

DESIGNS

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By David Quenneville

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*By the persistence of that which can end ,
to the neutrality of that which hurries after the beginning...*

Maurice Blanchot

Translated and Adapted into English

By Shelly De Vito

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CHARACTERS

BETTY: 35/40, owner of an art gallery

ALAN: 35/40, comic book artist

Telephone Voices:

SANDRA: Alan's latest girlfriend

JENNIFER: Press attaché for Alan's editor

MARK: Works in Betty's gallery

PATRICK FALLIERES: Owner of an art gallery

Alan and Betty's story could take place anywhere in the world. As long as there are men and women...

The play's action dances between dream and reality. In the reality, the two characters respect the positions of props and scenery. In the dream world, however, their movements follow their desires and imagination and may move in and out of scenes, space.

The lighting is crucial in establishing aspects of scenery and characters depending on the scene.

As dreams are the story's vehicle, the set will be minimal, stark.

The opening of a hallway is represented by fleeting lines. The importance is that it hints at a labyrinth-like structure.

Furniture: a coffee table, a chessboard with its pieces on a table, a mirror set to enable the audience to see the chessboard, an empty easel, a stereo, a couch, an aquarium, an orchid, a metal bookstand hosting a dictionary, two sketches, one representing Icarus, the other, a labyrinth.

Just as they do every Friday evening, Alan and Betty go to a film house and then find themselves at the apartment of one or of the other for a nightcap and a discussion of the evening's movie.

The credits of an old film roll down the stage curtain. As soon as the credits end, the curtain rises on a living room of an apartment in darkness. We are in Betty's home.

SCENE I

Sounds of voices and footsteps. Sound of a key in a lock. The door opens, Betty's hand reaches for the light switch.

ALAN : Can you get it ?

They enter into the apartment, bundled up in winter clothes.

BETTY: *(moaning)* Ugh! I'll never win with these switches. I'm always too high or too low, but never in the right spot. And that leaves...

ALAN: ...fingerprints all over the wall!

BETTY: *(lightly)* You find that amusing, do you?

ALAN: I find it funny because I have the same trouble at my place. The architects must be plotting against us. I bet that in their homes the lights go on instantly, as soon as they open the door.

BETTY: Sometimes I tell myself that if I get it on the first try, this wish or that wish will come true.

ALAN: And?

BETTY: And every now and again I hit it, right off the bat. *(Pause)* But then I usually forget what I'd wished for, so...

ALAN: Time well spent.

Betty takes off her coat and drops it on the back of the couch while Alan, frozen, rubs his hands together.

- Geeze, it's cold! I'm frozen.

BETTY: I'll warm you up!

ALAN: Ah-ha!

Betty goes towards the kitchen. Alan keeps his coat on. He sees a pair of stockings draped along the back of the couch. He takes one, brings it to his nostrils and closes his eyes.

BETTY: *(off)* What would you like to drink? Cognac, Vodka...?

Alan, deep in a nylon dream, doesn't respond.

(insisting) - Alan? What are you up to?

ALAN: *(dreamily)* I'm stroking my cheek with your stocking.

BETTY: *(off)* What?!

ALAN: Just kidding.

Alan returns to his dreaming.

BETTY: So, what'll it be? Cognac?

ALAN: Great. *(He coughs)* This dampness seeps right into your bones. *(Pause)* I don't know why I'm complaining; it *is* fall. If only I could be spared one flu season!

BETTY: *(off)* We're never satisfied. Too hot in summer, too cold in winter. Grumpy in the grip of our seasons.

ALAN: I agree entirely with your ideas on the human condition. But, I confess that I also agree wholeheartedly with your offer for a nip of cognac.

BETTY: It's a-comin', it's a-comin'.

Betty comes out from the kitchen with a bottle of Cognac and two glasses.

- Ah! The Friday evening nightcap that cannot be refused...The gentleman certainly has his habits.

ALAN: You must admit that some habits are good, even essential.

Betty places the bottle on the table. Alan fills his glass and downs the cognac. Too quickly – he starts choking.

ALAN: Wow, that's potent! But it's warming me up already.

BETTY: It's aged ten years.

ALAN: And well aged at that. *(He clears his throat)* Your orchid is splendid, my dear. Amazing. You must have a secret. You also give it...

BETTY: Just what you get, and also once a week. Every Friday it gets a little dose of cognac and "Voila!" it grows. I'm very proud.

ALAN: My hydrangea pouts...And I mist it every morning, just like the florist told me to. But it's stubborn. It refuses to cooperate.

BETTY: There's not enough light at your place, Alan. If I've told you once, I've told you a million times: your hydrangea would be much better off here. Oh, men! You live in these dark, dreary apartments and then you complain that your plants never grow.

ALAN: It will never be yours, Betty.

BETTY: It will die.

ALAN: Says you. I'm going to woo it, to cater to its every need. You'll see.

BETTY: You're going to woo it?

ALAN: Exactly. I'll chat with it. Every morning I'll ask the little sprouts what's new. I'll play Mozart for it. Your orchid will be shivering like a palm in Alaska while my hydrangea basks in the limelight.

BETTY: You talk big.

ALAN: We'll see.

BETTY: *(in the same tone)* Shall we have some music?

ALAN: I'm on it.

Alan gets up but falls immediately back down on the couch under the cognac's powers. After reconsidering the laws of gravity, he gets up again and goes to the stereo.

ALAN: Wow! That's powerful stuff. What's your pleasure? Jazz, classical?

BETTY: Don't know...Oh, yes! Rav...el.

Alan turns to Betty, the Ravel record in his hand.

ALAN: (smiling) Pavane Pour Une Infante Defunte?

BETTY: (Reminiscent) How we've listened to this record!

Alan examines the record.

ALAN: Maybe a bit too much. The grooves have gotten deeper.

BETTY: This piece! And all the memories...Remember the New Year's concert?

ALAN: My frostbitten limbs remember. Arctic temperatures and frozen like a Popsicle on the street makes it kind of hard to forget.

BETTY: (Dreamily) We were gorgeous that night.

ALAN: I'm never at ease in a monkey suit.

BETTY: Speaking of concerts, it's been a long time since we've been to one. I heard about a trio that's supposed to be great. It's three women, a harpist, a bass player and a singer.

ALAN: Three women? Whenever you'd like. I'm your man.

The first notes of the old record take over the apartment. Betty takes Alan by the arm and draws him to the couch with a quick movement that throws him off balance.

- Watch out. You'll knock me ov...er. (He gives in.) So be it. I give in and accept this musical interlude. (Beat. Then mockingly) Just like two old fogies.

Cuddling, legs on the coffee table, they toast each other, savoring the moment.

BETTY: I love this passage.

ALAN: It's so amazingly modern.

BETTY: Okay, you foggy, would you care for some pretzels?

ALAN: Ha! I thought you'd never ask. (Beat) Do you have any of that limburger left?

BETTY: Do I have any of that stinky stuff left? Do you really think I know anyone else who would eat it?

ALAN: Someone else might like...

BETTY: No. That stuff is yours and yours alone. In fact, your name is written in thick black marker all over the container.

ALAN: Many thanks, many thanks.

Betty pinches Alan's stomach.

BETTY: On second thought, I wonder if it was wise to save it for you.

ALAN: Stop. Knock it off. It's not my fault. It took me six months to find a pool that wasn't just for kids. Our good citizens' lives are controlled by those towheaded tots.

BETTY: You're the one who always goes on about how kids today don't get enough exercise.

ALAN: True, true. But nothing's stopping them from exercising on their own time, not mine!

She puts her arm around Alan's waist.

BETTY: Of course, dear. You know, I was just teasing you. (Beat) Personally, I like men who are a little...

ALAN: A little what?

BETTY: A little...cuddly. Like a teddy bear.

ALAN: I am nothing like a teddy bear.

BETTY: Oh, he doesn't like us talking about his belly. Oh, how you worry, you men and your fleeting abs!

ALAN: Not me.

He holds his stomach in.

- And besides, my abs are perfectly fine.

BETTY: Of course they are.

ALAN: So I work out, there's nothing abnormal in that. And it's more for others than for myself. Don't go comparing me with those guys who spend half their lives at Crunch.

BETTY: Of course I wouldn't...

Alan looks at Betty who is trying to contain her laughter.

- Works every time.

ALAN: Wench.

Betty, glass in hand, goes to the kitchen. Alan removes the record.

- So, what's tonight's line-up?

BETTY: Well, to kick off our Friday night events, we'll have a heated discussion about tonight's film.

Betty reappears with a tray holding snacks and a bottle of wine, a Médoc.

Then we have...Ah, yes! The spiciest part of the evening: the juicy details of our latest romantic endeavors. And if we're still feeling alert and perky, we'll add a splash of philosophy with an analysis of the rapport between we humans and our dear friends the dogs. Blend in some Ravel, Bach, Debussy, Art Tatum, Miles Davis and...Wash it all down with a nice Médoc wine of a fine year. We'll reinvent the world, just as we always do.

ALAN: It's supposed to be great for your health.

BETTY: Reinventing the world?

ALAN: The Médoc.

BETTY: (*surprised*) You read that article, too? That's pretty amazing, don't you think? We're reading the same articles now.

ALAN: (*Half-listening*) Pretty neat.

BETTY: Neat. I'd say more like eerie. Strangely eerie – especially as it's been going on for seven years now.

ALAN: Seven years? Already?

BETTY: It was at the opening at Daddy's gallery. I remember it well...You had that Slavic woman as your escort. A vulgar Slavic woman who spoke loudly.

ALAN: *(searching)* Ah, yes...*(his eyes light up)* Irina.

BETTY: Don't go all gaga when you say her name. She was nothing special, at least not the way she was dressed...

ALAN: *(teasingly)* True. But when she was undressed...

BETTY: *(dryly)* Enough already. That was seven years ago. There's a statute of limitations.

ALAN: Absolutely. The past is past! Wasn't it supposed to be at my place tonight?

BETTY: No. Remember, we went to your place twice in a row because of my neighbor problems following our last Brando evening.

Alan puts on a reflective pout and, miming, turns the accelerator on a handlebar. He smiles.

ALAN: Vroom, vroom!

Alan straddles the back of the couch and "kick starts" the motorcycle. Betty lifts her skirt to "get on the back". The bike "revs". Betty grabs Alan around his waist and they take off on an imaginary road trip. A certain sensuality should come through in this scene. Betty's hiked up skirt, her way of holding on to Alan...All of these gestures could be misinterpreted.

