

AN ORIGINAL PLAY:

THE PREACHER

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of

Southwest Texas State University

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

by

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San Marcos, Texas

December, 1998

THE CREATIVE PROCESS FOR *THE PREACHER*

A good idea to a writer is like a good soup bone to a creative cook: it has endless possibilities. Whether the outcome being sought is rich and has many ingredients or is simple containing only a few ingredients, it is the soup bone that gives the flavor to the whole pot. A good idea provides this first and basic flavor to a story, and like most good cooks who know a variety of recipes, it is the cook who combines the ingredients in such a way and chooses the cooking method that makes the most of that bone. Ironically, the best soup bone to be found for this thesis project was an ex-husband who gave endless possibilities to the soup pot that has come to be known as *The Preacher*.

The idea of a lying preacher who was guilty of committing bigamy was the first thing that appealed to this writer; however, the first concern was whether or not the concept would be believable to an audience. Taking into consideration the number of news stories that deal with preachers and priests who commit fraud or child abuse, overcoming the first reservation was made possible by the realization that a character like Greg was plausible: the bone was thrown into the pot. Because of the bigamy, the resulting guilt in Greg would be seen in his impotence problem and in his distrust of his wife, Beth. It was hoped that his habitual lying would make the audience have doubts about whether Greg was telling the truth about anything he said, and so it was concluded that all these things would make fine ingredients.

While there is a great deal of autobiography involved in this script, the events underwent many changes from reality as they found their way to paper. There are

many differences between the facts and fiction. First, in reality the preacher claimed to be divorced; however, it was seven years into the marriage before the real wife learned there had been no divorce. The real preacher did have two children by the first wife like the preacher in the play, but to keep the play simpler and to keep hurtful things at bay, the real son of the second marriage is never brought up in the play. The real wife has finally become emotionally stronger like the fictional wife, but not before she remarried the preacher after the first wife's divorce became final, and she went through six years of hell before seeing the light. Greg's impotence problem started when he saw a possible threat to his second marriage when he accidentally saw his first wife on a trip to San Antonio. The real preacher's impotence started the day he received the divorce papers from his first wife. Another big difference came at the end of the play when the preacher left giving the impression that he could go on to repeat what he had done to the first two wives. Reality was not that easy; it took almost a year to get the preacher off of the wife's property.

While the play took many turns from reality, there were a few things that remained the same. The wife remained constantly loyal and faithful to the preacher though extremely frustrated with his lack of affection. The husband did not find it easy to trust his wife when he felt guilty about his own deceptions, and he did lie and snoop anytime the opportunity presented itself. There were friends who stood by the wife and gave her moral support and encouragement; on the other hand, there was no lover from the past that came back into the wife's life. Most of what remained the same from reality was the deceit and the bigamy of the preacher, which is the basis of all that takes place in *The Preacher*.

Choosing the ingredients for the play's framework was the first technical decision to be made. Originally there were three acts because the project was a full-length play, but because the third act was very short, the play was divided into two acts for the final draft. The number of characters was limited by the writer only to those essential to the plot; therefore the dinner guests and deputy are never seen. Characters were also limited in number because of the desire to make the characters very interconnected, and by limiting the other characters, the four principals were constantly developing. Another personal choice was to have the action take place in as tight a time frame as possible so that there appears to be a rush of events. Deciding where to place the action was dictated by the fact that since the play deals with the personal side of the preacher, the parsonage would be the logical place for the setting. The one-set idea became a solid choice because, looking to future marketability, it could appeal to theatres on a tight budget or with limited space. These choices provided a structure in which the play could develop.

The development of individual characters came next. It was necessary to know each of them well before beginning the actual writing of the play. By having mental images of all of the characters and then putting them in various situations and writing down the dialogue, the characters began to develop certain distinctive qualities. These character dialogues or situations themselves may or may not have been included in the play later, but even scenes not included were an important character building tool. Each of the characters was based on real people, especially Beth and Greg. The other characters were mostly composites of several important people who were involved in the real life story on which *The Preacher* is based.

Greg's character had the least change from reality. In the earlier drafts, he was getting too much sympathy from those who read the play. He needed to exhibit a clear ability to become violent and his deviousness had to be intensified. Beth's character is also drawn closely from reality, but she was changed to be emotionally a much stronger character than the person on whom she is based. This was important for her to be able to make a clear decision when confronted with Greg's bigamy. Kathy is a composite based on a "wild and crazy" woman from a decade ago as well as a sweet and caring woman from the writer's present. Although Fred's character is based on a real person who gave much emotional support to the writer, this character's relationships to other characters is purely fictional. The characters are distinct and for the most part easily understood, with the exception of Greg who remains somewhat unfathomable because of his unreasonable actions. It is hoped that this will give some unpredictability and spice to the ending.

These characters also had certain important jobs to fill as well as simply being characters in a story. Humor is a key ingredient for keeping an audience involved in a story, especially a serious story, because it gives relief from too much tension, provides a strong sense of humanity, and can help to make a play memorable. As in the lives of most people who have problems, there are funny moments, and *The Preacher* is no different. The character Kathy is the source of most of the truly funny lines found in the play because of her outgoing ways and outright honesty in saying how she feels. Her conflict with Greg is also a source of humor because they dislike each other so intensely and enjoy verbally cutting each other down. This contrast is amusing because of Greg's clerical position which dictates that he "love his

neighbor” even though he would like nothing better than for her to move to another state. Kathy enjoys this position he is in and uses it to her advantage whenever possible. These humorous ingredients keep the play from becoming too depressing or boring.

Romance is another ingredient that shows itself in the characters of *The Preacher*, and there are two types of romance found in the story. First is the dying romance between Beth and Greg that is becoming a long and agonizing death for Beth. We see the deterioration of this love in Greg’s repeated refusal to engage in any physical demonstrations of affection with Beth. This, of course, is a source of conflict in the play and drives many of Beth’s actions. The other type of romance is the rekindled flame between Beth and Fred. While there are no overt love scenes or kisses, there are intimate moments that should be played as such, for example when Greg introduces Fred to Beth before the trip in Act I. It should be a moment where there is an overlong handshake between the two with a long look that goes undetected by Greg who has his back to them. Another moment is when Fred brings her favorite flowers to the anniversary party in Act II, and they have a moment alone. These moments should show intense feeling between the two even though they have no verbal communication of these feelings. The exposition about Fred and Beth’s past, which is given in several places, should give the actors playing the roles enough motivation to convey these feelings. This romance is contrasted to that of Beth and Greg with Greg’s choice of gift for the anniversary. The humorous role of Kathy is woven into the romance line with Greg’s desire to fix her up with Fred to “tame the

heathen” that Kathy is according to Greg. Romance is always a spicy ingredient that adds to any story.

Violence was an ingredient that was little used until the play went into the rehearsal process. It was needed to make Greg less likeable in general as well as to add an element of danger to the script, which of course also adds interest. Most of the violence was implied through the almost fistfights between Greg and Fred. Once into rehearsals and after considerable discussions with the actors, it was decided to make it evident that Greg could possibly do harm to Beth. His grabbing of her shoulders and arm was added in Act II during their fight after the party to give the impression that he could be capable of doing even more than this. That Greg is ready to harm Beth when he is angry is interesting when contrasted with the fact that what provokes Fred is the need to protect Beth. This conflict is another good ingredient for the soup pot.

The next ingredients that were needed were the situations for each of the scenes. Several things had to be presented as soon as possible, such as Greg’s unwillingness to show affection to Beth as well as his ability to lie and snoop, Beth’s continued faithfulness and frustration, Kathy’s sharp-tongued wit, and Fred’s sweet and caring nature. The first scene shows the lack of affection Greg shows Beth, and the audience finds out about his impotence problem. Scene two sets up both Greg’s ability to lie and snoop, as well as giving the audience a glimpse of his preacher persona on the phone. Having him look through Beth’s purse seemed more effective than trying to take the audience to the bedroom to see him go through her closets and drawers, but it enables them to imagine him doing just that when it is talked about later between Beth and Kathy. We see his double-sided nature as well as Beth’s

frustration with his actions and her affection for him when she breaks down and gives him an explanation in spite of her aggravation. The need to introduce Fred early in the play and to explain his connection to Beth and Kathy is as important as seeing Greg's hostility to Kathy. This writer felt the audience needed to see what Beth was like before she married Greg and to get some information about the various relationships between the four principal characters. By adding the drinking scene in Act I, Beth is able to take off her preacher's wife role and communicate more freely with Kathy about her problems. This scene originally ended the first act with the ominous visit from the deputy, but it changed with the later necessity to move the act division. The new act division is still workable to the structure of the play because the play is now divided into pre-party and the party with its aftermath. These choices were satisfying to the writer.

Once much of the structure of the play was sorted out and many pages of dialogue were available, then the actual writing could begin. With a great many ingredients at hand, a few would be chosen to simmer in the writer's mind before anything could be committed to paper. It was in this simmering process that most of what was written came to life the first time. This process could occur while driving, but most likely when alone in bed or relaxing in a hot tub. This simmering is much like the often used comedy sketch where actors act out the thoughts of the writer but without the humorous commentary. The actors move about on a set, which mentally is complete, as they try out different situations that frequently were part of the "characterization dialogues." When things seemed to work together on the mental set, it was time to put it on paper, either handwritten or typed, depending on what was

available. Once it was served up on paper, it was read and reread for contradictions and form. It was then set aside to be read a week or so later so that it could be viewed with a more objective eye. Then it was checked once more for errors in addition to how it fits in with the other scenes in relation to the overall time frame. Even though this simmering and serving tended to take a great deal of time, the result was something that had a tasty appeal to the writer.

Many of the original ideas for *The Preacher* that did not get rejected along the way evolved into other ideas that were part of the final product. Originally, the idea that Greg had an affair early in the marriage never came to fruition, but the guilt that would have stemmed from that now stems from the fact that he never mentioned the first wife or children to Beth. While first drafts call for Beth to be tempted into an affair with a classmate, the concept never made it past the simmering stage. The idea was totally removed from the pot, and she remains faithful to the end of her marriage to Greg. Other changes included when to have the anniversary party: this changed several times from the first to second act and back again until it finally came to rest in Act II. How much violence to include was another problem to be addressed. Most all of the mental and emotional conflicts have verbal confrontations, so it seemed that some threat of physical violence by Greg was needed to make the audience wonder how far he would go when angered. This lends a nice contrast to the Christian image Greg is supposed to give as a man of God. Beth's nocturnal visit to her husband on the couch during the wee hours of the morning of their anniversary near the end of Act I changed from a long soliloquy on her feelings to a scene with almost a total lack of words. The actress playing Beth should show tenderness in touching his face,

hesitancy in wanting to touch him but not wanting to wake him, and love in the way she puts an afghan over him. Above all, she needs to take her time and stop to give him a long, considered look that is much like the kind of look a new parent would give a baby as he lay asleep in his crib. This change makes the scene more interesting and meaningful because the “actions speak louder than words.” These choices seemed almost easy when compared with the one that had to be wrestled with many times before coming to a decision.

