

DOUBLE INDEMNITY

By

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## Seeing-Eye Man

To Peggy for the belief,  
Bob for the will,  
and Mark Cox for the knowledge.

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"Eagle Scout" won an Academy of American Poets Prize in 1993.

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## *The Treatment*

## Eagle Scout

Mr. Easterbrook's being dead  
makes despising him  
a little less satisfying,  
but I still like warming  
my hands over the hatred,

huddling over it  
as I did the campfire --  
watching him polish the brass  
on his Scoutmaster's hat,  
and hoping Smokey the Bear  
would eat him

while he joked  
about the plate in his head,  
and the twenty-seven gooks  
he shot in Korea,

describing in graphic  
detail how he wore their ears  
around his neck on a bootlace  
before calling Timmy Munson  
a "gutless wimp"  
when he went to throw up  
in the bushes.

I know it isn't "Trustworthy  
loyal, helpful, or friendly,"  
but I first started figuring out  
who I was by despising Mr. Easterbrook.  
And the hate kept me warm  
in my sleeping bag  
and filled my belly while he marched  
us on ten mile "nature hikes"  
designed to "build us into men."  
But it was the hate that built me --

I worked harder on it  
than any merit badge I ever earned,

learned more from Mr. Easterbrook  
than anyone I ever loved or admired.

And now he's dead,  
hating him's like freeze-dried  
trail-mix -- just add a little water  
and the slightly stale flavor comes back,

along with the urge to dig him up,  
stake down my tent with his ribs,  
and proudly pin his ears on my uniform --  
all for the pure, uncomplicated pleasure  
of being able to hate Mr. Easterbrook again.

## Cat People

She says I'm an insensitive asshole  
and has sex with me to prove it.  
Part of being a  
"cat person"

means loving me for coming home late,  
looking bored and biting her  
while I satisfy myself.  
Cruelty's the price

you have to pay to belong  
to a cat person --  
keeps her attached when you say  
she looks like a slut

or sleep with her  
sorority sisters.  
Because it's really what she wants --  
the chance to get emotional,

phone her friends for useless  
advice, and forgive you for being  
the bastard her daddy was before  
bullshit and Budweiser clogged

his heart. She's still missing  
the attention she never got --  
spends her time looking  
for a new daddy to despise.

And here I am: the latest surrogate  
son-of-a-bitch filling the old man's  
shoes, knowing love's the surest way  
of losing her.

Better to keep her heart tender  
with the incessant scrape  
of my sandpaper tongue.

So Here's the Thing:

George wants to ask Alice out to dinner --  
not a steak and lobster --  
*I want a serious commitment  
and mortgage* kind of dinner,  
just a salad and lasagna --  
*Do you like Woody Allen too?*

sort of meal.

But Alice really isn't interested in men  
like George.

Sure, he's a nice guy -- the kind she could count on

to wash her car and remember her birthday,  
but that only contributes to the fact that he's boring --  
first-kiss-after-choir-practice boring,  
freshman-feel-up-in-the-parking-lot boring,

bring-home-to-mom-and-dad boring.

Even George can sense the indifference  
behind the Pepsodent in her smile -- the go hither,  
*Oh God, please don't let him ask me out*

look in her eyes.

So he just borrows one of her ball-points,  
and they both go home alone, warm something cold  
in the microwave and watch the lives on TV.

## Old Pros

They even ring the doorbell  
when they come for him --  
huddling on the porch  
and talking about percentages:  
RBIs and ERAs,  
a clever joke someone heard  
on Sportscenter.

He's a good sport  
when he sees their dark suits  
and leather gloves -- manages  
a weary smile and invites them in,  
then fidgets in the hallway  
while they wipe their shoes on the mat.  
One of them says the wallpaper  
and tropical fish look nice.  
The man asks if he can have one more  
cup of coffee and they follow  
him into the kitchen, speaking in soothing  
tones about the scores of last night's games,  
patiently waiting for him to finish  
his Maxwell House before the one  
with Walter Payton's soft, tenor voice  
slips the silencer behind the man's left ear  
and blows his brains into the sink.  
Then the woman comes downstairs,  
and they kill her with brisk, businesslike  
faces -- like a pitcher shaking off a fastball.  
And out in the street,

they square their shoulders  
and quicken their stride --  
the grind of asphalt hard under their heels,  
like the good old days when their tunnels  
had always opened into the lights.

## A Jesus Like Everybody Else's

Mrs. Dupree wasn't amused  
when I asked if the chapel's  
blond, blue-eyed Jesus  
was skipping town through the garden  
when the cops busted him.  
So she backed me into  
a Sunday School corner;

spread-eagle against the American  
flag -- arms outstretched with ten  
pounds of Bible in each hand  
until I straightened up and thought  
about how He died for my sins.  
Sure I thought it over  
in the antique shop where

my parents priced Chippendale  
furniture, oblivious to the massive,  
Texas Chainsaw Jesus mounted  
above their heads --  
blood-stained nails, broken legs,  
Christ's mouth stretched open  
like Mrs. Dupree's when she dropped

a candlestick and broke two toes.  
You notice these things  
when you're suspended at an age  
young enough to shove second helpings  
of guilt off the supper table,  
old enough to know everybody's  
got a nail with your name on it,

and they won't be satisfied  
until you're up there with Him --  
hands and feet hammered down  
on top of His -- feeling desperate,  
R-rated Jesus-breath raise hairs  
on the back of your neck.  
Look, I'm sorry he died,

but stop painting Him  
with my father's tired,  
after-school eyes.  
Do you know what it's like  
having a bored, pissed-off Jesus  
pick you up after rehearsal?  
No matter how much you appreciate  
the sacrifice, it's never enough.



## First Date

So she talks you into trying out some country-western bar two miles beyond the city limits.  
and tells you about the medication  
that evens out her highs and lows.

And you sit on a stool, watching Saturday night cowboys two-step around the hardwood rink while she prods you to go ahead and pick up a Cherokee girl in tight black jeans

who's "*just your type.*"  
Or maybe you'd be better "*suited*"  
pressed against the slutty cowgirl  
with the scarlet Ropers

who's "not wearing any panties" --  
her voice rasping in your ear  
like an aspirin bottle as she pours  
another beer over her prescription.

And you're foolish enough to feel  
like the apples she always cuts  
into "easy to handle pieces" --  
afraid she might open

some part of you with a practiced  
twist of her wrist and take a dose  
just to even out one of her lows.  
So you're careful

to keep your eyes on the line-dancers,  
and off the only reason you came here at all  
as she points out each candy-coated cowgirl  
and whispers, "*I bet you'd like to try her... and her...  
and her...*"

## Matches

He does what he can to stay away:  
wanders the working-class sidewalk,  
orders coffee and bagels in all-night diners,  
even returns over-due library books --  
dragging out the time  
dropping them one-by-one into the slot.  
Sitting on the cold, marble steps  
he listens as they slide down like oysters,  
slipping into the library's gullet with the hiss  
of hydraulic brakes -- an inevitable, auditory  
prelude to the clunk of pot-holes beneath the bus  
he finds himself stepping off,  
only a block or two from the plants  
parching in her window.  
Somehow there seems nothing left to do  
but sit on the stoop, lighting matches  
and letting them burn down to his fingers  
until she opens her door and tells  
him how she loves her new tattoo,  
spreading her robe to show off the splotch  
needed near her hip,  
asking in the same careless, casual way  
whether he'd care to come inside and touch  
the stain beneath her skin.

## Sausage Man

Meat with dirty  
little secrets --  
gives it that gamey  
taste you still crave  
like the girls' shower  
you never peeped  
and the joint you wouldn't  
smoke with the art teacher  
after school.

Sausage is out on parole --  
a smirk frying on its face  
as it thinks about kicking  
your boss in the nuts,  
stealing his Rolex and wallet  
and picking up those two  
hookers you always drive  
past on Margot Street.  
Hot damn, this meat's  
got balls! Balls and other  
parts you'd rather not  
think about at breakfast  
with the Real Estate wife  
and kids.

It spits on your tie  
before you drive  
to the office and start  
grinding out the paperwork,

and you can just imagine  
it lying around the fridge,  
sneering at the cottage  
cheese and granola bars.

Yeah, this meat's got  
an attitude.  
Doesn't give a shit  
what it's made of --

packed fat and spicy  
in someone else's skin,  
laughing at the dirty  
little dreams clogging  
up the back of your mind.  
Knows, even dead, diced  
and pre-packaged,  
it's more alive than you.

## Balkan Carnival

The show rolled into town  
this morning -- tanks  
and artillery grinding  
orchards into sawdust  
and splitting the asylum open  
like a rotten peach.

Now the mad are free to crowd  
into blasted box seat windows,  
laughing at the headless clowns  
lying in the streets --

silly clowns leaving home  
without their heads  
while the cold March air's  
sharp with sun and shrapnell!

Any lunatic can see  
it must be meant for him --  
a raucous merry-go-round  
aswirl with color and carnage

spinning to the shriek  
of incendiary shells  
as a priest kneels  
beside a dead horse's flank,

doling out flesh  
like cotton candy

to children who warm their hands  
over the steaming corpse,

and stare up at the asylum  
where a manic audience waves  
straitjackets, calling their keepers  
to come in and take refuge with the sane.

## The Homemaker

When the cease-fire begins at dawn,  
the boy goes out to find the wood  
to build his mother's house.  
The morning sun ricochets off shell casings  
and shrapnel  
as he pulls his cart over Sarajevo's burned  
and splintered bones --

spying an unbroken board  
beneath a mound of plaster and brick.  
Just down the street, the scattered ribs  
of a bread shop provide second-hand nails  
and a few flour-covered planks that make the boy  
think of the way his mother baked bread in the winter,

and how her stiff, wooden hands are now turning  
the color of dough.  
A year of war has honed his skill --  
he builds his houses with careless competence,  
sizing up the task with a craftsman's practiced eye,  
cobbling up the same sturdy structure for each new

occupant: two aunts snug between the floorboards  
of the local pharmacy, and a cousin  
resting comfortably  
in the remodeled box-seats of a blasted theatre.  
Even his father's good right arm has four walls  
of its own -- buried in the same crowded garden

where the boy will dig the foundation of his  
mother's house -- packing sod and soil  
above the plain pine boards,  
insulating her from the gaudy, boisterous death  
at play above her head.

## Superbabe

What gets him off  
is hanging around the mall,  
catching glimpses of her blue dress  
rising above him on adjacent escalators--  
nothing like a bird or plane --  
just something unapproachable  
vanishing into thin air like the memories  
he manufactures

inside the Radio Shack:  
the way she might make him jealous  
at parties, or throw Slurpies in his face  
during mythic arguments outside the 7-11.  
It keeps him pumping  
his lunch money into video games --  
scanning electric skies for some sign  
of her, occasionally slipping into nearby phone booths

to savor the scent she's left behind  
in the Yellow Pages,  
until his imagination grinds ashore  
on reality -- the nightly roar of ten-round parental  
title bouts that rattles his bedroom door  
and sends him burrowing beneath his comic books  
until there's nothing left but the thin blue haze  
of his Superbabe

and a cricket nagging beneath his favorite bench  
as he watches the mundanities of life  
(laundry soap and litter boxes)  
pile a mall above his head,  
blotting out the sky.

## Orbits

He wakes  
and knows it  
will be one of  
those breathless, stillborn  
nights where the world has grown  
so quiet he can hear his  
son's bones dissolving into  
dust under six feet of sod, ten  
miles from this wife, curled up next  
to him in a barren womb of bed sheets  
and blankets, turning her back  
to the dark, distant universe he watches  
through their bedroom window -- the stars  
shining like coffin screws and the moon  
a small, fleshless face.



## The Treatment

He often comes over to watch the games  
and when he settles back and cracks open  
a beer, you notice the way his hands clench  
into everything he holds -- denting  
aluminum cans and crumpling the last Camel  
in his pack. He smokes it anyway, clamping  
down on the butt and pressing a match  
to the tobacco that spills from the bent  
and mangled end.

"You've got to know how to treat them,"  
he says, and you know when he says "them"  
he really means her -- the woman who unlocks  
her apartment door at two a.m. and dances  
drunken, bear-hug waltzes with him.  
Sometimes he brings her over so you can admire  
the way he's made her up:  
the puffy blue bruises that set off her eyes  
and dried blood adding a hint of color

to the corner of her mouth. Sitting on his lap,  
she has a muted, battered beauty --  
the delicate blush of broken capillaries  
spreading beneath her cheek, the slender arm  
he often twists limp around his neck.  
And you have to admire his gift;  
the brutality she wears so well --  
the way he's let her make herself a martyr.  
And when you're alone again, scraping

peach cobbler crust from another frozen  
dinner, you can't help wondering whether  
the women who killed a little time in your  
life would have stayed if you were willing  
to give them his kind of undivided attention.  
Then you bury the torn and crumpled aluminum  
tray beneath broken egg shells in the trash  
and hurry to scrub the stain off your hands.

## *Turning Point*

## Relativity

The first time you say the word "fuck"  
in front of your family, your sister's  
pushing garden peas beneath her mashed

potatoes, the Methodist church  
down the street rings six o'clock,  
and your mother asks, "Did you change

the grade on your report card?"  
That's when your mouth opens and the word  
just happens -- you say, "Why the fuck...?"

And time slows down;  
stretching out so you can see --  
in perfect, slow motion,

Six-Million-Dollar-Man detail --  
your mother's back stiffen, and the weary  
disappointment your dad's been distilling

in his eyes for the past two or three  
lifetimes. And in some useless part  
of your mind, you wonder if Einstein

included the "fuck" factor in his theory  
of Relativity -- how time tends to slow down  
around black holes, women who ask,

"How do you **really** feel about me?"  
after sex, and tenth graders who say  
the word "fuck" in front of their mothers

after forging fraudulent report card grades.  
Somehow your mind can't resist taking  
advantage of the temporary time warp,

tracing the carbon of the moment  
into your memory like you traced over  
your algebra grade -- dividing and rounding

the D's hump into a respectable B.  
And suddenly you have the urge to grab  
your sister's lump of pea ridden potatoes,  
slap it on your back, climb to the top  
of the Methodist church, and ring the bells,  
ring the fucking bells until time loses interest  
and passes you by.

## Seeing-Eye Man

He's definitely not the ideal guide --  
dragging you through the odds and ends  
of other people's lives,

into manic-depressive, dead-end corners  
and past severed, twitching pieces  
of private conversations:

*... don't forget about the chicken in the oven...*  
*... my father was a heartless bastard...*  
*... I don't know when I stopped loving you...*

Nosing through the trash  
piled behind our houses,  
he snaps up especially tender bits

to bury beneath the pages  
beside your bed.  
You can hear him now --

scratching to be let out again,  
straining at a leash that always seems too short,  
eager for you to clip yourself on

and turn him loose on back streets  
and alleyways --  
pulling you over miles of unmended sidewalk  
and construction sites,

sniffing at any stray idea  
that happens along, waking  
the industrious, work-a-day neighbors  
with his irreverent, howling yawp.

## Lifetime Warranty

He's never forgotten his first --  
the day he drove it home,  
parked it in the driveway for the neighbors  
to covet, and savored the sharp, new-car smell

that almost made him forget  
about the money just put down  
and a life parceled out in monthly payments.  
Now he merely admires their indifference,

these chrome-plated demi-gods  
striking majestic, metallic poses  
atop dealership daises and billboards --  
double-parked on automotive Olympus

while mortals like him scurry  
around glossy, glass flanks,  
peeking at their climate-controlled,  
sculpted leather bowels,

dreaming of a day  
when he can seal himself  
in a commuter's cocoon,  
turning up the stereo and putting life

on cruise control  
while his marriage breaks down,  
his prostate keeps him up at night,  
and all that's left to put his faith

in is the power-steering  
and state-of-the-art suspension  
guaranteed to give him a smooth, easy ride.

## Home Movie

The lie is black and white --  
focused on boot-heeled eyes  
and barbed wire lips stretched  
across shaven skulls and electric fences.

A silent scream of a lie,  
lens lingering on a single  
blood-blistered visage  
who stares, then smiles and turns away

a sudden shyness captured  
on celluloid -- every intimacy of tendon  
and bone exposed to a camera  
focused on fleshless

compound-fractures mouthing  
C-rations and waiting to be bulldozed  
into clinging, common embraces  
beneath the Buchenwald mud.

Perhaps the lie didn't even fool  
the liberators -- maybe they jeered  
and flicked ashes  
off their Lucky Strikes

at the emaciated, lice-ridden  
illusions filing off to feeding stations  
or made a fast buck selling handfuls  
of imaginary eyeglasses and gold teeth --

after all there was so damn much  
of the lie of go around:  
growing even now,  
coiled and bloated in its can,

swelling in some conveniently forgotten  
vault until its shiny, horror-patterned  
back splits its casing and slithers  
down a hole in our memory --

the crematorium where we try to burn  
away all the home movies we hate:  
slamming ourselves shut and sucking  
in the fragrance of denial.



Women Keep the Pictures,

eagerly slice open their scars  
with our letters and laugh  
at our faint-hearted masculine  
laws forbidding self-inflicted  
wounds.

Watch a woman paste her son  
in the family album;  
packing away his high school  
pictures and reading his summer

camp letters -- clasping close  
the razor-edged loss of him  
while her husband waters down  
his ghost in whiskey.

Parts of us all are buried  
in their cedar chests:  
pasts we fooled ourselves  
into forgetting, pain we roughly

patched with lies.  
And while our women roll up  
the sleeves of summer dresses  
and tend their plots of sorrow --

soil sown with broken glass  
and thorns -- we cower outside  
the wrought-iron gates,

trying to distract ourselves  
with box scores  
and dirty little wars.

## Messages

Roger frequently phones  
the answering machine  
Frances got custody of --  
says he likes to call  
every now and then,  
just to keep in touch.

After a few rum and Cokes,  
he claims the answering machine  
is being held against its will --  
another victim of the judicial  
system, like the house and car.

Most people would probably  
bore a bartender or friend  
with his problems --  
maybe hire a shrink to scotch  
tape his emotions back in place,

and staple over the scar.  
But Roger needs to hear  
the friendly voice Frances  
hasn't used for years  
invite him to wait for the beep

and leave a message.  
And though she often reminds  
herself to unplug the damn  
thing and send it to the Salvation

Army, she always comes home  
with half a bag of groceries  
and sees the red distress signal  
blinking in the darkness.  
Upstairs in the shower,  
she swears she'll erase him --

and always ends up hugging  
her knees in the darkness,

listening to Roger record  
himself into her machine.

## He Knows He's in Deep

when she nudges him out of a dream  
at four a.m. to rub her tush.

*Why should I rub your tush?*  
he mumbles, trying to slip  
back beneath his warm, flannel  
subconscious.

*Because I like the way it feels  
when I'm lonely,* she says.

And, of course, the illogic  
of it keeps him awake:  
the idea that loneliness somehow migrates south --  
a decade's worth of Saturday nights  
and singles clubs dripping  
down her back like his Mr. Coffee machine.  
It's like the way she's started  
asking him to buy Kotex:

*As long as you're going out, pick up  
some pads for me,* she says, cutting  
up carrots in his sink.

And he just wishes she wouldn't call them "pads"  
because it spoils his memory  
of high school football --  
the image of him high-fiving the guys  
in the locker room with Kotex taped  
to his shoulders and legs.

So he finds himself crossing off  
items on her shopping list --  
not even coming close to the familiar  
sandwich meat and frozen dinner sections.  
And the check-out girls all know  
what's going on -- smiling at the Betty Crocker  
and broccoli in his cart,  
and calling for price checks

on her goddamn "pads."

