

**A DAY IN THE WIFE OF AVERY MANN**

A Comedy in Two Acts

by

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## A DAY IN THE WIFE OF AVERY MANN

### CAST OF CHARACTERS (8 female, 3 male)

AVERY MANN.....	45, the narrator and the deceased, a writer
MARILYN MANN.....	45, Avery's widow, an academic
AMY MANN.....	20, Avery's daughter
GREGORY MANN.....	22, Avery's son, a graduate student
CONNIE PARSONS.....	47, Avery's first wife
GLORIA MANN.....	74, Avery's mother
KATE HENRY.....	40, Avery's former psychotherapist
NICK JAMES.....	45, Avery's tennis partner, an actuary
DANE LUCAS.....	42, Avery's agent and friend
WINNIE ADAMS.....	40, Avery's employer and friend
ANGEL ATKINS.....	25, a cocktail waitress and friend

### The Setting

The entire play takes place in the well-appointed living room/parlor of Avery Mann's home, a spacious old Victorian that could be in New York, Boston, Denver, New Haven, San Francisco, Houston, Seattle or even London.

### The Time

The present. The action begins in the early evening and runs well into the night.

### Playwright's Note

Since it is the *spirit* of Avery Mann that appears in the play, there are some moments in which action is suspended when Avery speaks. At other times his dialogue is used as a normal part of the scene. In neither case, however, are the others characters ever aware of his *physical* presence on the stage.

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### ACT I, SCENE I

SCENE: The play opens on a darkened stage. Then an intense pool of white light illuminates the stage, and AVERY MANN walks into the light. He is in his mid-forties, boyishly handsome, and seems somewhat uneasy. He is wearing faded Levis, a crew neck sweater over a dress shirt, penny loafers, and a corduroy sports jacket with elbow patches. He looks out onto the audience, forces a smile, takes a deep breath and begins speaking in an almost apologetic manner.

### AVERY

My name is--**was**--Avery Mann; I know it's a little heavy on the symbolism, but what can I tell you? You all had parents too, so you know how they are about names. My grandfather was named Anthony; my grandmother, Anthony's wife--Vera, and Avery--A V E R Y--was the best combination they could come up with. So, here I stand, Avery Mann in spirit, if not in flesh. In any case, it was a very functional, if not memorable name. That's really not true, the part about it not being memorable: People **always** seemed to remember my name; it was my **face** they forgot. And now without even that visible, except to you . . . well, anyway, I am--was--when living, the victim of, among other things, a devilishly freaky accident that left me totally incapacitated--that is to say, in my case, dead as a boot. And I don't suppose you can get anymore incapacitated than that. I have to tell you what happened, because if you heard it from anybody else, you probably wouldn't believe it, believe that anything so utterly stupid could happen to anyone. But it's the truth, and since the truth is what we're going to be dealing with here tonight, it's important that you believe me when I tell you something, whether it's true or not.

AVERY (continuing)

For the life of me--pardon the poor choice of words; I should and **did** know better, but I'm not at my best right now. You probably understand that--for the life of me, I can't figure where I went wrong. I mean, we all think about dying, and, of course, we try **not** to think about dying too. And we try to prolong our lives for as long as possible; at least I did. I have--had--lots to live for: a lovely wife, two exemplary children, my share of close friends, my work, my--health, and it was my direct attempt to protect those very things that led to my unexpected and premature--demise. Even now, I have trouble saying--death. I was, I'm sad to say--and I really mean that--smothered to death. In fact, I was suffocated by an air bag in my new Volvo sedan. I swerved to avoid hitting a black dog and plowed head-on into a massive oak tree, one of those symbols of longevity. My air bag proved to be of little use when penetrated by a ballpoint pen in my jacket pocket. The bag deflated around my face, cutting off my air supply, and the rest, as they say, is history. Which is to say that--I'm history. (A beat.) It is a portion of that history that will occupy and perhaps entertain you this evening. William Shakespeare once wrote that the "evil that men do lives after them while the good is often interred with their bones." I don't know if that's true or not, but I think it's an idea worthy of further exploration. So, if you don't mind, I think I'll just--assume the position--and let you make your own judgment, this being judgment day and all, at least for some of the less fortunate of us.

(A light comes up on a coffin and AVERY crosses to it and begins to climb in.)

AVERY

I know this--outfit--has writer written all over it. And that's what I am--was, a writer. I wasn't widely recognized or anything, but between a column for the local daily, a few novels, some royalties from plays, and some free-lance copy writing for an ad agency, I managed to make a living. And, of course, Marilyn is a professional; she teaches American literature at a small liberal arts college near here. If the truth be known, I suppose you could say that Marilyn provided the potatoes while I furnished the gravy. That arrangement worked well for both of us, and now that I'm gone she'll actually be a lot more comfortable; that is to say, she'll be better off. I don't like the sound of that either; the plain fact is, she'll have more disposable income now and one less person around to dispose of it. My former tennis partner is an actuary with the Hanover Group, and he loaded both Marilyn and me up with life insurance years ago. Just in case. Yeah, just in case. I guess some things **do** work out, for some of us. Anyway, as a writer, I never had many occasions to dress up and consequently, I don't--didn't even own a suit, and Marilyn, being the pragmatist that she is, wasn't about to waste money on a suit I'd only wear once, if even for a very long time. I've got to go; here she comes now, and I want her to have the opportunity to tell you her side of what happened. And if she sees me like this she'll just accuse me of being--overly dramatic.

(Lights come up on the entire stage, revealing a simple set, consisting of the coffin center stage,

lots of flowers and a few rows of folding chairs set up in the parlor of a large old Victorian home. On the left side of the coffin is the reception area; on the right side is where the chairs are located. One large wingback is situated downstage left, below the reception area. There is a couch upstage and a white marble mantle. A large gilded mirror is located on the wall above the mantle. The usual lamps, tables and bookshelves dot the room, and there is a portable television on a table in a distant corner. There are doors stage left and stage right. MARILYN MANN enters; she is elegant and normally confident, although naturally a little out of sorts on this day. At this point she is more agitated than mournful. AMY MANN, her daughter, about 20, graceful and flippant, accompanies her. AMY seems more in control than her mother, more concerned with the living than the dead. MARILYN is so involved in taking care of the business of getting her husband buried that she hasn't yet had time to face the fact that he is gone. She goes to the coffin, stops and peers in for a long moment.)

MARILYN

Well, you've really done it this time, haven't you, Avery?

AMY

Mother!

MARILYN

What? "Mother" what?

AMY

You know, **what!**

MARILYN

What? How should I know what? How **could** I know what?

AMY

Well then if you don't know, what--just, **don't**, okay?

MARILYN

Don't . . . **what?**

AMY

Don't--talk to Dad. For Chrisake!

MARILYN

I'm not. I'm talking to him for my sake.

(AMY walks away, groans and moves to examine some of the flowers.)

MARILYN

You don't think he's listening? (No response.) Amy? Do you?

AMY

No! I don't think he's listening.

MARILYN

I don't either, but . . . when did he ever really listen to me?

AMY

He listened; he could always repeat your . . .

MARILYN

Speeches? My speeches? Is that what you were going to say?

(AMY takes a flower from a vase and smells it, then carries it with her as she speaks.)

AMY

No, that's not what I was going to say. (MARILYN just shrugs.) Whatever they were--speeches, diatribes, lectures, opinions--Dad could always repeat them verbatim.

MARILYN

Doesn't mean he was listening. You can listen without hearing what someone is saying.

AMY

What?

MARILYN

Stop it!

AMY

I will. I'm sorry.

(She crosses to MARILYN, hugs her and gives her the flower.)

MARILYN

The only point I was making is that he has **really** shut us out this time. Crawled into his own little impregnable shell for perpetuity. Not that he didn't live in one all his life.

AMY

Mom, give him a break. It's not his fault.

EVERY (from the coffin)

It's not my fault.

MARILYN

Not **now**, but it was. For the last 24 years it was his fault! Do you know what I think?

(EVERY rises up slowly from his coffin, grabs the lid of the box and starts to close it.)

AMY

No, but I'm pretty sure I'm going to find out.

MARILYN

If he could, if he was able, he would reach up and close that coffin right now so he wouldn't have to hear this. That's what I think.

(EVERY stops what he is doing and sinks back into the coffin, leaving the lid open.)

AMY

And I think you're expecting too much of a dead man.

MARILYN

No, I'm just expecting . . . **something**. That's all I ever really expected, some kind of a human response to . . .

AMY

To what?

MARILYN

To--things that were important to me--us. Things that were important to **us**.

AMY

He had a different agenda, that's all. Besides you said things that were important to "me," meaning, you, first.

MARILYN

Well, dammit, they **should** have been important to him too. I lived with him for more than two decades, bore his children, shared his bed! Why wouldn't have they been important to him?

(During this exchange GREGORY MANN, 22, cocky and somewhat defensive enters; his clothes resemble those of his father, but he has on a tie rather than a crewneck sweater. He thinks his mother and sister are fighting, so he turns to exit.

MARILYN

Where are you going?

GREGORY

I don't know what's going on here, but I don't want to be a part of it.

MARILYN

Of what?

GREGORY

This . . . all of it. Whatever's happening.

MARILYN

Your father's wake is what's happening, Gregory. And you're expected to be a part of it.

GREGORY

I meant--your--heated exchange--with Amy.

AMY

Heated exchange?

MARILYN

Is that what we were having, Amy? A "heated exchange?"

AMY

Well, I thought it was more like a--difference of opinion.

GREGORY

Cute, Amy.

MARILYN

And I thought it was just a friendly little chat. A simple case of mother and daughter bonding. You must know all about that, male bonding I mean.

GREGORY

I don't care if it was a heated exchange, a difference of opinion, a friendly little chat, female bonding, or the beginning of a regional conflict, I don't want to be a part of it! Mom, I don't even want to be here. I feel like I ought to be here, not for me, but for Dad. So don't start on me, okay?

MARILYN

Start on you? Jesus, Gregory, it was the furthest thing from my mind to **start** on you. And, for God's sake, don't stay here just for your father. He's not in a position to care one way or another. Do what **you** want to do. Not him, and certainly not me!

(AVERY rises during this exchange, and listens as if MARILYN doesn't know what she's talking about. Then he gets out of the coffin, crosses to a wingback chair downstage and takes a seat. The others don't respond because they can't see AVERY; this is an instance where the action on stage is frozen for AVERY. To his family he never leaves the coffin.)

AVERY (to audience)

Well, I can already see that you're going to need to hear my side of things tonight. Not that Marilyn is mistaken or confused or even unfair, but simply because perspective is everything. And I don't want **your** perspective to be warped by what you see here. You'll see what I mean.

GREGORY

Okay, fine! Since Dad is in no position to care whether I'm here or not, I'm leaving.

AVERY

No you're not! Jesus!

AMY

No you're not! We--need you here. And this is--family business, okay.

GREGORY

Okay, but don't expect me to . . .

MARILYN

Show any emotion? Don't worry, we won't. Like father, like son. Male bonding, that rot.

AMY

Mother! Give him a break.

MARILYN

I'm sorry, Gregory. I didn't--shouldn't have said that.

GREGORY

But you did **mean** it. And why is it "rot" if males do it?"

AMY

Don't start on her either, Gregory. Not today. Not today of all days. Let's stick together, you, me, and Mom. Okay?

GREGORY

Okay.

AMY

Mom?

MARILYN

To the end, okay. We'll see this thing through to the end.

GREGORY

Which thing are you talking about? Through what?

AMY

This--occasion, this wake. We'll see it through to the end.

AVERY

You bet! To the bitter end, to its illogical conclusion.

GREGORY

Okay. The bitter end.

AVERY

That's my boy!

GREGORY

Why do they call them "wakes" anyway? (He crosses to the coffin and looks in.) He looks anything but awake.

MARILYN

It's an ancient religious ritual, a vigil. We--the living--stay awake to protect the body of the deceased from evil spirits until buried.

GREGORY (yells)

Get outta here! Goddamn evil spirits. Leave my dad alone; he never hurt anybody. Leave'em be. (A beat.) How's that?

(AVERY cheers him on, crosses to him and attempts to slap him a high five.)

GREGORY

When does the eating and drinking start? Isn't that part of the deal? After all, you have to eat to stay alive, and you have to be alive to stay--awake.

AMY

Gregory, could you possibly show some semblance of formality? I mean, Dad's laid out in that box there. I'm sure he would enjoy the family camaraderie; still I think you need to restrain your enthusiasm somewhat.

MARILYN

Weren't the caterers in the kitchen when you came in?

GREGORY

I guess that's who they were--the ones in the white coats. I **know** who the ones in the black coats were.

AMY

How very perceptive of you.

GREGORY

Look little sister, don't you start on me either.

AMY

Don't start with the "little sister" crap, Gregory! I--

MARILYN

Stop it! Both of you. I won't have you fighting at your father's wake. You know how he hated conflict.

GREGORY

Afraid we'll wake the dead?

AMY

Cute, Gregory. (A beat.) Well, I wonder who's going to show up?

(AVERY begins to look uneasy.)

AVERY

Now that's a very interesting question. Could be almost anybody, I suppose. I had all kinds of--acquaintances.

GREGORY

You always wonder about that as a kid--wonder who would show up at your funeral if you were to die before your time. Like those would be your only real friends--the ones that wanted to see you dead.

AMY

Knowing Dad, I'm sure it will prove to be an interesting assortment of characters.

MARILYN

You did then?

AMY

Did what?

MARILYN

Knew you father?

AVERY

Come on, Marilyn! Drop it! Jeeze.

AMY

Of course, I knew my father. Didn't you?

(MARILYN studies her, then smiles.)

MARILYN

Know my father?

AMY

No. Know **my** father? **Your** husband?

MARILYN

Well, yes, I knew him rather well in the Biblical sense, but I didn't know him well at all in any other important way. Why don't you tell me about him? Since you knew him so well.

GREGORY

Mother!

MARILYN

I'm completely serious. You too, Gregory. Tell me what you knew about your father.

AVERY

This is just the kind of thing that irritated me about Marilyn. I, for one, don't think you need to know every intimate detail about another person's inner life to **know** that person. I mean, if your own inner self is so complicated and conflicted, why compound your own problems by having to deal with someone else's as well?

AMY

I'll let you know what I know when I'm sure that I know it, but right now someone's coming.

(The three of them move to a position near the coffin and wait. CONNIE PARSONS, Avery's first wife enters, signs the guest book and glances at the family. She is a petite brunette, forty or so, stylish, still quite attractive. AVERY rises slowly and crosses to examine her.)

AVERY (incredulously)

My God! Connie? Is that really you?

(CONNIE turns, sighs heavily and moves to the family. She seems uneasy about doing whatever it is that she has to do.)

CONNIE

I'm Connie Parsons. I . . . knew Avery a very long time ago. Knew him rather well, as a matter of fact, at least in one sense.

MARILYN (reflects, then)

Connie Parsons? You're not . . . ?

CONNIE

He probably wouldn't remember himself, if he could remember anything. Not that he had a bad memory, but under the circumstances, I mean. And it was so long ago, and we were both just kids.

AVERY

I remember. Jesus! I'd have to be dead not to remember.

MARILYN (incredulously)

Then you **are** . . . my god, why now? After all these years.