- Here comes the bend!

They lean into the curb. Sound of a crash. They end up falling onto the couch, legs in the air. They continue their discussion, both now upside down.

- Yeah, that was another Brando. A Brando requires discussion. One cannot remain indifferent.

BETTY: Try explaining that to my neighbors the sour-pusses.

ALAN: Why bother?

They turn right side up.

BETTY: You'd never seen that one before?

ALAN: Nope.

BETTY: Me, neither. Who was the director again?

Alan removes a piece of paper from his jacket pocket.

ALAN: Hold on...I'll tell you. Always prepared, he is.

BETTY: (pleased) Never mind. I know!

ALAN: Yeah? Who?

BETTY: John Sturges.

ALAN: Sorry. You lose.

Betty tries to look over Alan's shoulder.

No cheating. Three giant steps back.

Betty obeys.

Let's see...Ferry...1946...the director is Robert Miller.

BETTY: Interesting film. And avant-garde to boot.

ALAN: What makes you say that?

BETTY: Everything! Everything about that film is avant garde. The dialogues, the clothes, the actors' bodies. Back then women had hips, pinched waists.

ALAN: So?

BETTY: All the women are thin! They're wearing pants! The film was ahead of its time. Did you see the independence that woman had?

ALAN: Uh, I hadn't really noticed.

BETTY: Macho pig.

ALAN: (stunned) Macho...me?

BETTY: Yes. You. Macho.

ALAN: You've got some nerve. Macho. Me.

BETTY: Absolutely, Al...I mean: Macho.

ALAN: I don't get it, Betty. Not even a little.

BETTY: The film dates back to 1946! Think of it: 1946 and a woman goes away alone on vacation?

ALAN: (triumphant) Well, yeah. She lives alone...

BETTY: (vindictive) That's not the point. She goes away alone. That is the point.

ALAN: Maybe. There's still something that's bugging me though.

BETTY: What's bugging you?

ALAN: You'll say that it makes little difference but...all the same, it bugs me.

BETTY: What!

ALAN: It's been all these years...We could have kept...

BETTY: You're reminiscing about that Slavic...

ALAN: Slav...? No, but there's no denying that she had talents that would make a gay man convert.

BETTY: There you go again.

ALAN: What?

BETTY: You're getting that look in your eyes. You look depraved.

ALAN: I do not. I look like a man who experienced pleasures he hadn't had for a long stretch of time. (beat) I acknowledge that, in small doses, a woman can be nature's most beautiful gift to man. And far better for your health than Prozac.

Alan looks at Betty, awaiting her reaction.

BETTY: Sicko! And a misogynist bastard on top of it. You'll end up in hell and it won't be co-ed, darling. (beat) Okay, what's bugging you?

ALAN: It's funny, this need we have to transform everything.

BETTY: Transform what?

ALAN: *(staring at his drink)* So much so that...

BETTY: *(yelling)* Alan!!

ALAN: What's up with you? Don't scream like that, you startled me.

BETTY: Sorry, but you spaced there. The need to transform what?

ALAN: *(still staring into his glass)* The color.

BETTY: The color? What do you mean, "the color"?

Betty takes the glass of wine and holds it up to the light.

- The color is superb. The robe is perfect. The legs exactly as they should be. A Médoc of an exceptional year. Bozo.

ALAN: I'm not talking about the Médoc.

BETTY: Alan!

ALAN: *(snapping out of it)* I don't like the colorized version. I have the right to my opinion.

BETTY: The colori...? Okay, I'm following you now.

ALAN: You disagree?

BETTY: No...I mean, once I'm able to follow you... *(She looks at Alan tenderly)* I adore you. Simply adore you, Alan. You're like a child. You float about on your cloud and you're happy. Come here. Get over here.

ALAN: *(focused)* It really gets me. It's not natural. You can tell the color's been added. It doesn't look right. Like filmed theatre or something. It completely ruins the film.

BETTY: It didn't bother me.

ALAN: Of course. The only color you saw was in Spencer Tracy's eyes.

BETTY: Not at all. Go ahead, make me out to be some sort of teeny-bopper.

ALAN: *(passionately)* There you go—A perfect example of how wrong it all is! Did you see his eyes? Yes, you saw them. Sorry, but no one has eyes that color. It's not at all credible.

BETTY: Spencer Tracy had very blue eyes.

ALAN: Granted but in the movie they were fluorescent, like lasers. But Lana Turner, on the other hand...I've got nothing to say but "well done."

BETTY: Sure, she had brown eyes.

ALAN: Excuse me, but she did not have brown eyes.

BETTY: Really?

ALAN: Really.

BETTY: What color eyes did she have, pray tell?

ALAN: Hazel.

BETTY: Hazel?

ALAN: Perfectly hazel. And that's nice and subtle for the camera.

BETTY: Very, yes, very subtle.

ALAN: She even has golden flecks in her eyes. Like stars in the sky.

BETTY: Everyone who has brown eyes says that.

ALAN: They're not brown; they're hazel.

BETTY: Well then, everyone who has hazel eyes says that.

Alan gets up and goes to look at the color of his eyes.

BETTY: You okay? Have your stars fallen?

ALAN: You go too far.

BETTY: Woopsy. I've irked him.

ALAN: No, you have not irked me. But hazel is not brown. Of course, with your eyes there isn't much subtlety of color.

BETTY: How he can become aggressive if left to his own devices. Bastard. You always told me I had beautiful eyes. With some women we speak of their eyes, with others...

ALAN: Don't even compare. First of all, I was talking of the upward angle of your eyes, quite rare in humans. I wasn't talking about their color. The color doesn't matter; it's the regard that counts.

BETTY: I must have been dreaming then. All the same, you have a problem with colors.

ALAN: I don't have any problem with colors. I just want to see some respect for the old films, that's all.

BETTY: Go on, Mister Testy. All this because I don't agree with him about the color of an actor's eyes. You can be such a child at times.

ALAN: It's got nothing to do with being childish. I hate when you speak to me like this, that's all. I have my own ideas and I'm defending them. There are plenty of people who have no opinions on anything and who get swept up in any passing current. I'm not like that.

BETTY: You know, I love these moments.

ALAN: (*grouchy*) You do? We go at it about the hues and the color of Spencer Tracy's eyes and you love these moments?

BETTY: (teasing) So many people have nothing to say to each other.

ALAN: Are you putting me on?

BETTY: No, I'm proving to you that we're in perfect agreement.

ALAN: (skeptical) Hmm...

BETTY: I'll put on a record and we'll dance.

ALAN: Now? You want to dance now?

BETTY: No, I was thinking some time next week, but as you are so charismatic a man, I'm staking my claim now. A reservation, like for a table in a restaurant. You're like that oh-so-sought after table at Balthazar.

ALAN: Go on, mock me all you want. You'll see how this sought-after table can cut a rug. Put on your music; you'll see.

Betty takes out several records before finding the one she wants. It's from an opera. Alan doesn't budge. Betty, legs crossed, waits for her friend's show.

BETTY: (*maliciously*) Well? The sophisticated dancer is less than inspired?

ALAN: How am I supposed to dance to that? I'm no ballerina.

She bursts into laughter.

- What's up with you?

She laughs even harder.

BETTY: Just a flash when you said you were no ballerina. I got this image of you in tights and ballet slippers.

ALAN: You can be so corny.

BETTY: I could have imagined you in a tutu.

ALAN: A tutu... Great. Are you still going to San Francisco?

BETTY: Yep. Confirmed yesterday morning.

ALAN: For a long time?

BETTY: No, just two or three days. Will you take care of my monsters?

ALAN: Of course.

Betty gets up and changes the record (Miles Davis). She leads Alan to centre stage.

BETTY: If the gentleman would be so kind...

ALAN: No slow dancing.

Betty sensually caresses his hair.

- Don't start.

BETTY: What?

ALAN: You know perfectly well what that does to me.

She giggles and continues her gesture, even more sensually.

- Stop.

BETTY: Yes, I know what it does to you and it amuses me.

ALAN: Fine, so now that you've had your fun, quit it.

BETTY: It's like silk stockings.

ALAN: Betty.

BETTY: What? The man with the thigh high fetish.

ALAN: I do not have a fetish. I like stockings, as do millions of other men.

BETTY: Yes, but you have a thing for details. You don't get turned on from just any run of the mill hose...The stockings must have reinforced heels. The detail that makes it a fetish.

ALAN: Stop saying that word. I hate that word. It sounds so perverted. It's disturbing. The word fetish is always linked to some kind of sex crazed lunatic. That's enough of your stocking fun.

BETTY: Turns you on, doesn't it?

ALAN: Yes. Are you happy now? Can we now please exit my sex life? I doubt it intrigues Miles Davis much.

BETTY: But Miles had a very active sex life.

ALAN: I hope so for his sake.

BETTY: I'm sure that he had his nasty little turn-ons. How else could he play such sensual music?

Alan tries to break free from Betty, who catches him immediately.

ALAN: That's quite enough, Missy. Do I go around asking you if you prefer boxers or briefs?

BETTY: Don't need to. You know perfectly well...

ALAN: All right. Anyway, I'm not interested in underwear talk right now. We're listening to jazz and so...let's listen to jazz.

BETTY: Okay by me.

Long silence in which they continue to look straight in front of them. A strange distance begins to pull them apart.

ALAN: (gently) Are you wearing them now?

BETTY: (same tone) No way! With this cold weather? I'm wearing nylons.

ALAN: (disappointed) Geeze, pantyhose?

BETTY: There's a great thing about them: they keep you warm. And anyhow, you couldn't care less, right?

ALAN: I'm thinking of my fellow man.

BETTY: Thinking of your fellow man?

ALAN: Yeah. I think that if a man meets a woman like you, he's more likely to imagine you with stockings than with pantyhose. Now, of course, there are warped ones everywhere.

Silence, Miles Davis' lone trumpet rings out.

BLACKOUT

Later that night, we find them dancing. Many empty wine bottles can be seen on the table.

ALAN: And your painter?

BETTY: Over, too. Couldn't have lasted.

ALAN: I thought you were in love...

BETTY: Yes. But it's over.

ALAN: A wave of sadness overtakes her.

BETTY: No.

ALAN: Can't fool me.

BETTY: I just realized that I'd made an error in judgement.

ALAN: Bad in bed?

BETTY: No, a true sexual beast. A marathon man, if you must know.

ALAN: Well, well...

