

A 70s' PLAY
A Play in Two Acts
By
Gene Rotberg
(written in 1970s)

Cast of Characters:

ALAN

CHILD

DAVID

HARRIS

HOSTESS

LUCILLE

JEFFREY

MAGGIE

MARK

RICHARD

SAMPSON

SHARON

TERRY

ACT I

Curtain Up

(The Hostess is seen walking about, putting on music (Adagio, Mahler's Fifth), softly brushing back her hair with her hand. Tall, elegant, the "perfect hostess" for a sophisticated cocktail party. Extremely elegant room.

A child enters from a side interior door dressed up for a party. She is spoken to silently by her mother – the Hostess – and "helps out." She is precocious, sure of herself – a miniature model of her mother.

In the background, four people (three men, one woman) – invited guests – are looking around at the furnishings, paintings, décor, trying not to be impressed with obvious elegance of room. They talk silently to each other. They mix. They are not "couples" and do not know each other.

A door chime sounds, a door is opened by the child and another guest enters through a doorway upstage left. Upstage center, she is greeted by Hostess and introduced to the guests. The child passes canapés from a table at rear center stage.

Another guest enters after chimes. She, too, is greeted by the hostess and introduced silently to other guests. They are sophisticated, "cosmopolitan" and rather sure of themselves. They have been to cocktail parties before. They are rather stiff, on good behavior. They are trying to impress each other. The ages of the guests range from Terry (20) to Harris (50) – a bit overweight, professorial and possibly out of place.

Silent conversations between three men and three women are going on in the rear, back, front and on couch. They talk quietly in groups of two or three. Later, during the first out-loud conversation, two more guests will enter separately and will be greeted and introduced by Hostess – who puts off music.

In total there will be four separate conversations.

The staging should be stylized, though realistic, but with some sense that it is not likely to be a straight drawing room piece. About three minutes elapse between the curtain rise and the first heard conversation. The staging should be such that, during each of the initial four “conversations,” the audience attention is focused on the conversants. The other guests are unobtrusive in the background.)

FIRST COUPLE

ALAN

It’s all a jungle. It all depends on who you know. If they take care of you, you make it.

SHARON

Do they? Have you?

ALAN

Taken care of me? Yes.

SHARON

And do they tell you when to buy?

ALAN

Yes.

SHARON

Do they tell you when to sell?

ALAN

No.

SHARON

I would think it involves the same discipline.

ALAN

Of course. You can't go overboard. You have to exercise some discipline.
(Smiling, conspiratorially) Y'know what Oliver Wendell Holmes said. . . "Put not your trust in money. Put your money in trust."

SHARON

(Coldly) That's not what I meant by discipline. I meant that the same process should tell you when to buy and sell. Or don't you care about profit forgone or lost opportunity. Anyway, I hear you are a financial wizard. What's a good stock?

ALAN

Ah, Swedish, Norwegians, Danes – I'm sorry. I'm only kidding. I don't buy stocks. Only bonds.

SHARON

What maturity?

ALAN

What does maturity have to do with it? Some pretty un-sophisticated people buy bonds.

SHARON

The bond's maturity – not yours.

ALAN

An eternity. I don't care if I ever get repaid as a matter of principle. You know what they say about eternity.

SHARON

What?

ALAN

(To audience) Ah, I've got just the piece to wipe that arrogance off her face. She's not as smart as she thinks she is. She missed the repayment as a matter of principle.

(To Sharon) You ask me what. I'll tell you what.

You have often seen the sand on the seashore. How fine are its tiny grains! And how many of those tiny little grains go to make up the small handful which a child grasps in its play. Now imagine a mountain of that sand, a million miles high, reaching from the earth to the farthest heavens, and a million miles broad, extending to remotest space, and a million miles in thickness: and imagine such an enormous mass of countless particles of sand multiplied as often as there are leaves in the forest, drops of water in the mighty ocean, feathers on birds, scales on fish, hairs on animals, atoms in the vast expanse of the air: and imagine that at the end of every million years a little bird came to that mountain and carried away in its beak a tiny grain of that sand. How many millions upon millions of centuries would pass before that bird had carried away even a square foot of that mountain, how many eons upon eons of ages before it had carried away all. Yet at the end of that immense stretch of time not even an instant of eternity could be said to have ended. At the end of all those billions and trillions of years, eternity would have scarcely begun. And if the bird came again and carried it all away again grain by grain: and if it so rose and sank as many times as there are stars in the sky, atoms in the air, drops of water in the sea, leaves on the trees, feathers upon birds, scales on fish, hairs upon animals, at the

end of all those innumerable risings and sinkings of that immeasurably vast mountain, not one single instant of eternity could be said to have ended; even then, at the end of such a period, after that eon of time, the mere thought of which makes our very brain reel dizzily, eternity would scarcely have begun.

(He looks very smug, amused and self-satisfied.)

ALAN

Do you have any other questions?

SHARON

(Aside to audience) Oh my God. He's trying to con me with James Joyce. I wonder if he'll own up who wrote it. But still – that was quite a feat. He could have chosen “Oh my love's like a red, red rose” or “Let me tell thee” ...or something like that. But, still, I don't think I'll let him pull it off. *(Hesitantly)* He's not all that bad, though. But I'm not sure. After the puns, probably palindromes, and then puzzles. Y'know: three men went into a motel to share a room. The manager said \$30.00 a night for the room – bucks apiece. The men each handed over a \$10 bill – for a total of \$30 for the room. After the men went to the room, the manager realized he had overcharged and the room was only \$25 a night. He sent the bell-boy up with five one-dollar bills to return to the three guests. The bell-boy realized he couldn't easily divide \$5 amongst the three men, so he pocketed \$2 of the five and gave the remaining \$3 back to the men – one to each man. Each man had now paid \$9 for the room -- \$10 less the \$1 returned by the bell-boy. \$9 x 3 men is \$27. The bell-boy kept \$2. \$27 + \$2 is \$29. What happened to the other \$1.00?

CHILD

(To audience) Please – don't try to figure it out. Wait until the intermission.

SHARON

(To Alan) Do you have that quotation ready for all occasions?

ALAN

Yes, I use it anywhere and everywhere. Its applicability is universal. Not only on the universe, physics, science and math; on our own gullibility, fallibility and general unawareness, on metaphysics and religion; on the rhythm of literature and music; on joy and Joyce; on portraits and artists and young men, even on vacations at the beach.... Y'know the bit about the grains of sand – and on birds and the flight and the speed of light. I use it all the time. Anywhere. Anytime. It always fits.

SHARON

I don't believe you.

ALAN

Test me.

SHARON

(Pause) Do you watch Pro-football?

ALAN

Yes, but with little hope. It'll be an eternity before we make the Super Bowl! You know what they say about eternity..."You have often seen the sand on the seashore. How fine are its tiny grains. And how many of these grains..."

SHARON

Enough....Enough.

CHILD

(To audience) Don't believe in him and don't believe in his asides, either – what he seems to be thinking. Every movement, every quotation is calculated. He's a con artist – a put on –even his "asides" are. Actually, his real motivations are buried very deep; it's all part of his unconscious subliminal. I have the key. I can open him up for you. *(Stilted)* Loved his mother, hated his father, had libidinous feelings to them both, felt guilty as all hell, wished 'em both dead and gone and when they died, he never got over it and hasn't been able to form even one itsy bitsy good relationship since. And that's why he talks and talks.

And that Sharon. She's a real pistol. Loved her father, hated her mother, had libidinous feelings to them both, felt guilty as all hell, wished 'em both dead and gone and when they died never got over it and hasn't been able to form even one itsy bitsy good relationship since. A "relationship," know what that is? That's something you have with somebody that you know you're not going to have pretty soon. For both of them, though, it's just fun and games. Just tricks and put-downs and fun and games. And puns and twists and turns. They are walking metaphors. Two smart asses. You'll never get emotionally involved with either of them. They're really refugees from a Tom Stoppard or maybe a Pinter play at best – or worst. Maybe those guys could do somethin' with "em. Anyway, they don't show me much – not enough anyway.

ALAN

Y'know, you are really something else. A real gem. Are you comfortable?

SHARON

What did you think I was?

ALAN

I beg your pardon.

SHARON

You said I was something else, a gem.

ALAN

It's just an expression. Don't you feel comfortable with it?

SHARON

With what?

ALAN

The compliment.

SHARON

(Coldly) You used the word, "comfortable," twice already. Are you in therapy?

