

Nothing to Die For

by Michael A. “Sasha” Miller

a comedy in two acts

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Cast of Characters

<u>Tom Altman:</u>	A man in his mid-40s and Carla's husband.
<u>Carla:</u>	A woman in her late 30s and Tom's wife.
<u>Nancy Chapman:</u>	A woman in her early 30s. A recent divorcee and new neighbor of Tom and Carla's.
<u>Brad Olsen:</u>	A man in his mid-40s; Tom's closest friend and Carla's lover.

Scene

Interior of an immaculate, modest home.

Time

The present.

Act IScene 1

SETTING:

The front room and adjoining dining area of the home of TOM and CARLA. The dining area is RS and the front room LS. The front room extends past the upstage wall of the dining area. Implied beyond the dining area's upstage wall is the front porch, the door opening into the entry space within the front room. In the right stage wall is an opening to the hallway. This is the most immediate way to go to the kitchen and basement stairway of the house.

In the dining area is a small table, four chairs, and a kitchen hutch. There is also a door to the hallway in the left stage wall. The living room is furnished with a small couch or love seat, two comfortable chairs on either end of a small coffee table, a small end table with a drawer and lamp.

AT RISE:

TOM, mid 40s, neat in his appearance, is sitting at the dining room table, looking at his laptop. CARLA, late 30's, casually dressed, sits in the front room, browsing a stack of art books. TOM is typing. Frustrated, he repeatedly taps the delete key.

TOM

Nothing. Five weeks now, and all I think about when I look at this thing is nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. NOTHING!

(CARLA glances at TOM.)

Damn!

(TOM get ups and exits RS. CARLA puts her feet on the coffee table. TOM returns with a bottle of glass cleaner and paper towels. He looks at Carla. She takes her feet off the table. He looks at the glass in the kitchen hutch.)

CARLA

The glass is clean.

TOM

There's a spot.

(TOM sprays the cleaner.)

CARLA

Tom, you're obsessing.

TOM

(He wipes, then refolds the paper towel and wipes again, and so forth.)

I'm not obsessing. I don't obsess. I clean, because --

CARLA

It relaxes you. You're cleaning the clean glass: that's obsessing. They have over priced questionable medication for that.

TOM

I don't need medication. Cleanliness is not a disease. There, now the spot's gone.

CARLA

There wasn't a spot there in the first place.

TOM

How can you tell from there?

CARLA

I've watched you clean the glass four times in two days, so unless people are breaking into our house in the middle of the night to smudge the glass, the glass is clean.

TOM

Well yes, it's clean now.

(He exits to the kitchen with the paper towels and cleaner. CARLA puts her feet back upon the coffee table. TOM returns and sits at his laptop. CARLA takes her feet off the coffee table. TOM stares at his screen, his fingers on the keyboard, but not moving.)

Nothing! Why can't I think of something?

CARLA

It's probably because you don't have any talent.

TOM

What, are you bored, Carla?

CARLA

Dreadfully.

TOM

Picking on your husband for sport?

CARLA

Are you feeling sorry for yourself?

TOM

Well, damn it! You know how much crap there is out there!

CARLA

A lot.

TOM

Exactly. Why do others get rich producing shit? Why can't I go around being admired for one of my turds?

CARLA

Are you regressing?

TOM

Is my writing too turdy or not turdy enough? What's the proper amount of turdness?

CARLA

You could try sleeping with someone to improve your career.

TOM

I'm not gay, not in the least!

CARLA

Ignoring the sexism in that comment dear, the lady doth protest too much, methinks.

TOM

The lady doth have a penis.

CARLA

I'd almost forgot that, but it's all about self-identity. How do you identify?

TOM

I identify as a frustrated writer!

CARLA

Well, that's not a sex yet.

TOM

Be serious, Carla. It's hard enough just to get someone to look at my work before they turn it down, and now I can't even think of something to write.

CARLA

I'm sure you'll think of lots of turds for someone to turn down.

(TOM shows her the middle finger. CARLA picks up a magazine.)

So, is being turned down anything like being turned off?

(CARLA lets the magazine droop.)

TOM

(while getting up and walking toward the front door)

Why are you being such a...

(TOM exits FD. CARLA puts her feet on the coffee table and returns to reading. Her phone vibrates. She picks it up and reads it. She looks out the window.)

CARLA

Great. Instead of cleaning the clean glass, you're going to repaint the repainted trim.

(She makes a call.)

Hi, Mr. Olsen, what are you doing? - That sounds fun, but I think I should stick around the institution today. - Oh God, yes, but I just him ran out. It's your fault. If I wasn't trying to suppress certain ideas, I might have tolerated my husband's crazed self-pity, for another day. I feel like I'm married to Lady Macbeth. Out damn spot! Out! - Well you can tell me how --

(TOM opens the front door kicking his shoes off outside. He hurriedly examines himself as he steps in and slips on his household slippers. He rushes to his laptop and begins typing. CARLA slips her phone out of sight.)

Did you think of something?

(TOM gestures for her not interrupt him and continues typing.)

TOM

Damn! It's no good! It's been done a thousand thousand times!

(TOM gets up frustrated and heads toward the front door.)

CARLA

What's been done a million times?

TOM

Infidelity.

(TOM exits, FD, changing shoes.
CARLA looks out the window, as
she calls Brad.)

CARLA

Sorry, Tom stormed in, typed like a, well like him, for a moment. Then shouted, "It's been done a thousand thousand times," and stormed out. - That's what I asked. He said, infidelity. I guess we're terribly unoriginal. - Oh, calm down. It doesn't have anything to do us. - I don't know. - Okay, I'll look.

