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SF PERUSALS

Baggage

A COMEDY

by **Sam Bobrick**



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830
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THE CAST

(In Order of Appearance)

PHYLLIS NOVAK – A woman in her mid-thirties
BRADLEY NAUGHTON – A man in his late thirties
DR. JONATHAN ALEXANDER – A therapist in his forties
MITZI CARTRIGHT – A woman in her mid to late thirties

ACT I

TIME: *The present. An early spring evening.*

PLACE: *The tastefully furnished, yet uncluttered living room of Phyllis Novak's New York apartment. It is a three story walk up. The front door is at Stage Right. At Stage Left is the entrance to the kitchen. Just below that is a door that leads to the bedroom. A large window is against the Upstage Center wall, flanked by two bookcases. At Center Stage is a sofa, two side chairs, two end tables and a coffee table. A console table is in back of the sofa. At Upstage Right is an attractive desk and chair. A waste basket is next to it. Several lamps and pictures placed throughout, give the apartment a very warm look. Lying on top of the coffee table is a small suitcase lock, a screw driver and a purse.*

AT RISE: **PHYLLIS NOVAK**, *a woman in her mid-thirties, dressed in slacks and a sweater ENTERS from the bedroom pulling a suitcase by its telescopic handle to the center of the room. She pushes the handle back into the suitcase. She then looks about the room and gives it a last minute straightening. The DOORBELL RINGS followed by impatient knocking. Phyllis crosses to the door and opens it.* **BRADLEY NAUGHTON**, *a man in his late thirties, wearing a grey jacket, grey shirt and grey slacks and somewhat out of breath and annoyed stands there.*

BRADLEY. Phyllis Novak?

PHYLLIS. That's me.

(Using the regular handle, Bradley ENTERS dragging in an identical suitcase. Apparently it is much heavier than the suitcase Phyllis brought out from her bedroom. He stops and tries to catch his breath. Phyllis closes the door)

BRADLEY. Jeez! You didn't tell me there was no elevator in the building.

PHYLLIS. It's only the third floor. I didn't think it would be an issue.

BRADLEY. It wouldn't have been if your damn suitcase wasn't so heavy. What the hell's in here, bricks?

PHYLLIS. *(A bit guilty)* Well, actually there was this little stationary store in Beverly Hills that was going out of business and they had a great deal on paperweights so I bought a few to give out at Christmas.

BRADLEY. How few is a few?

PHYLLIS. Thirty. I have a long gift list.

BRADLEY. Thirty paperweights. It's a wonder the plane was able to take off.

PHYLLIS. It was a little bit much, but I'm the kind of person who upon seeing a good opportunity, takes it.

BRADLEY. I guess I should consider myself lucky they didn't have any file cabinets on sale.

(He has caught his breath and indicates her suitcase)

Where do you want it?

PHYLLIS. Just anywhere.

(Indicates bedroom door)

Over by the bedroom door would be okay.

(Bradley begins to drag the suitcase towards the bedroom)

PHYLLIS, *(continued)* It would probably be easier if you raised up the telescopic handle and wheeled it.

BRADLEY. I would, except it's broken.

PHYLLIS. Oh, no. How did that happen? It's a fairly new bag and it seemed fine when I used it this morning.

BRADLEY. *(Annoyed, he stops dragging the bag and turns to her)* You're not insinuating that I broke it?

PHYLLIS. No. No. Don't be silly. Why would you want to do a thing like that?

BRADLEY. Is that a question?

PHYLLIS. No. Of course not. Still, it does seem curious…

BRADLEY. Let's just end it here, okay?

PHYLLIS. Okay.

BRADLEY. Good.

(He continues to drag the bag to the bedroom door)

I don't get it. Didn't my suitcase, being so much lighter than yours, give you a clue that maybe you were taking the wrong suitcase?

PHYLLIS. If it did, obviously I never would have left with it. When I saw the bag with my initials on it, P.N., I just assumed it was mine and that was that.

BRADLEY. First of all, it didn't have your initials on it. It had mine. B.N. B.N. as in Bradley Naughton and not P.N. as in Phyllis Novak. I admit the bottom part of the "B" was scrapped off a little due to some wear and tear, but if you had looked closely you would have noticed that you could still almost make out that it originally was a "B" not a "P".

(He has finished dragging the bag to the bedroom door)

PHYLLIS. Look, Bradley, I'm sorry you're irritated about our ending up with each others bag and that you've been somewhat inconvenienced but it all worked out. Let's be grateful for that. Besides, I'm sure if you had gone to the baggage claim office and told them what the problem was they would have handled everything. They do that. They would have delivered mine to me and taken yours and delivered it to you and your coming here would have been unnecessary.

BRADLEY. *(Patiently, with a snide attitude)* That sounds all well and good but frankly a bit naive. I know how the airlines operate. If I had gone to the baggage claim office to let them handle this, three things would have happened for certain. You would never see your bag again and I would never see my bag again and someone in Madagascar would have been stuck with thirty paperweights. Fortunately your I.D. tag included your

address and phone number and when I saw that you only live four blocks away from me, taking it to my place and calling you made the most sense. Do you mind if I sit down for a minute? I walked from my place with that bag.

(He sits)

PHYLLIS. Oh, that's too bad. You should have taken a cab. I would have gladly shared the expense with you.

BRADLEY. It wasn't the expense. If I got in a cab and told the driver I was only going four blocks, he would have gotten pissed off. I was already pissed off and frankly the last thing I needed was to be in a cab with two pissed off people. Besides, just the thought of lifting the damn bag into a cab again almost gave me a hernia. Is there a chance you might offer me a cold drink or something?

PHYLLIS. Oh, certainly.

(She stands there for a moment, trying to get herself together, obviously overwhelmed by Bradley's annoyance)

BRADLEY. Well, okay. Offer it.

PHYLLIS. Would you like a cold drink or something?

BRADLEY. That would be nice. That's very thoughtful.

PHYLLIS. God, you are a handful, aren't you?

(Phyllis EXITS to kitchen)

BRADLEY. I'm an attorney with the IRS. I need to be. Maybe next time you travel you should tie a little red ribbon on your handle to help you identify your bag. That way screw-ups like this won't happen.

PHYLLIS *(ENTERS with a can of soda)* Well, by the same token, you could have put a little red ribbon on your bag.

BRADLEY. Forget it. Men don't do that. That's a woman thing.

PHYLLIS. Well, then maybe you should tie a man thing around your handle.

BRADLEY. Like what?

PHYLLIS. How about an athletic supporter? That seems somewhat masculine. I could go one step further but that could be too picturesque. How's a diet root beer?

BRADLEY. Fine. Thanks.

PHYLLIS. Do you want a glass?

BRADLEY. Did you bring one?

PHYLLIS. No.

BRADLEY. Then you obviously think I don't need one.

(Opens the can and takes a swallow)

Jeez, it's been just one of those stupid days. From the time I left L.A. it's been one screw up after another. I had trouble checking out of the hotel. I almost missed the damn airplane. I sat next to a woman with a screaming kid. And the stupid lunch they served us. I think it was supposed to be pot roast. I was nauseous from the first bite. I really don't think meat should be blue. Why I ate it, I'll never know. Goddamn airlines. Unless they screw up your day they're not happy.

PHYLLIS. Well, they got us here safe and sound and basically nowadays that's all you can hope for.

BRADLEY. Please, don't try to make me feel better. I'm not in the mood for it.

PHYLLIS. Look, it's obvious you're upset so I will take full responsibility for the luggage mix-up and apologize profusely and after you finish your drink you can take your suitcase and be on your way. How's that?

BRADLEY. I wouldn't be surprised if that made us both very happy.

PHYLLIS. I have a strong suspicion it will.

(Notices the little lock on the lamp table)

Oh, darn. I forgot to put your lock back on.

BRADLEY. What lock?

PHYLLIS. This little lock that was on your suitcase.

(Gets the lock and hands it to him)

BRADLEY. You unlocked my suitcase?

PHYLLIS. It wasn't difficult. Those little locks are really a joke. A kitchen knife or a tiny screw driver opens all of them.

BRADLEY. *(Annoyed)* That's not the point. You opened my suitcase. You didn't need to open my suitcase? Everything you needed to know was on the outside I.D. tag. Name, address, phone number…What was the need to open my suitcase? That's a total violation of my privacy. I didn't open yours.

PHYLLIS. Well, you were coming to my apartment. This is New York. You don't just let anyone come to your apartment in New York. I wanted to know a little bit about you just in case I thought I might need to have a cop here.

BRADLEY. You should have gotten one. Maybe he could have helped me carry your goddamn suitcase up the stairs.

PHYLLIS. Anyway, after looking through your photo album I really didn't think I needed to bring anyone else into this. Your eyes seemed to indicate there was a reasonable touch of sanity behind them which proves pictures can be misleading.

BRADLEY. You looked through my photo album? Those were my wedding pictures.

PHYLLIS. I know. It said so on the imitation leather cover. "The wedding of Joyce and Bradley." Joyce is quite pretty.

BRADLEY. Yes, she is. Damn it, you really had no business…

PHYLLIS. And she seemed so radiantly happy.

BRADLEY. She was. We both were. Look, I really think you owe me a…

PHYLLIS. It's such a pity it didn't work out.

BRADLEY. Oh, no. You read the letters. You read my letters. How dare you…

PHYLLIS. Look, don't give yourself a seizure. Yes, I did read them and I'm sorry. And I know I shouldn't have. I

happen to be a very inquisitive person.

BRADLEY. Nosey, is more like it.

PHYLLIS. Yes. Maybe that too. I guess it goes with the territory.