ALAN

That wasn't necessary.

SHARON

You started it. What is this business – “You are really something else” – you make me feel like a chameleon – “Are you comfortable?” Don't use me or analyze me. You're not welcome in my psyche. I didn't invite you. You are a ---stranger.

ALAN

Enough. I'm just trying to make conversation. There's no need to be so tough. Relax. Soften up.

CHILD

(To audience) Oh, look at that. Just look at that. Trying to humanize her. Make her feel guilty. Soften her up.

SHARON

That's better. Much better. Now, tell me about yourself. No James Joyce either, just yourself.

CHILD

Oh, don't ask him that.

HOSTESS

(To child) Leave it be for a while. They (the audience) will understand them without your help.

ALAN

(A set speech – almost sounds memorized) I don't do much. I'm a lousy date. I don't play tennis or golf or squash or that other game – what is it – racquetball. I don't drive. I don't swim and I've never been on a horse or a bike or hike. I can't ice skate either. I don't drink, hate nightclubs and parties and crowds. I've never been on a horse or skied. I'm only good at verbal games. I can't add up a row of

numbers. I don't play cards. I don't take drugs. Haven't danced in 10 years. I don't shave on weekends. Don't hang up my clothes. Can't cook or paint or sing or read music. I can't balance my checkbook. Don't care. Don't spell well. Don't care. I don't play chess or checkers or read. Don't care. I don't fix faucets or cut wood or hunt or jog. I'm allergenic. I'm Type A or B, I think. I'm not sure. I don't smoke. I have poor spatial relations. I have a terrible memory. I don't even remember your name. *(smug and satisfied)*

CHILD

(To audience) Oh, my God. He wants to be told he has true, valid, fundamental, spiritual, honest, open, aware, sensitive, pure, warm, healthy, gentle, vital, genuine, soft, elegant, universal, real, lasting, supportive, natural, responsive, reactive, impressionable, susceptible, perceptive, chaste values. I mean if you got all that going, who gives a shit if you can't roller skate.

SHARON

Apparently, you don't have much to remember....

ALAN

(Interrupting) Beg your pardon? My hearing....

SHARON

Have you noticed that child passing canapés? She seems mature for her age.

ALAN

How old do you think she is?

SHARON

I have no idea. But certainly she seems mature, for her age I mean. *(They move off center)*

SECOND COUPLE

HARRIS

What's your point? (*perhaps slightly drunk*)

TERRY

(*Sweet young thing. Trying to act sophisticated, 18-20 years old.*) The point is that great artists always break mental sets.

HARRIS

(*Sarcastically*) I see. I see, my Vassar Virgin. If the critic likes their stuff, I guess they must have broken something – what did you call it? A mental set. I suppose since it's unintelligible to you and to me, that makes them great artists and assures success and fame for how else does one break those things – those mental sets? I get angry at modern art, miss. Very, very angry. It is all junk, trash, crap and don't tell me about Van Gogh or those other deformities who didn't sell a painting and other artists who got put down by the Academy. And don't talk to me about social significance or first ideas or essence. The fucking trouble is the critics... ah the hell with it.

Tell me something. Tell me, oh, Noblest of Mt. Holyoke, exactly what is a mental set?

TERRY

(*Oblivious*) Why, that's what great artists break all the time. The Impressionists did it. Then the abstract impressionists did it. Then the op, pop, kinetic, kinesthetic and minimalists did it. They all did it.

HARRIS

(*Bored, sarcastic*) It's Abstract Expressionists, not Impressionists.

TERRY

(*In a few breaths*) They would have been great mathematicians or composers if they hadn't been artists. You know they all have everything in common. These men (and women, too – but I've been told there aren't many of them – I mean not women, there are lots and lots of women...but not women composers and mathematicians and artists and mental set breakers) – can take abstractions like notes – music notes, not paper notes – and put it all together. You know, very few put it all together. Real genius can visualize dimensions that don't exist. Did

you know that the person who invented or found or discovered or whatever “Quarks” – that stuff out in space – got the name from Finnegans Wake? It’s all the same discipline. I mean who else but astro-physicists read Finnegans Wake. That’s why Einstein was such a good violinist and painter. You know Churchill was a painter too and he wrote this letter to Roosevelt, or maybe it was Einstein who wrote to Roosevelt, and that’s how we got the A-bomb...and more physicists and the space program and the environmentalists...and the disenchanteds and the disenfranchised.... And Hare Krishna and yoga and the dropouts. And that, you know, led to minimal art and small is beautiful and live in Vermont and less is better – unless you are poor. I think. But, there are limits to growth, you know. Some mathematicians, I think, at MIT figured it out. They figured it out. And we must be open and comfortable and not hide anything, even the tiniest things, and all those books about erroneous and erogenous zones and you’re O.K. and I’m O.K. and Dr. Spock had to change his stuff and now the music has more dead space than there are notes because we have to fill it in ourselves and there’s this big balloon that you blow air into and that’s the true expression of sheer oneself – I mean and the big banners across the Grand Canyon. And all of that stuff because of that letter and the bomb. And, of course, any reaction leads to an anti—reaction so we wear funky clothes and go back to the twenties and thirties and forties and fifties.... And it’s a very close race now whether there are more Orthodox Jews or Hare Krishna Jews, and did you know that Picasso got all of his ideas from Africa and that Braque didn’t really break new ground and that there’s nothing new under the sun and that some Indians in South America really and truly invented the whole space program tens of thousands of years ago or maybe the spacemen just landed there – I’m not sure – I saw it all – all those runways on top of a mountain – in a documentary on TV – I saw it all with my own eyes. And TV. TV. TV. Fantastic, absolutely fantastic.

And Darwin! There was one smart fella. That’s why the Republicans are gonna win lots and lots of elections. Nobody likes to hear bad news. They kill messengers who carry bad news. And bad news –that’s when you tell people they don’t have all the marbles they used to have to play with, that the games are different and someone else has the oil and other stuff or work for little money and they don’t like us and we don’t have control anymore; and the Republicans say that’s just defeatism. Kill the messenger. Darwin had the same problem you know. You know people don’t like to hear they are not descended from gods – that countries come and go and were going. So kill the messenger. Darwin

couldn't get elected dogcatcher, you know. And Galileo! Galileo – he said we weren't the center of the universe, that things did not revolve around us, and you know where that got him. And Freud, Sigmund Freud, he said we can't even control ourselves – our unconscious, of which we are not conscious, makes the decisions. They haven't even put up a plaque for him yet in Vienna. Nope: you just don't say that we don't have all the shiny marbles. Republicans know that, you know. They don't equivocate – or masturbate.

CHILD

Right on! Right on, baby!

HARRIS

Where did you go to school?

TERRY

Bronx Science. But I'm at Brown now.

HARRIS

Ah, Brown, the Kansas State of the East.

TERRY

I have 750.

HARRIS

I have a watch and I didn't ask for the time.

TERRY

My SATs.

HARRIS

Who's your favorite writer?

TERRY

John Fowles. He wrote Daniel Martin. Ever hear of him? John Fowles I mean. I also love John Barth and John Gardner and John Irving. And John Milton too.... And John Donne. And I adore Tom Pynchon.

HARRIS

(Pause) Tom? Tom Pynchon? You adore: Thomas Pynchon? No. I don't believe you.

TERRY

Yes, I read "Finian's Rainbow." He wrote it.

HARRIS

(Pause) Finian's Rainbow? Do you mean Finnegan's Wake – Joyce wrote it.

TERRY

No, I haven' read that. But it's the same thing.

HARRIS

"Finian's Rainbow" and "Finnegan's Wake" are the same thing?

TERRY

No, "Finnegan's Wake" and that Darwin thing by Tommy Pynchon.

HARRIS

Darwin? Ah, "Gravity's Rainbow!" Did you finish it?

TERRY

I started it. I read the reviews.

HARRIS

Everyone started it.

TERRY

I got a game. Let's describe the people around here according to their styles. There's a Vlaminck. Flashy, bright colors, powerful but not very elegant or smooth. (She smiles with satisfaction.) And there's a Renoir. So smooth and lush. Oh, it feels so good to be able to put things together from different fields – to be a cross disciplinarian. Look at the one over there. Clearly obsessive...

(Harris walks away as Terry continues to talk.)

THIRD COUPLE

MAGGIE

You don't have a right to ask that. I'm tired.

MARK

I take it back.

MAGGIE

O.K. O.K.

