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"WHAT'S A FEW SECRETS AMONG FRIENDS?"

A Thesis
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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Accepted by the faculty of the School of Humanities.
Morehead State University, in partial fulfillment of the re-
quirements for the Master of Arts degree.

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Date

WHAT'S A FEW SECRETS AMONG FRIENDS?

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Morehead State University, 1986

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This comedy in two acts is about three roommates who, in spite of their friendship, have secrets from each other and from the women in their lives. As the secrets are revealed or discovered, the men must deal with the not-always-comic consequences of their actions.

Oddly enough, this drama began as two pages of very serious dialogue between two men, Mark and Shane. As I continued to write the scene, I felt a lighter element was needed to achieve a balance between the characters, and so, the likable character of Andy was written in to balance the heavy sarcasm of Shane, with Mark in the middle ground somewhere. However, what I found was that the scene started to come alive when written with a comic touch. I was saying the same things as before, but in a comic vein, they were suddenly much easier to write. Instead of losing the effectiveness of what I was trying to say, the comedy gave the theme an underlying punch, ready to sting the audience while they were still laughing.

The play continued to change course as one idea sparked another, and as one page inspired the next. The threads of the plot began coming together as the girls were introduced and the play evolved into the work it now is.

Accepted by: Wynne Sackham, Chairman
Charles E. Trinsley
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ACT ONE

scene 1

(The setting is the living room of the apartment shared by Andy, Mark, and Shane. There is a couch, an easy chair, a television, and a dining table with chairs. Probably there would be end tables and other assorted furniture pieces. Upstage is a landing, lined with bookshelves, with a desk and typewriter. Beside the desk is a wastepaper basket full of wadded-up paper.

There are doors leading to the outside hallway, Mark and Shane's bedroom which must be on the same side of the set, and an optional closet where Andy would keep his clothes. There is also a swinging door into the kitchen. Also, the front door has several locks.)

(The time is late in the evening. The apartment is dark.)

(There is the sound of a key in the apartment's front door. But the door doesn't open. Some muffled curses can be heard from behind the door. The key is heard again, but the door when tried, still doesn't open. Again, the curses. On the next try, the door opens but is stopped by the chain. Mark reaches in and slips the chain off.

MARK enters, tiptoeing in, trying to be quiet. Closing the door, he crosses toward his room, but knocks over the wastebasket, spilling the paperwads all over the floor. While trying to pick up the paper, he knocks some typing paper off the desk. While trying to pick those up, he knocks a few books off one of the shelves. Trying to be quiet as he scrambles for the books, Mark does not notice the light come on in Shane's bedroom.

Shane's door opens, silhouetting SHANE and spotlighting Mark, and the latter freezes and tries to look inconspicuous.)

MARK

Uuuuh...hello...

SHANE

(Obviously not very pleased)

Ah, Mark, good evening! Are you home for the night, or will you be doing the Abbott and Costello routine again on your way out, too?

MARK

Ssssh!

SHANE

What is it?

MARK

(Pointing to the couch)
Sssh! Ssssh!

SHANE

Ooooh, you want me to be quiet, do you? Well, I won't! Were you trying to be quiet JUST NOW? This is my apartment, TOO, and if I want to talk in a reasonable tone, I WILL! I get my mail here; that entitles me to SOMETHING!

MARK

Are you through, Shane? If your little temper tantrum hasn't gotten him up yet, I don't know what will.

SHANE

I suppose you are thinking that Andy is fast asleep on the sofa. Guess again.

(Shane closes his bedroom door as Mark switches on the living room light.)

MARK

What?--I thought-- he was--but he isn't--where?--but the door locked!

SHANE

Your mastery of sentence structure, Mark, constantly astounds me. How do you do it?

MARK

And he isn't even here!

SHANE

Then, there are those incredible powers of observation. Really, I am amazed.

MARK

(Stops, thinks)
YOU threw the locks! All three of them?

SHANE

Of course. The chain makes enough noise to wake the dead, even you. Think of it as a very cheap burglar alarm.

MARK

Then where's Andy?

SHANE

I'm not his social secretary, Mark, just one of his roommates. Like you. Now, since you're up, why don't you make us some coffee?

MARK

Here. Make yourself useful. If you won't bother to check the mailbox, you can at least sort the mail.

(Mark pulls the mail out of his coat pocket, throws it onto the table, and exits into the kitchen.)

SHANE

Oh, boy. Here's a letter from your parents. I wonder how the chickens are doing?..There's a postcard from Mother. She's still in the Bahamas...Here's the electric bill and the phone bill and the gas bill. We'll let that be Andy's pile...Here's your last W-2 form, Mark, from the Mexican place. Do you want me to put it in the usual place?

MARK

WHAT?

SHANE

I'm putting this W-2 form in your copy of Gone With the Wind with the others.

MARK

Thank you.

SHANE

Andy got another letter from Linda.

MARK

(Poking his head out)
Not another one.

SHANE

(Going to the filing cabinet)
The drawer is starting to fill up. (He has to give the drawer a hard yank to open it.)

MARK

Don't you think it's time we told him? If he finds out, he'll be furious!

SHANE

Andy? Get serious.

MARK

Why you don't just throw them away is beyond me. I mean, what if he finds them?

SHANE

He won't. This drawer has always stuck and only the two of us ever bother to open it.

MARK

All he has to do is give it a good hard jerk and we're sunk.

SHANE

Would you rather he read each one as they came and then moped around until the next one comes? All because Linda dumped him?

MARK

No...I'll get the coffee.

SHANE

Good idea.

(Mark exits into the kitchen. Shane reads his postcard.)

SHANE

Mother sends her love and asks if I've heard from Father. Good old Mom. I've never known anyone who could put that little gold card to such good use. She's off to Monaco next.

(Mark returns with a coffee pot and mugs.)

MARK

The Bahamas? Monaco? If your parents are so loaded, why doesn't some of that trickle down to their own son?

SHANE

It used to, but number-one-and-only son spent way too much money, and volunteered to make it on his own.

MARK

That was dumb.

SHANE

What was that?

MARK

Coffee. Want some?

SHANE

You don't think he had a date, do you?

MARK

Andy? Our Andy? Naaaah, he's still mooning over Linda, remember? He's probably doing research for his book.

SHANE

Or maybe he's attending some lecture.

MARK

Or maybe a play.

SHANE

Shakespeare, perhaps!

MARK

Hamlet!

SHANE

(Dramatically)
Ah, "The Melancholy Dane"!

MARK

He went to see a play about a dog with the blues?

SHANE

Ha...ha...By the way, how was your date with Claire?

MARK

She was putty in my hands.

SHANE

What did you do, get her drunk?

MARK

Not at all. She was an amber field of wheat bending in the wind, and I was a harvester, all gassed up and ready to separate the wheat from the chaff.

SHANE

But did CLAIRE have a good time?

MARK

Of course she did! She had dinner with me, didn't she? Didn't I treat her right? Didn't I show her a good time?

SHANE

That's what I'm asking you.

MARK

Of course she did!

(Pauses)
Did you tell her?

SHANE

What?

MARK

DID-YOU-TELL-HER?

SHANE

About what?

MARK

About your job. Or should I say, your jobs, plural?

SHANE

You really don't need to bring the subject up. I'd rather not hear the lecture again, thank you.

MARK

You'll have to tell her sometime, Mark. If you don't, she'll find out--somehow--and whatever's left of this thing you INSIST on calling a "relationship" will go down the drain,--along with your carcass, I might add.

SHANE

Shane, what am I supposed to say to her?

MARK

Hasn't she asked?

SHANE

Yes...

MARK

And you didn't tell her?

SHANE

Well...

MARK

Did you?

SHANE

Sort of...

MARK

Sort of?

SHANE

MARK

Not at all, really...Sort of...Kind of...

SHANE

I thought so.

MARK

How am I going to tell her?

SHANE

Just open your mouth and let the words spill out. That should be the easy part; you get enough practice at that as it is.

MARK

I'm serious.

SHANE

If you were really serious, you would have told Claire the truth in the first place. What have you told her so far?

MARK

I sort of hinted around about the whole thing.

SHANE

Hinted around?

MARK

You know. I occasionally drop little phrases like "the Dow Jones Average", the price of "this stock" or "that stock", and of course, the clincher, "the "break-up of AT&T".

SHANE

You're joking.

MARK

Nope.

SHANE

You DON'T.

MARK

I DO.

SHANE

A STOCK BROKER?

MARK

Not exactly. A struggling young market analyst, to be more precise.

SHANE

Mark!

MARK

(Jumping up)

It's perfect! This way I can explain having money to burn AND why I'm so tired. I have a fairly-demanding, high-paying job. Simple, don't you think?

SHANE

Mark, suppose Claire finds out what you really do for a living, EVERYTHING you do. What then?

MARK

You mean: suppose she finds out that I'm not a market analyst AND how many part-time jobs I'm holding down at six different restaurants-

SHANE

Plus a bakery.

MARK

Plus a bakery. Suppose she finds out that I've been lying to her all this time, what will I do? (Pauses) I give up! What?