(looking at Tom's laptop)

Oh my... Okay, it says, "He's sleeping with my wife. I should kill them both." - No, I'm not kidding! - What?! - Tom's calling you? Are you kidding? Tom's up a ladder!

(TOM enters FD. He again
switches into his house slippers,
and hurriedly repeats his tidy
routine. He has his cellphone to
his ear, as he walks toward his
laptop)

TOM

(into phone)

Brad, it's Tom. What are you doing - Brad, Brad, stop. Let me finish my question. What are you doing, tonight? - Can you come to dinner?

(to Carla)

Do you mind if Brad comes to dinner?

CARLA

Not at all. Say hi for me.

TOM

(into phone)

Carla says hi. But look Brad, I've got a terrific idea. It's fantastic. This is the one! I'm sure. All I need to do is write it. You know the easy part. - Ha, yah, but there's a part for you. No, I'm serious, So, can you come tonight? - Good. Around six. Thanks. 'Bye.

(TOM starts typing.)

CARLA

What's your fantastic idea, Dear?

TOM

I need some coffee.

(TOM exits RS to the kitchen.)

CARLA

(into her phone, in a low voice)

Hello? - I'll see you tonight. That could make it a million and one? - Lighten up and bring some bubbly. You know he loves the bubbly. 'Bye.

(CARLA deletes things from her phone. TOM enters, RS, with a cup of coffee.)

TOM

I should thank you.

CARLA

For what?

TOM

(while typing)

Inspiration.

CARLA

Oh? How?

TOM

(while typing)

If you hadn't been so... annoying. I guess I just needed to get my mi...

(TOM becomes absorb in his writing.)

CARLA

I do what I can. So, how do you want to split the royalties, Dear?

(TOM continues typing.)

I can annoy you some more if you want?

(TOM types.)

Are you listening?

(TOM types.)

Tom did you hear what I asked? Tom?

TOM

(while typing.)

What, yes. That's great.

CARLA

What's great?

TOM

It's fine.

CARLA

Fine's great? Well, I'm not sure a thesaurus would agree with you, but you are the writer.

TOM

Okay dear.

(CARLA picks her book and reads for a moment.)

CARLA

(to herself.)

It's just not fair. Lady MacBeth gets to vanish into his work, like everything's great - spot's gone! - after weeks of sulking and driving me crazy. Oh God, now who's feeling sorry for herself. Damn!

TOM

What?

CARLA

Sorry Dear, I just remembered something I forgot.

TOM

That reminds me could you put the paint away for me?

CARLA

Are you sure?

TOM

I can finish another time.

(while typing)

Please? I need to focus.

(CARLA starts to say something, but then changes her mind. She exits, through the front door.
TOM pauses to look at what he's

written. He reads a line from
the screen.)

"This is my wife, Lady Macbeth."

(TOM repeatedly hits the delete
button and then returns to
typing. NANCY CHAPMAN early 30's,
with a very high energy, pokes
her head in the front door. She
sees Tom and enters.)

NANCY

Oh hi, Tom. The door was open, hope you don't mind.

TOM

Actually Nancy, I'm kind of --

NANCY

I just wanted to return this book.

(She starts to hand the book to
Tom, but then doesn't let go of
it.)

I liked it, but I was surprised how much sex is in it.

TOM

What book did I loan you?

NANCY

This one, "A Winter's Garden."

TOM

There's something of a dearth of erotic content in --

NANCY

You're probably use to endless sex, as a writer, I mean. Do
you find all the sex in this book realistic? I'm confused
about that.

TOM

I'm not sure how --

NANCY

For example, Mrs. Comer.

TOM

Who?

NANCY

Comer, Commer, no, no, Conner, no Conrad no Radcliff,
Clifton - no that's a first name. What's a cliff made out
of?

TOM

Rock?

NANCY

What's another word for a rock?

TOM

Stone?

NANCY

Right, Mrs. Stoneman. What did I call her?

(TOM doesn't reply.)

Well, she's obsessed with her neighbor, and keeps putting
herself into situations with him,

(She moves closer to Tom.)

hoping he'll pounce on her. Is that realistic writing?

TOM

(while backing away from Nancy)

Barlow writes remarkably realistically, that is in the see-
saw of how good literature both accurately reports on, while
simultaneously shaping our view of reality.

NANCY

Are you saying this book shaping a world full of sex? Why
did you lend it to me?

TOM

No. No. No. I'm not saying that at all. I --

NANCY

That's kind of exciting though. Where's Carla?

TOM

Probably in the garage. You know Nancy I'd --

NANCY

I forgot to close the door.

(She sets the book on the table.
goes to close and lock the
door.)

NANCY (Cont.)

You can't be too careful these days. You never know who might just walk in.

(TOM moves so the table is between them, and circles away from NANCY as she moves toward him.)

I love being able to discuss things with you, Tom. I mean, you're so many things you could teach me. smart.

(She stops at Tom's laptop and looks at it.)

Are you writing something? You were writing right? Ha, writing right. So, the writer's block is gone?

TOM

One form of it.

NANCY

Any sex in this? Ha, just kidding. I know you're not obsessed with sex like Mr. Barlow. Are you?

TOM

No.

NANCY

Really, what does sexual obsession mean? As a writer how would you describe it?

TOM

Lions and tigers and bears.

NANCY

What? Am I supposed to say, "Oh my?" I could.

TOM

You know Nancy, could you do me a favor?