MARK

(After a moment) I'm O.K. What's bothering you?

MAGGIE

If I knew, it wouldn't bother me.

MARK

Do you want to talk about it?"

MAGGIE

About what?

MARK

About what's bothering you?

MAGGIE

No.

MARK

Don't you trust me?

MAGGIE

No.

MARK

Why not?

MAGGIE

What is your name?

MARK

Mark.

MAGGIE

That's why.

MARK

Because my name is Mark?

MAGGIE

Because I had to ask what it was. And because I met you two minutes ago – and I don't trust people who want to give me psycho-therapy after two minutes – free of charge. You're a voyeur. Fuck off, mister.

MARK

Excuse me, I'm sorry.

MAGGIE

Forget it. Forget it.

MARK

(After a pause) So what's upsetting you?

MAGGIE

(Calmly, but with tension in voice) Look, Mister, get off me. I'm tired. Go, go seduce someone else.

MARK

Look, lady. I only asked what was bothering you. You seemed upset. I had other more hostile questions. Why do you shave under your eyebrows? Why do you stand like you have a congenital hip deformity? Why don't you scream? Why do you close your eyes when you inhale but open 'em when you exhale? Why don't you wear any jewelry? Why isn't your hair combed – or washed? Why don't you take off 10 pounds? How come you gain weight after you lose it? Why hasn't therapy helped? Do you worry about what's going to happen to you? Why does every pleasure become a lesser one than the one before? Why do you cry so much? Why do you buy so many shoes? Why did you come to the party? Why were you invited? Why don't you bite your nails? Why have you stopped reading? Have you ever thought of being a stewardess? "Why so pale and wan, fond lover; Prithee, why so pale. If by loving, wooing cannot win him, looking sad, prevail." Do you really read – books? Do you understand my questions? Lady, I only asked what was bothering you and you tell me to bug off.

CHILD

Oh, he's a winner; a real winner. *(Mother-Hostess clasps hand over Child's face)*

MAGGIE

(After a pause) (Controlled) Like I said, Mister, go seduce someone else. You're not only a voyeur. You probably talk about it. You suffocate. You get pleasure from it. You see too much.

MARK

(To Maggie) How would you like to fuck?

CHILD

(Lightly) Right on, right on.

MAGGIE

That was crude. Why did you ask that?

MARK

I ask it after 15 to 20 minutes of all women I meet. I read about it somewhere. It works. Without exception. No exceptions. I meet at least four to five women a day. At drugstore counters. Subway rides. Singles' bars. Parties. Meetings. Dinners. Receptions, soccer games. Young ones; old ones. In the wintertime, I get one "yes" in twenty. So that means about every three or four days I score.

(To the audience) O.K., now ladies, raise your hands, and everybody, everybody shut their eyes. Raise your hands, ladies, if you would like to share a bed tonight – with me. Raise your hands. Raise your hands. C'mon now. Deep in your heart. Raise your hands, just a little is enough. Don't be embarrassed. Ah – that's better. Shut your eyes, fellas. Shut your eyes, fellas. Look at that. Look at that! At least one in ten. One in ten! Fantastic. Considering they're with their husbands, boyfriends – even their kids.

MAGGIE

What about the summertime?

MARK

What about it?

MAGGIE

You said one in twenty in the winter.

MARK

More. Much more. much better. The weather's more erotic.

(Maggie walks away. Mark looks around for someone else to seduce)

FOURTH COUPLE

DAVID

(Sanely) Hi. This seems like a nice party. I'm David.

LUCILLE

They're all CIA. We're being watched. I know I am.

DAVID

You're right. Absolutely. (He starts to walk away)

LUCILLE

Are you here to spy on me?.... Please, don't leave.

DAVID

What are you talking about, lady?

LUCILLE

Look, I teach school in the Bronx. So I know what's what. And I don't like it here. I don't know how the Hostess got my name. I don't know why I'm here. I don't like being watched. I don't like the scene. I'm leaving. And I don't trust that child either. She's very mature for her age. How old is she? There's something in the air – something in the air. I have it – botulism. It's the canapés. Look at that. Just look at those crabs and clams, and shrimps and lobster and scallops and mushrooms and tuna fish and mayonnaise and fish roe. Fish roe. And that hard chopped liver. Pate`. That's it – pate`. From those tight little cans from France. What do you know about tight cans from France. My God, think of the probabilities. What do you know about infectious diseases? From those tight little cans in France. Pate. Pate. Hard chopped liver. Serves you right if you catch botulism.

DAVID

Do you think it's a deliberate attempt to poison all of us or someone in particular, or just an indelicate choice of a ...delicacy?

LUCILLE

It's the same thing. Her conscious, indeed – her (*nodding to Hostess*) expressed hatred of me shows itself by a subliminal disregard for even the simplest, most basic dietary precautions to protect her guests.

HOSTESS

(Walking over) Lucille. You look marvelous.

LUCILLE

(With great self assurance) Ter-rific. Couldn't be better. The kids are great. I'm out on the tennis courts practically every day. Just bought a spectacular new outfit. Planning a trip. And I've lost five pounds. Your party's super delicious. Both the people and the hors d'oeuvres. I can't thank you enough for having me over.

(Hostess walks over to David and takes him by the arm)

HOSTESS

She's not in good shape, you know.

DAVID

I know. I know. You should have heard the stuff she was giving me. Who is she?

HOSTESS

She lives at 80th and Amsterdam and is an absolute kook. She doesn't set foot outside her place from one month to the next.

DAVID

She said she lives in the Bronx and teaches school.

(Changing of partners who talk to each other)

Hi, I'm David. Harris, Alan, Maggie. Terry. Mark. I'm Lucille the house paranoid. ... *(Nod)* How do you do. Hi. Hello.

MARK

(To Lucille) Tell me, you look depressed. What's bothering you? If you want to talk, I'll listen. I'm a good listener, a professional listener really. Nothing distresses me.

LUCILLE

You're damn right, I'm upset. I got to get out of here. I don't even know the Hostess. Thanks for talking to me. I feel much better now. Much better now that someone has a real interest in me – not like that psychopathic one (David) over there. That paternalistic bastard, nodding “uh huh, uh huh,” trying to humor me.

ALAN

(To Maggie) It's all a jungle. Depends on who you know, you know.

MAGGIE

(To Alan) First, I'm not interested in you. Second, don't use the word, comfortable. Third, don't lay on any poetry.

SHARON

(To Mark) That's an outrageous question. An outrageous. I don't even know you. Do you ask that of everyone?

ALAN

(To Maggie) Y'know what Ambrose Bierce said. “Don't steal. Thou'lt never thus compete successfully in business. Cheat.”

HOSTESS

(To all) And this – this is my daughter. She will serve the canapés and take your coats and capes and cloaks this evening. You may wish to engage her in conversation. I think you will find her a mature child. But don't believe what she says. I mean don't not believe it either. But just don't necessarily believe it. She's a very mature child.

HARRIS

That means she's the only child in the fifth grade with pierced ears, eyeshadow, tube jeans and uses cold cream on her face before she goes to bed.

SHARON

Where do you go to school, honey?

CHILD

(Hesitantly) Down the street.

SHARON

Down the street? I think I know it. It's a public school, down the street, isn't it?

CHILD

No. Private

SHARON

Do you like it?

CHILD

It's okay. *(Shrugs)*

SHARON

What subjects do you like best?

CHILD

(Softly, quietly) The usual – recess, lunch and stuff.

SHARON

What don't you like?

CHILD

(Bored) The usual. Calculus, science, Sanskrit, and psycho-linguistics.

SHARON

What do you want to do when you grow up?

CHILD

I dunno.

TERRY

Are you having a good time?

CHILD

Uh huh.

HARRIS

Brilliant. Brilliant. Real pizzazz. She oughta go to Bryn Maur.

CHILD

(Coldly) Why are you so fuckin' hostile?

LUCILLE

(To David) I mean, do you really live in Washington, in the city? I once had a friend who told me that from her house in Maryland, she could look across the Potomac from Mohican Hills (that's not in South Dakota) with a telescope right into the CIA's offices in Virginia. I mean nobody really lives in Washington, proper. I mean nobody proper lives in Washington. I mean nobody lives in Washington properly, I mean in Washington proper.

