

A DIFFERENCE IN DESIRES

A Play in Three Acts

By Paul H. Hebner

CAST

- Allan: In his mid-thirties and attractive. He is an advertising executive at a somewhat lower level of success than he feels he deserves for a man his age. His life has been a long, less-than-satisfying, search for fulfillment.
- Karen: ALLAN's lover, she is in her late twenties and is a striking woman whose movements and mannerisms make her far more beautiful than her individual features would indicate. She is also an advertising executive – ambitious and very self-confident without being overtly aggressive. She is a nurturer.
- Barbara: ALLAN's long-time friend and confidant, she is ALLAN's age and is a dark, slightly exotic-looking woman. Everything about her is warm and earthy. She has an off-beat sense of humor that makes her appear a little wacky, but underneath, she is direct and perceptive.
- Andy: ALLAN's lawyer and Barbara's husband, he is a little older than they are and is easy-going and generous to a fault. He has not known either ALLAN or Barbara as long as they have known each other and, although he is very fond of ALLAN, tends to stand outside ALLAN and Barbara's relationship.
- Sylvia: ALLAN's estranged wife, she is a beautiful woman who is clearly a few years older than he. She is *very* dramatic in her expressions and seems perpetually on the verge of hysteria.
- Court Reporter: A flamboyant professional acquaintance of Andy's.

TIME

The present

SETTING

- Act One: Friday evening. Andy and Barbara's apartment.
- Act Two: Sunday evening. Same place.
- Act Three: Monday morning. Divorce Court.

ACT ONE
scene one

(AT RISE: Early evening, Andy and Barbara's apartment. The scene is the sparsely furnished but comfortable living room of a typically small Manhattan apartment. The decor is masculine in shades of black, white, and gray. It is vaguely Art Deco in the overall impression that it gives. A coffee table rests in front of a large couch facing DC. In the center of the coffee table, among a few knickknacks and magazines, is a white cordless telephone. ALLAN is seated on the couch, slightly to one side, staring at the phone. He fidgets nervously.)

ALLAN

(Almost a whisper but still audible.)

Oh, Christ!

(Picks up phone, looks at it blankly. To himself)

It's just a goddamn phone call. Why am I being so pathetic about it? Look at me. My hands are shaking again.

(ALLAN begins to dial the phone, stops at the last digit and abruptly puts the phone back on the table.)

“Pathetic.” That's one of her expressions.

(A pause. To the phone.)

Oh, Karen. What am I going to do with you? Better yet, what are you going to do with me?

(Picks up phone suddenly, dials.)

Hi, Karen? Yeah, it's me. It's Allan. How are you?

(The following monologue is actually a series of conversations that the audience hears only one side of but understands what both parties have said.)

Yes, I'm at Barbara and Andy's place. Got into town a little while ago. (Pause) No, not too bad. (Pause) Yeah, I can't wait to see you too. (Pause) Will he be gone for the whole weekend? (Pause) Bring whatever you want. (Pause) Okay, I'll see you in a few minutes. Bye.

(Puts down phone, looks at his watch, picks up phone again and dials.)

Hello, Sylvia? It's me. What do you mean what do I want? Does every conversation have to be like this? (Pause) I'm at Andy and Barbara's. (Pause) They used to be your friends too. Look, I want to see you this weekend. How about it? (Pause) No, I'm not trying to get us back together again – I mean – I don't know. Let's just get together and talk. (Pause) No, it's not good enough to talk on the phone. I want to SEE you. Please say yes. (Pause) Okay, okay! Look, we're not divorced yet, that's why. Why don't you come into town tomorrow? I'll meet you at

the train station and take you out to lunch. (Pause) Look, Sylvia, please, just think about it tonight. I'll call you again tomorrow, okay? Yes, thanks, I will. Good night.

(Apartment buzzer rings. ALLAN jumps for intercom box on wall beside door RC.)

Hello?

KAREN

(Through intercom. Typical electronic sound to her voice, but clear enough to be understandable.)

Hi, Babe. Guess who?

ALLAN

Hi, sweetheart. Come on up

KAREN

(From off stage as ALLAN opens door for her.)

I missed you!

(They embrace and kiss.)

ALLAN

God! It's so good to see you again. You look fabulous. You have a licence for those legs?

KAREN

You like what you see?

ALLAN

You know I do. I swear your skirts get shorter every time I see you.

KAREN

I only show myself off like this for you now. I don't think we finished saying hello.

(A much more intimate embrace and kiss.)

Okay, that's enough! Aren't you going to get me a drink or something?

ALLEN

Sure. (Crossing R to kitchen.) I think Andy has a bottle of your favorite vodka, "Absolute."

(To himself.)

Just like everything else about you.

(Exits to kitchen. Can be seen mixing drinks.)

KAREN

(Hears his remark but does not respond directly. Notices the arrangement of objects on coffee table.)

