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Waiting for Godiva

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WAITING FOR GODIVA

A Project Report

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Eugene Paré

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ABSTRACT

WAITING FOR GODIVA

by Eugene Paré

This play is a parody of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. It superimposes the Lady Godiva legend on *Godot*, casts her as a modern, would-be patron saint of the arts, and places her at the center of the action where themes concerning objectification, art, sexuality, and renewal can be explored. Set on a college campus, with a cast of young characters who feast while they wait for Godiva, the play turns the stillborn universe of *Godot* inside out, breaking its static cycle, yet maintaining its circular structure. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of parody as complement, not discredit, and his theory concerning the birth-death-renewal motif of the carnivalesque provided a perspective for *Godiva* from which we might re-view and even laugh at *Godot*.

WAITING FOR GODIVA, A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

I must be slow. It was not until I had finished reading Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* a second time that it dawned on me what was missing from the landscape that best signified the bleakness of the situation—not green hills and trees and blue skies, not some fabulous structure, not Godot, but women. Even in the Garden, Adam was discontent without Eve, and so too was Marvell's Damon without Juliana. It is no wonder Beckett's old tramps, stuck upon an "apocalyptic tableland of emptiness and desolation" (Grossvogel 89), feel so misbegotten. I went back and counted the times in *Godot* where the characters allude to woman's mean existence. There are seven remarkably oblique references pertaining to birth, death, sex, loss of innocence: Gogo starts to tell a joke about an Englishman in a brothel, but Didi stops him (Beckett 11); Pozzo's name reminds Didi of the Gozzo family, whose "mother had the clap" (15); Pozzo describes the ephemeral nature of daylight and of life itself on "this bitch of an earth" (25); in the course of his broken-record speech, Lucky refers to the "divine Miranda" (28), perhaps ironically alluding to Prospero's innocent daughter, who, raised without human companions, was awestruck at her first glimpse of mankind; Didi calls Gogo an "Abortion" (48) during an exchange of abuses; Gogo quips, "We are all born mad. Some remain so" (51); and finally, Pozzo, again reflecting on our ephemeral existence, remarks, "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more" (57). Such is the role to which women are relegated in *Godot*. Do not get me wrong. I do not mean to infer that *Godot* is flawed in this respect. On the contrary, the absence of women serves to heighten

the sense of barrenness and impotence of Beckett's landscape. However, considering how often *Godot* has been praised for its treatment of universal themes, this absence begs attention.

The root, God, which *Godot* and *Godiva* share, and the attendant host of implications led me to the notion of writing a parody superimposing the *Godiva* legend on *Godot*. I had read and enjoyed Aristophanes's parodies of the epic trip to the underworld in *The Frogs* and of epic battle in *Lysistrata*, and I wanted my parody of *Godot* to somehow emulate his satiric blend of seriousness and humor. To determine how to approach writing a parody worthy of a work as profanely sacred as *Godot*, I turned to Mikhail Bakhtin's "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" and *Rabelais and His World*. Bakhtin's theory of parody as complement, not discredit, and his theory concerning the birth-death-renewal motif of the carnivalesque provided a perspective from which parodying *Godot* seemed not only justifiable but necessary and natural. Drawing upon the *Godiva* legend and upon Bakhtin's theories, I was prepared to parody *Godot*.

The *Godiva* Legend

The *Godiva* legend provides a rich plot of mythopoetic ground in which to root my play. An account of Lady *Godiva*'s ride first appeared in the thirteenth century in Roger of Wendover's *Flores Historiarum*. It established her reputation as a sort of heroic saint who sacrificed her modesty to lower the taxes her husband, Leofric, had imposed on the poor people of Coventry. In Wendover's version, no one witnesses the ride, and all ends on a happy note, a miracle befitting *Godiva*'s proper name, *Godgifu*, gift of God.

Subsequent versions expanded on the legend, exalting Godiva. She was said to ride a symbolic white horse. An element of Christian retribution was added via the character of Peeping Tom, who was struck blind for his sin.

Victorians, nostalgic for a better, bygone era, were drawn to the legend and infused Godiva with an artistic-poetic spirit. "Sad is the day, and worse must follow, when we hear the blackbird in the garden, and do not throb with joy," Godiva laments in "Leofric and Godiva" from Walter Savage Landor's *Imaginary Conversations* (5: 103). A. Dwight Culler, in *The Poetry of Tennyson*, suggests that in Tennyson's "Godiva" the poet himself can be identified with Godiva:

[W]hen we come to the passage that is the emotional center of the poem, that in which Lady Godiva prepares to leave her inmost bower, and read the lovely description of her tender, shrinking modesty, her sense of shame, her reluctance to reveal her beauty to the world, then we realize that Tennyson was getting ready to publish again . . . he knew that by telling the story of Lady Godiva he was exposing himself to the same kind of ribald laughter that she was exposed to in her ride. (111-12)

Thus, in Victorian literature there is a premise for representing Godiva as the artist stripped bare, and the critic as Peeping Tom. My play develops this premise further, setting Godiva up as the symbolic patron saint of the arts, and Tom as the critic. Tennyson added another element to the legend; in the poem Leofric's refusal to take Godiva's demands seriously and the manner in which he toys with her earring indicate that she is nothing more than a sex object to him. This sexist element adds another

dimension to the Godiva legend, which I explore in my play.

As might be expected, in the twentieth century, skepticism and cynicism finally tear the legend down, at least in one retelling. In Raoul C. Faure's *Lady Godiva and Master Tom*, it is Godiva who insists that she go naked across the city, not Leofric. With a religious fervor that seems both selfish and scheming, she begs to be humiliated to prove she can suffer like a saint for her imagined sin, the sin of living in luxury while others suffer. Godiva's pride in her humility and the repressed sexuality which perhaps spurs her to take the bold ride in the first place eventually lead to her downfall; she becomes an adulteress. In my play, because, like *Godot*, Godiva is enigmatic the audience has to speculate along with the characters in the play as to whether she is a patron saint of the arts, a concerned artist, a hoax, or a publicity stunt. The audience must wonder whether she has made the right choice.

Mikhail Bakhtin's Carnavalesque

Bakhtin's theory of parody as complement, not discredit, is summed up succinctly in this excerpt from "Narrative Discourse":

any and every straightforward genre, any and every direct discourse—epic, tragic, lyric, philosophical—may and indeed must itself become the object of representation, the object of a parodic travesty "mimicry." It is as if such mimicry rips the word away from its object, disunifies the two, shows that a given straightforward generic word—epic or tragic—is one-sided, bounded, incapable of exhausting the object; the process of parodying

forces us to experience those sides of the object that are not otherwise included in a given genre or a given style. Parodic-travesty literature introduces the permanent corrective of laughter. (55)

According to Bakhtin then, any literary work may be parodied, even a work like *Godot* which achieves a good deal of its dramatic effect by employing parody and pastiche. But if my *Godiva* was to succeed as a parody on its own terms, it had to evoke the essence of *Godot* and at the same time offer an alternate perspective from which we might re-view and even laugh at Beckett's universe. The means for gaining that perspective came from Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque.

In *Rabelais* Bakhtin applies his theory of carnivalesque to *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel* to explain Rabelais's particular genius. A list of carnivalesque elements relevant to my discussion would include the following: carnival is usually linked to spectacles or feasts of some sort, which in turn are "linked to moments of crisis, of breaking points in the cycle of nature or in the life of society and man" (9); a peculiar logic of "inside out" operates in carnival, "a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings" (11); in carnival "images of the human body with its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life, play a predominant role" (18); the essential principle of carnival is the degradation of all that is high, bringing it back down to earth (20); and in carnival death is always related to birth and renewal (50).

Beckett employs each of these elements in *Godot*, with one notable exception to which I will come shortly. Although for Beckett's purposes Didi and Gogo are alienated

from the multitude, in essence they represent the multitude. They meet and wait each day to witness the spectacle of Godot's arrival, hoping he will bring some pertinent message to lend meaning and purpose to their lives. Travesties, humiliations, and profanations abound in *Godot*; for instance, Gogo is beat up every night, and Pozzo calls Lucky "Pig" and keeps him on a leash. Carnival images of the human body "with its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life"—what Bakhtin terms the "material bodily principle"—also abound in *Godot*. As Josephine Jacobsen and William R. Mueller insist, "Most of Beckett's mirthless laughs are directed against physical deformity, against the processes of elimination and eating, against loathsome and even pathetic sexual practices" (92). Consider Pozzo voraciously eating chicken and drinking wine or the numerous references to running sores, flatulence, and erections. According to Ruby Cohn, "Beckett contrives to approach the classical unities, only to leave us more aware of the monotonous infinitude of time, the repetitive indeterminacy of place, and the absurd discontinuity of action" (224-225). This is an example of Beckettian degradation. He also degrades Christianity, by alluding to the Second Coming and by casting doubt upon the Gospels because of John's singular account of the two thieves at Calvary.

But one element of Bakhtin's "carnavalesque" parody is missing from Beckett's play: the element of birth-death-renewal. As Rabelais employs carnival and grotesque imagery to cast down, to uncrown, to turn upside down, to parody all the elements of medieval teachings and sacraments (Bakhtin 379), Beckett employs these same elements to diminish or even dismiss the aesthetic, religious, and philosophical trappings inherited by twentieth-century society. But whereas Rabelais's parody casts down in order to renew,

Beckett's parody seems to me merely to cast down. The cycle of birth-death-renewal Rabelais employed is broken. Because Beckett equates birth with death, there is no renewal. Much of the criticism I have read supports this point. Jacobsen and Mueller state, "Man begins, for Beckett, not only with the unretractable fact of birth, but with the fact that his birth is his tragedy and his sin" (105). Cohn states, "Birth and death seem to be separated by a mere instant, except to those who have to live through that instant as an interminable wait for Godot" (220). And David I. Grossvogel suggests, "Beckett's world is doomed at birth. It is a parodic symbol that denotes the same impotence as that of its people. It is flat . . . sterile, and lonely" (95). In *Godot* we are doomed at birth, alienated, left waiting, while repeating ourselves indefinitely. This may, for the most part, be attributed to the relative disappearance of God by the end of the nineteenth century. It is not surprising that Hardy's landscape in "The Darkling Thrush," written December 31, 1900, mirrors the world in *Godot*:

The ancient pulse of germ and birth
 Was shrunken hard and dry,
 And every spirit upon the earth
 Seemed fervourless as I. (13-16)

But even Hardy had his thrush. Beckett gives us a few leaves. Jacobsen and Mueller remind us that "Beckett shares one thing in common with the more uncompromising mystics: the conviction that a universe lacking a meaning, an answer, a gesture of grace not found in mind or body, is worthless" (24). *Godot's* landscape and characters and Hardy's "Century's corpse" in "Darkling Thrush" (10) resemble Bakhtin's

birth-death image without renewal; or, as Bakhtin says, “What remains is nothing but a corpse, old age deprived of pregnancy, equal to itself alone; it is alienated and torn away from the whole in which it had been linked to that other, younger link in the chain of growth and development. The result is a broken grotesque figure, the demon of fertility with phallus cut off and belly crushed” (*Rabelais* 53). Early in Act I Didi and Gogo consider hanging themselves to get erections. We laugh, yet cringe at the desperateness of their situation.

Thus, *Godot* is vulnerable to and needs the dialogic completion of parody for two reasons: its exclusion of women mentioned earlier, and its emphasis on birth-death-without-renewal. Call me delusional, but I refuse to write off our lives, even unexamined lives, as worthless. In my play I set about trying to recapture Rabelais’s life-affirming spirit of carnival to offer it up as an alternative, as evidence of renewal in this Godless universe.

Parodying *Godot*

Waiting for Godiva opens with two college students, Tom and Simon, standing on their dormitory balcony, watching and waiting for Godiva to appear. An imaginary crowd, the audience, has gathered below in the street. This setting immediately turns *Godot*’s universe inside out: old clowns are replaced with young clowns; a gray, desolate landscape is replaced with sunshine, buildings, a street; the spectacle of Godiva’s anticipated Second Coming puts woman at the center of the play; and although the characters are still isolated, they act out their lives before an imagined multitude. When Tom fires up the hibachi and breaks out the buffalo wings, the carnival feast begins.

The tension in the play is derived first from the fragile balance between the antagonism of Tom and Simon towards each other and their dependency upon each other, and second from their waiting for Godiva. Tom is the analytical critic, disposed to the structural and technological. His props are binoculars and a laptop. Simon is the artistic dreamer, prone to making literary allusions. His props are a bird feeder and books. Nothing is known about the woman who would be Godiva except the information given in a flier posted around campus: she's an art major; she's married to a financial analyst who has promised to donate \$50,000 to the university's College of Humanities if she rides naked across campus. During the play, two other couples arrive, then leave, Joe and Natalie in Act I, Matt and Margaret in Act II. These couples "in motion" parody the master-slave relationship between Pozzo and Lucky, though I purposely leave open to debate who cracks the whip.

The tone of each act takes on the character of the visiting couple. I derived the idea for this correspondence from Goethe's *Elective Affinities*. In the novel a married couple's relationship is redefined, tragically, by their attraction to two visitors to their estate. Goethe fashioned the story after a chemical experiment. A character in the novel explains the experiment as follows:

Those natures which, when they meet, quickly lay hold on and mutually affect one another we call affined. This affinity is sufficiently striking in the case of alkalis and acids which, although they are mutually antithetical, and perhaps precisely because they are so, most decidedly seek and embrace

one another, modify one another, and together form a new substance. (52-53)

The mix of different “chemicals” in Acts I and II of *Godiva* produces different results in each act, new substances. This allows me to break the static cycle of *Godot* while maintaining its circular structure.

Joe and Natalie are primarily a physical couple. Thus there is a good deal of horseplay and roughhousing in Act I, and the conversation revolves mainly around breasts and other physical attributes. Simon plays a trick with the binoculars that marks Tom as Peeping Tom. Tom and Joe exhibit their vitality by objectifying and lusting after Godiva and women in general. Natalie holds her own amongst the “pigs.” Simon smolders with an absurd but touching secret that has left him impotent. Over the course of the play his literary allusions tie him to Sterne’s *Uncle Toby* and Hemingway’s *Jake*, who likewise had phallus-related problems. Everyone drinks beer and eats chicken. The males play a hand-slapping game that ends with Simon being knocked to the floor. Simon tells a story about getting his face slapped. A policeman arrives on a motorcycle to notify the crowd that Godiva has been delayed.

Matt and Margaret are a more cerebral couple. Thus in Act II physical activity gives way somewhat to mental activity. The level of conversation is elevated and revolves around a discussion of art and literature. Although the discussion does not offer any fresh insights, it at least represents the characters’ attempts at making meaning. Everyone drinks wine and eats bread. At Margaret’s request they play a game of word association. A policewoman on horseback arrives to notify the crowd that Godiva will not appear. Art is

not “saved.” Still, something positive comes out of the non-event. The infectious carnival atmosphere and the various discussions over the course of the afternoon, particularly Tom’s story about the mens’ trip to a brothel, finally induce Simon to reveal his secret. During carnival time what Bakhtin calls “a special type of communication impossible in everyday life” is created which permits no distance between those who come in contact with each other (*Rabelais* 10); tongues and libidos are liberated by food, drink, and celebration. In essence Simon is reborn. He regains his virility by facing his fear. As the curtain closes, Tom and Simon strip off their clothing and prepare to run down the street in place of Godiva. Therein lies the evidence that renewal is possible and worth striving for no matter how limited or absurd such renewal appears to be.

Many of the objects from *Godot* reappear in *Godiva* but in different contexts: a stool, a basket, a whip, baggage, chicken, pigs, excrement, phalluses. And the same carnivalesque elements employed by Rabelais and Beckett—the casting down, the abusive exchanges, the humiliations, the material bodily principle—are employed throughout *Godiva*, though admittedly they are toned down. But *Godiva* also employs objects and imagery distinctly its own. In carnival, Bakhtin tells us, objects are “turned inside out, utilized in the wrong way, contrary to their common use” (*Rabelais* 411). *Godiva* plays upon this premise: binoculars become “markers,” tongs become pincers, an umbrella becomes a phallic symbol, toilet paper becomes napkins, paper towels become crepe paper, a hibachi becomes a bonfire. Much of the play’s recurring imagery stems from Godiva herself, her long hair and her horse. As the absent central character, Godiva looms over the play, providing a figure for debate, emulation, and degradation. Simon’s sexual

ambiguity throughout the play foreshadows his symbolic metamorphosis into a Godiva.

As Bakhtin says,

One of the fundamental tendencies of the grotesque image of the body is to show two bodies in one: the one giving birth and dying, the other conceived, generated, and born. This is the pregnant and begetting body, or at least a body ready for conception and fertilization, the stress being laid on the phallus or the genital organs. From one body a new body always emerges in some form or other. (*Rabelais* 26)

Simon's new body is the same as his previous body, but he is prepared to laugh at it and face the world with it.

Although at the end of *Godot* the audience is given no hope that Didi and Gogo will break out of their static cycle, there is some semblance of hope expressed through their words and actions. This hope presents itself in Didi and Gogo's attempts at self-perception, a means of changing and coping that Beckett assimilated from Descartes and Kierkegaard. Yet Beckett's play offers little evidence of renewal; birth is death. As Michael Worton points out in his essay, "*Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*: Theatre as Text": "Beckett's plays have a cyclical structure which might indeed be better described as a diminishing spiral. They present images of entropy in which the world and the people in it are slowly but inexorably running down"; this spiral descends "towards a final closure that can never be found in the Beckettian universe" (69).

