

LANDSLIDE

A Play

Aram Saroyan

CHARACTERS

Seymour--forties

Sander--twenties

Mark--late forties/early fifties

Monica--twenties

Esther--forties

Latino (George)--twenties

Patricia--forties

Ted--twenties

ACT ONE

Scene One

The set is a large living room area, with a porch stage right and a bar-kitchenette stage left. The place has a kind of slightly tattered shabby chic decor, with a large sofa covered by a white sheet, several larger arm chairs also with sheet covers, and paintings, books, and knick-knacks that betray an interesting contemporary sensibility. Yet something is askew; the house was recently a couple's and is now occupied by Mark, who is involved in a divorce proceeding with his estranged wife. It is mid-morning in the Hollywood hills. A young man in his early twenties, Sandy, is asleep under a quilt on the sofa.

There is the noise of a door being opened, without a key, and then Seymour, a man in his forties wearing a jogging outfit and Walkman earphones, comes into the room and registers the scene, and in particular the sleeping figure.

Seymour: Hmmm...

He walks over to the young man to see who it is. He does this with a certain amount of caution; however, the young man awakens and violently pushes him across the room.

Seymour: Hey. What the...Shit!

Sandy: Lookin' for somethin', dude. Watch yourself, homes.

Seymour: (recovering) Yeah, I'm looking for something. What the fuck. (after a beat or two, recovering) Who are you? Where's Mark?

Sandy: Mark? In his room, probably. You check there?

Seymour: Who are you?

Sandy: Who are you?

Seymour: I'm a friend of Mark's. Why the fuck did you do that?

Sandy: (sitting up in his shorts) I'm sorry. I was having a nightmare or something. And you came up too close. I'm a friend of Jake's.

Seymour: Jake's in Europe.

Sandy: Yeah, well...

Seymour: (after a beat) Mark's asleep?

Sandy: Probably. We were talking pretty late...and then...

Seymour: Oh, yeah?

Sandy: Yeah...(switching channels) So...

Seymour: What?

Sandy: I don't know. (pulling it out of a hat) You vote?

Seymour: Did I vote?

Sandy: Yeah.

Seymour: No, I didn't vote.

Sandy: You gonna?...I know it's private...

Seymour: It's not private. Maybe how I vote is private. If I want it to be. But if I voted, you can ask. You don't give a shit, though. So why ask?

Sandy: (shrugs) It's the big election, I guess. I just meant it, like a current event kind-of-thing...

Seymour: (after taking this in) Are you going to vote?

Sandy: Am I?

Seymour: Yeah, you're over eighteen, right? Are you planning on voting today?

Sandy: I hadn't really thought about it.

Seymour: So why ask me?

Sandy: It's a free country, homes.

Seymour: I don't think so.

Sandy: (laughs to himself) You don't think it's a free country.

Seymour: I don't think it is, no, not essentially. Where are we going with this?

Sandy: You could vote "None of the Above." Can you do that? Or write it on the ballot, hunh?

Seymour: Or don't vote.

Sandy: It's not the same though.

Seymour: The other is just more pretence...maybe a little better...not enough, though.

Sandy: Jesus.

Seymour: What?

Sandy: Next thing you're gonna tell me buy a gun...

[Mark walks into the room]

Mark: (to Seymour) No guns. No guns in this house. You trying to convert my buddy here? Seymour's into Noam Chomsky, KPFFK, Jerry Brown...

Sandy: (not on familiar ground) That's cool...

Mark: (to Seymour) So. You want coffee? I'm meeting with Patricia today about all manner of things, my future, the house, Jake's college. I've been laid off for four months. My savings are almost depleted. Last night at about three in the morning, I--maybe I shouldn't say...I'm fifty four years old, and I feel like it's a new morning...A new day...

Seymour: (shaking his head) You're in denial. (pause) What happened last night?

Mark: Denial? You know something. I used to get up at the crack of dawn every morning to hurry off to this job that I quickly recognized was a strict routine of pissing on small fires...

Seymour: What you expect? You were working for the goddam government. At least they're trying to cut back there. But I'm over it.

Mark: Don't you get it? I'm ready for new adventure. I've checked out the new television season and it just isn't enough.

Seymour: What's next, my friend?

Mark: (walking out to the porch; inhaling deeply as he looks out) Goddam it, it's a world. I've just got to get the hell out of here.

Seymour: Your life is here, bro. You can't just pack up and go. What? Leave the country?

Mark: No, but a cheaper place. We're putting this place up for sale. Like I said, I'm fifty-four. It's now or never. I've been complaining for years. I put myself in harness, raised my son, ineptly as it may have been... Anyway, I never sowed my wild oats. Last night... You know that? It's like a missing piece in me.

Sandy: (having dressed in the meantime) I'm going to cut out for a few, okay, Mark? Did Monica go? And I'll see you a little later, if that's okay.

Mark: Sure, bud. She's still around, I think. Anytime.

Sandy: Later today, okay? I really appreciate it. (to Seymour) Hey, no hard feelings, okay?

Seymour: You need to watch that.

Sandy: I know it. You're right. I'm going to watch it.

He leaves.

Mark: What happened?

Seymour: I wondered who the dude sleeping on the couch was and got close enough to see his face and he exploded. Who's Monica?

Mark: Yeah, something's wrong with these kids. Jake's friends, you know, they're sweet kids...they're...it's weird to say this...but they're oddly ingenuous. And then the dope makes them dopey. Some dealer's stalking this kid. And then this glorious young woman...