Everything arranged perfectly. It's so like you to do that.

(louder, to kitchen.)

I guess we have a few things to talk about.

ALLAN

(Returning.)

I suppose we do.

(Hands her drink.)

Where would you like to start?

KAREN

I don't know. Wow! You made me a strong one.

(Finishes drink in one swallow.)

ALLAN

Thirsty, dear?

KAREN

Sarcastic asshole. Make me another?

ALLAN

Sure.

(Crosses away to kitchen. Mixes another drink. With back to her, from kitchen.)

So, are we going to have a serious talk or just do Noel Coward scenes all night?

(Returns with drink.)

KAREN

I think I should tell you where my loyalties are.

ALLAN

Your loyalties?

(Sits on end of couch opposite Karen.)

Okay. (Pause.) Go ahead. Tell me.

KAREN

I'm not going to leave Jim. My loyalties are with him. We've been together too long.

ALLAN

Loyalties? You've got an odd way of showing loyalty. Is that what you came over here to tell me? With your bag packed?

KAREN

Stop it! We have to stop this.

ALLAN

The last time we were together, we made love in the same bed you share with him. I brought you flowers. I brought you champagne. We pretended for one night that we belonged to each other. But I didn't dare allow myself to look at what we were doing and see what it meant. I needed you so much. I wanted you so badly. I just didn't care about anything else. In fact, I even convinced myself that it was a positive sign. If you had so little respect for him that you'd sleep with me in his bed, then how could you possibly stay with him? (Pause) And so one more time I told myself that you weren't using me. And one more time we told each other it was the last time and it had to end. And one more time we have the same fucking conversation while we get ready to spend the night together.

KAREN

(Angrily)

Don't take me for granted! That's what he does.

ALLAN

What do you expect? You're here.

KAREN

You're using me, too! You're the one who moved to Philadelphia so we have to use a borrowed apartment. (Pause.) How can I explain this? This isn't some weekend affair. It's been going on for nearly a year.

(Begins to feel the alcohol, but is not yet drunk.)

All because of that fucking candy machine at the office! You just HAD to buy me candy. And I thought, WHO is this man, why is he being so nice to me, what does he want?

(Pause.)

I don't even like candy. I thought I'd get rid of you at lunch that day. I told you I didn't want to lead you on.

(Another pause)

I was involved in a "committed" relationship!

ALLAN

I always thought that conversation was a little premature, considering the only thing we had between us at that point was a candy bar.

KAREN

(Quietly, more to herself than to him.)

You made me feel so special.

(Pause)

The two of you are so different! I've never known any man like you. Jesus! You're not even my type! When I met Jim, he was the college superstar and everybody was in love with him. He saw me at a local political rally, told me that he'd decided he wanted me, and that was it. No flowers, no romance, just the decision. That's what it's been ever since. He's still the most brilliant man I've ever met.

(Pause)

You! You bought me a candy bar! You send flowers, you bring presents, you write me poems, you notice the way I look, you tell me I'm beautiful. You're SO different. What am I going to do with you?

ALLAN

Stay with me tonight?

KAREN

I want to be wanted! I'm SICK of being needed!

(ALLAN finishes his drink in one swallow. Reaches behind the stereo and retrieves a colored greeting-card envelope and a small package with a bright bow. Sits beside her on couch and silently hands her both.)

KAREN

(Opening card and reading.)

Because I believe,
Because of love,
Because of you,
Because of you.

(Opens gift quickly.)

No, no, no, NO! You can't do this to me!

(Wipes tears from her eyes. Holds up gift to reveal a jeweled pendant.)

It's beautiful. (Pause) How can I wear this? How do I explain it? I can't. I can't.

ALLAN

Wear it for me tonight? (taking it from her hands.) Here, let me put it on you.

KAREN

I love you. I love you desperately.

(She turns to face him and they kiss.)

What's the matter?

ALLAN

I'm *sorry*. I keep thinking about it.

KAREN

No, Allan! Please don't do this again.

ALLAN

We pretend for now, but you don't belong to me. (Looking away from her.) We'll be together tonight and maybe tomorrow too, and then I'll send you home—back to Jim.

KAREN

Can't we have now? Can't we ever just have the moment without worrying about what might happen after it's over? Please? I need you. Touch me?

ALLAN

Go make love to Jim.

(Picks up glass from coffee table, crosses R to kitchen and mixes himself another drink.)

KAREN

Why did you say that? (Louder.) WHY, ALLAN?

(Karen throws object at wall in display of anger.)

ALLAN

What's that about?

KAREN

Nothing. (Frustrated.) I just need a few minutes to get over being rejected.

(Stands and swallows what's left of her drink.)

Maybe I should go.

ALLAN

No, please don't. I'm sorry, Karen.

(They stare at each other for a moment.)

KAREN

That hurt. I never told you to go back to Sylvia.

ALLAN

No, and I never asked you to choose between Jim and me.

