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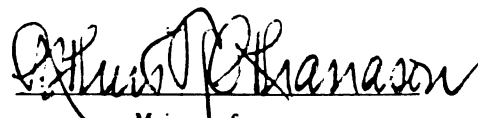
A TOUCH OF LIGHT

presented by

Jan Elizabeth Hoenshell

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

M.A. degree in English


Major professor

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A TOUCH OF LIGHT

By

Jan Elizabeth Hoenshell

A THESIS

Submitted to

Michigan State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

1989

ABSTRACT

A TOUCH OF LIGHT

By

Jan Elizabeth Hoenshell

When the intensity of need that fills a dream finally reaches the pitch necessary to propel that dream into reality, the truth often takes a shape the dreamer had not originally intended. Once he recognizes his dream in its corporeal form, however, he often has to admit that it has become even more what he truly needs than he ever could have imagined.

A Touch of Light, a full-length comedy-drama in two acts, demonstrates this dream-to-a-greater-reality process as it affects the lives of two extraordinarily vivid dreamers, Emily Gilbert and Jesse LeBlanc. Displaced homemaker and handyman, thrown together by an ironically prosaic episode--a broken bathtub--Emily and Jesse warily enter into each other's haunted lives, and together bring into being a single reality far more complete than the sum of its visions. In the process, with the inadvertent help of her precocious teen-age son, Nelson, and his solipsistic younger sister, Marsha, Emily and Jesse discover that possibly the only difference between dream and reality is simply that it is the dream that one comes to see with the greatest clarity that becomes the most palpable truth.

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JAN ELIZABETH HOENSHELL
1989

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For his rigorous, yet gentle, counsel and criticism of A Touch of Light, from my first character sketches of Emily and Jesse to the final draft, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Professor Arthur N. Athanason of the Department of English at Michigan State University. In spite of my mediocre performance in his graduate-level Drama Workshop four years ago, he enthusiastically agreed to shepherd me through a full-length play, refusing to consider that I might not succeed and continually urging me to "press on." His support, advice and friendship have been invaluable.

I would also like to thank my two readers at Hausman Steel Corporation in Lansing, David M. Beaumarchais and Mary P. Zdurne, for the "rave" reviews they gave A Touch of Light--the sort of unqualified approval and encouragement that can only derive from true friendship.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to Dean A. Marsh, Hausman Steel's district manager in Michigan, for the wholehearted permission he granted me to produce the final two drafts of this play on the typewriter in my office--as well as for his amused tolerance of my distraction and intermittent agitation as I wrote them.

Jan Elizabeth Hoenshell
Michigan State University
Spring, 1989

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(in order of their appearance)

Nelson Wadsworth

Marsha LeBlanc

Emily Gilbert

Harmon Melody

Jesse LeBlanc

Muffin

Jimmy Mason

Time: Mid-1980's

The entire action takes place in Emily Gilbert's
apartment in student housing at a large
Midwestern university.

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| Act I, Scene i. | An early Friday evening at the beginning of December..... | 1 |
| Scene ii. | Late evening, the same day..... | 55 |
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| Scene ii. | Mid-evening, the same day..... | 133 |

SONGS

Required

- Throughout: "Killing Me Softly (With His Song),"
Roberta Flack or Orchestral Arrangement
- Middle: "Gloria,"
Laura Brannigan
- "Stones,"
Neil Diamond
- End: "Solitaire,"
Laura Brannigan
- "I Found Someone,"
Laura Brannigan (preferred) or Cher

Suggested

- Beginning: "Don't Cry Out Loud,"
Melissa Manchester
- Middle: "Hello,"
Lionel Richie
- "Innocent Man,"
Billy Joel
- "I Wanna Dance with Somebody (Who Loves Me),"
Whitney Houston
- End: "I Knew You Were Waiting (For Me),"
Aretha Franklin

Possible

- End: "Unchained Melody,"
Righteous Brothers

The kitchen-living-study area of
EMILY's apartment:

The kitchen is at stage right and consists of countertop and sink, cupboards, a refrigerator and a stove. On the countertop is a coffee maker. At downstage right stands a small dining table surrounded by four chairs.

On either side of the countertop and appliances are two bedroom doors, EMILY's at downstage right and NELSON's at upstage center and right. Beyond NELSON's door are a bathroom door and a closet door.

Taped to EMILY's door is a full-length poster of singer-songwriter HARMON MELODY. This is the Sensual HARMON. He wears high boots, tight pants and a T-shirt topped by a half-zipped leather flight jacket. He strikes a casual pose with guitar in hand, pelvis thrust slightly forward, and with a heart-wrenching half-smile on his craggily handsome face. For his actual appearances here he will enter--without his guitar--from the extreme lower right beyond the edge of the set. In all cases he will be allowed to go no further than a few yards into the kitchen area, and always

he will stand in a well-defined circle of light.

At upstage left and center is an outer door leading to a common porch sheltered by the balcony of the apartments above.

At stage left is a large picture window with a long table beneath it covered with piles of books and magazines. There are no curtains on the window. Only dingy, battered venetian blinds provide any measure of privacy, and at the play's beginning they are raised to within a foot-and-a-half of the top of the window, giving it a wary, heavy-lidded look.

Beyond the table and window is EMILY's study area at downstage left. It consists of a desk, bookshelves containing a number of French titles, and a director's chair. Over the desk are posters of l'Arc de Triomphe and HARMON MELODY:

This is HARMON the Poet. He wears a shirt with flowing sleeves topped by a leather vest. He stares pensively across the desk and out into the room. For his appearances here he will enter from the extreme lower edge of the set. In all

cases (save one) he will be allowed to go no further than a few yards into the study area, and as with the Sensual HARMON, he will always stand (save once) in a well-defined circle of light.

At downstage center and left is a living room grouping of sofa (university issue) and loveseat perpendicular to each other, an end table between them, a lamp and a coffee table. On the end table is a telephone, and accenting the sofa are colorful crewelled pillows and an afghan draped across its back.

The floor of the entire apartment is bare tile--dull, pitted and scratched--with the exception of a small mat in front of the kitchen sink and a raveled carpet remnant in front of the sofa and loveseat.

The apartment has no discernible decorating scheme, but it is tolerably clean--if a bit cluttered. Most of the furniture pieces are worn but tasteful reminiscences of a former, more conventional lifestyle. Warm earth tones predominate.

LIGHTS UP. A weak late afternoon, late autumn light filters through

the picture window. NELSON is seated at the dining table, which is littered with papers and books. He holds a pen, and lying open on the table in front of him is a thick spiral-bound notebook in which he writes from time to time. NELSON is 17 years old and wears jeans, a sweatshirt and glasses. He needs a haircut and occasionally runs his fingers through his hair to get it off his forehead. MARSHA, pacing between NELSON's chair and downstage center, is an attractive 29-year-old dressed in jeans and a sweatshirt that reads "#1 MOM." Her short, curly hair is mussed.

Nelson

C'mon, Marsha.... Get real!

Marsha

(irritated)

What are you talking about?

Nelson

If I'm anywhere near that bathroom when my mother gets home, she's gonna suspect something.

Marsha

Howzat?

Nelson

Well, Mom's got the Gilbert bladder, and I've got the Wadsworth bladder....

Marsha

Is this gonna be another one of your stories?

Nelson

So when the Gilbert bladder is due home--especially after a two-hour exam in graduate economics--the Wadsworth bladder is in big trouble if he's in the bathroom and not puking his guts out.

Marsha

I see. Now why's her bladder so special?

Nelson

Lydia Gilbert. An ancestor of ours.

(baring his teeth hideously)

She was a witch.

(normal expression)

Hanged in Connecticut in 1654. Beat the Salem witch trials by 38 years.

Marsha

What does that have to do with your mother?

Nelson

Well, before they hanged old Lydia, they dunked her....

Marsha

Yeah....

Nelson

And if she hadn't had such a great lung capacity, she'd have drowned. Then the guys who did it to her would have found her innocent and wouldn't have had to go to the trouble of hanging her....

Marsha

Uh huh....

Nelson

So ever since old Lydia croaked, her more suggestible descendents have been trying to drown themselves in their own fluids in order to demonstrate their innocence.

Marsha

So that nobody'll think to hang them?

Nelson

Yeah. Or shit on them....

There is a pause while MARSHA considers this.

Marsha

(scornfully)

Is that true?

Nelson

(shrugging his shoulders)

That's what Mom says.... It's a symbolic thing, I guess.

Marsha

That's as weird as some of the stuff Jess comes up with.

Nelson

Who's Jess?

Marsha

(absently)

My big brother.

(reanimated)

Oh, my God! Nelson!

Nelson

(startled)

What?!

Marsha

You just gotta keep your mom outta that bathroom 'til Jess gets here!

Nelson

Marsha, I can't! After that two-hour econ exam it's gonna be urgent!

Marsha

Look. Jess can handle everything. The bathroom and your Mom. Please! Just keep her outta there 'til he gets here.

Nelson

Does Jess do Harmon Melody impersonations?

Marsha

Hah? The singer Harmon Melody?

Nelson

Yeah. Singer, songwriter and hunk. The way Mom's been lately, Harmon's the only person who could handle her, and he's not available right now.

Marsha

Um,... why not?

Nelson

Last week Mom spilled a glass of wine into her tape player, and old Harmon can't sing to her 'til she gets it fixed.

Marsha

(haughty)

Well, Jess is two things that Harmon ain't. He's in Maintenance here, and... he was in Vietnam. He's one of them that came back with it

all together. He can handle anything.

Nelson

Marsha,... nobody came back from Vietnam with it all together.

Marsha

Jess did.

Nelson

Well, that may be, but Mom's not too crazy about the people in Maintenance here. She says they're a bunch of sadists.

Marsha

Why?

Nelson

The last guy who came out to unclog the kitchen sink told the guys in Housing we had a cat here. We had to send poor Muffin over to Grandma's house, and Mom cried for three days.

Marsha

That wasn't Jess's fault. He has a dozen cats on the farm, and he's crazy about them.

Nelson

Just don't count on Jess's being able to make a difference. Mom's had it rough since she left French six months ago, and this bathroom business is gonna be the last straw.

Marsha

(miffed)

I didn't think good writers used clichés.

Nelson

(ignoring her)

What do you care anyway? You and Mom haven't said two words to each

other since you moved in. It's gonna be...

(with emphasis)

...no skin off your nose if she's mad at you.

Marsha

(suddenly intense)

Nelson, can you keep a secret?

Nelson

Nope. I'm gonna be the kinda writer that spills 'is guts and everyone else's.

Marsha

I'm gonna tell you anyway.

Nelson

(resigned)

Go ahead....

Marsha

I'll keep it short. Jess is lonely, and I can't stand to see him that way. And I've watched your Mom coming in and out of the building, and she walks lonely.

Nelson

That's arthritis. It's in her feet and ankles. She blames that on Vulcan and Aroni.

Marsha

Who th' hell are they?

Nelson

Vulcan is blacksmith to the gods. The lame god. And Aroni's a Nigerian god who's lame because he has one foot in our world and the other foot in the next world. Makes it kinda hard to walk straight.

MARSHA glares at him.

(warming up)

You see,... Vulcan is the natural planetary ruler of Virgo, which just happens to be Mom's birth sign, and until Vulcan gets out from behind the sun so it can get discovered, Virgos are gonna tend to be just a bit testy, and somehow--force of gravity maybe--all that bitchiness ends up in their feet.

MARSHA begins to advance on NELSON.
He glances uneasily at her.

(quickly)

Now, the way I figure it,... if NASA could just get the funding for a little trip to the other side of the sun, then maybe we wouldn't have to wait for Vulcan to... to... um....

MARSHA leans over NELSON threateningly,
and he trails off to stare back
at her.

Uh,... maybe I won't try to explain the rest of that. Aroni can wait, I guess.

Satisfied, MARSHA resumes her pacing.

Marsha

Anyway,... I thought maybe I could just try to get Jess and your mom together, and then...

Nelson

(incredulous)

Is that why you wrecked our bathroom? Just so you could get them together?

Marsha

No!

Nelson

Was Jess in on this?

Marsha

No, Nelson! That's not the way I was gonna do it. I was just gonna... gonna...

SOUND of a car driving into the
parking lot accompanied by the
SQUEAKING of a loose fan belt.

Nelson

(ominously)
She's home....

The SOUND of the car's ignition
being turned off. The ENGINE DIES
reluctantly.

Marsha

Oh, God.....

A car door SLAMS shut.

Nelson

(worried)
Really! That car's gonna croak soon....

MARSHA and NELSON stare at the
outside door. MARSHA begins to
back slowly away from it. NELSON
cranes his neck to look out the
window.

(sotto voce)

Maybe you'd better go now, Marsha. She's going for the mail, so you've got time to lam outta here.

MARSHA abruptly reverses direction and hurries toward the door. She stops at the bathroom door and looks in.

Marsha

(shaking her head)

How could I have done all that?

Nelson

Talent, I'd say.

(grinning--MARSHA misses it)

I'll give you a call when it's safe to come down.

MARSHA turns to look at NELSON.

Marsha

Great idea! I can't stay long, though. Gregory's gonna call tonight, and I don't wanna miss him.

Nelson

Gregory?

Marsha

(importantly)

Yeah. He lived with me before the girls and I moved out here. He's studying in London now, but he'll be moving back in just before Christmas.

NELSON shakes his head in annoyance.

Anyway, I've already called Jess, and he oughta be here any minute.

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Nelson

I'll order pizza. Mom's never been able to eat that and be mad for long....

(to himself)

Too bad Dad never figured that out.

MARSHA scoots to the outside door
and opens it but turns to face
NELSON again.

Marsha

By the way,... after you call, could you go upstairs and watch the girls for me?

Nelson

Who's watching them now?

Marsha

Big Bird.

Nelson

Oh. Sure, I'll watch them for you, but...

Marsha

I'll pay you this time.

Nelson

Okay,... but Mom says you've probably been taking me, so for this it's gonna be double time.

Marsha

(wailing)

Nelson....

Nelson

Look, Marsha,... if you can afford cable TV, a brand new stereo VCR

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and all that tuition and the medical textbooks and instruments,...
then you can afford me.

Marsha

(pause, then grimly)
Okay, you got it.

MARSHA slips out the door.

Marsha (Offstage)

(surprised)
Oh! Hi, Em! How'd the exam go?

EMILY enters upstage center and
right, backing in to speak to MARSHA.
NELSON lays down his pen, rises
from the dining table, crosses
to the sofa and sits down next
to the telephone. He lifts the
receiver and begins to punch the
buttons.

Emily

Marsha, I don't even want to think about that exam until I've had
dinner and a nice,... hot... bath.

Marsha (Offstage)

(pause)
Oh, geez....
(brightly)
Well, bon appetit! See ya later,... maybe.

Emily

Yeah.

EMILY turns to enter the apartment,

pausing at the closet to shed her worn car coat and hang it up. She glances at NELSON as she closes the closet door.

Hi, guy!

Nelson

Hi, lady!

(into the phone)

Yes. I'd like to have a sixteen-inch pizza delivered....

Emily

Good boy.

NELSON grins at her and EMILY smiles faintly as she drags her bulging backpack into the kitchen. In her other hand she carries her car keys and a few pieces of mail. She limps noticeably. EMILY's hair is medium length and disheveled. She wears glasses that have ridden down on her nose, and as she walks into the kitchen, she pushes them up with the hand holding the mail and her keys. EMILY is a nice-but ordinary-looking 37-year-old dressed in jeans and a sweater. She looks tired as she hooks her backpack on the back of the chair NELSON has just vacated and tosses the mail and her keys onto the table on top of NELSON's books and papers.

