



A Retrospective:
Three Plays

from the
Eavesdrop Theatre

“Snuff Flick”

“Pawn’s Gambit”

and

“Getting Rid of Horace”

by

John W. Fiero

SNUFF FLICK

by
John W. Fiero

CHARACTERS:

J. J. HALSTEAD a movie director, a man in his early thirties

MONA JAMES..... a pretty young actress of about twenty

KLINGERHalstead's assistant and chief trouble shooter, a woman of about thirty

RUDYa makeup specialist, about thirty-five and very gay

SCENE:

A platform on the set of a movie studio, bare except for a director's chair. The TIME is the present. Throughout the play, J. J. shouts in various directions, giving orders to a surrounding but unseen set crew.

At rise, MONA is seated in the chair, as RUDY, kneeling next to her, touches up her face, using cosmetics from a kit on the floor next to him. J. J. paces nearby.

J. J.: One disaster after another. The man is a walking calamity.

RUDY: He's the best there is, John-John.

J. J.: For a change, Rudy, why don't you keep your nose in your own ointment?

RUDY: (huffily) I'm only reminding you, Mister Halstead—you're not the box-office attraction; Clark Trabor is. He's one in a million. No, he's one in a hundred million.

J. J.: Once upon a time, maybe, but now he's nothing but an irresponsible lush. When and if he shows up, he'll be twenty-three sheets to the wind. He hasn't drawn a sober breath through his last five films.

RUDY: Drunk or sober, he's the best actor this studio has seen since Bogart and Cagney.

J. J.: And the biggest hot dog. (shouting offstage) Sid! Sid, did you check to see if he's even on the lot yet? (pause) Well get somebody on it, and I mean right now.

RUDY: You better hope that Clark doesn't overhear one of you compliments, John-John. He's still numero uno, and he could get you bounced on your keyster.

J. J.: (turning on RUDY) Aren't you finished yet?

RUDY: Don't rush me, John-John. Mona must look her absolute best. It's going to be her very first close-up.

MONA: I'm so excited.

RUDY: Hush, dear. You must never talk while Rudy corrects nature's blunders around the mouth.

MONA: (mumbling) Sorry.

J. J.: (shouting at an offstage grip) Hey you! You with the pimples. (pause) Yes, you. Where the hell are you taking that reflector?

RUDY: (to MONA) Lift your head, darling.

J. J.: I don't give a damn what he said. Put it back where it was.

RUDY: Now turn it to the left.

J. J.: Baxter, where did you pick up these grips? From an online penny auction?

RUDY: Now to the right.

J. J.: Tell them not to move a freaking thing unless they check with Sid or me.

RUDY: Now purse your lips, darling. Perfect. Perfect.

J. J.: (consulting his watch) Forty-five minutes. America's screen idol is already forty-five minutes late. The bastard's a total flake.

RUDY: (putting away his things) Now Mona, dear, you must try to avoid any energetic facial tremors whatsoever. Nothing more than gentle smiles.

MONA: I'll try.

RUDY: (standing) That's a good girl. (to J. J.) She's all yours, J. J. (He leaves the platform.)

J. J.: You see what it's like, baby? You see what it's like? I hope there's an object lesson in it. Here we are, waiting on the fantabulous Clark Trabor, like a bunch of half wits waiting for mental competence to set in. And do you have any idea what it costs this studio just to have us standing around like dodos? About six-hundred bucks a minute. And for whom? For Helmut Hoffenpepper.

MONA: Who?

J. J.: Exactly. Nobody, but nobody, has ever heard of Helmut Hoffenpepper, but every groupie in the country knows Clark Trabor. But that's who Clark was before this studio made him. Helmut Hoffenpepper—an ignorant, Walmart flunky out of nowhere Pennsylvania. And a stinking lush to boot—a goddamn ungrateful lush. When you get the chance to swell, honey, don't ever forget that Clark Trabor was once Helmut Hoffenpepper, an absolute nobody. You get too arrogant, and there won't be a director happy to work with you. They'll all hate your guts. Oh, yeah. they'll fawn all over you, but deep down inside they'll despise you. Stay humble, sweetheart, and for Christ's sake, stay grateful.

MONA: You don't have to worry about me, J. J. I grew up as Mona James, and I'll never forget it. I'll always be me.

J. J.: That's it, baby. Stay sweet. I'm holding you to it. You can bank on it. (shouting at an off-stage camera crew) Hey, Marty! Are we going to have enough light or not? Those look like thunderheads closing in. (pointing) You better get some big floods and a couple of hot spots, just in case. (turning and calling in another direction) What about it, Sid? Did the gate warden pass his royal highness or not? (pause) Aw shit! We might just as well call it off.

(KLINGER enters and stands at the edge of the platform; she is very agitated, and she gestures and hisses, trying to attract J. J.'s attention as he talks to MONA. His back is to KLINGER, however, and at first he doesn't see her.)

J. J.: I'm sorry, Mona. It looks like another no-go.

MONA: Oh not again.

J. J.: Can't help it. An hour's my limit. Another ten minutes and we're wrapping it up. We'll just reschedule and double the load in tomorrow's shoot. Then I'm personally going in every dive in the area until I locate the pompous son of a bitch. I may not be able to bust him in the chops, but I sure as hell can slap a fine on him. The contract says he makes all calls unless he's dead or damn near it. You can bet he's going to pay for this bender. (He turns and sees KLINGER.) Klinger, baby, tell me something good.

(J. J. crosses to KLINGER, and for a few seconds she whispers to him inaudibly.)

J. J.: HE WHAT? (pause) HOLY CRAP! Are you sure?

MONA: Is there something wrong?

KLINGER: A security guard found him in his dressing room toilet.

J. J.: (lowly) Get the studio quack over there. Maybe he just passed out. Hurry.

(KLINGER makes a hasty exit)

MONA: What is it, J. J.?

J. J.: It's Clark, honey. Apparently he's . . . well, it seems he's kind of incapacitated.

MONA: Then he has been drinking again.

J. J.: Of that you can be sure.

MONA: Oh, that makes me so mad. He promised me he'd be good today. Is he very drunk?

J. J.: Let's hope that's all he is. (shouting to the offstage crew again) Sid! Get on the book, Sid. Check me out. This is the last sequence with Clark. Yes or no? (pause) Good. How about movement? Does he have to walk? Walk hell! Does he have to smile? Take a good look, Sid. Is there anything in there a store-window dummy couldn't do? (calling in another direction) Hey, Marvin, all the sound has got to be non-synchronous. (pause) I don't give a shit what your sheet says. It's got to be non-synchronous. (turning back to Sid's direction) The old switcheroo, Sid. Quick cross cuts. Nothing subtle. When Clark talks, the camera's got to be on Mona, otherwise vice versa. And whatever you do, no head shots of Clark. It'll be a waste of footage. Give Mona as much exposure as possible. We go in fifteen minutes.

MONA: But if Clark is ill—

J. J.: Dead or alive, sweetheart. Dead or alive he's going to do it. We can't drop the scene.

MONA: It's so exciting. Mona James and Clark Trabor in the same frame!

(KLINGER comes up to the platform running.)

J. J.: I hope that's the way it'll be.

KLINGER: J. J.

J. J.: (turning to her) Let me have it slow and easy, Klinger.

KLINGER: It's all bad, J. J. He's a goner. Worse yet, he's--

J. J.: That son of a bitch! He did it on purpose. I know he did.

MONA: He's drunk, isn't he.

KLINGER: I'm afraid it's worse than that, Miss James.

MONA: (obviously disappointed) He passed out again?

J. J.: He's cashed in the old chips, sweetheart.

KLINGER: He's passed out permanently.

MONA: You mean he's . . . he's dead?

KLINGER: That's about the size of it.

MONA: But . . . but he can't be dead.

KLINGER: But he is. Had a massive stroke while trying to pass what the doctor thinks is a large wad of half digested French fries.

MONA: (starting to cry) Oh my God! Poor Clark—poor, poor Clark.

J. J.: I wouldn't shed a tear for that constipated stinker, sweetheart. He isn't worth it.

MONA: He was great, J. J. A fine actor, and so nice to me. I admired him.

J. J.: Jesus, Mona, if you knew him like I did, you'd be happy to be rid of him. One more day . . . no, just a few hours . . . if he had waited just two more hours, I'd be ecstatic.

MONA: He was magnificent.

J. J.: Stop bawling, Mona. You're ruining your face. (calling to offstage) Rudy! Rudy, get your ass up here. Mona's going to need a number on her kisser. (pause) Where the hell is he?

KLINGER: I started to tell you, J. J. Rudy's working on Clark.

J. J.: On Clark?

KLINGER: He's in bad shape.

J. J.: Yeah, he's dead. I guess that's about as bad as it comes.

KLINGER: Clark never logged out last Friday.

J. J.: You mean he's been . . . he's been—

KLINGER: Sixty hours—that's the doc's best guess. He's very sallow, stiff as a board, and starting to swell.

(MONA starts to wail.)

J. J.: Stiff?

KLINGER: Rigor mortis.

J. J.: Oh that son of a bitch! And I'll bet he's got his finger straight up in the air like this (He "shoots the bird" over his head). The thoughtless bastard . . . couldn't wait until tomorrow. Damn his hide.

MONA: (now bawling in earnest) There'll never be another like him.

J. J.: You can say that again. (to KLINGER) Klinger, get Rudy back here now. And ask the doc if he can't . . . you know . . . ask him if he can't use some kind of muscle relaxer or something. (KLINGER runs off as J. J. turns his attention to MONA.) Bear up, honey. We are going to finish this film. We can't leave the scene out. We're going to prop old Clark up and do the best we can.

MONA: But you can't be serious.

J. J.: (shouting towards offstage) Give me your attention everybody. Come on, now, stop what you're doing. Stop what you're doing and bow your heads. Clark Trabor is dead. I want everybody to bow your head and say a silent prayer for the old trooper. (He bows his own head.)

MONA: But J. J.!

J. J.: Shhh! (after an indecently short pause) Okay, everybody, back to work. We're setting up now. (calling) Marvin, how's the ambiance? And where the hell is your boom man? We go in ten minutes. (calling in another direction) Hey, Baxter! Take a reading. The light's got to be just right. (to MONA) We're almost ready, sweetheart. Everything is going to be A-okay and copacetic.

