

*Acting Edition*

# Wife of a Salesman

by Eleanor Burgess

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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*WIFE OF A SALESMAN* was co-commissioned by Milwaukee Repertory Theater through its John (Jack) D. Lewis New Play Development Program and Writers Theatre through its Literary Development Initiative, with the generous support of David and Mary Winton Green. The rolling world premiere was presented at Milwaukee Repertory Theater (Mark Clements, Artistic Director; Chad Bauman, Executive Director) and Writers Theatre (Bobby Kennedy, Interim Artistic Director; Kathryn M. Lipuma, Executive Director) in 2022.

The Chicago production, which opened on March 11, 2022, was directed by Jo Bonney, with scenic design by Courtney O'Neill, costume design by Raquel Madorno, sound design by Chris LaPorte, and lighting design by Heather Gilbert. The fight choreography was by Courtney Abbott and the vocal coach was Kate DeVore. The production stage manager was Katie Klemme. The cast was as follows:

**WIFE** ..... Kate Fry  
**MISTRESS** ..... Amanda Drinkall  
**JIM** ..... Rom Barkhorder  
**ANGELA** ..... Dekyi Ronge  
**ADDITIONAL RADIO VOICES** ..... Karmann Bajuyo

The Milwaukee production, which opened on September 30, 2022, was directed by Marti Lyons, with scenic design by Andrew Boyce, costume design by Izumi Inaba, sound design by Melanie Chen-Cole, and lighting design by Keith Parham. The fight choreography was by Jamie Cheatham and the vocal coach was Kathy Logelin. The rehearsal stage manager was Jade Bruno and the production stage manager was Bekah Brown. The cast was as follows:

**WIFE** ..... Heidi Armbruster  
**MISTRESS** ..... Bryce Gangel  
**JIM** ..... Bobak Bakhtiari  
**ANGELA** ..... Keltly Morash  
**ADDITIONAL RADIO VOICES** ... Vivian Vaeth Jared & Brandt Hoover

The first draft of the play was written during a residency at the Hermitage Artist Retreat, and workshopped through the 2050 Fellowship at New York Theatre Workshop, The Civilians R&D Group, and the Alley All New Program.

## CHARACTERS

**THE WIFE / HEATHER** – Female. Early 40s.

**THE MISTRESS / VIOLET** – Female. Late 20s to early 30s.

**JIM** – Male. 40s.

**ANGELA** – Only heard over the loudspeaker, may be prerecorded.  
Female. 30s.

**THE RADIO** – Prerecorded, played from onstage. The male and female voices might be those of Angela and Jim.

## SETTING

Boston.

## TIME

Sometime in America's mythic past, circa 1935–1950.

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

A line break within a character's dialogue indicates a new thought or a beat.

A slash within a line signifies interrupted dialogue.

## **THE AUTHOR WOULD LIKE TO THANK**

Bobby Kennedy, Kate Lipuma, and the entire staff of Writers Theatre.

Deanie Vallone, Mark Clements, Laura Braza, and the entire staff of Milwaukee Repertory Theater.

Jo Bonney, Kate Fry, Amanda Drinkall, Rom Barkhorder, Alex Dauphin, Katie Klemme, and Olivia Sullam.

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Ruth Nettles, Steve Sedlet, and Emily Bussanich, who helped take care of my children and made it possible for me to work on this play.

The Hermitage Artist Residency.

My mother.

And, as always, Nick.

*For the women whose stories were never adequately told,  
and the women who made it possible for me to tell mine*



*(The living room of a one-bedroom apartment in Boston. Some imprecise time during America's theatrical golden age, circa 1935–1950. We recognize this living room; we've seen bits of it before in productions of Williams and Miller and Inge and O'Neill and Odets. Though something about it should feel odd, too. Maybe it's the strange blend of naturalistic detail and stylization. Maybe it just looks too feminine.)*

*(The **MISTRESS** is onstage as the play begins, giving herself a manicure: fire engine red.)*

*(A melody plays – something sweeping, romantic.\* It's coming from a cathedral-style radio, occupying a prominent place in the room. A voice comes on through the radio speakers, with one of those 1940s transatlantic accents.)*

**NARRATOR 1.** *(On radio.)* That night, during the party, Lady Hamilton had just decided to take a turn about the garden, when who should she come across but the very man she'd been trying to avoid – Lord Nelson.

