

A DROPPED STITCH

a dramatic comedy

by

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CHARACTERS

BOBBIE	A faded beauty, care-worn, mousy, just beginning to dream.
MOTHER	Gentle tyrant, who staves off chaos with her passion for order.
BERTRAM	Insufferable prig, full of himself, yet infuriatingly accomplished.
METRO	Free-thinking, free-wheeling, idealist who all too freely offers his ideas.

SETTING

Sewing room in a home.

TIME

Present day.

SCENE

(Bobbie enters sewing room wearing a fashionably cut gem-toned top. All around are piles of fabric, some cut into patterns, all but burying a sewing machine. Chairs, one of them suggesting a throne, with end tables and doilies, all showing signs of excessive wear, but gathered into a neat whole. In pride of place, an expensive bottle of whiskey surrounded by glasses. Bobbie struts back and forth in a gently swaying walk, then pauses and looks at the audience as if it is her mirror.)

BOBBIE

Gem tones. Not good. Too rich for my fair skin and coloring. Pink is my color. Too bad I hate it. At least since Barbie laid claim to it. Which means since the dawn of time. No, instead, maybe orange or lime greens will work. Anything but gray. Gray is the color of death for me.

(She walks slowly back and forth keeping her eyes on the mirror.)

BOBBIE

(as if reciting, from a lecture)

The chiastic movement of the hips. We're made to sway - not in the exaggerated fashion of the runway. No, a soft, gentle sway. That is natural. Good for our back. Natural, the way humans evolved. As we stood up to take a look around at the world. And certainly not to walk all taut, tight and rigid, like a ramrod. That's just plain wrong. Wrong for the body - just ask your back after a few years! That's the promise of fashion. It combines the beauty of the natural with the beauty we create. (*normally*) No, not gray. Gray is death for me.

MOTHER

(from offstage)

Bobbie? Have you seen the spare shears? I want to cut up that new fabric. The one with the bunnies on it...Bobbin, are you there?

(Bobbie rips off the top, revealing an ugly gray brassiere underneath, stuffs the top in a chest and dons a shapeless gray smock as Mother enters to find shears on sewing desk as Bobby reverts to normal mousiness.)

MOTHER

There they are! Now to find my glasses. Where on earth...?

(Mother exits, muttering to herself.)

BOBBIE

The chiastic movement of the hips. We're made to sway - not in the exaggerated fashion of the runway. No, a soft, gentle sway. That is natural. Good for our...oh, who cares?

(Metro enters, wearing a facial, swimming trunks. He lies on a deck chair. Bobbie watches him through a window.)

MOTHER

(from offstage)

Bobbie? Bobbin, have you seen my glasses?

(Bobbie finds them buried in fabric on desk.)

BOBBIE

Here, Mother.

(Mother enters. Metro places cucumber slices on his eyes.)

MOTHER

Thank you! My goodness, I hit sixty-five and everything starts to go downhill.

BOBBIE

(smiling)

You're fine, Mother.

MOTHER

(looking out window)

Think so? Well, well. Oh, is the homo sunning himself again?

BOBBIE

(giggling)

Mother!

MOTHER

What? Why did he have to buy that house? It could have gone to a nice family.

BOBBIE

You...we don't even know if he's...

MOTHER

Why, just look at him! Shameless! Sunning himself out there for all the world to see. In my day no woman - let alone a man - would ever let herself be seen giving herself a facial. Cucumber slices! Hmph!

BOBBIE

(scrambling to peek)

What? He's not...He is. Wow.

MOTHER

Just what I mean. Where in the world did he learn about that? See? A homo.

BOBBIE

Mother!

MOTHER

What?

BOBBIE

Nothing.

MOTHER

He's wearing an earring, isn't he?

BOBBIE

It's just a stud.

MOTHER

Him? A stud?! No, sir! In my day, a man knew his place in this world. Knew that we all needed his broad shoulders to lean on. Knew that he carried us all from this day to the next. Knew that we relied on him to provide, to be solid, strong. Like Bertram! Solid as a fencepost.

BOBBIE

(muttering)

And about as bright.

MOTHER

What's that, dear?

BOBBIE

Nothing, Mother.

(Metro exits.)

MOTHER

Where's he going now? To paint his toenails?

BOBBIE

Mother! Would you...stop watching him?

MOTHER

Why? This is more entertaining than Oprah.

BOBBIE

I thought you wanted to...work on Bertram's quilt.

MOTHER

Oh, right. Such a man to donate it! The church nursery's going to look beautiful with it.

BOBBIE

(uncertainly)

Yes.

MOTHER

(rubbing hands)

Well, of course it will, dear. And, that means that every person at Madison Avenue Episcopalian Church will walk into that nursery at one point or another. And, then, some of those new young mothers at church might actually start coughing up some commissions for their own nurseries at home.

(Bobbie stares at her, stricken.)

MOTHER

What? Actually, I was thinking of those new grandmothers. They're the ones with the disposable assets.

BOBBIE

Why do you go there?

MOTHER

Because. That's what we do.

BOBBIE

But...isn't that...I don't know...sacrilegious or something?

MOTHER

Bobbin! You think I like that it's going to be another powdered milk month? That we have to count the days until we can afford ground beef again?

BOBBIE

Well...no.

MOTHER

Your father's pension...

BOBBIE

(hurriedly)

It will come back.

MOTHER

We don't know that, Bobbin. (*fiercely*) All those sleazy fat cats on Wall Street performing all of their derivatives-slush fund hocus-pocus, leaving the rest of us... (*firmly*) We've got to make up the difference. Somehow. Without dipping anymore into our savings.

BOBBIE

What?!

MOTHER

I had to use fifty dollars from it last month. I couldn't tell you.

BOBBIE

(*sighing*)

It'll come around. Somehow.

MOTHER

I can't count on that. I won't. We're going to make \$80 on this quilt. That's two weeks groceries, dear. You know that.

BOBBIE

I know.

MOTHER

(*wistfully*)

And there's a lot more money at Madison Avenue Episcopalian.

(Metro enters carrying large fashion magazine, reclines and reads.)

MOTHER

Oh, look at that now!

BOBBIE

(*looking, giggling*)

At least it's not a trashy one.

MOTHER

We'll see him in his newest Coco Chanel dress, next.

BOBBIE

The piping might look good on him.

MOTHER

(checking watch)

That's not funny. Goodness! Look at the time! Bertram will be here soon. Oh! To check on the quilt, too, I'm sure! Goodness! I had promised to show him the squares!

BOBBIE

Great.

MOTHER

Now, Bobbin, look. Bertram's a good man. They don't make them like that anymore.

BOBBIE

A throwback to another age.

MOTHER

So what if he is? That's a good thing. A man you can rely on. Nope. You won't find him with cucumber slices on his eyes.

BOBBIE

Hardly.

MOTHER

So, be nice to him. It's nice to see him come by.

BOBBIE

Maybe for you.

MOTHER

(lightly)

Could be for you, too. I've got a little feeling about Bertram.

BOBBIE

(stops, stricken)

What feeling?

MOTHER

Oh, just that he's got that look about him.

BOBBIE  
What look?

MOTHER  
(lightly)  
That look of the conquering hero.

BOBBIE  
Hero.

MOTHER  
Yes. That proud look of a man who knows that he is  
growing accomplished and that it's time to...

BOBBIE  
Time to...what?

MOTHER  
Settle down.

BOBBIE  
Oh, Mother!

MOTHER  
Oh, Bobbin, it would be so nice to have a set of broad  
shoulders and wide, strong hands around the house.

BOBBIE  
To do what?

MOTHER  
(slyly)  
Why...he could help us clear that back corner for the new  
compost pile you're always talking about.

BOBBIE  
That's something I would like to see. Bertram sweating  
over a shovel.

MOTHER  
Oh, of course not. He would hire someone to dig the  
hole. Yes, he would. And all the better for us.

BOBBIE  
Mother, I really don't--

MOTHER

At first I thought he started coming by these last Wednesdays just to check up on us. You know, like he was with many families. But, I've checked. We're the only family he visits at the church. In fact, Reverend Winthrop said that Bertram--

BOBBIE

(hastily)

So? He just wants to see about the quilt he's donating.

MOTHER

Of course he does. Checking up on his investment. As a prudent man, a man of money, does.

BOBBIE

Well then?

(beat)

MOTHER

All I'm asking is that you be nice to him.

(beat)

BOBBIE

Nice.

MOTHER

Yes, say something nice.

BOBBIE

Like what?

MOTHER

Like what. Hmm...that's a good point. Let's see. Well...how about...what a nice suit he's wearing?

BOBBIE

(simperingly, mockingly)

How about, "My what a marvelous toothbrush that is!"

MOTHER

He has a good job. Solid. Decent. Besides, men like to be complimented. They have such fragile egos, you know.

BOBBIE

That's the truth.

MOTHER

That's why they need such broad shoulders - to cover it up. Now, why not put on something nice, something pretty? Something...

