

SUPERSHRINK



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BIG DOG PUBLISHING
P.O. Box 1400
TALLEVAST, FL 34270

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For all the geeks of the world.

SUPERSHRINK

FARCE. The great superhero, Nuclear Man, is slipping. He's gained weight, he keeps forgetting to bring the bad-guy net, and he's obsessed with getting new rims for the Nukemobile. Worried, Atom Boy, Nuclear Man's sidekick, convinces Elliot, a psychologist, to take on Nuclear Man as a patient. When Elliot meets Nuclear Man, it is clear that Nuclear Man is suffering from a standard midlife crisis and Elliot advises Nuclear Man to take a vacation from fighting his arch-nemesis, Cosmo. Meanwhile...Elliot's sister-in-law falls in love with Cosmo while cyber-dating but doesn't know he's a super-villain, and Atom Boy falls in love with Elliot's assistant but she only has eyes for Nuclear Man. Sick of Nuclear Man's bullying, name-calling, and wedgies, Atom Boy hatches a plot to rid himself of Nuclear Man once and for all so that he can reinvent himself as the new superhero "Awesome Man"!

Performance Time: Approximately 120 minutes.

CHARACTERS

(4 M, 3 F, 5 flexible, opt. extras)

ELLIOT: A quick-witted, smart-alecky, quirky psychiatrist and comic book geek; male.

LYN: Elliot's no-nonsense wife.

NUCLEAR MAN/EVAN: One of Elliot's patients, a middle-aged superhero who hates comic books and is suffering from a midlife crisis; handsome but chubby with a bit of a gut and has slightly stooped posture and a faded scar on his bicep; superhero costume is black, white and yellow with a nuclear symbol on the chest and includes tights and a cape; Evan wears normal clothing and glasses à la Clark Kent.

ATOM BOY: Nuclear Man's scrawny, younger sidekick who can't fly and has a crush on Trudy; wears a green, blue, and white costume with cape, tights, and an utility belt.

TRUDY: Elliot's ditsy assistant who has a crush on Nuclear Man; wears her hair in a ponytail; female.

WADE/COSMO: One of Elliot's patients, a menacing man who looks like he could blow at any second, who is really the super-villain Cosmo, Nuclear Man's arch-nemesis; male.

GLORIA: Lyn's bubbly single sister who met Cosmo while cyber-dating but doesn't know he's a super-villain.

MRS./MR. BENDIS: One of Elliot's patients who is middle-aged, jolly, and likes to tell clichéd marriage jokes; heavy set and wears a suit; as Awesome Man/Woman, wears a crudely made costume that includes a mask, cape, and tights; flexible. (Note: If played as a female, change script accordingly and change name to Mrs. Bendis and "Awesome Woman.")

ROD/RAE MILLER: TV news anchor; wears a suit; flexible.

JOHN/JUDY MORRISON: TV news anchor; wears a suit; flexible.

JOSH/JANA DINI: TV news reporter; flexible.

BYSTANDER: Flexible.

EXTRAS (opt.): As Bystanders.

NOTE: For flexible roles, change the script accordingly.

SET

Elliot's office. A typical psychiatrist's office. At SL is a desk with a trashcan next to it. Behind the desk is a window overlooking the city. The door to the office is opposite the desk. There is a sofa CS with a chair that faces it. Against the wall, there is a bookshelf filled with various medical journals and psychology textbooks. A framed psychology doctorate from UIC hangs on the wall.

Elliot's condo. Living room/dining room. At CS is a sofa with a coffee table in front of it. A chair faces the sofa. Note: This is the same set up as in Elliot's office. Behind the sofa is the dining room table with four chairs surrounding it.

Gloria's condo. Kitchen/dining room. The room is tackily decorated and there is a kitchen table with chairs.

Motel room: The cramped room is tackily decorated and there is one small bed and a chair.

TV news studio: There is anchor desk and two chairs.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Prologue

ACT I

Scene 1: Elliot's office.

Scene 2: Elliot's condo.

Scene 3: Elliot's office.

Scene 4: Elliot's condo.

Scene 5: Elliot's office.

Intermission

ACT II

Scene 1: Gloria's condo, Florida.

Scene 2: Motel room, Florida.

Scene 3: Motel room, Florida.

Scene 4: Elliot's condo.

Scene 5: Elliot's office.

Epilogue

PROPS

Microphone	Briefcase, for Elliot
Book entitled "1,001 Useful Proverbs for Proving Others Wrong"	2 Cups of coffee
Comic book (DC Comics' "Identity Crisis")	Stack of pictures of Wade/Cosmo
Twinkie	Stack of documents
Forks	Cell phone, for Gloria
Plates	Suitcase
Sodas	Several identical costumes, for Nuclear Man
Cordless phone	Rope
Pen	2 Wallets
Notepad	Money
Watch, for Elliot	Book, "The Watchmen" by Alan Moore
Sunglasses, for Mrs./Mr. Bendis	Pajamas with same color scheme as costume, for Nuclear Man
Brown paper lunch bag with Elliot's name on it	Duct tape
Napkin	Fake bomb detonator
Spork	Small box
Small container filled with pasta	Small white crystal
Graphic novel ("Daredevil" by Frank Miller)	Comic book, "Marvel Civil War"
	Stack of papers

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Doorbell
Table rigged to break after karate chop
Evening news music

**"I LITERALLY TRIED TO CARRY
THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD
ON MY SHOULDERS ONCE,
AND IT JUST WASN'T HAPPENING.
I'M STRONG,
BUT COME ON...
IT'S THE WORLD"**

—NUCLEAR MAN

PROLOGUE

(AT RISE: Lights fade in on a television/projector screen. A video of television static plays for a brief moment. The static changes to various television stations: a cooking show, a cartoon, a home shopping channel, a talk show. Finally, the channel-flipping stops on the evening news. Rod Miller, a news anchor in a suit, is in the middle of a story. He sits at a standard anchor desk next to Judy Morrison, his fellow anchor. A title card is superimposed at the bottom of the screen in bold letters. It reads, ["1995"].) [Or insert another year.]

ROD: The man tried reasoning with the typhoon, and met his inevitable demise. Judy?

JUDY: Thanks, Rod. It's a bird. It's a plane. It's a...real-life superhero? That's right. All throughout the day, reports around the city have all pointed to something out of this world—a masked man in a cape, who apparently has been flying through the [Chicago] skies. *[Or another large city.] (A picture graphic appears on the screen. It's a blurry photo from street level of a flying superhero soaring next to the tall landscapes of [Chicago].)* Currently, this is the only known photograph of this supposed "masked vigilante" to have been taken. The police have begun investigating the legitimacy of the picture, but many are already beginning to believe the line between comic book fantasy and reality is fading rapidly, while others claim the obscured figure is nothing more than a morbidly obese pigeon. Our field reporter Josh Dini has more on the story. Josh?

(We cut to Josh Dini reporting live on the streets of the city. He is holding a microphone with a [Channel 3] News cover on it. Pedestrians behind Josh make goofy faces for the camera. [Or insert the name of another TV station].)

JOSH: *(To camera.)* Thanks, Judy. We've seen crime fighters with super-human capabilities before, but never quite like this. Today, the public has been experiencing utter pandemonium over whether or not this "flying man" is the real deal. As of this afternoon, three crimes—including a bank robbery—have already been inexplicably stopped. The chief of police has no comment on whether or not the incidents have any connection, but it's been speculated that the

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hero is, indeed, the man in the photograph. The significance of this event is monumental, to say the least.

(Josh turns around and sees the Pedestrians making faces at the camera. Annoyed, he turns back around to continue his report. We cut back to the studio with Rod and Judy.)

JUDY: That's just amazing. It's been reported that the captured bank robbers were delivered to the police station steps. One witness goes as far as saying it happened as fast as "the blink of an eye." Could this mean our "superhero" is capable of rapid speeds, Josh?

(Cut back to Josh on the street. He's distracted by the Pedestrians behind him. He's getting more annoyed. He tries to ignore the Pedestrians and address Judy's question.)

JOSH: That's, uh? That's what many are saying to have happened, yes, although this has not been confirmed. *(To Pedestrians.)* Okay, guys. Come on. Trying to do a report here. Let's try and be mature about this. All right?

(Josh turns back to the camera while the Pedestrians continue to goof off. Josh is getting angrier.)

JUDY: Now, Josh, is there anything else you can tell us? Have any of the criminals given any descriptions as to what their assailant looked like?

(Back to Josh. He's turned around to face the Pedestrians.)

JOSH: *(To Pedestrians, angry.)* Okay, we get it! Your 15 minutes are up! *(Mocking.)* "Oh, hey, let's go make faces behind the reporter. We'll get to be on TV. All our stupid friends will see us!" *(Sarcastic.)* Yeah, that's very original, guys! Keep up the good work!

(Back to the studio. Judy tries to get Josh to focus on his report.)

JUDY: Josh? Please, can you tell us anything, Josh?

(Josh is chasing the Pedestrians down the street. He's holding his microphone like a club. The camera keeps up with him.)

JOSH: *(To Pedestrians, shouts.)* This is my life, okay?! This is how I pay the bills! I'm gonna beat you! I'm gonna beat you guys with my microphone! Come here!

(Back to the studio. Judy and Rod are both in shock. They don't know what to say.)

JUDY: *(Awkward.)* Okay. Thanks, Josh...

ROD: *(Upbeat.)* Really makes you think, huh, Judy?

JUDY: Absolutely, Rod. I've never seen a man use a microphone as a club before. The mayor will be holding a press conference on this super development at city hall tonight at seven. *(Screen changes to static again. After a brief moment, the picture comes back. Time has passed. We see Judy and Rod again but they're dressed in different clothes. A titled card at the bottom of the screen reads, "2 Days Later...".)* The secret is officially out. The masked stranger who has won over the city has a name, and we have footage. We go to Josh Dini, who has been granted an exclusive interview. Josh?

(We cut to Josh, who now has a black eye. Josh is standing next to Nuclear Man, the masked hero from the photo. He strikes a classic superhero pose for the camera.)

JOSH: *(To camera, into mic.)* Thanks, Judy. I'm standing here with the man everybody has been talking about...and he has a name. He calls himself "Nuclear Man," and he is, indeed, the real deal. Nuclear Man, what can you tell us about yourself? How did this all begin? What do you plan to do for this city? Can we confirm you have actual superpowers?

NUCLEAR MAN: *(Laughs.)* One question at a time, my gentle journalist. And, yes, I assure you, I have genuine superpowers.

JOSH: Very well. How did you acquire these powers? Where and when did it all begin?

NUCLEAR MAN: I can't very well share that information with you, chum. I would be giving away my precious origin story.

JOSH: I'm sorry, your *origin story*?

NUCLEAR MAN: The tale of how I became Nuclear Man—from my humble beginnings...to my meteoric rise.

JOSH: So you were human?

NUCLEAR MAN: *Were* human? No. I'm still flesh and blood. As far as I'm concerned, I'm still a human being. I'm just a vastly superior being, that's all.

JOSH: Right. Speaking of which, what powers do you possess? There have been some pretty strong arguments regarding what you're capable of.

NUCLEAR MAN: *(Thinking.)* Let's see here...super-human strength, super-human speeds, immunity to radioactive materials as well as invincibility to bullets and any other firearms.

JOSH: Wow. Just like Superman, huh?

NUCLEAR MAN: *(Annoyed.)* No. Not like Superman.

JOSH: Fair enough. How do you plan to cooperate with the police? They're saying your crime-fighting days will be put to an end if you don't start an alliance.

NUCLEAR MAN: I welcome the idea of an alliance. I'm only here to help the people of this fine city that I've grown to love. I only wish to serve as your designated defender. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have crime to fight.

JOSH: Thank you for your time, Nuclear Man!

(Nuclear Man exits the frame. Josh watches him exit.)

NUCLEAR MAN: *(Offstage, shouts.)* Away I go!

(Josh looks up to the sky and watches Nuclear Man fly away offstage.)

JOSH: *(To camera, smiles.)* There you have it. Hah! "Designated defender." I like that!

(Television turns back to static. After another brief moment, we're back to the news with Judy and Rod. More time has passed. A title card at the bottom of the screen reads ["1996"].)

JUDY: This just in. An attack is now in progress in the middle of the city. The cause of this is uncertain, but the perpetrator appears to be a masked stranger who calls himself "Cosmo." He claims to be

Nuclear Man's one true nemesis. We go to Josh Dini on the scene. Josh?

(Cut to Josh, who addresses the camera in a cramped dark space. The sounds of people screaming and explosions are heard outside. Josh appears frightened. A small flashlight shines on his face.)

JOSH: *(Whispers.)* This is Josh Dini, reporting to you live. The scene outside is absolute carnage. I have never seen so much chaos and destruction caused by one person in all my years in the field, so I tripped the camera guy and hopped into this dumpster. I figured if I sacrificed him, it would buy enough time for me to save myself.

(Back to Judy and Rod in the studio.)

JUDY: It sounds terrible, Josh, just terrible. What can you tell us about this so-called *nemesis*?

(Back to Josh in the dumpster.)

JOSH: Well, I can tell you he wears a costume, much like Nuclear Man, and that he's very mean—obviously—and he's challenging Nuclear Man to a duel. For what reasons, we do not know as of yet.

(Back to Judy and Rod.)

JUDY: I see. Do you have confirmation that he, too, is superhuman?

(Back to Josh in the dumpster.)