The most difficult decision of the entire play was how to end it. Once Beth made the choice to leave Greg after finding out all that he was hiding, and he knew the jig was up, what then? The ending underwent the most rewrites of any part of the play. The first choice was to have an argument between Beth and Greg with him walking out; next it changed to Beth walking out leaving Greg to commit suicide. This presented another dilemma: suicide seemed too easy an out, and Greg needed to suffer. The favorite fantasy ending was to have Greg pull out a gun, put it to his head and not be able to pull the trigger. He then comes to his senses about what he is doing, decides to live, tosses away the gun that accidentally goes off and fatally hits Greg, who of course promptly dies much to everyone’s satisfaction. This scenario was too much fun and not plausible enough for reasonable people to believe, so once more the mental actor went to work going through the last page of Act II over and over. Finally, the decision came down to Beth leaving Greg on stage alone, pathetic, crying and a little remorseful. When real actors finally replaced the mental actors, this scene changed another time for the better. Thanks to the input of the actors, Greg lost any redeemable qualities by leaving the play with the distinct impression that he

felt no remorse, felt no responsibility, and could go on to do the same thing to another woman that he had done to Beth and his first wife. This conclusion was very satisfactory to the author's soup pot.

Using real actors instead of mental actors was a wonderful asset to the writing process. There were various minor and major changes that came about as a result of conversations with the actors and from being able to see them on a physical stage. Minor changes mostly consisted of the way certain things were said, usually to simplify the words in a way to make them seem more casual or natural to the characters. A number of times an actor would ask to change a line that felt awkward, and after discussing it and hearing several ways, an alteration would be made that kept the actor and writer both happy. There were only a few times when the decision was to keep the lines as they were, such as in Act I, the drinking scene with Kathy and Beth. There is a discussion of the self-portrait, and the topic of masturbation is brought up. The actress playing the wife found it was embarrassing to say the lines. The author felt it was important to the character and within reason for her to talk about this with Kathy, so the lines stayed as they were. The lines were modified at a later time so that "masturbation" is not mentioned outright, but clearly implied without changing the intent of the scene. This was done to make the play more appealing and marketable to community theatres. The use of the real actors made it possible to envision the rewrites for this clearly. Also, thanks to one of the actors, the day before *The Preacher's* only performance, it was discovered that the last two scenes of Act I had been reversed the whole time. It was no problem to fix this particular glitch before the performance. At a point during early rehearsals,

the cast resulted in rewriting two early scenes into one that made a tighter story without a lot of extra needless lines. Another major change that came from a cast discussion was the combining of the two scenes that originally made up Act III. The combining of scenes resulted in eliminating about twelve pages of script, but the streamlined remainder made a smooth transition to the resolution of the play. It made an extremely short third act that prompted the change from a three-act to two-act play. Some of these changes may not have occurred without the input of the cast members.

It was not until the play's public performance that one other change had to be made. The day of the anniversary party had to be changed from Sunday to Monday. After the performance, a Texas constable mentioned the fact that the divorce papers would not have been served on a Sunday. Although criminal warrants could be served anytime, civil papers could only be served Monday through Saturday. The best way to fix the problem was to move the party to Monday and justify it by making it Greg's fault that Beth could not have it Sunday when it was more convenient for her. It made Greg look a bit more unreasonable which was a perfectly good ingredient.

The Preacher is a play that speaks from the writer's heart and is full of various emotions and situations that some may find hard to swallow. It is the culmination of things that hurt and tickle, satisfy and anger, and all the time is interesting and fascinating to the author. It is hoped that the ingredients in this soup will appeal to many others, but then no cook can please everyone all the time. It just means that it is time to start a new pot of soup.

THE PREACHER

by

Cynthia Kaberle

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DEDICATED TO

My son, Hanz Kaberle,
Who put up with me being gone to work on this project,
And to my Mom, Anita Jaroszewski,
Who saw little of me while this play was in progress.

SPECIAL THANKS

To my dear friend, Fred McGilberry,
Whose encouragement and shoulder to cry on
Kept me going when I thought I could not.

Thanks to my Cast
For lots of help and insights.
Beth - Kim Trowbridge
Greg - Rob Driskell
Kathy - Patty Deihl
Fred - Dave Napier

SCENE BREAKDOWN

ACT I

Scene 1	15
Beth, Greg	
Scene 2	20
Beth, Greg, Kathy	
Scene 3	29
Beth, Greg, Kathy, Fred, Griffin	
Scene 4	54
Beth, Kathy, Greg, Fred	
Scene 5	63
Beth, Greg	
Scene 6	64
Beth, Greg	

ACT II

Scene 1	69
Kathy, Beth, Fred	
Scene 2	76
Kathy, Fred, Beth, Greg	
Scene 3	92
Beth, Kathy, Greg, Fred	

ACT I
Scene 1

Wednesday evening, BETH is in the kitchen, and GREG has dozed off on the couch. He has a newspaper on his lap; the television is on low. When BETH enters with a plate and dishtowel, we see a playful side of her that shows us that she does love GREG and wants to be able to show it.

BETH

(Coming from kitchen)

Want me to fix some coffee?

BETH stops and smiles. She gets an idea, so she takes things back to kitchen and reenters taking her hair down and fluffing it a little. She undoes a couple of buttons and goes to the couch and gets into as comfortable a position as possible without waking GREG. To wake him she kisses his neck and ear. He wakes with a start scaring them both with a laugh then he realizes what she is doing.

GREG

(Unhappy with situation)

Come on Beth, it's late. We can do this in the morning.

BETH

(Retreats, hurt)

Oh? Like this morning.

GREG

You know that wasn't my idea. When the deacons call me, I have to go.

BETH

I didn't think fifteen minutes late for coffee at the Dairy Queen would be such a problem.

GREG

Well, it was. Next time it probably won't be.

BETH

(Playful and coaxing)

We could have a little fun tonight and I can give you a nice back rub and massage you to sleep.

GREG

(Stands to get away from her)

I don't need a massage. I've got indigestion anyway and don't feel so great.

BETH

This is the third time this week with indigestion. You need to see a doctor.

GREG

I don't need a doctor. I just need sleep.

BETH

Your headache better from last night?

GREG

(Heading to bedroom)

Uh yeah. Let's just get some sleep.

BETH

(Not moving)

Yeah.

GREG

You coming?

BETH

(Seated, wipe tears)

Yeah.

GREG

(Wants to get away)

I'll go to the guest room so I don't bother you.

BETH

You won't bother me. You're very careful about that.

GREG

(Look at watch)

The news'll be on soon.

BETH

(Sadly)

I just thought maybe you'd want to sleep with me. It's been a while.

GREG

(Defensive)

You know I always watch the news. Give it a rest, Bethany, there's more to life than sex.

BETH

Yeah, I know.

GREG

Sex! That's all you ever want!

BETH

(Getting riled)

That's not true and you know it! I can't even ask for a hug or a kiss without being accused of being a sex maniac.

GREG

Why are you bringing this up again? You know I can't help the problem I've got.

BETH

You mean you cry yourself to sleep every night too? Is that why you won't sleep in the same room with me? All I want is a little affection. Nobody asked you to swing from the chandelier.

GREG

Not again. You know how I feel about that.

BETH

For over two years now I've been thinking of your feelings. You don't seem to realize that I have feelings too. I don't even feel like a woman when I'm around you.

GREG

Give it a rest. You know you're a woman.

BETH

Yeah, but do you? I can't tell by the way you treat me.

GREG

Damn it, Beth, would you just drop it. I can't do what I used to, and I can't help it.

BETH

I just don't see why you can't hug and kiss sometimes. What could it hurt? If you would just touch me –

GREG

Why? I could see in your face you would want more and I can't give you more. You might as well get it somewhere else.

BETH

(Truly shocked)

You can't mean that.

GREG

I know how much you want it, need it. I can't blame you if you do something about it. I wouldn't like it but-

BETH

What the hell kind of woman do you think I am? I admit I was promiscuous when I met you, but you know I'm not like that any more. I love you. When I took my wedding vows, I knew I would keep them.

GREG

I'm just saying that I know you need sex, and since I can't seem to, you know, do that, I –

BETH

(Exasperated)

Haven't you heard anything I've said? I don't want anybody else. I want you. I love you. I admit I don't understand what is causing this problem, but I want to help. I want to be close like we used to be. What can I do? Have you seen a doctor?

GREG

I'll take care of it. It's my problem.

BETH

There must be something I can do to help. I'm affected by it too.

GREG

I'm going to watch the news. You do what you want.

GREG exits abruptly. BETH is left alone. She sits hugging a sofa pillow and cries. After getting a grip on herself, she picks up the photo of BETH and GREG from the coffee table and holds it.

BETH

(Very sad)

What is wrong? Oh God, why is this happening to us? I just don't understand.

Lights fade as BETH cries silently over the photo.
LIGHTS OUT.

ACT I
Scene 2

The time is about 9:30
Thursday morning in the
Gillman home. BETHANY is on
the phone letting KATHY know
she is about ready to leave. They
are both art students and
commute to the local college.

BETH

(Looking for keys in purse)

Yeah, I think I'm on time for a change. I'm taking my stuff out to the car in a minute if you want to get your stuff out there too. ... Yeah, I'll just leave it unlocked. ... Okay, yell when you've got your stuff loaded. ... See you in a minute.

BETH hangs up and looks around, sees keys laying on a table, picks them up with a portfolio and takes them out the front door. Once she is out the door, the phone rings. GREG looks into the room from the kitchen entrance, sees she is not there, and goes to answer the phone. As he talks, he sees business cards lying in BETH's purse. He looks through purse for others as he talks.

GREG

(Takes on "preacher voice")

Hello, Gillman residence. ... Yes, this is Pastor Gillman. ... Oh, yes, I'll be visiting at the hospital right after lunch. What is the room number? ... Yes I'll be happy to. Get some rest, and I'll see you there this afternoon. Good-bye, Mrs. Nelson.

GREG hangs up, obviously not happy. Looks at business cards in his hand and hastily puts them in his pocket when he hears BETH enter.

BETH

(Sees him by phone)

Did you get the phone?

GREG

Yeah.

BETH

I heard it as I went out the door, but my hands were full. Who was it?

GREG

(Sees opportunity)

Well, I don't really know.

BETH

Why? Wrong number?

GREG

It was a man. He asked if you were here. I said "no," and then he hung up before I could ask who it was.

BETH

(Go to check hair in mirror)

That's weird. I wonder who it could have been. Oh well, no matter.

GREG

(Takes out cards)

So, what's with the cards.

BETH

(Absently)

What cards?

GREG

I'm sure you know what cards. Just tell me about them.

BETH

(Remembers "cards")

Oh, I'm sorry, I forgot. I didn't go yesterday, but I will first thing after class this morning. I'll get several, and we'll be prepared. I'll get some sympathy ones too, just in case.

GREG

(Confused)

Prepared for what?

BETH

Birthdays. There's quite a few church members with birthdays this month, and I need a couple for my family. And we used the last sympathy card two weeks ago.

GREG

(Lay cards on table)

I was talking about these.

BETH

They're business cards.

GREG

What kind of business?

BETH

(Not getting insinuation)

Let's see, auto sales, TV repair, farm implements-

GREG

(Grabs them back)

Well?

BETH

Well what?

GREG

Why do you have them?

BETH

What are you talking about? You've got quite a collection yourself. I came by mine the same way you came by yours.

GREG

Really? These look rather worn.

BETH

(Start to leave, angry)

You're right, they do.

GREG

Where are you going? You haven't explained why you have all these men's cards in your purse.

BETH

Why stay? You've already made up your mind why I have them, and what makes me think I can change it? Never worked before. By the way, they look worn 'cause they are. I'll let you figure out why; it's probably a hell of a lot more interesting.

GREG

(Knows he went to far)

All I wanted was a simple answer.

BETH

Then why did you ask a stupid question?

GREG

(New tactic)

Bethany, I'm so tired of you playing cat and mouse about this kind of thing.

