

**THE RELEASE
OF A LIVE
PERFORMANCE**

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I suppose everybody finds, in a mistaken notion about another person, his one reason for living.

--Yukio Mishima, *Forbidden Colors*

CHARACTERS

NELL

Late 20's, early 30's. Attractive.

COCO

Nell's older sister. Married, the mother of two. Husband doing quite well, financially. Hasn't been back home in years.

BRENT

Early 30's. Always on the road. Drives cars to various locations on commission. No education. Loves to pick up hitchhikers and remembers everything they tell him, forever.

SCOTT

Brent's latest hitchhiker. Coco's age. Wearing new Cowboy duds, which are the worse for wear. Went back to school and got his MBA, last week. Getting married tomorrow--going into the wife's father's business. Taking a last look before he leaves the single life behind.

SET

Texas. The house Nell and Coco's parents lived in. Located just on the edge of the McClellan's Steak House parking lot, beneath the shadow of the huge plastic red and yellow cow, known as the FIST OF MEAT.

Necessary set pieces: a couch, a couple chairs, an antique table painted in pastel tones for a child's room, a small lamp in the window.

Basic layout of set: a bathroom off to stage right, the front door stage left, a window next to the door which looks out, onto the parking lot.

A Tuesday night.

ACT ONE

(An ordinary living room, in a wooden frame house in a small town in Texas. The living room is decorated in the modest, but tasteful style of the middle class, circa 1960's. Some of the furniture suggests elegance--some of it is actually antique. A bit of lace and bric-a-brac indicates that the room was decorated by somebody's mother.

The room is filled with boxes and crates. Most of the boxes have various food logos on them--some are stamped SHIP TO McCLELLAN'S. There is a large Goodwill box, which Coco makes sure gets its share.

NELL is standing at the window, looking out.

COCO has been doing all the packing, and continues. Coco moves toward the door, holding a little antique table. Nell sees her, blocks her path.)

NELL

Sometime bitch.

COCO

Don't start that with me--

NELL

(Pulls the table away from Coco)

Little sometime bitch.

COCO

All right, then, talk to me. Tell me what you want to take, what you want to leave.

(Nell takes the table over to the window)

Get away from that window. You hear me, Nell, you come away from that goddamn window and talk to me. You have been nailed to that goddamn window--

NELL

I like to see what's coming up the drive. Makes me feel like Scarlet O'Hara. You know what I'd say if I were Scarlet O'Hara?

COCO

No.

NELL

I'd say "Tomorrow is another lay."

COCO

What am I supposed to do when you say things like that? I don't know whether to laugh or cry.

NELL

You're lying to me and you're lying to yourself. If you'd admit it, you'd be a self-confessed liar. Now wouldn't that be something?

COCO

You called, and I came.

NELL

I called, you came, and you're moving furniture.

COCO

I told you I wanted to get started, moving things out to the car.

NELL

You did not.

COCO

I did so.

NELL

I didn't hear you.

COCO

Cause you were standing at that goddamn window looking at that damn ugly parking lot, thinking about him.

NELL

I'm not looking at the parking lot.

(Coco comes over to the window, looks out. Swats at a mosquito)

COCO

Damn it.

NELL

You missed it. Here. Let me.

(Slaps her sister's back)

COCO

Get it?

NELL

Stand still.

(Slaps again. Then again, harder. Chases Coco around the room, slapping)

COCO

Nell--

NELL

Stand still!

(She grabs Coco, pulls down her collar, and looks at Coco's neck.)

Jesusus, will you look at this!

COCO

Nell, what's wrong!

NELL

A nape...of...the...neck. HE'S GOT A NAPE OF THE NECK TOO!

COCO

Let go of me, you hear!

NELL

Lord, Lord, he's got a nape of the neck--

(Coco pushes Nell away, sending her sprawling into a chair.)

--and a chair! Damn if he doesn't have a chair too!

(She climbs over the chair, stroking it.)

Jesusus, what a miracle! Swing low, sweet chair-i-o-t.

(She tumbles onto the floor.)

And he's got a floor. Got a rug too, I'll bet.