SHANE

You get out of the jacuzzi, because you'll be in enough hot water as it is. Have you even considered telling her the truth?

MARK

Ooooh, terrific suggestion! Put a quick end to the relationship, instead of enjoying it while it lasts. BRILLIANT! TERRIFIC suggestion.

SHANE

You might think about Claire's feelings in all this. I mean, she might actually love you...in time. What happens when you finally get up the courage to tell her? Suppose it gets to the point where you start discussing marriage--

MARK

Bite your tongue.

SHANE

And YOU say, "Claire, I'm not really a market analyst, but don't worry, we won't starve. I have SEVERAL jobs AND I can do all the cooking."

MARK

You hate me, don't you? Twist me up into an emotional pretzel, make me feel like a first-rate creep, then tear me into little pieces. You hate me... You have a point, though. But I just can't tell her,..I like her too much to tell her the truth.

SHANE

That's a new twist.

MARK

KNOW-IT-ALL. Saaaay, wait a minute! Hold the phone! Catch the next bus! Didn't you have a date with GWEN tonight?

SHANE

...Had.

MARK

(Seizing the opportunity)
What's this? Trouble in paradise?

SHANE

Knock it off.

MARK

Did she have a headache? Or did you?

SHANE

Shut up.

MARK

It's only fair that I get to rake YOU over the coals. Fair is fair.

SHANE

A black eye is a black eye.

MARK

I thought you were ABOVE all that tawdry violence.

SHANE

(Getting up)
I warned you.

MARK

Okayokayokay...sorehead. So what did happen? You both too busy to keep up this boyfriend-girlfriend thing?

SHANE

What are you talking about?

MARK

I mean Gwen never comes over anymore, and something always happens so that the two of you end up breaking your date. That doesn't seem too stable, even to me, or much fun.

SHANE

We've just been too busy, that's all. Satisfied?

MARK

Okay...I just thought that since you read me the riot act, I might return the favor. I didn't know you would get so worked up about it.

SHANE

I'm not.

MARK

I didn't say a word.

SHANE

I tell you I'm not!

MARK

Not what?

SHANE

Not getting worked up over this!

MARK

Yes, you are.

SHANE

NO, I-

MARK

Want to talk about it?

SHANE

With you?

MARK

Sure! Come on, I'm a great listener! I listen all the time! I listen to you when you sing in the shower at 7 am in the morning. That's even with a pillow over my head. I listen to the TV, the radio, YOUR stereo blasting away. I listen to Andy. Face it; I'm a great listener, the best darn listener you'll find in this entire apartment building.

SHANE

Except for Andy.

MARK

With the possible exception of Andy. But I myself am a great-

SHANE

I get the idea, so sit down.

MARK

Okay, I'm sitting. Go ahead...Well? Any time you're ready!
I'm listening.

SHANE

No, you aren't; you're still talking.

MARK

So tell me!

SHANE

(Not easy for him to admit)
Gwen and I haven't been getting along lately.

MARK

I knew that!

SHANE

We had a fight this afternoon over the phone. It was really just a repeat of every date we've made in the past two weeks.

MARK

What happened? What did you fight about? Come on, I want the dirt!

SHANE

(Not easy at all to admit)
She won't sleep with me.

MARK

Is that all?

SHANE

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "is that all"? She refuses to make love with me, Mark! She wants to wait until after we're married.

MARK

Married! You sly dog! You never even told me you cared!

SHANE

I don't!...I mean--I didn't propose. I was just trying to be a gentleman about the whole thing and she misunderstood.

MARK

Some misunderstanding! And she STILL won't sleep with you?

SHANE

No.

MARK

So what do you fight about? Her not sleeping with you?

SHANE

That, and I keep trying to tell her I maybe want to be engaged and I get frustrated and then, I end up picking a fight.

MARK

Shane, why worry? You could tell her the truth--or you could stay engaged to Gwen, who's the nicest, sweetest--

SHANE

Do YOU want to marry her?

MARK

The biggest bubblebrain you'd ever want to meet.

SHANE

Watch it. That's my fiance you're talking about. She's no bubblebrain.

MARK

Can she do long division?

SHANE

With a calculator. Can you?

MARK

Of course!

SHANE

Can you do decimals?

MARK

Usually.

SHANE

With a calculator?

MARK

Doesn't everyone?

SHANE

You're no help, bubblebrain.

MARK

I'm a great listener, though...You know what I think? I think this whole thing is just eating at your pride. Gwen won't sleep with you and your male ego can't handle the rejection, so it turns into frustration.

SHANE

I read the same article, Mark. It's in one of MY magazines, remember?

MARK

Are you sure? But still, there's a ring of truth about the whole thing, isn't there? It is eating at you, isn't it?

SHANE

What if it is?

MARK

Then you're going to get an ulcer. And I'll have to hear your complaints as you overdose on Milk of Magnesia.

SHANE

You're a great listener; you'll get used to it.

MARK

I'll get Andy to do it. He'll listen to anything.

SHANE

I wonder where he is. It isn't like him to stay out this late.

MARK

Isn't that kind of a double standard? You worry if your roommate is out late, but you hide the letters from his old girlfriend.

SHANE

So do you.

MARK

Leave me out of this for a minute. I just think this sudden flash of concern for Andy is interesting. I want to study it before it disappears.

SHANE

And if it doesn't disappear?

MARK

Then I'll have to get Mrs. Murdock to change the name on the lease, that's what, because it wouldn't be the Shane I'm used to. You know, the one who sings in the shower, the one who refuses to check the mailbox, especially when he's got subscriptions to at LEAST a dozen magazines, including TIME and NEWSWEEK, which come EVERY WEEK without fail, the roommate who throws all the locks on the door plus the chain when he knows good and well both his roommates aren't home. That's the Shane I'm used to.

SHANE

I never realized. Do you feel better now?

MARK

AND you're a know-it-all. The only reason you get those magazines is to keep up on world affairs just enough to be able to discuss them at parties or over lunch with your buddies from the department store.

SHANE

How on Earth do you know what I say at lunch?

MARK

I was your waiter that day, remember?

SHANE

Oh, yeah. So?

MARK

THAT'S the Shane I'm used to.

SHANE

Sounds about right. Is that it?

MARK

I still think you should give Andy those letters from Linda.

SHANE

And what do you suppose I should say? 'Look, Andy, what I found today while cleaning the space behind the filing cabinet: a whole bunch of letters from some girl named Linda. Isn't that the strangest thing? 27 letters, all of them from the same girl, all of them lost in the same place. Let's call Ripley's Believe It or Not! and see if that's a record! 'I don't think even Andy would buy that one.

MARK

There's a big hole in your story to start with: you never do the cleaning...I still don't like the idea, though. I feel as though we're cheating Andy out of something, even if it's the grief over an old girlfriend.

SHANE

It's too late now. If we did give him those letters, he might really get angry enough to move out or something just as drastic. And we couldn't afford this apartment with only the two of us.

MARK

Not the way we spend money. We'd have to work out a-- it scares me to think of it-- a budget.

SHANE

The verdict, then, is that we don't give Andy the letters.

MARK

Right. But what about the next one? Surely he won't suspect us if we give him that one.

SHANE

What if Linda asks about the last 27?

MARK

The post office ate them.

SHANE

27, right in a row?

MARK

We'll call Ripley's Believe It or Not! See if that's a record.

(The front door suddenly opens. ANDY enters, carrying a book and a pizza box.)

MARK

Andy! Buddy! Pal! Where have you been?

ANDY

I stopped off at the mall after work for a little pizza and something to read. You guys want some?

MARK

I DO!

SHANE

I thought you'd already eaten with Claire.

MARK

I worked it off, remember?

ANDY

How was your date, Mark?

MARK

She was amber field of wheat, bending in the wind--

ANDY

You mean you actually got lucky?

MARK

Well, in a word, yes. I did. Sure enough. You know it.

SHANE

It's depressing, isn't it?

ANDY

Hang on a second while I get the cokes.

(Andy exits into the kitchen.)

SHANE

Have you told Andy about your multiple employment?

MARK

The subject never came up. Besides, if he did know, I'm sure he would crack under Claire's third degree. He'd squeal. You know he would.

(Andy re-enters with the sodas.)

ANDY

Would what?

MARK

Want my pepperoni on your half.

ANDY

I guess if you don't want it...Well, what about you, Shane?

SHANE

I don't like pepperoni.

ANDY

I meant how was your date with Gwen? It was for tonight, wasn't it?

SHANE

Gwen couldn't make it. She had to do her hair or something.

ANDY

Maybe you should invite her over for dinner sometime, a nice romantic dinner for just the two of you.

SHANE

I've thought of that, but I'd have to find someone to do the main course. I can only make salads without a recipe. Maybe I could talk Mrs. Murdock into it. She might be willing to provide a small supper for a small fee. Unless, of course, Mark agreed to do it. For me. For one of his BEST friends.

(Mark looks up, puzzled, from his pizza.)

ANDY

I hate to mention it, but I just saw Elizabeth on the landing.

SHANE

And How is MRS. MURDOCK?

