

VENUS/MARS

BY

RON VIGIL

EXT CAFE - DAY

DR. JUDITH PRICE is with her husband FRED PRICE sipping their coffee.

FRED

You have that strange look in your eyes again. I may have to switch to something stronger to get over it.

DR PRICE

Am I that transparent?

FRED

You're the savvy one, but, even I can pick up those vibes.

DR. PRICE

Humor me.

FRED

You've got your first session with your new group tomorrow and you're trying to figure out how you're going to handle them.

DR. PRICE

I can see now I've underestimated you. I'm going have to be more careful with my thoughts in the future.

FRED

You always rise to the occasion.

DR PRICE

I've read all their summaries they wrote when they applied for my marriage counseling program and it's going to be a challenge.

FRED

Just the usual nasty conflicts that eventually rear their ugly heads after the honeymoon's over. Seven year itch isn't it?

DR. PRICE

Actually, statistical studies show that it happens in the sixth year.

FRED

From the way you're biting your lower lip I think this group may be

different.

DR PRICE

The short version is redneck self made businessman with his sweet Southern honey dripping with goodness. A very rich CEO with an overdose of testosterone and his fragile wisp of a lady who I may have to anchor down so she won't blow away...

FRED

Oh, goody, this sounds like it has possibilities.

DR. PRICE

...senior citizen with a much younger clinging lady when I'm thinking he should be the clinger, and, finally an artistic solemn quiet type with a perennially distracted husband who'd rather be watching a ball game.

FRED

In other words, the usual suspects?

DR PRICE

Pretty much, but I never know what's coming until I start peeling back the ever so reluctant layers.

FRED

Let's see, deep dark nasty secrets, emotional denials and rationalization, rampant lying, abusive accusations and outraged anger all brewing in one big pot.

DR. PRICE

And, that's just the first day.

FRED

And, you're loving every minute of it.

DR PRICE

Makes the soaps look tame by comparison, maybe because its real with no over acting needed.

FRED

How about a Bloody Mary for the

road?

DR PRICE

Please, no. I need to get a good nights sleep tonight.

FRED

Sleep? I was hoping for something a little more touchy, feely tonight.

DR PRICE

It's not Tuesday yet, is it?

FRED

You mean the first Tuesday of each month for the "touchy, feeley", don't you?

DR PRICE

Just following the Doctors rules of you not over doing it physically.

FRED

Wait a minute, this is the first Tuesday of the month.

DR. PRICE

Fred, it's the second Tuesday of the month. Really, your memory. You need to check into that.

FRED

Next week you're going to tell me it's the third Tuesday of the month and I won't remember enough to challenge you.

DR PRICE

You'll have to trust me, honey.

FRED

I know I'm getting screwed here.

DR PRICE

No, you aren't getting screwed, honey.

FRED

I can interpret that two ways.

DR PRICE

Take the one you prefer.

FRED

Do you have room for one more
candidate for your session tomorrow?

Dr. Price smiles as she pats Fred's hand.

INT STUDIO DEN - MORNING

DR. JUDITH PRICE is in the center of the large studio. ELENA
KEENE SIGHS as she hugs a large pillow.

DR. PRICE
You can just say it. Holding back
will only make you more frustrated.

Elena's husband, REGGIE KEENE, a middle aged man leans
forward intently focusing on her. Her WORDS come out slowly,
deliberately.

ELENA
(to Reggie)
It's like we're complete strangers.
He comes in, barely acknowledges me
and turns on the TV.

GEORGE CONNORS, a sixty-something country doctor type, is
holding hands with MARCIE CONNERS, a prim bookish, early
forties lady. DUSTIN WOOD leans back in his chair with a
bored SHRUG, his cowboy boots stretched in front of him. His
wife, BONNIE WOOD, pushes down her tight black slacks. BILL
GERARD, a beefy, fifty something executive type, checks his
watch as his wife FELICIA GERARD an elegantly dressed lady
caresses her dress.

REGGIE
I guess...

ELENA
(interrupting)
I need more. I need some intimacy.
Something, a clue that I matter to
him.

REGGIE
We've been married for eight years.
How long is a honeymoon supposed to
last?

Reggie pleads to Dr. Price.

REGGIE
You said the foundation for these
sessions is to not hold back and let
it rip, truth wise, right?

DR. PRICE
It's a good place to start.

REGGIE
Elena wants intimacy, but how can I get close to her when she's nagging me all the time?

DR. PRICE
You need to direct that question to Elana?.

REGGIE
(to Elena)
You want all the good stuff from me, but you forget about your nagging and controlling obsession. There's so many things I can't do I have to carry around a list.

DR. PRICE
Like what?

REGGIE
Coasters under your drinks, having to play music so low in the car you not even sure it's on, permission to go out with the guys for a beer. Shall I go on?

ELENA
Asking you to be considerate and responsible is not unreasonable.

REGGIE
It's like walking on egg shells all the time.

ELENA
You're exaggerating.

REGGIE
Being good in bed doesn't overcome being a bitch the other 23 hours and 30 minutes.

DUSTIN
You mean 23 hours and 58 minutes in your case, don't you?

REGGIE
Speak for yourself.

ELENA

Sometimes nagging is the only way I can get your attention.

REGGIE

(to Elena)

She's constantly working me to change and then complains I'm not the man she married.

ELENA

We used to be friends. You used to make me laugh. I don't know where we lost that.

REGGIE

It slipped away a day at a time because we stopped remembering what we loved about each other and now can only see our imperfections.

ELENA

I never stopped caring about you. Can you say the same?

REGGIE

Treat me with little respect and tenderness and maybe it'll come back. But, honestly, I'm here as a last resort and only because you asked me to.

ELENA

And, I'm that way because you hurt me with your silence and distance.

DR. PRICE

You don't love someone because, you love them although.

Dr Price addresses the group

DR. PRICE

I'd like to hear some comments from the rest of you on what's going on here.

BONNIE

One of them needs to step up and break the chain.

GEORGE

Maybe they need to focus on what they like about each other for a change.

DR. PRICE

Good point. Reggie, how about it?
Tell me one good thing you've always
admired about Elena.

REGGIE

It's not what you're asking, but I
feel closer to Elena when she's
fragile and needs me.

DR. PRICE

Isn't that what she's showing here
now?

REGGIE

Yes, but I don't think that will
change the rest of it.

DUSTIN

Maybe you should try a little bouncy
wouncy in the bedroom to get those
joy corpuscles popping again.

REGGIE

And, you're a loud mouthed creep who
should be seeking serious
psychiatric help.

DR. PRICE

Let's not get off track here. Elena,
care to comment.

ELENA

Your mind and body have to be in
sync for that to happen.

REGGIE

(to DR. Price)

Like when I try to initiate sex she
turns her back on me.

ELENA

That's not true, not always.

REGGIE

(to Elena)

Sometimes you say "okay", but it's
like you're giving in to a root
canal. I mean it takes the joy out
when you're just saying yes to
appease me.

DUSTIN

Maybe you ought to try seducing her

instead of just taking it for granted. You know, like driving out to a dark country road with a bottle of Jack Daniels and jumping in the back seat.

BONNIE

Hush, honey.

ELENA

I just wished he would talk straight to me so we know our positions and how we can compromise.

DR. PRICE

Positions? Compromise?

ELENA

I wish we could be connected beyond just the physical.

DR. PRICE

More than a hug when he gets home?

ELENA

Yes. that would be a good start. it would give me the opportunity to put everything down and go with him to show how much he means to me.

DR. PRICE

Why do you need to hear him sound like he genuinely wants and needs you? I'm just trying to nudge things along here.

ELENA

It lets me know his position and it's a reminder to me that because it's Reggie asking, maybe I need to go that way.

DUSTIN

So much for nudging.

REGGIE

It doesn't seem normal to have to ask. It should just happen naturally.

DR. PRICE

It's not a question of normal, it's a question of repairing damage that is so deep and long-term that the

healing process can feel very awkward.

REGGIE

What damage?

DR. PRICE

The damage many of us bring from our childhood experiences. That often shapes our fears and inadequacies.

REGGIE

Is that the reason she called her college boyfriend to meet him for coffee?

Elena turns her head away.

DR PRICE

What are you saying?

REGGIE

I give her points for being clever. She told me all about it before hand to diffuse the impact. You know, if it's transparent it can't be bad.

DR. PRICE

Elena, do you want to comment on this?

ELENA

No.

DR. PRICE

If you leave it open ended then people may come to their own conclusions and maybe not in your favor.

ELENA

He was the last person who I felt truly loved me and I wanted to see how we would both feel if we saw each other again. I told all of this to Reggie before I called him.

DR. PRICE

Did it occur to you it was reckless and could damage your marriage?

REGGIE

The guy actually told her if they continued to meet it would have to

be in secret, so I guess we knew what kind of guy he is and what he had in mind.

ELENA

I also wanted to see how Reggie would react.

DR. PRICE

And, how did he?

ELENA

He was angry, but told me I could do what ever I wanted.

DR. PRICE

Mixed signals. No help there.

ELENA

So you understand, don't you?

DR. PRICE

Reggie is the one that needs to understand.

REGGIE

She forgot to mention that she got all dolled up and wore short shorts for the occasion.

DUSTIN

I don't think he was caught up too much with the coffee.

ELENA

Once we met, I realized how reckless it was for both our families and how it was really Reggie I loved. He called me a few more times, but I put an end to it.

DR. PRICE

Any comments from the rest of you?

DUSTIN

(to Reggie)

People usually do what they want to do in the end anyway so why bother holding her back.

MARCIE

I empathize with Elena, because I see some parallels between her and her lack of intimacy with Reggie and

what's happening with George and me.

DR. PRICE

Can you elaborate?

MARCIE

Sure. She's not convinced Reggie loves her and this was a way to bring him out of the shadows so she would know her "position" as she said.

FELICIA

I can see why Elena's so lonely. It's like trying to grab a wisp of fog. Your man has to be there for you when you need him. Sorry, Reggie, you can't blame it all on her.

BILL

Give it up, man. Playing the injured party while your lady slowly twists in the wind don't cut it in the real world.

DUSTIN

Let's see if I got this right. She calls her old lover from her young passionate college days to see if they might hook up showing off her enticing long legs, decides he doesn't cut it anymore, leaving him drooling over an affair that never happened and now she feels like she's the injured party. Did I miss something?

ELENA

It wasn't like that?

DUSTIN

So how many times did he call you back with the number you gave him? If you hadn't dangled the carrot which is a euphemism for you know what, in front of his nose, another obvious euphemism, how many calls do you think you would have gotten?

DR. PRICE

Let's not be so quick to throw stones here. A perspective is in order. It was open and this is about

a quest for love not sex, to be fair.

GEORGE

I think we're not getting enough feedback from Reggie.

REGGIE

Maybe it's because "I am one who loved not wisely, but too well."

DUSTIN

Nice try.

DR. PRICE

The one common denominator we all have in life is to want to be loved and love someone back. A cliché, I know, but truth is often simple. And, that's why you're here and why I have such a thriving business.

FELICIA

(to Reggie)

As a person who's been following you through out this session, I find it painful to listen to you.

BILL

As my little woman said, you've got to massage your testosterone once in awhile or it will shrivel up on you.

MARCIE

Maybe we shouldn't be so quick to be so self righteous. We're all here with our own problems.

BONNIE

And the one thing we have in common is that we don't know how to solve them.

Dr. Price turns to the other group members.

DR. PRICE

Resentment and anger are two of the mainstay emotions almost all marriages eventually experience. They can be for a variety of reasons, but they will rear their ugly heads sooner or later.

BONNIE

But knowing it doesn't always really change anything, does it?

