

The Inner Circle

a play in two acts

by

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Cast

Simon Brent, a highly successful artist, in his 50s.

Deborah, late thirties, artist, Simon's assistant.

Kay, a volatile young woman, in her early twenties, who poses for Simon.

Marcia, a woman in her forties who used to pose for Simon, a drug addict.

William, a middle aged wealthy art dealer.

Notes

A / indicates cue for following lines in overlapping dialogue.

A } indicates lines begin simultaneously.

Act One

Set: A cluttered and messy studio. A number of canvases are stacked against the walls, mostly with their backs to the audience. Pots and tubes of paint are strewn about on a large table. A bureau. A mirror. Chairs and a couch. An old stone sink. A coffee machine. Old newspapers and empty bottles are scattered about on the floor.

Afternoon. Enter Kay. She wanders around the studio picking up this and that in a desultory but slightly illicit way. Sighs. Starts to undress. Notices her reflection in a mirror and starts posing in front of it, admiring herself. Enter Simon.

Simon Oh, all ready.

Kay [Startled.] Yeah, s'pose so.

Simon You're quick.

Kay No point in hanging about, is there.

Simon No. Quite right.

Kay What's it to be today then?

Simon Well, if you'd just sit over there, [Kay moves to the chair and sits] I thought we'd try another seated pose.

Kay Same as before?

Simon Yes, why not. [Simon sorts out his painting equipment and starts working during the following dialogue.] I must say you've taken to modelling very quickly.

Kay Nothing to it is there.

Simon Oh, I don't know.

Kay Piece a piss.

Simon You're a natural. As soon as I saw you I knew you'd be a good model.

Kay Really?

Simon Yes.

Kay How can you tell?

Simon I just can. It's a look. A certain look. The way you hold yourself – you've got it.

Kay Wow. [Silence while Simon works.] I wouldn't do it for just anyone though.

Simon No?

Kay I'm choosey.

Simon Very wise.

Kay You're good.

Simon Thanks.

Kay Yeah, I can tell you're good. I love that one you did of me sittin' in the chair.

Simon Yes, that one went very well.

Kay I could tell.

Simon Really?

Kay Yeah, I could tell it was going well by your expression.

Simon [Laughs.] It's funny, I'm so busy looking at other people it never occurs to me I'm being observed myself.

Kay It's interesting, watchin' you.

Simon You inspire me; perhaps it shows.

Kay Yeah, I really like that picture.

Simon I'm flattered.

Kay Can't stop looking at it, it kinda changes as you look at it.

Simon Really.

Kay Yeah. I'd love to have that picture.

Simon I can think of no more fitting person to have it.

Kay You're joking.

Simon No, really.

Kay Really!

Simon Yes.

Kay Wow.

Simon It's a pleasure.

Kay [Silence while Simon works.] How's your back?

Simon It's all right.

Kay Sorry I got a bit carried away.

Simon Don't worry about it.

Kay Got a bit too excited.

Simon Me too.

Kay Thought I'd really 'urt you for a bit there.

Simon You don't know your own strength.

Kay You don't have to be strong. It's all in the technique.

Simon It certainly is. Just remember, 'red' means stop.

Kay Yeah, stop, like the traffic lights.

Simon Exactly.

Kay Always tempted to jump the lights, me. Foot down, beat that fuckin' light!
Challenge init. Know what I mean?

Simon Sit still! [Pause while working.] Yes, well, that way one has accidents.

Kay Not me. I'm sharp see, quick.

Simon Yes, well just try and remember the highway code in the bedroom even if
you ignore it on the road. [Silence, working.] How are things down the
pub?

Kay It's all right; gets a bit boring, y'know, same old fucking jokes eh.

Simon Yes, why don't you give it up?

Kay Can't do that, me Uncle, he's depending on me.

Simon He's not the only one. [Pause.] Why do you live with your uncle?

Kay I don't get on with me parents. Me dad . . . we just didn't get on. . .

Simon But what -

Kay We just didn't get on.

Simon It must be difficult for you.

Kay Na it ain't nothing. I like it at me uncle's pub. I prefer it.

Simon Good.

Kay Better off without 'em aren't ya.

Simon What?

Kay Parents. Better off without the fuckers.

Simon If you say so. Hold it. Try and stay still. That's it.

Debbie [Enter Debbie, carrying groceries.] It's murder out there. [Walking across Simon's line of vision and pausing.] Very busy.

Simon I'm working, Debbie. Get out of the way.

Debbie That's a nice welcome back.

Simon I'm in the middle of a tricky bit; I'm trying to concentrate!

Debbie I thought you were too ill to work.

Simon I'm feeling better so I asked Kay to pose.

Debbie The doctor said you were supposed to rest.

Simon I've had enough rest, it's boring. Besides, painting Kay makes me feel better.

Debbie [Looking Kay up and down.] Yes, I suppose it does.

Simon Debbie, either get out the way or clear off, I'm trying to work.

Debbie Don't mind me, I'm not here, not here at all. [Moves to one side, rummages through the shopping bags, gets out a can of beer and cracks it open. Watches Simon watching Kay.] I couldn't get any basil.

Simon What?

Debbie Basil. I couldn't get any.

Simon So what.

Debbie So what! You can't make a decent pasta sauce without basil. Basil is a key ingredient in our staple diet.

Simon Then cook something else.

Debbie That's easier said than done. [Pause.] I looked everywhere. Every. Fucking. Where. What's the world coming to when you can't get a bit of basil?

Simon Shut up! Stop burbling, you're putting me off.

Debbie I never put you off before.

Simon Well you do now.

Debbie I never put you off.

Simon Look. Get out of the studio, you're in the way. I can't concentrate with you around.

Debbie Going. I'm going. [Starts to leave.] I can take a hint.

Simon You've been drinking.

Debbie So? It's thirsty work, searching for basil. [Kay smirking.] It occurred to me we should grow our own. [Suddenly to Kay.] What are you smirking about?

Kay You talkin' to me?

Debbie Well I'm not addressing the furniture.

Simon Look. I'm trying to get some bloody work done here.

Debbie Your model seems to find something funny.

Kay [Sniggers.]

Debbie What is it then? Someone tell a joke?

Simon [Kay continues to snigger.] If you didn't act like a clown people wouldn't laugh. Go and do something useful, put the shopping away, we're busy

here.

Debbie [Exits muttering.] We're busy here. Do something useful. Drop dead.

Kay Is she always like that?

Simon No.

Kay Why d'you put up with 'er.

Simon We've been together a long time. You wouldn't understand; you're too young.

Kay She's just sponging off you.

Simon [Talks while painting.] Don't underestimate Deborah; she's very useful. And loyal. That's the thing about Debbie, she has loyalty stamped all the way through, like a stick of rock. [Pause.] I admit, sometimes I wish she'd go. But you never know. I might miss her. [Stops painting. Steps back and squints at the picture, tilting his head.]

Kay Can I see what you've done?

Simon It isn't very good - yet.

Kay Let's have a look?

Simon Oh all right. [Kay puts on wrap and moves across to easel.] Don't expect too much, it's just the foundations so to speak.

Kay [Looking at easel.] I like seeing 'em before they're finished.

Simon Really?

Kay Yeah, I get to see something other people don't. Something secret. Anyone can see the finished ones, can't they.

Simon I suppose that's true.

Debbie [Enter Debbie.] We'll have to have cold chicken. Is she eating?

Simon Are you staying?

Kay Don't know.

Simon Stay. It'll be fun.

Kay Okay. [Debbie starts laying out the table.] What are you going to do with the pictures of me?

Simon William will organise a show at the Matrix Gallery and everyone will come and gaze adoringly at you.

Kay And buy me.

Simon Yes, buy you. Bet you never thought it was that easy to buy people? Eh? But perhaps you did.

Kay They're only buying a picture.

Simon [Laughs.] Yes, only a picture. Makes you wonder why you bother, doesn't it. [Pause.] I met Debbie at a show, didn't I, Debbie.

Debbie What?

Simon I was saying, I met you at your show.

Debbie Yes.

Simon Those were the days. We were all trendy in those days, even Debbie, weren't you, Debbie.

Debbie If you say so.

Kay So you're a painter too?

Debbie } No.

Simon } Yes.

Simon [Laughs.] Of course she is. She just likes to take her time, don't you Debbie.

Debbie I haven't painted anything for years.

Simon Some pictures take a long time to gestate. It's not easy, keeping going, is it?

Debbie No.

Kay What did you paint?

Debbie Nothing.

Kay Must've painted something.

Debbie It doesn't matter. You don't have to pretend to be interested.

Simon But she's curious, aren't you Kay. Show her. We must have something of yours hanging around somewhere.

Debbie No.

Simon There must be something. Go and find it. Kay wants to see, don't you.

Kay Yeah.

Simon You should be flattered, it's been a while since anyone asked to see one of your pictures. [Pause. Debbie doesn't move.] Go on. [Pause.] Show her for me. We won't tease, honest. Do it for me. There always used to be one over there. [Debbie gets up reluctantly and rummages among the stacked canvases.] We must have some of your old reviews somewhere. I remember they were very good. What was it they said? A startling new talent. Buy now or regret it later when you can no longer afford her. Something like that. Rather clever, I thought, good sales pitch. [Debbie retrieves a small canvas and props it up.] Of course it's all about selling. Ah, here it is. [They look at the picture; an embarrassed silence.] It's not quite how I remember it. Is this one of the later ones?

Debbie Yes.

Simon The larger ones were always better, weren't they Debbie.

Debbie They were all the same.

Simon Surely not.

Debbie All the same. [Walking out of the studio.] We need something to drink.

Simon Well, Kay, what do you think?

Kay I prefer yours.

Simon [Mock confidential tone.] So does everyone else. Mind you, when I first saw Debbie's pictures I was very impressed. That's when we started

working together. I thought it would be interesting; I had this notion of symbiosis.

Kay Simboywhat?

Simon Never mind. I thought if we worked together we would both benefit; feed off one another's creativity.

Kay Did it work?

Simon Well, I thought it would. [Coughs.] But for some reason Debbie started to dry up. The more she dried up the [Coughing.] more she drank. [Debbie comes back with a partially consumed bottle of wine.] Debbie prefers drinking to painting these days, don't you Debbie.

Debbie It's more reliable.

Simon There must be easier ways of killing yourself than drinking yourself to death.

Debbie I'm sure you're right, but they wouldn't be anywhere near as much fun.

Simon Personally [increasingly short of breath] I get depressed if I go a day without painting.

Kay [Pointing at Debbie's picture.] What's that bit supposed to be?

Simon Yes, I always wondered about that –

Debbie [Bangs the table.] It's no good, okay! Why rub it in? We all know.

Simon I always preferred your early work.

Debbie Everybody says that.

Simon I didn't mean to –

Debbie [Snatches up a stanley knife from the workbench and gesticulates with it in a threatening manner, pointing the knife at Simon's face. Simon gasps and starts coughing.] It's all just fucking paint! Why should it matter? [Waving knife around recklessly. Simon gasping as asthma attack comes on.] It doesn't matter. Who wants it anyway? Nobody! [Debbie slashes the

picture with the knife.] See! [Slash.] It's nothing! [Slash.] / Nothing!

[Slash.] Nothing!

Kay } Cool!

Simon } [Gasping.] Don't Debbie . . . Didn't . . . Mean . . . Anything -

Debbie No? [Slash.] You sure? [Slash.] There! Improved now, don't you think?

Simon Debbie. [Simon's asthma attack gets bad.]

Debbie Lucio fucking Fontana / eat your heart out.

Kay What's the matter, Simon?

Simon In / haler -

Kay What!

Debbie Oh, fuck.

Simon In -

Kay [Panicking.] What!

Debbie Oh, fuck! [Debbie rushes to the bureau and fetches an inhaler. Simon uses it.] I'm sorry . . . sorry Simon . . . didn't mean . . . didn't mean to -

Simon All [gasp.] right. I'll . . . Be . . . / all right

Debbie } So sorry.

Kay } Scary.

Simon in a . . . minute.

Debbie Didn't mean -

Kay Had me worried / there Simon.

Simon Don't worry . . . everything's / all right.

Debbie It's all fucked up. [Gets herself another drink while Kay holds Simon who gradually recovers from the attack.] Look at the touching couple. So touching. Sometimes I think he just does it to get out of things -

Kay How can you say that! You saw -

Simon Kay, leave it . . . it's just . . . one of . . . Debbie's little jokes.

Kay How ya feeling now, Simon?

Simon I'm . . . all right . . . it looks . . . worse than it is. This damned . . . asthma has been a . . . burden . . . all my life.

