

Side 1

BARNEX. (*Looks at her.*) Asshole! I can do it too. I don't understand the point of this.

ELAINE. The point is we've got a time problem and you're reading me fish poetry.

BARNEX. I realize we have a time problem but there's also the business of human communication. Of talking to someone, getting to know someone. . . . I'm sorry, maybe my whole approach to you is a little too old-fashioned.

ELAINE. (*Throws up her hands.*) Okay. All right. I'm flexible. I'll try things your way. . . . What did you want to see me about, Mr. Cashman?

BARNEX. Ohh, Elaine, don't be like that.

ELAINE. Well, maybe I just don't understand you. I've got a two-hundred-and-ten-pound husband who'd break my arms and legs if he caught me up here and you're telling me about your sweet succulent childhood in Sheephead Bay.

BARNEX. I just thought you might be interested in knowing a little bit more about me. I mean until you walked in her ten minutes ago—

ELAINE. *Twenty* minutes ago—

BARNEX. Twenty minutes ago, I was just a restaurant owner who admired your fingers and you were an attractive woman who has a craving for fish.

ELAINE. Look, you were the one who wrote down an address and apartment number on the back of a dollar-eighty check. Then I come here and find out we've got an hour and fifty minutes before your social-working mother with the high squeaky voice comes home to examine the puffed pillows. Now, if we had two weeks in Nassau I'd gladly look at color pictures of your tonsils—

BARNEX. I explained that. I thought a motel was a little sordid. . . . And I would gladly have picked up your check but my cashier's very nosy and if she saw me paying for some woman—

ELAINE. Forget it. You got a lot of courage. I was sur-

prised you took a chance giving me an extra shrimp in the shrimp cocktail. (*Finishes her drink.*)

BARNEX. I don't know how we got started on this—

ELAINE. It's cigarette nerves, pay no attention. (*Indicating the Scotch.*) Is that bottle just going to sit up there or are you going to turn it into a lamp?

BARNEX. You finished the other one already?

~~ELAINE. I didn't finish it, it evaporated.~~

BARNEX. Elaine. . . . Can I ask you a very honest question?

ELAINE. Yes, I've done this before.

BARNEX. (*Looks at her.*) That wasn't what I was going to ask.

ELAINE. All right, you got one for free. What were you going to ask?

BARNEX. I'm still not over that answer. You mean you have—on other occasions—?

ELAINE. I have on other occasions—in other places—with other men—done the unthinkable. If it'll help your vanity any, you are the first owner of a fish restaurant I've ever been with. In that respect, I'm still a virgin.

BARNEX. I gather then you're not very happy with Mr. Navazio?

ELAINE. What the hell kind of a question is that, am I happy with Mr. Navazio?

BARNEX. I'm sorry. It's none of my business.

ELAINE. I didn't come up here to get reformed. It's bad enough you got me to quit smoking; leave my sex life alone.

BARNEX. I drop the subject.

ELAINE. What was your question?

BARNEX. What question? Oh, before. . . . Well, I was just wondering, I mean, I told you I thought you were attractive. . . . I know why I asked you to come here. Did you come because. . . er. . . . Isn't it funny? I find it hard to just come out and say it.

ELAINE. Would you like me to wait in the kitchen?

BARNEX. Am I appealing to you?

* Start

ELAINE. Yes.

BARNEY. I am?

ELAINE. *Now* you appeal to me.

BARNEY. What do you mean, now? Do you mean possibly not tomorrow?

ELAINE. I mean possibly not in fifteen minutes. I have a short span of concentration.

BARNEY. You mean with you it can change from day to day?

ELAINE. By tonight I may hate filet of sole.

BARNEY. I'm not talking about seafood. I'm talking about people.

ELAINE. Yes, with me it can change from day to day.

BARNEY. Oh, Well, I find that disturbing.

ELAINE. (*An edge of sarcasm.*) Do you really?

BARNEY. Yes, I do. I find it disturbing, and a little sad, that your attitude towards people is so detached.

ELAINE. You'll get over it. Can I ask you a question?

