TURNABOUT
A SCREENPLAY

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Todd Lincoln Watson, B.A.
Denton, Texas
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*Turnabout*, a feature-length screenplay with an accompanying critical essay, is the story of Michael Houston, a successful stockbroker in his late twenties whose unlikely romantic rendezvous with a bohemian art dealer leads him to realize that finding love often begins with a soul-searching journey into oneself.
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TURNABOUT

FADE IN

INT. HIGH-RISE APARTMENT—MORNING

AS THE CREDITS ROLL:

MICHAEL HOUSTON's extremely muscular back is tensing, untensing, as he makes love to his date from the night before, SHARI, a robust, gorgeous brunette, in his sprawling waterbed. CLOSE ON Michael's face as Shari makes lots of noise and claws Michael's back. The ANSWERING MACHINE beeps and comes on.

LANA (O/S)
Michael?...I know you're there, you son-of-a-bitch. Pick up the phone...

Shari stops moving, looks up at Michael. He forces a smile.

MICHAEL
That's just...a friend. I, uh...

LANA (O/S)
I think I left my black bra at your apartment. You remember. The one you insisted on taking off with your teeth?

SHARI
She thinks? As in, she's not sure?

Shari laughs, thinks it's funny in a sick sort of way, but realizes the mood has been killed. She pushes Michael off of her. Michael sits up in bed and puts his hands over his face.

SHARI
(continuing)
Sorry, ride's over.

MICHAEL
Look, I...

SHARI
Don't know what to say?

Michael realizes he's been revealed.
SHARI

(continuing)
For future reference? Turn the volume down on your answering machine.

Shari gets up from the bed, grabs her undergarments and walks into the restroom.

SHARI (O/S)
Better yet, invest in voice mail!
You're a stockbroker, right?

The answering machine beeps, cutting Lana off. Michael immediately runs to his answering machine and turns it off. Then, realizing he has no clothes on, runs back to his bed and throws on a pair of underwear.

MICHAEL
Listen, uh...

He stumbles -- he's forgotten her name. He curses himself as he tries to remember.

SHARI (O/S)
(a talking personals ad)
Shari. Shari Mackenzie. I'm 29, I'm a buyer for Neiman's. I like tall men, BMWs, and I hate movies. You've got to stop putting everything into RAM, dear. The moment you turn off it disappears.

MICHAEL
Shari, listen, I'm really sorry. I don't want you to get the wrong idea.

SHARI (O/S)
No need to worry about that.

MICHAEL
I know, but it's just...

Shari walks back into the bedroom. She's wearing only her bras and panties.

SHARI
Kind of awkward? I'm sure you're used to it.

MICHAEL
Well...yeah. I mean, you know. You might misconstrue it as meaning I'm promiscuous or something.
SHARI
That, my dear, is obvious.

MICHAEL
(distressed)
Obvious? How?

Shari approaches the waterbed, reaches down inside one corner of the frame, and takes from it a black bra.

SHARI
This was a good sign.

MICHAEL
Oh.

SHARI
(warning him there's)
Uh-huh.

He reaches to another corner of the bed and pulls out a pair of black fishnet stockings, then dangles them also.

SHARI
(continuing)
And this.

Michael rolls over to the other side of the bed, embarrassed. He's been caught.

SHARI
(continuing)
But the winner has to be...this.

He turns back around just long enough to see she's holding up a black nightie that has a crotchless bottom and holes where the breasts would go. Michael groans and gets up from the bed. Shari drops the nightie on the bed, then reaches down as if she's about to pull her panties off.

MICHAEL
Wait! What are you doing?

SHARI
Making my deposit.

Michael doesn't know what to say. Shari laughs, then goes to pick her dress up from off the floor. She puts it on as she speaks.
SHARI
(continuing)
That was a joke. Listen, this has all been very nice, but I really have to be going. Eight o'clock breakfast with my ex, and his lawyer hates it when I'm late.

MICHAEL
You're married?

SHARI
Not for very much longer.

MICHAEL
Why didn't you tell me?

SHARI
(can't believe he asked this)
Would it have mattered?

Michael is stumped. Shari puts on her heels and grabs her purse. Michael watches her, hating the fact she's going to leave on this note. She approaches him and kisses him tentatively on the cheek. Michael starts to get up from the bed.

SHARI
(continuing)
I can let myself out.

MICHAEL
Can I call you?

Shari doesn't reply as she waves over her shoulder on her way out the door.

INT. GARAGE--DAY

The elevator door opens in the basement garage. Michael stands inside the elevator, dressed to a T and wearing RayBan Wayfarer sunglasses. He walks out of the elevator and turns the corner. The security guard, CHARLIE, smiles and greets him. Michael continues walking to his car.

CHARLIE
Morning, Mr. Houston.

MICHAEL
Morning, Charlie.

CHARLIE
How's my stock doin'?
MICHAEL
(over his shoulder)
Up three points. You're gonna be a rich man, Charlie.

CHARLIE
I ain't holdin' my breath.

MICHAEL
I wouldn't advise it.

CHARLIE
Have a good day, sir.

Michael nods and waves. CLOSE-UP on the trademark symbol on Michael's black, sleek BMW as he climbs inside. The car door SLAMS, the engine ROARS, the radio BLASTS on. Michael backs up, tires SCREECHING, then throws the car into gear and tears out of the parking garage.

EXT. A STREET IN THE ARTS DISTRICT--MORNING

The street is lined with warehouse buildings, many of them converted into clubs and others into loft apartments. The streets are empty with the exception of a small amount of traffic and a few pedestrians. The sidewalks are littered with emptied beer bottles and cigarette butts, and flyers advertising a variety of bands having strange names are posted on most every telephone pole.

The windows on all the clubs have shoe polished band names scratched on them. A drunk BUM moves down the street picking up cigarette butts. Several PUNK SKATEBOARDERS zoom by the bum on their skateboards. He turns and shakes his fist at them.

INT. LOFT APARTMENT--DAY

A large, open room with brick interior walls and a window overlooking the street below. Dirty clothes are scattered about the room, as are several empty beer cans fresh from the night before. The small kitchen area is covered with unwashed dishes, the kitchen table with old newspapers and full ashtrays. An emptied bottle of vodka rests on the table.

Most prominent in the apartment are several sculptures located around the room. The pieces are of very abstract male and female figures, some alone, some coupled, all restless. One sculpture, an unfinished lump of clay, rests off in one corner.
a photo of REX and ATHENA, a couple in their late twenties, arm in arm and dressed in blue denim, smiling wearily.

The camera tracks towards a shaking bed as we hear the sounds of two people making love. Athena's legs are thrown over and around Rex's waist, her long brunette hair wrapped around his face. They both seem to be reaching for a part of the other they probably don't want to see, but still they try. As their lovemaking grows more intense, Athena's cries start to cross the bridge that separates passion and pain.

Suddenly, Rex stops moving and collapses atop Athena. He starts to kiss her, and at first Athena reciprocates. Then, she grows restless and starts to push Rex off her. Rex lifts Athena up and looks at her.

REX
What?

Athena shakes loose Rex's grasp and sits up in bed.

ATHENA
I'm going to be late for work.

REX
C'mon. You got time.

ATHENA
(frustrated)
Too much of a good thing.

She rises from the bed and starts for the bathroom.

ATHENA
(continuing)
Anyway, somebody's got to bring home the bacon around here.

REX
What the hell's that supposed to mean?
(no response from Athena)

Huh?

ATHENA
You know exactly what it means.

Rex watches Athena disappear into the restroom. Angry, he gets up from the bed, walks into the kitchen, and grabs a beer from the fridge. He removes the beer top as the sound of the SHOWER RUNNING spills out from the bathroom. Rex puts the beer to his mouth and downs half of it.
Frustrated, he walks over to the bathroom door. He's about to begin knocking when he stops himself. He glances at the unfinished sculpture sitting off in the corner. He walks over to it with the demeanor of a predator surveying his prey. He leans down and touches the still moist figure, gently. He runs his fingers over the clay, molding it, caressing it. He then stands up and kicks the sculpture in the middle, doubling over the clay figure.

REX

Piece a shit.

EXT. FREEWAY--DAY

Michael zooms down the freeway, beating his hands on the steering wheel in sync with the music. His car phone rings. He turns down the volume on the radio and picks the phone up, places it between his ear and shoulder so he can continue to tap his hands.

MICHAEL

Yello?...Fred, what's up?...That's right, how was Jamaica?... Yeah?...On the beach?...Sand can be a problem, Fred...Yeah, business is fine...Oh, the new office is great...Yeah, a nice big window.

A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN with long, blond hair in a Corvette convertible pulls up alongside his car. She smiles. Michael smiles back.

MICHAEL

(continuing)

Oh, the view? The view is absolutely breathtaking, Fred...Uh- huh...Sure, I'll let you bring your telescope over...Uh-huh.

Michael notices the cellular antenna on the back right side of the woman's car. Michael points to his telephone. He mouthes the words "What's your phone number?" The woman laughs, then shocks Michael when she holds up a sign that has her cellular phone number written in large, bold letters. He laughs, scribbles the number down on a pad stuck to his dashboard, then signals for her to hold on for just a moment.

MICHAEL

(continuing)

Yeah, squash sounds great, Fred. Have your secretary call mine and make an appointment. Listen, the office just beeped me, I gotta run...
Michael hangs up on Fred and quickly punches in the woman's phone number. It RINGS twice before she answers.

CLAIRE
Do you always ask strange women for their numbers while driving down the freeway?

MICHAEL
Do you always carry that sign around in your car?

CLAIRE
Only when I'm feeling lucky.

MICHAEL
You feel lucky today? 'Cause you know, you look lucky.

CLAIRE
You're good at this, aren't you?

MICHAEL
The best.

CLAIRE
It won't work with me.

MICHAEL
Then why'd you hold up the sign?

CLAIRE
Okay. Take your best shot. What do you want?

MICHAEL
Dinner. Tonight, say eight, at the Mansion?

CLAIRE
I'm on a diet.

MICHAEL
A drink, then.

CLAIRE
I'm on the wagon.

MICHAEL
(mulling it over)
Good for you. So it's looking like a weekend in the Bahamas.

CLAIRE
You're getting warm.
MICHAEL
A woman in need of the tropics.
That's a good thing.

CLaire
They say the fun's all in the chase.

MICHAEL
You know something? You shouldn't believe everything you hear.

Michael smiles, accelerates, and pulls ahead of Claire.

CLaire
Wait a minute. You're going to give up that easily?

Michael waves at Claire, much like Shari waved at him when she left his apartment. He hangs up the phone.

INT. LOFT APARTMENT--DAY

Athena walks out of the bathroom. Rex is in the kitchen frying up some bacon and eggs. She throws on her clothes in a hurry. Rex watches her.

REx
Over easy?

ATHENA
I don't have time to eat.

REx
You gotta eat.

Rex opens the refrigerator and takes out some orange juice.

ATHENA
No, I don't gotta do anything.

Rex slams the refrigerator door shut.

REx
Are we gonna talk about this?

ATHENA
Later.

REx
What did I do?
ATHENA
(sarcastic)
You tell me, sweetie. What did you do?

REX
How the hell am I supposed to explain it to you, Athena? Huh?

She holds up her hand to stop him from going on.

ATHENA
You don't have to explain anything to me, Rex. Okay? Not a goddamn thing.

REX
Bullshit. I seen how you been lookin' at me lately. Like I'm all washed up.

ATHENA
You said it, not me.

REX
Then what the hell's a matter with you?

ATHENA
You lied to me, you fuck!

REX
About what?

Athena grabs her purse and storms out the door.

REX
(continuing)
Athena!

Rex turns and looks toward the bathroom. He knows what he's going to find there, but he also knows he has to make sure. He slowly walks over to it. The bathroom door is almost completely closed. He slowly pushes it open and turns on the light.

INSERT

on a syringe in the middle of the bathroom floor.

Rex looks up at the cabinet mirror. In large bold letters, written in red lipstick, are the words: IS LOVING ME NOT ENOUGH FOR YOU?

Rex falls to the floor and picks up the syringe. He starts to cry as he rolls it between his fingers, then violently throws the syringe against the wall.
EXT. FREEWAY--DAY

Michael sits in traffic. He's scanning the roadway for a way out when his phone rings. He picks it up immediately.

MICHAEL
Yello?

DENISE (O/S)
Good morning, Mr. Houston.

MICHAEL
Good morning, Denise.

DENISE (O/S)
I tried calling you last night.

MICHAEL
I was busy. Did you leave a message?

DENISE (O/S)
I don't know. Did I?

MICHAEL
I don't need this on a Monday morning, Denise. What is it?

DENISE (O/S)
(suddenly professional)
I just sent you a fax. I knew you'd want to see it before you got here.

MICHAEL
(instantly suspicious)
What's wrong?

DENISE (O/S)
Your monitor monkey Kevin fell asleep on the job last night. Xenix took a dive, and it's kind of hard to unload when you're catchin' Zs.

MICHAEL
Oh Christ.

DENISE (O/S)
Yep. The Tokyo exchange went haywire. Apparently a silicon plant burned down in Korea. Second largest in the world. Have you gotten the fax yet?

Michael rips a piece of paper from out of his cellular fax machine. He looks at the figures -- his heart sinks.
MICHAEL
Yeah, I got it.

DENISE (O/S)
It's bad, huh?

MICHAEL
Have Kevin in my office by nine. He's shitcanned, so start the paperwork.

DENISE (O/S)
You're really going to fire him?

MICHAEL
It's just "bidness," Denise. He screwed up, what else am I supposed to do?

DENISE (O/S)
Buy him some No-Doze. He's a good watchdog and you know it.

MICHAEL
I'll have a talk with him. See ya in a few.

Michael hangs up the phone.

EXT. STREET--DAY

Athena walks around to the driver's side of an ancient Ford Pinto. She inserts the key into the lock and tries to turn it, but the lock won't give. Athena pounds on the top of her car. She removes the key and walks around to the passenger side, unlocks the door on that side, climbs into the car, and scoots over to the driver's side.

She turns the key in the ignition. The car won't start. She pumps the gas and tries again. The engine turns over, backfires a couple of times, then comes to a steady rumble. She throws it into gear and starts to tear away from the curb, when she realizes she forgot to check the mirror. A Mercedes screams by, HONKING for Athena to look where she's going.

ATHENA
Fuck you, asshole!
(To herself)
Yuppie son of a bitch.

Satisfied with herself, Athena checks her mirror and pulls into traffic.
EXT. FREEWAY--DAY

Traffic has started moving again. Michael zooms down the freeway dividing his attention between the road and the fax. He still can't believe the bad news. A WOMAN in a VW Bug who passes him sees that he's reading the fax instead of watching the road. She shakes her head.

Up ahead, a CONSTRUCTION AHEAD, ONE MILE sign rests off to one side of the freeway. Michael doesn't notice it as he begins to cut in and out of traffic, still dividing his attention between the road ahead and the numbers on the page.

EXT. SERVICE ROAD--DAY

Athena drives along the service road. She pulls up to a stoplight, lights a cigarette, and smokes. A YOUNG GUY in the car next to her smiles and waves, flirting. Athena gives him the finger as the light turns green and she takes off.

ATHENA
I don't know if I've ever seen so many assholes in one day.

Athena's car approaches the bottom section of the service road that parallels the freeway on which Michael is driving.

EXT. FREEWAY--DAY

MICHAEL'S POV as he looks up from the fax and sees that there has been a sudden major slowdown in traffic. He is almost upon the stopped cars when he veers to the right. He tries to slam on his brakes, but the Beamer jumps through a guard rail and starts down a grassy embankment toward the service road below.

EXT. SERVICE ROAD--DAY

Athena approaches the on-ramp when she sees Michael's BMW racing down the embankment towards her car. She looks over her shoulder to check and see if it's clear enough for her to swerve to the right.

The BMW slams into the side of the Pinto, knocking it across the street and into a light pole. Several STREET PEOPLE walk out from underneath the underpass to check out the situation. Michael, stunned, sits in his car for a moment before getting out. He takes a quick look at his BMW, which has a crumpled fender, then runs across the street to check on the other driver.
As soon as Michael opens Athena's car door and tries to help her out, Athena begins screaming and carrying on.

ATHENA
You crazy son-of-a-bitch! You think you're some kind of Evil Knievel or somethin'? Goddamnit!

MICHAEL
It wasn't my fault. There was some construction ahead so I...

ATHENA
Thought you'd take a shortcut? Why don't you just wait like everybody else, asshole? Goddamnit! Look at my car. It's totalled. It's completely fucking totalled!

MICHAEL
Forget the car. Are you okay?

ATHENA
Forget the car?! That's the only car I've got, asshole. Goddamnit! How else am I gonna get to work now? You ever try to take a bus in this town?

(Takes a good look at him)


MICHAEL
I'm sure insurance will take care of it. I just want to make sure...

Athena jerks away from him.

ATHENA
Just get the hell away from me. I might get cooties.

(she checks her watch)

Oh shit, now I'm gonna be late for work.

MICHAEL
I'm sure your boss will understand.

ATHENA
How do you know? I could be my own boss for all you know.

Michael steps away from her and puts out his hands.
MICHAEL
You're right. I don't know anything about anything.
   (Gives her a good look.)
Are you?