That's when he makes up his mind  
to rip down her lacy curtains,  
toss the curling iron and feminine  
hygiene products out on the lawn  
and change all his locks...  
but when he finally pulls into the driveway,  
the strangely inhabited look  
of his house makes him wonder

where his own loneliness has migrated.  
So when she asks why he's smiling  
while he rubs her smooth, shapely tush  
at four in the morning,  
he says he's waiting for a genie to appear,

and listens as her laughter soft-shoes  
across the floor and makes itself home  
in their bedroom carpet.

## Music of the Spheres

In room 413, the astronomer  
tells his wife when God cracked  
the universe into a mixing bowl  
and started stirring galaxies together,  
the sound it made was like an orchestra  
small-talking itself into harmony.  
But her eyes don't open,

so he rambles on about interstellar  
dust condensing into solar systems  
that fizzle and hiss like their  
television after the national anthem.

It's all part of impersonating God --  
trying to fill the void  
with his voice, distracting  
himself with the empty light-years  
separating the stars in his telescope;  
cold malignant lumps like asteroids  
and comets clumping together and  
cluttering his mind as a nurse checks  
the rhythm in his wife's wrist.

Later tonight,  
when Orion tightens his belt  
and trudges down to meet the dawn,  
the astronomer will cover his eyes,  
returning to a space and time  
of Beethoven and breakfasts,  
with the simple wonder of his wife's  
scrambled eggs and galaxies  
warm on his plate.

## Magnetism

The whole thing starts long before  
you wake up with the alarm clock  
bonded to your forehead.

The toothpaste cap sticks  
between your fingers and the razor  
lodges behind your left ear.

When you go downstairs,  
credit cards fly out  
of your wallet and affix

themselves over your eyebrows  
and there's no use trying  
to dodge the car keys, electric

bills and your girlfriend's  
pantyhose. Pretty soon you're covered  
in the clutter of your life --

train wrecks and civil wars blowing  
out of newsstands and sticking  
to your heels while stupid television

commercials and parking tickets  
crackle and crunch along behind you.  
Jacob Marley once dragged a chain

like this through Scrooge's  
counting house -- hauling adolescent  
shaving-cuts and guilt past the bars

and nursing home where you'll wind up;  
spreading out your chain to fondle  
each arthritic link --

tiny, twitching bits of past  
stuck to the flypaper of your mind,  
suddenly precious now your present's

made of styrofoam and plastic  
and nothing seems to stick anymore.



## Pockets

It goes back to shooting pool  
in the basement --  
the way you always made your  
younger brother rack the balls,  
and the dry, whittling rasp  
of a cue being chalked.

You can still hear his clumsy  
adolescent curses and the balls  
jostling across the lawn-  
green felt, and now it seems strange

the two of you never noticed  
the darkness seeping through  
the basement walls and hanging  
from the ceiling,  
like the toy solar system  
that dangled above your beds --

the five-ball Mars giving  
one-ball Mercury Indian rope burns  
and beating it at cosmic  
eight-ball; oblivious  
to twilight running the table --

the cold implacable way  
it pocketed the older, outer planets  
who left their orbit to sell  
life insurance and real estate

until this morning  
when your phone rang a death knell  
for a brother you never  
let win at eight-ball --  
who died a light-year away  
on the other side of town.

## Tectonics

She's felt the ground  
giving way beneath his kiss  
so it's no surprise  
when the first tremors wake her --  
future recriminations and broken  
promises rippling over  
from his side of the mattress  
    until her footing starts to falter  
in front of his apartment door --  
the key he had cut  
catching in the latch  
while faint fore-shocks of discord  
tingle up her arm,  
stinging then numbing her  
    as she spends another breakfast  
watching him stir silence  
into his coffee --  
each clink of the spoon swirling  
her towards an anxious epicenter  
that drives away the squirrels  
    she often feeds in the park,  
leaving only a flock of crows  
cocking their heads above the grass  
around her bench --  
scratching and pecking away at time  
until something shocking,  
    and thoroughly expected,  
is plucked from beneath the surface.

## Dead, White Poet

It's got nothing to do with being deceased --  
you're too Caucasian to sing the blues,  
too flawed with masculinity  
to understand your sensitive,  
feminine side -- the one that would let  
you get in touch with all the shame  
that's supposed to go along

with a penis and pallid skin.  
Being dead only makes it more difficult  
to dodge the affirmative action  
aimed at spoiling your clandestine,  
Caucasoid dreams of conquest --  
the way you love to sit  
in laundry mats and secretly wish

for some minority to abuse --  
Africans to enslave, women to oppress,  
or maybe some Native Americans  
to push around the continent.  
Your fierce, Celtic forefathers  
would hike up their kilts  
and spit in your eye

if they could see you sitting there,  
watching spin cycles bleach  
the color out of your khakis --  
the way you've grown so complacent  
about the hand-me-down guilt

that's made you some kind  
of second-class citizen  
too white to sing the blues,  
and too dead to give a damn.

## Turning Point

You grew up hating seatbelts:  
the thick nylon strap  
constricting your chest  
like the whispered accusations

your parents used to trade  
behind their bedroom door,  
the way your father smiled  
and said *Buckle-up for safety!*

when he picked you up  
for his second weekend of the month,  
and how your mother always made sure  
you were fastened into place

before starting her car  
and questions:  
*Who's he seeing?*  
*What's she like?*  
*Does he cheat on her too?*

Your childhood spent spying --  
an adolescent double-agent  
locked into passenger seats  
by loving hands and driven

back and forth over matrimonial  
no-man's-land  
until you were finally old enough  
to cut your ties to them  
and the goddamn seatbelt

that hangs limp and useless  
when the headlights suddenly supernova  
in your mirror, the sky splinters  
above your head, and brackish ditch water  
fills your mouth.

And it seems as if another eternal

childhood passes before you find the strength  
to shove aside the clinging cat-tails  
and weeds, pull your face from the muck,  
and take that first free breath.

## Clue

I confess to the rainy afternoons --  
sitting across the kitchen table from my sister  
and taking secret passage short cuts  
to the Conservatory. And I freely admit  
to always forcing her to let me play Professor Plum

and lead searches for lead pipes in the Library.  
Somehow everything seemed like a game  
back then: petty competitions to see who'd get  
the bathroom first or rake the pine straw faster --

all for a sign of a smile beneath Dad's  
Colonel Mustard mustache.  
It was competition that drove me to the crime:  
the way we always raced to answer the phone,  
how I snatched the receiver away from her ear

and heard the gasp she often made after rolling  
snake-eyes as a crimson seam of Miss Scarlet's  
dress trickled down her cheek. That's why I stopped  
playing the game; afraid the "Top Secret" envelope  
might contain a clue to her cheek's thin white scar --

the all-important, carefully-phrased solution  
revealed at last: *I accuse you of wounding  
your Sister  
in the Kitchen  
with the Telephone.*

And though the memory has been packed  
away for years, I'm still uncomfortable

handling the phone when she calls from the coast,  
and find myself wishing for a secret passage  
back to our kitchen table -- just a way to cut  
through all our distance and quietly pass  
away an afternoon with no more games  
to come between us.

## Conquest

You can tell from the way she laughs  
that she'll have sex with you --  
leaning over the table  
and grazing your palm  
with the long, painted nails  
you can already feel strafing  
your shoulders and spine.

Yes, everyone else can sense it too --  
the way her body will soon twist  
and toil the sheets, soaking  
in your breath and sweat  
while her bed crickets and creaks  
on stiff, wooden legs.  
The waiter gives you a knowing grin,  
the cook shouts encouragement  
from the kitchen,  
and the table next to yours starts  
doing the wave.

But what they won't see  
is the way she'll want you to take  
her hard from behind --  
so hard she can only gasp and claw  
the headboard until you have to admit  
you're just another cold, callous rock  
to impale herself on --  
how she'll laugh at all your after-dinner jokes  
and always fuck you with her face turned away.

## The Girl Who Cuts Your Hair

every other Friday  
isn't that pretty  
but she has a sweet,  
lopsided smile

you can see in the mirror  
when you tell her a dumb joke  
or pretend to get hair up your nose.  
It's her hands you like best --

long fingers sorting through your hair  
like dresses on a rack --  
lifting up and pulling back,  
trimming away the layers.  
She's the type of girl

you don't mind knowing  
about your dandruff.  
Never mentions it --  
just that some shampoo  
her daddy uses really does the trick.  
And over a few months

of every other Fridays, you find  
out her mobile home has a leaky roof,  
her mother raises chinchillas,  
and her son-of-a-bitch ex-husband  
never sends the check on time.  
She even seems interested

when you tell her about running  
over somebody's cat with the cement truck  
-- kind of scrunching  
up her nose and smiling that lopsided  
smile at the part about hiding the body

in the foundation  
and telling Jimmie Hoffa jokes all day.  
That's when you start talking



about the weekends -- how she's got nothing  
to do, and you've got two tickets

to the tractor pull.

Then you find yourself sitting  
beside her (a lot prettier all dressed up)  
holding those long fingers  
between your calluses.

And pretty soon the haircuts  
are free, and you're on top  
of her mobile home, patching the roof.

## The Vagrant

# THE VAGRANT

## ACT I SCENE I

The scene opens on a city sidewalk. The back stage wall is a building covered with posters and graffiti. Down left is a hot dog cart and a young man reading a copy of *MAD* Magazine. Slightly left of center is a wooden park bench and down right is an overflowing trashcan. Up stage, slightly right of center, is a large heating grate occupied by a ragged looking bum. While the hot dog vendor (RODNEY) chuckles over his magazine, the bum (LENNY) stirs, stretches and slowly gets to his feet. He comes up behind RODNEY (who doesn't notice him) and starts reading over his shoulder. After a moment, LENNY lets out a tremendous burst of laughter directly into RODNEY's ear and he jumps away, dropping the magazine.

RODNEY

Jesus Christ, Lenny! You scared the hell out of me.

LENNY

Sorry. (Picks up the magazine) These things are great -- I used to read them when I was a kid.

RODNEY

(Snatching back the magazine) Well, you shouldn't sneak up on people like that -- you gonna give somebody a heart attack.

LENNY

(Beginning to look through the hot dog cart) So what's for breakfast this morning, Rodney? Got any pop-tarts or pancakes in this thing?

RODNEY

(Putting himself between Lenny and the cart) Oh no you don't. Last week, the boss chewed me out for giving you free samples. No more hand-outs -- from now on, you pay like everybody else.

LENNY

Rodney, I'm hurt. I thought we had a special kind of friendship -- a relationship that went beyond a meaningless exchange of currency. Rodney, my friend, I thought we had an agreement.

RODNEY

(Suspicious) Agreement? What kind of "agreement?"

LENNY

It's very simple -- **you** agree to furnish me with free hot dogs and I agree to eat them. (Reaching for a bun) Got any relish?

RODNEY

(Pushing his hand away) Somehow I don't think that's fair.

LENNY

Fair? Fair?! Of course it isn't fair! -- and if you weren't such a close, *personal* friend, I wouldn't do it.

RODNEY

Wait a minute! I give you free hot dogs and you're doing **me** a favor?

LENNY

(Putting his arm around Rodney's shoulders) Let me explain it to you, Rodney. (Looks around for a moment and whispers) I'm your food taster.

RODNEY

What are you talking about?

LENNY

(Still whispering) Everyday I risk my life to make sure those hot dogs are wholesome and uncontaminated. Who knows what kind of food poisons and bocholisms are breeding in that unsanitary, portable weenie machine.

RODNEY

(Shaking of Lenny's arm) Hey! I just cleaned it yesterday!

LENNY

Think about it, Rodney. Try to imagine the horrible attacks of nausea and intestinal distress the innocent public would suffer if I were not *constantly* willing to sacrifice my life by eating two or three of those thoroughly unappetizing hot dogs.

RODNEY

(Defensive) There ain't nothing wrong with these wieners.

LENNY

Maybe there is and maybe there isn't -- but how do you **know**? How can you be sure that overnight some new strain of bacteria hasn't wormed its way into this seemingly innocent vending machine and turned one of those pork wienies into a biological time-bomb just waiting to explode in someone's stomach.

RODNEY

(A little unsure) Oh, that's a bunch of bull. There ain't no bacterias or bocholisms or any of that stuff in here...

LENNY

(Opening the top of the cart) Take a look in there, Rodney. At this very moment, one of those hot dogs might be infested with germs that could rupture your intestines and... and make your colon explode.

RODNEY

(Looking in the cart) Do you really think so...?

LENNY

What if a little old lady came by and bought one of these hot dogs? Did you ever think about that, Rodney? How would you feel if some sweet old lady's colon suddenly **blew** out all over the sidewalk just because you didn't make sure your weenie wasn't crawling with killer bacterias?

RODNEY

Well... I'd feel pretty bad.

LENNY

And the cops! Don't forget about the cops, Rodney.

RODNEY

(Looking around) Cops? What about the cops?

LENNY

They'll be looking for you, of course -- the F.B.I., the C.I.A., the N.S.C. -- all of them.

RODNEY

(Beginning to panic) Looking for me? Why?

LENNY

Well, you can't go around making little old ladies' colons explode and expect everybody to just ignore it, can you?

RODNEY

Well, no. I guess not...

LENNY

I can see it now -- it'll be all over the news -- "Be on the lookout for Rodney the Hot Dog Vendor, wanted for peddling poisonous weenies to the public."

RODNEY

Now, wait a minute, Lenny...

LENNY

In fact, I consider it my civic duty to warn the innocent people of this city about these dangerous and possibly deadly hot dogs. (He stands up on the park bench and cups his hands around his mouth) Attention! Attention! These weenies may be hazardous to your health!

RODNEY

Cut that out! Somebody might hear you!

LENNY

(Ignoring him) If you value your lives *and* your colons, don't eat these germ-infested hot dogs!

RODNEY

All right, all right! I'll give you one!

LENNY

What was that? I didn't hear you.

RODNEY

I said, I'll give you a hot dog -- just stop yelling.

LENNY

Well, I don't know. Now that I've had a chance to think it over, maybe I shouldn't take a chance like this.

RODNEY

What?!

LENNY

Life is too precious to waste. If I ate one of those hot dogs, I might never see Paris, Rome or Pittsburg. I don't know if I'm still willing to take that chance. (Cups hands around his mouth again) Attention! Attention! These weenies are death in a bun!

RODNEY

(Frantic) Please, Lenny, please eat one of my hot dogs.

LENNY

Sorry, Rodney, I just can't do it. Attention...!

RODNEY

Wait, Lenny! -- you're my last hope. I don't want to make some little old lady's colon explode! For God's sake, eat a hot dog! I'm asking you as a friend.

LENNY

(Looking down at him) As a friend?

RODNEY

(Nodding) Yeah, Lenny -- as a friend.

LENNY

(Sighs) Well Rodney, since you put it that way, how can I say no? (Steps down from the bench and sighs) All right, I'll eat a hot dog. (He reaches into his pocket, pulls out a dirty handkerchief, and ties it around his eyes).

RODNEY

Thank God!

LENNY

But I hope you appreciate what I'm doing for you.

RODNEY

Oh, I do, I do. You're a real pal, Lenny. Here you go. (Hands Lenny a hot dog and watches as he takes a bite) Well -- what do you think?

LENNY

Hmmmmmm, a full-bodied flavor -- sharp, distinctive, and a bit impetuous.

RODNEY

Uh, does that mean it's all right?

LENNY

(Removing his blindfold) Rodney, my friend, I can say without a doubt that this hot dog is perfectly safe for human consumption -- pass the mustard.

RODNEY

I really appreciate you doing this for me, Lenny.

LENNY

Don't mention it, kid. Got any chili in there?

RODNEY

Yeah, here you go. I sure feel better now that I know those hot dogs are okay. You want another one, Lenny? -- just to make sure.

LENNY

Okay, but just one more. I'm trying to watch my weight.

RODNEY

(Handing him another hot dog) Well, thanks again -- I've got to go down to 8th avenue for the lunch crowd.

LENNY

All right -- just remember to stop by tomorrow so I can check out those hot dogs.

RODNEY

Sure -- I won't forget. Bye Lenny.



LENNY  
Goodbye, Rodney.

LENNY watches RODNEY exit with the cart, and laughs quietly to himself. Then he goes back to the heating grate, sits and continues to eat his hot dog. After a moment, JOHNATHAN and RACHEL enter from up right. Both are dressed in conservative business clothes and JOHN is carrying a briefcase.

RACHEL  
...I'm telling you, John, it wasn't nearly good enough.

JOHN  
I think you're over-reacting -- we didn't do all that badly.

RACHEL  
(Sitting on the bench) I am *not* over-reacting. I'm trying to be realistic.

JOHN  
(Sitting down beside her) Look Rachel, the market is supposed to fluctuate -- and besides, neither one of us picked any real losers.

RACHEL  
You're totally missing the point, John. I've been in this business longer than you have...

JOHN  
Six months longer. (Laughs) Practically a lifetime.

RACHEL  
Hey, you can see a lot in six months. Do you remember George Brockette?

JOHN  
Yeah, I think so -- thin little guy, going bald, always wore a bow tie?

RACHEL

Yeah, that's him. When I first got here, George was doing okay -- nothing spectacular, but no disasters either. Average profits, average losses -- just holding the line, you know.

JOHN

Yeah?

RACHEL

Well, that goes on for about three months and you could see that George was starting to worry about it. No matter what the poor guy did, he just kept on barely breaking even -- and then it happened.

LENNY gets up and stands behind RACHEL and JOHN.  
He reacts to their dialogue.

JOHN

What do you mean?

RACHEL

Right after you started work, Delaney called George into his office. They must have stayed in there over an hour and when George came out, he looked like one of those heart-transplant patients they show on T.V. -- you've seen them -- no color in their face, can barely breath.

JOHN

Jesus -- what happened?

RACHEL

Delaney let George go -- told him to clean out his desk and pick up his severance pay.

JOHN

Just because he didn't turn a profit for a couple of months?

RACHEL

Hey, that's the way they play the game around here, John. (Laughing) Do you think people are in this business to improve the quality of their souls?

JOHN

Well no, but...

RACHEL

A few of the Directors took a look at George's purchase record and decided he was "expendable." (Lighting a cigarette) Hell, if I was in their shoes, I'd probably do the same thing.

JOHN

You don't really mean that, Rachel.

RACHEL

Listen, John, we're in a business where **everybody's** expendable -- including you and me. So we'd better tighten up and start turning a profit before they make us clean out **our** desks.

JOHN

(Depressed) Yeah, I guess you're right... What happened to Brockette?

RACHEL

He tried selling insurance in Atlanta for a while, then two months ago, I heard he had a stroke. A few people from the office went to the funeral... I sent some flowers. (Laughing) Hell, maybe we should start investing in your dad's flower shop. I bet he makes a killing everytime someone back in Charlotte croaks.

JOHN

(Quietly) Not really. It isn't a very big shop.

LENNY

(Climbing over the back of the bench and sitting between Rachel and John) Hi, kids! What's happening? Life treating you all right?

RACHEL

(Looking at Lenny and moving away) John, do you know this... person.

JOHN

Uhhhh, no -- I don't think so.

LENNY

(Switching his hot dog to his other hand) Lenny Madison --pleased to meet you. (He shakes John's hand and turns to Rachel)

RACHEL

(Pointing at Lenny's hand) What is that?

LENNY

(Looking at his hand) What? Oh, that's mustard. (He licks the mustard off and extends his hand again)

RACHEL

(Pointedly ignoring his hand) Hello, Mr... Madison.

LENNY

Hey, you guys look kind of depressed -- want a bite of my hot dog? (He holds it up to John's face)

JOHN

(Leaning back) Uh, no, thanks -- I had breakfast this morning.

LENNY

Okay -- how 'bout you? (He shoves the hot dog in front of Rachel's face)

RACHEL

(Pushing it away) No, thank you -- I wouldn't want you to go hungry on my account.