BETH

(Really angry)

Me? Cat and mouse? You're the one who sneaks through my purse. You're the one who likes to play at being Mr. Detective. I'm the mouse and you can't wait to find me doing something wrong. What is it with you? Do you want me to do something wrong?

GREG

(Whiny)
Come on, don't be like this.

BETH

What do you expect?

GREG

I just thought you were getting, I mean, that men gave you these 'cause you, I meant that they thought, maybe-

BETH

(Finishes thought)
Because I might want to call them to come screw me.

GREG

No, no, not like that.

BETH

Then like what? No matter how you put it, it sounds really bad!

GREG

I'm sorry, it just makes me nuts sometimes.

BETH

Sometimes?

GREG

I don't know what gets into me.

BETH

I do.

GREG

What?

BETH

All those stories. They gave you doubts.

GREG

How? Those stories about your past were long before I came along.

BETH

Not in your mind.

GREG

You really think that?

BETH

I told you before, during, and after I was telling you those stories, which you begged me to tell you against my better judgment, that I didn't want any of it to come back to haunt me.

GREG

I know, but-

BETH

Wrong. No buts. Period. No second thoughts, no nothing. It's too late for that.

GREG

I can't help it.

BETH

(Sighs, goes and hugs him)

Look. People give me cards just like they give you cards, and I give them one of mine.

GREG

(Surprised)

When did you get cards?

BETH

(Innocently)

They were in my purse; didn't you see them?

GREG

All I saw were some of mine, oh.

BETH

Yeah. "Oh." Is that male for "I screwed up again?"

GREG

Okay, I'm a jackass.

BETH

Can't argue with you there! For the record, they're worn looking 'cause I just throw them in my purse and they stay there until I clean it out. Now give me the cards. Come on. Looking at these, I'll probably keep the TV repair card, farm implements I don't need, and this one is for you.

GREG

Me?

BETH

Yeah, you. We were talking, and he thinks he went to high school with you.

GREG

That's interesting.

BETH

Go by and see him.

GREG

Where did you meet him?

BETH

On campus. He does something in the administration building. We were in line at the cashier window. I'll tell you about it later. That conference starts tomorrow, right?

GREG

Yeah, but we're going up this evening so we don't have to drive three hours before the first workshop in the morning. I thought I told you. I'm sorry.

BETH

(Simple curiosity)

No problem. I've just about got all your stuff together. Who's "we."

GREG

Oh, I forgot to tell you. A guy from another church south of here is going to pick me up on his way. He'll be here by 5:00. Did you get my gray suit from the cleaners?

BETH

I'll pick it up this afternoon. That's nice you don't have to drive alone.

BETH leans over to kiss GREG good-bye and GREG turns his head so that kiss lands on cheek and not on his lips. She picks up purse and jacket and heads for the door.

GREG

Will I see you at lunch?

BETH

Don't know yet. Want me to call if we don't have a study lunch?

GREG

Never mind. Don't waste a phone call. I'll fix something.

BETH

If you're sure.

GREG

(Irritated)

I said so didn't I? Just go on to your thing. Bye.

KATHY

Are you coming or what? We're gonna be late!

BETH

Coming! See you later.

BETH exits. GREG looks at
business cards a moment, then
rips them in half.

GREG

Yeah, right.

LIGHTS OUT

Act 1
Scene 3

The same day about 4:45 PM.
BETH enters with the gray suit from the cleaners, her purse, and a large portfolio. She looks around, then drops purse and suit on the couch. BETH takes the portfolio to the guest room. She reenters living room, satisfied that no one is around, she takes purse and suit to the bedroom. GREG and FRED enter through front door.

FRED

It sure is nice when the parsonage is right behind the church like this one.

GREG

(Good humor)

That's true most of the time, but there are moments when a bit more distance wouldn't hurt! Like about a hundred miles.

FRED

(Laughing with GREG)

I've seen some of those moments at my church, and I wouldn't trade jobs with the pastor for any amount of money! You really do have a beautiful church here though; the windows alone are incredible.

GREG

(Proudly)

Yes, and they were hand made when the church was built. This church has been here over ninety years.

BETH

(From other room)

Greg? That you?

GREG

Who else? We have company.

BETH

Is it five already? Be right out.

GREG

Did you get my suit?

At the sound of BETH's voice, FRED shows some sign of recognition, however he hides it from GREG. FRED stands where he faces away from BETH as she enters.

BETH

Sure did. It's in your closet.

GREG

I want you to meet Fred Chapman.

FRED

(Turns to BETH's extended hand)

Very nice to meet you. Bethany, isn't it?

GREG

(Does not give her time to answer)

We've decided to go in Fred's car. He's the treasurer of the Trinity Baptist Church in Benton.

BETH

(Surprised, but recovering)

Oh really? Benton is such a nice place. I love the gardens at the city park there.

FRED

It's the town's pride and joy.

GREG

Would you keep Fred company while I get my stuff?

GREG exits before she can reply. It is obvious that they know one another and this is an awkward moment for them both.

FRED

(Smiling)

Is this a small world or what?

BETH

(Amazed)

Yeah. Fred, it's you. I can't believe it's you!

FRED

In the flesh. You look great. How are you?

BETH

I'm fine. You live in Benton? That's only twenty miles from here. How long have you lived there?

FRED

'Bout two years.

BETH

(Hesitantly)

Married?

FRED

Was.

BETH

Oh?

FRED

Widower.

BETH

Oh.

FRED

Annie was a great gal. She died in a car accident last year. It really was a shock when she was killed, so unexpected and all. You never know how long you have.

BETH

(Genuinely sorry)

I'm so sorry.

FRED

Thank you. It's still hard sometimes to realize she's gone.

Both FRED and BETH share a very awkward moment where they smile, nod and are at a loss for words. The smiles get bigger and FRED breaks the ice.

FRED

(Laughing)

So, you married a preacher.

BETH

(Ironical laugh)

Yeah. Kinda hard to believe, huh? Of course you don't have room to talk, Mr. Church Treasurer.

FRED

I must admit that Annie had a lot to do with getting me through those church doors at first, but I really do feel at home in church.

BETH

I know what you mean. If it wasn't for Greg, I don't know where I'd be right now.

GREG

(Pokes head in)

Where are those tan pants? The ones I wear with the navy jacket?

BETH

Left side of the closet under the dark brown jacket.

GREG

Thanks. Almost ready, Fred.

FRED

Take your time. We'll have at least an hour to spare anyway.

GREG disappears again. There is a couple of moments of BETH and FRED just looking at one another.

BETH

I have so many questions.

FRED

Me too ... So, do you work?

BETH

Yes and no. There's church work and house work, but my favorite is homework.

FRED

Homework? You're a student?

BETH

Can you believe it? I graduate next spring. Art major, English minor, and of course my teaching certificate.

FRED

That's wonderful! You always were artistic, and boy, could you be creative!

"Creative" should have some sexual overtones. The audience should see that the intimacy they once shared was a good memory for both of them.

BETH

(Pleased he remembered, but changes subject)

Thanks. What about you? What are you doing these days?

FRED

I'm still an accountant. Guess that's why the church thought I'd make a good church treasurer.

BETH

(Her turn at innuendo)

You always were good at everything you tried.

BETH and FRED both struggle to remain calm in spite of the intense feelings they have. They are both conscious of GREG in the next room and that they should not have these feelings.

FRED

You're as sweet as ever, Bethany. I sure hope Greg knows what he has in you. Ever since he mentioned your name the other day, you're all I thought about, but I never realized it was actually you though. I've thought about you lots over the years.

BETH

I've thought about you a lot too. Greg never mentioned your name, but... well, I've had you on my mind.

FRED

I've missed you.

BETH

Me too.

BETH and FRED have moved closer to one another, but quickly move apart as GREG enters carrying suitcase, clothes bag, and briefcase.

GREG

I think I've got everything. If I don't, I guess I'll always wish I had.

BETH

Let me help you.

FRED

(Picking up suitcase and bag)

No, no. I've got it. Be right back.

FRED exits with bags out the front door.

GREG

Thanks, Fred. Beth, if you need to get hold of me, I left a copy of the convention schedule and the motel phone number on my desk. You can't miss it. Just call if something comes up.

BETH

I'll be fine, so don't worry. Oh, I put a big bottle of antacids in your bag.

GREG

Antacids? Oh yeah, yeah. thanks. I'll call you tonight. You're not going over to Kathy's are you?

BETH

No, I'll be here doing homework.

GREG

(Relieved)

Good, I'll call you when we get settled.

As FRED comes in he sees the farewell GREG gives BETH. GREG manages to turn the hug and kiss BETH wants to give into a hasty kiss on the forehead.

FRED

Anything else?

GREG

Just my briefcase, and I've got that.

FRED

Bethany, it's been nice talking to you.

BETH

My pleasure. You guys better hit the road.

FRED

See you in three days. Bye.

BETH

Bye.

FRED exits, but GREG stops
at the door.

GREG

You know our anniversary party Monday night?

BETH

Yeah, what about it?

GREG

Well, Fred's a nice fellow, and I thought I'd invite him to the party, after all we have an odd number with Kathy coming and all. That's not a problem, is it?

BETH

No, no problem.

GREG

Maybe if she finds Fred interesting, we can tame that heathen woman and -

BETH

Greg, you're making me crazy again. Leave Kathy alone. She's my friend.

GREG

All right, all right. You're sure you don't mind if I invite him.

BETH

I promise. It's fine. Now go on, Fred's waiting in the car.

GREG exits leaving a very agitated BETH. BETH wanders around the room going through a range of emotions from frustration with GREG to wonder at seeing FRED again. BETH decides to work on her art project and exits into the work room off of stage right. KATHY enters the front door carrying her backpack. She does not see BETH, but calls her name a couple of times with no response, and so she exits into the kitchen. BETH reenters as if she heard something, looks out the window to make sure GREG is gone. She sets down jar of brushes and straightens up room. With her back to the kitchen, she does not see KATHY enter with glasses of ice. When KATHY speaks she startles BETH who in turn screams and scares KATHY who screams too.

KATHY

There you -

BETH

Ahhhhhhhh!

KATHY

Ahhhhhhhh! Don't scare me like that!

BETH

Me? You're the one sneaking around! Where'd you come from?

KATHY

The kitchen, and I wasn't sneaking.

BETH

God, you scared me. What are you doing here?

KATHY

(Putting down glasses)

Where is your mind? We have midterms, remember?

BETH

Don't remind me. I'm supposed to be studying, and Greg thinks I just have to throw a few lines on a canvas and I'm done. Not to mention he thinks cooking dinner for ten people on Monday is no big deal.

KATHY

I still can't believe he's not taking you out. Cooking for ten people is a lot of work.

BETH

Ah, but Kathy, it's so much cheaper this way.

KATHY

He's a jerk.

BETH

So what's the ice for? To revive me after you scare me half to death?

KATHY

I thought since Greg was gone, you could use some –
 (pulls out bottle of vodka and Hawaiian punch from bag)
 “Sex on the Beach.”

BETH

(Laughing)
 You are the craziest woman. You're right though, I could use a drink.

KATHY

(Mimics)
 Aren't you going to tell me the usual? “Oh, don't make it too strong, you never know who might come by!”

BETH

Actually, no. While you're at it, make it a double.

KATHY

(Curious glance)
 Sure, no problem. Hey, who was that guy that left with Greg a while ago? You know, if I didn't know better, I could have sworn it was Fred Chapman! He could have been an identical twin – a clone even.

KATHY turns to hand BETH
 a drink and sees the expression
 on BETH's face.

