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*The Metric System*  
First Printing, 2009  
Printed in U.S.A.

**More Great Plays Available**  
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**The Books**

**by Michael Edison Hayden**

1 Male, 1 Female, plus two off stage voices.

No intermission

**Synopsis:** An offbeat dramatic love story with plenty of dark comedy, *THE BOOKS* chronicles the developing relationship of a professional dominatrix, Mistress Chimera, and her agoraphobic client, Mark. After Mark loans her a copy of James Joyce's *Dubliners*, their personal relationship deepens, complicating their sadomasochistic rituals. Before the couple can truly fall in love, they both must accept that some people may never fit into society.

**Does The Body Good**

**by Patrick Link**

2 Males, 2 Females

**Synopsis:** A seductive housewife entices a young milkman his first day on the job. A depressed middle school teacher struggles to extract himself from a sexual affair with the precocious 8th grade girl who idolizes him. In *Does The Body Good* these two seemingly unrelated liaisons divide the stage into a distorted mirror image of the other, build on each other's intensity, and finally collide into a perfect storm of unfulfilled yearnings.

**Get Stuffed**

**by Mark Scharf**

2 Males, 1 Female

**Synopsis:** Marty tries to live his life while contending with a foul-mouthed teddy bear who says all the things Marty can't or won't. It isn't easy for a grown man to live with an oversized talking stuffed bear and Furball fears being sent into exile again. But who needs who more? During a visit by a woman Marty is interested in, Furball's antics cause Marty to imprison the bear in a closet – painfully reminding the bear of his years of attic exile. In response, Furball stops talking and Marty must decide if life is better with or without the voice of his friend.

THE METRIC SYSTEM

a play by

James Armstrong

The Metric System was originally performed in May 2009 by Playwrights Forum at TheatreWorks in Memphis, Tennessee.

Director:	Ruth Johnson
Production Manager:	Mark Rutledge
Lighting Design:	Diane Kinkennon
Sound Design:	Jason Spitzer
Stage Manger:	Sharri Reid

The cast was as follows:

ALAN STEVENS:	Dutch Warren
MARY BETH RILEY:	Mandy Lane
SUSIE STEVENS:	Emily Peckham
JIM:	Chris Tracy

CHARACTERS

STEVENS, mid-forties

MARY BETH, late twenties

SUSIE, mid-forties

JIM, late thirties

TIME

The present.

PLACE

The outskirts of a major American city.

## THE METRIC SYSTEM

### ACT I

*(The lights come up on Mr. STEVENS, dressed in a coat and tie, seated behind a large oak desk. MARY BETH, dressed in a Catholic high school girl's uniform, white blouse, short plaid skirt, knee socks, ribbons in her hair, sits in a chair in front of the desk. On the other side of the stage is a large folding screen.)*

MARY BETH: I'm sorry. I'm so, so, sorry. I didn't mean for it to happen.

STEVENS: Mary Beth, your teachers care about you very much.

MARY BETH: I was bad.

STEVENS: Sometimes you do bad things, Mary Beth. That doesn't make you a bad person.

MARY BETH: Do you hate me, Mr. Stevens?

STEVENS: No. I don't.

MARY BETH: You should. Everyone should hate me.

STEVENS: Why do you say that?

MARY BETH: I'm dirty. The things I do.... It's sin, Mr. Stevens. That's a fact.

STEVENS: So you think you're sinful?

MARY BETH: Oh, yes. I'm very sinful, Mr. Stevens. Though not as sinful as Joanne O'Conner. Joanne is always snooty, and mean, and un-Christlike, and she even sleeps with boys. I may have to burn in hell, but I'll be burning a little bit above Joanne O'Conner. That's for sure.

STEVENS: Why do you think you're going to hell at all? Do you need confession?

MARY BETH: Don't make me go to Father McDonough. Please!

STEVENS: You said you're--

MARY BETH: --I didn't mean it! Except the part about Joanne O'Conner.

STEVENS: Mary Beth--

MARY BETH: --Please! I hate Father McDonough.

STEVENS: You shouldn't hate.

MARY BETH: I know, I know.

STEVENS: Father McDonough wants what's best for you. That's what we all want.

MARY BETH: I'm sorry, Mr. Stevens. I'll try to be better.

STEVENS: You don't have to BE better than who you are, Mary Beth. But you can DO better. What concerns me is not who you are, it's what you've done.

MARY BETH: I apologized to Sister Margaret, and I promise, it will never happen again.

STEVENS: What?

MARY BETH: Excuse me?

STEVENS: What will never happen again?

MARY BETH: What I did.

STEVENS: And what did you do?

MARY BETH: Mr. Stevens... you know what it was.

STEVENS: Yes I do. But now I want you to tell me.

MARY BETH: But....

STEVENS: Tell me, Mary Beth. What did you do?

MARY BETH: That wasn't part of the--

STEVENS: --What did you do?

MARY BETH: Fine. What did I do...?

STEVENS: You have to admit it. Confront what it is you've done wrong.

MARY BETH: What I did wrong....

STEVENS: Well...?

MARY BETH: Sister Margaret....

STEVENS: What about Sister Margaret?

MARY BETH: She was giving the lesson.

STEVENS: And what were you doing?

MARY BETH: I was talking.

STEVENS: And what else?

MARY BETH: Passing notes.

STEVENS: And?

MARY BETH: And... Sister Margaret... she yelled at me!

STEVENS: And what did you say?

MARY BETH: What did I say...?

STEVENS: Yes. What did you say, Mary Beth?

MARY BETH: Well... I said... I said....

STEVENS: Shall I tell you?

MARY BETH: Yes! What did I say?

STEVENS: You said, and I quote: *(reading off a sheet of paper)*  
"Leave me alone, you old fart, why don't you go lick carpet like Sister Grace?"

MARY BETH: *(laughing)* I said THAT?

STEVENS: Mary Beth! Sister Grace's personal... preferences... and any rumors regarding why she left the order are not at issue here.

MARY BETH: I'm sorry. It was a wicked, wicked thing to say.

STEVENS: But that's not why you're here.

MARY BETH: It isn't?

STEVENS: Sister Margaret will get over having her feelings hurt. And Sister Grace.... Well, Sister Grace isn't around anymore, now is she?

MARY BETH: No.

STEVENS: I need to speak to you about something much more serious.

MARY BETH: Oh.

STEVENS: Sister Margaret reprimanded you, did she not?

MARY BETH: Yes.

STEVENS: And what did you say next?

MARY BETH: I don't remember.

STEVENS: You took the Lord's Name in vain, and you said:  
(*reading*) "The Lord's Name, Sister Margaret, can't you take a joke?"

MARY BETH: So?

STEVENS: The Lord's Name! You took the Lord's Name in vain!

MARY BETH: What's the big deal?

STEVENS: Oh, I don't know. It's only the second commandment.  
The second! Right after bowing down before false idols.

MARY BETH: It's just words. It didn't mean anything.

STEVENS: The Blessed Name of Our Savior doesn't mean anything  
to you?

MARY BETH: But it just means something because we want it to  
mean something. It's just words. It's air and sound. It only means  
something because we say it means something.

STEVENS: It most certainly means something to me.

MARY BETH: But that's just it. Words only upset us because we let  
them upset us. I mean, suppose you got upset every time I said... Vi-  
enna sausages!

STEVENS: Every time you said what?

MARY BETH: Suppose every time I said "Vienna sausages," you got  
horribly offended and thought I'd said something totally awful. Then  
it would be wrong of me, wouldn't it? It would be wrong of me to say  
something like that.

STEVENS: I suppose.

MARY BETH: But not because there was anything really wrong with  
what I said, but because it made you upset.

STEVENS: I don't see how--

MARY BETH: --But the words only mean something because you  
make them mean something. There's no difference really between my  
using the Lord's Name and saying, "Vienna sausages."

STEVENS: In that case, the next time you're upset with Sister Margaret, I suggest you call out, "Vienna sausages," and then you won't end up in my office!

MARY BETH: Yes, Mr. Stevens....

STEVENS: Now, do you have anything else to say for yourself?

MARY BETH: I want to be good, Mr. Stevens. I really do.

STEVENS: I told you. You already are.

MARY BETH: Fine. Then I want to DO good. I want to do what's right for a change. It's like things keep coming up. Like Sister Margaret. Or last gym class. Or Joanne O'Conner but that's really not my fault because she started it. But it's like I can't help myself, Mr. Stevens. I know what the right thing to do is, and I know I should be doing it. But then, when the time comes, it's so easy. It's so easy just to forget that every other person in the world even exists. There's just me. And what I want. And why shouldn't I take it, Mr. Stevens? Don't I owe it to myself? Don't I owe it to myself to be happy? But then I never am happy. Because I know... there's someone else out there... who's hurting... and it's my fault. I want to do what's right. For once in my life, I want to choose something, not for me, but for someone else. Because someone else is more important.

STEVENS: Can't you?

MARY BETH: No. Because it would still be for me, wouldn't it? Deep down, even if I thought I was doing it for someone else, wouldn't I really be doing it just to make myself feel better?

STEVENS: It sounds like you've thought about this a lot.

MARY BETH: Thinking hurts, Mr. Stevens.

STEVENS: Yes. I suppose it can.

MARY BETH: What are you going to do to me?

STEVENS: Since you've been thinking so much, I thought maybe I'd have you pick your own punishment.

MARY BETH: Don't make me do that again!

STEVENS: It's the best way.

MARY BETH: To make me feel miserable! Just pick it for me.

STEVENS: No. That's for you to do.

MARY BETH: But it's so hard! I'll do anything, Mr. Stevens. Anything you want.

STEVENS: And I want you to--

MARY BETH: --Tell me to pound my head into the blackboard. Tell me to clean the toilets with my tongue. I'll do anything, Mr. Stevens. But you have to tell me what to do. Don't make me choose.

STEVENS: I'm telling you to choose.

MARY BETH: Ungh!!!

STEVENS: The last time you came here, what punishment did I give you?

MARY BETH: Detention.

STEVENS: And when I came to visit you in detention, what were you doing?

MARY BETH: Talking.

STEVENS: To whom?

MARY BETH: Joanne O'Conner.

STEVENS: I see. So I gave you detention, and you ended up talking with your friends.

MARY BETH: But Joanne O'Conner isn't my friend any more. She's a snot.

STEVENS: So NOW if I gave you detention, THAT would be a punishment?

MARY BETH: It's not what it is, Mr. Stevens. It's deciding. If I choose it for myself, then no matter what it is, it's my fault, and I'll know it's my fault.

STEVENS: Precisely.

MARY BETH: No, Mr. Stevens! Make me do it. Force me.

STEVENS: I'm not going to force you to do anything.

MARY BETH: Why not?

STEVENS: It's not my job.

MARY BETH: Is that really the reason?

STEVENS: Yes.

MARY BETH: Maybe it isn't. Maybe you're too scared to force me.

STEVENS: Mary Beth--

MARY BETH: --Maybe you're not man enough. Maybe you're a coward.

STEVENS: Maybe you need to watch your tongue, young lady.

