



writing a woman

by

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*"Genius all over the world stands hand in hand, and one shock of
recognition runs the whole circle round."*

Hermann Melville

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THE PLAYERS:

MAN, 35
 WOMAN, 28
 WRITER, 35
 GIRLFRIEND, 28

(The play intends for two actors, no more. Regarding appearances, respective to themselves: in the first scene, the male character looks slightly better and the female character slightly less attractive, with the opposite the case to a greater degree in the second scene.)

SCENE 1

Sparsely furnished loft apartment; unobtrusive classical music plays very softly in the background throughout.

MAN sprawls on pillows, holding manuscript. WOMAN hovers around him expectantly, playfully trying to grab the manuscript, but never touching it. She wears a blue artist's beret noticeably flecked with paint, and a smock. MAN is dressed casually, comfortably, mirroring the initial feel of the scene.

Stage is largely bare but for the two and the pillows on the floor (center), an opened bottle of wine and two partially filled glasses, plus an easel and palette of paints UPSTAGE RIGHT. MAN and WOMAN are clearly close, and behave as such unless otherwise noted.

MAN

(slightly exasperated)

Of course you can read it. I want you to read it; just not read too much into it. I always want to know what you think, this one especially — you know that....I just don't see you reading it the way you did once...the way you did before you knew me.

WOMAN moves back to easel, picks up brush and addresses painting.

WOMAN

(amused; not looking at him)

Before we were sleeping together, you mean?

MAN

Not necessarily, no. I mean, that might have something to do with...hell, I don't know. I've been with women I wouldn't let near my stuff — nothing good could ever come of it.

WOMAN

I wish you hadn't used the plural, there...

MAN

Fine — you're right, actually. "Woman," not "women." Quick study, I guess. Learned my lesson.

WOMAN

Didn't she have to at least get near your "stuff?" "Quick study" is right.

MAN

(smiling)

Near my *writing*, words, ideas, plumbed depths — all my obituary material...

WOMAN

(concentrating on painting)

You're always morbid when you finish something — which is proof I've a long memory...Were you morbid around your other women, or am I special?

MAN

(rolling his eyes, but acknowledging)

Odd how a collective plural can mean five or 500...Like I said, absolutely no good came of it. Worst mistake I ever made — well, not the worst, but one I'll always remember: letting somebody I didn't really care about read something I'd written, while she was lying beside me in bed.

WOMAN

(pouncing playfully)

If you didn't care about her, why was she

MAN

(interrupting, smiling)

Are you going to let me get this out or not? I can feel the thread of this idea slipping as we speak...Everyone has stories they'd rather forget.

WOMAN

Not me — I'm pure...How can you be a writer when your ideas slip away so quickly?

MAN

It can be frustrating as hell. But give me a lump of charcoal and I'm fine — just a note to remind me of the thought, the idea of the idea, then I'm okay...Anyway. Point was, or is...Ah, Judas, maybe it is gone...Give me a minute — your purity threw me there for a second.

MAN finishes his wine, then snaps back to the conversation.

MAN CONT'D

Yeah, there's two now. There's the fact that physical intimacy has nothing necessarily to do with respect, god knows, and that's the key to taking someone at all seriously — recognizing something in them that you want as part of yourself, your own makeup...

WOMAN

Wouldn't that rather be the definition of "intimacy?"

MAN exhales heavily; goes on after a moment.

MAN

I didn't really care about what she thought, found I didn't have reason to care, so anything negative she had to say felt like an attack, and anything positive seemed frivolous and made me want to...reexamine the whole concept.

WOMAN

So...are you saying you do or don't respect me enough to let me read the damn thing?

MAN, flustered, opens his mouth to speak, but WOMAN cuts him off.

WOMAN CONT'D

Sorry, I'm a little lost — it happens most times you stop making sense...Actually, that's not true; I'm sure you're making sense in your head. Things with you just get muddled in translation, sometimes -- rarely lost.

MAN

Thank you. I think...But no, that was the first idea, the one that got dragged under by the others — it's actually kind of the flip side of what I just described. You know I respect you, but you know me well enough to actually...*know me*, to have seen me be silly, fall on my face and so forth, so there's bound to be a natural...

MAN trails off.

WOMAN

(amused, but a little defensive; after a second)

...Loss of esteem? Or of something that I may — or may not — have felt toward you, before we spent any real time together?

MAN

(grinning heavily)

You're going to tell me that you look at me the same way you used to?

