

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES

A One-act Drama

By Richard Packham

Characters:

STELLA - about 35, lithe, playful, attractive. Slight Texas drawl.

DANNY - Stella's younger brother, 25 to 30, huge, muscular, somewhat slow-witted. Also Texas twang.

STEVE - handsome, self-assured, obviously well off, 35 to 45.

Time: Sometime in the 1970s or 1980s.

Scene: The living area of a modest country house, somewhat rustic, furnished unobtrusively, but not "poor." Two doors, an outside door to a front porch, another door leads to the other rooms of the house (kitchen, bedrooms).

STELLA, somewhat "dressed up" for an occasion, is checking out the room, flicking off a piece of dust here, picking up a magazine there. Too frequently checks her face and hair in a mirror on a side wall. She is obviously nervous, and expecting someone.

STELLA: (calling to the back of the house) Danny! Danny! What time is it?

DANNY: (offstage) Dunno. Can't find my watch.

STELLA: Well, look at the kitchen clock! I'm not wearing my watch. It's too clunky looking. I can't find my dressy one.

DANNY: Almost five.

STELLA: I wonder what's happened? He said in his note that he would be here early afternoon.

DANNY: (enters from back) Maybe he got lost. Anybody could get lost out here.

STELLA: I mailed him a map.

DANNY: If he misses that turn-off, he's in Lubbock by now.

STELLA: He knows how to read a map. He's not stupid.

DANNY: (a little sarcastic) He's coming to see you, isn't he?

STELLA: Be nice, Danny. I insist you be nice. To me and to him. It's very important to me.

DANNY: Yeah, okay. (beat) I don't know why you want him to come here.

STELLA: You do know! I've been waiting for this for a very long time, a VERY long time, and I don't want you to spoil it.

DANNY: But why? We've been doing just fine here. We don't need anybody else around.

STELLA: Danny, I know you don't understand. You've never been in love, probably never had the chance. But some people need a little romance in their life. More than just companionship.

DANNY: But with a guy that ditched you?

STELLA: That isn't fair, Danny. He didn't ditch me. He loved me since the day we met. But Daddy

didn't like him because he thought he was after the money. And then after that he was tied down. Married. Why do all the nice men get married to somebody else?

DANNY: I'm not married.

STELLA: I know. I wasn't talking about you, Danny. You're nice, but I can't marry you. (laughs)

DANNY: I don't understand why not.

STELLA: Because you're my BROTHER, silly! I can't marry my brother!

DANNY: But we can live together. That's almost the same thing.

STELLA: No, it's NOT! We DO live together, but it's NOT the same thing! And I don't want to explain it to you! Don't talk like that.

DANNY: I do love you, Stella.

STELLA: Yes, Danny, I know that, and I love you, too. And you will always be with me. I promised Daddy before he died that I would always take care of you, no matter what.

DANNY: So I guess it's kinda like we are married, isn't it?

STELLA: Yes, I guess it is. We'll always be together.

DANNY: So what about Steve? Is he coming here to marry you?

STELLA: Not exactly. He's already married. (smiles) Danny, I've explained this all to you before.

(Sound of approaching car engine; horn honks outside)

STELLA: That's him! (quickly) Now, Danny, remember everything I've told you! Do exactly as I said, and don't talk! Just do what I've told you! I'm going to open the door now.

(Knock on door. STELLA smooths her dress, touches her hairdo, opens door, STEVE is standing there with a suitcase. He is dressed casual, looking a little tired from a long drive)

STELLA: Steve! Oh, Steve! (reaches out and pulls him into the house) Come in! Come in!

STEVE: Hi, Stella! You look great! How about a hug! (He puts down the suitcase and grabs her in a hug and kisses her)

STELLA: (breathless) Oh, wow, you take my breath away. Just wait a sec! Slow down!

STEVE: (Closes door behind him) Hey, sweetheart, I haven't seen you in a long, long time!

STELLA: Don't I know that! But we'll have plenty of time now.

STEVE: And we'll make good use of it, even if it isn't very long!

