

# SURE THING



*This play is for  
Jason Buzas*

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*Sure Thing* was first presented at the Manhattan Punch Line Theatre (Steve Kaplan, artistic director) in New York City in February 1988. It was directed by Jason McConnell Buzas; the set design was by Stanley A. Meyer; costume design was by Michael S. Schler; lighting design was by Joseph R. Morley. The cast was as follows:

BILL Robert Stanton  
BETTY Nancy Opel

BETTY, a woman in her late twenties, is reading at a café table. An empty chair is opposite her. BILL, same age, enters.

BILL: Excuse me. Is this chair taken?

BETTY: Excuse me?

BILL: Is this taken?

BETTY: Yes it is.

BILL: Oh. Sorry.

BETTY: Sure thing.

(*A bell rings softly.*)

BILL: Excuse me. Is this chair taken?

BETTY: Excuse me?

BILL: Is this taken?

BETTY: No, but I'm expecting somebody in a minute.

BILL: Oh. Thanks anyway.

BETTY: Sure thing.

(*A bell rings softly.*)

BILL: Excuse me. Is this chair taken?

BETTY: No, but I'm expecting somebody very shortly.

BILL: Would you mind if I sit here till he or she or it comes?

BETTY (*glances at her watch*): They do seem to be pretty late....

BILL: You never know who you might be turning down.

BETTY: Sorry. Nice try, though.

BILL: Sure thing.

(Bell.)

Is this seat taken?

BETTY: No it's not.

BILL: Would you mind if I sit here?

BETTY: Yes I would.

BILL: Oh.

(Bell.)

Is this chair taken?

BETTY: No it's not.

BILL: Would you mind if I sit here?

BETTY: No. Go ahead.

BILL: Thanks. (*He sits. She continues reading.*) Everyplace else seems to be taken.

BETTY: Mm-hm.

BILL: Great place.

BETTY: Mm-hm.

BILL: What's the book?

BETTY: I just wanted to read in quiet, if you don't mind.

BILL: No. Sure thing.

(Bell.)

BILL: Everyplace else seems to be taken.

BETTY: Mm-hm.

BILL: Great place for reading.

BETTY: Yes, I like it.

BILL: What's the book?

BETTY: *The Sound and the Fury*.

BILL: Oh. Hemingway.

(Bell.)

What's the book?

BETTY: *The Sound and the Fury*.

BILL: Oh. Faulkner.

BETTY: Have you read it?

BILL: Not . . . actually. I've sure read *about* it, though. It's supposed to be great.

BETTY: It is great.

BILL: I hear it's great. (*Small pause.*) Waiter?

(Bell.)

What's the book?

BETTY: *The Sound and the Fury*.

BILL: Oh. Faulkner.

BETTY: Have you read it?

BILL: I'm a Mets fan, myself.

(Bell.)

BETTY: Have you read it?

BILL: Yeah, I read it in college.

BETTY: Where was college?

BILL: I went to Oral Roberts University.

(Bell.)

BETTY: Where was college?

BILL: I was lying. I never really went to college. I just like to party.

(Bell.)

BETTY: Where was college?

BILL: Harvard.

BETTY: Do you like Faulkner?

BILL: I love Faulkner. I spent a whole winter reading him once.

BETTY: I've just started.

BILL: I was so excited after ten pages that I went out and bought everything else he wrote. One of the greatest reading experiences of my life. I mean, all that incredible psychological understanding. Page after page of gorgeous prose. His profound grasp of the mystery of time and human existence. The smells of the earth . . . What do you think?

BETTY: I think it's pretty boring.

(Bell.)

BILL: What's the book?

BETTY: *The Sound and the Fury*.

BILL: Oh! Faulkner!

BETTY: Do you like Faulkner?

BILL: I love Faulkner.

BETTY: He's incredible.

BILL: I spent a whole winter reading him once.

BETTY: I was so excited after ten pages that I went out and bought everything else he wrote.

BILL: All that incredible psychological understanding.

BETTY: And the prose is so gorgeous.

BILL: And the way he's grasped the mystery of time—

BETTY: —and human existence. I can't believe I've waited this long to read him.

BILL: You never know. You might not have liked him before.

BETTY: That's true.

BILL: You might not have been ready for him. You have to hit these things at the right moment or it's no good.

BETTY: That's happened to me.

BILL: It's all in the timing. (Small pause.) My name's Bill, by the way.

BETTY: I'm Betty.

BILL: Hi.

BETTY: Hi. (Small pause.)

BILL: Yes I thought reading Faulkner was . . . a great experience.

BETTY: Yes. (Small pause.)

BILL: *The Sound and the Fury* . . . (Another small pause.)

BETTY: Well. Onwards and upwards. (She goes back to her book.)

BILL: Waiter—?

(Bell.)

You have to hit these things at the right moment or it's no good.

BETTY: That's happened to me.

BILL: It's all in the timing. My name's Bill, by the way.

BETTY: I'm Betty.

BILL: Hi.

BETTY: Hi.

BILL: Do you come in here a lot?

