

SCREAMING TO GET OUT, or Why I Hate the Theater
— a play by Daniel Curzon

CHARACTERS: (3) Two men, one woman, to play all the roles, with accessories,
not full costume changes

A: An attractive female, 20-35

B: An attractive male, 20-30

C: A militant celibate, contrarian male, 40-65

SETTING: A bare stage, with some chairs, maybe a settee

(Lights up on male-female couple of the past)

B: “But I fear that your father will never relent, never let us marry.”

A: “Clive, you must never say never! For, you see, I have been working on Father.”

B: “But *has* it been working, Maud? That is the question.”

A: “When I mentioned you yesterday, he did not turn all red in the face and threaten to disown me. That’s progress, is it not?!”

B: “Ah, but, Maud, you find the good in everybody, even your stubborn, blind father.”

A: “My father cannot help being blind. It is most unkind of you to bring it up, Clive.”

B: “I did not mean his actual blindness, merely his blindness about our love.”

A: “I am sure that Father only wants what is best for me, his only daughter.”

B: “He wants only what is best for him! A daughter enslaved to taking care of him, at *her* expense!”

A: “I’m afraid you are blind yourself about Father’s good points. Perhaps you have, as they say, an agenda?”

B: “What agenda could that be? I simply wish to hold your hand for the rest of our lives. Nothing will content me more. I want to honor and cherish you until we are senior citizens – and beyond.”

A: “Well, Father says you want to kiss me.”

B: “He didn’t! I certainly don’t!”

A: “You don’t want to kiss me?!” (Frowns)

B: "Of course I want to kiss you, but only after we are lawfully wed."

A: "Father also says that you plan something horrible for me on our wedding night."

B: "I'm sure your father planned something horrible for your mother on her wedding night. But I am not your father!"

A: "As you know, I have been raised with little knowledge of men and their ways. Are you positive that you don't want more from me than you are claiming?"

B: "Let me get this clear in my head, Maud. Do you not know that husbands and wives share a bedroom, even share a bed?"

A: "Really? Mother and Father do not."

B: "Trust me, many do."

A: "But that's just it, Clive. *Can* I trust you? How shall I say this? I am not a very 'carnal' person."

B: "I should hope not!"

A: "I have heard rumors that some husbands are not content to hold their wives' hands forever. Some don't even stop at a kiss!" (Shows distress.)

B: "Then they are filthy brutes!"

A: (daringly) "I saw a man naked once."

B: "No!"

A: "I confess I did. I was not trying to look. It just happened, at our summer cottage. I was thirteen at the time."

B: "I am not sure that I wish to hear this story."

A: "And do you know what I thought about this naked man?"

B: (a warning) "Maud!"

A: "I thought: what is all the fuss about?!"

B: "Did you see him from the front?"

A: "No. Was I supposed to?"

B: "It might have made a difference."

A: "Really? Why?"

B: "Who was this naked man you saw?"

A: "I don't want to say."

B: "Was he 'exposing' himself to you?"

A: "I believe he was sun bathing."

B: "Without clothes on? What impertinence! Did you report him, I hope?"

A: "I wanted to. But he was in his own garden."

B: "He still should have considered your sensibilities. *I* would have."

A: "Do you ever sun bathe naked, Clive?"

B: "Of course not! What kind of question is that, Maud?"

A: "An innocent one, I would think."

B: "And did seeing this man naked scar you for life?"

A: "I don't believe so. He was not very appealing to look at."

B: "I should think not."

A: "He had — how shall I put this? — "

B: "Don't put it, Maud!"

A: (ignoring him) "He had follicles on his . . ."

B: "No!"

A: (correcting him) "Yes, he did! Quite a few follicles."

B: "Didn't you look away?"

A: "I attempted to."

B: "But?"

A: "Yes, on his "butt"! I found it quite . . . What is the word I want?"

B: "Scintillating?"

A: "No."

B: "Stimulating?"

A: "No."

B: "Nauseating?"

A: "No."

B: "How long did you actually look at his buttocks?"

A: "Not long."

B: "Five seconds?"

A: (irritated) "Five hours! Is there a time limit?!"

B: "Obviously there is a side of you, Maud, that I had not anticipated. I find this pre-occupation with male buttocks disconcerting."

A: "Pre-occupation? It was one time, one set of buttocks. And it's not as if I went searching for them!"

B: "A truly well-bred young woman would have looked away, perhaps even run away."

A: "I know that, Clive. Can you forgive me?"

B: "I don't know, darling. These news have come as quite a shock."

A: "Have you no skeletons in your closet, darling? Nude sun bathing? Or even worse?"

B: "I am happy, indeed proud, to say that my buttocks have never seen the sun! They are as God made them on the day I was born!"

A: "So you say, Clive. But where is the proof?"

B: "Are you saying that I think you are saying?"

A: "*What* am I saying, darling?"

B: "That you want to see my buttocks, and before we are married?!"

A: "I'm not saying that at all. . . . But one does wonder about what one may be getting in a would-be fiancé!"

B: "I can assure you that my buttocks take second place to no one's."

A: "So you say, Clive. But are you the best judge of that?"

B: "Are you accusing me of self-love?!"

A: "I accuse you of nothing. But how do I know that you don't have *follicles* like the man I saw when I was thirteen? I did not like those *follicles*."

B: "And yet you keep bringing them up!"

A: "I am merely curious as to whether all men have such follicles or just that man in the garden."

B: "I am hardly an expert on male buttocks, Maud!"

A: "But surely you have seen more than I, in dressing rooms and such."

B: "If I did see them, I certainly don't remember them."

A: "Well, I suppose the real question is what are *your* buttocks like, Clive?"

B: "Mine? *My* buttocks?!"

A: "Yes, yours. There — I've said it."

B: "I am afraid that you will have to wait until we are married, my dear."

A: "That's just it, Clive. I don't believe that I can bear the thought of finding out on my wedding night that my husband has such "*follicles*." I should despair."

B: "What are you asking me, Maud?"

A: "Do I have to draw a diagram?"

B: "You will not take my word for it?!"

A: "I will take your word for everything else, Clive. But not about follicles on the buttocks. No, no, that is too much to ask. What if I were required to touch them in some way?!"

B: "I am quite speechless in the face of this demand, Maud."

A: "I long to be married, and possibly even to you, but it would be my life's tragedy if I were to marry the wrong man and then never, ever be able to divorce. It is my greatest fear in life."

B: "Believe me, my dearest, there are other parts of the male anatomy that may be more relevant to both parties in the holy sacrament of matrimony."

A: "Speak for yourself, Clive. I know my innermost feelings on this topic."

B: "It is possible to shave one's buttocks, if necessary – for a loved one."

A: "Oh, yes, my father says that's what men say. Yet once married, they do what *they* want! I must be sure of the man I marry, or I cannot marry!"

B: "I can perhaps go to my physician and have him make rotogravures of the area in question and have him send them to you."

A: "There are other methods, more immediate methods."

B: "Maud, you're not asking that I . . ."

A: "I'm afraid I am, Clive. I am! Here! Now!"

(B hesitates)

A: "Now! Here!"

B: "Just remember that you asked me to do this."

A: "Of course I will."

B: "I guess you leave me no recourse but this." (Begins to lower his pants to show her his upper buttocks.)

A: "A little lower, Clive."

(He lowers his pants more)

B: "How's this?" (He moons A.)

(Enter C as her blind father, with dark glasses, tapping his cane.)

C: "Maud, are you in here in the parlor?"

A: "Oh, Father, it's you!"

(B freezes with his butt hanging out.)

C: "What are you doing, darling? Are you alone?"

A: (signals to B not to move) "Yes, Father, quite alone. I'm reading."

C: "Are you? What, pray tell, are you reading?"

A: "Butt-a . . . books. Books!"

C: "Butt-a-books-books? What are those?"

A: "A new form of reading material, Father."

C: "Really? What will they think of next! Would you mind reading this new book to me?"

A: "Oh, I shouldn't think you'd like it much."

C: (finding a seat) "Not like it! There is nothing I enjoy more in the world than having you read to me. Proceed!"

(B starts to pull up his pants partway.)

C: (sensing something) "Is there someone else in here with us, Maud?"

(B stops moving.)

A: "Someone else? I don't know what you mean, Father."

C: "Another person. Perhaps your bunny? I've told you and told you not to bring that bunny into the house! You know what he does on the carpet!"

(B looks back at his own butt, shakes his head no.)

A: "I assure you, Father, that Bunny is not in the house."