BOBBIE

Don't say it.

MOTHER

Pink.

BOBBIE

I knew it!

MOTHER

Men like pink. It reminds them of how dainty their womenfolk are. Non-threatening. Not their equal. Their...

BOBBIE, MOTHER

Helpmate.

(Doorbell rings.)

MOTHER

(anxiously)

Oh! There he is. Now, don't get excited, Bobbin. Maintain. Maintain. Everything's going to be just fine. Now, I'm going to...answer the door and you're going to...I'm going to....stall him by complimenting his suit and you will...

BOBBIE

(brightly)

Have nothing left to say, then.

MOTHER

(losing patience)

Put on something nice while we're out of the room. And sit in the chair when he enters. But don't rise to shake his hand. And let him kiss yours. Remember that.

(Mother exits. Bobbie wearily pokes around for another top to wear, then gives up.)

MOTHER

(from offstage)

Hello, Bertram! Hello! How are you this evening? It's so wonderful of you to drop by!

BERTRAM

(from offstage)

Good evening to you, too, Mother.

MOTHER

(simpering offstage)

Oh, don't bother really. You can call me...Mother.

(Bobbie sits in the chair. Mother and Bertram, immaculately dressed carrying bouquet, enter.)

BERTRAM

Roberta! You look beautiful this evening.

(He crosses to kiss her hand. Bobbie rises and shakes his as Mother looks daggers.)

BOBBIE

Thank you, Bertram. My, what a marvelous--

MOTHER

(hastily)

Suit!...that is.

BERTRAM

(pompously)

Why, thank you, Roberta. Thank you. Had it thrown together for me at Stilton's in the downtown.

MOTHER

Stilton's? Oh my goodness. So expensive.

BERTRAM

I don't mind cheerfully admitting that it did do a bit of damage to the old cash flow. But, what's a man of the world to do?

MOTHER

Oh, Bertram, you're such a man of--

BOBBIE

(brightly)

The world.

(Mother glares at her. Bobbie sits.)

BERTRAM

(not noticing, handing bouquet to Bobbie)

Thank you, my dear. Thank you. And these, my Lily of the Day, are for you.

MOTHER

Oh, Bertram!

BOBBIE

Thank you, Bertram. They're...

MOTHER

Lovely.

BERTRAM

Yes, don't mind cheerfully admitting they took a pretty penny, too.

MOTHER

So generous, Bertram. So generous. You didn't have to.

BOBBIE

That's right. He didn't have to.

MOTHER

Of course he did!

BERTRAM

(not hearing)

So! Busy hands at work, I see! Working on the new quilt for the church nursery, I see. Good. Good.

MOTHER

Why, yes!

BOBBIE

It's going to have bunnies on it.

MOTHER

(glaring)

And it will look lovely!

BERTRAM

Of course, of course.

MOTHER

Let me show you the new fabric. I was just about to start cutting out the squares for the pattern.

(Mother bustles out with the flowers.  
Bertram begins strutting, stops, doffs hat,  
looks for a coat rack, then absent-mindedly  
hands it to Bobbie, resumes strutting.)

BERTRAM

Of course. Rev. Winthrop let me know just the other day after the service - man to man - how relieved he is that I have taken on the onerous task of funding this new quilt for the nursery.

BOBBIE

Onerous?

BERTRAM

(not heeding)

Why, he said they'd been debating the issue for months. Months! Long committee meetings debating the appropriate pattern. Grave concerns that we were sending the wrong message to the next generation in decorating the wall with a quilt displaying steam shovels or (*shuddering*) baby dolls. I clapped the good reverend on the shoulder - man to man - and said, "Reverend Winthrop. This is a man's decision. Let the little ladies do it all up with their sewing machines, of course. But, in choosing the pattern, in cutting this Gordian Knot, in crafting a delicate instrument of momentous responsibility, we need a man's forthrightness, a man's fortitude, a man's certainty. Enough of this willy-nilly hand-wringing."

BOBBIE

Really.

BERTRAM

"A man's vision. That's what we need. Make it gender-neutral," I said. And clapped him on the shoulder - man to man.

BOBBIE

Bunnies.

BERTRAM

"So that we can move forward," I said, "Put it all behind us and get back to what we're here for: saving souls."

BOBBIE

And clapped him on the shoulder.

BERTRAM

Man to man. Now.

(Looking about him, Bertram's eye lights on Bobbie's chair. She gets up. He sits.)

BOBBIE

Shall I fetch your slippers?

BERTRAM

(not hearing)

No, just a whiskey will do. Neat. No, I tell you, Roberta...why does your mother call you "Bobbin"?

BOBBIE

(resignedly pouring)

It's a pet name, from Bobbie. The bobbin thread on a sewing machine. (to herself) For the thousandth time.

BERTRAM

(sipping)

Ah, perfect. Single malt. What the man of distinction savors. No, Roberta, I tell you, it's an onerous task managing lesser minds. But, what can you do?

(Mother enters with flowers in a vase and fabric, stops.)

MOTHER

(setting down vase)

Oh! What a delightful picture of domestic comfort! One might almost ask to fetch your slippers.

BOBBIE

(brightly)

One might.

MOTHER

Bobbie has poured out your single malt, then, Bertram? Is it satisfactory?

BERTRAM

As ever, Mother. You are too kind to this man who wearies of his labors. Too kind.

(He holds out his glass. Bobbie pours.)

MOTHER

Oh, don't think of that, Bertram. It's the least we can do. To make you comfortable. It's kind of you to look in on us each week.

BERTRAM

Yes, yes. No, Roberta, an onerous task. An onerous task managing lesser minds. But...

MOTHER

What can you do?

BERTRAM

Exactly. God made us the way we are: large and small, mighty and lowly, great and humble. God's design. God's will. We are just a piece of the puzzle. A part of the grand plan. So we might as well put our shoulders to the wheel.

BOBBIE

(gagging)

And heave.

BERTRAM

(not noticing)

Exactly. I'd like to say that this tête à tête at the church is unusual, but my experience of this world has revealed it to be, all too sadly, of a piece. Why, you'd think that constructing the world's best toothbrush would be a rather straight-forward affair, would you not?

MOTHER

Oh, Bertram, you have so many concerns on your mind.

BERTRAM

No more than I can handle, I assure you. Nevertheless, just this very afternoon, can you credit it? Just this very afternoon, the VP for Development sent around a hair-raising memo about the new synthetic bristles that Colgate is due to unleash on us all this next season.

MOTHER

Oh no!

BERTRAM

(solemnly)

Oh yes! They whiten as well as remove plaque! Just in time for Christmas. Their market share will jump to 32% in the holidays alone, I can tell you that! A whole percentile! A whole one! And that's just the beginning.

MOTHER

What will you do?

BERTRAM

Me?! Why continue the struggle, of course. That is what we do. That is what I do.

MOTHER

Are you worried...about...?

BERTRAM

No, no, no! No, fear not, Mother. I am too good at what I do to quail at the challenge. Other hearts may fail. Not this one. I've given my life to that firm, and the Senior Management well know it! They reward loyalty. Count on it! No, we soldier on. That is what we do.

(Time passes. Bertram continues pontificating, Mother listening. Metro puts on a sweatshirt, takes out a journal. Bobbie goes to window. Metro looks up from his journaling.)

METRO

Hello! It's time we met.

BOBBIE

Hi.

METRO

What's your name?

BOBBIE

Rob--...Bobbie.

METRO

Nice name.

BOBBIE

Thanks...really?

METRO

Yep. Embrace the androgyny. That's what I say.

BOBBIE

Embrace the--?

METRO

Sure. Cut yourself free of all those suffocating roles of a long, bygone era - like whalebone corsets or pantaloons or, why not? Cod pieces.

BOBBIE

(giggling)

Cod pieces?

METRO

Sure. In the Renaissance, men used to wear them to hold in place their--

BOBBIE

I know what a cod piece is.

METRO

There you are, then. Throw all those out, along with rigid gender roles of the past century, and what are you left with?

BOBBIE

I...don't really...

METRO

One vast canvas.

BOBBIE

Vast?

METRO

Better yet, a completely blank, vast canvas. On which you can paint whatever your heart's desire.

BOBBIE

But...

METRO

Sure. Think about it. Think of how much time you spend everyday fulfilling the requirements of a gender role. I mean, really. Count up the minutes. Then, chuck 'em all like old, forgotten furniture from the attic and...well! That's a lot of time on your hands for unfettered creativity.

BOBBIE

But...

METRO

Oh, sure. Sure. The world can say whatever it wants. And it will comment, you can bet on that. But, really, does it matter?

BOBBIE

Maybe.

METRO

Naw. Just a bunch of tongues wagging because they envy you your artistic freedom.

BOBBIE

But what about...?

METRO

About?

BOBBIE

People's...expectations or something?

METRO

What about 'em?

BOBBIE

Aren't they...important?