DR. PRICE

What I've discovered is that every couple who comes here is unhappy in their own way. And I can tell you they come in lots of different flavors.

Bonnie smiles. Elena clutches her pillow even tighter. Dustin looks bored. Marcie and George nod their heads in unison.

DR. PRICE

We all want the same thing from these "marital transformation" sessions. I've found that if I use big words people feel they're getting their money's worth.

Everyone but Dustin LAUGHS.

DR. PRICE

Dustin, you've been somewhat quiet about you and Bonnie. You're newcomers I know, but if you don't share your feelings you won't get much out of it.

DUSTIN

Ask Bonnie. It was her idea to do this thing.

DR. PRICE

She'll get her chance later. There weren't any body language courses in my doctorate curriculum, but I'd say you're expressing how you feel with your, let me be kind and call it nonchalance.

DUSTIN

I don't know what that word means, but Bonnie asked me to come so here I am.

DR. PRICE

We just want to know, to use the vernacular, where you're coming from.

DUSTIN

All right, if you insist. I never

believed in picking over things. If you want something, get it. If you have something on your mind, spit it out. All this touchy-feely, back and forth stuff makes me want to run to the nearest bar.

DR. PRICE

So you're saying you don't think you belong here?

DUSTIN

I think our marriage is more or less normal. A few bumps in the road here and there, but really no big deal.

DR. PRICE

Bonnie? Looks like Dustin's okay with your marriage.

BONNIE

"Little bumps in the road". Hardly.

DUSTIN

I never said "little". My mom and dad fought like cats and dogs their whole marriage and they were still married for 43 years.

BONNIE

You left out the word "happily".

DUSTIN

Where does it say that you have to be be happy all the time. That's not realistic. That's not what it takes to have a successful marriage.

DR. PRICE

And what does it take?

DUSTIN

When you're attracted to someone you know it, without having to psychoanalyze it to the 9th power. I don't think science has been able to break it down yet.

DR. PRICE

Can you give us an example, the attraction part?

DUSTIN

C'mon, that's obvious.

DR. PRICE
Enlighten the rest of us.

DUSTIN
She knows I'm into her or I wouldn't still be around? And I always tell her she's the best looking babe around. She's got great breasts and ass. What can I say?

GEORGE
You're right. We shouldn't have asked.

DR. PRICE
Bonnie, maybe you need to bring some clarity to the problem. Dustin's painting a rosy scenario.

BONNIE
He's being evasive like he always is. I tell him in a million little ways what I want and need, but somehow it never penetrates.

DUSTIN
Look, if you want me to know something just tell me, in plain English, loud and clear. Don't assume that I know it, intuit it or can somehow read your mind. Just get in my face and say it, straight up. Then I can deal with it.

DR. PRICE
Good communication is always crucial.

BONNIE
He knows I want to start a family, but he keeps putting me off.

DUSTIN
Kids complicate things. Not sure I can handle it.

BONNIE
I had three brothers and two sisters growing up and it was chaos and a struggle for my folks, but it was something I hope I can experience again.

DUSTIN

How about a big slobbering dog? Will that make it all better?

BONNIE

I think everyone can now see why I'm here.

DR. PRICE

Discovering what the problems are is the first step in overcoming them.

MARCIE

(to Dustin)

Maybe you're just not comfortable in being intimate or showing your emotions?

DR. PRICE

Good insight, Marcie.

GEORGE

If you keep your wall so high nobody will be able to get in, and then it may be too late.

DUSTIN

So much for the guys sticking together.

DR. PRICE

So you see this as a war between men and women?

DUSTIN

Sure, everyone knows that. They have a whole section in the book stores covering the subject. But the only ones who buy them are women.

REGGIE

That's not true, I buy them all the time. How else can you learn?

BILL

I just bought one last week and I learned plenty from it. Conflict is part of life in this world and you've got to get a handle on it or perish.

FELICIA

I think maybe one of our differences is that women have a stronger need for security and reliability.

DR. PRICE

Can you give me an example of that safety net you think is so important.

FELICIA

Bill rolled over in bed last night and kissed me softly on my cheek and I felt like we were one, together again.

DUSTIN

On the cheek? Really? Get him some Viagra and you'll experience a whole new level of security.

BILL

And you're a pathetic, insulting, annoying asshole.

DUSTIN

I resent that. I'm not pathetic.

DR. PRICE

I'm glad to see we're finally getting away from the superficial "bonding and being nice to each other" stage.

MARCIE

Maybe Elena isn't the only person who could use more intimacy in their relationship.

DR. PRICE

I'm surprised to hear you say that, Marcie. You and George haven't stopped holding hands once since you got here.

MARCIE

I'll let George answer that.

GEORGE

Holding hands doesn't necessarily mean you don't have issues, is that it?

MARCIE

We've been married for almost thirty years now and I can see us slowly drifting apart just in the last year. I just felt that if intimacy slips away, love can't be far

behind.

DR. PRICE

George, I think there's a question in there somewhere for you.

GEORGE

Maybe it's a retirement adjustment I'm going through. I just need to find something to keep me occupied during the day. You can only play golf so many times a week.

MARCIE

That's not it.

DR. PRICE

Marcie, you can't expect the first blush of romantic love to last forever.

MARCIE

Something is bothering my husband and I don't know what it is.

GEORGE

Maybe I don't know either.

DR. PRICE

Sometimes we have to step back and remember all the good things that brought you together.

GEORGE

I've never forgotten them and never will.

DR. PRICE

You can never tell your wife why you love her too often.

GEORGE

I'll be happy to share with you why I love Marcie. It's both little things and big things. Like the way she walks, the way she giggles, the way she hums softly when she's cooking. And the big things, her honesty, her compassion...

DUSTIN

Isn't that touching? Maybe it's not too late for a refund.

GEORGE

You're a dirt bag. No, lower than a dirt bag.

DUSTIN

Oh, haven't you heard, a little dirt is good for your immune system.

GEORGE

Then, you must be as healthy as a stallion race horse.

DUSTIN

I prefer the word "stud".

BONNIE

Honey, you've got to take that burr out from under your saddle and give this a chance.

DR. PRICE

Thank you, Bonnie. In what way, Marcie, do you see your relationship with George changing?

MARCIE

Something subtle has come between us and I don't know what it is. I don't doubt for a moment that he loves me, but there's a sword hanging over our heads. It may just be a feeling, but it's a strong one and I'm afraid of what it might mean.

BONNIE

I admire you, Marcie, for being so open with us. We can all learn from your question.

GEORGE

We're all unhappy in one way or another or we wouldn't be here?

DR. PRICE

A better word is "miserable". And, surprisingly, studies show that each one of you, consciously and/or unconsciously collude to create your own misery.

DUSTIN

You lost me.

ELENA

Is that possible?

DR. PRICE

In fact, you sometimes insist upon it, because of the strange unseen comfort it brings you.

REGGIE

Are you saying we want to be miserable? That doesn't make sense. I know I don't want to feel that way.

DR. PRICE

Psychoanalyst's have observed that when patients complain of their dead and lifeless marriages, it's often possible to show how precious that deadness is to them.

Bonnie scratches her head.

BONNIE

It's my misery, I'm comfortable with it and, by God, nobody's going to take it away from me?

Dr. Price gets up and paces in front of the group.

DR. PRICE

And it's safer not to confront it, because then you might learn something about yourself you don't really want to know.

GEORGE

The bogeyman sleeping with you is better than the one under the bed?

DR. PRICE

I'm not saying this is an exact science, it isn't, but collective therapy experiences suggest it.

REGGIE

"Lord, what fools these mortals be."

DUSTIN

No offense, doctor, but I didn't understand a word you said.

DR. PRICE

My responsibility is to peel back the layers and bring those bogeymen

out of the dark, however precious
they may be to you.

The group begins MURMURING among themselves.

DR. PRICE

Finally, Felicia, I want you to tell
us why you signed up and brought
Bill with you.

FELICIA

Bill isn't entirely sold on
psychiatry, but he realizes we have
a growing problem in our marriage so
he's taken some time off from his
busy business schedule to be here.

DR. PRICE

Since you're the one who brought him
here let's hear from you first.

FELICIA

We're comfortable with each other.
Our personalities are opposites, but
somehow it works.

DUSTIN

Sure, he can't find a hat big enough
for his ego and you recite poetry in
your rose garden.

DR. PRICE

Little sarcastic asides aren't
constructive, Dustin. A little
sensitivity would be much more
helpful.

BILL

This coming from a trailer trash
redneck who thinks an hors d'oeuvre
is potted meat on a cracker.

DR. PRICE

Go on Felicia.

FELICIA

The problem is time, or the lack of
time we spend together. His business
deals have him constantly flying
around the world while I'm at home
in my room wondering when he's
coming back.

DR. PRICE

How often is he home?

FELICIA

It varies, but seldom more than two weeks out of month.

BILL

I thought "absence makes the heart grow fonder."

DUSTIN

More like "Out of sight, out of mind."

FELICIA

I have my book club and my garden, but I need him by my side to feel whole.

DR PRICE

(to Bill)

Do you feel Felicia has a legitimate complaint here?

BILL

I'm the CEO of a 120 million dollar business and the demands can be brutal. But I hear what my little woman's saying.

FELICIA

But, when he's gone, he's gone. Very few telephone calls, emails, nothing.

BILL

By the time I get to my hotel I'm so beat up I just want to go to bed. Doesn't thinking of her count for anything?

FELICIA

You can't feel or hear someone thinking about you. When my father left us when I was eight I've always craved someone strong to be at my side. That's why I was so attracted to Bill when I first met him.

BILL

It's a problem, but a problem that we can work out. Almost all problems can be worked out. I just need to give this problem some more

concentrated thought.

FELICIA

Make it soon, because I get very lonely without you.

BILL

I'm putting it in my cell phone app right now.

Bill pulls out his cell phone and makes some notations in it.

DR. PRICE

On that note we're going to break until next week, and give you time to digest everything that's been said today.

Everyone gets up, SHUFFLING their chairs and grabbing their belongings.

DR. PRICE

And by the way, we have a new couple joining us in our next session. I think two more voices and their shared experiences will bring a new dynamic we can all learn from.

Dustin walks up to Dr. Price.

DUSTIN

This gang is way too uptight. Hope my no bullshit attitude isn't a problem for you, shrink wise.

DR. PRICE

Let me be kind and concede that you're annoying nature is bringing a provocative dynamic to the group.

DUSTIN

I knew we were going to get along.

Dustin extends his fist out for a fist bump. Dr. Price frowns.

DR. PRICE

Pleeeese!

INT DR. PRICE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

FRED PRICE is at the bar mixing cocktails for himself and his wife who is looking out the window tugging on her lower

lip.

FRED
Olive or onion in your martini?

Dr. Price waves her hand without looking away from the window as if to say "whatever".

FRED
I'll take that as my clue to take charge and make the difficult choice by myself. It's these little decisions that make all the difference, you know.

DR. PRICE
What'd you say?

FRED
An olive gives the martini a slightly tart taste while the onion is much more mellow. I read the manual.

DR. PRICE
Oh?

FRED
If you'd have chosen the olive it would mean you're a little on edge and want something subconsciously to match your feelings.

DR. PRICE
And if I picked the onion it would mean I'm bubbling over with joy?

FRED
No, it means that you're feeling loving and you'll be sneaking over to my side of the bed tonight.

Fred hands Dr. Price her drink.

DR. PRICE
Is that why you put two onions in the martini?

FRED
And only a drop of vermouth.

DR. PRICE
Really? The manual you read, was it on "How to Make the Perfect Martini"

or the "Art of Seduction"?