NANCY

I'd love to. What do you in my mind?

TOM

Would you get my wife for me?

NANCY

Do you need her for something? I could --

TOM

Yes. I mean, no. I need my wife. Or I could just get her myself.

(NANCY starts towards the left stage exit.

She's in the garage.

NANCY

Right. I forgot.

(She tries to open the front door, but it's locked.)

Silly me, I locked it. So safety-conscious.

(TOM sits down and continues typing. CARLA enters FD.)

CARLA

What did you want?

TOM

Where's Nancy?

(NANCY enters FD, with some paint splattered on her.)

NANCY

I'm right here.

TOM

Stop! Wait! Please, don't.

(NANCY stops.)

What happened?

CARLA

I accidentally splattered paint on her. What did you want?

TOM

Want? What did I want? Let me see, I was trying to write, and Nancy was talking to me, and I was trying to write. And... that's funny, I don't remember.

CARLA

Since you can't remember I'll just -

NANCY

I came over to return the book Tom loaned me. I don't know why writers put so much sex in their work, do you?

CARLA

I suppose they have to put it somewhere.

(NANCY starts to step further
into the room.)

TOM

No, please, not on the carpet!

NANCY

I'll just stand here.

TOM

A little farther back, please.

CARLA

Tom had a tragic incident in his childhood, a stain tried to
kill him.

TOM

Yes, yes, I'm a neat freak. I've always liked things nice
and tidy and put in their proper place.

NANCY

Oh, I love to put things in their proper place, but
sometimes I don't care where things go, just as long as
they're going somewhere.

CARLA

Miss Chapman it's such a joy to have you as our neighbor.

NANCY

It's wonderful isn't it.

(CARLA picks up the book.)

CARLA

(To Tom)

This one of your favorite books. You should share some of
your knowledge with Miss Chapman.

TOM

Now... I remember why I wanted. Do I need to go to the Co-op?

CARLA

Why?

TOM

For dinner tonight.

CARLA

No. It's just your boyfriend coming over.

NANCY

You have a boyfriend?!

TOM

My wife is being facetious. An old friend of mine is coming over for dinner, and Nancy we have so much to do.

CARLA

Like what dear?

TOM

That's so funny. Tom, you're so funny.

CARLA

My witty husband, but speaking of jokes, (to Nancy) what are you doing tonight?

NANCY

Nothing, other than what I do when I'm alone in a big house, none of it counts as wholesome entertainment, but -

CARLA

We're going to discuss Tom's new... Tom what are you working on?

TOM

A play.

CARLA

We're going to discuss Tom's new play, along with dinner, and sometimes we even act out parts read parts for Tom. It's not always productive, but it usually great fun, you should join us.

NANCY

Oh God I'd love that. It's so nice to live next to creative types. My last neighbors were no fun at all, especially after they put their fences up. Why do people need fences?

CARLA

Some people do like their privacy.

NANCY

You can have privacy without fences.

CARLA

Yes, but then your neighbors must respect your privacy.

NANCY

Which is why I'd never tell anyone all the things I see going on over here.

CARLA

What incredible will power you must summon. So tonight, around six?

NANCY

Is there anything I can bring?

CARLA

Just alcohol.

TOM

Nothing that stains.

CARLA

Don't listen to him. Worrying about the carpet is his favorite pastime.

NANCY

Nothing that stains huh, that takes so much fun out my choices. See you tonight.

(NANCY exits F.D.)

TOM

Did you have to invite her?

CARLA

What's wrong with Miss Chapman; she so adores you?

TOM

You used to get jealous when a woman showed me that kind of attention.

CARLA

I don't remember anyone showing you that kind of attention. Wait there was Aunt Susie's dog.

TOM

You know what I mean.

(TOM starts typing.)

CARLA

Perhaps a fresh perspective would be good for your writer's block.

TOM

(while typing)

There's nothing wrong with my creative process, presently. Well, maybe Nancy will take an interest in Brad. He's been oddly single for a while.

CARLA

He is breathing, not that I think that's a necessary requirement for Miss Chapman. But I don't think she's his type. Do you?

(TOM types.)

What type of woman do you think Brad's attracted to?

(TOM types.)

Do you think he likes a flaccid chatterbox with hedonistic compulsions? Or a stable but lively mature woman?

TOM

(while typing)

Uh huh.

CARLA

Uh huh? What does that mean?

TOM

(while typing)

Uh huh.

CARLA

You're not listening, again, are you?

TOM

(while typing)

Uh huh.

CARLA

I should let you work, but you really don't want that Dear, do you? Tom?

TOM

(while typing)

Uh huh.

CARLA

So, I was asking what kind of woman Brad likes? Tall or short, skinny or fat, bright or dumb, red heads, blonds, brunettes, what kind of woman does he like? Tom? Mr. Altman?

TOM

(while typing)

Ya sure.

CARLA

Ya, sure he like them all. Is that what you're saying? Say yes Tom. Yes.

TOM

(while typing)

Yes.

CARLA

Do you think he's sex starved?

TOM

(while typing)

Ah yah.

CARLA

Don't you think someone should try to help him? Tom, do you think was should help Brad?

TOM

(while typing)

Yah. I would.

CARLA

You would? Now that's a good friend.

TOM

Wait...

(He sighs, frustrated.)

I think I'll go downstairs.

(TOM closes his laptop. He exits
RS with it and his coffee.)

CARLA

I hope it's something I said, I think.

(CARLA puts her feet back upon
the coffee table).

