

ABSOLUTE PERVERSITY

by

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Changes in the concept of a woman's role in society, particularly in the area of her equality to men, have traditionally produced conflicting ideas about love, sex, and marriage. This conflict, according to Jean Gagen in The New Woman, became a vehicle for serious dramatic treatment only in the seventeenth century; prior to 1600, educated women were "still too much of a novelty--too limited to court circles--to have occurred to playwrights of the public theatres as a fit subject for serious dramatic treatment."¹ With the death of Elizabeth I of England in 1603, an anti-feminist feeling arose which encouraged writers to view women, particularly learned ones, as fit subjects for satire. Drama involving women, however, became a flourishing form.² The conflict between male and female ideas about love, sex, and marriage was the theme of many famous and well-established comedies, particularly of the Restoration. In philosophy and design, Absolute Perversity belongs to a long history of such romantic drama.

A common theme of romantic entanglements in comic drama is the practice of deception, usually for self-protection. In Much Ado About Nothing, Beatrice, unlike other Shakespearian heroines, does not disguise herself as a man; her protection--or self-defense--is her wit; she uses it to hide her true feelings from herself. Beatrice is interested in Benedick; her rudeness at interrupting the conversation of Leonato and the messenger and her questions concerning Benedick, though barbed, reveal both her interest and the fact she is self-conscious about her interest. Her manner is that of a young girl, awkward, but unconsciously in love, who disparages the object of her interest rather than betray herself. Benedick, too, has a pose, that of the confirmed bachelor. This is, however, a position that is easily swayed. He already believes that Beatrice is the most beautiful woman; he has already thought about a wife before he is persuaded that

Beatrice loves him. Once he believes Beatrice loves him, his pose drops and he welcomes love with open arms, to the point of even challenging his friend to a duel for Beatrice's sake. In Wycherly's The Country Wife, Horner pretends to be a eunuch, not, however, to protect him from romantic encounters, but to allow him easy access to them. Lady Fidget, Mrs. Squeamish, and Mrs. Dainty pretend--for their protection--to be honorable, modest ladies, but, as Lady Fidget remarks "You would have found us modest women in our denials only"; they are all only "seemingly honest." The use of disguises, along with the affectation of poses, is also a traditional practice of romantic entanglements. Harcourt, of The Country Wife, disguises himself as a priest and passes himself off as his non-existent brother to prevent Alithea from being legally married to another. Mrs. Pinchwife, in the same play, is forced by her husband to dress as a male and pose as her brother for her protection; later she pretends to be her sister-in-law and dons Alithea's dress in order to escape from her husband. Aphra Behn's The Rover also uses this convention of disguises. Florinda and Hellena disguise themselves as gypsies. Hellena later dons male clothing and pretends to be a page. Hellena had been thought of as nun material by her family, a representation she is determined to ruin; her disguises enable her to meet a man, while Florinda's allow her access to the man of her affections. The Rover also has its share of poses and also employs the convention of mistaken identities. Lucetta pretends to be a rich lover, when, in actuality, she uses that pose to rob her would-be lovers. Blunt pretends to be a lover while his interest is merely carnal and mercenary. Willmore gets mistaken for Don Antonio, Florinda for Lucetta and, at several instances, as a girl of the lower classes; Belville is mistaken for Don Antonio. Congreve's The Way of the World uses some of the same practices. Mirabell has pretended to be Lady Wishfort's lover in order to

be near her niece. Fainall has pretended love to his wife and to Marwood to gain a fortune. Waitwell is disguised as Mirabell's uncle, the rich Sir Rowland, in order to woo Lady Wishfort. Millamant, at first, feigns unconcern for Mirabell and his affections. In Goldsmith's She Stoops to Conquer there are mistaken identities as well as disguises. Hastings and Marlow believe Hardcastle is an innkeeper and his daughter a barmaid; Miss Hardcastle later uses this disguise to ensnare Marlow. Miss Neville pretends love to Tony Lumpkin to gain her jewels so that she can marry Hastings. Marlow's fear of the "terrors of a formal courtship" results in almost two personalities--the formal, tongue-tied, frightened would-be courter of an upperclass woman and the assured, confident, glib lover of barmaids.

There are many disguises and mistaken identities in Sheridan's The School for Scandal, though as in The Way of the World, not all of them are prompted by romantic love. Joseph poses as a modest, moral, upright fellow, when actually he is not. Charles' character has been besmirched, partly by false reports, so that he appears to the world more despicable than he actually is. Lady Teazle poses as her idea of a woman of fashion, one who is "accountable to nobody after they are married" and who indulges in gossip circles and slandering, as well as in admitting men as her lovers (though she keeps them--according to her "country prejudices"--Platonically). The two major male characters in Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest also adopt disguises. Jack, finding the maintenance of the "high moral tone" necessary to his position as Cecily's guardian fatiguing, has invented a bad brother named Ernest who must constantly be rescued; this gives Jack an excuse to go to town. While in town, Jack poses as Ernest. Algernon has invented a chronically sick friend, Bunbury, to escape the fatiguing social duties he owes his Aunt; his guise as "devoted friend" allows him to go down to the country whenever he chooses. In order to meet Cicely,

Algernon pretends to be Jack's bad brother Ernest. There is much social comment on the mistaken perceptions of people's identity. Finding that Jack, who was adopted, has no background--other than a black handbag and a train station--Lady Bracknell will not countenance marriage between her daughter and Jack. Believing Cicely poor, Lady Bracknell refuses a marriage between Cicely and her nephew, Algernon; when she learns Cicely is an heiress, she changes her position. Mistaken perceptions also play a part in Shaw's Man and Superman. Violet's acquaintances assume she is unmarried. Ann poses as the meek girl who always obeys her elders' wishes; in reality, she manipulates people with an unconscious scorn. John Tanner seems a wise man and is revealed a fool; Don Juan Tenorio seems the foolish philanderer but is revealed the wise man. In The Women, by Claire Booth Luce, Crystal poses as a nice woman in order to gain Mr. Haines; Sylvia pretends to be a devoted wife to keep her position. All of the women worry about the image of the fashionable wife they feel they must maintain.

Though Absolute Perversity has no mistaken identities or the donning of different guises, it still partakes of this tradition in the matter of poses. Poses, as we have seen, can be used to protect or ensnare someone. Like Lady Teazle, Anne and Brynn adopt the pose of the "fashionable lady" of their time. This is the "modern, independent" woman, and, for Anne and Brynn who are concerned with their equality, this takes the form of imitating men's actions in regards to one night stands, rating men, etc. That this is a pose is revealed not only by their actions, but by their use of cliches. They also advocate the usage of poses to ensnare others. Like Horner, Hellena, Mirabell, Miss Hardcastle--all of whom have used a pose to gain their lover--Christina is, with Anne's and Brynn's suggestions, to adopt the suitable pose to ensnare the object of her desire. All of this pretense

is related to confusion over gender roles as well as the definition of love, sex, and marriage.

What is a woman? For Christina, the ideal woman is independent, mature, confident, well-poised, and has a male. In theory, Anne and Brynn believe the ideal woman is independent, mature, confident, well-poised, and does not need a male. Theory and practice, however, are two different things; Anne involves herself with a male because she believes it is necessary to her image as a woman. Shaw's Man and Superman promotes the message that men are necessary for a woman; she must by instinct--having been designed to procreate the race--pursue men. Motherhood is a female's "initiation into womanhood." As Tanner accordingly says "It is a woman's business to get married"; her work in the world is to get a husband; romance is a heresy. Though child-bearing is not her motive, this doctrine of the importance of a man--not as a specific individual--also plays a part in Anne's consideration of a relationship. She decides upon Adrian because she likes him, but, as Brynn suggests, any man would do. Wilde spoofs this practice in The Importance of Being Earnest. Cicely has already decided upon Ernest before she ever met him. In her diary she has recorded all the stages of their courtship; she and Ernest have been engaged, broken their engagement, and gotten back together long before she had ever met him. The Countess and Sylvia in The Women also give the impression that any man will do but that males are necessary for women if women want to be held in any regard. This attitude is also reflected in The Way of the World where Marwood says, "it is better to be left than never to have been loved." The idea that a woman is incomplete without a man and will become someone else with a man is hinted at in Neil Simon's Barefoot in the Park; the flat of the newlyweds will not "take shape," cries Corrie blithely, "until the bride's own personality becomes more

clearly defined." The need of a man is disguised as "love" in Beth Henley's Crimes of the Heart. Meg says of Lenny "...she needs some love in her life. All she does is work out at that brick yard and take care of Old Granddaddy." Lenny has a slightly Shavian perspective of women; she believes that, because she can't have children, no man can and will love her.

The role of the male becomes entangled in women's perceptions of love, sex, and marriage, and the relationship of those three to each other. Anne and Brynn profess to believe that love and sex are two separate items. This is an issue brought up in many of the Restoration dramas where a man's wife was a distinct and different thing from his mistress and marriage quite often was not based on love. Arranged marriages and marriages with no inspiring passion at their base were common practice. Claudio finds Hero agreeable but checks the extent of her fortune before considering an alliance. Hero is quite ready to abide by her elders' choice of her spouse, as that is her proper duty. Hellena of The Rover takes exception to this practice; she does not want to wed for money or to carry on the family name. Florinda, who is the target of an arranged marriage, believes that arranged marriages make "slaves" of women; it is a "worse confinement," says Hellena, than religious life. Hellena intends to have only a man she likes, and she knows how to make use of her assets to the best advantage. She believes in giving no favors before she is wed. "And is there no difference," she asks Willmore, "between leave to love me, and leave to lie with me?" In The Country Wife, Alithea intends to wed her brother's choice for her husband, indeed, she feels bound by honor to do so. She believes that Sparkish, however, loves her or he would not marry her, though Harcourt attempts to disabuse her of this notion when he tells her, "Marrying you is no more sign of his love than bribing your woman; that he may marry you, is a sign of his generosity....Marriage is rather a sign of interest than love; and he that

marries a fortune covets a mistress, not loves her." Sparkish does not love Alithea, nor does he believe that matrimonial love is the best. Lucy, the maid, attempts to convince Alithea that it is necessary to love the man one marries; "can there be a greater cheat or wrong done to a man than to give him your person without your heart?...The woman that marries to love better, will be as much mistaken as the wench that marries to live better....marrying to increase love is like gaming to become rich; alas! you only lose what little stock you had before." The men of The Country Wife, for the most part, do not believe love is necessary for marriage; they worry over the constancy of their wives and mistresses. Horner says "women...are like soldiers--made constant and loyal by good pay, rather than by oaths and covenants. Therefore I'd advise my friends to keep rather than marry." In The Way of the World, Fainall has married for fortune and reserves his affection for his mistress. Mirabell tells Lady Fainall, "You should have just so much disgust for your husband as may be sufficient to make you relish your lover." Lady Fainall had married because she feared she was pregnant and needed a husband's name for respectability. It seems the way of the world, in this drama, that the majority of marriages are loveless and husbands cuckolds. Millamant has decided to marry for love. She expects that the rights that have been hers while she was single will accompany her into the marriage state. She desires Mirabell to continue his pursuit of her after they are married; she must be made sure of her will and pleasure before she marries and "dwindles" into a wife. She demands that she be allowed to sleep as late as she likes, that she not be called nauseous names nor will they show affection in public; "Let us never visit together; nor go to a play together; but let us be very strange and well-bred. Let us be as strange as if we had been married a great while; and as well-bred as if we were not married at all." Mirabell,

in turn, gives his conditions. A marriage, so believe Mirabell and Millamant, and Hellena of The Rover, should be a union between two free and like-minded people. Marriage for love plays a part in She Stoops to Conquer; Hastings and Miss Neville would wed on that basis despite Mrs. Hardcastle's efforts to arrange a marriage between her son Tony and Miss Neville. Marlow considers a marriage with Miss Hardcastle before he has ever met her because of his father's wish for such a union. When he falls in love with her--though he does not know it is she (he believes she is the barmaid)--he is ready to risk his father's displeasure. Miss Hardcastle knows that love does not have to be a part of marriage, but she desires that love be the basis of hers; she plans to make sure she secures the lover before she handles the husband. In The School for Scandal, Lady Teazle has married for love though it is considered unfashionable by her acquaintances. Maria, of the same play, does not accede to her elder's wish that she marry Joseph; she is drawn to Charles, the undesirable of the two brothers, though she knows it is not a desirable arrangement. Anne, in Man and Superman, makes great play in pretending to accede to the wishes of her parent and guardians while she is actually manipulating them to her advantage. Violet scandalizes her elders by marrying without their knowledge or consent. In The Importance of Being Earnest, marriages, so Wilde satirizes, should meet with the approval of one's peers and family. Marriages are not necessarily based on love; though Jack and Gwendolyn love each other, it is not sufficient reason for their marriage. Marriages occur for financial or social reasons; knowing one's future spouse is not necessary or desirable; "I am not in the favour of long engagements," says Lady Bracknell, "they give people the opportunity of finding out each other's character before marriage." Married couples showing love between each other is considered "not even decent." Wilde pokes fun at romantic love by having Gwendolyn and Cicely's affection rely upon a

name and by having Cicely and Algernon fall in love with each other before having seen each other. This same sort of pretense of love is seen in Coward's Private Lives. Amanda and Elyot, having divorced each other and married different partners, meet (moments after declaring love to their new spouses) and realize they love each other. Though Amanda believes that "Everything that happens is chance," love (and chance) are not the only basis of a relationship; mutual likes, as Coward reveals in the first act, are necessary too. The Women reveals three sorts of marriages. Mary's shows a relationship where the wife is happy and contented, though this is seen as unusual and slightly abnormal by her friends. This is the desired relationship; Nancy calls Mary a "woman," the rest of the wives are merely "females." Peggy's marriage seems to have a basis in love but not on acquaintance; Peggy has not been "married long enough to form a private opinion" of her husband. Sylvia's marriage was for social and financial reasons and has no love or fidelity in it. In Barefoot in the Park Corrie and Paul are very much in love, but their incompatibility--their different approaches towards living--nearly do them in; love conquers all, however; Paul walks barefoot in the park and Velasco has to adapt to plain food. Babe's marriage in Crimes of the Heart has no love in it on either side, but love, particularly love at first sight (Barnette's infatuation with Babe) does exist. Meg, who has been loved, but never returned the love, learns that she can care for others. This caring is the basis for a sound relationship, playwright Beth Henley says; when one cares one loves, and in the case of the mother and the cat, and Babe and Willie Jay, this care springs from loneliness.

Anne believes that love or caring are not necessary for marriage. Marriage is based on mutual like, compatibility, and sex. She decides to marry because she believes she is not complete without a male. Men and marriages,

for Anne, are similar to Sylvia's beliefs in The Women, they are done for social reasons. Christina is the traditionalist; she believes in marriage because that is what women do; she believes in having children because that, too, is what women do. She is, in a way, rather like Hero in Much Ado About Nothing, she accepts the conventional method of doing things, without question, because that is the way things are done. Christina is a romantic, however, because that is what convention idealizes; marriages are to be founded on love and that is sufficient basis for them. Sex, in Christina's eyes, is done for love and means love. This is opposed to Anne's view that sex is a sport and has no importance beyond that. Brynn had postulated that love does not exist--this was part of her pose as a young, independent, mature woman. Marriage, to Brynn, was an outmoded convention; sex was merely exercise. These precepts she had learned from Anne and believed Anne followed. Christina's beliefs influence Brynn to examine her own; Brynn comes to an idea of marriage contrary to Anne's; she believes, in the end, that a marriage should be more than just compatibility and sex. She also discovers that she had used "love" as an excuse for sex; "love" made sex socially acceptable. Brynn has been concerned with the effect a relationship has on an individual; this, along with her desire to preserve or find her own individuality, comes into conflict with her idea of a relationship. This concern with individuality is tied up in the recognition that married women can lose their rights or become less of a person in the married state. This is what prompts Millamant in The Way of the World to issue her conditions to Mirabell; she is aware, as Jean Gagen notes³, "of her own individual rights and her determination to preserve them within marriage." Other females are less fortunate and make sacrifices. Mary of The Women believes that women have no right to pride after they are married; the mother in Barefoot in the Park counsels her daughter to "give up a little

of you for him" if she wants to keep her marriage. Brynn's awareness of herself as an individual, and the fact she finds herself changing to fit her lover's image of her, cause her to wonder if her relationship with Anthony is right. But it is also her awareness of individuality that will not let her believe, as Anne does, that any man will do; she cannot see men as objects unless she believes she is an object. Trespassing on her belief of her rights as an individual was the fact that having a man as an ego-booster, it gave her a sense of power that she--to her horror--found satisfying. In The Rover, Angellica reflects over the same difficulty:

Had I remained in innocent security,
I should have thought all men were born my slaves,
And worn my power like lightning in my eyes,
To have destroyed at pleasure when offered.
But when love held the mirror, the undeceiving glass
Reflected all the weakness of my soul, and made one know
My richest treasure being lost, my honor....

