

WOMEN IN THE DESERT

BY

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Characters

Mary Malli, 29 years old wife to

Dariusz Malli, 32 year-old chemist

Paula Jones, 35 year-old chemist

Julia Smith, 30 year-old artist

Waiter, non-speaking part

Act One

Scene One – Hotel Room, early one fall morning

Scene Two – Hotel Lobby, that same morning

Scene Three – Hotel Room, one day after

Act Two

Scene Four – Hotel Lobby, lunchtime two days later

Scene Five – Hotel Room, afternoon that day

Scene Six – Hotel Room, half-an-hour later

Scene Seven – Hotel Room, the next morning

Scene One

The time is eight o'clock one autumn morning, in New York City. Hotel Room belongs to Dariush and Mary Mali. They arrived last night and their suitcases are not really unpacked.

Dariush

Wake up, wake up. It's morning. I've ordered breakfast.

Mary

We've only been asleep.. (she checks her watch) ..an hour!

Dariush

That time is wrong now. What did you do with my tie? (He holds it up. It is creased.)

Mary

Nothing, I don't think. Do I have to get up?

Dariush

No, no. I don't want to miss my appointment.

Mary

I thought you had a conference?

Dariush

After my appointment, and after that another conference.

Mary

What did you wake me up for?

Dariusz

Because in America it's morning, and you're in America whether you like it or not. (He draws the curtains) Look! All that rain...now you know you're back.

(In spite of herself Mary goes to the window.)

It looks just like Pittsburgh in all this rain. You'll feel right at home.

Mary

No, It's New York. (in awe)

Dariusz

I haven't seen anything as grey as that for four years.

I'm so glad to be back.

Mary

New York City's dangerous don't forget.

Dariusz

(They look at the view of the buildings together)

Oh, I don't believe that. It's powerful, isn't it?

Mary

It frightens me I guess.

Dariusz

What are you frightened of? Do you want me to buy you a gun?

Mary

No! I'd be very frightened of that.

Dariusz

You know the stories of violence in America are exaggerated.

Mary

It frightens me because it makes me feel that we haven't got enough. I remember being in New York, or even in Pittsburgh—the big cars and shops make me feel like a peasant. I feel like I haven't got enough and I don't know enough.

Dariusz

That's what makes me feel excited. Because we're going up – to the top.

Mary

(Looking down)

They're waiting for the bus. It looks cold.

Dariusz

It's hot summer – we'll go to a lake, a big one.

Mary

I went to Lake Champlain once. Mother was living there in a mobile home with someone.

Dariusz

We'll get a mobile home.

Mary

I watched television. But it was beautiful outside, I don't remember why I didn't go out. Maybe I had a cold.

Dariusz

How can you be jealous of the power of America? It's your country.

Mary

It's not jealousy.

Dariusz

It must be.

Mary

I just don't care for it, what it stands for, what's behind it.

Dariusz

Are you going to call your mother? You can easily call Pittsburg from here.

Mary

No, I don't know if she's in Pittsburg, or where she is.

Dariusz

You've got to tell her you're back.

Mary

She didn't know I left. (there is a knock on the door.)

Dariusz

Breakfast. (He opens the door) I can't wait to drink American coffee again... Don't worry, I ordered you tea.

(Waiter brings table in and sets it up) This is living. This is going first class.

(He gives waiter a tip which is not enough. Waiter exists)

Dariusz

I'm going to have a hamburger for lunch. You like hamburgers.

Mary

They probably still have pickles in them. (She doesn't like pickles)

Dariusz

Nothing is going to be changed in four years.

Mary

(Looking at breakfast)

Where's the bread?

Dariusz

Here it is. (He drinks the coffee and almost chokes) Wow! That's strong. This is your good old American bread that tastes like cake. (He eats some and obviously does not like it.) Delicious! (Mary starts to eat slowly.) When we get settled you can bake our own bread.

Mary

I hope we don't get settled in New York City.

Dariusz

What's the difference? If you're afraid to go out, don't go out. Sit at home and pray to Mohammad all day. (This is said sarcastically.)

Mary

Oh, yes? And who else shall I talk to?

Dariusz

We'll get to know people. If you're too lonely, track down that mother of yours.

Mary

I will. Anytime I think my life could be improved by a nervous breakdown.

Dariusz

(Goes to the telephone and dials)

Paula Jones? Dariusz Mali here. I'm ready to meet you – in the lobby? Yes, fine.
(Replaces receiver) Did I tell you Jones was a woman?

Mary

Yes.

Dariusz

She always signed herself 'Jones'. I didn't know it was Paula till I read about her. She's

probably an ugly old woman but as long as she gets things done. She actually did that experiment I thought up. Maybe even before I thought of it. She's almost as clever as I am. We could win the Nobel Prize for Chemistry together.

Mary

As soon as we're settled, we're going to have a baby. Right? At least I'll have someone to talk to.

Dariusz

As soon as I earn some money. Don't worry. Everything will turn out right for me. It always does.

Mary

If children are born here, they'll be American, won't they?

Dariusz

Of course. Just like you. (He kisses her goodbye. She smiles uncertainly.) Wish me luck.

(He exists)

Mary

It's hard to believe I'm back – all of a sudden. (She goes to the TV and turns it on.) Let's see what I've missed. (We hear Captain Kangaroo) I've seen this. (She goes back to bed to watch it.)

END OF SCENE ONE.

SCENE TWO

In the lobby of the Hotel. Paula Jones is sitting at the coffee counter having a quiet morning cup of coffee. Julia enters. She is putting on her clothes and she does so trying to get a hold on what is happening. She goes to the cigarette machine, gets cigarettes out and thumps the machine.