KAREN

It was never a contest between you and him. I thought you understood that. I never wanted to hurt you, but the choice for me was always very clear.

ALLAN

It's so easy for you. No matter what you choose you'll have one or the other of us. We're the only ones who stand to loose!

KAREN

I guess I deserved that. (To herself.) If its so clear, why am I so frustrated?

ALLAN

(Pause. He leans against the wall beside the kitchen entrance.)

Would he leave you if he knew?

KAREN

Yes, it would just kill him. (Puts down glass and moves L around coffee table.) But, he'd come back. I know him SO well. He'd leave and in six months or so he'd 'decide' to forgive me and come back. I'm sure of it.

ALLAN

What is this all about. Who am I to you?

KAREN

You're my—shit, what do I call you? What's the opposite of mistress? 'Mister?' (Looks at him. She has found a truth for herself.) You're one of the three most important men in my life. There's my father, Jim, and now you. (She begins to move toward him.) You're the other man in my life.

ALLAN

I adore you.

KAREN

I can't stand this any more. Let's make love.

(She takes him by the hand and leads him quickly L toward the bedroom entrance.)

CURTAIN

scene two

(Same scene, late the next morning.)

(Karen enters from bedroom L wearing only a man's dress shirt. It is only partly buttoned. She rubs her eyes sleepily as she crosses to the coffee table carrying a hair brush and a pack of cigarettes. Sits crosslegged on couch and lights cigarette from table lighter. Starts brushing her hair as she smokes.)

(ALLAN also enters from bedroom and leans against doorway, watching her. He is dressed only in a pair of trousers.)

ALLAN

I thought you wanted to quit.

KAREN

I do. I told you, baby, I'm addicted.

ALLAN

I'm going to make some coffee. (Looks at her as he crosses to kitchen.) I guess I'm addicted too.

KAREN

(Enjoying the memory.) I had a multiple last night.

ALLAN

(From kitchen.) A what?

KAREN

Orgasm. I had a multiple orgasm last night. Can't remember the last time I had one. It must be you.

ALLAN

(Genuinely puzzled.) Really? Was that what happened?

KAREN

You've GOT to be kidding! Couldn't you tell? No, you're serious. You didn't know what it was. Didn't Sylvia ever climax when you two were together? With all her hang-ups, I'll bet she was frigid, too.

ALLAN

(Leaning against kitchen doorway, waiting for coffee.) I don't know. She always told me she did.

KAREN

And you believed her?

ALLAN

Yes. I guess so. I know things were pretty awful between us for the last few years, but I didn't think sex was one of our problems.

KAREN

I suppose that's why you cheated on her. What's the matter with you, Allan? Why don't you wake up and look at what she's done to you?

ALLAN

Done to me? It was my choice. I married her.

KAREN

Of course it was your choice. It was your choice to marry her and it was your choice to cheat on her. Obviously, you were looking for some intimacy in your life. You sure as hell weren't getting any from Sylvia. How often did you tell me she slept with you? Once a month?

ALLAN

Yeah, something like that. It was more often than that in the beginning. She was always terrified of getting pregnant by me.

KAREN

I know. You told me. Seventeen different kinds of birth control at the same time, INCLUDING abstinence. Face it, she's afraid of sex. She thinks it's dirty or something. Jim and I were really into sex. Two or three times a day in the beginning. He's still *very* demanding. It's awful. I haven't been very nice to him that way lately.

ALLAN

Do you ever think of me? I mean, when you make love to him?

KAREN

If you're trying to ask if we still have sex, the answer is yes.

ALLAN

No, I always assumed you did. I just don't want to be the third person in your bed, flattering as that might be.

KAREN

Well, be flattered. I do think of you then.

ALLAN

(After a moment.) I had a dream about you last night. It was so weird. But then again, maybe it wasn't. We were in a hospital and you were giving birth in a delivery room. I watched you push, but I didn't see the baby come out. They handed it to you all wrapped up and you had the most incredible look of joy on your face. You were so proud—so happy. I was happy too. I was actually crying, I was so happy. Then YOU unwrapped it for me to see. It was a boy—the most beautiful little baby boy you could ever imagine. Somehow I knew—I don't know how—I just knew. That's what's so weird about it. I just knew that the baby was Jim's, not mine. I have no idea why I was there instead of him, but what the hell, it's my dream. Anyway, I guess it didn't make any difference to me, because I was so happy about it.

KAREN

That IS weird. You're right, though. I've always known that Jim and I will have gorgeous children.

ALLAN

How do you do it, Karen? How do you face him *every* day.

KAREN

I don't know. (Defensively) I don't know.

ALLAN

You spend the night with me, sometimes even the entire weekend. We'll go out to clubs and restaurants and walk down the street like we belong together. And then you go home to Jim and pretend nothing ever happened. Why, Karen. What's it all for.

KAREN

I knew it would come down to this. I'm sorry, Allan. What happened last night was a mistake.

ALLAN

A mistake? *My God*, Karen, I've made love to you, I've wept in your arms and held you while you wept in mine. I've bathed you. Goddamn it, I spend half a day driving just to be with you. I'm even dreaming about you now and all you can say is that you and Jim are certain to have beautiful kids and what we did was a mistake.

KAREN

Yes, a mistake. I don't want to do this any more. We should stop seeing each other like this. It's just not working.

ALLAN

You're using me.

KAREN

I'm not using you. I love you. I'm just not IN LOVE with you. Look, even before I met you I wasn't completely faithful to Jim. But he cheated on me first. About three years after we started living together we got into doing joint therapy and after one session he just told me. He said he'd been sleeping with his old girlfriend all along. He hadn't stopped seeing her, really. I was SO furious. The next night I didn't come home. I went out with this guy I met at a club who I knew was interested in me and slept with him just to get even. It was horrible—I hated it. But I went straight to Jim and told him what I did, just so he'd know what it felt like. Funny, he's been totally faithful ever since.

ALLAN

Look at us. A pair of repeat offenders. Why that way, Karen? Why all the 'eye for an eye' bullshit? Why not just leave him?

KAREN

Why don't you just let go. Stop hanging on to your dream of romance between us. I know you hope that things don't work out for Jim and me, but I just don't see myself spending the rest of my life with anyone else. We have so much history together. You can't give me that.

ALLAN

So, now what? Do we just keep on like this or do we break it off? What am I going to do with you?

KAREN

Well, you could teach me to masturbate.

ALLAN

(Stunned.) Now you're the one who's got to be kidding.

KAREN

No, really. I never learned. I wanted to, but I never figured it out. I just want to keep myself from going nuts when I'm by myself and horny. Come on, you're good with your hands. Why not? I'll always think of you when I do it. It'll be something only we can share. Especially now that we're not going to make love any more.

ALLAN

Why do I let you do this to me?

KAREN

Because you're a neurotic, lonely man, and because you love me.

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

(Sunday evening. The scene is nearly identical to the opening of the first act. ALLAN is seated by the coffee table again, dialling the cordless phone.)

ALLAN

Hi, Sylvia? Yes, It's me. I know called you on Friday. No, I want the same thing I did then. Look, the hearing is tomorrow. Can't we talk things over before the Court decides for us what our lives are going to be like for the next twenty years? Please, Sylvia? Is this really the way you want things to be? I've been thinking about it too. Stop saying that! All I hear from you is 'I can't, I can't.' Try saying 'yes' for a change. If it's what we really want, of course we can get back together. We'll make it work.

(Barbara enters, letting herself in the apartment door. She sees ALLAN talking on the phone and while he continues, she crosses L, drops her coat and bag, and sits in chair near stereo.)

(Seeing Barbara.) Hi, where's Andy? (Into phone.) Yes, Barbara just came in. Do you want to talk to her? Alright, I'll see you tomorrow. Please think about what I said. (Puts down phone.)

BARBARA

Let me guess. She has nothing to say to me, right?

ALLAN

Right. Isn't Andy with you?

BARBARA

I thought we should all go out to dinner. We'll I meet him later at the restaurant. So, is darling Sylvia still blaming you and everyone else for all her problems?

ALLAN

I don't know. She's been through alot. She just needs some time to get over it. I think I want to get back together with her.

BARBARA

Why, Allan? You'll only wind up cheating on her again. Haven't you had enough of all this yet?

ALLAN

Careful, Barbara.. I've just had my heart broken.

BARBARA

Not what's-her-name again. What has she done to you now?

ALLAN:

Her name is Karen and you know it. Anyway, I'm the one in love with her. What are you angry about?

BARBARA

Sorry I tend to get pissed-off when people I love are abused. I just don't like the woman. I think you could do alot better. You certainly deserve to. How did she break your heart this time?

ALLAN

We went shopping this afternoon. She told Jim that she'd spend the weekend shopping. So, this morning she said it was about time she actually went out and bought something and I went with her. We had a great time most of the day. No problems. Then we walked into a discount home furnishings store on Broadway for some queen-sized sheets. She said she needed extra sheets for her apartment.

BARBARA

I wonder why? Sorry. Only you could manage to have your heart broken while shopping for bedsheets with the woman you're having an affair with. Go on.

ALLAN

I had wandered down an aisle by myself to look for something when over my shoulder I heard someone calling Karen's name. I turned around and saw a couple greeting her. I wasn't sure what to do so I pretended to look through the merchandise while I listened to them talk. Apparently they were old friends of her's and Jim's and they hadn't seen each other in a while. They all made plans to get together, said goodbye and continued their shopping. I waited a minute and then went over to Karen. She didn't even look up. She just asked if they were still in the store and when I said yes she said, 'Don't let them see us together, for Christ's sake. Get the hell out of here. I'll meet you later down the block.'

BARBARA

I hope you left her there.

ALLAN

No, I met her later—much later. All she said was, 'I'm SORRY I had to do that to you.' We hailed a cab to take her home and didn't say a word the whole way there. When she got out of the cab, I told her I loved her and I'd talk to her soon. I came right back here and called Sylvia.

BARBARA

To talk her into coming back to you?

ALLAN

Give me a break, Barb.

BARBARA

Stop flattering yourself, Allan. Sylvia is not coming back to you and Karen will never leave Jim. They never leave who they're with. You, of all people, ought to know that. You never left Sylvia for me. Remember?

ALLAN

You never asked me.

BARBARA

And I wasn't about to, either. That's why we're still friends.

ALLAN

I love you, too. What do I do about her?

BARBARA

Nothing. You've been having sex with her. Big deal. That's all it's been about, so don't confuse it with any hopeless romantic ideas. And don't fool yourself into thinking you mean anything more to her than that.

ALLAN

I should have divorced Sylvia years ago and married you when I had the chance. I need you to take care of me.

BARBARA

No, I'm sure we would have driven each other to murder by now if we'd gotten married. I love you, dear, but you're a little too obsessive for me. You know, the only one I really feel sorry for in this whole mess is Jim. The poor bastard really deserves to know what he's living with. If it was up to me, I'd tell him.

ALLAN

He almost did find out once. It was close. Karen tricked him into letting her go out with me one night. She told him she was going out with her girlfriends from the office. He gave her a hard time about the mini-skirt she was wearing, but didn't stop her. Anyway, she wound up getting so drunk that I had to take her all the way home myself. I couldn't just put her in a cab, she was THAT drunk. When I got her into the lobby of her building, she announced that she couldn't make it up the stairs alone and that I was going to have to help her. No elevator. She was leaning against the lobby wall barely able to stand up, let alone walk.

BARBARA

Why didn't you just buzz upstairs and tell Jim you were Federal Express or something and he should come down to sign for his package?

ALLAN

I might have thought of that if I hadn't been nearly as shit-faced as she was. I just held her up as best I could and we stumbled up the stairs together. Those were four really long flights. They seemed to go on forever. I had to stop at the top of each flight to catch my breath and wait for the building to stop spinning. I considered myself fortunate that she only passed out on me once. All the way up I kept trying to figure out what the hell I was going to say to Jim when he opened the door.

BARBARA

Oh, come on, Allan. That's easy. You just knock loudly on the door, and when he opens it and sees a strange man holding the apparently lifeless body of his beloved, you shove the poor bitch at him, tell him you'll be happy to answer any questions he has about the situation tomorrow, and just run, or in your case, stumble down the stairs and out of the building before he can react. Simple, right?

ALLAN

Huh? Wait, I think I missed something.

BARBARA

No kidding! Well, now that we know what SHOULD have happened, tell me what you really did.

ALLAN

She revived a little as we got to her floor and said she could probably make it to the door on her own. Then she gave me this really weird grin, lifted her skirt up to her waist, and said, 'Don't you want to kiss me goodnight?'

BARBARA

The SLUT! Well, that would have been something interesting for Jim to see when he opened the door. I hope she barfed on you.

ALLAN

No, I was spared. Actually, I think she may have barfed on Jim, or at least in his direction. I was just out of sight down the hall when the door opened. She managed to say 'Hi, Jim I'm...' just before she started puking.

BARBARA

Bravo! Well, at least there's one small glimmer of justice in all this.

ALLAN

Jeez, Barb. I didn't realize how much my sarcasm had rubbed off on you.

BARBARA

I don't know who to be more pissed-off at. Karen for being such a manipulative bitch, or you for being such a wimp. God! You follow her around like some lovesick puppy-dog, begging for attention.

ALLAN

Fuck you, Barbara! Stop riding me. I take enough shit from Sylvia and Karen.

(Phone rings. Barbara grabs it instantly.)

BARBARA

Hello! Yes, Andy. Of course we're still here. Look, I'm sorry, but we're having a rather important talk right now. Can you start without us? Why don't you have another drink and memorize the wine list for us or something. No, Hun, don't worry. I have no intention of violating your precious client-attorney relationship. We'll give you a full report. So far, it's not about Sylvia, anyway. Yeah, It's what's-her-name again. I know. Yes, I'll make sure. See you in a little bit. Bye.

(Puts down phone.)

Fourth time must be the charm. He's a wonderful husband. Now, where were we?

ALLAN

Karen. For chrisake, her name is Karen. I was telling you to fuck-off.

BARBARA

Yes. Oh, by the way, since we're talking about fucking, I hope you remembered to change the sheets on our bed. I'm all in favor of you having more of a sex life than Sylvia ever gave you, even if it means you have to sleep with WHAT'S-HER-NAME, but Andy and I would just as soon have our sheets cold and clean, thank you very much.