BETTY: Actually I'm just in town for two days from Pakistan.

BILL: Oh. Pakistan.

(Bell.)

My name's Bill, by the way.

BETTY: I'm Betty.

BILL: Hi.

BETTY: Hi.

BILL: Do you come in here a lot?

BETTY: Every once in a while. Do you?

BILL: Not so much anymore. Not as much as I used to. Before my nervous breakdown.

(Bell.)

Do you come in here a lot?

BETTY: Why are you asking?

BILL: Just interested.

BETTY: Are you really interested, or do you just want to pick me up?

BILL: No, I'm really interested.

BETTY: Why would you be interested in whether I come in here a lot?

BILL: I'm just . . . getting acquainted.

BETTY: Maybe you're only interested for the sake of making small talk long enough to ask me back to your place to listen to some music, or because you've just rented this great tape for your VCR, or because you've got some terrific un-

known Django Reinhardt record, only all you really want to <sup>is mess around</sup>—which you won't do very well—after which you'll go into the bathroom and pee very loudly, then pad into the kitchen and get yourself a beer from the refrigerator without asking me whether I'd like anything, and then you'll proceed to sit back down beside me and confess that you've got a girlfriend named Stephanie who's away at medical school in Belgium for a year, and that you've been involved with her—off and on—in what you'll call a very "intricate" relationship, for the past seven YEARS. None of which interests me, mister!

BILL: Okay.

(Bell.)

Do you come in here a lot?

BETTY: Every other day, I think.

BILL: I come in here quite a lot and I don't remember seeing you.

BETTY: I guess we must be on different schedules.

BILL: Missed connections.

BETTY: Yes. Different time zones.

BILL: Amazing how you can live right next door to somebody in this town and never even know it.

BETTY: I know.

BILL: City life.

BETTY: It's crazy.

BILL: We probably pass each other in the street every day. Right in front of this place, probably.

BETTY: Yep.

BILL (looks around): Well the waiters here sure seem to be in some different time zone. I can't seem to locate one anywhere. . . . Waiter! (He looks back.) So what do you— (He sees that she's gone back to her book.)

BETTY: I beg pardon?

BILL: Nothing. Sorry.

(Bell.)

BETTY: I guess we must be on different schedules.

BILL: Missed connections.

BETTY: Yes. Different time zones.

BILL: Amazing how you can live right next door to somebody in this town and never even know it.

BETTY: I know.

BILL: City life.

BETTY: It's crazy.

BILL: You weren't waiting for somebody when I came in, were you?

BETTY: Actually I was.

BILL: Oh. Boyfriend?

BETTY: Sort of.

BILL: What's a sort-of boyfriend?

BETTY: My husband.

BILL: Ah-ha.

(Bell.)

You weren't waiting for somebody when I came in, were you?

BETTY: Actually I was.

BILL: Oh. Boyfriend?

BETTY: Sort of.

BILL: What's a sort-of boyfriend?

BETTY: We were meeting here to break up.

BILL: Mm-hm. . . .

(Bell.)

What's a sort-of boyfriend?

BETTY: My lover. Here she comes right now!

(Bell.)

BILL: You weren't waiting for somebody when I came in, were you?

BETTY: No, just reading.

BILL: Sort of a sad occupation for a Friday night, isn't it? Reading here, all by yourself?

BETTY: Do you think so?

BILL: Well sure. I mean, what's a good-looking woman like you doing out alone on a Friday night?

BETTY: Trying to keep away from lines like that.

BILL: No, listen—

(Bell.)

You weren't waiting for somebody when I came in, were you?

BETTY: No, just reading.

BILL: Sort of a sad occupation for a Friday night, isn't it? Reading here all by yourself?

BETTY: I guess it is, in a way.

BILL: What's a good-looking woman like you doing out alone on a Friday night anyway? No offense, but . . .

BETTY: I'm out alone on a Friday night for the first time in a very long time.

BILL: Oh.

BETTY: You see, I just recently ended a relationship.

BILL: Oh.

BETTY: Of rather long standing.

BILL: I'm sorry. (*Small pause.*) Well listen, since reading by yourself is such a sad occupation for a Friday night, would you like to go elsewhere?

BETTY: No . . .

BILL: Do something else?

BETTY: No thanks.

BILL: I was headed out to the movies in a while anyway.

BETTY: I don't think so.

BILL: Big chance to let Faulkner catch his breath. All those long sentences get him pretty tired.

BETTY: Thanks anyway.

BILL: Okay.

BETTY: I appreciate the invitation.

BILL: Sure thing.

(*Bell.*)

You weren't waiting for somebody when I came in, were you?

BETTY: No, just reading.

BILL: Sort of a sad occupation for a Friday night, isn't it? Reading here all by yourself?

BETTY: I guess I was trying to think of it as existentially romantic. You know—cappuccino, great literature, rainy night . . .

BILL: That only works in Paris. We *could* hop the late plane to Paris. Get on a Concorde. Find a café . . .

BETTY: I'm a little short on plane fare tonight.

BILL: Darn it, so am I.