STELLA: Danny, take Steve's bag, and then put his car out back in the barn (beat) where it's cooler.

STEVE: The keys are in it, Danny.

(Danny takes the bag, exits to rear; in a moment we hear the car engine start and recede)

STELLA: Come in and sit down! Sit in the big easy chair and I'll take your shoes off!

STEVE: (sits in the big chair, pulls Stella onto his lap) Not just yet! I want to start enjoying this reunion, however short it is! (They kiss)

STELLA: I have been waiting SO long to see you again and be in your arms!

STEVE: Likewise, I'm sure! Man, you look luscious!

STELLA: (flirty) Why, thank you, sir! I intend to please!

STEVE: And boy, do you ever! Stella, honey, I had almost forgotten what a stunner you are!

STELLA: Only around you, Steve, I do assure you!

STELLA: (gets off his lap) Now, you just put your feet up on this ottoman and let me start ministering unto my man, as a proper woman should.

(STEVE does so, STELLA lovingly takes off his shoes and socks, and massages his feet for a moment)

STEVE: (closes his eyes, enjoying the massage) Aah! Oh, that's so good, honey! So good!

STELLA: (to offstage) Danny! Come here, Danny!

DANNY: (enters) Car's in the barn. Luggage taken care of.

STELLA: Are you sure everything is taken care of the way I told you?

DANNY: Yes, yes. The way you said.

STELLA: (hands him Steve's shoes) And take care of these, too.

DANNY: Same?

STELLA: (a little irritated) Yes! The same! And bring out the gifts that are waiting for this handsome gentleman.

DANNY: Now?

STELLA: Yes, now!

DANNY: Okay. Back in a minute. (exit, taking shoes)

STEVE: Gifts? Oh, come on, Stella! It's gift enough that I've found you again and I'm here!

STELLA: Well, I am in a considerably better position to provide tokens of my affection to you now, than when last we encountered each other, my dear. Daddy was very stingy with money when he was alive, but he left everything to his two children, and we are very well off. So do not worry your beautiful head about it, if I want to give you something. I assure you, I can satisfy your *every* need: financial, emotional, and (flirty) physical! And I intend to do so!

STEVE: Stella, it sounds like you are the woman of my dreams. And I'm going to wake up, I'm afraid.

STELLA: Then don't wake up! Just keep dreaming!

DANNY: (enters with numerous department store type boxes; piles them on the floor next to Steve's chair) Here they are!

STELLA: All right! Now, my darling, see what I have for you! (She starts opening boxes) Here is a beautiful pair of silk pajamas, with your monogram! (holds them up for Steve; opens another box) And these of soft flannel, for colder nights! (holds them up) A robe, a gorgeous robe to wear around the house, Chinese motif! (holds it up, gets another) A simple robe with a monk's cowl - although I do not in any way intend to imply that you should live like a monk! (holds it up) Oh, and these boxes have two more beautiful robes

and four more pairs of pajamas. But you don't have to look at them now.

STEVE: Stella! They're beautiful, and it's very thoughtful of you. But...

STELLA: But what?

STEVE: I can't take these!

STELLA: Why not, for goodness' sake? They are tokens of my love for you!

STEVE: Yes, but I can't take these back with me to Chicago! How on earth would I explain them to Maggie?

STELLA: Well, don't worry about it now. There is a solution to every problem.

STEVE: Please don't feel that I don't appreciate the thought.

STELLA: Oh, Steve, it's much more than a thought. Much more. But I forgot one more gift! (She goes to a side table and picks up a small package)

STEVE: There's more?

STELLA: These are mocassins that I made with my own hands, to cover your feet. Shoes are not gentle enough for the feet of the man I love. (opens the package, takes out a pair of cloth or knitted mocassins)

STEVE: Why, they're beautiful! Thank you!

STELLA: (kneels down and slips the mocassins onto Steve's feet) There! May the ground these mocassins tread upon be always within my view! (kisses him)

STEVE: Stella, I'm just overwhelmed!

STELLA: Now, you probably want to wash up. Danny will show you where. Why don't you put on a pair of your new pajamas and one of the robes? Which one will you choose first?

