

AS LONG AS IT'S IN THE SCRIPT

a sex farce within a sex farce

by

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## AS LONG AS IT'S IN THE SCRIPT

Characters

**Mark:** A warm, solicitous husband. He is self-possessed and confident, but not unflappable. A handsome guy in his thirties.

**Helen:** Mark's wife. She is a smart, energetic, efficient woman who knows what she wants. She is smooth and usually gracious with the people around her, but she has a sarcastic edge at times. An elegant, attractive woman in her thirties.

**Julie:** An independent, uninhibited woman who is Helen's best friend. She is effortlessly gorgeous. Her moods easily flip-flop from poised to frazzled, bold to nervous, or easy-going to impatient. Same approximate age as Mark and Helen.

**Fred:** An affable businessman who tries to be agreeable toward everyone. He is more than a bit obtuse, but he has an unmistakable natural charm that women tend to be attracted to. He has unglamorous, boyish good looks and is about the same age as the others.

**Plumber:** A gruff, cantankerous man, middle-aged or older, who doesn't like to be told what's what by hotel guests.

Time: The Present

Place: A downtown hotel room in a city in Upstate New York.

(Act One.)

(A large, generic hotel room of the classic upscale variety, with the usual furnishings. These include one large bed [Center], a small table with two chairs [DSR], a dresser [DSL], and a dressing screen [USR]. A door along the back wall, SL of the bed, leads to the corridor; a door SR leads to the bathroom; a door SL leads to an adjoining hotel room, while another SL door, farther upstage, leads to a walk-in closet.

(We discover Mark and Julie standing on opposite sides of the stage, with the bed between them. They appear to have just arrived and have been getting their luggage situated. They are dressed in casual but elegant clothes, as if for a date. Mark's wardrobe includes a sport jacket. Julie wears a classy, sexy dress. Both appear eager; but Mark exudes confidence, while Julie seems somewhat ill at ease.)

MARK

Alone at last.

JULIE

Oh, darling.

(They approach each other downstage of the bed, and embrace.)

JULIE

I can't believe we're doing this. Are you sure she doesn't know we're here?

MARK

Positive. Helen is at a stamp collecting picnic today.

JULIE

A "stamp-collecting picnic"?

MARK

Yes. Apparently, the stamp collectors of the twenty-first century are trying to break free of the stereotype that stamp collectors spend all their time indoors.

JULIE

But what if it rains?

MARK

Then things could get sticky.

JULIE

I'm still nervous about this door.

(She walks to the adjoining-room door, and turns the knob.)

MARK

Look, darling -- so the lock to the adjoining room is broken. So what? There's nobody even booked into that room.

JULIE

I thought I heard a noise.

MARK

You're just nervous.

JULIE

I know. I said I was nervous.

MARK

I mean that you're so nervous you're imagining things. Come here -- I'll take your mind off of imaginary noises, once and for all.

(She approaches him, then stops abruptly. Her manner changes instantly from nervous lover to put-upon friend.)

JULIE

I'm sorry, Mark. It's not right.

MARK

Are you sure?

JULIE

Positive. The line about imaginary noises doesn't come until later.

(She sits on the edge of the bed.)

Oh, man. I have to say this is the weirdest thing I've ever been asked to do.

(Mark joins her and they sit together on the edge of the bed -- comfortably, as friends, with a good distance between them. All signs of romantic intimacy have vanished.)

MARK

I know. I'm sorry. You're really a good sport.

JULIE

Could you just give me a little more insight into why Helen wants us to do this? She didn't give me a lot of details, and I felt funny about asking questions.

MARK

No problem. I'll try to give you a complete picture, from the beginning.  
(He takes a deep breath.)

My wife Helen -- your best friend --

JULIE

Though that could change very soon --

MARK

-- has become a little blasé about our sex life. For a while now, she's been trying to think of a way to make it exciting again. I've tried to help, of course -- bringing her countless "spice up your love life" books and erotica anthologies, and CD's of sexy dance music where the vocals were evidently recorded in bed. We even went to one of those couples-friendly sex superstores.

JULIE

Really? What happened?

MARK

She got bored after five minutes and waited for me in the car.

JULIE

Oh.

MARK

And when I went back the next day, she didn't even come along.

JULIE

Was that when she started going to all those plays?

MARK

Well, as you know, Helen has always loved the theater. Especially comedies. She even writes those goofy skits for local charity events sometimes. Maybe she's told you the story about how, when she was only nine years old, she wrote and directed a neighborhood musical, casting herself in the starring role. She did makeup, costumes . . . the whole bit. Then she made herself Executive Producer and cut the budget. All this to say that it didn't surprise me when Helen wanted to go see one of those door-slamming bedroom farces that the repertory company was putting on. It was a funny show, and we both had a good time. That night, Helen was almost her old passionate self again in bed. Then, a few months later, they did another one, and we went to see that, too. After that it was pretty much one bedroom farce a month -- she'd take me an hour or two out of town if they weren't producing one locally. And if I didn't feel like going, she'd go alone. Then she started bringing home scripts from the library -- all sex farces. I never realized there were so many of them! And all with more or less the same plot devices. She'd stay up late in bed reading them or bring them into the bath with her.

JULIE

It sounds like a bit of an obsession.

MARK

That's what I thought. So I asked her about it. And that's when she told me . . .

JULIE

Told you what?

MARK

That this was the sexual thrill she craved.

JULIE

What was?

MARK

People hiding implausibly in closets and surprising each other through the doors of adjoining hotel rooms. People about to hop into bed with lovers when their spouses walk in. People parading their paramours as their plumbers and calmly explaining to their fiancées why they're half-undressed among strangers at noon.

JULIE

And that's where I come in.

MARK

Exactly. Helen came to me one evening -- after reading most of a three-act West End comedy in the bath -- and asked if I'd do her the biggest favor of her life. And what she asked was for me to act out a farce that she'd written, a sort of extended fantasy, in which you and I would pretend to be about to have an affair, so that she could surprise us through a hotel room door and be reunited with me.

JULIE

Leaving me to watch TV in the adjoining room.

MARK

Something like that.

JULIE

I have to hand it to her. She's really putting the "play" in foreplay. And that script -- it's a full-length farce! This charade is going to take us all evening.

MARK

Don't worry -- there's an intermission halfway through.

JULIE

(She looks around.)

These rooms must be expensive.

MARK

They sure are. Especially because Helen happens to have chosen the tourist season to indulge her sexual fantasy. But she's not fooling around.

JULIE

No. We are.

MARK

Yes. Or, rather, we're pretending to fool around.

JULIE

So that she can walk in on us at the crucial moment. Wow. I've done favors for friends before -- but it's usually more along the lines of feeding the cat or giving someone a lift to the service station.

MARK

Try to think of this as giving Helen's sex drive a lift.

JULIE

I guess.

MARK

(He places a fraternal hand on her shoulder.)

Are you sorry you agreed to it?

JULIE

No. After all, how could I say no? I mean, what kind of a friend would I be to Helen if I refused to have an affair with her husband?

MARK

*Pretend* to have an affair.

JULIE

Whatever.

HELEN

(From offstage)

Hey -- could you guys please speak up?

(As soon as they hear Helen's voice, Mark and Julie snap out of their friendly pose, jump to their feet, and assume a stiff embrace.)

MARK

Sorry, honey. We were just taking a break.

HELEN

(Offstage)

Remember -- I have to be able to follow where you are in the scene, so that I can do my dialogue at the appropriate moment. Timing is *everything* in a bedroom farce.

MARK

Don't worry, dear.

JULIE

Can we go back? I've forgotten where we were.

MARK

Sounds like a good idea. Helen, have you got a copy of the script that we can look at for a second?

(The door to the adjoining room opens a crack, and we see Helen's hand drop some manuscript pages in. They flutter to the ground, and Mark and Julie scramble to collect them. They sit on the edge of the bed again as they sort through the script and find the place.)

MARK

(To Julie)

Ready?

JULIE

I suppose.

(They stand.)

MARK

(He calls offstage to Helen.)

Okay, here we go.

(He resumes the scripted dialogue.)

Alone at last.

JULIE

Oh, darling.

(She looks around, nervously.)

Are you sure she doesn't know we're here?

MARK

Positive. Helen is at a stamp collecting picnic today.

(From offstage, we hear a telephone ring.)

HELEN

(Offstage)

Crap! Hold on a second.

(Mark and Julie relax. They sit on the edge of the bed.)

MARK

Oh! I just remembered something.

(He retrieves the script from behind them on the bed, and looks at it.)

I thought so.

(He points to a place in the script.)

Lingerie.

JULIE

Lingerie?

MARK

On the next page, you're supposed to go into the bathroom and change into sexy underwear. Did you bring any?

JULIE

(Blushing, she stands and walks away from the bed.)