WOMAN

(after a moment)

I...guess not...Well...A kid at Christmas looks at the presents under the tree differently after they're unwrapped, but that doesn't mean he doesn't want them...Anyway, the same's true of you of late, by the way.

MAN

(a little surprised;
quickly)

Really? Maybe...Not that I don't prefer the way things are now...Things have changed...so have we, I guess.

WOMAN

Yeah...People staring at you is just annoying now. It used to be fun, in a stupid sort of way — being with the one in the room everyone knows...I'm still relatively cloistered.

MAN

(quietly)

Knows of...

WOMAN

....Right, and that's not respect. It's more like...genuflection, something that never should be there to begin with.

As MAN begins to speak, he rises and paces; WOMAN takes his position, sipping her wine.

MAN

Oh...I don't know about that anymore. I used to agree completely — I couldn't understand the need to gush at people who manage to convey an idea a person happens to recognize or identify with, no matter how elegant the presentation...But now, I'm wondering...Maybe people need that sense of wonder -- making heroes of a sort out of those who put it out there, whatever the medium. Maybe people need to point a little too much in the direction of the source — the supposed origin of whatever they recognize as true.

WOMAN

(after a moment)

I don't think "hero" is the right word.

MAN

"Of a sort." And you're right, or you should be...but the look in people's eyes is the same — that weird mix of wonder and jealousy...Sculptors and poets have their groupies, same as rock stars and NBA teams. Christ, Dylan Thomas had sex thrown at him at cocktail parties, and he looked like a troll...

MAN affects a Richard Burton in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf accent.

MAN CONT'D

Mahtha, there's an small ugly man prostrate on the gazebo — is he yours?

WOMAN

(slowly)

Well...if an idea affects someone, I guess there's a natural tendency to revere the person who brought it forth, because it's evidently something that person considers a part of themselves...

MAN

To the point of wanting to screw somebody? I don't mean your standard star-fucker; I mean someone genuinely sexually excited by seeing something similar to themselves on stage, on screen, what have you. It's just creepy...God, it's not even based on something realistic — nobody actually speaks the way they do in a play — it's the verbal equivalent of expecting everyone to look like movie stars. Art's idealized, perfected to get a point across...It's the difference between the real and the true. The truest things I've written contain the fewest facts.

WOMAN

Hey, no argument here. I'm only with you for your money.

MAN

(smiling)

Good. It's wise to have parameters.

MAN is amused by her last comment, and looks at WOMAN with growing affection throughout her following lines.

WOMAN

But you shouldn't underestimate the power of presentation, especially if someone manages to make something ugly beautiful, or even the reverse...Anything that makes someone think differently makes them feel smarter, and that's...like a gift from someone you've never met and likely never will...But I see what you mean — it's still kind of...

MAN

(excited; finishing her sentence)

Self-aggrandizing. Exactly. They see that little piece of themselves put out and exalted...Hell, I don't know why I'm using the third person; I've done it too.

Pause. MAN looks for words.

MAN CONT'D

We recognize a part of ourselves in a painting or within a line, and realize crowds are assembled to share it — there's even applause at the end, ideally...What's most interesting for me, and a little scary, is when someone comes up with a completely valid interpretation of my stuff that never occurred to me in the slightest.

WOMAN

That's when you smile and nod?

MAN

(smiling dimly and nodding)

You know it. Not much else I can do, until I've had time to think a bit — what if their idea is better, and I've been off in the wrong direction all along? Or, if they've missed something obvious, but I'm so familiar with the material I can't see the forest for the trees. Either way, I really can't afford to be wrong. I'd hear about it for years.

MAN pauses ruefully for a moment.

MAN CONT'D

Bottom line, people are going to see what they want to see, no matter which direction they're pointed, or who's doing the pointing.

WOMAN

So, since we can't worship an idea, or much less a part of ourselves, we adore the person who manages to bring it out.

MAN

(after a moment; exhaling)

I suppose. And the reason writers are a dysfunctional lot that hates one another, is that we've read enough to know that everything's been said for thousands of years, and over and over again...The Greeks had humanity embodied in the clouds and on stage 500 years before Christ said a word, much less Shakespeare...Artists have to know that the best we ever do, even whatever we deep down hang our hat on most, is still...an adaptation of an echo, and that all those people who want to tell you how great you are...

WOMAN

(jumping in seamlessly,
quietly)

...if only for presenting a piece of themselves...