Debbie Come on, Simon, let's get you to bed. [Debbie and Kay help Simon up.]

Simon You'd think I'd be . . . used to it . . . by now . . . but, unfortunately, one is . . . quite inordinately . . . fond . . . of breathing.

Debbie [Debbie helps Simon off stage.] Come on Simon.

Kay You should take it easy.

Simon [Exiting.] Never take it easy.

Kay [Kay dresses quickly and starts poking around the studio, looking among the stacked up canvases. Debbie returns and pours herself another drink.]
Does he have those attacks often?

Debbie Sometimes he does, sometimes he doesn't, it's hard to predict.

Kay Scary.

Debbie More scary for him.

Kay Yeah, s'pose so. It makes ya feel so . . . helpless.

Debbie What are you doing?

Kay I'm looking for something.

Debbie I can see that. What?

Kay A picture he did of me.

Debbie Shouldn't be hard to find.

Kay Yeah, but there's one I sort of got attached to, like.

Debbie Well you can keep your thieving hands off it.

Kay Whatd'ya mean?

Debbie You heard.

Kay It's mine anyway.

Debbie Oh yeah.

Kay Yeah. he said he'd give it to me.

Debbie I bet he did.

Kay It's of me init!

Debbie It might be of you. It might elevate your sorry flesh into a fucking masterpiece but it still doesn't belong to you.

Kay He said I could have it, as a reward, for posing for him.

Debbie Pull the other one.

Kay No really, he did. He said that. He said I posed better'n anyone else.

Debbie Really.

Kay Yeah. I'm in demand. [Proudly.] Lucien Freud asked me to pose for him. But I didn't fancy it.

Debbie I'm sure you are held in high esteem, but do you realise how much these are worth?

Kay [Clearly doesn't.] Yeah, 'course I do.

Debbie And how much does an artist's model get paid for posing starkers? Your fee would seem to be radically out of line with the going rate for the job.

Kay [Kay still looking among the pictures.] It must be here somewhere. Anyway, I'm not *just* his model.

Debbie Oh aren't you. [Pause.] What else are you?

Kay We're friends.

Debbie Friends?

Kay Yes, friends.

Debbie Well there are friends and friends, what kind of "friend" are you?

Kay You know.

Debbie No I don't know. I don't bloody know. I'd like you to enlighten me. I don't have any imagination, you see. I don't have any left, I used it up years ago.

Kay You *know*.

Debbie You fucked him.

Kay Crude aren't ya.

Debbie You fucked him and he paid you.

Kay Nobody mentioned money. It was just a bit a fun.

Debbie Bloody expensive fuck.

Kay Shut up.

Debbie Must have been a bloody amazing fuck at that price. Must've been the fuck of a lifetime. Do any *special* tricks did you; any unusual services.

Kay Shut up.

Debbie Did he get you to tie him up? Piss on him? Whip him? He likes that. Or did he do it to you?

Kay You're warped, you are. You're fucking crazy.

Debbie It has been said before. That is true. It's all the booze, you see. It rots the brain. So what *did* you do?

Kay I told you.

Debbie [Imitating romantic talk.] Ah yes. I can see it now: the moonlight, the hot sultry atmosphere. Candlelight in a secluded room. You dance. You laugh. [Does false laugh.] In the heat of the moment it is all too much.

Kay You're gettin' on my nerves.

Debbie I could say the same about you. By rights I should throw you out. Going through his things like that. You have no right to go through his things.

Kay [Suddenly turns to Debbie and shouts in her face.] Shut up!

Debbie Sssssh! You'll disturb him.

Kay Then stop botherin' me.

Debbie [Sits in chair, drinking and observing Kay.] Okay, anything you say.
[Pause.] What's it look like then?

Kay It's about so big. I'm sitting on a chair. [Pointing.] That chair! And I'm

staring straight out at the viewer. I look . . . moody.

Debbie I know it!

Kay You do!

Debbie Yes. I know the very one. Oh, it's very good. Very good. You have a good eye, if I may say so. Yes, one of his best. Not as good as his early stuff, of course, but what is these days, by him or anyone else.

Kay Great. Where is it then?

Debbie He sold it.

Kay Sold it!

Debbie 'Fraid so.

Kay When?

Debbie Last week.

Kay I don't believe you.

Debbie I've got the receipt somewhere. [She searches in a cluttered bureau drawer.]

Kay I don't believe this!

Debbie He's a crafty bastard. You should know that. Oh yes, here it is. [Proffering the receipt to Kay.] Look at all the noughts; enough to make your knickers wet, isn't it.

Kay But he promised it to me.

Debbie I'm afraid Simon's promises aren't worth the . . . air he expends in uttering them. You've been raped. [Laughs.] Join the rest of us, deary. We've all been screwed by Simon, in more ways than the obvious.

Kay I'll kill the lying bastard!

Debbie Now, now. Let's not be hasty. With his health he's not going to last much longer. Why do yourself what dear old mother nature will do for you.

Kay You're a cynical cow.

Debbie Just being practical. Which is more than I can say for you. The number of times I've heard him come up with that old line: Oh I so enjoy painting you, you must let me give you a little something when we've finished; and it is a little something too, isn't it. [Laughs.]

Kay Think you're funny, don't you.

Debbie I do my best. I'll let you in on a secret. They're all sold before he's finished them.

Kay Never!

Debbie They are. All of them. [Gestures at the pictures.] There's a waiting list. People are waiting, on the list, for *permission* to buy one of his pictures.

Kay At his prices!

Debbie That's success for you. All the millionaires, the foreign museums with money, they're all in line.

Kay I didn't know.

Debbie Well now you do.

Kay I wasn't lying. Earlier. What I said, I wasn't lying. I want you to know that. He did say. . . he did tell me. . . he told me I could have it.

Debbie Simon says a lot of things. He likes to strike a pose. He wants to impress . . . everybody. [Pause.] Even you. I'm sure Simon will find another way of paying you.

Kay I wasn't being paid!

Debbie No, of course you weren't. [Kay sits on the floor with her back to the wall and lights a cigarette.]

Kay He wanted me to have it.

Debbie Yes, I'm sure he did.

Kay What the fuck are you doing here anyway?

Debbie Well, if we're honest what are we all doing? Waiting for payment.

Collecting our dues. Except there is one big difference between you and me.

Kay Oh yeah?

Debbie Yeah. Unlike you, I'm going to *get* paid. Of course the situation is rather different, I don't go around peddling my arse. I hope you used a condom, Simon's dick must have seen more exotic places than most travel writers.

Kay [Kay leaps up and grabs Debbie. She holds the cigarette to her face.]
Want'a play, do we? Want'a 'ave a laugh? Ha, ha. A bit a fun. A bit a fun, eh. / a bit of fun usin' your face as an ashtray.

Debbie No . . . no . . . Stop . . . Look . . . Look, I was only joking. I . . . I know how you feel. I feel the same way.

Kay Slag You're a slag. What are you? [Pause.] What are you?

Debbie A slag.

Kay That's right. A worthless piece of shit. [Pause.] Say it!

Debbie A worthless piece of shit.

Kay Yeah. That's right, darlin'. Just you remember. [Slaps Debbie's face playfully, Debbie flinches, scared. Kay gets up and starts looking through things again. Initially Debbie remains on the floor.] If you ask me you're past your sell-by-date Debs.

Debbie You want to watch that temper.

Kay Don't tell me . . . don't you tell me . . . yeah well, look, sorry, okay? Look, I was only mucking about. I wouldn't do nothin' really. But you shouldn't needle people if you can't handled the fallout. Why d'you hang around here? Nowhere better to go?

Debbie I have to keep an eye on things. You never know what might go missing.

Kay Not very trusting, are you.

Debbie Everyone wants a piece of Simon, but I'm the only one who really

understands him. He depends on me.

Kay Okay, impress me, what d'you do that's so important.

Debbie I am Simon's general factotum.

Kay He's fuckedwhat?

Debbie *Factotum*. I am, so to speak, his right hand.

Kay Oh yeah. Toss him off, do you?

Debbie He can't work without me. I assist him. I *have* assisted him for [pause, totting up] oh God, longer than I care to remember.

Kay Clean up after him, do you. Wash the brushes, do the dishes, little housewife; is that what you are?

Debbie It isn't that simple. I create the environment that enables him to . . . work.

Kay Oh yeah, I can see how important you are.

Debbie I'm not a housewife I'm an artist.

Kay If you're such a fucking genius why aren't you famous too?

Debbie I was too busy.

Kay [Mocking.] Helping Simon.

Debbie Yes, helping Simon. You wouldn't understand.

Kay Try me.

Debbie He came to my private view. He told me I had a great future.

Kay Oh yeah.

Debbie He was so charming. We talked all night. It was so exciting.

Kay You takin' the piss?

Debbie He recognised . . . he could see . . . he knew we had a shared vision. Other people couldn't see it, but we could, it was us against the others. For a moment there, it was as if . . . oh, I don't know. It felt right, it just felt right to work together.

Kay So?

Debbie He invited me over to his studio. He asked *my* opinion of *his* work. He wanted me to become his assistant, help him with his next series of paintings. He said, by working together we would feed off one another, that was his phrase, 'Feed off one another'.

Kay So how come it didn't work?

Debbie But it did work. It worked splendidly. Simon got on better and better. It was I who stopped painting.

Kay Couldn't keep up eh?

Debbie It isn't easy, with Simon around. I was so busy helping him, without noticing I became absorbed in his work; then one day it dawned on me, I hadn't completed a single painting for over a year. I looked at my work and it looked like someone else's. I'd stare at an unfinished canvas and I just wouldn't know how to go on. Then I'd look at one of his and I'd know; I'd know where it was going, I could see the potential.

Kay You must've been going fucking crazy; you should'a got out.

Debbie By the time I'd noticed . . . it was too late. And anyway, I didn't need to sell my pictures, one of Simon's would fetch the same as a whole show of mine. We didn't lack money. Simon was always very generous with money, and other things. [Kay goes over to Debbie, who flinches, but Kay gives Debbie a hug.]

Kay You poor thing. You really got sucked into it, didn'tcha.

Debbie You never know until it's too late. He's like a vampire sucking the life out of everybody he meets, sucking it out and putting it on his canvases.

Kay I wouldn't let 'im do that to me.

Debbie What makes you think he hasn't already?

Kay Don't worry about me, I can look after meself! If it's so bad why d'ya stick it?

Debbie There isn't anything else to do.

Kay You sad cow.

Debbie He needs me. That's the difference between you and me, he needs me.

Kay [Kay moves over to the stacks of canvases and rummages about.] Yeah, bet 'e does. You make me sick. I feel sorry for you, don't get me wrong. But you make me sick. You haven't got the backbone you were born wiv. [She picks out a small painting.] Oh well, not exactly what I wanted, but it'll 'ave t'do.

Debbie You can't take that.

Kay Just watch me.

Debbie It's stealing. The matter will have to be reported to the police.

Kay [Walking out of the studio.] Loyal servant to the last, aren't you.

Debbie [Debbie attempts to restrain her.] Give it back.

Kay [Kay lashes out and knocks Debbie to the floor.] Loser! [Exit Kay.]

Debbie [Gets up from the floor, groaning, slowly moves to the far end of the studio. Then yelling after Kay.] Bitch! You bloody bitch! Loser. I'll give you loser you thieving little tramp. [Slumps into chair and has a drink.]

Marcia [Sound of footsteps on the stairs to the studio. Enter Marcia.] Was that you yelling just now. [Debbie looks up at Marcia but does not reply.] The street door was wide open. Anybody could walk up.

Debbie One of Simon's 'models' just left in a hurry.

Marcia You look a bit shook up. Are you all right?

Debbie I will be. In a minute.

Marcia Here. Have one of these. [Proffering tablets.] Make you feel great in no time.

Debbie Always got a solution, haven't you Marcia. What is it?

Marcia Ativan

Debbie What?

Marcia It isn't poison, just take the bloody thing, it'll relax you. [Debbie takes a tablet and they both swallow.]

Debbie What do you want?

Marcia I came to see Simon. Where is he?

Debbie He's upstairs resting. He just had another attack.

Marcia Well he can't be getting much rest with the noise you were making. I'd better go and see how he is.

Debbie Don't bother. I'll tell him you called.

Marcia I think I'd better see him.

Debbie What do you want?

Marcia I just want to talk to Simon. Don't get all suspicious. As an old friend, I have every right, I have a duty, to come over and see how he is.

Debbie You want something.

Marcia I'm just concerned about him. I want to see how he's getting on.

Debbie You're just like the other one.

Marcia What other one?

Debbie Kay.