BARNEY. Yes?

ELAINE. Are you writing some kind of research book? Is that really why you got me up here? *Sexual Secrets of Seafood Sufferers?* You got a little tape recorder going on in the candy dish? (*She leans over and lifts the top of the candy dish.*)

BARNEY. I'm sorry, it's very hard keeping up with you. One minute we're having a nice conversation, and the next minute you turn on me.

ELAINE. Listen, it's really been terrific, Mr. Cashman. I don't know when I've had a better time. You certainly pour a beautiful glass of Scotch and my compliments to your mother's housekeeping.

BARNEY. Where are you going?

ELAINE. Outside to look for cigarette butts. And then home. Don't worry, no one will notice me leaving the building. I'll walk out backwards.

BARNEY. ~~What did I say? Why are you so nervous?~~
ELAINE. *I disturb you? I make you sad? I have been called a lot of things by a lot of people in a lot of places*

but I have *never* been called a depressant. (*Starts for the door.*)

BARNEY. I didn't say that. I didn't even mean that.

ELAINE. You got some nerve getting me up here in a 1938 furnished apartment in your shiny blue suit and your thimbleful of Scotch, sitting there smelling your fingers and telling me *I give you the blues*.

BARNEY. When did I say that? I'm not depressed. I'm not blue. I'm very happy.

ELAINE. No kidding? How about two fast choruses of "Let a Smile Be Your Umbrella"? . . . Look, let me have a dollar-fifty. I'll be goddamned if I'm going to pay for the lunch *and* the taxi.

BARNEY. Elaine . . . Elaine, please . . . please sit down. Let me just say something.

ELAINE. *Say* something? You've already talked away half our allotted time. Now you'll have to use the other half to wipe my lip prints off the glass, puff the pillows, and get the hell out of here.

BARNEY. (*Softly.*) Elaine, if you could just lower your voice a little—

ELAINE. (*Screams.*) LOWER MY VOICE?

BARNEY. Shhh . . .

ELAINE. (*Crosses to the wall and yells at it.*) *Mr. Cashman is using his mother's apartment to bring breads!*

BARNEY. What's the sense in that?

ELAINE. Don't tell me I depress you! "Flaming Florentine Flounder"—Holy Christ!

BARNEY. Elaine, you're getting yourself unduly upset.

ELAINE. Unduly upset? I'm risking a bullet between the eyes and I can't even get a lousy cigarette. . . . (*This starts her coughing. It gradually worsens into the same violent coughing fit as before. As she coughs, he rushes into the bathroom for a glass of water. Her fit gradually subsides and then turns into just heavy, deep breathing. He returns to her side with the water.*)

BARNEY. Your chest sounds all congested. Have you ever tried sleeping with a vaporizer?

Side 2

ACT TWO

The scene is the mother's apartment. It is the following August, about three in the afternoon. A key fits in the latch; the door opens, and BARNEX sticks his head in.

BARNEX. Mom? (He waits; there is no answer. He enters the apartment, puts the key on the shelf, and closes the door. He puts his straw hat on the railing post. He carries the attaché case, wears the summer version of his blue suit, in a lighter fabric, of course. He crosses to the dining table and puts down the attaché case. He goes to the large window and lowers the Venetian blind, crosses to the smaller windows, turns down the air conditioner and closes the blinds. He opens the attaché case and this time he has two bottles, Scotch and vodka. He takes them out, places them on the table. Then from the case he takes three packs of cigarettes and puts them on the coffee table. He goes over to the phone and dials, puts the receiver on the desk, takes a small mouth spray from his pocket and sprays mouth and fingers. He picks up the receiver, and into the phone, in a soft voice.) . . . Hello, Harriet? . . . Mr. Cashman. . . . (The DOORBELL RINGS.) I can't talk now, I'm at the dentist. (He hangs up, turns quickly and moves to the door. He looks out the peephole, then opens the door. BOBBI MICHELE stands there, a pretty girl of about twenty-seven. Despite the oppressive heat outside, BOBBI looks cool and fresh. She carries a large leather portfolio and a make-up bag. BARNEX smiles.) Well, hello.