AMY

I'm Amy Mann, Avery's daughter. I guess . . . I don't know you. Should I? (To MARILYN.) She's what or not what? Or who?

CONNIE

No, I am--was, married to your father--like I said, a very long time ago.

AMY

You were what?

GREGORY

Dad was never married before! Was he?

AVERY

It's a very short and simple story, hardly worth repeating.

MARILYN

Yes, he was.

AMY AND GREGORY

**What!?**

MARILYN

He had been meaning to tell you.

AMY

Well, that makes all the difference in the world! He'd **meant** to tell us, Gregory.

GREGORY

Must have just slipped his mind.

AVERY (apologetically)

All right, I put it off, and put it off, and off, then they were grown, and I figured what's the point? Know what I mean? Sometimes it's best just to leave the past dead and buried, even before the person whose past it is, is dead and buried.

AMY

I don't believe this! Dad was married to . . . this woman? Before he was married to you? Is that right? (MARILYN nods.)

CONNIE

It was a very long time ago.

AVERY

I'm getting the distinct impression it was a few years ago. It all seems to have run together now.

AMY

No, no! That's impossible. You just **don't** not tell your children something like that!

MARILYN

Your father did--didn't.

GREGORY

When? How long ago? Under what circumstances?

(CONNIE looks to MARILYN, seeking approval to tell the children the story.)

MARILYN

Please, go on. I don't know that much about it myself to tell you the truth.

AVERY

She didn't **want** to know. She said it didn't make any difference. That's why I never told her the details. And there were so few of them; hardly made it worth repeating.

MARILYN

We had been married three years before **I** found out, and that was by accident. I was looking for **our** marriage license, and . . . I found yours.

CONNIE

You must have been--surprised.

MARILYN

Surprised is not the word for it.

AVERY

"Surprised" I would say is a little on the mild side for what Marilyn felt. I mean, I'd meant to tell her too. And I would have--eventually. The time was just never--quite right. Then she found the marriage license, so I naturally had to offer some sort of an explanation. (A beat.) And I thought that I knew her; well, I had not seen the angry side of Marilyn Mann until that day. (A beat.) Just as a general rule, let me give you men out there a piece of advice: If you've been married before, you probably ought to mention that fact to a woman before you get seriously involved with her. Women are damned sensitive about that kind of thing.

CONNIE

It was early 60s, at the college where your mother teaches. We fell madly in--lust, I think you could call it, and eloped. We were both--good--kids, very provincial, and it never occurred to us to live together or just have a sexual relationship.

CONNIE (continuing)

Things were still pretty Victorian in the early sixties. So, we got married. A year later we split up, and I left the area and didn't return until two years ago.

AMY

Why did you split up? I don't understand.

AVERY

I never understood it either.

CONNIE

Irreconcilable remoteness on his part; somehow he couldn't comprehend that my needs went so far beyond the bedroom. It was probably just his age, a certain lack of maturity.

MARILYN

No, it wasn't.

AVERY

Irreconcilable remoteness! Give me a break. What the hell does that mean?

GREGORY

Tell me, do I have a half-sister or brother than I don't know about?

CONNIE

Not from me, you don't. The only thing left is something of a vague memory, an uneasiness, as if something was left unsaid or undone.

MARILYN

I can't imagine that Avery left anything unsaid. He had such a gift for words.

AVERY

Marilyn's gift is for sarcasm.

AMY

And you haven't seen him for all this time?

CONNIE

Not once, not even a glimpse.

AMY

Why are you here now then?

CONNIE

Closure, to finish it. I saw the obituary; I was curious, and I guess I felt a sense of duty. I think there's a kind of bond established with someone you love that remains, even after you stop loving and being loved. Excuse me, please. I. . .

(AVERY crosses to CONNIE, puts an arm around her and escorts her to a seat on the far side of the coffin. She is unaware of his physical presence, but at the same time seems to accept his help gratefully.)

AMY

Mom, why didn't you tell us?

MARILYN

It wasn't my responsibility; it was your father's. Besides it doesn't make any difference, not now.

AMY

You're right, it doesn't now; it wouldn't even have mattered before. What does matter is that he never **told** us! The--withholding is what matters.

GREGORY

What else did he not tell us?

AVERY

Nothing! I didn't not tell you anything else--of importance.

MARILYN

I don't know, but I have a very bad feeling that we're about to find out.

(GREGORY walks to the coffin and for the first time really looks in.)

GREGORY

Mom!

MARILYN  
What?!

GREGORY

He's not even--dressed up; he looks--the same as always, maybe more relaxed.

MARILYN

He **is** more relaxed.

GREGORY

Levis? You could have put him in a suit.

MARILYN

Your father didn't even own a suit.

AMY

Well, you could have gotten him one for **this**.

MARILYN

A new suit to wear one time! How impractical can you get? And how could I have gotten a proper fit? Was I supposed to present the haberdasher with the remains?

AMY

Jesus! Don't call him that!

MARILYN

Haberdasher?

AMY

No! **Dad**. Don't call him--the "remains."

MARILYN

Him! That's not **him**--he was what was inside what's in the box now. And God only knows what was in there. I certainly don't--didn't.

AMY (looking in the coffin)

Well that's what I remember, what he looked like--his smile. Dad had a wonderful, warm smile and sparkling mischievous eyes.

(AVERY flashes the audience a smile.)

MARILYN (sings)

"His smile, his frown, his ups and downs."

GREGORY

Mom, are you all right? You're behavior is a little weird--under the circumstances. I think you're under a strain.

MARILYN

I took some Valium; I'm fine. Besides, the strain is gone now.

AVERY

Oh, great! Valium.! She'll be fine--until she crashes. (A beat, then:) What do you mean, "the strain is gone now?"

AMY

Well, don't start drinking for God's sake.

MARILYN

If I start drinking it will be for mine. (A beat.) Gregory, what did you do with your grandmother?

GREGORY

She's in the den, talking with the funeral director. They were classmates or something, way back when.

(GLORIA MANN suddenly rushes into the room with all the subtlety of a raging bull. In her mid-seventies she remains as active and domineering as ever. She is dressed very stylishly, and she has about her an air of confidence and well-being. It is nothing more than a facade, however; she is hiding her grief.)

GLORIA

Well, I never expected to see **him** alive. And I had no idea he was in this--morbid business.

MARILYN

He was probably just as surprised to see you alive.

GLORIA

And disappointed I would imagine.

AMY

Nanny, don't be so morbid.

MARILYN

From a business standpoint, I mean. The worst thing that can happen to **us** is the very best thing for his business.

GREGORY

Well, that makes all the difference. Whatever it takes to keep the old economy rolling.

EVERY (proudly)

Fine sense of irony, that boy.

AMY

Wouldn't want the country to have a recession because not enough people are dying.

EVERY

Amy too.

GLORIA

Marilyn, I'll ignore your children's sarcasm, under the circumstances. (She goes to the coffin and peers in.) My God, didn't he even have a suit?

AMY

No, and you know how he hated ties.

GLORIA

Particularly ties that bind.

MARILYN

Yes, those and paisleys. Avery had a distinct aversion to paisleys.

GLORIA

And family ties? (A beat.) Even so, I think it's a travesty to turn up at a funeral so casually dressed, even your own. You might just as well put him in some overalls and plant him in the garden.

GREGORY

We've been all through that.

(GLORIA removes a tie from her handbag, reaches into the coffin and begins to tie it around the neck of AVERY'S body.)

GLORIA

I don't care what you've been through; I won't have you bury my son without a tie.

MARILYN

Gloria, what on earth are you doing?

EVERY

Mom! Jesus, I'm not a seven-year-old.

GLORIA

Don't worry, it's a muted paisley that goes nicely with his jacket. The sweater has to come off though.

MARILYN (moving to the coffin)

Leave him alone! He doesn't need a tie.

(AVERY begins to tug at his collar as if he is being strangled.)

AVERY

Mom, please! She's right. I don't need a tie, and I don't want a tie anymore now than I wanted them as a child.

MARILYN

Amy, help me, please.

GLORIA

It won't hurt him to wear a tie!

(AVERY stumbles around the room as if choking, and finally falls into the wingback.)

MARILYN

Mom, you can't pull him back from the dead. He's not a little boy on a leash.

GLORIA (defensively)

**What** do you mean by that? A leash!

(Stung, GLORIA stops struggling with the tie and moves away from the coffin to a position near CONNIE.)

MARILYN

I didn't mean anything. Just--leave him be. Gregory, help Amy get that--tie off your father.

(As the kids begin removing the tie AVERY begins to relax, to breathe more easily. The kids are working on the body; AVERY'S spirit remains in the wingback.)

GLORIA (regaining her composure)

I simply didn't want my son to be buried in nothing more than a crewneck sweater and Levis. It's--undignified.

AMY

It's casual, Nanny. All the rage in the literary community. Papa Hemingway had on a **hunting jacket** when he blew his brains out.

(GLORIA finally notices CONNIE and freezes momentarily, studying her, trying to put the pieces of the past together.)

GLORIA

Good God! Connie, is that you? Connie Parsons?

CONNIE

Hello, Gloria.

(CONNIE rises, crosses to her, and finally gives her a perfunctory hug.)

GLORIA

Good God, it is! I can't believe my eyes. What--are you doing here?

CONNIE

I was married to your son at one time; I used to call you "Mom." remember?

GLORIA

You called me a lot of other things too.

CONNIE

And I meant every one of them.

GLORIA

I know you did, but that was a long time ago. Eons. I didn't even know if you were still . . .

CONNIE

Alive?

GLORIA

Yes, I didn't know that. After you left, we never--communicated.

CONNIE

Neither did we, Avery and myself.

MARILYN

Never? Not even a Christmas card?

CONNIE

Not even a jingle.

AVERY

Nor a bell because she never let me know where she disappeared to. I would have--said something, called, written. Connie was very dear to me. I only heard from her attorney. And her father. I thought I would never stop hearing from dear old dad, a man with whom I had some difficulty bonding.

GLORIA

Well, how have you been? Married, children, college, career, addicted, been through rehab? Were you a flower child, an earth mother, into transcendental meditation, what?

CONNIE

Do you want a brief synopsis of the last 25 years, or shall I just say "fine" and leave it at that?

GLORIA

I'm afraid the latter is all we really have time for.

AVERY

I've got plenty of time.

CONNIE (simply)

I've been fine for the last 25 years. Yourself?

(GLORIA looks around the room seems for the first time to comprehend fully what is going on. Her facade begins to crumble under this realization.)

GLORIA (breaking)

Fine, until now. Now I've lost my only son.

MARILYN

I think you lost him a long time ago, Mom.

GLORIA

Not like this, I didn't. Now he's not just absent, but no longer here. He's a long way off, somewhere--out there.

AVERY

It wasn't my fault this time. I couldn't breathe for that damn air bag.

(AVERY and CONNIE help GLORIA to a chair. CONNIE sits down beside her, and they begin talking quietly away from the others. AVERY moves back to the wingback and takes a seat. KATE HENRY enters. She is about the same age as MARILYN, professionally dressed, attractive, and seems a little hesitant, unsure of herself. She signs the guest book, surveys the parlor, then goes to the coffin and looks in on AVERY.)

KATE

Well, no more worries, huh, Avery?

AVERY

That's what you think.

(KATE crosses to the others and extends her hand to MARILYN. She seems resigned to do whatever it is that she must do to settle accounts with AVERY'S widow and children.)

KATE

Marilyn, I presume, along with Amy and Gregory.

MARILYN

That's right, but . . . but I can't seem to place you.

KATE

Neither could Avery, but then that was supposed to be my job. (A beat.) Kate Henry.

MARILYN

Avery's analyst, of course. He spoke of you frequently.

KATE

Avery's **former** analyst. And I'm surprised he mentioned me at all. I thought we parted under some--rather unusual circumstances.

MARILYN

He spoke of you often--and quiet fondly. He was very upset when . . .

KATE

When I let him go?

MARILYN

Yes, when you stopped seeing him. He was upset for a long time.

KATE

So was I. For a long time; a long time ago I was upset too for a long time. (A beat.) Amy, would you two mind if I spoke with your mother for a moment?

GREGORY

Not at all. That's what she's here for.

AMY

She means alone, Gregory.

GREGORY

So did I! Of course, she wants to speak with her alone; she probably knows all **kinds** of things about Dad that we don't know.

(AMY takes his arm and leads him away.)

AMY

We'll get something to eat, Mom.

(They exit, leaving KATE and MARILYN standing uncomfortably close together near the coffin. AVERY wedges himself between them, pushes them apart, then he stands back observing them.)

MARILYN

Well, you must have known Avery about as well as anybody.

KATE

I was going to say the same thing about you. The fact is, I feel like I know as much about you as I do Avery.

MARILYN

That puts me at a distinct disadvantage; Avery was fond of you, personally, as well as professionally, but he painted you in very broad strokes. I don't **know** very much at all about you.

KATE

I wouldn't have expected him to talk about me at all. I'm somewhat surprised.

MARILYN

And, ill at ease, I'd say. He didn't say anything--incriminating. And, of course, I can't believe that Avery would withhold anything from me.

EVERY

Jesus, Marilyn! Just drop it.

KATE

He had nothing incriminating to report, at least on his part. He was a perfect gentleman, if not a model patient.

MARILYN

In my opinion, there's no such thing as a perfect gentlemen. Anyway, I don't understand. Perfect gentleman? Imperfect patient?

KATE

Avery, I'm afraid, didn't reveal very much of himself--his inner self to me--in all that time. I think . . . he was just beginning to feel more at ease with me when--he began to realize that I was attracted to him.

MARILYN (carefully)

Avery was attracted to you?

KATE

No, I was attracted to Avery. I really shouldn't be talking about him.

MARILYN

Of course, the doctor, patient/relationship, confidentiality--all that rot! Look, you started this; I'm not going to let you quit now. (A beat.) Besides, isn't this what you came for? Or did you come to comfort the grieving widow?

KATE

Maybe I came to be comforted.

MARILYN

By his absence or my presence?

KATE

I don't really know. Perhaps by his present absence.

MARILYN

Perhaps. Tell me, why did Avery come to you? What did he want?

KATE

It wasn't because there was anything **wrong** with him, not in the sense that he was maladjusted in any way, anymore so than any of the rest of us. But he did come to me--looking for something. Looking to . . . connect I think.

MARILYN

Avery wanted to--connect? He wanted to connect so he came to you for a very handsome fee--to connect.

KATE

That's right, connect. With you, with me, almost anyone.

MARILYN

I don't understand. I was more than willing to--**connect** with Avery; he knew that. I tried for years to make some kind of an intimate connection; I think the idea of connecting with me may have terrified him. But **you** obviously made some kind of a connection.

KATE

Not much of one, in the end. I mean, I think he gave me what he could, and then I spoiled it by wanting something more, something he wasn't willing or capable of giving.

MARILYN

Unless I'm mistaken you're talking about sex.

KATE

Yes, I am. I'm sorry I had to tell you that. I feel very ashamed.

AVERY

**Had** to tell her? She didn't **have** to tell her! Nobody twisted her arm; she didn't even have to come here tonight. She could be home reading Freud or making ink blots.

MARILYN

You don't have to apologize. My only **real** connection with Avery was through sex, and our children, which were a direct consequence of the sex. That's the only part of himself that he ever gave me, and that was a pretty small part.

