

ACT ONE

Curtain up.

A WOMAN, in full bridal costume, stands center, her back to the audience. The stage darkens.

SOUND: A squeal of brakes, of car tires burning on asphalt. SHE spins around. A set of headlights sweeps the stage. SHE drops her bouquet at her feet. A splatter of red appears on the apron of her gown.

A WOMAN screams.

A MAN laughs.

Lights up on a MAN at a card table, a cigar sticking out of his mouth. HE pours himself a drink from a bottle on the table. HE laughs at the best joke he's ever heard.

SOUND: Stiletto heels on cement.

Lights up on a MAN, tossing in a hotel bed. A WOMAN lies on the upstage side of the bed, asleep. Red neon through the window:
Hotel Lexington.

Lights up on a MAN, lighting two cigarettes with one match. HE takes one out of his mouth, hands it to someone unseen, out of the light.

Lights up on a LITTLE BOY on a tricycle, moving around and around in a circle.

SOUND: A desperate pounding on a thick wooden door.

Lights up on a WOMAN, standing on the balcony of a penthouse with a breathtaking view. SHE grips the rail, the wind blows through her hair.

SOUND: The ticking of a clock.
Lights up: A PAINTER, his easel before him. HE sticks up his thumb as a guide and looks at the audience, his subject. HE gasps in complete horror.

Lights up: A MAN and a WOMAN stand center, holding onto each other. The MAN begins to sink into the stage floor, as if in quicksand. The WOMAN releases him. HE grabs at her for support, pulls a black handkerchief off of the bodice of her dress. SHE moves away. A headstone looms up behind him as he sinks lower and lower. HE holds the handkerchief aloft. The WOMAN picks up the bouquet dropped by the BRIDE, places it before him on the stage floor.

Lights up: A MAN lies prone on the stage floor. A WOMAN draws a white sheet over his face.

A MAN screams.

A WOMAN laughs.

SOUND: A screaming police siren.

The MAN in the hotel room whips the sheet off his face, sits bolt upright in bed. HE sucks air into his lungs. HE looks at the WOMAN in bed with him. SHE sleeps. A bolt of lightning illuminates the room for an instant. Then, a roll of thunder. HE puts his feet on the floor, notices HE's holding a black lace handkerchief in his hands. HE holds it to his nose, inhales. Throws it away, takes a cigarette off the night table, lights it.)

MAN

I'M NO GOOD TONIGHT
FOR YOU OR FOR ME
I'M WORTHLESS TONIGHT
I'M SORRY

I'M HAUNTED TONIGHT
WHATEVER I DO
TORMENTED TONIGHT
AGAIN

I THOUGHT IT WOULD WORK
I THOUGHT WE'D BE FINE
IT'S NOT GONNA WORK
I'M SORRY

YOU AREN'T TO BLAME
THE FAULT IS ALL MINE
WE'D BETTER NOT TRY AGAIN

(HE moves to the window, looks out. The movement awakens his GIRLFRIEND. SHE sits up in bed, faces away from him.)

A COUPLE OF DRINKS
A JOKE AND A LAUGH
A GIRL TO DO MY BIDDING
A NEW PAIR OF ARMS
A SWEET PAIR OF LIPS
JUST WHO DO I THINK I'M KIDDING?

SHE'S SOMEWHERE OUT THERE
AS SURE AS I'M HERE
SHE'S WAITING OUT THERE
I KNOW IT

I'LL FIND HER OUT THERE
I SEE IT SO CLEAR
I'LL MEET HER OUT THERE
AGAIN

An accident. That's how it all started. An accident. Period. Nothing more. Oh, but there was so much more. She's still following me. Still, nine months after everyone else has put the period at the end of the sentence. There are two life stories on the wrong side of that period. Hers. And mine. The smallest thing reminds me of it. Of her. The smell of perfume...

MAN (contd)

IT'S ALMOST A YEAR
THE STORY IS DONE
BUT BOOKS DON'T CLOSE COMPLETELY
IT'S COME TO AN END
SO I CAN FORGET
IF ONLY LIFE WORKED SO NEATLY

SHE'S SOMEWHERE OUT THERE
AS SURE AS I'M HERE
SHE'S WAITING OUT THERE
I KNOW IT

I'LL FIND HER OUT THERE
I SEE IT SO CLEAR
I'LL MEET HER OUT THERE
AGAIN

The smell of perfume...

