

METER MAIDS IN FLAMES

(A Comedy Noir)

CHARACTERS: (5)

PUBLIC SHELBY, male, over forty, cautious,
polite, talks to himself

SECRET SHELBY, imaginary female, over forty,
not cautious, not polite

POLLY, about the same age as Shelby, sniping, selfish,
insensitive, and “grand”

JEANETTE, Shelby’s older sister, over fifty, arthritic,
semi-senile, with a cane

ZARA, SHELBY’S daughter, twenty, nervous, snotty,
sullen, humorless

SETTING: Suggestions of a group home, a restaurant,
a graveyard, apartment, etc.

STYLE: Absurdist, dark comedy

Note: Only PUBLIC SHELBY can hear and talk directly to SECRET SHELBY. When the two SHELBYs talk to each other while others are around, the others *cannot see or hear* the female SHELBY. A lot of what happens is the difference between the private thoughts and the public utterances of one person.

ACT I

Scene 1

(PUBLIC SHELBY is in an awkward heap downstage)

(Enter SECRET SHELBY, exhausted, looks at the PUBLIC SHELBY, shakes head)

SECRET SHELBY: (Starts to gather large pieces of wood from upstage)
You want to help, fatass?

PUB. SHELBY: (Does not respond, re-arranges self in the heap)

SECRET SHELBY: I could use some help. (Is slowly dragging out the wooden planks) (We cannot tell what she is building)
You lazy bastard.

PUB. SHELBY: Yes.

SECRET SHELBY: (picking up a plank, producing a hammer)
Where does this go?

PUB. SHELBY: Somewhere.

SECRET SHELBY: If you're not going to help, just shut up.

PUB. SHELBY: Did you find a job yet?

SECRET SHELBY: No. . . . Did you?

PUB. SHELBY: You know the answer to that.

SECRET SHELBY: It doesn't hurt to ask.

PUB. SHELBY: It *does* hurt to ask.

SECRET SHELBY: I'll find something.

PUB. SHELBY: No. We won't.

SECRET SHELBY: I had a nibble.

PUB. SHELBY: You did not.

SECRET SHELBY: It was almost a nibble.

PUB. SHELBY: I saw an ad for a job. I didn't answer it.

SECRET SHELBY: Why not? What's wrong with you? If it's a job, it's a job! Good God! You make me furious.

PUB. SHELBY: It was at a pet store.

SECRET SHELBY: Great!

PUB. SHELBY: Masturbating poodles.

SECRET SHELBY: Just poodles?

PUB. SHELBY: They train you.

SECRET SHELBY: Why just poodles?

PUB. SHELBY: I didn't ask.

SECRET SHELBY: Maybe a Chihuahua wouldn't be too bad.

PUB. SHELBY: It was on Craigslist. Maybe I can find the ad for you.
(Looks through discarded papers)

SECRET SHELBY: Never mind. Help me with this. (Pounds a nail)

PUB. SHELBY: You're doing fine on your own. . . . Can you loan me a dollar?

SECRET SHELBY: For what?

PUB. SHELBY: Love.

SECRET SHELBY: I need it myself.

PUB. SHELBY: I need it more. I'm starving.

SECRET SHELBY: Polly's taking us to lunch later.

PUB. SHELBY: Are you sure? She didn't cancel, the way she's being doing lately?

SECRET SHELBY: Don't eat so much this time. She doesn't like it.

PUB. SHELBY: It's the only food I get. And with Polly I earn it!

SECRET SHELBY: Be more like me.

PUB. SHELBY: I wish I could be.

SECRET SHELBY: I'm sorry I'm you.

PUB. SHELBY: Do you suppose everybody feels as divided about things
as we do?

SECRET SHELBY: No, I think we're "special."

PUB. SHELBY: By the way, what are you building?

SECRET SHELBY: None of your business.

PUB. SHELBY: Is there one for me?

SECRET SHELBY: Build your own.

PUB. SHELBY: Did you hear about the drought?

SECRET SHELBY: Now there's a drought too?

PUB. SHELBY: From here to the Antarctic.

SECRET SHELBY: Crap.

PUB. SHELBY: It's the worst one since the last one.

SECRET SHELBY: It always is.

PUB. SHELBY: Are you making fun of me?

SECRET SHELBY: You say stupid things.

PUB. SHELBY: And you say mean things. I'm hungry and I'm out of a
job and a drought is coming. And I have no love. Give
me a break.

SECRET SHELBY: I'll "break" your neck. How's that?

PUB. SHELBY: Lame. I wish you'd go away.

SECRET SHELBY: I wish I could get away. From you.

PUB. SHELBY: Well, you can't. . . . Have you finished it? (Gestures at the wood planks)

SECRET SHELBY: Just about. Help me put them up.

PUB. SHELBY: (resigned) I guess!

(Together they lift the planks. They make two simple crosses big enough to crucify two people)

SECRET SHELBY: (indicating the first cross) After you, Shelby.

PUB. SHELBY: (indicates a cross) No, after you, Shelby.

BOTH: (together) Whatever!

(They stand in front of the two crosses and raise their arms. There is no need for nails to hold their arms aloft. They are self-crucified)

SECRET SHELBY: How's it hanging?

PUB. SHELBY: Hanging in there.

SECRET SHELBY: Yeah, I'm getting the hang of it myself.

PUB. SHELBY: I don't know what I'd do without you.

SECRET SHELBY: Probably die.

PUB. SHELBY: You think?

SECRET SHELBY: And I know I'd die without you. Ha!

PUB. SHELBY: Perhaps death wouldn't be so bad. I saw a cat die once. It didn't seem to hurt. Just a little quiver. Then peace.

SECRET SHELBY: I saw a dog hit by a car once. It got all mangled and it took forever to die, yelping and crying every minute. It was on the median with lots of traffic. No one could get to it.

PUB. SHELBY: I suppose it depends on the luck of the draw. But I must say this cross is no way to live.

SECRET SHELBY: But it's so you! The mass of men lead lives of quiet crucifixion.

PUB. SHELBY: Self-pity is so off-putting, isn't it?

SECRET SHELBY: The ultimate taboo.

PUB. SHELBY: People like optimism.

SECRET SHELBY: I know . . . Maybe we'll be in Heaven soon.

PUB. SHELBY: Did I mention that a meter maid gave me a ticket?

(Slow Fade)

Scene 2

(Interrupting the slow fade, POLLY enters to the two SHELBYs, waving. As far as POLLY is concerned, there is just one SHELBY, and she does not hear the SECRET SHELBY. She never speaks directly to SECRET SHELBY)

POLLY: (hurrying in) Howdy! Hi! Hello! Shelby! You hoo!

SHELBY: (both at once, snappishly) *What!?*

POLLY: What are you doing with your hands in the air?

PUB. SHELBY: What does it look like, Polly?

POLLY: Yoga?

SECRET SHELBY: Yeah, yoga.

POLLY: Well, if you have time for yoga, it means you still haven't found a job!

PUB. SHELBY: Afraid not.

POLLY: Then lunch is definitely my treat. No question.

PUB. SHELBY: Oh, we couldn't!

SECRET SHELBY: Yes, we could!

POLLY: Not another word about it. I'm treating! Come away from that awful yoga.

PUB. SHELBY: You're sure now?

POLLY: I just got my inheritance from my aunt. Where do you want to go?

PUB. SHELBY: Anywhere close.

POLLY: I know this fabulous little place on this side street. It's called The Loaf of Bread. Such a cute name, don't you think? The Loaf of Bread. Jean Valjean. It's totally organic with only authentic French peasant recipes.

SECRET SHELBY: Gruel?

PUB. SHELBY: You're sure now?

POLLY: Oh, *you!* Come with Polly now! (Off she goes)

PUB. SHELBY: Polly, wait!

SECRET SHELBY: God, what I have to do for a lousy meal!

(The two SHELBYs hurry after POLLY)

(They circle back or re-enter from the other side of the stage)

POLLY: Here! This is the place! Shall we dine outdoors? *Al dente?*

SECRET SHELBY: (under her breath) *Al fresco.*

POLLY: Is this all right? (She sits on the ground)

PUB. SHELBY: No tables and chairs?

POLLY: Oh, that's so bourgeois!

SECRET SHELBY: Oh, for God's sake!

POLLY: Did you say something?

SECRET SHELBY: No.

PUB. SHELBY: No.

POLLY: Then sit! (The SHELBYs finally sit)

POLLY: So tell me. How's your imaginary friend?

PUB. SHELBY: Virtually gone.

SECRET SHELBY: No, I'm not!

POLLY: You don't still talk to her, do you?

PUB. SHELBY: Never.

POLLY: Now I don't want you eating enough for two, like last time.

PUB. SHELBY: I apologize. Things just haven't been –

POLLY: I kid! I kid! I don't begrudge you one bite. Eat, my darling, eat.
What are friends for, if not to sponge off. . . . I kid! I kid!

SECRET SHELBY: I hate her.

POLLY: (to offstage waiter) You hoo! We're going to dine out here.
Don't need a menu. Can see it from here. Now I'm ordering
for both of us. And if your friend comes along, that's fine too.

SECRET SHELBY: What a ditz! And she thinks *you're* crazy!

POLLY: I just love those chalk menus. Now, to tell the truth, I forgot my
glasses, and I may need you to help with the small print. Even
with my glasses, I can barely make out any print anymore. When
I had to read my aunt's will, it was almost impossible to see!

PUB. SHELBY: But you managed somehow.

POLLY: I persevered; indeed I dood!

SECRET SHELBY: By the way, turkey brain, how much did your aunt
leave you?

POLLY: I bet you're wondering how much my aunt left me. Oh, naughty!
That's between me, my aunt, and her tombstone. She insisted that
I get her a genuine marble mausoleum – a huge one. It cost a
pretty penny, let me tell you. Yes, it was just a fraction of the
whole estate, but do you really need a marble mausoleum, I
ask you?!

SECRET SHELBY: Can we order?

POLLY: Oh, I haven't even looked at that menu. (Squints toward the offstage menu)

PUB. SHELBY: I know what I want.

POLLY: Now, Shelby, you always make your choice so fast. Give me a chance to look it over. What does that say? 'Courageous?' What's 'courageous'?

PUB. SHELBY: That's *courgettes*. Fancy for small summer squash.

POLLY: Are you sure they aren't cauliflower?

SECRET SHELBY: Zucchini, dodo.

POLLY: Sounds so much better in French. But I don't think I want cauliflower. Do I want cauliflower? (Mulls it over) They're not really flowers, are they, cauliflowers? (Squinting again) Does that say "pig?" (Points to menu)

SECRET SHELBY: It do.

POLLY: Not "pork"?

SECRET SHELBY: "Pig"!

POLLY: Maybe this place isn't as great as I thought it was. You want to go someplace else?

BOTH SHELBY: No!

POLLY: Okay, if you say so. Why they have to call it pig, I'll never know. . . . Oh, I can't decide.

PUB. SHELBY: Maybe we can order an appetizer and start on that, with the rest later.

SECRET SHELBY: Where's our waiter?

POLLY: They're always busy here. It's very "in" right now since they got rid of their tables. (calling to offstage waiter) You hoo! *Garçon!*

OFFSTAGE

VOICE: One moment, madame!

POLLY: (calling) Why do you call it 'pig'? (to PUBLIC SHELBY) Not that classy, if you ask me. I don't want to eat pig!

SECRET SHELBY: You don't want to eat your own kind.

PUB. SHELBY: So how have you been, Polly? You look good.

POLLY: I've put on ten pounds. I have been stuffing myself since I got my inheritance. But actually it's a diet. It's called the All You Can Eat Diet.

PUB. SHELBY: You don't say.

POLLY: I know it sounds counter-productive, but the theory is you stuff yourself so much you get sick and throw up, and that kills your appetite.

PUB. SHELBY: You look fine the way you are.

POLLY: You're supposed to say I look like I've *lost* ten pounds, my dear!

PUB. SHELBY: Polly, you look like you've lost ten pounds.

SECRET SHELBY: Three hundred and fifty. You were enormous before.

POLLY: (to PUBLIC SHELBY) Really? Why thank you. By the way, how's your daughter?

PUB. SHELBY: Pretty good. She has her own apartment now.

POLLY: How grand for her! I always liked Zara. Give her my love.

PUB. SHELBY: I will.

POLLY: Is she still depressed?

SECRET SHELBY: Does the Pope shit in the woods?!

PUB. SHELBY: A bit, sometimes.

SECRET SHELBY: Waiter! Server! Somebody!

POLLY: Maybe they just never come, and that's how you lose weight! So tell me, how's the book coming along?

PUB. SHELBY: I finished it.

POLLY: You finished it, finally?

SECRET SHELBY: My agent turned it down. Said she couldn't sell it.

PUB. SHELBY: My agent is not sure about taking it on.

POLLY: Oh, bummer. But what does that agent know!

SECRET SHELBY: She wrote the book on agents.

POLLY: And after you've worked on that book for how many years now?

PUB. SHELBY: Ten.

SECRET SHELBY: Six. Actual work.

POLLY: And she's not sure about it!? Well, you should get a new agent.
You don't have to take that.

SECRET SHELBY: I've tried. I can't find another one.

POLLY: Have you really tried?

PUB. SHELBY: Wrote to every single agent in New York, London, and L.A.

POLLY: Oh, the whole thing is so unfair!

