

Christopher Durang  
27 Short Plays

## Introduction

Christopher Durang is relentlessly entertaining. Whether his play is a burlesque of other playwrights or an annihilation of the myth of the happy American family, or a vitriolic challenge to organized religion, homophobia, psychoanalysis, or parenthood, the plays are constantly arousing their audiences with hilarity and mirth. He succeeds because of the extraordinary fertility of his imagination, inventiveness, courage, and audacity. Blessed with twin gifts—originality and an anarchic spirit—he provides an audience with unruly laughter and outlandish amusement. One must guard oneself against the possibility of dying from laughter while watching a Durang play or reading a Durang script.

Coexistent with that power is Durang's tragic vision. Like all GREAT comedy writers, Durang has another significant dimension. From the time of his earliest plays, he has been responsive to the most profound and baffling question, "What is the nature and the purpose of the universe and to the human condition within that universe?" I know that chronology because the first major production of his play, *The Nature And The Purpose Of The Universe*, in 1971 preceded by two months his entering the Yale School of Drama. When he chose to come to Yale, I was the Associate Dean of the Drama School and together with Richard Gilman taught and supervised the training of the student playwrights. That position afforded me the rare good fortune of being in his immediate neighborhood for the three years of his training and his subsequent residence as an ABC Fellow. I had the opportunity to both observe and participate in his development as a playwright. On the day Gilman and I accepted him into the program, I rushed into Dean Robert Brustein's office to announce, "We took in a kid from Harvard who is about twenty-one or twenty-two and who already has a subject: A scream for help in a world he knows provides none, so he keeps on screaming and laughs at it."

Laughter for Durang not only affords a relief but a temporary refuge which might very well be the only remaining source of salvation. The modern playwright closest in spirit and form to him is Ionesco, and the playwright from the history of western dramatic literature most his kin is Aristophanes. A reader of *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You* will hear echoes of *The Lesson* by Ionesco as will the reader of *Canker Sores and Other Distractions* hear echoes of *The Bald Soprano*. Ionesco's bizarre and fantastic situations which inhabit his illogical universe in a form plotless and replete with non-sequiturs are echoed in Durang's *'dentity Crisis* and *Death Comes To Us All, Mary Agnes*. And just as Aristophanes took Euripedes to task while that playwright was still alive (*Thesmophoriazusae*), so Durang takes his contemporaries to task in *For Whom The Southern Belle Tolls* and *A Styx of the Eye*. He similarly echoes Aristophanes' habit of taking to task contemporary figures who sat in his audience such as Socrates (*The Clouds*) and Cleon (*The Wasps*) with his plays *Entertaining Mr. Helms* and *Cardinal O'Connor*. Aristophanes' universe was not at all absurd, but his inventions and his fantasy worlds that he created were designed to attack the corruption which was poisoning his beloved Athens.

Durang shouts for reason in an unreasonable universe and in an unreasonable society. He is, in the best sense of the critic, attempting to be corrective while fulfilling his primary purpose of entertaining his audience. He has to be offensive to be effective, just as Aristophanes had to be offensive and Jonathan Smith (Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin) had to be offensive. That offensiveness is in the service of an objective to aid an audience to see not only its follies and vices but also its misplaced values, its lies and deceits, its infirmities, even its cruelty and callousness. Only by having such conditions razed in front of us can we begin the process of building, of correcting. With his uncommon talent, Christopher Durang lights a candle rather than curses a darkness.

*Howard Stein, September 1995*  
*Professor Emeritus, Columbia University*  
*Retired Chairman, Oscar Hammerstein II Center for Theatre Studies,*  
*Columbia University*

## Wanda's Visit

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

This play is based on a teleplay I wrote in 1986 for a PBS half-hour comedy series called *Trying Times*, created by Jon Denny. It was Denny's idea to ask various playwrights to write half-hour teleplays about "difficult times." Denny produced about 12 of them for WCET in Los Angeles. The first ones included Beth Henley on meeting the in-laws; Wendy Wasserstein on learning to drive; Bernard Slade on moving day; George C. Wolfe on having a black maid put a spell on your house; Albert Innaurato on dealing with a tax audit. (The *Trying Times* program shows up from time to time on PBS stations and makes fun watching.)

My episode was number six and my topic was dealing with a visit from someone from your high school days.

The character of Wanda—needy, manipulative, impossible to be rid of—came charging out of my brain and was great fun to write.

The teleplay was filmed in a week, directed by Alan Arkin, and starring Jeff Daniels, Julie Hagerty and Swoosie Kurtz as Wanda.

My professional path had crossed Swoosie's when she played Bette in my play *A History of the American Film* at Arena Stage in 1977 and then repeated her role in 1978 on Broadway, winning a Drama Desk award for her portrayal. In 1977 she also played the pivotal, comic role of Rita in my friend Wendy Wasserstein's play *Uncommon Women and Others*, both onstage and on camera for PBS's *Great Performances*.

Swoosie is a very special comic talent, and it was a thrill to have her play Wanda. Indeed this whole experience of working with Jeff, Julie, Swoosie and Alan was one of the nicest and most artistically successful professional experiences I've had. (And for added fun, I played the role of the Waiter. Nepotism. Authorism?)

I was sorry that more people didn't see it (there's occasionally talk about putting some of the *Trying Times* out on video; I wish they would). So I decided to re-present it onstage as part of *Durang Durang*.

The script is mostly the dialogue from the teleplay. I have made some changes for transition purposes. For instance, on film we could simply fade to later in the evening, with Wanda wrapped in a blanket, talking, talking. On stage, I had to find other ways to make time pass.

As I was adapting it, some new lines also came to me and I often included those as well. (Marsha got some new quirks in the restaurant scene.)

So, *Wanda's Visit*.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

*Wanda's Visit* was part of *Durang Durang* at Manhattan Theater Club. The cast was as follows:

Jim. . . . . Marcus Giamatti  
Marsha . . . . . Lizbeth Mackay  
Wanda. . . . . Becky Ann Baker  
Waiter . . . . . David Aaron Baker

CHARACTERS

JIM  
MARSHA, his wife  
WANDA  
WAITER  
TWO MEN

## WANDA'S VISIT

*Scene: A comfortable home in Connecticut. Not realistically designed, though—different areas represent different rooms: the living room, the dining room, the bathroom, the kitchen. The dining room table later doubles as a table in a restaurant. The furniture and the colors are tastefully chosen. A “country” feel.*

*At Manhattan Theatre Club the setting was very simple: a round table and three chairs. When the chairs were one way, it was the living room. When the chairs were around the table, it was the dining room. For the bedroom, two chairs were put together and the actors sat on them and spread a comforter over themselves. The bathroom was defined by a square of light.*

*This is the home of Jim and Marsha. They enter and come to speak to the audience.*

*They are attractive, in their mid-to-late 30s. He's in somewhat preppy relaxed clothes—khaki pants, a button-down shirt. She's in a comfortable skirt and blouse, with warm but pale colors. Her hair may be pulled back.*

*Their manner in talking to the audience is that of telling a story, but also, perhaps, of explaining themselves to a marriage counselor.*

JIM: Our lives had been seeming dull for a while. You know, nothing major, just sometimes being quiet at dinner.

MARSHA: After 13 years, you run out of things to say, I guess. Or else it's a phase.

JIM: I think it's a phase.

MARSHA: Me too. It'll pass.

JIM: We've been married for 13 years.

MARSHA: Our anniversary was in March.

JIM: So in March we went to dinner and tried to get drunk, but we just got sleepy.

MARSHA: We didn't try to get drunk.

JIM: I did.

MARSHA: We had a very nice time, but the wine made us sleepy.

JIM: We were in bed at 10:30. Asleep in bed.

MARSHA: Well, we were tired.

JIM: And then the next week I got this letter from this old classmate of mine.

MARSHA: Wanda. He'd never mentioned her.

JIM: Well, she was just some girlfriend. You know. High school.

MARSHA: Wanda.

JIM: And Wanda wrote me, saying she'd like to visit. And I asked Marsha if she'd mind.

MARSHA: I have trouble saying no, most women do, I think. It's not pleasing or something. Anyway, Jim got this letter...

JIM: ...and Wanda said she was going to be in our neck of the woods...

MARSHA: ...and I hate the phrase "neck of the woods"...

JIM: And I asked you if you'd mind, and you said, it would be fine.

MARSHA: Well, I have trouble saying no. You know that. You should have said "Are you sure" or "Really" or something.

JIM: (*Slymied; out to audience.*) Well, I didn't. I thought it would be fun. You know, to mull over the old high school days—the prom, the high school paper—I was editor...

MARSHA: And really, what a ball for me...

JIM: And Marsha didn't seem to mind. I mean I can't be a mind reader. So I wrote Wanda back, and told her we'd love to have her visit. I mean, really it might have been fun. In high school Wanda had been quite a looker.

MARSHA: And, of course, what an enticement for me. To meet an old high school fantasy. Lucky me.

JIM: So we set a date, and Marsha cleaned the house and baked a chicken.

MARSHA: Jim refuses to cook or clean.

JIM: I mow the lawn, you make the chicken.

MARSHA: We're old-fashioned, I guess.



JIM: And so we waited for her visit.

*(Lights change. Sound of a car driving up, stopping, and a door slamming.)*

JIM: Oh, I'll go, honey. It must be Wanda.

*(Jim goes off to greet Wanda. Marsha straightens up things one last time. Offstage we hear great whooping and enthusiastic cries of "Jim! Jim!")*

*Marsha looks startled, curious.*

*Wanda and Jim come into the room. Wanda is also late 30s, early 40s, but unlike Jim and Marsha, she is not in as good shape. Her clothes are a little gaudy, her hair looks odd or messy, and she carries a sense of emotional disarray with her. But she also looks kind of fun and colorful.)*

WANDA: *(With longing.)* Jim!!!

*(Wanda throws her arms around Jim with great abandon, and then holds this embrace as if her life depended on it.)*

*Marsha goes closer to them, and waits patiently for the appropriate moment to be introduced.)*

WANDA: *(Still embracing him.)* Jim. Jim. Oh, Jim, Jim.

MARSHA: *(Since the embrace doesn't seem to be ending.)* Hello. I'm Marsha, Jim's wife.

WANDA: *(Breaking from the embrace.)* Oh, hello. Nice to see you. I was just so excited at seeing this guy. Hey, guy. Hey. How ya doin'?

JIM: I'm fine. *(A little uncertain he recognizes her.)* Wanda?

WANDA: Are you expecting someone else?

JIM: No, it's just—well, didn't you used to be blond?

WANDA: Yeah, and I didn't used to be fat either—although I'm not really fat, my woman's group doesn't let me say that, I just have a food problem and some of it shows. But really I just lost 20 pounds. You should have seen me last month.

JIM: You seem quite thin.

WANDA: Oh, you're sweet. I may look thin, but I'm really fat. *(To Marsha.)* Do you have anything I can eat?

MARSHA: Well...

WANDA: No, I'm just kidding, it was a joke, it seemed like this set-up, you know, I talk about my weight, and then I say, can I have some food.

MARSHA: But if you're hungry...

WANDA: *I am not hungry. (Glares at Marsha; then becomes friendly again;*

to Jim.) Say, Jim, I love your wife. She reminds me of my mother.  
(To Marsha.) No, no, the positive side of my mother. Really. I like both of you.

MARSHA: (*Innocently.*) Thank you. I like both of you.

WANDA: What?

MARSHA: (*Trying to fix what she said.*) I like you, and I like Jim.

WANDA: You better, you're married to Jim, you lucky dog, you. Oh, give me another hug, guy.

(*Wanda gives Jim another bear hug.*)

WANDA: Hrrrrrrrrrrrrrr.

JIM: Why don't we go in the living room?

(*Wanda careens into the living room area, looks around her. They follow.*)

WANDA: Oh, I love this room. It's so "country." Did you do it, Marsha?

MARSHA: Well, we bought the furniture. I never thought of it as "doing it" actually.

WANDA: Oh, it's wonderful. And I should know, because I have terrible taste.

MARSHA: What?

WANDA: I mean I can evaluate good taste in others because I have such bad taste in all my own choices. For instance, my house looks like the interior of a Baskin Robbins. Everything is plastic, and there are all these bright yellows and dark chocolates. Really the only thing worse than being married to me is to have me decorate your house.

JIM: Well, I'm sure you underestimate yourself, Wanda.

WANDA: Isn't he a dreamboat? You're a dreamboat, dreamboat. Well, say thank you!

JIM: (*Embarrassed.*) Thank you.

WANDA: (*To Marsha; with sudden focus.*) Do you have anything to eat? Pretzels or something?

MARSHA: Well, dinner should be ready soon.

WANDA: Oh, Lord, I don't want dinner yet. Just some pretzels would be good. Something to munch on.

MARSHA: Would you like some pate?

WANDA: Pate? (*To Jim.*) Where'd you get her, honey, the back of *The New Yorker*? (*To Marsha.*) Sure, honey, I can eat pate, as long as you have crackers with it. And maybe some pretzels.

MARSHA: Fine. I'll be right back. (*Exits to kitchen area.*)

WANDA: Oh, Jimbo, she's a jewel. An absolute jewel. (*Wanda sits next to Jim.*)

JIM: Thank you. We've been married 13 years.

WANDA: Oh. An unlucky number. But she's a jewel. I hope she's not hard like a jewel—just precious.

JIM: Yes, she's very precious.

WANDA: Good.

JIM: You know, I hate to say this, but I don't recognize your face actually.

WANDA: That's very perceptive, Jim. I've had plastic surgery. But it wasn't the fancy-schmancy kind to make your face look better, it was so they couldn't find me.

JIM: Who couldn't find you?

WANDA: I don't want to talk about it. Not on the first night, at least.

JIM: Now you've piqued my interest.

WANDA: Oh, you men are always so impatient.

*(Wanda squeezes his knee. Marsha comes in with the pate, and notices the knee-squeezing. Marsha sits down with the pate. Wanda is seated between Jim and Marsha.)*

MARSHA: Here is the pate.

WANDA: Thanks, honey, I'll just have the crackers. (*Munches enthusiastically on a cracker.*) Stoned wheat thins, I love this. (*To Jim.*) She's a jewel, Jim.

JIM: (*Rather miserably.*) I know. You're a jewel, Marsha.

MARSHA: Thank you. (*To Wanda.*) Would you like a drink?

*(Wanda pauses for a moment, and then begins to sob, very genuinely.)*

MARSHA: (*At a loss what to say.*) Don't feel you have to have a drink.

JIM: Wanda, what's the matter?

WANDA: (*Through sobs.*) Oh, I don't want to burden you. Or your wife.

MARSHA: That's all right, I'm sure we'd love to be burdened. I mean, if it would help you.

JIM: Yes. Tell us what's the matter.

WANDA: I don't know where to begin. I'm just so unhappy!

JIM: Gosh, Wanda. What is it?

*(Wanda pulls herself together, and tries to explain why she felt so upset.)*

WANDA: Well it all started the summer after high school graduation. (*To Marsha.*) Jim and I had gone to the prom together, and though of course nothing had been said, everyone just kind of presumed he and I would get married.

JIM: Really? Who presumed this?

WANDA: Well, everyone. My mother, my father, me, everyone.

JIM: Gosh. I mean, I knew we dated.

WANDA: Dated, Jimbo, we were inseparable. From about February of senior year to June senior year, we spent every spare moment together. You gave me your class ring. Look, I have it right here. *(Looks through her purse.)* No, I can't find it. *(Keeps looking.)*

MARSHA: Jim, gave me the nicest engagement ring.

WANDA: Uh, huh. Now, where is it? *(Wanda dumps out the messy contents of her purse; looks through the mess.)* No. No. Here's the prescription for seconal I always carry with me in case I feel suicidal.

MARSHA: I don't think any of the pharmacies are open this late.

*(Wanda stares at Marsha for a moment, like a child who's crying and has suddenly been distracted. Before she can go any further comprehending whatever Marsha said, Jim speaks up.)*

JIM: Forget about the ring, Wanda. Tell us why you cried a few minutes ago.

WANDA: Isn't it obvious?

JIM: Isn't what obvious?

WANDA: Seeing the path not taken. I could have had a happy life if I married you. Excuse me for talking this way, Marsha, I just want you to know how lucky you are.

MARSHA: Oh, that's fine. Whatever.

WANDA: No, not whatever. Jimbo. *(Kisses him; looks at Marsha, speaks to Jim.)* You see, I do that in front of Marsha so she knows how lucky she is.

MARSHA: Thank you. I feel lucky.

WANDA: Well, don't you forget it. Are you listening to me?

MARSHA: No one else is speaking.

WANDA: *(Genuinely laughs.)* Oh I love her sense of humor. So anyway, after the prom, Jimbo went away for the whole summer, and he didn't write me...

JIM: I didn't know you wanted me to...

WANDA: And then you and I went to different colleges, and *then* when you didn't write me, I was heartbroken...

JIM: Really? I'm terribly sorry... I thought we were kind of casual. I mean, we were 17.

WANDA: I was 18. They held me back in 3rd grade.

JIM: Wanda, if you felt this way, why didn't you tell me at the time? You haven't said anything in 20 years.

WANDA: Well, I've been very busy, and it's hard to be open about emotions, especially painful ones. (*Chomps on a cracker.*) So then I went to Ann Arbor, and oh, Jim and Marsha, I'm so ashamed to tell you this—I was promiscuous.

MARSHA: Really?

WANDA: Yes. (*Emphatic, cranky.*) Gosh, these crackers are sure making me thirsty. When you offered me something to drink, I didn't think it was going to be my one chance.

MARSHA: (*Startled, disoriented.*) I'm sorry. Would you like something to drink?

WANDA: (*Sweetly.*) Yes, thank you, Marsha. Anything at all. Preferably with vodka.

(*Marsha exits off to kitchen.*)

WANDA: She really is a jewel. She really is. Now where was I?

JIM: You were saying you had been promiscuous.

WANDA: It was awful. I became a campus joke. But it was because I was drowning my sorrow, you see—in flesh.

JIM: In flesh. Ah. Well, that's too bad.

WANDA: There was this one night a whole bunch of guys from the football team stood outside my window and they chanted my name.

JIM: Oh. Well, at least you made an impression.

WANDA: Yeah, but it was because I was missing a certain somebody. And also I liked sex.

(*Marsha comes in, just in time to hear this last remark.*)

JIM: (*Startled.*) Oh, Marsha's here. Hello, Marsha. We missed you.

MARSHA: (*A bit of an edge.*) Here's your drink. I hope you like Kool-Aid.

WANDA: Oh, I love it! (*Gulps her entire drink.*) Mmmm, delicious.

(*Marsha looks disappointed.*)

WANDA: So anyway, the campus minister once had to give a whole sermon against me, which made me feel just awful. (*To Jim.*) And all because I was pining for you.

MARSHA: I wonder if I should check on the chicken.

JIM: Please don't go just now. (*Jim gets up, to stand by Marsha.*)

WANDA: And, of course, I was raised Catholic, so I knew what I was doing was very, very wrong, but I was so unhappy... (*Weeps copiously.*)

(*Jim and Marsha stare at her for a little while.*)

JIM: (*Without too much enthusiasm.*) There, there, Wanda.

MARSHA: Yes. There, there.

WANDA: And then my second husband gave me herpes, and every time

the first one would call to threaten my life, it would trigger an outbreak...

*(Marsha sits back down in a chair, Jim sits on the arm.)*

WANDA: ...herpes is often set off by emotional turmoil, you know.

JIM: *(Forcing interest.)* Oh, yes, I've read that.

WANDA: And then I thought to hell with men, maybe I should become a lesbian. And I tried that, but the problem was I just wasn't attracted to women, so the whole experiment was a dismal failure.

MARSHA: Doesn't anyone want dinner yet?

WANDA: *(Suddenly switching moods.)* Marsha sounds hungry. Sure, honey, let's go eat.

*(Wanda bounds up and moves to the dining room table. Jim and Marsha follow.)*

*(The dinner is not realistically done. It may be mimed with plates and silverware already set on the table.)*

WANDA: Oh the dinner looks beautiful. Marsha, you're so talented as a homemaker. Now where was I?

JIM: Something about you were promiscuous.

WANDA: Well, I don't like to use that word. I slept around uncontrollably, that's what I prefer to say. Did you ever do that, Marsha?

MARSHA: No, I didn't. I was a late bloomer.

WANDA: Uh huh. So then, there was that guy from prison. And then there was his father, Fred. Did I tell you about Fred? Well, Fred said to me, I married you because I thought you would be my anchor in the port of life, but now I think you're stark raving mad...

MARSHA: Could I have the salt please?

*(Jim passes Marsha the salt.)*

WANDA: ...and I said, you think I'm crazy, who's the one who has hallucinations, and thinks that shoes go on the hands instead of the feet? Not me, buddy boy.

JIM: *(To Wanda.)* Did he take drugs or something?

MARSHA: Please don't ask her questions.

WANDA: What?

MARSHA: *(To Wanda.)* Well, I mean I want you to tell the story your own way.

WANDA: Thank you, Marsha. You know, Jim. I really feel close to Marsha.

JIM: I'm glad. *(To Marsha.)* Could I have the salt please?

WANDA: *(Responding to him.)* Sure, honey. *(Passes him the salt; to Marsha.)*

Don't you just love him? *(Continues on with story.)* So one day the washing machine blew up, and Fred said to me, you did that, everything about you is chaos, I'm leaving and I'm taking Tranquility with me.

JIM: He actually said "tranquility"?

MARSHA: *(Muttered.)* Don't ask her questions.

WANDA: *(Explaining.)* Tranquility was our dog. And I said, I'm the one who fed Tranquility, and walked her and took care of her worms, and she used to throw up on the rug, and, of course, you can't just leave it there...

MARSHA: Excuse me, I'll be right back.

JIM: Marsha, are you all right?

MARSHA: I'm fine.

WANDA: I hope my talking about vomit didn't make you feel sick.

MARSHA: *(Nearly out of the room.)* No, it's fine.

*(Marsha has left the dining area and gotten to the bathroom area. She holds her head in pain, or leans on a wall for a support. She just couldn't stand to be at the table for a minute longer.)*

WANDA: She's a little hard to talk to.

JIM: I think she had a hard day.

WANDA: Really? What did she do? Spend it making up the guest room for me?

JIM: Oh.

WANDA: Really, I can sleep anywhere. I think I'm being evicted tomorrow anyway, so I'd prefer not to be there.

JIM: That's too bad.

WANDA: I roll with the punches. I enjoy the little things in life. I enjoy colors. I like textures, I like silk and cotton, I don't like corduroy, I don't like ridges...

JIM: *(On his way to find Marsha.)* Uh huh. Hold onto the thought. I'll be right back.

