DELLA DOUCET,
A COMEDY OF NEW YORK

By
Kirsten Dahl

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For Tim

DELLA DOUCET, A COMEDY OF NEW YORK

An early, one-act version of this play entitled *New York Profiles*, was first produced by L.A. Theatre Works in Los Angeles featuring the following cast: Valerie Landsburg, Kevin McDermott, William Palmieri, Joshua Rifkind, Al Ruscio, Elizabeth Ruscio and Brenda Varda.

The completed, full-length version, retitled *Della Doucet, A Comedy of New York*, premiered at the Vintage Theatre in Denver, CO, featuring the following cast:

Della Doucet…….Johanna Jaquith
Sam Levine……...Abid Hassan
Erin Coffey……...Corinne Landy
Donny LeGrand……Wade Livingston
Angie/Salesgirl…....Linda Swanson Brown
Cabbie/Vasek/Axel/
Punk Rocker/
Bartender/
Chauffeur/Waiter/
Party Guest/
Subway Conductor….Mike Moran

CAST: 3 Men, 3 Women

DELLA DOUCET	late 30s-40s F, sensual, Louisiana-bred
SAM LEVINE	30s M, high-energy New Yorker
ERIN COFFEY	20s F, punk East Village artist
DONNY LeGRAND	60s M, self-made New York tycoon
ANGIE/SALESGIRL	30s F, secretary, working-class New Yorker/British punk fashionista
CABBIE/VASEK etc.	30s-40s M, working-class New Yorker/Czech architect, artist and many more

TIME: Early 1980s
PLACE: New York City

DELLA DOUCET,
A COMEDY OF NEW YORK

ACT 1
SCENE 1

We hear the Talking Heads song, "Life During Wartime." Enter DELLA, a pretty, youthful-looking woman in her late 30s. She wears a full-length ball gown, circa 1981. Her Southern accent is light--not a heavy drawl. Enter ERIN, late 20s, punked out East Village artist in black leather jacket, spiked hair. New York accent. Enter SAM, early 30s, suit and tie, New York accent. Each in turn addresses the audience.

DELLA. *(To audience.)* This is a little story that happened in a big city. Just a detail of New York life, in 1981.
ERIN. *(To audience.)* In 1981, we're starting to lay out magazines on desktop computers. The computers are fucking huge.
SAM. *(To audience.)* Mayor Koch just got us out of bankruptcy. He also cut services. I love the city but right now it doesn't smell too good.
ERIN. Down in the East Village, galleries are popping up. But it's still dirt poor. We've got rundown buildings, crime, trash in the streets. My family won't visit me there. Thank God.
SAM. And then there's the homeless guy on the corner of Fifty-Seventh and Sixth Avenue, belting out his own private opera. He sings off key, in this harsh kind of voice. Like he's searching for a melody he lost.
DELLA. In short, New York is the opposite of a Southern military base. *(Talking Heads music fades. Erin and Sam exit.)* But strangely enough, that's where it all began. *(MUSIC: The Marine Corps anthem, "From the halls of Montezuma, to the shores of Tripoli...")* Camp LeJeune, North Carolina. Tonight, at the spring military ball, the Marine Corps is

promoting my husband to regimental commander. They've asked me to say a few words. *(Della crosses stage. Lights up on an area representing her bedroom at Camp LeJeune, suggested by full length mirror and dresser. On the dresser sits framed photos of her two teenage sons and another of her husband, a Marine Corps Colonel, in dress uniform. Della practices her speech in mirror. She alternates with impatient asides to herself.)* How shall I start off? *(Pretends she's hearing applause.)* Thank-you, thank-you. I'm Mrs. Colonel Davis T. Upshaw and I'm so thrilled...that I can speak! As a colonel's wife, my function here at the base is to smile. And occasionally, to wave--*(Impatient.)* No, can't say that. I'm so thrilled to speak to you tonight because...I'm a ham! In Baton Rouge, I had my own little radio talk show....*(This memory saddens her, she trails off. Starts over, brisk.)* As you know, I volunteer at the Camp LeJeune Gazette. Last week I laid out a story on Davis's promotion and it made me think back over the past eighteen years, moving from one base to the next, bringing up our two boys. Stand up, boys! There's Tyler, who's heading to West Point next fall. And there's DeWitt, my youngest *(Fond.)*...who loves to cook. They're real smart and real talented and *(Uncertain.)* I know they love me. *(Starts losing track of her planned speech.)* They just like to imitate their Daddy. They make their beds military style and they say '800 hours' and they talk to me like I'm soft-headed, just like he does. It's a habit The Commander has. I call him that because everything he says sounds like a command. *(A memory.)* Back when he was courtin' me, he made conversation and laughed at my jokes. We played touch football in the park. I'd be laughin' so hard, with mud on my face, in my hair, and he'd yell, "Della Doucet *(doo-SAY)*, you're just as wild as a fox out of the woods!" That's how he treated me, like something wild and shy, that might run away. When we made love, it wasn't quite so...military. Now he rolls over me like a tank, with the gun turret pointed straight ahead. If I try to tell him what I like, he looks grim and says, "I'm driving the car." *(Beat.)* I've tried to bring this up with him but he's…too tall. *(Points at photo.)* There he is, that handsome pillar in white. Tall, isn't he? He never hit me. It's just that...he has a way of looming over a person. A way of bein' silent. *(Increasing anger.)* So I don't talk back to The Commander. Except underneath. Underneath, I'm growling and snappin.' 'You're a big

man, Davis, but you're low on personality. You're like military food. No real flavor, just a lot of starch.' Then I bound out of reach and sit there laughing silently, the way a fox does. *(Furious.)* I'm a wild creature, Davis. And if you aren't careful, I might just take myself off to a wild place---*(Della breaks off as a suitcase and coat rack appear, with a pastel suit jacket hanging from rack. After a moment, she drops her gown, steps out of it. Underneath she wears a matching pastel skirt and a top. She dons jacket and picks up suitcase. Coat rack disappears with her old finery. Rising sounds of honking horns, buses, other city noise. CABBIE enters with two chairs. Della sits behind him with suitcase. They sway to suggest a careening taxi. Cabbie smokes, talks, and drives insanely. He's relaxed, this is his daily gig. Della clutches her things, scared.)*

CABBIE. *(New York accent.)*---Yeah, I'm a recovering addict. *(Shrugs, at ease.)* Pills, booze, coke, smoke, you name it. I got in with bad company, ya know? *(Casual.)* So, ya single?

DELLA. *(Bursts out.)* I'm not single, but I'm free. *(Peers out window, anxious.)* Nothing looming over me…except those skyscrapers.

CABBIE. Where ya from?

DELLA. I was living on the North Carolina coast.

CABBIE. North Carolina, now that's a pretty state. Nice, polite people. *(Yells out window.)* Mind ya fuckin' manners! *(He swerves violently. Della starts sobbing.)* Hey, you OK?

DELLA. *(Tearful.)* I miss my boys.

CABBIE. Ya got family back there?

DELLA. *(Words spilling out.)* I left them a freezer full of casseroles. And a long letter. About my job offer in New York.

CABBIE. Got a job, huh?

DELLA. More like an interview. In graphic design. Have you ever heard of a magazine called *Glowing Maternity*?

CABBIE. *(Flat.)* I read *The Post*.

DELLA. They also publish *Country Contentment* and *Progressive Needlework—*

CABBIE. *(Casual.)* –Please. Don't bring up needles.