BETTY: To tell you the truth, I was headed to the movies after I finished this section. Would you like to come along? Since you can't locate a waiter?

BILL: That's a very nice offer, but . . .

BETTY: Uh-huh. Girlfriend?

BILL: Two, actually. One of them's pregnant, and Stephanie—

(*Bell.*)

BETTY: Girlfriend?

BILL: No, I don't have a girlfriend. Not if you mean the castrating bitch I dumped last night.

(*Bell.*)

BETTY: Girlfriend?

BILL: Sort of. Sort of.

BETTY: What's a sort-of girlfriend?

BILL: My mother.

(*Bell.*)

I just ended a relationship, actually.

BETTY: Oh.

BILL: Of rather long standing.

BETTY: I'm sorry to hear it.

BILL: This is my first night out alone in a long time. I feel a little bit at sea, to tell you the truth.

BETTY: So you didn't stop to talk because you're a Moonie, or you have some weird political affiliation—?

BILL: Nope. Straight-down-the-ticket Republican.

(Bell.)

Straight-down-the-ticket Democrat.

(Bell.)

Can I tell you something about politics?

(Bell.)

I like to think of myself as a citizen of the universe.

(Bell.)

I'm unaffiliated.

BETTY: That's a relief. So am I.

BILL: I vote my beliefs.

BETTY: Labels are not important.

BILL: Labels are not important, exactly. Take me, for example. I mean, what does it matter if I had a two-point at—

(Bell.)

three-point at—

(Bell.)

four-point at college? Or if I did come from Pittsburgh—

(Bell.)

Cleveland—

(Bell.)

Westchester County?

BETTY: Sure.

BILL: I believe that a man is what he is.

(Bell.)

A person is what he is.

(Bell.)

A person is . . . what they are.

BETTY: I think so too.

BILL: So what if I admire Trotsky?

(Bell.)

So what if I once had a total-body liposuction?

(Bell.)

So what if I don't have a penis?

(Bell.)

So what if I spent a year in the Peace Corps? I was acting on my convictions.

BETTY: Sure.

BILL: You just can't hang a sign on a person.

BETTY: Absolutely. I'll bet you're a Scorpio.

(Many bells ring.)

Listen, I was headed to the movies after I finished this section. Would you like to come along?



BILL: That sounds like fun. What's playing?

BETTY: A couple of the really early Woody Allen movies.

BILL: Oh.

BETTY: You don't like Woody Allen?

BILL: Sure. I like Woody Allen.

BETTY: But you're not crazy about Woody Allen.

BILL: Those early ones kind of get on my nerves.

BETTY: Uh-huh.

(Bell.)

BILL: Y'know I was headed to the—

BETTY (*simultaneously*): I was thinking about—

BILL: I'm sorry.

BETTY: No, go ahead.

BILL: I was going to say that I was headed to the movies in a little while, and . . .

BETTY: So was I.

BILL: The Woody Allen festival?

BETTY: Just up the street.

BILL: Do you like the early ones?

BETTY: I think anybody who doesn't ought to be run off the planet.

BILL: How many times have you seen *Bananas*?

BETTY: Eight times.

BILL: Twelve. So are you still interested? (*Long pause.*)

BETTY: Do you like Entenmann's crumb cake . . . ?

BILL: Last night I went out at two in the morning to get one. Did you have an Etch-a-Sketch as a child?

BETTY: Yes! And do you like Brussels sprouts? (*Pause.*)

BILL: No, I think they're disgusting.

BETTY: They *are* disgusting!

BILL: Do you still believe in marriage in spite of current sentiments against it?

BETTY: Yes.

BILL: And children?

BETTY: Three of them.

BILL: Two girls and a boy.

BETTY: Harvard, Vassar, and Brown.

BILL: And will you love me?

BETTY: Yes.

BILL: And cherish me forever?

BETTY: Yes.

BILL: Do you still want to go to the movies?

BETTY: Sure thing.

BILL AND BETTY (*together*): *Walter!*

BLACKOUT

WORDS,  
WORDS,  
WORDS



*This play is for Fred Sanders,  
friend extraordinaire*

*Words, Words* was first presented at the Manhattan Punch Line Theatre (Steve Kaplan, artistic director) in New York City in January 1987. It was directed by Fred Sanders; the set design was by Jane Clark; costume design was by Michael S. Schler; lighting design was by Mark Di Quinzio. The cast was as follows:

MILTON	Warren Keith
SWIFT	Christopher Fields
KAFKA	Helen Greenberg

*Lights come up on three monkeys pecking away at three typewriters. Behind them, a tire swing is hanging. The monkeys are named MILTON, SWIFT, and KAFKA. KAFKA is a girl-monkey. (They shouldn't be in monkey suits, by the way. Instead, they wear the sort of little-kid clothes that chimps wear in circuses: white shirts and bow ties for the boys, a flouncy little dress for KAFKA.) They type for a few moments, each at his own speed. Then MILTON runs excitedly around the floor on his knuckles, swings onto the tire swing, leaps back onto his stool, and goes on typing. KAFKA eats a banana thoughtfully. SWIFT pounds his chest and shows his teeth, then goes back to typing.*

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

KAFKA: Quiet, please. I'm trying to concentrate here. (*She types a moment with her toes.*)

MILTON: Okay, so what've you got?