Yes. It's -- uh -- it's already on.

MARK

(Enthusiastically)

Great!

(More soberly)

I mean -- ahem -- good job. You're really helping Helen by following the script so carefully.

(He gives her a comradely nudge on the shoulder with his fist.)

JULIE

It didn't say exactly what kind of sexy underwear, so I just picked something I thought you would like.

MARK

Huh?

JULIE

I mean something *I* would like.

MARK

(Blushing)

That's what I thought you meant.

JULIE

(She laughs nervously.)

I guess I sort of mis-spoke.

MARK

Haha, yes. Well, it wasn't scripted, so that's what happens sometimes, isn't it?

JULIE

Haha, yes.

MARK

Haha, when it isn't scripted, haha.

(Helen enters swiftly. Mark and Julie look awkward. Mark gets up and moves to Helen.)

MARK

What's up?

HELEN

That phone call was the front desk.

JULIE

I didn't know desks could talk.

HELEN

Actually, I would have *preferred* talking with a desk to talking with the person they have staffing it. He kept asking me questions and then not paying attention to the answers.

MARK

Sounds like he'd be perfect at cocktail parties.

HELEN

Anyway, the gist of it was that apparently someone screwed up, and they have an understandably tired businessman down there with a reservation but no room. They want to know if we can give up one of ours.

MARK

What did you tell them?

HELEN

Well might you ask. I didn't particularly feel like explaining that we needed both rooms to stage a sexual fantasy.

JULIE

Maybe you ought to. They might offer a special rate for that.

HELEN

(She ignores Julie's suggestion.)

I needed a reason why we three couldn't make do with just one room, even though they were ready to send up a cot.

MARK

So what reason did you come up with?

HELEN

I told them that you snore, and that Julie finds it impossible to sleep in the same room with someone who is snoring.

JULIE

Actually, I like the sound of snoring. When I was a small child, I would crawl into bed with my parents sometimes, and, since they both snored, I've always found the sound of snoring to be very soothing. Isn't it funny how your early associations can --

HELEN

(Continuing)

But the desk clerk didn't seem convinced. He asked exactly how loudly you snore, and I said I'd never actually measured it in decibels. Then he started telling me about an aunt of his who snored so loudly that it kept the raccoons from raiding her garbage cans on the porch three stories down. Fortunately, the businessman with no room interrupted at that point, and the desk clerk asked me to come downstairs to discuss the matter further.

(She sighs.)

I'm sorry, guys. Do you mind waiting until I sort this out?

MARK

Of course not, honey.

JULIE

No problem.

HELEN

(Smiling)

Thank you both. I promise we'll get back on track soon.

JULIE

(Trying to appear enthusiastic)

Yay.

(Helen exits through the door to the corridor. There is a moment of silence after she goes.)

MARK

So -- uh -- what kind is it, exactly?

JULIE

What kind is what?

MARK

The underwear.

JULIE

(Laughing)

Have you been thinking about that all this time?

MARK

(He shrugs.)

Off and on.

JULIE

Those are the two best ways to think about underwear.

MARK

So . . . what kind is it?

JULIE

Oh, it's sort of . . . well, I can just show you, can't I.

MARK

But you said you already had it on.

JULIE

So?

MARK

You want to get undressed and show me your underwear?

JULIE

(She blushes.)

Not if you don't want me to.

MARK

Of course I do! That is . . . but . . . don't you think it might be a little . . . inappropriate?

JULIE

On the contrary. When you see this underwear, I think you'll find that it's very appropriate. For the situation.

MARK

Yes, but I mean is it really right for you to get undressed and show me how fabulous you look in your sexy underwear?

JULIE

We're going to do it anyway. It's right in the script -- you just said so. So since we're going to do it anyway, I figure --

(She stops short.)

Did you say "fabulous"? That I'm going to look fabulous in my sexy underwear?

MARK

Um . . . I may have said something like that, yes.

JULIE

(Playfully)

How do you know how I'm going to look in my underwear?

MARK

Because of how you look out of it. I mean, not *out* of it -- though I'm sure you'd look fabulous that way, too, now that you mention it --

JULIE

(Fascinated)

I didn't mention it.

(She studies him for a moment.)

You did.

MARK

Did I? Well, good, I thought somebody did. But what I really meant was that I know you'll look fabulous in the lingerie because . . .

(Helen enters from the corridor.)

HELEN

The desk clerk has been on the phone for the past ten minutes, and shows no signs of hanging up. I learned as much as I cared to about his car, his sister's trip to the Grand Canyon, and what he saw on television last night. Finally I decided to go away and try again a little later.

JULIE

I guess it's too much to hope that solving his guest's problems would take priority over gabbing with his pals.

HELEN

He wasn't gabbing with a pal. He was just ordering a pizza. Oh -- Julie, did you remember to bring the sexy underwear?

MARK

She's already got it on.

JULIE

(Quickly)

On the *list*, he means. I have it on the costume list you gave me.

HELEN

Good.

(Sociably, to Mark)

Won't it be a treat to see how pretty Julie looks in her lingerie?

MARK

(Playing it cool)

Huh? Oh . . . oh, sure, yeah, why not. Just for laughs.

(Julie smiles knowingly at this, but Helen fears that Mark has hurt her friend's feelings.)

HELEN

*Mark.*

(The phone rings. Helen answers it.)

HELEN

(Into the phone)

Yes . . . . Well, I was trying to! . . . . Fine, fine -- if you're quite sure I won't be interrupting any important heart-to-heart talks with the pizza delivery people . . . . Okay, okay. I'll be right down.

(She hangs up and addresses Mark and Julie.)

Here I go again. Wish me luck.

(Helen exits into the corridor. Mark sits on the edge of the bed.)

JULIE

(Preoccupied)

I wonder . . . .

MARK

You wonder what?

JULIE

I wonder if Helen would have chosen me for this game, if she'd known --

(She hesitates as she makes eye contact with Mark. She blushes.)

MARK

Known what?

JULIE

I know it's silly, but I've always had a little bit of a crush on you.

(She laughs nervously and averts her eyes.)

MARK

That's great! I mean . . . it's a nice thing to say to someone, isn't it? I mean, even though -- you know -- well, what I mean is . . . .

JULIE

(Laughing, she sits next to him and gives him a friendly pat on the shoulder.)

That's okay, Mark. I know what you mean.

MARK

I guess I may as well admit . . . uh . . . I kind of also . . . you know . . . I mean, I sort of . . . .

JULIE

(Teasing)

Are you trying to seduce me with all that smooth talk?

MARK

(He laughs at himself.)

It probably *is* a good thing that I'm not relying on my eloquence to seduce anyone, isn't it.

(Helen enters from the corridor. Julie gets up and walks to her.)

JULIE

That was quick! What happened downstairs?

HELEN

Well, I thought things over in the elevator. And I realized that even though I wrote this scene to include an adjoining room, I could really just as well come in and surprise you from the bathroom -- if you didn't know I was in there. So I was able to accommodate Mr. Francis.

JULIE

Mr. Francis?

HELEN

The poor businessman with no room. I told him he could have that one.

(She gestures toward the adjoining room.)

Now, all I have to do is make a few changes in the script.

(She looks around, finds the script on the bed, and begins to scribble some things out and write some things in.)

JULIE

Let me get this straight. You'll be in the bathroom the whole time Mark and I are playing our scene?

HELEN

(Cheerfully)

That's right. It'll be less expensive, *and* I won't have any trouble hearing you say your lines.

JULIE

But what if we need to *use* the bathroom? I mean -- uh -- I usually, you know,

uh . . . before I have sex. Pretend to have sex. Pretend to almost have sex. I mean -- sorry, I have to go to the bathroom.

(She hastens into the bathroom and shuts the door behind her.)

MARK

She's got a point. Your script has her going in there to change. It says she exits to the bathroom, and then I'm supposed to turn the radio on and dim the lights and go down to the bar to get a chilled bottle of champagne, and when I return she comes out of the bathroom looking fabulous in her underwear.

HELEN

(Puzzled)

Did I write in the script that she looks fabulous in her underwear?

MARK

Didn't you? I guess I was just extrapolating.

(He paces the room, covering what he thinks may be an indiscretion by expounding pretentiously.)

I thought your intention, as the playwright, was probably that she would look fabulous in her underwear, even if you didn't write in so many words that she looks fabulous in her underwear. After all, a gifted playwright doesn't have to spell everything out -- a lot of the impact comes from reading between the lines.

HELEN

(Pleased)

Do you really think I'm a gifted playwright, sweetheart?

MARK

I'll go so far as to say that this scene you've written is beginning to feel uncannily real.

HELEN

(Delighted)

Well! That's certainly nice to hear.