METRO

Oh sure. Sure. To them, they're real important. But they're their expectations. What about yours?

BOBBIE

I don't...know.

METRO

Can't speak without a voice. Yep. Embrace the androgyny.

(beat)

METRO

Let's start simpler. How was your day today?

(beat)

(beat)

METRO

Or not. Mine? Mine was great. Quiet. But I like that. Gave myself a facial. Baked a loaf of rye. Rubbed my cat's belly. Marinated some asparagus for dinner. Worked a little. A little. Read about a new line coming out of Milan.

(beat)

METRO

Still the center of the fashion universe. House of  
Giovanna. Did her first line on her mother's sewing  
machine. Say that she's the new Versace. Ah, Milano.

BOBBIE

Have you...?

METRO

(sighing)

Si. Molto bene! Magnifico! And the girls...the  
girls...the girls!...legs from their ankles straight on  
up to their hemlines. At whatever length.

BOBBIE

Oh. My mother thought you were...

METRO

Of course she did.

BOBBIE

She's not...I mean.

METRO

Of course she is.

BOBBIE

Okay. Maybe a little.

METRO

Tell you what: Just tell her I'm confirmedly bi-sexual.  
That'll really make her wheels spin. (*mimicking*) More  
entertaining than Oprah.

BOBBIE

(snorting in laughter)

Maybe I will.

METRO

Her voice carries.

BOBBIE

I'll remember that.

METRO

So. That was my day. How was yours?

(Night falls. Bertram, Mother, Metro exit.  
Bobbie wanders pensively, in a dream.)

BOBBIE

How was my day? How was my day?

(beat)

BOBBIE

How was my day? Cannot speak without a voice...The  
chiastic movement of the hips. We're made to sway - not  
in the exaggerated fashion of the runway. No, a soft,  
gentle sway. That is natural. Good for our back...Grrr!  
What...bullshit! How was my day? Cannot speak without a  
voice?!

(beat)

BOBBIE

How was my day? Well, (*spitefully*) Bobbin, how was it?  
I got to sit in the sewing room cutting up squares and  
circles and triangles, rectangles, and half-moons - every  
little regular shape known to humankind - for the skimpy-  
assed hundred bucks that an insufferable prig has  
(*mockingly*) generously donated despite its (*mimicking*)  
bit of damage to the old cash flow.

(beat)

BOBBIE

How was my day? And then I got to hold his hat and pour  
him whiskeys while he began the first of what is sure to  
be several long speeches of self-flattering bombast of  
what an (*mimicking*) onerous task it is to donate a quilt  
to a church nursery.

(beat)

BOBBIE

How was my day? I got to meet my infuriatingly free and all-too-pleased-with-himself metrosexual neighbor who spends his day marinating asparagus and rubbing his cat's belly.

(beat)

BOBBIE

Actually, I kind of admire him for that. Marinated asparagus. It beats the drive-thru at McDonald's. And who takes the time to rub their cat's belly, anymore? I mean, really. Genuinely. Who sets aside time in the day for that? Who consciously puts that on their TO DO list?

(beat)

BOBBIE

Throwback? He's the throwback. To the nineteenth century when...when people put...lavender sachets in their linen to surprise themselves with the scent every time they opened the drawer. And now? What do we do? I don't know. Spray air freshener around or something.

(beat)

BOBBIE

(fiercely)

How was my day?...A vast canvas. On which I can paint my heart's desire...And all I have to do is chuck out the old, used furniture of (*spitting*) gender role expectations...(*shouting now*) No matter what anyone thinks...(*bitterly*) That's it. That's all there is to it. Thanks. Thanks a lot. (*toward window*) Fuck you! Fuck you, you hedonistic prick!

METRO

(from offstage)

Voices carry!

(Bobbie stands, shocked, then slowly starts to sink.)

BOBBIE

First time in years, first time since Daddy died, that someone asks me how my day was, and I don't have a single word to say.

(Bobbie sits and starts to cry. Morning comes. Bobbie sits, dully sorting through fabric squares. Mother enters.)

MOTHER

Well, I thought that came off quite well last night, don't you? Bertram was very pleased with the pattern. Why he even smiled when I showed him the bunnies. It's going to be perfect. Just perfect. What a wonderful thing it is to be able to turn your hands to some good! Don't you think, Bobbin?

(Bobbie grunts.)

MOTHER

Get up on the wrong side of the bed this morning, did we, sweetie? Well, well, never mind. Let me just get you another cup of coffee.

(Mother bustles out and quickly returns with a cup.)

MOTHER

There, there. Sip that now. Cream--

(Bobbie glances at her.)

MOTHER

Well, of course not. We can pretend. And with a drop of honey and dash of cinnamon. Just the way you like. Oh, by the way, Bertram is coming again tonight.

BOBBIE

What? Why?

MOTHER

(lightly)

Can't imagine. Oh, that reminds me.

(Mother takes a large bottle of cheap whiskey out from behind a cabinet.)

BOBBIE

(stupidly)

But...it's not Wednesday. He only comes on Wednesdays. Wednesday was...last night.

MOTHER

Of course, dear.

(Mother opens Bertram's bottle of scotch and tops it off. Bobbie watches.)

BOBBIE

He really is coming, then.

MOTHER

Oh, I noticed that whole chickens are sixty-nine cents a pound this week. We should get one. We're coming to the end of our broth.

BOBBIE

I thought we had another carcass left over.

MOTHER

Nope. That's okay. I was thinking potato soup this week. What do you think?

BOBBIE

Will Bertram like it?

MOTHER

That's not funny, dear. Count ourselves lucky that he doesn't come earlier for dinner. I don't know what I would do.

BOBBIE

I'm sorry.

MOTHER

(silky)

That's fine. Well, shall we get to work? It will be nice to show our progress to him this evening. How hard we can work when set our minds to it.

BOBBIE  
He really is coming?

MOTHER  
Yes.

BOBBIE  
On a Thursday.

MOTHER  
Yes, Roberta!

BOBBIE  
But...why?

MOTHER  
I guess we'll find out, won't we? Now, how are the triangles coming along?

(Bobbie sifts around then pulls out of stack of triangles.)

BOBBIE  
Ummm...here. About twenty, so far.

MOTHER  
Good. Why not cut out the rest and let tonight be tonight? I'll start seaming them.

(Mother sits at the sewing machine. Bobbie takes some shears and fabric and begins cutting out triangles.)

MOTHER  
My mother, your grandmother, had a Grasshopper, one of the originals. Did I ever tell you that?

BOBBIE  
(smiling)  
Not above a few hundred times.

MOTHER  
(threading machine)  
There's my Bobbin's smile! At last. Like the sun coming up over the mountains.

BOBBIE

Oh, Mother.

MOTHER

Yep, one of the very first Elnas. Goodness, what a sensation it was! Why, it was the talk of the neighborhood. Everyone wanted to come by and see its gorgeous green color. Its cute little accessories box, stored just behind the free arm. Its carrying case that folded out to be a worktable. The very first portable sewing machine. Of course, it could only do a straight stitch.

BOBBIE

Do tell!

MOTHER

(smiling)

Yes, I know. Still, it was a wonder all the same. Of course, Betty MacNeil, just down the street, had to outdo us and snapped up one of those Supermatics as soon as they came on the market. Trumped everyone with all the embroidery she was putting on her tablecloths and napkins. In minutes! Mother was fit to be tied.

BOBBIE

(enjoying the retelling)

A Supermatic?

MOTHER

Of course! You remember those? The first machine with a whole range of stitches, all automatic, even zig-zags. All you had to do was slip in the little cam...

BOBBIE

(meeting her cue)

Cam?

MOTHER

Yes, these cute little discs that had the stitch patterns all worked out. It controlled the feed dogs to move back and forth, left and right. Everything automatic. You want a new stitch, you just switch out the cam.

BOBBIE

And the best part?

MOTHER

As soon as they came up with new patterns - Turkish carpets, say, or a Parisian stitch - oh, any of a sort of decorative stitches, you didn't have to buy a new machine at all!

BOBBIE

You just bought the new disc--

MOTHER

And popped it in! What a wonderful invention that was! What an amazing feat of American engineering!

BOBBIE

(breaking the spell)

I thought Elna was Swiss-made.

MOTHER

Of course it was, dear. We can always pretend.

(They sit in silence as Mother runs a few seams.)

MOTHER

How are the triangles coming along?

BOBBIE

(feeling better)

Good.

MOTHER

That's right. There's nothing like sewing to set everything to rights. The whole world might be going to hell in a handbasket, cut out a few circles and squares, and it's soon all forgotten. Reverend Winthrop can say what he likes about God casting his hand out over the "celestial chaos" to bring about order. Typical man.

BOBBIE

What do you mean?

MOTHER

(snorting)

It's obvious, isn't it? All you have to do is look up at the night time sky to realize that God was a seamstress. Stitching out God's own patterns among the stars.