C: "If I catch him, I will not hesitate to thrust him through with my cane!"

(B grimaces at the prospect of being penetrated by the cane)

A: "Father, you wouldn't do such a dastardly thing to poor Bunny!"

C: (swinging the cane about) "I most certainly would. Dirty, filthy vermin, rabbits!"

A: "I find them rather cuddly."

(B wants to pull up his pants and run out. But A signals fiercely for him to stay put.)

C: (getting up) “Where is that damned Bunny?!” (Waves his cane around, searching.)

A: “Father, stop!”

C: “I will not stop! Where is it? It deserves at the very least a sound thrashing! Do you have any idea how much it costs to clean a carpet these days?!”

A: (stands between her father and Clive) “Father, if you wave that cane again you will hit your only daughter!”

C: “Stand away, Daughter! You can’t protect that awful Bunny from me any longer!”

A: “I can, and I will!” (She struggles with her father over the cane.)

(Lights out. Dark stage.)

(The actors now adopt a more modern and realistic acting style.)

B: What happened?

A: Lighting problem.

C: Now you know what it feels like.

B: Shit.

(The lights come back on.)

C: There they are.

B: (sarcastically) I thought you couldn’t see.

C: My character couldn’t. I can see perfectly. Are we going to rehearse this crap or not?

A: I need a cigarette.

C: Oh, please!

A: Fuck you.

C: You are gonna ruin your beautiful lungs.

A: They’re my lungs.

B: Will you two stop! How do you expect me to do a light comedy with you two bickering all the time?!

A: It's called professional acting.

C: "One-Acts of Love, Through the Centuries." Ugh!

B: It's cute.

C: It's crap. Your "bunny"! I mustn't see your "bunny." Hopeless twaddle. Gutless.

B: Well, it's daring in a way. Buttocks and all that.

C: It *pretends* to be daring, but it's totally safe. It's just yet another play about whether a man and a woman will get to mate. What do you want to bet they will?!

A: It's a living.

C: Scale.

B: I was having a good time.

C: You just like to flaunt your bunny.

B: And I'm sure you, at your age, don't.

C: Don't start!

A: (to B) Don't make this any harder than it is.

B: Oh, you two are so tired.

C: I am not tired. I just hate having to do this fluff.

B: I don't mind it. In fact I kinda like it.

C: Maybe that's because you're a fluffer?

B: You want me to take that cane and shove it up your ass?

C: You wanna try?

A: All right, all right. Where's the goddamned director? Late again! God!

B: Why don't we try improvising a little bit? It might free us up, get the fun back?

A: I don't know.

C: I'm game. I can't stand these lines we have to keep running and running!

B: Okay, from the top.

A: Do we have to stay in character?

C: If we're going to do it, let's *really* improvise! Whole hog. Let go! Let go!

B: Whatever.

(They take their places as at the beginning of the play)

B: "But, Maud, I fear that your father will never relent, never let us marry."

A: (improvising) Screw my father! He's not telling me what to do. He's a complete asshole.

(Enter C with cane)

C: What did I hear?

A: You can still hear?

C: I can, my precious one. Your foul mouth is hard to miss.

B: That mouth I long to kiss?

C: I bet that's not all you want to do with that mouth.

A: Father, what are you inferring?

C: I'm inferring nothing. I am *implying* that he wants a mouth job.

B: I want no such thing!

A: Good luck getting that.

B: I just want your lovely daughter's hand in marriage.

C: Yeah, right. You want as many of her holes as you can get.

A: Father!

C: But he's not going to get them. I want you to wait on me until one of us dies.

A: But is that fair, Father?

B: Yes, is that not selfish?

C: We're all selfish, for Christ's sake. You want to stick your dick into something pretty.
I want a mildly incestuous connection with a servant I don't have to pay.

A: And what do I want, Father?

C: I don't know. A meal ticket for life? His medical insurance? You do have those polyps that need attending to.

A: I would never marry someone for mere medical insurance! Or a meal ticket!

C: Well, plenty have. And for less than that. For shelter, for an emotional crutch, or because you're so lonely you'll even settle for him!

B: Hey!

A: I just want to love and be loved.

C: You don't even know what his love-making might be like. From the looks of him, I'd guess in and out in thirty seconds or less.

B: Hey!

A: Oh, no, Father. I'd be willing to bet he's good for at least thirty-three seconds.

C: And with two whole inches.

B: Hey!

A: They say it's not length.

B: That's right. It's width. And I've got width!

A: And I've got rhythm. (Dances a little.)

C: Whatever you've got, I give it a month.

A: Two.

B: For eternity!

C: Yeah, bad sex for eternity.

B: You don't know that I'm bad sex! Fuck you!

C: No, thank you. I'm celibate.

A: You're celibate?

C: For several years now.

B: Well, that explains a lot.

C: I got out of the game just in time.

A: It's made you bitter.

C: You should have seen me when I was still in the game. Now *that* was bitter.

A: How bitter?

B: Don't encourage him!

C: I looked around and saw all these ugly people calling it 'love,' but simply using each other, using and using, for sex, for relief, for some sort of comfort, then bored with each other beyond belief, and unable to get away from their other *un*-pathetic sillinesses. On and on – the whole world full of these stupid users. And calling what they do "holy" and "blessed" and even "sacred," and all puffed up with their pieties. Talk about who's blind! My God, the human race is blind! (Pause) Hey, I'm getting into this improvising stuff!

B: I'm sorry I suggested improv. Maybe we should get back to the real script.

A: Yeah, I think so.

C: Come on, come on! I've got lots more here.

B: No!

(C goes to the side of the stage, to snap the lights off, then back on)

C: There!

B: Oh, what the hell.

A: (improvising) Father, are you still around?

(C is gone.)

C: (offstage) No!

A: Did you kill Bunny?

B: (as himself) Bunny is fine. Let's do the second one-act in the series. Come on. We're married now, living in Mississippi, and you no longer live with your terrible father.

C: (still offstage with deep Southern accent) But I visit y'all from time to time!

B: (to A, acting) "How's our baby boy comin' along, sweetpea?"

A: (making herself look pregnant) "Any day now, lover man. Can't you tell?"

B: "You have never looked more pretty."

A: "Even with these extra sixty pounds?"

B: "I barely notice."

A: "Oh, you say the sweetest things, Leroy."

B: (suddenly apprehensive, to the audience) "But is it *my* child!?"

A: "Who are you talking to, lover?"

B: "No one, dear. Just a little ol' thought expressed aloud."

A: "But is that "allowed"? Get it – "aloud," allowed"?"

B: "You are so very verbal, precious momma."

A: (to audience) "If he only knew this baby is not his!" (Touching her belly)

(Enter C, threateningly)

C: "Whose baby could it be then?!"

B: (to C) "What are *you* doin' here?"

C: "Visitin'. What's it to you?"

B: "Visitin' your sister?"

A: "His half-sister."

C: (proudly) "That's right. Half."

B: "Is there more here than meets the eye?"

C: (to audience) It's not as though she's my whole sister!" (as himself) And of course she turns out not to be even his half-sister. Flirt with it, but draw back!

A: "I was drunk!"

C: "So was I!"

B: "Where was I?"

A: (to audience) "He was drunk too, but passed out under the bed."

B: (stupidly) "But is it my baby or not?"

C: "We'd better get one of them DMV tests."

A: "You mean DNA?"

C: "I can't keep all them different letters straight!" (as himself) Jesus H. Christ!"

B: (as herself) Do not take the name of the Lord in vain.

C: (as himself) It wasn't in vain. It was in order to curse!

A: (as herself) Christ, *I* want to curse.

B: (as himself) We're rolling along. Don't stop now.

A: (as herself) I despise doing hillbillies.

C: (as himself) At least we can still make fun of hillbillies.

B: I don't think the playwright thinks they're funny.

A: It's not funny! The woman's pregnant by her half-brother. She's going to have a shitty life.

B: She might get a TV reality show!

A: No, she won't! She'll wind up with some brain-damaged half-moron and living on food stamps in an ugly-ass trailer park where it's a hundred and ten in the shade!

B: But then she'll find the Lord and be happy.

A: Oh, God! I just hope she and her baby are so thoroughly stupid they won't even realize how bad off they are.

B: Don't be so hard on them.

A: Oh, shut your pious face. I come from a family like this one. Religious dumb-fucks who never went anywhere, never had an original thought in their skulls, thought breast cancer and piles were God's way of communicating with them, and wound up with no teeth at twenty-seven, and praisin' the Good Lord for making them proud that they had a goddamned trailer on a slab of concrete in Intestinal Parasites, Mississippi!

