

"The Break: Ten The Hard Way"

(10 Monologues)

by

Cliff Burns

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The Break: 10 The Hard Way

Note: A simple, minimalist set--a generic sofa placed slightly off-centre; a small coffee table in front of it containing a push button telephone, a scatter of magazines, beer bottles, etc., whatever each scene requires.)

I.

Sound FX: Numbers being tapped into a push button telephone.

Lights come up...

Yo, Tony-O! How ya doin'? Yeah? Great...great.

Hey, listen, I got some big news for you, dude: the deed is done.

The deed is done, man, get it?

Yeah! Ding-dong the witch is dead. No kiddin' it's been a long time comin'. That woman was harder to get rid of than hemorrhoids, know what I mean? (*Laughter*) You got it. No shit.

Well, you know me, I was cool. I just laid it on the line. Told her, you know, the thrill is gone, baby, the magic has *de*-parted and, you know, don't let the door hit you on your pretty little butt on the way out.

What? No...well, maybe I exaggerate slightly but that was the general--

Oh, okay, do you want me to call you back or--no sweat, but get rid of 'em fast 'cause, you know, I'm just getting to the juicy stuff.

(Long pause while he waits for his friend to take the call on the other end. Sits back on the couch, hums to himself, flips through a porno magazine, etc.)

You back? Yeah. So who was it and is she available? Okay, never mind then. Right. Exactly.

So, okay, I could tell right off the bat she knows something's up. 'Cause I'm playing it real cool, keeping my distance, not saying too much. I mean, I am *focussed*, dude, like a *laser*, zeroed right in on her. No way was I gonna let myself get distracted 'cause I am a man with a mission.

And she's all "Is there something wrong? Is something going on?" and I'm, like, no kidding something's wrong, you're wrong, we're all wrong and there's no use pretending any more. Stick a fork in it, honey, 'cause this relationship is done.

'Cause you got to be honest about stuff like that and, you know, ruthless too. To some extent. And it's like I say, it isn't like she was--that she didn't suspect something. I mean, she ain't dumb, I never said she was dumb. That wasn't the problem. And you can't say she didn't try either. All this week she's been--

Hang on a sec, now I got a call coming in.

(Pushes a button.)

Yo, what is it? Huh? No, listen, I ain't interested, all right? Just forget it. Try another number and while you're at it, lose this one. Okay? Thanks.

(Pushes button.)

Asshole. No, man, not you. It was a fuckin' charity or something. And the first time you give 'em something you're on the hook forever and then they're always calling. Fuck 'em.

What was I sayin'? Oh yeah. So all this week she can't be doin' enough for me, cookin' nice meals--hey, she even cleaned my *bathroom*. I'm dead serious. Like: baby, are you my girlfriend or the friggin' maid, y'know? And, by the way, you missed a spot there-- (*Laughter*)

It's crazy, it was almost, you know, almost pathetic. No kidding. No kidding.

No way, man, no effect whatsoever. Once I get my mind set on something I'm like one of those pit bulls. Shit, man, you know what I'm like. There wasn't going to be any last minute phone calls from the warden or whatever, if you know what I mean. I practically knew the time right down to the minute that I was gonna pull the trigger. Put her out of her misery fast, end the suffering.

Yeah, end my suffering is more like it. Awww, man, I shouldn't talk like that. She wasn't that bad. She had her moments. But moments, you know, they're--what do you call it? Transitory, is that the right word? You can't make a relationship out of moments. It takes a Helluva lot more than that.

I mean, what it comes down to, what this is all about is *chemistry*, right? Either the magic is there or--exactly, that's what I'm saying. We did our thing but there was no sparks, no electricity. We were like an old married couple or something. Like a couple of old fogies sittin' on a porch somewhere and pattin' each other on the knee--I mean, fuck that, right? Who needs it?

And you know what she was thinking, what was going through her mind. Another couple of months and she'd be expecting to move in or go and pick out a ring together or some kind of

shit like that. *No thanks*. I ain't that stupid. I'm still young, still got a lot of life left in me. I got my sights set higher than that. *A lot* higher. If you're gonna tie me down you'd better be wearing leather and carrying a whip, know what I'm saying? (*Laughter*) No shit.

And, hey, it isn't like there aren't lots of other guys around, right? There's plenty of dumb assholes out there who'd, you know, be happy to make an honest woman out of her, if that's what she wants. Sure. So she ain't gonna end up an old maid or anything. She'll meet somebody, no question. And good for her. I hope she finds what she's looking for. Sure I mean it. I got no hard feelings. We did our thing but, you know, all good things have to end. Live and learn.

And maybe next time she'll see people the way they really are. It's not like I was gonna change or anything, suddenly become...sure. That's what I mean. Take off the rose-coloured glasses and lose the illusions-- 'cause otherwise you're always gonna get let down in the end. You can't change people, make them into something they're not. That's not the way it works. Not in a million years. And if you believe that you deserve to get fucked over big time. You know, I hate to put it like that, so blunt and all but, hey, them's the facts of life.

No, man, no regrets, that's not the way I am. You oughta know me better than that. Fuck that. It's more, you know, getting used to her not being around and--and doin' shit together. 'Cause you get used to having someone in your face, pick up the phone and she's there--and talking and hangin' out. But, hey, you get over it. Life goes on.

Yeah, right. You got it. That's what I'm saying.

So, listen, you doin' anything tonight? 'Cause I'm, like, totally available, single and swingin' again--. Huh? Well, shit, man, tell 'em something's come up, tell 'em you're busy, call

'em back and--yeah, I understand but like I just said, hey, lock up your daughters 'cause the wolf is on the prowl again. *Awhhooooooo!* Ready to par-ty!

(Slumping)

Okay, that's cool. Sure, no sweat. We'll do it some other time. Do the rain check thing. How about Friday? Well, call me, okay? Soon as you know. Far out. Okay, sure....right, right. Talk to you later.

(He hangs up, sits for a moment, vaguely dissatisfied. Looking around, noticing the descending quiet. Becomes fidgety. Picks up the phone, taps in some numbers.)

Marvin? Marvin the man. Marvin, my main man. Sup, dude? Oh, you know, just chilling out, kicking back and enjoying the bachelor life. Nope, I ain't shittin' ya. You are talking to a free man. I done pulled the plug and, hey, I gotta tell you, from where I'm sittin' I gotta say it's the best thing that ever happened to me...

Fade out

II.

(Man sitting on couch wearing an expression that can only be described as shell-shocked.)

Wow. That's...I don't know what to say. I'm just...I have to be honest with you, this is coming at me right out of the blue.

(Sits back, exhales audibly)

I feel...I feel almost sick to my stomach right now. Like somebody's just...like I've been kicked in the guts. Was it...Jesus, even to find the right words. Excuse me for a second. I'll be...I just have to...

(He leaves the stage, sound of running water. He returns with a damp cloth, takes a seat.)

Sorry. This is hitting me really hard. I'm not...dealing with this very well. It's not your fault, I just need some time to, uh, to get my head together. I'll be all right. Just bear with me.

(Lays his head on the back of the couch, draping the cloth onto his forehead.)

I guess I wish you could have, if you had given me some kind of warning or a sign. This is...it's like being hit by lightning. I know you didn't mean it that way but...

Have you been thinking about this for a long time or is this something that's sort of spur of the moment? I guess that isn't really fair, is it? I know you're not the kind of person who-- who acts without thinking. That wouldn't be like you. And I realize you're not trying to hurt me and that this has been pretty hard on you too. I respect that. I've always felt that you've been completely straightforward with me and--and--*wow*. I'm completely stunned.

Is there any way to--can I say anything...no, I suppose not. Obviously you feel that we've reached some kind of impasse or--or dead end...