(Runs her fingers through the rug)

Got 100,000 closely threaded machine loomed fibers. I think about them. I think about him.

(She crawls around on the floor.)

He's got couch legs. Table bases.

(She is at the door.)

Doors. Windows.

(Stands and looks outside the window)

Drives. Outside of his house he's got--

(Pause)

--an outside.

(She goes to one of the boxes, pulls out a shirt.)

He's got a shirt. He's got all kinds of them. He puts them on. He takes them off. Sometimes I see shirts, and I want to see hundreds of 'em. I want to see them around me, in front of me, behind me, back through all recorded time. At times like that, I can't help myself. I jump in the car and drive to Neiman Marcus--the Men's Department.

I run inside and I want to scream SHIRTS! ALL THESE SHIRTS COULD BE HIS SHIRTS! He could wear every shirt in the store. Oh Lord should you see me in Neiman Marcus. I've almost died there. Twice I've almost just pulled down a display on top of me and died.

The fucking wonder of it all, Coco--that's what I'm talking about! It's the miracle of shirts! Like the famous shroud of Turin. I see him there. In every one of them.

COCO

You hate Neiman Marcus.

NELL

That was before. Now I walk into Neiman Marcus--and they can't tell. I look like a perfectly normal person--no one can tell! And boy do I love walking down the street, mingling with all those damn normal people--riding the same buses, sitting at the same luncheonettes, eating the same tasteless food. How I'd love it, someday at the luncheonette, some one day when everybody is eating the same runny mashed potatoes, the same dry turkey slice, how I'd love to stand up some one day and scream "You poor slob! You poor, ordinary himless slob! You're eating this shit but I'm thinking of him!"

It's just one of those things. I just happen to love runny mashed potatoes and dry turkey slice. Always have.

COCO

Don't be angry with me. Don't say I can't say it's got to stop.

NELL

What about the luncheonettes? How will I stand the luncheonettes?

COCO

So you won't go.

NELL

Neiman Marcus?

COCO

Deep down inside you still hate Neiman Marcus.

NELL

What about the buses?

COCO

You have a car. You won't need, anymore, to take the bus.

NELL

Fact?

COCO

Fact.

NELL

You make these definite statements and I don't know who you are. I don't know how you know all these things you say you know. Tell me. How do you know them?

COCO

If on the bus, people remind you of him--if what you want is to stop--it's just common sense, Nell. It's just common sense to use your car.

NELL

He has a car, you know. If I get into my car, sit behind the wheel--

COCO

So walk.

NELL

You always were after my car.

COCO

Where do you get these ideas?

NELL

In the aftermath of a miracle there are no ideas.

(Pause)

Hold me, Coco.

COCO

No.

NELL

No? You said no to me? No sounds like a cold, hard fact.

COCO

Why should I hold you? It doesn't change anything, my holding you. If you want me to hold you so the world will go away, it's still there. If you're convinced it's actually, finally gone away, my holding you doesn't bring it back.

Why should I hold you?

NELL

Good point.

COCO

(She puts her arms out to Nell and holds her.)

Stop thinking about him.

NELL

You always were after my car, admit it.

COCO

Always.

NELL

Tell you what. I'll put it in writing. I'll leave you my car. I'll leave you my chair. I'll leave you my shirts.

COCO

(Shaking her)

What are you talking about?

NELL

The one sure way to stop.

COCO

Little sometime bitch. You'd never have the guts.

NELL

Guts? The guts get thrown out with the bath water. With the car and the chair and the shirts.

If I stop, will you take care of me? I'm pretty sure that once a person's separated from their guts, it's hard holding down a job.

Will you take care of me?

COCO

I'm taking care of you now. If you'd let me.

NELL

It's too cold up where you live.

COCO

You get used to it.

NELL

Twenty years it takes to get used to it, that's how long it takes. I'll be an old woman by the time I get used to the cold. I'll be ready to move back down here.

COCO

The change'll do you good, Nell.

NELL

What will it change? I'll just be someplace cold, thinking about him.

COCO

So stop.

NELL

Just stop--

(Snaps her fingers)

--like that.

It doesn't stop like that.

Let me show you how it stops.