MARY BETH: Maybe it was just a joke. Jesus Christ!

STEVENS: What did you say!?!

MARY BETH: I didn't mean it!

STEVENS: You blasphemed!

MARY BETH: No I didn't! It was an accident.

STEVENS: I have the patience of Job....

*(STEVENS takes out a meter stick.)*

MARY BETH: Please don't hurt me. I didn't mean anything--

STEVENS: *(slamming the desk with the stick)* --How else are you supposed to learn?

MARY BETH: I'll do anything. Anything you tell me.

STEVENS: You know nothing but pain.

MARY BETH: Please, Mr. Stevens.

STEVENS: Nothing! Nothing but the rule of the rod. Bend over. Grab the edge of the desk.

MARY BETH: Please....

STEVENS: Do it.

*(MARY BETH bends over.)*

MARY BETH: How many?

STEVENS: Ten.

MARY BETH: Ten.

STEVENS: Mary Beth?

MARY BETH: Yes?

STEVENS: I want you to count them. Understood?

MARY BETH: Understood. *(swack)* One. *(swack)* Two. *(swack)* Three. *(swack)* Four. *(swack)* Five. *(swack)* Six. *(swack)* Seven. *(swack)* Eight. *(swack)* Nine. *(swack)* Ten.

*(STEVENS places the meter stick on the desk.)*

STEVENS: Go back to class now.

MARY BETH: No.

STEVENS: Excuse me?

MARY BETH: I'm not going.

STEVENS: Mary Beth--

MARY BETH: --I am not going. You think that's it, don't you? You can just beat me and send me back to class. It doesn't work that way, Mr. Stevens. It never works that way.

STEVENS: Mary Beth, I am ordering you to go back to class.

MARY BETH: You're ordering me? That must feel good. Real good. To tell a little girl what to do. Must be why you're where you are. Underpaid. Overqualified. Sitting behind a nice, safe desk. What is it about little girls, Mr. Stevens? What is it that makes you want to tell them what to do?

STEVENS: You are out of line, young lady.

MARY BETH: No. You are out of line. Out of line. Out of place. Out of time. Time to decide, Mr. Stevens. What is it about all those little girls, in their short little skirts, and their white little blouses? What is it about ribbons in their hair, Mr. Stevens? What is it about knee socks?

STEVENS: You need to leave. Right now.

MARY BETH: Or what? What are you afraid you'll do to me, Mr. Stevens? Are you afraid those knee socks might be too much for you to resist?

STEVENS: No!

MARY BETH: You're trembling, Mr. Stevens. That's not a good sign.

STEVENS: You are the pupil, Mary Beth. I am--

MARY BETH: --You like it that way, don't you? A girl. Beneath you. You. On top. It gives you power, Mr. Stevens. It gives you authority. That's how you know you're the grown-up. Because you get to be on top.

STEVENS: If you don't leave right now, I will.

MARY BETH: And how will that look, Mr. Stevens? When you leave a girl all alone in your office. After spanking her bottom?

STEVENS: Discipline is--

MARY BETH: --Is that what you think this is? Discipline? You've got a lot to learn, Mr. Stevens.

STEVENS: It hurts me more than--

MARY BETH: --I highly doubt it.

STEVENS: You have no idea what it's like to be me, Mary Beth.

MARY BETH: Can I guess? To be old--well--middle-aged, noticing those gray hairs, noticing that sagging belly, the extra breath it takes to climb the stairs to your office. Unhappily married. Unhappily employed. With such great promise once. You wanted to change the world. Now a school is your world. One small, petty, insignificant little school, for spoiled girls who will never amount to anything either. But it's yours, isn't it? And you get to run it. And you get to have power over it.

STEVENS: I am trying the best I can.

MARY BETH: Oh, but it's not about what you do, Mr. Stevens. It's about who you are. Who are you, Mr. Stevens? Shall I tell you?

STEVENS: But....

MARY BETH: (*picking up the meter stick*) You are a man. An old, old man. Who gets his jollies from spanking little girls. You like it, Mr. Stevens. You love it. Because it gives you power. It gives a weak, pathetic, impotent man power.

STEVENS: No....

MARY BETH: You are a dirty, pathetic, worthless old man, and that is all you will ever be. Bend over. Grab the edge of the desk.

STEVENS: Please....

MARY BETH: Do it!

*(STEVENS bends over.)*

STEVENS: How many?

MARY BETH: Ten.

STEVENS: Ten.

MARY BETH: Mr. Stevens?

STEVENS: Yes?

MARY BETH: I want you to count them. Understood?

STEVENS: Understood. *(swack)* One. *(swack)* Two. *(swack)* Three. *(swack)* Four. *(swack)* Five. *(swack)* Six. *(swack)* Seven. *(swack)* Eight. *(swack)* Nine. *(swack)* Ten.

*(STEVENS collapses to the ground. MARY BETH drops the meter stick. She takes out a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. STEVENS fondles the meter stick lovingly. MARY BETH lights a cigarette and takes a drag.)*

MARY BETH: So... was it good for you?

STEVENS: Chalk dust.

MARY BETH: Huh?

STEVENS: Next time... put chalk dust under your fingernails... for the smell.

MARY BETH: Hey, that's good! Lemme write that down. *(taking out a pad and pen)* Put... chalk... dust... under... finger... nails. You're good at this, you know that?

STEVENS: Mmm.

MARY BETH: I remember, in school, having to beat the erasers against the side of the building, and you'd get those clouds of chalk dust everywhere. It would get on your clothes, and all up in your nostrils. God. What a smell.

STEVENS: Yes.

MARY BETH: What time is it? Shit. I gotta get to work. Mind if I change?

STEVENS: Behind the screen.

MARY BETH: Yeah, yeah. I know. Ashtray?

STEVENS: Top drawer.

MARY BETH: That's right.

STEVENS: Susie doesn't smoke any more.

MARY BETH: Hell, no one smokes anymore.

STEVENS: You do.

MARY BETH: Gotta die some way.

*(MARY BETH starts to undo her blouse.)*

STEVENS: Behind the screen.

MARY BETH: Fine, fine. *(going behind the screen)* You know, for a complete and total pervert, you are such a prude.

STEVENS: I'm not a pervert. I'm just... different.

MARY BETH: Hey, it's fine. I'm not complaining.

STEVENS: I'm a... psychological minority.

MARY BETH: Waddya want? Affirmative action for S and M? Might not be such a bad idea. Get to quit that stupid job of mine. You ever wait tables?

STEVENS: No.

MARY BETH: It sucks ass. "Oh, Miss! Can I have a little more coffee? Oh, Miss! I'm out of water. This is too hot. This is too cold. This doesn't taste like last time." Makes me wanna smack the bitches right upside the head. And my boss, Arnie, you know what he considers late? One minute. One minute late, and you're late. It's like.... It's like high school.

STEVENS: No knee socks.

MARY BETH: That's right! High school without the knee socks. So, you were really a teacher once, huh?

STEVENS: That was a long time ago.

MARY BETH: What made you quit?

STEVENS: I was let go.

MARY BETH: What for?

STEVENS: *(putting away the ashtray)* I don't like to talk about it.

MARY BETH: So, what do you do now?

STEVENS: It's not interesting.

MARY BETH: Gotta be more interesting than waiting tables.

STEVENS: No.

MARY BETH: I just thought it was strange. You never mentioned it.

STEVENS: That's because it's out there. This is in here.

*(MARY BETH walks out from behind the screen. She is dressed in a waitress uniform and carries a bag with her other clothes.)*

MARY BETH: If you don't want to talk about it--

STEVENS: --It's not that.

MARY BETH: Just making conversation.

STEVENS: I work for a company called Medical Intelligence Management Incorporated, or MIMI, which covers medical symposia and conferences, and when something concerns a certain medical device or pharmaceutical product, MIMI hires me and I write a report, which MIMI keeps in their database and then sells access to that database to various clients within the pharmaceutical and medical device industries. *(silence)* I'm a writer.

MARY BETH: Oh.

STEVENS: Shouldn't you be getting to work?

MARY BETH: Shit! I lost track of time.

*(SUSIE and JIM enter. They fold up the screen. Behind the screen is a restaurant table and two chairs. They carry the screen off.)*

STEVENS: Next Tuesday?

MARY BETH: Yeah, I'll be here.

STEVENS: And if you could, park around the corner.

MARY BETH: I just forgot last week. It won't happen again.

SUSIE: (*re-entering*) Oh, Miss!

MARY BETH: I should be going.

STEVENS: I need to get some work done, too

(*SUSIE walks to the table and sits down.*)

MARY BETH: I was just wondering... you don't have to tell me if you don't want to... but....

SUSIE: Miss!

MARY BETH: Why were you let go? From teaching?

STEVENS: For beating a girl with a meter stick.

SUSIE: I'm waiting!

(*STEVENS exits. MARY BETH enters the restaurant scene.*)

MARY BETH: Sorry, ma'am.

SUSIE: I have a few questions about your menu.

MARY BETH: Can I get you something to drink first?

SUSIE: Tea, please. But I have a few questions about your menu.

MARY BETH: Be with you in just a minute, ma'am.

(*MARY BETH exits.*)

SUSIE: But Miss! The tuna melt, Miss! Jesus Christ! Service today is impossible.

MARY BETH: (*offstage*) Be right with you!

SUSIE: I have a question about the tuna melt!

MARY BETH: (*offstage*) Be right with you!

SUSIE: It used to be the customer counted for something, didn't it? The customer was always right. Well, I'm the customer, and I have a question about the tuna melt.

MARY BETH: (*offstage*) Right with you, ma'am.

SUSIE: Customer service. That's all I ask for--a little respect. A little deference to me, the customer. If you show some respect to the customer, the customer will show some respect to you in return. Someone your age really should have learned that by now. Maybe that's why you're still just a waitress.

MARY BETH: (*entering with tea*) I'm right here, ma'am.

SUSIE: Ah! Took you long enough.

MARY BETH: Here's your tea.

SUSIE: The tea's too cold.

MARY BETH: You haven't tasted it yet, ma'am.

SUSIE: But I can see the steam rising out of the cup, or for that matter, the lack thereof, so I know that the tea is too cold.

MARY BETH: I'll get you another tea, ma'am.

SUSIE: No, no. I'll make due. No reason to trouble you more than necessary. I just have a few questions about the menu.

MARY BETH: The tuna melt.

SUSIE: Now is that cooked on the same grill as the hamburgers, because I'm a vegetarian and I don't want beef fat cooked into my tuna melt.

MARY BETH: You're a vegetarian, so you don't want beef fat on your tuna melt.

SUSIE: Fish is different. Fish is not meat.

MARY BETH: I'll have to check on that with the kitchen.

SUSIE: And another thing. It says the tuna melt comes with french fries, cole slaw, and a pickle.

MARY BETH: Yes.

SUSIE: Now, can I get potato salad instead of cole slaw? I can't abide mayonnaise.

MARY BETH: You can't abide mayonnaise, so you want potato salad, instead of cole slaw, with your tuna melt.

SUSIE: Precisely.

MARY BETH: Ma'am, that's all got mayonnaise.

