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## Introduction

Postmodernism lives. It thrives, it beckons, and it torments. But it most definitely exists. Few critics can deny it, and that is perhaps the only point where most of them can agree. As Douwe Fokkema puts it, "Much to the embarrassment of the literary historian, the term postmodernism has become a household word even before there was time to establish its meaning." (vii). While some critics claim that it exists as an extension of modernism and others submit that it is an entirely new direction, very little consensus can be reached over the question of how exactly one gains membership to the club. One thing the debate serves to show is that postmodernism is far from a unified movement. Larry McCaffrey suggests that,

getting a sense of what does constitute postmodernism is perhaps best approached in the same way readers should approach one of Faulkner's multi-narrated novels: One reads one section, one tendency, one subjective opinion to get a feel for the territory, and then one moves on into another expanse, examines that area for its distinctive features, and so on (xi-xii).

Eventually one may be able to assemble a rough picture of what everyone is talking about. But the problem is that there's just so much of it around. Postmodernism has become a word synonymous with the 1980's and the yuppie generation. Almost any aspect of contemporary culture can be, and probably has been, labelled as another element, result, or cause of the postmodern movement. It engulfs much more than literature or even the arts: "Postmodernism is more than a buzzword or even an aesthetic; it is a way of seeing, a view of the human spirit and an attitude toward politi-

cal as well as cultural possibilities" (Gitlin 1). We are a postmodern generation in a postmodern age dealing with postmodern conflicts in a typically postmodern fashion. But what does it mean to be postmodern?

A superficial survey of the growth of postmodernism could begin with the Renaissance, where the philosophical stage was set for a universe centered around humankind. The romantics began to define themselves as individuals in a new and rapidly changing world. They were the first to draw attention to the ways in which they related to their own art and to the status of that art in its fresh and unpredictable context. Later, nineteenth-century literary realism based itself on materialist determinism: the Victorian bourgeois confidence in the social and moral progress of humankind. Realism was supposed to mirror reality and use it as a base upon which to criticize and sympathize. High culture and popular culture were separated by a wall of tradition and social class differences. The high modernists rebelled against those views. They set out to remake life, highlighting personal experience as the only ultimate meaning. High culture would stoop on occasion to borrow from low culture. Art, in the eyes of the Avant-Garde, was seen as an answer, as in fact the answer, to a ravaged world. Eventually, the bourgeoisie came to accept the private constructions of the modernists, and the upcoming generation was faced with a unique dilemma: the modern bourgeoisie was becoming Modern. Two world wars, the depression of the 1930's, and the shock of the nuclear bomb, among other

events, showed once and for all that art was not a solution, and the rise of existentialism began to make the possibility of any tangible solutions appear absurd. With no easily defined and readily available enemy at their disposal, and a growing sense that there is no indisputable "right way," the new generation came to accept that no hierarchy of world order is possible, and the postmodern demeanor was born. In place of modernism's concern for the individual comes postmodern indifference: indifference to tradition, consistency, and continuity. High culture and popular culture blur together. "It [postmodernism] neither embraces nor criticizes, but beholds the world blankly, with a knowingness that dissolves feeling and commitment into irony... It regards 'the individual' as a sentimental attachment, a fiction to be enclosed within quotation marks" (Gitlin 35). On the broadest level, it would be fair to say that while the concerns of modernism were epistemological, the concerns of postmodernism tend to be more ontological. That is, from questions concerning knowledge (What can be known and how?), we have moved towards general inquiries into the nature of being and the meaning of existence. Rather than openly confronting the problems of the world, there is a more inward movement:

Beckett, Borges, and Nabakov -- the three authors of this period [1940's and 1950's] who were to have the most direct impact on postmodern writing -- all appeared to turn their backs on the world outside in favor of a movement inward, toward the world of language, dream, and memory, to examine the nature of experience, of the way words beguile, mislead, and shape our perception, of the way imagination builds its own realm out of symbols. (McCaffrey xviii).

Generally speaking, postmodern artists are anti-dogma, anti-action, and apolitical. This is reflected in their portrayals of humankind's helplessness against the random whims of the cosmos.

Critically, postmodernism began to surface as a movement in the early fifties. At that time early critics, such as Irving Howe, saw it as an anti-intellectual current eating away at the foundations of modernism. The erosion of traditional values and centers of authority, a general passivity and apathy, and a neglect of traditional ceremonies -- all of these led to the creation of fictional characters with no social definition who appeared to be set adrift in a world without traditions or authority. Other critics saw this new trend in such writers as Iris Murdoch and Kingsley Amis, whose works move away from what they termed as the "alienation of modernism." In the sixties, postmodernism was associated with the American counter-culture by such critics as Leslie Fiedler and Susan Sontag. The movement was seen in relation to Jack Kerouac and the Beat generation, Ken Kesey's *Merry Pranksters*, Pop Art, and Rock and Roll, but it was limited to American culture for the most part. In the early seventies William Spanos developed a view of postmodernism, associating it with existentialism. By the late seventies certain critics, most notably Ihab Hassan, began to establish postmodernism as a movement that included more and more diverse views: "...in the 1970's Postmodernism became more and more an inclusive term that gathered to itself all literary and cultural phenomena that could not be classified as either Realist or

Modern" (Bertons 25). And where does it stand today? William Spanos claims that the Postmodern imagination is fundamentally a phenomenological/existential one. The postmodern personality is one in reaction to a world in which God is dead (Spanos 14). We are faced with an age in which nothing is certain. As Lance Olsen points out, "Postmodernism is the first movement that appears to be for and against everything and nothing." Unlike any other modes of consciousness, it believes in no higher truths, no "transcendant area that is somehow deeper and richer, more in tune with our fundamental impulses..." (13). We are stranded historically in an era where everything seems to have been done already, where the only authority is money, where words such as "individual," "common sense," or "reality" can only be printed with apologetic quotation marks. Even the name of the movement is uncertain. Many critics claim that the word postmodern is abhorrent, since it suggests that literary movements should be seen as a string of events or works leading towards some ultimate height.

The word postmodern, then, obscures the fact that the impulse informing the postmodern occasion is not fundamentally a chronological event in a developing plot but rather an inherent mode of human understanding that became prominent in the present (de-centered) historical conjunction (Spanos 199).

Ihab Hassan, one of the most flamboyant of the postmodern critics, agrees that the term postmodern denotes a certain temporal linearity that no postmodernist would admit to, and he also points out another reason why the term is inept: "The word postmodernism is not only awkward and uncouth; it evokes what it

wishes to surpass or suppress, modernism itself. The term thus contains its enemy within, as the terms romanticism and classicism, baroque and rococo, do not" ("The Question of Postmodernism" 119). But even Hassan admits there is no better title for this curious age.

By now it should be obvious that one of the fundamental difficulties that one encounters with postmodernism is one of definition. In a sense, to define postmodernism is to deny it. A warning common to postmodern texts is to beware of labels. There are no absolutes; reality is a subjective experience. "Postmodernism explores the impossibility of imposing a single determinant meaning on a text -- and for the postmodernist, the world is a text" (Olsen 8). Thus we are faced with a situation in which the hardened critics and eager graduate students desperately try to categorize and catalogue an elusive movement that Puckishly denies them the right to do so.

Perhaps "post-" is the proper way to describe this age: painting is post-Picasso, writing is post-Joyce, modern music is post-Beatles. There is a sense that everything truly great has already been done, that we are somehow abandoned, isolated from any sense of meaning. And if everything has been done, if everything is pointless, why bother to produce art? A good question that remains in many respects the paradox of postmodernism, (or at least one of them). One answer is that in order to survive with this existential dislocation, we must learn to accept our own powerlessness and this involves questioning absolutely every

human convention, every human value. Only through destroying our old illusions can we confront our actual situation. Postmodern writers are aware of the importance that language plays in shaping the world around us, the way it is used by power structures, the way in which so-called "reality," or "common sense," or "truth" are really disguised versions of ideologies that are promoted by the institutions that profit from the acceptance of these illusions. For this reason, much postmodern literature relies on strategies and techniques that parody the conventionality of our very ways of thinking and force us to question, as readers, our own reading habits and expectations. A vast variety of self-reflexive motifs are used to exploit this idea of art hyper-conscious of its own processes as art. Some of these include authorial intrusion, breaking down the boundaries between fact and fiction, and the exaggerated narrative techniques of magic realism, to name but a very few. There is a general resistance to closure in order to make us question the conventional frames within which we regard literary works. Other influences come in the form of cinema, television, and video, which encourage a different pacing in literature and a leaning towards writing in the present tense. In drama this current made itself known in the works of such different authors as Edward Albee, Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, and Sam Shepherd. For the most part, these playwrights find a union between realism and experimentalism:

At the end of the modern period of drama, therefore, two distinct strands emerged. Experimentalism had



coalesced and achieved a culmination in absurdism, while realism had dropped theatrical trappings and ceased experiment in expressionism and poetry, achieving a clarity and directness of purpose it had not possessed since its inception. The postmodern dramatist rises to the challenge of the two apparent cul-de-sacs to unite seeming opposites into a new and unified dramatic aesthetic (Simard 9).

How is Games For Adults of these trends? The first element that could be classified as postmodern is the "Godgame." The term "Godgame" was coined by John Fowles in his intriguing second novel, The Magus. In it, the protagonist, Nick Urfe, is led by an experimental millionaire through a series of illusions in which it becomes increasingly impossible for him, or the reader, to figure out his actual situation. Fowles calls this situation a godgame. Other Godgames have been used by such contemporary authors as Thomas Pynchon, Iris Murdoch, and Joseph Heller. The concept can also be traced as far back as Shakespeare in such works as The Tempest, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Othello, and Hamlet. In his article entitled "Spooking Oedipa," Robert Rawdon Wilson shows how godgames have existed in literature for centuries. In fiction, then, a godgame can be described as a situation in which there exists a master, or group of masters, who create a game-like situation in which they know the rules and the protagonist does not.

The term 'Godgame' may be extended to include all instances of a certain kind of literary illusion, common to both the baroque and the modern periods, in which a victim within a confusing, shifting web of incidents attempts to think his way out or through (that is, discover the rules), and in which the process of thinking, or playing the game, may be described from the inside as a succession of states of consciousness. (Wilson 188).

Wilson lists a number of criteria that go into the creation of a godgame. These criteria are: that a series of linked incidents create an illusion; that these incidents be impenetrable and constitute reality for the victim; that the illusion be a self-correcting and self-explaining system; that it is plotted and planned, though this is unknown to the victim; that the victim will act, or react, in terms of the illusion; and that his actions will be observed and subject to judgement (190). The godgame in Games For Adults is used to illustrate the postmodern concern for illusion as well as being an allegory for the post-modern condition itself.

The godgame plays upon, and calls forth, the essential human fear of puniness: of being weak, entrapped, depersonalized, and made a victim. Hence it makes vivid latent anxieties, or even deeper anguish, about a crucial aspect of human existence that is at once a quality of mind, of history, and of society (Wilson 204).

In Games For Adults, Paul is unaware of the extent to which he is a victim. Each phase is geared to confuse and simultaneously convince him of the authenticity of that particular aspect of the game. As each reality he experiences breaks down and becomes a fiction, it becomes clear that all realities are subjective fictions, that absolute meaning is an impossibility. As Damien says at one point; "We're trying to show you that the nature of reality depends on how it's depicted" (123), or else; "...you take the illusions for reality and pretend that you are wise... It's time for you to learn that it's all a fiction, that nothing is real" (133). Damien claims that the object of the first

phases of the game were to prepare Paul, to convince him that sometimes 'if' is the truth, or at least, in postmodern terms, as close to the truth as anything can be: "Because Paul in your everyday life, "if" is a lie. You said it yourself; you want facts. Our job is to warm you up, to persuade you to believe that sometimes 'if' can be the truth" (124). All of this serves to dramatize the postmodern loss of meaning, the frustration of our condition which is to know only penultimate realities.

While Paul's hosts are showing him some of the infinite dimensions of reality, they are also illustrating another important aspect of postmodern literature: the breaking down of the author's authority. "...the discourse of postmodernism...is committed to the demystification of the author's authority. It insists on the author as a being-in-the-world, a historical agent inscribed by the archive and engaged in the risky process of exploring the... world" (Spanos 204). This aspect of postmodernism is obvious in some of Damien's early comments on what are supposed to be his own plays: "There you go with 'meaning' again. I hope you don't look for meaning in all of my plays. I'm a stylist, not a prophet" (26). But it becomes especially evident in the character of Paul himself. Damien tells him that he "typifies his kind," that he is "a shadow lost in a world of meaningless truths, bombarded with empty solutions to an insurmountable array of problems, and rather than admit your own insignificance, you take the illusions for reality and pretend that you are wise. You are living in darkness, a womb lined with

lies, imagining bright futures where there aren't any—" (103). Paul is meant to be an everyman, a product of the postmodern norm. Through the plays within the play, Paul is, in a sense, author and audience, subtly breaking down the distinction between them.

As does most postmodern art, Games For Adults raises questions, but refrains from offering solutions. Neither Damien, Sarah, nor Céline can tell Paul what to write, nor do they really offer him any point from which to start except that he is to be a myth-maker. This idea of myth-making comes from my interest in the works of Northrop Frye and that which he sees as the recovery of myth through romance. The final chapter of Frye's book The Secular Scripture is entitled "The Recovery of Myth." Here, Frye begins by pointing out that we have lost the myths that once identified us with nature. He gives romance the central role in recovering myth to the human imagination, noting that the ascent of the hero tends to imply a return to an identity in a higher reality. In this way, he promotes a sort of revolutionary romance, if you like; "It appears in the polarizing between two worlds, one desirable and the other hateful, the triumphant upward movement of the living hero rising from the dead dragon, the point that expresses the reader's identity with a power of life strong enough to smash through any kind of barrier or danger." (163). Romance of a sort is on the rise, as is evident in much postmodern art. One only has to note the mingling of science fiction, fantasy, western, and detective genres in so

many postmodern parodies, all of which contain strong elements of romance in them. This would relate as well to the blurring of high culture and low culture in postmodernism. The difference is that unlike the triumphant ascent of the romantic hero rising from the underworld against all odds, the postmodern hero cannot attain the higher plane of Frye's romantic hero and is liable to be left floundering in the labyrinth, with the best of them learning to accept their condition and resigning to be docile minotaurs as opposed to raging Theseuses.

In the end, of course, there is no closure in Games For Adults. Paul's final situation is ambiguous and the audience is left to draw their own conclusions. But is Paul really the hero in the play? Frye suggests that there are two stages in man's recovery of myth through romance:

"As we make the first great move from projection to the recovery of myth, from return to recreation, the focus of interest shifts from heroes and other elements of narrative to the process of creating them. The real hero becomes the poet, not the agent of force or cunning whom the poet may celebrate" (Frye 178).

In a sense, the heroes in Games For Adults are Damien (a playwright who turns out to be false, but theoretically an artist all the same), Paul (the poet/victim/everyman), and ultimately the creative process itself, the imaginative process involved in creating poetry that Damien and the others hope to exploit in Paul. Thus, it is hoped that Games For Adults brings together some of the elements of romance and postmodernism in what is above all an entertaining experience for the audience.

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\*                   Games For Adults                   \*  
\*                   A play in two acts                   \*  
\*                   by                   \*  
\*                   Lee Scott Young                   \*  
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## The Characters

PAUL WEAVER: A Canadian of about twenty-five with no outstanding features.

SARAH SILK: An English actress in her mid-thirties. Sarah is seductively sophisticated and emotionally unpredictable.

DAMIEN SILK: An English playwright in his late forties. He is openly rich, intellectual, and dashing. Style is his key. He should display a highly confident attitude and a controlled sense of carelessness.

CELINE BERNARD: French, an artist, about 25, and very attractive.

ANITA SMITH: English, composed, Paul's fiancee.

## The Set

The livingroom of Sarah and Damien, the present. It is a large room with a distinctly upper-class air. It is modern, uncluttered, and precise. The walls are decorated with an array of large paintings. One especially grand and violent work dominates the back wall, center stage. To the right of this painting is the main entrance to the apartment. The windows are completely hidden behind venetian blinds. At the back of the room is a big desk upon which sits a computer terminal and a telephone. A staircase climbs the wall, stage right. It leads to a balcony which overlooks the livingroom and from which the audience can see two doors leading to the bedrooms. Stage left is the door to the kitchen. Stage right leads to another part of the apartment.



ACT I, Scene 1

(As the lights come up, Paul and Sarah are kissing passionately on the couch, CS.)

SARAH: (Breaking away.) This is probably disgustingly pragmatic of me, but I think we should get to know one another before we go any further.

PAUL: I wholeheartedly disagree. (Attempts to kiss her again.)

SARAH: (Pulling back.) Why? Are you afraid of what you might find out?

PAUL: (Pause.) Maybe I'm afraid of what you might find out.

SARAH: That's a sobering thought. (Rising.) How about some more wine?

PAUL: I'd rather continue what we were doing a moment ago.

SARAH: And I'd rather talk about you for awhile. (Pours the wine.) So tell me about yourself... (As an afterthought.) Darling.

PAUL: What would you like to know?

SARAH: What are your plans?

PAUL: My plans? (Awkwardly.) Well that depends on you...

SARAH: No, no. I don't mean your immediate plans; they're rather obvious. I want to know the big picture. What do you plan to do with your life? What is your purpose, your scheme, your goal, your raison d'être? What do you believe in?

PAUL: It's a little hard to sum all that up in a few seconds.

SARAH: Try.

PAUL: Well, I'm uh... liberal, I suppose. I, uh, try to... I don't know! This is silly.

SARAH: No it isn't. It's entertaining.

PAUL: Why don't you talk about yourself. I don't know anything about you.

SARAH: That didn't seem to bother you a moment ago. Besides, I asked you first.

PAUL: Maybe I will have that drink.

SARAH: You're avoiding my question.

PAUL: And you're avoiding my lips. Kiss me, Sarah. (They embrace momentarily.)

SARAH: (Breaking away softly.) Mmm. That's very nice, but I still want to know who you are.

PAUL: (Laughing.) Oh brother. It simply doesn't matter, alright?

SARAH: It matters to me. I want to know this stranger with whom I am flirting. Or at least I want to feel that I know you. Can you understand that?

PAUL: Yes, you want to judge me.

SARAH: And is there anything terribly wrong with that? You avoid all my questions. This isn't Last Tango in Paris, you know; I'm much too old for that type of thing. All I know is that I picked you up in a café in Chartres and that you're on your way to London.

PAUL: Well what else would you like me to tell you?

SARAH: I don't know. Whatever is significant, I suppose. (Paul shrugs.) What do you intend to do when you get to London?

PAUL: (Hesitates.) I'm not exactly sure. I thought I might settle down for awhile.

SARAH: "Settle down?" There, you see? Now we're getting somewhere. I had no idea you possessed such middle-class, sensibilities.

PAUL: Perhaps "settle down" isn't the right way to put it.

SARAH: Oh? Please explain.

PAUL: What I meant to say is that I've just been thinking it's time I found myself a proper job and stopped living like a vagabond.

SARAH: (In mock horror.) Good heavens! You don't mean to tell me that I've just driven a common tramp from Chartres to Paris and invited him up for a drink.

PAUL: And kissed him too. Yes, I'm afraid so. But don't worry, I'm really quite harmless.

SARAH: That has yet to be seen. But this is good, very good. We're making progress. So tell me more.

PAUL: Oh come on, Sarah. This is meaningless.

SARAH: Everything is meaningless for that matter.

PAUL: I just mean that--

SARAH: I know exactly what you mean. You have secrets that are none of my business.

PAUL: Well I wouldn't exactly say that--

SARAH: And your life is none of my business since in your eyes I represent nothing but a quick squeeze, an empty one night stand, a--

PAUL: Now that's not true--

SARAH: A "wham bam thank you ma'am," another fast food stand on your sizzling highway of conquests, a convenient hole to hole up in for a night, a--

PAUL: Now hold on, Sarah. I--

SARAH: You may as well admit it.

PAUL: But it's not true.

SARAH: No?

PAUL: Absolutely not.

SARAH: Then how exactly do you see me, Paul?

PAUL: Well, I, uh...

SARAH: (Laughs.) Don't struggle over it. I feel the same way about you.

PAUL: What?

SARAH: You're just another roadside attraction for me as well.

PAUL: Oh.

SARAH: Aren't you relieved?

PAUL: Not exactly.

SARAH: You seem a little put off. Come, kiss me.

(They embrace momentarily.)

SARAH: (Pulling away.) Paul, we can't go through with this.

PAUL: (Frustrated.) Why not?

SARAH: Because it wouldn't be fair to my husband.

PAUL: (After a pause.) Oh, you're married?

SARAH: I'm afraid so.

PAUL: (Pause.) Happily?

SARAH: Yes.

PAUL: (Sighs.) I see. (Pause.)

SARAH: Are you surprised?

PAUL: No. (Pause.) Why didn't you tell me?

SARAH: I am telling you.

PAUL: Why didn't you tell me sooner?

SARAH: Oh, would it have made a difference?

PAUL: Maybe.

SARAH: I know I should have told you sooner. I just found it so pleasant to... be seduced by you. I'm sorry if I misled you.

PAUL: You wear no ring.

SARAH: Oh, did you look for that? No, I rarely wear a ring. I only find that it gets in the way of things.

PAUL: Uh huh. I can see how it would. (After a pause.) Not that it would change anything, but I'd still like to take you to bed.

SARAH: I'm sorry.

PAUL: So am I. (Begins to shake his head and laugh.)

SARAH: What's so funny? Tell me, what is it?

PAUL: The truth may as well come out; I've been unfaithful too.

SARAH: You're married as well?

PAUL: Practically. I'm engaged to a girl in London.

(A pause. When they speak, it is in a new superficial tone. It should be obvious that they both regret confessing their attachments.)

SARAH: Well, that clears the air.

PAUL: (False chuckle.) Yes, I guess it does.

SARAH: At least we know where we stand.

PAUL: Anything else I should know?

SARAH: Would it matter now?

PAUL: No, I guess it wouldn't. (Pause.) It's terribly dark in here. Why don't we open up a window.

SARAH: No!... No light, please. I'd prefer to be in the dark.

PAUL: Alright.

SARAH: (Pause.) What's her name?

PAUL: Who?

SARAH: Your companion.

PAUL: Anita.

SARAH: Uh huh.

PAUL: (Pause.) And yours?

SARAH: Damien.

PAUL: Unusual name.

SARAH: I suppose it is if you've never heard it. (Pause.) Another drink?

PAUL: No, I think I've had enough.

SARAH: Suit yourself. (Pours herself another.)

PAUL: (After a pause.) I feel a bit foolish.

SARAH: Don't, Paul.

PAUL: Perhaps it would be best for me to hit the road now.

SARAH: (Looking into her glass.) I just want you to know... I don't make a habit of bedding down with strange men. I just found you to be... irresistible flirting material.

PAUL: Yes, that's exactly the way I felt myself.

SARAH: I'm glad we've been so honest with one another.

PAUL: So am I.

SARAH: Then let's start over again.

PAUL: I'd love to, but I think it would be best if I started making tracks for London. (Rising.) Didn't you say we were near Place de la République?

SARAH: That's right.

PAUL: Good, I can walk to Gare du Nord from here then. (Glances at his watch.) Look at the time. I must be crazy to have stayed this long.

SARAH: Yes, crazy. (Laughs.) I suppose that's how we shall remember this: just an enchanted little bout of temporary insanity.

(They both look at each other and sigh regretfully.)

PAUL: I thank you again for the ride and your hospitality.

SARAH: The pleasure was all mine... I'm only sorry that things did not work out to your liking.

PAUL: (Smiling bravely.) I've got a long life ahead of me.

SARAH: (Sincerely.) I hope so with all my heart.

PAUL: (Hesitating.) Well, thanks again.

SARAH: Stop thanking me. I can't stand it... And Paul, do come again if you find yourself in Paris.

PAUL: Maybe I'll do that.

SARAH: And perhaps you could write me a letter some time. You said you write poetry and I'd like to see it. We could become... pen pals or something.

PAUL: I'd like that.

SARAH: I'll give you the address.

(Paul reaches into his jacket and discovers that his wallet is missing. He slaps his breast pockets.)

SARAH: Something wrong?

PAUL: I think I've misplaced my wallet. (Bends down and searches through his bag.)

SARAH: For a moment I thought you were having a heart attack.

PAUL: (Frantic.) I think I really have lost my wallet. (Emptying the contents of his bag onto the floor.) This is terrible!

SARAH: What was in it?

PAUL: Everything! Cash, traveller's cheques, my passport. (Kicks through the contents of his bag.) It's not here!

SARAH: (Searching beneath the cushions on the couch where they were both sitting.) It's not here either. Do you remember where you had it last?

PAUL: It must have been in that café in Chartres. I was so busy talking to you that I must have left it on the counter.

SARAH: (Smiling.) Now don't try to pin the blame on me.

PAUL: This is very serious!

SARAH: I am fully aware of that, Paul, but panicking won't help you. Let us try to be rational about this. Do you recall the name of the café where we met?

PAUL: No, I never even looked at it. Besides, how long do you think a wallet full of money and a passport would last in there?

SARAH: And you're absolutely sure you didn't have it out after that?

PAUL: Positive.

SARAH: Then perhaps you'd better call your embassy.