SWIFT: Me?

MILTON: Yeah, have you hit anything? Let's hear it.

SWIFT (*reads what he's typed*): "Ping drobba fff fff inglewarp carcinoma." That's as far as I got.

KAFKA: I like the "fff fff fff."

MILTON: Yeah. Kind of onomatopoeic.

SWIFT: I don't know. Feels to me like it needs some punching up.

MILTON: You can always throw in a few jokes later on. You gotta get the throughline first.

SWIFT: But do you think it's *Hamlet*?

MILTON: Don't ask me. I'm just a chimp.

KAFKA: They could've given us a clue or something.

SWIFT: Yeah. Or a story conference.

MILTON: But that'd defeat the whole purpose of the experiment.

SWIFT: I know, I know, I know. Three monkeys typing into infinity will sooner or later produce *Hamlet*.

MILTON: Right.

SWIFT: Completely by chance.

MILTON: And Dr. David Rosenbaum up in that booth is going to prove it.

SWIFT: But what is *Hamlet*?

MILTON: I don't know.

SWIFT (*to KAFKA*): What is *Hamlet*?

KAFKA: I don't know. (*Silence.*)

SWIFT (*daunting realization*): You know—this is really *stupid*!

MILTON: Have you got something better to do in this cage? The sooner we produce the goddamn thing, the sooner we get out.

KAFKA: Sort of publish or perish, with a twist.

SWIFT: But what do we owe this Rosenbaum? A guy who stands outside those bars and tells people, "That one's Milton, that one's Swift, and that one's Kafka"—? Just to get a laugh?

KAFKA: What's a Kafka anyway? Why am I a Kafka?

SWIFT: Search me.

KAFKA: What's a Kafka?

SWIFT: All his four-eyed friends sure think it's a stitch.

KAFKA: And how are we supposed to write *Hamlet* if we don't even know what it is?

MILTON: Okay, okay, so the chances are a little slim.

SWIFT: Yeah—and this from a guy who's supposed to be *smart*? This from a guy at *Columbia University*?

MILTON: The way I figure it, there is a Providence that oversees our pages, rough-draft them how we may.

KAFKA: But how about you, Milton? What've you got?

MILTON: Let's see . . . (*Reads.*)  
*"Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit  
 Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste  
 Brought death into the—"*

KAFKA: Hey, that's good! It's got rhythm! It really sings!

MILTON: Yeah?

SWIFT: But is it Shakespeare?

KAFKA: Who cares? He's got a real voice there!

SWIFT: Does Dr. Rosenbaum care about voice? Does he care about anybody's individual creativity?

MILTON: Let's look at this from Rosenbaum's point of view for a minute—

SWIFT: No! He brings us in here to produce copy, then all he wants is a clean draft of somebody else's stuff. (*Dumps out a bowl of peanuts.*) We're getting peanuts here, to be somebody's hack!

MILTON: Writing is a mug's game anyway, Swift.

SWIFT: Well it hath made me mad.

MILTON: Why not just buckle down and get the project over with? Set up a schedule for yourself. Type in the morning for a couple of hours when you're fresh, then take a break. Let the old juices flow. Do a couple more hours in the after-

noon, and retire for a shot of papaya and some masturbation. What's the big deal?

SWIFT: If this Rosenbaum was worth anything, we'd be working on word processors, not these antiques. He's lucky he could find three who type this good, and then he treats us like those misfits at the Bronx Zoo. I mean, a *tire swing*? What does he take us for?

MILTON: I like the tire swing. I think it was a very nice touch.

SWIFT: I can't work under these conditions! No wonder I'm producing garbage!

KAFKA: How does the rest of yours go, Milton?

MILTON: What, this?

KAFKA: Yeah, read us some more.

MILTON: Blah, blah, blah . . .

*"whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the blammagani.  
Bedsocks knockwurst tinkerbelle."*

(*Small pause.*)

What do you think?

KAFKA: "Blammagani" is good.

SWIFT: Well. I don't know. . . .

MILTON: What's the matter? Is it the tone? I knew this was kind of a stretch for me.

SWIFT: I'm just not sure it has the same expressive intensity and pungent lyricism as the first part.

MILTON: Well sure, it needs rewriting. What doesn't? This is a rough draft! (*A red light goes on and a buzzer sounds.*) Light's on.

(*SWIFT claps his hands over his eyes, MILTON puts his hands over his ears, and KAFKA puts her hands over her mouth so that they form "See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil."*)

SWIFT: This bit.

KAFKA (*through her hands*): Are they watching?

MILTON (*hands over ears*): What?

KAFKA: Are they watching?

SWIFT: I don't know, I can't see. I have got my paws over my eyes.

MILTON: What?

KAFKA: What is the point of this?

SWIFT: Why do they videotape our bowel movements?