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Act IScene 2

SETTING: The table is partially set for dinner.

AT RISE: CARLA enters from RS with a dinner dish. There is a distinctive KNOCK on the front door. CARLA sets the dish down and hurries to open the door. BRAD OLSEN, mid 40's, casually dressed in a sports jacket and loose tie, enters. He's holding a bag, with bottles of champagne in it, and an envelope.

BRAD

Hi Carla. Lovely to see you.
(He brushes against Carla as he passes her.)
I brought some bubbly.

CARLA

Just set it on the table.

(BRAD sets the bag with champagne down on the table.)

BRAD

(While holding out an envelope.)
A woman said this was yours, and she wanted you to know she knows you're trying to kill her. She really did seem out of breath from walking up the hill.

CARLA

It's not me. It's Alexi Dys.

BRAD

Who?

CARLA

My daily sex partner.

BRAD

What?

CARLA

Brad, I'm just trying to be funny. I guess I missed the mark, just like this card.

(looking at the card)

It seems I missed twice on this one.

BRAD

Where's bunding genius?

CARLA

He's in the basement. I was distracting him too much.

BRAD

You are a distraction.

CARLA

Not in that way to my husband.

BRAD

Are we alone?

CARLA

I haven't heard Tom knock the ironing board over, which I absent-mindedly left in front of the door to the basement.

BRAD

So forgetful.

CARLA

Yes, but what can I do about it?

BRAD

Kiss me.

(CARLA and BRAD kiss.)

CARLA

I'm not sure it's helping.

BRAD

It takes more than one dose.

CARLA

Does it have any side effects?

BRAD

It can cause forgetfulness.

CARLA

What can cause forgetfulness?

BRAD

This!

(He kisses CARLA passionately.)

God, I've missed you! Every delicious morsel of you: your sparkling eyes, the tender curve of your neck, the intoxicating smell of your hair.

CARLA

Have you missed this pinky?

BRAD

(kissing her pinky)

This exquisite little digit? Ambrosia to the gods.

CARLA

Are you a god?

BRAD

I feel like a god when I'm with you.

CARLA

God, you're ridiculous! So, so ridiculous.

(CARLA and BRAD embrace heatedly.)

BRAD

Can we go somewhere? We'd only be gone for a moment.

CARLA

(sarcastically)

A moment?

(She pushes Brad away.)

Dinner's cooking.

BRAD

Couldn't it simmer? Doesn't that enhance the flavor?

CARLA

Yes, many things are better after they've stewed for a spell.

BRAD

But not your cooking?

CARLA

Not tonight.

BRAD

I'll just have to settle for appetizers: delightful, delicious, de-lovely --

CARLA

Appetizers? Is that all my affection denotes to you? Well, Tom did say you were sex-starved.

BRAD

What?

CARLA

It's a new game I play, when Tom's pretending to listen to me. I can say anything, and all he says is "yes, uh huh, sure, that's nice," and so on. I could tell him every detail about us, and all he'd say --

BRAD

You wouldn't!

CARLA

It wouldn't matter. He doesn't hear anything I say when --

BRAD

Still, you wouldn't? My god, what if --

CARLA

When we're caught, it's not going to be --

BRAD

When? What do you mean when?

CARLA

Brad, everyone always thinks they're clever. Then they get caught.

BRAD

We are not everyone, and we are clever.

(He kisses her.)

Very, very clever.

CARLA

But wouldn't you feel better if we had some rudimentary idea of how we'll handle it, just in case?

BRAD

You can't plan for something so completely unpredictable.

CARLA

Tom? Unpredictable? He's the most -

BRAD

He's wound so tight, these days. Who knows what would happen if all his tidy threads suddenly unraveled?

CARLA

Stock value in knitting needles would skyrocket.

BRAD

Are you feeling guilty? Do you want him to find out?

CARLA

No, I don't think so. I mean... Oh, it's just been a trying week. I guess I'm little confused like our new neighbor.

BRAD

I thought you said she was some kind of crazed stalker.

CARLA

I did say "a little like her." I invited the crazed stalker to dinner.

BRAD

Why?

CARLA

It's not a captive audience I'm thinking about, more of a captive performance. She so adores Tom.

BRAD

Oh you clever girl.

CARLA

Woman.

BRAD

Indeed, all woman. So, while your neighbor is occupying Tom.

CARLA

We might have a moment. That's all you need, right?

(CARLA picks up the bag with the champagne bottles in it and

walks toward the RS exit. BRAD starts to follow.)

CARLA

You'd better stay here. Tom might hear your clodden footsteps in the kitchen.

(CARLA exits RS.)

BRAD

Clodden? That's not a word. And I'll have you know I have the lightest of steps. I trained ninjas in Master of the Panther Arts.

(BRAD, reliving elements of a previous performance, moves around, melodramatically, like a ninja; while doing so he accidentally knocks a lamp over. He hurries to sit down and picks up a magazine. CARLA enters RS.)

CARLA

Hmmm...

(She bends over to pick up the lamp, with deliberate flirtation. BRAD rises.)

Now, now, this maiden will only yield to the charms of a ninja.

(BRAD impersonates a ninja again.)

Oh my, a ninja! Whatever shall I do?

(BRAD seizes Carla. There's a knock on the heard at the front door. CARLA and BRAD leap apart. BRAD sits on a chair. CARLA, flustered looks around, composes herself, then opens the door. NANCY enters in an overly-tight dress.)

Miss Chapman, what a surprise.

NANCY

Surprise? You did say tonight?

CARLA

You're early.