DELLA. Naturally it's only for a year. I'll get some valuable New York experience and then, well...*(Tries to convince herself.)* I guess I'll go home

to my family.
CABBIE. I go home to an empty apartment.
DELLA. *(Struck by this.)* An empty apartment?
CABBIE. Yeah. Maybe that's why I talk so much. End of a long day, whaddo I get? *(Weary.)* Nothin' but silence.
DELLA. *(Thoughtful.)* Nothing but silence. You know, that doesn't sound so bad.
CABBIE. *(Shrugs.)* Ya get to know ya'self. *(Swerves violently, parks.)* Here's the hotel. ***(****They get out, Cabbie retrieves her suitcase. Della pays him.)*
DELLA. Here's some extra tip money. You set me thinking. ***(****Della picks up suitcase as Cabbie exits with chairs. Lights up on an area representing Della's newly rented apartment, suggested by an aged sofa bed. On a night table with a lamp, sits a pile of novels and some tiny perfume sample tubes. Nearby are the same group of family photos. Della enters. To audience.)* At the interview, I went crazy, talking about the magnificence of their magazines. I seem to have a talent for Southern bullshit. ***(****She moves around, admiring her new place.)* My salary just barely covers the rent on a tiny little studio apartment with....*(Thrilled.)* an exposed brick wall. *(Moves around the space, taking it in.)* When I come home at night, there's a feeling that's so exciting. *(Savors the word.)* Solitude. *(Lights dim. She turns lamp on, unfolds creaky sofa bed.)* I love my bed. *(Turns photo of her husband face down.)* Because there's no one else in it. *(Picks up book.)* I can sit up late reading novels that are a little bit weird. ***(****She browses through pile of books including 70s-80s titles such as "The Incredible Lightness of Being," "The Flounder," and"The Female Eunuch.")* I get all kinds of suggestions from people on what to read. A museum guard. *(Holds up book.)* The newsstand vendor. *(Rummages through book pile.)* That nice homosexual man who works at the gourmet coffee store. I tell them, I'm new here and I want to read what New Yorkers are reading. Preferably something a little bit weird. *(Sexy jazz riff on saxophone, a la Stan Getz. Della tries on perfume samples.)* Sometimes, I put on perfume before I go to bed at night. I'm fascinated by perfume. I study it. I try to figure out what gives each scent its character...whether it has a base of *(Uncorks a tube, sniffs.)* orange

blossom...*(Sniffs.)* or lily of the valley...Take Shalimar. Shalimar's very vanilla. People don't think of vanilla as an exotic scent but it comes from a tropical orchid in Madagascar. It smells warm. *(Sniffs wrist.)* I like to lie there in the dark, inhaling it before I fall asleep. *(Sax riff continues the mood. Della stretches sensuously.)* I've discovered there's a certain kind of man I like. Dark, short, with a lot of personality. I have a theory that short men have more personality, because they're condensed. *(Spot on VASEK (VAH-shek), opposite, played by same actor as Cabbie. He's an Eastern European architect, dark, intense-- and not very tall. He has an artist's ego and carries himself with dignity.)*

VASEK. *(Slavic accent.)* I escaped by swimming the Danube at night, in the middle of December. *(Kisses Della's hand.)* And now I know why.

DELLA. *(To audience.)* Take Vasek *(VAH-shek)* for instance. He's brilliant, romantic and…*(Amused.)* not very sincere. *(Vasek shows her around his bachelor apartment, suggested by bed with black leather coverlet.)*

VASEK.....and this is the bedroom.

DELLA. A black leather bedspread?

VASEK. I was the first to use leather in this context. Now it becomes a big trend. Where Vasek shows the way, others follow. Come here, Darling. *(He puts arm around Della, points upward.)* Watch. *(He presses a button. He and Della gaze at ceiling above bed, as we hear sound of a panel gliding open.)*

DELLA. *(Startled.)* There's a mirror up there.

VASEK. I design this after seeing my first James Bond movie.

DELLA. *(Amused.)* Oh really.

VASEK. In such an old building, the engineering is quite difficult.

DELLA. *(Irony.)* You must have really wanted that mirror.

VASEK. I would like to see you in the mirror. *(He begins kissing her. When he starts to unzip her clothes, Della pulls back.)*

VASEK. *(Caressing her.)* What's wrong, my Darling?

DELLA. *(Amused.)* Vashek, you're such an operator. I bet that leather-covered bed is just one big revolving door. *(Beat.)*

VASEK. *(Taken aback.)* You are so direct.

DELLA. *(Enjoying the whole thing enormously.)* Why not?

VASEK. But what makes you think—
DELLA. --For one thing, you compared monogamy to Stalinism.
VASEK. Why did I say that?
DELLA. It's OK, Vasek. I like you very much. *(Shrugs.)* Don't know about anything more.
VASEK. Della, I am intensely attracted. I find you so different from other New York women, so exotic.
DELLA. You find *me* exotic?
VASEK. You come from a place where the air is softer. And yet....you are so strong and honest. *(Takes her hands.)* You make me disgusted with my life. *(Earnest.)* I want to change for you. *(Della tries to stifle her amusement.)* Always, you laugh at me. *(He turns away, frustrated. Beat.)* OK, I tell you the truth. I'm not so good at being faithful. *(Emotional.)* If someone gets too close, starts pressuring and crowding me, I feel an animal repugnance, like a creature that is trapped and must escape.
DELLA. *(Struck.)* You feel trapped? That's real interestin.'
VASEK. Do you despise me?
DELLA. Oh, no. I think we have so much in common. *(They begin kissing. Cross fade.)*

SCENE 2

Darkness, broken by static hiss and spray of sparks, which can be suggested by sound alone. This scene moves among different locations, but needs no stage furnishings. Lights up on Erin, holding a welding torch, with protective mask, gloves, smock. She's in her late 20's, favors punk style with spiked hair, safety pin earrings, wallet chain. Grudgingly, she puts down torch, removes welding gear, gets ready for work.

ERIN. *(To audience.)* I don't have much use for women. And men...*(Makes derisive noise.)*. In short, I am not a lover of humankind. How does a person get this burned out by age twenty-eight? I'll tell you. Ladies' magazines. I don't read them, for Christ's sake. I don't need tips on how to deodorize my shoes with cat litter. It's a day job. I go in, I do layout and design, I collect my insultingly tiny paycheck and I leave. *(Erin*

gives her spiked hair a final adjustment, clips on a black leather bracelet--also with spikes.) We have a new layout person. She's Southern. I hate Southern. *(Picks up graphic design portfolio, moves to center stage.)* You can always spot 'em. They're gracious. And they wear pastel. *(Time has passed. Now it's the end of the workday. Erin steps into (unseen) elevator, she's leaving the office. Della enters, in her pastel work outfit. She stands beside Erin, mimes pressing elevator button, which dings.)*
DELLA. I knew you were talented.
ERIN. Thanks but it's not like it has any relevance to my life.
DELLA. No, I mean this. *(Pulls a sketch out of her purse.)*
ERIN. *(Alarmed.)* Where'd you get that?
DELLA. You gave it to me, by accident, between a couple of layout boards.
ERIN. *(Curses herself.)* Sorry. It's just a preliminary sketch...for one of my pieces.
DELLA. *(Amused.)* Doing your art on company time?
ERIN. No--well, I mean…I get a lot of ideas for new pieces and it's so frustrating to be stuck here all day doing this shit--*(Weary.)* You gonna report me?
DELLA. No, of course not but...*(Shy.)* may I see more of your art? Can we visit your workshop?
ERIN. You wouldn't like my workshop, it's a dump. Eight of us share this crappy, dirty, old converted garage on a block full of hookers and drug addicts.
DELLA. *(Excited.)* You have eight artists working down there?
ERIN. You should go to the galleries on the Upper East Side. Nice landscapes, flower arrangements—
DELLA. *(Shy.)* --I'd...prefer to see your work.
ERIN. Yeah, well thanks but when I'm down there, I'm busy. I don't have time to be a tour guide. *(Beat. Della looks straight ahead.)* Didn't mean to be rude. The thing is, some people tell me my work is kind of harsh or scary or whatever, and *(With emphasis.)* you won't like it.
DELLA. *(Serious.)* But I do. ***(****The two women make their way through the East Village to Erin's (unseen) workshop. AXEL, a male artist, slouches in. He's played by same actor who plays Cabbie, Vasek etc. He wears a*

