

Brentwood Court

A play in one act

August 31, 2016

CHARACTERS (In order of appearance)

Harvey Geller: The Narrator. Divorced, Late thirties, humorous, highly intelligent.

Elsa King: Early 30's, highly intelligent, writer-editor for a software company, facially scarred but with a very sexy body.

Roger Warshaw: Mid- to late-30's, 2nd generation Hungarian Jew, civil engineer, unconventional.

Bekin's Man: 35+, brusque, sure of himself.

SETTING: The upstage area is split between the living rooms of Elsa's and Roger's apartments. Doorways to the two apartments are in the furthestmost downstage right and left walls. The hallway between the two apartments is downstage at the apron to the stage. Upstage right and left respectively are archways leading to their kitchens and bedrooms. Each apartment has a small couch, side chair and coffee table. They are decorated differently, reflecting feminine and masculine tastes respectively. At rise, the couches, chairs and tables are at the back wall, as far upstage as possible. They are moved into place prior to Scene 3.

The midstage and downstage areas provide playing areas for different scenes. In the opening scene we see the common gathering area for the apartment complex. There are two good looking poolside lounge chairs.

The downstage left area will be used for the laundry room in the complex' common area. Simulated washer and dryer on on the downleft wall. A clothes folding table and a bench are brought on and off for Scene 2. Downstage right is the area for the coffeehouse exterior table, which is also brought on and off for Scene 4.

SCENE 1: BRENTWOOD COURT COMMON AREA

(At rise, stage is barely lit. Elsa is standing downstage left in silhouette so that we see her sexy body. Her face is turned away from the audience. She is frozen. Light comes up on Harvey downstage center.)

HARVEY

(To audience) Welcome to Brentwood Court! The best singles apartment complex in all of West Los Angeles. Great facilities -- pool, tennis courts, and a big common area with a community barbecue pit. Every Sunday afternoon the young men and women grill their turkeyburgers or chicken, or steaks, pass the wine and get ready for the scene at the Brentwood Inn. Sunday is singles night there, and the piano bar is four deep. You can see someone there from just about every apartment in the complex...except Number 203: That's Elsa King.

(Elsa turns toward the audience, closely focused lights come up and reveal her face, which is extremely unattractive. She has a prominent, very old scar on her left cheek, and (through makeup) her mouth appears slightly misshapen.)

Over time Elsa and I have become good friends. We don't date, but even if I felt attracted to her, which frankly I don't, she wouldn't go out with me anyway. She makes it quite clear she won't date anyone in this complex. I guess I understand, but I do love talking with her.

(Lights up on full stage. Elsa sits on one of the lounge chairs. Harvey goes over and sits next to her.)

HARVEY (CONT'D)

Hi, Elsa. It's good to see you out here this afternoon. Can I get you a glass of wine?

ELSA

No, thanks, Harvey. I've got too much to do tonight.

HARVEY

Is there ever a time when you don't?

ELSA

I like to keep busy.

HARVEY

I don't think I've ever seen you at the Brentwood Inn . I'm going up there later. I'd be happy to introduce you.

ELSA

You're sweet, but you know that place isn't for me.

HARVEY

I sometimes wonder if all of Brentwood Court isn't for you.

ELSA

Sometimes I wonder that myself. I just realized... I've been here almost three years now. I can recall the day I signed the lease, a clear warm Sunday in July. I saw the group over by the pool, the barbecue party going strong. Maybe I thought I would magically become one of them. Three years later I am still in 203 and far from the poolside crowd.

HARVEY

I guess I don't understand why you don't just join them.

ELSA

Come on, Harvey. I'm not like those people... though I must admit, I do think about them. They show up in a dream I have from time to time.

HARVEY

Really?

ELSA

Yes. In the dream I am a lone silver perch, gliding slowly by a school of brightly colored carp. The beautiful fish don't even see me. All we share are the ferns and rocks through which we move.

HARVEY

That's just in your mind.

ELSA

Oh, Harvey! Be real! You know my...situation.

HARVEY

What are you talking about? People really like you.

ELSA

Which people? The truth is, beautiful fish only want to play with other beautiful fish. Over the years, I've come to accept my personal condition. Here, let me see if I can get the point across. Do you find me sexy?

HARVEY

Of course, but what has that got to ...

ELSA

But you're not attracted to me, right?

HARVEY

(Hesitates.) Yes, but that doesn't necessarily mean that...