SUSIE: But mayonnaise tastes differently in potato salad than it does in cole slaw.

MARY BETH: The customer is always right.

SUSIE: Thank you. Now will that be possible?

MARY BETH: I'll have to check with the kitchen.

SUSIE: Well, if I can't have potato salad, can you put the coleslaw on a separate plate?

MARY BETH: It comes in a little paper cup.

SUSIE: I don't want it in a little paper cup--I want it on a separate plate.

MARY BETH: I'll put the paper cup on a separate plate.

SUSIE: Unless it's potato salad. Then put it on the same plate with the tuna melt.

MARY BETH: It still comes in a paper cup.

SUSIE: I don't want a paper cup.

MARY BETH: Fine.

SUSIE: Why aren't you writing this down?

*(MARY BETH takes out a notepad and pen.)*

MARY BETH: So you want the tuna melt?

SUSIE: Only if it doesn't have any beef fat.

MARY BETH: And potato salad instead of cole slaw.

SUSIE: But I still want my french fries and my pickle.

MARY BETH: Uh-huh.

SUSIE: And if I have to have cole slaw, put the cole slaw on a separate plate, but not in a paper cup.

MARY BETH: Alright.

SUSIE: Have you got all that?

MARY BETH: Got it.

SUSIE: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: Positive.

SUSIE: May I see what you've written down just to make sure?

MARY BETH: *(handing her the closed notepad)* Here.

SUSIE: "Put chalk dust under fingernails?"

MARY BETH: Next page!

SUSIE: "Tuna melt, no beef fat, potato salad, or slaw on side, no cup."

MARY BETH: Yup.

SUSIE: What about the pickle?

MARY BETH: What about it?

SUSIE: I want my french fries and my pickle.

MARY BETH: All the sandwiches come with french fries and pickle.

SUSIE: Can you write it down, please?

MARY BETH: I will write it down.

SUSIE: French fries and pickle.

MARY BETH: Plus potato salad. If you can't have potato salad, you want cole slaw on a separate plate, no cup, and no tuna melt if it's cooked in beef fat.

SUSIE: There, now was that so hard?

MARY BETH: Is there anything else, ma'am?

SUSIE: Yes. Why are you fucking my husband?

MARY BETH: Excuse me?

SUSIE: At first I just thought Alan had taken up smoking. Then a little bird told me about a slutty waitress who made home deliveries.

MARY BETH: I'm not sure I follow you.

SUSIE: I hired a private investigator, Miss Riley. Your visits have now been documented both with still photographs and on videotape. Just to the house. He at least had the good sense to close the blinds. It doesn't take too much imagination to figure out what you were doing inside, however. I know everything except why, so you might as well sit down and tell me about it.

MARY BETH: You've obviously mistaken me for someone else.

SUSIE: My name is Susan Stevens. Stevens, Miss Riley. My card. I work for Green Bridge Real Estate. That's the holding company that owns the property on which Arnie's Diner is situated. Arnie and I go way back, Miss Riley, and I have already made sure that at the end of the day, you won't have a job here, so you might as well sit down and answer my question.

MARY BETH: Does your husband know you're here?

SUSIE: So you do admit to a relationship?

MARY BETH: I'm not admitting to anything. I just asked if your husband knows you're here and not locked up on a loony farm.

SUSIE: Spare me the pretense, Miss Riley. As I said, your employment at this establishment ends today no matter what, so you might as well take off your apron, sit down, and tell me: Why are you fucking my husband?

*(MARY BETH sits down.)*

MARY BETH: You are one screwed-up bitch.

SUSIE: Oh dear, oh dear. Your razor-sharp wit has wounded my pride.

MARY BETH: What do you want from me?

SUSIE: An explanation. Repentance isn't necessary; you're obviously not capable of that. I've already achieved revenge thanks to Arnie. Now I'm just trying to figure out why. He's practically old enough to be your father. Alan's not a bad looking man, but hardly someone I'd expect a young girl like you to go for.

MARY BETH: Life's just full of the unexpected, isn't it?

SUSIE: He's obviously not paying you. Alan wouldn't have the courage to go to a prostitute. And besides, if he paid you, you wouldn't still have to work in a dump like this.

MARY BETH: Maybe I just have a thing for tuna melts.

SUSIE: If you're after money, I'm the one who makes it, and if we divorce, Alan won't get a penny.

MARY BETH: Fine! Divorce him.

SUSIE: Do you think that's what I want? Alan may not be much of a man, but he's mine. I certainly hope you use a condom. I wouldn't want him getting damaged.

MARY BETH: You have no idea, do you?

SUSIE: We've already established I know precisely what's going on.

MARY BETH: Have we?

SUSIE: I love him! You don't understand that, and I wouldn't expect you to. A long time ago, before birth control in public schools and sex on prime time, before Internet dating and revolving-door marriages, before you were old enough to know what sex even was, people found each other. It doesn't matter how it happened. We just came together, like two drops of water in the ocean, finding each other out, becoming one. Alan found me, and I found him. And I am not letting him go to some twenty-something waitress who's good in bed.

MARY BETH: Wow. You don't have a clue.

SUSIE: I am not going to lose my dignity, Miss Riley. I know what he gets out of the relationship. Tell me what you get, and then I'll leave you alone. Answer me as honestly as you possibly can: Why are you fucking my husband?

MARY BETH: We don't fuck.

SUSIE: What, he just has you over once a week for a Lewinski?

MARY BETH: No.

SUSIE: I would find that rather difficult to believe.

MARY BETH: I could tell you every last detail. And you still wouldn't believe me. So much to learn. You don't even know your own husband. Do you, Mrs. Stevens?

SUSIE: Tell me.

MARY BETH: Every Tuesday afternoon, I go over to your house, and I sit in your husband's study, and we talk.

SUSIE: Talk?

MARY BETH: He says things to me he will never say to you, Mrs. Stevens. Ever.

SUSIE: And that's all?

MARY BETH: That's never all.

SUSIE: Because you leave the study and go to the bedroom.

MARY BETH: I've never even seen the bedroom.

SUSIE: Don't tell me you do it on the desk?

MARY BETH: (*getting up*) Do what on the desk, Mrs. Stevens?  
That is the question.

SUSIE: Where are you going? Do what on the desk?

MARY BETH: I beat him with a meter stick.

SUSIE: You do what?

MARY BETH: I beat him with a meter stick. And that, is all.

SUSIE: Are you telling me that the only reason Alan has you over is  
so you can thrash him about with a yard stick?

MARY BETH: Meter stick.

SUSIE: What's the difference?

MARY BETH: Meter's longer; it's the metric system.

SUSIE: I know that!

MARY BETH: Good-bye, Mrs. Stevens.

SUSIE: I'm not through with you.

MARY BETH: Chalk dust under fingernails. Do you know what that  
means?

SUSIE: No.

MARY BETH: Then you never will. Because he'll never tell you.  
And neither will I.

SUSIE: If you walk away now, I'll throw him out on the street.

MARY BETH: Will you?

SUSIE: In two seconds flat. Out on his ass!

MARY BETH: He's already left you, Mrs. Stevens.

(*STEVENS enters and throws an old table cloth over the desk.*)

SUSIE: Pah! What do you know?

(*SUSIE takes a sip of tea.*)

MARY BETH: By the way, I pissed in your tea.

*(SUSIE spits out the tea and exits as MARY BETH crosses over to what is now her apartment.)*

STEVENS: So this is it, huh?

MARY BETH: Sorry. It's a mess. I wasn't expecting company. I never expect company.

STEVENS: It's... cozy.

MARY BETH: Small.

STEVENS: I forgot people lived like this.

MARY BETH: It's all I can afford, really. Besides, it's just one person. It...

STEVENS: ...will still be one person. I just need a place for the night.

MARY BETH: I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said some of those things to her.

STEVENS: It's not your fault.

MARY BETH: Why'd you have to leave, anyway? It's your house, too.

STEVENS: Susie can be very persuasive. Especially when she's holding a meat cleaver.

MARY BETH: I had no idea.

STEVENS: We should have been more careful. I'd say we know now for next time, but....

MARY BETH: Yeah.

STEVENS: It used to be... we were on the same side. Susie and me. Sometimes, I think that's what love really is. Being on the same side.

MARY BETH: What's that mean?

STEVENS: Just that... the way it used to be, when I did something, took a job, or walked the dog, or brushed her hair out of her eyes, it wasn't just for me. I was thinking about her, too, not just myself. It was for Susie, too. And when she did something, even something I hated, smoked a whole pack of cigarettes, left her panties on the shower rod, made grilled salmon! I hate salmon.... But I still knew, even when she drove me insane, she didn't mean to. We were on the same side.

MARY BETH: You really think that?

STEVENS: God. If we could be on the same side again, I'd eat salmon until the day I died.

MARY BETH: Then eat it. But eat it for you, not her. She sure as hell doesn't cook it unless she wants something back.

STEVENS: What would she want back?

MARY BETH: I don't know. Approval. Sympathy. Lower carb intake. People do things for all sorts of reasons.

STEVENS: That doesn't mean she expected--

MARY BETH: --Of course it does. People do things for themselves. Nothing wrong with it. It's just life.

STEVENS: Still, sometimes people are on the same side.

MARY BETH: Not really. You do what you do because it will get you what you want, not because you're on the same side with anybody but yourself.

STEVENS: Aren't we on the same side?

*(Silence.)*

MARY BETH: No. We're not.

*(Silence.)*

STEVENS: I see.

MARY BETH: I'm sorry. It's... it's a beautiful sentiment. And it would be wonderful to be able to do something for.... But we don't. You look after you, and I look after me.

STEVENS: That's... fair, I suppose.

MARY BETH: It's just the way things are.

STEVENS: You never wanted to... give something to someone else? Not thinking about yourself at all?

MARY BETH: All my life. But no one's ever given that to me, and don't expect me to give that to you. Or to anyone else.

STEVENS: Fine.

MARY BETH: Look... do you want to do it?

STEVENS: Hmm?

MARY BETH: It. Do you want to do it?

STEVENS: I... don't think I could.

MARY BETH: Oh.

STEVENS: Not right now. I mean, not....

MARY BETH: It's okay. God. Where are my manners? Can I get you something to drink? A beer?

STEVENS: Tea.

MARY BETH: Tea. Sure.

*(She exits.)*

STEVENS: I had one of these once. Before Susie and I got married. Studio apartment. There was a shower in the kitchen.

MARY BETH: *(offstage)* I'm just gonna nuke it, okay?

STEVENS: Fine.

MARY BETH: *(re-entering)* Be just a minute.

STEVENS: Did you really lose your job?

MARY BETH: I don't know. I'm gonna talk to Arnie in the morning.

STEVENS: She shouldn't have done that.

MARY BETH: I probably deserved it.

STEVENS: No.

MARY BETH: There I go. Mary Beth. Screwing up again.

STEVENS: You're a good woman.

MARY BETH: Yeah, well I certainly don't feel like it.

STEVENS: Why? Because of what happened at the diner?

MARY BETH: She pissed me off, so I.... I knew I shouldn't have. But I wanted so badly to hurt her.... Never thought of what she'd do to you.