MAN

(nods slightly in
agreement)

...just haven't taken the time to look back far enough in the right places. Then there's the fact that when it happens, it has nothing to do with you whatsoever...

WOMAN

(acknowledging painting)

Speak for yourself.

MAN sits back down, unaffected.

MAN CONT'D

I don't know, maybe others go about it the same way they wash dishes, but it's something else for me...Even now, there's part of me that feels like I'm giving away state secrets, and I'll be stoned to death by other writers...

WOMAN

(after a moment)

Do you mean the work — the effort — or the result?

MAN

Well, the work is what I meant, if you can call it that. The process. But the same is true of both in the end. Wallace Stevens said it: "Success as a result of industry is a peasant ideal." Same idea as Bukowski's epitaph: "Don't try." When you find what you should be doing, it's not the same...brand of effort — one is creating something, offering up from within, compared to altering something unrelated to you — your level of success is naturally going to be commensurately higher...labor of love, all that.

MAN sighs, but not in any way uncomfortably.

MAN CONT'D

It's the difference between summoning the will to work and *being* summoned — I can't imagine a shovel getting someone out of bed. Rent and bills, yeah, but not the tool...Not to say time and effort isn't invested...just that the return on the investment is greater, and that the capital comes easier...Christ, sometimes I can put in months, and still feel like I found the thing in a cave.

WOMAN moves to MAN

WOMAN

That doesn't make very much sense at all — I've watched you work

MAN

(interrupting)

It does and it doesn't. It's the closest thing to magic I've known.

WOMAN stares for an instant, sits beside MAN; picks up wine glass and drinks.

WOMAN

(glumly)

Thank you, darling.

MAN winces, tries to hold her hand. WOMAN doesn't make it easy, but he eventually succeeds.

MAN

Different brand of the stuff, sweetheart. Apples and oranges. Passion versus...

WOMAN

(almost immediately;
standing)

Dear god, you're digging yourself in so much deeper now.

MAN is quiet for a moment, stifling the smile of someone who should know better.

Both are quiet for a few seconds, while she fixes him with a dangerously expectant smile.

MAN CONT'D

All right, look — you've known from the beginning I have this...thing.

WOMAN

(dryly)

Yes. Or at least by our third date.

MAN

(slightly impatiently)

You know what I mean. The thing for which I'm always trying to find the word I've never come across...

MAN pauses for a moment. WOMAN nods slightly in acknowledgement, as though she knows what is coming.

MAN CONT'D

If people don't have it, they sit around watching the rest of the world, wondering why everybody else is going to so much trouble...I'm only talking about the single most important aspect of life to an individual, so it's bizarre there's no word for it in English — imagine if there was no word for love: how would people communicate why they do so many things...

WOMAN

(as though they've had
this conversation before)

That's between two people, though...

MAN

Only ideally. And I said "thing," not "person." So what I want is a word for an individual's *raison d'être*.

WOMAN

I know...And what's wrong with *raison d'être*? I think that's it right there.

MAN

No, it's close, but it's got the...connotation of... justification — and it's too impersonal...And French. I want English. Point of professional pride.

WOMAN

(quietly)

Impersonal as opposed to "thing."

*MAN takes WOMAN'S hat; idly flips it in his hand,
then eyes it with more interest.*

MAN

You can say a hat's *raison d'être* is to be worn, to block the sun, whatever: its uses, reasons for existing. But you can't say a hat lives for something. I want a word denoting what is most at heart of a specific human being. Not just existence — anybody can exist and by definition does — I mean their reason for *living*, for getting out of bed in the morning...Probably some 40 syllable German word somewhere...

MAN replaces hat on WOMAN'S head.

MAN CONT'D

(looking WOMAN in eye by
end)

(MORE)

MAN CONT'D (cont'd)

An individual's art: what one knows one is meant to add to the world — objective or subjective, left brain or right, numbers, words, colors, what have you...But as far as I can tell, there's no word for a concept to which I can't ascribe more importance...There may be no real reason we exist, but there's no getting around that...there are those with more clearly defined and obvious reasons for being alive, and such people sustain one another, recognize one another...cling to each other for a dearer life...

They are quiet for a moment.

WOMAN

And if someone doesn't have...their something?

MAN

I guess they just drift...your Aunt who buys greeting cards for her dogs: extreme example. And success has nothing to do with it — half the best stuff I've read and seen has had an audience of me and maybe forty people...that's enough for some.

WOMAN

(after a moment)

You know, she's a good...

WOMAN trails off.