DAVID

I live in Washington. *(Gently)* It's a beautiful city. Sometimes the canal running 'long side the city is frozen. Families ice skate in winter like a Breugel painting, really. And the Mall downtown is wide and inviting and comforting. There are museums on both sides. And when the sun is out, there are lots of people wandering around. Lots of arm-in-arm walking – people moving in or out of the openings to the buildings. It's inviting and

(At that moment, in the rear center of the stage, the French doors are flung open. Noise and violence. A black, hard, violent man crashes through the glass double doors. Pistol drawn. A moment later, two more black men burst through and into the room from right side. All have guns. There is tension, bewilderment, in the air. Control by the black leader, Jeffrey. The child is harshly grabbed by one of the men who wields a knife who drives her back, knife to throat. Child has been

passing canapés – tray knocked from her hand; explodes food into the air. Everything scatters.)

JEFFREY

(Quietly – tense, slowly) Don't none of you mother fuckers move or we'll cut her to pieces. We want your money and your watches and jewelry and your wallets and your keys and your handbags. And fast. I want all you got.

(The men are quickly handcuffed or roped to heavy furniture. It is a planned operation, efficiently executed. Women are herded together or handcuffed to each other or furniture.)

GUESTS

Oh, my God.... Please don't.... Easy, easy buddy....

CHILD

(Screaming) Mommy, mommy. I want my mother. Where's my mother?

JEFFREY

Now take your free hand.. get your wallets and keys and throw 'em over here.

(Quickly, keys, wallets, rings, bracelets, expensive bric-a-brac removed efficiently and professionally. This clearly has been a planned operation. Table cloth or piano covering spread on floor where valuables are thrown.)

I think you are all shits. You're nothin' to us. You're nothin' to anyone. None of you do nothin'. You're all floaters. We will take you apart if we have to. Piece by piece. But first, first, we're goin' to have some fun and games.

(Everything freezes)

END OF ACT 1

ACT II

(Opens in same frozen position. Then...)

LUCILLE

(Hysterical, tense) I want to go home. I want home, now.

SAMPSON

Shut up your mouth, lady.

SHARON

We're not animals. What do you want?

JACKSON

(He pushes her – very hard) What do you have to start with? What can you afford to lose? Hee. Hee. Hee Hee.

SHARON

Why? Why us?

JEFFREY

Because you are here. There are no other rich shits around to help you. You are alone. You are – “immobilized” is the word.

SAMPSON

And we will get away with it. No one can hear you. It costs money to have those nice 10-foot high hedges and that nice long driveway, and all that space and garden. You are alone now. *(To his fellow terrorists)* Who you think gonna write this up – Norman Mailer or Truman Capote?

LUCILLE

Why are you doing this?

RICHARD

(Dully) You shouldn't have to ask, lady.

SAMPSON

I told you already. We gonna get away with it. We gonna pull it off. We gonna make the newspapers.

MAGGIE

So get on with it.

RICHARD

(Dully) Shut up your fuckin face, white lady.

MAGGIE

So. So why, so why us?

JEFFREY

(Coldly, in response) Because you're a car door lock pusher. Not always. Not mostly. But always even then. Just at traffic lights on my streets. Not always then even. Just when our eyes met; at traffic lights. Not even always then. Only when the light turns red. I'm a leanin against the post and you lean over – way over – and push down the button on the door. Hundreds of button pushers from the time I was a kid. Click, click, clunk. Pop. Just like little pistol cocks. That's why, lady. Maybe hundred times that arm goes a slidin over the seat, and that little pointed, pointed red fuckin fingernail pops the lock down. Today I'm gonna break off that fuckin finger. *(Slowly)* We ain't got nowhere to go, lady. You don't see us. You see a man who got nothing to lose – hee hee – you're right – I got nothing to lose. You pushed too many buttons, lady..Hee, hee.. It's too late for that tonight, lady.

SAMPSON

Man, take it easy. She ain't had it easy. Her whole life she been wearin this here kinda tight silk dress with them there big boobs and that yella hair and every day, any hour, she's a marchin down the street and getting looks. Day after day, week after week, for years lots of whites hustling and jostling. Eyes meetin. Followin and fuckin. Hey, man. That's a way to live. Gives you real confidence that you got it made. Man, you gotta feel good inside 'bout that. How's it feel, lady? How's it feel to know that's all there is to you. *(Turning)* What's in your case, fatso?

HARRIS

Work.

SAMPSON

How long you done worked on it?

HARRIS

Three years. It's my life.

SAMPSON

Ho. Ho. It's my life now. *(Opens briefcase, clutched by Sampson and throws manuscript into fire in fireplace page by page. Some pages flicked in , others rolled up . Some gently, some violently, some behind back, "hook" shots. Paper*

airplanes. Hiking between legs. All over stage. (Like a ballet) Great pleasure, almost orgasmic, fulfilling. Singing or humming as manuscript is destroyed.)

HARRIS

(Harris straining, distraught, fuming, sees his life, his work disintegrating.) No. No. Nooo. No, please. No.

JEFFREY

(To Sampson) Ah, the perfect rational event. It gives him more pleasure to burn it than it gives you pain to have lost it. But it's close. *(General ridiculing laughter from Blacks.)*

JACKSON

Ah ha, there's the painful cost *(gesturing to Harris and the destroyed manuscript)* and ... there's the matching benefit *(gesturing to Sampson)*. This world's in a wonderful state of balance. Who done made it that way.

JEFFREY

Pleasure/Pain. Pain/Pleasure. Cost/Benefit. Benefit/Cost. The world's best kept secret. Freud done founded the Harvard Business School. *(Laughter)* *(Taking a few pages from Sampson)* *(To Richard)* Take a shot. *(Richard, with great care, rolls up a page and misses fireplace.)* Try again. Ah, you missed again. *(Richard steps back further and misses a complicated throw around his back.)* Look at that. Look at that. He stepped back further, further back. Now why he done that? He should have got closer up after he missed. Much closer. Not further away. Man, you must love not makin it. If at first you don't succeed, fail, fail, fail again. That way you don't seem like a dummy. You just set yourself too high standards. What you tryin to average up for?

SHARON

Why are you doing this to us?

JEFFREY

"Cause Euripides said from the very beginning that you all was nothing but a bunch of mother fuckers. Ain't you ever read Oedipussy."

LUCILLE

(Hysterically) I told you. I told you. I told you. There's violence all around us. Want out. You got your stuff now. Let me go.

SAMPSON

(Grabs her under her dress – violently while holding her tensely) ... Listen, lady, I tell you when you can go. Because I can't breathe and now you know what it feels like. 'Cause I get myself a hard on when I look at her *(pointing to Maggie)* or her *(pointing to Terry)*.

I don't like kinky hair and I want some stuff that straightens it out. And that makes me want to vomit. And the number one killer before we're supposed to die ain't heart business or other fancy stuff, but murder. Murder and I ain't got nobody to talk to and I'm up to here with this stuff. *(He takes Chippendale style fragile chair and smashes it against a table – shattering it to pieces.) (Picking up pieces)*...It ain't because I'm jealous – no, no, or 'cause I want that fuckin silly skinny chair, but I don't know if it's worth something or nothing and you do. And you took the time to know whether it's worth something. No, I take my leave from your Bard:

“The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand
Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters;
Your fathers taken by the silver beards,
And their most reverend heads dashed to the walls;
Your naked infants spitted upon pikes,
Whiles the made mothers with their howls confused
Do break the clouds, as did the wives of Jewry at Herod's
Bloody-hunting slaughter men what say you? Will you yield,
And this avoid. Or guilty in defence, be thus destroyed?”

I learned that in some honky school one day long time ago and you all better shut up and leave me alone, leave me alone, 'cause your dress is too tight and my pants is too tight. So shut up your mouth, white lady.

RICHARD

(Quietly) Hey, you ain't supposed to feel that way since those there "Black is Beautiful" buttons come out and they teach that Black History stuff in the Universe Cities.

JEFFREY

You dummy. They don't teach that jazz 'cept for extra credit.

MAGGIE

Why us?

JEFFREY

You've been picked.

TERRY

"Rise like lions after slumber,
In unvanquishable number
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep hath fallen on you
For ye are many
And they are few."

RICHARD

What white man write that?

TERRY

Shelley. "Percy" Shelley.

SAMPSON

He screwed his sister I heard. Or maybe it was his mother-in-law. Or his wife's wet nurse. Or his wife's sister. All of 'em I think.

RICHARD

You sure he wasn't a black man? *(Laughter among the blacks)*

JEFFREY

If your wife wrote Frankenstein, that's enough to drive you bananas.