Dr. Price slowly sips her drink looking away.

FRED

It's one and the same book. What is it, honey?

Dr. Price shakes her head silently.

FRED

You're still agitating over Reggie and Elena, aren't you?

DR. PRICE

They're in their fourth month of counseling and no signs of breaking through. Sometimes I feel like I'm flying under false colors.

FRED

Some locks are more subtle to pick than others.

DR. PRICE

It's funny, when I'm expounding on big picture theories of "coupling" or how marriages progress through different stages their eyes glaze over.

FRED

Understandable.

DR. PRICE

But, if someone in the group criticizes them or shows sympathy it's much more powerful than all my supposedly profound insights.

FRED

You've always told me the chatter of peers is more difficult to dismiss than the wisdom of the ever-so reasonable therapist.

DR. PRICE

I'm the paid professional consultant, a non-person.

FRED

I think they appreciate both voices.

DR. PRICE

I'm the confident, in-control expert, the doctor with the magic potion who's going to lift them out of their self-made muck. But, then here I am with you alone wondering if my pixie dust is really working.

FRED

I've seen you interact with your groups. You thrive more with the back and forth angst. And you know how to pull out unexpected common threads in the stories they're telling you.

DR. PRICE

I want to make them step back and look back at their lives and think about their marriage in a larger context. It's like they're going lickity-split down life's winding road on a beat up wagon.

FRED

Existentialism, isn't that one ism too far?

Dr. Price lifts her glass and gazes into it intently.

DR. PRICE

At the core we are all driven to find meaning in our lives beyond our daily mundane comings and goings. And until we find it we'll always be lost and no amount of therapy will matter.

FRED

Bottom line is you know your group counseling works at least at some level or you wouldn't love it as much as you do.

DR. PRICE

I feel like I'm a cat on a fence, challenging people just enough so they'll feel the pressure, but not so much that they'll fall off the wagon.

FRED

Causing the right amount of trouble is an art form and one you're good at. And the fence and wagon is a

mixed metaphor.

DR. PRICE

I think you can cut back on the stroking. The onions will only take you as far as you're going to go.

FRED

This is what happens when you marry a psychiatrist, always one step behind.

Dr. Price puts her arm around Fred and smiles.

INT STUDIO DEN - DAY

The five couples are in the middle of the room leaning, twisting and bending into each other in slow improvised choreographic movements. The instructor, CLAIRE BOUTIN, ENCOURAGES them. A slow, soft MELODY wafts from the speakers.

CLAIRE

That's it, just let your body flow the way you're feeling it.

George moves his hands up and down in a wavy motion near Marcie's body smiling broadly. Marcie turns and leans into George and then pulls back with a GIGGLE.

CLAIRE

There's rhythm, tempo and unison in dancing. If you're having trouble just concentrate on one.

GEORGE

I'm dancing like a dog; two left feet.

Dustin is standing in one spot grinding his hips in and out with a lecherousness grin while Bonnie moves side to side, her eyes closed, her arms swaying from side to side.

DUSTIN

Dr. Price, this is the best part of your play book. Only you need to join the party.

DR. PRICE

It's against house rules.

DUSTIN

HA! Break the rules. that's when you have the most fun.

Dr. Price rolls her eyes.

DUSTIN

Doc, right now I'm having amnesia
and deja vu at the same time. I
think I've forgotten this before.

Dustin grins from ear to ear and puts his fist out for a
fist bump. Dr Price frowns.

DR. PRICE

I don't do that.

Bill and Felicia are more bouncing than swaying. TIFFANY
WALKER, a striking thirty-something with the air of a
confident aristocrat, dances with JACOB HENDERSON, a tall
handsome man who just stares at her feet.

CLAIRE

(to Jacob)

It's not so much dancing as it's
what's coming from within you,
inside out.

Jacob shrugs and lifts his hands in the air.

JACOB

I can't seem to get the hang of it
and I'm beginning to feel a little
foolish.

CLAIRE

(to Jacob)

That's the whole point, to make you
relax and not be so self-conscious.

Jacob shuffles his feet rigidly.

CLAIRE

(to Jacob)

Just close your eyes, stand in one
spot and let the music nudge you on.

Jacob closes his eyes and in a few seconds his head shakes
back and forth.

CLAIRE

(To Jacob)

That's it. Just focus on the music
and how you're feeling, nothing
else.

Jacob's whole body begins to move slowly, his head going in
full circles now.

JACOB
I think I'm getting it.

BILL
(to Felicia)
Just do the Shag like we do it down
on the beach at the club.

FELICIA
If we were at the beach maybe I'd
feel it more.

DUSTIN
(pointing to Bill)
He's bringing in the sand tomorrow.

BILL
You never could keep up with me. You
always leave out that extra back
step. You need to take another
lesson.

FELICIA
I'm trying my best, honey.

BILL
There's a point when you just have
to do it. I mean how many times have
I shown you, dear?

FELICIA
Okay, okay, I think I'm starting to
get it.

CLAIRE
Nice, nice. You're in the groove.

REGGIE
C'mon, lets shake a boogie.

ELENA
I don't do that.

REGGIE
How about the salsa? All you have to
do is dip in to it.

ELENA
Not funny.

Reggie pulls Elena off her chair. Elena look shocked and
stops with her hands on her hips.

ELENA

You know I don't like to dance in public.

REGGIE
We all know each other here. What the big deal?

ELENA
I told you before I don't do that.

Reggie holds his hand out to Elena.

REGGIE
Once you get going you'll start to feel it.

ELENA
No, I'm done here. I'm going outside.

Elena storms out of the room. Reggie looks at Dr. Price shrugging his shoulders.

REGGIE
(to Dr. Price)
What happened to the being more intimate lesson here?

DR. PRICE
One of Elena's sensitivities is physicality. You have to confront your problems or you'll never overcome them.

BONNIE
What's the big deal?

GEORGE
Yeah, what's her problem?

DR. PRICE
Now, let's not get into whose fault it is. It's not important. Claire, this is a good time to take a coffee break while I go talk to Elena.

CLAIRE
Okay, we can relax now. But, just remember it's about movement in space. The movement that you create in the space you choose.

Claire walks over to her cell phone and turns off the music. Dr. Price exits and returns with Elena.

DR. PRICE
Are you okay?

ELENA
(clipped tone)
I'm fine.

DR. PRICE
You don't sound fine to me.

ELENA
Let's just drop the subject.

DR. PRICE
Why?

ELENA
Because I don't want to discuss it.

DR. PRICE
Are you angry with me cause I
scheduled the dancing?

ELENA
When I say I'm fine, that means just
drop the subject.

DR. PRICE
Could you do me a favor...

Elena turns her head away.

DR. PRICE
...And instead of saying you're
fine, could you say, "I need to be
by myself?"

ELENA
Um, no, I find that when I say that
the response is the exact opposite.

DR. PRICE
I see, so the only way you can get
me off your back is to say you're
fine when you're not?"

ELENA
I've found that's the only thing
that works with you, and the other
people here too.

Dr. Price turns to the other couples.

DR. PRICE

We all have ghosts in our past that linger with us. Elena's is the alienation she felt in her childhood from her parents who were ambivalent in their love toward her. Being punched on her arm by her father as a sign of affection isn't enough. So now we have to heal her wounds so she can once again receive the love in all it's many forms, but most especially physically. So that's why I added the dance segment; physical contact with someone she cares for.

BONNIE

Face your demons head on so you can learn how to deal with them?

DR. PRICE

And, sometimes your demons aren't who you think they are. Your mind has their own dances they've mastered to stretch the metaphor a little further.

ELENA

Why am I always the one who get's singled out. I just want everyone to leave me along. I don't know if I can take this program anymore. It's too hurtful.

The group settle into chairs in a half circle surrounding Dr. Price's chair. Claire gathers her phone away and exits.

DR. PRICE

You all saw Elena storm out of our dance session. We can learn from what happened.

GEORGE

Maybe you can help me with this, because I'm not feeling good right now about Elena and I'm not sure why.

DR. PRICE

This isn't about Elena. This is about how we all cope with our own skeletons in the closet; smoldering presences who keep coming back no matter how often we try to beat them back.

Elena quietly sneaks back into the den and joins the group.

MARCIE

I think I know what you mean. I recently called home and my father answered and passed it on to Mom without saying a word.

DR. PRICE

Some fathers love you without showing it.

MARCIE

Even when I was a kid whenever I had a problem he always shuffled it off to mom.

JACOB

Just cause you're not wearing it on your sleeve doesn't mean you're not feeling it. A friend told me that once.

BONNIE

So you see Elena, we're not any different from you.

ELENA

I'm fine. Can't everyone just accept it that when I say I'm fine, I'm fine.

BONNIE

Maybe you can help those of us who have similar problems.

ELENA

Fine, I'll help, but don't expect anything more from me.

DUSTIN

Yeah, Doc, she's coming right along.

REGGIE

I'm trying to be what you told me you wanted me to be.

ELENA

Stay away from me.

TIFFANY

I can see that Elena is not comfortable right now, so maybe we need to just give her some space.

DR. PRICE

Good, and you've given me the perfect intro into why you and Jacob are here today.

MARCIE

I'm sure you will bring something new and different to our meeting since you're both so young.

BONNIE

And, welcome to our little cubbyhole of drama with all its different shapes and colors.

TIFFANY

Thank you. I feel very comfortable here with all of you already.

DR. PRICE

Tiffany and Jacob are not married, but they've been exclusively dating each other for over a year and a half now. Share with the group what you hope to get out of these sessions.

JACOB

Just want to see what's going on with us and why we haven't been getting along lately.

DR. PRICE

We don't usually get single couples here, but it shows how serious you are about each other to take this step. But we can only help you if you're willing to share what those problems are.

TIFFANY

Jacob is the only man I've ever known who from the first day I met him I knew was the person I'd been looking for my whole life.

DR. PRICE

Happens all the time.

TIFFANY

It was like putting on a pair of comfortable old shoes.

JACOB

I'll take that as a compliment even if it's not a romantic metaphor.

DR. PRICE

If he's that good, why are you here?

TIFFANY

I know Jacob cares for me, but at the same time, I don't think he's ready to cross the line and say, "Let's spend the rest of our lives together".

DR. PRICE

You're comfortable with him, but not very secure about his commitment to you, long term?

TIFFANY

When I ask Jacob about our future, he puts me off.

DR. PRICE

Sometimes it's a matter of syncing up, time wise, other times it can be something deeper.

TIFFANY

I don't think it's fair for him to keep telling me he loves me, but then put me on hold.

DR PRICE

(to Jacob)

Until commitments are made, there are only promises and hopes, but no plans for the future.

REGGIE

"...love knows not its own depth until the hour of separation."

BONNIE

You feel the clock ticking. I can relate to that.

DR. PRICE

Jacob, this is not a one way street. You need to speak up.

JACOB

We're both still young, what's the rush? I mean I thought it was the guy that did the asking, anyway.

DR. PRICE

Alright, folks, what's going on here?

ELENA

She wants to know her position so she can make her plans accordingly.

BILL

When there's a major decision that needs to be made you gather up all the facts and take action immediately.

FELICIA

Leadership 101. You nailed it.

GEORGE

I think it's a reasonable fear on her part.

DUSTIN

Yeah, he's getting all the goodies, and just giving her lip service in return. Sooner or later kiddo you're going to have to cough up.

BONNIE

Honey, you do have a knack for cutting to the quick.

DR. PRICE

This is the classic anxiety, abandonment syndrome, probably the most prevalent dynamic of all male, female relationship. One party feels he or she is going to be dumped and the other feels he or she is being trapped. The tighter Tiffany tries to reel Jacob in, the faster he's headed for the door.