MAN

(not unkindly; matter of fact)

Good enough to know she's here to what? That's all I mean. I'm not talking about being a good person...All may be created equal, but we don't create equally...That said, this is a rather cruel conversation we're having.

WOMAN

(after a moment)

And my thing?

MAN

(quickly; deadpan)

Pleasuring me. And the painting.

Not amused, WOMAN gives MAN a dangerous glance, but he is unaffected.

MAN CONT'D

We don't even do the same thing...except that we do. Different paths, same destination.

WOMAN

(unimpressed)

Uh-huh. Very pretty.

(MORE)

WOMAN (cont'd)

So now you're going to explain how your indefinable quality led you to omit me from the passions of your life?

MAN

(after a moment's
confusion; backtracking
to previous part of
conversation)

That's not what I said — hell, at this point I don't even remember what I said, but that's not how I feel, so it can't be what I meant...Point was, there's nothing I can do to get out from under it

Woman's eyes widen.

MAN CONT'D

(hastily)

The *writing* -- even if I wanted to be...It's not a job to me and it's not some religious calling, but it's somewhere in between...It's like some guy — a relative — that always comes to stay in the garage — even if you change your name and move, he always finds you...Fortunately, I've found a way to get paid for the affliction.

WOMAN

That might hold true if you weren't always so happy to see him in the garage — and traditionally isn't whom you're describing female?

MAN

(smiling uncomfortably)

I...was hoping that might get past you, given the gist of what we just

WOMAN

(interrupting)

We?

MAN

All right, of what *I* said...whatever the hell it was.

WOMAN

(immediately)

Well, which do you mean, precisely?

MAN

(after a moment; defeated
but honest)

I've really no idea, you know.

WOMAN

(standing)

Well, when you assumed I'm not capable of providing an intelligent reading of your material, given that I've seen you try to do math? When you brought up the meaningless sex you've had? Or that — and I think this was my favorite — when you acknowledged for the first time the most magical experience you've known, and that it doesn't involve me in any way, shape or form?

MAN

(slowly)

My, this has taken a turn for the worse...

WOMAN

(surprised to find herself
more than slightly upset)

There still may be a way out, but you'd better keep talking.

MAN is quiet for a moment, thinking visibly.

MAN

(slowly)

All right...absolute honesty now...god help me...It's like when you just made what I...desperately hope was a Muse reference, what with the gender of the guy in the garage and all?

WOMAN

(tonelessly)

Thank you.

MAN

Not at all. Delicate situation; I didn't want to start down the wrong path...Okay.

MAN takes a deep breath and dives in.

MAN CONT'D

People assume that art is a matter of discipline, of sitting down in front of the big blank something, and willing something into existence. But it isn't that way at all. I mean, discipline is part of it, but only within the structure, making sure the commas aren't supposed to be semicolons; split infinitives — all the stuff everybody loathed in school. The actual writing isn't a choice; it's something that gets you out of bed at 3:30 in the morning, wide awake in an instant and lets five hours slip by before...

MAN pauses for a moment, shaking his head.

MAN CONT'D

People expecting time to be consistent or logical in art is like expecting a complex idea to unravel with one pull on a random string, without having to inspect the knot...It's not consistent during the process; why would it be in the result?

MAN speaks next lines as though speaking aloud to self.

MAN CONT'D

As though you shouldn't have to break rules to get an intricate notion across...the rules are convoluted; you never know for sure where the lines are...

MAN looks at WOMAN, suddenly aware he is talking about more than one issue.

MAN CONT'D

...Things bounce back and forth; you don't know if you're driving it or it's driving you — chicken or the egg...

MAN takes a deep breath, and continues.

MAN CONT'D

The best art — the reflexive, shock of recognition stuff, what most truly falls beneath the term — it never offers answers, and is best because that absence mirrors life most: a world where we even have to imagine God, and all the things He's supposed to tell us...Recognizing yourself is one thing. Recognizing what you know, is something else...You have to look twice, ten, fifty times, because you're cognizant of an absence that you can place...It asks of you.

MAN is quiet for a moment, then subtly seems to remember where he is, and resumes speaking to WOMAN.

MAN CONT'D

Anyway. You look outside, the sun is up, you should be tired, but you're high as a kite, because something that wanted to come out of you, as though it were already formatted, logical, and preconceived, isn't taking up space, pressing against your brain — literally...Once I had a splitting headache for three days. Then I sat down at my desk for the first time in a while, and twenty pages later, my headache was gone.