Nelson

(into the phone)

Eighteen forty-three H University Apartments....

EMILY bends over to look under
the dining table.

(hand over phone)

No Muffin, Mom.

(into the phone)

Five five five... nineteen forty-nine....

EMILY straightens up to look at
NELSON.

Emily

Yeah, I know.... I just thought maybe she'd get tired of all of Grandma's
sneezing and sniffing and come back home....

Nelson

(into the phone)

Wadsworth and or Gilbert. Wadsworth's paying for it.

Emily

You're a good kid, kid.

Nelson

(hand over the phone)

Yeah, I know. Comes with the genes.

(pointedly)

Both sides.

EMILY frowns at him and wanders
over to her desk. She sits in
the chair facing downstage left
and stares moodily at the floor

in front of her. NELSON leans forward on the sofa and cranes his neck to look at the bathroom door. He strains next to stare at EMILY's back. Puzzled, he shakes his head and settles back into the sofa.

(into the phone)

Double cheese, double dough, mushrooms.... Yeah, and we'd like that half pineapple and half anchovies.... Yeah, that's for real. Pineapple for Gilbert and anchovies for Wadsworth. Just don't let them run together.... No, no ham or pepperoni. We don't eat mammals.

Emily

Not... unless they're economics professors.

Nelson

(into the phone)

Can you give me a price on that?

ALL LIGHTS GENTLY DOWN except for a DIM, HAZY LIGHT on EMILY. EMILY leans forward in her chair, staring intently at the space in front of her.

Emily

Harmon?

(Pause)

Harmon, I need you. Can you come now?

HARMON's MUSIC--"Killing Me Softly"--UP. There is a brief pause. HARMON's LIGHT UP--a soft, rosy glow. HARMON enters downstage left to stand

in his circle of light.

Harmon

(casually)

Hi, babe.

EMILY is abruptly alive, intense.

She smiles radiantly.

Emily

Hello, lover.

Harmon

I've missed you.

Emily

(ruefully)

I've been studying.

Harmon

How'd the exam go?

Emily

(sighing)

I think I may have failed it.

Harmon

Is that why you called?

Emily

Well,... yes. I'm worried. I need an MBA, and the MBA needs that economics course.

Harmon

Well, just take it over.

Emily

I'll have to.

Harmon

Well. What else can I do for you?

EMILY looks at him thoughtfully
for a moment.

Emily

What can you do? You're not really here, are you?

Harmon

Well, if you want to put it that way, all I really have of you is
four letters.

Emily

Harmon, tell me again. What was in those letters that made you finally
come when I called for you?

Harmon

(intent, leaning toward EMILY)

Those letters filled my life, Emily. You wrote that because of my
music... you hoped that if you had a soulmate he'd be like me. You
said it was because of my apparent depth,... compassion and capacity
for love. You're weren't just another crazy female fan who thought
she knew me. You knew you were only guessing.

Emily

And dreaming.

Harmon

Even my wife can't see me that way. She's like the others. She gets
the fame and the glitter and the money all mixed up with me. You've
never even seen me on stage, so you know just my music. Just me.

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Emily

I was afraid that seeing you, I'd start to cry.

Harmon

And again?... What have I done for you, babe?

Emily

If I hadn't dreamed you up, Harmon, I'd have never had the courage to leave Arnold.

Harmon

And my next three albums?

Emily

Believing they were for me helped get me through the next five years.

(anguished)

But Harmon, lately it's been hell! I've been so scared.

Harmon

I know, babe, but I'm here for you now.

Emily

I don't know that. You first came to me like this only two months ago in a fever.

Harmon

But I was still here when you came out of it, wasn't I?

Emily

Yes....

Harmon

So what's the big problem?

Emily

You're not really here.

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Harmon

Of course I am.

Emily

You're not here here.

Harmon

(lightly)

Beam me over, Scotty.

EMILY stands up abruptly.

Emily

Dammit, Harmon! I don't want to dream anymore!

Harmon

What is it that you want, babe?

Emily

I want you here.

(taking a deep breath)

I want you to hop into your jeep, drive to the airport in L.A., buy a one-way ticket to me,... and be here.

Harmon

I can't do that, Emily.

Emily

Why not?

Harmon

Look, babe,... we've got it better right now than most married couples.

Emily

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Harmon

We're not getting in each other's way.

Emily

I want you in my way.

Harmon

You didn't want that with Arnold....

Emily

When he got in the way it was because he talked too much about too little at all the wrong times. He never had a word to say about me or us or life or death or anything that really mattered.... Just business and his golf game.

Harmon

We already have that kind of getting in each other's way.

Emily

Harmon,... a week or so ago I had a dream about you. The nighttime kind of dream. There was a war going on outside the apartment, and bombs were falling, and the windows were taped so they wouldn't shatter. (smiling suddenly, briefly)

You were in my bedroom. It was a huge auditorium, and you were giving a concert. There were girls screaming and crying and trying to get to the edge of the stage so that you could bend over and kiss them,...

EMILY takes a yearning half-step
toward HARMON. He hastily steps
back half a pace. EMILY halts.

...and you were smiling and laughing and singing all the while. The bombs were still falling outside, and there was sniper fire, too, I think. Then... after the concert you stepped off the stage and walked slowly to where I was standing just inside my door.

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EMILY tries again to move toward
HARMON, but he steps back nervously.

By then you had on a doctor's scrub suit--green, I think--and you didn't have any shoes on. And by the time you reached me, I didn't have any shoes on, either. And then... you were smiling in front of me, just looking at me,...

EMILY smiles at him. HARMON smiles
back uncertainly.

...and the shooting and bombing had stopped, and everyone else had gone home, and it was very,... very quiet. And then you took both of my hands,...

EMILY reaches her hands out to
close them over a pair of invisible
hands.

...and very,... very lightly, you touched your feet to mine,...

EMILY looks down at her feet in
amazement and then back up again.

...and suddenly the pain was gone.

(pause, smiling dreamily)

And then you took me into your arms,... and we danced.

EMILY begins to dance slowly with
her invisible partner to the FAINT
STRAINS of "Killing Me Softly,"
a dreaming smile still on her face,
her eyes half-closed.

We danced very,... very close and for a long, long time.

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EMILY continues to dance.

And then...

The MUSIC FADES. EMILY slows her movements, stops dancing in one final slow-motion twirl and drops her hands.

And then when I realized that I was waking up, and that none of it was true, I started to cry.

EMILY drops into her chair and lowers her head, shaking it slowly and squeezing her eyes tightly shut.

It took me half an hour to stop crying, and then it was only 'cause Muffin was there to help me.

Harmon

That's a beautiful dream, babe. All except the very end of it, of course.

EMILY lifts her head to look at him.

Emily

(tremulously)

Anyway, when I thought about it later, I said to myself,... How nice. When Harmon finally really comes to me, my feet won't hurt anymore. I'll be free again.

Harmon

We could have that sort of thing from each other. We'd both be better.

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Emily

(anguished)

Could? Harmon, it's been five years since I wrote that first letter to you, and things are falling apart for me now. Muffin's gone,... I hate business, I miss my French, my mother's convincing me I'm going to fail miserably at whatever I try to do,... and I'm lonely as hell. Just talking to you and dreaming of you isn't making it anymore. I need you here. All of you.

Harmon

I can't come right now, babe. My family and the band need me, too,... and I'll be in the recording studio 'til spring, and then I've got a two-month tour lined up for next summer....

Emily

Well,... can't you stop in to see me when you're in the neighborhood? Can't I at least know that you're real?

Harmon

I can't promise that. There're just too many people watching me all the time.

Emily

Then what's the point in our having this if we're not willing to make it more?

Harmon

It's a lovely dream, babe. It keeps both of us going.

Emily

Not me,... not anymore.

Harmon

Look. I'll see what I can do. Okay?

EMILY stares at him for a long moment.

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Emily

(resigned)

All right.... I haven't anything else, so I might as well wait.

Harmon

(relieved)

Good girl. Look. Take care of yourself, and I'll see ya later.

HARMON turns to exit.

Emily

Yes. Later.

EMILY rises from her chair. HARMON exits downstage left, and his LIGHT FADES as STAGE LIGHTS COME UP.

Emily walks slowly into the kitchen area.

Nelson

(into the phone)

Ten ninety-five? You've raised your prices again?... All right. I'll see if I can get my mom to co-sign a loan.

He hangs up the phone as EMILY sits in the dining chair facing downstage center. She slouches far down on it, brooding, her legs extended beneath the table, her arms stretched out on top of it.

Emily

I've only got a dollar twenty-four, Nelson.

Nelson

That's okay. I just wanted to give her something to think about. If

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they're going to cater to college students they really ought not to be raising their prices all the time.

Emily

Well, prices are one thing you won't have to worry about. You'll be living at home.

Nelson

Now, Mom,... that's just what I'd like to discuss with you right now.

The PHONE RINGS. With a head-shaking gesture of annoyance, NELSON picks up the receiver.

(into the phone)

Hello?... Gesundheit, Grandma. You and Muffin getting along all right?...

EMILY rises quickly and limps over to NELSON.

Well, look at it this way. Maybe she's allergic to you, too. That's probably why she's under the bed all the time....

Emily

Oh, poor baby....

Nelson

Wanna talk to Mom?... Okay. Here she is.

NELSON hands the receiver to EMILY.
She remains standing.

Emily

(into the phone)

Hi, Mom.... Gesundheit. How's Muffin?... Tell me about Muffin first....

Look, Mom. Let me take her over to Arnold's house. He's offered already....

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Well, at least he wouldn't suffer as much as you are.... Nelson'd be there with her a lot.... All right, suffer then....

(sighing)

I probably failed it.... Oh, I expect to be out on the streets in about three months. I'm touched by your faith in me, Mother.... I'm not being sarcastic. After all, no faith at all is a kind of faith....

(laughs mirthlessly)

All right, I'll call back when I feel like being a bit more reasonable....

No, Mother, it's not that time of month!... Gesundheit.... Yeah.

Good-bye.

EMILY begins to replace the receiver as if she would like to slam it down but at the last moment places it gently in its cradle.

Like hell I'll call her back.

Nelson

Why do you let her get to you like that, Mom?

Emily

(grimly)

Thirty-seven years of habit and a case-hardened umbilical cord.

EMILY walks over to the dining table, unzips her backpack and begins to remove books and notebooks to slam down on top of NELSON's pile on the table.

Nelson

Another question.

Emily

(surly)

What?

Nelson

Why aren't you in the bathroom right now?

EMILY removes from her backpack an empty, partially crumpled potato chip package. She lifts it to show to NELSON.

Emily

(drily)

Induced water retention.

NELSON rises from the sofa and crosses quickly to EMILY. He takes the potato chip package from her.

Nelson

Here. Let me take that.

NELSON opens the door beneath the kitchen sink and stuffs the package into a wastebasket.

There. Now sit down, Mom. I want to discuss this college business with you.

Emily

Just a minute, Nelson. I want to get some aspirin.

EMILY heads for the bathroom.

Nelson

(panicky)

Can't it wait, Mom?

EMILY stops and looks back at NELSON.

Emily

(surprised)

I'll be just a minute.

Nelson

Oh, geez....

EMILY goes into the bathroom, and
NELSON lunges from the dining table
to the telephone. He lifts the
receiver and punches the buttons
rapidly.

Emily (Offstage)

OH... MY... GOD!

(pause)

SHIT!

Nelson

(into the phone)

Yeah, Marsha, come on down.... Yeah, it's safe. She's gonna be
reasonable.

NELSON replaces the receiver as
EMILY rushes limping out of the
bathroom and comes to a halt in
front of NELSON, facing him across
the coffee table.

Emily

(outraged)

Just what the hell happened in there?!

Nelson

Um,...

Emily

Did that moron upstairs have anything to do with it?

Nelson

Well,...

There is a KNOCK on the outside
door.

(relieved)

Door, Mom.

Emily

Shit!

EMILY limps angrily over to the
door and throws it open. NELSON
follows. JESSE, a nice-looking 41,
stands in the doorway wearing green
coveralls topped by a leather flight
jacket. When he speaks it is with
a trace of a French accent. EMILY
looks him up and down.

(coldly)

I didn't call for Maintenance. You must have the wrong apartment.

EMILY slams the door shut, but
NELSON pushes past her quickly

to open it again.

Nelson

Come on in, Jess.

JESSE enters easily.

Emily

Just what the hell do you think you're doing, Nelson? You know I don't want any maintenance people in this apartment.

Jesse

Excuse me, ma'am, but your upstairs neighbor called for me.

Emily

The upstairs moron, you mean. I'll take care of you in a minute.

EMILY turns on NELSON who backs into the living room with EMILY following closely. JESSE goes into the bathroom.

(to NELSON)

Now you can tell me what happened in that bathroom. Did the mental defective upstairs have anything to do with it?

Nelson

Mom, she didn't completely destroy the bathroom. Just the bathtub. And the immediate surroundings. And...

Emily

What... HAPPENED?!

Nelson

Well,... from the looks of it,... I'd guess that poor old Marsha just came home this afternoon from her anatomy exam totally exhausted,...

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started to draw herself a bath,... sat down on the sofa... and just... sorta drifted off.

JESSE rejoins EMILY and NELSON.

Jesse

It can be fixed, ma'am, but I'll have to wait until Monday for some help.

Emily

Monday?!

Jesse

(shaking his head)
I'm awfully sorry....

Emily

I need that bathtub right now!

Nelson

Mom, it isn't that big a deal. We'll just have to stink for a few days.

Emily

Nelson,... I just flunked an exam,... your grandmother's on my back,... my feet hurt like hell,... and I don't have Muffin here anymore. That bathtub was all I had left.

Jesse

Sounds like you've been having a rough time.

Emily

(proudly)
Not really. I'm handling it.

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Nelson

Mom, you made too much of that cat, anyway.

Emily

Nelson,... in the two years that I had her, she gave me more love and affection than your father was able to give me in fifteen years of marriage. And what's more important, she let me love her. She insisted on it.

Nelson

(miffed)

Well, maybe you just didn't push the right buttons with Dad.

Emily

He didn't have any buttons. He ran all by himself. He didn't need me.

(to JESSE, formally)

I apologize. You shouldn't have to be hearing all of this.

Jesse

(soberly)

That's all right. It's a familiar story.

There is a KNOCK on the outside door. EMILY rushes for it and throws it open. MARSHA stands in the doorway.

Emily

YOU!

MARSHA pushes past EMILY to face her in the foyer. EMILY slams the door shut.

Marsha

Look, Em,... I can explain.

MARSHA backs into the living area, eventually coming to a halt at downstage center. EMILY follows her into the room and stops to face her when she stops. MARSHA glances at JESSE.

(cheerfully)

Hi, Jess!

Jesse

Good afternoon, Marsha. You've been busy today, haven't you?

Marsha

(sighing)

Yeah. I had an anatomy exam, and it was a real...

Emily

You two know each other?

Marsha

(relieved)

Yeah. Em, I'd like you to meet my brother, Jesse LeBlanc. Jess, this is Emily Gilbert,...

(gesturing toward NELSON but not looking at him)

...and this is her son, Nelson Wadsworth.

JESSE reaches for EMILY's hand and takes it quickly.

Jesse

I'm pleased to meet you, Emily. Marsha's told me a lot about you.

EMILY stares at her hand joined with JESSE's. After half a moment she shakes her head slightly and withdraws her hand. She recovers her anger.

Emily

How could she have told you about me? She doesn't even know me.