*(Jim exits and goes to the bathroom area where he finds Marsha still crouched or leaning.)*

JIM: Why are you hiding in the bathroom?

MARSHA: I needed aspirin. Then I just couldn't go downstairs again. When is she leaving?

JIM: I think she's staying overnight.

MARSHA: What?

JIM: I think she's staying ov...

MARSHA: Did she say that, or did you say that?

*(Wanda, bored alone, bounds into the bathroom area with them. The area is small, and they're all crowded together.)*

WANDA: What are you two talking about?

JIM: Oh, nothing. Marsha was just brushing her teeth.

WANDA: It's so intimate brushing your teeth, isn't it? When you live with someone, you don't have any secrets. I remember David said to me, why didn't you tell me you had herpes, and I said, I forgot, okay? People forget things, all right? And he said, not all right, I'm going to have this for life, and I said, so what, you have your nose for life, is that *my* fault?

MARSHA: *(Tired, but sort of annoyed by the logic.)* Yes, but his nose wasn't your fault, while...

WANDA: What?

MARSHA: Nothing. I see your point.

WANDA: So then I thought I'd stay out of relationships for a while, and I went to work for this lawyer, only he wasn't a regular lawyer, he was a king pin.

JIM: King pin?

WANDA: Of crime. He was a king pin of crime, only I didn't realize it. Eventually, of course, I had to get my face re-done so they couldn't find me. But, I better not say anything more about this right now.

MARSHA: *(Trying to tell her no.)* Jim says you were expecting to stay over night...

WANDA: Thank you, I'd love to! I feel I'm just starting to scratch the surface with old Jim-bo here. Jim-bo, do you remember that girl with the teeth who won Homecoming Queen, what was her name?

JIM: I don't remember. She had teeth?

WANDA: Big teeth.

MARSHA: I would like to leave the bathroom now.

WANDA: What?

MARSHA: Well, we need to make your room up for you. I didn't know you were... well, we need to make it up...

WANDA: *(A little girl.)* I hope there's a quilt. I love quilts.

MARSHA: I'll look for one.

*(Wanda stares at her, happy, but doesn't get out of the way.)*

MARSHA: You have to move or I can't get out of the bathroom.

WANDA: *(Serious.)* I'm holding you hostage.

MARSHA: What?



WANDA: (*Shifting, cheerful.*) Isn't it awful the way they take hostages now? (*Cheerfully leaves the bathroom, talking away.*) It reminds me of my life with Augie. He was really violent, but he was really little, so I was able to push him down the stairs.

(*Jim and Marsha look at one another, a little alarmed by the "hostage" exchange.*)

*Lights change. The prominent sound of a clock ticking. Time is passing.*

*Wanda, Jim and Marsha standing, in a "hallway" area, about to make their goodnights.*

WANDA: (*Happy.*) Oh, you guys, it's been a great evening. I can't believe we played games for 4 hours!

MARSHA: I'm really sorry I shouted at you during Monopoly.

WANDA: That's okay. I know somebody who got killed playing Monopoly.

JIM: But you were really good at charades.

WANDA: Thanks, but I'm sorry I broke the lamp.

MARSHA: It's perfectly all right. Now the guest room is right down this hall.

WANDA: Well, good night, you two. See you in the morning.

MARSHA: Good night.

(*Wanda exits off to the guestroom.*)

*Jim and Marsha go to their bedroom, or rearrange the set to stand in for a bedroom—move two chairs together into a "bed," put a comforter over themselves.*

*They're too tired to talk. They kiss one another briefly, and close their eyes to sleep.*

*Wanda enters, wrapped up in a quilt.)*

WANDA: Oh, is this your bedroom? Oh, it's so pretty.

(*Jim and Marsha open their eyes, very startled.*)

MARSHA: Is something wrong with your room?

WANDA: No, it's lovely. Although not as nice as here. But then this is the master bedroom, isn't it?

MARSHA: Can I get you a pill?

WANDA: No, thanks. Marsha, I love this bedroom. I feel very "enveloped" here. It makes me never want to leave. (*Wanda pulls up a chair right next to their bed. Keeps wrapped in her quilt.*) I just love New England. I worked in Hartford for three weeks once as a receptionist in a sperm bank.

MARSHA: Wanda, I'm sorry. I really think I need to sleep.

WANDA: You can sleep, I won't be offended. So I got fired from the sperm bank, and then I went to Santa Fe, cause I heard the furniture was nice there.

*(Clock ticks. Time passes. Jim and Marsha change positions in bed.)*

WANDA: And then Arthur's ex-wife kept making threatening phone calls to me.

*(Clock ticks. Jim and Marsha change positions, now look more uncomfortable.)*

WANDA: *(Coquettish.)* And I said, "Billy, why didn't you tell me you were 16?"

*(Clock ticks.)*

WANDA: *(Chatty voice, just telling the facts.)* And then the policeman said, let me see your pussy, and I thought, hey, maybe this way I won't get a ticket.

*(Clock ticks.)*

WANDA: *(Teary voice, telling a tragic turning point.)* And Leonard said, Wanda, you are a worthless piece of trash. And I said, don't you think I know that? Do you think this is news?

*(Clock ticks.)*

WANDA: *(Energized, telling a fascinating story.)* And Howard said he wanted me to kill his mother, and I said, "Are you crazy? I've never even met your mother." And he said, "All right, I'll introduce you." *(Jim and Marsha have closed their eyes, either asleep or pretending to be. Wanda looks over at them, suspicious.)*

WANDA: Are you asleep? Jim? Marsha?

*(Wanda looks to see if they're asleep. She shakes their shoulders a bit, to see if she can wake them.)*

WANDA: Jim? Marsha? You're not pretending to be asleep, are you? Jim? Marsha?

*(Wanda opens Marsha's eyelid with her finger.)*

MARSHA: Yes?

WANDA: I was just checking if you were asleep.

MARSHA: Yes I am. Goodnight. Sleep well.

WANDA: Goodnight.

*(Wanda takes her comforter and curls up at the bottom of their bed. Then she pulls their blanket off them, and on to her. Jim doesn't notice, he's asleep for real. Marsha is startled. But gives up, what to do. Lights dim.)*

*Clock ticks.*

*Lights up for the morning. Wanda sound asleep. Jim and Marsha wake up, and abruptly leave the bedroom for the dining room area.)*

MARSHA: You know, she doesn't snore. I'm really surprised.

JIM: Want some coffee?

MARSHA: I think I'd like some heroin.

JIM: Maybe Wanda has some connections.

MARSHA: I'm sure she does. Oh God, why did she sleep on our bed? She seemed like some insane nightmare Golden Retriever.

JIM: Now I feel sorry for her.

MARSHA: Well good for you. Was she always this way?

JIM: Well she was always vivacious.

MARSHA: I see. High school prom queen. Girl Most Likely to Get Herpes.

JIM: Lots of people get herpes.

MARSHA: Yes, but they don't talk about it for 3 hours.

JIM: Why are you so hostile to her? *(Not meaning to say this.)* Is it because she's attracted to me?

MARSHA: *(Not expecting to hear that.)* Yes. *(Marsha goes off to the kitchen.)*

JIM: Are you getting coffee?

*(Marsha re-enters with two coffee mugs, one of which she kind of shoves at Jim.)*

MARSHA: And are you attracted to her?

JIM: Now come on, Marsha, she's an emotional mess.

MARSHA: You're putting up with it very patiently. Why is that?

JIM: Well that's because... I feel sympathy for her. She's someone I knew once who had a life, and look what's happened to her.

MARSHA: She's attracted to you.

JIM: Now don't make a big thing out of it. It's just slightly interesting for me, that's all.

MARSHA: Well, fine. I understand. I think I'll make a trip to the nearest loony bin, and find some mental patient who finds *me* attractive. Then I'll bring him home and make you suffer through a 48-hour visit while he drools on the carpet.

JIM: Oh, come on, stop making such a big deal about all this. It's no big deal...it's just...well, haven't you ever found it kind of exciting if someone finds you attractive?

MARSHA: I've forgotten. *(Starts to leave.)* I'm going to the A & P. I have to get out of here. *(Marsha grabs a purse and exits.)*

JIM: Don't be mad.

*(Jim sighs. With his coffee he walks after her, but Wanda, stirring on the bed, hears him.)*

WANDA: Is that life out there?

JIM: You awake? *(Jim comes back into the bedroom area, holding his coffee mug.)*

WANDA: Do I smell coffee? Oh, thanks, Jimbo. *(Wanda takes Jim's coffee, thinking it's for her.)* Uh, I love this. You're like a little house slave. I knew I should've married you. Where's Marsha? Did she wake up dead or anything?

JIM: No, she went to the A & P.

WANDA: That's terrible of me to say. I don't want her dead. I'm just teasing cause I'm jealous of what she has.

JIM: Oh, I'm not so special.

WANDA: Oh, Jimbo, you are. *(Wanda starts to get up; then shows a grimace of pain. A bit flirtatious.)* Uh. I've slept wrong on my back, I think. You know, a tense muscle or something.

JIM: *(Thinking to himself, is this code?)* Oh. Your back is sore? Um, I'm not a professional masseur, but do you want me to rub it?

WANDA: Oh, would you?

*(Wanda pretty much flops over in delight. Jim starts to massage her back, sort of in the center.)*

WANDA: It's the lower back, Jimbo.

JIM: Oh. Okay. *(He starts to massage her lower back.)*

WANDA: Uh. Yes. Oh yes. Oh, yes. Ohhhhhhh. Uhhhhhhh.

*(Marsha comes back in the house, holding the purse and car keys. She stops and hears Wanda's moaning. She marches into the bedroom, finds Jim and Wanda in the midst of their orgasmic backrub.)*

MARSHA: I'm back, if anybody cares.

JIM: *(Really jumps.)* Oh, Marsha. I didn't hear the car.

MARSHA: I don't blame you. It was very noisy here.

JIM: I'm...giving Wanda...that is, her back hurts.

WANDA: He gives the most wonderful back-rub.

MARSHA: I'm so pleased to hear it. Do you need the number of a back specialist, perhaps? I could call my doctor. If you can't walk, we can arrange for an ambulance to take you there.

JIM: Now, Marsha, please, it's really quite innocent.

WANDA: Hey, Marsha, really—I know he's your guy. *(To Jim.)* You're her guy, Jimbo. *(To Marsha.)* It's just my back hurt.

MARSHA: Yes, I follow what you say. Probably tension in the lower back. I have a tension headache in the back of my head today, it feels like it might split open. I think I'll go lie down. In the guest room that you never got to. *(Starts to leave.)* Jimbo, when you finish with her back, the car has a flat tire on the corner of Pleasantview and Maple. I thought you might do something about that.

JIM: Oh. I'll go now.

MARSHA: No, finish the back rub. You've convinced me it's innocent, so finish it.

*(Marsha walks out. Jim and Wanda look at one another uncomfortably.)*

WANDA: Well, she said to finish it.

JIM: I don't feel comfortable with her in the house.

WANDA: Look, she said it was fine, let's take her at her word.

*(Jim looks dubious and touches her back lightly. At the merest touch, Wanda starts to moan loudly again.)*

JIM: *(Stopping the back rub.)* Can't you be more quiet?

WANDA: It feels so good.

JIM: Look, that's enough. I'm gonna go deal with the flat tire.

WANDA: Can I come?

JIM: Why don't you...soak in the bathtub for your back?

WANDA: All right. Thank you for the back rub, Jimbo. *(Gets up; calls after where Marsha went.)* Marsha? Do you have any bubble bath?  
*(Marsha comes back.)*

MARSHA: What?

WANDA: Do you have any bubble bath? Jim won't continue with the back rub, and I need to relax.

MARSHA: The back rub...I...what was the question?

JIM: Bubble bath. Do we have some?

MARSHA: Yes, I'm sure we do. Maybe Jim would like to pour it on you in the bathtub.

JIM: Marsha. Please.

WANDA: Oooh, kinky. *(Loudly.)* Hey! I have an idea! Why don't I cook dinner for you guys tonight? Do you like octopus?

MARSHA: Thank you, Wanda, no. I thought we'd go to a restaurant tonight. The walls in this house are starting to vibrate.

WANDA: They are?

MARSHA: Yes. So we'll go to a nice, soothing restaurant where they will take care of us. All right?

WANDA: Sure! Fine by me.

*(Lights change. Maybe lovely classical music to change the mood. Jim, Marsha, Wanda sit at the table.*

*The Waiter comes out and puts a tasteful flower arrangement on the table, turning it into the restaurant.)*

WANDA: This is such a pretty restaurant. The music is so classical.

WAITER: Enjoy your meal.

JIM: Thank you.

*(Waiter exits. Wanda and Jim mime eating from their plates.)*

WANDA: Ohhh, I think I know someone. *(Waves, calls out to imaginary table.)* Hi, there! Oh, no, I don't know them. *(Calls out again.)*

Never mind! I thought you were my gynecologist.

MARSHA: You thought he'd be up here?

WANDA: Well, he travels a lot. He also sells encyclopedias.

*(Waiter re-enters with a tray of wine glasses. He gives each person a wine glass, Wanda last.)*

WAITER: And here is your wine.

WANDA: They didn't have Kool-aid?

WAITER: White Zinfandel was the closest we could get, Madam.

WANDA: Well, all right. *(To Marsha and Jim.)* Here's mud in your eye.

*(Everyone drinks. All of them finish their drinks in several quick gulps. The Waiter starts to leave.)*

JIM: Waiter! *(Makes signal to Waiter of "another round.")*

*(The Waiter nods and exits.)*

WANDA: I can't believe they didn't have octopus. It's a delicacy.

JIM: *(Referring to their plates.)* Well, the trout's pretty good.

WANDA: Yeah, but they put nuts on it or something.

JIM: Well, eat around them maybe.

WANDA: You know, Jim, tomorrow we should get out the old yearbook.

You know, Marsha, you wouldn't believe how dashing he was back then. *(To Jim.)* Not that you're not now, of course.

JIM: You're sure a shot for my ego.

MARSHA: I'd like to shoot your ego.

JIM: What?

MARSHA: Nothing. Go back to talking about high school. I'll try to achieve a Zen state. *(Closes her eyes, puts her arms loose by her side, tries to relax her body.)*

JIM: I... I wonder where the waiter is with the drinks.

MARSHA: *(With eyes closed; chant-like.)* I am sitting by a tree, and there's a lovely breeze.

WANDA: This restaurant is so adorable. This whole town. You know what I'm thinking? I'm thinking of maybe moving up here to the country with you all, finding a little house to rent. Nothing's happening in my life right now, this might be just the change I might need.  
*(The Waiter arrives with three more glasses of wine, which he passes out to them. Marsha's eyes are open again; Wanda's comments above pretty much blew her attempt at a Zen state.)*

WANDA: I'm almost through with my facial surgery. I've had everything done on my face except my nose. I kept that the same.

JIM: You're right. I recognize your nose now. Yes.

WAITER: Will there be anything else?

WANDA: What? Done to my face?

WAITER: Anything else I can do for you at the restaurant?

JIM: We wanted three more glasses of wine.

WAITER: I just brought them.

JIM: Oh. So you did. Well, thank you.

*(The Waiter leaves. Wanda starts to eat her fish.)*

MARSHA: So you're going to move up here, are you? Going to sweep up and stick your feet in the ground and root yourself in our "little neck of the woods," are you?

JIM: Marsha, we don't own this area.

MARSHA: I feel differently. *(To Wanda.)* I don't want you moving here, is that clear? I don't want you invading my life with your endless ravings anymore, is that clear?

*(The Waiter returns. Wanda keeps eating, seemingly just listening to what's being said, finding it interesting rather than upsetting.)*

WAITER: Is everything all right?

MARSHA: No, everything is not all right, this woman is trying to invade my life, and this man is too stupid to see it, and hide from her. *(To Jim.)* Don't you realize she's insane?

JIM: Marsha, could we just finish dinner please?

MARSHA: No, I'd like the check.

WAITER: Are you unhappy with your fish?

MARSHA: I'm very unhappy with it. It has too many bones in it.

*(Almost on cue, Wanda starts choking on a bone. She gasps and chokes. Jim, Marsha and the Waiter look at her shocked for a moment.)*

JIM: Shouldn't one of us do the Heimlich maneuver?

MARSHA: I don't want to do it, I don't like her.

*(Wanda looks startled, even in the midst of her choking. She keeps choking and pointing to her throat.)*

JIM: Marsha! *(To Waiter.)* Can you do it?

WAITER: I don't know how to do it yet. It's my first day. Can't you do it?

JIM: Oh, very well.

*(Jim gets up and gets the choking Wanda to stand. He stands behind her and then, not sure what to do, puts his arms under her arms, and locks his hands behind her neck: That is, he puts her in a half nelson, and keeps jerking her head forward with his hands, hopefully, as if this should fix her choking.)*

MARSHA: *(After a second.)* Oh, for God's sake.

*(Marsha gets up, pushes Jim away. She stands behind Wanda, puts her arms around Wanda's lower stomach and then rather violently and suddenly pulls her arms into Wanda's lower stomach. This does the trick, and Wanda spits out the bit of fish and bone, and starts to breathe again.)*

*Wanda sits back down, exhausted.)*

WANDA: Oh, thank God, I thought I was a goner.

*(Suddenly into the restaurant burst Two Men with handkerchiefs tied around their mouths, and carrying guns. They aim their guns at everyone, but make straight for Wanda.)*

MAN: There she is!

WANDA: Oh my God, they've found me!

*(The Men grab her and, pointing the guns at everyone else, drag Wanda out of the restaurant.)*

WANDA: *(Being dragged or carried out.)* Oh, God, it's the kingpin. Help me! Jim! Jim!

*(All this happens very fast and very suddenly. And now Wanda is gone. Jim, Marsha and the Waiter seem stunned for a moment.)*

*A "talking-to-the-audience" light comes up, and the Waiter crosses down into it and addresses the audience:)*

WAITER: The next day at the restaurant was considerably less intense, and eventually as time went on, I was made head waiter. For a while I liked the added responsibility and the additional money, but after a while, I realized I wasn't doing what I wanted to do with my life. I wanted to be an actor. But then the story isn't really about me.



*(Humbly, the Waiter exits.*

*Jim and Marsha look confused by the Waiter's behavior, and now address the audience themselves again.*

*They also straighten the set a bit, while they talk, so that it resembles their house as it was at the beginning of the play.)*

JIM: *(To audience.)* Well, all that happened a few weeks ago. Wanda hasn't been found yet, but she's probably fine.

MARSHA: I feel guilty about what happened. I wasn't a good hostess.

JIM: Now, honey, she's probably fine. Wanda's sort of like a bacteria—wherever she is, she seems to grow and go on and on just fine, so you shouldn't feel bad.

MARSHA: Yes, but right before Wanda started to choke on the fish bone, I had this momentary, stray thought of wishing she would choke on a fish bone. And then suddenly she did. I know it's not logical, but on some level, I feel I tried to kill her. And then thugs came and carried her away. I mean, in a way, it's just what I wanted.

JIM: Now, Marsha, you're not responsible for what happened.

MARSHA: I chose the restaurant.

JIM: Now, Marsha. You're not omnipotent. Besides, awful things are always happening to Wanda. She's like a magnet for trouble.

MARSHA: *(To the audience.)* Well, it was just the most awful two days. Three days, counting meeting with the police.

JIM: But some good came out of it.

MARSHA: Yes. We had a big argument, and that was good.

JIM: It cleared the air.

MARSHA: I said what I was feeling, and it was mostly negative, but it was good to say it.

JIM: It cleared the air.

MARSHA: And one of the things I said was that we don't feel joy enough. Or hardly at all.

JIM: Right. We don't feel joy much. So we joined an aerobics class...

MARSHA: To get the blood moving... When you move around, you tend to feel better...

JIM: And we're going to a marriage counselor who specializes in breaking down fear of intimacy in people who've known one another for over 10 years...

MARSHA: And, of course, we fit that. And all told, I guess Wanda's visit helped to stir us up in a good way, all told.

JIM: Right.

MARSHA: Blessings come in unexpected ways.

JIM: Right.

MARSHA: Now if only we were happy.

JIM: Right.

*(They look at one another. Then they look out at the audience. Some friendly, possibly optimistic music plays. Lights dim on Jim and Marsha. End.)*

#### TO THE ACTOR

This play is a real relationship piece and I'm proud of it. Sometimes it was a little hard for the audience to shift gears to get into it because it's in a very different style than the first four plays in *Durang Durang*, but once they did shift I felt they all identified with the familiar feelings about marriage and about long-term relationships. On the best nights I felt they were highly amused, and alarmed, by Wanda, and very much rooted for Marsha, the realist, who wanted this nut out of there.

"Nut" is a dangerous word, though. I think Wanda should be fun and have her charm—that's part of what Jim responds to (though primarily he's responding to her flirting with him; he's hungry for someone to think he's special at this point in his life).

But Wanda's very selfish and has literally no ability to wonder how anyone else is feeling. She finds her own story fascinating and assumes everyone else will too.

Wanda mentions her weight early on and there are references to food as well. In the TV version, Swoosie Kurtz, who is very thin, did all the same lines about feeling she looked heavy. They worked in that version as the diet-obsessed chatter of a thin woman. We all know some of those thin women who think they have a weight problem when they don't.

When we auditioned for stage, however, Walter and I decided that as long as we were doing a new version, we wanted to see what it was like with heavier actresses in the role. We ended up liking what happened when a somewhat overweight actress read for the part... somehow Wanda is so needy, that it sort of fit that she "feed" her anxiety with food.

In terms of casting, it's important though that it be believable that Wanda likes sex and has had a lot of it. Sometimes being overweight is a way of keeping oneself protected from sex (sorry to be an amateur psychologist) and sometimes it isn't, but it's important in terms of casting that Wanda be convincing in her flirtations and in her desires.

Because of the three-quarter thrust stage, it was kind of impossible to lug furniture on to change from scene to scene; so Walter and the designer Derek McLane chose to be really simple—three somewhat fancy dining room chairs and one round table. They arranged the chairs to stand in for everything: chairs in the living room and, most stylized, the bed in the bedroom (by bringing two chairs together, having the actors sit down and then throw a comforter over themselves).

I thought this was a good solution and the few set pieces also made for a “light” feeling, where the setting was secondary to the characters and their interactions.

If you had a wider stage and could have different playing areas with furniture already set up; or if you had ways of getting furniture on and off quickly—I think other solutions would be fine too. The one we had worked for MTC.

For the two henchman at the end (who work for the “kingpin”), we ended up using Keith and Patricia, but with both playing men. With pants, raincoats, fedoras and large machine guns, you never had a sense that it wasn’t two men.