BONNIE

So if that's the reality, seems like it's pretty cut and dried. You've got the classic immovable object against the irresistible force.

MARCIE

In other words, a stalemate. This is a game that Tiffany can't win.

JACOB

I never said I didn't want to marry

Tiffany, I just said I didn't feel the time was right for me at this exact moment.

TIFFANY

I want Jacob to know he's sure before he makes the commitment, but at some point I need to know where we're at.

DUSTIN

Just cut him off for awhile and after a few horny months he'll be back and you can lead him around by the nose.

JACOB

Dr. Price, this guy is annoying and not very constructive.

DUSTIN

Look Ivy League boy, when you stick your finger in the pie you own it. Just face it, your lady's wised up to you.

JACOB

And, what trailer trash park did you come from?

DUSTIN

Grew up in the nitty-gritty lower East Side where you have to have the real stuff to survive? Call it a doctorate in the real world.

DR. PRICE

Boys, we're getting off track. Jacob, the whole point of this counseling is to make you confront the truths underlying your relationship. I get a sense that you're not being completely forthright with Tiffany. Telling her you want out is much less cruel than stringing her along until you decide you've had enough and then walk away.

JACOB

Maybe this counseling will make me take that deep hard look and confront that reality. I'm just asking for a little more time.

DUSTIN

There's no rush. Take a few minutes.

JACOB

If you were a little younger I'd ask you to step outside where you wouldn't have to wait very long to know my what I think of you.

DUSTIN

That would be the biggest mistake of your life, boy scout.

DR. PRICE

Now, now children. If you're going to insist on macho posturing I'm going to have to have to ask you to park your testosterone at the front door before you come in.

Dustin and Jacob glare at each other.

BONNIE

Really, honey, pull in your fangs. Doesn't do anything for your looks.

DR. PRICE

There's a lesson here for everyone; marry for love, nothing else, it doesn't need anything else. If you marry for other reasons you'll end up disappointed. Love in and of itself should be the only determining factor. Or as one of my Hispanic friends says, "punto final", the period at the end of a sentence. Let's call if a day and meet here tomorrow at 2 o'clock.

The groups gets up and shuffles out.

INT FAMILY DEN - NIGHT

Dr. Price is typing furiously on her laptop computer. Fred walks in with a cup of coffee. She looks up and smiles.

DR. PRICE

Thank you, honey.

FRED

It's the only way I can have quality time with you.

DR. PRICE

I know, I know. I've been really absorbed with this class.

FRED

As opposed to the others.

DR. PRICE

The dynamics in this class are just so different. It's like a psychologists smorgasbord, a little bit of something for everyone.

FRED

I totally get it, the sociopath, neurotic, obsessed and downright deranged all in one room. I understand your excitement.

DR. PRICE

What's getting me is that they're pushing me to new areas where I've never been before and I'm learning right along with them.

FRED

So your riding a tsunami wave even though you know you may crash on the rocks at any moment and you're having the time of your life. Have I got it right?

Dr. Price nods.

DR. PRICE

We like to think of our profession as a science that's providing relief for diseases, but really it's just people talking about their particular failures at connecting with each other with a few offering from us here and there on how to reach that special place we call living and loving together.

FRED

That's my favorite, the living and loving together part, emphasis on loving.

Dr. Price gives Fred a big hug.

DR. PRICE

That should hold you for awhile.

FRED

Barely.

DR. PRICE

The only place where it's getting away from me is with this Dustin and Bonnie couple. I know there's got to be something pushing him to be such an asshole.

FRED

Have you ever considered that he just may be one, for real?

DR. PRICE

And then there's Bill and Felicia. He's this bulldog businessman with the thick alligator skin and she's this little delicate miss fragile looking for a tiny morsel of sensitivity from him.

FRED

Opposites do attract.

DR. PRICE

The common thread is that they are all really the same people with the same needs, fears and hopes with only one degree of separation from each other despite all their varied histrionic emotions...or lack of.

FRED

Let me guess. Being loved, loving someone and being appreciated for who you are gets you a warm hug at the very least and maybe more than one if you play your cards right.

DR. PRICE

You've been peeking at my books.

FRED

No I just made it up and I was just speaking figuratively about the hugs you understand?

Dr. Price gets up and gives Fred a hug.

DR. PRICE

I know you were. And, as we agreed earlier it's on a Tuesday and I'm going to make sure I'm there for

you...starting next week.

FRED

It just gives me one more week to conjure up twisted obscene sexual fantasies and you know how much more exponentially powerful they are then reality.

DR. PRICE

Which means you'll have to take two arthritis inflammation reducing pills instead of the usual one if you act on them.

FRED

With what I have in mind I'd better make it three.

INT STUDIO DEN - DAY

Everyone's focused on Bonnie.

BONNIE

I just wish he would pick up after himself. He knows I hate a messy house. I don't think that's asking too much.

DUSTIN

With all her nagging, I feel like I'm in boot camp and she's the drill sergeant.

BONNIE

If you'd just do one thing around the house to help I'd be happy. Just one time.

DUSTIN

I've helped lots of times.

BONNIE

When you get home, you pat me on my butt, make a beeline to the fridge, pop a beer and plunk yourself down on the sofa never to be heard from again.

DUSTIN

You forgot the natcho chips.

BONNIE

For hours you just watch sports or

trashy low life movies white
knuckling the TV remote control.

DUSTIN

With nothing but sex and violence
without any social redeeming values
whatsoever.

BONNIE

Okay, tell everyone here one single
solitary finger you lift to help me.
Go ahead.

DUSTIN

Alright, how about when I help clean
up the house.

BONNIE

You dust the TV screen before a big
game.

DUSTIN

Handyman around the house?

BONNIE

You change the light bulb on the
sofa lamp when it goes out.

DUSTIN

Heavy lifting when you need it?

BONNIE

You take out the garbage.

DUSTIN

Getting stuff from the supermarket?

BONNIE

Beer, natchos and Slim Jims.

DUSTIN

Aha, washing my own clothes.

BONNIE

One time. I was out of town and you
were down to your last pair of
undies.

DUSTIN

Hey, when you go to the Cheetah Club
you want to have clean underwear. I
mean you never know..

BONNIE
He's hopeless.

DUSTIN
Looks like I covered it.

BONNIE
I rest my case.

DUSTIN
Why do you always have to nitpick the little things when they're are so many good things about us men that you conveniently take for granted. How about it ladies?

DR. PRICE
That's a fair question. It brings perspective to our judgments. Let's start with you Marcie. Share something that's nice about George.

MARCIE
There are so many things. His best qualities are his kindness and patience. Doesn't rattle easily. I've always appreciated that.

DR. PRICE
That's a good start. Elena?

ELENA
I don't know if this is exactly what you want, but Reggie always puts the family first no matter what. And he is rock solid reliable. For me those are important qualities.

DR. PRICE
Felicia?

FELICIA
There's a strength in Bill that make people gravitate toward him. That's why he's so successful in his company.

DR. PRICE
The way you say it makes me wonder if it's enough for you.

FELICIA
I miss his physical presence. It can get very lonely when you don't have

any kids.

BILL

My physical attributes are exceptional. I've got a libido like a steel trap.

DUSTIN

Yeah, rusty, illegal in 37 states and slow to close.

DR. PRICE

Now this wasn't so hard, was it? Bonnie, you've been pretty hard on Dustin. How about a little balance with something that will make him feel good about himself?

BONNIE

With his ego I'm afraid to.

JACOB

I hear there are courses to lower your self esteem.

DUSTIN

Next time I have a little left over I'll shove some your way. You could use it.

DR. PRICE

Now, boys!

Bonnie scrunches up her face looking up.

DR. PRICE

Ahem! Bonnie?

BONNIE

I'm thinking, I'm thinking.

DR. PRICE

Bonnie, let's not be cruel now.

BONNIE

Underneath his bravado there's a tenderness that he tries to hide. There, I found something and it's the truth.

DUSTIN

There goes my reputation I've worked so hard for.

GEORGE

You mean nasty bottom dwelling scum of the Earth? Don't worry, it's still intact.

BONNIE

Not that he doesn't have other good qualities too.

DR. PRICE

Tiffany. Your turn.

TIFFANY

I hope I don't embarrass you Jacob, or offend the rest of you, but he's a wonderful lover.

DR. PRICE

We'd be stupid if we didn't take that into account.

TIFFANY

But not just physically. There's an intimacy and tenderness in him that's special.

DR. PRICE

Men have this myth that the best way to win over a woman is through super human sex. But it's only one piece of the puzzle and not even the biggest piece, for men either.

DUSTIN

Ha! When's the last time you went to the Cheetah club? The babes there, you wouldn't believe it. It's amazing what they can do with just a pole.

DR. PRICE

Do you want me to recite the studies that confirm it?

DUSTIN

Studies, smudies, I just don't believe it. Pleasure or knowing that exquisite pleasure is just an arms length away is what drives us baby, and don't forget it for a New York nano-second.

DR. PRICE

And not a word about security,

raising children, emotional support,
intimacy. And by intimacy, Dustin,
I'm talking about things like
holding hands and watching the
sunset together.

DUSTIN

If you don't mind, I'll choose sex
position 291, swinging off the
closet door while listening to
Beethoven's Fifth symphony...loud.

FELICIA

You're disgusting.

GEORGE

Dr. Price, this man obviously has
emotionally issues and his antics
are disrupting the class.

JACOB

And he lies just for the shock
effect.

DUSTIN

I could have gone into more details,
but I don't think this crowd is
ready for them yet.

BONNIE

Really, honey....

DR. PRICE

One of the rules we have here is to
encourage all forms of expression
without recrimination. The good, the
bad and yes...even voices that
offend us. If you don't like what
Dustin is saying let him know, argue
with him, scream at him, but don't
tell him he needs to conform to your
values.

MARCIE

But, Dr. Price, how can we truly
learn anything if he's got us
agitated all the time?

DR. PRICE

Sometimes strong emotions are
necessary to coax out the demons
buried deep within us. Maybe we're
so outraged because we suspect there
may be some truth in what he's

saying.

REGGIE

The lady doth protest too much,
methinks?

DR. PRICE

Exactly.

DUSTIN

The doctor in the house has
spoken. So I will conclude with three
deeply philosophical thoughts. One,
sex is the most awful, filthy
disgusting thing on earth. Two, save
it for someone you love and three,
the position is ridiculous.

GEORGE

Now wait just a minute. You're
trivializing our experience of
trying to honestly improve our
relationship with our loved ones
with nothing but sex, sex and more
sex. You're a pathetic, loathsome
individual.

Dustin gets up off of his chair and begins pacing.

DUSTIN

NO, YOU WAIT A MINUTE. What do you
think is going on here? Everyone
strutting around emotionally,
spilling their guts out. Carrying on
like they've got a patent on
suffering. So you're hurting. So
what. It goes with the territory.
What did you think you were going to
get when you got married, blissful
comfort and press the flesh 24/7?

DR. PRICE

There's always love and support?

DUSTIN

Please, Doc. Stop already. I read
the book; "marriage is a deep,
romantic, everlasting bond of
perfect union". Ha, ha, ha! Looks
good on paper or in the movies, but
not even close. It comes down to
power, whose got it and keeps it.

DR. PRICE

Crudely put, but very insightful and I was getting to it.

DUSTIN

All this back and forth angst is just another form of negotiating for who's going to be the last one standing.

DR. PRICE

Blunt, but some truth in it with emphasis on "some".

DUSTIN

If you're pissed cause you're not getting your way, you've already lost. Either accept the few bones thrown your way or move on.

