

One Before Forty—First Act  
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#### CHARACTERS

Kevin Gable      An ordinary guy, about to turn 40 and luckless at love.

Nivek            His alter-ego—the one that ruins dates.

Jolene Klein    The woman who enters Kevin's life—and might be the one. 30s.

Doug Laramee   Kevin's friend. A little too horny for his own good. Late 30s.

Date Girl        The image of Kevin's ruined dates. Appears as several incidental parts. 20s-30s.

ACT ONE

GENERAL NOTE ON LIGHTING AND STAGING: There are three areas in this play: Kevin's loveseat, the stool, and the restaurant table. The lights should follow Kevin's movement. Where he is, the lights are generally up full. When other characters enter at other areas, the lights can come up slightly, rising to full when Kevin enters that area to engage them. Similarly, when Kevin leaves an area, the lights fade. When Kevin addresses the audience, if there's another character with him, they should freeze in place until he addresses them again.

AT RISE

*To one side of the stage, up slightly from center, in a pool of soft, dim light, are a small "restaurant" type table, covered with a red checked tablecloth, and two chairs. A stool is up center, also in very dim light. On the other side of the stage are a loveseat and a standing lamp. The lights are up on the loveseat, where KEVIN GABLE is seated. He's an average guy, dressed in a polo shirt or loose dress shirt and khakis with sneakers. He's holding a cell phone, and is staring at it intently, fiddling with it, like he's trying to decide whether to use it. After several beats, he sighs, then looks up and addresses the audience.*

KEVIN My name is Kevin Gable. I'm thirty-nine and I'm single. Well, I'm not just thirty-nine, really. I'm...well, I turn forty tomorrow. *(He glances at his watch and raises an eyebrow.)* Forty and alone. *(He stands and walks C. Lights dim on the loveseat.)* Six months ago I made a decision. Kind of like a promise to myself. I decided that if by the time I'm forty I haven't found someone I can be with—you know, really be with, long term, the whole sit on the porch and grow old kind of be with? If I can't find that by the time I'm forty—by tomorrow—I'm done.

*He retrieves the stool, brings it DC, and sits.*

Done with trying, I mean. Done with dating and relationships and heartbreak. I don't need it. Who does? And it's not like I'm alone for lack of trying. I date. I've been dating. I've dated quite a bit. It's just that I don't do it well. I'm a bad date.

*DATE GIRL enters and sits at the restaurant table. She's dressed for a date, and looks splendid. Once she sits, she remains still.*

Everyone's had bad dates. I know that. I've just probably had more than most people. Well, more to the point, the people I've been on dates with have had bad dates. I usually have a pretty good time even though I know it's going to go wrong. It's them I'm worried about.

*He moves toward the table.*

It usually goes along okay for a while and then...well, come on. I'll show you.

*He sits. Quiet jazz plays in the background. Date Girl "comes alive."*

DATE GIRL ...and when I tell him what I do for a living, he goes, "Oh...really..." And calls for the check!

*They both laugh.*

KEVIN Well, it could be worse. You could be in my line of work and when you try to tell people about what you do, they just fall asleep.

*More laughter. There's a little pause. Date Girl reaches over and touches Kevin's hand. Kevin stiffens slightly—not panic, but something in that neighborhood.*

*NIVEK enters. Although he's Kevin's alter-ego, he doesn't need to look like Kevin. He wears dark colors—not necessarily black, but somber earth tones. Date Girl seems not to notice. She stops moving, stays fixated on Kevin. Nivek taps Kevin on the shoulder. Kevin looks up at him with a sad, resigned look. Nivek gives him a "get out of here" gesture. Kevin gets up and holds the chair for Nivek, who sits. Nivek and Date Girl hold still while Kevin wanders back C and sits on the stool.*

KEVIN That's not another guy cutting in on my date. I'm not that pathetic. No, that's me. Or should I say that's my alter-ego, the guy who ruins dates for me. *(He looks to Nivek, who smiles back. Kevin turns back to the audience.)* I wish I knew why.

DATE GIRL This was very nice. What a great restaurant.

NIVEK Glad you like it. My dates usually do.

DATE GIRL Dates?

NIVEK I've brought quite a few women here.

DATE GIRL Oh. I see.

NIVEK It's a nice place. It impresses them. I like to make an impression.

DATE GIRL You need a restaurant to impress a woman?

NIVEK Seems to be working on you.

DATE GIRL *(now getting disgusted)* And that means...?

NIVEK *(like a lounge lizard)* I guess that remains to be seen.

*Date Girl leans across the table. Nivek leans in as well.*

DATE GIRL You're an asshole and you've got broccoli in your teeth.

*Date Girl begins to reach for something on the table, then freezes in place. Nivek gets up, points to Kevin and indicates the chair. Kevin heaves a heavy sigh and heads for the table, crossing below it. He stops before sitting down. Nivek walks off.*

KEVIN And that's how it always happens. I come back at the wrong time. I get nervous and then I overcompensate, and...well, this won't be the first drink I've had thrown in my face.

*He sits, taking the same position Nivek was in. Date Girl pantomimes grabbing her drink and tossing it in his face, then storms out. The music fades. Kevin gets up and crosses back to the stool to sit.*

KEVIN You have to figure that if a guy is closing in on forty and hasn't yet locked down a woman, there's got to be something wrong with him. Something elementally, fundamentally—well, just plain mentally wrong. I'd like to think that's not true, but I don't have any strong evidence to the contrary.

*DOUG LARAMEE enters and sits still on the love seat. He's a little younger than Kevin, and dresses rather carelessly. The frumpier Doug is, the better.*

KEVIN My friend Doug has some opinions on the matter. A lot of opinions, actually, and he loves giving them. I guess that's what best friends are for—they're the ones who can tell you exactly what they think is wrong with you and you'll just sit there and take it. You have to. After all, they mean well. Don't they?

*Kevin pulls the stool over in front of the love seat and sits.*

KEVIN *(to the audience)* Technically, I don't have a stool in my apartment. It would be a chair. And I'd be sitting on that. There's sort of an unspoken rule that two guys never share a love seat. Unless, of course, they bought it together.