C: Or Bedsore, India.

A: Or Bent-Back, China!

B: Well, maybe it's better not to know how bad off you are.

A: Right. Only the *un*-examined life is worth living. Fuck Plato.

B: Well, you escaped. Here you are an actor in the Arts.

A: (low-key, sarcastic) Whoopee. How many people did we have for our last production?

B: Lots. . . . Enough.

A: We did fourteen performances and had a grand total of one hundred and seventy-eight attend!

B: Well, yes. But it's not as if we're doing *The Sound of Music*.

C: We do our own crap. Most people love real crap. *Love* it! "One-Acts of Love"!

A: My family adored crap, yes, they did. They shoved it and shoved it into their mouths until they were as bloated as dirigibles. And they shoved it into their souls with daytime "talk" shows with illiterate people throwing chairs at each other or treacly tales of lost sweethearts united after fifty-seven years living in towns next to each other. Endless junk! And they loved it, because it made their own lost, miserable lives seem like Heaven by comparison! And they even praised Jesus when one of them escaped a hurricane — instead of blaming Jesus for the goddamned hurricane in the first place!

(Pause.)

B: Well! (to C) Seems you're not the only bitter person around here.

C: I like reality TV. Everything I know about life I learned from reality TV.

A: Oh, shut up.

C: No, seriously. I think there's a play there.

B: Nobody will come to see it.

A: If I only dared. I'd write me some decent parts.

C: Dare, darling, dare! (Gets into character as a more realistic, unfunny hillbilly, to improvise) You carryin' Burval's child?

A: (getting into the same frame of mind) Nope.

C: It ain't mine, is it?

A: Nope.

C: Who's is it then?

A: I don't have the foggiest idea.

C: I can beat it out of you, mamma.

A: Yeah, and I can put a shotgun to your temple when you're sleepin'.

C: You wouldn't!

A: I would!

C: Why don't you have an abortion?

A: Because that's killing a child, God's creature, that's why. God gave me this baby for a reason!

C: He'd be better off as an abortion than growing up around you. He won't be able to read and write, most likely.

A: He can always go in the military.

C: And come out with one leg, no arms, and post-traumatic stress disorder of the brain.

A: But he served his country!

C: Praise the Baptist Lord!

A: And he can still be a Little League coach!

C: And a good one too, by golly. Get our boys trained up to fight them terriers.

A: Terrorists?

C: Them too. Lots of them terrier terrorists running amuck.

A: Tryin' to take away our freedoms!

C: Bastards!

A: But our leaders will always guide us into the right wars.

C: Amen!

A: They always know what's goin' on behind the scenes, and we can trust 'em.

C: I know I trust 'em with my life. And with the life of my unborn baby. (Points)
That baby! It *is* my baby, isn't it, Callie? Tell me the truth, once and for all. Tell me.
Tell me now!

A: My name is Lula. But I'll tell you the truth, Jaspur. . . . The baby's is . . . *God's!*

C: You're carrying God's baby?

A: It wasn't consenting, but, yes, I am. So you see why I can't have no abortion. I am
with child, carrying the Savior of the human race! (Raises both hands to Heaven)

C: (falling to his knees, hands folded) Glory hallelujah!

(A and C hold the glorious moment for a moment, then burst into laughs.)

B: I want my money back! So cynical. I don't know about you two, but I love my
family!

C: Baptist military?

B: Yeah, so?

C: Moving on! Maybe we should substitute our improvs for the real script on opening
night.

A: The playwright will scream bloody murder.

B: The critics will crucify us.

A: To say nothing of the audiences.

C: Maybe they'll be grateful for some honesty in the theater!

B: What makes you think anybody wants honesty in the theater? They pay big bucks to escape honesty.

C: And you call *me* cynical.

B: Not all "honesty" is nasty.

C: It isn't?!

B: Give folks a break. They have hard lives.

C: Made for themselves by themselves.

A: Plus circumstances beyond their control.

C: Hey, whose side are you on here?

A: I fluctuate.

B: I think people need sympathy. They don't get that much out of life.

C: Yes, let's smother our patrons with great big squeezies on opening night.

B: What do you say we rehearse that other one-act, the one about long-term relationships? It's sweet. I feel the need for something sweet right now.

A: I'm up for it. Maybe somebody should call Cal and see what's happened to him?

C: He'll show up, eventually. (to A) Sweet and wholesome here we come! Ready?

A: Ready. (Pulls out a magazine, starts reading it)

(C enters carrying a newspaper)

C: (acting) "Good morning."

A: (acting) "Morning. (She puts down the magazine she is reading) How are you feeling? Any better?"

C: (acting) "Not really. I think there was something bad in that pizza we ordered."

A: (acting) "Did you eat the anchovies?"

C: (acting) "Yeah. Didn't you?"

A: (acting) "No. I ate some of the pepperoni."

C: (acting) "I think the problem was in the anchovies."

A: (acting) "Could be. I told you to not order anchovies."

C: (acting) "I know. But I like anchovies."

A: (acting) "It seems anchovies don't like you."

C: (acting) "I think I might upchuck."

A: (acting) "You should get something from the town drugstore."

C: (acting) "What?"

A: (acting) "I don't know. Something to coat your stomach."

C: (acting) "Don't we have anything in the house?"

A: (acting) "It's probably expired."

C: (acting) "Is milk of magnesia good for an upset stomach?"

A: (acting) "Look on the label."

C: (acting) "I did. It says it expired six years ago."

A: (acting) "I think just plain milk is good."

C: (acting) "But not for my diabetes."

A: (acting) "How about some soy milk?"

C: (acting) "I'd have to go out and buy some."

A: (acting) "It's not that far to the store."

C: (acting) "I guess. But I'd have to find parking."

A: (acting) "You could double park and run inside."

C: (acting) "Yeah, but I might get sideswiped."

A: (acting) “You can go into the lot.”

C: (acting) “It’s always crowded in the lot.”

A: (acting) “It’s less crowded on Sunday.”

C: (acting) “I think it’s it would be nice if somebody went for me.”

A: (acting) “Who would that be?”

C: (acting) “Somebody who loves me?”

A: (acting) “You can’t go yourself?”

C: (acting) “My tum-tum aches.”

A: (acting) “All right, I’ll go, sweetie.”

C: (acting) “Will you? You’re so wonderful. I think ice cream might soothe my tum-tum.”

A: (acting) “What kind?”

C: (acting) “Watermelon fudge?”

A: (acting) “Are you sure your stomach is upset?”

C: (acting) “We’ll share the ice cream, one bowl, two spoons.”

A: (acting) “Oh, honey, you think of everything!”

C: (acting) “Darling, I love you so much!”

(The two embrace)

C: (suddenly, as himself) Enough of these boring but oh-so-loveable, small-town people.
(to A) How about our version? Ready?

A: Ready. (Pulls out her magazine, starts reading it)

(The two continue reading throughout the improvised scene.)

C: (entering, reading a newspaper, bored) Good morning. Bitch.

A: (still reading the magazine, bored) Morning. Prick!

C: (reading) Is there any coffee left?

A: (reading) No, I drank it all.

C: (reading) Thanks.

A: (reading) You're welcome. Anything in the paper today?

C: (putting down his newspaper) No. My guts are a little upset.

A: (No response, keeps reading)

C: Really hurt.

A: (Yawns, reads)

C: (reading) I think it may have been rat poison.

A: (reading) Yeah, that's nice, dear.

C: I'm serious.

A: (reading) I told you not to eat anchovies.

C: I didn't have any anchovies!

A: (reading) You wouldn't listen.

C: I didn't have any anchovies.

A: (reading) You always order anchovies. You won't listen.

C: I did not order any anchovies last night!

A: (about her magazine) The princess of Monaco is getting a new yacht.

C: (begins hacking phlegm)

A: (still reading, about the hacking, not looking at him) Oh, Lord!

C: (hacking more loudly)

A: (still reading) Oh, stop that!

C: I can't help it. I'm trying to dislodge the poison in my system. (Hacks loudly)

A: (still reading) You do that all the time!

C: I do not! (Hacks more)

A: (reading) You do too. Every morning!

C: It's worse today.

A: (reading) I don't know how it can get any worse than it is every day.

C: I think I need that Himmler Maneuver.

A: (correcting, still reading) Heimlich.