ANDY

Fine. She asked me to remind you both about your share of the rent.

SHANE

It isn't due until the day after tomorrow?

ANDY

I know, but that's what you said last month, and you still forgot about it. She'd like it paid on time this month.

MARK

(Wiping his mouth)
Hey, she got her money!

SHANE

Mark--

MARK

Just who does she think she is? Oh sure, she's the landlady, but what right does that give her?

SHANE

MARK--

MARK

The second of the month, that's when we paid it, right after--Andy--lent-us--the money...But we'll pay you back! We promise!

ANDY

I'm not worried. I know where you live.

MARK

Great! Then do you think you could see your way clear to lending me some money for say...oh, a couple of days?

ANDY

Until the day after tomorrow?...I think so.

MARK

What a pal, what a pal, what a pal! Wait a minute! Brainstorm coming! Why don't we invite the girls over for dinner? Shane can help me cook it, and Andy, you can make one of those wonderfully fattening desserts of yours.

SHANE

That's a great idea?

MARK

We don't spend enough time together. We should be buddies, the Three Musketeers! And this way we can sort of pay Andy back for putting up with us, uh?

SHANE

I beg your pardon?

MARK

He DID pay our share of the rent last month.

SHANE

(Not very happy at all)

We would be HAPPY to play 'Chef-for-an-evening'!

MARK

Good. When?

ANDY

How about the day after tomorrow?

MARK

Great! I'll clear it with Claire. Shane, you see if Gwen can do her hair some other night, okay? And what about you, Andy? Who will you call?

ANDY

Oh, maybe Karen. Or Sheila. I'll think of someone.

Mrs. Murdock? SHANE

Elizabeth? Why her? ANDY

She'd come if you asked her. That should be obvious by now. SHANE

She isn't my type. She IS a little older than I am, in case you hadn't noticed. ANDY

We noticed, believe me. Well, we can settle the details tomorrow morning, okay? I'll see about getting off work while I'm thinking of it. MARK

Did I get any mail? ANDY

(Suddenly) SHANE
Well, I'm going to bed. Tomorrow will probably be a very busy day at the store. Good night all.

'Night. MARK

Good night, Shane. ANDY

(Shane exits into his bedroom, almost hastily.)

So, did I get any mail? Mark? ANDY

(Suddenly) MARK
Well, I guess I'll be hitting the hay, too. Busy day tomorrow. Busybusybusy!

Mark? ANDY

I hate to tell you this, but...there were a few bills. Shane and I didn't want to depress you with them, that's all. MARK

ANDY

Have you noticed how tense he's been lately?

MARK

Have I noticed? Believe me, I did.

ANDY

Have he and Gwen been having problems?

MARK

Some.

ANDY

Would they happen to be of a sexual nature?

MARK

(Suspicious)
Maybe...

ANDY

You don't want to talk about it, do you?

MARK

I don't know if I should. Shane told me some things in confidence and I'm not sure I should repeat them.

ANDY

Then let me guess: Shane can't, for the life of him, persuade Gwen to engage in a little premarital intercourse. Am I close?

MARK

(Amazed)
Very.

ANDY

And now Shane's frustration is eating away at his ego and he lashes out in retaliation.

MARK

Yeah, yeah, did you read that magazine, TOO?

ANDY

What magazine?

MARK

One of Mr. Sarcasm's men's magazines. But of course, YOU wouldn't...
What are you doing?

ANDY

I think I have the one your're talking about around here somewhere. Here it is. Is this the one you're talking about?

MARK

Hey, where did you get this? Did Shane let you read this trash? How dare he, corrupting minds like that. Yeah, this is the issue. Just a minute. Shane always fills out these little quizzes in the back...but THIS one isn't marked up. What gives here?

ANDY

Why would I mark my own magazine up? If I'm the only one who reads it, who else would be reading my answers to the quiz?

MARK

This is YOUR magazine? YOURS?

ANDY

Yes, mine. What's the matter with that?

MARK

I can't believe it!

ANDY

Believe what? That you and I actually read material on the same wavelength? That is your copy of Gone With the Wind, isn't it?

MARK

Leave Margaret Mead out of this!

ANDY

Mitchell.

MARK

Mitchell who?

ANDY

Gone With the Wind was written by Margaret Mitchell.

MARK

Then who's Margaret Mead? Never mind. I still can't believe that this is your magazine. Miss October is still intact, too! You don't even take out the centerfold?

ANDY

Where would I put it? On the walls of my room? Look around here. Wouldn't our guests just love the decor? You still haven't told me what's the matter?

MARK

I never pictured you reading a magazine like that. I guess I just never thought of you doing that.

ANDY

I'm a man, aren't I?

MARK

Yes...

ANDY

I have eyes, ears, a nose, and a mind all my very own, don't I?

MARK

Yes, but--

Andy

I have urges just like everyone else. Understand?

MARK

Urges, too? I can't believe what I'm hearing!

ANDY

Listen, Mark. I am not the kid you and Shane insist I am.

MARK

I never--

ANDY

Yes, you do. You both treat me like I'm your kid brother, just out of diapers and not ready for my first date.

MARK

Well, Shane may do that, but I--

ANDY

You both do it.

MARK

But you let us.

ANDY

I let you because you're my friends. So I put up with it--and pick up the tab around here occasionally, when I know perfectly well how much money you both make AND how much money you both WASTE.

MARK

Wait a minute. How did we get onto the subject of money?

ANDY

Maybe it's worth it; I don't know. But don't worry; I've been keeping an account of the money you borrow. In case you ever decide to pay it back.

MARK

We'll...pay...you...back.

ANDY

This way, you understand, you won't pay back too much. Which is a great deal for you. Plus, I haven't charged you any interest, have I?

MARK

No...do you want us to pay interest?

ANDY

What for?...Is something wrong. Mark?

MARK

(Stunned)
I'm dumbfounded.

ANDY

I can see that.

MARK

(Dumbfounded)
And stunned.

ANDY

No kidding.

MARK

Dumbfounded and stunned, that's me.

ANDY

Do you remember when you moved in here?

MARK

Is this another surprise?

ANDY

Just answer me.

MARK

Yes, I definitely remember when I moved in. It was a Tuesday, or a Friday, maybe a Thursday...

ANDY

Do you remember which room you moved into?

MARK

My bedroom?

ANDY

Do you know what your room was before it WAS your room?

MARK

An extra room? A storage area? A very large closet?

ANDY

Do you really think I've always slept in the living room?

MARK

You did in college. That's what you told me when I asked about it. Let me guess. I moved into your room...Am I close?

ANDY

Very, and I let Shane think he talked me into it. Understand?

MARK

No.

ANDY

Well, I'll go wash these dishes and let it all sink in. I feel better, don't you? I feel as though a huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders. I suppose that's what keeping secrets can do to you. Don't you feel better?

MARK

I'll let you know.

(Andy carries the dishes into the kitchen. Mark rushes to Shane's bedroom door and knocks frantically. Shane finally opens it.)

SHANE

I hope you have a good reason for this.

MARK

It's Andy, Shane. We have to talk!

SHANE

Then shouldn't you find him and have this discussion?

MARK

No, I mean talk to YOU about Andy!

SHANE

About what? Can't it wait?

MARK

This is important. He knows about you and Gwen. The good stuff.

SHANE

So? Big deal. I knew you would open your big mouth sooner or later.

MARK

No, he figured it out for himself! That's what I mean! And he knows exactly how much we both owe him! And he has magazines! And urges, too!

SHANE

Oh, mercy, when will it end? Is that it? Is that what you got me up for?

MARK

Quick! What did you do with that W-2 form I got today?

SHANE

It's in the book with the rest.

MARK

I wonder if he knows about THAT?

SHANE

(Tired)

Oh, dear heavens, don't let it be true. Can I please go back to sleep?

MARK

No, this is important! I've seen a side of Andy I've never seen. Shane, my eyes have been opened!

SHANE

So has your mouth. Now close it and go to bed. Please? Good night!

(Shane slams the door. Andy enters from the kitchen.)

Mark, wha-

ANDY

MARK
(Backing away like a trapped animal)
What do you know about Mexican food?

ANDY
It's spicy, it's from Mexico, and it gives Shane heartburn. Do I pass?

MARK
What about bakeries?

ANDY
I don't know any right off the top of my head that sell Mexican food.

MARK
What do you know about bakeries?

ANDY
They sell donuts.

MARK
Anything else?

ANDY
Eclairs.

MARK
Is that it?

ANDY
Those long things with chocolate and nuts on the top, with creamy stuff inside.

MARK
That's an éclair!

ANDY
Aw, no! I failed! What do I lose, Don Pardo?

MARK
Don't toy with me, Andy.

ANDY
Okay. One question, though.

MARK
Here it comes. What is it?

ANDY
Why are you acting so weird?

MARK
No reason. Anything else?

ANDY
I need to go to the bathroom and wash up. Okay if I go through your room?

MARK
Sure. Be my guest.

ANDY
Whoever built this place sure didn't plan on three roommates.

(Andy exits into Mark's bedroom. Mark taps at Shane's door.)