**LADY HAMILTON.** *(On radio.)* Lord Nelson! Forgive me, I did not mean to intrude upon your private walk.

**LORD NELSON.** *(On radio.)* No, don't leave! Your appearance here – in the moonlight – this moment of solitude – it's fate. You know I set sail tomorrow for France. But, Lady Hamilton – nay, Emma –

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**LADY HAMILTON.** (*On radio.*) Lord Nelson!

**LORD NELSON.** (*On radio.*) I must ask. If you were just Emma, not Lady Hamilton. If I were not Lord Nelson. If we were only a man and a woman in the moonlight –

(*The MISTRESS stops to listen, rapt.*)

**LADY HAMILTON.** (*On radio.*) But we are no such thing! You are a warrior, a hero...

**LORD NELSON.** (*On radio.*) Is a hero to be permitted no passion? No connection of mind or soul? I love you Emma. I'd give up everything for you.

**LADY HAMILTON.** (*On radio.*) Please, we mustn't!

**LORD NELSON.** (*On radio.*) Alright Emma, then go. Go back in to the party. I will never speak of my feelings again. Go on, my love.

**LADY HAMILTON.** (*On radio.*) I – I can't! Lord help us but I can't!

(*The music swells. And swells.*)

**JINGLE.** (*On radio. Sung.*)

**MISTRESS.**

YOU WANT HAIR THAT  
REALLY SHINES

Of course they cut it off at  
the good part.

SO DO YOUR 'DO WITH  
BEAUTYFINE

MAKE HIM LOVE YOU  
MAKE HIM WANT YOU

MAKE HIM SAY  
"SHE'S MINE!"

JUST DO YOUR 'DO WITH  
BEAUTYFINE

MAKE HIM LOVE YOU  
WITH BEAUTYFINE

Ba da da do da  
do da da

**ADVERTISER 1.** (*On radio.*) For an easy and speedy hairdo that'll blow *your* Lord Nelson away, try –

*(A knock sounds.)*

*(The MISTRESS is startled, and knocks over her nail polish.)*

**MISTRESS.** Oh shhhhhhoooot.

*(She dithers between opening the door and cleaning up the spill; heads for the door; stops to turn off the radio; fluffs her hair; then finally opens the door.)*

*(The WIFE is on the other side, wearing a coat and carrying a briefcase.)*

*(The MISTRESS slams the door in her face.)*

**WIFE.** *(From the other side of the door.)* Umm – hello?  
I'm – I promise I'm not here to –  
you know, for anything strange.  
I was hoping to show you some fabric samples.

*(The MISTRESS is confused.)*

For sewing?

I'm – from Simpson and Simpson, and we have some –  
some lovely fabrics.

I only want a minute of your time.

Please.

*(The MISTRESS crosses herself, then opens the door.)*

**MISTRESS.** *Hi.*

**WIFE.** Hello.

**MISTRESS.** I apologize, only I get – suspicious of – you  
know, a total stranger at the door.

**WIFE.** Oh, of course I understand, it's only natural.

I know I don't have an appointment, but –

May I come in?

**MISTRESS.** Um...sure. Sure.

*(The MISTRESS steps away from the door.)*

*(The WIFE comes in and immediately starts looking around, trying to take everything in.)*

**WIFE.** Nice place.

It's very decorated.

**MISTRESS.** I suppose.

**WIFE.** Smells like perfume.

**MISTRESS.** Yeah, I like to spray it around.

Make the place a little glamorous.

*(The WIFE notices a small statue of the Virgin Mary.)*

**WIFE.** You're Catholic?

**MISTRESS.** What?

You don't sell to Catholics?