C: (Hacks again)

A: (still reading) Just stop hacking! For God's sake! It's disgusting!

C: Pound on my back. (Hacks)

A: (reading) Pound on your own back!

C: I can't reach my own back!

A: (still reading) Rub against the wall.

C: Okay. (rubbing against the wall, hacking again) It's not working!

A: Oh, for shit's sake, living with you is impossible! (Gets up and leaves, still reading)

C: Well, you're stuck with me until death do us part! (Really big hack)

B: (interrupting) Stop! I'm your pharmacist, and I have some medicine that will cure your problem like that. (Snaps fingers)

C: It's too . . . late! (Grabs his own throat. gasps, and falls to the floor)

B: Are you okay?

(C does not answer for a few moments, then jumps up)

C: Right as rain! That was exhilarating! Not your medicine. The little play!

B: I think we need to stay on book. Enough hacking! That was disgusting!

A: Oh, you're such a goody-goody.

B: I'm not *all* goody-goody! (B's cell phone rings. He answers it.) Yes? (Listens) Okay. Yeah, we're rehearsing them. (Listens) Yeah, it's going along just fine. (Listens) Okay. Okay. . . . Bye. (to the other two) It was Cal. He's on his way.

A/C: (together) Yeah, right.

B: He said we should do the adultery one-act. It needs the most work.

C: Maybe the playwright should work on it!

A: Let's do it!

B: It's my least favorite among all the one-acts.

C: Let's tell the writer that, and maybe he'll change it.

A: I worked on his last thing, a couple of years ago. He wouldn't change anything. Even his typos!

C: I never met him, but I hear he's got an ego as big as a porn star's penis.

A: I don't know how many people came backstage last time and gushed about how "uplifting" the play was, how it gave them hope to go on.

C: Was that the one about the orphaned polar bear cubs?

A: It was. I played the mother polar bear who dies.

B: I saw that. You made the polar bear black, right, to get more diversity?

A: You got it.

C: Oh, Christ!

A: I didn't mind. I like plays that reach out to other communities.

C: You mean than the community that actually goes to the theater? Old white people.

B: Well, more people of color would go if they could see themselves on stage.

C: No, they won't! I was in an all-black production of *Othello* once, where I played the white Othello. Nobody came to that!

B: I was cast one time as the juvenile lead in *Our Town*. But I gave up the part to a young man from India. And it wasn't just because of the protest either. I thought he was really good in the part, better than me.

C: An Indian from India in *Our Town* in 1901 Grovers Corners, New Hampshire?!

B: We simply ignored race. And ethnicity.

A: I'm ethnic myself. Although I don't look it. We're under-represented.

C: Everybody's ethnic! And whatever you are, you're way over-represented!

A: I mean –

C: I know what you mean. Some “ethnics” are more equal than others!

B: It's a way to re-invigorate the classics.

C: It's a way to keep me from working. How about instead of “people of color” we stick to “people of talent”?!

B: People suspend their disbelief all the time in the theater.

C: Not about everything. I think it's ridiculous.

B: I think it's here to stay.

C: And such shameless sucking up to “minorities,” who aren't even “minorities” any more! They outnumber me. And are we doing theater or publicity?!

B: Not all black people are bad!

C: Oh, for God's sake!

A: Okay, time for adultery! Adultery! Let's go! Let's go!

C: Just what the world needs, another story about adultery!

A: (acting, to B) “Darling, you're home early!”

B: (acting) “Yes, we had a pipe burst in Accounting.”

A: (acting) “I wish you had called to tell me you were coming home.”

B: (acting) “I thought I'd surprise you.”

A: (acting) “Indeed you have!”

B: (acting) “Is there someone hiding behind that drape over there?”

A: (acting) “Don’t be silly, Michael. It’s a breeze, that’s all.”

B: (acting) “I don’t feel any breeze, Angelica. You aren’t being unfaithful to me, I hope!”

A: (acting) “Of course not, darling. Why is that the first thing that comes into your head?”

B: (acting) “Why are you still in bed? It’s eleven-thirty.”

A: (acting) “I’m a little under the weather.”

B: (acting) “Are you sure that’s all you’re under – the weather?”

A: (acting) “I don’t like your tone, Michael.”

B: (acting) “If I thought you were cheating on me, I’d die! Simply die. My life would be over!”

A: (acting) “What if you are cheating on me?! Do you think I could keep on living?! Do you? Do you?”

B: “Betrayed! I feel so betrayed!”

A: “I realize how awful adultery is. It’s horrible, horrible!”

C: (as himself) I hate this one! Let’s skip to the end. Who gives a fuck if he’s cheating on her or not!?! (acting, coming from behind the drape) “Michael, it is your long-lost brother!”

B: (acting) “Ryan?”

C: (as himself) No, your other long-lost brother. . . . *Of course*, Ryan!

B: (acting) “What are you doing behind that drape?”

C: (acting) “Your loving wife wanted to surprise you. She has spent a year searching online for me.”

A: (acting, to B) “For your birthday, darling!”

B: (acting) “It’s my birthday? I had forgotten.”

A: (acting) “But *I* hadn’t.”

B: (acting) “So you’re not having an adulterous affair with someone?”

- A: (acting) “Good God, no, Michael! How could you think that for a moment?!”
- C: (acting) “Michael, you misread things. Your wife is faithful! Your lost-long brother has at last returned.”
- A: (acting) “And I have reason to believe, based on my Internet research, that our puppy that ran off when we were shopping at Walmart has been found, in perfect health. The shelter people called just before you arrived home!”
- B: (acting) “Oh, darling! Oh, dear brother!” (He hugs them both) (then as himself) Yeah, this is pretty ripe.
- C: I can hear the tears falling in the audience even as we speak.
- B: Okay. It’s my turn for a re-write. I’m not as naïve as you two seem to think. (to A) You ready?
- A: Hit me with your best shot.
- B: (to C) You?
- C: I can handle the truth.
- B: (improvising, entering the room) Darling, I’m home early.
- A: Really? I’m still in bed.
- B: So I see. Isn’t that a little suspicious, at eleven-thirty in the morning?
- A: I feel flatulent today.
- B: Oh? And who’s that in bed with you? Your doctor?
- C: (pretending to get in bed with A) Your long-lost cousin!
- B: My cousin?
- A: Oh, is there someone in bed with me? I was so heavily asleep I didn’t realize it.
- B: I don’t care who the hell it is. I gotta take a leak. Where’s that plastic bottle?
- C: Well, don’t take it in here! Go in the bathroom!
- B: I can’t wait that long. Where’s the bottle we keep on the dresser?
- A: I emptied it this morning, since you never will!

C: (to A) Should I run out of here?

B: (to C) Don't bother. Francine and I haven't had sex for four years. God, she's cranky!
Help her out! Help me out!

A: All I ask is a little nooky now and then? And what do I get? ED, that's what! He's too young for ED!

B: I can't help it! I didn't ask for it.

A: I hear your jacking off in the shower.

B: So?

A: I think masturbation is a form of adultery.

B: I don't have ED in there. Actually, at least there I don't have to keep pumping the same old piece year in, year out.

A: I beg your pardon?!

B: You're the real cause of my ED.

A: How do you think I feel with your limited technique?

B: My limited technique? You just lie there! Why do I have to do all the work?!
Where is it written than I have to pleasure you!? You haven't pleased me for years!

C: Why did you two get the idea there is supposed to be pleasure? This is marriage we're talking about!

A: For better or worse.

B: It can't get any worse in this marriage.

C: Maybe I should come back at some other time.

A: Naw. You're here.

B: Just don't get anything nasty on my side of the bed.

C: Do you want to join us?

B: No.

A: Do you want a divorce?

B: He's not moving in, is he?

A: (to C) Are you moving in?

C: God, no!

A: (to B) He's not moving in. He's just here for a booty call.

B: Good. Then we don't need a divorce. (to C) How often do you want to come over?

C: I don't know. Once a week?

A: Every other week is fine.

C: Really?

A: It's fine, it's fine. Believe me.

B: Pick a day and I'll be sure to be at work.

C: Every other Thursday?

A: I go to the food distribution give-away on Thursdays.

C: I work weekends.

A: What's today?

B: Tuesday.

A: What's wrong with Tuesdays?

C: They're okay by me.

B: I can live with Tuesdays.

A: Thank god we worked that out.

B: Maybe I could join in once in a while?

A/C: No!

C: Not if you have the heartbreak of ED.

B: (to A) I thought, when we go married, I would find everything I needed in you!

