

ACT I

Lights Rise:

Dante's Studio Apartment. A large easel sits C.S.
On a models platform D.S.C. sits JESSICA.
ELIZABETH stands in the kitchenette.
WILLIAM stands by the U.S. window over looking
the city skyline.

Scene 1

DANTE enters. He goes straight to the kitchenette,
pours himself a glass of whiskey and downs it.

ELIZABETH

What will that do?
(Pause)
Is it that bad?

DANTE

You can't understand.

ELIZABETH

Of course, I never understood.

DANTE

It was my fault.

ELIZABETH

I tried.

DANTE

I wanted it all for you.

ELIZABETH

You were so far above me. Above all of us.

DANTE

Ironic.

JESSICA

You were a genius.

ELIZABETH

Why her?

DANTE
There's no answer for that.

ELIZABETH
What was I to you?

JESSICA
What was I?

DANTE
You were everything.

WILLIAM
What is this?

Scene 2

WILLIAM
What are you trying to do?

DANTE
Here it comes.

WILLIAM
Damn right it's coming. Look at this shit! You're better than this, Dante. I have a dealer coming for a studio visit in two days and this is the crap you want to show. Are you trying to destroy your career?

DANTE
My career? When's the last time you had dinner with your family?

WILLIAM
Are you even trying?

DANTE
I'm stuck. I'm empty. In certain circles it's called a rut.

WILLIAM
In some circles it's called teaching Community College art classes again.

DANTE
This is what's coming out of me right now.

WILLIAM
This is all you're willing to do. It's amateurish. We mocked work like this in college.

DANTE

I don't have anything!

WILLIAM

Why aren't you painting Elizabeth anymore? I love those pictures, she's beautiful. Especially that first portrait, it's fascinating.

DANTE

She doesn't model anymore.

WILLIAM

Why not?

DANTE

Because she works too much. She's supporting both of us now. When she gets home she's too tired. We don't talk very much anymore.

WILLIAM

Problems?

DANTE

Everything's fine. She's just tired and I'm stressing over...these.

WILLIAM

Well, get another model. Not that anyone could replace Elizabeth, but do something for God's sake. If you're not getting any inspiration from Elizabeth then get it from somebody else. Christian Elders will be here in two days and he wants to see some work. This guy could make or break our career. You better shape up little brother. I'm not busting my ass out there for nothing. Don't screw this up.

DANTE

Don't worry. He'll love it, and if the painting's not done I'll put a sheet over it and he won't see it. Just show him the other stuff lying around. Drink?

WILLIAM

That's why you can't paint. You're hammered all the time.

DANTE

Is that why Caroline doesn't invite me over for dinner anymore?

WILLIAM

My wife doesn't appreciate people getting drunk in front of our children.

DANTE

I almost forgot about that.

WILLIAM
She hasn't.

DANTE
I'm really sorry.

WILLIAM
I know. It's just going to take a while.
(Pause)
Why are you doing this to yourself?

DANTE
I just need some time to figure shit out. Everything is a fucking mess. You wouldn't understand.

WILLIAM
You never give me the chance to understand. You can't even give me a straight answer. "Everything is a fucking mess", what bullshit!

DANTE
You're jealous.

WILLIAM
Jealous? Of you?

DANTE
Jealous that I could paint! Jealous that I got all the attention!

WILLIAM
And look where all that attention got you. A piece of shit studio apartment that your wife has to work two jobs to afford.

DANTE
Fuck you!

WILLIAM
I'm busting my ass out there trying to get you shown. I'm getting the dealers over here to look at your work. I'm doing for you what every other artist has to do for himself. Elizabeth can't support you forever; if you don't get your shit together soon you'll have go back to teaching.

DANTE
Maybe I like teaching.

WILLIAM

You only liked dating your students.

DANTE

Fuck you!

WILLIAM

If you like teaching kids how to draw still life so much then go back to it.

DANTE

Do you think they'd let me drink?

WILLIAM

What about Elizabeth?

DANTE

What about her?

WILLIAM

What's happening to her? What has all your bullshit about getting your shit straight done to her?

DANTE

Elizabeth is fine. She understands.

WILLIAM

No one understands, and that's just how you like it. I'm late. Do whatever you have to do to get out this rut. This guy is big-time. Compared to him those other places you showed at were nothing. Don't throw this opportunity away.

Scene 3

JESSICA

We all believed in you.

ELIZABETH

Everyone believed in you. Especially you.

DANTE

I did didn't I? What an ass I was.

WILLIAM

Talented.

ELIZABETH

Brilliant.

JESSICA
Genius.

DANTE
Genius?
(Pause)
When we first met...

JESSICA
When we first met you were on the verge of greatness.

DANTE
“Jessica by the Lake” was my signature piece.

JESSICA
You never liked it.

DANTE
The colors were all wrong.

ELIZABETH
Why her?

JESSICA
You’re such a perfectionist. The colors always seemed wrong.

DANTE
Ironic.

ELIZABETH
Why her?

Scene 4

JESSICA
Nice place.

DANTE
It’s a shit hole, but it’s good for working. The window gives a lot of natural light, and we’re high enough that street noises won’t bother us.

JESSICA
I was kidding. Relax.

DANTE

Oh. So, how long have you been modeling?

JESSICA

A couple of years.

DANTE

Do you like the school?

JESSICA

Excuse me?

DANTE

Do you like going to the Art Institute?

JESSICA

I don't go to the Art Institute. I just model there.

DANTE

I thought...

JESSICA

I model because I enjoy it. And I enjoy the company of artists'.

DANTE

Really? Why?

JESSICA

Passion. Artists have more passion than regular people. People are so boring-predictable. They aren't moved the way artists' are. Artists' see real beauty, experience real pain, understand what it is to be human. They're more...real.

DANTE

Interesting. So you don't do it just to make extra money?

JESSICA

Don't get the wrong idea, I'm still charging you for the session. I just really love the thought of some young artist being...inspired by my body.

