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## New York, 1965: A Queer Retelling of "The Odd Couple"

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New York, 1965

Karmann Ludwig

Based on The Odd Couple by Neil Simon

ACT IScene 1

1965. New York City at night, humid and unpretty. The street is damp. The wail of sirens echoes in the distance. Across the street is the small strip of metropark separating the Hudson River from the Riverside Drive apartment buildings. FELIX UNGAR, out-of-place in his tailored suit, stands in front of the buildings. He is in his early forties, well-groomed, and carries with him a small suitcase.

FELIX

This is a nightmare. The good thing about nightmares is that there is always a happy ending: you wake up. But I'm already awake. So maybe this is worse than a nightmare.

*FELIX places his fingers on his wrist.*  
My pulse is very fast. If I were dreaming, it would naturally be a lot slower. If I were dead-- well, it would be non-existent. It's important to be in tune with your body.

My back hurts. There are blisters on my heels. My sinuses are congested. Frances and I are getting a divorce. And the kids...are staying with her. You know-- I always thought I knew what the rest of my life would be like. And that was comforting.

But I guess things are never really guaranteed. In a hundred years even New York City could be unrecognizable. The Statue of Liberty could be moved to Buffalo for all I know. And in a thousand years the only thing left might be the Hudson River on one side of Manhattan and the East River on the other. I almost wish we'd get a good rain and the rivers would swell and swallow the city whole. And I'm not the only one with problems that could be solved by an apocalyptic flood. A lot of people have divorces or debt, family issues, secrets. And they would feel a whole lot better if everything and everyone ended up at the bottom of one very watery, salty Manhattan. Themselves included.

I don't know what to do. Things could get worse. I... could make them worse. I mean: look at me! Neurotic Felix Ungar. Ask me to recommend a brand of carpet

cleaner, I can do that. But I don't think I can give up what I would consider a very...perfect marriage.

Growing up, divorce was an even bigger taboo, so when I heard about a couple splitting up, I imagined two people screaming, throwing things, the floor opening up while the fires of Hell burned up their mahogany furniture and all the fine china came crashing to the floor. But it wasn't like that. No, there wasn't any yelling or crying. I came home. And Frances broke the news of our impending divorce while she stitched a tear in a throw pillow. It was all very quiet. Kind of like it is now.

There are two things I could do. I will regret both, which makes my decision either very easy or very hard. One, I could get myself a one-way ticket down the Hudson River, let the flooding happen to me instead. Or... or I could just walk into this building. Wave to the doorman. Elevator. Twelfth floor. Then ring the door bell. Or knock on the door. Or just walk in! And say... Hi, Oscar. My wife kicked me out. I don't know what to do.

I wonder what Oscar's up to right about now. Sleeping? Drinking? God, I could go for a drink. And that's saying something for me. It'd be nice to be up there. The place is cozy-- if you ignore the old beer cans and the ten-year-old news papers stacked up to your kneecaps. He's not expecting me, but I don't think he'll mind.

*A return to reality.*

But his fridge is broken. That's right. His fridge has been broken for two weeks and it's the middle of July. Eugh, I don't know how that man lives with himself.

Of course, he's not my...only option, but-- I'm not ready to make any permanent decisions. I've spent so much of my life planning, and look where I am now! Standing in the streets of New York City at eleven o'clock on a Tuesday night. Absolutely unplannable. It's not what my parents would've wanted for me. It's not what I wanted for me. But what does it matter, anyway, who wants what?

*A pause.*

Oscar doesn't know what I want. And it has to stay

that way; and it isn't lying because there isn't a singular, whole truth to this. Except for the truth, you know, that Oscar and I are very, very different people. Everyone says so. But I'm forgetting one thing: I know he'll take me in. So go, Felix.

He's all you've got right now.

*FELIX enters the apartment building.*

*An armchair and a couch are pushed out. A poker table and five chairs are set up. A buffet stands against the wall with a few bottles and a decanter upon it. Magazines, old shirts, baseball caps, and disregarded mail covers the furniture of an otherwise expensive-looking apartment. The doorbell buzzes.*

*OSCAR, (40s) dressed in sweats, sports a glass of whiskey in one hand and a newspaper in the other. He trips over a stray shoe, catches himself, and kicks it out of the way.*

*The door buzzes again. And again.*

OSCAR

I'm coming, I'm coming.

*The door buzzes again. OSCAR stops. He checks his watch.*

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Christ. Do you know what time it is?

FELIX

*(From behind the door)*

Oscar, it's me.

OSCAR

Oh.

*He opens the door.*

*FELIX enters and makes a beeline for the couch. He sits, face in his hands.*

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Bad day?

*OSCAR sighs and puts his glass on the coffee table in front of FELIX. He crosses to the bar*

*and pours himself another drink. There is a sense this has happened before.*

OSCAR (CONT'D)  
Let me guess.

FELIX  
Oscar, please.

OSCAR  
The maid quit. She just couldn't live up to your standards.

FELIX  
Not now.

*OSCAR sits in the armchair and takes a drink.*

OSCAR  
You burnt dinner?

FELIX  
I'm not in the mood.

OSCAR  
Or maybe you got home and Frances--

*FELIX lets out a sob and the answer becomes clear.*

OSCAR (CONT'D)  
Frances?

*FELIX continues crying and OSCAR shifts in his seat.*

OSCAR (CONT'D)  
Oh my God. Frances.

FELIX  
Could you stop?

OSCAR  
You broke up. The two of you.

FELIX  
Oscar, I came here to grieve. You aren't helping.

OSCAR  
This is my apartment, you know.

FELIX

She kicked me out.

OSCAR

Oh. So she was serious this time. Jesus, Felix, you could have just told me.

*OSCAR stands and clears the spot on the sofa next to FELIX, where he joins him. FELIX starts to get up.*

FELIX

(feigning humility)  
You don't want to hear about this.

*OSCAR pulls FELIX back down.*

OSCAR

But you want to talk about it. So. What happened? What sent her over the edge?

FELIX

I don't know. A lot of things.

OSCAR

You must've done something to tick her off.

FELIX

Why are you assuming it's my fault?

OSCAR

She did kick you out, after all.

FELIX

Right.

*FELIX stands and begins pacing. He fidgets with his hands.*

FELIX (CONT'D)

Well. I got home. You were right about that. And the kids were gone.

OSCAR

I'm guessing she didn't have a romantic dinner planned.

FELIX

She asked why I was late.

OSCAR

How late were you?

FELIX

Not by much. Half an hour tops. I'm usually very punctual so I understand if it's jarring.

OSCAR

That's enough to kick you out?

FELIX

There's more. She accused me of cheating on her.

OSCAR

You? Cheating?

FELIX

I was just as shocked as you are. A half hour late and she thinks I'm having an affair!

OSCAR

But you weren't cheating on her. Right?

FELIX

Of course not!

OSCAR

Then there's got to be more than that.

FELIX

There was. We argued about trust, about the kids, about my job, until she eventually told me she couldn't stand me.

OSCAR

(underwhelmed)

Wow. That's--

FELIX

And then she kicked me out. Said we're getting a divorce.

*A long pause.*

OSCAR

Do you ever think you have a problem?

FELIX

A problem?

OSCAR

Yeah--

FELIX

What kind of problem?

OSCAR

One-- I don't know-- one that makes you--

FELIX

A lot of guys have problems, you know. It's not just me.

OSCAR

You need a drink.

FELIX

Definitely not the one you were drinking out of. I can't believe you gave me your old drink and went to pour yourself a new one. Talk about disgusting.

OSCAR

(to himself)  
Poor Frances.

FELIX

You know how I feel about sharing glasses. It just isn't hygienic.

OSCAR

Fine, fine!

*OSCAR stands and crosses to the bar.*

FELIX

But you don't have to make me a new one. You know how alcohol hurts my stomach.

OSCAR

Pretend it's root beer.

*OSCAR hands the drink to FELIX.*

FELIX

Thank you.

OSCAR

So now what?

FELIX

What do you mean?

OSCAR

You're divorced. Or about to be. What are you going to do?

FELIX

I don't know. I don't know how I can go on. She's going to get custody of the kids.

OSCAR

What makes you think that?

FELIX

I'm not in the position-- no court would rule in my favor.

OSCAR

Because she's accusing you of cheating.

FELIX

Because of-- oh, yes. Which means I won't see them anymore. But that's not the worst part.

OSCAR

What is?

FELIX

Look, the whole thing makes we want to cry, I'm so hysterical, so confused. I came here to figure everything out.

OSCAR

Okay, okay. Drink up, Felix. These are hardwood floors. They can't handle your tears.

*FELIX drinks.*

FELIX

That's disgusting.

OSCAR

Do you want another one?

FELIX

Yeah.

*OSCAR slaps FELIX affectionately on the back and returns to the bar. OSCAR pours himself a drink and watches FELIX.*

OSCAR

Move in with me.

FELIX

Oh, no. You must be drunk if you've just asked me that. How many of those have you had?

*OSCAR hands FELIX his drink.*

OSCAR

No, I'm serious. I'm not going to let you wander out there by yourself. Not tonight. Not next week. Look. We'll split the rent. It'll be fun.

FELIX

You know why that won't work.

OSCAR

Do I?

FELIX

Oscar. I'm obsessive and particular and-- well-- you're you.

OSCAR

Very perceptive.

FELIX

So I think it would save us both a lot of stress if I figured something else out.

OSCAR

You think I like living alone? Being annoyed with you will give me something to do.

FELIX

I don't know if I should be offended.

OSCAR

Be flattered. Divorce isn't fun, Felix. The part about not being unhappily married anymore is good, but everything else makes me miserable. Unless you can find someone else to marry, you get sick of your echo pretty quickly.

FELIX

I had no idea you were so unhappy.

OSCAR

I don't know if I'd call it that. I'd like some company. That's all.

*A pause.*

And if someone paid half the rent I'd be in a lot better shape.

FELIX  
Okay, okay.

OSCAR  
So you'll...?

FELIX  
You've sold me.

OSCAR  
You're on drink two. Didn't know it'd be that easy.

FELIX  
Bring me another. Maybe you'll get me to pay your alimony, too.

OSCAR  
Or maybe you'll come to your senses. But I'm always a fan of gambling.

*OSCAR retrieves yet another drink for FELIX.*

FELIX  
I think you're right about this. This could be fun. We're a little old for bachelorhood but we can always pretend. I like the place, too. Always have.

*FELIX is starting to show signs of being drunk. His words slur and he is more than averagely cheerful.*

OSCAR  
I'll stop you if you try to rearrange the furniture.

FELIX  
I won't, I won't.

*FELIX gets up and plays an album on the record player.*

I haven't drunk since... geez, since before Leonard was born. Nine years.

OSCAR  
I can tell.

