

# ***In Progress***

by David Speranza

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## IN PROGRESS

### CHARACTERS:

*The Writer*

Not terribly talented, tends to mask insecurity with pomposity. Could be 21, could be 41, or anywhere in between

*Irene/Carolyn*

In her 20s, intelligent, independent, at bottom a romantic

*Humphrey/Mike*

Another twentysomething, well-meaning, bright but occasionally slow on the uptake

### TIME:

The present.

### PLACE:

An imaginary space somewhere between reality and the Writer's mind.

## IN PROGRESS

*Lights up on foreground stage left, revealing a desk and chair. Backstage right is a kitchen table with two chairs and a cupboard, though this area is presently dark.*

*Enter WRITER from stage left, who places a cup of coffee on the desk. He is about to sit, but remembers something and goes back offstage. He returns with a cookie, sets it down carefully next to the coffee cup. He sits, takes up a pen, writes the date at the top of a pad of paper. Pauses. Takes a sip of coffee. Puts the cup down, decides it is not placed to his liking and arranges it on one corner of the desk. Puts the cookie beside it, has a sudden thought and takes a bite before putting the cookie back. He stares at his pad. A few pens on the desk look messy, he lines them up neatly. He stares at the pad again. Finally he begins to write.*

WRITER: "Scene 1. A kitchen. Humphrey sits reading at the kitchen table. Enter Irene..."

*As he says "kitchen," the area at stage right lights up. We see HUMPHREY at the table with a newspaper, then IRENE entering on cue. She sits across from Humphrey, regards him a moment.*

IRENE: I think we should get a divorce.

*The action freezes, the lights over the kitchen table dim.*

WRITER: No, that's no good...

*The Writer crosses out what he has written as Irene departs offstage. He starts again.*

WRITER: "Scene 1. Enter Irene..."

*Again Irene enters, the same as before, and sits. Only now it is Humphrey who speaks.*

HUMPHREY: ...I think we should get a divorce.

*The action freezes, the lights dim.*

WRITER: No, that's no good either.

*He tears up the page and starts a fresh sheet.*

WRITER: "Scene 1. A kitchen. Humphrey sits reading at the table. Enter Iree—" No.  
"Enter...Carolyn."

*The same girl, only now wearing a different top—and perhaps with a slightly different manner—enters and sits.*

HUMPHR: Do you know how much I love you?

CAROLYN: How much?

HUMPHR: So much I could puke.

*Freeze.*

WRITER: Oh, that's romantic!

*He scribbles out the line, starts a new one. The scene picks up again.*

HUMPHR: ...So much, I don't know what I'd do without you.

WRITER: Much better!

CAROLYN: Is something wrong?

HUMPHR: No, nothing's wrong. What makes you think something's wrong?

CAROLYN: I'm always suspicious of unsolicited compliments.

HUMPHR: Aren't I allowed to tell the woman I love how much she means to me, without having some ulterior motive?

CAROLYN: Of course you are. Thank you, dear, that's sweet.

*She rises to get a napkin from the cupboard. Humphrey, trying to return to his reading, is distracted by Carolyn who, with her back to him, bends to pick up a napkin that has fallen.*

HUMPHR: Hon, you really should learn to bend at the knees. I mean, do you know how sexy that is? It makes me want to—

CAROLYN: You're objectifying me again, darling.

HUMPHR: I am?

CAROLYN: Yes, you are. I thought we talked about that.

HUMPHR: I'm sorry. It's such a thin line between objectifying and paying a compliment.

CAROLYN: Complimenting is when you remark kindly on a person's appearance; objectifying is when you interpret that appearance as something to facilitate sex.

HUMPHR: And that's bad, right?

CAROLYN: Of course it's bad. It robs a woman of her personality and her intelligence, and reduces her to a simple plaything designed to dangle on the end of a man's dick. *(Pauses, looks at Writer.)* Excuse me, I don't feel comfortable with that line.

WRITER: *(a bit surprised)* ...I beg your pardon?

CAROLYN: I don't think I'd say "dick."

WRITER: ...Why not?

CAROLYN: Well, it's a bit...crude, isn't it? What about "penis"?

WRITER: No. Penis is too clinical. And it doesn't have the same ring as "designed to dangle on the end of a man's dick." Do you hear all those D's? Penis doesn't have the same consonance.

HUMPHR: You mean alliteration, don't you?

WRITER: Whatever.

CAROLYN: I don't know about consonance, but I definitely don't think I'd say "dick."

WRITER: Hm. Okay... *(thinking)* What about dork? Or dong?