AVERY

Now, wait just a minute here, Marilyn!

MARILYN

God knows I wanted more from him, and would have done practically anything to get it.

KATE

So would he.

MARILYN

Like hell! The harder I tried to reach him the further he withdrew. The harder I tried to pry open his shell, the tighter he would close it. A classic male withdrawal syndrome, I'd say. After they get what they want they withdraw from you both physically and emotionally.

KATE

He clearly had a problem with intimacy, that's true, but that doesn't mean he didn't love you deeply.

MARILYN

I never questioned his love, or his commitment to it. But he held so much from me that I was incapable of keeping from him that it made me **feel** unloved. I offered him my heart and mind and soul and body. And the only thing he accepted was my body.

AVERY

That was the only thing I knew what to do with for crying out loud. But there's plenty of stuff that tells you what to do with another body. Where in the hell do you find out what to do with a heart or mind or soul?

KATE

A typical male.

MARILYN

Atypical or a typical male?

KATE

In his case, both I think. Or we--that is, **you** probably wouldn't have loved him.

MARILYN

Was that a grammatical or a Freudian slip?

KATE

Maybe it wasn't a slip at all. I stopped seeing--**counseling** Avery because I became so strongly attached to him; I told you that. **I** found it difficult to keep our relationship professional. He didn't respond however; you needn't be concerned about Avery responding.

MARILYN

I'm sure you had your ethical code--the Hippo--critic oath.

KATE

As I was saying, he never responded to my attention.

MARILYN

Are you sure he was aware of it?

KATE

He was after I told him. I mean I gave him every indication that I was interested before I finally told him, but I don't think he **knew** until I spelled it out for him. Either that or he was a terrific actor.

MARILYN

He was that. (A beat.) How **did** he respond to your--affirmation of affection?

KATE

That's a very civilized way to put it. Quite frankly, it was more like a plea to--do with me what you will.

MARILYN

That's a very literary way to put it. (A beat.) How did **he** put it?

KATE

To me? He didn't put it to me, which was the problem, at least as far as I was concerned. Instead he exhibited a classic case of withdrawal from the field of conflict. He didn't want to hurt me by his rejection; he didn't want to hurt you by accepting me, so he withdrew, but he did it indirectly. By standing still, he made me move--drop him as a client for professional reasons, which saved face for me, and at the same time distanced him from the source of conflict. Of course I knew enough about him not to give chase, and I do have my pride.

MARILYN

Did he ever try to re-establish contact? He talked about it quite often.

KATE

Not to me. Never heard a word from him. It was as if one of us had fallen off the end of the earth. Our own little Christopher Columbus--sailed to the brink of a new emotional world and fell off into the void never to be heard from again.

MARILYN

I remember when he stopped seeing you; he said that he was "all right" that everything was just "fine."

KATE

Maybe it was--for him. (A beat.) Well . . .

(She goes to the coffin and peers in for a moment. Then:)

KATE

I'm glad you didn't get him a suit; he looks--fine, and you must know how he hated ties.

MARILYN

He hated ties all right, particularly ties that bind.

KATE

And paisleys.

AVERY

And ties that strangle, suffocate.

KATE

Is there anything I can do, anything that I haven't already done?

MARILYN

Just tell me one thing; give me one more piece of information, if you can. (A beat.) I don't think there's anything wrong with me, with what I wanted or expected out of my relationship with Avery, or any man for that matter. So, there must have been something wrong with him. What was it? What was wrong with Avery?

AVERY

Wrong with me? Wrong with me! Just because I wasn't willing to spill my guts over the slightest little thing, there's something **wrong** with me! Even now, she won't--let a lying dog sleep! Jesus! Did I say that? Sleeping dog lie!

KATE

You mean, you want to know what I **think** was wrong with Avery? (Marilyn nods.) Like you said, I think Avery was--afraid . . .

MARILYN

Of me?

KATE

No, himself. I think he was afraid of losing himself, his autonomy, his own individual existence.

MARILYN (thoughtfully)

Or perhaps afraid of--finding it, finding himself. Seeing his reflection in another human being.

KATE

In you?

MARILYN

Perhaps. Or you?

KATE

You're very perceptive; maybe you knew more about him than you know. (A beat.) Well, I can't go on monopolizing your time. Thank you for--listening. I guess I needed to somehow reconcile my behavior with Avery and resolve some things that had remained issues for me, if not for him. I feel more at peace now.

MARILYN

I'm sure he does too.

AVERY

I feel more **like** a piece, a piece of meat that's getting hacked around in a butcher shop.

(KATE goes to MARILYN, pauses, then embraces her as if there is something there for both of them now, a common bond between them. As they part and KATE goes to find a place to sit down, GREGORY and AMY enter. Gregory is finishing a sandwich; both have drinks.)

GREGORY

Did she know anything that you didn't?

MARILYN

Let me put it like this: There's very little that she didn't know that I did.

GREGORY

What?

AMY

That's woman talk. (A beat.) Let us have it.

GREGORY

Yeah, both barrels.

MARILYN

It's too complicated to explain in a single lifetime. I'll tell you later, much later.  
(A beat.) What is that you're drinking?

GREGORY

Spirits.

MARILYN

Very funny. Let me have a sip.

AVERY

Don't! Not on top of the Valium.

(AVERY rushes to GREGORY and intercepts the cup. He drinks the thing dry then passes the cup to MARILYN.)

MARILYN

Funny boy. Now would you get me one?

GREGORY (puzzled)

What the . . . ?

MARILYN

Please.

AMY

I'll get you something.

GREGORY

Mom, I don't get it.

MARILYN

Never mind, your sister will.

GREGORY

Not that. **This**--this wake for Dad. You're here, his mother, his former wife, his daughter, his therapist. What other women are coming? Didn't Dad have any male friends? Who did he go hunting and fishing with? To ball games? Who did he hang out in the bar rooms with?

AVERY

With whom did he hang out in bar rooms?

MARILYN

I don't know that your father did any of those things.

(AMY returns with a drink for MARILYN.  
She takes it and starts drinking before  
AVERY can stop her.)

GREGORY

Dad wasn't normal; he definitely wasn't normal, not normal in the normal sense of the word. I mean he seemed normal at the time, when we were living with him. But looking back on it now, he was a very strange father, not a bad one, but definitely--**strange**. Not normal.

AMY

What was so strange? He was normal for him. He was just dad; that's what he did. And I think--what he did was who he was.

GREGORY

That's exactly my point. What he did wasn't normal. Did he ever take you out just to watch the sunset?

AMY

Of course! I've lost count of the times.

MARILYN

So have I.

GREGORY

But **why** did he take us to see all those sunsets?

AVERY

I thought the reason was obvious: Sunsets occur at a so much more decent hour than sunrises. Nothing abnormal about that.

AMY

He took us because the beauty of the setting sun was something to be shared. That's what he told me.

GREGORY

He told me once that we were watching the sun set on the British Empire. I was about eight at the time.

AMY

Was he giving you a history lesson?

GREGORY

That's just it. I don't know what the hell we were doing; we were just sitting there, and. . .

MARILYN

What? Sitting there and what?

GREGORY (thinks, then)

I was going to say, just sitting there in silence and not communicating, but, now that I think about it, maybe we were communicating after all, in some remote and ill-defined kind of way, without words to get in the way of what we felt. It was very strange, different from what other kids did with their dads. It was normal for him, I guess. Maybe there's something to be said for not saying anything.

MARILYN

Did he ever talk to you? (GREGORY sort of nods and shrugs.) Did he ever talk to you about women? About me?

GREGORY

Mom!

AMY

Did he?

AVERY

Leave the kid alone! Jeeze!

GREGORY

Not about you, but he told me what I needed to know, and he would explain things to me if I had a question. We talked some about personal things--private man stuff.

MARILYN

Well, I know better than to pry any further. After all, you are his son. I don't expect you to reveal anything of yourself or him to me, but I hope you won't withhold yourself from your mate.

GREGORY

I don't have a mate.

MARILYN

You will. You're really very much like him, and he couldn't get through the day without a woman at his side.

GREGORY

Or on his back?

AMY

Gregory! That was cruel. Nobody was on his back.

(MARILYN downs her drink, pushes the cup at GREGORY then turn away, hurt. He takes the cup and starts to exit.)

AVERY

That was a low blow, Son. She didn't deserve that.

(GREGORY stops, goes back to his mom, embraces her, then leaves to get her another drink.)

AMY

He didn't mean anything.

MARILYN

He just doesn't know; he has no idea what it was like.

AMY

He knows. But he only knows from his perspective. That makes all the difference.

MARILYN

Why are we so close, Amy, like we live in the same skin sometimes? And Gregory is so far away, like your father was? Does gender determine that? Or choice?

AMY

Mom, I'm just a sophomore. Give me two more years in school, and I'll know everything. Then I'll answer your question, okay?

(MARILYN smiles, touches AMY'S face, gaining the strength to go.)

MARILYN

Okay.

AMY

Pull yourself together. Here he comes again, and he has a man with him, thank god. Count your blessings.

MARILYN

I do. I count them every day. But it doesn't take long.

AVERY

That's my tennis partner, Nick James, the actuary I was telling you about.

(NICK JAMES enters the stage with GREGORY; NICK is about the same age as AVERY, attractive and well groomed, dressed in a medium gray suit, pastel shirt and muted paisley tie. He is carrying a tennis racket and a can of tennis balls. Upon entering he immediately goes to MARILYN and embraces her affectionately. She isn't surprised by his appearance, but it does seem to make her somehow uneasy.

NICK

Marilyn.

MARILYN

Nick.

NICK

Marilyn.

MARILYN

Stop it!

NICK

Just when I was going to burst into song.

GREGORY

I found Mr. James in the entry.

NICK

What did I tell you about that Mr. James business?

AMY

You told both of us not to call you Nick in front of Mom and Dad.

NICK

You're right, I did. Well, forget that. Call me--

AMY

Ishmael?

NICK

For God's sake, no, don't call me Ishmael. I'm not searching for the white whale; that was your dad's job. Call me, Nick, both of you.

MARILYN

What shall I call you, Nick?

NICK

Nick would be nice.

MARILYN

All right, Nick.

NICK

Marilyn.

AVERY

It's a real pleasure to see that everybody is adjusting so well to my absence. Wouldn't want to see anybody miss delivering a good one-liner just because I'm laid out in a coffin over there. By the way, Nick, that's a god-awful tie.

(NICK surveys the room, noticing all the women present.)

NICK

Nice crowd.

MARILYN

Some of Avery's--pals.

NICK (A beat, then to AMY.)

How 'bout those Celtics (Broncos, Chiefs, Warriors, whatever)?

AMY (puzzled)

What?

NICK

Never mind.

(NICK crosses to the kids and tucks each of them under an arm warmly.)

NICK

Now I don't claim to have all the benefits of your father's age--

AVERY

Of course not, he's three **days** younger than I am--was.

NICK (continuing)

--but, I did raise two kids by myself, neither one of which--has ever been in jail.

MARILYN

Nick! For God's sake, if you can't give them something of value, just forget it.

NICK

I'm sorry, it's just that I think we'll miss Avery's sense of humor more than anything.

AVERY

He'll certainly miss it more than he'll miss my backhand.

MARILYN

Yes, we might, if you'll just give us the chance.

NICK

Of course. Seriously, if there's anything you kids need, anything that I can give you that somebody else can't, don't hesitate to ask for it. I would like nothing better than to--make myself available to you for whatever you need. Okay?

AMY

Okay, thanks.

GREGORY

Yeah, thanks.

AVERY

Now that's awfully nice of him, considering I use to pound him into oblivion on the tennis court on a regular basis.

(NICK releases the kids and moves to the coffin and looks in.)

NICK

Well, how is the old boy? Looks surprisingly fit for being in that bad of shape; not that he was in bad shape when he was alive, but currently he's in about as

NICK (continuing)  
bad a shape as you can get in. (A beat.) Do you know what the probability of being smothered by your own air bag is?

MARILYN  
Relatively remote, I'd guess.

NICK  
You're about as likely to hit Lotto America.

AVERY  
Now why the hell couldn't **that** have happened to me?

NICK  
But no, **no!** You have to get smothered by an air bag. Way to go, Avery.

AVERY  
He's just irritated because I skewed one of his **normal** curves.

NICK  
Have you let the dog in to lick him yet?

AVERY  
What?!

MARILYN  
Have I what?

NICK  
Red. Did you let Big Red in to lick Avery's face.

AVERY  
No, they haven't let Red in to lick my face. And they're not about to!

AMY  
That's disgusting.

NICK  
No, it's humanitarian. You have to let the dog in to lick the face of his dead master; that way the dog catches the scent of death and knows he's gone.

AVERY  
Nick, Jesus, you've been reading too much Jack London.

MARILYN

Have you been reading Jack London?

NICK

No, I'm serious. Otherwise Red will wait endlessly for Avery to return. She'll sit out there in the front lawn crying for days, even weeks wondering where the hell he is.

MARILYN (skeptically)

Are you sure about this?

NICK

It's something between a man and his dog.

EVERY

I loved that animal, but I don't want her hanging over the side of my coffin, lapping away at my face, dead or not.

NICK

We did it when my grandfather died. Had a basset hound, tongue about a yard long; had to lift him up and put him inside the coffin with Gramps, couldn't reach otherwise. And you know what? As soon as we let that dog back outside he stopped digging holes in the yard, stopped looking for Gramps.

GREGORY

How do you know that's what the dog was doing? How do you know he didn't quit digging because he found his bone or something?

NICK

I know because I put his bone in the casket with Gramps.

EVERY

Maybe **that's** what he was licking for Chrisake!

MARILYN

All right, we'll let Red--say goodbye to Avery, but not right now. Later, when the guests have gone home.

NICK

It's for his own good; it's what Avery would have wanted.

EVERY

It is **not** what Avery would have wanted! I'll see if I can't get Norman Rockwell over here to paint this touching scene. "Something between a man and his dog!" Jesus, Nick, where do you come up with this stuff?

NICK

Avery was great with dogs and kids. Had a great backhand too. That's why I brought these.

(NICK goes back to the coffin and places the racket and balls inside, stands back and looks at MARILYN.)

NICK

Since he wasn't religious it may be too hot to play where he's going, but I think he ought to have a new racket anyway. I tried for years to give him a new composition or metal racket, but he wouldn't have any part of it.

AVERY

I was from the age of steel men and wooden rackets, not wooden men and steel rackets.

MARILYN

He always considered himself to be from the age of steel men and wooden rackets rather than vice-versa.

NICK

We all have visions of grandeur.

AVERY

And what are yours, old pal, oh buddy of mine? What are yours, other than, of course, to beat me just one time?

MARILYN

You're not going to give him a brand new racket?

NICK

And a set of balls. That's the least I could do, after everything he did for me.

AVERY

Name one thing.

AMY

Did you know Dad very well, Nick?

NICK

Know him?! Hell, we played tennis twice a week for how many years?

AVERY

Ten. Ten years, Nick.

AMY

So did you know him?

NICK

Well, no, I didn't **know** him in the sense that you're talking about. You're dad was a very private guy; I respected that in him.

AVERY

Which is exactly why we remained such good friends.

AMY

Respected him **for** it?

NICK

No, not for it, just it--his privacy.

GREGORY

But you were great pals, anyway?