Marcia I don't know what you're talking about.

Debbie After some money, need a fix do we? What's the matter, custom slow tonight, can't quite make the price?

Marcia You can be so nasty at times. I don't know why Simon puts up with you.

Debbie I'm right though, aren't I. I can tell. You want money off him. He could be taking his last gasp and you'd be too busy riffling through his wallet to notice.

Marcia Oh shut up! He owes me / money.

Debbie Oh *please*.

Marcia He does. He owes me money. I can't help it if he's ill. I need the money and he owes it / to me.

Debbie What does he owe you the money for?

Marcia Posing.

Debbie Posing!

Marcia Yes, posing.

Debbie Since when has he used you in one of his pictures? The last time you posed must have been years ago. You must be bloody slow in collecting / your fees.

Marcia Don't be sarcastic, it makes you an even bigger pain than usual. Anyway, you don't know everything that goes on. He's going to do a new series of me.

Debbie Oh, I bet the collectors can hardly wait. They must be crawling over one another to get to the head of the queue.

Marcia I'll just go up and / see him.

Debbie He's sleeping.

Marcia How do you know? The way you were shouting your head off I defy anyone to sleep. I'll just go up and check.

Debbie [Standing in her way.] You can't disturb him. He's very ill. You don't seem to understand. He had a very bad night last night. He'll never get his strength back if people keep disturbing him.

Marcia People! I'm not 'people'. Huh! He was painting me when you were still in art school. It was great in those days. We were known in all the pubs and clubs, the old gang; me, Simon and Maxine; and that composer, the guy whose music never gets played any more, what was his name? We knew how to enjoy ourselves.

Debbie It's different now.

Marcia Oh, I don't know. It's funny, this place. Coming back to the studio. It gives me a funny feeling. When you're in here it's as if time's stood still.

Debbie It's a dump.

Marcia Oh yes, it's a dump all right. It always was. Nothing's changed much. Except us. We're the one's who've changed. Not the studio, not Simon, just us. I don't know why I keep coming back here. It makes me sad.

Debbie. You were just saying how good it was.

Marcia. I suppose it seemed so at the time. I was full of ideas in those days, I was buzzing, I was going to be a writer. I just did the modelling on the side to tide me over. That's how I met Simon. It was different posing for him. He was more fun than the others.

Debbie Simon always likes to mix business and pleasure.

Marcia. But he's very intense. Sometimes, when he's working, it gets a bit scary. As I posed I could feel myself getting sucked into his world, almost like I'd become a bit of pigment he was pushing around the canvas. When he paints you you really feel part of it, d'you know what I mean?

Debbie No. I can't say I do.

Marcia He might be an old git but he can really paint.

Debbie He's going to have another retrospective, in New York this time.

Marcia He must be pleased.

Debbie Yes, yes, of course he is, but he hates to show it. There'll be a room devoted to the famous 'woman on a bed' series you posed for. It'll be one of the highlights. The curator is immensely pleased with himself at gathering together the whole series. He must have done a lot of pleading, or blackmailing, to get all the owners to lend their works.

Marcia So there'll be a room full of me.

Debbie So to speak.

Marcia How ghastly.

Debbie Not ghastly, beautiful. Stunning.

Marcia Yeah, “stunning’s” the word. It’s funny but when he painted those pictures of me, lying on the bed, with the hypodermic in my arm, I didn’t look a bit like that then. But I do now. I do now. I’ve come to resemble his paintings of me. Don’t you find that uncanny?

Debbie Marcia -

Marcia Because I do. I think it’s bloody strange. It’s almost like I’m not me anymore. I’m not Marcia, the writer, I’m just ‘Woman on a Bed’.

Debbie You mustn’t talk like that.

Marcia It’s the truth. I’ve become what he made me. But the funny thing is, the pictures of me, the paintings, they’re worth a fortune; but me, I’m worth nothing.

Debbie Don’t Marcia -

Marcia Now when I try and write my mind’s a blank. I can barely write my name these days. People see me coming and duck out of the way. They think I don’t know; but I’m not that far gone. I’m bad news. I remind them of what’s going to happen to them, if they’re not careful.

Debbie Don’t talk like that, Marcia.

Marcia It hasn’t always been like that. I was going to be a fucking brilliant writer. I was going to be famous for my witty satires of bohemian life. I even had a fucking agent. But I did my research so well I became my subject. Rather than write it I just lived it. While we were working on that series of paintings, the ones of me on the bed, Simon suggested we experiment with heroin, see what it was like, as a kind of ‘research’. So we did; and he was very pleased, it gave the paintings an extra authenticity, he said. And it did. Talk about heroin chic! He invented it before they had a name for it. But

when we'd finished working, when it was all over, and they were hanging on the walls of his gallery, he stopped and I carried on. He stopped! Just like that. The fucker just stopped! How did he do that! He was taking it the same as me then he went on and did something else, but I was stuck, stuck in those fucking pictures, [Enter Simon.] I couldn't get out, and I've been stuck in them ever since.

Simon Ah, Marcia, how nice to see you.

Marcia [Startled.] Simon! Hi. I was just telling Debbie about the old days.

Simon Ah, the old days. Yes. Yes. [To Debbie.] Really, Debbie, you're not being a very good host. Offer Marcia a drink.

Debbie There isn't any left.

Simon Well go and get some. [Debbie exits to kitchen.]

Marcia I hear you're off to New York.

Simon I don't know. It depends if I'm well enough.

Marcia I'm glad I caught you.

Simon Hmm.

Marcia Before you go . . . go to New York.

Simon Yes?

Marcia I was wondering. I was wondering if you could advance me some money.

Simon Money? Advance?

Marcia On the sittings, the new paintings you're going to do.

Simon [Dismissively.] Oh that. Well, I'm not sure I'm going to do them any more. I have a new model. I'm finding working with her quite absorbing. I'm not sure if I've got the energy for any more pictures at the moment.

Marcia Oh, only . . . I was sort of counting on it.

Simon Pity, but you know how it is.

Marcia Yes, yeah, course.

Simon Can't do everything.

Marcia No. Course not. Only . . . I don't know what I'm going to do now.

Simon How much do you need?

Marcia Well, you know, a, a few hundred.

Simon [Sharp intake of breath.]

Marcia Tide me over.

Simon Well, Marcia, I'm not a bottomless pit. You never paid back the last loan did you?

Marcia But –

Simon I haven't got as much money as people think. The amount of tax I pay it's a wonder I've got any at all.

Marcia It'd be a big help.

Simon What are we going to do, Marcia?

Marcia Your paintings must be selling well.

Simon I leave all that to William

Marcia Retrospective in New York – big stuff.

Simon It's nice to be appreciated, at last.

Marcia Debbie said they're exhibiting all the woman on a bed pictures.

Simon Hmm.

Marcia How much money did you make out of those paintings, Simon?

Simon Not as much as you'd think.

Marcia Plenty.

Simon Yes, well, I did paint them.

Marcia But I'm in them!

Simon Yes and you were paid at the time.

Marcia Not much.

Simon The going rate. You were paid the going rate.

Marcia Please Simon, I don't know what to do. If I can't make my connection –

Simon Where's it going to end, Marcia?

Marcia Come on, Simon. You owe me -

Simon Me? Owe you?

Marcia You know what I mean, maybe not money but you still owe me.

Simon Oh well, Marcia, we all have dreams don't we. But I'm too tired to argue.
[Sighs, gets money out of a bureau drawer and hands it to Marcia.] You can have your money, this time.

Marcia Thanks Simon.

Simon Oh Marcia. You know this can't go on forever.

Marcia Course not.

Simon Just remember – no more.

Marcia Sure Simon. [Enter Debbie with another bottle.]

Simon Were you watching my lips? No more.

Marcia I know, I just have to . . . I'll be back in a minute. [Exit Marcia.]

Simon Oh let's drink to that. [Debbie pours drinks. To Debbie.] Where's Kay?

Debbie She left in a hurry.

Simon Oh bugger, William'll be here soon and I wanted her to meet him. I hope you didn't upset her?

Debbie Me! Upset her! I'll tell you what your precious Kay just did, she only walked off with one of the paintings.

Simon What on earth would she want with a painting?

Debbie She said you promised to give her a picture.

Simon Oh did she.

Debbie Yes. The one of her naked, sitting in a chair; looks like she's about to be electrocuted.

Simon You have such a charming imagination, Debbie.

Debbie If you're going to promise her a picture you could at least make sure it's not one of the best.

Simon Yes. That one did go rather well. Still, she can't have it because it's not here, so no harm done.

Debbie Maybe not to you; but she got rough when she couldn't find it.

Simon Oh, poor Debbie, I hope she didn't scare you too much. She is such an impetuous girl [pause] she has a lot of anger, have you noticed that?

Debbie Ha, have I noticed it.

Simon I often wonder where all that anger comes from. She doesn't know where to draw the line. I thought the weals on my back would never go away.

Debbie You should be more careful. I would've thought it was rather dangerous to 'play' with someone who gets 'carried away'.

Simon Of course it is. But Debbie, there's no pleasure without danger. Haven't you realised that yet? No wonder you lead such a dull life. You should look for a little adventure, a little *risk*, it's what makes life exciting. Anyway, she's normally so gentle. You must have provoked her. She's a good girl at heart. She believes everything one tells her.

Debbie Yes, well she 'believed' she was entitled to a painting so she made off with one of the small heads.

Simon Who would've thought she was a collector.

Debbie You know William had a buyer lined up for that one. What are we going to tell him?

Simon Just tell him we had an accident.

Debbie An accident?

Simon Yes, a studio accident, destroyed, I'll do another.

Debbie Well you can tell him.

Simon Don't worry I can handle William. [Simon picks up phone and rings Kay.]

Kay! Yes. . . . Yes, much better. Come back Kay, I need you here

Debbie [Door bell rings. Debbie exits to answer door.]

Simon . . . of course you can. . . . There's someone I want you to meet . . . Don't worry about Debbie . . . of course she isn't. She's fine, she's always fine
[Debbie returns with William.]. . . . Yes, yes, good, see you later.

William Hello Simon.

Simon William.

William All set for New York?

Debbie He's just had another asthma attack.

William Oh dear.

Simon Don't fuss, I don't like fuss. What can I do for you, William?

William I thought we'd better finalise the arrangements for the New York retrospective, oh and the catalogues are back from the printers.

Debbie [To William.] Would you like a cup of coffee?

William Yes, thanks.

Simon I don't think I'll be able to go.

William Not go!

Simon I'm afraid not, William, I'm just not well enough.

William Oh dear, that could be very awkward.

Simon I hate these bloody retrospectives. All that old work, I'd rather forget about it. And I'm bound to get stuck with some boring ambassador who thinks a Bronzino is an Italian sports car.

Debbie [Debbie and William laugh.] Such are the burdens the mighty must bear.
[To William.] He'll be fit enough to go. It's just stage-fright.

William You needn't be nervous, Simon, we'll take care of you all the way. We can warn them you're not in the best of health and I'm sure they'd understand if you ducked out of a few of the receptions. But if you don't go at all I feel

sure, Simon, and I'm speaking as a friend here, not your dealer, you'll regret it.

Debbie You'll enjoy it once you get there.

William Of course you will. You'll be treated like royalty.

Simon Stop ganging up on me. I hate being ganged up on. I suppose you do have a point, I might be well enough to make the trip. But I don't want you to fix me up with all those functions full of stuffed shirts.

William Only the essentials. That's all we'll do. You'll enjoy it, I can guarantee it. No one's as hospitable as the Americans. They've really taken you to their bosom.

Simon How alarming.

William You'll like it. And I have good news. *Time* is going to put you on their cover to coincide with the retrospective; and the issue will contain a long feature on you called: 'Greatest Living Painter?'

Simon Mmm. Sounds too good to be true. Tell me, is there a question mark in that title?

William I think there is.

Simon What a pity. Can't you get them to drop it?

William I don't think we can dictate the title of their features. Still, it's great publicity. *And* the New Yorker is going to do one of its profiles on you.

Debbie Think of all that attention, you'll love it.

Simon I don't know.

Debbie [To William.] Simon loves being adored.

Simon You make me sound like a faded Hollywood actress.

Debbie Yes, but they can't paint. And here you are, about to be hailed as the greatest living painter - question mark. It'll be one long party. You'll enjoy it. [To William.] But you mustn't wear him out. Don't let him drink too much

and stay up all night or there'll be hell to pay when you get back.

William [Door bell rings, Debbie goes and answers it.] Don't worry. I'll make sure he doesn't over do it.