CAROLYN: No, those are guy words. Something more feminine.

WRITER: Feminine? Like what? Cock? Prick? Rod? Shaft? Love muscle?

CAROLYN: Very feminine.

HUMPHR: I thought you were looking for D words?

WRITER: I can't think of any more D words. Look, why don't you just say "dick" for now, and later I'll put in something better.

CAROLYN: When, later?

WRITER: I don't know—the next draft, okay?

CAROLYN: You promise?

WRITER: Since when do I answer to my own creations?

CAROLYN: Just because we're yours doesn't mean we have to agree with you.

WRITER: That's exactly what it means. It also means you're *there* and I'm *here*, and whatever comes out of my pen you have to live with.

CAROLYN: Children do grow up, you know.

WRITER: Yeah, and they get old and die, too. So just watch it—one stroke of the pen, that's all it takes.

CAROLYN: *(under her breath)* Mr. Big Shot...

WRITER: What was that?

CAROLYN: Nothing. Can we get on with it?

WRITER: Just waiting on Her Highness.

CAROLYN: Well, I'm ready.

WRITER: Thanks for your indulgence. *(to Humphrey)* And what about you?

HUMPHR: Hm? Oh, yeah. Ready.

WRITER: Good. So, we left off at...

*The scene picks up in mid-sentence.*

CAROLYN: *(to Humphrey)* ...and reduces her to a simple plaything designed to dangle on the end of a man's dick.

*Humphrey does not respond, only stares at her thoughtfully. The Writer looks up from his page at this unexpected silence.*

WRITER *(to Humphrey)* Well?

HUMPHR: I'm sorry. I'm just wondering if— What about "doorknob"?

WRITER: What about what?

HUMPHR: As in, "designed to dangle on the end of a man's doorknob."

CAROLYN: I like that! Now that's something I could say!

WRITER: Oh, you could, could you? And when have you heard a dick called a doorknob?

CAROLYN: There's always a first time.

HUMPHR: Sure. It's innovative. You'd be coining a new phrase.

WRITER: *I would? (thinks a moment)* Yeah, maybe I would... "on the end of a man's doorknob." It's not bad. All right, we'll try it.

CAROLYN: *(clapping hands)* Excellent! *(to Humphrey)* Way to go, Humphrey!

HUMPHR: Well, you did have a point—

WRITER: *(interrupting)* Hey, enough of the mutual admiration society! Let's try this out!

HUMPHR: Sorry...

*Carolyn pats Humphrey's hand as the Writer picks up his pen to write. The scene resumes.*

CAROLYN: ...and reduces her to a simple plaything designed to dangle on the end of a man's doorknob. *(She glances happily at the Writer, who waves "yeah, yeah.")*

HUMPHR: On the end of my *what?*

WRITER *looks up in surprise; then watches with interest.*

CAROLYN: Your doorknob! Haven't you ever heard it called a doorknob?

HUMPHR: I can't say that I have.

CAROLYN: But you know what I'm talking about.

HUMPHR: Well, sure—

CAROLYN: Okay then.

HUMPHR: —my dick. My cock. My prick. My prong.

CAROLYN: Humphrey, you know I hate that kind of language.

HUMPHR: I know. But I like seeing you turn all red.

CAROLYN: You really are a bastard sometimes.

HUMPHR: Bitch.

CAROLYN: Excuse me?

HUMPHR: Whore.

CAROLYN: Humphrey!

HUMPHR: Dyke.

CAROLYN: I can't believe you called me that!

HUMPHR: Cow.

CAROLYN: That's it, I'm not talking to you anymore. *(turning to Writer)* You can have him call me anything you want, I just won't listen. *(singing)* La, la, dee-da...

HUMPHR: Gorilla breath.

CAROLYN: *(to Writer)* Oh, that's clever. Just what is your point in all this?

HUMPHR: Mucus face.

CAROLYN: *(to Writer, rising)* I'm sorry, you're going to have to find another character. I can't be in this scene.

WRITER: Excuse me?

HUMPHR: Lizard tongue.

CAROLYN: You heard me. I will not be baited. As long as he keeps this up, I refuse to take part in this.

HUMPHR: Crocodile anus.

WRITER: *(to Humphrey)* All right, cut it out, Humphrey—

CAROLYN: What exactly is your point, anyway?

HUMPHR: Monkey colon.

WRITER: Humphrey, knock it off already!



HUMPHR: Whuh? Oh, sorry...

WRITER: *(to Carolyn)* My point? I think it's fairly obvious: I'm using language to deconstruct the inherent aggression within male-female relationships.