MARILYN

Thick as thieves, I'm sure.

NICK (unsure)

Yeah, every bit that close.

AVERY

Thieves aren't close, Nick.

NICK

I've got to run; I just wanted to drop these things by.

MARILYN

It was very thoughtful of you. I'm sure he'd have appreciated it.

AVERY

I do appreciate it. Thanks pal; I won't forget this, as far as I know anyway, I won't forget this.

(NICK turns and exits. AVERY goes to the coffin and takes out the tennis racket and begins practicing his ground strokes with an imaginary ball. As NICK exits, DANE LUCAS enters. She is like the other women in most respects--tall, attractive, the same age, groomed and dressed like a professional. Marilyn is immediately agitated by her arrival.

MARILYN

Amy, don't leave me now. Dane just walked in.

AMY

Oh, no, she's your--friend not mine. We're going to get a drink. Come on Gregory.

MARILYN

Amy!

(They exit, leaving Marilyn to handle Dane by herself. Dane breezes in, walks to the coffin and looks in for a long time.)

AVERY

Dane! Jesus, I didn't know if she'd come or not. As my agent and friend for a very long time we had our share of disagreements over the course that my writing career should take. Dane was more aware than anybody, except for Winnie, of what I wanted to do with my writing, aside from making a living. She and Marilyn were outwardly friendly, but underneath I sensed that something was not entirely congenial. I don't know why or what, and being the man I am—was—didn't want to know.

DANE (to the body)

My god, Avery, of all the stupid things to happen--to let a Parker T-Ball Jotter puncture your air bag. I'm sure you recognized the irony: you live by the pen, you die by the pen. (She sighs heavily and turns to MARILYN.) Hello, Marilyn. How are you holding up so far?

MARILYN

So far, so good, thanks. (A beat.) I guess you lost a pretty good client.

DANE

The best, and a dear friend. There aren't enough of either in this world.

MARILYN

Or any other that we know of.

DANE (looking in coffin)

Doesn't he look good though, so natural, maybe a little **too** relaxed. And he seems to have a bluish tinge to him, around the lips especially.

AVERY

An obvious case of oxygen deprivation. You'd have the blues too, Dane.

DANE

But then the blue suits him, doesn't it? Wouldn't you agree that blue suits him, Marilyn? Deep blue, like the ocean.

MARILYN

Still waters run deep, you mean. That sort of thing.

DANE

Oh, I don't know if he was all that deep or just a typically confused male of the species. Sometimes he seemed deep because the questions he kept asking didn't seem to have any answers.

MARILYN

Maybe that was because he didn't know where to look.

DANE

Or because he wasn't willing to look there if he did. (A beat.) I should have pushed him harder; I let him off too easily. He had so many wonderful stories that he just never got around to writing. Never will now. He used to spend hours telling me the stories that he was going to write, **needed** to write and they were all so wonderful, so wonderfully revealing.

MARILYN

Of what?

DANE

Himself, I think more than anything else. Maybe Man or men in general and himself in particular. He did tend to mask things.

MARILYN

Did he?

DANE

Didn't he? You would know better than I.

MARILYN

I don't recall any stories like that.

DANE

He never wrote them; he just told them to me. I know he **meant** to write them one day.

AVERY

Of course I meant to write them; they were terrific stories, and people love good

AVERY (continuing)

stories. I just had so much to do and a lot less time to do it than I figured. If I had only known . . .

MARILYN (ruefully)

If only Avery had said or done what he'd **meant** to say and do.

DANE

The world would be a better place?

MARILYN

My world! Maybe not better, but certainly--different. More revealing.

DANE

And that would be good?

MARILYN

Wouldn't it?

DANE

I was asking you.

MARILYN

And now I'm asking you. Would the world be a better place if people, not just Avery, were more revealing?

DANE

I guess it depends on what they revealed.

MARILYN

And what did my husband reveal to you?

DANE

That he didn't reveal to you? Is that the back half of the question?

MARILYN

Yes, the back half, the unstated, the unseen.

DANE

I don't know. Because I don't know what he revealed to you.

MARILYN

He revealed nothing to me, nothing of himself.

DANE

And that doesn't reveal anything to you?

MARILYN

No, of course you're right, it does. It reveals a great deal. I've just never had it put to me quite so--bluntly.

DANE

I have a gift for directness.

AVERY

Jesus, Dane, take it easy.

DANE

I'm sorry, Marilyn, I didn't--

MARILYN

Know? Didn't know that Avery was so remote, so distant?

DANE

No, I **did**. I could tell from the stories he told me.

MARILYN

Stories about me?

DANE

No, him. The stories were always about him in one way or another. About his inability to reveal some hidden aspect of his character to the people he loved most. And to the people that loved him.

MARILYN

Are you one of those people, Dane?

DANE

Which people?

MARILYN

One of the people that loved him? Or that he loved? One of the people to whom he refused to reveal some aspect of himself?

DANE

Avery didn't--hide anything from me.

MARILYN

You--loved him too didn't you?

(DANE nods, reluctantly.)

DANE

I was very fond of him. You knew that.

MARILYN

Jesus, Dane! How did you love him?

DANE

Shall I count the ways? (MARILYN just turns away, shaking her head.) Yes, I loved him. At first innocently, then impulsively, then passionately, and finally just as a dear friend. And the latter was the best.

MARILYN

I want to know about "passionately."

(DANE looks at her curiously.)

DANE

Don't toy with me, Marilyn. I would think that the passionate aspect of it would be the least of your concerns.

MARILYN

Toy with you? Why would I toy with you and not be concerned with my husband's infidelity?

AVERY

I can see how this thing is going to get way out of hand.

DANE

I mean with--Avery's problem, I don't see how infidelity would be a concern.

MARILYN

Avery's problem?

DANE

His--you know. Do I have to--say it?

MARILYN

Yes, for Chrisake! You have to say it. **What** problem?

DANE

His--impotence! Do I have to spell it out for you now?

AVERY

I M P O T E N C E.

MARILYN

His **what**? His impotence? Where did you ever get the idea that Avery was impotent?

(DANE begins to show some obvious signs of discomfort.)

DANE

From Avery. We never, I mean he didn't ever . . . because he said he had a problem, which, I assumed, was impotence. That's what he told me. And he was seeing a therapist.

AVERY

I didn't lie to her. She just **assumed** that the problem was impotence; that wasn't my fault. She came to that conclusion on her own, and it was a convenient explanation for me. You see, I didn't want to lose my agent or my wife. They both fulfilled important needs.

MARILYN

He wasn't seeing a therapist for impotence!

DANE

He wasn't?

MARILYN

No.

DANE

Are you telling me that Avery **didn't** have a problem?

MARILYN

Certainly not. Avery had **plenty** of problems, but impotence wasn't one of them. As a matter of fact, Avery was an extraordinarily sexual being.

DANE

That's just what I wanted to hear.

(DANE rushes over to the coffin and yells.)

DANE

You don't know how lucky you are to be dead, you son-of-a-bitch!

AVERY

Oh, yes I do!

DANE

I told you everything, would have given you anything, and you lied to me! Why? (To MARILYN.) I just wanted to get closer to him.

MARILYN

So did I. I think that's why he told his stories to **you**.

DANE

Maybe that will make more sense to me after a couple of drinks.

MARILYN

Get me one too, please. No, get me two, one for now, one for later.

(DANE goes to MARILYN and gives her a hug.)

DANE

I guess I'm not being much help to you--under the circumstances.

MARILYN

To tell you the truth, you've been about as much help as any of the rest of them. Now get me those drinks. That **will** help, and we'll make some sense of--this thing before the night is over. (DANE smiles and turns to go.)

(MARILYN looks up and sees ANGEL ATKINS and WINNIE ADAMS enter. ANGEL is younger than the others, maybe 25 or 30, an attractive, petite brunette with a lot of common sense but lacking the advanced education of the others. She is a cocktail waitress who had known AVERY for several years. WINNIE is the

owner of an advertising agency for whom AVERY wrote free-lance copy. She worked closely with him and thought she knew him well in some regards. WINNIE goes to MARILYN, who she knows quite well. ANGEL, who only knows **of** her, hangs back.)

AVERY

Oh, this is just great--Angel and Winnie, two of my closest friends arriving together. Not that I have--had anything to hide, but . . . well, Winnie Adams owned the ad agency where I did a lot of free-lance work. We got to be pretty close in some ways. I mean when you're forced together in a work environment you can't help but get to know someone pretty well. And Angel. Well, I talked and put away a lot of soda water with Angel at the lounge where she worked in the afternoons. Maybe it wasn't the right thing to do because she's the kind of friend that is hard to explain to a wife. So I naturally never tried. But I think it's perfectly natural for people to have good friends of **both** sexes. Don't you? I don't know why exactly, but I just seemed always to prefer the company of women to that of men. (He looks over the women in the room.) Can you blame me?

WINNIE (embracing MARILYN)

Oh, Marilyn --I'm so sorry. What a stupid waste of a human life--a goddamn air bag. We're all going to miss him dearly.

(GREGORY returns with the drink for his mom. ANGEL smiles at him, and he looks at her curiously. AMY is right behind her brother.)

WINNIE

Gregory, get over here and give me a hug, Big Guy. (He does so, reluctantly. Then she takes the drink from him.) Thanks, I needed this. Now, how are you two doing?

GREGORY

It's difficult, but I'll make out.

AMY

We'll make it. If we can just get by **this** day.

WINNIE

You will; we all will. Now be a good boy and get your mother and my friend, Miss Atkins, a drink.

AMY

I'll give him a hand.

(AMY and GREGORY exit. ANGEL and MARILYN look at each other with some obvious signs of discomfort.)

WINNIE

Oh, forgive me. Marilyn, this is Angel Atkins, a friend of Avery's from--where was it again?

ANGEL

The Regency Room at the Chase.

MARILYN

The--what?

WINNIE

It's an upscale cocktail lounge in the Chase Park Plaza. Avery, evidently with some regularity, would stop in there after leaving the agency.

MARILYN

Are you telling me that Avery drank and I wasn't even aware of it?

ANGEL

He didn't come in to drink--alcohol. All he ever drank was soda water with a twist.

WINNIE

Lemon or lime?

ANGEL

Does it matter?

WINNIE

It does to me. He was writing a campaign for limes.

ANGEL

He took lemon.

WINNIE

Dammit to hell! I could tell he wasn't committed.

MARILYN

I suppose I should be relieved, but I'm not. Other than for a soda water, with a twist of lemon, what **did** he come in for?

ANGEL

To relax, I suppose, retreat from the rat race. To talk, see his friends.

MARILYN

(To WINNIE) To talk with this . . . Angel. ((Now to ANGEL) And you served him, and talked, but didn't talk back to him, and got to be--so very close that he kept coming back? And one thing led to another and . . .

EVERY

It wasn't like that.

ANGEL

It wasn't like that.

MARILYN

What was it like? Cozy I bet. Avery always had this thing for petite brunettes; his first love was a petite brunette. She's sitting right over there--Connie is her name, but she's no angel, as far as I know anyway. I could be wrong; I've been wrong about so many other things. Maybe you'd like to meet that angel, compare notes.

WINNIE

I don't think there was anything **to** it, Marilyn. (To ANGEL.) Was there? Angel?

ANGEL

There was actually quite a lot to it. But nothing--sordid, in spite of what you think.

MARILYN

What do I think?

ANGEL

I'm sure I don't know.

MARILYN

But you just said **it**, whatever **it** is, wasn't sordid, in spite of what I think, which implies that you know what that is.

ANGEL

I should have said, I think I know what you think.

MARILYN

Very well. What do you think I think?

ANGEL

That I was having a sordid affair with your husband.

MARILYN

And you're saying that it wasn't--sordid?

ANGEL

No, I'm saying that it wasn't an affair.

MARILYN

Good, then we can be best friends. (A beat.) Are you married?

ANGEL

Divorced.

MARILYN

Great! So was he. But not from me. From that angel over there. That earlier model of yourself.

ANGEL

I know.

MARILYN

At least not in a legal or literal sense. He was just divorced from me--emotionally.

WINNIE

Marilyn, he was in love with you . . . in his own way.

MARILYN

Was he? Really?

ANGEL

Yes, really.

MARILYN

Then why you? Or you, Winnie? Why **any** of you? (A beat.) Well, I intend to find out before this night is over. I'm going to find out just who this Avery Mann was, and why he was go goddamn remote! And you're **all** going to help me.

AVERY

Lousy idea, Marilyn. A really lousy idea.

MARILYN

I know Avery would think it's a lousy idea, but I think we can all learn something from it, something about him, and, more importantly, perhaps something about ourselves. And it will add some life to this otherwise somber event. I'll get us some drinks.

(As MARILYN exits the lights begin to come down slowly. AVERY shakes his head, moves to the coffin and climbs back in, resigned to his fate. END ACT 1.)

## **A DAY IN THE WIFE OF AVERY MANN**

by

David W. Christner

### ACT II, SCENE I

SCENE: The lights come up in the living room of AVERY'S home as before. MARILYN, CONNIE, GLORIA, ANGEL, WINNIE and DANE are all present. All are seated comfortably somewhere in the room, with the exception of MARILYN, who is standing at a chalkboard upstage of the coffin where her notes are visible to everyone. WINNIE is occupying AVERY'S wingback, and all the women are "frozen" as if suspended in time and space when the scene opens. AVERY climbs out of the coffin and walks downstage.

### AVERY

Would it be overly dramatic of me to say that now begins the beginning of the end, Act II, in this drama of one man's wife? From what I've witnessed so far, probably not. But that's for you to judge. It's clear to me that Marilyn is going to go through with this--for want of a better word--inquisition of hers in her typical academic fashion, leaving no stone unturned, no psyche unexplored. She is, I think, looking for the truth that lies in the darkness between the stars, if indeed anything lies there at all. In any case, my life with her may turn out to be little more than a footnote on some obscure page of her own dog-eared journal of existence. Certainly, she was more than that in mine. (Pause.) I firmly believe that people establish their own personal identity through their meaningful relationships with other human beings. Our own uniqueness then is a consequence of what we offer and receive from the many people with whom we develop some kind of a significant relationship. I know it's just a theory, but it worked well for me, if not for--all of them.

(On the word "them" the scene comes alive; the women on stage begin sipping their drinks and nibbling on desserts. MARILYN is scribbling something on the chalkboard. AVERY wanders about the room watching and listening, but he does not intervene.)

MARILYN

This **isn't** an inquisition, Winnie. I simply want to discover for myself what it was about Avery that made him so cold and emotionally distant.

ANGEL

How can you call him "cold and distant?" He was the warmest, most compassionate man I ever met. Are you sure we're talking about the same man?

MARILYN

That's just my point: I don't think we are talking about the same man.

WINNIE

And she wants to know why.

AVERY

Academics **never** stop asking why. I often wonder why that is.

DANE

Avery wasn't cold. He could be distant, maintain his distance, but I don't think I would call him cold. For the most part, I found him to be a warm and compassionate friend.

ANGEL

Someone you could depend on.

DANE

Of course.

MARILYN

In a pinch, Angel? Could you depend on Avery in a pinch.

ANGEL

Depends on whether you mean a tight squeeze pinch, or a passionate embrace pinch.

MARILYN

Isn't a tight squeeze a passionate embrace?