(Taking off the cloth, sitting forward, very earnest.)

I only wish I could have seen this coming. Then I might have been better prepared and I could handle this with more--be a bigger man about it. I mean, excuse me for saying so but I really thought everything was fine with us, I thought we had something here, something special. We--uh--we seem to get along really well, we seem to to connect, there's never been any major conflicts... And that--that has to count for something, doesn't it?

Because when you see the other couples we know, if you made a fair comparison...like Bert and Laura for instance. Now there's two people that--that half the time you have to separate them with water cannons and tear gas. And I am not over-stating things. You know what they're like, constantly at each other's throats. And yet we're the ones who are...and that seems *crazy*. Excuse me for saying so but it does.

We had something, something real and concrete...there was commitment and a whole history. A *history*. And you don't just up and throw all that away. Not without a darn good reason.

And I don't see any reason here. That is the one thing I just can't --I can't bring myself to understand. It's completely beyond my comprehension. If there were conflicts, disagreements, I could see that. Then I could see some kind of rationale.

(Deep breath)

So is there someone else? That would--I guess if that were the case then there might be grounds to--to undo what we've built together. That would at least justify it in some way. Because I have to be honest, I've had opportunities, I've been tempted but I always thought that if

anything happened...it just wouldn't be right. Not while...not when we had something that I thought was unique and precious and--and worth preserving.

But, frankly, I would have a hard time believing that you, you know, that you would allow something to happen behind my back or whatever. Because, excuse me, you're not that kind of person. Or am I completely wrong? Maybe I'm wrong about *everything*. All of it...just a figment of my imagination.

(Lying back, replacing the cloth.)

Wow, this is...too much. I'm on overload. Everything I've ever believed in, the entire basis for my existence, *pow*, all gone. And now I'm just...well...look at me.

(Deep breath)

Sorry. I shouldn't be laying this on you. Obviously I have to take some responsibility for what's happened, for what you clearly believe is a no-win situation. I guess I didn't give you everything you needed. I've somehow let you down or not lived up to your expectations. But where? How? Because if I knew what it was I might be able to--to make amends or try to change...

And I *could*, you know. In a minute. If it meant keeping you, keeping what we have alive.

(Removing cloth, sitting up again.)

Because...and maybe I don't say it often enough, maybe that's part of the problem. But I love you. *I love you* and I think you're a very special person. You're an incredible human being and I've always thought I was lucky to--that we--God, even now, when it's so important, to find the right words...

I'll do whatever you want. Whatever's required. I'll become a better person. I mean it. I know that sounds stupid but I believe if you really, really love somebody, you can move mountains. So, honestly: whatever you want, you name it and--and I'll do it. Am I...is there something in particular that I'm doing? Am I too possessive? Because I can pull back, way back, give you more room to grow. I respect you and if you need some space, that's okay, I'll give you all you need. That's a promise. Put it in writing if you want. I'll sign in a minute.

Do you...should I be more passionate, more romantic? Hey, I'm totally into it. Flowers, movies, you name it. Kids? You wanna get a dog? A cat? No problem. To Hell with my allergies, I'll just learn to live with it.

What I'm trying to say, what I wish I could make you see is that, sweetie, there is *nothing* you could ask for that I wouldn't give you. Anything, you name it and it's yours. I'll rip my heart out and give it to you if that's what you want. You know I would. *You know that.*

And you don't have to do anything, not a single thing. Just keep on being you. Because who you are...you're perfect to me. You're everything I could ever want, ever need. All my life I've dreamed of being with someone exactly like you--it's like you were made for me. You define me, make me a better person. All I have to do is look at you and I feel stronger, like I can accomplish anything.

So I guess what I'm saying is--let's not give up on this. Let's not give up on *us*. Because, believe me, without you I'm nothing, the absolute essence of nothing. I will cease to exist. I know it. I'll just fade away...

I...love...you.

Do you hear what I'm saying? *Do you?* Those words--they're the most beautiful, wonderful words a person will ever hear. They're like a precious gift, a--a *blessing*.

So why can't you ever say it back to me? *Why?* Even if it's only just this one time...please...say it. For the sake of--of whatever we had....or thought we had. What are you afraid of? *Why* won't you? Why not? Just *try*, okay? Just this once. One time, that's all I'm asking. Okay? *Okay?* Sweetheart? Please...

Fade out

III.

(Uncomfortable, abashed; jumpy, hyper, alternating between standing up and sitting down, earnestness and self-deprecation:)

It's not that I don't care about you. That doesn't even enter into it, believe me. Put that thought right out of your mind. As a matter of fact, I think you're a terrific person, you're beautiful, you're smart... you've got...good teeth, impeccable personal hygiene...there is absolutely nothing wrong with you.

The problem is *me*. It's always been me. I'm just not very good at relationships. I have no concept of what's required to be a good partner. You need someone who gives, who's more willing to share...and that's not me. I'm like a kid, totally self-centred, I want to keep all the toys for myself and that--it doesn't leave room for anybody else, their needs, their expectations. You see what I'm saying?

You're different. You'd give the shirt off your back to a total stranger and not give it a second thought. I'd probably shoot him. Think about it--when was the last time you ever saw me donate to charity or do any kind of volunteer work? I'd rather have a tooth pulled.

And, see, it's like I said: I'm selfish. There's no getting around it. I'm selfish, I'm completely unfeeling and insensitive. You remember that time you cut yourself when you were slicing, uh, it was a frozen bagel, wasn't it? Remember? You're gushing blood all over the place

and I was pissed off at you. I actually asked you how you could be so dumb. Remember? Remember that? Rather than being worried, I saw the blood and the first thing I did was freak out and give you Hell. Is that the kind of person you--you want to be with? That's crazy...

And *cheap*? I'm so cheap it's not even funny. I got cobwebs in my wallet I'm so cheap. When was the last time I took you to a movie? Or--or bought you dinner. You see what I mean? Why do you put up with crap like that? I wouldn't. I'd dump me in a minute.

You're too good for me. You don't see it but you are. You deserve someone who treats you a lot better. Right now, you might as well be a dog. *I'm not exaggerating*. You're an awesome person, you're caring, you're loving and what do you get back from me? I'm nothing but an asshole. A loud-mouthed, insensitive asshole. I wish I could make you see that.

How about the fact that I refuse to meet your folks? And every time you try to arrange something, Christmas dinner, whatever, I'm always making up some lame excuse why I can't go. You know why I do that? Because they would see in a minute what a creep I am. I don't want to end up embarrassing you. I'm sparing you that, okay?

And what about my friends? Yeah, what about *them*? Now there's a perfect example. You *hate* my friends. And rightfully so: they're a bunch of *jerks*. Losers, every one of them. Remember that time Clint puked on you in the car? I mean, come on. And you know what they say: you can always judge a person by the quality of the people they hang out with. Well, there you are, case closed. *Bobby*? Bobby likes to run down cats. I told you about that. Whenever he's in a bad mood he goes out cruising, lanes, back alleys, whatever. And when he sees a cat he deliberately tries to hit it. That's *sick*. And he's one of my oldest friends. Do you see what I mean? And Rennie. Rennie's gonna be on fuckin' Death Row some day, believe me. The guy is

a complete sociopath. That's--c'mon, you can't argue with that. What kind of a guy has people like that for friends? What does that say about *me*?

And it's not like *I'm* any better. Worse in fact. Remember that party when I got drunk and I was hitting on your friend, what's-her-name? Practically groping her right in front of you and--don't make excuses for me, I knew what I was doing and I went ahead and did it anyway. You should have booted me out right then--slapped the shit out of me and walked away. And you would've had every right to. No one would've blamed you one bit. Least of all me.