CAROLYN: Are you sure you just don't like hearing women being verbally abused?

WRITER: Well...

CAROLYN: Ah-ha! So you're actually a sexist!

WRITER: I am not!

CAROLYN: You've got some serious hostility towards women.

WRITER: I do not! I love women!

CAROLYN: Sure, as long as you can objectify them.

WRITER: Look, this is a ridiculous discussion! Would you mind getting back into character?

CAROLYN: Why? So I can say what you tell me to say and do what you tell me to do?

WRITER: Exactly.

CAROLYN: Sexist!

WRITER: I am not! Humphrey has to do what I tell him, too!

HUMPHR: I'm not really comfortable with the name Humphrey.

WRITER: What!? What's wrong with Humphrey? It's a cool, offbeat name.

HUMPHR: Humphrey is not cool.

WRITER: Humphrey Bogart?

HUMPHR: Humphrey *Bogart* is cool. Humphrey by itself is just plain silly.

WRITER: So what do you suggest?

CAROLYN: Can we get back to monkey colons for a minute?

WRITER: You keep quiet!

CAROLYN: See? Hostile!

WRITER: *(to Humphrey)* What would you rather be called?

HUMPHR: I don't know. Something evocative. Something dynamic. Something quintessentially *me*.

WRITER: And who are you?

HUMPHR: Don't you know?

WRITER: If I did, we certainly wouldn't be having this little chat.

CAROLYN: / know! How about Derek? You look like a Derek to me.

HUMPHR: Derek's not bad.

WRITER: He's not cool enough to be a Derek.

HUMPHR: What do you mean, I'm not cool enough?

WRITER: Look, I may not know that much about you, but I do know you're not a Derek. How about Daniel?

HUMPHR: You used Daniel in your last play, remember?

WRITER: Yeah, that's right.

HUMPHR: That one you didn't finish.

WRITER: All right, I remember! So what about...Daryl?

CAROLYN: What's this hang-up of yours with the letter D?

HUMPHR: Nah, I don't like Daryl, either.

WRITER: Fine, no more D's. What do you think of Mike?

HUMPHR: Not bad...

WRITER: It's a good, functional name. And it goes well with Carolyn.

CAROLYN: *(trying it out)* "Mike and Carolyn... Mike and Carol..." It's like the Brady Bunch! I like it!

HUMPHR: All right, I can live with it.

WRITER: Good. I'm glad you approve. Now, can we continue?

Humphrey *nods*.

WRITER: *(to Carolyn)* Carolyn?

CAROLYN: Only if there's a change in tone here.

WRITER: Change in tone? I see. And what does Her Ladyship suggest?

CAROLYN: Well, less sarcasm, for one thing. Less aggression. More romance. And cleaner words.

MIKE: It's not the words that are dirty, it's the thoughts behind them.

CAROLYN: Oh, stop quoting George Carlin.

MIKE: I thought it was Lenny Bruce?

CAROLYN: What do you know about Lenny Bruce?

MIKE: I don't know. *(to Writer)* What do I know about Lenny Bruce?

WRITER: Nothing! You don't know anything about Lenny Bruce! He was dead before you were born! Now can we please get back to the scene?

MIKE: *(shrugs)* What exactly is the scene?

CAROLYN: That's what *I've* been asking him.

WRITER: It's an examination of the aggression that lies just beneath the surface of love. It's about how we only hurt those we're close to. It's about how the light side of a relationship can't exist without a corresponding dark side.

CAROLYN: And is all that true?

WRITER: I don't know. It sounds good, though.

MIKE: So in other words, you don't know what the hell you're talking about.

WRITER: I don't have to know what I'm talking about. My job is to make it sound good. That's the art of writing.

CAROLYN: So not only are you sexist, you're irresponsible too!

WRITER: It's not irresponsible! And I'm not a sexist! The best writers can convince a person of just about anything, whether they believe it themselves or not. It's all about fabrication. Do it with conviction, and the world is yours. Why do

you think totalitarian regimes hate us so much? Because they know the power of the word.

MIKE: Especially words that start with D.

WRITER: Look, this is no longer a subject for discussion! Now let's get back to the scene, before I scrap everything and start over with two completely new characters—preferably deaf mutes.

CAROLYN: Talk about totalitarian regimes...

WRITER: What was that?

CAROLYN: Nothing. Fine. What do you want us to do?

WRITER: Go back to your discussion. Talk about penises and monkey colons.

CAROLYN: I refuse to talk about monkey colons.