KATHY

(Getting excited)
 Oh my God, Beth! That was Fred wasn't it? Oh man, Fred Chapman! That was your Fred with Greg?

BETH

He's not “my Fred.” He isn't anybody's Fred.

KATHY

What does that mean? Single? Divorced?

BETH

Widower.

KATHY

Oh, I didn't know. Fred. I can see why you wanted a double. So tell me already!

BETH

Fred lives in Benton.

KATHY

Benton? That's only twenty miles from here.

BETH

I know, I know! Anyway, he's the church treasurer of the Trinity Baptist Church there.

KATHY

I'll bet he just about shit when he heard you were a preacher's wife!

BETH

Do you want to hear this or not?

KATHY

Sorry, go on.

BETH

Well, somehow Greg and Fred found out they were both going to this church finance conference for preacher and staff, and so they decided to car pool. I had no idea who he was going with until he introduced us.

KATHY

Oh, no. You didn't have any clue? What did you say? Oh my God! Does Greg know who Fred is?

BETH

Of course not! I'm not stupid. What do you think? I'm going to say, "Oh Greg, I know Fred. We used to screw all the time." That would be the last thing I need, unless I want to be more miserable than I already am.

KATHY

Speaking of miserable, have things gotten any better in the bedroom? Hey did you try that sexy nightie yet?

BETH

(Hands glass to Kathy for a refill)

Sure did! He asked if it wasn't kinda uncomfortable to sleep in. When I told him it wasn't for sleeping, he suddenly developed indigestion – again. Oh! you should have seen his face when I told him I put a big bottle of antacids in his suitcase. He'd forgotten about his "chronic problem." I thought he was going to choke.

KATHY

(After their laughter)

I take it that he hasn't forgotten about his other "chronic problem"?

BETH

I don't think so. Last night I thought I could get him in the mood to cuddle. What a joke.

KATHY

This has been going on an awful long time –

BETH

(Hint of bitterness)

Almost two years!

KATHY

Hasn't he at least admitted it?

BETH

He says he has a "problem," but he never has used the word impotent. I don't know if he's in denial or what, but he keeps saying that it's not my fault, it's his and he'll take care of it.

KATHY

So what's he doing to take care of it?

BETH

I have absolutely no idea. He won't really talk about it. Instead of regular sex one night, I tried to get him to, uh, be creative. He looked at me like I had asked him to preach his Sunday sermon in the nude.

KATHY

I'd have come to church to see that.

BETH

The way things are these days, you wouldn't have seen much.

KATHY and BETH both laugh really hard. The effects of the alcohol are getting to them both. They are getting tipsy and share that feeling when everything is funny, but serious things get a blunt, open honesty.

KATHY

In that case, I guess I'll just stay home and sleep.

BETH

(Teasing)

As usual. You know, you won't be a heathen much longer.

KATHY

Says who? Maybe I like being a heathen. It sure beats the hell out of being married to a man with L. D. S.

BETH

L. D. S.?

KATHY

(Laughing)

Limp Dick Syndrome.

BETH

(Laughing too)

Go ahead and laugh. I'm telling you, your days as a wild woman are numbered.

KATHY

Okay, I'll bite. Tell me why.

BETH

Remember I told you we have ten invited for our party Monday?

KATHY

Yeah, I was going to ask about that. I thought it was nine. You're not fixing me up with a date are you?

BETH

Oh no, I would never do that. Greg did though.

KATHY

Greg! What the hell –

BETH

(Laughing)

Wait, wait. Greg is asking Fred to join us, and hopefully you will be interested in Fred, fall for him and get saved in the process, and then you'll tame down and stop being such a bad influence on me.

KATHY

You're kidding! You're not kidding. He doesn't expect much does he?

BETH

(Enjoying her drink)

I can't remember the last time I had one of these.

KATHY

I can. The last time "Butthead" went out of town. Give it here. I'll fix you another.

BETH

Thanks. You shouldn't call him a butthead. That's not very nice.

KATHY

What should I call him that's polite? Mr. Butthead?

BETH

Yeah, that's better. Give the butthead the respect he deserves. You know what he did yesterday? He went through my purse and demanded to know why I had some business cards in there.

KATHY

Everybody gives you business cards. He went through your purse?

BETH

I still can't believe it. I think he went through my drawers yesterday too, but I'm not sure.

KATHY

(Giggling)

Didn't feel much, huh?

BETH

(Giggling too)

Dresser drawers. I wasn't sure, so I didn't say anything.

KATHY

(Conspiratorial)

I know how you could find out if he was.

BETH

How?

KATHY

Leave something for him to find, like a phone number on a paper with no name, or better yet, an open box of condoms! He couldn't stand it. He'd ask you about it for sure.

BETH

Oh, no. He would explode. Besides, I don't think he'd believe me when I told him it was just to catch him in my drawers.

"Drawers" make them both giggle again. When the laughter subsides, BETH gets serious.

BETH

Kathy, you remember me telling you that I told Greg 'bout some of my escapades from before I met him?

KATHY

Yeah, he asked you about them, didn't he? Thought it might make him horny, right?

BETH

Yeah, because that was the impression he gave me. Well, now he seems to think that all I'm interested in is getting laid by every Tom, Dick, and Harry that comes along. I told him the past is the past and nothing more, but in his mind ...

KATHY

(After a moment of thought)

Beth, have you ever considered a divorce?

BETH

(Thoughtful pause)

I hate to admit it, but I've thought about it a lot over the last year. I don't know that I could ever go through with it though.

KATHY

I hate seeing you so miserable.

BETH

You want to see miserable? Don't miss Monday night. It's bad enough to have to cook for ten people, but then have to answer Mrs. Clifftons's weekly question: "Does it look like we're going to have a little Gillman around soon?" Just once I'd like to smile at her and say, "Just as soon as the preacher figures out how to get his dick hard."

KATHY

(Laughs)

I would love to see that!

BETH

Feed me enough of these before the party and you just might!

KATHY

(After laughter subsides)

Say, how far are you on your project?

BETH

The self-portrait? 'Bout done already. It came together pretty quick, but I'll probably do a different one to turn in.

KATHY

I hated mine. That's one thing that's not going in my portfolio.

BETH

How come?

KATHY

Oh, it was just stupid.

BETH

(A bit of slurring and giggling)

Now there's an artistically professional opinion if I ever heard one. Was the problem the content or execution, or did it just stink.

KATHY

Yeah, it was.

BETH

Which one?

KATHY

Which one? Hell, all three. It sucked the big one. Did he tell you to put an action in yours?

BETH

He sure did.

KATHY

What is it, and why are you blushing?

BETH

(Big sigh)

Let's just say that Greg wouldn't like it.

KATHY

Oh, 'cause it's a nude?

BETH

It's a little more than that, to tell you the truth.

KATHY

This ought to be good. What's the deal?

BETH

(Starting to giggle again)

Let me show it to you. Promise you won't laugh, and you won't ever mention it to Greg? He just never would understand, besides, I'm not sure I'll turn it in yet.

As BETH starts to go to the work room, she trips over KATHY'S backpack. This sends them into fits of laughter.

KATHY

I hope you paint better than you walk.

BETH

Oh, shut up.

(Holding painting back)

Promise, not a word?

KATHY

Okay, I promise. What can be worse than naked?

BETH

(Turns canvas to KATHY)

This.

The audience can't get a good view of the canvas. They should use their imagination.

KATHY

(Truly surprised)

Oh, my God, Bethany Gillman! I don't believe this!

BETH

I'm going to do something else.

KATHY

No! Are you crazy? This is great! It's a helluva action! Your "action" is ma...?

BETH

(Cuts her off before she can say masturbation)

He said to go with what expresses our most private time best through an action. I should have showed me doing crafts or something.

KATHY

This is really great.

BETH

You're not just saying that? I still don't think I'll turn it in.

KATHY

You're stupid if you don't turn it in. But Beth, ma...?

BETH

(Takes painting back to workroom)

Will you quit? It's not that unusual!

KATHY

Maybe not for 98 percent of the student body, or faculty even, but you?

BETH

(Attempted levity, then sad)

If the preacher would go to bed with the preacher's wife once in a while, maybe she wouldn't be so damn frustrated! Actually it's just that sometimes I'm afraid that Greg won't ever touch me again.

KATHY

(All giggles are gone)

How long has it been?

BETH

He'll try maybe once a month or so, but it's been almost two years since it was good. It's been six months since he really kissed me and at least acted like he wanted me. He'll be gone three days, and I got a peck on the forehead.

KATHY

I didn't know it was that bad. I know you always try to hope for the best and all, but how do you stand it?

BETH

I kept hoping the next time would be better and he would be okay. I know it bothers him, and I've tried not to talk about it 'cause he's so sensitive. But Kathy, I'm tired of it. I need some kind of affection, but it's so, so cold when he gives it.

BETH breaks down into tears
and KATHY tries to comfort her.

BETH

(Wiping at tears)

I'm sorry. I'm okay. It just gets to me sometimes.

KATHY

(Tentatively)
Have you thought of taking a lover.

BETH

No. Well. No. Sort of.

KATHY

You don't think you could?

BETH

I don't think it would be the same. I never thought I'd have a problem saying "no" to an affair, but now ...

KATHY

Fred came back into the picture.

BETH

What am I going to do if he ... you know ... well ... you know!

KATHY

(Tries to cheer her)
There are worse things in life. I think you still have real feelings for Fred, if you would just admit them.

BETH

(A little too loud to be the truth)
I'm not admitting anything.

KATHY

Bethany, how long have I known you?

BETH

Okay, he makes me ... uncomfortable.

KATHY

(Smiling)
I haven't seen you blush like that since that time I walked in on you and Fred at –

The doorbell rings and BETH and KATHY both freeze for a moment before snapping into action. They tidy up, stashing the liquor and trying to look sober. They are rather frantic; KATHY drinks up the drinks during the next few lines.

BETH

(Freeze)

Oh, hell!

KATHY

(Freeze)

It's probably Greg checking up on you.

BETH

Just a minute! Be right there!

KATHY

Who could it be?

BETH

(Goes to window)

Anybody. Oh God, it's a deputy.

KATHY

Deputy? Greg's behind this.

BETH

(Goes to door)

Shhhhhhhhhh!

BETH opens the door and we can hear what is being said though we can't see the officer.

BETH

Deputy Griffin, what a surprise! Would you like to come in?

GRIFFIN'S VOICE

No, thanks. Is the preacher in?

BETH

No, he went to a convention, but he'll be home Saturday. He's got to be here for Sunday of course. Can I help you with anything?

GRIFFIN'S VOICE

No, not really. I just have to give him some papers.

BETH

If you want to leave them, I'll make sure he gets them first thing.

GRIFFIN'S VOICE

I'm sure you would, but I'm afraid I have to serve them personally. I'll come by on Saturday or Monday. Thank you. You have a good evening.

BETH

(Really confused)

Thanks, you too.

BETH slowly closes the door
and looks at KATHY.

KATHY

You didn't file for divorce already, did you?

BETH

No. What the hell is going on here? Greg acts weird all the time, Fred shows up out of nowhere, and now somebody's suing us, I guess. Great. This is all I need.

KATHY

It could be worse.

BETH

How can it be worse? Give me a drink.

LIGHTS OUT.

ACT I
Scene 4

It is Saturday afternoon and BETH is expecting GREG and FRED to arrive shortly. She has been cleaning and preparing for Monday's anniversary party. She notices the time and hurries to her bedroom. KATHY comes to the door and looks in.

KATHY

(Calling)

Beth? You here?

BETH

Yeah. Come on in. Be out in a sec.