BOBBIE

With Betty MacNeil's Supermatic and its interchangeable cams, I suppose?

MOTHER

Of course! Oh! What am I thinking?

BOBBIE

What?

MOTHER

(checking watch)

Yes, there's enough time. Sweetie, I'm going to run to the market and get a whole chicken and then roast it up.

BOBBIE

Why? We weren't going to make soup until later this week.

MOTHER

Of course. I'll roast it up, though, strip it, and start the broth going this evening.

BOBBIE

What's the hurry?

MOTHER

Bobbin! When Bertram arrives, the whole house will be filled with that hearth-like aroma of a seventy-hour chicken broth just beginning.

BOBBIE

(angrily)

Mother! I don't see any reason why we should have to--!

MOTHER

(airily)

He'll love it. The perfect picture of domestic harmony. Okay, I'll be back soon!

(Mother bustles out. Bobbie angrily cuts out a few more triangles. Metro appears with his journal, sits, frowning, scratches his head with a pen, then scribbles.)

BOBBIE

More fashion designs?

METRO

No, no. Just working out my own version of the GUT.

BOBBIE

Your gut?

METRO

Not my gut, the GUT.

BOBBIE

What? You mean like situps and leglifts and things like that?

METRO

(looking down)

What? Oh, you mean, like am I trying to build up a six-pack? No, no. Though, maybe I should work on that a bit. Getting a bit flabby there.

BOBBIE

Maybe you should lay off the asparagus.

METRO

Maybe. No, no. The GUT is the Grand Unified Theory of matter.

BOBBIE

The what?

METRO

Grand Unified Theory. Why do celestial bodies - stars, planets, comets and the like - operate according to one set of rules and sub-atomic particles operate according to a different one?

(beat)

BOBBIE

Some light thinking on a lazy morning.

METRO

The Grand Unified Theory - G U T, the GUT - is the holy grail of physics these days. Figure out the common rule for both macro and micro bodies and you've written your ticket for life.

BOBBIE

Is that what you do? You're a physicist?

METRO

No, no. I'm a dilettante.

BOBBIE

A dilettante?!

METRO

Okay, a gifted amateur if you like. Besides, I'm not interested in sub-atomic particles as much as I am in people.

BOBBIE

Which makes you...

METRO

Oh, in an earlier age, I suppose, I would have been considered a philosopher.

BOBBIE

That fits.

METRO

Thank you!

BOBBIE

So, your GUT...

METRO

My version of it, anyway.

BOBBIE

How's it coming along?

METRO

Well, actually, pretty good, now that you ask about it.  
It goes like this: Why do celestial bodies--

BOBBIE

Stars, planets, comets and the like...

METRO

Right. Take all those. Why do they function according  
to one set of rational rules - rules that we can define,  
refine - to help us measure, even predict their behavior?  
And, yet, people now. Why is their behavior, in  
contrast, so screwy? So random?

BOBBIE

I...don't know.

METRO

At first blush, sure, they're different, right?

BOBBIE

I guess so.

METRO

But that only depends on your perspective.

BOBBIE

Perspective.

METRO

Sure. If your perspective is limited to your backyard,  
comparing what you see up in the sky with what you see in  
your neighbor's window, there's no correlation.

BOBBIE

Ummm...

METRO

But! Expand your perspective to a galactic one, and the  
picture changes.

BOBBIE

Okay. How?

METRO

It's just your frame of reference getting in the way.  
Blinding you to the obvious.

BOBBIE

Which is?

METRO

Stars, planets may seem huge in comparison to your  
average person, but! But, all are occupants of the same  
universe.

BOBBIE

Uh...

METRO

Right?

BOBBIE

Uh...right.

METRO

So, it seems logical that they would follow the same  
basic rule set. And! If we think celestial bodies are  
rational in behavior but humans screwy, it's obvious:  
Our basic assumptions about people must be mistaken.

(beat)

BOBBIE

Wouldn't you rather...I don't know...be making homemade  
yoghurt or something?

METRO

Just started a fresh batch! Vanilla-flavored. If you'd  
like, I'll give you a quart.

BOBBIE

Uh...sure. So...

METRO

So, it seems to me that we're asking the wrong things of  
people. Our expectations are skewed.

BOBBIE

Back to expectations, again.

METRO

Sure! Why not simply expect people to behave like celestial bodies?

BOBBIE

Which means...?

METRO

Instead of expecting a man or a woman to behave according to some sort of randomly configured behavior traits, depending on their plumbing--

BOBBIE

Plumbing.

METRO

Yeah. Whether they come packaged with a penis or vag--

BOBBIE

I know what plumbing means.

METRO

Right! Instead expect them, as people, no matter what their plumbing, to behave like celestial bodies.

BOBBIE

Which behave like?

METRO

Themselves. Self-sustaining. Affected slightly in behavior as they orbit around each other, sure. But, as for the rest, completely self-sustaining. Free to do as they wish. No assumptions, really. Not when it comes down to it. I mean, who would seriously dis Mars for not having rings like Saturn does? Nobody. We just sit back in awe whenever we look at Saturn. In fact, we admire those rings. Treasure 'em. And as for Mars? Well, it is a bit dusty, sure, but it has an austere beauty all its own. Why not treat people the same?

(beat)

METRO

Only makes sense. They are fellow occupants of the same universe, after all. People and planets.

BOBBIE

That's...brilliant.

METRO

Thanks. That's what we dilettantes do...Tough night, last night.

(beat)

BOBBIE

(quietly)

Yeah.

(beat)

METRO

How's your day coming along?

BOBBIE

It just got much more interesting.

(The afternoon passes. Bobbie sits, cutting out patterns. Mother enters.)

MOTHER

Doesn't that broth smell wonderful?

(Bobbie stares at her thoughtfully.)

MOTHER

Don't you think so?

BOBBIE

(smiling)

Yes. It does.

MOTHER

(nervously)

He'll like it, won't he?

BOBBIE

Of course he will, Mother.

MOTHER

(confusedly)

Good. Good! Umm...is this the right moment to ask what you'll be wearing this evening.

(Bobbie chuffs in disgust.)

MOTHER

Maybe it is. How are the circles coming along?

(Bobbie shows her.)

MOTHER

Wonderful! You have such a steady hand. I've always admired your circles, you know that? Oh, sure, give me a straight edge, and I'm your girl. But, I could never, for the life of me, cut a smooth curve.

BOBBIE

(smiling, in spite of herself)

Is that so?

MOTHER

(encouraged)

Yes. Not since I was little. You, on the other hand, have always had a firm hand for the curved, the abstract.

BOBBIE

Well...I...

MOTHER

So...pink, then?

BOBBIE

Arggggh! Mother!

MOTHER

I'm only asking because you wore that...gray...smock of yours last night. Again. If you wear it tonight, he'll think that you're...

BOBBIE

I'm...

MOTHER

Slovenly.

BOBBIE

(chortling)

Slovenly! Well, that wouldn't do. Slovenly. Not in Bertram's life. That wouldn't do, at all.

MOTHER

Honey, are you...feeling all right? Here, let me check your temperature. Maybe you should lie down.

BOBBIE

(pushing her hand away)

I'm fine.

MOTHER

Are you sure? I can finish up...well...no, I can't. Maybe I could start on the stars.

BOBBIE

Stars...I'll get the circles done, Mother. And, I'm fine. Really.

MOTHER

Okay. You just seem a little...I don't know.

BOBBIE

It's two visits from Bertram in two days. It's left me a little...*(kindly, almost)* flushed.

MOTHER

Oh! Well, yes. It would do that, wouldn't it? Silly me. Well, I'll...uh...get back to the seams, okay?

BOBBIE

Great.

(Mother sits down and begins running seams. Bobbie continues cutting out circles.)

MOTHER

Goodness, what a to-do! Why, this reminds me of my first date with your father.

BOBBIE

With Daddy? At the City Park?

MOTHER

Yes, God knows, I didn't know what I was doing.

BOBBIE

Maybe that was for the best.

MOTHER

Hogwash. A woman has to know how to play a man if she wants to win him.

BOBBIE

Ummm...

MOTHER

Yes, I went along to the Park, all wide-eyed and innocent. My new orange velvet mini-dress - that's all that Mother would allow, and boy was that ever a struggle - my new white go-go boots. My, I must have been the very sight of the Park that day.

BOBBIE

(intrigued)

I'm sure that you were. Whatever happened to that dress?

MOTHER

(lost in reverie)

What?

BOBBIE

The orange dress, the go-go boots. What happened to them?

MOTHER

Oh...well, I don't know, to tell the truth. Probably Goodwill or St. Vinnie's.

BOBBIE

Too bad.

MOTHER

Why?

BOBBIE

I would have liked to have seen them.

MOTHER

Oh, Bobbie, they'd be about fifty years old now.

BOBBIE

All the more reason.

MOTHER

In any case, that first date was such a disaster, I don't know how we survived it.