STEVENS: I'll survive.

MARY BETH: That's not the point. Or... maybe it should be, but....

STEVENS: Mary Beth, I'm telling you... you're a good woman.

MARY BETH: I.... Your tea should be ready.

*(She exits.)*

STEVENS: I'll sleep on the floor, of course. I wouldn't dream of--

MARY BETH: --Be careful. It's really hot.

*(She enters and hands him the cup. Their hands meet.)*

STEVENS: Thanks....

*(Both are still holding onto the cup.)*

MARY BETH: What's wrong?

STEVENS: I... I've never touched your skin before.

*(She takes her hands away.)*

MARY BETH: Oh. That's all.

STEVENS: May I...? Please...?

MARY BETH: What do you...?

*(He puts down the cup.)*

STEVENS: Your hand.

*(She offers her hand. He takes it.)*

MARY BETH: It's just a hand.

STEVENS: Your skin is very smooth.

MARY BETH: Thanks. I think....

*(She takes away her hand.)*

STEVENS: I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable.

MARY BETH: No, no, I.... Your tea?

*(He tastes it.)*

STEVENS: Very hot.

MARY BETH: Sorry.

STEVENS: No. I like it that way.

MARY BETH: I... I do too.

STEVENS: That's why we get along.

MARY BETH: Tomorrow, I don't mean to rush you, but... will you talk to her?

STEVENS: I don't want to think about it right now.

MARY BETH: No. Of course not. I.... Are you sure you don't want to do it?

STEVENS: We don't have the desk.

MARY BETH: Well, this could be the desk. And I'll sit over here. I don't have a meter stick. Maybe we could use a broom handle.

STEVENS: It's not the same.

MARY BETH: No it's not the same.

STEVENS: I... suppose a broom handle could work, but--

MARY BETH: --Could we?

STEVENS: Broom handle?

MARY BETH: Or whatever. Just....

STEVENS: Would you like to?

MARY BETH: Only if you're up to it.

STEVENS: No reason why not.

MARY BETH: I'll sit down then. Would you...?

STEVENS: Sure, sure. Let's see....

MARY BETH: I should change first.

STEVENS: No, that's alright.

MARY BETH: Are you sure?

STEVENS: Sure.

MARY BETH: Alright then.

STEVENS: Well....

MARY BETH: I'm sorry. I'm so, so, sorry. I didn't mean for it to happen.

STEVENS: Mary Beth, your teachers care about you very much.

MARY BETH: I was bad.

STEVENS: Sometimes you... you....

MARY BETH: Yes?

STEVENS: Sometimes you do bad things. That doesn't make you a bad person.

MARY BETH: Do you hate me, Mr. Stevens?

STEVENS: No. I don't.

MARY BETH: You should. Everyone should hate me.

STEVENS: Why do you say that?

MARY BETH: I'm dirty. The things I do.... It's sin, Mr. Stevens. That's a fact.

STEVENS: So you think you're sinful?

MARY BETH: Oh, yes. I'm very sinful, Mr. Stevens. Though not as sinful as Joanne O'Conner. I may have to burn in hell, but--

STEVENS: --I need to speak to you about something much more serious.

MARY BETH: Oh?

STEVENS: She yelled at you, didn't she?

MARY BETH: Yes.

STEVENS: And what did you say next?

MARY BETH: It's just words. It didn't mean anything.

STEVENS: It means something to me.

MARY BETH: But that's just it. Words only upset us because--

STEVENS: --You... mean... something... to me.

MARY BETH: Mr. Stevens....

STEVENS: Now... do you have anything else to say for yourself?

MARY BETH: I want to be good, Mr. Stevens. I really do.

STEVENS: I told you. You already are.

MARY BETH: What are you going to do to me?

STEVENS: I don't know.

MARY BETH: Then... tell me to pound my head into the blackboard! Tell me to clean the toilets with my tongue. I'll do anything, Mr. Stevens. But you have to tell me what to do. Don't make me choose.

STEVENS: I'm asking you to choose.

MARY BETH: Don't ask.

STEVENS: Mary Beth....

MARY BETH: Don't ask. Tell me.

*(He kisses her, then backs away.)*

STEVENS: Should I have done that?

MARY BETH: I don't know.

*(She steps toward him.)*

STEVENS: Mary Beth, I don't want you to take one step closer to me. Do you understand?

MARY BETH: Yes, Mr. Stevens.

STEVENS: And Mary Beth... I don't want you to take one step further away. Understood?

MARY BETH: Understood.

STEVENS: Good.

MARY BETH: Mr. Stevens... Alan... I'm going to take off my apron now. *(she does)* Alan... I'm going to unbutton my blouse now.

STEVENS: No.

MARY BETH: I'm going to unbutton my blouse now, Alan. And I'm not going to move any closer. But I want you to watch.

STEVENS: Mary Beth....

*(She begins to unbutton her blouse.)*

MARY BETH: I want you to watch. Before tonight, you never touched my skin. I want you to touch me, Alan.

*(A knock at the door.)*

STEVENS: I can't.

MARY BETH: I want you to hold me.

*(A knock at the door.)*

STEVENS: Shouldn't you get that?

MARY BETH: No.

STEVEN: It might be--

MARY BETH: --Make love to me, Alan. Please.

*(A knock at the door.)*

STEVENS: *(turning away)* Cover yourself up!

*(She buttons her blouse back up.)*

MARY BETH: I'm sorry.

STEVENS: Don't be sorry. Just....

*(A knock at the door.)*

MARY BETH: The door's open!

*(JIM enters. MARY BETH is still buttoning up her blouse.)*

JIM: Oh. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to--

MARY BETH: --You want your mail?

JIM: Well, yeah. If it's not too much trouble.

MARY BETH: Hold on a minute. I put it in the kitchen.

*(She exits.)*

JIM: Alan?

STEVENS: Jim?

JIM: What are you...? Never mind.

STEVENS: I can explain everything.

JIM: That's quite alright.

STEVENS: Mary Beth and I are... are....

*(MARY BETH enters with a stack of mail.)*

MARY BETH: Here you are.

JIM: Thanks.

STEVENS: It's not what it looks like.

JIM: And it's none of my business.

STEVENS: No, really.

JIM: Thanks, Mary Beth.

MARY BETH: No problem. Hope you had a good time in Houston.

JIM: Austin.

MARY BETH: Whatever.

JIM: I'll be going now.

STEVENS: Jim! Uh... good to see you.

JIM: Yeah. Same here.

*(JIM exits.)*

STEVENS: Oops.

MARY BETH: You know my neighbor?

STEVENS: He works for MIMI.

MARY BETH: And she is?

STEVENS: My company. I freelance for them.

MARY BETH: Right.

STEVENS: He's my boss. I get all my assignments from him. What must he think of me?

MARY BETH: What does it matter? Your wife kicked you out. People are going to figure things out eventually.

STEVENS: But he thinks--

MARY BETH: --Yes, he thinks, and she thinks, and everybody thinks that I'm getting some, and I obviously ain't.

STEVENS: Mary Beth... it's been a very long time... since I've been... with a woman.

MARY BETH: You're married.

STEVENS: Like I said. It's been a very long time.

MARY BETH: What happened? Never mind. It's none of my--

STEVENS: --No. You have a right to ask.

MARY BETH: Well then?

STEVENS: What happened...? I lost my job.

MARY BETH: You mean... at the school?

STEVENS: Yes.

MARY BETH: For... beating--

STEVENS: --a girl with a meter stick. Yes.

MARY BETH: Jesus.

STEVENS: I've been... unable... since then.

MARY BETH: Have you tried the pill?

STEVENS: No, it's not biological. As my... present condition bears witness.

MARY BETH: Oh.

STEVENS: It's not that I'm not... capable. I just... I...

MARY BETH: You can tell me. If you want to....

STEVENS: I know I can. That's what scares me.

MARY BETH: Alan....

STEVENS: I'm scared, Mary Beth.

MARY BETH: It's okay. I'm here.

STEVENS: No closer.

MARY BETH: I can't spend my life in orbit around you, Alan. You have to make a choice. If you want me....

STEVENS: I....

MARY BETH: I won't wait for you. You have to make a choice.

STEVENS: Don't make me choose.

MARY BETH: I'm asking you to choose. Either you want me, or....

STEVENS: You should talk to Arnie tomorrow. Or I'll talk to him. Maybe he'll let you have your job back.

MARY BETH: Maybe.

SUSIE: *(entering)* Oh, Miss!

STEVENS: I need to get some sleep.

*(SUSIE walks to the restaurant table and sits down.)*

MARY BETH: You don't have to sleep on the floor.

STEVENS: I couldn't--

MARY BETH: --There's an air mattress.

SUSIE: Miss!

STEVENS: Mary Beth....

MARY BETH: Yes...?

STEVENS: Thank you.

SUSIE: I'm waiting!

*(STEVENS exits. MARY BETH enters the restaurant scene.)*

MARY BETH: Sorry, ma'am.

SUSIE: I have a few questions about your menu.

MARY BETH: Can I get you something to drink first?

SUSIE: Tea, please. But I have a few questions about your menu.

MARY BETH: Be with you in just a minute, ma'am.

*(MARY BETH exits.)*

SUSIE: But Miss! The tuna melt, Miss! Jesus Christ! Service today is impossible.

MARY BETH: *(offstage)* Be right with you!

SUSIE: I have a question about the tuna melt!

MARY BETH: *(offstage)* Be right with you!

SUSIE: It used to be the customer counted for something, didn't it?

MARY BETH: (*entering with tea*) Right with you, ma'am.

SUSIE: Ah! Took you long enough.

MARY BETH: Here's your tea.

SUSIE: Steaming hot.

MARY BETH: Just like you like it.

SUSIE: Thank you.

(*SUSIE takes a sip of tea and spits it out.*)

MARY BETH: Problem, ma'am?

SUSIE: You are revolting.

MARY BETH: Yes, ma'am. I suppose I am.

SUSIE: You wouldn't have this job if it weren't for me.

MARY BETH: No, I wouldn't.

SUSIE: You exist for one purpose, and one purpose only: to serve me. Without the customer, you are nothing. Now, what are you?

MARY BETH: Nothing.

SUSIE: Excellent.

MARY BETH: Would you like the tuna melt?

SUSIE: It says the tuna melt comes with french fries, cole slaw, and a pickle.

MARY BETH: Yes.

SUSIE: Now, can I get potato salad instead of cole slaw? I can't abide mayonnaise.

MARY BETH: The customer is always right.

SUSIE: And if I can't have potato salad, can you put the coleslaw on a separate plate?

MARY BETH: I'll put the paper cup on a separate plate.

SUSIE: Unless it's potato salad. Then put it on the same plate with the tuna melt.

MARY BETH: Would you like me to write this down?

SUSIE: Could you?

*(MARY BETH takes out a notepad and pen.)*

MARY BETH: So you want the tuna melt?

SUSIE: Only if it's not too much trouble.

MARY BETH: Uh-huh.

SUSIE: And if I have to have cole slaw, put the cole slaw on a separate plate, but not in a paper cup.