ATHENA
Am I what?

MICHAEL
Are you your own boss?

ATHENA
(Furious)
What the fuck do you care?

Athena shakes her head and looks away, suddenly laughing at the situation.

MICHAEL
Is there anything I can do to help?

ATHENA
Yeah, buy me a new car. While you're at it, give me a couple hundred thousand, take me to Paris for dinner.

MICHAEL
(earnestly)
Okay.

Athena looks at Michael skeptically, then realizes he's serious.

ATHENA
Right. Look, just...just get the hell away from me, okay? I just want...to be left alone.

MICHAEL
Listen, I'm really sorry. If there's anything I can...

ATHENA
Are you deaf AND dumb?
   (She steps up to him, in his face)
Pay attention asshole.
   (speaks slowly)
Leave me the fuck alone. You've fucked up my day sufficiently, thank you very much.

Athena walks away from Michael and stands on the shoulder waiting for the police.
EXT. SERVICE ROAD—DAY

Athena stands off to one side talking to a POLICEMAN about the accident. Michael give his account to a SECOND POLICEMAN. The policeman tears a piece of paper from his pad, hands it to Michael, and joins his partner. A tow-truck pulls away in the background with Athena's car behind it. Michael watches the tow-truck drive off. He removes a pen from his pocket and writes down the license plate number of Athena's car.

When the two cops walk back to their car, Michael approaches Athena.

MICHAEL
You sure you don't want a ride? Buses take forever in this town.

Michael pauses, sees her skeptical look, remembers her earlier comment.

MICHAEL
(continuing)
Or so I've heard.

Athena stops, thinks it over, then finally shrugs her shoulders. They both walk across the street to the BMW. Michael starts to open the passenger door, but Athena jumps ahead and opens it herself. Michael walks around to the driver's side and climbs in.

INT. MICHAEL'S BMW—DAY

Michael watches as Athena starts to light a cigarette. He starts to say something to her, then decides against it.

MICHAEL
Uh, smoking is...Forget it.

ATHENA
You bet your ass.

Michael cracks the window. They drive. Athena looks out the passenger window, still pissed.

MICHAEL
What do you do?

She doesn't answer.

MICHAEL
(continuing)
I'm a stockbroker.
ATHENA
(sardonic)
No, really?

MICHAEL
(proud)
Yeah. You know something about the market?

ATHENA
Enough to stay away from it.

They drive in silence. Athena opens the glove compartment and begins to look through his stuff. Michael watches her.

MICHAEL
Are you looking for anything in particular? Perhaps I could help.

ATHENA
You can tell a lot about a person by looking at what they keep in their glovebox.

INSERT ON a small, black poodle magnet in Athena's hands. She rubs it between her fingers, as a contemplative mood suddenly comes over her.

MICHAEL
Insurance. You're worried about insurance?

ATHENA
Huh?

MICHAEL
You don't have to worry. I can help you with your car. Even if it wasn't my fault.

ATHENA
That's a matter of opinion.

He reaches into his wallet and pulls out a business card.

MICHAEL
Here. Your company gives you any trouble you give me a call. I'm pretty persuasive. When I need to be.

Beat, as Athena considers his offer.

ATHENA
Why are you so eager to help me?
MICHAEL
You look like you could use it.

ATHENA
And?

MICHAEL
That's it.

ATHENA
Right.

EXT. ART GALLERY--DAY

The BMW pulls up in front of an art gallery in the arts district where Athena works. Michael leans forward to check the place out. Athena starts to get out of the car. Michael notices she has left his business card on the floor. He grabs it and holds it out to Athena.

MICHAEL
Hey! You forgot my card.

ATHENA
Oh. Yeah, thanks.

MICHAEL
What I said about helping you. Just so you know, there's no strings attached.

Athena sarcastically acknowledges and slams the door shut hard, and starts to walk away. Michael lowers the passenger window.

MICHAEL
(continuing)
Who knows? Maybe we'll run into one another again sometime.

Athena doesn't turn around and instead waves over her shoulder.

Michael's POV as Athena walks towards the entrance to the gallery. When she gets to the entrance, Athena turns her head around to look again. She obviously expects him to be gone and is embarrassed that he's still there. Michael grins behind his tinted windows as he now slowly drives away.

INT. PARKING GARAGE--DAY

Michael parks his car inside the garage. He climbs out, grabs his briefcase, and starts inside the building.
He locks his car using a wireless keychain.

INT. ELEVATOR--DAY

Michael stands in an elevator with a few other BUSINESS PEOPLE. An attractive BUSINESSWOMAN stands directly across from him. The woman stares at Michael, clearly flirting. Michael makes eye contact and smiles, but doesn't flirt back. He looks up and watches the numbers changing as the elevator rises.

INT. OFFICE--DAY

Michael walks out of the elevator and is immediately hounded by his secretary, DENISE, who hands him a wad of messages. They walk towards Michael's office. She watches him carefully.

DENISE
Good morning, Mr. Houston.

MICHAEL
Cut the bullshit, Denise.  
(scanning the wad of paper messages)  
Glad to see you've gotten the hang of E-mail.

DENISE
You're running late.

MICHAEL
I was in a car wreck.

DENISE
Michael, please.  
(beat)  
Oh my God, you're serious. Are you okay?

MICHAEL
Do I look okay? I was reading that goddamn fax you sent me instead of watching the road.

One of Michael's cohorts, SKIP, dressed in bright suspenders and tie, walks past.

SKIP
Mister Bigbucks, got a window on the world.
MICHAEL
What can I say, Skip? I'm a man who likes a view. Hey, nice suspenders.

Skip frowns at Michael as he walks past.

DENISE
So, what happened? Was anybody hurt?

MICHAEL
My car.

DENISE
Thank God.

Denise stops walking. Michael realizes this, stops, and turns around to see what she wants.

DENISE
(continuing)
Michael, listen. On the phone earlier, I didn't mean to pry.

MICHAEL
(discreetly)
Of course you did, Denise. You pride yourself on prying. But can we talk about this later? Somewhere a little more private?

Denise looks around. Two MEN in suits walk past them and continue down the hall. It's a revelation to Denise that they're in the middle of the hallway. She is immediately back to business.

DENISE
Oh. Right.

They walk into Michael's office. The furnishings are simple, but stylish. A computer sits on a table near the window, and a few scattered papers cover Michael's desk.

Michael is about to pick up the phone when he notices that Denise is still in the room. She looks at him, shakes her head ever so slightly, then starts to leave.

MICHAEL
What?

Denise smiles eagerly.

DENISE
Nothing. You just look good enough to eat, that's all.
Michael waves her off.

MICHAEL
If you're that hungry get yourself some breakfast or something. I've got work to do.

DENISE
(unfazed)
Maybe lunch, then.

Denise starts to leave, stops at the door.

DENISE
(continuing)
Oh, I almost forgot. Kevin is in the conference room waiting for you to give him his new asshole.

MICHAEL
I don't have time for that right now, either. Have him wait an hour then tell him to go home and pull a Rip Van Winkle. This market's too volatile not to have a fresh perspective on things.

Michael picks up the phone as Denise leaves. He sits down at his desk, turns and faces the window, and stares unhappily outside for a few moments before he turns back around and hits the speed dial button.

MICHAEL
(continuing)
It's me. We still on for lunch?... Yeah, I'll be on time. All I've got on for this morning is cutting somebody's balls off.

INT. REVOLVING RESTAURANT HIGH ABOVE THE CITY--DAY

Michael and his friend, CHUCK, a lawyer with a distinct Northeastern accent, are seated at a table next to the window. Chuck smokes.

MICHAEL
I thought you quit.

CHUCK
I did.

MICHAEL
So what happened?
CHUCK

(sharply)
I started again.

(softens)
Stress. What's it matter?

MICHAEL

I don't like sitting in the smoking section, Chuck. And don't give me that stress bullshit. Everytime you start smoking again it's because you're screwing somebody new, so what's her name?

CHUCK

Marlene. We met out at Willow Bend. She plays polo.

MICHAEL

That's nice.

Chuck leans over the table, as if what he's about to tell Michael is in the strictest confidence.

CHUCK

In the nude. You know, like Lady Godiva?

MICHAEL

Lady Godiva never played polo.

CHUCK

The point is she rode around nude on a horse and played with balls.

MICHAEL

And that makes you smoke.

CHUCK

It's complicated, Michael. I can't even begin to explain it.

MICHAEL

I get it. One of those New Age things I'll never understand.

Pause. Chuck sucks on his cigarette.

CHUCK

What's got you so pissy? The Dow Jones drop below the equator?

Michael looks distantly out the window at the city skyline. He doesn't know how to answer Chuck.
CHUCK
(continuing; realizing what it is)
Oh. You got a woman thing, too.
What's the matter? You knock somebody up?

MICHAEL
(bordering on defensive)
What makes you think it's a woman thing?

CHUCK
'Cause you look like you're about to start crying.

Beat. Michael notices a MAN and WOMAN sitting a few tables away. They're holding hands across the table, giggling and carrying on.

CHUCK
(continuing)
What?

MICHAEL
You see those two?

Chuck turns and looks at the couple.

CHUCK
Yeah. Ohhhhhhh. Yeah, not bad. Nice tune and good lyrics, but hard to dance to. I'd give her an 89.

Michael slugs Chuck in the shoulder.

MICHAEL
Not her. THEM.

CHUCK
Them?
(Takes another look.)
What about them? You know her?

MICHAEL
(exasperated)
They're in love.

Chuck stubs out his half-finished cigarette and lights another.

CHUCK
You been watchin' "The Young and the Restless" at lunch again?
MICHAEL
Wouldn't you like to have something like that?

CHUCK
I already did, Michael. It cost me two Mercedes, a condo, and a year's supply of Prozac, remember?

MICHAEL
I'm serious, Chuck. I'm talking about love here.

CHUCK
(leaning across the table)
Love? What the fuck is love? Would you listen to yourself, for Christ's sake?

Michael grins -- he can't help but let on.

MICHAEL
Sometimes, my friend, I don't think you have a clue.

CHUCK
I have a clue, and I'm not shitting you, there's no such thing as love. What there is is community property, child support, a settlement that you'll be lucky if you can eat after. The only people who make money on love are lawyers and Oprah.

Michael shakes his head sadly.

CHUCK
(continuing)
What?

MICHAEL
I met somebody.

CHUCK
What does that mean?

MICHAEL
In my car. This morning. I had a wreck. I ran into this girl. I mean, I met this girl.

CHUCK
Oh no. Your Beamer? Is it okay?
MICHAEL
Forget the car.

CHUCK
It's forgotten. So what's up?

MICHAEL
I don't even know how to explain it. She just liked...appeared. You know, out of thin air. And...I don't know, I was completely stunned. She's unlike anybody I've ever met.

CHUCK
How so?

MICHAEL
She was...wild. She was impassioned. I wrecked her car and you'd have thought the cold war had started back up.

CHUCK
And you were attracted to that?

INT. ART GALLERY--DAY

Athena is showing a large painting to MRS. HAWKINS, a wealthy snob of a woman who hardly pays attention to a word she is saying. Several abstract sculptures rest in and around the middle of the gallery, one of which is a large stallion. Athena turns the woman's attention to it.

ATHENA
This is one of my favorites.

MRS. HAWKINS
(shaking her head)
I don't know. It seems so awfully angry. So disconnected from the world.

Athena rolls her eyes so Mrs. Hawkins can't see it, then recovers:

ATHENA
I know what you mean. But it is very masculine, don't you think? The way it rears up, like it's about to conquer the world?

MRS. HAWKINS
It looks to me like he's about to get his rocks off.
ATHENA

(Smiling)
Well, it amounts to the same thing, now, doesn't it?

MRS. HAWKINS

Hmmm.

MRS. Hawkins ponders this. A telephone RINGS at the back of the gallery.

SHAWNA (O/S)

Athena!

ATHENA

Mrs. Hawkins, would you please excuse me for a moment?

MRS. HAWKINS

Why certainly, dear.

ATHENA

I won't be but a minute. Can I get you some coffee?

MRS. HAWKINS

No thank you. Coffee causes me to have a terrible flatulence.

Athena just smiles, not sure what she's supposed to say to this.

MRS. HAWKINS

(continuing)
Do you have any scotch? Or some gin? I'm dying for a martini.

ATHENA

I'll see what I can do.

Mrs. Hawkins continues to ponder the stallion as Athena walks back to the rear of the gallery to the counter behind which SHAWNA stands. Shawna covers the mouthpiece of the phone with her hand.

ATHENA

(continuing; in an audible whisper)
Who is it?

SHAWNA

Who do you think?

ATHENA

Is he loaded?
SHAWNA
Sounds like it.

Shawna tries to hand the phone to Athena.

ATHENA
Get five bucks out of my purse and go next door and have Mickey mix up a strong martini. A double.

Shawna looks confused.

ATHENA
(continuing)
It's for her.
(Nods toward the gallery)

Shawna looks out, then nods.

SHAWNA
Right.
(Starts off, then stops, turns)
Up on the rocks?

ATHENA
(Thinks for a second or two)
Up. Better yet, have him make a tray. Four. All doubles. But put an onion in mine, and make it just with water and vermouth. Light on the vermouth. Extra cold, too. Tell him I want to see frost on the glass.

SHAWNA
(winks)
Right.

Shawna leaves.

ATHENA
(Into telephone)
I'm with a client....I can't talk now...No...No. I'll call you when I'm done.
(Hangs up. Returns to gallery)
Martinis all 'round, Mrs. Hawkins. Did I show you the rampant bull? In a way, it makes a pair with the stallion.
EXT. ALLEY--DAY

Between buildings, Shawna crosses with silver tray full of full martini glasses.

INT. GALLERY--DAY

Shawna almost runs into ATHENA, who is returning from the gallery floor.

ATHENA

Won't need Mickey's famous Mickey Finns, after all. She took both pieces. Probably could have sold her a vibrator and a jar of Vaseline at the same time. Dirty old bitch. I thought she was going to rub the bull's balls off.

Athena picks up martini from the tray Shawna still carries. Shawna sets tray down, also selects a glass. They toast.

ATHENA

(continuing; Overdone)
Here's to the very rich and the very stupid. In my experience one thing goes with another. Long may they wave!

She drinks.

SHAWNA

(sips)
Fuck 'em.
(Spits water all down her blouse front)
Shit! I got the one with water!
Onion. God, I hate onion.

Athena laughs, reaches for her purse, which is on the counter, and removes a handkerchief to hand to Shawna to wipe herself. Michael's card flutters out and hits the floor. Shawna wipes her front and then picks up the card.

SHAWNA

(continuing)
Hey, this has gold edges. Who is it? Another rich, stupid client?

ATHENA

Naw. Well maybe. That's the guy who ran into me.
SHAWNA
A stockbroker? And you didn't yell whiplash?

ATHENA
I wasn't hurt.

SHAWNA
That's what whiplash is for.

Mrs. Hawkins clears her throat to get Athena's attention.

ATHENA
I'll be right there, Mrs. Hawkins!

SHAWNA
Was he cute?

ATHENA
You wouldn't kick him out of bed.

SHAWNA
Honey, the way my luck's been runnin' I'd be hard pressed to kick anybody out of bed. Hell, I'd definitely keep one in the back of a German sports car.

(Picks up another martini glass)
Here's to rich, stupid, good-looking stock brokers. Long may they wave. Let's just hope they occasionally wave it in my direction.

They both laugh.

INT. RESTAURANT--DAY

Chuck's finished lunch sits in front of him. Michael continues to eat.

CHUCK
Just last week you were saying you weren't ever gonna get married. Now you're flipping out over some chick you almost put in the morgue?

MICHAEL
Neither one of us is getting any younger, you know.

CHUCK
That's precisely why you shouldn't flip out over one girl.
MICHAEL
I've never been with one woman for more than a couple of weeks. I want to give it a try.

CHUCK
That's not the right answer, Mikey.

MICHAEL
I'm tired of playing the guessing game, Chuck. You remember that game? The one where you try to figure out the name of that strange woman sleeping in your bed?

CHUCK
I told you to always write down their name.

Michael gets up to leave.

MICHAEL
I have to get back to work.

Chuck grabs Michael's arm.

CHUCK
Jesus, you've gotten sensitive. Look, I understand your predicament. But don't go putting all your eggs in one basket is all I'm sayin'. If this girl calls, she calls. If she doesn't, it ain't the end of the world.

Michael drops a twenty on the table.

MICHAEL
She'll call.

INT. COFFEE LOUNGE--BACK OF THE ART GALLERY--DAY

Athena sits at a large conference table. A telephone is nearby, and she gives it hateful glances from time to time. She smokes a cigarette, and sips from a half-full cup of coffee. Trying to fend off an emotional outburst, she rubs her eyes but can't help herself. Shawna walks in as she starts to cry.

SHAWNA
Pretty good day.

She sees Athena weeping at the table.
SHAWNA
(continuing)
Hey? What's the matter, baby? Huh?

Shawna hugs Athena, who throws her own arms around her friend and holds her tightly. Shawna slowly strokes Athena's hair.

SHAWNA
(continuing)
It's Rex. Oh, baby, why you let him do you this way?

ATHENA
(crying)
'Cause I'm stupid.

SHAWNA
You ain't stupid. You're just in love.