BOBBI. Oh, thank God, air conditioning. Do you know it's a hundred and forty degrees outside? I swear. I mean it's gets hot in California but nothing like this. Hi, Bobbi Michele?

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ACT II LAST OF THE RED HOT LOVERS 33

BARNEX. Yes, yes. Come in, I'll close the door. It's cooler. (She comes in: he closes the door.)

BOBBI. I was wandering up and down the hall. All these apartment look alike. (Looks quickly.) Oh, this is nice. I like this. I'm not disturbing you now, am I? I mean you're not busy or anything?

BARNEX. No, no, I was expecting you. Remember I said—

BOBBI. I wasn't sure I'd be here on time. I just got through with my audition.

BARNEX. No, you're fine. Remember I said three o'clock—

BOBBI. It's got to be a hundred and ten, right? (Crosses to the air conditioner.) I mean forget about breathing, it's over. (Stands with her back to the air conditioner.) You sure I'm not disturbing you? I could come back later.

BARNEX. No, I'm positive. I'm clear till five. (He smells his fingers.) Can I get you a cool drink?

BOBBI. I love this neighborhood. I knew this street looked familiar. I once had a girl friend who lived on this block. Forty-seventh between First and York.

BARNEX. This is Thirty-seventh.

BOBBI. Thirty-seventh. Of course. Then she couldn't have lived on this block. Oh, that's better. The Schubert Theatre was a sauna bath. Oh, listen, my accompanist did show up, which I have you to thank for because you were so sweet in the park yesterday and I want to know I have not forgotten it, but here I am talking and talking and I really haven't said hello yet. Hello.

BARNEX. Hello.

BOBBI. Hello. Here I am.

BARNEX. So I see.

BOBBI. Oh, God, I talk a lot when I get nervous. Have you noticed that? I'll try and stop it if I can. You'll have to forgive me.

BARNEX. Are you nervous?

BOBBI. Well, I'm not nervous now. I was nervous be-

*Start

fore. I just had a terrible experience with a cab driver. Well, I don't want to go into it. Ohh, God, I just wilt in the heat. If I pass out on the floor, I'm just going to have to trust you.

BARNEX. (*Smiles.*) You don't have to worry.

BOBBI. Well, you're not a cab driver. You wouldn't try something like that.

BARNEX. Like what?

BOBBI. He wanted to make it with me under the Manhattan Bridge during his lunch hour. Listen, can we forget about it? It's over now. I must look awful.

BARNEX. Not at all. You look lovely.

BOBBI. Oh, poof, I don't.

BARNEX. You do. You do.

BOBBI. Give me three minutes, I'll dazzle you. Did you get shorter?

BARNEX. Shorter? Since yesterday?

BOBBI. Why do you look shorter?

BARNEX. I can't imagine why I should look shorter. (*Sits next to her.*)

BOBBI. Oh, flats.

BARNEX. Flats?

BOBBI. I was wearing flats yesterday. I put on heels for the audition today. I got taller. Actually, you're not really short. Well, you know that.

BARNEX. Yes, well, sometimes when a person has large bones—

BOBBI. You know, I couldn't make out your handwriting. I thought I had the wrong address. 432 East Thirty-seventh?

BARNEX. No, that's the right address.

BOBBI. Well, I should hope so. Otherwise where am I and who are you? (*She laughs; he tries to.*) Oh, that's silly. If I'm goofy today, it's the heat.

BARNEX. Yeah, not goofy at all.

BOBBI. I am. I'm goofy, let's face it.

BARNEX. I think you're charming.

BOBBI. Oh, I know I'm charming but I'm also goofy

which I think is part of my charm. That's a terrible thing to say, isn't it?

BARNEX. Not at all. Sometimes frankness can be—

BOBBI. It's terrible, I can't help it. I'm so open about things. That's why I'm always getting myself into trouble, you know what I mean?

BARNEX. What kind of trouble do you get—

BOBBI. My God, I didn't even notice it. You shaved your moustache.