**WIFE.** Oh no, of course I do! Why, there are Catholics right next door to me at home. We're very friendly.

**MISTRESS.** I'm sure you are.

*(The WIFE is still staring around the apartment.)*

...You wanted to show me some fabric?

**WIFE.** Yes! I – tell me –

Do you sew?

**MISTRESS.** Not really, nope.

**WIFE.** *(Taken aback.)* What – not at all?

**MISTRESS.** I always found it pretty dull.

**WIFE.** Oh. Well. Do you – ever get clothing made? Custom?

**MISTRESS.** *(She's about to say no, then:)* I guess I could.  
I certainly could.

Now that I think about it, that seems like a neat idea!

**WIFE.** Any sense of what you would want? Women's clothing? Men's...?

**MISTRESS.** Why don't you just give me the whole show?

**WIFE.** Great!

Can I set up over here?

**MISTRESS.** Sure.

*(She moves a couple magazines off the coffee table.)*

Oh – watch the – there's a fresh spill –

*(She points to the nail polish spill.)*

**WIFE.** Oh!

*(Beat.)*

You don't want to – you can take a moment to clean it up?

**MISTRESS.** Nope!

**WIFE.** You know ammonia gets that right out.

**MISTRESS.** Uh huh, I know!

**WIFE.** Well – you can take a seat right there.

**MISTRESS.** Thank you.

*(She sits.)*

**WIFE.** And I'll...

*(The **WIFE** sets her briefcase on the coffee table and tries to open it. She's awkward with it, unfamiliar with the clasps.)*

**MISTRESS.** Here – let me help you.

*(The **MISTRESS** is easily able to open the briefcase. There are fabric samples inside.)*

**WIFE.** Oh! Thank you.

Well! As you can see – we at Simpson and Simpson carry many very nice fabrics. In all sorts of shades and price points. We have – now see – this is a good durable fabric. This would hold up to a lot of washes. You could use it for clothing for your kids.

Do you – have you got any children?

**MISTRESS.** No. I haven't got any children.

**WIFE.** Well that's good – isn't it! You can wear much nicer things.

This – isn't this a nice green? You could wear this out with your husband for a special occasion.

If you've got a husband...

**MISTRESS.** *(Appreciating the fabric and avoiding the question.)* Mmmm.

**WIFE.** Or – oh, this is a lovely piece of lace. You'd hardly know it was made on a machine. The only way to tell is that a machine doesn't leave a single flaw, and handmade does, haha!

Not that you make things by hand.

**MISTRESS.** You should be nicer to your customer.

**WIFE.** Excuse me?

**MISTRESS.** People pay good money to feel special.

“A woman like you – with your complexion – it’s a crime to see you dressed in anything other than brilliant red.”

**WIFE.** Oh – yes it is!

Do you want to see the red –

**MISTRESS.** Or, “I can tell just by looking at you, you’re a woman who can spot quality. You must just *hate* to wear any rough sort of cotton – let me show you a little silk.”

That’s how he’d do it.

*(The WIFE freezes.)*

I know who you are.

He keeps your picture in his wallet.

*(The WIFE sits down. After a moment:)*

**WIFE.** Why’d you let me in?

**MISTRESS.** Same reason you came by, I imagine.

I wanted to finally see you.

I wanted to know who you are.

**WIFE.** I didn’t come here for *curiosity*.

I came here to save my family.

**MISTRESS.** I believe your family’s back in Brooklyn.

**WIFE.** They are.

**MISTRESS.** Funny way to to save ’em, traveling three states away.

**WIFE.** I’d go to the ends of the earth for them.

**MISTRESS.** Well isn’t it convenient I wasn’t any farther than Boston.

How’d you get up here, anyways? He lend you the car?

**WIFE.** He didn't have to *lend* me the car, it's my car too.

**MISTRESS.** Uh huh.

Long drive?

**WIFE.** Six hours.

**MISTRESS.** Sounds slow, was it slow?

Was there a lot of traffic?