ATHENA
Sometimes I wonder.

SHAWNA
He's back on the shit again, isn't he?

Athena nuzzles her head into Shawna's shoulder.

SHAWNA
(continuing)
Son-of-a-bitch. How long?

ATHENA
I don't know. A week. Maybe two.

SHAWNA
I'm sorry, sugar. I know how much it hurts you.

ATHENA
It's just so stupid, Shawna. He does really well and then...

SHAWNA
I know, baby. It ain't easy, I know.

ATHENA
I try talking to him, but it's pointless.

SHAWNA
Athena, you know better. That boy gotta talk to himself. That's the only thing that's gonna help, when he decides it.
ATHENA
I'm scared I'm gonna wake up one morning and he's gonna be dead, Shawna. Lying there next to me. I have these thoughts like that, where he's just lying there with his eyes closed, real peaceful.

SHAWNA
You stop them thoughts. You got to look out for yourself, you understand? (Athena nods her head)

You been using protection?

ATHENA
He won't let me.

SHAWNA
He won't let you! You don't know who he does that shit with, Thena.

ATHENA
I pull out a condom he shoots it across the room like a rubber band.

SHAWNA
I'm scared for you, baby. People think I'm crazy, but I got too many friends who got it. Just like that, Thena.
INT. MICHAEL'S OFFICE--DAY

Michael is on the phone with a client, feet propped up on the desk. There's a KNOCK at the door. It opens, and in walks Denise. She closes the door behind her, then walks over and puts a piece of paper on the desk in front of him.

    MICHAEL
    Just don't sell short, Mr. Bumgarner.
    You do, you'll be making a big mistake...Yes sir, I'll be right here. Goodbye.

Michael hangs up the phone.

    DENISE
    The phone number and address of the art gallery of the girl you ran into.
    Philip said to tell you you owe him one.

Michael looks over the address.

    DENISE
    (continuing)
    Nice part of town.

    MICHAEL
    I don't believe I asked for your color commentary.

Denise walks over and starts to sit in Michael's lap, but he pushes her away.

    DENISE
    C'mon, it's after five.

    MICHAEL
    Not here.

    DENISE
    That's a change. Then where?

    MICHAEL
    Denise, c'mon.

    DENISE
    You get a window office and suddenly you're too good to do the help?

    MICHAEL
    Now is that any way to talk?
DENISE
Is this any way to act? You want to
chill out with this thing, okay. Just
don't make me jump through hoops and
guess what's going on.

MICHAEL
Is that what you think I'm doing?

DENISE
No, that's not what I think you're
doing, that's what I know you're
doing.

MICHAEL
Denise, look, I don't know what I
want right now. You know? I'm a
little confused.

DENISE
No, I'd say you're a lot confused.
But you're a man, so it's perfectly
understandable. I'll tell you what,
soon as you figure it out, I'll be
home eating Coffee Haagen Daae and
Kosher dills and watching reruns of
"The Love Boat."

Denise turns around and starts to walk out the door. Michael
gets up from his chair and runs after her.

MICHAEL
What the hell is that supposed to
mean?

DENISE
You heard me, Michael.

MICHAEL
This means what I think it means.
Right? When did you find this out?

DENISE
My doctor's appointment on Friday.

MICHAEL
Denise, I--I don't know what to say.
I mean...are you sure it's...

DENISE
Some of us have beds that don't
revolve, sweetness.
MICHAE\[\text{L}\
  Right. Well, I guess we need to talk
  about this, huh? Sort things out?

DENISE
  If you can fit it into your busy
  schedule.

MICHAE\[\text{L}\
  (ignoring her
  bitterness)
  You want me to come over to your
  place? Around eight?

DENISE
  Yours. Say around nine.

MICHAE\[\text{L}\
  You want me to get anything together?

DENISE
  Perhaps your manners. Just treat me
  like a lady, Michael. A little
  respect. That's not much to ask. And
  believe it or not, that is all I am
  asking.

She kisses him on the cheek and walks out the door. After she
leaves, he closes the door and collapses against it. He
squeezes the bridge of his nose with his fingers.

MICHAE\[\text{L}\
  Shit.

EXT. SIDEWALK IN DEEP ELLUM--DUSK

Athena walks down the sidewalk on her way home.

As she passes by a coffeehouse, two PUNKS standing outside
the door stare at her as she walks by. Neither of them says
anything, but the tension is obvious. After she's past, she
turns her head over her shoulder.

ATHENA'S POV

of the two punks leering at her.

She turns back around just in time to move out of the way of
a DRUNK OLD MAN stumbling down the sidewalk, who startles
her. The old man gawks at Athena's breasts.

DRUNK OLD MAN
  My god, Martha, how you've grown.
Athena ignores the old man and continues walking.

EXT. WAREHOUSE BUILDING--DUSK

Athena approaches the entrance to the warehouse where she lives and unlocks the door.

INT. WAREHOUSE--DUSK

Athena pushes the up button to the freight elevator she uses to get upstairs. She glances up at the graffiti-covered wall off to one side. The elevator arrives. Athena raises the large gate and walks inside.

INT. ATHENA'S APARTMENT--NIGHT

Athena opens the door to the apartment. It's pitch dark inside. She walks in and Rex, who is standing behind the door, surprises her and grabs her from behind. He puts one arm over her mouth, the other over her chest. She struggles and tries to scream as he steers her to the middle of the room.

REX
Since when did you stop takin' my phone calls?! Huh?

ATHENA
(muffled)
LET GO OF ME! REX!

REX
Huh? You suddenly too good to talk to me? Ashamed to talk to your junkie boyfriend?!

ATHENA
You fuck! Stop it! What are you doing?!

REX
What the fuck you think is up? I'm up. That used to be enough for you. 'Cause I love you. So, what the fuck is up with that?

ATHENA
You keep going back, Rex. Everytime. It never ends. Why won't you change?

REX
'CAUSE I CAN'T HELP IT!
Rex throws Athena to the floor. She lifts her head to him and he backhands her. Athena falls away, crying. Rex backs off, realizes what he's done, goes to help her. When he grabs her and she turns around, blood is streaming out of the corner of her mouth.

REX
(continuing)
Oh, Christ. I'm sorry, baby...I'm...

Rex reaches for her. She swings at him to get away and falls back to the floor, crying.

ATHENA
I'm not your fucking baby!

REX
(in a soft voice)
Just...why won't you talk to me?

She starts to lift herself from off the floor.

ATHENA
I was with a client! I was trying to sell your work, you idiot.

REX
You coulda called me back.

ATHENA
I'M NOT YOUR MOTHER!

REX
(immediately)
I DIDN'T SAY YOU WERE MY FUCKIN' MOTHER! DID YOU HEAR ME SAY YOU WERE MY MOTHER?

ATHENA
You don't have to say it because you fucking well act like it every day of my life. I want to love you, not pick up your shit. I don't want to mother you!

REX
(angry, grabbing his crotch)
Mother this.

Rex walks past the kitchen table and grabs Athena's keys. As he starts for the door:

ATHENA
Where are you going?
REX
Out.

ATHENA
That's just great. Walk away, as always.

REX
'Til you start making some goddamned sense, you're fuckin' A right.

ATHENA
That's fine. You won't go far.

REX
Maybe, maybe not. But don't you worry, sweetheart, I'll be back.

ATHENA
Oh, I know you will. Sweetheart.
(After he's gone)
Sooner than you think.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE WAREHOUSE—NIGHT
Rex walks outside the building and looks around. There's no sign of Athena's car.

INT. ATHENA'S APARTMENT—NIGHT
Athena stands by the window and watches a confused and agitated Rex. He kicks the shit out of a large trash dumpster. Athena finds it all very amusing. When Rex looks up at the window, she waves.

INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT—NIGHT
Michael sits at his kitchen table, a bottle of Absolut and an almost emptied glass in front of him. He pours another drink. The buzzer RINGS—he spills some of the vodka. He grabs a towel from the bar and starts to wipe it up. The buzzer persists.

Michael walks to the door and opens it. Denise walks in carrying Chinese take-out.
DENISE
Thought you might be hungry.
(see the bottle of vodka)
Looks like you're definitely thirsty.
Nothing like a little fatherhood to bring out the drunk in a man, my mother always said. Did I ever tell you my father was an alcoholic?

MICHAEL
You want one?

DENISE
No, it's not good for the...I don't want one.

MICHAEL
Baby? Right? That's what you were going to say? It's not good for the baby. Nothing like motherhood to bring out the bitch in a woman. I said that.

DENISE
(Hands on her hips)
Is this the way it's going to be?

MICHAEL
(Chastised)
No. I'm sorry. Let's start over. Would you like to join me for a drink?

DENISE
(a beat, then goes along)
No, thank you. I thought you might be hungry and I brought some food. But you go ahead and have one without me. Maybe I'll put on some tea.

Denise goes into the kitchen.

Michael considers this while she's out of the room, finishes pouring his own drink.

DENISE
(continuing; returning, wearing an apron)
I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking.

MICHAEL
No you're not and yes you were. Sorry and thinking, that is.
(more)
MICHAEL (CONT'D)
The truth is that we really don't have anything to talk about, do we?

DENISE
Yes, we do. Or at least, we do now.

Denise puts out the spread of Chinese food, along with a couple of plates and some chopsticks. When it's evident Michael's not going to eat:

DENISE (continuing)
Okay. I'll say it. I want to have this baby.

MICHAEL
And if I don't want to be it's father?

DENISE
It's a little late for that.

MICHAEL
So you say.

DENISE
This doesn't have to get nasty.

MICHAEL
Doesn't it?

DENISE
I'm sorry, Michael. I apologize, okay? I don't know how this happened.

MICHAEL
You've forgotten your Biology 101.

DENISE
That's not what I meant.

MICHAEL
So what happened to the pill? Didn't you say you were on the pill?

DENISE
Yes, I was.

MICHAEL
Was? Are? Which is it?

DENISE
Am! Like you're any help, Mr. Au Naturale.
MICHAEL
(defensive)
I don't like wearing condoms. And besides, if you're on the pill--

DENISE
There are reasons to wear protection besides avoiding pregnancy.

MICHAEL
Yeah, I know. I read the little notices on the machines. "For prevention of disease only." Doesn't always work, though.

DENISE
Pregnancy is hardly a disease, Michael.

MICHAEL
It ain't no walk in the park, either, let me tell you.

DENISE
I'm going to have this baby.

MICHAEL
So, have it. Have two. Hell, have a six-pack. See if I give a damn.

DENISE
You're an asshole, you know that?

MICHAEL
Hey, you wanted to fuck, and I wanted to fuck, and we fucked. It's that simple. And not once did you ever complain about the service or the style. You told me you were on the pill. So I didn't see any need to wear a rubber. So who's responsible for what?

DENISE
We both are, that's my point. And it doesn't matter anyway. There's a baby inside me, Michael. It's as much mine as it is yours.

(A beat)
I can't go through this thing alone.

MICHAEL
I'm not asking you to. You wanted to discuss it and that's what we're doing.
Micahel makes another drink, all business now:

MICHAEL
(continuing)
So let's get to the bottom line. You want me to say that I want to marry you and have you bear my children and live happily ever after? That it?

DENISE
No, Michael.

MICHAEL
(pacing)
Well, let's see. Commitment's not it. Marriage's not it. Must be money. (Stops, confronts her.) So how much, Denise? What's the damage?

DENISE
(disgusted)
You asshole.

MICHAEL
We've covered that ground. No problemo. Soy un asshole grande. Right. Make a note of that and file it. Now, what do you want?

DENISE
(Still seated)
Maybe for you to grow up and act like a man. For once.

MICHAEL
(Defiantly)
That's not what you were saying the other night. Actually "moaning" would be a more accurate term. (Suddenly softens.) Look, you're my secretary, Denise, and you also happen to be my lover.

DENISE
One of your lovers.

MICHAEL
I stand corrected--one of my lovers. And while I care for you a great deal--a great deal--it goes no further than that. Do you understand?

Denise rises, removes the apron. She goes to the bar and pours herself a straight vodka, drinks it down.
MICHAEL
(continuing)
So much for the baby.

DENISE
One won't hurt. Besides, I want him—or her—to know everything there is to know—and feel—about you.

MICHAEL
You have to understand my position here, Denise.

DENISE
(Gathers her purse up)
I understand your position perfectly, Mr. Houston. You're a complete prick. Buy hey, you want to play hard ball, fine. Now, you understand my position. You hired me, you seduced me, you coerced me into sleeping with you on a regular basis. Now, I'm pregnant, and you're refusing to take responsibility. We'll see how Mr. Donaldson likes reading that in the Business section of the morning paper.

She starts for the door.

MICHAEL
Wait! Where are you going? We're not through discussing this.

Denise opens the door, sticks her head back inside.

DENISE
To call my lawyer. You can discuss it with him.

Michael watches in dismay as she storms out of the apartment.

EXT. STAIRWELL--NIGHT

Rex races upstairs to the apartment. Athena sits at the top of the stairwell, waiting for him.

ATHENA
It's not like you to exercise.

REX
Where's the goddamned car?

ATHENA
You mean where's my goddamned car?
REX
Don't fuck with me on this. Where is it?

ATHENA
(casually)
It was towed.

REX
Towed? What the hell did you get it towed for?

ATHENA
Like you give a shit.

REX
Like I can't go anywhere if the goddamn car's not here, so yes I do give a shit.

ATHENA
I was in a wreck.

REX
What'd you hit?

ATHENA
Somebody hit me, thank you very much.

REX
Who?

ATHENA
Some yuppie.

REX
You get his license plate?

ATHENA
No, I got his card. This is the 90s, remember?

REX
So where's the card, let's go see the guy.

ATHENA
Won't do you any good.

REX
Why not?

ATHENA
It wasn't his fault.
REX
Let's go see 'im, I'll talk him into it being his fault.

ATHENA
There's no point in that.

REX
Why not?

ATHENA
He said he'd buy me a new car.

REX
Let me get this straight. Some guy runs into you, but it's not his fault, but he's willin' to buy you a new car anyhow. And you're callin' this guy a yuppie?

She nods her head.

REX
(continuing)
So what the hell are you waiting for?
Let's go pick out a car. I'm thinkin' Mercedes, how about you?

Rex picks Athena up by the arm and pulls her back into the apartment.

INT. OFFICE ELEVATOR--DAY

Michael stands in the glass elevator and glances out the window at the skyline before him, going up. He sees a woman's very light, ghost-like reflection in the window. The reflection is Athena's, but when he turns around, Michael sees only a secretary making eyes at him. He smiles, confused, then turns back to the window.

INT. OFFICE HALLWAY--DAY

Michael walks off the elevator expecting Denise to be hounding him, per usual. But she's not there. He adjusts his tie and walks down to his office, keeping an eye out for her. The war is on, and he doesn't want to get ambushed.

When he gets to the office, he flips on his computer terminal and runs down the hall to the coffee machine while the computer boots up. He keeps a wary eye out. Still no sign of Denise. He pours the coffee and walks back down the hall and into his office.
Once there, he walks over to the computer, throws his legs up on the desk, and moves the mouse to an icon and clicks on it to get his E-mail.

ON THE COMPUTER SCREEN is a note that Michael stares at:

Dear ASSHOLE:

Your behavior last night was completely unacceptable. I hope you've had some time to come to your senses. I realize you were intoxicated, as you often are. I will accept the sincerest of apologies and a chance to resume negotiations. But fast. This offer expires at noon. Other options will be in force at that point.

Denise

P.S. You're right about this E-mail stuff -- it truly is the next best thing to being there.

MICHAEL
Oh, for Christ's sake.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET--DAY

A city bus pulls up to a stop. Through the glass, we see Rex and Athena waiting for the doors to open. When they do so, the two of them get off and look around.

REX
(excited)
There. That tall one right there.
Baby, we have hit the jackpot.

ATHENA
Rex, this is insane. I can't believe
I let you talk me into coming down here.

REX
C'mon, the man made you an offer you can't refuse.

Rex grabs Athena by the arm and starts to lead her towards the entrance of the building. She shakes his grasp and walks ahead by herself.

INT. FOYER--DAY

Rex and Athena enter the revolving doors and walk into the building, although Rex goes in a circle once just for kicks. When they walk into the foyer, VARIOUS BUSINESS PEOPLE stare at their dress, figuring they're obviously in the wrong place.
Athena approaches a phone booth and picks up the phone.

REX
What're you doin'?

ATHENA
You want me to get fired so we both starve?

REX
Very funny. Have a little faith, baby. When I'm done with this deal, people'll be callin' you, beggin' you to hire them.

Rex walks around the foyer of the lobby, enjoying being stared at. When he returns to the phone carousel, Athena is hanging up the phone.

Rex walks up to one of the elevators that is opening and, the gentleman that he's not, holds the door open for several SECRETARIAL TYPES and MEN IN SUITS, then follows Athena inside.

INT. ELEVATOR--DAY

Rex and Athena are the focus of the attention in the elevator. Aside from clearly not being dressed for the place, Rex starts to rearrange his genitals. When he makes eye contact with a woman watching him, Rex smiles a wide smile. The woman turns away in disgust.

While the rest of the people glance up at the flashing numbers announcing the floors they're passing, Rex continues to look at the other people inside the elevator, flouting elevator etiquette.