DANTE

I see.

JESSICA

Are you?

What?
DANTE

Inspired?
JESSICA

I guess we'll see when you get on my...platform.
DANTE

I have a good feeling about you. I have great intuition when it comes to artists.
JESSICA

Do you now?
DANTE

You know Joseph Rialta?
JESSICA

Of course.
DANTE

I modeled for him when he went to school. The statue in the commons area?
JESSICA

That's you?
DANTE

It's wonderful to be an artist. The work you do lasts forever, immortalizing you. But I like being a model. People see the work and think of the artist, but they're really looking at the model. That's immortality. Did you know many people don't even know who painted the Mona Lisa?
JESSICA

But no one knows your name.
DANTE

They don't have to. They know my face, they know my body. That's enough. Do you want them to remember your name?
JESSICA

Yes. Yes I do.
DANTE

Jessica removes her robe and lies on the platform.

JESSICA

That's all you want?

DANTE

No. Maybe. No, I want to be respected and admired.

JESSICA

Why?

DANTE

I suppose all artists want that. We put our souls into our work. It's the only thing we leave in this world. If Michelangelo never painted we would never have known about his genius. People who knew him might have, but after he died no one would've cared. This is all I have. Besides, who really wants to live in poverty forever?

JESSICA

You're absolutely right. It'll happen. I have a feeling for these kinds of things. Are you ready?

DANTE

Yes.

Scene 5

DANTE

Why? Why did you stay?

ELIZABETH

How could someone like me ever understand you?

DANTE

I never needed you to understand.

ELIZABETH

I tried but it was no use.

DANTE

You never gave yourself enough credit for anything.

ELIZABETH

Even when you didn't want to paint me any more.

DANTE

Why?

ELIZABETH
You know why.

JESSICA
She was weak.

DANTE
She was kind.

ELIZABETH
I loved you.

DANTE
More than anything.

JESSICA
What about me? Did you ever love me?

DANTE
Of course I did, it was different. You gave me what she couldn't.

ELIZABETH
I offered you everything. You took what suited you.

DANTE
You're right. You're right. I only took what suited me.

JESSICA
That's what made you brilliant. That's what made you famous.

DANTE
I never deserved it, any of it.

JESSICA
You deserved all of it, you know you did.

DANTE
I never deserved her.

JESSICA
She never understood you.

DANTE
She couldn't.

ELIZABETH

How could I?

DANTE

You loved me, unconditionally.

JESSICA

But she never understood you the way I did.

DANTE

It was my fault.

ELIZABETH

It was my choice. Everything was my choice.

Scene 6

ELIZABETH

Are you still staring at that?

DANTE

The colors are all wrong. I can't make this work. I'm a hack.

ELIZABETH

The colors are always wrong. You're just painting me too much. Try some still life.

DANTE

I could never paint you too much. You're my muse, my inspiration.

ELIZABETH

Stop. Now you're just teasing.

He crosses to her

DANTE

I am not. I love you. You're everything to me. I would be nothing without you.

ELIZABETH

Maybe you should have been the poet instead of your brother.

DANTE

No. William always had the gift for words, like you. He's a natural. Of course both of our parents being English teachers it wasn't surprising. I'm the freak. Not one person in my whole family has ever held a brush and done anything decent with it. Kind of like me right now.

ELIZABETH

Hey. That's my portrait you're working on.

DANTE

I mean I'm not doing you justice. I can't seem to capture your beauty on canvass. I'm a hack. I'm in a rut. I just can't make this work.

ELIZABETH

Maybe you should use another model, you know, someone fresh to work with.

DANTE

The models not the problem, the artist is.

ELIZABETH

No you're not. You're a genius.

DANTE

Maybe.

He kisses her

DANTE

William called. He got me another show.

ELIZABETH

Really! Oh, Dante that's wonderful. This is your second show in just three months. This is the start of something great. I know it.

DANTE

It's just a little gallery, no big deal. When things get better you can quit working too and we'll really live. One day I promise, I'll support the both of us.

ELIZABETH

I know you will. When do you open?

DANTE

In two months, they want eight pieces, like I said a small gallery. I need one more piece to make a complete show.

ELIZABETH

Will it be that one? Of me?

DANTE

No. This isn't for the eyes of the public. This is just for you and me. This is how I first saw you. This is the sight that has inspired the last two years of my work.

ELIZABETH

What will the other one be?

DANTE

I'll have to come up with something I suppose.

ELIZABETH

Let's celebrate. What do you want for dinner? Anything you want. Name it, it's yours.

DANTE

You.

Scene 7

WILLIAM

I wanted to put it in your first show. You said it wasn't ready.

DANTE

It was just for me. Not everything is for them.

WILLIAM

It's the most beautiful work you've ever done.

DANTE

I did it for me.

WILLIAM

You did everything for you.

DANTE

That's not true! That's not true! I would have done anything for her!

(Pause)

At one time.

ELIZABETH

At one time?

DANTE

Nothing is forever, nothing but the work. The work always lasts.

JESSICA

What about me, Dante? Did I last?

DANTE

What do you want from me? What do you want me to say? What do I have to do? I had to think about me, my work, my career. I had to make decisions, hard, difficult decisions.

You. WILLIAM

You. JESSICA

You. ELIZABETH

What do you want from me?!
(Pause)
What do you want from me?

Scene 8

WILLIAM
Come on Dante! It's a show.

DANTE
It's a coffee shop. Why would I put my work up in a coffee shop?

WILLIAM
It's not just a coffee shop. A lot of artists get their start there. It's a good move. Wait a minute, when I mentioned this to you the first time you said it was a good idea.

DANTE
I didn't really think you'd do it, besides now it just seems so...cheesy.

WILLIAM
You want the top galleries right away? You think anyone's going to touch you without some kind of showing somewhere?

