

devoted and that I happen to love. So why after twenty-three years do I write my mother's address on the back of a check, buy a bottle of Scotch with two glasses and pray to God I never get caught? Why? I'll tell you why . . . I don't know. I've never had the urge before . . . Not true. I started getting the urge about five years ago. Two years ago seriously. About a year ago I decided to give in to it, and the last six months conscientiously. I'm forty-seven years old and for the first time in my life I think about dying. The thought of death has now become a part of my life. I read the obituaries every day just for the satisfaction of not seeing my name there. I constantly think about how it's going to come and how I'm going to bear up to it. Do you know I even practice dying? I lie in bed at night trying to feel myself slipping away . . . and then I let my head drop off to the side . . . and then I let out my last gasp of air . . . then I go in and take two sleeping pills because I'm up the rest of the night scared out of my wits. But it's inevitable, it's going to happen someday, maybe sooner than I think. And I ask myself, "Have you enjoyed it, Barney? Was it a really terrific forty-seven years?" And you know what my answer is? "Well, I wouldn't say terrific. It was nice." . . . The sum total of my existence is nice. I will go to my grave having led a nice life. And I will have a nice funeral and they will bury me in my nice blue suit. And my wife will weep for me and mourn for me and in six months she will marry another nice fellow . . . maybe even give him my brown sports jacket. And I wouldn't condemn her for it. It's the natural order of things. Life must go on . . . But while it's going on, shouldn't it be better than just "nice"? Shouldn't there be something else besides opening the restaurant eleven o'clock every morning? Shouldn't there be something better than those three weeks every August in Saratoga Springs where I stand in a pool with fifty fat middle-aged people, wishing I were home opening the restaurant at eleven o'clock in the morning? Couldn't I just once give in to my fantasies, my secret dreams, experiencing things, emotions, stimulants I've never experienced before . . . I wanted to know what it was like with another woman. Would I be successful, would she like

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me, would I like the touch of her? A thousand questions that I'd never know the answer to if suddenly my name were in that obituary column tomorrow morning. So I decided to indulge myself, just once. I don't pretend I'm being fair to my wife. If she indulged herself the same way I'd never forgive her. So I started looking around . . . and, I promise you, with all intentions of having one affair, one day of pleasure and that's all. But if it was just going to be one day I wanted it to be memorable—an experience so rewarding and fulfilling that it would last me the rest of my life . . . not cheap, not sordid. And then I'd go back to opening the restaurant at eleven o'clock in the morning—but knowing that for one brief afternoon I had changed the pattern of my life, and for once I didn't just exist—I lived!

(There is a long silence)

ELAINE And that's why you wanted to get laid?

BARNEY I said I'd let you know when you can go. *Now* is a good time.

ELAINE I was going to cry in the middle, but I didn't want to wet your mother's carpeting.

BARNEY I had hoped you'd understand, but I didn't expect it.

ELAINE No, listen, it was terrifically entertaining. I really enjoyed it. There's one or two reasons, though, why I couldn't feel too sympathetic for the hero . . . In the first place, there is a very good possibility that that forty-four-year-old woman in Newark, New Jersey, was my mother. That'll give you some idea of my background. In the second place, any man who expects to have a beautiful, memorable and enchanting day of honest love with a woman he picks up in a fish restaurant is either sexually retarded or a latent idiot! And in the third place, no one gives a good crap about