INT. MICHAEL'S OFFICE--DAY

Michael sits down at his computer terminal and begins typing a response:

Denise,

About last night, you've certainly got reason to be angry, but as in business, I don't like walking into a meeting where the deal is already on the table without my having been notified.

There's a KNOCK at the door. Michael turns around—Denise cracks the door open.
DENISE
I see you got my note.

MICHAEL
I thought we weren't talking.

DENISE
We're not. The woman whose car you wrecked is waiting outside to see you. She has a thug with her. Maybe he's going to beat you up.

MICHAEL
That would please you, wouldn't it?

DENISE
It wouldn't exactly break my heart.

MICHAEL
Well, if he won't do it for her, maybe he'll do it for you.

DENISE
I'll see what he charges.

Denise looks at Michael in mock seriousness.

DENISE
(continuing; musing)
I doubt I could afford a full castration—not on my salary. I'll see what he gets for a mere rupture. Maybe there's a special this week, and he'll throw in a broken nose for free.

MICHAEL
That's what I always liked about you, Denise. You know how to find a bargain.

DENISE
(Looks at him with level gaze)
Well, you get what you pay for. That's for goddamn sure.

MICHAEL
I've had enough repartee for one morning. She's out there, but she has some guy with her?
DENISE
Some thug. That's my mother's word.
I like it. It applies to so many men
I know.

MICHAEL
Tell them I'm busy.

DENISE
I did. They said they'd wait.

MICHAEL
Thanks a lot.

DENISE
You're very welcome.
(She turns to leave,
then stops:)
By the way. The thug looks impatient.

MICHAEL
You find this amusing, don't you?

DENISE
I can see the humor in the situation,
yes. Especially if it involves any
measure of pain and discomfort for
you. I find that a laugh-riot.

MICHAEL
Show them in.

DENISE
Yes sir, Mr. Houston.

INT. WAITING ROOM OUTSIDE--DAY

Rex is staring at one of the paintings located on the
brokerage walls. He can't believe what he's seeing. Athena is
nervously sitting off to one side, embarrassed at Rex's
behavior.

REX
I don't fuckin' believe it. Look at
this, Thena. A Kandinsky! They got a
fuckin' Kandinsky hangin' on some
stockbroker's wall. What the fuck's
this world comin' to?

ATHENA
Leave it alone, Rex.
REX
But that's sacrilege. That's like puttin' a Warhol in George Bush's living room.

Denise walks back into the waiting room.

DENISE
Mr. Houston will see you now.

ATHENA
Thank you. Rex. Are you quite finished with your critique?

REX
Where the fuck does anybody come off hiding a Kandinsky in a glass shithouse like this?

DENISE
(Smiling)
There's no accounting for taste.

Athena grabs Rex by the arm and drags him into Michael's office.

INT. MICHAEL'S OFFICE--DAY

Michael greets Athena with an extended hand. It is clear that he is once again immediately taken with her.

ATHENA
I apologize for disturbing you at work.

MICHAEL
Don't worry about it.

REX
Don't worry, we won't. Mind if I smoke.

Rex lights a cigarette before Michael has time to answer.

ATHENA
This is Rex, my boyfriend. He insisted on accompanying me.

MICHAEL
The more the merrier. How do you do, Rex?

Rex nods his head, reluctantly shakes hands with Michael.
REX
(looking around)
Obviously not as good as you.

MICHAEL
Right. Say, really, I personally
don't mind if you smoke. But this is
a non-smoking building.

REX
(Genuinely mystified)
So?

Michael empties the paper clips out of his ashtray, and hands
it to Rex just as the ashes from his cigarette fall to the
floor.

MICHAEL
Please, won't you have a seat?

Athena takes a seat, but Rex continues to stand—smoking all
the while.

ATHENA
I would have called first, but...

REX
Don't apologize to this guy.

MICHAEL
No, that's fine. How can I help you?

REX
You see, it's fine.

Athena gives Rex a stern look.

ATHENA
It's about my car. You see, it's...

REX
The only car we got. Kinda like the
American Express card. We can't leave
home without it.

Rex thinks he's funny. Michael tries to laugh and sound
amused, but immediately looks back to Athena.

ATHENA
Rex.

MICHAEL
That's good. Really. So you've
decided you want me to help you fix
your car after all.
ATHENA
Well, I think--

REX
Totalled, man. Completely wasted.

MICHAEL
(Remembers Rex is still there, suddenly)
I beg your pardon?

REX
Son of a bitch won't start, won't run. It's totally fucked.

MICHAEL
I see.

ATHENA
(relucantly trying to support Rex)
I distinctly remember you saying that you would buy me a car.

REX
(immediately)
A new car.

MICHAEL
I said that?

ATHENA
I'm afraid you did.

REX
Yeah. It don't have to be anything fancy. Maybe a Lexus or something in that class. I was looking at Alpha Romeos, but that's not our style. A Jag would be nice, but they're shop hogs. High maintenance, don't you think? You like your Beamer? I personally wouldn't be buried in one of the fuckers. Germans make status symbols, not cars. If I need an extra dick, I'll grow one. Now, Italians got their shit together. There's a used Ferrari lot over in...

MICHAEL
Uh-huh.

ATHENA
My old car, see it was a very special car.
REX
Very special. Top ended like a motherfucker. Zero to thirty-five in two point three miles. Flat out. 'Course, you had to use premium gas.

ATHENA
It had a lot of sentimental value.

REX
Yeah. You know, like a family heirloom kinda thing. Ol' Thena an' I sort of got to know each other in the back seat. (Winks)
Know what I mean?

ATHENA
(Shocked)
Rex!

REX
Guess we still could. I mean it don't have to roll for that kind of action. We provide all the necessary rpm's. (Winks again)
Know what I mean? Hey, you got a drink 'round this upholstered whorehouse?

ATHENA
REX!!

REX
(angry)
What? What the fuck is it, for Chrissake?

ATHENA
I'm genuinely sorry.

REX
Thena, you ain't genuinely shit.

MICHAEL
(Magnanimous)
Don't worry about it. So you want me to buy you a new car to replace this...

REX
Family heirloom.
MICHAEL
(Specifically speaking
to ATHENA)
Uh-huh. Was there a particular car
you had in mind?

REX
(nonchalantly)
Like I said, there's this used
Ferrari dealership. I mean you got to
wait nearly a year for a new one. But
if you insist on going new, I think
something in the Lexus or Mercedes
class would work. We've looked around
a little.

MICHAEL
(laughing, not thinking
he's serious)
I'm sure you have.

Rex drops a picture of a Ferrari on Michael's desk.

MICHAEL
(continuing)
That's definitely a nice little car.
But I'm afraid it's also a little out
of my price range.

REX
It's hard to put a price tag on
sentimental things.

MICHAEL
What exactly are you trying to say?

REX
I ain't tryin' to say anything.
(to Athena)
You didn't tell me this guy was dense.
(to Michael)
What I am saying is are you gonna
hold up your end of the bargain and
buy the lady a new car or not?

ATHENA
Rex, I think --

MICHAEL
Somehow I get the impression that
this car is not for "the lady."
Hey, you're a regular fuckin' Einstein, right? Lemme tell you somethin', asshole --

ATHENA
Rex, please.

Athena grabs Rex by the arm and drags him towards the door.

ATHENA
(continuing)
Do me a favor, huh? Wait outside.

REX
Are you kiddin' me?

ATHENA
Rex! I can handle this. Now wait outside. And don't touch that painting.

REX
I'm not leavin' you in here alone with him.

ATHENA
Yes, Rex, you are.
(she leans close, whispers:)
You want the car?

Rex thinks it over, looks at Michael, then slowly starts to back up to the door. He reaches around behind his back and turns the knob, then slithers out like a serpent, all the while keeping his eyes on Michael. After he's gone:

MICHAEL
(understated)
You two make a very nice couple.

ATHENA
I'm going to pretend you didn't say that.

MICHAEL
No, I mean it. Very -- uh, loving.

ATHENA
We have our moments.

MICHAEL
So I gathered. I'm sorry. Where were we?

(more)
MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Oh, yes, you were asking me to buy you a new car. A Ferrari, if my memory serves me well.

ATHENA
This wasn't my idea. Just so you know.

MICHAEL
I'm not quite sure I understand.

ATHENA
And I'm not quite sure I can explain.

Athena, nervous, walks over to Michael's large picture window and looks out at the city.

ATHENA
(continuing)
You have an incredible view.

MICHAEL
It's not bad.

ATHENA
You can see the gallery where I work.

MICHAEL
No kidding?

Michael moves to the window and looks out.

ATHENA
See it? Way down there.

Athena points, Michael follows her finger.

MICHAEL
Yeah. So you're not working today.

ATHENA
I called in sick.

MICHAEL
Not feeling well?

ATHENA
Not feeling anything. Not lately, anyway.

MICHAEL
Sorry to hear it.
ATHENA
Not as sorry as I am to have to tell you.

The intercom buzzes. Michael pushes a button on the phone.

MICHAEL
I'm busy.

DENISE (O/S)
I'm sure you are. But I have a little problem here.

MICHAEL
So send me a fax. Maybe I'll read it and fall through the window.

DENISE (O/S)
(a loud whisper)
How long do you plan on leaving me alone with this simian?

MICHAEL
Buzz me when he starts beating his chest.

Michael hits a button and clicks off the intercom.

MICHAEL
(continuing)
Sorry. My secretary. You'll have to forgive her. She's a little short sometimes.

ATHENA
I'm the one who should apologize. You were nothing but nice yesterday, and I was a complete bitch.

MICHAEL
I understand. It was a stressful situation, and...

The intercom immediately buzzes again. He hits the button.

MICHAEL
(continuing)
What?!

DENISE (O/S)
You're going to be sorry we ever met.

MICHAEL
What makes you think I'm not already?
Michael hangs up again. Athena moves in front of the desk and drops a small object in front of Michael. He picks it up and looks at it.

INSERT ON the white half of a small poodle magnet.

MICHAEL
(continuing)
This looks familiar.

ATHENA
It should. The other half is in your glove compartment.

MICHAEL
That's right. I'll be damned.

ATHENA
I found it in a club one night a while back. Tommy's. You been there?

MICHAEL
Once or twice. You don't think...?

ATHENA
I don't know. But it's still pretty weird, huh.

MICHAEL
Yeah, it is.

They gaze at one another for a moment, before Michael breaks the stare and plops down in his chair.

MICHAEL
(continuing)
So about the car.

ATHENA
I'd like to propose a trade.

MICHAEL
I'm listening.

ATHENA
You buy me dinner and it's forgotten. Say tonight, around 8:30?

MICHAEL
I think I could swing that. But what about...?

Michael nods toward the other room.
ATHENA
The simian? Don't worry, I'll lock him in his cage.

Michael shrugs—if she's not worried, neither is he. Athena writes something down on a piece of paper on Michael's desk.

ATHENA
(continuing)
Pick me up at this address. 8:30 sharp, okay?

MICHAEL
You got yourself a date.

Athena promptly turns and prepares to leave.

MICHAEL
(continuing)
Hey, your magnet.

ATHENA
Keep it. I'm sure she misses her friend.

She opens the door and walks out. Michael stands transfixed as he watches her leave. After a moment, Denise walks into the office. She takes one look at Michael staring off into space.

DENISE
Going slumming, are we?

MICHAEL
Take a memo, Denise.

DENISE
Take it yourself.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET--DUSK

Rex and Athena stand on the corner waiting for the bus. Rex has his arm around Athena's shoulder. He's grinning from ear to ear, full of himself.

REX
It's time to celebrate, baby.

ATHENA
Celebrate what?

REX
Our newfound wealth.
ATHENA
It's a car, Rex. For Christ's sake, we didn't win the lottery.

REX
Give it time, baby. Just give it time.

The city bus pulls up and the door opens. Rex waits for Athena to go ahead of him, then pays for the both of them.

INT. CITY BUS--DUSK

Rex beats his hands against the back of the seat. Athena stares out the window. A Mercedes pulls up next to the bus. Inside it is a wealthy woman. Athena and the woman make eye contact. The traffic light turns green and off the woman goes. Suddenly Athena is not feeling well.

REX
I can feel somethin' goin' on, baby. This is gonna be like a whole new beginning for us.

ATHENA
Just what we need.

REX
You gonna pick a fight? I don't want to fight with you.

ATHENA
I haven't forgotten how hard you hit me last night. In fact, I haven't forgotten you hit me at all.

REX
I told you it was an accident. I didn't mean it.

ATHENA
I know what you told me.

REX
Okay, then.

Beat. Awkward pause as Athena considers how she's going to break this news to Rex:

ATHENA
I want to be alone tonight, Rex.

REX
You don't want to celebrate.
ATHENA
Let me rephrase that. I'm going to be alone tonight. I'm going out. Alone.

REX
(like he doesn't care)
Fine. Give me a chance to get some work done.

ATHENA
Will it?

REX
You don't trust me.

ATHENA
I don't want to start a fight either, Rex.

REX
The cat's away, so you can't trust the mice by himself, is that it?

ATHENA
I don't know, Rex. Not anymore I don't.

Rex stares out the bus window, despondent. Athena does the same.

INT. HEALTH SPA--LATE AFTERNOON

Michael and Chuck sit in the steam room, towels around their waists. Michael leans his head back, eyes closed, breathing the mist in. Chuck is as restless as ever.

CHUCK
I don't get it.

MICHAEL
Don't get what?

CHUCK
I must be missing something. She comes there with her boyfriend to see you about getting this car, and suddenly it's forgotten about and you're taking her to dinner.

MICHAEL
I don't think she gives a shit about the car.
CHUCK
You better keep your eye on this chick. Better yet, keep one hand on your balls and the other on your checkbook.

MICHAEL
That prescription's better suited to Denise.

CHUCK
(surprised)
You been doin' Denise? This from the guy who said don't mix the pussy with the payroll?

MICHAEL
Been's a good way to put it.
(dejected)
She's pregnant, Chuck.

CHUCK
You gotta be kiddin' me.

MICHAEL
And, she wants to keep it.

CHUCK
Christ.

MICHAEL
She wants to play house. What can I do?

CHUCK
Burn the fuckin' house down, that's what. Better yet, have her whacked.

MICHAEL
Very funny.

CHUCK
I know some people.

MICHAEL
I'm sure you do.

CHUCK
What'd I tell you about making sure you're careful? Huh?

MICHAEL
Save the I told you so's.
CHUCK
Stay away from disease and paternity suits. Beats the Prudential?
Speakin' of which, you think she's lookin' to get a piece a your rock?

MICHAEL
Am I talking to myself here?

CHUCK
Ah, Denise is a reasonable woman. She'll probably only ask for half of everything you own.

MICHAEL
I'm not even worried about it.

CHUCK
Custer said that.

Michael stands up to leave the steamroom.

MICHAEL
I gotta get going. My tan's fading.

CHUCK
Among other things.

MICHAEL
(taking this seriously)
You want to explain that?

CHUCK
Not really.

MICHAEL
Maybe you should.

CHUCK
Okay, you want the lowdown? I think you're sellin' out.

MICHAEL
To what?

CHUCK
PC, the new morality, call it what you want. All those nasty things you've done with your dick the last ten years have suddenly gone to your head. It's like you're having some kind of regressive guilt trip or somethin'.
MICHAEL
All this because I suddenly meet some chick I'm actually interested in getting to know? Thanks for the diagnosis, Sigmund.

CHUCK
Hey, you asked.

Michael shakes his head and starts to walk out of the steamroom. He stops at the door:

MICHAEL
We all have to grow up sometime, Chuck. Some of us just do it sooner than others.

CHUCK
Yeah, well you don't watch it with Denise, and you'll end up doin' it a hell of a lot sooner than you'd've liked.

CUT TO:

EXT. FREEWAY--DUSK

Michael drives down the freeway in a decidedly good mood. Loud music plays from his stereo as he taps his hands on the steering wheel. His cellular phone RINGS. Michael turns the stereo down and pushes a button. Denise's voice rings out over the speaker.

DENISE (O/S)
It's me.

MICHAEL
Are we gonna call a truce on this thing or what?

DENISE (O/S)
I don't know, Michael. Look, I just want to see you. Is that too much to ask?

MICHAEL
I'm afraid to see you, Denise. We don't know where it's going, and just talking could be dangerous. You get all worked up, pissed off, then you start slinging legalese around at me, threatening me. I don't know what you want or where you're coming from.

(more)
MICHAEL (CONT'D)
But I don't want this thing to go round and round like some sick fucking merry-go-round.

DENISE (O/S)
Couldn't we just go out and have a nice dinner? Talk?

MICHAEL
We could, but what good would it do? You already know my position.

DENISE (O/S)
Michael, this isn't a board meeting.

MICHAEL
Point taken. Sorry.

DENISE (O/S)
I'm sorry, too, about last night. I'm sorry I'm pregnant. I'm sorry you feel trapped. I didn't try to trap you. It just happened.

MICHAEL
No, Denise. Pregnancy doesn't "just happen," like rain and snow and earthquakes. There's a very definite cause-effect situation working there.

DENISE (O/S)
And you're the cause?

MICHAEL
Nope. Nice try, though. I was operating under the assumption of safety. An assumption you led me to accept was true, by the way.