BOBBIE

What happened?

MOTHER

You don't remember? Well, nothing.

BOBBIE

Nothing?

MOTHER

Yes, that's just it. No first kiss so I could turn my cheek. No anxious pressing that I could fend off. Nothing.

BOBBIE

Well...that's a good thing.

MOTHER

It most certainly was not!

BOBBIE

Clearly you got married, at any rate.

MOTHER

Of course! I was so distraught at your father playing the perfect gentleman, that I went home right there, had it out with your grandmother, and set up my new plan.

BOBBIE

Plan.

MOTHER

Plan. As you say, we did get married. Eventually. Goodness, however, if I had left things in your father's hands, I doubt that would have come off.

BOBBIE

I don't think I want to be hearing this.

MOTHER

Bobbin, I'm delighted to hear that you're thinking of wearing pink tonight.

BOBBIE

I definitely don't want to be hearing this!

MOTHER

The thing is...men need to be cossetted. Caressed - metaphorically speaking. Cooed. Fussed over.

BOBBIE

This is unreal.

MOTHER

And, with my help, you've been blundering along pretty well, especially with pouring out his whiskey and in sweetly listening, after a fashion, to Bertram. However, I think it's time that you took a more systematic approach to things.

(beat)

BOBBIE

What do you mean?

MOTHER

The Good Wife's Guide.

BOBBIE

Oh, Mother! That's an urban legend! Everybody knows that. Just some sneaky method making people spam each other.

MOTHER

Well, maybe it is. I still like it: "Listen to him. Let him talk first. Remember, his topics are more important than yours."

BOBBIE

Mother!

MOTHER

"Make the evening his. Try to understand his world of strain and pressure and his very real need to be at home and relax."

BOBBIE

You're right.

MOTHER

I'm right? Really?

BOBBIE

Yes, I do understand Bertram's very real need to (*emphasizing*) go home and relax.

MOTHER

Very funny. It's good advice, Bobbin. All they were missing was "Be sure to show a little leg when needed" and it would have been complete.

BOBBIE

Show a little--!

MOTHER

A little. Just a little. From time to time. I could have used advice like that myself back in the day. It would have made things...easier between your father and me.

BOBBIE

Daddy.

MOTHER

So, laugh all you want. But men and women are different. They think about different things. Want different things. Are attracted to different things.

BOBBIE

Such as?

MOTHER

It's obvious, isn't it? Men want power, action, wealth and command. Women want comfort, peace, love, and--

BOBBIE

Control?

(beat)

MOTHER

I was going to say "security," but, yes. Control.

BOBBIE

I'm not listening.

MOTHER

No, you should listen to this. I'm talking about the real world here.

BOBBIE

You're talking stereotypes.

MOTHER

Which is, like it or not, how most of this world operates. To dig any deeper takes too much effort.

BOBBIE

Oh, I'm not even--

MOTHER

The real world, Bobbie. Where an empty checking account means no groceries.

(beat)

MOTHER

Now: Men are direct. Women indirect. And that's just fine. That's the way it should be. Let men have the microphone, I say. Let them hog the podium. I could care less.

BOBBIE

So long as you know that you are ultimately in control.

MOTHER

Yes, Bobbie. Yes. He may be sitting in the throne of his castle...

BOBBIE

But you hold the keys.

MOTHER

His wife does. And with a little indirection every now and again, she (*emphasizing*) never lets them go.

(beat)

BOBBIE

(weakly)

And Daddy?

MOTHER

Would have bankrupted us a dozen times with his wild ideas if I had let him.

(beat)

MOTHER

You're getting older, Bobbin--

BOBBIE

Stop it! Just stop it!

MOTHER

--And we're getting poorer. That's it.

(beat)

MOTHER

Bertram will be here soon. Wear the pink, Bobbin. Be a woman. Be the woman I know you can be.

(Mother exits. Bobbie wanders back and forth in silence. Then, finally, takes off the gray smock, folds it tenderly, and puts on a pink, frilly top. The doorbell rings. She sits in the chair. Metro exits.)

MOTHER

(from offstage)

Bertram! How wonderful to see you! Come in! Come in!

BERTRAM

(from offstage)

Good evening, Mother! How are you this fine evening?

(They enter. Metro exits.)

MOTHER

Oh, simply grand! But, you, how was your day?

BERTRAM

Weighty, yet ponderous. Roberta! You look beautiful this evening.

(He crosses to her. She remains sitting and raises a hand to let him kiss.)

BERTRAM

(handing her bouquet)

And these, my Lily of the Day, are for you.

BOBBIE

Thank you, Bertram. They're lovely.

(She stands, takes his hat, and gestures for him to sit. Mother beams.)

MOTHER

(taking flowers)

Let me take those, dear.

(Mother exits.)

BOBBIE

A whiskey, Bertram?

BERTRAM

No, just a whiskey will do. Neat. No, I tell you, Roberta...why does your mother call you "Bobbin"?

BOBBIE

It's a pet name, from Bobbie. The bobbin thread on a sewing machine.

BERTRAM

(sipping)

Ah, perfect. Single malt. What the man of distinction savors. No, Roberta, I tell you, it's an onerous task managing lesser minds. But, what can you do?

BOBBIE

How was your day, Bertram?

BERTRAM

Take brushing your teeth, now.

BOBBIE

Yes.

BERTRAM

Is there a single more, declarative example of civic duty in America today than brushing one's teeth?

BOBBIE

I...I suppose not.

BERTRAM

Yes, yes. Did you know that, on the Lemelson-MIT Inventions Index, the toothbrush scored as the one invention half of all Americans cannot live without?

(Mother enters, sets down vase.)

MOTHER

Fascinating.

BERTRAM

Even more necessary to the good life than a car or a computer. Half of all adults! Half! Can you believe it?

BOBBIE

Well...I...

BERTRAM

Half! Only half! Just what, I would dearly love to know, are we in the industry doing wrong? What is this government coming to? I would dearly love to know that.

BOBBIE

(barely repressing a snicker)

It...

MOTHER

--Must be so difficult. Oh, Bertram, you have so many concerns on your mind.

BERTRAM

No more than I can handle, I assure you. Nevertheless, if this were an earlier time, back in the days before that saint, Wadsworth, patented his first toothbrush in 1857, well, then I guess I could credit it. Less so, in those heady days of World War II, fighting off Hitler with a bright smile.

BOBBIE

Hitler?

BERTRAM

Yes! All your general infantry soldiers were taught to brush their teeth as a matter of national security. After the war, they brought that wonderful practice back home to their families and America, the world, has never been the same.

BOBBIE

Do tell!

BERTRAM

Yes. This country, this planet, owes FDR and his military Chief of Staff George Marshall a great debt.

BOBBIE

I...certainly.

BERTRAM

But only half! That was almost three generations ago. That almost half of Americans still claim a car as more important to their existence than a toothbrush?! Can you credit it?!

BOBBIE

Why not combine them? Put toothbrushes in the cars.

(Bertram chuffs.)

BOBBIE

Save time. Do it during the commute.

BERTRAM

(handing up his glass for another pouring)

Well, well, what am I going on about? You little ladies don't need to worry about such heavy concerns.

MOTHER

Yes. Of course. You were saying about civic virtue.

BERTRAM

(abruptly standing, strutting)

Yes! Half! Only half! Why, brushing one's teeth is about the only clear-cut, inarguable manner in which one may display to all the world, all his fellow-countrymen that he is a fine citizen. Half. Can you credit it?! It is the epitome of accountability, brushing one's teeth. The very model of probity, integrity, fidelity, of moral rectitude. Of self-sacrifice for the Common Good. The one act that all may do for the Greatness of his country. I refer you to the direction provided us all by that titan, that dear bard of the Americas, Ralph Waldo Emerson: The only reward of virtue is...virtue. Is there anything less disputable than that, I ask you?

BOBBIE

Uh...why no!

MOTHER

No, of course not!

BERTRAM

All we need do, no matter how tired, no matter how weary, no matter how exhausting the sweat-stained labors of our day, is, every night, before we go to bed, brush our teeth. Nothing less will satisfy.

(Mother starts applauding. Bobbie, uncertainly, follows suit. Bertram bows.)

BERTRAM

I thank you. I thank you. I confess: It is a passion with me.

MOTHER

And what an admirable one. Bobbin?

BOBBIE

Uh...yes. Of course. Uh...here, Bertram. You must have so many...uh...

MOTHER

Weighty.

BOBBIE

Concerns on your mind. Sit down. Let me pour you a fresh drink.

(Bertram sits. Bobbie renews his glass. Mother sidles up to her.)

MOTHER

Remember: Show a little leg.

(Bobbie grimaces, then, resigned, nods. She hands the glass to Bertram, then sits on the arm of the chair.)

BOBBIE

Come, Bertram. You're...home now. Relax.

BERTRAM

Thank you, Roberta, thank you.

