

Interlude  
By Anne Lower

## CHARACTERS

ELLEN  
mid to late thirties

TONY  
mid to late thirties

(Lights up. An upscale hotel room. There is a queen-sized bed, unmade, bedclothes rumpled. Nightstands on either side of the bed. A small writing table and two chairs. Dresser with a mirror, and on the other side of the room a bar. A door leads to a bathroom. There is the suggestion of a window in the downstage area.

On the dresser is a large leather knapsack; on the table a man's briefcase. A neatly folded pair of men's slacks are on the chair with a dress jacket. Lying on the floor are women's clothing, a man's undershirt, socks and shoes. A watch, change and cigarettes are on the nightstand.

ELLEN sits at the head of the bed, dressed in a man's shirt. Her knees are drawn close to her body, her arms encircling them in an embrace. Her head is bowed. TONY enters from the bathroom. He is dressed in boxers.)

TONY  
You sick or something?

ELLEN  
You want to do something later?

TONY  
Like what.

ELLEN  
Go out to dinner.

TONY  
Can't. Got a date.

(He picks up his pants and undershirt. Puts them on.)

ELLEN  
This is it, Tony. This is the last time. (He laughs, shakes his head. She straightens up.) I mean it. No more.

TONY  
I have a date tonight. That bother you?

ELLEN  
Yes.

TONY  
You knew what you were getting into. Did I lie to you?

ELLEN  
That was two months ago. Things change.

TONY  
Not for me.

(ELLEN stares at him. He shrugs, picks up his socks. ELLEN crosses to the bar and pours herself a drink.)  
TONY watches ELLEN. Sighs. Reaches over for cigarettes. Gets one out, puts it in his mouth.  
Reaches for lighter. It isn't there. Stands up. Feels in pants pocket. Goes over to jacket, looks there.)

You seen my lighter? (Silence. He looks in bed) Hell. I lose something every day. Did you hear me?

(She pulls lighter out of her pocket. Throws it, he catches. Looks at her.  
ELLEN pours another drink.  
He starts to light cigarette, then puts it and the lighter down.)

You should go easy on that stuff.

ELLEN  
I don't have any pressing engagements.

TONY  
You're jealous. (She looks at him.) You're the one with a husband.

ELLEN  
Ex-husband.

TONY  
Since when?

ELLEN  
Last week. The papers went through.

ELLEN  
(cont'd)

(TONY crosses to bar and fixes a drink)

That bother you? That I'm not married now? (Beat) You should go easy on that stuff. You wouldn't want to spoil your date.

TONY

So I've got a date tonight. Big deal. I'm not fucking her. (Beat) Not yet.

(ELLEN crosses to the dresser, grabs clothes and pack. Goes to bathroom. Slams door.)

Ah, shit.

(He crosses to bed, sits, head in hand. Beat. He starts to pull on his socks. Stops. Throws them back on floor. Crosses to bathroom, knocks on door)

Ellen. I didn't mean it. Come on. Open the door.

(ELLEN enters from bathroom. She is dressing in her clothes)

ELLEN

Don't you have a date?

(She puts pack on table. TONY crosses behind her, puts his arms around her waist)

TONY

We were having a good day.

(He kisses her neck)

ELLEN

God! I don't understand you. How can you be here with me and go out to dinner with someone else?! Do you have after dinner lined up? Dessert? (He laughs) You find this funny?

TONY

You're getting yourself worked up over nothing...

ELLEN

Nothing?

TONY

...I'm taking this girl out for drinks and dinner. I'm meeting her there. End of story.

Girl?  
ELLEN

You think I'm going out with a guy?  
TONY

How old is she?  
ELLEN

Twenty-two.  
TONY

Jesus Christ. You are something else. You meet me here two times a week. I pick up the tab. You fuck me. You leave. You take a co-ed out to dinner. Beautiful. You're not kidding. You got a great thing.  
ELLEN

You offered.  
TONY

Why don't you pay for the room?  
ELLEN

You know how much that costs?  
TONY

Yeah. You might have to cut back on your dinner dates. (Pause)  
ELLEN

Look. I told you. I go out with other women.  
TONY

Uh-Huh. (Beat) So, does the clock tick both ways?  
ELLEN

You want to go out with someone?  
TONY

You got it.  
ELLEN

Who?  
TONY

No one you know.  
ELLEN

( Short pause. TONY pours another drink.)

TONY  
You want to date? Go right ahead.

ELLEN  
I will.

TONY  
Fine.

ELLEN  
Fine.

(She crosses to pack, gets organizer out. Sits on bed, opens organizer and looks for number.)

TONY  
You're calling him now?

ELLEN  
That bother you?

( She finds number, picks up phone dials.  
TONY sits in chair, pulls on socks and shoes.  
ELLEN turns her back to him.)