MARK

But getting back into the area of Julie's underwear -- uh, Julie's *exit* to the bathroom to change into her underwear . . . .

HELEN

I wrote it that way because it makes for a tidy, offstage costume change.

(Julie re-enters.)

HELEN

Look. I have an idea. I'll ask Mr. Francis if Julie can use his bathroom -- which was rightfully our bathroom -- to change.

MARK

How will you explain that? We obviously have a bathroom in here.

HELEN

There are three of us, and only one of him. I'll just say that in case Julie happens to need to change at the same time that one of us is using the bathroom in here, that I'd like him to allow her to use his. It's the least he can do, after all.

JULIE

But then won't I have to walk through his room in my underwear?

HELEN

Oh. I didn't think of that. Okay, then, no underwear.

JULIE

What do you mean, "no underwear"?

HELEN

I mean you won't change into your underwear until you return from the bathroom. Just go use his bathroom and then come back here and get undressed. You can change behind this screen here.

(She indicates the screen.)

JULIE

Then why do I have to go over to Mr. Francis' bathroom at all? I already went to the bathroom, and we could pretend that the make-believe Julie doesn't have to go. So couldn't I just walk behind the screen and change?

HELEN

No. Because while you're in the bathroom and Mark is downstairs getting the champagne, I'm supposed to sneak into the empty room and notice Mark's sport jacket hanging over the chair. See?

(She shows Julie the script. Then she looks at one of the chairs and frowns.)

Hang your sport jacket over that chair, dear.

(Mark does so.)

MARK

Okay, so the real Julie is going to pretend she has to use Mr. Francis' bathroom. But why would the *make-believe* Julie use the adjoining room's bathroom, instead of the one in here?

JULIE

Yeah. In the play, I don't know you're hiding in the bathroom. That would defeat the whole point of it.

HELEN

(She thinks for a moment.)

I know! We'll pretend that when I went into the bathroom to hide, I forged a note from the management saying that this bathroom was out of order, apologizing for the inconvenience, and directing you to the bathroom in the room next door -- which, in the play, is empty, since Mr. Francis isn't a character in my play, only a character in real life -- and that's why you go next door to use the bathroom.

MARK

But not to change.

HELEN

Right.

(To Julie)

Got it?

JULIE

I guess so. What's my cue?

MARK

(Reading from the script)

"Just relax, darling. Why don't you change into something more comfortable?"

JULIE

But we've decided that I'm not *going* to change -- not till I come back.

HELEN

No problem. You won't actually *change* in the adjoining room's bathroom, but you could go there to *get* your lingerie, and then bring it in here to change.

JULIE

But why would my lingerie be in Mr. Francis' bathroom?

HELEN

No, dear, there is no Mr. Francis. Not in the play. It's just an empty room with a functional bathroom. We can pretend that when you saw the "out of order" sign on this bathroom's door -- before the start of the play -- you had put your toothbrush and your dainties in the bathroom you knew you'd be using, i.e. the one next door.

JULIE

"Dainties"?

MARK

Sounds awfully complicated.

HELEN

Liaisons are always complicated, darling.

JULIE

Even pretend liaisons.

HELEN

*Especially* pretend liaisons.

(To Mark)

Haven't you learned anything from all those plays we've been seeing?

MARK

Yes. I've learned that most of the actors around here do *terrible* British accents.

JULIE

So -- uh -- tell me if I've got this. After make-believe Mark invites me to change into something more comfortable, I have to go into real Mr. Francis' real bathroom, telling him I need to -- you know -- even though I don't have to. Then, while I'm in his bathroom, which we're pretending is a vacant room's bathroom, I have to really get undressed, and then get dressed again without my underwear, so I can carry the underwear back here, so that I can go behind that screen and get undressed again and put the underwear back on, this time without the clothes over it.

HELEN

(Proudly)

You see how gracefully these things work in the theater! Now, all I have to do is arrange things with Fred next door -- oh, and make a little handwritten "out of order" sign -- and we'll be ready to resume. Isn't this fun!

MARK

(Speaking to Helen, but with a sidelong look at Julie)

I just want to make you happy, dear.

HELEN

Back in a minute!

(She knocks on the adjoining room door, and exits through it.)

(Mark and Julie meet downstage of the bed.)

JULIE

Did she say Fred?

MARK

I think so, yeah.

JULIE

Fred Francis?

MARK

Yeah. You know him?

JULIE

(Pacing)

Only in the sense that we lived together for six years.

MARK

You mean, like, roommates?

JULIE

I mean, like, bedmates.

MARK

Oh. Maybe it's a different Fred Francis.

JULIE

I don't think so. Freddy travels frequently on business and this city is on his route. And she did say "tired".

MARK

Your Fred Francis was tired?

JULIE

He always seemed to be. Then again, most men who share a bed with me at night are tired during the day. Mark, what am I going to do?

MARK

You could make them coffee in the morning.

JULIE

No -- what am I going to do *now*?

MARK

I thought we had that all figured out. You're going to take your underwear off in Fred's bathroom.

JULIE

But what am I going to tell him?

MARK

We covered that as well. You're going to tell him you have to pee.

JULIE

No, I mean how am I going to explain what I'm doing here?

MARK

Do you have to explain? You and this Fred guy broke up some time back, right?

JULIE

Of course. But you can't just walk into the hotel room of someone you slept with for six years, ask to use his bathroom, dash out with a set of sexy underwear, and leave him wondering what's going on in the next room.

MARK

It does sound a little abrupt. So why not just tell him that you're staying in the hotel with your friends Mark and Helen?

JULIE

An expensive hotel in the middle of the city in which I live?

MARK

Ah. Of course. He knows you live here.

JULIE

Yes. We both lived here, together. After we split he left the area, but he knows I'm still here. I send him a card every September 5th.

MARK

His birthday?

JULIE

Bob Newhart's birthday. He's a big fan.

MARK

Okay. So then why don't you tell him the truth?

JULIE

Bob Newhart?

MARK

Fred.

JULIE

What -- that I'm here to participate in a sexual fantasy that involves changing into my underwear for my best friend's husband?

MARK

Roughly, yeah.

JULIE

Just how kinky do you want him to think I am?

MARK

Kinky? What's so kinky about helping your best friend with her sex life? I think it's sweet.

JULIE

Would you like to go next door and explain that?

MARK

Uh . . . I would -- but, as it happens, I don't have to go to the bathroom.

(Helen enters from the adjoining room.)

HELEN

Okay, that's settled. Fred says we can come on through to his bathroom whenever we need it. We don't even have to knock on the connecting door. He says he's going to be busy working at the desk, and we can walk through as often as we like.

(She heads toward the corridor door.)

I'm going down to the lobby to try to round up some cardboard to make my sign. You two may as well stay here and get in the mood.

(She gives Mark a peck on the cheek.)

See you soon!

(Helen exits to the corridor. Mark and Julie approach each other and meet, once again, downstage of the bed.)

MARK

(Nervously)

Heh-heh. She keeps leaving us to our own devices.

JULIE

(With a twinkle in her eye)

Yeah. It's a good thing we're not really having an affair, isn't it?

MARK

Ha. Yeah. Otherwise . . .

JULIE

(She moves in a little closer to him.)

. . . You'd soon have me standing here looking fabulous in just my sexy underwear . . .

MARK

I -- I -- I --

JULIE

(She moves even closer.)

. . . With your smooth-talking eloquence.

(Julie touches Mark's arm, tentatively, when they suddenly hear the door to the corridor. They immediately jump apart. Then, just as quickly, they automatically jump back together and resume the staged embrace from Helen's play. Helen enters.)

HELEN

(Pleased)

Oh, good. You're rehearsing. I can't tell you how much I appreciate all the effort you're both going to. Especially you, Juliekins. You're a real pal.

JULIE

(Awkwardly)

Er . . . my pleasure.

HELEN

I realized I forgot my Sharpie.

(She digs into her luggage and retrieves a marker.)

Ta-ta!

(She exits to the corridor.)

(Julie looks into Mark's eyes like she means business. Mark looks petrified.)

MARK

(Suddenly)

You know what you need?

JULIE

(Still looking intently into his eyes)

Yes.

MARK

(Persisting)

You need a disguise!

JULIE

What?

MARK

So Fred doesn't recognize you.

JULIE

Oh. Fred. Yes, I suppose you're right.

MARK

Say, I'll bet you could find a hotel maid's uniform out there in a utility closet.

JULIE

A maid's uniform isn't going to disguise my *face*.

MARK

Well, maybe the maids around here wear Groucho glasses.

JULIE

I'll see what I can do.

(She exits to the corridor.)

(Mark sits down on the bed. Julie re-enters.)

JULIE

Wait a second. Why would make-believe Julie change into a maid's uniform, with or without Groucho glasses, before going into a vacant bathroom to retrieve her underwear?