Waiting for Godiva differs from *Godot* not only in its setting, characters, and subject, but in its philosophy. Although I appreciate the value existentialists place on self-

perception, or the descent into the self, I believe it is our perception of and sensitivity to others that supplies the meaningful connections in our lives and in our language. It is time we came *out* of ourselves. The structure of *Godiva* spirals open rather than towards closure. In the world of *Godiva*, we do not wait, we do not consider hanging ourselves out of boredom or frustration. We strip ourselves of that which comes between us and others. We enter the “race.”

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It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors—Wilde, Preface *Dorian Gray*

WAITING FOR GODIVA

Characters:

Tom
Simon
Joe
Natalie
Matt
Margaret
a cop on a motorcycle
a cop on a horse
a man in the crowd

ACT I

A dormitory, late morning, the sun is shining. Two young men, Tom and Simon, are leaning against the wrought-iron railing of a second story balcony. The taller one, Tom, is on the left, looking through binoculars at the audience. He has on jeans, a collared T-shirt, and loafers. Simon is wearing baggy shorts, a T-shirt, and flip-flops.

In the left corner of the balcony, a blackened hibachi, a bag of briquettes, and a can of charcoal lighter sit on a large wooden spool. A wooden stool stands beside the spool. In the right corner, a folder and several books are tossed on a plastic lounge chair. Hanging over the chair is an empty bird feeder, strung from the upstairs balcony. A box of birdseed sits on the railing, and a red cooler sits between the spool and the chair, back against a sliding glass door.

Tom (*looking through the binoculars down left, then right*): See anything?

Simon: I've got my eyes peeled. (*He looks down right, then left.*) Nothing yet.

Tom: You think she'll show?

Simon: Show what?

Tom: Up. Everything.

Simon: According to the fliers. We'll know at noon. (*He turns around and leans back against the railing.*)

Tom: (*He glances at the back of his bare wrist.*) What time is it now?

Simon: I couldn't say.

Tom continues to survey the crowd, looking through the binoculars from time to time. Simon walks over and takes the feeder down, unscrews the top and sets it on the railing, then picks up the box of birdseed.

Tom (*noticing what Simon is doing*): Do you have to do that?

Simon: (*He smiles and begins pouring the seed into the feeder.*) Yes.

Tom: The birds crap all over everything. I was out here the other day working on something and they crapped on my laptop.

Simon (*humored*): That's unfortunate. (*He continues pouring.*)

Tom: Luck had nothing to do with it.

Simon: Where were you sitting?

Tom (*pointing to the lounge chair*): Right there.

Simon (*glancing at the chair, then the feeder*): So it was fate? (*He sets the birdseed on the railing, then screws the top back on the feeder.*)

Tom: Bad timing.

Simon: On whose part, the crappee's or the crapper's? (*He hangs the feeder up, then circles the chair, eyeballing the feeder, making little adjustments to it. Tom watches him for a moment, then continues to survey the crowd.*)

Tom: Where'd they all come from?

Simon: The birds?

Tom: Forget the birds, will you. (*motioning with his hand*) These people. It's like watching footage of the crowd at the motorcade in Dallas. (*Pause.*) Don't they have classes, jobs, anything else to do?

Simon (*returning to the railing*): You'd think.

Tom (*pointing down and off to his right*): Look at that guy. What does his sandwich board say? (*Simon leans over and looks down the length of Tom's extended arm.*) No *Nude Equestrians*. He can't find a more pressing issue?

Simon: Probably an animal rights activist.

Tom: Activists are like cops aren't they. They have a habit of showing up where they've got no business being. It diminishes their credibility. That guy'd do better marching in front of a pet store at the mall. (*yells*) Save the mice in the wheels for God's sake, leave bareback riders alone.

Simon (*covering his ear on the side where Tom is standing*): My ear rings.

Tom (*looking at Simon's uncovered ear*): Maybe you ought to wear one.

Simon: (*He removes his hand from his ear.*) What's that supposed to mean? (*Tom looks away. Simon stares at him for a few seconds, then looks back towards the guy in the sandwich board.*) He may not be an activist. Could be a practical joker.

Tom: Just the same, you get my drift.

Simon: I think we need nuts willing to chain themselves to trees.

Tom: (*He looks down right for a moment.*) Think she'll ride bareback?

Simon: Hard to say.

Tom (*with mock pretentiousness*): Both the English saddle and the Western have something to offer. If she intends racing down the street or needs to jump any barricades, the English would be more suitable. The Western has a horn, (*suggestively*) which could prove serviceable.

Simon: Especially if she needs to honk.

Tom: I was speaking . . . autoerotically.

Simon: Of course you were. Next you'll have her doing rope tricks. (*He grips the railing with both hands and rocks back and forth a few times.*) She may go with just a blanket.

Tom: She'll probably ride sidesaddle. Less chafing. (*He tugs at the inseam of his jeans.*)

Simon: I'd expect. (*He puts his hands deep into his pockets, kicks the railing.*)

Tom: What about the horse. What do you expect she'll ride? An Arabian. A palomino.

Simon: An ass would be more symbolic.

Tom: Don't turn this into a persecution.

Simon: *(He holds his arms out, as if crucified, smiles, and drops them.)* A zebra would be surreal.

Tom: Dream on.

Simon: *(He balls up one hand, places the back of it against his forehead and points at Tom with his index finger, turning his head side to side.)* A unicorn would be mythical.

Tom: You're being ridiculous. *(Pause.)* Perhaps a Clydesdale.

Simon: You've obviously grown up on beer commercials.

Tom: *(He goes to look at the hibachi.)* The coals are getting there.

Simon: There they go.

Tom: *(Ignoring Simon, he scours the spooltop for something and looks around below.)* Won't be long now. *(He digs his comb out of his back pocket and pokes at the coals while he blows on them.)*

Simon: Shelley compared imagination to a fading coal stirred by an inconstant wind.

Tom: Imagine that. Blow me.

Simon: *(He turns his head to the side and coughs. He sniffs the air, making a face.)* What are you grilling? it stinks.

Tom: Nothing yet. *(He examines his comb, moistens the tips of his thumb and index finger with his tongue, pinches the end of the comb as though he were extinguishing a candle, and quickly puts it back in his pocket.)* Matt and Joe and the girls better get here soon though. *(He goes to the cooler and gets a beer.)* Want one?

Simon: Why not.

Tom: Catch. *(He quick-tosses a bottle. Simon nearly drops it. Tom twists off the bottlecap with his right hand, drops it to the right of the cooler, and returns to the railing. Simon twists off the cap with his left hand and sets it on the railing. They upend the bottles, take long drinks.)* Our very own Godiva. *(He sighs.)* Hope she doesn't just gallop by in a blur. How fast do you suppose she can ride in her condition?

Simon: She's expecting?

Tom: In her undraped state. *(He takes a drink.)*

Simon: (*He takes a drink.*) Fast enough I suppose.

Tom: Five? ten? fifteen miles an hour?

Simon: Who knows.

Tom: Too fast probably. Look at the Indians.

Simon: Where? (*He looks down right, then left.*)

Tom: The American Indians.

Simon: Where? (*He looks down right, then left.*)

Tom: They chased after buffalo bareback for days, weeks, in next to nothing.

Simon: They grew up that way.

Tom: On horses, nearly naked. (*He takes a drink.*)

Simon: Pretty much. (*He takes a drink.*)

Tom: She didn't.

Simon: Seems unlikely. (*He looks down. Pause.*) There's also the pavement to consider. Poor traction.

Tom: (*He looks down.*) So you're saying we'll get a good glimpse of her.

Simon: She's not an Indian.

Tom: What is she? Have you seen her?

Simon: No, just a picture of her husband on the fliers. (*baiting*) But I understand she's not a little attractive.

Tom: How did I miss her around campus? Never even heard of her 'til yesterday. Now suddenly this . . . this *Helen's* expected right beneath our noses.

Simon (*humored*): Can't conquer them all. Besides, you're probably exaggerating. She may only launch a couple dinghies.

Tom: Still, I must be growing slow. (*He takes a drink.*)

Simon: If at all. (*He takes a drink.*)

Tom: And the fliers don't mention names?

Simon: No. The naming's been left to us.

Tom: We're the namers.

Simon: And the named.

Tom: Tell me again. Why's she doing it?

Simon (*irritated at first*): According to the fliers, she's an art major. She married a financial analyst or something. He looks old in the picture. Must be a wealthy bastard because he's promised to donate fifty grand to the College of Humanities if she rides naked across campus. To prove her commitment I guess. Apparently she's committed.

Tom: Or ought to be.

Simon: The artist must be willing to bare everything.

Tom (*looking down left, then right*): See anything?

Simon: (*He looks down right, then left.*) Nothing yet.

Tom: (*He sets his beer on the railing and looks through the binoculars down left.*) I spy what appears to be a disenchanted group of feminists. (*He points down and to his left. Simon leans over and looks down the length of Tom's extended arm.*) Notice the disapproving frowns, the squared rounded shoulders, the marked determination to be seen as more than objects. Yet they appear rather solid, wouldn't you say? (*He hands Simon the binoculars without removing the strap around his neck. Simon refocuses, looks, hands them back.*)

Simon: On the whole, they do have a certain sphericity about them, (*sympathetically*) though a few seem famished.

Tom: (*He refocuses, looks through the binoculars at the same spot, then picks up his beer, takes a drink, and shakes his head side to side.*) They just can't tolerate being the *other*, or other women who do and turn it to their advantage. Pride. (*Pause.*) I suspect that what we perceive as a bold ride for the student body they perceive as gratuitous pandering to patriarchal oppression.

Simon: (*He takes a drink.*) Maybe we should avert our eyes.

Tom: You're kidding? And miss the spectacle? We'd be forced to rely on secondhand accounts, which pale beside actual experience. I'm sure, for some of them, protesting is just an excuse to get an eyeful.

Simon (*baiting*): What do you say we conduct an experiment, gather visual data for a paper to be written later at an undetermined date.

Tom: You've got something there.

Simon: I'm kidding.

Tom (*inspired, backhands Simon's shoulder*): No, it's a vision. A thesis concerning God's gift, bone of our bone, the female anatomy, and various reactions to its exposure and exploitation. A subject has already volunteered. No arm twisting. We need only stand by with our clipboards and mechanical pencils. Neutral observers. (*He raises his bottle.*) To visual data.

Simon: (*Simon raises his bottle reluctantly, and they clink them together.*) To undetermined dates. (*Each takes a drink.*)

Tom (*fired up*): A woman's anatomy is a blessed sight to observe. I can't imagine ever tiring of the view.

Simon: They say gynecologists do.

Tom: Who says?

Simon: Gynecologists.

Tom: Don't be absurd. They're forced to make comments like that to ease patients' minds. They may become weary of the blue-haired ones or the corpulent ones, not of the others. No straight man does.

Simon: What about female gynecologists?

Tom: You can bet the lesbians among them don't.

Simon: How lucky you are to be so cocksure.

Tom: (*He nods and takes a drink.*) All men, on the other hand, are ugly naked, regardless of condition. Dried-up tobacco pouches. Turkey necks. Hairy crevice tools.

Simon: (*He takes a drink.*) Let's return to women.

Tom: Imagine what an eavesdropper would be thinking right now, that we're homophobic, our machismo an obvious facade to our rosy interiors.

Simon: (*He looks over both his shoulders.*) Speak for yourself.

Tom (*looking down right*): I wonder how long her hair is.

Simon: (*He licks his middle fingertip and holds it up, twisting his hand about.*) There's a bit of a breeze out of the southwest.

Man in crowd (*yells from somewhere below*): Up yours.

Tom: (*Simon retracts his hand, shrugs his shoulders and smiles. Tom leans over the railing and flips the bird, yells.*) Same to you, buddy. (*turning to Simon*) What's his problem? (*He takes a drink.*)

Simon: (*He takes a drink.*) I couldn't say.

Tom: Where do they come from, Simon?

Simon: At least we've been noticed.

Tom: You think she'll look this way?

Simon (*looking Tom up and down*): I doubt she'll look like that.

Tom: (*He strikes a feminine pose, smiles, then looks down right.*) Some sort of pixie-do is too much to wish for I suppose.

Simon: Never know. Short is fashionable. Anyway, what are the odds it's past her waist?

Tom: About a thousand to one. There's some comfort in that. (*Pause.*) Of course there are wigs.

Simon (*running a hand through his hair*): True.

Tom: If she does have short hair, maybe the agreement her husband made stipulates, No wigs.

Simon: It's getting too complicated. (*A phone rings, barely audible behind the sliding glass door.*)

Tom (*turning towards the door*): Was that? . . . (*The phone rings again and keeps ringing. He palms Simon's bottlecap from the railing.*) We'll flip for it.

Simon: (*Tom flips the cap. Simon calls it in the air.*) Heads. (*Simon tries to snatch it midair with his left hand, misses, the cap bounces and rolls beneath the railing. They look over the side of the balcony, then at each other.*)

Tom: You could never catch a fly ball either.

Simon: But I could swing a bat. (*He holds his arms up like a batter, then glances over the railing.*) It would've been heads.

Tom: I'm supposed to accept that?

Simon: What are the odds?

Tom: (*He looks over the side of the balcony, then at the door.*) All right, I'll get it. Must be Matt or Joe. (*handing Simon the binoculars*) Come and get me if she shows. (*He exits, beer in hand, through the door, leaving it open a few inches.*)

Simon: (*The phone stops ringing. He sets his beer on the railing and looks through the binoculars, focusing while he looks. He lowers the binoculars and leans against the railing.*) The vestibule is overcrowded. If nothing else, we've learned to recognize a media opportunity. (*He begins to pace back and forth.*) Tailgate parties. Toga parties. Political parties. Press hounds. Academics. Paramedics. Paralegals. Single mothers. Single swingers. Carpenters. Con artists. Headhunters. Humbert Humberts. Secretaries. Civil servants. Engineers. Cheerleaders. Lotus-eaters. Proofreaders. And Prufrocks. Women come and go talking of (*emphatically*) Fabio. (*He picks up his beer.*) The age demanded an image with long hair. (*He takes a drink, sets it back on the railing.*) Was it for this? Once again there's a stir in the stable. Saint, succubus, succubus? Who can say? (*He leans over, his elbows on the railing. He turns the binoculars over a couple times in his outstretched hands.*) Here we are. Busy waiting. Watching and consuming. Each of us with pieces missing. Dying to be part of something bigger than life. A sea of camcorders and instant cameras. Desperate to capture the present as it passes to have something to look forward to. (*He opens his mouth wide.*) We're hungry. Feed us images. (*He dangles the binoculars by the strap, from his index finger, rocking them back and forth. He stops and looks around briefly.*) The hotdog vendors are delirious. (*He glances at the door.*) Tom would be quick to point out the phallic implications of all those telephoto lenses and foot-long dogs. Seems we're nothing if not fully erect. Oh well. (*He walks over to the spool with the binoculars. He stares at the coals a moment, then looks at them through the binoculars, sets them down and staggers backwards.*) Hell's seventh circle awaits. (*He opens the bag of briquettes, takes one out, then picks up the binoculars.*) Might as well burn. Be entertained. (*He rubs the briquette around the edges of the binoculars' eyepieces, looking over at the door from time to time. He looks up through the binoculars, being careful to hold them away from his eyes. He blows on one lens, looks up again, rubs the lens with his T-shirt, looks up again, then sets the binoculars on the spool, smiles and*

drops the briquette back in the bag. He returns to the railing and takes a drink of beer.)
When they broadcast this, I wonder if it'll have a laughtrack.

Tom returns with a laptop under one arm and beer in hand, walks over to the railing and looks around.

Tom: That was Joe and Natalie, calling from the carphone. They're having trouble finding a place to park. *(looking down left, then right)* I've got to get this on disk before it escapes me. *(He goes to the spool and sets the laptop down, finishes his beer, then stands the bottle on the balcony, to the right of the cooler.)*

Simon: How did we ever get by without laptops and carphones?

Tom: Like primates. *(He scrutinizes the coals.)* The coals are ready.

Simon *(cupping his hands to his mouth)*: Cue Dido.

Tom: You're beginning to worry me. Be back in a minute.

Tom goes back inside. Simon finishes his beer, walks over and stands it on the cooler. He returns to the railing, stopping briefly to admire the feeder. Tom returns with a large plastic bag and a pair of tongs. He sets the tongs on the spool.

Simon: What's all that?

Tom: Buffalo wings.

Simon: I didn't realize they had them.

Tom: Costco. *(holding the bag up)* Ten-pound bags. Preseasoned. Precooked. *(setting the bag on the stool)* Convenient for barbecues, sacrifices, and other festive occasions. *(He tears open the bag, dumps a pile on the hibachi, sets the bag on the table, and distributes the wings evenly over the grill with the tongs.)* Seared to perfection in just minutes.

Simon: They're so small.

Tom: That's why the species is nearly extinct.

Simon: That and pioneers taking potshots from the windows of westbound trains.

Tom: Natural selection. *(looking at the wings)* They're going to brown too fast. *(He raises the grill with the tongs.)* That's better.

Simon: Is this another of your capitalistic schemes?

Tom (*poking at the wings with the tongs*): No. But it would be profitable, wouldn't it? Five wings for three bucks.

Simon (*putting his index finger to his lips*): Shhh, you can almost hear the hotdog vendors' sighs of relief.

Tom: (*He notices Simon's bottle on the cooler, places it to the right of the cooler.*) Notice that I've designated this spot for the garbage.

Simon: Wherever.

Tom opens his laptop and turns it on. He returns to the railing, taking the binoculars with him.