Jesse

(to NELSON)

And I'm pleased to meet you, Nelson. Marsha tells me you do a lot of babysitting for her.

Nelson

Yeah. Mostly freebies.

Emily

Hey, look! I've got a broken bathroom, and you guys are getting up a party.

Nelson

Maybe that's just what we need, Mom.

Emily

Can it, Nelson!

(turning on MARSHA)

Now explain!

Marsha

It was an accident, Em....

Emily

(deliberately)

There's no such thing as an accident. Everything has a reason, and I want to know yours.

Marsha

Em, please. I was beat. I fell asleep on the sofa, and the water overflowed. It just must've soaked through my floor.

Emily

And now your bathtub is dangling over mine... which is full of plaster! You had to have done that before for that ceiling to have gotten that crumbly. Have you?

Marsha

(to NELSON)

Aren't you going upstairs?

Nelson

Sesame Street still on?

Marsha

Yeah....

Nelson

The kids'll keep. I wanna watch this.

(proudly)

I'm betting on Mom.

Emily

(to MARSHA)

Well, have you?

Marsha

Uh,... yeah. When we first moved in it overflowed once... or twice.

Uh, maybe three.... I was having kind of a rough time....

Emily

You've been having a rough time? For the last six months I've been listening to you drop marbles on my ceiling every night, and I've lost sleep, and I've had bronchitis twice, and the last time my

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temperature shot up to almost a hundred-and-five degrees,...

Marsha

Geez, that coulda killed you.

Emily

...and that's not to mention the boom boom boom I get from your stereo all the time!

Marsha

Marbles?

Emily

Every goddamned night.

Marsha

Oh, that's craps.

Emily

What?!

Marsha

Craps. The girls and I play every night before story time.

Emily

You're playing craps with two little girls?

Marsha

Yeah. Gregory taught us.

Emily

Who the hell's Gregory?

Marsha

(grinning)

My boyfriend. He's in London now, but he'll be moving back in with

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us just before Christmas.

Emily

You mean I'm going to have to put up with another one of you?

Marsha

Well, yeah....

Emily

Shit!

(turning on JESSE)

Now just what the hell is Marsha's brother doing here? Are you her back-up demolition expert?

Jesse

(calm, amused)

No,... my dear sister wrecks things and I fix them back up again.

Emily

Well, I don't want any university maintenance people in this apartment. You're all a bunch of sadists, and I'm afraid you're just going to have to leave.

Marsha

How can you say that, Em? Jess didn't squeal on poor Muffin.

Jesse

Who did?

Emily

(outraged)

One of you sons-... you... you....

JESSE holds EMILY's gaze, and she falters, confused and dazed. With a resolute shake of her head,

she recovers.

One of you... you guys in Maintenance told Housing about her, and they made me get rid of her.

Jesse

(concerned)

You didn't have to have her...

Nelson

(quickly)

She's at Grandma's which is almost as bad.

Jesse

I'm awfully sorry about poor Muffin, Emily....

Nelson

Mom, you did know when we moved in here that they didn't allow...

Emily

(fiercely)

Nelson, mon petit fils bruyant, ferme la bouche!

JESSE slowly steps back a pace and
smiles broadly at EMILY.

Nelson

Yo, Mom. Sorry.

Emily

(to JESSE)

What are you grinning about?

Jesse

(with a Gallic shrug)

Rien, vraiment. Je suis heureux simplement de trouver une autre personne

qui parle français. La plupart des Américains parlent seulement anglais.

EMILY is stunned, momentarily deflated.

Emily

Vous parlez français.

Jesse

(soberly)

Oui, madame. Je parle français.

Emily

But how...?

Marsha

Geez, Em.... He was born in France.

Jesse

La Bretagne.

Emily

Brittany?!

Jesse

Have you been there?

Emily

Only in imagination.

EMILY glances briefly at HARMON's poster over her desk. She recovers her anger and turns on MARSHA again.

In much the way that I'm going to have to soak my feet tonight.

Marsha

Geez, Em.... I said I was sorry.

Nelson

Yeah, she did. I heard her.

Emily

I've had enough! Everybody... OUT!

Nelson

I live here!

Emily

Out of my sight! You can manage that, can't you?

Nelson

Oh, yeah.... I suppose I could do that.

Jesse

(to EMILY)

Vous avez besoin d'être seule?

EMILY looks at JESSE and deflates again. She puts her hand to her forehead and pushes her hair back with her fingers.

Emily

(heavily)

Yes,... I need to be alone.

EMILY turns to go to her room at downstage right.

Jesse

La vie est difficile quelquefois, n'est-ce pas?

EMILY stops and turns to face JESSE.

Emily

(tremulous)

Yes, it is... difficult sometimes.

EMILY turns away again toward her room.

Jesse

Emilie,...

EMILY stops.

...je voudrais revenir.

EMILY turns slowly to consider JESSE silently for a moment. Then she smiles faintly and nods.

Emily

Si vous voulez.

Jesse

(smiling)

Merci.

EMILY turns and walks slowly to her bedroom door. JESSE watches as she opens it, enters the room and closes her door. He continues to watch the closed door.

Marsha

Well! I've gotta leave anyway if I'm gonna catch Gregory's call.

NELSON and MARSHA turn to leave, he to his room, she toward the outside door. JESSE, wresting his gaze from EMILY's door, halts MARSHA with a hand on her shoulder.

Jesse

Marsha, please be careful with Gregory. You've already had trouble with one alcoholic....

Marsha

Look, Jess, I can handle it. He's already cut back quite a bit.... Besides, Gregory drinks only beer. My dear ex-husband was a Scotch man. It's totally different.

Jesse

(doubtful)

Just be careful, okay?

JESSE and MARSHA begin to move toward the outside door. NELSON has reached his bedroom door but pauses to face JESSE and MARSHA as they approach. He holds out his hand, palm up.

Nelson

You owe me, Marsha.

Marsha

For what?

Nelson

Babysitting. You know,... Sesame Street?

(hopefully)

Double time?

Marsha

(distracted)

Uh, yeah. I'll pay ya later. My wallet's upstairs.

NELSON drops his hand and shrugs
his shoulders in defeat. He enters
his room, closing the door quietly
behind him.

(to JESSE)

I don't need to be careful, brother dear. I trust him.

Jesse

(resigned)

All right....

(pause)

And why didn't you tell me that Emily speaks French?

Marsha

I dunno. Just slipped my mind, I guess. What were you guys talking
about anyway?

Jesse

That, dear little sister, is none of your business.

Marsha

Well, geez....

Jesse

And Marsha,... I don't need to meet women so badly that you have to
wreck their bathrooms to get me within striking range.

MARSHA and JESSE pause in their
progress toward the door to face
one another.

Marsha

But I wasn't gonna do it that way. I was just gonna come down with a bottle of wine or something after Gregory called to celebrate the end of exams with her and then loosen up a few things in her bathroom when I got the chance.

Jesse

And just how were you going to get a wrench in here without her noticing something? She really seems pretty bright.

Marsha

I dunno.... I hadn't thought of that.

Jesse

(sighing)

As usual.

MARSHA and JESSE reach the door,
and JESSE turns to look thoughtfully
in the direction of EMILY's bedroom.
He then turns slowly, his gaze finally
settling on HARMON's empty station
at downstage left. MARSHA watches
him.

There's something... going on here....

Marsha

Just your imagination, Jess. As usual.

Jesse

I don't know....

JESSE shakes his head, puzzled,
then places a hand on MARSHA's shoulder
as he opens the door with the other.

Let's go. I've got to get home to feed the cats and the chickens, but I can stop by to see the girls before I leave.

MARSHA and JESSE exit through the doorway.

Marsha (Offstage)

Great! They'll love to see you.

JESSE reaches in to close the door. After a moment, EMILY enters warily, downstage right, wearing a worn bathrobe and fluffy slippers. Her hair is still mussed. She looks around carefully and then pulls out a dining chair, placing it so that it faces downstage right. She sits down on it, but the PHONE RINGS, and she rises again quickly, almost guiltily. She limps over to the phone, picks up the receiver and sits down on the sofa, propping her feet up on the coffee table.

Emily

(into the phone)

Hello?... Oh. Hi, Mom.... What can I do about it? I'm pretty sure I flunked the damned thing.... I couldn't have. I was making myself sick as it was.... What you mean is that I'll be thankful for it if it doesn't kill me first.... Well, then I'll just be this town's only bilingual bag lady!... Look, Mom,... there is a chance that I'll make it, isn't there? Why do you have to be so negative?...

Outraged, EMILY lifts her feet from the coffee table and drops them to the floor.

Realistic?!... You're a big help!... No, I don't want to go out for coffee tonight. I'm gonna crash for awhile.... All right, dinner tomorrow.... Six.... Yeah. Bye.

EMILY holds the phone's receiver a few inches above its cradle and lets it drop.

(near tears)
Shit!

EMILY lifts herself heavily from the sofa and limps slowly over to the chair she has pulled out. She sits down with her elbows on her knees and her face in her hands. ALL STAGE LIGHTS DOWN except for a FAINT, HAZY LIGHT on EMILY.

(muffled)
Harmon?

Pause, then EMILY lifts her head. She is crying.

Harmon? Please come now....

HARMON's LIGHT--slightly paler than before--AND MUSIC UP. HARMON enters and stands with his hands on his hips and his legs apart, looking down on EMILY.

Harmon

Hi, babe. How's it going?

Emily

How does it look?

HARMON peers at EMILY.

Harmon

Not good, I'd say. What's the problem now?

Emily

Harmon, I just can't take anymore, and I need you to hold me and tell me that I can.

Harmon

Ah, babe.... You know that I would if I could....

Emily

No, I don't.

Harmon

Look. Tell me what the problem is. Maybe I can help.

Emily

All right.... Marsha broke my bathtub, and Jesse can't fix it 'til Monday. Can you rub my feet so that I can sleep tonight?

Harmon

Who's Jesse?

EMILY stares at him for a moment.

Emily

(woodenly)

Maintenance. Marsha's big brother.

Harmon

How big?

EMILY looks startled at first but
then realizes his meaning.

Emily

Fortyish.

Harmon

I was forty-one when you first wrote me.
(ruefully)
An aging rock star.

Emily

Maturing, I'd say.

Harmon

You say his name is Jesse?

Emily

Jesse LeBlanc.

Harmon

French?

Emily

Yeah.
(in wonder)
Brittany, of all places.

Harmon

You've always wanted to go there.

Emily

Yes....

Harmon

Maybe someday....

Emily

(hopefully)
Someday what?

Harmon

(shaking his head)
Nothing....

Emily

(despairing)
You won't be coming, will you?

Harmon

What point is there? We couldn't have it better than this.

Emily

How do you know?

Harmon

It's such a risk, Emily.

Emily

Are you afraid of losing your muse?

Harmon

You make it sound as if I'm using you.

Emily

Well?

Harmon

I can't believe that you'd believe that!

Emily

What else am I to believe? Your most successful songs are about wanting but not being able to have. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

Harmon

That's just it. Having isn't usually as great as wanting.

Emily

So you want to want me, but you don't want to have me.

Harmon

I don't know, babe. This is the first I've thought of it. The dream has been so great that I haven't considered trying to make it real.

Emily

On ne peut pas passer son temps à rêver.

Harmon

What?

Emily

Harmon, you can't dream all the time. Finally you have to do something.

Harmon

I just don't know, Emily.

Emily

Harmon, I think... I think the reason that things are all wrong for me right now is that I'm dreaming the wrong dreams for me. I have to dream dreams that I can make real, and I want you to be that kind of dream.

Harmon

And if I can't be?

Emily

Then either I leave you... or I go insane. If I'm not already.

Harmon

Well, it's said that if you think you're going mad, you're probably not.

Emily

Harmon! Thinking I'm going mad is bad enough!

Harmon

What's wrong with it? Everyone's mad on at least one point, and I can be yours.

Emily

Harmon, I've had hints over the years from books and a few friends that the world can be a pretty wonderful place to live in, and now I think I want it. The dreams by themselves just aren't enough anymore. I have to make them real or let them die.

Harmon

The world is a lot of hard work, Emily. And sometimes it hurts like hell.

Emily

I want it, though. With you.

Harmon

I don't know, babe.... This... this is all so new. I just don't see how.... I guess I'm going to have to think about it.

Emily

(tremulously)

Please don't think for too long, Harmon. I don't know how much longer I can wait.

Harmon

(tenderly)

I can't lose you, Emily. You know that, don't you?

EMILY lowers her head and squeezes her eyes shut. She shakes her head in despair.

Emily

(near tears)

And I don't want to lose you, Harmon,...

EMILY lifts her head to look at
him.

...but pretty soon something's going to have to give, and it might
have to be you.

LIGHTS DOWN.

LIGHTS UP. The venetian blinds have been lowered, and on top of NELSON and EMILY's books and papers rests an open pizza box. NELSON sits at the table facing downstage center. In one hand he holds a slice of pizza and in the other a can of Coke from which he sips between bites of pizza. EMILY sits on the countertop facing downstage right, her feet resting in the sink. Her slippers are on the floor in front of the sink, and on the countertop opposite her is a small hand towel.

Nelson

Well, I think this is gonna be the last one for me. Sure you don't want another one, Mom?

EMILY is silent, thinking.

Mom?

Emily

Huh?

Nelson

Want another piece? You've had only one.

Emily

Save the rest. I'll have it for breakfast tomorrow.

Nelson

Mom?

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Emily

Yeah?

Nelson

Can I talk to you about something?

EMILY looks at him for the first
time.

Emily

(sighing)
Go ahead....

NELSON pushes his chair back and
stands up. He begins to pace,
pausing at the sink when he speaks
to EMILY.

Nelson

Mom, I want to go to San Francisco.

Emily

This summer? To see Aunt Mary?

Nelson

Well, yeah....

Emily

How long do you want to stay?

Nelson

Oh, I'd say that four years'd be enough.

Emily

You're not going to school in California.

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Nelson

And just why not?

Emily

We can't afford it.

Nelson

I can work, Mom. I've been doing janitor work for Dad since I was fourteen.

Emily

(fiercely)

You are not... I repeat, NOT going to go through the hell I've been through. I've saved just enough money over the years to get you through four years here without borrowing, and here is where you're going to have to go.

Nelson

But Mom....

Emily

Period.

Nelson

Well, I'll just ask Dad.

Emily

Nelson, your father spends all of his money on cars, VCR's and trips to Las Vegas, and he's mortgaged to the hilt. He has nothing to spare.

Nelson

(trying another tack)

But Mom,... there's nothing to write about here.

Emily

Sure there is. There are nearly quarter of a million people in this town alone.

Nelson

But Mom, this is the Midwest. They're all dead.

Emily

Thanks.

Nelson

Well, dammit, all winter long we're shut up in our little boxes, and once warm weather finally gets here, it takes us 'til September to thaw out. By then we're all ready to be boxed up again. Nobody gets to know anybody here. Look at you and Marsha.

Emily

You've got a point there,... and so has she.

Nelson

See? Can I go? Aunt Mary can look after me, if that's what you're worried about.

Emily

And the first weekend you're there, she'll hustle you on up to Lake Tahoe for blackjack and strawberry daiquiris. She's been wanting to do that since the day you were born.

Nelson

I thought you liked Aunt Mary.

Emily

I love her. She was a gift to the family.

Nelson

What's the problem, then?

Emily

I just don't want you to have to worry about money.

(softening)

And Nelson,... I don't want to lose you just yet.

NELSON hugs EMILY.

Nelson

Aw, Mom.... You won't lose me.

EMILY puts an arm around NELSON.