The henchmen should happen fast.

I think it’s obvious from the script, but Jim and Marsha are both nice, intelligent people. Jim is feeling bored and restless, Marsha’s feeling sort of ignored and left out. During their speeches at the beginning and the end, I think we should want things to work out for the two of them; they seem well suited, actually, and to care for one another. But I was pleased, in both the TV version and the stage version, that Marsha’s and Jim’s last two lines seemed very right and a little sad.

I praised the actors in the teleplay version, so I would like to salute the MTC cast as well: Lizbeth Mackay, Marcus Giamatti, and Becky Ann Baker as Wanda.

Business Lunch at the  
Russian Tea Room

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

I wrote this playlet directly for *Durang Durang*. It's about a playwright, named Chris, having a meeting with a film development person for a possible screenwriting job.

It's not a deep piece and many writers have had their go at how Hollywood treats writers and thoughts and ideas—for instance, David Mamet's *Speed-The-Plow*, John Patrick Shanley's *Four Dogs And a Bone*, Arthur Kopit's *Road To Nirvana* (which started as a parody of the Mamet play and once had the loonier title of *Bone-The-Fish*). Christopher Guest's movie *The Big Picture* with Kevin Bacon as a young filmmaker getting jerked around on his first film was quite funny.

Writers have a history of hating to work with Hollywood. My favorite example is J.D. Salinger. He sold his short story "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" to the movies and they turned it into a soggy love story called *My Foolish Heart* (1949). He was so horrified that he vowed never to sell another thing to Hollywood, ever. And he never has. (He lives in seclusion in New Hampshire. And he only speaks three sentences a day, two of them to his dog. No, I made up that last sentence.)

I'm more willing for things to work out with Hollywood and me, but so far it's been disappointing. I wrote a screenplay with Wendy Wasserstein that wasn't made. I wrote many versions of *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You* for an independent producer, but funding could never be completed. I wrote a screenplay for Warner Bros. I'm very proud of, a Monty Python-esque comedy called *The Nun Who Shot Liberty Valance*, which I keep wishing someone would make. And the only script of mine that was filmed was a disaster: an unfunny, forced version of my play *Beyond Therapy*, which the director Robert Altman radically rewrote. I wish I had taken my name off of it, but I didn't. If ever you see it, I apologize.

My only happy writing experience, so far, in films was being hired to rewrite some of the scenes in the Michael J. Fox movie *Secret Of My Success*. I had a supporting role in that film and I was asked to rewrite certain scenes a day or so before they were scheduled to shoot. It sounded intimidating, but it ended up being fun. I like the scenes I wrote and think it's a good commercial movie directed by Herbert Ross, whom I enjoyed working with.

So I keep hoping I'll hook up with the right director, and the right project, and so on.

Many of my experiences (and those of my writer friends) have been writing for "development" people.

In this play, the character of Melissa Stearn is a “development person”—that is, her job is to “develop” projects and ideas into movies or TV movies or TV series.

I hope to work in movies and TV again (especially in New York, the non-earthquake capital of the world), so I want to admit and stress that I do not regard all development people with disdain.

But there have been some. “Ideas” for movies are so debatable. Many development people seem to have no background in writing, directing or acting...they seem to have studied Opinion in college and then they proclaim their opinions about “what works” and “what can’t work” in a screenplay with total self-confidence.

They want everything in outline form. I’m afraid I don’t think (or create) in outline form. Do you?

I see many a movie where I can recognize the outline, but it’s not abetted by any good dialogue, any interesting character development, indeed any actual writing talent anywhere, just this damn outline that sounded good at the meeting.

From so many of these “outline” movies something vital is missing: The actual human desire to communicate is not there. What’s replaced it is the desire to make money, and then, rather pathetically, to judge success by how expensive your car is, or your watch, or what restaurant you eat in. The Catholic schoolboy in me (and the writer) disapproves of this materialism. I like to earn money, but it’s pretty far from my *sole* interest in life.

So maybe I should move to New Hampshire and talk to a dog. Salinger, by the way, was right about *My Foolish Heart*, it isn’t very good. Most of it is a flashback to what might have happened *before* the short story begins. However, the first 10 minutes are rather close to the story, and Susan Hayward is quite good for that brief section in capturing the story’s bitter, edgy take on an unhappy, alcoholic woman. And the theme song is quite pretty.

Maybe Melissa Stearn can convince Salinger to finally let *Catcher in the Rye* become a movie. In a few years Macauley Culken will be old enough. And I’d like to play Madame Arcati.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

*Business Lunch At The Russian Tea Room* was part of *Durang Durang* at Manhattan Theater Club. The cast was as follows:

Chris . . . . . Keith Reddin  
Margaret . . . . . Patricia Elliott  
Waiter . . . . . Marcus Giamatti  
Melissa Stearn . . . . . Patricia Randell  
Priest . . . . . David Aaron Baker  
Rabbi . . . . . Lizbeth Mackay

(Note: At MTC we didn't list the Priest and Rabbi as characters; we didn't want the audience to expect to see them. So in production, I'd prefer you didn't list them as well. Also, at MTC, we cast an actress as the Rabbi because all three actors already had parts in the play. Since Keith Reddin had been playing children and women for much of the evening up until now, it seemed only fitting, and kind of fun, to have Lizbeth Mackay play the male rabbi. However, if you are using a larger company and want to cast a male as the rabbi, that is fine also.)

CHARACTERS

CHRIS, a playwright  
MARGARET, his agent  
WAITER  
MELISSA STEARN, a Hollywood development person

## BUSINESS LUNCH AT THE RUSSIAN TEA ROOM

*Scene: Chris, a playwright, is going through a large basket of laundry, mostly white sweat socks. He is laboriously matching the socks, checking the tops of the socks to see if the stripes are blue or red or black, thin or thick, etc. The phone rings. On another part of the stage is Margaret, Chris' agent. She is holding a phone, calling him. She is any age over 45, worldly, smart, quick, a little inexact in her listening. Chris answers the phone, which is near his laundry. (It can be a cordless battery phone.)*

CHRIS: Hello?

MARGARET: Hello, Chris, it's me. Are you awake yet?

CHRIS: Is this public television again? I *have* renewed my membership, and I don't care about the umbrella, so please stop calling.

MARGARET: Chris, this is your agent.

CHRIS: Oh, Margaret. Hi.

MARGARET: Are you writing on your play?

CHRIS: No. No, I'm doing laundry. I'm matching socks actually. Making sure I don't put a blue stripe with a black stripe, or a thin double red stripe with a thick single red stripe.

MARGARET: Well, that won't earn me my 10%, will it?

CHRIS: No. But I need socks in order to wear shoes.

MARGARET: Yes, yes, details. Um . . . I'm reminding you that you have a meeting at the Russian Tea Room with Melissa Stearn.



CHRIS: Oh, right, yes, I'd almost forgotten. Who is she again?

MARGARET: She's a new script development person at Zovarax.

CHRIS: Zovarax? Isn't that a medication for cold sores?

MARGARET: Oh, is it? Well, maybe it's Zylaphone. You know, one of those film production companies. She's apparently very hot in Hollywood right now. And she likes writers from the theatre. Apparently Lanford Wilson wrote something for her.

CHRIS: Oh well, that's good. Do you have any checks coming in for me?

MARGARET: Well, the royalty for your one act is coming in.

CHRIS: How much is it again?

MARGARET: \$250.

CHRIS: Oh yes. That's not very much.

MARGARET: Now, darling, the play was only 10 minutes.

CHRIS: It was half an hour.

MARGARET: Well, it just flew by. Chrissy, dear, we know theatre pays less, that's why you should go meet with Melba Stringer, and make one of those development deals. Write a movie, write a TV show.

CHRIS: Melba Stringer?

MARGARET: Who's Melba Stringer?

CHRIS: You mean, Melissa Stearn.

MARGARET: Yes, Melissa Stearn. Call me later. *(Hangs up and exits.)*

*(The sound of chatter and clinking silverware. The stage transforms itself into the Russian Tea Room. The Russian Tea Room has a lot of red in it. A booth appears; the booth is in the form of a half-circle, and the seating and back are made of red leather or naugahyde. A round table with a pink tablecloth on top of it fits into the booth. This may be achieved with stage hands dressed as waiters. But however it's done, it should be fast and a little overwhelming. Chris does not exit, but lets this activity swirl around him. He is still holding his laundry basket. He sits in the booth that's been brought out, and puts his laundry basket on the seat next to him. A waiter, in a red tunic with a Russian feel to it, brings him a bowl of something.)*

WAITER: Here's your borscht, sir.

CHRIS: I didn't order borscht. This isn't mine.

WAITER: *(A bit surly.)* You don't want it?

CHRIS: I didn't order it. I just got here.

WAITER: *(As if Chris had changed his mind.)* I'll take it back then. *(Exits.)*

*(Enter Melissa Stearn. She's in her late 20s, early 30s. Very high energy.)*

*very forceful. Dressed in a "power" dress. 100% sure of her opinions, and loves the movie business.)*

MELISSA: Christopher! Melissa Stearn. I'm sorry, I'm late, I just flew in from L.A. and the limousine got stuck in traffic, but luckily I ran into Kim Basinger in the airport, and she rode in the car with me, so I had a movie star to talk to the whole way. I'm so pleased to meet you. I love your work. *Prelude to a Kiss* was my favorite play, it was my life story exactly.

CHRIS: It was your life story? You mean, on your wedding day your spirit left your body and entered the body of an old man?

MELISSA: Well, not literally, of course, but I just loved the play. It was my life story exactly. Although I've never been married, I like to have affairs with black men, and then just move on from one to another. Eventually I'll have a baby though, I think that's part of the point of being a woman, you should do every thing once.

CHRIS: Uh huh. You mean, ice hockey. Mass murder. Working in a library.

MELISSA: Exactly. Waiter!

*(She's so certain of herself that the Waiter comes immediately.)*

MELISSA: I'll have blinis and beluga, and tall ice tea, stirred with a stick not a spoon. And what will you have?

CHRIS: I'll have scrambled eggs.

MELISSA: You should have borscht. It's delicious here.

WAITER: He doesn't like borscht.

CHRIS: Thank you for remembering.

MELISSA: Bring it to him anyway.

*(Waiter starts to exit.)*

CHRIS: I'll have scrambled eggs please.

*(Waiter exits; we don't know if he heard Chris or not.)*

MELISSA: Christopher, all of us at Zerofax feel that we want to return to the old-fashioned kind of movie where the characters have dialogue and thoughts and emotions—you know like *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, we think that was great, you know, Hugh Grant and romance and people buying tickets. That's what it's about, and that's what makes Zerofax a different kind of movie company. We're interested in quality.

CHRIS: You know. I have to tell you, I didn't actually write *Prelude to a Kiss*. That was Craig Lucas.

MELISSA: Oh, that's right. Well, he wasn't available, so then we called

you. My assistant Jane loves your work, she said, why don't you call Christopher, he's a very funny writer. And I thought that was a brilliant idea.

CHRIS: Thank you.

MELISSA: I love theatre writers. I produced "Sleaze-O-Rama" for television last year. Did you see it? It got great numbers. It was about a serial killer who became president but who found his humanity after he got AIDS and died. Everyone loved it. Lanford Wilson wrote the first script, which was beautiful, but we had to throw it out because none of the network people liked it, so we had Babaloo Feldman rewrite every single word. But Lanford understood. He thought we wanted something sensitive, but we didn't. I hope he brings the caviar soon, I have a meeting with Nora Ephron in 15 minutes. Nora Ephron is the kind of quality writer we want to work with. That's why I'm meeting with you as well.

CHRIS: Thank you.

MELISSA: We want Nora to write a movie for Meg Ryan where Meg is a widow who misses her husband dreadfully, they had this really special relationship, and then some man hears her talking on the radio, and he's really moved by what she says and he wants to contact her, but the switch is it's her husband who hears her on the radio, she's not a widow at all, he disappeared at sea just like Julia Roberts did in the movie watcha-ma-call-it, and then he shows up and he kills her. It's sort of like *Sleepless in Seattle* meets "Psycho." What was that Julia Roberts' movie called?

CHRIS: *Sleeping with the Enemy?*

MELISSA: Yes. *Sleeping with the Enemy in Seattle*. Something like that. Waiter! I need my food *now* please.

*(Waiter has just started to enter with food.)*

WAITER: Alright, alright, here's your fucking caviar. *(Gives her caviar, gives Chris borscht.)*

MELISSA: Oh, terrific. I love caviar. Not the taste exactly, but the sense of status it gives me. It's sort of like going to the bank and eating your money. Mmmmmm, delicious. Yummy.

CHRIS: *(To Waiter.)* I didn't order borscht. I don't like borscht. I want scrambled eggs. Truthfully I'd like a BLT, but I'm sure the Russian Tea Room doesn't have BLT's.

WAITER: Enjoy your meal. Fuck you. *(Exits.)*

CHRIS: Why is he being so rude?

MELISSA: Rudeness doesn't bother me. Stupidity does, but not rudeness. I love to stand in a long line, and then just walk to the front and cut in, and if someone doesn't like it, I just say: Fuck you! Oh, you ordered the borscht. Good for you. I thought you didn't like it. So do we have a deal? Do you want to write the movie?

CHRIS: What movie?

MELISSA: Oh I haven't told you the idea. I told you the Nora Ephron. *(Suddenly serious.)* Now that's meant for her. Don't steal it, we'll sue you. I'm involved in six lawsuits right now, one of them against my mother. I'm gonna make her beg. *(Back to energy, friendliness.)* Now here's the idea for you. Shall I tell you?

CHRIS: I guess so. I'm here.

MELISSA: Okay. Here goes. *(Carefully, so the excellence can be savored)* It's about a Catholic Priest and a Rabbi, who fall in love and then, O. Henry-style, each has a sex change without telling the other one.

CHRIS: Ah.

MELISSA: So do you want to do it?

CHRIS: Um...

MELISSA: You see, you're the perfect person because Janet tells me you know all about the Catholic Church, you wrote a play about it once, you went to Catholic school apparently for 100 years or something.

CHRIS: Yes, well, twelve years.

MELISSA: That's amazing. You must have incredible stories.

CHRIS: *(His energy seeping away.)* Uh huh.

MELISSA: And so this story is perfect for you.

CHRIS: *(Has trouble saying no.)* Well, I'm glad you thought of me, but...you know...

MELISSA: What? Don't you think it's brilliant?

CHRIS: Yes, but...I don't really know anything about Rabbis.

MELISSA: Well, we'll call up a Jew and get them to tell you. I had dinner once with Philip Roth, I'll call him at home. *(Takes out her mobile phone.)*

CHRIS: No, please, don't call him yet. I'm not sure if this idea is right for me.

MELISSA: It's a great idea. Conceptual, but with lots of feeling. I wonder if you can do feeling. Well, we'll get Bo Goldman to come in and put in some feeling. But we really think you'll understand the religious angle.

CHRIS: Uh huh.

MELISSA: Do you like the idea?

CHRIS: Uh, well, I can see why you want to do it.

MELISSA: This idea really pushes the envelope.

CHRIS: Yes it does.

MELISSA: So when can you start?

CHRIS: I'm not sure that I'm available actually. I'm trying to write a play, and I have some letters to answer. And I haven't finished sorting my laundry.

MELISSA: I think it's great you brought your laundry to the Russian Tea Room. Very individual. Janet said you were a real person. And I like that, because I'm a real person.

CHRIS: Funny. You don't seem like one.

MELISSA: That's just my LA cover. Underneath I'm a real person, with throbbing, shrieking needs and neuroses. If we work together, you'll get to see that side of me. My mother knows that side. She's gonna go bankrupt and then if she apologizes in public, maybe we'll keep her from going to jail.

CHRIS: Really. Now that sounds like an interesting story.

MELISSA: No, no, just mother-daughter stuff, you know, competition for the father, the mother's a bitch. It's been done. *Terms of Endearment*, *Postcards from the Edge*. It's not new, it's not fresh. Now this priest-Rabbi-sex-change-but-it's-touching, that's new.

CHRIS: Gee, I'm very flattered, but I don't think I actually want to do it. I can't explain why. Sometimes I make decisions intuitively.

MELISSA: I'm not sensitive. You don't like this idea? I have 22 more of them. Wanna hear?

CHRIS: Shouldn't you be getting to Nora Ephron?

MELISSA: I have a helicopter waiting to take me to the Upper West Side, so I have a couple more minutes still. Let me tell you my other ideas.

CHRIS: Alright.

MELISSA: Did you see the movie *Cruising*?

CHRIS: Yes.

MELISSA: S & M Murders. Al Pacino as a undercover cop posing as a homosexual in leather.

CHRIS: Yes, I remember it.

MELISSA: Re-do the whole movie, but with children.

CHRIS: What? You mean 10-year-olds in leather?

MELISSA: Exactly. Did you see *Bugsy Malone*? It would be like that, only sick. We could get Gus Van Sant.

CHRIS: Yes, I might write that one. Wouldn't we all go to prison?

MELISSA: Clinton likes Hollywood. We'd get Janet Reno to give us a special dispensation.

CHRIS: Uh huh. Well, I can't believe we'd be allowed to make that movie.

MELISSA: Push the envelope. Back in 1939 they couldn't say "Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn." Now we can say fuck and show decapitations. So life moves forward.

CHRIS: *(Calls.)* Check please.

MELISSA: No, no, I'll pick up the check, every word I say is tax deductible, 80%. Mmmm, this caviar is delicious. I don't want to gain weight though. Excuse me while I make myself throw up in the ladies room, and then I'll hop in that helicopter and go see Nora Ephron. I'll call your agent, you tell me which idea you want to write, the Priest-Rabbi thing or the kiddie *Cruising*. Either one is fine, we just want quality but accessibility, something everyone in the world can identify with. It's going to be great. Zerofax is really excited about working with you. It was great meeting you.

*(Melissa puts out her hand; before Chris takes it, she puts her fingers down her throat and starts to gag.)*

MELISSA: Which way is the ladies room, do you know? *(Puts fingers down throat some more; exits.)*

*(At Melissa's exit, the restaurant transforms itself away again. Chris gets out of the booth and grabs back his laundry basket, as the booth disappears away. We are now back in Chris' apartment, where he had been folding laundry before. Phone rings again. It's Margaret.)*

CHRIS: Hello?

MARGARET: Hello, Chrissy. This is Margaret. How did your meeting with Melissa Stearn go?

CHRIS: It went very well.

MARGARET: Do you want to write it?

CHRIS: I think I need to finish matching my socks, and then maybe take a bath. Then I need to take my brain out and let it soak overnight in Clorox or something, and then...maybe I should consider moving to Europe.

MARGARET: Oh you didn't like her. Well, just take a nap. She's not the only person in Hollywood.

CHRIS: Yes, but sometimes it feels like she is.

MARGARET: Now, now. Don't overreact. Sleep on it. Remove her personality from the equation, and maybe her idea is actually good. Trust me, open your mind, don't be so judgmental. Mull over the idea for the evening. Alright?

CHRIS: Alright.

*(Margaret and Chris both hang up. Margaret exits. Chris stares and tries to think through Melissa's idea.)*

CHRIS: A Priest. A Rabbi. They fall in love. It's funny, it's touching. Different cultures, they clash, they contrast. Easter versus Passover. Baptism versus briss. They meet cute, in an S&M bar with Al Pacino. No, that's the other idea. They meet at a communion breakfast. *(Church bells are heard. On a different part of the stage, enter a handsome young Priest.)*

PRIEST: *(Out, to imaginary person.)* Good morning, Mrs. McGillicutty. Thank you. I'm glad you liked the sermon.

CHRIS: He's young, he's handsome, he's celibate. Rabbi Teitelbaum comes into the church, looking confused.

*(Enter the Rabbi, played by an actress. She is dressed as an orthodox rabbi, and has a beard and a black hat.)*

RABBI: Oi, oi, where am I?

PRIEST: May I help you?

CHRIS: Their eyes meet. They consider dating. They go to discos.

*(Suddenly disco music, flashing lights. The Priest and Rabbi start dancing together. From another part of the stage, Melissa appears... a voice in Chris' head.)*

MELISSA: No, no, no, not vulgar. We want sensitivity. Zerofax is big on sensitivity.

CHRIS: They don't go to a disco. They go for long walks in the autumn. They discover one another's humanity.

*(Sweet music. The Priest and Rabbi hold hands, mime walking.)*

RABBI: What beautiful trees. I see God's face in the autumn leaves.

PRIEST: Yes, Rabbi, me, too.

RABBI: Oi, oi, but I feel so guilty.

PRIEST: Don't feel guilty. Oh, Moishe. Even though we have different beliefs, I see more and more that your immortal soul looks just like mine.

MELISSA: Yeah, but sexy. Sensitive, but sexy.

*(The Priest and Rabbi stop walking, look at one another intently.)*

PRIEST: You make me hot.

RABBI: You make me hot too.

PRIEST: I don't think I'm gay, and yet I long to touch your penis.

RABBI: Oi, oi, please, I'm a Rabbi.

PRIEST: It's a sin. But can love be a sin?

RABBI: I think it can.

MELISSA: Good. Good tension. Sex versus religious belief. Excellent.

They're gay, they're not gay. Makes it easier to cast the actors. *Philadelphia* made money, but they didn't kiss enough. Have them kiss.

PRIEST: I feel so drawn to you, Moishe.

RABBI: Oh, Patrick, Patty boy, even though it's against the Torah, inside my heart I know I want to schtupp you.

PRIEST: Oh, Moise. Oh yes, oh yes.

*(The Priest and Rabbi keep looking intently at one another.)*

MELISSA: We don't need them to say "schtupping", that's bad writing. Just have them kiss, and we'll cut to a close-up of their tongues.

*(The Priest and Rabbi embrace and kiss intensely.)*

CHRIS: Then, there's an earthquake, and God strikes them dead. It's a replay of Sodom and Gomorrah, and He kills the Priest and the Rabbi... *(Aimed at Melissa.)* ...and everyone in the movie business in Los Angeles.

MELISSA: Good idea, but save it for the end. They haven't had their sex changes yet.

CHRIS: I don't want to write this.

*(The Priest and Rabbi have been continuing to kiss, but at the above line, they stop and look at Chris.)*

MELISSA: Keep kissing.

*(The Priest and Rabbi go back to kissing.)*

MELISSA: No, keep writing, you're doing well.

CHRIS: No, I won't write this. It's idiotic. You should write it yourself, you like the idea so much.

*(The Priest and Rabbi stop kissing again when Chris says "I won't write this." They stare at Chris and Melissa.)*

MELISSA: Good idea! I'll write it myself. I'll get help from Nora and Bo and Babaloo. I'll pay myself \$300,000. It'll be great! *(She exits, happy.)*

CHRIS: *(To himself.)* So I don't make the money. So what. I'm going to focus on what's simple and true. I'm going to fold my laundry.