DANTE
A coffee shop? They'll be judging me while eating biscotti's and drinking their fucking decaf non-fat lattes. That's so demeaning.

WILLIAM
That's it isn't it?

DANTE
What?

WILLIAM
You're afraid to show your work.

DANTE

Bullshit.

WILLIAM

You've never shown your work anywhere but at school. Everyone there thought you were a genius, but in the real world you're afraid people will think you're a hack.

DANTE

Fuck you!

WILLIAM

You're so scared of failure you won't even try.

DANTE

What do you care what I'm afraid of?

WILLIAM

What do I care? I've spent the last six months trying to get this for you. This place is booked up two years in advance with artists trying to get a break. I got you a showing in three months.

DANTE

So.

WILLIAM

So? Are you listening to yourself? Are you for real? Three months is incredible. No one gets their work in there in just three months. Do you have any idea what kind of a deal I got for you?

DANTE

No one asked you to.

WILLIAM

You asked me to!

DANTE

You wanted to! I may have asked but you would have offered. I just thought you could get me something more than a coffee shop.

WILLIAM

You know what? I should have known it'd be a mistake to help you. You're incapable of showing any kind of gratitude.

William begins to exit.

DANTE

William. I'm...sorry. Thank you for getting me the show.

WILLIAM

That must have been difficult.

DANTE

It was.

WILLIAM

Three months and they need eight pieces.

DANTE

No problem. They can have "the Ritual" set.

WILLIAM

Great, I like those pieces.

DANTE

There's a lot of red in them.

WILLIAM

They're good pieces. Are you guys coming over for dinner tonight?

DANTE

Elizabeth has to work tonight and I need to finish up some work.

WILLIAM

Are you going to make the bar-b-q this weekend?

DANTE

Yeah, Lizzy's making her seven-layer dip.

WILLIAM

That's Caroline's favorite.

DANTE

That's why she's making it.

WILLIAM

Wow.

DANTE

What?

WILLIAM
You're actually getting married.

DANTE
I know.

WILLIAM
You know Caroline prayed all the time you would find someone special.

DANTE
Who would of thought.

WILLIAM
You'll make this work. I know you will.

DANTE
Don't worry. I'd never screw things up with Elizabeth.

WILLIAM
You'd better not. You got a great girl on your hands.

Scene 9

D.S. two café tables. Elizabeth sits at one sketching.
Dante sits at the other one. He sketches Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH
Excuse me.

DANTE
Yes.

ELIZABETH
What are you doing?

DANTE
Sketching you.
(Pause)
You don't mind do you?

ELIZABETH
No, I suppose not. Why are you sketching me?

DANTE
Why not?

ELIZABETH

I'm sure there are better things you could be drawing around here than me.

DANTE

No. You're definitely the most beautiful woman here.

Dante sketches a bit more, finishes up and puts his sketchbook down.

ELIZABETH

Can I see it?

DANTE

See what?

ELIZABETH

The drawing.

DANTE

No.

ELIZABETH

No?

DANTE

No, you can't see it, but you can let me buy you a cup of coffee.

ELIZABETH

I already have a cup of coffee.

DANTE

Can I buy you another one?

ELIZABETH

No, one is my limit in the afternoon.

DANTE

May I join you then?

ELIZABETH

I suppose.

Dante crosses to Elizabeth's table.

DANTE

Dante Rossetti.

ELIZABETH

As in the pre-Raphaelite painter/poet?

DANTE

I'm impressed.

ELIZABETH

English major, Art History minor.

DANTE

Last name notwithstanding, my father loved Rossetti's poetry. His favorite playwright was William Soroyan, so he named my brother William. I suppose we're lucky that he wasn't partial to Tennessee Williams or Athol Fugard.

Elizabeth laughs.

DANTE

What?

ELIZABETH

Athol Rossetti?

They both laugh.

ELIZABETH

I never knew why my mother named me Elizabeth. I guess she just liked the name.

DANTE

It's a beautiful name. Are you an artist?

ELIZABETH

No, I just like to doodle. It relaxes me. I want to be a writer.

DANTE

Really, what do you write?

ELIZABETH

Short stories, and poetry, mostly.

DANTE

Can I hear something?

ELIZABETH

No.

DANTE

If I show you the sketch I did of you can I hear one of your poems?

ELIZABETH

Sure.

Dante shows Elizabeth the drawing.

ELIZABETH

That doesn't look like me.

DANTE

Sure it does.

ELIZABETH

I wish I was that beautiful.

DANTE

You're a vision. You're extraordinary. Why do you think I drew you just now?

ELIZABETH

I don't know.

DANTE

I had to. I was captivated by your beauty. You made me want to draw you. You inspired me to open this damn thing and put some art, some beauty into it.

ELIZABETH

Are you sure you're not really a writer?

DANTE

I'm destined to work a canvass till the day I die. Now, a poem?

ELIZABETH

I left my journal at home, and I don't have any of my poems memorized. Sorry.

DANTE

A writer who doesn't carry her journal around?

ELIZABETH

I was just planning on sketching today.

DANTE

Well next time bring your journal so you can read me some of your poetry.

ELIZABETH

Next time?

DANTE

Next time we have coffee. Friday at three?

ELIZABETH

I hardly know you.

DANTE

Meet me at three on Friday and you will.

ELIZABETH

I have class until three-thirty, how about four?

DANTE

Four's perfect. And write a poem about me, after all I did a drawing of you.

Elizabeth packs up and begins to leave.

ELIZABETH

I'll do what I can.

DANTE

Wait, what's your name?

Scene 10

DANTE

Elizabeth.

WILLIAM

Who?

DANTE

Elizabeth, Elizabeth Morel. My god she's amazing.

WILLIAM

This girl you had coffee with?

DANTE

It wasn't just coffee. It...it was magic.

WILLIAM

You need to cut back on those lattes.