MIKE: I don't mind.

CAROLYN: Oh, shut up.

WRITER: Fine. Then what *do* you want to talk about?

CAROLYN: Nose rings.

WRITER: Nose rings?

CAROLYN: Sure. I've always had a thing for pierced body parts.

MIKE: Nose rings?

WRITER: This is ridiculous.

CAROLYN: Come on, let's try it.

WRITER: *(giving in)* All right, we'll try nose rings! *(writing)* "Scene 1. Mike sits at breakfast when Carolyn enters..."

*The scene begins again. Carolyn enters.*

CAROLYN: Hon? Do you think I'd look good in a nose ring?

MIKE: Why would you want a nose ring?

CAROLYN: I'm not saying I want one. I'm only asking if you think I'd look good in one.

MIKE: No, I think you'd look terrible.

CAROLYN: Why?

MIKE: Why? Because everyone looks terrible in them. That's why they get them. To be fashionably ugly.

CAROLYN: Sandra looks good in hers.

MIKE: No she doesn't, she looks wretched. Anyway, she told me it's a pain when she gets a cold. And with your allergies it would be a real mess. What's so great about sticking bits of metal in your body, anyway?

CAROLYN: Well—

WRITER: *(interrupting)* All right! Enough with the nose rings! I am not writing an anthropological study on contemporary American jewelry habits! *(to himself)* This has got to be a new low...

CAROLYN: I thought it was interesting...

MIKE: *(to Carolyn)* He's right, it was a bit silly.

CAROLYN: It was better than monkey colons.

WRITER: Excuse me— *(waving pen)* Who's in charge here?

CAROLYN: *(turns to Writer)* And what topic would you like us to cover now, oh Master of the Papermates?

WRITER: I'm glad you asked!

*He applies pen to paper with sudden gusto as the characters snap into position.*

MIKE: *(to Carolyn, back in character)* I love you! I hate you! Fuck me! Beat me! Don't ever leave me! On your knees, you clinging succubus!

CAROLYN: *(to Writer)* Oh, that's subtle.

WRITER: That's just the subtext. Sometimes I need to put it out front before I work it back into the narrative. By the third draft you'll hardly notice it.

CAROLYN: I only hope I'm still alive by the third draft.

MIKE: I have an idea. What if we try something a little more...radical?

CAROLYN: *More radical?*

WRITER: Like what?

MIKE: Well...what if we express ourselves in dance? You know, instead of using words, we let our feelings come through in movement.

CAROLYN: No words?

WRITER: *(with a significant glance at Carolyn)* I like it.

CAROLYN: But I don't know how to dance!

WRITER: Sure you do. It says so right here.

CAROLYN: Right where?

WRITER: *(scribbling)* "Carolyn, with the grace and beauty of a gazelle, enters the room..."

*Carolyn stands suddenly from the table and does a graceful twirl in Mike's direction. Mike rises and clasps her in his arms. Their lips move in for a kiss, but at the last moment Carolyn spins out of Mike's arms and grabs a knife from the table. She brandishes it towards him, advancing. He backs up warily, then drops suddenly to his knees and, with eyes closed, stretches wide his arms and offers her his breast. She melts, drops the knife, and falls to embrace him. He rises quickly with her, holds her at arm's-length, and slaps her twice. Stunned, she falls weeping to the chair. He goes to his place at the table and begins to read, ignoring her. She rises now, and does a mournful little dance before him. He watches her, and when she is done he rises heartbroken and takes her gratefully in his arms. They kiss. As they separate, he spins slowly away from her—but when his back is to her, she hauls off and kicks him in the ass.*

MIKE: Hey! What's the big idea?

CAROLYN: Idea? Why, you big lug—

MIKE: Say, I oughtta—

CAROLYN: *(brandishing fists)* You just try it!

MIKE: That's all I need—another screwy dame!

CAROLYN: Screwy, am I? How'd you like to say that with a knuckle sandwich in your kisser? *(pausing)* Wait a minute— *(to Writer)* I thought this was supposed to be silent?

WRITER: I got bored. Anyway, if you guys don't say anything, the director will get all the credit.

CAROLYN: So now we're doing 1930's screwball?

WRITER: Can you think of a better way to express the basic antagonism between the sexes? There was a purity in those films: Man versus Woman, in a Battle for True Love... Only no one believes in true love anymore.

CAROLYN: That's not true.

WRITER: Yes it is.

CAROLYN: No it's not. *(to Mike)* Tell him!

MIKE: It's not true.

CAROLYN: See?