Julia

No matches! No matches! A rip-off for cigarettes and no matches. (Goes to the counter) Black coffee. Did I say coffee? Make that black. Two sugars, three sugars. Have you got any matches? Did I say sugars? Make that three packets of Sweet and Low. Make that four packets of Sweet and Low. I'll pay extra. I've got to get some blood sugar, but the real stuff makes me too hyper. I had a couple of drinks last night and there's sugar in alcohol. I can't even drink coke. (She gets coffee) Is it hot? (She takes a sip) It's too goddamn hot. I'm on a nervous sugar trip. That's why I look like such a Hesperedian Wreck this morning. Wouldn't be surprised if my hair turned to snakes and drank my coffee before I did. Serve them right, it's goddamn hot. (To Jones) Have you got any matches? Did I ask you for matches before?

Jones

Sorry, I don't smoke.

Julia

Do I know you?

Jones

So you've remembered... yes.

Julia

Did Raymond send you?

Jones

Raymond who?

Julia

Raymond who I spent the night with...(To Waiter) Have you got...? Thank you. (She takes the matches) Matches are free you see, which is why you can't get them when you need them.

Jones

I remember you.

Julia

That's not difficult. But you're not a friend of Raymond's...

Jones

We were in a feminist group together in Boston.

Julia

Boston, that's right. Years ago.

Jones

Two.

Julia

Now I remember. But we never fucked, did we? No, I would remember you in that case. What are you doing in this dump?

Jones

I'm here for the Science Conference.

Julia

That's right, you're a scientist. Can you believe that bastard threw me out in the middle of the night? He threw my clothes out of the room and told me I was killing him...I was killing him and he was the one who was throwing me out on a cold morning for Christsakes.

Jones

What were you doing?

Julia

Sleeping like a babe. He said he couldn't bear me sleeping like a babe while he couldn't get off to sleep all night. The jealousy was killing him.

Jones

You're singeing your hair.

Julia

I thought I smelled burning. Help! It's myself! But after all our feminist meetings, are you still a feminist? Now I go to artists' meetings – at least there's men at them. But men bore me when they're not throwing me out of hotel rooms at eight o'clock in the morning, and making me angry. My names Julia .

Jones

I know. Mine's Jones, Paula Jones.

Julia

Remember Suzanna?

Jones

Yes, we used to meet in her library.

Julia

No, it was a chapel dedicated to Lincoln. Some nut built it years ago. The only attractive thing about it was the British flag.

Jones

Where was that?

Julia

On the ceiling. Don't you remember it floating in the air-conditioning? I used to wonder how many men died under that flag – it was rotting at the corners – pure bull! Prisoners probably made it in Framingham. It looked spiritual though, while you women wailed about how insignificant you all felt and I complained about how magnificent I felt. It was quite out of place in a chapel dedicated to Lincoln, but the rhythms against the dark wood...

Jones

It was there we split.

Julia

I split. I came to New York.

Jones

We voted against each other. Don't you remember?

Julia

What was that quarrel about?

Jones

Some of us felt we have to be Marxist to be feminist and some of us didn't.

Julia

Who was the girl who smoked a pipe?

Jones

I don't know what happened to her.

Julia

I miss that – our togetherness.

Jones

Do you like New York?

Julia

Shall I confess? I never take a bus or a subway, or taxis – nothing. I can't stop walking the streets. The energy I get from walking down the streets makes me high, makes me work. I can't get enough sleep, I work so much.

Jones

What are you painting?

Julia

I'm not. I'm making... balloons. Big balloons. You should come and see them before they go on display. (Jones catches sight of Dariush who has just entered the lobby. He comes up to the counter.)

Jones

Excuse me, are you Dariush Malli?

Dariush

Yes. How do you know me?

Jones

I'm Paula Jones.

Dariush

How did you recognize me?

Julia

I'm Julia.

Dariush

It's a pleasure, it's a pleasure to meet you.

Jones

I was just having a cup of coffee.

Julia

Do you want some coffee?

Dariusz

Not right now.

Jones

Did you have a good trip?

Julia

Where did you come from?

Dariusz

Iran. I arrived last night. This morning.

Julia

I've always wanted to go to Iran. Did I say one more coffee, please? I've always wanted to go to India, too.

Jones

Are you going to the first lecture?

Dariusz

All of them. I will be looking for a job.

Jones

It shouldn't be too difficult to find.

Dariusz

I need a job to keep me in America.

Julia

Oh, you ought to keep in America.

Jones

Columbia has lent us a lab, and I'm going to get the experiment going in New York.

Julia

What experiment?

Jones

(Somewhat exasperated) If you must know, enzymes are more efficient than man-made catalysts operating under the same conditions. No one knows why. Are experiments prove...

Dariusz

We are certain we know why. What date did you begin experimenting, Jones?

Jones

Last May, but of course I researched for years...

Dariusz

My paper came out last June. Who's first? (He laughs excitedly)

Jones

Great discoveries have often been made simultaneously...

Julia

(To Dariush) There's no need to blush.

Jones

Julia!

Julia

He did. I was watching his skin intently.

Dariush

Are you a chemist too?

Julia

No. That reminds me of Jones, do you have any money? I spent the last of my change on cigarettes. I have money. I just can't get used to having it. Did I tell you I sold a balloon for three thousand dollars last week? Can you believe it? I'm a success, but it hasn't changed me a bit – I'm still a mess. (She looks around for her coat.)

Jones

I want to introduce you to Rheinhold

Dariush

(Impressed) Is he here?

Jones

Oh all the biggies. When we've set up our experiment, we'll invite him in to have a look for himself.

Dariusz

Terrific!

Julia

Excuse me, but did I have a coat? (They all look around) I have a horrible feeling it's raining. Wait a minute, I'll go and see.

Dariusz

Is she a friend of yours?

Jones

An old friend, but I just met her. Is your wife with you?

Dariusz

Yes, she's upstairs.

Jones

I bought a little welcome gift for her.

Dariusz

How kind.

Jones

But I left it in Boston.