A: Well, you didn't. I certainly didn't in you.

C: (with mock shock) Could there possibly be something faulty with the promise?!

B: (to A) Maybe I wouldn't have ED if you dressed up a little?

A: Like what?

B: I don't know. A burlesque queen?

A: A burlesque queen? You want to have sex with bubbles or feathers?

B: It was just a suggestion.

A: I don't do burlesque queens.

B: Maybe two wives?! There's an idea.

A: Are you a Muslim?

B: I'd consider converting.

A: Yeah, four wives for you! How about four husbands for me!?! Now there's an idea!

B: I want a divorce!

C: Till death do you part!

A: You mean the breakup of the family?

B: Yes!

A: But people who stay married, even if they are miserable and cause misery to their partners, are the good people!

B: I know that. But I don't care. I want to be one of the bad people!

C: (as himself, to B) Great! I didn't know you had it in you!

B: What?

C: The dark side!

B: I've lived. I don't say in public everything I think.

C: That's what Twitter is for!

A: I don't tweet. I can high and say awful things and then have to apologize.

B: I put some things on Facebook that I shouldn't have.

C: What?

B: Never mind. I took them down.

C: They say everything is still there in cyberspace, waiting to come back and haunt you when you try to get a job.

A: Facebook updates Thoreau. The mass of men live lives of *public* desperation.

B: Who's Thoreau?

A: Forget it. Am I the last reader on Earth?!

C: I read!

B: (as himself) That was exhausting!

C: Maybe we should write it down. It had some bite.

A: I'm afraid it's going to die with us.

B: Most theater dies right after it happens.

C: I love this improvising. I think we should write it down or record it.

A: I tried that once when I took an improve class. Our skits seemed hilarious and touching and you name it. But when they hit the cold light of print, for some reason they didn't.

B: It's probably because audiences are willing to forgive a lot of glitches if they think it's being created on the spot.

C: Like children's theater. Actually, only a parent or a pedophile can stand it!

A: Are you speaking from personal experience?

C: I am a parent, as a matter of fact. We've been a bit estranged of late.

B: For how long?

C: Three years. He's become born again.

A: Oh, sorry to hear it.

C: What can you do! Kids!

B: You have to accept them as they are.

C: No, you don't. He's a holier-than-thou asshole.

A: He takes after his dad?

C: Maybe. Fuck you, darling. If he wants my love, there are *conditions*!

A: I hope I never have kids.

C: Don't keep letting guys stick it in you then. It's really quite simple.

A: Are you sure you're not a pedophile?

C: I didn't say *I* like children's theater. I said *other* people do.

B: I like children's theater.

(Both A and C turn their heads to look at B)

B: Oh, I don't mean that! I mean, it's sort of cute, forgetting their lines, galumphing around. (He galumphs)

C: You're just encouraging them!

B: The happiest day of my life is when I was seven and we did this little show with the Boy Scouts, and I got to make the wind sound.

C: (smart alecky) You got to make the wind sound? And how in the world did you do that? Let me guess.

B: Like this. (Makes a wind noise with his mouth) It was just terrific. It's why I became an actor.

C: No!

B: It is! I also got to make the sound of a giraffe.

A: Giraffes make sounds?

B: I made one up for the giraffe.

C: Okay, I guess we have to ask to hear it.

B: Let's see if I can remember. (Remembers) It was something like this. (Makes an odd "giraffe" noise)

A: I think he's got it! I think he's got it!

C: Was the giraffe dying?

B: He could have been! I was a big hit!

C: But what have you done lately?

B: I'm starring in a bunch of positive one-acts in a community theater.

A: (ironic) Not with Kimberly Halliday?!

B: Why, yes I am!

C: (ironic) And Ralph J. Evers?

B: I am! Isn't that amazing!?

C: How are your co-stars, dare I ask?

A: Don't ask.

B: They're . . . adequate.

A/C: Adequate?!

B: Is there something wrong with adequate?

C: That's an insult.

B: You two can dish it out but not take it, it seems.

A: I'm not "adequate."

B: You're not?

A: I mean, I'm adequate. I'm not "just adequate."

C: (to B) You want me critiquing your acting?

B: Not particularly.

C: Your giraffe was not adequate.

A: And your wind sucked!

B: My wind was great! (to C) And my giraffe could beat your giraffe any day of the week, including matinees!

C: This is what giraffe sounds like. (Makes a different giraffe sound) Now that's a giraffe!

B: You call that a giraffe. I'd say it's more like cornered bush baby.

A: Will you two stop!

C: Let's hear your giraffe.

A: This male competition! Get over yourselves! You'll fight over anything!

B: I'm not fighting. I'm just reminiscing.

C: Someone's got to stand up for honest portrayals of giraffes in the theater!

A: No wonder we have wars!

C: Oh, don't go all feminist on us now. Please!

A: You don't have to be a feminist to know that men are assholes.

C: You use that word a lot.

A: Only when it's appropriate. Which is often.

C: Do you want me to start on women?

A: I thought you were celibate.

C: I wasn't born celibate! . . . So to speak. Women turned me celibate.

A: Not interested in the details. Thank you anyway.

C: (continuing) I'm not saying all women are, but the ones I knew tended to be – what's the word?" – prostitutes. All four hundred and seven of them.

A: Prostitutes? Please!

C: Takers. They wanted me to pay for everything. Everything, in one way or another.

B: I think we had better get off this topic.

C: Why? We're just chatting in the green room, aren't we? She's telling us how most men are war-mongering assholes, and I'm saying women trade their body parts for gifts and security. I guess it all works out for most folks somehow. Just didn't for me. I guess *I'm* weird.

A: I never sold a single body part of mine even once!

C: But you would for a wedding ring and a house in the suburbs.

A: Not true.

C: Plus a trip to Hawaii?

A: (joking) Keep talkin'! I'm not getting any younger.

C: See!

A: I kid, I kid! I kid the men who own most things and how you manage to get a few of them back.

B: You two are making me very uncomfortable. I think we should get back to rehearsing.

C: Oh, right. The "One-Acts of Love, Through the Centuries." I'd almost forgotten we have our careers to think of!

B: Nobody's forcing you to do theater!

C: I'm not a quitter. I am an endurer.

B: (accusatory) Are you a . . . right-winger?

C: Don't pigeon hole!

A: There are no Republicans in theater!

C: That would be exactly my point.

A: Except producers.

C: I just want it to be "fair and balanced."

B: I doubt that.

C: Then at least not so thoroughly dishonest about real life.

A: I think you're in the wrong business.

C: Maybe I'm the vanguard of a great new movement. No more bullshit! Come join me!
No more cheap tears. No more sentimental feel-good baloney.

B: I think the Nazis did that.

C: Oh, please. Anytime someone ventures the slightest deviation from the P.C., he's got
to be a Nazi!

A: Well, are you?

C: No! (to be provocative) The Nazis are wusses! They adore white people. I don't.
Happy now?

B: Okay. Let's do that one-act about old age.

A: I'm ready.

(B's cell phone rings. He answers it.)

B: Uh huh. Uh huh. (Hangs up)

A: Cal again?

B: He is on his way.

C: We don't need him, the little creep.

A: Let's do this. (announcing) "My Dad" coming up. (Takes her place to "act")

C: Let me get into the hospital bed. (Mimes getting into a hospital bed, conks out)

B: I'm supposed to stand near the bed, right? Was that the blocking?

C: (wakes up) Yes. (Conks out)

A: (entering to B, acting) "Tyler! Tyler! Have they cut off Dad's other leg yet?"

B: (acting) "I don't know, Melissa. I just got here."

A: (acting) "Should we look?" (Mimes lifting Dad's blanket)

B: (acting) "I don't think I can bear to look."

A: (acting) “Didn’t they take his right leg yesterday? I’m sorry I couldn’t be here.”
(Giggles as herself a bit)

B: (as himself) I don’t think the playwright means it to be funny.

A: (giggling) I’m sorry.

B: It’s not funny for an old man to lose both his legs. (Starts to giggle a bit)

C: (popping up) “To lose one leg, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune. To lose two looks like carelessness!” (as himself) On the author’s part!

(All three giggle madly)

B: The playwright is going to kill us.

C: You mean cut off *all* our legs?! We’ll never act in this town again!

A: Stop! Stop! We’re so *bad*.

B: I didn’t laugh that much. I’m sorry I participated in . . . in any of this.

C: Aren’t you precious?!

B: Keep that up and you’re going not only going to be celibate, you’re going to be dickless.