Seymour: (excited) The one named Monica? Really? She's here right now?

Mark: I think so. You know how you find yourself in some situation, doing something you've never done before, and you realize a page of your life has turned. You're in a new chapter.

Seymour: That's very Guttenburgian, in the McLuhan era. You discovered yourself in some sort of extraordinary sexual congress? I hope you remembered to use a condom.

Mark: It was fresh, it was greedy, it was...wonderful...

Seymour: No shit. (after a beat) What kind of dope--do they take?

Mark: I don't know, but probably everything. One of Mark's friends died in the army of undetermined causes and all his friends think it was freon.

Seymour: Freon? The stuff in air-conditioners?

Mark: Yeah, apparently it's a high--that can also be lethal--and it's undetectable.

Seymour: Serves us right for giving them this...goddam mess...

Mark: Listen, my rich bud...

Seymour: Stop. I diligently, studiously, worked a small stake into something. That's not being rich.

Mark: Okay, then cut the country that made you millions some slack. Have you ever thought about giving some of it away?

Seymour: Yeah, I've thought about it. How do you know I don't do it?

Mark: Good! Look, it's just that right now I see it as so elusively beautiful, all of it...It's a passing melody, dude...The whole banana boat...It's adios after a while, and Christ, L.A. is awful gorgeous on a day like today. In other words, it's not a nationalist thing.

Seymour: Boy, this must be some babe...

While they are talking on the patio, Monica comes out of the bedroom. She is a magnetic unselfconscious female.

Monica: (checking the refrigerator, assembling breakfast) Orange juice! There's coffee! Oooh, it's so well-stocked...these people are so serious about feeding themselves...It's so—sincere...

Seymour: You gonna vote?

Mark: Sure, I'll vote. I'll vote my conscience...

Monica: (hearing them on the porch; buttons a couple of buttons on her shirt but not being too careful) Oh, yes, vote. My God...

Mark and Seymour turn when they hear her.

Seymour: Oh...

Mark: (coming into the living room) Seymour, this is my friend Monica.

Monica: Hello, hello...

Seymour: (goes to shake her hand, which she does with a kind of dancer's gesture) My pleasure.

Monica: Thank you, thank you. I'd almost forgotten. We must all, of course, vote, though I can't quite remember why.

Seymour: That's actually more to the point.

Monica: What is?

Seymour: Not remembering why. I think that's the majority sentiment, in fact.

Monica: I know but don't you think he's sort of glorious? The perennial puer, who can't stop raiding the candy machine and miscellaneous panties...

Seymour: Exactly. He's not presidential.

Monica: And he's an adventurist, with blood on his hands, stars in his eyes, a great big hardon for the whole country, and a smile on his face. He's...perfect.

Seymour looks at Mark.

Seymour: Sounds crazy to me.

Monica: (coming out from the bar to look him over) You're serious, I guess. (to Mark) Is he serious? If you're serious, what the hell are you doing in that outfit, in this neighborhood? Get a job, get a life, and go to a meeting...I really would like to make the 11 o'clock on Melrose.

Seymour: AA?

Monica: Uh-hunh.

Seymour: You don't think it's perverse to indulge this guy who can't hold a principle that doesn't play with a majority constituency within a two week window.

Monica: Do you really believe that anyone who gets a nomination can? Or would? Isn't that a little naive?

Seymour: That's what I'm saying.

Monica: But that's the goddam genius of the system.

Seymour: Exactly what is it you're saying?

Monica: I'm saying he has this great big greedy, emotionally generous, however unrealistic, appetite. He'd be fun to hang out with for an afternoon,

and that's more than you can say for about 89% of the male American population right now.

Seymour: Oh, a popularity contest. First prize, an afternoon with Bob Rogers. Second prize, an afternoon and evening...

Monica: Of course it is! He was class president before he was President. But that's our gift to the world, isn't it? I really think it's all those MGM movies dreamed up by Jews like that guy wrote about--Andy Hardy Levinsky.

Seymour: You'll vote for him.

Monica: Today?

Seymour: It's election day.

Monica: The weather's so nice.

Seymour: Right, you basically don't care.

Monica: Speak for yourself.

Noise at the door, again.

Esther, an English woman neighbor of Mark's, is heard.

Esther: Hello! Anybody home?

She walks around the corner into the room. She's around forty, a nicely turned out woman.

Esther: Oh, Mark, darling, can I pinch a bit of white wine. I'm doing some baked codfish recipe I found in Julia Child for my new flame.

Mark: (amused) Man or a woman?

Esther: None of your business...(relenting) But his name's Suzy.

Monica: Sounds fab.

Esther takes in Monica.

Esther: Hello, my child.

Monica: (smiling) Hello yourself.

Esther: Hello, Seymour.

Seymour: My lady.

Mark: This is my friend Monica. Monica, this is my neighbor and confidant, Esther, a superb make-up artist who knows all the biggest names in Hollywood.

Monica: We all know their names.

Esther: Quite right, quite right. Where did you find this genius, darling?

Mark: She found me, so to speak, if that's not rude. (He looks at Monica, who does a little curtsy.) I think I can find a little something for you. Since you can't vote, you can tell us all how we should vote from the proper remove that inspired, for instance, de Toqueville.

Esther: Yes, his argument was correct. Except I don't think he factored in the evolutionary possibilities of inter-marriage...

Seymour: How so? (pause) Jesus, have you got some coffee?

Mark: I'm sure we do! (moves behind bar in kitchenette)

Seymour: You know, I leave you alone for a few days and it's like the old Les Crane Show around here.