ELSA

Harvey, I really understand. To put it bluntly, men leer at me from behind but veer away from the front. Oh sure, sometimes a particularly brave or audacious one stays around long enough to bolster my ego a little. And I get excited about it, perhaps too excited. But after we have sex a few times, the ending is always the same.

HARVEY

Elsa, not all men are like that.

ELSA

Right, and the ones that aren't, fly, just like pigs do. Sorry, Harvey, you're a sweet guy and I really like you. But you're a man just like all the others.

HARVEY

I'm really sad you feel that way.

ELSA

Just chalk it up to a lifetime of experience. And now, while you head up the street to the Brentwood Inn, I'll just pick up my things and go back to 203 for a quiet dinner and some last minute laundry. Night.

(She gives him a peck on the cheek and heads off, leaving him standing there as the

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK)

SCENE 2: LAUNDRY ROOM

(As lights come up on the laundry area, we see Roger sitting on a bench against the wall, deeply engrossed in his book, his feet propped up on an empty laundry basket. We hear the sound of a dryer rotating. Another laundry basket is sitting on the table. A pile of folded, clean, dry towels is next to it. Elsa enters, ignores the table and goes right to the dryer. She sees that the clothes tumbling around in it aren't hers. She goes to the table and starts to sort through the pile of towels. They are all hers.

(MORE)

ELSA (CONT'D)

(Her back is to Roger. He is still reading. Suddenly, the dryer comes to a loud halt and he realizes Elsa's presence.)

ROGER

Oh, excuse me, please. This was very rude of me, but I was so involved in my book I didn't hear you come in.

(Roger gets up and starts toward her. Her back is still turned to him. She hesitates, then finally turns to face him. He doesn't miss a beat.)

Hello, my name is Roger, Roger Warshaw.

(He holds out his hand. She carefully places hers in his and he gently shakes it.)

ELSA

Elsa King. I've not seen you around here. Are you new?

ROGER

Not brand new...a bit tarnished, I'm afraid. (She laughs in spite of herself.) Actually, I moved in on Friday. And you? Surely you are not one of the oldtimers?

ELSA

Oh, I've been around for a while, but I'm not in the Brentwood Court history books just yet.

ROGER

Well, I'm sure you will be some day. (He looks around the room.) I must admit this is a very nice facility, and convenient.

ELSA

Oh yes, and it's used a lot. The people here are pretty nice, too. You can leave your machine going and if you don't get back in time, they'll empty your stuff out on the table for you. See? Like this, though they've never folded my laundry for me before.

ROGER

I hope you don't mind. Your towels were dry, and I thought I ought to at least fold them if I was going to use your machine.

ELSA

Oh, no. That was very nice of you. I was gone just a little too long. Actually, in the future, you could just leave your own things drying and do your reading in the comfort of your own place.

ROGER

But then I'd miss the chance to meet someone such as you.

ELSA

If you're looking to meet someone, you'll find plenty of opportunities at the poolside.

ROGER

Yes, perhaps, but I find that scene a little too...congested. I think deep down inside I am more of a laundry room person. And besides, I really go for smart women who do their own wash.

(An awkward moment for Elsa. She turns back to the basket and places the towels carefully in it, picks it up and turns to leave.)

ELSA

Well, it was nice meeting you.

ROGER

Wait a minute. I'm leaving as soon as I unload. Let me walk you.

ELSA

That's all right. I'm really in a hurry. I left something in the oven.

(She exits quickly).

ROGER

(Shouts after her.) See you around then.

(He shrugs his shoulders and picks up his empty basket. He turns toward the dryer as the

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK)

SCENE 3: HALLWAY BETWEEN APARTMENTS

(It is Saturday during the daytime. Elsa enters from stage right going toward her doorway at stage left, carrying two big bags of groceries against her chest. Roger enters from stage left going toward his doorway at stage right, head down, carrying a briefcase. They almost bump into each other.)

ROGER

Oh, excuse me! You caught me deep in thought again.

ELSA

No, my fault. I didn't see you over these bags.

ROGER

Can I help you carry them to your door?

ELSA

No, thanks. I can manage.

ROGER

Which is your door, by the way?

ELSA

I'm over there...203.

ROGER

(He points) I'm 204. We're neighbors!

ELSA

I wondered who was going to move in there.

ROGER

Now you know. I am pleased to have such a nice neighbor.

ELSA

That's kind of you to say. Now, if you'll excuse me, my ice cream is starting to melt. I need to put these things away.

ROGER

You sure I can't help you?

ELSA

No, I can do it. I have years of experience.

ROGER

Well, then. After you take care of your ice cream, perhaps you'd like to come knock on my door. I make a great cup of coffee!