(Pause)

You see this chair? An ordinary chair.

COCO

Not the old chair trick.

NELL

It's a new trick.

COCO

It's still the old chair

NELL

No it isn't--that's the trick. Anyway, you love all my chair tricks.

COCO

You make these definite statements and--

NELL

You always have and you always will--

COCO

I never did. They're ordinary tricks.

NELL

You think turning a chair, a shirt, Neiman Marcus, and a luncheonette into him are ordinary tricks?

COCO

Yes.

NELL

Well, maybe.

But here's the trick: To think about them, without thinking about him.

You can't imagine what it's like when I try that trick.

COCO

I'm with you. I'll help you.

NELL

When I stop thinking about him there's nothing left. I'm all alone, and it's so hot--like the center of the earth--

COCO

Jesusus, not that center of the earth crap again. Don't you dare start in on the center of the earth. Don't you dare. You're right here. Here with me.

NELL

No, Coco. You're right here. Here with me.

COCO

It's just a story, that's all it is, Nell. The center of the earth is just a lovely, lovely story--

NELL

Is that what you think it is, Coco?

COCO

It's what you told me, Nell. It's what I have always believed.

NELL

That it was a story?

COCO

That it was lovely.

NELL

Here's what I didn't tell you: There's no way back.

There isn't anything I can do that doesn't make me think of him and when I think of him there's nothing left worth doing. Nothing. For awhile I thought I had it licked. I took care of myself. I did things right. I felt the pleasure of doing things right. Things got very right for awhile around here--the house was very clean and there was a lot of gourmet eating going on and I was to work on time and my bank balance was a piece of anal retentive art. Things got very right and I felt the pleasure of it, felt it fully, one day, for about thirty seconds.

That was my mistake. My first, last, and always mistake. My always.

I can make this chair--if I try very hard--I can make this ordinary chair not remind me of him. It's an act of the magic of hard work, but I'm not afraid of hard work. It can be done and I can do it. I can hard work systematically across this room like a mine sweeper, disengaging every snap, crackle and pop.

But I can't break the hold in here.

You walked into this house. You know--you must know--how warm and good it feels to have you walk into this house.

And everything it feels like is him.

COCO

Don't say things like that, Nell--

NELL

I called and you came but you can't change the trick. If I stop thinking about him I'll disappear.

COCO

You think you're so special. Oh, there was a time, there was a boy, and I thought like that. I have a story just like yours. Every woman has a story like that.

NELL

Some fact. Not my fact.

COCO

You remember him--no, you were too young, but he lived right down the street from us, in that big white house

(She goes to the window, points.)

--right next to the--

(She can't find it.)

--well, it's gone now, but--

NELL

Everybody has the same story and everybody always tells it. Everybody has a story of a man they loved who didn't love them.

Everybody tells the story, then stands up at the end and says "But I'm here, aren't I? I didn't let it destroy me, now did I?" And I don't know what to say.

I don't know that for a fact.

COCO

It was an entertaining story. And it might have helped.

NELL

They never help.

COCO

It still might have.

NELL

Too late for entertaining stories.

COCO

It's too soon to get you packed, it's too late to tell you stories. Just what the hell did you call me down here for? Just what do you want me to do?

NELL

I want you to--hold me.

(Coco holds Nell tightly.)

You're a good hugger. You hug like mom.

COCO

You hug like mom.

NELL

Here comes an Uncle Paul hug--

(Tickles Coco, rubs and hugs her)

COCO

Stop it--don't tickle me, Uncle Paul--please stop--

COCO/NELL

NOT UNTIL YOU STOP SAYING UNCLE!

(They hold each other for another few seconds.)

COCO

(Pulls away from Nell and slaps her.)

Damn you. This time bitch.

NELL

You feel it, don't you? Now you know it's real.

COCO

What's real about holding me and thinking about him? What's real about thinking about a man who never thinks about you? What? Nothing.

NELL

It's real.

COCO

Holding me and thinking about him--you've got your nerve.

NELL

Not you. I was holding Uncle Paul. He wouldn't mind. He'd understand. Uncle Paul, wherever you are--guess who loves you now. This time bitch loves you. Loves you so much, whenever she thinks about you she has to stop thinking about you and start thinking about him.