ANGEL

Oh, you're much too clever for me. Why don't you ask--that angel over there. She was married to Avery before you--knew him or decided that you didn't.

MARILYN

Connie, what do you say? Was Avery cold and distant?

KATE

You're--Connie, the Connie that was married to Avery?

CONNIE

A long time ago, I was, yes. I was married to Avery sometime during the ice age, I think it was.

KATE

I was his--therapist.

CONNIE

Physical?

KATE

Psycho. I wasn't aware that Avery needed physical therapy.

CONNIE

Neither was I. In fact, I wasn't aware that he needed psychotherapy.

KATE

Neither was he, until he gave it a try. Then I think he rather enjoyed it. (A beat.) In any case, he told me all about you.

CONNIE

**All** about me?

KATE

A great deal. All he could recall, and was willing to share.

MARILYN

Which is far more than he told me. He didn't tell me **anything** about her.

AVERY

Marilyn, we've been all through that.

MARILYN

Until he **had** to. Until I found out by accident! Then he had to explain. For all I know he may have been married **another** time. Does anybody know if Avery was married another time or not?

AVERY

I certainly was not **married** another time. Okay, I was **engaged** once, but I never saw any point in bringing that up, especially after she found out about my marriage to Connie. Besides she was engaged once before me too. It was no big deal.

MARILYN

I never hid the fact that I was engaged to someone before I met Avery.

AVERY

I didn't care; what did that have to do with me? I could have lived without that information; it wasn't vital.

MARILYN

I couldn't have lived with myself if I hadn't told him there was someone else.

KATE

Someone who wasn't cold and distant?

MARILYN (sighs heavily)

No, he was--**bold** and distant, a hero, a casualty of the--war in Vietnam.

KATE

I'm sorry. I didn't know that.

MARILYN (woodenly)

And Avery was a casualty of a conflict much closer to home.

WINNIE

So, Connie, tell us: Did you find Avery cold and distant?

CONNIE

It was years ago, of course, but at the time, I'd have to say that Avery was--**hot** and distant, if you know what I mean.

AVERY

Oh, fine! Why don't you draw them a picture.

WINNIE

I think we can figure it out.

DANE

Speak for yourself. I'd like to hear more about it.

CONNIE

The hot or the distant?

DANE

Two guesses.

MARILYN

That's enough. We have work to do. (A beat.) Okay, let me put that right here on the board for clarification and posterity. (She goes to the chalkboard.) That's one hot and distant, and one cold and distant. And, unless I'm mistaken, there are a couple of warm and compassionates out there somewhere.

ANGEL (raising her hand)

Yes, warm and compassionate, I said that.

MARILYN (pointedly)

I know. And I'll add--good in the pinch, whatever **that** entails. Does anybody **else** have anything to add at this point? (A beat.) No? Okay, we'll go on with the--character assessment of Avery Mann. (Looks to CONNIE.) Hot and distant, and yet--remote. That's why you left--irreconcilable remoteness, right?

CONNIE

Yes, remoteness. That was his strong suit, but, I think he had his reasons for keeping his distance.

GLORIA

You don't need to elaborate.

MARILYN

Yes, she does.

AVERY

By all means! Let's strip away the veneer and get down to the bare bones. Get the skeleton out of the closet.

CONNIE (carefully)

Well, I loved Avery the way a young woman loves a young man, probably more passionately than anything else, but it became clear to me even as a young and not too wise woman, that there were tremendous obstacles to overcome before

CONNIE (continuing)

he could or would become intimate with me on anything other than a physical level. Before he would involve himself with me emotionally.

MARILYN

What kind of obstacles?

CONNIE

I think he needed to--completely sever some--very close family ties before he could establish any kind of intimacy with another woman.

KATE

Another woman?

GLORIA

With me, Connie? Avery needed to sever those very close kinds of ties with me? Why don't you go ahead and say it? Tell them! Tell them the whole sordid story. Tell them how you tricked Avery into marrying you and took him away from the only woman who ever loved him. Tell them!

EVERY (shaking his head)

Mom and Connie were never--close.

CONNIE

Don't start with that shit, Gloria! I'm sorry you lost your son; I **know** what he meant to you, but don't start on me, not now, not again after 25 years.

GLORIA (sweetly)

It's the furthest thing from my mind, dear Connie. Of course, you're right, after all these years, years that incidentally have been very kind to you. Why you don't look a day older than any of the rest of Avery's friends, except for Angel. In fact, you don't even look any older than Avery, and god knows you are older than Avery, even if nobody else does.

DANE

Could I get you a drink, Gloria?

GLORIA

Yes, please, by all means. Gin. And get one for my friend Connie too, something cheap.

CONNIE

I'm pleased to see how the years have softened you, Gloria. Some people turn hard and cynical with time. Not you. You haven't changed a bit. The same sweet Gloria of the Neanderthal period.

AVERY

I don't think we've got to worry about anything being left unsaid in **this** conversation.

CONNIE

Do you **really** know why Avery married me, Gloria? Aside from the fact that he was crazy about me.

GLORIA

Of course, I know dear. I've always known. Because you seduced him; it was always crystal clear to me. Why else would he gotten involved with a--woman like you? A woman who hustled drinks and god only know what else for a living.

CONNIE

I didn't hustle drinks! I **served** drinks in a cocktail lounge to pay my way through school. We didn't all have loving mothers to provide us with everything and protect us from the world.

GLORIA

Of course not. Some of us had men to do that. (A beat.) You were about to tell me why Avery married you. I'd like to hear that, provided of course that I get equal air time to respond.

KATE

Maybe we should--just relax a while, continue this discussion in another decade or so.

MARILYN

No! Go on. I think maybe we should go on and bury the past along with Avery. But we need to know what it is that we're burying.

CONNIE

I'll tell you why, Gloria, **remind** you why he married me, in case your memory is failing in your advanced years. Because you wouldn't leave him alone; you refused to let him have a life of his own. You had to be the center of his life, because he was the center of yours. You smothered him with your attention after you ran his father off.

GLORIA (frantically)

That's a lie! (A beat.) Connie was older than Avery, you see; he was hardly more than a boy really, a freshman, when he met this "older" woman, who knew very well the way to a man's--heart. She seduced him, and Avery felt an **obligation** to marry her. That's all there was to it! There was never any love,

not for you, anyway! He was just too young to know the difference between what he felt in his heart and what he felt in his groin. Men are like that. He

GLORIA (continuing)

would have learned in time, however, that while the soft place in his heart would grow harder, the hard place in his groin would grow softer. And he would have left you, if given the chance.

CONNIE

You're just irritated, Gloria, because Avery never felt either one of those things for you!

GLORIA

I won't even dignify such a preposterous accusation with a response.

CONNIE

And you didn't love him either; all you wanted was to control him. Is it any wonder he fell for me? He would have fallen for any woman on earth that got him away from you!

GLORIA

And he fell for a bar room slut! Is that what you're telling me?

CONNIE

I'm telling you the truth!

GLORIA

Which is exactly what I'm telling you!

AVERY

Funny thing--the truth. I will say this about it though--as often as not, it hurts. And that's the truth.

CONNIE

I'm sorry, Marilyn. I shouldn't have stayed. When I first saw her, I thought maybe things would be different, but they're not. It's the same, and it doesn't make any more sense now than it did then. I have to go. I won't stand here and fight this pointless battle all over again.

(CONNIE turns abruptly and hurries off stage. AVERY starts to go after her, realizes the futility of his action and instead flops down into the wingback. MARILYN in the meantime goes to the

chalkboard. GLORIA is glad to see  
CONNIE go.)

AVERY

Mother was never one to forgive and forget.

KATE

Looks like you just lost a piece of your puzzle.

MARILYN

But not without making an important discovery.

WINNIE

What?

MARILYN

I think I discovered what it was that Connie gave Avery.

KATE

Other than sex?

MARILYN

Yes. I think that I discovered what she gave him other than sex.

GLORIA (defensively)

And what might that be?

MARILYN (frankly)

A way out.

(GLORIA stares at her savagely for a long  
moment, then wheels around abruptly  
and storms out.)

GLORIA (exiting)

I know my way out, and you needn't bother staying in touch.

AVERY

What she means by that is: Don't ever speak to her again, but she doesn't mean  
it.

(AMY suddenly rushes into the room.)

AMY

Mom, what on earth is going on? First, that--Connie person--

AVERY

Parsons. Connie Parsons Mann, if the truth be known.

AMY (continuing)

--comes rushing out all in tears. Then Nanny flies in and heads for the gin.

MARILYN

It's a long story, one you'd probably be better off not hearing. Suffice to say, however, that Nanny and Connie aren't--getting on.

(GREGORY enters.)

GREGORY

Nanny wants me to drive her home; she's into the gin.

MARILYN

Go ahead. You go with them Amy.

AMY

Why?

AVERY

That's Marilyn's influence.

MARILYN

In case he needs a hand with her. You know how she gets. (A beat.) Please. And tell her that I didn't mean what I said.

AMY

What did you say?

MARILYN

Ask her.

AMY

She won't tell me.

MARILYN

I know, but tell her I didn't mean it anyway.

AMY

All right. I'll see you later. (To the others.) It was a pleasure to meet all of you--ladies. I know Dad must have--

Amy. MARILYN

What? AMY

Never mind. They know what you mean, even if you don't. MARILYN

Yes, we know, even if **he** didn't. WINNIE

Okay, thanks. AMY

(As AMY exits, DANE enter, carrying drinks for the now departed, GLORIA and CONNIE.)

Well, I guess **they** won't be needing these. Anybody? DANE

I'll take one. MARILYN

And I'll take the other. Wouldn't want it to go to waste. KATE

So you'll have it go to **your** waist instead. DANE

Or thighs or hips; I'm not particular. I'm way past the point of worrying about maintaining my schoolgirl figure. Unlike some of us. KATE

Some of us practically are still schoolgirls. DANE

Only **one** of us, and it obviously isn't you. KATE

Or you. DANE

KATE

Thanks. I thought you'd never notice.

MARILYN

Angel, you're not drinking?

ANGEL

No, I'm not.

WINNIE

What she wants to know, Angel, is **why** you're not drinking.

DANE

She wants us all to drink, Angel; she's wants to loosen our tongues. Loose lips drop slips or something like that.

ANGEL

When you work in--my kind of position, it's not a good idea to drink.

WINNIE

I think it's always a good idea to drink, especially in a cocktail lounge. Avery must have been a bad influence, not drinking anything but soda water with a twist of women.

MARILYN

**Lemon!**

WINNIE

Of course, lemon. Did I say--

KATE

Yes, women. Soda water with a twist of women.

WINNIE

Yes, well . . . here we are.

(Silence.)

DANE

Yes, we're here all right, all of us--sisters, the lemon sisters. Or maybe the twist of lemon sisters.

WINNIE

Or sisters-in-law. What do you say, Marilyn? Are we sisters or not?

MARILYN

I don't know if we're sisters or not, but I do know--(She gulps down the rest of her drink.)--that I'm beginning to feel much better.

KATE

Valium?

MARILYN

Gin.

(MARILYN looks at her empty glass for a moment then throws it against the mantle where it shatters.)

AVERY

Oh, fine! Why don't you just shatter the entire evening?

MARILYN

There. Now I've shattered the illusions of my marriage and my life with Avery. It's time to pick up the pieces. To get on with my life as a therapist would undoubtedly put it. (A beat.) I feel better now; Avery bought me that crystal.

AVERY

That's the Waterford?

ANGEL

I think I'll be going.

MARILYN (hard)

You stay right where you are! Don't move a muscle; don't even flinch. (A beat.) We need you here. **Avery** needs you.

WINNIE

Avery is dead, Marilyn.

DANE

And damned lucky to be so from what I can tell.

MARILYN (softening)

Angel, sit down please. And have a drink. Somebody get Angel a drink; get us all a drink.

WINNIE

I know my way around. I'll go.

I'll take scotch.

KATE

Gin. I only do gin.

WINNIE (exiting)

Gin then.

KATE

(MARILYN goes over and sits down beside ANGEL. AVERY takes a seat on the opposite side of ANGEL and puts his arm around her protectively.)

Angel? Is that your real name or some sort of an affectionate nickname?

MARILYN

My real name.

ANGEL (woodenly)

And Atkins? Yours? Your maiden name or the surname of your former husband?

MARILYN

It doesn't matter. Leave her alone, Marilyn.

AVERY

Marilyn, you're being **awfully** inquisitive.

DANE

It's my nature, my--profession, in fact. To seek the truth. (A beat.) Angel?

MARILYN

Atkins was my former husband's name. (A beat.) I guess you want to know my maiden name now.

ANGEL

Of course. My next question. You're getting very good.

MARILYN

Brady. Angel Brady. Anything else?

ANGEL

Well, I don't really know. Is there any other pertinent information to be gathered at this point? Anybody?

MARILYN

KATE

Children? What about children?

MARILYN (To ANGEL)

Of course, children. How could I forget the children? I have some of my own. Amy and Gregory, you must have seen them.

ANGEL

Yes, I saw them. They are very handsome children.

MARILYN

Like yours? Do you have handsome children, Angel?

ANGEL

Just a son, and I'd call him cute rather than handsome.

KATE

Handsome comes later. They all start out cute.

DANE

Yes, like puppies. They're all cute when they're little. Then they become big handsome brawling studs.

MARILYN

Does he have a name? This now cute but soon to be handsome little son of yours.

ANGEL

No, no name. I just call him, "Boy."

DANE

And he calls you, "Jane," I'll bet.

ANGEL

How much?

DANE

Never mind. I don't **really** want to bet; it was just an expression.

MARILYN

Angel, you're not being honest with your sisters.

AVERY

You don't have to tell her anything, Angel. She's used to me not telling her anything. Besides, I kinda like, "Boy." Has a nice masculine ring to it.

ANGEL

Avery. I call my son, Avery.

AVERY

Perfect! That's exactly what I would have told her.

MARILYN

Avery! Now that is what I call interesting. Isn't that interesting? Kate? Dane?

DANE

Why yes, I find that **very** interesting.

KATE

Maybe it's just a coincidence.

DANE

Maybe it's not. Maybe it's by design.

(WINNIE enters with a tray of drinks.)

MARILYN

Winnie, thank god you're here with the drinks. Pass them around and hold on to your hat because in your absence, we just made the most startling discovery, the most startling discovery, I suppose, since Columbus discovered America or the West Indies or Jamaica or whatever the hell it was that he discovered when he discovered it.

WINNIE

Really?

MARILYN

I'll say. But, I'll let Angel tell you all about it because it's--her baby. (A beat.)  
Go ahead, Angel.

ANGEL

I just told Mrs. Mann--

MARILYN

Marilyn, please. We are sisters, after all.

ANGEL

Of course, sisters, I almost forgot. Anyway, I just told-- Marilyn, that I call my son--Avery.

WINNIE

Avery! My god! Not after our, that is **her** Avery.

ANGEL

Do you know any other Averys?

WINNIE

No, do you?

ANGEL

Just my son.

DANE

Well, there you are.

MARILYN

I think that's just about the most fascinating tidbit of information that I've heard in a very long time.

KATE

I think you're overrating it as an item of interest. I find it simply mildly interesting. Could just be a coincidence, the luck of the draw. Maybe it's just a **very** popular name.