MARK

(He shrugs.)

People do funny things when they're in the grips of passion. But look -- let's not tell Helen about you and Fred. I don't want anything to spoil her fantasy, and if she finds out you're nervous about Fred being next door, it might put a damper on things.

(Julie nods and exits.)

(Fred enters from the adjoining room.)

FRED

Excuse me.

MARK

Yes?

FRED

I'm Fred from next door.

MARK

(He stands.)

Pleased to meet you, Fred. Welcome to the neighborhood.

(Ushering him back to the adjoining door)

We must get together for a barbecue sometime.

FRED

I just wanted to warn you.

MARK

Warn us?

FRED

About my bathroom. Your wife said you folks might need it.

MARK

(Trying to get rid of him)

Yes, yes. Awfully kind of you. Thanks a million.

FRED

You're welcome. But I'm afraid it's out of order.

MARK

No no, *that's* not the one that's "out of order."

FRED

(Confused)

I beg your pardon?

MARK

Uh . . . I mean . . . are you sure?

FRED

Of course. I've called down for a plumber. In the meantime, there's always the one in the hall. But I just thought I'd better tell you that there's no point your coming into my room, as your attempt to use the facilities would not meet with felicity.

(He exits.)

(Julie enters from the corridor. She is dressed in overalls, a cap, and Groucho glasses.)

MARK

What in the world is *that*?

JULIE

A plumber's outfit. They were out of maids.

MARK

Ah. Nice glasses.

(Fred re-enters from the adjoining room.)

FRED

(To Julie)

Oh, you must be the plumber. You're in the wrong room.

(He ushers her into the adjoining room.)

MARK

Er . . . . Maybe I can help!

(He follows them out.)

(Helen enters from the corridor. She proudly bears a hand-lettered sign that says "*This bathroom is temporarily out of order. Please use the facilities in the vacant, adjoining room. We apologize for the inconvenience. Sincerely, The Management.*" She looks around the room, shrugs when she

sees it is empty, and proceeds to affix the sign to the bathroom door.)

HELEN

(Exiting to the corridor)

Mark? Julie?

(A moment later, the Plumber enters from the corridor. He is dressed exactly like Julie in her plumber's outfit -- overalls and cap -- except that his bushy eyebrows, moustache and glasses are real. As he enters, he checks the number on the door and realizes he's in the wrong room. He is about to leave, when he spies Helen's sign on the bathroom door. He checks the room number again, shrugs, and brings his tools into the bathroom to get to work. Just as he disappears through the bathroom door, Julie and Mark enter from the adjoining room.)

JULIE

Now what? Freddy thinks I'm going to return with my tools and fix his bathroom.

MARK

At least he didn't recognize you.

JULIE

If I go back there, Fred will expect plumbing expertise that I don't have, and Helen will wonder what's become of me. Whereas if I stay here . . .

MARK

Helen will wonder why you're wearing that ridiculous --

(Helen enters.)

HELEN

Oh! Here you two are.

(To Mark)

Mark . . . why is Julie wearing that ridiculous . . .?

MARK

I was just going to ask her the same thing.

JULIE

I -- I was about to change.

(She darts into the adjoining room.)

HELEN

That costume isn't in my script. At least . . . I don't think so.

(Helen picks up the script and begins to pore over it. Mark looks at it with her. While they are thus engaged, the Plumber comes out of the bathroom, wiping his hands. He does not notice Mark and Helen. The Plumber begins to whistle abstractedly, inadvertently attracting their attention.)

HELEN

(To the Plumber -- thinking she is addressing Julie)

I thought you went to change.

(The Plumber looks at her quizzically. Mark studies him an instant and realizes that this is not Julie and must be an actual plumber.)

MARK

Yes! Change . . . the fittings. Only . . . you're in the wrong room. It's the one through here.

(He pushes the Plumber into the adjoining room, closing the door behind him.)

HELEN

Fittings?

MARK

Yes. Julie told me she had to adjust the -- er -- straps -- on one of the pieces of the -  
- uh -- underwear you wanted her to put on, because it . . . they . . . weren't *fitting*  
quite right. It was, you know, a little bit embarrassing to hear about.

(Julie and Fred enter from the corridor.)

JULIE

(Speaking in a gruff, masculine voice)

Beg yer pardon, folks. I just been tellin' Mr. Francis here that I need to examine the functional facilities in *this* room by way of comparison with the inoperational apparatus in *his* room.

HELEN

(Aside to Mark)

What's she talking about? And why is she speaking like that?

MARK

Which would you like me to answer first -- the "what" or the "why"? Or how about we start with the "when"? Yes, that one I think I could field pretty nicely. Julie is speaking in that peculiar voice, my dear, at precisely this very moment.

FRED

(To Julie)

But this is ridiculous. It's perfectly obvious what's wrong with it. Look, I'll show you.

(Fred ushers Julie back into the corridor. Alone with Mark, Helen paces silently for a moment.)

HELEN

Mark, I don't consider myself a jealous person.

MARK

(Alarmed)

I hope not!

HELEN

What?

MARK

(Covering)

I said, "I should hope not."

HELEN

But I see what's going on here, and I can't help but feel a little upset with what Julie's up to.

MARK

(Nervously)

Julie? Up to?

HELEN

Oh, come on, Mark. It's obvious.

MARK

Now listen, dear, I --

HELEN

She's encroaching on my territory.

MARK

Honestly, sweetheart, it hasn't gone that far. It was only --

HELEN

As if I would let her take over the room I've booked and devote it to her own play!

MARK

Please don't be upset, darling. We can sit down and -- Huh? *Play?*

HELEN

Don't get me wrong. On any other occasion, I'd be thrilled to see Julie trying her hand at script-writing. I think that's great. But we're here to act out *my* script, not hers. And now she's started dressing up as extraneous characters and ad-libbing dialogue! She should know better. Frankly, I'm a bit hurt.

MARK

(Relieved, he now plays to Helen's misinterpretation.)

I don't blame you, sweetheart. But please don't be angry with Julie. She just got so enthusiastic about doing your play that when we were waiting for you to sort out the trouble with the second room, she jumped right in and started creating her own scene. You *inspired* her, darling.

HELEN

(Softening)

Do you really think so?

MARK

I'm sure of it. Why, Julie's never shown the slightest interest in theater until today -- right? Then, one glimpse of the theatrical magic you've crafted, and she's carried away with enthusiasm. That woman really admires you, dear -- and I don't blame her one bit.

(Julie enters through the adjoining room door.)

HELEN

Julie! Welcome back, honey!

(Helen rushes to Julie and hugs her. Julie looks confused.)

HELEN

(To Mark)

Hey! Maybe we *can* incorporate Julie's new character into my script.

JULIE

Huh?

MARK

That's so big of you, darling.

JULIE

Big? What's big? How big? Is the play going to run even longer now?

HELEN

We could pretend that Julie dresses up as -- uh, what exactly are you dressed up as?

JULIE

A plumber, of course.

HELEN

She dresses up as a plumber so that I won't realize you've got her in here with you. I know! You could tell me you called the house plumber when you saw the "out of order" sign on the bathroom door.

MARK

Perfect! It's got that zany touch -- the kind of thing that would never really happen, but which people in farces do all the time.

JULIE

(She removes the Groucho glasses.)

So am I supposed to don this disguise before or after I change into my underwear?

HELEN

This bit can occur immediately after you come out from behind the screen in your sexy underwear. Mark embraces you, but suddenly you hear a noise from the bathroom. So you dash into . . .

(She looks around the room)

that closet, in which, as luck would have it, you find a plumber's uniform. When I ask Mark who was in here talking to him, you emerge as the plumber and convince me -- for the moment -- that that's who you are.

JULIE

But why would there be a plumber's uniform -- complete with Groucho glasses -- in the closet?

HELEN

Plumbers have their secrets, too.

MARK

(Perspiring)

So when Julie comes out from behind the screen in her sexy underwear, I -- uh -- embrace her, in her sexy underwear that is, right here downstage of the bed, where I'll be standing waiting for her to come out, in her sexy underwear, so I can -- uh -- embrace her, and then, while I'm -- uh -- embracing her, in her underwear --

HELEN

*Sexy* underwear --

MARK

You begin to turn the knob of the bathroom door, and Julie runs into the closet.

JULIE

And after I emerge as the plumber, I go into the bathroom to make repairs?

HELEN

Exactly.

JULIE

And where do you go?

HELEN

That's a good question.

MARK

Well, the plumber wouldn't stay in the bathroom for long, because it's not really out of order, and he -- she -- he -- would soon figure that out.

JULIE

Except that I'm not really a plumber.

MARK

Okay, so then you don't stay in the bathroom long because you wouldn't know how to fix it even if it *were* out of order.