BRADLEY. I think the territory is breaking and entering. God, what a snoop you are. Maybe you should get a job with the CIA. They could use your kind of help.

PHYLLIS. Oh, get off it. I'm an editor at Putnam. I read books all day long and over the years, I developed this acute curiosity problem. I now have this overwhelming need to know how things end. It's a stupid and annoying hang up and I desperately wish I could get over it but I can't and most likely won't. When I started going through your album, I found the pictures of you and Joyce absolutely mesmerizing.

BRADLEY. *(Suddenly interested)* You did?

PHYLLIS. I did. You see, there seemed to be such an overwhelming certainty in both your faces that your marriage was going to last forever no matter what.

BRADLEY. Yes. Yes, we did have that look, didn't we?

PHYLLIS. Yes, you did. The photographer must have really done some heavy duty touching up.

BRADLEY. He did do some, but honestly, not that much.

PHYLLIS. And then those letters, they were tied together so nicely, so sweetly, with that cute little frilly red ribbon…

BRADLEY. *(Embarrassed)* I swear, that's the only time I've used a red ribbon.

PHYLLIS. That's not the point. It was obviously tied with care and affection. And I was truly happy for you. I thought, God, maybe they know the secret.

BRADLEY. The secret to what?

PHYLLIS. To a happy, trusting, lasting relationship. In this day and age relationships of that nature are not easy to come by. I should know. I've been through a few of them.

BRADLEY. I'm not surprised. Who wants to live their life with a spy?

PHYLLIS. For your information, Bradley, all the breakups were my doing.

BRADLEY. Well, that's what you say.

PHYLLIS. No, it's true. It's very true. I'm just too cautious. I want a hundred percent guarantee that my choice is going to be the right one, the perfect one. And as the relationship progresses I always seem to find a flaw that starts out small, but one that I soon find so overwhelming I know I'll never be able to live with it. It could be anything, the way he eats, the sounds he makes when he sleeps, the TV shows he likes…I seem to be hung up on finding the perfect mate which I know doesn't exist, yet I can't seem to make myself settle for anything less.

BRADLEY. You're obviously a bit of a nut case.

PHYLLIS. That's possible.

BRADLEY. I honestly don't know why you're telling me all this. Frankly, I couldn't care less. I didn't come up here to make a friend.

PHYLLIS. And believe me, you haven't. Maybe that's the reason I'm being so open about my situation. I think I need to hear myself admit the fact that I have a problem. Since we don't really know one another and most likely won't see each other again, I'm probably more comfortable opening up to you than I would be to a closer and more sympathetic acquaintance. I know I definitely have a commitment problem and it's obviously bothering me. When I finally agree to "till death do us part" I want to be sure I have a shot at it.

BRADLEY. How the hell does anyone know how anything's going to end up? Especially marriage. I certainly didn't. And as for the perfect husband, I thought I was one. Five days a week I left the house early in the morning and I didn't come back until late at night. Except for weekends Joyce hardly saw me. What more can a wife ask for?

(He opens up his suitcase and starts checking through it)

PHYLLIS. What are you doing?

BRADLEY. I'm just checking to see that everything that's supposed to be here still is.

PHYLLIS. Oh, please, you don't think I would…

BRADLEY. I don't know what I think.

PHYLLIS. Well, I didn't take anything. By the way, your taste in clothes is a little on the sorrowful side. Almost everything is grey. You're not an old man. Brighten up. Try a little color. It may just add a drop of cheer to your personality.

BRADLEY. Forget it. In my frame of mind, the only other color that makes sense is black.

(He pulls out the stack of various size envelopes tied with a red ribbon and begins counting them)

One, two, three, four…

PHYLLIS. Trust me, your letters are all there. All eleven of them.

BRADLEY. There were twelve of them.

PHYLLIS. Well, you can't really count the cease and desist from her lawyer.

(Bradley leers at her and puts the envelopes back)

Tell me. Why do you keep those letters of hers? They aren't very nice.

BRADLEY. How about it's none of your business?

PHYLLIS. God, she accused you of everything. I don't remember every accusation but the words, boring, humorless, indifferent and cranky sort of stick out. After reading her letters, if all she said about you is true, I can understand her wanting out of the marriage.

BRADLEY. Maybe it's possible I could be boring and humorless and cranky, but believe me, not that it's any of your concern, the last thing I am is indifferent. I wish I was. Maybe, I wouldn't be taking this break-up so hard. You want to know the real reason she left me? It's very

simple. We went to her high school class reunion. Her high school sweetheart showed up and she ran off to California with him. That usually will put a damper on any marriage. Now let's just drop the subject, okay.

PHYLLIS. Okay. *(A beat)* How was your sex life?

BRADLEY. You know, I don't really think that's any of your business either.

PHYLLIS. Of course it isn't. But let me offer this to you. The majority of the books my company publishes are what we refer to as kitchen novels, novels written mostly by housewives. In ninety-five percent of them, the first thing to go wrong in a marriage is the sex life.