Esther: That seriously dates you, Sy.

Seymour: Dates me, and provides me with a certain vague venerability, I hope, like all us veterans of the sixties who are standing...

Mark: Albeit a little imperceptible swaying...

Monica: (to Esther) Intermarriage, hunh?

Esther: Oh, that, or just plain old miscegenation. See, there's much evidence to support the thesis that these hybrid peoples are tougher and smarter and happier, despite the social stigmatization and all that.

Monica: Even if you and I weigh in as hos and bitches?

Esther: Well, my dear...Ooo, this girl is brilliant, Mark...Where did you find her? We must start spending time together again, now that you're...separated.

Mark: Patricia will feel betrayed. She adores you.

Esther: As I do her. Both of you. But, you know, this could turn out to be good for you both. The vows are vastly over-rated. Look around you, it's a new world. Look at her.

They all look at Monica.

Monica: (after a moment, as a sort of reassurance to everyone) I dropped out of Bennington...

Esther: Whatever for?

Monica: Heroin, actually.

Esther: Well, that would make sense.

Monica: If you slow your metabolism down like that and don't OD...

Seymour: Yes...

Monica: My theory is, there may be a gain in longevity. Bill Burroughs is fucking ancient. He has, like, heart surgery in his eighties, after posing for a Gap ad. His friend Herbert Huncke is still going strong. It's very still, heroin, and beautiful. Like that Rousseau painting at the Museum of Modern Art of the gypsy asleep with the lion nuzzling him.

Esther: Well, really, no wonder all of young Hollywood is in thrall...

Monica: Not all.

Mark: Thank God for that. I've got a son to protect. An addict type, but conservative, essentially, like his Dad, so he has steered clear of it...

Serves Seymour a cup of coffee.

Who else?

Esther goes behind bar and gets a cup. Monica sits down on the arm of a chair.

Mark: (to Esther) Did you say you have a new flame?

Esther: Flame? Yes, I think so. Flame. Just right.

Monica: Sounds like a sex thing.

Esther: Does it? I suppose it does, and it is. Gender is fascinating. Fascinating rhythm---da da da da da da da---Fascinating rhythm...

Begins to dance, engaging Mark's hand for a moment...

He drops out, a bit morose.

Esther: Be happy, my dear. That is your normal, God given, condition.

Mark: Thank you, Trish. I suppose I have a lot to be grateful for...

Monica: I'll say. (smiles at him) Just kidding, budly.

Esther: Oh my. Mark.

Mark: Look, Patricia's coming on board today and I want it quiet. We have some details to work out, and I don't want normal hatred to intrude.

Seymour: Normal hatred? Jesus, what's happening to you. This reminds me of me and Betty.

Mark: Betty?

Seymour: Betty. I realize my life isn't your life, and all co-dependency aside...but the woman I lived with for five years up the block?

Mark: (phone rings)...Sorry...Let me get this.

Monica: I'll get you some coffee, sweetie. I love this domesticity thing. I've really missed it since Trick.

Mark: Trick?

Monica: The lead singer with Planet X.

Esther: Oh my.

Mark: (as phone rings) Excuse me. (Picks up portable and walks out onto the porch). Hello.

Esther walks up to Monica.

Esther: So nice to meet you.

Monica: Thank you. (indicates coffee)

Esther: Don't mind if I do. I'm fascinated by your generation.

Monica: Really, why?

Mark: Jake? Hey, how are you?...Amsterdam...That's fine...Just soak it up...It's the weather, the different light, the different sense of time...Exactly...The Europeans, with all they've been through, seem to have a better sense of it...

Esther: (listening) He's so parental, and now a philosopher. Who would've thought it.

Monica: What about my generation?

Esther: Well, I've got to tell you, I've sort of begun to tune in a bit to you all, as I haven't done really in so long, when we were all back in the sixties, I a mere tot of course...

Monica: (smiling) I'm listening....

Mark: (talking on the phone) Yeah, alright...I can handle that...I want you to have this, but you've got to keep it in the back of your head that your mother and I are going through some stuff right now...Nothing bad, not in the long run anyway, and not related to you anyway...It could even be better for you...Tell me this, the weather there...Night...Of course, I knew that...It's eight or nine hours difference, right?

Esther: I mean part of it is that for the first time since those days, you have your martyrs...I know that's horrible to say...but Curt Cobain and TuPac...I sort of distantly care about them myself...

Monica: We don't have that mass movement quality you had in the sixties...You boomers get to boss the whole planet around with your numbers...I hear the stock market's not going to quit until every one of you has your retirement squared away...

Mark: (talking on the phone) Not right now, but it could happen in a week or two...Use the U-Rail pass and just explore...You're supposed to...see...the world, right now...

A young Latino man walks into the room and makes eye contact with Seymour, who has been listening to Monica and Esther.

Seymour: Can I help you?

Latino: Sander...around?

Seymour: Sander?

Latino: Young guy, brown hair? Sander...Sandy...

Mark on the porch puts his hand to the phone.

Mark: He's not here. And I don't want this happening in my house.

Latino: (smiling, to Mark) No problem. We got no problem, okay. (to Esther) I hear you mention my man, TuPac.

Mark: (on the phone) Jake? Are we squared away? That dealer kid is here...

Esther: (sternly) This isn't my house. Are you selling dope?

Latino: Hey, man, I ain't no dealer...Why you say that?

Esther: How do you live with it?