BARNEX. What moustache?

BOBBI. Didn't you have a moustache yesterday?

BARNEX. Me? No.

BOBBI. You *never* had a moustache?

BARNEX. Never. I don't look good in a moustache. It doesn't grow in thick on the left side.

BOBBI. Who am I thinking of? Who did I meet yesterday with a moustache?

BARNEX. That I couldn't tell you.

BOBBI. Well, I can't think straight. I'm still a nervous wreck over that cab incident. I've been back in New York three days and look what happens. I just want to forget about it.

BARNEX. Certainly. How about a drink? I have J&B Scotch, Wolfschmidt vodka . . .

BOBBI. I wrote the cabbie's name down. Max Schoenstein. I was going to report him to the police but he started to cry. Tears pouring down his face, I thought his cigar would go out. Then he pleaded with me he's married twenty-seven years with one son in Vietnam and another son in medical school and that he didn't mean any harm and I felt sorry for him and I said all right, I wouldn't report him, so he thanked me and asked me to reconsider going under the Manhattan Bridge. (*Brushes her hair and poses.*) How do I look? Better?

BARNEX. Marvelous. Gee, that's terrible.

BOBBI. Oh, it happens to me all the time. Coming in on the plane from California. The man sitting next to me kept feeling me up all during the movie. Well, I don't

* END *

Side 3

decent? That's the second time you left out decent. The first time I thought it was an oversight, this time I'd like to discuss it. Why did you leave out decent?

JEANNETTE. Do you consider her decent?

BARNEY. Thelma? My wife Thelma? What's the matter with you? She's the most decent human being on earth. Ask anyone. Thelma is the epitome of decency. My God, Thelma Cashman is synonymous with the word "decent."

JEANNETTE. That's wonderful.

BARNEY. Why, have you heard something?

JEANNETTE. Of course not.

BARNEY. Then why did you leave out decent?

JEANNETTE. She's on *your* list. It's not important if she's on mine.

BARNEY. What are you trying to do, Jeannette? Are you making inferences concerning the decency of my wife Thelma?

JEANNETTE. I'm not making inferences, Barney. *You're* indicating some doubt.

BARNEY. *Doubt?* About Thelma? (*Laughs.*) Good God, what the hell is there to doubt about Thelma?

JEANNETTE. How would I know, Barney?

BARNEY. Well, I'll tell you. NOTHING! THERE IS NOTHING TO DOUBT ABOUT THELMA!

JEANNETTE. As long as you're sure.

BARNEY. (*Shouting.*) Don't tell me "as long as I'm sure" because I'm sure. I have lived with the woman my whole life. I grew up with her. I know every nerve fiber in her body, every thought that's ever been in her head. The woman is without malice, without jealousy. Thelma Cashman is *beyond* reproach. She is as totally incapable of an act of deception as you would be or I would be or— Oh, my God! (*He slumps in his seat. She stares at him.*)

JEANNETTE. (*A long pause.*) So you have Kennedy and Christ! You have one more pick.

BARNEY. It's not true! Not Thelma, it's not true. She's not like other people. She's gentle and loving and decent.

JEANNETTE. In other words, you agree that other people are *not* gentle and loving and decent?

BARNEY. For God's sakes, Jeannette, why are you doing this? Is there something about Thelma you know that I don't? Is there something about her I should know that you're not telling me? I'll find out sooner or later, so you might as well tell me now. (*Points a threatening finger at her.*) You hear me, Jeannette? *I demand to know about Thelma!*

JEANNETTE. (*Stares at BARNEY a few seconds.*) Thelma is the only gentle, loving and decent woman I've ever met. She is unapproachable and incapable of deception. She is the epitome of decency. And the fact that you could doubt her is an act of indecency on your part. You are not a decent human being. Neither am I because I'm here with you, knowing what Thelma is. Neither is Mel, because he drove me to it. We are not decent people, Barney. Only Thelma is. But she thinks you're the most decent one of us all, so that makes her an idiot in my eyes. There are only indecent people or idiots in this world because that's all I ever see. And that's how I spend most of my day, thinking about things like that. Is it any wonder I take *Dictione*?