DOUG Your problem, you know, is that you try too hard.

KEVIN I don't try to try too hard.

DOUG But you do.

KEVIN I didn't know you could.

DOUG Try too hard? Of course you can.

KEVIN If you don't try hard, doesn't it come off like...you're not trying?

DOUG You have to be—what's the word? Aloof. Act like you don't care one way or the other. That makes them want you more.

KEVIN You sincerely believe that?

DOUG Women want what they can't or shouldn't have.

KEVIN And that's different than men how, exactly?

DOUG Look—I was out with a woman one time, right, and it wasn't going so great. Nice enough, but nothing really clicking. So I started being, you know, aloof. Not paying attention to what she was saying, changing the subject, and it's not ten minutes later that she's telling me that she wants to do me right there, on the table.

*Doug freezes in place. Kevin turns to the audience.*

KEVIN Like I said, he's my best friend, but his advice? It generally ends up being about sex or how to get sex or how all women really want is sex. It's like having a talking erection for a friend. So usually I just nod and smile and wait for a spot where I think I can steer the conversation in another direction. *(He starts to turn back, then looks again to the audience)* Sometimes that's a pretty long wait.

DOUG You can sit there and tell a woman what you want to do to her and how and how many times, and they'll just make you wait, wait, wait. But you pretend like they don't have anything you need, and BAM—like a battering ram, my friend.

KEVIN A battering ram.

DOUG A big throbbing battering ram.

*Kevin moves the stool back to C. Doug exits.*

KEVIN Some people's advice you take with a grain of salt. Doug's advice you take with a forty-pound bag of it. But the fact of the matter is, I wasn't getting anywhere on my own. And by anywhere I don't mean Doug's version of anywhere. I mean I was meeting people but I rarely got past a second date. Third dates were even more rare. I had a better chance of sighting a Yeti. That's not getting anywhere by anyone's definition. *(Pause. Then, reservedly)* Okay, I confess—one time I *did* try the whole "be aloof" thing.

Date Girl enters and spreads a different tablecloth on the restaurant table. She's wearing a different shirt, and eyeglasses. The same jazz song as earlier comes on quietly. Kevin rises and starts crossing as he speaks. Date Girl sits.

KEVIN It's not going to come as any surprise, I'm sure, but it didn't go so well. But it wasn't going so well in the first place, so I figured why not try? *(He gets to the table and stops before sitting. He points to Date Girl)* This is a different girl than earlier. Trust me, it will be a lot easier to explain this way. *(He looks at her a moment.)* She might have been blonde. *(NOTE: Or any other hair color the actress doesn't have.)* Anyway, it went like this.

Light jazz again rises in the background. Kevin sits.

DATE GIRL *(unconvincingly)* That's interesting. I never knew that about penguins.

KEVIN Neither did I. That's what public television is for, I guess.

An uncomfortable silence falls. They fidget. After a moment, Kevin looks idly away—his version of "being aloof."

DATE GIRL The smoked salmon was very good. I'd never tried it before.

KEVIN *(still looking away)* Uh huh.

DATE GIRL I don't usually eat much fish.

KEVIN *(distantly)* Yeah. I've been thinking about going to New

Hampshire.

DATE GIRL Sorry?

KEVIN New Hampshire. (He looks away again.)

DATE GIRL I see. It's nice up there. I love the White Mountains.

KEVIN Uh huh.

DATE GIRL I stayed at a nice bed and breakfast up there once. I wish I could remember the name. They had the best pastries—

KEVIN If you see the waiter, could you wave him over? I need more water.

DATE GIRL (between concerned and bothered) Am I...boring you?

Nivek walks on, a few feet above the table. Kevin doesn't see him yet.

KEVIN Excuse me?

DATE GIRL Am I boring you? You start a conversation and I try to keep it going and you're not even looking at me.

As Kevin turns more fully to her, he sees Nivek and has a startled reaction. Nivek smiles and gives Kevin a thumbs-up.

KEVIN (sputtering) No, not at all, I just...I had...something in my teeth. It was, um, distracting me. No, you were saying...penguins? In New Hampshire? Right?

DATE GIRL I'm going to use the ladies room, if you don't mind.

She rises and exits. Kevin stands as well, and ends up looking at Nivek, who just nods, smiles, and exits. Kevin wanders back

to C.

KEVIN For the record, she left through the kitchen. And she ordered a tiramisu on her way out and stuck it on my bill. The amazing thing that time was that I did it to myself. I didn't need any help from my alter ego to mess it up for me. (Pause then, like an explanation to himself) I should probably blame Doug. It was his idea, after all. Be aloof.

He sits.

So it was right about then, after that particular metaphysical whack in the nuts, that I made my crazy little promise to myself. Find someone by my birthday or just forget about it. It seemed logical. You can see that I wasn't exactly tearing up the charts in the dating world. Anyway, I make my promise. That was nine months ago. Four months go by. Nothing. Then...something.

Doug enters carrying a stand-up bookshelf. On one row are several paperbacks, all by the author Katherine Slater. Titles include "A Crate of Roses" and "Down by the River." On the top shelf is one copy of a hardcover titled "September Tomorrow." These are the ONLY books on the bookshelf. Doug sets the shelf just off center. He then stands a few paces to the side, pantomiming reading.

KEVIN It happened while I was in a book store at the mall. (*He stops, looks down at the bookshelf, then back to the audience, sheepishly.*) My imagination? Not vivid. (*He points to the shelf.*) Book store. Work with it.

He looks to Doug.

KEVIN What are you reading?

DOUG *Our Bodies, Ourselves.* My second-favorite book.

KEVIN What's the first?

DOUG My bible.

KEVIN The Bible is your favorite book?

DOUG Not *the* Bible, my bible—*The Kama Sutra.*



KEVIN Could you just...take a couple steps away from me? Thanks.