paint-spattered work shirt, carries tool bag and sees himself as ultra cool.)
AXEL. *(Casual.)* Hey, Erin.
ERIN. *(Embarrassed to be seen with Della.)* Hey. How's the new piece coming?
AXEL. Great. I'm leaving the co-op. *(Extra casual.)* Pace Gallery wants to take me on.
ERIN. Pace? You're gonna be with Pace? *(Jealous.)* Wow, congratulations. *(To Della, reluctant.)* This is Axel. He makes stuff out of old cars. He even uses the ashtrays and windshield wipers. OK, let's go.
AXEL. *(Interested in Della.)* Who's your friend?
ERIN. *(Sotto voce.)* She's not my friend! *(Louder.)* We, uh, work together.
DELLA. *(To Axel.)* I'm Della. *(Smiles.)* Pleased to meet you. *(They shake. Axel keeps hold of Della's hand.)*
AXEL. *(Sniffing her.)* Mmmm, you smell good.
DELLA. Thank you. My cologne has some unusual floral notes, mainly freesia. *(Beat. Axel keeps hold of Della's hand.)*
AXEL. Hey, I'm pretty psychic. Want me to read your palm? You've got a really interesting line here---*(Erin yanks Della away from him.)*
ERIN. ---Hey, we gotta go, OK? Come on, Della. *(Axel slouches off. The two women continue walking as Erin fumes.) He's* moving to Pace? I mean, he's just some trust fund kid. He has talent but...he's basically ripping off John Chamberlain *(For Della's benefit.)* who was this awesome junk metal sculptor from the sixties. I mean, I put myself through art school and I'm still paying down the loans. After a ten-hour day at our shitty magazine, I'm putting in another five hours down here. I'm killing myself. And Axel---he's the one who gets a dealer?! *(Enter SALESGIRL, dressed very glam/punk. She embraces Erin.)*
SALESGIRL. *(British accent.)* Erin, Dollface! We just got a shipment from London. *(Seductive.)* Gorgeous, tartan bondage trousers.
ERIN. *(Genuine anguish.)* You're killing me.
SALESGIRL. They won't last, Sweetie.
ERIN. Can't do it, I already have three time-payments.
SALESGIRL. Darling, I'm only thinking of your happiness. *(She blows a kiss, sashays out).*
ERIN. *(To Della.)* She's the crack dealer of clothing.

DELLA. Where does she work?
ERIN. Trash and Vaudeville, on St. Marks Place. You won't be shopping there. *(As the two women continue walking, they find their path blocked by PUNK ROCKER, played by same actor as Axel, in black leather, chains and a Mohawk. He staggers towards them, then trips and sprawls on sidewalk, deeply stoned.)*
DELLA. *(Alarmed.)* Is he all right? *(Punk Rocker yawns, snuggles into sidewalk.)*
ERIN. *(Impatient.)* Oh him, he's always there. You gotta step over. *(She steps over Punk Rocker. Gingerly, Della follows her lead. The two women enter Erin's workshop, as Punk Rocker exits opposite. Erin leads Della around the space, showing her various unseen art pieces.)*...Pretty much everyone here does sculpture. We do have one woman, Janey, who makes wall hangings, see? *(Points.)* And then there's Akiro, he does mobiles, kind of like Calder. *(Points.)* The only non-3-D guy is Carlos, he's a Conceptualist. He doesn't make stuff, he'll do something like...*(Shrugs.)* shoot himself. *(Points at wall.)* See the blood spatters? Kind of derivative. Chris Burden already did that ten years ago. *(Della halts in front of an unseen art piece, amazed. What she sees: a big metal creature, constructed out of old appliances welded together.)*
DELLA. *(Points.)* Is this yours?
ERIN. Yeah. *(Della studies it.)*
DELLA. *(Moved.)* I've never seen anything like this.
ERIN. Deborah Butterfield was a big influence. *(Offhanded.)* But obviously, I'm not gonna to do horses--she's got that covered. *(Pause. Della walks around the sculpture, absorbed.)* OK, well, thanks for coming. Gotta get to work. *(Della continues staring at the sculpture.)* Della? *(Della can't take her eyes off the sculpture).* Look, it's getting kind of late. I'll help you find a cab. *(No answer. Erin touches Della's arm. Della starts, then turns to her, wipes away a tear. Erin*'s *alarmed.)* What's the matter?
DELLA. *(Emotional.)* I just love it. *(Cross fade.)*

SCENE 3

Piano jazz version of 'Body & Soul.' Sam Levine is finishing a jazz variation on this old standard at the upright piano in his Upper East Side apartment. Apartment is only suggested but should be modern and more expensive-looking than Della's. NOTE: Actor does not need to actually play the piano. Sam is attractive, early 30s, in shirt sleeves. He is outgoing and full of vitality, with a light New York accent. He stands, turns to audience.

SAM. *(To audience.)* Right after college, before I got a real job, I played piano in the bars. I don't read music, I'm self-taught, just like my Dad. He liked the old standards straight. I'm more into jazz. I like music that sounds warm, relaxed, like honey pouring out of a jar. *(He plays a little more.)* The fantasy is, a hush falls over the crowd as they hear your masterful variations on '*Body and Soul*.' The reality is a drunk telling you to play '*My Way*' for the fourteenth time. But even so, I kind of miss it. I have this theory that playing the piano gives you a sweeter nature. My father was a very sweet man. *(Momentary sadness.)* A failure…but sweet. *(He stands, dons his suit jacket and tie.)* But my father was from another era. Now you have to have money to live in New York. Let's just say it costs more than the total amount of tips they used to leave in my cup. *(Sam moves across stage to rising noise of happy hour at a bar in Midtown. We hear roar of men's voices talking business, laughter, clinking glasses. A bar with a pair of cocktails appears. DONNY LeGRAND leans on bar, sipping his Scotch. DONNY is 60-ish, Bronx-bred, an up-from-the bootstraps real estate developer. He is wealthy, wears a fitted, Euro-tailored suit and a big Rolex. Sam joins him. They clink glasses and fall into unheard conversation. At other end of bar--or nearby-- Della and Erin sit together sipping wine. They're an odd pair, with Della's pastels and Erin's spiked hair and leather jacket.)*

ERIN. *(Looking around.)* There's no other women here. Who recommended this place?

DELLA. Margo, in Editorial.

ERIN. Margo! Figures. Her life is one big manhunt.

DELLA. *(Looks around, interested.)* There are a lot of men here.
ERIN. Yeah but they're suits. They all work for banks. They all live in Greenwich. They're basically all the same person, with slight variations in the cuff links. *(Fade on Della and Erin. Lights up on Sam and his Uncle Donny, at the other end of the bar, finishing up their drinks. Concluding a deal, Donny thumps Sam on the back. They shake. The men make to leave.)*
DONNY. *(Heavy New York accent.)* Like the suit? Danielle picked it out for me in Paris. *(Smooths jacket over his paunch.)* Little tight across the gut. But what can you do? *(Preens.)* It's Eurostyle.
SAM. You two had a good time in France?
DONNY. *(Winks.)* I *looooove* honeymoons. *(Donny flags BARTENDER, played by same actor as Punk Rocker, etc.)*
BARTENDER. Here ya go, Mr. LeGrand.
SAM. No, Donny, let me get it.
DONNY. *(Swats his hand away.)* You're my nephew, get outta here.
SAM. You don't know what this means to me. The chance to work with you. Getting out of industrial.
DONNY. With residential, you'll be operating in a much classier sphere. But you'll get the hang of it. *(Adjusts tie.)* After ya been building condos for awhile, ya just develop this innate sense a' classiness, ya know? *(Checks watch.)* My car's out front. I'll drop ya. *(As they leave the bar, the men pass Della and Erin. Erin, upset, is relating a bad experience.)*
ERIN. *(Yelling.)*--so I said, 'Look, Mister, if you want to psychoanalyze my art, do it in the privacy of your own fucking apartment!' *(Startled, Sam turns to look at them.)*
DELLA. *(To Erin.)* Calm down, Honey, or you'll have everybody---*(Her eyes meet Sam's.)*---lookin' at us. *(The glance holds for a few seconds before Della turns back to her conversation with Erin.)*
SAM. *(To audience.)* Maybe it's just the way I remember it but I would swear there was an aura of honey-colored light around her.
DELLA. *(To Erin.)*--you're so talented but you just don't know how to talk sweet to people. *(Sam gestures at Della.)*
SAM. *(To audience.)* I mean her.
ERIN. *(To Della, loud.)* I can't do that sugary shit. *(Sam gestures at Erin.)*
SAM. Not her. *(He stares at Della. Beat.)* Donny, I'll see you later.