ALLAN

I took care of it. You're welcome. Aren't we going to meet Andy at the restaurant?

BARBARA

Let's let him have some more time to himself. We'll get there soon enough. Okay, I was riding you. I'm sorry, but I think you deserved it. If you're so tired of all the shit you're taking from the screwed-up women in your life, then DO something about it. There are plenty of women out there who aren't abusive or crazy.

ALLAN

Like you?

BARBARA

Yes, goddamit, like me. Why not?

ALLAN

Look, Barbara, for all her faults Karen's done a lot for me. After Sylvia and I broke up, I was a mess. After nearly twelve years the marriage was finally over and all I could see was my own failure. Karen made me feel like I was worth something again. She changed my life, Barbara. How can I just let go of that?

BARBARA

Everyone changes our lives, Allan. The ones we love change us most of all. Hell, every man I've had a relationship with has changed my life. Andy has certainly changed my life. This is the longest I've ever been married. You changed my life too. But I don't owe you, or Andy, or anyone else anything.

ALLAN

She loves me and I'm grateful.

BARBARA

She uses you for some convenient sexual release and you let her get away with it out of gratitude?

ALLAN

There's more to it than just that.

BARBARA

I'm sure you'd like to think so. I just don't see it. At least you had the brains to divorce Sylvia. For years I've been telling you that you were going to end up divorcing her. What makes you think you can just patch things up now and get back together? What is it with you? Why do you make such an ass of yourself over these women?

ALLAN

Give me a break, Barbara. I just don't want to be alone. I'm tired of being alone. All my life I've tried to avoid being alone, just because it hurt so much to even think about how isolated we all are. I'm locked inside here and my eyes are the only ones I'll ever be able to see the world through. My thoughts are the only thoughts I'll ever hear. I'm in here 'till I die and everyone else and everything else is outside. If I stop to think about it for too long, it's terrifying. It's like floating in the middle of the ocean. There's nothing under you and nothing around you but an infinity of water, and nothing above you but an infinity of sky. You can't swim anywhere because there's nowhere to swim to. So You just float and grab at any passing shadow and *try* to

hold on for dear life. When I'm in bed with a woman, or even just holding her in my arms, that's the closest I ever get to escaping that void.

BARBARA

So, You wind up alone. Big deal! We all do in the end. What has that got to do with being lonely? If you don't want to be lonely, Allan, then just stop being lonely! Self-pity won't do it and neither will destructive love affairs. What's happened to you? You act like some kind of goddamn junkie. Why don't you wake up? How could you become such an asshole? How could you do that to me!

ALLAN

To you? What have I done to you? I've never done anything to hurt you!

BARBARA

Bullshit! Every time you fuck her you're hurting me! I love you. She doesn't deserve you.

ALLAN

You still want me? Is that it? You're married to Andy now. What's the point?

BARBARA

Maybe I would rather have married you than Andy. But you weren't available. When we met and had our affair, I accepted the fact that you weren't going to leave Sylvia. We agreed that we'd stay friends for the rest of our lives because we loved each other, and that was fine. For all those years, you were the strong one. You were the one I could always rely on. No matter what I was going through, you were always there for me. When you decided to divorce Sylvia, I was so proud of you for being strong enough to do it. And yes, I also realized that divorcing Sylvia finally made you available, even though you weren't available to me. So what do you do? You dive head-first into a sleazy affair that's doomed from the start. And when you finally face-up to it, you start begging Sylvia to come back. I don't get it. Most people try to avoid abuse.

ALLAN

What is this? Shock therapy? Karen thinks I'm obsessive, Sylvia thinks I'm a dog, and now you think I'm an asshole. I appreciate all the concern, but if I don't meet everyone's expectation of the way I ought to live my life, it's just not my problem. Yes, I have had enough of this shit, thank you very much.

BARBARA

About time.

ALLAN

Enough, Barbara. What do you want from me?

BARBARA

How about a little pride in yourself?

ALLAN

Go to hell!

BARBARA

(After a pause.) Feel better now?

ALLAN

Loads, thanks. I don't know what to say to you. You're my best friend. I never thought you wanted to be more involved than that.

BARBARA

Don't get too excited, Allan. I'm very happily married to Andy and I intend to stay that way.

ALLAN

What a relief.

BARBARA

So, do you want to have sex before we go to dinner? (Pause.) Sorry, just kidding.

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

(Monday morning. The scene is the hallway just outside a New York City courtroom. There is a door to the courtroom on one side of the stage facing D and a pay-phone hanging on the wall on the opposite side. A row of half-a-dozen or so folding chairs is placed against the wall between the door and the phone, facing the audience. But for the phone and the door, the wall is blank. The hallway extends into the wings on either side of the stage.)

(As the scene opens, we see ALLAN alone in the hallway, standing at the phone, talking. He is dressed in a business suit.)

ALLAN

Can you tell me when she's expected back at her desk? Yes, I see.