MOTHER

Well, I'll leave you two...lovebirds alone. I'll say goodnight, Bertram. Don't get up.

BERTRAM

(sipping)

Eh? Ah, yes, Mother. Good evening.

MOTHER

Don't hurry out.

(With a last look at Bobbie, miming pushing up her breasts, Mother exits. Bertram sips in silence. Bobbie stares at the ceiling for a long moment, then sighs, lowers her bust that Bertram may see.)

BOBBIE

(cooing)

What's really bothering you, Bertram?

BERTRAM

(eyes wide, choking)

I...I...

BOBBIE

(stroking his hair)

Come, Bertram. Tell me all about it.

BERTRAM

(settling down)

You're a fine woman, Roberta. A fine woman. What any man, in his right mind, would long for. Would strive for.

BOBBIE

Thank you, Bertram. Tell me, was it a hard day, today?

(beat)

BERTRAM

(sighing gloomily)

Yes. It's this damn...forgive me, Roberta.

BOBBIE

Not at all.

BERTRAM

It's this blasted WhitenWipe synthetic of Colgate's. It's got every one at the firm up in arms.

BOBBIE

WhitenWipe?

BERTRAM

Yes, a new synthetic fiber that will whiten your teeth even as it (*mockingly*) "wipes" away the plaque.

BOBBIE

Yes, I remember. Their market share rising by a whole percentile.

BERTRAM

Just in the holiday season alone, I tell you! Well, there's a lot of wild talk at the firm. Restructuring. Fingers pointing everywhere. Claiming every other department should have known, was responsible. Hand-wringing. Wondering how Colgate could have stolen such a march on us. No new ideas to combat it. Stock-holders will be furious.

BOBBIE

There, there, Bertram. I know that you can solve it.

BERTRAM

Really? I mean...of course. Of course. You're right. Of course, I can.

BOBBIE

There, there. Rest now. You must be so weary.

BERTRAM

As Hercules after his Twelfth Endeavor. As Atlas holding up the world.

BOBBIE

(taking glass, setting it down)

Here, drink up. Let me give my brave warrior a kiss and caress you to sleep. There, there.

BERTRAM

(getting sleepy, murmuring)

What would I do without you, Roberta? Such a woman.  
Such a beautiful goddess of a woman.

BOBBIE

Shhh. Shhh. Rest now. Just let yourself out later,  
okay? Rest now. Tomorrow's trials belong to tomorrow.  
Tonight is all for you. Shhh. Shhh.

(Bertram falls asleep. Bobbie watches him  
for a while, then quietly gets up and looks  
at herself in the mirror.)

BOBBIE

At least it's not Barbie's pink. But then, that doesn't  
really matter anymore, does it? Celestial bodies that  
are self-sustaining. Saturn's rings. Okay, I wouldn't  
be the first to accuse Barbie of matching Saturn for  
magnificence. I wouldn't be the last, either, come to  
think of it. Who cares? What matters is who I am.

(She sways gently back and forth.)

BOBBIE

The chiastic movement of the hips. A gentle sway.  
Natural. Much like...a willow tree in...a sun...a sun-  
kissed breeze. I like that. That's who I am. A willow  
in a sun-kissed breeze. I sway. Gently. Catching the  
eye with my natural, magical sway.

(She turns a few times, gently, slowly.)

BOBBIE

I was adored tonight. He adored me. He said I was a  
goddess.

(She abruptly stops.)

BOBBIE

What price divinity? Can I be that kind of goddess? It  
certainly was easy. All too easy. Can men really be  
that simple? Can I be that kind of woman? I mean, yes,  
I can. But do I really want to?

(She resumes her sway.)

BOBBIE

All too easy. Just a few poured whiskeys, a few strokes of his hair, a flash of the décolletage, and blustering, pompously strutting Bertram is reduced to a blubbering child, to be cossetted, caressed and cooed. What fun! My god, why did I never try this before? God, it's wonderful to be adored!...Well, whatever, I do next, whatever woman I become, I choose this: From now on, my sway is my own. I'm not giving it up for anyone. It feels so good. It's like...caressing myself with every step. Caressing myself. Yes. Like caressing myself.

(She begins to caress her inner thighs as she strolls, swaying gently.)

BOBBIE

(chuckling huskily)

And why shouldn't I? Why shouldn't I caress myself?

(She stops.)

BOBBIE

Colors. I need color. Enough of gray! I need oranges, and lemons, and limes and...well...okay, pinks, too. From time to time.

(She runs over to her trunk and begins rummaging through it, pulling out tops. She begins to pull off her top.)

BOBBIE

How far does this go? How much of a woman can I be?

(She pulls off her top. Then, slowly, she pulls off her bra and, slowly, puts on a daringly low-cut, brightly colored top. Then, completes the outfit with a sash.)

BOBBIE

There! World, meet the new Bobbie! And, Bertram? You get the first dance.

(She beckons to him. He comes out of his sleep, bows low over her hand, and they dance gently a few steps until she dances him to his exit. Morning comes. Bobbie is at the sewing table humming to herself, sorting through brightly colored fabric. Mother enters.)

MOTHER

What on earth?!

BOBBIE

What?!

MOTHER

Bobbin! What are you wearing? Cover up your breasts! Are you...are you not even wearing a bra?!

BOBBIE

Is that all? It's more natural, Mother. I feel more natural this way.

MOTHER

Is that all?! Bobbin, did you--

BOBBIE

Bobbie.

MOTHER

What?

BOBBIE

Bobbie. Bobbin was cute, and endearing, when I was twelve. I'm no longer twelve, Mom.

MOTHER

Mom?! Did...did Bertram...did you...you...and...Bertram?

BOBBIE

(laughing delightedly)

In his dreams.

MOTHER

What?!

BOBBIE  
No, we only danced. In mine.

MOTHER  
I don't understand.

BOBBIE  
It was sweet. Enchanting, in some ways.

MOTHER  
Well...I need to sit down.

BOBBIE  
(pouring her a whiskey)  
Here, Mom.

MOTHER  
(gulping)  
Mom. I liked Mother. Oh! That's better.

BOBBIE  
I know. It kept me younger, didn't it? There, there.  
Don't worry.

MOTHER  
I don't know what to say.

BOBBIE  
Well, tell you what: Given Bertram's state of mind last  
night, I'm certain that he will be returning this one.

MOTHER  
Are you sure?

BOBBIE  
Oh, quite sure.

MOTHER  
Well, good. I think.

BOBBIE  
So, I guess we'd best get back to work. How about you  
begin sewing my circles to the batting? I finished them  
last night.

MOTHER

Oh, Bobbin...Bobbie, you know I sew terribly on a curve. I know that you really want to do this part of the quilt in that way, but...

BOBBIE

I know. That's because you're trying to cut the curve by stitching like it's straight. Remember what I do: Keep your eye just to the right and front of the needle guide. About a half-inch. And just feed the fabric as it comes up through your fingers.

MOTHER

Well, I don't know.

BOBBIE

Give it a try, Mom.

MOTHER

Mom.

BOBBIE

Go ahead. Just try one. I've already pressed a stack.

(Mother sits with a circle and tries. Bobbie watches, swaying gently back and forth.)

MOTHER

Oh, my! It worked. *(turning)* What on earth!? What are you doing?!

BOBBIE

Walking.

MOTHER

Like a strumpet!

BOBBIE

No. Like the goddess that I am.

MOTHER

Goddess?!

BOBBIE

Bertram thinks so. And that's all that matters, right?

MOTHER

What have I done?

BOBBIE

Go ahead, Mom. Finish them up.

MOTHER

What have I done?

(She continues sewing, while Bobbie walks over to the window as Metro appears with a hefty, dusty tome. He sits.)

BOBBIE

Good morning!

METRO

Oh, hello! Found your sexuality last night, I see. About time.

BOBBIE

Like it?

METRO

What's not to like?

BOBBIE

Thank you.

METRO

Feels good, doesn't it?

BOBBIE

(caressing herself)

Yes, it does. It feels very, very good.

METRO

In a whole variety of ways.

BOBBIE

Yes. In fact. It does.

METRO

Stands to reason. Our sexuality is the root of our power.

(beat)

BOBBIE

(murmuring)

That's why.

METRO

Of course, if you're really daring, you'll quickly tire of using your new-found power to twist some guy around your little finger and do something creative with it.

BOBBIE

Creative?

METRO

Yes. Our sexuality is the root of our creativity, too. Only in a far more interesting - fascinating, really - way. Endlessly fascinating, in fact. You never quite get tired of it. Twisting guys around your finger, though. Well, I can tell you from experience that is going to get old really fast.

BOBBIE

Really.

METRO

Yep. Got a big canvas to fill up, remember? What are you going to fill it with?

BOBBIE

(smiling flirtatiously)

My heart's desire.

METRO

Nice try. And that would be...

(She stops swaying.)

BOBBIE

I...don't know.

METRO

Yep. Long road ahead. You're just beginning.