Tom: (*He raises the binoculars, but stops just short of pressing them against his eyes.*) Wonder what became of Matt. (*Simon shrugs. Tom raises the binoculars again, but stops.*) He could call.

Simon: Maybe there's no phone around.

Tom: Is that possible? (*He raises the binoculars, but stops.*) It's just rude otherwise.

Simon: In general, I'd say people are way too easily offended these days.

Tom (*turning towards the hibachi and motioning with his hand*): Well one has to consider the number of guests when arranging a soirée like this. (*He raises the binoculars, refocuses and canvasses the crowd. His eyes become ringed with charcoal. He points off to the left and back.*) Hmm, that bald guy on the grassy knoll looks suspicious, doesn't he? You see him?

Simon (*looking left and back*): Not entirely.

Tom (*offering the binoculars*): Here.

Simon (*fending him off with his hand*): No thanks.

Tom (*offering again*): Go ahead. Take a look. Some conspiracy's afoot.

Simon (*again fending him off*): No. Really. I'd rather be kept in the dark.

Tom: (*He looks through the binoculars, left and back, then off right, points.*) There's a nun with a *Go Diva Go* sign, going toe-to-toe with the sandwich-board guy. You see that? (*He offers the binoculars.*)

Simon (*fending him off, looking off right*): No thanks. I see her. She looks madder than Grendel's mother. (*Pause.*) Life's simpler when you have a cause, isn't it?

Tom: So find one. (*He looks down left.*) The feminists are getting antsy. (*yells*) Stone Godiva. (*He points.*) That got their attention. (*offering the binoculars*) Here, you've got to see their expressions. They look like crank fiends.

Simon (*fending him off*): Another subculture visited. (*looking down left*) Why do you assume they're feminists? or that they're angry with Godiva for that matter?

Tom: Who else would give a damn? (*pointing down left*) Look at those faces. I see anger. Whether it's towards Godiva or her old man or mankind in general, who knows? Whatever they are, my guess is they'd love to see her fall on her ass, especially if she's beautiful. It's there. See for yourself. (*offering the binoculars again*) Sure you don't want them?

Simon (*fending him off again*): Sure.

Tom: You're becoming a bore.

Tom goes to the spool, sets the binoculars down, and turns the wings with the tongs.

Simon (*leaning back against the railing, watching Tom*): It's nice to hear that I'm becoming.

Tom (*snapping the tongs open and shut*): Don't willfully misconstrue.

Simon: Meanings tend to get lost amidst such hoopla.

Tom: (*He goes to the laptop, half-stands half-sits on the stool. He pulls the laptop to the edge of the spool, stares at the screen a moment, then begins typing.*) There are no meanings, only interpretations of data.

Simon: That says mountains.

The doorbell rings. They look at the door, then at each other. The bell rings several times, as though someone is playing with it.

Simon: Joe.

Tom (*looking up briefly*): Your turn.

Simon (*exiting*): Notice how I go quietly.

Tom: Not quietly enough. *(He continues to enter data, sings.)* One of our submarines . . . *(He whistles.)* One of our submarines is missing . . . *(He whistles, repeats himself.)*

Natalie and Joe enter, then Simon. Natalie is carrying a large bag of potato chips. She's wearing tight cutoffs, a blouse tied in a knot below her breasts, and hiking boots. Joe has on faded jeans, a tank top, and sneakers.

Tom *(bent over the laptop)*: Be with you in a minute.

Joe *(looking at the grill)*: What's for lunch?

Tom and Simon: Buffalo.

Joe: Smells like chicken.

Tom stands up, bends over and hugs Natalie awkwardly, trying to avoid crushing the chips. She gives Joe an inquiring glance over Tom's shoulder.

Tom *(offering Joe his hand)*: I'm glad you guys could make it.

Joe: *(He shakes hands, steps back and scratches his chin.)* I give up. Alice Cooper? Tammy Faye Baker?

Tom: What?

Simon: The Hamburglar.

Tom *(glaring at Simon)*: What? *(He tries to catch his reflection in the glass, then moves closer to the glass.)*

Joe *(to Tom)*: You should have Nat help you with your eyeliner. Hers is perfect.

Natalie *(kissing Joe on the cheek)*: Don't start bragging about me already. *(to Tom, sympathetically)* I could give you a few pointers.

Tom *(fingering the rings on his eyes)*: What? *(turning to Simon)* All right, mama's boy. *(He goes and looks at the binoculars, firmly presses one eyepiece to each palm. Holding his marked hands out, he pursues Simon, who has cowered behind Natalie and Joe. Joe quickly distances himself from Simon. Natalie attempts to conceal Simon.)*

Joe: I'd make him pay, Tom.

Tom: Oh, he will. *(headfaking Natalie, threatening to stain her with the rings on his hands)* This isn't your cause.

Natalie (*enjoying herself, fending him off*): What is? (*holding the chips out in front of her*) You don't scare me.

Tom (*signaling with his hands, to Simon*): It's inevitable. (*He moves left, Simon right.*) Ear mite.

Simon: Head louse.

Tom: (*He moves right, Simon left.*) Bed wetter.

Simon: Android.

Tom: (*He moves left, Simon right.*) Bluestocking.

Simon: Laputan.

Natalie: Come on you guys.

Simon steps from behind Natalie.

Joe (*to Natalie, pulling her aside*): Stay out of this, Nat.

Natalie (*struggling loose from Joe's grip*): I'm a big girl. (*She sets the chips on the spool.*)

Simon (*submitting to Tom*): Go on and humiliate me. Remake me in your image.

Natalie (*opening the chips*): Is there a bowl for these?

Tom (*to Simon*): Bring me a stretching rack, and I will. (*to Natalie*) Don't bother. (*He repeatedly presses his palms to Simon's forehead and cheeks.*) There, at least your visibility's improved.

Simon: The power of the visible is the invisible. Figures, a woman had to point it out to us.

Tom (*slapping Simon on the back of the head, offended*): To think I treated you as an equal.

Simon: When?

Tom: No more, Tattoo.

Simon: Procrustes.

Tom wipes his eyes on the backs of his arms, then goes to the laptop, half-stands half-sits on the stool, enters data.

Joe: That's it? A little sissy name calling and a slap on the head?

Simon (*to Tom*): Joe would have you exact *wergild*.

Joe: If that means I'd bloody your mouth, you're right.

Natalie: Is anyone watching the buffalo?

Tom (*leaping up*): Christ. I forgot. (*turning the wings with the tongs*) These are ready. (*to Simon*) Go get me some paper towels.

Simon (*exiting*): Notice how I go obediently.

Joe: Who cares? Just go.

Tom (*pushing the wings into a stack at one end of the hibachi*): Have you heard from Matt or Margaret? They're s'posed to be here. They're bringing the bread.

Joe: It's been ages.

Natalie: Last time we saw them was over a month ago when we helped them move.

Joe: They're probably still mad at me for dinging the edge of the coffee table. (*He grabs a couple wings.*)

Simon returns with a roll of towels and a wad of wet towels.

Simon: Here. (*He sets the roll on the spool and wipes his face with the wad. Tom rips two towels from the roll and folds them.*)

Tom (*scraping the pile of wings off the grill onto the folded towels*): They are a bit anal.

Natalie picks up the books and the folder from the lounge chair and stacks them on the balcony.

Joe (*holding up the remains of a wing*): Good stuff.

Natalie (*pointing to the bag of wings on the spool*): They have those big bags of 'em at Costco. Real cheap.

Simon: Who's anal? *(He offers Tom the wad of wet towels. Tom wipes his eyes.)*

Joe: Don't get all pinched up. *(He tosses his bones off the balcony.)*

Tom: We were talking about Matt and Margaret. *(He drops the wad of wet towels in the garbage, then dumps another pile of wings on the grill and distributes them evenly with the tongs.)* Serve yourselves. Beer's in the cooler. *(He looks around.)* Joe, where're your bones?

Joe *(hitching with his thumb)*: Threw them to an old bum on the street down there.

Simon: That would be Gogo.

Joe: If you say so.

Tom *(pointing to the right of the cooler)*: From now on just toss the bones and stuff over there.

All four eat and drink casually as the scene plays out. Tom grabs a couple wings, some chips, a towel, and a beer, then goes to his laptop. He remains bent over his laptop entering data, looking up from time to time, joining the conversation. Joe gets two beers from the cooler, tosses the caps to the right of the cooler, and sets a beer on the spool for Natalie.

Natalie: Thanks, hon.

Joe grabs another wing, a handful of chips, and goes to the railing. Natalie drops a couple wings in a towel with some chips and hands it to Simon.

Simon: Thank you.

Natalie: *(She drops a couple wings in a towel with some chips for herself.)* They're not all that bad.

Joe *(holding a wing up)*: I said they were good. What do you want?

Natalie: Matt and Margaret. They're a little fussy, but I'd still like to see them. *(She takes her food and beer and sits in the lounge chair, sets the bottle next to the books.)*

Simon: I find them refined. A little *too* at times I guess. *(He gets a beer, drops the cap in the garbage, and goes to the railing.)*

Joe *(looking down left, then right)*: So when's the naked lady supposed to ride by?

Tom: Any minute now. *(He takes a drink.)* I'll check. *(He brings up the time on the*

laptop.)

Joe sets his beer on the railing, goes and looks over Tom's shoulder at the laptop.

Tom (*reading the clock*): Ten to twelve. (*turning around*) Don't stand there. Go keep an eye out. I don't trust Simon.

Joe (*looking at Simon*): Tomboys don't care much about naked women.

Simon (*scraping the balcony floor with his foot, as if the foot were a hoof*): Goatboys don't care much about anything but naked women.

Natalie: Will you guys stop? You're always going at each other.

Tom: It's the nature of our relationship.

Joe reaches around Tom and punches a key, wing bones in hand.

Tom: Don't mess around. It's not a remote.

Joe: What are you afraid of? (*He tosses the bones in the garbage, wipes his hands on his jeans, returns to the railing, and takes a drink.*)

Tom: You have no grasp of technology.

Simon: (*He balls the bones up in the napkin, rears back and throws them off the balcony as far as he can. Tom is looking at the laptop at the time. Joe and Natalie smile conspiratorially.*) Man's reach should exceed his grasp of technology.

Tom: It's the last frontier.

Natalie: I'm learning Framemaker.

Tom: That'll come in handy.

Simon: Art still has its pioneers. If Godiva's for real, maybe one or two will be able to study here.

Tom: Come on, art's been in bed with technology for years. Take photography. Cameras have been around for a hundred and fifty years. Or cinema. Nearly every movie made nowadays relies on computer graphics. Not to mention the technology involved in the process of making a film and projecting it on a screen. As for music, synthesizers can match a philharmonic note for note.

Simon: Never. (*He takes a drink.*) As usual, you've missed the point. You're talking about tools, not art itself or the creative, imaginative force behind the tools.

Beer in hand, Joe goes and grabs a few wings.

Natalie: Who's in bed with who?

Joe (*offering a wing to Natalie as he sits on the edge of the lounge chair with her*): Art and Godiva. I think he's got his tool out.

Natalie (*accepting the wing*): Art's her husband?

Simon: I'm not saying art and technology are incompatible. But you've got to admit, microchips and superconductors have little to offer the soul.

Tom: Get off your high horse. They afford us the leisure time to pursue the arts in the first place.

Simon: Technology's made us dependents. Ever been in a store when the electricity goes out? You're lucky if someone can write you a receipt or even sell you the merchandise and make change.

Tom: Can't blame that on technology.

Joe (*to Simon*): You ask me, you're making a big deal out of nothing. You use automatic tellers, don't you? (*Simon rolls his eyes.*) Are we supposed to go backwards?

Simon: Forward, looking backwards.

Natalie: We'd always be bumping into something.

Simon (*emphatically*): Exactly.

Natalie (*with reservations*): OK. (*Pause. Joe shakes his head, and Tom looks away.*) Someone tell me this. What kind of husband makes his wife ride around naked in public?

Joe: A horny old one. Probably be the first time he's seen her naked.

Tom: We don't know for sure that he's forcing her. (*He takes a drink, turns to Joe.*) You wouldn't allow Natalie to expose herself?

Joe (*looking at Natalie*): I suppose if the price was right.

Tom (*to Natalie*): Would you do it for \$50,000?

Natalie (*folding her arms across her chest*): I don't know. That's a hard one. (*She reaches for her beer, takes a drink, sets it back down.*) Not on a horse. And not for any school. But maybe for myself. (*looking at Joe*) Why not? A body's a body. We all know more or less what we look like. It'd make a nice downpayment on a house.

Tom: Hefner, Guccione, they couldn't have put it better.

Natalie: If Godiva's really doing this just for other people, which is hard to believe these days . . .

Tom (*interrupting*): Any days.

Natalie: (*She acknowledges Tom's remark, continues.*) . . . then she's better than me.

Simon: Not better necessarily. Maybe more selfless. More so than us all.

Joe: If Godiva's lucky she'll get a spread in *Playboy* or *Penthouse*.

Simon: I can just see it now, a tasteful tribute to nude coeds dedicated to the arts.

Natalie: Nudity's not such a big deal anymore. Even Meryl Streep flashed her boobs in *Silkwood*.

Tom: Mary Poppins flashed hers in *Victor/Victoria*.

Joe (*to Tom*): Remember the scene in *Trading Places* where Jamie Lee Curtis pulls her sweatshirt over her head?

Tom (*excited*): OFDs. Onboard floatation devices. Remember Uma Thurman in *Dangerous Liaisons*?

Joe (*looks at Natalie for agreement*): We didn't see that one. What about Tom Hanks' ex-girlfriend in *Bachelor Party*?

Natalie: Mel Gibson's got a cute butt for a guy his age.

Joe (*to Natalie*): You noticed, huh?

Tom: Sharon Stone, *Basic Instinct*. Ice pick aside, she had the right idea. Flaunt your sexuality. Use it as a weapon, a means to an end. Men are going to ogle you anyway, why not blind them with it?

Simon: No ideas but in things from movies?

Tom (to Joe and Natalie): Did you see *The Crying Game*? (They shake their heads, No.) That'll turn your head.

Simon: Suddenly Tom's squeamish.

Natalie: (She takes a drink.) Would you guys do it?

Tom: What? (He takes a drink.)

Joe: (He takes a drink.) With who?

Natalie: Strut your . . . you know.

Tom: Our *Guns of Navarone*.

Joe: Our *Mules for Sister Sara*.

Natalie: Your *Incredible Mr. Limpets*.

Joe: Simon wouldn't. He used to wear his swim trunks in the shower.

Natalie (to Simon): Are you Catholic or something?

Simon: (He takes a drink and sets his beer on the railing.) Something. (He looks off right and shoves his hands deep in his pockets.)

Tom: Joe used to carry a pocket mirror around with him in junior high.

Natalie (looking at Joe): What's this?

Joe: Nothing.

Simon: He'd walk up to a group of girls and pretend he needed to tie his shoes. He'd palm the mirror and try to see up their dresses.

Natalie (swatting Joe on the shoulder): How pathetic. (She sets her beer down and gets up from the lounge chair with a napkin full of bones.) Did you ever see anything? (She goes around the balcony, collecting bones and towels, then drops them in the garbage.)

Joe: Hair. Once.

Tom: He swears he saw Judy Weisenberger's rug. There was a rumor around school that she didn't wear underwear because of recurring yeast infections.

Natalie: I've heard enough. (*seriously, to Joe*) I better not catch you with any mirrors.

Joe: I'm beyond that now.

Simon: He's graduated to narcissism.

Natalie (*at the hibachi, turning the wings with the tongs*): Does anyone want anymore while I'm up?

Tom: I'll take a couple more. (*She gives him two from the cooked pile, in a towel with chips.*) Thanks.

Natalie: Simon?

Simon: None for me, thanks.

Joe (*holding up two fingers*): Two more over here. (*Natalie brings him two in a towel with chips, sits down.*) Maybe I used to carry a mirror, but Tom used to be a crosswalk guard.

Simon: That's right. (*He takes a drink.*) He had a whistle and wore a white belt with a shoulder strap. Wrote you a ticket if you tried to cross in traffic.

Natalie: Sounds like Tom. (*She takes a drink, sets her beer down.*)

Tom: The ungrateful little snots gave me shit every day. I enjoyed writing them up.

Simon (*good-humoredly*): Corrupted by power way back then.

Tom (*to Joe*): By the way, didn't I tell you to keep an eye out?

Joe (*raising his chin to indicate Simon*): Tomboy's got it covered.

Simon: Didn't you two get your money's worth at Enigmas last week?

Tom (*to Joe*): Remember that redhead? Red all over. (*He takes a drink.*) Freckles in the right places.

Natalie: Enigmas. Isn't that a strip joint?

Simon: What gave it away?

Joe (*Still sitting, he makes like he's going to throw his napkin full of bones at Simon, looks at Tom, then tosses them into the garbage.*) Thanks, Sim.

Natalie (*to Joe*): You were at Enigmas last week? when?

Joe (*looking sheepish*): Thursday.

Natalie: You said you were playing pool. (*She throws her napkin and bones at him.*)

Joe: I was.

Tom: Pocketpool.

Joe: (*He gives Tom a dirty look, turns to Natalie.*) We went afterwards. Just for a drink.

Natalie: A drink. Dammit. Can't you be honest just once.

Joe: Don't make an issue out of it.

Natalie: An issue. You had a fit when I mentioned having a stripper at Tara's bridal shower. You said it was sleazy.

Joe: That was different.

Simon: How exactly?

Natalie: (*She looks at Simon, then Joe.*) How exactly?