Your problem has always been that you--you're too decent. You forgive and forget and, I gotta tell you, when you do that people are always gonna take advantage of you. You keep turning the other cheek, dear, and one of these days somebody's liable to take your goddamn head off.

And I don't want it to be *me*. I don't think I could live with myself if I ended up hurting you. It would be like committing some kind of mortal sin.

That's why we gotta call this off right now, before it goes any further. It's all leading up to some major league, big time hurting and rather than go through that I'd just as soon call it quits and let you get on with your life.

I *know* you love me, I *know* that. But it's like you love me too much and it leaves you vulnerable, it leaves you wide open and that's not right. You're better off finding someone else and starting over again--and maybe next time you'll meet somebody who'll look after you and appreciate you for what you are.

I just don't see any hope that I'm going to get better or improve with age--suddenly become a good person, worthy of you. I'm just too set in my ways, too fucked up to be of any

use to anybody right now. Open your eyes, this is who I am, I'm showing you the real me now-- but you're not seeing it. Take my word for it, you're a lot better off without me.

And, you know, it's not like we're never going to see each other again, if that's what you're thinking. We can still be friends. That's no problem. I love hanging out with you, you're--you're a fun person. Just because we won't be together doesn't mean we can't go out, can't, you know, do stuff together. You think I want that? You're terrific company. Shit, one of the gang. And it would be great for both of us. We'd both be free to pursue--to see other people and explore other possibilities and--and see where it goes from there.

And *you're* the one getting the better end of the deal, you're the one who's getting off lucky. I'm the loser here, whichever way you look at it. I'm losing you, maybe the best, most terrific person I've ever met. That's my loss and, believe me, I feel it. I'm really, really torn up inside by all this.

Look, I gotta get going. Shit, look at the time. I promised I'd meet Rennie. If you could, you know, take a look around, find your stuff and --and take it with you, I'd really appreciate it. I think it would be easier for both of us. No reminders, that kind of thing.

Are you gonna be all right? I feel just awful about this, about hurting you...the whole thing. But, you know, I still say it's for the best. Better now than down the road some time, when there's more emotional issues, heavier stuff to deal with. And don't let this--let it affect the way you feel about yourself. I'm the bad guy here, I'm the villain. Just be clear on that and, you know, try to realize that this is right, this is the right thing to do. Okay? Okay?

I'll call you, all right? I promise I will. Scout's honour. And you...you take care of yourself. I'll be seeing you around. Oh...and could you leave your key somewhere? Great. Okay...see you. Yeah. Me too...

Fade out...

IV.

(Teenager, sixteen or seventeen years old. Agitated, barely contained fury. The scene is a party; music, sound fx of people talking, laughing. He has to shout to make himself heard:)

Can I talk to you a minute? Let's go outside, get out of here. Because I want to talk to you, that's why. Just cut the bullshit and come with me. Jesus, I just wanna *talk* to you. Is that asking too much?

(Walks to an empty part of the stage. Music and party noises fade. He is angry, quite drunk, gesticulating, talking fast.)

Okay, what the fuck is going on?

You know what I'm talking about so just fuckin' quit it, okay? *What do I mean?* Come on, what do you think I mean? I'm talking about what's goin' on with you and that Brian asshole. Hey, don't give me that. Don't pull that shit. I got fuckin' eyes. You were over there and you--

You get the fuck back here! Where the fuck do you think you're going? Fuck that, you stay out here and you talk to me, bitch! You fuckin' talk to me or I'll slap your fuckin' face off. This is serious, no bullshit. You wanna play games with me I'll go back in there and kick the shit out of the two of you. I don't give a fuck about anything right now. I don't *care* what you think. It's what *I* think. And right now you don't wanna know what I think.

You *should* be fuckin' scared. You fuckin' should be. 'Cause I am a scary fuckin' guy.

Who the *fuck* do you think you are? You think I was gonna watch that shit and not do anything? You think I'm just gonna stand there and--

Say that again. I dare you to say that again. Go ahead, *say it!* *You* fuckin' broke up with *me?* Nobody breaks up with me, okay? I break up with them. We're not broken up. We're not broken up until I say we're broken up, you got that? And until I say it, nobody touches you. *Nobody.* Especially that ugly, stupid, pimply-faced motherfucker.

Are you denying it? I *saw* it. What am I talking about? I'm talking about him slapping your ass and you letting him. You *let* him. I *saw* you, saw the whole fuckin' thing. You fuckin' skank. And I'm gonna tell you something. You better stay away from him or the two of you are gonna be sorry. That's all I'm gonna say and I'm only gonna say it once. And you know I'm not fuckin' around. That prick keeps his hands to himself or I am gonna beat the living shit out of him...and you too.

You can say whatever you want but none of that means shit. I have absolutely zero trust in you right now. You're acting like some kind of slut and I--

Get the fuck back here! You stay right where you are or so help me I'll fuckin' drop you right here. You are pushing your luck right to the fuckin' limit, I'm telling you.

That fuckin' Brian's gonna end up fuckin' dead if he's not careful. 'Cause I'll blow him away. There's no way I'm gonna let that kind of shit slide.

And *you're* the cause. You should have just fuckin' slapped him one but you just...let him. What are people gonna think? That I'm the biggest fuckin' loser in school, that some prick could just lay his hands on you and--

Shut up, okay, just *shut up.* You got nothin' to say to me right now. You're just lucky, that's all I'm gonna say. You should count your lucky fuckin' stars.

Because the next time I'm not gonna say anything I'm just gonna fuckin' flip on somebody. Anybody grabs your ass and it had better be me. I *own* your ass, understand? I own your ass and everything else that goes with it. Your ass is *mine*.

Are you fuckin' lipping me? Are you fuckin' lipping off to me? Huh? That's good, 'cause right now you are *this* close to a trip to the hospital. I'll knock your fuckin' teeth out.

Fuckin' prick slapping your ass. I don't care what the reason was--hey, I saw it and--and you know what? Everybody else saw it too. That's what really pisses me off. I mean, where does he get off doing something like that, thinkin' he can get away with it, y'know? Let him get his own woman. 'Cause you are *mine* and don't you ever forget it. Not in a million years. That guy, he's a fuckin' scumbag, all right? He's a...he's a insect and I'll fuckin' squash him.

So you keep away from him. Don't talk to him, don't look at him...don't even fuckin' *think* about him. 'Cause I'll know. You know I'll know. 'Cause I can read your mind. I fuckin' got your number. Nobody fucks me over and *nobody* touches my woman. I'll cut their fuckin' hands off.

I'm just talking now, that's all I'm doing is talking. But next time there won't be any talking. I'll just go home and get one of my dad's guns and just fuckin' waste somebody and I don't give a *fuck* who. Put a fuckin' bullet right in their head. And you know I'm capable of it. I'll fuckin' kill them and I'll kill you and I'll kill anybody else who fucks with me. No mercy, no surrender. *Bam, bam, bam*. Waste everybody if I have to.

And who's gonna be to blame? Not me, I'm just reacting, I'm just fuckin' laying down the law and staking my claim. People do me wrong and people fuckin' suffer and that's all there is to it. I could murder the whole world I get so fuckin' mad some days. You know that.

So? So quit acting like a skank and...do the right thing. That's all I'm asking. Don't be letting people slap your ass in public like that. Fuckin' show some respect for yourself, show some respect for *me*. This isn't about me, this is about *you* and the way you treat people. You gotta learn there's a right way and a wrong way of doing things. You gotta learn to be fuckin' straight with me. Don't fuck with my head. 'Cause I won't take it. Not from you, not from anybody, got it? Are we clear on that?

(Pause)

Okay. You can go back inside if you want.