WOMAN

(after a moment)

So the Muse idea is valid for you, huh?

MAN

It can sure seem that way, sometimes. The voices in some people's minds happen to be more eloquent than those in others, I suppose...Point is, I don't feel responsible — guess that's why the Greeks conceived a third party. I get credit for what I do, and I'm perfectly willing to take it, given what I'm saying lacks real sense, but...at least between us, the "magic" is in my hands, you know?

MAN takes WOMAN'S hand, looking straight ahead, speaking, WOMAN looks at MAN.

MAN CONT'D

You're not some odd ability I happened to be born with. We...fit for a reason. You know me, and you still want to be with me. So when I say it's a different kind of magic, that's only because it is...but one gives me a sense of peace only after it drags me around by the ears for hours at a time...you make me happy every time I see you. You aren't a relief: you're an addition, not a subtraction...With us, there's no work or worry: it's like all the rules have already been broken — there's nothing in the way...

MAN looks at hat on her head.

MAN

...Ridiculous hat or no...You know I've got my thing, that it makes me who I am, lets me be what I want to be, and you respect that, whether you know it or not...and you make me better.

MAN pauses, debating wisdom of next line.

MAN CONT'D

I use you all the time, in ways — I shouldn't say "use," but "take advantage of" is as bad or worse...Anyway.

WOMAN

(quietly, half-smiling but affectionate)

Careful.

MAN pauses a few seconds, wanting to get this one right.

MAN CONT'D

When I say "use," I mean sometimes I...plug us in to a situation in my mind, to make it that much more real. Especially the worst ones — the contrast makes them that much more real, visceral...painful.

They are quiet for a few moments.

WOMAN

(slowly)

So given all your bohemian metaphysics, why is it I sit down and paint every afternoon from 1:00 until 4:30 or so, according to a preconceived schedule designed to let me get the most done at the most appropriate times, yet I'm more successful than you?

MAN

(smiling)

You're just that damn good, I guess. That's all it boils down to...at least you've had the good sense to keep a low profile — wish I had.

MAN stands.

MAN CONT'D

And you're only more successful of late — I've been on sabbatical, after all.

WOMAN

According to your producers. To me, you've been wandering around the neighborhood and drinking too much.

MAN

(softly)

Oh well...I'm back on the horse now, if not the wagon.

MAN hands her the manuscript, looks at her for a moment.

MAN CONT'D

The happiest moment I can remember was when I opened that hotel door and saw you there...The way it was before that door...there's a difference between being glad you're alive...and pleasantly surprised you're not dead...Read it now, or forever hold your peace.

DARKNESS

The music continues until a logical stopping place or fades out slowly.

SCENE 2

Home office in posh town home.

WRITER sits at desk, three quarters stage left. A typewriter, desk lamp, and a stack of finished pages are the only items on the desk. The room feels subtly unfinished, as though objects which would ordinarily complete it have been removed, with those remaining moved to cover the space. As many of these remaining objects as possible should be distinctly feminine.

WRITER pulls a sheet of paper out of a typewriter, looks it over for a moment, then puts it beneath a pile of 16. He looks over his shoulder as though expecting someone, then slumps forward in his chair, rubbing his temples. He does not leave his chair until the end.

WRITER'S cell phone rings, slightly startling him. WRITER answers.

WRITER

Yes...No, no, absolutely not. The tickets are to be delivered to the concierge at the hotel...yes, that's the one, room, um...

WRITER feels various pockets for a moment, then pulls a scrap of paper from his breast pocket.

WRITER CONT'D

(rueful second line)

1204...Yeah, the room with the boxes. Everything's clear now? I'll be there in...45 minutes, an hour at the most — just leave everything with the concierge, he'll sign for them; it's been arranged...You're welcome.

WRITER hangs up the phone as GIRLFRIEND enters quickly, well-dressed, with a shopping bag from a quality store. She wears a hat identical to WOMAN'S, minus the paint. She tosses the bag on the floor, and sets about changing earrings.

GIRLFRIEND

(hurriedly)

Are you done yet? You said three hours, and I've spotted you fifteen minutes. We've got to hurry if we want to catch up with them — I don't know if we'll find them at the restaurant or the theater. They probably stopped for drinks; we've been guzzling those green apple martinis lately.

WRITER does not respond. WOMAN takes off beret and tosses it on the desk, and continues moving, pulling new jacket from bag and cutting out tags. She stays busy throughout, preparing to leave (fingernails, gloves, makeup, shoes, etc.).