(Donny follows his gaze.)
DONNY. *(Eying the two women.)* Hey, hey, hey, all right. *(Gives Sam a jovial punch in the arm, exits.)*
SAM. *(To audience.)* Oh man. Big brown eyes with little golden...beams in them. Long lashes, too. OK, I looked at her legs. They were fantastic. *(Beat, steels himself.)* Fortunately I'm not shy. I decided I would--No, too phony. *(Beat.)* OK. It's a rare moment in my life. I'm at a total loss. So I fell back on my experience selling real estate. Actually in any sales job they tell you this: you've got to ask for the order. *(He approaches Della and Erin, speaks to Della.)* Excuse me. I'd like to meet you. *(To audience.)* The other one looked like she was going to stab me with her hair.
DELLA. *(To Sam.)* I'd like to meet you too, but I'm in the middle of a conversation. Erin, Honey—*(Huffily, Erin stands up, interrupts her.)*
ERIN. --Obviously I'm gonna leave now before I'm knocked over by the good vibes. *(Della tries to pull her back into her seat. Erin protests.)* I gotta go in half an hour anyway. My art co-op's having a meeting---*(She breaks off as Della turns to Sam.)*
DELLA.---*(To Sam.)* Would you be kind enough to wait over there for half an hour? *(Beat.)*
SAM. *(To audience.)* What do I say to this? I mean, I'm not a bad-looking guy, I make good money, never in my wildest dreams did I think I would have to make an appointment to pick someone up. *(To Della.)* No problem. *(He retreats to other end of the bar.* T*o audience.)* She said she'd like to meet me. She looked me over and *then* she said she'd like to meet me. Jesus. There's this roaring noise in my head, like surf. *(To Bartender)* Hey!
BARTENDER. What'll it be?
SAM. Gimme a...a--*(Distractedly, he picks menu card off the bar, reads.)* A *Heavenly Bliss*.
BARTENDER. *(Warning.)* It's sweet.
SAM. So is life. *(Erin exits. The half hour has passed. Della joins Sam at the bar. They regard each other.)*
SAM. Sam Levine.
DELLA. Della Doucet *(doo-SAY)*.
SAM. What kind of name is that?
DELLA. French, from Louisiana. Doucet means 'sweet.'

SAM. I don't know what 'Levine' means. *(Shrugs.)* It means Jewish and from the Bronx.
DELLA. I haven't been to the Bronx.
SAM. There's no rush. *(They regard each other.)* You and your friend, who just left---Excuse me but you two seem...so different.
DELLA. She's an artist. She shows at a little co-op gallery the artists run themselves. She was telling me about a new piece she's working on which is a modern re-interpretation of the Sleeping Beauty legend. The Princess doesn't go to sleep, instead the thorns sprout right out of her skin. *(Thoughtful.)* I guess the Prince has to figure out how to overcome that.
SAM. I wish him luck. *(Beat.)* Does she uh, need life support when she comes north of 14th Street? *(Della regards him.)* Sorry. Sometimes the mouth kinda gets going on its own. I don't want you to think I'm down on art. I'm a member of eight museums. *(He pulls a credit card holder out of his suit pocket. It flops open like an accordion.)*
DELLA. My Goodness.
SAM. The cards make it fast. I can run in between business appointments, flash the card, take in a little Rembrandt here, a few Monets there. I like to make it part of my workday. To me, fifteen minutes twice a week is a lot better than a big visit twice a year. If you're only going to the museums twice a year, you don't need to be in New York. *(Della examines his long string of membership cards.)*
DELLA. Which museum do you like best?
SAM. Without question the Frick. Because it's in a beautiful old house, quiet, not too many people. And I can understand what I'm looking at. Old Masters. You know, the guys who could draw.
DELLA. I prefer Contemporary, myself.
SAM. I guess it's hopeless between us. *(They laugh.)*
DELLA. I wouldn't mind visiting the Frick.
SAM. And I wouldn't mind having somebody explain that weird stuff down in Soho.
DELLA. I like it because it's...irrational. *(Far off.)* Like things out of dreams.
SAM. *(Softly.)* Yeah? *(They gaze at each other. After a few moments, anxiety seizes Sam.)* Art is getting to be a big component in real estate

these days. Unless it's industrial real estate. Industrial tenants don't want art. They want heavy power and big loading docks—*(He hits himself.)* Jesus, shut up! *(To audience.)* OK, you've just met a beautiful, intelligent woman. You know she likes irrational art. You want to know more. I have it! *(To Della.)* Tell me more about yourself.
DELLA. I'm almost forty and I have two teenage sons. *(Sam is in shock. Beat.)*
SAM. You look...a lot younger.
DELLA. Thank you. That's because I have an oily complexion. It gives me blemishes sometimes.
SAM. *(Staring.)* Uh huh. *(Beat.)*
DELLA. How old are you?
SAM. *(Hasty.)* Age is meaningless. Really. I want to hear all about you, where you grew up, why you came to New York, what's your philosophy of existence. *(Beat.)* I'm 31.
DELLA. Have you ever been married?
SAM. No. But if the right—
DELLA. --Do you want children?
SAM. Well, I---
DELLA.---I bet you do.
SAM. I'm kinda a fool for kids. Sometimes I borrow my nephews. Take 'em to a Broadway show, try to get 'em to eat arugula. *(Beat.)* I bet you're a great mother.
DELLA. Not anymore.
SAM. What do you mean?
DELLA. My boys are with their father. I work for a magazine that tells you how to be a great mother. It's a constant reminder of...what I'm not. But I only have fifty percent of my life left. It's precious to me. I can't keep putting everybody's interests ahead of my own. Once my sons were born, I couldn't help loving them--but it wasn't what I wanted. Do you understand?
SAM. Sure, I—
DELLA.--you seem so nice. But we're incompatible.
SAM. Yeah but—
DELLA. We're at different stages of our lives.

SAM. Maybe a little but—
DELLA. It's important to be practical. It wouldn't make sense for us to carry this further.
SAM. I guess you're right. *(Pause.)*
DELLA. Well, it was nice to meet you. *(Della exits.)*
SAM. *(To audience.)* Once again, I'm at a total loss. *(Beat.)* And so, you may wonder how Della and I ever got together. *(Sam retrieves his briefcase.)* I'll tell you how. I ran after her. *(He bounds out.)*

SCENE 4

Music by Talking Heads as lights come up on magazine offices the next morning. Two slanted art desks with stools. A table or counter holds the phone, a tape player and coffee maker with mugs. Erin drinks coffee and works on her slant board. Della enters. Music fades.