ELSA

Some other time, perhaps.

ROGER

Is there something about me that bothers you?

ELSA

No, you seem like a perfectly nice man. Look, I hardly know you and I make a point of not going into strange men's apartments.

ROGER

(Amused.) So, you think I'm strange.

ELSA

I didn't mean it that way. Look, I've got to get going.

ROGER

Okay, as long as you don't think I'm some sort of ogre.

ELSA

No, I don't. I said, you seem nice.

ROGER

I like to think I am nice. You seem nice too. How 'bout if we have our coffee in a more public place?

ELSA

I don't know...

ROGER

Do you have plans right now?

ELSA

No, but...

ROGER

Then why not? Think of it as a chance to welcome your new neighbor.

ELSA

You don't give up easily, do you?

ROGER

I think it's good to be a straight shooter, don't you?

ELSA

Depends on who the target is.

ROGER

You have me there. Well, what do you say?

ELSA

All right, but just coffee!

ROGER

Of course. Just coffee. How long will it take you to unload the groceries?

ELSA

Give me about thirty minutes. I need to freshen up.

ROGER

Thirty minutes it is. I'll come knock on your door and we can walk up the street to that little croissant shop on Barrington Place.

ELSA

That sounds fine.

(She turns and walks toward her door.)

ROGER

See you in a while then.

(Stands there and watches her as the

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK).

SCENE 4: COFFEE HOUSE

(A small round table with two chairs is downstage right. Elsa and Roger are seated, coffee and pastries in front of them.)

ROGER

So, the ordinary first question: What do you do?

ELSA

I'm surprised. I would have thought you'd take pride in not being ordinary.

ROGER

Yes, but if I didn't ask I might never know which of the stories I've made up about you is right.

ELSA

How do you know any of them is right?

ROGER

I don't, of course, but I'm usually a pretty good judge of character.

ELSA

Well, I will tell you the real story, but I want to hear your best version first!

ROGER

All right, then. (Peers at her intently.) What I see is a well-spoken, intelligent young woman with a slight hint of sarcasm in her repartee -- no, not sarcasm -- irony, perhaps. She tends to keep to herself, but has the potential for loving children and dogs.

ELSA

Not bad for a start, but you haven't guessed what I do.

ROGER

Well, you're definitely not CIA. You seem too honest for that. No, I'd say you work a nine-to-five job in some office, but really aspire to be an artist of some sort.

ELSA

And you must make your living as a Psychic!

ROGER

So I am right?

ELSA

Perhaps the only difference is that my nine-to-five job does involve some creativity -- I'm a technical writer for a software company.

ROGER

And in your spare time you are writing the next Pulitzer Prize-winning novel.

ELSA

Something like that. And you? Is the Psychic business lucrative?

ROGER

See. There's that ironic streak again! No, my business is not quite as exotic as that. I'm just an ordinary Civil Engineer, I'm afraid.

ELSA

Why is that so ordinary?

ROGER

After you've calculated the size of steel rods in a retaining wall a few thousand times, you'll understand.

ELSA

Surely there must be more to it than that.

ROGER

Certainly. Lucky for me, there is the occasional suspension bridge over San Francisco Bay.

ELSA

Now who's being ironic!

ROGER

Just a metaphor, really. Probably my career choice was a mistake.

(MORE)

ROGER (CONT'D)

I began to realize that after just one year of college, but I always need to finish what I start, so I just plugged on to the end. Now here I am, in it and probably too late to get out.

ELSA

So you're not happy with your professional life?

ROGER

Love the analysis, hate the clients.

ELSA

Why is that?

ROGER

Perhaps I should explain. I'm relatively young, but I have old values. My parents came from Hungary. You know, the older generation of Hungarian Jews had fierce ethical standards and I must have liked what I saw growing up. Well those values sometimes screw up my business dealings. I can't tell you how many jobs I have walked away from because I couldn't handle the people's dishonesty or their unwillingness to take responsibility for their decisions.

ELSA

Actually, I admire you for that.

ROGER

That's nice to know. So am I breaking through the "strange man" barrier?

ELSA

Yes, but the coffee here is just fine, thank you.

ROGER

Okay, okay. One step at a time.

ELSA

What do you mean by that?

ROGER

Elsa, surely you have noticed that I like you.

ELSA

And I like you, as a person I mean. But, as I said before, you're a nice man -- warm and friendly, and apparently with high moral standards, standards I hope I can count on.

ROGER

Meaning?