COCO

For God's sake, Nell. Stop.

NELL

The only way to stop is to spend time with people I hate. To have only very second rate times. Go to movies I don't like. Wear the kind of clothes I never wear. Now is that your idea of a way of life?

COCO

When we were kids we used to plan to live together. We used to plan to have so much fun.

NELL

You got your own kids now.
(The phone rings.)

COCO

Well? Aren't you going to answer it?

NELL

No. I always let the first one of the evening just ring right off the hook. Can't be too easy, right?

COCO

But--but it might be Steven--
(She moves toward the phone.)

NELL

I said no. You let it ring.

COCO

But it might be Steven--something might have happened to one of the kids--

NELL

Jesusus, you called them the minute you got off the plane.

(Coco is about to pick up the phone.)

I'm warning you, Coco--

COCO

Don't be ridiculous, Nell--

(Starts to pick it up)

NELL

I said NO!

(She pushes Coco away from the phone. Coco falls against some boxes.)

What's the matter with you? You can't be away from them for one day without--

(Pause)

You think about them a lot, don't you? About Steven, about the kids?

COCO

(The phone stops ringing.)

If that was Steven--

NELL

You think about them all the time, don't you?

COCO

What are you talking about? They're my life. My children.

NELL

All the time?

COCO

Yes. Yes, of course I do. It's a natural thing.

NELL

I'm sure it is.

COCO

They're my children.

NELL

You couldn't stop thinking about them, could you?

COCO

You don't understand.

NELL

Then what about Steven?

COCO

What about Steven?

NELL

Could you stop thinking about him? Not for long. For a minute. For two. Could you?

COCO

I wouldn't. Even if I could.

NELL

Then you could.

COCO

I didn't say that.

NELL

I'll make you a deal. You stop thinking about Steven--and I'll stop thinking about him.

(Pause)

Deal?

COCO

What kind of a deal is that?

NELL

An impossible deal. The kind of deal I like. Is it a deal?

(Pause)

I stop thinking about him. If you do.

(Pause)

We get in my car. I go with you, home.

(Pause)

Deal?

(She extends her hand. Coco takes it. Nell is surprised.)

COCO

Deal.

NELL

Deal. But don't try fooling me--cause I'll know.

COCO

How will you know?

NELL

About this. I'll know. Fact.

(She walks over to the phone.)

And here is what I also know.

(She holds her hand over the phone.)

There's someone picking up his phone. There's--anyone starting to dial my number. He reminds me totally of him. Watch carefully--this was the hardest part to learn how to do.

As far as I know, it's impossible to undo it.

(The phone rings.)

COCO

Don't answer it.

NELL

I always answer the second call. I just need to know, in my heart of hearts, that I haven't been too easy. Think mama would be proud?

(She puts her hand on the receiver, then pulls it back, teasing Coco.)

I'm going to pick up this phone and say hello. Hello is just a word, right? But you lop off the o, you've got hell. Uncouple the l's, you've got he. Take away the he, you got no one to say hello to.

(She picks up the phone.)

Hello?

(Laughs)

How are you?

COCO

Who is it?

(She runs over to the phone.)

Is it him?

NELL

(To Coco)

Listen carefully, and tell me.

(To phone)

No, I can't. My sister's here visiting. I'm sorry the yes to no ratio isn't higher.

(Warm, generous laughter)

COCO

Is it him? Nell, tell me, what's he want--what's he saying--

NELL

(Waving at Coco to be quiet)

What--I can't--hello--hello--

(She holds the phone away from her.)

I didn't get to say good-bye.

COCO

Was it him, Nell--

NELL

Let's see what we can do with good-bye. Take off the by you've got good. Erase one o you've got God. Insert the deleted o in the discarded by you've got boy. Make a mistake with either one of those and you've got shit.

(She hangs up.)

You've got nothing.

COCO

Was it him!

NELL

Well--it was. But not the way you mean him.

COCO

Oh.

NELL

Maybe I should have let you talk to him.

COCO

Me? Why would I want to talk to him?