JOSH: No, no confirmation as of yet. It seems the only advantage Cosmo has is a vast array of advanced gadgets and weaponry. One could speculate that the man behind the mask has some sort of training in the field of applied sciences or technology, but this is all hearsay. I don't know where he's come from or why he wants Nuclear Man dead, but one thing is for sure...he's definitely a villain to this city. *(Dumpster lid opens. Light from outside shines onto Josh. He looks up in fear, shouts.)* Oh, my! Please, no!

(Back to Judy and Rod in the studio.)

JUDY: *(Urgent.)* Josh? What's happening? What do you see?

(Back to Josh in the dumpster.)

JOSH: *(Frightened.)* I see our camera guy! He looks very angry! Presumably because of the whole sacrifice thing! *(A hand pops into the dumpster and grabs Josh by the collar. Shouts.)* Oh, please! Help me! No!

(Camera shakes and cuts out to static. Back to Judy and Rod in the studio.)

JUDY: Our hearts go out to our field reporter, Josh Dini. More on this new villain tonight at ten.

(Television turns back to static. After another brief moment, we're back to the news with Judy and Rod. More time has passed. A title card at the bottom of the screen reads ["1997"].)

ROD: With a little luck and a little persistence, the grizzly bear won the pie-eating contest. Speaking of persistence, it seems our beloved Nuclear Man has a new partner, whether he likes it or not. Judy?

JUDY: Thanks, Rod. You might've seen the Designated Defender flying high above your head on any given day. But is he working with a new sidekick? According to some surfaced photographs, he is. *(Cut to a photo of Nuclear Man flying in the sky. He carries Atom Boy by the shoulders. Atom Boy is a young masked boy and is wearing a matching cape and uniform.)* According to sources, the youth calls himself "Atom Boy," and he wants to be Nuclear Man's sidekick. Despite the hero's protests, this young man won't take no for an answer. In the photo, we see Nuclear Man carrying Atom Boy by his shoulders. This raises the question of whether or not Atom Boy possesses the ability to fly, or *any* abilities for that matter. One thing is for certain...the image is very awkward. *(Back to Judy and Rod in the studio.)* According to the same source, Nuclear Man has been quoted as saying he could "use a little help" with his crime-fighting war waged against his archrival, Cosmo. The question is...does this Atom Boy have what it takes? Does this mean

Nuclear Man is already considering a worthy successor? Is Cosmo starting to get the best of him? More on this story tonight at ten.

ROD: And in other news, the search for our missing field reporter Josh Dini is still ongoing. He was last seen in a dumpster just one year ago with our camera guy— *(Television turns back to static. After another brief moment, we're back to the news with Judy and Rod. More time has passed. Rod and Judy have both aged. A title card at the bottom of the screen reads "Present Day.")* And we're happy to say nobody who was considered important was harmed in the process. Judy?

JUDY: Thanks, Rod. It's been over 15 years since the city was introduced to the world's only true superhero, Nuclear Man. *(Cut to a photograph of Nuclear Man standing in a classic superhero pose, present day. He has aged a bit. He has a bit of a gut and his posture is slightly slumped.)* And since [1995], the citizens of [Chicago] have walked the streets at ease, despite failed attempts by quote-unquote super-villain, Cosmo... *(Picture changes to a photograph of Cosmo, present day. He has a diabolical expression on his face. He too has aged a bit.)* ...who has tried to spread terror and fear to the public on numerous occasions. However, a new question arises: Does the city really need its beloved heroes and its hated villain anymore? *(Back to Judy in the studio.)* A recent poll has shown over 82 percent of voters have decided Nuclear Man's tenure as the Designated Defender has taken its toll. This is due to an overwhelming increase in property damage caused by the many feuds between Nuclear Man and Cosmo, totaling over 50 million dollars since [1996]. This has caused an increase in taxes over the years to support public works and cover the costs of construction. Our own Josh Dini walked the streets this afternoon to ask bystanders if all the destruction is worth it. Josh?

(Cut to Josh out on the streets. He is standing before the camera holding a microphone and looking nervous. He has aged quite a bit.)

JOSH: *(To Camera Operator, sheepishly.)* Okay, we're rolling? All right. If you could just get my top half, that would be great. I mean, if that's okay with you. I didn't mean to stir your pot or anything, just a simple request, if that's all right. Thank you. Sorry. Please don't hurt me. Are we cool?

(Back to Judy and Rod in the studio.)

JUDY: Josh? Hello? Josh?

(Back to Josh on the streets.)

JOSH: *(To Camera Operator.)* Okay, man, you're the boss, not me. *(To camera in reporter voice.)* Yes, hello, Judy. I'm out here today to ask if anyone still feels like this never-ending battle between good and evil is still of any interest to the city. As the poll will tell you, many believe that the ongoing struggles Nuclear Man, Atom Boy, and Cosmo have been wrapped up in merely serve as their own selfish match of wits and brawn and nothing more. Perhaps the most recent incident involving the three serves as the last testament...as it did not directly affect the city or the people in any way whatsoever. However, in the process, Nuclear Man did manage to take down several streetlights, causing a two-hour delay in traffic. This leaves the public asking, "Why must we keep paying to support a 15-year fistfight?" *(A Bystander walks by and Josh takes notice. Josh begins to follow the Bystander down the street, holding the microphone out. Camera follows. To Bystander.)* Excuse me, sir! Sir! *(Bystander stops to address Josh.)* Surely you have an opinion of this whole Nuclear Man-slash-Cosmo feud. Do you think it's gone on long enough?

BYSTANDER: Absolutely. They've been at odds for so long, and it's always the same story. Cosmo calls Nuclear Man out to play—usually with a few explosive gadgets. Nuclear Man and Atom Boy show up in their ridiculous car. The two fight and exchange some lame quips while Atom Boy pretends he serves a function to the equation. It's beyond played out.

JOSH: Well put, sir. How would you feel if Nuclear Man, Atom Boy, and Cosmo were to all disappear in the near future?

BYSTANDER: I would feel about the same as I do everyday.

JOSH: You can't deny it, though. Nuclear Man has helped a lot of people over the years.

BYSTANDER: Yeah, well, the way I see it, he's also caused a lot of trouble, too. If he never existed, I don't think Cosmo would, either. So it's a Catch-22. One thing is for certain, though...

JOSH: What's that?

BYSTANDER: They're not getting any younger. Nuclear Man is getting old and so is Cosmo. They aren't the same guys they used to be, and I bet they can't even remember what they're fighting about anymore. If you ask me, this business between them has gone on long enough. *(Camera zooms in on the Bystander's face. Pause. His tone becomes slightly more serious.)* Pretty soon the public will lose all interest and faith in Nuclear Man, if they haven't already.

JOSH: Thank you for your time, sir.

BYSTANDER: Don't mention it. What time will this be airing so I can tell my wife to set the DVR?

JOSH: Oh, we're reporting live right now, actually.

BYSTANDER: Yeah, but...okay, but that doesn't answer my question.

(Back to Judy and Rod in the studio.)

JUDY: Thanks, Josh.

ROD: Coming up next...are killer bees bad for your health? A recent development has shown their level of danger has increased by... *(Measures with two hands)* ...this much percent.

(Television shuts off. The screen is completely black. Screen is taken away from the stage after a brief moment. Blackout.)

ACT I **SCENE I**

(AT RISE: A typical psychiatrist's office. A sofa lies in the center of the room, and a chair faces it. A bookshelf is in the background against the wall filled with various medical journals and psychology textbooks. Next to it is a Psychology doctorate from UIC. A desk is SL, with a window overlooking the city behind it. The door to the office is opposite the desk, across the room. Elliot, our main character, sits on the chair and faces Wade, who is lying on the sofa. Wade is a menacing man who looks like he could blow at any second. Elliot has a calm but intimidating presence.)

ELLIOT: So, Wade...last week we were discussing your wife, Sally.

You mentioned she was *pressuring* you into quitting your job?

WADE: That's right, Doc.

ELLIOT: Why do you suppose she would want that?

WADE: (*Shrugs.*) I'm not sure. I don't think she approves of what I do.

ELLIOT: She doesn't approve of insurance claims?

WADE: (*Hesitant.*) No. Apparently not.

ELLIOT: Well, do you enjoy what you do, Wade?

WADE: Most of the time. The job can get pretty stressful, though, I suppose.

ELLIOT: Well, that's common. Do you think she might want you to quit because you're bringing that stress home with you?

WADE: No, I don't think that's it. She makes me feel stressed, so it's as if the stress is waiting for me at home.

ELLIOT: What do you mean?

WADE: Well...she's a nagger. She nags at me constantly. Like everything I'm doing is wrong because it goes against what she's doing.

ELLIOT: (*Puzzled.*) I don't follow. Goes against what she's doing?

WADE: Never mind.

ELLIOT: No, please...continue. I think this is good.

WADE: (*Sighs.*) It's always been this way, you see. We've always been at odds with each other, but that's what I felt kept us together in the first place. I don't feel that way anymore. I don't really know how I feel, to be honest.

ELLIOT: Like there's no joy in the relationship anymore?

WADE: I guess you could say that.

ELLIOT: Well, I think this is all very good, Wade. I mean, not for your relationship, but that you're honest enough to tell me how bad things are going. (*Guilty.*) Sorry.

WADE: It's all right. To tell you the truth, I'm not sure if I want to keep doing this. I've been looking for reasons to stay with her, and there are fewer and fewer every day. But what can I tell you? A very big part of me wants this to work. Our dynamic...it goes with us and against us.

ELLIOT: I see. Well, I think you need to bring Sally here.

WADE: (*Upset.*) Bring Sally here? Why? So she can turn you against me?

ELLIOT: I don't know what makes you think that, Wade. I'm a psychiatrist. I don't take sides. I'm not placing bets. This isn't a boxing match.

WADE: You bring her here, and it will be. I've told you that she hits me?

ELLIOT: Many times before. (*Calm.*) Okay, we can rule group counseling out.

WADE: Yeah. Nice try, though. What else you got?

ELLIOT: (*Thinks.*) Well, I'll be honest with you, Wade. Can I be honest with you?

WADE: Sure. Nothing's stopped you before.

ELLIOT: True. But you might not like what I have to say.

WADE: I'll manage. Beneath this boyish figure is a very tough man.

ELLIOT: Very well. I think your problem is quite common in any marriage. There comes a point—and it could be anywhere from five years to 30—when the both of you simply become bored. It happens.

WADE: (*Unimpressed.*) That's the shocking news? (*Sarcastic.*) Hallelujah, I'm cured!

ELLIOT: Let me finish. The defining moment of a relationship—when it's in the state yours is in—can be typically reached when you take what most folks refer to as a trial separation.

(*Wade sits up on the sofa.*)

WADE: (*Shocked.*) A separation?

ELLIOT: Trial separation. It's not as extreme as it sounds. It's just a little test. As a matter of fact, that's what they should call it...a little *test* separation.

WADE: I don't know, Doc.

ELLIOT: It's just a short break. It can be typically anywhere from a few weeks to a few months, maybe a year or so. And we've been over this before. Call me Elliot.

WADE: Absolutely not. And did you just say *a year*?

ELLIOT: Or so, yes. It varies. Calm down. Let me ask you a question...do you like your job?

WADE: Yes.

ELLIOT: Do you love Sally?

WADE: (*Hesitant.*) Yes.

ELLIOT: Well, it's high time you convince yourself you can't live without her. You do this by spending time away from her for a given period of time.

WADE: Yes, but you see—

ELLIOT: You move out of the house for a little while, and you'll both have time to think. Besides, have you ever heard the phrase, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder"?

WADE: Have you ever heard the phrase, "Home is where the heart is"? You're asking me to leave my home and my wife to go on a little separation? It's ridiculous!

ELLIOT: (*Thinks.*) Okay, but have you ever heard the phrase, "A smooth sea never made a skillful mariner"?

WADE: I don't know what that means or how it relates to this.

ELLIOT: It means things will get tough before they get better.

WADE: Have you ever taken a trial separation to strengthen your marriage?

ELLIOT: No, I haven't.

WADE: Ah, but you told me just a moment ago that we all get bored at some point. Have you ever heard the phrase, "The pot calls the kettle black"?

(*Elliot thinks. Pause. He quickly gets up out of his seat and walks over to his bookcase.*)

ELLIOT: (*Tough.*) I have a proverb book somewhere around here. (*Looking for book.*) Hold on.

(Elliot starts sorting through the books on his shelf. His back is turned to Wade. Wade looks impatient and angry.)

WADE: That's not necessary, Doc.

ELLIOT: *(Turns to Wade.)* You hold on just a minute! I'll find one in here that proves you wrong! *(Elliot turns back to the bookshelf, frantically searching for the book. Wade sighs, gets up out of his seat, heads for the door, and exits.)* Ah-ha! *(Elliot pulls a book off his shelf entitled, "1,001 Useful Proverbs for Proving Others Wrong." With his face buried in the book, he flips through the pages in a hurry.)* Let's see, here... *(Flipping through.)* Ah! *(Reads from book.)* "Lightning never strikes twice in the same place"! So, you see, Wade... *(Looks up from the book toward the sofa and sees that Wade is no longer in the room. Puzzled.)* Wade? *(To himself.)* Where'd he...? *(Goes to the door and opens it up. He pops his head out and screams toward the offstage area.)* I'm charging you for the full hour! Yeah, you think about that! *(Turns around and heads back into his office. He slams the door behind him, and it hits a young woman in the doorway. Turns around in horror and sees Trudy, his ditsy assistant, gripping her nose in pain.)* Whoa, Trudy! Are you all right? Do you need my assistance?

TRUDY: *(Holding nose.)* I'm fine. And, besides, what're you going to do? Counsel me? Help me overcome my fear of bosses slamming doors in my face?

