charlie?

THURSTON: I'm sorry. I've been prating.

MARTHA: (FEIGNING NONCHALANCE) Speaking of Charlie, you'll never guess what I found in the attic a couple of days ago, Alison.

CALVIN: Nobody was speaking of Charlie, Martha.

ALISON: (INNOCENTLY) Thurston was.

THURSTON: Was I? I must have mis-spoken. Anyhow, like the song says, it's a helluva town. And yes, I want to live there, too. We have that in common, Alison and I.

(MARTHA HAS TURNED AWAY FROM GROUP AND FRETS)

CALVIN: That was the question, wasn't it? If you have such glamored memories, maybe you should. Personally, I don't much care for the place. Never have.

THURSTON: I'm sorry to hear that. I have only good memories. . .of all my visits.

CALVIN: There's no accounting for taste, is there?

THURSTON: No, Sir. But mine is excellent. (STROKES ALISON)

MARTHA: (SHAKILY) Calvin, being a sore loser doesn't become you at all. And you'll have to marshall objections more convincing than any you've shown me before you'll excuse this behavior.

CALVIN: I don't have to make excuses for ^{correcting} my daughter's behavior in my own home.

MARTHA: Well, Alison, if you decide to stay for dinner, it should be ready in less than an hour. I won't listen to any more of this.

(STARTS TOWARD KITCHEN)

ALISON: I'll give you a hand, Mother.

MARTHA: No. I have a feeling they'll need a referee. And you're far more likely than I to be impartial. (EXITS)

CALVIN: Obviously Alison's Mother doesn't share my sentiments.

ALISON: To state the obvious: "obviously."

CALVIN: You've already made your position clear, young lady.

ALISON: Your position makes it clear I'm not a lady. . .in your humble opinion.

CALVIN: Alison, this is a complex situation.

ALISON: No. It's simple. You're making it complicated. But that's not the same.

CALVIN: All right--let's clarify issues. I do not dislike you personally, Thurston.

THURSTON: If you had disliked me, Sir, I was never aware.

CALVIN: Yes. Well. . .(PAUSE) This is not a task I enjoy, you understand. But somebody has to do it.

THURSTON: Certainly, I understand. Do you suppose I enjoy it?

(SILENCE)

CALVIN: It might be best if we sleep on it.

ALISON: Sleep on it? Under your roof? In separate rooms? What do you hope to gain?

CALVIN: Time to think.

ALISON: Of more excuses? Of rationalizations for irrational behavior? I don't need any more of that. Let's just have it out.

CALVIN: What's come over you?

ALISON: Maturity, Father. You should try it sometime.

CALVIN: If you'd had a few of these (RAISES HAND), you'd show a little more respect.

(INSTANTLY AS THE HAND GOES UP, THURSTON STEPS BETWEEN. BUT THE FATHER HAS NOT INTENDED TO STRIKE, AND THE DAUGHTER DOES NOT FLINCH)

THURSTON: You're aiming at the wrong person, aren't you?

CALVIN: I told you I don't dislike you.

THURSTON: That's not exactly true, is it? In the role of seductor-of-daughter I become eminently hateable. . .whatever the desirability of other roles.

CALVIN: Do you blame me?

THURSTON: As Mrs Welt just said, it's a matter of forthrightness. I'm sure we can work something out.

CALVIN: I don't see how. Nor why, for that matter. It's a time bomb.

ALISON: For crissakes, Father. Living together doesn't even raise eyebrows anymore, and you're having a miscarriage.

CALVIN: Alison, you don't understand what's at stake.

THURSTON: But I know, Sir, and we can work it out. I love Alison. We intend to stay together. If you consider our visits a confrontation, I won't inflict myself upon you. She can visit you alone. I won't be offended. And maybe when you see that it works. . .

CALVIN: I'm not an ostrich, Thurston.

ALISON: I think that's a reasonable arrangement.

CALVIN: And I said you don't understand.

ALISON: What's to understand? These are the Nineteen-Eighties. I think you've misplaced a century.

CALVIN: How could a thing like this have developed?

ALISON: Thurston, I can't deal with this harangue. Do you want to leave? I'm willing.

THURSTON: You already said you wanted to see it through.

ALISON: We're not accomplishing anything. He's closed for the weekend!

CALVIN: What more do you want from me, Alison? You come home with still another Joe College--

THURSTON: (INTERRUPTING) Co-captain of my varsity swimming team!

CALVIN: . . .Who's longer on jokes than prospects, and then you expect me to act overjoyed that you're living together. What about your family? Don't they count for anything except one-way support?

ALISON: My brother is sexually sane and couldn't care less about circumstances, if I'm happy.

CALVIN: His words?

ALISON: His words. And my mother can adjust. Even your mother approved of my first lover. She thought he was a nice boy.

CALVIN: You discussed your lovers with your grandmother?

ALISON: She's not nearly as narrow-minded as you are, Father. And besides, I had to confide in somebody--my mother tells you everything. How would you have taken the news five years ago? I mean, really.

(SILENCE)

THURSTON: I think all of this is beside the point.

CALVIN: (RESENTMENT SHOWING) What is the point, Thurston?

THURSTON: Lacking discussable personal objections, I'd say only my immediate economic prospects. Those are respectable and not particularly hampered by a sense of humor, even sophomoric.

CALVIN: For Alison's sake, let's be cool and collected.

THURSTON: I'm not upset.

ALISON: Only you, Father. Only you.

CALVIN: (REASONABLY) How and how long ago did you meet?

ALISON: In a bar. More than a year ago.

CALVIN: Alison! (DISBELIEVING) You don't pick up guys in bars. . .

ALISON: For shame, Daddy. You know I wouldn't. We were introduced.

CALVIN: By whom? And don't say my mother.

ALISON: True. Grams isn't much of a drinker. Not that she's a teetotaler, either.

CALVIN: Who introduced you?

ALISON: My friend and ex-roommate, DeeDee and her husband. They were showing me the unsung New York.

CALVIN: Meaning?

THURSTON: Manhattan's West Side. East Village. You know--the outré. We did part of the tour together.

CALVIN: You mean you picked up Thurston in a seamy bar. And you want to marry him?

ALISON: Well, you can't expect to meet everybody in church! It was a nice bar. In the flower district. Called Flower Stalk.

CALVIN: (INVOLUNTARILY) Damn it! Do you think I'm an idiot?

ALISON: Well, Father, that's the way it happened.

CALVIN: The Flower Stalk is one of the most disreputable bars in Manhattan. . .which has a corner on the world's supply of disreputable bars, it's safe to say.