LENNY

Hey, don't worry about that -- I've got another one right here. (He pulls the other hot dog out of his pocket) Take a bite off this end -- it doesn't have any fingerprints on it.

RACHEL

(Pushing the hot dog away again) That's very generous, but I'm afraid I've lost my appetite.

LENNY

Too bad -- it's a first class hot dog. (Confidentially) No bacterias or bocholisms. (He takes a bite and chews thoughtfully)

There is long, uncomfortable pause.

RACHEL

(Standing up) Well, we really have to be running along...

LENNY

(Standing up and putting an arm around John's shoulders) Boy, what a beautiful day! Don't you guys think it's going to be a beautiful day?

JOHN

(Reluctantly sitting back down with Lenny) Yes... yes, it certainly looks like it.

RACHEL

(Exasperated sigh) Beautiful.

LENNY

That's one of the best things about living out here -- you get to see days like these up-close and in-person. (Stands up) Yeah, while most people are locked up in their apartments, staring at sunshine through three inches of glass, I'm out here where you can see the sky and feel the smog on your face. (Takes a deep breath) What a treat!

JOHN

Yeah, but doesn't it get cold out here?

LENNY

It certainly does, John -- may I call you "John?"

JOHN

Well, sure -- why not?

LENNY

Thanks, John -- that's very kind of you. Tell me, John, who is your ravishing friend?

JOHN

Oh, I'm sorry -- this is Rachel LaMonde.

RACHEL

John...!

LENNY

Rachel LaMonde -- what a wonderful name! Almost poetic, wouldn't you say, John?

JOHN

(Laughing) Well, maybe a little.

LENNY

"Rachel LaMonde" -- it reminds me of Shakespeare, Chaucer, Zane Grey. May I call you "Rachel," Rachel?

RACHEL

(Cooly) I suppose so.

LENNY

Anyway, Rachel -- as I was telling my good friend John, It **does** get cold out here. In fact, I'd probably freeze at night if I didn't sleep on that steam vent.

RACHEL

(Cool) What a novel idea.

LENNY

(Walking over to the grate) Yes, my friends, this is my refuge, my haven, my oasis of warmth. I've spent many long December nights sitting on this grate and basking in the warmth of its steam.

JOHN

Well, that doesn't sound so bad, does it, Rachel?

RACHEL

It sounds like Club Med.

LENNY

(Sitting back down) Oh it's really quite invigorating. The only drawback is that by morning, my ass looks like a waffle.

RACHEL

Oh, gross!

There is another long, uncomfortable pause and LENNY begins whistling a monotonous tune. RACHEL gives JOHN a meaningful glance.

RACHEL

(Pulling John to his feet) Well, it was nice talking to you, but we really have to be...

LENNY

(Pulling John back down on the bench) But it's a person's attitude that really counts -- know what I mean?!

RACHEL

Oh God.

LENNY

Now, take me for instance. Here I am -- living on the street. No Diner's Club, no Mastercard, no BMW -- I mean, those are practically the necessities of life, right? But do you see me crying? Do you hear me complaining? Hell no! And do you know why, John?

JOHN

No... no, I don't, Lenny.

LENNY

Do you know why, Rachel?

RACHEL

(Checking her lipstick) Haven't got a clue.

LENNY

It's my **attitude**. I see life as a challenge. Sure I haven't taken a bath in three months. Sure I haven't changed my underwear since July, but I get up every morning and tell myself "Come on, Lenny, we've got challenges to meet -- so let's go and live the hell out of today!" (He looks from John to Rachel) Isn't that great?

RACHEL

You really haven't changed your underwear since *July*?

LENNY

(Standing) Forget about the underwear -- the important thing is the **attitude**. Let me tell you guys what I do when things get bad out here on the street -- you know, when the weather turns really nasty.

JOHN

Like the snow storm we had last week?

LENNY

Exactly -- just like that! When the snow is falling and I'm sitting out here, freezing off my fingers and toes, I imagine I'm Robert Scott -- you know, the guy who discovered the North Pole -- I tell myself (Pantomiming) "Here's Robert Scott trudging through the arctic ice and snow, on his way to discover the North Pole." And all of a sudden, I don't really mind being out here in the blizzard -- it's kind of exciting.

JOHN

You mean you imagine you're somebody else -- somebody famous?

LENNY

That's right. And when we get one of those summer thunderstorms and the wind starts blowing and the rain is pouring down, I imagine that I'm Admiral Horatio Nelson (Climbing on top of the bench) standing on the deck of his ship, laughing in the face of a terrible ocean typhoon! (Throws back his head and laughs) Look lively there, Lads! Hoist that sail! Batten down those hatches!

RACHEL

Quit stepping on my purse!

LENNY

What? Oh, sorry. (He sits back down on the bench) You see, John, it just proves that you can get through anything if you have the right attitude.

JOHN

(Unsure) Yeah, I guess you're right.

LENNY

Hey, I **know** I'm right. So take my advice and don't get depressed over a few lousy stocks.

RACHEL

(Sharply) How do you know about that?



LENNY

Eavesdropping happens to be one of my favorite hobbies -- it's lots of fun and doesn't cost anything.

RACHEL

(Standing) Oh, that's just terrific. I'm surprised that the whole damn city doesn't know how we did on the market!

JOHN

Look Rachel, we just had a bad day -- it happens to everybody.

LENNY

Hey guys, don't worry about it. I've got the situation under control.

RACHEL

(Turning on him) What are you babbling about?

LENNY

(Putting his arms around both their shoulders) John, Rachel --I'm going to help you pick some blue-chip stocks.

JOHN

What?

RACHEL

(Pushing away Lenny's arm and brushing off her clothes) You? **You're** going to help **us** pick stocks?

LENNY

That's right -- I guess it's just your lucky day. (He pulls a battered copy of "The Wall Street Journal" out of his coat pocket) Now, I was looking through this copy of the "Journal" the other day, and I found three companies that are sure winners...

RACHEL

(Exasperated) Well John, I guess this **proves** we're washed up -- here we are, stock analysts for one of the largest Mutual Fund Corporations in the entire Free World, and **street people** are giving us financial advice!

LENNY

Isn't America great? Now, I was thinking that considering the relatively low interest rates...

RACHEL

(Haughty) Mr. Madison, Mr. Wilson and I have spent the last four years studying business and economics in two of this country's finest learning institutions, so I'm sure you'll understand if we think that you are slightly "underqualified" to give us advice about the stock market.

LENNY

But this is a sure thing. All you have to do is buy all available stock for MacGruder Confections, the Fail-Safe Waste Disposal Company, and Roe and Buck Pharmaceuticals.

RACHEL

(Picking up her purse) Well, it's been interesting talking to you, Mr. Madison. I'm sorry John and I have to leave now, but we have a luncheon appointment to keep.

JOHN

(To Rachel) Come on, Rachel -- it wouldn't do any harm to humor the poor guy.

RACHEL

John, it should be plainly obvious to you by now that this man is mentally deranged. Humoring him will just make him more unreasonable. Now, if you don't want to be late, we'd better start looking for a cab.

RACHEL exits down left.

LENNY

(Looking after her) Was it something I said?

JOHN

No -- she's just in a bad mood. (Reaches into his pocket) Here, Lenny, I'd like you to have this.

LENNY

Twenty dollars? What's this for?

JOHN

Oh, I don't know. (Smiles) Think of it as your fee for the financial advice.

LENNY

(Smiling himself) Okay -- but you have to take this with you. (Hands him the *Journal*) A deal's a deal.

JOHN

Right -- I'm sure it'll be very helpful. Well, I'd better catch up with Rachel. It was nice meeting you, Lenny -- take care of yourself. (Exits down left)

LENNY

(Calling after him) Hey, that's what I do best! And don't forget -- Macgruder Confections, Fail-Safe Waste Disposal and Roe and Buck Pharmaceuticals -- they're sure things!

LENNY sits on the bench and looks at the twenty dollar bill. After a few moments, MAGGIE's voice is heard. She enters at the back of the house and slowly wanders through the audience towards the stage.

MAGGIE

Lenny! Lenny Madison, where are you?! (To an audience member) What the hell are you looking at?

LENNY

(hearing her voice but not seeing her) I'm over here, Maggie!

MAGGIE

(Pushing her way through the audience) Lenny! Where are you hiding?! (Laughing) Nice tie!

LENNY

I'm not hiding -- I'm right here.

MAGGIE

Where?!

LENNY

Here!

MAGGIE

I'm not in the mood for any of your games, Lenny. Now where are you?

LENNY

I'm on the bench!

MAGGIE

What bench? Do any of you assholes see a bench?

LENNY

This bench! It's the big green wooden thing that people sit on!

MAGGIE

I know what a bench looks like, Mr. Wiseass! Now where are you?!

LENNY

(Losing his cool) ON THE BENCH!

MAGGIE

(Rummaging around in the audience) Which bench is that?

LENNY

The one I told you about before.

MAGGIE

Oh. (Beat) Where's that?

LENNY

Where's what?

MAGGIE

The bench.

LENNY

(Getting up and standing on the bench) It's over here with me!

MAGGIE

Oh, that's good... where did you say you were?

LENNY

(Waving his arms and jumping up and down on the bench) Here! I'm here! With the bench! We're together! A team! I never leave home without it!

MAGGIE

(Entering during Lenny's tirade. She is carrying two large bags loaded down with clothes and other odds and ends) Oh, there you are, Lenny. (Pointing at the audience) Those bastards are back again.

LENNY

(Sitting down and sighing) What bastards? I don't see anybody.

MAGGIE

Jesus Christ, Lenny, can't you see them sitting out there. That's all those nosy bastards do -- sit around and watch you with their beady little eyes. (Yelling) Hey, you guys really want to see something?! Well, take a good look at this.

MAGGIE gives the audience a full view of her multi-clothed backside.

LENNY

(Dryly) Well, I'm sure they're gone now. That would scare anybody off.

MAGGIE

(Pulling her dress back down) What a rotten morning. If there's one thing I really hate, it's mornings like this.

LENNY

What are you talking about Maggie? It's a beautiful morning.

MAGGIE

Hey, Mr. "Weather Man," I've been around a lot longer than you so don't try to blow any sunshine up my ass. I know a lousy morning when I see one.

LENNY

Oh, you do? Well, what's so bad about it?

MAGGIE

You want to know what's so bad about it? All right, Mr. Optimist, I'll tell you. First of all, when I wake up this morning there's this dog -- the big,

ugly one that hangs around Manny's Pancake House -- and he's standing on top of me, breathing right on my face.

LENNY

The black one with the pointy ears?

MAGGIE

Yeah, that's the one. Anyway, this mutt's just standing there, Lenny, panting right in my face -- like this (demonstrates the noise) I don't know how many times you've had Purina Puppy Chow breath wake you up at five-thirty in the morning, but I can tell you, it ain't no treat.

LENNY

Well, what did you do?

MAGGIE

What do you mean, "What did I do?" I bit the bastard on the nose!

LENNY

(Surpressing a laugh) I'm sure that taught him a lesson.

MAGGIE

Yeah, but I had to chase the lousy mutt two blocks before I got my dentures back.

LENNY begins laughing loudly.

MAGGIE

Oh, you're laughing -- you think that's funny. Some friend you are Lenny Madison -- that dog could have given me rabies or something.

LENNY

Maggie, dogs only give you rabies if they bite **you** -- not the other way around.

MAGGIE

Oh, now you're a veterrarian. When did you become an expert on rabies, Mr. Louie Pasteur?

LENNY

I'm sorry, Maggie. (Stands up and spreads his arms) Come over here and let me give you a big, wet kiss.

MAGGIE

You're crazy, Lenny Madison. Crazy as a bed bug.

LENNY

I'm crazy about you, you sexy little minx. Now, why don't you sit down here and talk dirty to me.

MAGGIE

I always knew you were a pervert -- a **crazy** pervert. (Pulls a flyswatter out of her cart and waves it at him) I should teach you a lesson, Mr. Pervert.

LENNY

(Lying face down on the bench) Oh please! Please teach me a lesson -- I just love "higher education!"

MAGGIE

(Looking at his legs) Wait a minute -- where did you get those socks?

LENNY

(Still lying on the bench) Yes! Sock me, beat me, make me your love slave!

MAGGIE

(Grabbing his leg) Just look at that sock.

LENNY

What's wrong with it?

MAGGIE

It's got holes in it -- that's what's wrong with it.

LENNY

(Sitting up) I like having holes in my socks -- it lets my feet breath.

MAGGIE

Jokes, jokes, jokes -- you're always making jokes. Don't you know you'll catch pneumonia if you let your feet get cold. (Reaches into her cart and pulls out a bright orange pair of socks) Here, put these on.

LENNY

(Holding up the socks) What are they?

MAGGIE

Hunting socks -- I found them in the dumpster behind MacKenzie's Sporting Goods Store.

LENNY

Hunting socks? How could you go hunting with these things on -- the animals would see you coming for miles.

MAGGIE

Look, Mr. "Outdoors Expert," this isn't Mutual of Omaha's "Wild Kingdom," so quit asking stupid questions and put on the socks!

LENNY

(Pulling off his old socks) Boy, some people sure have gotten touchy lately. (Looking at his feet) Hey Maggie, have you ever noticed how much sock lint gets under your toe nails?

MAGGIE

(Putting Lenny's old socks in her bags) What?

LENNY

Sock lent -- I bet I've got a pound of sock lent under my toe nails.

MAGGIE

Why are you telling me this? Do I look like the kind of person who would care what has gotten underneath your toe nails? (Looking at the new socks on his feet) Well, how do they feel?

LENNY

(Standing up) It's strange, but now that I've put on these socks, I have the strangest, strongest, most uncontrollable urge to... dance!

He begins singing "I've Got Rhythm", does



an energetic jitterbug around the stage, and winds up standing on the bench.

LENNY

Well, what do you think?

MAGGIE

I think you should be in a straight jacket.

LENNY

You might be right. (Looks around) Wait a minute -- this isn't Kansas! Where's Toto? (Clicks his heels together) There's no place like home. There's no place like home. (Opens his eyes) Damn -- it never works for me.

MAGGIE

(Laughing and carrying her bags stage left) You're crazy, Lenny Madison. Crazy as a bed bug...

LENNY

Hey, Maggie -- aren't you forgetting something?

MAGGIE

(Stops) What?

LENNY

I said, "Aren't you forgetting something?"

MAGGIE

(Evasive) No -- I haven't forgotten anything.

LENNY

Oh, yes you have. (Taking two pill bottles out of his pocket and shaking them) You haven't taken your medicine today.

MAGGIE

I don't need any medicine!

LENNY

That's not what Mrs. Edgeworth says.

MAGGIE

Mrs. Edgeworth, Mrs. Edgeworth -- what does she know?

LENNY

She knows you've got a bad heart, and she knows you need to take your medication.

MAGGIE

My heart is fine! My whole body is fine (Holds up an arm) Just take a look at that.

LENNY

(Pulling her over to the bench) Come over here, Mrs. Universe -- you can show me your muscles after you take one of your pills.

MAGGIE

I can't swallow them!

LENNY

Oh, yes you can.

MAGGIE

They taste like... like ear wax!

LENNY

I eat it all the time.

MAGGIE

They make me constipated!

LENNY

You were born constipated -- now open up.

MAGGIE

(Clamping her mouth shut) NO!

LENNY

Come on, Maggie -- be a good girl and take your medicine.

MAGGIE shakes her head.

LENNY

(Sighing and holding up a pill) Oh look, Maggie -- here comes an airplane. (He waves the pill around and makes airplane noises) Brrrrmmm, here comes Mr. Airplane. Brrrrmmm, he's flying home. Brrrrmmm (Move the pill closer to her mouth) He's going to land. Brrrrmmm, open up the hanger. Brrrrmmm, open up the hanger and let Mr. Airplane land, Maggie...

MAGGIE screws up her face and clamps her hands over her mouth.

LENNY

You're not going to let Mr. Airplane land?

MAGGIE shakes her head.

LENNY

(Slightly exasperated) You're not going to take your medicine?

MAGGIE shakes her head.

LENNY

All right, Maggie. (Pulls out the twenty dollar bill) Since you've decided to be such a naughty girl, I guess I'll just have to find a way to spend this all by myself.

MAGGIE

(Removing her hands) Twenty dollars!

LENNY

And here I was -- planning to take you to the supermarket and let you pick out anything you wanted. Graham crackers, marshmallows, **Fig Newtons**...

MAGGIE

Fig Newtons! I love Fig Newtons!

LENNY

Yeah, I know. It's too bad you won't be a good girl and take your pills because I was going to buy you a great big box of those delicious, nutritious Fig Newtons. (Turns) Oh well --that's life, I guess. See you later, Maggie...

MAGGIE

(Getting up) Wait a minute, Lenny.

LENNY

(Back still turned) Hark, I hear a voice!

MAGGIE

(Sulky) All right -- you win.

LENNY

(Turning around) I win?! I win?! Oh, goody! What did I win? A car? A boat? An all expense paid trip to El Segundo?!

MAGGIE

(Snapping) You win -- I'll take my medicine!

LENNY

(Switching to a authoritative voice) You've made a wise decision, Maggie, my dear. Nine out of ten doctors agree that...

MAGGIE

(Grabbing the pill) Aw, shut up and give me that damn pill. (She swallows it) There. Are you satisfied now?

LENNY

Am I satisfied? I'm thrilled! I'm delighted! I'm delirious with orgasmic ecstasy!

MAGGIE

(Picking up her bags) Where did you get twenty dollars anyway, Lenny?

LENNY

(Putting the pills back in his pocket) What?

MAGGIE

Where did you get twenty dollars from?

LENNY

(Thoughtfully) Oh... it was a fee... (smiling) for my financial advice.

MAGGIE

(Laughing) Yeah -- and I'm the Queen of England. Come on -- I want to get my Newtons.

LENNY

(Shrugging and taking one of her bags) Right -- we can't keep those cookies waiting, can we? (Hooking his arm in Maggie's and dance stepping off left while singing) We're off the buy the Newtons, the wonderful Newtons of Fig...

Exit and BLACKOUT

ACT I SCENE II

Lights come up on LENNY who is sprawled on the heating grate with a newspaper on his face. After a moment, MRS. EDGEWORTH enters from up left, carrying a bundle of blankets in her arms. She sees LENNY lying on the grate, laughs and shakes her head as she puts the blankets down on the bench and moves to stand next to his head.

EDGE

Good evening, Lenny Madison.

LENNY

(Hidden by the newspaper) Good evening!

EDGE

How are you feeling tonight?

LENNY

Oh, I'm fine -- and how are you?

EDGE

Very well, thank you. May I ask why you're lying here with a newspaper on your face?

LENNY

I'm doing the crossword puzzle -- what's a ten letter word for hernia?

EDGE

Oh, stop being foolish. (Lifting the newspaper) Don't you know newsprint is bad for your complexion?

LENNY

Mrs. Edgeworth -- it's you!

EDGE

(Laughing) Well, of course it's me. (Walking over to the bench) St. Peter's donated some blankets to the relief fund, so I thought I'd drop by and bring you one.

LENNY

I knew it! I knew you were a saint! Someone should canonize this woman -- where's that Pope when you really need him...

EDGE

Lenny Madison, sometimes you act so...

LENNY

I guess I'll just have to do it myself. (He puts a blanket over his head and intones in a deep, solemn voice) By the powers invested in me, I hereby make you the saint of donated blankets and dirty bedpans. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Mackerel, amen. (He breaks into a comic version of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.")

EDGE

Excuse me for breaking in, Reverend, but could we discuss something?

LENNY

Certainly, my child. (Leads her to the bench) Sit down and unburden your soul to me.

EDGE

(Taking a bottle out of her purse) I've got some more medication for Maggie -- is she still taking it once a day?

LENNY

Yeah, but she really puts up a fight about it. You know how she hates the stuff.