Hey, listen, I'm sorry for freaking out on you like that. What I saw...it kinda made me crazy. I been in a shitty mood all day and, you know. I just...I just want you to know that no matter what, I love you, okay?

I know. I shouldn't fuckin' talk like that but I just wanted to make you understand...I was just...it just wasn't cool, y'know?

I know I scare you. I don't mean to, that's just the way I am. I got a lot of pressure, a lot of shit going on right now and that's why it's important, you know, not to get on my wrong side or anything. Just *help* me, that's all. Be there for me. Show me you care--that I can count on you. You're my number one girl...best thing that ever happened to me. You know that. You *are*. You're everything to me.

So let's just forget about this, okay? Just put it behind us. Pretend like it never happened.

But be careful, okay? Watch yourself and, you know, be aware that I'm watching and--and so are other people. How people see you, that's the way they see *me*. I don't wanna look like an asshole. I got my pride. You can understand that.

Okay. You go on inside, I'll see you in a minute. Oh, hey, could you bring me another beer? Yeah, yeah, I know but I can handle it. Just *bring* it, okay? I'll be right here.

Okay. Sure. Like I said, it's over. Let's just drop it.

(Calling after her:)

Don't forget to bring me that beer!

Fade out...

V.

(He stands beside the couch, occasionally pacing. Well-spoken, the epitome of reasonableness.)

Okay, I think I see where this is going. I think I grasp what's going on here. Believe me, there's no need to sugar coat it or beat around the bush. If you're trying to spare me or trying to be nice, well...

We're both responsible adults, I'm sure we can deal with this reasonably, don't you think? We've been sitting here for God knows how long, dancing around the issue and, really, it's getting us nowhere. At least we should have the courage to face this and, ah, realistically state our objectives, what we're trying to accomplish. I don't see how dragging out the inevitable is helpful--that's not the way to do it. This should be a quick, almost surgical procedure, with the absolute minimum of pain. Clean, fast and no bloodshed. Just do it and try not to leave any permanent scars, yes? And then get on with our lives.

I agree with everything you said. Things haven't been right between us for--well, if we were being completely honest we'd have to say it's been quite a while. There's a kind of deterioration that's taken place. That, I think, is undeniable. And I think you see that, it's very clear in your mind...but it's hard to just come out and say it. All I'm saying is we should have clarity, some concision and, more than anything else, some *honesty*. The one thing we've always had going for us is our honesty. And that's admirable--that's a very admirable trait.

I've always felt I could come to you, if something had happened I could tell you and the two of us could sit down and work it out. You're quite an intuitive person, very quick, very sharp. You seem to know, even without asking me, what I've been up to. Not that I've ever tried to hide anything from you. That's not the way I am.

When all that stuff was going on with Beth--I knew it wasn't serious, that it was just a fling, more the product of middle age hormones than anything else. But, still, I made sure I told you, I never held back. That wouldn't have been fair, either to you or this relationship.

And it's the same for you. You knew that I would realize we're both human and there are bound to be...indiscretions. We make mistakes. And there don't have to be recriminations and all that guilt and emotional baggage. Not when it's a mature, responsible relationship. I'm a man and you're a woman and we are, by our very natures, imperfect. You see what I'm saying? So by doing what we're doing, dancing around the subject, refusing to say the words, we're actually making a lie out of everything that we stand for. And I refuse to do that. I won't play that game.
(Pausing to light a cigarette; affected, considered motions.)

Mind you, that's not to say that everything has to be completely analytical or...cerebral. After all, there are feelings involved here, deep-seated emotions and we shouldn't ignore that. Things happen and people--well, I guess I'm stating the obvious but people grow apart, they diverge from a shared path and when that happens we have to acknowledge it and allow ourselves a...I don't know, would it be over-stating things to call it a grieving process? Is that too much?

It's natural if there's regret, some intrinsic pain...but that doesn't mean we should assign blame. That's where we get into trouble. In my view there's no reason why this can't be an

entirely amiable process, a natural and inevitable ending after a pleasant, enjoyable interlude.

Don't you agree?

I hope I don't sound cold about this. I'm just trying to frame it in a way that no one gets hurt and no one walks away feeling somehow responsible.

I certainly don't hate you--I assure you that isn't that case. In fact my thoughts for you, I think, I hope, will remain very fond, very clear. Looking back I'll always feel a certain amount of pleasure, of satisfaction. I know in my own way I tried my best to be a good person, a good partner and I can honestly say that you were--that you're very considerate and affectionate and...well, I don't think I need to belabour the point.

You know, I've often felt we were very fortunate to find each other; two people with common goals and interests, a shared worldview. So regardless of what happens from this point on I hope that on some level we can maintain some kind of a relationship, perhaps even a friendship of sorts. I think that would be a good thing--I don't see why that can't happen.

Because so many people in these circumstances react in a manner that is, in my opinion, completely irrational. There's hurt feelings, you have acrimony and recriminations. I hope we can spare each other that. I mean, why should there be hard feelings? I think it would only be because we lacked the awareness and...maturity to recognize that some kind of end point has been reached and there's no use proceeding any further.

That's why I felt I had to interrupt, to try to establish exactly what was going on here, name the demon, if you will. It's perfectly acceptable to want to handle this with a modicum of delicacy and sensitivity but at the same time I don't think it's necessary to draw things out and

refuse to just get it over and done with. Truthfully, did you think I was going to react negatively or create a scene? I mean, *really*, does that sound like me?

The main thing I want to express, to get across to you is how much I appreciate the way we can talk to one another, the rapport we've always had. That's been one of the great strengths of our relationship. That we relate to each other on a certain level and can always see things from the other's point of view.

My personal perspective on this is that we grow from every experience, good or bad, and through that growth we become better, more well-rounded individuals. I'm frankly surprised that it took so long to bring this up. I've been expecting this--well, not confrontation but this *discussion* for some time. And I'm okay with it, I really am. I see what's been happening, I understand...and I'm relieved, for both of our sakes, that we can sit here like two adults and get through what, to many, would be an uncomfortable, awkward process.

Anyway, I guess I'll conclude with...well, first of all, by thanking you...and also that I enjoyed knowing you, being with you, sharing a life with you. Does that--is that all right? Have we said everything that's--that needs to be said? Because I don't know about you but I certainly feel--not good about it but a strong sense of, ah, what's done is done and...and all's well that end's well.

So...thanks and...ah, have a great life. Really. I mean that. I truly wish you all the very best. Take care and let's--let's not be strangers. All right then. I guess that's it. Unless there's something else you want to say...

Fade out

VI.

(A tense scene; man upset, embarrassed, angry at the predicament he finds himself in, uncomfortable with the emotions being generated:)

Oh, Christ, don't cry. *Please* don't cry. You know I can't handle that. It isn't fair, Karen, you shouldn't do this every time something happens that you don't like.

Yes, you *can* help it--you're just not trying. You think if you turn on the water works eventually you'll get your way. And that's the whole point, isn't it? You have to get what you want or else you're not happy. And if *you're* not happy you have to make everybody else around you miserable. Nobody else matters, just you.

(Exasperated, leaping up from the couch, pacing around distractedly.)

Would you just *stop*? Put a plug in it or something. Because we can't talk like this, nothing can be settled or decided. You know it bugs me and that's why you're doing it. But you know what? It's not going work this time. I am not going to give in, do you hear me? This is *bullshit* and you know it. Emotional blackmail. I saw through this stuff a long time ago.

(Angry)

Stop. Are you going to stop or not? 'Cause I'll leave and that's it. No discussion, no debate, I just walk. I won't put up with this. I'm tired of it, this whole routine of yours...it's gotten really old. *(Groaning)* Oh, for God's sake. I wish you could see yourself, how pathetic you look. Your makeup's running, you've got a snotty nose. Use a kleenex at least. Yes, I *am* disgusted as a matter of fact. Disgusted with this whole thing. How I let myself get into this--that's something I'll never figure out.