HELEN

So you make an excuse -- don't have the right tools or something -- and leave the hotel room.

MARK

And then you

(He indicates Helen)

can return to the bathroom.

JULIE

But why would she return to her hiding place in the bathroom after you already know she's in there?

HELEN

Because -- because . . .

MARK

*Because . . .* she wants to take a bath.

(Helen and Julie wait for him to explain further.)

MARK

(He paces as he develops his idea.)

Helen admits to me that she forged the "out of order" sign so she could hide and spy on me. But now she's made a fool of herself by suspecting me of keeping a liaison, when I was in fact merely chatting with the plumber -- or so she thinks. So she apologizes, makes up to me, and goes off for a bath before "slipping into something more comfortable." Then, you

(He indicates Julie)

peek back into the room -- still dressed as the plumber -- to see if the coast is clear. It's clear for the moment, so you slip out of your overalls and stand there looking -- uh -- fabulous in your -- ahem -- sexy underwear. But I explain that Helen is in the bath and that you absolutely can't stay here looking absolutely fabulous in your sexy underwear. So I hurry you into the adjoining room and promise to meet you in there as soon as I can get rid of Helen.

JULIE

But Freddy -- er, I mean that businessman Mr. Francis -- is in there.

MARK

*Only* in real life. In the play, it's still a vacant room.

JULIE

But in real life -- if you'll pardon my mentioning real life -- you've once again got me parading through Mr. Francis' room in my underwear.

HELEN

You could slip the overalls back on.

JULIE

Why would I do that?

MARK

Because, like you just said, you don't want to barge in on Mr. Francis in your underwear.

JULIE

No, no. I mean why would make-believe Julie in the *play* slip into her overalls?

MARK

Um . . . I know! Because you don't want to leave them lying around here, which would make Helen suspicious.

HELEN

Perfect!

JULIE

But then what happens? How are we ever going to get to the part where we almost have sex and Helen surprises us and gets reunited with you, if I'm off in the other room?

HELEN

We'll just have to play that scene *in* the other room. Mark can leave me in the bath, then dart over to the next room for his tryst with you. Eventually, I can sneak into the adjoining room for the moment of surprise.

JULIE

But -- and forgive me for repeating this -- *Mr. Francis is in there!*

HELEN

Oh. Right. I keep forgetting. Wow, it's hard work directing a play, isn't it. So many details to keep track of.

MARK

Wait a second. If we all need to be in *that* room, then couldn't Mr. Francis be in *this* room? All he needed was a room, after all. I'm sure he doesn't care which one.

JULIE

But if he's in here, Helen can't be hiding in this bathroom.

HELEN

Why not? He already said we could use his bathroom. And now we know that the other one is out of order. *Really* out of order.

JULIE

But . . . but . . . we can't ask him to work in *that* room while we do a scene in here, and then move to *this* room halfway through the evening. He'd be coming and going like one of the characters!

MARK

Well, maybe he'd like a part. Then he wouldn't feel left out.

JULIE

(Aghast)

*Mark!*

HELEN

I think I'd better go someplace quiet, so I can sit down and re-think the next few scenes. You two can take a break. I'm going to need at least half an hour.

(She moves toward the corridor door.)

MARK

(Following her to the door)

Where are you going to go?

HELEN

The hotel bar.

JULIE

The hotel bar on a Friday night? I thought you said someplace *quiet*.

HELEN

I did. They've got karaoke set up in there, so everyone is avoiding the place. My only risk of distraction will be if the DJ asks me to help him with his crossword puzzle.

(She exits.)

(Mark and Julie walk slowly toward the foot of the bed, where they meet.)

MARK

(Nervously, he looks into her eyes.)

Alone at last.

JULIE

(She turns away abruptly.)

Oh, for Pete's sake, Mark. Not that dialogue.

MARK

(Indignantly)

That was the right line.

JULIE

Look, if we're going to -- you and I --

MARK

(Hesitantly)

Are we?

JULIE

(Tentatively)

I'm just saying . . . *if* we are . . . then maybe we shouldn't do *that* dialogue.

MARK

Maybe you're right. Her dialogue works so well for the situation, though.

JULIE

(She puts her arms around him.)

Maybe we don't really need much dialogue at all.

(They kiss.)

MARK

(Getting cold feet, he breaks away.)

On the other hand, there's nothing like a little snappy dialogue to break the tension. Yessiree, feel free to chatter away. I'm all ears. Say! "All ears" -- isn't that a funny expression! Makes me think of a lifetime supply of Q-Tips.

JULIE

You're digressing.

MARK

Am I? Splendid.

JULIE

Mark, I . . .

MARK

(He turns to face her.)

Yes?

JULIE

I . . .

MARK

(He goes to her.)

Yes?

(Fred and the Plumber enter abruptly from the corridor. Julie quickly walks to the adjoining door, so that her back is to Fred.)

MARK

Hey! Do you mind knocking first? We might have been digressing -- er -- *dressing*.

FRED

(To the Plumber)

No, no . . . I'm trying to tell you -- it's not this room, it's the room next door!

PLUMBER

And I keep trying to tell *you*, sir, that I've worked in this hotel long enough to know which room has a malfunctioning ballcock.

FRED

All right, all right. But after you get through in here, will you *please* look at mine?

PLUMBER

(Stiffly)

One ballcock at a time, sir.

(Fred exits.)

PLUMBER

(To Mark, with a curious glance at Julie's back)

I beg your pardon. I hope I won't be disturbing you and your wife if I get back to work in there.

(Julie slips on the Groucho glasses and turns to face the Plumber. Mark does not see her do this.)

MARK

(To the Plumber.)

No problem. You go right ahead. We weren't doing anything special.

(The Plumber does a double-take upon seeing Julie's get-up, then shrugs and goes into the bathroom.)

MARK

(To Julie)

Things are getting so complicated that I'm losing track of what's real and what happens next.

(Julie stands before him, removes her Groucho glasses, and then slips sensuously out of her overalls. She now wears only her underwear, which is indeed very sexy.)

JULIE

(Breathlessly, she indicates her body)

*This* is real.

(She takes a step toward him.)

And *this*

(She takes him by the hand)

is what happens next.

(Fred enters through the adjoining door.)

FRED

Sorry to barge in, but I think that plumber walked off with my --

(He sees Julie.)

Oh, hello Julie. I was going to phone your house and ask what you were up to tonight.

(There is an awkward silence.)

FRED

(Good-naturedly)

So . . . uh . . . what are you up to tonight?

(Blackout.)

(Act Two.)

(The same. The action is continuous.)

FRED

You see, Julie, since I was stuck in town overnight, I wondered if you might want to come over and help me make the most of this hotel room tonight. Just for old time's sake. That's why I was eager to get the bathroom fixed and not have to rely on the one in the hall. I was hoping to get that taken care of before I called you.

(To Mark)

Julie usually likes to -- you know -- before she -- uh --

MARK

Yes, I know.

FRED

You do?

MARK

Yes. She happened to mention it earlier.

FRED

Perfect.

(Another awkward silence.)

FRED

So I don't need to explain that, then.

MARK

No, no. I'm all set.

FRED

Cool.

(He proceeds to fill in the ensuing silence by making friendly, inane conversation.)

So . . . you two. You're friends?

MARK

Actually, Julie is really more my wife's friend, originally.

JULIE

Originally.

MARK

But we've become sort of close ourselves . . . what with one thing and another.

FRED

Yes, your wife. I met her. Nice lady.

JULIE

Very.

MARK

Very nice lady. I'm very fond of her.

FRED

(Looking around)

Where is she now?

MARK

My wife, you mean?

FRED

Yes.

MARK

Now?

FRED

Yes.

MARK

I think she's in the bar.

FRED

Oh. Karaoke fan?

MARK

Crossword enthusiast.

JULIE

And outdoor stamp collector.

MARK

Well, once again, it's a pleasure getting to know you, Fred, but we're actually in a bit of a --

JULIE

(Walking to Fred)

Freddy, did you really want to spend the evening with *me*?

FRED

Sure, kiddo. But if you're busy with -- uh -- say, what exactly are the two of you doing here, anyway?

MARK

Nothing . . . yet.

JULIE

We're here with Helen. Mark's wife.

FRED

Right. Of course. Nice lady.

MARK

Very.

JULIE

Very nice lady.

FRED

So, like I was saying, if you and Mark and Helen are busy, then I -- hey, you're in your underwear.

MARK

(To Julie)

Has he always been this perceptive?

JULIE

Where underwear is concerned, Fred used to be an expert. He must be out of practice.

FRED

If *you*

(He indicates Mark)

are married to *her*,

(He points toward the corridor door, referring to Helen)

then why is *she*

(He gestures toward Julie)

hanging around in your room wearing

(He again gestures in Julie's direction)

*that?*

MARK

She was --

JULIE

I was --

(The Plumber comes out of the bathroom.)