EDGE

Yes I do, and you're a good person to keep an eye on her.

LENNY

That's not it -- I just like force-feeding pills to little old ladies.

EDGE

Oh, I know better than that, Lenny Madison -- you can't fool me.

LENNY

I never could -- you're completely foolproof.

EDGE

Now, I've got something else to give you. (Takes a picture out of her purse) I went to Dunbar Elementary and got a picture of Sam. (Pointing to the picture) See -- there he is on the jungle bars.

LENNY

(Taking a quick look at the picture) Yeah... he's really growing up.

EDGE

Such a cute little boy -- so bright and active. Didn't you say he'd be seven next month?

LENNY

(Moving away) I... I don't remember.

EDGE

Why don't you go home, Lenny -- just for a visit. You could...

LENNY

(Desperately cheerful) What? And give up all this?!

EDGE

Lenny...

LENNY

(Growing more animated) The hustle. The bustle. And the smog -- don't forget about the smog. (Breathes deeply) Just take a whiff of that -- now that's what I call **real** air pollution. Did you know that Time magazine did a nation-wide poll and this great city of ours was voted the best place to gag in America. (Calling off stage) Hey, did you guys hear that? -- we're number one! (His back is turned to Edgeworth and the audience) Damn, I love living here!



EDGE

(Sighing) All right, Lenny. At least take the picture -- I know you want to keep it -- even if you won't admit it. (Picks up the blankets) Now, do you feel like walking a tired old lady to the bus stop? I've got another twenty blankets to give out this evening.

LENNY

(Taking her arm and walking stage left) Twenty blankets? Hey, I've got an idea -- why don't we have a slumber party out here on the street? Yeah -- We could roast marshmallows and sing camp fire songs. Do you think we should invite the Mayor? Nah -- he doesn't know any songs and he'd probably eat all the marshmallows...

Exit down left. After a few moments,  
JOHN enters from up right.

JOHN

Yeah... yeah, this is the place, Rachel. I remember that bench.

RACHEL

(Entering) This is ridiculous, John.

JOHN

And there's his heating grate -- remember, he told us about his heating grate.

RACHEL

I can't believe I let you talk me into this.

JOHN

I hope he didn't move.

RACHEL

(Sitting on the bench) Where the hell is he going to move, John? Palm Springs? The Riviera?

JOHN

I don't know... he was here last week.

RACHEL

Who cares if he moved or not? I still can't understand why you insist on wasting an evening looking for the bum.

JOHN

(Pulling a copy of *The Wall Street Journal* out of his coat pocket) Rachel, take another look at this -- just look at the figures.

RACHEL

(Rising) Okay, okay -- the stocks he gave you went up a little. Big deal.

JOHN

Oh, for Christ's sake, Rachel, get serious. Look -- MacGruder Confections: up ten points, Fail-Safe Waste Disposal: up twelve and Roe and Buck Pharmaceuticals: up nine points. How do you explain that?

RACHEL

All right -- they all went up! So what? The guy just got lucky.

JOHN

Come on, Rachel. Think about it -- three picks, three winners with a net gain of thirty-one points. That's a pretty good batting average -- in *anybody's* league.

RACHEL

(Confronting him) What are you saying, John? Are you trying to tell me that a... a vagrant knows more about the stock market than we do?

(Circling him) Are you really trying to convince me that even though I've spent the last four years busting my ass in business school, a man who sleeps on a steam vent, pretends he's a dead British naval commander, and wears the same pair of underwear for four months at a time is better qualified than me to predict the fluctuations in the American economy?

JOHN

All I'm trying to say is that numbers don't lie. And the numbers say this guy knows something about the market.

RACHEL

(Turning away) Well, I don't buy it. Goddamn it, John, it just doesn't make any sense!

Pause while JOHN looks down at the paper.

JOHN

Yeah. Yeah, you're right. (Laughing) It really sounds crazy, doesn't it? -- I mean, how could the poor guy possibly know...

RACHEL

(Turning) Wait a minute!... Wait one minute....

JOHN

What?

RACHEL

He likes to listen to other people's conversations. He was eavesdropping on us last week, remember?

JOHN

Yeah -- so what?

RACHEL

Don't you see, John? Jesus, it's so obvious! He doesn't know anything about the stock market, but he listens to people who do.

JOHN

(Understanding) Ohhhh... Do you really think so?

RACHEL

Of course -- it's the only explanation that makes any sense. I bet hundreds of people walk through here every day --businessmen, brokers, investors. And there he is -- sitting on that steam vent, soaking in all that information.

JOHN

Well, I suppose he might have heard something...

RACHEL

That's how he knew about those stocks. He overheard some executive talking about his portfolio or investment plans. (Decisive) John, we need to talk to that bum.

JOHN

That's what I've been saying.

RACHEL

Well, you were right. There's no telling what else he's heard.

JOHN

Yeah, but isn't what we're talking about a little... illegal?

RACHEL

Oh, give me a break and grow up, John. (Pointing at the paper) Who doesn't use inside information when they get a chance? And if you don't want to find yourself back in Charlotte, you'd better wise up and get with the game.

JOHN

Right... (Stronger) You're right. And anyway, it's not like we're hurting anyone, is it?

RACHEL

Of course not. (Putting an arm around his shoulders) We're just going to ask a harmless old bum a few innocent questions about what he's overheard about the market. How could that possibly hurt anybody?

JOHN

And besides, who would ever know?

RACHEL

Exactly. All we have to do is find this guy, slip him a few bucks and find out what kind of information he's got. It's as simple as that.

JOHN

Yeah -- but first we have to find him.

RACHEL

He couldn't have gone far. (Looking at her watch) You stay here and wait for him to show up. (Starts to exit)

JOHN

Wait a minute -- where are you going?

RACHEL

I want to make a few phone calls while the overseas markets are still open -- I'll be back in a few minutes.

JOHN

But what do I tell him if he comes back?

RACHEL

(Sighing) Just tell him we want to know what he's heard about the market, and that if he cooperates with us, there'll be something in it for him. Don't worry about it, John. (Laughs) It's not like we're dealing with Donald Trump here.

Exits up left.

JOHN

(Talking to himself) Right -- no problem. (Calling) Don't worry, Rachel, I've got it all under control!

He glances around the stage, drumming his fingers on the back of the bench. After a few moments, he sits and sighs. Then he has an inspiration, opens his briefcase, looks around and pulls out the comics section of the newspaper. He disguises the comics with a copy of the *Times* and chuckles as he reads.

MAGGIE

(Calling offstage right) Lenny! Lenny Madison! (To the audience) Jesus Christ! Don't you people ever take a break!

John hurriedly shoves the comics back into his briefcase, stands and straightens his tie.

MAGGIE

(Pushing her way through the audience) Lenny! Where the hell are you, Lenny Madison?!

JOHN

Hello?!

MAGGIE

Is that you, Lenny?

JOHN

No -- no, it isn't.

MAGGIE

You sound different -- like you've got a cold. Have you been wearing those socks?

JOHN

(Looking down at his feet) Socks? Uh, listen, I don't know what you're talking about but I'm trying to find Mr. Madison too.

MAGGIE

Very funny, Lenny! Hey, mister, is that your real hair?

JOHN

My name isn't Lenny!

MAGGIE

Oh, really? What is it then -- Dan Rather? Ronald Reagan? Rumpelstiltskin?

JOHN

It's Wilson -- John Wilson!

MAGGIE

Yeah -- and I'm Eleanor Roosevelt. You can't fool me, Lenny. Now stop hiding! (Sitting down) What the hell is in my shoe?

JOHN

Hiding? I'm not hiding?!

MAGGIE

I'm getting tired of your stupid games, Lenny -- where are you?!

JOHN

(Spreading his arms) I'm standing right here!

MAGGIE

(Standing) Where? Hey, "Princess Di," can you see where that asshole is standing?

JOHN

(To himself) I can't believe this. Look, I'm here... (Looking around) beside the bench.

MAGGIE

Now, don't start *that* again, Lenny!

JOHN

(Losing control) What are you talking about! I'm not Lenny --my name is John -- John Wilson! I don't know why the hell you keep on...

MAGGIE enter up right during JOHN'S tirade.

MAGGIE

(Pointing) Hey! You're not Lenny!

JOHN

(Sitting) That's what I've been saying.

MAGGIE

(Inspecting him suspiciously) Well, who are you then?

JOHN

(Wearily) I'm...

MAGGIE

What are you doing here?

JOHN

Well, I...

MAGGIE

What do you want?

JOHN

I'm looking for...

MAGGIE

You're not one of those... Shriners, are you?

JOHN

Shriners?

MAGGIE

Yeah -- you know, the guys that wear those funny red hats with the brussel sprout growing out the top.

JOHN

Yeah -- I know what a Shriner is.

MAGGIE

That's what you think, Mr. Hotshot. But I can tell you don't know what Shriners *really* are.

JOHN

Of course I do -- they're a bunch of old guys that march in parades and give money to orphanages and rest-homes. Everybody knows that.

MAGGIE

Is that what you think? (Laughing loudly) Ha, ha, ha! Oh boy, have they got you fooled! You haven't got a clue!

JOHN

(Standing) All right -- if you know so much about Shriners, go head and tell me what they are.

MAGGIE

(Grabbing his arm and pulling him over to the trashcan) Okay --but we have to be careful -- you never know when they might be listening in on you.

She looks all around, prompting JOHN to do the same.

MAGGIE

Shriners **really** are (Looks around some more) Blood-sucking aliens from the planet Venus.



JOHN  
What?!

MAGGIE  
Now you know the terrible truth.

JOHN  
(Laughing) Blood-sucking aliens from Venus?

MAGGIE  
That's right -- every one of those Shriners is really a rabid, man-eating vampire from outer space.

JOHN  
(Laughing louder) That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard.

MAGGIE  
Okay, Mr. Smarty-pants -- go ahead and laugh, but you'll find out how funny it is when one of those mean and ugly blood-suckers latches onto your neck and drains you dry!

JOHN  
Oh come on, lady, you can't really be serious.

MAGGIE  
Why do you think Shriners wear those funny hats with the brussel sprouts? How about *that*?

JOHN  
Hell, I don't know -- maybe it's some kind of tradition.

MAGGIE  
Wrong again, laughing-boy! They use those hats to get secret messages from Venus.

JOHN  
You've got to be kidding.

MAGGIE  
When nobody's around to see them, those brussel sprouts stand straight up (Pantomiming with her hand) and spread out -- you know, like a big

antenna! Then the head blood-sucker -- back on Venus -- starts sending out a signal. Beep, beep, beep... beep, beep, beep, beep... and before you know it, there're Shriners everywhere you go -- hospitals, libraries... McDonalds!

JOHN

(Looking at his watch) Well, would you look at the time -- I'd love to stay and chat but...

MAGGIE

That's right -- those lousy Shriners have even taken over McDonalds! (Advancing menacingly on John) And just when you ordered a Big Mac with extra lettuce and cheese, one of those gruesome... slobbering... drooling Shriners sneaks up behind you and sinks his teeth in your neck! (She looms over John who is huddled on the bench)

LENNY

(Entering on the end of Maggie's last line) Now there's a woman who looks likes she could use a Fig Newton.

MAGGIE

(Turning -- brightly) Fig Newton!

She goes over and takes the cookie LENNY is holding.

JOHN

(Rubbing his neck) Thank God -- you saved my life!

LENNY

(Draping the blanket around his neck like a cape) That's me all right -- Lenny Madison, the world's first homeless super-hero.

JOHN

Hey, I'm serious. That old lady was about to bite me on the neck!

LENNY

Who? Maggie?! You've got to be kidding. (Putting his arm around Maggie's shoulders) You wouldn't bite anybody on the neck, would you, Maggie?

MAGGIE

Of course not -- you know I'm a vegeaterian.

LENNY

Did you hear that -- this woman is a "vegeraterian" -- A Ghandi of the garbage cans. She wouldn't even think about biting you on the neck. Now if you happened to be an apricot or a kumquat, well that's a different story.

JOHN

(Rubbing his neck) I don't know -- I still think she was going...

LENNY

Wait a minute -- You're the kid I met last week -- the "stock analyst."

MAGGIE

I still think he looks like a Shriner.

LENNY

Don't be ridiculous, Maggie -- look at how he's dressed. Expensive suit and tie, thirty dollar haircut, and look -- his shoes even match. This is obviously a young, up-and-coming businessman.

MAGGIE

(Also closely examining John and wrinkling up her nose) What's that stuff he's got on -- smells like limburger cheese.

JOHN

Hey, this cologne costs fifty dollars a bottle!

MAGGIE

Ha! Did you hear that, Lenny? This jerk paid fifty bucks to smell like limburger cheese! (To John) You could have rolled around in a dumpster and smelled that way for free. (Goes to her cart and pulls out a copy of *Cosmopolitan*) Jeez, they don't teach kids anything these days!

LENNY

Don't pay any attention to Maggie -- she probably woke up on the wrong side of the alley this morning. (Sitting on the bench beside Maggie) What did you say your name was?

JOHN

John -- John Wilson.

LENNY

Right. So what brings you back to our little slice of urban heaven, John Wilson?

JOHN

Actually, I wanted to talk to you.

MAGGIE

What do you want to talk to Lenny for? Don't you know he's crazy?

LENNY

(Smiling) Yeah -- why would a successful junior executive take time out of his busy schedule to talk to a crazy bum like me?

JOHN

Do you remember those stock picks you gave me last week?

LENNY

Sure -- MacGruder Confections, Fail-Safe Waste Disposal and Roe and Buck Pharmaceuticals.

JOHN

Well, they all went up -- way up.

LENNY

(Standing up and laughing) Of course they went up -- I told you they were sure things.

JOHN

Look, Lenny (Pause) I haven't been doing too well on the market lately, so when you told me about those stocks, I figured "What the hell -- I'll buy a few shares and see what happens." I have to admit I wasn't expecting much, but in one week those three stocks have gained an average of ten points on the exchange.

LENNY

(Coming over to look at the "Journal") Ten points, huh? Hey, that's not too bad...

JOHN

Not bad?! I wish I could show that kind of profit every week.

LENNY

Yeah, well, I told you they were first-class picks. It's nice to know I haven't lost my touch.

JOHN

Listen, Lenny -- Rachel and I figured out how you knew about those stocks.

LENNY

(Smiling) Oh, you did?

JOHN

Yeah -- and we would be very interested in any other... information you might have.

LENNY

(Sitting on the bench) Oh, you would?

JOHN

(Moving closer -- confidentially) And of course "they'll be something in it for you."

LENNY

(Elbowing Maggie) Did you hear that -- they'll be something in it for me.

MAGGIE

You mean like Fig Newtons?

LENNY

I don't know. (Turning to John) You mean Fig Newtons?

JOHN

What?

LENNY

You said there'd be something in it for me.

JOHN

There will be -- if you cooperate with us.

MAGGIE

Forget all that -- what about the Fig Newtons?

LENNY

Yeah, what about the Fig Newtons?

JOHN

(Starting to lose his cool) What has "Fig Newtons" got to do with anything?!

LENNY

How should I know -- you're the one that started this.

JOHN

Look -- we know you overheard somebody talking about the stocks you gave me last week. What Rachel and I want to find out now is whether or not you've heard anything else about the market.

LENNY

(Laughing) You've got it all wrong, kid.

MAGGIE

Hey, Lenny -- how would you describe my (Reading) "Primary Disposition Profile?"

LENNY

How would I describe your what?

MAGGIE

My "Primary Disposition Profile" -- it's for one of these personality tests they have in "Cosmopolitan." Do you think my natural disposition is "Charming, Dignified, Sensuous or Alluring?"

JOHN

(To Lenny) Wait a minute -- are you saying that you didn't hear someone talking about those stocks?

MAGGIE

Well, what do you think -- am I charming, dignified, sensuous or alluring?

LENNY

(To John -- laughing) Of course I didn't.

JOHN

Then how did you know that...

MAGGIE

(Standing up and advancing on John) Hey! Mr. Three-piece-suit! Shut your mouth before I rip off your lips and shove them up your nose! (Turning on Lenny) Now, I'm only going to ask you one more time, Lenny Madison -- Am I Charming! Dignified! Sensuous! or Alluring?!

LENNY

All of the above.

MAGGIE

(Turning and going back to the bench) Good -- that's what I put down.

LENNY

I hate to tell you this, John, but I'm the one that picked those stocks.

JOHN

But how could you know anything about the market -- I mean, you're a...  
a...

LENNY

A crazy old bum? (Laughing bitterly) Yeah -- I guess that's what I am. Not a pretty picture is it?

JOHN

I'm sorry, Lenny -- but I just don't see how you could have possibly picked those stocks by yourself.

LENNY

(Turning, taking a breath -- brighter) Why not? Take a look around you, kid. (Spreading his arms) All the information you need is right here.

JOHN

(Giving up) Maybe this wasn't such a good idea.

LENNY

I'm telling you, John, everything you need to know about the market is out here on the street. (Pointing to the trashcan down right) Look -- do you know what that is?

JOHN

Of course I do -- it's a garbage can.

LENNY

Wrong! This is a goldmine of information -- a fountain of financial facts and figures.

JOHN

(Looking at the can) This is a "fountain of financial facts and figures?"

LENNY

Think about it, John. How does trash get into a trashcan? Somebody throws it in there. But before they can throw away the trash, first they have to **buy** it. This isn't just a garbage can, John -- this is a fully-updated, state-of-the-art consumer purchasing guide!

JOHN

(Coming over, taking a look in the trashcan, and looking back at Lenny) You've got to be kidding.

LENNY

Alright -- I'll prove it to you! (He begins digging through the trashcan -- throwing out handfuls of rubbish)

JOHN

Hey, wait a minute! (Dodging the debris) What the hell are you doing?!

MAGGIE

(Looking up from her magazine) Don't bother, Lenny -- I already checked it this morning.

JOHN

Checked it? -- For what?



MAGGIE

For breakfast, you moron -- why else would I look through a garbage can?

JOHN

(Revolted) Breakfast?!

LENNY

(Pulling out a small box) Ah hah! I knew there'd be one in here. Take a look at this, kid.

JOHN

(Holding it gingerly) It's an empty box of cough drops. So what?

LENNY

So think about it. It's Winter, right? And when it's Winter, people catch colds. And when people catch colds, they get sore throats. And when people get sore throats, they take -- cough drops!

JOHN

Alright -- people take cough drops when they have sore throats...?

LENNY

Listen, John -- when it's this time of the year, people start catching colds and they start *buying* cough drops for their sore throats. So what do you start buying on the market when Winter comes around...?

JOHN

(Realizing) Medicinal stocks.

LENNY

Exactly.

JOHN

(Laughing) But that's so obvious.

LENNY

(Laughing also) Yeah, it is isn't it? (Putting his arm around John's shoulders and pointing at the box) Tell me something -- what does all that fine print at the bottom say?

JOHN

(Sighing) Manufactured by... Roe and Buck Pharmaceuticals!

LENNY

Surprise!

JOHN

But... but how did you know about this particular company -- I mean, a lot of people are in the cough drop business.

LENNY

Yeah, but this is the cheapest brand on the market -- everybody out here on the street buys it. And besides, I just happen to know that Roe and Buck Pharmaceuticals is the country's largest manufacturer of cold medication.

JOHN

I can't believe this! You actually used a trashcan to help you pick this stock?

LENNY

(Sitting on the bench) Sure -- and it really works great with "junk bonds."  
(Elbowing Maggie) **Junk Bonds** --- that's a joke, Maggie.

MAGGIE

Hey look -- one of those scratch and sniff perfume samplers. (Reading) "Ode to a Nightingale." (Tearing out the page, sniffing it, and wiping it under her arms) It matches my "sensuous" personality.