BRADLEY. Maybe if those housewives spent more time taking care of their husband instead of writing those stupid books you wouldn't have those statistics. Besides, for your information, our sex life was damn good. Once, twice, quite often three times a month. With all the pressures we have to endure that's almost remarkable for a New Yorker.

PHYLLIS. I guess so.

BRADLEY. Besides, we were married almost four years. You can't keep a marriage hot and heavy forever you know. I didn't have a clue she wasn't happy. Wherever we'd go, we'd always hold hands. Except of course at her high school class reunion. Why did I ever agree to attend? She danced almost every dance with that stupid ex-boyfriend of hers.

PHYLLIS. And where were you?

BRADLEY. At the shrimp bar. I like shrimp. It was all you can eat for ten bucks. They lost a bundle on me. I was there for hours. Since she left me I haven't been able to even look at a shrimp. I don't know why I'm even talking to you about it. I feel lousier now then when I came up here. I need to go.

(Shuts the suitcase and puts the lock on it)

Let me warn you now, If I'm missing anything I'll make sure you get a tax audit.

PHYLLIS. You went to L.A. to obviously try to talk her into coming back to you, didn't you?

BRADLEY. I don't know why I went to L.A. What does it matter? All I did for six days was stay in my hotel room. I didn't make any calls. I didn't go out. I didn't do anything. I ate all my meals in my rooms. I think the airlines and the hotel had the same chef. I don't know if you can understand this, but I just wanted to be in the same city with her. It was crazy and I was crazy and now here I am talking to you and I think you're crazy.

(He sits on the sofa and buries his head in his hands)

Damn it, I really miss her. I really, really, really miss her.

PHYLLIS. *(An awkward moment. She doesn't know what to say)* You really miss her, don't you?

BRADLEY. *(Looks up)* Didn't I just say that? I thought I just said that.

(He begins to weep and sniffle)

PHYLLIS. Yes, yes, you did.

(Bradley continues to weep)

Are you crying?

BRADLEY. Yes, I'm crying.

PHYLLIS. Oh, my.

BRADLEY. I miss her so much. So very, very much.

PHYLLIS. I know. I know. Gosh, I hate sending you home this way. Would you like a paperweight?

(He gives her a stare)

I'm sorry. I don't know why I said that.

(Bradley continues to weep throughout)

I have to admit, I'm really impressed by a man's crying.

BRADLEY. I'm thrilled to hear that.

PHYLLIS. No, really. Not that I like it but it's actually very moving. It shows sensitivity. I would never have guessed

that about you. None of the men I was serious about ever cried.

BRADLEY. Maybe had you married any of them, they would have. Do you have any Kleenex?

PHYLLIS. Yes, of course.

(She hands him a box. He takes out one and begins blowing his nose)

BRADLEY. *(He has control of himself now)* Maybe we should have had children. That might have kept her home. Men seldom run off with women who have children.

PHYLLIS. Why didn't you have any?

BRADLEY. She wouldn't stop taking her birth control pills. My life is a mess.

PHYLLIS. I know.

BRADLEY. I can't ever see it getting any better.

PHYLLIS. Most likely it won't.

BRADLEY. *(Annoyed)* Why are you agreeing with me?

PHYLLIS. I'm sorry. I just didn't think right now was a good time not to.

BRADLEY. *(Begins weeping again)* I miss my wife.

PHYLLIS. I know.

BRADLEY. Why? Why did she leave me?

PHYLLIS. Boring, humorless, indifferent, cranky and an ex-boyfriend.

BRADLEY. *(Stops weeping)* God, you are a big help, aren't you? I should go home. I hate losing control like this.

PHYLLIS. I know. It's not a pretty picture.

BRADLEY. I thought you said you liked it when men cry?

PHYLLIS. I do, but it's still not a pretty picture.

BRADLEY. *(Takes a deep breath. Composed)* I think I'm okay, now.

PHYLLIS. Good.

BRADLEY. I'll be on my way. It was fairly nice meeting you.

PHYLLIS. Same here.

BRADLEY. *(About to get up, he falls back on the sofa and begins weeping again)* Why? Why did she go?

PHYLLIS. God, I feel so badly for you.

BRADLEY. Me too.

PHYLLIS. Look, do you have any plans for dinner?

BRADLEY. Yes. I was going to go home and take some poison.

(He stops his crying and is now just sniffling a bit)

PHYLLIS. Okay, here's an offer. I know you're not in a good place and I feel some of it is my fault. This suitcase incident seems to have pushed you over the edge. Anyway, at this particular time, I don't think it's a wise thing for you to be alone. Now, I haven't eaten since the airplane and you probably haven't either, so what if we had dinner together tonight?

BRADLEY. I hope you're not planning to try and cheer me up?

PHYLLIS. No. That may not be possible. I just thought that maybe you might need to be with someone until you can pull yourself together.