By the end, WOMAN should be transformed in a meaningless way, looking no better nor worse than when she entered — just different.

GIRLFRIEND CONT'D
(not rudely)

So are you done or not?

WRITER
(quietly)

All done. Another semi-eloquent acknowledgement of confusion...Want to read it?

GIRLFRIEND
(rushed; smiling half-seductively)

Maybe later. We've got to be back early; tonight's Sunday, after all...maybe we ought to switch back to Tuesdays and Fridays; there's less to miss on TV.

WRITER
(wan smile; distantly)

I can remember when there was a bit more to it than that.

GIRLFRIEND

Hey, it's not my fault there's eight channels of HBO to keep up with...there's at least two shows that women have to see if they want in on the conversation...Thank god for reruns.

WRITER

Proof of His being at last.

GIRLFRIEND is quiet for a few seconds, seeming expectant.

GIRLFRIEND CONT'D

Well?

WRITER

Well what?

GIRLFRIEND
(playfully, but straight faced)

Well, why no "All right, but this'll be the last time" speech slash threat about making the rounds. It's how I know it's time to do my nails.

After a moment, WRITER shrugs slightly, as GIRLFRIEND begins to file nails.

GIRLFRIEND CONT'D

It's why they like you, you know.

WRITER
(genuinely surprised;
after a moment)

They like me?

GIRLFRIEND
Of course. They know damn well you don't want to be there, so they...what's the word, begins with "R", kind of like spinning...

WRITER
Spinning...rotate...revolve..?

GIRLFRIEND
That's almost it, but...anyway. You could crack the whip and half the room would jump, if you wanted. You're just too nice for your own good.

WRITER acknowledges last statement with a quick look of sad irony, then speaks after a moment, with more surprise.

WRITER
Did you mean "revel?"

GIRLFRIEND
Yeah, that's it — they revel in being tolerated by the intellectual...Why can't you enjoy yourself more? Anybody else in town would jump at the chance...No lines at the door, free drinks, whatever you want when you want it, people waiting just to catch a glimpse...

WRITER
(finishing her thought)
...All fighting to get through the doorway of an empty room...That's probably it right there.

GIRLFRIEND
Where?

WRITER
(after a moment; quietly,
not looking at her)
Given enough time, one does all one can do — sees and feels all that's supposed to represent the heights of this and that, and from there on it's just...a redundancy...The same people in different bodies doing the same things to each other and themselves...albeit in different ways, given advances in pharmaceuticals...All that's left is to find an even place of peace, and live...however you've found best.

GIRLFRIEND

(not really listening)

Some of the most beautiful women on earth at your table — there for sin...only you could actually not care.

WRITER

(somewhat ruefully)

I care...Did you ever think that maybe grown-ups shouldn't want to make a point of being bad? That either you're bad or you aren't, and making an effort is more appropriate to eight-year-olds?

GIRLFRIEND

(sly smile)

Sometimes it just happens...Opportunity can shorten the list of things you'd never do...

WRITER

(not hearing her)

Maybe I'm too old to be capable of being naughty...

GIRLFRIEND stares at him with a mixture of fondness and incomprehension for a few moments.

GIRLFRIEND

I ought to let you have someone on the side, to give you a jump-start, but I'd get cockholded in some magazine, sure as can be...

WRITER

(after staring at her for a second or two)

Affairs are where they are found...And it's "cuckolded"...I'm not even sure it's a verb.

GIRLFRIEND

(back to nails)

Mmph. Did you get Daddy's message about the tour? He said it would be really good for you, that the college kids should be talking about you again after this next bunch of magazine interviews — you signed those papers?

WRITER

(softer)

Signed with a few minor changes, and couriered away...Done is done...No, the cuckold is cuckolded, of course he is...Now I'll bet "couriered" isn't a word.

GIRLFRIEND

He also said you should get rid of your agent. Said he's tired of talking numbers with someone who's never had money — like talking sex with the boy who hits the high notes, or something crass like that.

WRITER
(subtly, but noticeably
displeased)

He hasn't lost his knack for the tender turn of phrase...I like my agent. She finds space that fits the work, as opposed to seating...I may lose her, but it won't be my choice...I'll put up a fight...

GIRLFRIEND
Asses in seats keep us a happy family. And "like" shouldn't enter into it. You can still like her after you fire her — this is business, you know that.