DANTE

It was more than just a simple cup of coffee William, this girl makes me want to paint, I can't stop I have to work I have to get her on this canvass. I found my muse, I found what every artists dreams of. The one who inspires the most out of him. The one who brings it all together and makes it make sense. She's everything.

WILLIAM

You sure you're not a poet?

DANTE

Wait till you meet her.

WILLIAM

When will this be?

DANTE

On our wedding day.

WILLIAM

Dante, I need to ask you an important question.

DANTE

What?

WILLIAM

When are you going to get someone to look at your work?

DANTE

What do you mean?

WILLIAM

You've been out school for two years now. You're miserable teaching Dante, it's not for you. When are you going to get out there and get people interested in your work?

DANTE

I don't know, I never really thought about it.

WILLIAM

Well you should. Look, I know this guy who has a friend who owns a gallery. It's kind of a gallery slash coffeehouse slash performance space. It's not the big leagues but it's a good place to be seen. He might put some of your work up. You might even sell something.

DANTE

That sounds great. Why don't you call him and set something up?

WILLIAM

Me? I'm not your agent. I'm an English Lit professor, what the hell do I know about selling an artist?

DANTE

Look, William, you know how I am. I'm terrible with people. This guy's going to say some shit and then I'll say some shit and I'll ruin the deal. Just take an afternoon and go talk to him. You don't have class on Tuesday afternoons. I'll give you some slides.

WILLIAM

What slides?

DANTE

Come back in few days and I'll have some for you.

WILLIAM

Are you serious? Just drop everything and become your manager?

DANTE

I'm not asking for a lifetime commitment, just talk to the guy for me.

WILLIAM

All right, just this once. I have to go.

DANTE

Tell Caroline I said hi. When is she due?

WILLIAM

In two months.

DANTE

Boy or a girl?

WILLIAM

Boy. We're naming him David.

DANTE

Dad would have liked that.

WILLIAM

Mom asked us if we would.

DANTE

I'll call her tomorrow, how is she?

WILLIAM

She's fine. I'll be back on Thursday, and you better have some slides for me.

DANTE

Will do.

Scene 10

WILLIAM

Why did you do it?

DANTE

You wouldn't understand.

WILLIAM

I should have told her.

DANTE

It wasn't your place.

WILLIAM

She was my sister-in-law.

DANTE

She was my wife!

JESSICA

Did you really think you could have hidden it?

ELIZABETH

You wanted me to find out.

DANTE

Not that way.

JESSICA

We should have known better.

DANTE

I'm a fool.

WILLIAM

It took you this long to see that?

ELIZABETH

Genius?

DANTE

To take it all back.

JESSICA

Would you have given it all up for her? Everything you had, everything you became?

DANTE

It all meant nothing without her.

Scene 11

JESSICA

Beautiful as always.

DANTE

I've got to work more on your arms and neck. I can't get them right.

JESSICA

No, those are my arms.

DANTE

Funny. There's this line that runs along your forearm and continues on through your bicep to your shoulder. It's very interesting.

JESSICA

There is? Where?

DANTE

Right there. I see things in people that they don't see in themselves. I knew a guy in school who would do portraits, you know just the face. He would have all these colors in it. If you looked carefully at the painting, and then at the subject, you could start to see the colors he saw.

JESSICA

You just see lines on peoples bodies then.

DANTE

I see all types of things on peoples bodies; that's why I work with the human form.

JESSICA

Do you see anything else on my body?

DANTE

I'm married.

JESSICA

I heard you were quite the player when you went to school.

DANTE

Who did you hear that from?

JESSICA

I know a few of your classmates.

DANTE

I don't know who's been talking to you but they're wrong.

(Pause)

Who's saying that about me anyway?

JESSICA

Dante, relax. Can't you take a little teasing?

DANTE

Sorry, I'm a little on edge right now.

JESSICA

What's wrong?

DANTE

Nothing.

JESSICA

You know you can talk to me.

DANTE

It's personal. You wouldn't be interested.

JESSICA

I thought we were becoming friends.

DANTE

We are.

JESSICA

I know you're brilliant. I know you have something special, and I know you're going to make it.

DANTE

Who says I want to make it? Maybe I'm just happy here in my studio painting.

JESSICA

Everyone wants to be recognized and rewarded for their work. Don't you Dante?

DANTE

I won't compromise. I won't paint shit because it sells. I'll make it on my own terms.

JESSICA

You will. You're lucky to have William and Elizabeth in your life. They really take care of you, help you, support you.

DANTE

Yeah, I guess I am.

JESSICA

What's bothering you?

DANTE

Elizabeth works fifty hours a week. When she gets home she's tired. We don't really communicate much anymore.

JESSICA

Have you been fighting?

DANTE

No. I've never stayed with a woman this long. I've never had to deal with something like this. Elizabeth is the first woman I've wanted to be with, no matter what. I don't know how to deal with these feelings. I never loved anyone like her before.

JESSICA

You got too used to dealing just with yourself. Marriage isn't for the selfish.

DANTE

You think I'm selfish?

JESSICA

Yes, sometimes you are very selfish. But you're unique, sometimes you need to be selfish. People in general need to be selfish sometimes. Why should you be any different?

DANTE

Why can't Lizzy understand me the way you do?

JESSICA

I'm sure she tries. It's obvious she loves you; after all she's supporting you now. Obviously she believes in you.

DANTE

You really do believe in me don't you?

JESSICA

Yes.

DANTE

You understand me so well.

JESSICA

Yes.

They slowly lean in and kiss each other.

DANTE

That never happened.

JESSICA

Yes, it did.

DANTE

I can't do this.

JESSICA

Dante, you can't deny your feelings. Your feelings define who you are.

DANTE

Just go.

JESSICA

What?

DANTE

I need time to figure this out. Please just go.

JESSICA

If you think that's best.

You have to go now.
DANTE

JESSICA picks up her clothes and goes behind the
changing curtain.