ELENA

I think you are a very cynical person, probably even psychologically disturbed.

DUSTIN

From day one it's about power. And the first lesson is "whoever loves the least controls the relationship".

DR. PRICE

Power is usually shared.

DUSTIN

The whole idea behind this charade is supposedly to ferret out the truth. So let me give it to you straight up without any violins playing in the background bullshit.

BILL

Words of wisdom from the professional, ghetto gutter professional that is.

DUSTIN

If you're not measuring up it's because you ain't got it, plain and simple and all the sensitive counseling in the world isn't going to get you into that warm fuzzy wet place you're yearning for.

DR. PRICE

That's a little severe.

DUSTIN

You are who you are and time, counseling and meditating in the lotus position facing the setting sun, chanting mantras isn't going to change anything. People don't change.

FELICIA

In your case, if that's true, you're destined for a sad, lonely life.

DUSTIN

Maybe so, but I have no illusions.

DR. PRICE

I appreciate you coming forth. All we had before was sarcasm and barely concealed scorn.

DUSTIN

It's my favorite default mode.

DR. PRICE

So, I'm curious, with all these insights, why did you marry Bonnie?

BONNIE

I'm beginning to wonder myself.

DUSTIN

Does it really do any good to go into all this?

DR. PRICE

Yes, it does.

DUSTIN

Okay, if you insist. There's was just something about her which I can't break down in words, but let's just say it's there.

BONNIE

I'm overwhelmed.

DUSTIN

I never had any illusions. I figured eventually she'd leave me, since we don't have any kids, the glue that keeps most marriages together.

BONNIE

I never held you back there.

DR. PRICE

What, in the end, are you trying to tell us, Dustin?

DUSTIN

Most people marry with unrealistic high expectations and when they fall short it naturally has to be the other persons fault. Most relationships are eventually doomed by incompatibilities, day to day living stresses and the dynamics of growing old, time running out.

MARCIE

Familiarity breeds contempt?

DUSTIN

I knew eventually you'd come around.

MARCIE

Hardly.

DR. PRICE

A lot of powerful, emotional feelings have been expressed here, which I am happy to see. It's much better if we bring it out of the depths into the fresh sunshine for us all to pick at.

ELENA

(to Dr. Price)

He's not even close to being right, is he?

DR. PRICE

Truth is not something you can gather up in a bottle. It wears many faces.

MARCIE

He's wrong, dead wrong. I know the feeling I have for George. It's not about power. It's not about control. It's not Machiavellian. It's a simple, basic thing called love. And it's the only feeling you can have that makes life worth living. If Dustin denies it, then he's a fool. There, I've said it, you're a fool,

Dustin.

DUSTIN

I call them the way I see them.

ELENA

He's not a fool, but you have to wonder why he's so mean all the time, Bonnie?

BONNIE

He's not mean all the time. This crowd's got him all riled up for some reason.

DR. PRICE

Anyone else want to join the feel good crowd?

GEORGE

Sure. When I first saw Marcie at a flower shop smelling a bouquet of roses and smiling I fell in love with her on the spot and I knew then and there I was going to do everything in my power to make her mine.

MARCIE

They were begonias, but that's sweet of you to say it.

GEORGE

Totally unlike me, I went right up to her and told her she was the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen.

MARCIE

Actually it was "You look awfully pretty next to those flowers".

REGGIE

I asked her straight away if she'd ever consider going out with me.

MARCIE

You offered to buy me a cup of coffee.

GEORGE

But right away after just talking to her for a few minutes I knew we were synced up, hand in glove.

MARCIE

You told me you were a big Yankee fan and I asked you Yankee who?

DUSTIN

Just tell me where I can find these rose tinted glasses and I'll rush out and buy me a pair.

BILL

I guess you can now finally see that you're alone in your warped cynical viewpoint.

DUSTIN

Really? Then why are you all sitting in this room for the last three months agonizing through all the crap that's been bounced around ad nauseum if you're so blissfully happy?

DR. PRICE

Happiness, like truth is incremental and dynamic. We get different size pieces the best way we can as the opportunities arise.

MARCIE

Sure, but the truth doesn't always surrender itself to you easily.

DR PRICE

That's why I'm here; to help you find that truth. This was the kind of inter-action we can all learn from. We're going to conclude on that truth and I'll see you all here next week.

The group break up and prepares to leave. Dustin stays with Dr. Price.

DUSTIN

You need to put me on the payroll. Just what you needed to get the gang going.

Dustin extends his fist to Dr. Price for a fist bump. Dr. Price frowns.

DR. PRICE

Give it a rest.

The group leaves in unison talking amongst themselves except for Dustin who everyone studiously avoids.

INT. STUDIO DEN - DAY

The group is watching Dr. Price in the center of the room. She has a small "post em" pad in her hands.

DR. PRICE

Now that our group session is coming to an end I think the time has come to finally lay our feelings bare for one and all to see and hear.

ELENA

I though that's what we were already doing

DR. PRICE

I sense some of us are still holding back.

FELICIA

Maybe we can't confess something if we don't know it.

DR. PRICE

Let's see if this helps.

Dr. Price pulls out a small note pad.

DR. PRICE

I'm going to write several random words on this pad and hand them out to a few of you for reflection. I want a gut check reaction from all of you or "thin slicing" as they call it in the shrink world.

MARCIE

Stream of consciousness in other words?

DUSTIN

If you unlock the liquor cabinet it'll save a lot of time.

Dr. Price scribbles on the note pad and hands it to Tiffany.

DR. PRICE

Commitment.

All the heads turn toward Jacob.

TIFFANY

Or lack of it.

Dr. Price writes a word on her pad and hands it to Elena.

ELENA

Beauty. I need to think about that one.

Elena pulls out a small note book from her purse and begins scribbling in it. Dr. Price hands a note to Marcie.

DR. PRICE

Fear.

Dr. Price hands a note to Felicia. Felicia READS the note.

FELICIA

Values.

Dr. Price jots a word on the pad and hands it to Bill.

BILL

Tenderness.

DR. PRICE

The floor is now open for discussion on any of these topics.

JACOB

This is just a shabby trick game I won't play.

DR. PRICE

Which word are you objecting to?

JACOB

Please don't play me for a fool. I've given Tiffany every commitment except the legal one. So does that make me evil, somehow?

DUSTIN

Maybe if we phrase it more delicately he won't get his widdle feewings hurt. How about "Shit or get off the pot." I hope I'm not being insensitive.

Jacob lunges for Dustin, but George and Bill hold him back.

TIFFANY

I don't think we need to talk about this anymore. I realize that I'm

chasing after a dream that I'll never reach, so there's no more to be said. No hard feelings.

JACOB
I'm sorry. I have to be true to myself. I need time.

Jacob looks down at the floor.

TIFFANY
"But, we can still be friends", right? Isn't that the way the cliché goes?

JACOB
You can't walk me to the end of the plank with a sword at my back. I can't make a life changing decision that way.

TIFFANY
I understand. Not making a decision is a decision.

JACOB
Don't do this, Tiffany.

TIFFANY
I did everything I could to make you mine and I guess it just wasn't enough.

JACOB
Why don't you just slap my face and tell me you hate me. It'd be easier that way.

TIFFANY
Goodbye, Jacob.

Tiffany grabs her purse, smiles weakly and rushes out.

REGGIE
"Love is most regretted when it is lost".

Jacob strokes his chin, hesitates and shuffles out.

DUSTIN
I like these word association games. They bring out the best in you.

DR. PRICE

More like prompt your thoughts as
you hear them.

BONNIE

You left one word off the board;
compatibility.

DR. PRICE

Values, life style, communication
are just a few of the areas where
you need to sync up. I know the
prevailing wisdom is that opposites
attract, but only to a point.

DUSTIN

But you missed the biggest
incompatibility of them all.

ELENA

Really, enlighten me.

DUSTIN

Woman marry men thinking they can
change them, but they can't. Men
marry woman hoping they won't change
and they do.

DR. PRICE

What was your word, Elena?

ELENA

Beauty. I've read poetry since I was
a kid for the beauty in them.

DR. PRICE

Reggie told me you were an artist,
but I never knew what type.

ELENA

I love poetry because of the
underlying truth you find in them;
truths that we can all learn from.

DR. PRICE

Can you give us an example.

ELENA

Sure. I actually wrote one down in
my notebook.

Elena pulls her notebook out from her purse.

ELENA

(To Reggie)

One of my favorites is "Heart, Not So Heavy As Mine" a Poem by Emily Dickinson. Will you read it for me, please?

REGGIE

I don't know anything about poetry.

ELENA

I wrote it down for you.

REGGIE

I prefer not to.

ELENA

Dancing is like love, I can only dance if you let me and I can only love you if you let me.

REGGIE

That cuts both ways.

ELENA

I wouldn't dance with you before because it terrifies me to have people watching. But, I'll dance for you now if you'll read it for me.

Reggie studies Elena closely and nods.

ELENA

Dr. Price, here's my iPhone. If you hit the music app I can dance to it while Reggie reads the poem.

Elena hands Dr. Price her phone as Elena hands the notebook to Reggie.

DR. PRICE

I see it.. Just let me know when you're ready.

Elena nods toward Dr. Price As Reggie READS the poem classical MUSIC fills the room. Elena slowly twirls around Reggie with her arms and hands delicately painting the air.

REGGIE

"Heart, not so heavy as mine Wending late home-- As it passed my window Whistled itself a tune-- A careless snatch--a ballad--A ditty of the street-- Yet to my irritated Ear An Anodyne so sweet-- It was as if a

*Bobolink Sauntering this way
Carolled, and paused, and carolled--
Then bubbled slow away! It was as if
a chirping brook Upon a dusty way--
Set bleeding feet to minuets Without
the knowing why! Tomorrow, night
will come again-- Perhaps, weary and
sore-- Ah Bugle! By my window I pray
you pass once more.*

Elena's dancing slows to a deep bow with her two arms stretched behind her, her head bowed. The group remains silent absorbed in the meaning of the poem and then CLAP their approval.

DR. PRICE

That's beautiful, especially the way you read it, Reggie.

REGGIE

I've never seen you dance like that, honey. Is it okay if I hug you?

Elena with tears in her eyes nods.

ELENA

(softly)

Please.

Reggie pulls Elena to him and hugs her tenderly. The group CLAPS and WHISTLES enthusiastically except for Dustin.

DR. PRICE

That was wonderful. These are the moments in my work that are the most rewarding. Let's move on now to some of my other posts. How about yours, Marcie?

Marcie reads her note.

MARCIE

Fear is the emotion I hate the most, fear of the unknown to be exact.

DR. PRICE

Elaborate.

MARCIE

I like to know what's going on, where I stand so to speak. That's why I understood Tiffany's feelings so much.

MARCIE

Okay. Since this is the bare your soul day I will say that George is keeping something from me and it hurts.

REGGIE

"There are no secrets that time does not reveal."

GEORGE

I don't think it's possible to keep secrets from someone you've been married to for 32 years.

MARCIE

Then why are you going to bed at 9:30 every night?

GEORGE

Because I'm tired.

MARCIE

And the hugging that's stopped, is that because your tired too?

GEORGE

I'll be 70 next month Marcie. You have to make allowances for the ravages of time.

MARCIE

I don't know the exact amount energy you need for a hug or a kiss, but I don't think it's off the charts.

GEORGE

I've got high blood pressure, high cholesterol, macular degeneration and I can't even keep my hands steady anymore and you're accusing me of something I have no idea.

MARCIE

You've got everything under control with your medication.

GEORGE

Yes, this year, but you have to know that my health isn't going to get better. And you're 15 years younger than me. You shouldn't have to be putting up with this at your age.