Darius

Ah.

Jones

I've been reading about Iran and Iranian women.

Darius

Really?

(Julia enters)

Julia

It's stopped raining, but it's freezing. (To Darius) Are you going out, outside?

Jones

The lecture's here.

Julia

Oh, pity!

Darius

What about going to the lab?

Jones

Not till after the lectures.

Julia

Could you lend me your coat? If you walked home with me you could wear it back you see. I'm just recovering from pneumonia. Unless you're just recovering from pneumonia yourself...

Dariusz

No, are you sick?

Julia

No. But wait a minute, I didn't take my pills this morning. (She gives her purse to Dariusz and swallows some pills.)

Dariusz

Are they drugs?

Julia

No. Medicine. Why don't you walk me home and then you can see my work.

Jones

We're here for the lecture. That's why we have come all these miles. I think.

Julia

Maybe you'd like to buy one of them? (To Dariush) Do you have any money? Never mind, I don't care. Come and look at them before they go on display next week. You too Jones, I'm desperate for a familiar face sometimes.

Jones

I have to go to the conference.

Dariush

Is it far?

Julia

No!

Dariush

I'll walk you home, and then wear the coat back and you won't have to return it.

Julia

That's a great idea.

Julia

Why don't you come Jones? I've got the latest event in 20th century art standing in my apartment – ready to be launched... if people don't let me down, moving men in particular. They're so difficult to move without bursting. The insurance covers my cost which is easier than selling them I suppose, but it does nothing for my career to be paid for broken balloons, does it? I'll make you a cup of coffee if you like eggshells in it.

Dariush

Eggshells?

Jones

(To Dariush) I'll be in the conference room when you get back.

Dariush

Right. Yes.

(Julia puts on Dariush's coat and they exit.)

Jones

Am I left with the check?

(Jones gets the money out of her purse to pay for it.)

END OF SCENE TWO

SCENE THREE

Hotel room. One day later. It is late afternoon. Mary dressed in a dress that she has embroidered herself, is sitting on the bed embroidering another skirt. There is a knock at the door. Jones enters.

Jones

Salaam!

Mary

Salaam! Harley Shoma?

Jones

I'm afraid that's all I know. My name's Paula Jones.

Mary

You want my husband?

Jones

(Surprised) Oh you speak English?

Mary

(With heavy accent) A little. He is at the conference.

Jones

Yes. I got tired of... listening. I get to speak but not until the fifth day. We speak in order of importance. (She makes a face.) There's some very interesting ideas being discussed. Were you going out?

Mary

No. Come in. (She sits on bed. Jones sits on chair.)

Jones

If you want to go out shopping or something, I'll be happy to take you.

Mary

Thank you.

Jones

Some people think it's fun to look at the shops.

Mary

Thank you.

Jones

I don't like shopping much. But if you like, we could go to the Museum.

Mary

Yes?

Jones

I'll have a day free when the conference finishes. (Goes to window)

What a good view.

Mary

The window no good.

Jones

What's the matter with it?

Mary

No opens.

Jones

Of course not. It's too high up. They're afraid you would fall out. I bought you a little welcome present, but I left it in Boston.

Mary

Ah.

Jones

I'd like to go to Iran one day.

Mary

Yes?

Jones

But first I should learn Farsi. You can't enjoy a country without knowing its language. But then it seems a waste of time to learn a language just to visit a country. I would like to work there.

Mary

You want to work in Iran?

Jones

I learned Spanish once to work as a waitress in Spain. It was a lot of fun. Ideally, I think that's the way to really find out what a country is all about, find out what the people really want. Do you work in Iran?

Mary

At home.

Jones

What sort of work do women do in Iran? Are they allowed to do everything?

Mary

Oh yes.

Jones

Do they earn the same as men?

Mary

I don't know.

Jones

If I am a little girl in Iran, what sort of work can I imagine myself doing?

Mary

You can weave carpets?

Jones

I can get to weave carpets when I grow up, what else?

Mary

No. Little girls weave carpets.

Jones

Little girls? How old?

Mary

Two, three... the best.

Jones

The best little girls weave carpets?

Mary

No, little girls weave the best carpets. Small fingers.

Jones

That's incredible! The little girls... don't they go to school?

Mary

Oh, yes. The government say all children go to school.

Jones

But in fact they don't.

Mary

They do. The government says so.

Jones

But in fact... in fact, there are many Persian carpets being made.

Mary

Yes.

Jones

Little boys go to school?

Mary

Some.

Jones

But they don't make the carpets?

Mary

No. Some men make cheap carpets – in factories.

Jones

But you went to school?

Mary

Yes.

(Mary sits on the floor, after sliding off the bed. She is not enjoying this questioning. Jones ignoring her dislike, joins her on the floor.)

Jones

What do their mothers think about them working? Or are they orphans?

Mary

Their mothers work with them.

Jones

But Iran is a rich country. Can't it afford to send its children to school?

Mary

There are not too many schools in the small villages in the desert.

Jones

But in the towns, doesn't anybody say anything? Doesn't anybody do anything?

Mary

(Gets up from floor) They are honored, to do much important work.

Jones

(Gets up too) Who told them they were honored? Who tricked them into being so “honored”?

Mary

Excuse me. (She rushes from the room to the bathroom)

Jones

(Jones is left not quite knowing what is happening. She looks around the room, she looks out of window.) (Dariush enters).

Dariush

What are you doing here?

Jones

I was talking to your wife.

Dariush

I don't think that's right.

Jones

I came to visit you. But I got a chance to talk to an Iranian woman and I took it.

Dariush

Really? Very interesting.

Jones

I thought so. (Mary enters room)

Dariusz

This 'Iranian' happens to come from Pittsburg, born and bred. She was Mary Smullin before I married her and took her back to Iran with me, where she seemed to think she belongs.