Millamant in The Way of the World has something to say on the issue of power, though it does not, as for Brynn and Angellica, cause regret:

...one's cruelty is one's power, and when one parts with
one's cruelty, one parts with one's power; and when one
has parted with that, I fancy one's old and ugly.

Lord, what is a lover, that it can give? Why one makes
lovers as fast as one pleases, and they love as long as
one pleases, and they die as soon as one pleases; and
then, if one pleases, one makes more.

Millamant's philosophy of lovers would agree with Anne's; a male, not a specific individual, is what matters. Millamant does marry for love, however, unlike Anne. Lovers were an accepted equipage of a woman of fashion, such as Mrs. Millamant, yet she does the unfashionable and marries for love.

The conflict of relationships and love is dramatized quite often by contrasting sets of lovers. In Much Ado About Nothing the proper Hero and the respectful Claudio, representing the traditional, proper couple with the traditional attitude towards love and marriage, are contrasted with the

witty, vivacious pair of lovers, Benedick and Beatrice. In The Rover there are the contrasting couples of Belville and Florinda, and Willmore and Hellena. Belville and Florinda, though they marry for love and do not at first have her family's permission, accept the conventional marriage arrangement without qualms; it poses no threats for them. Willmore and Hellena also marry for love, but they do not see marriage as a binding unequal relationship of male and female rights; it is, rather, a contract wherein each party has equal rights and equal freedom. Mrs. Behn also uses other lovers who display differing, but conventional attitudes towards love, women and marriage, highlighting the two major couples. Blunt's interest in women is merely carnal; he sees them as objects. His miserliness causes him to view marriage as an economic matter; if he can marry without having to make a settlement on the bride's family, he will marry, but only then. Pedro represents those who view marriage as a matter of family need; he wants Florinda to marry Antonio because Antonio's position as a wealthy member of a noble family will enhance the social prestige of Pedro and Florinda's family. Antonio, partly because of his position, believes he can gain both marriage and mistresses because of that position. Florinda means nothing to him; he is willing to pursue Angellica not believing this pursuit could cost him his proposed marriage. In The Way of the World we have the two sets of lovers, Mirabell and Millamant who, like their counterparts Hellena and Willmore of The Rover, represent an untraditional yet romantic union based on love and the recognition of equality between partners, and the pair of Lady Wishfort and the ubiquitous "Sir Rowland" (Waitwell). Lady Wishfort desires their union for economic reasons --"Sir Rowland" has a fortune--as well as for the desire for revenge. Base motives such as these are commonplace in marriage, as seen in the Fainall's marriage. She Stoops to Conquer has the pairs of Hastings and Miss Neville,

and Marlow and Miss Hardcastle. While Miss Neville and Hastings love each other, their relationship, though passionate on Hastings' part, is strained by Miss Neville's "prudent" approach; she wants to secure their fortune before she consents to flee the country with him. Miss Hardcastle, as the barmaid, refuses a union with Marlow to spur him on into taking the untraditional route of marrying beneath him; the approaches to courtship are contrasted by the lovers' methods. The Importance of Being Earnest, with Gwendolyn and Jack, and Cicely and Algernon; Man and Superman with Violet and Hector, and Ann and John; Private Lives with Sybil and Victor, and Amanda and Elyot; The Women, with the contrasting marriages of Mary, Sylvia, Peggy, Edith, the Countess, and Miriam; Barefoot in the Park with Corrie and Paul, and Velasco and Mrs. Banks, and Crimes of the Heart with Babe, Lenny, and Meg and their "affairs"; all use contrasting sets of lovers to dramatize their conflict over romantic love. Another technique used to dramatize conflicting ideals is in confronting sophistication with innocence, usually in the guise of the naive country girl meeting the ladies of the town. The Country Wife is of this tradition. Mrs. Pinchwife is the country wife whose antiquated and idealized notions of love, and her desire to be a woman of fashion throw into sharp contrast the practices and beliefs of the women of town. School for Scandal has Lady Teazle fulfilling the same duty; Peggy, of The Women, also has this role, as does, to a certain extent, the child Mary. Absolute Perversity uses both these devices to dramatize conflicting values. Though they start off with the same philosophies, Anne and Brynn are both different lovers and end up miles apart in their attitudes towards love, marriage, and sex. Christina, the country girl, adds a third but different perspective, and she is the catalyst for Anne and Brynn's conflict.

Conflict over the notion of romantic love still exists today and this

is what prompted the inception of Absolute Perversity. In its original idea, the play was to concern a group of actors in the midst of a production of Ibsen's The Doll's House. Their private comments and actions were to highlight and contrast the views propounded by Ibsen. This idea was abandoned for two reasons; I did not feel it would be economically feasible and I worried that such a play could quite easily be boring because it would rely either on an audience familiar with Ibsen's play (and therefore have less appeal) or on an audience with a lot of time to spare. There are thousands of plays being composed but, due to economic reasons, few plays being produced. The more simple a play, the more likely it will be produced. The fewer actors a play has, the less expensive a play is to put on. Absolute Perversity was scaled down from a cast of eight to one of three. The majority of actors today are female; Absolute Perversity's cast became entirely female. Sets are expensive to design and construct; Absolute Perversity was pared down to one realistic set. These were all deliberate choices which framed the way the play was ultimately constructed and contributed to its problems. Obviously relying on a cast of three women, particularly when the plot involves conflicting notions between male and female pairs, means that such a play could have a tendency to be boring, with stagnant action, and could also be open to a charge of unfairness, bias, or misrepresentation. The biggest problem, and one the play still suffers from, is this tendency toward stagnating action. The interest of the audience is quite often reduced to relying on what the characters say; this, too, contributes to the dragging of the play's pace. Some of these problems could be cured by introducing more actors, particularly male actors, to complement the females. Not only would this, though, make the play more expensive to put on, it could conceivably still lay the play open to charges of sexism and misrepresentation. Basically

I would distrust my portrayal of male beliefs about love; I could have interviewed men as I did women for this play, but part of the difficulty, in a time where men and women aren't sure of their beliefs and each other, is obtaining clear information. Being female, I can respond to and understand other females' perspectives; this is a luxury; I felt my portrayal of men would probably be stereotypical, or thought of as such, and this would lessen the play itself. This does not mean, though, that the play has everything to say about females or says those things I had planned. I do not feel that shock treatment in a subject where women are unsure of themselves is of good value; education should unfold in subtle degrees. That I do not talk about orgasm, masturbation, or really about sex--areas that could be talked about in an all-female play--could lay me open to charges of cowardice and unrealistic treatment. But the greater truth is that women are ignorant or unsure of themselves in those areas; that Brynn and Anne pretend to be modern, independent women but do not bring up these topics, reflects not only their posing, but what I feel is the reality of the situation at the present time--we are afraid to speak, to betray our ignorance. Yes, perhaps, there is a greater play in this, but I am concerned more with the illusions people weave for themselves, and Absolute Perversity, as it is a comedy of manners, is less concerned with plot and more with the "manners and conventions of an artificial, highly sophisticated society."⁴

The play takes the form of a comedy for several reasons. I believe people learn more from laughing; education is best when delivered in the guise of comedy. Only through laughter, says Twain, can we destroy those juvenilities we believe in; laughter is our only effective weapon. A play is less likely to be avoided today, in a world where people want to be entertained, if it is a comedy. Another major reason to write such a play as a

comedy is that it does help eliminate the boredom and dragging pace likely in a serious play limited to three actors of the same sex. I also believe that people are funny; if the play had been strictly serious, people would have probably found it less realistic and probably would have considered the characters arrogant prigs and any chance of the audience relating to the characters would have been lost.

Absolute Perversity also represents, to me, stages that an individual goes through in life. There are the poles, the idealized romantic stage and its extreme, the pragmatical, aloof, "mature" individual who cuts himself off from relationships or conflicts to avoid, in the end, any responsibility. A child always believes he will reach his ideal, but, in reality, we perversely float between extremes until, or unless, we decide to give up and thus sacrifice all conflict and our individuality; when we embrace as ideal our extremes, we are running away.

Notes

- ¹Jean Gagen, The New Woman (New York: Twayne Press, 1954), p. 30.
- ²Gagen, pp. 30-31.
- ³Gagen, p. 153.
- ⁴William Thrall, Addison Hibbard, and C. Holman, A Handbook to Literature (New York: Odyssey Press, 1960), p. 99.

ABSOLUTE PERVERSITY

A full length play in two acts

ABSOLUTE PERVERSITY

CHARACTERS

ANNE--steady, sensible, the apparent modern, she is in her late twenties and is highly attractive. She wears the latest fashions.

BRYNN--sister of ANNE, she is in her middle twenties. She is imaginative, dramatic; also an apparent modern, she, like her sister, is concerned with independence. Her clothes are more original. She, too, is attractive.

CHRISTINA--daughter of a friend of ANNE and BRYNN'S mother, she is just eighteen, very naive, and from a small town in the country.

SETTING

The play takes place in the modern apartment of ANNE and BRYNN. Upstage is the kitchen area equipped with microwave and dishwasher, and a kitchen/dining table. Upstage and right is the front door. Midstage is the living room area with sofa and several small tables and chairs. To the right of the living room area is the bathroom; to the left are doors leading off to the bedrooms. Downstage is a small balcony area. The set should be very simple, hinting at the symbolic in its simplicity. The time is the present.

"I have noticed, especially in New York, when a woman is with a man she has such a look of relief on her face."

Irma Kurtz

ABSOLUTE PERVERSITY

ACT ONE

THE SCENE: (The apartment is in excessively wild disarray with papers, books, clothing, and dirty dishes everywhere. Christmas paper and ribbon, along with boxes, also contribute to the mess. A small, ugly, plastic Christmas tree is on a corner table with a beer can on its top. It is decorated with garbage--candy wrapping, Big Mac containers, french fry bags, and rubbers; it is a bitter and angry tree. ANNE and BRYNN are seated in the living room area of this mess. ANNE is wearing clothes of the latest fashion; BRYNN wears a mixture of things: warm up pants, football jersey; she presents an uncouth but independent appearance. Though it looks like Christmas, it is actually the beginning of September.)

ANNE

Do you suppose we ought to clean up?

BRYNN

(Lounging on sofa, she raises her head and looks around.)

No.

(She slumps back in sofa and sighs.)

It took a good party to get it to look this way. You don't want to ruin the effect.

ANNE

But the new girl is coming, remember?

BRYNN

Oh.

(Mock bitterness)

Our first modern art piece and you want to ruin it. Look!

(Points dramatically around the room.)

Andy Warhol, eat your heart out.

ANNE

(smiles)

We could just collect oil-on-velvet art pieces.

BRYNN

(Staring at ANNE in mock hurt)

You have no concept of living art.

(ANNE gets up and starts putting dishes in dishwasher. Short pause)

ANNE
We don't have enough room for all these dishes in here. Do you want to wash?

BRYNN
No! Put them in the oven. That'll hide them.

ANNE
(mildly)
And what are we supposed to do when we want to cook?

BRYNN
Cook? We don't cook. You don't know how.

ANNE
But just supposing...?

BRYNN
Look, what did we eat last night?

ANNE
Burritos.

BRYNN
Exactly. And the night before?

ANNE
Burritos.

BRYNN
Exactly. And we don't use the oven for those.

ANNE
We use the microwave.

BRYNN
Right.
(She gets up and wanders aimlessly around, half-heartedly picking up.)
I hate Christmas.

ANNE
(smiling)
Even when it's in August?

BRYNN
That's the point of the thing. It's like cauterizing an old wound. Absolute perversity. By the way, that magnificent thank-you letter you wrote to Aunt Gladys in January, what did she really send you?

ANNE
Aunt Gladys...
(Laughs)
Oh wait...wait. It's classic.
(Gets up and searches)
It's here somewhere. What did she send you?

BRYNN

(gravely)
I'm consoled only by the thought she likes you best. Here. This is it.
My gift.

(Takes gift from box and hands to ANNE.)

ANNE

What is it?

BRYNN

What? You don't know? And puberty's miles behind you. Shame. Here.
(Takes gift back from ANNE and says gleefully.)
You put your toilet paper on it....

ANNE

Well, yes....

BRYNN

And when you grab a piece of paper....
(Demonstrating to ANNE's laughter)
it twirls around and the little beads knock at each other and release....
(Dramatic pause)
"the wondrous odors of a soft spring morning."

ANNE

(laughing)
Somehow it's...it's not the paper that smells....Wait 'til you see what I
got.

(She pulls out a paper bag and throws it at BRYNN's feet.)
There. Voila.

BRYNN

M'mm. Nice wrapping.
(She prods package with her foot.)
Is it alive?
(She kneels down and peers into the bag.)
My God. Purple.

ANNE

M'mm. Yes.

BRYNN

Purple?

ANNE

School colors.

BRYNN

What do you do with it?

ANNE

You wear it.

BRYNN

I don't.

(She begins to pull it out of the bag.)

Velour?

(ANNE nods; BRYNN says sarcastically)

Nice.

(She pulls it out of the bag and looks at it.)

Bathrobe?

(ANNE nods.)

A velour bathrobe?

(Very politely)

How nice.

(pause)

Well....

(helpfully)

I can see you wearing it.

ANNE

Hallucination.

(Pause; dangerously)

Yes?

BRYNN

With a black negligee.

ANNE

Oh? I don't have one.

BRYNN

Nonsense. Every woman has one. Yes, I can see you now, sweeping down the hall in your charming velour bathrobe, your black lace negligee artfully peeping through, your hair slightly ruffled from an early morning breeze; you gracefully slide to that door....

(She points dramatically to the bathroom.)

to be met by....

ANNE

Yes?

BRYNN

All the wondrous odors of a soft spring morn.

ANNE

(laughing)

I'm afraid it's going to be a long time.

BRYNN

But why?

ANNE

It's a winter bathrobe. In winter we do not open windows, and it's a bit early for spring breezes.

You BRYNN

(She sniffs)
are not romantic enough. When you're young, in love, and have a purple bathrobe, any breeze is a spring breeze.

ANNE
And pneumonia only a slight cold.

BRYNN
Yes, and that too.
(pause)
I suppose we have to pick up?

ANNE
Yes.

BRYNN
I am just not too thrilled with this new girl coming.

ANNE
It will be all right.

BRYNN
She doesn't know our customs.
(pause)
She's small town.

ANNE
It won't be that bad.

BRYNN
Hah. Little do you know. She's going to march brightly right in with matching luggage--what do you bet it's flowered--out of date clothes...
(pause)
I'm not taking the tree down.

ANNE
Look, she's a friend of Mom's.

BRYNN
The daughter of a friend of Mom's. And she won't be here for more than five minutes before she starts crying. And her conversation will consist of "At home!"

(mimics)
"At home we do this, at home we do that!"

ANNE
Have a little compassion.

BRYNN
(unbelieving)
Sure.

(Pause. BRYNN begins to pick up living room area; ANNE moves to kitchen area.)

ANNE

You get to explain to her about Christmas in August.

BRYNN

Gee, thanks.

(Good humor is restored; delivery speeds up.)

Every time I think of real Christmas I get bitter. Remember the last time we had Christmas at Christmas? Mom was here. We lugged that enormous tree in, and we discovered we had to cut the bottom off because it didn't fit the stand. There weren't any tools....

ANNE

(bored)

Dad got all the tools at the divorce.

BRYNN

I know. Why?

ANNE

Mom got the blender and the microwave. They're equally as useful.

BRYNN

Have you ever tried to cut a tree with a blender? Anyway, there we were....

ANNE

(drily)

I know.