JOHN

(To Lenny) But how did you know about the other companies -- like MacGruder Confections?

LENNY

Oh, that was "obvious" too. (Picking up a candy wrapper) You see, they started running this promotional campaign a few months ago -- if you find one of their specially marked candy wrappers, you can win (Reading) "Ten thousand dollars in cash, a new car, a trip to Hawaii, or a life-time supply of "Uncle Bonzo's Extra Chewy Jelly Bellies."

JOHN

Yeah, but people don't **really** go for these contests.

LENNY

Sure they do -- it's just like the Lottery, kid. People always like to think they're getting something for nothing -- even people who've got nothing to begin with. Besides, would you pass up the chance for a life-time supply of Uncle Bonzo's Jelly Bellies?

JOHN

(Pointing at the wrapper) So you guessed that MacGruder's stock was going to go up because of this promotional gimmick?

LENNY

Well, that was one of the reasons. Lately, I've started seeing alot of these wrappers in the garbage so I figured somebody had to be buying more of MacGruder's candy. You've heard of politicians taking straw polls? -- Well, I take trash polls.

JOHN

I don't know -- it all seems too... too simple.

LENNY

(Laughing) Of course it's simple. (Pointedly) What else would you expect from a "crazy old bum" like me?

JOHN

Okay -- I can see how you might have known about things like candy bars and cough drops -- but how did you find out about the Fail-Safe Waste Disposal Company?

LENNY

(Shaking his head and pulling John down on the bench) John, John, John -- you're not using your head. What's the "obvious" answer?

JOHN

(Shaking his head) It beats the hell out of me.

LENNY

Come on, kid -- think about it. Who *picks up* the trash

JOHN

Well... the trashmen do.

LENNY

Right.

JOHN

(Thinking it through) So you must have known that the garbage around here was picked up by trashmen that work for Fail-Safe Waste Disposal.

LENNY

Right again. And since some of my dearest friends happen to be trashmen, I also managed to find out that Fail-Safe just got the garbage contract for the whole city.

JOHN

(Standing) So you figured that increased trash would mean increased cash -- which would send the company's stock prices up!

LENNY

(To Maggie with an English accent) By George -- I think he's got it!

RACHEL

(Entering from off left) Mr Madison -- how nice to see you again!

JOHN

(Excited) Rachel, you're not going to believe what's happened!

MAGGIE

(To Lenny) Who the hell is she?

LENNY

I guess you two haven't been introduced yet. (Pulling Maggie over to Rachel) Maggie, this is John's friend -- Rachel LaMonde.

MAGGIE

(Pointing at John and pulling Rachel around in a circle) Did you know he's a Shriner?

RACHEL

What is this woman talking about?

JOHN

I am not a Shriner!

MAGGIE

(To Rachel, pulling her around in the opposite direction) Has he tried to bite you on the neck yet?

RACHEL

Bite me on the neck? John, what's going on?

JOHN

Don't pay any attention to her -- she doesn't know what she's talking about.

RACHEL

(Pulling John aside) Have you had a talk with Mr. Madison -- Did you explain what we wanted?

JOHN

Yeah -- and I discovered something incredible. (He walks over to Lenny) Rachel, Lenny Madison is a financial genius!

LENNY

Well, I wouldn't say a genius. Brilliant perhaps. (Hopping up on the bench) Endowed with mental abilities far beyond those of mortal men...

RACHEL

(Pointing at Lenny) This man is a "financial genius?"

JOHN

I know it doesn't make any sense, but somehow Lenny understands the basic laws of supply and demand, and he predicts what's happening on the market from here on the street. (Goes over to Lenny who is striking a heroic pose on the bench) This man is a natural born economist!

LENNY

I am aren't I? (Holding out his hand) You may kiss my ring.

RACHEL

(Pleasantly skeptical) Well, there certainly seems to be more to you than meets the eye, Mr. Madison. Perhaps Mr. Wilson and I were a bit hasty in

underestimating your... "talents." (Starting to lead him stage right) Why don't we go somewhere and discuss it further.

LENNY

Wait a minute -- I can't just leave.

RACHEL

(Impatient) Why not?

LENNY

I've got things to do.

RACHEL

(Laughing) Excuse me for laughing, Mr. Madison, but you hardly look like the kind of man who has a lot on his "agenda."

LENNY

(Pulling Maggie's medicine out of his coat) Yeah, well why don't you kids just run along without me -- It's time for Maggie to take her pill.

MAGGIE

I don't need any pills!

LENNY

(Following Maggie) Oh, God -- here we go again...

JOHN

Look, Maggie -- why don't you be nice and cooperate with Lenny...

MAGGIE

(Pulling a large egg-beater out of one of her bags) Stay away from me, Mr. Bloodsucker! One more step and I'll turn you into Shriners casserole!

RACHEL

Oh, this is ridiculous! (She pulls a twenty dollar bill out of her purse and snatches the pills out of Lenny's hand) Listen --if you take your medicine, (Holds the bottles up to Maggie's eyes) I'll give you this. (Holds up the bill)

MAGGIE

Twenty bucks?!

RACHEL

That's right -- all you have to do is take these pills and the twenty dollars is yours. Do we have a deal?

MAGGIE

(Looking at the medicine and the money -- grabs both) Deal!

RACHEL

(To John) See how simple that was? You just have to know the right buttons to push. (Looks at Lenny for a moment and then says conspiratorily to Maggie) You don't **really** need anybody to give you your pills, do you, Maggie?

MAGGIE

(Belligerent) You're damn right I don't. (Looking at Lenny) I can take my own pills any time I want.

RACHEL

Well, I guess that settles that. (To Lenny) Now can we go?

JOHN

Come on, Lenny -- she said she'd take her pills. I want you to tell Rachel how you knew about those stocks.

LENNY

(Looking closely at Rachel) You're a very persuasive woman, Rachel. Do you always get what you want?

RACHEL

Why don't we discuss it over dinner? I know a great Italian restaurant near here. (Leading Lenny stage right) Do you like Italian food, Mr. Madison?

LENNY

Are you kidding? I eat Spaghetti-O's three days a week. (Turning) I'll be back soon, Maggie, and then you can take your pills.

MAGGIE

You stay out of this, Mr. Know-It-All. (Looking at Rachel) They're my pills and I can take them by myself.

RACHEL

(Leading him stage right again) You see, Mr. Madison? --everything's under control. (Persuasive) And if you *are* the "financial genius" that John says you are, I would very grateful if you would share some of your "expertise" with us.

LENNY

Well, I guess I *could* spare the time to show you kids a thing or two about the market. (Walking over to Rachel) I'm beginning to think the two of you need all the help you can get. I just hope I'm not too over-dressed for this restaurant.

RACHEL

(Smiling) Oh, don't let that concern you, Mr. Madison -- the owner's a personal friend of mine. (Leading Lenny off right) Now, what I'm really interested in finding out is how you managed to get so much information on the Fail-Safe Waste Disposal Company...

JOHN

(Following close behind) And make sure you tell her about the trashcan and how you found out about MacGruder Confections...

Exit up right.

MAGGIE

(Running up right and calling) You don't have to worry about me, Lenny Madison -- I can take care of myself! (Softer) So go ahead and leave -- I don't care. (Going over to the trashcan) Open up, Mr. Trashcan, it's time to take your medicine. (She imitates Lenny's airplane noise as she pours the pills into the garbage can and tosses the bottle in after them. She looks out at the audience) Well, what the hell are all of you looking at? I know what I'm doing!

She shoves the twenty dollar bill down the front of her dress, picks up her bags and exits down left, singing "I'm in the Money." Lights dim with a spotlight on the trashcan, then slowly to BLACKOUT.

END OF ACT I



ACT II SCENE I

Lights come up on an empty stage. After a few moments, RODNEY cautiously enters from stage left and looks around. He exits and quickly re-enters, pushing his cart across the stage. When he crosses halfway, LENNY enters from up right.

LENNY

(Spreading his arms) Rodney! What a pleasant surprise!

RODNEY

Oh no!

LENNY

(Advancing on him) I can't begin to tell you how happy I am to see you...

RODNEY

(Flinging himself between Lenny and his cart) Stay back! Keep away from my wieners!

LENNY

(Innocently) Wieners? (Smiling) Oh, that's right -- you **do** keep hot dogs in there, don't you? How convenient.

RODNEY

(Bodily covering the cart) You know damn well I keep hot dogs in here! And you're not getting any! Not a single one!

LENNY

(Looking at Rodney) Do I detect a note of hostility in your voice?

RODNEY

(Pointing at him) You lied to me, Lenny -- you lied about these wienies!

LENNY

Rodney -- I don't know what to say. You've cut me to the quick -- and after all I've done for you.

RODNEY

Ha! You haven't done a thing for me -- except make up a bunch of bull about my wienies. But I'm not falling for your tricks anymore, Lenny. Now get out of here before I call a cop!

LENNY

(Dramatically) How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless hot dog vendor. (Sitting on the bench) My faith in humanity is crushed.

RODNEY

Oh, cut the crap, Lenny -- you knew all along there wasn't anything wrong with my wieners.

LENNY

All right, Rodney, I can see that it's no use trying to fool you any longer. (Looking away) You're just too smart for me.

RODNEY

You better believe I am. I asked the dispatcher and he said it's too hot in one of these machines for any of those bacterias or bocholism germs. And all this time you've been telling me how these wienies were going to "rupture" people's intestines and "blow the eyeballs out of little old ladies!" You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Lenny.

LENNY

Oh I am, Rodney -- mortified, devastated with guilt and shame. I don't know how I could have done such a thing. Can you ever forgive me?

RODNEY

I don't want to talk about it. (Starting to push his cart off right) Just leave me alone!

LENNY

(On his knees in front of the cart) It was the smell of the hot dogs that drove me to it, Rodney! I can't hide it any longer but I'm... I'm a wiener addict! I just can't say "no" to sandwich meat! Please say you forgive me.

RODNEY

Look, Lenny -- ever since I've known you, you've tried to trick me into giving you hot dogs. I don't get to eat for free so why the hell should you?

Where would America be if we gave away everything for free? Did you ever think of that, Lenny? Where would this country be today if we just gave everybody what they wanted?! Jesus, we might as well be... communists! I hate to say it, Lenny, but I think you've been acting like a commie.

LENNY

Me? -- a "commie?" (Getting to his feet) Lenny Madison -- a communist?! Let me tell you something, Rodney -- I'm a red-blooded, patriotic, Yanky-Doodle American. Every morning I wake up on that heating vent, I thank God that I'm living in the U.S. of A! And when I'm digging through the back-alleys and trashcans, you can hear me humming the "Star Spangled Banner." And while I'm picking Chicken McNuggets out of the dumpsters, I always sing at least one chorus "America the Beautiful" and say the Pledge of Allegiance when I'm finished. And let me tell you something else, Rodney my friend -- you can't truly *appreciate* this great country of ours until you live in it like I do.

RODNEY

Oh yeah? -- and how do you figure that?

LENNY

Isn't it obvious? -- I mean, just look at what the "free enterprise system" has done for a guy like me. (Goes to the heating grate) Free housing with free heating. Free clothing and free blankets. With all this going for me, I never should have made up those vicious lies about your hot dogs. But don't worry, Rodney -- I'm going to make it up to you.

RODNEY

You... you are?

LENNY

(Putting his arm around Rodney's shoulders) Yes, I am. I'm going to give you something that every American businessman wants and needs -- free publicity!

RODNEY

"Publicity?" (Suspicious) What kind of publicity?

LENNY

The best kind, Rodney -- a true life testimonial on the benefits of eating your hot dogs. I'm going to tell this **whole** city how I, Lenny Madison, have had my life enriched and fulfilled by your wieners!

RODNEY

Now, wait a minute, Lenny...

LENNY

No -- don't try to thank me, Rodney. (Standing on the bench) I know this is going beyond your wildest dreams, but it's the least I can do after eating all those free hot dogs. (Cupping his hands around his mouth) Attention! Attention! I would like to *personally* endorse Rodney's wieners!

RODNEY

What the hell are you doing?! (Looking around in a panic) Don't listen to this guy -- he's... he's crazy!

LENNY

It's true -- I'm crazy with admiration for this man! His hot dogs have changed my life!

RODNEY

(Running around the bench) Shut up, Lenny! Stop yelling!

LENNY

What?! And hide your light under a bushel? Deprive the world of these miracles of processed pork? Never! Attention! Attention! (Spreading his arms) Rodney's wienies made me the man I am today!

RODNEY

Please, Lenny -- please don't give me anymore publicity! I'm... I'm asking you as a friend.

LENNY

(Looking down at him with a smile) As a friend?

RODNEY

Yeah -- what's a few hot dogs between friends -- right? I mean, there's no reason for you to give me all this... this "free publicity" just because I let you have a couple of wieners. After all, that's what friends are for.

LENNY

(Looking around) Did you hear that?! What a man! What a humanitarian! I'm telling you, Rodney -- a guy like me doesn't deserve to have a friend like you. Just thinking about it makes me feel... misty...

RODNEY

(Helping Lenny off the bench) Aw, now don't start getting all sentimental about it -- I mean, they're just hot dogs. Why don't you let me fix you one.

LENNY

No, no -- you've been too good to me already.

RODNEY

Oh, come on -- it'll do you good to eat something.

LENNY

No, I couldn't possibly take another one of those hot dogs... unless it was completely disguised in chili, mustard, mayonaise...

RODNEY

(Already fixing it) ...peppers, garlic, and extra relish.

LENNY

(With a sniffle) You remembered.

RODNEY

(Handing it to Lenny) Of course I remembered -- who could forget an order like that? (Starting to push his cart down right) Did you really mean all that stuff about singing "America the Beautiful" and "The Star Spangled Banner?"

LENNY

(Walking with him) Absolutely every word. (With his mouth full) Take it from me, Rodney -- we're living in the land of opportunity.

RODNEY

(Shaking his head) Yeah, I guess you're right.

LENNY

(Putting his arm around Rodney's shoulders, pointing off stage and singing)  
"Oh say can you see, by the dawn's early light..." (Lenny looks at Rodney  
and after a moment they both break into a  
rousing chorus of the Star Spangled Banner)

LENNY and RODNEY exit stage right, still  
singing. After a few moments, RACHEL  
enters from down left and impatiently  
looks around the stage. She sits on the  
bench and opens her briefcase as MRS.  
EDGEWORTH enters from down left and  
goes to the heating vent.

EDGE

(Going over to Rachel) Excuse me, Miss, but did you happen to see a man  
hanging around that steam vent?

RACHEL

(Suspicious) Uh, no... no, I haven't.

EDGE

(Worriedly preoccupied) Oh... well, thank you anyway.

EDGEWORTH exits hurriedly off right and  
RACHEL stands, looking after her.  
After a moment, JOHN enters from off left.

JOHN

Sorry I'm late but I wanted to get these figures as soon as the market  
closed. (Pulling a piece of paper out of his breast pocket) Well, it looks  
like Lenny's done it again.

RACHEL

(Taking the paper and examining it closely) Are you sure about all of these?

JOHN

Yeah, I double checked every one. (Pointing to the paper) And he was  
even right about Trainor Computing -- it went up twenty-three points even  
before the take-over bid went public.

RACHEL

And Consolidated Metal Works went up another twelve points. How the hell does he do it?

JOHN

(Going over to the trashcan) He **told** us how he does it -- remember?

RACHEL

Oh, come on, John, (laughing) you can't tell me you *honestly* believed that load of crap about picking stocks out of the trashcan.

JOHN

Hey, I know it sounds crazy, but how else do you explain what Lenny's been able to do over the last week.

RACHEL

I don't know and I really don't care -- as long as he keeps on doing it. (Puts the paper into her briefcase)

JOHN

Listen, Rachel, I want to find apartment for Lenny -- it's time to get him off the street.

RACHEL

Now, wait a minute. I still think it would be a mistake to rush into anything.

JOHN

What do you mean?

RACHEL

I mean that Mr. Madison seems to be perfectly happy living out here on his steam vent. Now whether or not he picks his stocks out of a trashcan or overhears people talking about the market doesn't really matter to either one of us. What matters is that we're finally making a name for ourselves and I just don't think it would be wise for us to do anything that might jeopardize that.

JOHN

Yeah, but what about Lenny? Don't you *think* we owe it to the guy to help him get out of here? (Looking around) Just take a look around you, Rachel -- nobody could possibly be happy living in a place like this.

RACHEL

We're not social workers, John. It's not our job to find homes for vagrants or solve all the world's problems. Now, I suggest that you start thinking of Mr. Madison as a... resource -- a very valuable resource -- that shouldn't be allowed to go to waste.

LENNY has entered from up right during  
the last part of RACHEL's line.

LENNY

You know, I've never really noticed it before, but you two make a *lovely* couple.

RACHEL

(Turning quickly and putting a smile on her face) Mr. Madison -- I didn't see you standing there.

LENNY

(Sitting down on the bench) That's because I naturally blend in with all this beautiful scenery.

JOHN

(Sitting down beside Lenny) Rachel and I were discussing whether or not we should move our (looking around) meeting place to a more... pleasant location.

RACHEL

(Quickly sitting down next to Lenny) And I was explaining to John what an upsetting and traumatic experience moving one's home can be. Now I want you to know, Mr. Madison, how important your peace of mind is to the two of us, and that we wouldn't want to do **anything** that would make you feel uncomfortable.

LENNY

(Looking at Rachel) Really? (Looking at John) You really mean that? (Putting his arms around their shoulders) I've got to tell you both this -- and it comes straight from the bottom of my heart -- a guy like me doesn't **deserve** to be treated this way by people like you. (Standing and facing the audience) Just thinking about it is starting to make me feel... misty...



JOHN

(Slowly) Listen, Lenny, I really think it would be best...

RACHEL

(Hurridly interrupting) ...if we got down to business right away. (Pulling a copy of the *Wall St. Journal* out of her briefcase) Now, I saw a number of interesting prospects in the *Journal* this morning and I wanted to get your **expert** opinion on them.

LENNY

(Turning) Well, it's a lucky thing that you two guys stopped by because last night I experienced a financial revelation -- what some people might call a monetary miracle.

RACHEL

(Playing along) Oh, really? Well, I'm sure that we'd be very interested to hear about this "miraculous" event, wouldn't we, John?

JOHN

(Absently) What?... Oh, yeah. (Somewhat bitterly) Yeah, of course we would.

LENNY

Well, it happened just after I had finished a whirlwind shopping spree of the Fourth Street Salvation Army. I was strolling through the alley behind Dunkirk's Donut Shop when I heard this voice call my name -- (In a deep, booming voice) Lenny! Lenny Madison! Now both of you guys know how exhausting late night shopping can be -- especially when you've been searching for fashion bargains such as this exquisitely tailored, two-tone flannel shirt (modeling it) with the ever-tasteful tire tracks on the back and elegantly placed holes beneath the armpits. Anyway, after a long evening of modeling one-of-a-kind designer apparel such as this, I just wasn't in the mood to strike up a conversation in a dark alley behind a doughnut shop. You can understand that, can't you, Rachel?

RACHEL

Yes, I certainly can, Mr. Madison.

LENNY

It makes sense to you, doesn't it, John?

JOHN

Yes -- yes, it certainly makes sense to me.

LENNY

So, I had just decided to keep on going when I heard that voice call me again. "Lenny! Lenny Madison!" (Pointing) And that's when I saw it!

RACHEL

Well, what was it?

LENNY

It was incredible. Amazing! Beyond belief!

JOHN

Come on, Lenny! What did you see?

LENNY

Are you really sure you want to hear this? It might change the world as you know it -- send the price of sushi up, destroy miles of ocean-front property, wreak havoc on your credit ratings.

RACHEL

Yes, yes! Just go ahead and tell us.