ELLIOT: I'm sorry about that.

TRUDY: It's fine, Elliot.

ELLIOT: So glad to hear that. Please shut my door.

(Trudy lets go of her aching nose and closes the door behind her. Stressed, Elliot makes his way to his desk, sits down, and leans back in his chair.)

TRUDY: What was all that yelling about?

ELLIOT: I can't divulge that information, Trudy. You know that. There's a thing called doctor-patient confidentiality, and if that isn't honored, then the whole system is— *(Annoyed, Trudy turns around and heads for the door.)* Okay, okay! Come back. I'll tell you...but only because I hit your face with my door. *(Trudy turns around and smiles. She makes her way to the sofa and sits in a relaxed pose.)* Wade was going on about his wife again. He's trying to convince himself there's nothing wrong with his obviously impaired relationship. So I merely suggested that he and Sally take a trial separation.

TRUDY: He didn't respond well to that, did he?

ELLIOT: No, he did not.

TRUDY: Did you tell him it was more like a little *test* separation?

ELLIOT: (*Defensive.*) Yes, I did, and it still didn't get through to him!

(Elliot begins flipping through a comic book resting on his desk. It's an issue of DC Comics' "Identity Crisis.")

TRUDY: Well, don't be so hard on yourself. Wade is stubborn.

ELLIOT: (*Flipping through comic.*) You're telling me. The man is diabolical.

TRUDY: (*Notices comic.*) What's that you're reading, Elliot? Another piece of your adolescence coming back to haunt you?

ELLIOT: (*Cocky.*) This is DC's "Identity Crisis" and I'll have you know I started reading these things in college. They got me through some tough times when I was just a wee psych major at UIC.

TRUDY: Ah, so this was around the time the real superhero showed up.

(Elliot opens a drawer from his desk and pulls out a Twinkie. He begins to unwrap it.)

ELLIOT: Incidentally, yes. I wanted to know everything I could about the protector of our city, so pardon me for taking a little interest in our health and safety.

TRUDY: Says the man about to eat a yellow sponge of sugar.

(Elliot takes a bite of the Twinkie.)

ELLIOT: (*Mouth full.*) Don't judge me. I'm having a tough day, okay?

TRUDY: Seriously, Elliot, do you have any idea how many calories and grams of sugar are in those things? Let me see the package.

(Trudy grabs the Twinkie wrapper and examines it.)

ELLIOT: Great, throw that out when you're done with it. You'll save me the effort.

TRUDY: (*Reads nutritional facts.*) Look at this. Nineteen grams of sugar. (*Shocked.*) One-hundred and fifty calories!

ELLIOT: So what?

TRUDY: So what? (*Points to Twinkie.*) That thing is a death trap disguised as a delicious dessert.

ELLIOT: But it's got cream filling. It's magnificent. And, besides, I'm getting really sick of you high-and-mighty health freaks.

TRUDY: Oh, are you?

ELLIOT: Yes, I am.

TRUDY: Oh, God forbid we lead happy, productive lives.

ELLIOT: Seemingly. On the surface, you appear disciplined and self-aware. In fact, so self-aware that you exhibit the traits of a subject with narcissistic personality disorder.

TRUDY: Excuse me?

ELLIOT: The constant need for admiration with a lack of empathy for everyone else. And then, of course, there's the manipulation of others in the hopes that they'll see you how you want them to see you. I.E. an extremely athletic and conscious lifestyle.

TRUDY: Don't do that, okay?

ELLIOT: Do what?

TRUDY: You know exactly what. Don't analyze me, all right? I'm not one of your patients.

ELLIOT: You could be, but I'd have to charge you. Tell me about your mother...

TRUDY: Listen, just cut back on the sweets. You'll thank me someday.

ELLIOT: Oh, will I? Will I shed those excess pounds? Listen, Trudy, you're pointing fingers because the nutritional facts were laid out in front of you. If there was a little chart that hung over my head and told you how many calories I burn walking up the stairs to my condo every day, you'd see that I'm breaking even with this tasty little snack, which by the way, I deserve. So I'm going to enjoy it. Excuse me...

(Elliot is about to finish his Twinkie. It's inches away from his mouth.)

TRUDY: (*Assertive, mother-like.*) Don't do it. (*With a blank expression, Elliot brings the Twinkie closer to his mouth.*) Elliot? What did I say?

(Elliot slowly brings the Twinkie closer. He opens his mouth wide. Just before he can bite it, Trudy grabs the Twinkie and throws it out the window behind Elliot's desk.)

ELLIOT: *(Angry.)* Hey!

TRUDY: You left me no choice!

ELLIOT: Jump down there and get it!

TRUDY: It's for your own good!

ELLIOT: Bad move, Trudy. I could fire you for that! You better start looking for a receptionist gig somewhere else.

TRUDY: You're going to fire me for throwing your Twinkie out the window?

ELLIOT: Yeah, that's right! I got you for several charges! Number one...stealing company property!

TRUDY: Oh, so it was company property now?

ELLIOT: Number two...littering! We're on the 27th floor. You could've killed somebody! Actually, you better check, because if those things are dropped from a high enough altitude they could really do some damage. You might have blood on your hands, Trudy. Spongy, delicious blood on your hands!

TRUDY: I'm sure the good people down below will live.

ELLIOT: Doesn't matter. I really wanted that, Trudy. That's one-half of a Twinkie I will never get back. *(Twinkie flies back into the office from outside the window and hits Elliot in the back of the head. Puzzled, shocked.)* Hey! *(Turns around and sees the Twinkie lying on his office floor. Puzzled, Trudy examines it. She looks out the window.)* You think I'll get back that Coke I spilt earlier, too?

TRUDY: *(Looking out window.)* Our designated defender is outside your window.

(Elliot looks out the window and sees what Trudy sees. In awe, they both calmly stare.)

ELLIOT: Oh, wow. It's Nuclear Man.

TRUDY: Yup.

ELLIOT: Look at him fly. Such grace. Have you ever seen him before?

TRUDY: Just on TV.

ELLIOT: Where's he going?

TRUDY: Looks like he's perching himself up on one of the Marina Towers...wow. Is it just me, or is he looking a bit on the, uh, flabby side?

ELLIOT: (*Disappointed.*) Yeah. I wonder why. Flying seems like it would be great exercise. If I could fly, I'd be flying constantly...unless a pigeon whacked me in the face or something, then I'd take a little break. (*To Trudy.*) You ever see that photo of Fabio on the rollercoaster?

TRUDY: (*Staring out window, points.*) Look, there's his sidekick.

ELLIOT: Yep. Atom Boy.

TRUDY: Looks like he had to take the elevator to meet Nuclear Man on the roof.

ELLIOT: Yeah, Atom Boy can't fly. Actually, I'm not too keen on what Atom Boy can do.

TRUDY: (*Surprised.*) He sees us! Look! He's looking right at us! He's waving!

ELLIOT: Well, let's not make it awkward. Wave back.

(Trudy and Elliot grin stupidly and wave to Atom Boy.)

TRUDY: (*Waving.*) That's amazing.

ELLIOT: (*Waving.*) It certainly is. (*To Trudy, serious.*) By the way, you owe me half a Twinkie. I'm not eating that one anymore, on account that it's been touched by Nuclear Man. I will preserve it forever.

TRUDY: (*Stops waving. To Elliot.*) Are you serious?

ELLIOT: Deadly serious. (*Trudy looks outside the window. She continues to wave at Atom Boy and smiles.*) I'll expect half a Twinkie on my desk within the next—

TRUDY: Oh, my gosh! They're coming this way!

(Elliot focuses his attention outside the window.)

ELLIOT: (*Disgusted.*) They never did figure out a way to make flying together look good. The whole carrying Atom Boy by the shoulders thing is just awkward. It's a shame, really.

TRUDY: (*Freaking out.*) I can't believe this! They are heading in our direction!

ELLIOT: Yeah, why are they doing that?

TRUDY: I don't know, and I don't care! *(To Nuclear Man and Atom Boy offstage, shouts.)* Hello, boys! What a fantastic entrance, Nuclear Man!

(Trudy and Elliot back away from the window. Nuclear Man makes his way through the window. He's a bit chubby, but he's handsome in his own right. Trudy and Elliot stare in awe as he strikes a classic superhero pose.)

NUCLEAR MAN: Gentleman, and lady, your designated defender has arrived!

ATOM BOY: *(Offstage.)* And his loyal companion... *(Atom Boy trips over the windowsill and falls into the office. He gets up off the ground and dusts his tights and cape off. He is a scrawny kid and is wearing a matching green, blue, and white costume. Elliot and Trudy watch in awe as he strikes his classic superhero pose next to Nuclear Man.)* ...Atom Boy.

TRUDY: *(Impressed.)* Oh, wow. This is too much. I can't believe you're actually here!

NUCLEAR MAN: Yes, well, we try to make public appearances as much as possible.

ATOM BOY: It's in our binding contract with the city.

NUCLEAR MAN: *(Assertive.)* Yeah? What else did the contract say?

ATOM BOY: *(Ashamed.)* It says we shouldn't acknowledge it vocally.

NUCLEAR MAN: That's right. Let's keep it that way.

ELLIOT: I am at a loss for words. This is incredible. First of all, let me just say, I love what you guys are doing. Keep it up. And, also, do you know, off the top of your head, how many calories you burn when flying?

(Confused, Nuclear Man and Atom Boy exchange looks for a brief moment.)

NUCLEAR MAN: *(Shrugs.)* Probably enough to burn the fat that was in that Twinkie you threw out the window.

ELLIOT: *(Satisfied.)* Well, that's just...what are the odds of you saying that to me?

TRUDY: *(To Nuclear Man.)* This is unbelievable. It's not often we get superheroes here at the therapist's office. Except of course Mr. Somersby, who claimed he could transcend space and time with his rapid sonic speeds.

ELLIOT: *(Laughs.)* I shouldn't laugh. The man was very delusional.

NUCLEAR MAN: (*Looking around.*) A shrink's office, huh? Cute. I like the décor. It's everything I'd expect in a room designed to calm you down.

TRUDY: (*Laughs.*) That's great. Just great, Nuclear Man. A room to calm you down. So, to what do we owe this monumental occasion?

NUCLEAR MAN: (*Flirtatious.*) Well, it's funny you ask that, Miss...

TRUDY: Trudy.

NUCLEAR MAN: Trudy.

(Nuclear Man slowly approaches Trudy. She blushes and appears incredibly excited. You can tell she really is attracted to Nuclear Man.)

TRUDY: Why is it funny I ask, Nuclear Man?

NUCLEAR MAN: Well, Trudy... (*Casual tone.*) Since my sidekick, Atom Boy, is weak and spineless, he wanted me to carry him over here and ask you out for him.

ATOM BOY: (*Embarrassed.*) Nuclear Man, please.

NUCLEAR MAN: What? What did I say? I only said what you wanted me to say. Don't wuss out on me.

ATOM BOY: I'm not being a wuss.

NUCLEAR MAN: You are, too, being a wuss. Come here.

(Nuclear Man grabs Atom Boy and puts him in a headlock. Atom Boy struggles to push him off.)

ATOM BOY: Stop it!

NUCLEAR MAN: What?! What?! I'm sorry, I can't understand you! I'm not fluent in wuss!

(Nuclear Man gives Atom Boy a noogie. Atom Boy screams like a child.)

ATOM BOY: You're embarrassing me in front of Trudy! (*Nuclear Man lets go of Atom Boy. Atom Boy straightens his hair and gives Trudy a cool smile. To Trudy.*) Everything he said was true. I think you're really something.

(Trudy is completely uncomfortable. She hides her displeasure behind a fake smile.)

TRUDY: Wow, thank you. That's just...great. Thanks.

NUCLEAR MAN: So what do you say, Trudy, you wanna give my chum, here, a chance to take you out on the town?

TRUDY: Um...well...I'm really flattered, but I'm kinda seeing somebody at the moment.

ATOM BOY: (*Upset.*) Oh...I understand.

TRUDY: But you seem like a really sweet guy.

ATOM BOY: (*Hopeful.*) Yeah? And?

TRUDY: And that's it. You seem like a sweet guy. I'm not going out with you because I'm seeing someone already.

ELLIOT: No, she's not.

TRUDY: (*Stern.*) Yes, I am. Remember?

ELLIOT: No, I literally cannot recall you ever telling me you had a boyfriend, or were seeing anyone, ever.

TRUDY: (*Angrier.*) That's probably because I never told you I was seeing my boyfriend...because we just started dating this week.

ELLIOT: Yeah, that's probably not it at all.

(Trudy gives Elliot a sharp look. Elliot shrugs and smiles.)

NUCLEAR MAN: The shrink's right, Atom Boy. You don't need to have super-heightened senses to know the chick's not into you. Let's just get out of here. We got a neighborhood to save, and we're gonna talk about the plans for the new model of the Nukemobile. I've noticed rims are pretty hip these days. I'm saying that right, aren't I? "Rims"?

ATOM BOY: (*Annoyed.*) Yes, you're saying "rims" correctly, Nuclear Man.

NUCLEAR MAN: (*To Trudy.*) Thanks anyway for humoring him. You two take care, stay out of trouble, etcetera, etcetera...

ATOM BOY: (*To Trudy and Elliot.*) Bye, guys.

TRUDY: Bye!

ELLIOT: Take care, fellas!

(Nuclear Man and Atom Boy walk back through the window. They prepare to take off.)

ATOM BOY: (*To Nuclear Man.*) I really wish you wouldn't embarrass me in front of girls.