MARCIE

What are you saying?

GEORGE

Maybe you'd be better off with someone younger.

MARCIE

I don't understand.

GEORGE

Do I have to spell it out for you.

MARCIE

Yes, you do.

GEORGE

You don't need to be bogged down with an old man. I'm falling apart and it's only going to get worse.

MARCIE

I married you for better or worse, remember?

GEORGE

It's a hardship being constantly reminded how inadequate I am when I'm with you.

MARCIE

Are you saying you don't want me anymore?

GEORGE

Yes that's what I'm saying. You'll be better off without me.

MARCIE

Why don't you let me decide that.

GEORGE

God, can't you take a hint. I DON'T WANT YOU ANYMORE. I won't have you handicapped taking care of me. I feel ashamed thinking I would take advantage of you that way.

MARCIE

So that's what this is all about?

George turns away from Marcie.

GEORGE

I release you from all your obligations to me and I won't hold it against you.

MARCIE

You're a fool Mr. George Edward Connors, an old fool.

GEORGE

Please. This is the best thing you can do for me.

Marcie puts her hands on her hips and shakes her head.

MARCIE

No, sir, I'm not leaving. I'm staying with you no matter what you say or do. You fool, I love you and can't, no won't live without you.

George turns his head to hide his tears.

GEORGE

Can't you just listen to me just this one time?

MARCIE

No matter what, I'll always be at your side. If there are hard times ahead we'll tackle them together. And yes when you get older it will be tougher, but you won't be alone I can promise you. I'll never leave you. NEVER!

George puts his hands to his eyes and SOBS quietly.

MARCIE

Don't cry honey, everything will be alright.

Marcie puts her arms around George. Everyone except Dustin gathers around George and Marcie offering their support.

BONNIE

You don't know how lucky you are to have this loving unbreakable bond.

ELENA

She's right. Be happy with what you have..

DR. PRICE

Let's get one of the guys into the

fray. Bill, tenderness was your word
I believe?

BILL

I've been thinking about that word.
I give you credit, Dr. Price. I know
that was a calculated prompt to get
me going. Tenderness is not my
strong suit but I think I can muster
it up under the right circumstances.

DUSTIN

Try it and you'll break out into a
rash.

BILL

You need to remember that I'm much
bigger than you.

DUSTIN

Don't worry, I'll cut you down to
size.

BILL

You're just jealous because I'm
rich.

DUSTIN

But, how many rules did you break
along the way to get that way?

BILL

My life's an open book. Ask any
question and I'll answer it.

DUSTIN

Okay, how many mirrors do you have
in your home that you can walk by
without stopping?

BILL

The meek shall inherit the earth.
Six feet is all they get.

DR. PRICE

Okay, Okay. Let's get back on task.
Can you conjure up any possible
circumstance that might entice some
tenderness out of your soul?

BILL

Well, I think Felicia knows I hold
her in high regard and show her
tenderness in my own way.

DR. PRICE

And what way would that be, Felicia?

FELICIA

Well, after he comes home from his many extended overseas business trips he's very energetic.

DUSTIN

That's code for he slams her against the wall, rips off her clothes and consumes her in three very large bites, two grunts and one humongous sigh.

Bill glares at Dustin.

BILL

I work out every day and my favorite is the hand grip exercise, a hundred a day; good for squeezing if you get my drift.

DUSTIN

I like your impersonation. Jack the Ripper, right?

DR. PRICE

Dustin, you're out of line here, again. You provoke and then you act offended when you get a hostile reaction.

DUSTIN

Sorry, I just can't stand bullies. Yea, that be you, big boy.

BILL

I'd crush you first chance I get, but you know you're protected here.

Bill and Dustin glare at each other.

BONNIE

(to Dustin)

What's wrong with you? It's like I don't even know you anymore.

DUSTIN

(to Bonnie)

He's just a loud mouth I want to shut down.

BONNIE

Not just that. It's like you're pushing me away. And why are you chewing up the scenery every chance you get. You need to talk to me, honey.

DUSTIN

Coming here stirred something ugly in me that's spiraling out of control.

Tiffany and Jacob enter. All eyes turn toward them, surprised.

DR. PRICE

Well, I'm a little surprised to see you back, but you're always welcome, of course.

JACOB

Tiffany and I have talked it over and agreed that we will continue our counseling. Basically, I have come to realize I've been a selfish, irresponsible and an overall immature brat over this whole thing.

TIFFANY

Those are your words, not mine.

JACOB

It took a walk to the abyss to realize that I can't live my life without Tiffany. I went out with another woman recently after a big fight with Tiffany and the whole time I was with her I found myself thinking about Tiffany.

DUSTIN

Translation, he couldn't get any goodies from her so he came back to mama for some home cooking.

JACOB

I'd break you in half, but then there'd be two of you.

MARCIE

That's sweet. The not being able to live without her part.

JACOB

I've always known I loved her, but

down deep I was just afraid. A fear that if we got married it would change things between us. Irrational I know, but it takes some people longer to grow up than others.

BONNIE

It's so wonderful to hear this.

REGGIE

"Love is a smoke and is made with the fume of sighs."

The ladies all hug Tiffany and the guys, except for Dustin, circle Jacob offering their congratulations.

DUSTIN

Isn't that touching. I can hardly contain myself.

JACOB

I'd squeeze your head, but there's not much there.

DUSTIN

I'd have been a Rhodes Scholar if it hadn't been for my grades.

JACOB

In fact empty personifies everything about you.

DUSTIN

How low do you have to grovel to get her back? Now I know why there's dirt on your nose.

JACOB

What's that other word that describes you? It's got an "s", "l" and a "z" in it.

DUSTIN

It's all over, boy scout. She set up the "you do what I want or you no get what you want" template and you signed on without even a whimper.

JACOB

You're a toxic blabber mouth, running non-stop as usual, but no one's listening, again, as usual.

DUSTIN

She cracked the sex whip and you
come jumping.

JACOB

If you don't shut that pie hole I
may have to stuff it and you don't
even want to know what with.

DUSTIN

And, you'll be dancing to that pussy
whistle, line and verse, in two, two
time, to your last dying gasp. Game
over, boy scout.

Jacob grabs Dustin by the throat and they scuffle briefly as
Dr. Price SCREAMS at them.

DR. PRICE

LET GO! I SAID LET GO! THIS IS
UNACCEPTABLE.

Jacob and Dustin separate, glaring at each other.

DR. PRICE

Dustin, you're way out of line. You
need to apologize or leave the
class.

DUSTIN

What am I supposed to do, turn the
other cheek?

DR. PRICE

Fair enough. Jacob, you need to
apologize for your behavior as well.

JACOB

You're asking for too much.

DR PRICE

Okay, then since you're both acting
like children I'll have to treat you
the same. You have a choice of
leaving the room or taking a break
together at the coffee area until
you show you are under control and
ready to rejoin the group. Another
outburst and you're both expelled
from the group.

Jacob and Dustin continue to glare at each other.

DR. PRICE

Decide now so I can get on with my

class.

Jacob and Dustin shuffle toward the corner refreshment area looking menacing at each other as they go.

DR. PRICE

Now, let's continue. We still haven't heard from Felicia's on her topic. Values wasn't it?

FELICIA

Values are pretty much universal aren't they?

DR. PRICE

Really?

Everyone one in the group watches as Dr. Price pulls out a stem wine glass and put's it on the table.

DR. PRICE

This is part of a set that I found several years ago in Europe. I saw it, I liked it, I wanted it and I bought it, but how much did I pay for it?

FELICIA

I can tell from way over here it's beautiful and probably very expensive.

DR. PRICE

Anyone want to put a value on it?

BILL

That's a trick question. Value is what someone arbitrarily estimates it's worth while price is what someone is willing to actually pay for it.

DR. PRICE

Eighty dollars. It was on sale.

Dr. Price reaches into a bag and pulls out a very old black and white photograph of a wedding couple.

DR. PRICE

What about this one?

ELENA

If that's a family photo there's no way you can put a price tag on it.

BONNIE
Sure, it's priceless.

DR. PRICE
It's my grandparents wedding day in 1939, but it's only priceless to me or members of my family.

Jacob approaches Dr. Price

JACOB
I'm ready to apologize for trying to hurt Dustin. Just can't stand the guy.

Dustin comes over as well.

DUSTIN
I don't want to say I'm an asshole, but when people start being nice to me I get suspicious.

DR. PRICE
That's as close to an apology I'm going to get from you so it'll have to do.

GEORGE
I'm not sure I understand what the point of the game is. I feel kind of silly.

DR. PRICE
It is a game. But, the game's a powerful mechanism to loosen us up enough to unconsciously reveal what's buried inside that's preventing us from connecting in a deep way with each other.

MARCIE
It's like a secret that we don't even know is a secret?

DR. PRICE
Games are, of course, metaphors for the lives we lead. Rules, challenges, winners and losers. Stakes aren't as big, but still can tell us how we play the game and in a way reveal who we are and/or secrets we harbor.

DUSTIN

Lot's of luck. The deep secrets we hide from each are buried deep for a reason.

BONNIE

Are you keeping big secrets from me, honey?

DUSTIN

Of course. And the things I want to know you would never tell me, either.

BONNIE

Like what?

DUSTIN

Okay, but I'll make it open ended for all of us to ask each other. Like for instance, who's the best lover you ever had?

All of the couples look at each other awkwardly.

DR. PRICE

That's more about being discreet than having a secret.

DUSTIN

Discreet, secret? Semantics. You're splitting hairs. It's a question we all want to ask our significant others, but seldom do.

DR. PRICE

But, it's a question whose answer can't help your relationship.

DUSTIN

Okay, than how about, how many lovers have you had in your life? And if you're bi-sexual you can throw them in too.

DR. PRICE

What's crucial is not violating the trust after you've married.

FELICIA

You're a disgusting, sick person.

DUSTIN

Fine, then ask your loved one if he or she ever cheated on you?

Cheating, or course, is a euphemism for sneaking off and fucking the brains off of someone.

JACOB

Do you feel like talking about it or in your case lying about it?

DUSTIN

It's the one sneaking suspicion we all have about our mates sooner or later. I hope I'm not breaking any rules here.

DR. PRICE

These type of revelations are destructive and counter intuitive in restoring fragile marriages and over dramatized by the media.

DUSTIN

Come with me to the Cheetah club and watch the hordes of pious married men, you know the ones who go to church every Sunday, pumping twenty dollar bills in the hot babes panties and you'll get closer to your sanctimonious truth.

DR. PRICE

Take a slice out of them and misery and loneliness will ooze out.

DUSTIN

A better way to get the troops to open up, wouldn't you say, Doc?

FELICIA

A less way, much lesser.

GEORGE

Just ignore him and he'll eventually slide back into the slime hole he came from.

JACOB

Someone just duct tape his mouth.

BILL

They don't come in extra large.

DUSTIN

If you're honest with yourself you'll admit you always wanted to

ask those questions.

FELICIA

If I was married to you I'd have to poison you.

DUSTIN

If you were my wife I'd take it.

FELICIA

You're a cheap, white trash scum bag who'll die in the gutter.

DUSTIN

I love it when you talk dirty like that. It charges me up.

Dustin smiles and winks at Felicia who SLAPS him across the face. Dustin flinches turning his head. Everyone GASPS and rushes to Felicia showing their alarm.

DR. PRICE

No, no, no, Felicia. Please, we don't need to be doing that.

Bill puts his arms around Felicia as she rubs her closed eyes looking down.

BILL

He had it coming to him. In fact it was long overdue.

Bonnie rushes to Dustin putting her hand on his shoulder.