SECRET SHELBY: I had a reply from one in Slop Bucket, Missouri.
But even that didn't materialize.

PUB. SHELBY: The times they are a-changin'.

POLLY: I just don't get it. You've written books before. In fact, you write
enough for two people. So prolific, so talented, and practically
nobody knows who you are!

PUB. SHELBY: Thanks.

SECRET SHELBY: Bitch.

POLLY: Here, let me check on that waiter. (Goes offstage)

SECRET SHELBY (to PUBLIC SHELBY) Why are we friends with
this woman?

PUB. SHELBY: I have no idea. You found her.

SECRET SHELBY: The hell I did! You did.

PUB. SHELBY: I did not.

SECRET SHELBY: At that seminar on finding your Inner Strong Woman.

PUB. SHELBY: I did? It must have been a weak moment.

SECRET SHELBY: Didn't you have a little affair with her?

PUB. SHELBY: I did not!

SECRET SHELBY: At the time you were trying to be friendlier with people.

PUB. SHELBY: Polly's not that bad.

SECRET SHELBY: She's awful, and she's getting worse.

POLLY: (re-entering) Here's what they have today. (Tries to recall) Hmm, it was something unusual. Oh, I can't remember.

PUB. SHELBY: (getting up) Do you know what you want? I'll go tell the waiter.

POLLY: I'm really not hungry. But you go ahead. Remember, it's my treat.

SECRET SHELBY: You're not going to eat?

POLLY: I can't decide.

PUB. SHELBY: I know what I want. (Starts to leave)

POLLY: Don't worry about me!

SECRET SHELBY: Bring plenty of brain food for fathead here.

PUB. SHELBY: Don't worry. (Exits)

POLLY: (to herself) It's sort of rude of him not to wait to order.

(PUBLIC SHELBY returns with crackers)

PUB. SHELBY: I ordered a large pizza with extra cheese. It was already prepared.

POLLY: (pointing) What are those? Crackers . . . with pizza?

PUB. SHELBY: To tide me over. (Opens package, gobbles a cracker)
My god, that's delicious!

SECRET SHELBY: (impatiently) Can I have one?

PUB. SHELBY: I thought you weren't hungry. Here. (Tosses a cracker
to her)

SECRET SHELBY: (not catching the crackers) Watch it, asshole.

POLLY: (to SECRET SHELBY) You know, those look good. Can I
share one?

SECRET SHELBY: Polly wants a cracker! (Retrieves them)

POLLY: Just half of one. Pretty please!

PUB. SHELBY: Why didn't she order something when she was over there?

POLLY: Shelby? Can't I just share yours?

(PUBLIC SHELBY reluctantly breaks a cracker in two, hands some
to POLLY)

SECRET SHELBY: I guess I should have brought more.

POLLY: (taking a bite) Oh, that's delicious! Too heavenly!

PUB. SHELBY: You want more?

POLLY: Could I?

SECRET SHELBY: How long before that pizza comes?

PUB. SHELBY: A few minutes.

SECRET SHELBY: That long?

PUB. SHELBY: I didn't see you getting up off your fat butt to order it.

POLLY: What?

SECRET SHELBY: Sorry.

POLLY: Are you starting to talk to yourself again? You know it's very off-putting.

SECRET SHELBY: Don't you realize that most people talk to themselves?

POLLY: Sometimes I wonder about you, Shelby. Oh, this cracker has made me so dry. They haven't even given us water.

PUB. SHELBY: I can go back for water.

SECRET SHELBY: I'll go.

PUB. SHELBY: Don't knock yourself out.

SECRET SHELBY: How about if I knock you out?

POLLY: I don't suppose they have sparkling water, do they?

PUB. SHELBY: (getting up) I'll check.

POLLY: With a little lime in the glass!

SECRET SHELBY: How about blessed and from Lourdes too?

PUB. SHELBY: I shouldn't be long.

POLLY: (sincerely) You're so good.

SECRET SHELBY: (muttering) No, he's not.

POLLY: (to herself) Some people are so difficult! I've got to stop having these lunches. Whatever Shelby and I once had in common has completely dried up and blown away. And he's too old to have an imaginary friend.

(PUBLIC SHELBY returns with a large bottle of water)

SECRET SHELBY: Just what the doctor ordered.

POLLY: Does it have bubbles? I so love bubbles.

PUB. SHELBY: Sorry, no bubbles.

POLLY: Does it have iodine?

PUB. SHELBY: I don't think so.

POLLY: You don't remember my iodine deficiency?

SECRET SHELBY: (to PUBLIC SHELBY) What's the *matter* with you?!

POLLY: Well, it's gotten much worse, let me tell you.

PUB. SHELBY: Shall I pour?

SECRET SHELBY: Pour away! (Holds out glass)

POLLY: It's my thyroid. It's stopped functioning. My doctor can't for the life of him figure it out.

SECRET SHELBY: You used it too much.

PUB. SHELBY: Is it possible to abuse it?

POLLY: My thyroid?

POLLY: I didn't use my thyroid any more than anybody else!

SECRET SHELBY: Sometimes parts of the body just go. Why not your *face*?!

PUB. SHELBY: Maybe it just wears out.

POLLY: Not the thyroid!

SECRET SHELBY: Like friendships. (exasperated) Oh, this place!

POLLY: I'll have to ask my doctor about that. But you know what's really bothering me? (Both SHELBYs are eating crackers, drinking water, obviously not asking POLLY for more information) Well, let me tell you! I can see that you're all ears. Just keep eating. It's my treat! It's my . . . How can I put this delicately? It's . . . it's . . .

BOTH SHELBYs: What?

POLLY: My ass-crack.

(The two SHELBYs spew crackers and water from their mouths)

PUB. SHELBY: Polly!

POLLY: Well, I don't know what else to call it. Upper derriere?

SECRET SHELBY: You could have left it vague.

PUB. SHELBY: There's a lot to be said for euphemism.

POLLY: Yes, but we're among friends. And I don't know what else to call it. Mine's gotten quite infected. First it was red and now it's turned all yellow.

SECRET SHELBY: Meanwhile, turning a new page . . .

POLLY: With some greenish sections. I take this mirror I bought in Vienna on one of my trips and hold it out like this. (Demonstrates) And then I can see it blown up. Yellow with green.

SECRET SHELBY: How colorful.

POLLY: It's not all the way down. It's just along the upper edge. Is there a medical term for that area? I can't think of what that might be.

SECRET SHELBY: Ass-crack will have to suffice.

PUB. SHELBY: Polly, we're eating.

POLLY: I know, but it's been there for months. It's not quite a fungus, I don't think.

SECRET SHELBY: Well, I should hope not!

POLLY: And it's not quite a rash either.

SECRET SHELBY: (to PUBLIC SHELBY) *Whatever* could it be?!
The medical community waits and holds its
collective breath!

POLLY: It's sort of crusty, but when I pick at it, it won't flake off.

SECRET SHELBY: Persistent little bugger.

POLLY: I bought this thing. I don't know the name of it. It's got a long handle and these thin, finger-like things on the end. What is that called!? It's on the box.

SECRET SHELBY: An ass-crack scratcher?

PUB. SHELBY: (laughs out loud)

POLLY: (to PUBLIC SHELBY) I suppose it's funny to you, but not to me. And I have to confess I've been having high-volume flatulence as well.

SECRET SHELBY: And just when I thought it couldn't get any better!

POLLY: I hope this isn't too much information, but it's not your everyday, garden-variety flatulence. So, siree! I had it checked, and it's . . . it's . . .

SECRET SHELBY: A very special Polly-only flatulence.

POLLY: My doctor says that he's never seen anything quite like it. It can be extremely painful at times. I almost double over.

PUB. SHELBY: You poor thing.

SECRET SHELBY: To say nothing of the poor people behind you!

POLLY: Other people seem to think it's amusing, but my stomach gets all distended and bloated, and I think I'm about to have a baby elephant. And then suddenly it just all goes away.

SECRET SHELBY: Sort of hysterical elephant flatulence?

PUB. SHELBY: (to SECRET SHELBY) Do I dare ask where it goes?

SECRET SHELBY: Don't ask.

POLLY: I'm glad you asked. I know this isn't a very pleasant topic while we're dining. But we're not actually eating yet. Well, you're sort of eating, but I'm not eating. Anyway, the best part is that when the flatulence disappears, there is absolutely, positively no odor. None whatsoever.

PUB. SHELBY: You're sure about that?

POLLY: My dear, I'm right there when it disappears. Nothing, *nada*, caput.

SECRET SHELBY: So you're claiming your farts don't smell? Have I got that right?

POLLY: I do have to confess that sometimes it does make a whooshing sound. Like this. (Makes a whooshing noise with her mouth)
No. I think it's actually more like this. (Makes a different whooshing sound) Can you believe it?

SECRET SHELBY: We believe, Polly. We more than believe!

POLLY: It's not something to be ashamed of. I've asked people around me. And they say, "What was that noise?" And I say, "I have a medical condition." And they say, "I heard it, but I didn't smell a thing." I don't think our waiter is coming. Why don't we leave? (Gets up)

SECRET SHELBY: But our pizza! And the witty luncheon conversation!

POLLY: Well, I'm leaving. I don't know about you. I just don't feel like food today. (Moves away) But it's been fun! Why don't we do this again in a couple of weeks?

PUB. SHELBY: We may be dead by then.

POLLY: Oh, you're so amusing, Shelby. Now you've got to stay alive until next time. I so enjoy our times together. But I feel something building up inside me. It must be that half-cracker I ate. Got to run! Got to run! Ta-ta! (Runs off)

SECRET SHELBY/

PUB. SHELBY: (as one) She's *your* friend! Not mine!

BLACKOUT

Scene 3

(Lights up on JEANETTE in wheelchair, on telephone.
The two SHELBYs enter the group-home)

JEANETTE: (on telephone to somebody) Hello?

PUB. SHELBY: (entering) There's my gal! (Hugs sister)

JEANETTE: (hard of hearing) *Who's* gal?

PUB. SHELBY: Did I interrupt your phone call?

JEANETTE: (on telephone) *Who?* Who is this? (No answer)

PUB. SHELBY: Who are you talking to?

JEANETTE: (to PUBLIC SHELBY) Who are you?

PUB. SHELBY: Your baby brother.

JEANETTE: No.

PUB. SHELBY: I came to visit.

JEANETTE: You put me in here, didn't you? I ought to hit you.
(Puts down phone. Waves cane)

SECRET SHELBY: You couldn't take care of yourself anymore.

JEANETTE: I'm calling the police! (Picks up phone again)

PUB. SHELBY: No police, no police! (Takes the telephone from her)

JEANETTE: Where's my Tino? Where is he?

PUB. SHELBY: *He* hasn't been around, I hope.

JEANETTE: You drove Tino away, you prick!

PUB. SHELBY: (changing the topic) Do you know that you haven't been
paying your bills?

JEANETTE: How would you know?

PUB. SHELBY: I checked your bank account online. You hadn't paid
anything for four months.

JEANETTE: I did too! If I'm not paying my bills, why isn't anybody
complaining?

SECRET SHELBY: People *are* complaining!

PUB. SHELBY: You had notices on the kitchen counter when I
was there. I thought that we agreed you would
write some checks.

JEANETTE: You were in my house?

PUB. SHELBY: About four weeks ago.

JEANETTE: Here? Or my house?

SECRET SHELBY: Jesus Christ!

PUB. SHELBY: Don't you remember? We went out to breakfast.

JEANETTE: I don't think so. I eat in here. I can't afford to eat out.
I don't even have a dress.

PUB. SHELBY: You have plenty coming in every month, Jeanette.
More than enough to live on. But you have to pay
your bills.

JEANETTE: Well, I earned it! I typed for Generic Motors for thirty-two
years.

SECRET SHELBY: Without a single promotion, because you're so stupid!

PUB. SHELBY: I know you earned it. That's why you shouldn't give it
away.

JEANETTE: I don't give it away! What are you talking about? You're
goofy.

SECRET SHELBY: You give it away to Tino, because he "loves" you!

JEANETTE: He doesn't know where I keep my money.

SECRET SHELBY: Oh, no, never!

PUB. SHELBY: Jeanette, anybody can see where you keep your money.
You're always misplacing your wallet.

JEANETTE: Well, Tino helps me find it. He loves me.

SECRET SHELBY: You bet he does!

PUB SHELBY: Why do you take out so much cash at one time?

JEANETTE: I guess I need it.

SECRET SHELBY: Tino needs it to get his green card.

PUB. SHELBY: How can you spend more than you take in?

JEANETTE: Why don't you just leave me alone? If I want your help,
I'll ask for it.

PUB. SHELBY: Because you don't seem to realize that you need help.
Tino is robbing you blind.

JEANETTE: I hide my money. And Tino has no idea where it is.

SECRET SHELBY: Jeanette, you're withdrawing cash from your
checking account every three or four days.
There's no need. You can pay with a check.
Or use your debit card.

JEANETTE: I don't have a debit card.

PUB. SHELBY: I showed it to you when I was here last time. We
paid for your groceries with it.

JEANETTE: We did?

PUB. SHELBY: Remember, we swiped it together.

JEANETTE: You did?

PUB. SHELBY: We did it together. About a month ago.

JEANETTE: Does it look like a credit card?

SECRET SHELBY: My god, she's a vegetable!