Simon You are both becoming sickeningly proprietorial. I can decide what I will and will not do. Stop treating me like a child. / And in any case, I can drink you under the table any day.

Marcia [Voice Off. To Kay.] Haven't I seen you down the Rose and Crown?

Kay [Voice Off.] Yeah, I work behind the bar.

Marcia [Voice Off.] Are you here to see Simon?

Kay [Voice Off.] Yeah, we're friends.

Marcia [Voice Off.] Oh.

William [Debbie returns with Marcia and Kay.] I think this retrospective is going to be even better than Paris. There's a lot of excitement building up. [To Marcia.] They're going to have the whole of the 'Woman on a bed' series.

Marcia Yes, Debbie told me.

Simon Kay! I'm glad you could make it back. We're going to celebrate my little New York outing.

Kay Cool.

Simon William, this is Kay - remember I told you about her - she is my new inspiration.

William Hello Kay.

Kay Hi.

Simon Debbie, let's get some more drinks. [Simon and Debbie exit to kitchen.]

Marcia I've got a work of art of my own.

William Really.

Marcia Yeah, want to look? [She shows William and Kay a stylised sun tattoo on her bicep.]

William Fascinating, Marcia, it's very artistic.

Marcia Got it done in the Holloway Road.

William Really.

Kay Good quality, that.

Marcia They're very good there.

William I can see.

Marcia You should get one; / it'd suit you.

Kay Yeah.

William Do you think so?

Marcia Get the right one.

Kay } It'd be cool.

William} I don't know.

Marcia What would suit him?

William I don't think Sabina would like it.

Marcia Surprise her.

William She doesn't like surprises.

Marcia Sounds boring.

William Not necessarily.

Kay Barbed wire.

William What?

Kay You could have some barbed wire, going round your bicep.

Marcia That'd be good.

William I don't think so.

Kay Cool. Very cool

Marcia Something more significant?

William What?

Marcia A thinking man like you - pro'ly want something a bit more meaningful.

William Yes.

Marcia How about a yin-yang symbol.

William I don't / think so.

Marcia Harmony of opposites - suit you.

William I'd have to think about it.

Kay Yeah, don't want to rush these things.

William} Exactly.

Debbie} [Debbie and Simon enter from the kitchen, remain apart from the other group.] I don't know why you want to celebrate.

Marcia I can get you a special / rate.

Simon I want to say farewell to my friends.

William Oh, er, thanks / Marcia.

Debbie You're only going away for a week.

Kay I've got a tattoo.

William} Really.

Simon } You have no sense of occasion.

Kay Want to see it?

Marcia } Yeah.

William} What is it?

Simon I don't know what's / become of you,

Kay It's a snake. [Kay starts undoing her trousers (the tattoo is on her bum).]

Simon in the past it would have been any excuse for a party.

William You don't have to show us.

Debbie It just seems unnecessary.

Kay No trouble.

Simon Well I am having a bloody retrospective in New York.

Marcia Is it big?

Simon It's hardly minor.

Kay The snake?

Simon In any / case

Marcia Yes.

Simon all pleasure is unnecessary,

Kay No, it's curled up.

Simon but the world would be a very dull / place without it.

Marcia It's very good.

Kay D'you like it?

Marcia [To William.] It's good, isn't it.

William Yes.

Simon I see Kay is entertaining the guests.

Marcia Where'd you get it done?

Debbie I don't know why you / always want her around.

Kay Kensington Market.

Simon The evening wouldn't be complete / without Kay.

Marcia Was it expensive?

Kay [Doing up trousers.] Not 'specially.

Simon You're being a killjoy.

William } [Wanting to change the subject.] We're very excited about the paintings
 Simon has been doing of you.

Simon } It's my place, I can invite who I like. [Debbie sulks, Simon gets himself a
 drink.]

William I'd say it's the best work he's done in some time; wouldn't you, Marcia?

Marcia Yeah, fucking brilliant.

William } How pithy.

Kay } [Laughs.]

Marcia Yeah, it's a knack us writers have;

Kay I like it.

Marcia it's what we're good at. [To Kay.] What are you good at, Kay? [Marcia, under the effects of the Ativan, Alcohol and Heroin, steadily loses interest in the conversation.]

Debbie [Debbie moves over to Simon.] She's only after your money.

Kay I'm good at bar work.

Simon Yes, and it's so / transparent it's a delight.

William Bartending's more skilled than people think.

Kay Nothin' to it.

William Oh.

Debbie I don't know what you see in her.

Kay All you have to do

Simon [Looking across at Kay.] I'd've thought / that was obvious.

Kay is remember where everything is.

Debbie Don't you want a little intellectual companionship?

Kay Course, you have to know what all the drinks are, don't ya.

Simon I have you for that, / Deborah.

William It's the mental arithmetic that would / trip me up.

Simon Anyway, intelligence is overrated.

William I always have to use a calculator to work out VAT / on a picture.

Simon I prefer honesty to intelligence; / Kay is honest.

Kay That's percentages, percentages are 'ard.

Debbie [Exasperated.] Oh *please*.

Simon She's an open book. / To me.

William True.

Debbie With a lot of blank pages.

Simon I like her honesty.

Debbie She isn't honest!

Kay What's a 'Rusty Nail'?

Simon She is. / If she doesn't understand something she says so.

William Is that a drink?

Kay Whisky and Drambuie on the rocks.

Simon Unlike intelligent people who always pretend to know even when it's obvious / they don't.

Kay Here's an easier one what's 'Snakebite'?

William Sounds like something with tequila.

Kay Cidar'n Lager with / Blackcurrent juice.

Simon It's even worse when it comes to / paintings.

William Do people really drink that?

Kay Some, / I wouldn't fancy it myself.

Simon Education seems to blind people to art.

Kay Here's a really easy one, what's a 'Black 'n Tan'? [William puzzles over the answer.]

Simon They're so busy trying to think of something *clever* to say they forget to look at it.

William Um, let me see, um,

Debbie I had no idea Kay was such a connoisseur, I just thought she was a good fuck.

William [Wild guess.] Beer and Blackcurrent juice!

Kay Na, Guinness 'n Bitter

Simon [Irritated.] You said yourself she picked the best painting from the series.

Kay You'd be crap behind the bar, I should stick to the art.

William Yes, I think I will. That reminds me I haven't shown you the catalogue for

Simon's show. [William gets catalogues out of a brief case and hands them to Kay and Marcia.]

Simon I can't think why you dislike Kay so much.

Debbie Actually, I feel sorry for her.

Simon Sorry?

Debbie Yes. I think she's going to get hurt. You're going to let her down just like all the others.

Simon I don't let people down. What're you talking about?

Debbie Forgotten their names? Let me refresh your memory. What about -
[Tauntingly.] Maxine! [Simon glares at Debbie then joins William. Debbie slumps in an office chair, on her own, and proceeds to drink heavily.]

William Hello Simon, I was just showing them your catalogue.

Simon The colours are all wrong, as usual.

William I thought they did a better job than last time.

Simon That wouldn't be hard.

Kay I didn't know you'd done so many pictures?

Simon I suppose it mounts up over the years.

William You're a regular powerhouse, Simon.

Simon I have to keep going. I worry, you see, if I stopped I wouldn't be able to get going again. [Looking across at Debbie.] It's easily done, isn't it Debbie?

Debbie [From across the room.] What?

Simon Stopping. That's easy to do. It's starting again that's difficult.

Debbie If you say so.

Simon Oh I do. I always make sure I've got other paintings started before I finish anything. That way I have a lot of momentum, it carries me forward.

Kay It sounds like you're stuck on a conveyor belt. Don't you ever stop working?

Simon No. You have to keep going, day in, day out, it's the only way. I've seen too many people with promise fall by the way side.

Kay Most people would be thinking of slowing down at your age, maybe even retiring.

Simon You don't retire from art.

Kay S'pose not.

William Simon, I'm afraid I have to go. I promised Sabina I wouldn't be late. I just wanted to wish you bon voyage. [Simon and William walk to the door.] I'll see you at the airport; I'll be at the opening but I have to be back in London by the end of the week. Do you need a driver to take you to the airport?

Simon No, Kay is going to drive me.

William Okay, well, I must be going. Don't worry about New York, the whole thing is going to go like a dream; bye. [Exit William.]

Simon Bye. [Walks back into the studio and as he passes Debbie.] Staying power's the thing, isn't it, Debbie.

Debbie Yes.

Simon You have to have staying power. That's what art is all about. It's like running a marathon, it's not all this showy stuff, it's endurance that counts. But we knew how to have a good time, and we still do. It wasn't all work, was it, Marcia?

Marcia [Marcia is slumped in a chair.] No.

Simon Debbie thought the painting I did of Kay looked like she was about to be executed in the electric chair. I didn't think sitting for me was such an alarming experience; what do you say, Marcia?

Marcia It all depends what mood you're in, Simon.

Simon Yes. But I'm not the only moody one, am I Marcia? [To people in general.] Do you know the interesting thing about the electric chair?

Kay No.

Debbie [From across the room.] I hope this isn't going to be a joke.

Simon Thomas Edison, that *hero* of modern technology, famous for inventing the light bulb and the phonograph also invented the electric chair, they don't teach you that in school. In the early days of electricity people worried about its safety and in order to damage the reputation of a rival, Westinghouse, I think, he came up with the electric chair stipulating that you had to use Westinghouse electricity because it was so much better at killing people than Edison electricity. [Laughs.]

Marcia [In bored tone.] Fascinating.

Kay I never knew that.

Simon And they say big business is ruthless now. [Coughs.] Executions are fascinating things; do you know, [coughs] the Saudis do an interesting thing
-

Debbie [Shouts across the room.] Oh shut up Simon!

Simon [Wheezing.] All right, calm down, I was only being entertaining.

Debbie You're sick.

Simon It's just a touch of asthma, I'll be as right as rain tomorrow. [Coughs.] But it is sweet of you to be so concerned.

Marcia When are you going to New York?

Simon Tomorrow afternoon. We're going over first class. Champagne all the way, it's the only way to travel.

Kay Must cost a lot, that.

Simon Yes. But I don't care, I'm not paying.

Debbie [From across the room.] I hope they're laying on an extra crate. Someone should warn them you're going to be on the flight.

Simon [Coughing.] Very amusing, Debbie, I can't think why you're not on

television. [Simon uses his inhaler. Debbie slumped in the chair ignores the following.] I'm in such a good mood even Debbie can't spoil it. I feel like a party. We used to have some good parties, didn't we Marcia.

Marcia Yeah, it was so much fun I'm still trying to get over it.

Simon Sometimes our parties would go on for days. One would merge into another, we'd keep changing venues as the booze ran out. We knew lots of fun people in those days. [Sarcastically.] Debbie kindly reminded me of Maxine. [To Marcia.] *You* remember Maxine, don't you?

Marcia Maxine, yeah, she was wild.

Kay Who's Maxine?

Simon She was a friend of mine.

Kay I'd like to meet her.

Simon She's dead.

Kay Oh.

Simon She was murdered.

Kay Never.

Simon Yes.

Kay What happened?

Simon It was a very long time ago; you don't want to know.

Kay Yeah, 'course I do.

Simon Well, if you're sure you want to know.

Kay Yeah.

Simon Maxine and I use to get up to lots of tricks. Anyway, one night we hooked up with a couple of men at this SM club, at first I wasn't so keen but Maxine wanted to do it and if Maxine wanted something no force on earth could stop her. She liked groups, so we all went back to her place. But things didn't work out the way we planned.

Kay What went wrong?

Simon Well, Maxine wanted to do this kidnap scenario. A bit of role play, you know. I should have realised it was risky but by the end of the evening I'd had so much coke I thought anything we did was guaranteed to be perfect.

Kay So what happened?

Simon [Simon goes to the bureau and pulls out a pair of handcuffs and sneaks up on Debbie.] Well, at the beginning we were getting on so well. Maxine suggested her little game – a kinky game. And we like a bit of kinky, kinky is nice and the boys seemed keen on the idea. [Simon handcuffs Debbie to the chair. Debbie's reactions are very slow, her speech slurred. She is in a state of stupefaction under the combined effects of the Ativan and alcohol throughout the rest of this scene.]

Debbie Stop messing about Simon.

Simon So we let them tie us up.

Debbie Simon.

Simon But then things turned nasty.

Debbie Stop mucking about.

Simon [Gesturing to Debbie.] Maxine here was waiting for them to start playing but instead they stood back and said: 'Where's the money'. [To Kay.] This was in the days before plastic. [To the group.] And Maxine said -

Debbie Let me go!

Simon No, she said that later.

Debbie Come on Simon, stop messing about.