MIKE: Sure. People still go for romance. Why do you think soap operas and chick flicks are so popular?

WRITER: Yeah, but romance is crap. And that's the problem. Because sooner or later everyone finds that out. We shouldn't be looking for romance—we should be looking for love.

CAROLYN: Don't they go together?

WRITER: In the movies, maybe. But in life they're two completely different things: Romance is soft lighting and long kisses and holding hands at sunset. While *love*—love is sharing toothpaste and fighting over the garbage and waking up to the same face and seeing each other's imperfections and smelling each other's farts—but still knowing you couldn't live with anyone else.

CAROLYN: That's *love*? That's disgusting!

MIKE: No, no, he's got a point. Farts are love.

WRITER: Thank you, Michael.

CAROLYN: Farts are love?!

WRITER: Exactly. "Scene 1! Michael! Carolyn! The kitchen!"

*The characters immediately take up positions at the table.*

CAROLYN: Michael, do you still think I'm beautiful?

MIKE: What kind of question is that? Of course I think you're beautiful.

CAROLYN: Do you mean it?

MIKE: No. I'm just saying it to make you feel good.

CAROLYN: I knew it!

MIKE: I'm kidding! Don't be so serious.

CAROLYN: I can't help it. I mean, I know I'm not an old hag, but don't you get tired of seeing the same face every day?

MIKE: Don't you?

CAROLYN: Of course not. But I'm not a guy.

MIKE: What's that supposed to mean?

CAROLYN: You know exactly what it means. Guys look for different things in a woman than women look for in men.

MIKE: You mean big tits, blond hair, a firm ass and endless legs?

CAROLYN: Exactly.

MIKE: That's a myth.

CAROLYN: What?!

MIKE: That's only what women *think* guys want.

CAROLYN: So then why do blondes with big boobs have such a blast?

*Writer emits a self-congratulatory chuckle at this display of alliteration.*

MIKE: Look, I'm not saying guys aren't attracted to that sort of thing. Sure they are—just like women are attracted to beefy Brad Pitt types. But it's not nearly as important to men as women think.

CAROLYN: Well, someone should tell all those plastic surgeons and hair dye companies.

MIKE: Maybe they should. But in the end, looks don't really matter.

CAROLYN: That's such crap! Of course looks matter! If I was fat and covered with warts, do you really think you would have asked me out that first time?



MIKE: *(thinks)* Um...no. But that's not the point. When we first meet someone, the surface is all we have to go on—at least until we get to know them better. Take Grace Kelly:

CAROLYN: She's dead, isn't she?

MIKE: Or any big movie star in her prime.

CAROLYN: How about Michelle Pfeiffer in the '80s?

MIKE: Michelle Pfeiffer, perfect. Practically any man alive would be happy just to wipe that woman's butt—

CAROLYN: Do you always have to be so...graphic?

MIKE *turns to the Writer questioningly.*

WRITER: *(without looking up)* Yep—

MIKE: *(turning back to Carolyn with a shrug)* Now, objectively speaking, Michelle Pfeiffer was one of the most beautiful women on the planet, correct?

CAROLYN: She was too skinny. And she had small boobs.

MIKE: Don't be catty. If we were to follow through on the assumption that men only crave women for their beauty, then the man who bagged Michelle Pfeiffer in her prime, given she wasn't a total headcase, would be the happiest man alive. Right?

CAROLYN: Well...

MIKE: I mean, what do you do when Michelle Pfeiffer comes up to you at breakfast and asks if you think she's beautiful? Do you have to even *think* about it? But I can guarantee that after a couple years of living with Michelle's periods and hangovers and burnt dinners, you won't even notice her looks anymore. Sure, she'll still jump out at you on Oscar night, or when she's getting hot-and-heavy with her leading man, but she's no longer an object of beauty—she's the wench who won't clean her crumbs off the counter after making a sandwich and who won't wipe her toothpaste out of the sink every morning.

CAROLYN: And what makes you think Michelle Pfeiffer is such hell to live with?

MIKE: Look, you could just as easily think of her as the sweet and considerate lover who always remembers your birthday and washes your dishes and never complains when you leave the toilet seat up—but the point is, you don't hate her or love her in relation to her beauty, you hate her or love her according to who she is and what she does. If you're still attracted to what's

underneath, then what's on the outside doesn't matter—even if she is the most beautiful woman in the world. So for you to ask me if I still think you're beautiful, is to ask the wrong question.

CAROLYN: And what's the right question?

MIKE: The right question is, do I still love you? Because if I still love you, then it's a given I still find you beautiful. And how I feel about you is far more important than how I think you look.