PUB. SHELBY: That's it!

JEANETTE: Let me look in my wallet.

PUB. SHELBY: Do you have it there?

JEANETTE: I'll get it. (She gets up from wheelchair, wanders offstage,
using her cane)

SECRET SHELBY: I want out!

(Both SHELBYs wait for a while)

PUB. SHELBY: (calling) Jeanette? (No answer)

SECRET SHELBY: Hey, Einstein!

PUB. SHELBY: *Shhh!*

SECRET SHELBY: She was never very smart even before she got demented!

PUB. SHELBY: Shelby!

(The sister remains off-stage)

PUB. SHELBY: (calling) Did you find your wallet?

(There is no reply. He waits patiently)

SECRET SHELBY: Where the fuck are you?

(She wanders back in without the wallet)

JEANETTE: (picks up the telephone) What was I looking for? Did the phone ring?

SECRET SHELBY: Oh, God!

PUB. SHELBY: (patiently) Your wallet.

JEANETTE: Oh. It must be upstairs.

PUB. SHELBY: Your debit card is inside your wallet. Use that and only that. Or write a check if you have to. But nothing to Tino.

JEANETTE: I keep good track on my checks.

SECRET SHELBY: Like a bank!

PUB. SHELBY: I'm sorry, but you don't. No one can make head nor tail out of that checkbook.

JEANETTE: Why don't you mind your own business!? I ran my life for all these years without any help from you. Why are you butting in now?

SECRET SHELBY: Because you're brain dead.

PUB. SHELBY: Because Deelie asked me to.

JEANETTE: Never mind what Deelie wants. She's not the boss of me.
She took my car away from me.

PUB. SHELBY: Jeannette, you can't drive any longer.

JEANETTE: I sure can! I didn't have any problems. I had that brand new
Buick too. That brat made me give it up. I hate her!

SECRET SHELBY: You had three accidents.

JEANETTE: Yeah, people hit me. I didn't hit them!

PUB. SHELBY: Because you can't control a car anymore. Your eyesight,
your hearing.

SECRET SHELBY: Are in the toilet.

JEANETTE: (to PUBLIC SHELBY) Wait until you're my age! You
won't be so high and mighty then, Mister!

PUB. SHELBY: I am not being high and mighty. I am trying to help you
live your life, safely

SECRET SHELBY: For as long as it lasts.

JEANETTE: You're just like Deelie, trying to order me around. I can take
care of myself. I've managed so far, quite well, thank you.

PUB. SHELBY: You're losing control, Jeannette, and you need to
acknowledge it.

JEANETTE: If I'm in so much trouble, how come I don't know about it?
I told Deelie to stop bothering me. If I need her help, I'll let
her know. She's a pain in the butt. She's going through the
menopause. That's what wrong with her. And she takes it
out on me. She took away my brand new Buick. And now
I can't get around anywhere. Unless Tino drives me.

SECRET SHELBY: Do you think she and Tino have sex?

PUB. SHELBY: (ignoring the other SHELBY) There's a van service.
Remember, when we were at your doctor's, he mentioned it.

JEANETTE: I haven't been to no doctor. I can't afford to go. And I don't
have no dress.

PUB. SHELBY: We went together.

JEANETTE: I have to take a taxi to get anywhere, and it costs an arm
and a leg.

PUB. SHELBY: Do you remember what your doctor said when you told
him you still wanted to drive?

JEANETTE: No.

SECRET SHELBY: He laughed till he peed himself.

PUB. SHELBY: He said that you should go and take the driver's test.
If *they* say you can drive, then you can drive.

JEANETTE: Dr. Garcia said that?

PUB. SHELBY: He did.

JEANETTE: He's gay, did you know that? He used to be a woman, but
now he's a man.

SECRET SHELBY: *What?!*

PUB. SHELBY: I don't think so, Jeannette.

JEANETTE: He had a complete sex change, everything.

PUB. SHELBY: I met him, remember. I don't think he used to be a woman.

JEANETTE: He told me that!

PUB. SHELBY: He may be gay, but I don't believe he used to be a woman.

JEANETTE: Yeah, he used to be a woman. He's gay.

PUB. SHELBY: Jeannette, not everybody who's gay used to be a woman.

JEANETTE: He wants to meet you. I told him you were weird. That you talk
to yourself.

SECRET SHELBY: Thanks.

JEANETTE: And you think *I'm* crazy!

SECRET SHELBY: Who's to say?

PUB. SHELBY: We're quite a family.

JEANETTE: Dr. Garcia wants to meet you.

PUB. SHELBY: We met. He had read one of my books.

JEANETTE: Are you famous? How come I've never heard of you?

SECRET SHELBY: I'm more famous than you!

PUB. SHELBY: Whoa. Let's cool down.

JEANETTE: My hairdresser used to be a woman, too. Julio. But I don't
mind. He's very nice, Julio. He comes and picks me up
every Friday and takes me to his shop and does my hair.
He treats me like a queen. He's gay.

PUB. SHELBY: I'm sure he's great. We're all great.

SECRET SHELBY: Does this Julio every 'help' you with your wallet?

JEANETTE: He doesn't usually charge me, either. Once in a while,
I give him \$5 as a tip. He makes me look like a queen.
His name is Julio. He's Mexican.

PUB. SHELBY: I thought you told me he was from Ecuador.

JEANETTE: His boss is Jewish. I don't like her.

PUB. SHELBY: Let's try to clear this up. Is there anybody besides
Julio and Tino who ever came inside your house?

JEANETTE: Peggy's cousin.

PUB. SHELBY: Who?

JEANETTE: Over at the bar, the bartender, Peggy – her sister.

PUB. SHELBY: Is it her sister or her cousin?

JEANETTE: I forget. Wait till you get to my age! You won't be so
hot yourself.

PUB. SHELBY: I'm getting somewhat forgetful already. I am aware of
the problem. Anyway, why does or did this Peggy's
relative come inside your place?

JEANETTE: She cleans for me. She's expensive.

PUB. SHELBY: How much?

JEANETTE: I don't know.

PUB. SHELBY: How often does she come?

JEANETTE: When she feels like it.

PUB. SHELBY: And you pay her cash?

JEANETTE: A lot of money.

PUB. SHELBY: How much cleaning does she do?

JEANETTE: I don't know.

SECRET SHELBY: Well, how long does she stay?

JEANETTE: Until she's finished.

PUB. SHELBY: The whole day?

JEANETTE: An hour.

SECRET SHELBY: You pay her lots of money for one hour of cleaning?

JEANETTE: She hasn't been over for a while. I call her when I need her.
I need to call her.

SECRET SHELBY: She doesn't clean *here*. She used to clean your house.

JENNETTE: Huh?

PUB. SHELBY: You don't need her anymore.

JEANETTE: She talks to me. Nobody talks to me at the bar anymore.

PUB. SHELBY: Why not?

JEANETTE: Because I don't go there anymore! Ha, ha. Got you there!
Did you make them kick me out?

PUB. SHELBY: You were drinking too much, every day. You fell out of
bed drunk and lay on your bedroom floor for two days.

JEANETTE: But Peggy came and got me, didn't she?! They had to break down the door.

PUB. SHELBY: Was that who got you?

JEANETTE: It wasn't Deelie. She's back in Michigan. She can't be bothered. She's going through the menopause.

PUB. SHELBY: Jeannette, that's not fair. Deelie offered to have you move in with her. But you refused.

JEANETTE: I'm not going back to the cold. I had all of that I want. Besides, I don't like her husband. He's Polish. He used to be a woman.

PUB. SHELBY: They both have been nothing but nice to you.

JEANETTE: He's going through the menopause too. He told me I was a cranky bitch.

SECRET SHELBY: Well, maybe you are . . .

PUB SHELBY: (correcting) . . . mistaken.

JEANETTE: He's Polish.

PUB. SHELBY: You're not supposed to say those things anymore.

JEANETTE: What things? He hit Deelie. And he's a womanizer. And do you know what your daughter Zara said to me? "Fuck you, Aunt Jeanette" Is that any way to talk to a relative? "Fuck you, Aunt Jeanette!"

PUB. SHELBY: I don't know about any of those things, but they are not relevant right now. We need to stop your money from disappearing. I don't want the wrong people coming here. Is it possible your cleaning lady had access to your wallet?

JEANETTE: Nobody had my wallet but me!

PUB. SHELBY: That's not true, Jeanette. I was there. I saw how you forgot where your wallet was. I saw you hide money and forget where it was.

JEANETTE: You saw who hide money?

PUB. SHELBY: You.

JEANETTE: You didn't see me hide money.

PUB. SHELBY: You hid some in the Kleenex box on that little table you keep in front of you when you watch television.

JEANETTE: What are you talking about?

PUB. SHELBY: We stuffed \$600 inside the Kleenex box, as a trap to see if your friend Tino or somebody else would take it. And then it was gone. And we couldn't find it. And then the next day suddenly these fives and tens appeared from under the ottoman. Apparently you pulled some tissues out and didn't notice the money coming out with them.

JEANETTE: You're making this up.

PUB. SHELBY: I was there. I saw it with my own eyes.

JEANETTE: You were here?

PUB. SHELBY: I was *there*, last month.

JEANETTE: Why didn't you stop in to visit me?

SECRET SHELBY: I stayed with you!

JEANETTE: I'm moving back to my home. Nobody visits me here. But that's okay. They like me over in Peggy's Bar. I make them laugh. I dance around. I do spins. I'm like their mascot. Or I used to be. I go over there every day. Or I used to. They like me. I'm a big hit there. I'm a very popular person. Or I used to be. Now Tino looks after me. He loves me.

SECRET SHELBY: Did he used to be a woman? I think Tino looks after your money. Or somebody does.

JEANETTE: (to PUBLIC SHELBY) You just don't like Tino because he's a Mexican.

PUB. SHELBY: I couldn't care less if he's Mexican.

JEANETTE: Not all Mexicans steal, you know.

PUB. SHELBY: I'm aware of that. I'm not accusing all Mexicans. Or all Poles. Or all of anything. I'm just trying to find out who took your money. To make sure it doesn't happen again.

JEANETTE: It's my money. I can spend it any way I like. I can give it to Tino, or I can throw it on the floor, or wipe my butt with it! It's my money. At least he cares about me, and that's more than I can say about my goddamned relatives!

BLACKOUT

Scene 4

(Enter POLLY ahead of the two SHELBYs)

POLLY: Wait till you see it! It's fantastic!

PUB. SHELBY: Is it much further?

POLLY: I know it's far, but when I go I want to be just like my aunt, out here in the middle of all this peace and quiet. (Stops) Hear that?

(PUBLIC SHELBY stops and listens too)

POLLY: Isn't that magnificent?

SECRET SHELBY: I don't hear anything.

POLLY: Exactly!

PUB. SHELBY: This is all yours?

POLLY: Thanks to Aunt Sophie's money. Of course I hope I won't be using it for years and years; still, you do have to be prepared.

PUB. SHELBY: But who's going to come all the way out here to visit your grave?

POLLY: Oh, somebody will come – some long-lost relative. But if they don't, they don't, I'll be at rest here among my own two-hundred-and-fifty-acre garden. I am so lucky! Oh, I guess I'm being insensitive. Have you found a job yet?

PUB. SHELBY: No.

POLLY: Come on now! Have you really looked?

PUB. SHELBY: Every day.

POLLY: Well, at least because you're not working, you have time to spend with me. I'll take you to lunch again!

SECRET SHELBY: Can we actually have some food this time?

PUB. SHELBY: You're so good to me, Polly.

POLLY: If your friends won't help, who will?

PUB. SHELBY: True.

POLLY: So you'd better not piss me off, or who knows where you'll be eating lunch! Ha! Ha! I kid! I kid!

SECRET SHELBY: (to PUBLIC SHELBY) Just say no to this bitch!

POLLY: Wait! I need to rest. I can't believe how jet-lagged I am.

PUB. SHELBY: How long have you been back?

POLLY: Two days. Switzerland again! It's my third trip since my inheritance. I'm just so awful!

PUB. SHELBY: I've always wanted to visit Switzerland.

POLLY: To be honest, once you've seen *one* mountain lake . . .
However, I can't seem to stop myself from going. If I'm not careful, I'm going to spend all my money! . . . *Not!*
Okay, I'm ready.

SECRET SHELBY: Dare we ask how her ass-crack is?

POLLY: It's right around here someplace.

(They take several more steps. We see the front of POLLY's mausoleum suggested. It is a burial vault made of fake marble with a front door. There is an iron bar across this door that lifts up)

POLLY: *Voila!*

PUB. SHELBY: It's very impressive.

POLLY: I know it's a lot of tomb for one family, but I'm the last one now, so whatcha gonna do?!

SECRET SHELBY: We can cremate you and scatter your ashes over Switzerland.

PUB. SHELBY: (looking around the side, which is not shown) It's huge.

POLLY: And the best part is that it was on sale. Fifteen percent off for Easter. So naturally I had to grab it.

PUB. SHELBY: Can we see inside? Is your aunt in here?

POLLY: I brought the key. (Takes it from a pocket) *Voila!*

SECRET SHELBY: Fuck *vous!*

POLLY: She's in a side vault inside. Help me with this iron bar, would you? It weighs a ton. It helps keep vandals out. And raccoons. Now I want you to tell me if I ought to re-decorate inside or not. It's got all these high-rise glyphics, or whatever you call them, across the top.