MONA: But . . . but I can't do a scene with a dead man!

J. J.: Baby, in this business the word "can't" just doesn't compute.

MONA: But suppose it got out! Think of the publicity.

J. J.: Not to worry, sweetheart. There's no way. The crew is solid and behind you a hundred and ten percent. I give you my word. (calling to offstage again) Sid, are you listening? (pause) Good. Now get this straight. I'm promising Mona—and I want you all to hear this—I'm promising Mona that we aren't going to do more than two retakes. That's the bottom line, Sid. (to MONA) See, kiddo, there's a limit to what I demand.

MONA: But . . . but . . .

J. J.: Don't sweat it, babe. If the rushes come back bad we'll just go with whatever we have.

MONA: (beginning to cry again) Oh my God. I need some time, J. J. . . . time to think. I just don't see how I can do it.

J. J.: Old Clark is swelling, baby. We can't wait. And stop that crying. Your face is a mess.

MONA: I can't help it.

J. J.: Don't use that word, Mona. I forbid you to use that word.

MONA: It's too much to ask. I won't do it.

J. J.: Hey, remember who you're talking to. I told you a long screen test ago that in this business nothing's sacred. And what did you say, sweetheart? (pause) Come on. What did you say?

MONA: (glumly) That I didn't care.

J. J.: That you'd do anything to be a star. That is the name of the game, sweetheart. You can forget there's a heaven, because in this business there's no way to get there.

MONA: But this . . . this is terrible.

J. J.: Not to worry, baby. Sid'll figure it all out . . . camera angle . . . focus . . . range . . . sequence. Nobody'll know the difference. (shouting towards offstage) Where's that goddamn fag?

MONA: But what about his lines?

J. J.: Nothing to it. Rudy could fill a creek bed with putty.

MONA: No—his voice. Clark speaks in the sequence.

J. J.: Hell, that's the least of our problems. What's his face . . . that standup mimic? He sounds more like Clark than Clark did. We'll just high line his voice in. Everything is going to be non-synchronous. The critics will eat it up. They'll think it's poignant.

MONA: I don't know. I just don't know.

J. J.: Baby, baby—in ten minutes It'll all be over, fifteen at the outside.

MONA: (suddenly hopeful) Why . . . why we could find a double for Clark—somebody who looks just like him.

J. J.: Honey, you know better than that. His face, maybe, but not with the ears to match it. Not in a hundred years. Not even an anime genius could get them right. We have to go with Clark.

MONA: But that's ghoulish. It would be a desecration. I just can't do it.

J. J.: It's the vital scene, Mona. The whole film depends on it. A seven-second obligatory scene, that's what it edits down to, but without it, the whole thread would be gone, and we'd have to end up shelving a ninety-seven million dollar blockbuster. You've got to do it, baby. Do it for Clark. Do it for me. Hell, do it for yourself. This is your big chance, and I mean your *big* chance. We'll be in so tight on you the studio clerks will be ass deep in fan mail. You know that's the way old Clark would want it.

MONA: (starting to bawl again) But he's dead!

(RUDY comes to the platform carrying his makeup kit.)

RUDY: You stop that, Miss Mona. You stop that this instant.

J. J.: It's about time you got here.

RUDY: Don't give me your macho-macho, John-John. (to MONA) You mustn't cry, darling. (to J. J.) Clark has challenged even my talents, but he's almost ready. They're dressing him now. (kneeling by MONA and examining her face) Yeck, creases. You mustn't ever cry, my dear. (He starts to work on her face.) You've made veritable rivulets.

MONA: I can't help it.

RUDY: Stop talking! You know the rules. When Rudy creates, stars only listen.

J. J.: (to MONA) Sweetheart, I want you to know that I can understand your reluctance. It shows real class . . . real delicacy. And I know it won't be pleasant. But you have to consider the alternatives. Without this scene, the film won't have squat going for it. And we all have too much invested to let that happen.

RUDY: John-John is right, darling.

J. J.: It's like this, kiddo. The whole cinematic continuity depends on the segment. You read the script. You know that we'd cut the vital nerve if we scrapped the scene. We aren't going to let that happen, baby. There is no way we are going to let that happen.

MONA: But it's . . . it's barbaric!

RUDY: (striking her with an eyebrow pencil) Stop it, stop it, stop it! There will be no yapping while Rudy works.

MONA: (mumbles) Sorry.

J. J.: (calling to offstage again) How's it look, Sid? Can we keep the tracking shot? (pause) Try to keep it, man. We need that one. If we have to, we'll hang Clark from a boom with piano wire. (pause) What? (pause) You're right. Heavy test monofilament would be better. Good thinking.

RUDY: I detest patch work. The lighting is bad, John-John. Mona should go back to the dressing room.

J. J.: There isn't time. Just do what you can.

MONA: I think I'm going to cry again.

RUDY: (striking her again) Shhhhh! Don't you dare. I won't tolerate it.

J. J.: (calling to offstage again) Sid! How about the zoom potential? Can we use a deep focus montage? It would help to keep Clark kind of fuzzy. (pause) To hell with it then. It was just a thought. (shouting in another direction) Hey Baxter, is everything on the green light? (pause) Terrific, baby, terrific.

RUDY: That's the best I can do, John-John—given the deplorable conditions.

J. J.: (examining MONA) Miraculous, Rudy—absolutely fantastic.

RUDY: Yes, I think so. Now, Mona, child, you must be very careful not to cry again. One more crease and I'll throw one of my infamous fits, and you wouldn't like that.

MONA: I'll do my best.

RUDY: That's a good girl. (He puts away his cosmetics and stands up.) She is all yours, John-John. I'll go put the finishing touches on Clark. (He goes offstage.)

J. J.: (calling after him) Good show, Rudy—absolutely super. (to MONA) Now how about it, sweetheart—are you ready?

MONA: (on the verge of tears again) He took me to lunch last Friday, J. J. He took me to lunch.

J. J.: (surprised) *Rudy* took you to lunch?

MONA: No. Clark took me. (pause) Oh my God! That's when he ate the French fries. He ate my potatoes.

J. J.: Don't cry, Mona. Whatever you do, don't cry. Rudy will freak out. (shouting to offstage) Klinger! Somebody get Klinger up here.

MONA: It's all my fault. I wouldn't eat my French fries.

J. J.: Mona, sweetheart, look out there. (he points offstage) Do you see that piece of finely wrought equipment? That's a super Panavision wide-screen, ultra-chromatic camera. Go ahead. Look at it.

MONA: But you told me never to look at the camera.

J. J.: Only when you're on camera, baby. This time I want you to look. Look right at it, right in the lens. Do you know what you're looking at?

MONA: A motion picture camera?

J. J.: No, baby. You're looking at eighty-three hundred clams a day. That's what you're looking at. That's what it costs this studio to rent that machine. And that's a bargain, because without it, there's nothing. You and I both are nothing. (twisting her head in another direction) Look there. You see those guys?

MONA: The grips?

J. J.: Thirty bucks an hour, sweetheart. That's all they get. Thirty lousy bucks an hour, and working like sled dogs. (twisting her head in another direction) And what do you think Charlie over there pulls down?

MONA: I . . . I don't know.

J. J.: Fifty, maybe seventy-five at the outside. And when you're on, he's got to hold that long boom right over your head. (shouting) Klinger! (back to MONA) And it's heavy, baby—real heavy. (twisting her head in another direction) And look at Sid. He's a bloody Einstein—the best in the business. Two hundred an hour, Mona. Two hundred zilch an hour. And Baxter gets half that. And he goes home hurting every day. Those headphones made his skull throb.

MONA: Sid only makes two hundred dollars an hour?

J. J.: Remarkable, isn't it. And take me, Mona. All I get is three percent of the gross and a flat four-hundred thou. Do you get the idea?

MONA: I'm not sure.

J. J.: I'm talking about a lot of bread, Mona. I'm talking about ninety-seven million bucks down the rat hole if we don't finish this film. You can't be squeamish, sweetheart. You have to go through with it. Nobody else is squeamish. Look at them. They're all set to go. Ready to work harder than you ever worked in your life. And for you, Mona, working to make you a star, and working for nothing compared to what Clark was making, even to what you're making. You can't let them down, baby. You have no choice. You have to go through with it.

MONA: You're just trying to make me feel bad.

J. J.: No. It's not that at all. You're a professional, sweetheart, and a pro knows the show goes on no matter what. Everybody out there knows that. They're pros too. They're giving it everything they have, working for peanuts, just so you can make it to the top.

MONA: I didn't know. I think I'm going to cry.

(KLINGER and RUDY come up to the platform in time to hear her.)

RUDY: I will scream if you cry. I will scream if you so much as grimace.

J. J.: Is he ready?

KLINGER: Just about. (she draws J. J. aside and speaks lowly) Doc is doing a little last minute surgery.

J. J.: Shit, Klinger, we need him out here. There's no time.

KLINGER: He's got to stick his eyeballs in the right place, J. J. And sew his lids open.

J. J.: Yeah, I guess that would be kind of critical. How much longer?

KLINGER: Not more than five minutes.

MONA: What do you make, Rudy?

RUDY: (offhandedly) Oh, boys, mostly.

KLINGER: We're also going to have to douse him again.

MONA: That's not what I meant.

J. J.: Douse him?

KLINGER: With cologne.

MONA: How much money?

KLINGER: He doesn't smell too good. Rudy's already used two bottles.

RUDY: That my dear is for me to know and you to find out.

KLINGER: After all, it's been over two days, and the bathroom heater was on the whole time.

J. J.: Oh my God.

MONA: I'll bet you do very well.

RUDY: Only stars do well, darling. We underlings barely make enough to keep body and filet of sole together.

J. J.: Just make sure he's presentable, Klinger.

KLINGER: We're doing our best, J. J.

J. J.: (turning to MONA and speaking enthusiastically) Smile, baby. This is going to be the greatest scene you've ever played.

RUDY: You're going to be a star, darling.

J. J.: Nobody, but nobody, has done what you're going to do today. You are going to play opposite a corpse.

RUDY: A Hollywood first, darling.

MONA: I'll try.

