

CHEATERS

(HOWARD & MONICA)

A bedroom

Soft, romantic music is playing. HOWARD and MONICA are dancing to it. MONICA is lost in the dancing. HOWARD is not quite so caught up. He is preoccupied, thinking about most anything else.

MONICA: (*Dreamily*) You move me so effortlessly. As if we were one, flowing into each other. (*Whispers*) Say something nice to me. (*No reply*) I feel so safe tucked within your arms... Howard, say something nice to me. (*No reply. She barks*) Howard!

HOWARD: (*Automatically*) Your hair smells good, what'd you do, wash it?

MONICA: (*Sweetly*) You charmer. (*Naughtily*) I know what you want. (*Instructs him*) Touch my hair. (*He lays his hand flat on her head.*) Oh! You tempt me to submit to my innermost yearnings. (*Fights it*) No, no, darling, I mustn't. You understand.

HOWARD: (*Not disappointed*) I understand. (*He removes his hand.*)

MONICA: (*A drill sergeant*) Put it back. (*He puts it back immediately.*) Your touch is a soft breeze rustling my plumage. (*Howard stands still. He looks at her. She dances all around him.*) My heart, my heart...you're not moving, dear...my thoughts drift back to that starry night in St. Moritz.

HOWARD: We've never been in St. Moritz.

MONICA: So take me.

HOWARD: Monica.

MONICA: So dance.

HOWARD: This is not dancing. This is desecrating Tony Bennett. *(He drops his arms.)*

MONICA: Look. You can ruin the evening and leave me my fantasy or take me out of my fantasy and give me an evening but give me something will you! *(She tromps off into the bed, picks up a copy of Cosmopolitan, and eats a chocolate from the candy box.)* You used to be so romantic.

HOWARD: Why? Those aren't my chocolates you're eating? That isn't my rose in the vase? Candy and flowers? A perfect rose? That isn't romantic? One perfect rose?

MONICA: In the beginning it was romantic, now it's cheap.

HOWARD: Cheap?

MONICA: And unoriginal.

HOWARD: Unoriginal?

MONICA: You used to be so seductive. Now you're just middle-aged.

HOWARD: Hey. Cheap and unoriginal but never middle-aged. I'm thirty-eight years old and close to passing for thirty...two.

MONICIA: The only thing you're close to passing is away.

HOWARD: I'll walk right out of here.

MONICA: And you can take me with you. We never go anywhere anymore. I want to go to Lutece.

HOWARD: I hate that place.

MONICA: Why? We used to have those candlelight dinners there. Lutece brought us together.

HOWARD: I hate that place.

MONICA: Well, either take me to dinner or take me to bed. *(She holds her arms out to him.)*

HOWARD: All of a sudden I'm starved.

MONICA: (*Pats the bed*) Here, Howard.

HOWARD: Would it be alright if I didn't feel like it just now? I have a little back pain.

MONICA: I'll rub it.

HOWARD: Don't touch me.

MONICA: But this is Friday night. You know how I look forward to Friday night.

HOWARD: I'll make it up to you next Friday. I mean it, my back is acting up from the war.

MONICA: What war?

HOWARD: The war we had last Friday.

MONICA: Then come sit down and talk to me.

HOWARD: I don't feel like talking.

MONICA: And you don't feel like dancing and you don't feel like bed, what do you feel like doing?

HOWARD: A nineteen-year-old.

MONICA: You'd be dead inside an hour. Howard, you're having a life crisis. So, you're getting a little older. So what? I think the most attractive men in the world are a little older. Besides, you're in terrific shape and the years are only improving you. You're a fine wine, dear.

HOWARD: I'm afraid you have this all wrong, Monica. I'm not at all concerned with my encroaching middle age.

MONICA: Good.

HOWARD: I'm concerned with your encroaching middle age.

MONICA: What?

HOWARD: I am a majestic eagle soaring into the next phase of my life, and you are a rabbit, dropping raisinettes into the sands of time. I'm not trying to upset you. You wanted to talk and I'm talking so don't get upset.

MONICA: I'm not upset.

HOWARD: Good.

MONCIA: Fucker.

HOWARD: Oh, now you're going to be miserable, huh? That's what really charms me. Misery. You're such a misery. Who needs it? *(He moves to the closet.)*

MONICA: Okay, maybe we should talk. While we still can.

HOWARD: I don't know. I think we've got a little trouble.

MONCIA: But that's okay. Trouble's okay. You just sit here next to me.

HOWARD: I'm okay here.

MONICA: Come on, soldier. Right here.

HOWARD: Soldier only works when I'm in the mood.

MONICA: *(Breathy)* Whooooee, soldier boy.

HOWARD: No. I said no.

MONICA: *(Drapes a bare leg off the bed and begins to sing)* Falling in love again, what am I to do?

HOWARD: *(Perks up)* Don't do that.

MONICA: Never wanted to.

HOWARD: *(Torn)* Don't.

MONICA: Can't help it.

HOWARD: *(Losing his grip)* Don't.

MONICA: *(Hums, and pulls him to the bed. He offers token resistance)* La la, de de de de de...*(She lays on top of him and kisses him passionately)*.

HOWARD: Nothing.

MONICA: Get out.

HOWARD: What?

MONICA: Out. I've had enough.

HOWARD: You want me to leave?

MONICA: I'm through with you.

HOWARD: No, no. I'm through with you.

MONICA: I'm through with you!

HOWARD: You want me to leave? (*Moves to the closet*) Good. (*Takes his jacket*) Because I'm through with you. (*He heads for the door.*)

MONICA: I'm through with you! Where are you going to go?

HOWARD: Home.

MONICA: You never get home this early. What are you going to tell your wife?

HOWARD: Don't let it concern you.

MONICA: I won't. It obviously doesn't concern you.

HOWARD: That's because I know how to handle my marriage.

MONICA: Of course.

HOWARD: And I don't have to perform for my wife.

MONICA: What does that mean?

HOWARD: That's all you want, Monica. Performance. Well, I am sick and tired of being a sex machine.

(She laughs)

And I don't have to perform for my wife. She'd never expect it.

MONICA: Don't bring up your wife to me. What do I care about your wife?

HOWARD: Don't you ever talk about my wife! My wife is a saint. Her name has no business coming out of your mouth.

MONICA: You told me you were leaving her for me.

HOWARD: I was under pressure. You know, I could've had a casual fling with a younger girl, but I wanted someone with a mature attractiveness, like you. Because I thought you were mature enough to realize we both had our own lives. I have my life to concern me, you have yours. Now you want me to be concerned about your life too, and that's why this whole thing is falling apart if you want to know.

MONCIA: (*Moves to him, gently*) Because I want you to care for me? Because I'm looking for a little romance?

HOWARD: I don't want to care, Monica. I have too many cares. Wife cares, mortgage cares, enough romance. I needed a diversion from romance.

MONICA: We can be anything we want with each other. We can take each other anywhere. Why do you want to go home to your mortgage?

HOWARD: Because you can be whatever you want with whoever you want, and though it holds no attraction for you, my mortgage is mine and it needs me.

MONICA: But, if you have no need of me, and you don't want to care anymore, then there's nothing left.

HOWARD: Exactly what I'm trying to tell you, thank you and goodbye. (*He turns and exits*)

END