NUCLEAR MAN: You do it to yourself, wuss.

ATOM BOY: (*Angry.*) Stop calling me a wuss!

NUCLEAR MAN: What do you mean, wuss?

(Nuclear Man and Atom Boy exit out the window. Trudy and Elliot watch as they exit. As Elliot waves goodbye, Trudy gives him a death stare.)

ELLIOT: Take care! Fly safe! (*Notices Trudy's death stare.*) What?

TRUDY: You know exactly what. I'm not sure what grade that kid's in, but I'm sure it's one of the awkward stages! You threw me under the bus!

ELLIOT: And you threw my Twinkie out the window. Call us even. (*Trudy sighs and exits. Elliot sits at his desk, opens his comic book, and continues reading. He looks pleased with himself. To himself.*) I don't care what anyone says. I've done good today.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 2

(AT RISE: Living room/dining room of a small condominium. In the center lies a sofa with a coffee table in front of it. A chair faces the sofa. Note: It is the exact same sofa-chair set up as Elliot's office. Behind the sofa lies the dining room table with four chairs surrounding it. Elliot is sitting across from Lyn, his attractive wife. They are eating dinner in silence. Only the sound of forks hitting their plates are heard. Elliot looks into Lyn's eyes and clears his throat. Lyn looks up and smiles. She goes back to focusing on her plate. Elliot clears his throat louder and more deliberately. Lyn looks up.)

LYN: *(Smiles.)* What was that? Your patented I-need-your-attention-but-don't-want-to-ask-for-it signal?

ELLIOT: *(Deadpan.)* I have no idea what you're talking about.

LYN: *(Laughs.)* Oh, okay, then I can stop paying attention to you.

ELLIOT: No, you can't because I have something to say.

LYN: *(Jokingly.)* You have the ability to communicate with animals and you counsel them at your office?

ELLIOT: Yes. And on an unrelated note, I changed my name to "Dr. Dolittle, starring Eddie Murphy." Will you just listen to what I have to say?

LYN: Okay, please continue.

ELLIOT: Thank you. *(Excited.)* I had a moment today with Nuclear Man and his sidekick, Atom Boy! *(Lyn is unenthusiastic. Giddy.)* Isn't that great? *(No reaction from Lyn. She keeps her exact expression. Elliot nods repeatedly with a big grin on his face. Doorbell. Nodding, giddy.)* Go see who it is.

(Lyn goes to the door and opens it. Atom Boy is standing in the doorway and appears distraught. Confused, Lyn and Elliot just stare at him.)

ATOM BOY: *(To Lyn.)* I really need Elliot right now.

(Lyn closes the door on Atom Boy. She turns to Elliot, who stares back in confusion.)

LYN: What kind of moment did you have with Atom Boy? *(Elliot doesn't know what to say and shrugs. Lyn sighs and opens the door. She makes her way back to the table. Atom Boy lets himself in. Leans in, to Elliot.)* I'll leave you two alone for a little while.

ATOM BOY: Thank you for letting me into your lovely home.

(Looking around.) It's very lovely.

LYN: Thank you, Atom Boy. You two play nice.

(Lyn smiles and exits. Atom Boy makes his way to the table and sits across from Elliot.)

ELLIOT: This is most unexpected. What brings you here, Atom Boy?

Did you bring Nuclear Man, or is this just like a little sidekick mission?

ATOM BOY: Please don't refer to me as "sidekick." I find it belittling. I prefer "assistant defender."

ELLIOT: My mistake.

ATOM BOY: Elliot, I came here with hopes that you could help me.

This may come as a shock to you, but your cooperation and guidance could potentially save this city from death and destruction.

(Pause. Elliot isn't sure what to say.)

ELLIOT: Do you want a soda? I'm gonna grab a soda.

ATOM BOY: No thanks.

ELLIOT: Very well. *(Exits and returns seconds later with a soda in his hand. He cracks it open and takes a seat at the table. Takes a drink.)* Ah.

Much better. Very refreshing. Very refreshing.

ATOM BOY: Well? Do you think you can help me?

ELLIOT: I don't know. To be honest, I still don't know why you're here...if we're being honest.

ATOM BOY: I need your expertise. You see, I've been assisting Nuclear Man for quite some time. And, lately, more than ever, I've been noticing changes in him. Bad changes.

ELLIOT: What? Is he getting soft? You can't be so hard on him, Atom Boy. We all age... *(Thinks. Puzzled.)* Wait. Nuclear Man does age, right? Or is he like immortal or something?

ATOM BOY: No. That's a popular misconception. Despite his superpowers, Nuclear Man can still age.

ELLIOT: Good to know. So you fear he's been slipping recently?

ATOM BOY: Exactly. "Slipping" would be a generous way to describe it, though. I fear it's much worse.

ELLIOT: How so?

ATOM BOY: Well...lately he's been forgetful, like the other night when we were fighting Cosmo and his thugs over at this ominous abandoned warehouse.

ELLIOT: Classic villain attraction. Why is it always some ominous abandoned warehouse?

ATOM BOY: (*Agreeing.*) I know, right? Anyway, Nuclear Man ends up forgetting our bad-guy net, and we're left to our own devices!

ELLIOT: Wait. Hold up a second. Bad guy net?

ATOM BOY: Yeah, bad guy net. It's a net that we put bad guys in. You really didn't know what that meant? It's all in the name.

ELLIOT: I don't know. I just figured you'd have a more clever name than "bad guy net." I mean, you have your vehicle, the "Nukemobile." And we all know about your clandestine underground hideout, the "Radiation Station," where your crime lab is. And "bad guy net" is all you could come up with?

ATOM BOY: (*Offended, sarcastic.*) Yeah. You know, you're right. We should've spent more time coming up with a cooler name instead of, you know, going out and fighting crime. You're absolutely right.

ELLIOT: All right, all right...not liking your tone, but please continue.

ATOM BOY: Thank you. Anyway, I was tying the henchmen's hands behind their backs with their shoelaces when Nuclear Man flies after Cosmo's stealth aircraft. What does the guy end up doing? He loses him! He couldn't see which way the aircraft turned.

ELLIOT: (*Sarcastic.*) Oh, I hate it when that happens.

ATOM BOY: He comes back without Cosmo and blames his blurry vision for the turn of events.

ELLIOT: Blurry vision, huh? And this has never happened before?

ATOM BOY: Never. And, honestly, all of these mistakes are forgivable—forgetting the bad guy net, letting Cosmo get away—all forgivable, but what I cannot tolerate is his overall attitude.

ELLIOT: What do you mean?

ATOM BOY: He's been really emotional lately, and he's been pushing himself really hard. A couple of weeks ago, he bet me that he could throw a semi-truck halfway around the world with one toss. It landed in New York and took out a chunk of the Central Park Zoo.

ELLIOT: I heard about that. They lost the African safari wing.

Wasn't the driver still inside the truck when Nuclear Man threw it?

ATOM BOY: Yeah. Luckily, he wasn't hurt. But you see what I mean about Nuclear Man? It's like he's trying to prove something. You were there earlier today when he suggested we get rims on the Nukemobile.

ELLIOT: Say no more. I hear you loud and clear. He's going through a standard midlife crisis.

ATOM BOY: That's what I've come to believe.

ELLIOT: Well, you obviously know him very well, and you have a grasp on what he's going through. What do you need *me* for?

ATOM BOY: He doesn't listen. He treats me like I'm still a naïve amateur.

ELLIOT: Well, aren't you? I mean, how old are you?

ATOM BOY: (*Offended.*) You think I'm a teenager, don't you?

ELLIOT: Um...no?

ATOM BOY: I'm [28 years old]! [*Or insert another age.*]

ELLIOT: Well, how am I supposed to know that? I mean, your name is *Atom Boy*, for crying out loud!

ATOM BOY: Whatever. It's fine. So will you at least consider counseling Nuclear Man?

ELLIOT: (*Reluctant.*) I don't know.

ATOM BOY: Come on, Elliot, it's gotta be you.

ELLIOT: Oh, it does, does it?

ATOM BOY: Absolutely. I've done my homework, and there's no one else more qualified. You went to grad school at UIC and got your master's in psychology. And, apparently, you're a comic geek. What more can I ask for?

ELLIOT: (*Defensive.*) Well, I don't know if I'm a geek, but— (*Realizes.*) How did you know that?

ATOM BOY: I saw the book on your desk today. DC's "Identity Crisis." Face it. You're the perfect fit for this. All you need to do is talk to him for a while until he snaps out of this middle-aged funk he's in. He'll be back to his normal self, and you'll be getting paid to analyze an actual superhero. Now what do you think of that?

ELLIOT: Well... (*Thinks.*) ...I guess I could give it a shot.

ATOM BOY: Great to hear, Elliot. I'm so relieved I didn't need to use excessive force.

ELLIOT: Right. (*Under breath, sarcastic.*) I'm sure that would've been just awful.

ATOM BOY: What's that?

ELLIOT: Nothing. *(Under breath.)* Sidekick.

(Atom Boy and Elliot shake hands.)

ATOM BOY: I really appreciate this.

ELLIOT: Hey, don't mention it. What are licensed therapists for?

But, hey, if I'm gonna do this, you gotta do something for me.

ATOM BOY: Yeah, sure.

ELLIOT: Could you repeat that part you were saying earlier about saving the city from death and destruction again? My wife should hear that. I am really struggling in the admiration department these days.

ATOM BOY: Yeah, why not?

ELLIOT: Fantastic. *(Calls.)* Hey, Lyn?!

LYN: *(Offstage.)* Yeah?!

ELLIOT: *(Yells.)* Can you come in here?!

LYN: *(Offstage.)* Why?!

ELLIOT: *(Yells.)* There's something you need to hear!

LYN: *(Offstage.)* I'm on the phone with my sister!

ELLIOT: *(Yells.)* Oh, okay! *(To Atom Boy.)* She's on the phone with her sister, so just wait. She should be off in a few minutes.

ATOM BOY: All right.

(Elliot and Atom Boy wait at the table in silence. It's awkward.)

ELLIOT: So...how'd you end up working with Nuclear Man? Did he take you in after your family died in an unfortunate trapeze-related circus death?

ATOM BOY: No. I just kinda kept bugging him until he caved.

ELLIOT: Oh, the Tim Drake method. That is far less exciting than I imagined. *(Awkward pause.)* So...you got a little crush on Trudy, huh?

ATOM BOY: *(Childish blushing.)* I don't knooooow. Why? Did she say anything about me? Gosh, I looked like such a dork in front of her today. She probably thinks I'm a total loser. I should probably just be more direct. Maybe I'll write her a note or something.

ELLIOT: How are you not a teenager?

(Lyn pops her head in through the doorway and has a cordless phone in her hand. The receiver is against her shoulder and she is in a hurry.)

LYN: What did you want to tell me?

ELLIOT: *(Excited.)* Oh, hey, honey. So glad you asked. *(To Atom Boy.)* You wanna say to her what you said to me?

ATOM BOY: Uh, sure. *(To Lyn.)* As I told your husband a moment ago, I believe with his help we can save the city from death and destruction.

(Lyn doesn't react.)

LYN: *(Unenthusiastic.)* Oh, that's great. *(To Elliot.)* Can you take the garbage cans out to the curb? You forgot last week.

ELLIOT: *(Embarrassed.)* I know, honey, I know. I forgot. We have, like, double the trash as a result. You already yelled at me about this already.

LYN: *(Annoyed.)* Okay, just thought I'd remind you. *(To Atom Boy.)* He can save the city from death and destruction, but he can't bring the cans out front for the garbage men.

ELLIOT: Don't you have your sister on hold?

LYN: Don't give me that, Elliot. Okay? Don't. *(Elliot rolls his eyes. Lyn puts the phone back to her ear. Into phone.)* Yeah, I'm back, Gloria. No, it was nothing. I got Nuclear Man's sidekick here. He told me Elliot could save the city from death and destruction, blah, blah, blah.

ELLIOT: *(Sarcastic.)* You're one in a million.

(Lyn gives Elliot a smile and exits.)

LYN: *(Offstage, into phone.)* So tell me, what's this guy's name?

(Elliot gives Atom Boy a disappointed look.)

ATOM BOY: *(Confused.)* What?

ELLIOT: What do you mean "what"? Where was the conviction?

ATOM BOY: Excuse me?

ELLIOT: You didn't say it to her like you said it to me. It lacked enthusiasm. How can you captivate if you're saying it like you don't even care?

ATOM BOY: (*Offended.*) Oh, so it's my fault?

ELLIOT: Yes, it is.

(*Blackout.*)

SCENE 3

(AT RISE: Elliot's office. Elliot is sitting with a pen and notepad, listening to Mr. Bendis, a jolly middle-aged man in a suit. Elliot appears uninterested.)

MR. BENDIS: So I tell the foreman I haven't spoken to my wife in over 18 months. He says, "Oh, really?" I go, "Yeah, I don't like to interrupt her." (Slaps his knee, lets out a cackle, and then gleefully slaps Elliot's knee. Elliot reacts with an uncomfortable flinch and moves back a little. Cackles.) But you know what I always say..."The secret to a happy marriage remains a secret." (Lets out another loud cackle and slaps Elliot's knee harder this time. Elliot appears to be running out of patience. Cackles.) That's a good one, right? (Sighs.) I got hundreds.

ELLIOT: (Unenthused.) Hundreds, huh?