*Doug steps away slightly, scowling. JOLENE KLEIN enters and stands behind the bookshelf, looking over the selections. She's in her early to mid-30's. Kevin notices her, as does Doug. They both look from her to each other with a sort of "Hey now!" look on their faces.*

KEVIN Then this girl walks in. And the air...changes. It's like this approaching thunderstorm of attraction. Well, my attraction to her, anyway. And the ventilation is blowing just the right way and I can smell maybe it's her perfume or maybe it's her shampoo or maybe she just smells this nice all the time, but it hits me like... You know on the Bugs Bunny cartoons when Bugs smells something good cooking and he floats over to it? Just like that. And then the worst thing that could possibly happen, happened.

Jolene looks up and catches Kevin's gaze. She smiles.

JOLENE (*friendly*) Hi. (*A moment passes, and she looks down again.*)

Kevin takes a few steps downstage.

KEVIN She smiled at me. It didn't really mean anything. It was just a smile in a book store. But I'd never seen anything like it. I wanted that smile. For my own. I didn't want it smiling at anybody else. Just me. So you're wondering why this is the worst possible thing that could have happened. Well, because it meant that I was going to try. And in the back of my mind I knew that once I tried, once things got going well...they weren't going to go so well. But I was going to try.

*Doug sidles over to Kevin and turns him so their backs are to Jolene.*

DOUG Dude, she smiled at you.

KEVIN Yes, she did.

DOUG You know what that means, don't you?

KEVIN That she's a nice person?

DOUG You're not *that* oblivious are you?

KEVIN Oh, good Lord. All right, so tell me, Casanova... Which aisle do you recommend for the wild, illicit, public book store sex that you're about to tell me is going to happen? Something over near...*fiction*, perhaps?

DOUG I'm wounded. I was just going to suggest that she might want to talk to you. Smartass. *If you need me, I will be over in the café with a latte and the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue.*

*Doug exits. Looking over the books, Jolene comes around the side of the bookcase. Kevin watches her, and then reaches for a book. Jolene reaches for the hardcover at the same time.*

JOLENE Oh!

KEVIN Sorry, I was...you like Katherine Slater?

JOLENE Very much! I've read everything she's written.

KEVIN Really? What's your favorite?

JOLENE *Down by the River.* It's her best work.

*Nivek crosses the stage above the bookshelf, glancing toward Kevin as he speaks his next line.*

KEVIN She's done better.

JOLENE *(playfully)* Oh, has she, now?

*Nivek pauses in his cross and smiles at Kevin, who sees him and blanches.*

KEVIN I, uh, I mean...I just think *A Crate of Roses* was better. Different! Not...better, really. I liked it.

*Shaking his head, Nivek exits.*

JOLENE I did, too. But I just thought the characters in *River* were more fully realized, and the arc of the story was somehow more genuine and naturalistic.

*Kevin turns to the audience.*

KEVIN She was cute...and literate.

*He turns back to the conversation.*

KEVIN Can't argue with that. You definitely know your Slater. Were you looking for the new one?

JOLENE *September Tomorrow*, yes. I've read some great reviews of it.

*Kevin looks at the bookshelf.*

KEVIN Here it is. Only one copy.

JOLENE And two of us.

KEVIN A gentlemen would let you have it.

JOLENE Yes, he would.

KEVIN I was going to suggest thumb-wrestling for it. Best two out of three?

JOLENE Is this how you usually pick up women in book stores?

KEVIN No, sometimes I try to charm them.

*Jolene laughs lightly. Kevin takes the book and hands it to her.*

KEVIN Here you go. *(Pause as he gets up his nerve)* Can I...would you have time to maybe grab a coffee and...talk? About Katherine Slater or something? I mean, I understand if you—

JOLENE I'd like that.

*They cross and sit at the restaurant table. A world-music-style song rises in the background. Doug comes on to remove the bookcase. Date Girl, with a waitress' apron on, enters and places two large coffee cups on napkins on the table, then exits. Jolene sits still as Kevin addresses the audience.*

KEVIN So there I was, sitting in a book store café having a long, intelligent discussion about writing with a good looking woman named Jolene who seemed genuinely interested in me. She was funny and sweet and engaging and could talk about anything at all and I never once got that Sword of Damocles sensation. It was nice. And when she said...

*Jolene looks at her watch, surprised.*

JOLENE Oh my God, look at the time!

KEVIN *(to audience)* ...it was a relief to see that more than fifteen minutes had gone by for a change. So with all that, I figured, why not go for it?

*Kevin turns back to her.*

KEVIN I'm sorry, I didn't realize we'd been talking so long.

JOLENE It's okay. It was really nice.

KEVIN It was. Can I be obvious here and ask you for your phone number?

JOLENE I'd be disappointed if you didn't.

*Kevin turns to look at the audience and smiles a huge, almost goofy grin. Jolene takes her napkin, gets a pen from her purse, and writes her number on it.*

JOLENE I hope you can read it. I tried to write around the coffee stain. Anytime after six but before ten, okay? I need my beauty sleep.

KEVIN (*quickly*) No you don't.

*A pause. She smiles, blushing. She gets up.*

JOLENE Call me, okay?

KEVIN (*standing*) I will.

*Jolene exits.*

KEVIN (*after her, quietly*) I will.

*Kevin turns to the audience.*

KEVIN So there you go. I met a nice girl before I turned forty. Thank you. (*He takes a deep bow.*) Wouldn't it be great if the story ended here?

*Nivek walks in, sits in the seat vacated by Jolene.*

KEVIN It doesn't, of course. (*He sits*) Because once she was gone I was left alone with my thoughts. With him.

*Nivek waves to the audience.*

NIVEK Well that was strange, huh?

KEVIN What was?

NIVEK That! The thing with the girl, the cute girl.

KEVIN Strange how?

NIVEK Do you realize how long you two were talking?

KEVIN A while...

NIVEK Like hours! Did you know that you had something hanging out of your nose?

KEVIN (*horrified*) I did?

NIVEK No, just messing with you. But come on...let's talk about a fluke here.

KEVIN A fluke?