MAGGIE

Why are you playing with us?

SAMPSON

(Lunges at her) Look, lady, don't be so curious. Don't be smart-assed. Don't act like a white lady. Act like him (Harris), will you. Hide. Shut up. Act like you want to live – to move on up. Act like you want to survive. Act like a coward, will you. Like him in the corner.

MARK

Look, man, let's talk. I won't say "brother to brother." You want more than our money. O.K. O.K. But get it over with. A little kindness, please. A little understanding. A little humanity. We're scared. Our hearts are pounding. Take it easy, will you. There's badness in the air. You guys aren't moving fast enough. You're talking too much. Much too much.

SAMPSON

Do you know why Jews have short necks?

HARRIS

(Shrugs)

RICHARD

'Cause you always go like that all the time.

JEFFREY

(To Harris) Give me your wallet now. You. Pick it out. Now. *(Harris' wallet is picked up.)*

HARRIS

Leave it alone. Leave me alone.

JEFFREY

Ah, what have we here? *(flicking out from wallet, all over stage)* ... 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 credit cards; three rubbers; ho, ho, one small packet of "coke;" little photos of one, two little children; four lottery tickets; one ticket to "Oh Calcutta;" 5-10-12 dollars in hard cash; a group insurance card from the New York City Teachers Association. *(Cards are flicked all over stage one at a time.)* Man, you're nothing but a busted credit-seeking pervert, but a nervous one at that ...

RICHARD

What's a rubber?

SAMPSON

That's what white folks use on black girls.

JEFFREY

...high on coke, with a busted marriage, teaching pimply-faced school kids something about nothing, who wants to jerk off in a theater – five years after everyone else was doin it. *(Throws sets of keys to Richard.)* Check out the cars. *(Richard leaves.)*

(Picks up Sharon's purse. Opens it. Starts flicking out capsules, one by one to audience, all over.) Valium. Valium. Valium. How many of you got Valium in your purse? I feel a song comin on. *(Strutting, but viciously, to the tune of "I've Got Plenty of Nothin'" while flicking pills.)* "I got plenty of Valium, and Valium's plenty for me. I got Valium in the morning; I got Valium in the evening. I've got Valium in my purse sister...etc. *(Repeat.)*" Sort of a white lady's spiritual.

SHARON

Leave it Mister.

SAMPSON

What else you got here *(from purse—taunting)*. She got lipstick and rouge and powder and brushes and paste and baby killing pills. My Lordy, she got a thousand-legger in her purse. Two of 'em.

JEFFREY

You stupid. Them's false eyelashes *(Quotes Robert Herrick on use of cosmetics to falsify.)* See Gene

SAMPSON

O, lookee here – she got a little book. John Tuesday, Henry Wednesday, Tony breakfast, Sandy theatre, Timothy dinner. All in the same week.

SAMPSON

She's a hooker.

JEFFREY

She ain't no hooker! A hooker would write down how much or when, not where. She's a collector. She's a collector.

SHARON

Stop it. Stop.

SAMPSON

Sandy? Sandy. Ho, ho. Ambiguous, ambiguous.

SHARON

You're a cruel bastard.

JEFFREY

Now then to business: who's worth saving?

HOSTESS

What?

JEFFREY

Who is worth saving? Start talkin. Anythin. Start reciting anything. And then we're going to vote. Me and Sampson. We're gonna vote. Fair and square. You first. And don't come in last. You first. *(To Alan)* You know a poem maybe?

ALAN

I don't know any poem.

JEFFREY

(Teasingly) Yes, you do. I can tell. You know lots and lots of poems. Yes, you do. I can tell. . .

ALAN

Roses are red, Violets are blue; give me a kiss and I'll love you.

SAMPSON

Yeah, man. *(Walks over – sensuous kiss. Alan startled at first, pushes away, but then responds. Then, slow dance. Jeffrey puts up music – slow movement from Mahler’s Fifth Symphony. Everyone watches silently. Embarrassed. Fear. Sampson and Alan hold on to each other for a few moments. Again.)*

JEFFREY

You may be worth saving.

MAGGIE

I have a poem *(Romantic, lush poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (Quote))*.

JEFFREY

(Pause.) She ain’t worth it.

SAMPSON

Keep it simple. *(Quote Herrick.)*

SAMPSON

(To child) O.K., Goldilocks. You too. Up you go. *(Lifts her on to a table.)* O.K., little girl, start talkin.

CHILD

(Hysterical) My mommy told me it was like a birthday party. She said if I passed around the trays and said little cutesy things – she said she didn’t want to spend \$40 for a Schwartza – she said next week I could invite my friends over. Do I have to sing from up here? I forgot all my poems. I forgot my songs. I have to make. I have to make. Please, I have to make. *(Screaming.)* Please let me down. Please *(holds knees together. Very frightened child)*.

SAMPSON

You stay right there, honey. You got the best seat in the house.

MARK

Let me go. Let me go. I'll pay. You can trust me. I got friends. (*Laughter from the blacks.*)

JEFFREY

(*To David.*) Your turn.

DAVID

I don't have any poems. I better tell a story. I don't think there's much time left.

JEFFREY

Make it good – and fast.

DAVID

One time – a long time ago – I got on a bus. I wasn't feeling well and I got a bit dizzy. I noticed that there was a lovely, somewhat older woman, perhaps 15 years older than me, sitting in the bus. She had blue eye and black hair. She offered me her seat. A few moments later, the seat next to me became available and she sat down. She started to talk. She told me about problems with her teenage daughter and her husband. She got off the bus somewhere downtown and I didn't think much about it. The next day I took the bus again. She was there again. We started to talk and found something. Not much was said. A lot was left unsaid. The next morning, the same thing happened . By the end of the week, we had few secrets. Neither of us talked about seeing each other outside the bus. We were both married, nervous, vulnerable. She was a gentle woman. The next week, this non-love affair continued, and on Friday, I had a difficult decision. I had changed jobs. I had no need to take the bus again. She did not know my name, my address where I worked. I knew nothing about her. I simply walked off the bus and said to her, "See you Monday," and, of course, I didn't. And I knew I wouldn't see her when I said, "See you Monday." Weeks later, I wondered what she had thought had happened to me. I had disappeared. I was a

little upset but not much. A year later, by accident, we met in the street. I cannot describe her expression. I am not sure I remember. She told me she was crying, that she had checked the hospitals, the police stations, the newspapers – obituaries, because she assumed I had died. Why else did I disappear. She said if I wanted to break it off, I could have said so, or even made an excuse – even a lie – a change of jobs, a new house, a car – anything. I owed that much to her she said. So she figured I died. But then she said she realized I wasn't dead. I could have said anything; instead all I said was – "See you Monday." Why did I leave her looking, waiting, not knowing what had happened. She said she traced the route of the bus by car and for months looked for me at all the stops. She could not find me. She said I did her a lot of damage. I said nothing – maybe only, "I'm sorry." I walked away. She walked away. I haven't seen her since. That was a long, long time ago. But I think about it all the time.

SAMPSON

What do you think about, white buy?

DAVID

I just think about it. All the time. Every day. And that was 20 years ago.

RICHARD

(At this moment Richard comes running in.) There's a Volvo, a BMW and a 450SL. We're ready to roll, except for the 450SL. What bastard kept the keys.

JEFFREY

(Quickly) Whose car?

DAVID

Mine.

JEFFREY

Get it started – fast. *(Gathers up the valuables.) (David roughly pushed out of room through rear double doors.)* Now then. *(To Maggie)* Now, your turn. *(Maggie doesn't move.)* Your turn, I said.

MAGGIE

I've learned not to help from better than you.

JEFFREY

Your turn. *(Maggie doesn't move.)*

JEFFREY

(Slowly walks over. He deliberately tears open her blouse. Should be buttoned down front, long sleeves and pulled apart – side to side, and then down behind her. No bra.) Maggie turns her head. Silence.

CHILD

(Then, child screaming from top of table.) Mommy, mommy, what's he going to do?

HOSTESS

(Slowly, deliberately, Hostess walks to center front of stage and half to audience, half to blacks – speaks slowly.) Fantastic. Fantastic. Fantastic. You guys are fantastic. Permit me now to introduce you, properly, to my guests. But first, please undo these handcuffs. *(Jeffrey and Sampson relax, become jaunty, a little sheepish, but pleasant.) (Introducing)* Maggie, Terry, Sharon, Lucille.... I've been bored to tears for years with cocktail parties. So – I took myself downtown, found myself the best damned bunch of black equity actors I could find at \$18 an hour; agreed on a free Sunday evening and left the improvisations up to them. You guys are unbelievable. Alan, this is Derek. *(Sampson)* He played Othello last year.... Jose *(Jeffrey)* here played the road company in that "Your Arms Are Too Short: thing. Jose, that dance was super, you are a gem. And Derek, your speech was fantastic. My God, where did you learn to mumble like that? Brilliant.