DENISE (O/S)
So, that's your position?

MICHAEL
Now who's talking like a board meeting?

DENISE (O/S)
You're so damned stubborn sometimes.

MICHAEL
Set in my ways. That's how I'd put it.

DENISE (O/S)
Whatever. Can we just have dinner?
MICHAEL
Not tonight.

DENISE (O/S)
You're busy.

Michael doesn't respond.

DENISE (O/S)
(continuing)
I take it that's a yes. Then I'm coming over right now.

MICHAEL
How do you know I'm on my way home?

DENISE (O/S)
You've got to get ready for your date, don't you?

MICHAEL
Don't do it, Denise.

DENISE (O/S)
Five minutes.

Denise hangs up on him. Michael slams his fist against the steering wheel.

MICHAEL
Dammit!

INT. BATHROOM--ATHENA'S APARTMENT--NIGHT

Athena stands looking in the mirror as she puts on her lipstick. She reaches for a Kleenex and dabs off the excess.

Around the corner Rex stares at a large lump of clay. He works it some with his fingers, but can't seem to concentrate. He stands up, goes to the kitchen, retrieves a beer from the fridge, then walks over to the bathroom. The door is cracked just enough for him to see inside.

REX
You're puttin' on an awful lotta makeup to be going out alone.

Athena ignores him.

REX
(continuing)
Where you goin', anyway?
ATHENA
Rex, you're mining for crap and I'm about to give you enough to finish that sculpture. I figure that'd make us even.

REX
Why so much makeup, Athena?

ATHENA
You don't like me to look nice?

REX
Not for anybody else I don't.

ATHENA
Who said it's for anybody else but me?
(beat)
Your sculpture's getting lonely, sweetheart.

REX
So'm I. Sweetheart.

Athena pushes the bathroom door open.

ATHENA
Look, I just want to have one night to myself. Is that too fucking much to ask of you?

REX
She says earnestly.

ATHENA
Damn you. Is it really that hard for you to be alone?

REX
I spend every fucking day by myself, Athena. Staring at that goddamn clay, wondering what I'm supposed to do with it. Is it too much to ask to want to be with you at night?

ATHENA
Tonight it is. And as for what you can do with the clay, I have a few suggestions.

REX
Fuck you!

Rex goes out to the living room, grabs his leather jacket, and heads for the front door.
ATHENA
(as he goes out the
door)
You can't run away from yourself
forever, Rex!

INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT--NIGHT

Michael, dressed only in a robe, lays out some clothes on the
bed, trying to decide what to wear for the evening. The
doorbell rings. Michael goes to answer it. Denise stands in
the doorway, smiling libidinously.

DENISE
Avon calling.

MICHAEL
No just isn't in your vocabulary, is
it?

DENISE
Not in this context, no. I'm going to
come in if you don't mind.

MICHAEL
And even if I do mind.

DENISE
Your psychic skills are making
headway.

Denise walks straight to the bedroom as Michael watches
suspiciously. She starts to take off her clothes.

MICHAEL
What you are doing?

DENISE
I figured you might like a little
afternoon delight?

MICHAEL
You figured wrong, Denise. This isn't
a good time.

DENISE
It's the perfect time. Do you need
help getting undressed?

MICHAEL
Denise.
DENISE
Quit gawking. I don't have all night.
And neither do you, if I remember correctly.

MICHAEL
You'd better leave now.

Standing only in her bra and panties:

DENISE
I've given this a lot of thought lately, Michael. Why should you have all the fun? At first I thought the way you treat women is really contemptible. But then I thought, wait a minute, why don't I just turn it around? The Golden Rule and all that.

MICHAEL
Sorry, but I don't think I'll be getting pregnant anytime soon.

Denise slaps Michael hard across the face.

DENISE
That's not what I meant. Don't be such a smartass.

MICHAEL
That was entirely unnecessary.

DENISE
As is this whole thing, sweetie. But it got your attention, didn't it? I could turn this scenario around on you. I think you'd be well-advised not to forget that.

MICHAEL
Would you like to clarify that?

DENISE
Certainly. Boss calls secretary into office to take a memo. Secretary gladly complies, goes into Boss's office. Boss says to lock the door behind her. Secretary does so, finds that curious. Then Boss starts making suggestive remarks to Secretary. Along the lines of you do something for me, I'll be sure and return the favor.
MICHAEL
We've played this scene before, Denise. At least last night you brought Chinese and made dinner theatre out of it.

DENISE
Last night I was upset.

MICHAEL
And you're all calmed down now?

DENISE
I'm not kidding Michael. I'll fuck you over.

MICHAEL
Do you know what you're describing here, Denise?

DENISE
It's a scenario I've become quite familiar with through the course of my secretarial career, yes. Secretary finds herself in a no-win situation. Boss's hands begin pulling on drawers she'd rather keep shut.

MICHAEL
But it's not true!

DENISE
Tell it to the judge, Michael.

MICHAEL
You wouldn't do it, Denise. I know you.

DENISE
Do you? Do you know me, Michael? Because I don't think you do. You haven't even tried to know me. And I wonder why that is. Am I not good enough to know? Am I not worth knowing, Michael?

MICHAEL
No. I mean, yes, of course you are.

DENISE
(seductive)
It's a volatile climate out there, Michael. Just remember, with such...volatility, anything is possible. You know?
Michael is clearly flustered. They kiss—long, passionate embrace. His hands wander. Her bra falls away. Michael starts working his way out of his attire.

DENISE
(continuing)
Would you care to retire to the boardroom now?
(really at his level now)
I'm sorry, I meant the bedroom.

Denise slowly takes his hand and leads him into the bedroom. She lays him down across the clothes he's put out for the evening, then climbs on top of him and starts to run her hands all over him.

DENISE
(continuing)
Don't worry. I'll be careful not to leave any bruises. And remember, Michael, it's just "bidness."

They go to bed.

EXT. STREET CORNER--NIGHT

Athena stands on a street corner, waiting. Hordes of TEENAGE PUNKS move down the sidewalk behind her, intermixed with several YUPPIE COUPLES. The punks leer at the yuppies, and mimic them, like monkeys. Athena ignores all the carrying on behind her, however, and checks her watch.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE STREET--NIGHT

A crowd of PEOPLE walk past a street corner. After they've moved past, Rex is seen standing on the sidewalk, peering around the corner of a building. He smokes a cigarette as we

INSERT ON REX's POV of Athena.

EXT. FURTHER DOWN THE STREET--NIGHT

Michael's car sits in traffic that goes nowhere fast. MICHAEL's POV as he anxiously looks through the windshield in search of the street corner he's supposed to be meeting Athena at.

BACK TO ATHENA at the corner. Just as she sees Michael's car, a WOMAN appears and immediately approaches Athena.
PHYLLIS
Athena, is that you?

Athena turns, forces a smile, then quickly glances back down the street and sees Michael driving in her direction.

ATHENA
Hi! How are you?

PHYLLIS
It's been so long. Oh my God.

The woman moves forward and kisses Athena on the cheek.

ATHENA
Phyllis! From the Marchand Gallery!

PHYLLIS
Of course, silly. I've been hoping I'd run into you. There's a new artist whose work I'm not sure if you're familiar with. His name is--

Michael's car pulls over to the curb. Athena is afraid to have the woman see her get in the car, but doesn't have much choice.

ATHENA
Listen, Phyllis, I apologize, but I have to run. The guy in the Beamer behind me is a new client. Big bucks, you know? Gotta do some serious wining and dining.

PHYLLIS
I understand. Hey, call if you need any help, huh? He's cute.

As she starts for Michael's car, over the din of the traffic:

ATHENA
I'll do that. Let's do lunch soon, okay?

Phyllis laughs and waves as she moves off down the sidewalk. Michael gets out of the car and walks around to the passenger side, presumably to open the door for Athena. But by the time he makes it around to the other side, she has already climbed in. He sees this is the case, and starts back for the driver's side.
EXT. SIDEWALK—NIGHT

Down the street, Rex watches Michael walk back to the driver's side and get in the car. He's not happy.

He then follows Phyllis until she turns the corner. Rex purposely stumbles into her as she starts down his block.

REX
Excuse me. Oh. Phyllis?

PHYLLIS
Rex?

REX
What a pleasant surprise.

PHYLLIS
That's the strangest thing.

REX
What's that?

PHYLLIS
I ran into Athena right down the block there, not a minute ago. I was just about to ask her how you were doing when...

REX
(charming)
Why ask her when you can ask me yourself?

PHYLLIS
Why indeed.

REX
How about we have a drink, catch up on old times.

PHYLLIS
Okay.

REX
I can't believe we haven't run into one another sooner.

PHYLLIS
Well, you know, people get busy. I was just about to remark to Athena that...

Phyllis's voice fades out as Rex looks over his shoulder at the BMW as it pulls away from the curb.
Rex and Phyllis continue to walk away down the sidewalk.

INT. MICHAEL'S CAR--NIGHT

Michael drives. Athena stares out the window at the passing cars. Michael glances over at her, admires her. Athena turns and catches him. He looks away. Athena continues to look, until he finally turns back.

MICHAEL

What?

ATHENA

This really doesn't have to be that awkward, does it?

MICHAEL

I didn't think it was.

ATHENA

It's headed in that direction.

MICHAEL

(finding this amusing)

What do we do to put a halt to it?

ATHENA

Stop pretending that we're not attracted to one another.

MICHAEL

You certainly say what's on your mind.

ATHENA

Not usually. But I'm trying to make a change.

MICHAEL

That's funny. So am I.

ATHENA

Really? For the better, I hope.

MICHAEL

Let's hope not for the worse.

ATHENA

It's difficult, isn't it? Making a change. Changing.

MICHAEL

(agreeing)

Very.
ATHENA
Girlfriend?

Michael shakes his head no.

MICHAEL
You?

ATHENA
Very funny.

MICHAEL
Just trying to lighten the moment.
(Beat)
I see some women.

ATHENA
Lots or a few?

MICHAEL
Somewhere in between. I work a lot.

ATHENA
That's what we all do, isn't it? In order to stay out of relationships. Work. Avoid people. Meeting them, getting to know them. Loving them? Fucking their brains out. That's the expression, isn't it?

MICHAEL
I beg your pardon?

ATHENA
Just trying to lighten the moment.
(Beat)
I'm sorry. I'm just trying to rationalize the middle-class mating ritual.

MICHAEL
(inferring this should not be the case with her)
But you have a boyfriend.

ATHENA
(uncomfortable)
I work quite a bit myself.

MICHAEL
I see.

ATHENA
Yes.
Now that there's an understanding:

MICHAEL
So. Where should we have dinner?

ATHENA
You don't already have all that arranged? I should think you've already figured the tip.

MICHAEL
I didn't know what you liked.

ATHENA
I know I like what I see.

MICHAEL
But you...don't even know me.

ATHENA
Not yet, but I want to.

MICHAEL
(getting off on this)
I have to tell you. I've been looking forward to this evening all day.

ATHENA
Why look forward to it? Carpe diem.

Michael looks over at her, grins.

MICHAEL
Yeah, carpe diem. That's French, right?

Athena can't help but laugh back.

INT. FRENCH RESTAURANT--NIGHT

Michael and Athena sit at an intimately located table off to one side of the elegant restaurant. Michael reaches for the bottle of wine and fills Athena's glass first, then his. He's wrapped around her every word.

ATHENA
So I guess it's a little like falling in love with an illusion. A hologram or something. What's really inside can't be seen from the surface. Understand?

MICHAEL
I catch your drift.
ATHENA
And that's what I fell in love with. That illusion. The inside of the hologram that I thought was there. And...I don't know, I guess it gets really nasty when you start trying to convince yourself that you love that thing about someone which you should probably hate the most. That's what happened with Rex and me. I love that thing inside him that I probably should despise.

MICHAEL
They have drugs that can cure that now.

Athena looks up at Michael, laughs. It's as if she's suddenly forgotten what she was talking about.

ATHENA
I'm sorry, I promised myself I wasn't going to talk about this.

MICHAEL
No, it's okay. I'm interested.

ATHENA
I think maybe I'm getting a little tipsy.

MICHAEL
Maybe you should slow down.

ATHENA
Even if I don't want to?

MICHAEL
(he's game)
Hey. Cheers.

Michael holds his glass out. Athena clinks hers to his.

INT. PHYLLIS'S APARTMENT--NIGHT

The place is a mess. Rex stumbles over to Phyllis's bed and falls directly into the center of it. Phyllis follows him to the bed and falls on top of him.

REX
(drunk)
You've cleaned since last I was here.
PHYLLIS
(laughing)
What is that? Shakespeare?

REX
Yeah, Phyllis. Fuckin' Hamlet. The man who would be king.

PHYLLIS
(imitating him, half-drunk)
You've cleaned since last I was here.

REX
You're gonna have to excuse me. I gotta piss like a Russian race horse.

PHYLLIS
(trying to kiss him)
But we just got here.

REX
There's plenty time for that.

Rex goes into the restroom and closes the door. Phyllis gets up from the bed and wanders into the kitchen to get a drink.

PHYLLIS
That's a shame about you and Athena.

REX
Huh?

IN THE BATHROOM, Rex fires up his heroin in a spoon. He watches as the powder turns to liquid and melts together.

PHYLLIS (O/S)
I said it's a shame about you and Athena! You two made a good couple.

REX
(in a daze)
Sometimes. Sometimes we didn't.

PHYLLIS (O/S)
Ain't that always the case?

REX
Fuck if I know.

He throws a cotton swab into the spoon, sucks the liquid into the syringe, then holds up the syringe. He looks at the syringe in the mirror, then for a long time at himself—disgusted.
Outside the restroom:

PHYLLIS
(pondering their breakup)
She's a nice girl, Rex. I just don't understand it.

REX
What's to fuckin' understand, Phyllis?! Huh? Some people just can't fuckin' get along! You know?

Back to REX:

He angrily jabs the needle in a vein in the crook of his left arm and shoots the liquid into his arm. He then throws the needle in the trash.

PHYLLIS
You don't have to get all huffy about it. I was just making an observation.

Rex throws the door open, almost hitting Phyllis. Phyllis backs up and leans against the wall.

REX
(mean)
Well, don't. I don't need you tellin' me about it. You think I haven't thought about it enough on my own?

Phyllis moves towards Rex, puts her finger to his lips.

PHYLLIS
I'm sorry. It's okay. Okay? Forget I brought it up. C'mon, we're here to have a good time. Right?

REX
(revealing his drunk)
You got me, Phyllis. I don't have a fuckin' clue why I'm here.

PHYLLIS
Then maybe you should leave.

REX
Maybe I don't want to fuckin' leave. You ever think about that? Huh?! Come 'ere.

Rex grabs Phyllis and pulls her towards him. He begins to kiss her on the neck and ear. It starts to turn Phyllis on. Suddenly, with a violent force, Rex shoves her to the floor.
REX
(continuing)
Go down on me, Phyllis.

PHYLLIS
Rex!

REX
You hear me?

PHYLLIS
We'll get to that. Kiss me some more.
Like you were.

REX
Fuck kissing.

PHYLLIS
That's one of the things I always
loved about you, Rex. You're such the
romantic.

REX
And fuck romance.

PHYLLIS
(play ing his game,
looking him square in
the eyes)
No, fuck me.

REX
Now we're gettin' somewhere.

Phyllis starts to pull Rex's pants down. Rex picks Phyllis up and pulls her towards the window.

REX
(continuing)
No, over here. So I can see.

Rex is a black silouhette in the large window that looks out over the street as Phyllis undoes Rex's pants.

After she gets his pants off, Rex leans forward and starts to undo Phyllis's dress. He kisses her on the neck. Phyllis gets more and more riled up and starts to moan.

PHYLLIS
Is this how you do it with Athena,
Rex? Huh?

REX
Forget her. What are you bringing her
up again for?
PHYLLIS
Tell me.

REX
You sick bitch. Why do you want to know for?

PHYLLIS
Makes it more exciting. Talk about past loves. Past fucks.

REX
You're psycho, Phyllis.

PHYLLIS
Maybe. But I've got nothing on you, honey.

REX
No. I guess you don't.

Phyllis starts to kiss Rex back, then lowers herself to her knees. Before she can even get started, Rex grabs her by the hair -- not hard, just enough to get her attention.

PHYLLIS
What?

REX
I don't want you to do that now.

PHYLLIS
You sure change your tune fast. What's the matter?

REX
Nothin's the matter. I just don't want you to do that now.

PHYLLIS
(starting to figure this out)
You are still with her, aren't you?

Rex won't answer her.

PHYLLIS
(continuing)
That's just great.

REX
We split up. Now come here.

Phyllis hesitates, unsure, then moves closer to Rex.
PHYLLIS
You're lying to me. We're too drunk
to be doing this, Rex.

REX
(sincere)
I like what you done with your hair.
It's different.

PHYLLIS
(needing the affection)
You really like it?

REX
Yeah. C'mere, lemme run my fingers
through it.

Phyllis moves directly next to Rex as he reaches up and
begins to gently stroke her hair.

REX
(continuing)
You like that?

PHYLLIS
(closing her eyes,
wallowing in the
moment)
Uh-hmm. It's nice.

REX
Turns you on, don't it?

PHYLLIS
Hmmm.