NIVEK A woman like that, talking to you for so long and not suddenly developing a dead relative? That doesn't happen, my friend.

KEVIN She gave me her number!

NIVEK Have you tried it yet?

KEVIN It's been two minutes...

NIVEK You should check it. I bet it goes to a movie theater.

KEVIN No it doesn't.

NIVEK She probably has caller ID. I hate caller ID. If they don't answer, you can be sure they know it's you.

KEVIN I am going to wait a couple of days and then call.

NIVEK A couple of days? You're letting her off the hook that easy?

KEVIN I don't want to seem over-eager.

NIVEK Or disinterested. A couple of days? What's that mean?

KEVIN It means not now and not tomorrow.

NIVEK So how many? Two? Four?

KEVIN Three, maybe.

NIVEK Three! She could move out of state in three days!

KEVIN Why are you doing this?

NIVEK Me? (*He stands, picking up Kevin's coffee as he does.*) I'm

not doing anything, Kevin. I'm not real.

*Nivek exits, drinking Kevin's coffee. Kevin looks baffled for a moment, then rises and moves C. Date Girl "busses" the table.*

KEVIN I wish I could say that didn't happen, but it did. I wish I could tell you that I just said to myself, wow, I found a really nice woman who's interested in me—but I didn't. I was confused. I was worried. I needed to talk it out with someone who'd listen and understand and offer good advice. When I couldn't think of anyone, I called Doug.

*Doug enters and sits on the loveseat. Kevin pulls the stool over by the loveseat, upstage, and sits.*

KEVIN A long time ago, Doug and I established a sort of protocol for talking about our problems. If one of us needed to vent about something that was bothering us, the person with the problem would buy the beer, chicken wings, beef teriyaki, and crab rangoon and the other would act as a sounding board. The beauty of this plan is that if you don't solve anything, you can at least get drunk and have a belching contest.

DOUG Let me get this straight. We're here to figure out how something went *right*?

KEVIN Exactly.

DOUG I don't think you're supposed to question something like that.

KEVIN I know, but it just feels like there's something wrong.

DOUG There's something wrong with something being right?

KEVIN Right.

DOUG That's just so wrong.

KEVIN Come on, let's focus here. Let's figure this out. Why would a woman like Jolene be interested in me?

DOUG Is that a rhetorical question?

KEVIN No.

DOUG Damn. Do you actually need me to answer or should I go "Hmmm" and wait for you to start talking?

KEVIN Whatever works for you.

DOUG Hmmm...

KEVIN If she was just one thing—cute or smart or interesting—then it might make more sense. But she's cute and smart and interesting and I can't think of anyone I've ever dated who was all three.

DOUG What about Diane?

KEVIN Smart. Kind of cute. Not interesting.

DOUG Leilah?

KEVIN Very interesting. Cute. Not real smart.

DOUG Who was the one with the really big boobs?

KEVIN Jodi.

DOUG And....?

KEVIN Really big boobs.

DOUG Do you still hear from her?

KEVIN Focus!

DOUG All right. The question as I see it is, why do you think you can't get a girl who's cute and smart and interesting?

KEVIN Because it's never happened!

DOUG And that precludes it from happening now?

KEVIN No, but it makes it hard to understand *why* it's happening now. I need to figure out what she saw in me. Help me out here!

DOUG I'm thinking we can rule out confidence.

KEVIN Gee, thanks.

DOUG Look, you're way over-thinking this. You don't need to figure it out right now. Hell, you don't need to figure it out at all as long as you're enjoying yourself.

KEVIN But I'm not—that's the thing. And I won't until I figure it out. I know it!

DOUG You're going to have to trust me on this one.

KEVIN That scares me.

DOUG Understandable. But come on—you have her number, right?

KEVIN Or the number to a theater.

DOUG What?

KEVIN Nothing.

DOUG So use it. She gave it to you for a reason. Call her. Talk. Go out again. Let it happen. Just let it happen, and see.

KEVIN You really think so?

DOUG Not gonna get laid otherwise.

*Kevin crosses to the stool as Doug exits.*

KEVIN It was actually decent advice. Good, simple advice. Very Zen, really. Let it happen. *(He closes his eyes and takes a deep, cleansing breath. After a beat, he opens his eyes.)* Of course you know by now that there's no way I was going to do that. See, because it didn't make sense, and I needed it to make sense. I like sense. I'm a very sensible kind of guy. Logical. I like things to be in order.

*Date Girl enters and sits at the restaurant table. She's dressed casually.*

Okay, so sometimes I like it too much. I'll tell you a little story here. Bear with me. I was at dinner a few years ago with a woman I'd been seeing for about a month.

*Kevin sits. The same light jazz tune plays. While Date Girl goes through her next several lines, Kevin mimes putting his silverware, plate, and glass just thus-and-so in front of him. He's quite occupied with it, and keeps at it until she asks what he's doing.*

DATE GIRL The thing of it was, neither of us quite understood just what was going on. We could see what was happening, of course, but something about it just wasn't clicking, you know what I mean? It was one of those things where you—what are you doing?

KEVIN *(looking up)* Huh?

DATE GIRL I was wondering what you were doing with your fork and



knife and all that. You were, like, putting them...

KEVIN In place.

DATE GIRL In place?

KEVIN Sure. I like them in place. I like having the bottoms of the silverware level.

DATE GIRL I see. And the water glass?

KEVIN I like it pointing a certain way.

DATE GIRL It's round.

KEVIN Huh?

DATE GIRL It's round. It can't really "point" anywhere.

KEVIN *(pause)* I like it right there.

DATE GIRL I...see.

*She reaches across the table and mimes moving a fork or knife. Kevin immediately "moves" it back. As he does, she mimes moving the water glass, which he immediately moves back.*

DATE GIRL Oh my God!

KEVIN What?

DATE GIRL You're totally obsessive-compulsive!

KEVIN I am not! I'm neat!

DATE GIRL Okay...hold on. I'm going to move your silverware now and I want you to leave it alone for fifteen seconds.