SCENE12

I never meant for any of it to happen.
DANTE

Didn't you?
WILLIAM

I never wanted to hurt either of them.
DANTE

I should have known.
WILLIAM

I should have known.
ELIZABETH

Why would you? You loved me, you trusted me.
DANTE

I was so blind. I refused to see it.
ELIZABETH

You trusted me.
DANTE

It wasn't all your fault.
JESSICA

I'm responsible, for everything. It is my fault.
DANTE

It was my choice. Not yours.
ELIZABETH

I should have known better.
DANTE

Yes, you should.
WILLIAM

ELIZABETH

How come I never met her? Don't all your models come over at night?

DANTE

She takes night classes so she comes over during the day while you're at work. What's with all these questions? What are you insinuating?

ELIZABETH

I'm not insinuating anything. I'm just asking a question. I would like to know why you've been working with a model for three months who you've never mentioned to me before. It's just not like you that's all.

DANTE

She's just a model. I suppose I never thought about discussing her that's all. She's not important.

ELIZABETH

OK, I'm sorry I said anything.
(Pause)
I went to the doctor today.

DANTE

Is something wrong?

ELIZABETH

No. Just the opposite.

DANTE

You mean...

ELIZABETH

Yes.

DANTE

You're pregnant?

ELIZABETH

Yes. Aren't you happy?

DANTE

I'm just surprised that's all.

ELIZABETH

A good surprise?

DANTE

Yes. A very good surprise.

ELIZABETH

I thought you would want this. I know we really haven't talked about a family, but you're doing well now. We can afford to move into a bigger place.

DANTE

I do. I do want this. This is great honey. This is really great.

They embrace.

ELIZABETH

I love you.

DANTE

I love you too.

Scene14

WILLIAM

It was a beautiful piece.

DANTE

She was so beautiful.

WILLIAM

Yes, she was.

DANTE

Why?

WILLIAM

No one can answer that but her.

DANTE

Why?

Scene 15

JESSICA

It looks a lot better. I like the line you put on my arm. It gives a great flow to the piece. My eye just follows up the line to my face. I don't mean to sound conceded, but I like that.

DANTE

I told you that line was there. I'll do some touch up work on it tomorrow and it should be done.

JESSICA

We don't have a session tomorrow do we?

DANTE

I don't need you for the touch up work; I'll just be doing some shadowing here and there.

JESSICA

You don't need me for shadowing?

DANTE

No.

JESSICA

You know what you need?

DANTE

Do tell.

JESSICA

A break.

DANTE

If Neil Shaiman likes my work then that's what I'll get.

JESSICA

Not that kind of a break, a vacation.

DANTE

What do I need a vacation for?

JESSICA

You just look really tense today, that's all. You're tired, I can tell.

DANTE

I need to finish one more piece for my show. William meets with my dealer in two weeks.

JESSICA

You're almost done with this one aren't you?

DANTE

I need one more in addition to this one.

JESSICA
You really need time away.

DANTE
I can't.

JESSICA
Why not?

DANTE
I can't just take off, besides I can't afford to go away. We don't have enough money for rent sometimes, there's no way we could afford to go off to some resort for a weekend.

JESSICA
My friend Wallace has this wonderful cabin by the lake. He has a full studio and everything. It's the perfect retreat. You'd be amazed at how much a weekend away could help you out. All I need to do is make one little phone call and you're in.

DANTE
An artists' retreat? Over the weekend? I can't, Elizabeth works on weekends. That's the busiest time at the store.

JESSICA
Just go alone, you don't have to take her. All you need is time, your equipment and me.

DANTE
You?

JESSICA
I am your model aren't I? What would you paint if you didn't have me?

DANTE
What do I tell her when she asks why I'm leaving town so suddenly?

JESSICA
Just tell her that you're going to an artists' retreat for the weekend to work on your final painting. Tell her that you need to be alone and out of the city to finish it. She'll understand.

DANTE
And how do I explain you?

JESSICA
You don't. You are so paranoid.

DANTE

I don't know if I can do this.

JESSICA

What do you want to do? What does your heart tell you to do?

DANTE

I don't know if I can handle this.

JESSICA

Neither do I, but I'm willing to take that chance.

DANTE

What do you mean?

JESSICA

I've never slept with a married man before.

DANTE

Really?

JESSICA

What the hell is that supposed to mean?

DANTE

Nothing.

JESSICA

I don't know what you think about me but you're wrong. I don't just casually fuck every artist I model for.

DANTE

I'm sorry.

JESSICA

Damn right you are.

DANTE

I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. I didn't mean to insinuate that you're an artistic slut.

JESSICA

Artistic slut? That's funny. I'm really falling for you Dante Rossetti. Although you really can be a jerk sometimes.

DANTE

Outside of painting it's my only real talent.

I'm sure you have other talents.

JESSICA

She kisses him.

Lights Fade:

ACT II

Lights Rise:

Scene 1

William enters.

WILLIAM

They're in.

DANTE

What are?

WILLIAM

The reviews.

DANTE

Well?

WILLIAM

“The showing of new realist painter Dante Rossetti is a unique blending of color variations on the human form.” He goes on...here. “His piece ‘Jessica by the Lake’ is a striking use of blues. While looking at his work I wondered if he had ever seen a color wheel, but he pulls it off so well it doesn’t matter.”

DANTE

Bullshit!

WILLIAM

No bullshit. They loved it. Two galleries called me this morning. They want to see more of your work and talk about possible shows next season, and I got three buyers making offers.

DANTE

You mean I’m actually going to sell something?

WILLIAM

Not to just anyone. Guess who wants to buy some of your work?

DANTE

Who?

WILLIAM

David Andrew Steelgrave, and the Chronicle called. They want to do a spread on you in the Pink Pages. We did it little brother, you’re on the way up.

DANTE

David Andrew Steelgrave? I've got to call Elizabeth. She'll be so excited. I can't believe this is really happening.

WILLIAM

Damn right it's happening.

JESSICA enters from the bedroom in her robe.