Emily

Yes, I will. You're staying here.

NELSON abruptly pulls away from
EMILY.

Nelson

(angry)

Dad was right about you!

Emily

How was he right about me?

Nelson

He said you were frigid.

There is a long pause while EMILY
stares at NELSON. NELSON looks
down at his feet and shifts them
uneasily.

Emily

You can just tell that precious father of yours, Nelson, that there's
no such thing as a frigid woman. Only... incompetent men.

NELSON stares back at EMILY.

Nelson

Shit!

NELSON stomps to his bedroom door,
opens it, enters the room and slams
the door shut.

Emily

Yeah,... shit!

There is a KNOCK on the outside
door.

Nelson! Get that, will you?

NELSON, glowering, stomps out of
his room and flings open the door.
JESSE stands quietly in the doorway.

Nelson

(surprised)

Well, hello, Jesse. Come on in.

(to EMILY)

Mom, Jesse's here.

Emily

I hear you, Nelson....

JESSE enters less easily than before.
He walks slowly toward EMILY, coming
to a halt before the sink. NELSON
watches them curiously for a moment,
then re-enters his room.

Jesse

Hello, Emily.

Emily

(blank)

Hello, Jesse.

Jesse

Look. I came to apologize.

Emily

What for? You didn't do anything.

Jesse

That's just it. My sister did something, and I'm responsible.

Emily

I don't understand.

Jesse

(taking a deep breath)

Well,... when Marsha was very young,... after our parents were killed...
and our uncle died,... I left her alone with our aunt too much of
the time....

Emily

You lived with your aunt?

Jesse

Yes. On the farm. She died just a few years ago. Aunt Lydia...
didn't like people. Or at least she didn't think of them very often.
I guess she rubbed off a bit on Marsha.

Emily

(gently)

How were your parents killed, Jesse?

JESSE turns and walks away from
EMILY to stand at downstage left

in front of EMILY's desk. He stares at the posters as he speaks.

Jesse

My mother and father were taking their first vacation alone together after Marsha was born,... and they were killed by a drunk driver. The other car jumped the median, became airborne and came down right on top of them.

Emily

Oh, no! How old were you?

Jesse

Thirteen. Then a year later Uncle Max was helping a neighbor dig an old tree stump out of the center of his bean field when he had a heart attack. He was only 35.

Emily

So young....

Jesse

Aunt Lydia considered herself liberated.

Emily

That's awful!

JESSE turns to face EMILY.

Jesse

They didn't get along. She didn't decide until after their marriage that she didn't like the French.

(taking a deep breath)

That's why I feel responsible for your bathroom. I left Marsha alone with Aunt Lydia all of the time because I couldn't stand to be around her, and I'm sorry.

EMILY reaches for her towel and lifts her feet out of the sink. Sitting on the edge of the countertop, she begins to dry them. She doesn't look at JESSE.

Emily

Don't worry about it, Jesse. I still don't hold you responsible.

JESSE turns casually to look at HARMON's station by the desk. He takes a tentative step toward the space, stops, shakes his head in bewilderment and then turns to look again at EMILY's posters. Finally, he turns and walks slowly toward her.

Jesse

Ainsi donc, vous n'avez jamais visité la France?

EMILY looks up and smiles as JESSE approaches her.

Emily

Non, jamais. Je n'ai jamais eu assez d'argent,...

EMILY extends her right hand, palm up, and rubs her thumb against her first two or three fingers.

...et peut être je n'en aurai jamais assez.

EMILY sets aside the towel.

Jesse

C'est dommage.

Emily

(ruefully)

Yes, it is too bad. And especially I've wanted to visit Brittany.

Jesse

I can understand that!

(passionately)

It's a wild, beautiful, mysterious place. One would never imagine that la Paris et la Bretagne belong to the same country.

EMILY hops off the countertop to stand before JESSE.

Emily

(suddenly shy)

Would you... Would you like a glass of wine?

Jesse

(smiling broadly)

I would love a glass of wine. Merci.

EMILY takes two glasses down from over the sink and sets them on the countertop. She opens the refrigerator, removes a bottle of wine, unscrews the cap and pours the wine into the glasses. She hands one to JESSE and takes the other for herself.

Emily

I hope you don't mind domestic.

Jesse

I think California wines are as good as the French.

Emily

Well,... this one comes from Paw Paw, Michigan.

JESSE regards his glass thoughtfully.

Jesse

Well, I've heard a lot of good things about Michigan wines....

Emily

Um,... Brittany's supposed to be just full of ghosts, too, isn't it?

Jesse

Yes, indeed. The ghosts of Merlin and the fairy Vivianne,... the dead of many, many wars,... and no doubt the daughter of the King of Ys.

JESSE takes a sip of wine and nods approvingly to EMILY. EMILY smiles in relief.

Emily

Who was she?

EMILY and JESSE move unconsciously into the living area, headed for the sofa. EMILY is not limping as badly as before.

Jesse

Well, Ys was a legendary sixth century town on the coast of Brittany that was protected from the sea by a breakwater. Now the king of the place had a daughter who... really liked men. She liked them a lot. She took many, many lovers, and when she tired of them, she

drowned them in the Bay of Douarnenez.

EMILY sits down at the far end of the sofa next to the telephone, motioning JESSE to sit at the other end. He sits closer to the center of the sofa than she had indicated and, in brief panic, she tries to crawl back into herself; but then she struggles visibly to relax.

Emily

Some of that princess must have ended up in Marsha.

Jesse

(grinning)

I've thought of that. Anyway, one day the princess met a handsome young man who promised to return her love on the condition that she get for him the keys to the gate of the seawall that protected the town. Well, she was pretty turned-on by the guy, so she stole the keys to the breakwater from her father and gave them to her new lover who turned out to be none other... than the Devil himself. Et toute de suite, he opened the gate, the waters rushed in, and everyone in the town drowned.

Emily

Might the lady have been napping when all of this happened?

Jesse

(grinning)

Perhaps she too had just taken an anatomy exam.

Emily

(wickedly)

Either that,... or it was the ultimate wet dream.

EMILY opens her eyes wide in shock and worry over her words, but JESSE grins and laughs delightedly, and EMILY joins him in relief. JESSE reaches out to touch her lightly, briefly on the shoulder, and EMILY leans into his touch. She seems faintly surprised at herself.

(sobering)

Marsha isn't really a bad sort, though, is she?

Jesse

No,... just thoughtless sometimes. I guess we all are on occasion.

Emily

She's not really French, either, is she?

Jesse

Nope. All-American.

Emily

Could that be part of the problem?

Jesse

Oh, no! If anything, Americans are more generous with their neighbors than the French. I just didn't take better care of her.

Emily

(earnestly)

I still don't think you're responsible for that, Jesse. People will be pretty much who they are whether they get any help or not.

Jesse

Which isn't to say we shouldn't help where we can....

Emily

Of course not! Just please don't worry about Marsha, Jesse. She's a survivor. She'll do all right.

Jesse

You're a survivor, too, aren't you, Emily?

Emily

Only in the sense that I have not yet croaked.

Jesse

Don't underestimate a talent for staying alive.

Emily

I don't.

(wryly)

It helps, though, to have it accompanied by sanity.

Jesse

(puzzled)

Sanity?

EMILY looks stricken. The PHONE RINGS. Gratefully, she picks up the receiver.

Emily

(into the phone)

Hello?... Jesse? Yes, he's here.... Just a minute.

EMILY hands the receiver to JESSE.

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Um... I

(to JESSE)

It's Marsha. I think something's wrong.

Jesse

(into the phone)

Hello, Marsha?... Hold on now, sweetheart. What's wrong?... Slow down, Marsha.... Look. I'll come up. Okay?... Yes. I'll be right up. Just hang on. See you....

JESSE hands the receiver back to
EMILY who replaces it. JESSE rises.

I've got to run upstairs. Marsha has a problem.

Emily

Not serious, I hope.

Jesse

Hard to tell, but I think it's Gregory.

EMILY stands up, and JESSE heads
rapidly for the door.

Emily

Will you be coming back?

JESSE stops at the door and turns
to face EMILY.

Jesse

(smiling)

Yes, if you'd like me to. I'd like to hear what you meant by "sanity."

Emily

(uncomfortable)

Um,... I guess I didn't really mean anything.

EMILY shrugs her shoulders and attempts a smile. JESSE just looks at her soberly for a moment. Then he smiles.

Jesse

All right. If you say so....

Emily

I was just talking off the top of my head.

Jesse

We'll talk some more later.

Emily

Uh, yes. Later.

Jesse

A bientôt.

Emily

Oui. A bientôt.

JESSE opens the door and exits.
EMILY stares at the closed door for a moment.

Oh,... geez.... Now I'm going to have to make something up.

EMILY turns and hurries over to her desk. She sits down quickly in her chair facing HARMON's station.

Emily

Harmon,... where are you? Please come.

(pause)

Harmon? Please!

ALL STAGE LIGHTS DOWN, HARMON'S
MUSIC AND LIGHT UP, slightly fainter
and paler than before. HARMON
enters.

Thank God you're here, Harmon!

Harmon

What's the problem, babe? Feeling worse?

Emily

Harmon, I'm losing it!

Harmon

(puzzled)

Losing what?

Emily

My mind! What else have I got to lose?

Harmon

What brought all this on?

Emily

Harmon, I almost... I almost told someone about you tonight.

Harmon

So?

(pause)

Who did you almost tell?

Emily

Just... somebody.

Harmon

Jesse?

Emily

Well,... yeah. Jesse.

Harmon

He came back?

Emily

I told him he could.

Harmon

I didn't think he was supposed to be able to fix that bathtub 'til Monday.

Emily

He can't. He just came back to apologize for Marsha. And then we talked about Brittany and ghosts and the daughter of the King of Ys and the Devil and the keys to the gate to the sea and then about Marsha again and then surviving and then sanity,... and I almost told him about you.

Harmon

Well, maybe you'd better.

Emily

NO! I don't want him to think I'm crazy!

Harmon

Why not? What does it matter what he thinks of you?

Emily

Harmon, he's good people. That's enough.

Harmon

Emily, be careful.... Remember Arnold? How cold it was? You said yourself you'd never find anything warmer in that part of the country. Remember?

Emily

You were raised in Brooklyn, for God's sake!

Harmon

My music warmed me up.

Emily

I've felt only the cold, hard plastic of you, Harmon. I've needed the warmth of your touch, and I haven't been getting it.

Harmon

And you think you can get it from this Jesse character?

Emily

(smiling suddenly)

Harmon, are you jealous?

Harmon

You're mine, babe, and he can't have you.

EMILY stares at him for a moment.

Emily

I think I'm mine first, though, Harmon.

(sighing)

Don't worry,... lover. He only came back to apologize for Marsha. Besides, he's probably happily married.

Harmon

I hadn't thought of that.

Emily

See? Nothing to worry about.

(intently)

I do need you here, though, Harmon. Every time I talk to you lately I wonder if I'm going to return to the apartment or to a locked ward.

Harmon

(worried)

I'll... I'll see what I can do, Emily.

Emily

I don't... think I can stand to hear that anymore.

Harmon

Don't push me, Emily.... I want to be with you, but the obstacles...

Emily

...are surmountable. Just give it a try, please, Harmon?

Harmon

All right.... But in my time.

EMILY stares at HARMON for a moment
and then slumps.

Emily

I'm sorry.... I guess I can't really ask for anything more, can I?

HARMON is silent. EMILY rises
from her chair.

I'll see you later,... Harmon.

Harmon

Yes. Later.

EMILY turns from him.

(tenderly)

Sleep tight, babe.

EMILY just squeezes her eyes shut briefly and shakes her head as she walks away from him. ALL STAGE LIGHTS UP, HARMON's LIGHT DOWN more slowly than usual. HARMON stands watching EMILY as she walks into the kitchen area. Only when his light has faded completely, does he turn slowly and exit. EMILY crosses to the dining table, closes the pizza box and turns to put it into the refrigerator. There is a KNOCK on the outside door.

Emily

Nelson, get that, will you?

EMILY opens the refrigerator door, slides the pizza box in and closes it.

Nelson?

(pause, listening)

All right, stay mad.

EMILY, her limp returned, goes to the door and opens it. MARSHA bursts through the doorway, wraps her arms around EMILY's neck, almost bowling her over, and buries her face in EMILY's shoulder. JESSE

follows carrying a bottle of wine.

Marsha

(sobbing)

Oh, Em! He's not coming back!

EMILY puts an awkward, reluctant arm around MARSHA's shoulder, leads her into the kitchen and sits her down at the dining table facing downstage right. As she does this, she looks back at JESSE. He shrugs his shoulders and follows EMILY and MARSHA into the kitchen. He sets the wine bottle on the table.

Emily

(to MARSHA)

Now. Tell me what the problem is.

EMILY sits down at the table facing downstage center, and JESSE remains standing between and slightly behind them.

Marsha

He's not coming back!

Emily

You said that already. Get to the next part.

Marsha

(sniffling)

I can't tell you 'til Jess leaves.

Jesse

She says... that only another woman would understand.

EMILY looks back at JESSE.

Emily

Do you believe that?

Jesse

No, but since she does, that's what she knows.

EMILY looks at JESSE for a moment
and then returns to MARSHA. She
puts her arm around her shoulder.
NELSON quietly emerges from his
room and stands in the doorway.

Emily

Do you really want Jesse to leave, Marsha?

Marsha

(sniffing)

Yeah. Make him pour us some wine first.

JESSE smiles and shakes his head.

Jesse

That really won't help, Marsha.

Marsha

Yeah, it will.

JESSE shrugs his shoulders and
turns toward the kitchen cabinets.
He takes two wine glasses down
from over the sink, sets them on

the table, lifts the wine bottle,
unscrews the cap and pours.

(mournfully)

Sorry, Em. I can afford only the kind with the screw-on kind of cap.

Emily

That's all right....

Marsha

Actually, it's kind of appropriate.

EMILY looks at her hard. Then
she looks back at JESSE.

Emily

Maybe you had better leave, Jesse.

(to NELSON)

And Nelson, you can go up to watch the girls.

NELSON walks into the kitchen area.

Nelson

Aw, Mom,... I was gonna go over to Ralph's tonight. We were gonna
read some Chaucer together.

Emily

Chaucer?!

Nelson

Yeah. "The Miller's Tale" and "The Nun's Priest's Tale." They won't
let us read it in school.

Emily

Upstairs, Nelson, and leave the Chaucer here.

Jesse

Come on, Nelson. I'll go with you.

JESSE and NELSON head for the outside door, NELSON stopping at the closet for his jacket. They exit.

Emily

Now what?

MARSHA picks up her wine glass and drains it.

Marsha

Tha's what. Can you do that?

EMILY eyes her wine glass for a moment.

Emily

Sure. Why not?

EMILY hoists her glass, drains it and then refills both glasses.

Now. Tell me what the problem is.

Marsha

(remembering, breaking down again)

Oh, Em! They were... They were in bed!

MARSHA drinks half of the wine in her glass.

Emily

Uh huh. Who were in bed?

Marsha

When the call came through, dear Gregory was drunk and in bed with some bimbo. A British bimbo.

Emily

Oh, yeah?

Marsha

Yeah. Some British bimbo who'd never had kids, he said.

MARSHA leans over to whisper.

He described her to me in minute... detail.

Emily

Well, for God's sake, why didn't you hang up?

Marsha

I wanted to find out what color her eyes were.

Emily

What color were they?

Marsha

He didn' know. Said it was too dark to tell.

Emily

And you want that bozo to come back?

Marsha

(pitifully)

He was all I had.