J. J.: Not good enough, sweetheart.

RUDY: Think positive, Mona. Anything for art, as the saying goes.

J. J.: You'll do it, Mona. You'll do it because you've got it in your blood.

RUDY: A star is born, darling.

J. J.: Just think about all the no talent broads lined up waiting for the break you got. There must dozens of them standing around the corner of Hollywood and Vine alone, and I mean right now, this morning. Half of them would eat Clark Trabor's mortal remains for a crack at your role. Am I right, Klinger?

KLINGER: Absolutely.

RUDY: They're exaggerating a bit, my dear, but not much.

MONA: I certainly don't want to be ungrateful, but I do wish there were some other way . . .

J. J.: There isn't, sweetheart. (beat) Of course, there's nothing particularly odd about your ears.

MONA: I do feel a little better about the whole thing.

KLINGER: There's a gal in wardrobe who is almost a dead ringer for you, Mona. Rather remarkable, don't you think?

MONA: I must have confidence in myself.

KLINGER: Of course, if I saw you both up close, together, I suppose the differences would become apparent.

RUDY: Ah, but I could make them look like identical twins.

MONA: I can go through with it now. I know I can.

J. J.: That's the spirit, sweetheart.

RUDY: You'll be magnificent, darling.

MONA: (standing) I will carry the scene.

J. J.: We never had any doubts, Mona.

MONA: Poor Clark. He always was . . . (she giggles) he always was a little stiff.

J. J.: Nothing but a has-been, kiddo. You're the one that's going to make this picture. Go get him, Klinger. We're at standby right now.

KLINGER: Let's go, Rudy.

RUDY: Of course.

(KLINGER and RUDY go off)

MONA: (clasping her hands together on her breast) I will be magnificent. I can feel it.

J. J.: A super star, baby, it's in the works. (calling to offstage) Sid! Sid, take some notes on editing. When those credits roll, Mona's name goes up first. You hear me?

MONA: (now rhapsodic) I will be supreme!

J. J.: Nothing but the best will do Mona. From now on, it's top billing all the way, and everything you ever wanted.

MONA: All over America, on every marquee, Mona James In . . .

J. J.: You've got it, sweetheart. (shouting to offstage) Sid, did you hear that? Mona's name goes in *before* the title.

MONA: Mona James in "The Life and Loves of Don Juan"!

J. J.: (shouting to offstage) Sid, the title has to go. Make a note.

MONA: Mona James in . . . Mona James in "The Maid of Madam X." No . . . no, Mona James is "The Maid of Madam X."

J. J.: (shouting delightedly) Did you hear that, Sid? She's a genius--a goddamn genius.

MONA: (suddenly turning to J. J.) I want to rehearse it, J. J. It has to be flawless.

J. J.: Anything you say, sweetheart. Anything you say.

MONA: Give me my cue.

J. J.: (shouting to offstage) Sid, what's Clark's line? (pause). I've got it. (turning to MONA) Are you ready, baby? (MONA nods) Then here we go. (he alters his voice, as if in imitation of a leading man) Good morning, miss. Is the countess at home?

MONA: (curtsying) La, sir. She's expecting you.

J. J.: A little more animation, sweetheart. And make that dip lower. They're going to want to see your equipment. Do it again.

MONA: (repeating the routine) La, sir. She's expecting you.

J. J.: Much better, baby, but it needs just a touch of spice. Put a little more knowing in that smile. You look too innocent. Try again.

MONA: (repeating the routine) La, sir. She's expecting you.

J. J.: Oh, perfecto! Absolutely perfecto. Just the right amount of titillation. Now the sequel, love. Now the sequel.

MONA: If you follow me, sir, I'll take you to her.

J. J.: That's good, honey, real good. But it needs a little more—what?—a little more coyness. Try again.

MONA: If you follow me, sir, I'll take you to her.

J. J.: That's it! That's it to a "t." And now the clincher.

MONA: (jumping as if pinched on her rump) Oh, sir! You're wicked! (She holds a palm to her lips and titters.)

J. J.: Terrific, baby—terrific. But try it one more time.

MONA: (repeating the routine) Oh, sir! You're wicked!

J. J.: Magnificent, sweetheart. (shouting loudly) Klinger! Move the stiff up here. Hey, Baxter, send some grips to give them a hand. We go, Sid. We go right now. Quiet on the set! Come on, Klinger. Where the hell is Clark? Hey you, you with the pimples, get your ass over there and give them a hand. Mark it. Scene 383, take one. (to MONA) One more time, darling. Just one more time.

MONA: (repeating the routine) Oh, sir! You're very, very wicked! (she titters)

J. J.: (shouting) Wow! Did you hear that, Sid? Did you catch the ad lib? Mona's a fucking genius!

(BLACKOUT)

END

PAWN'S GAMBIT

by
John Fiero

CHARACTERS:

WILLIAM: A forty-year old waiter-servant. He is dressed in the formal attire of a butler in a wealthy family's employ.

VICKERS: A billionaire in his early eighties, one of the two "pillars" of the Olympus Club. He is pompous and arrogant, used to having everything his own way. He wears an expensive looking smoking jacket over a white shirt and tie. He also wears extremely thick-lensed glasses and is, presumably, all but blind.

BLACKSTONE: The other "pillar," who, like VICKERS, is a billionaire. He is in his late eighties and just as pompous and pampered. He wears a rich dressing robe over a shirt and cravat. On the table where he sits is an old-fashioned ear trumpet which he uses now and then, for he, presumably, is all but deaf.

FRANCES: A voluptuous young model of about twenty.

SCENE: The lounge of the Olympus Club, an anachronistic institution that caters to very wealthy men of impeccable lineage. The *time* is the present. The room is entered through a door situated *stage left*, next to the bar. WILLIAM is seated on a stool at the bar, polishing a silver tray with a rag. *Stage center* are two tables; BLACKSTONE sits at one, VICKERS at the other. The tables are spaced about fifteen feet apart and are so arranged that VICKERS and BLACKSTONE, although nearly back to back and not seeing each other, are still angled towards the audience. Each of them has an identical chess set, a pad of paper and a pen or pencil before him. They are virtually frozen in their concentration on their game. At *stage right*, against a wall, is a solitary stool which serves as WILLIAM'S "station" when he is not at the bar.

WILLIAM: (looking up, as if surprised, he addresses the audience) Oh. Hello there. Welcome to the Olympus Club. (he puts down the rag) My name is William—William P. Thurgood the Third, to be precise. Anglo-Saxon to my toenails, but of course, that's only fitting. My position requires some credentials, you see. (as if revealing a secret) This is, after all, a very exclusive club. Very, very exclusive.

VICKERS: William.

WILLIAM: Coming sir. (to the audience) That's Mr. Vickers, one of the moguls here. (he stands, drapes a towel over his arm and picks up the tray) Excuse me a moment. (he goes to VICKERS' table and stands attentively)

VICKERS: William!

WILLIAM: Here, sir.

VICKERS: Damn it, William, don't pussy foot around. I won't have you sneaking up on me.

WILLIAM: Sorry, sir. It won't happen again.

VICKERS: Bring me a snifter of cognac. (he tears a sheet from a pad and hands it to WILLIAM) And give this to that old fart. (he moves a chess piece)

WILLIAM: Very good, sir. (he goes to BLACKSTONE'S table, reads slip, and shouts loudly) "PAWN TO QUEEN FIVE," SIR.

BLACKSTONE: (raising trumpet to ear) How's that, Thurgood?

WILLIAM: (shouting) "PAWN TO QUEEN FIVE," SIR. (he places the slip of paper in front of BLACKSTONE)

BLACKSTONE: Pawn to queen five, eh. Classic Giuoco Piano. (he moves his opponent's piece) I'll have him in short order, Thurgood. In short order.

WILLIAM: (shouting) I'M TO FETCH HIM A COGNAC, SIR.

BLACKSTONE: (concentrating on chess board) How's that?

WILLIAM: (shouting) MR. VICKERS, SIR. HE ORDERED A COGNAC.

BLACKSTONE: Yes, yes. Go ahead, and while you're about it, bring me a scotch.

WILLIAM: VERY GOOD SIR. (he goes to the bar and calls out the order) The usual for Mr. Blackstone and Mr. Vickers. (turns and addresses the audience again) Now, where was I? Oh yes, credentials. Understand, this club is a veritable institution, one that thrives on what one calls snobbery. It simply wouldn't do to have just anyone in service here. These gentlemen believe that a gentleman's gentleman should truly be a gentlem—*in name; in breeding, and in deed.* (the ordered drinks are placed on WILLIAM'S tray) As for my name . . . well, one of my ancestors was first secretary to Governor Bradford of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and another was in President's Polk's cabinet. But it doesn't really matter. I don't place much stock in such things. After all, without money . . .

VICKERS: (roaring) WILLIAM, WHERE THE DEVIL IS THAT COGNAC?

WILLIAM: Coming Mr. Vickers. (he goes to VICKERS' table and sets the drink down, then heads towards BLACKSTONE'S table, but stops between them to address the audience) Oh mind you, I do keep up my membership in the Mayflower Society and the Sons of the American Revolution, but only for appearance sake. (he moves the rest of the way to BLACKSTONE'S table and sets his drink before him) May you choke on an ice cube, sir.

BLACKSTONE: What's that, Thurgood?

WILLIAM: YOUR MOVE, SIR. ARE YOU READY?

BLACKSTONE: (irritated) No, no Thurgood. How many times do I have to tell you not to intrude upon my concentration. I'll let you know.

WILLIAM: BEG YOUR PARDON, SIR. (he goes to the stool near the wall and sits down, speaking to the audience again, more and more as if speaking to a confidant) It's like this every night. There's no pleasing either of them. William this and Thurgood that. I'm a battered ping pong ball. I would have quit long ago—long, long ago—but, you see, I'm in their wills. That's the long and the short of it—I'm in their wills. I've simply been biding my time, suffering their outrageous, monstrous pretensions with remarkably good grace, even if I do say so myself. But that's all coming to an end—very soon. (smiling) Very soon, indeed.

BLACKSTONE: Thurgood.

WILLIAM: (walking quickly to BLACKSTONE'S table) SIR.

