

2.

A few days later. Late afternoon. James sits at the table typing on his laptop. Sarah, her laptop nearby, exercises her leg by raising and lowering it. We hear the sound of an arriving email.

JAMES: I just sent you something.

(Sarah checks her email. She laughs.)

SARAH: That's good.

(Silence. The sound of a second email.)

JAMES: I just sent you another one.

SARAH: I thought you were working.

JAMES: I am.

(She reads the second email.)

SARAH *(A tepid response)*: Very funny.

(A beat.)

(Regarding his work) This that freelance piece?

JAMES: Uh-huh.

SARAH: What are you calling it?

JAMES: Oh, I don't know, "The New Cinema of Cruelty"? Something like that. They'll probably come up with a lame title of their own.

SARAH: "Cinema of . . . Cruelty"?

JAMES: "Cruelty," yeah. How horror movies are a good barometer for the political climate of their day? *You* know, like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*: made in the fifties, remade in the seventies, and then that stinker from a few years back? They're all about xenophobia. And this *new* brand of horror is all about torture. And the one thing they all have in common, is people being punished for having sex.

SARAH: That's like every horror movie ever made.

JAMES: Exactly. Like Janet Leigh in *Psycho*: She sleeps with her lover on her lunch hour so you know she must die.

SARAH: I'll never forget that black bra.

JAMES *(A la Groucho)*: *You'll* never forget that black bra? *(A beat)* Anyway, nowadays, sexually active people in movies don't get off that easy. Now the promise of sex lures them into, not just perilous situations, but out-and-out torture chambers.

SARAH: So, what're you trying to say with this?

JAMES: Well, that . . . this trend . . . Teenagers *love* this stuff, you know; they see them two, three times. It's cathartic.

SARAH: "Cathartic"? or are they just *feeding* on images of horror?

JAMES: No, I think it helps them, I do. Look at the world these kids are growing up in! Terror, torture—this constant bombardment of graphic sadism. It's desensitizing after a while; loses its shock value.

SARAH: So, wait, you're saying it's desensitizing *and* cathartic?

JAMES: Yeah . . . I guess . . .

SARAH: Is that even possible? I mean, *can* something be desensitizing and cathartic at the same time? In order

to experience catharsis, they have to be able to *feel* something, right?

JAMES: Yeah . . .

SARAH: But if they're desensitized . . . They're numb. Right? Isn't that what you're saying?

(*A beat.*)

JAMES: Uh-huh . . .

SARAH: So how . . . ? I don't know, sweetie . . . This seems a little . . . It's good; I think it's really good. But you might want to flesh it out a little bit more, don't you think?

(*He thinks she's right—dammit. A beat.*)

What time did you say he was coming?

(*She begins the arduous process of getting up to go to the bathroom.*)

JAMES: He said four.

SARAH: I need time to clean myself up.

JAMES: You know Richard: he's never on time.

SARAH: I wish you could have put him off.

JAMES: I did; for days. He's dying to see you.

SARAH: The last thing I want to do is chat.

(*He comes to her aid.*)

(*Rejecting his help; sharp*) Stop. (*Realizing she was harsh*) Jamie. Honey. Please. You're going to have to let me do things myself.

JAMES (*Backing off; softly*): Okay.

(*He tries to hide his attention to her journey to the bathroom.*)

SARAH (*Her back to him*): Stop. Staring. It only makes it worse. JAMES (*Softly*): Sorry I'm sorry.

(*The downstairs buzzer sounds. He checks his watch.*)

That's him.

SARAH: Fuck.

JAMES: Relax. It's only Richard. (*He buzzes back, unlocks the front door, and calls downstairs*) Come on up!

(*She enters the bathroom and sees herself in the mirror.*)

SARAH: I gotta do something about this face.

JAMES: Okay, hurry, he's on his way up.

(*She closes the door behind her.*)

James prepares coffee.

Richard enters.

RICHARD (*Warmly*): Heyyyy!

JAMES: Hey.

(*Richard gives him a bear hug.*)

RICHARD: Boy am I glad to see you!

JAMES: Me, too.

RICHARD: Thank God you're home.

JAMES: I know!

RICHARD: Some nightmare, huh?

JAMES: Oh yeah.

RICHARD: Unbelievable. (*Lowers his voice*) Is she uh . . . ? (*Meaning: "Is she napping?"*)

JAMES: Bathroom.

RICHARD (*Looks toward the front door*): C'mere, sweetie, it's okay . . .