FELIX  
Well, not heavily, I mean. I like the music. I like

that you are letting me stay here.

*FELIX meanders back to the couch.*

I was so worried I'd have to sleep in a hotel, and God how I hate hotels! They are disgusting. No, I'm glad I'm here. This is the best damn idea you've ever had. I don't deserve you. You've done so much for me; I don't deserve you.

*OSCAR stands up and crosses to the record player. He turns it off.*

OSCAR

I think you've had enough, Feel.

FELIX

You're probably right.

OSCAR

Come on. You can make the guest bedroom yours.

FELIX

Oscar, you don't know how lonely I've been. I keep thinking about the future.

OSCAR

Think about it in the morning. I don't want you throwing up your emotions all over the floor.

*OSCAR leads FELIX offstage. Lights fade out.*

## Scene 2

*Lights fade in. GWENDOLYN, a young woman dressed in elaborate Victorian attire, lounges on the couch, reading a book. CECILY, dressed equally as elaborately enters in a rush. They both speak in refined British accents.*

GWENDOLYN

You're late.

CECILY

I know, I know. I'm sorry.

GWENDOLYN

Very late.

CECILY

There were many important things I needed to attend to; I can't help it if--

GWENDOLYN

I know where you've been.

CECILY

Oh.

GWENDOLYN

I may mention, dear sister, that I have always suspected you of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist; and I am quite sure of it now.

CECILY

Bunburyist? What on Earth do you mean?

GWENDOLYN

Living two lives. Enjoying two identities. It is very useful when one does not wish to partake in certain activities, such as luncheon with one's grandmama or a stroll with the mother-in-law.

CECILY

I'm afraid I still do not understand.

GWENDOLYN

I know you as Cecily, but I fear you are engaged with other circles behind my back, using a name that is certainly not your own.

CECILY

Don't be absurd.

GWENDOLYN

You've been late two days in a row! And I heard from Mr. Worthing you were seen in broad daylight with--

CECILY

Rumors.

GWENDOLYN

You're lucky I'm so forgiving. Many others would not be so kind. Whatever this second life you've made is, I suggest you abandon it completely. It's foul.

CECILY

Gwendolyn, please.

GWENDOLYN  
Disgusting. Filthy.

CECILY  
You're being cruel.

GWENDOLYN  
Shameful.

CECILY  
This isn't like you!

GWENDOLYN  
And what you're doing-- it's not like you.

CECILY  
You don't know who I am. I--

*FELIX enters the room. GWENDOLYN and CECILY go silent and watch him. FELIX, still a little drunk, takes a blanket off the back of the couch, throws it over his shoulders, and exits.*

GWENDOLYN  
It's alright. If he wanted to see us, he would have.

CECILY  
I'm sick of playing these ridiculous games.

GWENDOLYN  
Then off with you! I'm rather enjoying my observations here.

CECILY  
You won't...meddle, will you?

GWENDOLYN  
Oh, I don't know. Perhaps. I find myself a rather capable meddler. I can make that which is wrong, right again.

CECILY  
You're awfully confident.

GWENDOLYN  
No one ever accomplished much without it.

CECILY  
Do what you will here, but I'm afraid you are completely... misinterpreting whatever you've heard about me.

*CECILY storms out.*

GWENDOLYN

I should hope so.

*OSCAR enters the living room. GWENDOLYN barely acknowledges his entrance. OSCAR does not notice her quite yet: he crosses to the bar and pours himself a drink.*

GWENDOLYN (CONT'D)

I was hoping you'd be awake.

*OSCAR starts.*

OSCAR

You again?

GWENDOLYN

It's been quite some time, Mr. Madison.

OSCAR

Look, it's great to see you, Gwendolyn. It really is. But now isn't a great time to start giving me advice. It'll look like I'm talking to myself.

GWENDOLYN

Aren't you?

OSCAR

I just came out here for a drink.

GWENDOLYN

You've not missed me at all?

OSCAR

Sorry, I've been kind of focused on real people.

GWENDOLYN

Real or not, I did rather enjoy myself last time we..."visited."

OSCAR

I did, too.

(carefully)

So... is that why you're here?

*OSCAR moves to sit next to her. GWENDOLYN raises her hand.*

GWENDOLYN

It is true I've always been a bit of a "dirty puzzle," but I am not in any mood for your "tot-hunting" this evening.

OSCAR

English, please?

GWENDOLYN

Our "amorous congress" of past is not the reason for my return.

OSCAR

I'm not following.

*GWENDOLYN sits up straight.*

GWENDOLYN

Oh dear, do you know how vulgar it is for a lady to leave the realm of euphemism?

*OSCAR stares at her blankly.*

GWENDOLYN (CONT'D)

I am here for more than a simple "rendezvous," Mr. Madison. I will be keeping my dress on.

OSCAR

Oh.

GWENDOLYN

For now.

OSCAR

Oh?

*OSCAR peers over her shoulder.*  
What are you reading?

GWENDOLYN

A peculiar work on the complex meanings behind one's dreams. The imagined events that transpire during slumber may mean a great deal more than previously imagined.

OSCAR

What, like Freud?

GWENDOLYN

Oh, have you also read his work?

*GWENDOLYN shows him the cover.*  
He's become very popular as of late, though I'm told it's very undignified I should be bothering with such indelicate topics.

OSCAR

No, I know who Freud is.

GWENDOLYN

And your opinion of him?

OSCAR

I don't know...I don't think about him very much. Kind of heady. Not something you can bring up with the guys.

GWENDOLYN

As much as I appreciate your empowering opinions on the emerging field of psychoanalysis, I am actually rather interested in learning how you've been since we last met. The most obvious difference, of course, being that you are no longer married.

*She gestures to the spot beside her. OSCAR sits next to her.*

OSCAR

Things are fine. Better, now that Blanche is on the other side of the country.

GWENDOLYN

Personally, I see divorce as an indicator of ill breeding. Marriage is a very simple transaction. And if you and your spouse find each other disagreeable, then there is nothing easier than ignoring one another.

OSCAR

If it were that easy, Blanche would be here tonight, not Felix.

GWENDOLYN

Ah, yes. Felix! I do remember him. He's a better husband than you ever were. I'm surprised he and Frances were unable to work things out. I so dream of a world in which husbands listen to their wives. I suppose that makes me a radical, but I am sure it would save many a marriage from destruction.

OSCAR

Divorce is a good thing-- in the end. It means people who don't get along don't have to make each other miserable anymore.

GWENDOLYN

I'd believe you, if you weren't still miserable yourself.

OSCAR

You don't know me.

GWENDOLYN

I know everyone. And everything.

OSCAR

Like what?

GWENDOLYN

I know your income is more than suitable to pay the rent on your flat.

OSCAR

Of course it is. But I have alimony. And I gamble the rest of it away. That's why I want Felix here.

GWENDOLYN

And when sleep washes over you at night, what comes to mind? Money does not fare well in water: coins sink to the basin and bills fall apart. Capital is an invariably simplistic incentive; and yet, nothing is seen as more motivating.

OSCAR

Here we go. See, this is why we don't meet up that often. You get cryptic.

GWENDOLYN

Cryptic?

OSCAR

Every time you're here, you start telling me things I don't care about. I brought you here for a very...specific purpose.

GWENDOLYN

What makes you think I had no part in my being here?

OSCAR

It's like last time. I needed... I wanted--

GWENDOLYN

The last time you and I saw one another was five years ago. The night your son was born.

OSCAR

Does that make me horrible?

GWENDOLYN

(sympathetic)

No, no, of course not. Mr. Madison, you are a complicated man. And while I am here as little more than a means to process more...complicated ideas, I believe you would find it useful to remind yourself that I simply do not exist.

OSCAR

I already know that.

GWENDOLYN

I can leave, you know. I have much, much better things to do than lounge about your flat all day. Although, despite the filth, I am fond of your home. Always have been.

OSCAR

No, no, stay here. I'm sorry.

GWENDOLYN

I'm aware you seek me out as a comfort. No one ever said you had to like me.

OSCAR

But I do like you. Come on, Gwen. I care about your imaginary words. And imaginary feelings.

GWENDOLYN

You aren't being very compelling.

OSCAR

(seductively)

Your imaginary lips.

*OSCAR kisses GWENDOLYN.*

GWENDOLYN

Well-- when you put it that way.

*They kiss again.*

*OSCAR reaches over GWENDOLYN's shoulders and begins unbuttoning the horribly immaculate back*

*of her dress.*

*OSCAR pushes her dress off her shoulders,  
revealing a corset on top of another layer.*

OSCAR

Jesus Christ, this thing again?

GWENDOLYN

Any proper lady is outfitted with a corset, Mr. Madison. Here.

*GWENDOLYN turns so she is facing away from  
OSCAR.*

I'm not able to untie it myself, so you'll have to help me.

OSCAR

I don't know where to start.

GWENDOLYN

Start by untying the knot.

*OSCAR fiddles with the strings.  
Then unweave the strings.*

OSCAR

I think I tied it in another knot.

*GWENDOLYN turns around.*

GWENDOLYN

No matter. I'll just keep it on. Now. Where were we?

OSCAR

You sound like you just want to get this over with.

GWENDOLYN

No, it's quite alright. Come on, now. Kiss me.

*OSCAR leans into her, but stops when she speaks.  
Before we begin, I must tell you how lonely I've  
been. I keep thinking about the future.*

*GWENDOLYN leans in to kiss OSCAR again. He backs  
up.*

GWENDOLYN (CONT'D)

Oh, are we finished?

OSCAR

How did you know he said that earlier?

GWENDOLYN

Oh, Felix? I told you I know everything. He said--

*OSCAR stands up.*

OSCAR

Never mind, don't talk.

GWENDOLYN

(stern)

Please refrain from speaking to me like that.

OSCAR

Get out of here.

GWENDOLYN

Why?

OSCAR

Because I'm thinking about-- you made me think about him. So-- thanks a lot! Now it's ruined. I'm not in the mood anymore.

GWENDOLYN

What shall I do? Shall I vaporize into thin air? Use the door? You conjured me, Mr. Madison, and you share the responsibility of removing me.

*OSCAR ignores her.*

You've made a mess of me. My hair.

OSCAR

I need to stop drinking.

*OSCAR sinks into a chair at the poker table.*

*FELIX enters. He stops.*

FELIX

Oscar?

*OSCAR starts. He looks at GWENDOLYN.*

GWENDOLYN

Go on, don't mind me.

OSCAR

(to Felix)  
Oh. What's wrong?

FELIX

I can't sleep.

OSCAR

You want a drink?

FELIX

No. I already drank too much. It was stupid of me.  
Where do you keep the broom and dustpan?

OSCAR

Broom, I think Blanche took with her. Dustpan I might  
have used as a fan. You know, like a:

*OSCAR pantomimes a handheld fan.*  
Why? What do you plan on doing?