BETTY: Contrary to popular belief, that's not really my thing. Three hours in bed with a guy, you start counting cobwebs on the ceiling. Only stupid men worry about longevity.

ALAN: And...

BETTY: And Paul is one of those terribly stupid men. Plus, after our first night together, he already started talking marriage. In the morning, I got the “I wanted to be the first to wish you good morning, honey.” Oye!

ALAN: What are you complaining about? It’s nice.

BETTY: Sure, but at eight in the morning? And besides, I don’t like opportunists. He thought that by sleeping with me, he’d sell more paintings.

ALAN: You women are funny. When guys aren’t sexually obsessed they’re nice and if they’re nice, they’re opportunists. Doesn’t offer much leeway. So, poof! No more Paul.

BETTY: No more Paul.

Alan fills their glasses.

ALAN: Here’s to Paul.

BETTY: And you ? The actress?

Alan gets a photograph from his wallet.

- Her photo in your wallet, even!

ALAN: At her request.

BETTY: Since when have you been following the orders of a girl?

ALAN: It’s not like that...Here...here you go.

Betty studies the photo and Alan studies Betty.

BETTY: Ah, I see...I see.

ALAN: And?

BETTY: Yes, I see...

ALAN: Beautiful, don’t you think? Okay, maybe not beautiful, but.... She’s got a look that’s...well...

BETTY: Rarely seen today...It’s never in style, so it can never go out. That sort of look...

ALAN: But there is something magnetic that draws me to her face...I'm not sure what it is.

BETTY: Her teeth, maybe.

ALAN: What are you talking about? No, not her teeth. Back off, Betty. Perhaps she'd rather wear a retainer than have diction problems.

BETTY: Especially if she's a Shakespearean actress. A lisp might work wonders on a sitcom, but it's not too hot on stage. Married?

ALAN: No.

BETTY: Wealthy?

ALAN: Mmmhmm.

Suddenly Alan breaks out laughing; Betty does not seem surprised.

BETTY: Well done. I must admit, I believed it, not for long, but a little all the same. The part about the retainer was perfect. And then the photo in the wallet. Really. It deserves a solid C+.

ALAN: C+? You are tough. If you hadn't asked about her money, you'd still be falling for it.

BETTY: Doesn't matter. You know the rules. You were the storyteller on this one.

It is late. Tired, their discussion becomes clumsier. Alan puts his hand on Betty's knee.

ALAN: Ooo. Nice muscles, lady.

BETTY: Stop. I've gained weight.

ALAN: You're fine. Don't you worry. You're still desirable. A perfect candidate for marriage.

BETTY: Funny you should say that.

ALAN: Why?

BETTY: Because last week, I was out with the girls and you know what they were griping about this time?

ALAN: The missionary position?

BETTY: No, seriously.

ALAN: If it's not about the missionary position, I'm stumped.

BETTY: They asked me why I wasn't married yet. Amazing, don't you think? It's so easy to upset people's rhythms just by going at your own.

ALAN: (*lightly*) "What can I poke my nose into now?" Ladies delight. Just for the added self-assurance.

BETTY: They each have two kids and a husband (who, by the way, takes a beating at each of our gatherings), so we all must be alike. Karen is the worst of all on this subject.

ALAN: Karen? The one who wants to have a baby? The one who's always cheating on her husband?

BETTY: Yep.

ALAN: Of course.

BETTY: But I stood my ground. You know what I said to them?

ALAN: You said that you'd prefer the company of your dog to that of any man.

BETTY: No. I told them to try and find a guy who, after seven years, still tells them that they're desirable. Even if they are a few pounds overweight.

ALAN: Cut it out. It's far too early for liposuction.

BETTY: Still, I could stand to lose five or six pounds. (beat) Do you think a husband would be able to say to his wife that she's desirable after seven years? Honestly. I don't just mean on Christmas and birthdays.

ALAN: I don't know. I suppose so. I still think you're desirable, but with us it's different.

BETTY: Even a nice husband says things like, "You've been putting on a little weight, haven't you, honey?"

ALAN: *(pretending to be scandalized)* No!

BETTY: I told the girls to do what I do.

ALAN: You advised your friends to take lovers?

BETTY: No. And they've all got lovers, anyway; they're married. No, I said, find a good friend. A guy friend. That's what I said. Intelligent, confident, handsome... All the qualities that we find on a first date but that fade away after the first few mornings together. You know, a guy like you.

Alan goes to Betty and kisses her on the lips.

ALAN: *(proud)* You said all that to your girlfriends?

She curls up in Alan's arms.

BETTY: *(yawning)* I'm nodding off. I think I've had a bit too much to drink.

ALAN: I'll let you get some sleep. I'll call you tomorrow.

BETTY: No, wait. Stay. I want to keep talking.

ALAN: Like we do every Friday night. Once again, staying up until dawn. Remember last Friday when we went to see The Big Sleep? What'd I tell you?

BETTY: ...that you didn't want to be going home at sunrise every Saturday morning. I know. *(beat)* But stay, please.

She goes to Alan, nuzzles his neck.

- You smell good.

ALAN: Not gonna work. Bye.

Betty puts herself in front of the door.

BETTY: Over my dead body!

ALAN: Not every Friday.

Betty throws herself at Alan's feet.

BETTY: Dazzled by your flame, I prostrate myself before you like the two faces of Olympia. Let me kiss thy feet. Let me, my lord.

ALAN: *(unmoved)* I thought you were tired.

She gets up and drags Alan to the couch. She pushes him, falls onto him and kisses him passionately.

BETTY: Say it. Say it! Say it.

ALAN: Betty, what's up? Are you sick?

As if reassured, with help from the alcohol, she falls asleep on Alan's shoulder. He caresses her cheek.

- My queen is tired.

Gently he frees himself from under Betty and carefully lays her down on the couch.

BLACKOUT

The apartment is in shadowy darkness. Just one source lights the couch. All is quiet. Night takes over. The phone rings. Betty comes out from her bedroom, rubbing her eyes. She goes to the phone and picks it up.

BETTY: *(with eyes closed)* Hello, Alan....What time is it...? Four in the morning? Are you sick? No...I should look at what...? The moon? What's up with the moon...? It's full. Good for the moon... Yes, I was sleeping very well, thank you.... I don't care if normally people can't sleep when there's a full moon... No, no. No need to come over. I can see the moon on my own, from my own bed.... The view is better from my couch?

Mumbling, she goes to where Alan has suggested.

Yes, yes. You're right. I see it better....No. Don't bother with your astronomic binoculars. I'm falling asleep anyway. Hello? Oh, what a pest he can be! Hello? Okay. **BETTY:** We'll make a wish at the same time. No, I'm not getting my opera glasses out. I can't see straight with them.

She unwillingly gets up and gets the opera glasses. She lies down on the couch.

BETTY: Give me a second to get set up... Yes, I see the Copernicus crater. And opposite right the Sea of Tranquility. And you know that not too far right is the Sea of Crisis. You see what I mean? No. I'm not mad at you, but I am exhausted. I'd like to sleep. My plane leaves in a few hours.

Unable to keep her eyes open, she puts the phone receiver on the floor and almost immediately falls asleep.

BLACKOUT

From this point, Betty's apartment will be less lit. The characters are lit equally, as if a light emitted from each. A third piece of artwork that had not been present at the beginning of the play is now on the easel. It is a sketch of two overlapping faces. A man's and a woman's. The phone rings and the answering machine picks up.

BETTY (outgoing message): Good morning or evening. Not in at the moment. You can leave me a message or a fax at this number. And for those of you who confuse the words "not in" with "break on in guys, no one's home" I'd like to inform you that a magnificent canine specimen answering to the name bulldozer will be here to greet you.

BETTY (incoming message): Hello? Hello? Alan? You're not there. Are you in the shower? On the john with a good book? Fine. I'll call you from the airport. I'll call you later. Don't forget my monsters. Bye-bye. Beep. Beep. Beep.

Alan comes out of the bathroom, book in hand. He's in a T-shirt and boxers. He looks at his book, grins and then goes to the phone.

ALAN: Hello? Hello? Betty? Shoot! What's that message?

He presses a button on the answering machine.

BETTY (outgoing message): Good morning or evening. Not in at the moment. You can leave me a message or a fax at this number. And for those of you who confuse the words "not in" with "break on in guys, no one's home" I'd like to inform you that a magnificent canine specimen answering to the name bulldozer will be here to greet you.

ALAN: Bulldozer!

Pretending to call this dog, hitting his hands against his thighs.

ALAN: Bulldozer! (*Laughs*) Bulldozer...bulldozer. What have you come up with this time, Betty? Bulldozer. (*still talking to the imaginary dog*) Come here, boy! As for the monsters, I'd completely forgotten about them.

He goes into the kitchen and comes out almost immediately.

- I'd be happy to water them, but with what?

Alan looks at the new sketch.

- I know that I saw that thing around here somewhere.

He opens the door to Betty's room, closes it and then opens it again.

- She's always leaving her stuff around.

He goes into her room and comes back out with a skirt and a pair of stockings.

- I'd swear she does it on purpose.

He caresses Betty's clothes for a moment before going back into her room. He comes out almost immediately and goes into the bathroom, coming out again with a watering can filled with sunflowers.

- I knew it was somewhere.

His arms filled with sunflowers, he places them on the floor.

- Don't you worry, it's for your comrades.

Alan goes to the kitchen and comes out with the watering can filled with water, some drops falling to the floor. He waters the plants and then looks at the sunflowers.

- See?

BLACKOUT

Two days later... The sound of light jazz: "Laura" by Don Byas fills the apartment. Alan is sitting cross-legged on the floor, working on his drawings on the coffee table by the light of a candle. The music and dim light make this scene appear slightly unreal. Alan takes a break. He stretches. With head in hands, he looks at the sketch of the two faces. Someone knocks at the door. Alan, taken in by the sketch, does not respond immediately. Again, the knock.

ALAN: Coming! Coming! Just a sec...Betty! I didn't expect you so soon.

BETTY: Charming. Why? Am I disturbing you? You're not alone?

ALAN: Of course I'm alone. You'd said your plane would get in around ten.

BETTY: I took an early flight. Can I enter my home?

ALAN: Uh, oh, sorry. Come on in. Are your paintings in here?

He takes her suitcase and carries it to the couch.

BETTY: No. Just a hundred chocolate bars. I'm a fake. Did you have people over?

ALAN: People over?

BETTY: Yeah. I don't know...guys...gals?

ALAN: Gals?