PAUL: It's late...

SARAH: I expect they have some branch to handle emergencies. Come, here's the phone.

PAUL: (Into the phone.) Hello? Oui, est-ce que je peux avoir le numéro de l'embassade du Canada, s'il vous plait... Merci. (Dials.) Hello? I'd like to report a stolen passport... Yes, alright... Hello?... Yes, I've lost my passport and I-... In Chartres... A café, I think... Of course I'm a Canadian citizen... Tomorrow morning? But I was planning on going to London tonight... Yes, I understand... A place to stay? Yes, I'll be fine... Tomorrow morning... Yes, Weaver, Paul Weaver... That's right... Thank you. (Hangs up.)

SARAH: So?

PAUL: Nothing can be done until tomorrow morning.

SARAH: Was Anita expecting you? You're welcome to call her from here.

PAUL: No, that's alright. I didn't say when I'd be back so a day or two won't matter.

SARAH: Where do you intend to spend the night?

PAUL: I have a friend in Aulnay-sous-Bois. I'm sure he won't mind a house guest for the evening.

SARAH: Aulnay-sous-Bois? But that's way out in the suburbs.

PAUL: I'll manage it.

SARAH: No, no, it's out of the question. You'll simply have to spend the night here with us.

PAUL: Us? You mean with you and your husband?

SARAH: Yes, of course.

PAUL: I don't think that would be a very good idea.

SARAH: Why not? I know my husband would be pleased to meet you. As a matter of fact, I'm sure the two of you would get along splendidly. He's a writer like yourself.

PAUL: That's very interesting, but I think--



SARAH: And besides that, there's another friend of ours coming for the evening, a painter named Céline Bernard. I'm sure you'd like her.

PAUL: Thanks, but I think it would prove to be an awkward situation.

SARAH: Whatever makes you say that?

PAUL: I just don't know that I'd be comfortable around your husband after what you and I... shared, or at least nearly shared, this evening.

SARAH: Oh don't dwell on that. It was but a short and magical moment far removed from reality. It's in the past now. In fact, the whole thing is beginning to feel far away, like a dream. And now that we're both wide awake again, I would very much like to get to know you.

PAUL: Maybe this dream, or whatever it was, is all in the past for you. It's still very real in my mind. As a matter of fact, I'm beginning to feel rather ashamed of myself.

SARAH: We have nothing to be embarrassed about, Paul.

PAUL: Then perhaps guilty is a better way of putting it.

SARAH: (Ironically.) Well, that's a high-minded and noble turn-about. I had no idea you were such a principled young man. (Seriously.) It would be pointless for us to feel guilt over something we haven't done, Paul.

PAUL: All the same, I think it would be best if I simply crashed in the suburbs tonight. As a matter of fact, I should give my friend a call to warn him that I'm on my way. (Standing.) Do you mind if I use your phone again?

SARAH: Paul, you are being unnecessarily prudish about this whole affair. It would be senseless for you to go all the way out to Aulnay-sous-Bois this evening when you are perfectly welcome to spend the night here.

PAUL: Would you mind if I used the phone?

SARAH: (Playfully.) Yes.

PAUL: Yes what?

SARAH: (Rises and stands in front of telephone.) Yes, I would mind very much if you used the phone again. I want you to stay.

PAUL: I'd like to, Sarah, but I just think--

SARAH: Would you please stop playing Saint Sebastian with me? What we shared back there was very sudden and concupiscent, I admit, but it is most definitely over now. There is absolutely no reason in the world why you can't tarry here a little longer and pass a pleasant evening with me and my husband. I feel partially responsible for you losing your wallet, and I would sincerely like to make up for it in some way, so sit down again and relax.

PAUL: (Reaching for the telephone.) I still think it would be best if I got on my way.

SARAH: (Playfully holding it out of his reach.) No, I shan't let you. I shall lock the door, tie you up, and keep you prisoner 'til morn'.

(Tension here. They are very close, and it appears for a moment as if they are about to kiss again. It should be obvious they'd like to.)

PAUL: (Quietly.) Please... the phone.

SARAH: (Significantly.) Spoil sport.

(Paul goes to phone, and Sarah exits into the kitchen. As he dials, Paul absently scans over the contents of the desk top. He listens to the phone for a moment and hangs up. The painting above the desk catches his eye, and he maneuvers the lamp so as to shine more light upon it. Sarah returns carrying two fresh glasses of wine.)

PAUL: He's not home. I got his answering service. He could be out of town for the weekend.

SARAH: Too bad. Fortunately for you my offer still stands. Is it settled then?

PAUL: I guess it is.

SARAH: Good... Do you like that painting?

PAUL: Yes, it's stunning.

SARAH: It was painted by my friend, Céline Bernard. She'll be coming by tonight, if you'd care to meet her.

PAUL: It's fascinating. What's it supposed to be?

SARAH: Actually, it represents one of my husband's moods.

PAUL: Looks like one zinger of a mood.

SARAH: Yes, it is a bit ferocious, isn't it.

PAUL: What kind of stuff does this husband of yours write?

SARAH: Drama mostly.

PAUL: Oh? (Skeptically.) Anything I might know?

SARAH: (Unconcerned, as she does something else, perhaps puts some music on the stereo.) Probably. Most people know of Damien Silk. I believe at least one of his plays is being performed in London right now.

PAUL: Damien Silk?!

SARAH: Then you know him?

PAUL: Of course I know him! Everybody knows him! Identical Nightmares is my favorite play! You're married to Damien Silk?! The Damien Silk?!

SARAH: That's right.

PAUL: But this is incredible! I just saw the film version of Criminal Visions a month ago. Why didn't you tell me you were married to Damien Silk!

SARAH: I had no idea you were such a fan of his.

PAUL: (Ecstatic.) Who isn't a fan of his? He's probably the most celebrated playwright of the decade.

SARAH: I'm glad you think so.

PAUL: But I didn't know he lived in Paris. I thought he lived in London.

SARAH: We have a number of homes.

PAUL: What brings him to Paris?

SARAH: Actually, it is my career that brings us here.

PAUL: Oh?

SARAH: Yes, I have a part in the French version of A Question of Identity.

PAUL: You didn't tell me you're an actress.

SARAH: There are many things I didn't tell you.

PAUL: I'm beginning to see that. Why didn't you tell me about your husband?

SARAH: It never came up.

PAUL: But it's--

SARAH: (Interrupting him.) Would it have made a difference? (Pause.) Yes, yes, I can see now that it would have made a difference. You wouldn't have been interested in me as an attractive older woman whom you happened to meet in a café in Chartres, but rather as Sarah Silk, the wife of your favorite playwright.

PAUL: (Embarrassed.) No, no, it wouldn't have been like that, or, at least I hope not... I'm sorry. I guess I got a little carried away there. It's just that I absolutely worship Damien Silk. I think I've seen almost every play he ever wrote.

SARAH: (With a touch of bitterness.) There are many that worship Damien Silk. Don't fret about it. I'm accustomed to reactions like yours by now. I merely have to breathe his name and everyone is in ecstasy. (Mimicking Paul's excitement.) "Damien Silk! Why Identical Nightmares is my favorite play! Oh, he's probably the most celebrated playwright of the decade!" I hear it all the time.

PAUL: I'm sorry.

SARAH: (More distant than before.) There is nothing to be sorry about.

PAUL: So what's it like to live with Damien Silk?

SARAH: (Sharply.) Let me just tell you, it may be entertaining to see Damien Silk's works performed on the stage; it is quite another thing entirely to be a character forever playing in one of them.

PAUL: What do you mean?

SARAH: Never mind.

PAUL: (Pause.) I can imagine that he might be a difficult man to live with.

SARAH: (Sourly.) You can imagine it, can you?

PAUL: Well, I mean that...

SARAH: Damien is a very challenging man, and I appreciate that. He's a man with great ideas who questions everything, and I need that. But sometimes... Oh, I don't know, sometimes it's bloody hard living with a genius... Sometimes it would be pleasant to lead a normal life.

PAUL: What's a normal life?

SARAH: (During the following speeches, her anger should build slowly, reaching a climax when she questions Paul.) I don't know, doing the things that normal, everyday people do: taking a drive in the country, a walk in the rain, maybe renting a cottage at the seaside. Normal things! Damien Silk doesn't enjoy doing anything common or ordinary.

PAUL: What does he enjoy?

SARAH: He writes his precious plays and thinks his precious thoughts and rarely does anything else.

PAUL: It's hard for me to think of him in a domestic environment.

SARAH: (Detached.) Then stick around and see your idol in a new light.

PAUL: What's he really like?

SARAH: What's he like? (Smiles to herself.) Let me tell you about your hero Damien Silk. (Pauses to reflect.) Did you know that when he wakes up in the morning, he has bad breath? It's true. His mouth is foul in the morning, wretched with the after-taste of the expensive wine he has to down each night before bed. Furthermore, he can never make love in the morning because he's so desperate to urinate. (Paul laughs nervously.) What else? Oh I know; I would love for you to observe how woefully he stands before the mirror regarding every new wrinkle. He is terrified of aging...

PAUL: Maybe you shouldn't be telling me this.

SARAH: Why ever not? (Sarcastically.) It's not a good thing to have illusions at your age, Paul. When the time comes, you have to

let your heros die... Now let me see, I imagine you're interested in the way he writes. That's what all you fans want to know: Where does he write? What does he wear? How does he sit? What is the magical food that generates such profound literature? Well, Damien Silk generally wears a ratty old bathrobe when he writes. And in the morning he eats brie cheese and white bread washed down with a little black coffee. Do you know where he writes? Over there at that computer terminal behind you. Imagine, if you can, the most celebrated playwright of the decade, as you call him, sitting in a thread-bear bathrobe, picking his nose, and grunting occasionally, while he burns out his eyes in front a computer terminal, and produces critically acclaimed drama. Can you envision that, Paul?

PAUL: (Quietly.) No...

SARAH: Horrible, isn't it?

PAUL: Well, I--

SARAH: Not exactly what you expected?

PAUL: Not exactly.

SARAH: It just goes to show, Paul: artists are rarely like the art they produce. But don't worry, Damien Silk is nothing like the portrait I just painted for you.

PAUL: What?

SARAH: I said he's nothing like the image I just created for you. He's one of the most image conscious men on the planet, and he wouldn't be caught dead in a ratty bathrobe.

PAUL: But they why--

SARAH: To see the look on your face and to get you back for blindly admiring him like everyone else does.

PAUL: Then you don't really have problems with him?

SARAH: No problems with him? Everybody has problems with him. Everybody has problems with everybody else for that matter, but the problems I have with Damien have nothing to do with the things I told you a moment ago.

PAUL: Does he not pay enough attention to you?

SARAH: It's nothing as ridiculously trite as that. Yes, he pays enough attention to me, and I would hardly complain to you if he didn't. No, it isn't that at all. The real problem is that every-

thing has to be a challenge with Damien, a new and exciting game in which the stakes are abnormally high. He is constantly testing people, daring them, pushing them to see how far they'll go. And lately he's become...

PAUL: What?

SARAH: Never mind. Suffice it to say that he can be difficult... and sometimes I get sick of it. (Pause.) You told me you know all of his plays. You know to what lengths his characters are willing to go. Well most of those characters were real at one time or another.

PAUL: What are you saying?

SARAH: I am saying that Damien Silk can be a difficult man to live with.

PAUL: I'm sorry.

SARAH: What are you sorry for? It's not your fault.

PAUL: I mean that I'm sorry for you.

SARAH: (Suddenly cold.) Don't ever feel sorry for me.

PAUL: Sorry.

SARAH: Sorry is a cheap word; overused and rarely understood. Stop apologizing to me. You can't imagine how weak it makes you appear.

PAUL: I'm-- (Catches himself.)

SARAH: There. You almost said it again.

PAUL: Look, I just want you to know, Sarah; I like you, and I don't care who your husband is. I feel compassion for you. Maybe we don't know each other very well, and maybe I've got a lot to learn, but all the same, I want you to know you've got a friend, okay?

SARAH: I appreciate that, Paul, but let me tell you a little story. Other than Damien Silk, there has been only one other man with whom I ever believed I was truly in love. He was my sculpting instructor, Francis, back when I was seventeen, and my parents still had high hopes of me becoming a great artist. With that left bank pose of his, Francis was a walking cliché. The long woollen scarves, the smelly Gitanes, and those interminable disheveled locks - Francis had it down to a science. I can especially recall him in his studio; we were often alone there. I remember that he always had Bach on the record player as we worked our fingers into the cool wet clay with the intense heat of the kiln burning nearby. I remember how I would

feel the most indescribable confusion at those times: an uncomfortable burning in the pit of my stomach, a strange desire to brush all that unkempt hair out of his lonely eyes. In my naive young mind I assumed that sensation was love. Poor Francis. He saw my confusion, and I believe it made him even more anxious than he usually was. He was such a nervous man. Eventually I began to intuitively sense that he was attracted to me. This of course only made matters worse, and it's a miracle that I managed to get any work done at all. We were always flustered, always dropping things and earnestly apologizing to one another. Nothing was working out. Then, as we were working together one quiet afternoon, I turned to reach for a tool and accidentally brushed against his arm with my breast. I can still recall that breath-taking pause as he turned crimson and babbled out his apologies as if it were his fault. Then, all of a sudden, he raised those miserably despondent eyes to me and said, "Sarah, circumstances dictate that I...that I..." He never did finish the sentence. He just grabbed me right here (She puts a hand to her own breast.) and began fumbling with the buttons on my blouse with his other hand... He finally managed to undo my shirt and open my bra. I was quite passive really. I simply stood there watching him as he goggled at my young breasts. He was kissing them and fondling them and making faint animal sounds, and all of a sudden it dawned on me that it wasn't love I felt for him; it was pity. I felt sorry for him.

PAUL: So what happened?

SARAH: When I didn't respond to his caresses he was ridiculously repentant. Oh, to see him standing there actually begging my forgiveness. He even got down on his knees to me. It was a pathetic performance and more than enough to disillusion anyone. More than anything else, he was afraid that I would tell my parents. I never did, of course. But I spent far less time in the studio. As a matter of fact, that's probably why I'm not a sculptor today. Since then I've never let myself confuse love with pity.

PAUL: Why are you telling me this?

SARAH: Paul, there are many things wrong with Damien Silk, but I know I will never have to feel sorry for him. I can accept very much from someone who will never let me feel sorry for him, very much indeed.

PAUL: That's understandable.

SARAH: When you find someone you know you will never have to pity, you have found someone to try and love. Otherwise love gets confused with all sorts of inferior emotions. Can you understand that?

PAUL: (Pensively.) Yes. Yes, I think I can.



SARAH: (Interrupting him and smiling.) That's what I like about you, Paul: your simplicity. It's what I liked about you from the start. "Mind if I share your table?" you asked me with your innocent smile. You didn't have a clue who I was, or to whom I was married. I saw instantly that you didn't know anything about me, and I knew then and there that I needed to talk to you. Does that make any sense?

PAUL: (Awkward.) Sure it does.

SARAH: (Smiling comfortably.) You are wonderfully uncomplicated. (She moves closer to him.) I could see that right away. That's why I offered to drive you to Paris. I wanted to be with someone who had no pretensions, someone with whom I could discuss the everyday joys of living without being so analytical about it all, someone who wouldn't find it necessary to push me to the brink for my own good... (Quietly.) Someone sane. Oh Paul, you were so frank, so ingenuous with your compliments, so accepting, so enviably innocent. We talked about the cathedral of Chartres, the weather, and then you promptly fell asleep.

PAUL: Sorry about that, I--

SARAH: Stop apologizing to me! You haven't appreciated what I said. You saved me, Paul. You're exactly what I needed. I was feeling so empty today, so discouraged with my life. I thought that driving down to Chartres for the day would do me good, but nothing changed. Then I met you, and before I knew it I had offered you a ride... (Sighs.) As I drove, I would glance over at you sleeping peacefully beside me, your knees curled up on the seat, and your hair mussed all over your forehead. (She is very close now, perhaps running her fingers through his hair as she speaks softly.) Oh, you were so beautiful: dreaming your simple little dreams and snoring ever so softly...

PAUL: Oh hell, I wasn't snoring was I?

SARAH: (Laughing.) I'm afraid you were, but not to worry. It didn't bother me in the least. In fact, I quite liked it. The rhythm kept me company.

PAUL: (Embarrassed and slightly awkward with her intimacy.) I'm still not sure that I understand all you've told me about your husband.

SARAH: Forget about my husband.

PAUL: But--

SARAH: And then we arrived in the garage, and I knew that I had to wake you up and that you would probably go your own way and never know who I was. And I just sat there gazing down upon you, when all of a sudden you opened your eyes, and I could see instantly that we were on the same plane, some secret wavelength that was distinctly our own.

PAUL: I noticed that too.

SARAH: Oh, Paul. (She leans over and kisses him. Paul responds hesitantly.)

(They begin to kiss in earnest now. Sarah pulls him down on top of her. There is the sound of someone fumbling with the front door. They immediately pull apart. Enter Damien. He is stylishly dressed and wearing dark glasses.)

SARAH: (Flustered.) Darling! You're early.

DAMIEN: Am I?

SARAH: I wasn't expecting you for at least another hour.

DAMIEN: Then I hope I haven't interrupted anything.

SARAH: (Still flustered.) Of course you didn't interrupt anything. I'm simply curious as to why you're here.

DAMIEN: I'm only dropping by to pick up a disk for someone. (Begins sifting through a box of computer disks.) So who's your chum?

SARAH: Oh, excuse me. Damien, this is Paul Weaver. I met him in Chartres. He's a great fan of yours.

DAMIEN: How do you do?

PAUL: I'm honored to meet you.

DAMIEN: You don't say.

SARAH: Paul's lost his passport, and so I offered to let him spend the evening here.

DAMIEN: Lost his passport?

SARAH: Yes, and I feel partly responsible.

DAMIEN: How's that?

SARAH: Just that he was with me when he lost it in Chartres.

DAMIEN: I see. Make yourself at home then.

PAUL: Thank you. You're sure it's no problem?

DAMIEN: No problem at all. (To Sarah.) You'll make sure the guest bed is in order?

SARAH: I thought he'd sleep here on the sofa.

DAMIEN: Whatever for? We have a perfectly good bed upstairs.

SARAH: But darling, Céline is coming up from Nice this evening, or had you already forgotten?

DAMIEN: I forgot nothing of the sort. I simply thought there would be no problem with them sharing a bed, seeing as how this old couch is so worn out.

SARAH: (Smiling.) That's a thought.

DAMIEN: And an excellent one at that. Exactly what Céline needs. (Paul laughs nervously.) I expect that's why you brought him here in the first place, isn't it darling. You're playing dangerous games, darling. (Laughs to himself.) But I think it's a splendid idea, simply splendid..

SARAH: But maybe Paul...

DAMIEN: What do you say, Paul? Does the idea of sharing a bed with our friend Céline appeal to you?

PAUL: I-I'm sorry, but I'm engaged to someone.

DAMIEN: Ah, I see. Already spoken for, are you?

PAUL: Well, yes.

DAMIEN: And there's nothing we can do about that, I suppose.

PAUL: Well, no I--

DAMIEN: No matter. We'll figure something out. I shall be right down.

(Exits upstairs.)

PAUL: (Whispering.) What the hell was that all about?

SARAH: Just play along. He's only pulling your leg.

PAUL: What do you mean, "Just play along." I don't even know this Céline person.

SARAH: Ssh! Lower your voice. Go along with what he says, Paul. I think he suspects something.

PAUL: Forget it. From here on in, I'm a practicing celibate.

SARAH: Ssh! You don't know what you're saying. I don't want him to know about us.

PAUL: I'm not about to tell him.

SARAH: He'll guess.

PAUL: I've told him I'm engaged. That ought to dull his suspicions.

SARAH: He has an enormous imagination.

PAUL: But Sarah, I don't want to sleep with this Céline, or whatever her name is.

SARAH: No one's asking you to commit yourself to anything. Besides, how do you know you won't like her?

PAUL: That has nothing to do with it.

SARAH: Oh, how boring you are. (Kisses him.)

PAUL: (Nervously.) For Christ's sake, Sarah. You're husband's upstairs.

SARAH: I'm aware of that, Paul. (Kisses him again.)

PAUL: (Rises and moves across the room.) What's the matter with you?! Stop this!

SARAH: Ssh!

(Enter Damien.)

DAMIEN: Looks like I've just got time for a quick drink before I get back. Anyone care to join me?

SARAH: We've been drinking all afternoon.

DAMIEN: What else is new? Some wine, Paul?

PAUL: No thanks.

DAMIEN: Come now, come now. You make me feel as though I've interrupted something. Have a drink.

(Paul glances nervously at Sarah.)

PAUL: If you insist.

DAMIEN: I do insist. How about you, my dear and devoted wife?

SARAH: No, I have to arrange a few things. I'll leave you two to get acquainted.

DAMIEN: Suit yourself. (Exit Sarah to kitchen area.) Here you are, Paul. (Raising his own glass in a toast.) To an entertaining evening.

PAUL: Cheers.

DAMIEN: Cheers. So are you really a fan of mine, or is my wife merely grooming my ego?

PAUL: Oh, I'm a great fan of yours.

DAMIEN: Many people find my work offensive, you know.

PAUL: Well I don't find your work offensive. I think its--

DAMIEN: No? It's often meant to offend.

PAUL: Well I think your work is brilliant. I must have seen everything you've written.

DAMIEN: How can you have seen everything I've written? Most of it isn't even published.

PAUL: (Laughing lightly.) I meant that--

DAMIEN: I know what you meant.

PAUL: (After a pause.) Well I think your plays are... are... (Struggling to find the right word.)

DAMIEN: Entertaining?

PAUL: Of course, but there's more to them than that. Your plays have a--

DAMIEN: My plays, my plays. I detest talking about my plays.

PAUL: Oh.

DAMIEN: (Musing to himself.) Do you know that when I see one of my own works performed on the stage, I can never make any sense of it? It doesn't matter which one. They're all the same to me.

PAUL: Really?

DAMIEN: Really. I can never make a connection between those silly actors bouncing about on the stage and myself... Strange, isn't it?

PAUL: Well, yes. I would have thought that--

DAMIEN: You would have thought what? That each play comes from my heart? My soul? From life?

PAUL: Well, yes, I suppose.

DAMIEN: Ha!... How old are you?

PAUL: Twenty-five.

DAMIEN: That's young... Do you know how old I am?

PAUL: Fortyish?

DAMIEN: That's right; fortyish.

PAUL: (Politely.) It doesn't show.

DAMIEN: Doesn't show? (Laughs.) Of course it shows. See this? It's called grey hair. And these? They're called wrinkles, also known affectionately as laugh lines, or crow's feet. If it doesn't show, how did you manage to guess my age?

PAUL: I-I've read about you.

DAMIEN: Clearly you trust words absolutely. Trust of any sort is bad enough, but trusting a collection of silly symbols is simply inexcusable. Words are unreliable and evasive. Ask the critics; they're in the process of kicking language altogether. "Too ambiguous," they snort disdainfully. Personally I find that after awhile of watching words waver on the screen, or the page, or wherever, they begin to nauseate me.

PAUL: Really?

DAMIEN: Really. Take it from a writer: Don't believe everything you read.

PAUL: I don't by any means. I'm just--

DAMIEN: Let's change the subject. (Pause.) Do you like Paris?

PAUL: Very much.

DAMIEN: Why?

PAUL: It's a beautiful city, an inspiration. I love the museums, the galleries, the cafés--

DAMIEN: Skip it.

PAUL: I...sorry.

DAMIEN: What are you sorry for?

PAUL: Well, for offending you, I guess.

DAMIEN: I'm not offended.

PAUL: Good.

DAMIEN: So there's no need to apologize for anything... (Looking Paul in the eye.) Or is there?

PAUL: Look, this is very confusing--

DAMIEN: What is?

PAUL: Your manner of conducting a conversation.

DAMIEN: How's that?

PAUL: You keep leading me in circles and cutting me off.

DAMIEN: I get that way sometimes. Don't take it personally.

PAUL: (After a pause.) Are you working on a new play these days?

DAMIEN: Why?

PAUL: Just curious.

DAMIEN: Yes, I'm working on a play. I'm a playwright. That's what I do.

PAUL: What's it about, if you don't mind my asking.

DAMIEN: I do mind you asking, but I'll tell you anyway. It's about a young man who meets a young woman and the two of them fall in love and decide to marry against their parents' will. Eventually they all talk it out though and everyone lives happily ever after. It's crammed to the brim with clichés and cheap one-liners, and I expect to make quite a lot of money on it.

PAUL: (Laughing.) I'm sure your synopsis doesn't do the real thing justification. I'll have to wait for the stage production to find all the hidden meanings.

DAMIEN: Hidden meanings?

PAUL: Well, the importance of it. The theme, if you know what I mean.

DAMIEN: No I don't know. Please go on.

PAUL: The message, I guess.

DAMIEN: The message. I like that: the message. (Pause.) What are you trying to do? Make sense of it all? Instill a little order around here?

PAUL: Well, no. I--

DAMIEN: How dare you claim that my art says something, that it communicates some more or less humanely important matter. My art is not accountable to anyone. And there are especially none of the liberal humanitarian values that you and your type want to find there.

PAUL: But--

DAMIEN: Do you think I want that kind of responsibility?