KEVIN Why?

DATE GIRL To prove that you can.

KEVIN I can.

DATE GIRL No, you can't.

KEVIN Bet a backrub?

DATE GIRL Full-body massage.

KEVIN You're on!

*She "moves" things, and right from the start Kevin is fidgety.*

DATE GIRL Not yet...

*She moves things some more. Kevin is clearly edgy.*

DATE GIRL And.....start.

*A fidgety five-count, and Kevin veritably rockets away from the table to C.*

KEVIN If you must know, it was four seconds, okay? And she was cute, but not all that interesting. So yes, I like things to make sense. And try as I might, I couldn't get myself to accept that this—Jolene being interested in me—made sense. But I knew that Doug was right. I had to call.

*Kevin moves to the loveseat, sits, and takes a cell phone from between the cushions. Nivek enters and strolls up behind Kevin.*

NIVEK You're going to call her? You're really going to call?

KEVIN *(without looking at him)* Yes, I am.

*With a loud, joyful laugh, Nivek sits next to Kevin, upstage. Kevin is noticeably uncomfortable.*

NIVEK Great! This is going to be great! Can I talk to her?

KEVIN No.

NIVEK Come on!

KEVIN No!

NIVEK You know I'm going to end up talking to her, so you might as well just give me the phone.

*They stare at each other a moment, then Kevin faces away from Nivek, closes his eyes, and takes a long slow breath. After he lets it out, he opens his eyes and looks at Nivek. There's a pause.*

NIVEK Yeah, that'll help.

KEVIN I can do this. I can just ask her to dinner. It's easy.

NIVEK Ooooookay...if you say so.

*Kevin shakes his head and picks up the phone.*

NIVEK Where's the number?

KEVIN I memorized it.

NIVEK Oh, aren't you cute!

*Kevin shifts away from Nivek, turning his back slightly, and starts to dial. Nivek reaches over his shoulder and punches a random number.*

KEVIN Damn it!

NIVEK Problem?

KEVIN Nothing. Just punched a wrong number. That's all.

NIVEK Must be nerves. Or maybe you don't really know the number.

KEVIN I know it.

NIVEK What theater does it go to?

*Kevin shoots him a hard look. He starts to dial again, and Nivek presses a button again.*

KEVIN For crying out loud...

NIVEK Are you sure you want to do this? I don't think you want to do this. Maybe it's too soon. Is it too soon?

*Kevin gets up off the loveseat and takes a few steps away, slightly downstage. As he dials, he shoots a look back to Nivek, who just raises his hands like "Not doing anything!" As Kevin finishes dialing, Jolene comes out and sits at the restaurant table, a cell phone at her side and the hardcover "September Tomorrow" in her hand. The phone rings.*

JOLENE Hello?

KEVIN Hi, is Jolene there?

JOLENE This is Jolene.

KEVIN Hi...Jolene. It's Kevin.

NIVEK From the book store.

KEVIN Kevin from the book store?

JOLENE Hi! How are you? I was hoping you'd call.

NIVEK *(rising and moving toward Kevin)* This is probably a bad time.

KEVIN Did I catch you at a bad time?

JOLENE No, I'm just sitting here reading.

*Nivek snatches the phone from Kevin.*

NIVEK What are you reading?

*Kevin angrily swipes the phone back.*

JOLENE *September Tomorrow*, silly! Remember? We thumb-wrestled for it.

KEVIN Of course, yeah. How is it?

*Nivek starts reaching for the phone again. He and Kevin start a sort of predator/prey thing back and forth around the couch as Kevin talks to Jolene.*

JOLENE Wonderful.

NIVEK Come on, give me the phone.

JOLENE You liked *A Crate of Roses*, right?

KEVIN I did.

JOLENE Then you'll like this one. Very similar.

NIVEK If you're not going to ask her out, let me!

KEVIN I can't wait to read it.

NIVEK Enough with the small talk!

JOLENE You know, I wondered when you were going to call. Or if you were going to call.

KEVIN I was—

NIVEK Busy!

KEVIN Working.

NIVEK Being a pussy!

KEVIN A lot. I meant to call.

NIVEK But I was being wishy-washy.

JOLENE I don't know, Kevin. Waiting three days to call? I could have moved out of state.

*Kevin and Nivek STOP in their tracks and gawk at each other.*

JOLENE Are you still there?

NIVEK Say something!

KEVIN Yes! I...sure, yes! Well, I'm glad you didn't move.

NIVEK (*sarcastically*) Brilliant.

JOLENE You're really very cute, you know.

*Nivek looks surprised.*

NIVEK I am so confused right now.

*He sits on the loveseat.*

KEVIN (*shooting a smug look at Nivek*) Thank you. The reason I was calling—

JOLENE I hope it's to ask me out.

NIVEK *WHAT?*

KEVIN As a matter of fact, yes it is. I was wondering if maybe you were free for dinner sometime? Maybe this weekend?

NIVEK If she says yes, I swear I'm going to—

JOLENE That would be great.

NIVEK That's it. I got nothing. I'm done. This makes no sense whatsoever.

*Nivek gets up and exits in a huff.*

KEVIN Great. Yeah. So what do you like? I know a few good places. Indian? Thai?

JOLENE What do you like?

KEVIN I don't think the guy gets a vote on that on the first date.

JOLENE My guy does.

*Kevin turns to the audience.*

KEVIN Okay, so I had a little giddy moment when she said "My guy." Let's move on. *(Turning back)* So I have to choose, huh?

JOLENE I'd appreciate it.

*Nivek charges on and nabs the phone from Kevin.*

NIVEK There's this one place that I usually take women on first dates.

*Kevin is wide-eyed in disbelief. Nivek's smirking.*

JOLENE Really? Great! It must be pretty good if you keep going back! Let's go there!

*Pause. Nivek's mouth is wide open. He's helpless. He looks at the phone, then hands it to Kevin and exits, head down and shaking.*

KEVIN That would be great. I'll pick you up at 7:30.

JOLENE Excellent! Hey...Kevin...