BETTY: You could have had one over. I asked you to apartment-sit, not to join a monastery.

ALAN: It might seem a little strange to you, but I can't really picture myself doing that at your place.

BETTY: Why not? Do you need a director? Some special kind of lighting?

ALAN: No, but, you know, I can control my libido for three whole days.

BETTY: Oh, really? Wasn't it you who said you had a certain rhythm to maintain?

ALAN: No more so than the next guy. I'm merely a man.

BETTY: Who are you spying on?

Betty opens the curtains. Winter's soft light fills the apartment.

ALAN: I like drawing with limited light. I feel like I'm in a shell – see what I mean?

BETTY: No, but whatever inspires you. Let the artists express themselves.

ALAN: So, how'd it go?

BETTY: Just a minute, I'll tell you.

She takes off a shoe and rubs her foot.

-My feet are all swollen from the flight.

ALAN: Allow me.

Alan kneels at Betty's feet and massages them.

BETTY: Oh, that feels good.

ALAN: I like giving foot massages. I should have been a masseur.

BETTY: Yuck! Feeling people's feet all day long...

He stops his massaging.

- Oh, go on, please go on.

ALAN: So, good, okay or bad?

BETTY: A bit of all three.

ALAN: Meaning...?

BETTY: Some things were quite good, others bad and others nothing to write home about. Like in life.

ALAN: Explain. Is the Weller Gallery taking the work or not?

Silence. Then, as if she were waking from a dream, her face changes expression. She lies down on the couch and rests her head on Alan's lap.

BETTY: You know my rules about punctuality, don't you?

ALAN: On that you can be sure.

BETTY: So, my plane arrives at 10:28 as planned. But no one's there to pick me up at the airport.

ALAN: Not very hospitable.

BETTY: Don't get me started. I take control of the situation though. I find a taxi and go to the gallery.

Betty pauses.

ALAN: And it was closed.

BETTY: No, luckily no. But Weller was nowhere to be found.

ALAN: Rather absent-minded, this Weller. He didn't just forget that you were arriving?

BETTY: Not absent-minded. Macho. Far worse. Decadent masculinity. In the flesh. His highness was stuck on the 7th hole.

ALAN: The 7th hole?

BETTY: Yes, the 7th hole. I'm no golf pro, but I do know that a golf course has either nine holes or double that. Fortunately for me, Mr. Weller starts his days with just a little 9-hole.

ALAN: So, what did you do?

BETTY: You can imagine the state I was in. I said to myself, "Okay, I'll take a stroll, come back and whack him."

She knocks Alan over with her gesture. He falls to the floor.

ALAN: And...

BETTY: And so, I whacked him.

ALAN: What?!

BETTY: At least one hundred times in my mind while I was watching the ducks on the lake. You find this funny?

ALAN: It's the image of you in your little suit watching the ducks.

BETTY: Not funny at all. Believe me. Eight hours on a plane and no one to welcome me.

ALAN: Did you end up seeing this guy or not?

BETTY: Yes, at the end of the morning, all smiles in his pearl grey suit.

ALAN: Elegant.

BETTY: True, true. Seductive even.

ALAN: So, you knew what to do and Weller took the paintings.

BETTY: What's that supposed to mean? "You knew what to do?"

ALAN: It means that you're a professional, my dear. I'm very happy for you. And Decasso will be ecstatic.

BETTY: As long as his check arrives, he doesn't give a damn. The rest doesn't matter.

ALAN: Come on...A partnership with the Weller Gallery. Damn. Kudos, my dear. It's the window to the world. He'll have a collection of English classic cars in no time, that little house painter, Decasso.

BETTY: Now the paintings have to sell. And my monsters?

ALAN: In perfect health. See for yourself.

She kisses him.

BETTY: You're a love. Well, I'm going to change. I cannot stand to be in these clothes a minute longer.

She goes into the bathroom.

BETTY (*off*): Where'd this vase come from?

ALAN: I thought it would go well in the bathroom.

BETTY: It's wonderful. Thank you.

She goes into her bedroom.

- You put my clothes away?

ALAN: Uh, yeah. I couldn't find your watering can, so I opened the bedroom door and I saw...so...I put them away.

BETTY: And well done at that. Tops with tops. Skirts with skirts. A real chamber maid. And you, did you go out some? Did you go see the trio?

ALAN: We said we'd go together. No, I worked on my drawings.

BETTY: We're good together, huh?

ALAN: Yep.

BETTY: A loved one, a good wine, a comfy sofa and all is well.

ALAN: You'd think we were in a TV commercial.

BETTY: Exactly. It is a commercial. An ad for happiness. I want the whole world to see us.

ALAN: Not me. And besides, your happiness is not necessarily the world's.

BETTY: You have to learn to recognize happiness. That's all. What is their happiness? Going on vacation in order to make love? Two weeks of fornication a year? First of all, just because you're tan doesn't mean that you can fuck any better. Don't you agree?

ALAN: Sure. But I don't see where..

BETTY: Do you think they're looking at us?

ALAN: No...Except the pervert across the way.

BETTY: I don't mean him. I mean, do you think the people on the street can sense our happiness just by seeing the light coming from the apartment?

ALAN: I doubt highly that people would have any more fun watching this apartment than they would any other.

BETTY: Of course they would.

ALAN: Why?

BETTY: Because it gives off such a wonderful light.

ALAN: We're happy. I'll give you that. Even very happy. Your apartment is charming. We're good friends. We haven't seen each other for three days. Now, that people should stop to look at the light radiating from this apartment...?

BETTY: We have to take advantage of these magic moments.

ALAN: We're good. Don't go overboard.

BETTY: I'm not going overboard. I'm just aware of the blissful moments we share. Most people spend their time seeking these moments in others. They try to reproduce other people's happiness, as if they could do a cut and paste job.

ALAN: What are you talking about?

BETTY: Happiness is a breeze if you're the architect and not the photographer.

ALAN: I've no idea where you're going with this, Betty. Has your trip...?

BETTY: Opened my eyes?! Yes. People need to have landmarks in life. Like little lighthouses. At first, it's Mommy's breast. Later, Daddy's muscles. (*She takes on a child's voice*) "My Daddy's bigger than your daddy." What do we call that? People serve as reference points. But we're not supposed to let them know it, right?

In her enthusiasm, she knocks over her glass.

- No biggie. It's white wine...good luck...or so they say.

ALAN: There's no need to wake up the whole building.

BETTY: I don't give a fuck. They close themselves into their pigeonholes so they can never get out again! Do you hear me? Never out again.

ALAN: That's their business. You don't have the right to disturb their lives.

BETTY: (*violent*) Their happiness is based on ordered human classification, all neat and tidy. And in you go! Into your pigeonholes! Their cars, their paid vacations, their sadness. Perfectly pathetic. Do you know the definition of happiness? Well I'll give it to you.

She goes to the dictionary on the reading stand.

So, Happiness: the state of well-being, of felicity. You see? It's that simple. The state of well-being...You've never passed by someone's home, seen a light in the window and wanted to go in? To be like a little mouse?

ALAN: It's called voyeurism, Betty.

BETTY: There are so many things behind these lights. So many...First, the sad ones. Those don't shine for very long. When we've got nothing to say to each other, might as well go to bed. There's no obligation to talk when you're sleeping. And then there are the eternal...

Alan disappears into the labyrinth-like hall. Betty continues, facing the audience.

- Those that go all night. Long...Long. Faithful to my scintillating and proud dreams. But when sadness overpowers an eternal, I feel such sorrow, so alone.

ALAN: I knew about the insomnia, but I'd never heard your chapter on sleepwalking.

BETTY: (*as if she hasn't heard Alan*) Their problem is that their idea of happiness burns them up as quickly as stars fall from the sky because their happiness is not really theirs. (*Change of tone*) That doesn't mean that all sleepwalkers are brimming with joy.

ALAN: (*as if he'd never left*) Is that so?

BETTY: It's my imagination's interpretation, that's all. Hold me tight.

A long moment in which we see their intertwined silhouettes. As if the moonlight were meant only for them. The telephone rings. The machine picks up.

ALAN: Ah, yeah. Great message.

BETTY: Must be Weller.

BETTY (outgoing message): Good morning or evening. Not in at the moment. You can leave me a message or a fax at this number. And for those of you who confuse the words “not in” with “break on in guys, no one’s home” I’d like to inform you that a magnificent canine specimen answering to the name bulldozer will be here to greet you.

SANDRA’s VOICE: Hello, Alan? It’s Sandra. Are you there, cupcake?

BETTY: No, not Weller. (*hushed voice*) Cupcake? Why not buttercup? Utterly ridiculous.

ALAN: She’s a friend. I gave her your number, since I was staying here...

BETTY: I managed to figure that out.

She rolls her eyes. Alan gestures to her to keep quiet. She stands close to Alan, listening in on the receiver.

ALAN: Hello? Hello. Sandra? Excuse me. I was working on a tricky drawing.

SANDRA’s VOICE: It’s not a good time?

ALAN: No, no. It’s fine now.

SANDRA’s VOICE: You’re sure?

ALAN: Yeah, yeah. It’s fine.

SANDRA’s VOICE: Do you know why I’m calling?

ALAN: Hmm...No.

He gestures “get away” to Betty.

SANDRA’s VOICE: I wanted to talk to you.

ALAN: That I did guess.

BETTY: Intelligent to boot!

ALAN: Shhh...

SANDRA’s VOICE: What?

ALAN: Nothing. I'm here.

He again gestures "get away" to Betty.

SANDRA'S VOICE: I wanted to talk the way we did last night.

BETTY: Very interesting.

ALAN: Cut it out.

SANDRA'S VOICE: I wanted to hear your words again.

Embarrassed, Alan turns away from Betty who immediately follows him.

- Hello? Alan? Are you still there?

ALAN: Uh, yeah. I'm still here.

SANDRA'S VOICE: Were you talking to the dog?

ALAN: Dog? Oh, yeah, the dog. Exactly. *(Alan shoos Betty away)* Go dog. Lie down. Go.

SANDRA'S VOICE: Alan, talk to me. I'm ready.

ALAN: You're ready. But...I can't now.

SANDRA'S VOICE: Why not? Don't tell me that you've run out of inspiration after all you said to me last night. I could sense your wide range. Tell me that thing about when you're under the table at my office...

BETTY: *(mocking)* Yes, please, tell us! Pretty please.

ALAN: I can't! I can't, Sandra. I...it has to be at night. In the daytime nothing comes out. I mean...