ERIN. *(Immediate.)* Well? *(Della puts down purse, tosses jacket on her chair.)*
DELLA. Let me get some coffee.
ERIN. Was he Mr. Right? *(Della pours herself coffee.)*
DELLA. No. He's a sweet young guy and whether he knows it or not, he's looking for a wife.
ERIN. Eee-yuck.
DELLA. Wants children.
ERIN. Lives on the Upper East Side.
DELLA. How did you know?
ERIN. They always start out there. It's like a warm-up for Greenwich. Greenwich is where the suits go to breed. They get married, buy a colonial house, join the country club and start raising future suits. *(Della absorbs this. She takes her coffee to her drafting table. The women work for a few minutes without looking at each other.)*
DELLA. What if I told you I agreed to go out with him?
ERIN. Are you nuts?
DELLA. I know it doesn't make any sense. *(Pause. They continue to*

work.)
ERIN. *(Grudging.)* He's not bad looking.
DELLA. And he's not too tall. Sometimes when a man's real tall, it thins out his personality. *(Beat. They work).*
ERIN. Just don't forget, he's a suit. And a suit is still a uniform. *(Soberly, Della absorbs this. The women get back to work. Phone rings. Erin answers.)*
ERIN. *(Into phone)*. Art Department. *(Listens, turns to Della.)* It's for you.

SCENE 5

Bill Evan's piano version of his poignant tune,"Waltz for Debby," rises. Sam walks buoyantly toward his office swinging a small shopping bag from an expensive men's store. His secretary, ANGIE, sits at a desk outside his office. Angie is 30-ish, with big hair, a nasal Queens accent, a lot of blue eye shadow, and a slightly mournful quality. She hands him pink message slips.

ANGIE. Nothin' urgent *(OYE-gent)*. How was the meetin'?
SAM. The meeting went great. And it's a gorgeous day. The sun is shining, I'm walking along 57th Street, I'm in a great mood, I'm loving the city, and suddenly I find myself buying...a hundred-dollar tie.
ANGIE. Ya so wacky today. *(Sam starts unwrapping tie.)*
SAM. Ridiculous. Hundred-dollar ties are for guys so insecure, they have to wear a paycheck around their neck. I don't need to get my self-esteem from a little piece of colored silk. *(reverent)* Beautiful, isn't it?
ANGIE. *(Irony.)* This'll definitely make her fall in love with you.
SAM. *(Annoyed.)* You know too much.
ANGIE. *(Sly.)* Hope it goes good tonight. *(Fade on Angie. Sam goes into his office--suggested by a desk and chair. His office has a good view of Manhattan, suggested by a wide-angle daytime shot of midtown taken from a high floor.)*
SAM. *(To audience.)* It's kind of a miracle that she's going out with me all. When I ran after her outside the bar, I didn't have a plan. So I fell back

on sales technique. *(A memory: city street noise. Sam joins Della outside the bar where they've just met. Della is looking at her daily planner.)*
DELLA. *(Laughing.)* You have so many arguments. And you're quick, too. As soon as I think up an answer to one, you're on to the next. Is this how you sell those warehouses?
SAM. With warehouses, I'm more romantic. *(Della chuckles, studies her planner.)*
DELLA. Can't do Friday or Saturday.
SAM. What about Sunday or Monday?
DELLA. How about a week from Tuesday?
SAM. You mean ten days from now?
DELLA. Is that inconvenient?
SAM. It's not inconvenient, it's distant.
DELLA. I won't be rushed into anything.
SAM. All I meant was--
DELLA. Don't even know if I need a warehouse. *(Beat.)*
SAM. Tuesday's fine. No problem. Gives me plenty of time to...*(Return to present, fade on Della. Sam paces in his office, addresses audience.)*...Pace. So I paced. My main worry was that even though I'd temporarily overcome her objections with an avalanche of charm, as time wore on, the effect might melt away. Her objections might start to re-surface. So I decided to fight back with another classic sales technique. Maintenance calls. *(He dials phone. Della answers at her drafting table in the office. Talking Heads or Devo play in the background. Della holds phone on shoulder while working at drafting table.)*
SAM. Hi. Only seven days, eleven hours and twenty-three minutes left.
DELLA. *(Warm.)* Hello Sam.
SAM. Am I calling too much? Because I have a problem with chronic over-enthusiasm. My Mom says I'm like a dog that always wants to go for a walk. You know, the pleading eyes, the thumping tail. *(Sighs.)* You probably don't like the dog type. You probably like the Bengal tiger type. Big, silent, mysterious.
DELLA. *(Sober.)* No. I've never had any luck with things that are big and silent. *(Slowly.)* I think I prefer chronic over-enthusiasm.
SAM. *(Delighted.)* Yeah?

DELLA. And I like the way you New Yorkers say *(New York accent.)* "Yay-ahh." *(Tries it out.)* "Yay-ahh."
SAM. Are you making fun of me?
DELLA. Yay-ahh! ***(****They hang up. It's two days later. Sam dials phone, Della picks up.)*
SAM. Hi.
DELLA. Hi. When I returned your call yesterday, you were out but I had a chat with your secretary. She has a crush on you.
SAM. Angie? Nah, she's a newlywed.
DELLA. Well, she followed you from your old job and you're the best, kindest, sweetest person she ever did work for.
SAM. *(Embarrassed.)* She said that?
DELLA. Angie and her sister Connie don't understand why you're not married. Of course, you were engaged but you broke it off because your fiancée wanted to move out to some place called Larchmont---
SAM.---Well, that wasn't the only reason....*(Thinks.)* Actually, it was the reason.
DELLA. Is Larchmont a terrible place?
SAM. Nah, my brother lives out there. It's just that I'm kind of a city person. Are you a city person?
DELLA. I'm beginning to think so. *(They hang up.)*
SAM. *(To audience.)* I decided to only call her every other day. Maybe not even that much. After all, you don't want to seem *too* interested. ***(****He glances sideways at his phone. Strolls away. Glances at phone again. Suddenly, he grabs it and dials. Talking Heads blares. Lights up on Della, working at her drafting table.)*
SAM. Why are the *Talking Heads* always playing over there?
DELLA. Erin brings in tapes. She also likes that group called *Devo*.
SAM. The Heads and Devo are cool but what I really love is jazz. Do you like jazz?
DELLA. Sam, I'm from Louisiana. If you don't like jazz and Dixieland and zydeco, you can't show your face in my parish.
SAM. Della, are you Cajun?
DELLA. Um-hmm. And the longer I'm here, the more Cajun I seem to get. At Camp LeJeune I lost track of all that, but now....I put on music and

make a pot of gumbo and have a one-person fais do-do *(fay-dough-dough)* in my apartment. *(Explaining.)* That's like a dance party.
SAM. *(Impressed.)* Can other people attend? *(Beat.)* I mean, if our date on Tuesday goes OK and we uh, like each other and everything.
DELLA. I bet we will.
SAM. *(Dreamy.)* Yeah?
DELLA. *(Teasing him.)* Yay-ahh. *(They hang up. Fade on Della.)*
SAM. *(To audience.)* So the ten days dragged by. At least I was getting to know her better. And the better I got to know her, the more I wanted our first date to be---well, the best evening two people ever had together in the history of Manhattan. *(Beat.)* Fortunately, I know how to plan a date. *(Sam attacks pile of magazines on his desk, makes notes.)* To start, I know a lot of incredible restaurants. *(Looks at his list.)* Too many. And there was something wrong with every one. *(Scans magazine listings.)* Suddenly, in the entire metropolitan area, there's nothing to do. New York is one big entertainment wasteland. *(Reads.)* "*Famed avant garde director combines Euripides with mud wrestling---*"*(Shakes head no.)* Nuh-uh. "*Hear New York's top jazz artists live at The Village Vanguard, closed on Tuesdays*---" Closed? Christ. *(Returns to listings.)* Nothing on Broadway. What about Carnegie Hall? *(Reads.)* "*An evening of experimental electronic chamberworks---*" No thanks. *(Frantic, he goes through the stack, scattering magazines and papers.)* Here's a--No. Maybe we should--No. *(Reads.)* No, no, no, no, NO! *(Disgusted, he knocks entire stack to the floor. He stares down at the mess.)* God. *(He crouches down to clean up the magazines and papers. As he works, one catches his attention.)* Hmm. *(Sam grabs his pen and notebook, jots something down. "Waltz for Debby" rises as light shifts to evening. Sam goes to his office window, watches lights blink on across the city. He returns to his desk, removes his tie, takes new tie from shopping bag.)* Ten days have passed. It's…*(Gestures at stack of magazines.)* five-thousand New Yorker listings later. Tuesday the fifteenth. There's a kind of magic about Tuesday, don't you think? *(Savors it.)* Tuesday. *(Sam straightens his new tie. Angie pokes her head in.)*
ANGIE. *(Awed.)* Sam, your...*limo's* here.
SAM. *(To audience.)* It's expensive but we have a lot of territory to cover.