STEVE: (looks at each of the robes and the pajamas, makes a selection) How about these?

STELLA: I can't wait to see you in them! Danny, show Steve where he can change. And then take care of his clothes for me.

DANNY: Yeah, okay. Mr. Steve, I'll show you where you can change and wash up.

STEVE: Thanks, Danny. Honey, I'll be right back. Give me an extra minute to shave!

STELLA: Don't take too long, lover! I'm anxious to see the new Steve! My Steve!

(Danny and Steve exit)

(Stella walks around, humming softly. Checks her appearance again in the mirror. Turns on a cassette player or phonograph, which plays "Seems Like Old Times" by Guy Lombardo. Goes to a small bar cabinet, pours gin and vermouth into a cocktail shaker, adds ice, shakes it. Places it on a tray with a small dish of green olives. Places a cocktail glass on the tray. Then a wine glass. Pours wine from a decanter into the wine glass. Carries the tray to a side table near the easy chair. Sits in the easy chair, smiling. Leans back, extends her arms over the chair arms, closes her eyes, humming along with the music.)

(Steve enters, dressed in his new pajamas, robe and mocassins)

STELLA: (jumps up, runs to him, hugs him, quick kiss) Feel better?

STEVE: A hundred percent!

STELLA: You shaved, too, didn't you? I can smell the aftershave. (turns the music down)

STEVE: Yeah, and I took my contacts out, too. Can't see anything without 'em, but your Texas dust was making me miserable. Especially the last twelve miles on your gravel driveway!

STELLA: Well, you don't have to see much. (suggestively) And what you can't see, you can feel for with those wonderful hands. Can you see what's on the tray?

STEVE: Looks like it's cocktail time!

STELLA: A martini for my man! (puts an olive in the cocktail glass, pours from the shaker) Now, drink with me to our future! (hands him the glass, takes the wine for herself)

STEVE: Whatever there may be of it!

(They each sip their drinks)

STELLA: And now I want you to dance with me! Take me in your arms and dance with me! (she puts down her wine)

STEVE: Ah, with pleasure! (he puts down his glass, and takes Stella in his arms.)

(They dance during the following dialogue, which should have pauses)

STELLA: You know you should have married me, not Maggie.

STEVE: Are you going to scold me?

STELLA: (enjoying the sound of the words) "Steve and Stella!" "Steve and Stella!" "Stella and Steve!" Doesn't that sound a lot better than "Steve and (pulling a face) Maggie"?

STEVE: Okay, don't start in on Maggie.

STELLA: Why not? She took my man!

STEVE: It wasn't really her fault. She loved me, too, in her own way.

STELLA: Did she even know about me?

STEVE: If she did, I certainly didn't tell her.

(pause)

STEVE: So, what do you do out here so far from everything?

STELLA: Oh, I read, I listen to the radio. I dance to my music. We don't have TV. I hate TV.

STEVE: What does Danny do?

STELLA: He loves to potter around with stuff. He's got a little shop out in the barn. He's good at fixing things. It doesn't take much to keep him entertained.

STEVE: Do you ever go anywhere?

STELLA: Danny goes into town every ten days or so to get groceries and pick up mail. Sometimes I go with him, but I'd rather be here by myself than among people.

STEVE: Stella, it sounds like you have become a real hermit.

STELLA: Yes, I guess I have. I enjoy solitude. Present company excepted, of course!

STEVE: I could never live like that.

STELLA: Oh, I'll bet you could. I'll bet once you tried it for a while, you'd like it as much as I do.

STEVE: No, I don't think so.

(The music ends, Steve kisses Stella, they break)

STELLA: Sit down now in your chair and relax.

(Steve sits in the easy chair with his drink. Stella stands back, looking at him lovingly.)

STELLA: That IS your chair, you know! When I got it, I was picturing you sitting in it, in your robe, drinking a martini. So dreams DO come true!

STEVE: Oh, Stella, if only they all came true! I was so much in love with you. Your father seemed to have something against me. I could see that he would never accept me.