KEVIN Yes?

JOLENE Thank you for calling me.

*Kevin looks around with a smile—he's looking to see if Nivek is coming back, and he isn't.*

KEVIN My pleasure. Really. See you Saturday.

*He hangs up. Jolene exits. Kevin moves to C.*

KEVIN So there it was. I did it. I asked the cute, smart girl who wasn't supposed to like me to have dinner with me and I didn't mess it up. Didn't trip over my tongue...much. Didn't say anything awkward

or embarrassing, and she said yes. What a great word. I felt good. That was on Tuesday, and I rode that wave of confidence all the way to late Saturday afternoon. *(Pause. Then, with some nostalgia...)* Oh, that was a good ride.

Nivek comes out and lounges on the loveseat.

KEVIN Then it gets to be about six-thirty Saturday night. If you thought I was getting through this without at least a little angst, you've been sleeping. *(He stands as if he's in front of a mirror, preening a little.)*

NIVEK You're wearing that?

KEVIN Yes.

NIVEK *(sitting up)* That?

KEVIN Yes!

NIVEK Don't you think it's a little...

KEVIN What?

NIVEK Geeky?

KEVIN No. Sort of... No!

NIVEK Oookay.

Kevin looks himself over, unsure.

NIVEK You've got some lint, by the way.

KEVIN Where?

Nivek points vaguely to his shoulder with a brushing motion. Kevin follows suit, slapping at his shoulder like he's killing gnats.

NIVEK Oh, and your socks don't match.

KEVIN What?

NIVEK Kidding.

Kevin glares at Nivek, then turns front again and does the deep Zen breathing. As he inhales, eyes closed, Nivek gets up and

crosses to him, getting his face right near Kevin's. As Kevin opens his eyes and reacts with a start:

NIVEK You're going to keep trying that, aren't you? It's cute.

KEVIN I gotta go. Gotta go.

*Kevin starts to cross. After three steps:*

NIVEK Wallet! *(He's wagging a wallet between his fingers.)*

*Kevin hurries over to Nivek and takes the wallet.*

KEVIN I knew that.

Kevin crosses to C. Nivek sits on the loveseat.

KEVIN All the way to Jolene's I kept telling myself everything would be fine. It was just a dinner date. I've had plenty of dinner dates. It's those post-dinner-date dates that I'm not so familiar with. But I wasn't going to think about that. Nice dinner, nice girl, nice time. That's all.

*Jolene enters, coming in downstage of the table. She's in half-light; very nicely dressed, in light colors, and looks lovely. Kevin looks at her in awe for a moment, then turns to the audience.*

KEVIN When I picked her up, she was—she was even better than I remembered. My first thought was: I chose well. Actually, that was my second thought. My first was something along the lines of "Oh my God." She looked great. And she said I looked great.

JOLENE *(taking a step towards Kevin)* You look great.

KEVIN You too.

*Jolene stands next to Kevin. They both face out as though they're driving. (No pantomime driving, please.)*

KEVIN *(to the audience)* So it started out well. The ride to the restaurant was about twenty minutes and we filled it with small talk. I worry about small talk because it usually gets around to...

JOLENE So what do you do?

NIVEK *(from the loveseat)* All right! Here we go! Into the pit!



KEVIN Oh, it's dull. I'm an actuary.

NIVEK Woo hoo!

JOLENE What's that?

KEVIN I work with an insurance company, calculating the dollar value of risks associated with insuring companies or people or...

NIVEK Ride 'em, cowboy!

KEVIN It's not very-

JOLENE So if a guy wanted life insurance but he was an eighty-year-old lion trainer who smoked three packs a day and lived in a place where they have a lot of mudslides and a volcano, the insurance company would ask you if that was a good idea?

KEVIN *(slowly, astounded)* Something like that. Sure.

JOLENE I think that would be fun!

NIVEK This woman is not human.

*During the next lines, Kevin and Jolene move a few steps closer to the table. Over the next several lines, Date Girl comes out and as quietly as possible sets the table—plates, silverware, a candle, wine glasses, a bottle of wine. Light jazz music—different than in the other restaurant scenes—comes up very quietly.*

KEVIN *(to the audience)* I confess that all night long I kept expecting things to go wrong—like they always do—because I so badly wanted them to go right. And yet...they never did, although they came close. The whole night! It was weird. For example, when we got to the restaurant...

*He turns to Jolene.*

KEVIN There's a forty-five minute wait for a table.

NIVEK *(moving to the stool)* Should have made a reservation.

KEVIN I should have made a reservation, I'm sorry.

NIVEK Saturday night. Busy restaurant. Who knew?

KEVIN What was I thinking, right? Saturday night and I don't make-

JOLENE (*touching his arm*) It's okay. Really. Why don't we just wait in the bar. We can talk. Forty-five minutes isn't that long. (*Coyly*) Or did you have somewhere you needed to be?

KEVIN I don't need to be anywhere but here.

JOLENE Great!

KEVIN And she was right. We sat and talked and it went by like that. And dinner...dinner was really good. She was fascinating.

*They move to the table. Kevin pulls her chair out for her before sitting.*

JOLENE ...and then two weeks in Italy. Milan, Rome, Venice. That was the last stop before I came home and realized I actually had to find a job.

KEVIN That's great. You're so lucky. I've never been to Europe.

JOLENE Have you ever been out of the country?

KEVIN Once. But it doesn't count. I went to Canada.

JOLENE Why doesn't that count?

KEVIN It's Canada. It's not even like another country. It's like... north New Hampshire. But with French. (*pause*) Oh God, you're not Canadian, are you?

*Nivek walks over and stand behind Kevin, smiling.*

JOLENE I really didn't want to say anything...

KEVIN I'm sorry! I didn't mean to—I liked Canada! It was really...pretty.

JOLENE "Pretty"?

KEVIN In a...Canadian sort of way.

*Nivek pats Kevin on the back.*

JOLENE Kevin, I'm joking! Relax!