(Andy enters through the courtroom door. He is also dressed in a business suit. He sees ALLAN on the phone and takes a seat in one of the chairs near the phone.)

No, there's no message. I'll try her again later, thanks. Good bye.

(Hangs up phone. Takes a seat next to Andy)

ANDY

It's a zoo in there. Typical Manhattan court. I did my best, but we're still pretty far down on the calendar. It'll take a while, I'm afraid. You can just hang-out here for a while and relax. (Pause.) Wasn't she at her desk?

ALLAN

Who?

ANDY

What's-her-name. Weren't you trying to call what's-her-name a minute ago?

ALLAN

Karen. Her name is Karen. No, I was calling for my goddamn horoscope. Of course I was calling her!

ANDY

Hey, lighten up, Allan. I'm on your side. Barb must have really worked you over last night before dinner.

ALLAN

No, I'm sorry. guess I'm a little nervous about this whole thing.

ANDY

Don't be. Stop taking this so seriously. It's just a conference with the judge. Nothing terribly dramatic is going to happen today.

ALLAN

Great. I could use a break. Why don't we just call this a vacation and have a party?

ANDY

Give it a rest! Look, ultimately we're all just a bunch of highly organised molecules in the middle of a rather peculiar chemical process. In a million years who's going to care?

ALLAN

We're all doomed AND insignificant? How cheerful! Thank you. I'll never be sad again.

(Barbara enters from hallway. Crosses to ALLAN and Andy.)

ANDY

I was just trying to give you some perspective, that's all. I'll let Barbara cheer you up. Hi, hun.

ALLAN

Hello, Barbara.

(They greet each other. Hugs and kisses all around.)

BARBARA

Hi. I thought I'd come down and lend some moral support before you face the executioner.

ANDY

Really, Barbara, it's only a conference. And I know for a fact that the judge is a certified human being.

BARBARA

Actually, I was talking about Sylvia.

ANDY

Okay, I've had my daily recommended dose of sacasm. I'm going in to check on the schedule. (Starts for door.) Do your best to cheer him up, Barb. I'd really like it if he didn't become a complete pain-in-the-ass today. (Exits.)

BARBARA

(Taking Andy's seat next to ALLAN.)

Still being an asshole, I see.

ALLAN

Today I'm just a sarcastic asshole. That's quite an improvement. Yesterday I was a completely pathetic asshole.

BARBARA

How true. Give yourself a break, dear. Andy won't let anyone hurt you. I think he enjoys helping you.

ALLAN

I really appreciate what he's doing for me, taking my case as a friend. Especially considering that you both were friendly with Sylvia not that long ago.

BARBARA

No, we were friends with you. We tolerated her. Andy never knew her that well anyway. There wasn't time.

ALLAN

Still, sometimes this arrangement makes me a little uncomfortable. I just wonder if he resents our relationship in some way.

BARBARA

Resents what? Allan, as far as Andy's concerned you're an old friend, not an ex-lover. What we had happened years before I met him and, as much as I love him, isn't any of his business. He knew I'd been married several times before and he knew about all my odd relationships in between.

ALLAN

Including our's?

BARBARA

Our's was the oddest, no question about that.

ALLAN

But does he know?

BARBARA

It doesn't make any difference whether he knows or not. You weren't going to discuss it with him, were you?

ALLAN

No, no. You're right. I guess it doesn't matter.

BARBARA

If you're worried about his motivation for helping you, don't be. He's not doing this just because I asked him to. He really cares about you. He considers you his friend.

ALLAN

And Sylvia?

BARBARA

I'm sure she could use a good friend too. But, that's something she'll have to take care of on her own. She certainly hasn't won any points with us. I'm going to leave you in my darling husband's capable hands. I'll see you both tonight. (Gets up and starts to exit.)

ALLAN

(Quietly.) I love you.

BARBARA

(Just as quietly.) I love you too. (After a moment.) And please, Allan, do yourself a big favor and don't call what's-her-name any more. (Exits.)

(ALLAN sits alone briefly, then goes to the pay-phone and begins to dial. As he does, Andy and the court reporter enter through the door. The reporter has his stenographic machine under his arm and enters ahead of Andy.)

REPORTER

(Crossing with Andy toward ALLAN, who hangs up the phone quickly.)

Really, Andrew, this is nothing. This is a church service compared to the way it was a few weeks ago when Donald and Ivana went before the judge to settle their little domestic differences.

(Both stop next to ALLAN.)

ANDY

(Interrupting the reporter. To ALLAN.)

Yes, the Trumps.

REPORTER

You should have seen the commotion. TV people, newspaper reporters. Just mobs! Of course, I was there recording every word in the interest of justice. You should have heard the accusations! That poor woman deserved much better treatment from him, I must say.

(Stops and eyes ALLAN as if he were regarding a scupiture.)