PAUL: (Bewildered.) We don't seem to be communicating.

DAMIEN: No? What would you call it?

PAUL: I get the feeling you're, well, making fun of me.

DAMIEN: Why should I want to do that?

PAUL: I wouldn't know.



DAMIEN: How did we start this conversation anyway?

PAUL: I was telling you what a fan of yours I am.

DAMIEN: Ah, maybe that's it then. You see, you're no fan of mine; you're a fan of that other man.

PAUL: What do you mean?

DAMIEN: It's that other man, "the celebrated Damien Silk," that people love.

PAUL: But--

DAMIEN: I hear about that other fellow all the time: complimentary reviews, vicious society gossip, and blatant advertisements for his plays. I understand that he's quite a dashing fellow, someone with style and a flare for what's current and popular. We enjoy the same things, he and I, but he seems to enjoy them with more savoir faire. In fact I am frequently worried that he's really nothing but a conceited show-off. I freely admit that he writes well, that he's quite good at stringing words together, but in the end, I have to ask myself what that has to do with me. I recognize myself less in his plays than in the work of others, and I never read anything of his that I would say is truly great... And yet, despite all my efforts, I can never get away from him... (Sincerely.) Christ, I don't even know which one of us is speaking right now. (Pause.) So you enjoy the plays of Damien Silk, do you?

PAUL: Yes.

DAMIEN: Which one is your favorite?

PAUL: I'd say The Elements of Ecstasy.

DAMIEN: Ecstasy? Why?

PAUL: It's hard to say, really. I didn't like it at first, but when I sat down and thought about it for awhile I understood it.

DAMIEN: Hmm. Oscar Wilde once wrote that there are two ways of disliking art: one way is to dislike it and the other is to like it rationally.

PAUL: Well, I don't know about Oscar Wilde. I just felt that The Elements of Ecstasy was your deepest play, the one with the most meaning to me.

DAMIEN: There you go with "meaning" again. I hope you don't look for meaning in all of my plays. I'm a stylist, not a prophet.

PAUL: Well then let's just say that I found it the most entertaining. It was a great inspiration to me.

DAMIEN: An inspiration? You don't say. What precisely did it inspire you to do?

PAUL: To tell the truth, it inspired me to write a poem.

DAMIEN: Well, well. An aspiring poet.

PAUL: Sort of. I mean, no, not really.

DAMIEN: Sort of? No, not really? Come now, Paul. Either you are or you aren't? There's no middle ground. Which is it?

PAUL: Please, you're embarrassing me. I don't write poetry anymore.

DAMIEN: None at all?

PAUL: None to speak of.

DAMIEN: Pity. Ever published?

PAUL: Just a couple of poems in the London Writer's Forum. It's a small press. No one's heard of it.

DAMIEN: I certainly haven't. So all this poetry's in the past, is it?

PAUL: That's right. Now all I write are travel articles.

DAMIEN: I have always wondered who wrote all those insignificant travel articles... Now I know. (Sarah enters and catches the tail end of the last conversation.) Ah, Sarah. Would you like a glass of wine?

SARAH: Why not?

DAMIEN: I can think of a dozen reasons why not, but we won't dwell on those. (Pours the wine.)

SARAH: Paul's thinking of settling down in London.

DAMIEN: Settling down?

SARAH: Yes, he's going to get married and "settle down." He was just telling me his plans when you arrived.

PAUL: (Embarrassed.) Sarah...

DAMIEN: How dreadful.

PAUL: Your wife is simplifying the situation.

DAMIEN: That's funny, she's best known for complicating other people's situations. So what's the matter, life in the literary fast lane no longer appeals to you?

PAUL: (Politely.) I would hardly say I was living in the literary fast lane. Not all of us can be world-renowned playwrights, you know.

DAMIEN: True, true. But then again, not all of us can be dishwashers or street sweepers or crossing guards. I know I couldn't.

PAUL: I'm not exactly seeking employment as a dishwasher.

DAMIEN: Too bad. We could have used one tonight... So you're looking to move up in the world, are you?

PAUL: You might put it that way.

DAMIEN: And this moving up entails matrimony?

PAUL: Well, no. I think it's more that matrimony entails moving up.

DAMIEN: Ah, yes. Family to support and all that. Time to be responsible. (Mock emphasis on responsible.)

PAUL: (Laughing lightly, but uncomfortable.) That's one way of looking at it.

DAMIEN: Is this girl well off?

PAUL: (Attempting to be cheerful.) I don't think that's--

DAMIEN: Oh, come on.

PAUL: No, not particularly. (With a hint of pride.) She comes from a wealthy family, but she's left all that behind.

DAMIEN: Pity. So how do you propose to support her, financially I mean?

PAUL: I'll be starting next week as a proofreader for United Publications.

DAMIEN: United Publications? Never heard of them.

PAUL: They publish, er, text books and things, mostly university stuff.

DAMIEN: (Mock serious.) That ought to do wonders for your artistic aspirations.

PAUL: I already told you, I've never counted on my artistic aspirations... I'm a little more realistic.

DAMIEN: Ah, more realistic... Well I am glad to hear that you have reality neatly defined.

PAUL: (Annoyed.) Don't make fun of me. It's much more complicated than that.

DAMIEN: Come, come. All artists have their own personal crises, their own devastating periods of insecurity; it doesn't mean you have to restructure your entire life.

PAUL: (Defensively.) I've given this a lot of thought.

DAMIEN: Have you?

PAUL: Yes, of course I have.

DAMIEN: Glad to hear it.

PAUL: Good.

DAMIEN: And where did all these thoughts lead you?

PAUL: (Trying to joke off the conversation.) Look, my good man--

DAMIEN: Don't "my good man" me. You'll soon find that I am not a good man at all.

PAUL: I was just trying to--

DAMIEN: I know what you were trying to do. You were trying to avoid my question.

PAUL: Maybe I was! I don't see that you have any right to ask these questions.

DAMIEN: I'm only curious as to why you're so defensive.

SARAH: (Gently.) Don't push him, darling.

PAUL: I'm not being defensive.

DAMIEN: You're being extremely defensive.

PAUL: Maybe that's because I feel attacked.

DAMIEN: I don't think that my questions have been unreasonable. After all, only minutes ago you were asking me about my plays. Now I'm asking you about your poetry. Am I public property just because I'm famous?

PAUL: It's the way in which you're questioning me! (Pause.) Look, I've already told you; I'm getting married. There will soon be two of us in the picture and that has to be taken into account. Writing poetry takes up a lot of time and doesn't exactly bring in a lot of money. I can't very well risk being perpetually broke if I have a family to support.

DAMIEN: (Casually.) Sounds like a sell-out to me.

SARAH: (Smiling.) Damien, don't push it.

PAUL: Marriage with Anita is not a sell-out, it's a compromise! I'll still be able to write poetry, in fact she encourages that in me. I-I just won't be giving it the time that I did before.

DAMIEN: (Skeptically.) Of course.

PAUL: You don't believe me, do you?

DAMIEN: No.

PAUL: (Calmer.) What right do you have to tell me I'm selling-out? This hasn't been an easy decision. I went through a rough time awhile ago, and I've had to ask a lot of questions.

DAMIEN: What sort of rough time?

PAUL: Personal things.

DAMIEN: Such as?

PAUL: I simply don't think that it's any of your business! (Pause.) Do you understand? (Damien nods. A pause, and then Paul continues with a sigh.) Well, about a year ago nothing seemed to be working out for me. When I met Anita I was going through a bout of severe depression.

DAMIEN: (Mockingly.) Severe depression? That is rough stuff. But is not suffering a trait of the artist?

PAUL: Maybe I just don't feel like suffering.

DAMIEN: Ah, that's the difference. Truly great artists have no choice. They cannot simply decide one day that they will stop suffering; they suffer because they are here, in this world.

PAUL: Perhaps, but...

DAMIEN: But you would rather avoid that unbearable anguish and hide yourself behind what sounds to me like a typical middle-class affiliation disguised as a compromise.

PAUL: Unbearable anguish? You're blowing this all out of proportion!

DAMIEN: You're the one that mentioned clinical depression.

PAUL: I said severe depression, and I never claimed to be a great artist.

DAMIEN: Granted.

PAUL: Then stop exaggerating my situation.

DAMIEN: I'm not exaggerating your situation; I'm simply voicing my disapproval of it.

PAUL: How can you disapprove? It doesn't appear as though marriage has done your work any harm.

DAMIEN: There's a lot about my marriage that you don't know.

PAUL: And there's a lot about my life that you don't know. I appreciate your advice, but you can't just sit there and tell me how I should run my life without knowing who I am.

DAMIEN: I think I have a pretty good idea of who you are.

PAUL: How?

DAMIEN: Call it an educated guess.

SARAH: (Smirking.) Damien, stop this.

PAUL: You haven't even read my poetry! For all you know, I'm probably doing the literary world a favor by "selling out."

DAMIEN: No one can know that, Paul, and I'm afraid that someday you'll regret your decision.

PAUL: Do you honestly think I haven't considered that?! Do you think I don't question the life I'm making for myself: Anita, the job, and yes, my poetry? I do question it, and for your information, sometimes I get very scared. It's easy for you with your hit plays and your classy Parisienne apartment to tell me that I should go on living like a bum. Sure, pat yourself on the back and go to bed believing that you did your good deed for the day. The truth is, you know nothing about it.

DAMIEN: Good point, and I apologize for being so typically bourgeois. I have a bad habit of stepping in when I see that someone is making a bad decision.

PAUL: Stop presuming to know what's best for me! You don't know all the facts. It's not an objective situation.

DAMIEN: Oh no?

PAUL: No! There are many personal factors involved.

DAMIEN: Such as?

PAUL: (Angrily.) I'd rather not discuss them.

DAMIEN: (After a pause.) I'd like to know about this Anita. Would you mind if we talked about her?

PAUL: (Obviously minding.) Well...

SARAH: Don't Damien.

DAMIEN: Tell me about her. What's she like?

PAUL: Anita? (Tense.) She's an... admirable woman.

DAMIEN: Do go on.

PAUL: Well, she's warm, attractive, and supportive. She's a fine person, and I have a lot of respect for her. If I had to sum her up in a word, I'd say she was... .

DAMIEN: Flawless?

PAUL: (Noncommittally.) Well, few people are flawless.

DAMIEN: True, very true. But you obviously admire her very much.

PAUL: (Carefully.) She's quite a woman.

DAMIEN: Do you love her?

PAUL: Of course I do!

DAMIEN: And that's the only reason you're marrying her?

PAUL: I don't think that's--

DAMIEN: It's a simple question. No need to get upset about it.

PAUL: (Uncomfortable.) I love Anita very much. (Hesitating.) I wouldn't have married her otherwise... She has much to offer...

DAMIEN: And that is the only reason you're marrying her of course...

PAUL: Look, there are many factors involved in every marriage.

DAMIEN: Of course. (A pause. Paul sips his drink nervously while Damien reflects.) Sounds to me like you've knocked her up.

PAUL: What?!

DAMIEN: It sounds to me as though she's pregnant.

PAUL: For Christ's sake! You are taking this too--

DAMIEN: I thought so.

PAUL: I didn't say yes!

DAMIEN: You implied it.

PAUL: Alright, alright! Yes!! Anita is pregnant and I am responsible! Satisfied?

DAMIEN: The question would appear to be are you satisfied?

PAUL: (Quietly.) I'm learning to live with the idea.

DAMIEN: Commendable of you.

PAUL: (Sourly.) Thanks.

(A pause.)

DAMIEN: Well, that was enlightening.

SARAH: That was completely uncalled for, Damien. (Sincerely.) I'm sorry, Paul. That wasn't fair of him.



PAUL: (Quietly.) Can we just forget it?

DAMIEN: Splendid idea. Well. I've got everything I need. I suppose I shall see you later.

SARAH: Goodbye, darling.

PAUL: (Stiffly.) Goodbye.

DAMIEN: Ta. (Exits main door.)

(An awkward moment as the two find themselves alone again.)

SARAH: I am sorry about that. He can be... pushy, I know.

PAUL: Now you know, alright.

SARAH: Cheer up, Paul. It can't be as bad as all that.

PAUL: Can we change the subject?

SARAH: Alright.

(Pause.)

PAUL: Do you think he suspected anything?

SARAH: Suspected anything?

PAUL: Between us.

SARAH: It's more than likely.

PAUL: He seemed suspicious.

SARAH: He probably was. It's unfortunate, especially since I haven't done anything of which he should be jealous... yet.

PAUL: Not done anything?! You tried to ravish me while he was upstairs!

SARAH: Now don't get ruffled; it was all in fun.

PAUL: Is that your idea of fun? Making a fool of me?

SARAH: (Playfully.) I wasn't making a fool of you. He was the one doing that. I was trying to molest you. They're two different things entirely.

PAUL: Call it whatever you like. I no longer want any part of it.

SARAH: Now, now. There's no reason to sulk.

PAUL: I'm not sulking!

SARAH: No? Then what's the matter? Do I no longer appeal to you? (Paul doesn't respond.) Funny, not too long ago you were only too eager to take me to bed, even when you knew I was married. What's happened? Is my age getting to you at last?

PAUL: You know that's not it.

SARAH: Then what? Why am I so suddenly off bounds?

PAUL: I simply don't want us to do anything that we could very well regret later. You're married and I'm engaged.

SARAH: How high and noble of you.

PAUL: I'll take that as a compliment.

SARAH: Paul, this is becoming rather tedious. Are you being honest about this sudden change of heart? Is fidelity truly that attractive to you?

PAUL: It is.

SARAH: And you're not in the least bit tempted by my actions?

PAUL: I'm tempted, but...

SARAH: London is a long way away. (Lying across his lap.) Come, Paul, take advantage of me; I'm yours.

PAUL: Sarah, no.

SARAH: (Whispering.) Yes, Paul. Yes.

PAUL: Sarah, I can't I-- (Stands up suddenly.)

SARAH: (Concerned.) Darling, I didn't mean to upset you. Are you alright?

PAUL: Yes, yes... (sitting down again.) Please, I'm sorry...

SARAH: (Holding a finger to his lips.) Uh uh, no apologies. It sounds as though Damien really did rub you the wrong way. He tends to do that to people. I should have realized you were in no condition to... fool around after your little confession back there--

PAUL: Let's just change the subject.

SARAH: No, let's not change the subject. That's far too easy. I want you to tell me all about it, darling.

PAUL: I-I'd rather not. It wouldn't be right.

SARAH: Never mind about what's right and what isn't right. Just trust me... Is this girlfriend of yours really pregnant?

PAUL: (Quietly.) Yes.

SARAH: And you wouldn't have married her if she wasn't?

PAUL: I don't know. I really don't want to talk about it.

SARAH: Yes you do, Paul. I can tell.

PAUL: I... I don't know.

SARAH: It's all far away across the channel, Paul. You're in Paris now and absolutely no one in the world other than me and my husband knows that you are here. Unburden yourself.

PAUL: There's not much to tell really. When I met Anita I was going through a bad spell. I was lost, floating in space. Anita took me into her arms and breathed gravity into me. She helped me. She was always there...

SARAH: What's she like?

PAUL: I don't know what to tell you.

SARAH: You're a poet; tell me about her eyes.

PAUL: Her eyes? Her eyes are close together and, though she laughs easily, her eyes are sad, always sad...

SARAH: Tell me about it, darling.

PAUL: It was okay in the beginning. We'd share a laugh and an evening. We laughed a lot back then. Things were never serious. Each of us needed something and we molded each other to fit that need; it was convenient. I had a decent job, and we shared a little flat up in Finsbury Park. It was a quiet street lined with pleasant little trees and quaint flats like our own. I used to look up at all those flats and imagine that each one had a little kitchen, a little sitting room, and a little bedroom, just like ours.

SARAH: Were you writing your poetry then?

PAUL: Sometimes, but not much. I couldn't seem to translate the feelings I was having then into words. I was supposed to be working though. I was supposed to be working on one poem, my big poem. Anita was very proud of that. She would pour the tea when I got home--

SARAH: Pour the tea?

PAUL: Yes, she'd pour the tea, and I'd sit at my desk, stare out the window, and wonder why I couldn't seem to write anything down...

SARAH: It sounds nauseatingly domestic, Paul.

PAUL: It was. I came to dread coming home to sit at that desk. Sometimes when I walked home alone, I'd keep on walking right past our flat. I'd walk straight past it and go to the park or the pub, and I'd sit there on a bench, feeling like the unhappiest man alive... The worst of it was that I could never understand why. I should have tried to talk to her about it, but somehow I knew she was afraid of those feelings in me. So I didn't talk to anybody.

SARAH: You didn't have any friends you talk to?

PAUL: No, we were pretty secluded really. Funny, but we just never seemed to meet anybody.

SARAH: What about family?

PAUL: Anita's father is a bigwig in business, or something. I never met him. It sounds to me as though he disowned her, but she never liked to talk about that.

SARAH: What did you talk about?

PAUL: We found plenty to talk about, don't get me wrong. I mean, things aren't bad between us; they're just so damned ordinary... I didn't mean that the way it sounded.

SARAH: I suspect you meant it exactly the way it sounded. This Anita doesn't sound like a very exciting person.

PAUL: (Pause.) To tell the truth, she isn't.

SARAH: Maybe you haven't been looking in the right places. Maybe she has an entire wine cellar of secrets you never dreamed of.

PAUL: It could be so, but she's always been very honest with me, and I'm afraid excitement simply isn't one of her strong points.

SARAH: How do you feel about fathering her child?

PAUL: That's a tough one. To be honest, I wasn't exactly thrilled at first.

SARAH: Why?

PAUL: I guess it just seemed to clarify a few things.

SARAH: Such as?

PAUL: Well, the night she told me I lay on the bed and she gave me a massage, murmuring all the while how everything was going to be all right. I lay there and listened to her, but I was experiencing something else altogether. It was as if I was an outsider looking down on the two of us, and suddenly it was very clear that there was a very concrete reason why the two of us shouldn't be together. I didn't say anything to her, but I lay there in the dark and whispered it to her in my mind.

SARAH: What did you whisper?

PAUL: (Pause.) I whispered, "I don't love you!" And at the time I wanted to scream it. I never had the courage to say it out loud, and she never asked me, but she could see it in my eyes... and she knew.

SARAH: (After a pause.) How do you feel now?

PAUL: At the time I felt awful. But I've come to terms with it. Maybe it's a foolish thing to go about chasing after love. Maybe we never do find that projection we selfishly spend our lives in search of. What really happens is that two people meet each other and find that after spending years together there's no way for them to split apart without a lot of bad feelings. So they hang on to it out of fear of the unknown and learn to love, or at least tolerate, one another. Hell, I guess I've always known it... but, somehow... somehow, I always thought it would be different for me.

SARAH: (Sarcastically.) I think it's that youthful optimism of yours that I find so irresistible. So what are you going to do now?

PAUL: I'm going to marry her and make the best of our situation. I can get used to walking by those identical flats everyday. I'll even learn to appreciate it if I have to.

SARAH: You don't sound convinced.

PAUL: I am though. I'm convinced that we'll do very well together. And if not, divorce is legal. Hell, I'm even going to meet her father at long last. That's in the cards for next week, and as you can imagine, it's not exactly something I'm looking forward to.

SARAH: Whew! You have got problems. I'm going to have to help you to forget all of that for tonight. (She leans toward him expectantly.)

PAUL: No. I don't think that's a good idea.

SARAH: Of course it is. Kiss me. It will do you good.

PAUL: No. Earlier on when we kissed it felt wonderful. It's been ages since my lips have been caressed by another's. I'd forgotten how different it can feel. But it can't work any longer. It wouldn't be spontaneous now. It would only be an escape.

SARAH: Then let's escape together.

PAUL: No, I've got to start facing up to things the way they are.

SARAH: (Touching him.) Paul...

PAUL: Maybe it would be best for me to leave.

SARAH: And go where? Your friend isn't home, and you haven't the money for a hotel. Besides, if you left now, Damien would know that something had happened between us. I don't want him to suspect anything.

PAUL: What would he have done if he'd caught us?

SARAH: Who knows? He's completely unpredictable.

PAUL: Would he have hurt you?

SARAH: No, no, of course not. He's not a monster. That isn't the problem. I simply don't want him to know, not now.

PAUL: What's so special about now?

SARAH: (Avoiding the subject.) He's not quite himself these days. He's working on a new play and that always takes a lot out of him. You don't know how he can be.

PAUL: Then tell me.

SARAH: (Uncomfortably.) Let's talk of something else.

PAUL: Why don't you unburden yourself?

SARAH: (Too firmly.) No, Paul. I'd rather not.

(An uncomfortable pause. The characters sip their drinks in mutual embarrassment.)

SARAH: Terrible about your wallet.

PAUL: Yes.

SARAH: You know it's never a good idea to keep all your valuables in one place. It's always best to keep your passport in one pocket and your money in another.

PAUL: Yes, very stupid of me.

(Pause.)

SARAH: You don't suppose your wallet could be in the car, do you?

PAUL: I don't think so.

SARAH: Maybe it fell out while you were asleep. Why don't we go down and take a look, just to be sure.

PAUL: All right; you never know.

SARAH: Wait, I've just remembered that Céline is supposed to call. Someone should be here to answer the phone, just in case.

PAUL: I can go down and check the car.

SARAH: No, it has a rather complicated alarm system. I'll run down myself. If Céline rings, tell her that I'm here and that I'll gladly come and pick her up at the station.

PAUL: Sure thing.

(Exit Sarah. Paul takes the opportunity to look around the apartment. He pours himself another drink and then regards the large central painting. He moves to the computer terminal, skims over some of the loose papers, and then quietly opens one of the drawers. At that moment the main door opens. Enter Céline. Paul loudly slams the drawer shut and looks up at her guiltily. A pause of four beats while they take

each other in. She is wearing fashionable clothes and speaks with a heavy French accent. In one hand she holds the keys to the apartment. At her feet are a couple of grocery bags and a small suitcase.)

CELINE: (Fiercely.) Qui est toi!

PAUL: (Awkwardly.) Hello, my name's, Paul. Uh, you must be Céline. Parlez-vous anglais?

CELINE: What are you doing here?

PAUL: I'm a friend of Sarah's. She's just gone down to the garage to get something. You must have just missed each other.

(Céline doesn't answer and proceeds to angrily pick up her bags.)

PAUL: May I help you with those?

CELINE: (Firmly.) I can manage them myself.

PAUL: (After a pause.) Sarah spoke very highly of you and your work.

CELINE: Yes, I am sure she did. (Looking at Paul intensely as she passes him on the way to the kitchen.) How well do you know Damien and Sarah?

PAUL: (Uncomfortably.) Actually, I only met Sarah today in Chartres.

CELINE: I see. (Accusingly.) I suppose you will be staying here tonight?

PAUL: Well, uh, as a matter of fact, yes.

CELINE: That is what I thought. (Storms out into kitchen area.)

(Paul stands uneasily in the center of the room. Enter Sarah.)

SARAH: (To Paul.) No luck, I'm afraid. (Notices Céline who is leaning against the door to the kitchen regarding Sarah with an elusive expression.) Céline. (Warmly, mysteriously.) My precious darling... (The two approach each other and kiss lightly.) Oh, my little dove. I thought you'd call first.



CELINE: (Not smiling, but caressing Sarah, not taking her eyes off her for a moment.) I took a taxi from the station.

SARAH: You didn't have to do--

CELINE: I wanted to. I wanted to arrive as quickly as possible.

SARAH: Oh, my dove. (They stare at each other in silence. Paul coughs to get their attention.) Céline, this is, Paul. Paul this is my dear, dear friend, Céline.

PAUL: (Politely.) I'm pleased to meet you.

CELINE: (Dead serious.) Why?

PAUL: (Confused, but treating it as a joke.) Heh, heh...

CELINE: (To Sarah.) We have already met.

SARAH: (Taking no notice of Céline's mood.) Paul and I have been having the most wonderful evening together...

CELINE: (Disinterested.) I can imagine.

PAUL: (Trying to play Céline's game.) Can you?

CELINE: (Contemptuously, after a short pause in which she appears to deeply consider the question.) Yes, I think I can.

SARAH: Paul's been having a difficult time coping with his life lately, and I thought that a calm evening in Paris would do him good.

CELINE: Calm?

SARAH: (With a smile.) Maybe not completely calm.

CELINE: (Seriously.) I just hope you know what you are doing, Sarah.

SARAH: Now you know me better than that, darling. Why don't we all sit down and have a good drink? Wine anyone?

PAUL: Might as well.

SARAH: Céline?

CELINE: Non.

SARAH: At least sit down and join us.

CELINE: I want to arrange my things. (Exits angrily into kitchen.)

PAUL: Maybe I shouldn't stay, Sarah.

SARAH: (Absently, as she watches Céline through the kitchen door.)  
No, no, don't be silly. Don't mind Céline; she's always like that.

(The sound of cupboard doors being slammed  
in the kitchen.)

PAUL: But I think--

SARAH: Shh. Not another word. It's merely her way. Excuse me for  
a moment. (Exits to kitchen.)

(Paul sits uncomfortably in the living room  
listening to the faint sounds of the women  
arguing in French. Enter Céline and Sarah  
after ten seconds. Céline seems grudgingly  
compliant, but still inexplicably angry at  
Paul.)