EMILY stares for a moment in the direction of HARMON's station by her desk. She returns to MARSHA.

Emily

Marsha, how long did you know dear Gregory before he moved in with you?

Marsha

Three weeks.

Emily

(astonished)

Three weeks?

Marsha

Well, he told me he was leaving for London soon and that who knows, he could get hit by one of those big double-decker buses and never see me again. I jus' couldn't let him leave without giving him...

Emily

Marsha,... that line was first used in the Peloponnesian War in 428 B.C. by Plato's father. His mother was dumb enough to fall for it, and that's why Plato never liked women much.

Marsha

The Pel'ponnesian War had buses?

EMILY turns her head in disgust
and sloshes down half the wine
in her glass.

Men're creeps!

Emily

For the mos' part, Marsha dear, but maybe you jus' take too many risks.

Marsha

Well, maybe you don't take enough risks.

Emily

What the hell're you talking about? I'm here, aren't I?

Marsha

Yeah, but you don' see anybody. You jus' come in and out of the building with that book bag of yours an' don' go anywhere else.

EMILY glances at the HARMON the
Poet poster over her desk.

Emily

I see plenty of...

(pause, staring hard at HARMON now)

...of people.

(back to MARSHA)

An' I go plenty of places. Nelson and I go to the movies a lot, and all the time I'm having dinner with my... with my... my moth-er.

Marsha

It doesn' count... unless you gotta worry about whether or not they're gonna wanna kiss you good-night.

EMILY stares at MARSHA for a moment
and then slumps.

Emily

Yeah.

EMILY folds her arms on the table
in front of her and buries her
head in them. MARSHA refills their
glasses. EMILY raises her head
to look at her.

(mournfully)

You're right, Marsha, ole buddy. It doesn' count if they can't touch

you and hold you and make you feel really, really good and one helluva lot less lonesome.

EMILY buries her head again, and
MARSHA drapes an arm around her
shoulders.

Marsha

There, there, Emmy dear. We'll jus' see if we can't find you someone.
An' maybe he'll have a frien' for me.

EMILY raises her head.

Emily

Marsha, ole buddy, lemme ask you a hyp... hypah... hyp'thetical question.

Marsha

Think ya can?

Emily

I'll use short words.

Marsha

Okay, shoot.

Emily

Now jus' suppose that all of a sudden there weren't any men anywhere...
anymore.

Marsha

(shocked)

No men?!

Emily

No men. Just imagine that a really, really strange virus eckscapes
from one of those genetic engineering lab'ratories,...

Marsha

Yeah....

Emily

...and just imagine that it's a really, really nasty virus that attacks only human beings that carry those macho little "Y" genes,...

Marsha

(trying to follow)

Uh huh....

Emily

...an' just imagine that it's a really, really fast son-of-a-... son-of-a-gun and wipes out all the guys in a matter of hours.

Marsha

Jus' like that?

Emily

Jus' like that. What... would you do?

Marsha

Well, first we'd have to get those suckers buried.

Emily

After that.

Marsha

Geez, Em,... I'm a card-carrying het'rosexual. No men isn't in the realm of poss'bility for me.

Emily

Well, I'll tell ya what I'd do.

Marsha

Start using the men's room?

Emily

I'd make one up.

Marsha

Jus' one?

Emily

S'all I need. I'd make him up and maybe... jus' maybe, if I believed hard enough, he'd get to be real.

Marsha

You can't do that!

Emily

Well, hell! I jus' wasted two-and-a-half billion of 'em,... I mos' certainly can make up jus' one of 'em that way....

Marsha

Okay,... jus' supposing you could do it. How would you do it?

Emily

All right, Marsha,... of all the men you've ever known, seen or jus' heard of, which one turns you on the most?

Marsha

Well,... I'd have to say... John the Baptist.

(slyly)

I like a guy who loses his head once in awhile. Now who would you choose?

EMILY eyes MARSHA coldly for a moment.

Emily

Firs', let me say that you have a really, really sick mind.

Marsha

S'good thing I'm gonna be a doctor. Now who would you choose?

Emily

Well,...

EMILY glances casually around the room, frowning in thought. Her eyes light upon the poster of HARMON the Poet over her desk, and she beams.

I think I'd choose Harmon Melody.

Marsha

That wimp? He's only a little more macho than Barry Manilow!

Emily

He writes lovely songs!

Marsha

Yeah, lovely,... but there's no meat in 'em.

Emily

(half-rising)

Well, he's a helluva lot better than that thump thump thump crap you listen to!

Marsha

Okay, okay. Siddown. I'll concede the point.

EMILY sits, mollified.

Emily

Thank you.

Marsha

Well, now that you've got old Charmin' Harmon thought up, what d'you do next?

Emily

I elab'rate on him. I imagine how he moves, how he speaks, what he would say to me and what he would do with me.

Marsha

(slyly)

Any of this doing of a sexual nature?

Emily

Well,... of course. But that's just icing.

Marsha

That's no fun.

Emily

(haughty)

Well, as I understand it, Marsha, that's life. The sex jus' helps make even better something else that's already pretty damned good. Without that something else, sex is jus' breeding.

Marsha

All right,... what kind of something else are we talking about?

Emily

(thoughtfully)

Well,... like us cooking meals together and me not minding that he's better at it than me,... like him sitting through two hours of "Star Trek" because I like it,... and like both of us getting the flu at the same time and throwing up all over the place but both of us still trying to take care of each other. That kind of something else.

Marsha

That's a dream, Em. You'll never get a man like that. 'Bout all you can count on is the breeding.

Emily

(hotly)

Well, jus' 'cause we've never found men like that doesn't mean they're not out there somewhere, and until one does come along, it's a helluva lot safer to dream one up than to take jus' anything that comes along.

Marsha

(weary)

Okay,... now that you're moving ole Harmon around in your head, what d'you do next?

Emily

I wait for him to show up.

Marsha

Now jus' how's that gonna happen?

Emily

One of two ways. Either I get real sick and halluc'nate him,...

Marsha

Yeah....

Emily

...or under the same conditions, I make gen-u-ine tel'pathic contact with him an' let him halluc'nate himself into my life.

Marsha

How you gonna know which it is?

Emily

I'm not. But in the beginning that doesn' matter.

Marsha

What happens when you start to want more than just a spook?

Emily

(uncomfortable)

I dunno. I've only just... I... I s'pose I'd jus' try to talk him into coming to see me.

Marsha

An' if he doesn't?

Emily

(morosely)

Then he doesn't,... and I'm lost.

MARSHA pats EMILY on the back.

Marsha

Don' worry, Emmy, you can always make up another one....

Emily

Nope. I've got only enough energy to make up one. Kinda like a bee that stings once and then has to croak.

Marsha

Look, Em, this sort of thing prob'ly isn't very healthy, anyway.

Emily

Yeah, prob'ly.

Marsha

Ya know,... Jess said you were extr'ord'nary. Man, what an imag'nation!

Emily

Yeah.

Marsha

Said he could feel it in here.

Emily

How'd he know it was me? Coulda been Nelson.

Marsha

Jess was born in Britt'ny. S'part France and part Somewhere Else.
Whenever I call him at the farm he doesn' jus' say "Hello," he says
"Hello, Marsha." He always knows.

Emily

That comes from Brittany?

Marsha

That's what he says....

Emily

Well, after all, I get it from a witch and a coupla gimpy gods....

Marsha

Anyway, we're gonna have to find you a real man. We're gonna have
to find something for both of us.
(lifting her head to gaze at the ceiling)
Prefer'bly something that's had a vasc...tomy.

There is a brief pause while EMILY
considers this.

Emily

Nope.
(enunciating carefully)
Il n'y a pas d'hommes.

Marsha

Huh?

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Emily

Men. There aren't any. Not even ones that haven't been fixed.

Marsha

Sure there are. On this campus alone there're thou...sands.

Emily

Nope. They're all babies. All they want outta life are VCR's, BMW's and IRA's. The whole damned alphabet, in fact.

(pause, thinking)

And not one of 'em has ever had a kid throw up on them. They haven't begun to live.

Marsha

Well,... what about all the guys around here your age?

Emily

They're all married or gay. The nices' ones are, anyway.

(sighs)

Or they died in Vietnam. I sometimes wonder... if my soulmate or whatever he is... was one of those statis...tics I heard on TV every night after dinner fifteen or twenny years ago.

Marsha

(soberly)

Jess lost a good frien' that way. S'name was Paul.

Emily

How'd he die?

Marsha

Don' know. Jess never talks much 'bout Vietnam.

Emily

Does anyone wanna listen?

Marsha

(defensively)

Well, I was only 'leven when he came home, and his wife...

Emily

His wife?

Marsha

Yeah. The lovely Linda. They got a divorce years ago.

Emily

Oh.

Marsha

Anyway, the lovely Linda was fed to the teeth with her family's fighting all the time--she'd had two years of it without Jess there to back her up--an' she wasn' in the mood for any emo...tional displays. She jus' wanted to get back to par...tying.

Emily

He's a party boy?

Marsha

Naw.... He jus' went along to keep Linda happy. God only knows why, though.

MARSHA drains her glass.

Emily

He sounds too good for her.

EMILY drains her glass.

Marsha

My sen...timents exackly. You're more his type than she was.

(thoughtfully)

A kind of... passionate celibate. Kinda like Em'ly Dickinson or Thoreau,...

(patting EMILY's hand)

...only not for as long, let us hope.

MARSHA refills their glasses.

Emily

Uh,... Marsha....

Marsha

And Linda did say that he's pretty great in bed,...

Emily

Marsha....

Marsha

...an' I don' think he's had any lately....

Emily

Marsha!

Marsha

I don' think he's had a vas...ect'my,...

Emily

Marsha, stop it!

Marsha

...but if you really want something better'n Harmon the Spook....

Emily

Marsha! 'Member Gregory? The British bimbo?

Marsha

(hurt)

Em, that was mean. I'd almos' forgotten that bastard. Jus' like my husband he was. A filthy... sot!

Emily

I'm sorry.

Marsha

You're prob'ly right, though.

Emily

Howzat?

EMILY drinks half the wine in her glass.

Marsha

I shouldna been talking about good ole Jess the way I'da talked about those drunken bums. I shouldna even mentioned Jess in the same con...versation. Or even on the same day... or week... or year... or....

Emily

That's enough, Marsha.

Grateful for the interruption,
MARSHA drinks half the wine in
her glass.

I'm aw'fly sorry about your pro...blem with Greg'ry, but maybe after this you'd bedder stay away from alc'holics, and don'... don't let them move in 'til at least the fourth week.

Marsha

You're right, Em. Abs'lutely right.

MARSHA lifts her left wrist, trying to focus on her watch as she drains her glass.

Emily

I sometimes am.

Marsha

I guess I'd bedder go home. If I'm gonna be able to pay your son I'm gonna have to be home two days ago.

EMILY drains her wine glass as MARSHA rises unsteadily and staggers toward the outside door. EMILY gets up and stumbles after her. MARSHA stops abruptly halfway to the door, and EMILY runs into her, staggering backward a couple of steps before righting herself.

Say, Em!

Emily

Say, what?

MARSHA puts an arm around EMILY's shoulders, squeezing her tightly. EMILY's arm goes around MARSHA's waist.

Marsha

Say, Em,... you're really a pretty good frien'.

Emily

An' Marsh,... you're... really a good frien...d, too. Bedder'n I'da guessed.

Marsha

An' jus' to show you how much I think of you, I'm gonna let you come upstairs with me and use my shower before you go to bed,... since yours is out of order.

Emily

Marsha,... yours is broken, too.

Marsha

Oh, yeah. Well,... I guess you'll jus' have to go to bed dirty.

Emily

I'll sleep on the sofa.

Marsha

Oh,... jus' one more thing... before I toddle off upstairs.

EMILY and MARSHA release each other.

Emily

Whatzat?

Marsha

I promise I won' breathe a word of your idea to anyone.

Emily

What idea?

Marsha

The one 'bout dreaming up Harmon Mel'dy and Jom... John the Bap...tist.

Emily

(sheepish)

Thanks, Marsh.... It is kinda stupid, isn't it?

Marsha

Real stupid.

MARSHA lunges for the door and
EMILY follows. MARSHA yanks the
door open and weaves back and forth
with the backlash.

Emily

When you get up there would you send Nelson down?

Marsha

You bet. You want Jess, too?

Emily

Marsha....

Marsha

Okay, okay....

MARSHA stumbles over the thresh-
hold. EMILY catches her arm.

Emily

Need some help upstairs?

Marsha

Nope. I won' get hurt. My bones are like rubber, so if I fall down,
I'll jus' bounce a liddle.

Emily

Great! See ya....

Marsha

Yo.

MARSHA exits, and EMILY leans out
the door to watch. SOUND of BICYCLES
CRASHING to the cement.

Marsha (Offstage)

Shit! Damned bikes, anyway!

Emily

You okay?

Marsha (Offstage)

S'okay.... I'm a doctor....

Emily

Tha's right.... See ya....

EMILY closes the door. She weaves
her way over to her desk, plops
down into her chair facing HARMON's
station and crosses her right ankle
over her left knee.

Harmon, get your ass out here!

HARMON's LIGHT AND MUSIC UP, slightly
fainter and paler than before.
HARMON steps into his station.

Harmon

Hello, babe.

Emily

Well, it's about time! Where the hell are you?

Harmon

I'm right here, Emily. Can't you see me?

Emily

You're not here here.

Harmon

(amused)

You're drunk.

Emily

I'm not drunk. Drunks don't have degrees. I'm in-e-bri-a-ted.

Harmon

(mildly)

And what were we celebrating?

Emily

We... were cel'brating the imm'nent death of dreams.

Harmon

(wary)

Dreams?

Emily

Yeah. Good ole Marsha dreams that she can turn drunks into really great lovers, and I....

Harmon

And you?

Emily

I... I... One of my dreams.... Yeah! One of my dreams is to succeed in business without really frying.

Harmon

You mean trying.

Emily

Frying. As in hell. That dream ain't gonna make it.

Harmon

So?

Emily

So I think I'm jus' gonna take risk number one and go back into French.

(to herself)

Yeah. That's what I'll do....

(to HARMON)

Howzat sound?

Harmon

Sounds great! When we get to Paris, you can do all the talking.

Emily

Come off it, Harmon!

Harmon

What?

Emily

You have no intenshun of coming here, an' here's where you're gonna have to come first if we're ever gonna get to Paris.

(petulantly)

I don' wanna go to Paris, anyway. I wanna go to Britt'ny.

Harmon

What's in Brittany?

Emily

Spooks. I'll be right at home there.

Harmon

Maybe you'd better talk this out, Emily. Get it out of your system.

Emily

All right.... Now just where the hell are you? You're not really here, are you?

Harmon

No, I'm not.

Emily

And you're not all there in L.A. right now, are you?

Harmon

I'd say not.

Emily

So like the song says, you're "lost between two shores." Right?

Harmon

That sounds about right.

Emily

But you know how to get home, don't you?

Harmon

Maybe....

Emily

Then where the hell are you? I need you, Harmon. I'm losing my mind, and I need you to hold me and tell me I'm not.

Harmon

That's what I am telling you.

Emily

But you have to tell me and touch me at the same time. Harmon, your music....

Harmon

My music....

Emily

Your music is full of light. Jus' full of it. You sing of the love of men and women,... parents and children,... artists for their creations,... the love of God who's all of us....

Harmon

Me for you....

Emily

No, Harmon! Not you for me! I said your music is full of light,... but I only hear it. I don't see or feel it. I'm so awfully cold,... and I need to feel your warmth on my skin. I have to bask in it, Harmon. I can't know that you love me until you can touch me with that light.