FELIX

With a broom and dustpan? Cleaning. If I can't fall  
asleep I might as well clean.

OSCAR

Don't do anything big.

*FELIX rummages through a pile of garbage and  
finds a rag. He begins dusting surfaces with it.*

FELIX

What about you? If you can't sleep, don't you think  
you ought to be doing something?

OSCAR

I can sleep just fine.

FELIX

There must be something you'd rather be doing  
than...sulking? You're sulking.

OSCAR

So? You just spent the last hour salting my furniture  
with your tears. I should call in the city. See if  
they can use it on the streets.

FELIX

Well. I've decided to move on.

OSCAR

That fast?

FELIX

And you need to move on, too.

OSCAR

From who?

FELIX

Blanche.

OSCAR

Felix, I was over Blanche long before we got a divorce.

FELIX

Prove it.

*FELIX procures a stack of hand towels. He tosses them to OSCAR.*

These still have your wife's initials embroidered on them.

OSCAR

Have you been carrying around my hand towels?

FELIX

You've been divorced for over a year and a half, but you never bothered to take out her initials.

OSCAR

Oh, please.

FELIX

It makes you look desperate.

OSCAR

I look desperate?

FELIX

Take them out.

OSCAR

You're being ridiculous.

FELIX

If you want me to move on from Frances, I think you could start by setting a good example.

*FELIX picks up a pair of scissors. He crosses to OSCAR and hands them to him. GWENDOLYN, unseen by FELIX, picks up one of the towels and examines the embroidered initials.*

OSCAR  
Don't make me do this.

FELIX	Here. Start by untying the knot. Then unweave the strings.	GWENDOLYN	Here. Start by untying the knot. Then unweave the strings.
-------	--	-----------	--

FELIX  
Well, I guess you'd want to put the scissors under  
the string and cut it, first, but--

*OSCAR stares at him.*

FELIX	What?	GWENDOLYN	What?
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*OSCAR stands.*

OSCAR  
I have to leave. I'm suddenly very tired.

*FELIX takes the scissors and towels from him.*

FELIX  
Fine, I guess I'll move on from Blanche for you!

OSCAR  
Felix, I don't know what you think you're doing. But  
this arrangement? It's not going to end with me  
feeling better about who I am. Or you becoming  
happier than you ever were before.

FELIX  
You've changed your tune. Only an hour ago--

OSCAR  
I'm tired, Felix. And actually very drunk. If you  
want to stay here, you need to stop playing shrink.

FELIX  
Don't say that.

*OSCAR begins to exit. FELIX chases after him.  
You wouldn't kick me out already! You invited me in!*

Begged me! You said you were lonely.

OSCAR

I never said that.

FELIX

Well. Weren't you?

OSCAR

Goodnight, Felix. For real, this time.

*OSCAR stops to look at GWENDOLYN.*

GWENDOLYN

This is your fault, you know.

OSCAR

It's not.

*FELIX overhears.*

FELIX

Oscar?

GWENDOLYN

It's a shame. I was looking forward to being taken to bed.

*OSCAR exits. FELIX returns to the couch. GWENDOLYN drops a hand towel in Felix's hands. She exits. FELIX uses the scissors to begin unstitching the initials.*

*Lights down.*

### Scene 3

*OSCAR'S bedroom is a jungle. The floor is covered by a layer of clothing, newspapers, pencils, paper, and various sports memorabilia. On the nightstand is a bottle of whiskey, half full. OSCAR lies in bed. He fidgets in bed, unable to sleep. After a few restless moments, he finds a comfortable position and holds still.*

*The door opens slowly. SPECTRE enters. He is tall and well-groomed but there is something archaic about him. All of his clothing is sepia toned: his slacks are a little dusty, and over his undershirt is an unbuttoned WWII jacket. He quietly sits on the edge of OSCAR'S bed,*

*unnoticed.*

SPECTRE

(to Oscar)

Well, this was unexpected. I didn't think you'd actually let him move in with you. You know how this story ends, don't you? It's been told hundreds of times. So how long, Oscar? He's going to leave you. All alone, by yourself. I don't want to make you panic, but this might be your last chance.

*SPECTRE crosses to the nightstand and flips through a few newspapers.*

I think a lot of people believe in fate-- I do, sometimes. But even at my most religious I still think we have choices. The choice to speak, or not to; sometimes living or dying. But not loving. That's not a choice.

*There is no response.*

Oh, but listen to me ramble. I'm sure I'm the last person you want to talk to. But still: I keep you company when you have all eight rooms to yourself. But I'm not your shadow. I waste my breath trying to be your echo. You never talk back to me. Don't get me wrong, I love it when you tell me all your problems and ignore my advice. I mean, it's almost like I don't exist at all! Sorry, bad joke--

*OSCAR gets up without acknowledging SPECTRE.*  
What are you doing?

*OSCAR crosses to the dresser and opens it, pulling out a sealed envelope.*

Oh, that? I thought you had forgotten about it. Are you going to open it? I wouldn't, if I were you. There's no use dwelling on the past.

*OSCAR stuffs the letter back in the dresser. He turns abruptly to SPECTRE.*

OSCAR

(to Spectre)

I might be regretting it already.

SPECTRE

Finally! It's embarrassing to monologue.

OSCAR

Jesus Christ, did you hear him earlier? He's "moved on." I don't know whether he's being naïve or insulting.

SPECTRE

I don't know, I'd give him a break.

OSCAR

What makes him think he's so superior? Do you know what I went through with Blanche?

SPECTRE

Yes, I was there for all of it.

OSCAR

I spent months and months hating myself. How hard can it be to get one lousy marriage to work? My kids are in California and I'll probably never see them more than once a year for the rest of my life. So all of that yelling and fighting, and all that drinking and the empty apartment: it doesn't mean anything. Felix has got it all worked out in a couple hours and I'm stuck feeling bad.

SPECTRE

You do realize he's lying, don't you?

OSCAR

It doesn't matter what's actually going on in that head of his. Sorry I can't streamline the five stages of grief.

SPECTRE

He'll be back to his normal, neurotic self by tomorrow morning.

OSCAR

I don't know if I prefer that.

SPECTRE

Just because you coped with your divorce by nearly drinking yourself to death doesn't mean he has to.

*OSCAR ignores him.*

And there it is. I listen to you, but you don't acknowledge a word I say.

Here's some perspective: Remember when Brucey was born? You sat in the waiting room by yourself,

worried sick. Worried about Blanche, worried you'd be a terrible father and Felix stayed with you and somehow, the most hysterical man on Earth calmed you down. And I thought to myself: Frances is lucky.

The way he described it, you were father and husband of the year. Things turned out differently, but I was thinking... maybe you owe Felix some generosity.

OSCAR

The only thing I owe is alimony.

SPECTRE

We all owe each other, in some way. If we didn't, I can't think of any reason life would be worth living.

OSCAR

You would say that. You're just like him, so optimistic, like you swallowed half a dozen fortune cookies.

SPECTRE

You're the one who asked him to move in. Don't you think things will get a little cramped in here? It's true I pack pretty light, but with you, me, and Felix? I don't know if the apartment can handle that level of emotional turmoil.

OSCAR

All I'm asking is that he doesn't try to make me his therapist-- or worse yet, try to be mine.

SPECTRE

I'm not sure he's telling the truth, anyway. About Frances.

OSCAR

What do you mean?

SPECTRE

Don't you think it was all a little strange? You know Frances. She's a careful woman.

*A pause.*

Think about it: their entire marriage? Twelve years? For being late twice?

OSCAR

She thought it meant he was cheating.

SPECTRE

Then maybe--

OSCAR

Then maybe he was. But he would never. Felix hardly knows any other women, much less talk to them. It's not in his nature.

SPECTRE

How well do you know him? Really?

OSCAR

Maybe he's on the run. There are lots of issues guys would go into hiding for. Money, crime. Humiliation? Felix gets humiliated really easily.

SPECTRE

Why don't you just ask him?

OSCAR

Oh, please. If I tell him I think he's lying, it'll only cause more problems.

SPECTRE

You don't seem especially fond of him.

OSCAR

No, I am. I am. He's a good friend. Funny. Very considerate, too. Your problems are his problems. But Felix is a sensitive person. If he thinks I don't trust him, or if I pry, he'll wallow and complain and-- you know how he is. I can't ignore him like I can with you.

SPECTRE

Thanks. I feel great.

OSCAR

You know what I mean. There aren't any... real consequences if I don't talk to you.

SPECTRE

That's real nice of you, Osc.

OSCAR

You know full well where we stand.

SPECTRE

You can walk on eggshells around Felix all you want, but you're a nosy person. You're going to try to get the truth out of him.

*OSCAR starts climbing into bed.*

OSCAR

What, can you see the future now?

SPECTRE

No, I'm just perceptive is all.

OSCAR

And what if he is telling the truth? What if Frances just had enough?

SPECTRE

Maybe. But I don't think you would've started talking to me again if that's what you really believed.

*Lights down.*

#### Scene 4

*The next day. The living room is spotless. Any trash has either been thrown out or reorganized into a gaudy, but nostalgic 60s aesthetic. The poker table has been transformed into a classy dining table, complete with a yellow flower in a vase. OSCAR enters and is immediately shocked.*

*FELIX enters with two plates. He sets them on the table.*

FELIX

Good morning.

OSCAR

Did you even sleep at all last night?

FELIX

Of course I did.

OSCAR

(pointing to one of the plates)  
Is that for me?

FELIX

Yes. Go on, sit down.

OSCAR

Wow.

*OSCAR sits down.*  
Listen, Feel. I'm sorry for snapping at you last night.

FELIX  
It's okay. I know your divorce is a touchy subject for you. I shouldn't have brought it up.

OSCAR  
It's a touchy subject for most people.

*OSCAR hesitates, drinks some coffee.*  
What about you? Once some actual time passes, don't you think it'll be difficult to talk about? She threw you out--almost unprompted. It would mess any guy up just out of complete surprise.

FELIX  
Not almost unprompted. Completely unprompted.

OSCAR  
Whatever.

FELIX  
It's a new day. I'm a new man.

OSCAR  
Seems a little fast.

FELIX  
I can only go forward from here.

OSCAR  
Must be strange to wake up alone for the first time in-- how long were you married? Twelve years?

FELIX  
Twelve, yes, but I have so many more years left! This isn't the end, you know.

OSCAR  
What do you think she told the kids this morning?

FELIX  
They're smart children. Mature for their age. I'm sure she told them in a very candid way--

OSCAR  
I haven't seen my own kid in almost six months. He

could've grown half a foot for all I know.

FELIX

(fighting back tears)  
Listen, Oscar, do you think you could use a coaster?  
For your coffee?

OSCAR

See? Look at you! You haven't moved on!