*With a look of disgusted resignation, Nivek throws up his hands and stomps back to the stool.*

JOLENE Anyway, when I got back to the states I started contacting

everyone I knew who was even remotely connected with any kind of editorial work, and I landed my first job at a magazine.

KEVIN A magazine! Wow.

JOLENE Yeah. Filing. But it got better from there. I'm just happy to be doing something I love, and working with writers. You know, I bet you could be a good writer. I get that creative sense from you.

KEVIN You may be the first person ever to say that to an actuary.

JOLENE Seriously, though! I think that everyone has some kind of artistic talent inside them.

KEVIN You haven't met many actuaries, have you?

JOLENE Okay, nine out of ten people.

KEVIN What about the tenth one?

JOLENE I don't know. I've never met one. But almost everyone has something they do, something artistic or creative, but a lot of the time they're embarrassed to tell people about it. So what's yours?

*Kevin turns to the audience.*

KEVIN The thing I'm about to say? I've never told anyone—well, not on a date, anyway. Wait...*(he thinks)* No. No one. Ever. But with her, somehow I knew it might be okay.*(to Jolene, who unfreezes)* I play the piccolo.

*Nivek HOPS off the stool happily.*

NIVEK We're done!

JOLENE *(amused)* No, you don't!

KEVIN No, I do.

NIVEK Give her the rest!

*Nivek crosses to stand behind Kevin.*

KEVIN I played it from fourth grade all the way through college. As a matter of fact—

NIVEK Big finish!

KEVIN —I went to college on a piccolo scholarship.

JOLENE I had no idea there was such a thing as a piccolo scholarship.

KEVIN That's what the guy who played the triangle said.

*Jolene laughs. She reaches out and takes Kevin's hand. Kevin stiffens. Nivek grabs Kevin by the shoulders.*

NIVEK *(almost scared)* It's going well.

KEVIN Shut up.

NIVEK It's going well.

KEVIN Stop it!

*They struggle, with Nivek trying to displace Kevin.*

NIVEK Give me my seat.

KEVIN No!

NIVEK Get up! I have something I want to say.

KEVIN No!

JOLENE Did I mention how glad I am that you called me?

NIVEK *(all but ripping Kevin from his seat)* It's my—

*Kevin springs up from the table.*

NIVEK —turn! KEVIN No! *(He pushes Nivek away)*

JOLENE Are you okay?

KEVIN *(to Jolene)* I just have to—

NIVEK Drain the lizard!

KEVIN Pee. Uh—use the men's room.

NIVEK Before I wet myself!

KEVIN Before—you—I...have to—

JOLENE I get it. Go. I'll be here.

KEVIN *(to Nivek)* She'll be here.

NIVEK Wanna bet?

*Kevin grabs Nivek and drags him C.*

KEVIN All right. Listen. Time out. You know what? We're not doing this. I'm not going to do this to myself. She touched my hand. So what? She likes me. I want her to like me. I like her. That's all. That's good. The night is going well. She likes the restaurant. She likes the conversation. She likes *me*. *(Angrily)* It's going well!

NIVEK Which would explain why you're freaking out in the men's room.

KEVIN Why do you do this? Why do you wait until things are going right?

NIVEK I don't "wait" for anything. I just do what I'm told.

KEVIN Fine. Fine, but I'm not telling you to do this! Not now!

*Nivek shrugs in an "if you say so" way.*

KEVIN I'm not! I'm having a good night and I'm going to keep having a good night. I'm not going to worry about it. I'm not. I'm just going to let it happen, just like Doug said.

NIVEK Doug? You're really going to take advice from a guy whose idea of a big Saturday night involves a bottle of skin lotion and a rubber kitchen glove?

KEVIN I wish he'd never told me that.

NIVEK I know what you mean.

KEVIN Okay. You need to go. I'm going back out there, and I'm going to enjoy myself. *(He turns to go.)*

NIVEK Fly's down.

*Kevin stops. He does NOT look down at his zipper.*

KEVIN Not going to work. My fly is not down. I never touched it. My fly...is not...down.

NIVEK Okay, chief.

KEVIN Thank you.

*He walks back to the table, taking a moment to adjust his fly as he goes. Nivek smiles, feeling validated. Kevin sits.*

JOLENE    Everything okay?

*Kevin looks back at Nivek, who gives an innocent look, "zips his lip" and points to Kevin as if to say "You're the man."*

KEVIN (to Jolene)    Yeah. Yeah, everything's fine.

JOLENE    Excellent. *(She takes his hand again.)* Now where were we?

*Nivek, shaking his head, exits. Kevin and Jolene rise, still holding hands. They cross to slightly UC together, holding hands.*

KEVIN (to the audience)    I'm very pleased to say that from there, the rest of the date went well. Good conversation, laughter, nothing flying out of my mouth and landing on her. A good date. Then...one final hurdle. *(to Jolene)* Well, here we are.

JOLENE    Here we are. Thank you again for a lovely night.

KEVIN    My pleasure, believe me.

JOLENE    You're very sweet. And that restaurant was excellent. No wonder you go there so often!

KEVIN    "So often" is a relative term.

*Jolene laughs. There's a pause; they're looking at each other in that pre-kiss moment. Kevin is tensing slightly. Jolene begins to reach up to his face, then freezes. Kevin breaks off and takes two steps downstage to address the audience.*

KEVIN    Here's a surprise. I have a...problem, for lack of an even less appropriate word, with first kisses. They unnerve me. But at least I can tell you exactly why.

*Date Girl enters and sits on the loveseat. Kevin crosses as he speaks, and sits close to her.*

KEVIN    This wasn't a date. It was a friend. Interested but not interested, you know? You know how these things go. Both single, known each other for a while, Friday night, just hanging out, a little wine, watching a movie, and...

*They look at each other. A moment passes, and then they're in a deep kiss. After a beat or two, she suddenly pushes him away.*

DATE GIRL What was *that*?

KEVIN What was what?

DATE GIRL That thing you just did with your tongue.

KEVIN Was it a good thing or a bad thing?

DATE GIRL It was...a thing.