MARK
Shane?

SHANE
(Still in his room)
Go away.

(Mark runs to the bookshelf, pulls out Gone With the Wind, checks his tax forms, hastily returns book and all to the shelf, then runs to check the filing cabinet. Andy re-enters.)

ANDY
What are you doing?

MARK
Nothing! Just admiring your filing cabinet.

ANDY
I need to get that bottom drawer fixed.

MARK
No hurry. 'Wait until you need it', that's what I always say.

ANDY

You do?

MARK

Of course I do. It's one of my favorite expressions!

ANDY

It is?

MARK

Absolutely! Well, I guess I'll be hitting the hay now. That's another of my favorite expressions. Well, Andy, nice talking to you. Nice getting to know more about you.

(Mark edges around the room until he reaches his door.)

MARK

Well, good night!

(Mark exits into his room. Andy watches him leave, shakes his head, then goes to the closet, gets his blanket and pillow, puts them on the couch, and turns out all the lights except for his desk lamp. He takes out a notebook, sharpens a pencil, and starts writing. Mark suddenly comes out of his room, grabs Gone With the Wind off the bookshelf, and waves goodnight to Andy as he exits back into his bedroom.)

ANDY

That guy is definitely weird.

(The lights fade as Andy stretches and goes back to work.)

scene 2

(It's two days later. The table has been set with a tablecloth, dishes, and candles. Mark can be heard offstage in the kitchen singing something Italian-sounding. He enters, wearing a chef's hat and apron, and carrying a casserole.)

MARK

Shane?

SHANE

(Still in the kitchen)
I'm not coming out.

MARK

Come on, get into the spirit of things. Play 'Chef-for-an-evening'!

SHANE

You play; I'm not coming out.

MARK

You'll have to when the girls get here. It's in the rules.

(Mark sneaks to his room and returns with a Polaroid camera. He swings the kitchen door open and snaps Shane's picture.)

SHANE

HEY!

MARK

Now you'll have to come out, because with this picture, we'll know what you look like anyway, hee hee!

(There is a knock at the door. Mark hops over and swings it open, revealing ELIZABETH MURDOCK, an attractive older woman in her late thirties. Mark, realizing who it is, starts to close the door but stops himself.)

Oh--HI! Hello, Mrs. Murdock! If this is about the rent, we--

ELIZABETH

You're getting Andy to pay it again this month? Don't worry, Mark, Shane already dropped it off. That isn't why I'm here.

MARK

Well, then, come on in! What can we do for you?

ELIZABETH

Actually, I'm here for dinner.

MARK

Dinner?

ELIZABETH

As Andy's guest.

MARK

Dinner?

ELIZABETH

You remember, you eat it sometime between noon and when you go to bed?

Dinner?

MARK

That's the one. Is Andy here?

ELIZABETH

Uh, no, he isn't--He's working late at the printshop again probably, but he'll--Shane?--be here soon--I hope.

MARK

That boy works too hard.

ELIZABETH

He sure does, but you can't keep him down, though. Work work work!! --Shane!--That's our Andy!

MARK

How ELSE could you afford to pay for everything around here?

ELIZABETH

Excuse me, won't you? SHANE!

MARK

I'm not coming out.

SHANE

Cast your eyes this way.

MARK

(Mark opens the kitchen door and holds it open so that Shane can see Elizabeth.)

SHANE

Oh...hello, Mrs. Murdock.

ELIZABETH

Shane. Couldn't find anything else to wear?

SHANE

Very funny, Mrs. Murdock. Are you here as Andy's guest this evening?

ELIZABETH

Do you have any problems with that?

SHANE

Don't ask me.

MARK

Hey, no problem here, either. Shane's the one who--

ELIZABETH

All right, you two. I know my being here makes you uncomfortable, but the fact is, I like that. Both of you take advantage of Andy's good nature far too much, too often, so I'm staying. Am I understood?

MARK

Yes, Mrs. Murdock. Actually, it was OUR idea that you come.

ELIZABETH

Really?

MARK

Oh, yes! We were just saying to Andy the other night--

ELIZABETH

Save your breath.

MARK

Yes, ma'am. Will you excuse me a second? I have to help Shane in the kitchen. He's lost without me. May I get you something to drink?

ELIZABETH

White wine?

MARK

(As he exits into the kitchen)
I think Andy bought some the other day...

(Elizabeth walks around, sizing up the apartment. Mark sneaks out, watches her a minute, then straightens up and enters to give her the wine.)

MARK

Your wine.

ELIZABETH

Thank you.

MARK

Excuse me again?

ELIZABETH

Of course. I do it all the time.

(Mark exits back into the kitchen. Elizabeth looks over Andy's sketches, sipping her wine. There is a knock on the front door.)

ELIZABETH

Mark, there's someone at the door.

MARK

(In the kitchen)

Could you get it? I trust you.

Elizabeth opens the front door for GWEN and CLAIRE. Gwen is pretty and unassuming. Claire is sharply dressed and sharp-looking.)

GWEN

This IS Mark and Shane's apartment, isn't it?

ELIZABETH

That's what the names on the mailbox downstairs say. I'm Elizabeth Murdock, the landlady. You must be Gwen...and Claire. (She greets each correctly.)

CLAIRE

Have those naughty boys been talking about us behind our backs?

ELIZABETH

Sorry. Andy's the one who described you in such great detail. You DO know who Andy is, don't you?

CLAIRE

Of course. He's the sweet one.

ELIZABETH

That's him.

CLAIRE

Are you Andy's girlfriend, Mrs. Murdock?

ELIZABETH

No, why do you say that?

CLAIRE

Well, Mark said--

ELIZABETH

Yees?

CLAIRE

He said you might be Andy's date this evening.

ELIZABETH

I see. And you thought the word DATE might be substituted for GIRLFRIEND. Well, when you put it that way, maybe...

GWEN

What does MR. Murdock think about it?

ELIZABETH

I haven't asked him. But I will, the next time I take some flowers to his grave.

GWEN

Oh, is he dead?

ELIZABETH

I hope so. He was buried four years ago.

CLAIRE

How awful!

ELIZABETH

Yes, it was. The funeral AND the marriage. But I survived. I think I've managed quite nicely.

CLAIRE

But you do miss him, don't you? I mean, he was your husband.

(Mark enters, chef's hat.)

MARK

Hey, hey, girls! Entrez-vous! Don't you look gorgeous, Gwen!

CLAIRE

What about ME?

MARK

Best for last, my love. You know you're beautiful. (Kisses her). I see you've met Mrs. Murdock, our wonderful landlady.

CLAIRE

But Mark, you said--

MARK

(Quickly, to Elizabeth)
So many WONDERFUL THINGS ABOUT YOU THAT THE GIRLS WERE PROBABLY
EXPECTING A MUCH, MUCH, MUCH OLDER WOMAN. Say, in her forties.
Let me put your coats away. (He does.)

CLAIRE

Forties! I was expecting sixties, at least, from your description.

MARK

Don't help me, Claire. Shane, the girls are here!

SHANE

(In the kitchen)
I'm not coming out.

(Mark holds the door open, snaps another Polaroid, and holds the door so that the girls can see Shane. Shane steps out, dressed in a chef's hat and "Eat at Joe's" apron, spatula in hand.)

SHANE

Hello.

(Shane steps back into the kitchen.)

CLAIRE

Attractive.

GWEN

Cute outfit, Shane.

SHANE

Mark, could I see you for a minute?

MARK

Get rid of the spatula and I'll think about it. Could I get you girls something to drink?

CLAIRE

Wine?

GWEN

Wine sounds good.

MARK

Wine all around it is. Shane? Could we call a truce so that I can get the girls their wine?

(Mark opens the kitchen door a crack, trying to see if the coast is clear.)

SHANE

Of course. Come on in.

(Mark enters the kitchen and immediately there is a clatter of pots and pans. Shane leans out.)

SHANE

Mark will have your drinks as soon as he regains consciousness.

(Mark leans out.)

MARK

Nooo, he's lying. I already regained consciousness, so I'll have your wine in a minute, ladies.

(Shane and Mark disappear again into the kitchen. The ladies sit on the couch and easy chair, with Elizabeth taking the chair.)

CLAIRE

So, Mrs. Murdock, have you known Andy a long time?

ELIZABETH

Ever since he became one of my tenants. That's been about two years.

GWEN

Don't you ever get lonely?

ELIZABETH

You mean without George, my husband? No.

CLAIRE

But you DO miss your husband?

ELIZABETH

I wasn't that fond of him when he was alive, Claire, so the transition was fairly easy after the funeral. When I married George, he seemed much nicer, more intelligent, and more caring than he really was. So, no, I can't say I miss him all that much.

CLAIRE

How awful.

ELIZABETH

I can tell we're going to get along.

(Mark enters with two glasses of wine.)

MARK

You girls getting acquainted?

ELIZABETH

Very.

MARK

That's just great. --Wait! What's that sound? Is someone coming down the hall? Let's see who it is! Ladies and gentlemen, it's-- (Mark swings the door open. Andy comes into view, carrying sacks of groceries.)--Andy Palmer, man-about-town! And here's tonight's special guest host to say a few words while I take the groceries and help Shane in the kitchen. Take it away, Andy!