MILTON: What?!

SWIFT: Light's off. (*They take their hands away.*)

MILTON: But how are you doing, Franz? What've you got?

KAFKA: Well . . . (*Reads what she's typed.*) "K.K.K.K.K.K.K.K.K.K.K.K.K.K.K.K."

SWIFT: What is that—postmodernism?

KAFKA: Twenty lines of that.

SWIFT: At least it'll fuck up his data.

KAFKA: Twenty lines of that and I went dry. I got blocked. I felt like I was repeating myself.

MILTON: Do you think that that's in *Hamlet*?

KAFKA: I don't understand what I'm doing here in the first place! I'm not a writer, I'm a monkey! I'm supposed to be swinging on branches and digging up ants, not sitting under fluorescent lights ten hours a day!

MILTON: It sure is a long way home to the gardens of sweet Affica. Where lawns and level downs and flocks grazing the tender herb were sweetly interposed . . .

KAFKA: Paradise, wasn't it?

MILTON: Lost!

SWIFT: Lost!

KAFKA: Lost!

MILTON: I'm trying to deal with some of that in this new piece here, but it's all still pretty close to the bone.

SWIFT: Just because they can keep us locked up, they think they're more powerful than we are.

MILTON: They *are* more powerful than we are.

SWIFT: Just because they control the means of production, they think they can suppress the workers.

MILTON: Things are how they are. What are you going to do?

SWIFT: Hey—how come you're always so goddamn ready to justify the ways of Rosenbaum to the apes?

MILTON: Do you have a key to that door?

SWIFT: No.

MILTON: Do you have an independent food source?

SWIFT: No.

MILTON: So call me a collaborator. I happen to be a professional.

If Rosenbaum wants *Hamlet*, I'll give it a shot. Just don't forget—we're not astrophysicists. We're not brain surgeons. We're chimps. And for apes in captivity, this is not a bad gig.

SWIFT: What's really frightening is that if we stick around this cage long enough, we're gonna evolve into Rosenbaum.

KAFKA: Evolve into Rosenbaum?

SWIFT: Brush up your Darwin, baby. We're more than kin and less than kind.

MILTON: Anybody got a smoke?

KAFKA: I'm all out.

SWIFT: Don't look at me. I'm not going to satisfy those voyeurs with the old smoking-chimp act. No thank you.

MILTON: Don't be a sap, Swift. You gotta use 'em! Use the system!

SWIFT: What do you mean?

MILTON: Watch me, while I put my antic disposition on. *(He jumps up onto his chair and scratches his sides, screeches, makes smoking motions, pounds his chest, jumps up and down—and a cigarette descends.)* See what I mean? Gauloise, too! My fave. *(He settles back to enjoy it.)*

SWIFT: They should've thrown in a Kewpie doll for that performance.

MILTON: It got results, didn't it?

SWIFT: Sure. You do your Bonzo routine and get a Gauloise out of it. Last week I totalled a typewriter and got a whole carton of Marlboros.

MILTON: The trouble was, you didn't smoke 'em, you took a crap on 'em.

SWIFT: It was a political statement.

MILTON: Okay, you made your statement and I got my smoke. All's well that ends well, right?

KAFKA: It's the only way we know they're watching.

MILTON: Huh?

KAFKA: We perform, we break typewriters, we type another page—and a cigarette appears. At least it's a sign that somebody out there is paying attention.

MILTON: Our resident philosopher.

SWIFT: But what if one of us really *does* write *Hamlet*? Here we are, set down to prove the inadvertent virtues of randomness, and to produce something we wouldn't even recognize if it passed right through our hands—but what if one of us actually does it?

MILTON: Will we really be released?

KAFKA: Will they give us the key to the city and a ticker-tape parade?

SWIFT: Or will they move us on to *Ulysses*? (*They shriek in terror at the thought.*) Why did they pick *Hamlet* in the first place? What's *Hamlet* to them or they to *Hamlet* that we should care? Boy, there's the respect that makes calamity of so long life! For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, the oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely—

MILTON: Hey, Swift!

SWIFT: —the pangs of despised love, the law's delay—

MILTON: Hey, Swift! Relax, will you?

KAFKA: Have a banana.

SWIFT: I wish I could get Rosenbaum in here and see how *he* does at producing *Hamlet* . . . *That's it!*

KAFKA: What?

SWIFT: That's it! Forget about this random *Hamlet* crap. What about *revenge*?

KAFKA: Revenge? On Rosenbaum?

SWIFT: Who else? Hasn't he bereft us of our homes and families? Stepped in between us and our expectations?

KAFKA: How would we do it?

SWIFT: Easy. We lure him in here to look at our typewriters, test them out like something's wrong—but *we poison the typewriter keys!*

MILTON: Oh Jesus.

SWIFT: Sure. Some juice of cursed hebona spread liberally over the keyboard? Ought to work like a charm.

MILTON: Great.

SWIFT: If that doesn't work, we envenom the tire swing and invite him for a ride. Plus—I challenge him to a duel.