ELSA

(Not ready to discuss it) Meaning that I could possibly see us becoming good friends some day.

ROGER

Good friends?

ELSA

Perhaps we could be like brother and sister.

ROGER

So, do I take it that you are not physically attracted to me?

ELSA

My, you are direct, aren't you?

ROGER

Nice technique -- answering a question with another question. Yes, I'm direct. How about you being direct with me?

ELSA

Roger, I have just met you.

ROGER

So? Does that mean you have no gut feelings, no reactions, nothing?

ELSA

I told you I think we might grow to be friends some day. More than that I can't say.

ROGER

But you are repulsed by me physically.

ELSA

No, I didn't say that.

ROGER

Okay, then. How about going to dinner with me, say, next Saturday night?

ELSA

No, thank you.

ROGER

You're busy. Okay, Friday night? (No response). Sunday, an early evening, six o'clock?

ELSA

No.

ROGER

You're busy then too?

ELSA

No.

ROGER

Then why...? Oh, I get it. You have a boyfriend.

ELSA

No.

ROGER

Then damn it! Why won't you go out with me? Tell me the truth! I can take it.

ELSA

(Thinks it over.) Look, Roger. You certainly seem very different from the typical males around here, in a good way, I mean. But my experience tells me that dating someone from Brentwood Court is a mistake I'll live to regret. I'm sorry, but it's a firm principle I've established, and I live by it with no exceptions. Kind of like your old Hungarian values.

ROGER

Let me see if I understand this. If I lived in Sherman Oaks and had met you in a UCLA extension course on how to do better laundry, that would be okay? You'd go out with me?

ELSA

If it had happened that way, I might have accepted your dinner offer, yes. But it didn't. I'm in 203 Brentwood Court, and you are in 204, and the only thing I will let you do is buy me an occasional croissant, right here.

ROGER

(Rising.) Okay, let me walk you home at least. After that, I've got to go lie down.

ELSA

I'm sorry if I tired you out.

ROGER

Not you, just your twisted logic. I need somehow to figure it out, and I've learned that I do my best analysis lying flat on my back.

ELSA

Well, let's go then. I wouldn't want you to lie down right here.

ROGER

Oh, I wouldn't do that. Floor's way too hard. Shall we?

(He leaves a tip, takes the last sip of his coffee and gently guides her by her elbow as the

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK).

SCENE 5: APARTMENT DOORWAYS

(We see a man dressed in a Bekins mover's uniform enter from stage right. He goes to Elsa's door and knocks. She comes to the door but doesn't open it.)

ELSA

Who's there?

BEKINS MAN

Bekins man.

ELSA

(Still behind the door.) Excuse me?

BEKINS MAN

It's the moving man, miss. Apartment 203, isn't it?

(She cautiously opens the door.)

ELSA

Yes this is 203, but you must have the number wrong. I am not moving.

BEKINS MAN

No, ma'am. I know that. (Consults his papers.) It's Mr. Warshaw, Roger Warshaw, 203 it says here.

ELSA

Well, to begin with, Mr. Warshaw doesn't live here. He is in 204. But he just moved in a few weeks ago. There must be some mistake.

BEKINS MAN

Oh, no, ma'am. No mistake. I got the order right here, see? They just gave me the wrong apartment number. Thanks for your help.

(He starts to go down the hall, crossing to the other apartment door. Elsa follows him. He knocks on the door to 204.)

BEKINS MAN (CONT'D)

Moving Man!

(Roger opens the door.)

ROGER

I expected you an hour ago!

BEKINS MAN

Sorry, traffic was really backed up on the 405.

ROGER

Well, you can start in the bedroom. But let's get a move on.

(Bekins Man goes off to the bedroom. She barges into the apartment.)

Oh, Elsa! I didn't see you. What are you doing there?

ELSA

Never mind that. What's going on here?

ROGER

Isn't it obvious? I'm moving out.

ELSA

I don't understand. I thought you liked it here, and you only just moved in!

ROGER

Oh, I love this place. Spacious apartment, great facilities, nice neighbors. (He grins.)

ELSA

So why are you leaving?

ROGER

It has a bad address.

ELSA

What are you talking about? It is the number one singles complex in all of Brentwood.

ROGER

True, but the street address has a fatal flaw.

ELSA

(Still doesn't get it.) What's that?

ROGER

It is exactly like yours.

ELSA

Oh, no!

ROGER

Yes. The problem was really quite simple once I analyzed it.

ELSA

Lying flat on your back, you mean.