LENNY

(Acting it out) I looked across the alley, and then I saw it. (Pointing) There! -- beneath a poster for Anal-Salve hemorrhoid cream. It was a trashcan -- a burning trashcan. And out of the flames the voice called to me again -- "Lenny! Lenny Madison!" (Switching to a biblical tone of voice) And I saw that the fire did not consume the trash and lo, I was afraid. And then the voice spoke unto me again, saying "Come forward and remove the shoes from thy feet." And I said, "Why should I remove my shoes, O' Container of Burning Rubbish?" And the voice said unto me, "Thou art standing upon holy ground." And then I looked down, and behold! -- I saw that I was standing upon asphalt that sparkled like gold and shone like silver. And so, I took the shoes from my feet, and once again the voice spoke unto me from out of the fiery trashcan, saying "Come forward and look upon me, Lenny Madison." And I came forward and looked upon the trashcan, saying "Who is it that calls unto me from yon Receptical of Fiery Refuse?" And the voice said unto me "I am the god of your fathers, and your fathers' fathers. Of Carnegie and Hughes, of Rockafella and Forbes. I am the

currency of life and the depository of power." And then the face of George Washington appeared unto me out of the flame, and I saw a pyramid beneath the face and a golden eagle perched upon its head, and the voice spoke unto me again from the fire, saying, "In me, all ye shall trust." And lo, I was afraid and fell upon my knees and said, "What dost thou want of an penniless and impoverished vagabond such as I, O' Deity of the Flaming Debris?" And the voice said, "Deliver this holy parchment unto my faithful servants, Rachel and John, that they may purchase their salvation and reap all that they have sown." And behold, (Pulling the paper out of his coat) a copy of the Wall Street Journal appeared before me. And then a star rose in the East, the angels wept with joy, and the trashcan vanished in a whirlwind of dust and flame!

There is a pause.

JOHN

Wow...

RACHEL

(Pleasantly skeptical) Well, that certainly was a very interesting story, Mr. Madison. Didn't you think it was interesting, John?

JOHN

(Looking at Rachel) Well, I... (Looking at Lenny) I mean, I've never heard... (Back to Rachel) Wow.

RACHEL

My sentiments exactly. After all, it's not every day that one has an unusual and deeply moving experience like Mr. Madison's. (Moving closer to Lenny) Do you think it would be possible for us to get a quick look at that copy of the Journal?

LENNY

(Handing it to her) Oh, I wouldn't dream of keeping it from you. (As Rachel and John look over the paper) Never let it be said that Lenny Madison ever kept holy scripture out of the hands of a stock analyst.

RACHEL

(Looking at the paper) Look -- Remington Consolidated has been underlined. There -- four lines from the bottom.

LENNY

(Walking over to the bench) I mean, isn't that what this great country of ours was founded on -- religious freedom? "Do unto other before they can do it to you" and that kind of thing...

JOHN

And look -- there's some kind of note beside Garrison Petroleum.

RACHEL

What does it say. I can't make it out.

JOHN

(Reading) "Buy two thousand shares after stock has fallen four to six more points."

LENNY

And when I think about all the hardships endured by those first brave stockbrokers who came across on the Mayflower -- the blizzards, the indians, the high-risk, low-yield mutual funds. Hey, I'm not ashamed to say that it puts a lump in this fella's throat.

RACHEL

(Reading) Shearson Aviation, MacGowen Communications, and the Ty-Kel Advertising Corporation. Are you getting all this down, John?

JOHN

(Scribbling hurriedly into a small notebook) Yeah, yeah -- I'm getting it. Keep on going.

EDGEWORTH enters hurriedly from down right.

EDGE

Lenny! I've been looking all over town for you.

LENNY

Mrs. Edgeworth, how nice of you to drop by. (Walking over to Rachel and John and putting his arms around their shoulders) I don't think you've had the pleasure of meeting my two *good* friends, Rachel and John.

RACHEL

(To John) Are you sure that you've got all these names down right?

JOHN

Yeah, I think so, but we'd better run down the list one more time to be safe.

LENNY

(Pointing to the notebook) I think "consolidated" is spelled with one "s" instead of two.

JOHN

Oh, yeah. (Changing it) Thanks, Lenny.

EDGE

(Coming over and pulling Lenny aside) Lenny, I need to talk to you. Have you heard about Maggie?

LENNY

Maggie? You know, I haven't seen her around for a few days. (Sitting on the bench) What kind of trouble has she gotten herself into now?

EDGE

She's had a stroke. She's in St. Mary's hospital.

LENNY

(Looking up) ...What?

EDGE

I just found out today. She's been in the hospital since Thursday.

LENNY

Thursday?... but, but she was just fine the last time I saw her...

EDGE

The doctor said it could have happened anytime -- especially after she stopped taking her medication.

RACHEL

(Coming over with the paper) Excuse me for a moment, but is this word "bat" or "but?" John thinks that letter's an "a" but I keep telling him it has to be a "u."

LENNY

(Slowly to himself) ...Her medication... I forgot about her medication...

JOHN

I'm perfectly capable of distinguishing the difference between an "a" and a "u," Rachel, and I'm telling you that word is definitely "bat."

LENNY

I never should have let her have those goddamn pills! (To Edgeworth)  
Where did you say she was?

EDGE

St. Mary's -- the fifth floor. But you shouldn't blame yourself, Lenny -- you couldn't have known...

JOHN

(Walking over) Did I hear you say someone was in the hospital?

LENNY

(Starting to exit stage left) It's all my fault. I should have known better...

JOHN

(Grabbing his arm) Hold on, Lenny. Let me call you a cab.

LENNY

(Pulling himself free) Get your hands off me, stock-boy! (Pointing to the paper) Look, the two of you got what you came for so why don't you just get the hell out of here! (To Edgeworth) I never should have gotten involved with them.

LENNY exits down left.

EDGE

(Coming stage left) Wait, Lenny! It **isn't** your fault!

JOHN

I don't understand any of this. Would you please tell me what's going on.

EDGE

Maggie's had a stroke. (Looking after Lenny and shaking her head) Living out here, it was just a matter of time before it happened. (Turning to John) Listen, are you really Lenny's friend?

JOHN

Yes... Yes, I really am.

EDGE

(Opening her purse and handing him a card) I have to deliver some canned food to the Church Street homeless shelter. The next time you see Lenny, would you give me a call and let me know how he's doing?

JOHN

Sure -- I'd be glad to.

EDGE

(Looking off left again) I had no idea he would react this way. (Turning and shaking John's hand) Well, thank you for your help, Mr...?

JOHN

Wilson -- John Wilson.

EDGEWORTH exits hurriedly off right. RACHEL puts the paper into her briefcase and closes it.

RACHEL

Come on, John -- we'd better get back to the office and start running these stocks through the computer.

JOHN

(His back towards her) I suppose it doesn't matter that Lenny's friend is in the hospital.

RACHEL

Well, I certainly don't see how you and I could do anything about it. Now I suggest that we go ahead and check out these stocks and come back when Mr. Madison is in a less emotional frame of mind.

JOHN

Yeah, well why don't you go ahead and start without me. (Sitting on the bench) I think I'd rather stay around here for a while.

RACHEL

Are you sure? (Looking around) I mean it's getting pretty late.

JOHN

No -- I'm really not sure about anything anymore.

RACHEL

(Walking over and taking the notebook) Well, I'll be at the office if you need me. Don't forget about our two-thirty appointment with Delaney tomorrow. (Turning) Look, why don't you have some kind of floral arrangement sent to Mr. Madison's sick friend -- after all, flowers are your family's specialty, and it never hurts to make a good impression.

She exits up left, and JOHN remains sitting on the bench staring at the card.

JOHN

(Softly to himself) Yeah, I guess you can always count on flowers to make a good impression.

SLOW BLACKOUT



ACT II SCENE II

Lights come up slowly on LENNY who is lying on the bench, clutching a brown-bagged bottle of Wild Irish Rose. After a few moments, RACHEL enters from up left, looks around, and goes over to LENNY. She leans over him in an almost predatory manner.

RACHEL

Well, hello, Mr. Madison. And how are we feeling today?

JOHN

(Entering hurriedly from up left and catching her arm) Rachel, I really don't think this is a good idea.

RACHEL

(Pulling her arm away) He's had a few days to get over it (Turning back to Lenny) and we've got business to take care of.

JOHN

(Stepping between Rachel and the bench) Leave him alone -- can't you see he's not ready for this?

RACHEL

Take a look at him, for Christ's sake -- how much longer do you think he'll be of any use? -- especially after he's poured a few more bottles of that battery acid down his throat?

JOHN

(Voice rising) I don't know! I don't know how much more "use" he'll be. Don't you think we've **used** him enough already?

LENNY

(Lifting his head during John's line -- he is drunk but not incapacitated) Well, well -- it's my two "friends" Rachel and John. (Laughing bitterly) I wonder what brings both of you back here again.

RACHEL

(Turning quickly -- charming) John and I were concerned about you, Mr. Madison. We dropped by and see how you were getting along.

LENNY

(Acidly) How sweet. (Climbing to his feet) Oh, if only I could tell the whole city how lucky I am to have two wonderful pals like you. (Holding up his bottle) A toast! A toast to Rachel and John -- may their Gold Cards never tarnish and their Mercedes never rust!

JOHN

Lenny, I'm sorry I ever talked you into...

RACHEL

(Hurridly interrupting) What John's really trying to say is...

LENNY

Yeah, John -- just what the hell are you *really* trying to say? (John sighs and sits on the bench) Wait -- let me guess. You're going to tell me how sorry you are things have worked out this way, but cheer up and look on the brighter side of life. Well, thanks a lot, John -- you don't know how much better that little inspirational message makes me feel.

RACHEL

(Smoothly, moving towards Lenny) Actually, we thought it might be a good idea if we helped you take your mind off your troubles.

LENNY

(Turning and laughing) Oh, how considerate. And just what did you have in mind? A game of Tiddly Winks? Or maybe we could just sit around and tell each other *scary* ghost stories. No -- I can tell from your face that I haven't guessed it yet. Wait! Wait one minute -- you wouldn't want me to pick a few more stocks, would you?

RACHEL

Well, now that you mention it, I happen to have today's copy of the *Wall Street Journal* here in my purse.

LENNY

My God! -- what an *incredible* coincidence! (Going over to John) Can you believe it, John? Rachel actually has a copy of the *Wall Street Journal* in

her purse! (Takes a drink) Well, let me tell you kiddies what you can do with the *Wall Street Journal*. (Pantomiming) First, tear it neatly into two equal halves, then crumple up each half into a nice, round newspaperly ball, and then shove each one of those balls up your ass. (Going over to the steamvent and lying down) And after that, then you, John, and the *Wall Street Journal* can all go straight to hell.

JOHN

(Turning to Rachel) I told you he'd feel this way. Don't you see what we've done to him?

RACHEL

(Coldly angry) And just what do you think we've "done" to him? **We** didn't get him fired. **We** didn't throw him out of his house. **We** didn't force him to live out here on the street. It's not our fault and it's not our problem. (Walking over to John) Do you really want to know what we've "done" to him, John. We've given him an chance to be useful. We gave him the opportunity to make a profit. And *all* he had to do was to give us a little information. That's all -- it couldn't have been simpler. (Walking over to Lenny) But is he grateful? Does he appreciate any of that? No. He's just like all the other derelicts and bums living out here. No matter what you give them, they always want more.

JOHN

You're wrong, Rachel -- it isn't his fault. He doesn't really understand what's going on! The eavesdropping, the stock picks, the talking trashcan - - it's all been some kind of game to him. Don't you see -- we should have stayed out of his life.

RACHEL

(Laughing) Life! You call this a "life?" (Moves towards John) What were we supposed to do, John? Just let all that information go to waste? (Pointing at Lenny) Go to waste like him. Jesus, you make it sound like we've been doing something immoral. *We're* not the one listening in on other people's conversations -- but as long as *he's* doing it, why not put it to good use?

LENNY

(Laughing loudly) I can't believe you morons -- you **still** haven't figured it out!

RACHEL

(To John) You see -- he's completely delirious. (Walking over to Lenny) Drunken, dirty and delirious. (Turning back to John) You know, John, I'm almost glad this whole thing is over. Now that we've established ourselves, I don't see why the two of us should put up with this kind of "aggravation" any longer. (Looking down at Lenny) Yes, I think it was finally time to say goodbye to you anyway, Mr. Madison.

LENNY

Oh, really? (Sitting up) You mean that you and the "boy wonder" over there are actually going to take off before I let you in on my little secret?

RACHEL

(Walking away and laughing) And just what kind of "secret" do you think we'd be interested in hearing now, Mr. Madison?

LENNY

The secret of my **success**. (Standing) Aren't you the least bit curious about how I *really* picked those stocks, Rachel? (Walking over to John) And you were right -- the cough drops, the candy wrappers, the talking trashcan -- it's all bullshit.

RACHEL

(Gathering up her things) That's hardly a secret, Mr. Madison -- we're perfectly aware of how you were able to pick those stocks.

LENNY

Oh, come on, guys -- (Holding up the bottle) You don't seriously believe a drunken old bum like me could have gotten all that juicy information just by sitting on a steamvent and eavesdropping on a few passing businessmen.

JOHN

Well, it seemed like the only logical explanation.

RACHEL

(Starting off right) Come on, John -- we've wasted enough time here already.

LENNY

It's a shame about George Brokette -- I always enjoyed doing business with him.

RACHEL stops with her back still turned.

JOHN

(Surprised) How do you know about George Brokette?

LENNY

Come on, John -- what's the only "obvious" answer? What's the simplest, most logical, most rational explanation? (Leaning over the bench and staring at him) You still haven't guessed, have you?

RACHEL

(Turning) All right, why don't we go ahead and put an end to this whole charade. (Walking over to John) Would you really like to know the dirty little secret Mr. Madison has been hiding, John? -- the reason for the lies, and the games and all those terribly amusing stories. (Turning and walking towards Lenny) A few years ago, there was a successful stock analyst who worked for a Mutual Fund Company located here in the city. He had made quite a name for himself so it was naturally a big surprise when he was convicted of insider trading and sentenced to a year or two in some up-state, county club prison. (Lenny slowly walks over to the bench and sits down) But the thing that makes this tragic little story so remarkable is that nobody ever heard from the broker again. He just vanished into thin air. (Smiling) Until now. (Turning to Lenny) John Wilson, allow me to introduce Mr. Leonard W. Madison -- or at least all that that's left of him.

JOHN

(Looking at Lenny) Oh, come on, Rachel, you can't really be serious.

LENNY

(Shaking his head -- to Rachel) You knew all along, didn't you?

JOHN

What?!

RACHEL

Of course I knew -- almost from the very beginning.

JOHN

I can't believe this! How the hell did you know?

RACHEL

You really believe I'd take financial advice from someone like this without checking him out first? Besides, it was obvious that he had a lot of practical experience in the market so I made a few discreet phone calls and it turned out the name "Lenny Madison" had a number of very interesting stories attached to it.

LENNY

(Softly) And all this time you were just playing along with the game.

RACHEL

Two can play the game, Mr. Madison -- (Holding up the paper) especially when it's as profitable as this.

JOHN

(To Rachel) To hell with the "game!" Why didn't you tell me?!

RACHEL

(Coolly) Because I knew you'd react this way. You're far too emotional for your own good, John.

JOHN

And how did you expect me to react? All this time he's been lying to you, you've been lying to him, and you **both** have been lying to me!

RACHEL

(Soothingly) Don't you see -- it was for your own good. I knew if you found out the truth you'd only want to get personally involved with him.

JOHN

And what's so wrong about that? Jesus Christ, Rachel, he used to be **us**!

RACHEL

What difference does that make? Look at him now. Look at what he's made himself into, John. Do you honestly believe that you or I could ever be like him?

JOHN

That's not the point...

RACHEL

That is *precisely* the point. Nobody forced him to throw away his life. He made that decision himself and there's nothing you can do or say that's going to change it, John.

JOHN

But what's wrong with giving him some help?

RACHEL

Don't you understand? This man has been convicted of insider trading. We can't afford to be directly connected with him.

JOHN

And even though you knew that, you still went ahead and used all that information he gave us. Didn't it ever occur to you how dangerous that was?

RACHEL

(Cooly) At the time, it was a risk I was willing to take.

JOHN

Oh, really? And what about me? Did you ever stop to think that I might not be willing to take that risk?

RACHEL

Look, it's pointless to argue about it now. Besides, everything worked out fine. (Taking John's arm) Now why don't we go and have a drink to celebrate.

JOHN

(Pulling away) And what about Lenny? What are we going to do about him.

RACHEL

We're going leave him just like we found him. (Walking over to Lenny and dropping a few bills on him) But if it'll make you feel any better, I'll buy him a drink. (Heading off right) That should last him about a month.

JOHN

(Pause) That's your foolproof solution to everything, isn't it?

RACHEL

(Lightly) Well, it's always worked before. (Starting off right again) Now, if we hurry, we can still get a table at MacArthur's.

JOHN

Yeah, I have to admit that your "solutions" have been very effective so far. Pay them off now and send flowers to the funeral later -- nice and neat with no messy strings attached. The problem is, I don't have the stomach for that kind of solution and I'm not going to be the one who winds up sending flowers to **his** funeral.

RACHEL

(Smoothly) That's very noble of you, John. I really admire your sense of conviction. Why don't we discuss it over dinner and a few drinks.

JOHN

(Sitting down on the bench) I'm afraid I've lost my appetite. Why don't you go ahead without me.

RACHEL

(Losing control) Goddamn it, John, don't you understand -- he could have gotten that information *anywhere* and if you and I are ever connected with him, it'll be *both* our asses!

JOHN

(Looking at her) I guess that's a risk I'm willing to take.

RACHEL

(After a short pause -- coldly) Well, I'm not. I'm sorry you feel this way, John. It seems a shame to break up such a close friendship over (Looking at Lenny) something like this. Are you sure you won't change your mind?

JOHN

I'm sorry, Rachel, but I can't.

RACHEL

(Looking at him) No... no, I don't suppose you can. (Sighs, drops the paper at his feet and shakes his hand) Goodbye, Mr. Wilson.



JOHN  
Goodbye, Ms. LaMonde.

RACHEL exits up right and JOHN remains standing, looking after her.

LENNY  
(Sitting on the bench and holding up the bottle -- quoting):  
"When the Himalayan peasant meets the he-bear in his pride,  
He shouts to scare the monster, who will often turn aside.  
But the she-bear thus accosted rends the peasant tooth and nail,  
For the female of the species is more deadly than the male."

JOHN  
(Turning) And just what is that supposed to mean?

LENNY  
Why the hell didn't you go with her?!

JOHN  
I don't know -- maybe I just wanted to help.

LENNY  
Oh, that's great! And now I'm supposed to get down on my knees and tell you how kind and compassionate you are to take pity on a worthless piece of crap like me. (Spreading his arms) Thank you, God! Thank you for sending "Saint John" the "good Samaritan" to watch over me!

JOHN  
Stop it, Lenny! Why are you doing this?

LENNY  
(Getting off his knees) Because Rachel was right, you idiot! (Picking up the paper) Don't you understand -- (Spreading his arms) you're working in a jungle packed full of cannibals! What the hell do you expect me to do? -- pat you on the back and tell you what a terrible person she is. Well, it doesn't work that way, my friend, because Rachel is exactly the kind of cannibal who stays on top of the food chain around here, and five years ago I was just like her!

JOHN

I don't believe that, Lenny. You were never like her.

LENNY

(Laughing) Oh, I know it's hard to imagine now -- Lenny Madison in a tailor-made Italian suit, driving his Jaguar to the office every morning, wheeling and dealing on the market all day, and going home to his tastefully furnished Manhattan condominium at night. But I was a very civilized and successful cannibal back then -- and it was all because I had developed the perfect technique for eating the competition. The trick is to bite off a little bit at a time. Just nibble away at them until you reach a vital organ -- the liver or heart for instance. (Pantomiming) And when you've finally found a particularly sensitive bodily part, you just reach inside, rip it out, and show it to them. (Holding out his hand) "Excuse me, Mr. Brockette, but isn't this your heart? Yes, I thought it was. Maybe it's time for you to start selling insurance in Atlanta."