*(With dignity and importance, he starts to match his socks. The Priest and the Rabbi come over to Chris.)*

PRIEST: May we help?

CHRIS: Please.

*(The Priest and Rabbi help match the socks, and perhaps fold T-shirts.)*

CHRIS: Red stripe with red stripe. Double blue stripe with double blue stripe. Light blue stripe with light blue stripe. Green sock with green sock.

*(Chris, Rabbi and Priest keep trying to match the socks. For some reason it is very hard to make a match. The Rabbi in particular keeps holding up one sock with another, and discovering that it is not a match. They are not upset or frustrated doing this. It's just the task they've committed to do. Happy, contented music plays. Lights fade on Chris, the Rabbi and the Priest, matching the socks in the laundry basket. End.)*

#### TO THE ACTOR

Chris should be polite and also have trouble saying no. He finds it embarrassing to say something is a bad idea, so he says things like "ah" and "I can see why you want to do it."

Margaret's part is small, but she's crisp, lively, she knows her client well and cares about him; she's just a trifle scattered and gets names wrong.

Melissa is very sure of herself, she loves her job, she loves her opinions, she's very much "in the business" and loves throwing around the names of Meg Ryan and Nora Ephron.

When she has her long speeches, usually telling a movie idea, she is always energetic, she enjoys telling the idea, she thinks they're always great. On a line like "He disappeared just like Julia Roberts did in that movie watchamacallit," don't slow down and get lost in thought, trying to think what it was, or feeling momentarily uncertain. She's a happy, fast-talking executive, and she breezes by "watchamacallit," it doesn't stop her. She assumes you know the one she means and titles are only details anyway, she doesn't get bogged down in mere details.

When Chris says to Melissa, "Funny, but you don't sound like a real person," Walter Bobbie directed Patricia Randell to just accept the comment without taking any offense; somehow she is beyond being insulted. I thought that was very right.

#### *The Priest and Rabbi; The Ending*

In the earliest draft of this there was no final scene with the Rabbi and the Priest showing up; Chris just folded socks on his own and he didn't have a fantasy about what he'd write. We were going to originally end with *Wanda's Visit*,

but that ending seemed too thoughtful a tone to send the audience home on. So then we decided that *Business Lunch* in its lightness and punchiness seemed the proper way to conclude the evening. But I needed to end it more satisfactorily than I had. So then I came up with the Rabbi-Priest variation on the ending.

When the Priest and the Rabbi break into disco dancing, I was in seventh heaven; most of the audience was too. It was truly loony.

A couple of things about this section. Please don't make the priest talk in an Irish accent. That is a cliché that is way past being funny. I know I have him talking to "Mrs. McGillicutty;" that's because most of the Catholics I grew up around in my youth in the late 50s were Irish; *none* of them, though, spoke in an Irish accent.

To me the real joke of the priest is how "Hollywood" he is: He's handsome, he's well-spoken, he's charming, he's all a leading man character should be. Then when the Rabbi comes out, dressed so otherworldly and never ever presented in a sexual way, it's partially that juxtaposition that's funny; he's not in any way a Hollywood fantasy.

I initially planned to have the Rabbi be played by a man; it is, after all a gay affair between the priest and the rabbi that Melissa wants written.

However, we only had three actors at our disposal and all three had parts already. We could have brought Marcus back, who had played the Waiter, but somehow it seemed wrong in the world of this play to have any actors double in parts. You didn't want the audience to have a moment of looking at the Rabbi and going: Oh, right, he was the waiter a minute ago.

So we cast Lizbeth Mackay in the part, who was the Southern mother in *Belle*, poor white trash Meg in *Stye*, and straitlaced Marsha in *Wanda's Visit*. And now the Rabbi. Talk about stretching yourself in an evening!

There was something fun about including the role of the rabbi in the transgender casting that had happened throughout the evening, especially in *Stye* where Beth is meant to be played by a young man. So if you want to also cast a woman as a rabbi, that's fine. Just be sure to give her a beard and a big black hat.

Casting a woman, though, did lower the emotional "shock" about the gay romance. So if you do the evening with more than three men and want to consider a man as the Rabbi, that's how I originally envisioned it.

The ending, about folding the laundry: I don't want it to be a "down" ending. It's a strangely happy ending. In Chris' world he may have lost a good-paying job—that he felt mixed about anyway—but now he doesn't have to listen to Melissa's opinions anymore; he's going to do, as he says, "What's simple and true. I'm going to fold my laundry."

At this moment in time folding the laundry represents something good, valuable, and worth doing in his universe. When the two characters break the convention of being in his head and offer to help, he's pleased to get their help.

I thought the ending was going to just be the somewhat sweet image of the three of them matching the socks together. But in tech rehearsal it became clear that for whatever reason actually making a match with a sock was hard. So the ending shifted to the rather funny sight of these three people—Chris, Priest, and Rabbi—dutifully going through socks, holding them up together, not finding a match, and then going on to look for the next pair.

So I recommend playing that they're having trouble making a match (and thus there have to be lots of socks to make this believable). Don't then "color" this difficulty of matching with too much upset or frustration. Just a little... they continue on with their resolve to do this "simple and true" thing. It's just that we see that their task is a little harder than we at first thought.

Finally, I think the music you choose to fade out on at the end is important.

Walter came up with Irving Berlin's "It's a Lovely Day Today," which was perfect. It was upbeat but not frenetic, the lyric was quickly and easily understood; it also left the audience in a good mood (as did the last few beats of the play itself).

Other choices are possible, but whatever you choose, the ending should be pleasantly upbeat, contented.

(Note: There are additional production notes on the six plays in *Durang Durang* in the Dramatists Play Services acting edition of those plays, including some comments on sets, scene changes between the plays, and some cut suggestions. If you're going to produce these plays, I hope you'll consider looking at the expanded notes in that edition.)

# DMV Tyrant

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is a simple sketch about a man trying to renew his license at the Division of Motor Vehicles.

It was included in early previews of *Urban Blight*, but then was dropped. It went well, it just didn't stand out that much in comparison to *Woman Stand-up*, so I understood leaving it out as well.

But I think we all live in fear of places like the Division of Motor Vehicles, which is why I wrote the piece. So I include it here.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

*DMV Tyrant* was part of *Urban Blight* at the Manhattan Theater Club. Its cast was as follows:

Customer . . . . . John Rubinstein  
DMV Lady . . . . . E. Katherine Kerr

CHARACTERS  
CUSTOMER  
DMV LADY

## DMV TYRANT

*Scene: A window at the Division of Motor Vehicles. Sign on desk reads "Division of Motor Vehicles." A Woman at a window (DMV Lady), approached by a Customer.*

CUSTOMER: Is this window 7?

DMV LADY: Yes?

CUSTOMER: I'm afraid something rather complicated has happened with my driver's license.

DMV LADY: I'm sorry to hear that. What happened? *(With great disinterest she begins to read a book.)*

CUSTOMER: Well, you see, I moved here from another state, and I let my driver's license lapse...and...*(Waits.)*

DMV LADY: *(Looks up.)* Yes?

CUSTOMER: Should I wait until you finish?

DMV LADY: I don't think so. It's a very long book.

CUSTOMER: But...are you listening to my problem.

DMV LADY: I can read and listen at the same time. Go on. *(Goes back to reading.)*

CUSTOMER: Oh. Well. Uh, anyway, I took the driving test again, and I passed it and got this temporary license, which has now expired, and I've never gotten my permanent one, and when I called about it, they said they had lost me in the computer, and they had no record of my taking the test, and so they couldn't send me my license even though I did take and pass the test. *(Pause.)* Your turn to say something.

DMV LADY: Wait a minute. (*Reads some more. Looks up.*) I wanted to finish the paragraph. Now what seems to be the matter?

CUSTOMER: Well...

DMV LADY: In one sentence.

CUSTOMER: I haven't received my driver's license.

DMV LADY: Let me see if you're on the computer.

CUSTOMER: I'm not on the computer.

DMV LADY: What is your name?

CUSTOMER: I'm not there.

DMV LADY: How do you spell that?

CUSTOMER: I'm not on the computer. I went to Window 3 and they told me there was no record of me on the computer.

DMV LADY: I am not Window 3, I am Window 7, and I need to know your name.

CUSTOMER: James Agnes.

DMV LADY: Is that A as in aardvark, g as in gesundheit, n as in nincompoop, e as in excruciating, s as in seltzer water, pause pause, j as in Jupiter, a as in Agnes, m as in Mary, e as in excruciating, and s as in slow, lingering death?

CUSTOMER: Yes.

DMV LADY: (*Types into computer; looks.*) Well, you're not on the computer.

CUSTOMER: I told you I wasn't.

DMV LADY: Fine. I will give you an award at the end of the day. How else may I help you.?

CUSTOMER: I...I would like to get my permanent license.

DMV LADY: I'm sorry. There is no record of you on the computer.

CUSTOMER: Yes, but I have my temporary license. (*Hands it to her.*)

DMV LADY: This temporary license has expired.

CUSTOMER: Yes, I know it's expired.

DMV LADY: It is no longer a valid license.

CUSTOMER: I know that. That's why I want my permanent one. I hadn't noticed it hadn't come in the mail until this one had already expired. I had presumed everything was alright.

DMV LADY: What a funny thing to do. (*Suspicious.*) If you do not have a valid driver's license, how did you get here to the Division of Motor Vehicles?

CUSTOMER: I took a taxi.

DMV LADY: Can you prove that to me?

CUSTOMER: What?

DMV LADY: Did you keep a receipt from the taxi?

CUSTOMER: No, I didn't.

DMV LADY: I trust you did not drive here yourself, did you, Mr. James Agnes?

CUSTOMER: No, no, I realize my license is not valid.

DMV LADY: That is correct. You have an invalid license. Good morning.

CUSTOMER: But you're not helping me.

DMV LADY: (*Pleasantly.*) How may I help you?

CUSTOMER: I want my driver's license.

DMV LADY: You must take the driving test.

CUSTOMER: But I took the driving test.

DMV LADY: I have no record of that.

CUSTOMER: I know you have no record of it, some *schmuck* lost it in the computer...

DMV LADY: Kindly do not speak Yiddish to me. If you wish to make an appointment to take the driving test, go to Window 4. (*Goes back to reading.*)

CUSTOMER: I DON'T WANT TO TAKE THE TEST AGAIN!

DMV LADY: (*Irritated.*) Well, when did you take the test before?

CUSTOMER: It's the same date as that on my temporary license.

DMV LADY: February 3, 1894. The Division of Motor Vehicles did not exist in 1894.

CUSTOMER: Let me see that. (*Looks.*) Alright, it's a typo. It's clearly meant to be 1994.

DMV LADY: I am willing to agree with you that it is more likely a typo. You see, I don't stick to the rules on everything, I am human. What is your name again?

CUSTOMER: James Agnes.

DMV LADY: Is that a as in aardvark, g as in gesundheit...

CUSTOMER: James Agnes!

DMV LADY: Let me see if we have a record of you in the computer. (*Types into computer.*)

CUSTOMER: You don't, you don't, I told you you don't!

DMV LADY: Why are you shouting at me? When I am shouted at, I do not feel like cooperating.

CUSTOMER: But you haven't *been* cooperating.

DMV LADY: I have been cooperating. If I had not been cooperating, you would have been shouting at me much earlier than this.



CUSTOMER: I want my license.

DMV LADY: Well, you can't have it. You're not on the computer.

CUSTOMER: But that's not my fault.

DMV LADY: And it's not my fault. We are both blameless. Isn't it a nice feeling?

CUSTOMER: You are not helping me.

DMV LADY: I am doing everything in my power.

CUSTOMER: But don't you have more power than you're using? Can't you, for instance, type me into the computer, and then send me my license?

DMV LADY: No. Only the secretary at the driving test site can do that.

CUSTOMER: But when she forgets to do that at the time of the driving test, can't someone else do it then?

DMV LADY: If the secretary at the driving test site is willing to write a note admitting that she had forgotten to type in your name, then I can enter your name into the computer. And then we will fire her. Do you want her to lose her job?

CUSTOMER: No, I don't. I want you to lose *your* job.

DMV LADY: I don't see how you can expect me to help you if you're going to be hostile.

CUSTOMER: Isn't there anything you can suggest to solve my problem?

DMV LADY: (*Thinks.*) If you could re-live the initial driving test, when it was finished, you could ask to watch the secretary type in your name and your test result into the computer.

CUSTOMER: Your suggestion is that I *re-live* the initial driving test?

DMV LADY: It is a hypothetical suggestion, I admit, but it is the limit of what I can think of to assist you.

CUSTOMER: Could I see your supervisor please?

DMV LADY: My supervisor is shredding documents in the other room, and cannot be disturbed.

CUSTOMER: (*Angry.*) Look into my eyes. I want you to tell me what I should do that will solve my problem, and I want you to tell me *right now!*

DMV LADY: Move out of New York.

CUSTOMER: (*Taken aback, but it might be worth it.*) That's a good suggestion. Thank you. (*He storms out.*)

DMV LADY: (*Calling after him.*) Ohio's nice. (*She goes back to reading.*)  
(*End.*)

Canker Sores  
and Other Distractions

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is another sketch I wrote with Carol Burnett in mind. I thought she could be the difficult waitress Midge.

However, it's never been done. I found it in my trunk (or rather on my computer, which sometimes is like a trunk).

#### CHARACTERS

MARTIN

PRUNELLA, his ex-wife

MIDGE, a waitress

## CANKER SORES AND OTHER DISTRACTIONS

*Scene: A restaurant. Martin and Prunella, a well-dressed couple.*

MARTIN: Prunella, it's so good to see you.

PRUNELLA: You too, Martin.

MARTIN: Prunella, how I've missed saying your name. Prunella, Prunella, Prunella. Like prunes with vanilla.

PRUNELLA: Martin, Martin. I...can't think of anything equivalent to say.

MARTIN: How long has it been?

PRUNELLA: It's been a long time.

MARTIN: It's been a long time, hasn't it. Prunella. Prunella, Prunella.

PRUNELLA: Ten years. Ever since our divorce.

MARTIN: That dreadful day. We had a particularly contentious divorce too, didn't we? Swearing, crying, hurling accusations. I said so many awful things. You said so many awful things. Then you got all our possessions and the house and the kids and the car.

PRUNELLA: I know. We really hated one another back then. As a matter of fact, we've continued hating one another until...just yesterday, that chance meeting on the street.

MARTIN: It's true, Prunella. When I saw you yesterday, the sunlight shimmering on your wig, all of a sudden all the hate and anger fell into perspective, and I thought, I love this woman, I always have loved this woman. I mean, who cares who got what in the settlement—those are only “things.”

PRUNELLA: Yes. *My* things.

MARTIN: Right, but the point is, Prunella, after 10 years of hating you, suddenly that hate has lifted and in its place is...well, it's corny to say it, but in its place is love.

PRUNELLA: I feel the same way, Martin. The kids are grown, the car is broken, the house needs repair. But our love for one another is real.

MARTIN: Prunella, I know this is crazy, and the last thing either of us thought would ever happen, but I think we should get back together. I want us to remarry.

*(A rather unwilling waitress named Midge approaches their table. She's not hostile, it's just there are about twenty other places she would rather be.)*

MIDGE: Hello, my name is Midge, and I will be your waitress for the evening. Let me tell you about our specials, and then take a cocktail order.

MARTIN: Could you come back in a minute?

MIDGE: What?

MARTIN: I'm sorry. Would you come back in a minute. I was in the middle of a thought.

*(Midge thinks and mutters to herself, and sort of sluffs away.)*

MARTIN: Now where was I?

PRUNELLA: Oh, Martin, it's amazing you feel this way because I feel absolutely the same.

MARTIN: You do?

PRUNELLA: Yes. I haven't felt anything like...

MIDGE: *(Trying again.)* We got duck and chicken and fish, all almondine.

MARTIN: I'm not ready now.

MIDGE: *(By rote; as if repetition will make this work out.)* My name is Midge, and I'm your waitress.

MARTIN: My name is Martin, and I'm not ready yet.

MIDGE: Well, when you're ready you let me know. Okay?

MARTIN: Yes, Midge.

MIDGE: I'll be waiting. *(Walks away.)*

MARTIN: Now what were you saying?

PRUNELLA: I forget.

MARTIN: Oh I hate it when this happens. Well, let me tell you more about my feelings then. Stop me if you've heard it before. I feel so thoroughly renewed, young, in love...I... *(Suddenly realizing.)* I think I'm developing a canker sore.

PRUNELLA: What?

MARTIN: Yes, right on my inner cheek. (*Puts his tongue there.*) Ow, it hurts when I put my tongue on it.

PRUNELLA: Don't put your tongue on it then.

MARTIN: I have to. It hurts.

PRUNELLA: When did you get it, darling?

MARTIN: (*Cranky.*) I don't know, I don't know, it just happened.

PRUNELLA: Darling, I'm sorry.

MIDGE: (*Holding a tray of five drinks.*) Did you all order drinks?

MARTIN: No we didn't.

MIDGE: Well somebody did. I wonder who it was. (*She puts the drinks down on their table, and looks through her notes.*) No...no...no...

PRUNELLA: (*To Martin.*) Go on, dear, I'm listening.

MARTIN: (*In pain, grouchy.*) I was saying I feel so alive, so renewed... damn it, Prunella, this canker sore is just hurting, it's sitting in my mouth and it's hurting me.

PRUNELLA: Maybe you could drink something. (*To Midge.*) Is there any drink you could recommend that makes a canker sore feel better?

MIDGE: Grapefruit juice.

MARTIN: Better, not worse!

MIDGE: I'm not sure if we have grapefruit juice. We have Mimosas, but somebody said the orange juice tasted like grapefruit juice. I'll go check. (*Leaves her pad on the table and exits.*)

PRUNELLA: Don't forget your pad.

MARTIN: I don't want grapefruit juice, Midge.

MIDGE: I'll check. (*Is gone.*)

MARTIN: I'm becoming very sorry we've come to this restaurant.

PRUNELLA: Now, Martin, don't let it ruin this evening for us.

MARTIN: Are you telling me what to do already?

PRUNELLA: It's just a suggestion, don't be angry.

MARTIN: (*Angry.*) I'm not angry. I'm just coping with a canker sore.

PRUNELLA: More like a "cranker" sore.

MARTIN: What?

PRUNELLA: Canker and cranky sound alike. I was just noticing.

MARTIN: Canker and cranky. They don't sound particularly alike.

PRUNELLA: "Anker" and "anky." Well, they're more alike than, say, "canker" and... "geranium."

MARTIN: This is becoming a stupid conversation.

PRUNELLA: Well, I'm sorry I brought it up.

(*Silence for a moment.*)

MARTIN: (*Puts tongue in his cheek again.*) This really hurts.

PRUNELLA: Don't keep feeling it then.

MARTIN: It's hard not to.

PRUNELLA: Well, suit yourself. (*Pause.*) So you think we should get married again.

MARTIN: What? (*Distracted.*) Oh yes. I do.

(*Midge comes back.*)

MIDGE: Did I leave my pad here? (*Picks it up.*) I don't know how you expect me to remember anything if I lose my pad.

MARTIN: We don't expect anything from you. Except service.

MIDGE: Well, that's expecting something. (*Takes her pad and leaves.*)

PRUNELLA: Martin, we're getting distracted, and letting petty things interrupt our wonderful reconciliation. Let's not do that. Oh, oh, oh. (*Blinks her eye madly, throws her head back.*)

MARTIN: What is it?

PRUNELLA: Something in my eye. Oh dear. Oh my, it stings dreadfully.

(*Prunella dabs her napkin in her glass of water and dabs her eye madly.*)

Oh my. Ow. Ow.

MARTIN: I don't understand. Something just flew into your eye?

PRUNELLA: Well, I'm not making it up. Ow ow ow. Oh dear. Ow.

MARTIN: Must you say ow? It sounds peculiar.

PRUNELLA: Well it hurts. Ow.

MARTIN: I believe it hurts. It just seems peculiar to have to be vocal about it.

PRUNELLA: Ow.

MARTIN: Seems unnecessary.

PRUNELLA: Don't try to control my pain. It's my pain.

(*Midge comes back.*)

MIDGE: Here's your grapefruit juice.

PRUNELLA: Ow, ow.

MARTIN: I didn't order grapefruit juice.

MIDGE: Well, I wrote it down. (*Shows him her pad.*)

MARTIN: I don't care what you wrote down, I don't want it.

MIDGE: Do you want a mimosa?

PRUNELLA: Ow, ow. Do you have an eye cup?

MIDGE: What?

PRUNELLA: To rinse my eye.

MIDGE: I can get a shot glass.

PRUNELLA: Yes. Please. Ow ow.

(*Midge goes off to the bar.*)

MARTIN: Well, my canker sore hurts too. *(To her, sort of.)* Ow. Especially when I touch it. Ow ow ow.

PRUNELLA: It's not a contest, Martin.

MARTIN: You always get this way when there are difficulties.

PRUNELLA: It's called appropriate response, Martin. My eye hurts.

*(Midge comes back with the shot glass.)*

MIDGE: Here's the shot glass.

MARTIN: I don't want to get married again. It was stupid idea. Life is nothing but pain and misery, it's stupid to have even thought about trying to look for something to work out.

PRUNELLA: Martin, you're overreacting. Eventually I'll get the thing out of my eye, and eventually your canker sore will leave.

MARTIN: It doesn't matter, something else awful will happen.

PRUNELLA: *(Still holding a napkin to her eye.)* Well, fine. I'm remembering what being married to you was like.

MIDGE: Oh, he's right. You get your hopes up and something awful happens. I got a call last week from representatives of Ed McMahon and they said I won a million dollars. And then I thought, I'm going to quit my job as a waitress. But I misheard them. They said I might win a million dollars, if I agreed to subscribe to some magazine. So I ordered TV Guide for thirty-six weeks. And then last night my apartment got robbed, and I don't have a TV anymore. But I'm going to get TV Guide for thirty-six weeks.

MARTIN: Well that's too bad. I wonder if you could not talk to us so much this evening.

MIDGE: What?

PRUNELLA: Martin...

MARTIN: Well, I didn't realize when I came in here that this was one of those talky-chatty restaurants.

MIDGE: What?

MARTIN: I would like to have conversation with my ex-wife, but with you I would like to say hello and good-bye, and here's my order please.

MIDGE: Oh, you'd like to order now. *(To Prunella.)* He's difficult to understand.

MARTIN: I am not difficult to understand. I would like some politeness and decorum with the people whose work it is to serve me.