MARILYN

Maybe you'd think it was more interesting if the child was **yours**. Or if you had a child to name Avery or by a man called Avery. **That** might change your perspective.

AVERY

Jesus, Angel, maybe you ought to offer some sort of an explanation. Nothing conclusive; just a few simple words to clear the air.

ANGEL

Marilyn, my Avery isn't your Avery's child. My son is the only decent thing that came out of a horrible marriage, but he came out of it with his father's name. I was glad when that man took off because he was physically abusive, both to me and my child; I never wanted to see him or hear his name again. (A beat.) Your husband showed me that men could be warm and compassionate without demanding or expecting anything else. That's why I call my son Avery. I'm sorry I can't help you in this--whatever you want to call it, but I refuse to be a part of tearing down someone that--

MARILYN

You loved?

ANGEL

No, someone that I--cared for enormously. It wasn't like you think; it wasn't like that at all. (A beat.) I think I **will** have that drink now.

MARILYN

I want to know what it was like. You don't have to tell me now, but later, before you leave. You have to tell me what it **was** like. Tell me what you got from each other.

(ANGEL stares at her for a long time, says nothing, then walks away, escorted by AVERY.)

WINNIE

What was it like for you, Marilyn? If you expect us to bare our souls to you, you have to tell us about your relationship with Avery. What did you get from and give to Avery Mann?

DANE

Yes, Marilyn, 'fess up. You managed to wrangle the truth out of me before I even started on the gin. You must have gotten something out of this relationship to stay in for more than two decades.

MARILYN

I don't have to tell you anything.

KATE

But you will, won't you?

MARILYN

Why should I?

KATE

Because we're sisters. And because there's something that one of us has that you want. I don't know what it is or which one of us has it, but it is clear to me, that there is far more happening here than a grieving widow accepting the condolences of family and friends. Tell us what you're looking for, Marilyn; maybe we can help you find it.

MARILYN (moving to coffin)

I already told you: I'm trying to solve the equation of Avery's remoteness. I mean, he's as close to me right now as he was when he was living, lying next to me in our own bed. He was there physically, but he wasn't really there at all. He was out there somewhere. Or maybe lost in the recesses of his own inner

MARILYN (continuing)

space. (A beat.) Sometimes, something as simple as having dinner with Avery was like traveling in the vast distances between the stars.

WINNIE

Then why did you stay? If it was countless miles of oblivion between the soup and the nuts, why not just get the hell out?

DANE

Maybe it was just physical?

KATE

Not for 25 years, it was just physical. She was getting **something** that she wanted and more than likely needed.

MARILYN

I don't deny that. For a long time I thought Avery provided me with everything that I needed, and wanted: a family, between the two of us an acceptable level of comfort and security, respectability, yes, sex, and to some degree, companionship.

AVERY

What more could a woman want?

DANE

But that wasn't enough?

MARILYN

From what I gather from this--gathering, evidently, it wasn't enough for either of us. Was it?

KATE

It is well documented that we humans tend to attain different plateaus of satisfaction. Once our basic needs are satisfied we attempt to satisfy other secondary needs or desires that weren't so apparent before. And our secondary needs become almost like primary drives because the satisfaction of our basic needs is a foregone conclusion.

DANE

What happens when and if these secondary-primary needs are met?

KATE

I don't know that they ever are, completely. But if they are ever completely fulfilled, this theory would have us create new needs and desires.

AVERY

Just as I suspected: never satisfied!

ANGEL

Then what's the point?

KATE

The point, I think, is to **try**.

ANGEL

To try and what?

DANE

To be happy? Is it so simple as that?

KATE (reflects, then)

**Saying** it is simple. I think it's much more difficult to understand and almost impossible to achieve if you have to **try** to achieve it.

DANE

But you just said that the point was to try to achieve happiness.

KATE

I should have said that the point is to attain happiness **without** trying to achieve it. Happiness isn't an end, but the by-product of a successful process, the process of living the life that **you** want and need to live. I don't think I understood that until this moment. (A beat.) Must be the gin.

MARILYN

What I want to understand is why Avery wasn't or couldn't be happy with me-- why I couldn't fulfill his needs for--whatever the hell it was that he thought he wanted or needed. I don't know exactly what that was because he didn't tell me. He just--looked elsewhere for it. Did he find what he was looking for from any of you? That's all I want to know. (A beat.) Winnie?

WINNIE

What?

MARILYN

You know what.

DANE

She wants to know about you and Avery.

WINNIE

Marilyn does? Or is it you who wants to know?

DANE

Both of us, along with Angel and Kate. I think we **all** want to know.

WINNIE

To satisfy your secondary needs?

DANE

If you want to call it that. I call it curiosity.

WINNIE

How 'bout that, Kate? Does curiosity qualify as a secondary need in this case, in the case of Avery Mann?

ANGEL

I think it's more like a primary need in the case of every woman, at least every woman present.

MARILYN

That was clever, Angel. But she asked Kate.

ANGEL

Sorry.

MARILYN

It's okay. I won't hold it against you. In fact, I'll offer you another drink. God only knows what you'll say before the night is over.

DANE

Yes, let's let the gin talk for us this evening. Let's be very elemental and **gin--**erous with our thoughts and secrets. Let's share Avery's life with Avery's wife.

AVERY

I don't care much for the sound of that.

MARILYN

God I can see we're **all** going to be clever tonight. But no double speak; we have to tell the truth.

WINNIE

The whole truth and nothing but?

MARILYN

So help you god.

AVERY

God help us all.

DANE

Then let the. . . Ginquisition begin.

MARILYN

Yes, but first, more gin. We'll need lots of gin to run Avery through the mill, the gin mill.

WINNIE

I'll get the bottle.

DANE

And some lemons, don't forget the lemons.

WINNIE

How could I forget? I'm pushing lemons.

ANGEL

I thought it was limes.

WINNIE

Limes? Is it? (A beat.) You're right, it **is** limes. Forget the lemons, I'm pushing limes.

AVERY

Don't forget the rope then! What fun's a ginquisition without a rope?

KATE

Why is it that Winnie seems to be so--intimately acquainted with the whereabouts of things in your house, Marilyn? I mean, she seems almost--at home.

MARILYN

Winnie and Avery, as you probably suspect by now, were **very** close. They worked together for a number of years, and, I suppose, developed a--close working relationship, probably among other things.

DANE

I worked with Avery for years myself, but I can honestly say that I don't know where he kept the gin.

MARILYN

He didn't. I kept the gin. Avery kept--

DANE

Pretty much to himself.

MARILYN

No, not the gin, he didn't. He shared the gin. But he kept everything else pretty much to himself.

ANGEL

Well, it's no big secret if you ask me.

DANE

Which we didn't.

ANGEL

There's a whole table of liquor set up in the dining room. And I assume the lemons--limes are in the refrigerator, which is probably in the kitchen. I don't think you have to know a person "intimately" to know where to find the makings for a gin and tonic.

DANE

Oh, Angel, you take the fun out of everything. Are you always so practical?

ANGEL

Hardly ever. But I need to know where to find a drink--for professional reasons.

DANE

Of course you do.

(DANE wanders over to the television and takes the remote control. The others watch as she switches the set on and off. With the set off she takes the remote, moves to the coffin, and places the remote control device inside.)

MARILYN

What on earth are you doing?

DANE

It's the remote control. I thought that Avery might need it.

MARILYN

To control his remoteness? (DANE nods.) Jesus, I told you we were going to be clever tonight!

(AVERY hurries over to the coffin and grabs the device. The action on stage FREEZES momentarily. He points the remote at the women in the room, to the ceiling, at the audience and finally to the television set, switching it on and off over and over again.)

AVERY

Call me--**Remote Man!** King of inner and outer space. Purveyor of darkness, distance, deception and despair. Get too close and I'll shut you off or change channels. Keep your distance, and I'll be your best friend forever and ever. And, who, disguised as a mild-mannered reporter for a small insignificant daily newspaper, can distance himself faster than a speeding bullet; leap huge emotional gaps with a flick of the switch and cause turmoil in the lives of those he loves the most? Remote Man! That's who.

MARILYN

Did you ever see his Remote Man act? (A beat.) If it hadn't have been so true, it would have been quite humorous.

DANE

I don't think I ever had the pleasure.

MARILYN

I didn't say it was a pleasure. Far from it.

(WINNIE enters with a bottle of gin, tonic and limes on a silver tray.)

WINNIE

All right, everybody. The bar is open; help yourselves.

(Some of the women move to the table where WINNIE sets the tray and begin mixing themselves drinks.)

MARILYN

Winnie, did you ever catch Avery's Remote Man act?

WINNIE

Remote Man, the purveyor of doom and gloom, distance and despair.

KATE

I guess she did.

WINNIE

I caught it all right. If it hadn't have been so true, it would have been quite humorous.

KATE

Marilyn just said that.

WINNIE

Said what?

ANGEL

That it would have been funny, if it hadn't have been so true.

WINNIE

Well, that's true. It would have been. Did **you** ever see Remote Man, Angel.

ANGEL

No, Avery didn't share Remote Man with me. I never had the pleasure.

MARILYN

I already said that it was no pleasure! And you don't know how lucky you are **not** to have been introduced to Remote Man. It's one of those things that you're probably better off not seeing. Of course Dane never saw it either; that's one thing Avery didn't share with Dane, although he did share many other facets of his character with Dane that he didn't share with the rest of us, at least not with me. Isn't that true, Dane?

DANE

I don't know if that's true or not, Marilyn, because I don't know what he shared with you and the others.

MARILYN

**That's** what we're here to find out!

(MARILYN returns to the chalkboard.)

MARILYN

I'll tell you what he shared with me: S E X. That's what he shared with me.

ANGEL

And his life.

MARILYN

No, it was his daily routine, his style of living, his humor and wit or lack thereof, not his **life**. He didn't share that with me at all, except through the union of our bodies. Our minds or spirits or souls or inner beings never touched like our bodies.

KATE

Put that down on the board then, Marilyn. You gave and received sex from Avery.

AVERY

And a family, space--lots of space, freedom, and praise; I never stopped giving her praise for everything she accomplished.

ANGEL

How can a whole relationship be based on sex when sex itself requires at least some degree of emotional intimacy?

DANE

Says who?

WINNIE

Don't be so crass; Angel is practically a child, and she's liable to get the right impression about you.

DANE

God, I hope so. I wouldn't want her to think I was virtuous.

KATE (To ANGEL)

Compartmentalization. Avery kept things in separate mental spaces; he didn't let his feelings, whatever they were, interfere with things he wanted to do or had to accomplish.

ANGEL

I mean for her, Marilyn. How did she do it?

MARILYN

You really do want me to bare my soul, don't you? Okay, I will, but you owe me one. (Goes to bar for a gin. Then goes on.) For a long time my sexual relationship with Avery was based on--**hope**, hope that by making myself so vulnerable, by physically opening myself up to him that he would or could at

least attempt to do the same thing for me. I hoped that at the very moment of penetration when I was most vulnerable he would recognize and accept what his entering me physically meant to me emotionally. I hoped that he would

MARILYN (continuing)

somehow let down his guard and not be concerned with his being disappearing into my being in the way that his body was disappearing into mine. I hoped that we could become one emotionally the way we became one physically while making love.

ANGEL

But you didn't?

MARILYN

**He** didn't. And I don't know if he would even recognize what I'm talking about.

AVERY

Of course I recognize what you're talking about. I just . . .

MARILYN

What it amounts to is trust. Avery didn't trust me, at least not with everything, not with everything that I trusted him with. (A beat.) So, now you know my secret; I started out with more but ended up primarily with sex. Even now I won't say that it was a--bad marriage, but even after all those orgasms, I'd have to say that it was--anticlimactic. There was definitely something missing, some part of himself that he consciously or maybe unconsciously withheld from me and gave to somebody else, perhaps to somebody in this room.

KATE

But not necessarily a single person.

DANE

Oh, no. I don't think Avery was capable of giving everything to a single woman, as evidenced by those present.

KATE

What did he give you, Dane? Tell us that. And what did he get in return?

DANE

I think we should hear from his therapist first. Don't you, Winnie? Don't you agree we need to see what kind of light Kate can shed on the dark recesses of Avery's soul?

WINNIE

By all means. Tell us what he gave you, Kate, when you had him on the couch.

KATE

The slip. That's what he gave me.

WINNIE

I take it you're not talking about something from Victoria's Secret.

KATE

No, the verb rather than the noun. When I tried to get too close, Avery gave me the slip. He distanced himself, hit the road, took a hike, disappeared into the wild blue yonder. Get the picture? (A beat.) I already told Marilyn.

DANE

How does one's therapist get **too** close? Isn't that what psychotherapy is all about?

KATE

Of course, you want to get close, but not **too** close while at the same time maintaining a professional distance, a detachment from the patient. (A beat.) I'm afraid that with Avery, the closer I got the more I wanted to take an unprofessional position with him. That's when he gave me the slip. I already told Marilyn.

WINNIE

You already told us that you already told Marilyn.

MARILYN

Yes, she told me. And now she has told you that she told me.

DANE

Twice.

ANGEL

So, put that down, MARILYN. Kate got too close, so Avery gave her the slip. Avery **got** nervous. And Kate got the old slipperoo.

MARILYN

God, I love the way you put that. No wonder Avery was attracted to you--aside from the fact that you're from the petite brunette mold, a mold they obviously didn't throw out with the birth of Connie, Avery's first angel. You're also in the clever-with-words mode. Avery liked that in a woman.

WINNIE

Before he gave you the slip, Kate, he must have given you something else. Or why else the attraction?

KATE

He did, but that he gave to me in confidence, as my patient. I don't know if I should share it.

DANE

Well, of course, you **shouldn't** share it. Nor should we be here dancing on Avery's grave, but we are. So the question is: Will you share it?

MARILYN

If she doesn't I'll shut down the gin mill.

KATE

God forbid! I'll talk. First let me freshen my drink. Gin has a way of growing stale on you, going bad if you don't swill it fast enough. Men tend to do that too.

WINNIE

Swill gin?

KATE

No, go stale on you.

MARILYN

I think we're keeping up.

WINNIE

With the gin or the men?

MARILYN

Take your pick.

WINNIE

Gin, it's more dependable. You always know where it's coming from. (A beat.)  
Make one for me.

(KATE pours the gin and passes the drinks back to her sisters. Then she stands back and sighs heavily.)

KATE

Where shall I begin?

ANGEL

At the beginning.

KATE

God, no, not there. Anywhere but there; I'd bore you to death. I think I'll begin with the end, and work backwards, toward the beginning of the end.

DANE

But we already know the end; that's (Nods to coffin.) what we're here for. And it's not a particularly happy ending.

AVERY

And it's getting worse all the time.

KATE

Not his end, **our** end, when we gave me the "old slipperoo" as our sister Angel so eloquently put it. I'll start with the why of the slipperoo and work backwards to the beginning of Avery's horrors.

MARILYN

Avery's horrors?

KATE

Exactly. His fear of intimacy. You were right when you told me earlier that you thought Avery was afraid of intimacy. He was; he was frightened to death of it. And precisely for the reason you said. He feared losing his autonomy, his individual identity to another person. And I think Gloria more than adequately demonstrated how he came to have such fears.

MARILYN

But Avery wasn't a little boy. He could make choices; he chose not to get close.