ALISON: Well, I didn't know. I was sightseeing.

THURSTON: It's actually a very esoteric and circumspect bar, Sir. So all the rest is a matter of opinion.

CALVIN: It's also a swinger's bar where men and women go to pick up other men and women--not necessarily in socially-approved combinations.

ALISON: Is that true, Thurston?

THURSTON: It's a couples-only place. . .professionals and executives. Well-lighted. Absolutely above reproach.

CALVIN: On the surface.

THURSTON: Isn't that where our society's interest usually lies--at the surface?

CALVIN: It's a hole! What about the back-room orgies?

ALISON: How would you know, Father? Have you been there?

CALVIN: Don't get smart with me. The question is, "What were you doing there, Thurston?"

THURSTON: Having a drink with a friend.

CALVIN: Is that your habit?

THURSTON: On occasion. I happen to live nearby.

CALVIN: Is that the only reason--convenience? Or. . .

THURSTON: (SHRUGS) What difference?

ALISON: Thurston, are you a switch-hitter?

THURSTON: Does it matter?

ALISON: I think I have a right to know.

THURSTON: Sure.

ALISON: Sure--what?

THURSTON: Sure, you have a right. Sure, your father knew the answer. Sure, I do switch. Sure enough?

ALISON: (PAUSE) Oh, no. . . .Thurston? . . .You wouldn't. . .

THURSTON: Alison, we've joked about it.

ALISON: We joked because I thought it was a joke.

CALVIN: Seems the joke's on you, Alison. Does this latter-day social standard make your life better? That was the criterion you set, not so?

(SILENCE)

CALVIN: Well? (PAUSE) Now maybe you'll believe me, Thurston. This arrangement is not going to work. And I think it would be politic to end it while we're all on good terms.

THURSTON: Were we on good terms this visit, Sir? I've certainly been on better, wouldn't you say?

CALVIN: I believe it/^{was} Alison who asked the knock-out question.

THURSTON: Led by Socratic direction. You knew what you were doing, and we both know why.

ALISON: Daddy was only trying to protect me.

THURSTON: That's the most naive comment you've ever made.

CALVIN: All right, Thurston.

THURSTON: No, it's not all right. As long as you wanted to talk about it, let's talk about it. All about it.

ALISON: I don't want to talk about it. I just need to think.

THURSTON: I wasn't talking to you.

ALISON: You might as well. It's not Daddy's decision.

THURSTON: Aren't you a pair!

CALVIN: More than you and she, I'd say.

THURSTON (POINTEDLY) More than us?

ALISON: (MISSING THE POINT) Maybe. We'll have to see.

THURSTON: When?

ALISON: I'll have to think about it.

THURSTON: Isn't that what you've criticized your father for doing?

ALISON: You don't understand him.

THURSTON: You bet I do!

ALISON: Mother says she does, too. And you see how they talk past each other. That's no way to live.

THURSTON: You've learned to live when you've learned to accommodate reality.

ALISON: Don't double-talk me now, Thurston. I'm tired.

THURSTON: We agreed always to talk out our differences.

ALISON: We didn't say at my parents' home.

THURSTON: Then let's go to our home.

ALISON: (PAUSE. QUIETLY) No, I'm at home here, for the weekend.

THURSTON: And I?

ALISON: Suit yourself. We can talk when we get back.

THURSTON: That's side-stepping it.

CALVIN: You said a few minutes ago that you wouldn't push us to confrontation, Thurston. It would do much harm and gain absolutely nothing. So why don't we leave it at that?

THURSTON: Do you want me to leave, Alison?

ALISON: Like I said: Suit yourself.

THURSTON: Wow! You should sing soprano!

ALISON: And you shouldn't pick up every handkerchief you find.

(SILENCE)

CALVIN: Let me drive you to the station, Thurston.

THURSTON: Alison?

ALISON: (HESITATES) I'll get your bag. (HURRIES OUT)

THURSTON: So you got your way. Now send the kid packing.

CALVIN: Is that necessary?

THURSTON: Maybe not necessary, but deserved.

CALVIN: I don't see why.

THURSTON: For using "discretion" as your dodge from reality. You do remember the word. . .

CALVIN: I've heard it.

THURSTON: You've said it--how many times?

CALVIN: I've also said I don't dislike you, Thurston. But the situation is intolerable. Why have you done this?

THURSTON: Why have I done what?

CALVIN: Come here. . .making a scene!

THURSTON: I came here to meet a guy named "Calvin." I found a "Charlie." How is that my fault?

CALVIN: You're right. I should have told you. I guess I was afraid.

THURSTON: After all the conversation about mutual trust?

CALVIN: I'm sorry.

THURSTON: Yeah. Sure. Well, that and a token will get you a ride on the subway. Get on or get off any time you like.

CALVIN: We did lose touch, didn't we?

THURSTON: You knew where to find me. I can't say the same.

CALVIN: It was getting too. . .awkward.

THURSTON: Guilty conscience?

CALVIN: (TOO QUICKLY) No!

THURSTON: Just a little?

(NO RESPONSE)

THURSTON: You weren't the first, Charlie. Nor the only. The most, maybe. Listen--Sigmund Freud taught that since children are sexual and respond to love equally with either sex, bi-sexuality might be the human norm. We have to be molded into an "approved" pattern. Didn't you know that, Charlie?

Cavalier

Charlie, I-40-B (rev)

CALVIN: No.

THURSTON: Because the American branch of Freudian analysts knuckled under to social pressure and called it a sickness for half a century. Would it have made a difference to you?

CALVIN: Who knows? It's done, now.

THURSTON: So they trapped you into living a lie. Intellectual whores do more damage to more lives than street-corner whores ever will. "But the truth will make you free." The words of Christ, according to John. I'm not trapped. I grew up knowing most teens mess around with their friends until they start making it with girls. Some quit. Some don't. Big deal. Now, I'm ready to commit, but I won't run away from my early friends. (GENTLY) I wish you hadn't run from yours.

CALVIN: We accountants learn to cut our losses.

THURSTON: I was well into my twenties last I saw you. Grown up. My investment, too. But a loss, you say. Let's see. We had some great times for a couple of good years. I learned to feel at ease in nice hotels . . . to have confidence ordering in fine restaurants. You made me stay in college. You opened up new horizons. I still live in the town I first saw with you. Is that a "loss to be cut"? Not for me.

CALVIN: I didn't mean it that way. I still . . . like . . . you.

THURSTON: That's an easy out. I like you too. But I guess I don't respect you anymore. And I can't blame the situation.