MR. BENDIS: Yeah. So later that day we're eating dinner. And you know, as I always say, "My wife dresses to kill, and cooks the same way." (Cackles again. Reaches for Elliot's knee, but Elliot smacks his hand with the notepad.) And, suddenly, my heart starts pounding. I think to myself "Oh my, she finally got her wish. I'm havin' a heart attack, and it's all because of her pork tenderloin!" Or at least I hoped it was pork tenderloin! (Cackles.) Anyway, it turned out it was just the blood pressure acting up again. When I realized I wasn't dying, I thought to myself, "Oh, great, I get to spend more time with her." (Cackles.) But, you know, as I always say, "I never knew what true happiness was until I got married...but then it was too late." (Lets out the loudest, most obnoxious cackle yet.)

ELLIOT: (Can't bite his tongue anymore.) All right, Mr. Bendis, let me just stop you right there. (Mr. Bendis stops laughing.) I'm going to ask you a question, and I hope for both our sakes that you answer honestly, okay?

MR. BENDIS: Sure thing, Elliot.

ELLIOT: You've been coming here for the last three months.

MR. BENDIS: I have.

ELLIOT: Can you see how by this point I'm starting to become a little...agitated that all of your conversation derives from one particular theme?

MR. BENDIS: I'm not followin' ya, Elliot.

ELLIOT: I'm gonna go out on a limb here. I think the only reason you got married is so that you could tell clichéd wife jokes. Most men your age use humor as a defense mechanism to mask contempt for their spouses. And stop me if I'm wrong, but, frankly, I think the only reason you keep coming here is so that you can get out of the house.

(Mr. Bendis pauses for a moment. His face is sincerely surprised and shocked. Elliot looks like he is regretting what he just said. Mr. Bendis starts to cackle again.)

MR. BENDIS: That's a good one, Elliot! *(Cackles.)* Classic! You're a funny guy! *(Reaches over and slaps Elliot's knee.)*

ELLIOT: *(Fake laugh.)* Yeah, that's what I am! *(Fake laugh.)* I was telling a funny joke just now, wasn't I?

MR. BENDIS: You're a crack up! We should double-date sometime. You, Lyn, me, and the ol' ball and chain.

ELLIOT: *(Looks at watch.)* You know what? We are out of time. So we'll pick back up next week, Mr. Bendis.

(Elliot and Mr. Bendis get out of their seats. Mr. Bendis leads the way to the door. Elliot is eager to send him on his way.)

MR. BENDIS: Sure thing, El, sure thing. You give it some thought. I gotta get back home or the hag bag starts to nag, you know what I mean? *(Reaches the door, turns around, and slaps Elliot on the back. A loud thud is heard.)* Take care, El.

ELLIOT: Will do. Say "hi" to the ol' ball and chain for me. Bye-bye.

(Mr. Bendis steps out, pats his front pockets, and turns around to face Elliot, who is about to shut the door.)

MR. BENDIS: Oh, hey, Elliot, I think I left my sunglasses on your—

(Elliot slams the door in Mr. Bendis' face, goes to the coffee table in front of the sofa, picks up Mr. Bendis' sunglasses, and stands next to his desk. Trudy enters.)

TRUDY: Hey, Elliot, are you busy? How'd your session with Mr. Bendis go?

ELLIOT: Just dandy.

(Elliot tosses Mr. Bendis' sunglasses into the trash bin next to his desk. He sits and leans back.)

TRUDY: Well, you know I hate to bother you—

ELLIOT: That's a lie. It's the high point of your day. Why else would you keep doing it?

TRUDY: Good point. Anyway, I know this is unexpected, but Wade dropped by. He said he wanted to speak with you for a few minutes.

ELLIOT: He's here now? I'm about to eat my lunch.

TRUDY: He's willing to pay for an hour.

ELLIOT: *(Interested.)* Send him in. *(Trudy exits. Elliot reaches under his desk, pulls out a brown paper bag with his name on it, sets it on the desk, and begins to rummage through it. He removes a napkin, a plastic spork, and a small container filled with pasta. He is very meticulous and methodical. Wade enters, appearing happier than usual.)* Wade! Nice of you to drop in. You know, we have schedules for a reason.

WADE: I realize that, Elliot. Forgive my intrusion during your lunch break, but I wanted to come here and talk to you personally.

ELLIOT: I see. Take a seat. *(Wade takes a seat in front of Elliot's desk. Elliot opens the container of pasta and digs through it with his spork. Takes a bite.)* So what did you want to talk about?

WADE: This isn't easy for me. Well, actually, it was, and when I realized how easy it was, it started to feel difficult again.

ELLIOT: You're being vague. It's irritating. Have you talked to your wife recently about the separation? Is that what this is about?

WADE: More or less. You see, I've decided I don't need to come here for therapy anymore.

(Upon hearing the news, Elliot bites down on his spork and it breaks in his mouth. He slowly pulls out the end of the spork and sets it on his desk. A spot of sauce is on Elliot's cheek.)

ELLIOT: I'm sorry. You were saying?

WADE: Your help has guided me as far as I can go, and I— *(Points at Elliot's cheek.)* You have a little sauce there. And I thank you for

that. Now it's time to figure out some things for myself. I thought you'd be happy for me.

ELLIOT: (*Wiping his mouth.*) But, Wade...at this stage in our counseling, do you see how abnormal that might sound to me? I mean, last week we discussed the issues with your wife, and now you're telling me you've worked everything out?

(Elliot stuffs the napkin in the front of his shirt like a bib.)

WADE: Not exactly. I thought a lot about what you said. At first, I began to think you were a hack. But then I dug a little deeper, and the deeper I dug, the more your suggestion intrigued me.

ELLIOT: Naturally. So you're doing the trial separation?

WADE: Indefinitely. I already met someone.

ELLIOT: (*Pleased.*) Oh, really? Wow. You work fast, huh? Fantastic.

WADE: Thank you. She's really quite something.

ELLIOT: Good for you, man.

WADE: I've never felt this way before. It's as if all that hate inside me just melted away. She's so full of life, and passionate, and outgoing.

ELLIOT: How'd you two meet?

WADE: Online.

ELLIOT: Sure, sure. (*Makes a funny face at this woman being "outgoing."*)

WADE: I think I'm smitten, Elliot. I may never go back to Sally.

ELLIOT: Well, let's not do anything rash, Wade. I know how you think. You're like Superman. You're too idealistic. Does this mystery woman know you're married?

WADE: No.

ELLIOT: Do you see how that could be an issue?

WADE: I guess. (*Realizes.*) So you're saying I should file for divorce?

ELLIOT: (*Disappointed.*) Wade, Wade, Wade...have you even met this woman?

WADE: Well, yeah, of course.

ELLIOT: Face to face?

WADE: Yeah, we both have webcams.

ELLIOT: You know what I mean...in the flesh, in person, not via pixilated screens and doctored photos of her holding the camera to the mirror at a jaunted angle, giving her best gangsta face.

WADE: Oh. Well, no, not yet. But her sister lives around here, and we agreed to meet when she comes to visit her.

ELLIOT: Wade, I'm happy for you, but I'm afraid you might be in over your head. You said "smitten." I don't think anyone should ever use that word, ever. Let's keep these acquaintances casual and friendly, and then after some time, you can start a real relationship. Try to work it out with Sally first.

WADE: *(Thinking.)* Yeah...

ELLIOT: *(Nodding.)* Yeah.

WADE: This is exactly why I'm not coming here anymore.

(Wade gets up and heads for the door. Elliot follows. Elliot realizes he's still wearing the napkin as a bib and throws it off.)

ELLIOT: Come on, Wade! Don't just quit on me! You know I think you're a good guy, and that's what kills me. I'd hate to see you lose your wife over some chick you've never even shaken hands with. What if she's one of those [Nigerian] scam artists? She might fool you into something! *[Or insert another type.]*

(Wade stops at the door and turns around. He is angry and slowly approaches Elliot.)

WADE: All right, you listen up!

ELLIOT: How does one "listen up"? That never sounded right to me.

(Furious, Wade grabs Elliot by the shirt and slams him against the wall. Elliot is frightened.)

WADE: Shut up! You therapists are all the same. You think you're helping when all you're really doing is making judgment calls until the clock runs out! *(Points.)* That degree on the wall? All that it means is that your parents spent loads of money for you to babysit saps that can't help themselves! Well, I'm here to tell you I can help myself from here on out! You have no idea what I'm capable of! You think she'll fool me? Think again! Nobody fools me into anything, especially not some geek shrink! *(Slams Elliot against the wall once more. The degree falls to the floor and breaks. Wade holds*

Elliot and stares at him. A knock is heard outside the window.) What was that?

ELLIOT: *(Lying.)* What was what? I didn't hear anything.

WADE: Am I crazy, or did I hear someone knocking on your window?

ELLIOT: You're not crazy. You're definitely not crazy. Trust me, I'm a doctor.

(Another knock is heard outside the window. Elliot is frightened.)

WADE: Well? Aren't you gonna see who it is?

(Wade lets go of Elliot. Elliot dusts off his shirt and approaches the window.)

ELLIOT: It's probably nothing. Pigeons in this city...they're always losing their direction. Just last week, a pigeon flew into my windshield. His beak was lodged in the glass. I had to get him with my wipers because his eyes just kept staring me down. It was disturbing.

WADE: Just open it!

ELLIOT: Okay. Okay. I'm opening the window. *(Opens the window and looks disappointed. Nuclear Man and Atom Boy enter through the window. Wade stares in disbelief. Lying.)* Why, Nuclear Man and Atom Boy, what the devil are you two doing here?

NUCLEAR MAN: Are you daft, my clinical companion? I had an appointment, remember?

ELLIOT: *(Under breath.)* Shut up.

WADE: *(Points at Nuclear Man.)* What's he doing here?

ELLIOT: Uh...that's what I want to know.

(Nuclear Man approaches Wade and studies his face. Wade appears stressed.)

NUCLEAR MAN: *(To Wade.)* I'm Nuclear Man. Designated defender. You've probably seen me on the broadcast television. I'm the one who can fly. *(Extends his hand. Wade does not react.)* You appear somewhat familiar. Have I saved your life from a burning building before...because you look like someone I might've saved from a burning building before.

WADE: (*Urgent.*) No. I must be going now. I have a webcam date.
(*To Elliot.*) And this is the very last time you'll be seeing me, Elliot.
So, farewell!
(*Wade rushes out of the office. Elliot and Nuclear Man watch him go.*)

NUCLEAR MAN: Strange little fellow. (*To Elliot, points to Atom Boy.*)
Sorry I brought Wussy McWuss-face with me. He wanted to hang
out in reception. I guess he thinks he has another shot with your
assistant. (*Laughs.*) So far from the truth.

ATOM BOY: (*Sighs.*) I don't have the energy to argue. If you guys
need me, I'll be in the other room with Trudy. (*Exits.*)

NUCLEAR MAN: (*Calls.*) No comeback, huh? I'll be here waiting to
punch you in the arm and disguise it as a playful gesture when you
come up with one. Good luck with Trudy! (*To Elliot.*) He thinks
I'm being sincere. I wasn't being sincere.

ELLIOT: Yeah, good one.

NUCLEAR MAN: Shall we begin?

ELLIOT: Sure. Yeah. I must state the one office rule, though, before
we start. Please do not use any superpowers while you're in my
office. This is a non-super-human zone.

NUCLEAR MAN: Very well. I will refrain from employing my brute
strength, super speeds, and immunity to radiated materials while
in your quarters.

ELLIOT: Yeah, I don't think you'll have to worry about any radiation
here. But, hey, it's nice to share those good qualities. It builds the
self-esteem. Please sit. (*Nuclear Man makes his way to the sofa and
sits. Elliot sits in his chair and gives Nuclear Man a long stare. Nuclear
Man isn't sure how to react.*) Wow. This is unreal.

NUCLEAR MAN: (*Reluctant.*) Tell me about it. I actually agreed to
come here.

ELLIOT: Atom Boy tells me you've been maxing out your
capabilities lately...that you've been pushing yourself too hard.

NUCLEAR MAN: (*Scoffs.*) I scoff at the accusation. I'm in the best
shape I've ever been. (*Makes himself comfortable on the sofa. His gut
hangs out. Elliot notices.*) Atom Boy is obviously wrong. It's almost
laughable how wrong he is. Wait. You know what? It is
laughable. (*Lets out a loud chuckle, starts to hack and cough, and
hunches over in his seat.*)

ELLIOT: Mmm-hmm. He also told me you tried to throw a semi-
truck halfway around the world and it landed in New York.

NUCLEAR MAN: *(Sighs.)* Of course he brings that up. Why wouldn't he? It's not like I singlehandedly captured any armed bank robbers this week. Nah, I just threw a truck and accidentally crippled a couple elephants at the Central Park Zoo! I am going to punch him in his stupid mask!

(Nuclear Man gets out of his seat and makes his way to the door. Elliot stands.)

ELLIOT: Wait, wait, wait! Stop! That isn't necessary. Violence isn't going to solve any problems!

NUCLEAR MAN: Look who you're talking to, here. I use violence every day to solve the city's problems.

ELLIOT: Good point, but maybe that's the issue. *(Nuclear Man stops in his tracks, his back turned to Elliot.)* Have you ever heard of anger displacement? It's a fairly basic psychology term. Your mind takes the negative effect of one situation and implants it into a safer one. Kinda like how you bully Atom Boy to hide the fact that you're scared of getting old. I also heard on the news that you shattered some poor thug's teeth while he was in your custody a few weeks ago. Was this before or after you captured and restrained him?

(Nuclear Man turns around and faces Elliot. He is calm, but intimidating.)

NUCLEAR MAN: That thug had it coming. He said my costume was flamboyant and presumptuous. I can't help it if these tights make a strong case for these muscular calves!