Joe (*pointing at Simon*): Stay out of this. You've caused enough trouble already. (*to Natalie*) It wasn't in someone's living room. (*He collects the napkin and bones Natalie threw, gets up, drops them in the garbage, and goes to the railing with his beer.*)

Natalie: So a living room is more unwholesome than some dingy bar where women lapdance for dollar bills?

Tom: Twenties, to be exact. (*He takes a drink.*) It wasn't dingy.

Natalie: Did you take your mirror?

Joe: Drop it already. You know I love your body.

Natalie: Too late.

Joe: Nat, you've got a great body. Doesn't she? you guys.

Natalie (*embarrassed*): Stop. (*She stands, picks up Tom's napkin and bones on the spool, puts them in the garbage, goes to the hibachi and scrapes the wings off with the tongs.*)

Joe: Really, you do.

Natalie: (*She stops scraping.*) Stop. (*She continues scraping.*)

Simon: She's got more than that.

Natalie: (*She stops scraping, turns to Simon.*) Thank you, Simon. From you that means something. (*She continues to scrape.*)

Tom: I'd spank you any day of the week.

Simon: Now there's a compliment.

Joe: Dance for us, hon.

Natalie: (*She sashays over with the tongs behind her back, grabs Joe by the ear with them.*) Say you're sorry.

Joe (*half-heartedly*): I'm sorry. (*She twists his ear.*) I'm sorry. (*She let's go.*) What's wrong with asking for a dance? (*She grabs his ear again.*) All right, all right. (*She let's go.*)

Joe (*cupping his ear, whiny*): My ear rings. (*Tom and Simon exchange looks.*)

Natalie (*looking at the crowd, waving the tongs about*): I should warn Godiva about the pigs around here.

Simon: Can't blame Circe this time.

Tom: Save your sympathy. Godiva's counting on us being here. After all, we're the ones being exploited. Just like at Enigma's. They work our wallets and then expect us to be ashamed.

Simon (*raising his bottle*): May it rain dollar bills. (*He takes a drink.*)

Natalie returns to the lounge chair and sets the tongs on top of the books. She takes a drink, sets the beer down. Tom gets up and rolls up the bag of wings.

Tom (*considering the pile of wings, to no one in particular*): This should be enough to feed Matt and Margaret if they show. Don't you think?

Natalie: Plenty. I don't think they eat meat any more.

Tom: Since when?

Natalie: I don't know. Since they became serious about each other.

Joe: That's too serious.

Simon: Maybe theirs is a vegetable love.

Tom *(to Simon)*: You're unremitting. If it's not literary allusions it's holistic puns. *(Simon smiles. Tom grabs his beer, goes to the railing, sets the beer on the railing, and stands between Simon and Joe. He places his palms together, extends his hands as if praying, and challenges Joe and Simon.)* How 'bout a quick bout to pass the time?

Joe: *(He sets his beer on the railing, places his hands at his sides and squares off with Tom.)* You're dead meat.

Tom: Not yet.

Natalie: Not that stupid game.

Joe: *(He fakes with his left hand, fakes again, slaps at Tom's hands with his right, hits them.)* That hurt. Admit it.

Tom: Nothing. I felt nothing.

Tom and Joe take turns slapping at each other's hands. Simon sets his beer on the railing and goes over to Natalie. He tweaks the feeder.

Natalie *(looking up at the feeder)*: Do you get many takers?

Simon: Not many.

Tom *(to Joe)*: Aah, you missed. My turn. *(to Natalie)* Keep an eye out, Natalie. You're in a military zone.

Simon *(to Natalie)*: Don't worry, Tom's the primary target. *(Simon leans back against the railing. As he stretches his hands out along the railing he nearly knocks the box of birdseed off.)* I'm such a doofus. *(He slides the birdseed farther away.)*

Natalie: My parents have a hummingbird feeder in the backyard. One bird, with green markings on its breast, keeps coming back. At least I think it's the same bird. I love to watch it hovering there, its little wings a blur.

Joe: *(Tom misses.)* See. I'm too fast for you. Put 'em out. *(He glances at Natalie.)*

Simon (*staring at the feeder*): There's something reassuring about them. (*leaning back against the railing*) It sounds silly, but it's nice to know they have someplace to go.

Tom: To go is right. Chirp and crap. That's all they do. (*to Joe*) Missed.

Joe: No I didn't. I got your thumbs.

Tom: My thumbs? That's weak.

Joe: Put 'em out. (*He glances at Natalie. Joe and Tom take drinks, then set their beers back on the railing and face off.*)

Natalie (*to Simon*): Are you seeing anyone? (*She takes a drink and holds the beer in her hand, picking at the label. She rolls the label up and flicks it in the garbage.*)

Simon: Not right now.

Joe (*to Natalie*): He's in-between right now. (*to Simon*) Aren't you, tomboy?

Tom (*to Joe*): That's a clean miss.

Natalie: (*She sets her beer down.*) I have a friend . . .

Joe (*interrupting*): He's not interested.

Simon: I'm not disinterested. I'm . . . (*distracted by Tom's antics*)

Tom: (*He slaps wildly with his right hand and backhands two of the beers off the railing with his left hand.*) Damn. (*Tom and Joe look over the side.*) Nobody's hurt.

Natalie: You're lucky.

Joe: Waste of beer. (*pointing at the remaining beer*) Is that yours, Sim?

Simon: I think so. (*baiting*) You can finish it.

Joe: I don't think so. (*to Tom*) My turn. Put 'em out. (*He glances at Natalie.*)

Tom: I'm slapped out. (*He looks around.*) Simon, show us how quick you are. You used to slap both of us around.

Natalie: Why don't you guys just relax for a while? Have something to eat.

Simon (*to Tom*): Maybe later.

Tom (to Simon): Poultry. *(He finishes Simon's beer, goes and puts it in the garbage, then goes to the laptop, enters data.)*

Joe (to Simon): Come on. I know you're dying to hit me.

Simon: *(He leans back against the railing, gripping it with both hands.)* It wouldn't change anything.

Joe: *(He goes and stands on the opposite side of the lounge chair, Natalie between them.)* What's to change?

Natalie *(patting the chair)*: Sit with me, hon.

Joe: As soon as we're finished. *(waving Simon on)* Let's go. *(Neither one moves.)*

Tom *(turning around, instigating)*: Someone pull your plugs?

Simon: *(He walks behind the chair, stands with his back to the glass, and holds his hands out.)* All right. You serve.

Joe *(holding his hands out)*: Ladies first.

Tom: Nobody's watching for Godiva. We're going to miss her.

Natalie: Maybe you'll see her at Enigmas some time. *(She takes a drink, sets her beer down.)*

Joe glances at Natalie. Simon slaps Joe's hands.

Joe: Sneaky. That's the spirit.

Natalie: Please, you guys.

Joe *(taunting, holding his hands out)*: Try again.

Simon slaps again, hits again.

Tom: He hasn't lost a nanosecond.

Joe *(holding his hands out, still confident)*: Go ahead, tomboy.

Natalie: You're asking for it, hon.

Simon slaps again, hits again.

Simon (*purposely pretentious*): My apologies. Forty, love.

Joe (*holding his hands out, fidgeting*): You'll get yours.

Tom: Hasn't he already?

Simon slaps again, hits again.

Simon: My arm's getting tired.

Natalie (*to Joe*): Why don't you take a breather?

Joe (*holding his hands out, reluctantly*): Payback's a bitch.

Simon slaps again, hits again.

Simon (*reveling*): It's too easy. He's retarded.

Joe slugs Simon in the side of the head. Simon stumbles backwards and falls in the garbage by the cooler, knocking over bottles. He lies in the bones, napkins, and bottle caps. Tom and Natalie jump up and go to Simon. Joe goes to the right corner of the railing.

Tom (*gently shaking Simon*): Wake up, Simon. Wake up.

Natalie: (*She puts her hand on Simon's forehead, then bends to hear his breathing.*)
Simon?

Simon. (*glaring at Joe*) You thug. How could you?

Joe looks away, looks back.

Tom (*to Joe*): Cheap shot. (*patting Simon on the shoulder*) He's just a runt. (*to Simon, coming around*) There you are. (*helping him sit up*) Back from a dream. Trapped in a video game.

Joe (*out of the side of his mouth*): Mortal Kombat. (*Tom and Natalie shoot him a dirty look.*)

Natalie (*caressing Simon's head*): Are you all right? (*Simon nods.*) All there?

Simon (*shaking his head*): I imagine so.

Tom (*brushing the bottle caps off his back*): You're still a bit loopy.

Simon (*He brushes the bones and napkins off of himself, looks around in a daze.*) I'm back where all the ladders start. (*Tom and Natalie exchange looks. Simon tries to stand.*)

Natalie (*preventing Simon from rising*): Wait a minute. Your legs are still rubbery.

Tom (*patting Simon's shoulder*): You're not fit to climb anything just yet.

Simon (*still loopy, looking at the feeder*): I thought I heard birds.

Tom: You probably did.

Simon (*shrugging it off, standing with the help of Tom and Natalie*): Maybe I dreamed them. It was beautiful.

Joe *scuffs over, holding his hand out sheepishly. He steps on a bone, slips, nearly falls. He kicks it towards the cooler. Tom and Natalie use their feet to sweep the caps, napkins, and bones into the garbage by the cooler.*

Joe (*shaking hands*): Sorry. You know I'm a poor loser.

Simon (*grimacing, but forgiving*): I'll say this much, you punch like Billy Budd.

Tom (*patting Simon on the back*): He's back.

Joe (*to Simon*): Is he a welterweight?

Natalie (*putting her arms around Joe and Simon*): We've had enough sparring for one day.

Simon (*rubbing his head, to Tom*): Remind me not to provoke or to be provoked again. I'm not built for it.

Joe (*to Simon*): Remember when that girl slapped you at Friday's?

Natalie (*locking her arm in Joe's, steering him away from Simon*): Accuse us of eating and running, but I think this is a good time to go walk around, check out the crowd. (*She nudges Joe.*)

Tom: (*He picks up the binoculars and goes to the railing.*) There's no reason to go. You can see everything from here. (*He rubs the eyepieces, inspects his fingertips, focuses, then canvasses the crowd.*)

Joe (*holding his ground, to Natalie*): Simon called her your least favorite word.

Tom (*turning around quickly, joking*): Smegma?

Natalie: (*She looks blankly at Tom, then turns to Joe.*) Cellulite?

Simon (*to Joe*): I see what you're getting at. (*thinking it through*) That began innocently enough too. Escalated. Next thing you know. (*He jerks his head sideways as if he'd just taken a blow.*)

Natalie: Now I'm curious.

Simon: (*He sits on the stool.*) We were sitting at the bar. (*looking at Tom then Joe*) I don't think Matt was there.

Joe: Don't remember.

Tom: I don't recall. Wait. He was. No. Nevermind, that was another time.

Simon: Anyway. We were drunk.

Joe: You were.

Simon: I was. Joe and I were arguing about something as usual, when this girl leans between us to order drinks for her and her friends. She had long hair, and it nearly spilled into my drink. I said, Watch it, just messing with her for the fun of it.

Tom (*leaning back against the railing*): She was cute. A bug.

Natalie (*to Joe*): Don't you have an opinion you want to share?

Joe: I've learned my lesson.

Simon (*to Natalie*): You sure you want to hear this?

Natalie: All ears.

Simon: She seemed to have a good sense of humor. She smiled, flipped her hair over her shoulder, said, *You watch it*. For the sake of argumentation, I guess, or to pass time, we started in on each other. She called me a lush; I called her a barfly. She called me a nerd; I called her a cheerleader. Your typical sophomoric banter. I can't remember everything we said, only that the name-calling gradually got nastier. The bar was crowded, and their drinks were taking forever. She called me blueballs; I called her couchqueen. By the time the drinks arrived, things had turned mean. She paid for the drinks, then threw one last

spear. She called me minnowdick, and I just blurted out the c word.

Natalie (*aghast*): Simon. (*She snickers, puts her hand over her mouth.*)

Joe: Her face went all pale and offended. Then she slapped him good.

Tom: You could hear it above the racket in there. (*He claps his hands together.*) The whole bar shut down for a few seconds. Everyone staring at Simon.

Natalie: Wow.

Simon: (*He lifts his arms and locks his hands behind his head, elbows out.*) That was that. She left in a huff. The rest of the night her and her girlfriends pointed me out to people and made disturbing faces.

Natalie: Why didn't you leave?

Tom: Man's got to stand his ground.

Natalie (*exasperated*): Brother. (*to Joe*) By the way, that's not my least favorite word. It depends on how it's used. In a bar, talking to a stranger, it's disgusting. But in bed, you know, when you're dirtytalking, it can be kind of a turn-on. (*She covers her face with both hands for a second, drops them, then puts an arm around Joe.*) Now I'm embarrassed.

Joe (*to Natalie*): I'm aroused suddenly. (*He whispers in her ear; only a few words are audible.*) . . . skirt . . . coffee table . . . mirror . . . (*Natalie snickers, leans into Joe affectionately.*)

Natalie: Time to go.

Tom: (*He goes to the spool, sets his binoculars down, and rolls up the bag of chips.*) Want to take these? (*Natalie and Joe shake their heads, No.*)

Natalie hugs Tom, then Simon.

Natalie: Thanks for the buffalo.

Joe (*shaking Tom's hand*): And the beer. (*He pats Simon on the side of the head.*) No harm done?

Simon: Words have hurt me worse. (*Joe gives him a shove. Natalie tugs at Joe.*)

Natalie: Say hello to Matt and Margaret for us. Tell them we're sorry we missed them.

Tom: We will. If they show.

Joe and Natalie (*exiting, with little waves*): See you later.

Tom and Simon follow them through the door. Quiet, except for their muffled good-byes. Then from the right, offstage, the roar of the crowd in the distance. Just as Simon and Tom return, the crowd roars again. Tom grabs his binoculars, and they rush to the railing.

Tom: She's coming. (*yells*) Blow wind blow.

Joe and Natalie appear below. Tom and Simon wave to them as they exit right. The crowd roars again. Tom looks through the binoculars down right.

Tom (*lowering the binoculars, disappointed*): I can't see her. (*He leans way out over the railing, stands up.*) See anything?

Simon: (*He leans way out over the railing, stands up.*) Same as you. Too many Yahoos in the street.

Tom: She'll never see us up here. (*Simon shrugs. The crowd roars again.*) We could yell until we're hoarse.

Simon: You could. If she's humiliated, she'll probably keep her head down anyway.

Tom: I hope she's defiant. Why be demure? even if she is humiliated. We won't know whether she's acting or not. Most people will assume she is. We're just oglers. What do we know? What difference does it make whether we think she's some kind of saint or a publicity whore?

Simon: Face it, you just want to see her naked flesh. And you want her to see you seeing her.

Tom (*looks down right*): I am facing it. (*He looks at Simon.*) What about you?

Simon: You've seen me naked.

Tom: Don't remind me. (*Pause.*) You want to see her too. Don't you?

Simon (*looking down right*): I want to see her ride. (*Pause.*) You could jump about, waving your arms. If she looks up, you may catch her eye. Of course you'd look like a fool.

Tom: I'll be her fool. (*The crowd roars again, nearer.*) I could hang from the balcony.

Simon: Isn't that a bit extreme? They'll refuse to bury you in sacred ground.

Tom: Hang by my feet. (*He lifts one foot, then the other, checking his loafers.*)

Simon: That'd be silly.

Tom: The sillier, the more apparent.

Simon: The more apparent, the more transparent.

Tom: So she sees through me.

Simon (*holding his hands out*): Do you want me to hold your feet?

Tom: You'd drop me.

Simon (*smiling*): You'd be noticed. The headlines would go something like: (*bracketing a headline with his hands*) Zealot Dives off Balcony at Nudist Rally. (*The crowd roars again.*)

Tom: (*He canvasses the balcony.*) Wait. I've got an idea. (*He goes and sets the binoculars on the spool. He grabs the roll of paper towels, comes back and hands it to Simon.*) Think of it as jumbo crepe paper. Costco style. (*swinging his arm as if pitching underhand*) Pitch it over the side . . .

Simon: (*Simon pitches the roll off the balcony, holding onto the end towel.*) Like this?

Tom: (*He looks over the balcony, following the string of towels with his eyes.*) I was going to say, as she passes by.

Simon (*humored, raising the end towel*): Do you want me to tie this off or something?

Tom: (*He swipes at the string of towels; it breaks and falls. Simon is left with just the end towel in his hand.*) Comic relief, that's all you are. (*The crowd roars again, very near. Tom looks down right.*) The street's finally clearing. Not much time. (*He canvasses the balcony.*) I've got it. (*He hurries and grabs the stool and the can of charcoal lighter, goes back, sets the can on the railing and stands the stool near the railing. He hurries and removes the grill from the hibachi, sets it on the spool, then carefully lifts the hibachi by the handles, goes and sets it on the stool. While Tom is getting the hibachi, Simon picks up the charcoal lighter.*) We'll fire up the Olympic torch.

Simon: There's genius in you when you're desperate.

Tom: (*The crowd roars below. Tom looks down right.*) Look. (*pointing*) A pig on a hog.

A cop on a Harley Davidson enters from the right. The motorcycle is outfitted with black saddle bags and a squawkbox. The cop stops, puts the kickstand down, straddles the bike, and grabs the squawkbox's handset.

Cop (*speaking into the handset*): May I Have your attention please. (*There is feedback*

from the squawkbox. The cop waits a moment.) Your attention please. (More feedback, the crowd boos. The cop fiddles with the handset's cord, taps the handset against his palm.)

Simon fidgets the can's cap open, drops the paper towel into the hibachi, and squirts charcoal lighter onto the coals. A huge flame bursts up, nearly scorching the balcony above. The cop looks up, notices the flame and glares at them.