SECRET SHELBY: (to PUB. SHELBY) She means hieroglyphics.

POLLY: (continuing) But I don't really care for them. Okay, are you ready?

PUB. SHELBY: Ready. You're sure she's dead?

POLLY: On the count of three, we move the iron bar together. To tell you the truth, that's why I brought you out here. I tried to inspect this place yesterday, but I couldn't get inside. Hope you're strong! You ready? Counting . . . one . . . two . . . three!

SECRET SHELBY: I'm *not* helping.

(POLLY and PUBLIC SHELBY move the iron bar part way up)

POLLY: No, hold it. *Hold* it! Oh, where's that key?! What did I do with it? Shelby, did you take the key?

SECRET SHELBY: Yeah, I swallow it. The metal prevents ass-crack-itis.

PUB. SHELBY: Not me.

POLLY: Could you please find the key? My arms are breaking. Oh, there's the key on the ground! I must have dropped it. Can you hold this while I get it? Don't let it fall down.

PUB. SHELBY: I think it's too much for one person.

POLLY: Oh, for god's sake, let's let it down then! Watch your hands. Watch your hands! (With difficulty they drop the iron bar back into its slot) Now we're just going to have to lift it again! You could have held it while I got the key. Shelby, sometimes you are absolutely no help whatsoever, I swear!

PUB. SHELBY: Sorry, it's heavy.

POLLY: (snatching the key from the ground) Okay! Got it! Have you bothered to look at the outside of it?

PUB. SHELBY: What about it?

POLLY: It's made from authentic *stones*! From one of those *pheromones* — those Egyptian kings! I forget which number, but it's real, real old. You don't seem to appreciate it.

PUB. SHELBY: How old? It doesn't look that old.

POLLY: Oh, now you're gonna be negative. You can be so negative sometimes, Shelby. Are you saying I got cheated?

PUB. SHELBY: I don't know.

POLLY: Don't ask how much I paid for this! A pretty penny, let me tell you.

PUB. SHELBY: I don't think this is ancient Egyptian.

POLLY: Don't say that! I got a document from the seller!

PUB. SHELBY: Does it really matter if it's genuine or just a reasonable facsimile?

SECRET SHELBY: As long as your body rests in it.

POLLY: I wanted my burial spot to be attractive. I plan to re-do the whole inside and have my ashes in a Greek urinal right in the center. There's even a spot where the morning light shines through and your body lines up with the heavenly spheres! I am counting on that! It will make me one of the Blessed.

SECRET SHELBY: Dear blessed Polly, you are already amazing enough as it is.

POLLY: Too bad I have no more family of my own. They also could have been buried here with me and my aunt. It would be so nice.

PUB. SHELBY: So serene.

SECRET SHELBY: (to PUBLIC SHELBY, pointedly) So isolated.

PUB. SHELBY: Yes, isolated.

POLLY: Do you still want to see the inside? Probably not, since you don't like it!

PUB. SHELBY: Are there any other doors?

POLLY: Not that I know of. Just this one.

SECRET SHELBY: No secret panels? Escape routes? Ask her!

POLLY: Once you're settled in here, you're in for the long haul.

PUB. SHELBY: Are you planning to be mummified?

POLLY: Oh, don't be silly. Cremation is enough. I heard they take your brains out when you're mummified. Who'd want that?

SECRET SHELBY: True. And you have to have some brains to start with!

PUB. SHELBY: All right then, let's move that bar. Do you have that key now?

POLLY: Don't worry. I'm on top of it. (Shows the key) We need to move that bar. Together.

(Together they raise the iron bar and POLLY negotiates around it and inserts the key in the lock)

POLLY: I think I've got it. Wait! It's stuck. (Jiggles the key) Oh, damn, it's stuck. Wait! Wait! I think it's turning. It's probably rusty. But it's turning. I think it's . . . (about the iron bar) Have you got it?

PUB. SHELBY: Just barely. (Manages to stand the iron bar upright)

(Leaving the key in the lock, POLLY bursts through the door and goes out of sight inside the mausoleum)

POLLY: (in an echoing voice) I'm inside!

(Note: All voices *inside* the mausoleum echo)

PUB. SHELBY: Can you see?

POLLY: There's a little light from the door.

PUB. SHELBY: Is there a light switch inside?

POLLY: (with echo) I don't think so. Why would you need a light switch if you leave the door open? I'm not paying no electricity bill.

SECRET SHELBY: Penny wise, pound foolish.

POLLY: (with echo) There's enough light. Come on inside.

PUB. SHELBY: I'll stay out here.

POLLY: Oh, don't be such a sissy! Shelby's a sissy! Shelby's a sissy!

SECRET SHELBY: I'll go in! (Steps inside the tomb)

POLLY: (hearing a sound, with echo) Did you hear something?
Was that a rat?

SECRET SHELBY: (stepping back out) All right, enough with the rats!

POLLY: (with echo) There are no rats in my tomb. It was probably a squirrel.

PUB. SHELBY: I don't really need to see the inside.

POLLY: (with echo) Oh, for god's sake, Shelby! I brought you out here to see this. So come see it! I need to rest a minute. I am so jet-lagged I could just lay down here and go to sleep for days.

SECRET SHELBY: Be careful of what you wish for, Polly.

(PUBLIC SHELBY steps inside the tomb)

POLLY: (with echo) Can you see it? Isn't it pretty? Is it that hard for you to give a compliment? So what do you think? Do you like it?

PUB. SHELBY: (with echo) It's my first mausoleum.

POLLY: (with echo) But do you like it?

PUB. SHELBY: (with echo) It's hard to see much.

POLLY: (with echo) You think it's hideous, don't you?!

PUB. SHELBY: (with echo) I didn't say that.

SECRET SHELBY: Plus shoddy, cheap, and fake.

POLLY: (stepping outside) You can't even say something nice about my tomb! What kind of friend are you? You know what? I don't even think I want to have lunch with you.

SECRET SHELBY: If it means having to compliment your ugly, over-priced tomb, I don't care!

PUB. SHELBY: (with echo) I care. I'm hungry.

SECRET SHELBY: Where's your backbone, your integrity?

POLLY: And to think I was going to ask you if you wanted to be buried here with me. You're my best friend in the whole world, and I wanted to share eternity with you. But not now!

(PUBLIC SHELBY comes out of the tomb)

PUB. SHELBY: I'm sorry if I offended you, Polly.

SECRET SHELBY: Oh, for god's sake! You don't want to spend eternity with her! Lunch with her is an eternity!

POLLY: Oh, don't go trying to be nice now. You can't take back what you said. One would think he or she could count on a so-called friend to enjoy some new real estate with you. But not with you, Shelby, not with you.

SECRET SHELBY: Polly, stop it, or I'm going to kill you.

POLLY: I need to catch my breath.

PUB. SHELBY: It's a little stuffy in there.

POLLY: It is not!

SECRET SHELBY: The only way I'm going in there is if I'm dead.

POLLY: You barely looked at it. Why don't you go all the way in and look? We're probably never coming back here. And my aunt is not a zombie, either!

PUB. SHELBY: Okay, I'll look. (Steps just inside the door)

SECRET SHELBY: You're not planning some funny business with my buddy here, are you?

POLLY: (laughs maniacally) Ah! Shelby trapped in the tomb, no one around to hear but the rats! My zombie aunt feeding on his flesh!

SECRET SHELBY: You're not funny. *I'm* funny!

PUB. SHELBY: (with echo) Polly?!

POLLY: You just don't have a sense of humor. That's what wrong with you, Shelby. You've never had a sense of humor. Just one of the things wrong with you. What if I locked you in? (Fiddles with the iron bar) Now that would be funny, wouldn't it?!

SECRET SHELBY: What are you doing?

POLLY: At last Shelby falls into my trap! (Trying to lower the iron bar, unsuccessfully) Shit! Or, as they say in parts of Switzerland, *merde!*

SECRET SHELBY: Get out here. She's crazy!

(PUBLIC SHELBY darts out of the tomb)

PUB. SHELBY: Hey, what's going on? Were you really trying to lock me in?

SECRET SHELBY: I think she was serious.

POLLY: I couldn't move the iron bar by myself. Otherwise you would have been . . .

SECRET SHELBY: Rat bait. Maybe zombie bait too.

POLLY: I kid! I kid!

PUB. SHELBY: Are you all there, Polly? Your mind is . . .

POLLY: Oh, so I'm dumb, is that it?

PUB. SHELBY: That's not quite what I said.

POLLY: Are you saying that because I'm a woman?

SECRET SHELBY: Oh, crap. No, I'm saying it because you *used* to be a woman!

POLLY: Well, if you think I have to stand here and listen to this, you've got another tinkle coming. I can buy better friends than you any day. And day!

PUB. SHELBY: They may just not be genuine friends.

POLLY: You think you're a genuine friend? I've got news for you. I met some people in Switzerland who I like much, much better than I ever liked you. And you know what? They don't bellyache night and day about their problems like some people!

SECRET SHELBY: Maybe they don't have any problems?

POLLY: You probably think they don't have any problems. You probably think I don't have any problems. Well, I do! I am trying to get a private cabin on this river cruise on the Elbe for the fall, and they're all booked up! Do you think I want to share a cabin? Maybe last year I had to, but not this year. And not any year until the day I die. And do you have any idea what the Euro is against the dollar right now?! It's outrageous. I can barely afford to travel *anywhere* anymore!

PUB. SHELBY: Then maybe you shouldn't travel.

POLLY: Don't tell me what to do! Who are you to tell me? You can't even find a job. All I hear about is how poor you are. Poor you. Poor you. God, it's sickening! I can barely enjoy my trips because when I tell you about them you're so grim, so envious. You'd think you'd be happy for a friend. But no! What do I hear all the time – you can't find a job, you're running out of money. You! You! You! It's all about you. You're simply no fun any more, Shelby, no fun whatsoever. Come to think of it, you never were all that much fun.

PUB. SHELBY: I think you've said enough, Polly. If this friendship is to survive.

POLLY: You call this a friendship? I don't. It's too one-sided. My having to put up with your lame excuses. Don't you have a relative who can die and leave you some money, or something? Life is too short. I just want to have happy times. To tell you the truth, I've come to dread our lunches together. You never pay. You eat a ton. You don't really listen.

SECRET SHELBY: I listen, believe me.

POLLY: You didn't even remember that I went to Switzerland, when I had mentioned it to you, I'm sure. A real friend would remember. Oh, I suppose we had some good times in the past, when you had a job, when you had money. I can even recall a few times when you were almost fun. But those days are long gone, believe you me!

PUB. SHELBY: The times are such that –

POLLY: I don't want to hear it! Times are always bad. Pull yourself up by your bootstraps. When the times get tough, get tough with the times. I hear McDonald's is hiring. The next thing I'll have to hear is that you're losing your house because you can't make the goddamned payments. Well, you should have planned ahead. You didn't really need a two-bedroom place. I told you that when you bought it. But no! You had to have two bedrooms and one-and-a-half baths. You never use that half-bath by the front door. And you should have gotten a mortgage you could afford. I did! That's the thing about you, Shelby! You're irresponsible!

PUB. SHELBY: And bankrupt.

POLLY: Morally bankrupt. And another thing, since we're talking.

SECRET SHELBY: We're talking?

POLLY: You're not nearly as smart as you think you are. Oh, I know I use the wrong word upon occasion, and I see your little grimaces, gremlins, or whatever the hell your call 'em. You're very condescending. You think you're better than I am. Well, you're not. And now I have a whole lot of money and you don't. And there's a reason for everything in this life. That's why I was left that money by my aunt. A reason!

PUB. SHELBY: Yes?

POLLY: You don't really think I'm going to give you my money, do you?

PUB. SHELBY: Just some of it?

POLLY: For god's sake, how can you be so abstruse!? I'm not giving you a penny. You're an asshole. A judgmental, nasty, put-downy, arrogant, selfish, insensitive, really quite vicious person, now that I see you as you truly are. And you know what? You're not my friend anymore. In fact, you're an anti-friend! So there!

SECRET SHELBY (to PUBLIC SHELBY) I guess she told you!

PUB. SHELBY: (to POLLY) Do you care to hear my side of all this?

POLLY: Not in the least.

SECRET SHELBY: *Nada?*

POLLY: I've argued over this long enough. I'll drive you home, but then I really never want to see you ever again. You have destroyed our friendship.

PUB. SHELBY: Polly –

POLLY: Just shut it! I've said what I have to say. Let's just close up this place and leave. I can tell you don't even want to be here. Let me check and then we'll leave.

(POLLY goes inside the tomb)

(The two SHELBYs turn their heads toward each other, slowly, conspiratorially)

POLLY: (putting her head back out, from inside) Oh, no you don't! I wouldn't put it past you to try and close the door on me. Fortunately, I'm not that stupid.

SECRET SHELBY: (to PUBLIC SHELBY) Shelby?

PUB. SHELBY: Shall we?

(POLLY tries to come out of the tomb, but the two SHELBYs grab her and shove her back inside. She falls down. They work fast to close the door and secure the iron bar)

(PUBLIC SHELBY turns the key in the lock and removes the key)

POLLY: (with faint echo) Shelby? . . . Shelby?!

PUB. SHELBY: I kid, Polly. I kid.