KATE (gently)

He got close; he just didn't get close to you. It's very clear to me now, under these circumstances, that Avery couldn't risk everything to any single woman, to any **one** of us. He was afraid of being engulfed, swallowed up and drained. The sexual and emotional images run in parallel and sex is the perfect metaphor for what Avery feared would happen to him emotionally if he--entered into a total relationship with any one woman. Until this moment I don't think I could have articulated what his reluctance was to let himself go, but I certainly sensed and sympathized with it when he came to me.

DANE

So you tried to--what? Mother him?

KATE

Certainly not! I thought he needed a woman, but not a mother. He had one of those. (A beat.) I found him very attractive physically, and as I got to know him very well, I suppose, I must have come to the conclusion that **I** was the one

KATE (continuing)

woman who he didn't have to fear, that I alone could love him without engulfing him.

ANGEL

And just when he started to trust you, as a woman or therapist or friend, you betrayed him.

KATE

Yes, but I hadn't gotten to that part yet. How did you know?

ANGEL

Intuition. You don't need a Ph.D. to have that.

KATE

In any case, your right. Just when I gained his confidence, I lost it by--pardon the expression--falling for him. And that's when he gave me the slip. Never to be seen or heard from again. That's how much I scared him.

MARILYN

A very interesting story indeed. One that I'm sure will be passed on and on to the generations to come.

DANE

Don't be cruel, Marilyn. She's feeling some pain here, even if you aren't.

MARILYN

If I'm feeling no pain at the moment, Dane, it's because of the gin. But that will pass, too, in time. Just like the pain I've been subjected to for countless years from an unfeeling husband. (A beat.) I'm sorry, Kate. It's the gin and the lack of a tangible target, namely Avery, that's makes me vent my anger and frustration on his friends.

KATE

I won't deny you your anger, Marilyn, but, I won't remain your target either. All I'm doing is telling you what you **said** you wanted to know. If you've changed your mind I'll be happy to leave. Maybe I should leave anyway. I don't have anything else to tell you.

WINNIE

No, you can't leave now. Nobody leaves yet! We've just begun. Marilyn, get back to the chalkboard and put this down: Kate: what she got from Avery was his fears; he shared his fears with her.

DANE

And the slip. Remember that's what he gave to her.

WINNIE

Put that down too. His fears and the slip.

ANGEL

But what did she give to him?

DANE

That's a good question. Kate, what did **you** give to Avery.

KATE

Evidently, I gave him the heebie-jeebies. That's why he split.

WINNIE

Okay, put it down: Kate gave Avery the heebie-jeebies.

ANGEL

Maybe we should call it the--**she**bee-jeebies.

MARILYN

Of course, you clever girl. The shebee-jeebies. Is jeebies with a "J" or a "G?"

WINNIE

"J," I think, as in Jeep.

DANE

No, it's not Jeepies; it's **geebies**. A, "G," for sure.

MARILYN

It doesn't really matter; Avery couldn't spell anyway. I'll stick with the "J."

AVERY

I can't spell anyway. Go with the "J."

WINNIE

She's gone now, possibly for good, and I don't want to talk **about** her, but I think it's important to consider what Gloria gave Avery. She was--is his mother. We can't get away from that.

DANE

Neither could he, evidently.

KATE

She gave him his neuroses, of course.

DANE

That's what all mothers give to their children, no charge.

MARILYN

Not me! I told Avery in the beginning that he was going to nurture our children too; I told him that I would not be held solely responsible if our children turned out to be neurotic. We agreed that he would be responsible too if they turned out neurotic.

AVERY

Well, they are and I am. My mother didn't have a corner on the neurotic market.

MARILYN

How shall I put that?

DANE

As gently as possible. Put her name first--Gloria: Gave Avery his neuroses and got--a neurotic son's love.

KATE

And, in time, the old slipperoo. She got it too, in the form of Angel.

ANGEL

Connie.

KATE

Sorry--Connie.

MARILYN

What else?

DANE

Evidently, she gave him more--what? Love? Attention? Than he wanted or was capable of handling, accepting.

WINNIE

You can hardly fault a mother for giving her children that.

KATE

Knowing when to let go is part of loving too.

ANGEL

And if you don't know when to let go, your kids will find out soon enough.

DANE

How would you know that?

ANGEL

I was speaking as a child, not a parent.

WINNIE

Don't flaunt it, Angel.

ANGEL

Don't flaunt what?

WINNIE

**Any** of it--your looks, your energy, your wit, and especially your age. Not if you want to remain our friend.

MARILYN

Youth flaunts itself, Winnie; it isn't Angel's fault that she's young and beautiful.

DANE

This is a depressing subject. Let's get back to Avery.

AVERY

Of course, something pleasant, like dear ole--dead Avery.

DANE

Do you think he died in a state of grace?

MARILYN

Don't be ridiculous. Avery died in a state of--disarray if anything, not grace.

DANE

I mean, do you think he's--okay?

MARILYN

If "okay" is enough, then Avery is probably just fine. Avery was always okay. (A beat.) The real question is: Are **we** okay? And it's a much more important

question because it's one that we can do something about. Right here and right now.

WINNIE

What can we do about it?

DANE

The first thing we can do is swill some more gin. Would you fix a gin and tonic with a twist of lime for one of your sisters, Winnie?

WINNIE

Which one?

MARILYN

Fix one for all your sisters.

WINNIE

It will be my pleasure.

(WINNIE begins mixing drinks and passing them out to the others.)

DANE

And why don't you share some of **your** experiences with Avery with the rest of us? You haven't told us anything yet, and aside from Marilyn, you're probably Avery's oldest, if not, dearest friend.

WINNIE

"Oldest" friend? I suppose I should be flattered, but. . . does that make Angel his youngest friend?

ANGEL

I'm not that young.

WINNIE

And I'm not that old.

ANGEL

I didn't say you were.

WINNIE

And it's a good thing you didn't.

KATE

Just tell us what you know, Winnie. Old, young, we don't give a damn. Drink up and let the gin do the talking.

WINNIE

Actually, I thought I was going to be spared this--crucible.

MARILYN

No one is getting spared--speared maybe, but not spared.

WINNIE

Well, then, start tossing. I'll try not to flinch.

DANE

Beware, she's being too cooperative.

KATE

A sure sign she's hiding something.

WINNIE

God, it didn't take you long to get on to my scheme. Okay, I give up, Marilyn, and I'm willing to tell you what I gave to and in turn received from your beleaguered husband.

MARILYN

Beleagured? I didn't know he was beleaguered.

WINNIE

Maybe he wasn't. If that's the case then perhaps the information you seek is for the beleaguered wife.

MARILYN

Yes, if you insist on someone being beleaguered, I'll be happy to assume that role. We all have our troubles, don't we?

KATE

I know I've got my share.

ANGEL

Comes with the territory.

DANE

Contrary to popular opinion, life is anything but a bowl of cherries.

WINNIE (wearily)

Maybe I should have said--bewildered. (A beat.)

DANE

Bewitched, bothered and bewildered, like the song?

WINNIE

How about besieged, like I'm beginning to feel? (A beat.) Just tell me what you want, Marilyn.

MARILYN

Another drink.

WINNIE

In addition to more gin. You want to know what Avery and I gave to and got from each other, right? Like Kate--gave Avery the shebee-jeebies and got the slipperoo.

KATE

I couldn't have said it better myself.

MARILYN

That's exactly what I want to know.

WINNIE

Okay. Just give me a moment to retrieve my wits from the gin. God knows I don't want to be too sincere.

DANE

Be as sincere as you please. And don't worry about what you say because any misrepresentation of the truth is more than likely going to be misinterpreted anyway.

WINNIE

Well, I wouldn't want things not to get distorted, not blown all out of proportion.

KATE

I don't think you need to worry about that.

WINNIE

Very well then, I'll start by telling you the truth.

MARILYN

Do you expect us to believe that?

Of course not. WINNIE (simply)

Then don't keep us waiting. ANGEL

WINNIE  
My relationship was very simple because it was based primarily on his needs: He needed money and my business provided it. But, and this is an important but, he was, as you probably suspect, much more than just another copy writer. Avery was my friend and confidant.

Exactly how friendly was he? DANE

WINNIE  
Too friendly, but not **too** friendly, if you know what I mean.

I haven't even the vaguest idea. DANE

WINNIE  
Good. Suffice to say, then, that we were close.

ANGEL  
But not too close.

WINNIE  
Naturally not; after all, Avery was a married man, married, in fact, to a woman with whom I also became good friends over the years.

MARILYN  
But not too good.

WINNIE  
No, but that was your fault, not mine.

MARILYN  
It was Avery's fault. He came between us.

WINNIE  
I thought I did.

MARILYN  
You came between Avery and me. Avery came between me and you.

DANE

Pass the gin.

KATE

So, you gave Avery money and he gave you copy? Was it **that** simple?

WINNIE

That part of it was that simple. But as we grew closer I began to make certain--discoveries.

KATE

I'm on the very edge of my chair.

WINNIE

They weren't earth shattering or anything, but I do think that they were revealing in that these discoveries involved--secrets.

MARILYN

Did Avery have a secret life--or wife?!

WINNIE

Nothing so dramatic, at least as far as I knew. What he did have was dreams, secrets, aspirations.

DANE

Who doesn't?

MARILYN

He was a dreamer all right.

ANGEL

Do you know what he wanted more than anything else?

WINNIE

This is my story, Angel.

MARILYN

What? What did Avery want--more than anything else?

WINNIE

To win a Pulitzer.

MARILYN

Don't be ridiculous. Avery--

WINNIE

So **you**, Marilyn, would recognize his talent.

MARILYN

Avery--was a good writer, clever, a skillful writer; he wasn't a great writer. I don't think he was Pulitzer material.

DANE

You don't have to be great to win a Pulitzer; all you have to do is be competent, productive and read in the right circles.

WINNIE

Like in Times Square? Is that one of the right circles?

DANE

Oh, yes, that's one of the far right circles. It doesn't hurt to be read in New York, that's for sure.

MARILYN

I knew Avery wanted a Pulitzer; it was no secret. He told me that.

WINNIE

But you didn't know that he really wanted it; you didn't take him seriously because . . . you didn't believe in him.

MARILYN

Avery was a dreamer; I'm a pragmatist. I simply tried to protect him from his unrealistic expectations.

KATE

Which is probably why he went to Winnie with his dreams.

MARILYN

In my defense I can only say that we had to make a living. I hate to bring that up, but making a living sure gets in the way of having a life.

KATE

Or wife?

MARILYN

He had a wife! How dare you say he didn't have a wife; he just didn't know what to do with that wife because she needed him so much more than he needed her. (A beat. Then to WINNIE.) What other dreams did Avery share

with you? And what did you give him in return other than--your financial and emotional support?

WINNIE

Believe it or not, he dreamed one day of opening up, of sharing himself with someone.

MARILYN

Me?

WINNIE

That would have been the ideal.

MARILYN

But not the reality. He wanted to open up, **did** open up to all of you, but remained closed to the person with whom he supposedly was sharing his life. You know how so often you can never quite get what you want in a dream, how things remain just out of reach? That's how Avery was. For him it was a dream, for me a nightmare. He left me alone in those desert places of his between the stars.

DANE (after a few moments)

Well, I could use another drink.

MARILYN

To loosen your tongue?

DANE

To quench my thirst. All this talk of desert places makes me thirsty.

KATE

Put that on the list, Marilyn. That Avery shared his dreams with Winnie.

ANGEL

His dreams and his talent as a copy writer. He was very good, you know.

WINNIE

Yes, I know just how good he was when he was committed to a project, but he never gave those limes a chance. Now he's gone off to never-never land, and I'm stuck with a lemon of a lime campaign. Damn him!

AVERY

If your friends protect you from evil spirits at a wake, who protects you from your friends?

MARILYN

Okay, so far, this is what we've got: Gloria gave Avery his neurosis and received a son's neurotic love.

KATE

And a practically perfect child.

MARILYN

Fine. And a practically perfect child, insofar as a child can be practically perfect. Connie: gave sex and got sex. Marilyn: gave everything, got nothing.

AVERY

Whoa!

ANGEL

That's not fair.

MARILYN

You're telling me!

KATE

Put it like this then: Marilyn--gave the mine, and got the shaft.

MARILYN

I like that. Avery would have too, the symbolism. Okay, Kate, we're up to you.

KATE

I offered myself and received the slipperoo for my trouble.

MARILYN

Got it. Winnie: gave emotional and monetary support, and got the dreamer's dreams, for what they're worth.

AVERY

I think we could do without the editorial comment.

MARILYN

Dane?

WINNIE

Yes, Dane. We haven't heard from you yet.

MARILYN

I did; I heard from Dane earlier, before you came in. And she had quite a story to tell.

KATE

Well, don't keep it from us. We've all been very cooperative.

ANGEL

His stories. That's what he gave to Dane. I'm sure she must have told us.

MARILYN

No, she only told **me**. I remember it quite distinctly; it was just before you and Winnie came in.

KATE

Then how does Angel know, if she knows at all.

DANE

Intuition, Angel? Or something more tangible?

MARILYN

That's a very interesting question; even you have to admit that, Kate, that **that** is a very interesting question.

KATE

It is indeed, and I'm sure the answer to it lies somewhere here in the gin. Sometimes if you consume enough gin things become crystal clear. Gin is clear, like crystal, but it doesn't break.

DANE

Are we supposed to understand that?

KATE

No.

DANE

Good. I don't.

WINNIE

Tell us about these stories, Dane, unless, of course, they are too personal.

KATE

All the more reason **to** tell them.

DANE

I don't have to hide **anything** about my relationship with Avery.

WINNIE

Dammit! Never mind then.

DANE

Shall I start with the story of the black dog?

AVERY

Oh no, not the black dog?

WINNIE

Oh, yes, the black dog story! I can hardly wait.

DANE

You know it?

WINNIE

No, but I want to hear it. I loved Avery's stories, the one's he wrote. He never told me one personally, like he did you.

DANE

Very well. The story of the black dog by the late, if not great, Avery Mann. There once was this black dog, which we shall, for want of a better name, call-- what?

KATE

Blackie.

DANE

No. Spot. Spot was the black dog's name.

AVERY

The black dog's name was **not** Spot; black dog didn't even have a name.

KATE

Was the dog all black or did he just have a black spot?

DANE

**She** was all black, **like** a spot.

KATE

Like a black hole in space. I see.

DANE

No, you don't. You couldn't see her; that was the whole point of the story. No one could see her because she only appeared in the darkness of night on the

darkest night of the year. But she craved attention; she was lonely and desolate, living in her own inner as well as the outward darkness. And she was invisible, blending in with the darkness all around her. Naturally, she was a very lonely animal, this black dog of ours.

WINNIE

She must have cried out if she was so lonely in all that darkness; people would hear her whimpering and would undoubtedly offer her some kind of contact.

AVERY

Maybe a can of Alpo, a raw hide bone, **something**.

DANE

Yes, people, some people could hear her crying, but they didn't know how to help her because they didn't know what she was crying about. Nor could they determine where the crying was coming from because they couldn't see her. They just heard this crying coming out of the darkness. But nobody could tell what to do or where to do it.

KATE

So what happened?

DANE

Nothing. Nothing ever happened.