LENNY slowly goes to the bench, sits,  
and takes a drink. After a moment,  
JOHN sits down beside him.

JOHN

So you really knew George Brockette.

LENNY

(Softly) Oh, yes -- I knew George... and I watched them eat him bit by bit until there was nothing left.

JOHN

But didn't you try to do something?

LENNY

Of course not. I was too interested in staying off the menu myself. (Looking at John and shaking his head) And now you've put yourself at the top of Rachel's entree list.

JOHN

Oh, don't worry about her -- she's mad now, but she'll get over it. What I'd like to know is how she figured all this out so fast.

LENNY

It's simple -- Rachel is a realist. She doesn't allow the unpleasant little realities of life cloud her judgement. Most people prefer just to ignore cultural eye-sores like me -- George Brockette walked past this steam vent for two and a half years and never recognized who I was. I used to try and guess what part of him the cannibals would eat next -- an arm, part of a leg, a shoulder blade maybe. (Taking a drink) It was kind of like a parade - - everyday I'd sit here and watch as less and less of George went marching past to work until there was nothing left but a skeleton wearing a suit and a bow tie.

JOHN

I'm sorry, Lenny, I guess I should have known all along.

LENNY

(Standing) Why should you have known? (Laughing) Nobody wants to know who people like me used to be -- we're all just a bunch of weeds that sprouted out of the sewers and trashcans and spoiled the social yard. (Turning to John) *You* didn't figure out who I was because you couldn't bring yourself to believe someone like you could ever turn into someone like me.

JOHN

No -- I just never thought about it that way.

LENNY

Of course you didn't. I mean, who would guess this could happen to a man with such a bright financial future. But I'll tell you something, John, and it's a secret most of us hard-working, red-blooded Americans can't bring ourselves to believe. (Confidentially) You're living two paychecks away from the street. (Standing) That's right, you're just two paychecks away from sharing these spacious, road-side accomodations with me. (Walking over to the steam vent and taking a drink) Take my word for it, John -- I'm living proof!

JOHN

(After a short pause) Look -- maybe you're right, but you can't expect anyone to know who's living out here -- I mean, you and Maggie are the only two people I've ever actually met on the street.

LENNY

Oh, Maggie used to be somebody before she decided to turn into a burden on society. (Leaning closer) Would you like to know why she hates Shriners so much? It's actually quite an amusing story. You see, Maggie's son is a Shriner. And every Thanksgiving all the Shriners get together and have this big parade -- they all dress up like clowns and drive around in funny little cars. And that's the one time a year that Maggie gets to see her son.

JOHN

(Standing) Oh, come on, Lenny -- you can't expect me to believe anyone would let his own mother live like this.

LENNY

(Laughing) Who the hell do you think's living out here, John? -- all of us used to have families. (Climbing up on the bench) Just take a look around - - the streets are running over with former relatives -- ex-mothers, ex-fathers, ex-sons and daughters. Jesus Christ, we've got one big homeless family reunion going here!

JOHN

But why hasn't Maggie let him know where she is?

LENNY

Oh, that's the funniest part of the whole story. (Stepping off the bench) You see, Maggie's too proud to do that. For some reason she doesn't want her son to find out she's spent the last seven years sleeping on park benches and eating out of garbage cans. (Going over to the steam vent and sitting) So she stays out here on the street and every Thanksgiving she watches Vincent ride past on a miniature fire truck, and every year she despises him a little bit more for leaving her out here. (Taking a drink) Anyway, that's the reason Maggie hates Shriners so much.

JOHN

Yeah... now it all makes sense.

LENNY

But what else can you expect from a crazy old bag lady who won't even take her medication. (Takes a drink) And now she's lying in some charity ward with tubes in her arms and up her nose -- all courtesy of Lenny Madison and the miracle of modern medicine.

JOHN

(Coming closer) What happened to Maggie wasn't your fault.

LENNY

It **was** my fault! -- my fault that I ever got involved with you and Rachel. My fault that I had to prove I could still play the "game." (Takes a drink) Oh well, some people never learn, do they, John?

JOHN

(Taking his arm) Come on, Lenny -- let me help you get out of here.

LENNY

(Snatching away his arm) Leave me alone, you stupid bastard! Can't you see I don't *want* your help! I don't want your sympathy! I don't want to see your goddamn face anymore! (Throws the bottle at him) Get the hell out of here!

JOHN

(Turns and slowly walks to down right exit.) All right... all right -- I'm going. (Turning) But the least you can do is tell me why I can't even *try* to help.

LENNY

Because I'm just like all the other derelicts and bums. No matter how much you give us, we always want more. (Looking at John) Don't you understand -- Rachel was right -- right about it all. Nobody forced me to ruin my life -- and there's nothing you can do or say that's going to change it.

JOHN

Yeah -- I guess Rachel was right about a lot of things. Goodbye, Mr. Madison.

JOHN turns and exits down right. LENNY looks after him for a few seconds.

LENNY

(Husky whisper) Goodbye, Mr. Wilson.

Light slowly go down with a dim spot on  
LENNY, then slowly face to

BLACKOUT.

ACT II SCENE III

Lights come up slowly on LENNY who is slumped on his steam vent. After a few moments MAGGIE's voice is heard off left -- much weaker and less combative.

MAGGIE  
Lenny Madison.

LENNY stirs as if he is dreaming and rolls over.  
MRS. EDGEWORTH enters with MAGGIE.

MAGGIE  
(Clearly confused and weakened) He's always playing games. You never know where he's hiding.

EDGE  
(Sitting MAGGIE down on the bench) There he is -- over there on his grate.

MAGGIE  
(Dazed) He used to buy me Fig Newtons. (Singing softly to herself)  
"We're off to buy the Newtons, the wonderful Newtons of Fig..."

EDGE  
(Shaking LENNY's shoulder) Lenny. Lenny, wake up.

LENNY  
(Groggy) Leave me alone -- I gave at the office.

EDGE  
Come on, Lenny -- there's someone here to see you.

LENNY  
(Curling up) Go away.

MAGGIE  
(Standing -- in her strong, old voice) Lenny! Lenny Madison! Where the hell are you hiding?! (Sitting and weaker) ... stop playing games.

LENNY sits up at the sound of MAGGIE's voice.

EDGE

I wanted the two of you to have a chance to say good-bye.

LENNY

So they finally decided where they're going to put her.

EDGE

There's a state home near Albany -- it's not much -- but it's the best I could manage.

LENNY

How's she doing? Is she feeling okay?

EDGE

(Pulling LENNY over to the bench) Why don't you ask her yourself.

LENNY sits beside MAGGIE who doesn't notice him.

LENNY

(False bravado) Hi, baby -- what's your sign?

MAGGIE

(Vacant) Hello...

EDGE

It's Lenny -- aren't you glad to see him?

MAGGIE

(Looking at LENNY) That's not Lenny -- doesn't look anything like him.

EDGE

(To LENNY) She's still disoriented -- especially with all the medication.

MAGGIE

(Still looking at LENNY) Vincent? Is that you, Vincent?

LENNY

No, Maggie -- look, it's **me** -- Lenny...



MAGGIE

Remember when I used to make those butterscotch cookies with the M&M smiley faces -- the ones with coconut in them...?

LENNY

Please, Maggie -- I'm not Vincent...

MAGGIE

(Touching LENNY's face) Such a sweet little boy... my little boy...

LENNY

I'm sorry... I'm so sorry...

MAGGIE

...but then you grew up... just a card at Christmas -- then not even that...

LENNY

(Holding MAGGIE's hands) Stop it, Maggie -- please...

MAGGIE

(Looking blindly around) ... There's nothing left. The house -- everything -- everything's gone. And **you're** a shiner -- waving at me in the Thanksgiving Day parade... You didn't know who I was, Vincent! (Standing) You didn't even know it was **me!**

MAGGIE strikes LENNY across the face and turns away.

EDGE

(Her arm around MAGGIE's shoulders) Oh, Lenny... I'm so sorry... she didn't mean it...

LENNY

It's all right.

EDGE

I guess we'd better be going -- it's a long drive to Albany and there's always a lot of paperwork.

LENNY

(Standing and moving towards his steam vent) Yeah. Well, good-bye, Maggie. (Turns) Don't forget to write.

MAGGIE

(Her back still turned) Jokes, jokes, jokes -- you're always making jokes.

LENNY turns.

MAGGIE

You think you're pretty damn funny, don't you, Mr. Life of the Party?

LENNY

Yeah -- I suppose I do.

MAGGIE

(Pointing at the audience) Well, they do too. All this time they've been out there, sitting on their fat polyester asses, laughing at you, Lenny Madison.

EDGE

Who, Maggie? Who are you talking about?

MAGGIE

(Pointing at the audience) Them! Can't you see them sitting out there?! Haven't you heard them laughing at us? Laughing at **you**, Lenny! They don't have the right -- they don't have the right to laugh at us, Lenny!  
(Quieter) Stop making them laugh...

LENNY

No more jokes -- I promise.

MAGGIE

(Sitting) I'm going away now. (indicates EDGE) She says it's some place warm with big white toilets -- like the Phillips 66 station.

LENNY

(Sitting beside MAGGIE) The toilets are so big, you could get lost in them for a week.

MAGGIE

(Fading) ...and the toilet paper's soft -- so soft you could stuff a pillow with it...

LENNY

And there's all the hot water you'd ever want.

MAGGIE

Yeah... they took away my bags, Lenny.

LENNY

Now why would anybody need bags with toilets like that?

MAGGIE

(Unwinding her scarf) This is for you -- I won't need it anymore. (She wraps the scarf around LENNY's neck) Make sure you wear it in McDonalds -- it'll keep the Shriners off your neck.

LENNY

(Softly) Thanks...

EDGE

We'd better get going now -- the office closes at four.

LENNY

(Standing with MAGGIE) Good-bye, Maggie.

MAGGIE

(Looking at him) Vincent? Is that you?

Pause.

LENNY

Yeah, it's me, mama. I love you.

MAGGIE smiles radiantly at LENNY and allows EDGEWORTH to lead her off right.

MAGGIE

Good-bye, Vincent -- good-bye!

MAGGIE and EDGEWORTH exit. LENNY walks to the bench and sits. After a few moments, JOHN enters from stage left. He is dressed in casual clothes and carries a suitcase.

JOHN

Well, it's nice to see the neighborhood hasn't changed.

LENNY

(Surprised) What are you doing here?

JOHN

(Placing his suitcase beside the bench) Oh, I just thought I'd drop by -- for old time's sake.

LENNY

How nice -- sorry I didn't have time to freshen the place up.

JOHN

Don't bother -- I won't be staying long.

LENNY

Why rush off? (Indicates the bench) You're always welcome to the spare bedroom.

JOHN

Actually I'm leaving -- heading back home to Charlotte.

LENNY

What? You're giving all this up? What will they say back on Wall Street?

JOHN

They've already said it -- I believe "You're fired" were the exact words they used.

Pause.

LENNY

Ms. LaMonde, I presume.

JOHN

Rachel was only protecting herself -- just like you said she would.

LENNY

(Quiet) I'm sorry, John.

JOHN

Don't be. It finally made me realize that I came here for all the wrong reasons -- to turn myself into somebody I couldn't be -- someone I never really *wanted* to be. You tried to tell me that too -- and I can see it now.

LENNY

Well, it's nice to know my vast experience hasn't been a total waste.

JOHN

You know, Rachel always said I'd wind up back in Charlotte selling flowers. Funny thing is, I've always liked the florist business. But Dad wanted me to take a shot at the "big time" -- "Don't go wasting that ivy-league education on bouquets. You go up there and kick some seeds out of the Big Apple's ass!"

LENNY

(Laughing) My dad said something like that... a million years ago...

JOHN

And you were right about the city -- *it is* a jungle. A dangerous, wonderful jungle. I used to wake up at four in the morning just to listen to it -- that soft roar that sounds a thousand miles away, creeping up around you like the tide. People like Rachel were born to live in places like this -- every day a fight for the highest skyscraper and stock margin. (Laughs) And here I've been -- like a kid playing Monopoly -- moving my silver shoe around the board for a piece of Park Place or Boardwalk. It took a while to figure out, but people like George Brockette and me were never meant to play for these kinds of stakes -- and / don't want to wind up selling insurance in Atlanta.

LENNY

Or someplace even worse...

JOHN

"Someplace?" Oh, I think you can be more specific than that, Mr. Madison. Don't you mean a place like *this*?

LENNY

(Moving back towards the steam vent) Well, I know you've got a plane to catch...

JOHN

It can wait -- I've still got something to say to you.

LENNY

Oh, really? And what precious pearls of wisdom are you going to cast before this swine?

JOHN

You're a goddamn coward, Lenny Madison.

LENNY

Hey, that's a pretty good one. (Moving toward his grate) I'll add it to the list.

JOHN

It's so easy to laugh it off, isn't it? You've got that technique nearly perfected.

LENNY

Thanks. Now, do you have any more stunning revelations or can I go back to sleep?

JOHN

When are you going to stop hiding?

LENNY

(Spreading his arms) Hiding? Does it look like I'm hiding? It doesn't get any more **public** than this, John!

JOHN

You're hiding from your sanity! It must be a real bitch trying to convince everybody you're out of your mind -- but I guess it's easier than actually dealing with all those "unpleasant little realities" you were so eager to tell me about the other day.

LENNY

Oh, that's very perceptive of you, Dr. Ruth. They must be putting psychiatric degrees in Cracker Jacks now.

JOHN

(Mocking) Poor Lenny Madison -- so damn clever and amusing -- he's probably the smartest person I know. Isn't it a shame he's insane -- not responsible for himself or anything else. You know, I bet that's the reason he's homeless -- but I guess that's what happens to crazy people. That's what you'd like us all to believe, isn't it?

LENNY

(Growing angry) I don't give a damn what you believe.

JOHN

The problem is you play the part of a lunatic a little too well. Insanity is supposed to be a disease -- but you've turned it into a full-time job.

LENNY

Why don't you get the hell out of here?! Take your suitcase and your "country boy" opinions back to Charlotte!

JOHN

But we've still got some "business" to take care of. (Pulls some pictures out of his coat pocket) I mean, you wouldn't want me to run off before you got your weekly "fix."

Pause.

LENNY

Where did you get those?

JOHN

Oh, didn't Mrs. Edgeworth tell you -- I thought it might be a good idea if I brought them by for a change.

LENNY

(Reaching for the pictures) Give me that.

JOHN

Why? (Pulling away) Why should a crazy bum like you care about a few lousy pictures? Why should you give a shit about anything at all?

LENNY

You son of a bitch.

JOHN

Yeah, (holding up a picture) but whose son is this?

LENNY

(Turning away) Go ahead and keep them -- I don't care.

JOHN

Sure, that's what I thought.

JOHN begins to toss the pictures on the filthy ground one by one. LENNY turns, cries out, goes to knees and begins picking up the pictures.

JOHN

(Still tossing the pictures onto the ground) Sam playing his trumpet... Sam washing his hands...

LENNY

Stop it!

JOHN

Sam eating lunch... Sam tying his shoes...

LENNY

(Clutching the pictures to his chest) Why are you doing this to me?!

JOHN

I haven't done anything to you. You've done this to yourself -- down on your knees in the trash, scrambling after all the memories you're missing -- all the love you've cheated yourself out of.

LENNY

Shut up... shut up...



JOHN

Did you finally get a chance to say good-bye to Maggie? How long is it going to take before you're the one hating shriners? How many years out here is it going to take before **you're** the one watching the Thanksgiving Day parade and despising a son you never even had the guts to know?

LENNY

(Snapping) How could I go back?! How?! There I was, wearing handcuffs on the six o'clock news. After the trial, the lawyers took everything that was left -- **everything!** And when I finally got out, I wanted to go back and forget it all -- pretend it never happened. But I... I couldn't let them see me after that... goddamn it, you can't just show up on someone's doorstep and apologize for ruining their lives!

JOHN

Listen, I haven't got a single solution to your problem. All I know is there's a thin line between being a son of a bitch and a real friend -- and either one would tell you to do the same thing -- go home.

LENNY

Don't you think I want to? Don't you think I dream about that every night I spend on this lousy, stinking steam vent? But look at me... Look at me, John. I can't go back now -- not like this.

JOHN picks up the suitcase.

JOHN

This is for you.

LENNY

What are you talking about?

JOHN

It's a change of clothing, some shaving cream and a razor -- plus a few dollars for a cab. It's not much -- but it might make showing up on somebody's doorstep a little easier.

LENNY

I can't take this, John -- I'm... I'm not ready...

JOHN

Fine. I'll just leave it here. Consider it my final donation to the "Save Lenny Madison Fund."

Pause.

LENNY

(Laughing) I guess I do look like a refugee from the endangered species list.

JOHN

I know the feeling -- but I don't think the two of us are ready for extinction just yet. Maybe you and me just wound in the wrong jungle -- a change in habitat might do both of us some good.

LENNY

(Looking around) You really think I could find a way to tear myself away from all this?

JOHN

(Laughing) I know you could. And if you feel like it, you could try selling flowers in Charlotte with a fellow ex-stock analyst. Besides, with your talent for spreading fertilizer, I have a feeling you'd make one hell of a florist.

They laugh together. Then there is a pause.

LENNY

I'm scared shitless.

JOHN

Me too. Maybe we should try introducing my dad to your son -- they'll probably have plenty to talk about. (Stands) Well, I've got a plane to catch and (picks up a picture and hands it to Lenny) you've got an appointment to keep.

LENNY

Thanks... thanks for everything.

JOHN

You really want to thank me? Get out of here and get a life -- and say "hello" to Sam for me while you're at it.

JOHN and LENNY shake hands.

LENNY

Goodbye Mr. Wilson. Try not to get mugged on the way to the airport.

JOHN

Good-bye, Lenny -- may I call you "Lenny," Lenny?

LENNY

Yeah, I guess so -- all my friends do.

JOHN exits right. After a moment, LENNY picks up the suitcase and sits on the bench. He opens the suitcase and removes a sports jacket. He hesitates, stands, pulls off his ragged overcoat and puts on the new coat. RODNEY enters from up right.

RODNEY

All right, you win! Take all the wieners you want -- I don't care anymore!

LENNY

(Absently) Hello, Rodney...

RODNEY

(Opening his cart) There -- there they are! Go ahead and take them all!

LENNY

(Removing a pair of shoes from the suitcase) He even got the right size...

RODNEY

Didn't you hear me?! I give up! I surrender!

LENNY

(Taking a tie out) Now that's a great tie -- a fantastic tie. The kind of tie you could wear if you wanted to show up on somebody's doorstep.

RODNEY

I know what you want. You want me to announce it. You want me to tell this whole damn city that you're too smart for me. Well, I don't care!  
(Climbs up on the bench) Attention! Attention! Lenny Madison is smarter than me!

LENNY

(Looking up at him) What are you doing? Got off of there.

RODNEY

No way, Lenny. I know you're not going to be satisfied until everybody in this city knows you're smarter than me. Attention! Attention! This man is my intellectual superior!

LENNY

Please, Rodney -- sit down for a second. I'm asking you as a friend.

RODNEY

As a friend...?

LENNY

(Pulling Rodney down onto the bench and showing him a picture) Listen, do you see this kid?

RODNEY

Yeah, I see him.

LENNY

Well, his name is Sam and he's put up with a lot of crap the last few years. You see, his dad left home and never came back -- no letters, no phone calls -- not even a lousy card on his birthday.