Latino: (offended, but holding himself back) You know, lady, I show up in the morning, and everybody say it's a dope dealer. I'm wearing a sign? This is wrong.

Esther: Mark said it. He lives here.

Latino: I don't come to see him. I come to see Sander, who been hiding out in his house after he rip me off. White homes do the street... What I'm supposed to do? I really like him 'cause he's white...Stupid bitch.

Esther: Are you speaking to me?

Monica: He's talking about the young man. It's a denigrating term... bitch...

Latino: Sexist pig, ey muchacha?

Mark: (on the phone) Alright, buddy...I love you.

(coming into the room)

What's going on here? (to Latino) I don't want this in my house. I told Sandy I don't want it.

Latino: Excuse me, man. What? What you don't want?

Mark: I don't want drugs here. Now I'm asking you politely to get out of my house.

Latino: (looking around the room) I sell some drugs? I have drugs? (he pats himself down)

Mark: Alright, fine. Sander's not here.

Latino: I don't know you, man. You people gonna cry about TuPac, but a brother show up, you dial 911. TuPac's got to die before you love him. That's a problem.

Seymour: I'd say you over-stated it a little, but I wouldn't disagree...

Monica: (to Seymour) Easy on the double negatives there, homeboy...

Seymour: Did Cobain have to die, too, before we...

Latino: That dude have some problems...

Monica: Excuse me, are you an artist? Or are you carrying crystal meth?

Latino: Why?

Monica: Why?

Latino: Yes, muchacha, why you want to know if I got crystal meth?

Monica: I'm not asking for some. Let's get that out of the way. I don't want crystal meth. It bothers me when you--when we talk about these people who had all these problems, and are racial or other minorities, and all that, but they also produced art, okay? Do you do that?

Latino: Am I an artist?

Monica: That's right. Like TuPac.

Esther: You know what's getting me about this...you know, like you said, the martyrs that we had... and now Generation X...and it suddenly struck me...

Latino: Yeah, we got plenty of martyrs. You Catholic?

Seymour: (coming back into the conversation) No.

Latino: Check out the barrio some time.

Monica: Can we...

Mark: Look, I asked this man to leave my house...

Esther: Honestly, Mark.

Mark: What?

Esther: Oh, I don't know. The whole thing is impossible...

Monica: That's easy for you Brits to say...

Esther: Listen, we've got little Calcutta in London, if you haven't noticed...

Mark: And?

Esther: It could be okay, like I said. You know you had the great communicator for eight years, sowing an underclass and then getting out just in time before we began to reap it, but what gets me about TuPac is that even though he grew up with bullets whizzing by his crib, he turns out to be this garden variety artist, ambushed by his country and race and everything else...and he has to die young. Thank God I don't have to vote.

Seymour: I don't either.

Monica: I want to get to my meeting...

Seymour: So you won't either--vote.

Monica: So what? It's true, but that's hardly a solution or anything to be proud of. He's the perfect President. They love poor boys because once they start rubbing shoulders with money they lose the point...It takes Roosevelt or Kennedy--even a one generation removed parvenu like Kennedy, who had brains...although he wasn't really so hot as a president, was he?

Latino: You fuckin people don't need dope. If Sander comes, tell him I come by....

Mark: I'll tell him.

Latino: Sander owe me something.

Mark: He's a mixed-up kid.

Latino: He going to be messed-up kid.

He goes.

Mark: (sighs) Jesus. (walks around the room, and then pauses mid-walk)
You know. I don't know what it's about. For some reason, I have this recurring impulse to go to Vegas...

Esther: It's an occupational hazard of the unemployed or under-employed...no wonder Vegas is so hot these days...

Mark: I love Vegas. It's this incredible monument to American solitude.

Seymour: How did you get to that...word?

Mark: Solitude? You wake up at three in the morning and instead of reaching for some magazine, you get dressed and go down the little bullet of an elevator and the door opens and there's a party going on.

Monica: It's a party of money.

Mark: Yeah, but people are attached to or detached from the money. They don't notice the loneliness of it. It's a kind of jagged square dance--with a couple of major spills each night. They pump oxygen into the rooms to make everyone feel good.

Esther: Maybe that's the future. Artificial air. That young man was scary. I know Sandy and he's way off the beaten track. He needs someone to sit him down and talk straight to him.

Seymour: (to Mark) This is the kid that threw me across the room this morning?

Mark: He's a lost soul, gentle as a lamb, but, you know, also, a flake. I hired him and Jason to help move Jim Peabody when he moved over to Los Feliz to write his novel, and when I paid Sandy after the first day he didn't show up to finish the job.

Monica: And so he was demoted several notches in your character index. It's a little predictable. Maybe he was, like, suicidal?

Seymour: Why should you think that?

Monica: Because I know him, slightly. Look around you.

Mark: She's probably right. We're all fucking brainwashed, anyway. It's so simple really--television. I'm watching the debates on television. I'm a middle class man who's recently had the shit beaten out of him by the economy. Not only did I lose my job, my position was eliminated. And these two bionic men are going at it--one like a four-wheel drive Land Rover, and the other like a big Lincoln on cruise control and I'm sitting there, and I swear to God, there's this little surge of pride that starts to happen in me. God, we've made progress...I'm educated. I read the progressive journals--sporadically--and listen to Pacifica Radio. I once spent an afternoon with Larry Bensky. And I'm buying it.

Esther: You see, it's a matter of...

Monica: Knowing what you actually feel. Women are supposed to be thrilled if some idiot likes them.

Esther: When really it's other women who understand them...That's right. It's very hard for you to remember what you feel.