Mary

I do. I have a passport to prove it. And a husband who had to give me permission before I could leave the country. (This was said without a phony accent, and she makes a little bow.)

Jones

I see.

Dariusz

Good! What else did you want?

Jones

I can't see any point in us trying to pursue this completely academic relationship. You were supposed to come to the lab...

Dariusz

I can explain that.

Jones

That's just not professional...

Dariusz

You coming here is not professional. You sneaking to talk to my wife. I. I think you're jealous because I went off with Julia.

Jones

But where have you been since then? I haven't seen you at the Conference.

Dariusz

What business is that of yours?

Jones

I'm trying to get support for our research, and explore some areas in which it might be useful...

Dariusz

There's plenty of time for that.

Jones

Can you help with the experiment tonight?

Dariusz

Maybe. Maybe not.

Jones

Aren't you interested in proving the points you made in your paper?

Dariusz

The points I made are right. You proved them yourself.

Jones

I don't understand your attitude. You missed your chance to meet Rheinhold who had some fascinating green and blue dyes we should be interested in...

Dariusz

I have some fascinating things to show him if he cares to come and knock on my door – I might be in.

Jones

I'll tell him. In that case he's interested. But don't wait too long. (She is angry at being rebuffed.)

Dariusz

Oh, let him wait for me.

Jones

Well, I am not going to wait for you anymore. Since you obviously do not take your work seriously...

Dariusz

Seriously? Do you know how much I have to give up to follow the path of those

enzymes? I gave up my family, my country, my security – so don't talk to me about my work being serious. For me, it is serious.

Jones

Well, maybe I'll see it in the lab tonight.

(Jones exists)

Dariusz

Impudent school-teacher! I don't even know where the lab is. And I was at the Conference. She didn't see me. So I sat in the back! So what? Do I want to sit in the front and clap like a clown? (To Mary) Don't worry, everything will turn out right. I don't need Jones. I have all the degrees they need.

Mary

Who's Julia?

Dariusz

A pretty girl I met downstairs. She took me to see her artwork. Rubbish, rubbish! A load of mud plastered on some statues, one she calls Bubble Gum Moma and another hideous thing called Astronaut. Art, she calls them! Garbage, I call them. And she sells these objects. It's incredible.

Mary

I played a trick on Jones. I pretended to be Iranian.

Dariusz

Well, you are.

Mary

Sometimes I wonder who I am. Just lately. In Iran I was so happy to be one of you - I don't know how to live here now. That's what I'm afraid of. That I've forgotten. As your wife, I don't know what to do.

Darius

Wait till I get established.

Mary

I went to the room opposite to talk to the maid – she doesn't talk much English. And you can see the Park from that side of the hotel.

Darius

Really? They have a better view, eh?

Mary

The people looked very far away.

Darius

Why don't you go out, go down for God's sake? It's not dangerous.

Mary

They didn't look frightened.

Darius

There's nothing to be afraid of. Since when have you been a coward?

Mary

I'm not really.

Dariusz

I know that.

Mary

I just can't make myself want to go out. Everyone was hurrying by, even the children looked in a hurry. Everyone looked like they had something to do. I envied them.

Dariusz

What do you want to do? Work as a secretary again?

Mary

No. That's the trouble. I don't want to work for anyone. I don't want to work at all.

Dariusz

So enjoy the park. I don't understand the problem.

Mary

I don't want to do anything. I don't want to get dressed in the morning. I don't want to make love at night. I don't want to clean my teeth after meals. I....

Dariusz

You sound like you have one or two problems.

Mary

I have, yes. But if I have problems, so do you – don't you?

Dariusz

No – what do you mean? Me? Me? I'm just fine.

END OF SCENE THREE

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE FOUR

Hotel lobby, two days later. Dariush is sitting at the table waiting for a hamburger and keeping a lookout for Jones. He sees her and jumps up.

Dariush

Jones! Paula! Jones! Can you come here a minute?

I've got to talk to you. (Jones enters) Sit down. Can I get you some lunch?

Jones

I have to speak in fifteen minutes.

Dariush

I know. But before that I have to speak to you.

Do you want a donut?

Jones

Those donuts were here yesterday.

Dariush

Nothing?

Jones

I'll have a glass of milk.

Dariush

Waiter, one milk, too, please.

Jones

How's Mary?

Dariusz

She's fine – she's not herself, of course. I want to apologize for yesterday.

Jones

You mean the day before yesterday?

Dariusz

I'm all confused. The time change. I can't control what time I sleep.

(Jones looks at her watch)

Look, I'm sorry I got angry yesterday... the day before. I was upset. Mary and I... she did not want to come back to America. She does not know what she wants. I know. I did not mean to insult you... I wanted to... oh, nothing ever turns out right for me.

(His hamburger has arrived and he bites into it in his eagerness. But then can't talk because his mouth is full. Jones drinks down her milk, and it is a race to see which one finishes first as to who will talk first.)

Jones

Have you seen Julia?

Dariusz

I was supposed to have tea with her today, but I can't of course. My work must come first, you understand?

Jones

Yes. (She joins him at the table) I'm depressed about this conference. People come from all over the world to say what they said last year and the year before that and what they said in their PHD, theses most of them. The only new faces are those of the prostitutes in the lobby.

Dariusz

I thought they were scientists. I spoke to Rheinhold yesterday. He's interested in our project. And wants to come to Boston to see your experiments – I told him about them. I hope it's not a secret?

Jones

No. I was going to speak about it today.

Dariusz

Good! He wants me to apply for a grant.

Jones

Does he? (Hiccups) Excuse me.

Dariusz

You're welcome. He's very impressed. I mentioned your name and he thought I was working with you... I did not intend to say that, you understand.

Jones

(Hiccups) Excuse me

Dariusz

You're welcome. Do you think I can get a grant?

Jones

I thought you were looking for a job?