BOBBIE

(stung)

Thanks.

METRO

Ooo! Anger, too! All in one night. You really are coming alive, aren't you?

BOBBIE

Thanks. I think.

(beat)

BOBBIE

What's your heart's desire?

METRO

You're seeing it, babe.

BOBBIE

Rubbing your cat's belly? Scribbling thoughts about Grand Unified Theories? Being a dilettante?

METRO

You know it. Can you imagine a more satisfying life?

BOBBIE

(bitingly)

Yes. Yes, I can. Easily.

METRO

(ignoring the barb)

Good. That means you're not me. Nor should you try to be. Saturn's rings, remember? Let Saturn be Saturn and spend your time, instead, figuring out yourself.

(beat)

(beat)

BOBBIE

(wilting)

I wouldn't know where to begin.

METRO

Oh, come on now. Don't give up so easily. Look, I love the new look. The color, the line, the décolletage, the sway. If, after a few days, you still love it, too, keep it. It's yours.

BOBBIE

Well...good! Because I don't want to give it up. I don't need a few days to decide that.

METRO

All right. I'm just saying that the outside is easy. Superficial. The inside, though, that's where the real adventure begins.

BOBBIE

Okay.

METRO

The journey of a thousand li begins with one step.

BOBBIE

And that would be...

METRO

Mao Zedung. Communist leader of China. Supposedly. Personally, I think he cribbed it from somebody else. In any case--

BOBBIE

Chinese history?

METRO

That's my day today. What's yours? The first step.

(beat)

BOBBIE

Can't you help me? Even just a little?

(beat)

METRO

All right. In fact, I've already thought about it: What are you getting paid for that quilt?

BOBBIE

You know about--?

METRO

Voices carry, remember?

BOBBIE

Right. \$100.

METRO

And your costs are...what...\$20? For the fabric, I assume.

BOBBIE

How did...? Never mind. Yes.

METRO

Meaning, you're getting paid \$80 in labor and profit. Not bad. Two weeks worth of groceries. For you two, that is. Though how you live on that, I can barely--

BOBBIE

Never mind. Yes. Yes. That's all true.

METRO

Okay. So, let me ask you: Are you enjoying the work?

(beat)

(beat)

BOBBIE

No.

METRO

Because?

BOBBIE

It's...too predictable. There are no surprises.

METRO

Which, I assume, is precisely why your mother loves it so much.

BOBBIE

That's true! God, why didn't I--?

METRO

But you love sewing.

BOBBIE

I...

METRO

Rephrase: Life without sewing to you is like a world without color.

BOBBIE

Yes...yes!

METRO

See where we're headed?

BOBBIE

No. No, I don't.

METRO

Big canvas, babe. I suggest you get started.

BOBBIE

Wait!

METRO

Nope. The dilettante is no longer in. He has a date with Mencius.

(beat)

BOBBIE

What makes you, you?

METRO

Someone who wasted too much of his life doing what everyone told him he should.

(Metro turns a page. Bobbie turns back into the room.)

MOTHER

Bobbie, these are turning out better than I thought.

BOBBIE

Good!

(Doorbell rings.)

MOTHER

Now, who on earth could that be? Certainly not Bertram, it's barely noon.

BOBBIE

If it is, he's being fired.

(They freeze. Mother stunned. Bobbie surprised at herself.)

BOBBIE

He talked about restructuring last night. He wouldn't really say, of course, but I just realized that he was pretty worried about it.

MOTHER

Well...I...don't know what to...

BOBBIE

Get the door, Mom. Let's find out.

(Mother exits.)

MOTHER

(from offstage, uncertainly)

Why, Bertram! What a tremendous surprise!

BERTRAM

(from offstage)

Good morning, Mother. Is...is Roberta in?

MOTHER

(from offstage)

Of course, of course. Do come in.

(They enter. Bobbie stands, receiving them.)

BOBBIE  
Bertram, won't you sit down?

BERTRAM  
(ashen, uncertain)  
Roberta, you look--

BOBBIE  
Bobbie.

BERTRAM  
Uh...yes, yes. As I was saying, Roberta--

BOBBIE  
Bobbie. That's my name. Not Roberta.

MOTHER  
Bobbie! Um...Bertram, do sit down. And, a whiskey,  
perhaps?

BERTRAM  
I...

BOBBIE  
Do sit down, Bertram.

(He sits.)

BOBBIE  
How did you leave it?

(beat)

BOBBIE  
Are you returning there this afternoon?

BERTRAM  
I'd like to. I want to.

BOBBIE  
Tea, Mom. Please?

MOTHER  
(confusedly)  
Certainly, dear. What would you like?

BOBBIE  
No, it's for Bertram.

MOTHER  
I don't...

BOBBIE  
Earl Grey.

MOTHER  
But, Bobbie, I don't think we have any Earl Grey in the house. *(sneaking glance at Bertram)* Right now.

BOBBIE  
Ask the Metro.

MOTHER  
The what?

BOBBIE  
The Metrosexual. Next door. He's reading in his garden.

MOTHER  
The what? Oh. Him?! He wouldn't...oh! Of course he would!

*(She goes to window, beckons Metro over. They have a sotto voce conversation and then Metro exits and returns with a teaball, which Mother doesn't know how to use, so he demonstrates. Finally, she exits into kitchen, shaking her head. He sits and continues reading. Mother eventually brings out tea and hands it to Bobbie who serves it to Bertram. All this time, meanwhile...)*

BERTRAM  
(tightly)  
I hardly know what to say, Rob--...Bobbie. A man's dreams...

BOBBIE

There's no hurry, Bertram. Rest now. You are safe here.

(She kneels in front of him and places her hands on his knee. He sobs and places his head on her hands.)

BERTRAM

(sobbing, choking out)

Oh, Bobbie! If you only knew! I've worked so hard, so very hard! To earn a good wife. All these years. And to have it come to this!

BOBBIE

I know. I know, dear. It's okay. It will be fine. Just fine. Don't worry.

BERTRAM

What do I do? What is a man to do?

BOBBIE

Shhh. Shhh. It's okay. You're safe here. Please, try to gather yourself.

BERTRAM

Gather myself?

BOBBIE

Yes, Bertram. We need to talk. I need you to be strong.

BERTRAM

(settling down)

Yes...yes...of course. Of course. I'm sorry...I...I'm sorry...I don't know what came over me...I...

BOBBIE

Shhh. Shhh. You've had a terrible shock.

BERTRAM

I...yes...I...

BOBBIE

You've worked all these years. Given your life, really to one firm. All this, to have someone upstairs make an awful mistake and pin it on you.

BERTRAM

You understand! How?

BOBBIE

The restructuring.

BERTRAM

Yes! It was announced this morning. My division is being taken from me. Unless...

BOBBIE

Unless...

BERTRAM

(sipping tea, summoning indignation)

Unless I "prove" my "worth" by bringing some "original thinking for a change." Can you credit it?! Me? Lacking an original thought?!

BOBBIE

(hiding her smile)

Well, we'll just have to see about that.

BERTRAM

(abruptly standing, strutting)

That's right! And we shall! It is not for nothing that I have devoted my entire life to bringing smiles to this world! It is not for nothing at all! Damn it! Oh, forg--

BOBBIE

Never mind, Bertram. Keep going!

BERTRAM

Right!...Where was I?

BOBBIE

Bringing smiles to the wor--

BERTRAM

Yes, damn it! I have! I have devoted my entire life to bringing smiles to this world. And, when you think about it, is that really so terrible? Am I running guns! No! Am I robbing banks! No! Damn it! No! I give the one thing that everyone can enjoy on this planet - all too wretched all too often in its suffering - and it costs pennies! Pennies! Don't talk to me of your \$2000 Bangladeshi micro-loans to buy a herd of goats! Don't talk to me of your \$100 African wireless laptops to connect the Dark Continent to the world! Yes, yes, yes! Laudable! Admirable! Of course! But - and I ask you - can you credit it? Can they top what I do?

MOTHER

I...don't know.

(Bertram stops, as if slapped.)

MOTHER

I mean...of course they can't!

BERTRAM

Can they? I bring smiles to the world for pennies. Pennies! My PlakWhacker retails at \$.15 a piece. *(lowering voice)* At a volume discount of 144 per package. Some restrictions apply. *(normally)* What is the one outstanding characteristic that any person on this planet - be he born ever so exalted, be he born ever so low - may develop, I ask you!

MOTHER

I...

BERTRAM

Brains? Hah! As if we could all be Einsteins! Brawn? Not on your life! As if we could all be Olympians! No. A smile. A bright smile. The one outstanding characteristic that all may have. Your calling card that seals that business deal. Your Welcome Wagon that brings a ready friendship. Your Madonna-like sweet smile of compassion that assuages all the world's suffering and soothes all the world's ills. I bring that! For pennies! Mere pennies! Top that, I ask you! I demand it of you! Top that!

MOTHER

Uh...you can't!