MARY BETH: Alright.

SUSIE: Have you got all that?

MARY BETH: *(handing her the notepad)* Here.

SUSIE: "Eat shit, you fucking bitch."

MARY BETH: Sorry, I left out the part about the pickle.

SUSIE: Would you like to keep that job?

MARY BETH: Yes, ma'am. I'd also like to be treated with respect.

SUSIE: You don't deserve respect. You are a worm. You are an insect. You are the dirt beneath my heels. What are you?

MARY BETH: I am nothing.

SUSIE: That's right. Nothing. Now go get my food.

MARY BETH: Yes, ma'am.

*(MARY BETH exits.)*

SUSIE: I work. I work hard, you understand. Real estate is kill, or be killed. And I for one am a survivor. Which is why after a hard day of work, I walk into this diner, and I expect to be served. I expect you to do whatever it takes to make me, the customer, satisfied. If that's to smile, that means you smile. If that's to put the cole slaw on a separate plate, then you damned well better do that, too. Because you serve me. What I want, you do. I am your own personal god.

*(MARY BETH enters with a plate. On the plate is a mountain of cole slaw.)*

MARY BETH: There you are, ma'am. Can I get anything else for you?

SUSIE: What is this?

MARY BETH: Tuna melt, ma'am. Would you like another tea?

SUSIE: But what is this?

MARY BETH: Comes with cole slaw, ma'am.

SUSIE: I didn't want cole slaw. I wanted potato salad.

MARY BETH: Sorry, ma'am. We're out of potato salad.

SUSIE: This is disgusting.

MARY BETH: Exactly what you ordered, ma'am. I even wrote it down.

*(SUSIE picks up the plate and places it on the floor.)*

SUSIE: Eat it.

MARY BETH: Excuse me?

SUSIE: Get down on your hands and knees, and eat it.

MARY BETH: I'm not going to do that.

*(SUSIE takes out a twenty-dollar bill.)*

SUSIE: You see this? This is your tip. *(placing the bill on the table)*  
Eat it.

*(Pause.)*

MARY BETH: More.

*(SUSIE places another twenty on the table.)*

SUSIE: There.

MARY BETH: More.

SUSIE: Greedy.

MARY BETH: I gotta pay my rent. More.

*(SUSIE puts down a third bill.)*

SUSIE: This is my final offer.

*(Pause.)*

MARY BETH: No.

SUSIE: Yes.

MARY BETH: No. Not for that.

*(SUSIE picks up the latest bill.)*

SUSIE: This one is about to disappear.

MARY BETH: I won't do it.

SUSIE: Going once.

MARY BETH: You can't make me.

SUSIE: Going twice.

*(Pause. MARY BETH grabs the bill from SUSIE's hand. She then grabs the two other bills and stuffs them in her pocket.)*

MARY BETH: Fine.

*(MARY BETH takes a fork from the table and kneels down before the plate.)*

SUSIE: No. Like a dog.

MARY BETH: God....

*(MARY BETH puts down the fork and eats cole slaw like a dog.)*

SUSIE: Isn't it nice when the customer finally gets what she pays for? In this day and age, it can be hard, so hard for a working woman to finally get her due. She struggles and struggles, puts in long hours at the office, and finally, at the end of the day, puts away her files, shuts down her computer, and can finally enjoy a nice, relaxing meal at the neighborhood diner. Now. Was that so difficult?

MARY BETH: You liked that, didn't you? You enjoyed that.

SUSIE: Quite.

MARY BETH: Why?

SUSIE: I hardly think--

MARY BETH: --Shall I tell you?

SUSIE: Please.

MARY BETH: Because you... are... me.

SUSIE: What does that mean?

MARY BETH: When it comes right down to it, I'm you. And you hate yourself so much, there isn't anything you won't do.

SUSIE: I've heard enough of this.

MARY BETH: You think that's it, don't you? You can just humiliate me, and hand me a wad of cash, and send me on my way. (*throws back the money*) Take your filthy money back. It doesn't work that way, Mrs. Stevens. It never works that way.

SUSIE: But you can't--

MARY BETH: --Time to decide, Mrs. Stevens. What is it about all those waitresses, in their short little skirts, and their white little aprons?

SUSIE: Aprons?

MARY BETH: What is it about name tags?

SUSIE: Have you gone insane?

MARY BETH: You're trembling, Mrs. Stevens. That's not a good sign.

SUSIE: You are a waitress, and nothing but--

MARY BETH: --You like it that way, don't you? Another woman. Beneath you. You. On top. It gives you power, Mrs. Stevens. It gives you authority.

SUSIE: You don't know the first thing about me.

MARY BETH: Can I guess? To be old--well--middle-aged, noticing those gray hairs, that sagging chest, the extra breath it takes to climb the stairs.

SUSIE: I am doing the best I know how.

MARY BETH: Oh, but it's not about what you do, Mrs. Stevens. It's about who you are. Who are you, Mrs. Stevens? Shall I tell you?

SUSIE: Umm....

MARY BETH: You are a woman. An old, old woman. Who gets her jollies from ordering around other women just like you. You like it, Mrs. Stevens. You love it. Because it gives you power. It gives a weak, pathetic, impotent woman power.

SUSIE: No....

MARY BETH: You are a dirty, pathetic, worthless old hag, and that is all you will ever be. Eat it.

SUSIE: You mean...?

MARY BETH: Eat it!

*(SUSIE gets down on her hands and knees and begins to eat the cole slaw like a dog. MARY BETH takes a broom handle out from under the table. SUSIE looks at her.)*

SUSIE: How many?

MARY BETH: Ten.

SUSIE: Ten.

*(MARY BETH swacks SUSIE ten times, then drops the broom handle. She takes out a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. SUSIE, her face covered in cole slaw, fondles the broom handle lovingly. MARY BETH lights a cigarette and takes a drag.)*

MARY BETH: So... was it good for you?

*(Blackout.)*

## ACT II

*(The table cloth has been removed from the desk. SUSIE and MARY BETH enter the office. SUSIE throws down her purse.)*

SUSIE: So I'm going to get rid of the books and the pictures, and throw out this awful desk, and we can set it up like a restaurant. Little tables and chairs. Then we won't have to use the diner.

MARY BETH: Susie--

SUSIE: --I know. It won't be the same. But I don't want to wait until the diner closes before we can... you know... do it.

MARY BETH: Alan doesn't have a place yet for the desk.

SUSIE: I'm not giving it to Alan. I told you, I'm throwing it out.

MARY BETH: But it's not yours.

SUSIE: It certainly is now.

MARY BETH: The desk is very important to him.

SUSIE: I don't care about him. I have you now.

MARY BETH: I'm not one of your things, you know.

SUSIE: Ooo. Are we starting?

MARY BETH: No!

SUSIE: Sorry. Why are you so tense?

MARY BETH: Because I fucked up.

SUSIE: How?

MARY BETH: It's bad enough I made you leave him.

SUSIE: You didn't make me do anything.

MARY BETH: If it hadn't been for me--

SUSIE: --I would have been in a joyless marriage to a penguin.

MARY BETH: Penguins... can be very emotional.

SUSIE: Alan Stevens is a walking corpse. Any fire in his heart burned out a long time ago.

MARY BETH: You're wrong. I've seen it.

SUSIE: So you say.

MARY BETH: When he was with me, underneath that collar and tie, underneath the tweed coat, there was something else. Darkness. Passion. Desire.

SUSIE: Ah, yes. His unrequited lust for Madam Curie.

MARY BETH: Don't make fun of him.

SUSIE: He must be a completely different man in bed.

MARY BETH: Why is it you still won't believe me?

SUSIE: Week after week, with a beautiful woman like you, and nothing?

MARY BETH: Not nothing. Just not that.

SUSIE: He didn't want me. Fine. I accepted that. But he didn't want you?

MARY BETH: Wanting is one thing. Taking is something else.

SUSIE: So he was too much of a coward?

MARY BETH: No.

SUSIE: Yes. That's why you left him, wasn't it?

MARY BETH: I didn't mean it to end that way.

SUSIE: Because he was too much of a coward to fuck you.

MARY BETH: It's not about sex! Well... it's not just about sex.

SUSIE: Mmm-hmmm.

MARY BETH: Sexual tension! Not sex. It's the absence that makes it all worth it.

SUSIE: You don't need to explain. I understand, remember?

MARY BETH: Oh, do you?

SUSIE: Have you forgotten--

MARY BETH: --What, your amateur night at the diner?

SUSIE: Amateur?

MARY BETH: I give you a little cole slaw and slap you around a bit, and all the sudden you think you're the queen of pain!

SUSIE: I thought I was pretty good.

MARY BETH: Mediocre. God, I never should have even talked to you. This was such a bad idea.

SUSIE: Then why did you come back? (*Silence*) See? There's something you want.

MARY BETH: Yes. But not from you.

SUSIE: You can't tell me that.

MARY BETH: Have I ever touched you, Susie? Have I ever laid one hand on you?

SUSIE: I've seen the way you look at me, and there's no way you can look at me like that, and tell me it's not about the sex.

MARY BETH: You want me to spell it out for you? Fine. Sit down.

SUSIE: Why do I have to--

MARY BETH: --SIT! (*SUSIE sits*) Hate to break it to you, but if you think this is just some bedroom fantasy, you don't even begin to understand.

SUSIE: What is this? Domination 101?

MARY BETH: Yes. And class is just starting, so pay attention.

SUSIE: Well?

MARY BETH: The sex is there. But not done. It's left. Unperformed. Untouched. Unspoken. That's what makes it so powerful. But what it's really about... is pain.

SUSIE: Pain?

MARY BETH: Giving it. Taking it. Making it yours. Together. And that's more intimate than any sex I've ever had.

SUSIE: You talk about it like....

MARY BETH: Someone who's been around the block? More than once.

SUSIE: That a boast?

MARY BETH: Just a fact.

SUSIE: You're awfully young for all that experience.

MARY BETH: I started young.

SUSIE: What, fifteen?

MARY BETH: Twelve.

SUSIE: That is young. Was he cute? What was his name?

MARY BETH: Father McDonough.

SUSIE: Jesus Christ.

MARY BETH: I was twelve. He was fifty-two. And no, he wasn't cute.

SUSIE: I'm so sorry.

MARY BETH: It's over. He's dead now, anyway.

SUSIE: I had no idea.

MARY BETH: It's not something you talk about.

SUSIE: At your school?

MARY BETH: Yeah. At school.

SUSIE: Fucking bastard.

MARY BETH: That wasn't what I was saying. I was saying.... God, what was I saying?

SUSIE: It's okay.

MARY BETH: No! It's not okay.

SUSIE: No....

MARY BETH: People think it's just boys, you know? But Father McDonough....

SUSIE: You can tell me.

MARY BETH: It's just something that happened.

SUSIE: Once?

MARY BETH: Yes.

SUSIE: More than once?

*(Pause.)*

MARY BETH: He told me there was something wrong with me. Was right about that.

SUSIE: No he wasn't.