(Nuclear Man extends his leg out to show Elliot, and points to his calf muscle. Elliot stares, unenthused.)

ELLIOT: *(Unimpressed.)* Yeah, they look great.

NUCLEAR MAN: Touch it. Touch my calf. See how solid it is.

ELLIOT: Looks pretty solid from where I'm sitting, thanks. Let's move on. Let's talk about Atom Boy.

NUCLEAR MAN: What about him?

ELLIOT: What's his best feature? What do you see in him when you think about the legacy you'll be leaving him when you retire your cape?

NUCLEAR MAN: I don't think about that kind of stuff.

ELLIOT: Maybe you should start.

NUCLEAR MAN: Maybe you should mind your own business.

ELLIOT: I'm a therapist. Your mind is my business. Tell me...why do you bully Atom Boy so much?

NUCLEAR MAN: I don't bully him.

ELLIOT: Sure you do.

NUCLEAR MAN: Okay. I bully him because he needs structure if he ever wants to be as good as me. I never had structure growing up. I had to discipline myself when I became superhuman.

ELLIOT: Yeah, but look at you now. Look where you are. You obviously came here because you know something's wrong. Whatever that is, it's damaging your personal life, so you take it out on your sidekick.

NUCLEAR MAN: *(Correcting him.)* Assistant defender.

ELLIOT: Whatever. You know I'm right.

(Ashamed, Nuclear Man sits on the sofa. Elliot sits in his chair.)

NUCLEAR MAN: I wasn't always this way, you know. Things were different before Atom Boy. I was a one-man army. I was at my prime. I was handsome beyond words. I was a *God*.

ELLIOT: What makes you think you still aren't those things—besides the God part because that's just arrogant.

NUCLEAR MAN: Well? I guess it's because things are different nowadays. I'm getting older. I've seen and experienced so much more than Atom Boy has. That's why I hate him sometimes—that stupid naiveté that allows someone to throw inhibition away and dive in with confidence. And, besides, I don't think people care anymore about some middle-aged vigilante and his ongoing battle with his bitter archrival.

ELLIOT: You're talking about Cosmo, of course.

NUCLEAR MAN: That's right. Ol' Cosmo hasn't been out to play in awhile. I'm starting to think he's losing touch, too.

ELLIOT: You're saying that you miss him?

NUCLEAR MAN: *(Defensive.)* No, of course not. The streets are much safer without some sociopath planting cheap explosives designed to look like practical household appliances. *(Laughs.)* I used to think he'd do that because he thought it was clever. But, now, he knows I can spot those knockoffs a mile away. He still makes them as a joke, though. *(Chuckles.)*

ELLIOT: (*Weirded out.*) Quite a unique thing you two got going on. Sounds like you're starting to miss that dynamic you share.

NUCLEAR MAN: What are you implying?

ELLIOT: All the good ones had one sworn enemy: Batman has Joker, Wolverine has Sabretooth, Tony Stark has alcohol, and you have Cosmo. Without that one main villain, you're just lowering your standards and caring less. There's no motivation.

NUCLEAR MAN: (*Confused.*) I'm sorry...Tony Stark? Alcohol?

ELLIOT: Yeah, he's Iron Man. He likes to drink in the comics. (*Disappointed.*) You don't read comics?

NUCLEAR MAN: No. I find them unrealistic.

ELLIOT: (*Shocked.*) Are you kidding me?!

NUCLEAR MAN: No, I'm not.

ELLIOT: You're a superhero, and you find them— (*Slight pause.*) I can't talk to you right now. (*Gets out of his seat and paces around the room, frustrated. Nuclear Man watches. After a few seconds, Elliot stops pacing and sits. Calmly.*) All right. I'll be honest with you, Nuclear Man. Can I be honest with you?

NUCLEAR MAN: Sure.

ELLIOT: I think you have far too much anxiety in your life. You're scared about degrading to a worthless existence and you're angry. All that frustration is just building up, and you don't stop because you feel like you still have something to prove. (*Nuclear Man sits for a moment and thinks.*) I'm here to remind you that aging is a natural part of life. There's nothing you can do about it. You have nothing to prove because you've already proven it. So, forget Atom Boy. Forget Cosmo. I say it's time for a vacation.

NUCLEAR MAN: (*Scoffs.*) Are you insane? I know you're the therapist and everything, but I'm asking you...honestly, are you clinically insane? I can't take a break. Crime doesn't just wait around! Scumbags and murderers don't just say, "Oh, you wanna take some time off? Okay, we'll try to assassinate the president in an elaborate terrorist plot when you get back! Send us a postcard!" Does that sound all right to you?

ELLIOT: No...sounds more like an episode of ["24"] I saw. [*Or insert the name of another suitable TV show.*]

NUCLEAR MAN: (*Excited.*) Ooh, I like that show! Which episode are you talking about?

ELLIOT: They're all like that. That's not the point. I want you to give it some thought. People realize a lot about themselves when their schedules are free.

NUCLEAR MAN: Yeah, like how unproductive they are. I'm sorry, Elliot, but I like contributing to society. And, besides, I still have unfinished business.

ELLIOT: (*Annoyed.*) Again with Cosmo? What? Do you have a crush on him?

NUCLEAR MAN: (*Scoffs.*) Not funny.

ELLIOT: Listen, you can do what you want. I'm just saying if you were to stop this crime-fighting stuff, you would be relieved of all that pressure and anger. Think about the man you were before you turned into Nuclear Man—just a normal guy who didn't need to worry about whether or not a purse was being snatched or if the local gangs were pleased with their long-distance service. Those weren't your problems.

NUCLEAR MAN: (*Takes a deep breath and swallows his pride.*) All right. I'll tell you a story I've never told anyone before. About 16 years ago, I worked as a foreman at the Powell Chemical plant. I was the one who made sure the workers weren't killed when they handled the plutonium or uranium or any other "-ium" we had. Everything was going fine until one day, the new guy, Joey, wanted to heat up his leftover Chicken Marsala in the break room microwave. Unbeknownst to him, the foil in which it was wrapped is not meant to be microwaved and a fire started momentarily. Knowing it was my duty to save every worker in that plant, I guided them all to the nearest exit. But, Joey, idiot that he was, got his coat stuck in the emergency door that sealed off the containment facility. The fire spread closer as I ripped Joey free from the door. He got out just fine. Consequently, upon rescuing Joey, I too had unfortunately gotten my coat stuck in the emergency door. Ironic, I know. The fire boiled a vat of plutonium and several other compounds, which became gaseous and airborne. Naturally, I held my breath as long as I could, but, eventually, I inhaled the chemical. I freed myself from my coat and exited the plant. I woke up the following day feeling stronger than ever. I decided right then and there that I would be the one to save stupid people like Joey—the ones who turn a blind eye to the dangers of this world—the helpless and the weak. And I've never stopped since.

ELLIOT: (*Realizes.*) Wow. That was your—

NUCLEAR MAN: That's right, Elliot, my fateful origin story. All because of the Chicken Marsala. So, you see, it's impossible for me to quit, not as long as there are Joeys out there. And I strongly advise you not to tell anyone my story.

ELLIOT: Hey, doctor-patient confidentiality...I have to honor it. You can tell me anything, and it will never leave this room.

NUCLEAR MAN: Good, because if that information were to get out to anyone, it would be catastrophic. Regular Joes would start huffing plutonium. We'd have a master race of flying superhumans spreading their own brand of justice on the piece of bread that is this city. It can't happen.

ELLIOT: Okay, okay, I get it. So you're not going to quit anytime soon. (*Bitter, pouty.*) Fine. It's your life. Do what you want.

NUCLEAR MAN: Really? You're going to act like that? Like a baby?

ELLIOT: Yeah, I am.

NUCLEAR MAN: All right, all right. I'll tell you what, Elliot, you seem like a sensible person, albeit a stubborn one. The day I defeat Cosmo is the day I'll start thinking about retirement.

ELLIOT: (*Sighs.*) Fair enough. Whatever the outcome may be, I just wanted to tell you that you've already led an extraordinary life, and it's time to stop carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders.

NUCLEAR MAN: Well, of course. I never could carry the weight of the world. I tried, and I'm just not strong enough.

(*Pause as Elliot thinks about how deep Nuclear Man's statement is.*)

ELLIOT: (*Slowly nods his head in agreement.*) Right. Just so we're on the same page, you weren't speaking in literal terms, were you?

NUCLEAR MAN: No, I was. I literally tried to carry the weight of the world on my shoulders once, and it just wasn't happening. I'm strong, but come on...it's the world.

(*Disappointed, Elliot buries his head in his hands.*)

ELLIOT: I think this is a good place to stop for the day. Let's pick back up next week.

NUCLEAR MAN: Sounds good. I think we made a lot of progress today, chum. And thank you for your discretion. I've never entrusted anyone with my origin story.

(Nuclear Man, proud of himself, stands. Elliot stands and extends his hand to Nuclear Man.)

ELLIOT: Well, your secret's safe with me. See you next time.

(Nuclear Man shakes Elliot's hand. His grip is way too strong for human hands. Elliot is in serious pain.)

NUCLEAR MAN: Indeed. By the way, I hope a cashier's check is okay.

ELLIOT: *(In pain.)* No!

NUCLEAR MAN: Okay, okay, no cashier's check. I'll make it cash.

ELLIOT: *(Serious pain.)* Please let go of my hand! You're gonna crush it to bone dust!

NUCLEAR MAN: Oh! *(Lets go of Elliot's hand. Elliot winces and cradles his hand.)* I'm terribly sorry about that, Elliot. Sometimes I don't know my own strength. Are you all right?

ELLIOT: I'll live. Wow, that stings. I think it fell asleep. *(Starts to shake his hurt hand around to get the feeling back.)*

NUCLEAR MAN: Yeah, just shake it around. You'll be all right.

ELLIOT: *(Shaking hand around.)* I've got no feeling at all! Forget asleep! You put my hand in a coma! It may never snap out of it!

NUCLEAR MAN: *(Nervous.)* Yeah, I should probably get going now. Big city, lots of people. Danger lurking ahead...all that stuff. I bid you adieu, Elliot! *(Rushes to the door, opens it, and pops his head through the doorway. To Atom Boy, calls.)* Let's am-scray, "Atom Wuss"! Come on, move it!

(Nuclear Man turns around and heads for Elliot's window. Atom Boy enters and heads for the window.)

ATOM BOY: I'm coming, I'm coming. Don't get your cape in a wad. See ya later, Elliot.

ELLIOT: You know, you guys don't need to fly out the window. We have an elevator.

NUCLEAR MAN: Ha! I'm tickled you would even mention that idea. What good is flying if you're taking elevators everywhere? *(Lets out a loud chuckle and then starts to hack and cough worse than before. To Atom Boy, coughing.)* Let's get out of here. *(Climbs out the window. Atom Boy follows. Offstage.)* All right, hold tight...here we go! Up, up, and awaaaay!

(Elliot shuts the window. Trudy enters and looks around the room suspiciously. Elliot takes a seat at his desk and pulls out a graphic novel from his briefcase, "Daredevil" by Frank Miller. He starts to read it.)

TRUDY: They both left?

ELLIOT: How could you tell? Was it the "up, up" or the "away"?

TRUDY: *(Sighs.)* Just as long as they're gone. That Atom Boy creeps me out. You should see this guy. He was following me everywhere I went...breathing down my neck while I was working. It's pathetic.

ELLIOT: *(Reading, uninterested.)* Uh-huh.

TRUDY: You should hear what he says to me...bragging about how he has all these cool crime-fighting gadgets and weapons. I'll tell you, he might be a little guy, but he has a Napoleon thing going on. *(Disgusted.)* Such arrogance.

ELLIOT: *(Reading.)* Yep.

(Trudy notices Elliot isn't paying attention to her.)

TRUDY: Hey, come on! What are you doing? Hello? I have a crisis on my hands!

ELLIOT: *(Stops reading.)* What? I'm sorry. I'm not listening.

TRUDY: I knew you weren't! Please listen. I'm trying to vent. *(Elliot starts to read the graphic novel again. Trudy doesn't notice. She's too busy with her own thoughts.)* Where was I? Oh, yeah. I was gonna say how desperate he is, which is very. He's like that neighborhood cat you feed one time because you feel sorry for it, and then it keeps returning to your porch every night hoping you'll feed it again. You know what I mean? It's like, "Geez, try being a little monastic once in a while." Am I right? *(Notices that Elliot is reading. She grabs the graphic novel and throws it onto the sofa. Elliot gives Trudy a disapproving look. Ashamed.)* You know what? I'm gonna let myself out. *(Heads for the door, stops at the door, and looks*

back at him. Innocently.) So do I tell him flat out to quit bugging me or is there an easier way? What would you do? (Elliot doesn't answer. He just stares at Trudy, waiting for her to leave.) All right, I'm just gonna...yeah.

(Trudy exits and shuts the door behind her. Elliot calmly gets out of his seat and makes his way to the sofa. He lets himself fall backward onto the sofa and lies down with his graphic novel. He opens the book, reads for a few seconds, stops, sets the book on the floor, and stares at the ceiling, deep in thought.)

ELLIOT: *(To himself.)* A superhero who hates comics? Now I've seen it all.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 4

(AT RISE: Elliot and Lyn's living room/dining room. Lyn is sitting on the sofa, drinking a cup of coffee. There is another cup on the coffee table in front of the sofa. Stressed out, Elliot enters with his briefcase in hand.)