BRADLEY. *(He has his crying under control)* Oh, really? Well, quite frankly you would be the last person I'd want to be with, Miss Snoop.

PHYLLIS. No. I think quite frankly I would be the best person you could be with. I already know your story so you won't have to go through it again. We can talk about other things just to get your mind off of Joyce. Movies, books. It won't have to be a long dinner. I have to be at work in the morning and I assume you do too. And, since you brought my bag over, I insist on picking up the check.

BRADLEY. You're offering to buy me dinner?

PHYLLIS. I am.

BRADLEY. That's really very decent of you and very unexpected. I might like that. I might like that very much. For once in my life I might come out on top.

PHYLLIS. Good. Besides shrimp, what other kinds of food do you like? How about French?

BRADLEY. How about Italian?

PHYLLIS. I don't think Italian's good for you. You apparently get acid build up.

BRADLEY. Oh, no. You looked through my toiletries? You found my Tums. Why did you look through my toiletries?

PHYLLIS. Well, I wanted to see if you took any antidepressants. After what you've been through you may want to consult your doctor about getting some. They're quite wonderful.

BRADLEY. Do you take them?

PHYLLIS. Do you think I could have gotten through this encounter with you if I didn't? Come on. Let's leave right now before you start crying again.

(She grabs her purse off the table, takes Bradley by the arm and leads him to the door)

BRADLEY. I'm not sure this is a good idea.

PHYLLIS. *(Opening the door)* It probably isn't but we can talk about that at dinner. Oh another thing. Your bottle of Advil has expired.

BRADLEY. Oh, jeez.

(She pushes him out the door, turns off the light switch on the wall and follows him out, closing the door behind them)

BLACKOUT

End Act I, Scene 1

Scene 2

The stage is dark. **DR. JONATHAN ALEXANDER**, *a therapist in his 40's, walks out from the wings to the footlights Center Stage. A spot follows him.*

JONATHAN. How do you do. I'm Doctor Jonathan Alexander, a professional, licensed psychologist with degrees from several prestigious Universities, a B.A., an M.A., a P.H.D, etcetera, etcetera. I deal mainly in couples counseling and have written a number of books on the subject, among them COUPLES IN CONFLICT, COUPLES IN COMBAT, and the recently published COUPLES IN HELL. All of them about nipping bad relationships in the bud. What you are watching, obviously, is a story about two people who are absolutely so wrong for each other, but never-the-less become involved with each other and most likely at the end of the play end up together. A wonderful, neat little story, that we seem to encounter in movies and plays over and over and over again. Frankly, for my taste, I find these sort of stories a bit trite, but that's not important. What is important is that they are really very misleading and does you, the audience, a great disservice. Ladies and gentlemen, in my professional and knowledgeable opinion, you are watching a train wreck about to happen. I don't care how the play ends, this is a relationship that won't and can't work and unfortunately two years down the line I'm afraid they're going to find that out. I know what I'm talking about. I've been down this road several times myself with the wrong partner. That's why I got into this line of work in the first place. Phyllis and Bradley are two very, very troubled people who, if they had any common sense, would get out of each others lives as fast as they can. Let's start with Bradley. Bradley! Just his name makes me shudder. It really says it all, doesn't it? Angry, confused and whinny. God, I just hate to see a man cry. Certainly, there are times when it can't be helped,

like over the loss of a loved one or when your favorite baseball team loses the World Series, but for the most part it shows a definite lack of confidence and control, not really a desirable attribute in a man. And as for Phyllis, I, myself, would rather get run over by a semi-truck than get involved with someone like her. I've seen controlling women before but she takes the cake. Strong, domineering, opinionated, she would rather live anyone else's life but her own. What the hell can these two very troubled and contradictory people expect from this sort of union? What happens after they marry and are up to their necks in kids and house payments and car payments and school tuitions and insurance payments and realize they are both now living a life of unfulfillment, unhappiness and ulcers? The point I'm making is that life is not a play. You've got to think past the happy ending for crying-out-loud. If two people aren't right for each other at the beginning of the relationship, they haven't got a prayer in hell of working it out down the line. I'll have more to say about this as the evening progresses. Anyway, Phyllis and Bradley have eaten and they're on their way back to her place, so I'd better get going. Oh, by the way, at the end of the play, you'll have an opportunity to buy all three of my books in the lobby. Thank you.

(The LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK as he walks off)

End Act I, Scene 2

Scene 3

TIME: *Later that evening.*

The apartment is dark. We hear a key in the lock. The door opens and Phyllis ENTERS and turns on the light. She is followed by Bradley who goes right to his suitcase, lifts the telescopic handle and starts to wheel it towards the door.

BRADLEY. *(Annoyed)* Well, goodbye and good luck. It's been an experience.

PHYLLIS. The very least you can do is say thanks.

BRADLEY. No. The very least I can do is get the hell out of here and never see you again. How could you do what you did?