Monica: It's not about sex...I don't think.

Esther: Oh, but of course it is. But that's confused too. These women impersonating inflatable dollies...

Monica: But do you notice that the guys are panting after them.

Seymour: Jesus, what is this...a debate? I'm not into silicone.

Esther: Good for you, sir. This is our good neighbor, Mark.

Mark: Our whizz at futures.

Seymour: Stop.

Monica: Look, it's not the silicone effect, necessarily, it's the fact that some woman was such a fucking idiot she felt she had to do that to herself to please this guy, or probably just a generic man, not even a guy. Men get the sense they're still calling the shots--lethal injections of silly putty, literally--but they feel better because she's probably making as much dough as he is and he's got to maintain that edge.

Seymour: God, you're cynical. Can we talk about politics?

Monica: Politics is eyes, as somebody put it.

Seymour: Eyes?

Monica: (going up to him) E-y-e-s.

Seymour: Yes, wonderful. The immigration issue, say.

Monica: Oh, God.

Seymour: Listen, for a second, okay?

Mark: See, we have that little job we have to do...

Seymour: Right, vote. Let me tell you the immigration pretzel. Drive up the 101 to Ventura County at harvest time and check out the people in the fields to the left and right of you--colorful they are, colorfully dressed in a ragtag mode, Mexicans, doing the back breaking labor. Then, dig that their employers are the ones who are so up in arms about the immigration issue.

Mark: Okay.

Seymour: Ask me why.

Mark: Why?

Seymour: Because as long as they're illegal, or in trouble, or off balance, they're a ready source of cheap labor. It makes economic sense to keep them down, that's all.

Monica: Like slavery.

Seymour: That's right.

Esther: So what's supposed to happen? We vote "None of the Above"?

Seymour: Sure, but I think they're gonna take it to the street.

Monica: Which means your white ass.

Seymour: Yeah, I know. I feel bad about it. I like my little house. I like waking up in the morning in this neighborhood with the birds singing in this tree up the street. It's very nice. It's a lot like paradise. After forty, it's a maintenance thing, you know. You take care of yourself and you still feel pretty good, maybe even great.

Esther: (sizing him up) And you do...take care of yourself...

Seymour: Yeah, thanks...Listen, one more fine point. Maybe I can invite you out, after all this time. I'm a diseased bachelor, but you don't bring a lot of baggage to the table.

Monica: She likes women.

Esther: Not exclusively, dear, although I would be preferential in your case.

Monica: Deferential?

Esther: Now don't be insincere, dear. It doesn't suit her.

Seymour: Whatever. This is something I picked up in an article in the L.A. Times. These immigrants don't come over here with a really finely developed appreciation of democratic principles. We're talking descendants of Cortez, Montezuma...When they take it to the street, which they do all the time, the democratic process is going to be slighted big time...I drive home from meetings in downtown L.A. sometimes at nine or ten at night, and I see young men--

Esther: You're very well informed, but it's...

Seymour: Young guys Jake's age, or that kid Sander's age, actually younger, on their knees facing the sides of buildings with their hands up and LAPD

with guns out in back of them. Okay, so I'm...what?...not in touch with my feelings?

Esther: You're aerobicized. It's like an L.A. thing. It's hygienic, but there's something accelerated about it...jetstream. Nothing gets your attention, insinuates itself in a deeper, more sensual way...

Mark: Jesus, sweetheart. What was it you needed? Wine?

Esther: Oh, God, relax. We're being social.

Seymour: (warming up) She's cute. Lemme take you to dinner.

Esther: Not if I'll be bored, I won't. That's terrible about those young men.

Seymour: They're kids. They don't know anything, but that's what's in front of their noses...They're growing up in a state of siege...So I'll entertain you.

Esther: Well, that's the issue, isn't it? And...

Mark: (making the T for the Time signal with his arms) Can we take five here.

Monica: It's perfectly alright for her to have him jumping through hoops, if only because he's hoping to see her tits...

Seymour: Jesus...

Monica: I'm sorry. Did I get that wrong? Were you not hoping...

Seymour: And like she wants to know what my dick looks like, right? (They all sigh.) That's what I mean. It's a double standard. And don't forget I'm over forty. Okay? I'm over her tits--or whatever.

Esther: That's a relief.

Laughter.

Monica: I should go to a meeting.

Esther: And I have this baking to do...How old-fashioned. I should go out and shoot a quail or something.

Mark: That's out of another era, too.

Seymour: (to Mark) What's with that kid, anyway? He's doping? Have you thought about the dangers involved?

Mark: Maybe...I'm not sure. What--like that guy coming back to make an example of me?

Seymour: Yeah...

Mark: I'm practically worthless now. The house is still insured. I guess he could take my life. But see I've been praying lately...It's the program I started working when Patricia and I started to fall apart...And it's not prayer for anything, you know, just to live God's will...

Monica: Good for you.

Mark: I'm into it. It's a tremendous relief about so many things. I have this need to...try to...control. It sweeps up all my feelings, my thoughts, into...

Monica: A great big garbage bag of ego.

Mark: And it's painful. I feel a lot of pain about Jake, or Patricia, or some schlemiel at work I have no control over. Sand bagging is a specialty for some of these guys in government agencies. I do nothing--for which I'm paid an hourly rate.

Seymour: You pray, then?

Mark: God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.

Esther: That's nice.

Mark: Thanks.

Seymour: So the Mexican mafia isn't a problem.