SARAH: Now we're all together. That's better. (To Céline.) Paul  
was admiring your work earlier. (Points to central painting.)

CELINE: Oh?

PAUL: Yes, I find that it has... (Pensively.)

CELINE: A certain ferocious composure?

PAUL: No, not exactly, more...

CELINE: (Sarcastically.) Perhaps it is the hint of molestation that  
you find attractive?

PAUL: No, it's more... more... the movement I guess. The color  
contrast.

CELINE: It was Damien who inspired it.

PAUL: Yes, Sarah told me.

CELINE: I wanted to capture his... violence.

PAUL: His violence?

CELINE: You do not know him very well, do you?

PAUL: Well, no.

SARAH: (Quietly to Céline.) He hasn't met that side of him yet, darling.

CELINE: I see.

PAUL: (After a slight pause.) Did I miss something?

SARAH: No. (Glancing at her watch.) Good Heavens! Look at the time. I've got to set up your room.

CELINE: Do not bother with that, Sarah. I know where everything is.

SARAH: I just want to arrange a couple of things. This won't take me a second.

CELINE: (Gestures at Paul.) Where will he be sleeping?

SARAH: (Laughs.) Damien suggested that he sleep with you.

CELINE: That sounds like Damien.

SARAH: Doesn't it though? Why don't the two of you make yourselves at home. (Exits upstairs, leaving the other two alone.)

PAUL: (Awkward, but trying to be polite.) Have you known Sarah for long?

CELINE: (Coldly.) Long enough to understand the kind of woman she is.

PAUL: You seem very close.

CELINE: Then you are quite the detective. It would appear that you too are quite close to Sarah; you have lipstick on your cheek.

PAUL: (In horror.) My God, you aren't serious. (Frantically wiping at his cheek.)

CELINE: No, I am not.

(Céline glances upstairs to make sure that Sarah has left, then stands and moves to the computer terminal. She quickly sorts through the box containing the disks, obviously looking for one in particular.)

PAUL: What are you doing?

CELINE: Nothing for you to worry about.

PAUL: (Uneasily.) Do you, uh, have permission to go through their things? (Celine doesn't respond.) What are you looking for?

CELINE: (Unable to find whatever it is.) Did Damien come by earlier to pick up a computer disk?

PAUL: Why?

CELINE: I want to know.

PAUL: Well, yes he did. (Celine nods knowingly.) Why?

CELINE: I would prefer if you asked me no more questions.

PAUL: (Short pause.) How do I know you aren't trying to steal something? (Celine doesn't answer.) I said, how do I know you're not--

CELINE: I heard you the first time.

PAUL: Then answer me.

CELINE: (Angrily.) Look you, I do not know who you are. I do not particularly care who you are. But I can see that you think of yourself as a perceptive young man. Let me just assure you that you know nothing about this situation, so kindly piss off.

PAUL: I'm not claiming to know anything around here! I just don't think that it's generally considered a good idea to go through someone else's things without their permission!

CELINE: (Smiling mysteriously.) How morally smug you are. (Seriously.) Leave me alone unless you want there to be trouble.

PAUL: (Angrily.) What do you mean by that?

CELINE: Do I have to spell it out for you?

PAUL: I have half a mind to tell Sarah that you've been rifling through her things while she was upstairs.

CELINE: (Laughs.) Go ahead and tell Sarah. See what happens.

PAUL: (Mutters to himself, then defiantly.) All right, I will tell her.

CELINE: (Reflects for a moment and appears to have a change of heart.) If you must know, I was simply looking for a disk that I left the last time I was here.

PAUL: And Damien has it now?

CELINE: Yes.

PAUL: Why?

CELINE: (Hesitates.) Because it is actually one of his disks, and he doesn't know that I added something to it.

PAUL: What did you add?

CELINE: That is private.

PAUL: How do I know you're telling the truth?

CELINE: (Fiercely.) You don't! You don't know if I am telling the truth; in fact you know nothing about anything here! (Sitting down, calmer.) Look, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, Sarah and I are close friends; I am not trying to harm her in any way.

PAUL: All I know is that it isn't right to go through other people's things behind their backs!

CELINE: Yes, you have already expressed your sentiments on that subject. Would you mind telling me precisely what you were engaged in doing when I entered by that door?... Cannot answer that, can you? (Laughs.) As I said, go ahead and tell Sarah what I was doing. I shall simply answer that I was checking to see that all was safely in order after I had caught you snooping.

PAUL: That wasn't the same thing, and you know it.

CELINE: Oh no? Then why do you not tell me exactly what it was... I assume by your silence that you have no answer.

PAUL: All right, all right.

CELINE: Good boy. Now I am going to finish arranging my things. You can help me by carrying my bags over there for now.

PAUL: (Sarcastically.) Anything you say.

(Celine exits to kitchen. Paul carries her suitcase and exits stage right. Enter Sarah from above. She is dressed differently, more comfortably, and playing with her hair as she descends the stairs. Celine simultaneously enters from the kitchen. They both look around and not seeing Paul, embrace and kiss very deeply.

Paul enters stage right, spots them and halts.)

CELINE: You look beautiful.

SARAH: Oh, my dove. (Sees Paul watching them and gently pulls away.) Darling, not in front of the boy. (Motions to Paul.)

CELINE: I'm sure the boy does not mind, (Turning to Paul.) do you?

PAUL: (Uncomfortably.) No, I don't mind.

CELINE: Many men even find it arousing.

(Paul laughs uneasily.)

SARAH: All the same, he is a guest, and I wouldn't want this getting back to Damien. Understand, Paul?

PAUL: Of course. It doesn't bother--

(The sound of someone trying to open the front door. The women leap apart.)

DAMIEN: Hello.

(Flustered hellos from the others. Ad lib.)

DAMIEN: (Jovially, to Paul.) Still here I see. I was worried that I may have frightened you off.

PAUL: Still here.

DAMIEN: Good, good. (Turning to Celine and speaking slowly. There should be tension between these two right from the start.) I'm glad to see that you've arrived safe and sound, Celine.

CELINE: (Sarcastically.) Oh, of that I am sure, Damien.

DAMIEN: (A pause.) Have you not learned, Celine, that sarcasm is unhealthy, unoriginal and almost always the result of some deep-rooted insecurity?

CELINE: I see that you are still eager to criticize me.

SARAH: (Trying to ease the tension.) We were just sitting down to have a drink before dinner.

DAMIEN: Good, good. I trust Paul and Celine have been getting to know one another?

SARAH: I think so.

PAUL: (With a hint of sarcasm, looking at Céline.) Oh yes. We've been getting along splendidly.

DAMIEN: Glad to hear it. So what brings you to town, Céline? You didn't make that clear in your letter.

CELINE: I came to see Sarah's latest painting.

DAMIEN: Ah, and what did you think of it?

CELINE: I have not seen it yet.

DAMIEN: She hasn't shown you?

SARAH: No, not yet.

PAUL: I didn't know you painted.

SARAH: I just dabble at it really. It's nothing serious, not like Céline's work. (Putting an affectionate hand on Céline's shoulder.) She's the real artist.

DAMIEN: Come, come Sarah. Don't be modest. (To Paul.) Her work is very good.

SARAH: But it isn't as good as I would like it to be. Céline's is much freer.

DAMIEN: (Snorts.) Less disciplined you mean.

SARAH: (Reproachfully.) Darling. That wasn't very nice.

DAMIEN: It wasn't meant to be.

(Pause.)

SARAH: Why don't you come upstairs and see my painting, Céline?

CELINE: I would like that.

(The women exit upstairs.)

DAMIEN: (Pouring himself a drink. The question should be asked in a way that could mean either woman.) I believe she likes you.

PAUL: Who?

DAMIEN: Céline, who do you think?

PAUL: Céline? She can barely stand me.

DAMIEN: Now, now. I saw that look she gave you. There was the faintest hint of an invitation reclining on that smile.

PAUL: I really think you're mistaken.

DAMIEN: What makes you say that?

PAUL: I just didn't get the impression that I was her type.

DAMIEN: Doesn't hurt to try.

PAUL: I'm engaged.

DAMIEN: Of course. How forgetful of me. Anita isn't it?

PAUL: Yes.

DAMIEN: (As if struggling to remember.) And she's pregnant, isn't she?

PAUL: (Annoyed.) You know she is.

DAMIEN: Ah well, such is life... Still, it seems a shame to pass up an invitation like that.

PAUL: I still think you're mistaken in presuming that Céline is inviting me into anything.

DAMIEN: Perhaps, perhaps... We shall never know now, I suppose.

PAUL: No, I suppose we won't.

DAMIEN: Still, it does seem a shame... Do you imagine she's very good in bed? Céline, I mean?

PAUL: All right, that's enough. You can stop this little game right now. I am engaged, and I would prefer to remain faithful to my fiancé.

DAMIEN: Of course, of course. How inconsiderate of me to assume otherwise. (Pause.) I don't suppose you would ever dream of lying to this fiancé of yours.

PAUL: No! I would prefer to be honest with her, so would you kindly cut this out?



DAMIEN: Oh loosen up.

PAUL: I beg your pardon?

DAMIEN: I said loosen up, man. I understand this phenomenal change you're going through: marriage, fatherhood, and a steady job. I went through the same thing myself so I can sympathize.

PAUL: Can we talk of something else?

DAMIEN: No. Listen to me; you are free. Why, no one even knows you're here. You don't even have a passport.

PAUL: I don't see the connection between losing my passport and sleeping with your guest.

DAMIEN: Do I have to spell it out for you? Where's the poet in you? What has happened to your lust for life?

PAUL: While you make it all sound very exciting and romantic, I'm afraid I have other loyalties.

DAMIEN: You're a discouraging fellow, Paul. Of course you realize that in three years you're going to kick yourself for passing up this opportunity.

PAUL: As of yet, all I'll be passing up are your fantasies.

DAMIEN: (Ignoring Paul.) You'll sit across the breakfast table from Anita, scowling at her from time to time over your Financial Times, as you eat your toast and try not to get crumbs on your uncomfortable suit. Ah yes, I can see it now; you'll look down at her across the table and perhaps notice that faint yellow tinge between her sagging breasts, you'll take in take in the blue-cheese varicose veins on her legs, and then you'll look back at your newspaper and wonder how you ever could have found her attractive in the first place.

PAUL: Now wait a minute--

DAMIEN: Ha! Sounds like I'm getting to you. Dare to disturb the universe, Paul! Dare, before you are permanently chained to the rhythms of middle-class tedium.

PAUL: Now wait one minute here--

DAMIEN: No, you wait! When you step on that train tomorrow, you'll be leaving all of this behind. No one ever has to know about it. What have you possibly got to lose?

PAUL: My integrity!

DAMIEN: Your integrity? Where will your integrity be when you're lying awake at 2:00 AM, cursing your debts, and your ulcer as dear Anita feeds the second bawling child?

PAUL: (Trying to control himself.) You have some pretty one-sided ideas about the kind of person I am.

DAMIEN: And you tell me if they're wrong! Listen to me; in another two weeks you'll find yourself locked into a subservient position in a firm that publishes text books. You'll spend your time worrying about your precious financial situation while you correct the spelling mistakes of others as lifeless as yourself. I'm saying you can escape that for an evening. Call it a last fling if you like.

PAUL: Look, it isn't as though I haven't had my share of living it up! I've been around, okay? And you can cut it out with the dismal portraits of my life to come. It isn't going to be that way!

DAMIEN: I'm only asking you to give it a chance.

PAUL: I have no desire to give it a chance! And even if I did, I can assure you that your friend Céline wants nothing to do with me--

DAMIEN: How can you know that?

PAUL: (Hesitates.) She just didn't seem interested, that's all!

(A pause which allows them both to calm down somewhat.)

DAMIEN: Give it a try Paul. Tonight could be a turning point for you. You may even be surprised.

PAUL: It would take a lot to surprise me.

DAMIEN: (Smugly.) I bet it would.

PAUL: (After a pause, trying to put Damien in a better mood.) Look, I would like to give it a try. I honestly would, but... (Shrugs.)

DAMIEN: But what?

PAUL: But I just don't think it would be best for me at this stage in my life. I've made my decision. All that you've said might be absolutely true... Hell, it probably is true, I don't know. I would like to give it a go, but... (Shrugs.)

DAMIEN: Why is it that you persist in ending every statement with an inconclusive "but" that leaves your meaning meandering off into nowhere?

PAUL: (Annoyed.) Alright already. I've said what I have to say.

DAMIEN: (Standing up and shouting down at Paul threateningly.) That's right, you've had your say! Laugh if you like. I'm only offering you your last chance to have a little fun, and believe me, I'll be the one laughing one day!!

(A stunned silence. Paul holds his drink uncertainly while Damien sits back in embarrassment.)

PAUL: Are you all right?

DAMIEN: (Distracted.) Yes, yes... I tend to get carried away now and then. Think nothing of it.

PAUL: I'm sorry if I've somehow--

DAMIEN: No, don't apologize. It was completely my fault. I take things too far. Let's change the subject.

PAUL: Yes, let's.

(An uncomfortable pause. The characters sip their drinks in mutual embarrassment. Enter Sarah and Céline from upstairs.)

SARAH: (Concerned.) Is everything alright? I thought I heard someone shouting.

DAMIEN: I was just illustrating a scene from my latest play, darling.

SARAH: Then the two of you must be getting along. (To Paul.) Damien seldom shows his work in progress to anyone.

DAMIEN: Paul and I are finding that we have a lot in common.

SARAH: I'm so glad.

CELINE: (Deadpan.) It does not surprise me.

SARAH: Is anyone hungry? Dinner should be ready by now.

DAMIEN: I am. I'll set the table.

CELINE: I will help.

DAMIEN: (Overly friendly.) You will do no such thing. You're our guest and you'll sit right here and keep our other guest company. Any objections Paul?

PAUL: Actually, I--

DAMIEN: (Winking at Sarah.) I thought not.

SARAH: Damien, maybe Paul would like to--

DAMIEN: Come along, darling. Come along.

(Exit Damien and Sarah. Paul and Celine are left side by side on the sofa. Celine puts her head back, stares at the ceiling, and ignores Paul.)

PAUL: You don't like me very much, do you?

CELINE: (Lifts her head and regards Paul for two beats.) No. (Puts her head back.)

PAUL: Why?

CELINE: (Without looking at him.) I don't know why.

PAUL: (After a pause.) Are you and Sarah lovers?

CELINE: What do you think?

PAUL: I would assume you are, or at least were.

CELINE: Such a detective... What else have you uncovered then?

PAUL: How do you mean?

CELINE: (Turning to him.) I mean, have you noticed anything else unusual?

PAUL: (Cautiously.) In what way?

CELINE: About Damien?

PAUL: He's different.

CELINE: How?

PAUL: He's not exactly the way I expected him to be.

CELINE: I see... I thought I heard him shouting. You must have upset him.

PAUL: Upset him? He was the one provoking me. If anyone should be upset--

CELINE: Yes, yes. It would, of course, appear that way to you.

PAUL: What do you mean?

CELINE: Never mind. You would not understand.

PAUL: Try me.

CELINE: (Reflects for a moment.) If you are to stay here, it is only fair that you know. I am going to tell you, but I am not so sure you will like what I have to say.

PAUL: Is something wrong with him?

CELINE: Yes.

PAUL: In what way?

CELINE: How shall I put this? (Pause.) Damien Silk has problems with his mind.

PAUL: You mean he's... unbalanced?

CELINE: That is one way of putting it.

PAUL: Well, how? Is he crazy, or what?

CELINE: Take care how you use that word. You know nothing about it. Yes, Damien has problems. He is not an idiot, but he has problems.

PAUL: What kind of problems?

CELINE: He sees things in a different way than you or I, and sometimes that can be... difficult.

PAUL: But how is he different?

CELINE: He can be a little paranoid of strangers.

PAUL: Paranoid about what?

CELINE: Paranoid that they are trying to get him.

PAUL: Get him?

CELINE: (Sighs, as if speaking to a simpleton.) Perhaps it was a mistake to have told you. Officially his condition is known as "referential mania." It effects many great people. In its extreme form it is type of paranoia in which the patient believes that everything is somehow involved in a complicated conspiracy against him; the clouds, the trees, the grass, everything. It is as though all these things possess a hidden god that watches only him. The wind whispers deadly secrets, rivers laugh maliciously, and lightning strikes at him alone. That is its extreme form. Luckily it is rarely that serious. Usually he only believes that the people around him are involved. He is liable to suspect anyone. That too can be difficult, but it is bearable.

PAUL: But he didn't seem that abnormal to me.

CELINE: That is because you were not looking for it. It does not show all the time.

PAUL: But this is incredible... Has this been going on for long?

CELINE: It has been developing slowly, on and off for years now. Since Africa.

PAUL: Africa?

CELINE: Did you not know that Damien was in Africa?

PAUL: I know that he lived there when he was younger. I believe he wrote Heat there.

CELINE: And did you also know that he was involved in a war there?

PAUL: No, I didn't.

CELINE: Damien happened to be living in the Congo when war broke out. He was taken prisoner and tortured.

PAUL: That must have been terrible.

CELINE: It was dreadful for him, and he has never fully recovered from it. Now and then it all comes back to him. That is why he has problems.

PAUL: But why hasn't anyone heard of this?

CELINE: Because Sarah takes great pains to cover it up.

PAUL: Sarah mentioned something about this I think...

CELINE: Yes, it is constantly on her mind.

PAUL: But this is incredible! Can nothing be done about it?

CELINE: They are trying, but little is known about the disorder.

PAUL: (After a pause.) I don't know. How can I be sure you're telling the truth?

CELINE: (Unconcerned.) Draw your own conclusions, Mr. Detective. I am only telling you for your own good.

PAUL: Just suppose I do believe you; how am I supposed to act in front of him?

CELINE: Just be yourself and play his game. He is always quite charming during dinner. After that he usually goes straight to bed.

PAUL: But what about--

CELINE: Understand that Damien is a very great and important man. But he can be difficult, and you must be careful.

PAUL: But--

CELINE: Shh. There is nothing to worry about as long as you do not upset him. (A light bell rings in the kitchen.) Come, dinner is served.

PAUL: But how--

CELINE: (Firmly.) Dinner is served, Paul. Come along.

(Celine rises and exits into kitchen area.  
Paul remains seated for a moment seeming very  
uncertain, but soon rises and follows.)

Lights.

ACT 1, Scene 2

(As the lights come up, Paul, Sarah, Damien, and Céline enter from the kitchen area in mid-conversation. They have just finished dinner and the mood is more relaxed than earlier. All except Céline are in high spirits.)

PAUL: ...Anyway, after all that I finally grabbed the train as it pulled out of the station, found a quiet compartment to myself, and fell asleep for six hours.

SARAH: That's quite a story.

PAUL: It's not over yet. When I woke up, I found that I wasn't in Rome at all. I'd taken the wrong train and ended up in Catania.

SARAH: Catania? In Sicily? Didn't anyone check your ticket?

PAUL: Apparently not.

SARAH: What did you do?

PAUL: Well, at that point I was broke. In fact, I didn't even have enough money to take the train back to Rome. Luckily, a friend wired me some cash, but for awhile there I was doing the park bench shuffle, if you know what I mean... I actually wrote one of my best articles on Catania. (Sarah laughs.)

CELINE: Do you often make mistakes like that?

PAUL: Not anymore. I was green in those days.

DAMIEN: Of course loosing his passport doesn't count as a mistake.

PAUL: That was an exception.

SARAH: It must be wonderful to travel about like that.

DAMIEN: When did Anita come into all this?

PAUL: That was much later, when I was living in London.

DAMIEN: Why don't you tell us how you met? There's nothing I enjoy more than a soapy love story.

SARAH: (Joking.) Don't get him started again.



PAUL: Actually, there's not much to tell. She approached me in a pub one night and told me she liked my eyes.

(Celine laughs.)

DAMIEN: You find that funny, Celine? Don't be offended, Paul. She was just considering that line herself.

CELINE: Be quiet, Damien. I never allow myself to be interested in a man who is involved with another person. That is one of the many reasons why I am not interested in you.

DAMIEN: Come now, Celine; I understand that you want to impress our guest, but I find it difficult to keep a straight face when I hear you, of all people, boast of what you "never do." (To Paul.) A man's marital status is not a matter of consideration when Celine decides she is interested in a man.

CELINE: Be quiet.

SARAH: That was rude, Damien.

DAMIEN: (In mock horror.) Was it? (Overly apologetic.) I'm so sorry if what I said has offended you in any way, Celine. The truth has a way of doing that.

CELINE: There is no need to apologize, Damien. You can no longer hurt me.

SARAH: All right, that's enough you two. Who would like more wine?

CELINE: Si te plais.

SARAH: Paul?

PAUL: No thanks.

DAMIEN: No? I thought all you young poets had a flair for the bottle.

PAUL: Not this one.

CELINE: A poet? Does he write?

DAMIEN: Apparently.

CELINE: (Smiling to herself.) Yes, I can see it now.

PAUL: Please, you're embarrassing me. I'm not really a poet, I just dabble at it. Anyone could do what I do.

DAMIEN: Oh? Do you think that anyone could be an artist then?

PAUL: I don't know. I don't see why not if they were willing to put the time into it and prepared to take the knocks. I don't mean that everyone could be a great artist, but I guess anyone could write.

DAMIEN: I see, very interesting.

SARAH: Why don't you read us one of your poems, Paul?

PAUL: Sorry, I haven't got any of my finished work with me.

CELINE: Then read us some of your unfinished work.

PAUL: No, it's too embarrassing.

SARAH: Why not, Paul. We're all friends here. I'm sure Damien would be able to offer you some valuable criticism.

PAUL: No, really. I couldn't.

DAMIEN: Oh, come on. Read us one of your poems.

PAUL: (Shyly.) Well... okay. (He goes to his bag and pulls out a notebook.)

DAMIEN: I knew he had to have some poetry on him.

PAUL: Okay, here goes: Park Bench "Fall day footballs thud on a green field / While women stroll by me, / Their pastel skirts billowing in the wind. (Damien smirks.) I wish their clothes would shed, / fall away... (Damien smirks again. Paul hesitates.) ...from them, / And flutter to the ground, / Like the leaves that--" (Damien bursts out laughing.) Alright, forget it then!

SARAH: (Reproachfully.) Damien...

DAMIEN: (Still chuckling.) I-I'm sorry, Paul. Please excuse me. It wasn't you. I just remembered the most extraordinary joke. Do go on.

PAUL: (Angrily.) Forget it. I don't think any of us are in the mood.

SARAH: I'm in the mood.

DAMIEN: Yes, that's been bloody obvious all evening.

SARAH: I am being polite, Damien. If you choose to interpret that in another way, than that is your problem.

DAMIEN: There is no need to take me so seriously. I never take myself that way.

(An uncomfortable pause.)

DAMIEN: Well, what shall we talk about now? History? Philosophy? How about the meaning of life? Paul's very interested in meanings, aren't you Paul?

PAUL: Well...I--

SARAH: Damien, please--

DAMIEN: But it's true. Why just a little while ago we had a provoking discussion about the "meaning" of my plays. How do you respond, Céline, when someone asks you what a painting means?

CELINE: (Flippantly.) I tell them that it means nothing, that I did it for the money.

DAMIEN: Ah, a woman of my heart.

PAUL: (To Céline.) Do you really say that?

DAMIEN: Yes, and then she gives them a sly smile and says, (Imitating Céline's accent.) "My real art is performed back at my apartment. Would you like to come home with me for a demonstration?"

CELINE: That I do not do. (To Paul.) Are you surprised that I would paint for the money?

PAUL: Yes, I guess I am.

CELINE: (Gravely.) Why? Do you think I am so profound then?

PAUL: (Uncomfortably.) Well, I wouldn't know, but I would've thought...

CELINE: (Severely.) You do not know me, Mr. Detective. You have no idea who I am. (Pauses, then slowly unfurls a smile.) But you are right: I do not create for the money.

SARAH: No, Céline would never do that.

DAMIEN: She couldn't afford to.

SARAH: Don't be like that, Damien. (To Paul.) Celine's paintings are very challenging.

DAMIEN: I'll admit that.

CELINE: Thank you, Damien. It is not often that I receive a complement from you.

DAMIEN: I wasn't complimenting you, I was complimenting your work.

CELINE: Then it is my blood that you compliment, because when I paint I split blood onto the canvas.

DAMIEN: Spare us the lecture, Celine. We all agree that you're a fine painter.

CELINE: Just so long as you understand that.

(Pause.)

DAMIEN: Excuse me for a moment. (Rises and exits upstairs.)

SARAH: Why don't we do the dishes?

(Sarah and Celine rise.)

PAUL: I'll help you.

SARAH: No, no. You sit and finish your wine. Celine and I are perfectly capable of doing the dishes alone.

(Celine exits to kitchen area.)

PAUL: (To Sarah in a low voice.) I have to talk to you.

SARAH: (Glancing upstairs.) Hurry then.

PAUL: I have to know, is something...wrong with Damien?

SARAH: (Hesitates.) Why?

PAUL: I mean, is there something peculiar about him?

SARAH: (Nervously.) In what way?

PAUL: His mental condition, is it...satisfactory?

SARAH: Has Celine been talking to you about this?

PAUL: Yes, I--

SARAH: It's nothing for you to worry about.

PAUL: But I want to know what's going on here. I mean, is he, well, dangerous?