WINNIE

You mean--

DANE

**Nothing** is what I mean. Because nothing is what did or didn't happen.

WINNIE

That's a very sad story, and I'm **glad** Avery didn't share it with me. I wouldn't have wanted to hear a story like that.

AVERY

It's not that great of a story, but then she didn't tell it right either. That black dog has a life of its own, but it wasn't as bleak as she paints it.

MARILYN

Kate, did Avery reveal this--dark side of himself to you at all?

KATE

No, nothing quite so dark as that. I mean he did have his moods, but that story--was about as dark as you could get.

MARILYN

Dane, are you sure about this. That just doesn't sound like one of Avery's stories?

DANE

I embellished it a little.

WINNIE

You bitch! You didn't?

AVERY

Yes, she did!

DANE

Yes, I did. I embellished it as I went along, on the--spot. Thinking on my feet, like Avery. I thought it was rather good.

MARILYN

A little on the bleak side, but, yes, good enough I suppose if you have a fondness for such existentialist drivel.

WINNIE

You just changed it as you went along! You bitch! How could you?

DANE

It was easy, now that I think about it; I think this is something that Avery gave to me--the ability to recognize and tell a good story. That's my profession, of course, but Avery was such a natural storyteller that I couldn't help but become a better editor and agent myself from working with him.

WINNIE

I can't believe you did that to us. Made him out to be some poor creature lost in the blackness of an existential nothingness, crying out for help and finding nobody to provide it.

MARILYN

Clearly, that wasn't the case. We were all only too anxious to provide help in any number of ways.

KATE

Which maybe tells us more about ourselves than about him.

MARILYN

Tell us more. What else did Avery give you?

WINNIE

The truth this time.

DANE

Looking back on it, I think, through the stories that he told me, he was giving me a key to that portion of himself that Marilyn is looking for, that portion of himself that he denied to her for all those years.

WINNIE

Why would he give that to you rather than Marilyn?

KATE

Because Dane wasn't sharing his bed. He could give her that portion of himself while withholding sex and consequently not be engulfed by her feelings for him. As a listener she didn't threaten his autonomy.

DANE

That's true, I wasn't sharing his bed, or his room, or his afternoons, or the back seat of his goddamn Volvo! The **only** thing Avery shared with me was his stories.

WINNIE

I think we've touched a sensitive spot, which was made all the more sensitive because it was an area that Avery, evidently, ignored.

MARILYN

Let's stop trying to be clever now and start being nice.

WINNIE

I'm sorry, Dane. That was a cruel thing to say. You deserved better.

DANE

We all did. (Lifts her glass.) Cheers!

WINNIE

Yes. Cheers! (A beat.) Marilyn?

MARILYN

Sure, why not? Cheers.

WINNIE

I'm overwhelmed by your enthusiasm.

MARILYN

I guess that's all I have left at this point.

DANE

I think maybe we've worn out our welcome. The gin's gone anyhow.

MARILYN

There's probably another bottle somewhere. Or we could switch to Scotch.

ANGEL

Never mix, never worry.

KATE

I think we're all past the mixing or the worrying point. Maybe we should just go.

MARILYN

No, not yet. You can't go yet, not until I've discovered--whatever it was that I wanted to discover.

WINNIE

If you can't even recall what it was that you wanted to discover, I definitely think it's time to go.

DANE

Come on Winnie, I'll call us a cab.

WINNIE

I'm not sure I should even be a passenger in this condition. I'm not as sober as I look.

DANE

You'll do fine. Say goodbye to Marilyn and--what's his name.

AVERY

Avery! Avery, goddammit! The corpse's name is Avery.

(WINNIE goes to and hugs her affectionately. Then she crosses to the coffin and looks in on AVERY.)

WINNIE

I'm not sure what you got from me, Avery, other than some compensation for your talent in a very tangible sense. But I know I'd give you hell if I had it to do all over again. Not because of what you did to me alone, but because of how

you used each of us, maybe not consciously, certainly not maliciously, but to provide for your own needs when all of us were thinking about your needs instead of our own. I realize it's ironic that I fault myself for not doing exactly what I'm criticizing you for. But I suppose that's the lesson in all this for me, that unless your own needs are somehow satisfied, you sure as hell can't meet someone else's.

DANE

Enough philosophizing. Let's go.

MARILYN

Dane.

DANE

Yes, Marilyn.

MARILYN

Thank you, for--participating in this . . .

DANE

I don't know what to call it either, but, you're welcome. That's what friends are for. Who said that?

MARILYN

It doesn't matter. And you know you're welcome to come back--whenever.

(DANE crosses to MARILYN and they embrace. Then she exits with WINNIE.)

KATE

Well, I guess that about wraps this thing up.

MARILYN

No, not quite. We're not quite through yet.

MARILYN (pointedly)

Are we, Angel?

ANGEL

I think I'd better be going too. If I hurry maybe I can share the cab with them. (A beat.) Thanks for a wonderful evening.

MARILYN

No! I'll get you home; Gregory can take you home. You can't leave until I've heard from you. Put this down on the board, Kate. Angel gave. Angel received.

MARILYN (continuing)

But we still don't know what. (A beat.) Tell me, Angel, was it more blessed to give than to receive?

ANGEL

I don't know what you're talking about.

MARILYN

Yes, you do. I'm talking about Avery. **My** Avery, not yours! And I think you know what I want to know.

ANGEL

I don't have to take this.

MARILYN

I know, but don't you think you owe it to me?

ANGEL

I don't **owe** you anything.

MARILYN

Yes, you do, remember?. I let you off the hook earlier. Besides, you're the only one that didn't participate in the ginquisition. You didn't tell us what you know.

ANGEL

You didn't ask.

KATE

She's asking now.

MARILYN

Kate, am I right or wrong?

KATE

I can't answer that question for you, Marilyn.

MARILYN

I didn't mean in a philosophical sense. I meant in the simple manner of whether or not Angel shared her knowledge about--my husband with the rest of us.

KATE

You're right, she didn't. (A beat.) And I think I'll leave now.

MARILYN

And miss the fun?

KATE

I've had enough fun for one night. And somehow I sense that whatever is left to be said is between the two of you. Am I right or wrong?

MARILYN

I think you're right.

KATE

I was asking Angel.

ANGEL

I don't know that there's anything left to say but goodbye.

KATE (To ANGEL)

Don't you hide him from her too. She just wants some kind of--of--I don't know what the hell she wants. But try to give it to her. And, Marilyn, if you want to know whatever it is that Angel knows, you have to ask her the right questions.

(KATE hugs MARILYN affectionately, then does the same with ANGEL. When she exits, MARILYN goes to the bar and pours the last few drops of gin into an empty glass. AVERY goes to the coffin, climbs in and lies down.)

ANGEL

Haven't you had enough?

MARILYN

More than enough. These last few drops are for you. Sometimes it's that little extra--something--that makes all the difference. In this case, a little extra gin.

ANGEL

It won't make any difference in this case.

(MARILYN moves to the coffin and slams down the lid.)

MARILYN

The case is closed on Avery Mann. Is that what you mean? You're not talking?

ANGEL

Yes, I'm not talking.

MARILYN

Which means there is something you would prefer not to say.

ANGEL

There are a number of things I'd prefer not to say.

MARILYN

Like what?

ANGEL

I'd prefer not to say them.

MARILYN

And I would prefer that you did.

ANGEL

No, you wouldn't.

MARILYN

Why don't you let me be the judge of that?

ANGEL

Because I'd have to say them in order for you to be the judge. And if you decided upon hearing them that you'd prefer not to hear them, it would be too late.

MARILYN

The damage would have been done?

ANGEL

Yes.

MARILYN

What damage?

ANGEL

Marilyn, I haven't had **that** much gin.

MARILYN

Neither have I. (A beat.) Tell me one thing.

ANGEL

Okay, one thing.

MARILYN

You and Avery were close--that's a given. How close?

ANGEL

I suppose you could call us--soul mates.

MARILYN (reflects, then)

You knew it all, didn't you? About the rest of them--us. He told you everything that he told them, **plus** he told you about all of us.

ANGEL

You said one thing.

MARILYN

One more. I have--**need** to know.

ANGEL

Why? Why do you **have** to know? Why can't you just bury him and everything else with him?

MARILYN

I have my reasons. (A beat.) They're very personal; you should be able to appreciate that.

ANGEL

All right, I knew about the others; he told me about them.

MARILYN

And me? Did he tell you about me?

ANGEL

He told me that you were the finest, the most sensitive and compassionate human being he would probably ever know.

MARILYN

Not exactly a romantic endorsement.

ANGEL

And he loved you dearly.

MARILYN

Dearly? Not passionately, or madly? Not beyond all reason?

ANGEL

You know he loved you passionately.

MARILYN

Oh, he loved **passion** all right; but I don't know if he loved **me** passionately. I think--dearly--is the more appropriate expression of his sentiments for his wife. We loved him passionately, but . . . oh, dammit, I don't know. What the hell am I looking for? How 'bout you, Angel? Did you love Avery? (A beat.) No, no, wait. I know the answer to that. You're no different from the rest of us: you loved him too, you must have. The **right** question is: did Avery love you? That's what Kate meant. (A beat.) Angel? Did Avery love **you**?

ANGEL

I think he loved all of us in one way or another.

MARILYN

No, I think he loved us all in essentially the same way. Except for you. I think he loved you differently. Tell me what you think.

ANGEL

I think you think too much for your own good. Sometimes it's best just to let things be.

MARILYN

But this isn't one of those times. I **have** to know what Avery felt for you.

ANGEL

Why?

MARILYN

Why not?

(ANGEL sighs heavily then moves to the coffin, opens it and looks in. Then she crosses back and stops close to MARILYN. AVERY rises up to observe them, but does not intervene.)

ANGEL

Avery never said he loved me.

MARILYN

Verbally, he never expressed his love for you in words.

ANGEL

No.

MARILYN

But he did **show** it. Can you deny that he treated you like a woman he loved?

ANGEL

No, I can't deny that, but, we were never intimate.

MARILYN

Physically! You were never intimate physically; you weren't lovers in the normal sordid back room sense. But emotionally he gave you everything--things that he parceled out to the rest of us piecemeal. You got his dreams and fears and joys and sorrows. You knew all of that before we told you, didn't you?

ANGEL

Yes, Avery shared those things with me. I told you that.

MARILYN

But not where you worked?

ANGEL

What do you mean?

MARILYN

Just that--to get to know Avery as well as you obviously did, you had to--spend some time together, away from where you worked. You had to--go out or meet places.

ANGEL

We had to--**date**?

MARILYN

Or something like that.

ANGEL

Okay, to an outside observer, I suppose what we were doing could be construed as dating, going out. But I honestly never considered myself to be dating your husband. We were just very close friends, friends that naturally chose to spend

time together. I needed--support and compassion, a decent role model for my son. Avery provided those things.

MARILYN

The wife is always the first to know and the last to find out. But, I don't understand this situation. It's very clear to me now that Avery loved you, that he was intimate with you in a way that he was never intimate with me or

MARILYN (continuing)

anybody else. And physically you're the type of woman he was most attracted to and yet you didn't become lovers? Why not? (A beat.) Angel?

(ANGEL turns away, refusing to answer.)

MARILYN

It was **you**, wasn't it? He would have; he probably would have left me, but he didn't. He didn't because of you.

ANGEL

No, it was because of you.

MARILYN

Me?

ANGEL

In my marriage I discovered what it was like to be left behind; not that I minded when he finally left for good. But before things went completely sour I discovered what it was like to feel unloved. I didn't want to be a part of that in somebody else's marriage. I didn't want to do that--to become the other woman to another woman.

MARILYN

Sisters to the end, huh? (A beat.) Did he know that--that you wouldn't have him because of me? Was he aware of that?

ANGEL

I didn't hide anything from Avery.

MARILYN

I'm sure he recognized and loved the irony of the situation--that the one woman he could or would love totally couldn't fully respond to his love because of me, the woman he supposedly was committed to.

ANGEL

He recognized the irony, but I can't say that he loved it.

MARILYN

Tell me one more thing. What did he get from you that none of the rest of us could give him?

ANGEL

I can only tell you what he told me he felt. All I know is what he told me, and what I could make out of his stories.

MARILYN

I'll accept that. At least I want to hear what it was; I'm not sure I can accept it. I'll decide that after I hear it.

ANGEL

Joy, serenity, the inner peace that comes from being a complete person in a fragmented world.

MARILYN

Those do sound like his words.

ANGEL

There's more. (MARILYN nods for her to continue.) He said I was his connection with the human race, a twinkling light between the stars.

MARILYN

He could be very poetic.

ANGEL

I think a sense of peace is what it really amounts to; the knowledge that you aren't alone in this world.

MARILYN

I guess we all need to know that. To know somehow that we won't wander forever lost in our own inner space. Or in the one out there between the stars.

ANGEL

Yeah. (A beat.) You're not--upset?

MARILYN

No, resigned, relieved. It's a long story, one you'd probably prefer not to hear.

ANGEL

Or one you'd prefer not to tell.

MARILYN

You're very perceptive. Avery hated that in a woman.

ANGEL

I know.

MARILYN

So, what are you going to do now?

ANGEL

Get some rest.

MARILYN

I meant, with your life.

ANGEL

Oh, that! (A beat.) I still have my Avery, and time, plenty of time. And I have an idea of what to expect out of an intimate relationship if I chose to have one.

MARILYN

Well, I hope you find--whatever will be best for you. I just hope that--

ANGEL

That's enough. We've both said enough. I'm suddenly exhausted.

(ANGEL goes to MARILYN, touches her face, embraces her affectionately, then she goes to the coffin. She removes a rose from an arrangement and places it next to the body. )

ANGEL

He loved roses, especially the day that they burst from bud to flower.

MARILYN

Yes, I know.

ANGEL

Goodbye, Marilyn. (A beat.) Goodbye, Avery.

(ANGEL exits. MARILYN goes to the coffin, takes a rose from an arrangement and places it next to AVERY. She stands there for a moment in silence.)

## MARILYN

You weren't a bad man Avery, but neither were you a complete one. By spreading yourself so thin across the entire spectrum of your women friends, you cheated all of us. But more than any of us, you cheated yourself. I don't know why you were so afraid of giving yourself to me, and I don't suppose that even matters anymore. I never stopped loving you; I gave up on trying to be what I wanted and thought I needed to be to you, but I didn't withhold my love. Not in all those years of marriage which now somehow seem so long ago. So, farewell dear Avery Mann. I hope that in the next world, if there is another world, that there will be nothing for you to be frightened of. Or perhaps that you can find an angel to show you the way.

(As Marilyn delivers her monologue the lights first increase in intensity until a brilliant spot illuminates her and the coffin. Then as she reaches the end, the lights begin to come down slowly until the stage is immersed in darkness. except, for a low blue light illuminating the coffin. Marilyn turns and moves into a darkened area of the stage near an exit. In the darkness we hear a door click shut as she leaves and then the sound of a DOG BARKING. Avery rises up in the coffin, listens momentarily, shakes his head and finally smiles as if to say, "what the hell?")

## AVERY

Come on Red! Come on ole girl, come say goodbye to your master.

(Again we hear the DOG BARKING as Avery lies back in the coffin, resigned, if not, content. As he lies back, the lights come down slowly until the stage is totally dark. Then the DOG BARKS a final farewell in the darkness. )

## CURTAIN