

SYLVIA. I'm nervous.
GREG. No. Hey, you're in your element now. This is nature, Sylvia. This is your natural habitat.
SYLVIA. I'm still nervous.
GREG. Look at those other dogs.
SYLVIA. I see them, I see them.
GREG. This is called Dog Hill. They allow dogs to play freely here. *(He takes the leash from her.)* Go play, Sylvia. *(Giving her a shove.)*
SYLVIA. Hey! Stop pushing.
GREG. Then go, Sylvia. There's your group, there's your pack. Call of the wild, kid.
SYLVIA. I know all that.
GREG. And you need the exercise.
SYLVIA. Look, it's no easy thing wading into a new group. They can gang up. Or bite. Or simply ignore you. I notice you're not barging into that group of dog owners.
GREG. You have a point.
SYLVIA. So. Let me take my own sweet time. *(She starts tentatively offstage.)*
GREG. *(Watching her go.)* Good girl. *(Continuing to watch.)* Good.... Go on.... Play.... Run around.... Good. *(Sylvia goes off. Tom comes on. He wears jeans, a windbreaker and a baseball cap.)*
TOM. Hiya.
GREG. Hello.
TOM. New around here?
GREG. Just got a dog.
TOM. That one yours?
GREG. Right.
TOM. Cute.
GREG. Thanks.
TOM. Cute little butt on her.
GREG. I agree.
TOM. That's my Golden sniffing around her.
GREG. Good-looking dog.
TOM. His name's Bowser.
GREG. He looks like a Bowser.
TOM. He is. He is definitely a Bowser.

GREG. Mine's called Sylvia.
TOM. Sylvia?... Uh oh.
GREG. You don't like the name Sylvia?
TOM. Might cause problems.
GREG. Why?
TOM. Give a dog a woman's name, you begin to think of her as a woman.
GREG. Oh yes?
TOM. That can be dangerous. Which is why I go for doggy names. Spot. Fido. Bowser ... Sylvia? That can spell trouble.
GREG. Oh come on.
TOM. Maybe I'm just associating. I had a girl named Sylvia.
GREG. Was she good-looking?
TOM. No, she was a dog. *(Both laugh; then both watch.)*
GREG. They seem to be getting along.
TOM. Sylvia and Bowser. *(Calling out.)* Easy, Bowser. Go slow. *(To Greg.)* Is Sylvia spayed?
GREG. She's a stray. I haven't had her checked yet.
TOM. Don't let them spay her till you're sure she's been in heat.
GREG. Don't?
TOM. It's a feminist thing. You're supposed to let her experience how it feels to be female. That way, she'll retain a sense of gender later on.
GREG. Ah.
TOM. There's a book on the subject. Called *Play Now, Spay Later*. I'll bring it the next time I come to the park.
GREG. Thanks. *(Sylvia runs back on enthusiastically.)*
SYLVIA. Just touching base here, just touching base.
GREG. Having a good time, Sylvia?
SYLVIA. The best!
GREG. Do you like Bowser?
SYLVIA. I think he's absolutely fantastic!
GREG. Then go back and play!
SYLVIA. May I?
GREG. Sure, kid! Go on! Shoo!
SYLVIA. Oh boy! Look out, Bowser! Here I come! *(She runs off.)*

TOM. She's a little insecure, isn't she?
 GREG. Why do you say that?
 TOM. The way she checks back with you.
 GREG. She loves me.
 TOM. Ah.
 GREG. She thinks I saved her life. I'm her knight in shining armor.
 TOM. Uh-oh.
 GREG. Now what's the matter?
 TOM. You married?
 GREG. Sure. Why?
 TOM. Wife fond of Sylvia?
 GREG. Not yet. Why?
 TOM. Kids out of the nest?
 GREG. Right. Why?
 TOM. Be careful.
 GREG. What do you mean?
 TOM. You can get lost in it.
 GREG. Oh yes?
 TOM. Sure. A man and his dog. It's a big thing.
 GREG. I guess it is.
 TOM. Women sense it. They nose it out. My wife feels very threatened by it.
 GREG. She does?
 TOM. Oh God yes. And I imagine it's worse with yours.
 GREG. Why?
 TOM. No offense, but you're older. With older guys, it can become major.
 GREG. Think so?
 TOM. Oh sure. It's something to hold onto, on the way down.
 GREG. Oh now.
 TOM. Look, women with dogs, no problem. A dog is basically another kid to them. It's a maternal thing. But for guys, it's different. When I come home at night, I have to *remind* myself to kiss my wife before I say hello to Bowser.
 GREG. Mmm hmm.
 TOM. I even think about him at work. I keep wanting to

call him up and chew the fat. I don't think it's a gay thing, but I love that guy.
 GREG. I can understand that.
 TOM. And they say it's even worse if your dog's a female.
 GREG. Really?
 TOM. There was a guy here, had a dog named Debbie — half basset, half beagle — sweet little thing. His wife walked in on him giving Debbie a bath, and got so jealous she gave the dog away.
 GREG. Christ! What did the guy do?
 TOM. Sued her for damages. The judge was a dog owner and came down on his side. He said a man and his dog is a sacred relationship. What nature hath put together let no woman put asunder.
 GREG. So what happened?
 TOM. Well, the guy got Debbie back, and his wife back, and they all tried moving to Vermont. But it's still not good. Someone visited them recently and said it reminded him of the last chapter of *Ethan Frome*.
 GREG. Good Lord.
 TOM. There's a book out on the problem, actually. *Your Pooch and Your Partner*. It has one basic bit of advice. Always remember that your dog is simply a dog. Always keep reminding yourself of that fact. Not a person. Just a dog. Force yourself to think it. Otherwise you can get into deep dogshit.
 GREG. Gotcha.
 TOM. Well. Time to go. Better hold Sylvia so she won't follow Bowser.
 GREG. Oh she won't do that.
 TOM. She might. Bowser brings out the beast in them. (*He goes off. Music: something cozy and domestic, like "My Blue Heaven."** *Greg strolls off as the set becomes the apartment and Kate enters, settling at her desk.*)
 GREG. (*Calling from off.*) We're home!

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