KATHY

When are they supposed to be back?

BETH

Pretty soon. I got busy dusting and thinking, and time almost got away from me.

KATHY

(Looking around)

Looks like we could eat off the furniture, it's so clean.

BETH

Thanks, I've been working my ass off since yesterday. Since I have class Monday, I can't do it then. I wanted to have the party Sunday evening but that would have interfered with Sunday night church. The midterm I have Tuesday was "just" an art class, so ...

BETH enters wearing a nice shirt and her hair is combed and she has on lipstick.

KATHY

(Teasing about GREG)

He is such a butthead. You don't look all that overworked. I guess you're just anxious to see Greg.

BETH

(Smiling)

If you aren't going to be nice, go home. I know why you're here, so don't try to kid me. Be nice and don't mention that I know Fred, or you either for that matter.

KATHY

(Pretending hurt)

I can't imagine why you would say that. I've been thinking though.

BETH

Oh, no. Here it comes.

KATHY

(Seriously)

Just listen. This could be very good for your situation.

BETH

What situation?

KATHY

You said that Greg wants me to get to know Fred, right?

BETH

Yeah, so?

KATHY

So, I could make like I like Fred, which wouldn't be hard since I think he's a great guy anyway. Then it wouldn't be unusual to invite him to my house. And when I know that Greg is away, guess who could come over to see him?

BETH

(Laughing nervously)

Are you totally insane? Do you have any idea what you're saying?

KATHY

(Seriously)

Look Bethany, why be so unhappy? I didn't say you had to go to bed with him, you could at least talk or ... something.

BETH

(Looking out window)

I don't have any intention of starting something with Fred. Oh no, here they come. Please don't say anything, things are hard enough with Greg, and all I've thought about since Wednesday is who's suing us and why.

KATHY

Okay Beth, but I don't think starting something with Fred's the problem. I think there's something you need to finish with him.

GREG enters the front door with FRED following him. They carry in GREG'S bags and set them down.

GREG

(Gives peck on BETH'S forehead)

Hello Bethany. Hi, Kathy. Everything go okay while I was gone?

BETH

No problems at all. Kathy, I'd like you to meet Fred Chapman. I think I told you that Greg went to the convention with him.

KATHY and FRED shake hands and smile. KATHY is dying to do some mischief but refrains.

FRED

(Taking KATHY'S offered hand)

Very nice to meet you. Greg's told me a lot about you.

KATHY

(Having fun)

Oh, I bet he did. Beth mentioned that you may be coming to their anniversary. I hope you'll be there.

FRED

(Looking to BETH)

I'd love to if the invitation is still open.

GREG

(Cuts BETH off before she has a chance to answer)

Of course it is. Be here around six and be hungry. Beth is a great cook, and I know she's planning a feast.

FRED

I'll be here. Greg's talked about you two so much the last couple of days, I feel like I know you already.

KATHY

Really? I have to confess that the more I look at you the more familiar you look. I could almost swear that I know you, but I can't of course 'cause I'm not allowed to swear in Greg's house.

GREG

(Nervous laugh)

Well, I told Fred you were a real character.

KATHY

(Enjoying GREG'S nervousness)

I bet you did, Greg. And I can't wait until Fred and I can have a long talk together on Monday. I'll bet I've met him somewhere along the line. He just looks so familiar to me!

BETH

(Still nervous)

Kathy, you seem to remember everyone you ever met. Even if you knew them only five minutes.

KATHY

No really, Beth. Doesn't he look familiar, like someone we knew in Austin?

BETH

Not offhand, no. You know how bad I am at remembering people.

GREG

Don't be so modest Beth. You always remember faces even if you don't remember names. I tell you Fred, she can remember people I never could have if she hadn't told me exactly where and when we met them.

BETH

(Wants to get away, grabs suitcase)

I'm going to put these in the other room. Be right back.

GREG

(Takes case)

Don't worry about that. Here, let me take it if you want it out of here. Be back in a flash.

GREG takes his things to the bedroom. When he is safely out of the room, KATHY gives FRED a hug.

KATHY

It is so good to see you again! I can't believe you've been just around the corner in Benton.

FRED

(Looking at BETH)

I'd have been here sooner if I'd known you were here.

BETH

Will you two cut it out? I'm about to have a coronary and all you can do is kid around.

FRED

I'm sorry Beth, I didn't realize. Do you want me to skip Monday?

BETH

No, no. It's a long story and I can't explain it now, but Greg would not really understand if he knew-

GREG sweeps into the room in an unusually good humor.

GREG

Did I miss anything?

BETH

Of course not. We were just getting to know each other.

FRED

I'd better be going. Kathy, nice to meet you. Beth, good to see you again. I'm looking forward to the party. Is there anything I can bring?

BETH

No. And if Greg didn't tell you, it's not fancy, just dinner with some church members and of course Kathy.

GREG

And thanks again for the ride to the convention, I enjoyed the company.

FRED

(Moving to the door)

Anytime. It was a good meeting.

KATHY

Nice to meet you, Fred.

GREG

I'll walk you to the car.

GREG and FRED exit out the front door. KATHY starts to giggle. BETH practically throws herself down on the couch.

BETH

I don't believe this. I can hardly get through five minutes with you two, and tomorrow I get to spend at least three hours with you and three stuffy deacons and their busybody wives.

KATHY

(Controlling her giggles)

It's going to be fine. Don't worry. Fred and I will be perfect little angels. I'll even call him tonight and explain that you're nervous about the party and I won't provoke him in any way like I did a while ago.

BETH

Only if you promise no details about my problems with Greg. He doesn't need to know any of that, okay?

KATHY

Are you sure you don't want me to –

GREG enters and begins talking
without regard to any
conversation already in progress.

GREG

Bethany, I'm afraid that gray suit is going to have to go back to the cleaners again. I'm beginning to think I can't wear the damned thing unless I spill something on it.

BETH

No problem, I can run it down there in a few minutes. I have a couple things I have to pick up yet.

GREG

(Picks up briefcase)

Fine. I'm going to finish my sermon for tomorrow and then go to the church to check on a few things.

KATHY

I'd better go. Call me later if you have time.

BETH

(Walks her to door)

Okay, just remember what I said, please?

KATHY

(Smiles)

Talk to you later!

BETH closes door quietly, and looks over at GREG who is busy sorting his sermon notes, and other papers in his briefcase. She is obviously very confused and unhappy. She wants to be shown affection, but is scared she will be rejected again. BETH makes a decision to try again.

BETH

(Sits close to GREG)

So, was it a good convention?

GREG

(Not looking up)

Yeah.

BETH

Learn a bunch of new stuff?

GREG

Huh? Oh, yeah, tax stuff mostly. You'd be bored.

BETH

You must be tired. Want me to rub your neck?

GREG

(Evade physical contact)

Nah, I'm okay. I know you have lots of cleaning to do for tomorrow, so I'll go over to the church to work.

BETH

(Sadly)

Yeah, the house is a mess, isn't it?

GREG

(Shoves work into case and heads for door)

Yeah, I'll just get out of your way so you can get things in order.

GREG exits, leaving BETH alone with no hug or kiss or kind word. BETH is almost numb with the chill. BETH curls up on the couch and looks around.

BETH

(As if talking to GREG)

It sure is a mess, isn't it? I guess that's why you couldn't manage a kiss hello. I guess one of these days if I get the house clean enough I might get a pat on the back. Oh, Greg, why won't you just hold me for a minute? Just for a minute?

BETH puts her head down and sobs. LIGHTS FADE OUT.

ACT 1
Scene 5

It is a few minutes after midnight that same evening. GREG is asleep on the couch with the TV on low. BETH is dressed for bed and appears to have been sleeping already. She walks over and looks at GREG a moment; she touches his face lightly with her fingertips. With a sigh, she goes and turns down the TV. Going back to GREG, we can see that she seems to be considering whether or not to wake him. Taking advantage of him being asleep, she touches his hair and smiles. Allow plenty of time to do these things.

BETH

(Softly)

Oh Greg, it used to be so wonderful.

When the frustration of knowing that she can only have these moments when he is asleep hits her, she stops. Wiping away a tear, she moves to the doorway and turns back to GREG. She blows him a kiss.

BETH

Happy anniversary, Greg.

BETH turns slowly and exits to the bedroom.

LIGHTS OUT

ACT 1
Scene 6

It is Sunday morning and GREG is still on the couch. He is waking up and is feeling pretty stiff from being on the couch all night. He stretches and turns off the TV. He sits back down as BETH comes to the doorway.

BETH

Oh good, you're up. I'll get the coffee started. You on the couch all night?

GREG

Yeah, you were sleeping so good, I didn't want to wake you.

BETH

Oh? When was that?

GREG

'Bout midnight I guess. What's for breakfast? I'm starving. Hey, how about pancakes and bacon?

BETH

(Uneasy)

Actually I thought since I had so much to do for tomorrow and today being our actual anniversary date and all, maybe we could run out for breakfast?

GREG

(Surprised)

Oh, well sure. I was just kind of tired of eating out the last few days. You know, if you don't want to cook, we could just have cereal, and then we wouldn't have to rush to get ready for church and you wouldn't have many dishes to wash.

GREG is kind of proud to think of such a reasonable plan, especially since he spent all his extra money on his trip. BETH is not surprised at his reluctance.

BETH

(Disappointed, but knowing)

Fine. Cereal it is.

(Pulling out small box, trying to be cheerful)

Happy anniversary, Greg.

GREG

(Taking offered box and card)

Thank you. What is it?

BETH

Why don't you open it and find out?

GREG

(Opens gift, finds tie tack)

Thanks Beth. It's real nice.

BETH

(Expecting a gift that doesn't come)

You might as well read the card too.

GREG

(Opens and reads)

Nice. Thanks. I bet you think I forgot you, but I didn't.

GREG reaches for briefcase and pulls out an envelope. BETH smiles thinking there is a romantic card inside but finds a stupid card with a slip of paper that falls out.

BETH

(Retrieving paper)

What's this? A ten dollar gift certificate to Wal-Mart?

GREG

I didn't know what you wanted, so ...

There is an awkward pause as BETH tries to be excited about her gift without crying.

BETH

Well, it sure is practical.

BETH gets up during her last lines so that GREG cannot see her face. She is hurt that it is not something personal.

BETH

I guess I could run over there while you eat breakfast and pick out something so I can say what you got me when people ask what you gave me.

GREG

Why would anybody ask?

BETH

Women always ask, especially certain women at church. They like to know what kind of gift a woman gets so they can tell their husbands and give them ideas.

GREG

What's wrong with a gift certificate? You can get something romantic in the right color and size, and not have to return it. Besides, you never tell me what other women get.

BETH

I never needed to tell you before. You just always gave me something sweet or romantic like flowers, perfume, or that cute little plaque from our second anniversary. And when did I ever return or exchange a gift?

GREG

I don't know.

BETH

That's because I never have. Your gifts used to be thoughtful and sweet.

GREG

I still don't see what's so bad about a certificate, but I'll tell you what, since it's our anniversary, I'll do whatever you want. I'll go to Wal-Mart for the gift and I'll pick you up an egg McMuffin too. How bout that?

BETH

(Approach GREG with romantic intent)

I was thinking more along the lines of skipping breakfast and going back to bed a while ... naked?

GREG

(Unwilling)

Beth, not before church. We don't have enough time, besides I need to be thinking about my sermon.

BETH

You have time to go to Wal-Mart and McDonald's but not fifteen minutes for me? Just for the record, I didn't ask for sex, all I wanted was a little cuddling. I never said you had to do "it".