JULIE

Waiting for the plumber!

FRED

The plumber?

MARK

So she could take her bath!

(Laughing nervously)

Look! She's all ready for it. For her bath, I mean. Almost.

(To Julie)

Don't forget your duckie, Julie, heh heh.

(He quickly crosses to the Plumber and addresses him.)

All fixed?

PLUMBER

As far as I can see, it was never broken.

MARK

Even better!

(To Fred)

Helen and I thought that since our bathroom was in *perfect working order*, we'd invite our good friend Julie to drive over here and take a bath in our tub, while the two of us were having dinner.

FRED

But we all thought your bathroom was *out* of order.

MARK

Exactly. That's why Julie got undressed out here.

(To Julie)

Have a nice bath!

(With a gentle push from Mark, Julie exits to the bathroom. Fred looks confused, but finally gives up and changes the subject.)

FRED

(To the Plumber)

I believe it's my turn now.

PLUMBER

(He clears his throat.)

That's between you and the lady.

FRED

I mean it's my turn to have my bathroom looked at.

PLUMBER

Oh. Yes, I suppose it is.

(Fred and the Plumber exit into the adjoining room.)

(Mark paces the room for a moment. Helen enters from the corridor.)

HELEN

Hi, honey. I hope you haven't been too bored.

MARK

Not to worry. How'd you make out with the revisions?

HELEN

I think I've got it all figured out.

(Looking around.)

Where's Julie?

MARK

(Nonchalantly)

She's having a bath.

HELEN

Fine. I need a few minutes to re-arrange some things with the props and costumes.

(Her eyes wander to the closet, which attracts her attention.)

And, before I forget, I'd better get the closet set up.

(She disappears into the closet.)

(Julie emerges from the bathroom, still dressed in her underwear. She thinks she is alone with Mark.)

JULIE

I have a problem.

MARK

What do you mean?

JULIE

(She walks to Mark and traces a line down his chest.)

I was really looking forward to picking up where we left off.

(Mark, alarmed, makes frantic hand gestures and points toward the closet, but Julie is looking toward Fred's door and does not notice.)

JULIE

But now I also sort of want to take Freddy up on his offer to spend the night with him.

(To the audience)

Decisions, decisions.

MARK

(He removes her hand from his body.)

If it makes the decision any easier, you might consider the fact that Helen --

JULIE

(She paces the room.)

I know, I know. Helen's play. She'll be back any minute . . . .

MARK

Actually, she's --

JULIE

Meaning that (a) I don't really have time to properly seduce you, and (b) I'm going to be saddled with this stupid farce of hers all evening, when I could be rolling around under the covers with Freddy. Why don't these things ever work out right!

(Helen suddenly enters from the closet.)

HELEN

Julie!

JULIE

Helen!

HELEN

Great dialogue, from the few bits I could hear. But listen, sweetheart, I really can't make any more changes in the script. You should write your own play, okay?

(She pats Julie supportively on the shoulder.)

It's good stuff.

(She starts to bustle around the room, preparing the scene.)

And, by the way, we're not ready for you in your underwear just yet.

MARK

(Aside)

Speak for yourself.

JULIE

Enough! This is a farce!

HELEN

That's right, dear. A bedroom farce.

JULIE

No! I don't mean that the farce is a farce. I mean that it's *all* a farce!

MARK

Julie, I don't think you really want to --

JULIE

Yes! Yes, I do really want to! I really want to with you, and I really want to with Freddy, and nothing's going my way tonight . . . .

(She collapses onto the bed, sobbing.)

HELEN

(To Mark)

Wow, she's really been bitten by the theater bug. Look at the performance she's giving -- and all ad-libbed! I'm impressed. Of course, she does keep forgetting that Fred isn't actually a character in the play, but --

(Fred enters from the adjoining room.)

FRED

Hey, everyone. I just wanted to let you know that the bathroom is working now, in case anyone --

(He notices Julie sobbing quietly on the bed.)

What's wrong with Julie?

MARK

She's --

HELEN

(Quickly)

She's rehearsing.

FRED

Rehearsing? For what?

HELEN

Oh -- uh -- a little play we're going to do for a local charity next week.

FRED

(Cheerfully)

Neat!

(To Mark)

That explains why you and she were doing that hot-looking scene before, with Julie all over you in her underwear. Now I get it.

MARK

Yes, you just might.

HELEN

(To Mark)

You and Julie were rehearsing in front of Fred?

MARK

(Sheepishly)

I guess we got carried away with enthusiasm.

HELEN

(To Mark, sotto voce)

Really, darling, I wish you'd been a little more discreet. This is a very private, personal, narcissistic thing for me. *But . . .*

(Loud enough for all to hear)

since Fred now knows that we're

(She winks at Mark)

*rehearsing*, that makes everything simpler.

(To Fred)

Fred, you don't mind moving around a bit from room to room so that we can act out our little scenes, do you?

FRED

Huh? Well, I . . . .

HELEN

Come on. I'll show you what I mean.

(She heads toward the adjoining room, beckoning Mark and Fred to follow her. They do so.)

JULIE

(Collecting herself and getting up the bed.)

I don't believe this.

(She looks around, finds her "plumber" overalls, and climbs into them. Then she exits into the corridor.)

(After a moment, there is a knock on the corridor door. The Plumber enters. He looks around, sees that the room is empty, and heads for the bathroom. He disappears into the bathroom, then re-appears a moment later with the wrench that he has obviously come to retrieve. As he passes the bed, he tests its springiness with one hand. He then sits on the edge of the bed, making it clear that he is fatigued from a hard day's work. He looks around to make sure that no one is coming, then decisively sheds his shoes and overalls. He is now wearing a T-shirt and boxer shorts. He climbs under the covers and disappears from sight.)

(Mark enters gingerly from the adjoining room, looking behind him to make sure his absence is not noticed.)

MARK

(Whispering)

Julie?

(He looks for her, then sees the Plumber's overalls on the floor at the foot of the bed. He picks them up, looks to the bed, and sees the form under the covers, which he assumes to

be Julie. He sits on the edge of the bed, still holding the overalls, and rests his free hand gently on "her" flank.)  
 Julie, I'm so confused. I love Helen. I really do. This was supposed to be all for her. For us. But now I'm feeling this strange, undeniable passion for *you*. Somehow tonight you're so -- so *irresistible*.

(The Plumber gives a loud snore.)

MARK

Not so loud! We don't want to attract Helen's attention. Or maybe we do. I just don't know what's right anymore. I don't want to do anything that would hurt Helen or injure our marriage, and yet . . . and yet . . . when I see you standing there, looking fabulous in your underwear, all I want is . . . is to touch you, and is that so wrong?

(Julie enters quietly from the corridor. She has changed back into her street clothes. Mark does not see or hear her come in.)

MARK

So that's where I'm at with this. But what about you?

(He begins to caress "Julie's" leg.)

Were you serious when you said you wanted to seduce me? Do you really feel the same, irrepressible urge to give yourself to me -- here, tonight -- that I feel for you? Because if you do, I think --

JULIE

(Tapping him on the shoulder)

Who are you talking to?

MARK

(Matter-of-factly, with a wistful sigh)

To Julie.

(Double-take. He jumps up, still holding the overalls.)

Julie! You . . . then . . . who . . . ?

(The Plumber sits up in bed, revealing himself.)

PLUMBER

Would you mind keeping it down? For crying out loud!

(Helen enters from the adjoining room.)

HELEN

I wondered where you'd disappeared to. The action is supposed to be happening in the *other* room, at the moment.

MARK

Honey, your play is a runaway success.

HELEN

(Pleased)

You think so?

MARK

Well, it certainly keeps running from room to room.

HELEN

(Noticing the Plumber)

Why is the plumber in our bed?

PLUMBER

(Petulantly)

*You're* not using it.

MARK

After all, darling, it's not really *our* bed. It belongs to the hotel. And since the plumber *works* for the hotel, he probably felt he could just . . . .

PLUMBER

Not that a body can get any rest with the likes of you tromping in and out.

MARK

(Sharply)

Don't you have a toilet to unclog?

PLUMBER

All right, all right.

(He gets out of the bed and snatches his overalls out of Mark's hand. Then he moves toward the corridor door.)

I know when I'm not wanted!

(Mark rolls his eyes. The Plumber exits.)

(Fred enters from the adjoining room.)

FRED

Helen, I think I have the wardrobe moved into the place where you need it. Can you take a look and see if I've got it positioned correctly?

HELEN

Right away.

FRED

(He looks around the room.)

I don't know anything about plays . . . but I must say, you've got a nice little set.