ROGER

Yes. You see, if you won't go out with me because I live here, then all I have to do is not live here, and voila! The problem is solved.

ELSA

Assuming I would go out with you under those conditions.

ROGER

Well, would you?

ELSA

(Caves in.) I guess I'd have to.

ROGER

There, you see? Problem solved.

ELSA

But this is going to cost you a lot of money isn't it?

BEKINS MAN (FROM OFFSTAGE)

Oh, yeah!

ROGER

Let's see. Security deposit forfeited along with the last month's rent. Bekins moving van for six hours. Hotel for two weeks while I look for a new place. And don't forget dinner for two at Jimmy's. But, you are worth every penny.

ELSA

Okay, you got me.

ROGER

What do you mean?

ELSA

Is it too late to change your mind?

ROGER

Yes. I will not give up my quest for a legitimate date with you.

ELSA

That is not what I meant. Is it too late to cancel these moving plans?

ROGER

Why should I do that?

ELSA

Because you have just shown me what an idiot I am! Don't move out, please. I will swallow my principles and go out with you even if you do live down the hall.

ROGER

How about tonight, then? Eight o'clock.

ELSA

Um...Okay.

ROGER

It's a deal! Hey, Bekins Man. Cancel the order.

(Bekins Man enters from bedroom.)

BEKINS MAN

What did you say?

ROGER

Cancel the order. I'm not moving.

BEKINS MAN

Hey, I came all the way from Northridge. This is gonna cost you!

(Roger puts his arm around Elsa's shoulders)

ROGER

That's all right.. Think of what I just earned.

(Elsa smiles up at him as the)

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK).

SCENE 6: HALLWAY, HIS APARTMENT

(Roger and Elsa have just come back from their date. He escorts her to her door.)

ELSA

Roger, I must tell you, this was the nicest date I've had in years. I'm glad you are so good at solving problems!

ROGER

I hate for the evening to end. Would you consider coming over to my place for a very chaste nightcap?

ELSA

(Considers the dangers, including her own feelings.) I guess you're not a strange man to me anymore.

ROGER

As I recall, that was the only principle involved.

ELSA

That's true. Very well, but just one.

ROGER

I promise to be good.

ELSA

(Almost to herself.) I think I'd better promise the same thing.

(He takes her arm and guides her gently to his door which he unlocks and then ushers her in before him.)

ROGER

Make yourself comfortable on the couch. I'll get the drinks. What would you like? I have all kinds of liqueurs.

ELSA

What are you going to have?

ROGER

I have a great old cognac.

ELSA

That sounds like just what I need.

(He pours the drinks.)

ROGER

So the evening with me was that tough, was it?

ELSA

No. I already told you how much I enjoyed it, and you. It's just that I'm feeling a little tingly right now, and I need something to steady my nerves.

ROGER

Tingly?

ELSA

Yes, but I'll be fine in a moment.

(He hands her the drink and sits down. She toasts him silently as they clink glasses.)

ROGER

To good neighbors.

ELSA

Yes, to very good neighbors. (They sip the cognac) Did the Bekins man give you a lot of trouble when you canceled?

ROGER

No. My cousin Joe is very even-tempered.

ELSA

No, I was asking about ... (She gets it) What! The Bekins Man was your cousin?

ROGER

Yes, and he was so pleased he could help me out. I thought he did a really good job, don't you?

(She smiles in spite of herself and playfully punches him.))

ELSA

You devil! You made all that up just to get me to change my mind?

ROGER

Yes, and it worked, Thank God, or else I would have been out on the street.

ELSA

I don't know if I will ever forgive you for that. I'm going to have to figure out a good way to get even.

ROGER

Well, at least I'm forewarned. I'll be particularly cautious around the first of April.

ELSA

What other lies have you told me?

ROGER

That was it, but you mustn't think of it as a lie, merely a problem-solving exercise.

ELSA

And I was the problem.

ROGER

No, no, no. Only the question of whether you would go out with me, and now, that question has been answered.

ELSA

Yes, but there's a second question.

ROGER

What's that?

ELSA

Will I go out with you again.

ROGER

And the answer is?

ELSA

I'm not telling. Besides you haven't asked me.

ROGER

All right. How about tomorrow? 11 AM. Brunch at the beach and a walk on the sand.

ELSA

(Teases him with a long delay.) I'll have to think about it.

ROGER

I can wait. Another cognac?

ELSA

(She looks down at her drink.) The answer is yes.

(He gets up and brings over the bottle.)

ROGER

To the cognac or the date?

ELSA

(She smiles coyly.) To both, I suppose.