BRYNN

I know, I know. There were the three of us, trying to cut the bottom off the tree with this little, groaty, rusty saw with that thin blade and funky handle....

ANNE

Hack saw?

BRYNN

Whatever. I don't know. I hadn't used a saw since Girl Scout Camp. It was so funny. Mom was in such a state. I kept thinking we're not supposed to do this; this is what men are for. So stupid. How come we're not supposed to be able to do things? Or have tools? Or....

ANNE

You're frothing.

BRYNN

I don't care; this idea of different training for men and women....

ANNE

Well, it's the way things are.

(BRYNN snorts; slight pause.)

BRYNN

I guess I ought to take the rubbers off the tree.

ANNE

Goodness, yes. At least.

(Pause. ANNE turns radio on; they resume
lounging.)

BRYNN

(dreamily)

Don't you think Christmas trees are a bit weird? I mean, I was thinking... maybe it's sort of a well...a ritual of spite? I mean, you've got this guy who got crucified on a tree; and we've got this holiday where millions of trees are cut down, killed, sacrificed for this same guy. And all those poor, little ornaments crucified on the tree...

ANNE

Weird.

(The doorbell rings.)

BRYNN

Oh shit!

(She grabs an old shirt and flings it over the tree, partially obscuring it; she then grabs a mound of things and exits to bedroom.)

(Bell rings again. ANNE moves to door and opens it, revealing CHRISTINA with matching, flowered luggage, and crumpled, out-of-date clothes and overdone make-up; she looks dowdy.)

CHRISTINA

(Forced brightness)

Hi! I'm Christina Mc....

ANNE

(interrupting)

Yes. Uh, come in.

(ANNE stares but does not move aside, so CHRISTINA can't enter; finally she collects her wits and moves.)

I'm Anne. Brynn is in her bedroom. Do you need any help with your luggage?

CHRISTINA

(Picking up luggage and looking forlorn, says sadly)

There's more downstairs.

(She looks around.)

Christmas?

ANNE

Yes...Well....Let me show you your room.

(ANNE marches CHRISTINA to her bedroom with luggage. BRYNN reenters and starts picking things up. ANNE reenters.)

ANNE

She's crying.

(They look at each other and start to laugh.)

You were almost right, but you left one thing out of her description.

BRYNN

Oh?

ANNE and BRYNN

Loud make-up!

(They laugh.)

BRYNN

Oh well. Never leave home. What shall we do with the purple wonder?

(She picks up bathrobe.)

ANNE

I'll hang it in the bathroom of the wondrous scents.

(ANNE exits to bathroom; BRYNN moves to CHRISTINA's room and knocks.)

BRYNN

Can I help you with your stuff?

(There is no answer. ANNE reenters, they exchange glances.)

ANNE

Well?

(BRYNN shrugs and moves downstage. CHRISTINA's door opens, she enters.)

CHRISTINA

My luggage is downstairs.

(pause)

BRYNN

(helpfully)

You had something in your eye.

CHRISTINA

Uh...yes.

(pause)

ANNE

(briskly)

Well, I'll go downstairs and help you while Brynn does the dishes.

CHRISTINA

(effusively)

Oh, thank you.

(drily)
Yes, thanks.

BRYNN

(ANNE and CHRISTINA exit. BRYNN turns radio on very loud and starts washing but not drying dishes; she hums and dances to the music. ANNE enters with boxes which she dumps in living room; she exits. CHRISTINA enters with boxes and carries them to her room; she reenters, crosses to BRYNN, says something which can't be heard, taps BRYNN on back. BRYNN turns, turns off music.)

(disapprovingly)
At home we never have the music on that loud.

BRYNN

Oh.
(She turns back to dishes.)

CHRISTINA

At home we dry immediately.

BRYNN

(sighs)
That's nice.

CHRISTINA

At home....

BRYNN

(interrupting)
The bathroom's there.
(She points.)

CHRISTINA

(startled)
Oh. Thank you.
(She crosses to bathroom and looks in.)
At home the bathroom is pink...and the toilet paper hangs in towards the wall.
(She darts in to adjust paper; reenters.)

BRYNN

Happy?

CHRISTINA

Oh, yes.

BRYNN

Good.
(She turns back to dishes.)

CHRISTINA

(Sitting on her boxes)

Gee, it's great to be out on my own. My own apartment! 18. Independence!
Gosh, this is a great building, and the people are so helpful. There was
this nice man in the elevator.

BRYNN

I suppose you talked to him?

CHRISTINA

Yes.

BRYNN

(Sighing, she turns around.)

Did you tell him who you were?

CHRISTINA

Oh, yes. You can't talk to people without knowing their name.

BRYNN

And you told him where you live?

CHRISTINA

Oh, yes.

BRYNN

Didn't your mother tell you not to talk to strangers?

CHRISTINA

Oh, yes, but he's too nice to be a stranger.

BRYNN

But it could be dangerous....

CHRISTINA

(interrupting)

And I told him about moving and who you all were.

BRYNN

You told him our names? But that's not safe.

CHRISTINA

And he knows you, too.

BRYNN

(disbelievingly)

Uh uh.

CHRISTINA

He said he met you in Chicago. And he gave me his telephone number to give
to you.

(She exhibits a piece of paper which she places by the phone.)

BRYNN

(drily)
Anything else? Did you give him our telephone number too?

CHRISTINA

Sure. He's moving in, anyway, across from us.

BRYNN

(sighs)
Where's Anne?

CHRISTINA

Oh, she stopped to get a Coke and a candybar.

(disapprovingly)
At home we're never allowed snacks.

(She gets off boxes and carries them into her room, then reenters.)
I'm going to unpack now.

(She looks around.)
This is a nice apartment. But at home we take the tree down January first.

(CHRISTINA exits to bedroom. ANNE reenters.)

ANNE

(To BRYNN)
Well?

BRYNN

(gravely)
I've been listening to "At home" reports.

ANNE

Chicago?

BRYNN

Well, yes. It's this little town in Illinois.

ANNE

I don't remember your going to Chicago.

BRYNN

Once. Train layover. On my way to that dig in Smithton.

ANNE

Oh. Right. Is he nice? What's he like?

BRYNN

(drily)
Experienced. Typical guy.

ANNE

He's cute.

(BRYNN shrugs. Pause)

BRYNN

By the way, at home we hang our toilet paper in towards the wall.

ANNE

(blankly)

Oh?

(She realizes, then laughs.)

BRYNN

And the tree comes down the first of January. And we don't have snacks or loud music, and we do dry the dishes immediately after washing.

(Lights, which have been gradually fading, go out.)

Scene ii: (It is early morning. CHRISTINA, in ruffled night dress, is sitting in living room looking bored and impatient and loudly drumming her feet. ANNE and BRYNN sleepily stumble from their bedrooms, yawning.)

My God. What time is it?
BRYNN

(disapprovingly)
It's late.
CHRISTINA

Ten? Two?
BRYNN

It's eight.
CHRISTINA

(Sotto voce)
Eight? Late? God.
(She moves to microwave and begins making oatmeal.)
BRYNN

(hurriedly)
My gosh, it is late. I don't know why we overslept.
ANNE

(Muttering from kitchen)
Because we went to bed at three.
BRYNN

Three?
CHRISTINA

(To CHRISTINA)
Brynn's just joking, dear.
ANNE

Oh. At home we go to bed at ten.
CHRISTINA
(BRYNN snorts.)

Oh.
Breakfast?
(Brightly to CHRISTINA)
ANNE

And we get up at six.
CHRISTINA

ANNE

(To CHRISTINA, a bit desperately)
I don't personally eat, but if you'd like....
(She waves hand in direction of kitchen.)

CHRISTINA

My mother says you should always eat a well-balanced breakfast.

BRYNN

(Calling from kitchen)
There's eggs in the 'fridge. You want anything this morning, Anne?

(ANNE and CHRISTINA move to kitchen.)

ANNE

I don't personally eat breakfast....

BRYNN

Then who personally ate my toast yesterday morning?
(She gets oatmeal from microwave, places it on table where
CHRISTINA forlornly sits.)

ANNE

Well...maybe.

(BRYNN goes to cupboard, takes out decanter,
and pours red wine on her oatmeal. ANNE
watches amusedly.)

CHRISTINA

(Bewildered, whispers)
What are you doing?

BRYNN

(Waving her hands over the oatmeal)
It's hot.

CHRISTINA

But what's....

BRYNN

(interrupting)
Oh, that?
(Indicating decanter)
Chianti. It's best with port, but we're out of that.
(She begins to eat.)

CHRISTINA

Oh.
(Short pause)
At home we use milk.

BRYNN

Would you like to try some?

BRYNN

(drily)
How utterly horrible.

ANNE

(Ignoring BRYNN)
And, well, guys don't like fat women.

CHRISTINA

Oh. Well. Maybe just some toast.
(CHRISTINA rises and starts to make toast.)

ANNE

Of course, that's not really important--the guys--but I imagine your mother told you to look for some nice boy.

CHRISTINA

(Blushes, whispers)
Yes.

BRYNN

Sick. It makes me sick.

ANNE

What parents do....

BRYNN

"Pushing their kids on the marriage market!"

ANNE

(To CHRISTINA)
What Brynn means, is that....

BRYNN

(interrupting)
And what we do in the name of guys! Changing ourselves--dieting, exercising, wearing the "right" clothes. Why do you have to become other than what you are for someone else?

ANNE

What Brynn means....

BRYNN

(interrupting)
It's all a part of independence. Look, you said last night you were finally independent, right?

CHRISTINA

(dazedly)
Right.

BRYNN

Well, don't change. Not for anybody else, but for yourself. You are not an object.

Right. ANNE

Oh. CHRISTINA

(To CHRISTINA)
Your toast is burning. BRYNN

Oh. Thanks. CHRISTINA
(She rescues her toast and sits down.)

(To CHRISTINA)
Did you finish your room? ANNE

Almost. There are just a few things left to do; I'll get done today, probably. CHRISTINA
(hesitantly)
I...I thought maybe I'd look for a job this morning.

(Reaching for a piece of CHRISTINA's toast)
Good for you! That'll be nice. Do you have any place in mind? ANNE

(On the verge of tears)
N...no. CHRISTINA

(ANNE and BRYNN exchange glances.)

Well, look, just relax. It will be O.K. I know it's a little scary, but that will pass. ANNE

Try not to be scared. BRYNN

That will pass. Have you checked the want-ads? ANNE

N...no. CHRISTINA

Brynn will get them. ANNE

Gee thanks. BRYNN
(She strolls to living room for paper, returns and hands them to ANNE.)

ANNE

(Handing paper to CHRISTINA)

There! Just read that section. That will tell you what jobs there are; Brynn and I can give you references if you need them. It won't be that bad. Now go get dressed.

(CHRISTINA trundles off obediently.)

BRYNN

It's like feeding lambs to lions.

ANNE

Oh, don't be so melodramatic. We were just that scared once, too.

BRYNN

(unbelievingly)

Oh, sure.

(sighing)

I suppose what she'll put on will be hopeless, too.

ANNE

(shudders)

That make-up last night! Well, we'll get her in shape.

BRYNN

(Imitating CHRISTINA)

Gosh, gee. That'll be fun. Said Ma and Pa Kettle down on the farm.

ANNE

(laughs)

Don't tease her too much.

BRYNN

I just hope she doesn't get homesick. I can see her mewling around like a sick pup. Ugh.

ANNE

Of course you were never homesick.

BRYNN

Golly, gee, by gosh golly, no.

(pause)

Her mother must be weird.

ANNE

(shrugs)

That's the way things are. It's the dream of all mothers to have wedded daughters.

BRYNN

But it's archaic! It's not right! It's not fair.

ANNE

Why worry about it? She's so shy she'll probably never find a "nice" boy.

BRYNN

It's important to find the truth. With the...the...outmoded ideas of her mother, she'll probably just find misery.

ANNE

Maybe not.

BRYNN

Or masochism or martyrdom or motherhood.

ANNE

There's nothing wrong with children.

BRYNN

To marry just for children? I feel sorry for guys if they're only here on this earth as studs. Says a lot for their existence.

(ANNE laughs and turns to kitchen, BRYNN toward the tree; they begin cleaning up. CHRISTINA emerges in a hopelessly out-dated outfit. ANNE and BRYNN stare.)

CHRISTINA

(With hope)

Well?

(Longish pause)

BRYNN

Well...gosh...Most people don't...well....

ANNE

Yes. Well....

BRYNN

(To CHRISTINA)

Look, you're nervous, right?

CHRISTINA

Y...yes.

BRYNN

Well, get comfortable.

CHRISTINA

Pardon?

ANNE

Put on a pair of slacks, dear, or jeans.

CHRISTINA

Jeans? For a job?

BRYNN

It's how everyone dresses here.

CHRISTINA

Oh.

(pause)

But all I have are work shirts.

ANNE

I'm sure I can find you something to wear, and maybe we can do something about your make-up, too.

BRYNN

Yes. Blush goes on the cheekbones and not in the hollows and not extending to your nostrils. It's not war paint.

CHRISTINA

Oh.

ANNE

(Leading CHRISTINA to her room)

There's this nice shirt of Brynn's.

(ANNE and CHRISTINA exit to room; BRYNN goes back to cleaning; after brief moment ANNE re-emerges.)

(Calling over her shoulder to CHRISTINA)

Just put those things on and then come on out.

(To BRYNN)

I've got her trying that cute plaid blouse of yours.

(She resumes cleaning; pause.)

BRYNN

Well, doing anything different this semester?

ANNE

(drily)

I'm finishing my internship.

BRYNN

(humorously)

Tsk, tsk. Selling out.

ANNE

Yes. Rather. I'm going for the real world. Real life.

BRYNN

(drily)

Yes, somehow I've missed the reality here.

ANNE

(laughs)

Quite.

(pause)

Let's do her out here, the lights are better. I'll go get the make-up and stuff. Will you do her hair?

Sure.

BRYNN

(ANNE exits to bathroom; CHRISTINA enters.)

BRYNN
(Looking at CHRISTINA)
Well, that's nice.

CHRISTINA
(tremulously)
Do you think so?

BRYNN
Well, you feel less nervous, right?

CHRISTINA
(With relief)
Yes, that's true. Hose always scares me. And high heels! I always kick myself when I walk in them and that hurts.

BRYNN
(laughs)
I know, I do the same thing.

(ANNE reenters with a tray of make-up.)

ANNE
(To CHRISTINA)
I thought I would do your face; Brynn will do your hair.

CHRISTINA
Gee, thanks.

ANNE
I've got just the right shade of base. The color you had on last night was too pinky for you.

CHRISTINA
Oh.

BRYNN
Permed your hair?

CHRISTINA
(happily)
Oh, yes.

BRYNN
(Exchanging glances with ANNE)
It'll grow out.

ANNE

(briskly)

Now put this on....

(Indicates base; CHRISTINA complies as ANNE and BRYNN watch intently)

I think just a touch of blush and maybe eye-liner. You don't want full make-up; you're too young. Now close your eyes.

(ANNE applies liner while BRYNN brushes CHRISTINA's hair.)

CHRISTINA

Gosh, this is nice. You're all so nice to me. I wish my sisters were like this. Do you ever fight?

BRYNN

(laughs)

Oh, Anne and I are special. We really get along.

ANNE

(sophisticately)

We never fight.

BRYNN

(Mock seriousness)

Oh, never.

ANNE

(To BRYNN)

Be serious.

(importantly)

We're honest. I think that's the important part.

BRYNN

(seriously)

We've got the same views, too.

CHRISTINA

Gosh, that's nice. I never really talked to my sisters.

(pause)

Can I open my eyes now?

ANNE

Sure.

(CHRISTINA crosses to mirror.)

CHRISTINA

(crestfallen)

Oh. A pony tail.

BRYNN

Very French.

ANNE
They're very in, particularly with boys.

CHRISTINA
Oh.

ANNE
Just like the make-up, too. It's very European. You really fit in.

CHRISTINA
Oh? Really?
(smiles)
Gee, thanks. I feel much more comfortable now.

BRYNN
Good.

ANNE
I'm sure you'll do fine at your interviews.

CHRISTINA
(sighing)
I just hope I get a job.

ANNE
(firmly)
You will. Now go get your purse.