STELLA: Well, you were a Yankee, for one thing. He warned me when I went to Chicago to be on my guard against Yankee men who were lurking in the bushes waiting for rich southern girls.

STEVE: I wasn't interested in your money, Stella.

STELLA: Oh, I know that. And it wouldn't have bothered me, even if you were. If a rich girl can't buy a handsome, loving husband, what good is the money anyway?

STEVE: Well, in a way you got me, after all.

STELLA: Being your mistress after you married Maggie was not my idea of "getting you."

STEVE: I sort of had to marry Maggie. It was more of a professional move than a romantic one, you know. That position in her father's firm made a big difference for me.

STELLA: That is so sad, to marry for any reason but love.

STEVE: Yes, but I had the best of both worlds. Until you left Chicago without saying a word or telling me where you were.

STELLA: Well, I simply had to do something else. I couldn't go on just sitting around waiting to find out when you might be able to graciously spare a few hours for me. So I came back home.

STEVE: But not to tell me you were leaving? Or where I could get in touch with you?

STELLA: What for? You had made your choice. I was playing second fiddle in a one-woman band.

STEVE: Don't think of it like that. It was a way for us to still be together.

STELLA: But we WEREN'T together! Even when you took me to the convention in Minneapolis, you were in meetings most of the time, and when you came back to the room the first thing you did was to call your wife!

STEVE: I had to do that so that she wouldn't be suspicious!

STELLA: You should have just gotten a good Minnesota hooker and left me in Chicago.

STEVE: Come on, sweetheart! Let's not argue about water under the bridge! Let's not spoil the little time we have together now.

STELLA: You're right, and I'm sorry. I am just too sensitive, I suppose, and remember the hurts.

STEVE: I'm just glad that you finally wanted to see me again.

STELLA: Well, after Daddy died and left us this place out in the middle of nowhere, on this Texas-sized piece of sagebrush that he owned, I thought, that's the perfect place to bring Steve!

STEVE: It's a real hide-away, that's for sure!

STELLA: Nobody ever comes out here. We don't even have a phone. Just to get power run to the house cost Daddy a small fortune. But he loved it here. And so will you!

STEVE: Oh, I do! It makes for a perfect private weekend.

STELLA: Now, Steve darling, you were very careful not to let Maggie know where you were going, weren't you?

STEVE: I'm not that dumb, honey! I told her that on the drive back from the convention in Miami I would be making a few calls on prospective clients, and take a little time to visit some historic sites that I had never seen.

STELLA: So, were you careful not to leave a trail, I mean like with credit cards?

STEVE: After Vicksburg I paid for everything with cash - gas, motels, restaurants. I called her from Vicksburg and said I was going to mosey casually up the Mississippi for a few days.

STELLA: Wonderful! She'll never be able to find you! Not in a hundred years!

STEVE: Well, she won't really have to. She doesn't expect me now, and I'll be home in another week. I just hope she doesn't check the odometer on my car for some idiotic reason. All those extra miles would be hard to explain.

STELLA: (smiles) Steve, I'm sure that you won't have to worry about that. Now, have some more martini, and relax! (pours from the shaker)

STEVE: (sips) Mmm! Nothing like a martini. (sips again) From the hands of a pretty girl!

STELLA: (kisses him, fondles him lovingly) It's all yours! All you have to do is reach out and take it!

STEVE: If only I could! If only we could go back and do things right the first time!

STELLA: Not many people get that chance. But some do. Some do!

STEVE: Nobody I've ever heard of!

STELLA: Steve, don't you believe in wishes coming true? Being able to start over again, with a clean slate?

STEVE: Sorry, honey, that ain't the way life works!

STELLA: But it does, sweetheart! It does!

STEVE: Maybe for a couple of days, like our little get-together here. But that, too, will end. (finishes the martini) I'm getting tired. I came here to have one last, beautiful fling before I have to go back to real life.

STELLA: But you don't have to go back!

STEVE: (stands up, a little wobbly from the alcohol) C'mon, Stella, let's not waste what time we've got. Where's the bedroom?

STELLA: Not just yet, just a few minutes more! (to offstage) Danny! Danny!