SARAH: Of course he's not dangerous. Just don't upset him.

PAUL: But I--

(Enter Céline from kitchen area.)

CELINE: Sarah?

SARAH: Yes, I was just keeping Paul company while Damien is upstairs.

CELINE: Of course. (Returns to kitchen.)

PAUL: (As Sarah turns to follow Céline.) But wait. How am I supposed to act around him?

SARAH: Just be your innocent self, Paul. Just be yourself. He always goes to bed very early.

(Enter Damien from above. Sarah exits to kitchen.)

DAMIEN: Well then, tell me what you think.

PAUL: The dinner was excellent.

DAMIEN: Not about the dinner, about Céline.

PAUL: Damien, I don't want to start--

DAMIEN: (Pleasantly.) I'm only asking what you thought of her, Paul.

PAUL: (Cautiously.) She's very nice.

DAMIEN: (Amiably.) Why is it that you North Americans are always so short of adjectives? Everything is either "very nice" or "really neat."

PAUL: (Easing up.) Alright then, she's "really neat."

DAMIEN: Have you noticed anything different about her? Be honest.

PAUL: Well... She doesn't smile very often.

DAMIEN: Yes, she can be rather severe.

PAUL: Have you known her for long?

DAMIEN: Years and years. We were engaged at one point.

PAUL: (Surprised.) You were?

DAMIEN: Yes, does that surprise you?

PAUL: Well, yes. You don't seem particularly friendly towards her.

DAMIEN: I have to admit I'm hard on her. Things get all mixed up whenever she comes here. I'm not proud of the way I act. But then again, she's not much better. It makes things easier when there's someone else to distract her. You understand.

PAUL: Does Sarah know that you were once engaged to Celine?

DAMIEN: Of course. Why?

PAUL: Just that... Oh, never mind.

DAMIEN: Perhaps now you understand why I was so eager for the two of you to be together tonight. It makes things much easier between Sarah and I. And besides, you must admit that distracting Celine is hardly a disagreeable task.

PAUL: No, but I'm afraid I'm not the one to do it.

DAMIEN: (Switching momentarily to his earlier, more aggressive tone.) Than you are an even bigger fool than I thought.

(Enter Celine and Sarah from kitchen area.)

PAUL: That didn't take long.

SARAH: We've decided to leave it until the morning. The kitchen is a disaster.

DAMIEN: And I wasn't even there.

SARAH: (To Paul.) Damien is not the cleanest chef in Paris.

DAMIEN: Nor the best, I'm afraid.

SARAH: (Putting her arms around Paul from behind.) I'm sure that

Paul is clean in the kitchen. Maybe I should have married him instead. (Paul laughs nervously.)

DAMIEN: Splendid idea! I'll marry his precious Anita. Only problem is that I shall have to find it in myself to enjoy little children.

CELINE: And I?

DAMIEN: You can continue to pick up strangers off the street like you always do.

CELINE: (Pause, then dead seriously.) Must you insult me, Damien?

DAMIEN: It's all in fun, dear Celine. You need not fear that Paul is going to think any less of you. He drools like an anxious puppy every time you slink by him.

SARAH: (Smiling.) Damien, why are you saying these things?

DAMIEN: (Laughing.) Because it is obvious, that's why. There's no need for us to go on covering up and beating around the bush all night. Paul is simply panting over our dear Celine, aren't you, Paul. Be honest now.

PAUL: Damien I--

DAMIEN: Oh, of course. You're engaged and such sinful thoughts never even cross your mind. How silly of me.

CELINE: Do not listen to him, Paul.

DAMIEN: (Imitating Celine.) "Yes, do not listen to him, Paul. He is crazy."

(Awkward pause.)

DAMIEN: (Smiling.) Why, what's the matter? Have I said something wrong?

CELINE: (Fiercely.) You always have to take things too far.

DAMIEN: Oh bloody hell, it's all in fun.

CELINE: I, for one, do not enjoy your idea of fun.

DAMIEN: You shouldn't be so painfully serious about it all, Celine. It really doesn't become you. (The others are silent.) Oh come now. All this talk of art and artists, and we can't even break a few minor conventions among ourselves. Paul isn't taking my little games seriously, are you Paul.

PAUL: I, uh...

DAMIEN: You know, Paul, for a poet, you are often at a loss for words.

PAUL: Maybe you are being a bit hard on Céline tonight.

DAMIEN: (To Céline.) There you are, my dear: a man to defend your honor.

(Uncomfortable pause.)

SARAH: It's late, dear. Maybe we should be getting to bed.

DAMIEN: (Sighs.) Yes, you're right. I should know by now when I've had enough to drink. (Rises.) Sorry if my manners have in some way offended you, Paul.

PAUL: No harm done. We've all had a lot to drink.

DAMIEN: Yes, blame it on the alcohol. Always best that way. (Begins to mount the stairs, arm in arm with Sarah.) Goodnight then and, to use a popular cliché, don't do anything I wouldn't do. (To Sarah.) There, that ought to leave him with an unlimited array of possibilities.

SARAH: Goodnight Paul... (Looking at him significantly.) Do sleep well. I think you will find everything you need in the bathroom.

DAMIEN: (To Sarah.) Unless he should happen to need you, darling.

(Sarah laughs lightly. Céline and Paul say their goodnights. Ad lib. Paul and Céline left alone. Céline puts her head back on the sofa and ignores Paul as before.)

PAUL: (After a pause.) How did I do?

CELINE: (Without looking at him.) You did well. You did not upset him, and that is what is important.

PAUL: (Pause.) Céline, he doesn't seem crazy to me.

CELINE: Of course not. What do you know about it? You know nothing.

PAUL: I do know that he doesn't seem half the dangerous figure you make him out to be. A bit eccentric, maybe, but I always imagined him to be that way anyway.



CELINE: He is only difficult when he is angry, and you did not make him angry. He likes you.

PAUL: I find that a bit hard to believe.

CELINE: It is true.

PAUL: (Still skeptical.) I just don't know about this whole thing. I'm beginning to feel as though I'm the butt of some elaborate joke.

CELINE: Of course you do not understand. If you were to spend more time with us, it would become clearer to you. (Turns to him.) I would not tell you these things if they were not true.

PAUL: Damien told me that you were once engaged to him.

CELINE: Did he say that? It is true, but that was a long time ago.

PAUL: Does that have anything to do with why you two are so hard on each other?

CELINE: No. As I told you, that was a long time ago. It is Sarah who I care about now. It is she who I come to see. I worry about her, worry that he will destroy her.

PAUL: What is the problem with Damien? I've been listening to you, listening to Sarah, and watching him all night, and other than his having a tendency to flare up now and then, I don't see anything particularly wrong with him.

CELINE: What do you want? Would you be happier, perhaps, if he drooled and babbled nonsense? Would you be satisfied if he had some irritable tick above his eye? What do you want?

PAUL: I'm just telling you my impressions.

CELINE: Think what you like about him. I do not care.

PAUL: But that's just it; I don't know what to think of him anymore. Up until a couple of hours ago I could only think of Damien Silk with reverence. Now everything is upside-down.

CELINE: You can still respect him as a writer and as a man. His problems only help to make him a better writer and, in many ways, ... a better man.

PAUL: How do you mean?

CELINE: It is too much to say... and you would not believe me anyway.

PAUL: (Sardonically.) That's right, I'm only a fool. How could I have forgotten. Between you and Damien I've been reminded of it often enough.

CELINE: I am sorry. You are not a fool.

PAUL: (Sarcastically.) You flatter me.

CELINE: This is hard to explain. Damien's power is very great, greater than you could ever imagine or understand... But you are in it.

PAUL: Oh come on. You can cut it out with the Gothic overtones.

CELINE: I am only saying that there is much about us that you do not know, much about Damien you would not like. You must be careful.

PAUL: Thanks for the profound advice. I feel as though I've stumbled into Count Dracula's Parisienne retreat.

CELINE: Just do not ask too many questions, Paul. In the morning you will take the train to London, and you will forget all about those silly people you met in Paris.

PAUL: (Annoyed.) Whatever you say. (Turns away from her and concentrates on his drink.)

CELINE: (After a pause.) Would you like to sleep with me tonight?

PAUL: (Surprised.) What?!

CELINE: I asked if you would enjoy spending the night with me.

PAUL: I... I-- No! I happen to be engaged.

CELINE: That is a pity. I would have enjoyed very much making love to you.

PAUL: Why?

CELINE: Because I like you. (Kisses him.) You have nice eyes.

PAUL: (Suspicious.) I find that a little hard to believe. Why are you so interested in me all of a sudden?

CELINE: You have a very low opinion of yourself. Is it so hard to

believe that I find you attractive? (Kisses him.) I know you find me attractive. (Kisses again.) And you kiss very nicely.

PAUL: So do you. (They kiss again, slowly.)

CELINE: Mmm. That is lovely. Perhaps you will change your mind?

PAUL: (Pause.) I don't know. (Pause, while Céline comes closer.) Look, if I were to change my mind, Damien isn't to know, all right? I don't want him to get the credit for corrupting me.

CELINE: I understand. I will come back down later in the night when I am sure they are asleep.

(They kiss deeply. Enter Damien from the bedroom above. He stands smiling as he watches them from the balcony. After five beats, he clears his throat and begins to descend the stairs. Paul pulls away from Céline.)

DAMIEN: Well, well, well. You must excuse me. Mind if I sit down? Sarah decided to take a bath before bed. (Pouring himself a drink.) Who would like a drink? Paul?

PAUL: No thanks.

DAMIEN: (Sitting down.) I'm so sorry, Paul. I get the impression I interrupt you every time I step into this room.

PAUL: No, no. You weren't interrupting a thing.

DAMIEN: Now don't be shy. Carry on as if I wasn't here.

CELINE: (To Paul.) It excites him. (Paul repeats his same nervous laughter.) I am going to bed. Goodnight Paul. (Kisses him on the cheek.) Goodnight Damien.

(The men say goodnight. Ad lib. Céline goes to exit stage left but halts before she is out of sight. Damien should have his back to her so that she is only visible to Paul. She points to her watch and nods, conveying to Paul that she will be back later. Exit Céline upstairs.)

DAMIEN: Sorry Paul. Didn't expect her to leave you out in the cold like that. A bit out of character for her.

PAUL: It was my decision.

DAMIEN: Really?

PAUL: I have my priorities.

DAMIEN: (Laughing.) Your priorities? That's beautiful. Tell me, Paul, where were those priorities a few moments ago? Were you fantasizing of Anita while you kissed Céline?

PAUL: (Uncomfortably.) That was a harmless kiss. I have nothing to feel guilty about.

DAMIEN: Ah, yes. A harmless kiss. You'll have to teach me that sometime, Paul. I would love to be able to tell Sarah now and then, "Oh don't worry darling, I was simply having a harmless kiss with that woman in the corner there." Are you sure that wasn't a preliminary for something to come?

PAUL: Think what you like.

DAMIEN: Oh come along, Paul. Let's cut all this rot. I'm sure this fidelity of yours is a fine thing, but--

PAUL: Let's not get started on this again.

DAMIEN: I suppose you feel that it proves something to restrain yourself like this?

PAUL: Look, we already went over this. I don't want to hurt Anita--

DAMIEN: Then lie to her, Paul. It's as easy as that. Simply don't tell her about it.

PAUL: I told you that we're very honest with one another--

DAMIEN: Alright, alright... I suppose it would wound her deeply to hear that you had slept with Céline?

PAUL: Yes!

DAMIEN: (Pause.) Would she be injured if she found that you had given Céline a "harmless" kiss? (Paul doesn't answer.) Ha! There you are. The crime has already been committed.

PAUL: There's a difference.

DAMIEN: Is there? You can't deny you found Céline attractive. You can't deny that the desire to sleep with her has graced your principled mind. Now suppose Anita could have read your thoughts tonight.

What would she have to say about that? (Suddenly switching to a very serious and intimidating tone.) Or suppose she were here to see the way you were leering at my wife, for that matter?

PAUL: (Quietly, nervously.) I wasn't leering at Sarah.

DAMIEN: (Quietly, but seriously.) No? Seemed that way to me.

PAUL: You're mistaken.

DAMIEN: I hope so. (Back to his previous tone.) But you haven't answered my question. How would Anita feel about that?

PAUL: You can't control your feelings, but you can control your actions. I believe Anita understands that.

DAMIEN: Ah, well. (Smiling.) I can see I'm no match for you. (In his previous serious tone as he rises.) I just wanted to clear up one or two minor things between us. Goodnight then.

PAUL: Goodnight.

DAMIEN: (Hesitates.) Oh yes, there's just one more thing.

PAUL: Yes?

DAMIEN: Did Céline say anything about me? Anything out of the ordinary, I mean?

PAUL: No, we didn't spend much time talking about you.

DAMIEN: (Laughs.) You're a terrible liar, Paul. She told you I was insane, or some such rot, didn't she.

PAUL: (Uncomfortably.) Well... yes, she did.

DAMIEN: I thought so. Let me just assure you that I am not before you have nightmares about me murdering you in your sleep. I may enjoy playing games, and I may have a spoiled disposition that comes across as rather frightening at times, but that hardly qualifies me as a candidate for the asylum.

PAUL: Damien, I don't want you to think that--

DAMIEN: Hush. Not another word. Do you think you are the first person to be taken in by her?

PAUL: But why?

DAMIEN: That's just the way she is. She has her games and I have mine. Now get some sleep.

PAUL: Goodnight.

(Exit Damien upstairs. Paul puts his head back and sighs. In a moment Celine enters stage left. She motions for him to be quiet.)

CELINE: How did it go?

PAUL: He just told me he isn't crazy.

CELINE: Of course he told you that. (More to herself.) That means he knows I spoke to you about it. That could be bad.

PAUL: I don't know who to believe anymore.

CELINE: Poor Paul. (Leans to kiss him.)

PAUL: Look, I'm confused and tired. Maybe it would be better if we didn't...

CELINE: (Laughs quietly.) Has anyone ever told you that you are frigid?

PAUL: No, it's not that. I'm just--

CELINE: Please, Paul. Not another word. We are not obliged to do anything at all.

PAUL: You don't mind?

CELINE: Of course not. (She moves to the computer terminal and begins flipping through the disks.)

PAUL: What are you doing?

CELINE: (Looks annoyed for a moment, then smiles.) You might as well know. I am looking for his play in progress. I want to read it.

PAUL: Why?

CELINE: Because I am curious. I suspect it is his best play yet.

PAUL: Really?

CELINE: Yes. (Pause.) Would you like to see it?

PAUL: I-I don't know. Do you think we should?

CELINE: I intend to. (Loads the disk into the terminal.)

PAUL: I don't know, I--

CELINE: Come, here it is. (Paul moves to look at the screen.) Do you know anything about computers?

PAUL: No, not really.

CELINE: You press this button here to move the screen up. Like this, see?

PAUL: Alright.

CELINE: And this button moves it down, see?

PAUL: Uh huh.

CELINE: Good. I have already read the first act.

PAUL: Well what happens in it?

CELINE: It is very complicated. Perhaps it would be best for you to read it yourself. (Pushes some buttons.) Here, that is the beginning. You read it quickly, and I will get us some more wine. Then we can read the second act together.

PAUL: Wait, what if he comes?

CELINE: He won't, but even if he does, that is easy. As soon as I hear him coming, I can turn it off like this. (Pushes some buttons.) I simply do this and this. See? It is very easy.

PAUL: This is exciting. (Reading the screen.) Working title: Games for Adults. (Celine exits to kitchen. Paul begins to read.)

(Celine exits to kitchen area. Paul pushes buttons and smiles, then scowls as he reads the screen. He begins to look disturbed as he reads on. Enter Sarah from above. She leans over balcony and whispers loudly.)

SARAH: Paul? (Paul is not visible to her from above.)

PAUL: (Jumping nervously from the screen.) Sarah?

SARAH: (Descending the stairs.) I had to talk to you one more time.

PAUL: Your husband said you were taking a bath...

SARAH: (She does not notice that the screen is lit.) I was. I just had to talk to you before I went to bed.

PAUL: (Nervously manoeuvring her so that her back is to the terminal.) What about?

SARAH: I don't think you had a very good time this evening.

PAUL: Oh, it was alright. (He sits her down on the couch with her back to the computer.)

SARAH: I had the feeling you were... well, upset by Damien's comments.

PAUL: (Moving slowly towards the computer, hoping to turn it off before she discovers it.) Oh, it was no problem at all. I'm very happy to have met him.

SARAH: (Shaking her head.) No, I can tell he got to you. You sound different now. Things between us aren't the same as they were before, are they? I hope you don't think less of me, Paul. (Turns to him just as he is trying to turn computer off.) What are you doing?! (Rises and moves towards him.) What do you think you're doing?!

PAUL: Now Sarah, wait a minute.

SARAH: That's Damien's play!

PAUL: Ssh. I know, I know. Just let me explain--

SARAH: But you have no right--!

PAUL: --It isn't what you think--

SARAH: --to look at that!

PAUL: Please, Sarah.

(Paul presses the button to turn it off, but instead the machine begins to print loudly. Paul stands looking at the machine with a shocked expression. Sarah looks him in the eye, takes a corner of her robe and tears it. For a moment she regards him with a malicious



smile, and then she screams. Enter Damien above and Celine from kitchen.)

CELINE: Paul!

SARAH: (Crying.) Aide-moi, amoure. Il veut me violer!

PAUL: What?!!

CELINE: You rape her?!

PAUL: No!!

SARAH: (Covering herself and crying.) Bastard!!

PAUL: (Furiously.) I didn't do anything!

CELINE: Get away! You are drunk!

(All this time Damien has been slowly descending the stairs. He does not look pleased. Sarah's sobs increase when she sees him.)

CELINE: (Warning.) Do not go near him, Damien. I will handle this.

(Damien says nothing. He moves to the computer, which is still printing, and turns it off. He rips a sheet from the top and glances at it. Pause for five beats.)

DAMIEN: (Not loudly, but firmly, intensely, dangerously.) This is my play. (Looks up at Paul with malice.) Who the hell are you, anyway?

PAUL: Who the hell is she? (Pointing to Celine.) She's the one who turned it on!

(Damien looks at Celine. She shakes her head as though she has no idea what he's talking about.)

PAUL: It's true!

DAMIEN: (He swiftly approaches Paul and towers over him. Damien's superior height should be especially obvious here. At first Damien should speak firmly, with authority, but he shouldn't raise his voice yet.) I want to know what you're up to, and I want to know right now.

PAUL: (Frightened.) You've got the wrong man.

DAMIEN: No, I don't think so. What happened Sarah?

SARAH: (Sobbing.) He-He attacked me!

PAUL: Why don't you ask her what she was doing down here in the first place!

SARAH: (Angrily to Paul.) I came down to see you!

PAUL: See?!

SARAH: I wanted to say I was sorry about you losing your passport, and then I saw that you were reading Damien's play, and then you attacked me like an animal!!

PAUL: Lies!!

DAMIEN: Shut up.

PAUL: She's been the one coming on to me all night, ever since I arrived here!

DAMIEN: (Now raising his voice suddenly and picking Paul up by the front of his shirt.) I said shut up!!

CELINE: Don't hurt him, Damien!

DAMIEN: Stay out of this! (Slams Paul up against the wall.) Now I want to know who you are and who you're working for!

PAUL: (Desperately.) Stop! I tell you, I haven't done anything!

DAMIEN: (Punches Paul hard in the gut.) Tell me, you little--!!

PAUL: I haven't got anything to tell--!!

DAMIEN: When I say talk, (Punches Paul.) I mean that I want you to talk! (Punches him again.)

(Damien and Paul continue to scuffle, Damien getting the better of Paul. Sarah fumbles in one of the desk drawers and takes out a bottle and a syringe.)

SARAH: Help me, Celine!

(Celine and Sarah attempt to separate the two. Damien traps Paul in a headlock. Sarah

approaches from behind and jabs Paul with the needle. Paul stiffens and falls to the floor unconscious. The others stand about panting for a moment, then Céline bends down and takes his pulse. She looks up at the others and nods. All three begin to laugh.)

Lights.

ACT II, Scene 1

(Same scene, an hour later. The sofa has been pushed to one side and the chair that was previously with the desk against the back wall is now CS. Paul is tied to the chair, unconscious in his underwear. Celine paces nervously behind him. Paul moans softly, and Celine glances at her watch, then moves to his side and kneels. She shakes him lightly.)

CELINE: Wake up, Paul. Wake up! (Gently slaps his face a few times.)

PAUL: (Moaning.) Wha?...Wha's happening?

CELINE: (Checking his pulse, his eyes.) How do you feel?

PAUL: (Drowsy, confused.) I feel awful... What happened? Did I faint?

CELINE: You did not faint. You were drugged.

PAUL: (Realizing that he is tied down and coming to life.) Hey! What is this?! Why am I tied down?!!

CELINE: Calm down. You have nothing to worry about yet.

PAUL: (Struggling.) Untie me!!

CELINE: I cannot. Not yet. There are one or two things I want to be sure of first.

PAUL: Untie me!! I'm not telling you anything!

CELINE: Paul, I want to know exactly how you happened to meet Sarah.

PAUL: No! Let me go!

CELINE: (Calmly.) Tell me, Paul.

PAUL: Why should I?!

CELINE: (Hesitates.) Because I must know who I can trust.

PAUL: (Incredulously.) Who you can trust?! What about me?! Huh?! Who the hell...

CELINE: Be quiet.

PAUL: ...am I supposed to trust! I'm not trusting you, that's for sure. You're the one...

CELINE: You fool...

PAUL: ...that showed me how to turn off that damned computer!

CELINE: ...you understand nothing.

PAUL: Untie me!!

CELINE: (Regarding Paul with disgust.) I should have known better than to try to talk to you. (To herself.) This has gone much too far.

PAUL: What's gone much too far? (Celine ignores him.) I said what's gone much too far?

CELINE: (Pauses and regards him for a moment.) All of this.

PAUL: All of what?!

CELINE: (Sighs.) This... game of Damien's.

PAUL: What game?!

CELINE: (Coldly.) I will tell you nothing until you tell me how you met Sarah.

PAUL: I'm not telling you anything!

CELINE: Have it your way. (Crosses her arms and turns away.)

(Pause.)

PAUL: (Quieter.) Please, Celine, untie me.

CELINE: Be silent. If you want to say something, tell me about you and Sarah.

PAUL: Untie me first. I'll talk to you then.

CELINE: (Angrily.) Listen you fool, I do not like to inform you of this, but the others have something planned, and I do not think it will be pleasant for you. I am probably the only hope you have, so tell me what I need to know!

PAUL: How do you mean you don't think it will be nice for me? What

do you mean by that? (Celine does not answer.) What are they planning to do?

CELINE: You have your secrets, and I have mine.

PAUL: But are they going to hurt me? Is that it? Tell me! (Celine does not answer.) Is it because of the computer? That was your fault!

CELINE: Shut up!

PAUL: (Quietly.) It was your fault.

CELINE: (Looks at Paul contemptuously.) You are an idiot, do you know that?

PAUL: I was an idiot to have listened to you.

CELINE: And you are an idiot if you do not listen to me now. I believe I am on your side, but before I can help you I must know about you and Sarah.

PAUL: (After a pause.) What do you want to know?

CELINE: Where did you meet her?

PAUL: In a café in Chartres. She asked me for the time and we got to talking.

CELINE: And she offered to bring you to Paris?

PAUL: When I mentioned I was going there, she offered to give me a lift, yes.

CELINE: What did you talk about on the way?

PAUL: Not much. I slept for most of the ride and didn't wake up until we were in the garage.

CELINE: Did you have something to drink with her before you got into the car?

PAUL: Just a beer.

CELINE: That explains it; she drugged your beer. That is why you slept.

PAUL: But why would she...?

CELINE: Never mind. How close were you to Sarah before I arrived?

PAUL: That's none of your business.

CELINE: (Suddenly very violent.) Tell me!!

PAUL: Okay, okay. We were very close.

CELINE: How close?

PAUL: We kissed.

CELINE: Is that all?

PAUL: Yes.

CELINE: Good. Now, did you talk to her about Damien?

PAUL: Here and there.

CELINE: Did you tell her what I had told you about him?

PAUL: That he's unbalanced? Yes, I mentioned it.

CELINE: And how did she react?

PAUL: She said pretty much the same thing that you did; that it was nothing for me to worry about as long as I didn't upset him.

CELINE: Good, good. Now, when you were reading Damien's play on the computer and Sarah came downstairs, what did she talk to you about?

PAUL: She said she felt bad for me. She thought that maybe I'd been disturbed by Damien, and that I didn't care for her after what had happened.

CELINE: That is all?

PAUL: Yes.

CELINE: Why did you print the play?

PAUL: Why?! As if you didn't know! I was trying to turn the damned machine off! I followed the instructions you gave me, and it started to print!

CELINE: Yes. (Laughs.) That was beautiful.

PAUL: You knew it would print, didn't you!

CELINE: Yes.

PAUL: Then that was a dirty thing to--

CELINE: (Serious again.) Be quiet. Did you kiss Sarah before she saw the play?

PAUL: No.

CELINE: Why was her gown torn, and why did she claim you'd raped her?

PAUL: She torn it and I don't know why she said that! When she saw that I was reading the play, she gave me the strangest look and then she ripped it herself.