(The two SHELBYs take two handkerchiefs and wipe all the fingerprints from the iron bar and anything else they have touched)

(When finished, the two SHELBYs shake hands and walk offstage)

SECRET SHELBY: (stopping, turning back) Is it quiet enough for you, Polly?

POLLY: (even fainter echo) Shelby!

BLACKOUT

Scene 5

(PUBLIC SHELBY is sitting in a chair, reading a newspaper)

(Enter SECRET SHELBY)

SECRET SHELBY: Is there anything in the news about it?

PUB. SHELBY: I'm looking. (Searches through the rest of the newspaper)
Here's something, on page eight. (Reads) "Woman Found
in Coma in Her Own Tomb." I think that passes for irony.

SECRET SHELBY: Coma! Damn it, she's not dead. Read it to me!

PUB. SHELBY: (glancing at the article, summarizing) Polly Lewis,
prominent realtor — she wasn't prominent! — found
in a coma in her recently purchased mausoleum in
Glen Meadows Cemetery in unincorporated Valdez
County . . . apparently locked inside when the iron bar
to the mausoleum fell after she entered the tomb. . . .
Suffered heart attack and suffocation.

SECRET SHELBY: Anything else?

PUB. SHELBY: Police are investigating possible foul play.

SECRET SHELBY: Anything about fingerprints?

PUB. SHELBY: (checking article) No. But they wouldn't put that in
the paper.

SECRET SHELBY: We should have left Polly's fingerprints on the iron bar.

PUB. SHELBY: How would we have separated them from mine?

SECRET SHELBY: Yeah, it looks funny with no fingerprints at all there. I hate being like most jerks, who can't plan five minutes ahead.

PUB. SHELBY: If she wakes up, they won't need fingerprints.

SECRET SHELBY: Her word against yours.

PUB. SHELBY: Attempted murder! *Why* did the fingerprints disappear? Somebody wiped them off.

SECRET SHELBY: At least you weren't a wimp as usual.

PUB. SHELBY: I'm not so sure you're good for me.

SECRET SHELBY: I'm the best thing that ever happened to you. Maybe she'll die, and you'll be off the hook.

PUB. SHELBY: Polly was bad, but she didn't deserve to die.

SECRET SHELBY: Most people deserve to die. Next time we'll do it right.

PUB. SHELBY: There won't be a next time.

SECRET SHELBY: You never know.

PUB. SHELBY: If we get away with this, and I stress *if*, we're never coming close to doing something like this again.

SECRET SHELBY: (about the news story) Anything about the tomb door being locked from outside?

PUB. SHELBY: Obviously Polly did not lock herself in.

SECRET SHELBY: Yes. Does it say anything about that? Never mind. The cops wouldn't release that bit of information.

PUB. SHELBY: What did you do with the key?

SECRET SHELBY: I thought you took it.

PUB. SHELBY: I didn't take it. Did we leave it in the door?

SECRET SHELBY: Did we? I'm supposedly the hot head. But maybe not an air head? (Produces the key to the tomb) (fake surprise)
Oh, what's this?!

PUB. SHELBY: Oh, thank God! . . . Or should we have left it there?

SECRET SHELBY: We'll get rid of it. Trust me.

PUB. SHELBY: Now there's this key linking us directly with Polly.

SECRET SHELBY: Well, you wanted to take her car, with our DNA all over it.

PUB. SHELBY: But she drove us other times. I don't think they can pinpoint fibers and such that closely. Can they?

SECRET SHELBY: Probably not. Just don't panic. (Hands him the key)

PUB. SHELBY: The police no doubt will want to interview her friends, colleagues.

SECRET SHELBY: Have they called you?

PUB. SHELBY: Not yet.

(A telephone rings)

PUB. SHELBY: Oh, my God!

(It rings again)

SECRET SHELBY: Answer it.

PUB. SHELBY: You answer it!

SECRET SHELBY: I don't exist. Just be calm. And don't be an idiot and confess!

(The telephone rings a third time)

PUB. SHELBY: (answering) Hello. . . . Yes, this is Shelby Green. (covering the mouthpiece, to SECRET SHELBY) It's the police. (Listens) . . . Yes, I heard that Polly was found. (Listens) Yes, she is a friend, sort of.

SECRET SHELBY: (Coughs, waves that that is not a good answer)

PUB. SHELBY: By that I mean that I haven't seen as much of her lately.
Not as much as I would like. (Listens)

(SECRET SHELBY puts a finger in throat to gag)

PUB. SHELBY: Is she still in a coma? (Listens) . . . She still is.

SECRET SHELBY: Are you a suspect?

PUB. SHELBY: (Waves at SECRET SHELBY in dismissal) Is there
any particular reason you are calling me? (Listens)
I see. . . . I see. (Listens) No, we wouldn't mind
answering a few questions. (Listens) In person?
When would be convenient? (Shrugs questioningly
toward SECRET SHELBY)

SECRET SHELBY: (Shrugs back)

PUB. SHELBY: Today is okay.

SECRET SHELBY: Make it tomorrow. We need to think this through.

PUB. SHELBY: Could we schedule that for tomorrow instead? (Listens)
Could you call back later with directions? (Listens)
The Park Branch downtown. Sure, we know where
that is. Not that we've been there before!

SECRET SHELBY: (Waves arms because the male SHELBY is sounding
guilty) No!

PUB. SHELBY: (on telephone) Okay . . . Okay . . . We'll be there at
three o'clock tomorrow. Goodbye. And . . . and that's
terrible news about Polly. (Hangs up)

SECRET SHELBY: Why in the hell did you agree to go there?

PUB. SHELBY: What was I supposed to say — no? That wouldn't look
suspicious now, would it!?

SECRET SHELBY: I knew we should have planned this better! What is
wrong with us?!

PUB. SHELBY: We didn't plan to kill Polly! It was spontaneous!

SECRET SHELBY: I knew the first time I saw the tomb she was going to wind up there, if I had anything to do with it.

PUB. SHELBY: That was just a thought. I already miss Polly.

SECRET SHELBY: Oh, fuck!

PUB. SHELBY: She wasn't that bad. Not enough to kill her.

SECRET SHELBY: She should have been killed a long time ago.
With a stake through her ass-crack!

PUB. SHELBY: We shouldn't have locked the door with the key.
Polly couldn't have done that herself.

SECRET SHELBY: We should have left the key there. Wait! Polly could have left the key in the lock when she opened the tomb – and it swung shut!

PUB. SHELBY: And the key turned in the lock?

SECRET SHELBY: So maybe Polly could have locked herself in from inside?

PUB. SHELBY: Then why didn't she unlock herself once she discovered her predicament?

SECRET SHELBY: She panicked, in the dark. She fumbled at the lock; she . . . she . . .

PUB. SHELBY: Then the key would be on the floor, inside.

SECRET SHELBY: Right. Damn. But, no, we had to lock it from outside.
What were you thinking?

PUB. SHELBY: I froze up.

SECRET SHELBY: That's why you have to plan these things!

PUB. SHELBY: Trust me, when I murder you, I'll plan it!

SECRET SHELBY: Believe me, I'll get there first.

PUB. SHELBY: We can't turn on each other now. We'll fall apart and the police will catch us.

SECRET SHELBY: Okay, let's practice our answers, to be sure we're on the same page. (as detective) Did you or did you not accompany Polly Lewis to her tomb on the 17th?

PUB. SHELBY: (hesitating) . . . Ah . . .

SECRET SHELBY: There can't be any hesitation! You were either there or you weren't!

PUB. SHELBY: Okay, okay. . . . I . . . *wasn't*. Right?

SECRET SHELBY: Unless somebody saw you there. A gardener or a care-taker or somebody. Or Polly wakes up.

SECRET SHELBY: (as detective) Even though you were not there, as you say, how do you imagine that Polly Lewis got locked in?

PUB. SHELBY: (thinking hard) Ah . . . I have no idea.

SECRET SHELBY: (as detective) Surely someone locked the door on Ms. Lewis from the outside.

PUB. SHELBY: Ah . . .

SECRET SHELBY: (as detective, suddenly) Do you still have the key?

PUB. SHELBY: Of course I don't have the key. I was never there. Why would I have the key?

SECRET SHELBY: Good! Now we've got to get rid of this key.
(Points toward it)

PUB. SHELBY: You think?!

SECRET SHELBY: Don't be sarcastic. It's not you.

PUB. SHELBY: What do you suggest that we do with the key?

SECRET SHELBY: We don't toss it in the garbage. That's the first place they'll look.

PUB. SHELBY: We can't burn it.

SECRET SHELBY: Whatever you do, don't bring it to the police station with you.

PUB. SHELBY: Will they search me?

SECRET SHELBY: They will if they arrest you!

PUB. SHELBY: A key's not that big. What if we throw it off a bridge?

SECRET SHELBY: They can dredge for it.

PUB. SHELBY: Bury it somewhere? We could walk a couple of miles from here and dig a hole and drop the key in and simply walk away.

SECRET SHELBY: They couldn't trace it to you. Unless you're seen digging.

PUB. SHELBY: And dropping.

SECRET SHELBY: This is hard!

PUB. SHELBY: Harder than the actual crime.

SECRET SHELBY: She's not even dead yet.

PUB. SHELBY: If she comes out of her coma, she'll press charges.

SECRET SHELBY: So you locked her in the tomb. It was a practical joke.

PUB. SHELBY: She almost died.

SECRET SHELBY: She should have carried a spare key.

PUB. SHELBY: She should have been a better friend. I would not have been tempted.

SECRET SHELBY: Let's face it. She was horrible, and the world is a better place with her dead, or at least in a coma. Eat worms, Polly! (The two high-five each other in celebration)

PUB. SHELBY: Now what about the key?

SECRET SHELBY: How's this? What if we go visit your sister and hide the key in her stuff? She has no connection with Polly, has never even met her. A key in your sister's purse will go unnoticed, but we'll know where it is should we ever need it.

PUB. SHELBY: We could get my sister to touch it. If the key is ever discovered, they'll think she did it.

SECRET SHELBY: She's too weak to move an iron bar, among other things.

PUB. SHELBY: Haven't you heard of sudden bursts of surprising strength?

SECRET SHELBY: Not from your Sis. Also no motive to hurt Polly. Of course she's nuts! How about random rage?

PUB. SHELBY: Now you're just being silly.

SECRET SHELBY: Even I get tired.

PUB. SHELBY: Well, we can't be tired! That's when they get you!

SECRET SHELBY: Okay, so suppose we don't try to pin the crime – if indeed it was a crime; why not a boon to society? – on our dear senile relative. Let's just put the key in her belongings, undetected, very unobtrusively, with no staff around, with Sis out of it as usual. It will never even be noticed.

PUB. SHELBY: I think just throwing it away might be better. No connection to us whatsoever.

SECRET SHELBY: But never knowing for sure if it will turn up. I like that if it's with your sister, you can check on it whenever you want. Then, when she dies, it will be thrown out with all her stuff. Gone, poof, forgotten! End of key.

PUB. SHELBY: It's worth a try, I suppose.

SECRET SHELBY: It's goddamned genius is what it is!

PUB. SHELBY: I don't know if I'd go that far.

SECRET SHELBY: You got a better plan?

PUB. SHELBY: Not at the moment. But I think –

SECRET SHELBY: Then shut up and let's do it. By the way, you got a parking ticket on your car.

BLACKOUT

Scene 6

(SIS's group-home, her private room. JEANETTE is in bed)

(Enter the two SHELBYs)

BOTH SHELBYs: Hi, Sis!

JEANETTE: Who are you? (yelling) Somebody's in my room! (She hides under the covers)

PUB. SHELBY: Whoa! Whoa! Sis, it's Shelby.

SECRET SHELBY: (punning under her breath) What Shelby Shelby.

PUB. SHELBY: What?

SECRET SHELBY: Nothing.

JEANETTE: (still under the covers) Somebody help me!

PUB. SHELBY: (going to the door, speaking to the unseen staff)
My sister's just a little confused today. Everything is fine in here.

JEANETTE: (her head showing) Who's confused? Me? You're confused.
You don't know whether you're a man or a woman. You schizo!

PUB. SHELBY: Maybe so, maybe so. How have you been, Sis?

JEANETTE: Don't let my son, Jimbo, come here. He wants to fuck me.

SECRET SHELBY: No, he doesn't. *Nobody* wants to fuck you.

JEANETTE: Wants to pound into me, up one side and down the other.

PUB. SHELBY: Jimbo's dead, remember? He died three years ago.

JEANETTE: Then why does he want to fuck me?

PUB. SHELBY: He doesn't. He never did. Something got confused.

JEANETTE: He said he wants to come out here and take care of me,
but I know what he really wants.

PUB. SHELBY: I hope you don't say these things to the staff.

JEANETTE: Why are you defending Jimbo? He said, "Mom, I'm horny for you."

SECRET SHELBY: He did not, you crazy old loon!

JEANETTE: Did you say something?

PUB. SHELBY: No.

JEANETTE: I think you whispered something.

PUB. SHELBY: (to SECRET SHELBY) I think she's on to you.

SECRET SHELBY: I'm real scared.

JEANETTE: I'm still a very attractive person. Why wouldn't he want to fuck me? But we can't have that in the group-home here. They got mad at me because I slipped into Mr. Overmeyer's bed the other night. Damn fools!

PUB. SHELBY: You did what?