Tom (to Simon): What are you doing? Not now. *(He tries to wrestle the can from Simon.)*

Cop (speaking into the handset): Good afternoon. *(More feedback, the cop bends over and scrutinizes the squawkbox, waving his hand, then the handset, in front of the speaker.)*

Simon: Wonder what he's got in the saddlebags.

Tom: Canisters of tear gas. A stun gun maybe. Parking tickets.

Cop (speaking into the handset, holding it up higher): Good afternoon. *(slight feedback)* I regret to inform you that the ride scheduled for twelve hundred hours has been delayed. *(The crowd boos.)* Apparently the party concerned failed to obtain the proper permits *(feedback)* . . . excuse me *(He shakes the handset.)* . . . those required for staging public rallies and for equestrians intending to access public roads. *(The crowd boos again.)*

Tom: I can't believe it. I mean I can, but . . . *(He trails off when he realizes what Simon is doing. Simon squirts charcoal lighter onto the coals again. A huge flame bursts up.)* Holy shit.

The cop notices the flame.

Cop (speaking into the handset, to Tom and Simon): You boys had better put that fire out.

Tom: *(He ducks and scoots back from the railing.)* Dammit, Simon.

Simon: You wanted to be noticed.

Cop (speaking into the handset): The ride has been rescheduled for thirteen hundred hours. *(The crowd roars.)* Those of you choosing to remain are asked to stay on the sidewalks and grass. Do not block the street or trespass on private property. *(Feedback, he pauses.)* And please deposit your trash in the receptacles. *(The crowd boos.)*

Simon squirts charcoal lighter onto the coals again. A huge flame bursts up. The cop notices the flame.

Cop (speaking into the handset, to Tom and Simon): Now don't make me tell you boys again. *(He continues to look up at the balcony.)*

Tom hunkers over to the cooler, lifts it, carries it back to the hibachi and sets it down.

Simon: You going to offer him a beer?

Tom (*opening the drain-plug on the side of the cooler*): I thought about tossing one at him. (*He lifts and tilts the cooler, aiming the stream of melted ice water around the coals. A cloud of smoke rises.*)

Simon: If we had a blanket we could send our apologies to the Indians in the audience.

Cop (*speaking into the handset, looking at Tom and Simon, then the crowd*): Thank you for your cooperation. Have a good day. (*The crowd roars. The cop returns the handset to its holder, rolls the cycle off its kickstand, and exits left.*)

Tom (*reaching for the charcoal lighter*): Give me that. (*He takes the can from Simon and puts it on the spool.*) I don't believe you.

Simon: I was just joining in the spirit of things.

Tom: It would've worked. She would've seen the torch.

Simon: She might still . . .

Tom (*interrupting, as he picks up the hibachi*): The torch has been doused.

Tom carries the hibachi to the spool, holding it out away from himself. He goes back and gets the stool, then the cooler, puts them back where they were. Simon watches him, amused. The crowd roars off in the distance, to the left.

Simon: Maybe we should go down amongst them. (*He paces back and forth, trailing his hand along the railing.*)

Tom: I want to work on the laptop for a while. (*He looks around the balcony, picks up Natalie's beer and the tongs lying atop the stack of books.*)

Simon: I suppose we ought to wait for Matt and Margaret anyway.

Tom: They don't know what they're missing. (*He lays the tongs on the spool, then shakes the bottle, checking its contents. He drains the remainder over the railing, then sets the bottle in the garbage. While he's there he stands up the bottles Simon knocked over when he fell.*)

Simon: (*He leans back against the railing.*) I'm exhausted. (*rubbing his head*) My head hurts.

Tom: You took a beating. On the other hand, so did Joe. (*He returns to the railing with*

the binoculars, looks through them down right.) Who would've guessed—the sandwich board guy and the nun, sitting on the grass together eating hotdogs.

Simon: Amen. (*The crowd roars off in the distance again.*)

Tom (*canvassing the crowd*): People are restless. They don't know what to do with themselves for another hour.

Simon: Nothing to do but wait, grab another dog.

Tom: Probably wishing they'd brought their Game Boys right about now. (*looking down left*) Even the feminists look bushed.

Simon (*staring at the books*): I wonder if I can read. (*He walks over to the lounge chair, kicks off his flip-flops, sits down and stretches out. He grabs the book atop the stack, Chopin's Awakening. He makes a face, wiping his fingers on his shorts.*) God, the remains of buffalo. (*He scrapes the book along the edge of the chair, then thumbs through it nearly to the end. He begins to read, looking up from time to time to join the conversation.*)

Tom: (*He canvasses the crowd.*) Wonder if Joe and Natalie caught the fireworks?

Simon: I imagine they're reclined somewhere.

Tom: (*He stretches, holding his arms out, twisting his trunk, turns around and leans back against the railing.*) You think she'll show? (*The crowd roars off in the distance again.*)

Simon: I'm sure she'll show him everything.

Tom: Why do you insist on doing that when you know what I mean?

Simon: There are no meanings, only misinterpretations of data.

Tom: Lousy deconstructionist.

Simon (*correcting*): Reconstructionist.

Tom: (*He grips the railing and stretches his back and shoulders.*) She'll show.

Simon: Nothing to do but wait and see. (*He glances at the feeder overhead.*)

Tom: The cop made it sound like she would.

Simon: Uh-huh. She appears to be real.

Simon reads. Tom turns and canvasses the crowd for a moment. He goes to the spool,

sets the binoculars down. He grabs the bag of wings, stuffs it in the cooler. He sits on the stool in front of the laptop, holds his hands out and stretches his wrists and fingers. The crowd roars again, farther off in the distance. Tom tilts his head slightly, listens. He settles and resettles himself on the stool until he finds a comfortable position. He adjusts the laptop's position slightly, then enters data.

Curtain

ACT II

The balcony looks just as it did when Act I closed. Tom is sitting on the stool, entering data, the laptop now in his lap. Simon is asleep in the lounge chair, The Awakening lying in his lap. Above him, a sparrow pecks at the feeder, chirps. Tom turns and looks at the sparrow, continues to enter data. Simon's body begins to jerk, and he rolls onto his side, facing Tom. Tom looks at Simon, then continues, finishing his entry in a flurry. He brings up the time on the laptop.

Tom: *(He sets the laptop on the spool and stands up.)* Won't be long now.

Tom holds his hands out, stretches his wrists and fingers, turns and exits through the patio door. Simon breathes heavily. The bird pecks at the feeder above. Tom returns, slides the patio door closed behind him. He's squeezing a blue rubber ball in his right hand. He picks up the binoculars and goes to the railing, looks around for a moment, squeezing the ball. Simon's body jerks again, and he folds up, fetus-like. Tom sets the binoculars on the railing, switches the ball to his left hand, then goes to Simon, gently shakes his shoulder. The sparrow flies off.

Tom: Wake up. Simon. *(Simon stirs drowsily.)* Come on. Get up.

Simon *(confused)*: Where? *(He sits up, stretches and rubs his eyes.)* I was dreaming.

Tom: I figured as much.

Simon: *(He sets the book atop the stack beside the lounge chair.)* I was in a stable.

Tom: Your whole body was twitching. Looked like you were on a grill.

Simon *(noticing the ball in Tom's hand)*: Talk about me. *(pointing his chin at the hand with the ball)* You're looking at carpal tunnel.

Tom: The symptoms anyway. *(He tosses the ball from hand to hand a few times.)*

Simon: You ought to lay off the laptop for a while. *(He digs in his ears, shakes his head.)* I heard birds again.

Tom: There was one at the feeder. *(He sits on the stool, sets the ball on the spool. It rolls a little; he stops it.)*

Simon: *(He looks up.)* They were chattering above me, on the crossbeams of the stable.

Tom: Was Godiva there?

Simon: *(He scratches his head.)* No.

Tom: Forget it then.

Simon: You'll get a kick out of this.

Tom: No I won't.

Simon: You will. *(He slides his feet into his flip-flops and goes to the railing.)* I was a jockey. Or a stableboy or something. I remember wearing funny pants, and being nervous about a big race.

Tom: *(He kicks the stool, acts as if he's riding a horse.)* Simon does Belmont. *(He stands and returns to the railing.)*

Simon: *(He runs a hand along the railing.)* I was grooming a horse. A brown horse. Golden brown.

Tom: If you tell me it had wings I'm gonna chuck you off the balcony. *(He grabs the waist of Simon's shorts and the back of his T-shirt and drives him into the railing, almost knocking the binoculars off. Simon grabs them.)*

Simon: Easy boy. *(dangling the binoculars over the rail)* You don't want me to drop these. *(Tom lets go. Simon distances himself.)* No mythology. I promise. *(He hands the binoculars to Tom, who hangs them around his neck. Simon straightens out his shirt and shorts, gathers himself.)* Where was I.

Tom: Grooming.

Simon: Right. So I brushed the horse out, ran my hand along her flanks. *(He runs a hand along the railing.)* I checked her hooves and scraped them clean. I massaged her hind quarters.

Tom: So this is sexual after all.

Simon: Let me finish. *(He grabs the railing, leans backwards, then pulls himself upright.)* Her saddle was sitting on the railing behind her. As I . . .

Tom *(interrupting)*: Was it English?

Simon *(annoyed)*: I don't know. I don't remember. It was smooth and cool to the touch; it surprised me. *(kicking the railing)* As I checked the stirrups, the horse reared up, and I turned around. She kicked out with a hind leg and got me in the shin. *(rubbing his shin absently)* God, it hurt.

Tom: Is this going somewhere?

Simon: I hopped around the stall on one leg for a while, then kept my distance. But I was

determined. All I could think about was the race. I remember thinking, I don't want to screw up this time. I took her reins from a nail. I ran them through my hands, tugging at them, looking for wear. She reared again and looked back at me. (*He leans forward, hands on the railing.*) So sad, I thought. She's sorry, I thought. Great big eyes—balls of amber with my image trapped inside them. (*Tom shakes his head.*) The race. I remembered the race, shook out the reins in my hands. (*jerking backwards*) She kicked again and got me in the crotch.

Tom: You're a real National Velvet, Simon. (*He looks through the binoculars down right.*)

Simon: I fell and lay there in the dirt, listening to the birds. Then you woke me. (*Pause.*) So what's your misinterpretation?

Tom (*lowering the binoculars*): Simple. She didn't want to be mounted.

Simon: Besides that.

Tom: Let's leave it at that and hope Godiva doesn't draw the same horse.

Simon: I'm ambivalent. (*He bends a leg back and hops a few times.*)

Tom: See a psychiatrist. (*He looks through the binoculars, canvasses the crowd.*) You know, there're even more people now.

Simon: Word's out.

Tom: We're all over this event.

Simon: Like locusts.

Tom: Godiva can name her price. There's a *Movie of the Week* in it.

Simon (*sarcastically*): I can hardly wait. (*He looks at the crowd for a moment, then goes to the feeder and examines the food-level.*) Just one bird?

Tom (*turning, annoyed*): Just one. (*He goes and picks up the ball.*)

Simon: Hungry little thing. (*He taps the feeder.*) So little cause for carolings.

Tom (*bouncing the ball, returning to the railing*): I thought for sure it was going to crap on you while you were lounging. Would've served you right.

Simon (*tweaking the feeder*): How thoughtful of you not to scare it off. (*He returns to the railing.*)

Tom: (*He looks through the binoculars down right for a moment, squeezing the ball.*) A sad thought just occurred to me. What about the crap in the streets?

Simon: That is sad.

Tom: You think someone will follow her with a shovel?

Simon: I imagine she'll go before she starts the ride.

Tom: And her horse too, I hope. Otherwise you can bet I'll be the one who manages to ride through it on my bike. Be tracking roadapple all over the apartment.

Simon: You seem to have an affinity for the stuff.

Tom (*giving Simon a shove*): Shithead.

Simon (*shoving Tom back*): That's *your* dubious distinction. (*He looks out at the crowd.*) Can you imagine what's going through Godiva's head right now?

Tom: Dollar signs, I'd wager. (*He goes to the right corner and sits on the railing, bounces the ball from time to time.*)

Simon: Hmm. Green thoughts in a green shade. God, I hope not.

Tom: What goes through a centerfold's head before doing a layout? (*Simon shrugs.*) Air. (*Tom puckers his lips and blows.*) Nothing but air. Maybe some last minute concerns about cosmetics or unsightly hair.

Simon: (*He goes to the left corner and sits on the railing.*) I wonder if her husband has any regrets. I mean, his wife is about to get on a horse and ride across campus, naked to the world.

Tom: (*He tosses the ball up and catches it, looks at Simon.*) What difference does it make, really? (*He bounces the ball to Simon.*)

Simon: They say, whoever says such things, that a single moment can change your life forever. And other peoples' lives. (*He fakes throwing the ball.*) You're right in a way though. It's certainly debatable. We've had world wars we didn't learn from. And numerous renaissances. (*He bounces the ball back to Tom.*) Here we are.

Tom: What if nobody cared, nobody showed up? That'd be worse.

Simon: Would it?

Tom: At least she's got an audience. (*He tosses the ball up and catches it.*)

Simon: But why are they, we, here? Just to see her naked? to see her squirm?

Tom: (*He bounces the ball.*) Both. (*He bounces the ball to Simon.*) If you take the high road, which is your inclination of course, aesthetically, theologically, and paradoxically her ride's only *beautiful* if she doesn't enjoy herself, if she suffers. True, or not? We need our saints to be persecuted. That's what defines them.

Simon: True. (*He bounces the ball to Tom.*) We share in their persecution, find something pure to emulate. That's the idea anyway.

Tom: Even though we know instantly that we'll fall short of their example. (*He bounces the ball to Simon, adding some speed.*) On the other hand, if she enjoys the attention, even a little bit, then her ride's no better, essentially, than some girl stripping at Enigmas. You have to admit, something sucks about the whole thing.

Simon: It's all so Margery Kempe. (*He bounces the ball to Tom, also adding speed.*) Then again, we also love the ones who don't go gently.

Tom: That's what I was getting at before when I said I hope Godiva's defiant, refuses to be ashamed. Even if she's not riding just for the Humanities, even if her and her old man's motivation is suspect, if the university gets the \$50,000 then something positive has occurred. (*He turns and bounces the ball off the patio door, barely missing the birdfeeder and lounge chair.*)

Simon: Hey. Careful.

Tom: What do we want from her? Does she have to be a saint? Bullshit. If good comes from the ride and it's a publicity stunt, who cares?

Simon: I agree basically. It's just that it would be nice to witness something done wholly for the act itself, something unselfish.

Tom: Dream on. (*He bounces the ball to Simon and surveys the crowd with the binoculars for a moment.*) Why is it that a person can't admire the female form sincerely *outside* the realm of art?

Simon: I'm not sure it's possible without some lechery even within the realm of art. You're not trying to tell me you're waiting for Godiva for purely aesthetic reasons, are you? (*He bounces the ball to Tom.*)

Tom: Not at all. I'm the pervert, remember? But that's the crap you've been trying to lay on me, isn't it? (*He quick tosses the ball to Simon, who drops it.*)

Simon: *(He scrambles after the ball.)* Don't try to drag me into the bog with you. I know why I'm here, and it's not just to ogle some babe. *(There's a rap on the patio door. Margaret slides the door open; she and Matt enter.)* Woh . . . saints alive. *(Simon sets the ball on the spool.)*

Margaret is wearing a mid-length skirt, a sleeveless silk blouse, and leather sandals. She's carrying a compact umbrella, which is strapped shut. Matt is wearing chinos, a polo shirt, and oxfords. In one hand he's carrying a wicker basket that resembles a small piece of luggage. He has a baguette tucked under his other arm.

Tom: Look who's here. *(holding his hand out to Matt, who looks for a place to set the basket and bread)* Finally decided to make an appearance, huh?

Matt: The door was unlocked. We let ourselves in. *(He sets the basket and bread on the spool and shakes hands with Tom.)*

Simon: *(He embraces Margaret, pulls away and gives her the once-over.)* Don't you look fetching.

Margaret *(twirling her umbrella by its wrist-strap)*: Thank you.

Simon *(shaking hands with Matt)*: How're you doing?

Matt *(patting Simon on the shoulder)*: Good. Real good.

Tom *(approaching Margaret)*: Fetching did he say? *(He hugs her and pulls away.)* Sounds more like a canine maneuver than a compliment. Are you going to let him get away with that?

Margaret: Don't start, Tom.

Tom: You are looking sumptuous.

Margaret: And you look good in binoculars.

Simon *(going to the spool, tapping the lid of the basket)*: So what's in the basket?

Matt: A Bordeaux. Something modest. Suitable to the occasion, I think.

Tom: I'd think something immodest would be more appropriate. Simon and I can't appreciate the difference. Suitable, unsuitable. Hell, break it out.

Margaret: You'll have to forgive Matt. One weekend at the local culinary academy and he

fancies himself an epicure.

Matt opens the basket. The wine bottle, two crystal glasses, and corkscrew inside are secured with wicker straps. He removes the crystal glasses, holds them up to the light, turns them in his hand, then stands them on the spool. Margaret sits on the edge of the lounge chair and sets the umbrella next to her.

Matt (*indicating Tom and Simon*): You two will need glasses.

Simon (*going towards the patio door*): I'll dig something up. (*He exits.*)

Margaret picks up The Awakening, thumbs through it and sets it back on the stack of books. She leans over and glances at the bindings of the other books.

Tom (*elbowing Matt, who is removing the wine from its strap*): Trying to distance yourself from your past?