NELL

You wanted to know what he said.

COCO

That was only when I thought it was him.

NELL

(Pause. Slyly)

It might be him next time, Coco. Would you like to talk to him then?

COCO

If it's him.

NELL

You would?

COCO

Yes.

NELL

Would you like to do more than talk to him?

COCO

What do you mean?

NELL

You're right. It's a stupid idea.

COCO

You wouldn't--would you? You wouldn't have him come over with me here? No, you wouldn't.

NELL

I just thought if you wanted to talk to him, you might as well have a good look at him, too. But it's a stupid--

COCO
No. I would. Like to.

NELL
You would?

COCO
Yes.

NELL
Deal.

COCO
But only--only if it's him.

NELL
That'll be up to you to decide.

COCO
What--

NELL
After all, to me they're all of them him.
(The phone rings.)

COCO
Just how am I supposed to know which--

NELL
You'll have to watch carefully. You'll have to catch the slight of man.
Remember--the heart is quicker than the eye.
(She puts her hand on the receiver, then pulls back, teasing
Coco again.)
I'll let you in on a little secret. The one that just called--that wasn't really
him. Not really.
(Whispering)

But this is.
(She picks up the phone.)
Hello? Yes. Good to hear your voice.
(Aside to Coco)

Listen to the sound of my voice and tell me--is it him?

(To phone)

Yes, yes, no I love the heat. I was born to it. Born in it, took to it, can't live without it. Did you know it takes a person twenty years to adjust to a colder climate? Warmer one takes only three weeks. I read that somewhere. Well, I'd be dead by then. Yes. Cold did my sister in. At times.

(To Coco)

Well? What do you think you're willing to risk?

(To phone)

Hang on, just one second.

(To Coco)

Take a chance. What can you lose?

COCO

What if I say yes? Say it's him?

NELL

You get to talk to him.

COCO

But what if it isn't really him?

NELL

Oh, you can talk to as many as you like--as long as you think that it's him.

COCO

All right.

(She reaches for the phone.)

NELL

You do?

COCO

Yes.

NELL

Good.

(She hands Coco the phone.)

It's your husband.

COCO

Steven--I--no, we're not driving back till morning. I told you we might not.
Oh. It's in the top drawer. You called me because--it's always there.

(She laughs softly.)

I love you.

(She hangs up.)

NELL

You didn't ask him over. And here I thought we had us a deal.

COCO

Steven wants you with us too. And the kids--Jeffery adores you.

NELL

You're not listening to me. We had a deal.

COCO

You're talking to hear yourself talk.

NELL

Fact?

COCO

I love you. Doesn't that make a difference?

NELL

It makes all the difference. And it doesn't change a thing.

COCO

What would it change? Answer me--what would it change?

NELL

It doesn't change this--

(She goes to the phone, picks up the receiver, and puts it to her head.)

Click. Russian Roulette.

COCO

You're breaking my heart.

NELL

Your heart? You're not here because I'm breaking your heart. You're here because I'm breaking mine.

(Putting the receiver back)

What will you do when he gets here?

COCO

Wait for him to leave.

NELL

I thought you wanted to talk to him. Look at him. Get up close and feel the heat.

COCO

It's too damn hot already. And that smell. It never used to smell like that.

NELL

That's the smell of the 72 ounce steak, over at McClellan's.

COCO

How do you stand it?

NELL

You get used to it. Look. You can see it from here.

(Takes Coco over to the window)

See? Capital M little c Big C L E double L A N S. McCLELLAN'S. You can see the underside of the polyvinyl cow.

COCO

I think it's making me sick.

NELL

Aw, come on, Coco. Right at this very minute, there's men over there, eating it. The 72 ounce steak. I mean, think about it. A 72 ounce--

COCO

I'm gonna be sick--

NELL

Come on then--

(She leads Coco over to the couch.)

COCO

Don't, Nell--

NELL

But you're sick--

COCO

(Nell makes her lie down with her head in her lap.)

Don't, Nell--stop it--

NELL

Just put your little head down--

COCO

(Trying to get up)

I said don't baby me, Nell--

NELL

Stay where you are. Any minute now, that phone's gonna ring. Wouldn't it be nice, just to stay like this until it rings?