CALVIN: Sometime we'll look back on all this . . .

THURSTON: Bullshit!

ALISON: (ENTERING) Maybe it's lucky you're leaving, Thurston. Before you two come to blows.

THURSTON: Maybe it's lucky gas is so expensive—it saves tires.

ALISON: I don't follow you sometimes, you know?

(SHE TURNS AWAY FROM AN ATTEMPTED KISS. THURSTON TAKES BAG)

THURSTON: You don't follow. And this is one of those follow times.

CALVIN: (JANGLES CAR KEYS) Ready, Thurston?

THURSTON: I was always ready when you were, Charlie. Isn't that the problem?

(ALISON DOES A DOUBLE-TAKE, BUT THE THOUGHTS DON'T CONNECT.
CALVIN AND THURSTON GO OUTSIDE. AS THE DOOR SLAMS SHUT:

BLACKOUT. END OF ACT I)

SPEAKING OF CHARLIE

ACT II:

(TIME: MOMENTS AFTER. THE ACT II CURTAIN DISCOVERS ALISON IN THE SAME GENERAL STANCE HELD AT ACT I CURTAIN)

ALISON: Mother! . . .(DISTRESSED) Mother?

MARTHA: (HURRIED ENTRANCE, HOLDING SOMETHING) What life-or-death-crisis now? (SEES MEN ARE GONE) Where are they?

ALISON: At the station.

MARTHA: The station? Whatever for?

ALISON: Father did a number on Thurston's head. And Thurston left.

MARTHA: Your father is driving him to the station?

ALISON: Bag and baggage. Father insisted on driving him.

MARTHA: Whose idea was it? That he go, I mean?

ALISON: Thurston sort of offered. But Father's idea, I guess.

MARTHA: How did it happen?

ALISON: I really don't know.

MARTHA: (SHARPLY) Were you there or not?

ALISON: I'm not sure. It was all so. . .(SEARCHES). . .cryptic. What a mess, Mother. Just short of a fist-fight.

MARTHA: Now, really.

ALISON: You know what I mean. It was Father's typical cool-and-collected executive nastiness that did it.

MARTHA: We're in the middle. Start over.

ALISON: It started when Father asked Thurston where we met--I mean, as adults. That's where I picked up on the cuts.

MARTHA: And?

ALISON: It was a swingers' bar in the flower district in Manhattan.

MARTHA: Really.

ALISON: It's not what you think.

MARTHA: Oh? What am I thinking?

ALISON: That I don't belong in a swingers' bar.

MARTHA: I tried to raise you to think for yourself. . .but I was never able to congratulate myself for succeeding.

ALISON: You didn't succeed--I'm not a swinger. My dear father doubted me, but it was innocent. DeeDee and her husband were showing me the sights. That's all.

MARTHA: Is DeeDee a swinger?

ALISON: Mother, be serious! She's so jealous, he can't even go to the john alone.

MARTHA: Did your father recognize the bar by name?

ALISON: Yes.

MARTHA: Why, do you suppose?

ALISON: I asked the same thing. He said everybody knows. Top echelon people swapping and coupling by the dozens in dark rooms--at least that's Father's version.

MARTHA: The cream of the middle class compromising itself in very respectable heaps. How fitting. I do hope they go to church, too. Did you see any of that?

ALISON: No. You can't prove it by me. But Father doesn't think his precious daughter should get serious with a man who carries on.

MARTHA: Is Thurston a swinger?

ALISON: I guess so. I never gave it much thought before.

MARTHA: And how do you feel about it now?

ALISON: I don't know. I suppose I thought Thurston was a tourist, too. He doesn't look to be the type.

MARTHA: Really, Alison. Swingers aren't a type any more than are communists or vegetarians. The only cliché which applies, I think, is "Some of your best friends. . . ." Well, he'll be there when you get back, I'm sure.

ALISON: Maybe, Mother. It sounded kind of final--go with him, or else.

MARTHA: He can't find a new home on ten minutes' notice.

ALISON: We don't live together, Mother. Sorry to disappoint you.

MARTHA: But you said--

ALISON: I said what I had to. . .to make my point with Father.

MARTHA: Wouldn't going with Thurston have made your point, too?

ALISON: Sure. But the risk is high on the other side.

MARTHA: And here you are. . .Daddy's secure little girl. Mother's free-thinker failed.

ALISON: You and your free-thinking bullshit!

MARTHA: (QUIETLY) Your language is unbecoming.

ALISON: Look at you--the lecturing haus-frau! What have you ever done to earn the free-thinker's award of the year?

MARTHA: If you can find the contest, I don't think I'll place last.

ALISON: Whoopee! (DEFIANTLY) It's show-me time, girl.

MARTHA: Maybe it is. The station is only ten minutes. Your father should be back any moment.

ALISON: No thoughts of your own, Madam Free-Thinker?

MARTHA: Quite a few. But only your father can validate them.

ALISON: I figured.

MARTHA: Impatient, aren't you? Edgy. Narrow, maybe. . .at least, somewhat shallow in thought process. Does that mean superficial? And does that mean I'm not as competent a mother as I'd hoped?

ALISON: Before you start feeling too sorry for yourself, remember that it's me this is happening to.

MARTHA: What "happened," Alison? Your father threw your beau out. If he's got a backbone--and I suspect he has--he'll be back, sooner or later.

ALISON: Sooner or later the world will end.

MARTHA: Long after you do, dear. So I think that qualifies as "later."

ALISON: Damn ~~you~~^{it}! You don't care a fuck about my personal life, do you? You've never cared enough to help me with my problems.

MARTHA: That's unfair, Alison. It's hurtful and unfair, because I've always tried to help you help yourself solve them. That's far better.

ALISON: In your opinion. You just stand by and quote platitudes.

MARTHA: Reverses are the most dependable part of life. Adjust. Re-think. And go on living. It works for me. But you refuse to hear of it. Everything must be easy and now. Then suffer! I can't help.

ALISON: When I hurt, I don't need textbook remedies.

MARTHA: Pages from my book of life, Alison. Not Xerox copies. You and your brother are my life, and you can take what you really need.

ALISON: And your husband?

MARTHA: Originally. . .a miscalculation. I've adjusted.

ALISON: (STUNNED) Daddy? A miscalculation? Do you know what you've just said?

MARTHA: Do you know what he just did?

ALISON: Yes. He threw my boyfriend out.

MARTHA: That and much more! Why did he do it?

ALISON: To protect me.

MARTHA: Is that all?

ALISON: Now you're going to say he's jealous of me.