BLACKSTONE: (he writes on his pad, tears the sheet off and hands it to WILLIAM) Take this to the old goat. (chuckling, he moves his own chess piece)

WILLIAM: VERY GOOD SIR. (he looks at the slip) OH, BRILLIANT, SIR—POSITIVELY BRILLIANT.

BLACKSTONE: Damn it, Thurgood, this is not a polo match. Don't be impertinent.

WILLIAM: SORRY, SIR. TERRIBLY SORRY. IT WON'T HAPPEN AGAIN. May you rot in hell.

BLACKSTONE: See that it doesn't, Thurgood.

WILLIAM: YES, SIR. (he heads for VICKERS' table, again stopping half way between the two to address the audience) You see how it is. They're both bastards. Just like their fathers—only richer. Blackstone there, he's a transportation magnate. You can't travel anywhere without feathering his over-stuffed nest. Jets to roller skates, he's in it all. Oil too. And banking and chemicals and microelectronics. (goes to VICKERS' table and reads the slip) "Knight to queen four," sir.

VICKERS: (disbelieving) What? Let me see that. (WILLIAM hands him the slip which he holds up to his face closely) Well, what is that deaf idiot up to now? All right, let's see. (he puts the paper down, moves the opponent's piece and studies the board; after a moment, he shoos WILLIAM away with his hand)

WILLIAM: (going to stool again and speaking to audience) Vickers, there, he's in satellite communications. Cinema, too, and steel, and coal, and aluminum. If it weren't for plastics, we couldn't do anything without making both of them richer. Not fiberglass, mind you, they have that tied up, but they don't trust plastics. Too risky, and they don't like recyclables. Anyway, they're billionaires, and I'm in their wills. And there they sit, two curmudgeons, playing chess like demi-gods while half the world starves. Miserly and mean to their marrow, they are. Hate everything, including each other. Did I tell you that they haven't spoken to one another in fifteen years? Imagine that—fifteen years! They're regular misanthropes. (he pauses, gets up and walks over to the bar, sitting down on a stool; he addresses the unseen bartender) Some water, please. (to the audience) My father had this job before me. He died at it. Much too young, too. Had a heart attack in this very room. Blackstone, there, (pointing to BLACKSTONE) his father was here—and so was Vickers' father. Do you know what they were doing? (pause) That's right—playing chess. How terribly inconvenient for them to have old dad drop in a heap on the floor. I doubt that it ended their game. (pause) You see what these two are like. I've heard that their fathers were even worse. It's rumored that the mortician had to sew Blackstone Senior's lips together to get rid of his sneer, and that the elder Vickers' funeral wasn't even attended by the minister. (a glass of water is placed in front of him) Excuse me. I have to take my pill. (he takes a medicine bottle from his pocket, removes a pill, pops it in his mouth and swallows it with some water)

VICKERS: William.

WILLIAM: (not hearing VICKERS, still speaking to audience) I'm not well, you see. Congenital heart problems are a curse of the Thurgoods, and that's why . . .

VICKERS: WILLIAM!

WILLIAM: Sir.

VICKERS: Get over here, you sluggard.

WILLIAM: (moving quickly to the table) Sir.

VICKERS: Why are you so damn slow?

WILLIAM: I was taking my medicine, Mr. Vickers.

VICKERS: We're not paying you to lollygag around. Take your bloody pills at home.

WILLIAM: I have to take them at regular intervals, sir.

VICKERS: No excuses, William, no excuses. Double up before you come to work. (he rips a piece of paper from the pad and hands it to WILLIAM) Here, take this to that senile bullfrog dropping, and be quick about it. (he moves his own piece)

WILLIAM: Yes sir. (he moves to BLACKSTONE'S table and reads the slip) "KING TO BISHOP TWO," SIR.

BLACKSTONE: Eh? (he lifts trumpet to ear)

WILLIAM: "KING TO BISHOP TWO," SIR.

BLACKSTONE: As anticipated, Thurgood. As anticipated. (he writes down a move on his pad, tears the slip off and gives it to WILLIAM) Here. (he moves his opponent's piece and his own)

WILLIAM: (goes to VICKERS' table and reads slip) "Knight to king six," sir.

VICKERS: You mean to tell me that he didn't even think about it?

WILLIAM: Apparently not, sir.

VICKERS: (moving the opponent's piece) Hmmmmm. (he studies the board; WILLIAM starts to go away) Where the hell do you think you're going?

WILLIAM: Just to the bar, sir.

VICKERS: I didn't dismiss you, William.

WILLIAM: Sorry, sir. (he waits patiently)

VICKERS: (after a long pause as he studies the board, and without looking up) What? Still standing there?

WILLIAM: Yes, sir.

VICKERS: Well, don't ogle. Go to your stool. I might want to keep my eye on you.

WILLIAM: As you wish, sir. (he starts to go, stops, leans over the table and deftly swipes away a chess piece and palms it)

VICKERS: (sensing movement) There's a goddamn fly in here. (pause) Did you hear that, William? I won't tolerate it.

WILLIAM: I'll see to it, sir. (he continues to his stool, sits down, and addresses the audience again) Keep his eye on me indeed. He's blind as a bat. Anyway, as you can see, I have my petty

revenge. (he holds up the chess piece) But tonight . . . tonight . . . (he looks at his watch) but there's no sense in getting ahead of myself. Let's get back to where we were. (he puts chess piece in his pocket) You see how they run me around. Their fathers did the same to mine. Oh yes, they put him in their wills, or so my father used to say. But they killed him, too—there's no doubt in my mind. They killed him and took him out of their wills. It's dreadfully ironic. The elder Blackstone just kicked off about five years ago—at one hundred and two. Fancy that. I guess you have to be full of spite to hang on that long. And my poor father? Dead at forty. That's my age now. Well, this is one man these wanton gods won't kill for sport. (he looks at his watch) In my game, a pawn will check at least one king. (he smiles, amused with himself)

VICKERS: William.

WILLIAM: (his smile turns to a grimace) Sir.

VICKERS: Get your arse over here.

WILLIAM: Coming sir. (to the audience) After all, it's my due, my inheritance.

VICKERS: (as WILLIAM approaches) You certainly are inattentive tonight.

WILLIAM: Sorry sir.

VICKERS: Bring me another cognac. (tears slip and hands it to WILLIAM) And take this to that antique ninny, Blackstone. (he moves a chess piece)

WILLIAM: (picks up empty brandy glass) Very good, sir. (goes to BLACKSTONE'S table and reads slip) "KING'S ROOK TO QUEEN'S BISHOP ONE," SIR.

BLACKSTONE: Speak up, Thurgood, speak up.

WILLIAM: (moving closer to BLACKSTONE'S ear) "KING'S ROOK TO QUEEN'S BISHOP ONE," SIR.

BLACKSTONE: (moving opponent's piece, he considers it for a moment) What in thunderation does he want to do that for?

WILLIAM: I REALLY DON'T KNOW, SIR.

BLACKSTONE: Of course you don't, idiot. But neither does he. Bring me another scotch.

WILLIAM: VERY GOOD, SIR. You insufferable toad. (picks up empty glass and goes to the bar; to the bartender) Another round for Mr. Vickers and Mr. Blackstone. (to the audience) Blackstone there is eighty-eight. He's already had a stroke and a cardiac infarct. He's the one I'm counting on. Vickers seems more durable, and he's also seven years younger. Still, there's hope there. His father had a cardiac arrest at seventy-one. (looks at his watch) A good shock might do either of them in, preferably both, and that's what I'm hoping to arrange—imminently. You see,

this bastion for the blue stocking elite really only exists for one purpose. (the bartender places the drinks on WILLIAM'S tray) Oh yes, one must be socially fit, wealthy as Midas, and as well-named as the Cabots and the Lodges, but most importantly one must be—have you guessed it?—that's right, one must be a man. (he picks up the tray and goes to VICKERS' table, deposits the cognac snifter, waits a minute, but since VICKERS ignores him, moves between the tables and speaks again to the audience) As far as I know, in the two hundred and twenty-seven years of this club's existence, no woman has stepped foot in here. Imagine that. (goes to BLACKSTONE'S table, deposits drink and waits; BLACKSTONE ignores him also, so he goes to the stool and sits down and speaks to the audience again) Now just suppose a woman were to walk in among these pompous goats, these titans of male sovereignty, these . . . (he jerks his head about) Excuse me. (he grabs at an unseen fly in the air, once, twice, and on the third try, successfully captures it) Be back in a minute. (he goes to VICKERS' table and delicately drops the "fly" in the cognac glass; speaks to VICKERS) I've taken care of that fly, sir.

VICKERS: What's that, William?

WILLIAM: The fly, sir; I've taken care of it.

VICKERS: Bully, William. Bully.

WILLIAM: (going back to stool and addressing audience) They're misogynists one and all. Take Blackstone there. Typical. He was married once, for all of two weeks, I believe. Just long enough to sire another club member. And he has nothing on his father. Blackstone Senior was married for only three days. Had to keep the family name, you see. Never mind the indignities. Vickers there, he lasted nine months—wanted to see the little bugger born. They live here now, Blackstone and Vickers. I've never even seen them go out to dinner or the theater. Are you beginning to get the picture? (WILLIAM looks at his watch; at the same time, VICKERS knocks over his cognac glass) It's almost time.

VICKERS: William!

WILLIAM: Sir.

VICKERS: Come clean this up; my cognac spilled.

WILLIAM: (to audience) Damn the luck. (to VICKERS) Right away, sir. (he goes to VICKERS' table, takes towel from his arm and sops up the spilled drink and rights the glass) Shall I bring you another, Mr. Vickers?

VICKERS: Of course, and be more careful next time.

WILLIAM: Yes sir. (he picks up the glass and goes to the bar; to the bartender) One more for Mr. Vickers. (addresses the audience again) I admit it's chancy; if I'm found out, I'll get the sack, but that won't matter if one of these two irascible gentlemen should collapse head first on his chess board. After all, I'm in both their wills. (looks at his watch again) It's all arranged. (bartender puts drink on tray) Any moment now a young, vivacious woman will smash a

time-honored, sacrosanct restriction. Let's hope the shock will be sufficient. (he picks up the tray and goes to VICKERS' table) Here you are, sir. (puts the drink down) Will there be anything else?