JEFFREY

(In a very polished British accent.) Actually, madam, it wasn't a difficulty at all. It's much harder to do it this way.

HOSTESS

(To child) And, you, my own little sweetie, you were just super. You are an absolute born actress. *(Child jumps down off table.)* Why, before you know it, you'll be in the "King and I" in one of those sweet little robes, and later, later, my little actress, who knows...maybe if you work real hard – "The Bad Seed."

ALAN

My God. A hoax!

CHILD

(Aside to audience, wide-eyed) I told you. It's all fun and games. We all only play fun and games. And that's how we get relief – all the time. And the actors play, "let's pretend," and for a few moments, we and you pretend we're at a kooky party, and for a few moments we all are terrorized, and for a few moments it's all real; but the funny thing is, it's not real – but the words that come out are all familiar, the people are familiar, everything is familiar – so what to pretend?

SAMPSON & JEFFREY

Pleased to meet you. Hope we didn't go too far....just good clean fun.

(Slowly, whites recover. Maggie covers up.)

ALAN

I don't believe it. I don't believe it. Have a drink. Have a drink. Incredible. Incredible. Incredible. Have a martini. Have two. Have three. Oh my God, am I relieved.

MARK

(Smugly) I knew it all the time. I knew it all the time. You guys were too smart. Much too smart. I mean you wouldn't use words like "Immobilized" ...and "suffocating" ...and "cost/benefit" and "upward mobility." And poetry and that Euripides stuff.

HOSTESS

What I want to know is who peed in their pants? Panties? *(Much hilarity, drinking, laughter, conviviality.)*

TERRY

Whee. What a time. Woeee. Woeee. Are we suckers. This is my first cocktail party in New York. I mean I'm going to have the best Monday morning English composition of the year. It's a sure "A" – I mean for content. I mean we get marked down for grammar.

HARRIS

You get marked down for grammar?

TERRY

For mistakes in grammar, I mean. Oh, this is such a ball! I feel just like Gertrude Stein. Or Alice Toklas maybe.

HARRIS

My work! It's gone. It's gone.

HOSTESS

Com, come. Come, a little sleight of hand. All planned. Here's the only object of your heart's desire. *(Gives him manuscript. The flames got just typing paper.)*

MARK

You guys went pretty far, though.

SAMPSON

All in fun. All in fun. I mean, four of my buddies wrote my violence speech – all whiteys too. Please, no hard feelings. It was really just a job. I’m really so embarrassed.

HARRIS

Bullshit. I’m relieved. O.K. O.K. But I’m embarrassed, and I’m still shaking.

HOSTESS

Oh, don’t take it so seriously. It’s all in good spirits. The wallet business was a bit much though...What was it?

JEFFREY

“Man, you’re nothing but a busted, credit-seeking pervert, but a nervous one at that ... “

TERRY

(Loud, and with verve, to audience, with head nod to Harris) Serves the fuckin cynic right.

ALAN

Well, at least maybe we know what we’re really like under ... stress.

MARK

No. No, we’re not like that. We’re like that under real threat. That’s not what I’m like. That’s what I’m like when I’m terrorized.

HOSTESS

Don’t worry about it. We all still love you.

JEFFREY

(Likeable) Sure enough. My God, this was a ball. I apologize to all of you. I really do. It was a great experience. Our humblest apologies. I hope we didn't go too far, though I'm afraid we did get a little bit carried away. But you really took it like great sports. Really, I apologize. I mean most of our best friends are ... well, you know, being in theater and stuff. We wouldn't really bite the hands that feed us.

CHILD

What does he mean by that, mommy?

JEFFREY

And to you, in particular, *(bowing to Lucille)* my most abject penitence. I hope I didn't upset you.

LUCILLE

I didn't mind. Honest. Not a bit. I mean, I work in the Bronx. As a matter of fact...I was sort of waiting..frankly...I mean, a little trauma can do wonders for paranoia....

MAGGIE

What are you apologizing to her for? You just grabbed her leg. That's normal – expected – at cocktail parties. But with me, you meant business. Well, *(to Hostess)* you owe me a blouse anyway. One of those silk ones with little French flowers ... and bouffant sleeves, if you please.

HOSTESS

Ah, but wasn't the pain offset by the pleasure of the expectation?

MARK

Or the expectation of the pleasure.

MAGGIE

Oh, shut up. Don't you every stop?!

MARK

Hey! Hey! Are you guys available next weekend? I'm giving a little party myself...

JEFFREY

Eighteen bucks an hour. Twenty-four after midnight. Never on Sundays.

MARK

Incredible. We ought to franchise it. I got a friend. He can work out the details. We'll call it Kentucky Fried Guests. *(General laughter, hilarity, clinking of glasses, applause by guests.)*

.....

(Then, when the laughter subsides a bit, devastating, very loud single pistol shot is heard, reverberating in the room. Total silence on stage. All heads turn to the rear French doors and Richard comes staggering in, bloody, and carrying a pistol.)

HOSTESS

(Frightened) My God! What happened?

RICHARD

I killed the bastard. He pulled a gun on me – from the glove compartment of the car. I grabbed his arm. I screamed, "It's a joke, only a joke, a hoax, we've hired actors!" He twisted. The gun went off. David's dead out there on the ground. *(Two or three run out.)*

CHILD

(Aside to audience) He's not really dead. I mean, the actor's dead, sure. I mean the guy he's playing – he's dead, but the actor – well, y'know he's just an actor.

Everyone freezes.

CURTAIN – 10 seconds

SCENE II OF ACT II

(Curtain opens with same setting – 10 seconds later.)

ALAN

It was a joke, you fool – a cocktail party hoax. Why did you shoot him?

RICHARD

Look, mister, I was scared. That dude pulled a gun on me. That's all I know. I walked into this place with a toy pistol for some fun and games. Your friend tried to kill me. I got scared.

LUCILLE

Someone call the police.

HOSTESS

Get a doctor.

HARRIS

(Coming in.) The police you can get soon enough. It's too late for a doctor...he's dead.

ALAN

(To blacks) You guys stick around. Maybe the fun and games are just beginning.

JEFFREY

Look, buddy, I'm not running anywhere.

HARRIS

(To Jeffrey) Don't give me that "Look Buddy" business. That little speech of yours about car door locks was a little bit much. Much too much. I didn't put you in hold of some ship. And I'm not responsible for you. I don't owe you anything. You all just seem too quick to violence. God damn it, you enjoyed yourselves – too much. You got your kicks not from terrorizing us – that would have been bad enough – but from humiliating us. You liked being on top. You ate the ridicule up. And more, what's much more – sure maybe you're scared now – but you were on a God damn high humiliating us. I'm not saying your brother here wanted to pull that trigger, but God damn it, you seem too smug about the whole thing. You think you're going to get away with it. No pain. No guilt. Sure, sure, you're just strolling bit players – actors – but you played the part, in spades, if you'll excuse the expression. I don't know what happened out there and I don't care to guess, and I don't give a shit but as you said, most poignantly, people do what they have to do, sooner or later.

RICHARD

I killed him. He didn't.

HARRIS

What the fuck's the difference? You all want to be lumped together to take advantage of past sins on your grandfathers – whether or not you can find one. And I didn't sin against anyone –either against you or your grandfathers. You all get lumped together for jobs – for schools. You get pushed. You're either pushin' or getting pushed. So don't tell me that you didn't pull the trigger. You all pulled the trigger.

JEFFREY

(Confrontational) Lumped together. Yeah, mister. You're right. And you believe there's more benefit than cost in that. That's the best joke of the evening. Mister, I spend \$300 which I ain't got –for suits so that I don't get lumped together with my brothers when strangers pass me on the street. My suits – the pinstripes are close together – not two inches apart; I can't afford those kinds of suits. And don't give me your shit about my enjoying being on top. The air's better up there, mister. You just don't notice it so much because that's all you're used to.

LUCILLE

Oh my heavens, he's paranoid.

JEFFREY

Get off us lady. I don't like what I feel around here, what I see. Look around – I'm not imagining anything, beautiful.