MARTHA: Maybe that, too. He's complex.

ALISON: Daddy's the most transparent person I know. A doormouse accountant who pays his bills scrupulously and goes to church and loves his neighbors and kisses his children's skinned knees and does what's right. Doesn't that cover it all?

MARTHA: That certainly covers his fine, upstanding God-fearing image. And that in turn covers everything that matters.

ALISON: I don't understand you.

MARTHA: Be glad!

(LONG SILENCE)

MARTHA: Does it still hurt? (STROKES DAUGHTER'S HAIR)

ALISON: What difference?

MARTHA: If it helps to talk about it. . .

ALISON: Thurston's gone. Talking won't help. . .except with him. And I don't know if that's important. It wasn't that serious an affair.

MARTHA: Really? I thought marriage was a fairly serious act.

ALISON: It could have been. But I got a raw deal.

MARTHA: How?

ALISON: He lied to me.

MARTHA: Outright? Or by omission? And about what?

ALISON: His personal life. I could have guessed, I suppose.

MARTHA: His sex life, you mean. You're as prudish as your father. But you disguise that with those filthy gutter phrases and feel terribly worldly-wise. It's adolescent.

ALISON: All right--his sex life.

MARTHA: Are you jealous of the unknowns? Did you ask specifics?

ALISON: Hardly. I wouldn't have suspected he sleeps with guys, too.

MARTHA: Not even considering the bar you met him in?

ALISON: I told you I didn't know.

MARTHA: Never?

ALISON: You don't seem too all broken up about it. But then, it's only my life; so what the hell.

MARTHA: Didn't you march during the NOW and ERA protests? What did it mean, if anything?

ALISON: That's different.

MARTHA: Isn't it always?

ALISON: That's out there—it's neutral. This is right here—in my gut. Personal. Salary levels and abortions are a far cry from having a boyfriend who's . . . queer.

MARTHA: Oh, yes. The polite conventions. The values all "decent" people hold without question. The fact that abortion and poverty and wife-beating and child-molesting didn't exist until last week shouldn't cause us to question those conventions, should it? Did no one have hemorrhoids before Jimmy Carter? No drinking problems before Betty Ford?

ALISON: Well, no swingers in the White House.

MARTHA: Indeed? You're very young. And if this problem really matters to your gut, then you'd better decide what you think about it. And act accordingly. And I don't think you've thought it out.

ALISON: Queerness is quite a handicap, Mother. Why think about it?

MARTHA: Queer, Alison? Where does it begin? Does he use the ladies' room instead of the men's? Or has he experiment once or twice? Or is he merely bi-sexual and so quite ordinary?

ALISON: You certainly make light of it—in theory, of course.

MARTHA: You needn't marry him. But a man has a whole range of faults and attributes that are more important. Does he have character? Warmth? Integrity? That's what makes a man a man. The rest is only maleness, however polished or crude. Thurston could become a dear friend. Those are rare, and to be cherished.

ALISON: Bully for cool, dispassionate, third-party appraisal. But what would you say if it happened to you?

MARTHA: (PAUSE) About the same thing, I suppose: "What are his compensating qualities?"

(GO TO page II-46)

ALISON: You are unreal!

(SILENCE. MARTHA SQUEEZES ALISON AND MOVES AWAY AGAIN.)

MARTHA SITS WHILE ALISON WANDERS ABOUT THE ROOM. AS SOON AS THE REMOTENESS IS ESTABLISHED, CALVIN IS HEARD ON THE PORCH. HE ENTERS)

CALVIN: (FALSELY EBULLIENT) Hello, again! (NO ANSWER) Why so glum?

MARTHA: Really, Calvin. Don't posture. I hate it.

CALVIN: What happened to your famous cool?

ALISON: She wasted it on me.

MARTHA: I'm sorry it was "wasted."

CALVIN: Well, it's for the best.

MARTHA: Is it, now? How is it "best" that you make the final decision on whomyour adult and intelligent daughter can or cannot marry?

CALVIN: Because I know better than she does about these things.

MARTHA: What things?

CALVIN: You know damned well what things.

MARTHA: No. I missed the crucial conversations. I was haus-frau-ing.

CALVIN: I'm sure Alison filled you in.

MARTHA: She tried, but she doesn't understand. So I want to hear it from you.

CALVIN: I don't want to discuss it.

MARTHA: Well, I do, and we shall! It was a low and ungracious thing to do. . .to make Thurston uncomfortable in our home.

CALVIN: There's more to it than that.

MARTHA: Such as?

CALVIN: I said I don't want to discuss it.

MARTHA: You are not abandoning your daughter in this state.

ALISON: I'm all right. You're making too big a deal out of it, Mother.

MARTHA: Am I? My prospective son-in-law was run out of my living room for dubious reasons, and I'm not supposed to ask why? I want to know why. Tell me, Calvin. (NO ANSWER. DEMANDING) Tell me!

CALVIN: He has an objectionable lifestyle.

MARTHA: You mean he doesn't shower regularly? His apartment is messy? He smokes marijuana!

CALVIN: Don't be cute.

ALISON: Mother, just drop it.

MARTHA: I will not. I found Thurston to be pleasant and direct and charming, into the bargain. And although he was nervous for some still

(MARTHA) undetermined reason, I like him. And I'm willing to defend him. Somebody should.

ALISON: Meaning me?

MARTHA: You're a logical candidate. And I don't see your father rushing forward with words of wisdom and understanding.

CALVIN: In this case, the understanding works against the defense.
(HE SET ABOUT MIXING A DRINK)

MARTHA: Horrors! He must have done something ghastly. Murdered, perhaps? Cheated a trusting client? Lied to a constituency?

CALVIN: For crissakes, be reasonable.

MARTHA: Oh, reasonable misconduct. He doesn't go to church? Doesn't feed the collection plate enough? No, that's only passive. Active misconduct might be. . .feeding the poor or clothing the naked. We are forbidden to show compassion in this enlightened age of Everybody-for-Himself. And to hell with the Golden Rule!

CALVIN: Who pulled your fire alarm?

MARTHA: You did.

CALVIN: I wasn't even here.

MARTHA: The reason you weren't here is the issue.

CALVIN: I drove Thurston to the station.

MARTHA: Why?

CALVIN: It's too far to walk with a suitcase.

ALISON: You're both becoming a little ridiculous.

MARTHA: I'm barely started. And I want an explanation. What did Thurston do so to offend you, Calvin?

CALVIN: It's what he does. (HESITATES)

MARTHA: Well?

CALVIN: The bars he frequents.