NANCY

Am I? Sorry, I've just been so eager and I --
(to Brad)

Hello. You must be Tom's friend. I guess I'm not the only one who's early. I'm Nancy, Miss Chapman to Carla. I don't know why she does that, calls me Miss Chapman, no one's that formal except her. It's Miss or Misses or, of course, Mister. Why don't men have to be called something different if they're single? I mean, that's a handy thing to know. See, everyone knows I'm single because I'm a Miss something. Okay, I'm rambling, I'm such a chatterbox. Hi, I'm Nancy.

BRAD

Brad. Pleased to meet you. How do like your new house?

NANCY

It's a little big. I suppose I should have thought about that. I'm just not use to being single.

(to Carla)

We've been neighbors for three months, tomorrow. Did you know that?

CARLA

It seems so much longer.

NANCY

Doesn't it? I feel like I've been spying on you guys forever. Just kidding. Where's Tom?

CARLA

He's in the basement, writing.

NANCY

Does he have a man-cave?

(BRAD and NANCY repress a
laugh.)

CARLA

I should let Tom know everyone's here. Drinks, anyone?

NANCY

Oh, I forgot the booze. I'll be right back. Don't start the party without me.

NANCY (Cont.)

(NANCY rushes out the FD.)

BRAD

So, is she single?

CARLA

You want me to set you up on a date?

BRAD

Yes, with the most dazzling woman on earth?

(BRAD kisses Carla.)

CARLA

Does she have a name?

BRAD

Fred.

(CARLA laughs. Offstage the ironing board is heard falling over. BRAD and CARLA remain seated while starting a fake conversation.)

CARLA

I can't believe that.

BRAD

It's absolutely true.

CARLA

You're kidding me.

BRAD

Why would I joke about something like that?

CARLA

You and Tom are constantly making up stories, so --

BRAD

Yes, but I'd never make up -

(TOM enters RS.)

CARLA

Hi dear. Brad was just telling the most amazing story.

TOM

You left the ironing board in front of the basement door.

CARLA

I'm sorry. I got so preoccupied with cooking, and then Brad showed up.

TOM

That's not Brad.

(BRAD whispers into Carla's ear.)

CARLA

Brad would like to know why Brad isn't Brad?

TOM

I've known Brad Olsen for more than twenty years, and there is one thing Brad never is, and that's early. The Brad that held up our wedding for a half hour, now that was Brad.

CARLA

(to Brad)

My husband does have a point; I think we might have to dissect you.

BRAD

Sorry I'm early, but our camera man was arrested, so came over early to lie to Carla.

CARLA

Brad, you made that whole thing up?

TOM

(to Carla)

You're so gullible.

(to Brad)

I'm surprised you didn't have some love nest to rush off to. Are you losing your touch?

BRAD

I...don't think so.

TOM

If you don't mind. I'd like to go down and continue writing.
It's great stuff Brad.

BRAD

Sure, I'll just go back to lying to Carla.

TOM

Hey, we haven't had a good liars match in ages, but... what am I thinking. Not tonight.

(TOM exits RS.)

BRAD

Tom's in a great mood.

CARLA

He's jollyastic.

BRAD

Thinks he's going to be famous enough that he's going to be able to make up words. And he called you gullible.

CARLA

There are advantages to being gullible. Someone told me I'm the most dazzling woman in the world, and I believed him.

BRAD

No, no, I said Fred.

(CARLA throws a cushion at him.)

BRAD

So, where were we?

CARLA

Well, Fred needs to go put the ironing board up.

(CARLA exit RS. BRAD gets up walks over to the desk. He opens a drawer and browses through papers in it. NANCY enters through the front door. She notices Brad looking through the desk drawer and quietly walks over to stand behind him.)

NANCY

Whacha doin'?

(BRAD, startled, shoves the
drawer closed.)

Did I catch you snooping? Or are you looking for drugs?

BRAD

(nervous and defensive)

I was just... just looking for a pen.

NANCY

Like the one right here?

(NANCY pokes the pen in his
pocket and leaves her finger on
it.)

BRAD

Oh, right.

(He steps away.)

Look, it's an old habit. I always check what kind of
response Tom's getting to his work. Tonight, it doesn't
matter, but sometimes it helps.

NANCY

How?

BRAD

I'm sorry, Nancy, but that's kind of...

(He points to the bottle Nancy
is holding.)

Nothing that stains?

NANCY

Oh yes, but it takes so much fun out of my choices. Where is
everyone?

BRAD

Tom just went back down to his man-cave, and Fred is in the
kitchen.

NANCY

Fred?

BRAD

Inside joke. Carla.

NANCY

It's just you and me. Well, what do you do Brad? I bet it's something very interesting.

BRAD

By day or by night?

NANCY

Which is funner?

BRAD

By day, I'm America's greatest undiscovered actor.

(He makes a dramatic bow.)

And by night, I do stuff online. It pays the bills, just not always my taxes. You don't work for the IRS?

NANCY

Ha! I think decimal points are evil. Those little dots! If I put them one place, I'm rich, but if I put them another, I'm broke. I always want to put things where they feel good, don't you?

BRAD

If only it were that easy.

NANCY

It can be. Are you a Misssster or a Mister?

BRAD

Uh... I'm not married.

NANCY

Really? A guy like you isn't married? I see all kinds of yummy going on, and you're single?

BRAD

I guess I just haven't met the right... guy yet.

NANCY

Oh damn. I'm sure you will. I meet so many gay men these days. Is it catching?

(BRAD half shrugs, awkwardly.)