CAROLYN: So... Do you still love me?

MIKE: You make Michelle Pfeiffer look like an old hag with warts—that's how much I love you.

CAROLYN: Oh, Michael... *(she begins to cry)* That's so nice...

MIKE: Well, it's true—

*But he suddenly realizes she is not talking to him, but to the Writer, whom she now approaches. The Writer, busy with his text, does not notice her until she has crossed the imaginary wall between the "stage" and his writing area.*

CAROLYN: You really know what to say to a woman...

WRITER: *(noticing her)* Hey! Whoah whoah whoah. What are you doing over here? Get back in the play! You can't—

CAROLYN: I don't care what you think you know about love, you're really a romantic!

WRITER: I'm a what? Have you lost a button? *(She is caressing his arm)* Cut that out! A few minutes ago you were calling me a sexist!

CAROLYN: I was wrong. You're not a sexist—you're a romantic hiding beneath a sexist facade!

WRITER: That's a *horrible* thing to say!

MIKE: *(from the "stage," timidly)* Um, excuse me, but—

CAROLYN: *(ignoring him, to Writer)* Don't deny it! I know your type—huffing and puffing about how tough you are, but inside you're really a little boy!

MIKE: Um, can I just ask something here?

WRITER: *(to Carolyn)* Don't start that mother complex shit with me! You women are always so sure you can scratch a man and he'll bleed Kool-Aid and soda

pop! Well, not this man! I won't be coddled, thank you! Now would you kindly—

*He is gesturing with his pen toward the kitchen area, but Carolyn suddenly snatches it from his hand.*

WRITER: Hey, give that back! That's a professional writing instrument! Without proper training, someone might get hurt!

*A short struggle ensues.*

MIKE: Uh, hello? I just wanted to know if—

*Carolyn and the Writer pause in mid-struggle and turn to Mike.*

CAROLYN & WRITER TOGETHER: *What?*

MIKE: Well...um. I just wanted to ask the Writer if he meant all the things I just said. You know, about beauty and love and stuff.

WRITER: Of course not. Men are pigs. All they want is big boobs and a moist crotch.

CAROLYN *turns angrily to the Writer and slaps him.*

WRITER: *(calmly)* Now that's more like it.

*He snatches the pen back from her.*

CAROLYN: You're disgusting.

*She heads back to the "stage."*

WRITER: You see how great this love-hate thing is?

CAROLYN: Pig.

WRITER: That's okay—I still love you, sweet cheeks.

MIKE: *(as Carolyn sits at the table and sulks)* So you didn't mean any of it?

WRITER: What if I did? It's only one point of view. And in this case it's the point of view of one particular character—you. Who knows what motives you have for saying it, or what your hidden agenda is? Maybe you only think it's what she wants to hear.

MIKE: I wouldn't do that.

WRITER: And how do you know what you would do? A desperate man is capable of all sorts of things.

MIKE: Since when am I desperate?

WRITER: Since you started fooling around with that 17-year-old you met at The Bloodshot Eye three weeks ago.

MIKE: What 17-year-old?

WRITER: The fresh-faced blonde in the short skirts and ankle socks. The one who doesn't wear a bra and who took you back to her place the second time you guys met. The one with the beauty mark just below her—

MIKE: Oh my god! *That* 17-year-old! I can't believe what scum I am! And she was a virgin, too!

WRITER: You certainly are scum, Mike. Now, would you care to explain to your lovely mate of three years exactly how scummy you are?

MIKE: Oh my god...

WRITER: Action—

*Mike instantly composes himself and regards Carolyn from across the table.*

MIKE: Carolyn, I...

CAROLYN: What is it, Mike?

MIKE: I... (*glances at Writer*) I don't think we should play putt-putt tomorrow.

CAROLYN: Why not? Jack and Irene are expecting us.

MIKE: Well, because...because I've always hated putt-putt. It's a stupid game... Knocking little white balls into holes with a club. Where's the sense in that?

CAROLYN: But it was *your* idea.

MIKE: Since when was it my idea?

CAROLYN: Since you said, "Carolyn, hon', how do you feel about playing putt-putt this weekend?"

MIKE: (*glances nervously at writer, then back*) I said that?

CAROLYN: I certainly didn't dream it.

MIKE: That doesn't sound like something I'd say.

CAROLYN: Fine, I'm not going to argue. What would *you* like to do?

MIKE: Don't change the subject.

CAROLYN: How am I changing the subject?

MIKE: You're changing the subject by avoiding the real issue here.