MARTHA: He didn't seem an alcoholic to me.

CALVIN: The type of place.

ALISON: I told you--that swinger's bar.

MARTHA: Oh, yes. For executives and professionals--the respectables.

CALVIN: (TO MARTHA) Have you been there, too?

MARTHA: You never invited me. But it sounds fascinating. But if you disavow Thurston, shouldn't you disown Alison, too? She was there.

CALVIN: She was there as a tourist.

MARTHA: And he?

CALVIN: He frequents the place.

MARTHA: Oh. Then what does he do that's so terrible?

CALVIN: You can imagine.

MARTHA: I can't imagine. I'm too old and practical to fantasize.

ALISON: I told you: he swings.

MARTHA: A lot of so-called solid people do that. Nearly as many as cheat on their taxes, I'd guess.

CALVIN: You evidently don't comprehend the shaded meanings of "swing."

MARTHA: I do. But how do you know he explores the darker shades of that meaning?

CALVIN: He admitted it.

MARTHA: Volunteered the information. . .or was prodded?

CALVIN: Volunteered.

ALISON: You were pushing, Father.

MARTHA: Really. Where did you get so sophisticated an understanding of swingers, Calvin? After all, under our judicial system, the prosecution usually has independent knowledge before it badgers witnesses.

CALVIN: And what's that supposed to mean?

MARTHA: That I suspect your evidence. . .or rationale. . .or motives.

ALISON: Oh, God. Not another diatribe on father-daughter relationships.

MARTHA: Nothing so simple this time, I'm afraid.

CALVIN: So?

MARTHA: So?

CALVIN: Say it.

MARTHA: Say what?

CALVIN: What's on your mind.

MARTHA: I'm saying it: you can't simply object to patronage of a bar. Even a swingers' bar. So what's behind all this?

CALVIN: Despite her marching for liberal causes, our daughter is rather traditional in outlook, and I don't think she would take well to a husband who. . .who. . .

ALISON: Fucks around with other guys.

CALVIN: For crissake, Alison.

MARTHA: Yes, for crissake. Only whores and their johns "fuck." Nice people make love. I'm not sure what the difference is, in purely anatomical terms. But Thurston is nice people. He couldn't fuck around, could he? Nice people--cheat a little? You're nice people, Calvin. Would you do such a thing?

ALISON: You're unreal.

CALVIN: He is evidently promiscuous. This is too permissive a society for Alison's upbringing.

MARTHA: Did she say that without prompting?

ALISON: Daddy's right. I don't like the idea.

MARTHA: That Thurston's not a virgin?

ALISON: Neither am I.

MARTHA: I never accused you of it. (LAUGHING) It was that red-headed Jerry you were seeing in your senior year, wasn't it?

ALISON: Yes.

MARTHA: Then why did you deny it so often?

ALISON: Because I didn't think you could handle it.

MARTHA: Are you talking to me or your father?

ALISON: To both of you. The Hummel-figurine daughter--besmirched.

MARTHA: Not my attitude, ever. (TRIUMPHANTLY) You might not want to believe this, Alison, but I discovered sex before you were born! Do you admit participating, Calvin, or must I transcend?

CALVIN: When I was growing up, my parents didn't discuss sex--especially with their daughters and in joking terms.

MARTHA: When your parents were growing up, ladies skirted the legs of their pianos, too, because legs lead to unmentionable places. That's why none of you ever grew up to be comfortable with it. Two girls and a boy--your mother raised--and you all three talk like little old maids.

CALVIN: Let's get off the subject.

MARTHA: I might if you explain and apologize to your daughter.

CALVIN: There's no need for either.

MARTHA: That perfectly marvelous young man in the rhinoceros T-shirt?

CALVIN: He is morally objectionable.

MARTHA: Even at that age?

CALVIN: I told you--you're going ding-bat.

MARTHA: You've told me a lot of things that aren't necessarily true.

CALVIN: What can I say to that?

MARTHA: You can say what's really bothering you.

CALVIN: No, I don't think I can.

MARTHA: It's easy. You could begin by saying you over-reacted.

CALVIN: I don't think I did.

MARTHA: Then you could tell your daughter that after the first few years, sex is a relatively small part of marriage. . .and I don't mean frequency, alone.

CALVIN: You never complained to me.

MARTHA: I was too busy protecting and excusing and rationalizing. I had neither the time nor the energy nor the will to complain. I had a fine, model family, it seemed; and I learned to make that enough.

CALVIN: Most people wouldn't ask for more.

MARTHA: Most people are afraid to look behind the images. So they make "fitting in" one of the highest virtues. That's neurotic--psychotic, even.

ALISON: Mother, I've never seen you flout convention.

MARTHA: Does it always have to be a show? Your generation decided that marching and shouting are the best ways to rebel. Mine was taught that we had no right to rebel. Yet I did, by refusing to object to the standard socially-objectionable behavior. Isn't that rebellion, too?

ALISON: Do you know what you're talking about? I don't.

MARTHA: We're talking about this fanatic religious preoccupation with sex and the appearance of goodness. Show me one adulterer who has done as much damage as religious persecution. Do you know that Thurston does a wrong? By whose standards? And tell me in explicit terms, not unctious moralisms. I'm not an emotional cripple on the subject of sex.

CALVIN: When you don't want to understand, there's no way to reach you.

MARTHA: I understand. I understand the whole problem. And I've been trying to solve the smallest dilemma it presents. But you can't deal in partial solutions because you can't acknowledge the whole. And that's your dilemma, Calvin. Yours. . .not mine.

CALVIN: Remind me to see my doctor about my transparent dilemmas. But have they prevented me from being an effective pater familias?

MARTHA: No. Probably not. Until today.

CALVIN: Well, then?

MARTHA: Well, then, tell your daughter what's really happening.

CALVIN: I'm sure she knows.

MARTHA: You know she couldn't possibly!

CALVIN: Then phrase it for me, since you have so much insight.

MARTHA: Fine. Today, Alison--and for the first time in our long life together--your father has been truly immoral. He has acted destructively toward another human being. . .knowingly, intentionally, and unnecessarily. . .for purposes that are his own and dishonest. That's despicable, Calvin, and I never thought I'd have to apply that word to you.

ALISON: That's not fair, Mother.

MARTHA: Isn't it, Calvin?

ALISON: We have to do what's right.

MARTHA: What's right? Is it right that he cheated himself of the integrity that comes only when beliefs and actions are in harmony? Is it right to twist our lives to conform to arbitrary rules different in every part of the world? Is God so schizophrenic?