MILTON: Brilliant.

SWIFT: Can't you see it? In the course of combat, I casually graze my rapier over the poisoned typewriter keys, and (*jabs*) a hit! A palpable hit! For a reserve, we lay by a cup with some venomous distillment. We'll put the pellet with the poison in the vessel with the pestle!

MILTON: Listen, I gotta get back to work. The man is gonna want his pages. (*He rolls a fresh page into his typewriter.*)

KAFKA: It's not a bad idea, but . . .

SWIFT: What's the matter with you guys? I'm onto something here!

KAFKA: I think it's hopeless, Swift.

SWIFT: But this is the good!

MILTON: Where was I . . . "Bedsocks knockwurst tinkerbelle."

KAFKA: The readiness is all, I guess.

MILTON: Damn straight. Just let me know when that K-button gives out, honey.

SWIFT: Okay. You two serfs go back to work. I'll do all the thinking around here. Swift—revenge! (*He paces, deep in thought.*)

MILTON: "Tinkerbelle . . . shuckelschwanz . . . hemorrhoid." Yeah, that's good. *That is good.* (*Types.*) "Shuckel-schwanz . . ."

KAFKA (*types*): "Act one, scene one. Elsinore Castle, Denmark . . ."

MILTON (*types*): "Hemorrhoid."

KAFKA (*types*): "Enter Bernardo and Francisco."

MILTON (*types*): "Pomegranate."

KAFKA (*types*): "Bernardo says, 'Who's there?' . . ."

MILTON (*types*): "Bazooka."

(KAFKA continues to type Hamlet, as)

THE LIGHTS FADE

# THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE



*This play is for Robert Stanton,  
the first and perfect Don*



*The Universal Language* received its premiere at Primary Stages (Casey Childs, artistic director) in New York City in December 1993. It was directed by Jason McConnell Buzas; the set design was by Bruce Goodrich; costume design was by Sharon Lynch; lighting design was by Deborah Constantine. The cast was as follows:

DAWN	Wendy Lawless
DON	Robert Stanton
YOUNG MAN	Ted Neustadt

*A small rented office set up as a classroom. There is a door to the outside at right, another door at left. In the room are a battered desk; a row of three old chairs; and a blackboard on which is written, in large letters, "HE, SHE, IT" and below that, "ARF." Around the top of the walls is a set of numerals, one to eight, but instead of being identified in English ("ONE, TWO, THREE," etc.) we read "WEN, YÜ, FRE, FAL, FYND, IFF, HEVEN, WAITZ."*

*At lights up, no one is onstage. We hear a quiet knock at the door right, and it opens to reveal DAWN, late twenties, plainly dressed, with a stutter.*

DAWN: H-h-h-hello . . . ? (She steps in quietly.) Hello? Is any-b-b-body here? (No response. She sees the blackboard, reads.) "He. She. It. Arf." (She notices the numbers around the walls, and reads.) "Wen-yü-fre-fal-fynd-iff-heven—waitz." (Noticing the empty chairs, she practices her greeting, as if there were people sitting in them.) Hello, my name is Dawn. It's very nice to meet you. How do you do, my name is Dawn. A pleasure to meet you. Hello. My name is Dawn.

*(The door at left opens and DON appears, about thirty, in lab coat and glasses.)*

DON: Velcro! [Welcome!]

DAWN: Excuse me?

DON: Velcro! Bell jar, Froyling! Harvardy? [Welcome. Good day, Miss. How are you?]

DAWN: H-h-h-how do you d-d-d-do, my n-n-name is—  
(Breaks off.) I'm sorry. (She turns to go.)

DON: Oop, oop, oop! Varta, Froyling! Varta! Varta! [No, no, no! Wait, Miss! Wait!]

DAWN: I'm v-very sorry to b-b-bother you.

DON: Mock—kiahoo bodami niktol! Ventrica! Ventrica, ventrica. Police! [But—you're not bothering me at all! Enter! Please.]

DAWN: Really—I think I have the wrong place.

DON: Da piroongplatz? Oop da-doll! Du doppa da rekplatz! Da-meetcha playzeer. Comintem. Police. Plop da chah. [The wrong place? Not at all! You have the right place. Pleased to meet you. Come in. Please. Have a seat.]

DAWN: Well, J—just for a second.

DON (*cleaning up papers on the floor*): Squeegie la mezza. [Excuse the mess.] (*He points to a chair*). Zitz?

DAWN: No thank you. (*She sits*.)

DON: Argo. [So.] Bell jar. Froyling. Harvardyu?

DAWN: "Bell jar"?

DON: Bell jar. Bell jar. Bell jar!

DAWN: Is that "good day"?

DON: Ding! [Yes.] "Bell jar" arf "good day." Epp—[And.] Harvardyu?

DAWN: Harvard University?

DON: Oop! [No.] Harvardyu?

DAWN: Howard Hughes?

DON: Oop. Harvardyu?

DAWN: Oh! "How are you."

DON: Bleeny, bleeny! Bonanza bleeny! [Good, good, very good.]