HELEN

(She does not see him looking at the furnishings, and glances down at her chest upon hearing his comment -- which she takes as a compliment to her person. She responds with breezy courtesy.)

Thank you.

(Fred exits to the adjoining room.)

HELEN

(She hands a manuscript to Mark.)

We'll be ready to begin in a few minutes. You two had better look over the changes I've made.

(She exits into the adjoining room.)

(Mark begins to pace. Julie sits on the edge of the bed. After an awkward silence, she begins to speak.)

JULIE

Mark, I'm so confused. I love Helen like a sister. I really do. This was supposed to be all for her. But now I'm feeling this strange, undeniable passion for you. Somehow tonight you're so -- so *irresistible*.

(As Julie speaks, Mark stops pacing. His face shows the audience that her speech strikes him as emotionally powerful, but somehow familiar.)

JULIE

I just don't know what's right anymore. I don't want to do anything that would hurt Helen or injure your marriage, and yet . . . and yet . . . when I see you standing there, looking at me looking fabulous in my underwear, all I want is . . . is for you to touch me. That, and maybe to hop in the sack with Freddy for an hour or two.

(Mark walks to her. Julie stands, and she tentatively reaches out a hand toward him.)

HELEN

(Offstage)

Mark? Julie? Are you ready?

(Mark and Julie freeze.)

MARK and JULIE

Yes!!

JULIE

(Shaking her head, she addresses Mark.)

I can't face this right now. If I slipped downstairs for a drink, would it be too terrible?

MARK

Depends on who's tending bar.

JULIE

I promise I'll be back soon.

MARK

Go ahead. I'll make your excuses.

(Julie kisses Mark on the cheek, then exits to the corridor.)

MARK

(To himself)

It's just one thing after another, isn't it. Why can't it ever be one thing *before* another?

(Helen enters, followed by Fred.)

HELEN

All set? Where's Julie?

MARK

She'll be back soon.

(Helen shrugs and sits down at the table. Mark, seeing that there's nothing else to do, joins her. Fred stands nearby. There is a moment of silence, which Fred eventually breaks.)

FRED

So, you guys are all theater goofs, huh?

MARK

It's really just Helen who's the theater goof.

(With an apologetic glance at Helen)

So to speak.

FRED

(To Helen)

Do you actually write plays?

HELEN

Once in a while. Most of them are really more like skits than plays. For charity events and so forth.

FRED

That must be rewarding.

HELEN

In theory, yes. It's just too bad that the particular charity I work with seems to be run by the laziest people in town, so that I always end up doing all the work myself.

MARK

As a result, Helen is greatly appreciated.

HELEN

Oh, yes. At last month's Board meeting, they even voted to write me a letter of thanks for all I've done. Of course, they asked *me* to draft it.

(During the following speech, Fred loses interest and moves to the dresser, on which there are various bottles and some drinking glasses. While Helen talks, he pours from one bottle into a glass.)

HELEN

And then there's our organization's February Awards Night, which has become an unwelcome winter tradition -- like winter itself. I'm in charge of the Community Enrichment Award, which is supposed to go to someone who has done extra special things for the community the previous year. The guidelines state that no one shall receive the award more than once, and that if no suitable candidate appears, the award is not given out. Consequently, since all the eligible people around have already received it, I, as presenter, have a closet full of the things. Do you know anybody who needs one? I'll deliver it to their house. I'm only half kidding.

FRED

(Pleasantly -- he has not been giving Helen's speech his full attention, but he is trying to be a polite listener.)

On your mother's or your father's side?

(He sips from the glass.)

Yucch! This Aquafina water is terrible!

(Mark gets up and walks to the dresser. He examines the bottle Fred has poured from.)

MARK

That's not Aquafina, it's Aqua Velva. Can't you tell the difference?

FRED

Sorry. I'm usually really good about that.

(Beat. He makes a sour face.)

They definitely *taste* different.

MARK

(To Helen)

Helen -- while we have what passes for Fred's attention, is there anything else he needs to know about the script?

HELEN

I don't think so.

FRED

Since we're waiting for Julie, I may as well go back to my room. I'll be next door when you need me.

(He exits to the adjoining room. A moment later, He reappears.)

Hey -- I just thought of something that would really be great for your play. What if you threw in a few jokes about bad breath? That's always really funny, y'know?

(He laughs a little, as if to demonstrate what "funny" means.)

HELEN

(Tactfully)

Look, Fred. I don't want to waste your time. I'm going to get back to my preparations, and I'll let you get back to your . . .

FRED

(Helpfully)

Boredom?

HELEN

Yes. We'll be in touch soon.

FRED

Thank you. Uh . . . nice chatting with you.

HELEN

You too, Fred. Take care, now.

FRED

Okay. Give my best to Mark. Bye-bye.

(He exits to the adjoining room.)

MARK

That man has all the wit and finesse of a deck chair.

HELEN

He's a strange mixture of intelligence and . . . something else.

MARK

I must have missed the "intelligence" part. I *will* say that his idea about the halitosis jokes wasn't half bad.

HELEN

(Surprised)

You think so?

MARK

Uh-huh. It was substantially more than a third bad, but not quite half. I estimate that it was an idea with roughly 44% badness to it.

HELEN

(Looking around)

What this set really needs is some mood lighting.

MARK

Yes, then I could go into one of my moods.

HELEN

Do you mind if I go down and see if they have some softer light bulbs?

MARK

If that's what you want. Personally, I'm more comfortable on an ordinary mattress.

(Helen exits into the corridor. Mark paces the room, nervously. After a moment, Julie enters from the corridor. She has had a drink and is a little more relaxed and a little more intense. She and Mark meet, once again, at the foot of the bed.)

MARK

Uh . . . hi.

JULIE

(With a shy smile)

Hi.

(They instinctively take each other's hands.)

MARK

I -- I can't believe we're actually doing this.

JULIE

That's my line.

MARK

Not quite: I added an "actually", actually.

(He notices that her hand is trembling.)

You're so nervous.

JULIE

You're doing her dialogue again.

MARK

Sorry. She's -- uh -- she's downstairs. But only temporarily.

JULIE

(She caresses his shoulder, seductively.)

That stockroom where I found the plumber outfit is available.

MARK

But Helen would never find us *there!*

JULIE

Mark, you're forgetting. She's only supposed to find us in the play. This isn't the play now. We don't *want* her to find us.

MARK

Oh. Right. I keep forgetting the difference.

JULIE

That could cause complications.

MARK

But don't we want --

JULIE

No, baby. Only in the play. In reality, we try to minimize complications.

MARK

I don't think we're succeeding. You know, it's funny -- Helen always says that in the theater, we have to be larger than life. But right now I feel that life is larger than us. Larger than me, anyway.

JULIE

(She pats him on the cheek.)

I'm sure you'll be large enough. Now listen -- we'd better hurry, if we want to sneak out to the stockroom before she gets back. Are you ready?

MARK

I guess so. What's my cue?

(Julie gives a little sigh of exasperation, then takes him by the hand and leads him out into the corridor. A moment later, Fred enters from the adjoining room.)

FRED

I just remembered! You know what's better than jokes about bad breath . . . jokes about spinach.

(He notices that he is alone. He now addresses the audience.)

Spinach -- funny stuff, huh?

(Helen enters from the corridor.)

HELEN

(To herself)

You'd think that a hotel this size would have soft lightbulbs on hand.

FRED

I would?

HELEN

(Just noticing him)

Oh, hello, Fred.

FRED

Hi there. Um . . . no pressure, but when are we going to get started?

HELEN

I don't know. This seemed like such a good idea -- er, this play we're rehearsing for the charity group -- but now I'm getting all bogged down in the details.

FRED

If I were you, I'd stop worrying about the details and just get on with the show.

HELEN

Well, I *am* me, and that's not how I do things. Dammit, if I can't be compulsive and anal and perfectionistic about a project, then I'd rather not do it at all. I just can't relax with a task unless I'm being at least a little bit obsessive about *some* facet of it. But now I'm having trouble getting motivated. It all seems so tedious.

FRED

Are you saying that it's become -- I don't know -- boring or something?

HELEN

I'm saying that's it's become -- I don't know -- *extremely* boring or something.

FRED

Maybe you should have a drink.

HELEN

Aqua Velva? No thanks. But perhaps I should put on some music. Would you mind handing me that CD that's on the table?

FRED

(He picks up the CD and looks at it as he brings it to her.)

The Gazebo Sisters?

HELEN

Yes. My favorite group.

FRED

Whose sisters are they?

HELEN

(She is puzzled by his silly question.)

Each other's.

FRED

Wow! What a coincidence. Do any of them play electric tuba?

HELEN

Not to my knowledge.

FRED

That's a shame. It's such a fulfilling instrument to play. Whenever I get the chance, I enter one of those contests where we compete to see who can play electric tuba the longest in front of a live audience.