CHRISTINA
Oh, yes.
(She trots off to room; returns.)

ANNE
(To CHRISTINA)
And be civil. Say "Good morning."

CHRISTINA
Oh, yes.
(She moves to front door, pauses and turns.)
Thank you.

ANNE
Have a good day.

CHRISTINA
Bye-bye.

(CHRISTINA exits; ANNE and BRYNN watch door close)

BRYNN
Baa-baa.

ANNE
Oh?

BRYNN
You're awfully motherly.

ANNE
Well, really.

BRYNN
The earth shall inherit the meek.

ANNE
I don't think that's very kind.
(pause)
We'll have to get her a better purse.

BRYNN
And some shoes.

ANNE
True.

BRYNN
(dreamily)
Maybe we can burn her clothes.

ANNE
(laughing)
Brynn!

BRYNN
It's just a thought.

ANNE
What are her chances for a job, though?

BRYNN
No problem. Fast food, ugh, will hire anyone, anytime. Want some coffee?
(She goes to kitchen, pours two cups and returns.)
Well, how are your last few months at "the store" going?

ANNE
The store's looking at new lines.

BRYNN
Isk! I hope you can live through it.

ANNE
You should see the stuff. Very chic. Live through it? We couldn't even wear it.

BRYNN
Speak for yourself.

ANNE
Only models have such long necks, long arms, long legs, and long waistlines.

BRYNN

Do you think they're human? Models. Maybe there's a factory that grows them somewhere.

(Pause, curiously)

Does it make you happy?

ANNE

Not having long arms and a long neck?

BRYNN

No. Your work.

ANNE

I don't know. I guess. I mean I can make myself happy doing it. It's just....

BRYNN

That you could make yourself happy doing anything?

ANNE

Perhaps. But I can make myself happy.

BRYNN

But there are so many things to do!

ANNE

(shrugs)

What comes, comes. Let's go get rid of that tree or at least denude it.

BRYNN

Oh, all right.

(ANNE and BRYNN move to tree and slowly start to de-ornament it.)

(desperately)

But how do you know what to do?

ANNE

What's the matter? Work that bad? I just liked fashion design.

BRYNN

Yes, but you wanted to be a dancer and an artist and an actress and a librarian.

ANNE

Work is that bad?

BRYNN

No...it's just...I wish I lived a hundred years ago. If you were female, you either married or were "prop to family."

ANNE

Yes, no careers.

BRYNN

You're made to feel guilty anymore if you don't have or want a career.

ANNE

And as if you're incomplete.

BRYNN

Sometimes I wish I were one of those fat ladies you see at Wal-Mart. You know, the ones with curlers in their hair, penchants for Harlequin romances and chocolate covered caramels. You know exactly what to do with a life like that.

ANNE

(laughing)

It's easier. Everything is programmed from that point.

BRYNN

(dreamily)

Maybe I hate change. I hate revolutions. When they're on, you know where you're going; when they're over....directionless. If I were a fat lady... I could just be fat.

ANNE

Start eating.

BRYNN

Good ole ERA. Left a void...a room with too many doors....

ANNE

Of course some people could say maybe you're too frustrated....

BRYNN

But that's such an easy excuse! "Frustrated women who haven't found their MAN." I hate to think I need a male for the purpose of existence.

ANNE

Well, perhaps. Besides, fat isn't your color.

(Short pause)

How many times have we had this conversation? It always occurs a few days after a party--remorse sets in and beer goes out.

BRYNN

It's not a conversation; it's a chorus.

ANNE

My, we're melodramatic.

BRYNN

I guess I envy our little farm girl. She's just supposed to go to the city and find a nice boy as Mama says.

ANNE

(drily)

In this city that could be difficult.

(ANNE and BRYNN laugh.)

True.
BRYNN

ANNE
When do you think we'll see our little lamb again?

BRYNN
If she turned right at the corner, soon.

ANNE
Oh?

BRYNN
Burger King is hiring.
(The phone rings; BRYNN answers it.)
5489. Yes, this is she. Yes? Yes, I remember. Chicago.
(sarcastically)
Well, isn't that nice.
(angrily)
No. I'm not interested. Look, I'm busy tonight. What? I'm washing my hair!
(She slams down the phone.)

ANNE
What was that?

BRYNN
What, I don't know. The train lay-over guy.

ANNE
Chicago?
(BRYNN nods.)
Are you avoiding him or something? Do you have something against him?

BRYNN
Him, no. His approach, yes. I don't want to discuss it.

ANNE
Well...

BRYNN
No. Later. I'm too mad.

ANNE
Well, O.K.
(pause)
Do you want to finish the tree?

BRYNN
No, I'm going to my room. Where I'm going to be busy!
(Begins to relax; grins)
After all, I have to wash my hair!
(She exits to bedroom.)

(lights)

Scene iii: (ANNE and BRYNN are in living room discussing when the front door opens; CHRISTINA appears on threshold in a Burger King outfit.)

CHRISTINA

(excitedly)

Look. I got it! On my first interview! A job. Just like you said. It's wonderful. I get minimum wage. And this neat uniform!

BRYNN

My God! What is it? Polyester?

ANNE

(Sotto voce)

Of course.

BRYNN

(Sotto voce)

My favorite, next to velour, of course.

CHRISTINA

I went in and said "Good morning" just like you said. It's so wonderful. I start tomorrow.

(She notices rubber on floor by tree.)

What's that?

(ANNE looks agonized; brief pause.)

BRYNN

(Shrugging, to ANNE)

It's your lamb.

ANNE

(To CHRISTINA)

Well, dear, it's a...a...an....

BRYNN

(smoothly)

It's an insulator for test tubes. Anne's heavily into Chemistry.

CHRISTINA

Oh? I don't like Chemistry. I never did very well in it at school.

(Gets rapturous)

But it's so great! A job! I just walked in and five minutes later I was hired.

ANNE

That's wonderful.

BRYNN

You see, they get awfully hot and must be contained.

(ANNE and CHRISTINA look at her.)

The test tubes.

Oh.
 (To ANNE)
 And it's right around the corner.

ANNE
 That's fine.

CHRISTINA
 Mom will be so happy.

BRYNN
 (flippantly)
 I'm sure.

CHRISTINA
 Oh, and I met this really nice guy in the elevator.

BRYNN
 Another one? My God, the city's full of them.

CHRISTINA
 (Innocently happy)
 Oh, yes.

BRYNN
 Did you tell him who you were?

CHRISTINA
 Oh, no. I remembered. I just told him where I was going.

BRYNN
 (sarcastically)
 Oh, good.

CHRISTINA
 And he knew you, too. And he gave me a message for you all.

BRYNN
 (drily)
 Oh, really?

CHRISTINA
 (enthusiastically)
 Yes. There's a party, and I can come, too!

BRYNN
 (dangerously)
 What?

CHRISTINA
 (enthusiastically)
 Oh, yes. It's tonight. At 6:00. A barbeque by the pool.

BRYNN
 (amusedly)
 Are you going?

CHRISTINA
 Oh, yes. He seemed so nice.

BRYNN
 (To ANNE)
 You explain it.

ANNE
 Uh...who is he? This man.

CHRISTINA
 Oh. Uh...Phil...something...Inkish? He lives below you.

ANNE
 (relieved)
 Oh, Phil!

BRYNN
 (To ANNE)
 He's still dangerous.

CHRISTINA
 (wistfully)
 I'd like to go...but only if you go, too. I'd be too scared, alone. I don't know anyone.

BRYNN
 (drily)
 You know the guy on the elevator.

CHRISTINA
 He, Phil, said you all would know everyone there. A Tom and a Cindy and an Adrian. There's going to be a barbeque at the pool! And Phil said you could bring the wine.

BRYNN
 He would.

ANNE
 Well, I guess we could go. It would be rather fun.

BRYNN
 (To ANNE, laughingly)
 Traitor! You can get the wine.

CHRISTINA
 He was on his way to invite you but said I could do it as he had a lot of people to invite.

BRYNN
 Well, I'm going to get a suit then. You come, too, Chris.

CHRISTINA

A suit?

BRYNN

So we can sunbathe. If we're going to get a tan, you need to change.
(BRYNN exits to her bedroom.)

ANNE

(To CHRISTINA)

A swimsuit. You can lay out on the balcony.

CHRISTINA

Oh.

ANNE

Aren't you glad you didn't eat that breakfast?

(As CHRISTINA exits)

(Yelling to bedrooms)

I'm going to Adrian's. He's got wine. O.K.?

(ANNE exits.)

(BRYNN reenters in swimsuit, carrying a towel; she moves to balcony and looks out; CHRISTINA enters in an out-dated suit and joins BRYNN.)

CHRISTINA

Oh, this is fun! Who's Adrian?

BRYNN

Lives next door.

(Pause; looking out)

There's an eight...no...wait...an eight and a half.

(Short pause)

Ulp! Tsk. Wears his jeans too tight...four.

(Short pause)

That's unrateable! Yeck.

(Short pause)

M'mmm. That's not too bad.

CHRISTINA

But that's a girl.

BRYNN

Is it?

(She looks again.)

You're right. Still, it's not too bad.

CHRISTINA

Oh.

(Short pause)

Well...

(wildly)

There's a nine.

BRYNN

That? Noooo. See, you want the tush to have a better curve. Like this.
(She demonstrates with her hands.)

CHRISTINA

Oh.

(Short pause as she looks over the balcony.)

Five?

BRYNN

M'mmm. Yeah. A five would about do it.

(BRYNN unfolds towel and lies down;
CHRISTINA does the same.)

CHRISTINA

(sighs)

Oh, it is so nice to be away from home. No one to bother us. To tell us
what to do. No parents.

BRYNN

Is this your first time away from home?

CHRISTINA

Yes. But I've waited for it for a long time. Independence! Freedom. To
be able to do what I want, when I want, and the way I want to do it. I
don't think my parents understand.

BRYNN

(drily)

They never do.

CHRISTINA

(darkly)

Yes, at home....

BRYNN

(Hastily interrupting)

Did you finish unpacking?

CHRISTINA

Yes! And I got the room just the way I want it. Would you like to see it?
Please?

(CHRISTINA jumps eagerly to her feet and
rushes to her room; BRYNN gets up and
crosses room as ANNE enters)

ANNE

Hey, what's going on?

BRYNN

(To ANNE, with emphasis)

We are talking about independence.

(She looks into CHRISTINA's room)

Yes, it's very nice.

CHRISTINA

(From room)

I've always had the bedspread and curtains...Aunt Lila gave them to me years ago. The paint isn't quite that shade at home, but after I rearranged the furniture, it looks exactly like my room at home.

BRYNN

(To ANNE)

It's exactly like her room at home.

ANNE

(knowingly)

Oh, independence.

(CHRISTINA reenters.)

CHRISTINA

Uncle Frank gave me the study lamp when I was twelve. Gosh, it's nice to have your own apartment.

(Sees ANNE)

Oh hi, Anne.

ANNE

Adrian was on the phone. He'll call. I think I'll get my suit and join you.

(ANNE exits to bedroom; BRYNN and CHRISTINA move to balcony.)

CHRISTINA

(timidly)

There's just one thing....

BRYNN

Oh?

CHRISTINA

I've been wondering....

(rushes)

How are we going to get a suntan by tonight?

BRYNN

Oh, I get mine out of a bottle.

CHRISTINA

Really?

BRYNN

There's this stuff that darkens your skin. You don't want to stay out in the sun too much anyway; it's bad for your complexion.

(pause)

Besides, it's in to be pale.

CHRISTINA

Oh.

BRYNN
Of course, you can't go swimming in it. It washes off.

CHRISTINA
Oh.

BRYNN
But I don't like water anyway.

(The phone rings; BRYNN jumps up to answer it; ANNE reenters and comes to balcony.)

ANNE
(To CHRISTINA)
Well, how's it going?

CHRISTINA
Just fine.

ANNE
Homesick?

CHRISTINA
(Forced brightness)
Never.

ANNE
Everything is all right?

CHRISTINA
Oh yes...well, it's a bit strange.
(timidly)
How come you celebrate Christmas in September?

ANNE
(laughs)
Well, we don't like institutions or proscribed patterns. Brynn thought this would be a good way to express it. The trouble with institutions or customs is that they're too limiting. It's like specialization. It's all a dead end. You know.

CHRISTINA
(Not really understanding)
Oh, sure.

(An unhappy BRYNN enters on balcony.)

ANNE
(To BRYNN)
Well?

BRYNN
(unhappily)
I thought it was Adrian.

Chicago?
ANNE

BRYNN
Yes, he's coming to the barbeque.
(bitterly)
Everything's just hunky-dory.

(pause)

CHRISTINA
Gosh, it must be great to live like this. To be what you want. To be independent, mature. Like you all are. I really envy you. Do you go to a lot of parties?

ANNE
Well....

BRYNN
(amusedly)
Sure....

CHRISTINA
And have a lot of friends? Lots of...boyfriends?

ANNE
Well....

BRYNN
Sure, coming out of our ears, even unwanted ones.

CHRISTINA
I mean women, well, like you--mature, independent....
(She sighs.)

BRYNN
Independent, mature women all have boyfriends?

CHRISTINA
Oh, sure.
(She thinks.)
Not boyfriends. Companions. Men.
(hungrily)
Affairs. I can't wait to meet your men.

BRYNN
Oh. Well....

(The phone rings; CHRISTINA jumps up.)

CHRISTINA
I'll get it.
(She exits to living room.)

BRYNN

Saved by the bell.
 (To ANNE)
 Your lamb has horns.
 (Short pause)

ANNE

By the way, Chicago?

BRYNN

Remember the train lay-over? I told you when I came home.

ANNE

Train lay-over.
 (She thinks.)
 You mean that's the guy? Wow, he's cute. How could you leave him and not stay in touch?

BRYNN

Easily.
 (Brief pause; she shrugs.)
 You know. It was just a physical thing. The proverbial one-night stand. We have them all the time. Fun on the run. You know.

ANNE

Nice?

BRYNN

M'mmm. Yes.

ANNE

Well, do you think he plans to...?

BRYNN

(drily)
 He's certainly expecting it.
 (Brief pause)
 But I'm not meat. It's like he thinks he's got squatters' rights to my body. Besides, I wanted to keep him one night, not take him to raise.

(CHRISTINA reenters.)

CHRISTINA

It's Adrian. He was asking about the party and me. He seems awfully nice. He wants to know exactly what kind of wine, Anne.

ANNE

I'll talk to him.
 (She jumps eagerly up and runs into living room.)

CHRISTINA

(Looking out over balcony)
 Wow, there's a ten.

BRYNN
 (without looking)
 Fine.

CHRISTINA
 Really?
 (She stares intently over the balcony; ANNE reenters.)

ANNE
 (laughing)
 He wanted to know if, for Phil's sake, he should put the five dollar wine
 in fifteen dollar wine bottles.

BRYNN
 (laughing)
 It's the only way Phil will drink it.

CHRISTINA
 (puzzled)
 I like Phil.

ANNE
 Sure, honey. But be careful. Phil likes to collect...chicks.

BRYNN
 Notches.

CHRISTINA
 Oh.
 (Blushes; understanding finally)
 Oh!

BRYNN
 He's pretentious.

ANNE
 (reflectively)
 I can't think of anything good about him.

BRYNN
 (lazily)
 Well, I can think of one thing.

ANNE
 Really?

BRYNN
 He's so easy to seduce.

ANNE
 Brynn!

BRYNN
 Well, it might come in handy.
 (pause)

CHRISTINA

Gosh, this is great. At home....

ANNE and BRYNN

(Hastily interrupting)

What have you got to wear to the party?

(lights)

BRYNN
Oh, God. How disgusting.

(ANNE enters, supporting CHRISTINA.)

CHRISTINA
Gosh, that was fun. I met so many nice people.

ANNE
(To CHRISTINA)
I did like you in that blouse of mine.

CHRISTINA
Gosh, it was fun.
(Pause; guiltily)
I have to go to the bathroom.
(She giggles and dashes off to the bathroom.)

BRYNN
(Turning to ANNE)
And where were you half the night? I had my hands full keeping the lamb there away from wolves and alcohol.

ANNE
Well...I was mingling.

BRYNN
Mingling my...foot! Is there something you want to confess?