Dariusz

Job! Grant! I need money.

Jones

You can get money if you can convince them your research is important.

Dariusz

It is. Very important!

Jones

To us.

Dariusz

(Raves this consideration aside) We're on the edge of some very exciting research.

Jones

I seem to have been on the edge for the last five years. I'm sort of tired of being on the edge. Why did you become a chemist?

Dariusz

I was clever. I had to do something. I got good recommendations from Pittsburg. But

when I get home there are no facilities. I am trained for nothing there. And I want to do my research. I am wasted.

Jones

I know what you mean. I just can't make my mind up what is being wasted. What's your country like?

Dariusz

(About to go into a long explanation that does not happen) Oh... my country is... hot... the trouble with my country is that it does not rain enough. It's dry...

Jones

And we don't know enough science to water it. That's the crazy thing. We know so much... and so little. (She hiccups again) Excuse me.

Dariusz

Do you think I can get some money?

Jones

I don't see why not. I'll help you write a proposal, and talk to the right people. I've done it myself, but I don't believe in it anymore. Oh I don't mean research should come to a stop. People have to contribute what they can and in some cases they're lucky – they contribute a lot. But when I see my colleague's bullshit at this conference I want to say, go drive a truck or teach basketball because bullshitting is drying you up. Look at their hands and faces sometimes. Those who do make important discoveries don't... very few get involved in the political consequences. They don't take responsibility for what they have thought up in their big narrow heads! They leave it to the politicians who don't know what's going on in science.

Dariusz

(Consulting his watch) You have to speak soon.

Jones

I've sort of spoken myself out. Why don't you tell them how we've increased the velocity to .042.

Dariusz

Excuse me, .035.

Jones

Not in my lab. .042!

Dariusz

Then you didn't do it right.

Jones

You should have done it yourself. Why don't you speak at the conference instead of me? Although I ought to represent women, there's only been three women speakers so far and that's probably a record.

Dariusz

You tell them what we think. It would be strange for me...

Jones

For a man to talk for a woman? Never' (She hiccups again. She is actually frightened of speaking) Besides I've got the hiccups.

Dariusz

I never talked before so many. (But the idea appeals to him.) Last night, I had a dream

about talking to a sea of faces. I was standing in a box, very high up.

Jones

It will help you get a grant.

Dariusz

What was I saying in my dream? No, I remember. I was standing on a bridge, not knowing which way to go, backwards or forwards so I turned and spoke about... fireworks... that was it... fireworks.

Jones

You will stick to the subject if you speak?

Dariusz

Can I? Can I really speak?

Jones

Julia's right. Your skin does change colour...

Dariusz

How do I look? What am I wearing? (He tries to see himself in the mirror over the counter.)

Jones

You look fine.

Dariusz

We should both speak.

Jones

What grant did Rheinhold think you could get?

Dariusz

The Sloanst... or Sloan... or something.

Jones

Wait a minute! I get that.

Dariusz

We can share it

Jones

Share it? You obviously don't know what I pay for my rent. I rely on that grant. I want you to get a job, but not my job. Are my defeatist instincts getting the better of me again? I'll have to have them taken out. Do you know how many women scientists have been cheated out of public recognition? They'll start by calling it your project when they hear I was the one who did the experiment. They'll think I was the lab assistant!

Dariusz

I don't get the grant before you. I am not even an American.

Jones

That's true. Maybe if I told them I wanted to employ you, I could get an even bigger grant. Crank out another proposal, against my better judgement.

Dariusz

Please. Yes.

Jones

What's the least amount of money you need? (Dariusz looks perplexed at this.) Does your wife work?

Dariusz

No. Not yet.

Jones

We'll talk about it. I guess we better go get 'em or we'll be late.

Dariusz

Yes, yes.

(They exit together)

END OF SCENE FOUR

SCENE FIVE

Hotel room. Mary is not seen. There is a feverish knocking on the door. Eventually Mary exits from the bathroom. She is in a white bathrobe and her head is wound up in a towel. She opens the door and Julia enters.

Julia

Oh! Who are you? My name's Julia.

Mary

(A little taken aback. She steps back into the room and Julia immediately follows her.)
Yes? Can I help you?

Julia

(Sarcastically, looking around) I hope I'm not interrupting anything. Have I got the wrong room? (She searches in her purse, but cannot find what she is looking for.) I'm looking for Dariush... Dariush...

Mary

Malli?

Julia

Yes. I am in the right room.

Mary

I'm Mary Malli.

Julia

Oh? That's right. He's married. I forgot. Well, I'm sorry to come barging in here, but I had an appointment with him this afternoon and he didn't show up. I'm furious. Do you know what time it is?

Mary

No.

Julia

You don't know what time it is? Haven't you got a watch? I've been waiting all afternoon for your husband to show up. Why do men let me down all the time?

Mary

Dariush is at the conference.

Julia

Oh they always have some good excuse. I am of the last importance! That's what they're trying to tell me. And I'm ready to give them all I've got. Now I'm not going to get to Finocchiaro's before five o'clock.

Mary

Excuse me a minute. (An alarm has gone off in the bathroom and Mary exits to the bathroom.)

Julia

Sorry. Were you in the bath? (She follows Mary to the bathroom. But Mary shuts the door firmly.) Is he coming back? (She goes to door and knocks) Is Dariush coming back? I'll wait. But I do have to get to Finocchiaro's before five o'clock. (She picks up the dress Mary is working on in Scene Three. She puts it against herself.)

Mary

(Enters from bathroom. The towel is rearranged around her head.)

What do you want?

Julia

Oh, You're not very friendly. I've just had to drink Lapsong Oolong all by myself – why didn't you come instead?

Mary

I... I

Julia

I could have showed you my work.

Mary

Thank you.

Julia

Is that your thing? (Pointing to dress)

Mary

That's my dress.

Julia

That's your embroidery isn't it?