Oh, come on, knock it off. You know I care. I care or else I would've left a long time ago. Christ, don't you ever get dehydrated? Oh, stop. I'm telling you for the last time: *stop*. Are you gonna stop? 'Cause if you don't, I'm leaving and I mean it.

Now *there's* something I haven't heard before. You don't have the guts to kill yourself so don't even bother. You might drive someone else to kill you, that much I'll give you. But you don't have the nerve to do it yourself. You're not the type. I'll kill myself a long time before you will. And don't think I haven't thought about it. Anything would be better than this.

Get a grip on yourself. Do you know how stupid you sound? You're stuck in a groove: "I'll do it. I'll do it." So *do* it. Don't just talk about it. Throw yourself off a bridge. Cut your wrists, cut your throat--do *something* so the rest of us don't have to suffer. Oh, I'm a bastard, all right. I am one stupid bastard for putting up with you for as long as I have. But let me tell you something: *this is it*. I've had it. You've hit the wall with me. Reached the limit. Right now if I thought you were *really* serious I'd buy you the razors. How about some pills? How about a gun? You name it, I'll get it for you.

Just *stop crying*. It's driving me nuts, can't you see that? Is this the only tactic you have? Can't you--isn't there something else you can try? Break something, throw some plates--but stop *crying*. Because if you don't, so help me...

This is pointless. I'm going around and around here and it never ends. Every time something comes up, ever time we reach a certain point, you pull this shit and--and nothing changes, nothing improves and we're back where we started. I'm tired of it. Sick of your games, sick of your blubbering, sick of *you*...

I've tried to leave! How many times have I stood at that door--I can't even count that high. But then you open the tear ducts, do your thing and I end up staying and, like I said, nothing gets better so sooner or later we're back at it again. The same thing, it's the same thing all the time. "Boo hoo, boo hoo, poor me"--God, what's the point?

(Flops onto the couch, kneading his forehead.)

I'm just...so...tired. You suck me dry. Always needing, always wanting, never giving anything back. I swear you're some kind of a vampire and one of these days I'm gonna wake up with a big hickey on my neck and realize I am now one of the living dead.

It reaches the point where I don't have anything left to give you. I'm just so drained and fucked up that I'm not any use to anybody, including myself.

You always say that. I don't know how many times I've heard you say exactly the same thing. But you never change. It's this eternal circle. And I'm getting tired of chewing on my own tail, you know?

I wish I could believe that. But, you know, I stopped believing anything you say a long time ago. I hope and I hope but it's always the same. Because if you were honest you'd admit that even if you did try you can't get better. You're too sick. You need help and--I wish I was the one who could give it to you. But I'm not. I've got nothing left to give that you haven't already taken. When it gets right down to it, you don't *want* to change. Why should you? This way you get everything you need and everybody else doesn't even enter into it.

Why did I come over here today? I should've listened to that little voice in my head, screaming at me: *stay away, stay away*. I didn't want to get into this. I knew what would

happen. I should have just sent you a telegram from somewhere. Timbuktu maybe. Some place where you could never find me.

(Slumping back, exhausted.)

You leave me nothing. You take everything and now I'm just--I'm left like this. Don't you see what you're doing to me? Don't you care? You're *killing* me. Slowly but surely. You're not the one going to die, I am. And I can't wait. What a relief it'll be. Oh, go ahead. See if I care. Cry your damn eyes out.

(Pause. Deep breath.)

Christ. Jesus. Please stop. Please...*stop*. Karen? Karen, listen to me. Are you listening to me? It's too much, okay? You're pushing things too far and I can't--I can't deal with this right now.

I know. I *know*. And I'm sorry. I'm *sorry*, okay? I wasn't trying to be mean, I was trying to make you see...I don't know. I don't know anything any more. Just let me sit here a minute. And meanwhile you--try to get yourself under control. Go splash some cold water on your face or something.

I know. I know you try. Sure, I realize that but...all I'm asking is just ease up on me. 'Cause I can't take much more. You force me into a corner and then I lash out and all I want is to get away from you. Escape. You don't know what it's like, the toll it takes on a person.

Sure, that's what I'm talking about. I mean...it's not like I hate you. I love you. I *do*. You may not believe it but it's true. Hey, if I didn't do you think I'd put up with you for as long as I have? There's your proof. You can't do much better than that.

I guess that's right. We're stuck with each other. But can't we make it easier on one another, do there always have to be these...crises, all the big scenes and dramatics? I *hate* them. I just can't deal with emotional stuff. The crying and wailing and carrying on. It frustrates me. I feel so useless.

I want you to be happy. Is that asking so much? And I want to be the one who makes you happy and not always taking the blame for--you know what I mean. Most of the time it seems like we're both so *miserable*. And that's not right. That's not the way two people should treat each other.

So...just promise me that you'll at least *try*. And I will too. Wipe your eyes, okay? Nobody's going anywhere. I know I said that and I'm sorry, I shouldn't have. I didn't mean it. You know I'll always be here for you. *Always*. You know that. You're my lady and--and I'll never, ever leave you. And that's a promise.

Hey, look: you've stopped crying...

Fade out...

VII.

(A very placid, almost bland demeanor; a preternatural stillness, yet an unmistakable air of impending menace.)

I guess you think you're pretty smart.

It must give you a real thrill the way you can control and manipulate people. I bet you like that. I bet it makes you *hot*. Why else would you do it? Because you had it planned all along, didn't you? You saw me coming from a mile away. And I never suspected a thing.

What was it about me? Did you see something in my face? Did I seem...vulnerable to you? Well, I may give that impression but, believe me, there are other sides of me, parts people never ever see. I'm deep... practically bottomless. A big, gaping pit. So many layers and you peel and peel but there's always more that's hidden. But you never saw that, did you? All you saw was somebody you could play with. That's too bad. I wish it could have been different, that you had been straight with me. Eventually maybe I would've showed myself to you, the real me, given you that gift. But now...

There's still a part of me that wants to give you the benefit of the doubt. Get in my car and drive over there and see you. It'd be so easy.

I know you're working right now. I could pull up to the pumps and fill up and walk in and say hi...

What really got to me was how nice you always were. How you made an effort to make conversation and ask me how I was doing. And, uh, the way you made eye contact. Most people

avoid looking me in the eye but not you. Right from the first--I guess it doesn't matter now but I really believed that we were communicating on some deeper level. Looking at each other...almost like we were *communing*.

You know, after that first time, I never went anywhere else. Even if I was all the way across the city, I made sure I'd drive over there just so I could see you. A couple of times I swear I was running on fumes. But I had to see you. Even if it was just for a few seconds those few seconds made my entire day. They meant the world to me. And I convinced myself that they meant something to you too. The way you seemed to perk up when I came in, the way you kidded me when I bought pop or chips. You told me I ate too much junk food and, wow, that blew me away. The way you seemed to care about what I was eating. I wish I could recapture that, the magic of how it used to be. The way you looked and smelled.

You sure did a number on me. And I never suspected, just walked right into it. I'm not too smart that way, too trusting or what have you. I don't have a lot of experience...but I bet you do. I guarantee that you've done this before. Set somebody up and then shot him down and walked away laughing. I take my hat off to you--you had me completely fooled.

I was *so* naive. Stupid is more like it. The way I kept coming by, making up all sorts of excuses, buying oil or washer fluid when I didn't really need it. I've got boxes of the stuff in my hall closet. Enough to last me for years. But I didn't care. I didn't. I had to see you and that's all there was to it.