ANNE
Well, hey, it kept Chicago out of your way.

BRYNN
Trust Phil to invite him. He probably invited the whole building.

(CHRISTINA reenters.)

CHRISTINA
Why did you say it was disgusting? I liked it.

BRYNN
It's the way people act. Right, Anne?

ANNE
You know, Christina, like Cindy.

BRYNN
She kept bragging about the clothes and haircut of her boyfriend, the "look" she'd given him. How she had changed him.

ANNE
Dragging him around like a doll.

BRYNN

He was a possession! He wasn't himself; he was Cindy's something.

CHRISTINA

(slowly)

Well...maybe....

BRYNN

You shouldn't have to be that way in a relationship!

ANNE

It should be honest. You should be yourself.

BRYNN

Without changing or being expected to change. You can't let yourself be made over; you're not you then.

CHRISTINA

Oh. I see.

BRYNN

And if it's not "you" then, how can "you" be loving the guy anyway?

ANNE

(shrugging)

It's all illusion.

BRYNN

That's the most disgusting trademark of our society, the ability to maintain illusion.

(importantly)

We're afraid to find the truth.

ANNE

(To CHRISTINA)

Now she will tell you about drinking. Getting drunk is....

BRYNN

Gee, thanks Anne. Getting drunk is the palest excuse, the supreme way of avoidance.

CHRISTINA

(bewildered)

Oh?

ANNE

When you're drunk, you tell people all sorts of things you never would tell them sober.

BRYNN

(lecturing)

But it shouldn't be that way. You should be able to tell anything to anybody, freely, openly, honestly.

ANNE
Without excuses...like alcohol.

BRYNN
Drinking is just another form of dishonesty.

ANNE
Well, that's generally our philosophy.

BRYNN
Illusion turns people into beasts.

ANNE
Competing beasts.

(There is a brief; CHRISTINA starts to cry.)

What's the matter?

CHRISTINA
I just feel so.... You and Anne have each other.

BRYNN
But you've got sisters.

CHRISTINA
But they're not here!

BRYNN
Well, no.

ANNE
(To CHRISTINA)
I think you've had a long, fatiguing day.

BRYNN
And maybe too much beer.

CHRISTINA
It's just...oh, you're all so old!

BRYNN
Gee, thanks.

CHRISTINA
(despairingly)
I don't mean that. You're adults. You know what you want. You know how to live! You know how to handle everything.

BRYNN
What's wrong? Someone give you trouble at the party?

CHRISTINA

Oh, them.

(She sniffs.)

All the people--well, the guys were just like the ones back home. They all want you to sleep with them.

BRYNN

You don't miss much.

CHRISTINA

I'm not that stupid.

(flushes)

Well, maybe I am. I'm shy and kind of nervous around you.

BRYNN

I know how you feel.

CHRISTINA

But boys--! It's just...I feel like a girl and not like a woman!

ANNE

But, honey....

CHRISTINA

I'm eighteen for Pete's sake! But...sex...it seems so gross...But our parents did it, but they were in love....

(Becoming more incoherent)

...but sex...how could they? It's so confusing! How do you...I mean...sex? and love?

(She is in a full spate of tears now.)

ANNE

What on earth?

BRYNN

You mean, how do you reconcile sex and love?

CHRISTINA

(eagerly)

Yes!

ANNE

You don't. Sex is physical.

CHRISTINA

But sex!

(She shudders.)

BRYNN

(laughs)

Afraid of it?

CHRISTINA

Well, yes.

BRYNN

But you want to get married?

CHRISTINA

Yes.

BRYNN

Well, can you imagine being a virgin when you marry? So you have sex the first time and you don't like it--well, you're stuck with the guy and sex for life or at least a suitable period before divorce. That is, assuming women are supposed to like sex.

CHRISTINA

I guess...it would be kind of scary.

BRYNN

That's what I thought. I think it--virginity--is simply a bondage cult. In fact, our entire attitude towards sex is disgusting. All those myths! And we don't even communicate with each other. This girl I know, sweet and good Catholic with her good Catholic new husband, well, they were both so frightened on their honeymoon night when they saw blood. They didn't know what to do. They finally resolved she'd ask her mother in the morning, but they were so worried! I'm sure the pope would say trust God, but why? Mary had a virgin birth! I mean, if God couldn't even--!

CHRISTINA

There's blood?

ANNE

Only a little.

BRYNN

Sometimes.

CHRISTINA

I think I'm going to be ill.

ANNE

Nonsense. Sex is only a natural function.

BRYNN

You might as well try it first and see if you like it, before it's too late.

ANNE

It's a right. A basic right of a woman. She has the right to know what it is. When I was eighteen, no longer my parents' responsibility, I felt I ought to know. So my then-boyfriend and I went to this motel.

(She shrugs.)

But anyway, I waited until I was my own responsibility, so I could say it was my own business.

BRYNN

I guess a certain amount of curiosity forces you into it anyway. You plain want to know! I was twenty-four and I figured well, I ought to find out what it's like before I make celibacy a permanent practice without knowing what I

was giving up. I was haunted by this picture of two virgins on their wedding night, so I decided I needed to find someone who was experienced. I didn't want anything to go wrong and I kind of wasn't sure what...well, you know.

ANNE

(To CHRISTINA)

She always slept through biology class.

BRYNN

(flushing)

Well, I investigated the matter thoroughly. I looked at books. I got protection, the pill. And then I waited. At times I thought of going to find a male prostitute; I wanted to make sure I got a competent, wise, safe, knowing source. Anyway, eventually I met this older, divorced man and... you know.

CHRISTINA

Oh.

ANNE

You know those books...romances, harlequins, etc.?

CHRISTINA

(Eagerly, enthusiastically)

Oh, yes.

BRYNN

Well....

ANNE

It doesn't exactly happen like that.

BRYNN

(drily)

Fire and ice have little to do with it, unless you're in a room with thermostat problems.

ANNE

Well, for the first couple of times at least. Then it's fun. But it's like exercise, and it doesn't have to be anything more.

BRYNN

Don't worry about it. There's nothing wrong with being a virgin.

ANNE

It needs to be your decision, dear.

CHRISTINA

Oh.

ANNE

Well, I'm going.

(BRYNN and CHRISTINA look at her.)

Back to the party. I....

(She looks as if there is something she wants to tell BRYNN but changes her mind and says flippantly)

I want to get drunk.

(She exits to BRYNN's astonishment.)

CHRISTINA

Oh, good! Can I go back, too?

BRYNN

Don't you have to go to work tomorrow?

CHRISTINA

(disconsolately)

Yes.

(Short pause)

I guess I'm kind of nervous about that, too.

BRYNN

Well, don't be.

CHRISTINA

I've always been kind of shy.

BRYNN

But you talk to every stranger you meet.

CHRISTINA

Oh, but I'm not afraid of people. Just about things I'm supposed to know about or do. I get scared.

BRYNN

Well, talk yourself out of it. Tell yourself not to be nervous.

CHRISTINA

(unsure)

Yeah.

BRYNN

Look, tomorrow has to end, right?

CHRISTINA

Right.

BRYNN

So no matter what happens, how horrible, how awkward you feel, the situation won't continue. It has to end.

CHRISTINA

That's true.

BRYNN

What I do is to tell myself that twenty years from now it won't matter; I won't feel the same way; I probably won't even remember.

CHRISTINA

(longingly)
I wish I had your poise.

BRYNN

(grinning)
The mature, independent woman?

CHRISTINA

Yes. Does your method work?

BRYNN

Well, in a basketball game I once scored a basket for the other team. Ten or so years ago. I think I feel better about it.

(CHRISTINA has moved to balcony and looks out.)

CHRISTINA

It's a beautiful night. So clear. Look, there's Anne with her boyfriend.

BRYNN

You must be mistaken.

CHRISTINA

Oh, no. It looks like Anne. They all say, back at home, that I have good eyesight.

(She giggles. BRYNN crosses over and joins her.)

They must really love each other. Look at the way they walk; she has her arm around his hip.

(She sighs.)

It's so romantic.

BRYNN

Oh, I see. No, that's not Anne.

(lying)

That's this other girl who lives around the corner. She looks a lot like Anne. People are always confusing them.

CHRISTINA

Oh.

(She crosses back to living room; BRYNN follows.)

It must be wonderful to be in love. I can't wait to meet your boyfriends, well, men. I'm sure you and Anne....

BRYNN

(Interrupting; slightly bitter)

Being mature, independent women?

CHRISTINA

Oh, yes. Gosh, this was a fun party. I wonder....

BRYNN

(Again interrupting; stiffly)
 Hadn't you better be going to bed? You have to work tomorrow.

CHRISTINA

Gee, that's right.
 (dreamily)
 Maybe I'll meet some nice boy at work.

BRYNN

That's possible. Go to bed. You'll know in the morning.

CHRISTINA

(giggling)
 I had such a good time. I sure am talking a lot tonight.

BRYNN

(tiredly)
 Go to bed.

CHRISTINA

(Slightly puzzled)
 Well, sure. Goodnight.
 (She crosses to her bedroom.)
 I hope you sleep well....

BRYNN

(expressionlessly)
 Goodnight.
 (CHRISTINA exits. BRYNN waits a moment, then crosses to balcony and looks over.)
 Anne. It is Anne. Anne and Adrian. I wonder what she's doing? What is she up to?

CHRISTINA

(Calling nervously from her room)
 Brynn?

BRYNN

(shortly)
 What?

CHRISTINA

(plaintively)
 I feel sick.

BRYNN

Oh, God.
 (BRYNN looks out of the window again.)
 Oh, God.
 (bitterly)
 I hate parties.

(lights)

Scene v: (Next morning at the breakfast table. ANNE is fully dressed. CHRISTINA is partially dressed-her hair and make-up is done; BRYNN is still in her p.j.'s.)

CHRISTINA
What a neat party.

ANNE
(yawning)
Yes, it was fun.

CHRISTINA
(To BRYNN)
Didn't you really like it?

BRYNN
Too many couples. Right, Anne?

CHRISTINA
Oh. But I thought that was nice.
(dreamily)
It must be wonderful to fall in love.

BRYNN
Why?

CHRISTINA
Oh, the things it does.

BRYNN
I've always found it inconvenient.
(Looks at ANNE)
Right, Anne?

CHRISTINA
That sort of glow, you know.

BRYNN
And springy step?

CHRISTINA
Oh, yes. I've read about it. You know, the feeling of warmth, of happiness.

BRYNN
Running slow motion through daisy fields?

CHRISTINA
Oh, yes.

BRYNN
You could just take drugs.

CHRISTINA

(laughing)
Oh, you're so funny. I didn't see your boyfriends last night.

BRYNN

(curtly)
We don't have boyfriends.

CHRISTINA

Men, then.

BRYNN

(firmly)
We don't have them.

CHRISTINA

But I thought...I mean, you're both so goodlooking and mature and....

BRYNN

Independent? You don't have to have a man to be that.

CHRISTINA

Oh. Yes.

(Short pause)
Have you had many affairs then?

ANNE

Really!

CHRISTINA

Oh, I'm sorry....

BRYNN

Hey, no problem.

ANNE

Well, we've had our relationships.

BRYNN

It's just an understood thing among adults. You get together and have some fun, but there are no claims made on each other. Right, Anne?

CHRISTINA

But....

BRYNN

It's practical and fun. Sex does not have to be romantic.

ANNE

It's the way life is.

CHRISTINA

Why?

Why not?
ANNE

Oh.
CHRISTINA

ANNE
Look, we've had the sexual revolution.

BRYNN
I suppose we could make the effort and find some bodies, right Anne? We are attractive.

ANNE
(slowly)
Of course, most importantly, we're open-minded and willing to test our theories.

BRYNN
(Staring at ANNE)
Of course.

ANNE
It's important to be open-minded. To be willing to try some other theory or philosophy.

BRYNN
(To CHRISTINA)
Get dressed, Chris. Now.

CHRISTINA
(rising)
Well, sure, but....

BRYNN
Now!
(CHRISTINA exits; to ANNE)
Was that some other philosophy I saw you with last night?

ANNE
Now, Brynn....

BRYNN
(interrupting)
I've always listened to what you've said. We've always agreed on the same things; we've always believed in the same things.

ANNE
(desperately)
Now, Brynn...I mean...we have to test those things.
(pompously)
We can't live on theory.

BRYNN
(sarcastically)
Are you the willing victim or what?

ANNE
(firmly)
We can't be afraid to find the truth.

BRYNN
So this relationship is more than physical?

ANNE
(sighs)
Well....

BRYNN
Are you in love? Does it really exist? We always said it was convention.

ANNE
Don't be a snob! How do we know you're right?
(pause)

BRYNN
I don't know. I don't know.

ANNE
Well, I think you should try. How do you know you're simply not afraid of men?

BRYNN
Anne! That's cruel.

ANNE
But people could say that.
(pleadingly)
We need to find the truth.

BRYNN
(slowly)
Yes....

ANNE
Fair. We need to be fair. You always say you want to find the truth.

BRYNN
Yes.

ANNE
We can't just have these things intellectually! They need to move beyond formulas. We need to test them. We need to experience them emotionally.

BRYNN
You sound like a mad scientist.
(pleadingly)
You could have told me!

ANNE

Yes.

(She looks away.)

I was afraid.

(Short pause, then pleadingly)

Try it! You might like it.

BRYNN

Isn't that a slogan for food or something?

(CHRISTINA enters in her uniform.)

CHRISTINA

Gosh, this is a great day.

(She senses something is amiss.)

Is something wrong?

BRYNN

(slowly)

No.

CHRISTINA

Oh. Well.

BRYNN

We're just exchanging notes.

CHRISTINA

Oh.

(Short pause)

Well, what are you guys doing today?

ANNE

Well, I have to go to work in a few moments. What are you doing, Brynn?

BRYNN

(slowly)

I don't know.

(pause)

CHRISTINA

Gosh, it's a beautiful day.
(Forced cheerfulness, sensing there is still something in the air)

ANNE

(Staring at BRYNN)

Yes.

CHRISTINA

(Getting upset)

M...my first day at work. Gosh.

BRYNN

(Looking at CHRISTINA)

Still nervous?

CHRISTINA

Gosh.

(She smiles.)

No. I'm not afraid.

BRYNN

Good.

ANNE

That's nice. I'm sure you'll do fine.

CHRISTINA

(sighs)

I hope so.

BRYNN

Remember the day has to end.

(Short pause; BRYNN looks at time, says drily)

Of course, the most important thing is to be on time.

CHRISTINA

Gosh, yes.

(She looks at clock.)

Oh my goodness, I'll be late. 'Bye.

(She heads for door, ANNE jumps up.)

ANNE

I'll walk with you, to the corner at least. 'Bye Brynn.

(ANNE and CHRISTINA exit. Pause. BRYNN paces around the room.)

BRYNN

Shit. Shit. Shit.

(BRYNN sighs, crosses to phone and picks up scrap of paper CHRISTINA left there.)

Maybe he's not home.

(dials)

Shit. Hello? Uh...this is Brynn. From across the hall and Chicago.

(flippantly)

Remember me? What? Oh, I'm sorry. I know I was rude before.

(desperately)

It was my period. Makes me irritable.

(pause)

No, it's over. Uh...what is your name? I can't keep calling you "Chicago."

Anthony. That's nice. Uh...doing anything tonight, Anthony? There's this movie playing down at the Square...paperwork? Hey, I can't type. Well, yes, I'd rather see a film. Eight? Sure. See you then. Bye.

(Hangs up)

Oh, shit.

(lights)

ACT II

Scene 1: (Some months later. BRYNN enters the apartment. CHRISTINA is on sofa.)

BRYNN
Hi, Christina. How's it going?

CHRISTINA
(excitedly)
Oh, fine. They're going to give me a raise at work! They say I've really been improving.

BRYNN
That's great.

CHRISTINA
Gosh, this job is wonderful. They may even start training me for a higher level. I'm so excited. And we're going to bring out a new sandwich, and we're even going to make our french fry portion larger!

BRYNN
(drily)
That is good news.

CHRISTINA
Oh, it is.
(pause)
It's so fun at work. I hardly ever see anyone here; I mean you and Anne are always at school or with your boyfriends. You and Anne don't even sleep here.

BRYNN
(startled)
I'm sorry.