ANDY

Don't you think you should look down the hall before you swing the door open like that? Last week, you nearly gave poor Mr. Rubiniwicz down the hall an attack. Where'd you get that hat?

MARK

Next time, I'll look, but see if I ever open the door for YOU again. Excuse me.

(Mark exits into the kitchen.)

ANDY

Good evening, ladies. Shall we dispense with the niceties and just skip to the part where I kiss your hands? Good.

(He kisses each hand with great ceremony. Then he comes to Elizabeth.)

ANDY

Such a lovely hand! One that signs rent receipts. The hand of the landlady!

ELIZABETH

Now don't YOU start.

ANDY

(Kissing her on the cheek)
These girls giving you a hard time?

ELIZABETH

Oh, I can handle them, but those roommates of yours. Take a look at Shane in the kitchen.

ANDY

Shane's in the kitchen? I've got to see this!

ELIZABETH.

While you're at it, snap a picture of him, will you?

ANDY

This must be good.

(Andy swings the kitchen door open and snaps a Polaroid.)

SHANE AND MARK

HEY!

ANDY

What's the matter? Couldn't find anything to wear?

SHANE AND MARK

Don't YOU start. Close the door!

(Andy lets the door swing shut.)

ANDY

(Laughing)

You'd think no one had ever seen two guys in aprons before.

ELIZABETH

How are things at the printshop?

ANDY

Busy. Very busy. We had orders backed up so I did some of the little ones tonight so that we could concentrate on big ones during the day.

CLAIRE

You mean they made you work OVERTIME?

ANDY

Who's THEY? Nobody MADE me do it. I just took care of a few simple orders to get them out of the way. No big deal.

ELIZABETH

That's the way he is, girls. Helpful to a fault. A real sweetheart.

ANDY

(Uncomfortable)

There's nothing special about it. It just made sense to do while I had the chance.

ELIZABETH

Modest to a fault, too.

(She looks directly at Andy, but he breaks the stare.)

GWEN

Shane says you're writing a book, Andy. I think that's just too fascinating! Imagine, just being in the same room as an author!

ANDY

Well, it isn't finished yet, so I'm a "soon-to-be", and with luck I won't end up a "has-been".

CLAIRE

Soon to be what?

ANDY

Author, Claire. Soon-to-be-author.

CLAIRE

Oh, I see! You're playing with the language! I know what that is!

ANDY

Thank goodness I know what it is, too.

GWEN

What's the book about?

ANDY

It's a murder mystery.

GWEN

You mean like Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie?

ANDY

You've read those?

GWEN

They're on my bookshelf, right above the romance novels.

ELIZABETH

Exactly where they should be. Some of these romances are so awful, but they're addictive.

CLAIRE

I know! I'm reading one that just came out called College Days' Desire. It's really the most marvelous book. I hope Sylvia Faraday writes another one soon.

(At the mention of the book and Sylvia Faraday, Andy almost snaps to attention.)

(Mark enters with Shane following, both with trays of food.)

MARK

Food's ready. Everyone take a seat, and please, people, boy-girl-boy-girl, okay? No ganging up with the gender of your birth, all right?

(They sit, boy-girl-etc. Andy holds Elizabeth's chair for her. Mark and Shane quickly leap to imitate the gesture.)

MARK

(Pouring the wine.)

May I propose a toast? I will anyway. To the man who made all this possible...But enough about me. To Shane, who helped pick out the dishes. To the girls, including the landlady. "Elizabeth" to her friends, "Mrs. Murdock" to the rest of us. And finally, to Andy, all-around nice guy. Taught him everything he knows! To Andy, a man with urges just like the rest of us. Salud!

SHANE

What's THAT supposed to mean?

MARK

What. "salud"? It means "drink up" in some foreign language.

SHANE

No, "a man with urges just like the rest of us"?

MARK

Exactly.

SHANE

But what did you mean?

MARK

You had your chance to find out, but you blew it.

GWEN

I'm confused.

MARK

I'm hungry. We're even.

GWEN

Andy, what did Mark mean?

ANDY

Who knows what Mark ever means?

ELIZABETH

So, you have urges just like the rest of us?

ANDY

Could we change the subject? I don't think my urges make good dinner conversation.

MARK

It could give SOMEONE an appetite.

GWEN

Who?

ANDY

Could we please change the subject? I'm losing MY appetite.

SHANE

Here, here.

ELIZABETH

Not me.

(She grabs Andy's leg under the table. He jerks away as the lights begin to fade.)

GWEN

I'm still confused.

(The lights fade out.)

scene 3

(Lights up. Everyone has obviously finished and is pushing away from the table, evidently stuffed. Mark makes a move to clear away some of the dishes.)

MARK

I'll do it. Don't help me. Don't help me, I said.

ANDY

Do you want some help, Mark?

MARK

Please? Who wants dessert?

ELIZABETH

Just coffee for me, thanks.

CLAIRE

Me, too, Markie.

MARK

Cut the "Markie" in public, okay? I have an announcement to make: Andy made the dessert.

ELIZABETH

I changed my mind. I WILL have some.

CLAIRE

Me, too, MARKIE.

MARK

I knew that would work. Dessert for everyone? Fine. Grab those glasses, will you, Andy?

(Mark and Andy exit into the kitchen, loaded down with dishes.)

ELIZABETH

That was some dinner.

GWEN

Uh huh. Who would have thought that Mark could cook so well?

SHANE

He wasn't the only one in the kitchen, you know.

ELIZABETH

Who would have thought that Mark could cook so well?

SHANE

He gets a lot of practice.

CLAIRE

Really? As it is, he barely has time for me.

(Mark and Andy return with dessert and coffee.)

MARK

Ladies and gentlemen, and Shane. I present to you, "dessert"!

(He serves everyone while Andy gets the coffee poured. Everyone groans with delight as they taste the dessert. Obviously, it's pretty good stuff.)

GWEN

Oh, Andy, this is wonderful!

(Everyone moans in agreement.)

MARK

(Pretending to sulk)
I made the coffee.

EVERYONE

Awwwww, poor baby!

MARK

I have to admit it, though, this IS delicious!

(Shane snaps a Polaroid.)

SHANE

Got it!

MARK

What are you doing?

SHANE

Just capturing this moment for posterity. You, actually ADMITTING something.

MARK

Cool it, will you? Verbally chastise me later.

ELIZABETH

We were just saying how wonderful the dinner was, Mark.

MARK

Aw, gee, thanks. I don't get much of a chance to cook.

GWEN

That isn't what Shane said.

MARK

OH? And what exactly DID Shane say?

ELIZABETH

Exactly? He said you got a LOT of practice.

MARK

You said that, Shane? You must have gotten me confused with someone else, right?

SHANE

Actually--

MARK

Shane!

CLAIRE

Mark?

MARK

SHANE!

SHANE

Actually--

CLAIRE

Mark, why are you acting so weird?

MARK

WHO'S ACTING WEIRD?

GWEN

You are, for one. Do you get a lot of practice at cooking or don't you?

MARK

Well...

ANDY

I think he's trying to say that between working all the time and seeing Claire when he can, that he's a little embarrassed at the notion of a man spending his leisure time in the kitchen. Am I right, Mark?

MARK

...On the nose! I guess I've still got a little male chauvinist pig left in me.

CLAIRE

We'll get rid of that after we're married, eh, honey?

SHANE

Married?

CLAIRE

I'm sorry, Mark, I know we promised to wait a while--

SHANE

MARRIED?

MARK

Yeah, well, you know, it was just one of those things.

SHANE

Nice of you to tell me, BUDDY. How long have the two of you been engaged?

MARK

Not long...

CLAIRE

Not long, really. Only about two weeks.

SHANE

TWO WEEKS!

GWEN

Isn't that a coincidence?

ELIZABETH

Isn't what a coincidence?

MARK

Yeah, isn't that a coincidence? Shane, don't you have something to announce?

GWEN

I think this would be the perfect time to announce OUR engagement, don't you, Shane?

SHANE

(Sarcastically)
Just perfect.

ANDY

(Surprised)
Don't tell me you two are engaged, too?

GWEN

Yes, isn't it wonderful?

SHANE

(Sarcastically)
Yippee.

ANDY

This calls for a toast. I guess coffee cups will do. To Shane and Gwen and to Mark and Claire. Congratulations to all on your engagements.

SHANE

(Sarcastically)
Yippee.

(They clink cups in a toast.)

MARK

(Sarcastically to Shane)
Well, that was ENLIGHTENING.

SHANE

(Equally sarcastically)
Yes, wasn't it?

MARK

(Pretending to console Shane)
Now, Shane, BUDDY! It would have come out sooner or later, wouldn't it? Now you won't have to sneak around. You and Gwen can be lovebirds out in the open. You can open your hearts to each other and share those private things that bring two people together.

SHANE

Or keep them apart. You know how those private things are.

MARK

Yeah, well...