ROGER

Well, then, that's settled. (He grins and refills the glasses.) I knew you couldn't refuse me.

ELSA

(Just a little serious.) Don't be so smug.

ROGER

I'm not smug at all. Just glad I don't have to solve that problem again.

ELSA

(Very serious this time.) Please don't take me for granted.

ROGER

What makes you think I would do that?

ELSA

Nothing. I just want to be clear about it, that's all.

ROGER

I would have thought you had a better opinion of me than that.

ELSA

I'm sorry. Of course I do. It was silly of me. By the way, didn't we agree -- just one drink?

ROGER

You're right!. (He reaches for her glass.) I'll take it back right now.

ELSA

Well, I did say yes to it. (She holds on to the glass.)

ROGER

No. A deal is a deal. It is one of my strongest principles.

(He takes the drink from her.)

ELSA

Old Hungarian ethics?

ROGER

Yes. I may not agree to sell you my grandmother, but if I do, I will deliver!

ELSA

That certainly is a high moral standard.

ROGER

I can't really decide if that is irony or sarcasm.

(She rises and gets her things.)

ELSA

You can tell me your decision over brunch tomorrow.

ROGER

Eleven AM. Beach clothes.

ELSA

Yes, sir! Any other orders, Captain?

ROGER

I didn't mean it that way.

ELSA

I don't really mind, as long as I agree with the orders.

ROGER

I get your point. I'll be more careful next time. Here, let me walk you to your door.

ELSA

That's all right. The criminals at Brentwood Court are all in their beds by now. Good night, Roger. I had a wonderful evening.

(She makes herself available for a good night kiss, but he reaches out and takes her hand in his.)

ROGER

It was indeed a wonderful evening. Till tomorrow then.

(He lightly kisses her hand. She turns and goes out the door, leaving him standing there as the

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK).

SCENE 7: POOLSIDE

(Lights come up on Elsa seated on a lounge chair reading. Harvey enters and approaches her. She looks up.)

HARVEY

I always like to see you sitting by the poolside. It means you are definitely getting your money's worth.

ELSA

(She laughs.) Yes, I love the late afternoons. It's the only quiet time around here. I try to take advantage of it whenever I can.

HARVEY

I've noticed. Would it disturb you if I joined you?

ELSA

Not at all. I always enjoy your company.

(She motions for him to sit.)

HARVEY

Actually, I've been wanting to talk with you. There's a rumor going around that you're dating someone from here.

ELSA

Apparently, it's a very unusual rumor --- it happens to be based on fact.

HARVEY

Wow! I'm stunned. I thought that was against the rules.

ELSA

It's a long story.

HARVEY

Well I can only conclude that he must be someone special. Do I know him?

ELSA

You might. His name is Roger Warshaw and he is fairly new.

HARVEY

I think I've seen him around. How long has this been going on?

ELSA

I don't exactly know what you mean by "this", but we've been going on dates for about three months now.

HARVEY

That's an interesting way to put it: "going on dates".

ELSA

Well, we haven't slept together if that's what you're asking. We haven't even done any serious kissing.

HARVEY

I don't understand.

ELSA

Me neither! Roger has been my constant companion since we met. We take weekend outings together...to the beach, museums, symphony, theatre. He does hold my hand as we walk, and sometimes I get a quick goodnight kiss, but that's all. I'm very attracted to him, and he does like me, I think.

HARVEY

So things are progressing. Maybe you just need to be patient.

ELSA

I'm trying to be, but he is starting to occupy my thoughts all the time. I dreamed last night that I was the silver perch again, swimming through the familiar ferns and rocks. Only this time, a large golden Koi was following me wherever I went, not in a threatening way, more like a protector. When I awoke, of course, I was thinking of Roger.

HARVEY

You see him as your protector?

ELSA

I suppose there's a little bit of that, but we seem to be getting more comfortable with each other every day. He's a very thoughtful, intelligent person. It's a new experience for me, feeling that close to a man.

HARVEY

That's good!

ELSA

Maybe not so good. I'm beginning to get this intense desire for him, and it's building up more and more every day. I keep telling myself to be careful. I don't want to get hurt again.

HARVEY

Elsa, maybe that's a risk you just have to take.

ELSA

What do you mean?

HARVEY

Look, we talked before about your finding a special man. And you didn't believe you ever would.

ELSA

I still worry about that.

HARVEY

Well, along comes a guy who seems to be different from the rest, someone you can feel close to. Isn't that what you always wanted?

ELSA

Yes, of course.