CAROLYN: And what issue is that?

MIKE: The issue of...the issue of how you're always so quick to accuse me of things!

CAROLYN: (*not believing her ears*) Did I accuse you of something?

MIKE: Yes! You did!

CAROLYN: Of what? Wanting to play putt-putt?

MIKE: I did *not* want to play putt-putt!

CAROLYN: (*exasperated*) Fine, so I just imagined you did. I really don't care. But if—

MIKE: Well, I do care! It's so easy for you to just hurl accusations and then say it doesn't matter! But it does matter! Because in today's world you only have to accuse a person of something, and even if he's proven innocent, no one ever trusts him again!

CAROLYN: (*calmly*) Michael, is there some subtext to this conversation I don't know about?

MIKE: What subtext? It seems pretty black-and-white to me!

CAROLYN: Well, to me it's Technicolor and Cinemascope with Dolby sound. What are we fighting about, here?

MIKE: (*calming himself*) Nothing. We're not fighting about anything.

CAROLYN: That's what I thought. So is there something you want to tell me?

MIKE: Like what?

CAROLYN: I don't know—you tell me!

MIKE: There's nothing for me to tell you!

CAROLYN: Fine. *(Pause)* But there's something I have to tell you.

MIKE: There is?

CAROLYN: Yes.

MIKE: What?

CAROLYN: *(pause)* I've been seeing someone.

MIKE: *(shocked)* You've... What...what do you mean?

CAROLYN: I mean, I've been sleeping with someone else.

MIKE: How could you? I mean...who? I mean, why?

CAROLYN: Why? Why? Because...

*Nothing comes to her, and she turns to the Writer for help. He looks at her uncomfortably, shrugs, then stares back at his pad.*

CAROLYN: Because...

*The Writer scratches his head as the lights over the "stage" dim a little and the characters freeze. Then he has a sudden thought, and with a gleeful smile he resumes scribbling.*

CAROLYN: ...because you have a small penis, Michael. And a woman needs to be satisfied.

MIKE: What?

CAROLYN: *(to Writer)* Oh, are you kidding?

WRITER: It's okay, just run with it—

MIKE: *(to Carolyn)* Wait a minute—didn't you once say, "It's not the size that counts, it's how you use it"?

CAROLYN: That's crap. That's just something women tell men to make them feel better. I like big ones, Michael. When I make love, I want to feel like I'm giving birth.

MIKE: I can't believe you're saying this! Since when did you become so cruel?

CAROLYN: Not cruel. Honest.

MIKE: Oh, is that what this is? Honesty? Well, I've got a little honesty for you, too!

CAROLYN: What do you mean?

MIKE: I mean, maybe you're only happy running with the horses, but there are some women who don't mind grazing with the goats!

CAROLYN: What are you talking about?

MIKE: I mean, Bambi didn't seem to have a problem with my size!

CAROLYN: Bambi? Michael, have you been sleeping with a deer?

MIKE: Bambi happens to be a scrumptious 17-year-old who says she's never had a lover like me!

CAROLYN: At seventeen I'm not surprised. What is she, a virgin?

MIKE: You think you're so smart! She happens to have had... lots of experience for her age!

CAROLYN: *(not liking this)* What were you doing with a 17-year-old?

MIKE: I was having fun, is what I was doing! Something we don't seem capable of anymore! She was young, she was willing, and she wasn't going to give me shit for leaving toothpaste in the sink!

CAROLYN: No, I'm sure she left that to her mother! So, does she swallow? *(to herself)* I can't believe I just said that.

WRITER: *(chuckling)* —I can.

MIKE: Oh, you're an evil, evil woman. How could I have lived with you for almost three years now?

CAROLYN: Because no one else would put up with you.

MIKE: And you're such a prize.

CAROLYN: You seemed to think so when we first started dating.

MIKE: That's because you were smart, beautiful and had a great personality. Only now I've learned that isn't everything!

CAROLYN: And what, pray tell, have you decided I'm missing?

MIKE: A heart! A soul! Genuine sympathy! And giant gazongas!

CAROLYN: What?! *(turns to Writer)* Just what is your problem, anyway?

WRITER: Only being honest, dearie.

CAROLYN: You are a seriously troubled person, you know that?

WRITER: I know that. Can we continue?

CAROLYN: No, we cannot continue! That's as far as I go! I will no longer be the vessel of your aggression towards women! If you want to take out some deep-rooted hostility against Mommy, then you can do it without me! I quit!