I'll just go give the booze to Carla.

(NANCY exits, RS. A Moment later
CARLA enters, RS.)

CARLA

Maybe I should tell Miss Chapman you're gay, just so she doesn't --

BRAD

I already did. It was a fight or flight reaction. And I think she could take me.

CARLA

When?

BRAD

Just now.

CARLA

She's back?

BRAD

She just went into the kitchen.

CARLA

Excuse me, I think I need to rescue my husband.

BRAD

Why? I thought that was your clever plan.

CARLA

I haven't spent hours cooking to let it go to waste. Dessert is for after dinner.

(CARLA exits RS. BRAD walks around the room. TOM enters from the LS door. He walks up behind Brad.)

TOM

Brad, where --

BRAD

Jesus, Tom! I thought you were still in your man-cave.

TOM

My what?

BRAD

The basement.

TOM

I needed to tinkle.

BRAD

You needed to tinkle?

TOM

I've just been writing lines for a woman; she's still in my head.

BRAD

Well, she scared the hell out of me, just like Nancy.

TOM

So you've met our enthusiastic neighbor.

BRAD

Is that what you call it?

TOM

I don't what the clinical term is. She's having some sort of breakdown. Carla must pity her. I don't know why else she'd invite her.

BRAD

They're both looking for you.

TOM

You should be so lucky. I guess I'll go find them.

(He exits, RS. BRAD turns toward
the LS. TOM returns from the RS
exit.)

Hey, Brad --

BRAD

(startled again)

Would you stop doing that!?

TOM

Sorry, I just thought I should offer you a drink.

BRAD

I brought champagne. I had it in an ice chest on the way over.

TOM

Oh bubbles, my favorite. Maybe they can find us.

(TOM exits RS to the kitchen.
BRAD picks up a magazine and
flips through it, keeping an eye
on the kitchen exit.)

BRAD

(to himself)

"Brad, you seem a little nervous tonight." "Me nervous? What do I have to be nervous about?" "Nothing, nothing, at all, but you know you're talking to yourself." "Well, I do that sometimes, when I'm -"

(CARLA enters swiftly from the LS door.)

CARLA

Well, I can't find her or TOM.

(BRAD jumps.)

Are you all right?

BRAD

I would be if people would stop sneaking up behind me!

CARLA

What?

BRAD

Never mind. Tom just went into the kitchen.

CARLA

And Miss Chapman?

BRAD

I haven't seen her, but I'm sure any moment she'll be right behind me.

CARLA

How could she vanish?

(CARLA exits RS. BRAD backs toward the front door, keeping an eye on the RS and LS entrances. The front door's knob starts to move. Brad sees this. He grabs the door and jerks it open.)

BRAD

Ah ha!

(NANCY, who had been using the door to balance herself so she could remove her shoes, screams and tumbles inside.)

NANCY

My God, what's wrong with you?!

BRAD

I'm so sorry. I didn't know, I mean -- I thought you went to the kitchen?

(BRAD helps her up.)

NANCY

I couldn't find anyone and thought they might be out on the back porch, but the door locked behind me. I had to walk around, and I stumbled and broke my heel. And I love these shoes! And then for some reason, you yanked the door open and screamed at me!

BRAD

I'm sorry about that. It's just -- Well it's hard to explain, but I didn't mean to.

(CARLA enters from the RS exit with two champagne glasses. TOM follows her in with a champagne bottle and a notebook binder under his arm.)

CARLA

I see you've reappeared, Miss Chapman.

(NANCY, feeling entitled to, uses Brad to balance herself while she removes her shoes.)

NANCY

Yes, I stepped out the back door and --

(TOM opens the champagne with a loud "pop". BRAD screams and

jumps, causing NANCY to fall
over.)

BRAD

Oh, God, no I -- I'm not doing this on purpose.

(BRAD tries to help Nancy up.)

NANCY

Get your hands away from me.

(NANCY hits at Brad with her
shoe.)

BRAD

(to Tom and Carla)

I opened the front door, which he was leaning on and she
fell. It was an accident.

NANCY

An accident! He jerked the door open and screamed at me,
like some juvenile. Some perfectly useless gay juvenile.

TOM

Juvenile is an apt, but g --

CARLA

Brad, why would you scream at Ms. Chapman? What a horrible
thing to do.

BRAD

I - I -- I need a drink!

TOM

How fortuitous that I have drink to offer.

(TOM pours and serves the
champagne.)

NANCY

Who knew a dinner invitation could be so dangerous?

BRAD

I feel really terrible.

NANCY

You should! You're crazy, and I know crazy! I paid two

NANCY (Cont.)

dollars for these shoes.

CARLA

I'm sure it can be fix.

BRAD

I'll be glad to pay. There's an excellent cobbler --

NANCY

I don't want your money. Use it to see a therapist.

(TOM hands a full glass of
champagne to Carla.)

CARLA

How about a glass of champagne, Miss Chapman, to cobble our
fun little evening back together?

NANCY

Trying to bribe me with booze? Okay.

(She gulps the champagne down
and hands the empty glass back to
Carla.)

So, Tom, are you ready to tell us all about your play?

TOM

I'm dying to tell you, but let's eat first.

NANCY

What, your mouth can only do one thing at a time? Mine can
--

CARLA

(to Nancy)

That's something else we can wait to her until after dinner
I think.

BRAD

Dinner's worth the wait. Carla's an amazing cook. I don't
know why Tom doesn't weight 400 pounds.

TOM

I see you've put on a little weight.

