Novel and play 14

**Characterization**

**Exercises about character**

**Setting and character:**

If somebody broke into your home while you were away, chances are he could construct a good profile of who you are. Creating a setting for one of the following and furnishing the place with his character.

1. An unsuccessful painter 2. A college student about to be flunk out 3. A paranoid woman

**Denial and unconscious forces**

Patty [Mom] and Douglas [Dad] was washing dinner dishes.

Patty: Douglas, we have to talk. I got a call from Mr. Brand this afternoon.

Douglas: Who’s Mr. Brand?

Patty: Scott’s English teacher.

Douglas: Guess he wanted to tell us how great Scott’s doing, right?

Patty: Not exactly. Sit down for a minute. Mr. Brand called because he thinks Scott has been cheating.

Douglas: What? What did he say?

Patty: He thinks Scott’s grades have gone up so suddenly because he’s been cheating. He can’t account for it any other way. Of course, I asked Scott, who denied it.

Douglas: You asked Scott? You actually believe this Brand guy? No son of mine would ever cheat.

Patty: I don’t want to believe it either, but Scott’s grades do seem to have jumped suddenly. Last semester he had a C in French and now he has an A.”

Douglas: The boy’s smart, Patty. He’s finally learned the value of working hard. He’s finally listened to me.

Patty: But Douglas, if anything, Scott’s been studying less. Mr. Brand wanted to know if he was under a lot of pressure at home.

Douglas: What pressure? The kid’s a normal, happy teenager.

Patty: Maybe Scott feels so much pressure to do well that he has to resort to cheating. To please you.

Douglas: Great. Now this Brand guy is accusing me. Look, my old man put a lot of pressure on me and I turned out okay, didn’t I? I didn’t cheat.

Patty: No, but you dropped out of high school, Doug. No one’s saying this is your fault, but you do put a lot of pressure on Scott.

Douglas: You’ve been brainwashed, Patty. The kid’s finally getting it right, and you all think he’s cheating. I don’t even want to say, I’ll set him straight. My son doesn’t cheat, Patty. He’s too smart for that.

**Switching gender:**

Barker: Why do all you girls think you’re fat? Even you skinny ones?

Kathy: You really think I’m skinny?

**Subtext (psychic clothing):**

1. Dad [speaking to Mom on the phone]: As you get older, you start to wonder about things—why we’re here, or why there’s anything at all.
2. [Foster ad his former wife are cleaning out the attic of a house they once lived in together and which she is now selling.]

Foster: How can you beat it?

Former Wife: Oh, it’s fun. Once you get into it. Off with the old, on with the new. The new people seem nice. They have *little* children.”

**Humor:**

Abraham: Isaac, I have had a dream where the voice of the Lord sayeth that I must sacrifice my only son, so put your pants on.

Isaac: So what did you say? I mean when He brought this whole thing up.

Abraham: If you think this is merely a gag, think twice.

**Conflict**

Absolutely Nothing

By Dana Cavallo

THE SETTING is the living room of MEG’s small apartment with couch and arm chair. The coffee table is littered with issues of *Glamour*, *Vogue*, and *Cosmopolitan*. MEG, about 20, is sprawled on the couch blankly staring at the wall. JASON, also about 20, is in the chair reading the sports page of the newspaper. MEG fidgets. Eventually JASON looks up and glances at MEG.

MEG

What?

JASON

Nothing.

MEG

No, what?

JASON

Nothing, I said.

MEG

Well, then, why did you give me that look?

JASON

What look?

MEG

You know exactly what look I’m talking about.

JASON

Actually, Meg, I have no idea what you’re talking about.

MEG

You gave me a look, Jason, and I just want to know what your deal is.

JASON

You want to know what my deal is. I’d like to know what *your* deal is! I was sitting here, just reading the sports page, and I looked over at you. No look in particular, Meg. It was just a “Hey, I wonder how Meg’s doing over there on the couch” kind of look, and you freak out on me. So maybe I should be asking you what your deal is.

MEG

But something is bothering you, isn’t it?

JASON

Yeah, Meg. You are bothering me.

MEG

I know what this is all about. You’re angry about last night.

JASON

What about last night?

MEG

About me talking to that guy at that party.

JASON

What guy?

MEG

Oh, don’t pretend like you didn’t notice. Just that guy. Just my friend.

JASON

On. “Just your friend,” huh? So what is this friend?

MEG

His name is Bill.

JASON

Bill Anderson? Oh yeah. Good old Bill. Yep, he sure is the friend type. That’s fabulous, Bill Anderson. Just great.

MEG

Jason, he’s my friend. And we were just talking. And you don’t need to get jealous.

JASON

Uh-huh. And you were nowhere to be found for forth-five minutes while I sat there with all your friends trying to entertain myself. But, hey, you were just talking to your old buddy, Bill, so what’s the harm, right?

MEG

Right. Just like there was no harm in you throwing yourself all over Jessica Howlett.

JASON

Throwing myself at Jessica Howlett?

MEG

Well, you were with her most of the night, hanging over her.

JASON

The only reason I was even talking to Jessica Howlett is because she was practically the only person I knew there besides you. And you were making your rounds, talking to everybody but me, hanging out with your buddy, Bill Anderson, so what was I supposed to do? Stand there like a loser?

MEG

You don’t have a thing for Jessica?

JASON

Are you kidding me? Is that what this is all about? She’s one of the ditziest girls I’ve ever had the displeasure of talking to for forty-five minutes. I’m sure she’s not nearly as intriguing as Bill Anderson.

MEG

I was only talking to him to make you jealous.

JASON

Well, you succeeded.

MEG

Oh. Well, good.

(They are silent for an awkward moment. MEG picks up an issue of *Cosmo*. Jason, confused, puts down his paper, fidgets, and stares blankly at the wall.)

THE END

Doctor: I can see that. Are you just going to leave this garbage all over my front yard?

Trash collector: Look, Mac, you got a million-dollar house there, so how come you use cheap bags? It ain’t my fault it broke.

Doctor: I got it out here, didn’t I? It didn’t break on me.

Trash collector: I don’t need this, buddy.

Doctor: You get it cleaned up. Every bit of it. I’ve got to take out a gall bladder in twenty minutes, and I can’t even get my car out of the driveway.

Trash collector: So call a cab.

Doctor: You get it picked up or I’ll report you!

Trash collector:

(Throws down the remnants of the bag in his hand and signals for the truck to pull on.)

Pick it up yourself, Mac. And next time use a better bag!