COCO

Maybe it won't ring.

NELL

And you, come all the live long day to hear it ring. To watch him walk into this room. If it didn't ring, what would you do?

COCO

Stay like this.

NELL

You're lying to me, and you're lying to yourself. If you'd admit it you'd be a--

COCO

Why do we think that line is so funny?

COCO/NELL

A SELF-CONFESSED LIAR.

NELL

It will ring.

COCO

You still don't have to answer it.

NELL

Here are some truths: Dust to dust. Birth death taxes. $1 + 1 =$ the phone will ring and I will answer.

COCO

Remember what we used to say when mama said things like that? When she'd say things like "You *have* to be in by 10" or "That bed of yours *has* to be made?"

NELL

What'd we say?

COCO

We'd say "What about the bomb, mama? What if the bomb falls first? I won't have to make my bed, mama, if the bomb falls first."

NELL

The bomb ain't falling before that phone rings, Coco.

COCO

Fact?

NELL

Fact. If the bomb were dropping in, it would call first. This is what it would be like: Ding, dong. A-bomb falling.

COCO

(Laughing)

You are the sometime terrible. The sometime worst.

(Pause)

Nell? Tell me a story.

NELL

What kind of story.

COCO

Any kind of lovely, lovely story.

NELL

Bed time story?

COCO

I already know the one about the three little pigs.

NELL

BED time story. Story about time in bed.

COCO

Oh, God. I don't know if I'm ready for this.

NELL

Jerry the Sailor. A True Bed Time Story.

COCO

Oh, God. Not a sailor.

NELL

And just what do you think you know about sailors?

COCO

Everybody knows about sailors.

NELL

You do not. You know one line about all sailors--"a girl in every port and any port in a storm." That's all you know, right?

COCO

All right--right. Fact.

NELL

Fact. You're right. So lie back, and relax.

(She places Coco's head in her lap again.)

The True Story of Jerry the Sailor. You'll like it. It's a lovely, lovely story.

Jerry the Sailor was a scuba diver who lived by the sea. I lay down with Jerry the Sailor because he bandaged my knee.

COCO

Is it over yet?

NELL

On the night I met Jerry the Sailor, he was on his way South to the sea.

I lay down with Jerry the Sailor because of the way he--bandaged my knee.

COCO

Jesusus, not a refrain.

NELL

Buck up, will you? The one who's calling any minute now, most likely I lay down with him for reasons that will never rhyme with anything.

COCO

Okay, okay, get it over with.

NELL

Coco! That's no way to listen to a lovely, lovely story!

COCO

What's so lovely about it?

NELL

It's a story about him, Coco. All the stories about him are lovely.

In this story, this is what he said when he met me. He said: "You look like the kind of girl who could get some depth." Depth is the thing scuba divers talk about wanting. So how can it help but be a lovely story--it's about him when he knew how to use a huge, cold ocean, and a thin rubber skin to stay warm.

It's about him when he was the man who when we finally fell asleep that night turned to me, and said, so sweetly: "Pleasant dreams. I'll nail you in the morning."

COCO

Oh, God.

NELL

I'll nail you in the morning. It's what they must have said to Jesus Christ. I looked it up. "Clavis confligero te mane."

COCO

What?

NELL

That's Latin for "I'll nail you in the morning."

COCO

I'm cold. So cold.

(Nell wraps Coco up in her arms, and continues, sweetly.)

NELL

On the night I met Jerry the Sailor, he forgot all about that Sea. Listen: This is the story of how he bandaged my knee.

He smiled at me. He smiled at me and he held up the mercurochrome and he dipped in the swab. It came out that wild, popsickle orange and I asked him, "Does it hurt?"

He smiled at me. He smiled at me and he said, so sweetly, he said "No. It doesn't hurt."

He smiled at me as he ran the swab along the cut and it hurt like hell.

I asked him again. "Does it hurt?" He held the swab to the deepest part of the cut, and he said, so sadly, "Don't you trust me?" he said.

He said it again: "It doesn't hurt." He smiled at me as he said it again and I lay down with him.