Mark: It could be a big problem, but it's out of my hands. That kid is just an underling, and I'm a nobody. But the bottom line is I have no control...and of course Patricia thinks this is just a big cop out, another kind of dope. She has a real problem with this...side of...who I am.

Monica: She doesn't work a program?

Mark: Her own program, yes. She works it hard. But how do you tell a woman anything...like that.

Esther: You two are each such lovely people. Whether you need to be together remains to be seen.

Mark: I love the time element in a relationship, control freak that I am. We have a history. If I got together with somebody now...

Monica: She couldn't catch up.

Mark: That's right. But it may all be changing anyway. It's funny, just before I got fired, I got a call from a woman I hadn't seen in thirty years, that I spent one night with in New York when I was a callow youth. She sounded so...mature. This was a wild creature, too rich for my blood...although I could never forget her. Anyway, it was all stilted. As far as I could make out, she called to say hi and tell me she had a nice time that night.

Esther: How sweet of her.

Mark: That's what I thought, too. But I mean...Patricia and I were struggling, and she, this lady, was...married...Well, it's not like I was ready to...

Seymour: But almost. Getting there, right? The new chapter...under the sheets.

Esther: I must be off. I'll use this, if I may. (Holds up wine bottle.)

Mark: My pleasure.

Seymour: Me too. I'll walk you...where you're going.

Esther: Alright. Lovely meeting you.

Esther and Monica shake hands.

Monica: Goodbye. Goodbye, sir.

Seymour: Goodbye, Ms.

They leave.

Mark: So, we're out of here...

Monica: Either that...Or we could...

Mark: I'm too old for you.

They leave. The living room is empty for a moment, and then the young man in the first scene comes into the room, breathing heavily.

Sandy: Mark? Anybody home? Hello?

Looking around, getting his breath. Sighs with relief. Takes out works and belt and begins to shoot up. Looks up from this, catches himself, and moves with all of his apparatus, off-stage, presumably the bathroom.

The room remains empty for a moment, and then he comes back, now having shot up. He is feeling the rush, and sits down on the sofa, grinning at the audience, and slowly falls to one side.

The lights gradually go down.

Scene Two

Several hours later. Set as before with Sandy on the nod on the sofa. Mark enters and walks into the living room.

Mark: (seeing Sandy on the sofa, Mark goes over to him and makes a pass or two with his hand in front of Sandy's open eyes) Oh, no. Hey! Come on, now. (Begins to move him, shake him out of his stupor and get him to wake up and get on his feet.) Look, you know, you don't pull this shit. I've got

Patty coming over here any moment and you're in the middle of my living room (having trouble budging him) like some kind of human archipelago. What the fuck is wrong with you! How the fuck is Hawaii? Hunh? You know what, though?

Sandy: (unexpectedly answering) What?

Mark: (staggering now with Sandy draped over him) Oh, you're up. Are you? What'd you just say?

Sandy: What?

Mark: Alright. Christ, give me some help here, will you? What is this? How much do you weigh?

Sandy: What?

He is struggling to get him over to the back bedroom. Seymour enters.

Seymour: (taking in the tableaux) Whoa. Jesus...

Mark: Help me, will you? This kid weighs a fucking ton.

Seymour: (going over and helping) I just saw you pull in. What happened?

Mark: (out of breath) I have no idea. I come home and find him on the sofa watching TV without a goddam television.

Seymour: On the nod. What are you doing with this in your house?

Sandy: What?

Mark: (to Sandy) Stop saying "what," okay?

They stagger with Sandy between them into the back of the house and then Seymour comes back out again.

Seymour: (looking out at the day) I'll be honest with you, man.

Mark: What do I do now? Patricia's supposed to be here any moment.

Seymour: You don't want to call 911. I gotta say this...

Mark: Do I look alright?

Seymour looks at him.

Seymour: You look...younger, man. I mean smooth out a little. (Mark smooths himself down) Yeah, that's right. But you look...better. What the hell happened last night?

Mark: Oh, I'm not ready for that. I know that. One night, great. But, look--
-

Seymour: And I gotta tell you...

Mark: What?

Seymour: Esther...

Mark: She's gay...

Seymour: We've never talked like that...this morning...I was intrigued by her. Frankly, I'd never really looked at her, seen her. You know what I mean?

Mark: She's an interesting woman, but you've got to be aware...

Seymour: She likes women. I don't care. I've gotten to the point where I need something more...

Mark: ...than I experienced last night...

Seymour: Well, Monica is something else. But you know these babes that have like sculpted themselves completely and totally for the purpose of fucking up any man's normal motor responses. You know what I'm talking about--thin...very thin arms, for instance...very big breasts...

Mark: Yeah, I know...

Seymour: But, whatever you do, don't look one inch beyond, because underneath it's a goddam control panel...A silicone chip board or something. I went out for a while with Leslie Applewright, you know.

Mark: Un-hunh. Human white chocolate.

Seymour: Exactly. I was given a slot in her time table, no pun intended. It was the fucking interim, I guess. Between yoga class, facial masks...and having her ass wiped by her personal assistant, who actually was a better...well, not better looking, maybe. But more human...

Mark: Look, you caught me at a bad time...What do I say to her?

Seymour: Patricia? You asking me?

Mark: You've been through this. I've gotten too old for the relationship, maybe. I don't know...

Seymour: Older? Meaning you need a younger woman?

Mark: No. It's that maybe a younger woman would be able to tolerate me better.

Seymour: You've got low self-esteem. I'm not putting you down. So do I.