C: (smart alecky) That sounds pretty serious. (acting) “Have they cut off dad’s other dick yet?”

B: Let’s stick to the script.

A: We are! It’s unintentionally hilarious. And Cal won’t say boo to the writer.

B: Well, he did win the Fresh Voices Award last year for these one-acts.

C: (mocking) Wow. I’m ‘whelmed.’ Not ‘over,’ not ‘under,’ just ‘whelmed.’

A: Back to the script. (acting the part) “Tyler, do you think our mother will be well enough to make it here to the hospital?”

B: (acting) “You mean to visit our Dad before he goes?”

A: (acting) “I do. I certainly hope that her fibromyalgia won’t prevent her from seeing her husband of fifty years one last time.”

C: (as himself) Oh, my God, the exposition is horrible!

B: (acting) “Dad, Dad, calm down.”

C: (as himself) Cut off my head too! Please! Soon! So that I don’t have to listen to this!

A: (acting) “Maybe I can videotape Mom and Dad’s last goodbyes and post it on YouTube.”

B: (acting) “So the world can share in their love, Sis?”

A: (acting) “It’s the least we can do for them.”

C: (waking up, acting) “Do you think, my son, my daughter, that you could possibly have that video finished so that your mother and I can view it together on YouTube, before we die?”

B: (acting) “I’ll do my best, Dad.”

C: (acting) “I’m sure you will, my son. You always have, ever since your mother and I got your from that Romanian orphanage.”

B: (acting, shocked) “You got me from a Romanian orphanage!?”

C: (acting) “We didn’t know how to tell you until now.”

A: (acting) “I suspected something all along.”

B: (acting) “You did?”

C: (acting) “But we never told your older sister.”

B: (acting) “Is that why she and I look absolutely nothing alike?”

A: (acting) “Of course I loved you as if you were my actual brother.”

B: (acting) “Even though I was an outcast from Romania?!”

A: (acting) “You were as good as any actual brother could be. In fact, you were better!”

B: (acting) “Oh, Sis! How can I ever thank you?!”

A: (acting) “You can start by giving me a hug, a great, big brotherly hug!”

(A and B as brother and sister hug)

C: (acting) “Is there room inside that hug for me?”

(A and B turn toward C)

A/B: (acting) “Of course there is, Dad!”

(All three hug)

C: (as himself) Blackout.

B: (as himself) We need to work on the blocking.

A: At least we got most of the words right.

C: Unfortunately.

A: This is the one-act Cal wants us to perform at the Veterans’ Home before we open.

B: I think they’ll like it.

C: Are you sure he doesn’t want them to choke to death from laughing?

B: Well, you could play it a little more sincere.

C: Now he’s giving me acting lessons!

B: People just want to cry sometimes.

C: When I go into a home, and I no doubt I will be, whatever you do don’t make me have to watch anything resembling what we just did, ever! Put a plastic bag over my face instead.

B: Gladly.

A: (impishly) Let’s do ours now. We’ve gone this far, haven’t we?

C: I’m ready for my close up.

B: Do we really have do any more?!

C: Absolutely!

B: Damn. (Moves away, gets into character, returns, with a real plastic bag, improvising)
Poppa! It’s Tommy! I have something for you! (Holds up the plastic bag)

C: What’s that, my boy?

B: I have a plastic bag for you! (Waves it)

C: No!

B: Yes, Poppa. To place over your head!

C: Is that a cure for a gangrened leg?

B: It's a cure for everything that ails you, Poppa!

(Enter A as sister)

A: No, Poppa! No Tommy! Plastic bags can be lethal!

B: (gleefully) I know!

C: (as himself) I'm not so sure about this.

B: (as himself) Let's just try it. (Moves toward Poppa)

A: Not one more step! (Gets between her brother and her father)

C: Oh, what's the difference! I don't want to live anymore anyway.

A: (blocking B) You'll have to smother me first, younger brother!

B: That can be arranged!

(B and C struggle over the plastic bag)

B: (trying to put the plastic bag over his father's face) Yes!

A: (trying to prevent him from smothering their father) No!

B: (succeeds in placing the plastic bag over C's face) How's it feel, Poppa? Is it a good fit?

C: (as himself) Hey! That's a little too real. Let me get my fingers underneath it so that you don't actually suffocate me. You need more experience!

B: Hey! I just want it to be real!

(B and c struggle over the plastic bag)

A: Enough, you two!

(They finally subside, with some final grabbing at each other)

B: (as himself) Did you read about that actor who accidentally hanged himself playing Judas?

A: Really?

B: Yeah. He thought the harness they were using didn't look real enough. So he . . .

A: How awful.

B: Nobody even noticed that he was dead until the end of the scene.

C: That's what he gets for doing Christian theater!

B: It can happen in any theater.

C: (about the plastic bag) Well, I'd notice if I were dead! So keep your plastic bag to yourself.

A: I'm dying of thirst.

C: Is there a vending machine out there? (Points off)

B: It's broken.

A: Not to worry. I brought my own. (Opens her purse)

C: You brought water?

A: (having a swallow) I've learned.

B: I brought some too. (Gets his bottled water from a backpack)

C: You kids these days! You think you need water!

B: I suppose you didn't bring any.

C: I didn't.

B: And I suppose you want some.

C: I'm fine.

A: (taking another swallow) Oh, that's great!

B: (taking a swig) Umm, delicious!

C: You think I want your water, but I don't.

B: (drinking, rubbing it in) It's so good!

C: Are you sure that vending machine is broken?

B: Yeah. I broke it.

A: (to C) I'm finished. You want the rest of mine?

C: No thanks. I'll replenish when I get home.

B: That small studio?

C: Not that small.

B: Where you drink alone?

C: No, I drink with the cockroaches.

A: Okay, boys! Enough!

C: (to B) You probably live at home with your parents.

B: At least somebody wants to live with *me*!

C: Do they still tuck you in when you go beddy-bye?

A: Only Americans think it's odd for kids to live at home after eighteen.

C: And they're right!

A: You need to travel more.

C: You need to travel less.

A: Hey!

C: What about you, Kimberley? What are your living arrangements?

A: None of your business.

C: I'm not trying to get in your pants. As I said, I'm celibate. A militant one.

A: Men will say anything to get in your pants. Even if they're celibate.

C: No, I'm curious. We rehearse together and we'll act together, and yet we know so little about one another.

B: Don't tell him. He'll just use it against you.

C: (to A) Let me guess. You have a boyfriend who's into digital something or other.

A: Wrong.

C: You're a lesbian!

A: No. I used to be a lesbian.

C: Funny. So did I.

B: I have never been a lesbian.

A: It didn't work out for me. I guess my heart wasn't in it.

C: And now?

A: Believe it or not, I am happily married – legally married, not just shackled up – with a wonderful man.

C: Really?

A: Really. Three years. He lives on a trust fund. He thoroughly loves my acting. In fact, that's how we met. He saw me in a play. Came back stage.

C: You're making this up!

A: You'll never know, will you?

C: I don't begrudge other people some happiness. Jeez.

B: (to C) That's what I want.

C: Her husband?

B: A wife with a trust fund!

C: (to A) Does your husband have a sister for our friend here?

B: I can find my own, thank you.

C: I could live with a trust fund. So could my cockroaches.

B: You're just the kind that will probably inherit a trust fund!

C: You really despise me, don't you?

B: Of course not. You're just too negative.

C: (faking it) I'm sorry! I'll give you my trust fund when I get it!

B: You need to take a happy pill now and again.

C: You need to get off the Prozac!

A: We all need to get through this rehearsal! That's what we need! (Puts her bottle of water away)

C: No bathroom break? If we were Equity, we'd have a bathroom break.

B: You want one?

C: I do, but I'm not going to take it. I want to get finished and go home and sleep.

B: People need bathroom breaks sometimes. Give 'em a *break*!

C: Whoa, word play from sonny boy here! Believe me, with my prostate expanding along with my waistline, I know all about bathroom breaks. Sometimes I even wet myself.

A: Okay! TMI!

C: There can never be too much information about your colleagues!

(B's cell phone rings. He picks up, then hangs up immediately)

A: Was that Cal?

B: Probably.

A: He's going to be mad that you hung up on him.

B: I don't care.

C: That's my boy! Don't let 'em boss you around.

B: Let's do the last one-act.

C: “Of love”!

A: “Through the centuries”!

C: Eternal verities!

A: Can’t get enough of those.

B: Let’s do the one called “Death!”

C: Can’t wait!