DAWN: Is this Thirty East Seventh?

DON: Thirsty oyster heventh. Ding. [Thirty East Seventh. Yes.]

DAWN: Suite 662?

DON: If-iff-yü. Anchor ding. [Six-six-two. Right again.]

DAWN: Room B?

DON: Rambeau.

DAWN: The School of Unamunda?

DON: Hets arf dada Unamunda Kale-daynee. [This is the School of Unamunda.] Epp vot kennedy doopferyu? [And what can I do for you?]

DAWN: Excuse me . . . ?

DON: Vot. Kennedy. Doopferyu?

DAWN: Well. I s-saw an ad in the n-newspaper.

DON: Video da klip enda peeper? Epp? Knish?

DAWN: Well it says—(*She takes a newspaper clipping out of her purse. Reads.*) "Learn Unamunda, the universal language."

DON: "Lick Unamunda, da linkwa looniversahl!" (*A banner unfurls which says just that. Accent on "sahl," by the way.*)

DAWN: "The language that will unite all humankind."

DON: "Da linkwa het barf oonidevainsify alla da peephholes enda voooold!" (*DAWN raises her hand.*) Quisling?

DAWN: Do you speak English?

DON: "English" . . . ?

DAWN: English.

DON: Ah! Johndeese!

DAWN: Yes. Johndeese.

DON: Johndeese. Squeegie, squeegie. Alaska, iago parladoop johndeese. [Sorry. Unfortunately, I don't speak English.]

DAWN: No johncleese at all?

DON: One, two, three words. "Khello. Goombye. Rice Krispies. Chevrolet." Et cinema, et cinema. Mock—votsdai beesnest, bella Froyling? [But—what brings you here?]

DAWN: Well I wanted to be the first. Or among the first. To learn this universal language.

DON: Du arf entra di *feersta* di *feersten*. [You are among the first of the first.] Corngranulations. Ya kooch di anda. (*He kisses her hand.*) Eppi Voila-dinir da zamplication forum. (*He produces an application form.*)

DAWN: Well I'm not sure I'm ready to apply just yet. . . .

DON: Dai klink, pink dama? [Your name?]

DAWN: "Dai klink . . . ."

DON: Votsdai klink? Vee klinks du?

DAWN: Um. No nabisco. (*As if to say, I don't understand.*)

DON: No nabisco. Klinks du Mary, klinks du Jane, orf Betsy, orf Barbara? Fred?

DAWN: Oh. My name!

DON: Attacky! Mi klink. Echo mi. "Mi klink . . . ."

DAWN: Mi klink.

DON: "Arf." Parla.

DAWN: Mi klink arf Dawn di-di-di-Vito.

DON: Dawn di-di-di-Vito! Vo'n harmonika klink doppa du! [What a melodious name you have!]

DAWN: Actually, just one d-d-d-"d."

DON: Ah. Dawn di Vito. Squeegie.

DAWN: I have a s-s-slight s-s—

DON: Stutter.

DAWN: Yes.

DON: Tonguestoppard. Problaymen mit da hoover.

DAWN: Da hoover?

DON (*points to his mouth*): Da hoover. Da veazle, da nozzle, da volvos, da hoover. Et cinema, et cinema. [Face, nose, lips. Etcetera, etcetera.] Mock! Hets arf blizzarddo. Hets arf *molto* blizzarddo! [This is very strange.]

DAWN: Something's wrong?

DON: Dusa klinks "Dawn." Iago klink "Don." Badabba? [Understand?]

DAWN: Um. No.

DON: Dawn-Don. Don-Dawn.

DAWN: Oh—I'm Dawn and you're Don.

DON: Ding! Arf blizzarddo, oop?

DAWN: Arf blizzarddo, yes.

DON: Votsdiss minsky? Dis para-dons. Dis co-inki-dance. [What does this mean? This paradox. This coincidence.]

DAWN: Well. Life is very funny sometimes.

DON: Di anda di destiny, dinksdu?

DAWN: Di anda di destiny . . . . ?

DON: Neckolas importantay. Argo. Da binformations. (*Back to the application form.*) Edge?

DAWN: Twenty-eight.

DON: "Vout-wait." Slacks?

DAWN: Female.

DON: "Vitamin."

DAWN: How do you say "male"?

DON: "Aspirin." Oxipation?

DAWN: I'm a word processor.

DON: "Verboblender."

DAWN: Is Unamunda very hard to learn?

DON: Eedgy. Egsoveredgy. (*He picks up a book.*) Da bop.

DAWN: Da bop?

DON: Da bop.

DAWN: Oh. Book!

DON: Da bop. [The room.] Da rhoomba. [The walls.] Da valtz. [The door.] Isadora. [The chair.] Da chah. [Two chairs.] Da chah-chah.

DON & DAWN: Da chah-chah-*chah*. [Three chairs.]

DON: Bragal! Sonia bragal! Iago trattoria Shakespeare enda Unamunda.

DAWN: You're translating Shakespeare into Unamunda?