CALVIN: Are you saying anything goes--any time--with anybody?

MARTHA: You should know me better than that. But until there's agreement on the true nature of man, I'll just believe that love is never evil.

CALVIN: So the whole world is wrong, and Martha is right.

MARTHA: The history of the world is the control of the many by the few. The surest control mechanism is guilt: guilt about our tax returns. Guilt about our genitals. Church and state maintain control through guilt. It's effective--but is it ethical?

CALVIN: As ethical as the Golden Rule religion gave us.

MARTHA: Aristotle gave it to us 300 years before Christ. . .as a simple philosophy of everyday life: to do the more admirable deed when we have a choice. But in an ethical world, religion would be irrelevant. Do you suppose that's why religions don't teach ethical principles? Would you go to church, Calvin, if you led an ethical life and didn't feel guilty?

ALISON: Guilty about what?

MARTHA: Good question, Alison!

CALVIN: Is it unethical to look out for Alison's health? Sex can kill these days.

MARTHA: It always could. Syphillis was incurable for thousands of years. That didn't stop Henry VIII. And it won't stop young people today. So Alison has to be careful, not self-righteous: responsible.

CALVIN: How can she be careful if he isn't?

MARTHA: Did you ask him if he's careful? Are you responsible?

CALVIN: Thurston has the capability to hurt our daughter. And I cannot endorse that.

MARTHA: (CUTTINGLY) How touching, Calvin. Could he hurt Alison more than you have hurt me? We all have the capability to hurt those who love us. Isn't the lack of defenses a mark of love? It's not the capability to hurt that matters. No, the lover's gift is the will not to hurt. That has helped to save us, Calvin.

ALISON: What are you trying to say, Mother?

MARTHA: That Thurston's socially-unapproved proclivities are something to hear from him, not your father. Only Thurston knows for sure what he is doing. Only you can decide how it will affect you.

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CALVIN: And affect her children and her happiness.

MARTHA: Fortunately Thurston is open. She can discuss sexuality with him. We couldn't Calvin. That's what makes it so sad.

ALISON: I thought it was Daddy's traveling, Mother. Everything else looked so perfect.

Martha: I was never unhappy in the Hollywood sense of anguished and hysterical scenes. But yes, I was at times totally and enervatingly miserable. And it was unnecessary, given only honesty.

CALVIN: I suppose a talking-out is overdue.

MARTHA: Amen! But that could take days or months. And we'll be too late to save this day.

CALVIN: What can you hope to salvage?

MARTHA: An honest man. One who does what he must; he harms no one. He could conceivably make somebody a good husband, a gentle lover, and a strong father. . .if we don't destroy his confidence today.

CALVIN: You impute all those qualities to a person you've known for an hour?

MARTHA: An hour? I've known him through my daughter's eyes for a year. And my eyes showed me nothing different in this hour. He's honest.

CALVIN: There's a message there, somewhere.

MARTHA: If you were honest with yourself, you could tell your daughter that an occasional [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] slumber in a strange bed does not alone destroy a healthy bond. A quirk indulged does not negate a gift of love. Can't you tell her that?

CALVIN: (LONG PAUSE) No, I can't.

MARTHA: Because I'm wrong? Or because you can't bring your Puritanical tongue to speak of it?

CALVIN: I'm not sure.

MARTHA: Well, I am sure. (TO ALISON) If that boy has all the fine qualities you've described to me during the past six months, any woman could live with him and love him and cherish his children, whatever his "club" memberships. I assure you.

ALISON: That's easy for you to say.

MARTHA: (BITING EACH WORD) Easy for me? Tell her, Calvin.

(SILENCE)

MARTHA: Easy for me. You bring one of my husband's lovers into my home and then say it's easy for me!

(BLAST OF SILENCE)

ALISON: That can't be true. . .

MARTHA: Can't it? Deny it, Calvin. She wants easy comfort.

CALVIN: (MUMBLING) He wasn't. . .

MARTHA: Louder. I can't hear you.

CALVIN: He was never my--lover.

MARTHA: What was he, then?

CALVIN: We. . .met.

MARTHA: I never doubted that. Not after he said, "Charlie."

ALISON: You know Thurston? That way?

CALVIN: It was. . .nothing.

MARTHA: Don't tell me it was nothing. I couldn't bear that. Not after such long years of wondering who and how many. There were many, I know.

CALVIN: Yes, there were a few.

MARTHA: Don't say they meant nothing to you. Have the decency to say you had affection for them.

CALVIN: All right. I did. I suppose I do.

MARTHA: Our model family--and its illusions.

CALVIN: I had no illusions, Martha. None at all. It was just something I had to do.

ALISON: But why?

CALVIN: Because it was there in my gut. You understand that, don't you? An urge so intense, sometimes, that I couldn't stand the pressure.

MARTHA: You see, Alison. The difference between your father's behavior and Thurston's is essentially your father's hypocrisy.

CALVIN: Go ahead--make the worst of it.

MARTHA: You made the worst of it. I tried to make the best of it.

CALVIN: I'm sorry.

MARTHA: So am I, Calvin. Less that you did it than that you hid it.

CALVIN: I hoped you would never know. And that would be best. I wasn't trying to wound you.

MARTHA: Maybe not, but you did. How could I not discover? The cryptic phone calls in. The furtive calls out. The night your son fell down the stairs while sleepwalking, you weren't in your hotel room all night. You said your phone was blocked; but I'd had the manager go up to wake you, and you weren't there. Do you know how it feels to have somebody you've committed your life to--(BREAKS) How it feels to have him refuse to confide in you. . .to trust you. . . for one of his life's great crises?

CALVIN: How could I expect you to accept something I couldn't? I was terrified. That you'd leave me. That my job would be jeopardized. That my friends would hate the queer. (RESTRAINED DELIVERY THROUGHOUT)

MARTHA: Then they were never your friends.

CALVIN: Even I wasn't my own friend. I hardly knew that other guy with the same name. I avoided "him" when I could. Certainly I couldn't approve of the things "he" was doing. "He" couldn't talk about "those" friends. . .or even keep a photo. "He" couldn't stay in contact with anyone who mattered--even a little--for fear that one of them might grow to matter too much. Martha, you can't imagine living in a world that needs to shun the very things that should give it joy.

"He" did what he had to do, and I tolerated it. And after you've compromised your own innate being, what's a political contribution here or a machination there? It's a tiny step--not even in the same league with the denial of self. Osgood wasn't innocent; but he never had a chance to survive because of the prime rule of the double life: don't feel anything done by that other guy with the same name. If your gut aches, just deny that you have a gut. It works: my own daughter didn't know I have a gut! (REFLECTING) Strange. . .for the first time I see the double-entry system working even here: to be driven by my gut while denying that my gut exists.