CELINE: That is very interesting. It sounds like Damien's touch. (Begins to pace, oblivious to Paul.)

PAUL: Hey! I told you the truth, now untie me!

CELINE: Be silent! I must think.

PAUL: But you said you'd--

CELINE: Silence!

PAUL: I should have known I couldn't trust you.

CELINE: (More to herself.) I have to figure out their plan.

PAUL: Where are they?

CELINE: They have gone to get some things. They will soon be back.

PAUL: Untie me then!!

CELINE: I cannot do that.

PAUL: What do you mean you can't do that!! You said you'd--

CELINE: He would be furious. You do not understand.

PAUL: (Cynically.) That's right, I don't understand anything around here. How could I have forgotten?

CELINE: This is serious, Paul. It could be very bad for you.

PAUL: (In a sudden fit of frustration and rage, struggling.) Untie me!!!

CELINE: (After a pause.) Are you finished?



PAUL: (Nods. Pause.) Céline, what are they going to do to me like this?

CELINE: I am not sure yet. I do not think they will try to hurt you.

PAUL: Will you please explain to me what is going on here?

CELINE: (Hesitates.) What would you say if I told you that everything that has happened to you has been more or less planned?

PAUL: What do you mean?!

CELINE: I thought that is what you would say. You always say that.

PAUL: What are you talking about?!

CELINE: (Sighs at his stupidity.) Look, you have been involved in a little artistic experiment here. We have done this type of thing before.

PAUL: What?! What type of thing have you done before?!

CELINE: This. This game, if you like. You have been set up. Damien and Sarah have often done this sort of thing... but it has never gone this far, at least not when I have been working for them.

PAUL: Well how far has it gone?!

CELINE: It has always ended before it became this deep. Usually we are all sitting around and laughing by now.

PAUL: Laughing at what?!

CELINE: At the play.

PAUL: The play? What play?

CELINE: This play. The things that have been happening to you.

PAUL: I don't understand what you're talking about!

CELINE: (Dropping her French accent and speaking with an American drawl, Californian.) All right, all right, don't yell. If you're going to hear the truth, you may as well hear all of it.

PAUL: Jesus Christ! You aren't French!!

CELINE: No, I'm not. I'm American, and my name's Dierdre, not Céline. Are you satisfied?

PAUL: This is unbelievable!

CELINE: I know it must seem that way to you. I'm only doing this so you'll know I'm telling the truth. A lot of things around here are not what they seem.

PAUL: Would you please tell me what's been going on?

CELINE: How can put this?... It's going to sound a little bit strange to you at first. Damien Silk believes that art should be an aggressive force in our lives, that it should invade every single aspect of our day to day existence. He doesn't think that someone should be able to set oneself up for it in advance; ideally, it should take the spectator by surprise. Damien can't stand the idea of people choosing to go to a performance, or waiting in line to visit a museum. He prefers to catch his audience off guard. He likes to grab his fans by the ankles, turn them upside-down, and shake them up good and hard. You know his plays. That's the way he works.

PAUL: But--

CELINE: Wait, I'm not finished. What it boils down to is that he and Sarah find someone on the spur of the moment and then they play different parts. They hire others, actors like me, to help them out. We ad lib it as we go along, twisting your perceptions until you, the audience, are forced to participate in the art without even knowing it. The audience and the play become one and the same.

PAUL: This is madness!

CELINE: Not really. Usually we just distort the audience's perception of reality enough so that they're forced to question certain things about art and themselves. When they become thoroughly confused and involved, we reveal the game and everyone has a good laugh.

PAUL: I don't believe this.

CELINE: It's true, Paul. I know it must sound a little wierd to you, but Damien's accomplishments are important. It's a challenging new idea with roots in the Medieval tradition of the masque, while at the same time, reaching forward to confront contemporary ideas of Post-modern alienation. It's probably a bit complex for you to grasp at first.

PAUL: But that's not art! That's... just a way to humiliate people!

CELINE: Now don't jump to conclusions. Just because you don't understand it doesn't mean it isn't valid.

PAUL: But you can't just tie someone up and claim that it's art!

CELINE: We've never tied anyone up before. This is a first.

PAUL: What?!

CELINE: I'll get back to that.

PAUL: What is going on around here? Why me?

CELINE: I don't know. It's always been a spontaneous thing. I guess Sarah found you in Chartres and decided that you'd make a good audience. So she offered you a lift, drugged your beer, took your passport, and then called me. All I was told was that I was to play a French artist named Celine. The rest was up to me.

PAUL: But how do you know what to do?

CELINE: I don't know. That's just it. We never collaborate on this thing. We're professionals and we play it by ear, adopting and adapting to our roles as we see fit. I had no idea that a session was planned for tonight until she called me. To tell the truth, I had a nasty hangover and was in no mood to think up a character. That's why I may have seemed a little hard to get along with at first. But that's all part of it too; we, the artists, can't choose either. It's all chance.

PAUL: This still sounds incredible to me, and you haven't yet answered why I'm tied up!

CELINE: (Hesitates.) I don't know why you're tied up. I think something's gone wrong.

PAUL: What?!

CELINE: Look, this is all I know. When I got here, I saw right away that you and Sarah had been, well, close. I thought it might be fun if I were to come on to you too. I was aiming for a confrontation between me and Sarah in front of Damien in order to see how you'd react. I admit it was a weak idea, but there were no other outsiders, other than myself, so I didn't think it was a very serious session anyway. I had no idea that things would end up like this... (Gestures to his binds.) I was just as surprised as you were. That's why I wanted to know what had happened between you and Sarah. I had to be sure that they weren't telling the truth, that you hadn't really tried to rape her. It sounds silly now, but I didn't know who I could believe.

PAUL: But what happened? How come it backfired?

CELINE: I already told you; I don't know. I don't even know if it has backfired. The play may still be on... But I doubt it. We've never gone this far... To tell the truth, I'm confused.

PAUL: Why?

CELINE: (Pause.) Because I'm not quite sure how far the two of them are willing to go. Look, part of what I said earlier is sort of true. Damien Silk has been through a lot, things you'd never dream of, and, well, he isn't exactly all there at times. I suspect he can be, well, dangerous.

PAUL: Are you telling me that he really is crazy?!

CELINE: Not exactly crazy, but not exactly sane either. He has to be a little off center to create what he does. Surely you can understand that.

PAUL: What exactly are you saying?!

CELINE: What I told you before about Africa is true. He was captured and tortured, and from what I've heard, it was pretty bad for him. Anyway, now and then it comes back to him and apparently he tends to get, well, a little out of hand. I've heard rumors of him doing one or two things that I'd rather not talk about...

PAUL: Like what?!

CELINE: Believe me, you don't want to know about that right now.

PAUL: Jesus Christ!!

CELINE: Look, these sessions take a lot out of us as actors, and sometimes we all get a bit carried away by our roles. We don't even stop playing when the audience is asleep, and there are times when... Oh, I don't know. Damien's always going on about that perfect balance between hazard and control, but now I'm beginning to think that the idea of domination has gone to his head. I think he's tipping the scales in his favor.

PAUL: But what about Sarah?

CELINE: So you think you know Sarah Silk, do you. Don't underestimate her. That woman is as smart as a whip. Try to understand, Paul, those two believe that everything they do can be justified in the name of art. And I'm beginning to think they've gone beyond me this time. They may even be testing me somehow. I can't be sure.

PAUL: Céline, I mean Dierdre, how long does one of these little skits usually last?

CELINE: It varies on the players and the audience. It has gone on for as long as three days. But I knew, or at least I thought I knew, that it wasn't even going to last overnight with you. You weren't willing to go with the swing of it. Don't give yourself all the credit though. It was mostly our own fault. We mucked up our roles terribly and couldn't settle down to one thing. (Laughs lightly.) I knew my story of his "hidden powers" wouldn't carry any weight.

PAUL: Dierdre, there's still time. Untie me before this gets out of hand.

CELINE: I'm afraid I can't do that.

PAUL: But you can't just leave me like this!

CELINE: I'm sorry, Paul, but it's not in my contract. The play might still be on.

PAUL: But what if it isn't?

CELINE: (Pause.) Then I'm still not sure what's going to happen.

PAUL: But Dierdre, if it's still on, it's too late. You've already told me about it. Please untie me.

CELINE: Sorry, Paul. You're just going to have to stay that way for now. Damien might be testing me, or he may be trying something absolutely new. Until I know I can't let you up.

PAUL: Then I'll tell them everything I know when they get back!

CELINE: (After a thoughtful pause, smiling.) I was wondering if you would get to that. There may be hope for you after all.

PAUL: How do you mean?

CELINE: Why do you think I've told you all this?

PAUL: Because you're justifiably worried about me!

CELINE: That's part of it, yes. I won't deny it. But I'm also offering you a chance to be in on the action.

PAUL: I don't want in, I want out.

CELINE: Listen Paul, I wouldn't have told you if you hadn't expressed such admiration for Damien's plays. I'm offering you the chance to be immediately and consciously involved in his work. You and I are going to put a little kink in Damien's ideas of power.

PAUL: How?

CELINE: It's simple. I've thought this out. Now that I've told you about the game, you can play along and make up your own role. You don't know the particulars, but you know more or less the general idea. I'll be a sort of double agent running between you. Now it's up to you and me to distort their reality, just as Damien and Sarah have been distorting yours. This way it adds an entirely new dimension to the game; the audience fools the artist! It's brilliant!

PAUL: No way! I don't want any part of this feeble excuse for art.

CELINE: I was afraid you wouldn't understand. Let me put it another way; you don't really have a choice. If you explain to Damien that I've told you, don't expect him to be overjoyed about it. I don't know how he'll react, but he probably won't admit the truth to you. I expect he'll come up with a counter role and claim that I'm crazy or jealous. It's certainly no guarantee that he'll let you go. People come away from these experiments on good terms with him, otherwise word would get around and the idea would be ruined. Damien would be terribly upset if he knew that the masquing sessions were ruined, and... well, I wouldn't want to upset him if I were in your position. He may, in fact, decide to get rather nasty. No Paul, the play can only end when we all agree. Those are the rules.

PAUL: I don't care about your rules. They don't apply to me.

CELINE: Paul, listen to me. Nothing's going to happen to you. I'll be watching, and I promise that I'm not going to let it get messy. Think Paul, this will be a first! The audience will beat the artist at his own game. I'm sure that when the truth eventually comes out, Damien will be more than a little impressed with you.

PAUL: I don't care! I don't want--

CELINE: Paul, all your life you have stood on the edge observing. You watch the world and scribble pseudo-sensitive words in countless notebooks all the time imagining that you have been experiencing the real thing. It's time for you to participate and perform if you dare to call yourself an artist. Think of it: you'll have taken part in something absolutely new and exciting: a new art form invented and presented by Damien Silk and yourself, Paul Weaver.

PAUL: I don't want to participate in it!

CELINE: All right, all right. They'll be here soon. You do what you like. But I'm disappointed in you. I thought you were supposed to be a poet. I would have given anything to work with Damien Silk back when I was in your position, but I guess other people have their priorities.

PAUL: You've never been tied up to a chair in your underwear.

CELINE: (Quietly.) Don't be so sure about that.

PAUL: (Pause.) Look, even if I were to play along, what could I possibly do like this?

CELINE: It's not what you do. It's what you say, how you act, and, most importantly, how you react.

PAUL: But I can't even think straight tied up like this! The ropes are cutting into my wrists!

CELINE: Don't lie. I tied you very carefully so that you'd be in as little pain as possible.

PAUL: Well it's too tight.

CELINE: Don't look for sympathy from me.

PAUL: (Sighs.) If I were to go along with it, what would I have to do?

CELINE: That's entirely up to you. Now that I've told you what's going on, you have a distinct advantage over them. Just don't let yourself be surprised by what happens.

PAUL: But what is going to happen?

CELINE: Who can say? But I will tell you one thing: I've added a private little kink of my own that should prove very interesting.

PAUL: A private kink? What do you mean?

CELINE: That, I'm afraid, is a secret. I can't tell you everything; it wouldn't be fair. Damien doesn't tell us all of his plans, so I can't tell you all of mine. It's my turn to be the maestro for a little while.

PAUL: But if I don't know what it is, how am I supposed to play along?

CELINE: Think professionally. This is the big league. Use your imagination, and whatever happens, don't panic.

PAUL: But what should I--

CELINE: Look, just close your eyes and pretend that you're still asleep. When they arrive, they'll probably question you and try to shake you up a little bit. They know that you're confused and frightened, and they have a fairly good idea how you're liable to react. It'll be up to you to beat them at their own game. You have to break down their own expectations of you.

PAUL: But how?

CELINE: Think, Paul. They'll expect you to be angry, upset, and very frightened. They also think you're going to deny everything. What if you were calm when they arrived? What if you were to admit to the crime? That would throw them off.

PAUL: But wouldn't they just suspect that you'd told me?

CELINE: Not if we play our parts well. Remember, I'll be helping you. We'll have to be careful; Damien is very sharp and not easily taken for a ride. But I do believe it's possible. Are you in then?

PAUL: (After a pause.) I guess so.

CELINE: Wonderful. (She squeezes his shoulder.) I know you won't regret this.

PAUL: There is one thing; I want to arrange a signal, something I could do that would indicate whether or not things are out of hand.

CELINE: Like what?

PAUL: Suppose I were to cough, or something, when I got really worried.

CELINE: If you like, but I'll know better than you when things are getting out of hand and-- Wait! (Listens.) Here they come. (Glances at her watch.) They're early.

PAUL: But what about--

CELINE: Sh! (Returning to her former accent.) Not another word. (Warmly.) When this is all over, you and I will have a good chat, non? Now sleep.

(Paul shuts his eyes. Enter Damien and Sarah by main entrance. They are both carrying video equipment which Sarah im-



mediately begins to set up so that the camera is facing Paul.)

DAMIEN: Céline darling. Is our little guest still asleep?

CELINE: Yes.

DAMIEN: Well let's see what we can do about that. (Moves to bar, pours himself a glass a water, and then throws it on Paul.) Up you get, Paul. We have a long night ahead of us. (He immediately turns away, proceeds to help Sarah with the equipment, and ignores Paul.)

PAUL: (Sputtering.) What the--! Hey! Why am I tied down?!

DAMIEN: (Distracted, helping Sarah to set up a tripod.) So that you don't run away.

PAUL: (Glancing at Céline, then calmly.) Who says I'd run away?

DAMIEN: (Without looking up.) If you knew what I had planned, you'd be a fool not to try.

PAUL: (Uncomfortably.) Oh.

(The others occupy themselves with the video equipment and ignore Paul completely.)

SARAH: No, Damien. This plugs in here. See?

DAMIEN: Right.

SARAH: And that has to be plugged in over here. Céline, could you help me with the sound equipment?

CELINE: Of course.

SARAH: I think we will need more light on him.

DAMIEN: (Moving a lamp so that it shines directly onto Paul, causing him to squint.) How about this?

SARAH: (Looking through the camera.) Perfect.

CELINE: (Untangling a mess of wires connected to two microphones.) I think that you should look at this, Sarah.

SARAH: (Still looking through camera and moving up to within three feet of Paul.) I'll be right there.

PAUL: What's going on here?

DAMIEN: You'll find out soon enough.

PAUL: Listen here, I demand to be let up! You have no right to keep me here like this.

DAMIEN: No right? I'm afraid you're the one who has no rights.

PAUL: I demand to be let up right now!

(Damien approaches Paul, grabs a handful of his hair, and yanks his head back so that Paul is forced to look up at him.)

PAUL: Hey, you're hurting! (Glances as well as he can at Céline who shows no sign of her previous actions as Dierdre.)

DAMIEN: Let us get something very clear between us; you are in no position to demand anything. Got that? (Lets go of Paul and turns to Sarah.) Now how's the camera?

SARAH: Everything's ready.

DAMIEN: Good, let's get started then.

(Sarah should be moving about with the camera, focusing on Damien or Paul as they speak. Paul should look annoyed occasionally as the camera comes within two feet of his face.)

DAMIEN: Anything you'd like to say before we begin, Paul?

PAUL: (Calmly.) I'd like to explain.

DAMIEN: Explain?

PAUL: Explain why I did it.

DAMIEN: Go right ahead.

PAUL: I read your play because I had hoped I might find inspiration there. That's the truth. I know it was wrong, but--

DAMIEN: And did you attempt to rape my wife for inspiration as well?

PAUL: Actually, no. That was... a mistake, a very bad mistake. I admit to it.

DAMIEN: Go on, I'm listening.

PAUL: Maybe Sarah should be the one to explain.

DAMIEN: Oh? Sarah, do you have anything to say?

SARAH: I could add a word. Could you take the camera, Céline?

CELINE: Of course. (Takes the camera and focuses on Sarah who speaks to no one in particular.)

SARAH: As I explained earlier, I came downstairs to talk with Paul because I was afraid that Damien had upset him. I felt badly about him being all alone and losing his passport, and I thought I might try to console him. He was still awake when I came down, so I sat beside him on the couch.

DAMIEN: How did he react?

SARAH: He seemed... like a child, like a little boy. He was very nervous with me there. We chatted quietly, and I told him that I sympathized with him and felt it was unfortunate that he had stumbled onto such rotten luck. Paul said nothing for a long while... and then he started to cry.

PAUL: Now wait a minute--

DAMIEN: Let her finish, Paul. You'll have your turn.

SARAH: His gentle tears effected me. I could tell he was embarrassed so I softly held his hand. He told me that he missed his fiancé, Anita...

PAUL: I didn't--

SARAH: And then I held him while he cried. It was then that I noticed that the computer was on. I gasped. He tried to silence me. He pleaded with me, but I would have none of it. Then he forced himself onto me. He attacked me savagely! He tore my pajamas and whispered that he would do terrible things if I screamed. I screamed anyway.

DAMIEN: And when did he print the play?

SARAH: Right after I screamed. To be honest, I believe he was trying to shut it off.

DAMIEN: I see. Thank you, darling. Anything to add to that, Paul?

PAUL: (Glancing at Céline.) Well, it wasn't quite as violent as all that.

DAMIEN: But you admit to it?

PAUL: (Sighs.) Why not?

DAMIEN: Very interesting, very interesting indeed. Now let me see... (Moves to computer terminal.) You had my play on the screen like this, and then... (Pause while he rummages through his box of disks. Then quietly, to himself.) Where the... (Louder, but calmly.) Where is it? (Paul, presuming he is speaking to one of the women, does not respond.) Where is it?

PAUL: Me?

DAMIEN: Where is it?

PAUL: Where's what?

DAMIEN: Where is it, Paul?

PAUL: Where's what? What are you talking about?

DAMIEN: You know what I'm talking about! Where the hell is it!

PAUL: I don't know what--

DAMIEN: (Leaning over Paul, suddenly ferocious.) WHERE IS IT!!

PAUL: (Very nervous.) I honestly don't know what you're talking about.

DAMIEN: Where's my disk?!

PAUL: What disk?

DAMIEN: (Taking Paul by the collar.) Where is the disk you took?!

PAUL: I didn't take the disk! I only looked at it on your computer!

DAMIEN: I'm not talking about that disk. That was unimportant; annoying, but forgivable. I want the disk you took!

PAUL: I don't know what you're talking about.

DAMIEN: I think you do. You saw me come in here and take out a disk earlier today when we first met. Then you saw me put it back in that

box when I came in for dinner. Now that disk is missing, and I want to know where it is.

PAUL: (Glances at Céline who turns away.) Look I admit to reading your play and I even admit to... attacking your wife, but I honestly didn't take that disk. I mean that.

DAMIEN: Then who did?

PAUL: I don't know.

SARAH: Damien, Céline said something about seeing him going through your disks when she came in.

DAMIEN: Is that true, Céline?

CELINE: Yes, as a matter of fact. I did not think anything of it at the time. He looked so harmless.

DAMIEN: Obviously he wasn't as harmless as we thought. Search through his bag, Sarah.

PAUL: Look, you're making a big mistake here--

DAMIEN: Silence!

SARAH: It's here, Damien.

DAMIEN: I see. So who do you think put it there, Paul?

PAUL: Maybe she did! (Points to Céline.) Did you ever consider that? I don't even know what's on this mysterious disk. I don't know anything about you!

DAMIEN: (After a pause.) Rot! Who are you working for?

PAUL: No!! You've got it wrong!! (Glances again at Céline who guiltily refuses to meet his eyes.) She did take it! Honestly! I'm beginning to understand it now!

DAMIEN: Alright then, you've had your say. Gag him, Sarah.

PAUL: Wait! (Glances at Céline for a moment.) I can explain!

DAMIEN: Go on.

PAUL: Céline really was going through your disks earlier. I mean it. She said she was looking for a disk that she left the last time she was here, or something like that, and she--

DAMIEN: Gag him.

PAUL: Wait! (Glances at Céline for a moment.) There's one other thing.

DAMIEN: Go on.

PAUL: (Frantically.) There's a reason why you shouldn't keep me tied down.

DAMIEN: Oh?

PAUL: Yes, yes. You have to let me up.

DAMIEN: Explain.

PAUL: I-I have a disease. I have diabetes and I need to have a shot of insulin.

DAMIEN: That so?

PAUL: Yes, it's true. I'm already feeling very weak. In fact, I think that drug you gave me is already having a bad effect. It's true.

DAMIEN: Diabetic eh?

PAUL: Yes. It's true. I was born that way.

DAMIEN: Rubbish. Sarah?

(Sarah, who has moved up behind Paul, gags him. Paul struggles against it, but is helpless.)

CELINE: (Slightly nervous.) Perhaps it is true, Damien.

DAMIEN: Oh, come on.

CELINE: But perhaps--

DAMIEN: Céline, do you honestly and truly believe such a feeble little story?

CELINE: (Weakly.) Well, one can never be sure with these types.

DAMIEN: Let me assure you that it is merely an attempt to escape. And even if it were true, (With mock emphasis.) who cares? Let him suffer. How's the gag, Sarah?

SARAH: I believe it will hold.

DAMIEN: Excellent. Comfortable Paul? (Paul grunts furiously.) Good. Now let's get this show on the road.

(As Damien speaks, Sarah is constantly active with the camera, sometimes zooming in close to Paul's face, sometimes standing back for an overall view. Céline should handle the microphone, but not with the same zeal as Sarah. It should be obvious that she is concerned about Paul.)

DAMIEN: I understand that you may not be exactly comfortable like this, Paul. Few people enjoy being tied up, though at times it is a necessary thing to do. I have seen a number of people in your position and it never ceases to amaze me how desperate someone can become when they are physically helpless. (Paul grunts.) I gather this stems from a fear of the one who has tied one up in the first place. But more than that, I would say that you are afraid of the unknown. You see, you have no idea what I am planning to do... and that frightens you. I can see it. Be careful, Paul. There is no torture that equals the imagination. (Pause.) Now tell me, Paul: What are you doing here? (Pause.) Who are you working for?

CELINE: He cannot answer with the gag on, Damien.

DAMIEN: Don't interrupt, Céline. So how did you get involved in this, Paul? Bored and looking for a little excitement perhaps? Go ahead, admit it. I could understand that. There was a time when I wanted a little action in my life. I was living in Africa at the time, and I managed to get myself caught up in a silly little war. Yes, Paul, I know all about tortures and the imagination. I was captured, you see. I was captured and dumped into a damp, little cell that reeked with the stench of its former occupants. My arms and wrists were shackled and I found myself as helpless as you are now. Sometimes I could hear the cries of my neighboring inmates as they underwent the painful indignities of torture. I would lie on the floor and listen, knowing that inevitably they would come for me. There was no escape. And do you know what I learned in those moments? I learned that my worst enemy in a given situation was my own imagination. Yes, Paul, my own precious and famous imagination. You see, few tortures can measure up to the anticipation of being tortured. For this reason, I learned to numb my mind, to focus all of my mental energies on a crack in the wall, a stain on the floor, or a wrinkle in the bedclothes -- anything to keep me from thinking of the inevitable. Because the actual torture, whatever it happened to be, was bad, very bad indeed, but never as bad as I imagined it would be. (Pause while he regards Paul for an instant and then continues.) Interesting, isn't it? I also came to learn a fair bit about that

little known breed of men: torturers. While now and then I encountered a bona fide sadist, my interrogators were generally nine-to-fivers; men simply doing their job to the best of their ability, nothing personal about it. They were not a particularly creative bunch. For the most part they preferred to rely on the dependable methods that have been proven effective and successful over time. Thus, I have been variously shocked with electrical current, penetrated with a wide assortment of hot needles, and horridly abused with water, to name but a few of the violations afforded to me.

CELINE: (Nervously.) What are you planning to do, Damien?

DAMIEN: I am simply stating the facts, Celine. I am warning Paul not to let his imagination get away on him, because that is a dangerous thing to do.

CELINE: But torture--

DAMIEN: (Ignoring her and becoming more violent in his speech.) Torturers can be impulsive. They are completely unpredictable and, in a rash moment, I have known them to make use of, oh, say a nearby sharpened pencil, or a conveniently open desk drawer, an open door, a burning cigarette,--

CELINE: Damien!

DAMIEN: (Silencing her with an upraised hand.) And especially their fists. (Calming down slightly.) Yes, especially their fists. My interrogators always liked using their fists. They liked to hit. The problem was that they never let anyone hit them back.