BERTRAM

That's right. You cannot. Oh, they laugh. They laugh at old, sainted Wadsworth. They sneer at his original boar's hide bristles. How was he to know that they would breed bacteria like a petri dish? It wasn't like he was squirting cholera into the watertable, now was he? He was a visionary. A true visionary. They forget that, with the way they worship their synthetic fibers! They are standing on the shoulders of a giant and they've forgotten that. I never have. I never will!

BOBBIE

Bertram?

BERTRAM

Yes!

BOBBIE

You need an idea.

BERTRAM

An idea?!...Oh, yes...*(sitting, sinking)*...That's right.

*(beat)*

BOBBIE

At this point, they're pretty panicked about the WhitenWipe, am I right?

BERTRAM

*(gathering himself)*

Yes...yes...That's right. Stockholders' anger. It terrifies them. Terror at being blamed for sleeping at the wheel while Colgate slipped by on the inside curve. That's what they're frightened of. Getting chucked out at the next shareholders meeting.

BOBBIE

So, they'd grasp at just about anything?

*(beat)*

BERTRAM

(strutting again, tearing at hair)

Why...yes. Yes, I think they would. I just need an idea! An idea. An original idea. It doesn't matter if it's a bad one...Is that true? Why, yes, I think it is...Just one completely new, hare-brained idea...To get the panic to stop. Get everybody working as a team again. And stop tearing each other down...One idea...One simple...God! Why's it so difficult?!

BOBBIE

(quietly)

Well, Bertram, I don't think it helps much to (*emphasizing*) drive yourself to distraction...

(beat)

BERTRAM

Drive myself to...Eureka!! I have it!

MOTHER

You do?!

BERTRAM

(feverishly striding back and forth)

Yes! Just a moment! Just a moment!...A Drive-N-Wipe. No, too many syllables. Sounds too much like WhitenWipe, anyway. Sounds like we're coming from behind... The...no...no...not that, either...car, toothbrush, toothbrush, car, console, passenger, driver, cigarette lighter...driver...The Commuter's Cleaning...no...too...unwieldy...no...Ah! The Clean Commute.

MOTHER

The what? But isn't that Bobbie's--?

BOBBIE

Hush, Mother! Not now. He's almost there.

BERTRAM

The Clean Commute! Yes! For that busy executive on the go! An electric toothbrush, with saliva-activated paste in the bristles, with the sweetener cut down so that it doesn't dry the mouth! Yes! And it plugs straight into the cigarette lighter! Just like a cell phone charger! Eureka! Yes! Retails at...no, can't make it too cheap. More exclusive. Gold-plated? Well, maybe...But the standard model...\$39.95. Yes! It will work! The perfect holiday gift! Take that, Colgate! Ha! Oh, Bobbie! You've saved me. Dear, dear, sweet goddess of a woman! You've saved me. How can I ever thank you?

BOBBIE

Go get 'em!

BERTRAM

Yes! I will! In fact, I think I'll call on the way - all the Senior Management - and demand they gather in the Executive Suite. Whet their appetites! Ha! I'll see you soon.

BOBBIE

And, Bertram?

BERTRAM

Yes, my love.

BOBBIE

Don't return tonight. Come tomorrow morning.

BERTRAM

(summoning himself, formally)

I...of course. Of course, my dear. Until then. Goodbye, Mother! I've worlds to conquer without a moment to lose!

MOTHER

Yes, I...

(He exits at a run.)

MOTHER

Tomorrow morning?

BOBBIE

Yes.

MOTHER

I don't...

BOBBIE

When he returns, Bertram will come to propose.

MOTHER

Oh, my! Are you certain?

BOBBIE

As certain as you were, Mother, that your first date with Daddy was a disaster.

MOTHER

Oh.

(beat)

MOTHER

Well, I guess I had better...prepare something special...  
I imagine that you have a great deal of thinking to do.  
I...If you need me...I'll just be...

(She turns to exit, then...)

MOTHER

You called me "Mother" and not "Mom."

BOBBIE

Yes, Mother. I finally remembered that you prefer that.

(Mother exits. Bobbie wanders over to the window.)

BOBBIE

Hi.

METRO

Did you know that Meng-tze - sorry, that's Mencius for the uninitiated - believed that humans were fundamentally good?

BOBBIE  
Really?

METRO  
Yep. It's as natural for a person to do good as it is  
for water to cascade down a mountainside. That's my guy!

BOBBIE  
Nice thought, that.

METRO  
You believe that, too.

BOBBIE  
Yes. Yes, I do.

METRO  
Particularly of your man. For all of his bluster.

BOBBIE  
Yes. I do.

METRO  
The Clean Commute, eh? I'm going to have to get one of  
those myself!

BOBBIE  
Really?

METRO  
Sure! For the fun factor if nothing else.

BOBBIE  
He is a good man.

METRO  
He is. But that's not the question that you should be  
asking yourself.

BOBBIE  
I know.

METRO

It's your canvas, babe. And no one else's. Besides, you've already assembled all the pieces. Do you see the design, yet?

BOBBIE

No. Not yet.

METRO

You will. You've come too far not to.

(Night comes as Bobbie sways gently back and forth, thinking.)

BOBBIE

Why not? For the fun factor if nothing else.

(Bobbie takes out a large sketchpad and sits, drawing. Metro exits, smiling. Bobbie stops, then slowly nods to herself. Morning comes. Doorbell rings. Mother enters.)

MOTHER

Goodness! Already?! Are you...are you...ready, dear?

BOBBIE

I'm fine, Mother. Bring him in.

MOTHER

Are you sure? You look like you haven't slept. I mean...you look beautiful, Bobbie. It's just that... maybe a few minutes to freshen up or something?

BOBBIE

No, Mother. I'm fine. I'm ready.

MOTHER

Well...should I...? I...don't know what...I've never...

BOBBIE

It's fine, Mother. Really. Bring him in and listen to us talk.

MOTHER

No! I can't do that! At moments such as these, a woman must be alone with her--

BOBBIE

Mom! Please.

MOTHER

Okay, okay. I just don't...

(She exits.)

MOTHER

(from offstage, almost frightened)

Good morning, Bertram! My what a lovely bouquet! Please, do...do...umm...come in.

BERTRAM

(from offstage)

Thank you, Mother. And how are you this fine morning?

(They enter. Bertram carrying large bouquet.)

MOTHER

(giggling skittishly)

I'm...I'm...

BERTRAM

Thank you, my dear. Thank you. And these, my Lily of the Day, are for you.

BOBBIE

(taking, treasuring flowers)

Thank you, Bertram. They're lovely. So! It went well?

BERTRAM

Smashing! Brilliant! Production starts next week! Everyone's champing at the bit, and I'm to lead the project.

BOBBIE

That's wonderful, Bertram.

MOTHER  
(over-excitedly)

Wonderful!

BERTRAM

Bobbie?

BOBBIE

Yes?

BERTRAM

I have a proposal to make.

BOBBIE

As do I.

BERTRAM

When a man comes into his own...eh?

BOBBIE

I'm not going to marry you, Bertram. At least not yet.

MOTHER

Bobbie! No!

BERTRAM

I...

BOBBIE

Please sit, Bertram.

BERTRAM  
(sitting)

I...

BOBBIE  
(pouring)

Scotch? It's not single malt, I'm afraid. But it's a gift from my heart all the same.

BERTRAM  
(gulping whiskey)

I...

BOBBIE

I want you to back my new line of fashion design.

MOTHER

What on earth?!

BOBBIE

(laying out designs for him)

My new line. For next spring. Called "The Goddess."

(beat)

BERTRAM

(considering her very carefully)

You are aware, Bobbie, that I don't know that industry.

BOBBIE

Yes. I am also aware that you know both how to meet a need and to market a line.

(beat)

BERTRAM

(slowly)

That's true.

(beat)

BOBBIE

Who knows? You might even find that you enjoy fashion. You certainly have an eye for and genuinely enjoy Stilton's tailoring.

BERTRAM

That's also true.

BOBBIE

Besides, I know that everything is rosy at the firm now, with The Clean Commute coming on. However, when the dust settles...there will be some hard feelings about how they nearly scapegoated you for their sins.

(beat)

BERTRAM

(glittering, hard)

You know me, well, Bobbie. Much better than I had guessed.

BOBBIE

And you know the quality of my ideas. Strike hands on the bargain? Partners?

BERTRAM

But not man and wife.

BOBBIE

No. Not with anyone. Not until I am financially independent.

BERTRAM

(looking around, thinking)

Financially independent...

BOBBIE

(chuckling)

Yes, Bertram. Our needs, our wants are few. I don't think it will take all that long.

BERTRAM

Until you're financially independent. And then we'll entertain my proposal.

BOBBIE

(offering to shake)

Until then. Partners?

MOTHER

(fearfully)

Oh, Bobbin!

(beat)

BERTRAM

(shaking her hand)

I do.

(Fade.)