Matt (*inspecting the bottle*): Not really. Just adding a little finish to the exterior. (*He removes the corkscrew from its strap, points at the laptop with it.*) Is that new?

Tom: Nope. Same one I've had for years. (*He goes to the laptop, remains standing, enters a command and watches the screen.*)

Matt: Looks new. (*He opens the wine.*)

Margaret: What are you working on?

Matt: I thought I'd let it breathe.

Margaret: I know what you're up to. I meant Tom.

Tom: It's a thesis suggested by today's events.

Simon: (*He returns with two plastic Little Mermaid tumblers and sets them on the spool.*) Found these collectibles from Burger King. I'm dying to see Tom drink out of one.

Margaret (*looking at Matt, who looks away, irritated*): How darling they are.

Tom (*picking up one of the cups up and scrutinizing it*): A bit of Disney.

Matt: (*He pours a little wine in a crystal glass and sips.*) So, did we miss anything? (*He fills the other crystal glass and hands it to Margaret. She takes a sip and sets it on the balcony. Matt refills his glass and, after some hesitation, pours some wine into the tumblers.*)

Tom: Not much. (*grabbing the tumbler*) Thanks. (*He takes a drink, then another.*) Not bad. (*He sits on the stool, sets the tumbler on the spool, removes the binoculars and sets them on the spool.*) You're lucky, Godiva's been delayed. She should be by any minute. You missed Joe and Natalie though. They were by earlier, but left in heat.

Simon (*grabbing a tumbler*): Much obliged. (*He takes a drink, goes and leans back against the railing.*)

Matt: I guess they're still in that groping phase of their relationship.

Simon: When does that phase end exactly? I'd like to know. (*He takes a drink, sets the tumbler on the railing.*)

Tom: Me too. (*He takes a drink.*)

Margaret: I'm curious as well. (*She takes a sip, leans forward with her elbows on her thighs and dangles the glass over her knees.*)

Matt: (*He looks at everyone; then flustered, he reaches for the baguette.*) How about some bread to go with the wine. (*removing it from the wrapper*) It's still warm. Actually, I should have served this first.

Tom: We have some butter. Maybe some jack cheese.

Margaret: (*She looks at Matt.*) We're watching our dairy.

Simon (*looking around*): Where is it?

Tom: No meat, no dairy. Not much left.

Matt (*holding the baguette up, then tearing off a heel*): What do you say we dispense with formalities and just tear off pieces that suit us. (*He offers the baguette to Margaret.*)

Margaret: (*She sets her wine glass down and takes the baguette.*) Matt, dear, did you remember to pack the napkins? (*She holds the bread over her lap.*)

Matt (*snapping his fingers*): I knew there was something.

Simon: There's always something.

Tom: We're fresh out of paper towels. (*He looks at Simon accusingly.*) We'll have to improvise. Hold on a second. (*going towards the patio door*) Notice I'm fetching.

Simon: Go Cerberus. (*Tom exits.*)

Margaret (*laying the baguette across her knees*): We haven't seen Natalie and Joe since we moved.

Simon: Joe said the same thing about you. (*Matt goes to the laptop, taps a key and stares at the screen.*) Don't let Tom catch you near that; he'll blow a chip.

Matt: Just perusing.

Margaret: (*She crosses and uncrosses her legs, the baguette slipping down into her lap.*) Get away from there. (*to Simon*) He's such a snoop. (*Matt goes back where he was.*) I've caught him going through letters from my old boyfriends. Once I walked in on him lying on the floor with my high school yearbook.

Matt: You'd be surprised what those private school girls write.

Simon: I don't know. I'm not as easily surprised as I once was.

Tom: (*Tom returns with a roll of toilet paper, tears off a few squares for himself and hands the roll to Margaret.*) Pass it around.

Margaret (*wrapping the paper around her hand*): How . . . functional. (*Margaret looks at Matt; he shrugs and takes the roll. She folds the paper, sets it in her lap, and places the baguette on top of it.*)

Matt (*tearing off a few sheets of paper*): For some reason I feel like I should be doing this in private. (*He folds the paper on the spool and sets his bread on it. He offers the roll to Simon, but Tom intercepts. Matt leans against the spool.*)

Tom (*intercepting*): I'll take that. (*placing the roll on the spool*) Simon's a little too festive to be trusted with this.

Matt: Did Joe mention that he scratched the Louis Quatorze tea table Margaret inherited from her great grandmother?

Simon (*to Margaret, indicating the baguette*): I'll take some of that if Tom doesn't mind.

Margaret: Oh. I'm sorry. (*She tears off a piece of bread, sets it and the paper on the lounge chair, and starts to stand up; but Simon goes and gets the baguette, tears off a piece, hands the baguette to Tom, and returns to the railing.*)

Tom: Joe left out the details but mentioned something to that effect. (*He tears off a piece of bread, sets the remainder of the baguette on top of the toilet paper roll.*)

Matt (*shaking his head*): Goofing around as usual. He was carrying it on top of his head like a canoe and brushed up against a doorjamb. (*He looks at Margaret, who is reaching for her wine. He reaches for his wine.*)

Simon: That's Joe. (*He takes a drink.*) I'm surprised you didn't keep a tighter leash on him.

Matt: Margaret and Natalie were in the bedroom, still packing. I was arranging the boxes in the U-Haul and walked up just as he came crashing through the doorway. I couldn't believe my eyes.

Tom: (*He takes a drink of wine.*) Tell me Margaret, what's with the umbrella?

Margaret (*surprised at the question, reaching for the umbrella at her side*): Oh. Well, I wasn't sure where we'd end up today, and I didn't want any direct sunlight. Ultraviolet rays and all. I got so much sun as a kid, it scares me.

Simon (*mimicking Burgess's Alex*): Real horrorshow, that ultra-violent.

Margaret (*good-naturedly pointing the umbrella at Simon*): It's what you don't see that kills you, you know.

Tom: Try explaining that to some guy who's just had a head-on collision.

Margaret: You know what I mean.

Tom: I do. Carcinogens, viruses. If it's not secondary smoke, it's asbestos in the walls. But from another perspective, what we don't see enhances our lives. (*motioning to the laptop on the table*) Data, memory, it all comes down to unseen bits, ones and zeroes.

Simon (*opening and closing his hands like lights flashing*): Caution: techno-speak. Haves and have nots. (*Simon turns around and scans the crowd.*)

Tom: (*He takes a drink.*) As in the past, so in the future. Only now it's, Those who have computers and computer skills advance, those who don't fall behind.

Matt: Don't you mean get dragged along?

Margaret (*swinging the umbrella back and forth*): Machines originally created to entertain us, to do our dirty work, et cetera, are now an inherent part of our evolution, or devolution—is that the gist of it, Tom?

Tom: They're all around us. Face it. (*He raises his arms as if to spook her.*) Face them.

And when the human machine itself breaks down, they're attached to us or planted inside us. As much as literature and art, they're a testament of our achievement.

Margaret: It's an old argument. Are you Cartesian? or Berkelian? or just a mutt?

Tom: Let's see. I perceive myself thinking that I'm perceived, therefore I am.

Simon (*turning around, exasperated*): Lord.

Matt: There's some sense in this nonsense. My dad had a pacemaker. (*to Margaret*) Weren't you saying just the other day that you'd like to have one of those time-release, contraceptive things implanted in your arm. (*He reaches out and strokes Margaret's upper arm with the back of his hand.*)

Tom: There you go.

Margaret (*brandishing the umbrella at Matt*): In case this comes up again, my thoughts on birth control are confidential.

Tom: What's the fuss? There's a similar device with insulin for diabetics.

Margaret (*brandishing the umbrella at Tom*): This makes a fairly effective prodder too, you know.

Tom (*standing and bending over*): Prod me, please.

Margaret: (*She leans over, pushes a button in the handle. The umbrella, still strapped shut, shoots out and pokes Tom in the rear.*) Take that.

Simon: Touché.

Tom (*holding his rear in mock pain*): Ingenious. Crowd control. (*holding his hand out*) May I?

Margaret: (*She holds the umbrella out to Tom; he reaches for it; she pulls it back. She holds it out again; he reaches for it; she pulls it back, then lays it in his hand.*) Be kind.

Tom: (*He pushes the umbrella back into its locked position, holds it between his legs, pushes the button—the umbrella shoots out and hits Matt in the thigh.*) Ahh. (*He gives a knowing smile, repeats the process. He goes over to the railing, faces the crowd, smiles, and struts back and forth locking and ejecting the umbrella.*)

Margaret: That ought to catch Godiva's eye.

Simon: Maybe you're onto something, Tom.

Matt: Don't encourage him.

Simon holds out his hand; Tom gives him the umbrella. Simon pushes the button, watches the umbrella eject. He raises the umbrella like a bat and takes a few swings. Tom sits down on the stool and takes a drink.

Matt: *(He grabs the ball on the spool.)* Here. *(He pitches it softly to Simon. Simon swings, knocks the ball into the crowd.)* You can tell that one good-bye.

Tom *(jumping up)*: Shit. I've been fondling that ball. *(sitting down)* Now I'll have to break another one in.

Margaret *(holding out her hand to Simon)*: May I have my umbrella back, please? before someone gets sued.

Simon hands Margaret the umbrella, goes to the spool, tears off a piece of bread, and returns to the railing. Margaret sets the umbrella on the lounge chair.

Tom: Tell me something, Margaret. You've heard about Godiva's so-called agreement, haven't you?

Margaret: Only what's on the fliers.

Tom: Would you ride naked for \$50,000? *(Margaret reaches for her drink.)* You wouldn't, would you?

Margaret: *(She takes a sip.)* No.

Tom: Why not?

Margaret: It's just not me. I haven't got anything against it actually. If the university gets some money, good for her. But I think it's awfully demeaning.

Tom *(to Matt)*: Would you let Margaret ride? that is, if she agreed to do it.

Margaret: Hold on. It's not up to him.

Matt: If she wanted to. But it seems to me there are better ways to obtain money.

Margaret: Listen, Matt wanted me to have some of those boudoir photographs done, and I wouldn't . . .

Tom (*as if saying, Way to go*): Matt, you lizard.

Margaret: I don't want some stranger snapping shots of me in black underwear and pumps, much less the whole world scrutinizing the mole on my back.

Tom: What's an insect eating mammal that lives primarily underground doing on your back? (*He squeezes his head between his hands, then bends over.*) Somebody kick me. I sound like Simon. (*Simon bends his leg back, threatening.*)

Margaret: I told Matt to go buy an Instamatic.

Simon: Did he?

Matt: Not yet. (*He takes his wine and the binoculars, goes to the railing, looks around, then leans back against the railing.*)

Tom: Damn. What's the hold up?

Margaret: Here's a question. Tell me, would you *gentlemen* be as excited about the ride if you knew for certain that Godiva was unattractive?

Tom (*emphatically*): No. (*He takes his wine, goes to the railing, sets the tumbler on the railing.*)

Margaret: At least you're honest. (*She looks at Simon, who's not forthcoming.*) Simon?

Simon: I think it would make us, most of us, uncomfortable. Maybe that's good. Everything about this spectacle is absurd anyway.

Margaret: So if she's hard on the eyes so to speak it will spoil everyone's fun?

Simon: I don't know. It's a suspicion.

Margaret: What if she's gorgeous, but obviously embarrassed and humiliated?

Simon: I would hope that people would empathize with her and feel ashamed themselves. But I'm afraid the majority would still be glad they had a chance to see her.

Matt: (*He hands the binoculars to Tom, who hangs them around his neck. Matt takes a sip of wine, stares at Margaret.*) Aren't you interested in my opinion?

Margaret: I know you'll lie. It's the smart thing to do with me right here. (*Pause.*) So. Here's another question. What if the situation were somehow miraculously reversed, if Godiva was a man? Do you think there'd still be this kind of turnout?

Tom: Ooh. Feminists would have a field day with that one. (*turning to the crowd for a second, then back to face Margaret*) If you look at this crowd, the male to female ratio is about what you'd expect. More men than women, but not a vast difference in numbers.

Margaret (*stretching a little to see*): I can't see. But for the sake of argument, I'll accept your estimate.

Tom: Wouldn't you agree that men, in general, are more homophobic than women? That means a lot fewer males would show up if Godiva were a George or a Bob. I doubt I'd bother, except as a lark.

Simon: A lark? You despise birds.

Matt: The whole composition of the ride would change. It's hard to believe that a man can feel the same sense of shame at being exposed that a woman can.

Simon: I wouldn't be so sure of that.

Tom: Matt's right. The ride would be more of a carnival from the get-go. Right now we don't know what the hell to expect from Godiva.

Margaret: Well, I, for one, would love to see the husband ride by. That'd be worth a few dollars.

Simon: (*He takes a drink, looks at the crowd.*) Things seem pretty carnivalesque right now, if you ask me.

Tom: Nobody did.

Margaret: (*Margaret looks at the books next to the lounge chair, picks up The Awakening.*) This must be Simon's.

Tom: I resent that. (*He goes to the spool, tears off a piece of bread, and returns to the railing.*)

Simon: It's from my American Lit class.

Matt: Have you finished it yet? (*He goes to the spool.*)

Simon: Just this afternoon.

Matt: (*He picks up the last of the baguette, offers it to Margaret, who shakes her head, No.*) What do you think of the ending? (*Matt refills his wine glass, holds the bottle up.*)

Anyone need a refill? (*Margaret again shakes her head, No.*)

Simon (*holding out his tumbler*): Over here. (*Matt goes to Simon, pours some wine into his tumbler. Matt motions to Tom with the bottle.*)

Tom: Not right now.

Matt (*He returns to the spool, grabs the last of the baguette.*) When Edna strips and swims out into the ocean . . .

Tom (*interrupting*): I like it so far.

Matt (*continuing, to Simon*): . . . were you saying to yourself, She's overreacting?

Simon: How so?

Tom: It's rude to start discussing something we all can't participate in. But go ahead, if it makes you feel smart.

Matt: It's just that—sure, Robert left, but Edna had come so far. Her suicide is like Godiva's ride in a way. You think to yourself, There's got to be a better way. If I left Margaret she'd hardly go out and drown herself.

Tom: She'd swim into my arms.

Margaret: I'd dog paddle to shore and get out of the water. The choices a person makes can only be judged against the life experience that led up to them. (*to Matt*) What do you know about nineteenth-century Creole society?

Tom: You judged Godiva.

Margaret: I said I wouldn't take her place. That's all. I haven't condemned her. Not yet anyway.

Tom: So Edna kills herself over a man? Original. (*He takes his tumbler, goes to the right corner and sits on the railing.*)

Simon: She symbolically returns to the womb, among other things.

Tom: I'm always trying that.

Simon: In her mind it's her only escape from motherhood, a husband who considers her his property, and a would-be lover who spooks too easily.

Tom: Sounds like she took the easy way out.

Simon: If dying is easy.

Margaret (*settling and resettling herself on the lounge chair*): Edna realized that life with Robert only meant a new set of boundaries. There was no place to turn, no one to turn to.

Tom: Can't we talk about something else?

Simon: What? movies.

Matt: Let me say one more thing. If you compare Edna's situation to, say, Janie's in *Their Eyes were Watching God*, then her suffering seems almost superficial. All right, her husband was overbearing; but he gave her a lot of rope. She lived comfortably. He never beat her.

Margaret: Not physically. (*clenching her fists*) That's your yardstick?

Simon: He did give her a lot of rope . . .

Tom: She hung herself? I thought she drowned.

Margaret: Give? (*stamping her foot on the lounge chair*) She took it. She had a right to a place of her own.

Simon: Out pops Virginia Woolf. (*He takes his tumbler, goes to the left corner and sits on the railing.*)

Tom: Don't go feminist on me.

Margaret: Oh, I almost forgot your aversion to them. They must scare you something awful.

Tom: As soon as they open their mouths. (*He opens his mouth wide.*)

Margaret: Have you ever once considered what comes out of your mouth? how it affects people?

Tom (*tapping his chest*): I try to ignore the internal editor. Besides, I'm more concerned with what goes in my mouth. (*He yawns.*) All this talk about some book hardly anybody's read is putting me to sleep.

Margaret: Stay awake. (*She picks up the umbrella, ejects it toward him.*) Try to be serious for a moment. It won't ruin your reputation. (*She locks the umbrella and sets it beside*

her on the lounge.) We all bring our own baggage to every judgment, or in the case of *The Awakening*, to every reading.

Tom (*nodding at the basket on the spool*): Looks like Matt brought his. I'm going to start packing mine if we don't get off this.

Margaret (*determined*): We all react to stimuli and make individual associations based on what past experience has taught us and what we remember. There's no getting around it. The important thing is to be aware of that baggage. (*She takes a sip of wine.*)

Tom: Mine's Samsonite.

Margaret: Let's try something. I'll give you a word, and the three of you respond with the first word or words that pop into your head.

Matt: I'd rather not. (*He takes his glass, goes to the railing.*)

Margaret: Don't be difficult.

Tom: It's cheap psychoanalysis, but I'm game. Anything to get off that *Awakening* crap.

Simon (*to Margaret*): Can I respond to that?

Margaret: No. (*She takes a sip of wine.*) First word: grass.

Tom: Diamond.

Margaret: Not glass, grass.

Tom: I heard you. Grass made me think of an infield, a diamond.

Margaret: My mistake.

Simon: Flesh.

Tom: It was either that or Whitman. He's so predictable.

Matt: Pot.

Tom: Wish we had some.

Margaret: Rose.

Tom: Pete. (*Margaret looks at him, dumbfounded.*) He's a baseball player.

Margaret: I didn't say anything.

Simon: Yeats. (*He sticks his tongue out at Tom.*)

Matt: Valentine's Day.