Even my mother guessed something was up, the way I seemed so cheerful all the time. She told me I acted like I was in love. She asked if I was seeing anybody and I made the mistake of telling her some of it. She wanted to know why I didn't ask you out. She said "What kind of

relationship is that?" That we barely knew each other and that I was just making things up in my own mind. I told her to stay out of it, that what we had was special and--and that she shouldn't--

But she didn't understand. My mother isn't what you would call a very bright person. It's all so superficial to her. She doesn't understand how much two people can communicate to each other with just one look.

Because I really believed that I knew you, right down to the depths of your soul. I *saw* you, the way you really are. I memorized your face, every part of you, right down to the smallest detail. I got *inside* you...and I thought it was beautiful, the most beautiful, magical thing I've ever experienced. There was never anything dirty or, uh, you know. I always felt we were beyond that.

Once, when you were giving me back change, our hands touched, just a light brush and it was like I'd stuck my head into a wall socket. This incredible surge of electro-chemical...*something*. That's when I began to believe that everything I had ever dreamed of or...envisioned for us was going to come true. I fell for your beautiful lie.

I went out and bought you that chair. Put it on my credit card and I didn't care how I would pay for it, where I would get the money. I just did it. That was going to be *your* chair. No one else would be allowed to use it. Not even me. And you'd sit there and we'd talk and I'd tell you all the stuff I'm thinking, all my hopes and dreams. To finally be able to tell someone my secrets and know I wouldn't be judged or found wanting or scare you away. That you would accept me and care for me...and love me.

But you couldn't let me have that, could you? You had to deny me my one chance at happiness, of leading a normal life.

You must be some kind of a monster--without conscience or any sense of guilt or...common decency. No right or wrong. A sadist who preys on the feelings of others and gets off on hurting them, destroying them. You're sick, you're *venal*. You hurt for pleasure. You're worse than an animal. I don't know how you live with yourself.

Did you tell him about me? Was he in on it all along? Do the two of you sit around and laugh about it? I bet you do. I guess it adds to that perverted, sick thing the two of you have going. Toying with somebody like that...

I'm just lucky I decided to drive by there today. I wasn't going to, I thought I've been kind of over-doing it lately. But, you know, it gets to the point where a person can't help themselves. They're in love and they're crazy, they do crazy, stupid things.

And then I didn't want to believe what I was seeing. I turned away, hoping it was a mistake or... And then I got it into my head that I should run in and protect you, that he was some kind of creep harassing you. But then I realized...I saw the two of you laughing and carrying on. Laughing at me maybe. Waiting for me to pull up and see you together. Carrying on and meanwhile knowing what you were doing to me.

But...you don't know me as well as you think. You thought I'd just sit back and take it. That's okay. You just go on deluding yourself.

It's gonna take awhile and I'm going to wait. Act normal, keep coming in like usual. Pretend like nothing's happened, nothing's changed. That's the way I am. I don't act impulsively, don't leap into things. I like to sit back...lie in the weeds, watching...planning.

But one of these days--or nights--I'll be ready. And then...then I'm going to play a little game on *you*. Give you a taste of your own medicine. I'm not going to be satisfied until you know how it feels to have someone tear your guts out and leave you empty inside.

I want you to know what you did and that there are repercussions, punishment that comes to those who do evil for no other reason than because they can. Because they have the power.

I have power too. Great power. I'm capable of things you can't imagine. Some time soon, I'll come and I'll show you. And then you'll know, know what I'm *really* like, deep down inside...way down here in the dark.

Fade out

VIII.

(He is drunk, a little high--sitting on the couch with a coffee table overflowing with empty beer bottles, Zigzag rolling papers and a distinctive baggie of marijuana in front of him.)

I just wanna thank you, man, sincerely, for, uh, you know, letting me stay with you like this. Yeah, I know, but it was really sudden and all that and you didn't, you know, you could have said no or whatever. And that would've been cool, I could have gone to my sister's and-- and no hard feelings. But you really came through for me and I want you to know, hey--

(Raising a beer bottle in salute)

You're one in a million and that is no bullshit. What you did, it's a sign of a true friend. You were there for me and, you know, don't think I'm ever gonna forget it. No, no, this is something I gotta say and it's from the bottom of my heart: you need me for *anything* and you just say the word. Anytime, anywhere. I'll be there, swear to God.

And that's, like, a sacred promise, man. Me to you. And when I say something, I mean it. I am there for you two hundred per cent. *A warrior*. So...cheers. If you weren't so damn ugly, I'd kiss you.

(Laughing; taking a long drink)

Damn, that's good. Isn't it? That is one fine beer. Makes me wonder what I've been missing. I mean, the more I look at it, the more I think about everything that's happened--hey, as far as I'm concerned this was long overdue. Time to start living again. Because I was dead inside. Seriously, I was like a dead man. And now it's like I've completely come back to life.

(Cocks his head, listening)

Man, I love this song. And this is so cool, being here with you. Like the old days. We got tunes, we got brewskis, some weed. This is Heaven. I was dead and now I'm in Heaven.

(Another drink)

What was I thinking, y'know? Why did I put myself through all that shit...what was the point? It wasn't fun, there was never any laughs or good times. Not like this. Honestly, I got twice as much in common with you as I ever did with her. Most of the time it was just...trying to get through the day. Putting up with all of her shit and trying to--I dunno. Coping with all the weirdness and the whole time wondering what the Hell was going through her mind...what she was thinking...

(Thumping the empty beer bottle down)

I mean, *what the Hell do they want?* Can you tell me that? Because I gotta say, I never could figure out what made that woman tick. It was like living with some kind of alien creature or something. The thing from another world. Trying to carry on a decent conversation, finding something that we could both--that a person could relate to and not feel like--like...

You're the smart one. You're the one who's got it all figured out. Love 'em and leave 'em, man. Just keep 'em around for a good time, not a long time. One night and then get 'em to fix you breakfast in the morning and that's it. Don't call us, we'll call you. That way you save a whole lot of trouble and and you never have to deal with all the... complications and stuff, everybody knows what's expected and no one--no one ends up getting hurt. I tell you, a person could learn a lot from you. You should write a book. *I'm serious*. So guys like me can read it and--and follow it, step by step.

(Opens another beer, snaps the cap away)

It was always what *she* wanted. Like it was her idea to live together--I never wanted that. I sure as Hell didn't bring it up. Those words never left my mouth. If anything I was, like, "whoa, whoa, let's slow down here". Maybe part of me already knew it was a huge mistake -- and, hey, I shoulda listened to myself because, you know, here I am. Not that I'm complaining. Being here with you, my bosom buddy, lifelong pal, my go-to guy. This is great, man. No bullshit, just good times.

(Long drink)

I must've been crazy. You know? To realize, to have absolute knowledge that everything about it was wrong and then allowing myself to get talked into it anyway. She just kept it up, yakkety-yak about how great it was gonna be and, man, I can't believe I fell for it. She should go into advertising because, seriously, she could sell rubbers to the Pope, you know what I mean? You met her, you know what she's like.

And then all of a sudden it's like *wham!* "Where are you goin', you're not goin' anywhere" and *wham!* "We never do anything any more" and *wham!* "It's your turn to do the dishes". Hey, *doll*, last time I checked Lincoln freed the slaves or maybe you didn't hear the news.

(Drinks, regarding his friend slyly)

You know, I knew right away that you didn't like her very much. C'mon, admit it. That time we all went out to Bushwackers and we were sitting there, you hardly said a word. That's when I realized--holy shit, I am in some *serious* trouble. 'Cause you like *everybody*, man. And it took a lot, I could tell, you were really holding back, not saying anything. And she was just being so stupid that night, talkin' about stuff she didn't know anything about. You shoulda

brought her down a peg. I wouldn't have minded. I guess you thought it would be disrespectful to me...I can appreciate that.