RODNEY

Yeah -- that kind of thing happens all the time nowadays -- it's a damn shame.

LENNY

You right, Rodney -- it's a damn shame -- a disgrace -- a tragedy! Even a nobody like me can see that nobody's kid deserves to be treated like that.  
(Resolved) And that's why I'm leaving.

RODNEY

Leaving? (Gesturing to the steam vent) You mean you're moving?

LENNY

That's precisely what I mean -- I've decided to pay this brave young man a visit.

RODNEY

Oh. So you mean you're like a friend of the family?

LENNY

One can always hope, Rodney -- one can always hope. Anyway, now that I'm leaving, I've got a very special gift for you. (Unwinding the scarf from around his neck) This was given to me by a remarkable woman -- a saint, an angel, a woman who's been like a mother to me. But I won't be needing it where I'm going -- so I want you to have it.

RODNEY

(Holding the scarf -- emotional) I... I don't know what to say, Lenny.

LENNY

Don't say anything, Rodney. Just remember all those happy times we've had together. Remember those happy hot dog memories and never forget it was your wieners that kept me going all these years.

RODNEY

(Emotional) I won't forget -- I promise I'll never forget.

LENNY

(Putting his arm around Rodney's shoulders) That's the spirit. Now keep that chin up and that upper lip stiff.

RODNEY

Why don't you let me make you one more wiener -- you know, for old time's sake.

LENNY

Would it make you feel better?

RODNEY

(Almost overcome) Yeah...

LENNY

Then I'd be proud to eat another one of your wieners. And do you know why? Because they're *American*. I mean, what's more American than hot dogs? What could be more American than sitting at a baseball game with (holds up a picture) a kid like Sam while you're singing the "Star Spangled Banner" and eating a hot dog. Rodney, my friend, I've just come to the realization that you're a national treasure (Salutes him) a patriot of processed pork!

RODNEY

(Handing Lenny a hot dog and saluting) And you're an inspiration to every one of us god-fearing, red-blooded, all-American hot dog vendors!

LENNY

Don't say any more, Rodney. Just let me look at you one last time -- I want to remember you just the way you are -- the George Washington of weenies!

RODNEY

(Crying) Good-bye, Lenny! Thanks for the scarf!

RODNEY quickly pushes his cart off left.  
LENNY stands a moment then goes to the steam vent, gathers up a few things and places them in his suitcase. He begins tying the tie around his neck.

LENNY

(To himself) Come on, Lenny -- we've got challenges to meet. So let's go and live the hell out of today...

He takes a deep breath, looks around for one last time, and deliberately steps over the boundary where MAGGIE has always entered from the audience. And, as LENNY steps across the barrier, lights quickly fade to a

FINAL BLACKOUT.

## A Final Word from the Author

Lear

Does anyone here know me? This is not Lear.  
Does Lear walk thus? Speak thus? Where  
are his eyes? Either his notion weakens,  
his discernings are lethargied -- Ha! Waking  
Tis not so. Who is it that can tell me  
who I am?

Fool

Lear's shadow.

William Shakespeare was recognized as an accomplished poet, producing such laudable verse as *Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, and the *Sonnets* as well as being acknowledged as history's foremost dramatist. Shakespeare's success in both poetry and drama helped encourage me as I directed my fledgling attempts at writing for the stage and subsequently strove for an understanding of poetics. And it is through my study of both poetry and drama that I've come to realize the two genres are intimately linked at a fundamental level.

One need not look far to discover tangible ties between Shakespeare's poetry and plays. Much of the dynamic imagery utilized in his verse reappears in his dramatic work. An example of this phenomenon is found when one examines the following passage from *The Rape of Lucrece*:

Now stole upon the time of the dead of night,  
When heavy sleep had closed up mortal eyes.  
No comfortable star did lend his light,

No noise but owls' and wolves' death-boding cries.  
Now serves the season that they may surprise  
The silly lambs. Pure thoughts are dead and still,  
While lust and murder wakes to stain and kill. (Andrews 448)  
and then compares it to the grimly foreboding setting of Duncan's murder in  
*Macbeth*:

Now o'er the one half-world  
nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse  
The curtained sleep. Witchcraft celebrates  
Pale Hecate's offerings; and withered murder,  
Alarumed by his sentinel, the wolf,  
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,  
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design  
Moves like a ghost. (Andrews 448)

The reader can plainly perceive the same mind at work behind both the poem and the play. Here we have the prologue to two heinous crimes (rape and murder) described in much the same manner: a deep, death-like sleep, the diabolic wolf standing baleful watch, nature itself seeming to shut its eyes and hold its breath. After reading passages such as these I find myself in agreement with Harry Levin when he writes:

A Shakespearean phrase, like a musical theme, is subject to orchestration. Developed through a sequence of repetitions and variations, modulated into changing harmonies, and counterpointed with other themes, it can set forth a distinguishing pattern of thought. (11)



It should come as no surprise that the same distinctive “voice” surfaces in Shakespeare’s verse and dramatic writing. Likewise, it is understandable that an author of Shakespeare’s versatility and range would have chosen to write about matters of personal importance in poetry *and* drama. However, I have always wondered what prompted The Bard to initially make the move from poetry to playwriting. Why did he eventually choose to use the stage (instead of the page) as his primary mode of expression? Did he ultimately find the poetic restraints of his time too constraining or did he simply wish to try his hand at creating the multiple voices that make up dramatic works. Regardless of his reasons, one can hardly deny Shakespearean drama is greatly indebted to Shakespearean poetry for much of its lyric beauty and imagistic richness.

Eric Overmyer is one of many contemporary playwrights who takes pains to point out the connection between drama and verse, saying in a recent interview:

One of the great strengths in the theater is that it accommodates language, it accommodates poetry and image and myth and metaphor and other things that great playwrights of the past use. (DiGaetani 254)

In fact, a number of influential contemporary dramatists have followed Shakespeare's example -- experimenting freely with poetic forms before shifting their attention to the theatre. August Wilson, author of plays such as *Man Friday*, is one such writer. While concentrating his latest efforts toward producing work for the stage, Wilson still considers himself primarily a poet -- even in his approach to writing dramatic literature:

Writing poetry is very hard at times, but it is also joyful. Being a poet helps me think a certain way. The idea of metaphor for

example, is an idea I find missing in most contemporary plays. As a person who has written poetry for over fifteen years, I find metaphor very natural to me. (DiGaetani 281)

Some playwrights seem to have made their final choice of genre almost by chance. Even Edward Albee claims to have thrown his lot in with the theatre out of sheer desperation:

I attempted poetry, I attempted novels, I wrote short stories and essays -- and they were all terrible. I tried to be a composer and that didn't work, I tried to be a painter and that didn't work; I even did sculpture and then there was nothing left, so I started writing plays. (Bryer 2)

My own development as a playwright started on the stage -- as an actor. By the age of seven I was active in children's theater, fascinated by the way audiences responded to even the most clumsy attempts at live performance. Here was a magic, a tangible sense of personal investment I had never experienced in any other art form. Performing in front of a live audience was both thrilling and terrifying -- completely different from the politely reserved code of behavior observed by crowds at the local cinema.

Even as an adolescent, I sensed the theatre audience was an entity unlike any other in the world of performance -- unpredictable and utterly interactive. On any given night, one could actually sense the audience beyond the lights -- growing restless, or bored, or tense with anticipation. And if one worked hard and perfected the delivery of a certain line, a certain look, a certain precisely-timed pause, it was somehow magically possible to stretch a few sparse chuckles in the back of the house to general laughter, to a howl of approval washing over the stage and back into itself. Through my experience as an actor I learned the theatre was

remarkable because every moment on stage was potentially a triumph or disaster.

My desire to actually write for the theatre came much later. Over time, I developed an interest in manipulating the action on stage in a more direct manner than could be achieved by simply playing a single role. In a sense, playwrights have an opportunity (and obligation) to play all the parts in their scripts before they reach the stage. To this end, practical acting experience is greatly helpful in understanding the dynamics of live theatre -- specifically when learning what will work and what will fall flat in front of an audience.

Two influential figures in my early development as a playwright were Noel Coward and Neil Simon. Performing in plays by both writers helped me gain an actor's appreciation for their material -- the way their scripts readily lent themselves to successful performances. Coward's witty, verbose characters naturally intrigued and delighted audiences and Simon's carefully crafted situation comedies could almost be treated as blueprints to humor -- one laugh deliberately constructed upon the next. I was also influenced by Tennessee Williams -- particularly the way he skillfully intermingled comedy with personal tragedy. *The Glass Menagerie* has always impressed me as a play that somehow manages to be simultaneously humorous and heart-rending, especially in the scenes where Tom confronts (and intentionally shocks) Amanda.

Later, I became increasingly influenced by the work of George Bernard Shaw, Samuel Beckett and Bertolt Brecht -- primarily reading instead of performing in the plays themselves. I particularly admired Beckett's willingness to stretch the stage in new directions, to resist the theatre's more classical impulses toward closure and catharsis.

In a similar vein, I found Brecht's work highly provocative -- especially his determination to infuse dramatic literature with social and political propaganda. Performance of plays like *Three Penny Opera* and *Caucasian Chalk Circle* proved to me that it was possible to write plays which provided both a healthy dose of entertainment and social commentary.

My development as a poet primarily occurred in graduate school -- especially during my time at Oklahoma State University. In workshops at OSU I first began to sense and explore the underlying structural ties that naturally exist between drama and poetry. Initially, my poetry was stilted and stuffy -- heavily reliant upon complex conceit and ornate imagery. Many poems could have been described as "Faberge Eggs" -- gilded and glitzy on the outside, but lacking any real emotional content inside.

It was not until I began to read extensively a wide range of poets and poetic theories that the possibility of turning my knowledge of dramatic literature towards writing verse occurred to me. At the core of this emerging understanding was a recognition of the importance of controlling one's "voice" in poetry -- the same way a dramatist must develop and maintain the multiple "voices" that make up the framework of his or her play.

One poet who greatly influenced me during the formative stage of my writing was Albert Goldbarth. I was particularly taken with Goldbarth's dramatic use of setting and dialogue -- the way characters spoke and interacted with each other in his poetry.

Among my favorite Goldbarth poems is *The Dynamics of Huh*:

When I was

10, the common comic-book expression "Huh?"

might have stood for whole days in my life; once,  
in that room where the apartment bulged enough  
for the indulgence of an extra secondhand sofa -- they called it  
the sunroom -- I came on my father weeping, my father  
turning his wide face physically inside-out  
by tears. I remember: the light, and the lace drapes, placed  
a wavy veil over his eyes. And all he said  
of it then and would ever say was just *One day*  
*you'll understand*, words wobbly and much furzed-over (127)

I was impressed by the way this portion the poem firmly established its setting and characters -- the economy with which dramatic tension and distinctive voices were created -- the son who defines much of his childhood by the expression "Huh?" and the enigmatic father whose cryptic "One day you'll understand" reveals nothing and yet everything about their relationship. Goldbarth's work inspired me to take more chances in my own poetry -- to write pieces like *Messages* that consciously used distinctly theatrical settings and characters to create dramatic tension within a poem.

Alice Anderson has also greatly influenced my work -- especially my use of dramatic narrative within poetic frameworks. Many of Anderson's poems seem to lean toward prose, or as I see it, toward dramatic monologue. This trend is obvious in a piece such as *What The Night Is Like*:

*What Waiting Sounds Like*

You lie in bed and listen to the neighbor lady do her dishes.  
Her oldest, whose voice is high and thin, sits at the table and  
talks while her mother does the batch as always, plates and

bowls first, then pans, then pots. She runs through the events of the day like a liturgy, one regret at a time

*What It Tastes Like*

Like bourbon and aftershave, perfume on your tongue.  
Cigarette hair. Eraser heads, old paper clips, dry milk licked from the rim of a carton, sour. Like the smell of his skin

*What It Sounds Like*

Like a saw, sawing through a hard white board. Like sharp steel teeth, pulling back and forth. Like a saw breathing in and breathing out until the fine wood snaps.

*What It Feels Like*

Secret. Good. (15)

Much of this poem has the tone and pacing of a finely-crafted soliloquy. I can imagine an actor sitting in the isolation of a single spotlight, reciting this poem and creating on stage the amount of dramatic tension needed to actually illustrate "what waiting sounds like."

Perhaps it is no coincidence that when I find myself drawn to a particular poem, I begin thinking of the piece in theatrical terms. At the core of most of my favorite poems lies a discernible dramatic voice -- a voice that establishes the character of a narrative persona through tone, pacing, syntax and vocabulary. In this way, Bill Knott's work fascinates me -- the way he skillfully uses voice to create character in his poetry. *Problem* is a piece I admire almost purely for its adept use of voice:

I might be worse if I did know

I might be tempted to go look up  
her or him  
and bluster, *Now, let's get this straight*  
or *What's going on here*

That's just wish. In real life I'd get the address wrong, mistake  
their nextdoor neighbor for them:

*Boy, this is a nice apartment.* (45)

Work like this gave me the inspiration (and courage) to begin an attempt to marry my love of dramatic literature with my growing admiration for contemporary poetry. Although all the work contained in *Seeing-Eye Man* was produced after *The Vagrant* was completed, I believe the drama and poetry contain at least one common thread -- the voice that lies at their foundations. And it was only after I realized the voice I had developed as a dramatist was equally compatible with poetry that I began to produce viable verse.

My background in playwriting directly influences the way I go about creating poetry. I see many of my poems as "lyric scene-lets" -- brief glimpses into the life of a character (or characters) that are likely to appear in later, much longer theatrical works. For example, *Messages* is a poem where the characters and their dramatic entanglement seem to naturally call for a more fleshed-out dramatic treatment sometime in the future. In fact, I originally had the idea for the poem after tossing around the idea of a play entirely made up of people's answering machines talking to each other. Another poem that falls into this pattern is *He Knows He's in Deep.*" The piece started out as an attempt to talk about the inevitable changes in lifestyle often brought about by intimate relationships and the piece

consequently took on a dramatic life of its own. It's hard for me to imagine simply leaving those two characters laughing in their bedroom without some plan to eventually use them (in some form) as part of a longer dramatic work.

Not surprisingly, my organization of *Seeing-Eye Man* is heavily based upon dramatic principles. To this end, I have attempted to use the order of the poems themselves to create and break tension. I have always admired poets (like Goldbarth and Thomas Lux) who manage to create theatric tension in their collections by alternating lyric overtone -- moving from contemplation, to contempt, to comedy, to despair, to exultation. I find successful collections of poetry are often structured like successful scenes -- building, releasing, and re-building tension in much the same manner that Shakespeare's "Gatekeeper" scene in *Macbeth* effectively employs bawdy comedy to break the tension building up to Duncan's murder. With this technique in mind, my attempt to vary dramatic overtone explains why the quiet contemplative tone in *Pockets* moves to disquieting revulsion in *The Treatment* and finally towards an attempt at gentle humor in *The Girl Who Cuts Your Hair*.

If writing plays has influenced my poetry, I suppose it should come as no surprise that writing poetry has, in turn, had a marked effect on my dramatic work. This growth has occurred primarily in the area of revision. After my experiments in verse, I find myself even more willing to pare extraneous matter from my scripts -- to eliminate material that does not contribute directly to the dramatic needs of a particular scene. Simply put, my study of poetry has helped me mature as an all-around writer, prompting me to place even more emphasis on the smallest textual details.



*The Vagrant* represents an evolution in my dramatic writing -- a movement toward a more Brecht-like brand of social drama. Basically, I wanted to write a play that would entertain audiences while simultaneously stimulating a re-examination of traditional American values and ideals. However, I do not see *The Vagrant* as a play about "homelessness." Rather, I see it as a drama about the choices people often make when living in the competitive atmosphere fostered by capitalist societies. Lenny Madison *chooses* to live on the street rather than face disgrace at home. John and Rachel *choose* to use Lenny merely as a resource instead of treating him as a person. Even Maggie *chooses* to blindly hate all Shriners instead of confronting her son's abandonment. Ultimately, I am more interested in writing about *people* than *issues* such as the homeless, poverty, or the welfare state.

One of my primary goals while working on *The Vagrant* was to create an engaging homeless character -- one that would appeal to audiences of diverse social/economic backgrounds. The play needed at its nexus a character who could concurrently appear downtrodden and exuberant, sane and deranged, tragic and triumphant. As John points out in the play's final scene, Lenny is a man hiding from himself -- too ashamed to confront the painful realities of his past and desperately trying to distract himself with a variety of oddball antics. It was crucial that audiences became eager to discover the reason for his strange behavior, and more than any other character I have created, Lenny Madison's reception on-stage underpins the ultimate success or failure of the entire play.

Maggie is also an essential component of *The Vagrant* -- particularly her direct interaction with the audience. Through Maggie, I wanted to bend (but not break) the imaginary barrier between audience and play. I also

wanted to explore the idea that Maggie (through her unusual mental state) would be able to interact in two planes of existence at once -- the worlds on *and* off the stage. A character with similar attributes is *The Glass Menagerie's* Tom who is conscious of an audience while remaining active in the on-stage drama. When Lenny finally crosses this "fourth wall" barrier himself, I wanted audiences to sense the symbolic importance of the moment -- the idea that the character has decided to act and take on a life of his own.

Given these challenges, it seems somehow ironic that *The Vagrant's* most difficult role to write was John. Although I fully intended to create a character who was pleasant, sensitive and ultimately unambitious, I was afraid he might also appear colorless and weak. This potential shortcoming was particularly dangerous because the audience is so often encouraged to identify directly with John -- especially in his "Shriner" sequence with Maggie and final confrontation scene with Lenny. In a play primarily made up of highly distinctive, eccentric characters, John is the commonplace glue that helps hold *The Vagrant* together.

Fortunately, I was able to observe and participate in a staged production of *The Vagrant* -- using the day-to-day rehearsal process to write and re-write significant portions of the play. The opportunity to revise a script during production is one of the most valuable experiences a playwright can have -- a chance to make critical adjustments to his or her script based on the cogent suggestions of actors, directors and experts in technical theatre. I have no doubt that *The Vagrant's* warm audience reception was in part a result of the intensive textual revision that occurred during the play's preparation for performance.

One sequence greatly improved during *The Vagrant's* rehearsal was Lenny's "burning trashcan" speech. Audiences typically reacted favorably to this contemporary parody of Moses' "burning bush" encounter with God -- a potentially delicate subject that required precise modulation of tone to achieve a balance between sarcasm and reverence. Another portion of the play often revised during production was Maggie's final scene with Lenny. Here I wanted to create a touching separation scene between the two characters without lapsing into melodrama, and once again, I was consistently satisfied with audience reaction to the final textual product -- the scene seemed to play as sorrowful without stepping over the line into the maudlin.

Overall, I was extremely pleased with *The Vagrant's* initial performance. The show appeared to achieve my two primary goals -- to entertain an audience while challenging them to reflect on and reconsider their perception of the world. And, as I recall the nervous backstage energy and excitement before *The Vagrant's* opening night, I cannot help feeling a resurgence of love for live theatre -- the inexplicable joy playwrights experience as their scripts blossom into full dramatic life in front of an audience.

Finally, I feel it is important to point out that my development as a writer was greatly augmented by the unusual academic variety and freedom afforded me throughout my doctoral studies. Originally, I came to Oklahoma State University as a young dramatist whose sole interest lay in writing plays. To my good fortune, I unwittingly found myself enrolled in a program with truly outstanding teachers of poetry and fiction. Additionally, I was permitted (even encouraged) to work with an exceptional theatre department, exceedingly generous with both its time and resources. And it

is no doubt significant that I now consider myself neither a playwright nor poet -- but (much like this collection) a synthesis of the two.

All that remains is to offer my sincere thanks to those wise and generous scholars who have guided me these past five years.

*The rest is silence.*

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