JEANETTE: He wanted me, I know that. I'm still a very attractive woman. Can you say as much?

SECRET SHELBY: You're so right. We can't hold a candle next to you – although I'd like to. Where's a candle?
(Looks around)

JEANETTE: You need to pull yourself together. I always said that you'd go off the deep end someday. Not being quite right in the head runs in our family. Don't you have a daughter? What's her name . . . ah . . . ah . . .

PUB. SHELBY: Zara.

JEANETTE: What kind of name is that? Foreign? Does she want to fuck you?

PUB. SHELBY: Of course not!

JEANETTE: Well, Jimbo has a big boner for yours truly.

SECRET SHELBY: Let's change the subject to something pleasant. How's your thieving lover, Tino?

JEANETTE: Tino came by to visit.

PUB. SHELBY: What?! I told the staff not to let that bastard in.

JEANETTE: He snuck through my window.

PUB. SHELBY: He's stealing your money!

JEANETTE: He's the only person who cares about me. Except for Jimbo,
and that's not the kind of love any mother wants to have.
"He said, "Mom, next time I'm there I'm taking you to bed."

SECRET SHELBY: You people must come from some kind of ancient
Greek stock.

PUB. SHELBY: Or maybe some kind of lead poisoning? You're right.
Something's off.

SECRET SHELBY: Where do you think, for the key?

PUB. SHELBY: The little pocket at the top of her suitcase?

SECRET SHELBY: Can you distract her?

JEANETTE: What are you whispering about?

PUB. SHELBY: Your suitcase. I was wondering if you still have it here.

SECRET SHELBY: We might want to take you with us on a vacation.

JEANETTE: I'm not going with you anywhere. You just want to get
into my pants.

SECRET SHELBY: Jesus!

JEANETTE: Jesus wants to fuck me too.

SECRET SHELBY: Well, don't let him!

PUB. SHELBY: Is your suitcase handy?

JEANETTE: I think it's underneath the bed. Unless it's gone.

PUB. SHELBY: Well, let's take a look and see if it's suitable for
our vacation.

JEANETTE: Mr. Overmeyer smells old. Where we going? He can't come.
Can we go now? I'm going out of my mind in this place.

PUB. SHELBY: This place is nice.

JEANETTE: Easy for you to say.

SECRET SHELBY: (pulling the suitcase out) Here it is! It looks okay.

JEANETTE: (reminiscing) I can't remember the last time I had a vacation.
Now I do! I went to China.

PUB. SHELBY: You've never been to China, Sis.

JEANETTE: How would you know, you little shit! Maybe I sneaked off
when you weren't looking.

PUB. SHELBY: (looking over the suitcase) I'd know if you've been to China.

JEANETTE: There was a Chinaman there who wanted to fuck me.

SECRET SHELBY: Did you let him?

PUB. SHELBY: Shelby!

SECRET SHELBY: Well, really! How much of this can we take?

JEANETTE: Are you packing my suitcase for me? Let's go back to my house.

PUB. SHELBY: We're not actually going anywhere, Sis.

JEANETTE: Why not? You said you were taking me to China.

SECRET SHELBY: Maybe next fall! Here, Sis! Look! (Throws an old
sock from the suitcase so that JEANETTE will look
toward it)

JEANETTE: Don't throw my socks! (Goes after it)

(SECRET SHELBY shows the mausoleum door's key to
PUBLIC SHELBY, as JEANETTE is trying to retrieve the
sock. The key gets placed into an inside pocket of the suitcase
and zipped up)

(When JEANETTE is about to notice, SECRET SHELBY throws
another sock as a distraction)

JEANETTE: You bastard! Those socks are perfectly good!

SECRET SHELBY: Look! They're flying! (Throws another sock as a distraction)

PUB. SHELBY: Shelby!

SECRET SHELBY: What?! You want her to see where we put it?

JEANETTE: Don't forget my P.J.'s. They're under my pillow. I saw what you put in my suitcase.

PUB. SHELBY: What?!

SECRET SHELBY: Oh, crap.

JEANETTE: Was it a key?

PUB. SHELBY: Don't worry. It's fine.

JEANETTE: What's the key to?

PUB. SHELBY: It's not a key.

SECRET SHELBY: Not at all.

JEANETTE: It is too a key. You put it in my fucking suitcase. Fuck you!
And fuck Mr. Overmeyer for reporting me.

PUB. SHELBY: Sis! Your blood pressure!

SECRET SHELBY: Now what are we going to do?

JEANETTE: I don't want your stuff in my suitcase. Are you planting evidence on me? I've seen it on TV. Fucking relatives!

PUB. SHELBY: You're seeing things, Sis. (Closes up the suitcase)

JEANETTE: I'll have Tino check it.

PUB. SHELBY: (under his breath) Shit!

JEANETTE: Tino's taking me shopping later. I need some Depends.

PUB. SHELBY: When's he coming?

JEANETTE: I don't know. Later.

PUB. SHELBY: (to SECRET SHELBY) Do you think he's really coming?

SECRET SHELBY: I have no idea.

JEANETTE: Tino loves me. And I love Tino. Who loves you? Your imaginary friend?

PUB. SHELBY: Does Tino actually come here or not, Sis?

JEANETTE: Who?

PUB. SHELBY: Tino.

JEANETTE: Who the fuck is Tino?

PUB. SHELBY: (to SECRET SHELBY, about the key) What do you think about the . . . you know?

SECRET SHELBY: We can't risk it.

PUB. SHELBY: I agree. Shit!

JEANETTE: Watch your fucking language!

SECRET SHELBY: I have an idea. Why don't we take her shopping today?

PUB. SHELBY: Shopping?

SECRET SHELBY: (with a sinister innuendo) *Last-minute* shopping.

JEANETTE: Do I need a sweater?

PUB. SHELBY: We can't do this.

SECRET SHELBY: We have to.

JEANETTE: Are we going or are we not?

SECRET SHELBY: I think we have to sign her out.

PUB. SHELBY: Can't she just wander away?

SECRET SHELBY: The staff has seen you come in.

PUB. SHELBY: That's why she ought to just wander away. She was here when we –I – left.

SECRET SHELBY: We left her just fine.

JEANETTE: I can drive!

PUB. SHELBY: No.

JEANETTE: But I want to!

SECRET SHELBY: We're playing this like total amateurs. It's so messy!

JEANETTE: I almost got hit by a car the other day.

(The two SHELBYs turn their heads toward one another at the same time)

BOTH SHELBYs: Oh?

JEANETTE: Some Jew almost hit me!

PUB. SHELBY: Where was that, Sis?

JEANETTE: That busy intersection two blocks over. You can't even cross with the light. Not the way those Jews drive!

PUB. SHELBY: That's terrible, Sis.

JEANETTE: You bet it was. I had the right of way. But that truck just missed me.

SECRET SHELBY: At her age, she has to watch herself in traffic at all times.

JEANETTE: The fuckers around here said I can't go out anymore. But they're not the boss of me. I can get out anytime I want. You just have to wait for them to get out of the front room. I have to get my hair done at Julio's, which is right near there.

SECRET SHELBY: She'll have to show us, *won't* she?

PUB. SHELBY: Ah . . .

SECRET SHELBY: Won't she!?

(PUBLIC SHELBY hesitates more)

SECRET SHELBY: She *won't* be missed! Trust me.

JEANETTE: Are we going or not?

PUB. SHELBY: Can you show us out to get out without being seen, Sis?

JEANETTE: Sure can. Follow me. But be quiet. (They start to exit)

PUB. SHELBY: Oh, my god, another murder!

SECRET SHELBY: They're don't count. They're accidental murders.

BLACKOUT

END OF ACT I

ACT II

Scene 1

(ZARA, SHELBY'S twenty-year-old daughter, is cooking Thanksgiving dinner in the kitchen of her apartment)

ZARA: (to herself) How do you cook sweet potatoes, for god's sake!?
(Checking recipe book) You mean I have to peel them first?
Why don't they come already peeled! (checking recipe) I don't
have milk! Christ! I hate this! I'm going to call and cancel.

(The doorbell rings)

Oh, no! They're here already!

I can't take it. (She sits on a sofa with arms folded)

(The doorbell rings again)

I'm not answering. That's all there is to it.

PUB. SHELBY: (through the door) Zara? Are you there?

ZARA: (still sitting) Shit.

PUB. SHELBY: Zara!

(ZARA rushes to the door, flings it open, and goes back to sit on the sofa)

ZARA: Thanksgiving dinner is not ready, and I'm not cooking.

PUB. SHELBY: (entering) What's wrong?

ZARA: It's just too hard. Life is full of shit. And then you go to Hell
and burn in even more shit.

(Enter SECRET SHELBY)

SECRET SHELBY: Darling Zara! *There's* our little baby!

ZARA: (to PUBLIC SHELBY) Is *she* here?

SECRET SHELBY: She's here!

ZARA: If she's here, tell her to get lost.

PUB. SHELBY: Have you had a bad day, hon?

ZARA: No! It's always a bad day! I got an F on my term paper. How's that for a holiday present?

PUB. SHELBY: An F?

ZARA: Don't worry. I'll write up that son-of-a-bitch professor on that online site. He's a child molester.

PUB. SHELBY: He is?

ZARA: No! But nobody is going to give me an F! Maybe they'll even arrest him.

PUB. SHELBY: It's not going to be one of those visits, is it?

ZARA: You invited yourself. Take what you get.

SECRET SHELBY: She's as charming as ever.

ZARA: It's not easy fixing food for other people.

SECRET SHELBY: Ah, but the joy in doing it!

ZARA: Well, come in, I suppose. Don't expect much.

PUB. SHELBY: Have you been in touch with your mother?

ZARA: No! Why should I?

PUB. SHELBY: Because she's your mother?

ZARA: She's not my mother! She was the host where you put your sperm.

PUB. SHELBY: So we were a little unorthodox in how we had a child, but she raised you. Biologically she's your mother. And I'm your real father. Sure, we started out in an unusual manner, but now we're a regular family.

ZARA: Why don't *you* visit her then? You have so much in common.

PUB. SHELBY: We have our lovely, wonderful daughter in common.
What more could I want?

ZARA: You're so full of shit.

SECRET SHELBY: Let's put this one on our murder list.

ZARA: Well, Mom's not coming today.

PUB. SHELBY: Why not?

ZARA: I can only handle one of you at a time. That's why.

PUB. SHELBY: I think it's very nice of you to have this Thanksgiving at
your place.

ZARA: You would. Then you don't have to cook.

SECRET SHELBY: (to PUBLIC) Maybe we could shove her in the oven
with the turkey.

ZARA: (to PUBLIC SHELBY) I didn't get a turkey, either.

PUB. SHELBY: You didn't? Did something happen?

ZARA: Why can't you remember I'm a vegan! We're having sweet potatoes.
But I'm not using milk and I'm not using sugar.

PUB. SHELBY: I brought a sugarless pumpkin pie. (Removes it from bag,
shows it) Isn't that what you wanted?

ZARA: I suppose. I bet it has milk in it.

PUB. SHELBY: I could have brought more things.

ZARA: It's *my* dinner! We're having what *I* want!

PUB. SHELBY: I didn't mean to stress you out over this. I just
suggested that you might want to –

ZARA: Do *your* job?

PUB. SHELBY: You said you wanted to cook. So we agreed you
would cook.

ZARA: I only said it because you wanted me to. Everything in my life is because *you* wanted it! Why was I created, like some experiment in a lab? Because you and my mother wanted it, even though you barely knew each other. Was I consulted?

SECRET SHELBY: What child was ever consulted about his or her birth? Except Jesus maybe.

ZARA: You sent me to that private school. And what did I learn there? How to fake reading and to cheat on exams! If I'd gone to public schools, maybe I'd know something! Who paid for the first two years of college? Oh, I know you and mom congratulate yourself on giving me the tuition, but I was too young to appreciate it. So I just wasted my time there. You should have been harder on me and made me pay my own way. I wouldn't be failing now! I have no discipline. What in the hell were you thinking?!

PUB. SHELBY: Zara.

ZARA: And what the fuck kind of name is Zara? I've been saddled with that my whole life. It sounds like something out of a sci fi comic book!

SECRET SHELBY: Who would have known it was going to prove so appropriate?

ZARA: And do you see this apartment? How can I live here? It has cockroaches!

PUB. SHELBY: We could bring in a fumigator.

ZARA: That's just the tip of the problem. My roommate is moving out.

PUB. SHELBY: Oh, I was hoping to meet her. I thought you two were getting along.

ZARA: Well, we're not! Do you know that she's a clown? I mean, for a job.

PUB. SHELBY: I think you mentioned that.

ZARA: She's "clowning" for some party uptown today. She's become *so* annoying. She leaves bacon grease in the sink. I've told her and told her. I even clean it up for her. Is she grateful? Not in a million years. You know what she accused me of?

SECRET SHELBY: Toxicity?

ZARA: She said I poop in the shower.

SECRET SHELBY: Better yet.

PUB. SHELBY: Why would she say that?

ZARA: She found out she pays more of the rent than I do. I told her I've been here six months longer, and why shouldn't she pay two-thirds? It's not that easy to find a place these days. And what does she say? That I poop in the shower!

SECRET SHELBY: Do you?