Betty takes the telephone from Alan's hands before he has time to react.

BETTY: Hello, Sandra? Hello. This is Betty, the owner of this apartment. Alan is without inspiration. Nothing's coming out of him today. In any case, I'm not getting anything.

SANDRA's VOICE: Uh, I'll call back later.

BETTY: Ta da!

She hangs up the phone and looks at Alan with pride.

ALAN: Do you know what you've just done?

BETTY: Absolutely.

ALAN: And you're okay with it?

BETTY: I'd say. I believe I've just saved you from a royal pain in the ass.

ALAN: How can you say that? You don't even know her.

BETTY: Her perfume tells me plenty.

ALAN: Her perfume? *(He sniffs the receiver)* My compliments. Your sense of smell is highly acute. Through the telephone receiver. Very good, Betty. Very good.

BETTY: My sense of smell is OK, but you're senses are all numb, poor boy.

Alan sniffs at his jacket.

- Cheap dime store toilet water. When a woman wears that type of...fragrance...you can be sure the rest is...well..I understand what I'm saying.

ALAN: Please stop! And anyway, it's probably my mother's perfume. *(beat)* She dropped by to bring me some clean shirts.

BETTY: This is not your mother's perfume. I know your mother's perfume. This here is a cheap dime store "eau de toilette" for a cat in heat.

ALAN: Whatever! I'm telling you it's the new perfume my step-father gave her for their wedding anniversary.

BETTY: And I'm telling you it's the cheap perfume of that girl.

ALAN: Are you trying to start something here?

BETTY: I'm trying to warn you of the impending danger.

ALAN: But there is no danger. What are you talking about?

BETTY: And the other one? Do you still see her?

ALAN: What other one? You mean Jennifer?

BETTY: Yeah. Must be her. What a common name.

ALAN: All right, Betty. All right.

BETTY: So.

ALAN: So, what?

BETTY: Are you still seeing her?

ALAN: From time to time. She's nice and our evenings are enriching.

BETTY: As often as we see each other?

ALAN: (*fed up*) What? There aren't any rules, if that's what you mean. We just want to...

BETTY: (*arrogant*) To fuck.

ALAN: To see each other. To talk.

BETTY: She's left marks Alan. This girl has left her marks in your head the way other girls leave scratch marks on guys' backs. Less spectacular, but equally efficient. This woman leaves you tactless.

ALAN: Always the extremist. I'm talking about a friend and you...

BETTY: Marvelous evenings. Profoundly enriching, you say.

ALAN: (*exploding*) Fine. But fucking is fucking and talking is talking. You don't have exclusive rights to my intellectual evenings, you know. And I'm not just a joystick, as you seem to be implying.

BETTY: And the Friday when you almost cancelled "us" with your lame excuse.

ALAN: I wasn't making excuses. And there was nothing lame about my reason.

BETTY: Lame! Lame! Lame!

ALAN: You're just going off on anything! I had to finish my drawings for my editor.

BETTY: My editor, my book. My, Mine, Me! Free yourself a bit. Breathe other people's air! A good dose of others would do you good. Others with their germs and their flaws. Keep yourself all neat and tidy on the shelf, Alan, and you're still gonna end up gathering dust.

ALAN: Whatever, dear Betty. Whatever. You're off on god knows what kick, but you're definitely off.

BETTY: Asshole.

ALAN: You're going too far, Betty.

BETTY: Say whatever you wish. It was lame. Nothing would have ever gotten you to miss Night of the Hunter before.

ALAN: I didn't miss it. I made it if I remember correctly.
Silence) Betty? Betty?

BETTY: What?

ALAN: I came.

BETTY: *(sad)* Yeah.

ALAN: So...

BETTY: You came with someone else. It's not the same thing.

ALAN: That's insane.

BETTY: *(exploding)* They're our evenings.

ALAN: Listen. Jennifer is the press agent for the editor. She was kind enough to help me do some photocopying just so I'd be able to make the film on time. Now cut it out, Betty.

BETTY: You fuck on the photocopier – a fantasy like any other, you'll say. Reproduction on the photocopier. A mere metaphor – you two haven't done anything original. Your belladonna just wanted to get herself knocked up at the press of a button.

ALAN: What planet are you on? All this because a woman came with me to the movies?

BETTY: With *us*. Friday is our day. I couldn't give a damn about the other days of the week, but Friday...Friday.

ALAN: Betty, look at me. Look at me.

He takes her in his arms. She turns her head away.

- Look. (*calm*) When she dropped me off in front of the film house, it seemed like the right thing to do, to invite her to join us after she'd helped me. She just so happens to love that film, that's all.

BETTY: She would have loved any film you...(*beat*) I was so afraid when you said you spent all night talking and listening to music.

ALAN: There's no harm in doing that.

BETTY: But there is.

ALAN: You and I do it all the time.

BETTY: It's not the same thing. What we do is different. They're our nights. Only ours.

ALAN: So, if I've understood correctly, you'd rather I make love to a girl than to spend the night talking to her.

BETTY: Well, yes. It's more civilized. You get off. It's clean, it gets your blood circulating and it alleviates stress.

ALAN: Stop being so vulgar.

BETTY: Just calling a spade a spade.

ALAN: You're speaking of this woman as if she were a whore.

BETTY: No. I have much more respect for a prostitute. A prostitute looks you square in the eye and isn't afraid of telling you how she makes her living. Big difference.

ALAN: What did this girl ever do to you?

BETTY: She's stealing your soul, Alan, and you don't even realize it. I know for a fact that one day you'll forget it's Friday and you won't even show up. (beat) When that day comes, my life will end.

ALAN: Whatever.

BETTY: It's not whatever. It's a battle, poorly begun. The match with false moves.

ALAN: What match? Betty, you're pissing me off.

Betty goes to the chessboard, picks up a pawn.

BETTY: (*arrogantly*) Speaking of matches, shall we finish it?

ALAN: (tense) I really don't feel like playing chess, and anyway, we've already finished that match.

BETTY: The game is never really over until the last piece is taken.

Betty throws the pawn across the room.

ALAN: I'm going home.

BETTY: Why?

ALAN: Because I'm fed up. I've had enough. Enough of hearing you spit out idiocy after idiocy for the past hour. I'm going to let you get some rest. (*He heads for the door*) Why don't you go for a jog in the park? It'll calm you down. You'll have the park all to yourself at this hour.

Alan exits through the hallway, followed by Betty.

BETTY: (*from the hall*) Wait! Alan! Alan! Please don't leave me. I'm at a critical phase. I should wake up. Everything I said was for your...for us. But when you're next to me, it's not easy. It's nuts because I feel so good and so awful at the same time. It's as if a transparent wall goes up each time I want to talk to you about us. And as time goes by, I can't stand seeing all these girls around you. I'm afraid...afraid I'll lose you.

The phone rings. Betty's message has changed. We hear Patrick Fallières's voice, Alan appears.

He moves about the room, but Betty doesn't see him. She goes to the phone, but doesn't pick up.

BETTY (outgoing message): Good morning or evening. You've reached Betty Logan's machine. Leave a message and I'll get back to you.

PATRICK'S VOICE/ : Well, good evening, it would be. It's Patrick Fallières. I hope you're well, darling Betty. I'll be brief: I'm in town for the day and I'd like to see you about two or three things concerning your protégé Decasso. Some Japanese came to the gallery...Let's get together and I'll tell you all the details. How about in two hours at...

ALAN: Patrick Fallières? I don't know this one.

BETTY: It's...it's another gallery I got in touch with.

ALAN: Pick it up! Pick it up!

As if having awaited Alan's order, she picks up the phone.

BETTY: Yes, hello? Hello? Good morning...I mean evening. How are you...? No, I was in the shower. I didn't hear...What?...Oh, yes, I'm dry...Okay in two hours at the Plaza. I'll be there. Bye.

Alan goes to the sketch. In a hushed voice...

PATRICK'S voice: Would you do me a favor, Betty?

BETTY: I don't know...

ALAN: Would you mind putting on that little flannel suit that you wore when you came to the gallery? It flatters you so.

BETTY: I think it's at the dry cleaners.

Alan goes into Betty's bedroom and comes out with the flannel suit.

BETTY: Are you pushing me into this guy's arms?

ALAN: It seems like you need ...I want you to be happy.

She goes into the bathroom.

BETTY (off): Maybe something's happened with the Japanese.

ALAN: Good. I'm happy for you.

BETTY: And you're okay with this? My going out with this guy.

ALAN: It's important for your work.

BETTY: I think that...well, I don't disgust him.

ALAN: You say he's not bad.

BETTY: He's handsome.

ALAN: Handsome, with a gallery.

BETTY: What do you think I am?

ALAN: I'm kidding. (Betty reappears) Very elegant. If this guy doesn't fall head over heels, you have my permission to smack him one.

Alan studies Betty.

- Are you wearing pantyhose or stockings?

Betty lifts her skirt to show the top of one of her stockings.

- Oh, no question about it. I am deeply and truly a heterosexual.

BETTY: And you're sorry to be?

ALAN: Oh, no. It moves me.

BETTY: Do you really have a hard on?

ALAN: I simply said that I'm a confirmed heterosexual. If it must be said, you are a perfect vision. A sort of patron saint for a lost man, one perhaps plagued by demons. That's all. Now go on or you'll be late.

Betty goes to Alan and gives him a kiss on the lips.

BETTY: Thank you. Now I feel beautiful.

She looks at him. He signals to his watch.

ALAN: Tell me all about it when you get home.

Alan escorts her to the hallway. Betty rapidly vanishes.

BLACKOUT

Alan is lying on the couch, observing the moon. Sound of keys in the front door. Betty enters the room. She seems upset.

ALAN: And here she is, the belle of the ball.

BETTY: I see you're in high spirits.

ALAN: *(dreamily)* I've been to the moon.

BETTY: Well, well.

ALAN: *(jokingly)* Perfect landing. A brief stroll toward Schiller's Circus, down to the craters. World record in the long jump. Nothing special. What about you? How was it?

Betty mechanically removes her things. She goes into her room.

BETTY: A disaster.

ALAN: Oh. Do you want to talk about it or...?

She returns in a bathrobe.

BETTY: He got there an hour and a half late.

ALAN: You're so uptight about time. Maybe he got stuck in traffic. Does he have a car?

BETTY: *(dryly)* A gorgeous station wagon.

ALAN: *(trying to lift her spirits)* Ha. The station wagon. At twenty-five the Porsche, at forty the wagon. It's a guy thing, you wouldn't get it.