HARMON stares silently, impassively
at EMILY.

Can't you see it?

HARMON remains silent.

Aren't you going to answer me?

HARMON shakes his head sadly.

Harmon

I've told you, Emily,... I'll do what I can....

Emily

(breaking)

Godddammit, Harmon! I need you now! I don't want to be your dream anymore. I want to be everything... everything for you that I can be, and you won't let me be.

Harmon

Just wait, Emily....

Emily

Damn, damn, damn!

EMILY stands abruptly and turns her back on HARMON. She staggers to the sofa and throws herself down on it, sobbing. HARMON, finally breaking his calm, reaches for her.

Harmon

Emily....

EMILY continues to sob.

Emily! Babe, can't you hear me?

EMILY continues to sob.

Emily, please! I do love you! I just can't get away. My family....
The band....

HARMON struggles to leave his light.

You just don't understand. I can't leave. We have to settle for this. You're crazy to want anything more!

HARMON continues to struggle as
EMILY's crying segues into exhausted
weeping.

Emily, there's no real world better than a dream! Trust me! I know!

EMILY finally quiets into sleep,
and HARMON finally breaks free
of the light. He races to the
sofa to kneel beside EMILY. He
reaches to hold her, but the outside
door opens suddenly. JESSE and
NELSON enter. HARMON freezes.

Nelson

Geez! I thought we'd never get your sister off that bathroom floor.

JESSE and NELSON walk into the
kitchen area. HARMON rises quickly
and backs away from the sofa to
his station. His light is very
faint now, but he stays there to
watch.

Jesse

Yeah. I wonder what kind of shape your mom's in.

JESSE turns to look around the
room and sees EMILY.

There she is.

Nelson

Well, at least she's not throwing up. The pizza must've soaked a
lot of it up.

JESSE and NELSON cross to the sofa
to look down at EMILY.

I guess I'll have to tuck her in here. I'm not up to moving another
body tonight.

Jesse

You go on to bed, Nelson. I'll take care of your mother.

Nelson

Thanks. I'm beat. See ya later....

NELSON turns and heads toward his
bedroom.

Jesse

Sure.

NELSON enters his room. JESSE
leans over the sofa and picks up
one of the crewelled pillows.
Very gently he lifts EMILY's head
and slips the pillow beneath it.
He begins to reach over EMILY for
the afghan.

Emily

(asleep)

Harmon?

JESSE freezes.

Is that you, Harmon?

JESSE looks over suddenly at HARMON.
Startled, HARMON steps back a pace.

JESSE straightens up and acknowledges HARMON's presence with a lift of his head. They stare at one another.

Harmon, love, is it you?

EMILY, still asleep, tries to raise herself on her elbows.

(weeping)

Harmon, please answer me this time.... Please come....

JESSE turns from HARMON and reaches for the afghan. He covers EMILY with it. He then looks at HARMON again, staring at him intently. He returns to EMILY, placing his hands on her shoulders.

Jesse

(softly)

Yes,... babe, it's me. I'm here for you now.

JESSE gentles her back down onto the sofa.

Emily

It doesn't sound like you.

Jesse

It is me, Emily.

EMILY struggles to rise again.

Emily

I don't believe you!

Jesse

(distressed)

Mon Dieu! Comment est-ce que tu ne peux pas savoir que c'est moi?

EMILY stiffens, listening intently.

She then sags and falls back onto the sofa.

Emily

You're really here.

Jesse

(relieved)

I'm really here.

JESSE gently covers EMILY again with the afghan.

Emily

(sighing deeply)

You're really home, then.

JESSE kneels beside the sofa, sitting on his heels. He slowly puts his arms around EMILY. She nestles closer to him, and he tightens his arms around her. Tenderly, he brushes a stray tear from her cheek and pushes a lock of hair back from her forehead.

Jesse

I've never been home before this, Emily. We're both home,...

Emily

(sighing)

At last....

JESSE bends closer to EMILY, smiling and regarding her with wonder. He pushes back another lock of hair and drops a light kiss on her forehead. He withdraws slightly to look at her.

Jesse

...si c'est moi que tu... que tu pouvais aimer....

Emily

(faintly)

Oui,... c'est toi.

EMILY pulls him closer to her, and as he rests his temple against her forehead, he closes his eyes tightly.

Jesse

(with feeling)

Oui,... et je pense que c'est toi pour moi, Emilie....

HARMON drops his head and shakes it in frustration. He turns abruptly and exits.

LIGHTS DOWN.

LIGHTS UP SLOWLY. The scene is the same as the night before. EMILY is still asleep on the sofa, and JESSE sits on the edge of the loveseat watching her. EMILY stirs, tries to lift herself on her arms but drops back onto the sofa.

Jesse

(softly)
How are you feeling?

EMILY lifts herself on her arms, successfully this time, and stares at JESSE.

Emily

Where'd you come from?

EMILY sits up painfully and drops her feet over the edge of the sofa.

Jesse

(lightly)
Brittany.

EMILY props her elbows on her knees and puts her head in her hands.

Emily

Yes, I know, but where did you come from just now?

Jesse

Here. How do you feel?

EMILY lifts her head to look at JESSE.

Emily

I think I'd feel a whole lot better if I'd rolled off this sofa and into a vat of acid.

Jesse

I'm awfully sorry about that. I shouldn't have let Marsha talk me into bringing that bottle down last night.

Emily

It wouldn't have mattered. I've got four liters in the refrigerator.

Jesse

Can I get you anything?

Emily

Has Nelson made any coffee yet?

Jesse

I made it an hour ago. I'll get you some.

JESSE rises, goes into the kitchen area, takes two cups down from over the sink and pours the coffee into them.

Emily

When did you get here?

Jesse

Last night.

Emily

(astonished)

Last night?

Jesse

Yes. After we scraped Marsha up off the bathroom floor and fixed up her knees.

Emily

Then you were here all night?

JESSE brings the coffee over to
EMILY who takes it gratefully.
She takes a sip of it. JESSE resumes
his seat on the loveseat, taking
a sip of his coffee.

Jesse

Yes, I was here all night.

Emily

(bewildered)
But why?

Jesse

(with a Gallic shrug)
It seemed you needed someone here.

EMILY shifts uneasily on the sofa.

Emily

It did?

Jesse

You were having a bad dream.

Emily

Did I... say anything?

JESSE hesitates before answering.

Jesse

(reassuring)

Just something about home. I thought perhaps you were going through another remake of The Wizard of Oz.

EMILY laughs and then grabs at her head with one hand.

Emily

One really ought not to make drunks laugh. It's a violation.

Jesse

Violation?

Emily

Yeah. The only really immoral things are the things a person does or says that can hurt someone else.

Jesse

That means that things like premarital sex and moderate drinking are in and that malicious gossip and criticism are out?

Emily

Exactly. And making people laugh when they're hungover.

Jesse

(grinning)

I'm sorry. I won't do it ever again.

Emily

(surprised)

Ever again?

NELSON breezes in through the outside

door and slams it shut. He carries a large package. EMILY grabs her head again.

Nelson

Got it, Jesse!

NELSON comes to a halt at the end of the loveseat.

Jesse

(mock severity)

Nelson, don't you know that slamming doors is a violation?

Nelson

Huh?

Emily

What Jesse means, Nelson, is that slamming doors when people are hungover is positively immoral.

Nelson

Oh. Sorry, Mom.

Jesse

(to NELSON)

Did you get the cats and chickens fed all right?

Emily

Chickens?

Nelson

Hey, yeah! That's really a neat place you've got there, Jesse.

Emily

(to JESSE)

Nelson fed some chickens?

Nelson

Yeah. And we're gonna kill one this afternoon.

Emily

You're gonna kill one of Jesse's chickens?

EMILY looks at JESSE.

Nelson

Yeah. For dinner. After we get the shutters up. And then after dinner we're gonna get Muffin back here.

Emily

Jesse, how long have I been out?

Jesse

About ten hours. Why?

Emily

I seem to have slipped into a warp in reality. What's going on?

Jesse

You and Nelson are invited to have dinner with me tonight at the farm. If you don't have other plans, that is.

NELSON walks around the coffee table, sets the package down on the downstage end of the sofa and sits down next to EMILY. He puts an arm around her shoulder.

Nelson

Say yes, please, Mom. It's a great place. You can look out windows and see trees. No buildings, just trees... and a pond... and ducks and geese. But we're not gonna kill any of them. Just a chicken.

Emily

But I told Grandma I'd have dinner with her.

Nelson

You need to get outta town, Mom. Tell Grandma you're sick or something. Then we can pick up Muffin on our way back home after you've started to feel a little better.

Emily

(confused)

Muffin? What are you talking about?

Nelson

We're getting Muffin back, Mom. Jesse's fixing it.

EMILY looks at JESSE, dumbfounded.

Jesse

Is that all right with you, Emily? Do you mind?

Emily

Of course not. But how? Somebody'll see her sitting in the window. She goes right through the blinds. I can't keep her out of the window, and I don't want to.

Jesse

You won't have to. You see, if we put up louvered shutters, she'll be able to sit on the table and look out, but nobody'll be able to see in.

EMILY stares at JESSE, wonder and

joy dawning on her face.

And I'll do all of your maintenance work for you, so you won't have to worry about anyone else seeing her.

EMILY, near tears, drops her head and squeezes her eyes shut. She lifts her head again to gaze at JESSE.

Emily

But I can't afford shutters. I've priced them.

NELSON pats the large package beside him on the sofa.

Nelson

That's what this is, Mom. Jesse and I are gonna put them up before we leave for his place.

Emily

(to NELSON)

But you didn't buy them, did you?

Nelson

Nope. This is on Jesse.

EMILY returns her gaze to JESSE. She is stunned and moved.

Emily

But why, Jesse?

Jesse

(taking a deep breath)

I... I like cats.

(qui
And

And

Mom,

(to
But

We'

(to
I've

Yea

Oka
chi

(quickly)

And I like you, Emily.

NELSON, becoming distinctly uncomfortable,
stands up, moves over to the window,
and raises the venetian blinds.
Bright sunlight filters in.

Emily

And I like you, Jesse, but....

Nelson

Mom, you really ought to clean this window.

Jesse

(to EMILY)

But what?

Nelson

We're getting rainbows in here.

Emily

(to JESSE)

I've been such a bitch!

Nelson

Yeah!

EMILY and JESSE turn to look at NELSON.

Okay, okay. I'll go. Just call me when you're ready to go kill the chicken.

NELSON escapes to his room. JESSE
and EMILY watch him leave and then
turn back to each other.

Jesse

Let me fix you some breakfast.

JESSE rises from the sofa and holds out his hand to EMILY. EMILY takes it slowly and stands up.

Emily

(dazed)

All I've got is left-over pizza. I was going to do some shopping this afternoon.

JESSE and EMILY walk into the kitchen. JESSE releases her hand to open the refrigerator door.

Jesse

Pizza will be fine. I acquired a taste for it in Vietnam.

EMILY sits down at the dining table facing downstage center. JESSE opens the refrigerator and takes out the pizza box.

Emily

Could you get pizza in Vietnam?

JESSE sets the box on top of the papers and books still on the table.

Jesse

Not where I was. That's why I acquired a taste for it there.

EMILY glances briefly at HARMON's station by her desk. JESSE sits down at the table facing downstage right.

Emily

What happened in Vietnam?

Jesse

Not what you read in the papers.

Emily

Marsha said you lost a good friend there.

Jesse

Yes.

JESSE takes a piece of pizza and
bites into it.

This isn't bad. Could use a bit more pineapple.

Emily

Paul.

Jesse

(surprised)

Yes. Paul. Have some pizza.

EMILY takes a piece of pizza and
bites into it.

Emily

Paul what?

Jesse

Paul Schroeder.

Emily

German?

Jesse

A little. The rest was Ethiopian.

Emily

Did he have a hard time of it?

Jesse

He might have had.

JESSE looks at EMILY searchingly.

Do you really want to talk about this?

EMILY meets his gaze.

Emily

Yes. If it doesn't bother you.

Jesse

No, I won't mind telling you. It's just not a subject for sunny mornings.

Emily

Later?

JESSE smiles and reaches for EMILY's
hand to hold it briefly.

Jesse

Maybe after we bring Muffin back, if that's all right with you.

Emily

All right. I've got a long break coming up.

Jesse

(smiling)

It shouldn't take that long.

EMILY just smiles, tilts her head
flirtatiously and shrugs her shoulders.

(smiling)

I haven't told you yet why I don't think you're a bitch, either.

Emily

Uh, maybe we can save that for later, too.

(smiling weakly)

Sunny mornings and all that,... you know....

Jesse

Good, 'cause I'm going to have to think about it for awhile more.

Emily

You don't know why you don't think I'm a bitch?

Jesse

(intensely)

You're extraordinary, Emily. When a person like you gets a bit cranky, there's generally a very good reason for it. Usually something she wants to keep pretty much to herself.

EMILY shifts uneasily in her chair.

Emily

Um,...

Jesse

Something she doesn't have to reveal because once in awhile she'll run into someone who knows without asking who can help with the burden of it,... if she wants.

Emily

She... She....

NELSON bursts from his room and
strides into the kitchen.

Nelson

Hey! When we leaving?

Jesse

We've got to put the shutters up first, Nelson. Besides, your mother
hasn't said yet whether she wants to go.

Both JESSE and NELSON focus on
EMILY. EMILY grins at JESSE.

Emily

She would love to go. She just doesn't want to have anything to do
with killing chickens.

Nelson

Geez, Mom. Chickens aren't mammals.

Emily

I just don't think I could eat something I've watched croak.

Jesse

Haven't you ever pulled carrots out of the ground?

EMILY simply looks at him.

Emily

I'll watch from a window or something. Maybe.

EMILY stands up.

Well. If we're going to party today, I'm going to try to make it
easy on you guys and see if I can't scrounge up a shower first.

Nelson

Good idea, Mom.

EMILY glares at him.

And I'm sure that I could use a shower, too.

Jesse

Nelson, we've got to go back to my place anyway for some tools, so we can shower there.

Emily

And I'll ask Myong Hyun. He's offered already.

Nelson

He can smell you all the way next door?

Emily

Nelson,... they're from Korea. They share everything with their neighbors.

JESSE stands up.

Jesse

Well, Nelson, we'd better get a move on.

(to EMILY)

Can you be ready in an hour?

Emily

Sure. What should I wear?

Jesse

Whatever makes you feel good.

JESSE gestures to NELSON.

Come on, Nelson. The sooner we get the shutters up, the sooner you can waste a chicken.

NELSON and JESSE leave. EMILY remains standing by the table for a moment, looking fondly at the closed door. Then she smiles and shakes her head, bends over to pick up her slippers still on the floor in front of the sink, and walks slowly toward her bedroom door. The PHONE RINGS. EMILY automatically reverses direction, crosses to the telephone and picks up the receiver.

Emily

Hi, Mom.... I don't know. Lucky guess, I suppose.... Nope. I failed it fair and square, and I'm not going to make excuses.... Well,... I thought maybe I'd go back into French....

EMILY holds the receiver away from her ear for a moment.

I can teach!... I don't need that much.... No, I won't come crawling to you. I'd rather die first....

(voice rising)

I'm not waiting for you to....

(deep breath, then quickly)

By the way, we're coming by tonight to pick up Muffin. We've figured out a way to.... I'm afraid I can't. I'd made other plans that I forgot about....

(surprised)

Ungrateful? Where do you get that?

(outraged)

Intellectual snob? You're... You're....