ZARA: No way do I *poop* in the shower. I sometimes have to clean myself in the shower, and maybe some of whatever doesn't always go down the drain. But I don't *poop* in the shower!

SECRET SHELBY: Anyone can see the distinction.

ZARA: Besides, if I want to poop in the shower, it's none of her damn business. She's lucky to have this place. But now all she does is slam doors. That's how insensitive she is. I told her to be out by the end of the month. And she said, "That's not happening. I need two or three months." And I said, "I want you out, bitch!" And do you know what she said to that?"

PUB. SHELBY: (cringing) No.

ZARA: First, I've told her what a terrible mother my mother was, how she stabbed me with a fork in the face when I was ten –

PUB. SHELBY: (softly, trying to interrupt) She never stabbed you with a fork . . .

ZARA: But she wouldn't believe me, just like you don't. But I was there! I know what a fork in the face feels like.

SECRET SHELBY: Is it worse than a daughter from the planet Morbidia?

ZARA: You know what she said?! That I was probably a horrible child and that's why my mother did it. I don't have to listen to that shit from some bacon grease clown in my own apartment! I was *not* a horrible child. And then she had the nerve to say, "I know you

(cont'd.)

were a horrible child, Zara, because you still *are*! (Suddenly starts to cry) Oh, Daddy, how can people be so mean!?

PUB. SHELBY: (offering his arms) Come here. . . . Come over here.

(ZARA goes to his arms, and they embrace)

PUB. SHELBY: There, there . . .

ZARA: Oh, Daddy, I'm so unhappy. I wish to God you had never brought me into this world.

PUB. SHELBY: (at a loss for words) Uh . . .

SECRET SHELBY: Cat got your tongue?

PUB. SHELBY: It's just the holidays. People get –

ZARA: It's like this all the time. I don't even want to live.

SECRET SHELBY: Well, that's something to look forward to.

(The doorbell rings)

ZARA: Oh, they're here!

PUB. SHELBY: Who's here?

ZARA: It's a surprise.

(ZARA goes to the door, is offstage)

ZARA: (to unseen driver) Yes, that's me. Thank you for bringing her.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: You're welcome, Miss.

(ZARA comes back with POLLY in a wheelchair, with a beach ball inside a paper bag on her lap)

ZARA: Guess who's here! It's Polly!

SECRET SHELBY: Oh, my God!

PUB. SHELBY: Where did you . . . How did you . . . ?

ZARA: They offered to let her out of the hospital for a day, but she had nowhere to go for Thanksgiving. So I arranged to have her brought here. I had to sign and everything. And you say I never think of other people! So say, "Welcome back, Polly"!

PUB. SHELBY: Polly? . . . How are you?

ZARA: She can't talk and she's almost completely paralyzed, but what a recovery from that coma!

SECRET SHELBY: Can she blink?

ZARA: I don't know. I think she can hear. Can you hear us, Polly?

POLLY: (Blinks)

ZARA: See! She blinked. Maybe she can blink Morse code to us.

POLLY: (Blinks several times)

ZARA: What is she saying?

PUB. SHELBY: Polly is not the kind who would know Morse code.

ZARA: What a pity. I don't know it either.

SECRET SHELBY: Yeah, and it's very hard to learn.

ZARA: The hospital said I should make sure she has plenty of fluids. She has a catheter on, so we don't have to worry about that. They'll empty her when we take her back. You want a drink, Polly?

POLLY: (Blinks)

ZARA: Was that a yes?

PUB. SHELBY: I'm not sure.

ZARA: I got some ginger ale this morning. They said nothing too cold or too hot for her. (Gets a can of ginger ale from a table) Here we go! (Opens the can, which splashes on POLLY) Oh, I'm sorry, Polly! Did I get some on you? I'll go get a towel. (Runs offstage to bathroom)

(There is an awkward moment between the SHELBYs and POLLY)

PUB. SHELBY: Uh . . . (Looks, gestures to SECRET SHELBY)

SECRET SHELBY: Even I don't know what to say.

PUB. SHELBY: Do you know who I am, Polly?

POLLY: (Blinks)

SECRET SHELBY: What did that mean?

PUB. SHELBY: I can't tell.

SECRET SHELBY: The police must not suspect you. They would have arrested you by now.

PUB. SHELBY: I think I just squeaked by at the police station.

SECRET SHELBY: Unless somebody figures out her blinks, I don't think she's saying very much.

PUB. SHELBY: It must be awful to be trapped in her body like that.

SECRET SHELBY: Awful for her, great for everybody else.

PUB. SHELBY: Shelby!

(Re-enter ZARA with a towel)

ZARA: Talking to yourself again, Dad?

PUB. SHELBY: Sorry.

ZARA: Here we go, Polly! Let's get that ginger ale off you. (Wipes POLLY. Removes the paper bag from POLLY's lap)

PUB. SHELBY: Did you go to see her in the hospital?

ZARA: Yes. Several times. We've always liked each other, Polly and I. We're soul mates. She's very open, not all closed off like some people.

PUB. SHELBY: And what happened? What did the doctors say? What's the diagnosis?

ZARA: You'd think you would have visited her yourself. She's really your friend.

PUB. SHELBY: I guess I should have. But . . .

ZARA: Apparently there's been extensive brain damage.

SECRET SHELBY: Thank you, Jesus!

ZARA: I don't think she understands much of what's going on around her.

PUB. SHELBY: Are you sure?

ZARA: Well, look at her! (in a baby voice) How we doin', Polly Wolly Girl?

PUB. SHELBY: (admonishingly) Zara.

ZARA: What?!

PUB. SHELBY: She's not an infant.

ZARA: At least I've shown some interest in her. That's more than you can say.

PUB. SHELBY: Is she always going to be like this?

ZARA: The doctors don't know.

SECRET SHELBY: Will she die?

ZARA: (to PUBLIC SHELBY) She'll need a permanent home now.

PUB. SHELBY: A home outside the hospital?

ZARA: She has lots of money, but she needs somebody to look after her.

PUB. SHELBY: In a nursing home. Yes.

ZARA: She needs to be with somebody who cares about her, not in some sterile institution.

SECRET SHELBY: Believe me, they're not that sterile.

PUB. SHELBY: So you're going to take her in?

ZARA: Hell no! Today is one time. I thought you would want to take her into your place.

PUB. SHELBY: I can't take her in.

SECRET SHELBY: For several reasons.

ZARA: Sure you can.

PUB. SHELBY: I'm not going to do it.

ZARA: What kind of a friend are you? Polly was always good to you.

PUB. SHELBY: That can be debated.

ZARA: After what happened to her. Being found in her tomb like that.
Under suspicious circumstances. Nobody should have to go through
that. And now look at her – trapped inside the tomb of her body.

PUB. SHELBY: Do you think she can hear us?

ZARA: Most likely. But maybe all garbled. I don't know.

PUB. SHELBY: She's probably just having some automatic physical
movements.

ZARA: What if she is fully conscious, just can't move? Don't you feel
sorry for her?

PUB. SHELBY: I do.

ZARA: Then you owe it to her to start looking after her. You can probably
get her estate to pay you, if it comes to that. You don't have a job,
right? Well, here's one right in your lap.

PUB. SHELBY: I don't think I could stand to have her blinking at me
all the time.

ZARA: If you worked at it, you could probably figure out what the
blinks mean. Maybe one blink for "yes" and two for "no."
Or something like that. I mean, for god's sake they can teach
a gorilla to spell!

SECRET SHELBY: Aren't you glad that you had a child, Shelby?
You always said that it was the one element
missing from your life.

PUB. SHELBY: Shut up!

ZARA: You could even find out what happened to her in that tomb.
Catch that mugger or whoever it was.

PUB. SHELBY: She would have been better off if she had just died.

SECRET SHELBY: (ironic) Life is life, Shelby! Who are you to say which
is better?!

ZARA: My life may be in the toilet, Dad, but Polly should have a chance
to live hers.

PUB. SHELBY: Then maybe Polly can become your new roommate.

ZARA: Is that supposed to be funny? Polly's situation isn't funny, Dad!

PUB. SHELBY: It was only a suggestion.

ZARA: Do you realize how much work she'd be? It's terrible enough
fixing Thanksgiving dinner for her and you! I have to go class
every day, even Saturday mornings. I can't afford the time it
would take to care for Polly. She needs changing at least twice
a day. She also needs to be watched. She can't really move, but
sometimes gravity or whatever makes her tip over. You're not
doing anything. You could be her care-giver.

SECRET SHELBY: Do I smell karma in the room?

ZARA: You have a house. You don't have anybody in your life. What's
the problem?

SECRET SHELBY: What am I? Chopped liver?

ZARA: Why don't you do it, Dad? You're always preaching to me about
doing good things with your life.

SECRET SHELBY: You and Polly could have lunch together every day!

ZARA: Oh, and she needs exercise too. (Opens the paper bag, pulls out the
beach ball) They say she's getting better. But she needs to keep active.
Sometimes she can even kick this. Watch!

(ZARA places the beach ball in front of POLLY'S feet. They all wait)

(Nothing happens)

SECRET SHELBY: The suspense is killing me.

ZARA: Polly, do you want to kick that ball?

(They all wait again)

(Nothing happens)

ZARA: Well, I guess not today. (She starts to remove the beach ball)

(Suddenly POLLY kicks the ball, almost hitting ZARA with it)

ZARA: Whoa there! . . . See! She's getting better. She was the best kicker in her recovery group at the hospital. (to PUBLIC SHELBY) You try it. (Retrieves and hands him the beach ball)

PUB. SHELBY: I don't think so.

ZARA: Dad! You've gotta help! Polly's your friend!

PUB. SHELBY: I don't want to.

ZARA: She couldn't even do that a month ago! If we all pitch in, she'll get better.

SECRET SHELBY: And have you arrested for attempted murder. Nifty.

ZARA: Come on, Dad. Get her to do just one more kick. Just one more!

PUB. SHELBY: All right. (Takes the beach ball) Look what I've got, Polly. (He places the ball in front of her)

(Nothing happens)

ZARA: Encourage her, Dad!

PUB. SHELBY: Kick it, Polly.

SECRET SHELBY: Polly wanna kick?!

(Nothing happens)

PUB. SHELBY: I guess she's had her kick for the day.

(He bends down to get the beach ball, and POLLY kicks it so that it hits him, preferably in the head)

PUB. SHELBY: Hey!

ZARA: Atta, girl, Polly!

(POLLY smiles)

SECRET SHELBY: Wouldn't you know. Polly still gets a kick out of life.

ZARA: (seeing something upstage) Was that a mouse? Oh, for God's sake, now we have mice! What next!?

(The doorbell rings)

PUB. SHELBY: Who's that?

ZARA: Another surprise! (ZARA goes to the door, offstage) Hi there!

ANOTHER VOICE: Zara Shaeffer-Green?

ZARA: This is the right place! Thank you!

ANOTHER VOICE: You're welcome.

ZARA: Let's say hi to everybody.

(She wheels in JEANETTE in a wheelchair, who is bandaged heavily)

ZARA: Look who's here! I'm trying to make up for telling her to go fuck herself on the phone.

JEANETTE: I'm here, all in one piece.

ZARA: And they said that she would never recover from that hit and run! It just goes to show what doctors know.

JEANETTE: You can't keep me down. I can still get up when I need to!
(Stands up from her wheelchair)

ZARA: (to PUBLIC SHELBY) Aren't you going to say hello to Jeanette?

PUB. SHELBY: Hi.

JEANETTE: I remember him. He was with me when that truck hit me in the crosswalk.

PUB. SHELBY: Yeah, that was a close one.

SECRET SHELBY: Only not close enough.

ZARA: That's your brother Shelby. Remember?

JEANETTE: He tried to save me.

ZARA: He did?

JEANETTE: Yeah, he put his hands on my shoulders and pulled me back.

ZARA: He did?

SECRET SHELBY: Something like that, wasn't it, Shelby?

JEANETTE: We were out for a walk.

ZARA: How lucky Dad was with you. Do you know Polly?

JEANETTE: No. Who is she?

ZARA: She's a friend of Dad's and mine.

JEANETTE: What happened to her? She looks terrible.

ZARA: She got caught in a tomb.

JEANETTE: What was she doing in a tomb?

ZARA: I think she had just bought it and –

JEANETTE: She should stay out of tombs. Tombs aren't good for you.

SECRET SHELBY: So we've learned.

JEANETTE: Nice to meet you. . . . Can she talk?

PUB. SHELBY: Not really.

JEANETTE: Oh, the poor thing. When do we eat?

PUB. SHELBY: We might have to go out.

JEANETTE: Out? I thought we were gonna eat here. I could have eaten
at the group-home. They have chocolate parfait today!

ZARA: Do you think they would let us all go back there to have dinner?

JEANETTE: Sure! (to PUB. SHELBY) You can get that key you left in my suitcase.

PUB. SHELBY: (feigning ignorance) What?

JEANETTE: The last time you were over. Don't you remember? A key for something. I think it was important.

POLLY: (stirring, trying to communicate) *Whh*.

ZARA: Hey, Polly tried to say something! What is it, Polly?

POLLY: (agitated, trying to move and talk, but not very well) *Whh!*

JEANETTE: We've got worse ones than that. Polly should come and live with us.

PUB. SHELBY: I think we maybe should just order in. My treat!

ZARA: You don't have any money! It'll be my treat.

PUB. SHELBY: You don't have any money either.