Simon She said, 'Money, what money?' Go on, Debbie, say the lines. [Debbie silent. Simon waving the key to the handcuffs.] You won't get out unless you say the lines.

Debbie [Reluctantly.] Money, what money?

Simon That's right Debbie, I mean Maxine, you don't know what they're getting at. Because Maxine knows, and I know, that she hasn't got any money; but they don't. They turn the place upside down trying to find it. A smart chick like her must have pots of money, but where is it? They can't find it, it must be hidden, tucked away somewhere, out of harm's way. They'll have to find out where it is. But there's one thing that isn't tucked away out of harm's way, and that's [turning and pointing to Debbie] poor little Maxine. So they ask her nicely, where's the money. [To Marcia and Kay.] Go on, ask her where the money is. [Pushes the chair with Debbie on it to Kay.]

Kay Where's the money? [Pushes the chair/Debbie to Marcia.]

Simon Yes!

Marcia Where's the money? [Pushes the chair/Debbie to Simon.]

Simon That's right. But all poor Maxine can say is, what money? I haven't got any money. Go on Debbie, say it.

Debbie What?

Simon Say your lines! Really, you're a bit slow catching on, aren't you, say: What money? I haven't got any money.

Debbie [Dully.] What money? I haven't got any money.

Simon Well, you could have made it more dramatic; but I suppose that'll have to do. We artists must work with the materials available to us, [looking pointedly at Debbie] however shoddy they may be. Well, it's a disappointing answer, in more ways than one. So they start asking less nicely. [Pushes chair/Debbie to Kay.] You get angry. She's making a monkey out of you. [Kay pushes the chair/Debbie to Marcia.]

Debbie Hey.

Simon Luring you here under false pretences. Making out she's rich, just to get laid. [Marcia pushes the chair/Debbie to Simon.]

Debbie That's enough.

Simon [Circling Debbie in the chair.] She's at your mercy. You can do what you like with her. So you slap her around a bit [turns and suddenly slaps Debbie in the face].

Debbie Hey!

Marcia I think we should stop now.

Simon But it's getting to the interesting bit. Slap her around a bit, show her you mean business. [Simon and Kay slap Debbie.]

Marcia } Stop it! Stop it!

Debbie } No. Look. Stop!

Simon Poor old Maxine pleads to be released. You did that well, Debbie, a good bit of acting, you're improving. / She tells them again,

Debbie Look, Simon.

Simon she hasn't got any money, hidden or otherwise. [To Debbie.] Go on, Maxine, tell them you haven't got any money. [Debbie is silent, Simon lunges towards her shouting.] **Tell them you haven't got any money!**

Debbie [Reluctantly, coolly.] I haven't got any money.

Simon But, far from placating them, far from soothing the savage beast, this makes them more angry. You're really angry now. She's making a fool out of you. You'll have to resort to more drastic measures, she deserves all she gets, if she wants to make it stop all she has to do is tell you where the money is, and you don't know she hasn't got any money. [Simon opens a pot of paint and gets out brushes.] So you take out your knives and you start to cut her. [While speaking Simon wields the brush like a knife, leaving slashes of red paint on Debbie's chest.]

Debbie Urgh, for fuck sake, Simon!

Simon And you cut her here, and here, and here. You can get quite artistic. And

poor Maxine screams and screams; scream Maxine, go on. [Debbie lets out a loud scream, partly of rage at being treated like this.] That's right. All the blood is dripping down your body. [Turns to face audience, gazing into space.] And they turn to me and say, Enjoying the show? Because you're next, you know that, don't you, you're next. [Turning to Marcia and Kay.] They get quite excited; but it's exhausting. You need to take a breather, recharge the batteries, smoke a cigarette. You're beginning to think she really hasn't got any money. But it hardly matters now, because you're enjoying yourselves; and if there's one less perv in the world, who cares? You'd be doing everyone a favour, really. So you put out your cigarette, [picks a dog-end out of the ashtray and grinds it into Debbie's chest] and you go back to work, but things are getting far too noisy and a neighbour starts hammering on the door. They might've / called the police.

Marcia Stop! Stop! Stop it! It's too horrible.

Simon It might be horrible, Marcia, but it's real.

Marcia You don't have to rub our noses in it.

Simon But it makes such a good story.

Marcia [Trying to release Debbie.] No it doesn't. It makes a horrible story. A horrible story.

Simon The best stories aren't nice. They're never nice, Marcia. That's what you don't understand.

Marcia You enjoy it. You're a sadist.

Simon Oh no, Marcia. You've got it all wrong. I'm not a sadist, I'm a masochist. I've got the scars to prove it; want to see them?

Marcia No!

Simon Spoil sport.

Marcia It's not funny, it's not amusing, it's not clever.

Simon Oh, we are in a negative frame of mind this evening. Quite the party pooper. [Marcia begins to subside again, beginning to cry.] But surely you want to know how it ends? [Takes up a brush heavily laden with red paint.] Of course you do, you're just as curious as the rest of us. As I was saying: things are getting a bit fraught, there's someone pounding on the door, demanding to know what's going on, so you have to leave quickly, but not before you [Simon pulls back Debbie's head by the hair and drags the brush across her throat leaving a gash of red paint. Blackout. End of Act One.]

Act Two

Scene 1

The following, morning. Marcia asleep on the floor in one corner of the studio.

Debbie, still drunk, sitting in a chair covered in a blanket, drinking. Simon enters the studio and looks, with disdain, at Debbie.

Simon Isn't it a trifle early to be drinking? Even for you.

Debbie It's not early, it's late.

Simon What?

Debbie It is always later than you think.

Simon I knew it was a mistake buying that quote for the day calendar. [Pause.]
You're starting to smell. When was the last time you had a bath? I will not have people going around smelling in my studio.

Debbie Oil paint.

Simon What?

Debbie That's the studio smell.

Simon And you smell like a dustbin that hasn't been emptied in a long time.

Debbie It must be all the things rotting inside.

Simon What?

Debbie [Pointing at herself.] That's what makes the dustbin smell. [Pause.] Why do you torture me?

Simon I don't know what you're talking about.

Debbie What've I ever done to you?

Simon You're becoming paranoid, Debbie. It's a common enough occurrence after consuming the quantity of alcohol you get through.

Debbie They warned me about you.

Simon What?

Debbie They warned me, but I ignored them. I thought I knew better.

Simon Who on earth are you talking about?

Debbie Graham – and Hannah – they warned me not to get too close to you, not too involved. I didn't believe them; I thought they were jealous. Jealous of you. And [laughs] jealous of me. Can you believe that? I actually thought they might be jealous of me; because –

Simon The art world is very fickle, Debbie. You know that. People will say anything to spoil things.

Debbie But, the joke is . . . the joke is . . .

Simon The second rate are always snapping at the heels of the great, one just has to put up with it.

Debbie . . . they were right. They were right and I was wrong. They weren't acting out of jealousy. I was wrong to think that. They were telling me . . . [self-pityingly] because they liked me.

Simon How touching.

Debbie Yes, they liked me. Do you like me, Simon?

Simon I like you, Deborah, when you're . . . not talking nonsense and . . . not stinking the place out.

Debbie They were my friends. I didn't realise at the time, but they were real friends.

Simon I think it might be time you visited the Priory again.

Debbie I don't want to go to the Priory!

Simon It did wonders for you last time. You came back a new woman.

Debbie You just want to get rid of me.

Simon Nonsense. It's for your own good. The best care money can buy.

Debbie But that's it! Money doesn't buy care, does it. Not *care!* [Pause.] Do you care?

Simon Yes, Debbie. I wouldn't be wasting my time talking to you now if I didn't 'care'. But there's no point continuing this conversation. You're far too

drunk, and I'm far too tired; and in a few hours you won't remember a thing we've said.

Debbie I remember everything.

Simon Oh you do, do you.

Debbie Yes. [Thumping her chest.] In here. I remember *in here*.

Simon Go upstairs and clean up. You look disgusting. Kay will be here shortly and I don't want her to see you like this.

Debbie She hit me.

Simon I'm sure she didn't mean it.

Debbie You all hit me.

Simon Don't be absurd.

Debbie Last night!

Simon We were play acting.

Debbie You murdered me!

Simon It was a game.

Debbie You murdered me last night. And you ruined my T-shirt!

Simon [Simon manhandles Debbie up the stairs.] Come on, I'll buy you another T-shirt. Let's get you in the bath. You'll feel much better after a nice relaxing soak.

Debbie I'm dead.

Simon Only from the neck up, Deborah. [They exit. Pause. Simon returns to the studio and notices Marcia asleep on the floor. Prods her.] Marcia. Marcia! / Wake up. Time to be going.

Marcia Wha' . . . Wha' . . .

Simon This is your wake up call.

Marcia Wha' time is it?

Simon 10:30

Marcia Oh shit.

Simon I'm sure you have important things you must be doing.

Marcia Got a coffee?

Simon I don't provide room service.

Marcia Go on, I'm gasping.

Simon Oh, all right. But don't hang around; I'm expecting Kay for a sitting. [Simon gets Marcia a coffee.]

Marcia I thought you were going to New York.

Simon Later. I thought since she is going to drive me she might as well come early and we can get some work done.

Marcia Always working, eh.

Simon We have to amuse ourselves somehow.

Marcia Slave driver.

Simon Coming down this morning to a studio strewn with bodies reminded me of the old days.

Marcia It reminds me of things I'd rather forget.

Simon I'm sorry if you didn't enjoy yourself.

Marcia All that stuff about Maxine. How can you do that?

Simon Kay wanted to know, she was curious.

Marcia I don't know how you can –

Simon I adopt my story telling voice.

Marcia What?

Simon Then I can do it; if I pretend it happened to someone else.

Marcia Why do you always have to pretend?

Simon I prefer it to reality.

Marcia It gave me nightmares.

Simon Sorry.

Marcia Don't say sorry.

Simon It gave me a few too.

Marcia I bet.

Simon Yes, yes it did.

Marcia I'm surprised you want to remember it.

Simon You don't choose what to remember; it chooses you.

Marcia I suppose it can be cathartic.

Simon [Laughs.] Don't believe that psychological crap. It isn't 'cathartic' it's just there. [Pause.] Do you know, I still see her.

Marcia What?

Simon Maxine, I see her still, from time to time, or, well, I think I see her; just glimpsed in a crowd of people; but, of course, it isn't her, it's just . . . just a profile, a way of walking, the cut of someone's hair; the mind makes us see what it wants. I suppose I must still be looking for her.

Marcia I had no idea.

Simon But of course I know I'll never find her.

Marcia D'you think you'll ever get over it?

Simon It isn't something you get over, you just – get on. Most people go through life and they never know, they never get tested, they never know what they're like. But you go through something like that and you learn; you learn things about yourself you'd rather not know.

Marcia Yeah.

Simon That night, when they had us tied up, do you know what was going through my mind?

Marcia Pretty fucking scared I should think.

Simon Yes, 'pretty fucking scared' all right. But not just that. I remember thinking, Oh fuck, this is it. Then I thought, start on her. [Pause.] I willed them to

turn their attention to Maxine, not me, Maxine. That was the only thought going through my mind, please let it be her, not me. Sometimes I wonder if, mentally, I somehow got them to do it. Nonsense, I know. You can't get someone to do something just by thinking, can you.

Marcia No.

Simon No. But now I'm left with the knowledge that when it came down to it my one concern was: if something bad is going to happen let it happen to Maxine, not me.

Marcia Self-preservation, I suppose.

Simon Kind of you to put it like that. [The bell rings.]

Marcia I should be going. [They both go to the door.]

Simon Do me a favour, Marcia?

Marcia What?

Simon Pick up this prescription for me. It's for my asthma.

Marcia Okay.

Simon Thanks. There's a chemist round the corner.

Marcia I know where the chemists are.

Simon Of course you do. [Simon opens the door; enter Kay.]

Kay Hi.

Marcia Ciao. [Exit Marcia.]

Kay Not too early, am I?

Simon No, no, just right.

Kay I'm surprised you're working today.

Simon I always work. [Positioning Kay.] I just want to get down some quick impressions of your face. I can finish it off when I get back from New York.

Kay New York, eh. Must be interesting, New York.

Simon [Busy with his paints.] I suppose so. I've been before. It's the same as

London, really, there are just more potholes in the roads.

Kay I'd like to go to New York . . . some day.

Simon It's really very over rated.

Kay We could go together.

Simon [Starts to paint Kay.] Maybe. But not this time, if that's what you're getting at, this is strictly an official visit. It wouldn't be any fun for you; just a lot of boring old people with more money than they know what to do with. [Pause while Simon works.]