Mary

Yes.

Julia

Funk art.

Mary

What?

Julia

My art is punk art, surreal punk. But that's funk. Folky funk I grant you. Do you sell them?

Mary

No.

Julia

You should.

Mary

I do it for myself, to wear...

Julia

It's good. Do you have any more?

Mary

Skirts and blouses.

Julia

Show me. You should be out in Greenwich Village selling these. Do you have them here?

Mary

Yes. (Goes to closet automatically) I wear them myself...

Julia

Finocchiaro's might be interested in buying them.

Mary

Buying them?

Julia

How much would you want for them?

Mary

I never thought about it. (An alarm goes off in the bathroom)

Julia

What's happening in there?

Mary

I'm dying my hair. Now it's done. (She takes the towel off and shakes her hair. It is a dark brown color.)

Julia

That's a good color. I dye mine blonde. Mine's really brown.

Mary

Mine's blonde. Fair...

Julia

You've ruined that towel.

Mary

It belongs to the hotel anyway. (She tosses it in the waste-bin.)

Julia

Wait a minute. (She goes over to waste-bin and picks it up to look at it.)

That's interesting. That's very interesting. Is it Henna?

Mary

Yes.

Julia

Can I have it?

Mary

It's dirty.

Julia

You don't know much about art, I take it? Do you want to come to Finocchiaro's with me? I've seen a pair of silver boots that are out of this world. It's all politics. If I wear Finocchiaro's boots, maybe he'll come to my show and if he comes to my show, he won't go to Baker's disaster on 44th Street. It's imperative we get there by five o'clock. He won't wait for me. No one will. Which is why I have to grab what's going by. Coming?

Mary

I haven't been out of the hotel room... since we arrived.

Julia

All the more reason.

(There is a knock on the door. Mary opens it and Waiter enters with dinner for Mary on a tray. He sets in down. Mary signs for it. Julia looks it over.)

What have you got there? Steak. You don't want to eat that. Haven't you got any salad or potatoes with it? (She is disappointed about this.)

Mary

Have I got time to eat?

Julia

No. Not if we're going to be there by five o'clock. I'm hungry. But I can't eat meat. Takes too much time to chew it. Can I have a glass of your wine though? I'm thirsty. (She helps herself to a glass.) Get your dresses together, and bring them.

Mary

But then I wont have anything to wear...

Julia

If this is your thing, you have to show it. Carry it around with you if you can't get people back to your room to look at it. And if you still don't get any commitments, set yourself up on the sidewalk until the manager of Bonwit Tellwe comes along and finds you.

Mary

Wait then. (She takes some pants and blouse to bathroom.)

Julia

Where are you from, originally?

Mary

(From bathroom) Pittsburg.

Julia

Oh, that's not interesting. (She drinks some more wine.) Help! Help!

I've just remembered I musn't drink. Water! Water! (She rushes into the bathroom. Mary exits slowly, dressing, she is not sure what is happening. She sits on the bed, as if this is the chance to eat her steak.)

Mary

Maybe it's me who's crazy.

Julia

(Enters drinking water) That's better. I can't counteract all the effects, but I won't faint at least. Aren't you coming?

Mary

No. It wouldn't be any use. I'd hate the way people would look at my thighs. I don't want people to look at me. I can't think why you want to wear silver boot – everyone will stare. I know I wore white socks in the fifties, but they kept me warm at least. I'm a cold person. I can't walk around selling dresses with the winter coming on... besides, it's crazy. And I couldn't stand the noise in New York City. You are a bit too loud for me yourself – after so long – I mean I don't want to hear what you're saying. I know that sounds odd, but it's been so long since I heard English spoken. I think I'm offended by it, not by what you're saying – the language even...

Julia

(Amused, but kindly) Where have you come from? An insane asylum for deaf-mutes?
(She laughs. Mary laughs a little at herself.) You're surreal. Like my work. Have you got a case?

Mary

Under the bed.

Julia

We'll put the clothes in it. (She gets it out while Mary goes to get a very old raincoat out of the cupboard.) Don't you screw around. (Mary does not answer, but stares hostilely.) Don't worry, Dariush probably doesn't screw around either. Men are terrible creatures of habit, no matter how hard I try to persuade them they're not. God! If I were a man I'd fuck anything that moved. Of course, I do almost. (She has been packing Mary's dresses during this speech. Mary who is terribly offended by this speech, sits on the bed dazed.)

Julia

(Looking at dresses) This is fantastic!

Mary

(Smiles weakly) Isn't it dangerous to go out alone?

Julia

Oh we won't be alone. Can I try this one on?
(Hardly waiting for Mary's response, she puts it over her head. We hear it rip.) Oops, that's only the seam I expect. You can sew it up. It's terrific. (She twirls around) I'd love to go out in the street like this. We could put one dress on top of another, and then we wouldn't have to bother with the case.

Mary

Peasant women often wear more than one dress.

Julia

I'd love to open my show in a dress like this. Do you think it would go with silver boots? You've got to see my work. If you think you're surreal, you should see my work. I'll show you after we've bought these boots. I'd better take the dress off – we might be attacked as oddities or accused of shoplifting... (Mary reacts frightened to this. Julia pulls the dress over her head. We hear it rip again.) Oops! Sorry about that! (When she comes out of the dress, she sees that Mary is in a fit of anger and has raised her steak knife in a threatening attitude. Julia, who has just come out of the dress, sees this and screams.) A maniac! (She falls back on the bed in a faint. Mary stabs her on the bed twice and runs to the door. She has difficulty opening it, but eventually does so and stumbles out.)

END OF SCENE FIVE

SCENE SIX

Hotel room. Half-an-hour later. Jones and Dariush enter. They are both excited after a successful conference.

Dariush

Mary! Mary! Has she gone out? Good!

Jones

Are they going to send up something to drink?