Rex leans down and kisses Phyllis, first on the neck, then on
the lips. Soon, Phyllis starts to undress Rex, then herself.

She leads him over to a futon couch and lays down. Rex lays
down on top of her and continues to kiss her neck, then soon
her breasts. Although Rex is excited at first, he can't keep
his momentum going. He grows weary and retreats, flustering
Phyllis.

PHYLLIS
(continuing)
Rex, what's wrong?

REX
(simply)
I can't.
PHYLLIS
(disappointed)
You can't, or you won't?

Long beat.

REX
(glum)
I can't.

PHYLLIS
(genuine)
I understand.

REX
No. I don't think you do. I don't think a woman can.

PHYLLIS
Whatever.

Phyllis stands up and starts for the restroom.

REX
Where are you going?!

PHYLLIS
(walking, a double entendre)
To relieve myself.

REX
Very funny.

Phyllis goes into the bathroom and turns on the light. She sits down on the toilet and starts to pee when she sees the syringe lying on top of the rest of the trash in the trash can.

INSERT ON THE SYRINGE

PHYLLIS
Son-of-a-bitch.

Phyllis gets up from the toilet, grabs the syringe, and runs into the other room to confront Rex, who is now standing next to the window staring out at the street below.

PHYLLIS
(continuing)
What the hell is this doing here?
(waiting for an answer)
Rex, answer me.
REX
I guess you could say that's my problem, Phyllis.

PHYLLIS
You're a sorry son-of-a-bitch, Rex. You have some nerve to bring this shit in my house!

REX
I'd better be going.

Rex picks up his clothes and starts to dress.

PHYLLIS
Don't leave. Did I ask you to leave?

REX
You didn't have to.

PHYLLIS
Talk to me.
(Not knowing where to start)
Jesus, why are you doing this to yourself?

Rex can't answer.

PHYLLIS
(continuing)
She loves you, Rex.

REX
How the fuck would you know?

PHYLLIS
The guy was a client, Rex. She told me as much.

REX
And you believed her?

PHYLLIS
Yes. And so should you.

REX
You don't know the whole story.

PHYLLIS
(flustered)
Why did you come over here?

Pause, as Rex thinks it over.
REX
I guess 'cause I didn't know where else to go.

PHYLLIS
I'm not going to lie to you, Rex. I don't like seeing you like this. You're too talented to be doing this to yourself.

REX
Don't give me that God-given talent bullshit, Phyllis. You don't have to live my fucking life. You don't have to walk around in this skin.

PHYLLIS
Thank God for that.

REX
You think I like acting this way?

PHYLLIS
Give me a break. You thrive on it. Look, I couldn't care less if we fucked or not. Okay? So if that's what this little show is all about...

Rex falls over on the floor, laughing.

PHYLLIS
(continuing)
What?

REX
That's hardly it.

PHYLLIS
Whatever it is. Do something. Change yourself. You do have talent. But you're worthless on that shit and you're worthless without her...And you know it.

REX
I'll be seein' you, Phyllis. Thanks for the drinks.

Rex starts for the door.

PHYLLIS
Rex.

Rex stops at the door.
PHYLLIS
(continuing)
Take care of yourself. Okay?

Rex nods and is gone.

INT. THE RESTAURANT--NIGHT

The waiter clears the dishes from Michael and Athena's table. Most of the other patrons have already cleared out.

MICHAEL
You're sure you don't want dessert.

ATHENA
Really, I'm stuffed. But thank you. It was very good.

MICHAEL
I'm glad you liked it.

ATHENA
So what about you, Michael?

MICHAEL
What about me what?

ATHENA
I've been doing all the talking. You've hardly said a word.

MICHAEL
What's there to say?

ATHENA
Tell me about you, like I've been doing.

MICHAEL
I'm a broker.

ATHENA
Something I don't know.

MICHAEL
I like football.

ATHENA
You're a man, that's a given.

MICHAEL
Listen, they're about to run us out of here. You want to go somewhere and grab a drink?
ATHENA
Sure, where?

MICHAEL
Oh, I don't know. There's Millies, there's the Main Bar, there's...

ATHENA
How about your place?

MICHAEL
My place.

ATHENA
Yes, your apartment. I'm sorry. Am I being too suggestive? I did promise to fuck your brains out.

MICHAEL
(taken aback)
No, I...it's just my place is a mess.

ATHENA
It couldn't be any worse than mine.

MICHAEL
(has to think about it again)
We can go to my place.

ATHENA
If you don't want to, I understand.

MICHAEL
No no, that's a good idea. We'll go to my place.

ATHENA
You're sure?

MICHAEL
Yeah.

ATHENA
Because you seem a little hesitant.

MICHAEL
I guess maybe I am. A little.

ATHENA
But why? We've had a really nice evening, the wine was superb, and now I'm finally getting you to open up a little. Let's not stop there. And besides, I'm dying for an orgasm.
MICHAEL
You say the damndest things, you know that?

To the WAITER who walks by:

MICHAEL
(continuing; his weakness overcomes him)
Could we get our check, please?

EXT. STREET--NIGHT

Rex stands next to a pay phone, staring at it. He takes a coin, puts it in the slot, and dials a number. The phone RINGS, and an answering machine picks up.

ATHENA (O/S)
We're not in right now...

REX (0/S)
But leave us a message after the beep and we'll call you back.

A BEEP sounds and Rex hesitates, then starts to talk.

REX
It's me. I...

Rex doesn't know what else to say so hangs up the phone. He walks over to the street, sits down on the curb, and watches the traffic go by.

INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT--NIGHT

Michael opens the door to his apartment and waits for Athena to walk in ahead of him. Athena takes one look around and is suitably impressed.

MICHAEL
This is home.

ATHENA
Very nice.

MICHAEL
Drink?

ATHENA
Scotch. On the rocks, please.

Athena walks over to the large window and looks out at the city below.
ATHENA  
(continuing)  
Your life is one big panorama, isn't it?

MICHAEL  
I've always been a sucker for a good view.

ATHENA  
What else have you always been a sucker for?

Michael starts to make drinks at the bar.

MICHAEL  
(thinking it over)  

ATHENA  
In the country?

MICHAEL  
On the golf course.

And?

ATHENA  
You want a laundry list?

MICHAEL  
Sure.

MICHAEL  
I don't know. I'm liable to start sounding like a personals ad.

ATHENA  
We don't have to talk.

MICHAEL  
That's what I'm afraid of.

ATHENA  
Don't be afraid. I don't bite.  
(she smiles)  
Okay, maybe a little.

Athena moves over to the bar where Michael stands. He holds out her drink. She takes it and places it back on the bar. She looks Michael in the eye and waits just a moment before she leans forward and kisses him. After the long kiss:
ATHENA
(continuing)
That was nice.

MICHAEL
Too nice.

ATHENA
I said don't be afraid.

MICHAEL
I can't help it. I...

ATHENA
What?

MICHAEL
I...I think you'd better leave.

Michael starts to move towards the front door. Athena slowly moves around and cuts him off, though, and starts to back him towards his bedroom.

ATHENA
I just got here, silly.

MICHAEL
(nervous)
I know, but the sooner you leave, the sooner this won't happen.

ATHENA
Can I tell you something?

MICHAEL
What?

ATHENA
It's going to happen.

MICHAEL
It is?

ATHENA
Uh-hmmm. I'm going to fuck your brains out whether you like it or not.

MICHAEL
I'm not used to this.

ATHENA
But you want me to....Don't you? You can't wait. You've thought about it all night long.
MICHAEL
I don't know. Like I said earlier,
I'm...I'm trying to change.

ATHENA
That's admirable.

MICHAEL
But I don't think you understand.

ATHENA
I understand completely.

MICHAEL
But you don't even know me.

ATHENA
I'm working on it.

MICHAEL
(honest)
I'm a complete asshole.

ATHENA
Yeah, I know. I realized that the
moment we met.

MICHAEL
I can't be trusted.

ATHENA
Right.

MICHAEL
And I lied. I have hundreds of
girlfriends, spread all over the
world.

ATHENA
They've had their chance.

MICHAEL
That doesn't bother you?

ATHENA
Should it?
(Michael doesn't say)
Just relax.

MICHAEL
Uh-oh. We're in the bedroom.

ATHENA
Yes.
MICHAEL
Are we...going to make love?

ATHENA
Nope. I already told you, we're going to fuck. We can make love later.

MICHAEL
I feel like there's more I should tell you.

ATHENA
You will. But there's no need for you to give away all your secrets right off the bat.

Athena pushes Michael backwards onto the bed. They begin to kiss passionately. After a long kiss, Athena lifts herself up and removes her blouse. She throws it to the side, where it lands near a corner of Michael's waterbed.

Michael leans forward and begins to kiss Athena passionately on the neck. He grabs her and throws her down on the bed.

FADE TO:

EXT. A FREEWAY--MORNING

The city has come back to life, as swarms of commuters stream down the freeway, cutting one another off and honking impatiently.

EXT. OUTSIDE REX AND ATHENA'S APARTMENT BUILDING--MORNING

Rex sits on the front stoop leading into the building where he and Athena live, asleep. Sunlight sneaks up and illuminates the edge of his face, but is not quite in his eyes when a bus driving by the building HONKS loudly and stirs him awake.

Rex immediate covers his eyes from the sunlight screaming its way into his sleepy conscious. Realizing it's morning, he immediately looks at his watch--it's 7:30.

Rex removes a cigarette from his pocket and lights it. Puffing away his at breakfast, he looks anxiously up and down the street.

EXT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT BUILDING--MORNING

Denise pulls up in front of Michael's skyscraper apartment building, looks up at the tall granite and glass structure.
INSERT ON the building. She is just about to take the last parking space when a BUSINESSMAN driving a black Mercedes sedan screams around her and grabs the space.

INT. DENISE'S CAR--MORNING

Denise immediately pulls in behind the guy and parks her car directly behind him. She opens the door of her car and climbs out. When the man climbs out of his car, she leans in and honks her horn.

DENISE
Excuse me.

BUSINESSMAN
Can I help you?

The businessman shakes his head, thinking she's some crazy. He starts to walk off when she honks her horn again.

DENISE
Don't walk away from me when I'm talking to you!

BUSINESSMAN
Is there something I can help you with?

DENISE
Yeah, you can get the fuck out of my parking space! Or perhaps you're color blind and couldn't see my blinker.

BUSINESSMAN
I guess I didn't...

DENISE
Don't make lame-ass excuses. Just move it.

The businessman promptly moves his car.

INT. DENISE'S CAR--DAY

Denise gets in her car and backs up so that the businessman can back up. After he has pulled out, he tears away, afraid she's going to come after him. Denise smiles with satisfaction as she parks her car with the grace of a princess.
INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT—DAY

A hidden alarm goes off somewhere in the bedroom. Michael jumps up and gets out of bed, naked, struggling to find the alarm clock. He finally finds it under a pile of his clothes, picks it up and shuts it off. He then notices Athena waking up, and realizes he's standing there with no clothes on. He places the alarm clock over his privates.

ATHENA
Good morning.

MICHAEL
Morning.

ATHENA
(stretching)
What time is it?

Michael's stumped. He turns the clock over in a quick motion and checks the time.

MICHAEL
Uh, 7:30.

ATHENA
(finding this amusing)
What in the world are you doing?

MICHAEL
Oh, just...standing here, killing time.

ATHENA
Come here.

MICHAEL
Over there?

ATHENA
Yes, silly.

MICHAEL
(suddenly rushed)
That's okay. I've got to get ready for work.

ATHENA
Come snuggle with me.

MICHAEL
No, really, I...

ATHENA
Just for a minute?
Michael starts to walk towards her, holding the clock.

ATHENA
(continuing)
You can lose the clock.

MICHAEL
Oh. Right.

Michael throws the clock down and jumps into the bed. Athena takes Michael into her arms.

ATHENA
Are you always so modest?

MICHAEL
Only when I'm this nervous.

ATHENA
What's to be nervous about? I'm the one who should be nervous.

MICHAEL
How's that?

ATHENA
Because I've got some serious explaining to do. To Rex.

MICHAEL
Oh yeah. I almost forgot. Rex.

ATHENA
Don't say it like that. It's not like it's the end of the world.

MICHAEL
No, I'd just forgotten.

ATHENA
What?

MICHAEL
I just wish he wasn't in the picture is all.

ATHENA
He won't be for much longer.

MICHAEL
I'm not asking you to...you know, do anything rash.
ATHENA
You don't have to ask. I've been wanting to do something rash for a long time now.

MICHAEL
I know. But I mean, it's not like...

ATHENA
Not like what?

MICHAEL
(cautious)
I don't want to say the wrong thing here.

ATHENA
Just say what you mean.

MICHAEL
It's not like we're going off to get married or anything.

ATHENA
Can we get one thing clear, Michael? I told you last night, I'm trying to make a change, just like you. And quite frankly, I need all the help I can get. So I'd really appreciate it if we could just shuck this scared rabbit routine. I never said a word about running off and getting married.

MICHAEL
(taken aback)
Okay.

ATHENA
What?

MICHAEL
That's...you're just very direct. I'm not used to it.

ATHENA
But you're okay with it.

MICHAEL
Uh, yeah. I'm, uh...I'm gonna go get ready for work now.

ATHENA
Kiss me first?
Michael kisses her. When he pulls away, he's not sure what to do next.

MICHAEL
I...I think I'll go make some coffee.

She grabs his arm.

ATHENA
I had a wonderful time last night. Did you?

MICHAEL
Yeah. I did...Thanks.

Athena kisses him again, this time longer and more intensely. When Michael stands, he sways as he starts into the kitchen.

INT. ELEVATOR--DAY

Denise stands in the elevator, checking her makeup in the ceiling mirror with one hand, and holding a picnic basket in the other. An OLD WOMAN stands next to her, watching, as does her small French Poodle. The poodle begins to bark.

OLD WOMAN
Quiet, Fifi.

OLD WOMAN
(continuing; to Athena)
You'll have to excuse Fifi. She's a little upset. She just had the operation.

DENISE
The operation?

OLD WOMAN
You know. Snip snip?

The old woman simulates a pair of scissors with her hand.

DENISE
Oh. Lovely.

The elevator comes to Denise's floor. As she starts to walk off:

OLD WOMAN
You look fine. Your makeup, I mean. It looks fine.

DENISE
Great. Thank you.
OLD WOMAN
Have a good day.

Denise walks down the hall to Michael's door. She stops directly outside the door to compose herself, then picks up The Wall Street Journal. Just as she’s about to knock, the door opens. Athena starts to bend over and pick up the newspaper when she notices Denise.

ATHENA
Oh. Good morning.

Denise smiles.

ATHENA
(continuing)
You must be here to pick up Michael.

Denise forces another smile and nods her head. Athena notices the picnic basket.

DENISE
Looks to me like you've already taken care of that.

ATHENA
Oh, this? This isn't really...
(on second thought)
Okay, maybe it is.

DENISE
(composed)
I'm going to come in now.

ATHENA
(hesitant)
Michael's in the shower.

DENISE
And you're not with him? That's odd. He's never liked taking a shower alone before.

Denise walks in as if she owns the place, sets the picnic basket on the table.

DENISE
(continuing)
I'm curious, did he use a condom?

ATHENA
Excuse me?
DENISE
(on second thought)
No, I guess not.

ATHENA
Wait a minute. You two...?

DENISE
He failed to mention that chapter? Of course it's terribly cliche. Secretary doing the boss. But I've always cherished cliches. Just what the doctor ordered for a broken heart.

Athena sits down at the table and palms her cup of coffee.

ATHENA
I'm...geez, I'm sorry. I don't know what to say.

DENISE
I'm a big girl. You don't have to say anything.

ATHENA
Then I don't think I understand. Why are you here?

DENISE
To prove to myself once and for all that Michael will never change. You see, he's too chickenshit to just come out and say it himself, so I figured I'd save him the trouble. I'm curious, though. What did he tell you?

ATHENA
That there'd been lots of women. That he's an asshole. That he can't be trusted.

DENISE
At least he was honest.

ATHENA
I couldn't say. I obviously don't know him as well as you.

DENISE
(taking this the wrong way)
Oh, Jesus. I'm...look, I'm really sorry. I'll be on my way.
ATHENA
(stopping her)
There's no hurry. I want you to tell me something. What would you change about him, if you could?

DENISE
(thinks it over for a moment)
The way he sees the world. How he perceives women, how he looks at them, communicates with them. Make him understand them.

ATHENA
Them or you?

DENISE
Both, I guess.

ATHENA
That's a tall order.

DENISE
I know. I expect too much, what can I say? Seems better than not expecting enough.

ATHENA
I can relate.

Suddenly a promise of friendship is in the air, despite the circumstances, and Athena realizes her rudeness when she notices that she hasn't offered Denise anything to drink.

ATHENA
(continuing)
Would you like some coffee or juice?

DENISE
Coffee. Black. Please.

Athena runs to the kitchen to pour her a cup. As she walks back to the table and puts the cup in front of Denise:

ATHENA
I have to tell you something. Denise, right? Because I think you still have the wrong impression. About this whole scene, I mean.

DENISE
That doesn't seem likely.
ATHENA
(a secret)
He didn't put any moves on me last night.

DENISE
(truly amazed)
No way.