Well, it certainly LOOKS as though your getting a better class of client, Andrew. The last divorce case you brought in was such a waste. The man was absolutely psychotic. Ranted and raved at the judge. Ignored ALL your good advice. Got what he deserved, I think. Judge ate him alive. Well, I must get back to my tireless service to Lady Justice. (Starts back to door.) I'll see you both inside later. I'm sure you'll do just fine. Enjoy your time in these hallowed halls. Bye. (Exits.)

ANDY

Court reporters can be very handy people to be on friendly terms with. They also do very well for themselves.

ALLAN

They must. I haven't seen a suit that expensive looking since I threw out the last fashion supplement to the Times. So, I impressed him with my quiet sanity.

ANDY

Compared to the Trumps and my poor, deranged former client, you're an absolute paragon of respectability. Barbara went home?

ALLAN

Yes. She'll meet us tonight.

(Andy looks past ALLAN to the phone, then back at ALLAN.)

Okay, you caught me. I was trying to call you-know-who again.

ANDY

I thought she was "What's-Her-Name." Look, far be it for me to give you anything but legal advice, but as a friend, I think I owe it to you: loose the sign.

ALLAN

The what?

ANDY

The sign. The neon sign that lights up over your head every time you decide you're lonely. The one that says "Relationship Wanted. Psychotic Women Need Only Apply." I've been meaning to tell you about it.

ALLAN

I always wondered how they found me. So, it's that obvious, is it?

ANDY

I'm afraid so. You're not going to die if you don't have a relationship. Take it easy for a while. (Pause.) I'm going back inside to talk to Sylvia's lawyer while we wait for our case to come up. Who knows, we may be able to work something out so we can avoid all this nonsense. (Exits.)

(ALLAN waits a moment, staring at the phone with his back to the courtroom door, then picks up the receiver and begins dialing. As he dials, Sylvia enters through the door and watches him.)

SYLVIA

Trying to get a date?

ALLAN

(Turns around, startled.) Why? Do you want one too?

SYLVIA

I never had to chase after anyone. They always called me.

ALLAN

They all have my sympathy. (Sylvia turns to leave.) Sylvia, wait! So now we've said hello. Do you think we can be civil to each other here, if nowhere else?

SYLVIA

Okay. What was it you were so desperate to see me about this weekend?

ALLAN

I hoped we could find a way to stop hurting each other.

SYLVIA

I'm all for that. Do you want to get back together?

ALLAN

Perhaps. Sylvia, we were together for nearly twelve years. Isn't that worth trying to save?

SYLVIA

You're the one who wanted this divorce in the first place. Now you want us back together? you make up your mind, ALLAN. What will you want tomorrow?

ALLAN

I should have listened to my dad before I married you.

SYLVIA

Why? What did he tell you about me?

ALLAN

He said I should marry someone who's a help, not a hindrance.

SYLVIA

I don't believe he said that. I always respected him.

ALLAN

It doesn't matter now. I just wish I'd listened to him, that's all.

SYLVIA

You always think of things when it's too late, don't you.

ALLAN

Stop blaming me. That doesn't get us anywhere. (After a moment.) Don't you ever miss it, Sylvia. Don't you ever miss being together?

SYLVIA

Of course I do. But I have my pride. When you said I was playing with fire, you really meant it didn't you?

ALLAN

When did I say that?

SYLVIA

When we first met. Don't you remember? It was after our first kiss and you told me I should be careful, I was playing with fire. I thought you were saying it just for dramatic effect. Little did I know. Allan, you can't expect things to be the same after what you did.

ALLAN

What I did? Why is it always what I did and not what you did, or didn't do?

SYLVIA

I was a good wife to you. I was never unfaithful. I took my vows seriously.

ALLAN

"Forsaking all others" wasn't supposed to include me, Sylvia. We were supposed to be part of each other's lives...intimately...completely. Not sleep with our backs to each other every night.

SYLVIA

That was never one of our problems. We always got along well in bed. We had a good sex life.

ALLAN

The only good sex is no sex. Is that it? Come on, Sylvia. The once-a-month mercy fuck isn't exactly the stuff that wet dreams are made of. I couldn't get your legs apart with a crow-bar the rest of the time.

SYLVIA

You certainly had no trouble finding other women to satisfy your needs!

ALLAN

That didn't mean I didn't love you or didn't want you. And it doesn't mean we can't start over again, either, if that's what we both really want. All we have to do is bury the past.

SYLVIA

No, Allan. I can't. I just can't. You can't undo what's already happened. The past will always be there.

ALLAN

Sylvia!

SYLVIA

No, I'm sorry, Allan. Our lawyers will have to settle this. (Exits.)

ALLAN

Sylvia! Damn!

(For a moment he tries to cope. Then goes to phone and lifts receiver.)

So, I'm a junkie. So what. (Dials.) Hello, Karen. Yes, it's me. I'm back again. Can you get away for a little while tonight?

CURTAIN