(B thinks for a moment, getting into character.)

C: You’re Death, right?

B: Yeah!

C: And you have to think about how to get into character?

B: I don’t want to do it like a stereotype.

C: Of course you don’t. See, I’ve changed your thinking about theater.

B: You have not! But there must be some fresh way to do the Grim Reaper.

C: How about a happy Grim Reaper?

B: Maybe. Could be.

C: There are some things that you can’t change in the theater, most things actually, no matter how much I want to. Even I expect the Grim Reaper to be *grim*!

A: Let *me* play the Grim Reaper.

B: No. It’s my part.

A: Just for a minute. Think of it as non-traditional casting.

B: Not for the show, though.

A: Just for now!

B: (reluctantly) I guess a minute will be all right.

A: I brought a hood. Let me get it. (Goes to her purse)

C: You brought a hood?

A: I was going to wear it for Momma, but maybe it's better here. Here it is. (Gets the hood, puts it on) How does it look? (She extends her arms like the Grim Reaper)

B: You need one of those things with the . . . (Demonstrates a scythe)

C: A scythe?

B: Whatever.

C: (to A) Don't let him use it. He'll become a "scythe"-queen.

B: You seem to think I'm gay, and that it's not okay!

C: Don't be so sensitive.

B: Well, I'm not gay, and it *is* okay!

C: Oy vay!

A: You don't like people making fun of you.

C: Believe me, I'm past worrying about it. You're all so P.C.! I want to scream!

A: Maybe you're just mean.

C: So be mean back. But don't cut ever criticism off at the knees. Free speech, my ass! You have free speech in this country, until you try to use it!

B: You have plenty of free speech. More than most!

C: And you'll only get it away from me when you pry my free speech from my cold, dead mouth!

A: Speaking of which. (Assumes her Grim Reaper posture)

C: Oh, my heavens, it's the Grim Reaper!

A: What if the Grim Reaper danced in?

B: What?!

A: Like this. (She goes off a bit, then dances in as the Grim Reaper)

C: I love it!

B: I don't.

A: (handing B the hood) Here. You play it.

B: (donning the hood) I can't see!

C: Death is blind? Or is that Justice?

B: Screw it! (Throws the hood down) (to C, acting) "I have come for you at last! Prepare yourself!"

C: (acting) "For me? Why me?"

A: (acting) "I am his wife. Take me instead!"

B: (acting) "Such self-sacrificing love have I seldom seen!"

A: (acting) "I mean it!"

C: (acting) "Dearest wife!"

(A and C clasp hands together)

B: (acting) "Quite a dilemma for me, the Grim Reaper! Which one of you should I take?"

C: (acting, falls to his knees) "Take me, O Grim Reaper! Spare my wife!"

A: (acting, falls to her knees) "No! Spare my husband!"

C: (acting) "Me!"

A: (acting) "Me!"

B: (acting) "I can't decide!"

A: (acting) "He is such a good husband! He'll provide for our children when I'm gone!"

C: (acting) "She's younger than I, and such a perfect mother. It would not be right to take her so soon!"

B: (acting) "I could take both of you! What do you say to that?"

A: (acting) "But what about our children?!"

B: (acting) "I could take them too."

C: (acting) “No, no, never that! Drag me to Hell. Let me spend eternity there in endless torment. But please, please spare my wife and children!”

A: (acting) “Let me be with him in Hell too, with endless torment. Only one thing I beg of you! Let my children live!”

B: (acting) “Let me ponder this.” (Ponders) “I have made my fateful decision!”

A/C: (acting) “What might that be?!”

B: (acting) “I will now take both of you to Hell for all eternity!”

A/C: (acting) “Yes? And?”

B: (acting) “Your children *will* live, and your children will have children!”

A: (acting) “Oh, thank you, Grim Reaper!”

C: (acting) “Thank you!”

B: (acting) “Now come with me to Hell! It is the price you have made in this bargain with me this day!”

(He starts to lead A and C off)

C: (acting) “We go willingly!”

A: (acting) “To Hell for all eternity!”

A: (acting) “And we are content.”

C: (acting) “Because we sacrificed ourselves –

A/C: (acting, together) “For our children!”

(B leads them off)

B: (as himself) And fade to black.

C: It’s even worse than I remember!

A: At least it’s short.

B: I think it’ll touch a chord in people’s hearts. People love their kids.

C: Yes!!! But in Hell for all eternity so they can have seventy, eighty years here?

A: It's a play! An uplifting play.

C: I know it's an uplifting play. That's what I hate about it.

B: Are you sure you're in the right profession?

C: It's too late to get out now.

A: You watch. This will be people's favorite one. They'll come backstage with tears streaming down their faces.

B: Telling us about their kids who died young.

C: Oh, please not!

A: With photos of their graves.

C: No!

B: And you won't be able to say a cynical thing to them, not one.

C: Quick! I need some therapy. Have you got the strength to do one last improv?

A: I don't think so.

B: We'd better go over that last one some more.

C: Please! I need some wormwood to get the saccharine taste of that out of my mouth!
I'll pay you.

B: How much?

C: With compliments.

A: Just compliments?

C: You know me. I never give compliments. They'd be the first compliments I have ever given anybody.

B: But will they be sincere?

C: If there's anything I am, it's sincere!

A: Forget the compliments. Let's do it. Make it quick. I need to get home.

B: What about Cal?

A: Fuck him.

B: Yeah, fuck him.

C: I agree. Fuck him!

(The cell phone rings. They don't answer it)

A/B/C: (as one) Fuck you!

C: (taking another place) Okay, let me be the Grim Reaper this time.

A: (improvising) Who are you there, with that scythe?

C: (waving the imaginary scythe) I'm not telling.

B: (joining in) You're not the Grim Reaper, are you?!

C: No, I'm Jack the Reaper!

B: (Groans) Oh!

C: Sorry!

B: You have ripped out my guts with that pun!

C: You ain't seen nothin' yet! Where are your children? I want to *meet* them.

B: My children?

A: You mean our hiding children?

C: Yes, little Ann who keeps that diary.

A: (as herself) Don't go there!

C: But you don't know where I'm going.

A: Not Ann Frank. It's too much.

B: Who's Ann Frank?

C: How can I be outrageous when he doesn't even know anything!?

B: I know things from *now*. You know things from *then*.

C: Not bad. Almost a touché. Almost. (as the Grim Reaper again) If not little Ann, then what other child can I take with me to Hell!?

A: Little Dorrit?

C: Too obscure.

A: Little Nell?

C: Never read it. (about B) And I know *he* never read it!

A: Tiny Tim?

C: Over-used.

B: The singer?

C: Yeah, the singer with bad teeth who played a ukulele. I'll take him with . . . No, he's probably already in Hell!

A: Cossette?

C: Yeah, that's perfect. (improvising) Come here, little Cossette!

B: Is she in *Les Miz*? The little girl in the poster?

C: (to B) Yes! (improvising, to A) Prepare yourself, little poster child!

A: Are you going to shoot me on the barricade?

C: Yes. . . . But do you think you can sing a few bars before you croak?

A: I can try, Mister! (Opens her mouth to sing)

C: Too late! Death mows you down! (He pretends to hit her with the imaginary scythe)

A: You cut me off at the knees?

C: You can still sing without legs, Cossette. Sing, child! Sing!

A: (singing) Tra la la la la!

C: Time for the next death! Goodbye! (Chops A down)

B: This is sick.

C: Have you seen *Les Miz*? Everybody dies! It's my favorite show.

B: I don't care for musicals.

C: I put up with them.

A: My husband doesn't like them.

C: Let's do another one! One, singular sensation! (dancing) Every little move that he makes!

B: Now I'm sure I hate musicals!

C: (to B, singing) Fuck you!

B: (singing) Fuck you back!

C: (singing) But at the end we'll be friends, because it's a musical!

A: (singing) I feel pretty! I feel pretty!

C: (singing) When you're a Jet you feel pretty!

A: They're not as bad as opera. All that straining!

B: And those ridiculous plots!

C: Let me hide behind this tree. In a cloak as a disguise!

B: And as a eunuch!

C: Now we're getting into it! I bet you hate even more theater than I do, if you're honest.

B: I really can't stand Shakespeare.

C: (mocking B) Who?

B: All that gibberish with words that don't make sense anymore.

A: If they ever did!

B: (acting Shakespearean) Ho there, good friend Stinkulo, what goeth on with thee?