Now isn't that a lovely, lovely story?

COCO

What do you want from me, Nell? When you tell me a story like that I don't know whether to laugh or cry.

NELL

You're lying to me and you're--

COCO

STOP IT! I DON'T KNOW!

NELL

Coco, I can't believe that. You always know.

COCO

Why do you want me to say it's a lovely story when you know I can't?

NELL

I don't know that.

COCO

It's not a lovely, lovely story. Not to me. Not to ME!

(She tries to get away from Nell. Nell holds her back)

NELL

(Snaps her fingers)

I know why you don't like it. I forgot to tell you the happy ending. I forgot to tell you what Jerry the Sailor said to me in the end.

COCO

Did you ever see him again?

NELL

Course I didn't.

COCO

Then who cares what he said.

NELL

He said some very interesting things. For a sailor.

COCO

It doesn't matter what he said.

NELL

Watch it. You're beginning to slip.

COCO

Fact. It doesn't matter to me what he said. Fact.

NELL

Two wrongs don't make a right. But three rights make a left. You figure it out.

COCO

He was a goddamn nobody, a nothing, a scum, and you let him--

NELL

Take that back. You take that back!

COCO

They are all of them nothing. What's happened to you?

NELL

You know the rules. You take it back.

COCO

All right. All right. But it's still a fact. He's gone.

NELL

A nothing can't be gone.

COCO

I said I was sorry.

NELL

(Pause)

I was telling you what Jerry the Sailor said.

COCO

I'll nail you in the morning is what that goddamn--

NELL

Try it in Latin. It's even sweeter in the Latin. But it's so--so absolute in the original. So--so choiceless.

I think you'd better say it in Latin. Go on, I'll help you. Say it.

COCO

No.

NELL

No?

COCO

No.

NELL

(Pause)

Then I guess I'll have to finish my story. I guess I'll have to tell you what Jerry the Sailor said.

He said I was tight. Like a hooker. And he asked me, did I do those exercises hookers do.

(Pause)

Come on, Coco. Ask me about those exercises. I can't finish the story unless you express some interest in the exercises.

(No response)

Ask me about those exercises, Coco, or this story will go on and on.

COCO

(Barely audible)

Tell me about those exercises.

NELL

What?

COCO

Tell me about those exercises.

The exercises hookers do.

NELL

Now 'a days, everybody does 'em. They say that the woman who does them daily, religiously, has got the benefit of a very soft, very deep, very warm hand.

COCO

Who the hell wants a hand there?

NELL

My sentiments exactly. I don't know one man who wouldn't scream like a son of a bitch if he climbed in and found a hand in there. Still, the body of literature about its effect on men--mostly found in women's magazines--the body of literature, to sum it up, says: Show me the penis stroked and held and fondled far inside the well-trained vagina, and I'll show you a happy penis.

(Pause)

Of course, you couldn't really show it.

But there's another reason for doing the exercises.

(Whispers)

They make you have a new orgasm.

COCO

What's wrong with the one I have?

NELL

This one's all improved. They even have a name for it--like a Z-sports car, or brand X. They call it--the G Orgasm.

COCO

You didn't try it, did you?

NELL

It's not as if I needed one...but then I thought, don't be afraid of progress. You know how I'm always saying "the future is here"? I thought, maybe it's a little lower.

(Pause)

But I didn't have it. The exercises don't do you any good, you do them once.

COCO

What good do they do you if you do them more?

NELL

They make you come like a man.

COCO

Bullshit.

Scientific fact. NELL

Scientific bullshit. COCO

You never wanted to come like a man? NELL

No. COCO

Me neither. So what we have here is a double golden opportunity of becoming self-confessed liars. NELL

Fact? COCO

Fact. COCO/NELL

A woman can't come like a man. Not even in a story. COCO

You wouldn't like to try to just once? I can show you the exercise. Come on, Coco. Just once? NELL

(Coco shrugs.)

Lie down. On your back.

(Coco lies down on her back.)

Now. They say to start with a swimming pool. I want you to understand that somebody else, they'd start you off with a swimming pool. Not me. I mean, sure, it's clear and blue, but it's not real water, you know? It's used water. And besides, the neighbor's kids have been pissing in it. That's why I prefer the Aegean Sea.