GREG

Then what was the "naked" for?

BETH

It's been so long since I've seen you naked, I thought it might be fun. If you want me to admit it, okay I will: I must be a pervert because I like to see my husband naked.

GREG

(Angry)

Okay, okay. If that's what you want, come on.

GREG starts taking off his shirt and exits to the bedroom. BETH is shocked. BETH slips out the front door making no sound.

GREG

(Calling from bedroom, impatient to get it over with)
Are you coming? We don't have all day you know! ... Beth? ...Bethany?

Still talking as he enters.

Damn it to hell. Try to make her happy and this is what I get.

He trails off in the middle of the last sentence as he realizes she's not there to hear him.

GREG is wearing socks and his boxer shorts. He realizes that he is no longer obligated to do anything for her. GREG smiles and then begins to laugh as he exits.

LIGHTS OUT.

ACT 2
Scene 1

Monday evening about 6:00 PM.
BETH is finishing the last minute
details for the party. She has
chips, dips, etc to put out. She
has pillows to arrange as well as
flowers.

KATHY

(Coming in door)

Beth?

BETH

Yeah, come on in, Greg just went for some more ice.

KATHY

I thought he would never leave. I have so many questions, I'm about to explode!

BETH

You have questions? I'm still wondering how in the world I'm going to live through the next three hours of unmitigated hell. But go ahead, ask me a question, I'll pretend you're Mrs. Clifton. I need the practice before she gets here. You didn't bring me a drink by any chance?

KATHY

(Laughing)

No, but if things look grim, I'll run next door and grab something to slip into your coffee. So, who's suing you?

BETH

Still don't know. The deputy hasn't been back, and Greg claims he knows nothing. With my luck he'll show up in the middle of dinner and arrest somebody.

KATHY

Don't be so negative. They might just want him to witness in a trial or something. It might not even have anything to do with him. I was thinking, didn't some kid in your church get into some pretty big trouble a while back?

BETH

(Growing relief)

I didn't think of that. They might be having Greg as a character witness or something. It makes sense.

KATHY

This is going rather well, don't you think?

BETH

(Quick hug)

If you knew how worried I was. That must be it. Okay, ask another one.

KATHY

What did Greg do when you got home yesterday morning? He's had you on such a short leash I thought I was never going to get to talk to you alone!

BETH

I expected his usual raving then pouting. But he had a new twist: he was such a martyr, that he was trying to give me what I wanted, and I just ran off.

KATHY

Stop before I throw up! He is such a moron. How can you put up with that? The Wal-Mart bit would have been enough for me to tell him to take a hike.

BETH

(Sincere)

But Kathy, he hasn't always been like this. He used to be so fun and warm and just plain sweet. I don't know what happened to him. I keep thinking it'll change, but it doesn't.

KATHY

Can you think when it started to change? Maybe it was some event, maybe?

BETH wants to tell something,
and can't. KATHY senses this.

KATHY

It's okay if you don't tell me. I don't want to pry. Well, yeah, I want to pry, but you know I understand if it's something you can't talk about.

BETH

(Pause)

Kathy, I'm afraid you're going to think I am really nuts. I think I'm nuts when I think about this, but I know what I saw.

KATHY

(Responds with seriousness)

What did you see?

BETH

About two years ago Greg and I went to San Antonio to this preacher/ wife workshop thing. On the last evening there we had gone out to eat, and as we came out of the restaurant, there was this woman with two children coming toward the place. Greg noticed her and practically made me run to the car. Then he almost pushed me into my seat.

KATHY

Did he know her?

BETH

He said he didn't. I said I believed him, but I could have sworn that the woman recognized him too. It was so weird!

KATHY

Beth, Greg lived in San Antonio for a while didn't he? It could have just been someone from his past he wasn't proud of, you know?

BETH

I can understand that. Heck, we've had our share of those. But why practically shove me into the car? He knows I would understand that kind of thing.

KATHY

Didn't you ask him?

BETH

(Little laugh)

Oh yeah. He said he got a sudden horny feeling and wanted me in bed.

KATHY

What's wrong with that? Last I heard it was a good thing.

BETH

That's the other thing. That was the first time he couldn't, uh, perform. And he was so nervous. I never saw him that way before.

KATHY

I can see where it would make you wonder. What do you think it meant?

BETH

I don't know. There was just nothing else to connect it with. Nothing else like that ever happened again.

KATHY

Did you ever ask him about it later? You know, after you got home?

BETH

Once. But he pretended like he never even remembered the incident. But I swear he knew her; it was just too plain.

KATHY

Sounds like it. How bizarre.

BETH

(Checking watch)

Oh no, look at the time. People are going to be here any minute. How do I look?

KATHY

You look great. Ten to one, Fred's the first one here.

BETH

Please don't start this.

KATHY

(Laughing)

I told you I would be good, so don't worry. What can I do to help?

BETH

Pretend you're me and take my place.

KATHY

Not on your life.

BETH

Thanks! Would you get the mints and nuts from the kitchen?

KATHY

(Move toward the kitchen)

Sure. Hey, I think I hear a car in the drive. Bet it's Fred.

BETH

(Looks out window)

Oh God, it is. Get the door Kathy, please.

KATHY

I'd love to but I can't. Gotta get the stuff from the kitchen.

KATHY exits to the kitchen area leaving BETH to answer the door. She opens the door so FRED can enter. He is carrying a bouquet of her favorite flowers. They are identical to the flowers BETH has in the room.

BETH

Hello Fred. How are you?

FRED

(Offering flowers)

Fine. Congratulations on your anniversary.

BETH

(Taking flowers)

Thank you, they're beautiful. Roses are still my favorite.

FRED

(Indicating other flowers)

I remembered. I see Greg remembered your favorite too.

BETH

(Speaks before thinking, then recovers)

Oh, no. I just got those for the party. I didn't get ... ah, anyway, Greg got me something really personal. Would you like a snack?

FRED

No, thanks. I hope he had sense enough to make it extravagant and romantic.

BETH

(Doesn't want to tell)

Let's just say it was unique and leave it at that.

FRED

Okay, I won't ask. Is Kathy here yet?

BETH

She's in the kitchen. Fred, I haven't told Greg yet that we know each other, and I don't know if I can now. I hate to ask, but, uh –

FRED

I understand ... maybe more than you think. You know I did spend quite a bit of time with him in the car this week and we did a lot of talking ... much of it about you.

BETH

What did he say?

The doorbell rings and BETH and FRED freeze looking at one another a few seconds. The doorbell rings again.

FRED

I will be talking with you this week sometime.

BETH nods her head and goes to the door. As she reaches for the door, she looks at FRED. In spite of her confusion, she puts on a big smile and opens the door.

BETH

Hello! Come in!

LIGHTS OUT.

ACT 2
Scene2

It is the same evening as Scene 4, except at the end of the party. BETH and GREG are at the door saying goodbye to the last of the guests except for FRED and KATHY who are in the living room. There are several additions to the room. An afghan on the couch and a pretty country wreath and a wooden figurine on the coffee table are new.

BETH

Thanks for coming, and thanks for the beautiful afghan you crocheted for us Clara.

GREG

Yes, we're so glad you came. Henry, I'll be looking forward to that fishing trip.

BETH

Good-bye.

GREG

Drive careful.

GREG closes the door and he and BETH enter the living area and take off the "preacher and wife" roles and relax. BETH does this more so than GREG who is still uncomfortable with KATHY in the house.

BETH

(Dropping into a chair)

I'm so glad that's over. I thought nine o'clock was never going to get here!

KATHY

(Pretend to get up)

Is that a hint that we should get going too? Come on Fred.

FRED

(Playing along)

I can tell when I'm getting thrown out. Next time I'm bringing plastic flowers.

KATHY

Good. And she can do the dishes herself.

BETH

(Laughing)

Will you people get a life! Now sit down. I need more coffee. Fred? Greg?

GREG

I'll have another cup. Fred, you ready?

FRED

A warm up would be great.

BETH

(Heading to kitchen)

Be right back.

KATHY

(Joining BETH)

Would you like some Kathy? Oh yes, thank you. No, please don't bother. I'll get it myself.

BETH and KATHY laugh; exit.

FRED

(Chuckling)

Those two are quite a pair. I bet they keep you in stitches.

GREG

(Under breath)

I'd like to put her in stitches.

FRED

What?

GREG

Oh, nothing.

FRED

How long has Kathy lived next door?

GREG

Too long. When we moved here, she already lived there. I remember the first day we moved in. With all the screaming, I thought Beth had found a body in the back yard.

FRED

A body?

GREG

(Relaxing a bit)

Beth was exploring the house and all while I was getting some bags out of the car. She went into the back yard where nosy was watching from next door. She recognized Bethany and all hell broke loose. They had been friends for years, and then they lost touch when Kathy married and moved, and then Beth moved too.

FRED

She's a widow, right?

GREG

Yeah. That was about three months before we got here. I've never seen such a happy widow.

FRED

Oh, Greg. Don't be hard on her. I think Kathy is just a naturally bubbly kind of person.

GREG

Maybe. I just wish she wouldn't –

BETH and KATHY enter with coffee.

KATHY

Did you miss me? I know Greg did, didn't you , Greg?

GREG

I certainly did notice your absence.

BETH

You two behave, please.

FRED

Did you make the cake, Beth? It was wonderful. Banana cake is my favorite.

BETH

I guess it's been eight years since I made one. Glad you like it.

KATHY

Greg, you know that kid in your church that got into all that trouble a couple months ago? Vandalism, I think. When does that go to court?

GREG

Oh, that got settled out of court a week or so ago. Didn't I tell you about that Beth? It wasn't in the newspapers. The boy's father had enough influence to hush it up.

BETH is very shocked as is KATHY. Now BETH is starting to worry again about the deputy's visit.

BETH

No, you didn't tell me.

FRED

So you're an art major. Are any of the paintings in here your work?

BETH

(A little distracted)

Work? Oh yes. The one over there with the little country house and windmill.

FRED

(Goes to look)

Was this a class project? It's really nice.

BETH

(Focus back on party)

That was from before I started college, just after we moved here. Kathy let me play with her paints.

KATHY

I'm glad she's going for her degree, but she makes such good grades all the time, I get a little intimidated.

Everyone laughs a bit at this as the doorbell sounds. GREG stands up to answer the door.

GREG

(Moving to door)

Somebody probably forgot something.

GREG opens the door and we can hear the conversation between him and the deputy who is serving the papers. As before, we cannot see the deputy, only hear him. KATHY tries to comfort and support BETH as they listen to what is going on at the door. FRED listens intently too, but does not interfere.

GREG

Deputy Griffin, what can I do for you?

GRIFFIN'S VOICE

I hope I'm not interrupting your evening. I came by earlier and saw all the cars and thought I'd wait. I need to give these papers to you.

GREG

(Nervous, lowers voice)

What's all this about? Is it a law suit?

GRIFFIN'S VOICE

(Lowers voice too)

Well, sir, not exactly. They're divorce papers.

GREG

(Shocked)

I don't believe Beth would -

GRIFFIN'S VOICE

(Really nervous)

Uh, no sir, I believe it's the other wife.

GREG

Oh my God.

GRIFFIN'S VOICE

(Regains composure)

You'll find all the information in the envelope.

GREG

(Realizes he may have been overheard)

Yes, thank you. I'll look it over carefully. I'll get back with you when I know more.

BETH and KATHY are now whispering. GREG quickly closes door and puts on his best preacher persona.

I'll be right back.

BETH

(Frantic)

But Greg, what was that-

GREG

(Gives her a professional hug)

Don't worry. Nothing is wrong. There isn't any problem.