Mark: And so does she, probably. But did'ya ever reach a point in a relationship where you realize you're the goddam monster?

Seymour: You're the monster?

Mark: That's sort of where I am right now. I did every thing quite badly. I'm not proud of myself. And it's not exactly my fault. It's like cancer. You know? Who do I blame? God?

Seymour: I'm not following you. For cancer?

Mark: No, for being not a perfect, not even a normal okay guy.

Seymour: Come on. Give me a break, and stop talking like that. D'you go to that meeting?

Mark: What stories. Noon on Melrose and these actors are up there working out with very personal material.

Seymour: None of us is the greatest person in the world. Does that make me or you a monster? So what?

Mark: Patricia's gonna be here any moment. Do I look alright?

Seymour: We already went through that. Are you ashamed of me? You want me to leave? Jesus.

Mark: No, stay. Please. What am I supposed to say? That's her.

Seymour: What?

Mark: Her car. Outside. You go out the back, okay Sy? I'm sorry.

Seymour: It's alright. I'll be around later...if you want to talk.

Mark: Yeah, yeah, okay.

Seymour leaves through the back of the house. Mark goes to the sofa, smooths himself out again and attempts a casual pose on the sofa, grabbing a magazine from the coffee table, draping an arm over the top of the sofa...

Patricia, a professionally dressed attractive woman in her late forties, walks into the room, taking the measure of her old house before she notices Mark, who is pretending he isn't aware she's there.

Patricia: (looking at him on the sofa): Hello, Mark.

Mark: (looking up from the magazine, smiling) Oh, hi.

Patricia: I guess it's going to be quite a landslide.

Mark: Pardon?

Patricia: The election. It's election day.

Mark: Yeah, of course. I know it is. I've got to go over and vote. Did you?

Patricia: (nodding, smiling) I pretended I still live here. I hope you don't mind.

Mark: God, no. Not at all. I mean it's as much your place as mine.

Patricia: Well, I just hope it's not going to be on the market forever. Is June planning on putting up a "For Sale" sign any time soon?

Mark: Oh, yeah. I should call about that. But I know it's listed and she wants to do an open house some time.

Patricia: (nodding; she goes over to the entrance to the porch) Have you been watering the plants?

Mark: (he gets up off the sofa and goes over to the porch entrance, keeping a careful distance from Patricia) Yeah...well, I've got to do it again.

Patricia: (turning to him so that he backs up a few steps) You've got to--it's a selling point, and someone who goes out and finds it all limp and scraggly is going to be turned off...

Mark: Limp and scraggly...Is that the way it looks...Jesus...

Patricia: Look, if you want to move out, I'll take care of it. I just thought it would be easier since Claire offered me a room...

Mark: Yeah, no, you're right. I'm sorry. (getting a little annoyed at her even as he responds reasonably) Same old Patricia.

Patricia: Oh, God. Grow up. (catching herself) I'm sorry. I take that back. Just don't start, okay? We have to handle this like adults. Both of us. Have you heard from Jake?

Mark: He called this morning. I'm practically ready to go over there myself.

Patricia: Are you kidding, to be with Jake?

Mark: What's wrong with that? Father and son in Europe together?

Patricia: Don't you see he needs to be on his own? To get his feet in the world, and the last thing he needs is his father with him in some youth hostel.

Mark: Why a youth hostel? I still have some bucks, you know.

Patricia: Really? How come I don't have any.

Mark: (sheepishly) Not a lot of bucks, believe me.

Patricia: I do, unless you've got some secret you've been keeping...

Mark: But why do you assume I'm going to undermine Jake? It's good for fathers and sons to know each other.

Patricia: Look, he needs his own life. Whether you know it or not this is taking its toll on us...on both of us...

Mark: Maybe we're being too hasty--

Patricia: Don't, Mark. I've got a few papers you need to sign...

He takes the papers from her, looks them over for a moment, and then impulsively signs them.

Mark: Sure. That's it? Divorce is simple, hunh?

Patricia: That's what gets me, too. We've been together so long, and it was like all we needed to do was...

Mark: Sign papers and walk out, or vice versa.

Patricia: You know what I mean. Yes.

The front door opens and Monica walks in with Ted, who is dressed in bib overalls without a shirt, a handsome twenty-something actor.

Monica: Oh, I'm sorry. This is Ted...I forgot my...

Mark: No problem. Come in. This is Patricia...(carefully) We have been married.

Monica: Hello.

Ted: (reaching a hand to her) Nice to meet you.

Patricia: (shaking his hand) Hello.

Monica goes into the back of the house, and Ted lingers uneasily in a no-man's land between the front and back of the house.

Mark: (to Patricia) Okay. You're right, of course. A thought went by in my mind, that's all. I'm laid off so I have more thoughts. It's no big deal. He sounds fine. He's got the U-Rail pass.

Ted: He your son?

Mark: (with some annoyance) Unh-hunh.

Ted: (enthusiastically) It's the greatest thing you can do for him. Let him travel. Let him see how other people live. And you get perspective on where you're coming from, like your parents, and even America. It gives you the distance you need to appreciate it a little.

Mark: Really. That's great. When were you over there?

Ted: Actually, I haven't gone there personally. But I watch "The Real World."

Monica comes back out into the living room.

Mark: (incredulous) "The Real World"--?

Monica: (embarrassed) On MTV. Forget it. Please. We're going to Ted's class, acting class...I just wanted to...get...oh, wait a minute.

Monica goes into the back of the house again. Ted follows her this time.

Patricia: Really, Mark.