VICKERS: Not now, William, not now.

WILLIAM: Very well, sir. (he starts for his stool)

BLACKSTONE: Thurgood!

WILLIAM: (shouting) SIR.

BLACKSTONE: Thurgood!

WILLIAM: (moving to table and shouting) SIR!

BLACKSTONE: (tearing off a piece of paper from his pad and handing it to WILLIAM) Here. Tell the old baked prune to counter that, if he can. (he moves his piece)

WILLIAM: RIGHT AWAY, SIR, you senile cipher. (goes to VICKERS' table and reads move from slip) "Queen to knight four," you blind . . .

VICKERS: What's that?

WILLIAM: I beg your pardon, sir. Ah . . . ah Mr. Blackstone annotated his move.

VICKERS: Never mind. Queen to knight four, you say?

WILLIAM: Correct, sir.

VICKERS: (moves piece and examines the board) Hmmmm. What do you suppose he did that for?

WILLIAM: I haven't got the foggiest, sir.

VICKERS: No, I don't suppose you do. But damn it, it must mean something.

WILLIAM: Perhaps he's trying to break your queen's threat, sir.

VICKERS: (considering) That may be. (pause) Yes, that may be it. Thank you, William. You're in my will, you know.

WILLIAM: Yes, sir. I know. And I'm grateful. Thank you, sir. (he goes back to the stool and addresses the audience) I can't afford to wait, you see. There's my family to think of. Young William is ready for college, and Mary, my wife, keeps pressing me to move us out of the city. I'd like that. A small country house. Nothing fancy, mind you. Just a house with a garden for

raising flowers. Roses or tulips—that sort of thing.

VICKERS: William. On the double, William.

WILLIAM: Coming, sir. (he goes to VICKERS' table) Ready, sir.

VICKERS: (writes on his pad, tears sheet off and hands it to WILLIAM) Take that to the wretched pinch penny. (he moves his chess piece)

WILLIAM: Yes, sir. (he goes midway between the tables and addresses the audience again) Now if that isn't a case of the burned pot calling the kettle black, then I don't know what is. (he goes to BLACKSTONE'S table, reads the slip and shouts) "PAWN TO KING'S KNIGHT THREE," SIR.

BLACKSTONE: Who's that?

WILLIAM: THURGOOD, SIR. MR. VICKERS HAS MOVED. PAWN TO KING'S KNIGHT THREE. (he places the sheet on the table in front of BLACKSTONE)

BLACKSTONE: The devil you say. (he moves his opponent's piece) Let's see. (he concentrates on the board)

WILLIAM: ANYTHING ELSE, SIR?

BLACKSTONE: What's that, Thurgood?

WILLIAM: WILL THERE BE ANYTHING ELSE, SIR?

BLACKSTONE: No, Thurgood. I'll call.

WILLIAM: VERY GOOD, MR. BLACKSTONE. (he goes to the bar and once again addresses the audience) She had better get here soon—before my voice gives out. (he looks at his watch) Well, I suppose it's a woman's prerogative to be late. But I did hire her at a very fine agency. Oh yes, I didn't tell you—she's a model. First rate. And not your Twiggy sort either. Au contraire. To succumb to the vernacular, she is built like a brick chicken coop. Commands a top fee, too.

BLACKSTONE: Thurgood!

WILLIAM: (to the audience) I'm inclined to let the fish-faced warlock wait, but I might as well . . . Excuse me once again. (shouting) COMING, SIR. (Goes to BLACKSTONE'S table)

BLACKSTONE: Thurgood! Where the devil are you?

WILLIAM: RIGHT HERE, SIR.

BLACKSTONE: (writes on pad, tears off slip and hands it to WILLIAM) Take that to the jackal bait. (he moves his piece)

WILLIAM: VERY GOOD, SIR. (he goes midway between the tables again and addresses the audience) I've agreed to pay her twice her regular fee. It is a bit tacky, you see. She has to sneak in the servants' entrance at the rear and up the back stairs.

BLACKSTONE: Thurgood!

WILLIAM: (going back to his table) YES, SIR.

BLACKSTONE: I've changed my mind, Thurgood. Tear up that move.

WILLIAM: AS YOU WISH, SIR. (he methodically rips up the slip of paper while BLACKSTONE retrieves his chess piece and puts it in its former position)

BLACKSTONE: (pause) Well, just don't stand there, man. I'll let you know.

WILLIAM: VERY GOOD, SIR—may you be the first to go, you plug-eared baboon. (he walks to bar and addresses audience again) Her name is Frances—Frances Samson. Samson: I like that. There's poetic justice for you. Here are the two pillars of the Olympus Club (by gesture indicating VICKERS and BLACKSTONE), and in will come Samson to pull them down. May this temple to mammon and all false gods fall with them!

(Frances enters; over her dress she is wearing a man's overcoat and hat, a partial disguise; she walks up behind WILLIAM)

FRANCES: I'm sorry I'm late, Mr. Thurgood.

WILLIAM: (not yet turning to her, he continues to address the audience) Mister Thurgood. Imagine that! Mister Thurgood. Now that's something I never expected to hear in this place. (turns to her) No apology is necessary, Miss Samson. The exact time wasn't critical.

FRANCES: Well, sir, I like to keep my commitments.

WILLIAM: (turns to audience) Sir! Better yet. Delightful. (turns to FRANCES) I understand, my dear. Here let me help you with those things. (he assists her while she takes off the overcoat and hat, which she deposits on a stool) Yes, yes. Perfect. Even Vickers can't be so confoundedly blind as to miss seeing you.

FRANCES: I beg your pardon.

WILLIAM: Never mind, Frances. Never mind. Let's get down to business, shall we?

FRANCES: You said I didn't have to do very much?

WILLIAM: Just topple a couple of antiquated pillars.

FRANCES: What?

WILLIAM: Just a manner of speaking, Frances. Basically, all you have to do is take my place for a few minutes. Here, take this tray and towel (he hands the items to her), and when one of those two decrepit fuddy duddies over there calls for me (points to VICKERS and BLACKSTONE, both deeply engrossed with their chess boards) just go up and ask what he wants—politely, of course, but with as much femininity as you're able to muster. That shouldn't be too difficult, eh?

FRANCES: (dubiously) That's all? I'm just to act like a waitress.

WILLIAM: Believe me, Frances—that should be enough.

BLACKSTONE: Thurgood!

WILLIAM: COMING SIR! (to Frances) That's Mr. Blackstone. You'll have to shout. He's deaf as a boulder.

FRANCES: But what is he going . . .

WILLIAM: He'll hand you a sheet of paper with a chess move written on it. You're to take that to the other gentleman, Mr. Vickers. I don't think you'll have to do much more. They'll do the rest.

BLACKSTONE: Damn it, Thurgood, where the devil are you?

WILLIAM: COMING SIR! (to FRANCES) Go on. (she hesitates) Go on, now. (he shoos her with his hands)

FRANCES: (going to the table, speaking uncertainly) May I help you, sir?

BLACKSTONE: (not looking up) That finally you, Thurgood?

FRANCES: It's Frances, Mr. Blackstone.

BLACKSTONE: Speak up, man! You know I can't hear you.

FRANCES: (louder) It's Frances, sir.

BLACKSTONE: Damn it, man, don't mumble when I talk to you. Speak up!

FRANCES: (shouting) MAY I HELP YOU, SIR?

BLACKSTONE: That's a stupid question, Thurgood. Of course you can help me. That's what you're paid for. Besides, you're in my will, you know. (he scratches on his pad, rips off the sheet

and hands it to FRANCES) Here. Vickers can't counter that without cost. (he sniffs the air) Strange. (he moves his piece)

(FRANCES takes the sheet; she is bewildered; she looks at WILLIAM questioningly, forming the words "what now" with her lips; he shrugs, and gestures with his hands to indicate that she should try again)

FRANCES: (loudly, but trying to sound sensual) HOW ABOUT A DRINK, HONEY?

BLACKSTONE: Drinkhoney? Damn it, Thurgood, you know I only drink scotch. (he sniffs the air again) And change your deodorant, Thurgood. You smell like a French tart.

FRANCES: Well, of all the nerve. That's "Joie," by Jean Patout. Sixty dollars an ounce.

BLACKSTONE: Damn it, Thurgood, there's something wrong with your voice. You sound like a choking pigeon.

FRANCES: (offended) You've got some nerve, mister. I'll have you know . . .

BLACKSTONE: Of course it's a good move. Now take it to the old pretender over there before you asphyxiate me.

(FRANCES is about to say something but thinks better of it; she looks questioningly at WILLIAM again; he shrugs, scratches his head and then gestures for her to go over to VICKERS' table)

WILLIAM: (to audience) If you can't budge one pillar, try another. (turns to face FRANCES, who is still hesitant, and, with gestures, encourages her on; she goes quietly to VICKERS' table)

VICKERS: Is that you pussyfooting around again, William?

FRANCES: It's me, Mr. Vickers.

VICKERS: Well, just don't stand there. Read the old buzzard's next move.

FRANCES: (starts to say something but then reads from the slip dutifully) "Rook takes knight, check."

VICKERS: (looking up) My gawd! You're not William, you're . . .

FRANCES: (sexily) I'm Frances, Mr. Vickers. Frances Samson. My friends call me Fran.

VICKERS: Well where the devil is William? He's in my will, you know. (pause; he takes out his pocket watch and scrutinizes it about an inch from his glasses) It's only quarter of the hour. He's got another fifteen minutes on duty. The club will not tolerate goldbricking. A hard day's work is

a wage in the Lord's grace and a penny saved is a penny earned and so on. Now what's that jack-ass move again?

FRANCES: (becoming exasperated) Here, read it yourself! (shoves sheet under his nose)

VICKERS: (grabbing her wrist and examining her hand closely) Young man, you really ought to cut your nails.

FRANCES: (pulling back her hand) Let go, you old coot. Don't you know a woman when you . . .

VICKERS: (primly outraged) By God we'll have no obscenities in here, young man.

FRANCES: What obscenity?

VICKERS: Unforgivable. I'm afraid you just won't do. Didn't William teach you anything? (squinting) And that hair! Don't you college boys have any sense of propriety? It actually curls!