CLAIRE

A double engagement. Isn't it something? It's so romantic, for one thing. Maybe Sylvia Faraday will include something like it in one of her books.

MARK

Sylvia who? Faraday? The one who wrote that book College Days' Desire?

ELIZABETH

Have you read that, Mark? I wasn't aware that it was included in the Sesame Street Library.

MARK

It isn't my book; it's Andy's. It's sitting in the kitchen on the refrigerator.

Andy?

ELIZABETH

ANDY

I heard it was a good book. And it was the featured selection last month in my book club.

MARK

You couldn't wait until it came out in paperback?

ANDY

I wanted to read it, okay? Now could we please change the subject to something we can ALL talk about?

ELIZABETH

We could talk about YOUR book.

CLAIRE

We could talk about our engagements some more.

GWEN

We could talk about ourselves.

MARK

I'd rather talk about the last episode of Dynasty.

ELIZABETH

I'd rather talk about urges and related subjects.

SHANE

We could talk about our jobs. Couldn't we, Mark?

MARK

I'd rather wash the dishes.

SHANE

We could wash the dishes AND talk about our jobs.

MARK

Is washing the dishes in silence one of our options?

CLAIRE

Honestly, Mark. Just how long do you think you could KEEP your mouth shut?

MARK

I'm willing to time it and find out.

CLAIRE

Then come on and we'll see how long you last before you break the silence. Agreed?

SHANE

THIS I have to see. No, Andy, you and Mrs. Murdock stay in here. With Mark, this shouldn't take long.

(Shane, Mark, Gwen, and Claire exit into the kitchen. Andy and Elizabeth take their coffee and sit on the couch. Andy sits at one end after Elizabeth is seated. She moves closer to him on the couch.)

ELIZABETH

You're being awfully quiet. Are you having a race with Mark? To see who can be the quietest the longest?

ANDY

No, I just don't have anything to say at the moment.

ELIZABETH

Think of something.

ANDY

um...

ELIZABETH

All right, I'll get you started. What was Mark talking about when he made that toast, the one about your urges?

ANDY

That was just Mark kidding around. I had no idea he'd make a silly toast like that.

ELIZABETH

Which urges are we talking about?

ANDY

The very ones you imagine we are.

ELIZABETH

You know, I haven't forgotten about that night.

ANDY

I didn't think so.

ELIZABETH

Are you sorry it happened?

ANDY

What makes you say that?

ELIZABETH

You always shy away from the subject.

ANDY

(A little defensive)
I do not.

ELIZABETH

Are you ashamed of it?

ANDY

No, I am not. And I do NOT shy away from the subject. And I'm not sorry it happened.

ELIZABETH

Good...Do you want to relive old memories?

ANDY

Tonight?

ELIZABETH

Any night. It doesn't matter when. I'll wait as long as I have to. You know that.

ANDY

Elizabeth, I don't know...

ELIZABETH

Do you still think you'll hear from Linda? Has she written you? Has she called? No. No cards. No letters. Nothing. Now do you really think you'll hear from her?

ANDY

No...I guess not.

ELIZABETH

Exactly. Are you going to continue to mope around while she's off somewhere finding herself?

ANDY

Knock it off.

ELIZABETH

I'd like to, believe me. Don't you realize that you have someone who cares about you right here, and we both know who I mean. Andy, I love you. You know I mean it, too, don't you?

ANDY

I guess.

ELIZABETH

One night we shared something beautiful. We were both lonely and needed someone that night. Well, I need you again. Would you deny me that?

ANDY

What about what I need? What if it isn't the same thing?

ELIZABETH

I'm going to go downstairs. If you should feel like making an older woman happy, just knock on the door, okay?

ANDY

And if I don't knock on your door?

ELIZABETH

There'll be a lot of lonely nights when you might...Think about it?

ANDY

I will.

(Elizabeth starts for the door, with Andy following. At the door she turns to him and they kiss, with the familiarity of lovers. Mark pokes his head out and sees them, and starts. He can't believe what he's seeing! He hastily retreats into the kitchen. Finally, the kiss breaks.)

ELIZABETH

Think about what I said. About you and Linda, you and me, especially about those lonely nights. Okay?

(Andy nods and kisses her again.)

ELIZABETH

You watch those urges now. They could get you into trouble.

ANDY

Don't I know it. Look what's happened so far.

ELIZABETH

Funny, boy.

ANDY

Maybe I'll see you later.

ELIZABETH

I hope so. Good night, dear.

(Elizabeth exits and Andy sits at his desk. Mark peeks out and comes in.)

MARK

Mrs. Murdock leave?

ANDY

Yeah, she had to get up early or something.

MARK

(He's got a secret!)
Oh, really?

(Mark sits on the desk.)

MARK

Do you remember the other night when you told me some things about yourself that sort of freaked me out for a minute?

ANDY

Yeah...

MARK

Well. I just SAW something that freaked me out.

ANDY

And...?

MARK

Your secret's safe.

ANDY

Good. So is yours.

MARK

...what?..

ANDY

The next time I feel like re-reading Gone With the Wind, remind me to give you those W-2 forms so that they don't get lost.

MARK

You know?

ANDY

It took me a few minutes, but then I put the pieces together. You know, like "What do you know about Mexican food?"

MARK

Are you going to tell Claire?

ANDY

That's your job; you're the one who's going to marry her. I imagine she might find out one of these days by herself, especially if you decide to fill out joint returns at tax time.

MARK

Do you think she'll be mad?

ANDY

That depends on how fast you can talk. With you, that part should be the easiest.

MARK

Listen, Andy, it isn't that I didn't trust you, but--

ANDY

You thought I might tell Claire or let it slip? Shane's the one you'll have to worry about there.

MARK

Andy, there is something I think I should tell you. I don't want you to think it was my idea, but--

(Shane, Gwen, and Claire enter.)

CLAIRE

Are you boys talking about us while WE finished up the dishes?

MARK

Oh, no...what would give you that idea?

SHANE

Just what WERE you talking about?

MARK

Nothing.

GWEN

Hey, where's your landlady? In the little girls' room?

MARK
She had to get up early or something tomorrow. Andy and I have just been chewing the fat while you guys finished up.

SHANE
What fat were you chewing?

MARK
Oh, movies and stuff.

SHANE
Like Gone With the Wind?

CLAIRE
I loved that movie.

GWEN
I loved the book.

SHANE
YOU read the book?

GWEN
You think I can't read something for enjoyment?

SHANE
I didn't say that.

MARK
Can you do long division?

GWEN
With a calculator.

CLAIRE
Doesn't everyone?

MARK
How about decimals?

ANDY
Why are we talking about this?

GWEN
Because Shane doesn't think I can read a book like Gone With the Wind for my own enjoyment.

SHANE

I didn't SAY that.

GWEN

I'll prove it. Where's that copy I saw before? There it is.

MARK

--NO!

GWEN

Why not?

MARK

We all know you can read, Gwen. Shane was just kidding, weren't you, Shane? Shane?

SHANE

Second shelf from the top.

MARK

NO!!

(There is a knock on the door.)

MARK

Someone's at the door! It must be Mrs. Murdock, come to rejoin the fun!

(Mark rushes to the door, swings it open to reveal a startled LINDA.)

MARK

Heeeelllloooo? Uh, hi, can I help you?

LINDA

Is Andy here?

MARK

Sure. Andy, there's someone here to see you.

(Andy comes to the door and stands there, stunned.)

LINDA

Hi honey!

(Linda throws her arms around Andy, who just stands there, stunned.)

MARK

Excuse me. I'm Mark, one of Andy's roommates, and you are..?

LINDA

Pleased to meet you.

(Linda shakes Mark's hand. Andy still stands there, stunned.)

MARK

Hey, Andy, I like her already!

ANDY

(Stunned)

Guys, and girls, this is Linda, the one I told you about.

(Both Mark and Shane are visibly shaken.)

MARK

Linda?

SHANE

THE Linda?

LINDA

You mean you've been talking about me, Andy? Where are your manners?

ANDY

Lost my head. What are you doing here?

LINDA

I just moved here this week. Didn't you get my last letter?

(As the lights fade, Linda greets Gwen and Claire. Mark pokes Shane hard in the arm. Andy just stands there, as before, stunned.)

(The lights fade to black.)

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO

scene 1

(It's a half-hour later. Andy and Linda are alone, the coffee pot sitting on the coffee table in front of them.)

ANDY

And I'm telling you, Linda, I haven't been ignoring your letters. I haven't gotten one in over six months. I would have written you back if I had. I didn't even know you were moving here OR that you would be stopping by tonight.

LINDA

A likely story.

ANDY

Forgive me?

LINDA

Let me think that one over.

ANDY

More coffee?

LINDA

All right.

ANDY

The pot's empty. Mark was brewing some fresh, let me see...

(Mark peeks out of the kitchen to see if the coast is clear.)

MARK

Hi, kids! You ready for a refill?

(He takes the pot and stops at the kitchen door and makes gestures of approval to Andy when Linda isn't looking.)

MARK

I'll be right back. Now, don't you go anywhere, you two!