Margaret: No sucking up, dear. Cans.

Simon: Cannots.

Tom: Beer. Wait, tits.

Margaret (*making a sour face*): Please.

Matt: Warhol.

Tom: I'm getting bored.

Margaret: One more. Ocean.

Matt: Shrimp scampi. Mmm. (*Margaret shakes her head, No. He takes a drink.*)

Tom (*making a fin with his hand, slicing the air*): Sharks.

Simon: Edna.

Tom: (*He jumps down from the railing and throws up his hands.*) Stop. We're right back where we started. (*to Margaret*) It'd be more interesting to analyze why you chose those particular words.

Margaret: Be my guest. The point is, each word conjured something different from each of you. Something with your baggage attached. If we can never be certain we understand or are understood completely, then who's to say what's the right choice in any given situation or, for that matter, what the situation is exactly.

Tom: My situation right now is that I wish I didn't understand you. (*He sits on the railing again, in the right corner.*)

Matt: Let her finish.

Margaret: All I'm saying, or trying to say, is there is no definitive or even best reading of *The Awakening* or any other literary work, only ones with baggage closely resembling our own.

Simon: Only misinterpretations of data.

Tom: Only more Samsonite.

Matt (*to Margaret*): You cheated though. You didn't ask us to define the words; you wanted us to respond to them. Our definitions would have been similar enough no doubt. Let's not pretend we can't understand each other at all.

Margaret: Of course we can communicate. I'm just trying to illustrate that nothing is ever so simple as, *There's got to be a better way.*

Tom: By your own admission then, Margaret, the feminists are swinging as blindly as the Marxists or anybody else. (*He uppercuts the air.*)

Margaret: To a certain extent, yes. I wouldn't say *blindly*. Futilely perhaps. But there's nothing wrong with their demanding to be heard and accepted. (*She finishes her wine, raises her glass, indicating to Matt that she wants some more.*)

Tom: So why is it that when I speak constructively about technology no one around here wants to hear it?

Matt: (*He takes his glass, goes and sets it on the spool.*) I was listening. I'm all for it. The non-stick pan, the self-cleaning oven, the five-speed blender.

Margaret: I'm not dead set against technology either, as Matt pointed out. (*Matt grabs the bottle, fills her glass.*) But I do appreciate simplicity. I don't know what half the buttons in my dashboard are for.

Tom (*holding his tumbler out*): I'll take some.

Matt goes and pours Tom some wine, then sets the bottle on the spool, takes his glass and stands behind the lounge chair.

Simon: It's me. I'm the one who doesn't want to hear about our bright technological future, especially today. Forgive me if I'm nonplused by the fact that the College of Engineering receives more private funding than nearly all of the other colleges combined. The Engineering building is the most modern and best equipped on campus. Glass everywhere. Windows with views. New oscilloscopes in the labs undoubtedly. In the meantime, money to support the Humanities is almost non-existent. And when funding's tight, art programs are the first to go, from grammar schools on up. People like Godiva are forced to go to extremes. (*He looks at the crowd.*) Talk about, *There's got to be a better way.*

Matt: I had no idea my humble words would become this afternoon's soundbite.

Tom (*to Simon*): Then it's money you're whining about, not technology.

Margaret: The money we allot to the football team alone for one season would fund the Humanities for years.

Tom: There's an idea. (*raising his tumbler*) Let's give scholarships to a bunch of spindly poet-wanna-bes and have them serve doubleduty as defensive linemen.

Margaret: You're being contrary on purpose. You appreciate art, Tom. You're well read. Why do you have to be so obstinate?

Tom: (*He stands and stretches.*) Because aesthetes are so damn pretentious. They claim to read and study and absorb so much, but typically they're narrow-minded and self-involved. (*He takes a drink.*) Art is subjective, isn't it? (*to Margaret*) Isn't that what you were alluding to with all that baggage crap? With all these conflicting schools of criticism, who decides which authors enter the canon, which paintings grace museum walls, or what art is in the first place?

Margaret: Watch yourself, feminists take a similar stance.

Tom: Anyway, the whole art/non-art argument is a dead horse. Leave it to the flies.

Margaret: Come on, beat it for us one last time.

Tom: Not right now.

Simon: Beat it.

Tom: But it's so . . . (*Matt pounds a fist on the back of the lounge chair.*)

Margaret: Please?

Tom: All right. Here's a for instance. (*He pretends he's dribbling a basketball, then glides across the balcony as if going in for a stuff. Simon makes an imaginary hoop; Tom stuffs the imaginary ball.*) Is the way Jordan moves in mid-air to the hoop art?

Matt (*setting his glass on the spool*): Sure. In the same way preparing risotto with truffles is.

Simon: Aesthetically it may be pleasing (*to Matt, smiling*) or palatable, but it's not art per se.

Tom: Is there an art to playing video games? (*He gets his tumbler and sits on the stool.*)

Margaret: Semantics. You're confusing art with a commonplace expression, *There's an art to such and such.*

Simon: Art is quite useless. Maybe Wilde foresaw the age of vidiocy.

Matt: You can't compare Jordan or Julia Child to some geek with a pocketful of quarters. (*He gets his wine from the spool, stands behind the lounge chair.*)

Tom: Forget it. I didn't want to talk about this crap in the first place. (*He takes a drink.*)

Margaret: No. Keep beating. (*She picks up the umbrella, as if to warn him.*)

Tom: You asked for it then. (*He glances at the laptop.*) Is there art in designing a software program? or laying out a mask for a semiconductor? If you blew up a photograph of a memory chip, put it in an expensive frame and hung it on the wall at the Museum of Modern Art, would that be art?

Simon: Technology isn't art. It's based on equations and predictable outcomes.

Matt: Sonnets are too, to a certain extent, aren't they? There's a recipe for everything.

Simon (*clasping his hands together, prayerlike*): Nuns fret not. (*He takes a drink.*)

Margaret: But an engineer isn't attached to his work in the same way, say, a sculptor is to his. The soul of the so-called artist is removed from the art.

Tom: How do you know?

Simon: It's a moot point. The end result is not art. Artistic maybe, but not art. You can't compare chip designs or beef Wellington to Dutch Masters.

Matt: Tom has a point though. Designing a semiconductor, just like cooking, draws upon the creative process, doesn't it? It demands invention, imagination, expression. Granted, the materials are different.

Tom (*rocking back and forth on the stool*): Can we just drop all this?

Margaret: Wait. (*She takes a sip.*) There's still not the same attachment between the artist and the art. The very purpose for creating is different. Artists are impelled to realize, on paper or canvas or what have you, something that comes through them. Engineers are compelled to create something newer, faster, more functional. Aren't chips designed on computers? There's nothing artistic in that.

Tom: Says who?

Matt: Some artists feel no attachment whatsoever to their work once it's completed.

Simon (*holding up his tumbler*): Like the chefs at Burger King, right? (*He stands, takes the tumbler and walks along the railing.*) No offense, but haven't we got enough engineers? Seems to me a lot of students go into careers, not just in technical fields, but in marketing, accounting, those sorts of things as well, and they end up on jobs in their thirties that seemed like a good idea way back when because of the salary, only now those jobs somehow leave them dissatisfied. (*He sets the tumbler on the railing.*) Didn't they have other talents? How many times have you heard some adult say, God, I used to love to draw—or to paint, or to play the tuba or something—when I was a kid. (*He bends a leg back and hops a few times.*)

Tom: Everybody goes through job burnout. Writers certainly do. Besides, for most people those things are just hobbies; they never consider making a living by them.

Margaret: Maybe that's because they were never properly encouraged.

Matt: Maybe they never really had much talent either.

The crowd roars off in the distance to the right. Tom leaps up, hangs the binoculars around his neck, and goes to the railing. Matt takes his wine and follows.

Tom (*looking down right, rubbing his hands together*): That's the signal. She's on her way. (*He goes to the spool, takes a drink, and returns to the railing.*) OK. Before she arrives and drives me to distraction, let's get this dead horse buried once and for all. Simon and I were debating something earlier with regards to Godiva. When is the depiction of the human body art, and when is it, as some prude might put it, lewd objectification? Assuming that the artist is competent, does it balance on intention?

Margaret: No. Good intentions aren't enough. People doing porn and soft-porn may claim to be full of good intentions, trying to pass it off as erotic art to dignify themselves.

Tom: Good for them.

Matt: Of course there are higher and lower levels of art.

Tom: Personally, I subscribe to the lower. Doesn't even the stuff we consider great art in some cases objectify or create the same so-called undesirable urges as non-art or pornography? As if nobody's ever looked at a Botticelli and lusted after one of those mythical beauties like a Miss February.

Margaret: Luckily they probably never get their hands on a Botticelli.

Tom: There're always art books. And don't be too quick to rule out dealers and collectors. They're not above reproach.

The crowd roars again, nearer. Tom looks through the binoculars down right, then takes them off and hands them to Matt. Matt sets his glass on the railing and canvasses the crowd.

Simon: For better or worse, in any given period the prevailing moral climate dictates what's art and what's lewd or sensationalistic, not the artists themselves. Look at Hardy's *Tess*. Victorians, at least a good portion of them, were outraged by it; yet there's nothing in the book we'd find remotely objectionable. Or, among contemporaries, look at the mixed reactions to Mapplethorpe's photography. *(He takes a drink.)*

Tom: That's all fine and well and entirely beside the point. Even if the artist's intent is to depict a man raping a woman in order to capture the violence, pain, fear, whatever, whether he's successful or not in his depiction, doesn't it, much like non-art supposedly does, incite certain disturbed people to emulate that behavior at the same time it deters other people from that behavior?

Margaret: Perhaps. Art affects everyone differently, just as pornography does. But art aims higher. There's no mistaking a depiction of Leda and the Swan for pornography.

Tom: Someone might consider it bestiality. *(Margaret takes a drink, sets her glass on the balcony, rises and goes to the railing, puts her hands on Matt's shoulders. He hands the binoculars back to Tom and takes a sip of wine.)*

Simon: There's always someone.

The crowd roars again, nearby.

Tom *(hanging the binoculars around his neck)*: All I can say is, if I find art in the way a naked lady sits a horse, then that's art. You can try to convince me otherwise, but it's all subjective. *(He goes to the lounge chair and gets the umbrella, returns to the railing.)*

Simon: No one's trying to dissuade you. But you have to admit, even the most simple among us recognize and agree on great art when it's in front of us.

Some people in the crowd below cheer, others boo as a bald man in jodhpurs enters from the right pulling a child's hobbyhorse with training wheels. An undraped mannequin in a long blond wig is tied to the horse. The man waves a riding crop at the crowd.

Tom: What a disappointment.

Simon (*patting Tom on the back*): There's your Helen, Tom. (*pointing at the hobbyhorse and rider*) Does that meet your expectations of art?

The man stops, smiles, moves behind the mannequin, runs a hand through her hair, reaches around and squeezes her breasts. Some people in the crowd cheer, others boo.

Tom: Not even as parody. That guy should be shot. (*He ejects the umbrella, holds it in his arms like a rifle, and takes aim at the bald man.*) Years from now they'll still be trying to disprove the single umbrella theory.

Simon: We've all got our hobbyhorses.

The man whips the mannequin's buttocks with the riding crop, grabs its hips, and simulates sex while pushing the hobbyhorse along. The crowd grows quiet, except for a few rowdy celebrants cheering the man on. Simon goes to the spool and grabs the roll of toilet paper, returns to the railing.

Tom: Where are the cops now?

Simon: Sadomasochistic exhibitionists probably don't need a permit.

Margaret: This is one of those times I wish I had a gun. (*Simon hands Margaret the roll. She tosses it at the man, shouts.*) Pervert.

Tom (*yells*): Asswipe. (*He raises the umbrella and shakes it at the man.*)

Simon grabs his tumbler and tosses his wine at the man. Matt picks up his wine, has second thoughts about tossing it, takes a sip instead. The man stops, looks up at the balcony, waves the riding crop, and mouths, Thank you. He kisses the mannequin, then the hobbyhorse, and exits to the left, pulling them behind him. The crowd roars.

Tom: (*He lowers the umbrella, raises the binoculars and looks down left.*) I've seen that guy before. If that's Godiva and her husband, I'm going to be depressed shortly. (*He locks the umbrella, goes and lays it on the lounge chair, grabs his tumbler, takes a drink, and returns to the railing.*)

Simon: On the flier the husband's hair was thinning, but he wasn't bald.

Margaret: I knew he reminded me of someone.

Tom: Who?

Margaret: The creep with the mannequin.

Matt: He was older than the guy on the flier.

Tom: The mannequin reminded me of the inflatable Matt ordered from the classifieds in the back of *Rolling Stone*. (*He looks through the binoculars down left for a moment.*)

Margaret (*turning to Matt*): Tell me you were never so desperate. (*Matt takes his wine, goes and sits on the stool.*)

Tom: He had it stowed in the back of his closet at home.

Matt: That was dumb; my mom found it the first week.

Tom: Not before we all had a go at it.

Margaret: (*She gasps.*) That's sick. You're as bad as that creep who just went by.

Tom: I guess that makes us hypocrites.

The crowd roars off to the left.

Simon: (*He grabs his tumbler and goes to the spool.*) We each got five minutes alone in the bathroom with it. (*He pours himself some wine, takes a drink, and returns to the railing.*)

Margaret: Five minutes?

Tom: We were young. (*He looks through the binoculars down right.*) Someone please convince me that that wasn't Godiva. (*He takes his tumbler, goes to the right corner and sits on the railing.*)

Matt (*as though it was proof*): The crowd hasn't dispersed, has it?

Simon: Joe locked the door and refused to come out.

Matt: Tom had to pick the lock.

Margaret: You're all perverts. (*clasping herself*) I'm surrounded by perverts. (*She goes and sits in the lounge chair, making a point of pulling her skirt down discretely and laying the umbrella in her lap like a weapon.*)

The crowd roars again, farther off in the distance.

Tom: You wouldn't have known Matt just a few years ago. He's a regular domestic now,

but back then . . .

Matt: I'm all for ensconcing ourselves in current events. (*He looks at the bird feeder.*)

Simon, where're the birds?

Simon: Here and gone.

Tom: This subterfuge is wasted on me.

Margaret: I'm afraid to hear anymore. (*Using the umbrella, she reaches up and gently rocks the feeder back and forth.*)

Tom (*to Margaret*): Did Matt ever tell you about our escapade in North Beach?

Margaret (*looking at Matt*): No. (*slapping her palm with the umbrella*) Go on.

Simon (*to Matt*): By the way, were you there the time I got slapped?

Matt: No, but I remember hearing about it. It was at Fridays, was it not?

Margaret: Simon, you were slapped? when?

Simon: (*He takes his tumbler, goes to the left corner and sits on the railing.*) I just got through telling that story to Natalie. And it was already old then. Some other time maybe. It's not that earthshattering. Really.

Tom (*to Matt*): I thought you were at Fridays that time, but I was thinking of North Beach. I know you were there; I remember you being angrier than the rest of us.

Matt (*regretfully*): I was. (*He looks at Margaret.*) I invested the most.

Margaret: (*She takes a sip of wine.*) Someone tell me about North Beach. (*setting the glass back on the balcony*) This isn't another *drunk* story is it?

Tom: No, no. This is a bordello story. (*Margaret shoots Matt a look and begins to slap her palm with the umbrella again. Tom locks his fingers and, palms out, stretches his arms in front of him.*) The week before we started college, Simon, Joe, Matt, and I decided to treat ourselves to some *experienced* women.

Matt: Actually, it was your idea, Tom.

Margaret: I'm sure nobody had to twist your arm.

Tom: As I recall, Matt was all for it. He's already admitted that he put up the most

money. (*Matt looks away.*) Anyway, we end up in North Beach on a narrow street lined with titty bars and smoke shops. Between the three of us, after we empty our wallets and pool our resources, we've got about twenty three bucks each. We sniff around like lost dogs for a while until this nervous dude with dreadlocks steers us to a yellow door up a flight of stairs in a rundown Victorian. (*He takes a drink.*) We walk in and stand around in the vestibule with our hands in our pockets. A pretty woman with a big birthmark on her neck slips through a beaded doorway and smiles. We come to the understanding that, for the money we've got, each of us is going to get a hand job. And we have fifteen minutes to get it.

Margaret: How punctilious. (*She lays the umbrella on the lounge chair.*)

Tom: (*He holds his hands up.*) What can I say? She pushed a button on the inside of the counter and five or six women came into the vestibule. They lined up along the wall, turned around, and looked at us invitingly. Since Simon was the only declared virgin—the inflatable didn't count—we agreed that he should have first choice.

Simon (*drumming the railing with his fingers, sarcastically*): Lucky me.

Tom: You got the only young one. And she was attractive. Wasn't she the one with green eyes?

Simon: Never mind.

Matt: You're never satisfied, are you? (*He grabs the wine bottle on the spool, empties it into his glass, and takes a sip.*) She had green eyes and pouty lips.

Margaret (*to Matt*): And what features did *yours* come with?

Tom: Do you want me to finish the story or not?

Margaret: Yes and no. (*She tugs at the hem of her skirt.*)

Tom: The rest of us just sort of fell in with someone and were led through the beaded doorway and down a dark hall. There were two more beaded doorways, one on the left, one on the right. They opened onto two large rooms divided by curtains. The curtains set off the individual rooms, each about the size of an office cubicle. On the other side of the curtains cigarette smoke curled into the air and beds creaked. And you could hear voices.

Simon: You're relishing this, aren't you? setting the scene.

Tom (*smiling*): Someone else can break in any time.