JESSICA

Hello.

WILLIAM

Hello.

DANTE

William, this is Jessica. She's one of my models.

WILLIAM

"Jessica by the Lake"?

JESSICA

That's me. So you're William. It's very nice to meet you.

WILLIAM

Yeah, it's nice to finally meet you too.

DANTE

We were just finishing up.

JESSICA

Yes, actually I'd love to stay and chat but I have another appointment to get to. Excuse me while I change.

DANTE

Wait, did you hear what William just told me?

JESSICA

No. What is it?

DANTE

David Andrew Steelgrave is going to buy some of my paintings.

JESSICA

That's wonderful. Congratulations. He's one of the top art collectors around. Do you know what this means?

DANTE

I'm on my way up.

WILLIAM

Yes, this is a very good move for his career.

JESSICA

Oh this is so great. I'm so happy for you. But I do have to change; I'm meeting someone in half an hour. It was nice meeting you William.

Jessica exits back into the bedroom.

WILLIAM

What the hell was that?

DANTE

That was Jessica, my model. Didn't I just introduce you?

WILLIAM

Don't get smart with me, Dante. Why the hell's going on?

DANTE

I was painting.

WILLIAM

You're painting in your bedroom now?

DANTE

Who the hell do you think you are?

WILLIAM

I'm your brother who's trying to get your career moving in a positive direction, and I don't need your love life fucking that up.

DANTE

My love life is none of your fucking business! You concentrate on getting galleries and museums interested in me, and getting your commission, and I'll concentrate on painting. And I'll do whatever I goddamn have to do to paint.

WILLIAM

My commission? You think I'm doing this for my commission check?

DANTE

Well?

WILLIAM

Fuck you Dante. I'm not in this for the money. I want to see you succeed.

DANTE

Then butt out of my personal life and let me work.

WILLIAM

What about Elizabeth?

DANTE

She doesn't know, and she doesn't have to.

WILLIAM

How could you do this to her?

DANTE

Elizabeth knows nothing, therefore she's not getting hurt. What do you know about it anyway?

WILLIAM

I know about marriage Dante. I've been married for almost ten years and never once have I cheated on Caroline. Don't think I wasn't tempted either. I don't know what your excuse is. You've only been married for two years now. What kind of man cheats within two years of marriage?

DANTE

You don't know anything about it. You don't know what's going on with me. Don't judge me.

Jessica enters.

JESSICA

William, this may not be my place but...

WILLIAM

You're right, it's not.

JESSICA

But...I'm inspiring some great work in him. You should support that. I don't much like the fact that he's married either, but that's what's happening. I really care about Dante and his work. Maybe I don't love him the way you or Elizabeth do, but I love him in my own way. Dante's right, as long as Elizabeth doesn't know she's not being hurt. Do the right thing William.

WILLIAM

You're right again. You don't love him the way Elizabeth and I do.

DANTE

Maybe you should go now.

Jessica exits.

WILLIAM

I really don't understand you sometimes.

DANTE

You don't have to understand me. Just keep getting me shown.

WILLIAM

You know, you've fucked up some pretty important things in your life; you've always had a talent for doing that. But I'm asking, begging you. Don't do this to Elizabeth. I stood by and watched you throw away perfectly good relationships, but not this time. She's a wonderful woman, and now she's pregnant. Don't throw this away, please.

DANTE

Believe it or not William I know what I'm doing.

WILLIAM

For Elizabeth's sake I certainly hope so.

DANTE

Are you going to tell her?

William exits.

Scene 2

ELIZABETH

Why her?

DANTE

She inspired me.

ELIZABETH

I didn't? I didn't!

DANTE

Not in the same way. You were different.

Who did you love more?
JESSICA

It was...just different.
DANTE

That's an excuse.
WILLIAM

Why her?
ELIZABETH

She was what I needed, at the time.
DANTE

Was she? Was she what you really needed?
ELIZABETH

Yes...Yes she was.
DANTE

Scene 3

I'm almost done with my last piece for my new show.
DANTE

That's great sweetheart. I knew you would get it finished on time.
ELIZABETH

I just need the weekend to finish it up.
DANTE

Will you get it done by Sunday?
ELIZABETH

Sunday?
DANTE

Sunday, we're going over to Williams for the bar-b-que.
ELIZABETH

Shit. I totally forgot.
DANTE

Don't worry about it; you can get it done by then. I have complete confidence in you.
ELIZABETH

DANTE

That's not it. I made plans to go away for the weekend.

ELIZABETH

What are you talking about? Go away? Where are you going?

DANTE

I'm going to an artists' retreat with a friend of mine. It's this little place up North. The guy's going to let me stay there for the weekend and paint. It's supposed to be really great up there.

ELIZABETH

When were you going to tell me about this?

DANTE

I'm telling you now.

ELIZABETH

What about Sunday? We've been planning this for weeks now.

DANTE

It's not a big deal, William has these all the time. Besides he'll understand.

ELIZABETH

I'm not so sure I do.

DANTE

I just need to get out of the city and away from people for a little while. I'm getting stuck on this painting and I think the fresh air will do me good. I didn't invite you because you always have to work on Saturdays and I didn't find out about this until a couple of days ago.

ELIZABETH

Which painting are you working on?

DANTE

That one.

ELIZABETH

This is of Jessica isn't it?

DANTE

Yes it is.

ELIZABETH

I like the pose you put her in, very beautiful.

DANTE

Thanks.

ELIZABETH

That's one I used to do for you.

DANTE

I know.

ELIZABETH

Is she going with you?

DANTE

To the retreat?

ELIZABETH

Yes, Dante, to the retreat.

DANTE

She might be there. What?

ELIZABETH

Nothing.

DANTE

You're not going to get on that subject again are you?

ELIZABETH

No. You told me nothing's going on and I believe you.

DANTE

I'm just going up there to paint. That's all. I promise.