MAGGIE

You owe me the blouse, not her *(pointing to Hostess)*. And they don't have em' on 125th Street or wherever you hang out.

ALAN

(Quietly) Call the cops.

SAMPSON

O.K. O.K. O.K. Call the police. But what happened to the “buddy, buddy...have a martini... great speech – guys are fantastic...,” and little Red Riding Hood over here... “I didn't mind a bit; a little trauma does wonders for a paranoid?” And what happened to our little franchise? What happened to next weekend? I'll tell you something. Maybe, maybe...ah, forget it.

ALAN

What the hell are you talking about? You busted in here like animals. What do you expect?

HARRIS

We lost a friend.

SAMPSON

Oh, shit. You didn't even know him. You never saw him before. He was a stranger.

ALAN

He was the most likeable of all of us. His life's been snuffed out. And for nothing. For no reason.

JEFFREY

(A pause. To Hostess) Lady, rewrite it.

HOSTESS

What?

JEFFREY

Rewrite it. Rewrite it. You heard me.

HOSTESS

I'm the hostess, not the author.

JEFFREY

Lady, you're a hired hand. You hired us. You organized us. You created us. You wrote it. I didn't. Please. Rewrite it.

CHILD

Mother, rewrite it, rewrite it already.

HOSTESS

(After a pause. With a wave) It's done.

(At that moment – blackout – for three seconds.)

(Lights come on and scene is identical to 10 minutes earlier. Laughter, hilarity, drinking.)

JEFFREY

Eighteen bucks an hour. Twenty-four after midnight. Never on Sundays.

MARK

Incredible. We ought to franchise it. I got a friend. He can work out the details. We'll call it Kentucky Fried Guests. *(General laughter, hilarity, clinking of glasses, applause by guests). (Then, as earlier, a very loud devastating shot rings out, but this time David comes crashing through the French doors. Holding a gun.)*

DAVID

Don't anyone of you move... *(Puzzled at scene.)* I shot – killed your bastard friend. My God, what's going on here?

HOSTESS

You did what?

DAVID

These guys are maniacs. I killed the bastard.

ALAN

It's a hoax, a joke! They were hired for the evening.

HOSTESS

(Repeats her previous speech, mechanically) “I’ve been bored to tears for years with cocktail parties. So I took myself downtown, found myself the best damned bunch of black equity actors I could find for \$18 an hour; agreed on a free Sunday evening and left the improvisation up to them.” Now, tell me, what happened?

DAVID

I grabbed a gun I keep in my glove compartment. He said something like, “Hey, mister – it’s all a joke, a joke, a hoax, we’ve just hired actors.” Some joke. I shot the mother fucker.

MARK

Serves him right. They humiliated us. What did they expect? He got what he deserved.

DAVID

Who was he? I mean who does he belong to? I mean was he well known? I mean did he have relatives?” Where did he come from?

HOSTESS

Get a doctor. He came from the Village. Of course, he had relatives. Everyone does.

JEFFREY

Detroit

MARK

(With assuredness and confidence. To David) Involuntary manslaughter at worst. Probably self-defense; possibly even excusable homicide. Don’t worry about it. You’ll forget it in a few days. These things happen all the time. You just have to talk your way out of them. Establish rapport with the police. Plead vulnerability.

Explain it to them. They'll understand. Use words like terrorized and threatened. Ask them to imagine what it was like. Don't worry about it. You'll forget it in a few days. *(Then, to Maggie, who is stunned)* What's bugging you lady? You don't look comfortable. Y'notice those guys didn't get to me. No sir. Didn't get to me. I'm just an innocent bystander.

MAGGIE

Shut up you God damn parasite. Are you comfortable? What's bugging you lady? Why are you so upset? Why don't you read books? Everything's relative. Stay cool. Don't get committed. Act cool. These guys are scared and you're giving two-bit therapy. One's dead. All of us have been humiliated and you're asking are we comfortable – and you're fiddling around with cutesy stuff still. You need an enema down your throat to drown out these words. Doesn't anything shut you up? Aren't we entitled to let the reality just wear us down?

MARK

Look, lady. I only asked what was bothering you. You seemed upset. I had other more hostile questions. Why do you shave under your eyebrows? Why do you stand like you have a congenital hip deformity? Why don't you scream? Why do you close your eyes when you inhale but open 'em when you exhale? Why don't you wear any jewelry? Why isn't your hair combed – or washed? Why don't you take off 10 pounds? How come you gain weight after you lose it? Why hasn't therapy helped? Do you worry about what's going to happen to you? Why does every pleasure become a lesser one than the one before? Why do you cry so much? Why do you seem so happy? Why do you buy so many shoes? Why did you come to the party? Why were you invited? Why don't you bite your nails? Why have you stopped reading? Have you ever thought of being a stewardess? "Why so pale and wan, fond lover; Prithee, who so pale. If loving, wooing cannot win him, Looking sad, prevail." Do you really read – books? Do you understand my questions?

Or, of course, I could have asked about the health of your blouse, which seemed the only object of your preoccupation. *(Then, to David)* Relax, fella, it'll pass. Block it out. Block it out. Don't worry, don't worry about it. The event has already happened. It's over. It's only where your head's at. There is no right – no wrong. You did what you did what you did, a rose is a rose is a rose.

DAVID

I'm not worried now – now. I'm not scared. I never pulled a trigger before. I got him with one shot – right in the gut. Just like in the movies – didn't hesitate this time. I'm no coward. I know my responsibilities. I met them. I don't walk away from things. No sir, I know my responsibilities. I don't turn my back. I know my responsibilities.

JEFFREY

Wait a minute, buddy. Wait a minute. That was no woman you picked up on a bus. You think a loaded pistol maybe maybe makes you not a coward? You've done-in two now. Congratulations! Only you snuffed out my friend this time.

DAVID

He was a terrorist – as far as I knew.

JEFFREY

You're awful quick to violence, buddy.

SHARON

Give me my book back. And the pills and everything else you took from me. Give me my God damn book back. And call the doctor, will you?

(David runs out.)

ALAN

(To Sampson) Did you know him?

SAMPSON

No. not really. Just a few weeks. He came in from Detroit a few months ago. Played bit roles off off-Broadway. Where do you live?

ALAN

Around.

SAMPSON

You want to tell me where?

ALAN

Sure.

SAMPSON

Where? Where?

ALAN

Around. Around.

SAMPSON

See you then.

ALAN

Sure, sure, maybe we'll bump into each other or somethin'.

JEFFREY

When?

ALAN

Oh, some time.

JEFFREY

When?

ALAN

Some time.

JEFFREY

Now?

ALAN

I don't know. Maybe we'll bump into each other or somethin'.

HARRIS

(Interrupting – falling apart.) What is this maudlin crap? You bleeding hearts are all alike. Sure they had toy pistols, but these jokers aren't playing fun and games. These let's – pretenders, these phonies are like that. What have they written? Nothin'. They only act. I write. I write and write. And nothin's getting published and a little pisser like this *(pointing to Terry)* tells me about unified field theory and the nature of the universe and spends \$7,000 a year to go to some cutesy finishing school and you, Jeffrey, you bastard remind me that I got to sweat it out for a lousy \$8,000 a-year pension in seven years. And that ain't enough for me to live on. I need better. I want better. I know better. And I'm jealous, mister, you're right, because I can't bust out and look like a dude and play the numbers and the girls, And I can't get away with it, and I'm stuck just like you, buddy. And I'm just as tired, and I know what you feel, and that chokes me. I-don't-want-to-know, to-feel, to-understand-how-or-what-you-feel. I learned lots of things and not on the street. I don't want to share with you. Nothing. And least, what you feel. And I don't give a shit, frankly, about your friend out there. No one will miss him. Not really. Not for long. He's a punk, a nobody. He got nobody. He's a zero. He never spent eighteen bucks for a theater ticket. He never stood at the Met. And I'm tired too. I'm tired of writing, tired of talkin' to Miss Muffets here. Tired of the role I play at these parties. I know why I'm invited – the bon vivant cynic. Sort of the Hampton's answer to Oscar Levant. How's that for an image?