EMILY makes a visible effort to
bring herself under control.

(strained)

Look, Mom, this has got to stop!... You either take me just as I
am or not at all.... No, but just one phone call a week ought to
do it. Five minutes, no more.... Sunday night, seven o'clock....
Yeah. You'll say "Hi," I'll say "Hi," I'll ask how you are, you'll
ask how I am, I'll not tell you a damned thing, and you'll return
the favor.... No, I'm not closing the door. I'm just installing
a safety chain....

(softly, intently)

No, Mother,... it's probably the most reasonable thing I've ever done....
That's right. And Mother?... I'm sorry....

EMILY gently replaces the receiver,
leaving her hand on it for a moment.

(in wonder)

Now why... didn't I do that twenty years ago?

EMILY walks slowly, distractedly
toward her bedroom door. STAGE
LIGHTS DOWN, HARMON's LIGHT AND
MUSIC--downstage right, paler and
fainter than before--UP. HARMON
enters downstage right. EMILY
approaches him slowly, warily.

Harmon

Emily.

Emily

Harmon.

Harmon

I'm really sorry about last night, babe. I didn't realize how upset you were. I thought you were just drunk.

Emily

I was both.

Harmon

Am I forgiven?

Emily

Forgiven? Yes, you're that....

Harmon

But?

Emily

I had another dream about you last night, Harmon.

Harmon

(wary)

Did you?

Emily

It wasn't quite the same, though.

Harmon

How?

Emily

You were... You were changing into someone else, I think.

Harmon

(gingerly)

Um, Jesse?

Emily

Maybe.... Do you know any French?

Harmon

(casually)

Only stuff like "Je pense que c'est toi...."

Emily

(puzzled)

That was it, but....

Harmon

After five years, babe, it couldn't have been anyone else.

Emily

Five years....

Harmon

I'm gonna try, Emily. Can you believe me?

Emily

Harmon, I'm not sure that I can anymore.

Harmon

Do you want to?

Emily

I... don't know....

Harmon

How about it I give you a date and a time? Say next....

Emily

(firmly)

Tonight.

Harmon

Tonight? But I can't....

Emily

I'll be out, but I'll leave the door unlocked. I should be home around nine. If you go to the airport right now, you can just about make it.

Harmon

You sound so cold-blooded, Emily.

Emily

(softening)

I'm sorry, Harmon. I really am,...

(earnestly)

...but soon it may be too late.

Harmon

It is Jesse.

Emily

Maybe not....

Harmon

You've only known him since yesterday....

Emily

Harmon, he spent the night here and didn't touch me. He could have, but he didn't.

Harmon

Oh, yes, he did!

HARMON looks stricken.

Emily

What?

Harmon

He just covered you. That's all....

EMILY turns from HARMON to face
the sofa. After staring at it
for a long moment, she turns back
to him.

Emily

(in wonder)

No, Harmon.... He did more than that,... and still he didn't....

Harmon

But first it was me.

Emily

Yes. First it was you,...

Harmon

See?

Emily

...but he was really here and stayed with me. You weren't and didn't.

Harmon

And if I can come tonight?

Emily

Then....

(half to herself)

Jesse may not even really want me that way.

Harmon

He does.

EMILY stares at HARMON.

Emily

Do you?

Harmon

I love you, Emily. I have nothing else, really, except my music. My wife is beautiful, but she doesn't know me. She doesn't hear my music.... She doesn't hear me the way you do. You live me.

Emily

(softly)

That I have.

Harmon

Can you live anyone else in that way?

Emily

There aren't many that I could....

Harmon

It has to be me, babe.

Emily

(gently)

Have I been too hard on you, Harmon?

HARMON shrugs his shoulders
helplessly.

Shall we make it a phone call?

Harmon

(taking a deep breath)

All right.... A phone call.

Emily

By nine.

Harmon

By nine.

Emily

No later.

Harmon

No later.

Emily

And only... only if you can say for sure when you'll come.

(intently)

You have to be certain.

HARMON looks at EMILY for a moment,
his face expressionless.

Harmon

All right.

Emily

And I can't promise....

EMILY turns to gaze at the sofa
once more. She returns to HARMON.

Harmon

You can't promise?

Emily

Harmon, even if you are here, I may not be.

Harmon

(ruefully)

That's a chance I'll have to take.

Emily

Either way, we'll both be taking risks. I still don't know what my capacity is. I may not be enough for either one of you.

Harmon

You are.

EMILY meets HARMON's eyes silently
for a moment then turns away from
him.

Emily

(shaking her head)

I don't know.... I just don't know.

LIGHTS DOWN.

LIGHTS UP. The shutters are in place on the window, and the dining table is cleared. EMILY, NELSON and JESSE enter through the outside door, EMILY taking the lead carrying MUFFIN, a laid-back cat of murky lineage. All three humans are wearing attractive dress coats. As they enter, NELSON and JESSE take theirs off and hang them in the closet. They are both wearing slacks and sweaters. EMILY leaves her coat on.

Emily

(to MUFFIN)

Ah, tu es la plus belle chatte du monde, et tu es chez nous finalement!

Nelson

Subtitles, Mom....

EMILY, NELSON and JESSE walk into the living room.

Emily

It's nothing, sweetheart.

Nelson

Just glad to have the little beast home, huh?

Emily

(sighing)

Yes.

(to JESSE)

Jesse, I don't know how to thank you for this. You can't know what it means to me.

Jesse

(smiling)

I think I can.

EMILY smiles at him.

Emily

Yes,... I guess you can.

NELSON and JESSE sit down on the loveseat and sofa, respectively.

EMILY remains standing, caressing MUFFIN.

Nelson

(to EMILY)

Take off your coat and sit down, lady. You've had quite a day.

Emily

I'm going to take care of Muffin first. I've got her box all fixed up in my room.

EMILY walks to her bedroom door, her limp noticeably improved, opens it and sets MUFFIN down inside. She leaves the door ajar.

There you go, Muffin. Bonne nuit et fais de beaux rêves....

EMILY, shedding her coat and draping it over the back of one of the dining chairs, walks back into the living area. She is wearing an attractive dress.

(to JESSE)

She'll sleep now, but I expect she'll want to play about three hours after I get to sleep.

EMILY sits down next to JESSE,
not touching him but closer than
before.

Jesse

I know all about it. My cats prowl at night, and when they're ready for a break, they play King of the Mountain on top of me.

EMILY laughs and shares a smile
with JESSE.

Nelson

Say, Mom,... when we gonna get some chickens?

Emily

Haven't we had enough trouble with one cat?

Nelson

I just thought that since now we have someone who lives here who can kill them without puking, we ought to get some. At least, then, we'll know they're fresh.

Emily

The university would undoubtedly frown on all the noise and blood.

Jesse

Well, Emily, you did manage to keep it to a minimum.

Nelson

Yeah, Mom, you were great! I really feel bad about throwing up.

Emily

You know what bothered me most about killing that chicken?

Jesse

What's that?

Emily

I wanted to go right out again after dinner and kill another one.

Jesse

(laughing)

Spoken like a true anachronism. Fifty years ago, housewives got to kill chickens every day.

Nelson

Now they let Holly Farms have all the fun.

Jesse

(patting EMILY's knee)

Well, Emily, I usually kill one or two of them a week, but if you want to do it, the job's yours.

Emily

Beats having to cook them.

(softly)

The meal was wonderful, Jesse. I don't think I've ever had such a beautiful evening.

Nelson

Yeah.

(pause and then in wonder)

Hey, Mom, how many times have you seen Star Trek's Journey Home?

You knew practically every line. You too, Jesse. If only you guys hadn't insisted on translating the whole damned thing into....

Jesse

(to EMILY)

I'm just happy you could be there, Emily. I would like it to be....

There is an insistent RAPPING on
the outside door.

Nelson

I'll get it, Mom.

NELSON rises and goes to the door.

Emily

(to JESSE)

What time is it, anyway?

Jesse

Around eight-thirty, I think. I'm not wearing a watch.

NELSON opens the door.

Nelson

Hey, Mom! It's good old Marsha. And somebody else.

Jesse

(to EMILY)

I hope it's not another psychological aberration she thinks she can
heal....

EMILY shrugs her shoulders.

Emily

Let them in, Nelson.

EMILY and JESSE stand as MARSHA
and JIMMY enter. JIMMY, a young 25,

is dressed in a dark, expensive three-piece suit. MARSHA, beneath a stylish dress coat, wears a tailored dress and pumps. She fairly bounds into the living area with JIMMY following in morose dignity. NELSON trails them into the room.

Marsha

Em, Jess,... I'd like you to meet Jimmy Mason. Jimmy, this is my neighbor, Emily Gilbert, and my brother, Jesse LeBlanc.

JESSE reaches for JIMMY's hand.
JIMMY takes it and shakes it firmly.

Jesse

I'm happy to meet you, Jimmy.

Jimmy

(seriously)
I'm pleased to meet you, Jesse.
(to EMILY)
You, too, Emily.

NELSON pushes his way in.

Nelson

And I'm Nelson. Marsha's babysitter. Freebies, mostly....

Jimmy

(nodding to NELSON)
Happy to meet you, Nelson.

Marsha

(exuberantly)
Jimmy and I are on our way to a business machines trade show.

Jimmy

(significantly)

Yes. And then to dinner with my employer and his wife at the Flaming Peacock.

Emily

(politely)

Oh, really?

Nelson

Business machines?

Marsha

Yeah. Jimmy sells office copiers, of all things.

Jesse

(politely)

And how did you two happen to meet?

Marsha

The girls and I just happened to be feeding the ducks on campus this afternoon, and there Jimmy was, sitting on the bank of the river, ignoring just everything. We showed him how to feed the ducks.

Jimmy

One of the little buggers bit me.

Marsha

There, there, Jimmy.... You were just depressed. They sense that.

Emily

Depressed?

Marsha

For the last week Jimmy's been trying to sell his best copier to...

Jimmy

...to a snotty little steel fabricating company over on the south side.

Jesse

Interesting....

Jimmy

How's that?

Jesse

One doesn't usually equate steel with....

Marsha

Anyway....

Emily

Why didn't they like the copier?

Jimmy

Well, the district manager's secretary,...

Marsha

Tall, skinny redhead....

Jimmy

...tall, skinny redhead, said,...

(falsetto)

"This copier is simply bristling with useless appendages. It's just too difficult to make simple copies on this thing."

Marsha

The receptionist,...

Jimmy

The receptionist,...

NELSON, beginning to be bored,
wanders over to the window and
peers over the shutters.

Marsha

Short, fat blonde....

Jimmy

...short fat blonde, said,
(falsetto)

"This machine copies better only than a morgue full of monks. It
doesn't work for shit."

Marsha

They just didn't push the right buttons.

Jimmy

They just didn't push the right buttons. Some of the steel rust out
in the yard must've seeped into their brains.

(shaking his head)

I just don't understand it. Top-of-the-line, does everything but
milk the cows....

Marsha

Anyway....

Nelson

Say, Jimmy! Is that your BMW?

Jimmy

(proudly)

It most certainly is....

Marsha

Cost him 35 grand....

Jimmy

(puffed up)
That's right....

Nelson

Why?

Jimmy

Why what?

Nelson

Why do you need a car like that?

Emily

(warningly)
Nelson....

Jimmy

Well, for a businessman in a position as visible as mine,...

Nelson

Seems to me that trying to sell anything, top-of-the-line or bottom-of-the-barrel, to people like that from a car like that is pretty much an exercise in futility.

Emily

(exasperated)
Nelson!

Jimmy

I'm sorry, Nelson, I don't understand.

Nelson

What kinda car does that secretary drive?

Jimmy

I dunno. Chevy Sprint, I think.

Nelson

Simple, cheap, dependable, 54 to 58 miles to the gallon....

Jimmy

I don't see what you're....

Nelson

And the receptionist?

Jimmy

I think she takes the bus.

Nelson

(triumphantly)

Better yet!

Emily

Hang it up, Nelson.... You know that the outsides are just like the insides. You can't change it for other people.

Jesse

(to EMILY)

You know this then?

Emily

(to JESSE, ruefully)

In theory. I haven't gotten the hang of changing the insides in order to make the outsides different.

Jesse

It'll come....

Marsha

Anyway,...

Nelson

(to MARSHA)

You want a babysitter, right?

Marsha

As a matter of fact....

Nelson

Nope.

Marsha

Aw, c'mon, Nelson.... Please?

JIMMY reaches into his pocket and
pulls out a hefty wallet.

Nelson

Nope, nope, nope. There's a principle involved here, Marsha, that
I'm sure you don't appreciate.

JIMMY pulls a twenty dollar bill
from his wallet and shoves it toward
NELSON. NELSON stares at it.

(hesitant)

Uh,... uh,...

(abruptly resolute)

Nope, nope, nope! I'm going to stay in this evening and read some
Chaucer.

JIMMY, disgusted, drops his arm.

Emily

Go ahead, Nelson.... You're going to need the practice.

Nelson

Huh?

Emily

Well, if you're going to school in California, janitor work won't quite make up the difference between....

Nelson

What? Whatwhatwhat?

Emily

(teasing)

Don't you want to go to California?

Nelson

My God, yes! But....

Emily

Just promise me something.

Nelson

(breathlessly)

What?

Emily

No Tahoe, blackjack or strawberry daiquiris until you're twenty-one.

NELSON throws himself at EMILY

and wraps his arms around her.

EMILY, grinning, holds him tightly.

Nelson

You got it, Mom! You're great, just GREAT! And I won't let you down,

either. I'll write the best damned stuff and get you a little house out in the country so you can kill all the chickens you want....

Marsha

Nelson,... we really have to be going. Jimmy and I are to meet his boss at nine, and we have only fifteen minutes to get there as it is.

NELSON, still holding EMILY, turns to look at MARSHA.

Nelson

Oh. Sure.

NELSON releases EMILY.

(to MARSHA)

Well, let's go....

NELSON grabs the twenty from JIMMY.
JIMMY looks startled.

(haughty)

For my education.

JIMMY rolls his eyes upward, and he and MARSHA turn to walk toward the outside door. NELSON follows them but then stops and turns to look at EMILY. He grins, hunches up his shoulders and rubs his hands together gleefully.

Hee, hee, hee...! You're fantastic, Mom. I love you!

NELSON blows her a kiss and then turns to catch up with MARSHA and

JIMMY who are going through the doorway. EMILY and JESSE stand watching them.

Say, Marsha,... are the girls still playing cutthroat craps?

Marsha

That's so juvenile, Nelson! It's Monopoly and Risk now.

JESSE winces visibly. NELSON reaches in to close the door. EMILY and JESSE watch the door for a moment and then turn to face each other. EMILY, slightly nervous, takes a step backward.

Emily and Jesse

(in unison)

Well!

They laugh.

Jesse

Go ahead....

Emily

(embarrassed but grinning)

I was just going to say that with this one she might have even more to worry about in the reproduction department. And if there are any bimbos involved, they'll come from a bit east of England.

Jesse

(grinning)

That must have been some conversation you two had last night.

Emily

Yeah. Now it's your turn.

JESSE sits down on the sofa and
takes EMILY's hand to pull her
down beside him.

Jesse

I was just going to ask why you did it.

Emily

Why I did what?

Jesse

Why you told Nelson he could go to California. You don't want him
to go, do you?

Emily

No,... not really. But one of the reasons was that I didn't want
him to have to go through the hell of borrowing and worrying about
paying it all back and the heavy class loads to keep the total debt
down and getting sick all the time....

Jesse

Has it been that bad, Emily?