But, afterwards, y'know, she was putting you down and saying stuff about how stuck up you were and I just wanted to tell her to shut the hell up. I felt like saying "Hey, if Chuck didn't like you, maybe he's got a point". Just to get her to back off.

(Drinking, shaking the bottle to see how much is left)

Wow, I'm just downing this. I'll make sure I replace it. I won't, you know, take advantage of your hospitality or anything. This is just for a few days until I get my shit together and find a place. I'll totally contribute around here. Whatever you want. I'll tell you this: I make a mean omelette. Tomorrow morning, before you go to work, I'll whip one up for you. It'll be like a gourmet meal. You got any Cheez Whiz, man? 'Cause that's, like, my secret ingredient.

(Looking around)

I really gotta take a leak. Where's your--over there? That's handy. How about while I attend to business you roll us some more of that there fine ganja? 'Cause it's been, like, ages since I, you know, since I indulged. And don't think I didn't miss it.

Let's just get totally fucked up, what do you say? Just like the old days. You got any movies? Or--maybe we should stick with the music. Dust off some old Zep or Sabbath. Yeah, I could use some Ozzy right now. Blow the carbon out of my ears. 'Cause with her the music was--we couldn't even agree on that. She'd be playing all this chick stuff and I be just--like, come on, who wants to listen to this shit? When you don't even have music in common--it's hopeless. You might as well forget about the whole thing.

(Stands up)

Whoa, my back teeth are floating. Hurry up with that joint, man, 'cause I wanna get just totally discombobulated. Reality is the last thing I wanna be dealing with right now. Tonight we are on a mission, my friend. Goin' to the dark side of the moon--

(Teetering, nearly falling)

Whoa, shit, I think I'm already there. Hey, man, I feel *great*. Just fuckin' great. You get that bomber started and I'll be right back.

(Starts to go, pauses)

Bro, I just wanna tell you: being here with you...it's right on, you know? You are fuckin'-A number one with me. And I'm being totally sincere. You and me, we're like Kirk and Spock, man. The Lone Ranger and Tonto. Abbot and Costello. The dynamic duo...masters of disaster. Am I right? *Huh?* Fuckin' right. And don't you ever forget it...

(He bumps into the edge of the couch, nearly trips, lurching away, into the spreading darkness...)

Fade out...

IX.

(Stung, betrayed; resentful, eager to inflict injury in return.)

What about the kids? The whole time this was going on, did you give one single, solitary thought to *them*? What are you going to tell them--how are you going to handle it? I'm curious...how do you explain something like that? "Mom's gone crazy and she's going away for awhile until she gets this little attack of hormones under control"? Maybe--this is just off the top of my head--but maybe you could have spared them just a *wee* bit of consideration before you started carrying on with this...boy toy of yours.

What else am I supposed to call him? Am I supposed to have any respect for him? Am I supposed to feel threatened or insecure because he's--what?--how much younger than you? Ten years? *Twelve*? Oh, marvelous, that's going to look real good.

Oh, I know you don't care. That much is obvious. I'd say you don't give a damn about *anything* right now. Clearly you don't give a shit about this family, what it means to be a family, all the--

(Furious, bursting out:)

Goddamn you for this. For what you're doing.

How soon can you be out of here? Packed up, lock, stock and barrel. I mean the bare minimum. How much time do you need? No, not just a few things, the whole kit and caboodle. Make sure you take it *all*. I don't want a single scrap of you left behind. Because I'll burn it. Every last trace. You leave and you take *everything*.

Except the kids. You try anything there and, so help me God, I'll kill you. You go off with Prince Charming but you go *alone*. And you stay there. You wanna see your kids, you bloody well call first and make arrangements. And don't come up to the house. Stay on the sidewalk and I'll send them out to you. Stay the Hell off my property. That's right. *My* property. You leave us, you abandon us and it's *mine*. Every goddamn inch. Every knife, spoon and fork. You take what's yours and that's *it*.

You get your lawyer, get as many as you want. I'll fight you every step of the way. I'm the wounded party here, I'm the one who's being hung out to dry. You're the one leaving--you just remember that.

Fuck you. If you cared at all you wouldn't have done this in the first place. Or you would have had the guts to come to me and--and tell me you wanted us to get counselling or ask for a separation. Instead of sneaking around like a goddamn teenager.

That's it, isn't it? Your little boy toy makes you feel young again, doesn't he? Helps you recapture your lost girlhood. I'm sure a shrink would have a field day with this.

Oh, sure it's love. *Sure* it is. What the Hell do either one of you know about love? Screwing around isn't love. Right, whatever you say. He's, what, twenty-two years old, for Chrissakes. Jesus, where did you meet him, were you cruising the high school or something? That sounds about your speed.

Hey, I'm just getting started. Wait 'til I get you in court, that's when the fun *really* begins. I'll throw the fucking book at you. And I'll make sure the kids are sitting right there, watching the whole thing. I want them to know exactly what kind of person their mother is. What you've been up to in your spare time. How much you *care*.

You started this. Did you think I was going to sit back and let you tear this family apart and not do anything? After fourteen years, you ought to know me better than that. I'm going to be like a wild animal, protecting his young. Because somebody's got to protect them. Since you've apparently made your choice. Nobody's going to make this easy on you. Don't think that for one minute.

Have you told your parents? No, I didn't think so. What do you suppose your *dad's* going to say? I'll bet he'll be real impressed.

What's the matter? All of a sudden you don't look so good. Maybe you didn't think this through all the way, huh? Well, it's too late now. It was too late from the moment you started screwing around with that *kid*. Hey, compared to you he's a kid. Do the arithmetic, sweetheart. Get used to it, you'll be hearing a lot of it and not just from me.

Man, I'd love to be around to see the look on your mother's face when you tell her. She thinks the sun shines out of your ass. Boy, is she in for a surprise. Both of them are.

Y'know, maybe I should be the one who breaks it to them. Yeah, give 'em a call after you leave and drop the bombshell. Fill them in on the situation. Hey, all's fair in love and war and all that.

I was just thinking: let's see, you're thirty-four so when you're forty he'll be, what, he'll be twenty-eight, right? Still in his prime. And you'll be starting to sag by then, going grey...I dunno, kiddo, doesn't look so good in terms of a long-term relationship, does it?

Oooo, a flash of temper. What's the matter, did I hit a nerve? Well, I wouldn't worry about it. You're a professional woman, you've got money--you're a real catch for a bum like him. He'll never have to work a day in his life and I'm sure that's a very attractive quality for someone

in his position. The physical stuff, that fades--hey, we're proof of that, right? But he won't mind, not when you're supporting him, putting food on the table, paying the bills. Maybe he'll even take up a hobby, like knitting...or fucking around with girls more his age.

Did I go too far? Are you leaving? Jeez, I'm sorry. What was I thinking? But if you *are* leaving, make sure you pack up your shit first, you hear? And make sure you find the time to tell the kids before you go. You owe them that much. Because, to be honest, I don't think you want me to be the one who does it. I'm not what you would call an impartial bystander. Besides, I want to see how you handle that. How you rationalize it--and don't you *dare* try to lie to them. None of that "Mommy's going away for a little while" crap. That isn't going to cut it. You tell them what you've done. If you don't, *I* will.

I don't care. I couldn't care less if it eats your goddamn black heart out. You won't get any sympathy from me. I'm way past that. All I want now is vengeance...all I feel for you is...

I'll go get some boxes from the basement. You start packing. *Everything*. Haul it over to your new lovenest and the two of you just--and don't *ever* bring him by here. He comes around and I'll fucking kill him. You tell him that. I don't wanna see his face or hear his voice on the phone. I'll put him through a wall. So do him a favour.