**WIFE.** I don't want to talk about the traffic!

**MISTRESS.** Okay.

*(She waits expectantly.)*

Do you want to talk about the weather?

**WIFE.** I want you to stop sleeping with my husband.

**MISTRESS.** Alright then.

**WIFE.** Alright?

**MISTRESS.** I mean, now I know what you want.

I probably could have guessed before, that you'd feel that way.

**WIFE.** I thought Catholics didn't believe in adultery.

**MISTRESS.** I don't think anyone really *believes* in adultery.

Which is sorta funny, something everyone knows happens and nobody believes in.

**WIFE.** It's not that people don't admit these things happen they just know they're wrong. They're bad. They're – it makes you a bad person, to do it. It makes you an immoral person.

**MISTRESS.** You had six hours in a car to think of what to say to me and the best plan you could come up with was insults?

*(Beat.)*

**WIFE.** You knew about me.

**MISTRESS.** Not at first. He used to take his wedding ring off before he came in the door of our office.

But yeah, I knew.

I'm no fool.

Unmarried men are always evaluating. Do I want another date, do I want her to think I'm serious, can I get lucky, can I do better.

The married ones are so grateful to be with anyone besides their wives that they're *delighted* with everything you do. You get in their car, and the *smile* they give you – you know that smile he has –

**WIFE.** Of course I know that smile he has he's my husband that is my point he is *my* husband –

**MISTRESS.** When I get in his car he gives me that smile.

**WIFE.** You don't feel *any* guilt, do you?

**MISTRESS.** *I'm* not married to you.

I can't help it if men fall for me, they always have.

As early as junior high, there'd be a crowd of boys following me from class to class, hoping to carry my books. I had to give one book to each of them to keep them from fighting.

When I walk down the street, if I smile at a man his face just lights right up.

It's a kindness, when a girl like me pays attention to a man.

**WIFE.** You're a terrible person.

*(That punctures the MISTRESS's airs a bit.)*

**MISTRESS.** Excuse me – you don't know me at all / you've just met me –

**WIFE.** You're clearly a bad person, you clearly have no sense of – of religion, or kindness, or family –

*(The MISTRESS gets up and walks away from the WIFE, towards the radio. She turns it on.)*

**WIFE.**

You are a tramp, and a selfish person, and a cheap person –

**GIRL'S VOICE.** *(On radio.)*

Mommy, can I have a snack?

**MOM.** *(On radio.)*

Of course sweetie.

*(As the WIFE talks, the MISTRESS turns the volume up and up to drown out the WIFE's speaking.)*

**WIFE.**

You're a whore!  
That's the only word for it, you're a lousy rotten whore and and and –  
A *bad* woman.  
I have *no* idea what he sees in you.  
You're not even that pretty!  
I was expecting you to be prettier!

**ADVERTISER 2.** *(On radio.*

*At a deafening volume.)*

YOU WORK HARD TO MAKE SURE YOUR KIDS GET THE VERY BEST. BUT DID YOU KNOW THAT EVEN WITH A HEALTHY DIET, THEY MIGHT NOT BE GETTING ALL THE VITAMINS AND MINERALS THEY NEED? TRY BISKERWHISK FLOUR! WITH ADDED VITAMINS AND MINERALS. BISKERWHISK, BECAUSE THERE'S ALWAYS MORE YOU COULD DO FOR YOUR KIDS.

*(The MISTRESS dials the volume back down to a low level.)*

**MISTRESS.**

Don't insult me. You can stay here and talk a while, but not if you're gonna insult me.

**HOST.** *(On radio.)*

And now welcome back to yum tum bubble gum variety hour, we're here with Billy Brant's golden orchestra and brand new number out of the Windy City, "Till the End of Time" ...

*(The soft, jazzy music continues to play faintly in the background.)\**

*(Beat.)*

**WIFE.** *(Calmer now.)* We've got kids, you know.

**MISTRESS.** Yes, I know.

*(The WIFE rummages through her purse, looking for something.)*

**WIFE.** I have – I've got photos – I want to show you – I want you to take a good look at our family –

**MISTRESS.** He's shown me pictures of your kids.

*(The WIFE stops rummaging.)*

He's so proud of them.