GREG takes the papers he is holding and exits into the bedroom.

BETH

(Frantic)

But did you hear what Griffin said? I know I heard him right. He said "other wife." I didn't know he'd been married before! A wife!

KATHY

Shhhh! Get a grip on yourself. You need to find out what is going on. You want me to stay with you?

BETH

I'll be okay. He won't say anything while you're around. A wife!

FRED

(Going to the women)

Beth, do you want me to talk to Greg? Maybe talking to another man would help.

BETH

(Pats hand)

No Fred. Don't get involved with this. I just can't believe this! We've been married five years. I can't believe I never even had a clue!

KATHY

Bethany, listen for just a minute. Fred why don't you come next door with me? You can pull your car around to my house to make Greg think you left. Beth, we'll be right there if you need us.

BETH

What do you think he'll do?

KATHY

I don't know Beth, I just think it would be wise if we stayed close.

FRED

I think Kathy's right. If you don't need anything, no problem, but if you do ...

BETH

Yeah, I think you're right. I just can't believe he's –

GREG enters and clears his throat. FRED, BETH, and KATHY look like conspirators caught in a huddle.

FRED

I was just telling the ladies that I think it's about time for me to head on out. I had a wonderful time and the dinner was just great.

BETH

(Feeble smile)

Thank you, Fred. I'm glad you came.

GREG

It's a shame you have to leave so soon. I thought maybe we could play some cards or something.

FRED

Tomorrow's a work day, and I really should be going.

GREG

(Not very concerned with walking him to door)

I understand that. Thanks for coming. Come back soon.

BETH

(Warm handshake)

And thank you for the gorgeous flowers. That was really sweet.

FRED

That was certainly my pleasure. G'night.

BETH

'Night.

KATHY

I've got to go too. I'll walk out with you Fred. See you later Beth. Call me whenever.

KATHY and FRED exit the front door. GREG is lounging in his chair trying to look innocent.

GREG

(Attempt lightness)

I think the party was a real success. You really outdid yourself on the food.

He gets no response from BETH.
He continues.

Fred sure was right about the banana cake. It was great. I don't remember you ever making it for me.

BETH

That's because I never did. I made them all the time for a friend before I met you.

GREG

She sure was lucky.

BETH

He.

GREG

(Almost sarcastic)

Of course.

BETH

Well?

GREG

(Innocently)

Well what?

BETH

I'm really not in the mood for your smooth talking bullcrap. Now, I heard Griffin say that your "other wife" wants something. What the hell is that about?

GREG

Bethany, baby, this is a long story. Let's get a good night's rest and then –

BETH

No way! Trust me, I'm wide awake. Now start explaining.

GREG

I was going to tell you –

BETH

When? On our tenth anniversary? Maybe our twenty-fifth?

GREG

Honey please, you don't understand.

BETH

I understand a hell of a lot more that you think. Or should I just ignore all this until you think it's a good time?

GREG

It's not that. Before I met you, things kind of got away from me, then I met you-

BETH

(Really angry)

Tell me how a wife just "kind of gets away" from you? Anything else get away from you?

(Remembers story she told KATHY)

You didn't by chance have a couple of kids get away from you at the same time did you?

BETH has obviously hit the nail on the head with this one and the blow to GREG is apparent.

Oh, this is priceless! Are there any other wives and kids going to pop up?

GREG

Would you just listen to me for two minutes?

BETH

(Almost hysterical, but still in control)

Two minutes? You can explain this in two minutes? This must be the explanation of a lifetime!

GREG

Come sit down.

BETH

No.

GREG

Please.

BETH

I said "no". Are you deaf and forgetful?

GREG

Just hear me out. I was wrong not to tell you.

BETH

You're damn right you were wrong. Why didn't you tell me? I can almost understand about a wife, but a kid? When were you divorced?

GREG

I need to talk to you about that.

BETH

Just tell me when. How long before you met me?

GREG

Well, it's not that simple –

BETH

(Tired)

How can it not be that simple?

BETH is suddenly aware of how it could not be that simple and is horrified at the thought.

No ... no, don't tell me you're still married.

GREG

Bethany, you don't understand how it was then.

BETH

I don't need to know how it was. I need to know how it is. How could you?

GREG

I didn't leave her. She left me. I thought she divorced me because she said she would.

BETH

Do you have any clue how lame that sounds? Do you hear what you're saying?

GREG

(Pathetic looking)

I know. One day she told me that she didn't want me any more; she was getting a divorce and taking the kids. What could I do?

BETH

You're a preacher. What would you council someone who was going through something like this?

GREG

But she wouldn't listen to me. She only listened to her "friends."

BETH

(Makes a connection)

Is that why you don't like my friends?

GREG

Yes, no, I mean it's not that, exactly.

BETH

You know Greg, I don't think you know what you mean. We just celebrated five years of marital bliss. What a joke! I don't guess I'm even married, am I?

GREG

Beth, baby, please don't say that. You know we're married. I love you more than anything in the world. We can work all this out.

BETH

And what do you think the church is going to say?

GREG

I thought, uh, maybe –

BETH

Not planning to tell them, were you?

GREG

Beth, please,

BETH

Listen Greg, you may as well tell them. And while you're at it, tell them that you're getting a divorce from your second wife too. That is of course IF I'm married. You might be able to tell them I just stopped shacking up with you.

BETH storms into the kitchen where she has the revelation that the woman in the San Antonio story is his wife.

GREG

(Calling to BETH)

Come on Beth ... Bethany? ... Honey?

BETH

(Standing in doorway)

That woman in San Antonio, she's your wife. And those kids ... those were your kids, weren't they?

GREG

(Getting closer to BETH)

Oh, Beth, I'm so sorry –

BETH

(Sitting on couch)

This is so unreal. All this time I knew you knew that woman. I thought a fling or illicit affair, but wife? Never in my wildest dreams did I think you had a wife.

GREG

(Behind BETH, hands on her shoulders, inflicting pain)

I thought that I was divorced. Don't you see? I thought I was divorced. She told me that she was divorcing me and that she wanted nothing from me except to leave her alone.

BETH

(Pulls away on last of her line)

Didn't you think the judge was going to make you pay child support at least?

GREG

(Grabs arm)

Hell, I don't know. I never had a divorce before.

BETH

(Elbows him and gets away)

That we know of.

GREG

(Angry)

You're making this sound like something it's not –

(Grabbing Beth by her upper arms)

I don't know what to say, Beth, but I'm sorry. If you would just try to calm down a little, we can work this out. I don't want to lose you. I love you, Beth, can't you see that? Nobody can love you as much as me.

BETH

(Quietly and controlled)

No, Greg, I can't see that. There's lots I can see very clearly, but love ... no, I don't see that.

GREG

(Releases BETH, heading to guest room)

Look, we're both tired. I'll sleep in the guest room and tomorrow we'll look at this thing together. Honey, we can work this out, I know we can.

BETH

I think you ought to leave.

GREG

But, Beth –

BETH

Get out.

GREG

Beth, I need –

BETH

I said get out. If you don't leave now, I swear to God you'll be carried out later.

GREG

I can't just up and leave. Come on Beth, where would I go?

BETH

Right now you can go to hell.

GREG

(Backing towards door)

You can't mean that. Okay, we'll talk tomorrow. I'll go sleep on the couch at the church office. We can work this out. I'll see you in the morning, okay?

He gets no response other than a slight nod from BETH. GREG exits out the front door leaving BETH stunned and sitting still. She begins to cry and rock quietly. After a reasonable amount of time, KATHY and FRED burst into the room. KATHY kneels at BETH's feet and FRED stands behind BETH.

KATHY

Beth, are you okay. We saw Greg leave. What happened?

BETH

He's married. That woman I told you about ... he's married.

KATHY

Oh my god! You mean he had a wife and never told you?

BETH

No, Kathy. He HAS a wife and never told me.

KATHY

Has? Damn.

FRED

That son of a bitch.

LIGHTS OUT.

ACT 2
Scene 3

It is daybreak the morning after the party. FRED and KATHY enter from the bedroom.

KATHY

I'm sure glad you talked her into getting some sleep. I don't think she slept any the night before, getting ready for the party and all.

FRED

She hasn't changed a bit. She does things with all her heart.

KATHY

Whatever happened to you two? Beth won't say.

FRED

We were just stubborn, couldn't compromise.

KATHY

Then how could she go for a control freak like Greg?

FRED

Don't know. How do the regular church members feel about him? The people tonight seemed to like him. You could tell they really loved Beth though.

KATHY

Beth gets irked at being in a fishbowl sometimes, but she loves the people in this church like family. They like Greg okay, but they only see his preacher side.

FRED

He sure goes in and out of that. It seems like people would notice that after a while. How long before you saw the difference?

KATHY

(Laughs)

Trust me, it didn't take long. Greg didn't like me from the word go.

FRED

(Mock serious)

I could tell he didn't think a whole lot of you.

KATHY

When he found out I was from Beth's past, I became dirt. He is so afraid that she's going to do or think something on her own.

FRED

It's amazing that he can hide that whole side of himself from his congregation.

KATHY

He's evidently better at hiding things than we thought.

FRED

You would think he'd have given himself away long ago.

KATHY

He has a wife and kids and he lied to Beth about it. What kind of man can do that?

FRED

I don't know, but I won't let him hurt her again.

KATHY

What do you mean?

FRED

(Thoughtful considered silence)

I still love her. I thought I was over her when I met Annie. In a lot of ways she was like Beth, except she was a little straight laced in the bedroom, you know. But it was okay. We may not have set the world on fire, but we lit our share of candles.

KATHY

That's the kind of marriage I had too. I thought that's what Beth and Greg had at first, but then it began to crumble. Beth has always been loyal to Greg, even when he acted weird.

FRED

Weird?

KATHY

Oh, looking through her purse, asking sly questions about who she's seen and where she goes. She's a grown woman for god's sake. She'd never cheat on him, but he is always insinuating that she is.

FRED

Poor Beth.

KATHY

I'd have ditched him by now. She tell you what he gave her for their anniversary?

FRED

She never said.

KATHY

How about a ten dollar gift certificate to Wal-Mart?

FRED

You're kidding.

KATHY

I wish I was. That blew her away. The worst part was when he offered to make it up to her however she wanted, he got mad at what she asked for.

FRED

(Really curious)

She never asked anything from me except to keep her well fed – uh, satisfied.

KATHY

All she wanted was the warm-ups, and he got mad. I may as well tell you, Greg can't do it.

FRED

Do what?

KATHY

You know ... "it."

FRED

Ohhh, "it!"

KATHY

What really makes her crazy though is that he won't give her any affection. None.

FRED

She's put up with all that, and now he's married. Bethany must feel like she woke up in hell. God, what kind of man is he?

KATHY

I think he's just a plain ol' ass.

FRED

Kathy, she's all I think about. Knowing she's married to an idiotic, ungrateful bastard doesn't help. I'm sorry, this is probably the last thing you want to hear about.

KATHY

It's okay. I love you and Beth the same as always. And if you still loved me, you'll go start the next pot of coffee.

FRED

Well, I'll go prove my love.

FRED exits to the kitchen and KATHY stretches and gets more comfortable in GREG'S chair. GREG enters the front door and is dismayed to find KATHY in his living room. KATHY knows without looking who it is and smiles knowing that it will piss him off to find her there. She is ready for him.

GREG

(Tentative at first until he sees KATHY)

Beth? Bethany? Oh Kathy, what the hell are you doing here?