ATHENA
He didn't even want me to come up here.

DENISE
Are we talking about the same man?

ATHENA
I had to push him. Is that the Michael you know?

DENISE
I'm sorry, but that Michael doesn't exist as far as I'm concerned.

ATHENA
That's what I figured.

DENISE
And yet you still...?

ATHENA
Because I wanted to.

DENISE
Don't you think that's being just a little bit naive? Because there's no use in both of us getting hurt.

ATHENA
Normally yes, but this time, I don't think so.

DENISE
(wincing)
Athena, he's a snake. He can't be trusted.

ATHENA
(a wicked smile)
And I'm a snake charmer.

DENISE
You'd better be.
ATHENA
Listen, I'm really sorry about...it's just kind of awkward, you know?

DENISE
Nothing surprises me anymore. I'm curious though. What about your...?

ATHENA
Rex? What about him?

DENISE
You two splitting up?

ATHENA
I don't know yet. Probably for awhile. He can be a real dick.

DENISE
So I saw. But you still love him.

ATHENA
Yeah. I still love him. I mean, do you ever really stop loving somebody?

DENISE
You're asking the wrong person.

The room falls silent except for the sound of the shower.

ATHENA
I'm sorry. I didn't mean to infer that...

DENISE
No, that's okay.

Denise lights a cigarette from a pack sitting on the table.

DENISE (continuing)
Look, since we're spilling beans here, I have to tell you something. And I don't want you to think I'm trying to rain on your parade.

ATHENA
About you and Michael.

DENISE
Yeah.

ATHENA (curious)
Okay.
DENISE
I'm pregnant.

ATHENA
By him.

Denise nods her head.

ATHENA
(continuing)
Oh. I see.

DENISE
And I'm going to keep it.

ATHENA
Uh-huh.

DENISE
Michael doesn't really figure into the whole scenario at this point, but I wanted to talk to him about it. That's why I came here.

ATHENA
And to embarrass him.

DENISE
Yes.

ATHENA
That's brave of you. In a weird way.

DENISE
Not really. Crass, perhaps, but not brave.

ATHENA
No, it takes guts.

DENISE
In any case, it doesn't really matter now.

Denise gets up to leave. Athena gets up as well.

ATHENA
Oh yes it does. Very much so. I'm the one who should be leaving. You two have some serious talking to do.

Athena starts to gather her things. She grabs her clothes from the floor next to the kitchen table and starts to put them on hurriedly.
DENISE
You're leaving?

ATHENA
He has my phone number.

DENISE
I don't know if that's such a good idea.

ATHENA
Look, I have enough problems of my own without getting mixed up in all this.

DENISE
Somehow I think you already are. Mixed up in it, I mean.

ATHENA
Then I'm calling a time-out.

DENISE
You can't leave. What's Michael going to say?

ATHENA
That's what you want, isn't it? To have it out?

DENISE
I'm not sure.

ATHENA
You've got a few minutes to figure it out. On second thought, tell Michael I'll call him.

Athena starts for the door.

DENISE
It's funny. This is how I was hoping this would end, and now I'm regretting it.

ATHENA
Be careful what you wish for.

DENISE
Yeah. Well, it was nice meeting you. Again.

ATHENA
Yeah. Good luck.
DENISE
I'll need it.

ATHENA
You probably will. Goodbye.

Athena leaves. Denise starts to unpack the breakfast spread that was stashed away in the picnic basket. The door to the bedroom opens and out walks Michael, a towel wrapped around his waist. He sees Denise and is speechless.

DENISE
Surprise!

Michael turns around, marches back into his bedroom, and slams the door.

EXT. BUS STOP—MORNING

Athena climbs on the bus and takes a seat at the rear. She leans against the window, the heat of her breath fogging up the window as she looks out at the world. Her eyes impart a new perspective on things, one of simultaneous melancholy and bliss.

EXT. STOOP OUTSIDE ATHENA AND REX'S APARTMENT--MORNING

Rex sits smoking a cigarette on the porch of his apartment building. A bus pulls over across the street. When it pulls away, Athena stands there and sees him. They look at one another before a long time before she starts across the street.

As she approaches Rex, neither of them can look the other in the eye.

ATHENA
I'm sorry, Rex. I don't know what else to say.

REX
I have no one to blame but myself.

ATHENA
I...you keep saying you're going to change, but you never do.

REX
I know.

ATHENA
You need help. Are you finally starting to realize that?
Rex doesn't say anything, then:

**REX**
You fucked him, didn't you?

**ATHENA**
(frustrated)
Rex.

**REX**
Didn't you?

**ATHENA**
Does it really matter?

Beat. Rex looks up at her.

**ATHENA**
(continuing)
Look, goddamnit, I didn't want it to end up this way.

**REX**
Is that what this is, Athena? The end?

**ATHENA**
It's something, Rex. A turning point, a transition, I don't know. But it's something. It has to be.

**REX**
You're probably right.

**ATHENA**
I know I'm right.

Rex stands up from the curb.

**ATHENA**
(continuing)
You fell asleep out here, didn't you?

**REX**
Passed out.

**ATHENA**
I wish you'd take better care of yourself.

**REX**
Sometimes so do I.

**ATHENA**
It doesn't have to be completely over. You know?
Rex shrugs.

ATHENA
(continuing; protesting)
It doesn't.

REX
(looks her in the eye)
I'll get help.

ATHENA
How many times have I heard that one before?

REX
(firm)
I'll get help.

ATHENA
Okay.

REX
I can't lose you, Athena. If that were to happen, I...

ATHENA
You haven't, okay? So don't say anything else. It doesn't have to end. It just has to change.

Rex nods.

REX
Listen, about yesterday.

ATHENA
I don't want to talk about it.

REX
I want to apologize.

ATHENA
Fine. Just...if it ever happens again, that's it. You understand?

REX
Yeah...
(musing)
It's pretty fucked up, huh.

ATHENA
It's been better. C'mon. Come inside and get some sleep.

Rex follows her inside.
INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT--DAY

Denise bangs on Michael's bedroom door.

    DENISE
    You can't hide in there all day!

    MICHAEL
    Watch me!

    DENISE
    Michael, she said she would call you!

    MICHAEL
    What did you talk about?

    DENISE
    Things!

    MICHAEL
    Did you tell her you were pregnant?

Denise doesn't respond. Michael opens the door.

    MICHAEL
    (continuing)
    You did, didn't you? You're a woman with balls, Denise, you know that?

    DENISE
    I had to.

    MICHAEL
    The one good thing to happen in my life since God knows when and you had to go and fuck it up.

    DENISE
    The one good thing? What the hell was I, the one bad thing?

Michael, in frustration, sits down at the kitchen table.

    DENISE
    (continuing)
    Did it ever occur to you that I have fallen completely and madly in love with you? Did you ever get the slightest inkling?

    MICHAEL
    Did you ever bother to tell me?!
DENISE
How could I? You were too busy off screwing the other half of the population!

MICHAEL
I'm trying to change!

DENISE
Well it's a little late for me, now isn't it?
(she waits for him to say something)
Isn't it?

MICHAEL
What are you talking about?

DENISE
Miss Bohemia! You've gone off and fallen in love with her!

MICHAEL
Her name is Athena!

DENISE
I know her fucking name! I just had an in-depth conversation with the woman!

MICHAEL
(worried)
You did talk to her! What did you talk about?

DENISE
What do you think we talked about, you idiot! We talked about you!

MICHAEL
What did you tell her?

DENISE
I told her that I get the Mercedes, and she gets the cellular phone and portable fax. It didn't seem fair at first, but I have known you longer.

MICHAEL
Very funny, Denise.

DENISE
(suddenly very calm)
I explained to her as best I could that she had won and I had lost.
Denise gets up from the table and starts to gather up her things. She goes into Michael's bedroom to remove some clothes from his closet. Michael follows her.

MICHAEL
Denise, none of us has won anything. Don't you see? Okay, what do you want me to say? That I'm sorry? I'm sorry, there.

DENISE
You are sorry. You're a sorry son-of-a-bitch and I hope I never have to see you again for the rest of my life.

MICHAEL
Denise, don't leave like this.

DENISE
What? Is this not a grand enough exit for you? Perhaps I should put on one of those many pieces of lingerie you keep hidden in the corners of your bed and strut right out of the building the way I strutted in!

MICHAEL
Now you're being ridiculous.

DENISE
Maybe I feel like being ridiculous!

MICHAEL
Okay, fine. Be ridiculous.

DENISE
You have made me feel ridiculous! Do you know what it's like to be the last in line, Michael!? To be the last person on earth that you call! Don't think for a minute I never figured that one out! I may only be your lowly secretary, but I'm not stupid!

MICHAEL
You're right. That was wrong of me.

DENISE
So maybe you could apologize? Not that it would make me feel much better. I'd just like to see you humbled for once in your life.
MICHAEL
I'm sorry, Denise. For everything.

DENISE
Are you?

MICHAEL
Yes. I'm sorry it had to come to this. I'm sorry I had to put you through all that I have just so I could realize the true asshole that I am.

DENISE
I'm going to faint. He actually said it.

MICHAEL
Do you have to rub it in?

DENISE
(mean-spirited)
With a Brillo pad.

Denise gathers the rest of her things.

MICHAEL
You want to go have breakfast or something?

DENISE
I'll be dining alone this morning, thank you. May as well start getting used to it.

MICHAEL
Is there anything I can do?

DENISE
Yeah. Click your heels three times and disappear.

MICHAEL
Will I see you at the office?

DENISE
Sure. There's that picture I gave you. The one you keep hidden away in the inner confines of your desk. As for the physical me, I'll be seeking new career opportunities.

MICHAEL
You're not even going to give me two week's notice?
DENISE
Honey, I gave you notice a long time ago.

Denise leaves. Michael stands there, astonished. He doesn't know what to do next. He goes over to his large bay window and stares anxiously out at the city below.

EXT. GOLF COURSE--DAY

Michael and Chuck are on the teebox. Michael is about to address the ball. Chuck coughs. Michael backs away from the ball. He looks down the fairway, then approaches the ball once more. Chuck again coughs.

MICHAEL
Do you mind?

CHUCK
What?

MICHAEL
You sound like you've just stepped out of the TB ward.

CHUCK
I can't help it I gotta cough.

MICHAEL
You need to quit smoking.

CHUCK
You need to quit telling me that I need to quit smoking.

MICHAEL
I'm going to hit the ball now.

CHUCK
Go ahead.

Michael approaches the ball once again. He steadies his club and waits for Chuck's inevitable cough.

MICHAEL
I'm waiting.

CHUCK
For what?

MICHAEL
Are you gonna cough or not?
CHUCK
I'm through coughing.

MICHAEL
Are you sure?

CHUCK
Sure as I can be. You never know with this smoking.

MICHAEL
'Cause I'm gonna hit the ball now.

CHUCK
Let's hope it's soon.

Michael approaches the ball once more and gets ready to swing. Just as his backswing goes up, Chuck starts to cough. Michael backs away from the ball.

MICHAEL
This isn't working.

CHUCK
I couldn't help it.

MICHAEL
You hit first.

CHUCK
Oh no. I'm not falling for that one. That's the oldest trick in the book.

MICHAEL
Somebody's got to hit.

CHUCK
This is about that girl, isn't it? She won't let you concentrate.

MICHAEL
That girl?

CHUCK
That hippie chick.

MICHAEL
She's not a hippie chick.

CHUCK
Whatever she is, she's standing right smack in the middle of your backswing.

MICHAEL
And?
CHUCK
She's getting in the way of our game.
Why don't you just call her, for Christ's sake?

MICHAEL
Just the other day you're telling me not to get emotionally involved with her. Now you say call her. You'd make a helluva politician, Chuck, the way you waver on the issues.

CHUCK
I figure it's too late for me to tell you not to get involved, and now she's interfering with our game. So call her.

Chuck pulls a cellular phone out of his golf bag and hands it out to Michael. Michael stares at it.

MICHAEL
You want me to call her. Right here.

CHUCK
No time like the present.

MICHAEL
She might not be home.

CHUCK
So you leave her a message.

MICHAEL
What if she doesn't want to talk to me?

CHUCK
Michael Houston? Afraid of rejection?

Michael ignores him. He approaches the ball and in one quick motion, with no practice swing, nails the sphere directly down the center of the fairway. He walks over to Chuck and grabs the phone from him.

MICHAEL
Not afraid. Concerned.

CHUCK
Nice drive.

Michael punches Athena's number into the phone. He hits the send button, then moves away from Chuck over to the other side of the teebox. Chuck watches, waits, then leans over to tee up his own ball.
MICHAEL
Hello? Athena?

WITH ATHENA AT HER APARTMENT, phone to her ear:

ATHENA
Hi.

MICHAEL (O/S)
How are you?

ATHENA
Fine. How are you?

MICHAEL (O/S)
Fine. And you?

ATHENA
I just told you I was fine.

MICHAEL (O/S)
Oh, right. That's good.

Pregnant pause. Chuck hits his drive. Athena hears the sound over the phone.

ATHENA
What was that?

MICHAEL (O/S)
That? Oh, that was Chuck's drive.

ATHENA
You're calling me from the golf course?

BACK WITH MICHAEL

MICHAEL
Yeah. I mean, Chuck had his cellular and...I just wanted to call you.

ATHENA (O/S)
You couldn't wait. Is that what you're trying to say?

MICHAEL
Yeah, I guess so. Listen, about...

ATHENA (O/S)
It's forgotten.

MICHAEL
Am I forgotten?
ATHENA (O/S)
No.

MICHAEL
Well I didn't know.

ATHENA (O/S)
Call me after you finish your golf game. Maybe we'll go have a drink or something.

MICHAEL
Really?

ATHENA (O/S)
Yes. Really.

MICHAEL
It's good talking to you.

ATHENA (O/S)
Bye.

Michael holds the phone away and hits the end button. Chuck anxiously waits to hear what happened.

CHUCK
So?

MICHAEL
She asked me to have a drink.

CHUCK
Good deal. You look like a kid in a candy store. Now can we get back to playing a little golf?

Michael climbs into the golf cart on the passenger side, Chuck the driver's side. They drive off down the fairway.

EXT. A BAR--LATE AFTERNOON

Michael and Athena are seated on the terrace of a restaurant in the arts district. Michael nurses a martini as Athena watches him.

ATHENA
So how was your golf game?

MICHAEL
Fine.

ATHENA
Did you have any long drives?
MICHAEL
Just the one to come pick you up.

ATHENA
And why's that?

MICHAEL
I was scared.

ATHENA
Somehow I get the impression you only get scared when you're around me.

MICHAEL
You're pretty perceptive.

ATHENA
So what is it that scares you?

MICHAEL
Your confidence.

ATHENA
You have a problem with women who have confidence?

MICHAEL
No, I'm just not used to them.

ATHENA
You should get used to them.

MICHAEL
Maybe so.

ATHENA
You want to know the truth, part of that confidence came from you.

MICHAEL
From me?

ATHENA
From the wreck. You saw something in me that even I didn't know was there. That was cool.

MICHAEL
And vice versa.

ATHENA
Yeah.

Beat. They take a sip from their drinks.
MICHAEL  
So, your boyfriend.  

ATHENA  
His name's Rex.  

MICHAEL  
Yeah, Rex. So you're gonna stay with him.  

ATHENA  
I'm giving him one last chance.  

MICHAEL  
I see.  

ATHENA  
It's nothing against you. The kind of love Rex and I have, I don't think it comes around very often. So I have to see it through.  

MICHAEL  
I'm starting to think it doesn't come around ever.  

ATHENA  
What about Denise?  

MICHAEL  
What about her?  

ATHENA  
I think she loves you.  

MICHAEL  
Maybe.  

ATHENA  
You should give her a chance.  

MICHAEL  
I think I've blown that one. Anyway, I'm here with you, not Denise.  

ATHENA  
But I can't be with you.  

MICHAEL  
Not your type?  

ATHENA  
That's not it. Listen, I had a great time the other night.  

(more)
ATHENA (CONT'D)
And it's not that I don't want to be with you. It's just not the right time. You understand?
(Michael nods.)
Anyway, it looks to me like you need to learn how to be more of a friend to your female companions.

MICHAEL
You're probably right. I really am trying to change.

ATHENA
So stop trying and do it.

Michael reaches into his pocket and pulls something out. He opens his hand and drops the poodle magnets on the table.

MICHAEL
I've been thinking about these magnets.

ATHENA
What about them?

MICHAEL
Fate. Destiny. You believe in all that stuff?

ATHENA
Part of me does.

MICHAEL
This all seemed so inevitable. Like it was going to happen whether we wanted it to or not.

ATHENA
Maybe it was.

MICHAEL
It's a weird feeling. Like it's beyond your control.

ATHENA
It is beyond your control.

They both stare at the magnets.

ATHENA
(continuing)
Did you ever try putting them together?
MICHAEL
No.

ATHENA
Maybe you should.

Michael leans forward and tries to put the magnets together, but they have the same charge and repel one from the other. Athena laughs.

MICHAEL
You think that's a sign?

ATHENA
Definitely.

MICHAEL
Really?

ATHENA
Yeah. We're doomed.

Athena sweeps her arm across the table, knocking the magnets off the table.