I hear your older son is gonna be president and your younger son is gonna be fighting the ladies off with a stick.

It seems like he's a wonderful father.

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**WIFE.** They're devoted to him.

**MISTRESS.** That's great. That's as it should / be –

**WIFE.** They need to believe in him.

I really think children – boys especially – they need a man in their life they can look up to, who shows them, this is what it means to be a man, this is what a man is.

**MISTRESS.** Oh, I think he's showing them what a man is.

*(Gentler.)* Sorry, I – I tend to kid.

They're getting big, right? I think your older son is about to graduate high school?

**WIFE.** Yes.

**MISTRESS.** I imagine that feels wonderful.

To launch them into life like that.

All those diapers and scoldings and steps and moments.

And now you're almost done.

They'll be adults soon.

They won't hardly need the two of you anymore.

**WIFE.** I'm not sure you realize how much it affects a child – even one who's nearly grown – to start to believe their father is a person they can't count on.

It makes them feel like – rules don't matter.

Our oldest son – he's the sweetest boy! But –

Lately he's been taking things too far with girls at school.

Been thumbing his nose at his teachers. He's flunking math.

He took the car and drove it all around without a license – almost smashed it.

And I think it's because his father, who he's so devoted to, has been taking longer and longer trips.

Been clearly having his mind on other things besides us.

*(No answer.)*

What I'm trying to tell you is you're not just hurting me, you're hurting children.

Those children need a father – they need a roof over their head – we have a mortgage!

**MISTRESS.** Have you tried talking to *him* about this? About me?

*(Beat.)*

**WIFE.** I haven't told him yet. That I know.

The moment I tell him – we'll never get it back. We won't have – happy mornings, with nothing to talk about except where's he traveling today, and oh gosh can you believe the news.

He'll feel guilty.

And he'll hate me for making him feel guilty.

**MISTRESS.** As opposed to you being angry, and hating him for making you angry?

**WIFE.** I'll get over it.

**MISTRESS.** Well I can see why you'd want to fight for a relationship like that.

**WIFE.** You've never been married, have you?

**MISTRESS.** No, I've never been married.

**WIFE.** I don't think you can imagine what it is, a marriage.

A marriage is a thing that gives a shape to your life. It gives a purpose to it.

I have made it the business of my life to – to tend to him. To be the person he needs me to be. To be an encourager. An advisor.

Someone to joke with. Someone to celebrate with.  
Someone to grieve with and plan with.

I have – made dinners. I have kept a happy home.

*(In the background, on the radio, the music subtly gives way to ads:)*

**WIFE.**

I have listened.

And listened.

I have *cheered* him on.

I have *done my job*.

You do not get to come  
through and make it all  
meaningless!

Make me – silly.

Make –

good hours into bad  
hours.

Look would you mind if  
we –

the radio –

**JINGLE.** *(On radio. Sung.)*

BATES, BATES

FOR YOUR HANDS AND  
YOUR FACE

THE SOFTNESS OF SILK  
AND THE LOVELINESS OF  
LACE

YOU CAN SMELL LIKE A  
FLOWER

HOUR AFTER HOUR

THAT'S ALL WITHIN YOUR  
POWER THANKS TO BATES.

Bates Lotions and  
Luxuries, now open six  
days a week on Boylston  
Street. Come look, smell  
and feel your very best.

*(The radio play resumes under the following lines.)*

**MISTRESS.** Hmm?

**WIFE.**

Can we have the radio  
off please? It's making  
me crazy hearing a  
second voice talking  
over us the whole time.

**NARRATOR 1.** *(On radio.)*

And now back to *Lord  
Nelson's Lady*. In high-  
society London, from  
ballroom to ballroom,  
and salon to salon,  
rumors swirled.

*(The MISTRESS gets up and heads towards the radio.)*

**MISTRESS.**

Oh, that's funny! I barely hear it anymore. I have the radio on just about every second of the day.