MARY BETH: Sure he was! Said I needed a man in my life. To show me God. That's all God is to men, anyway. A little piece of flesh to shove up the nearest convenient orifice.

SUSIE: That's awful.

MARY BETH: It happened. I wasn't the first. And I wasn't the last. Eventually tracked him down. He was dead by then. Had gotten moved around from school to school. They'd made him a Monsignor by the end of it.

SUSIE: That's what this is all about?

MARY BETH: No. It's not. But it's a part of it. Because it's a part of me.

SUSIE: Tell me.

MARY BETH: You can't understand. And even if you could, you wouldn't want to.

SUSIE: Oh, baby, I'm so sorry.

MARY BETH: Don't call me baby!

SUSIE: Why? That a different routine?

MARY BETH: We're not doing a routine.

SUSIE: Of course we are! You're playing the victim, aren't you? And I'm here to comfort you. So come on. Cry.

MARY BETH: You're more fucked up than I am.

SUSIE: I'm just trying to get you to love me, for Christ's sake! Alan loved me once. And it was the single most beautiful thing in my entire life.

MARY BETH: I'm not Alan.

SUSIE: I know. But let me feel that again, please. Let me feel it one more time. Tell me the role, Mary Beth. I'll play it.

*(Pause.)*

MARY BETH: You got a cigarette?

SUSIE: I gave up smoking.

MARY BETH: Shit.

SUSIE: There's a gas station up the street. I'll be right back!

*(SUSIE grabs her purse and starts to exit.)*

MARY BETH: It's okay! I just... wanted a cigarette.

SUSIE: I've got... something else.

*(SUSIE opens her purse. She takes out a piece of Tupperware and opens it. She dips her finger into it and pulls it out, covered with cole slaw. SUSIE offers it to MARY BETH.)*

MARY BETH: You're absolutely embarrassing.

*(SUSIE sucks the cole slaw from her own finger.)*

SUSIE: Mmmmm....

MARY BETH: Put that away. And sit down.

*(SUSIE sits.)*

SUSIE: Is it time for the rest of my lesson?

MARY BETH: Sure.

SUSIE: Well, Miss Riley? I'm listening.

MARY BETH: Sex isn't about love. If that's what you came for, forget it. Sex isn't about caring. And it certainly isn't about sharing yourself. It's about power. Sex is about getting what you want. What do you want from a man? Money? A job? Someone to say you look pretty in a new dress? Then I'll tell you how to get what you want.

SUSIE: Men will just use you.

MARY BETH: Of course they'll use you. But aren't we out to use them, too? Don't be bitter about it. Just play it out. You give what you have to, you take what you want.

SUSIE: It's not that simple.

MARY BETH: Sure it is. Just a matter of what you want. For some people it's dinner and a movie, for others it's whips and chains. For others it's....

SUSIE: Meter sticks?

MARY BETH: Well... sometimes you have these... fantasies. It's no weirder than anything else.

SUSIE: I suppose.

MARY BETH: There are... ways... to meet people.... After a while, the sex becomes less important. It's the thrill. Never liked sex anyway. Never even came until I was twenty-two... in the shower... alone.... But that never stopped me from pouring hot wax on a guy's crotch.

SUSIE: Eww!!!

MARY BETH: There are so many fucking wackos out there. I thought about trying it out professionally. At least getting some money out of the deal. But once you take their money, it's like they own you, you know?

SUSIE: Well... sort of... no.

MARY BETH: It doesn't matter. They're all rat-bastards. But then... I was on-line, and there was this guy.... Metric3937.

SUSIE: Metric what?

MARY BETH: We started to chat. He was different... He didn't want the sex. Just the pain. And he wasn't some sadistic asshole, or some loser who'd just put me up on a vinyl pedestal. He was real. And his pain, was real. Because the pain you feel on the outside? That's fucking nothing. The shit you have to live with every day, the failure, the guilt, the hate, the self-disgust, that's the pain. And it's everywhere. It's in your shoulders, it's in your feet, it's in the pit of your stomach when you're having breakfast. Just this dull throbbing, throbbing, every second of every goddamned day. But then-- (*slaps her hands together*) You feel that, and it's there, and it's sharp, and it hurts, and it's gone. And then you can go back and live. Because the pain's gone now. And you can live.

*(SUSIE stares blankly at MARY BETH for a moment. Then SUSIE stands up, looks at her hand, bends over, and slaps herself on the bottom.)*

SUSIE: Like that?

MARY BETH: No!

SUSIE: Then what?

MARY BETH: Look, I don't care about anybody in the world, but me. You got that? You, your husband, the rest of the world can go to hell. I'm going to take what I want. But this, this is different. This is two human beings dealing with each other without the bullshit of status and relationship and the fucking games we play all day long. This is the closest we get to God. It's a sacrament--as sacred as any I've ever known. This is our communion. With one another. Kneel down.

*(SUSIE kneels.)*

SUSIE: Like this?

*(MARY BETH kneels.)*

MARY BETH: Like this. Listen. I have something to tell you. A confession to make. Are you ready?

SUSIE: I guess so.

MARY BETH: Don't guess.

SUSIE: Then... yes. I'm ready.

MARY BETH: A year ago, I was walking in the park. It was about dusk. There was a young man, with red hair, juggling these three rings. He dropped one. I told him his shirt was too tight. It was getting in the way. So he took it off. He was built. I asked him how old he was. Eighteen, he said. He looked old for his age. I sat on the grass, watching him juggle. Then he stopped, and asked me if I knew any tricks. I told him I knew one. He asked if he could see it. I told him no. I could only do it if he closed his eyes. Susie. Close your eyes.

*(She does.)*

SUSIE: Okay.

MARY BETH: I took a scarf I was wearing, and I tied a blindfold around him. Then I took one of the juggling rings, and I put it over his hand. Then I pulled his arms behind his back, and forced the other hand through the ring. He said I was hurting him. I told him that was good. I forced him behind some bushes and pushed him to the ground. I undid his belt and pulled down his jeans. He was trembling all over. I took another one of the rings and moved it up and down his body, all over him, until he was quite erect. Then I dropped my skirt to the ground, and I mounted him. All the while, I took the ring, and I put it right here. *(takes out a pen and holds it to SUSIE's throat)* I held

MARY BETH (cont'd): it close, so he could breathe, but just enough that he knew it was there, and I told him if he screamed, it would be the last scream he ever made. And I fucked him 'til he came.

*(MARY BETH lowers the pen.)*

SUSIE: He was just a kid.

MARY BETH: He wasn't eighteen.

SUSIE: You said--

MARY BETH: --He lied. He wasn't eighteen. He was fourteen. He looked old for his age.

SUSIE: *(opening her eyes)* Dear Lord.

MARY BETH: Now it's your turn. This is confession. Tell me your sins.

*(MARY BETH closes her eyes.)*

SUSIE: My sins....

MARY BETH: Yes.

SUSIE: Tell you my sins....

MARY BETH: You can tell me anything.

SUSIE: Anything....

MARY BETH: Nothing leaves this room. It is holy.

SUSIE: Holy....

MARY BETH: Tell me your secret. What makes you ashamed. What makes you afraid. Tell me your pain.

SUSIE: Well... I was at the supermarket.

MARY BETH: Yes?

SUSIE: I had gotten fish, and salad, and celery, and skim milk, and carrot sticks, and Diet Coke, and three bags of double chocolate chip cookies.

MARY BETH: Go on.

SUSIE: The line. It was really long. So I went to the eight items or less line, and I told the woman ahead of me that there was a sale on double chocolate chip cookies.

MARY BETH: And?

SUSIE: And there was no sale. I lied. But she left the line.

MARY BETH: And?

SUSIE: And I went through the eight items or less line faster.

MARY BETH: And?

SUSIE: And I had nine items.

*(MARY BETH opens her eyes and stands.)*

MARY BETH: You see! This is the difference between you and your husband.

SUSIE: Will you stop bringing him up?

MARY BETH: He understands.

SUSIE: Understands?

MARY BETH: Metric3937. That was him on the Internet. He knew what it meant to have pain.

SUSIE: Alan cries at long-distance commercials.

MARY BETH: But he understands. He's so dark. So guilt-ridden. He knows what it is to be evil.

SUSIE: He was a Boy Scout.

MARY BETH: He beat that girl. He crossed the line and he beat her.

SUSIE: When?

MARY BETH: That's why they fired him. Why he has to write medical bullshit, when all he ever wanted, was to be a teacher.

SUSIE: Is that what he told you?

MARY BETH: Well... yeah.

SUSIE: That he was fired?

MARY BETH: Wasn't he?

SUSIE: No! I'm getting rid of this desk. I'm getting rid of every god-damned thing in this room.

MARY BETH: He wasn't...? I'm very confused.

SUSIE: *(opening up drawers)* What is all this crap? What does he fucking need this for?

MARY BETH: But if he wasn't fired...?

SUSIE: One brass apple. A memento from happier days. Crap!

*(SUSIE throws the apple offstage with a whoosh, and it lands with a crash.)*

MARY BETH: Susie--

SUSIE: --One framed certificate. Phi Beta Kappa. Crap!

*(Whoosh, crash.)*

MARY BETH: Please.

SUSIE: One I-don't-even-know-what-this-is. Crap!

*(Whoosh, crash.)*

MARY BETH: Stop it. You're making a mess.

SUSIE: One copy Roget's Thesaurus. Hmm.... I wonder how many words there are for--CRAP!

*(Whoosh, crash.)*

MARY BETH: Shit.

SUSIE: One meter stick--

MARY BETH: --DON'T even think about it.

SUSIE: Sorry. Forgot that was special.

MARY BETH: *(taking the meter stick)* They're hard to find. Everyone wants yard sticks.

SUSIE: And it has to be--

MARY BETH: --Yes!

SUSIE: You two are so fucking weird.

MARY BETH: Yes. We two are.

SUSIE: Damn it, Alan! I thought I'd gotten rid of you!

MARY BETH: He did it with this. He did it. And he was fired.

SUSIE: Alan was... he was suspended.

MARY BETH: From teaching?

SUSIE: Temporarily. There was this girl. Joanne... Joanne....

MARY BETH: O'Conner?

SUSIE: How'd you guess?

MARY BETH: Never mind. Go on.

SUSIE: Well, he kept her back after class because she was passing notes. Apparently, one had said something not very nice about Alan. He gave her a very stern talking to, and she started to cry. Ran out to the girl's bathroom to hide. Ended up telling this nun that he had hit her with a meter stick.

MARY BETH: Sister... Margaret?

SUSIE: Sister Grace.

MARY BETH: Figures.

SUSIE: The girl was embarrassed, that's all. But she stuck to her story. Said that Alan had made her bend over, grab the edge of his desk, and that he beat her ten times. They suspended him, of course. You can't have someone around kids when there are allegations like that.

MARY BETH: Suspended, fired, it was still for beating--

SUSIE: --But he didn't do it. She made it all up. A week later she threatened a substitute. She said she'd tell the principal he'd beaten her if he gave her detention.

MARY BETH: She threatened someone else?

SUSIE: It was like the inmates were running the asylum. The principal sat her down, and the O'Conner girl apologized profusely. She said she'd just been mad at Alan. Had never meant to get him suspended from his job.