Kay I like posing for you.

Simon I'm glad.

Kay I'll miss it while you're away.

Simon So will I, Kay.

Kay I like being looked at.

Simon It's a pleasure looking.

Kay Do you think I'll become famous?

Simon What do you mean?

Kay Like Marcia.

Simon Marcia isn't famous.

Kay Her pictures are.

Simon Yes. [Pause.] It's not quite the same thing, though, is it.

Kay No, s'pose it's not. [Pause.] It's funny the things you think about when you're posing.

Simon [Concentrating on painting.] Mmmm.

Kay Things keep flittin' into your mind.

Simon Mmmm.

Kay Why are you going to New York on your own?

Simon I won't be on my own. The gallery will chaperone me. It's more like going

on a touring holiday, except you don't get to see many interesting places.

[Silence. Simon working.]

Kay Why did you say you'd give me that picture?

Simon Probably because you wanted it. I like to please people.

Kay You didn't ought to have promised me a painting if you've already sold it.

Simon You're quite right, Kay. It was very bad of me. But you took one, and that was very bad of you.

Kay I don't want it anyway.

Simon What?

Kay The one I took; I don't want it.

Simon Then give it back.

Kay I want the one you promised me.

Simon It's gone! I can't conjure it back out of thin air. Anyway soon there will be many more of you. You can have one of those.

Kay Why are you saying that?

Simon Well you can. I want to please you. Select another painting.

Kay They're *all* sold. That's what Debbie said, she said they're all sold even before you've done 'em. You can't give it to me if you've sold it.

Simon Technically Debbie is correct, but only technically. I have a contract, you see; with William. Everything I paint is his to sell. But I don't have to tell him about everything; what's a picture or two among friends? [Simon stops working.]

Kay Have you finished?

Simon I don't feel like going on now. It's not any good. I'll only end up destroying it.

Kay Do you destroy many things?

Simon Yes, lots.

Kay It's a bit of a waste.

Simon If things aren't good enough they have to be destroyed. I have to keep up the standard. Even if nobody else notices, I will, if it's not up to scratch. I like things to be perfect. They rarely are but that's no reason to stop trying, is it?

Kay s'pose not.

Simon [Moves over to Kay and leaning over her.] You, on the other hand, *are* perfect.

Kay What?

Simon You. You're perfect. That's why I want to paint you. That's why I like to be around you. You're perfect, in your own way. [Tender embrace.] You are . . . completely yourself.

Kay [Puzzled.] What?

Simon You'd be surprised how very few people one can say that about. [Moment of tenderness.]

Kay I like being with you; you're different. All the other men, they just want to fuck me, I can see it in their eyes, but they're not interested in *me*, they don't want to know anything about me, just a quick poke, but with you . . . when you look at me I feel . . . I dunno . . . I just feel different.

Simon That's because I think you're very special. A very special person.

Kay Do you really?

Simon Yes, I do.

Kay No one's told me that before.

Debbie [Enter Debbie.] Not interrupting anything, am I?

Simon No. No. It's almost time we set off for the airport anyway.

Debbie Have a good trip.

Kay Do we have to go now?

Simon Planes wait for no man. [Bell. Debbie answers door, enter Marcia.] Ah, thanks Marcia, wouldn't want to run out on my little trip. Come on Kay, let's get to the airport, and don't jump any red lights. Bye. [Exit Simon and Kay.]

Marcia } Bye

Debbie } Bye. [Debbie moves to the easel and looks at the painting Simon has been working on.] It's not very good.

Marcia What?

Debbie This. [Debbie gestures at the painting on the easel, Marcia joins her looking at it.] He's losing it.

Marcia D'you think so?

Debbie Look, he's beginning to pastiche himself. It happens to them all in the end. It's taken him longer than most, but he's doing a 'Simon Brent'. [They study the picture.]

Marcia Mmm. I see what you're getting at.

Debbie Poor bastard. Do you think he knows? [Pause.] He must know, don't you think?

Marcia Dunno.

Debbie He's too smart not to know.

Marcia I suppose so. But if he's so wrapped up, struggling with his demons, it might blind him to something that's obvious to other people.

Debbie Hmm

Marcia If you ask me it doesn't matter what he's painting I always get the impression he's painting himself. He's smearing all that paint around and he's thinking about his own tortured mind. He just uses models because he's so fucking ugly himself not even he'd be able to sell them.

Debbie Marcia. He has painted twenty self-portraits. He has *sold* twenty self-portraits.

Marcia Well, I still say he's painting himself whether it's called a self-portrait or not.

Debbie I wonder what William thinks.

Marcia He won't be bothered. As far as he's concerned if they sell they're good.

Debbie Mmm.

Marcia They'll go on selling just on Simon's reputation. Don't forget, he's the greatest living painter. If *Time* says so it must be true.

Debbie With question mark.

Marcia [Laughs.]

Debbie Greatest living painter with question mark. I wouldn't be at all surprised if that feature they're doing doesn't turn out to be a bit of a hatchet job. You can get too famous you know. There comes a point when everybody keeps saying you're so good someone has to start saying you're crap just to have something new to say.

Marcia Do you think he knows? Do you think that's why he was reluctant to go to New York?

Debbie No. He had no intention of not going. He just likes to get people to beg. He has to keep testing them, making sure he has them where he wants them.

Marcia You make him sound like a monster.

Debbie He is, in a way. A charming monster. You get quite addicted to it. The thing about Simon is, he doesn't care what people think; he's got us where he wants us so why should he / be bothered

Marcia Speak for yourself. He hasn't got me where he wants me.

Debbie No?

Marcia No! I'm my own person, not like . . . not like -

Debbie Me?

Marcia The others.

Debbie Others?

Marcia All the others. I never could figure out why you stay with Simon.

Debbie He needs me. Oh, I know people think it's the other way around. I know it looks like that. But people . . . what do people know?

Marcia People think you stay around for the money.

Debbie Money keeps everyone in their place – don't you think? Those who've got it, those who haven't.

Marcia Money isn't everything, you should've left years ago.

Debbie Maybe. I'd go if I knew how. But when you've been together for so long there are all these little threads that bind you together, and each one has to be wrenched out in order to get away. I'm a coward. I'm not like Simon, I don't like pain. And all the little threads, they hurt like mad when you tear them out. And there *is* always the money, you can't avoid that. He's got it and I haven't, not if I move out. [Focusing on the painting again, pointing.] This bit here. It's totally wrong. I don't know what he thought he was doing. I could do better than that. [Pause.]

Marcia Why don't you.

Debbie What?

Marcia Why don't you - do better than that.

Debbie I could. If I tried.

Marcia Go on then?

Debbie Not now.

Marcia Why not? No time like the present.

Debbie I wouldn't know what to paint.

Marcia Paint me.

Debbie You?

Marcia Yes. Me. Come on. What are you waiting for? Paint me.

Debbie You? Now?

Marcia Yes. Now, right now. He's gone. You can breathe again. I'll let you have a sitting for free; get you started.

Debbie I don't know.

Marcia You never will unless you try. [Pause.] You can do better than that. You know you can. You can do a *lot* better.

Debbie Do you think so?

Marcia Who gives a shit what I think. It's what you think that matters. You need to convince yourself. Come on. [She drags another easel out with a blank canvas on it. She goes over to the couch and poses.] How's this? [Debbie hesitates by the easel.] You'd be doing me a favour. Paint me. Come on! Paint me out of this . . . this. . . give me another image. Don't leave me trapped in Simon's sadistic universe, pinned to a dirty mattress by a hypodermic needle all my life. Give me something else. Give me a new vision! You can do it. [Debbie stands before the easel trying to summon up the courage to make a mark. Fade to black.]

Act Two

Scene 2

Several days later. The studio. Enter Debbie carrying canvases she has painted. She arranges them in the studio, covering some of Simon's pictures in the process. She goes to the easel, her manner more confident, she prepares her equipment.

Debbie Marcia, I'm ready. [Enter Marcia who sits and poses. Debbie begins to work. Pause.] I don't know why you encourage Kay to hang around.

Marcia She looked lonely. I don't like to see people looking lonely.

Debbie Rubbish. She's probably waiting for another opportunity to steal something.

Marcia You're too suspicious. She's missing Simon, I can tell, I know how addictive Simon can get.

Debbie Huh.

Marcia And so do you.

Debbie I don't like her around the place; she makes me nervous.

Marcia Don't be so uptight. I think she's sweet.

Debbie Sweet! Kay?

Marcia Yes, in her own way, yes.

Debbie Well Marcia, I hate to bring up the subject of friends, but with your track record do you really think you're a good judge of people?

Marcia Anyone can make a mistake.

Debbie Yes, but how many times can you go on making the same mistake?

Marcia Don't be nasty.

Debbie Let's face it, you have a habit of taking people under your wing who are, how shall I put this, not suitable.

Marcia Yeah, well you don't know until it's too late.

Debbie Exactly.

Marcia What?

Debbie My point. You are not a good judge.

Marcia You can't always tell. They're so nice when you first meet them.

Debbie Hmm. [Enter Kay, returning from shopping and looking dishevelled.]

Kay [To Marcia.] They didn't have Marlboro Lights so I got the regular.

Marcia What happened to you?

Kay Nothing.

Marcia You took your time.

Kay I got held up in the shop. Had a ruck with another customer.

Debbie } What happened?

Marcia } Give us the cigs, I'm dying for one.

Kay [Hands Marcia the cigarettes.] This cow jumped in in front a me, just like that. No, sorry I'm in a hurry, no 'scuse me, just a fuck off look.

Marcia Got a light?

Kay [Searching for a light in her pockets.] I wasn't standin' for that. [Lights Marcia's cigarette.]

Marcia Thanks.

Kay So I said, what the fuck d'you think you're doing

Marcia What did she say?

Kay She told me to fuck off.

Marcia Rude.

Kay Yeah, so I 'it 'er.

Debbie Oh dear.

Kay Turned into a bit of a ruck. The shop keeper kept shouting 'e was going to fetch the police.

Marcia Was that Mr. Patel?

Kay I don't know, some old git behind the counter.

Marcia That'd be him.

Kay Anyway, she learnt her lesson.

Marcia I hope you didn't upset Mr. Patel.

Kay He's all right. But you can't let people take advantage like that; fucking bitch.

Debbie It would've been quicker to let her go first.

Kay What?

Debbie Quicker.

Kay It's a matter a principle init. It made me so angry. I couldn't let her get away with it.

Marcia Did you get hurt?

Kay Nah, not much. Can't let people walk all over you can ya.

Debbie That temper will get you into trouble.

Kay You sound like a fucking teacher. My teacher, she used to say that; she was a right bitch 'n' all.

Debbie She might've had a point.

Kay I'd've liked to smack her one too, sarky bitch.

Debbie They say you never forget a teacher.

Marcia Like the adverts on the tele!

Debbie } Yes.

Kay } Yeah. [Laughs.] I remember Mr. Wilson, I'd still like to break 'is fucking neck. [They all laugh.]

Marcia But watch out, you could get into trouble.

Kay Get detention.

Debbie At Her Majesty's Pleasure.

Kay Who'd want to pleasure 'er. [laughs at her own joke]

Debbie Apparently many people dream about it.

Kay What?

Debbie Pleasuring the Queen.

Kay Oh, leave it out, you're turnin' me stomach.

Debbie Apparently it's true, makes you wonder about the state of the Nation, doesn't it.

Marcia I once had a dream about Prince William.

Debbie Yeah, well Prince William is different. Get out the way Kay I'm trying to work.

Kay I thought you'd stopped.

Debbie I'm trying to continue – you're in the way!

Kay Sorry.

Debbie Just get out the way.

Kay Sorry. [Moves to one side and drinks.] Have you heard from him?

Debbie Who?

Kay Simon, of course.

Debbie No.

Kay Me neither. You'd've thought he'd've rung or something by now. Wouldn't you.

Marcia I expect he's busy.

Kay Yeah.

Debbie I *bet* he's busy. Simon plus New York equals interesting possibilities.

Kay What you getting at?

Debbie Have you been to New York?

Kay No.

Debbie Well, let me put it like this, for someone with Simon's tastes New York is, heaven. I must say I'm surprised he didn't take you with him. When he said you weren't going I assumed it was because you didn't want to.

Kay He said it wouldn't be interesting.

Debbie } [Laughs.]

Marcia } [Laughs.]

Kay Just a business trip.

Debbie } Business.

Marcia } [Laughs.]

Kay Yeah. That's what he said, he said there was no point in me going because
it was just boring business.

Debbie But you must know by now Simon always mixes business and pleasure.