Betty serves herself a drink, ignoring Alan, and goes back to her room.

- Traffic's been awful lately. No one realizes just how traffic has altered our lives. You've seen how many people show up late to the opera.

BETTY: They should leave on time.

ALAN: And what time would that be? When do you lock the front door and climb into your car? Leave two hours early and get to the theatre in thirty minutes. Not really a solution.

Betty reappears.

BETTY: I have no idea why you're looking to defend this guy. And on top of it, why are you giving me some asinine dissertation on traffic when you don't even have your license? *(beat)* I felt like he was tasting me the way he would a good wine. She's got nice legs, lovely color, how's her bouquet... Good god! It's all so phony:

ALAN: There's nothing phony about it. It's logical. You attract him and he wants you.

BETTY: Darling dearest, you *can* want to make love to someone you don't really love. The act is the same. There's no border.

ALAN: What's that supposed to mean?

BETTY: It means that this guy didn't have a valid passport and I left him at the border.

ALAN: You can be a right pain, Betty.

She starts to cry.

- I...I didn't expect you to take it that way. I'm sorry. We've always laughed about our bad dates before.

Betty's crying turns to sobbing, Alan takes her in his arms.

- It's okay...relax...shhh...

Betty sniffles.

BETTY: Do you think that I'm losing it? I no longer know what I'm saying, I'm always depressed. I wake up, I cry. During the day, I cry. At night, I cry. Sometimes I barely have enough time in between to snifle.

ALAN: (*Gently*) Don't get yourself all worked up. It's not worth it...

BETTY: I admire your bravery.

ALAN: Bravery? You're tired...You've been working too hard. Look, you've got your contract with the gallery now, you can breathe a little.

BETTY: I don't know if you're brave or clueless.

ALAN: Wow, must have been something else, this guy who can put you in such a state.

BETTY: It's not him. It's everything. I'm fed up.

ALAN: I don't get it. You seem to have a pretty full schedule...

BETTY: Sure... Full to the brim with starving artists, men who slurp women like a wine, incomprehensible Japanese buyers, evenings with no tomorrows. Fill her up! Lunches that transform themselves into dinners just before the last glass of wine are fine for a while, but I've come to the end of that chapter.

She serves herself a large glass of wine and waves it in front of Alan's face.

- Last call! After, let's screw!

ALAN: Maybe you should put the cork back on the bottle for tonight. (*Beat*). You need a vacation. Look, why don't you close the gallery for ten days? You're artists won't die, nor will I. There are telephones and faxes all over the world, just get a plane ticket, head for the sunshine, the beach, the ocean.

BETTY: Thanks for your advice, but ten days in the tropics breathing in SPF 30 and watching the passing fluorescent shorts isn't going to help me any. The chasm is already too wide. What I need is a man. Why is it so damned difficult? I'm no Ava Gardner, but I still make men hard, don't I?

ALAN: (*embarrassed*) Sure...um...

BETTY: I make you hard?

ALAN: Sure...I mean...You're not really...I...You're attractive.
Alan tries to take her glass from her.

BETTY: Am I just attractive or do I make you hard?

ALAN: What...I don't know...I mean...

BETTY: Why is it that each time I fall for a guy, he couldn't care less. And each time one falls for me, I couldn't care less. For once, just once, couldn't I be in synch with someone? I'm alone. I'm forty years old and childless!

ALAN: Well, I'm forty, too. I'm alone and "childless"! So what? We've always said it's better to be alone than poorly mated, right?

BETTY: Having never taken the risk of being poorly mated, I'm left with no mate at all!

ALAN: Oh, come on! Who cares? You want have dinner at Balthazard ?

BETTY: Well, I see you're on top of the world. Maybe now is as good a time as any.

ALAN: To do what?

BETTY: To ask you for something.

ALAN: Granted in advance. Whatever you wish, as long as I see a smile on your face within the next two seconds.

BETTY: (*Seriously*) Alan, you might be surprised by what I'm about to ask you.

ALAN: Let me guess! You've killed Weller? You're on the lam and you want me to find you a secret hideout? *Beat.* Faillières! You're going to marry Faillères and you want me to be the best man, but he won't allow it. No problem. I'll beat him up later.

BETTY: It's more serious, Alan.

ALAN: You've turned lesbian?

BETTY: You putz.

ALAN: Well, you said it's not an everyday affair.

BETTY: I want a child.

ALAN: I know. You just told me that you're forty years old and you want to have a baby. Happens to millions of women. It'll pass.

BETTY: No, I mean, I *really* want a baby. I want to have your baby.

ALAN: Ha! You've got to be kidding me! No? No! She's out of her mind! My friend Betty here has gone off her rocker!

BETTY: I'm perfectly sane. I've been thinking about it for a long time. Seven years! I think that's an adequate period for reflection.

ALAN: But you seem to have forgotten one small detail, Betty: we're not a couple.

BETTY: Ah, you don't think we're a couple? How would you define a couple?

ALAN: I don't know. Two people who are married, who have sex under the same roof...I don't know.

BETTY: And you think that love comes from getting hitched at the town hall or fucking twice a week under the same roof? And, oh! Betty's being generous with that statistic, because it's only twice a week in the beginning, sort of a special introductory offer. After it's headache after headache. That's what you call being a couple? Those people in restaurants staring at their plates during dinner in complete silence? The other's regard can be hard to swallow when there's nothing left to say. Do you consider that being a couple?

ALAN: No, but what does all this have to do with us?

BETTY: You've never noticed how the waiter can't figure out who to give the bill to when you and I go out to dinner? We *are* a couple! More couple than anyone else!

ALAN: We are friends, Betty. Friends.

BETTY: Friends who know each other pretty damned well. Do you want to see what you gave me for my last birthday? I'm wearing it now. *(Betty lifts up her sweater and reveals part of her bra).* 36 C.

ALAN: I'm familiar with your breasts, thank you very much.

BETTY: It's not just my boobs that you're familiar with.

ALAN: Yeah, well...

BETTY: You're not going to get all sheepish on me! Come on. You even know where my G-spot is! I've told you about it a million times.

ALAN: Fine.

BETTY: I'm so sick of these dicks who poke around you for hours before they even find the right path! It makes me want to hand out a map and compass before we begin. (*Beat*). Maybe I'm being a bit heavy-handed, but it's just to show you that if coupledom really exists, it must be pretty close to what you and I already have together. There are times I'd swear that you're in my soul. Like right now, I don't even know if it's me or if it's you who...

ALAN: I listen to you, that's it. We are friends. You also listen to me. It's perfectly normal.

BETTY: Let's look at this objectively. We could save a lot of time and not waste our energy asking stupid questions: I know how many sugars you put in your coffee. I know that you never eat in the morning, just an apple at 10:00 am. Don't you see? We can avoid the whole breakfast embarrassment. We already spend the night together on average once a week.

ALAN: I know that. But it's not the same thing.

BETTY: Now, you're not going to tell me that you've never once thought of screwing me.

ALAN: Stop being vulgar.

BETTY: Vulgar? And the super station wagon that transports you to the restaurant, the restaurant that just so happens to be part of the hotel, what would you call that? You know, I haven't seen an honest pair of testicles for some time.

ALAN: I am no different from the others.

BETTY: No, Alan. *Beat*. You've got nothing in common with those macho pricks who only think about fucking you, coming all over your stomach with a shout...*Beat*. It's never a sound of love. It's a cry, a selfish, bestial cry. That cry rings in my ears for days on end and each time louder and louder. I don't want to hear it anymore.

ALAN: Not all men are like that.

BETTY: (*Bitterly*) No, you're right. There are those who get off, roll over and smoke their cigarettes. Do you remember what you said to me when we got back from the concert the other night?

ALAN: No.

BETTY: You told me that you needed a woman like me.

ALAN: I was drunk. We were both drunk.

BETTY: You were perfectly aware of what you were saying. I could feel your sincerity. Alcohol reveals what we try to hide.

ALAN: It's not like that was the first time we'd ever kissed.

BETTY: Your sincerity...Or whatever you want to call that thing between your legs!

ALAN: (*Avoiding the subject*) I don't remember any of that.

BETTY: Don't you play games with me. Don't you flee from this.

ALAN: For Christ's sake, Betty! What do you want? To fuck? Is that it? To get off? What? Did you take some sex quiz in a magazine and realize that you're not one of the elite when it comes to fucking? Is that it? You've got to get more? Just say it!

BETTY: No. I want you. That's all. I love you, Alan. I love you, and I want to make a baby with you. That's all.

ALAN: That's ridiculous.

BETTY: You didn't say that the other night.

ALAN: The other night I'd been drinking. I saw how sad you were. Don't go reading into things. *Beat.* What are we doing? We're fighting as if...

BETTY: As if we were a couple.

ALAN: No. Not a couple!

BETTY: So, it's physical. I'm not your type. Is that it?

ALAN: It's not about your body. We are FRIENDS, that's it. I don't give a damn about your body.

BETTY: Is that so? It seems to me you rather like knowing what I'm wearing under my skirts.

She lifts her skirt; Alan tries to stop her.

ALAN: It's just a game.

BETTY: A dangerous one.

He looks at her. A long silence follows and then Alan takes Betty into his arms and caresses her hair slowly.

ALAN: I love you, too.

BLACKOUT

A soft light on Betty. Betty and Alan, in turn, appear and disappear via the hallway, with a quick blackout between each.

BETTY: How can I find out what he thinks of me? How does he talk about me when he's with his friends? Is he proud of me the way I'm proud of him? Does he speak to his guy friends the same way he does his girl...friends? (*Beat*). Does he speak of me first thing? I'm sure that...

Light on Alan who faces the audience

ALAN: Betty is an incredible girl. Brilliant, intelligent, courageous. She runs an art gallery. In fact, it's a painting gallery, but she hates when I say that because she thinks it sounds vulgar. She says it sounds like I'm talking about painting like house painting... She's a snob, but that's Betty. I love her. As a friend, of course. I wouldn't mix love and friendship. We've known each other for seven years. We're good, old friends, that's all. We're like a couple but we don't have sex. Although, at this present time, Betty seems to have something she needs to express.

Lights on Betty.

BETTY: Alan. It's been seven years that I've known him but it feel as though I've always known him. Right from the beginning. The beginning of time, I mean. He became part of my genetic makeup millions of years ago. I'm sure that we're two old fossil friends in

some pond or something like that. He is part of my future. He's what keeps me alive...Alive.