(Mark exits into the kitchen.)

ANDY

He's a little on the weird side.

LINDA

You didn't have to point that out. So, what have you been up to? Of course, if you had written, I wouldn't have to ask...

ANDY

I told you--

LINDA

I know. I just wanted to get a rise out of you. So, talk to me.

ANDY

Not a lot's happened to me in the last six months. I've been working at the printshop. The work's okay and I get free copies anytime I want. And I'm working on my next book.

LINDA

Your NEXT book? What was your first? You never said anything about it. But then, you haven't written me, either.

ANDY

It's a long story.

LINDA

You might as well tell me. You know I'll find out anyway. I always do.

ANDY

I know. That's something you could always do was get me to talk.

LINDA

About normal things. I had to pry the juicy, personal stuff out of you with a crowbar.

ANDY

No, you didn't. You never wanted to hear the juicy, personal stuff. You said you couldn't handle it with everything going on in your life.

LINDA

I said that. At first, maybe, but after I got used to the idea, I had to pry the personal things out of you.

ANDY

I didn't know what to say.

LINDA

How about 'I love you'?

I said that often enough.

ANDY

Not enough for me.

LINDA

Yes, I did. I said it several times a day, every day. I made it a point to tell you whenever I had the urge.

ANDY

Oh, that's right, that WAS you.

LINDA

It wasn't that guy Jerry.

ANDY

No, it wasn't Jerry. You know he still hates you for stealing me back.

LINDA

Likewise.

ANDY

Jerry very seldom had the urge to do anything but listen to his stereo, much less tell me he loved me.

LINDA

How you could mistake a large collection of record albums for a sign of intelligence is somehow beyond me.

ANDY

Do you have the urge right now?

LINDA

...what?

ANDY

I asked you if you had the urge to tell me you loved me.

LINDA

No.

ANDY

Why not?

LINDA

Because I don't know if I would mean it.

ANDY

LINDA

Why not? You DO love me, don't you?

ANDY

Maybe I do. So?

LINDA

Then tell me.

ANDY

What good would that do? It would be as one-sided a conversation as it's always been. I tell you I love you and you say how sweet that is. You never, ever, saw fit to say it first.

LINDA

That's not true!

ANDY

Yes, it is.

(Mark enters with the coffee pot.)

MARK

Coffee, anyone?

ANDY

We're still talking.

MARK

I'll hurry then, .sire. If you need anything--

ANDY

I'll call you.

MARK

Right.

(Mark exits back into the kitchen.)

LINDA

Isn't there someplace we can go? Someplace private, like your room?

ANDY

We're in it.

LINDA

You sleep in the living room?

Yes.

ANDY

That's awful.

LINDA

What's so awful about it? I did it in college.

ANDY

But that was with only one roommate, and the only other room besides the bathroom was a walk-in closet.

LINDA

You remember.

ANDY

I should. I practically lived there.

LINDA

Is your memory faulty, or is mine? Lived with me? Get serious! You just slept there when it was convenient for you.

ANDY

You asked me to stay.

LINDA

Because I loved you, and I wanted to spend as much time with you as I possibly could.

ANDY

Is this where you sleep?

LINDA

It happens to be a very comfortable couch.

ANDY

Would you be willing to share tonight?

LINDA

Whaaa...? No.

ANDY

Why not? Afraid of reliving old memories?

LINDA

Maybe. Besides, I don't want Mark and Shane walking in on us during the night.

ANDY

LINDA

Do you think they would?

ANDY

Every chance they got. It would be just like Mark to bound in any minute now.

(Mark comes in.)

MARK

Everthing okay in here?

ANDY

See? You guys don't have to stay in the kitchen all night, you know.

MARK

Great. The conversation's been getting a little stale in the last few minutes.

ANDY

Like day-old donuts?

MARK

Watch it, you, I know where you live. Hey, you guys, come on in.

(Shane, Gwen, and Claire enter from the kitchen.)

MARK

So, have the two of you become reacquainted?

LINDA

Yes and no.

MARK

So, how do you find our fair city, Linda?

LINDA

With a roadmap.

MARK

I like this girl, Andy! Like her! Like her!

CLAIRE

What was that, mister?

MARK

As a newfound friend, dear. Nothing else.

GWEN

Well, I think it's great that Andy has someone of his own around to take care of him.

LINDA

And love him. Don't forget that.

ANDY

Actually, I get enough mothering from my two roommates and the landlady.

SHANE

Oh? I wasn't aware that Mrs. Murdock had the slightest interest in being your MOTHER, Andy.

MARK

Could we change the subject?

CLAIRE

I agree with Shane.

MARK

No, not that! It can't be! You can't side with him! Not after all WE'VE meant to each other!

LINDA

Melodramatic, isn't he?

ANDY

Like you on graduation day.

MARK

I sense hostility here.

SHANE

There's always hostility when YOU'RE in the room.

GWEN

Did Andy tell you he was writing a book?

LINDA

His next book? Yes, he did.

CLAIRE

His next book? Was there one before? No one mentioned that one to me.

ANDY

Let's change the subject.

MARK

From what I understand, this book is a detective novel. The one coming up, that is. It could be a classic!

SHANE

Like Gone With the Wind?

MARK

(Glaring)
No, like Sherlock Holmes or Murder on the Orient Express. (Directly to Shane.) YOU KNOW, someone dies in the still of the night and the detective tries to figure out who-done-it.

GWEN

Who DID it, Mark. Or were you playing with the language, too?

MARK

No, just writing the epitaph of an old FRIEND.

CLAIRE

You knew Sherlock Holmes?

MARK

Forget that. Andy's book will be right at the top of the bestseller list. We'll have a special display for it right here on the top shelf. We'll leave the second shelf for other books like Gone With the Wind and College Days' Desire.

LINDA

Isn't that one of those romance novels?

MARK

The ones anyone can write? Yeah.

ANDY

Not just anyone.

CLAIRE

What was that, Andy?

ANDY

Nothing.

MARK

I'll bet I could throw together one of those things and hit the bestseller list in a week, tops, and they'd probably do a movie based on it.

SHANE

There he goes, dreaming again.

MARK

It's Andy's book.

ANDY

(Getting up and grabbing the book)
That's right. It's MY book. So kindly change the subject.

MARK

Hey, what's the matter? Shane make you angry? He does that to me all the time.

ANDY

It's just that--I bought the book because--I know the author personally.

CLAIRE

You know Sylvia Faraday? You really know her?

ANDY

That's only a pseudonym. The author's really a man. He just changed it because women buy these romance books and it wouldn't have sold if he had used his own name.

CLAIRE

Who is he? Do we know him?

ANDY

How should I know? He was in my creative writing class in college.

MARK

Wow! What a scoop! Is he famous? Has he written anything else? A sequel, maybe? Desire After Graduation?

ANDY

I heard he's about to finish his next book, but it won't be a romance novel. It'll be legit, under his own name.

LINDA

What's his name?

ANDY

That's all the dirt I can give you right now. You'll have to be satisfied with that bit of gossip for a while.

MARK

I'm satisfied! This is great! The inside scoop on the publishing game.

ANDY

Now can we change the subject?

GWEN

To what?

MARK

Well, actually, I need to talk to Claire alone, so if you'll all excuse us, we'll head for the privacy of my bedroom. Claire?

(Mark escorts Claire into the bedroom. Then he comes back out, grabs Gone With the Wind, and giving Andy the "thumb's up," exits into his room.)

LINDA

Is he going to read to her?

ANDY

I think he's finally ready to take the plunge. Don't you, Shane?

SHANE

Hm..? Oh,..yes. Gwen, could I talk to you...alone?

GWEN

...All right.

SHANE

In my room?

GWEN

I don't--all right.

(Shane and Gwen exit into Shane's bedroom.)

LINDA

Now, where were we before we were interrupted?

ANDY

You wanted to know if I was willing to share the couch tonight.

LINDA

And your answer was...?

ANDY

No.

LINDA

So, have you changed your mind in the last few minutes?

ANDY

Look, Linda, the truth is that I DO still love you. There, I said it. But when I didn't hear from you for six months, I figured you had found someone else, another Jerry to fool around with. I missed you, but I don't know if I can reopen that can of worms again.

LINDA

A can of worms?

ANDY

Just hold it right there. All the time we were dating you talked down to me, like the lovesick puppy I was. But no more. I've had to do a lot of growing up and soul searching since then. I'm more than I was before, and you will not talk down to me.

LINDA

I'm sorry. I guess I never realized...

ANDY

I know you didn't. But I loved you anyway.

LINDA

I did miss you.

ANDY

Did you.

LINDA

I did, really. After college I found out how lonely the world really was, and I started having second thoughts about what I told you on the day we graduated. It wasn't until after I had lost you that I began to realize how much I truly cared for you. How much I loved you. Jerry dumped me, sure. But I was glad to be rid of him, to tell the truth. I was bored with him, in every sense of the word. With you, there was always something to talk about, even if it was how much you loved me. I never fully appreciated you until you were gone. So, when you wrote me that first time, I thought 'great!', maybe in time this thing can work itself out. Am I making sense?