CELINE: Damien, what are you--

DAMIEN: The bastards hit you and hit you, but they never let you hit them back. I'm different though. Help me with these, Sarah. (Pulls on a pair of boxing gloves.)

CELINE: Damien, what are you going to do?

DAMIEN: Not to worry, Celine. If there's one thing I did learn, it's that it's only fair to give your victims a fighting chance. I'm going to give Paul a fair fight, Celine. Here, put these on him, Sarah. (She puts the gloves on Paul's wrists while he struggles unsuccessfully.) I am too human to torture him while he is helpless like this, but I am also human enough to want a confrontation. There, that's perfect. How are his gloves, Sarah?

SARAH: Good and tight.



DAMIEN: Excellent. Shall we clear some space then? (They push the furniture out of the way.) Now Paul, are you ready to do a little sparring? You have a distinct advantage in that you are considerably younger than I am, and I daresay you have some adrenaline pumping through your veins by now.

CELINE: Damien, do not do this. It is not right.

DAMIEN: Please don't get principled on me, Celine.

CELINE: This is not part of the... plan, Damien. You know what I am talking about.

DAMIEN: Things are different now, Celine.

CELINE: But you have been boxing for years. It is not fair; you will kill him.

DAMIEN: Cut him loose, darling.

(Sarah cuts Paul's binds while Damien takes a few experimental stabs in the air. Paul immediately reaches for his gag, but finds that he is helpless to untie it with the gloves on.)

DAMIEN: Come on, Paul. Let's see how good you are.

(Paul rises and is immediately pushed by Damien.)

DAMIEN: Come on, Paul. Give it a go.

CELINE: Damien, don't!

SARAH: Shut up, Celine. He knows what he's doing.

DAMIEN: What's the matter, Paul? Never been in the ring before.

(Having no choice, Paul begins to spar and is quickly beaten back by Damien. After a moment of scuffling with Damien clearly getting the upper hand, Paul lands a lucky shot that momentarily staggers his opponent.)

DAMIEN: Oh, nice shot Paul. Nice shot indeed.

(Angered, Damien starts to knock Paul

around so that it begins to look dangerous.)

CELINE: Damien, stop it! You will kill him!

DAMIEN: There is a distinct possibility that you are right, Celine.

(Damien starts to beat into Paul in earnest now. Paul begins to stagger.)

CELINE: (Dropping her accent.) Damien stop! It's gone too far! He knows everything! It was I who planted the disk in his bag!

DAMIEN: (Turns to her, dropping his guard for a moment.) What the bloody hell do you think--!

(Paul hits him hard in the face. Damien stumbles backwards, trips and hits his head hard against the wall, or some other convenient object. He moans and drops to the floor unconscious. A silence of four beats while the other characters take in what has happened.)

CELINE: (Softly, in her American accent from now on, smiling in surprise.) Jesus Christ.

SARAH: (Angrily.) You stupid bitch!!

CELINE: (Calmly moving to Damien and checking his pulse.) He'll live. (Feels behind Damien's head. Her hand comes up bloody.) There's a little blood, but I don't think it's serious.

(All this time Paul has been struggling with the gag, but can manage to remove neither it nor the gloves. Celine rises and removes his gag. Sarah sits beside Damien, angrily.)

PAUL: Ach! Christ! (He quickly gets the gloves off.) You fools! (He approaches the body.)

SARAH: Stay away from him!

(Paul stands where he is. Celine looks from Paul to Sarah and starts to giggle.)

SARAH: You stupid, stupid bitch!! What got into you?!

CELINE: (Beginning to laugh.) Something I've been meaning to do for a long long time.

SARAH: What are you talking about?!

CELINE: I've kinked your little plan. I've ruined it.

SARAH: That's bloody obvious! Why?!

CELINE: I have my reasons.

SARAH: Well what are they?!

CELINE: I wanted to get you back.

SARAH: For what!

CELINE: I don't suppose you remember a student production you saw back in London about three and a half years ago?

SARAH: What are you talking about?!

CELINE: An ambitious little project, too ambitious perhaps. We were young and, yes, inexperienced, but we were eager to try something new. Do you remember that show? It was called Freedom to Act.

SARAH: Oh, that one. Yes I remember it.

CELINE: Well I was in the cast of that production. You didn't know that, did you?

SARAH: (Quietly.) No.

CELINE: Maybe you remember what happened at that show. We had this little idea that it would be great to get the audience involved in the play. Remember now? The idea was that at one point a member of the cast would stop what he was doing and say, "No, no, this isn't working." And then he would turn to some unsuspecting member of the audience and ask him rather aggressively, "Do you know what this is all about? Do you? Come on, stand up and tell us then." Now usu-  
ally the poor observer would be so taken off guard that he would merely mumble something unintelligible and the show would go on. Then one night the actor asked his unfriendly question to a member of the audience who turned out to be Damien Silk. Do you remember that, Sarah?

SARAH: (Quietly.) Yes.

CELINE: Damien not only stood up, he stepped right up onto the stage and proceeded to tell us all, audience included, exactly what was

going on and how it was at fault. He made us out to be idiots. Of course by the next day all the papers had heard about how Damien Silk had kinked our ambitious little project. The critics had a good laugh, and Damien Silk got to put another feather in his cap at our expense. We were lucky if we could find work on the stage for a year after that. I was more fortunate than most and ironically I managed to get a job in the London production of Damien's hit play, Criminal Visions, but I vowed that someday I would get even with him. Tonight I saw my chance.

SARAH: You silly bitch.

CELINE: Call me whatever you like. I'm feeling too good right now to be bothered by your insults. I planted that important little disk in Paul's bag, something I knew Damien wouldn't be expecting, and then, just to make sure, I told Paul more or less everything in the hope that he would play along and somehow make fools out of you both. (Laughs.) But I never dreamt Paul would be so handy with his fists. (To Paul.) You throw a mean punch.

SARAH: Get out of here.

CELINE: I'm going, no need to worry about that. But I want you to know that your little games are over. All of Paris will soon know what I know, and believe me, this city's going to have a good laugh. You're washed up, Sarah. Both of you are.

SARAH: Get out of here!

CELINE: It was getting out of hand anyway. Sooner or later someone was bound to get hurt. You know that.

SARAH: Get out!!

CELINE: See you around. (Exits main door.)

PAUL: (Awkwardly.) How badly is he hurt?

SARAH: I don't think it's too serious, but he should probably go to a hospital.

PAUL: Christ.

SARAH: (Furiously.) That silly little bitch!

PAUL: That silly little bitch saved my life! Your husband very nearly did me in there!

SARAH: Oh shut up! It wasn't as serious as you think.

PAUL: What would you know about it; you weren't the one having your face turned into hamburger.

SARAH: He wasn't going to kill you.

PAUL: He came close, too damned close for my liking!

SARAH: Be quiet Paul! Can't you see I'm a little upset!

PAUL: Well I'm upset too!

SARAH: Look, it's over now, all right? You're alive and well.

PAUL: You two and your bloody games! You didn't even know what you were playing with!

SARAH: Would you simply shut up!!

PAUL: Okay, okay. I'll be on my way as soon as I get my clothes on.

SARAH: That's right, simply leave! He's probably dying and all you can think of is leaving!

PAUL: What do you expect me to do? I could have been the one lying there, you know.

SARAH: You could at least help me to clean him up. After all, you're the one that knocked him out.

PAUL: I never asked to be a part of this!

SARAH: No one's claiming that you did! It's over now and it doesn't matter anymore! Can't you understand that?!

PAUL: (Calming down slightly.) Okay, okay. This type of thing doesn't happen to me everyday, you know.

SARAH: Well it doesn't happen to me either. I'm not used to seeing my husband bleeding on the carpet.

PAUL: What are you going to tell them at the hospital?

SARAH: I'm not so sure I'm going to take him to the hospital, but if I do, I suppose I shall have to say that he fell down or something.

PAUL: You're not going to take him to the hospital?

SARAH: No, the press would be sure to get a hold of it.

PAUL: So? Nothing wrong with falling down, is there?

SARAH: Your problem is that you still think of him as a hero. Get it straight, Paul; the heroes are all dead. They've been replaced by celebrities, and being a celebrity means one has to be fastidious about one's image. Damien wants nothing that will make him look in the least bit clumsy.

PAUL: It won't make him look that clumsy.

SARAH: You don't understand. Think of what you know about Damien Silk and his plays. He cultivates a certain image. He tries to come off as a sort of mysterious mastermind, an illusive genius who's always two steps ahead of the crowd. It is imperative for him and his popularity that nothing tarnishes that image.

PAUL: Why?

SARAH: Because that's the way the world works. Keep them guessing and they'll beg for more, but reveal yourself to be a passionate whiner with a heart and a purpose and you'll be no more than a flash in the pan. Once they've figured you out, you're as good as dead in the art world.

PAUL: But how would falling down...?

SARAH: Because it would look as though he lost control. Damien doesn't lose control, at least not in the public eye.

PAUL: What are you going to do with him then?

SARAH: The first thing we've got to do is stop this bleeding. (Leaning over Damien.) I just hope that Dierdre was right; that it isn't very serious.

PAUL: Do you have a gauze or something to cover it up with?

SARAH: No, pass me that towel... Good. Now we'll just tie it up like this... There, that ought to do it.

PAUL: Do you have any smelling salts?

SARAH: I'm afraid not.

PAUL: We'll just have to wait then.

SARAH: I do hope that we're doing the right thing. If he has a concussion, that could be serious.

PAUL: I guess so. I don't know much about it.

SARAH: Neither do I... Oh, what a mess. How could she have done it to us?

PAUL: (After a pause.) Are the things that Céline, or Dierdre, said true? Did he really stand up and ruin their play?

SARAH: Yes, he did... But it deserved to be ruined. (Laughs.) It was quite funny really. He managed to astonish them all, actors and audience alike. At first the spectators thought it was part of the play, but then they recognized him and everyone began to whisper. The actors were dumfounded; they couldn't very well simply kick him off the stage, and they weren't experienced enough to ad lib their way through it.

PAUL: What happened?

SARAH: He had his say and then he sat down. The audience erupted in a ferocious buzz of questions, and then they started to giggle. The actors were helpless. They paused for a few moments and then tried to carry on with the play, but it was forced and no one was into it anymore. The grand finale came when we got up to leave and everyone clapped. Damien got a bigger hand than the players did. He even bowed, the bastard. Dierdre was right too; Freedom To Act flopped after that. A few people went to see it just for a laugh, but the actors didn't bother asking anyone in the audience what they thought the play was about.

PAUL: It sounds like it was a terrible thing for him to do.

SARAH: I suppose it was, in a way. But, then again, they needed it. They were far too confident with their petty little idea. They'd lost track of what the stage is all about. A play is play, and that has to remain first and foremost. The theatre is not a classroom, and those youngsters were lecturing.

PAUL: But he didn't have to ruin their show.

SARAH: No, you're right. I admit that Damien Silk can be a first class prick when he feels like it, but that's simply the way he is. There's no getting around it. If he were any different, he wouldn't be Damien Silk.

PAUL: Tell me about this game or play or whatever it is you've been doing to me.

SARAH: I thought Dierdre already told you about it.

PAUL: She told me some of it, but I still don't understand it all.

SARAH: It's very simple really. Damien was simply playing around. He was experimenting with drama, trying to see how far it could go, or at least, how far he could take it.

PAUL: Why the cameras?

SARAH: Part of the idea has always been to make a film of all our spectator/participants. We were going to call it "The Masquing Tapes." Get it? We were going to show you your part of the film tonight so that you could see your own fear. We've been filming you since you arrived, you know.

PAUL: What?

SARAH: We've been filming you since the beginning. There's a camera in that wall. (Points to the audience.) It's hidden behind that lamp. We got the shots of you and I together, of you and Céline together, and I suppose we now have the shots of you knocking out my husband.

PAUL: My God, you really had this thing worked out, didn't you.

SARAH: Obviously not worked out enough. There was a serious flaw in Dierdre that we overlooked.

PAUL: So you've filmed everything I did?

SARAH: That's right.

PAUL: It's incredible.

SARAH: We meant no harm. Usually people take to the idea when it's all over and they see that we are merely playing an elaborate prank.

PAUL: I feel ridiculous.

SARAH: Don't. You did what almost anyone else in your situation would have done. As a matter of fact, you performed quite well compared to a few others we've had.

PAUL: So you have done this thing before.

SARAH: Oh yes, but it's never turned out like this.

PAUL: But... why? Why do you do it? What's the point?

SARAH: Because it's something to do, Paul. It's simply something to do. How many times have you wondered how someone would react if you were to do something completely out of the ordinary to them, something absolutely out of the scope of their expectations?



PAUL: Like what?

SARAH: Like anything. I don't know. Imagine someone who quite liked you, who expects nothing but your love and respect: Anita, for example. Imagine her reaction if you were to tell her that... you'd murdered someone. Imagine it!

PAUL: She'd never believe me.

SARAH: Then imagine that you staged it. Imagine you and a friend setting up an argument in which you suddenly take out a kitchen knife, or even a pair of boxing gloves, and pretend to kill him before her very eyes.

PAUL: But that would be awful. She'd hit the roof.

SARAH: Or why not imagine one of your least favorite aunts, one of those elderly beauties who always has lipstick on her teeth, and who always expects the traditional kiss whenever she leaves. Imagine her reaction if you were to slip her the tongue as you stood on the front porch before the whole family.

PAUL: Ugh! That's disgusting! I don't even like to think about it.

SARAH: But you must admit it's funny to imagine.

PAUL: It's revolting.

SARAH: Oh, come on. Surely you can understand how fun it would be to unsettle some unsuspecting stranger.

PAUL: Maybe if you're on the other side of the fence.

SARAH: Well that's what Damien does; he shocks, he stuns, he appalls, he horrifies.

PAUL: But why?

SARAH: Because it's fun, Paul. Believe me, it's a riot.

PAUL: But to upset people like that, to take them on an emotional roller coaster for no reason at all. It just isn't right.

SARAH: (Smiling.) Are you sure you wouldn't find it just a teeny weeny bit entertaining to see someone else in the same situation you were in tonight?

PAUL: No, I wouldn't like that at all.

SARAH: Not even just a little bit?

PAUL: To see someone obviously confused and suffering? To see someone truly frightened? No I--

SARAH: Are you sure?

PAUL: (After a pause.) Well, it might be a funny thing to see, but--

SARAH: Not just funny, educational.

PAUL: Educational?

SARAH: Of course. What better way to learn about the human psyche than to see it trying to operate outside of its own element. What better way to appreciate the human condition.

PAUL: I don't know...

SARAH: You don't know because you've never seen it. Believe me, it's amazing what you can learn by shuffling someone in a loaded deck.

PAUL: Possibly.

SARAH: You just find it hard to accept because you were the one being shuffled.

PAUL: I was working with Dierdre, wasn't I?

SARAH: Not really. She told you some of it, but you weren't really in on the action. She wanted to run the show herself. You were as much a pawn in her game as you were in Damien's.

PAUL: I know.

SARAH: That's why you find the idea of the game so distasteful right now. If you were to move to the other side, I think you'd find it much more enjoyable. In fact, you should stick around and play a role. I believe it would be a truly edifying experience for you.

PAUL: Perhaps.

SARAH: I know you'd be good at it. I was very impressed with your reactions. You kept your... integrity throughout the entire thing.

PAUL: Thanks.

SARAH: I mean that. Not everyone could have pulled it off the way you did.

PAUL: Well, I don't know. I didn't really do anything.

SARAH: Exactly; it was what you didn't do that was so impressive. A lot of people have taken it all wrong. They whine and sniffle and swear they'll never forgive us, but you've proven to be more adaptable than most. So how about it? Would you like to play another game sometime?

PAUL: Perhaps, but I'm not promising anything.

SARAH: I'm so glad.

(Damien moans, but doesn't come to.)

SARAH: Maybe we should move him onto the couch where he'll be more comfortable.

PAUL: That's probably a good idea.

SARAH: You take his arms.

(Paul takes Damien's arm only to have it close on his own.)

PAUL: Hey! Ouch, you're hurting!

DAMIEN: There is this wonderful scene in Beowulf that is reminiscent of this. Have you ever read Beowulf, Paul?

PAUL: No! Ouch, you're breaking my arm!

DAMIEN: (Pulling himself to his feet using Paul as leverage.) It happens very near the beginning when Beowulf first arrives in Hrothgar's kingdom. The warriors have all gone to sleep for the night, and the dreaded monster, Grendel comes sneaking into the mead hall late at night. Big bad Grendel reaches for his first sleeping victim and grabs him by the arm only to discover that lo and behold that particular warrior, who happens to be Beowulf himself, has grabbed onto his arm and is holding it in a death grip.

(Damien twists Paul's arm in a painful manner so that Paul is helplessly forced to turn his back to him.)

PAUL: Ah! Stop it!

DAMIEN: Do you know what Beowulf does at that point, Paul?

PAUL: No! Please, you're breaking my arm!

DAMIEN: Exactly. He breaks his arm clean off and leaves poor Grendel to run home to his mother. (He lets Paul go.)

PAUL: You bastard! That hurt!

DAMIEN: I imagine it did.

PAUL: What did you do that for? Haven't you done enough already?!

DAMIEN: I should say not.

PAUL: You stupid bastard! I ought to--

DAMIEN: (Silencing him with his finger.) Uh, uh. Now don't get over excited, little man. (Calling to the main door.) Celine!

CELINE: (Entering by the main door holding a gun.) I'm here.

DAMIEN: Thank you. Sarah?

SARAH: (Preparing another syringe.) Just about ready.

PAUL: What?! What's going on?!

SARAH: I thought you wanted to play more games, Paul.

PAUL: But what about...?! (Looking at them all in turn as it dawns on him that he has been taken in again.) What is this?!

DAMIEN: This is merely another point at which the three of us get to have a good laugh at your expense. Ah, you little man. You little, little man. How you love a compliment from a beautiful woman. (Imitating Sarah in a mock earnest tone.) "I was very impressed with your reactions, Paul. You kept your... integrity throughout the whole thing." (Imitating Paul.) "Why thank you, Sarah. I try to be a good citizen and that means clinging to my hard-earned values." (The others laugh.)

PAUL: Y-You bastards!

CELINE: (Laughing.) How pedestrian.

PAUL: Goddammit!! (To Sarah.) You! I should have known not to trust you!

DAMIEN: Yes, you should have known. But having been witness to the way in which you've handled yourself so far, it hardly surprises me.

Despite what you may like to think about yourself, you really possess a strictly average intelligence.

PAUL: (As Sarah approaches him with the syringe.) On no. Please, Sarah.

SARAH: Don't fight it, Paul. You know the effects are painless. We have a few things to arrange before the final phase, and it will be much more convenient for us if you're out of the way for that.

(Sarah injects Paul in the arm and he loses consciousness.)

Lights.

ACT II, Scene 2

(Paul is slumped in the same chair unconscious, as in the previous scene. He is no longer tied down. The transition between scene 1 and scene 2 can be performed before the audience if the director should choose. While the lights are low, Sarah and Céline carry four tripod-mounted spotlights and a slide projector onto the stage and place them so that they are facing Paul. The women then set up three director's chairs on the outskirts of these lights. Sarah takes up a small bell and rings it softly.)

PAUL: (Awakening.) Huh? (Unable to see in the darkness he looks around.) Hello?

(The spotlights flash on suddenly. Blinded and startled, Paul stands and yells in surprise. Squinting into the light, he is unable to see the others.)

PAUL: Ah! Turn them off; I can't see! (The others do not respond.) I said turn them off; it hurts!

(Enter Damien disguised as an older businessman with a fedora and a cane. Both Paul and the audience should be deceived by the display. Damien moves slowly around the outside of the lighted parameter scrutinizing Paul while Paul blinks and squints back at him. After a moment, Damien sits in one of the remaining director's chairs facing Paul.)

SARAH: (To Damien.) This is the one.

DAMIEN: (Disguising his voice.) I see. I was expecting someone a little more... virile. More muscular. So what's so special about him?

SARAH: That's what we've been trying to find out. As you requested, the subject has been given a number of tests, none of which he has passed with flying colors.

PAUL: Turn those lights down; I can't see a thing!

DAMIEN: He doesn't appear to be very comfortable.

SARAH: We felt it would be more desirable for you to observe him under these conditions.

DAMIEN: Of course, of course. Now what about these tests?

SARAH: We began with a simple test of fidelity. You will be happy to know that I undertook that assignment personally. The following slides will be sufficient to confirm our results to you.

(The spotlights are turned off, and the slide projector is simultaneously switched on. On the wall behind Paul are projected large photographs of he and Sarah kissing on the sofa. The scenes change rapidly, sometimes showing Paul with Sarah and sometimes showing him with Céline. Paul, framed by the various images on the wall and unable to perceive what they are, squints and complains to no avail.)

DAMIEN: Hmm, very interesting. How long did it take for you to get that far?

SARAH: A mere fifteen minutes.

DAMIEN: I see. What else have you done?

SARAH: With a little encouragement, he gave us a grim portrayal of the various difficulties he has found in his relationship with your daughter.

PAUL: Daughter?

DAMIEN: And what, if I may ask, were these difficulties?

PAUL: What is this?!

SARAH: I believe that this cassette of his previous conversation with me will sufficiently sum up his feelings on the subject. (She turns on a cassette recorder and the voice of Paul is heard repeating his previous speech concerning his problems with Anita, [Act I, scene 1, pp. 34-36].)

PAUL: (In protest, but nervous in this new situation.) Hey, really, I don't think this is--

CELINE: (Standing momentarily, to Paul.) Silence!

(They all listen in silence to Paul's recorded speech.)

DAMIEN: I see. And how has my daughter reacted to the evidence?

SARAH: We thought it best to await your permission before presenting her with our findings. But I should warn you now, according to our sources, I doubt that these results will either surprise her, or alter her feelings towards the subject in any way.

DAMIEN: (Sighs deeply.) I see. So it is your belief that she is determined to have a child by this man.

SARAH: That is correct.

DAMIEN: I won't deny that I am disappointed, very disappointed indeed... Can the subject - His name is Paul, isn't it? - Can this Paul be of any use to our organization?

SARAH: We have run him through a series of secondary tests to find out just that.

DAMIEN: And what did these tests involve?

CELINE: That's where I came in. We placed him in a number of unnatural situations in order to gauge his reactions. For the most part, he was unable or unwilling to act with any initiative.

DAMIEN: For example?

CELINE: Early on, I made as if to steal some important documents from the host. The subject was curious, but easily satisfied with my lame excuses. He made no real attempt to stop me and was almost immediately pacified by my threats. Later, he accepted my suggestion of the host's insanity without any hesitation. He showed none of the qualities of leadership or intelligence that your organization requires; he is gullible, a coward, slow, and easily led. In short, he is worthless.

DAMIEN: I see. Was there more?

CELINE: We designed a little skit in which we had hoped his supposed creative side would show some promise, but we had no such luck. When threatened by the host with torture, he was quick to panic.

DAMIEN: What then are your final conclusions?

SARAH: It is my opinion that the subject in question is of little, if any, use to you and your organization. He has no professional skills to speak of, he lacks initiative and the ability to think creatively on his own, and finally he is not particularly intelligent. I would say that he is a typically inconsequential citizen,



self-centered and devoid of ambition -- a product of the postmodern era.

DAMIEN: But the problem remains that my daughter still finds him... attractive.

SARAH: I don't know whether attractive is the word I would use to describe her attachment to him. According to our sources, Anita is possessed by some deep-rooted maternal instincts. In Paul, she finds the perfect figure to fulfill that need. He is refreshingly simple and almost completely dependent upon her.

DAMIEN: Now let me get this straight. You say that this young man is of no possible use to me or my organization; he has no qualities that would serve our needs, nor it would appear, the needs of society. Yet my daughter intends to marry the fellow and someday, because of the nature of our organization, he would be expected to play an important role within it.

SARAH: That is correct.

DAMIEN: But now the question remains: what are we to do with him?

SARAH: I believe that with the birth of her child, the maternal desires within Anita will be fully satisfied and her attachment to the subject will slacken significantly. In other words, if Paul were to disappear in an accident of some sort, I do not believe that it would have any permanent effects on your daughter. She would be temporarily upset, but she would recover.

DAMIEN: Hmm. (Rises and paces as he observes Paul.) So she would recover, would she?

SARAH: In my opinion, she would feel the effects of his absence only slightly.

DAMIEN: Suppose we were to simply send her a farewell letter from this fellow and then send him on his way? Surely you must have some drug that would induce him to forget the evening's events. Wouldn't that be enough? I fail to see that it is necessary to... eliminate him completely, and frankly, I think it's a risky proposition.

SARAH: The risk to the organization will be much greater if we fail to eliminate him. There is no way to assure that any drug we can give him will be one hundred percent effective. We cannot afford to run the risk of detection. The secrecy of the organization is at stake.

DAMIEN: You're younger, and I suppose I should leave decisions like this to you. All the same, killing has never been the organization's

policy except under extreme conditions. Once you get started on that game, it becomes next to impossible to stop. (Stares at Paul momentarily.) But then again, I suppose these are special circumstances. Turn those lights down. (The lights go down slightly and Damien approaches Paul. He looks him up and down carefully and even prods him once with his cane.)

PAUL: (Extremely nervous.) W-who are you?

DAMIEN: (Ignoring him.) So how is this... accident to take place?