PHYLLIS. What did I do?

BRADLEY. It could have been a tolerable evening, maybe even a nice evening, but no, you had to ruin it by inviting that obnoxious woman to our table. And then to tell her everything about what I'm going through. How callous are you?

PHYLLIS. Mitzi Cartright is one of my very dearest friends. I had no idea she was going to be at the restaurant and since she was by herself I thought it was only polite to ask her to join us. And I had no idea you were so concerned about keeping your situation a secret, especially after you were so open about it with both the waiter and maitre 'de.

BRADLEY. Well, when they saw me crying, I had to tell them something. What if they blamed it on the food or the service? Why should they go home feeling upset?

PHYLLIS. Look, I thought Mitzi was someone you might like to get to know. Especially since you both seem to be in similar situations. You had a bad marriage, she had a bad marriage.

BRADLEY. Correction. She had three bad marriages.

PHYLLIS. Regardless. I had optimistically hoped you might

find comfort in each other's misfortune. So I was wrong. I'm sorry.

BRADLEY. First of all, let me correct you on one other little thing. I did not have a bad marriage. I had a great marriage. It was my wife that seemed to have the bad marriage. Besides, how could you possibly think someone like Mitzi could ever comfort me. So loud, so pushy, the way she insisted we all taste each other's food.

PHYLLIS. That's what people do in a Chinese restaurant.

BRADLEY. Yeah, well, I don't. When I order in a restaurant, I order something I want to eat, not the crap everybody else orders. She took a bite, you took a bite, the people at the next table took a bite, when my plate finally came back to me the only thing left on it were three hot peppers and a fish bone from someone else's meal. That's why people are always hungry two hours after leaving a Chinese restaurant.

PHYLLIS. I'm afraid your ex-wife was right. You are very cranky.

BRADLEY. No, I'm very hungry. That's what makes me cranky. Do you have any milk?

PHYLLIS. Low fat milk.

BRADLEY. May I have a glass. My stomach is killing me. I shouldn't have eaten those three hot peppers.

PHYLLIS. I'll get the milk.

(She EXITS to kitchen)

BRADLEY. Thank you. My stomach is actually making hunger noises. As soon as I get home I'm making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for myself and eating it in a closet where I can be sure I won't have to share it with anybody. And another thing. I hated the fortune in my stupid fortune cookie. Everyone had a nice one but me. "Stay away from chocolate." What kind of dopey fortune is that? I love chocolate. It's the only decent thing left in my life.

PHYLLIS. *(ENTERS with a glass of milk.)* I'm sorry. I couldn't hear what you were saying.

(She hands him the milk)

BRADLEY. It doesn't matter. Repeating it would just give one of us a headache.

(He takes a sip of milk)

You know what really irks me?

PHYLLIS. I would say about ninety-five percent of everything in the world.

BRADLEY. That you could even think that someone like Mitzi could ever appeal to me.

PHYLLIS. Look, I'm not in the matrimony business. It just seemed you two had a lot in common. She's pathetic, you're pathetic, I thought it was a perfect match.

BRADLEY. Maybe in hell it would be, but at Uncle Wong Fu's Chinese Grill, it wasn't. There was absolutely no chemistry between us. Not a bit.

PHYLLIS. Really. Then why did you give her your phone number?

BRADLEY. She asked me for it. She was a friend of yours and I didn't want to be rude. Besides, I'm changing my number anyway. All I seem to get are calls from people who want to sell me something. Every time I explain what happened to my marriage, they all seem to side with my ex-wife, those that don't hang up.

PHYLLIS. Well, Mitzi sided with you. She was the only one in the entire restaurant who did.

BRADLEY. That's not so. Jose, the waiter, seemed very sympathetic.

PHYLLIS. Trust me. He wasn't. He just wanted a good tip.

BRADLEY. I hope you left him one.

PHYLLIS. I did. Anyway, I think except for the two or three times you got into a crying jag again, it wasn't that bad an evening. Between you and me, I think if Mitzi calls you, you should give her a chance.

BRADLEY. Forget it. She's been married three times and dumped three times. There's a message there and I believe I got it.

(Starts to cry again)

What am I going to do without Joyce? I'll die without her, I know I will.

PHYLLIS. Don't. Please don't cry anymore. It's starting to become annoying.

BRADLEY. I can't help myself. I miss her so much. Her soft velvet hair, her cute little button nose, those beautiful blue eyes of hers…or were they brown? They may have been brown. I'm not sure. I never actually looked that closely. Oh, God, I miss that woman.

PHYLLIS. Weren't you ever a little bit suspicious your marriage was in trouble?

BRADLEY. Not for a minute. I thought she was happy, I thought I was happy. You can't ask for better than that. Believe me, I would have done anything to make the marriage work. I loved married life. In the winter, when we went to bed there was always someone I could warm my cold feet on. In the summer, I always had someone to put sun screen on my back. New Year's Eve I always had a date. I am a man in pain.