MARTHA: You never before showed me the pain of it, Calvin.

CALVIN: Show a pain without betraying a root cause? How? So I just accounted for it like any other business transaction. Lots of helpful boxes in the ledger sheets--you were wrong about that, too.

(Continues)

CALVIN: (TICKING OFF THE SQUARES) There's a column marked "Family Duties" and a balancing entry marked "Time Off for Good Behavior." And if I debit "Meticulous Detail" to shelter my public life, I also have to credit "Nebulous Answers" for the unseen hours. On the asset side of the Work Sheet, we enter "Hugs and Kisses from the Kids" and on the liability side, "Empty Encounters." Enter "Applause and Achievement" on one side and "Impending Chaos" on the other. Steal a "Relieving Tenderness" here and pay with "Silent Remorse" over there. Everything costs--twice! In accounting, everything has a double entry: that's an inflexible rule. No exceptions. No mistakes tolerated. Why should I have expected my life to be any different?

(PERFUNCTORILY) But I learned early that if your entries are neat and clean. . .with no smudges or visible erasures. . .nobody will call for an audit. And that's why it works.

MARTHA: How long were you willing to live like that?

CALVIN: Forever--or until audited. . .whichever occurred first.

MARTHA: But why?

CALVIN: Because it was expected. Demanded!

MARTHA: Not by me!

CALVIN: By the society around me. When you grow up believing in the social values. . .and when those same social values say you're less than dirt. . .how do you live with yourself?

MARTHA: By doing what you feel you must, while you must. With dignity!

CALVIN: And what about public opinion?

MARTHA: To quote our insightful daughter (ACT I) "Fuck the gossip mongers." What are they hiding, that they should be so proper?

CALVIN: For crissakes, Martha.

ALISON: She does a great imitation.

MARTHA: Just live for the ones you love. We can't be concerned for the attitudes of six billion people whose names we'll never know. The ones affected are the ones who should help decide.

ALISON: Thurston didn't tell me, either.

MARTHA: You told me he did tell you. But you didn't want to know. That's your mistake. You made the problem. Because, as you can see, it is possible to live and to love despite the "club."

Cavalier

Charlie, II--54-C

ALISON: But you said "unhappily."

MARTHA: Only for the lie. I never demanded perfection. Or even an easy life. As Shakespeare said, "Fortune never comes with both hands full." But we have a right to meet adversity with the truth.

CALVIN: There were times, Martha, when I felt I had only empty hands for you.

MARTHA: I never felt that. Or I'd have left you, I'm certain.

(GO TO PAGE 55)

(If minority version)
continue



Cavalier

Charlie, II--54-C

SPECIAL ADDITION FOR ALL MINORITY ACTING TROUPES:

MARTHA: But what I never could understand is this:
How can any group of persecuted minorities help, in turn,
to persecute any other group of minorities--whatever the
reason?

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CALVIN: (PAUSE) I wish I'd gotten to know you better, Martha.

MARTHA: So do I! Oh, let's not pretend it would have been a lark. I'm sure I'd have wailed. . .and maybe railed. But even the shock of directness would have been preferable to the horror of discovery. The anonymous male voice saying he loved "Charlie," and wouldn't I give him up?

CALVIN: And you said?

MARTHA: Naively, with the dog in mind, I said, "Of course not. We love him, too, and he belongs to us." And the voice said, "He will never belong to you. You can lock him up, but he's mine." And I said, "Why are we quarreling over a mongrel?" And he said, "Charlie is not a mongrel. He's the kindest man I've ever known." And he talked for an eternity, but I didn't hear another word. Finally I heard myself saying, "He's ours, and he always will be." I hung up, and he never called back. At least, I never heard that voice again. They didn't even know your name, Calvin. Haven't you been honest with anybody?

CALVIN: Was it honest of you not to tell me?

MARTHA: To confront you with something you couldn't admit to yourself? Maybe in this more enlightened age--if it is. Not in those days. I was a different person, too. Absolutely the fit-in my daughter decries in me. A young wife with two children and no alternatives beyond "shame," for that was our common enemy. Alison was just starting kindergarten. I was more terrified than you, Calvin. If I were to denounce the father of my children for his unspeakable transgressions against society, what would happen to them?

CALVIN: I guess I earned the blame.

MARTHA: Strangely, I never blamed you. Instead I blamed myself, as my culture says I should. I blamed myself for not understanding. For not being woman enough to fulfill you. But I couldn't live with that. So then I told myself you were simply unwilling to hurt me by unleashing your personal devil. But that was never convincing. Then I read the Kinsey Report. Nearly fifty percent of all ^{white} adult males ^{studied} were willing-- way back in the Dark Ages of the 'Fifties--to admit they had had an orgasm with another man at least once. / But Kinsey says that only six percent of the adult males are ~~straight~~ ^{exclusively} gay. Then it dawned on me that

(MARTHA) the only cogent difference between me and the wives of the other forty percent of all men is that I happened to know. It was both consoling and isolating. Finally I realized that there were discrepancies in their lives, too. And if they didn't know, perhaps they didn't want to know. And that's the truth. That's the source of all the hypocrisy and deceit that does the damage. Calvin, you are no worse than half the other men of the world--I can deal with that. And that common difference was not enough to make me sacrifice a good man to the social inquisition.

ALISON: ~~Until today,~~ . . . Thurston was the last straw. I'm sorry.

MARTHA: No, not Thurston's being here, although that was a shock. It was your father's decision to sacrifice Thurston's welfare to protect an image he knew to be false. . . knowingly cheating you and me and Thurston in the process. That I won't abide, because if I accepted this lie, there will never be truth between us. I'm sorry I had to tell ^{her,} Calvin. But I tried to get you to fess up. And you refused.

CALVIN: To protect you both.

MARTHA: No, Calvin. To protect your image. You were willing to sacrifice honesty for image. I can't respect that. Now we've had it out. Now we adjust and go on with life.

ALISON: I wish I'd never been born.

MARTHA: Back then, so did I. But I have a workable life. And many, many happy times. And so will you.

ALISON: With Thurston?

CALVIN: Not with Thurston.

MARTHA: With Thurston, yes. Not as a husband. Even I in my wildest theorizing would ^{not} take on that situation. But as a friend? Why not?

ALISON: Because too much has changed.