DANNY: (appears from back) Yeah?

STELLA: Bring in my other present for Steve!

DANNY: Now?

STELLA: Yes, NOW. I think he's ready (looks fondly at Steve). Now, Steve, sit back down for just a minute. I have something else for you!

(Danny exits)

STEVE: (sits back down) Stella, I don't want any more presents. Just you. All I want right now is you!

STELLA: Well, this won't take but a minute, but it's the most special present of all. And then you can have all of me that you want!

(Danny enters carrying a small, unwrapped cardboard box)

DANNY: Here it is. (he hands it to Stella)

STELLA: Thank you, Danny. (to Steve) Now, my darling, sit back and relax, and put your feet up on the ottoman, (beat) and close your eyes!

STEVE: Close my eyes?

STELLA: Yes, close your eyes. This is a wonderful surprise and I really want you to be surprised.

STEVE: Oh, c'mon, Stella! Why do I have to close my eyes?

STELLA: Oh, I knew you would be stubborn! (laughs) So I'm going to blindfold you with my scarf so you can't peek! (takes her scarf, goes behind the chair and blindfolds Steve)

STEVE: Hell, this better be good! I feel silly.

STELLA: You promise not to peek, now. Promise?

STEVE: Okay, I promise. (smiles)

(Stella takes a metallic ring out of the box. It is about a quarter inch thick, an inch wide, hinged on one side, with a snap lock on the other, somewhat like half of a pair of handcuffs.)

STELLA: (slowly, solemnly) Steve, this ring is a belated substitute for the wedding ring I never got from you and the ring I never was permitted to give to you. It represents my eternal love for you. I place it on your ankle, to be with you forever as a token of my eternal love. (she snaps the ring around his ankle)

STEVE: (pulls off the blindfold) Hey, what are you doing? What's that?

STELLA: I told you what it is, Steve, my darling.

STEVE: (tries to pull the ring off) Stella, take it off. I can't wear that. Take it off!

STELLA: Steve, don't try to take it off. You can't take it off. It's on there for good. You will wear it always.

STEVE: What do you mean, for good? Take it off, I tell you! (keeps trying to get it off) I can't wear this!

STELLA: It's locked on, Steve, and there is no key..

STEVE: No key? But how am I going to get it off? (jumps up)

STELLA: That's the beauty of it, Steve, darling. You can't get it off. And neither can I. It binds us together. Forever together. Steve and Stella. Stella and Steve.

STEVE: But I can't let Maggie see this! What will I tell her? How can I explain this?

STELLA: Steve, you don't have to tell Maggie anything, because she will never see it.

STEVE: What do you mean, she'll never see it? Of course she'll see it as soon as I take my pants off.

STELLA: I assure you, Steve, Maggie will never see it. Never.

STEVE: How can you say that? Of course she'll see it!

STELLA: Believe me, she will never see it.

STEVE: I've got to get a hacksaw. Has Danny got a hacksaw?

STELLA: Calm down, Steve. Here, have some more martini. (she pours from the shaker)

STEVE: I don't want any more to drink! I just want this thing off my leg!

STELLA: You have to calm down, darling. Here, sit down and have a sip of the martini I made for you.

STEVE: (sits, takes the martini glass but does not drink) Stella, I don't understand what you're doing with this.

STELLA: Dear Steve, I know it's a surprise, but I was hoping it was a special surprise that would make you happy.

STEVE: What do you mean? An ankle ring is supposed to make me happy? That I can't get off? That my wife is going to ask me about? That makes me happy?

STELLA: Well, I guess I ...

STEVE: (interrupts, puts down the martini glass) Get this damn thing off me, Stella!

STELLA: Honey, I know it's a surprise, but...

STEVE: Surprise hell! (stands up, paces) I don't get it! What are you up to?

STELLA: Steve darling, I'm not "up to" anything except trying to do everything to make you happy and to fulfill your every desire.

STEVE: Well, start fulfilling my every desire by taking this thing off me!

STELLA: I can see that you're upset, sweetheart, so let me...