HARVEY

That dream you had? That's your intuition talking! Listen to it, trust it. If you keep holding back, waiting and waiting until you're perfectly sure, you'll never find the love you want.

(She gets up from the chaise.)

ELSA

Come here, you.

(He gets up and goes toward her.)

HARVEY

You going to smack me?

ELSA

Yes, on the lips.

(She kisses him, sweetly.)

You are such a good friend, and your advice feels right. I will do it.

HARVEY

Great! I hope it all works out.

ELSA

Me too!

(She gathers up her things and waves to him as she goes off, as the

LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE TO BLACK).

SCENE 8: ROGER'S APARTMENT

(Elsa and Roger are returning from a date. They are laughing as they enter the hallway.)

ROGER

My place for coffee this time?

ELSA

Yes, if your coffee has some of that cognac in it.

(He unlocks the door and ushers her in.)

ROGER

You can just have the cognac straight if you like.

ELSA

Good idea.

(She removes her jacket and waits on the couch as he brings the drinks. He hands her the cognac and sits down beside her. They clink glasses. He raises his in a toast.)

ROGER

(Smiling.) To the good neighbor policy.

ELSA

(She raises her glass.) No, to the Bekins Man!

ROGER

I agree. That was a great start to a beautiful friendship.

ELSA

(Teasing.) Like brother and sister, you mean?

ROGER

Oh, no. That was your prediction of the future.

ELSA

(Takes it a little further.) That's true, and it seems like that's the way it has worked out, wouldn't you say?

ROGER

No, I wouldn't say. Do you really think that's the kind of relationship we've developed?

ELSA

(Committed, now.) It defines itself. How long have we been dating? Three months? And we haven't even had one romantic kiss on the couch.

ROGER

That's how you define something other than a brother and sister relationship?

ELSA

I would think that's a key factor.

ROGER

So if we had a romantic kiss on the couch tonight, you would consider us to be in a different kind of relationship?

ELSA

(No way out, now.) There's a good chance I might.

ROGER

Well, let's put it to a test.

(He pulls her close and kisses her, carefully. She becomes more and more passionate, but as things start to heat up, he pulls back and holds her off. She pushes him away, gets up quickly from the couch, grabs her purse and heads for the door)

ELSA

I thought you would be different, but you're not! You're just like all the rest of them!

ROGER

What are you talking about? What on earth have I done?

(She leaves and slams the door, runs down the hall, fumbles in her purse for her keys, opens the door, locks it behind her and collapses on the couch in tears.

(MORE)

ROGER (CONT'D)

He gets up and goes after her. He arrives at her door just as she has locked it. He knocks carefully and speaks in moderate tones.)

ROGER (CONT'D)

Elsa, open up. I don't understand this. You have to talk to me. Let me in, please.

(No response. He knocks again.)

Elsa, please, it's not right for you to treat me like this! Please talk to me.

(No response.)

Okay, then. If you won't talk to me, I will just have to shout. I think your other neighbors might like to know what is going on. I am prepared to stay here till morning, shouting out the whole story. I will count to five! Three would be too short, I think, so I will give you a good five before the whole world hears about this. One. Two. Three. Four... Okay here goes!

(She opens the door.)

ELSA

Shhh, shhh! All right, you can come in, but stay by the door, away from me.

(She goes back to the couch.)

ROGER

Fine, as long as we talk.

ELSA

I have nothing to talk about.

ROGER

That is silly! We were having a perfectly wonderful evening and all of a sudden you tell me I'm just like a bunch of people I never met, and you run out the door.

ELSA

Not people, men.

ROGER

I have not behaved like other men. I have been a gentleman throughout. I have done nothing to take advantage of you. Why are you so angry at me?

ELSA

When I kissed you, you pulled away from me in disgust. Am I that ugly?

ROGER

What are you talking about? You are a wonderful person to whom I am very attracted.

ELSA

Just not physically.

ROGER

You are wrong. I am attracted to you physically.

ELSA

Sure, to my body.

(He starts to slowly approach the couch.)

ROGER

Elsa, listen to me. Physical attraction is a very complex phenomenon, and different for every person. For me, a woman's mind and spirit are just as important as her body or her facial features. Please believe me, it is true. I am very attracted to you.

(He sits next to her.)

ELSA

Right. That's why you kiss me so carefully. You're so attracted to me you pulled away when I started kissing you!

ROGER

I pulled away because it was exciting me too much.

ELSA

Oh, please!