FELIX

Oh, so what?

OSCAR

So it's not a race, Felix! No one's making bets on  
who crosses the finish line first!

FELIX

I'd have a lot easier time if you didn't do things to  
make me cry.

OSCAR

Look. I think you might feel a lot better if you talk  
through it. You know? Tell me everything that  
happened.

FELIX

I appreciate the offer, but your brand of therapy  
probably involves alcohol and women, so I'll have to  
pass.

OSCAR

You can lay on the couch and I'll get a cigar and a  
notepad and help you discover your repressed  
memories.

FELIX

(sarcastically)  
Huh, I wonder why I paid someone for that? I could  
have just asked you.

*FELIX relaxes.*

It just feels so surreal. We really were a perfect  
family. Our kids are so smart, so polite. Frances is  
the most beautiful, amazing woman. Maybe she wasn't  
the best cook, but she has an eye for decorating. I  
really loved Thanksgiving with her. After dinner, I  
would wash the dishes and clean the living room. And  
then we would sit there. In perfect silence. Taking  
it all in. Oh, Oscar, we had some really good times.

OSCAR

My grandmother had more exciting Thanksgivings.

FELIX

It's what we wanted. But now it's all gone.  
Thanksgiving is ruined for the rest of my life.

*FELIX begins to cry.*

OSCAR

Felix, Felix, Felix.

FELIX

I know, I know, I know.

OSCAR

Do you have an estimated date and time of when you will be moving on from Frances?

FELIX

I know, I'm annoying. God, I hate me. Oscar, I hate everything about me.

OSCAR

Here we go.

FELIX

I shouldn't be a burden on you. I didn't know where else to go. But here I am, ruining your morning. You'd really be doing us both a favor if you threw me out now.

OSCAR

Knock it off, okay? It's okay to be upset. I'd be worried if you weren't.

FELIX

That's right. You're right. I remember what happened to you when Blanche left you.

OSCAR

I'd prefer not to talk about it.

FELIX

I need your help. Help me move on from Frances. Please?

OSCAR

I don't know about that. Like you said, my idea of therapy is a few steps short of a health code violation.

FELIX

All I'm asking for is a distraction.

OSCAR

I'm not sure you have the liver for it.

FELIX

Doesn't have to be alcohol, but it could be. I don't know, let's go bowling, let's see movies. Let's go out and do the things we never could while we were married.

OSCAR

Fine. I'll figure something out. But I have to get to work pretty soon.

FELIX

I took the day off. I want to sterilize your bedroom.

OSCAR

Stay out of my bedroom.

FELIX

Oscar, you want to talk about health code violations?

OSCAR

Do whatever you want to the rest of the apartment. Bedroom is off limits.

FELIX

Fine, fine.

*OSCAR exits. FELIX picks up the blanket on the back of the couch and refolds it. There is the sound of a door slamming from one side of the apartment. FELIX's head snaps in that direction.*

FELIX (CONT'D)

Hey, Oscar?

OSCAR

(offstage, from the side opposite of the noise)

What?

*FELIX fixes his attention on the side from which the door slam came.*

FELIX

Nothing, never mind.

*After making sure Oscar is in the other room, FELIX grabs a trash bag and follows the sound.*

Scene 5

*FELIX enters OSCAR'S bedroom and is immediately repulsed. He investigates carefully, making sure no one is in the room. FELIX cannot see SPECTRE. SPECTRE is already in the room, spinning himself in a swivel chair, tossing a baseball up and down in his hands.*

SPECTRE

Well, well, well. It's been a while, Mr. Ungar. I see you're looking as neat as ever.

(gesturing to the bedroom)

This is usually where I spend my time, so don't be shy if you ever want a chat. I know you're not supposed to be in here. I won't tell him, you know. That's why I slammed the door. So you'd find me.

*A pause.*

Okay, so I know you can't see me. A minor issue. Just because I'm imaginary doesn't mean I'm not real, though.

Being the figment of someone else's imagination has its drawbacks. For one, I end up monologuing. A lot. And two, I am very, very lonely. Here's an idea. Felix: do you have an unwanted, imaginary guy who follows you around and provides unnecessary and sometimes critical commentary on your day to day life? Because if you do, I would really love to meet him.

*FELIX spots the envelope sticking out from the dresser drawer. He picks it up.*

Hey, wait a minute.

*FELIX reads the outside of the envelope.*

Put that back. Felix, put that back.

*FELIX flips the envelope over, as if about to open it.*

*SPECTRE knocks over a chair. FELIX jumps and puts the letter back in the dresser. He exits.*

Well. I'm surprised that worked.

*SPECTRE opens the dresser and looks at the envelope.*

1952. Seems like a lifetime ago.

*SPECTRE replaces the envelope and exits.*

### Scene 6

*FELIX re-enters the living room. He begins distractedly dusting the furniture.*

OSCAR

(offstage)

Hey, Felix?

FELIX

Yeah?

OSCAR

I think I left my razor in the living room. Mind grabbing it for me?

FELIX

Sure.

OSCAR

Should be on my desk.

*FELIX crosses to the desk. He lifts up a bag of potato chips and finds the razor within.*

FELIX

(calling out)

I'm going to sanitize it.

OSCAR

(offstage)

Please do not.

*FELIX folds up the bag of chips. He notices something on the desk where the bag used to be. He lifts up a set of dog tags and examines them.*

*OSCAR enters. FELIX sets down the dog tags.*

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Come on, Felix, I gotta be to work in-- Are those my dog tags?

*OSCAR picks them up.*

OSCAR (CONT'D)

I thought I lost them.

FELIX

It looks like you did. Under some prehistoric newspapers and a bag of chips from the agricultural revolution.

OSCAR

An appreciation for the past, Felix. Now, where did you put my razor?

*OSCAR pockets the dog tags.*

FELIX

How come you never told me?

OSCAR

Told you what?

FELIX

I've known you ten years, Osc. You never thought to tell me? That, you know--

OSCAR

You're making me nervous.

FELIX

That you're Jewish.

OSCAR

Oh.

*OSCAR removes the dog tags from his pockets.*

FELIX

There's an *H* on them.

OSCAR

Well, I'm not. Not technically, anyway. It's on my dad's side. Has to be the mother, you know.

FELIX

Then why bother telling them when you enlisted?

OSCAR

It was either that, *P* for Protestant, or *C* for Catholic. If you say nothing, they put *P*. I didn't feel like nothing. I didn't feel like *P* or *C* either. *H* is the closest I get.

FELIX

I'm sorry you felt like you couldn't tell me.

OSCAR

It's not that. I never really felt like people needed to know.

*OSCAR repockets the dog tags.*  
So what about you? Aren't you Catholic?

FELIX

Methodist.

OSCAR

Right. You wouldn't be getting a divorce if you were.

FELIX

I'm sure we've all done things the Catholic Church wouldn't approve of.

*OSCAR reaches for the razor.*

OSCAR

I'd love to see a list of your sins, Felix. Thou shalt not vacuum at three in the morning. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's dehumidifier.

FELIX

Knock it off, Osc. Go to work.

OSCAR

But really. Besides being on the receiving end of a divorce, you've got a pretty low batting average on the seven deadly sins. But remember: it's a sin to lie, so if you do tear up the town, I'd better be the first one you tell.

FELIX

(bashful)  
Fine, fine. Go finish shaving. I want to do some dishes, anyway.

*FELIX exits.*

OSCAR

Good talk, Feel.

*OSCAR makes to leave. He runs into SPECTRE.*

OSCAR (CONT'D)

I need to get to work! Can't this wait?

SPECTRE

Come on! You heard him! "We've all done things the Catholic Church wouldn't approve of?"

OSCAR

It's true!

SPECTRE

Think about it! What if he's committed a crime? You could be housing a criminal!

OSCAR

You're delusional.

SPECTRE

Plus, I don't like Felix pretending he's the first person to ever notice what's on your dog tags. That was me. I noticed.

OSCAR

Yeah, well. You're not exactly a person the Pope would appreciate, either.

SPECTRE

What if he needs something? What if he's in trouble?

OSCAR

I've asked. He won't change his story.

SPECTRE

You saw him yesterday. It really only takes him two drinks and he'll start talking.

OSCAR

You want me to get him drunk? I'm not going to do that.

*FELIX enters. SPECTRE sits back in the armchair and observes.*

FELIX

Hey, before you leave: what do you want for dinner tonight?

SPECTRE

Now's your chance.

OSCAR

Actually, do you want to get dinner and drinks somewhere tonight?

FELIX

No, I think it's better if we stay in. We'll save a lot of money if I'm cooking.

OSCAR

Don't worry about it. My treat.

FELIX

Oscar, you have thirty four cents to your name.

OSCAR

You're a sad guy. I'm trying to make you happy.

*FELIX hesitates.*

FELIX

How can I turn down an offer like that?

OSCAR

Maybe it'll help you move on.

FELIX

Thanks, Osc. I mean it.

*FELIX exits.*

OSCAR

(to SPECTRE)

I don't feel good about this.

SPECTRE

You'll feel a whole lot better tonight. Trust me.

*Lights fade.*

### Scene 7

*An urban bar. It is classy but not exclusive.*

*OSCAR seats himself at the bar. The bar hums with a vague, blue ambience, something halfway between murmurs and glasses clinking.*

*SPECTRE meanders the length of the room, a drink*

*in his hand.*

*FELIX enters the bar. He takes a seat next to OSCAR.*

FELIX

I don't know about this.

OSCAR

Relax.

FELIX

This place makes me uncomfortable. I feel visible.  
What if my kids saw me here?

OSCAR

Your kids go out drinking?

FELIX

I always went to places like this with Frances.  
Without her here, there are too many possibilities.

OSCAR

Like what?

FELIX

I just mean there's an element of surprise now. Being  
married gave me a routine. I could count on things  
always being the same.

OSCAR

Sounds pretty awful.

FELIX

Oh, no, I liked it. I needed it. I learned that about  
myself pretty early on. I was an Eagle Scout, you  
know.

OSCAR

I thought you wanted to move on. From Frances.

FELIX

I did. I do.

OSCAR

Then be spontaneous. You want to really get over her?  
Take someone home tonight.

FELIX  
You wouldn't mind?

OSCAR  
Why would I?

FELIX  
It's your apartment.

OSCAR  
You pay half the rent. Come on, there must be someone here you'd like to talk to.

*A silence. They stare at each other.*

*FREUD enters from behind the bar. He begins pouring drinks. OSCAR notices him and is alarmed. FELIX is not; he does not even acknowledge him.*

OSCAR (CONT'D)  
So. Um. What do you think of Freud?

FELIX  
Freud.

FREUD  
Me.

OSCAR  
Yeah, you know, with the cigar and the--

FELIX  
I know Freud, Osc. As for what I think of him? Well, I don't know. It's not something you really talk about over drinks.