Ready? Here we go.

(Softly)

Imagine that you are lying on the fine, white sand on the shore of the Aegean Sea. It is a clear...warm...bright summer day.

COCO

Why the Aegean Sea?

NELL

The Aegean's a sea you can see all in one place. It doesn't move around a lot like the big 7 do. And it's warm. All that land around it makes it warm. Imagine doing it with the Arctic Ocean--you're talking icebergs, you're talking chunks of dirty gray ice the size of Manhattan.

The Aegean Sea is more green than blue, they say--I've never seen it. I suppose there are more things in a sea than there are in swimming pools--tuna and sharks and lots of microscopic swimming things--but I just can't picture doing it with a concrete, chlorinated pool. What would be the point?

Are you relaxed now?

That little talk was supposed to relax you. Get you primed.

Imagine you are lying on your back on the fine, hard white sand on the shore of the Aegean Sea. You are looking up at the sky. It is more blue than any blue you have ever seen.

You part your legs slightly.

(Coco does.)

They open onto the bright, clear water. You hear the sound of the waves, breaking gently.

You close your eyes. You draw in, with something inside you. It takes a moment or two, but gradually the water begins flowing up between your legs. The movement of the water feels--it feels--full. Whatever it is between your legs can suck, can pull, you suck and pull with. The water rushes in, past every soft, smooth place inside you.

By now you know for sure where it is inside you that can suck and pull. By now you know how good it feels. By now you are ready to stop. Already ten's of thousands of gallons have emptied into you. The level of the Aegean Sea, if you looked--but you don't look, you keep your eyes closed, you keep on sucking in--by now the level of the water is two, then five, then twenty feet lower, if you looked you'd see the great Aegean Sea shrinking, you'd see it funneling, disappearing into you, and you'd stop. But you don't

stop. You'd see the slime and rock exposed banks, the naked bottom of the sea, the countless water creatures, gasping in the air, and you'd stop. You can't stop. You keep on, sucking in and in.

And it feels wonderful, and it feels full and it will never fill you. Never.

(The phone rings. She starts for it eagerly, then hesitates. She looks over to Coco, then goes to the phone and picks up the receiver.

She holds the receiver like a gun to her head for an instant.)

Pow.

(Pause)

Hello?

(Pause)

No. You don't have to tell me who this is. I know who this is.

I guess I knew it would be you.

Brent--you didn't. Not the 72 ounce steak. Oh, no, Brent, you didn't--you did. The 72 ounce steak--no, oh no, you're not coming over here. You'll be sick, you'll be sick all over the--no, I didn't mean that. No, I want you to. Please, come over.

Please.

(She hangs up.)

That was Brent. Calling from beneath the huge fist of meat. Calling from McClellan's to say "A-bomb falling."

He's a sometimes sweet man. He'll be sick all over the floor.

(She goes to the bathroom, puts the toilet seat up and hangs the bath mat out of the way.)

Well, Coco, I guess the gun was loaded. Coco--

(She walks over to Coco.)

Coco, you asleep?

(She prods Coco with her foot.)

Coco, you all right?

COCO

(Sits up. Angry)

I almost had it.

NELL
Had what?

COCO
The Aegean Sea.

NELL
Don't be ridiculous.

COCO
I almost had it all inside me.

NELL
Almost is never a fact.
(Coco lies back down, closes her eyes.)
Coco--what are you doing?

COCO
Leave me alone.

NELL
Didn't you hear me, Coco? He's coming. Brent's coming.
(Pause. No response)
I guess you knew that.

But here's what you didn't know.
(Leans down, whispers in her ear)
He's picked up a hitchhiker, and he's bringing him along. For you.
(Stands up)
He's coming, Coco. And he's bringing somebody for you.
(The phone rings.)
Why don't you get that, Coco. It might be Steven, you know.
(No response)

Coco? COCO!
(The phone continues to ring. When it stops, Nell takes it off the hook.)

This time, Coco. This time--him.
(Nell goes to her window, and waits.)

BLACKOUT)