ZARA: Mom gave me some for the holidays. She's rolling in it. She feels a little guilty for the way she treated me.

JEANETTE: I've got money!

SECRET SHELBY: And Polly's got money!

ZARA: Isn't this great? All of us together!

SECRET SHELBY: It's Heaven on earth.

JEANETTE: (seeing the beach ball) Hey, is that a beach ball?

ZARA: It sure is. You want to see it?

JEANETTE: Yeah. Bring it here.

(ZARA gets the beach ball)

ZARA: Now be careful.

JEANETTE: I'm careful. Here, catch! (She throws the beach ball toward PUBLIC SHELBY. He misses it) Butterfingers! Here, give it back to me.

PUB. SHELBY: (retrieving the ball) Are you sure this is a good idea?

JEANETTE: Give it to me. Give it to me.

PUB. SHELBY: Here! (He throws it pretty hard at his sister)

JEANETTE: (catching it or not) Is that the best you got? Put some muscle into it.

(Throws it back to PUBLIC SHELBY)

PUB. SHELBY: When did you become a jock?

JEANETTE: What else have I got to do with myself? (Throws the ball at him)

ZARA: She's pretty good.

JEANETTE: Hit me with your best shot!

PUB. SHELBY: (throwing it hard) I wouldn't want to hurt you!

JEANETTE: You can't hurt me! I'm immortal! Look sharp!
(Throws the ball. It hits a lamp or a vase and knocks it off a table) Oops!

ZARA: Oh, that's my roommate's stuff. Now she's really going to be mad at me.

JEANETTE: Shelby should have caught it.

PUB. SHELBY: It wasn't anywhere near me.

JEANETTE: We play beach ball three days a week at the group-home.
You need to come and join us, Shelby. You need the practice.

PUB. SHELBY: Not quite yet. . . . Not quite yet.

ZARA: So what are we gonna do about dinner?

SECRET SHELBY: I'm not cooking, not for this bunch. Unless it's poisoned.

JEANETTE: I'm famished!

ZARA: What about you, Dad?

PUB. SHELBY: Not very hungry.

ZARA: Well, I don't know what to do then. I can't please everybody!
And after all the effort I went to, to get you all here together!

JEANETTE: We could play games! I love games.

ZARA: That's a possibility. We play a few games and then we go out.

PUB. SHELBY: Won't that be a lot to handle? (Nods at the two wheelchairs)

ZARA: It was just a suggestion. I'm not married to it. You want to order
in? We can order in.

PUB. SHELBY: Maybe Chinese.

ZARA: On Thanksgiving? I'm not usually traditional, but there's one day
when I want a traditional meal, and that's Thanksgiving. As long
as it's vegan.

JEANETTE: I want turkey!

ZARA: And what do you want, Polly?

JEANETTE: She wants a cracker! That's a good one! She's Polly and
she wants a cracker.

POLLY: *Whh!*

JEANETTE: See! She agrees. Give her a cracker!

PUB. SHELBY: I'm not so sure that's what she means.

JEANETTE: We could do exercises! I'm supposed to do them.

SECRET SHELBY: Exercises?

JEANETTE: It helps with digestion. So you don't get all clogged.
Okay, everybody, form a circle! Come on, come on!

(The groups forms sort of an elliptical circle. ZARA helps move POLLY next to JEANETTE, who encourages PUBLIC SHELBY to participate. He then offers his hand to SECRET SHELBY to join in)

SECRET SHELBY: How in the Hell did I wind up in this zoo?!

JEANETTE: First we lift the left hand! And twirl it all about.

(They lift their left hands if they can, with varying degrees of reluctance and ability)

JEANETTE: (encouraging) And twirl it all about!

SECRET SHELBY: (joining in and twirling hand) Christ Almighty!

JEANETTE: Now the right hand – as high as you can get it. Come on, Polly! You can do it.

(POLLY can't move at all)

JEANETTE: Now twirl it all about!

(There are various twirls, most of them forced and unsuccessful)

ZARA: I don't like doing this.

JEANETTE: Now both hands together! Up! Up! (Hands go up, except for POLLY) Now twirl 'em all about! (Reluctant twirling of hands) Way to go! Especially Polly! Let's hear it for Polly!

(People applaud for POLLY, who starts to slip out of her wheelchair)

ZARA: Oh, my God! There goes Polly.

(ZARA tries to right POLLY, but she is unsuccessful. POLLY slips to the floor)

(POLLY farts loudly)

JEANETTE: What was that?

PUB. SHELBY: Nothing.

JEANETTE: Did somebody fart?

PUB. SHELBY: No.

JEANETTE: We could see who can fart the loudest? Sometimes we play that at the group-home. Want me to start?

SECRET SHELBY: I'm out of here. (Starts to leave)

JEANETTE: I've got to warn you. I usually win!

PUB. SHELBY: (to SECRET SHELBY) Don't abandon me now!

ZARA: Dad, you've got to stop talking to yourself.

SECRET SHELBY: *You're* giving him advice?

PUB. SHELBY: How did I wind up like this?

SECRET SHELBY: Just family, friends, and murder most foul!

ZARA: There's no reason to be ashamed of a fart. It's perfectly natural.

PUB. SHELBY: A Thanksgiving fart contest and with two . . . two . . .
(gesturing at POLLY and JEANETTE) And a . . .
(gesturing at ZARA)

ZARA: With a what?! Don't you like me, either?

PUB. SHELBY: I can't take anymore. I'm going to explode.

SECRET SHELBY: You made your bed. Now you must fart in it.

PUB. SHELBY: Oh, shut up!

ZARA: Dad?

PUB. SHELBY: All you do is make snide comments. You're no help.

SECRET SHELBY: I keep you sane. Such as it is.

PUB. SHELBY: Didn't you say you were leaving?

SECRET SHELBY: That's for me to decide.

PUB. SHELBY: Go on. Go!

SECRET SHELBY: I'll go when I'm good and ready and not a minute before.

PUB. SHELBY: I don't need you.

SECRET SHELBY: You can't survive without me.

PUB. SHELBY: Do you want to bet?

ZARA: Dad, you're sort of embarrassing us.

PUB. SHELBY: Embarrassing you?! I've lived my whole life to wind up here, like this?! This is what life is supposed to be all about? A roomful of utter lunatics!?

SECRET SHELBY: They're hilarious, if you look at them right.

PUB. SHELBY: They are sad and pathetic, and so am I. My life is a total mess. I have no job, no partner, no friends, except an imaginary one, a child I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy, a sister even loonier than I am. And for what? I lived for what? For *this!* . . . I'd rather be dead.

SECRET SHELBY: And you couldn't even commit your murders right!

PUB. SHELBY: I think I'm going to jump out that window,

ZARA: Dad! I don't like the way you're talking. Stop it.

JEANETTE: He's drunk!

PUB. SHELBY: I'm stone, cold sober. That's the problem. And I live in a nightmare.

JEANETTE: Aren't we supposed to be thankful on Thanksgiving?

SECRET SHELBY: Would you like me to kill you?

PUB. SHELBY: Yes.

SECRET SHELBY: Don't tempt me.

PUB. SHELBY: Do it.

SECRET SHELBY: How do you want to go?

PUB. SHELBY: Surprise me.

SECRET SHELBY: Baseball bat?

PUB. SHELBY: Something more original.

SECRET SHELBY: Thrown to alligators?

PUB. SHELBY: That's better.

ZARA: Why are you talking about alligators?

JEANETTE: I had a pair of alligator shoes once.

ZARA: Why can't I even have one party that turns out nice?! Just one!

SECRET SHELBY: Shelby, I bet you that if I explained a few things to the assembled guests here that we could probably arrange a group death stomp for you. What do you say?

PUB. SHELBY: Be my guest.

SECRET SHELBY: You're serious, aren't you?

PUB. SHELBY: Deadly.

SECRET SHELBY: I don't think Polly and your sister are up to it physically.

ZARA: Are we going to go out to dinner or not?

JEANETTE: (moving the wheelchair) Polly's got gas!

POLLY: (makes plaintive sound with her mouth) *Whoooo!*

JEANETTE: Hey, that's a great sound. Like a motor. Come on, Polly!
Let's move it!

(JEANETTE pushes POLLY'S wheelchair around the room)

JEANETTE: Whoa! *Whoa!* Choo-train coming!

(JEANETTE pushes the wheelchair dangerously close to the edge of the stage)

ZARA: Be careful, Aunt Jeanette!

JEANETTE: Polly needs the exercise!

PUB. SHELBY: (to SECRET SHELBY) Let's go into the bedroom.

SECRET SHELBY: Oo, that's the best offer I've had all day.

PUB. SHELBY: Let's do it.

ZARA: Dad, what's going on here? You're scaring me.

PUB. SHELBY: (to SECRET SHELBY) I'll show you how to do it.

SECRET SHELBY: Is this really a plot to get rid of me?

PUB. SHELBY: It's very effective. Just don't stop when I tap out.

SECRET SHELBY: You're really planning to kill me, aren't you?

PUB. SHELBY: No. I want my better self to win out.

SECRET SHELBY: Is that supposed to be ironic? What are you doing?
I'm the ironic one around here!

PUB. SHELBY: Shouldn't everybody have a strong inner woman who carries the day?

SECRET SHELBY: If we go into that bedroom, only one of us is coming out.

PUB. SHELBY: You're on.

ZARA: Dad, you're hallucinating. I've never seen you this bad before.
You're talking to nobody!

PUB. SHELBY: I don't think I'm so different from other people. My voices are just a little louder.

(PUBLIC SHELBY almost exits, stops to gesture to
SECRET SHELBY to join him)

SECRET SHELBY: All right. (to the others) Wish me luck, kids.

ZARA: Oh, my God! I heard a voice just now.

JEANETTE: I heard it too!

ZARA: Did it say, "Wish me luck"?

JEANETTE: I thought it said "Suck my lids."

SECRET SHELBY: At least I'm getting through! Call me Pinocchio.
I just want to be a real boy.

PUB. SHELBY: Are you coming?

(PUBLIC SHELBY exits, followed by SECRET SHELBY)

JEANETTE: Why did they go in there?

ZARA: Love?

JEANETTE: Love?

ZARA: Maybe hate?

JEANETTE: I thought we were going out to dinner.

ZARA: We will, later.

JEANETTE: Are they gonna fuck or kill each other?

ZARA: I have no idea.

(The lights begin to fade)

JEANETTE: Wait! (The lights stop fading) I want to know what happens!

POLLY: *Whhh!*

JEANETTE: See! Polly agrees. She liked my wheelchair ride!

ZARA: I think Dad may have done some bad things recently.

JEANETTE: He's a bastard!

ZARA: Unfortunately or fortunately, he's not very good at being a
bastard.

PUB. SHELBY: He's not very good at anything.

(Lights down) (Lights up) (Enter SECRET SHELBY)

(The *Resurrection* of the PUBLIC SHELBY as the permanent SECRET SHELBY can be as big as the budget permits, from a few on-and-off flashes of light to a big rock rolling away across the stage)

SECRET SHELBY: (entering) (She can now be seen) It is finished. . . .
It is begun.

ZARA: Who are you?

SECRET SHELBY: A friend of your father's.

JEANETTE: Tell Shelby we're going to leave without him.

SECRET SHELBY: He won't mind.

ZARA: What have you done to him?

SECRET SHELBY: I made him whole.

ZARA: Is he . . . ?

SECRET SHELBY: Yes.

ZARA: Did you . . . ?

SECRET SHELBY: He was ready to go. (Shows choke hold) It's easy,
if the other person doesn't fight back. Funny, it
was the only murder he was actually able to commit.
Of himself.

ZARA: Oh, my God! (She rushes offstage to the bedroom)

SECRET SHELBY: It's too late.

ZARA: (offstage) Dad? Dad? . . . Dad!! (After a few moments, ZARA
returns) He's dead.

SECRET SHELBY: He's been under a lot of stress. I think he really died
of niceness.

ZARA: Oh, my God, he wasn't that old!

SECRET SHELBY: I know. But he's not completely gone. He asked me to
look after you . . . all three of you. So, to some extent,
he lives on in me. I know I can't replace the man you

(cont'd.)

knew as a father and a brother and a friend. But believe me when I tell you that things are going to be better from now on. Or at least different. That I can promise you.

ZARA: How? . . . *How?*

SECRET SHELBY: Let's start with his final wish. What do you say to that?

ZARA: Dad made a final wish?

SECRET SHELBY: He did. He wants me to carry on his life, only to be better at it than he was, to be competent and together and to make things happen in a way he never could.

ZARA: Really?

SECRET SHELBY: The past is the past. So you three are safe, at least for now. As for the rest of the World . . . first we begin with meter maids. Do you know that lot a few blocks from City Hall with those rows upon rows of those little hideous carts the meter maids drive around when they're giving out parking tickets? They park them there overnight. Unattended. I've always wondered what those little carts would look like going up in flames. (pointing over the heads of the audience) See them? One after fucking one. Well, I intend to find out. Shelby is not dead. Shelby has been resurrected, and finally Shelby has released his inner cunt! Now shall we all go out to dinner?

JEANETTE: (Twirls POLLY around in the wheelchair) Wow! Are we having a party? Are we? Are we?

SECRET SHELBY: You bet, Jeanette. The party has only just begun!

BLACKOUT

END of PLAY