PRUNELLA: Just the check, please.

MIDGE: What?



PRUNELLA: Martin, I remembered why I divorced you. You're really horrible. You should be in therapy.

MIDGE: I'd love to be in therapy, but I can't afford it.

MARTIN: Where's the manager? I want this woman fired.

PRUNELLA: Just bring him the check. I'm going to go to a fast-food restaurant. *(Leaves, holding her eye.)*

MARTIN: Where's the manager, please?

MIDGE: I don't know if we have a manager. You want to see the cook?

MARTIN: Oh, forget it, forget it. Life is hopeless. You've ruined my re-marriage. *(Stalks off.)*

MIDGE: Yeah, yeah. Big deal.

*(End.)*

The Hardy Boys and the Mystery of  
Where Babies Come From

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

Back when I wrote this sketch, *The Hardy Boys* was a series on television, featuring cute Shaun Cassidy and cute Parker Stevenson looking preppy and wearing sweaters.

The title was actually given to me by my friend Stephen Paul Davis. Thank you, Stephen.

I rather fear the title is funnier than the sketch. But then, nothing's perfect.

#### CHARACTERS

FRANK HARDY, a cute young man

JOE HARDY, another cute young man

NURSE RATCHED, a terrifying nurse

MR. HARDY, Frank and Joe's father

(Note: I wrote this piece for camera, but think it could be done on stage with minor adjustments.)

## THE HARDY BOYS AND THE MYSTERY OF WHERE BABIES COME FROM

*The title above shows on the screen.*

*Interior: The Hardy Boys' Bedroom.*

*Bunk beds. Posters on the wall. "Episode One" is superimposed on the screen. Frank Hardy sits at his desk. He's around age 20, nice looking, preppy, wearing a collegiate sweater. Joe Hardy, his brother, comes in. He's around age 20, nice looking, preppy, wearing a collegiate sweater.*

JOE: Hi, Frank.

FRANK: Hi, Joe.

JOE: Neat sweater, Frank.

FRANK: Yours too, Joe.

JOE: Dad gave me mine.

FRANK: He gave me mine too.

JOE: Dad's great.

FRANK: Yeah, he is. Great.

JOE: You wanna play Monopoly?

FRANK: Not now.

JOE: Chess?

FRANK: No, you have to think too hard.

JOE: Clue?

FRANK: No, but you're getting closer. Why don't we do some sleuthing?

JOE: Oooh, I love the word "sleuthing," Frank. It makes me feel excited right in the pit of my stomach.

FRANK: Me too. It's a great word.

JOE: Is there some mystery to solve, Frank, that we can use our sleuthing powers on?

FRANK: Yes, Joe, there is. But let's change sweaters first.

*(Music and fade to: The same, a few minutes later. The Boys are wearing different sweaters.)*

JOE: Nice sweater, Frank.

FRANK: Yours too, Joe.

JOE: Now what's the mystery?

FRANK: Well, I heard someone at school say that Nancy Drew may have to get married because "She has a bun in the oven."

*(They both look baffled.)*

JOE: Gosh, Frank, that doesn't make any sense at all. Our housekeeper Mrs. Danvers has had whole cakes in the oven, and she's never had to get married.

FRANK: That's just it. Something's fishy here.

JOE: I love the word "fishy." It makes me feel excited right in the pit of my stomach.

FRANK: Me too, Joe. And you're right—this whole thing *doesn't* make sense. Let me think. *(Thinks.)* No, it hurts.

JOE: Well, how shall we solve this mystery. I know—let me interrogate you! Frank, who told you this crazy thing about "buns in the oven"?

FRANK: I don't remember.

JOE: Well, that finishes that investigation.

FRANK: No—wait. The school nurse said it!

JOE: Nurse Ratched!

*(Ominous music.)*

JOE: Gosh, that music sure is ominous. I wish Mrs. Danvers would leave our stereo system alone. Maybe we can get Dad to fire her. Then it would be just guys living in the house. I'd prefer that.

FRANK: Me too. At least she doesn't sleep here.

JOE: And she's so crazy. Always trying to get me to jump out the window.

FRANK: That's just her sense of humor.

JOE: Well, I don't find it funny. Women are terrifying, aren't they?

FRANK: That's what Dad always said.

JOE: Say, speaking of terrifying women, maybe we should go see Nurse

Ratched and ask her what she meant about all this bun in the oven stuff.

FRANK: We *could* ask her, but that seems too simple.

JOE: Why don't we do some sleuthing then? (*Shudders with delight.*)  
Ooooooh, my stomach again. It's just like late at night when I...well, never mind. Why don't we go see Nurse Ratched, but we won't actually ask her anything, we'll pretend we're sick, and we'll kinda talk around things listening for clues, and that way it'll still be sleuthing!  
Oooooooh!

FRANK: That's a good idea, Joe. But let's change sweaters first.

JOE: OK.

(*They start to take off their sweaters as we fade. "End of Episode One" is superimposed.*)

(*Interior: The School Nurse's Office. Nurse Ratched is there, looking through a Sears Roebuck catalog. "Episode Two" is superimposed. Frank and Joe come in, in new sweaters.*)

FRANK: Hello, Nurse Ratched.

NURSE RATCHED: Well, hello, boys. Nice sweaters. What can I do you for?

JOE: We wanted to ask you a que...  
(*Frank jabs him in the ribs.*)

FRANK: One of us is sick. We think it might be strep throat.

NURSE RATCHED: Strep throat, huh? Which one of you has it?

JOE: We're not sure. We thought you better examine both of us.

NURSE RATCHED: Sure, I'll examine you. Oh, you boys are so cute, I could eat you up!

FRANK: Eat us up...like "buns in the oven"?

NURSE RATCHED: No, not like buns in the oven. Like hot dogs! (*Laughs hysterically.*)

JOE: Gee, another terrifying woman whose sense of humor I don't understand.

NURSE RATCHED: Now which of you is Frank, and which of you is Joe, I get confused.

FRANK: I'm Frank.

JOE: I'm Joe.

NURSE RATCHED: And I'm ready for action. (*Laughs hysterically.*) Oh I'm going to be fired if I don't watch it. I just love young men. That's

why I took this job. Alright, boys, take your shirts and pants off, I want to look at your throats.

JOE: OK, but you gotta promise that you'll talk some more about buns in the oven.

NURSE RATCHED: Sure. Hot cross buns, French pastries, French movies, X-rated x-rays. Anything you want, Joe.

JOE: Frank.

NURSE RATCHED: I thought you said you were Joe.

JOE: Oh, I'm sorry, I am Joe. I just got confused.

FRANK: You bozo.

NURSE RATCHED: OK, boys, now take off your clothes.

*(Ominous music. Boys start to remove their sweaters. Camera pans to a clock that reads three o'clock. Fade to the same clock, now reading seven fifteen. It is now darker. Frank and Joe are in T-shirts and boxer shorts, tied up back-to-back on the examining table. They are alone.)*

FRANK: I didn't know they had to tie you up to check for strep throat.

JOE: Neither did I.

FRANK: Okay, let's add up the facts we know so far about the mystery.

JOE: Well, Nurse Ratched says we don't have hernias because she gave us that coughing test for two hours.

FRANK: Alright, that's fact number one. What else?

JOE: Well, she thinks we're cute.

FRANK: I think we're cute too, but we need more clues than that to solve this mystery. Nancy may be in trouble!

JOE: I find it hard to think all bundled up this way. I wonder when Nurse Ratched is coming back with the bicycle pump?

*(Mr. Hardy, Frank and Joe's father, comes into the office, wearing a suit and looking annoyed.)*

MR. HARDY: Frank, Joe! What are you two boys doing here all tied up?

FRANK: We're sleuthing, Dad.

JOE: Ooooooh.

MR. HARDY: You two boys really are retarded. I should have my sperm analyzed. Don't you know the Nurse Ratched is a sex maniac?

JOE: Gosh, Dad, no! Is she?

FRANK: Wow. And what's sperm?

JOE: And what's sex, and what's maniac, and what's retarded?

FRANK: And why should Nancy have to get married because of some breakfast food she has in her oven?

MR. HARDY: What? Breakfast food?

FRANK: There must be some reason she has to get married.

MR. HARDY: She's pregnant.

*(Joe and Frank look at one another, astonished.)*

FRANK: Pregnant!

JOE: Gosh!

FRANK: What's pregnant?

MR. HARDY: Well, I guess you boys are old enough to be told the facts now. I kinda wanted to wait until you were thirty-five or so, but maybe now that you already know this much, I better tell you the rest. OK, fellas, listen up. I'm about to explain where babies come from.

JOE: Babies! What do babies have to do with buns in the oven?

MR. HARDY: Well, it's complicated, and a little bit disgusting.

FRANK: Go ahead, Dad, we can take it.

MR. HARDY: We'll start with the flower and the bee. The bee pollinates the flowers, by taking pollen from the stamen, and delivering it to the pistil, which in the human species is like fertilizing the egg, which is...

*(Nurse Ratched appears behind Mr. Hardy and puts a cloth soaked in chloroform over his mouth.)*

NURSE RATCHED: That's about all the filth I think the boys should learn today, Mr. Hardy.

*(Mr. Hardy falls to the floor.)*

JOE: Gosh, Dad, you've been chloroformed. *(To Nurse Ratched.)* Why did you do that? Are you crazy?

NURSE RATCHED: Is the Pope Catholic?

JOE: I don't know. He's Polish. Is he Catholic too?

FRANK: Wait, Joe, we got some clues from Dad right before he lost consciousness. He said something about eggs, and you make eggs on *top* of the oven, while you make buns *inside* of the oven. Maybe there's some clue about being on top, and being inside.

JOE: It doesn't ring any bells with me, Frank. I think we have a lot more sleuthing to do, ooooooh.

NURSE RATCHED: Something make you shiver, honey?

FRANK: The bee, the flower. Inside, on top.

NURSE RATCHED: That's very nice. That's almost a haiku.

JOE: Hi coo? Gosh, I just don't understand women.

NURSE RATCHED: That's cause we have different hormones.

JOE: I heard about that in health class. We had to do a paper on what makes a hormone.



NURSE RATCHED: And what makes a hormone?

JOE: I don't know. I got an F. Is that a good grade?

NURSE RATCHED: Oh, I like a good F.

FRANK: Can you go away for a minute? I need to think.

NURSE RATCHED: Well, I'll be right back, and then we'll take some pictures. *(She leaves.)*

FRANK: I'm so confused. I feel we're on the brink of learning a really big mystery, but I'm finding it hard to concentrate because we're all tied up in our underwear, and that crazy woman keeps coming in here acting all funny.

JOE: But she said she wasn't crazy. She said she was a Polish Catholic.

FRANK: I don't know. *(Sees something, tense.)* Joe, look!

*(The camera pans over to the floor, where their sweaters are lying in a heap.)*

FRANK: Joe. She didn't even fold our sweaters!

JOE: Gosh.

FRANK: Joe—I think maybe she *is* crazy.

*(Ominous music. "End of Episode Two" is superimposed on the screen. Then: "Next week Frank and Joe join a health club and get a fungus in a strange place." End.)*

## Women in a Playground

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

I graduated from Yale School of Drama in spring 1974. A play I co-authored with Albert Innaurato, *The Idiots Karamazov*, was chosen by Robert Brustein for production that fall at the Yale Repertory Theater. Brustein, having seen me perform and sing at the Yale Cabaret, chose to cast me as the monk Aloysha Karamazov who, in Albert's and my version, becomes a rock singer under the tutelage of Anais Nin. I also got cast in a small but interesting role in a serious production of Dostoevsky's, *The Possessed*, directed by Polish filmmaker Andrej Wajda.

Once these two acting jobs were over, I found myself suddenly facing the real world and having no money. I then went through a six-month period of supporting myself (still in New Haven) with three part-time jobs: I taught acting at Southern Connecticut State College; I helped a doctor at the Yale Medical School index his book on schizophrenia; and through the Katy Cook Temporary Employment Service, I got a typing job at the Yale Medical School, writing to people who had donated their bodies to science after death to tell them that Yale had a glut of bodies and they should make other plans. Did you perhaps receive a letter from me?

Why am I telling you all this? No real reason, except it was during this period and for one of those jobs that I wrote the following two pieces.

Teaching acting twice a week, I mostly used Viola Spolin's book of theater games as my guide. But after a while, I started to want to experiment with the students on acting intentions and how much they could change a text. We especially used ambiguous scenes from Harold Pinter, which in their ambiguity were especially able to shift radically depending on what intentions you played. (We did one scene two ways: First the actor played that he intended to kill his wife, though nowhere does the text suggest such a thing; then the next time doing the same scene, he played that he was deeply depressed and intended to kill himself. Same scene, same words, but obviously wildly different meanings and effect.)

As I got more comfortable with the class, I started to write short scenes of my own that I'd bring in for them to work on. These two are the only ones I can still find. (The others are in a box somewhere.)

## CHARACTERS

ETHEL, fairly happy

ALICE, not too happy

## WOMEN IN A PLAYGROUND

*Ethel, Alice*

ETHEL: Which one is yours?

ALICE: What? Oh, the little boy in the blue jacket.

ETHEL: Oh. That's a nice jacket.

ALICE: Yes. *(Silence.)* Which is yours?

ETHEL: That's Mary playing with your son.

ALICE: Oh yes.

ETHEL: She's five.

ALICE: Oh. She's a pretty child.

ETHEL: She's very well behaved and never gives me a moment of worry.

ALICE: That must be nice for you.

*(Silence.)*

ETHEL: How old is your son?

ALICE: He's five also.

ETHEL: What's his name?

ALICE: James.

ETHEL: James. Do you call him Jimmy?

ALICE: No. Not yet.

ETHEL: But you might?

ALICE: No, I don't think we will. James.

*(Silence.)*

ETHEL: Does he give you any trouble?

ALICE: Not yet.

ETHEL: That's nice he hasn't given you any trouble.

ALICE: Well, you never know when he'll start though.

ETHEL: That's sort of a pessimistic attitude to take.

ALICE: Oh, I am pessimistic.

ETHEL: I'm an optimist, and me and my husband are very happy.

ALICE: Are you?

ETHEL: Yes we are.

ALICE: Well, that may change.

ETHEL: I hope not.

ALICE: We all hope not, but that doesn't stop things changing.

ETHEL: I don't think I could stand to have your attitude. I wouldn't want to get up in the mornings.

ALICE: And you do now?

ETHEL: Of course I do.

ALICE: Why?

ETHEL: Well, to make breakfast for my husband. Bill. And for my little girl Mary. And to take Mary to the playground. And to see what the day has in store.

ALICE: To see what's in store, eh?

ETHEL: Yes.

ALICE: I don't see why anyone would be anxious for that. Lots of terrible things can be in store.

ETHEL: Well, of course, I know that. I may be an optimist, but I'm no Pollyanna. But you have to proceed as *if* things will be all right, you have to proceed that way, or you'll never get things done.

ALICE: You've gotten that philosophy from some saying or other. You sound like the back of a match pack.

ETHEL: Well, I hope you don't give your philosophy to your little boy. You'll have a suicide case on your hands before he's eight.

ALICE: Six. Look, they're climbing up the slide. Do you think either one will fall off?

(*End.*)

Phyllis and Xenobia

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Here's the other one. It's about two sisters.

CHARACTERS

PHYLLIS, controlling, rather cheerful.

XENOBIA, her sister; unhappy, resistant.

## PHYLLIS AND XENOBIA

*Scene: The kitchen of Phyllis and Xenobia. Pretty, feminine, fussy curtains and kitchen table cloth, and so on. Phyllis and Xenobia are sisters. They can be as young as 35, or as old as 65. Both wear print dresses with busy tiny flower patterns on them. They're sitting at the kitchen table, chatting and maybe having tea, like every day of their lives.*

PHYLLIS: I like pudding. I like vanilla pudding and chocolate pudding and tapioca pudding and butterscotch pudding.

XENOBIA: I don't like pudding.

PHYLLIS: I do. I like pudding.

XENOBIA: I know. I don't though.

PHYLLIS: Yes, you do. Oh, the puddings our mother used to make. And the cookies. She used to bake dozens and dozens of cookies a day. And you know where she put 'em?

XENOBIA: I don't like cookies. I never have. I never will. They're not good for you.

PHYLLIS: Well, what is, these days? (*Fondly remembering.*) She used to put them all over the room. In the cookie jars, of course. But under the sofa, and behind the sofa pillows, and behind the china cabinet, under the carpets, behind the curtains, embedded in the floor boards, in little holes in the walls, up above the door frames—just everywhere you looked, there were cookies. That woman was obsessed with cookies.

XENOBIA: She was a bad housekeeper, mother was. She never should have done that. We got bugs everywhere.



PHYLLIS: You're right, we did. It started, of course, with the rugs, that's where the bugs started. But they didn't stop there. I didn't mind them though. Did you?

XENOBIA: Yes, I did mind the bugs. I couldn't stand them.

PHYLLIS: Well, you learn to stand everything after awhile, don't you?

*(Suddenly reaches over and hits Xenobia hard on the side of her head. Xenobia is shocked and angry.)*

XENOBIA: What did you do that for?

PHYLLIS: You had a bug in your hair.

XENOBIA: I didn't!

PHYLLIS: You did.

XENOBIA: I did *not* have a bug there. I did *not*.

PHYLLIS: Either you had a bug in your hair, or you're wearing a bobby pin that crawls on little legs. And for your sake I hope it's bugs. *(Hits her in the head again.)* There's another one! *(Xenobia looks shocked and upset. Stares at Phyllis. They're silent for a moment.)*

XENOBIA: I hated mother. I'm glad I killed her.

PHYLLIS: Xenobia, you've got to stop thinking you did it. Stephen did it. We saw him do it, and then we watched him be put away, don't you remember?

XENOBIA: I'd like a cookie now.

PHYLLIS: You can't have one. You don't want one.

*(Xenobia thinks for a second.)*

XENOBIA: I killed mother. I remember. Because she was in the kitchen and she was making French toast and she was dipping the bread into the egg batter, and she was spreading little chocolate nuggets on the floor with her feet for the baby to eat, and I remember thinking, *This woman is crazy!* So I picked up a mop...

PHYLLIS: No, no, no, no, it wasn't that way at all. It was much more pleasant for one thing. And it was egg meringues, not French toast. Light and fluffy and filled with egg-y goodness. It was like eating an angel's head.

XENOBIA: Well, it doesn't really matter whether it was egg meringues or French toast, the point is that mother's dead, and now we can keep the house clean again. Only you won't let us. You're always hiding Tasty Cakes underneath the sofa, and behind the curtains, and in the cabinets. You're no better than mother. You're just like mother.

My doctor says I shouldn't live with you anymore. He says I should...

PHYLLIS: Should? Should what?

XENOBIA: (*Thinks; evasive.*) Should not live with you anymore.

(*Pause.*)

PHYLLIS: You do like pudding.

XENOBIA: I don't.

PHYLLIS: You do.

XENOBIA: I don't.

PHYLLIS: You do.

XENOBIA: I don't.

(*Phyllis hits Xenobia in the arm.*)

PHYLLIS: Another bug.

(*End.*)

# Diversions

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is a very old play of mine. I hesitate to tell you how old. I hesitate to tell you. Shall I tell you? Maybe later. Well...I wrote it in 1967, when I was eighteen. My freshman year at Harvard College I put on a production of it in the Loeb Experimental Theater. After that, I went into a two-and-a-half-year depression, and did nothing else until 1971.

One reason I felt an impulse to include this play is that it was the first thing I wrote that started to be in "my style."

For some reason I had written plays for most of my youth. I wrote my first one—a brief version of *I Love Lucy*—when I was eight. After that, with parental cooing and encouragement (for which I'm grateful), I wrote short plays every year. Once I wrote a play called *Dinner at 8* based on the title alone. At that point I hadn't seen the Kauffman-Hart play.

With Kevin Farrell, a school friend who composed music, I started to write musical comedies. The very first one, written when he and I were thirteen, was called *Banned In Boston*. It was extremely innocent and precocious, and ended like a Shakespearean comedy with four marriages. (Its subplot had to do with two conservative aunts trying to shut down a local show they found "offensive;" odd foreshadowing, given the protests my play *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You* eventually received, including in Boston.)

*Banned In Boston* was performed at Kevin's and my all boys Catholic high school. The administration "borrowed" girls from a local girls' Catholic school. The priests at my school thought the show was fun, but the nuns at the girls' school were offended by a number where one of their girls dropped a shoulder strap seductively. (Clearly, they didn't relish an *hommage* to *Gypsy* as I did.) That girls' school vowed not to loan out girls for plays at my school again.

Our second musical, when we were fifteen, was getting a bit more cynical and was called *Businessman's Holiday*. (We borrowed girls from another school and had no trouble.) It ended with the heroine realizing the hero was a jerk, turning down his marriage proposal, but otherwise seemed very much like an imitation of a "commercial" musical from the 50s.

*Diversions*, for what it's worth, seemed to come from a different place in me. It has a young person's existentialism, I guess; it also is drawn to absurdism, which I seemed to know from Edward Albee's *The American Dream* and maybe from some Fellini movies.

So, hoping it's worth reading, here's *Diversions*.

## ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

*Diversions* was presented at the Loeb Experimental Theater at Harvard College in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the fall of 1967. It was directed by the author. The cast was as follows:

Man . . . . .	Chris Durang
Nun . . . . .	Pat Pilz
Aloysius Kain . . . . .	Mike Stone
Policeman 1 . . . . .	Ernst Louis
Hysteria . . . . .	Bonnie Raitt
Policeman 2 . . . . .	Lynn Stephens
Judge . . . . .	Burton Craig
Clerk . . . . .	Richard Bock
Deborah Kain . . . . .	Jane Stein
Prosecuting Attorney . . . . .	Dean Sheppard

(Note: Bonnie Raitt is indeed the same person who went on to become the much-enjoyed singer-composer. She was quite good as an actress too.)

## CHARACTERS

- MAN, who's feeling depressed
- NUN, who's not depressed, and is very sure of herself
- ALOYSIOUS KAIN, a bit of a milquetoast
- POLICEMAN
- HYSTERIA, who screams a lot
- POLICEMAN 2
- JUDGE, who's a bit irritated
- CLERK, who's trying to do his best
- DEBORAH KAIN, Aloysius' sultry wife
- PROSECUTING ATTORNEY, who's virile, knows his place  
in the world

## DIVERSIONS

*Scene: A Man is standing at the edge of a small platform, preparing to jump. A Nun enters right. She sees him and screams. The Man almost loses his balance because of her scream.*

NUN: Don't jump!

*(The Man looks at her, then prepares to jump again. The Nun repeats her scream; then rushes up to him and pulls on his arm.)*

NUN: Don't jump!