ANGIE. And Miss Doucet is on Line One.
SAM. ***(****Alarmed.****)*** Ask her to hold for a moment. *(To audience.)* Why is she calling me *now*? We confirmed yesterday. I'm picking her up at her office. Her voice was so warm. *(To Angie.)* Just a minute. *(To audience.)* This is not good. *(To Angie.)* Could you tell her I've already left? No, forget that. *(To audience.)* I've spent ten days thinking about this woman and now I don't want to take her call.
ANGIE. *(Yells.)* SAM!
SAM. Put her through. ***(****Angie presses button on her phone, exits. Sam picks up phone. Lights up on Della on phone in her office.)*
DELLA. *(With difficulty.)* Sam, I--I'm not well. I have to cancel my plans with you. ***(****Pause. Sam is frozen.)* Sam?
SAM. *(With difficulty.)* I'm...sorry to hear that. Very sorry.
DELLA. All day I've been trying to ignore the feeling. But I've always had a delicate stomach and I know when it's trying to warn me--*(Hasty.)* What I mean is, maybe it's a touch of flu.
SAM. You feel that bad, huh?
DELLA. Yes. Very bad. ***(****Pause.****)***
SAM. Listen, I have a limousine waiting. Would you like a lift home from the office? It's no trouble. You're only three blocks away—
DELLA. --No! I mean, that's sweet of you but I---I have to finish up. I'll probably be here at least another hour.
SAM. Well...why don't I call you at home tomorrow to see how you're doing? ***(****Pause.)* You don't want me to call you tomorrow. ***(****Pause. Della swallows, says nothing. Sam starts to get angry.)* Or set another date. ***(****Pause.)*
DELLA. I'm not sure when I'll be up to it. *(Beat.)* I'm sorry, Sam.
SAM. Yeah.
DELLA. Well…*(Beat.)* Good-bye.
SAM: Good-bye, Della. *(Beat.)* I'll miss you. ***(****They hang up. Fade on Della. Sam speaks to audience.)* Classic brush-off. Classic. Every suggestion I made, she blocked. ***(****Hits the desk top, hard).* Ten days. Ten days! What was I thinking? Someone who wants to see you doesn't make you wait ten days. ***(****Sam yanks at his collar. The tie gets in the way. He rips it off his neck, runs it angrily through his fingers.)* Goddamn tie. Goddamn

one hundred dollars. Is this pathetic or what? Fuck this tie. *(He rummages in desk, finds scissors, cuts tie in half. Triumphantly, he flourishes the pieces. (Beat. Realization sets in.)* Awe, Jesus. *(He drops the pieces.)* I thought I was charming her. What a jerk. I wasn't charming her, she just couldn't figure out how to get rid of me. Goddamn chronic over-enthusiasm. To her, I was just a pest. A dog with a tennis ball who won't go away until you play catch. So she took the ball and pretended to throw it. I sprinted off, spent ten days rooting around, all excited, coming up with nothing. *(Shouts.)* LIAR! Goddamn sweet-talking, phony, Louisiana, Alabama, *Gone with the Wind*, whatever the hell it was LIAR! *(Panting, he tries to recoup.)* OK. You're going to salvage this. She isn't going to destroy what I created. Someone's going to have this evening. *(Presses intercom.)* Angie! *(Angie enters, re-applying eyeshadow and lipstick, getting ready to leave.)*

ANGIE. What should I tell the limo driver?

SAM. Never mind that, I want to talk to you.

ANGIE. I gotta go. If I don't start getting dinner ready earlier, Sal's gonna murder my ass---*(During the following scene, they frequently overlap and interrupt each other.)*

SAM. But Angie---

ANGIE.---The other night he says to me, *what happened to that calamari with the wine sauce you used to make me?* It takes too long, I says. *It didn't take too long before we were married,* he says. I'm working in the city now, I says. Every night coming back to Ozone Park, I'm on the subway an hour and a half—

SAM. ---How would you and Sal like dinner at one of the best restaurants in the city tonight, on me?

ANGIE. It isn't National Secretaries Week.

SAM. Angie...*(Beat.)* She cancelled.

ANGIE. *(Genuinely upset.)* Oh no!

SAM. I want someone to enjoy this evening. Someone I like. You and Sal—

ANGIE. ---That's real nice Sam but some of the things you like are kind of...*(Makes a face.)*

SAM. Just let me tell you. It's a highly original evening. You start out at

the New York Aquarium. I love the aquarium. *(Dreamy.)* Those pearly white beluga whales, the tropical fish, glowing like jewels in the dark--- *(He sees Angie's look.)* OK. Skip the aquarium. Next is dinner at a fantastic nouvelle French-Japanese restaurant. Exquisite food, Angie, unbelievable—
ANGIE. *(Flat.)* ---I don't eat Japanese, they don't cook their food.
SAM. *(Takes a deep breath.)* What about dancing down at the Cat Club? Usually it's rock but on Tuesday nights they have this great little swing combo—
ANGIE. *(Matter of fact.)* ---Sal hasn't danced since our weddin.' To get Sal to dance, you would have to shoot bullets at his feet.
SAM. And then there's a hot new jazz club---
ANGIE. ---Jazz. *(Beat.)* I heard it once. *(Thinks.)* I didn't like it.
SAM. *(Explodes.)* Goddamn it, Angie, I come from the same kind of background as you. My father sold air conditioners. My mother sells girdles. But I've tried to make something of myself, learn new things, enjoy Manhattan, instead of hiding out in the boroughs like an old turtle in a stagnant pond.
ANGIE. *(Hurt dignity.)* I gotta go. *(She picks up her enormous, tacky handbag and makes to leave. Sam grabs her arm, whirls her around.)*
SAM. Goddamn it, Angie!
ANGIE. *(Recoiling.)* Sam! Ya hurtin' me. *(He sees her fright and lets her go.)*
SAM. Sorry. I'm sorry. I'm acting crazy. *(He turns away. Pause. Angie circles him, peers into his face.)*
ANGIE. *(Amazed.)* Are you crying—
SAM. ---*(quickly)* No.
ANGIE. You musta liked her a lot.
SAM. Yeah.
ANGIE. So what's her problem? She involved with somebody else?
SAM. I don't know. *(Beat.)* She's separated. Probably getting a divorce.
ANGIE. Right now?
SAM. Kind of...on-going. She doesn't talk about it much. *(Beat.)*
ANGIE. My girlfriend got divorced last year. She still don' want any guy touchin' her.

SAM. Della's the opposite. I think she has a pretty busy social life.
ANGIE. Seeing a lot of guys?
SAM. I guess. *(Beat.)*
ANGIE. Well, there's all kinds a' ways of not being touched. *(Pause. Sam looks at her. Understanding dawns.)* I gotta go. Sal's gonna murder my ass.
SAM. Wait. *(He fishes a credit card out of his wallet.)* Angie, take Sal out to your favorite place in Ozone Park and charge it to me.
ANGIE. Is this because you called me a turtle?
SAM. No. It's because you're smart. *(Angie looks at the card.)*
ANGIE. Gee, this is nice.
SAM. Order up a storm. Steak, lobster, cocktails, whatever you like.
ANGIE. Really? *(Sam nods. She starts out the door, turns.)* You gonna be all right?
SAM. Yeah. I'll be all right. *(Angie exits. Sam goes to his office window and looks out, as darkness descends and the city lights blink on. The blackness fills with dazzling lights.He speaks to audience.)* New York isn't much to look at by day but at night, it breaks your heart. It's like a woman dressed up in black velvet...*(Gestures at lights.)* and jewels. *(As night deepens, the cityscape grows more dazzling.)* I've always dreamed about a woman who is as exciting to me as New York. Someone who can hold her own with those lights. And now, even though she cancelled our date, somehow I think I found her.