**GOSSIPY WOMAN 1.**

*(On radio.)*

Have you heard? They were seen walking together along the embankment. And driving together in Hyde Park. And dancing together in Vauxhall Gardens.

**GOSSIPY WOMAN 2.** *(On radio.)* I have always known Lord Nelson to be a sensible, honorable man.

It is clear that he has been bewitched.

**GOSSIPY MAN 1.** *(On radio.)* And who would not be bewitched, by a woman so beguiling?

*(The MISTRESS turns the radio off. There's a moment of sudden quiet.)*

**MISTRESS.** I hate the quiet.

It gets so damn quiet, and lonesome here on a Sunday afternoon, work a full day away and no one to talk to.

*Life needs excitement!*

Thank God for radio.

You know, it's hard to hear it from the bathroom... most nights I'll wash my face in the kitchen sink, brush my teeth right in the middle of the living room. Just so I can keep listening.

**WIFE.** Well that's odd.

**MISTRESS.** No it isn't. They make good shows these days. They know how to make you want to keep listening.

**WIFE.** Look I am –

I am asking you to give me back my happiness.

*(Beat.)*

**MISTRESS.** I'm gonna make a drink. Do you want a drink?

**WIFE.** *(Flabbergasted.)* No I would not like a drink!

**MISTRESS.** Okay. I'll just make one for me.

*(She saunters towards the kitchenette and starts to fix a drink as they talk.)*

**WIFE.** I just don't know what sort of person doesn't care that they're hurting other people.

I mean I have tried my whole life to do the right thing, I have tried to be proper, and kind, and *decent* –

**MISTRESS.** Oh I am so sick of – of – judgmental women with tidy homes!

You know – you know maybe he likes to spend time with me because *you* have no idea what it's like to do bad things and to still want to be a good person.

Is this what you do at home – this – scolding, and superiority –

**WIFE.** I treat him like a prince. *A prince.*

**MISTRESS.** “Oh hubby, I'm such a good wifey, I made your favorite pot roast, because I'm so good, it's got carrots in it and everything because they're soooo healthy, I've been so faithful, I've been so deserving, you just have to love me, you owe it to me to love me.”

**WIFE.** You're describing good things as if they're bad things!

**MISTRESS.** We're milk and whiskey, sweetie.

After a man turns about sixteen he's gonna want one and not the other.

**WIFE.** That sounds like something out of a bad movie.

**MISTRESS.** After a long day of work a man doesn't want to think about eating his carrots.

You may be good, but *I* know how to make men like me. And that's what counts.

**WIFE.** (*Sarcastic.*) Oh really? And what exactly do you do? Wobble around on high heels like a pin-up girl?

**MISTRESS.** He comes in the door here –

*(The WIFE looks around.)*

I throw my arms around him before he can put his briefcase down.

**WIFE.** I take his briefcase, I take his coat, I take his hat, I put them all away for him so he can get off his tired feet.

**MISTRESS.** I tell him I've been so lonesome for him, I tell him he looks so handsome, I tell him it's so good to see him.

**WIFE.** I tell him that every day!

**MISTRESS.** I say how do you like this new lipstick? How do you like this new skirt?

**WIFE.** I say dinner's waiting, I made your favorite dish.

**MISTRESS.** I say let's go out dancing, I wanna show you off.

**WIFE.** I say wait till you see what your son did today, you're gonna be so proud.

**MISTRESS.** I say tell me absolutely everything about yourself, and I only interrupt to say that I agree.

I say tell me something you've always wanted to do, we'll make it happen tonight.

I make every day different.

I make every night special.

I've worked harder than you at this.

I've earned your husband's attention.

**WIFE.** I'm supposed to "make every night special" for twenty years?

I'm supposed to never talk about an unpleasant thing for *twenty years*?

**MISTRESS.** Just look at your skirt.

**WIFE.** What about my skirt?

**MISTRESS.** How is anyone supposed to love you if you go around wearing a skirt like that?

A woman who wears a skirt like that doesn't love herself.