ELLIOT: *(Calls.)* Honey, I'm home! Boy, I'm dead tired, my dogs are barkin', and all those other generic phrases you say when you come home from work.

LYN: How was your day?

ELLIOT: Stressful, to say the least. Who knew superheroes were so complicated? *(Raises hand.)* I, for one, did not. Live and learn.

(Gloria, Lyn's bubbly single sister, enters from the other room. Elliot sees Gloria and tries to mask his disappointment.)

GLORIA: *(Excited.)* Elliot! Hello!

ELLIOT: *(To Lyn, unenthused.)* Hey, look at that. Your sister is here. *(Sarcastic.)* This day keeps getting better.

(Gloria rushes over to Elliot and gives him a giant hug. Elliot appears uncomfortable.)

GLORIA: It's so great to see you again! It's been too long! This is so great!

ELLIOT: Yep. That'll do just fine. *(Pats Gloria's back lightly. She lets go and makes her way next to Lyn on the sofa.)* So, Gloria, what brings you here to my home...unannounced?

LYN: She had some paid time off at work and thought she'd fly out here and surprise us. Wasn't that nice?

ELLIOT: *(Unenthused.)* Oh, yeah. So nice. This is joyous.

GLORIA: Oh, I'm glad. I didn't want to impose or anything.

ELLIOT: Impose? What? No. Get out of town. Seriously. *(Serious.)* Get...get out of town.

GLORIA: Well, thank you so much for letting me sleep on the sofa. This is so great. I'm so glad I'm here with you guys! It's great!

(Gloria picks up the cup of coffee sitting on the coffee table and takes a sip. Elliot starts to exit to the other room.)

LYN: *(To Gloria.)* So, you were just about to tell me about this new guy you met online...

(Elliot stops in his tracks.)

GLORIA: Oh, my gosh, he's so great! So amazingly great! You must meet him! He's great! *(Sips coffee.)* Oh, what's in this? Irish cream?

LYN: Hazelnut.

GLORIA: Sooo great! Anyways, he actually lives not too far from here, so we agreed to meet up. It's gonna be so great! I'm so excited!

(Shocked, Elliot slowly turns around and listens closely to Gloria.)

LYN: Ah, it's all starting to make sense. You flew out here to see him, didn't you?

GLORIA: Oh, stop it, Lyn! I came out to see him *and* you. *(Laughs obnoxiously.)*

LYN: So what's the lucky guy's name?

ELLIOT: *(To himself.)* Wade.

(Gloria turns around and notices Elliot standing behind the sofa.)

GLORIA: *(Amazed.)* Wow, Elliot, that's a really great guess! So great!

LYN: *(Confused.)* How did you know that, Elliot?

ELLIOT: *(To Gloria.)* Let me guess...he works in insurance claims.

GLORIA: *(Shocked.)* Okay, you must tell me how you know that! Are you psychic or something? I am so amazed!

LYN: *(Assertive.)* How did you know that, Elliot?

ELLIOT: You know I can't tell you that...

LYN: Okay, so he's a patient of yours.

GLORIA: He is?

ELLIOT: I can't say.

LYN: *(To Gloria.)* He is.

GLORIA: Are you serious? Wow! Small world, huh? *(To Elliot.)* Has he mentioned me?

ELLIOT: Yeah.

(Elliot sits in the chair, looking even more stressed than before. Gloria is giddy and blushing and even more hyper than before.)

GLORIA: *(Leans in, to Elliot.)* You have to tell me everything, Elliot!

This is great! Seriously! Details, right now!

ELLIOT: Oh, there's not much to tell.

GLORIA: Tell me anything about him! Why does he need therapy?

What's his favorite restaurant in [Chicago]? Does he want a dog or a cat? You need to tell me these things, Elliot!

ELLIOT: Gee, Gloria, we don't normally go into that kind of stuff.

It's not a dating service. It's a therapist's office. My office. A private sanctuary. So I'd really like to change the subject if that's okay.

GLORIA: No, it is not okay! I want to know more about Wade!

LYN: *(To Elliot.)* Just tell her a few things about him, honey. It'll get her off your back.

ELLIOT: I really can't. There's not much to tell. *(Gloria slaps Elliot's knee really hard. She is starting to become aggressive. Elliot leaps slightly in his seat.)* Ow!

GLORIA: Just tell me something!

(Elliot takes a deep breath like he is about to drop a bombshell. Lyn and Gloria wait with anticipation.)

ELLIOT: Okay. Sure. You wanna know something about Wade?

GLORIA: Yes!

ELLIOT: He's married! Okay?! He's a married man! He has a wife.

He's getting tired of her, but he's still married to her as far as I know. There! Is that good enough? *(Gloria sits in silence. She looks like she's about to break down and cry. Lyn watches, waiting to comfort her at any moment. Elliot lets out another deep breath and sinks into his chair, feeling slightly guilty about what he just said.)* Listen, I'm sorry you had to find out this way. Are you all right? *(Gloria slaps Elliot's knee even harder. Jumps out of his seat.)* Ow! Are you kidding me?!

(Gloria starts to cry loudly. Lyn puts her arm around Gloria and consoles her.)

GLORIA: I can't believe this!

LYN: It's gonna be okay, hon. I promise. He doesn't deserve you.

(To Elliot, sarcastic.) Way to go.

ELLIOT: I'm sorry! What was I gonna do? Keep it a secret?

GLORIA: I'm gonna call him! *(Runs out of the room, crying.)*

LYN: Bad idea. You don't need to call him.

(Lyn starts to exit after Gloria but stops halfway. She turns around and gives Elliot an angry stare.)

ELLIOT: *(Puzzled.)* What? *(Lyn slaps Elliot's arm and exits to the other room.)* Ow! Why?! *(In the living room alone.)* Yeah, that's an appropriate response! Let's shoot the messenger! It's all Elliot's fault! And let's jump on the bandwagon and shoot the messenger because everyone else is shooting messengers, Lyn! *(Starts to pace around the room, frustrated. To himself.)* Unbelievable...unbelievable. *(To Gloria, offstage.)* The guy's a psycho anyway! You should've seen him today! He threatened my life! He made fun of my degree, and it really hurt my feelings! He's crazy! *(Stops in his tracks. Realizes. Now appears frightened. To himself.)* Oh, man...he's crazy. *(Calls.)* Hey, Gloria! Please don't call Wade! *(Starts to exit to other room. Scared.)* Don't you see?! You're going to make him angry! You won't like him when he's angry! *(Exits. Blackout.)*

SCENE 5

(AT RISE: Elliot's office. Elliot's desk is propped on its side in the form of a barricade. Frightened, Elliot is hiding behind it. A few seconds pass and Trudy enters. Elliot jumps up from behind the desk and screams. He looks like he hasn't slept all night.)

TRUDY: You gotta be kidding me.

ELLIOT: *Kidding* you? I'm far from kidding right now, Trudy. (Stage whisper.) I'm on the edge.

TRUDY: Well, you're already there. You might as well jump.

ELLIOT: Oh, ha, ha, ha! Ha!

TRUDY: Why is your desk like that? Are we going to war this afternoon?

ELLIOT: Keep wisecracking, Trudy. It won't be so funny when Wade comes pounding on the door, bloodthirsty!

TRUDY: Wade? I thought he stopped coming here.

ELLIOT: He did! And then I found out he's been cyber-dating my sister-in-law.

TRUDY: Oh, so she's his web mistress, huh? Let me guess...you told her he was married.

ELLIOT: Yes, I did. I thought I was helping, but it's so easy to confuse help with death wishes these days!

TRUDY: So you're scared Wade's gonna come here and kill you for spilling the beans?

ELLIOT: Yes! How can I make it any clearer? Listen, I don't want my possible last moments on earth to be bickering with you, Trudy! I just want to reflect on the golden years. Please, leave me be. And if you see Wade getting off the elevator, just give me a signal loud enough I can hear it from my office. Let's practice that right now, actually.

TRUDY: All right. (Thinks.) How 'bout, "Hey, Elliot! Wade's here to kill you"?

ELLIOT: That'll do just fine. Thank you. Now, I just need to figure out my exit strategy. I figured I could plant a tape recorder behind my desk with my voice on it. That way, he'll think I was hiding behind my desk when really I'm hiding behind the door. I figure that'll give me a few seconds head start. That's where you come in. Now, you may have to protect me, but only until the elevator opens and I get on. Sound good?

(Trudy stares at Elliot with a concerned look. He has clearly lost his mind.)

TRUDY: Yeah, so I just wanted to let you know your 12:30 has canceled today.

ELLIOT: Okay, 12:30 is canceled. Good. Is that all?

TRUDY: Uh, yeah. That's it. Are you gonna be okay in here, or should I leave the door open?

ELLIOT: *(Chuckles.)* I bet I look pretty silly right about now, huh?

TRUDY: Yeah, a little bit. I'm not gonna lie.

ELLIOT: *(Chuckles.)* You're right. You're absolutely right. I'm a little wacky right now. Actually, all I really need is a hug.

(Elliot approaches Trudy, who stands completely still. Elliot wraps his arms around her. Trudy appears uncomfortable.)

TRUDY: Okay. Okay. Are we all better?

ELLIOT: Much better. *(Thinking out loud.)* You're only a couple inches shorter. You could easily pass for me. I'll use you as a body double. *(Lets go of Trudy and starts to remove his necktie.)* Here, you put on my suit, and I'll put on your clothes. That'll fool 'em.

TRUDY: All right, stop! Stop it right now! *(Elliot stops. His tie is left hanging loose around his neck and his shirt is disheveled.)* You're really starting to act like a nut, Elliot. We can't have a nut counseling the other nuts! It's bad for business. Now, I want you to put your desk back where it was and pull yourself together.

(Elliot thinks.)

ELLIOT: Okay. You're right. *(Chuckles.)* You know what? I'm gonna be okay. I'm gonna be just—

NUCLEAR MAN: *(Offstage from outside the window.)* Elliot!

ELLIOT: Oh, no!

(Elliot runs to the door and hides behind it. Nuclear Man enters through the window.)

TRUDY: *(Smooth.)* Hello, Nuclear Man.

NUCLEAR MAN: Hello, Trudy. Is Elliot around?

TRUDY: You know what? He snuck off somewhere. I'd go find him, but who knows what that man does behind closed doors?

(Elliot closes the door and reveals himself behind it.)

ELLIOT: *(To Trudy, sarcastic.)* Good one.

NUCLEAR MAN: Ah, there you are. I have some incredible news.
Are you ready to hear it?

ELLIOT: As ready as I'll ever be.

NUCLEAR MAN: I caught him! I finally caught him!

ELLIOT: Caught who?

NUCLEAR MAN: Who do you think, my psychiatric sensei? Cosmo!

ELLIOT: Are you serious?

NUCLEAR MAN: I'm deadly serious. He hijacked an armored vehicle from the bank. It was making its way down Clark Street, and I was flying, you know? Making my rounds? I saw Cosmo from above, so I headed him off at [Diversey]. And, Elliot, I don't know what came over me. Maybe it was what you said yesterday about my quest to prove myself once again, but I'm telling you, I was in the zone! *[Or insert another location.]*

ELLIOT: That's amazing.

TRUDY: *(To Nuclear Man, excited.)* Then what happened?

NUCLEAR MAN: I landed on the street, just 30 feet opposite the rapidly approaching vehicle. I struck the only hero pose I could come up with under such extreme pressure... *(Poses with his left hand on his hip and his right hand extended in front of him, as if to say "Halt!")* ...and I never moved once. The vehicle collided with my right palm, and I made a lasting dent in the fender. I literally single-handedly stopped Cosmo.

TRUDY: Wow.

ELLIOT: *(To Nuclear Man.)* You see? All you needed was some encouragement, some reflection time, and voila, you caught your nemesis!

TRUDY: *(To Nuclear Man.)* So you took him to prison, right?

NUCLEAR MAN: Well, interesting you should ask. I threw the bad-guy net on him after the crash, and decided I would personally fly him to the local authorities. However, while we were on our way, Cosmo had but one request before he served his sentence for all his wrongdoings.

ELLIOT: Yeah? What's that? Freedom?

(Elliot laughs at his own joke. Nobody else laughs. Elliot nudges Trudy to get her to laugh but she doesn't.)

NUCLEAR MAN: No...he wanted to come here and talk to you, Elliot.

(Elliot isn't sure what to say. Trudy appears confused.)

TRUDY: *(Indicating Elliot.)* Him?

ELLIOT: *(To Nuclear Man.)* Yeah. Me?

NUCLEAR MAN: As peculiar as it may seem, I figured even the most heinous of derelicts deserves one last request. Will you humor him?

ELLIOT: Well...sure, I guess.

NUCLEAR MAN: Very well. Hold on a second. He's hanging from a balcony.

(Nuclear Man exits through the window. Elliot takes a seat on the sofa to calm down.)

ELLIOT: *(To Trudy.)* This week just keeps getting stranger. First, I lose my car keys, then I find them in the last place I'd look, and now all this hero/villain stuff is happening. I can't handle it.

(Nuclear Man enters through the window. He carries with him Cosmo, whose hands are tied behind his back. Nuclear Man leads him through the window. Cosmo makes his way through, but his foot gets caught in the windowsill.)

NUCLEAR MAN: *(To Cosmo.)* Come on, work with me here. I can't be doing all the work.

COSMO: I would, but my foot's stuck in the windowsill. Don't move. I'll get it.

(Cosmo removes his foot from the sill and enters the office with Nuclear Man. Elliot and Trudy stare, surprised. Nuclear Man drags Cosmo to Elliot's chair and plops him into it. Nuclear Man stands beside Trudy and watches. Trudy stares at Nuclear Man, enamored.)