STEVE: You're damn right I'm upset! How would you feel if I put something like this on you?

STELLA: Why, I would attempt to understand your motive in doing so.

STEVE: Okay, then, what's your motive in putting this on me?

STELLA: If you will calm down and sit down, I will make an attempt to clarify the purity of my motives.

STEVE: (hesitates, sits) This better be good, Stella.

STELLA: I promise you that it will be.

STEVE: Okay, then. Out with it!

STELLA: (pause, trying to frame her words) I was so happy when you let me know that you were going to work out a way to come and see me, you just cannot imagine. At last you would be here with me, the two of us together, the way it should have been from the very beginning.

STEVE: (impatiently) What does all that have to do with this thing on my leg?

STELLA: I'm coming to that, just be patient! But then my joy and happiness was marred by the realization that after only a few short, happy hours, you would be gone. Gone for who knows how long, and I would be alone again, just like before.

STEVE: We both knew that. That was the understanding. I figured it would be worth it, to spend a couple of days together, just like old times.

STELLA: I just couldn't bear the thought of you leaving me, abandoning me again. (pause)

STEVE: So?

STELLA: (quickly) So I decided to keep you. Not let you go.

STEVE: WHAT? (jumps up, starts pacing angrily) Not let me go? (struggling for words) Why, that's... that's kidnapping!

STELLA: I don't care what you call it. I call it giving the man I love exactly what I knows he wants more than anything else: ME!

STEVE: But how can you keep me from leaving? I've got to head back home in just two days, (beat) or maybe even sooner!

STELLA: Well, that's what the ring is for, darling. It's one of those electric things that keep people from wandering off when they aren't supposed to.

STEVE: This thing (looks at it) will keep me from leaving?

STELLA: It's called something like an electric fence. Danny did it all. All around the yard here, buried just under the surface, are wires that can sense when that ring is trying to cross them. And when they sense that little ring is too close, like somebody trying to run away, they tell that ring to remind that person to go back to where he is supposed to be.

STEVE: And just how does it remind that person?

STELLA: Why, by a very short but strong jolt of electricity. Not enough to do any harm, but quite unpleasant, I understand. Just enough that nobody would want to experience it again. (beat) Darling, I don't want you ever to have to feel that unpleasant jolt, so I hope you don't go wandering around in the yard too far!

STEVE: Stella, that is absolutely wicked! I can't believe you would do such a thing to me!

STELLA: Oh, Steve, please understand my motivation! It is not to cause you pain, but to convince you to accept pleasure!

STEVE: Stella, I will not let a few seconds of electric shock stop me from leaving here when I damn well please!

STELLA: Well, there are a few other considerations that you should be aware of, my darling.

STEVE: There's more? My God, Stella, don't tell me there's more?

STELLA: Danny has disabled your car, darling, so that you have no transportation.

STEVE: What? My car? What has he done to it? (frantic)

STELLA: Oh, I don't know specifically. Danny's the mechanic, not me. He just told me that he would fix it so that it won't run.

STEVE: How could you do this!

STELLA: It's all right, Steve darling! You won't need a car any more! You'll be staying here!

STEVE: Dammit, Stella, I'll walk out of here if I have to!

STELLA: But that would be very painful, Steve dear. Danny has taken all your shoes and clothes and disposed of them, since you don't need them any more.

STEVE: Don't need them? What do you mean, I don't need them?

STELLA: You really would need shoes, I suppose, to walk twelve miles on a gravel road. So I thought it would make it easier for you to like staying here if you didn't have any, any more.

STEVE: And my clothes?

STELLA: Darling, you are now a man of leisure! You don't need suits or dress shirts or jeans any more! Your wardrobe will be nothing but silk pajamas and satin robes!

STEVE: My God, Stella! This is madness! I've got a job, responsibilities! I can't stay here. Not even if I wanted to!

STELLA: Of course you can! Easiest thing in the world! It's all arranged! All you have to do is enjoy it! And I assure you, lover, that I will make certain that you do!