MARY BETH: So he went back to work?

SUSIE: No. The whole thing humiliated him. The parents wanted him lynched. Then, when they found out their daughter had been lying, they tried to make up. We kept getting these fruit baskets and wheels of cheese. It was too late by then. The whole thing had been in the papers. We ended up moving. I got another job. Alan started freelancing.

MARY BETH: You mean... he never touched her?

SUSIE: There was a full classroom next door. They would have heard it. Of course, no one thought of that until afterward.

MARY BETH: But... his dark, brooding soul!

SUSIE: Alan doesn't have a dark soul, Mary Beth.

MARY BETH: No. No! I refuse to believe you.

SUSIE: Face it, Doll. He's nothing special.

*(MARY BETH starts rummaging through the drawers of the desk for something to throw.)*

MARY BETH: One electric stapler. Crap! *(whoosh, crash)* One three-hole punch. Crap! *(whoosh, crash)* Crap! Crap! Crap! Crap! Crap!

*(MARY BETH wildly throws various objects offstage, then collapses into a huddle at the side of the desk.)*

SUSIE: Truth hurts. Don't it?

MARY BETH: None of it makes sense.

SUSIE: It's not supposed to make sense. It's life.

MARY BETH: But since that time, the incident, since he was suspended... you two never...? NEVER?

SUSIE: Afraid not.

MARY BETH: Then why wouldn't he--

SUSIE: --Mary Beth, look at me. My breasts sag, my skin droops, I've got more crows feet than a Texas telephone wire.

MARY BETH: Even back then? When he stopped?

SUSIE: Back then? Maybe not so much back then.... But he'd been humiliated. And besides, I... I didn't believe him either. At first I thought it was... that I didn't want to sleep with him. Then, when it came out--the truth--I realized... he didn't want to sleep with me. Apparently, he doesn't want to sleep with anyone.

MARY BETH: It hurts.

SUSIE: Yes.

MARY BETH: He rejected you. He doesn't want you. And it hurts.

SUSIE: Yes.

MARY BETH: But you deserved it. Didn't you?

SUSIE: I suppose... in a way... I did.

MARY BETH: So you want it to hurt. You want it to hurt like hell. You want to hurt, and hurt, and hurt, until you can't be hurt anymore. You want someone to beat you until you bleed. You want someone to tear you apart until there's nothing left to feel the pain.

SUSIE: Yes.

MARY BETH: Then you'll have to find someone else. Because I won't do that for you.

*(MARY BETH starts to go.)*

SUSIE: Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: Good-bye... Mrs. Stevens.

*(SUSIE exits. MARY BETH crosses to the restaurant. JIM enters and sits.)*

JIM: Mary Beth! I didn't realize you worked here?

MARY BETH: Small world. *(to customer offstage)* Be with you in a minute! *(to JIM)* Just you today?

JIM: No, actually, I'm meeting a colleague of mine.

*(STEVENS enters.)*

MARY BETH: So I see.

STEVENS: Hello. How do you do? Mary... Beth, is it?

JIM: Yes, um, I suppose you've met, haven't you?

STEVENS: *(sitting)* I'd like the eggs.

MARY BETH: You can't--

STEVENS: --I'm a customer, same as any other customer, and I'd like to have the eggs.

MARY BETH: It's a diner. We have 57 different types of eggs. You're going to have to be more specific.

STEVENS: Oh.

MARY BETH: *(to offstage)* With you in a minute!

STEVENS: Um... poached?

JIM: Sorry. Alan just suggested... and I wasn't thinking... I mean, I didn't think that--

MARY BETH: *(to offstage)* --In a minute!

JIM: Perhaps I should... use the facilities, or... something.

*(JIM exits.)*

MARY BETH: Why did you come here?

STEVENS: Where else can I get 57 different types of eggs?

MARY BETH: They all suck. Trust me.

STEVENS: I'd never been to where you work. Funny, isn't it? After everything we....

MARY BETH: Well, here it is.

STEVENS: It's smaller than I expected.

MARY BETH: Welcome to my life.

STEVENS: Susie still has all my stuff. My pajamas. My electric razor....

MARY BETH: *(to offstage)* A minute, okay!

STEVENS: Last night... I almost slit my wrists.

MARY BETH: *(to offstage)* Get your own fucking coffee!

STEVENS: I'm sorry.

MARY BETH: Alan, I want to help you. I really do. But I can't. I can't now, and certainly not here.

STEVENS: This was separate. This... part of you. We had one world, and the rest of life, that was another. They weren't supposed to meet.

MARY BETH: They did. We can't go back.

STEVENS: I know. *(Pause)* I miss you.

MARY BETH: I know.

STEVENS: There was always real life. Where I had a job, and a wife. Responsibilities. And another world, where I could act. Pretend to be something I wasn't. Until I realized, when I was acting, that was when I was being me. And everything I used to call real, it was a game.

MARY BETH: Maybe everything's a game.

STEVENS: What if that's true? What if there is no real life?

MARY BETH: I can't help you anymore.

STEVENS: Then where do I go now?

MARY BETH: Alan--

STEVENS: --You've awoken me. But now that you've shown me who I am, where do I go now?

MARY BETH: You're going to get me fired, Alan. Again!

STEVENS: Why don't you call me Mr. Stevens?

MARY BETH: Oh... this wasn't supposed to be so complicated.

STEVENS: But it is. And I don't think there's a way out of that now. Do you?

MARY BETH: No, Mr. Stevens.

STEVENS: Thank you.

MARY BETH: Oh... stop being so damned cute! You lied to me!

STEVENS: When?

MARY BETH: You told me you hit that girl.

STEVENS: Well--

MARY BETH: --You told me they fired you.

STEVENS: I never said they fired me. I said--

MARY BETH: --I thought you were dark, and black, and brooding, and, and you tricked me!

STEVENS: What I said was true, just--

MARY BETH: --I talked with your wife, you asshole! You never laid a hand on her, did you?

STEVENS: No.

MARY BETH: Shit.

*(MARY BETH sits down and lights a cigarette. JIM enters.)*

JIM: I trust everything's--

MARY BETH: --I'm on a break, okay?

JIM: Fine.

*(JIM exits.)*

MARY BETH: Liar. Goddamned liar.

STEVENS: I wanted you to know the truth. I just didn't know how to tell you.

MARY BETH: I'll tell you the truth. You were every man who ever screwed me. Literally, and figuratively. My father who walked out on us. Father McDonough. Every goddamned son of a bitch who ever hit me, or wanted to hit me. Fucked me, or wanted to fuck me. That was you.

STEVENS: I just--

MARY BETH: --I'm talking here!

STEVENS: Sorry.

MARY BETH: The thing is, you were the genuine article. You didn't just stand in for the monster, you were the monster. After you told me, I pictured it every day. Lying in bed at night, before I went to sleep. The empty classroom. The young girl. Petite. Blond. Wearing a short, plaid skirt. You force her down against the desk, your heart racing, the blood pulsing through your veins, you grab a hold of that meter stick, and you beat, and you beat, and you beat! And then I saw you, how broken, and fragile, and pitiful you were. And I couldn't hate the monsters any more. The thing that destroyed me as a little girl, healed me. And I wanted to be a part of it. I wanted to embrace the darkness. There. Now you can talk.

STEVENS: I wanted to hit her.

MARY BETH: That's it? You WANTED to hit her?

STEVENS: Do you know what her note said? "Can you believe that tie Mr. Tit-head's wearing!"

MARY BETH: So?

STEVENS: I gave my life for those ungrateful little wretches! I slaved for practically nothing to get them to pass a subject they didn't even give a damn about! I wanted to throw her over the desk and beat the crap out of that bitch!!! I'm sorry. I don't normally use words like that.

MARY BETH: Bitch?

STEVENS: No, crap.

MARY BETH: But you didn't do it.

STEVENS: I wanted to. I held that meter stick in my hand, and it felt.... If she hadn't run out... I don't know what I would have done.

MARY BETH: Oh, Alan.

STEVENS: I know what I'm capable of. I am the monster. Knowing that... I couldn't teach. Not ever again.

MARY BETH: You could have hit her. But you didn't.

STEVENS: Perhaps it isn't about what we do after all.

MARY BETH: You know yourself now. Isn't that a good thing?

STEVENS: How? How when there's nowhere to go?

MARY BETH: Go where?

STEVENS: Precisely!

MARY BETH: Alan....

STEVENS: There was a part of me, dark, nasty, brutish, and I pushed it, deep, deep down inside. Only I couldn't get rid of it, because it was me. It was a part of who I am.

MARY BETH: I've seen it.

STEVENS: And you let me be that. Let me be myself. Lash out in fury and anger and rage. And then gave me what I needed. The pain. The pain that reminded me, I was still alive. I lived for that pain. And you took it away. You took away my pain. You may be a sadist, but that was REALLY cruel.

MARY BETH: You crossed the line, Alan. Back in my apartment, you crossed the line.

STEVENS: Me?

MARY BETH: You kissed me, Alan! You showed me tenderness. Compassion. That wasn't part of the deal.

STEVENS: I wasn't the one who broke the deal.

MARY BETH: Yes you were! I didn't come for your love. How dare you.... I didn't come for your caring!

STEVENS: You crossed the line, Mary Beth.

MARY BETH: You kissed me!

STEVENS: Before that.

MARY BETH: When? When we were doing it?

STEVENS: Before that.

MARY BETH: Before what?

STEVENS: When you made me tea.

MARY BETH: Tea?

STEVENS: Don't you remember? You touched my hand.

MARY BETH: I...

STEVENS: Before the kiss. Before the act. You touched my hand. Like this. (*touches her hand*) You touched me. For the first time, you touched my skin. That is when you crossed the line. And there was no going back.

MARY BETH: This is wrong.

STEVENS: I spent my whole life telling myself this is wrong. If it is... then let me be damned.

MARY BETH: I want to. I want to so badly.

STEVENS: Then do it.

MARY BETH: I can't.

STEVENS: Why not?

MARY BETH: Because this is mentally ill!

STEVENS: So?

MARY BETH: (*taking her hand away*) So!?!

STEVENS: I don't care what other people think anymore.

MARY BETH: But--

STEVENS: --You can't let other people measure your life. The standards that we use, people made them up. They're not real. And once you realize that, you realize you can make up any standard you like. Because none of it was real to begin with. We, you and I, we came up with a system. Remember? A way to be happy.

MARY BETH: Were we ever happy?

STEVENS: I don't know. But I think we can be. Kneel with me, Mary Beth.

MARY BETH: Here?

STEVENS: Kneel with me.

*(STEVENS kneels before MARY BETH.)*

MARY BETH: Alan, we're in a fucking diner.

STEVENS: I don't care.

MARY BETH: Everyone's looking.

STEVENS: One last time. Please.

MARY BETH: One last time.