KATHY

Good morning to you too, Greg. I'm here because I have a friend that has been treated like crap by a real ass.

FRED enters and distracts GREG from pursuing his repartee with KATHY.

GREG

Fred? Why are you here? I didn't see your car.

FRED

That's because I parked over at Kathy's.

GREG

(Nasty innuendo)

Oh, I see. I didn't realize you two hit it off so well. Well, be careful. Folks in this town sure do gossip.

FRED

(Toying with GREG)

You don't say. I bet they could chew someone up and spit them out before they knew what hit them.

GREG

(Realizing he's being toyed with, tries to redirect)

Oh. ... Isn't Beth here?

FRED

Yeah, but don't bother her.

GREG

(Irritated by FRED'S authoritative way)

She in the bedroom?

As GREG makes a move toward the bedroom, FRED steps into his path.

FRED

(Calmly)

Greg, she's resting. Leave her alone.

GREG

Who do you think you are? Beth is my wife and if I want to go to my bedroom, I damn well will.

FRED

No, I think not.

KATHY

Come on Greg, let her rest. No need to get her all worked up.

GREG

And why don't you mind your own damn business?

FRED

Don't even think of trying to intimidate Kathy or Beth or you'll answer to me.

GREG

You can get the hell out of my house.

FRED

No.

GREG

I'm warning you. Get out.

FRED

No.

GREG

(Picking up phone)

I'll call the police.

FRED

Go ahead.

GREG

What?

FRED

I said "go ahead." I'll bet that would be one hell of a visit.

GREG

What do you mean?

FRED

Well, if you have me arrested, would we be put in the same cell?

GREG

What are you talking about?

FRED

(Speaks as if GREG is deaf)

I said, "would we be put in the same cell?" It seems like bigamy is just as illegal as trespassing.

GREG

(Putting down phone)

So, what all did Beth tell you? I'm sure she was upset, but it's not as bad as it seems.

KATHY

(Growing anger)

"Not as bad as it seems"? You mean to tell me a woman finds out she's married to a bigamist and that's not bad? And what woman could understand how a man could never give his kids another thought? What the hell kind of man are you?

GREG

You don't know anything about this so just butt out!

KATHY

No. I'm not. If you think I'm going to let you dump all over Beth, you are wrong.

GREG

I don't have to listen to a damn heathen trouble-maker like you.

FRED

Would you shut up. You're going to wake Beth, and I want her to rest.

GREG

My, aren't we comfortable? I didn't think she had time to cozy up to you.

FRED grabs GREG by the shirt and pulls back his other arm to punch him in the face. BETH enters on GREG'S last line and quickly grasps the situation.

BETH

(Rushing into room)

Fred! No! Don't! He's not worth it.

Beth has put out her hand toward FRED, and again we see the effect as though she physically touched him. FRED hesitates, then shoves GREG away.

FRED

(To BETH)

You better tell him. He's going to find out.

BETH

(Nods)

Sit down, Greg. I need to tell you something about Fred and me.

GREG

(Sarcastic)

Let me guess. You have a new lover.

FRED

Don't be an ass, Greg.

GREG

You can shut your goddamn mouth.

KATHY

(Overly sweet as she sits)

I just love the way preachers talk; it's so uplifting!

GREG

(Under breath)

Bitch.

FRED

Beth is trying to tell you something.

GREG

Well excuse me. I come to my house to talk with my wife, and I can't get any privacy. So tell me if you're having a fling.

FRED

(In his face with seething anger)

No, Greg, but you're really close. Our affair ended before she met you. I haven't seen her in eight years, until you were kind enough to reintroduce us. And you know what? I'm so glad to know where she is.

GREG is stunned at first and grows angry as FRED talks.

GREG

It sounds a little fishy to me. If you hadn't seen each other, why didn't you tell me you knew each other when I introduced you? Or did you think it was easier to keep me in the dark so you could sneak around behind my back? I guess Kathy's your look out when you get together?

KATHY

That is not true! I may have been in the next room, but I never acted as a lookout!

GREG

What the hell? –

BETH

Greg, that was before I met you! I have never, ever broken my wedding vows to you, even though you seem to spend a lot of your time imagining that I have. You're forgetting that the problem here is not whether Fred and I knew each other before I married you, or whether Kathy knew anything about it. It's about "why Greg didn't tell Beth he already had a wife." I didn't say anything the other day about knowing Fred because I was afraid you'd make assumptions – like you just did. What did you expect? It wasn't like I was married to him.

KATHY

No, that's Greg's trick.

FRED

Beth is right. We were both surprised to see each other the other day.

GREG

Yeah, right. I don't believe any of you. There's something going on here that you're not telling me.

BETH

Would you listen to yourself? You never used to be so paranoid. I don't understand this. How can I trust anything you ever say now?

BETH sits and KATHY goes to comfort her. FRED moves closer to GREG so that BETH doesn't hear too much of what is said.

FRED

I think you ought to let her rest.

GREG

Are you telling me to leave my house again?

FRED

I'm just saying you're making things worse if you stay.

GREG

All you want is a clear path to my wife.

FRED

Fine. If you want to make it easier for me, just stick around. You can push Bethany into my waiting arms without even trying.

GREG

You sorry son of a bitch.

FRED

Hey, you do what you want, I'll just wait.

FRED walks away from GREG.
GREG is uncertain for a moment or two.

GREG

Beth? Could I speak with you a few minutes ... alone?

BETH

(Looking at FRED and KATHY)

Yeah, okay. Would you two mind going into the kitchen?

GREG wants KATHY and FRED out of the house. KATHY and FRED don't want to leave BETH alone with GREG. All three "But Beth" to disagree.

FRED and GREG and KATHY

But Beth.

BETH

No, Greg. After last night, I'm not asking them to leave, at least not farther than the kitchen. If you two wouldn't mind waiting in the kitchen...

FRED

(Nudge KATHY who doesn't want to leave)

Let's get some of that fresh coffee.

KATHY

Oh, all right.

KATHY and FRED leave with concerned looks at BETH.

BETH

Okay Greg, you want to explain it all? You can explain until you think you have it covered, and if I have any questions, I'll ask, okay.

GREG

Sure, sure. First I want you to know that I never intended to hurt you in any way, and I really want to make it up to you. You mean more to me than the world. I'll never tell another lie as long as I live.

BETH

(Expectant pause)

Well? You haven't explained anything yet.

GREG

(Deep breath)

Well, she was real young and we shouldn't have gotten married in the first place, but she got pregnant, and it was the right thing to do.

BETH

Were you a preacher then?

GREG

(Reluctantly)

Yes.

BETH

That's interesting. Go on.

GREG

We, uh, I just couldn't seem to make enough money to make her happy, and the only person she would listen to was this friend of hers that constantly criticized me. Then she stopped going to church with me, and that looked really bad. I was trying to work nights and be the youth pastor at this little church near Kerrville. It was just too much. Then she tells me that she's leaving me, taking the kids and going to her brother's place in Washington state somewhere. The church sure as hell wasn't going to keep a divorced preacher, and I knew I wouldn't be able to get another church if I was divorced. So I figured fine, I'd let her have her divorce and just pretend I had never been married at all.

GREG stops talking and looks at BETH as if he has explained all the important stuff. BETH sits obviously expecting more.

So she packed up one day while I was gone and took the kids. I never saw her again.

BETH

So what about the divorce? Didn't you think you'd get papers or a child support order? Especially since she wanted you to make money?

GREG

She said she didn't want anything from me and I believed her.

BETH

What did you tell the church?

GREG

I wasn't at the church but a couple of weeks after she left. I just told them she had a family crisis out of state, and I figured it would be best if I joined her and resigned.

BETH

Then where did you go?

GREG

I traveled around the country a while before I came back to Texas. I ended up at a little church near here and then this church called me about the same time I met you. So we all started off together.

BETH

Didn't the church ask if you had a wife or anything?

GREG

I figured if they wanted to know they would ask. They didn't ask.

BETH

Why didn't you tell me? I asked.

GREG

I don't know. Embarrassed I guess. I was afraid you'd think less of me to know I was a divorced preacher.

BETH

I'd have thought more of you if you had the guts to be honest with me like you said you would be. I told you way back there that honesty was the only thing that could make a relationship work.

GREG

I'm sorry, Beth, I just –

BETH

Sorry doesn't help at this point.

GREG

Beth, I can't lose you. You're all I have. If I lose you, I'll lose the church, our home, I'll have to leave town.

BETH

To be perfectly honest, Greg, right now I don't care what you'll do. We've been living a lie for five years, and you are not the man I thought I married. And another thing, I feel sorry for your first wife and especially your kids. They're probably better off without you if this is the kind of example you set for children. God, I am so glad we never had children. How could you possibly explain to a child that Daddy, the *preacher*, is a liar with two wives.

GREG

I can't believe you're saying these things –

BETH

You can't believe? I can barely grasp the fact that you put me in this situation. What am I going to tell my family? Don't you have any conscience?

GREG

Of course I do. Beth, you just don't understand –

BETH

I understand enough to know that I can no longer live this way, and I too will be asking for a divorce *if* I'm married. I'll be moving in with Kathy this afternoon, and as soon as I get a lawyer, you'll hear from him. Just leave me alone.

GREG

You can't mean this. Honey, you're my life.

BETH

Right. I love the way you've shown it this past year.

GREG

I can't help that.

BETH

(Getting up to leave)

That's not what I'm talking about, and I'm not going through that again. If you wanted to show me affection, you could have done it hundreds of ways without sex.

BETH is at kitchen door when
GREG speaks.

GREG

You can't do this to me –

BETH

(Turning sharply)

No! I can't believe you have the gall to stand there and tell me I'm doing this to you. That's it. Any last vestige of respect that I might have had for you is dead.

GREG

Okay. I guess I have no choice. If you don't mind, I'll just get a couple things.

BETH

(Call to kitchen)

You can come out now.

GREG exits into the bedroom.
KATHY emerges from the
kitchen with FRED.

KATHY

You okay? Anything I can do?

BETH

Yeah. Help me pack.

KATHY

Greg gone?

BETH

He's getting a few things before he goes.

FRED

Wise choice on his part. You going to be okay, Beth?

BETH

(Picking up wedding photo)

Yeah, I think the hard part is over. I can't believe that for six years I've been so blind.

FRED

It's time you do something for yourself.

KATHY

(Taking picture from her and put it on couch)

Fred's right. We can get your stuff this afternoon. Now you're coming to my house to sleep, and Greg better not come over or he'll find his ass in jail.

BETH

You're right. Thanks. Let's go.

They exit talking
about getting boxes, moving, etc.
GREG enters from bedroom and
looks around. He notices photo.
He picks it up and looks at it.

GREG

So, you've done it to me too. I can't believe it. You're just like she was. You listen to your heathen friends and become just like them.

When the phone rings, he is rather distracted as he answers, but snaps into his preacher mode as he realizes it is a member of the church.

GREG

Hello ... Oh, yes Mrs. Clifton. ... Well, no, I won't be able to make it. There's been a crisis in my family and I need to go out to the West Coast. ... Thank you, I appreciate your prayers. ... I'm not really sure, maybe a couple weeks. ... Yes, thanks, I will. Bye now.

GREG tosses photo on couch and gives one last look around. Pull out keys and tosses and catches them. He notices Beth's purse on the table and goes to it. He removes the checkbook and any cash. He gathers his things, looks down at the photo.

GREG

(Bitter)

I guess this is it. We could have been so happy, but you would rather have your heathen friends.

Tosses picture in trash basket.
Exits whistling hymn.
LIGHTS OUT

END OF ACT 2