BONNIE

(to Dustin)

You knew it would eventually come to this.

DUSTIN

Make sure you round up the usual suspects.

BONNIE

(to Felicia)

Do that again and I'll be putting a hurt on you.

REGGIE

(to Dustin)

If you insult people they tend to slap you in case you haven't noticed.

DUSTIN

"My head is bloody but unbowed".

Felicia continues to rub her face in anguish.

FELICIA

I don't know what got into me.
Sorry, I'm so sorry everyone.

DR. PRICE

Maybe you need to direct it to
Dustin.

FELICIA

(to Dustin)

I'm sorry if I hurt you, but you
represent every vile, loathsome
quality I've ever encountered in a
human being if you can even call
yourself that.

DUSTIN

I'm feeling much better with your
apology.

An awkward silence engulfs the group.

DR. PRICE

Okay, let's get back to values. We
just witnessed a conflict of values
in a rather dramatic way.

BONNIE

Doesn't Felicia have to take some
responsibility for her lack of
control? Isn't that a lack of
values.

DR. PRICE

In a way, yes. Values vary from
culture to culture and even
historically, but some are
universally constant: love, honesty
and respect for your fellow man or
woman, a foundation we should all
build in our relationships.

BONNIE

But each couple can have their own
special idiosyncratic values that
don't fit the norm?

DR. PRICE

Marital tensions come in all shapes

and sizes, but ultimately they fall back on shared values or the marriage won't survive.

BILL

I think it's safe to say that some people have never learned those shared values and I don't think we have to look too far for an example.

Everyone looks at Dustin. Dustin CLAPS his hands.

DUSTIN

Bravo, bravo! Let's hear it for William R. Gerard, the third, CEO power broker from the rich side of town. Big car, house on the shore, expensive jewels for the wife. Living the modest, quiet humble life.

BILL

I don't need to apologize for my wealth, I earned it.

DUSTIN

Did your wife earn the expensive diamond necklace she's wearing or did you buy it to impress everyone with how rich you are?

BILL

Hah! You're a nobody who knows nothing.

DUSTIN

That's a double negative. Bad grammar. Careful now or your country club cronies will be whispering about you.

BILL

You fool, that's costume jewelry she bought at a drugstore.

DUSTIN

Ten thousand dollars if it's worth a dime.

BILL

Seventeen dollars and change at Rite Aid. Looks like you're mind's unraveling.

Felicia clutches her necklace nervously.

DUSTIN

Tight as a square knot. Ten thousand is a low estimate.

BILL

I'll bet you the biggest bill you have in your wallet that it's not worth a penny over Eighteen dollars, if you can spare the five dollars that is.

DUSTIN

Well, let's see what I have.

BILL

If that's too much we can wait until payday for a twenty.

Dustin pulls out his wallet and looks at the greenbacks in it.

DUSTIN

Well, lookie here, lookie here. What do you know, a hundred dollar bill.

BILL

Good, just hand it over. I hope you're not the type who cries when they lose.

DUSTIN

I'm an expert at jewelry. That's one of the things I do. Ninety nine percent they're real diamonds, but I can't know for sure until I examine them under a loupe, unless you want to take my word for it.

BILL

Why waste the time going to a jeweler. I told you my wife bought them at our local drug store.

Felicia puts her shaking hand over her necklace.

FELICIA

I'm not playing this game.

DUSTIN

If you're wife won't mind letting me take a little peak under my loupe we can settle it.

Dustin pulls out a loupe from his pocket.

BILL

You think I'm going to trust you
when I've got a hundred dollars
riding on it?

DUSTIN

If I'm wrong I'll concede. If I'm
right you can confirm it with a
jeweler.

FELICIA

Bill, this is silly. You're acting
like children.

BILL

You're not going to deny me the
satisfaction of seeing this pompous
blowhard eat his words, not to
mention taking his money. Give it to
me.

FELICIA

Please, Bill. I feel ridiculous.

Bill turns Felicia around, unsnaps the necklace and hands it
to Dustin who immediately puts it under his loupe. After
examining it for a few seconds, Dustin looks up with a big
grin.

BILL

What you got?

Dustin throws back his head LAUGHING.

DUSTIN

(singing)

Now we will be happy, happy, happy,
and happier still running down the
happy hill.

Bill grabs Dustin's arm roughly.

BILL

Tell me what you've got scumbag or
hand over the money.

DUSTIN

Well Big Boy, here's the way it...

Dustin notices Felicia with her hand over her mouth looking
terrified and freezes. He looks at her closer as she closes
her eyes, her hand trembling. Dustin gathers himself and

slowly looks back at the necklace, thinking.

BILL
You're just stalling, asshole, cause
you know you've lost.

Dustin finally look up, a wry grin on his face.

DUSTIN
Maybe I'd better take another look
to make sure.

Dustin pretends to be studying the diamond again. He looks
up shaking his head.

BILL
Well?

DUSTIN
It's not fooled often, but looks
like this time you got me.

BILL
You cocky bastard, hand it over.

Dustin pulls out the one hundred dollar note and Bill yanks
it out of his hand.

JACOB
How sweet it is to see you finally
exposed for what you are, an in the
dirt loser.

Felicia looks up her eyes closed, visibly shaken. The crowd
share their happiness seeing Dustin lose except for Dr.
Price who studies Dustin perplexed.

BILL
Next time you won't be so quick to
run your filthy mouth when you don't
know what you're talking about.

GEORGE
And, if there's an after life he'll
come back as a cockroach.

FELICIA
STOP IT. ALL OF YOU, STOP IT.

Everyone is stunned into silence.

FELICIA
The reason you hate him so much is
because maybe there's some truth in

what he's saying, more than we're willing to admit.

BILL

He's a mongrel dog who only deserves living in the deepest dregs of the sewer.

FELICIA

FOR ONCE IN YOUR LIFE CAN YOU NOT BE THE KNOW IT ALL BULLY.

Bill puts his hand on Felicia's shoulder.

BILL

(softly)

Sweetie, are you raising your voice at me?

FELICIA

YES, AND GET USED TO IT. And, take your hands off of me.

Bill looks flabbergasted, but pulls his hand away.

DR. PRICE

I'm surprised to hear it coming from you, but I agree. Hating Dustin is not the answer.

FELICIA

If you look deep enough there's usually some good in even the worst of us.

DR. PRICE

This isn't the values session I imagined, but I think the point we've learned is that things aren't always as they appear even when you think you're absolutely, positively right. I want all of you back here next week for our final session.

Everyone files out the door except for Dustin who is still standing by himself. Felicia who had lingered by the door comes back and puts her hand briefly on Dustin's shoulder, smiles faintly and exits.

INT UPSCALE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Dr. Price is deep in thought sitting in a booth with Fred, who is running his finger over his martini's glass rim.

FRED

A penny for your thoughts.

DR. PRICE

I'd have to give you change.

FRED

That bad?

DR. PRICE

I'm not sure I've turned the corner on Bill and Felicia. Maybe it's because he's such an arrogant know it all.

FRED

Arrogant?

DR. PRICE

And a number one, in your face, capital "B" bully.

FRED

Can't do much with those types, can you?

DR. PRICE

Bill's bullying is the way he's learned to gain power over others, especially the weak, or vulnerable. He does this consciously or unconsciously because of a deep, dark insecurity and inner rage that he externalizes by dominating others.

FRED

For what purpose?

DR. PRICE

It gives him a sense of power and authority that he may not otherwise experience.

FRED

Maybe if he got kicked to the curb a few times, he might learn a little humility.

DR. PRICE

Not likely. His bullying has been reinforced by his success in business. Moral and ethical behavior considerations of his

misbehavior don't apply to him.

FRED

Well, you're in the home stretch with your last session tomorrow so don't worry about it too much.

DR. PRICE

True, the group session may be coming to an end, but it feels like there's a loose end I can't quite tie down.

FRED

What do you mean?

DR. PRICE

Everyone has moved closer to each other, even Bill and Felicia. Everyone, that is, except for Dustin and Bonnie.

FRED

Isn't he the leaping, screaming gaping, flaming asshole everyone despises?

DR. PRICE

He's working pretty hard to earn that reputation and he's succeeding wildly with almost everyone including, unfortunately, his wife.

FRED

Who's the almost?

DR. PRICE

Me. I've done some research on him and he's a mystery man who has a secret.

FRED

How so?

DR. PRICE

He's working too hard to be the bad guy. And, just when he's almost got me convinced he does something redeeming that is totally out of character.

FRED

There's a little good in the worst of us.

DR. PRICE

More than that. He actually did something quietly noble for someone who had just slapped and insulted him and no one knew it except the lady who had just manhandled him.

FRED

And you, of course.

DR. PRICE

Why did he protect Felicia when he could have destroyed her and her bully husband who he loathes? He's just the opposite of what he wants everyone to think he is. That's what's so puzzling.

FRED

You'll uncover the mystery of the man. That's what you do.

DR. PRICE

I'll have this nagging inadequate feeling until I do. And I only have one more day to uncover it.

INT STUDIO DEN - DAY

All four couples and Bonnie are standing around Dr. Price except for Dustin who is standing at the far end of the room.

DR. PRICE

Now the time has come for us to say our goodbye's. As a parting gift to your ongoing, unavoidable life challenges and setbacks, I'd like to leave you with this following thought.

Dr. Price motions everyone to come closer which they do, except for Dustin who stays removed.

DR PRICE

Our disconnect between ourselves stems from our fears and anger. If we could learn, adapt, control, work-with, get-over, or simply just deal with our fears and, or, anger, you will evolve to a quiet, happier place with greater tolerance, compassion and love for others and yourselves, as well.

MARCIE

A lesson I hope I, no, all of us
never forget.

Everyone except Dustin gather up to Dr. Price and gives her
a group hug.

GEORGE

I think we can all agree we've made
friendships here that we'll always
remember with fondness and respect,
except for you know who.

All heads turn toward Dustin who's off is still off by
himself on the far side of the room.

DR. PRICE

For those of you who want to come
back for more consultation my door
will always be open.

GROUP

Thank you.

Smiling, every one gathers their belongings and shuffles out
the door except for Bonnie who approaches Dustin.

BONNIE

I'll be moving out tomorrow. I think
secretly it's what you want. There
will be no need for a lawyer. I know
you'll be fair and I won't need one.

DUSTIN

You won't have any trouble finding
someone who will finally give you
your own flesh and blood kids; what
you've always wanted.

BONNIE

I could never understand why you
didn't want to have kids, yet you
mentioned adopting kids once.

DUSTIN

Less hassle and no risk in birthing.

BONNIE

I want my own babies to nurture and
love. It's deep in me and can't be
denied.

DUSTIN

Now, I'll no longer be in your way.

BONNIE
You're a mystery to me.

Bonnie exits.

DR. PRICE
Dustin, if you don't mind, can you
stay for a few minutes.

DUSTIN
You sure you want me around? You
know, your reputation.

DR. PRICE
I'll take a chance. Have a seat.

Dr. Price waves her hand toward a chair.

DUSTIN
I'm not going to be charged
overtime, am I?

Dustin flops downs on the seat and Dr. Price sits down also.

DR. PRICE
Bonnie told me she's leaving you;
something you expected I'm sure.

DUSTIN
I asked her if I could have one last
roll in the hay for old times sake,
but she just brushed me off
muttering something about being a
fool.

DR. PRICE
My batting average in this messy,
murky soup we call counseling
wouldn't get me batting ninth on a
bottom dwelling class A team. It's
mostly singles, fielders choices and
once in awhile sliding into third
just ahead of the throw.