ANDY

Yeah...

LINDA

So what do we do about it?

ANDY

Start again.

LINDA

From scratch?

ANDY

Oh, no--I want to remember everything that went on before.
Everything.

LINDA

Come here, you.

(The two of them kiss. Then, suddenly, there is shouting. Gwen enters from Shane's room, with Shane following.)

GWEN

I told you not until after we're married, with a real wedding in a real church, not some justice of the peace! There will be no fooling around before, and that's final!

SHANE

I told you, both of my parents are out of the country. Who knows when they'll be back. One of us could be killed before then.

GWEN

Is that the line your father used on your mother back in the war? Well, mister, it won't wash now! If your parents don't care enough to come home for their own son's wedding, then you can do without that kind of parent. Did you even tell them?

SHANE

I was going to.

GWEN

Going to? GOING TO? Were you going to give them a call during the reception? Or during the honeymoon?

ANDY

If you want to be alone--

SHANE

Stay out of this! When I want your two cents, I'll ask for it!

ANDY

Fine.

GWEN

Don't jump all over Andy! He isn't the one anyone should be mad at, is he? HE wouldn't get married and not tell his parents.

SHANE

If you must know, I wasn't even intending to get married!

ANDY

Shane--

SHANE

Butt out!

GWEN

(Crying)
I'll never forgive you for that, Shane. What a cruel thing to say!

SHANE

I don't care! Good-bye!

GWEN

Good-bye!

(Gwen leaves, slamming the door. Shane goes into the room, slamming the door.)

LINDA

What was that all about?

ANDY

It's another of those long stories. I can't believe the two of them would get into that big a fight. But maybe they'll cool off.

(There is shouting again, this time from Mark's room. Claire enters from there and throws Gone With the Wind back into the room, presumably at Mark.)

CLAIRE

And when were you going to tell me, on our honeymoon.

(Mark enters cautiously.)

MARK

But Claire, honey, I just wanted to impress you!

CLAIRE

So you lied to me? I could have accepted the truth. But not this far along in the game! It isn't fair to me, Mark!

MARK

I know, sweetheart.

CLAIRE

I would have thought that you would have more respect for me than that. You could have told me the truth!

MARK

I know.

CLAIRE

Did you think that was cute? "Claire, I'm not really a market analyst, but don't worry, we won't starve. I have SEVERAL jobs AND I can do all the cooking".

MARK

Well...

CLAIRE

I'm leaving, but don't you think I'm through with you yet, mister!

(Claire leaves, slamming the door. Mark stands dejected in the middle of the room.)

ANDY

I guess you told her, huh?

MARK

Yep.

ANDY

Are you all right?

MARK

I'm still alive. I guess that counts for something.

ANDY

What are you going to do, now?

MARK

Kill Shane for giving me that "Claire, I'm not a market analyst..." line. Then I'll go for a nice long walk. Maybe across the river.

ANDY

That could take all night.

MARK

I know...Look, kids, I'll be out for a while. You have a lot of catching up to do and if you should need the use of my room, feel free. After all, it was Andy's room in the first place.

ANDY

Mark...

MARK

Aw, hey, go ahead, just let me grab my jacket and I'm gone.

(Mark steps back into his room.)

ANDY

Wow.

LINDA

Is it always like this?

ANDY

Never.

LINDA

Listen, before we go any further, are there any secrets you'd like to share with me that you think I should know?

ANDY

There is one.

LINDA

Let's hear it. Who was she?

ANDY

Make that two.

LINDA

Let's hear the first one, loverboy.

ANDY

College Days' Desire really WAS written by a guy in my creative writing class. Me. I'M Sylvia Faraday, best-selling author of romance novels.

LINDA

What's the other thing?

(Mark re-enters, jacket in hand.)

MARK

Be my guest kids. Live it up. I'll see you later.

ANDY

Well, you heard us mention our landlady, Mrs. Murdock...

LINDA

Yeees?

ANDY

Thanks, Mark.

(Andy and Linda exit into Mark's room and close the door behind them. Mark stands there for a minute, puts on his jacket and starts for the door. He stops and goes to Shane's door.)

MARK

Shane?

SHANE

Go away.

MARK

Let me through. I forgot to use the bathroom.

SHANE

Go away. I mean it!

MARK

Have a heart!

SHANE

Drown in it for all I care.

MARK

That's what I'm afraid of.

(Mark goes into his own bedroom door and gets ready to knock, but stops when he hears noise inside. He exits, walking a little strangely. As he leaves, he flips out the living room lights.)

scene 2

(The next day. Mark is eating breakfast at the table when Andy sleepily comes out of Mark's bedroom.)

ANDY

Good morning.

MARK

Morning.

ANDY

How was your walk?

MARK

Long. Want a donut? I made them not more than an hour ago.

ANDY

You've been to work already?

MARK

Yes, at the bakery. Up to my eyeballs in donuts and eclairs. You know what I figured out last night when I was wandering all over town? You're never really content until you're happy.

ANDY

That's deep.

MARK

So's the river. I considered throwing myself in.

ANDY

Thank god you didn't.

MARK

You know, I was sitting on the bank of the river, trying to think this thing through and realize what mistakes I made. I messed up, Andy. Badly.

ANDY

Are you going to try to talk to Claire to sort things out between you?

MARK

I'll tell you later. I made her jelly-filled and left them outside her door with a note. Maybe she'll appreciate the gesture.

ANDY

Maybe she will.

MARK

What about you? How was the rest of your evening?

ANDY

Great. The best I've had since college.

MARK

Really? Hey, I...uh, overheard you tell Linda about College Days' Desire.

ANDY

And?

MARK

And I started leafing through it. Looks interesting. Do you think I could get Claire Sylvia Faraday's autograph?

ANDY

I'm sure of it. She's a personal friend of mine.

MARK

Mine, too. Thanks. Well, I've got to go talk to my bosses about my jobs. I'm going to see about a full-time job cooking somewhere in one of the restaurants.

ANDY

What about the bakery? Are you going to quit there, too?

MARK

What? And miss the free donuts? Forget that. Hey, if Claire calls, will you take a message?

ANDY

Absolutely.

(Mark grabs his jacket and heads out the door. He meets Shane in the doorway. Shane seems unusually subdued. Mark greets him and leaves. Shane comes in and stands there.)

ANDY

Shane?

SHANE

Good morning.

ANDY

I didn't think you'd be up this early on a Saturday. You don't have to be at work today.

SHANE

I've just been talking to Mrs. Murdock.

ANDY

Here, have a seat. Mark just made these donuts this morning. What were you talking to Elizabeth about?

(Shane sits at the table and Andy pours him a cup of coffee. Shane still seems distracted.)

SHANE

Did you know Mr. Rubiniwicz down the hall is moving out?

ANDY

No, I didn't know that.

SHANE

Yeah, he's moving in with his daughter and her family. They have a place out in the country. It'll be great for his nervous condition.

ANDY

I'll bet.

SHANE

Well, his apartment will be opening up, and it would be terrific for two people.

ANDY

Like a couple of newlyweds?

(Shane breaks out of his stupor.)

SHANE

Exactly like a couple of newlyweds...You could have my room.

ANDY

What would I do if Mark moved out? Find another roommate?

SHANE

Or move in with us. You can always sleep on my couch.

ANDY

I appreciate that.

SHANE

(Getting up)

Well, I'm going to see Gwen. You know, I was wrong. I never considered how intelligent she really was. Do you know that she's read War and Peace? I mean, so what if she has to use a calculator to do long division?

ANDY

Doesn't everyone?

SHANE

Right...I'll see you later...buddy.

(Shane starts for the door, but stops. He looks back at Andy, then goes to the filing cabinet, jerks the drawer open, and takes out all 27 letters.)

SHANE

You'll probably hate me for this. But don't blame Mark; it was my idea, all of it. Well, see you...buddy.

(Andy goes to the desk and begins sorting through the mail. Linda enters, dressed in a football jersey. She comes to Andy, kisses him, and looks at the pile of mail on the desk.)

LINDA

What's all this?

ANDY

Would you believe all the letters you wrote that I never received. All unopened.

LINDA

What happened? The Dead Letter Office?

ANDY

Something like that?

LINDA

This isn't another one of those secrets, is it?

ANDY

I'll fill you in on the details later. As soon as I find out what they are myself. Breakfast?

(They sit at the table. Andy gets another cup.)

ANDY

Well, it looks as though everything will turn out great in the end.

LINDA

You mean, besides us?

ANDY

Besides us. I mean, Shane and Gwen may still get married. Same with Mark and Claire. And I'll be getting my own room. But if both guys gets married, that leaves me without a roommate to my name.

LINDA

So what's the problem? You can afford it, 'Sylvia Faraday'.

ANDY

I was just thinking about how lonely it might get around here.

LINDA

Not on your life, handsome. I have an idea!

ANDY

Uh oh.

LINDA

I could be your roommate.

ANDY

You? Gee, I don't know. What would the landlady say?

LINDA

How long do you think we could keep it a secret?

(The lights fade as Andy kisses Linda.)