ROGER

Look, Elsa. I am telling you the truth. Our relationship has been growing steadily, just as my feelings for you have. But I have specifically held back sexually. I wanted you to be sure about me before you made love with me. This has happened to you...to us very quickly. I started to have strong feelings pretty early, but I could see that you were holding back, for what reason I didn't know. So when we started kissing like that, I didn't know how long I could last without my hormones kicking in.

ELSA

Obviously mine already were.

ROGER

I know, and I wanted to go slow for both of us. But, I didn't do too good a job at communicating that.

ELSA

No, not your fault. At that moment I couldn't hear anything anyway, with all the rage pounding in my head. It's the old problem I can never get away from.

(He carefully puts his arm around her.)

ROGER

Will you tell me about it?

ELSA

(She leans against him.) It hurts just to think about it.

ROGER

It happened when you were young?

ELSA

The scars, yes. But people's reaction to my face...I can't recall when it wasn't happening to me. Over the years I've finally learned to accept it and just deal with the consequences.

ROGER

What consequences?

ELSA

Let's be honest, right? I have a very nice body and a not so nice face. Most men respond to my body really well. No one ever responds to my face, except to push me away.

ROGER

And that's what you thought I was doing.

ELSA

Yes.

ROGER

I was just like the others.

ELSA

That's what I thought, then, yes. Now...I'm still not sure.

ROGER

Did you ever see the movie Tootsie, with Dustin Hoffman?

ELSA

Nice change of subject. Isn't that your line?

ROGER

Elsa, it's definitely not a change of subject. Try to hold onto your sarcasm for a moment and listen to me.

ELSA

All right. I'm listening.

ROGER

Did you ever read Hoffman's interview about how he felt under that dress and makeup?

ELSA

No.

ROGER

What he said was this -- I'm paraphrasing, of course.

ELSA

(Sarcastically.) Of course.

ROGER

Will you listen!

ELSA

All right, all right.

ROGER

Thank you. Anyway, Hoffman said that when he was dressed up as Tootsie, he realized from people's reactions what an unattractive woman she was on the outside. But he knew that underneath the frowsy dress and excess makeup it was still him -- intelligent, interesting and sensitive. He said that feeling, that understanding, changed his whole life, his whole attitude about the importance of looks. From that time on, he always searched for the person beneath the makeup.

ELSA

And you?

ROGER

His comments had a profound effect on me. At one time I had a pretty active bachelor life, including my share of one-night stands with Hollywood starlets. But I always wondered why I felt so empty the next day. After the Tootsie story I knew.

ELSA

So when we first met, you didn't notice...

ROGER

Of course I noticed, but how you looked didn't matter to me. Even in those first few moments I felt there was something different about you...something that drew me to you as a person, not to your face or to your body. No, there was something sweet and intelligent and humorous about you. That's what attracted me. And that is why I pursued you.

(She moves closer to him.)

ELSA

Somehow, now I believe you.

ROGER

Finally.

ELSA

If I kiss you now, will you not pull away.

ROGER

Yes. But just one kiss, and then I have to go.

ELSA

Certainly, just one kiss.

(She begins it, he finishes it strongly. Then they break for air.)

ROGER

See I didn't pull away.

ELSA

Shows I'm gaining on you.

ROGER

But now I must go. A lot has happened tonight. I want you to think about it and we can talk tomorrow.

(He gets up.)

ELSA

Yes, sir. But I need to ask you a question first.

ROGER

All right. Ask.

(She gets up and advances toward him.)

ELSA

This idea you had, about not going to bed with me as long as I had reservations. Is that based on some kind of principle?

ROGER

Of course. I consider myself a gentleman, and I would never take advantage of a lady, especially in a vulnerable moment.

(She gets closer to him.)

ELSA

And do you ever violate one of your principles?

ROGER

Certainly not.

ELSA

Even with good reason? (Closer.)

ROGER

(Flustered.) Certainly not.

ELSA

It seems to me that your principle is just like the one you convinced me to violate.

ROGER

No, the two are very different. And I found a way to prove to you that yours was just a foolish, arbitrary rule that had ridiculous consequences.

(She reaches behind him and locks the door.)

ELSA

Well, I'll tell you what. I need to find a way to prove to you that your principle is just a foolish, arbitrary rule that has ridiculous consequences. Follow me.

(She takes his hand and leads him toward the bedroom door.)

ROGER

(Following her, caught up in the analytical possibilities.)
And how do you propose to find such a proof?

ELSA

Well, just like you, I do my best analysis lying flat on my back!

(She pulls him offstage.)

BLACKOUT.

END OF PLAY