SCENE 6

A short time later. Evening. Devo's "Whip It" rises. The art department at Glowing Maternity. A cubicle-style partition to one side. The office is shutting down, sounds of other employees leaving. Erin, in a good mood, gets ready to leave while singing and bopping along to "Whip It." Della's upset and the music irritates her.

ERIN. *(To Della.)* Need the copier? *(Della shakes her head no, tries to work. Erin hollers O.S. to other unseen employees.)* You can shut it off! See ya! *(Continues bopping.)* Ooo, this is the good part! *(Sings along.)*

"When a problem comes along, you must whip it. Before the cream sits out to long, you must whip it..."(To Della.) Don't you love their irony? *(Sings.)* "*Now whip it into shape. Shape it up. Get straight...*" *(Della jumps up, shuts off cassette player.)* Hey!
DELLA. *(Angry.)* I can't deal with that right now. *(Phone rings. In her haste to answer, Della knocks her purse off her desk, scattering contents across floor. Eagerly, she grabs receiver.)* Art department. *(Listens, disappointed.)* Margo? No. She's already left for the day. *(Della bangs phone down. Sees mess on floor.)* Damn it all! *(She starts picking up the scattered perfume vials. Erin eyes Della curiously, then picks up a couple of vials.)*
ERIN. What are all these little glass tubes? *(Examines one.)* Perfume samples. Christ, look at 'em all. *(Opens tube, sniffs.)* Not my style. *(Opens another, sniffs.)* I mean, do you really want to smell like fruit salad? *(Della glares at her.)*
ERIN. OK, sorry. Let me help. *(Della brushes her hand away.)*
DELLA. I'll do it. *(Erin persists in trying to help, Della pushes her hand aside again.)*
ERIN. Della, honestly—
DELLA. --No! *(Hurt, Erin recoils.)*
ERIN. OK, OK. *(Moves off.)* I've never seen anyone turn psycho over perfume.
DELLA. *(Still mad.)* I can't afford to buy it so I spend a lot of time and effort collecting these samples. *(As ERIN moves.)* You watch where you step!
ERIN. *(Hurt.)* All right! *(Erin returns to her desk, collects her things. Sam enters unseen--but halts abruptly when he spots the two women. Nervous and intimidated, he steps behind the partition.)*
DELLA. Erin...don't go. *(Erin stops, turns. Beat.)*
ERIN. *(Small voice.)* I thought you liked it when I play cutting edge tunes.
DELLA. I do. *(Beat.)*
ERIN. Look, you did the right thing.
DELLA. *(Trying to convince herself.)* It was logical and rational, in terms of personal goals and biological realities.
ERIN. You have to be tough with men. Especially New York men.

They're the worst. Rude, selfish, lying assholes. And so hostile. *(Beat.)* I mean, some dude asks you out, the idea is, he likes you, right? You go out to a club and before you know it, he's making sarcastic remarks, dancing with other women...So you're cool, you let it roll. You don't let it ruin the sex. And then afterwards...*(Furious.)* He doesn't call!
DELLA. I don't think Sam is that type. If anything, he's too attentive.
ERIN. I HATE that! ***(****Della dons her jacket, picks up her purse, gets ready to go. Gives her desk a last-minute straightening. She picks up one of the framed photos.*
DELLA. *(Gazing at photo.)* DeWitt's having problems in history class. Did I say?
ERIN. *(Sympathy.)* Yeah. *(Beat.)* Sure you don't want to come down to St. Marks Place?
DELLA. My stomach just isn't right.
ERIN. This club is a real scene. I could introduce you to more artists. I have a lot of good friends who go there. Really good friends. *(Beat.)* Actually, some of them are pretentious jerks. ***(****Still in her jacket, Della sits down at drafting table, puts down purse, starts working.)* What are you doing?
DELLA. *(Intent on work.)* I need to re-size all the type in this diet piece.
ERIN. I thought you were sick! *(Beat.)* Look, if you don't feel good, you should go home. ***(****Beat.)*
DELLA. Usually, I love going back to my little studio but tonight...it feels like returning to a box. ***(****She spots another perfume sample on the floor, goes to retrieve it. Half to herself.)* I should have cancelled earlier. All last week, I kept saying to myself, 'Tuesdays coming, you've got to call.' But I didn't. Then today, my stomach started acting up just like it did before my wedding. I believe your body warns you if you're about to make a mistake.
ERIN. *(Shrug.)* So you called.
DELLA. Only gave him one hour's notice. I don't like to treat people that way.
ERIN. The chances are a hundred to one he's a creep.
DELLA. *(Slow.)* He said he would...miss me.
ERIN. Della, he's in real estate. We're talking major slime. Haven't you noticed when we go out at lunch, there's not one fucking ray of sunlight?

They're destroying the city with one big, greedy high rise after another. I'd never even give a guy like that the time of day. He's OK-looking but he's a suit, a suit in real estate. That's one step up from guys who grab your crotch on the subway. *(Beat.)* Besides, he probably just wanted to fuck you.

DELLA. *(Furious.)* Erin, sometimes talking to you is like taking a bath in a barrel of nails.

ERIN. Just trying to cheer you up.

DELLA. Sam is a nice man. He's smart and good-looking and I think he's...kind. He's a man a lot of women would be proud to spend time with. You should think about finding yourself someone like Sam. Just the right age for you, too. ***(****Sam steps around the partition.)*

ERIN. Jesus Christ!

DELLA. Sam!

SAM. *(To Della.)* I had to step in here, before you*...(Gestures from himself to Erin.)* marry the two of us off. ***(****Pause. The two women stare at him.)* I haven't been here long.

ERIN. *(Quickly.)* How long?

SAM. *(Cheerful.)* So you don't like real estate people. I can live with it. *(Instantly, Erin turns away, mortified.)*

ERIN. Just let me die now.

SAM. Look, forget it. I don't care...I'm happy. ***(****Della moves behind her slant board, as if for protection.)*

DELLA. *(To Sam.)* You don't have any business being happy...or being here at all.

SAM. You're right. I shouldn't be here. *(Shakes head in disbelief.)* And I wouldn't be, if your building didn't have the world's worst security. There's this friendly old duck in the lobby. When I ask him to call up to you, he just smiles and waves me into the elevator. When I get up to your reception area, the girl just smiles and waves me back here. On the way, I pass all these people leaving. They smile and nod. Are we in New York? How did they manage to fill up a whole building with smiling, trusting idiots? *(Beat. Sam pats his pockets, looking for something, then he pulls out a tape cassette.)*