MAN: *(Tired.)* Why not?

NUN: It's against the fifth commandment.

*(The Man struggles to free himself from her grasp and to attempt jumping again.)*

NUN: *(Yanking at his arm harder now.)* Don't jump!

*(The Man looks at her.)*

NUN: Think of your wife.

MAN: My wife left me five years ago.

NUN: Think of your children.

MAN: I did. *(Vaguely sarcastic.)* And I appreciate your concern, but please leave me alone. *(He prepares to jump again.)*

NUN: *(In a booming voice.)* If you do that, you're going to go straight to hell.

*(The Man glares at her, starts again.)*

NUN: DON'T JUMP!

MAN: *(Exasperated, getting angry.)* My good woman...

NUN: I'm not a woman, I'm a nun.

MAN: My good woman, would you kindly go away and let me be in peace!

*(He throws off her clutching hand. She seethes.)*

NUN: Who do you think you are? Who do you think you are, to speak to me that way? How very typical of our modern secular world you are. Someone tries to help you, to reach out, and you turn on them, tell them to leave you in peace. Well, I'm finished helping you. I'm finished with you completely. As a matter of fact, I'll help you jump. I'll push you.

*(She rushes toward him; they struggle. From left enters Aloysius Kain, a New York Times under his arm. Seeing the trouble, he raises his newspaper and charges over.)*

ALOYSIUS: Hey! Stop that. Stop that at once.

*(He starts to pull the Nun away from the Man.)*

NUN: Help! Let go!

ALOYSIUS: Stop this! Stop this!

*(A policeman enters, sees the three people struggling. He blows his whistle.)*

MAN: *(Amidst the struggling.)* If you'd all just leave me alone.

*(The policeman struggles to pull Aloysius off the Nun; Aloysius tries to pull the Nun off the Man; and the Man tries to keep his balance. Suddenly through a quick motion, the policeman loses his balance and falls off the platform, lying in a lump on the floor. [The policeman, not the platform.] A scream offstage. Aloysius, the Nun, and the Man stare aghast at the body at their feet.)*

MAN: He fell.

ALOYSIUS: My God.

NUN: Do you think we're...murderers?

ALOYSIUS: Don't say that.

*(Enter an Hysterical Woman with another policeman.)*

HYSTERIA: I saw it! I saw it! They pushed the policeman over. I saw it!

*(She gives an ear-splitting scream.)*

ALOYSIUS: *(Nervous.)* For God's sake, woman, not so loud.

NUN: *(Frightened.)* She's a liar! We didn't push that man over. *(She points to Aloysius.)* He did.

ALOYSIUS: I did! How can you say that? You saw me. I didn't do anything. I was trying to...

*(The Hysterical Woman screams again.)*

*(As the above commotion has been going on, a Clerk has entered, carrying a desk, followed regally by the Judge. The Clerk drags the dead*

*body of the first policeman offstage. The Judge sits behind the desk. The second policeman ushers the group [Aloysius, the Nun, the Man, and the Hysterical Woman] over to the Judge. Much noise and commotion.)*

JUDGE: *(Rather tired.)* What is it? Be quiet, please. I can't think.

COP: Your Honor, these three people have been accused of murdering a policeman?

JUDGE: *(Looks at the people in front of him.)* Which three people?

COP: *(Pointing to Aloysius, the Nun, and the Man.)* That woman and the two men.

JUDGE: *(To the three.)* How do you plead?

ALOYSIUS: Not guilty.

MAN: Not guilty.

NUN: Clergy. And I demand to be tried in an ecclesiastical court.

*(The Judge frowns.)*

JUDGE: *(To the Cop.)* Who is the other one?

COP: She is the witness.

*(The Hysterical Woman screams very loudly, followed by a series of sobs. The Clerk rushes in with a pair of pants.)*

CLERK: Here are your pants, Your Honor.

JUDGE: *(Distracted.)* What?

CLERK: Here are your pants.

JUDGE: *(Checking.)* But I have my pants.

CLERK: I don't know. The dry cleaners just sent them, that's all.

*(Clerk exits. The Judge puts pants on desk.)*

JUDGE: *(To Hysteria.)* And what did you see, my good woman?

*(Hysteria, terrified, breaks down into further sobbings.)*

HYSTERIA: *(In between sobs.)* I demand to call my lawyer.

JUDGE: *(Truly exasperated.)* I can't understand her.

MAN: She said she wants to call her lawyer.

JUDGE: Very well. Clerk! Bring in a telephone. *(Enter the Clerk with telephone and another pair of pants.)*

CLERK: Here are your pants, Your Honor.

JUDGE: I have my pants. *(The Clerk looks sternly at him.)* Oh, very well. I won't argue.

*(He takes pants, gives telephone to Hysteria. Exit Clerk. Hysteria, calmer, picks up telephone. Silence. She starts to cry again.)*

JUDGE: Now what's the matter?

HYSTERIA: I don't have a lawyer. Everyone else has a lawyer but me. *(Her*



*sobbing is making her talk unintelligible again.)* I'm only a simple working woman...etc.

ALOYSIUS: I don't see why she needs a lawyer. We're the ones who need a lawyer.

HYSTERIA: *(At climax.)* But he's trying to intimidate me!!

JUDGE: My good woman...

*(Hysteria gives a horrifying scream.)*

COP: Your Honor...

JUDGE: I'm sick of this case. I want nothing more to do with it. It's disgusting.

COP: But Your Honor...

JUDGE: Clerk! Clerk! *(Enter the Clerk.)* My pills, quickly.

CLERK: Which ones?

JUDGE: Ulcer, liver and kidney. *(Motioning toward the Hysterical Woman.)* And please take this woman out. I'm going to rest. Court recesses for my pills. *(To Clerk.)* Tell the Prosecuting Attorney I want to see him when he comes. *(Exit Judge L.)*

CLERK: *(To the Nun.)* I tried to contact your Mother Superior but she was praying.

NUN: You needn't have done that. I have God. I could levitate right up to the ceiling if I wanted.

CLERK: *(To the Man.)* I wasn't given any number to call for you. Do you want to call anyone?

MAN: No.

ALOYSIUS: Did you call my wife?

CLERK: Yes. She's coming down here any moment. Alright. All of you wait in the other room until court begins again. Come on. *(Clerk leads everyone offstage right. Moment's pause. Enter Deborah Kain, Aloysius' wife. She stands alone on stage, takes out her compact. She arranges her hair and powder. Enter the Prosecuting Attorney. They stare at one another, somewhat startled. The Prosecuting Attorney then exits right. Enter the Clerk.)*

CLERK: You are the wife of Aloysius Kain?

DEBORAH: Yes.

CLERK: I'll send him in to you.

*(Exit Clerk. Enter Aloysius. Silence.)*

ALOYSIUS: Nice of you to come.

DEBORAH: *(Rather loudly.)* I got a phone call which said you were being held for murder. Are you, Henry?

ALOYSIUS: Why did you call me 'Henry'? You know my name is Aloysius.

Have you been seeing Henry again?

DEBORAH: I've asked you not to pry into my personal life.

ALOYSIUS: Have you?

DEBORAH: Now, Aloysius. Don't badger me.

*(Silence. Aloysius looks away uncomfortably. Deborah takes out a cigarette, waits for him to light it.)*

ALOYSIUS: I'm sorry. I don't have my lighter with me.

*(She puts away the cigarette, disgusted.)* Are you going to stay for the trial or go to your bridge club?

DEBORAH: Bridge club was called off today.

ALOYSIUS: Oh. Well, I guess I'll wait in the other room.

*(Deborah stares vacantly into nowhere. Aloysius exits. Enter The Prosecuting Attorney.)*

ATTORNEY: You're one of the defendants' wives, aren't you?

DEBORAH: Yes.

ATTORNEY: *(Close to her.)* I'm the Prosecuting Attorney. *(They kiss.)*

DEBORAH: Henry...darling. *(Breaks away.)* We must be careful not to be seen like this. Aloysius doesn't approve.

HENRY: I like the new shade your hair's dyed.

*(He lights her cigarette. She begins to pace.)*

DEBORAH: Henry, just think. Now that Aloysius has been arrested, we can get married. And if he gets the electric chair, I won't have to leave the Church.

*(Silence.)*

HENRY: You didn't tell me you were Catholic.

DEBORAH: I didn't think it really mattered.

HENRY: It does.

DEBORAH: But why? Henry. You're not...prejudiced, are you?

HENRY: Well I wouldn't want my daughter to marry a Negro.

DEBORAH: Who would? But, are you prejudiced against...Catholics?

*(Henry turns away.)*

DEBORAH: Henry, what a horrid thing to come between us. Henry, please. Believe me. I haven't been to Church for years, except for Christmas. And I'd even give that up for you.

HENRY: It wouldn't matter. It would be a blot on our past.

DEBORAH: Henry, does this mean we're through.

*(He refuses to turn towards her. She begins to sing softly.)*

DEBORAH: "We kiss in a shadow, we hide from the moon, our meetings are few..."

*(He turns and they embrace. They kiss.)*

DEBORAH: I didn't know you had a daughter.

HENRY: I don't. I was speaking figuratively.

DEBORAH: Oh.

*(They kiss again. Enter the Nun, the Man, Hysteria, the Clerk, and Aloysius. Upon seeing the kissing couple, Hysteria gasps. Henry and Deborah break away, startled. The Nun goes to the couple, pulls them apart.)*

NUN: Are you married?

DEBORAH: Take your hands off me.

NUN: God have mercy on your souls.

*(Enter the Judge. Hysteria screams.)*

JUDGE: Is she still screaming?

ALOYSIUS: *(Humiliated, angry.)* Deborah, this is the end of us.

DEBORAH: Aloysius, don't be dramatic.

ALOYSIUS: But I'll never divorce you. Just to spite you.

JUDGE: What is everyone talking about? Court come to order, please.

*(Clerk provides chairs. Hysteria, Man, Nun, Henry sit. Clerk exits. Aloysius and Deborah continue talking.)*

DEBORAH: You spiteful thing! But I love Henry so.

ALOYSIUS: You are incapable of love.

DEBORAH: Then why did you kill that policeman if you didn't think he was my lover?

*(She sits down triumphantly. Hysteria stands up and applauds. The Clerk enters and admonishes her, slapping her palms. He gives the Judge a pair of pants. Exits.)*

ALOYSIUS: I didn't kill the policeman!

JUDGE: Order in the court. Who is the Prosecuting Attorney?

HENRY: I am.

JUDGE: Oh yes. I spoke to you a moment ago. And the Defense Attorney?

ALOYSIUS: Your Honor, this thing is so simple, I will defend myself. It can all be over in a minute. Now you see, I saw this nun *(He points.)* trying to push this man off the roof, and I came to stop her. Then a policeman came along, and apparently thinking I was trying to push the nun or both of them off, came and joined the struggle. By mistake, one of us pushed him off. *(Silence.)*

JUDGE: That is the most preposterous story I have ever heard in my life.  
DEBORAH: Aloysius! Tell the truth. *(To the Judge.)* He thought the policeman was my lover, while the Prosecuting Attorney here really is.

ALOYSIUS: That's a lie!

HENRY: No, it's not. I am your wife's lover.

ALOYSIUS: I know that. I mean it's a lie that I thought the policeman was my wife's lover.

JUDGE: Oh, so you admit that the policeman was not her lover. Then what possible reason could you have for killing him?

*(Pause. Everyone stares at the Hysterical Woman.)*

JUDGE: That's funny, I could've sworn you were going to scream.

*(Hysteria smiles at him. Henry suddenly stands.)*

HENRY: I call to the stand the prosecution's first witness, the eye witness.

*(Hysteria comes to the stand, terrified. Silence. Henry begins to shout.)*

HENRY: And did you not see that man, Aloysius Kain, willfully push that policeman off the roof, while that horrified couple over there watched aghast? I put it before you. did you not!!!!???

HYSTERIA: *(Screaming.)* I did!!! I did!!!

HENRY: And did you not see that innocent couple try to stop Mr. Kain from this horrible murder?

HYSTERIA: *(Screaming.)* YES!!

HENRY: *(Abruptly stopping shouting.)* Your witness, Mr. Kain.

JUDGE: *(Not hearing; out of it.)* What did you say?

HENRY: I said to Mr. Kain that if he should like to cross examine the witness, he might do so.

*(Judge nods.)*

ALOYSIUS: *(Standing.)* My good woman...

HENRY: *(Shouting.)* Objection! Your Honor, he is browbeating the witness! *(To Hysteria.)* Isn't he????!

HYSTERIA: *(Anguished.)* YES!!!

HENRY: She can no longer stand it. Can you?

HYSTERIA: NO! *(She breaks down wildly.)*

JUDGE: Clerk! Clerk!

*(Enter the Clerk. He takes Hysteria out.)*

HENRY: Your Honor, I submit that we rid those two people over there, the nun and the man, of any charges. It is obvious that they had nothing to do with the policeman's murder.

JUDGE: Quite obvious.

ALOYSIUS: But Your Honor...

DEBORAH: Aloysius! Don't involve two innocent people! Don't!

JUDGE: *(To Nun and Man.)* You may go.

NUN: Thank you, Your Honor. *(To Aloysius.)* I shall pray for your soul.  
*(Exits.)*

MAN: *(Starting to leave, but turning back.)* Your Honor, this man didn't...

JUDGE: Shush. My head. Wait—do you play bridge?

MAN: Yes. Sometimes.

JUDGE: Good. And you, Mrs. Kain?

DEBORAH: I am one of the best players in my bridge club. I'd be at my bridge club today if one of the members hadn't killed herself.

JUDGE: What an inconvenience for you. And you, Mr. Prosecuting Attorney?

HENRY: Indeed, I do, Your Honor.

JUDGE: Good.

ALOYSIUS: *(In a small voice.)* I play bridge.

JUDGE: The defendant is never allowed.

ALOYSIUS: Oh.

JUDGE: Clerk!

*(Enter the Clerk.)*

CLERK: Yes, Your Honor?

JUDGE: What? No pants?

CLERK: I forgot them in the other room.

JUDGE: Well, never mind. Bring me a pack of cards instead.  
*(The Clerk produces them from his pocket.)*

JUDGE: I presume Mr. Kain will not mind if we play bridge to make the trial go faster.

ALOYSIUS: I don't think it's fair, Your Honor.

JUDGE: That was meant as a statement, not a question.  
*(The Clerk exits.)*

JUDGE: *(To the other players.)* I'll deal.

DEBORAH: I'll deal.  
*(She takes the cards and deals at the Judge's desk. They are seated thusly: r to l, the Man, the Judge, Deborah, and Henry. Aloysius isolated right. The Man looks at Aloysius, then away. Deborah is finished dealing—sloppily. They arrange cards.)*

HENRY: Your Honor, I suggest that since we have heard all the evidence, we send the jury out for a verdict.

JUDGE: My God! I knew there was something I'd forgotten. There is no jury.

DEBORAH: Well then, make the decision yourself.  
JUDGE: Oh. Alright. Who bids first?  
HENRY: I do. One club.  
MAN: I pass.  
JUDGE: You're supposed to say two clubs.  
MAN: I pass.  
JUDGE: You're supposed to say two clubs.  
*(Deborah kicks the Man under the table.)*  
MAN: I pass, I said.  
*(The Judge twists the Man's wrist. Deborah kicks the Man under the table.)*  
JUDGE: Say two clubs.  
*(The Judge, Henry and Deborah begin to chant together.)*  
CHANT: Two clubs, two clubs, two, clubs...  
MAN: TWO CLUBS!  
*(The three laugh, go back to their places.)*  
DEBORAH: Good. Start over.  
HENRY: One club.  
MAN: Two clubs.  
JUDGE: Three clubs.  
DEBORAH: Four clubs!  
*(Judge, Deborah and Henry laugh, clap their hands in glee.)*  
ALOYSIUS: Your Honor...  
HENRY: Objection!  
JUDGE: Contempt of court.  
DEBORAH: Judge, the verdict.  
JUDGE: *(Looking up from his cards.)* Oh, yes. *(Shouts at Aloysius.)* The Court has come to the decision that you are guilty. Sentence: death! Clerk!  
*(Enter the Clerk, with a pair of pajamas.)*  
CLERK: Your pajamas, Your Honor.  
JUDGE: So I see. Clerk. Execute Mr. Kain, please.  
*(Aloysius does not move. The Clerk takes a gun from the Judge and shoots Aloysius. No one looks or moves except the Man. The Clerk then drags the dead body off.)*  
MAN: I think I'll quit.  
JUDGE: No you don't.  
DEBORAH: Henry, darling. Now that Aloysius is dead, we can get married. Your Honor, can you marry us?

JUDGE: I can do anything. Do you, Henry, take this wo...

HENRY: I do.

JUDGE: Do you, Mrs. Kain...

DEBORAH: I have already, but I will again.

JUDGE: I pronounce you man and wife. You may kiss the bride.

*(Henry and Deborah kiss very coldly.)*

JUDGE: May I kiss the bride?

DEBORAH: Certainly.

*(Deborah and the Judge kiss passionately.)*

DEBORAH: Let's play bridge.

JUDGE: Alright.

DEBORAH: *(Looking at her cards.)* Let's start over. I don't like my hand.

HENRY: Deborah, what about a honeymoon?

DEBORAH: *(Shouting.)* If you're going to nag me, I won't let you play with us. Judge, I want a new fourth.

JUDGE: Very well. Clerk!

*(Enter the Clerk.)*

JUDGE: Do you play bridge?

CLERK: Very well indeed.

JUDGE: Then come play it with us.

*(Clerk sits down where Henry was.)*

HENRY: But Deborah, what about me?

DEBORAH: What about you, Aloysius?

*(Silence. Henry is shaken.)*

HENRY: *(Correcting her.)* Henry.

DEBORAH: Henry. Sorry. *(Looking at her cards.)* Four spades.

CLERK: Pass.

MAN: Pass.

JUDGE: Pass.

DEBORAH: *(To Man.)* You're dummy.

MAN: I know.

HENRY: *(Shouting.)* DEBORAH! WHAT ABOUT ME?

*(Deborah does not hear him; no one does, except the Man; and he turns away.)*

HENRY: Deborah, answer me!

DEBORAH: *(To Man, who keeps looking back at Henry.)* You're not concentrating.

MAN: Bridge makes me sick. *(He turns his back to all of them.)*

HENRY: DEBORAH!

*(Deborah hands him a revolver from her purse. Henry shoots himself.)*

JUDGE: How many hearts are out?

DEBORAH: *(Gaily.)* All of them. *(Putting down her cards.)* I'm tired of bridge. What other games can we play?

*(They all put down their cards.)*

JUDGE: I don't know.

CLERK: *(Discreetly.)* There's always double solitaire.

JUDGE: But there are three of us. Only two people can play that.

DEBORAH: Clerk, why don't you play it with me?

CLERK: Alright.

DEBORAH: We can play it in your room so we won't be bothered.

*(The Clerk, carrying the Judge's pajamas, starts to exit with Deborah and the cards.)*

JUDGE: But Deborah, wait! Wait! What about me? What about me?

*(Deborah and the Clerk, dragging the dead Henry out after them, are followed by the Judge, who keeps calling after them. They exit.)*

*The Man is now alone on stage. He gets up from his chair, looks about him. He arranges the chair next to the desk, and then climbs up onto the desk. He looks down to the floor. He prepares to jump. Enter the Nun.)*

NUN: *(Sternly.)* Don't jump.

*(The Man looks at her very seriously. She remains stern, uncompromising. He sits down on the desk.)*

MAN: *(Barely audible.)* Why not? *(To the floor, more or less.)* Why not, why not, why not... *(His voice trails off. He just stares at the floor. End.)*



# Beyond Therapy

*Beyond Therapy* was previously presented by the Phoenix Theatre in New York City on January 1, 1981. The production was directed by Jerry Zaks; scenery by Karen Schultz; costumes by Jennifer von Mayrhauser; lighting by Richard Nelson; sound by David Rapkin. The cast was as follow:

BRUCE. . . . . Stephen Collins  
PRUDENCE . . . . . Sigourney Weaver  
DR. STUART FRAMINGHAM . . . . . Jim Borelli  
MRS. CHARLOTTE WALLACE . . . . . Kate McGregor-Stewart  
BOB. . . . . Jack Gilpin  
ANDREW. . . . . Conan McCarty  
PAUL\* . . . . . Nick Stannard

\*The character of Paul, a former suitor of Prudence's, appeared in the final scene of the play at the Phoenix. This scene was changed for the Broadway version, and the character was written out.

## SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

### ACT I

- Scene 1: A Restaurant
- Scene 2: Dr. Stuart Framingham's Office
- Scene 3: The Office of Charlotte Wallace
- Scene 4: The Restaurant Again
- Scene 5: Dr. Framingham's Office
- Scene 6: Bruce's Apartment

### Intermission

### ACT II

- Scene 1: Mrs. Wallace's Office
- Scene 2: The Restaurant Again
- Scene 3: The Restaurant Still

STUART: You're a very sick woman, and you mustn't be without a therapist even for a day.

PRUDENCE: *(Not taken in by this; wanting to leave without a scene.)* Is the session over yet?

STUART: We have thirty more minutes.

PRUDENCE: Could I go early?

STUART: I think it's important that we finish out the session.

PRUDENCE: I'd like to go.

STUART: Please, please, please, please...

PRUDENCE: Alright, alright. For God's sake.

*(They settle down, back in their chairs.)*

STUART: When are you seeing this person again? I'm asking as your therapist.

PRUDENCE: Tonight. He's making dinner for us.

STUART: *He's* making dinner?

PRUDENCE: He says he likes to cook.

STUART: I don't think I need say anything more.

PRUDENCE: I don't think you do either.

*(They stare at one another; lights dim.)*

## ACT I

### Scene 6

*Bruce's apartment. Bruce fiddling with pillows, on couch, looking at watch, etc. Doorbell. Bruce lets in Prudence.*

BRUCE: Hi. Come on in.

PRUDENCE: Hello. *(They kiss.)* I brought some wine.

BRUCE: Oh thanks.

PRUDENCE: You have a nice apartment.

BRUCE: Thanks.

PRUDENCE: It looks just like my apartment.

BRUCE: Yeah I guess it does.

PRUDENCE: And like my office at the magazine. And like the lobby at the bank.

Everything looks alike.

BRUCE: Yes, I guess it does.

PRUDENCE: I'm sorry, I'm just rattling on.

BRUCE: That's alright. Sit down.