FRANCES: (as WILLIAM moves to table) But I'm . . . I'm (she is almost crying) I'm . . .

WILLIAM: She's a female, Vickers—a woman, a lady, a girl, a member of the opposite sex, a broad, a chicky! Can't you see that, you old fool? She's a woman. W-O-M-A-N.

VICKERS: Well this time Blackstone's gone too far. I won't play with a scoundrel who sends obscenities with his moves.

WILLIAM: (raging) You can't be that blind. Look at her, you imbecile. She's a woman! AN HONEST TO GOD WOMAN IS IN YOUR CLUB!

BLACKSTONE: What's that? Is that you, Thurgood? You're getting your voice back.

WILLIAM: (going over to BLACKSTONE'S table) I NEVER LOST IT, YOU HORSE'S ASS.

BLACKSTONE: Glad to hear it, Thurgood. Glad to hear it.

VICKERS: Why, he ought to be tarred and feathered. And driven out on a rail. Mere blackballing is too good for him.

WILLIAM: (he runs back to VICKERS' table) It wasn't Blackstone's move—it was mine! The pawn's gambit, you blithering idiot!

VICKERS: Is he annotating his moves again, William? (bends to chess board) Let's see. A pawn's gambit.

WILLIAM: (about to yell something else at VICKERS, stops and heads back towards BLACKSTONE and starts to shout) DAMN YOU, BLACKSTONE . . . (suddenly he clutches his chest)

Aghhhhhh. (he drops to his knees) SHE IS A WOMAN! (he falls into a lifeless heap on the floor)

FRANCES: (running to help WILLIAM) Oh, Mr. Thurgood. (she bends over him, trying to shake some life into him) Are you all right? Please, Mr. Thurgood, speak to me.

VICKERS: (ceremoniously removing his glasses and looking squarely at her with perfect sight) I don't think he can, Frances. It runs in his family.

FRANCES: What?

VICKERS: A weak hearted lot—to a man. Pity. A good name, too, though William didn't put much stock in that.

FRANCES: (frightened) Do you mean he's . . . he's dead?

BLACKSTONE: (obviously hearing clearly) I'm afraid so, young . . . (reluctantly, squeamishly) lady.

VICKERS: I simply won't tolerate such language, I tell you.

FRANCES: Well, for heaven's sake, what are we going to do?

BLACKSTONE: We? You are going to leave—quietly and unobtrusively. As for Vickers and myself, we are going to complete our game of chess.

VICKERS: Don't worry, dear; we'll put you in our wills.

BLACKSTONE: Right. Scratch out William and put in Frances. Frances Samson, was it not?

FRANCES: How did you know that?

VICKERS: He heard William mention it. There's not much that escapes his ears.

BLACKSTONE: Vickers, on the other hand, sees almost everything.

VICKERS: He's only deaf to what he chooses not to hear.

BLACKSTONE: And he's only blind to what he chooses not to see.

VICKERS: (puts his glasses back on) And I wish not to see you any longer. (he turns and examines the chess board) This is a **men's** club. A very exclusive men's club.

BLACKSTONE: There is nothing to be done, my dear. And nothing left to hear. (he too rivets his attention on his chess board)

FRANCES: (goes to BLACKSTONE'S table, speaking imploringly) But Mr. Blackstone, something must be done.

BLACKSTONE: (raising his trumpet to his ear) Eh?

FRANCES: SOMETHING MUST BE DONE.

BLACKSTONE: What's that? Do you have that witless turkey's next move?

(FRANCES is about to say something but checks herself)

VICKERS: Oh, yes, I almost forgot. There is something you can do, Frances. In William's pocket you will find a chess piece—a white pawn I believe. Would you fetch it for me? You are in my will, you know.

FRANCES: But what about Mr. Thurgood?

BLACKSTONE: Just do as Mr. Vickers asks, Frances.

(FRANCES hesitates a minute, then kneels and searches WILLIAM'S pockets. She finds the piece, gets up, and carries it to VICKERS; he takes it and places it on the board)

VICKERS: You may go now, Frances. And do do something about those nails.

(FRANCES backs away from the table, drops the tray and towel, turns on her heel and runs—as if at her wit's end—to exit and out)

BLACKSTONE: (after a long pause) I suppose this means that we'll have to converse, Vickers.

VICKERS: I'm afraid so.

BLACKSTONE: Well, it's your move.

VICKERS: (squinting at the table) I seem to have lost your last slip.

BLACKSTONE: I put you in check.

VICKERS: I know that.

BLACKSTONE: Rook takes knight, check.

VICKERS: Oh yes. (he moves his opponent's piece and examines the board) You know, I meant to tell Frances that gods help those who help themselves, but the poor dear ran off too quickly.

BLACKSTONE: Never mind the chit chat, Vickers. Just move.

VICKERS: Oh, I can see this will grow tiresome very quickly. Do you know if William has a son?

BLACKSTONE: William? William who?

VICKERS: Thurgood. After all, Blackstone, we can't go on like this—speaking to each other.

BLACKSTONE: No, you're quite right about that, Vickers. It's not to be endured. As for Thurgood's son, I really haven't heard.

VICKERS: Well, I suppose we'll have to look into it. A nuisance, of course. We'd have to put him in our wills.

BLACKSTONE: (impatiently) Never mind the folderol, Vickers. Just move.

VICKERS: As you wish. (he takes piece and moves it, removing his opponent's rook from the board) King takes rook.

BLACKSTONE: (pauses, examining the board carefully) Well, I've misjudged you, Vickers. It appears we'll reach a stalemate once again.

BLACKOUT

END

GETTING RID OF HORACE

by
John W. Fiero

CHARACTERS:

HAROLD WORTHINGTON a man in his early fifties
MARTHA WORTHINGTON his wife, some years younger
NOAH ARKMAN an elderly but robust man
SARAH ARKMAN his wife, much younger

SETTING: The lawn of the large suburban home of the WORTHINGTONS, located in an exclusive and expensive subdivision. A table, sun umbrella and two or three lawn chairs serve as furniture. The time is mid-morning of a Saturday in the not too distant future.

AT RISE, HAROLD is standing next to the table looking off towards the ARKMANS' property through a pair of binoculars. MARTHA is seated at the table, sipping tea from a cup. On the table there are a tray, tea service and breakfast accoutrements.

HAROLD: Isn't Saturday supposed to be their day of rest?

MARTHA: The tea is getting cold.

HAROLD: Yes, I'm sure it is.

MARTHA: Where do you suppose Horace has gone?

HAROLD: Bertie told me that she used to work for a rabbi who had to turn on his television before sundown on Fridays and leave it on all night so he could watch football games on Saturday.

MARTHA: Do you suppose he's gone off to the Simpsons' again?

HAROLD: Said he couldn't touch the set on Saturday . . . not even to change channels.

MARTHA: Dear, I do wish you'd stop gawking at them.

HAROLD: I am not gawking. Can you imagine one of those people liking something as American as football . . . and a rabbi to boot. So much for the spirit of one's convictions. (pause) Lord, he's got enough lumber to build three houses.

MARTHA: I know that you don't like Horace.

HAROLD: Like him? I despise the beast.

MARTHA: You just have it in for cockapoos.

HAROLD: I told you long ago, Martha: I only like Irish setters.

MARTHA: We'll have to look for him.

HAROLD: What on earth can they be up to?

MARTHA: Harold, do sit down and drink some tea. You're as bad as those Arabs . . . spying like that.

HAROLD: (lowering the binoculars and speaking sternly) I am not spying, Martha. As president of our subdivision's association I am duty-bound to know what is going on . . . to make sure that nobody is in violation of the subdivision ordinances.

MARTHA: Hmm, hmmm. . . especially the Arkmans.

HAROLD: Do you know what your trouble is?

MARTHA: (sighs) Please sit down and drink your tea.

HAROLD: You're ingenuous—that's what.

MARTHA: So you've told me.

HAROLD: You don't know these people.

MARTHA: I've spoken to them. At least I've done that.

HAROLD: Yes . . . much to my chagrin. A naive Kansas farm girl—that's what you are. And, please, don't start that nonsense about Mr. Goldstein, the friendly druggist back home.

MARTHA: He was a very nice man, and he went to all our high school football games . . . on Saturday.

HAROLD: Which only proves a point, Martha. A Jew in rural Kansas has a chance of becoming a decent sort, but only because he's not among his tight-fisted cronies.

MARTHA: There was the Rosen family. I'm sure they were Jewish too.

HAROLD: You just don't know, Martha.

MARTHA: What could have happened to him?

HAROLD: You're very short on experience. They are pushy . . . clannish . . . secretive . . . miserly . . . and, most of all, devious. I wish they had all moved to Kansas. Then you'd know what I'm talking about. Simply put: you are an innocent. As for that stupid cur of yours . . . he's probably raiding garbage cans. (he raises the binoculars and looks towards the ARKMANS' property once again) Damn if I can figure out what he's building.

MARTHA: You're not at all kind.

HAROLD: It almost looks as if he's laying a keel . . . for a boat. He's got the whole bunch out there helping him.

MARTHA: They're going to catch you spying again.

HAROLD: Even that obnoxious little urchin . . . the grandson . . .

MARTHA: Canaan.

HAROLD: Yes . . . they even have him banging away. (pause) I'll give them this: they are industrious. It's amazing the way that old man swings a hammer and bounces around. (pause) Oh, oh. (he suddenly turns around and looks in the opposite direction) Did they see me?

MARTHA: I'm sure I don't know. I'm not looking at them. I'm keeping an eye out for Horace.

HAROLD: (very loudly) DID YOU SEE HIM, DEAR? DEFINITELY A SPARROW HAWK.

MARTHA: You're not fooling them, Harold.

HAROLD: (still loudly) VERY RARE THIS TIME OF YEAR. (in a normal voice) Are they still looking this way?

MARTHA: Harold, I refuse to do your peeking for you. Look for yourself.

HAROLD: (lowering the binoculars and sitting down) You are no help at all, Martha. The least you can do is pour me some tea.

MARTHA: (she pours him a cup from the teapot) I really don't understand why you have to spy on them.

HAROLD: I am not spying. I'm observing. (pause) Isn't there any toast left?

MARTHA: No. And you are spying.