HELEN

What strength and talent that must take!

FRED

(Modestly)

Thank you.

HELEN

I was referring to the audience.

FRED

Mind you, I'm really just a dabbler. I'm told that the world record is held by someone named Cliff Bunsen.

HELEN

Oh, I very much doubt that.

FRED

You do? Why on earth would you doubt that?

HELEN

For one thing, I've never liked the name "Cliff".

FRED

(Gallantly)

Maybe if you asked him nicely, he'd change it.

(Beat.)

I would.

HELEN

(She looks at him a little more kindly.)

You're sweet, Fred.

FRED

(Warily)

Are you referring to me this time, or the audience?

HELEN

(She laughs and puts down the CD. She is beginning to relax.)

Did you say something about a drink a minute ago?

FRED

That's a good question. It's quite possible that I did. Now let's see if we can reconstruct the past few minutes of conversation . . . .

(He begins to pace the room as he concentrates.)

HELEN

(She taps him on the shoulder.)

Ahem. Now that I think about it, I'm *sure* you said something about a drink.

FRED

I do have some Scotch in the other room.

HELEN

That should hit the spot.

FRED

What spot?

HELEN

Any spot you like. I'm very agreeable after a drink.

(They exit to the adjoining room.)

(Mark enters from the corridor, followed by Julie. They look slightly disheveled.)

MARK

Please understand, Julie. It's not that that wasn't terrific . . . .

JULIE

Terrific? *That?* We hardly got started. What you and I did in that stockroom just now, I can do by myself before breakfast.

MARK

(He gives her an intrigued look.)

I'd like to hear more about that, actually.

JULIE

Anytime. But what I don't understand is, why did you come running back here?

MARK

I thought Helen might be in here, wondering where we were.

JULIE

She was *supposed* to wonder. As long as she was wondering, we were okay. We just didn't want her to *know* where we were.

(Helen enters from the adjoining room, a Scotch in her hand. She is quite tipsy.)

HELEN

Oh, here I am. I mean, here you are. We. Us.

(Julie throws up her hands in exasperation, and sits on the edge of the bed.)

HELEN

Freddy's been helping me relax.  
(She giggles.)

MARK

Ready to resume the play, darling?

HELEN

Oh, the *play*. We're here to do a play, aren't we. All the world's a stage, and the bar will be closed until intermission. The Management wishes to announce that the part of Helen will be taken tonight by Julie. The rest of Helen will be taken by her husband.

(Helen collapses in laughter at her own antics. Mark helps her into a chair.)

MARK

Helen, have you been drinking?

HELEN

Hmm . . . . How recently?

(Fred enters from his room.)

FRED

I'm sorry about this. I thought Helen might like a drink to help her relax.

JULIE

Evidently she did like it.

FRED

(To Mark)

Does alcohol go to her head like this when she's with you?

MARK

(Matter-of-factly)

No, only when she's with strange men in hotels.

FRED

(Agreeably)

Well, perfect, then. Actually, she's sort of cute this way, isn't she?

JULIE

(Sarcastically)

Adorable.

MARK

(He helps Helen up.)

Helen . . . . How about we go out for a little walk?

HELEN

(She is cooperative but still giggly.)

Okay. I'll be as little as I can.

(They exit to the corridor.)

(Julie stands up and approaches Fred.)

JULIE

Freddy?

FRED

(He is not sure what to say to her.)

Uh . . . .

(Feebly)

Spinach?

JULIE

What?

FRED

(Defensively)

I said, "spinach." Okay, maybe it's not the most brilliant thing I've ever said . . .

JULIE

I'm afraid it might be.

FRED

Anyway, it's what I said, and that's that. I suppose you've never said "spinach" to an old friend?

JULIE

I really don't recall.

FRED

If you'd said "spinach" to a friend, you'd recall, all right. It's not the kind of thing you just forget about. Julie, I like you . . . and I like spinach. . . and . . . and . . .

JULIE

(Looking at him like he's not making any sense)

Freddy, you're not making any sense.

FRED

Eh? Oh. Sorry. It's the jetlag, I guess.

JULIE

Jetlag? But you've only come from Watertown, which is one hour by car *and* in the same time zone.

FRED

Then culture shock, maybe. So, how was the bar?

JULIE

Inconsequential.

FRED

Cool. I love that kind.

(They sit at the table. There is a brief pause.)

FRED

This play you're doing -- what's it about?

JULIE

It's sort of embarrassing.

FRED

Nonsense. I'm not the slightest bit embarrassed.

(Beat.)

I'd forgotten how fabulous you look in your underwear.

JULIE

Thank you. I hear that a lot around here.

FRED

Sometimes I wonder if we should have stayed together.

JULIE

You and my underwear?

FRED

Me and all of you. I just wonder, that's all. Of course, I wonder about a lot of things. For instance, sometimes I wonder if I should have taken clarinet instead of tuba.

JULIE

Taken it where?

FRED

You know, *taken* it. In school. You see, in fourth grade, I was torn between clarinet and tuba. The music teacher said I didn't have the mouth for clarinet. I was a little hurt by that.

(Earnestly)

What do *you* think of my mouth?

JULIE

It always worked for me.

FRED

So I went with tuba because I supposedly didn't have the mouth for clarinet. I love playing the tuba, but sometimes I wonder if I would have turned out a different person if I'd defied that music teacher and taken up clarinet. Do you think maybe I would be a different person today if I'd done that?

JULIE

Oh, I'm certain you would be.

FRED

(Intrigued)

Really? How so?

JULIE

You would know how to play the clarinet.

(Beat.)

Do you wish we hadn't split up, Freddy?

FRED

(He thinks a moment.)

Nah. No offense -- those six years were fun. But it was enough. How about you?

JULIE

(She thinks a moment.)

Not really. I mean . . . you were splendid. But, you know . . . been there, done that.

(There is a silence as they size each other up. Then, with perfect synchronization, they leap up from their chairs and into each other's arms.)

(Helen and Mark enter from the corridor, as Julie and Fred get lost in a passionate kiss. Helen has sobered up somewhat.)

HELEN

See? I told you Fred was dull. He can't even hold up his end of a conversation for five minutes without resorting to *kissing*.

MARK

It *is* a sex farce, dear.

HELEN

But Julie and Fred kissing isn't in my play. I mean, what would be the motivation for *that*?

MARK

(Looking at the continuing clinch.)

I don't know, but they certainly seem motivated.

HELEN

Okay, fine. I'm sick of the play, anyway. How can something that's called a "play" be so much *work*?

MARK

(He is unable to take his eyes off Fred and Julie.)

Julie . . . Julie . . . Fred? Julie!

JULIE

(She parts with Fred, reluctantly.)

What is it, Mark?

MARK

Julie . . . I want you. More than I ever have.

HELEN

Mark!

MARK

It's all right, Helen. Your job here is done.

(He shakes her hand and pats her on the shoulder.)

You've been great. You too, Fred. You guys are the best pals.

FRED

Actually, Helen and I barely know each other.

MARK

No, no . . . I mean that you've both been terrific pals to *me*. And to my wife, Julie.

(He takes Julie's hand, tenderly.)

Julie, you are the kindest person in the world for having consented to participate in this convoluted charade -- in front of my friends Helen and Fred -- so that I could be sparked back into the passion I knew I still held for you, deep inside.

JULIE

(She hugs him.)

Darling, after 12 years of marriage, what's a little charade?

MARK

You even sat through all those silly plays I took you to, so you'd know what I was going for. And so you could understand the ridiculous plot twists I had engineered, with Helen as my pretend wife and you as the alluring "other woman". You're amazing, Julie.

JULIE

I have to admit that there were times I didn't know whether I was coming or going.

HELEN

(She reveals herself to be totally sober.)

Same here! I was afraid I'd have to go home with Mark tonight.

(They all laugh.)

HELEN

I mean, like, eww.

(Mark stops laughing.)

FRED

Actually, I was wondering if you'd like to go home with *me*, Helen. In real life, I have my own place just a few blocks from here.

HELEN

Ooh! Now there's an idea.

FRED

Also, I'm not quite as stupid as I was in Mark's script.

(Helen moves to Fred, and they begin to talk quietly.)

MARK

The lines all of you memorized . . . the entrances and exits . . . and you even went a step further -- I mean, how did you ever come up with that nutty-looking plumber? I didn't recognize that guy at all! I was *amazed* when he started improvising around my script. A friend of Helen's? Fred's?

JULIE

He's *real*, Mark.

MARK

Oh. Anyway, it all worked out great.

(He looks into Julie's eyes.)

And now . . . . Which room would you like to spend the night in, my love?

JULIE

Hmm . . . I'm not sure. But probably whichever one you're in.

(They kiss.)

(Blackout.)

(The End.)