*(They sit.)*

BRUCE: Can I get you a drink?  
PRUDENCE: Ummm, I don't know.  
BRUCE: Do you want one?  
PRUDENCE: I don't know. Do you want one?  
BRUCE: Well I thought I might have some Perrier.  
PRUDENCE: Oh that sounds good.  
BRUCE: Two Perriers?  
PRUDENCE: Well, do you have Poland water?  
BRUCE: I think I do. Wait here. I'll be right back. *(Bruce exits.)*  
*(After a moment Bob enters. Bob sees Prudence, is rattled, ill at ease.)*  
BOB: Oh. You're here already. I...didn't hear the bell ring.  
PRUDENCE: Oh. Hello. Are you Bob?  
BOB: Yes. *(At a loss, making an odd joke.)* And you must be Marie of Roumania.  
PRUDENCE: I'm Prudence.  
BOB: Yes, I know. *(At a loss how to get out of room.)* Is Bruce in the kitchen?  
PRUDENCE: Yes.  
BOB: Oh. *(Starts to go there; stops.)* Oh, well, never mind. When he comes out would you tell him I want to see him in the other room?  
PRUDENCE: Alright.  
BOB: Excuse me. *(Exits back to bedroom presumably.)*  
*(Enter Bruce with two glasses of sparkling water.)*  
BRUCE: Well here we are. One Perrier, and one Poland water.  
PRUDENCE: I thought you said Bob was away.  
BRUCE: Oh, you met Bob already? Yes, he was going away, but then he changed his mind and I'd already bought the lamb chops.  
PRUDENCE: You mean he's going to be here all through dinner?  
BRUCE: Oh I don't think so. He said he was going to his mother's for dinner. He has a very funny mother. She's sort of like Auntie Mame.  
PRUDENCE: Oh yes?  
BRUCE: Now don't let Bob upset you.  
PRUDENCE: Well he seemed very uncomfortable. He asked me if I was Marie of Roumania.  
BRUCE: Oh, he says that to everyone. Don't take it personally. *(Raising drink.)* Well, cheers.  
PRUDENCE: *(Remembering.)* Oh. He said he wanted to see you in the other room.  
BRUCE: Oh. Well, alright. I'll just be a minute. Here, why don't you read a magazine?  
PRUDENCE: *People*, how nice.

BRUCE: Be right back. *(Exits.)*

*(Prudence reads magazine uncomfortably, and tastes his Perrier water to compare it with her Poland water. We and she start to hear the following offstage argument; initially it's just a buzz of voices but it grows into anger and shouting. Prudence looks very uncomfortable.)*

BRUCE: *(Offstage.)* This isn't the time to talk about this, Bob.

BOB: *(Offstage.)* Well, when is the time?

BRUCE: *(Offstage.)* We can talk about this later.

BOB: *(Offstage.)* That's obviously very convenient for you.

BRUCE: *(Offstage.)* Bob, this isn't the time to talk about this.

BOB: *(Offstage.)* Well when *is* the time?

BRUCE: *(Offstage.)* Come on, Bob, calm down. *(Softer.)* Now I told you this doesn't have anything to do with us.

BOB: *(Offstage. Very angry.)* Oh God!

BRUCE: *(Offstage.)* I'm sick of this behavior, Bob!

BOB: *(Offstage.)* Well I'm sick of it too!

*(There is a crash of something breaking. Pause. Then re-enter Bruce.)*

BRUCE: Everything's fine now. *(Pause.)* We broke a vase. Well, Bob broke it.

PRUDENCE: Maybe I should go.

BRUCE: No, everything's fine now. Once Bob vents his anger then everything's fine again.

PRUDENCE: I thought you told me that Bob didn't mind your seeing me, and that the two of you had broken up anyway.

BRUCE: Well, I lied. Sorry. Some members of Bob's group therapy wrote me a note saying they thought if I wanted to see women, I should just go on and see women, and so I just sort of presumed they'd convince Bob eventually, but I guess they haven't yet.

PRUDENCE: They wrote you a letter?

BRUCE: It's a very intense group Bob is in. They're always visiting each other in the hospital and things.

PRUDENCE: But what shall we do about this evening?

BRUCE: I think you and Bob will really like one another once you get past this initial discomfort. And besides, I'm sure he'll be going to his mother's in a little while.

PRUDENCE: Maybe we should go to a restaurant.

BRUCE: No really I bought the lamb chops. It'll be fine. Oh my God, the rice. I have to go see about the rice. It's wild rice; well, Rice-a-roni. I have to go see about browning it. I won't be a minute.

PRUDENCE: No, no, don't leave...

BRUCE: It's alright. (*As he leaves.*) Bob will come talk to you... (*Exits.*)

PRUDENCE: (*As she sees he's gone.*) I know... Oh dear.

(*Enter Bob.*)

BOB: Hello again.

PRUDENCE: Oh hi.

BOB: I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable about Marie of Roumania. It's just something I say.

PRUDENCE: Oh that's alright.

BOB: (*Offering it as information.*) I just broke a vase.

PRUDENCE: (*Being pleasant.*) Oh yes, I thought I heard something.

BOB: Bruce says that I will like you if I can just get past my initial hostility.

PRUDENCE: Oh. Well I hope so.

BOB: Bruce is really a very conflicted person. I really suffer a lot dealing with him.

PRUDENCE: Oh I'm sorry.

BOB: And now this latest thing of having women traipse through here at all hours.

PRUDENCE: Ah.

BOB: Did you ever see the movie *Sunday Bloody Sunday*?

PRUDENCE: No I didn't. I meant to.

BOB: Well I sure wish Bruce had never seen it. It had a big effect on him. It's all about this guy played by Murray Head who's having an affair with Peter Finch *and* with Glenda Jackson.

PRUDENCE: Oh. Good actors.

BOB: Yes, well the point is it's a very silly movie because I don't think bisexuality exists, do you?

PRUDENCE: Well it's hard to know really.

BOB: I mean, I think that Bruce is just trying to prove something with all these ads in the paper for women. That's what my mother says about Bruce. She tells me I should just be patient and understanding and that it's just a phase Bruce is going through. I've put a lot of work into this relationship. And it's so difficult meeting new people, it's just thoroughly intimidating.

PRUDENCE: It is hard to meet people.

BOB: I think everyone is basically gay, don't you?

PRUDENCE: Well, no, not really.

BOB: You just say that because you haven't come out yet. I know lots of lesbians who'd like you a lot. I'd be happy to give them your number.

PRUDENCE: Thank you, but no.

*(Enter Bruce.)*

BRUCE: Well I burned the rice. Sorry. We'll just have more salad.

PRUDENCE: Oh that's alright.

BRUCE: So have you two been getting to know one another?

PRUDENCE: Yes.

BOB: *(Truly being conversational, not trying to be rude. To Bruce.)* Don't you think Prudence would be a big hit in a lesbian bar?

BRUCE: Yes, I guess she would.

BOB: I know Liz Skinner would certainly like her.

BRUCE: Yes, she is Liz's type.

PRUDENCE: Bruce, could I speak to you for a moment please? *(To Bob.)* I'm sorry, excuse me.

*(Bruce and Prudence cross to side of room.)*

PRUDENCE: Bruce, I'm getting very uncomfortable. Now you told me that Bob wasn't going to be here and that he wasn't jealous about your seeing women, and I don't want to be told which lesbians would like me, so I think maybe I should forget the whole thing and go home.

BRUCE: No please, don't go. Bob needs help to get over his feelings about this, and I'm sure he'll go to his mother's in a little while. So please just be nice to him for a little longer. For our sake.

PRUDENCE: I don't know.

BRUCE: Really, it'll be fine.

PRUDENCE: *(Deciding to try.)* All right. All right.

*(They return to Bob.)*

PRUDENCE: *(On returning, to Bob.)* Sorry.

BOB: Don't be sorry. I realize I make you uncomfortable.

PRUDENCE: No, no, really it's not that.

BRUCE: Prudence likes you, Bob. She isn't like the other women you know.

PRUDENCE: Yes, I do...I like lots of men. *(Laughs nervously.)*

BOB: We have that in common.

PRUDENCE: Yes... *(Laughs, very uncomfortable.)*

BRUCE: *(Making big transition into "conversation".)* So, Prudence, did you finish writing your interview with Joyce De Witt?

BOB: Who's Joyce De Witt?

PRUDENCE: *(Trying to be very friendly.)* Oh, she's the brunette actress on the TV show *There's a Crowd*. *(Pause; looks mortified.)* I mean, *There's Company*.

*(Long pause. They all feel awful.)*

BRUCE: So, did you finish the article?

PRUDENCE: Yes, I did. Right on time. *(Pause; to Bob.)* Bruce tells me your mother is like Auntie Mame.

*(Bob glares at Bruce.)*

PRUDENCE: Oh, I'm sorry. Was that a bad thing to say?

BOB: It depends on what you mean by Auntie Mame.

PRUDENCE: I don't know. Bruce said it.

BOB: My mother has a certain flair, if that's what he means.

BRUCE: Your mother acts like a transvestite. I'm sorry, she does.

BOB: Just because my mother has a sense of humor is no reason to accuse her of not being feminine. *(To Prudence.)* Don't you agree that women *theoretically* can have senses of humor?

PRUDENCE: Yes indeed.

BRUCE: Sense of humor isn't the issue.

PRUDENCE: *(Trying to help conversation.)* I've always hated transvestites. It's such a repugnant image of women.

*(Bob looks disapproving.)*

PRUDENCE: I'm sorry, I don't mean to imply anything about your mother. I...I liked Jack Lemmon as a woman in *Some Like It Hot*.

BOB: My mother does not resemble Jack Lemmon in *Some Like It Hot*.

PRUDENCE: I'm sure she doesn't. I didn't mean to imply...

BRUCE: Change the subject, Prudence. This is getting us nowhere.

PRUDENCE: Oh, alright. *(Thinks.)* What does Bob do for a living?

BOB: I'm still in the room.

PRUDENCE: Oh I'm sorry, I know you are. *(Pause.)* What do you do for a living, Bob?

BOB: I'm a pharmacist.

PRUDENCE: Oh really?

BOB: Do you need any pills?

PRUDENCE: No thank you. *(Pause.)* Maybe later.

BRUCE: *(To Prudence.)* Can I freshen your Poland water?

PRUDENCE: No thank you. I'm fine. *(Pause.)* So you're a pharmacist.

BOB: Yes.

BRUCE: I wish I hadn't burned the rice. *(Whispers to Prudence.)* Say something to him, he's starting to sulk.

PRUDENCE: Ummmm...What exactly is in Tylenol, I wonder.

BOB: That's alright. I realize I'm making everyone uncomfortable. Excuse me. *(Exits.)*



PRUDENCE: Really, Bruce, this isn't very fair to me. This is a problem the two of you should work out together.

BRUCE: Well you're right actually. You're always right. That's why I like you so much. *(Moves closer, puts arm around her.)*

PRUDENCE: Maybe I should go.

BRUCE: Oh you're too sensitive. Besides, he'll be leaving soon.

*(Bob re-enters.)*

BOB: My mother's on the phone.

BRUCE: I didn't hear it ring.

BOB: I called her. *(To Prudence.)* She wants to speak to you.

PRUDENCE: I don't understand. I...

BOB: *(Hands her the phone.)* Here.

PRUDENCE: *(It's happening too fast to stop.)* Hello. Who is this? Oh, hello. Yes. *(Laughs uncomfortably.)* Yes, thank you. What? No, I don't want to ruin your son's life. What? No, really, I'm not trying to...

BRUCE: *(Takes phone away from Prudence; talks into it.)* Now, look, Sadie, I've told you not to meddle in my life. It doesn't do anybody any good when you do, including Bob. Don't sing when I'm talking to you, that's not communication to sing when someone is talking to you. Sadie...Sadie! *(Hands phone to Bob.)* She's singing "Rose's Turn" from *Gypsy*, it's utterly terrifying.

BOB: Hello, mother.

BRUCE: *(To Prudence.)* She's an insane woman.

BOB: Mother, it's me, you can stop singing now. Okay, well, just finish the phrase. *(Listens.)*

PRUDENCE: Where's Bob's father?

BRUCE: She killed him.

BOB: That's not funny, Bruce. Okay, mother, wrap the song up now. Yes, I'm alright. Yes, I'll tell them. *(To the two of them.)* My mother thinks you're both very immature. *(Back to phone.)* Yes, I think she's a lesbian too.

PRUDENCE: I'm going to go home now.

BRUCE: No, no, I'll fix this. *(Takes phone away from Bob.)* Finish this conversation in the other room, Bob. Then please get out of here, as we agreed you would do earlier, so Prudence and I can have our dinner. I mean, we agreed upon this, Bob.

BOB: You mean you agreed upon it.

BRUCE: I've finished with this conversation, Bob. Go in the other room and talk to your mother. *(Listens to phone.)* What's she singing now, I don't recognize it? *(Bob and Bruce both listen to phone.)*

BOB: That's "Welcome to Kanagawa" from *Pacific Overtures*.

BRUCE: Keep singing, Sadie. Bob is changing phones. It was good hearing from you.

BRUCE: I just don't understand your behavior. I just don't. (*Exits.*)

PRUDENCE: Bruce, I can't tell you how uncomfortable I am. Really I must go home, and then the two of you should go to a marriage counselor or something.

BRUCE: I am sorry. I should have protected you from this. (*Listens to phone, hangs it up.*)

PRUDENCE: I mean we're only seeing one another casually, and you and Bob have been living together and his mother calls up and she sings...

BRUCE: Prudence, I'm not feeling all that casual anymore. Are you?

PRUDENCE: Well I don't know. I mean, probably yes, it's still casual.

BRUCE: It needn't be.

PRUDENCE: Bruce, I just don't think your life is in order.

BRUCE: Of course it's not. How can life be in order? Life by its very nature is disordered, terrifying. That's why people come together, to face the terrors hand in hand.

PRUDENCE: You're giving me my rash again.

BRUCE: You're so afraid of feeling.

PRUDENCE: Oh, just put the lamb chops on.

BRUCE: I feel very close to you.

(*Enter Bob with suitcase. Phone rings.*)

BOB: Don't answer it. It's just my mother again. I told her I was checking into a hotel and then jumping out the window. There's just no point in continuing. (*To Prudence, sincerely.*) I hope you're both very happy... Really.

PRUDENCE: (*Startled, confused.*) Thank you.

BRUCE: Bob, come back here. (*Answers phone.*) Sadie, we'll call you back. (*Hangs up.*) Bob.

BOB: No, go back to your evening. I don't want to stand in your way.

BRUCE: You're just trying to get attention.

BOB: There's just no point in continuing.

(*Phone rings; Bruce answers it.*)

BRUCE: It's all right, Sadie, I'll handle this. (*Hangs up.*) Bob, people who announce their suicide are just asking for help, isn't that so, Prudence?

PRUDENCE: I really don't know. I think I should leave.

BOB: No, please, I don't want to spoil your dinner.

BRUCE: You're just asking for help. (*Phone rings.*) Let's let it ring. Bob, look at me.

I want you to get help. Can you hear me? I want you to see my therapist.

BOB: I have my own group therapy.

BRUCE: You need better help than that. Doesn't he, Prudence? *(Answers phone.)*  
It's all right, Sadie, I'm going to call up my therapist right away. *(Hangs up.)*  
Now you just sit down here, Bob, and we're going to call Mrs. Wallace  
right up. *(To Prudence.)* Unless you think your therapist is better.

PRUDENCE: No! Yours would have to be better.

BOB: I don't know what you have against my group therapy. It's been very helpful  
to me.

BRUCE: Bob, you're trying to kill yourself. That proves to me that group therapy  
is a failure.

BOB: Suicide is an innate human right.  
*(Phone rings.)*

BRUCE: *(To Prudence; hands her phone.)* Will you tell her to stop calling?

PRUDENCE: Hello?

BRUCE: You're not acting logically.

PRUDENCE: No, I don't want to see him dead.

BOB: I simply think I should end my life now. That's logical.

PRUDENCE: Please don't shout at me, Mrs. Lansky.

BRUCE: We have to talk this through.

PRUDENCE: Bruce.

BOB: I don't want to talk it through. *(Sings.)* Frere Jacques, Frere Jacques,  
dormez-vous? dormez-vous? *(Etc., continues on.)*

PRUDENCE: Bruce.

BRUCE: Don't sing when I'm talking to you.

PRUDENCE: Bruce.

BRUCE: What is it, Prudence?

PRUDENCE: Please, Mrs. Lansky is yelling at me.

BRUCE: Well she can't hurt you. Yell back.

BOB: *(Takes phone.)* Mother, it's alright, I want to die. *(Hands phone back to  
Prudence, goes back to song.)* Ding dong ding ding dong ding. Frere Jacques...  
*(Continues.)*

BRUCE: Bob, you're acting like a baby.

PRUDENCE: No, he's still alive, Mrs. Lansky.

BRUCE: *(Irritated, starts to sing at Bob.)* Seventy-six trombones led the big  
parade, with one hundred ten cornets close behind... *(Continues.)*

PRUDENCE: Mrs. Lansky, I'm going to hang up now. Good-bye. Stop yelling.  
*(Hangs up.)*

BOB: *(Stops singing.)* Did you hang up on my mother?  
*(Bruce stops too.)*

PRUDENCE: (*Really letting him have it.*) Oh why don't you just go kill yourself?  
(*Bob sits down, stunned. Phone rings.*)

PRUDENCE: (*Answers it.*) Oh shut up! (*Hangs up.*) I am very uninterested in being involved in this nonsense. You're both just making a big overdramatic mess out of everything, and I don't want to watch it anymore.

BRUCE: You're right. Bob, she's right.

BOB: (*Looks up.*) She is?

BRUCE: Yes, she is. We're really acting stupid. (*Phone rings. Bruce picks it up, and hangs up immediately. Then he dials.*) I'm calling Mrs. Wallace now. I think we really need help.

PRUDENCE: You have her home number?

BRUCE: Yes. She's a really wonderful woman. She gave me her home number after our second session.

PRUDENCE: I slept with my therapist after our second session.

BRUCE: Hello? Uh, is Mrs. Wallace there? Thank you. (*To them.*) I think that was her husband.

BOB: (*Not defiantly; just for something to do, sings softly.*) Frere Jacques, frere Jacques, dormez-vous... (*Etc.*)

BRUCE: (*Suddenly hearing it.*) What do you mean you slept with your therapist?

PRUDENCE: I don't know, I...

BRUCE: (*To Bob suddenly, as Mrs. Wallace is now on the phone.*) Sssssh. (*Into phone.*) Hello. Mrs. Wallace? Mrs. Wallace, this is Bruce, we have a bit of an emergency, I wonder if you can help...we're in desperate need of some therapy here...

END ACT I

CHARLOTTE: Oh, we're making progress. Don't you see? And you said it yourself. You didn't buy the gun to shoot me, you bought it to shoot Bruce and that floozie of his. Right?

BOB: Yes.

CHARLOTTE: So you see what I'm getting at?

BOB: You mean, I should follow through on my impulse and go shoot Bruce and Prudence.

CHARLOTTE: (*Stands, staggers to her desk, overwhelmed with how well the session is going.*) Oh I've never had such a productive first session!

BOB: (*Stands.*) But should I get a real gun, or just use this one?

CHARLOTTE: That would be up to you. You have to ask yourself what you *really* want.

BOB: Well, I don't want to go to jail, I just want to punish them.

CHARLOTTE: Good! Punish them! Act it out!

BOB: I mean, I could go to that restaurant right now.

CHARLOTTE: Oh yes! Oh good!

BOB: Will you come with me? I mean, in case someone tries to stop me you can explain it's part of my therapy.

CHARLOTTE: (*Agreeably.*) Okay. Let me just get another cookie. Oh, I'm so glad you came to me. Now, should I bring Snoopy with me, or leave him here?

BOB: Well, which do you really *want*?

CHARLOTTE: Oh you're right. That's the issue, good for you. Okay, now...I don't know which I want. Let me sit here for a moment and figure it out.

(*She sits and thinks, weighing pro-and-con-Snoopy ideas in her head.*)

(*Lights dim.*)

## ACT II

### Scene 2

*The restaurant again. Bruce, Prudence.*

PRUDENCE: Why have we come back to this restaurant? We've been here twice before and never got any service.

BRUCE: You're upset about Bob, aren't you?

PRUDENCE: No. I understand. It's all difficult.

BRUCE: Bob will get used to the idea of us, I just tried to make it happen too soon. He's innately very flexible.

PRUDENCE: Then maybe the two of you should stay together.

BRUCE: Will you marry me?

PRUDENCE: Bruce, this is inappropriate.

BRUCE: Prudence, I believe one should just *act*—without thought, without reason, act on instinct. Look at the natives in Samoa, look at Margaret Mead. Did they think about what they were doing?

PRUDENCE: Important life decisions can't be made that way.

BRUCE: But they can, they must. Think of people who become heroes during emergencies and terrible disasters—they don't stop to fret and pick things apart, they just *move*, on sheer adrenaline. Why don't we think of our lives as some sort of uncontrollable disaster, like *The Towering Inferno* or *Tora! Tora! Tora!*, and then why don't we just act on instinct and adrenaline? I mean, put that way, doesn't that make you just want to go out and get married?

PRUDENCE: But shouldn't I marry someone *specific*?

BRUCE: I'm specific.

PRUDENCE: Well, of course. But, what about the gas man? I mean, do I want the children saying I saw Daddy kissing the gas man?

BRUCE: We'd get electric heat.

PRUDENCE: Oh, Bruce!

BRUCE: Besides, I don't want lots and lots of people—I want you, and children, and occasionally Bob. Is that so bad?

PRUDENCE: Well it's not the traditional set-up.

BRUCE: Aren't you afraid of being lonely?

PRUDENCE: Well, I guess I am.

BRUCE: And aren't all your girlfriends from college married by now?

PRUDENCE: Well, many of them.

BRUCE: And you know you should really have children *now*, particularly if you may want more than one. I mean, soon you'll be at the end of your child-bearing years. I don't mean to be mean bringing that up, but it is a reality.

PRUDENCE: Can we talk about something else?

BRUCE: I mean, time is running out for you. And me too. We're not twenty anymore. We're not even twenty-six anymore. Do you remember how old thirty used to seem?

PRUDENCE: Please don't go on, you're making me hysterical.

BRUCE: No, but these are realities, Prudence. I may be your last chance, maybe no one else will want to marry you until you're forty. And it's hard to meet people. You already said that Shaun Cassidy was too young. I mean, we have so little time left to ourselves, we've got to grab it before it's gone.

*(Stuart enters, sees them, hides behind a table or large plant.)*

PRUDENCE: Oh, stop talking about time please. I mean, I know I'm thirty, it doesn't mean I'm dead.

BRUCE: I didn't say dead. I just said that our time on this earth is limited.