*FREUD places a drink in front of both OSCAR and FELIX. They drink quickly and in sync.*

OSCAR  
But do you think he was right? The things he said. You know... dreams. Saying this, but meaning that. And it all boils down to your childhood.

FELIX  
You're asking the wrong person. I studied journalism.

OSCAR  
And he could diagnose you into a type of person. Tell you everything you needed to know about yourself just

by asking a few questions.

*A pause.*

But they proved that it's all bullshit anyway.

FELIX

Did they?

OSCAR

Probably.

FELIX

Wait a minute. Are you seeing a therapist?

FREUD

(dryly)

I think he's "seeing" a lot of things.

OSCAR

No.

FELIX

Then why are you talking about Freud?

OSCAR

Forget it. Just concentrate on picking up some gal tonight so you can forget about Frances.

FELIX

Some gal? Oscar, you know me! I'm about commitment, and romance, and sorry-- but I'm not interested in taking just anyone to bed. If you want to take someone home tonight, be my guest. But stop worrying about who I'm with. Okay? I can take care of myself.

OSCAR

But you wanted me to help you.

FELIX

(apologetic)

I do, I do. It's complicated. Maybe what I really want is for you to be patient with me while I try to figure this all out.

OSCAR

I need another drink.

*FREUD fills two drinks and passes them to OSCAR. SPECTRE picks up one of them. OSCAR drinks the other.*

SPECTRE

I haven't been out to a place like this in twenty years. You should really bring me along more often. I like seeing Felix, too. Did you know I was also an Eagle Scout?

*SPECTRE finishes his drink.*  
Another, please?

*FREUD slides two identical drinks to him.*  
*SPECTRE gives one to OSCAR and keeps the other for himself.*  
And make sure Felix stays hydrated, too. Put it on my tab.

*FREUD slides two identical drinks to FELIX.*  
I remember coming to places like this with the guys back in the day. Okay, they weren't as nice, and an Austrian Psychoanalyst wasn't serving your drinks, but they were good times.  
(to FREUD)  
Who let you in here anyway?

FREUD

Perhaps you should rephrase: who didn't let me in?

SPECTRE

(to Oscar)  
So let's say Felix meets someone tonight. Where does that put you? I'm not trying to make you upset. I only want to prepare you for a very awkward night.

*In sync, OSCAR and SPECTRE take a long drink.*  
*FELIX finishes his drink.*

*GWENDOLYN and CECILY enter.*

SPECTRE (CONT'D)

Unless? Ladies, how do you feel about a double date?

CECILY

I would sooner chew broken glass.

GWENDOLYN

I second that. Would someone please be kind enough to fetch me a drink?  
(to FREUD)  
Hullo, Ziggy? A double drambuie with crushed ice.

Unless you haven't got crushed ice.

FREUD

I'm afraid we are all out. Will broken glass do?

GWENDOLYN

I suppose it must. For my lovely sister?

CECILY

A double vodka for me.

GWENDOLYN

Cecily!

CECILY

A small double vodka.

*GWENDOLYN notices SPECTRE.*

GWENDOLYN

Well, hello! What have we here, a soldier? You know it's often said about town that I have a type.

SPECTRE

Listen, I think your efforts would be better spent with someone else.

GWENDOLYN

Silly me.

*GWENDOLYN grabs CECILY by the shoulders and pushes her towards SPECTRE.*

My lovely sister, then? Cecily is sweet, obedient, and virtuous. She'd make a marvelous wife for a strapping soldier like yourself.

CECILY

Gwendolyn, stop!

GWENDOLYN

I'm doing what's best for you!

SPECTRE

Please. I'm not interested.

GWENDOLYN

Cecily, look what you've done! You've scared him off!

CECILY

I've scared him off? Why can't you ever let me alone!

FELIX

(to OSCAR)  
You're quiet all of a sudden.

*GWENDOLYN slinks over to OSCAR and peers over his right shoulder.*

GWENDOLYN

Don't you enjoy our company, Mr. Madison?

OSCAR

There's a lot going on in my head.

GWENDOLYN

Only in your head? How insulting.

FELIX

Come on, I can't believe I'm telling you to relax.  
You need to clear your head.

CECILY

(to SPECTRE)  
I'm sorry about my sister.

SPECTRE

No harm done.

OSCAR

(to FELIX)  
It's a lot easier said than done.

GWENDOLYN

Come now, Cecily. It is obvious we're unwanted. Let us away.

(to FREUD)  
Thank you for the drinks, Doctor. Ta ta!

CECILY

Ta ta!

SPECTRE

Ta ta!

FREUD

Ta ta!

*GWENDOLYN and CECILY exit. OSCAR nods in SPECTRE's direction.*

SPECTRE

Me, too?

OSCAR

I want a clear head.

*SPECTRE exits.*

*The alcohol begins to take effect. FELIX's words slur in the slightest way. OSCAR finally relaxes.*

FELIX

I guess I just want to be understood. We had a good marriage, but Frances never really understood me. Sure, I'm obsessive and finicky and annoying, but I just want things done in a very particular way. It's who I am. But you understand me, Oscar. You would never divorce me for something like that.

OSCAR

I would never need to divorce you.

FELIX

Women want so much out of us. I should've moved in with you years ago.

OSCAR

I don't think Blanche would've liked that very much.

FELIX

Men are so much more straightforward. No "saying this but meaning that."

OSCAR

Uh, I'm not so sure about that. I think women almost always say what they mean. Maybe they left us because we couldn't do the same.

FELIX

No, no, no, because there are things we can say to each other that we can't say to our wives.

OSCAR

...What do you mean?

FELIX

Well... did you know that I once cheated on Frances?

OSCAR

Really?

FELIX

Mhm. Yeah. See? I could never say that to Frances

for-- obvious reasons, but I can tell you because you understand what it's like and--

OSCAR

Wait, wait, wait-- so you did cheat on her. Which is why she kicked you out. Why didn't you tell me?

FELIX

No, no, no. It was during the war. While Frances and I were engaged.

OSCAR

Whatever happened to that Felix?

FELIX

Are you really that surprised?

OSCAR

Yes.

FELIX

Consider this, Oscar: maybe what you think you know about me is wrong. Maybe I-- maybe I like going out, getting drunk, breaking the rules.

OSCAR

You don't.

FELIX

Maybe I do.

OSCAR

So who was it? A nurse? An escort?

FELIX

You are asking a lot of questions. My turn. I want to ask you a question.

OSCAR

I can't believe you cheated on her.

FELIX

I can't believe you're that surprised. You're telling me you never, you know... during the war?

OSCAR

I only meant to say I was surprised because, you know. You're you.

FELIX

I'm me.

OSCAR

And I think I know you best, Feel. We're close friends, right?

FELIX

Of course. Yeah, yeah. Of course. But I think you can be the closest of friends without knowing everything about them. It's important to-- I mean I personally like to have one or two things to keep as my own.

*SPECTRE enters. Behind them, the set becomes the apartment again.*

SPECTRE

You learned something, all right.

OSCAR

I feel sick.

SPECTRE

Funny. You set out to get Felix drunk, but I think he may have gotten you drunk.

OSCAR

It was your idea.

SPECTRE

It's a good thing you didn't say anything you might regret. That would have left you in quite a mess.

*SPECTRE exits.*

FELIX

I'm never drinking again.

OSCAR

Me either.

FELIX

Nah, we'll do this again. Soon. I know we will. Talk more about the war or something. Or Freud.

OSCAR

Freud.

FELIX

God, I hate Freud. Took a psych class in '39. Didn't make any sense.

OSCAR

So you think he's wrong?

FELIX

Oscar, it's really not worth your breath.

OSCAR

But if he was right-- What if he was right?

FELIX

You are very drunk.

OSCAR

It means I'll be the same person forever. Seems like a lousy deal. I don't want to be the person I am.

FELIX

For what it's worth, I think you're fine.

*They stare at each other.*

OSCAR

I think I should go to bed.

FELIX

Yeah.

OSCAR

Yeah. Goodnight.

*FELIX and OSCAR exit to opposite sides.*

*Lights down.*

### Scene 8

*The living room. CECILY reads The Importance of Being Earnest. GWENDOLYN enters.*

CECILY

Good morning.

GWENDOLYN

It is a good morning. I've never seen weather so fair. Though they say it may rain tomorrow.

CECILY

That may cool things down a bit.

GWENDOLYN

Though it sometimes gets hotter after it rains.

*CECILY closes her book.*

CECILY

Pray don't talk to me about the weather, dear sister. Whenever people talk to me about the weather, I always feel quite certain they mean something else.

GWENDOLYN

Forgive me. You know how much I dislike confrontation.

CECILY

If you have anything to say to me, please do.

GWENDOLYN

I heard you leave. Shortly after midnight.

CECILY

I returned, didn't I?

GWENDOLYN

If this "bunburying" continues, I'll have no choice but to alert Mother. She'll send you straight back to England, Cecily, and I know how much you dislike it there.

CECILY

That's hardly a threat. I'm an adult.

GWENDOLYN

And if she disinherits you? I'm afraid this city is extremely expensive. You would never make it on your own.

CECILY

Disinherit me? For Heaven's sake, Gwen, I'm only doing a little exploring.

GWENDOLYN

I know where you've been, and it certainly wasn't for a stroll in the park.

CECILY

This is ridiculous. You can hardly control me.

GWENDOLYN

Perhaps I should rephrase: I know who you've been with.

CECILY

And it is positively none of your business.

GWENDOLYN

Can't you tell me her name?

CECILY

I'm not daft. A name is a dangerous thing.

GWENDOLYN

Well. You know I find the situation rather despicable, but I believe in redemption. In time, you will learn who you really are.

CECILY

Who I am? Gwendolyn, for goodness sake, look at yourself in the mirror. You speak to me of filth and disgust, but you go to bed with any man that asks.

GWENDOLYN

How dare you?

CECILY

Don't think I haven't noticed! Your bedroom reeks of men, and might I say, it is absolutely foul! Tell me, Gwendolyn: at what point do my private engagements smell any worse than yours?

GWENDOLYN

Don't be vulgar.

CECILY

I'm being metaphorical.

GWENDOLYN

Now I really am writing to Mother. She'll hate to know you've discovered figurative language.

CECILY

What kind of sister are you, anyway? You chastise me, you threaten me.

GWENDOLYN

Because I am worried for you! And... I don't feel I know you anymore.

CECILY

Perhaps not.

*A pause.*

And yet, I owe you an apology. I should not have made such judgments about you.

GWENDOLYN

But they're true.

CECILY

I must respect your privacy. Otherwise I am a hypocrite.

GWENDOLYN

You make me look rather immature.

CECILY

I hope you've changed your mind about my...erm...affiliations. Because I certainly haven't changed mine.