ELLIOT: Okay, Cosmo. I don't know how you know me, but I'd certainly appreciate it if you told me.

COSMO: *(Laughs.)* You have some nerve, Elliot. You're the one who put me here.

NUCLEAR MAN: Actually, I put you here, remember? It happened two seconds ago? Give credit where credit's due.

COSMO: Yes, but my capture was Elliot's doing.

NUCLEAR MAN: Uh, no, it wasn't. That was also me. Come on, you're not giving me enough credit.

ELLIOT: *(To Cosmo.)* He's right.

COSMO: *(To Nuclear Man, frustrated.)* Yes, I know. You physically captured me, and brought me here! I am aware of that!

NUCLEAR MAN: Then why do you keep giving Elliot the credit?

TRUDY: *(To Cosmo.)* I'm confused by that, too.

ELLIOT: *(To Cosmo.)* Yeah, I know.

COSMO: *(Angry.)* Shut up! Just take off my mask and get it over with!

NUCLEAR MAN: Great idea.

TRUDY: Wait a second. Where's Atom Boy? Shouldn't he be here for this?

NUCLEAR MAN: He has the flu or something, so I quarantined him at the Radiation Station.

COSMO: *(Muttering under breath, sarcastic.)* Yeah, that sounds like a good place to quarantine someone.

ELLIOT: *(Laughs.)* You have a diabolical sense of humor.

NUCLEAR MAN: Everyone, please shut up. You're ruining my moment. I've been waiting for this for over 15 years. *(Slowly reaches for Cosmo's mask. Elliot and Trudy watch with anticipation. Inches closer and stops. Giddy.)* I'm sorry. I'm so excited. My hands are shaking a little.

(Nuclear Man inches even closer, grabs Cosmo's mask, and yanks it off to reveal Wade. Elliot jumps back in shock. Trudy gasps. Nuclear Man is confused.)

ELLIOT: *(To Cosmo.)* Oh, my gosh! It's you!

NUCLEAR MAN: *(Puzzled.)* Him?

ELLIOT: It's Wade! He was one of my patients until yesterday.

WADE: That's right.

ELLIOT: This is most unexpected. Nobody could've seen this coming.

TRUDY: *(Shrugs.)* I kinda did.

WADE: Now do you see why I'm here?

(Somewhat ashamed of himself, Elliot sinks into his seat.)

ELLIOT: Yes. Now I do.

NUCLEAR MAN: *(Frustrated.)* Wait a second, I still don't! What's the deal?

TRUDY: Wade is sorta going out with Elliot's sister-in-law, Gloria, but he's married.

WADE: *(Defensive.)* I wasn't sorta going out with Gloria...I was going out with Gloria!

TRUDY: *(To Nuclear Man, stage whisper.)* It was an online thing. They never met face to face.

NUCLEAR MAN: Oh, I see. Yeah, that doesn't count.

TRUDY: So Elliot told Gloria that Wade's married, and she broke it off last night.

WADE: And I hold Elliot responsible for the whole thing. If it wasn't for his big mouth, I'd be with Gloria right now, happy and not held prisoner!

ELLIOT: What did you want me to do? Keep it a secret? Gloria is family, and I kinda tolerate her. I wasn't going to let you break her heart with the inevitable truth.

WADE: *(Sighs.)* You couldn't be more wrong.

ELLIOT: So...what? Now you're gonna tell me you're not married?

WADE: Yes.

ELLIOT: Wade, come on, that's a lie. You told me all about your wife, Sally, in our sessions.

WADE: *(Deep breath.)* This isn't easy for me, but that whole wife business was a lie. I'm actually single. All those times in therapy when I was referring to Sally, I was referring to...Nuclear Man.

NUCLEAR MAN: Excuse me?

TRUDY: Oh, that's twisted.

WADE: *(To Elliot.)* I couldn't tell you Cosmo was having problems with Nuclear Man—even if you have a confidentiality agreement—so Wade was having problems with Sally. I thought the advice would translate.

ELLIOT: It all makes sense now.

NUCLEAR MAN: *(To Wade, disgusted.)* I'm Sally, your wife?! Seriously?!

WADE: *(Rolls eyes.)* Yes.

NUCLEAR MAN: I am...so *disturbed* by this. Incredibly disturbed.

WADE: (*Ashamed.*) All I knew was that I was having problems. I'm willing to admit I'm troubled, but I wanted to improve, you have to give me that. So I thought therapy would help me, and it has. It helped me gain the courage to start a relationship with a beautiful woman.

TRUDY: Online.

WADE: Yeah, online! Whatever! (*To Elliot.*) Anyway, how was I supposed to know she was your sister-in-law? Neither of us ever mentioned you in our chats.

NUCLEAR MAN: I can't believe you pretended I was your wife...

WADE: Will you please shut up and get over it?!

ELLIOT: So after I told Gloria you were "married" and she called to break it off—

WADE: I succumbed to my evil urges and reverted back to Cosmo. And I was doing so well without him.

ELLIOT: A classic case of a double life. (*To Nuclear Man.*) That's why you haven't seen Cosmo for so long. Wade didn't need him. He was in love.

WADE: I still am. I'm crazy about Gloria. I wanted to be with her in Florida and shower her with extravagant gifts, so I had Cosmo take off with the armored car.

TRUDY: (*Touched.*) Aw, that is so romantic.

NUCLEAR MAN: And that's where I came in and busted him.

WADE: Anyway, here we are now. I'm no closer to Gloria, and I'm about to go to prison.

NUCLEAR MAN: For a very long time. (*Chuckles.*) Life is good, my friends. I only wish Atom Boy was here to see this. Poor little wuss. (*To Wade.*) Anyway, we should probably get going. You have a cell to call your own, and I have celebrating to do! Come on. (*Helps Wade out of the chair. Trudy watches anxiously and taps Elliot on the shoulder. She gives him a look as if to say, "Do something!" Elliot thinks. Starts to exit.*) Elliot, it's been real. But I think your work here is done. Wade's going to jail, and I finally have that feeling of accomplishment I've been waiting for. You know what? I'm gonna start thinking about retirement just like I promised. Thank you for everything. Say goodbye, Wade.

WADE: (*Sadly.*) Goodbye, Elliot. Thanks for convincing me I could be a better person. I hope prison will give me the same piece of mind I was looking for.

(Nuclear Man and Wade head for the window.)

NUCLEAR MAN: Let's go, my petulant pest.

TRUDY: *(Stage whisper.)* Please do something, Elliot.

(Elliot stops thinking, his adrenaline is pumping.)

ELLIOT: Wait!

(Nuclear Man and Wade both stop and turn around.)

NUCLEAR MAN: Did you want to take a picture of us? I don't blame you. We can do a quick one for my profile pic but that's it!

ELLIOT: I don't think we're done yet.

NUCLEAR MAN: *(Puzzled.)* What are you talking about, Elliot? Of course we are. I saved the day.

ELLIOT: No, Nuclear Man. Don't you see? It can't end this way. It's just too...anti-climactic.

NUCLEAR MAN: I beg your pardon? You beseech me to take a vacation. I said I would consider it upon vanquishing Cosmo. Now you're saying not to vanquish?

ELLIOT: Well, sorta. I mean, yes. I mean, I think you're going to miss Cosmo when you put him away.

TRUDY: *(To Nuclear Man.)* He's right. Revenge never heals a wound. It just leaves a nasty scar.

ELLIOT: What? Where'd you come up with that?

TRUDY: Shut up, Elliot, I'm trying to help you. Forgive me if I don't keep a proverb book in my office.

ELLIOT: *(Points to bookcase.)* Hey, that book over there has helped out in more arguments than you'll ever know. And you don't have an office.

WADE: Those proverbs you used on me weren't that impressive.

ELLIOT: Shut up, Wade, I'm trying to help you. *(To Trudy and Wade.)*

Okay, new plan...we work together and not make fun of helpful proverb books. This is about Nuclear Man and why he shouldn't turn Cosmo in to the police.

NUCLEAR MAN: The man has committed hundreds of crimes!

TRUDY: But he's got a big heart...

NUCLEAR MAN: Wait a second. I see what's going on...you don't want me to turn him in because you feel guilty about ruining his relationship with that Gloria woman.

ELLIOT: Well, it's not that – yeah, maybe. So what?

NUCLEAR MAN: *(To Trudy.)* And you want me to let Cosmo go because you're a woman and you trust romantic men far too much. It's a character flaw in your kind that only allows you to get hurt. You chicks love hunky jerks like me. I'm like honey to you buzzy little bees.

TRUDY: *(Offended.)* All right, all right, that may be completely true, but I think we should discuss this over dinner sometime soon. *(Flirtatiously.)* Would you like my number?

NUCLEAR MAN: Yeah, that's what I thought. And to answer your question...no. I'm a hunky jerk, remember?

TRUDY: *(Romantic daze.)* You certainly are...

NUCLEAR MAN: You guys sicken me. You're so selfish you can't even see the big picture. We're putting a criminal behind bars. This is a great day for humanity. *(To Wade.)* Now let's get out of here. I want to be back home so I can finish season one of ["24"] on DVD. The next episode is about an elaborate terrorist plot to kill a U.S. governor, and I'm looking forward to it. *[Or insert another TV show.]*

(Nuclear Man and Wade head for the window.)

ELLIOT: It hurts me to do this, Nuclear Man.

(Nuclear Man sighs and turns around.)

NUCLEAR MAN: Do what, Elliot?

ELLIOT: Hey, Trudy, did I tell you what happened at some chemical plant about 16 years ago?

(Nuclear Man realizes the threat. Trudy is oblivious. Elliot and Nuclear Man lock eyes and never turn away.)

TRUDY: Um...I'm not sure. Maybe you did and I wasn't listening.

ELLIOT: *(Sighs, disappointed.)* I didn't tell you yet.

TRUDY: Oh, okay. Are you gonna tell me now?

NUCLEAR MAN: Do you realize what I could do to silence you, Elliot?

ELLIOT: Not nearly as much as I realize certain information about a certain superhero could damage that certain superhero's career if it got out.

TRUDY: I still don't know what's going on. Are you going to tell me the story about the chemical plant or not? I kinda need to know now or it'll drive me nuts.

WADE: *(To Elliot, surprised.)* You know Nuclear Man's origin story?

ELLIOT: That's right, Wade. With enough research, I'm sure the press could discover his secret identity as well. After all, Nuclear Man was the only one to survive the—

NUCLEAR MAN: *(Explosive anger.)* That's enough! *(Silence. Gains his composure.)* Now...back to what I was saying. What makes you so invincible, Elliot? You've seen me. You know the insufferable damage I can inflict if provoked, and yet you force me to cooperate. Quite enigmatic.

ELLIOT: Well, let's just say I know you wouldn't do that. Aside from your little fights with Atom Boy, you're clean when it comes to civilian relations. Call it morality. Call it some ancient superhero oath. Whatever it is, I can be at ease knowing you would never hurt me.

WADE: *(Nods in agreement.)* He's like Batman and you're just a citizen of Gotham.

ELLIOT: Thank you! I'm tickled to know that at least the villain community in this city reads comic books.

TRUDY: *(To Wade, sarcastic.)* Yeah, great job, nerd.

NUCLEAR MAN: *(To Elliot.)* I'm sure the citizens of Gotham never stood in Batman's way when he was trying to fight crime. I'm also certain they would never throw Batman under the bus by telling his secrets to the world, especially after they made a confidentiality agreement not to. You realize you can lose your license, don't you?

ELLIOT: If that's what it takes, I'm willing to make the sacrifice. I'm also willing to compromise.

NUCLEAR MAN: What did you have in mind?

ELLIOT: You give me a chance. We have group sessions, and we solve your differences through words. Meanwhile, I'll repair the relationship between Wade and Gloria. If I don't get Wade back with Gloria and change him completely into a good guy, you can turn him in to the police.

NUCLEAR MAN: What do you really want out of this? Is this a monetary thing?

ELLIOT: I want to help you both. It's why I got into this business. And trust me, if it was a monetary thing, I'd be hijacking armored bank cars.

WADE: *(Chuckles.)* Good one, Doc.

NUCLEAR MAN: Shut up.

WADE: All right.

NUCLEAR MAN: You drive a hard bargain, Elliot. It's pretty gutsy of you to threaten me like this.

ELLIOT: You'll thank me later. I know it.

NUCLEAR MAN: I certainly hope so.

(Nuclear Man extends his hand to Elliot. Elliot refuses to shake hands.)

ELLIOT: Let's skip the handshake. I'm still recovering from the last one.

WADE: *(Delighted.)* I can't believe this is working! *(To Elliot.)* I mean, you really believe in me! Thank you.

ELLIOT: Don't thank me yet. *(Points to Nuclear Man.)* We need to convince him and Gloria you're not evil anymore, or you're going to jail. And not just any jail, Wade! They'll send you to the Negative Zone!

(Wade nods in compliance.)

NUCLEAR MAN: What's the Negative Zone?

ELLIOT: It's a prison created for super-villains in the Marvel universe. Reed Richards and Tony Stark created it.

TRUDY: *(Disappointed.)* Another comic book reference? Really? It's like a second language with you.

WADE: *(Shrugs.)* I liked the reference.

NUCLEAR MAN: *(To Elliot.)* When do we begin our therapy?

ELLIOT: As soon as we make it to Florida.

NUCLEAR MAN: Okay, sounds fair but— *(Shocked.)* Hold on just a back-breaking minute! Florida?!

[END OF FREEVIEW]