*And with that, she tears off the wig we realize she's been wearing, slaps it onto the table, and storms offstage.*

WRITER: You can't quit! Come back here! You can't quit until we're done! Goddamnit, we've got a play to write! Get your twitchy ass back here!

*The Writer, who has risen threateningly during this tirade, stops short of the "stage." He exchanges glances with Mike, who has watched all this with interest.*

MIKE: I don't think she's coming back. Nice job. You been doing this long?

WRITER: Oh, shut up—

*He now steps across the "border," and slumps defeatedly into the chair across from Mike.*

MIKE: Hey, how did you do that?

WRITER: I'm the one with the pen—I can do what I want. You got a beer?

MIKE: Sorry... She did have a point, you know.

WRITER: Yeah—they always do. And they always leave me...every stinking one of them. I thought the idea was to make art come out the way life never can. I can't even do that right.

MIKE: Don't be so hard on yourself. These things take practice. You think Neil Simon hasn't had a character or two walk out on him? Where do you think he got the title "The Goodbye Girl?"

WRITER: Neil Simon's got one-liners—he doesn't need characters.



MIKE: So what's the problem? You just write another character. There's got to be more where Carolyn came from.

WRITER: Sure there are. But they're all the same. They all see right through me, they all eventually leave. They all break my heart.

MIKE: I'm gonna bust out crying. Tell you what: let's do a little improvising.

WRITER: What?

*Mike, who has been handling Carolyn's wig, now puts it on.*

MIKE: Improvising. You know, like improvisation. I'll be the girl.

WRITER: Are you kidding?

MIKE: Come on. Maybe we can salvage this. You be me.

WRITER: Get the fuck out...

MIKE: Okay, then be yourself, I don't care.

WRITER: I can't believe this.

MIKE: Why not? *(falsetto)* "Oh, Mike, don't be such a fuddy-duddy!"

WRITER: My name's not Mike. It's Herbert.

MIKE: Oh, I'm sorry.

WRITER: Yeah, me too. That's why I only use my first initial.

MIKE: *(falsetto)* "Well, Herbert, has anyone told you you're awfully cute?"

WRITER: Cut it out.

MIKE: *(mincing it up)* "Oh, the monosyllabic type, huh? That's okay. I don't mind my men silent—as long as they're strong. And that's quite an impressive pectoral you have there, Herbert."

WRITER: Don't touch me, okay? I don't like men touching me.

MIKE: "Temper! Is it my imagination, or have we added a touch of homophobia to our misogyny?"

WRITER: Look, I'm not a homophobe, all right? I've just never been fond of improvisation—and I've never liked men in wigs! So just back off!

MIKE: *(giving up)* Fine. *(throws wig down on table)* Have it your way. If you're so keen on being alone, then be alone. No wonder all those women left you.  
*(Exits)*

WRITER: *(yelling and shaking wig after him)* And what's so bad about being alone? It's a lot quieter! And there's no one to bother you about taking out the trash! Writers are supposed to be alone! It's our lot in life! It's the price we pay for knowing more than everyone else! What the hell do you know, anyway? You're just a character! I created you! I can create more of you whenever I want! I can create you in my sleep! *(to himself)* Where does he come off judging *my* life? Huh! A lot of nerve! The day one of my own creations tells me how to live, is the day I wear a wig and bend over for a gay sumo wrestler!

*Carolyn enters quietly at stage left and sits at the desk.*

WRITER: ...Carolyn? What are you doing here? Hey, that's *my* desk! What are you doing? What—?

*He attempts to go to her, but she waves one of his pens at him with a smile. He stops, frightened.*

WRITER: Hey, that's for professionals only! Put that down! You can't—

*He tries to leave the "stage," but is stopped by some kind of invisible wall. He glares at her. She takes a sip of his coffee and lowers the pen to write.*

WRITER: Carolyn, don't—

*He immediately freezes as she begins to write.*

CAROLYN: "Scene 1. A kitchen. Herbert is just putting on his wig..."

*The Writer, still holding the wig in one hand, puts it on.*

CAROLYN: "There is a knock at the door... *(We hear a knock.)* "Herbert sees who it is..."

*After a reluctant pause, the Writer goes to answer it, exiting stage right.*

CAROLYN: "Enter...one...gay...sumo wrestler."

WRITER: *(off)* No-o!

*The kitchen area goes abruptly black.*

*Carolyn pauses in her writing, smiles thoughtfully. Then she scribbles two final words.*

CAROLYN: "The...end."

*She picks up the cookie, glances about to make sure no one's watching, then takes a satisfied bite.*

*BLACKOUT.*