HAROLD: I am not. What happened to all the toast?

MARTHA: It was cold and soggy, so I fed it to Horace . . . half an hour ago.

HAROLD: But you know better than to feed that mutt bread, especially toasted and spread with butter and marmalade. He'll just puke it up.

MARTHA: It's your fault, Harold. If you would stop spying on Mr. Arkman long enough to eat your breakfast, it wouldn't get cold, and I wouldn't have to feed it to Horace.

HAROLD: Now that's a wonderful piece of female logic. Just because I don't eat it doesn't mean that you have to feed it to your worthless beast.

MARTHA: Waste not want not.

HAROLD: Giving Horace my breakfast is a waste.

MARTHA: I'll make you some more if you want.

HAROLD: No . . . don't bother. (he picks up the binoculars and swings around in his chair to peer at ARKMANS again)

MARTHA: (pause) They're on to you know.

HAROLD: What's that?

MARTHA: The Arkmans. You . . . what is it they say? . . . you blew your lid.

HAROLD: The word is "cover," my dear.

MARTHA: Whatever. They've seen you spying on them.

HAROLD: I believe it *is* going to be some sort of boat.

MARTHA: Mr. Arkman has not been taken in by your bird act for one moment.

HAROLD: And just how do you know that?

MARTHA: Harold, we've lived next to the Arkmans for six years.

HAROLD: I am painfully aware of that fact, Martha . . . rather, I am painfully aware that they have lived next to us for six years.

MARTHA: And in all that time you have never showed the slightest interest in birds. Now, all of a sudden, you expect them to believe that you've become an ardent bird watcher? Nonsense.

HAROLD: People do develop hobbies, you know. (pause) It just has to be a hull.

MARTHA: You'd be the laughingstock of the Audubon Society.

HAROLD: It must be . . . what . . . oh, at least three or four hundred feet long. The man is mad . . . absolutely stark-raving mad.

MARTHA: Yesterday you bellowed out that what was distinctly a mocking bird was a pileated woodpecker.

HAROLD: So what? They couldn't see what I was pointing at. (pause) How in blazes do they think they plan to move that thing?

MARTHA: My dear, there isn't a pileated woodpecker to be found within a thousand miles of here. And before that it was a bald-headed eagle. Not a chance of seeing one of them this side of Colorado.

HAROLD: So what? That old fool wouldn't know the difference.

MARTHA: Ah, that's where you're wrong.

HAROLD: Lapstrake and double ended . . . as sure as you're born, it's a boat . . . a huge boat.

MARTHA: Mr. Arkman is some sort of naturalist.

HAROLD: What's that?

MARTHA: Mr. Arkman is very interested in the local fauna.

HAROLD: Oh? And just where did you pick up that piece of information? Been to your hair-dresser's, eh? . . . the old gossip mill? They will never be able to budge that thing.

MARTHA: As a matter of fact, Ham told me.

HAROLD: (lowering the binoculars and staring at her) So, you've been talking to them again. I'm very unhappy with you, Martha . . . very unhappy indeed. Last time you promised that it wouldn't happen again.

MARTHA: It was quite unavoidable.

HAROLD: You're just as willful as that mutt of yours.

MARTHA: What could I do? Ham and young Canaan came to the front door while Bertie was out doing the shopping.

HAROLD: What? They had the nerve to come over here?

MARTHA: They wanted to know if they could try to trap a couple of squirrels in our pecan tree. They said Mr. Arkman wanted them for his menagerie.

HAROLD: (fuming) Well that is most definitely the last straw. In our pecan tree! Of all the damn gall.

MARTHA: They were very polite.

HAROLD: And you actually talked to them.

MARTHA: What was I to do? I couldn't very well stand there in stony silence.

HAROLD: You should have unleashed that worthless dog on them. In our pecan tree . . . just think of it . . . in our tree.

MARTHA: I told them we couldn't permit it.

HAROLD: And that's all? It's lucky for them I didn't answer the door. I hope you know what they were really doing. (pause) No, I imagine not. That's your Kansas innocence. They were trying to make inroads, Martha. That's what they were doing. Trying to get one of their crooked noses through the door. I know the way they work. How do you think they got that idiot Forster to sell them that place? By conniving, that's how.

MARTHA: They seemed very nice.

HAROLD: Poisonous . . . just like rotten apples. They know once they get their noses in they can spoil the whole barrel. That's their conniving method. In six months they'll be pressing us to move through their subtle, elbow-rubbing tactics. It's happened in a dozen good neighborhoods. Let one in, the property values slump, and before you know it, everybody's learning to read from right to left and wearing beanies. Where do think ghettos come from?

MARTHA: Not from mixed-up metaphors, I'm sure.

HAROLD: Yes, well I promise you, this is one apple they won't spoil. If I ever sell, it won't be to one of their tribe. It'll be to a promiscuous, dirty Latino with muchos bambinos and lice. They wouldn't like that, I can assure you.

MARTHA: Neither would the Simpsons or the rest of our neighbors.

HAROLD: (ignoring the observation) They've tried before. Remember when Arkman's shyster son . . .

MARTHA: Shem.

HAROLD: That's the one. Remember when he applied for membership in the country club? Talbert and Johnson thought it was time to let in a token Yid, but Bill Simpson and I straightened them out. It was unanimous. We wrote back and told him that we thought he'd be much happier playing at Muni, where they have no objections to mixed twosomes. It will be a cold day at the Equator before I see a kike trapping squirrels in my pecan tree, I can tell you. (he raises the binoculars again, once more surveying the progress of the ARKMANS) They're already putting down the decking. (pause) I'll be damned if I can see how he plans to power the thing, much less move it.

MARTHA: Maybe they have no intention of moving it. Maybe it's not even a boat.

HAROLD: Any fool can see it's a boat. Clunker build . . . and looking for all the world like one of those old Viking ships, only a lot bigger.

MARTHA: Couldn't it be a modernesque temple . . . a synagogue?

HAROLD: Oh don't be ridiculous, Martha. We couldn't even build a church in this subdivision. The zoning regulations are very explicit . . . residential dwellings only. (chuckling) And that's why they're in a heap of trouble.

MARTHA: What trouble?

HAROLD: (lowering the binoculars and speaking triumphantly) They are going to be in violation of the subdivision covenant. We've got them on the hip, Martha . . . on the hip.

MARTHA: What does that mean?

HAROLD: Don't you see? They didn't get a building permit.

MARTHA: Which means?

HAROLD: Which means that they are either going to have to move that monstrosity or go to court—maybe even pay a whopping fine. The covenant stipulates that a building permit is required unless the structure is both temporary and portable. And just look at it, Martha. It's obviously not meant to be either temporary or portable. (he hands her the binoculars)

MARTHA: (peering through the binoculars at the ARKMANS' property) It certainly is big . . . and quite substantial looking. (lowering the glasses) Maybe they do have a building permit.

HAROLD: No, that they do not. Bill and I checked as soon as the first piece of lumber was delivered. And we've checked every day since.

MARTHA: (handing him back the binoculars) It's most peculiar. I can't imagine that Shem would let his father overlook . . .

HAROLD: Ah, what does that ambulance chaser know? He probably spends all his time suing his relatives. I tell you, there's no way they could move that thing. At the very least they'll have to dismantle it. Nothing to do now but sit back and wait until the last nail goes in; then I'll see to it that a petition is put before the association, demanding that they tear the thing apart. If they refuse, old Harry Kingston will just love to take them to court. (he raises the binoculars to check the progress again) Oh, oh . . . something new. They're working on a cabin now. (pause) Good . . . excellent . . . nail away.

MARTHA: I do hope that you aren't going to gloat.

HAROLD: And why not.

MARTHA: It must mean a lot to them, working the way they are.

HAROLD: Tsk, tsk—too bad.

MARTHA: You ought to have a little compassion.

HAROLD: For them? I have about as much for them as I do for that miserable beast of yours. (pause) Now they're putting the roof on. Remarkable the way they work. (pause) I'd say the whole thing is of very primitive design . . . but it sure is big. Hell, it must be close to five hundred feet long.

MARTHA: It's exactly three hundred cubits.

HAROLD: What?

MARTHA: Three hundred cubits. That's how long it is.

HAROLD: (lowering the binoculars and looking at her oddly) What the devil are you talking about?

MARTHA: Mrs. Arkman said that it was to be three hundred cubits long. At least I gather she was talking about that thing.

HAROLD: Martha, you amaze me. You've been talking to the whole damn family behind my back.

MARTHA: I wasn't talking to Sarah.

HAROLD: Sarah?

MARTHA: I was in the pet store buying Horace that new collar and overheard her talking to Mr. Seymour. She said that Mr. Arkman was working on a big project of very specific dimensions. It had to be exactly three hundred cubits long, fifty wide and thirty high.

HAROLD: You're a regular font of information. What in the hell were you doing talking to Mrs. Arkman?

MARTHA: I told you, dear. I wasn't talking to her. She was just there, ordering all kinds of things . . .

HAROLD: In Seymour's Pet Shop.

MARTHA: Yes. Two by two, she said. She had to have them two by two.

HAROLD: Have what?

MARTHA: Pets, of course . . . mates. She ordered guinea pigs, white mice, cocker spaniels, parrots, parakeets, canaries, Dalmatians . . .

HAROLD: I don't believe this.

MARTHA: Frogs, boa constrictors, turtles . . . every animal they had in the store. She wanted them all, and pet food too . . . oodles of it.

HAROLD: The whole family is mad.

MARTHA: She was very specific . . . three hundred cubits long.

HAROLD: And just what the hell is a cubit?

MARTHA: She said Mr. Arkman knew. He has a stick exactly three cubits long.

HAROLD: And you stood there listening to all that without finding out what a cubit is?

MARTHA: I was just doing what you told me. I was not going to speak to her unless she spoke to me first.

HAROLD: My dear, sometimes you need to take a little initiative. Cubit . . . I'll bet it's part of that commie metric system.

MARTHA: It's in the dictionary.

HAROLD: Which dictionary?

MARTHA: Our Webster's.

HAROLD: In our *American* dictionary?

MARTHA: Yes.

HAROLD: You looked it up?

MARTHA: Yes.

HAROLD: And why the devil didn't you tell me all this before?