PHYLLIS. You want some good advice?

BRADLEY. No. You've been giving me advice all evening. Even at the Chinese restaurant. I ordered the Kung Pao Chicken because you told me to.

PHYLLIS. I thought it was an excellent choice.

BRADLEY. I wouldn't know. I never got a chance to stick a fork in it, remember?

PHYLLIS. Okay, well here's the last bit of advice I'm giving you and you'll be smart to consider it very seriously. The only chance you have of becoming healthy enough to fit back into society again is to get involved with someone else as quickly as you can, even if it's only a superficial relationship. Just someone to help get your mind off of both Joyce and yourself because

you're building it into something much bigger than it was and all you're going to do is get more and more depressed and end up in worse shape then you're in now.

BRADLEY. Well, I'm not getting involved with your friend, Mitzi. She is so wrong for me it's not funny. I'd even rather be involved with you than with her.

(More crying)

I'm going to die. I know it. I feel it. I once read an article where a guy wished himself dead and he died. Maybe after tax season I'll give it more thought.

PHYLLIS. All right! All right! I'll do it.

BRADLEY. Do what?

PHYLLIS. What you suggested. I'm going to let you get involved with me.

BRADLEY. Wait a minute. I didn't suggest it. You suggested it.

PHYLLIS. I suggested you get involved with someone. You mentioned me. I just thought it over and it makes good sense.

BRADLEY. What do you mean you thought it over. I just mentioned it two seconds ago.

PHYLLIS. I have a mind that processes things very quickly.

BRADLEY. Look, I was just rambling. I really don't like you that much, if at all.

PHYLLIS. That's not the point. The point is, I think our getting involved with each other is a wonderful idea for both of us. By concentrating on me, there would be less room in your head for your ex-wife. I'll keep you busy. I'll fill up the space she left and then some. We'll go to plays, to movies, we'll go for walks. I'll make you do things that will bring you back into the world again.

BRADLEY. What about bowling?

PHYLLIS. No. I draw the line at bowling.

BRADLEY. Just asking.

PHYLLIS. I'll see that you won't have time to think about Joyce. You'll find I'm a very strong, determined and focused woman which is what you need at this time to make you fit to live among people again.

BRADLEY. *(A beat)* Okay, what's the catch?

PHYLLIS. What do you mean, what's the catch?

BRADLEY. I mean what's in it for you?

PHYLLIS. All right. I'll level with you, but don't take this the wrong way. Being with you for as short a time as I have, I realize that there wasn't one guy that I went with that was half the pain in the ass you are.

BRADLEY. So?

PHYLLIS. You're annoying, you're difficult, you're practically hopeless. You're everything your ex-wife said you were if not more.

BRADLEY. Oh, so now you're taking her side too.

PHYLLIS. No, not at all. Here it is in a nutshell, Bradley. All my life I've been looking for the perfect guy when deep down inside I know there is no such animal. The problem is, I can't get myself to accept that. By forcing myself to be around you for any length of time, I have a feeling that anyone that comes my way after you, is going to look like Prince Charming by comparison. Maybe, after a month or two with you, just maybe, I'll finally be able to compromise, to settle, to be more tolerant of male shortcomings and maybe, just maybe, I won't be doomed to spinsterhood.

BRADLEY. So then you'd be using me.

PHYLLIS. Yes. And you'd be using me.

BRADLEY. That is so sick.

PHYLLIS. Yes. But so are we. In our own way. You, of course, worse than me. You need to be forced to forget about a marriage that is over and I need to be forced to get real about relationships, otherwise we're going to end our days as the stupid sad souls that we are.

BRADLEY. So what we'd be doing is going steady in a superficial sort of way.

PHYLLIS. Yes. A very superficial sort of way.

BRADLEY. For how long?

PHYLLIS. Let's say until one of us is so fed up with the other that they may need to be institutionalized.

BRADLEY. What about sex?

PHYLLIS. Take your pants off and I'll punch your lights out.

BRADLEY. No sex?

PHYLLIS. None.

BRADLEY. That's more like being married than going steady.

PHYLLIS. Just keep in mind, Bradley, this is not a romance. It's a companionship.

BRADLEY. Companionship? Don't you have to be in your eighties for something like that? I don't know. I might need a few days to mull this around, let it simmer in my head a bit.

PHYLLIS. If you're smart you'll give me a "yes" right now. In a few days there's a chance that I may come to my senses.

BRADLEY. Let me think…Let me think. The two of us seeing each other…dating…but not really dating. I really don't like the idea but I have to admit anything's better than this constant wallowing in the pain. Okay…I'll do it. Yes! I say yes! I'll try anything to get over Joyce, to forget her…*(Sadly)*…her soft velvet hair, her cute little button nose, those beautiful…

PHYLLIS. Okay, okay. We already went through that list.

BRADLEY. Maybe if I show you some recent pictures of her you'll know what I'm going through. May I? I have several in my wallet.