CHRISTINA
Oh, it's not your fault.

BRYNN
I guess it does get kind of lonely for you. At least you enjoy your job.

CHRISTINA
Oh, yes.
(reverently)
It's wonderful.

BRYNN
(nonplussed)
That's nice.

CHRISTINA
Oh, yes. What did you do today?

BRYNN

Uh? Oh. Well, I went to class. You know. Where's Anne? She said she'd be here.

CHRISTINA

Oh, she went shopping for just the right piece of steak.

BRYNN

Oh?

CHRISTINA

She's making turnedos for Adrian tonight. I saw the recipe. It looks awfully complicated. I wish I could cook like that. My mother says plain cooking's best though.

BRYNN

(bored)

Oh?

CHRISTINA

Oh, yes. At home we'd never have turnedos.

BRYNN

(bored)

What a pity.

CHRISTINA

Yes, they look so good.

(Short pause)

This apartment has such interesting meals cooked in it. Last week you made souffle and that wonderful looking mousse for your boyfriend. Anne's making turnedos and maybe even crepes? Lucky Adrian!

(She sighs.)

I just eat what I bring home from work. Cold hamburgers. Soggy french fries. They do perk up in the microwave though.

BRYNN

I'm sorry.

CHRISTINA

Oh, I don't mind. We do have the microwave and dishwasher and your guys don't. And my mother says....

BRYNN

(interrupting)

Yes, I know. "Plain cooking's best."

CHRISTINA

Yes, it's not as rich.

BRYNN

(sarcastically)

What a pity.

CHRISTINA

(admiringly)

It must be great to be in love. To dine by candle light! To surprise someone with great cuisine. What's it like?

BRYNN

(flippantly)

Full of calories. I've gained five pounds. I shall have to take up running.

CHRISTINA

No, not the food. To be in love. What's it like to be in love? Do you feel happy?

BRYNN

Well, yes....

CHRISTINA

(interrupting)

And warm all over?

BRYNN

Well, yes....

CHRISTINA

(interrupting)

Then it's just like the book I just finished reading.

BRYNN

(dryly)

That's nice. You know, Christina, you could get the same effect just by soaking in a hot tub.

CHRISTINA

(giggling)

You're so funny.

BRYNN

(slowly)

Well, it is kind of funny.

CHRISTINA

Love?

BRYNN

No, the way you feel. Not funny ha-ha but funny odd.

(Short pause)

CHRISTINA

(sympathetically)

Bad date?

BRYNN

No.

Period?
CHRISTINA

(tiredly)
BRYNN
No, it's not my period.

CHRISTINA
Oh, I just mentioned it 'cause you seem out of sorts.
(furtively)
You're not having...sexual problems?

BRYNN
(staring)
What do you mean?

CHRISTINA
(frightened)
Uh...well...I just....

BRYNN
What have you been reading?

CHRISTINA
(vaguely)
Oh, I just heard about...somewhere...Ann Landers?

BRYNN
(drily)
Reading for future reference?

CHRISTINA
(weakly)
Oh, no.

BRYNN
(relenting)
It's O.K. No, it's just...it seems odd...someone would love you.

CHRISTINA
Oh, I know what you mean. I can't imagine any guy would love me.

BRYNN
(A bit miffed)
I am not, however, unattractive.

CHRISTINA
(hurriedly)
No, no. Of course not.

BRYNN
It just doesn't seem like what I expected.
(sarcastically)
It's probably not in any of your books.

(Short pause)
You make all kinds of plans for the future.

CHRISTINA

Oh, I know. I....

BRYNN

(dreamily)
But it's kind of...scary.

CHRISTINA

Scary?

BRYNN

Not because of sex.

CHRISTINA

(eagerly)
Oh, Anne's been telling me all about it. Love and all. Of course, she didn't say it was scary. She said....

BRYNN

(sharply)
It isn't easy.

CHRISTINA

Oh. Anne says....

BRYNN

It takes an immense amount of concentration. Love is...love is....
(pompously)

It's not merely loving just a man's physical body and the good times you can have with it...it's loving the mind, the work, the whole world of that man. Love is not just an incident in life. It is life.

CHRISTINA

(rapturously)
Oh, that was just like poetry. It's so romantic.

BRYNN

(Looking at her sharply)
I feel ill.

CHRISTINA

(solicitously)
It's probably all that concentration.

(BRYNN glares at her.)

(hurriedly)
Or all that rich food. My mother says plain cooking's....

BRYNN

(tiredly)
I know.

(mechanically)

You concentrate on the whole life of that person. Everything he does becomes important. It all becomes your central concern.

CHRISTINA

Oh.

(sighs)

It's so romantic.

BRYNN

(snapping)

No, it isn't! It's hard work and gives you a headache.

CHRISTINA

(longingly)

But you're in love.

BRYNN

By all the definitions, yes.

(pause)

I feel I'm in love.

(pause)

I'm enjoying it.

(ANNE enters with a filled grocery sack.)

ANNE

Hi! I'm back. What's up?

CHRISTINA

(eagerly)

Oh, Brynn's been telling me what it's like to be in love.

ANNE

Really? That's nice. You know, we ought to fix you up with someone, Christina. I think we could find a nice man somewhere. You can be rather appealing. How's Chicago, Brynn?

BRYNN

(stiffly)

His name is Anthony.

CHRISTINA

Gosh, I do think you're both so lucky to have boyfriends, well, men. It's so....

BRYNN

(interrupting)

Romantic?

CHRISTINA

Why, yes.

(longingly)

What did you all do last night?

(Pause. ANNE and BRYNN hesitate, exchanging glances; finally)

BRYNN

Well...well, we went out to eat at that new restaurant on the Square. It's not so bad. We had a few drinks, then dinner. I had chicken. Uh, then... uh....

ANNE

(interrupting)

We went to a French restaurant. Adrian ordered for me.

CHRISTINA

Oh, how romantic!

BRYNN

Well, we danced afterwards.

ANNE

(bragging)

I had filet mignon. It was superb. And we had the most magnificent wine. Imported!

BRYNN

(desperately)

We had champagne!

ANNE

Well, I never dance at restaurants. It's too blase.

BRYNN

I see you're wearing pink. I thought it didn't become you.

ANNE

Adrian likes pink. You've changed your hair.

BRYNN

Anthony says it is more becoming up.

(ANNE and BRYNN continue to challenge each other with their eyes for a moment.)

CHRISTINA

Oh, you're not fighting, are you?

ANNE

(relaxing)

No, of course not.

(pause)

I'm sure we both had wonderful evenings.

BRYNN

Wonderful.

(amusedly)

And we wouldn't dream of fighting. After all, we're honest with each other.

ANNE

And dishonesty causes all the fights in the world.

CHRISTINA

Oh. Well, I do think it's romantic. Being in love! I just came home to soggy french fries and reruns on T.V. I did...

(looks at BRYNN)

have a nice soak in the tub.

ANNE

Well, we must fix you up. Then you can have fun, too.

BRYNN

Sure.

CHRISTINA

Oh, I don't know.

(brightening)

I got this really neat pattern for this dress today. You must see it!

(wistfully)

Would you like to see it?

ANNE

Why, sure.

(CHRISTINA exits to her room.)

BRYNN

So, how's it going with Adrian?

ANNE

Oh, fine.

(importantly)

I'm making turnedos for him tonight.

BRYNN

I know. Chris told me. But "plain cooking's best."

ANNE

Oh, really?

(ANNE and BRYNN laugh.)

BRYNN

(soberly)

It's weird. I found myself apologizing to Chris today. I don't think I like her.

(CHRISTINA reenters with pattern.)

CHRISTINA

Here it is! Isn't it great?

(ANNE and BRYNN look at it; pause.)

Oh. ANNE

Isn't it a little...aren't you...uh... BRYNN

(firmly) ANNE
I think it's for somebody a bit taller, Christina.

(thankfully) BRYNN
Yes.

ANNE
Your figure is just a bit different.

Just. BRYNN

Oh. CHRISTINA

BRYNN
(hastily)
Well, I really need to be going. I just came over for some clothes.
(She exits to her bedroom.)

ANNE
(To CHRISTINA)
I think we could find something really flattering.

CHRISTINA
Oh, really? That would be great.

ANNE
Maybe we can do some shopping soon. There's several new stores I've been wanting to visit.

(BRYNN reenters with an armful of clothes.)

BRYNN
Well, this is what I need. 'Bye.

ANNE and CHRISTINA
'Bye.

(BRYNN exits.)

CHRISTINA
It's kind of lonely without you and Brynn here.

ANNE
(startled)
Oh, I am sorry.

CHRISTINA

Though I did see Brynn a couple of nights ago. She slept over. There was this big test she had to study for; she says Anthony never leaves her alone at night.

ANNE

So?

CHRISTINA

(righteously)

I think it's kind of gross.

ANNE

Not really. It's totally natural. It's biology.

(pause)

How's work?

CHRISTINA

Oh, fine.

ANNE

Any cute guys there?

CHRISTINA

(blushing)

I hadn't really noticed.

ANNE

See any?

(Gently teasing)

Anywhere?

CHRISTINA

Well, Phil tried to pick me up, but I remembered what you all said.

ANNE

Bravo. Remember it has to be your own decision.

CHRISTINA

(passionately)

But when do you know it's right?

ANNE

Right? There's nothing "wrong" about it.

(slowly)

I guess there's always a little fear, but you know.

CHRISTINA

How?

ANNE

Well, it becomes a matter of wanting to try something new. It's something to do; it's...you feel like you're missing a part of you...or something.

CHRISTINA
That doesn't sound romantic.

ANNE
(laughs)
You remind me of Brynn. You have to make it romantic. That's how you get romance in a relationship.

CHRISTINA
Oh.

ANNE
It's hard work.
(She shrugs.)
But it's fun.

CHRISTINA
Oh.

ANNE
Someone is going to love you sometime, and it will be your decision whether or not to love him back.

CHRISTINA
Oh.
(wistfully)
You think someone will love me?

ANNE
Why shouldn't they?

CHRISTINA
Oh.
(timidly)
One more thing....

ANNE
Yes?

CHRISTINA
(hesitantly)
What about love at first sight?

ANNE
(shrugging)
I don't personally believe in it, but it is still your decision. Like as not you could talk yourself out of it, the way you talk yourself out of expensive clothes.

CHRISTINA
(disappointed)
Oh. It sounds kind of...kind of....

ANNE
It's great really. It relaxes you.
(importantly)
You feel fulfilled.

CHRISTINA
Oh.

ANNE
Well, don't worry about it. You'll find out all about it when you want,
and you'll never feel the same afterward.

CHRISTINA
Oh.
(longingly)
I hope so.
(despairingly)
It's so...so...confusing!

ANNE laughs; LIGHTS)

Scene ii: (ANNE and BRYNN enter; CHRISTINA is on sofa.)

ANNE
 Christinal (surprised)

BRYNN
 I thought you had to go to work.

CHRISTINA
 No.

(wistfully)
 You don't need the apartment for anything, do you? I can stay here?

BRYNN
 Sure. (surprised)

CHRISTINA
 I thought your boyfriends might come over.

BRYNN
 Well, if they do, you're welcome to stay.

CHRISTINA
 Oh, no...I...no....

ANNE
 (To CHRISTINA)
 What are you doing here?

CHRISTINA
 Business was slow. They had too many people on schedule, and they're trying to keep their labor down, so they let some of us off early.

ANNE
 Well, that should be nice. An evening off. You can go see a film or something.

CHRISTINA
 Yes, I guess. (unenthusiastically)

BRYNN
 You don't sound too pleased.

CHRISTINA
 Yes, well....

ANNE
 Yes?

CHRISTINA
 I kind of like working Thursday nights.

ANNE
 (mock-incredulously)
 What?

BRYNN
 And miss Magnum P.I., your favorite T.V. show?

CHRISTINA
 Well....

BRYNN
 What's up?

ANNE
 Confess.

CHRISTINA
 (slowly)
 There's this...really cute guy at work.

BRYNN
 I don't believe it.

ANNE
 Our little Christina's fallen in love.

BRYNN
 She's looked at a guy.

CHRISTINA
 Oh, it's not that. But he is marvelous. And so kind.

ANNE
 Kind?

CHRISTINA
 Oh, yes. The other day I bumped into him and made him spill the salt, and he didn't even yell at me.

BRYNN
 (sarcastically)
 That was kind.

CHRISTINA
 Oh, he's so handsome. He's...magnificent!

BRYNN
 (drily)
 Another Greek god.

CHRISTINA
 (dreamily)
 Oh, yes. You should see the way his hair curls out of the back of his cap.

BRYNN

(To ANNE)

Well, at least he's not bald. But has she only seen the back of him?

ANNE

(laughs)

Brynn!

(To CHRISTINA)

Well, have you spoken to him?

CHRISTINA

(Looking alarmed)

Oh, no! Of course not.

BRYNN

I thought you weren't afraid of guys.

CHRISTINA

Oh, I'm not. It's...different. He's...special. Why should he notice me?

ANNE

Why shouldn't he? Why shouldn't someone notice you? Granted, you're not the best dresser, but have a little confidence, Christina.

CHRISTINA

I guess. But he's so handsome; I'm sure he has a girlfriend already; a guy like that--! In fact, he probably has a wife. Guys like him are never available.

BRYNN

(dryly)

Not to mere mortals, certainly.

ANNE

Well, you'll never find out unless you make the effort to find out.

BRYNN

(To CHRISTINA)

Relax. It could be good news.

CHRISTINA

Do you think so?

BRYNN

Well, at least you'll find out the truth.

CHRISTINA

But...how do I find out? I mean, how do I ask him? What do I ask him?

ANNE

Well, first you want to capture his attention.

CHRISTINA

Yes, oh yes.

Well.... ANNE

That depends on what type of guy he is. BRYNN

There's a lot of variety among men. ANNE

And the approach you take... BRYNN

Depends upon the guy. ANNE

Oh. CHRISTINA

Let's see. ANNE

If he's macho.... BRYNN
(She flexes her muscles.)

You know, the absolute he-man. ANNE

Well, then.... BRYNN

(interrupting) ANNE
Then you come over all feminine, dainty, fluttering. You know. The southern belle. You could sort of bump into him and become all delicate and helpless.

Except that she's bumped into him before. We don't want him think she's a klutz. BRYNN

True. ANNE
(She thinks.)
Ask him to do something for you. Lift a box up or down. Say it's too heavy for you. Then compliment him on his strength and muscles. Be vulnerable.

Of course, if he's not the macho type...like maybe he's shy. BRYNN

Well, then, you use the "turnover." ANNE

Turnover? CHRISTINA

ANNE

You trade roles. You come up to him and tell him that you've always been attracted to him, and maybe he could come over some night and have dinner with you. This always works well with the shy ones.

BRYNN

They get so grateful and admire you immensely for having the guts to do what they only daydreamed about. Of course, if he's not shy....

ANNE

You've blown it. He'll be terribly insulted and think you're fast or something.

BRYNN

He'll probably never speak to you again.

CHRISTINA

(alarmed)

Oh, no!

ANNE

If he's "ordinary, just likeable," that's a bit different.

BRYNN

They're often a lot harder to handle.

ANNE

The best approach, I think, depends upon being direct. It's like this....

BRYNN

(Drily interrupting)

Scenario number three.

ANNE

You walk up to him and say "I'd like to be honest with you; I find you very interesting; you remind me of my brother."

CHRISTINA

I don't have a brother.

ANNE

Uncle or cousin.

BRYNN

You have to be subtle here.

ANNE

Now, you can't talk of romance. One word and he'll be off like a shot. You have to get to know him. Sound him out. Encourage him to tell you stories of his childhood. Now, you shouldn't talk a lot, except to flatter him.

BRYNN

It's important to be a listener.

ANNE

Pretend to have things in common with him, that helps the conversation.

BRYNN

It's sort of the "girl next door" with the "nice neighbor" touch.

ANNE

And, as you get to know him, flatter him a lot. He'll get to think you're special.

BRYNN

That's when you have to be extra careful.

ANNE

Be mysterious. Act as if you have a boyfriend. Eventually he'll get jealous. But play hard to get. They like that.

CHRISTINA

Oh.

BRYNN

Of course, this approach takes a lot of time.

ANNE

But it generally works. Of course, there are a lot of other types.