KEVIN (*reaching for her*) I won't do it again.

DATE GIRL (*all but leaping from the couch, and edging toward exiting*)  
I'll...I'll just..I have to...I should—I'm—

*She exits hurriedly. Kevin stands and moves to just below the couch.*

KEVIN To her credit, she didn't leave right away. But later I did notice that my bottle of mouthwash was open. But it left me wondering how many women *hadn't* said anything about that tongue thing. Whatever it was. And that's when I got a little self-conscious about first kisses.

*He looks back to Jolene, and has a small sigh. Then he walks back over to her. He turns to the audience.*

KEVIN Whatever was going to happen, I wasn't about to pass up this chance. Especially if it might only happen once.

*He turns to her. She reaches up and touches his face. They kiss. It's brief, but fairly intense. When they break, she remains looking at him as he turns to the audience.*

KEVIN It was an amazing kiss. Her lips tasted like candy. And wine. Like candy wine. Thinking about it, even now...hoo! And then we said good night.

JOLENE Good night, Kevin.

KEVIN Good night, Jolene.

JOLENE (*stepping away*) You'll call me.

KEVIN You got that right.

*Jolene moves far R, but doesn't exit. Nivek enters from L, about equidistant from Jolene. Kevin stands C and turns to the*

*audience.*

KEVIN And I did call her. And we went out again—more than once. Sometimes more than once a week! It was going very well—you know, comparatively historically speaking. But something was happening. (*He points to his chest*) In here. It was like...when I was with her, everything was the way you'd want it to be.

JOLENE (*taking two steps closer*) Thanks for another great night, Kevin. I can't wait to see you again.

KEVIN But then, until I saw her next, I was alone with my thoughts. And they weren't so great.

NIVEK (*taking two steps closer*) Any day now she's going to change her mind. And her phone number.

KEVIN I tried to focus on the good stuff.

JOLENE (*closer*) Did I wake you? I'm sorry to call so late, but I was thinking about you.

KEVIN Which would work. Until I was alone.

NIVEK (*closer*) I wonder what her last boyfriend looked like. Do you think he was better looking?

KEVIN I knew what was happening.

JOLENE (*almost standing next to him*) I have to go to Chicago for four days for a conference. I wish you could come with me.

KEVIN And I swear I tried to stop it.

NIVEK (*matching Jolene on the other side*) You know, she'll probably meet someone in Chicago.

KEVIN But I couldn't. One day it sort of got away from me.

*Kevin and Jolene move to the love seat. She sits at the upstage end.*

KEVIN We were just hanging out at my place, watching a film, sharing a pizza, nothing we hadn't done before. And...I was looking at her, you know? Looking when she didn't know I was looking. (*Staring at her*) She was all wrapped up in the movie. Her face in the glow of the screen, the way it reflected in her eyes, her brilliant, intelligent eyes, and the curve of her mouth...



*Nivek walks above the couch, watching them, crossing behind it until he's behind Kevin.*

KEVIN And all of a sudden it was just too much. So much all at once. So much...good. And it just...came out.

NIVEK Why are you here?

*Jolene looks at Kevin, surprised. As she speaks, Nivek moves around the couch, upstaging Kevin.*

JOLENE What do you mean?

NIVEK I mean what are you doing here—

KEVIN —with me?

JOLENE I'm having pizza and watching a movie. I thought later I might kiss you.

*As Nivek says his next line, he sits, displacing Kevin, who wanders C, where he can do nothing but watch.*

NIVEK I just don't get it.

JOLENE Which part? The pizza, the movie, or the kissing? Because I admit the movie's a little vague—

NIVEK This isn't going to last, is it?

JOLENE Okay, now you're freaking me out a little. What are you talking about? What's not going to last?

NIVEK Us.

JOLENE Us?

NIVEK Me and you. You being here with me. It can't last.

JOLENE Why do you say that?

NIVEK I just know it can't.

JOLENE It can if you want it to, Kevin. I do.

NIVEK Yes, but for how long, really? How long can I keep you?

JOLENE Keep me? What are you saying? Where is this coming from? Kevin, I'm here because I want to be here. *(She touches his face.)* I

like it here. I like you. Us. This.

*Nivek moves from her touch.*

NIVEK Well, yes, for now, but I know there's going to be someone else sooner or later. There always is. Better looking or more interesting—

JOLENE What are you doing?

NIVEK I'm not doing anything. I'm just telling you how I feel.

JOLENE How long have you felt this way?

*Nivek looks to Kevin, who can only look down sheepishly.*

NIVEK From the start. Always. There's no reason, I can't think of a reason why you're here or why you stay unless...

JOLENE What?

NIVEK You just don't have any other options right now. And as soon as an option comes, a viable option...that's it for me. You can do better. You know you can.

*Jolene is suddenly speechless, nearly on the verge of tears. She slides away from him on the loveseat. Kevin starts to move, but Nivek puts up a hand, ordering him to stop.*

JOLENE Are you *trying* to get me to leave?

NIVEK Hey, it's going to happen eventually, so why not hurry it along?

*Jolene all but springs from the loveseat. She backs away until she's about a foot from Kevin, with her back to him. She's focused on Nivek.*

JOLENE This is just—this is so...crazy. Why do you feel that I...oh, God...you—you honestly believe what you're saying?

*Nivek looks around Jolene at Kevin. Kevin holds Nivek's gaze for a moment then, very sadly, nods his head.*

NIVEK *(to Jolene, with equal sadness)* Yeah. I do.

*A pause. Unable to muster so much as a word, Jolene rushes out. Kevin hurries to the loveseat.*

KEVIN Jolene—

*But she's gone. Kevin wanders back C. Nivek gets up and follows him. Lights go black except for the spot on the two men.*

KEVIN So there you have it. That would be how I—

NIVEK We.

*Kevin glares at Nivek.*

NIVEK Okay, you.

KEVIN How I lost the perfect girl.

*Nivek smiles and puts his arm around a dejected Kevin's shoulder as the lights fade to black.*

End Act 1.