A: (acting) I am going to hide under a smelly blanket, forsooth! (Mimes doing so)

B: (acting) Methinks I will too! Under the same blanket! (Mimes doing so) With a bottle of liquor! (Acts drunk)

C: (as Caliban) Is there room under that smelly blanket for me? I'm Caliban, and I am indigenous! I want liquor too! My mistress showed me thee, and thy dog, and thy bush!

A/B: (acting) Not our bush! No liquor for you!

C: Am I the indigenous Taliban then?

A/B: No!

C: (acting) I'm oppressed! I'm oppressed. Oops. I think we're mixing genres. Isn't that *La Raza* theater?

A: No, you need a large mysterious bird for it to be genuine Hispanic theater.

C: Are you sure?

A: (acting) I fly to the mountain tops of my aboriginal ancestors! (Flaps arms) I fly now!

B: You dirty gringos!

C: (with heavy Spanish accent) *La Raza*? Oh, I have always longed for *La Raza* . . . ism!

B: (acting) We just want to work in this country!

C: (acting) And overpopulate and commit the crimes that Americans don't want to commit!

A: (reacting) Ouch.

B: I don't think I can participate in this.

C: It's therapy!

B: What I really, really can't stand is Theater of the Absurd.

C: Right!

B: I'm turning into a rhinoceros! (Mimes doing so)

A: I'm turning into a bald soprano! (Mimes doing so)

C: I'm turning into a bald rhinoceros! (Does so)

B: I'm full of existentialism!

C: (overly impressed) Oo! I'm overly impressed!

A: (to B) I'm more existential than you are!

B: Like hell you are!

C: I'm more existential than either one of you. In fact, I'm full of it!

B: (as himself, to C) I'd think you'd like Theater of the Absurd. It's bleak.

C: No, it's not! It's clownish. It's afraid to deal with its own themes without covering them over with horseplay and horseshit.

A: You're not leaving much room for fun in the theater.

C: I go to *life* for fun. When I go to the theater, I want the opposite!

B: I bet you don't, really.

C: Yes, I do. . . . Actually, I don't go to the theater anymore, just appear in it from time to time.

B: I think that's sad.

C: It is sad. I agree. I can't escape, even when it's escapism. More and more, even entertainment is not sufficient.

B: What's going to happen to you?

C: I'm going to die and turn to mulch.

A: (changing the topic) Have we done Kabuki yet?

C: Have we?

B: I don't know Kabuki.

C: Of course you don't. No Kabuki for you. . . . What about Irish theater?

B: Top of the mornin' to you!

C: I love the way the British do Irish theater.

A: How's that?

C: Like niggers.

B: We can't use that word!

C: Sorry. Let's use the "P"-word? You goddamn *I-words*! (explaining) "Irish"!

A: I hate all political theater.

C: Except when it's about women.

A: Shut up. What about soap opera?

B: That's on TV.

A: I know. It's still "theater." (acting) "Is that you, Julia, my twin sister, who has recently been living in Bolivia?"

C: (acting) "No, Julia died. In fact, I killed her. And now I am taking her place."

A: (acting) "Aren't you afraid I will go to the police with this information?"

C: (acting) "Hah, the police! They'll never believe you."

A: (acting) "But you're a man, and Julia was a woman!"

C: (acting) "Or so you thought!"

B: (jumping in) "You mean Julia was a transsexual?!"

C: (acting) "No, she was a transvestite! Get your terms straight."

A: (as herself) He's right. Believe me, *they* do!

B: (as himself) I'm confused.

C: Perhaps you are a person of *trans* yourself!

B: Not that confused! (acting) "I arrest you for the murder of Julia Peterson! I am an undercover police officer! And completely heterosexual!"

C: (acting) "Arrested? Oh, my god, no!"

B: (acting) "Off to jail with you!"

C: (acting) "No, not after all my plans!"

B: (acting) “Yes!” (Pretends to remove C)

A: (acting) “Poor, poor Julia! I will miss you.”

C: (acting) “Do you know what Julia’s final words were?”

A: (acting, very curious) “Yes?”

C: (acting) “She said, and these are her exact words: ‘I forgive Megan, my much older sister, for all she did to me while we were growing up. Tell her I forgive her ... and I love her.’”

A: (catches her breath, acting) “Oh! How wonderful to hear her final words!”

B: The end!

C: Not quite. (acting) “Did you hear that Ashley is dating that international playboy?!”

A: (acting) “Not him!”

A: (acting) “Have you ever hear anything more scandalous?!”

B: To be continued tomorrow!

C: (as himself) I don’t think Cal is coming.

A: Maybe we should leave?

C: Wait! I know what we haven’t hated yet!

B: What?

C: (pointing at B) His kind! Gay theater!

B: I haven’t seen much of that.

C: Oh, right. Even if you aren’t gay, you can’t get away from it.

A: I did a lesbian play once, back in the day.

B: And?

A: It wasn’t very “gay.”

B: The last one, okay? Somebody’s going to overhear us.

C: Last one. I promise. (to B) Of course you'll have to be nude.

B: I'm not getting nude!

C: At least from the waist up.

B: Now who's gay!?

C: I don't want to see your exposed flesh, but the audience may.

A: You two are so afraid of being gay, one might think you both are *way* tempted.

B/C: Hey!

A: Okay, enough hate!

C: There can never be too much hate in the theater!

B: What's that from?

C: From nowhere. From tonight.

A: I'm leaving. (Starts to gather her things)

B: Me too. (Gathers his things)

C: I guess I'll hang around. I'll wait for Cal to finally show up.

A: Really?

C: I've been sleeping on his sofa.

B: Honestly?

C: Would I lie about that?

B: What happened to your apartment?

C: I couldn't afford the rent any longer.

B: Really?

C: (impatiently) Yes, really!

A: That's terrible.

C: I have to share the sofa with Cal's cockerpoo. He snores.

B: You're making this up!

C: I wish I were. . . . I suppose I'm the victim of the little boy who cried wolf one too many times syndrome.

B: Probably are. . . . Well, good night.

C: Wait! We haven't exhausted all the theater that needs to be mocked. One more!

A: No more.

C: Just one! Don't leave. I don't want to be here alone. Please!

B: (being nice) Okay, just one.

A: (being nice) And then I leave.

C: Moliere or murder mysteries?

B: You pick.

C: The end of the murder mystery. "Not only was it the nun who pulled the trigger, it was she who had that special curare poison made and then used in that blowgun to kill the abbess!

A: And the suicide of the bishop?

C: No, the bishop did not commit suicide. The bishop was murdered by the abbess before she was murdered with the blowgun because he wasn't really a bishop but had dressed up like a bishop in order to deceive her into making the series of confessions about her . . . her . . . (Turns to B for help)

B: Connection with the Mafia?

C: No. Her . . .

B: Affair with the Pope?

C: I like it!

A: Okay. Good night now. (Starts to gather her things)

C: Wait! There's more explanation of the murders. Pages and pages!

B: I think we're done for tonight.

A: We have a rehearsal tomorrow night, right?

B: At seven.

A: See you at seven. (to C) You going to be okay, Ralph?

C: Sure! I'll wait for Cal. He has my phone number. Actually, it's a lovely sofa.
Better than the sidewalk.

A: See you tomorrow then.

C: You know something. I don't think I'm coming back.

A: Why not?

C: Not tomorrow. Not at all.

B: What?!

C: I found out tonight how much I seriously, deeply loathe theater. Really.

A: No, you don't.

C: I'm afraid I do. And you two should get out before you turn into me.

B: I'm just starting out!

A: I don't hate it as much as you do!

C: You will!

B: I hope not.

A: You'll feel better after a good night's sleep. See you soon.

C: Not so. I just quit the theater! Really! My revels now are ended! I'm free! And
I don't even feel sentimental about it.

B: I've really got to go. (awkwardly) . . . Bye. (Leaves)

A: Me too. (awkwardly) . . . Bye. (Leaves)

C: (after they are gone, a small wave) . . . Bye. (C sits down to relax, sighs) What I need now is a *deus ex machina* to save me from myself! Okay, Cal, get your crazy, unreliable ass down here. At least I have your sofa and your cockerpoo! Not all is lost for this lost soul. (After a moment, his cell phone rings, and he answers) Cal? Finally?(Listens) Really? (Listens) He *what?! Is this Cal Barcello we're talking about? (Listens) You're kidding! (Listens) He was late to a rehearsal and was speeding on 280? (Listens) How is he? (Listens) He's dead?! Cal is dead? Dead? . . . Shit!*

BLACKOUT