BRYNN

(drily)

But they're mainly variations on one of those three themes.

ANNE

They take a bit of specialized handling. Oh you know, types like Frat rats, intellectuals, professionals. But I don't think they apply here.

CHRISTINA

Oh.

BRYNN

So which type is he?

CHRISTINA

Oh...I don't know. I never noticed.

ANNE

Noticed? I thought you were attracted to him.

CHRISTINA

Oh, yes.

(Sighs dreamily)

But I just look at him.

ANNE

(sighing)

You're so young.

BRYNN

(To ANNE; drily)

Maybe we should just buy her a poster or something.

ANNE

(To CHRISTINA)

Now don't worry. It will be all right. When you go back to work just keep your eye on him. You'll figure it out in no time. Just start to study him as soon as possible and when you find out, let us know.

CHRISTINA

O.K.

ANNE

You'll know what approach to take. And Brynn and I can give you more advice.

CHRISTINA

Oh, that'll be great. Only....

BRYNN

Only?

CHRISTINA

Only I don't know. What if I wreck it?

BRYNN

(firmly)

There are always and will always be other guys.

CHRISTINA

But not like this!

ANNE

Don't bet on it. I know your first love is always special, but there are others.
(pause)

CHRISTINA

(indecisively)

Oh, I don't know!

ANNE

You'll never know....
(She shrugs.)

CHRISTINA

(tiredly)

I know. You're always telling Brynn. I'll never know unless I find out.

ANNE

Maybe we all ought to go down to the store for malts or something tonight.

BRYNN

Yes. I'd like to see this paragon.

CHRISTINA

Maybe we could all go. We can use my employee discount.

BRYNN

It'd be a different way to spend the evening.

CHRISTINA

(slowly)

Of course...maybe that wouldn't be such a good idea.

ANNE

Afraid of competition?

BRYNN

Afraid of finding out the truth?

CHRISTINA

(Making up her mind)

We'll all go.

(firmly)

But I won't speak to him.

(lights)

Scene iii: (ANNE, BRYNN, and CHRISTINA are in the living room with their hair pinned up and masques on.)

BRYNN

(lazily)

So, how's the love interest, Chris?

CHRISTINA

(blushing)

I don't know. He hasn't been coming to work.

ANNE

Fired?

CHRISTINA

Oh, no. Nothing like that. He's on vacation.

ANNE

Thought any more about asking him out?

BRYNN

Or getting him interested in you?

CHRISTINA

(unhappily)

Yes.

ANNE

Well, don't worry. We'll help.

(To BRYNN)

You should see this dress we're going to make. It's going to look so good on her. Any guy not out of his head will notice her.

CHRISTINA

(eagerly)

Oh, do you think so?

ANNE

Definitely. As soon as we get the right fabric, we'll start, and we'll have that dress done in no time.

CHRISTINA

Oh, that would be great.

BRYNN

(To ANNE)

I didn't know you sewed.

ANNE

I love to sew. Don't you remember me taking home-ec in school?

BRYNN

We all had to take home-ec; it was required.

ANNE

Yes, but I loved it. Particularly sewing.

BRYNN

(drily)

Yes, it's all coming back to me. You made that terry-cloth two-tone thing that didn't fit anybody. Not even a small elephant. As I recall, you swore you'd never sew again.

ANNE

(distinctly)

I love to sew.

BRYNN

You don't even like to hem pants. Who was so thankful when crop pants came out?

ANNE

(To CHRISTINA)

I really like to sew.

BRYNN

Just about as much as you like to cook.

ANNE

(To CHRISTINA)

Brynn's just teasing.

BRYNN

You're becoming awfully domestic.

ANNE

Maybe I always liked doing this sort of thing, you just never noticed. Besides which, you've been cooking up a storm lately, too. And if I remember correctly, you were the girl who, at age fourteen, swore you'd never cook again.

BRYNN

Who, me?

ANNE

(To CHRISTINA)

We had to take a hatchet to get her muffins out of the pan. Her home-ec teacher only passed her because Brynn promised she'd never take another home-ec class again.

BRYNN

Huh!

(Mock seriousness)

You malign my character.

(She laughs; ANNE joins her.)

Still, it does seem odd to be doing these things.

CHRISTINA

(To BRYNN)

Well, you said love was odd.

She did?

ANNE

I think it's miserable!

CHRISTINA

(She starts to cry.)

Oh, Christina!

ANNE

(She attempts to comfort CHRISTINA.)

You're going to have to do something with that guy.

BRYNN

I know! I know. It's just...I'm miserable! I'm just depressed all the time. I can't concentrate. Everytime I think of him--!

CHRISTINA

Just relax.

BRYNN

You're just going through what every girl in love goes through.

ANNE

I felt better when I had the flu.

CHRISTINA

(She resumes crying.)

There, there. It will be all right.

ANNE

(Patting CHRISTINA on the shoulder)

(BRYNN gets up, comes back with box of kleenex.)

Here.

BRYNN

(Handing CHRISTINA a kleenex)

Thanks. I just don't know what to do.

CHRISTINA

(Blowing nose)

We're going to have to work on this guy of yours. When does he go back to work?

ANNE

Tuesday.

CHRISTINA

Well, let's see. Have you thought any more about what type he is?

ANNE

(BRYNN rises, goes to kitchen and makes microwave coffee.)

CHRISTINA

Well...no.

(dreamily)

He's so big and handsome.

ANNE

We've got to make him notice you. Have you spoken to him at all?

CHRISTINA

N...no. I was afraid I'd wreck it.

(BRYNN comes back with coffee.)

BRYNN

Wreck it? You don't have anything to wreck.

(She flings herself down on a chair.)

ANNE

(To BRYNN)

Hush.

(To CHRISTINA)

Have you even smiled at him?

CHRISTINA

J...just a little. Once or twice, maybe.

ANNE

(sighs)

This isn't good.

(thinks)

Well, instead of concentrating on what type he is, we'll have to work with what type you are.

BRYNN

(drily)

Shy.

ANNE

Shy.

(She glares at BRYNN.)

Yes. Well, there's nothing wrong with that. Now, let's see....

(She reflects.)

BRYNN

That means she can't trap him in the freezer.

(CHRISTINA giggles.)

ANNE

(admonishingly)

Brynn.

BRYNN

Oh, all right.

ANNE

(To CHRISTINA)

If he's noticed you at all, he's got to have figured out that you're shy.

BRYNN

That's the truth. Unless he's totally stupid. The handsome ones usually are.

ANNE

Really!

BRYNN

Or totally egotistical.

ANNE

(Ignores BRYNN, addresses CHRISTINA)

We're going to have to turn your shyness into an asset.

CHRISTINA

Oh.

ANNE

(With the air of a pronouncement)

You will be delicate, fragile, vulnerable.

CHRISTINA

How?

ANNE

I'll coach you.

BRYNN

Just relax.

ANNE

(To CHRISTINA)

Just ignore her. Now, let's see...he's been at the store longer than you?

CHRISTINA

Yes.

ANNE

And he knows more, then, about the store?

(CHRISTINA nods.)

Get him to show you something, to explain how something works. A new procedure or something.

CHRISTINA

(slowly)

Well, I'm not clear on all my sandwiches.

ANNE

Sandwiches. That's good. Ask him to explain them to you sometime. Take a slow work period, a break, before or after work. If you can just get started talking to him....

CHRISTINA

(dreamily)

Yes.

ANNE

You won't be so miserable. Love can be really glorious. If you want.

CHRISTINA

(longingly)

Yes?

ANNE

Oh, like getting little surprises now and then. Flowers. A card. A little knick-knack. You know that gold bracelet of mine?

(CHRISTINA nods.)

Well, I got that from Jack. And then there's that blue sweater Martin gave me. Oh, and that stuffed rhinoceros...somebody gave that to me. I don't remember who. Of course having someone to do things with is nice. Sometimes you even do things you wouldn't normally do. It is really great having company to do things with.

CHRISTINA

Oh, it sounds so nice.

ANNE

Now you try to talk to him the next time you work with him.

CHRISTINA

(timidly)

O.K.

ANNE

(firmly)

You must. If you want to resolve this thing.

CHRISTINA

(tremulously)

I...know.

ANNE

And if it doesn't work out, we'll find someone else. Don't worry. I've got a cousin coming to school next semester. He's about your age and kind of cute.

CHRISTINA

Oh.

ANNE

He's majoring in law. And you know what kind of money lawyers make--! Much more than fast food employees.

CHRISTINA

Oh.

ANNE

Remember, don't get overly romantic the first time you talk to him. You don't want to turn him off. Be mysterious; pretend there's someone else, a tragic past or something. Do you know how to dance?

CHRISTINA

No.

ANNE

We'll work on it. You'll have to know how to dance.

BRYNN

(smoothly)

Unless you have other plans on how to spend your nights.

ANNE

Brynn!

CHRISTINA

Oh.

(She realizes what is intended and blushes.)

Oh!

ANNE

(To CHRISTINA)

I'll look at your wardrobe later.

CHRISTINA

Gosh, that'll be nice.

ANNE

A proper wardrobe will be essential.

BRYNN

(dryly)

Anything else? Clothes and dance lessons, and she's prepared?

CHRISTINA

(longingly)

I just want him to love me so much!

ANNE

Don't worry. It will turn out all right.

CHRISTINA

(rapturously)

To be in love must be the greatest thing.

ANNE

Must? Do you have doubts?

CHRISTINA

Well, I guess you can't have doubts and be in love.

(She giggles.)

BRYNN

(sarcastically)

Don't tell me love is perfect!

ANNE

Hadn't you noticed? I've got to go wash my masque off.

(She exits to bathroom.)

BRYNN

(sardonically)

Ah yes. The mandatory twenty minutes to beauty are up.

CHRISTINA

I have to wash mine off, too.

BRYNN

(drily)

Me three.

CHRISTINA

(With longing to BRYNN)

Oh, to be in love. It must make you tremendously happy.

(She sighs.)

Do you want to spend your entire life with him? Do you think you'll get married?

BRYNN

Married?

CHRISTINA

Sure, you're in love.

(dreamily)

"United in holy matrimony." It sounds so romantic.

BRYNN

(sardonically)

I never figured out if "united" meant two became one, or merely two half people, or just one set of Siamese twins. I'm going to wash mine off in the kitchen sink.

(BRYNN stalks to kitchen and begins washing her face; lights.)

Scene iv: (ANNE is in the bathroom; CHRISTINA is in the living room, in front of her is a dress pattern mostly laid out on a piece of fabric and ready for cutting. BRYNN storms in, slamming door behind her.)

CHRISTINA

Gosh, Brynn. I wasn't expecting you. Anne's here. She's helping me make my dress. It's going to be spectacular! How was your date? Why are you home so early? Is something wrong? I bet you had a romantic evening.

BRYNN

You think everything dealing with a male is romantic, don't you?

CHRISTINA

Well...y...es....

BRYNN

(interrupting)

If you say just one more stupid, silly thing about romance! You know, you look like a rabbit, bleating, every time you say all those stupid, silly things about lu-uv. Disgusting.

(She stalks to her bedroom and slams door.)

CHRISTINA

(Surprised and aggrieved)

Well, she's in a bad mood.

(She calls loudly.)

Anne, Anne! Something's wrong with Brynn.

(ANNE emerges from the bathroom.)

ANNE

What is it?

CHRISTINA

Well, I don't know. I was just sitting here when Brynn came in, and I asked her about her date, and she bit my head off!

ANNE

(amused)

Where is she?

CHRISTINA

In her room.

ANNE

(laughs)

I tell you what, they had a nine o'clock dinner reservation, and it's only eight thirty, so she hasn't eaten yet. Why don't you run down to the corner and get some pizza.

But.... CHRISTINA

(persuasively) ANNE
You know how she loves pizza. It'll cheer her up.

Oh. Oh, well. O.K. If you think it best. CHRISTINA

I do. ANNE
(She gets her purse.)
Here's some money. 'Bye.

(Hesitant to go) CHRISTINA
Oh. 'Bye. What size should I get?

Oh, a large should do. If we have any left over, we can always have it for
breakfast tomorrow. 'Bye. ANNE

Any particular type? CHRISTINA

No, she'll eat anything. 'Bye Christina! ANNE

Should I get anything to drink? CHRISTINA

Do what you think best. ANNE
(She shoos CHRISTINA to front door.)

Goodbye, Christina. (CHRISTINA exits; ANNE goes to BRYNN's door and knocks.)
It's me, Anne. I got rid of the girl.

BRYNN
It took you long enough.

(laughs) ANNE
What's wrong? Did you have a fight with your boyfriend? Do you want to come
out and discuss it?

(BRYNN emerges.)

BRYNN
It was just so stupid. He kept telling me how I had to learn to do things
for myself, as though I haven't really been living the last twenty-five years.
It was idiotic. It wasn't important, you see, if I did things for him. He
was like a complacent, cud-chewing guru. Telling me what I ought to do! I
wanted to wring his fucking little neck.

ANNE

(laughs)

Well?

BRYNN

It's just that he irritates me sometimes. As long as I do what he wants, that's fine, but I have to make sure, according to him, that I do it for myself and not for him. It's ridiculous. He refuses to acknowledge that I do things for his sake, and that I like doing them. He keeps on talking about the damned sexual revolution.

ANNE

Oh, I know. Adrian is that way sometimes. It's just their way of trying to avoid responsibility. If you are doing something for yourself, then they can't be blamed. They're so blind sometimes.

BRYNN

It's irritating.

ANNE

(shrugging)

It's the way things are.

BRYNN

I'm just kind of...well....

ANNE

What's on your mind? The doctor's in.

(ANNE moves to living room, BRYNN follows.
ANNE picks up dress and begins to cut it
out on the floor.)

BRYNN

It's like...well...what I imagine for the future is...the scenes are so still...like photographs.

ANNE

Well?

BRYNN

Shouldn't there be movement?

(Short pause)

That's gross material for a dress.

ANNE

That has been picked to make Christina dainty and feminine. It's a man-hunting dress. I picked it out.

(There is a pause. BRYNN watches ANNE.)

BRYNN

I don't think I love Anthony.

Is there someone else? ANNE

No. Not really. BRYNN

What's the problem, then? ANNE

It's just...I don't know. BRYNN

You do like him? ANNE

Yes. BRYNN

You have good times with him? ANNE

True. BRYNN

He doesn't repulse you. You want the same things? ANNE

Yes. And he's kind and handsome. BRYNN

Well, what more do you want? ANNE

Movement! BRYNN

M'mmm. Why don't you pin? ANNE

What? BRYNN

(Indicating pattern)
This. The sleeves and collar have to be laid out and cut. ANNE

Oh. BRYNN

(She takes up material.)
We don't seem to be the same anymore.

(ANNE shrugs.)
Remember when we used to talk of love? It seemed so uplifting, so involved, so....

ANNE
So what? We were young.

BRYNN
I just feel...empty. Missing.

ANNE
What? What were you expecting? Romance, like in a harlequin? "Lu-uv" that strikes like a virus? "Lu-uv," the uncontrollable force?

BRYNN
Well...it's just....

ANNE
You realize what it means. If love is uncontrollable, you have no responsibility for what goes wrong. No one can blame you if you get pregnant, if the relationship falls apart, if the guy's a real bastard, 'cause poor little you got attacked, infested, by love.

BRYNN
But....

ANNE
(interrupting)
You're absolved, child. Lu-uv will make all of your decisions for you and take all of the blame.

BRYNN
Oh, thanks loads, Mother Almighty. So what is it? Love, the controllable?
(Mimicking game-show host)
"It's your life, Anne. Plot your life! Pick the guy! Which handsome stud will she choose, ladies and gentlemen? Behind door number one...."

ANNE
Brynn....

BRYNN
Let's not get involved in life, guys. If you make the choices you'll always be in control. Hah!

ANNE
(Looking at BRYNN with dislike)
Really.

BRYNN
What am I supposed to do with this?
(Indicates material)
I don't sew.

ANNE
Pin the paper pieces to the fabric. They're already laid out. There's instructions in this pamphlet.

BRYNN

(disgustedly)

Great. I have to research this too.

(Brief pause)

Does it even matter what guy? You seem to have a new one each semester. Let's see, there was Pete, Martin, Ray, Jack, Tom....