SAM. *(To Della.)* I brought you a present. You guys always play music

while you work and I thought maybe--don't get me wrong, it's nothing great--but it's original. ***(****He puts it on nearby table.)*
DELLA. Why are you giving me a present after I cancelled our date?
ERIN. *(Looking from one to the other.)* I think I oughtta go.
DELLA. *(To Sam.)* I told you I was too ill to see you tonight.
SAM. I guess I wasn't convinced.
ERIN. *(Retreating.)* Della, I'm going. ***(****Sam and Della are oblivious.)* I'm going, Della!
DELLA. *(To Erin.)* So am I, Honey. *(She doesn't move. To Sam.)* It's not your place to be convinced or not convinced. You know something? You're bossy. Talking me into going out with you, making those big plans. *(Enraged.)* You went and hired a limousine! ***(****Erin gives up and starts to exit. On second thought, she quietly slips behind the partition.)*
SAM. What is that, a crime?
DELLA. It's not exactly appropriate for a first date. Why couldn't we just have a cup of coffee? Why do you have to come hunt me down in a big, black limousine?
SAM. *(Taken aback.)* I thought you'd like having a limo.
DELLA. That relentless feelin,' I remember it so well. *(In the past.)* Saying sweet things, bringing me presents, but all the time, wanting his own way.
SAM. *(Bewildered.)* Who's *he*?
DELLA. I don't think you know what you've got here. I cannot be caught and domesticated. When I go to the park with my football, I run and scream and cuss and jump around like a...*(A memory.)*...like a fox ... dancing in a meadow. I saw that once and it gave me the chills. Because that fox was not something you could ever tame. ***(****Beat.)*
SAM. You like me. I heard what you said.
DELLA. I didn't know you were listening!
SAM. Besides, you kinda invited me here.
DELLA. *(Outraged.)* Invited you!
SAM. Sort of. You give me a very unconvincing excuse at the last minute. You tell me you're staying late at the office. You know I'm just three blocks away with *(Emphasis.)* Nothing to Do This Evening. Furthermore, you know I'm a person who makes my living by being overly persistent.

So what did you expect?
DELLA. You're talking to me like I'm a child. Oh, I know that trick. Acting all logical and patient while you show me how bad my reasoning is. Let me tell you something. It is a big mistake to try and convince someone to go out with you by proving to her that she's stupid.
SAM. Della—
DELLA. --You go right ahead and win this argument. Enjoy your victory. But remember, you'll be celebrating alone. *(Pause.)*
SAM. *(Sighs.)* All right.
DELLA. All right what?
SAM. I'll go. I shouldn't have come here, I apologize. *(Della folds her arms defiantly. Sam moves toward door.)*
DELLA. Tell me one thing, Sam. Why did you eavesdrop on us? That was embarrassing. Why didn't you make yourself known? *(Sam turns back to her. Beat.)*
SAM. If you want to know...*(Beat.)* I was scared.
DELLA. Scared?
SAM. Yeah.
DELLA. You told me your whole career is based on calling people who don't want to hear from you and knocking on the doors of people who don't want to see you.
SAM. That's right. And I'm scared every time. I have to force myself. I forced myself to come here tonight. On the way over, I was scared witless. Then that old guy in the lobby tells me 'go on up.' I coulda *killed* him. When I got up here, I was already sweating. Then I heard your voice. I couldn't move. I've never felt so low. Until you started to talk about me. *(Pause.)* I'll never forget what you said, Della. It meant a lot. *(Beat.)* Look, maybe you're right about us being at different stages of our lives. Maybe Angie was right and you had a bad experience. I guess I'll never know. Anyway... good night. *(Once more, he starts to exit. An audible crunch. Sam looks down at his shoe.)* What was that? *(He bends down to look.)* It smells fantastic down here. *(Della rushes over. Sadly, she picks up the broken vial.)* Is that perfume or something?
DELLA. *(Sad.)* My favorite.
SAM. I'm sorry, I--

DELLA. --No, it's nothin.' *(Grieving.)* Just a little sample.
SAM. Will you let me replace it?
DELLA. It was free. Besides, you can't buy it anymore. It wasn't a successful fragrance. *(Inhales.)* It has a strong floral base of tuberose and jasmine. Too sweet and heavy for most. But it makes me think of nighttime in Louisiana when I was young. *(She touches the puddle on floor, sniffs again.)* La Belle Nuit. *(la bell noo-EE)* Beautiful night. The air's so humid, the smells just hang there. Magnolias, pine trees, damp earth, the insects all celebrating, like something's about to happen. I was so full of anticipation back then. Life and I were still in the courtship stage.
SAM. Perfume means a lot to you.
DELLA. For many years during my marriage, I never wore any fragrance. I didn't want to attract.
SAM. That's rough.
DELLA. Rough, yes. Feels like you're rubbing up against something that makes your skin go raw.
SAM. But isn't it over?
DELLA. Not yet. My boys are in a lot of pain. *(She goes to table. Sam follows. Della picks up one of the framed photos, shows him.)* Here's DeWitt, my youngest. Only fifteen. Still has that little boy smell of dirt and crushed grass and...popsicles. *(Puts photo down, picks up the other.)* And here's Tyler, my eldest.
SAM. Good-looking kid.
DELLA. *(Half to herself.)* My little tragedy.
SAM. *(Startled.)* What?
DELLA. *(Hasty.)* I mean, my first-born.
SAM. Why did you say that, Della? *(Della moves around the room, restless.)*
DELLA. In college, I had my own little radio show. *Della's Demi-Monde*. *(Remembering.)* I loved chatting with people on the air. And I was engaged to Davis and he was a handsome young cadet and my parents were thrilled and then...
SAM. What happened?
DELLA. I got pregnant. *(As if fending something off.)* Didn't want to be, didn't mean to be, I was only twenty years old....But that started things

falling over like dominoes. Real quick, Davis and I got married, he finished officer training, I quit school, we moved to Quantico...then Fort Pendleton then...lots and lots of moving...*(Beat, slowly.)* Just like dominoes. *(Beat. She turns to Sam.)* All my life, I just drifted along, never bothering anybody. Until suddenly I found I could barely stand to be alive. *(Beat.)* Can't do that anymore. No more drifting. *(Draws herself up.)* I have to look ahead, be rational, go according to a plan.

SAM. It's good to have a plan.

DELLA. It's essential. That's why it doesn't make sense for us, Sam. Not that I don't like you....*(Embarrassed.)* Well, you heard. I just can't take any more risks with my future.

SAM. I have a plan too. Yearly sales goals, a ten-year career path, an investment strategy. But once in awhile, a good opportunity comes along that I wasn't expecting. So I modify my plan. *(Pause.)*

DELLA. *(Amused.)* You really are somethin.' You could almost get me to buy one of those warehouses of yours. *(She notices cassette tape. Picks it up, heads for tape player.)*

SAM. *(Hasty.)* You don't have to play that now. Maybe some other time, when you don't have anything better to do---*(A piano jazz version of "Body and Soul," fills the room. The music is played with a lot of feeling.)*

DELLA. *(Amazed.)* Is this you?

SAM. Let me explain. My brother's recording equipment really stinks and halfway through, there's this drunk who---

DELLA. --Shhhh. *(Listens. They listen for a few moments.)* Sam, I never knew you played piano. It's beautiful. *(They listen again. She's indignant.)* Why are all those people talkin' in the background?

SAM. Hotel bars attract many who are unable to recognize musical genius. *(Pause. Dreamily, Della sways to the music, then edges into a graceful foxtrot around her drafting table.)*

SAM. *(Wanting to dance with her.)* You don't, uh---*(Thinks better of it.)* No. *(Della holds out her arms to him. Slowly, they move around the office together.)*

SAM. Don't think I've ever danced this close to a high-speed copier. *(They circle around drafting table.)* You're better than I am.

DELLA. Lots of practice at the Officer's Club. *(They dance a few more*

moments.) Sam, what if you show someone a warehouse and they like it, but they're worried?
SAM. Worried about what?
DELLA. Worried about....fillin' up all that space.
SAM. I'd offer them a short-term lease with an option to buy.
DELLA. How short is short-term? Can it be just for one night?
SAM. That's pretty short. *(Twirls her.)* But we try to make the customer happy.
DELLA. A one-night lease?
SAM. Uh-huh.
DELLA. With no pressure to buy?
SAM. No pressure. *(Music ends. As they exit together, Della bends down to swipe a finger over the spot where her perfume vial shattered. With a quick smile at Sam, she dabs it on. Sam offers his arm and tenderly covers her hand with his own. They exit. After a moment, Erin steps into the light and stands looking after them. Fade.)*

END OF ACT I

THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—ORDER A COPY AT WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.COM