WRITER
Yes...I suppose it is, isn't it...Like if I found a more appropriate producer or two, I'd be obligated to move on, hmm? Mine own self being true, and all?

GIRLFRIEND
(as though the idea is
beyond possibility)
Sure. It's up to you to take full advantage of every situation, and if people get caught in the middle, S.I.L...If whoever you screw over is going anywhere themselves, they'll understand — they've been there, done that too, or they will...Maybe your agent could be your mistress — rather frumpy, as I recall...Might not catch the cameras.

WRITER
(after a moment; quietly,
smiling sadly to self)
She's having her first gallery show, actually...quite a painter. And she's lost weight since her divorce...It's probably too late anyway...She says there's somebody, talking about moving on...Such is life.

GIRLFRIEND
(not breaking stride)
Daddy has it tattooed on his bottom, but you didn't hear that...I've had about six messages from him today, yelling for me to call.

WRITER
(with quiet understated
surprise)

Really.

GIRLFRIEND takes out her cell phone, and tries unsuccessfully to turn it on. She puts it away, continuing to speak.

GIRLFRIEND CONT'D

He can wait till I've had my dinner, and he's had his Xanax...You certainly got his attention one way or another — it's not like any of the other writers Daddy produces have even seen the inside of his house, much less...

WRITER

(interrupting, wincing;
very slowly at end)

I get it, yeah...His words, 17 April, '02: "It's almost half talent, almost half luck, with what remains — something intangible that sets apart." And he was right...Then he smiled...And introduced us.

GIRLFRIEND

(sincerely)

Still the best first night I've ever had.

WRITER

I should bloody well hope it was; you were 22...I, of course, was within that elusive but magical measure of whiskey where it does the most good and least harm...Something intangible...

WRITER shakes his head slightly with genuine wonder, looking at GIRLFRIEND.

WRITER CONT'D

At least he didn't have me sign something.

GIRLFRIEND smiles knowingly; WRITER is quiet for a moment.

WRITER CONT'D

When you came down those stairs that evening, dressed the way you were — was that...choreographed, timed, whatever? I mean, the last word came out of his mouth, and you swept into the room like Scarlett O'Hara on methamphetamines — it felt...planned — or at least it does now...Did he say something to you beforehand?

GIRLFRIEND gives him an inscrutable smile, and ignores the question.

GIRLFRIEND

So I'm intangible, is that what you're saying? Doesn't bother me — sounds kind of sexy.

WRITER

(quickly, sincerely,
softly)

Far from it, actually. You've been as...omnipresent as anything in my life. Now did he or didn't he say something

GIRLFRIEND

(interrupting; pretending
to pay little attention)

That's good. It's always best to make an impression. I hate the feeling of not being in control of a situation. Probably why I talk so much. I know they bitch about me behind my back about that, and other things, but never to my face...and that's all that matters, really. Not like any of them have what it takes to mount a coup anyway — or who it takes...

GIRLFRIEND leans over and gives WRITER a peck on the lips, and settles on his lap as though posing for a picture.

GIRLFRIEND CONT'D

Sorry, "whom".

WRITER begins to laugh deeply at this after a moment's looking at her, and continues so long that GIRLFRIEND begins to laugh as well. After about six seconds of this, he pulls her close to him.

WRITER sits smiling quizzically and nodding slightly [recreating smile and nod from first scene], as though trying to remember something long since forgotten.

WRITER

(suddenly)

If you weren't here, here with me, what would you be doing? Is there anything you want to do, or make happen...something on earth you'd like to be involved with?

GIRLFRIEND

(slowly at first)

Well...if I wasn't with you, I'd be with someone else, I guess. You can't hold it against me if you're taking yourself out of the picture, can you?

GIRLFRIEND stands.

WRITER

No...of course not..Do you ever...Sometimes I feel like my life has already been written — by me. The choices I make seem balanced against some sense of foresight I couldn't actually possess, yet I can feel my own...values within the results. As though I can recognize my own sense of humor, or at least the absurd, between the lines, between events...It makes an odd sort of sense, as I can only find myself where I put myself, but...

WRITER pauses a moment or two.

(MORE)

WRITER (cont'd)

Can you relate to that? In any way? An almost cyclical process where...situations that have nothing to do with one another come together in a coherent fashion?

GIRLFRIEND

(looking at watch; after a moment; matter-of-fact)

I think you know I can't.