Kay Lot's of receptions, do's, boring.

Debbie Last time I went to New York with Simon there was never a dull moment. In
fact it was a bit too exhausting for me. They have these clubs –

Kay I don't want to know.

Debbie No?

Kay No.

Debbie Suit yourself. You're missing some great stories, though.

Kay I don't want to hear your stories. Anyway, it's different now.

Debbie Yes, I suppose it's changed, it was a long time ago.

Kay He's just gone for the art this time.

Debbie Yes . . . I'm sure you're right. Still, old habits die hard, don't they.

Kay It's just work.

Debbie Yes . . . Yes . . . of course I suppose it's all changed now. Nothing stays the
same for long, does it? Everything changes, nothing's reliable, one minute
it's there, the next minute it's gone. It wasn't only Keats's name that was
written in water.

Kay What?

Debbie I'm just saying, things . . . things . . . they don't last, do they?

Kay Dunno. Depends.

Debbie Yes, it all depends. Watch out if he gives you any jewellery, anything like that; he thinks of it as severance pay.

Kay D'you know something?

Debbie What?

Kay You get on my tits.

Debbie Really?

Kay Yes. Really. On my tits, *really*. D'you know what I don't like about you?

Debbie Oh, where shall we begin?

Kay You're so fucking smug.

Debbie Smug?

Kay You act like you've done something wonderful, fucking brilliant, but you haven't done nothing.

Debbie Turning into quite a critic aren't you.

Marcia Girls, stop fighting. It's getting boring.

Kay She started it.

Marcia I don't care who started it just shut up. [She gets up.] I've had enough.

Debbie Marcia!

Marcia I need a break.

Debbie You haven't been posing long.

Marcia I need a break.

Debbie How am I supposed to work?

Marcia Oh don't be such a prima donna, fill in the background or something.

Debbie You said you'd help.

Marcia. I am helping; give us a break! Now you're painting again you're getting as moody as Simon. It's obviously not good for you.

Debbie Oh, but it is, for the first time in years I feel alive.

Marcia Good. Perhaps you can progress from alive and miserable to alive and cheerful.

Debbie You don't know how frustrating it is. I know I can do so much better. But it just won't come out. I feel like someone who's had a stroke. I know what I want to say but I just can't make the muscles work to bring it out.

Marcia Give it time, Debbie. It won't all come back at once. Come on Kay, let's leave Georgia O'Keefe here to her oils. [Marcia and Kay exiting.]

Kay Yeah, so long Debs.

Debbie You are coming back, aren't you?

Marcia Don't worry, I'll be back. [To Kay, Voice Off.] Let's get a drink.

Kay [Voice Off.] I can't understand why he hasn't phoned. He said he would. [Debbie, left alone in the studio, tries to continue working on the painting. She concentrates intently but it looks like it isn't going very well. The bell rings. Debbie sighs and answers the door, enter William.]

William Hello Debbie. Thought I'd pop round to see how you're getting on.

Debbie How are things in New York?

William Marvellous. Everything's going very well, I'm glad to say. I thought I'd leave a little gift for Simon, for when he gets back. A 'thank you' for being good in New York

Debbie Oh. He behaved himself, then.

William Like a pro. He charmed all the wealthy patrons, he was clever with the intellectuals and workmanlike with the artists.

Debbie So he lied to everybody.

William They all think he's wonderful. It's such a relief. As you know, he can be a bit unpredictable. It makes arranging these things so nerve wracking. One never knows until the last minute how he's going to behave; will he be charming or a stinker? Still, he usually controls himself for the really big

occasions. [Pause, puts package down on a table.] I'll just leave this here.
Make sure he notices it when he gets back, won't you?

Debbie Yes. What is it?

William It's a Rolex.

Debbie You must have been worried.

William News travels fast in New York. If he'd balls'd it all up it could have got difficult. We don't want the important collectors getting jittery. After all, there aren't many people who can afford a painting by Simon and I plan on keeping it that way. One can't be too careful. Paintings are like stocks, it's all to do with reputation. One minute you can be sitting on a fortune and the next it's all just pretty pieces of paper. [Pause.] Been keeping yourself busy while he's away?

Debbie Yes. Plenty to do.

William [William looks around and notices Debbie's pictures.] What's this?

Debbie I've been doing a bit of work.

William It's very good.

Debbie Not bad. I can do better . . . on a good day.

William And this one. I like this.

Debbie Yes. I was quite pleased with that one. But now I look at it again this bit here doesn't seem quite right.

William I've never seen Marcia look so angry.

Debbie. She was thinking about Simon.

William Oh. [Awkward pause.] How many pictures have you?

Debbie Not many.

William When you've done some more we should see about getting you a show.
[Pause.] How long has it been since your last show? [Pause, thinking.]
Must have been a long time. That gallery, what was it called? it's closed

down now.

Debbie I don't like shows.

William Neither do I, Debbie. This is what it's all about. This is what I enjoy, visiting studios, seeing the work in progress, that's where the real excitement lies. But shows are a necessary evil. A show is publicity, reviews, reputations, that's what a show is. So you must have a show, whether you like it or not.

Debbie I don't know. I'm just painting for myself at the moment. I'm just seeing if I still have it in me. I don't even know if they're any good.

William I know someone who's starting up a little gallery out of town, I'm sure they'd be interested.

Debbie [Ignoring William, to herself.] They should be better.

William Well, I'll mention it to them anyway. It might be just the sort of thing they're looking for. [Looks at his watch.] I'd love to stay and look at some more but I must dash, got an important collector coming over to look at a few things, mustn't be late. Perhaps we can talk about your work another time. Keep at it, I'm sure we can do something with it. [Exit William.]

Debbie [Repeating to herself after William has gone.] Do something with it. [Debbie starts working on her painting again. Mixes paints, makes a few marks. Stands back and looks at the canvas she is working on, moves forward and applies paint more and more frantically until, exasperated, she slaps the canvas with a loaded brush. Fade to black.]

Act Two

Scene 3

Debbie sits in a chair watching as Marcia moves back and forth laying out food and glasses on the table. Marcia goes to the kitchen and returns with an ice bucket containing a bottle of champagne.

Marcia Don't get up Debbie I don't need any help.

Debbie I wasn't getting up.

Marcia I know.

Debbie I feel nervous.

Marcia Then do something.

Debbie I don't know why you're bothering.

Marcia Got to make a fuss of the old git. He'll be expecting some kind of welcome.

Debbie Trying to ingratiate yourself with Simon already.

Marcia Just trying to be pleasant -

Debbie Crawler.

Marcia obviously something not in your repertoire.

Debbie The thought of him coming back makes me nervous.

Marcia Don't be nervous.

Debbie If I feel it I can't just -

Marcia Have some confidence in yourself!

Debbie I don't know / it's easier said than done.

Marcia He'll be pleased. He's always going on about you not working.

Debbie Exactly.

Marcia And now you have.

Debbie Exactly.

Marcia Stop saying 'exactly' you're making me nervous now. Have a drink. Steady your nerves.

Debbie I've had a drink.

Marcia Have another one.

Simon [Sound of footsteps on the stairs, key in lock. Door opens, enter Simon and Kay.] Hello Debbie.

Debbie Hi Simon.

Simon [Going up to Marcia.] Dear Marcia, how nice to see you.

Marcia How was New York?

Simon New York was wonderful.

Marcia It all went smoothly?

Simon Like a dream.

Debbie How was the asthma?

Simon I didn't have a single gasp the whole time I was there. The pollution in New York must suit my lungs better than the pollution in London.

Debbie What about the receptions?

Simon Do you know, I must be getting old or something, but I actually quite enjoyed them. It all went very well, apart from one frightful old woman who kept trying to persuade me to paint some bloody awful concrete chapel she was building in the fucking desert. She expected me to come and *live* there while painting it, said the desert is a spiritual place and the climate would be good for my asthma. I told her, I don't do chapels; firstly, I'm not an interior decorator and secondly I'm a bloody atheist. She said, that's all right I'm an atheist too. I said, then why are you building a bloody chapel? She said it was going to be non-denominational - anyone could go in and pray to whatever or whoever they liked. It sounded very fishy to me; I began to wonder if she was all there. Fortunately Madison came over and rescued

me.

Debbie Who's Madison?

Kay [Muttering.] Oh don't. I've heard nothing but bloody Madison all the way from / the airport.

Simon She's this delightful young art historian I met on the first day. She's a curator at the Met. Very civilised, you'd've loved her, Debbie. She's witty and intelligent, not in that flashy way that art critics try to be. And so attractive, I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. She wore those cute little suits with the short skirts, and her legs seemed to go on forever. We talked about everything from pre-Columbian artefacts to late Picasso. She became my unofficial guide, showed me around town; and I can tell you, she did a very thorough job. We must have some champagne to celebrate my return. [Marcia unwraps and opens the bottle.] Have you seen any of the reviews?

Debbie Not yet.

Simon They're very good. On the whole. I could sense that question mark fading with every notice that came out. William should be pleased; it's bound to jack up the prices quite a bit wouldn't you say?

Debbie That reminds me. He left this for you. [Hands Simon the package.]

Simon For me?

Debbie A little thank you for being good, he said.

Simon How sweet. William is getting cheekier every day. As if I wouldn't be good. It's only acting. All you have to do is act the part of the great artist and they all believe you.

Debbie So long as they don't look at the pictures.

Simon [Ignoring Debbie's sarcasm.] Precisely. But nobody ever does. At every single view I've been to everyone has their back to the pictures. [Simon

unwraps his present while talking.] You can't 'mingle' if you look at the pictures, you have to have your back to the people, very anti-social, and people only go to views to see one another. There's absolutely no danger of anyone looking at the art. [Putting on the watch.] How charming. Typical of William. He has exquisite taste; I don't know how on earth he ended up as an art dealer. [Showing off the watch.] Do you think it suits me?

Debbie Yes.

Simon Not too flashy?

Debbie No.

Simon Good.

Marcia [Hands round drinks.] To the return of Simon!

Debbie } Simon!

Kay } To Simon!

Simon Thank you. [Drinks.] Mmmm. Really, Marcia, you make me sound like a Lassie movie. And what have you all been up to while I've been away? I hope you haven't been wrecking the place. Inviting disreputable people around, that kind of thing.

Marcia Debbie has been working again.

Simon Never! Tell me it's not true, Deborah, I couldn't bear the shock.

Debbie Shut up, Simon.

Simon It must be true. It's making her ratty. Oh well, bottoms up. [Drinks champagne. To Kay.] And how have you been getting on? Not getting into any trouble, I hope.

Kay I've been working down the pub.

Simon Really.

Kay They missed me there.

Simon I bet they did.

Kay Thought I'd go somewhere where they appreciate me.

Simon Very wise. I'm sure they revel in all your talents down the Rose and Crown.

Kay I missed you.

Simon How sweet. Well, I'm back. Oh Debbie, you'll never guess, they cleaned up Time Square and all around there! It is now deadly dull.

Kay I kept waiting for a call.

Simon I was rushed off my feet.

Kay Yeah, sounds like it.

Simon I simply couldn't get to a phone.

Kay I wanted to know how you were getting on.

Simon It's so awkward with the time difference. [Pause.] Look, I bought this for you. [Rummages in his bag, gives Kay a package] It's a little something from Tiffanys.

Kay I dunno.

Simon Take it.

Kay [Kay unwraps the package, and pulls out a beautiful pendant.] I don't want it.

Debbie } I only got earrings.

Simon } Don't be silly, of course you do. It's beautiful. Let's not argue. [Kay stares at the pendant like a telegram bearing bad news. Simon walks around and sees Debbie's pictures.] Oh, and what have we here? [Debbie tenses.] So it's true, you have been painting again.

Marcia She started the day you left for New York.

Simon Let's see. Mmmm. Mmmm. I'm surprised you could remember how to unscrew the tubes, Debbie. [Pointing at the canvas on the easel.] What's this splodge in the middle?

Debbie I got fed up with that one.

Simon Yes. I can see why. Yes. But the splodge shows promise. [Picks up and examines other pictures by Debbie.] Been quite productive, haven't we. Of course, it's useless asking my opinion, I'm so hopelessly old fashioned these days. [Looks at pictures in silence, Debbie and Marcia getting very tense.] Are you going for that clever post-modern kitsch look? [Debbie looks devastated and walks out.]

Marcia [Begins to follow Debbie then turns back. Sound Off: Debbie running down the stairs.] Debbie, don't go

Simon Oh dear, evidently not.

Marcia That was a very cruel thing to do. She needs encouragement. Why couldn't you have encouraged her? / You of all people.