PHYLLIS. If you must.

(Bradley takes several pictures from his wallet and hands them to Phyllis)

BRADLEY. Here. I heard she's gotten even more attractive since she left me.

PHYLLIS. *(Taking them and looking at them)* She's very pretty. But from now on, I'm the woman in your life.

(She tears the pictures in half and hands them back to Bradley)

BRADLEY. That was very cruel.

PHYLLIS. I know. But either we go at this one hundred percent or not at all.

BRADLEY. You're tough.

PHYLLIS. You've got that part right.

BRADLEY. Damn it, I hate to admit it but in a crazy way this just might work. I already feel my anger for Joyce slowly turning towards you.

PHYLLIS. Good. Now when do you want to start?

BRADLEY. Why not tomorrow? Monday's are always saddest for me and until football season rolls around in the fall, there's nothing really worth watching on TV.

PHYLLIS. Okay, tomorrow it is. We'll try a movie.

BRADLEY. What about dinner?

PHYLLIS. Something healthy.

BRADLEY. I'd rather have something good.

PHYLLIS. We'll see.

BRADLEY. I can't believe I'm buying into this. It just proves how desperate I am. Still, I have to admit Phyllis, it's so very, very kind of you to do this.

(Starts to snivel)

No one's really ever gone out of their way for me.

PHYLLIS. Don't start crying. Please, don't start crying.

BRADLEY. No more. No more. I promise.

(Controlling himself)

Well, good night, Phyllis. I'll see you tomorrow, let's say about seven.

PHYLLIS. Fine. Good night, Bradley.

BRADLEY. Boy, it's really been some wild day, huh?

(Bradley starts out)

PHYLLIS. Uh, Bradley. Aren't you forgetting something?

BRADLEY. Oh, I'm sorry.

(He goes over and kisses her on the cheek)

Good night, Phyllis.

PHYLLIS. I meant your suitcase.

BRADLEY. Oh, right. Right. Thanks.

(He goes to his bag and wheels it to the door)

See you tomorrow night.

(He EXITS. Phyllis stands at the door for a moment, shakes her head, closes the door and then approaches the audience)

PHYLLIS. Let me explain how I've been thinking. Here I am, a very cautious, unattached, independent, not unattractive, woman, with no guy in sight and not getting any younger. Okay, along comes Bradley Naughton, a guy who is not bad looking, clean, apparently no criminal record, has a good job, is emotionally needy and ripe for the picking with only one slight problem. He's not my type. So here's my plan. It's very simple. I will turn Bradley Naughton into my type. George Bernard Shaw sort of did that in Pygmallion and that worked out fine. It's not going to be that difficult. He's already beaten down so the resistance will be almost nil. I will simply win his confidence, make him very dependent on me and what I don't like about him, I'll change. In no time at all, Bradley Naughton will be the perfect man for me. Trust me, when I finish with him you will like him so much more than you do now. And what about his hang up with his ex-wife? Well, did you listen to him? In all the time he kept crying and moaning about missing her, did you once here the word "love" mentioned? I didn't. That should tell you something. Anyway, I think it's a positive opportunity. Devious? Underhanded? Unethical? Yes. But in today's market, not a bad option for a single girl over thirty. Especially one as…spirited and picky and terrified about relationships as myself. Okay, I know what you're thinking.

What about love on my part? Well, I've been living without it so far and as you can see, it hasn't affected me in the least. But it's time for me to settle down and I do believe Bradley and I can have a very nice life together. I promise you, it's going to work out fine. I'll have to write the airlines a thank you note.

(Jonathan ENTERS from the wings.)

JONATHAN. Excuse me! Excuse me.

PHYLLIS. *(Confused)* Yes?

JONATHAN. How do you do. I'm Doctor Jonathan Alexander. I'm a professional, licensed psychologist with degrees from many prestigious Universities, a B.A., an M.A., a PHD, etcetera, etcetera. The audience already met me. I deal mainly in couples counseling and have written a number of books on the subject.

PHYLLIS. And what seems to be the problem?

JONATHAN. I need to warn you Miss Novak, you are in very dangerous territory. You and Mr. Naughton obviously seemed destined to wind up together at the end of the play.

PHYLLIS. Yes. That's the idea. Of course, the fun is in getting there. The audience expects it and actually looks forward to it.

JONATHAN. Yes, but you need to know that after the play ends, when you do begin going through life together…

PHYLLIS. Yes. What about it?

JONATHAN. Well, as I already told the audience, it's going to be a disaster. If there ever were two people so wrong for each other, it's you two. You're day and night.

PHYLLIS. Yes, I know that. But didn't you hear what I was just…

(Indicates audience)

…telling them? I'm going to change him. I'm going to make him into the perfect man for me. Yes, I'm sure we'll hit a few rough spots along the way, but I'm prepared for that. And as long as I control the ship, I'll

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