PRUDENCE: Stop talking, stop talking. *(Covers her ears.)*

BRUCE: Prudence, I think you and I can make each other happy. *(Sees Stuart.)*

Do you see someone over there? Is that a waiter *hiding*?

PRUDENCE: *(Looks.)* Oh, for God's sake.

BRUCE: What is it?

PRUDENCE: It's my therapist.

BRUCE: Here?

PRUDENCE: I thought we were being followed. *(Calling.)* Dr. Framingham, we see you.

BRUCE: What's he doing here?

*(Stuart comes over to them.)*

STUART: I want you to leave here with me this instant.

PRUDENCE: Why are you following me?

STUART: I'm going to give you a prescription for a sedative, and then I'm going to drive you home.

PRUDENCE: I can't believe that you've been following me.

STUART: I care about my patients. *(To Bruce.)* She's really *very* sick. The work we have to do together will take years.

PRUDENCE: Dr. Framingham, I've been meaning to call you since our last session. I'm discontinuing my therapy with you.

STUART: That would be very self-destructive. You'd be in Bellevue in a week.

PRUDENCE: I really don't want to see you ever again. Please go away now.

STUART: You don't mean what you say.

BRUCE: Do you want me to hit him?

PRUDENCE: No, I just want him to go away.

BRUCE: *(Stands.)* The lady wants you to leave, mister.

STUART: *(To Prudence.)* So this is the degenerate you told me about?

BRUCE: What did she tell you about me?

PRUDENCE: Bruce, don't talk to him, please. Stuart, leave the restaurant. I'm tired of this.

STUART: Not until we set up our next appointment.

PRUDENCE: But, Stuart, I *told* you I'm discontinuing our therapy.

STUART: You haven't explained why to me.

PRUDENCE: Then I will. BECAUSE YOU ARE A PREMATURE EJACULATOR AND A LOUSY THERAPIST. NOW BEAT IT!

STUART: (*Very hurt, very mad.*) Okay, Miss Sensuous Woman. But do you know what's going to happen to you without therapy? You're going to become a very pathetic, very lonely old maid. You know what's going to happen to you? You're going to break off with this clown in a few days, and then you're not going to go out with men anymore at all. Your emotional life is going to be tied up with your cats. (*To Bruce.*) Do you know what she does in her apartment? She keeps cats! Some guy she almost married last year wanted to marry her but he was allergic to cats and so *she* chose the cats!

PRUDENCE: That's not why we broke up at all!

STUART: You're gonna end up taking little boat cruises to Bermuda with your *cats* and with spinster librarians when you're fifty unless you decide to kill yourself before then! And all because you were too cowardly and self-destructive and stupid to keep yourself from being an old maid by sticking with your therapy!

PRUDENCE: You are talking utter gibberish. Michael was only *slightly* allergic to cats and we didn't get married because we decided we weren't really in love. And I'm not going to end up an old maid, I'm going to get married. In fact, I may even marry Bruce here. And if I do, Bruce and I will send you a picture of our children every Christmas to the mental institution where you'll be locked up!

STUART: (*Hysterical.*) You're a terrible, terrible patient!

PRUDENCE: And you're a hideous doctor! I hate you!

(*They throw water at each other. Enter Bob and Mrs. Wallace.*)

CHARLOTTE: Hello, everybody!

STUART: Who are these people?

CHARLOTTE: Go ahead, Bob, tell them.

BOB: I want to tell you how you've made me feel. I feel *very* angry.

(*He takes out his gun; Prudence, Bruce, and Stuart look terrified. He fires the gun at them six or seven times. They are terribly shocked, stunned; are trying to figure out if they've been hit and are dying. Enter a young Waiter.*)

WAITER: I'm sorry. We're going to have to ask you people to leave.

BRUCE: But we haven't even seen menus.

WAITER: I'm sorry. We can't have shootings in here.

STUART: Oh my God. Oh my God. (*Feels himself all over for wounds, just coming out of his fear.*)

PRUDENCE: (*Taking the gun from Bob.*) Give me that. (*Points the gun at the Waiter; Waiter puts hands up.*) Now look here, you. I am sick of the service in this restaurant. *I am very hungry.* Now I want you to bring me a steak,



medium rare, no potato, two vegetables, a small salad with oil and vinegar, and a glass of red wine. (*Angry, grouchy, waves gun toward the others.*)  
Anyone else want to order?

CHARLOTTE: (*Raises hand.*) I'd like to see a menu.

PRUDENCE: (*Waving the gun.*) And bring these other people menus. And make it snappy.

WAITER: Yes, ma'am. (*Exits in a hurry.*)

CHARLOTTE: (*To Prudence.*) Oh I like your directness. Bravo!

STUART: (*Feeling for bullet holes.*) I don't understand. Did he miss all of us?

PRUDENCE: Shut up and sit down. I'm going to eat some dinner, and I want everyone to shut up.

CHARLOTTE: Oh, I think she's marvelous.

PRUDENCE: (*Aims the gun at her.*) Shut up.

CHARLOTTE: Sorry.

(*Everyone sits quietly. Waiter brings menus which people look at except for Prudence, who glares, and Stuart, who's shaken.*)

WAITER: Our specials today are chicken marsala cooked in a garlic and white wine sauce; roast Long Island duck with orange sauce...  
(*Lights dim to black.*)

## ACT II

### Scene 3

*The restaurant still. They've finished their dinners: Prudence, Bruce, Bob, Mrs. Wallace, Stuart. The Waiter is clearing the dishes.*

CHARLOTTE: Mmmmm, that chocolate mousse was delicious. I really shouldn't have had two.

WAITER: (*To Prudence.*) Will there be anything else?

PRUDENCE: Just the check please.

(*Waiter exits.*)

STUART: (*Who's still in a sort of shock; to Bob.*) I thought you'd killed us all. You should be locked up.

BOB: Well, all's well that ends well.

CHARLOTTE: Please, I thought we'd exhausted the whole topic of the shooting. No harm was done.

STUART: What if I'd had a heart condition?

CHARLOTTE: That would have been your responsibility. We must all take responsibility for our own lives.

STUART: I think you're a terrible therapist.

CHARLOTTE: Sounds like professional jealousy to me.

PRUDENCE: *(To Stuart.)* I would not bring up the subject of who's a terrible therapist, if I were you.

CHARLOTTE: *(To Bruce.)* Oh, she's *so* direct, I just find her wonderful. Congratulations, Bruce.

PRUDENCE: What are you congratulating him on?

CHARLOTTE: Aren't you getting married?

*(Simultaneously.)*

BRUCE: Yes.

PRUDENCE: No.

*(Re-enter Waiter.)*

WAITER: Here's the check. *(Mrs. Wallace calls for the check.)* The second chocolate mousse was on the house, Mrs. Wallace.

CHARLOTTE: Thank you, honey. *(Kisses him on the cheek.)*

*(Waiter exits.)*

CHARLOTTE: He's one of my patients too.

BOB: He's quite attractive.

BRUCE: I thought you were going to kill yourself.

BOB: Mrs. Wallace helped me express my anger and now I don't feel like it anymore.

STUART: If one runs around shooting off guns, blank or otherwise, just because one is angry, then we'll have anarchy.

BOB: No one is interested in your opinion.

BRUCE: I think Prudence and I are a good match. I think we should get married as soon as possible.

PRUDENCE: I never want to get married, ever. I'm going to quit my job, and stay in my apartment until they evict me. Then I'm going to become a bag lady and live in the tunnels under Grand Central Station.

*(They all stare at her.)*

BRUCE: *(To Prudence.)* If you marry me, I'll help you want to live again.

BOB: What am I supposed to do?

BRUCE: You seemed too busy with the waiter a minute ago.

BOB: For God's sake, I just looked at him. You're trying to go off and marry this woman. Really, you're just impossible. I thought after I shot at you, you'd get over this silly thing about women.

BRUCE: I need the stability of a woman.

BOB: You think she's stable? She just said she was going to become a bag woman.

BRUCE: She was speaking metaphorically.

BOB: What kind of metaphor is becoming a bag woman?

BRUCE: She meant she was depressed.

BOB: So I'm depressed too. Why don't you marry me? We'll go find some crack-pot Episcopal minister somewhere, and then we'll adopt children together.

BRUCE: And that's another thing. I want to have my own children. I want to reproduce. She can give me children.

PRUDENCE: Please stop talking about me that way. I don't want to have your children. I want to be left alone. I want to become a lesbian and move in with Kate Millett.

BOB: Now she's making sense.

BRUCE: Don't make fun of her. She's upset.

BOB: I'm upset. No one worries about me.

BRUCE: Prudence, don't cry. We'll live in Connecticut. Everything will be fine.

STUART: Why doesn't she marry me? I make a good living. Prudence, as your therapist, I think you should marry me.

BRUCE: Prudence would never marry a man who didn't cry.

STUART: What?

BRUCE: You're too macho. Prudence doesn't want to marry you.

STUART: There's no such thing as macho. There's male and female, and then there's whatever you are.

*(Bruce cries.)*

STUART: Oh, I'm sorry. Was it what I said?

CHARLOTTE: Bruce cries all the time. I encourage him to.

BRUCE: *(Having stopped crying; to Prudence.)* Why won't you marry me?

STUART: She should marry me.

PRUDENCE: No. I don't want to marry either of you. You're both crazy. I'm going to marry someone sane.

BOB: There's just me left.

PRUDENCE: No. I'll marry the waiter. Waiter!

CHARLOTTE: Oh dear, poor thing. Fear of intimacy leading to faulty reality testing. Prudence, dear, you don't know the waiter.

PRUDENCE: That doesn't matter. Bruce said it's better to know nothing about people when you get married.

BRUCE: But I meant you should marry me.

PRUDENCE: But I know too much about you and I know nothing about the waiter. Waiter!

*(Enter Waiter.)*

WAITER: Is something the matter?

PRUDENCE: Yes. I want you to marry me.

WAITER: I don't understand. Did I add the check wrong?

PRUDENCE: No. I want you to marry me. I only have a few more years in which it's safe to have children.

WAITER: I don't understand.

CHARLOTTE: It's alright, Andrew. She's in therapy with me now.

PRUDENCE: *(Takes out the blank gun. Aims it at him.)* Marry me! Marry me!  
*(Starts to giggle.)* Marry me!

CHARLOTTE: It's alright, Prudence; you're my patient now. Everything's going to be alright.

PRUDENCE: I don't want any more therapy! I want tennis lessons!

CHARLOTTE: Now, dear, you're not ready for tennis yet. You must let me help you.

STUART: She's my patient.

CHARLOTTE: I think you've already failed her. I think I shall have to take her on.

PRUDENCE: *(Screams.)* I don't want either of you! I've been to see several therapists and I'm sick of talking about myself!

*(Charlotte throws a glass of water at Prudence.)*

CHARLOTTE: Enough of this self-destructive behavior, young woman!

*(Prudence, furious, picks up another glass of water to throw back at Charlotte, hesitates momentarily, and throws it in Stuart's face.)*

CHARLOTTE: Bravo, good for you!

STUART: Why did she do that?

CHARLOTTE: She's getting in touch with her instincts. Prudence, you're making progress in my care already.

PRUDENCE: I HATE THIS RESTAURANT!

CHARLOTTE: The restaurant isn't the problem. You're looking for perfection. Prudence, you know the song "Someday My Prince Will Come"? Well, it's shit. There is no prince. Everyone in this world is limited; and depending on one's perspective is either horrible or "okay." Don't you agree, Dr. Framingham?

STUART: *(Just noticing.)* I'm all wet.

CHARLOTTE: Ah, the beginnings of self-awareness, bravo, ruff ruff ruff! Oh that's right, I left Snoopy home. Well that was a wrong decision. Prudence, I'm making a point here. We're all alone, everyone's crazy and you have no

choice but to be alone or to be with someone in what will be a highly imperfect and probably eventually unsatisfactory relationship.

PRUDENCE: I don't believe that's true.

CHARLOTTE: But you do. That's exactly why you act the way you do, because you believe that.

PRUDENCE: I believe there's more chance for happiness than that.

CHARLOTTE: You don't! And why should you? Look at Chekhov. Masha loves Konstantin, but Konstantin only loves Nina. Nina doesn't love Konstantin, but falls in love with Trigorin. Trigorin doesn't love Nina but sort of loves Madame Arkadina, who doesn't love anyone but herself. And Medviedenko loves Masha, but she only loves Konstantin, which is where we started out. And then at the end of the play, Konstantin kills himself. Don't you see?

PRUDENCE: What's your point?

CHARLOTTE: I've forgotten. Oh damn. Oh yes! My point is that everyone thinks Chekhov's plays are tragedies, but he called them comedies! It's all how you look at it. If you take psychological suffering in the right frame of mind, you can find the humor in it. And so that's how you should approach your relationship with Bruce.

BRUCE: This is getting too complicated.

PRUDENCE: My stomach feels queasy.

BRUCE: Never mind that. Prudence, remember what I said about acting on instinct, like you do in a crisis?

CHARLOTTE: (*Happily.*) Like when I threw the water!

BRUCE: Right.

PRUDENCE: Yes I remember.

BRUCE: Okay. I want you to answer quickly now, on instinct, don't think about it, alright?

PRUDENCE: Alright.

BRUCE: Does your stomach feel queasy?

PRUDENCE: Yes.

BRUCE: Is your name Prudence?

PRUDENCE: Yes.

BRUCE: Is your dress wet?

PRUDENCE: Yes.

BRUCE: Will you marry me?

PRUDENCE: Yes.

(*There is a pause.*)

CHARLOTTE: Well, I'm glad that's settled.

STUART: You're not going to say yes like that, are you?

PRUDENCE: I guess so. All the other answers were yes. I have to go to the ladies room to throw up. Excuse me. *(Exits.)*

BRUCE: I'm so happy. Not that she's sick, but that we're getting married.

BOB: *(Discontent.)* Well, everyone's happy then.

STUART: All my patients leave their therapy. It's very upsetting.

CHARLOTTE: Would you like to talk about it?

BOB: *(To Andrew the waiter.)* Hi. I don't think we've actually met yet. My name is Bob.

ANDREW: Hi, I'm Andrew.

BOB: You look awfully familiar.

ANDREW: You've probably just seen my type.

BOB: Ah, well...

ANDREW: I get off in five minutes.

BOB: Need any help?

*(Everyone looks a bit aghast. Especially Bruce.)*

ANDREW: Could be. *(Exits.)*

BRUCE: What are you doing?

BOB: Well if you expect me to live over the garage and let you carry on with that woman whenever you feel like it, then I'm allowed an occasional waiter.

STUART: Good God, he's not really going to live over the garage, is he?

CHARLOTTE: Well it depends on the zoning laws, I guess. *(Holds both sides of her head.)* Uh, I'm getting a rush from all that mousse. Anyone feel like going to a disco?

BOB: I'm game. Bruce?

BRUCE: Not particularly. *(Nasty.)* Maybe the waiter will want to go.

CHARLOTTE: Oh, Andrew is an excellent dancer! He's been to reform school.

BOB: Oh, he's sulking now.

BRUCE: I feel jealous about you and the waiter.

BOB: That's not very fair. What about you and Prudence?

BRUCE: You're right. But I still feel the emotion. And that's alright, isn't it, Mrs. Wallace?

CHARLOTTE: It's alright with me.

BRUCE: I feel happy about Prudence, and unhappy about the waiter. And I think I may want to cry. *(Tries.)* No. False alarm.

*(Enter Andrew in leather jacket.)*

STUART: He certainly cries a lot.

CHARLOTTE: Don't you ever cry, Dr. Framingham?

STUART: Only when things fall on me.

CHARLOTTE: Oh yes! Do you all remember Skylab—that space thing that fell from the sky? That upset my porpoises very much.

STUART: You have porpoises?

CHARLOTTE: I'm sorry. Did I say porpoises? Andrew, what word do I want?

ANDREW: Patients.

CHARLOTTE: Yes, thank you. Patients.

ANDREW: We had this guy in reform school that we didn't like much. So we took this big heavy metal bird bath, and we dropped it on him. *He* didn't cry.

CHARLOTTE: That's interesting, Andrew.

ANDREW: He went into a coma.

CHARLOTTE: (*Stern.*) Andrew, I've told you, I want you to have empathy for other people.

ANDREW: Oh right. I forgot. We felt real bad for him.

CHARLOTTE: Andrew has a real sensitivity in him; we just haven't seen any of it yet.

BOB: How long were you in reform school?

ANDREW: About three years. (*Grins.*) Til it burned down.

BOB: Ah. (*Starting to think Andrew may be a bad idea.*) Great.

BRUCE: I hope Prudence isn't ill.

CHARLOTTE: Oh who cares? Let's go dancing!

BOB: Bruce, would you prefer I didn't go?

BRUCE: No, it's okay. I guess you're allowed waiters. We'll talk later. Have a nice time.

BOB: Thanks.

BRUCE: I think I better go check on Prudence. Good night, everybody. (*Gives Bob and Charlotte hugs, exits.*)

CHARLOTTE: He's so nice. Well, the music is calling all of us, I think.

ANDREW: (*To Bob.*) My motorcycle's out this way.

BOB: My mother doesn't like me to ride motorcycles.

ANDREW: (*Shrugged off.*) Fuck her.

STUART: (*To Charlotte.*) I don't think I want to go. I don't like discos.

CHARLOTTE: Nonsense. You must learn to like them.

STUART: There'll be too many women. I shouldn't tell you this, but I have troubles relating to women.

CHARLOTTE: Not to me. I think you're delightful.

STUART: You do?

CHARLOTTE: You know what I think? I think I could help you. I think you should come into therapy with me. I don't mean therapy, I mean thermidor.

ANDREW: No you mean therapy.

CHARLOTTE: Do I? It doesn't sound right. Thermidor. Thorazene. Thermometer.  
BOB: No, he's right, you mean therapy.

CHARLOTTE: Therapy. Therapy? Thackery. Thespian. The second Mrs. Tanqueray.  
Ftatateeta. Finickulee, finickula. Well let's just go. It'll come to me. (*She starts to go; then:*) Ovaltine. Orca, the killer whale. Abba dabba dabba dabba dabba dabba dabba...Oh, now I've really lost it.  
(*Charlotte, Stuart, and Andrew exit. Enter Bruce and Prudence.*)

PRUDENCE: Please, don't ever come into the ladies room after me again, alright?  
It's very disconcerting.

BRUCE: I was worried.

PRUDENCE: Where is everybody?

BRUCE: They went to a disco.

PRUDENCE: Why?

BRUCE: Something about the mousse Mrs. Wallace ate.

PRUDENCE: Never mind. I don't want to know.

BRUCE: Okay, now, answer on instinct again. Where in Connecticut do you think we should live? Quick, instinct!

PRUDENCE: Bridgeport.

BRUCE: Oh, God, have you ever been to Bridgeport?

PRUDENCE: No, I meant Westport.

BRUCE: No, you said Bridgeport. There may be some psychic reason it's right we live in Bridgeport.

PRUDENCE: No, please, we can't keep making decisions like this.

BRUCE: There are probably some lovely parts of Bridgeport.

PRUDENCE: Please, I don't want to live in Bridgeport. Bruce, why do you want to marry me. Answer on instinct.

BRUCE: I wrote it down earlier. (*He takes out typed piece of paper; reads:*) "I want to marry Prudence because all my life I keep fluctuating between being traditional and being insane. For instance, marrying Sally was my trying to be traditional; while sleeping with the gas man or that time I took my clothes off in the dentist's office were my going to the opposite extreme. But I'm not *happy* at either extreme. And that's where Prudence fits in. I feel she's very traditional, like Sally, but Sally has no imagination, she's too stable. And I think that even though Prudence is very traditional, she's very *unstable* and because of that I think we could be very happy together." Do you understand what I'm saying?

PRUDENCE: I don't understand what happened at the dentist's office.

BRUCE: Well, I needed root canal...



PRUDENCE: (*Getting upset.*) And that wasn't on instinct. You'd written that down.

BRUCE: Well, I know. But it was an instinct to *read* it.

PRUDENCE: How can I marry someone who takes his clothes off at the dentist's office?

BRUCE: I don't take them off as a general rule. It just happened once.

PRUDENCE: (*Very upset.*) I must be out of my mind.

BRUCE: Oh God, you're changing your mind, aren't you? Oh my God, oh my God. (*Sits down, weeps.*)

(*Prudence sits down, calm at first, then she too starts to cry. Then she starts to sob. Bruce stops crying, looks up.*)

BRUCE: Prudence, you're crying. Don't cry. (*Holds her.*) What's the matter?

PRUDENCE: (*Through weeping.*) I don't know. I'm upset you took your clothes off at the dentist's office because that means you must be insane, and I thought maybe you weren't insane but just sort of, lively. (*Cries some more.*)

BRUCE: I'm lively.

PRUDENCE: No, you're too lively. I wouldn't be able to cope.

BRUCE: (*Desperate to please her, keep her, comfort her.*) Mrs. Wallace could give me lithium, she could give you speed. We might meet in the middle.

PRUDENCE: I don't want speed. I want an Alka-Seltzer. Do you think the waiter could get me one?

BRUCE: The waiter went to the disco with Bob.

PRUDENCE: Well there must be another waiter, don't you think?

BRUCE: Well, it is a restaurant. (*Calls.*) Oh waiter! Waiter! I don't see anybody.

PRUDENCE: I don't either. (*Calls.*) Waiter!

BRUCE: I'm really honored you cried in front of me. Thank you.

PRUDENCE: You're welcome. Waiter!

BRUCE: I bet you don't cry very frequently.

PRUDENCE: No. Not in front of anyone at least.

BRUCE: I'm really honored.

PRUDENCE: I'll try to cry for you again sometime. Waiter!

BRUCE: Thank you. Waiter.

PRUDENCE: Waiter. Waiter.

BRUCE: Waiter. Waiter. This is a very existential restaurant.

PRUDENCE: (*A little woozy, a little sad, a little cheerful.*) Yes, that's why I like it here so much.

BRUCE: You like it here?

PRUDENCE: Yes. Sort of. It's very comforting. They leave you alone here. It's conducive to conversation.

BRUCE: *(Very friendly, a basis for hope again.)* Yes, it's a great place to talk.

PRUDENCE: *(Smiles, then futilely calls again.)* Waiter. Waiter.

BRUCE: *(Makes a joke, sings:)* There's a waiter that I'm longing to see, duh duh duh duh...

BRUCE & PRUDENCE: *(Sing together, dreamily, a little rueful.)* Duh duh duh duh  
Dum dum dum dum, over me.

BRUCE: *(Smiles at her.)* Silly song.

PRUDENCE: *(Smiles at him.)* Very silly.  
*(Curtain)*

END OF PLAY