ELIZABETH

I know.

DANTE

You trust me, right?

ELIZABETH

Of course.

Scene 4

JESSICA

Don't you just love the fresh air up here?

DANTE

Fuck, I can't get this right. I'm going to chuck this fucking painting right into that lake.

JESSICA

Don't you dare! What's wrong with it?

DANTE

I'm using too much blue... I'm definitely using too much blue in this.

JESSICA

I'm posing next to a lake, what other color should you use?

DANTE

I can't concentrate.

JESSICA

Why? What's wrong?

DANTE

I just don't do this. I can't stop thinking about Elizabeth.

JESSICA

Look, if you're feeling guilty then we won't sleep together tonight. You can sleep in your own room. But you need to paint. That's why up here.

DANTE

Elizabeth knows.

JESSICA

She knows that you're painting. Now stop worrying so much and paint. You're defeating the whole reason for coming up here.

DANTE

She knows! I was a fool for thinking she wouldn't suspect anything.

JESSICA

Sweetheart, you have to stop. Right now you need to finish this up. Worrying about what she may or may not know doesn't matter right now.

DANTE

I guess you're right. I just need to relax.

JESSICA
What do you plan on calling it?

DANTE
What?

JESSICA
The painting. What do you plan on calling it?

DANTE
I don't know. 'Jessica by the Lake?'

JESSICA
Simple. How about, 'The Goddess of the Blue?'

DANTE
You've got to be kidding me.

JESSICA
No. It's a great title.

DANTE
Too cheesy.

JESSICA
Screw you!

DANTE
Relax, I was kidding.

JESSICA
So you like Goddess of the Blue?

DANTE
(Thinks about it)
No, no I don't. Goddess of the Blue is a shitty name, sorry.

JESSICA
You're a jerk.

DANTE
It's my best feature.

JESSICA
No it's not.

Scene 5

DANTE
You didn't deserve that.

ELIZABETH
I didn't deserve any of it.

JESSICA
We should have known better.

DANTE
I was a fool.

WILLIAM
It took you this long to see that?

ELIZABETH
I had hoped the baby could have changed things. I thought you would get over her and we could put it behind us and become a family.

WILLIAM
You can't put something like that behind you.

ELIZABETH
I was so foolish to think a baby would change anything.

DANTE
The baby.

WILLIAM
You couldn't make this work could you?

DANTE
To take it all back.

WILLIAM
Did it mean anything after that? All the fame, success, did it mean anything at all?

DANTE
It meant nothing without her.

WILLIAM
Ironic isn't it?

DANTE

I was so blind.

ELIZABETH

Genius?

Scene 6

Elizabeth enters and crosses to the bedroom. We hear her scream followed by Jessica's scream. Elizabeth re-enters.

ELIZABETH

Oh my god! Oh my god!

Dante enters pulling up his pants.

DANTE

Lizzy, please. I can explain, I really can.

ELIZABETH

Explain? Explain what? Who the fuck is that?

DANTE

Lizzy, please...

ELIZABETH

Is that Jessica? The one you wont tell me about! Is that why you don't talk about her? Because you're fucking her!

Elizabeth slaps him.

DANTE

Lizzy please. You can't excite yourself like this. Just calm down, we'll talk about this.

ELIZABETH

Calm down! You want me to calm down! You're screwing another woman in our bed and you want me to calm down? I knew it. How could I be so stupid? How could I have just let you go away for the weekend with her? Painting? What bullshit!

Elizabeth tries to slap Dante again but he grabs her arm and holds on to her.

DANTE

Lizzy! Get a hold of yourself and I'll explain everything. Please just calm down!

ELIZABETH

Fine. But you better have one goddamned good explanation for this.

DANTE

Yes, that's Jessica. Yes, I haven't been talking about her because...we've been sleeping together. I'm sorry, but it's not what you think. I never meant for this to happen. You have to believe me. I never wanted to do anything to hurt you I swear. She's just a model
(whispering)

She's nothing. She helped me out of my rut that's all.

ELIZABETH

If all you needed was sex to get out of your rut that's what I'm here for. I'm your wife!

DANTE

Honey, please. Just sit down.

ELIZABETH

Fuck you!

Jessica enters in her robe.

JESSICA

Nothing?

DANTE

Not now!

ELIZABETH

Yes, now. Let's all talk about this now.

JESSICA

Nothing?

DANTE

That's not what I meant and you know it.

ELIZABETH

What did you mean? Is she nothing to you, am I everything to you?

JESSICA

Yes Dante, what am I to you?

DANTE

I can't believe you're doing this to me.

JESSICA and ELIZABETH

To you!

JESSICA

It's always about you isn't it?

ELIZABETH

Say it Dante, how do you feel about her?

DANTE

Don't do this.

ELIZABETH

Why? Will I not like what I hear? How could I hate it more than what I just saw?

DANTE

Don't do this I beg you. You don't want this to happen.

ELIZABETH

Do you love her?

(Pause)

Oh God!

DANTE

I'm sorry, Lizzy.

ELIZABETH

Oh God!

Elizabeth grabs her stomach falling to the ground
screaming in pain.

DANTE

Lizzy!

JESSICA

What the hell's going on?

DANTE

I don't know. Call 9-1-1.

JESSICA

Is it the baby?

DANTE

Call 9-1-1! Now!

Scene 7

WILLIAM

How long are you going to blame yourself?

DANTE

As long as I feel like it.

WILLIAM

And how is that going to help her?

DANTE

Nothing I do will help her now. It's all my fault.

WILLIAM

Sitting here feeling sorry for yourself isn't going to help her. Just go to the hospital.

DANTE

I can't! Don't you see that?

WILLIAM

You're right, she caught you and Jessica in bed, and that might have led to the miscarriage. But she was also stressed out and not taking care of herself. But sitting here and wallowing in your self-pity is doing nothing for her. You want to make things right? Then go with me to the hospital to pick her up. She needs you right now.