BARNEY. (*Falls back in his chair, exhausted. He shakes his head.*) I swear, I have never been so depressed in all my life.

JEANNETTE. I think my analyst has an opening Thursday afternoon.

BARNEY. Is it true, Jeannette? Am I really so terrible? Are we *all* so terrible?

JEANNETTE. Do you know what the rate of literacy is in the United States? Eighty-six percent. Do you know how many married people have committed adultery? Eighty-seven percent. This is the only country in the world that has more cheaters than readers.

Start

BARNEX. I never thought of myself like this. I never thought of anybody like this.

JEANNETTE. You should see what it's *without* Diglene.

BARNEX. No. No, listen, Jeanette, I don't buy it. We're not indecent, we're not unloving. We're human. That's what we are, Jeanette, *human!*

JEANNETTE. If I were to tell you stories about people you know, people you respect, you would get sick to your stomach right here on this carpet.

BARNEX. I'm not interested in other people. It's no concern of mine.

JEANNETTE. You don't see what's going on around you? The lies, the deceit. The stinking, sordid affairs that are going on in motels, in offices, in little German cars.

BARNEX. Jeanette, you can't go on like this. You've got to look at the brighter side.

JEANNETTE. (*Fighting back tears.*) Do you know Charlotte Korman, big, red-headed, buxom woman, her husband is the Mercedes-Benz dealer in Wantagh? (BARNEX *nods.*) Mel doesn't like her. He doesn't want me to see her. He doesn't want her to be my friend, doesn't want her to come to our house; he can't stand Charlotte Korman.

BARNEX. So?

JEANNETTE. He's been having an affair with her for eight months! I had to stop seeing her three times a week so *he* could see her four times a week. These are the times we live in, Barney.

BARNEX. Listen, Jeanette, maybe you're wrong. Maybe it's just your imagination. Your whole outlook's a little distorted lately. You must admit you're even having trouble tasting food.

JEANNETTE. You know what my proof is? He told me. Two o'clock in the morning, he leans over, taps me on the shoulder and says, "I've had an affair with Charlotte Korman." Who asked him? When he tapped me on the shoulder in the middle of the night I thought he wanted *me!*

End

with no eyelashes and a dry mouth and hear that your husband is getting it from a woman you're not allowed to see for lunch? And you know why he told me, Barney? He explained it to me. We're living in a new guiltless society. You can do anything you want as long as you're honest about it. Aren't we lucky to be living in such a civilized age? In the old days I would have gone to my grave *ignorant* of the wonderful and beautiful knowledge that my husband was spending his afternoons humping Charlotte Korman! . . . When he told me, I didn't say a word. I went down to the kitchen and made myself a cream cheese and jelly sandwich on date-nut bread. And that was the last time in eight months that I tasted food. . . . I estimate, going four times a week, I should be through with Doctor Margolies in another year. And then, when we both think I'm ready, I'm going to get in my car and drive off the Verrazano Bridge. In the meantime, I'm very depressed. Excuse me, Barney. Nothing personal, but I don't think we're going to have our affair.

BARNEX. Where are you going?

JEANNETTE. Where's anyone going?

BARNEX. Please, not yet.

JEANNETTE. (*Walks over to the desk and gets her pocketbook.*) Some good time you had, heh, Barney? A barrel of laughs, right? I think my eight point two is down to a three or a four.

BARNEX. I'm not indecent, Jeanette.

JEANNETTE. Don't start again, Barney. I only got one Diglene left. (*She's at the door.*)

BARNEX. Foolish, stupid, maybe, but I'm not indecent.

JEANNETTE. (*Hand on the door.*) Have it your way.

BARNEX. *Don't leave!* Don't leave until you say I am not indecent. It's important to me, Jeanette.

JEANNETTE. You want me to lie? You're not indecent. We're a terrific bunch of people.

BARNEX. (*Begins to fume.*) All right! All right, we're all no good. We're all indecent, unfeeling, unloving, rot-