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The Metric System
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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... Vienna 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.