*(They kneel.)*

STEVENS: My joy was gone. Food had no taste. Sleep had no rest. There was no life left in me. I took out my shaving kit, the antique one that used to belong to my grandfather. I removed the straight razor and began to trace gently over the veins in my wrist, trying to decide whether or not to press down. Then I thought of Susie, when she was young, and her eyes, when she looked at me. And I remembered what it was like to be loved. And I knew in the pit of my stomach that she would never love me again. She could never love the monster inside. So I wanted your pain. I wanted your strokes upon my back. I wanted your bruises upon my body. If I can't have, then let me give. Let me give you what you want.

MARY BETH: How can I--

STEVENS: --Take it, Mary Beth. Just reach out and take it.

MARY BETH: What I want... what I've always wanted....

STEVENS: It's yours.

MARY BETH: Are you sure?

STEVENS: Yes. It--I'm yours, Mary Beth. Now, and forever. All you have to do is reach out and take it....

MARY BETH: Alan--

STEVENS: --Take... me....

*(MARY BETH rises.)*

MARY BETH: Tonight... come to my apartment.

STEVENS: What time?

MARY BETH: Eleven o'clock.

*(STEVENS rises.)*

STEVENS: Really? You really mean this?

MARY BETH: Eleven o'clock. The door will be unlocked.

*(MARY BETH exits. As she goes, she throws the table cloth over the desk. STEVENS enters the apartment space.)*

STEVENS: Hello? Mary Beth, I'm here. I'm ready now. No holding back. All of me is yours. You can take it, Mary Beth. Rend me, tear me, make me new! I was waiting outside. Shaking. I'm still shaking. I want you to be happy. Break me, rip me apart, do what you need. And be happy. Be happy, Mary Beth. There's nothing more I want than that.... For you to be happy. For that... I'd give you my body... my life... my soul... everything.... Mary Beth? Are you there...? Mary Beth...?

SUSIE: *(off-stage)* Yoo-hoo! Bunnykins, I'm home!

STEVENS: Huh?

SUSIE: *(off-stage)* All's forgiven. Just like you said, right? And you brought the cole slaw?

*(SUSIE enters.)*

STEVENS: You?

SUSIE: What the hell are you doing here?

STEVENS: I'm here to see Mary Beth.

SUSIE: No, I'M here to see Mary Beth!

STEVENS: You always have to go and ruin everything, don't you?

SUSIE: Me? You're the one who's crashing the party.

STEVENS: You could never accept me for who I am.

SUSIE: That's because you're a fucking nutcase.

STEVENS: I am not! You just never understood.

SUSIE: Why would I even want to understand?

STEVENS: You see? This is precisely what I mean.

SUSIE: You're pathetic, you know that?

STEVENS: Every time I try to put my life together, you go and--

SUSIE: --You're a miserable toad--

STEVENS: --strangle me.

SUSIE: You're the albatross around my neck. The constant reminder that no matter what I do, no matter how hard I try, I'll never be good enough. I'll always be a failure. Because no matter what I do, you will still never —

STEVENS: Make me want to suffocate. You just squeeze and squeeze until there's no life left. Well I finally have a little life. I at last got a taste of air. And I'm not giving up now. I may not deserve it, but for once I want a tiny piece of —

*(MARY BETH enters, dressed in black leather boots, fishnet stockings, tight leather miniskirt and corset. She cracks a whip.)*

SUSIE: Oh, dear Lord....

STEVENS: Mistress....

*(SUSIE and STEVENS fall to their knees. MARY BETH puts her boot on STEVENS's shoulder and kicks him, spinning him away from her. His butt is now up in the air, and she whips it. He cries out. MARY BETH does the same to SUSIE, and she cries out.)*

MARY BETH: Listen up you sniveling, groveling, worm-like excuses for humanity. I'm sick of your shit! I'm gonna tell it like it is, and you're gonna like it!

*(MARY BETH takes out a meter stick. STEVENS and SUSIE crouch on all fours, waiting to be thrashed.)*

STEVENS: Please!

SUSIE: I'm begging you!

MARY BETH: Shut up! I'm through with your goddamned whining!

*(MARY BETH strikes one, then the other.)*

STEVENS: One!

SUSIE: One!

STEVENS: Two!

SUSIE: Two!

STEVENS: Three!

SUSIE: Three!

*(JIM enters.)*

STEVENS: Four!

SUSIE: Oh my God!

JIM: Oh. I'm sorry.

MARY BETH: You want your mail?

JIM: Uh....

MARY BETH: Hold on a minute. I put it in the kitchen.

*(She exits.)*

SUSIE: I can explain everything.

JIM: That's quite alright.

SUSIE: It's not what it looks like.

JIM: And it's none of my business.

SUSIE: First of all, it's not about sex! Well... not just about sex.

JIM: Okay.

SUSIE: Damn! How'd she put it? The sex is there. But not done. It's left. Unperformed.

JIM: Fine.

SUSIE: That's what makes it so powerful, you see? But what it's really about... is pain.

JIM: Ma'am, I really don't need to know.

*(MARY BETH enters with two FedEx packages. A riding crop is sandwiched between them.)*

MARY BETH: The FedEx guy must've buzzed the wrong apartment.

JIM: You said anytime before midnight.

MARY BETH: Hey, whatever.

*(JIM hands her back the riding crop.)*

JIM: This is yours.

MARY BETH: Thanks.

SUSIE: You don't understand! It's not like that.

JIM: Mary Beth, Alan... whoever the hell you are, I'm sure you all have very good, rational reasons to be doing whatever this is, but I just got home, it's past eleven, and I'm going to bed. Good night.

*(JIM exits.)*

SUSIE: Oh dear Lord. The nuns were right. I AM a slut!

MARY BETH: Quiet!

STEVENS: I'll never work again.

MARY BETH: I said, QUIET! You're mine now. Both of you. Mine! You are my goods. My things. My chattel. I own you. Because you were mine to take. And now... I'm going to let you go.

STEVENS: Mary Beth?

MARY BETH: I want to do what's right for a change. I know what the right thing to do is, and I know I should be doing it. But then, when the time comes, it's so easy. It's so easy just to forget that every other person in the world even exists. There's just me. And what I want. And why shouldn't I take it, Mr. Stevens? Mrs. Stevens? Don't I owe it to myself? Don't I owe it to myself to be happy? But then I never am happy. Because I know... there's someone else out there... who's hurting... and it's my fault. I want to do what's right. For once in my life, I want to choose something, not for me, but for someone else. Because someone else is more important.

SUSIE: Who?

MARY BETH: Susie, that man over there is a half-sniveling, half-fuming idiot who has his head so far up his ass he can't see what's right in front of him! He also is the most gentle, caring, soul-filled man I have ever met. Mr. Stevens... Alan... that woman over there is a conniving, self-serving, greedy, frigid little bitch! She also loves you more than life itself. I don't know where in this fucked-up, crazy world I belong. But I know it's not in this room. Not here. Not now. You are both so beautiful, and I could happily crush you beneath my unmerciful heel. But I won't. Because this time... I'm doing what's right. It's not about me anymore. For the first time in my life, it's not about me. I'm going to walk out that door, and I'm going to leave the two of you here. Alone. Together. Do whatever it is you have to do. When I come back, I want you gone. The door will lock behind you when you leave. And I don't want to see either one of you ever again.

*(MARY BETH starts to go.)*

STEVENS: Wait!

MARY BETH: My way this time... Mr. Stevens.

*(MARY BETH exits.)*

SUSIE: She's gone.

STEVENS: Yes.

SUSIE: Really gone.

STEVENS: Yes.

SUSIE: Alan... I have to know. Not that it makes any difference... but I have to know.... Did you fuck her?

STEVENS: No.

SUSIE: Did you want to?

STEVENS: Did I want to...? No. No, I didn't.

SUSIE: Really? I did.

*(The look at each other and burst out into hysterical laughter.)*

STEVENS: You!?!

SUSIE: Isn't that funny? I'm not even gay! I'm straight, and I still wanted to fuck her!

STEVENS: That's hysterical.

SUSIE: Oh come on! Those legs? That ass?

STEVENS: The ass... was nice.

SUSIE: And her eyes. The way she looked at you, with those big, beautiful eyes. I could tell... she wanted me. It didn't matter if she was a woman or a man or a fucking zebra. She wanted me, and I wanted those eyes. Until I realized, what I really wanted, was for those to be your eyes. For you to look at me like that.

STEVENS: There was a time.... You had those eyes for me once.

SUSIE: Do you think we can figure it out again?

STEVENS: I don't think we figured it out the first time.

SUSIE: Maybe... you never do. Maybe... you just have to keep stumbling, figuring it out differently each day. Each day... meeting each other all over again... for the first time.

STEVENS: I don't know if you're going to like what you see.

SUSIE: I don't either.... But can we try? When was the last time you kissed me, Alan?

STEVENS: We both know the answer to that.

SUSIE: Fine! So I thought you'd hit her! What was I supposed to think?

STEVENS: Do you love me?

SUSIE: Yes!

STEVENS: Would you have loved me if I had hit her?

SUSIE: But you didn't.

STEVENS: Would you still love me if I had hit her?

SUSIE: Honestly?

STEVENS: Honestly.

SUSIE: If you ever struck an innocent child, you goddamned son of a bitch, I would dig my nails into your stomach and pull out your spleen! And yes... I would still love you.

STEVENS: Thank you.

SUSIE: Thank you.

*(SUSIE steps toward STEVENS.)*

STEVENS: Don't step any closer. But please. Don't take one step away.

SUSIE: I'm going to step closer, Alan.

STEVENS: No.

SUSIE: I'm going to step closer. *(she does)* And now. I'm going to kiss you. *(she does)* Can we try this? Can we still make this work?

STEVENS: Don't ask. Tell me.

*(SUSIE picks up the meter stick.)*

SUSIE: Show me what to do.

*(STEVENS bends over and grabs the edge of the desk.)*

STEVENS: Ten.

*(SUSIE pulls back the stick and freezes. Lights dim on the apartment and come up on the restaurant scene. JIM enters and sits down. MARY BETH enters in her waitress uniform with a menu and a cup of tea. JIM gets up.)*

JIM: I'm sorry. Never mind.

MARY BETH: Jim--

JIM: --I didn't realize this was your table. I'll move.

MARY BETH: Jim, please. Can we both just be adults?

JIM: Yes. Yes, of course. I'm sorry.

MARY BETH: All that's over now. God, it was... it was nice, but... it's over.

JIM: Fine.

MARY BETH: You have to live in the real world, you know. You have to give things up. What am I telling you for? Tea, right?

*(She hands him the tea and the menu.)*

JIM: Thank you. And don't worry. I'm not judgmental. I just... You understand.

MARY BETH: I'll be back in a minute.

*(She starts to go. He picks up the tea.)*

JIM: Haven't seen anything that weird since I taught high school.

*(MARY BETH stops.)*

MARY BETH: You used to teach?

JIM: Tenth grade.

MARY BETH: Not... Catholic school... was it?

JIM: Holy Cross... why?

*(MARY BETH looks over her shoulder.)*

MARY BETH: No reason.

*(She winks at him. JIM's cup rattles in its saucer. SUSIE unfreezes and swacks STEVENS.)*

STEVENS: One!

*(Blackout. End of Play.)*

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