It does wonders for you =-- except at 8:15 a.m., Monday through Friday, the home room bell gongs, and I better be there. And I'll be God damned if I'm going to spend the next 10 or 15 years thinking good deeds and good thoughts about the 100 neediest cases of the year. I'm the less fortunate and I, too, want out – and who walks, who sings, who writes, who paints, who takes pictures, who bleeds, who marches, who cries for me. The fuckin' politicians do. They know how I feel. Things are changin'. I feel change on the winds. They give me signals. I get signals from all kinds of people. Little Miss Muffet here. She was giving me signals. I saw them. She thinks I'm interested. ...I'm a possible adventure for her. And you were eyeing me up too, weren't you? Ah, you all (to the Hostess). ...And you invited me because I'm stimulating, interesting, didn't you? Remember, remember last week you read my paper. Worthwhile you said. Didn't need hardly any polishing. A signal. That's what it was, a signal. I read my horoscope – "Success will come." Those thinks are pretty accurate, you know. They are based on sunspots or other identifiable phenomena. My time has come. I get signals. My kids visited me – I mean I visited them last week. I could see they liked me. They remembered me. My wife got this order from the judge. He didn't believe I was unstable. I could see them. They were fine. Just fine. The older one's in high school. Asked to read my paper, my manuscript. This paper put everything together. Really put it all together. Amazing. My kids asked about the paper. Not at all like my homeroom kids. My kids knew how important that stuff was. You don't build stone aqueducts for no reason. Got to have water. That's why they built them, you know, got to get water. And all from the natural surroundings – the stone, the lime, the labor. Quite a feat. Quite a feat. ...My kids were interested in it. They asked about how it was coming. I write about aqueducts, Roman aqueducts. What do I care about some guy from Detroit out there? Detroit! What's he know about aqueducts...? Roman aqueducts....

SHARON

Come on. I'll take you home, or wherever you live. We'll talk. You need someone of substance to rely on. You don't need Roman aqueducts. I'll take care of you for a while. I have taken care of a lot of people. It's sort of like a

hobby. Pick 'em off the ground and rehabilitate them. You know you can survive that way. Pretend you're needed – does wonder for the complexion. But a girl's gotta keep up appearances nowadays. Y'enter the party like a tough-assed bitch, and then you squeeze what you can out of the sponge. What did you say your name was, my friend?

HARRIS

Take it easy on me.

SHARON

Sure. Sure. Not a thing to worry about. *(She takes the manuscript from Harris who has been holding on to it tightly and throws it over to Jeffrey.)* Take care of it...properly. People nowadays don't need crutches or props...just good old-fashioned "relationships." *(She leaves slowly, pulling and leading Harris.)*

TERRY

Same something of him for me will you? Maybe not now, but later I'll be ready, maybe. I'm not ready yet. Somehow I don't think I want to write about this Monday morning. *(Sort of in a daze—subdued.)* As I was saying, Monet is a jewel, an absolute jewel.

ALAN

(Getting up) No, he's a jeweler. You see the stuff on the front counter of Lord & Taylor's all the time. Hardly before you're all the way through the revolving doors...

.....

(Pause/uneasy silence ; heads turn, as at that moment Richard comes walking in through center of rear stage. Nervous, dressed in street clothes, turtleneck sweater, corduroy pants. All of characters on stage are bewildered, ill at ease, including Hostess. Puzzled and embarrassed. Richard obviously does not belong on the stage. (He had been shot.)

HOSTESS

No, no. No. You don't belong. Please. What are you doing here... *(The fire curtain of the theater comes all the way down, unexpectedly and quickly, then immediately up again. There's commotion on stage, but actors are trying to retain their professionalism.)*

TERRY

(A stage whisper) What the hell are you doing on stage? You're supposed to be dead out there.

(A large piece of scenery comes crashing down, falling backward into backstage. Several workmen are seen scurrying about. David and others are seen backstage, talking to workmen/each other. Lights and scaffolding are visible. This must be staged in a way so that audience sees and believes that something has gone very wrong with the production.)

RICHARD

(Richard is clearly an interloper. He walks to front of stage and looks at audience. Sits down. Partially at audience and partially at his fellow actors.) This play stops right here. He (Harris) has it all wrapped up – fine and dandy. (To the audience) You are with him. You feel for him. I know it. I'm an outsider. I'm nobody, and you couldn't care less about my character. Half of you even forgot I was out there. *(To blacks.)* We are outsiders. You just don't know it. I'm nothin' but a fuckin' understudy. I think my name is out there in the lobby on a card or somethin'. But I'm on stage now, not him (Harris). Hear me out now. I don't know exactly where to start. I know I don't like that God damn line about *(taunting)* "Y'know, most of our best friends are...well you know, being in the theater and stuff. We wouldn't really bite the hand that feeds us." And that business about maybe Shelly was black because he was screwing his sister and some other people. And Jose has to make an effort to talk good English. And Harris *(pointing)* he rambles, maybe he is a little schizy, that still gives him no right to say what he said. And, we're "too quick to violence," and we're "pushed or

pushing... ." And "where did he come from – Detroit." I know what that means, and so did you *(to audience)* when she wrote it. And poor, poor Harris is just about destroyed because he is middle class – and on and on it goes.

MARK

C'mon fellow. Get off it. Some professional ethics, please. Get off the stage. You are a disgrace to Actor Equity.

RICHARD

(Ignores Mark) This play could have been rewritten so you were with me – with us --. Instead, you *(to Hostess)* didn't rewrite it. You killed me. And the sympathy somehow, someday still ends up with the oh-so-vulnerable, oh-so-sensitive, so aware, invited whiteys. They're always invited guests. She did it deliberately. She sucked up to the audience. She tapped the responsive chords. They enjoyed hearing some actors recite lines they were right on, right on target. Particularly, our lines. Gave the lines real credibility, real credibility didn't it, to have the lines spoken out by blacks. Their heart goes out for the faggot (Alan) even – even sympathy for Miss Crutch over there (Sharon) -- but what you got for us! Nothin'. Nothin'. Nothin'. Can't you whiteys write something for us.

(Fire curtain comes half down, then up. Workmen on stage.) I've seen this play in rehearsals and performances dozens of times, and when Terry starts with her Monet bit, I puke. And how come you (Jeffrey) can't write a piece about being black – you needed your three whitey friends to help. Yeah, she wrote it, but shit, man, there's something you don't say for no money. Nope, we don't have a chance. Never did. Never will. The performance ends now. *(To whites)* It's simple. You're in. *(To blacks)* We're out. *(To audience)* Let's just say the New York Times tomorrow will footnote it as one fuckin' man's fuckin' protest. But I busted up your honky play for one night. Tomorrow night you can play it straight. But for one night, one night, it gets rewritten my way. It ends now. Right now. With my speech – not hers (Terry). Go home and wait for the fuckin' Times tomorrow.

JEFFREY

C'mon fella, get off he stage, will you.

RICHARD

Everybody has fun and games, at a cocktail party. The only things that are not fun and games is the way you all (audience) feel about all of us. And that's no fun – not for me anyway.

LUCILLE

(In a realistic voice.)

My God, he's really paranoid.

MAGGIE

(To front and center.) Ladies and gentlemen, we apologize on behalf of Actors' Equity and the Producers..for this most unfortunate development. The regular production will continue tomorrow night. The producers have also authorized me to announce that should any of you wish an exchange of your tickets for another performance, you may do so at the box office.

(Puts his arm around Richard's shoulder) C'mon fella.

RICHARD

Leave it mister.

(Backstage lights all go on. All stage lights and house lights are now on.)

MARK

(To audience) I'm afraid he may have had a bit to drink folks.

HOSTESS

Will someone please Bring down the curtain.

RICHARD

(To audience) Leave it alone.

(A workman walks over to pull down curtain.)

RICHARD

Leave it! I said leave it.

(Workman reaches for curtain pull.)

(Richard turns from audience, pulls a pistol from his pants, aims deliberately and, with a guttural shriek, shoots the workman who staggers back, grabs his stomach, staggers across stage – collapses. Pandemonium breaks loose on stage and perhaps in audience.)

ALAN

“Oh, my God.” (Fire curtain falls and then immediately goes up. Draw curtain starts to pull closed, then opens. All houselights go up. Audience frightened. One or two actors run offstage. Police on stage. Richard turns his back on audience and walks, perhaps runs, glancing backward, straight out back through rear of backstage through a door marked “Exit to Street” – possibly showing actual New York street activity.)

CHILD

(Hysterical) Mommy, mommy. Where’s my real mommy?

(No curtain)

(Workman, after no more than 20 seconds, gets up, brushes himself off, bows deeply to audience and walks offstage.)

(Quickly curtain falls.)

*** END ***