



DINNER WITH FRIENDS *by Donald Margulies*

TOM:

No, Gabe, there were no other women. There were opportunities, though. I mean, when you're out of town as much as I am ... You're lonely, you're far from home, it doesn't seem like you're living in real time. I'd be in a hotel bar and strike up a conversation with a female colleague, or some divorcee with big hair, and I'd make them laugh and they'd look pretty and I'd feel competent again, you know?, and think, Gee, maybe I am still clever and attractive after all. There'd be that electricity in the air, that kind of buzz I hadn't felt since college, remember?, when a single move, any move at all, and there'd be sex? But I'd get scared and say goodnight and go back to my room and call Beth out of guilt, or hope, and get some shit about something I neglected to do or did badly. Well, by the time I met Nancy - she made me feel good from the first time I talked to her on the phone - I hadn't even laid eyes on her yet - she booked all my travel. She had this great laugh and this flirty sense of humor, and she said, "We've been talking for weeks, I want to meet you already!" And I began to think, Why the hell not? What am I saving myself for? This hypercritical woman waiting for me back home? Who looks at me with withering disappointment. All the time. This accusatory, how-could-you-be-so-thoughtless look. So, on one hand, there's this delightful woman who makes me feel worthwhile and there's this other woman, my wife, who makes me feel like shit. Who would you choose?