Simon I'm sorry, Marcia. But I don't lie. Not even to friends.

Marcia How can you be so . . . so certain. You've only glanced at them.

Simon A glance carries thousands of pieces of information to a trained eye.

Marcia I bet she's gone straight round the pub.

Simon I just didn't want her to waste her time.

Marcia What else has she got to do with it?

Simon I can't help it, Marcia. I'm honest. I know people don't like it, they think it's cruel; they prefer kind lies to the truth.

Marcia Crap! That's crap, and you know it. You wanted to hurt her because you're jealous!

Simon Me! Of Debbie?

Marcia Yes. Because you know that if she kept going she might be better than you. And no one's allowed to be better than you, are they Simon.

Simon You have such a touching faith in Deborah's abilities. Unfortunately it would seem to be a *blind* faith.

Marcia You think you're the only one who can see but we all see, we can all see what's going on. You needn't think I didn't notice what you did to Debbie, how you destroyed her confidence, dripping in the poison day after day, the little insinuations, the faint praise, planting the seeds of doubt; I saw what happened.

Simon Really, Marcia, I think your imagination has started working overtime.

Marcia You don't deserve friends, do you Simon. I don't suppose you ever really want them. You just want acolytes. Someone to tell you how good you are. Someone like this Madison in New York. Someone who'll suck up to you and make you feel important.

Simon I always rely on my own judgment when it comes to artistic matters. That's the case if I'm judging other people's work or my own. I don't *need* other people to tell me whether what I do is good or not, I know, I know. And I'm a harsher judge of my own work than anybody else's.

Marcia But you do need other people, Simon. You might not think it but that only goes to show how little you know yourself. You've been feeding off other people for years, you just don't know it: but we do, we've got the bite marks to prove it!

Simon How poetic you're becoming, Marcia. I suppose you're going to tell me you've started writing again. That would really round off a perfect day.

Marcia The only writing I'd enjoy at the moment is doing your obituary. [Moving towards the door.]

Simon You're too late! It's already been written. They write them years in advance for *important* people.

Marcia Fuck you! [Exit Marcia. Door slam. Silence.]

Simon Oh dear. Not quite the homecoming I had anticipated. [Pause.] Still, at least you're pleased to see me, eh Kay. [Goes to hug Kay who steps back.]

Kay Dunno.

Simon What?

Kay I dunno if I'm pleased to see you or not. I missed you. I did miss you.

Simon There we are then.

Kay I kept thinking, What's he doing now, in New York, without me. I wondered what you were doing. I'd keep asking myself; What's the time in New York? Wonder what he's up to.

Simon Charming.

Kay What were you doing in New York?

Simon I told you. Lots of boring receptions, lots of rich people talking loudly. You would have hated it.

Kay But you liked it.

Simon Not really.

Kay Not really?

Simon No.

Kay But you said you did. Earlier, you said you liked it. You enjoyed it. You had a wonderful time, that's what you said. You didn't want to come back you were having such a good time; a good time with this, Madison.

Simon Oh dear, do you think I've been a bad boy?

Kay Yes.

Simon Do you want to punish me?

Kay No I fucking don't!

Simon Go on, you'll feel better.

Kay No I fucking won't. Leave me alone!

Simon Really, Kay, why all the histrionics?

Kay Why couldn't you have phoned me?

Simon I told you.

Kay I couldn't relax, waiting for a call.

Simon Don't be so demanding.

Kay Demanding?

Simon You take things too seriously. When you're older -

Kay I don't want to know about the future I want to know about now.

Simon There won't be any 'now' if you keep being so possessive.

Kay I'm not possessive.

Simon I'm afraid you are, Kay -

Kay Don't you patronise me.

Simon I wonder if, after all, you're really suited to being one of my models.

Kay Suited?

Simon It's all a question of attitude. It was different in the old days, with Marcia.

Kay What?

Simon I'm just thinking aloud.

Kay But it's me, it's me you're talking about.

Simon If you keep pestering me, Kay, I won't be able to work, I won't be able to concentrate.

Kay You said we had something special.

Simon We did.

Kay Did?

Simon Well, I mean we do. Yes, of course we do.

Kay I don't understand. I thought you liked me.

Simon I do, of course I do, I suppose it was seeing all those old paintings in New York, it got me thinking about things.

Kay Are you getting rid of me?

Simon No, of course not, why should I want to do that?

Kay I'm not Madison.

Simon I don't want you to be Madison, I want you to be you, but I think we should let things cool off a bit.

Kay I can be as good as Madison!

Simon There's no need to feel jealous of Madison. She was just a New York thing. I was grateful for her company, that's all; it was such a relief to have someone intelligent to –

Kay Unlike me, I suppose.

Simon No, no. I didn't mean you. I meant compared to the other people / at the receptions.

Kay I bet you think I'd embarrass you if you took me to New York. Okay for the studio but not good enough for your posh New York friends.

Simon You wouldn't have liked it.

Kay No?

Simon No.

Kay Didn't get the chance though, did I. Didn't get the option.

Simon I had no idea you wanted to go so badly.

Kay [Imitating Simon.] I had no idea you wanted to go so badly.

Simon Let's not become childish.

Kay You just wanted me out the way.

Simon Nonsense.

Kay You don't think I've got any brains.

Simon I do Kay. I admire everything about you. I admire your body, your personality and your mind.

Kay But not like Madison.

Simon Madison is a different person. With different people we are different. You're not the same with your Uncle as you are with me, are you?

Kay No.

Simon Exactly. And I'm not the same with Madison as I am with you.

Kay Because she's got brains. She's got brains and a body.

Simon That is fairly common among human beings, yes.

Kay [Getting angry.] Don't take the piss out of me! You can't walk all over me like you do Debbie. You know what I mean.

Simon I really can't see why we're having this conversation. This conversation is completely pointless.

Kay You don't care about me any more than the others.

Simon This is really ludicrous. Must we go on?

Kay You've been laughing at me all the time, haven't you.

Simon This is getting silly.

Kay I bet you've been having a good laugh with Madison, over in New York, about your bit a rough in London. That's all I am, aren't I, your bit a rough. I thought I meant something to you. I thought I meant something to you because you meant something to *me!* But that's a stupid way of looking at things, init. That's not the way you and Madison would think: oh, she's so naive. I can 'ear you saying it.

Simon This is pure fantasy.

Kay I thought we 'ad something. I thought we 'ad something special.

Simon We do.

Kay I thought you cared about me.

Simon I do –

Kay But I'm just a little amusement.

Simon Kay –

Kay A game. Part of your little games.

Simon This is nonsense.

Kay I thought what we had was real. I felt so good when I posed for you. I felt

so good. I felt like I was somebody. I felt like I meant something, meant something for the first time in my life. But now I realise it's all just a game to you; but it was real to me.

Simon Please, Kay.

Kay I thought you were different, but you're like all the rest, laughing at me behind me back.

Simon Look –

Kay All my life the one they want to get rid of. The reject!

Simon Listen –

Kay First they chuck me out a school; then me parents chuck me out, and now, now this!

Simon [Simon has been getting agitated and his asthma is starting to come on.]

Kay. You must . . . calm down.

Kay I bet Madison's a lot more fun than your bit a rough, in't she.

Simon Kay.

Kay In't' she!

Simon Stop this.

Kay And she's so clever.

Simon Kay, you've got this all wrong.

Kay Yeah, course I 'ave. That's because I'm stupid.

Simon Kay.

Kay Too fucking stupid! Ain't I!

Simon Please.

Kay [Mocking Simon.] *Please.* [Simon's asthma attack is getting bad, he goes to his travel bag to get his inhaler. Kay snatches it up and pulls the inhaler out of the bag.] This what you want?

Simon [Gasping.] Yes. Yes.

Kay What? [Walking away from Simon.] Sorry I didn't get that. I'm a bit thick you see.

Simon Yes.

Kay Not very quick on the up take.

Simon Kay . . . please.

Kay [Imitating.] *Please*. [Normal voice.] Sure you wouldn't rather get it from Madison; bet you would. [Places the inhaler on the table.] There it is. Why don't you come and get it? You know you want it. [Simon staggers to the table. As he is about to grasp the inhaler Kay knocks it onto the floor.] Oh dear, I'm so clumsy. Clumsy as well as stupid! [Simon lurches towards it, loses balance and falls to the floor, gasping for breath, he begins to crawl, painfully, towards the inhaler. As he nears it Kay kicks it farther away. Simon crawls after it again, but moving slower now.] What's the matter? Don't you want it after all? [Simon gradually gets closer to the inhaler, as he reaches it Kay pulls another inhaler out of the travel bag and holds it up.] Silly me. Look at that. I'm so stupid I got out the empty inhaler by mistake. This must be the right one. [Simon gasping. Amplified sound of Kay depressing the inhaler.] Yes, this works. You must have the empty one. What a pity. [Sound of Simon gasping.] Here, catch. You can catch, can't you? [Kay throws the inhaler to Simon, who fails to catch it. He crawls to it and desperately uses it.] Not so high and mighty now, are we? Not on top of things. [Simon still gasping, slowly starts to recover; Kay helps him onto the office chair.] Come on, can't have you cluttering up the floor like that, can we. [Simon sits in the chair, using the inhaler and trying to regain his breath.] Not much of a party is it? Bit boring, think I'll go. [Simon tries to speak but can only manage a croak; eyes pleading with Kay to stay.] No? Want me to stay? S'pose we could play one of our games.

Simon [Wheezing.] Please – Kay –

Kay But you always want to play, you like to play.

Simon No –

Kay That's all you do is play.

Simon Listen –

Kay [Kay rummages in the bureau and gets out handcuffs and advances on Simon with them.] We can't stop playing now. I'm just starting to enjoy myself. It wouldn't be fair would it. You wouldn't want to disappoint me.

Simon It's – not – a – game.

Kay [Handcuffing Simon to the office chair.] Yes it is, it's all a game. Snug fit? Comfy? It's all a fucking game; make believe.

Simon No.

Kay I'll make you fucking believe.

Simon Not - well.

Kay Why don't we play the painting game.

Simon Kay.

Kay You like that. [Pulling out a canvas and propping it up.] That's your favourite game, the painting game. [Picking up the Stanley knife.] What d'you think of this one? [Pause.] Not very good, is it.

Simon No!

Kay If something's not good enough it has to be destroyed. That's right init.

Simon No.

Kay That's what you told me. And I always believe what you tell me. Not up to scratch, is it. [Slash.] Can't 'ave this [Slash] sub-standard crap [slash] cluttering up the place. [Kicks the damaged picture to the floor.] Improved, wouldn't you say?

Simon Please . . . I beg of you . . . Kay.

Kay Don't whine. I hate whining. I didn't think you were a whiner.

Simon Can't – breathe.

Kay I thought you were tough, I thought you could take your punishment like a man. Don't like the painting game anymore? [Kay goes to the workbench and empties out a large plastic bag containing paint tubes. The inside of the bag is smeared with paint.] Here's another game. This is a good game, I think you'll be impressed. [Kay approaches Simon with the bag, Simon shakes his head.] Don't tell me you don't want to play. [Standing behind Simon Kay grabs him and forces the plastic bag over his head. As Simon tries to breath, the bag, streaked with paint, closes over his face making him resemble one of his paintings and suffocating him at the same time.] 'Cos I know you always like to try new things. [Kay backs away as the plastic bag clings to Simon's face.] There, that's better, I knew you'd get into it once we got started. I'd love to stay and chat but I've got things to do. So long, Simon, don't s'pose I'll see you 'round much. [Exit Kay. Simon alone in the studio suffocating in the plastic bag. During the following dialogue faint spot on Simon's head as ambient light gradually fades as Simon starts to lose consciousness. At the end only Simon's head in the plastic bag visible in the faint light of the spot, floating as if disembodied.]

Kay [Voice Off.] What you doin' here?

Debbie [Voice Off.] What?

Kay [Voice Off.] You been lurking on the stairs.

Debbie [Voice Off.] No!

Kay [Voice Off.] Well?

Debbie [Voice Off.] I just . . . I have to –

Kay [Voice Off.] Can't stay away.

Debbie [Voice Off.] I must speak to Simon.

Kay [Voice Off.] I wouldn't disturb him.

Debbie [Voice Off.] I have to make him see –

Kay [Voice Off.] Don't waste your time.

Debbie [Voice Off.] He can't . . . can't treat me like that

Kay [Voice Off.]. I wouldn't disturb him, not now.

Debbie [Voice Off.]. I must make him understand.

Kay [Voice Off.]. Too late. You should've told him years ago. Come on, let's go
down the pub, I'll buy you a drink.

Blackout. End.