ANNE

Tom was before Jack.

BRYNN

Well, excuse me.

ANNE

This is different.

BRYNN

Why? Because you're going to have to find a real job when your internship ends? Would any guy do?

(Brief pause)

I just don't know if I love Tony or just the idea of him.

ANNE

So? What's wrong with that? You need a guy.

BRYNN

Great. Can't I exist as a person without one? Is love merely need? That's gross. What, we've got an instinct to love and will love whatever is around? We would marry the last man on earth? Like the Stockholm syndrome--the victim loves its kidnapper because he's the only one around. Love is necessary for survival?

(sadly)

The Sabine women grew to love their captors.

ANNE

So? You have too vivid an imagination. Be sensible.

BRYNN

Why do you think all those surveys say women hate sex or prefer merely to be hugged? They all got talked into their relationships. They were told they were supposed to love and supposed to like sex. There must be more!

ANNE

How do you know you're not rationalizing all this because you're scared?

BRYNN

Yes, Ann Landers. I'm scared, because of the implications.

ANNE

Relax. You think too much. If all you do is think of things, you'll never get anywhere.

BRYNN

(sadly)

I don't know if I love Tony.

ANNE

(spitefully)

Well, if you have to ask--!

BRYNN

(candidly)

That's what I wonder, but maybe it's just a cop-out to keep our minds shut.

ANNE

(laughs)

Oh, Brynn. Maybe you just analyze too much. Can't you take things on faith?

BRYNN

Love as religion?

ANNE

Can't you be contented with life?

BRYNN

(passionately)

I don't know what it is!

ANNE

(sharply)

Don't be so melodramatic. Do grow up.

(pleadingly)

Don't make it more than it is.

BRYNN

(pleadingly)

Don't confuse love with need.

(pause)

ANNE

You're really frothing. It's work to have a real relationship. Maybe you're just not putting your mind to it.

BRYNN

(passionately)

I don't want to put my mind to it! I don't want to feel that I've talked myself into it. What's the point of it, then? Can't it just happen? Can't a relationship occur without you having to convince yourself that it exists?

ANNE

You just don't want to make your own decisions.

BRYNN

(tiredly)

No, that's not it.

ANNE

You want to avoid responsibility for your own actions.

No! BRYNN

(spitefully)
ANNE
Well, that's what it means when love is the uncontrollable force, the traveling spirit, the infectious virus. Do grow up, Brynn.

(disgusted)
BRYNN
That's not it, oh guru on the mountain.

ANNE
What is it then? Is love something more beautiful? Something aloof and noble?

BRYNN
No! I don't know.
(Brief pause)
If I don't know, I can hardly ask it of myself, can I?

ANNE
You'll never get anywhere with an attitude like that. It's a cop-out.

BRYNN
I don't think that's quite fair.

ANNE
Whoever said life had to be fair?

BRYNN
I don't know, but I hope they're dead! If you want to settle for less--! What idiot said that first, anyway? I finished pinning that stupid collar and sleeves.

ANNE
They're awfully crooked.

BRYNN
What do I care?

ANNE
And where do you get off calling me a guru on the mountain?

BRYNN
(Smiles sweetly)
Where is Christina, anyway?

ANNE
I sent her out for pizza.

BRYNN
Do you think she's ready for a guy?

ANNE
Just because you're not--!

BRYNN
Thanks a lot!

ANNE
(Smiles sweetly)
I had to get even for the guru remark.

BRYNN
Look, I'm just a little confused.

ANNE
A little?

BRYNN
Oh, all right. A lot. What are we supposed to do with life anyway?

ANNE
Eat lots of pizza. Christina should be coming soon.

BRYNN
I wish it were that easy.

ANNE
If you want it to be that easy--!

BRYNN
I can put my mind to it? Thanks a lot.

ANNE
Well, go out and test your theories, child. You have my permission.

BRYNN
Gee, thanks Mom.

ANNE
Anytime.

BRYNN
(jokingly)
Go forth. Find the truth. They say it's relative, but whose relative?

ANNE
You can make yourself happy.

BRYNN
Well, I can be happy, but will my self be happy?

ANNE
Oh, go eat a fortune cookie.

BRYNN

I prefer pizza.

ANNE

I think I hear Christina. I guess I'll go to the bathroom.
 (She rises and crosses to bathroom.)

BRYNN

(Calling as ANNE enters the bathroom)
 I guess this would be a good time for me to apologize to her; is that what you're trying to tell me?

(CHRISTINA enters.)

CHRISTINA

I got tired of waiting, so I told them to deliver. Where's Anne?

BRYNN

She's in the bathroom.
 (Short pause)

Look Christina, I'm sorry I yelled at you.

CHRISTINA

(cheerfully)
 Oh, that's all right. You probably weren't feeling well or something. It's probably your period. I understand these things.

BRYNN

(Closes her eyes)
 It's not my period and that wouldn't matter anyway.

CHRISTINA

But they say--

BRYNN

Crap. Don't use it as an excuse. Don't ever do that. Christina....

CHRISTINA

Yes?

BRYNN

Remember when we talked about sex, the night of the party?

CHRISTINA

Oh, yes.

BRYNN

Don't ever...I was so proud to have sex; don't let it be like that for you.
 Think of it...well, not as an achievement. Don't sell yourself.

CHRISTINA

(puzzled)
 Why sure.
 (pause)

(ANNE reenters.)

Where's the pizza?

ANNE

(lights)

Scene v: (ANNE enters the apartment. CHRISTINA is on the sofa. A pie is cooling on the kitchen table.)

CHRISTINA

(Seeing ANNE enter)

Oh, it's you. Hi! How are you?

ANNE

Oh, fine. Listen, is....

CHRISTINA

(interrupting)

It's a pity it's raining. It's my day off. I wanted to lay out on the balcony.

ANNE

That's too bad. Is Brynn around? I have something to tell her.

CHRISTINA

I haven't seen her. She hasn't been in this morning, and she wasn't here last night.

ANNE

That's not so unusual....

CHRISTINA

(interrupting)

Yes, I know, but Anthony's been calling every fifteen minutes for her, wanting to know where she is. And, she wasn't with him last night!

ANNE

Did you tell Anthony that Brynn wasn't here last night?

CHRISTINA

(guiltily)

It kind of slipped out.

ANNE

Oh.

CHRISTINA

I didn't mean to. But I'm not very good at this.

ANNE

Oh.

CHRISTINA

(happily)

Anyway, I have the most wonderful news. You know that guy from work I've been telling you about?

ANNE

(amusedly)

The one that looks like a Greek god?

CHRISTINA

Oh, yes. He is so handsome. Well, anyway, he's going to call me. At two o'clock. And ask me for a date!

ANNE

That's great. Are you going to accept?

CHRISTINA

I don't know. I think my mother would say he is a nice guy.

ANNE

Your mother has nothing to do with it.

CHRISTINA

I know. I'm so excited! He is so cute. I thought maybe I'd ask him over. I made a pie.

(She points to pie on table.)

ANNE

You cooked for him. That's good! Always cook for them. They like it. It helps them think of you in a domestic role and thus possible wife material. Well, congratulations.

(importantly)

I have some good news, too.

CHRISTINA

Really? What?

ANNE

(slowly)

Well...I kind of wanted to tell Brynn first.

CHRISTINA

(excited)

It's about you and Adrian, isn't it?

ANNE

Well...yes.

CHRISTINA

Oh, you're going to get married, right?

ANNE

(laughing)

Yes.

CHRISTINA

Oh gosh, that's great! That's so exciting! When? Where?

ANNE

Well, we haven't decided quite yet, but....

CHRISTINA

(interrupting)

Is it going to be a church wedding? Are you going to have a ceremony? White would look so good on you. Can I help? Maybe I can be a bridesmaid. Of course, you probably have enough friends already. Gosh, this is great! Wait 'til Brynn hears.

ANNE

(amusedly)

Calm down. I won't be getting married for a while yet.

CHRISTINA

When did he propose? Last night? Where were you? At a fancy restaurant? Did he get down on his knees? Gosh, it's so romantic.

ANNE

Well....

CHRISTINA

(interrupting)

I can't wait to see your engagement ring. He's from a wealthy family, right? It should be gorgeous.

ANNE

Well....

CHRISTINA

(interrupting)

Tell me all about it.

ANNE

(laughing)

I will, if you let me get a word in edgewise.

CHRISTINA

Oh. I will. I'm just so excited. I guessed something was up right when you came in. You were kind of, well, beaming. Oh, you're so lucky. Congratulations.

ANNE

Thanks. Well, Adrian and I went to that French restaurant last night.

CHRISTINA

Did you have champagne?

ANNE

(laughs)

No. We talked things over a bit--about my graduating and his job, and, well....

CHRISTINA

Did he tell you he couldn't live without you?

ANNE

(laughs)

No. We just decided we got on well with each other and that we should....

CHRISTINA

(interrupting)

You mean he didn't get down on his knees?

ANNE

(amused)

No. He just said he'd like to try marriage and, well, I agreed.

CHRISTINA

Oh gosh, it's so great! Maybe, someday, it will happen to me.

(dreamily)

Maybe when that phone rings, I'll say yes and go out for a date. And maybe we'll date for a few months, and then maybe he'll say he loves me and wants to get married, and we'll have this big church wedding, you can be my bridesmaid, and we'll move out to the country and have lots of kids and a little, yellow house with a white picket fence.

ANNE

Whoa, hey, that's a lot to build on a phone call that hasn't happened yet.

CHRISTINA

(shame-facedly)

Yes, I guess you're right. You inspired me. But wouldn't it be great?

(Brief pause)

Do you think he likes peach pie?

ANNE

(amused)

I don't know. I haven't really met him.

(Brief pause)

We're thinking just a small ceremony.

CHRISTINA

Maybe I could sing a solo? They all say, back at home, that I have a nice voice.

ANNE

I do wish Brynn were here.

CHRISTINA

I wonder where she's at.

ANNE

She was in kind of a weird mood when I talked to her last. Do you like your new dress?

CHRISTINA

Oh, yes.

(Brief pause)

Gosh, she'll be so excited.

(Brief pause)

I used my mother's recipe for the pie...

(BRYNN storms in, slamming door and interrupting the conversation.)

CHRISTINA

Hi, Brynn! Anne has the most wonderful news, and Anthony's been trying to call you.

BRYNN

(bitterly)

Charming I'm sure.

(To ANNE)

Well, that was an interesting test. You know what I did? I slept with Phil last night. You know what I discovered? I found that I could talk myself into the same feelings for him that I have for Anthony. I found myself thinking it would be so easy. I even kind of wanted to. It gave me a wonderful sense of power.

ANNE

So? You can make yourself happy with anyone.

BRYNN

(bitterly)

Yeah, anyone. It doesn't matter whom I love then, does it? That doesn't say very much for the self.

ANNE

(rudely)

Self-schmeif.

BRYNN

I want to be a person. I want to be myself. I'm not an object. I don't want to treat anyone else like an object. I'm an ordinary civilized being, why can't I be me in love? Why do I change?

(Brief pause)

I can't treat others like objects.

ANNE

(bored)

Chivalry is not dead. Grow up, Brynn.

(ANNE and BRYNN look angrily at each other.)

CHRISTINA

(excitedly)

Anne's going to be married!

ANNE

(Defensively, to BRYNN's look)

I like him.

BRYNN

And you like sex?

ANNE

Of course.

BRYNN

Like plus sex. That's a basis for marriage? Wonderful. Is that love?

ANNE

(spitefully)

Well, it's better than lu-uv. Adrian and I are both intelligent; we can make it work.

BRYNN

(drily)

Some kind of love.

ANNE

It will be a partnership!

BRYNN

Sounds like a business arrangement.

ANNE

We're mature adults!

BRYNN

Why? Because you have sex?

(Pause; pleadingly)

We're sisters. We used to believe in the same things. Why have you changed?

ANNE

I haven't changed. You just never noticed the real me.

BRYNN

And Adrian does?

(pause)

Why? Are you afraid of graduating? Going off on your own? The real world? Real life? Are you afraid people will think something is wrong with you because you're an attractive girl without a mate?

(The phone rings.)

I'll get it.

(She stomps to phone and picks it up.)

ANNE

(Yelling to BRYNN)

And what are you afraid of?

BRYNN

(In phone)

Hello? Oh. Anthony.

CHRISTINA

(To ANNE)

She's in a bad mood.

(horrified)

She slept with Phil?

BRYNN

(To phone)

No, I don't care. It's none of your business where I've been.

ANNE

(To CHRISTINA)

So?

BRYNN

(To phone)

Relationship? You call that a relationship? Well, let me tell you...what?

CHRISTINA

It's...it's so...complicated.

(Brief pause)

I hope she won't be on the phone too long.

ANNE

(To CHRISTINA)

What? Oh, that's right, your Greek god is supposed to call.

BRYNN

(To phone)

I've been out with Phil. And we had fun...Oid I sleep with him? Yes!

(sarcastically)

He does it with black leather and it's real nice.

(repentantly)

I'm sorry...No, not because I slept with Phil, because of what I said...Love? No, I don't love you...How can I do this to you? What about me?...No, I don't love Phil, if that's any consolation. I don't love Phil! I slept with him, sure, but that was fun. Pleasure, not love. Oon't tell me you've never had that excuse. It's the typical male excuse.

(mimics)

"Yes, I slept with Arlene, but I still love you, baby. I don't know what came over me; I just had to do it." Well, hey, I understand. I know. Look, I claim the right to that excuse now, too. What?...So what? No, I'm not burning my bra. Sexual revolution? Do you want to know what the real sexual revolution was about? What it really meant? It wasn't that we could talk about sex above a whisper. It wasn't that the age limit dropped at which we told our children about the facts of life. The real sexual revolution--thank you, science--meant that a woman could sleep with someone not because she loved them or felt obligated to sleep with them because she had done it once, she could do it for fun. For pleasure. At her whim...How could I do this? I slept with you, didn't I?

(Makes discovery)

This threatens your ego? Oh, I am sorry!...No, I don't love Phil! Do I have to love someone to sleep with them?...Oh, great. Call me a bitch. And what are you? What am I that I don't have the right to do the same things as you? You expected me to sleep with you. And then you expected me to keep on sleeping with you, as though having slept with you once gave you the right to my body. What does that make you?

(pause)

I thought I loved you, but I was pretending. I pretended I loved you. It

was an act of justification....

(distinctly)

Look, I tried to make my reason for sleeping with you culturally acceptable by saying that I loved you. But I don't love you. I was pretending.

(pause)

It's not Phil. Oh, pretend it's Phil if it makes you feel better.

(She slams phone down and turns to ANNE.)

Fear? I fear all right. I fear for "you."

(CHRISTINA is crying; ANNE stares for a moment and begins to smile.)

ANNE

(murmurs)

You're so dramatic.

(Brief pause)

BRYNN

(To ANNE)

If this were real life, I'd throw

(Indicates CHRISTINA's pie)

that pie in your face. But this...this is absolute perversity.

(BRYNN stalks to bedroom, slams door behind her. ANNE watches, triumphantly malicious. The phone rings. CHRISTINA moves a little towards it and stops, frightened; she stares at it in absolute horror. Curtain.)

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ABSOLUTE PERVERSITY

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

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Abstract. Absolute Perversity is a play which deals with conflicting ideas about love. The play concerns two sisters who hide behind the pose of modern, independent women. Their notion of equality leads them to believe they have the same rights as men, so they imitate traditional male acts such as one-night stands and rating people. Their beliefs come into conflict when a third girl comes to share their apartment. She is a naive, romantic idealist and her position causes the second of the two sisters to examine and change her own beliefs. Absolute Perversity is prefaced by a critical apparatus which discusses some famous and well-established plays and other period pieces that deal with the same themes: Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing, Aphra Behn's The Rovers, Wycherley's The Country Wife, Congreve's The Way of the World, Goldsmith's She Stoops to Conquer, Sheridan's The School for Scandal, Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest, Shaw's Man and Superman, Claire Booth Luce's The Women, Coward's Private Lives, Neil Simon's Barefoot in the Park, and Beth Henley's Crimes of the Heart. It compares and contrasts them to Absolute Perversity. The critical apparatus also deals with the process of composition, the original idea for the play and the reasons the play took the form it ultimately used.