BRAD

(pinching himself)

I don't think so.

TOM

What do you think Carla, has Brad put on some weight?

CARLA

I was thinking just the opposite.

BRAD

Well, I'll put some weight on tonight.

CARLA

Save room for desert.

NANCY

These days, I just cram more in. So, Tom how long have you known this lunatic?

BRAD

We went to college together. We were in the Navy together. We were orphans in the foster care system. We met in a spelling bee contest... which lie do you want to hear?

TOM

Regardless, we've known each other for a very long. And here we are pursuing the same dreams, we had when we were young.

BRAD

(to Tom)

Seems to me you've caught at least one of those dreams.

CARLA

When you reel your dreams in Brad, do you club them over the head first, or go straight to gutting?

BRAD

Catch and release.

CARLA

I guess someone else gets to keep your fish then.

NANCY

(to Tom)

Is your play a drama, a comedy, or a tragedy?

TOM

I haven't decided.

NANCY

You're not giving my imagination anything hard to work with.

CARLA

(to Tom)

Didn't you say something about infidelity?

NANCY

Is someone sleeping with someone they are not supposed to?

TOM

I'll slay you all with my brilliance after dinner. I promise.

NANCY

I can imagine better ways to die, but you don't seem like a killer to me.

CARLA

He's killed the mood more than once.

NANCY

Infidelity huh. Where do you get your ideas?

TOM

Where do ideas come from? Are we their creators or but midwives? In the twilight of the mind, do we breathe life into them or they into us? It's a very old question.

CARLA

Yes, where does all that crap come from?

NANCY

I think everything comes from the unconscious. We know so much we don't know, you know?

TOM

(while writing in his binder)

Do you mind if I borrow that?

NANCY

What? What did I say?

TOM

"We know so much we don't know, you know?"

NANCY

Was that clever?

BRAD

Don't let him get it cheap Nancy.

NANCY

I'm sure Tom can do something for me in return.

CARLA

Does your house need cleaning?

NANCY

No.

CARLA

Do you need help with some writing?

NANCY

No.

CARLA

Research, that's it. Tom's exceptional at research.

NANCY

No.

CARLA

I'm at a loss then. I can't see how he'll repay you. Well, back to the kitchen.

BRAD

Can I watch the maestro at work?

CARLA

Sure, but keeps your fingers off the goods.

(CARLA and BRAD exit RS.)

NANCY

I know Carla was joking. I'm sure you have lots of wonderful talents.

TOM

Brad's a very talented guy. He's --

NANCY

I'm sure Brad's marvelous. It seems like every time I meet an interesting guy, he's marvelous. You're not marvelous. You're married. Thank god. May I ask you a question?

TOM

Another.

NANCY

Mr. Literal.

TOM

Occupational hazard.

NANCY

Oh, I bet your writing isn't so literal. I bet you write all kinds of wonderful things, things that say one thing, but mean another, like conversations that are ordinary, but have hidden, juicy meanings.

TOM

Titillating subtext?

NANCY

I've always been fascinated with subtext.

(She touches his hand.)

You know I could help you with research.

TOM

Research?

NANCY

If your play's about infidelity, I know quite a lot about that.

TOM

You know, I should make sure my wife doesn't need real help in the kitchen. I'll be right back or send Brad out to keep you company.

NANCY

Oh Marvelous.

(TOM exits.)

NANCY

(She lifts her glass.)

I guess it's just you and me bubbles.

(NANCY opens Tom's binder.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Act I

Scene 3

Setting: After dinner.

At Rise: TOM and NANCY are sitting in the living room. Both have champagne glasses. Tom looking at his pages. NANCY is staring at the bubbles in her glass.

NANCY

Bubbles, bubbles, bubbles. Did you ever feel like a bubble?

TOM

No.

NANCY

Bubbles, bubbles, bubbles, soft, round bubbles.

(TOM scribbles a few words.)

What are you writing?

TOM

Soft, round bubbles.

NANCY

I just said that.

TOM

Did you?

NANCY

Oh, you're teasing me. I like to be teased.

TOM

I know.

NANCY

How?

TOM

I'm psychic.

NANCY

I love men who are psychic. Do you know what I do with men

NANCY (Cont.)

who are psychic?

TOM

Of course I do.

NANCY

Oh right, because you're psychic. Well, Mr. Psychic do you want to --

TOM

No.

NANCY

You're no fun. Be fun, tell me about the play.

TOM

Brad and Carla are almost done.

NANCY

They sure are taking their time. I think they're up to something, that guy --

TOM

Brad.

NANCY

Yeah, he's shifty. I wouldn't trust my wife with him.

TOM

You wouldn't?

NANCY

Nope, nope, nope. He's shifty.

TOM

You think Brad is shifty?

NANCY

Yeah.

TOM

Why?

NANCY

He's happy.

TOM

And that makes him shifty?

NANCY

My ex-husband wasn't happy, and then he was happy: happy, happy, happy. I'm taking all kinds of meds and I'm not happy. Happy people are up to something, something naughty, and that's why they're happy.

TOM

Should I send you in there to catch them?

NANCY

I could. I could sneak in and catch 'em.

TOM

Putting the food in the refrigerator.

NANCY

No, no. Putting the salami in the ziplock.

TOM

What are you going to do when you catch 'em?

NANCY

Hmmm...kill 'em?

TOM

How?

NANCY

Uh... Oh, oh I know, a frying pan!

TOM

I think it might be difficult to kill two people with a ceramic coated aluminum frying pan, even for a sober person.