(Another bolt of lightning. It illuminates his GIRLFRIEND, whose back is to us. HE stares into her face, his eyes widening. Another flash of lightning on the other side of the stage illuminates a WOMAN with long blonde hair in full evening dress, but only for an instant. The GIRLFRIEND puts a cigarette to her lips. HE lights a match. At the same time, at the other side of the stage, a match is struck. A hand holds the match to the BLONDE's cigarette. Another flash of lightning illuminates the hotel room, and the lights go to black at that side of the stage. A huge flash on the other side of the stage: A flashbulb. A group portrait.)

ALL GUESTS

Here's to the happy couple!

(SCENE: A penthouse apartment in New York City. There is a balcony with a breathtaking view. An engagement party is in progress. The happy couple, MANNING and SHERRY, stand center, surrounded by their guests. All glasses are lifted. The WOMAN

WITH THE CIGARETTE is seated on a chaise. Her eyes are riveted to MANNING.)

A GUEST

May you be as happy as I never was.

ANOTHER GUEST

May your love stay as strong as it is now for the rest of your lives.

ANOTHER GUEST

Or, at least, until the morning after the honeymoon.

SHERRY

You've made this the most exciting day of my life.

GUESTS

ONE MORE GLASS OF CHAMPAGNE SHOULD DO IT
ONE MORE CANAPE, ONE MORE JOKE
ONE MORE GLORIOUS BIT OF GOSSIP
ONE MORE WHISPER ABOUT WHO'S BROKE

SHERRY

Who is she?

MANNING

Who?

SHERRY

Who. The blonde who's been boring a hole in you all evening. I've never seen her before in my life. I assumed you knew her.

MANNING

Isn't she a friend of yours?

SHERRY

Well, do something about it.

MANNING

What do you suggest I do? Go over and say, "Stop staring at me?" That'll make it worse.

SHERRY

I don't care what you have to do, just get her out of here. This is a shower, not a stag party.

GUESTS

ONE MORE PARTY TO GO FROM THIS ONE
ONE MORE PARTY, OR IS IT TWO?
ONE MORE MARVELOUS DROP OF SLANDER
WHO'S BEEN SLEEPING WITH YOU-KNOW-WHO

BORED

GOD, IT'S TOUGH TO BE BORED
TIME ENOUGH TO BE BORED
WHEN WE'RE ANCIENT AND PUSHING FORTY

ONE MORE GROPE IN THE MASTER BEDROOM
ONE MORE KNIFE IN THE BACK AND THEN
ONE MORE PARTY TO GO TO FROM THIS ONE
ONE MORE CHANCE TO GET DRUNK AGAIN

MANNING

Do you really think I'd let some fly-by-night blonde stand in the way of what we have?

SHERRY

(Skeptically:) Well...

MANNING

What a thing to be jealous of.

SHERRY

I'm not jealous. I'm nervous. She gives me the creeps.

GUESTS

APPLE SELLERS ON EVERY CORNER
ALL ARE COMMUNIST PARTY PLANTS
ONE MORE GRIPE ABOUT THIS DEPRESSION
AND WE'LL MOVE TO THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

ONE MORE PARTY IS JUST THE TICKET
HELPS YOU COPE WITH THE COUNTRY'S ILLS
AND SO YOU CAN GET THROUGH THEM SOMEHOW
TAKE A LOVER OR TAKE SOME PILLS

JOE

HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT JOE
HE LOST ALL OF HIS DOUGH
WHAT A PITY - WE LOVED HIS PARTIES

ONE MORE PASS AT EACH OTHER'S PARTNERS
SHOULDN'T SOMEONE BE KEEPING SCORE?

GUESTS (contd)

ONE MORE PARTY TO GO AND THEN IT'S
ONE MORE PARTY AND
ONE MORE PARTY AND
ONE MORE PARTY AND
THEN
ONE
MORE!

(The MYSTERY WOMAN exits to the balcony, keeping her eyes on MANNING all the while.)

SHERRY

There she goes. Alone on the balcony. Now's your chance, Romeo.

MANNING

You're the only one I'll ever want. Ever need.

Prove it.

MANNING

Watch me.

SHERRY

You do what you have to. I'll be in my room.

(SHE grabs one of the GUESTS.)

Sylvia! Love the dress.

GUEST

Do you? Hubert said, "How much?" I said, "About as much as your affair with Muriel Dedrickson is costing you."

SHERRY

Tell me all about it. Somewhere else. It's too... It's too unstuffy in here. Darling? You have ten minutes.

MANNING

I won't need ten. In five minutes, it'll all be over.

(SHERRY and the GUEST exit. MANNING goes to the bar, fixes himself a drink. HE and the MYSTERY WOMAN stare at each other through the sliding glass doors.)

MANNING goes out to the balcony. MYSTERY WOMAN turns away from him and looks out at the night. A pause.)