Silence. Betty looks out into the darkness of the audience.

- All this just to say that there's a link between Alan and me. In fact, lately I've been trying to speak to him about this link. I realize that it must be a bit destabilizing for him, but we have so much in common, it's got to come out at some point. It's obviously not the right year to talk about it. And with my luck, the right year is probably a leap year!

Lights on Alan.

ALAN: She's really gone too far, don't you think? Her reasoning is logical in the abstract, but it takes two in the physical world. I mean, two, really two.

Lights on Betty.

BETTY: Maybe I should have spoken to him differently, less directly. That's typically me. Poor fool that you are! But what I'm saying makes sense, doesn't it? You see the logic, don't you? When you use only the finest ingredients, the sauce can't help but turn out right...You'll then say that it takes just one little thing to make the sauce turn sour...Why should I go on looking for something that I've already got?

Normal Voice: Sure, but you can also understand that not everyone sees things the way you do, Betty.

Innocent Voice: Yeah, I can understand that, I can comprehend it, but I don't care about anyone else. It's him, no one else. You'll tell me that love is like a serious disease; you've only got a one percent chance of catching it, but once you've got it, it's in you one hundred percent.

Normal Voice: Don't compare love to a disease!

Innocent Voice: What would you call it when you have to take pills to escape sleepless nights? And in the morning you take different pills so you can get out of bed? I'm ill. I can tell. He'll say that I need to take a vacation. It's his way of avoiding the subject.

Lights on Alan.

ALAN: She needs a vacation. She's stressed over her job and all the artists she has to manage. Even if she could just take a week...

Lights on Betty. She's holding the sketch of the two faces.

BETTY: No one understands the way you do. No one. You...All of your senses are alive. You see more than everyone else. You hear more than everyone else. You love more than everyone else. You're almost inhuman. And you want me to miss out on all that? No woman in the world should let a love like that get away. I know what you're going to say. That it's time I stopped acting like a princess, that no one's going to find my slipper, that it's stupid to walk around barefoot on the asphalt and that at midnight the cars will not be changing back into pumpkins.

Alan appears and approaches Betty. He puts his hand on her shoulder.

ALAN: I'm sure that you'll find a...

BETTY: *Wildly* You will not just toss me aside.

ALAN: You're in need of a little attention for now. It's autumn. In the autumn people always tend to get depressed.

BETTY: *feigning composure* You see me sad so you say to yourself, "I'd better pay some attention to her. She's having her little seasonal depression. She takes the shortening of the days very seriously."

ALAN: You let me know that you need attention and I tell you that I understand. You carry on with your arrogant tone and it sucks. You act as if I didn't pay any attention to you.

BETTY: If you look at it that way, sure you pay attention to me. Like seasonal help, twice a year. Just enough to ease your conscience.

ALAN: *Hurt* Seasonal help...For seven years I've been giving you constant attention. I call you three times a day. We spend every Friday together. We vacation together! I live in symbiosis with you. When you're sick, I'm sick. When you're happy, I'm happy. When you suffer, I feel it. And you dare to tell me that I don't give you enough attention?

BETTY: You lock up all your feelings with your self-imposed censorship. You want so badly to fit the ideal image that you forget where you're at. The frustrated artist can't let real life seep into his failed universe. You don't even know who you are, so spare me the attention speech. There is no one more selfish than you are.

BETTY: Look at yourself! You're starting to behave like a grumpy old bachelor, set in your ways.

You're so afraid to take the next step that you wall yourself up with your idiotic convictions.

ALAN: A grumpy old bachelor because I don't want to have a kid with my depressive friend? I'm being sincere.

BETTY: Sincere? You're speaking of sincerity? You men are all alike. Big machos in bed and terrified little tykes when confronted with real life. Let yourself believe what you'd like. Whatever you'd like.

ALAN: Believe what? That my friend has gone completely bezerk and is asking me to father her child. Should I believe in that, Betty?

BETTY: You don't believe in love because you have a predisposition for it.

ALAN: First of all, it's not that I don't believe in love. I don't believe in our love. I mean, our love the way you seem to see it.

BETTY: Try.

ALAN: This is absurd. There's nothing to try.

BETTY: But we know each other so well.

ALAN: Okay. We know each other. You've told me things, I've told you things. We've told each other plenty of things. That's not enough to have a child. The only thing that you are looking for is to stop being alone. All of a sudden you've decided you don't want to be alone, and you choose me as your company.

BETTY: For you it's all of a sudden. But for me it's been happening gradually over the years. The more I've come to know you, the more I've come to appreciate you.

ALAN: Why me?

BETTY: Because you're my best friend.

ALAN: But friendship and love are not the same thing.

BETTY: Says you.

ALAN: A baby, Betty!

BETTY: Well, if you want to make a baby, isn't it better that it be with someone you get along with?

ALAN: But there's a huge difference between getting along with someone and making a baby with someone.

BETTY: It's a thin line. Do you really think it's easy for me to be talking with you under these conditions without knowing what you really think?

ALAN: I know perfectly well what I think!

Alan becomes motionless, as if he has turned into a statue. There's a moment of doubt in Betty's dream.

- Damn it! What's gotten into you?

BETTY: I've already told you: I'm forty years old.

ALAN: So what! We don't care about those things. Look at me. Look at me! We don't care!

BETTY: I care. I care now. I'm forty years old and this solitude is starting to weigh on me. I'm tired of coming home hoping that my life will change when I turn the front door knob. I'm tired of hoping that there'll be someone on the other side of the door who'll ask me how my day went, who'll fix me a drink, who'll play a game of chess with me! I'm sick of always checking the answering machine. My first glance and "phew!" -- thank god, the little light's flashing. Do you see? It's stupid. You see a little flashing light and you're happy. This little light becomes your heartbeat, your cardiac rhythm. And if one night you come home to your dark apartment and see no little flashing light, it's as if your heart has stopped. Pretty dumb, huh?

She puts the chess pieces back in place. She picks up the queen.

- Being alone means you never get to say "we". Everything is first person singular. (*She speaks to the queen*). What is there to do when you're all alone?

She continues to put the rest of the chess pieces back in place.

BETTY: Once I found myself sitting at a display table in a department store. It was set with a bouquet of flowers as a centerpiece. Even though the flowers were plastic, the air was filled with their fragrance

ALAN: I...I don't know what to say...

BETTY: If I asked you in another way?

ALAN: You no longer care about your gallery? Why does the word reproduction disturb women so?

BETTY: (*Shift*) It's no small nothing to want to bring forth life, damn it!

ALAN: Sure, but I stand by my right to not want to sire a child.

BETTY: Open your eyes. You're 40 years old.

ALAN: So what? I'm aging very well, if I do say so myself. My sciatica has even decided to leave me in peace, but you decide to nag me with your 40 years.

BETTY: I want to stay aware, awake. I want to have something to believe in. A little being biologically conceived by two beings united by...

ALAN: Two friends, Betty. Two friends. A child cannot be the product of two friends!

BETTY: Why not?

ALAN: I don't want to have children.

BETTY: What do you think you'll be able to do? Conquer time? Stay an eternal adolescent or become an aging Casanova?

ALAN: This conversation is getting sterile.

BETTY: So, you're saying no? Alan?

ALAN: What?

BETTY: You refuse?

ALAN: To be what you've decided on my being? Yes. Call it a selfish desire.

BETTY: There's no room for a baby in the life of a great artist?

ALAN: You're way off.

BETTY: No, you are, pal. I'll tell you why. I'm meant to love you and you're meant to love yourself. Your senses are disturbed. You're emotionally challenged. You don't even know what you want.

ALAN: (*Exploding*) I know for sure what I don't want. I have no desire to spend sleepless nights because the littlest has chicken pox or because the eldest has adjustment problems in junior high, or because his pubescent skin is breaking out or because he's been stood up by some girlfriend! I...I am not ready for that.

Betty goes to kiss Alan but he turns away.

BETTY: Love running over doesn't stain. (*To herself*) Why do I persist?

ALAN: Stop it! It's got nothing to do with you. I don't want to, period! I don't want to be a second rate father because I'm still concerned with the judgements of others. What kind of upbringing do you think they're giving their kids? Failed ambitions, unfulfilled desires. Is that what being a responsible, respectable parent is all about?

A long silence in which the lighting changes. In reality, Betty wants out of her dream; she is not managing it the way she would like to be.

- I might just want a child even more than you do, but I'm far from assuming I've learned enough to be ready.

Betty composes herself while placing the sketch on the easel.

- Ours wouldn't be a child of love but of folly. A sketch made by one and the same person. Do we really have the right to do that?

We hear a voiceover, that of a little girl calling for her mother.

- You haven't worked so hard just to drop your gallery and stay at home with a kid playing the role of the ideal mom. I know you'll find the...Don't you remember when you told me that a couple was a totalitarian regime, the death of two lives?

BETTY: Completely different. We're different.

ALAN: Because you've gone and decided that all is different. All your life you've been snapping your fingers to get what you want. This is one thing you can't buy, Betty.

BETTY: Why are you here then?

ALAN: Because you invited me into your dream. No, not invited – you created me. I've become the parasite of your dream.

Silence. Betty looks at each object that surrounds her.

BETTY: It's too complicated. I'm going to go to sleep.

She goes to leave but Alan blocks her path.

ALAN: No! If you go to sleep in your dream, you'll wake up and we'll no longer be able to...I mean...You'll be no further ahead than...

Alan steps back into the shadows.

- Quick, Betty. Think of something, quick! Don't replace me. Don't replace me.

Betty puts her head in her hands.

Voice of Jennifer: Hi! It's Jennifer. Would you like to get together, Alan?

Voice of Sandra: It's me, cupcake. Talk dirty to me. Go on...I'm waiting.

BETTY: It hurts! I want out! I don't want to be in this dream anymore. I want it to end. Stop.

Alan reappears in the hallway.

ALAN: No one can help you, Betty. You're the captain of your dream ship. You have all the rights, all the power. Talk, live, scream. But no one can help you. No one, no one, no one...

Alan disappears.

BLACKOUT

We find Betty in front of the painting on the easel.

BETTY: You won't toss me aside.

ALAN: It takes two...

BETTY: You've asked for it. The first one I see! Do you hear me! The first guy I see will be my baby's father.

ALAN: What? You think I'd be jealous? Poor Betty. I don't give a shit who you're going to spend your nights with, who's going to lay you, or who's going to knock you up. I don't give a fuck.

BETTY: Well, then, the first guy I see...