SARAH: We have a number of options. There is always the possibility of an auto accident, but a more convenient solution would be for us to drown him and then leave him in the Seine with a suicide note. I leave the decision to you.

DAMIEN: Leave the decision to me... I see. (Stares hard at Paul.)

PAUL: (In fear.) Please, I-I never meant any...

DAMIEN: I'm sure you didn't, young man. I am sure that you didn't. Unfortunately in my organization we cannot afford to take chances. Had you been able to contribute in some way, had you been able to show a strength or two, we could have used you. As things stand, you don't appear to have much to offer.

PAUL: Who are you? What is this "organization" you're talking about?

DAMIEN: I am Anita's father. As you have probably guessed, I have some rather important economic interests, and these people, who have been having such a wonderful time with you, work for me. When my daughter confessed that she was pregnant and would be marrying a young man by the name of Paul Weaver, I decided to investigate. It is rare that one of us marries outside of the organization, but it is done occasionally. I knew that my daughter had expressed deep feelings for you, and I had hoped that a place for you could be found. Your hosts have shown me that there is no function you could possibly perform that would be of any benefit to us. As a matter of fact, from all accounts you would probably be little more than an embarrassment. I'm sorry.

PAUL: But... What does all that mean?

DAMIEN: It means that we are going to have to do away with you, I'm afraid. (Turns to the others and makes to leave.) I suppose drowning would be the most practical. I leave him to you.

SARAH: Thank you.

(Sarah and Céline approach Paul. Céline points a gun and Sarah is loading a syringe.)

PAUL: But wait, please!

SARAH: Please cooperate, Paul, and we shall try to make this as painless as possible.

PAUL: No! Stay away!

(He holds the chair in front of himself in fear. The women move forward slowly. Damien turns for a moment and faces Paul.)

DAMIEN: Wait one moment. (The women halt.) I think there is one thing he should be made aware of before we proceed any further.

(Without taking his eyes off of Paul, Damien proceeds to take off his disguise. While Paul watches, his mouth hanging open in surprise, Sarah moves up slowly behind him with her syringe.)

PAUL: You!!

DAMIEN: I thought you should know.

PAUL: (Confused and flustered.) Then... then you're Anita's father?

DAMIEN: (Smiling.) No, no, not her father.

PAUL: Then what-- (In horror as Sarah injects him.) Oh my God!!

SARAH: Not to worry, Paul. It won't kill you. This is only temporary.

PAUL: (Already drowsy.) But why...?

(The women catch him as he slumps into his chair.)

Lights

ACT II, Scene 3

(Same scene, later. Paul is tied to the same chair in the center of the room. The desk has been moved so that it is now in front of him, and the spotlights are now positioned on either side of him. As before, he is unconscious and dressed only in his underwear. Sarah and Celine stand on either side of him. The transition between scenes can again be performed before the audience.)

SARAH: (Using smelling salts.) Rise and shine, Paul. Rise and shine.

PAUL: (Drowsy and confused, but determined to hang onto his dignity.) Ugh! Take it away.

SARAH: Now, now. We just want to make sure you're wide awake for the grand finale.

PAUL: (Cynically.) I thought you said you didn't have any smelling salts.

SARAH: (Smiling.) I lied.

PAUL: You lied. Of course you lied! You all lie, don't you! That's all you do!

CELINE: You'll soon see us do something very different. You may even find out the truth about us if you'd care to stick around.

PAUL: I have a choice?!

CELINE: You'll soon be given a very big choice.

PAUL: Oh, here we go again. More mysteries to torment Paul.

CELINE: (Smiling as she dabs his forehead with a wet cloth.) That's right, Paul. Here we go again.

PAUL: So what's on the menu now? Another act? Some more lies? Another complicated experiment designed to measure the breaking point of human beings? Is that it?

SARAH: Could be, Paul. You never can tell.

PAUL: I see I'm tied down once again.

CELINE: That's right, Paul. We still have one final phase to put you through.

PAUL: One final degrading humiliation, you mean.

SARAH: It all depends on you.

(Enter Damien from upstairs.)

CELINE: He's ready.

DAMIEN: Splendid. How do you feel, Paul?

PAUL: Splendid! How do you bloody well expect me to feel?!

DAMIEN: (Clinically checking Paul's pulse and beneath his eyelids.) Yes, you look to be in good condition. That last little nap did you well.

PAUL: I'm always better after my beauty rest.

DAMIEN: Happy to see you in such a humorous mood, Paul.

PAUL: Fuck you.

SARAH: (In an exaggerated mother's tone.) Oh, oh; somebody's tired.

PAUL: Fuck you too. All of you can fuck yourselves.

DAMIEN: Right then, let's get started. This is the final phase, Paul. The games are over now and "reality," as you call it, has officially begun. You are free to ask us any questions you like, and we shall do our best to answer them honestly.

PAUL: You can start by telling me just what the hell's been going on around here!

DAMIEN: Where would you like us to begin?

PAUL: Out of everything you've told me, what the hell was true and what was false?

DAMIEN: It was all true, and it was all false.

PAUL: I should've known I wouldn't get a straight answer from you.

CELINE: In your mind, Paul, it was all true at one point or another. We existed as the figures you believed us to be. And in reality, are men and women ever more than what others perceive them to be?

PAUL: Bullshit! Facts, what about facts!

DAMIEN: (Scornfully.) Facts. What is a fact? Are men and women facts in your categorical little mind?

PAUL: Fact number one: are you, or are you not Anita's father, and are you related to some clandestine organization?

DAMIEN: (Laughs.) No, no, I am not Anita's father, and although I am a member of an important secret organization, it is nothing like the one you are thinking of.

PAUL: Fact number two: are you insane?

DAMIEN: (Laughs.) How typical of you. Is insanity a fact then? I do like that. I certainly don't feel insane. And I daresay that neither Sarah nor Céline think me insane. Insanity is one of those social conditions that is impossible to measure objectively; traditionally, it is decided by popular consensus. Thus, while you may think that I am insane, I'm afraid that in the present context I am quite stable. (To the others.) Wouldn't you agree?

SARAH: You seem fine to me.

CELINE: A more lucid and balanced individual would be hard to find.

DAMIEN: It looks as though you're outvoted, Paul. Maybe you're insane. Ever pause to consider that one?

PAUL: (Struggling in his chair.) Don't give me that shit! You're trying to drive me insane, but you're the ones who should be locked up! All of you!

DAMIEN: Come, come, Paul. When the first colonial explorers landed on savage shores, the natives must have seemed utterly deranged to them, and vice-versa. In truth, they were simply experiencing different realities. We have landed on the shores of your personality and set up camp. And let me assure you, your standards and customs seem just as barbaric to us as do ours to you.

PAUL: Don't give me your superior airs! This is all bullshit! I want to know who you are and what's been going on around here!

CELINE: (Sighs.) To put it bluntly, we've been taking you for a ride.

PAUL: I can see that! And I'm beginning to understand how! I want to know why, dammit!

DAMIEN: Why do you think?

PAUL: You're the ones who are supposed to be doing the answering! You said you'd answer my questions and I want facts!

CELINE: And we are saying that facts are few and far between, Paul.

DAMIEN: We're trying to show you that the nature of reality depends on how it's depicted.

PAUL: Bullshit! All I know is that I'm tied to a chair in an apartment in Paris and I want to know why!

SARAH: Are you so sure that this apartment is in Paris?

PAUL: What's that supposed to mean?

SARAH: It seems to me that you were fast asleep when we pulled into the garage. Listen closely. Do you here the hustle and bustle of Paris?...

DAMIEN: It's noon out there, Paul. I daresay there's generally a little more noise than this.

PAUL: (Listening in stunned silence.) Then where are we?

DAMIEN: That is not important. At least not in your present condition.

PAUL: (Beginning to show the first quiet signs of real fear.) What's going on here?

DAMIEN: Let me ask you once again; why do you think you are here?

PAUL: As a victim! A dupe for you to humiliate with childish tricks and games that you try to disguise as art!

DAMIEN: You are right in presuming that we are partaking in an unconventional art form. But it is not what you suspect it is. The masque was only a part of it.

CELINE: That was nothing new.

PAUL: Then why?!

DAMIEN: Because Paul in your everyday life, "if" is a lie. You said it yourself; you want facts. Our job is to warm you up, to persuade you to believe that sometimes "if" can be the truth.

PAUL: What's that supposed to mean?!

DAMIEN: Part of our art is to make you, the potential artist, bring the "if" to life. The first step is for us to create a reality in which you have to function creatively.

CELINE: Unfortunately, you were utterly predictable.

SARAH: You refused to give up any of your hard earned illusions.

PAUL: What's this crap about potential artist?

DAMIEN: All right, Paul. Time to be straight with you. We are artists, very serious artists. Our goal is not merely to create frivolous dramas in which actors and audience participate unwittingly. We go far beyond that. We are partaking in the profoundest of arts. We create artists.

PAUL: What?!

CELINE: We create artists.

DAMIEN: We've been watching you for awhile, Paul. When we read your poetry in The London Writer's Forum, we saw the potential in you. We chose you as a subject.

PAUL: A subject for what?!

DAMIEN: We have decided to make an artist out of you.

PAUL: (A pause while this sinks in. In disbelief.) You what?

SARAH: We've decided to develop you.

PAUL: I-I still don't understand.

DAMIEN: I know that the concept is a little hard to grasp at first. For now, just accept that we want to sharpen up your creative skills.

PAUL: (Confused.) Do you mean this is some sort of twisted writing course?

DAMIEN: (Laughs.) No, nothing of the sort. I'm sure you've been to plenty of those. No, no, we are not interested in discussing your work in an airy group therapy environment, nor in assigning trifling exercises for you to complete. That you can do on your own time. We don't develop your skills; we develop your genius.

PAUL: This is madness!! What are you saying?!

CELINE: We make artists, Paul. We find someone with the potential and we fine tune them.



PAUL: But--

SARAH: You are hardly are first subject and you certainly won't be our last.

PAUL: But you can't make artists! You can't screw around with human beings like that!

DAMIEN: We can and we do.

PAUL: You're all insane!

DAMIEN: I can assure you, Paul, this is not as demented a notion as you may think. Many famous people have been through more or less the very same performance that you've been put through tonight.

PAUL: Then why don't they tell?

CELINE: Because no one would believe them. It's as simple as that.

PAUL: But--

DAMIEN: Also, the reward is great. When one passes the test, one realizes its importance. Much of that importance lies in its secrecy.

PAUL: What about the ones who don't pass?

DAMIEN: We shall get to that. For now let's talk about you. Let me just punch up your file here... (Presses some buttons on the computer and it starts to print.).

PAUL: My file?!

DAMIEN: As I said, we've been following your progress for a long time now. You showed some promise with that first piece that you called, "High Tech." It was original and well-crafted, though something was missing. Your second published poem, entitled "Window-splash," was far superior, but again it was lacking.

(A pause. Damien looks at Paul's file for a moment until curiosity gets the better of Paul.)

PAUL: So what was wrong with it?

DAMIEN: (Looking up.) Sorry?

PAUL: I said, what was wrong with my poem?

DAMIEN: It simply wasn't contemporary in spirit.

PAUL: Contemporary in spirit?

DAMIEN: No, not at all. You still see yourself as somehow the centre of it all. You believe that there's some universal truth, and worse, a universal right. You haven't come to terms with life's illusions yet. You have learned the tricks and cover-ups that every artist eventually learns, and you have chosen to fall back on them. You have sold out.

PAUL: Here we go with selling out again. So I haven't faced up to life's illusions yet.

CELINE: Exactly.

PAUL: (Laughing nervously.) You're all full of shit.

DAMIEN: Think what you like. Maybe we are full of shit. Then again maybe we aren't. You're the one tied to a chair.

PAUL: So I see myself as the centre of it all? That's not such a difficult way to see myself when I'm tied to a chair being scrutinized by three strangers.

DAMIEN: That's one way of looking at it.

PAUL: And I haven't come to terms with life's illusions yet?

DAMIEN: Exactly.

PAUL: You can tell all that from two poems?

DAMIEN: (Reading from the file.) I quote, "'Tis a joy to study the masters / in this aspiring season of shared dreams. / With love I urge you to bloom and plaster / many your own page with your sensitive theme--"

PAUL: Hey! (Struggling.) Those are private!

DAMIEN: This is one of my favorites. Something from your blue period: "The poetry in your eyes that lights the room--"

PAUL: You bastard!! You've been in my things!

CELINE: We are hardly judging you on two poems, Paul.

PAUL: You pricks!! All of you!

DAMIEN: Don't get us wrong, Paul. You wouldn't be here if we hadn't judged you as a potential. The skill is there, but not that final quality, that personal flame.

SARAH: Yes, Paul. Much of your work is very good. I quite liked the subway poems, for example.

PAUL: The subway poems?! But I've never shown those to anyone!

DAMIEN: Our research is very extensive.

PAUL: But how did you get your hands on them?!

DAMIEN: We have our ways.

PAUL: But you can't--

DAMIEN: Let us look at your present situation, Paul. You haven't written anything of worth for almost three months now, unless you count those asinine travel articles that you're so proud of.

PAUL: How would you know? Just because I haven't published doesn't mean I haven't been writing! You don't know who I am!

SARAH: Oh, but we do, Paul. It says right here in your journal, "What is wrong with me? I lie in bed and watch the movies roll beneath my eyes. The ideas are there, dancing, seething, frothing, yet when I get up to write them down, when the lights are on, when the page is before me, something short circuits. My thoughts bottle-neck and nothing can uncork them. They dribble out thickly, unevenly, like mud instead of water."

DAMIEN: Sounds to me like an elaborate description of writer's block.

PAUL: Jesus Christ! That journal's in London! How did you get hold of it?!

DAMIEN: As I've said, we have been following your progress for quite some time now. Do you remember when that diary of yours mysteriously disappeared for a week? You'd given it up for lost. And then one day, there it was, beneath the kitchen counter.

CELINE: (Mock seriousness.) And you were sure you'd looked beneath that counter.

PAUL: My God! Those-those are personal.

SARAH: There's nothing to be ashamed of Paul.

PAUL: But you can't do this! It's, it's unethical! You can't invade someone's private life like this.

DAMIEN: Obviously we can do it. We have done it.

PAUL: But--

SARAH: Now Paul, this is just the thing for a lonely ego like yours. Think of it. No lover will ever lavish on you the attention that we've invested. Imagine how lucky you are. You are not as alone as you thought.

CELINE: Yes, solitude would appear to be one of your greatest preoccupations. I quote, "Even with Anita it is painful to think that we will always be profoundly alone. Two solitudes forever catching glimpses of one another, shadows that dissolve the moment you reach out to touch them."

PAUL: You're mad, all of you! My journals aren't serious, at least not all of the time. Don't come off as I'm a frog on the dissecting table!

DAMIEN: So your journals aren't serious?

PAUL: No, not all of the time! Maybe you've poured through them and robbed me of my privacy, but you don't know who I am!!

(Enter ANITA from kitchen area behind Paul so that he is unable to see her.)

ANITA: Perhaps I do though.

PAUL: (Straining to turn around in his seat.) Huh?

ANITA: I said perhaps I know who you are.

PAUL: Who are you?!

ANITA: (Quietly, as she approaches him from behind.) I think you know that. (She covers his eyes from behind.) Guess who.

PAUL: Anita?

ANITA: That's right, lover. (She comes around the chair and sits on his lap.)

PAUL: (Looking around in helpless confusion.) 'Nita? What's going on? Do you know these people? What is this?! (She laughs and kisses him lightly.) What have they done to you?!

ANITA: They haven't done anything to me, Paul. I'm one of them.

PAUL: No!

DAMIEN: She's been with us all along. As a matter of fact, it was she who first brought you to our attention.

PAUL: No!

DAMIEN: She read "High Tech" and decided to find out just what kind of a poet you really were. She got your address from the publisher, watched you for awhile...

ANITA: And then one night when you were alone in the old Frog and Swan, I happened to wander in and tell you that I liked your eyes.

PAUL: No!

ANITA: After that I proceeded to tell you how I had recently broken up with my boyfriend, the accountant.

DAMIEN: That was my touch.

SARAH: She told you how lonely she was, and you took it from there.

PAUL: No!

SARAH: You were quite taken by her. I remember it distinctly.

DAMIEN: We were there.

CELINE: All of us.

PAUL: (Struggling.) No!!

ANITA: (Rising.) Yes, Paul. I'm afraid so.

DAMIEN: So you see, Paul; we do know a thing or two about you.

PAUL: (Desperately fighting back tears.) Anita, darling, lover...

ANITA: Don't take it like that, Paul.

PAUL: But then--then all the time together, the apartment, the loving... it was... all lies...

ANITA: I would hesitate to say it was all lies, but--

PAUL: But you aren't really, I mean, I mean, it was all false, wasn't it?

ANITA: At best, Paul, a self is a temporary rendez-vous of several personalities, and it's fair to say that you saw one of mine.

PAUL: I-I don't understand this...

DAMIEN: No, I don't imagine that you do.

PAUL: (Exploding.) You're telling me it was a pack of lies!! All of it! Everything we shared together! It was all lies to-to... Why?!!

ANITA: I know this isn't easy for you, Paul.

PAUL: You've set me up to ruin me! For six months you carefully set me up to ruin me!

CELINE: Not ruin you, Paul. Improve you.

SARAH: As an artist.

PAUL: All your games, your dirty lies!!

ANITA: Merely different frames. You see, Paul, it all depends where one draws the frame.

PAUL: But what gives you the right!

DAMIEN: The right? What right does the painter have to inflict his paintings on the world? The musician? Or, closer to home, the poet? We're artists too, and what we're trying to do is just as demanding both intellectually and emotionally. We refuse to be censored.

PAUL: But you can't create artists! Art involves...free will! The artist has to choose!

SARAH: We chose you.

PAUL: But what about me?! I'm not a canvas or a blob of clay!

DAMIEN: True. You're a far more difficult subject to work with. That's why we had to take such care in preparing you. In much the same way that a sculptor wedges his clay, we've had to lift you up and slam you down hard a number of times to get the air bubbles out. This way you won't explode in the kiln.

PAUL: What do you mean explode in the kiln?

DAMIEN: Through our little preliminaries, we have tried to make you

feel that the "if" is always a possibility. Now you are ready for the test.

PAUL: What test?

DAMIEN: You were right earlier, Paul; art involves the freedom to choose. You too are about to be given a choice. It's a choice that every artist must face at some point in their career; to create... or to die.

PAUL: To die?!

DAMIEN: For most artists this death is a spiritual/artistic one, but in an true artist it amounts to the same thing.

PAUL: (Frightened.) What do you want from me?

DAMIEN: We want you to create, to write, to give of yourself onto the page. And we want you to give it your best shot, because death is tapping at your shoulder.

(Anita, who has moved to a standing position behind Paul, taps him on the shoulder. Paul turns to find himself staring down the nozzle of the gun.)

PAUL: Jesus Christ! Take that thing away.

ANITA: I'm afraid I can't do that yet, Paul.

PAUL: (Looking around.) My God, Anita, you're serious!

ANITA: I am. We are.

PAUL: Anita, please. You wouldn't - you wouldn't kill me...

ANITA: I might.

PAUL: But lover... after all we've shared... you-you wouldn't...

ANITA: None of that was real, Paul. Only this is real.

PAUL: (Turning to Damien.) Please take that gun away, please. I'll do whatever you want.

DAMIEN: Calm down, Paul. It would be very easy for us to say, "Well, we've taught you good and proper. Now be on your way and don't forget what we told you." But this is much more than a visit to the principal's office. Our creations leave here - if, indeed, they leave at all - with a solid souvenir, a vivid reminder of just

how serious a game we play around here. You're going to write now, Paul. You have six hours to give us a poem. It can be anything you like, but it has to be you. No silly tricks, none of your cover-ups, no wasting time. Don't for a moment forget that we know you inside-out. We know your past, we know your present. We know your mind, and we will know if you're not on that page.

PAUL: Anita please, for the love of god, you won't let him do this, will you?

ANITA: It isn't just him, Paul; it's all of us.

PAUL: (To Anita.) You can't kill me in cold blood, lover. You wouldn't.

DAMIEN: That is just it: you don't know. It's obviously safer for you to assume that we might. You've already seen a sampling of the lengths we are willing to go.

PAUL: (Tearfully, to Anita.) I loved you.

ANITA: No, no you didn't love me. That too is an illusion.

PAUL: What would you know about it? I was just a specimen to you.

ANITA: I know enough to understand that what you were living was not the real thing. Remember your reaction when you thought I was pregnant?

PAUL: I know it may not have sounded ideal, but...

ANITA: I was never the person you thought, Paul, and you wouldn't have fallen in love with who I really am.

PAUL: I don't care what you say! It's all words, and I loved a living person!

ANITA: (Smiling gently.) You don't even know what love is. You think you're a romantic, but you keep the real romance locked up tightly between your legs like the royal jewels. That much was evident to me from the start. You don't know what it is to give, what it is to see beyond the fragile confines of your precious skull. You can't give of yourself to others and you can't give of yourself to the page.

PAUL: Why?!! Why me?!

ANITA: You happened to fit in, to be around at the right time.

PAUL: You mean I happened to be convenient?!



DAMIEN: No. It was more than that. You're a representative.

PAUL: A what?

DAMIEN: You typify your kind.

PAUL: What are you talking about?!

DAMIEN: You are typical. You're a shadow lost in a world of meaningless truths, bombarded with empty solutions to an insurmountable array of problems, and rather than admit your own insignificance, you take the illusions for reality and pretend that you are wise. You are living in darkness, a womb lined with lies, imagining bright futures where there aren't any--

PAUL: But--

DAMIEN: It's time for you to learn that it's all a fiction, that nothing is real. And it's time for you to express that fiction.

PAUL: But why?!! Why do it at all?! What's the point of humiliating people like you've done to me? What's the point of ruining people?! Are artists worth all that to you? Huh?! Because it sure as hell isn't worth it to me!

DAMIEN: Paul, I want you to imagine something.

PAUL: But--

DAMIEN: I want you to try and imagine a small fire that gives warmth and safety. Try to see the primeval tribe that sits around that fire; an elementary culture facing a harsh world with little more than that fire and their myths to keep them going. Can you see that fire, Paul? (Paul doesn't respond.) Their myths give them life. Their myths are their connection. It's dark out there, and the tribe is quiet, alert, listening to the night, and the storyteller. He shapes their myths... He gives them a past and a present. He makes them whole.

PAUL: (After a pause.) So you see me as a storyteller?

DAMIEN: We see you as a myth-maker.

PAUL: A myth-maker... I don't see how your labyrinths have encouraged that.

DAMIEN: And maybe you will never see it.

PAUL: You aren't really Damien Silk, are you?

DAMIEN: No. With a little make-up I can be made to resemble the playwright, but I'm not the real thing either. Anita told us about your love for Silk's work, and we decided to use that as a base. Now let's get started.

PAUL: But I still don't understand what you want from me?!

DAMIEN: I can't answer that for you. Maybe you'll never understand, and maybe there isn't any point. It's not for me to say, but I will leave you with one more thing to imagine. I want you to go back to that fire again. In fact, I want you to go even further back until there is just a cave. No storytellers or myth-makers then; not even a real language. The tribe - if, indeed, they can be called that - sits and eats as one. When they move, they move as one. When they think, they think as one... until one night. That night a single member disturbs the silence. Leaning forward, he takes a blackened stick from the fire and then moves to the wall of the cave. He puts that stick to the wall and he makes a mark... and then another. The others stare dully as one. Nothing but a few lines here and there, but it's made the difference. The maker turns and sees the shadows dancing on the wall, and then he walks out of the cave to escape the darkness and breathe the air. He is no longer one with them... He is one with himself... It's your game now.

PAUL: No.

DAMIEN: It's time for you to deal your own cards. There's no one else pulling the strings. Now let's get started.

PAUL: Damien, no!

DAMIEN: We can't untie your legs, I'm afraid. The fear of death can drive a man to perform the most absurd and desperate feats, and we wouldn't want any unnecessary accidents. We cannot untie you completely, but we shall otherwise try to make your conditions as conducive as possible to your craft. Now, I know you're not too swift with a computer, so what will it be: pen or pencil? (Holding one of each before him.)

PAUL: Please tell me you're not serious.

DAMIEN: Pen or pencil?

PAUL: (Almost a whisper.) Please.

DAMIEN: (Pronouncing the words slowly, with emphasis.) Pen or pencil?

PAUL: (Three beats, then with a resigned determination.) Pen.

DAMIEN: Ballpoint or plume?

PAUL: Ballpoint.

DAMIEN: And your paper? Lined or blank?

PAUL: Blank.

DAMIEN: Fine. Don't hesitate to ask if you should need anything else; food or drink, etc.

PAUL: Cigarettes and a drink. A strong one.

DAMIEN: Right away. (Sets a timer.) Six hours, Paul.

PAUL: (Whimpering.) Please, I can't possibly write under these conditions.

DAMIEN: You've never had to.

PAUL: At least take that gun away from my head.

ANITA: Sorry, Paul. I want you to feel the edge. That's part of it.

PAUL: This is inhuman.

DAMIEN: Write.

(Reluctantly, Paul begins to write. Perhaps the steady sound of a clock ticking or a heartbeat could be heard in the background. Lights fade slowly to black.)