Dariush

I ordered, yes.

Jones

Well, you are a big success.

Dariush

Yes? I think also, yes.

Jones

Rheinhold said we were the most original speakers at the conference – I suppose that was a complement.

Dariush

He told you I could get a grant?

Jones

No. He said he was coming to Boston next week.

Dariusz

That's very good, isn't it?

Jones

We didn't get any praise we didn't deserve. Our findings are correct. Unfortunately, no one could use them. At least not right away, which I found very disappointing.

Dariusz

Oh they will, eventually.

Jones

I think I'll look for a job myself now.

Dariusz

What do you mean? Didn't Rheinhold say we could get a grant?

Jones

No. He said he was coming to Boston to check the experiment.

Dariusz

But I need a grant.

Jones

Oh I'm sure you can get one.

Dariusz

Don't they see that our findings open up another area of research?

Jones

Do they?

Dariusz

Fields of research.... Yes, to bring back a good harvest.

Jones

I'm sure the question is good for another few colloquiums.

Dariusz

Why are you so cynical?

Jones

I don't doubt you are capable of creating a few other problems, in place of the one we think we've solved. You're a creative person.

Dariusz

I think, if that's what you mean. Mostly about the rate of enzymatic reactions.

Jones

That's all I've thought about for the last seven years. Now I feel it's time I went on to

other things.

Dariusz

You don't want the Sloan grant then? If you don't – I'll apply for it.

Jones

Maybe I'll teach. I wanted to be a doctor. That's how I got into enzymes in the first place.

Dariusz

Are you married?

Jones

I live with someone. A nuclear physicist.

Dariusz

That must be fascinating. Nuclear physics has always fascinated me.

Jones

Does Mary know anything about enzymes?

Dariusz

No, she's not interested. She wants to get settled soon. I don't know what else she wants. She didn't want to leave Iran unfortunately. My mother and her got on very well, too well. She taught Mary Farsi and they chatted day and night. And giggled a lot in the kitchen, especially when they were frying. They found frying very funny for some reason. And trying to measure how much salt should go on. They giggled a lot about salt.

Jones

So what does she do with herself here?

Dariusz

Sewing. She loves to sew. (He picks up the dress on the bed and discovers Julia underneath it.) WHAT.... Julia!

Jones

Julia... What the hell are you doing?

Julia

Dying.

Dariusz

What's the matter?

Jones

Look at this blood? Where's the wound? Take your dress off. Let me look. We've got to stop the blood. (She makes a bandage with a piece of sheet.)

Julia

I'm soaked.

Dariusz

Oh dear, I can't bear... (He feels sick.)

Julia

I must have passed out.

Jones

Are you haemorrhaging?

Julia

No. That crazy wife of yours stabbed me.

Dariush

Mary?

Julia

She got my arm. (Shows Jones where to apply bandage) My hand! She got my painting hand.

Jones

You don't paint, you plaster.

Julia

My plastering hand then.

Jones

It's not that bad. Let me tighten the bandage...

Dariush

Shall I call a doctor?

Jones

Yes, dial the hospital operator.

Julia

No. Call the police.

Dariusz

(Goes to phone and dials.)

Jones

Calm down, you've had quite a shock.

Dariusz

Jones? (He hands her the receiver.)

Jones

Yes? Room 251. Can you call an ambulance from the nearest hospital? Quick!

Julia

Call the police. I'm going to have your wife committed. There are too many nuts loose in New York since they cut back on mental health.

Dariusz

You mean Mary did this?

Julia

Mary, Mary, quite Contrary?

Jones

Just calm down, you've had a shock.

Julia

You'd be shocked if you were stabbed in the back while you were trying to be kind to some nut. What are you two into – blood and sadism, this week?

Jones

Stop talking!

Julia

Why? Call the police. Get the police in here. She's probably half way to Peru by now.

Dariush

Did you have a fight?

Julia

Stop asking me questions. I'm losing blood.

Jones

You'll be all right. It's a couple of nasty cuts...

Julia

Cuts? They're stab wounds. Don't you forget! Get my pills out of my purse. I'm still under the doctor's orders to rest. Did you call Dr. Gorden? No. Well that's good. He expects my blood sugar to be back to normal this week – He doesn't have to know I haven't got any blood left.

Jones

Shush! (Julia goes to speak again, and the door opens. Mary enters. She looks more frightened and nervous than before. But she smiles a lot more.)

Julia

There she is! Call the police.

Jones

Wait a minute. Mary's not running. She's come back.

Julia

A crime has been committed. Doesn't anybody see that? Or am I to be swept under the bed like the dust? No one takes any notice when I get the shaft! Why is that? Don't I look human? How come I don't get any sympathy? A knock on the door.)

Jones

The ambulance! She goes to open it. Waiter enters with drinks.) No thank you, no thank you.

Mary

I'm thirsty. I'm very thirsty. (She takes a beer and fills a glass with it. Dariush signs for it. Waiter avoids Julia.)

Julia

I'm not well. I have an expedition next week and two doctors' appointments already. I spent a lot of boring time caring for this body when I'd rather be painting. Call the police Jones? Oh, you've always got some political excuse for not seeing what's in front of your eyes. I'm dying.

Jones

Why do you want me to call the police? You're capable of it.

Julia

I'm not the type to call the goddamn cops down on an... underprivileged person, but what the hell does she think she's done? She's attacked me, unprovoked and marked my personal flesh. Look in my purse and you'll find a spray gun against would-be muggers and I come in here and get stabbed by a... seamstress. We're supposed to be friends. Can't we be friends without going to a goddamn meeting? All my life I've fought because I've been a woman and every time some patronizing son-of-a-bitch gave me advice, I'd give it back to him with embellishment. People wonder why I'm prickly! If I had an animal instinct for self-survival, I'd be a porcupine by now. But I'm a friend. And they still fight me. They fight me. There's so much anger going round – people can't wait for me to finish what I'm saying before they hit out and hit out... (She looks around and realizes she has the floor and has had it.) Why can't we all dance together? I like dancing. (She stamps her foot and flicks her wrists a little, but this makes her arm hurt. She clutches it.)