ALAN: By all means. The door's wide open.

BETTY: Bastard. I tell you that I'll go with the first guy I see and you don't care. Your best friend is going to get herself good and laid by god-knows-who and you're completely indifferent. Bravo! Bravo and thanks a million.

ALAN: The way you think that all the world should focus on your belly button is outrageous! And now you want that bellybutton to start dilating?!

BETTY: I'm frightened and you don't even see it. I'm drowning in my role of the confident, wealthy woman and you...

She starts to hit Alan.

ALAN: Stop it! Stop it!

BETTY: Really – I could kill you, Alan!

ALAN: Fine. I'm calling a cab.

Betty tries to stop him from getting to the phone. They stand their ground and Betty grabs the receiver from Alan's hands.

BETTY: You go and desert me when I need you most.

Alan turns abruptly and slams the door as he exits. Betty breaks down.

- Not like this. It's not supposed to turn out like this.

She goes to the door.

BETTY: You'll pay for this. You hear me? You'll pay.

She goes into the kitchen and comes back with a bottle. She downs half of it.

- I'm lost, Alan. Completely lost.

She sits on the floor, leaning against the couch.

- I would so like to hear it.

She places her glass on the edge of the coffee table and lifts her head. Then, imitating a child's voice...

- Mommy? Mommy?

She turns her head as if to find the origin of the voice.

- Mommy?

She gets up and begins to cry. Then, sniffing, she speaks in her natural voice, going to the hallway.

- I'm here, darling. Mommy's here.

She goes into the hallway, returning almost immediately cradling a blanket as if it were a baby.

- Don't cry. It's over. It's okay. Mommy's here. Shh...she...

She rocks it.

-I love you so much, my baby. So much.

She cries even harder, dropping the blanket and a pillow on the floor. She, too, falls to the floor and stays on her knees for a long moment. Despite the darkness, we can distinguish Betty's silhouette reclining on the floor. We see her moving but can't see what she is doing. Then, we see her upright silhouette go into the bedroom. She comes out wearing a raincoat and holding a letter in her hand. The light seeming to come from Betty begins to fade. Her head lowered, she goes to the front door and opens it. She pins the letter

onto the door. She looks once more at the pillow and blanket lying on the floor. She closes the door, leaving the apartment in darkness.

BLACKOUT

ALAN: *(offstage)* What has she done now?

Sound of a key in the door. Alan enters Betty's apartment reading the note on the door. He turns on the light. The sketch of the two faces is no longer visible.

BETTY's Voice: For you. My eyes are like the autumn sky, filled with sadness. Except that when the sky cries, it nourishes the earth. My eyes feed only memories...Seven years of memories...I've thrown out the sketch that you gave me for my birthday. The one with the two faces.

Alan looks rapidly around the dark apartment.

- After all you've said about that sketch, I couldn't stop looking at it. It haunted me. Each curve, each colorful, image-rich part. What's beautiful in a sketch is its monochromatic quality. One color for one subject. A hesitation of the hand, of life. The first stone of an edifice. Once colors are added, the sketch ceases to be and your dream is shattered. Just like the thousands of people who look at the canvas of their lives and no longer know what the sketch of their hearts resembles. The colors have faded, Al...Affectionately Yours, Betty.

Tears stream down his face. The letter trembles in his fingers. He doesn't move, alone in his thoughts. He searches in the bedroom, the bathroom, with no success. He goes to the couch and suddenly stops in his tracks. We see a reflection in the mirror: traced in white is the outline of Betty's body on the floor.

ALAN: What is this, Betty?

He panics. Betty appears in the entryway. She's drenched and completely drunk.

BETTY: Casanova himself!

ALAN: What's this thing?

BETTY: That is known as a couch, my dear. No, excuse me, it's a futon. Ideal for lumbar problems.

She rubs his back.

ALAN: I'm not talking about the futon! What is this charade?

BETTY: Oh, that? It's me.

ALAN: What do you mean "it's me"?

BETTY: Me. Yes, me. Your little doll, Betty. Not easy to do when you're all alone, especially the lower limbs. Very difficult, the lower parts.

She runs her foot along Alan's leg.

- But overall, it's not a bad silhouette. Were you frightened? Did you say to yourself, "She's done it this time! She's really gone and done it." I could do it, huh? I could. The proof...I practically did. Anyway, the important thing is that your heart started beating faster for me.

ALAN: You're a monster.

BETTY: Shh...You thought it. That's all. Say no more. Not a word. Let me enjoy the image of your worried look.

She caresses his cheek. He pushes her away violently.

ALAN: You're sick, Betty! Really insane.

BETTY: Not as insane as you may think, you poor fool. I'll do anything to get your eyes on me. See, I'll let you walk all over me.

She lies down in her outline, grabs Alan's leg and pulls it to her until he lifts it.

- Come on! Leg up! Walk on me. Walk on me, for Christ's sake!

She pulls his pant leg. Alan jerks his leg back. Betty stays sprawled out on the floor.

- You're like "Swede" in The Killers. But with you, it won't be the hoods who kill you. There'll be no bloodstains. No. You'll be devoured by your life. You won't even fight for it because of your ridiculous need for freedom. Your love of liberty has you cowering away. Or maybe it would be more accurate to say that you're afraid of not finding the exact replica of your dear mommy.

ALAN: (Stern) Don't.

BETTY: You're afraid, Alan.

She moves toward him until she can once again grab his pant leg.

BETTY: You'll never find your mother in another woman. Never, never!

ALAN: Stop it, Betty. Stop.

He goes to her, hand raised, ready to hit her.

BETTY: Go ahead! Do it! Do it! At least you'll have accomplished one thing in your life.

Alan stops his gesture inches from Betty's face.

- And there you have it. The one and only reason why you seek refuge in your job, your pathetic drawings for retarded adults. It's not even noble. It's cowardly, just like your life. Even the look on your face is cowardly. You walk around with your tail between your legs...You live in a permanent flashback. Freeze-framed. You've stopped the film on your past because your future terrifies you. The little boy was shocked by mommy and daddy's divorce so now, at forty, he's still incapable of getting his act together and saying "yes" to a woman. You're afraid it'll be like it was with your mother, huh? You're afraid that she'll leave you?

ALAN: You have no right...No right. Not my mother.

BETTY: Just doing what needs to be done. You leave me little choice.

ALAN: Something's changed with you, Betty. You've become nasty, worse, grey. The only company you can stand is your own shadow's, and even that you drag along with you. It weighs you down, deformed by your touch. The lines are blurry like your soul. This shadow smashes into every surface while you spill out all over the place. If you could, you'd abandon it so as not to leave a trace. Well, vanish with it. You'd be doing the world a favor. You must've been born on a day when the calendar didn't have any more room. You're a mistake, Betty. News flash.

A burst of pride brings her to her feet.

BETTY: Bastard! Bastard! You bastard! Son of a bitch!

ALAN: You're completely drunk. You don't even know who you're talking to...You disgust me.

BETTY: I know damned well who I'm talking to! One of the most fabulous bastards on god's green earth!

She slaps him, he slaps her and then drags her toward the bathroom. She resists.

- Get your filthy hands off me! Bastard!

From offstage, the sounds of a shower and then Betty screaming.

- It's freezing. You bastard – you're trying to kill me!

BLACKOUT

After a long silence, Alan comes out of the bathroom, clothes drenched, face contorted. He sits on the couch. A long moment in which we can hear the music from "Pavane Pour Une Infante Defunte". Betty comes out from the bathroom in a robe that she holds closed with crossed arms. She is cold and exhausted. She sits next to Alan, looking at him. His face remains motionless.

BETTY: Will you come see the film next Friday?

ALAN: I don't know. I don't know.

BETTY: I'm sorry.

ALAN: Maybe you're right.

BETTY: No, I realize now that you are.

ALAN: Your analysis is solid – everything you say is justified. You could even say there's method to it.

BETTY: I'm an ass.

ALAN: No, maybe I am. Who knows?

BETTY: I'm always going after what I don't have. I never think things through.

ALAN: No...I think I understand you.

BETTY: I don't understand me anymore. I'm able to throw away seven marvelous years just to satisfy a biological craving? You're right to call me selfish.

ALAN: No, I was angry, too. I had to defend myself. I would've said anything to destabilize you and to reassure myself.

Alan goes to Betty. They look at each other for a long moment before they kiss. Betty opens her robe for Alan who kisses her breast.

BETTY: I was so sure.

ALAN: The two of us have something else, Betty, maybe something stronger than love. Can we go back to the way it was?

BETTY: To the way it was.

Alan goes to the stereo and puts on an Ella Fitzgerald standard.

ALAN: It's better this way, right?

They begin to dance.

BETTY: Yes...Maybe.

BLACKOUT

Lights up as at beginning of play. The sketch of the two faces is where it had been. The outlines have become a little heavier. Betty wakes up in Alan's arms. He's lightly massaging her temples.

BETTY: Yes...Maybe.

ALAN: What?

BETTY: I don't know if it's better this way.

ALAN: Hello? It's me, Al. Remember me? Your old friend? Almost eight years? The guy who dates vulgar Slavs?

BETTY: Alan?

ALAN: No, I'm Peter.

BETTY: Peter?

ALAN: Oh, boy. Waking up is hard to do. You're really out of it.

BETTY: It was so real...But not really...

Alan shows Betty the painting on the easel.

ALAN: Like the Decasso piece.

BETTY: Yeah...It's not living but it awakens all our senses. Do you think it's possible that millions of people can have the same dream at the same time? That we can create and destroy things through our thoughts, to keep ourselves sane?

ALAN: You choose the music to sound the notes you hear. Do you want to go to bed? Get some rest? I've got to go. I'm going to be late for my date. Rachel is expecting me at 10 o'clock. You've kept me once again, Betty.

Alan gets his jacket and Betty stares at him.

BETTY: Why do relationships have to be so complicated? Are we so different that we have to struggle to express our love?

Alan picks Betty up and carries her to her room through the hallway.

ALAN: Oh, Weller called. The Japanese have bought the paintings.

BETTY: Weller? Which ones?

ALAN: The sketches. Goodnight, Betty. I mean, good morning.

BETTY: Good night.

As the curtain closes, the beginning credits unroll.

CURTAIN

Penser a ajouter didascalies pour situer frustrations de allan : il dessine et froisse son papier, plus loin il propose à betty de lui montrer un dessin mais finalement fait demi tour. A la fin il lui dit : a tout à l'heure ma chérie