So how can anyone love her?

(*Beat.*)

**WIFE.** He could suggest taking *me* out, you know. He could make nights special for *me*.

**MISTRESS.** He could. But he won't.

**WIFE.** I thought, you marry someone, they're yours, but no, according to you a marriage is like a mortgage, and you gotta keep paying in every single month or you can lose everything you worked for for half your life!

**MISTRESS.** Well...

Yeah.

**WIFE.** You know my younger son likes girls like you.

Makes me worry I gave birth to an idiot.

Must be an idiot if he picks flattery over substance.

You're like a car with a fancy paint job and an unreliable engine.

**MISTRESS.** Who would anybody rather sleep with? You, or me?

*(Beat.)*

I mean – when's the last time you two made love?

**WIFE.** That is absolutely none of your business!

**MISTRESS.** Are you embarrassed because it was a long time ago?

I was with him last week. On Tuesday.

**WIFE.** I was with him last night.

*(Beat.)*

**MISTRESS.** I don't believe you.

**WIFE.** It was a warm night, and he was a little sweaty, and as I was giving him a kiss on the cheek I stopped to smell his scalp.

I've always loved how he smells.

Like some spice without a name.

And I was just sort of standing there, resting my hands on his shoulders and breathing in his smell, and he turned around and he kissed me and that was that.

*(Beat. This next line is not competitive. The MISTRESS is trying to process this.)*

**MISTRESS.** He brought me flowers. And I – I kissed him to say thank you. Just a light little peck. Only we couldn't stop kissing.

**WIFE.** He loves me, you know. He does. Whatever you –

He says I'm his foundation. His support.

He calls me his sweetheart. Same as he did when I was sixteen.

We met at my sweet sixteen, did you know that?  
I turned sixteen on a Saturday, and he –

*(She stops herself.)*

**MISTRESS.** He what?

*(Beat.)*

**WIFE.** He was someone else's date.

*(The MISTRESS is amused.)*

That's not the same thing as a marriage!  
That's nothing like a marriage.  
I just – I don't understand why you'd want to –  
I know he can be – charming.  
And – and sweet.  
I know he's a good salesman –

**MISTRESS.** He's not that great of a salesman.

**WIFE.** Yes he is!

He's the best they have in New England.  
Lately he's been on a real winning streak.  
If he keeps it up he'll be a member of the firm –

**MISTRESS.** I let him in first with the buyers.

I set his appointments at the best times.  
I keep track of when our inventory's running low and I  
book him right at a time I know they'll buy.  
I can always predict exactly what the bosses will do.  
It's my job to stay three steps ahead of them.  
Without me that place would fall apart.

I've got a real head for business.

I was number one at Mrs. Lincoln's secretarial school.

**WIFE.** That's nothing. I did three semesters at Brooklyn College.

For math. I won an economics prize. My professor picked me special for it. They put my name on a plaque.

It's the darnedest thing – I never went to go pick it up.

**MISTRESS.** I mean what are you gonna do with a plaque?

**WIFE.** Exactly.

*(Beat.)*

Well, particularly if you don't think he's a good salesman, I don't see why you'd want to – why you'd go after him.

**MISTRESS.** I didn't go after him. He came after me.

All I did was say yes.

**WIFE.** But *why*?

**MISTRESS.** *(A little thrown.)* For – fun. For excitement. For –

I'm a fun girl, I say yes to things. To life!

You have to keep yourself open to the possibility that something special might happen at any moment. That's why you wear the right perfume. It's why you wear the right skirt.

*(Rallying.)* You know Lana Turner, you know how she was discovered?\*

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\* Please feel free to substitute in the name of a different starlet who might better suit the casting. It's also fine if the **MISTRESS** doesn't actually look much like the person she references, or – if you prefer – to make up a name.

She skipped class, to go drink a coke at Schwab's Pharmacy, and one of those studio guys saw her and he took a picture and brought it to his agent, and boom. She was a star.

Everyone says I look a little like her.