MARTHA: Really? The change was simple knowledge, and it affects your father as much as Thurston. And unless you first disown your father, I will not tolerate your disowning Thurston.

ALISON: Thank you, Mrs God!

MARTHA: Aren't you the one who talks about doing what's real all the time? Well, this is real.

ALISON: It sure is. A lot more real than I had in mind.

MARTHA: And when does reality ask our permission?

Minority version only:
Calvin: Do I look "white" to you?
Martha: No. But you do look reasonably male.

ALISON: (IMITATING) So we adjust. . .

BOTH: . . .And go on living.

ALISON: You win. I'll be civil when next we talk. If. . .

CALVIN: And do we dispose of our problem so casually, Martha?

MARTHA: What problem, Calvin? The only difference between now and noon is that you know I know. Don't you think it's a little bit late for me to make a scene? It's no problem at all for me. It is, in fact, a problem eliminated: good-bye to Jekyll and Hyde.

(TELEPHONE RINGS. CALVIN IGNORES IT; ALISON WAVES OFF)

ALISON: I'm not here.

MARTHA: (ANSWERING CHEERFULLY) Welt residence. . . .Yes, she's here. . . .Is this Thurston? . . .I was concerned about you. . . . Well, why not? . . .Of course I know what happened. I know better than you. A tempest in a teapot, and I apologize. . . .Thank you. And you're quite a man, too. And what really upsets me, if you want to know, is that my dinner party is ruined. That's thoughtless of you, you know. . . .All right; next time. . . .If you're already tired of me, yes, I can put her on.

(MARTHA HOLDS OUT HANDSET TOWARD ALISON, WHO REFUSES IT)

MARTHA: (INTO MOUTHPIECE) Just a minute, Thurston.

(MARTHA PUTS THE INSTRUMENT DOWN, GOES TO ALISON, AND STEERS HER BACK TO THE PHONE, DURING FOLLOWING EXCHANGE)

ALISON: What does he want?

MARTHA: I don't know. But he probably does. And if you'll just say hello, he can tell you. Here's a real chance to communicate.

ALISON: (INTO PHONE) Hi. . . .Yes, a little. Where are you? . . . Here? Did you miss it? . . .Oh. Well. . . .No, I can't go back tonight. You know I'm unpacked. . . .That's not fair. . . .I don't know. . . . Besides, there isn't time(LOOKS AT WATCH). . . .I don't know. . . . Well, I'll think about it. Good-bye. . . .No. Goodbye. (HANGS UP)

MARTHA: Well, wasn't that a chilly reception.

CALVIN: He's still at the station?

ALISON: Yes. He skipped the last train. So I could join him on the next one.

MARTHA: Get your coat and purse.

ALISON: I'm not sure I want to go.

MARTHA: That's sad. I'm disappointed in you.

ALISON: It won't be the first time.

MARTHA: I'd hope it could be the last.

(LONG SILENCE)

CALVIN: What did he say about--it?

ALISON: The argument? Nothing. We should forget about it. And talk the rest out.

CALVIN: Could you?

ALISON: Like I said, I don't know.

MARTHA: Like I said, If you don't disown your father, you don't disown Thurston. And I'm sure there are some religious fanatics who would applaud a bloodletting. But it's your choice. Make it.

ALISON: I want to think about it.

CALVIN: When did you become so executive, Alison?

ALISON: Daddy, are you saying I have to go?

CALVIN: No. But don't delay a decision you wouldn't allow me to delay.

MARTHA: I don't believe this day!

ALISON: And I don't believe the way you've both turned on me!

MARTHA: Poor baby. Because it hurts a little. We should help you to get over a little emotional scratch. Thurston has the wound--and he's asking for help, too. Can't you understand anything?

ALISON: I'm sure he can find somebody else who will listen.

MARTHA: But he called you.

ALISON: Well, there isn't time. The train will be here in fifteen minutes. I'm totally unpacked.

MARTHA: That's plenty of time. Your father can drive you. I'll take your bag in on Monday. I need to do some shopping, anyway.

CALVIN: Martha, are you out of your mind? Stop harrassing her.

MARTHA: Calvin, you did a downer on that boy's head, and now she's about to do one. He doesn't deserve it.

CALVIN: She can't go back with him, Martha. Too much pressure.

MARTHA: For her. . .or you?

CALVIN: She can't go back. That's final.

MARTHA: All right. We compromise. She won't go back; but she can at least see him off at the station. Take the car, Alison.

ALISON: Mother, do I have to?

MARTHA: No, you don't have to. But if you reach out now and later change your mind--nothing is lost, and surely something is gained. If you don't reach out now--that could be a wrong you can never undo.

ALISON: (HESITATES) Where are the keys? (PAUSE) Daddy? (PAUSE) Daddy, I want the keys.

(CALVIN DIGS IN POCKET AND TOSSES SET OF KEYS. ALISON CATCHES THEM AND TURNS TO GO, HOLDING AS MARTHA SAYS)

MARTHA: I love you, Alison. I wouldn't hurt you for the world. And if Thurston is willing to come back to dinner with us, he's welcome.

(ALISON DECIDES AGAINST ANSWERING. SHE STARTS ACROSS THE ROOM TOWARD THE FRONT DOOR)

MARTHA: And you, Calvin. I love you, too. I always have.

CALVIN: Even today?

MARTHA: With reservations, even today. But if you could find it in your soul to apologize to Thurston for today--only for today, mind you--I'll love you the more.

(ALISON STOPS DEAD)

CALVIN: You ask a lot of me, Martha.

MARTHA: Have you asked less of me?

CALVIN: Apologies, I won't promise. (PAUSE) But I'll drive you, Alison.

ALISON: Mother--(TENDERLY) you're unreal. (RUNS BACK TO PLANT A KISS AND THEN SHOOTS OUT THE DOOR)

CALVIN: (FROM THE DOOR) You are unreal. And I love you.

MARTHA: I know, Calvin. How else do you think I'd have found the strength for all these years? (PUTS HER HAND TO HER EYES) Please go! Quickly. (COVERING) You'll be late.

(CALVIN EXITS, CLOSING THE DOOR QUIETLY. MARTHA WIPES HER EYES. THEN SHE GOES TO THE TABLE AND PICKS UP ONE PLACE SETTING. SHE THINKS FOR A MOMENT AND PICKS UP A SECOND; THEN RE-THINKS AND REPLACES BOTH. SHE CROSSES TO THE LIVING ROOM, CHECKS HER WATCH, AND SITS DOWN, FACING THE DOOR.)

(LIGHTS FADE: SLOW CURTAIN)

END