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ACT ONE

Scene 1

Living room of Peter's apartment in New York City. Late spring, 2000. Night.

Stylish and minimalist—the domain of a young upstart. On the back wall are the front door and a full-length mirror, which Peter will use from time to time as he dresses. On one side, a hallway leading to the rest of the apartment; on the other, a bar. A couch and coffee table at center.

There is LOUD KNOCKING on the front door.

PETER emerges from the hallway buttoning his slacks: barefoot, undershirt on, dress shirt in hand. He is clean-cut and handsome.

Get in here!

PETER

The knocking continues.

It's open, come in!

PETER

More knocking.

I said, it's open, it—

PETER

The DOORBELL RINGS repeatedly.

PETER
(tossing the dress shirt on the couch)
No, please, let me get it *for* you!

He opens the door, and in walks NEIL, handsome but wrecked: suit wrinkled, shirt untucked, tie undone, collar turned up, hair mussed, and damp in places.

PETER
Jesus ... I didn't know it was monsoon season.

NEIL
What are you talking about?

PETER
I mean, there's an elevator. You didn't have to climb up the drainpipe.

NEIL
I've been nursing a sadistic hangover.

PETER

Where, the Bermuda Triangle? What took you so long?

NEIL goes to the bar and pours a glass of whiskey.

NEIL

You've been waiting all this time? It's Saturday night. Shouldn't you be out suppressing loneliness with everybody else?

PETER laughs and grabs the dress shirt. NEIL takes a plastic bag of cocaine out of his coat.

PETER

I got half an hour. And it doesn't look like *you're* ready to paint the town red. What's *your* excuse?

NEIL

Moral superiority.

PETER

Does that mean today's outing with Kasey was a bust?

NEIL shrugs. He has laid the cocaine on a small portable mirror on the bar counter and is cutting it with a gold credit card.

PETER

All right, come on, don't do that. You're killin' me.

NEIL

It's chunky. You want your coke chunky?

PETER

Just send it my way.

NEIL

You want the whole bag?

PETER

Twenty grams. How much *is* there?

NEIL

More than that.

PETER

Gimme twenty.

He grabs a measuring cup from the bar and sets it in front of NEIL, who pours some cocaine into the cup.

PETER

Christ, I had a kid bring me some last week—while you were doing that party downtown. Some prep school punk—you know, Daddy's little dealer—and I tell him I wanna party, I got company. Kid shows up with half a gram. You believe that?

(MORE)

PETER (Continued)

And he's come all the way from Westchester—he'd have to go back for some more. I can't believe it. I say: "Listen, you little asshole, I got a hot girl upstairs in my bedroom just waiting to get fucked and another in my bathroom waiting for me to snort a line off her ass, so hustle it up and get me my shit!"

He grabs a tiny gold spoon from the bar, scoops up a sample of cocaine, and snorts it.

PETER

Fucking amateurs.

NEIL

(raising his glass)

Amateurs.

PETER

So what happened, man?

NEIL

(pouring another shot)

Where shall I begin ...

PETER

I mean, half a gram! What is that? Do I have a face that says: "I'm an asshole, please fuck me?" I don't wanna stir the shit in my coffee; I wanna get high!

He dabs some cocaine on the top of his hand and snorts it, then massages the sides of his nose.

PETER

I swear, Neil, you're the only one who knows what he's doing.

NEIL nods coolly and downs the whiskey.

PETER

Smile, genius! We're not smokin' meth in an alleyway. Have a seat, get comfortable—

(grabs a bar stool)

Have some rum! You make me nervous like that.

He goes off to the kitchen as NEIL sits on the stool.

PETER

(from off)

So tell me what's up? What happened?

NEIL

Nothing, really ...

NEIL takes a gold-plated flask (engraved with initials "N.B.") out of his coat pocket and fills it from the whiskey bottle, then pours what's left from the bottle into his glass.

PETER returns with a bottle of rum with a red ribbon tied around it.

PETER

“Nothing,” he tells me. You come in here looking like a fucking snot rag and you tell me nothing. What happened with Kasey? Today was supposed to be it. You said for sure it's gonna happen today.

NEIL

Certainty is a luxury I can't afford.

PETER

How about clarity? Can we try for that?

NEIL

(proceeding with mock romance)

Well, Kasey and I have had a very special chemistry for quite some time ...

PETER

Right.

NEIL

On the one hand, she invites me to this book party because there are going to be plenty of publishing people there, and, as a publicist, she likes to help foster any up-and-coming writers who might up-and-come her way. But on the other hand, she just enjoys my company ...

PETER

Yep.

NEIL

And it's the start of these things that's always the most exciting, wouldn't you say?

PETER

(unimpressed)

Uh huh.

NEIL

The new prospect, the potential for romance. That's the real beauty ...

PETER

So how was she?

NEIL

I'm telling a story. Would you let me tell the story?

PETER

Fine, but get to the climax. All this fucking exposition!
(tucking his shirt in)

You gimme a headache.

NEIL

Kasey, of course, looked transcendental. She had on this black strapless number, low hem—nothing trashy—but it was form fitting. There was nothing between this and her Feminine Mystique, if you know what I mean.

PETER grabs a belt.

PETER
I speak your language.

NEIL
She's a knockout. Is she not a knockout?

PETER
(impatiently)
She's a knockout!

He tosses the belt on the couch, then undoes his pants
to adjust the tuck of his shirt.

NEIL
And there's an energy between us. In the eyes, the way she caresses my arm as she leads me around
the room, the way she utters my name like it's some kind of delicacy ... You'd think I was a Nobel
laureate to see her introduce me to people.

PETER
So'd she get you a book deal or what?

NEIL
No, I've been pitching this one for months ...

PETER
And?

NEIL
And, as usual, they hurled it back in my face. One editor, in her infinite twenty-four-year-old
wisdom, informed me that there's no market for the indigenous cultures of Bolivia, as if it isn't the
book that's unsellable, it's the people themselves. They're not a commercial ethnicity.

PETER
(laughs)
Well, I gotta say, you pick the most out-there groups of people you can find, you'd think you'd
need a fucking paleontologist to figure out where they come from.

PETER goes down the hall. NEIL gets up.

NEIL
We're talking about poor farmers. That's not exactly a foreign concept.

PETER
(from off)
So, then, what are they looking for?

NEIL
Right now they're only buying *fiction* about hard-nosed women professionals who enjoy
dysfunctional love lives.