INSERT ON the black and white poodle magnets bouncing onto the sidewalk. The black poodle slips over the curb and falls into a running stream of water as the white magnet perches over the edge, as if to watch its partner disappear yet once again.

FADE OUT
CRITICAL ESSAY

This thesis screenplay, *Turnabout*, was inspired in a variety of ways, not the least of which was my own experience in the "dating scene" over the course of the past ten years. Though the story is in no way autobiographical, it would be futile to insist that its myriad predilections about love and relationships in the late 1980s and early 1990s, along with their simultaneous accompaniment of confusion and bliss, did not somehow stem from my own personal experience.

If the story of *Turnabout* has any verisimilitude to speak of, then, it derives not only from the finite (yet modestly seasoned) experience of its author, but also from the wellspring of lovelorn episodes encountered by friends, relatives, and yes, even mass media personalities (both fictional and otherwise) that have been retold to me through a variety of channels.

While love may indeed be "a many-splendoured thing," it is also filled with the thorns of despair and bewilderment, which makes for an often perplexing perspective of the opposite sex. My thesis screenplay attempts to delineate a variety of these perspectives, as told through a handful of unique characters, each of whom has their own idiosyncratic take on what relationships connote in the early half of the last decade of this millenium.

Admittedly, it would be foolish to attempt to define holistically the variety of societal and moral influences that
have, through the disposition of its author, encouraged the
development of each of these characters. However, a summary
explanation does seem to be in order, if for no other reason than
to force me to contemplate what I consider to be the moral "order
of the day" that helped shape the persons invented in this small,
fictional universe.

It is my belief that American culture, for better or worse,
has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past three
decades that will continue to define our moral constitution well
into the next century and beyond. The roles of "man" and "woman"
in America, which previously had been so easily (if generally)
defined within the context of traditional, familial functions,
have undergone a vigorous and tumultuous transformation, and have
cessoed to be so effortlessly defined within the limited context
of "sex" or gender.

The rise of the American civil rights movement in the early-
to-mid 1960s gave way to the propagation of feminism in the early
1970s, which in turn helped pave the way to a cacophony of ever-
changing cultural and gender roles that confused its disciples as
much as it troubled its opponents. These changes, which were
effected in the mass media as well as within the confines of
peoples' personal relationships, gave way to a new frontier of
how we, as men and women, relate to one another.

In much the same way that newfound race relations helped
redefine the manner in which blacks and whites dealt one with the
"other," the evolution of gender politics has forced us as a
culture to re-examine our discourse and behavior in regards to
gender roles. Although much of this colloquy was instigated by mass mediated scrutiny initiated by the likes of feminist writers such as Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem, it initially stemmed from the post-World War II era that forced many women out of the war machine workplace and back into their domestic enclaves.

Friedan's formation of the National Organization of Women (NOW) served as a clearinghouse for the "New" feminism, successfully providing an avenue of both communication and political machination, but her (and a multitude of others') valiant attempt at "constitutionalizing" the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) failed to be ratified by the necessary number of states, thereby eliminating any official declaration of the rights of womanhood -- at least, not in this country.

However, and probably more importantly, the metamorphosis of sex roles was launched, and the political and polemical momentum carried forward through the tangential abortion rights and equal opportunity in the workplace movements well into the 1980s and on into the 1990s. And while the inequities for women in the American home and workplace continue, it can hardly be argued that women's status in the U.S. has not been elevated to a position that would be almost imaginable had these events not taken place.

Not surprisingly, the male response to these changes has been multifarious, and often just as impassioned. With change comes confusion, and the men's movement led by the likes of poet/author Robert Bly, whose response was, although not entirely unsympathetic, somewhat exceptionable, gained steady ground in
the mid-to-late 1980s. Although Bly had been an avid supporter of feminism in the past, both in his writings and speeches, he also felt there had been a concurrent evaporation of the qualities that he believed made men masculine, or at the least, characterized them as being somewhat different from women.

Afraid that the overpowering social effects created by feminism were diminishing these male characteristics that he believed were necessary to the mental well-being of men in American society, Bly turned his energies to instigating an almost propagandistic response through the creation of his "wild man" retreats and workshops, as well as through his prolific poetry writings. In these activities, Bly argued that men who lost touch with their "wildman" energy were indeed losing the unique power of male consciousness, a consciousness that had up to this time allowed them the strength and courage to take action in a variety of circumstances that demanded it.

In a speech excerpted from a December 1984 issue of Utne Reader (and later reprinted in the March/April 1994 issue), Bly had this to say about male energy:

The idea that male energy, when in authority, could be good has come to be considered impossible. They called it Zeus energy, which encompasses intelligent, robust health, compassionate authority, intelligent, physically healthy authority, good will, leadership. The Native Americans understood this too, that this power only becomes positive when it is exercised for
the sake of the community, not for personal aggrandizement. All the great cultures have lived with images of this energy, except ours.

The male in touch with the wildman has true strength: He's able to shout and say what he wants in a way that the '60s and '70s male is not able to. The approach to his own feminine space that the '60s and '70s male has made is infinitely valuable, and not to be given up....The ability of a male to shout and be fierce is not the same as treating people like objects, demanding land or empire, expressing aggression -- the whole model of the '50s male. Getting in touch with the wildman means religious life for a man in the broadest sense of the phrase.¹

This link to spirituality made Bly's movement all the more alluring to men searching for emotional footholds in the greed-filled, often nihilistic atmosphere of the 1980s, and had both men and women flocking to his seminars in groves.

Yet probably just as large a camp felt that Bly's philosophical avowals on the state of relations between men and women in the 1980s was overstated, and more pointedly, downright off target. Writer Sam Keen, whose 1991 book Fire in the Belly was embraced as an all-out entreaty for men to start questioning

society's mandated "warrior/provider" role, and instead seek out a more peaceful, family-oriented one, seemed an antidote to Bly's war cries. It emphasized the role of the man/father figure as peacemaker, both within himself and in the variety of roles he played in society at large -- as father, brother, son, uncle, lover, etc., rather than that of the warrior.

Keen requested that the male figure cast off the millions of years old symbolic and cultural suit-of-armor that a variety of societies demanded he wear in favor of a more loving, peacemaking, tailor-made coat that consisted of a devotional fabric threaded exclusively for the betterment of he, his family, and the society in which he lives. Keen's entreaty, however, was dismissed by many as being a wimpy, New Age treatise not suited to the charged discourse occuring amidst the realpolitik of the gender war.

And then along came Camille Paglia.

The much-discussed, castigated, and often mislabeled (read: "anti-feminist") scholar who wrote the controversial 1991 book, Sexual Personae, Paglia arose from the depths of the 1970s and 1980s gender battlefield and (according to her) academic stasis, and demanded a reassessment of feminist politics and woman's role in American, and world, society and culture.

While Paglia's academic stance alone was enough to send the neoliberal Establishment from which she emerged trumpeting into a philosophical uproar, it was her outspoken, unapologetic, public (i.e., mass-mediated) discussion of traditional (and not-so-traditional) sex roles that had the likes of hardcore, New-New
Feminist journalist Susan Faludi running to the safe confines of the nearest NOW meeting in an attempt to find an engaging rejoinder for Paglia's often calamitous and inflammatory, if sometimes truth-ridden, utterances.

The stage now set, and the recent oh-so-politically correct American academe taken aback, Paglia set out on a mission that, while perhaps not ordered by God, certainly seemed to be of some divine inspiration. At times, it seemed as if Paglia's media odyssey was exponentially usurping the majority of American womanhood's mandated Warholian 15 minutes of fame as she discussed everything from her adoration of Madonna to date rape as polemical sexual subterfuge, an act deserved by women who drank too much at bacchanalia fraternity parties. While Paglia's media crusade may have resembled an uncontested political campaign as she made every talk show stop from Sonia Live to The Donahue Show, her antagonistic missives escaped neither the far Right, Left, or Center, or, for that matter, normally indifferent camps falling somewhere in-between.

The gist of Paglia's convictions centered on the notion that American feminism had taken a wrong turn somewhere between 1970 and 1990, and that it was her duty to set it back on track. She argued that women had allowed themselves to be duped by the feminist establishment's meek epistemology of victimization and finger-pointing, rather than engaging and empowering themselves in the risky but worthwhile ongoing campaign for equal opportunity. She found the notion of sexual harassment in the workplace laughable, even going so far as to say that "the
'hostile workplace' category of sexual harassment policy is that women are being returned to their old status of delicate flowers who must be protected from assault by male lechers."

If Paglia's criticism of the delicate "flowering" of American womanhood appears provocative, her embrace of the traditionally accepted notions of masculinity as a positive force in the world angered conventional feminists to no end. In her now famous essay on date rape, "Rape and Modern Sex War," Paglia wrote that "Masculinity is aggressive, unstable, combustible. It is also the most creative cultural force in history. Women must reorient themselves toward the elemental powers of sex, which can strengthen or destroy." This is a far cry from the elemental orientations of "New" feminism, to say the least.

Perhaps Paglia's most poignant argument lies not in her rebuff of the New feminists' indoctrination of victimization, though, than in her assertion that women somehow missed out on the sexually empowering liberation that was theirs to wont. Or rather, that they would allow themselves to have misgivings about their newfound sexual liberation by allowing that emancipation to metamorphosize itself into the pusillanimous and foreboding attributes evident in the recent discourse over such topics du jour as date rape, sexual harassment, full consent, etc.

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Paglia argues this point in another essay from Sex, Art, and American Culture entitled "The Rape Debate, Continued:"

The point is, these white, upper-middle-class feminists believe that a pain-free world is achievable. I'm saying that a pain-free world will be achievable only under totalitarianism. There is no such thing as risk-free anything. In fact, all valuable human things come to us from risk and loss. Therefore we value beauty and youth because they are transient. Part of the sizzle of sex is the danger, the risk of loss of identity in love. That's part of the drama of love. My generation demanded no more overprotection of women. We wanted women to be able to freely chose sex, to freely have all the adventures that men could have. So women began to hike on mountain paths and do all sorts of dangerous things. That's the risk of freedom...I'm not defending the rapist -- I'm defending the freedom to risk rape. I don't want sexual experience to be protected by society."

This "risk of freedom" of which Paglia speaks serves as the ideological locus of Turnabout.

A Line in the Sand

In *Turnabout*, once-established lines (read: roles) of sexual demarcation have been transformed by an elusive and ever-changing boundary, a perimeter filled with usually unfulfilled wishes and desires that, while stimulated by the perennial cryptic expectations of traditional romantic relationships, fail when considering the outdated precepts upon which these wishes and desires are based.

Following closely upon the heels of Edwin Zwick's romantically-confused film *About Last Night* from the mid-1980s (and based on David Mamet's play *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*), as well as the more recent *Singles*, *Reality Bites*, and *Threesome*, *Turnabout* attempts to provide an introspective examination of the state-of-the-romantic-union as we approach the middle of this century's last decade. While it obviously does not portend a definitive analysis of the subject, as no fiction can, it does attempt to provide a representative portrayal of the complexities involved in relationships that are occurring amidst the continuing turbulence that follows the sexual revolution -- for the upheaval seems to have just begun as the precocious, "disenfranchised" (so-called) Generation Xers attempt to come to terms with the gender disruption initiated by their progenitors, the Baby Boomers.

For fear of lapsing into cliché, an examination of the "roles" in *Turnabout* is apropos at this point, and will hopefully better explain my motivations for writing the script, as well as the impulsions of its characters, for it is they who speak worlds better than any essay or treatise on changing gender behavior.
The screenplay begins as the last decade of the century is nearly half-over, and the "hero," or protagonist, of the story, Michael Houston, is in the midst of a severe "relationship" identity crisis (though we come to find he is hardly a hero).

Michael has recently begun to feel he has reached his sexual and career zenith, and this as he beds yet another young Dallas socialite. A consummately narcissistic stock broker, he ruminates early in the story to his good friend Chuck, a cynical lawyer who has recently undergone a bitter separation and subsequent divorce, that he's starting to feel the urge to enter into a serious relationship, although he's currently not seeing anyone special. Over lunch, Michael tells Chuck that he wants to be "in love," just like a young couple he notices seated near them at the restaurant. Due to his own recent and bitter experience with marriage (and subsequent divorce), Chuck laughs at this notion, entirely skeptical that Michael could be dissatisfied with his current promiscuous state of affairs.

Michael is also sleeping regularly with his personal secretary, Denise, whom he treats with very little deference. Complicating matters, Denise has recently become impregnated by Michael and attempts to corner him into making a commitment to her, or at least support her in whatever decision she makes regarding her pregnancy.

While this slap in the face from reality does have some effect on Michael -- if none other than to force him to understand he doesn't live in a vacuum -- it is only after Michael literally runs into the car driven by the young art
dealer, Athena, with his BMW that he begins to understand and accept the implications of his antideluvian conduct, for it is with Athena that the inamorata which Michael has been so desperately seeking out looks as though it might be realized.

The ensuing difficulties derive from Athena's already being involved in a relationship with a misogynistic sculptor (and heroin addict) named Rex, coupled with Michael's own antagonistic relationship with Denise. These conflicts make up the thrust of the script's narrative backbone, and intersect with one another towards the end of the screenplay in order to facilitate the screenplay's denouement, if, again, the traditional movie story expectations can be applied to this script.

Michael's very un-PC and habitual sexist tendencies create the core dilemma for our protagonist, and come across the strongest in his relationship to Denise, who represents a well-intended medusa whose tentacles will never be able to reach around the ever-elusive Michael. These tendencies represent not only a proclamation of Michael's apparent belligerence towards women, but also serve as the manifestation of his character lack which motivates the changes he goes through during the course of the script -- changes which are a long time coming and which fail to occur without a longstanding, culturally-bound resistance.

If Michael, then, is seen as the virile Everyman, Athena can hence be regarded as this fictional world's Everywoman, whose own culturally-determined role is as volatile as that of Michael's. Athena becomes the auspicious savior, of both Michael and of herself, if only because of her own gender role transcendence.
She, too, wants to be involved in a relationship that is meaningful and agreeable, but unfortunately for her, this has not been the case in her union with Rex, who has not even begun to come to terms with the changing farce of gender relations. When Athena attempts to strike away from Rex and distort her somewhat conventional expectations of relationships by avidly pursuing Michael, aggressively pursuing and eventually bedding him much to his initial objections, she has a few revelations of her own, both in regards to her tumultuous relationship with Rex and her perception of men.

Because of his reluctance to change, Rex could be considered to be the most complicated of all the characters, for he has failed to recognize or even acknowledge that a change in gender relations has been taking place. He seems to see all women through a set of cultural blinders that forbids understanding or sensitivity to those issues and agendas which women strove for over the course of the past century, and which came to the fore in the late 1960s and early 1970s. But his obliviousness derives not so much from an unwillingness to change as it does from a deficiency in even conceding that there might be a reason for such change.

Though Michael lives in a constant inner struggle with the sexual role he has entertained for the entirety of his adulthood, Rex continues to live with a feministically insensitive guise about him, and any compassion he has in this regard stems solely from his reprobated treatment of Athena, which he comes to understand later in the story is abusive and plain wrong.
To further the complexity, Athena's recognition that all is not well in her relationship derives from her own ignored admonitions to Rex to change his behavior and lifestyle. Realizing that the change must occur because Rex wants it to occur, and not because she is pushing him to do so, Athena comes to understand that the problem lies not within her, but within Rex himself, and that for any change for the better to occur in her life, she must first escape the co-dependent behavior she has allowed herself to tolerate in their relationship, or at the very least, try and get Rex to begin to become more sensitive to some of these issues. Her chance rendezvous with Michael serves as the launching point for this change, and vice versa.

Unfortunately for all the characters, none can so easily escape their socially-prescribed roles, try though some of them may, for they all seem to be caught in a quagmire of failed expectations and outdated conceptions of what romantic love should be, or how the opposite sex should behave towards them. Because of this, the culmination of the story ends on something of an acerbic note.

It becomes apparent to both Michael and Athena by the end of the story that they cannot simply walk away from their current romantic engagements and into one another's arms only to live happily ever after. This would be both unreasonable and unlikely -- in Athena's case, because of her still deep-seated love for Rex, and in Michael's, his recognition that for him to truly change his ways, he must first change both his attitude and actions.
If *Turnabout* fails in any way, it does so in its negligence in adhering to the traditional Hollywood screenplay structure. Although I would argue that it does follow some of the more conventional frameworks of Hollywood storytelling, it concurrently refuses to be bound by them. Many of the scenes go on longer than is usually expected, and the almost absent plot line is undercut by the importance placed on the relationships and conversations between the characters. This is by design.

The initial drafts of this script, which attempted to strictly adhere to traditional Hollywood narrative, seemed contrived and unconvincing. The characters were shallow, and their actions concocted. Depending on the vantage point of the reader, this may still be so, and in any case, cannot be left up to the writer to decide. However, I believe this final draft to be a faithful depiction of the story I set out to tell.

That is, it hopefully provides a brief, telling, and potentially disturbing tale of the battle between the sexes in the early 1990s. Rather than offering a sugar-coated, quixotic view of this battle, it crawls under the skin of its audience in its attempt to decipher the motivations and inadequacies of its four primary characters as they try to make their way through an evolving, and frequently confusing, culture of romance -- or lack thereof.