**WIFE.** I don't see it.

**MISTRESS.** Of course that was California, not Boston.

I can't tell you the number of times I've wanted to just hop on a bus and go West.

No one in this town has any sense of style. Or fun.

Nobody can appreciate sophistication.

I hate the men in this neighborhood and their poorly cut pants and the way the minute they're done talking about baseball they're ready to start talking about hockey.

And then a guy with no ring walked in and said he was from New York City and did I know a good place in this town to get a drink.

**WIFE.** Well, now you've had a nice little romance.

A nice little adventure.

"Excitement," as you like to call it.

It can be a nice memory for you.

**MISTRESS.** Maybe I want something more.

*(Beat.)*

**WIFE.** You know you're not special.

He's done this before.

There was some woman in Pittsburgh a few years back.

He told me all about it once it ended.

Told me she had a laugh like a donkey and a vulgar mind and it all made him appreciate me more.

This all ends with him appreciating me more.

*(The MISTRESS holds up her left hand.)*

**MISTRESS.** He gave me this.

*(Beat.)*

**WIFE.** I don't believe you.

*(The MISTRESS shrugs. The WIFE looks again.)*

It's *red*. It's not like it's a diamond.

**MISTRESS.** I like color. He knows that. It's something he and I have in common. We like our world to be colorful.

He's made me certain promises.

**WIFE.** Well yeah. He's a *salesman*.

*(Beat.)*

...You don't want to be married.

**MISTRESS.** I don't know. You seem to like it.

**WIFE.** Sure but – I'm a homebody.

You – you're glamorous! You like excitement. It wouldn't be for you.

**MISTRESS.** I don't know.

Glamour can be a little exhausting.

And I am getting *slightly* older.

I'm tired of getting looked at when I walk into the butcher shop or the post office.

Those tidy little housewives, I can see them pitying me.

I've got more fashion sense and personality than anyone in there but those shrews still think they're better than me for some reason and I can't stand it anymore.

You know recently, we went together to this jazz club.

He and I.

And I sprained my ankle.

And I felt just terrible about it.

The cover charge was expensive.

He'd done all this work to arrange a really fun night.

And then suddenly I couldn't be fun.

And we limped away across the street to get a coffee.

I kept apologizing – saying I'm so sorry I ruined the whole night.

And he said, "no night could be ruined if I get to spend it with you."

And it felt wonderful.

It felt really wonderful.

I want more of that feeling.

*(The WIFE is flabbergasted.)*

**WIFE.** You think marriage feels like a *jazz club*?

Trust me, that's not what marriage feels like.

Marriage feels like – being furniture. You don't get seen anymore you just get sat on.

**MISTRESS.** Maybe *you* do.

You've got a manner that invites people to sit on you.

I'm not a fool. I'm not going to let myself be like that.

*(Beat.)*

*(The WIFE gets up to wander a bit around the room, inspecting things.)*

**WIFE.** Does he ask how your day was?

**MISTRESS.** Of course he does.

**WIFE.** Does he really?

With me at least – he comes in the door, I say “How was your day?” And he tells me all about where he’s been and his sales and his driving and all that’s frustrating him and the radio programs he’s been listening to.

And I ask more questions: how’d you feel about that? What are you going to do about that? Do you need an aspirin, do you need your suit mended, what can I do to help?

And he keeps answering.

And then when he’s done he asks about dinner.

Maybe he used to ask about my days, back in the beginning. But at some point he stops. You should know that. At some point – he stops.

And I know – he thinks the things I want to talk about are boring.

He always wants to talk about, I don’t know, gold mining in Nevada, or California steel, and I always want to talk about the hole in the screen door, and he thinks that makes me dull, and trivial, but – we’re never going out West to Nevada! We’re not investing in steel. But the mosquitoes are getting in that hole every night. So who’s trivial now?

**MISTRESS.** That sounds frustrating. That sounds real frustrating.

**WIFE.** You know what it is – it’s that he doesn’t even try. He doesn’t even *try* to be a better husband.

I mean, is it that hard?

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