GWENDOLYN

Cecily. Oh, dear, Cecily. You mean everything to me. But I cannot sleep at night if I know you are twisting and bending nature as if it were clay.

CECILY

Then I am afraid you won't find yourself able to sleep.

*Lights down.*

### Scene 9

*The apartment is in a slightly worse condition than before. The curtains have been torn from the window and are draped over the table. The coat rack is still filled with an unusable number of coats.*

*OSCAR lies on the sofa, staring at the ceiling. His hands are folded on his chest. The armchair has been brought closer to the sofa; it is positioned at a 45 degree angle from the horizontal couch.*

*On the armchair sits SPECTRE. He is dressed in a fashion not dissimilar to Sigmund Freud. He sports the circular glasses, a blazer, and it wouldn't be surprising if he was smoking a cigar.*

*SPECTRE removes a fountain pen and a notebook from his breast pocket.*

SPECTRE

(in a very rough German accent)  
Good morning, Mr. Madison. How are you feeling?

OSCAR

Hungover.

SPECTRE

Not unusual. Tell me a little bit about your childhood.

OSCAR

Okay...I was an only child, very average at everything. Really liked sports. Especially baseball...

*SPECTRE jots down notes.*

SPECTRE

Mhm... Baseball... Yes. Silly American sport. Far too many metaphors you can make. You know, with the bases.

*OSCAR stares at him.*  
First base is-- and home run--

*OSCAR says nothing.*  
Perhaps pitching and catching?

*OSCAR looks away. SPECTRE huffs.*  
Oh, you're serious. Okay. Tell me about your parents.

OSCAR

Dad was a schoolteacher. Mom was a nurse. Nothing spectacular.

SPECTRE

Indeed. Hm. And what were your feelings towards each of them? In particular, how did you feel about your mother?

*OSCAR sits upright.*

OSCAR

This isn't helping.

SPECTRE

Patience, patience! The journey to the truth is a

dangerous and arduous path.

OSCAR

I don't want to hear it anymore. Okay?

SPECTRE

(in an American accent)

Okay, okay! I'll lose the accent.

*SPECTRE takes off the glasses and tosses them behind him. He removes the blazer and tosses it on to the coffee table. OSCAR relaxes and lies back down.*

What do you want to talk about?

OSCAR

Nothing, actually. I was trying to take a nap. You started talking.

SPECTRE

You know it's your fault I'm here, right? What's going on in your head, anyway? Freud this, Freud that. I had no idea you were such an intellectual.

OSCAR

I'm not.

SPECTRE

You're smarter than I am, aren't you?

OSCAR

Not really.

SPECTRE

Oh, please. I won't be offended. I was born on a farm. I have a fifth-grade education at best. I've done some stupid things.

OSCAR

Me, too.

SPECTRE

So, some part of you thinks Freud can prevent you from doing more stupid things.

OSCAR

My stupid things are my business, so I'd appreciate it if you'd let me think about it in peace.

SPECTRE

I'm trying to help you.

OSCAR

Help me? There's nothing wrong with me.

SPECTRE

I never said there was. You did!

OSCAR

Okay! I'm temporarily...broken. Out of commission. And I'm trying to fix that. So could you just leave me alone? For once?

SPECTRE

Aren't you tired of being alone?

OSCAR

Stop.

SPECTRE

I am. I sometimes wish I could go home, but I can't. You need me.

OSCAR

I don't need you.

*A pause.*

SPECTRE

Why do you think there's something wrong with you?

*OSCAR lies back down and closes his eyes.*

OSCAR

It was a dream I had. In it, Felix and I went for this long walk. I don't even think we were in New York anymore. Not our New York, anyway. Central Park was filled with huge fields of wheat. And all the subways were suddenly operating above ground. When I turned around, I saw the Hudson River. I looked down. I saw that Felix had jumped into the river. Anyway, Felix ends up drowning and I can't do anything about it. My muscles seize up. My brain draws a blank. In the end I had to tell Frances her ex-husband drowned and it was all my fault. She didn't seem too surprised. But since it was my fault, she decided I should be the one to plan his funeral. So I do, and it's the most beautiful service anyone has ever seen. The entire country seems to be there.

Everyone's sobbing. Gigantic bouquets of lilies bloom in every corner of the room. People begin to tell me they want an open casket.

I guess I'm allowed to do this since I planned the thing, so I open up the casket. And Felix isn't in it. I am. I am the dead body. I turn around and everyone's gone, except for one person. Felix is in the pews.

*A pause.*

SPECTRE

I'll be honest with you. I don't know anything about psychology.

OSCAR

That's probably a good thing. Most of it are things you'd rather not hear about yourself. Although a lot of guys probably could have gotten some use of it after the war. It screwed a lot of them up. Not me, I adjusted for the most part.

*SPECTRE, careful not to alert OSCAR of his movements, picks up his pen and notepad and begins taking notes.*

But I was lucky. Forget the war, do you remember what training was like? I would fight anyone who asked. We'd knock each other's teeth out over the dumbest things. And you'd think it was a waste of energy to beat each other half to death for fun, but no one stopped it. Winning meant I was a good person. You get consumed by those feelings. It's a high. It crawls under your skin. It gets all over your body and you can't wash it off. It's like... guys in the army would get tattoos of anchors and eagles and snakes, but they might as well have been a type-written list on "how to be a man," so you could look at it in case you ever forgot.

SPECTRE

What do you mean?

OSCAR

There's some level of manliness no one can ever really reach, and everyone's always trying to kill each other to get to it. Down to the way you walk, or the beer you drink, or the way you look at women. It's exhausting.

SPECTRE

Maybe. But I don't think Felix cares about those things.

OSCAR

He does. You sometimes can't tell, but he does. Everyone does. I maybe took it all a little far. If I didn't sleep with a woman who looked my direction, or if I backed down from a fight, I knew how it would look. Or what they would say.

SPECTRE

Why'd you care what they said?

OSCAR

Because. Dammit. It felt like they had already found me out. I felt like my own thoughts were playing like a movie projector on my forehead. And everyone could see them except for me.

SPECTRE

I think I know where this is going. You don't have to keep talking about it.

OSCAR

It's like living two lives. Except one part has never really done any living.

SPECTRE

It has to stay that way.

OSCAR

It should. But I think that might not be the case right now.

SPECTRE

Oh... you mean--

OSCAR

It's complicated.

SPECTRE

You'd better be careful.

OSCAR

I never said I was going to do anything about it.

SPECTRE

You're not a subtle person.

OSCAR

I've held these-- I don't know, do you want to call them feelings? I've taken care of them for my whole life. I'm in control.

SPECTRE

It's different. Oscar, you live with him. Try to make sense of it.

OSCAR

I don't want to be made sense of! Maybe that's it: maybe I'm--too complicated to be understood by psychology.

SPECTRE

Come on.

OSCAR

Freud was wrong. They're all wrong. I'm not any type of person. You can't fill out a medical form and make sense of me. I'm a normal guy. Who has, you know, done some not normal things that don't mean anything.

SPECTRE

You might be better off forgetting we ever talked about this.

OSCAR

(suddenly)  
Are you jealous?

SPECTRE

No. I'm worried about you.

OSCAR

Don't be. It's good I can think about Felix like this. I can deal with it on my own time. Until the feelings are gone.

SPECTRE

How very neat of you.

OSCAR

It's a whole lot better if I'm not spontaneous about this. You know what could happen.

SPECTRE

Yes, I do! Which is why-- more than anyone I want you to talk through things, but don't you think this is a little far? True, I have no medical degree, but any sane doctor would tell you to take all those feelings

and lock them up. Find a cool, dry location in your brain. Keep it out of direct sunlight or else it'll start to rot back through and everyone will know. So forget. About. It.

OSCAR

Quit telling me what to do or I'll find you a box in my head. Remember. I'm in control. Of you. Of myself.

SPECTRE

I don't think you are!

*FELIX enters carrying a laundry basket. He crosses behind the couch.*

FELIX

Hey, Osc.

OSCAR

(startled)

Hi.

*FELIX stops. Looks closely at OSCAR.*

FELIX

Did you shave?

OSCAR

I always shave.

FELIX

Huh. You did a better job than usual.

*FELIX backs away.*

Must be the new shaving cream I bought.

*FELIX exits.*

*SPECTRE stares at OSCAR.*

OSCAR

What?

SPECTRE

You're blushing.

OSCAR

That's razor burn.

SPECTRE

Fine. I won't tell you how to feel. But I am going to tell you to be careful.

OSCAR

I don't want anything from him.

SPECTRE

Really.

OSCAR

It will pass.

SPECTRE

I knew a guy once. They found him out, and--

OSCAR

But I'm not that kind of guy.

SPECTRE

Then good luck. Felix would never hurt you, but there are plenty of people who would.

OSCAR

You know, I think I liked talking to Freud better.

*Lights down.*

### Scene 10

*FRANCES enters. Though she is dressed in a fairly traditional dress for 1965, she is decidedly relaxed. She kicks off her heels, lets loose her hair from its pins, and sits on the edge of the stage. Maybe she also smokes a cigarette.*

FRANCES

Good God! Jesus Christ! Holy ever-loving shit! Sorry. I had to get that out of my system. Felix never let me say anything like that. He's awfully religious-- or maybe just a little too polite. He also never swears, you know. Was always a little strange to hear him say "holy mackerel" during sex, but what do I know?

Sorry. I'm Frances. Felix's ex-wife. Greatest title I ever had. And yes, I know I'm not what you were expecting. Felix talks about me constantly, of

course. But has anyone ever really seen me? I don't plan on staying long, but I can assure you that Felix's description of me is far from the truth. He sees what he wants to see.

It's easy for you to say: "Good for you, Frances! You don't need some guy telling you what to do! Burn your bra!" I'm brave, but not stupid. It's scary to be on my own. I don't exactly have job prospects, or...a job, and I have two young children; but I'm getting checks from Felix as alimony, and that has to be good enough. For now.

God, I hate getting checks from him. I appreciate the money, but his signature pisses me off. There isn't a Nobel prize for "most impeccable handwriting."

Now, our marriage was good. It was decent. It had its ups and downs. We were a good family, but I think Felix thought he could recreate "Leave it to Beaver" with me and the kids. I'm not cut out for that. I don't think anyone is, actually. But that's not why we split up.

Neither of us were happy. I certainly wasn't. And I could tell something was wrong with Felix. More wrong than usual, anyway. Something's always wrong with him. For a while, I thought this was normal. I never had many friends, but when I did have dinner with other women, other wives and mothers, we bitched and complained about our husbands constantly. "He won't come home on time", "he yells at the kids", "he spent our savings on a new truck." By comparison, Felix was a dream husband. "Don't be unhappy," I'd tell myself. "Everything could be so much worse." I wonder if Felix ever told himself the same thing.