Emily

Well,... it has been getting better lately. Anyway, I finally said
to myself, Why should I have all the fun? Let Nelson have some of
it, too.

Jesse

He's mature enough. It'll be good for him.

Emily

He'll need a bit of misery, anyway, in order to have something to write about.

Jesse

Have you ever thought of getting some of your story down on paper, Emily?

Emily

I wouldn't want anyone to read it. Some of it's totally insane.

Jesse

(ruefully)

Some of mine is, too.

Emily

You were going to tell me about it?

Jesse

Well,...

THE PHONE RINGS. EMILY stares at it. Then she looks away toward HARMON's station at downstage right. The RINGING CONTINUES, and JESSE watches EMILY curiously. After several rings, EMILY takes a visibly deep breath, stands, bends over the phone and disconnects the receiver. She sits back down next to JESSE.

You don't want to get that?

Emily

It's probably just a wrong number. A lot of underclassmen on campus have trouble seeing numbers on Saturday night.

Jesse

All right....

Emily

Paul?

Jesse

Paul.

JESSE lowers his head and closes
his eyes briefly.

Emily

(softly)

Would you rather not talk about it?

JESSE raises his head and looks
at EMILY.

Jesse

I've... never told anyone about it,... and it's not very pretty....

Emily

Would it help, though?

Jesse

Yes.... Yes, I think it would.

Emily

Tell me, then.

JESSE looks into EMILY's eyes for
a moment.

Jesse

All right.

JESSE stands abruptly and moves
away from the sofa to stand facing

downstage center. His face is impassive at first, but then he begins to smile. He turns to face EMILY. EMILY leans forward on the sofa, her hands clasped in her lap. She answers JESSE's smile.

Paul... was the kind of friend a person finds maybe once...

JESSE nods slowly toward EMILY.

...or twice in a lifetime. I don't know how to explain it. We clicked on the first day of boot camp, and we kept on clicking until....

JESSE looks away briefly and then back again. He begins to pace.
EMILY's eyes remain on him throughout.

Paul... was something else. In one breath he could discuss with me the American Transcendentalist Movement and in the next tell me all about how he once filled his neighbor's mailbox with cream cheese.

Emily

(grinning)

Why did he do that?

Jesse

Well, the neighbor was a nasty old man who liked to open his windows whenever he saw Paul outside so that he could scream racial obscenities at him.

Emily

Why did he do that?

Jesse

Hemorrhoids.

Emily

What?

Jesse

The old man was in agony, and he blamed it on blacks.

Emily

How did he make that connection?

Jesse

Well, Paul said that it was his subconscious that created the hemorrhoids for him in the first place in order to bring to his attention some inner imbalance....

Emily

Fear, perhaps?

Jesse

That's my guess. Anyway, since the color black for a lot of people symbolizes the subconscious mind, the old man just transferred the blame to the entire black race.

Emily

Actually, that was rather clever of him, if totally unconscious.

Jesse

That's what Paul thought.

Emily

Why did he fill the mailbox with cream cheese, then, instead of just ignoring the old man?

Jesse

Ahhh!... That was Paul's symbolic transferral of the blame back to the old man where it belonged. You see, he didn't mind being blamed for the old man's piles, but he was damned if his brothers and sisters were going to hurt, too.

Emily

Was Paul ever found out?

Jesse

Nope. His mom suspected him but never asked him about it. He wouldn't have been able to lie about it, anyway.

Emily

Pathological integrity?

Jesse

(abruptly sober)
Terminal.

Emily

Terminal?

Jesse

Paul had a foot problem that could have kept him out of the Army, but he managed to hide it from the doctors. They whisked him right on in.

Emily

He doesn't sound like the kind of person who'd want to shoot people....

Jesse

He wasn't.

JESSE stops pacing to stare into the air for a moment, brooding.

Emily

(softly)

He wasn't?

Jesse

(looking at EMILY)

No, he wasn't.

JESSE resumes his pacing.

Paul Schroeder was an idealist. He'd heard from some friends in 'Nam that racism was rampant over there, and he wanted to help.

Emily

How?

Jesse

Well, as representative of both races--black and white--he felt he could show them that if two races could live comfortably together in one body, they really ought to be able to live together peacefully in several. Or millions.

Emily

Did he show them?

Jesse

He didn't get the chance.

JESSE stops pacing and stares off again. EMILY waits for him. Abruptly, JESSE whirls around to face EMILY.

Jesse

(anguished)

Look, Emily. Do you really want to hear this?

Emily

(slowly)

No.... But I want you to tell me, anyway.

Jesse

(taking a deep breath)

All right....

JESSE resumes pacing.

We were on patrol. I'd just told him a raunchy story in French and translated it for him.

JESSE stops to smile at EMILY.

Sorry I can't repeat it. It's even worse than some of Marsha's stuff.

Emily

(smiling)

That's going some.

JESSE resumes pacing.

Jesse

Exactly. Anyway,... we were in a pretty good mood, and...

JESSE begins to drift away.

Emily

And?

Jesse

...and we were walking. We were both armed,...

Emily

You were both armed,...

Jesse

...but neither one of us couldn't've shot anyone then, so we were probably pretty useless. But we tried to look as if we could. We had to be quiet, but we were laughing inside about it....

Emily

You were laughing....

Jesse

(tense)

It was dark, moldy, damp. Water dripping everywhere.... You could smell it, everything rotting.... And we were walking, and it was dark, but we could feel each other in the dark.... He was maybe... maybe ten yards away, but he felt like another me, he was so close.... And then....

EMILY moves to the edge of the
sofa.

Emily

And then....

JESSE stops and stares away. He
turns abruptly to face EMILY.

Jesse

(explodes)

It was a sniper that got him, Emily! A goddamned, dirty, cowardly, mother-fuckin', son-of-a-bitchin' SNIPER!

Emily

Oh, God!

Jesse

I didn't stop to think. I dropped,... crawled to him,... pulled him onto my lap.... All... all of him that was... left....

JESSE sinks slowly to his knees
at downstage center facing left
and looks at EMILY in anguish.
EMILY rises and hurries to him.
She stands before him facing right,
but JESSE reaches for her, and
she takes his hands, allowing him
to pull her down to a kneeling
position close in front of him.
They gaze into each other's eyes.

(voice breaking)

God! You should have seen him, Emily! His head,... that soft, curly,
dusky head of his,... with its beautiful, loving mind,... the head
of the only real friend I'd ever had! My God,... it was blown half
away! First he was there,... alive,... thinking,... feeling....
He was still laughing inside about the joke and our pretending to
be killers.... I know. I could feel it in him,... and then he was
gone. That son-of-a-bitchin' sniper'd shattered him! He wasn't anywhere
anymore!

JESSE begins to sob into his hands.
Convulsively, EMILY takes him into
her arms and pulls him to her.
He buries his head in her shoulder
and wraps his arms tightly around
her waist. Then, almost against
his will, he pulls away just far
enough to look into her eyes again.
His face is contorted with grief.

God, you should have seen him, Emily!

(shaking his head)

Damn!

HARMON enters downstage right and

assumes his station. His light
is very pale, just barely visible,
and his attitude is one of consternation.
EMILY, her arms still around JESSE,
shifts slightly to her left as
she senses HARMON's presence.
Her eyes meet his briefly, but
she immediately returns to JESSE.

Emily

(whispering)

I think I can see him, Jesse....

JESSE peers for a long moment into
EMILY's eyes. He shakes his head.

Jesse

You can't.

EMILY holds his gaze.

You can't.... Not really.... Maybe... maybe you can....

EMILY nods slowly, sadly.

God, but you can!

JESSE pulls EMILY back into his
arms, holding her close just briefly
and then holding her away only
far enough for him to look into
her eyes.

But then, Emily, I saw him--really saw him--I saw him after, too.

HARMON is becoming more disturbed.
He strains to leave his circle
of light but cannot.

Emily

(puzzled, but almost knowing)
You saw him after? How?

Jesse

(deep breath and then in wonder)
He was a light. A soft light. At first... at first it was like Brittany's forest mists.... Soft,... glowing,... full and warm.... His blood... his blood was soaking me.... It was warm, thick, sticky,... smelled tangy.... I was sweating and cold.... His blood was cooling.... Made my skin feel tight.... And it was dark,... very dark.... But his body was glowing.... It shone faintly at first.... Then it got stronger.... And I could feel... there was something in it.... It wasn't just light.... It was more.... Something much, much more.... Then the light began to rise from his body.... He rose,... floated.... Slowly,... very slowly.... And then he was above and before me, just hovering there... before my eyes.... Right... before my eyes.... The jungle was black,... damp,... moldy,... but there was his light. At first... at first there was no shape to it,... and I thought maybe I was really seeing things.... But then... he formed into a soft,... very soft... glowing ball,... a luminous...sphere of light.... He was all light.... And there weren't any edges to him like skin has edges.... His surface blended,... mixed with the air around him.... It was like... it seemed as if he didn't have to be held in anymore,... limited,... confined... like we have to be,... as if he could be free,... free to be everywhere,... everything.... And I knew then that he was everywhere,... everything.... And I could feel him then, too,... really feel him.... His body was getting heavier,... and I realized then that I was crying, and I couldn't stop.... I just couldn't.... I didn't want to stop.... I was trapped beneath his body, and it hurt.... It hurt like hell.... But I felt him, too.... Him and his body.... His empty body.... It was a shell, Emily! Just his

shell.... And he was shocked,... sad, lonely, worried for me....
But he wasn't dead! He wasn't really dead, Emily!

Emily

(full)

You still knew him, then!

Jesse

Yes,... I still knew him. I still really knew him.... He wasn't really gone.... And he wasn't only sad.... He was glad,... happy,... everything! Like a pinwheel,... shooting off everything he could feel,... like sparks,... and all at once.... It filled me up... for a minute,... maybe more. I was both of us.... Just for a moment I was both him and me....

Emily

Did he stay, Jesse?

Jesse

For awhile.... I don't know how long. He stayed,... and we said "Au revoir."

Emily

Not adieu.

Jesse

Au revoir.

(laughs hoarsely)

That much I'd had time to teach him. That and...

(slowly)

That and "Merci, mon ami...."

JESSE drops his head briefly and then lifts it heavily to look at EMILY again.

But I couldn't touch him anymore.... We weren't the same.... I was trapped,... caught,... and he was free,... and I couldn't touch him....

EMILY looks at HARMON. He strains toward her, and she shakes her head slightly, sadly. She turns back to JESSE.

Emily

You couldn't touch him.... Did he come again?

Jesse

Sometimes.... He came back sometimes. Late at night. I wasn't sleeping much. None of us were.... Our buddies were getting killed... and we were killing... in... in revenge. He came back and we talked.... It was all inside of us, though.... I couldn't touch him.... I couldn't even see him anymore.... And then he had to go and finally didn't come anymore. He couldn't come.... He had somewhere else he had to be, and I had to let him go....

Emily

But he was alive.... You had that....

Jesse

But I couldn't touch him....

EMILY looks quickly at HARMON who is shaking his head in frustration and despair.

Emily

And that's really the worst of it,... not being able to touch....

JESSE stares for a long, silent moment into EMILY's eyes.

Jesse

You know this, too, don't you, Emily?

Emily

I know it, Jesse. Dammit, I know it!

EMILY's eyes meet HARMON's. He
drops his head and shakes it sadly.
JESSE pulls EMILY closer.

Jesse

And we shouldn't have to know it....

Emily

No....

Jesse

And we don't have to....

Emily

No, we don't....

Jesse

(fiercely)

And we won't have to....

Over JESSE's shoulder EMILY looks
at HARMON, and she drops her head.
She then leans back in JESSE's
arms to look at him and places
her left hand on his cheek. She
draws it down slowly, gently, across
his jawline and lightly touches
his throat before placing her hand
again on his shoulder. Then smiling
at JESSE, EMILY rises, turns and

walks slowly toward HARMON. She stops further from him than she has ever been. She glances back at JESSE who has closed his eyes and dropped his head in an attitude of patient waiting. EMILY returns to HARMON.

Harmon

(quickly)

I'm sorry, Emily. I didn't call. I'll try, though. I'll really....

Emily

I didn't answer it, Harmon.

HARMON stares at her.

Harmon

Wrong number?

Emily

After I pulled the plug on it, I almost knew it wasn't you.

Harmon

Were you disappointed?

Emily

(gently)

I'm sorry,... no.

HARMON sags a little and then inclines his head toward JESSE.

Harmon

Your friend has really needed you.

Emily

I've needed him.

Harmon

It could have been me.

Emily

Have you ever hurt like that?

Harmon

(slowly)

No....

Emily

Then it couldn't have been you. I have to be filled up.

Harmon

(incredulous)

With that kind of pain?

Emily

(fiercely)

Yes! The joy comes with it. It can't be any other way.

EMILY glances at JESSE.

Harmon

No other way?

EMILY returns to HARMON, shaking
her head.

Emily

Harmon, don't you see? You and I accepted the joy, the dream from
each other, but we couldn't handle each other's pain.

Harmon

I gave you only words, didn't I? Nothing real.

Emily

That was more than I could offer you. The hurt I found in your music, the music healed, and there was nothing left for me. You're still up there for me. Untouched.

Harmon

Then I always will be. If the one human being who can read my music can't touch me, then no one can.

Emily

There are others, Harmon, but your bodyguards keep them away from you.

Harmon

I can't change it.

Emily

Do you want to?

Harmon

I have to keep writing and performing.

Emily

Surely you don't need the money....

Harmon

I need the audiences.

Emily

You do make many, many people very happy with your songs. Maybe that's it.

Harmon

What's that?

Emily

Perhaps you're meant to touch only the many, not individuals. Not me.

Harmon

That has value....

Emily

It's as important as being able to touch just one. Maybe someday you'll shift into reaching ones, but for now....

Harmon

It'll be too late for you, though.

EMILY looks back at JESSE and leans slightly toward him. JESSE slowly lifts his head to look at her worriedly, hopefully. EMILY smiles at him and then returns to HARMON.

Emily

(taking a deep breath)

Yes, Harmon, it will be too late.

Harmon

I'll miss you, Emily.

Emily

I'll miss you, Harmon. You got me through a rough time with my marriage and with the first year of school, but....

Harmon

But it became not enough, didn't it?

Emily

Yes.

JESSE rises to his knees and reaches for EMILY. HARMON inclines his head toward him. EMILY turns around and, taking a step toward JESSE, smiles at him. He returns the smile.

Harmon

You will call for me sometimes, won't you?

EMILY looks at HARMON and slowly shakes her head.

Emily

I will think of you, though,...

(smiling)

...often. Au revoir, Harmon.

EMILY turns and walks slowly toward JESSE. JESSE takes her hands and pulls her down in front of him. HARMON, watching them impassively for a moment, then turns heavily and exits downstage right. HARMON's LIGHT completely DOWN. EMILY and JESSE look at one another, smiling, for a long moment. EMILY then gently places an open hand on his cheek, and he places a hand lightly on her waist.

Emily

(softly)

No, we won't have to, Jesse.... Not anymore....

There is a long pause as they continue
to gaze at one another.

Jesse

Et je pense que je pouvais t'aimer, Emilie....

EMILY takes a deep, tremulous breath
and smiles.

Emily

And I think... that I could love you, Jesse....

JESSE pulls EMILY close to him.

Jesse

(sighing)

Grâce à Dieu....

EMILY tightens her arms around
him.

Emily

Oui.... Grâce à Dieu....

EMILY and JESSE begin to kiss,
slowly at first and then more hungrily,
JESSE extending his legs and then
drawing EMILY into his lap.

LIGHTS slowly DOWN.

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