Simon: No, you're doing a good job. You've recaptured all the sordid details. (*He takes a*

drink.)

Margaret: I agree. It's more interesting than I thought. (*She looks curiously at Matt.*)

Matt: Just remember, this happened a few years before we met.

Tom: Joe and Matt and I went into the room on the right, Simon, the one on the left. Or vice versa. The women guided us into our separate cubicles. When our fifteen minutes were up, the woman with the birthmark pulled the curtains aside and said, Time's up. That's it, time's up. We all met in the hall and were ushered out into the vestibule.

Margaret: How anticlimactic. There's more isn't there? (*She takes a sip of wine.*)

Tom: We stared at each other for a minute, then went downstairs. We stood in the street. Nobody said a thing. We just looked around.

Margaret: And? Did you get your *jobs*?

Tom: Joe finally spoke up. He said he'd been ripped off, that when he started to unzip his pants the woman grabbed his arm and patted the bed. She told him to sit down, relax, she liked him, there was plenty of time. She acted as if he was special. He thought he was going to get something extra for his money. So for fifteen minutes they talked. She asked him if he had a girlfriend, had he been laid before. That kind of crap. Next thing he knew, he heard the curtains being drawn and the woman saying, Time's up.

Margaret (*slapping her thigh*): That's perfect.

Matt: Of course while Joe was divulging all of this, the rest of us were realizing that we'd been duped in exactly the same way. They'd counted on our egos to keep us quiet, at least until we were outside. I was so pissed. Mine had me thinking I was some kind of satyr.

Margaret: You can't buy much for twenty three dollars, dear.

Tom: We weren't after much. I went back upstairs to complain, and some barrel-chested guy I hadn't seen before told me if I didn't have any money he didn't want to see me up there again.

Margaret: I can't believe the four of you were so naive to begin with.

Matt: Our heads were clouded.

Tom (*looking at his crotch*): Our little ones.

Simon: (*He sighs.*) I think it's time I got something out in the open.

Matt: By all means.

Margaret: Yes?

Simon: It's been gnawing at me ever since that day. (*He stands and grips the railing.*) I've been putting up with lame innuendoes about my sexual proclivity for a while now. And although I hate to admit it, the assumptions everyone makes about me are directly related to what happened in North Beach. It's silly really.

Tom: (*He stands, goes over to Simon and puts a hand on his shoulder.*) You realize they've identified a gene for that, don't you?

Matt: Give him room, Tom. (*He goes and stands behind the lounge chair, plays with Margaret's hair.*) I never assumed anything.

Margaret (*taking Matt's hand*): Go ahead, Simon.

Simon: All right. Here we go . . . You have to promise not to laugh out loud.

Tom: I can't do that. (*He grabs his tumbler, goes and sits on the stool.*)

Margaret (*crossing her heart*): I promise.

Matt: Out with it. We're your friends. (*He goes to the spool, takes a sip of wine, and returns to the lounge chair.*)

Simon: Just please don't interrupt me, or I'll never get it out. (*He takes a deep breath.*) I got a little farther that day than I admitted. I wish I could say I didn't brag at the time because I'm a gentleman. Not so. When Lotty and I were alone—she told me her name was Lotty—my whole body began to shake so bad that I had to sit on the end of the bed because I was afraid I'd collapse and embarrass myself if I didn't. I'm sure she was used to nervous customers, maybe even felt sorry for me. She sat next to me and put her finger to my lips when I started to explain myself. She had me stand up and coaxed me around the edge of the bed to an end table. A ceramic bowl full of soapy water was sitting on top of it. She said, I have to wash you first.

Tom (*rocking back and forth on the stool*): Go, Simon, go.

Margaret (*raising her fist*): Tom.

Simon: I stood there like a statue on Easter Island while she unbuckled my pants. She unzipped me and took me out. She held me in her fingertips for a moment. Then she looked up and smiled. She said, and I'll never forget it, Gosh, it's so cute. With those

four words, my sexlife sputtered out before it ever started. (*He takes a drink.*) I can't forgive Lotty for that, or myself for being there in the first place. I was relieved when the curtains were drawn.

Tom: That's the big, I should say little, revelation? Shit, Simon, that explains a lot. I never realized your (*with an Irish accent*) wee little gadget bothered you so much. What with all your books and your poetry and stuff I assumed you were above the whole penis envy thing. Joe and I were afraid you'd morphed (*humping with his pelvis and holding his hands out as if grabbing someone by the hips from behind*) into a chocolate artist.

Margaret: (*Disgusted, she attempts to rise, but Matt pushes her back into the lounge chair.*) Could you be any more repugnant, Tom?

Tom (*to Simon*): Now if it was a clitoris you'd have something to brag about.

Margaret: Oh, that's . . .

Matt: (*He goes over and shoves Tom off the stool.*) That's enough.

Margaret: Size is relative, Simon.

Tom: (*He sits on the stool again.*) Yah, it's a cousin to intercourse. Women always say it doesn't matter, but it's the first thing they call attention to when they want to demean you.

Margaret (*to Tom*): You seem awfully familiar with the criticism.

Matt: (*He grabs one of Tom's arms and twists it behind his back.*) Say uncle. (*Tom squirms; Matt twists harder.*) Say uncle.

Simon: Uncle Toby.

Tom: (*He struggles with Matt, but relinquishes.*) Carbuncle.

Matt goes and stands behind the lounge again. Margaret reaches for his hand.

Margaret (*to Simon, dismissing Tom with a wave of the hand*): Did you consider that Lotty may have been saying that cruelly just to keep you from ejaculating? Consider the trick those women played on Matt and your other so-called friends.

Simon: It's possible. But why would she bother to unzip me in the first place. (*He looks away, then back.*) Besides, I have to admit, it is . . . diminutive. Lotty did her best to soften the blow, said she'd seen a smaller one on an Asian guy once. But that didn't help. Then she said she enjoyed smaller ones more than big ones because they were less threatening, whatever that means. That only made matters worse. (*He sighs.*) Pathetic. I

know it's stupid and irrational, but it's frightened me off relationships with women ever since.

Tom: Well, you didn't really have any prior to that. (*Matt makes a threatening gesture; Tom lowers his head and wraps his arms around his trunk.*)

Margaret (*to Simon*): I can't believe that a guy with so much going for him could be so rattled by something so inconsequential as the size of his peter. Actually, I can. Small-breasted women usually experience similar feelings of inadequacy. If it's any consolation, Virginia Woolf said that the greatest writing is androgynous. Maybe you're destined to be a great writer.

Simon: Isn't it pretty to think so.

Tom: There's your solution, Simon, find yourself a flat-chested woman. Look what it's done for Matt.

Margaret (*standing up*): That's it. (*grabbing the umbrella*) I'm going to stick this in your fat trap and open it.

Matt (*grabbing her arm*): Don't let him provoke you. (*wresting the umbrella from her*) That's what he wants.

Tom: Ignore me and I go away.

Margaret: No, we're the ones going away. (*going to Simon and putting her arm around him*) I'm sorry Simon, but I can't take any more of this.

Simon (*patting Margaret on the back*): It's OK. It's OK. Don't take it to heart. You need thicker skin. (*He pinches the skin on his forearm.*) See, I'm becoming aspersions repellent.

Margaret (*collecting herself*): I hate being this way. (*looking at Tom*) Damn you, Tom. (*She smiles faintly.*)

Simon: Deep down I know Tom loves us.

Matt: Tough love.

The crowd roars off in the distance to the right. Tom goes to railing, looks through the binoculars down right. Margaret picks up her wine glass and sets it on the spool. Matt hands Margaret the umbrella, finishes his wine, then straps the glasses and the corkscrew in the basket and closes it.

Tom: I'll tell you what I love, friends who try to understand me and accept my excesses.

And Simon is foremost among them.

Simon: I'm foremost among your excesses?

Tom (*looking down right again*): I also love the sight of a naked woman.

Matt: (*He picks up the wine bottle, makes sure it's empty.*) Do you recycle?

Tom (*pointing to the trash beside the cooler*): Just set it there.

Simon: Are you really going?

Margaret: We've had enough love for one day.

Tom (*going to Margaret and trying to put his arm around her*): Don't be offended. Simon isn't.

Margaret (*pushing Tom away*): He should be.

Matt: You know me. I'm no avenging angel. I'm used to you, Tom, but your mean spiritedness this afternoon . . . Grow up. (*He picks up the basket and puts his arm around Margaret.*)

Tom: I am. Right before your eyes.

The crowd roars again, nearer.

Simon: Why don't you at least stay until Godiva arrives? Tom will behave. (*grabbing Tom's T-shirt*) Won't you?

Tom: I'll be preoccupied.

Simon: There. You see.

Margaret: One naked mannequin will have to suffice. We're going to scoot. (*She nudges Matt.*) We can always stop and see Godiva on the way to the car.

Tom: (*He holds his hand out to Matt.*) Believe me, I really am sorry. Maybe it was the wine talking.

Matt (*shaking hands*): Don't blame the wine.

Tom: I forgot, it was a modest one. (*opening his arms to hug Margaret*) Don't hold today against me. Your heart's big enough to forgive a fool starved for attention, isn't it? (*They*

hug and separate.) You can hold that against me anytime though.

Margaret (*pointing her umbrella at Tom*): Only if you quit behaving like one of the Marx brothers on Spanish fly. (*She brushes his cheek with the back of her hand.*) In spite of your incivility, we had a good time. (*looking at Simon and Matt*) And the stories especially were enlightening.

The crowd roars again. Tom goes to the railing, looks down right.

Tom: She's on her way. (*He whistles.*)

Simon: (*He shakes hands with Matt, then hugs Margaret.*) Thanks for coming to my defense. It's a relief to have everything out in the open, even if the bypass got messy.

Margaret (*hugging Simon again*): You're a sweetheart.

Tom: What about me? (*He goes to Margaret with open arms.*) I'll take seconds.

Matt (*grabbing Margaret's elbow*): We'll be leaving now.

Matt and Margaret exit, followed by Tom and Simon. The crowd roars just offstage. Tom and Simon return and go to the railing. Matt and Margaret appear below.

Tom (*yells, to Matt and Margaret*): Hope there's something good on PBS. (*Matt and Margaret wave and exit left.*) All in all, I thought that went well.

Simon: As if it were scripted.

Tom: Now for some unbridled ogling. (*He leans over the railing, yells.*) Hold your head up, Godiva. Show us those mammae. Put somebody's eyes out with them.

Simon: (*He takes a drink.*) Don't get too close.

The crowd roars below. A cop on a spotted horse enters from the right and stops. A bullhorn hangs from the cop's holster, and a coil of nylon rope hangs from the saddle's pommel.

Tom: Not again.

Simon: They sent in Dudley Do-Right this time. Must be serious trouble.

Tom (*pointing at the horse*): Notice the Western saddle?

Simon: It's turning into a regular rodeo.

Cop (*speaking through the bullhorn*): Good afternoon. (*The cop is a woman. The crowd roars.*)

Tom: He's a she. Is it her? (*He jumps about excitedly, then stops and stares at the cop.*) It must be. (*He leans over the railing to look closer.*) Well she isn't much to look at. Now we know why she wasn't on the flier.

Simon: I'm not so sure . . .

Tom: All the same. (*yells*) Lose the uniform, Godiva.

Cop (*speaking through the bullhorn*): May I have your attention please. First of all, on behalf of your mayor's office, your city council, and your entire police department, I'd like to thank you for your patience and cooperation this afternoon. (*The crowd roars.*)

Simon: What do you suppose the rope is for?

Tom: Bondage.

Simon: Maybe it's for cordoning off the street.

Tom: For lassoing stray feminists.

Simon: For hanging chauvinists. (*slapping Tom's shoulder*) Heads up.

Cop (*speaking through the bullhorn*): Thank you again. (*She stands up in the stirrups, then settles back in the saddle.*)

Simon: Here comes the bad news.

Tom (*slapping Simon's shoulder*): Don't jinx it.

Cop (*speaking through the bullhorn*): I regret to inform you that the ride rescheduled for thirteen hundred hours has been postponed indefinitely. (*The crowd boos.*)

Tom: No. No. No.

Simon: No Godiva.

Tom: We've been deceived.

Cop (*speaking through the bullhorn*): After a thorough examination of all applicable codes, and in consideration of the possible repercussions due to the nature of the ride, the party concerned was refused a permit to access public roads. (*The crowd boos.*)

Tom: Godiva's big audition. It was nothing more than a tailgate party.

Simon: I'm beginning to think it was all a hoax cooked up by the city council and the hot dog vendors.

Cop (*speaking through the bullhorn*): If at some future date a permit is granted, the public will be notified through the appropriate channels. (*The crowd roars.*)

Tom: What channels would that be?

Simon: In other words, we can expect more fliers.

Cop (*speaking through the bullhorn*): In the interest of public safety, I ask that when you disassemble please do so in a peaceful and orderly fashion. And remember to drive carefully and to deposit your trash in the receptacles. (*The crowd boos.*)

Tom (*canvassing the balcony*): I need to hurl something. (*Simon puts a hand over his tumbler. Tom goes and grabs a handfull of buffalo wings, thinks better of it, sets them down and goes and grabs the box of bird seed. He returns to the railing.*)

Simon (*attempting to wrestle the seed from Tom*): Not that. (*Tom sidearms the box at the cop. It veers off wide behind her. She doesn't notice it.*) Pearls behind swine.

Cop (*speaking through the bullhorn*): Thank you for your cooperation. Have a good day. (*The crowd boos. The cop exits left.*)

Tom: That's it then? What a waste.

Simon: Not entirely.

Tom: Entirely.

Simon: You saw a woman on a horse.

Tom: Big deal.

Simon: You ate, you drank, you abused.

Tom: Well, there is that.

Simon: You got plenty of material for your thesis.

Tom: And that. (*looking at the laptop*) I should have gotten more of this down on disk.

Simon: Sometimes it's necessary to be part of the experiment. Don't you think? *(Pause.)* Most of us are just spectators at our own lives.

Tom: Today was a day designed for spectating.

Simon: We all had designs on Godiva all right.

Tom: *(He looks through the binoculars down left.)* Hey, at least someone got something out of this lousy sideshow; one of the feminists is wearing the mannequin's blond wig. I hope she beat that bald guy soundly.

Simon: That in itself is a sign of progress—you siding with a feminist.

Tom: Keep dreaming. *(scanning the crowd)* Nobody's leaving yet.

Simon: They're stunned. Nowhere to go. Nothing to record.

Tom *(looking down right)*: That sandwich board guy was a practical joker after all. He crossed out *Equestrians*, and now his board reads, *No Nude Mannequins*. And would you just look at that. *(pointing down right)* The nun changed her sign to *Go Diva Go To Hell*.

Simon: As a species we're nothing if not adaptable. *(He goes to the spool, stares at the hibachi. He stirs the ashes in the hibachi with his index finger.)*

Tom: And skeptical. *(watching Simon)* Don't try anything funny with those ashes.

Simon: *(He picks up some ashes and rubs them between his fingertips.)* I won't.

Tom: You think Godiva was for real?

Simon: Who can say? Real.

Tom: *(He goes and sits on the stool, pulls the laptop to the edge of the spool, and starts to enter data.)* Maybe she'll get a permit and reschedule the ride later.

Simon: You'll have to wait and see. *(He goes behind the lounge chair, kicks off his flip-flops, and pulls down his shorts.)*

Tom: What are you doing?

Simon: I thought I'd go for a run. Give people something to laugh about.

Tom: You're nuts.

Simon: My nuts and everything else. *(He takes off his T-shirt, goes to the railing in his underwear, scans the crowd for a moment, then turns around and leans back against the railing.)* Want to come with me?

Tom *(turning to face Simon)*: You got \$50,000?

Simon: Fifty cents maybe.

Tom: Sorry.

Simon: Then run in your jeans.

Tom: Wake up. I'm not running. Period.

Simon: Why not? We die running or we die waiting.

Tom: What about running in place?

Simon: That's not life, that's aerobics. *(Pause.)* Afraid of what people might think?

Tom: Could be.

Simon: Since when?

Tom: You're not really going.

Simon: I am.

Tom: No you're not. Sit down and read for a while or something. Get in touch with your God for Christ's sake, or your feminine side. Or both, or something else, or both and something else. *(He turns, grabs the laptop and sets it in his lap, starts to enter data.)* I've got to get my thoughts on disk.

Simon: All stored up.

Tom: In little bits.

Simon: There's a whole left.

Tom: I'll fill it with data.

Simon: *(He takes a drink.)* All right. All right. Go ahead and stay here astride your

laptop. As for me, (*pulling his underwear down*) there's more enterprise in running naked.

Tom: Look (*turning around*) . . . oh man, Simon. (*He puts a hand over his eyes, then peeps through his splayed fingers.*) Is that what I think it is?

Simon: It's the beginnings of one. (*He grabs his tumbler, goes and sets it on the spool. He hesitates for a moment, then goes to the patio door.*) Notice I'm going.

Tom: Let's talk about this.

Simon: We did.

Simon exits. Tom sets the laptop on the spool and follows. Tom returns, rushes to the railing. Simon appears below. The crowd below cheers.

Tom (*motioning with his hand, yells*): Get back up here before you're arrested. (*Simon shrugs and smiles. Tom throws his hands up, drops them. Simon waves. Tom waves. Simon turns to exit left. Tom yells.*) Wait. (*Simon stops and looks up.*) I'm coming. (*Simon raises a fist, waits. Tom pulls off his loafers, takes off the binoculars, goes and sets them on the spool. He hesitates in front of the laptop, then shuts it down, turns and exits unbuttoning his jeans.*)

Curtain