DANTE

I can't. I can't face her right now. I don't even know what I'll do when she comes home. I don't even know that I'll be here when she gets home.

WILLIAM

You selfish bastard. What is that going to accomplish?

DANTE

I don't know. Probably nothing.

WILLIAM

I really wish I could understand you.

Jessica opens the door.

JESSICA

May I come in?

May she?
WILLIAM

Why not?
DANTE

Jessica enters.

How's Elizabeth?
JESSICA

WILLIAM
She's better. In fact she's coming home today. We were about to leave to pick her up,
weren't we Dante?

Just go.
DANTE

William leaves.

Should I go too?
JESSICA

Do what you want.
DANTE

Dante?
JESSICA

DANTE
Why are you here? What the hell do you want?

JESSICA
I don't know, I guess I wanted to see you.

Why?
DANTE

JESSICA
Because I care about you.

DANTE
What do you want?

JESSICA
I want to be here for you. Can't you see that?

DANTE

No, I can't.

JESSICA

Was I really was just a fuck?

DANTE

What do you want from me? Your face is going to be remembered for a very long time. Isn't that what you wanted? Isn't that what you've always dreamed of? Being the next Mona Lisa?

JESSICA

That's not why I got involved with you.

DANTE

No? Didn't you say you had a feeling about me the first day we met? Isn't that what you do? Fuck the good artists?

JESSICA

You're the only one I ever got involved with who I knew would make it. The others were just dreamers.

DANTE

Are you really in love with me?

JESSICA

Yes. I'm willing to admit it. Yes, I am in love with you. What about you?

DANTE

You don't need that. You just need your recognition.

JESSICA

Fuck you, Dante! I came over here to see how you were. I wanted to find out how Elizabeth was. I feel responsible for what happened and I...

DANTE

What the hell are you talking about?

JESSICA

I was there too. I was the one who was caught in bed with you. Remember?

DANTE

You are responsible for nothing. I am responsible! I am responsible for my child dying. I am responsible for my wife almost dying, I am responsible for destroying the best thing I ever had! You are not responsible for anything! It is all me! Me! Me! It's always been

about me! Everything's about me, don't you get that! Get the fuck out! Get away from ME!

Jessica runs out of the apartment.

Scene 8

Elizabeth enters from the bedroom with a bottle of pills. She looks as though she hasn't slept in days. She heads for the kitchen. She pulls out Dante's bottle of whiskey.

She opens the bottle of pills and dumps a handful into her mouth. She then washes it down with the booze. She almost gags but manages to swallow it. She takes a few more swigs.

She takes another handful of pills and another swig. Slowly she passes out.

After a moment or two Dante enters with some flowers. He sees her lying on the platform and runs over to her.

DANTE

Lizzy? Lizzy? Honey, are you Ok?

He feels for her pulse.

DANTE

Lizzy! Oh my God! Lizzy! Somebody help! Somebody help me! Please! Somebody help me!

Lights fade.

Lights rise.

Scene 9

William stands looking at the picture on the easel.

WILLIAM

You finally finished it?

DANTE

No. I just couldn't work on it anymore.

William crosses to the kitchen.

WILLIAM

I need a drink. You want one?

Dante holds up his bottle.

WILLIAM

Yeah right.

(Pause)

We need to get going. You should get dressed.

DANTE

In a minute.

WILLIAM

Do you want me to tell Caroline to go on ahead? We could meet them later.

DANTE

Sure.

WILLIAM

Caroline will bring the kids to Elizabeth's parents house afterwards, she doesn't think they're old enough to go to a funeral service. Is that all right?

DANTE

That's fine.

WILLIAM

I'll go tell her to go ahead without us. We'll get there later.

(Pause)

I'll be right back.

William exits.

Dante rises and goes to the painting. He stares at it for a moment and then takes another drink.

Scene 10

WILLIAM

The Byrne Gallery wants to do another showing next season. I sold three more works and the Art Institute wants to do a showing of your work. You know one of their famous alumni things.

(Pause)

Dante?

DANTE

I heard you.

WILLIAM

Guess who I ran into today?

(Pause)

Jessica. She bought one of your paintings. One of the abstract pieces. Her husband is a big fan of yours. They were asking about purchasing “Jessica by the Lake.” I told them it’s not for sale

(Pause)

Jesus, Dante. I miss her too.

(Pause)

Is this what it’s come to? I loved Elizabeth too you know. I think about her everyday. I wonder if there was more I could have done. But then I realize there’s nothing any of us could have done. She made her choice.

(Pause)

Fine, drink yourself to death, I don’t care. I’ve tried for three years to help you but I’m done. You want to be alone in this world? You got it!

(Pause)

All I want to do is understand you. All any of us wanted was to help you. Why is that so difficult? I’ll see you later.

William exits.

Scene 11

D.S. two café tables. Elizabeth sits at one sketching. Dante sits at the other one. He sketches Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH

Excuse me.

DANTE

Yes.

ELIZABETH

What are you doing?

DANTE

Sketching you.

(Pause)

You don’t mind do you?

ELIZABETH

No, I suppose not. Why are you sketching me?

DANTE

Why not?

ELIZABETH

I'm sure there are better things you could be drawing around here than me.

DANTE

No. You're definitely the most beautiful woman here.

Scene 12

Dante sits in his chair, William is by the window.
Jessica is on the platform once again in her robe.
Elizabeth is in the kitchen.

Dante sets the bottle on the floor. His head falls
down to his chest he is dead.

William crosses to the chair, picks up the bottle and
returns it to the cupboard.

Jessica crosses to the chair and props up Dante's
head and places his hands neatly in his lap.

Elizabeth crosses to Dante, picks up a blanket and
drapes it around him covering all but his head. She
kisses him on the head.

Elizabeth then crosses to the easel, she removes the
painting and hands it on the wall. It's of her, sitting
at the café table.

A tableau.

Lights out.

THE END