MARTHA: I was afraid you'd be angry.

HAROLD: I am not angry. Now what in blue blazes is a cubit?

MARTHA: The definition is not very exact. All it says is that it's any of various ancient units of length based on . . . let's see . . . based on the length of the forearm from the elbow to the tip of the . . . the tip of the middle finger. Yes, that's right. And that it can be anywhere from eighteen to twenty-one inches long.

HAROLD: Damn if that isn't just like them . . . devious and secretive. An inch is an inch, a yard is a yard, but a cubit is anywhere from eighteen to twenty-one inches. Well, let's see. (he pauses to do some mental calculation) That makes it anywhere from four hundred and fifty to five hundred and twenty-five feet. (impressed, he raises the binoculars to look once more) Extraordinary!

MARTHA: What is it?

HAROLD: They've already finished the cabin! I've never seen people work like that.

MARTHA: You've never seen an old-fashioned Kansas barn raising.

HAROLD: Good grief . . . what are they doing now?

MARTHA: I remember when the Filmores put one up. It took less than six hours. And guess who helped.

HAROLD: They're lowering a gangplank.

MARTHA: Mr. Goldstein helped—that's who. I don't remember if the Rosens were there or not.

HAROLD: What's he got? Damn . . . that crazy old fool is carrying . . . why, yes, he's carrying sheep on board. He's got two sheep under his arms.

MARTHA: How very odd. Are you sure?

HAROLD: (lowering the binoculars) Call the block warden, Martha. The subdivision restrictions are very explicit about this sort of thing. Other than standard house pets, there can be no domestic animals of any sort.

MARTHA: Oh you must be mistaken, dear. Maybe they are woolly dogs.

HAROLD: Don't argue with me, Martha. I know what I saw.

MARTHA: But you must be seeing things. Look again.

HAROLD: (raising the binoculars and peering once again) They were sheep I tell you . . . I don't believe it!

MARTHA: What is it?

HAROLD: Donkeys.

MARTHA: Donkeys?

HAROLD: That's what I said . . . donkeys. That shyster is dragging a pair of them up the gangway.

MARTHA: Now that is ridiculous, dear. What would the Arkmans be doing with donkeys?

HAROLD: And there goes that other one . . . oh what the devil is his name? . . . the other son.

MARTHA: Jappeth.

HAROLD: Yes. He's got two dogs on leashes . . . damn cockapoos, just like Horace . . . hell's bells, that is Horace!

MARTHA: Don't be silly, Harold.

HAROLD: I'm sure it is. I recognize your cur's twenty-four-dollar collar when I see it. (he lowers the binoculars) They've stolen your dog, Martha. (he laughs) They've gone and taken your damn dog.

MARTHA: You must be imagining things. They wouldn't do anything like that.

HAROLD: (laughing again) It's Horace I tell you. If that doesn't take the cake.

MARTHA: It must just look like Horace.

HAROLD: (raising the binoculars again) I know that damn dog. Wait until they find out what a puker he is . . . Oh my God!

MARTHA: What now?

HAROLD: No, it can't be. (he lowers the binoculars again) I must need glasses, Martha. I could swear I just saw Ham and Shem herding a couple of giraffes on board.

MARTHA: Dear . . . are you feeling alright? You have to be mistaken.

HAROLD: (he raises the binoculars and looks once more) You're right. They aren't giraffes. They're zebras.

MARTHA: Well, that's a relief.

HAROLD: Zebras . . . and right behind them two elephants.

MARTHA: I don't think so, dear. Not elephants.

HAROLD: It's a damn zoo . . . that's what they've built—a damn zoo. I'm going to have to check the subdivision regulations . . . oh, oh!

MARTHA: Don't tell me.

HAROLD: Mrs. Arkman.

MARTHA: Sarah?

HAROLD: She's headed right in our direction . . . right through our ligustrum!

MARTHA: She wouldn't do a thing like that.

HAROLD: (lowering the binoculars) Of all the damn nerve. We're on a collision course. (he twists around and gestures over his shoulder) See—here she comes.

MARTHA: (looking in the indicated direction) Why, you're absolutely right. Now do be nice.

HAROLD: What the devil can she want?

MARTHA: You will be civil.

HAROLD: Why should I? She's intruding . . . uninvited. That's their damn, gate-crashing Jewish nerve for you.

MARTHA: If you can't be polite, then at least be quiet.

HAROLD: My dear, I shall be a study in that stony silence that you should have shown Ham and his brat at our front door. It is the only way to handle those pushy Arkmans.

MARTHA: (rising and greeting SARAH who now appears before the table) Why, Mrs. Arkman . . . what an unexpected pleasure. How are you?

SARAH: (she is extremely upset) Ach, Mrs. Worthington . . . you must help me. I think Mr. Arkman is meshugge.

MARTHA: Oh dear.

HAROLD: I'll say he is.

SARAH: He's after me with his stick.

MARTHA: What is wrong?

HAROLD: Maybe they've been arguing about the length of a cubit.

SARAH: (she starts pacing and wringing her hands) I said I wouldn't go inside. He thinks he's a mashiach. He's got the whole family in there . . . with all those farshtinkener animals. Oy vey iz mir!

HAROLD: (amused) That sounds like Horace.

SARAH: He says we have to stay in there for several months.

MARTHA: But that's terrible.

SARAH: Oy vey . . . you don't know the half of it. If I could tell you! Believe me, you would not believe me. How I have suffered, Mrs. Worthington.

MARTHA: Perhaps some tea.

HAROLD: (ominously) Martha.

MARTHA: It's cold, I'm afraid, but it might help calm you down.

SARAH: No thank you. But maybe I
could hide in your house?

HAROLD: Remember that
nose in the door.

MARTHA: But Mrs. Arkman . . .

HAROLD: What did I tell you, eh . . . just what did I tell you?

MARTHA: Please sit down and try to control yourself, Mrs. Arkman.

HAROLD: It's a conniving trick.

SARAH: Until all the water's gone. That's what he said. Until seven days after the dove returns with an olive leaf. I don't even understand what he's talking about. But I can tell you this: I'm not going to humor him. A dybbuk's got him.

HAROLD: The man has flipped his lid.

MARTHA: No, no dear . . . his cover. It was you who corrected me.

SARAH: Ach . . . what am I going to do, Mrs. Worthington?

MARTHA: Well why don't you begin by calling me Martha. And this is Harold.

NOAH: (from off stage) Sarah!

SARAH: Oy vey iz mir!

MARTHA: And we're happy to meet you too. Harold, why don't you pour Sarah some tea.

NOAH: (approaching) Where are you, you worthless golem?

SARAH: (shouting) I'm not coming back, you . . . you alter kocker!

NOAH: (stick in hand, he approaches the table) Ah, there you are, you bubkes.

SARAH: Oy . . . get away from me . . . you bulvon!

(A chase ensues around the table; MARTHA very calmly starts to pour some tea while NOAH runs after SARAH with his stick held in a striking position.)

NOAH: (stopping for a moment) I've tried to be reasonable woman, but now you leave me no choice. Don't play the draykop with me. We must get aboard . . . now.

SARAH: (pleadingly) Mr. Worthington, isn't there something you can do?

HAROLD: (calmly) Yes . . . as a matter of fact there is. I plan to buy an Irish setter. I've always wanted an Irish setter, a breed that *is* recognized by the AKC.

MARTHA: (by way of explanation) He never did like cockapoos.

NOAH: I'm going to beat you, Sarah. (the chase around the table again commences again)
Bummerkeh, stand still for a frosk in pisk.

SARAH: Oy gevalt!

MARTHA: We really don't need another dog, dear. We do have Horace.

HAROLD: You haven't been listening, Martha. I told you that they took him aboard

MARTHA: Stuff and nonsense. The dog you saw just looked like Horace.

HAROLD: It serves the dumb beast right. He never came when you called him.

MARTHA: What you mean is that he wouldn't come when *you* called him. He always came when I called him. More tea?

HAROLD: Not now, thank you. And although I don't care to argue the point, I can assure you that it was your turkey-brained dog they took aboard.

MARTHA: Are you sure, Harold?

HAROLD: Absolutely.

MARTHA: (now worried, she stands and starts to call) Horace!

HAROLD: It won't do any good, Martha.

MARTHA: Here Horace! Come to mommy, boy. (pause) Horace!

(NOAH gets close enough to hit SARAH with his stick)

SARAH: Oy gevalt! (she runs off in the direction of the ARKMANS' property with NOAH in hot pursuit)

MARTHA: Horace!

HAROLD: It won't do any good, my dear.

MARTHA: (she snatches the binoculars from HAROLD and peers through them towards the ARKMANS) Good heavens!

HAROLD: What's happening now?

MARTHA: Mr. Arkman is beating her.

HAROLD: They're all quite mad. Imagine that spectacle in court.

MARTHA: He's chasing her into the boat.

HAROLD: (now rubbing his hands) Good . . . good.

MARTHA: (she lowers the binoculars and shouts) Horace!

HAROLD: Give it up, my dear. The Arkmans have got him.

MARTHA: It's not possible.

HAROLD: Believe me—with that family, anything is possible. They're all quite mad.

(the lights start to fade)

MARTHA: (raising the binoculars and looking again) They're all inside. Are you sure about Horace?

HAROLD: Quite sure.

MARTHA: There's something wrong with these glasses. They seem to be . . . well, everything seems to be dimmer.

HAROLD: (looking up and scanning the sky) It is getting darker. It looks as though we're going to have a storm.

MARTHA: (she lowers the binoculars again) HORACE! (the lights continue down)

HAROLD: As a matter of fact, I'd say we're going to have one hell of a storm. So much for the weather prediction. We were supposed to be in for several days of clear skies. We better go inside.

MARTHA: Not without Horace. (calling loudly) HORACE!

HAROLD: (quietly and firmly) I told you, Martha—he's on their boat.

MARTHA: Are you absolutely sure?

HAROLD: (wearily) For the last time, yes . . . I'm absolutely sure.

MARTHA: (raising the binoculars and looking once again) Will he be alright? That boat doesn't look all that substantial.

HAROLD: I'm sure he's perfectly safe, my dear . . . perfectly safe. (laughs) After all, what's a little rain?

(Blackout)

END