NANCY

Well Mr. Smarty, how would you kill 'em?

TOM

I'd have a better plan than a frying pan. No offense.

NANCY

None taken. Bubbles, bubbles, bubbles, soft, round bubbles, say it again.

TOM

It.

NANCY

No, no, no. Soft round bubbles.

TOM

You're drunk.

NANCY

Yes, Mr. Psychic, but say it.

(CARLA and BRAD enter, both are carrying glasses of champagne and Carla is also carrying the bottle of champagne.)

CARLA

Say what?

TOM

It.

NANCY

No, no, no, no, no... soft, round... bubbles, bubbles, bubbles.

TOM

She likes the bubbles.

CARLA

You have something in common. More?

TOM

Please.

NANCY

Me too.

CARLA

I don't want to carry you back to your house.

NANCY

No more bubbles?

CARLA

I'm sorry.

NANCY

Fine then, but since we're all here, Tom can tell us about his play.

BRAD

Yes, Tom, what is this brilliant idea?

TOM

Did I say brilliant? I meant genius.

CARLA

My modest husband.

NANCY

I believe you're a genius, Tomsy Womsy. Go ahead, show them. I already know. I peeked. My favorite part: kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, but I don't remember who we're killing. Who are we killing?

CARLA

Yes, Tomsy Womsy, who are we killing?

NANCY

Are you making fun of me?

BRAD

Come on Tom, you've kept us in suspense long enough! Especially poor Nancy, who I suspect won't remember a thing in the morning.

NANCY

Don't bet on it. I have a great memory Mr. -- Mr. -
(to Tom)
Psst, what's his name?

TOM

Brad.

NANCY

Mr. Brad Shifty. We know what you're up to, and Tomsy's got a plan, and it's not a frying pan. Hey, that rhymes!

TOM

The concept is simple, but I find so many possibilities with it, some very dark.

BRAD

Dark isn't your thing.

TOM

Not usually.

CARLA

Well, what is it?

TOM

Have a seat, and I'll tell you.

(BRAD and CARLA sit on the
loveseat. TOM studies them for a
moment.)

As I said, it's a simple idea: a man discovers his wife is
cheating on him and so invites her lover over for dinner.
What do you think?

BRAD

I -I -- I don't know. It sounds -- it sounds just -- what do
you think, Carla?

CARLA

It's an idea, but where are you going with it?

NANCY

Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill...

CARLA

Yes, we've heard that part.

BRAD

What part is that, Tom?

TOM

That's skipping ahead.

BRAD

It seems like a good set-up for a comedy. Don't you think
so, Carla?

CARLA

Hilarious.

TOM

Do you? Do you think it's funny?

BRAD

You're writing it. How about a woman as the lover? That would be more modern twist.

TOM

No, it's a man. Actually, a close friend. It's got to be comedy then, unless the husband's a total sap.

BRAD

I'm not sure I follow.

TOM

I always thought that men whose wives cheat on them are a bit pathetic. If they don't know, they've got to be kind of stupid.

NANCY

Total idiots. He's either a loser or she's a slut, and if she's a slut, then only --

CARLA

Miss Chapman I would --

NANCY

It's Nancy. Why are you always calling me Miss Chapman? Why don't you call me Nancy?

CARLA

I like the sound of Miss Chapman.

NANCY

Well, I don't. It's like you're trying to remind me I'm single, while you have Tomsy and Mr. Shifty Bradly.

CARLA

I don't have - Look, I'm sorry. I don't mean it that way, Nancy. It just would be nice, Nancy, if we could dispense with the vulgarities, Nancy.

NANCY

What did I say?

TOM

It could be a comedy. Affairs can be good light-hearted material, right?

TOM (Cont.)

BRAD

Yah, a romantic farce. Nothing serious. Just fun. Nobody gets hurt. Nothing to die for, that's brilliant. That's the way I'd write it.

CARLA

Sounds so inane.

BRAD

Why, Carla? Don't you think it's a funny idea?

CARLA

People get hurt in affairs. There's nothing brilliant about trivializing that.

NANCY

You tell 'em, girl.

BRAD

It's a play. People love to laugh about situations that in real life some people wouldn't take so well. Right Carl?

CARLA

Yes, yes, of course. But, Tom, you said you had a brilliant idea, and there are so many comedies about affairs, what --

BRAD

Even more tragedies, I think, and everyone's doing dark and violent stuff today. There's just too much of it.

NANCY

I'd like to add my ex-husband to the list of violent tragedicks.

TOM

Look, I printed some copies of what I've written so far. Let's act some out and see what happens.

(TOM exits, RS.)

NANCY

This is so exciting. I get to watch you act.

BRAD

Yes, it's going to be quite a night for acting. Tom will do a lot.

CARLA

Tom isn't one for pretenses.

BRAD

It's a coincidence.

NANCY

What's a coincidence?

CARLA

Only that we all love the bubbly.

(She drinks her whole glass.)

Bubbles, bubbles, bubbles.

NANCY

Bubbles, bubbles, bubbles. It's not fair. I'm quite --

(She tries to rise but can't.)

It's just... the world is a little drunk, I think. Can you feel her spinning?

CARLA

No, but I'm sure you can.

NANCY

Then you should drink some more. Shadly, pour her some more bubbles.

CARLA

You know about bubbles, don't you Nancy? They --

(A gunshot is heard offstage.

BRAD and CARLA bolt up.)

NANCY

My god, what was that?! It sounded like a gunshot!

(BRAD and CARLA look at each other.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF ACT)

Act II