(Stella tries to put her arms around Steve; he pushes her angrily away; she remains very sweet and romantic during the following)

STEVE: Cut it out, Stella! You're crazy! Maggie will have the cops looking for me soon enough!

STELLA: How are they going to find you, honey? You made very sure that nobody knows where you are! (smiles) Didn't you?

STEVE: (beat) Well...

STELLA: The last anybody heard anything from you was from Vicksburg. Right, sweetie?

STEVE: Yes, I called Maggie from Vicksburg...

STELLA: So, that's a long, long way from where you are now, lover, off in your own pleasure-palace in the wilds of Texas!

STEVE: They'll be searching, though.

STELLA: Along the Mississippi - didn't you say that's where you were going?

STEVE: Yes....

STELLA: They'll be looking north, then. But you came west! If I remember my geography rightly.

STEVE: But...

STELLA: You think that a dozen helicopters will be scouring a radius of a thousand miles to look for one little runaway husband, darling?

STEVE: Well,...

STELLA: And even if one were to fly right over here looking for your car, it's safe in the barn. They would never see it.

STEVE: Yeah, but....

STELLA: And you imagine that hundreds of police officers and sheriff's deputies will stop at every little filling station and roadside cafe within a thousand miles of Vicksburg just to show your picture, to check if anybody has seen this handsome man? (smiles)

STEVE: I guess not.

STELLA: No, of course not. Honey, I don't think Maggie loves you enough or needs you enough to make such a fuss!

STEVE: Don't go on about Maggie! You don't know a thing about it.

STELLA: Well, I do know that I went to enough trouble to make it possible for you to escape, and without a trace! That's how much I love you, Steve.

STEVE: Well, I'll get out of here somehow, Stella. What's to keep me from phoning the sheriff once your back is turned?

STELLA: Don't you recall, darling, that we don't have a phone here? Why do you think you had to write to me, instead of calling?

STEVE: That's right! Your letters! (beat) Damn, damn, damn!

STELLA: What's the matter?

STEVE: Yeah, I was very smart. I burned each one so that no one would ever find them. Except for the one with the map, and I brought that one with me.

STELLA: You see? Subconsciously you wanted to be with me!

STEVE: I wouldn't have to take my car to get out of here. I could take yours.

STELLA: The pickup? Oh, Danny keeps the keys to that, and you'd never find them. (pause) Besides, your eyes are so bad, you'd kill yourself trying to drive.

STEVE: I see just fine with my contacts.

STELLA: But honey, I've got your contacts. Danny got them out of the bathroom.

STEVE: Dammit, Stella! I need them! I can't see without them!

STELLA: I know, darling! That's why I hid them. (pause) But you're not going to need them. I'll be your eyes. And you won't need to see anything when you're in bed with me!

(pause)

STELLA: And if it should maybe get into your head to get mean, like - well, I hate to even think of it, because I know you wouldn't, but - suppose you got crazy and threatening, even though it's not like you, not my loving man, but just suppose - you just put that nasty thought right out of

your head, because Danny is very strong and very protective, and he's not too fond of you anyway.

(pause; Steve is sitting, stunned, trying to process it all)

STELLA: (more cheerful) Oh, darling, it's going to be so lovely! Days sitting on the veranda sipping tea and listening to romantic music. Evening cocktails. Your martini and my chardonnay. Then some cribbage or backgammon or gin. You like to play gin, don't you? No chess, though. I'm no good at chess. (daydreaming; she comes and sits on Steve's lap)

(Steve is still stunned, does not respond)

STELLA: And Danny is learning to play pinochle! He'll be able to join us in a pinochle game!

(Still no response from Steve)

STELLA: We'll find enough to keep us busy! (pause) And our nights! Oh, I know they will be wonderful!

(Pause)

STELLA: (stands) Well, I'm very tired. Ah, but not TOO tired! (smiles, flirty) I'm going to bed. And you're coming with me. (she pulls him up, and starts toward the door to the back; as she is almost at the door, she turns toward Steve, takes both his hands) Welcome to paradise, darling! (kisses him)

(Steve is shaken, unresponsive, as if in a trance)

(Both exit as she leads him off)

CURTAIN