Dariusz

Thank you for being so sincere.

Julia

Shit!

Jones

Lets go down and meet the ambulance.

Julia

Isn't she going to say something? Sorry or something? I've got an expedition next Tuesday, and I could have been killed. We've got to call the police. (To Mary as she exits) Bitch!

Dariusz

Jones... (Jones is about to exit)... Nothing.

(Jones exits)

Dariusz

(To Mary) What have you done.

Mary

(Mocking) Did I do something?

Dariusz

Have you really gone crazy or are you doing this on purpose to stop me?

Mary

Stop you?

Dariusz

Is that your plan?

Mary

I went shopping.

Dariusz

That poor girl – she did nothing to you. Did she? Did she?

Mary

I didn't have any money to buy anything, so I went shoplifting. See. (She takes chocolate bars out of her pockets.)

Dariusz

What do you mean, you didn't have any money?

Mary

American money, dollars.

Dariusz

(Gives her money) Here! Take this, take everything I've got. I don't understand you. We were like a rock. I counted on you. And you've gone crazy. Did you shoplift before?

Mary

When I was a kid.

Dariusz

But you are no longer a kid. We were talking about having a kid, and you're acting worse than one. It's a good job we don't have one. Are you really doing this on purpose? Should we have stayed at home? Really? Maybe we should go back. Maybe you're right. Maybe we should go back home.

Mary

Whose home?

Dariusz

Mine.

Mary

No.

Dariusz

I know you were happy there. Strange, because I thought you were making a big sacrifice to leave your country and come with me.

Mary

I was glad to. You were the only person who never hurt me – I can't bear to be hurt.

Dariusz

Then maybe we should go back. Get a plane ticket...

Mary

No. It was a dream, and I've woken up. I went off with a prince to a foreign land and married into a large family. Every day I was smiled at and I smiled back, and I thought – here people care about each other – about their own things. Here problems are different but I'm going to make them mine. Except... I lost myself in these people. When you moved the mirror, I didn't know who I was. I've got to start feeling myself again, so that if I come across a mirror somewhere... If I found a mirror... I would be able to recognise myself in it.

Dariusz

I thought it would work. Everything turns out right for me and I thought it would work for both of us. Why are you packing? Where are you going?

Mary

Home. To Pittsburgh.

Dariusz

You haven't got a home in Pittsburgh.

Mary

I'll find one. I was born and brought up there. It must be my home.

Dariusz

At least come with me to Boston.

Mary

Is that where you are going?

Dariusz

Yes, I can get a job there.

Mary

Why not go to Baltimore, or Seattle, or Los Angeles, or Phoenix, or some other desert?

Dariusz

You don't know what you're saying. I forbid it. I forbid you to go anywhere.

Mary

You can't.

Dariusz

You're not going! (He takes suitcase and empties her clothes from it.)

(She grabs it back, and goes into bathroom, then re-enters with towels from the hotel which she starts to pack.)

Dariusz

I want to talk to you.

Mary

Talk.

Dariusz

What are you doing with those? That's stealing.

Mary

You should have thought about that before. You're a thief too. You stole me.

Dariusz

I never did any such thing. I never did anything. I never forced you to do anything.
(There has been a knocking on the door. Dariusz answers it. Jones enters.)

Jones

I forgot my purse. (Mary in a fit of rage at seeing Jones, tares down the curtains and packs them.)

Darius

Jones! Stop her! What can I do? She doesn't know what she is doing.

Jones

(Very cool) Why do you say that?

Darius

Look at her! (Mary goes to exit, but Darius grabs her and gets in front of door to stop her.)

Look at her!

Jones

I'm looking. At both of you. Maybe she's better off going. Maybe you'd be better off if she went.

Darius

No, no. You understand nothing, nothing. And I don't understand enough.

Jones

Well I have to leave myself. I'm meeting Julia at the hospital, and I believe she deserves some consideration.

Darius

(Grabs Mary's arm and pulls her back in order to leave the way clear for Jones to exit.) Go on, then, Go. Why don't you go? (Jones steps out) Jones! Do I have your address in Boston? (Mary gets free and dashes out.) Hey, come back! (Darius dashes out)

(Jones re-enters, she looks around waiting for a minute. Checks the corridor and then slowly closes the door.)

END OF SCENE SIX

SCENE SEVEN

Hotel Room. It is the morning of the next day. It is still raining. The room is neat but has a depressing motel-room appearance. Dariush enters from the bathroom. He is tying his tie. He is about to go into a depression from which he may or may not recover. The telephone rings. He grabs it, but is disappointed.

Dariush

Hello? Oh, hello Jones. Are you coming up on the train with me? Good!

Oh, I can stay in a hotel somewhere, anywhere. Yes, Rheinhold said I was sure to get your grant. It's marvelous. Are you really going to teach? By the way, I worked it out again and I've got to be right. Yes, It's got to be .023. Yes, oh I mean .032. Yes. That's my belief, .023. I mean .032. Wait! I don't know where Penn Station is? Can I meet you in the lobby? Thanks, thanks. No. I've heard nothing. I don't know where she is. She doesn't have an address. Yes. Right.

(He replaces receiver and takes his briefcase and exits. He re-enters as if he has forgotten something.) Did I have a coat? (He starts to look for it.) 5 over 5, she's forgotten that, and if you take into account the ratio of... what am I looking for? My coat... she must realize the 's' factor doesn't apply in this case. That's what I have to explain to her. On the train, on the train...

(He exits without taking his coat, hanging on the door-peg.)

END OF SCENE SEVEN

END OF PLAY