WRITER

(slight, sad, quick smile of acknowledgement; slower)

So you've never been left wondering about something that really can't be understood...That's a shame; it's an exquisite feeling, in its way...An acknowledgement of something beyond oneself...

WRITER sits looking at GIRLFRIEND, smiling slightly but now with such a palpable sadness, that GIRLFRIEND picks up on it.

GIRLFRIEND

(not rudely, but unaware of the true nature of conversation)

I'm sure what you said will make sense if you write it down, give it to Daddy and let him find some people to say the words right, and I might even figure it out once I see it on stage a few times — I usually do, don't I? I don't know how you do what you do, but you do it. And they like it most of the time. So sell it.

WRITER

(quietly)

Not this one.

GIRLFRIEND

(Oblivious. Prodding him, but not rudely.)

Well, tonight we've got places we need to be if you want to keep having the chance to confuse everybody. This is part of the game, or at least my part...Daddy put us together for a reason.

WRITER

(shocked)

He...you know that — you've known that? You're sure that's true?

GIRLFRIEND

Like you aren't? I think we were just talking about it.

WRITER
(with wonder)

Yeah, I suppose we were. I guess I...just never expected to hear it out loud...not from you.

GIRLFRIEND

Well, now you have...But I wouldn't change anything if I could — you've found your place, and so have I, and...our places fit together.

Last line visibly gets WRITER's attention.

GIRLFRIEND CONT'D

We're good for each other, right here, right now...So go find some pants with a crease in them, and we'll get moving. Go! Go! My cell's dead again; I'm going to go find out how far they've gotten.

GIRLFRIEND moves to EXIT stage right to use the phone.

WRITER swings slowly around in chair, hat in hand, only speaking when GIRLFRIEND is nearly offstage.

WRITER

Don't forget your hat.

WRITER tosses hat like frisbee to GIRLFRIEND; it flies over her head. She mock-sowls at him a moment, smiles as she picks it up, and EXITS. WRITER watches her go.

WRITER sits looking at direction GIRLFRIEND exited for a few moments, with no small amount of admiration. There is no sound nor activity.

WRITER
(with a slight smile)

There's really nothing wrong with you whatsoever. You are a...splendid quintessence of your experience and your values; there's no fault in that...You could have turned out far worse, but for some better instincts...

WRITER continues staring for a few seconds, wistful, resigned, then spins back around to the sheets of paper. Moving quickly but not hurriedly, he clamps them together with a large clip from a drawer, speaking as he works.

WRITER

Tacit royalty amongst "them," wherever "they" may be, by sheer force of will...and utter concentration and focus on the meaningless...It was charming as hell, for a time.

WRITER positions the manuscript neatly in the center of the desk, and focuses the desk lamp so that the light shines directly on the manuscript.

WRITER
(sad smile)

As many kinds of love as people on Earth. How gently tragic.

WRITER turns and exits stage left.

GIRLFRIEND re-enters stage right a few moments later, mystified, but not upset.

GIRLFRIEND
(loudly)

Where in the world are your clothes? It looks like you're dry cleaning everything except what we bought that weekend in London...as though two fittings were the end of the world...Saville Row; you're lucky it was only two.

GIRLFRIEND notices the manuscript on the desk, austere and alone.

She crosses to desk, picks up manuscript, thumbs through a few pages, then scans the first page. She then puts it down, impatiently, and takes a few steps stage left.

GIRLFRIEND CONT'D
(medium volume)

We've got to go now.

GIRLFRIEND is quiet for a few seconds; perplexed by the silence. She looks around the room, moves to shelves and picks up one or two items, noticing dearth of familiar, long-ignored objects for the first time.

GIRLFRIEND CONT'D
(volume decreasing as she speaks)

Whatever you're wearing is fine; people expect you to dress badly, you're a writer...Where are you? We've got to go!

GIRLFRIEND stares around the room for a few moments, then looks again at the otherwise empty desk, comprehending, and moves to the desk. She sits, staring at manuscript, but not reading.

DARKNESS

CURTAIN

NOTES:

In the first scene, MAN and WOMAN are happy. In the second scene, GIRLFRIEND is content, WRITER is sad, wistful, and knows something is about to happen that GIRLFRIEND is utterly unaware of. That said, GIRLFRIEND is not stupid, and is not meant to be portrayed as lacking dignity — she simply has her own brand of the stuff. If she is portrayed as a vapid halfwit, the character, scene and the play are robbed of much of their reason for being.

Concerning blocking, the two scenes should be, in every possible way, physically oriented in opposite directions.