Mark: Look, don't get the wrong idea. This is a friend of a friend of Jake's...

Sandy comes out of the bedroom dishevelled and still not in full possession of his faculties.

Sandy: (taking in Patricia, suddenly underneath his stupor alarmed) Oh, hi...

Patricia: (recognizing him) Sandy? Is that you? What've you done to yourself?

Sandy: (stoned, but trying to deal) Oh, hi, Mrs. Slade. It's nice to see you. I was just...napping.

Patricia: (concerned, going over to him, he gives a half turn away which makes her hesitate) Sandy...I'm...surprised...to see you like this...

Sandy: (giving it his best shot, but hobbled) Oh, I know. (He is facing her now but backing away, coming to rest on the edge of the sofa) Believe me, I'm aware that I still have college ahead of me, and...I shouldn't...I can't go on like this...I'm going to have to get in gear for the new semester...

Patricia: Are you on drugs?

Sandy: What? You mean like on drugs or something?

Patricia: (nodding sadly) Why are you doing this to yourself, Sandy? Where's your Dad?

Sandy: Oh, Dad's here. In fact I'm supposed to see him later, actually. We're going to have dinner together.

Patricia: Are you living with your mother again?

Sandy: (nodding) Un-hunh. Sort of. (He goes toward her and extends his hand) It's really nice seeing you, Mrs. Slade...I've got an appointment. Otherwise it would be fun to stay and talk...

Patricia: (shaking hands, amused in spite of the gravity of what she sees) Sandy, I want you to think about what you're doing. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Sandy: Oh, absolutely. Believe me, I do, Mrs. Slade. I don't want...(he makes a motion of his hands to indicate his whole body)...this...you know? I know I need to get ready for my future...(He makes a quick pivot to the back of the house)...right away.

Patricia: (to Mark) Somebody has to sit down with him, Mark. Really.

Mark: Look, you know as well as I do, there's no talk for that. He either hits bottom and starts a program...or...

Patricia: What? He dies?

Mark: I didn't realize how far it had gone. That's why I pray. Dear God, please help me live your will for my life. See, I don't pray for anything. I'll pray for Sandy, and Jake, and for you, but I'm just praying that we'll live God's will for our lives.

Patricia: Doesn't that strike you as a little easy?

Mark: It's a lot easier than figuring I know the right thing for anybody. I don't, even for myself, and it's taken me all this time to realize it, and I want to tell you, it's a great relief.

Patricia: Not knowing what you want?

Mark: Not being the final authority, so to speak, letting God be it. After all, I've generally made a mess of it. I know you'll agree about that.

Patricia: Because you've been too easy-going. Sandy shouldn't be here, for one thing, not like he is. I don't think you realize that we have a job to do here. What if that agent comes over?

Mark: I didn't realize how far it had gone...until...just a little while ago. That Latino kid came by...

Patricia: What Latino kid?

Mark: I've seen him before. Jake knew him, and Sandy does...

Patricia: Well, what did he want?

Mark: He was looking for Sandy...which is scary. I feel sorry for these kids. They get offered this crap on a tray from middle school on, before they know who they are, before they have a clue what they want to do, so they have no way of measuring the effect it has on them. I got loaded when I was twenty, for the first time. I was interning at this lawyer friend of my parents for the summer and writing a goddam business letter became an incredibly complex series of decisions that exhausted me before I got through the first short paragraph. So I didn't get loaded at lunch again. I had a way to measure the effect it had on me, which I don't think an eleven year old is going to have.

Patricia: I doubt if either Jake or Sandy knows the format of a business letter.

Mark: Exactly.

Monica and Ted come back into the room.

Monica: Well I certainly do, and I'm not opposed to sharing the information. We are gone--to acting class.

Ted: (expansive again) But whatever you do, don't give up on them, or lose hope. That's what hurts them the most.

Monica: Who said anything about that?

Ted: I mean, just in case they were considering...

Monica: What's this counseling thing? (to Monica and Mark) He's a wonderful actor, by the way.

Mark: Yeah, I may have heard you this morning. You were great.

Ted: That wasn't acting.

Mark: I know. I just meant I appreciated the sharing...

Ted: Thanks, man.

He sticks out his hand, and turns the handshake into the revolutionary shake.

Monica: So. Nice to meet you.

She extends her hand to Patricia, who shakes somewhat uneasily.

Monica and Ted leave.

Patricia: I suppose none of this is my business unless it gets in the way of selling this house. Is it doing that?

Mark: No way.

Monica returns.

Monica: This Mercedes just pulled up.

Mark: (panicky--about to dart behind a sofa) Oh, no!

Patricia: (frightened) What is it, Mark?

Mark: (to Monica) The dealer kid, right?

Monica: (smiling) No, I don't think so...It's a woman driving, another woman in the front with her....

Patricia: That could be the agent...Did she phone?

Mark: (relaxing) No. Jesus. What am I supposed to do with this situation? Is Sandy still here?

Monica: Yeah, he's watching TV in the bedroom.

Mark: I've got to get him out of here.

Patricia: Yes. I'm glad you see that now.

Monica: Okay. We're gone.

Mark: (looking to the back of the house) Is he...dressed?

Monica: Oh, yeah. He's fine.

The doorbell rings.

June: (off-stage) Hello! Mr. Slade! It's me, June...from Prospect Realty...I hope I'm not disturbing you. I have a couple with me, and I just had a feeling they'd want to see your home...

Mark: Yes, June. Come on in. Let's give them the tour.

Lights go down.

End of Act One