DUSTIN
Actually, betting on the ponies is
more my gig. Had a dream the other
night. Woke up with the number five
on my mind. So on the fifth day of
the month I went to the race track
and put five big ones on number five
in the fifth race.

Dr. Price frowns.

DUSTIN
He came in fifth.

DR. PRICE
You're putting me off.

DUSTIN
Sorry, I don't want you to think I'm
being insensitive.

DR. PRICE
I was just saying when I fail I
usually know why and am confident
that I've taken it as far as I can.
Sometimes it's just a bridge too far
or the hurt's too deep. And I'm
always disappointed that I wasn't
able to do more.

DUSTIN
Do you want me to rub your feet or
will a sympathetic face be enough?

Dr. Price smiles.

DR. PRICE
I usually don't look back, but in
your case there's something that's
not right, doesn't add up.

DUSTIN
It's easy. Lefty's tend to be pull
hitters so it's best to throw them
high, inside.

DR. PRICE
Can't put my finger on it. My
analysis isn't always on target, but
my instincts usually are.

DUSTIN
Maybe you can give me some tips on
the races tomorrow?

DR. PRICE
Dustin, you're throwing so many
roadblocks at me I can't keep up.

Dustin gets up and begins walking towards the door.

DUSTIN
Nothing personal, but my favorite

dancer at the Cheetah Club comes on
in a half hour, so if you don't
mind....

Dustin opens the door.

DR. PRICE

That's just it. You've never been to
the Cheetah Club.

Dustin turns around.

DUSTIN

What?

DR. PRICE

Oh, didn't I tell you. The owner is
one of my clients. You know, the
guilt thing. I asked him if he knew
you since it's a private club. He
didn't and you're not a member.

DUSTIN

There's Angel, this little fox, five
foot five, long black silky hair,
honey milk skin and a sweet little
ass to die for.

Dustin moves his arms down outlining curves and WHISTLES.
Dr. Price shakes her head.

DR. PRICE

Nice try. No. I showed him your
picture just to be sure. He's never
seen you and he's fanatical about
his customers.

Dustin throws his arms in the air and LAUGHS.

DUSTIN

Okay, so you got me. You can now
tack on liar to all my other sins.

DR. PRICE

A huh, but the question is why?

Dr. Price gets up and begins pacing.

DR. PRICE

Why would you go to so much trouble
to make yourself look so bad?

DUSTIN

Just bad? Contemptible doesn't even

come close.

DR. PRICE
Okay, contemptible, curious,
wouldn't you say?

DUSTIN
Sometimes, things just come natural
to you.

DR. PRICE
You had to have a reason greater
then Bonnie leaving you, not to
mention being loathed by the group.
Hard to figure.

DUSTIN
I hear they have refresher courses.

DR. PRICE
I checked up on you. You're not
anything like you're making yourself
out to be.

Dr. Price walks up to a nearby desk and pulls out a folder
and begins READING.

DR. PRICE
Honor student, wrestling all
conference in high school. Started
own business at 20 and built it up
to a multimillion dollar business by
30. Gold member contributor to "The
Untouchables" a regional orphanage.

DUSTIN
Nothing but a good tax write off.

Dr. Price looks up.

DR. PRICE
And then there's the Felicia diamond
necklace incident. You know the
expensive one given to her by her
secret lover. Yet, you never let
on, even after she had slapped you.

DUSTIN
I'm irresistible lovable, what can I
say?

DR. PRICE
Doesn't your sarcasm ever let up?

DUSTIN

She had a deep dark secret like we all do.

DR. PRICE

But, why? You could have put a big time hurt on Bill, a man you loathe. Curious wouldn't you say?

DUSTIN

She was lonely and a man was there when she needed him. And, isn't that where it all begins and ends?

DR. PRICE

Your interaction with the group the whole time was nothing but an act, a complete farce. Well executed, but still a sham.

DUSTIN

So maybe this will be our little secret.

DR. PRICE

You're not bad, Dustin, You're good. And all the others who heaped hate and scorn on you will never know it.

DUSTIN

(smiling)

Please don't tear down the reputation I've worked so hard to build up, or is it down?

DR. PRICE

Shall I mention some other nice things you've worked so hard to conceal?

DUSTIN

I'm a big tipper? It's five percent, right?

DR. PRICE

You were offered a membership in the Broadway 500, Manhattan's power elite club, but you turned it down.

DUSTIN

Any club that would have me as a member I wouldn't want to join.

DR. PRICE

So tell me Dustin, what is this terrible dark secret you've holding so tight to your chest? It's just us sisters here now.

DUSTIN

Hey, you're the big bucks shrink. You tell me.

DR. PRICE

Okay, if you insist, I'll take a few whacks at it. Could it have anything to do with Bonnie?

Dustin cocks his head, scrunches his eyes and shrugs.

DR. PRICE

Just trying to find a way get on first base. It's obvious you were deliberately trying to get her to leave you. A bunt single, maybe?

DUSTIN

If I'm going to be grilled under the lights with a rubber hose can I at least have a drink?

Dr. Price walks to a small cabinet.

DR. PRICE

Anything in particular, bourbon, scotch, gin?

DUSTIN

Any bottle with a long straw.

Dr. Price pulls out a bottle of wine, fills a small goblet and hands it to Dustin.

DR. PRICE

Sorry, this will have to do.

Dustin drains the glass.

DUSTIN

Such a little glass. So you service little people too?

Dr. Price grabs the wine bottle and hands it to Dustin who promptly fills his glass.

DR. PRICE

Maybe you've got a sweet one on the side you love better. Hmmm! Or,

maybe you're just looking for a way
to dump Bonnie?

(beat)

No, that's not it. I've seen the way
you look at Bonnie. A passed ball on
strike three, maybe?

Dustin takes a sip, looks at the glass and turns it slowly.

DUSTIN

Not bad stuff. I must remember to
get some next time I want to impress
someone. Not with the low life's I
hang out with, of course.

DR. PRICE

Hmmm! So, you still love her, but
want her to leave you. So maybe now
we can narrow it down and avoid
extra innings.

Dr. Price looks up and scratches her chin.

DR. PRICE

Must be something you don't want her
to know about you and the easiest
way is to get her gone so she'll
never find out.

DUSTIN

I bet you take clairvoyant lessons
or do you read tea leaves?

DR. PRICE

Maybe I'm chasing after a fly ball
I'll never catch up to. Or, maybe
you're just what you appear to be
after all, contemptible, shallow,
and deceitful.

DUSTIN

Those are just hasty first
impressions people have. When they
really get to know me they learn how
truly despicable I am.

Dustin grabs the wine bottle and fills his glass up.

DR. PRICE

You played the obnoxious fool
because you knew if you didn't
Bonnie would never leave you. A
brush back pitch so she had no
choice, but to jump back. And isn't

that what it's all about in the end,
anyway, Bonnie leaving you? A triple
off the wall maybe?

DUSTIN

You know how it is? You give a woman
everything you've got and all she
can say is, I've had just about all
I can take.

Dr. Price grabs the wine bottle and POPS the cork back into
it.

DR. PRICE

Time for clever sparring is over.
If you want me to help you you've
got to step up to the plate. Right
now you're headed down a dark,
lonely, one way street.

DUSTIN

That's a mixed metaphor.

DR. PRICE

STOP IT! For once in your life have
the guts to be honest with yourself.

DUSTIN

Trust me. In the long run Bonnie's
going to be better off this way.

DR. PRICE

(softly)

Everyone deserves to be loved,
Dustin. Even you.

Dustin closes his eyes and shakes his head.

DR. PRICE

So talk to me Dustin. Just give me a
clue, something to work with.
Please.

DUSTIN

I don't think begging is in the
manual. I know, I checked.

DR. PRICE

Your sarcasm is just a shield, a
wall to protect yourself. Let me in
Dustin, so I can help you.

Dustin starts to reach for the wine bottle, but Dr. Price
grabs it first.

DR. PRICE
Not until you let me take a peek
into your soul.

Dustin clenches his teeth.

DUSTIN
NO!

DR. PRICE
Take a chance, Dustin, just this
once.

Dustin gets up and walks to the window. He turns around and
nods his head.

DUSTIN
OKAY! OKAY! So you've figured me
out. Bonnie married into a lie, a
big lie. We're talking mother lode.

DR. PRICE
What lie?

DUSTIN
You want all the dirt, don't you?

DR. PRICE
That's me all right. Now, let's have
it.

Dustin points to the bottle still in Dr. Price's hand.

DUSTIN
A little more joy juice to tide me
over?

Dr. Price hands the bottle over and Dustin fills his glass.

DUSTIN
I tricked her into thinking I could
give her what she wanted so she'd
marry me.

DR. PRICE
And what was that?

DUSTIN
Does the "what" really matter?

DR. PRICE
Yes, it does?

DUSTIN

A family. She loves kids. She wanted a boatload of them. And she'd be the best mother in the world.

DR. PRICE

So?

DUSTIN

I was flying under false colors.

DR. PRICE

What colors?

Dustin shakes his head.

DR. PRICE

WHAT COLORS?

Dustin drains the glass of wine and wipes his lips with the back of his hand.

DUSTIN

I don't want to say.

DR. PRICE

Spit it out. Go ahead.

DUSTIN

NO!

DR. PRICE

YES!

DUSTIN

I'M STERILE. There you have it, I'm sterile as a neutered mule. Satisfied? I knew it when I married her and never told her. I was afraid I'd lose her if she knew the truth.

DR. PRICE

Maybe you should have given her the opportunity to make that choice.

DUSTIN

I thought if I could show her how much I loved her and gave her a good life it would be enough, but at some point I realized it was a slip knot that wouldn't hold. And then guilt kicked in and started to eat at me.

DR. PRICE

So you sabotaged the relationship so

she could at least hang on to her illusion that you were, despite all your sins, still a macho guy, the way you wanted her to remember you?

Dustin nods.

DUSTIN

It was a lose, lose thing. If I told her the truth she'd resent me for lying to her and also know she could never realize her dream. And then even if she stayed by some miracle, she might pity me for my affliction.

Dustin looks away with his lips pursed.

DUSTIN

Pity is the one thing I couldn't take, WON'T TAKE.

Dustin looks out the window.

DUSTIN

No, there's no other way.

Dustin puts his arm over his eyes, bows his head and makes a face like he's fighting back tears. Dr. Price walks over and rests her hand on his shoulder.

DR. PRICE

The light's peeked in and I can see you clearly now. Lift your head and never lower it again. It doesn't go with who you are.

Dustin looks up and surrenders a weak smile.

DUSTIN

Sorry about my weak moment. It's not like me to lose it.

DR. PRICE

I've never liked you more.

Dr. Price walks up to her desk, pulls out her appointment book and scans it.

DR. PRICE

I've got an opening next Tuesday.

DUSTIN

What are you talking about?

DR. PRICE
I'm penciling you in for another
round of consultations and I'm
getting Bonnie in here too.

Dustin walks toward Dr. Price.

DR. PRICE
Maybe, just maybe, she loves you
more than you realize.

DUSTIN
You think I'm going to go crawling
back to her, hoping she'll come
back. Think of my reputation.

DR. PRICE
You mean the scum of the earth,
knuckles dragging on the ground, low
life neanderthal reputation?

DUSTIN
I concede the point.

DR. PRICE
I was being kind.

DUSTIN
You think there's a chance?

DR. PRICE
As long as there's a wisp of love in
the air, there's a chance.

DUSTIN
It's a knuckler on the outside
corner. You'll never get to it.

Dustin looks to Dr. Price who nods her head slowly.

DR. PRICE
Not only get to it. I'm going to
knock it out of the park.

Dr. Price extends her fist to Dustin who bumps it with his
fist, both smiling.

FADE OUT