One day, one of the neighbors, Mrs. Laufer, told me she heard from her husband who has a friend who works downtown who saw-- never mind who they were, the point is, someone saw Felix in a place of...questionable repute. And I said, "No, that can't be right. Felix would never go there. Why would he go there?" But the more I thought about it, the more things made sense. I don't remember the last time I saw him smile. He was so unhappy. Maybe more unhappy than I was.

So I confronted him about it. I told him. I said: "I know where you've been." And that was that.

Felix is... annoying. He really did try to change everything I'd cook. He taught the kids perfect penmanship before they ever learned how to read. He's dramatic, he's overwhelming, he made many of my days and nights utterly miserable. But I've spent too many hours upset about the things he's done. I'm ready to be happy on my own. I'm thirty-eight years old. There is so much more time.

*Lights down.*

Scene 11

*The living room. OSCAR sits on the couch, reading. FELIX enters.*

OSCAR

Hey, Feel.

*OSCAR motions for FELIX to sit beside him. FELIX sits instead in the armchair.*

What do you feel like doing tonight? I saw a theatre down the street is playing "Breakfast at Tiffany's." And you know, that Audrey Hepburn is really something else.

FELIX

Listen. Oscar. I wanted to ask you about something.

*OSCAR freezes.*

OSCAR

Okay.

FELIX

I don't know really know where to start.

OSCAR

That's probably a sign that you shouldn't.

FELIX

Is this a bad time?

OSCAR

I'm obviously not in the middle of anything, but a general rule in life is that it's always a bad time to ask vague, personal questions.

FELIX

I never said it was personal.

OSCAR

But it is. Isn't it?

*FELIX hesitates. He pulls the envelope, folded, from his pocket. OSCAR stands up.*  
Why do you have that?

FELIX

Oscar, please, before you freak out--

OSCAR

Did you read it?

FELIX

No, no-- no. It's still sealed shut.

OSCAR

Okay. Um. I'm trying very hard to-- to not wring your neck. Because I thought this went without saying, but you really shouldn't go through my stuff.

FELIX

I know, I know. I thought I heard something in your room. I didn't mean to, but I saw it. I thought it was trash at first, but I noticed it was an envelope, which is not an extraordinary thing. But I thought it was strange because it was post marked in 1952.

*OSCAR extends his hand and FELIX hands him the envelope.*  
Why haven't you opened it?

OSCAR

Haven't gotten around to it.

*FELIX scoffs.*

FELIX

I assume you won't tell me who John Swain is? The one who sent this?

OSCAR

Not important.

FELIX

I understand. But be careful. Don't leave things out in the open. Because most people are a lot nosier than I am.

OSCAR

I didn't leave it out in the open.

FELIX

I'm just telling you what might happen.

OSCAR

What are you talking about?

FELIX

Why do I need to explain myself?

OSCAR

Because things mean things!

FELIX

I mean, watch your step.

*FELIX starts to exit.*

OSCAR

Is that a threat? Felix, are you threatening me?

FELIX

(abruptly)

Has it ever occurred to you that I'm trying to make things better for you?

OSCAR

Then it's a good thing I'm fine the way I am.

FELIX

I don't think you are.

*FELIX exits. OSCAR looks at the envelope.  
SPECTRE enters.*

SPECTRE

Aren't you going to open it now?

OSCAR

No.

SPECTRE

I told you to be careful.

OSCAR

So did Felix.

SPECTRE

What are you going to do?

OSCAR

Don't you usually tell me what to do?

SPECTRE

Only when it's something you want to hear.

OSCAR

You were right. Felix is like everyone else. God, I wish-- you know, I'm so lonely.

SPECTRE

Me, too.

OSCAR

I need to destroy the letter.

SPECTRE

You don't even know what's in it.

OSCAR

I don't. But I have a hunch. And that's already too much.

SPECTRE

I can't stop you.

OSCAR

I'm tired. I'll do it in the morning. Tear it up, burn it. I don't know. I should have done it years ago.

*Lights down.*

## SCENE 12

*GWENDOLYN sits, watching FELIX sweep the floor. He cleans furiously, but ignores a large plate of spaghetti (linguini) which has been knocked over on the ground. The rest of the apartment is an unspeakable disaster. CECILY enters.*

CECILY

(to Felix)  
You've missed a spot.

GWENDOLYN

Ah. Cecily. Have you come to apologize?

CECILY

I've come to say goodbye.

GWENDOLYN

So it's true? You have taken the cursed step from bunburyist to invert?

CECILY

I'll write. I'm sure we'll have plenty correspondence.

GWENDOLYN

I hope this mystery woman is worth it. It's caused quite the rift between the two of us.

CECILY

No, Gwendolyn. You've made us quarrel. But you were right, anyway: I am only one person. Sporting the weight of two identities is rather bad for one's back.

*FELIX exits with the broom.*

GWENDOLYN

Wouldn't you like to see how things end here?

CECILY

No. I think your meddling has put everything in a rather awful state. I'll take my leave knowing there is nothing left for me here.

GWENDOLYN

I don't care where you go or what you call yourself. You will always be Cecily to me.

CECILY

Then I shall be no one to you. Goodbye, sister. I wish you luck.

GWENDOLYN

(sarcastically)  
Ta ta!

*CECILY exits. FELIX enters, carrying the letter.*

GWENDOLYN (CONT'D)

Oh, excellent.

*GWENDOLYN, unseen, takes the envelope from FELIX. She opens it and places the letter in his hands.*

GWENDOLYN (CONT'D)

Well, at the very least this will provide some

entertainment.

*FELIX sits on the couch with the letter. He reads it. GWENDOLYN exits. OSCAR enters.*

OSCAR

Good morn-- Are you serious?

FELIX

What do you mean?

OSCAR

You went through my things again, even when I begged you not to--

FELIX

I thought you wanted--

OSCAR

How much have you read?

FELIX

All of it, but I thought that's what you wanted.

OSCAR

Why? Why would I want that?

FELIX

Because you put it on my nightstand.

*OSCAR backs off.*

OSCAR

What?

FELIX

It was there when I woke up this morning.

OSCAR

You're lying. I never did that.

FELIX

Then who did? The Ghost of Christmas Past? Quit playing games with me.

OSCAR

You're crazy. You've done a lot of things to piss me off, Felix, but this is the final straw.

FELIX

What, were you sleepwalking?

OSCAR

That would imply I could sleep, which I can't--  
thanks to you.

FELIX

Why? What have I done to stop you from sleeping?

OSCAR

Do you want a list?

FELIX

Oh, I'm not to blame for this. You put that letter on  
my nightstand. Just because you've been drinking  
almost constantly for months doesn't mean it's my  
fault if you can't remember anything you do!

OSCAR

Are you calling me a drunk?

FELIX

I don't know. Should I?

OSCAR

If you want to keep living here, you'll watch your  
mouth.

FELIX

Did you ever think I might be worried about you?

OSCAR

You're trying to change the subject.

FELIX

You drink a lot.

OSCAR

You clean a lot.

FELIX

It's a habit I picked up in the army.

OSCAR

I can say the same.

FELIX

I'm glad we have so much in common.

(looking to the letter)

But I guess there are more things you've never told  
me.

OSCAR

(panicked)  
Like what?

FELIX

That you were shot during the war.

*A pause.*

OSCAR

Oh, um. Yeah.

FELIX

(reading)  
"I hope you've been able to make a full recovery. I don't wish that kind of wound on anyone."

OSCAR

It was in my shoulder, if you were wondering.

FELIX

We don't know each other, do we?

OSCAR

There aren't really many times guys can sit down and spill their guts, you know?

FELIX

You look a little pale.

*OSCAR walks away. FELIX trails after him.*  
I'm sorry, Osc. I swear I would never have read it if I didn't think you wanted me to.

OSCAR

I didn't put it on your nightstand.

FELIX

I'm sorry I called you a drunk, too. That was really out of line, I just get defensive sometimes-- but I'm apologizing, and I mean it. I'm sorry.

OSCAR

You don't have to keep apologizing. It's over with.

FELIX

Okay.

*Silence.*

But can I ask you a question?

OSCAR

You're pushing your luck.

FELIX

You were in the war together? You and Swain?

OSCAR

Yes.

FELIX

Why didn't you open the letter? It's dated 1952.  
That's over ten years ago.

OSCAR

I can count, Felix.

FELIX

I'm your friend, aren't I? If there's something you  
want to talk about, I promise you can tell me--

OSCAR

There's nothing in that letter I want to talk about.

FELIX

You haven't even read it. How can you know that?

*This is the last straw.*

OSCAR

Listen here. I think Frances is the smartest woman in  
the world. She did what no other genius could: she  
left you. And with every violation of my personal  
space and privacy, and every self-righteous episode,  
I'm realizing Frances Ungar has twice the guts I have  
because-- for some reason-- I can't bear to throw you  
out.

FELIX

Frances didn't--

OSCAR

I don't want to hear it.

FELIX

Oscar, Frances didn't leave me. I left her.

*Absolute silence.*

OSCAR

No. That's not right. Why would you leave her?

*FELIX deliberates.*

FELIX

Because I knew you would take me in.

OSCAR

Of course I would. I was having a sympathetic episode. But that's not a reason. That only explains why you came to me.

FELIX

You don't understand.

OSCAR

I don't understand why you left her. Even when you had fights, you always said-- what was it you said?

FELIX

I already told you. I left her because  
(deliberately)  
I knew you would take me in.

OSCAR

I don't know what you mean. Get to the point.

*FELIX hesitates. He takes a step towards Oscar.*

FELIX

Oscar, I left my wife. I left her. Because I knew you would take me in.

*OSCAR turns and walks to the record player. He sorts through a few records, then tosses them aside.*

She figured some things out. And in the end-- I decided to leave.

Come on. I told you I'm perceptive, Oscar. I notice things.

And I feel things, too.

OSCAR

I know you feel things.  
You tell me all the time. How sad you are that Frances doesn't love you. That things will never be

the same.

FELIX  
Can't you take a hint?

OSCAR  
How much you miss your kids.

FELIX  
That's true. I do miss them. But I was telling you things. And you said them back... I thought.

OSCAR  
For clarification, because I don't think I believe what I'm hearing. You're saying... you're saying what I think you're saying.

FELIX  
Yes--

OSCAR  
How long?

FELIX  
A few years, maybe.

OSCAR  
I can't believe you lied to me.

FELIX  
Don't be ridiculous. I couldn't say anything until I was sure.

OSCAR  
And you're sure now?

FELIX  
You're not exactly denying it.

OSCAR  
You don't know what you're talking about.

FELIX  
Then tell me I'm wrong. Tell me I'm wrong and I'll leave. I'll leave and we can pretend this conversation never happened.

OSCAR  
Don't leave. I don't want you to leave.