Michael. Hi, this is Ellen. Hi. Fine. How are you? (laughs) Look I was calling...I was thinking about what you said the other day. Uh-huh. Yeah. And the thing is, well...I was wondering if you were doing anything tonight? Well, do you...yeah. That'd be great. Okay. No, why don't you pick me up at my place. Yeah. Eight o'clock. Okay. See you. Bye.

(She hangs up the phone. He sits in a chair and pulls on his socks and shoes.)

TONY  
He's picking you up.

ELLEN  
Mm-hmm.

(She crosses to window, looks out.)

TONY  
Huh.

(He crosses to bar and picks up his cigarette and lighter, lights cigarette. Crosses to briefcase, opens it. Puts cigarette in ashtray.)

Gets out clean dress shirt, puts it on table.  
Closes briefcase lid. Picks up shirt.  
Puts it on. Laughs.)

Who is he, one of your fag friends or something?

ELLEN

No, he's not.

TONY

Damn cleaners. Wouldn't know light starch if it bit 'em in the ass. (Picks up cigarette, takes a drag. Crosses to nightstand, gets watch, change. Puts on jacket) Shit. Why'd you have to screw this up?

ELLEN

You're the one screwing around...!!!

TONY

I told you its no big deal...!!

ELLEN

...you think I'm stupid...?

TONY

...now you, you got this guy coming over. This Michael. He's going to pick you up, right. Take you out. Then he's going to take you home.

ELLEN

Maybe not.

TONY

Maybe you'll take a cab?

ELLEN

Maybe he'll take me to a hotel.

(Beat. TONY grabs his briefcase, starts to exit)

TONY

Fuck you. (Stops.) My shirt. Where's my other shirt? (He puts case on table, crosses into bathroom)

ELLEN

I don't know.

(TONY enters from bathroom, crosses to bed, pulls back comforter, sheets.)

TONY

What you do with it? Dammit, that's my favorite shirt. (He looks at her.) Where'd you put it?

ELLEN

I don't remember.

TONY

You don't remember. (She says nothing. Beat. He looks around room, sees her bag. He crosses to it and picks it up.)

ELLEN

No...Tony...don't..

(She runs over and grabs bag from him.  
They struggle for it. He wrenches it free  
and dumps the contents on the floor.  
His shirt falls out.)

TONY

THERE! You see it!!! That's my shirt!!! (She snatches it off the floor) What are you crazy? Give me my shirt, Ellen.

ELLEN

No!

TONY

You stealing from me?!

(He crosses towards her,  
she backs away.)

ELLEN

Leave me alone!

TONY

(Grabbing her)

Give me my shirt...!

ELLEN

(struggles)

...NO!

TONY

GIVE ME MY GODDAMN SHIRT!!!!

ELLEN

I CAN'T I CAN'T IT'S ALL I HAVE!!! (Pause. He lets go of her. Steps back. She is speaking very rapidly) It's all I have left. Please. Please don't take it from me. I need to have it. I do. I know. It's crazy. I... (She quiets) I stay here. After you leave. I can't stand to go home. It's so lonely. Quiet. God it's so quiet. There's nothing to drown out the noise in my head. I don't sleep. I go crazy. So I stay here. All night. It's like you're still here. I order up dinner. Watch old movies. I put on your shirt. I can smell you in it. Your smell. It's all around me. I breathe you, Tony. I breathe you in all night. Please don't take it away from me. (She cries) I'm sorry. God, it's pathetic.

(TONY sighs, puts his arms around her, holds her close for a moment. Strokes her hair. Pulls back. Lifts her chin up. Touches her face. They kiss.)

TONY

Are you staying here tonight?

ELLEN

I don't know.

(Beat. He pulls away.)

TONY

What are we doing?

(Short pause. ELLEN hands him the shirt. She goes to bathroom, gets Kleenex. Wipes her eyes, blows her nose.)

Ellen...

ELLEN

No, you're right. What are we doing.

(She picks up things from floor, puts them back in bag. Picks up shirt. Puts it on table.)

TONY

Listen. (He gestures to room.) This. I can do this. But the other...I've been there. I can't go through that again.

ELLEN

Yeah.

TONY

I like you. I do. More than...Christ. I wish we were on the same page.

(Silence. He walks towards her, she turns away and crosses towards the window. Looks out. He crosses to table, picks up case, shirt.)

Turns away. Stops. Places shirt on table.  
Crosses towards door.)

ELLEN  
Tony?

TONY  
(He stops) What?

ELLEN  
See you Thursday.

TONY  
You sure?

ELLEN  
Yes.

TONY  
All right. Thursday.

(He turns to her, stands as if  
not knowing what to say. Pause.  
Turns away and leaves, shutting door behind him.  
ELLEN takes a deep breath. Turns around.  
Sees shirt, crosses to table.  
Touches the shirt. Pause. Picks it up,  
and holds it to her face, breathing it in as

THE LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK)