

from a distance and from one side. You can't show a fragment to a theater audience—it's all or nothing. It's simpler. Which is more exposing? I don't know.

Two weeks before shooting—mid-Tracy Anderson panic, and before I knew my co-star was my former teacher—there also had been direct phone messages from the director to set up a talk just between us “to discuss the scene at the publisher's apartment,” he tastefully said. I admit, I thought it might be fun to not be too prim during the phone call; this scene might be hot and fun on screen and a blast for the character. And after all, it might be George Clooney playing the publisher.

Cut to filming day: Back to the trailer, my sticky body and the Tums. I was offered a very puffy light blue bathrobe that made me feel more like Lucille Ball than Sharon Stone. I went to the set, breasts floating together (I was wearing a sticker contraption with a clip that creates cleavage, apparently a popular item on *Sex and the City*), and my body less sticky each moment. I felt good, airbrushed and healthy, if not as thin as I'd like to be. Obviously I was wondering how I would approach Austin when we were on set. ‘Hi! Remember me? It's Eliza Doolittle! I'm in my 40s now and, well, here we are! Strip down!’

So, how did we do it? The costume designer, who'd become a friend, introduced me to the coolest of his compatriots, a wardrobe woman with belly piercings, tattoos everywhere and wonderful rings on every finger. She set a tone, and I picked up on

it and treated the day as any other day to be bold, to be open, to accept the ridiculous turns of life and to enjoy working and acting. She told me no, no sideboob was needed. She went up to Austin's crotch and built a tower of folded towels for me to sit on, a barrier. It was meant to be as realistic as a kid's mechanical pony ride outside an ice cream parlor. While the wardrobe girl built her tower, I asked Austin, “Is this your first time doing this?” And he quipped, “You mean on TV?”

How can you act something so intimate? It's hard to describe the frame of mind that two professional actors lock into in order to trust each other enough to walk this incredibly fine line,

our projects, and we acted like... what is the word I need? I want to say family, because actors really are like brothers and sisters. It's more than friendship that bonds us. It's some pact: We are in this together. There is a decency and unspoken closeness that makes me proud I gave my life to this profession.

The cameras rolled on my naked back and the scripted bouncing, and together Austin and I became storytellers. He was funny, easy, smart and clever in his performance. Father-figure, mentor, assistant, compatriot, star—it all went out the window, and he was The Publisher: a man with power who could catapult June out of the pain and

to clock how successfully we had broken any remaining ice. Here was my former teacher who had so many times asked me to say Eliza's lines until they were natural to me, so I wouldn't be careful or ‘watch myself’—one of the things actors work hardest to avoid—while I auditioned at the age of 22. Here I was more than 20 years later, feigning sex with this same mentor, and scatting much more like a jazz singer now, but scatting with my emotions and self, and feeling safe. Neither of us, years ago, could have seen this day's work ahead. Austin was a part of a lifetime of empowering myself to be an actor, to be free enough to play my role playfully and embrace unexpectedness in circumstances both on and off camera.

That evening, we played the scene a dozen times, and he was wicked, he was sweet, he was practical, he was scheming—he was The Publisher. When we were done he, resuming his voice as a teacher but with an excited delight in his eye, said he'd loved working with me, that I was fun, “so free,” and allowed the scene to flourish. He actually seemed to think what happened was a rare encounter, as if we had gone into the precious realm of really good work. Maybe undressed actors can sometimes be a bit less flexible? Maybe I had just ceased to be his student? “The difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she is treated,” Eliza Doolittle says to Colonel Pickering and Prof. Higgins in *My Fair Lady*. We treated each other with respect—all of us.

An actor's life goes on. And I went home to my husband. **B**

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a tight wire of logic and impulse. A smile, an understanding gaze, passed between us; then his helpful hand offered as I climbed onto his tower and stumbled, that helpful hand making both of us less awkward, letting us share an identity as both lovers and, more importantly, partners.

He got into bed and lay down without a hint of leer, and with a technical placement that was deliberate and comforting. He helped me adjust a sheet to protect myself from the potential slip and gaze of others in the room. (It was called a closed set, but still there were still about 20 people in attendance.) I shifted my stickers, tweaked my beddy hair; he experimented with how many pillows he needed behind his head. Our bodies became

monotony of her widowhood and maternal servitude and make her life exciting. June knew he had the access, and she wanted the book deal, a talk shows and a new beginning. What might Austin's character feel? I don't know, but I do know that the actor himself said to me, between takes, “These two are very funny, I think they get each other.” It was as if Austin sensed the two characters were very aware of their bargain and happy in it. Did our own connection and acceptance of our professional situation color his perception? That's the mystery of acting.

On a few takes, we enjoyed the freedom we had established, and we bounced a bit too vigorously. The director told us we could reel it in. We laughed