FELIX

I don't want to leave, either.

*A pause.*

Oscar, I'm serious. This is how I feel.

OSCAR

Aren't you scared?

FELIX

Yes. But I can trust you.

OSCAR

I don't know if I'm a good person to trust.

FELIX

But I do. I trust you.

*FELIX walks to the window and looks out.*

FELIX (CONT'D)

It wasn't a nurse or an escort. During the war. It was a friend. My friend. He was my friend.

OSCAR

Oh.

FELIX

But I knew I loved Frances, too. It was complicated. It's complicated now. You and I.

OSCAR

You don't need to tell me all this.

*FELIX walks away from the window.*

FELIX

But now you have it. I've never told that to anyone before.

OSCAR

I would never say anything.

FELIX

Because this information--  
(he laughs nervously)  
--well--

OSCAR

You can trust me. I promise.

FELIX

We can still step away from this.

OSCAR

I know.

FELIX

Because you mean a lot to me. And if you're sure--

OSCAR

Cut the sap, Feel.

FELIX

But you're sure.

*They close the distance between each other and  
kiss briefly.*

OSCAR

I never thought--

FELIX

That's funny. I was scared I was too obvious.

OSCAR

No, I really never...

*A pause.*

Do it again.

*FELIX kisses OSCAR.*

FELIX

I know you probably don't want to hear this from me,  
but you're really an excellent kisser.

*OSCAR initiates another kiss. More intense.*

*FELIX reciprocates.*

FELIX (CONT'D)

It's a good thing I already live here. It saves us a  
step.

OSCAR

What do you mean?

*OSCAR pushes FELIX gently away.*

FELIX

If this is how we want things to be.

OSCAR  
Things?

FELIX  
Then it's a good thing I already live here.

OSCAR  
Things won't be any different.

FELIX  
Things?

OSCAR  
I don't know what you think this is.

FELIX  
I feel a certain way about you--

OSCAR  
Stop it. You're embarrassing yourself.

FELIX  
I'm going to go out on a limb. I want something. You want something. The same thing, maybe. But I don't think you want it to mean anything.

*OSCAR crosses to the poker table.*  
Please talk to me. I wish I had all the words to make sense of everything, but I just don't.

OSCAR  
Consider us lucky. Those are words I really don't want to hear.

FELIX  
Do you see what I'm saying?

OSCAR  
No.

FELIX  
Give me something, Oscar. This is crazy, it's scary, actually. But can't you tell me what you want?

OSCAR  
Can't you?

*FELIX is silent.*  
I don't know what's happening, but I do know there

are things we can't do. We can't go out. We can't see a movie, or go bowling.

FELIX

We do those things all the time.

OSCAR

It would be different. People can tell. They have a sixth sense for guys who are doing things they shouldn't be.

FELIX

Let me get this straight: in your ideal scenario we spend our nights together, crawl back to our own beds, and pretend none of it ever happened.

OSCAR

Yes. We're just. Helping each other out.

FELIX

Well, it sounds pretty horrible to me.

OSCAR

This world is horrible. We're horrible.

FELIX

I'm not horrible. If you didn't want this, you shouldn't have kissed me.

OSCAR

Are you that insulted? Isn't it better this way?

FELIX

I guess I never realized how unhappy you were.

OSCAR

It wasn't what I thought it would be like.

FELIX

You can't wish me into being a woman.

OSCAR

That's just the issue--

FELIX

Then you must already know what you're getting into. It's a different set of codes. Different words. And can I compliment you by saying you're remarkably well-versed?

*OSCAR recoils. FELIX continues.*

You know about me now. You know what really happened during the war. So what about you?

OSCAR  
What do you mean?

FELIX  
Be honest with me. Better yet, be honest with yourself: has this happened before?

*OSCAR is silent.*

FELIX (CONT'D)  
I'm not dumb. I read the letter.

OSCAR  
You're reading too far into it.

FELIX  
I couldn't have been sure, that's true, but you were panicking and the letter was over ten years old. It doesn't take a detective--

OSCAR  
It was different. You think you've got me all figured out.

FELIX  
Oscar, please.

OSCAR  
What you've done and what I've done are different.

FELIX  
And what we've done?

OSCAR  
We haven't done anything. And we won't.

FELIX  
You kissed me. I kissed you. Doesn't that mean anything to you?

OSCAR  
It can't.

FELIX  
If you wanted. It could.

OSCAR  
Felix, it can't.

FELIX  
Okay. I just want you to know that--

OSCAR  
Don't.

*Silence.*

OSCAR  
Listen, I think you  
should leave.

FELIX  
I think I should  
leave.

FELIX (CONT'D)  
Oh.

OSCAR  
Now.

FELIX  
No, I agree.

*FELIX hesitates.*  
I'll come back for my things tomorrow.

OSCAR  
You've got somewhere to go?

FELIX  
I'll figure something out.

OSCAR  
Not to Frances.

FELIX  
I don't know.

OSCAR  
I don't want you wandering the streets.

FELIX  
You want me out. Get your facts straight.

OSCAR  
Don't do anything stupid.

*FELIX turns away.*

FELIX  
Don't tell me what to do.

OSCAR  
Goodbye.

FELIX  
I'll see you on Friday for poker with the guys.

OSCAR  
Good idea.

FELIX  
It wouldn't have worked out anyway.

OSCAR  
Goodbye.

FELIX  
Goodbye.

*FELIX exits.*

*OSCAR leans against the wall, trying to compose himself.*

*A pause. GWENDOLYN enters carrying the Freudian book from earlier. She shoves it into his arms.*

GWENDOLYN  
I hope you don't expect to see me anymore.

*The door swings open. FELIX stands in the doorway. Both freeze.*

FELIX  
I forgot my coat.

OSCAR  
Felix, it's the middle of July.

FELIX  
It's raining.

*FELIX pulls a coat from the coatrack. He puts it on as quickly as possible, and leaves.*

GWENDOLYN  
I cannot believe I allowed you to touch me. Filthy, the lot of you. Positively revolting.

*SPECTRE enters. OSCAR crosses to the bar.*

GWENDOLYN (CONT'D)

(to SPECTRE)

Ah! Private Johnny Swain, First Class. At last!  
You're certainly not one of them, are you? Come now,  
why don't you show Mr. Madison what a real man looks  
like.

SPECTRE

Haven't you done enough?

GWENDOLYN

Don't play coy. You've meddled just as much as I.

*OSCAR turns around.*

OSCAR

I don't want to see any of you anymore. I'm sick of  
it, I'm sick of all of you. All I want is quiet. For  
once.

*The lights go out. A wash of light on OSCAR and  
SPECTRE. GWENDOLYN exits into the darkness.*

GWENDOLYN

Ta ta!

OSCAR

That means you, too.

SPECTRE

Oscar--

OSCAR

Everything you said to me--this is all your fault.

SPECTRE

You know who I am.

OSCAR

You aren't anything more than my imagination. You're  
in my head. I want you out.

SPECTRE

I am in your head. That's true. But I'm something  
more. I think you know.

OSCAR

No, I don't.

SPECTRE

Stop lying to me. Isn't that the least you could do?

OSCAR

I have nothing left to say to you.

*OSCAR turns to exit.*

SPECTRE

I put the letter on Felix's nightstand.

*OSCAR stops.*

OSCAR

How?

SPECTRE

I took it from your dresser and I set it on his nightstand. I wanted him to read it. I was scared you were going to destroy it.

OSCAR

I should have destroyed it. Look what it lead to.

SPECTRE

I am that letter, Oscar. And if you burned it or tore it up, I'd be here forever.

OSCAR

Don't you want to stay?

SPECTRE

Yes. But more than anything, I want you to move on. To stop being miserable. To stop feeling guilty. And you can't do that as long as you're wondering what's inside that letter.

OSCAR

I already know what's in there.

SPECTRE

You don't. You saw a few lines.

OSCAR

All I know is that there was enough to give me away to Felix. And it's your fault.

SPECTRE

I think you should read it.

OSCAR

Felix already read it. The words are spoiled, wasted. They don't mean anything anymore.

SPECTRE

If you read it, the memory of Private Johnny Swain will stop haunting you. Only then will I no longer have any meaning.

*SPECTRE hands OSCAR the letter.*

Or maybe you want me to stay. Maybe you're used to my company. Maybe you still love me. In that case, tear it up. Toss it in the fire. I'll stay with you till the day you die.

*A pause.*

OSCAR

Which one would you choose?

SPECTRE

I don't have an opinion. I can't have one. But whatever you choose, I can promise you that everything will be okay.

OSCAR

Johnny, I'm sorry I never wrote you back. I was so ashamed.

SPECTRE

It's okay. Let yourself change. Let someone else take up space in your head. Someone more real, if you're ready.

*OSCAR hesitates, then opens the letter. He doesn't read quite yet.*

OSCAR

I'm sorry--

SPECTRE

Don't be.

*OSCAR steels himself and begins to read. SPECTRE steps away from OSCAR.*

SPECTRE (CONT'D)

Dear Oscar,  
I hope this letter finds you in good health. I know it's been ten years since we last met, but I am writing to tell you I am glad to learn you survived the war. I hope you've been able to make a full recovery. I don't wish that kind of wound on anyone.

It looks like you're a little famous now. I read something you wrote about sports in the newspaper. That's how I found your address. But don't worry, I won't visit you.

Things are fine for me. After the war I found work on farms. I stayed in Alabama for a few years. When I got sick of the fields, I headed to Pittsburgh to get work in the factories. I'm sure you'll be glad to know I found a wife. Her name is Alice. We have three beautiful children; their names are Johnny Jr, Annie, and George.

Life since the war has been too good to me. Sometimes I think I don't deserve it. I remember all the men and women killed and I pinch myself just to make sure I'm alive. I only pray my children will never have to see the things I saw. For a very long time I didn't know how to sleep at night without reliving the worst of it.

After a while, it became easier to work all day and all night, just so my thoughts wouldn't have a moment alone with me. My wife noticed. She tried to get our pastor involved, but I was embarrassed and every word of every verse felt empty. No one tells you this, but I think these sort of things need to happen within yourself. Maybe there isn't a reason for everything on this Earth. I found peace in knowing I can only move forward. The past is only worth anything if we learn from it.

*The wash of light on SPECTRE fades. OSCAR reads the rest of the letter.*

OSCAR

So I decided that while there are things you can't unsee, it is far worse to live in fear of what you might see. I hope you've had an easier time getting over the past than I have. But if that isn't the case, maybe my advice can help you along the way.

You and I may never see each other again. But I can live the rest of my life knowing we found each other when it mattered most. It's a debt I don't know if I can ever repay. Take care of yourself. And most of all: don't think too much about the past. The future is a much brighter image.

Yours,

Johnny.

*Lights fade.*

CURTAIN