Oh, I'm mean, all right. I'm one nasty sonofabitch. And you made me that way, put me together out of spite and hate and--and stupidity...

Damn you. The both of you. I wish you nothing but the worst, I wish you cancer, misery and horror. May you find that together and worse besides. I'll tell you right now that it won't last. It won't take long before the two of you are at each other's throats and, man, I can't wait to see it. You deserve one another.

Here come the kids. You sit right there. You're not going anywhere. I wanna watch this. You tell them. Right here in front of me. Tell them *everything*. And I'm going to sit here and watch. I want to see you suffer. That's all that matters to me right now.

(Calling, brightly:)

Kids? Come in here for a minute, will you? Your mother has something she wants to say to you.

Fade out...

X.

(Even before the lights come up, he can be heard. Talking on the phone, his tone unctuous, ingratiating, repentant. But as soon as he is visible, the ruse is transparent, the apologies self-serving, insincere:)

I know....I know. What can I say? You're right, everything you're saying...you're one hundred per cent right.

But if I could just--no, don't worry, I'm not going to make any excuses for myself. What would be the point? You know what I am now --you've figured out the score. I won't even try to pretend that I'm a good person, that there's a single ounce of decency in me. There's no possible explanation or reason for what I did. It was unforgivable, a total betrayal of you and--and everything you represent: love, trust, loyalty. How can I ever excuse something like that?
(But his demeanor and mien give him away. He carelessly plucks lint off his shirt, pages distractedly through a magazine on the table, barely listening as she prattles into his ear.)

And I'm not asking for another chance. That would--I know I don't have the right, I haven't got a right to *anything* right now. Why you're even bothering to talk to me is a complete mystery to me. If I was in your shoes I--I'd do something like take out a contract on me or...nail a dead cat to my door. I'm *serious*. I'd deserve it.

(Getting down to business:)

Why I called...like I said, I know I can't expect your forgiveness, not in a billion years. That's completely out of the question. And, believe me, that thought has never crossed my mind.

What I wanted to say, what I *have* to say, for my own peace of mind if nothing else, is that I'm sorry. I know that sounds lame--the two most over-used words in the English language, right? But regardless of whatever else you might think and even if you hate my guts and, like I said, never want to see my face again, I want you to know that, sincerely, from the bottom of my heart: *I'm sorry*. For everything. For being alive and--and breathing the same air as you...

What can I say? I'm a horrible person, the absolute worst person in the universe. Call me any name you want and I'll agree with you--I'll even throw in a few of my own.

I could be on the phone with you all night long and I still wouldn't be able to explain what happened or *why* it happened...to tell you the honest to God truth, I don't know myself. Maybe I suffered a temporary form of insanity...but, like I said, it doesn't matter and there's no point going into it. Even if I had all the time in the world it wouldn't change anything, nothing that happened can be undone and I just have to accept that. I had my chance and I blew it. Blew it forever.

(Not moving from his comfortable position on the sofa.)

You know what I'm doing right now? I'm getting down on my knees and you know why? I'm not going to ask you to forgive me but I do want to say, with as much humbleness as I can, that you are the last person in the world I would ever want to hurt. I am. I'm on my knees here. If anyone walked in right now they'd think I was praying or something. Don't forgive me, don't say anything if you don't want to. Just know that I'm sorry and--and then hang up and forget all about me, put me out of your mind and get on with your life.

Is this getting too heavy for you? Am I freaking you out? Okay, well, thanks. Thanks for giving me the opportunity. Not that I'll find it any easier to live with myself.

(Reaching over and opening a can of pop, resting it on his chest.)

I honestly and truthfully don't want you to forgive me and...I don't want *me* to forgive me. I want to wallow in my misery and guilt. I want it to keep me awake at night and I want it to be the first thing I think of every morning. I hope it ruins my life, I really do. That's not nearly enough but that's, you know, at least part of the price I'm willing to pay for what I did to you.

(Listens to her; starting to smile, a small, thin rictus of a grin.)

You don't have to say that. You *shouldn't* say that. That's almost letting me off too easy. Instead you should--God, I don't know...

(Hitching in his breath; an ersatz sob.)

I'm sorry, I can feel myself getting all emotional on you here and--and I don't want you to have to deal with that. Listen, I'd better go...before I start bawling or something. You really don't need that right now. Unless that would make you feel better. I'll blubber my head off if that would give you any satisfaction. It's not like I haven't made *you* cry. I'll bet you've cried an ocean, haven't you? I wish I could catch each and every one of those tears and collect them and--and drown myself in them.

(Grimacing at the tacky imagery.)

But you *should* want that. You should wish the worst things in the world on me: death, tax audits, Jehovah's Witnesses--hey, did you just laugh? Was that my imagination or--wow, well, at least I've accomplished something tonight. Boy, it's good to hear you laugh again. Almost like...never mind. I just started to say, you know, it was like old times. Stupid. Shouldn't have said it.

(Suddenly becoming more alert, radiating a potent charm.)

It's *so* good talking to you again. As soon as you picked up the phone--I mean, I was scared to death but at the same time it was *you*, your voice, and I almost couldn't bring myself to say anything.

Okay, you want to hear something? And this is the honest to God truth. I ended up changing my mind, couldn't bring myself to do it but I had this speech all worked up in my mind. I practically memorized it...but as soon as I heard you, I knew I couldn't say it. That it would sound completely lame and--and inadequate or inappropriate or...I don't know.

Because...right off the bat I was making the assumption that some day, maybe even years from now, you'd be able to forgive me. That I was *worth* forgiving. See, that was the flaw, that's what kept me from--from insulting your intelligence and not recognizing that it's gone too far and nothing can ever make it right again.

(A huge grin, pumping his fist in the air in triumph.)

No, believe me, it was a stupid idea. You'd laugh in my face. Not that you don't have a right to. No, really, it's--it would be a complete waste of your time. Forget I even mentioned it--

You're right. You're absolutely right. There's nothing I should deny you right now, is there? Anything you ask I should leap at the chance. And if you laugh, all the better. Really, laugh your head off. Have a good chuckle at my expense. Because I'm nothing but a joke. A huge joke on the human race.

Okay, are you comfortable? Because this might take awhile. I'm not keeping you from anything am I?

Right off the bat I should say that, you know, if I'm going to do this right, you have picture me getting down on one knee in front of you and just...cutting loose. Just picture that in your mind as you're listening. That's really important, okay?

(Covering the phone, snorting in derision.)

Oh, yeah, I'll bet you'd like that. I mean, it's bad enough that I'm going to lay myself bare to you on the phone. In person it would be like a thousand times worse. I'm serious. This is gonna be one of the all-time great sob stories. A real tear jerker. If you wanna see someone totally humbled and losing it in front of you--

Jeez, I don't know. It's kind of late and I wouldn't want to wreck your evening. Probably just seeing me would do that. *Really?* But don't you think it would be, you know...too much for you? Wouldn't it just be a reminder--you're right. Sure. It's totally up to you. But...I guess what it comes down to is I don't want to end up hurting you again. I had my chance and I fucked up and seeing me again, even for a few minutes might--

Well...

(Pause, drawing out the moment.)

I gotta tell you, it *is* a pretty good speech. And I swear to God it's totally, one hundred per cent sincere. One right from the heart.

Okay. Well, if you're *sure* about this. You're sure, right? Okay, *okay*, I believe you. I'll be there. I'm hanging up right now and I'll come right over. You bet. See you soon.

(He breaks the connection, claps his hands together in satisfaction, an almost sensual surge of pleasure.)

Whew.

(Stretching languorously, scratching himself, etc.)

Man, you are sooo slick...

(Gets up, grabs his jacket and exits the stage.)

Fade out

Curtain