MANNING

Nice night.

MYSTERY WOMAN

Perfect.

MANNING

(Overlapping:) What's the game?

MYSTERY WOMAN

Excuse me?

MANNING

I don't know why you're after what you're after, but it won't work.
Not tonight, at least.

MYSTERY WOMAN

Excuse me?

MANNING

At least wait until we're back from the honeymoon, sweetie.

(Another GUEST comes out onto the
balcony.)

GUEST

So here's where you've hidden yourself. You're missing it all.

(HE sees the MYSTERY WOMAN.)

Oh. Hello.

(SHE turns away from him.)

Jack told a good one just now. Guy walks into a bar, see...?

MYSTERY WOMAN

Excuse me, but would you be a dear?

GUEST

For you? Name it.

MYSTERY WOMAN

My friend would like a refill.

GUEST

But his glass is full. As we've been telling him all night.

(SHE takes the glass out of
MANNING's hand, tilts it over the
balcony, hands the glass to the
GUEST.)

MYSTERY WOMAN

Now it's empty.

(A pause. HE stares at her. HE looks at MANNING.)

GUEST

The woman you're supposed to marry is in the next room. Don't blow it, buddy.

(HE exits.)

MANNING

That wasn't very bright.

MYSTERY WOMAN

I wanted to be alone.

MANNING

You're not alone.

MYSTERY WOMAN

I will be.

MANNING

Huh?

MYSTERY WOMAN

He bored me. It's you I'm interested in.

MANNING

But I have to turn you down. That girl in there is my fiancée, for your information. And this is our engagement party. From now on, all that's mine is hers. And vice versa. And this apartment is hers. And this building. And that one. And that one. Well, her father's. It's as good as hers.

(A bolt of lightning. A roll of thunder.)

TOP O' THE WORLD
THAT'S WHERE I'M STANDING
TOP O' THE WORLD
GOD, WHAT A SIGHT

LOOK AT THAT WORLD
SEE IT EXPANDING
ALL OF IT MINE
STARTING TONIGHT

MYSTERY WOMAN

You're pretty sure of yourself.

MANNING

I don't have to be. Everyone else is sure of me. I'm just beginning. And no one stands in my way.

MANNING

TOP O' THE TOWN
IS THE SPOT WHERE I'M LOCATED
TOP O' THE LINE
ARE THE PRIZES I HAVE WON
TOP O' THE HEAP
IS THE PLACE FOR WHICH I'M FATED
TOP O' THE CLASS
IN AMBITION ONE-OH-ONE!

WOULD YOU BELIEVE
ONCE I WAS NOWHERE
LOOK AT ME NOW
BANNERS UNFURLED

YOU CAN BE SURE
I'M GONNA GO WHERE
WINNERS BELONG
TOP O' THE WORLD!

MYSTERY WOMAN

I'd knock on wood, if I were you.

(SHE takes out a cigarette.)

I was sure of myself once, too. I had it all. When I was married...

MANNING

You're married? Strike two, baby.

(HE lights her cigarette.)

MYSTERY WOMAN

I was. But things happen. You don't expect them, but they're just 'round the corner, waiting. Better watch out.

MANNING

Another woman, huh?

MYSTERY WOMAN

Everyone has dreams. But sooner or later, the alarm goes off and it's time to wake up. Something or someone comes along to change your plans. Ruin the dream.

MANNING

TOP O' THE POLE
IS THE POINT WHERE YOU CAN FIND ME
TOP O' THE LIST
IS RESERVED FOR NUMBER ONE

TOP O' THE PEAK
LEFT THE OTHERS FAR BEHIND ME
TOP O' THE MORN
TO TOMORROW'S RISING SUN!

(HE begins an impromptu dance. HE does a balancing act on the balcony rail. HE swings his legs over and walks along the edge of the terrace. HE holds onto the railing with one hand, swinging his body out into space.)

SEE 'EM DOWN THERE
ANTS IN A HURRY
SEE 'EM DOWN THERE
INSECTS GALORE

THEY'RE ALL DOWN THERE
LOOK AT 'EM SCURRY
I AM UP HERE
LIVING UP HERE
TOP O' THE WORLD...

MYSTERY WOMAN

Not any more.

(SHE stubs out the lit end of the cigarette in his hand. HE lets go of the railing, reacting in pain. Then, HE realizes what HE's done. HE lets out a squeak before HE disappears. SHE grabs the rail and watches him go. The wind blows through her hair. SHE notices SHE's broken a nail.)

Damn. That'll take a month to grow back.

(SHE goes back into the room.)