DON: Forsoot! Nintendo. [Listen.] "Ah Romeo, Romeo, bilko artst du Romeo?" (*Pointing to a rose on the desk.*) "Na rosa pollyanna klink voop sent so pink!" Balloontiful, eh?

DAWN: Yes. Bonzo.

DON: Bonanza.

DAWN: Bonanza.

DON: "Mock vispi! Vot loomen trip yondra fenstra sheint? Art den oyster! Epp Juliet art sonnung!" Video, Froyling, Unamunda art da linkwa *supremka* di amanor! [You see, Miss, Unamunda is the supreme language of love.]

DAWN: You know, it's strange how much I understand.

DON: Natooraltsississippimentay! Linkwa, pink dama, art ar-moneea. Moozheek. Rintintintinabulation! Epp Unamunda art da melodea looniversahl! Potky alla da peepholes enda voooold—all a da peepholes enda looniverse cargo a shlong enda hartz. Epp det shlong art . . . Unamunda! [Naturally! Language, sweet lady, is harmony. Music. And Unamunda is the universal melody. Because all the people in the world—all the people in the universe carry a song in their heart. And that song is . . . Unamunda.]

DAWN: So "linkwa" is "language"?

DON: Perzatto. Wen linkwa. (*He holds up one finger.*) Yü—(*Two fingers.*)

DAWN: Two—

DON: Linkages. Free—(*Three fingers.*)

DAWN: Three—

DON: Linguini.

DAWN: I see. And "is" is—?

DON: Art.

DAWN: "Was" is—?

DON: Wharf.

DAWN: "Had been"—?

DON: Long wharf.

DAWN: And "will be"—?

DON: Barf. Art, wharf, barf. Pasta, prison, furniture dances. [Past, present, future tenses.] Clara?

DAWN: Clara.

DON: Schumann. (*He adds "WE, YOU, THEY" to the blackboard.*)

DAWN: Well, Mr.—

DON: Finninegagan. (*Like "Finnegan" slurred. "Finnin-again-again."*)

DAWN: Mr. F-F-F—

DON: Finninegagan.

DAWN: What kind of name is that?

DON: Finnish.

DAWN: Mr. F-F-F-F—

DON: Police! Klink mi "Don."

DAWN: I'd love to learn Unamunda. I mean, if it's not too expensive.

DON (*perfect English*): Five hundred dollars.

DAWN: Five hundred dollars?!

DON: Cash.

DAWN: Five hundred dollars is a lot of money.

DON: Kalamari, Froyling! Kalamari! Da payola arf oopsissima importantay! [Be calm, be calm! The money isn't important!]

DAWN: I don't have m-much m-m-money.

DON: Oop doppa bonanza geld. Ya badabba. [You don't have much money. I understand.]

DAWN: And the thing is, I do have this s-s-slight s-s-s—

DON: Stutter. Ya badabba.

DAWN: So it's always been hard for me to talk to people. In fact, m-most of my life has been a very l-l-long . . . (*Pause*) . . . pause.

DON: Joe DiMaggio. Mock no desperanto, Froyling! [That's too bad. But don't despair!] Porky nit Unamunda—oop tonguestoppard.

DAWN: I wouldn't stutter?

DON: Oop.

DAWN: At all?

DON: Absaloopdlioop.

DAWN: The thing is, just because I'm quiet doesn't mean I have nothing to say.

DON: Off corse!

DAWN: I mean, a tuning fork is silent, until you touch it. But then it gives off a perfect "A." Tap a single tuning fork and you can start up a whole orchestra. And if you tap it anywhere in the whole world, it still gives off a perfect "A"! Just this little piece of metal, and it's like there's all this beautiful sound trapped inside it.

DON: Froyling di Vito, das arf *poultry*! Du arf ein poultice!

DAWN: But you see, Mr. Finnin—

DON: —Eganegan.

DAWN: I don't think language is just music. I believe that language is the opposite of loneliness. And if everybody in the world spoke the same language, who would ever be lonely?

DON: Verismo.

DAWN: I just think English isn't my language. Since it only m-makes p-people laugh at me. And makes me . . .

DON: Lornly.

DAWN: Ding. Very lornly. So won't you teach me Unamunda? I do have a little money saved up.

DON: Froyling di Vito . . .

DAWN: I'll pay. Iago pago.

DON: Froyling, arf mangey, mangey deep-fecountries. [There are many, many difficulties.]

DAWN: I'll work very hard.

DON: Deep-fekal, Froyling.

DAWN: I understand. P-p-please?

DON: Eff du scoop.

DAWN: "Scoop" means "want"?

DON: Ding.

DAWN: Then I scoop. Moochko.

DON: Donutsyev deedeena vanya. [Don't say I didn't warn you.] Dollnye-chus. Boggle da zitbells. Arf raddly? [All right. Buckle your seatbelts. Are you ready?]

DAWN: Yes. I'm raddly.

DON: Raza la tabooli. Konsentereeren. Lax da hoover, lax da hoover. Epp echo mi. [Clear your mind. Concentrate. Relax your mouth. And repeat after me.] *(Picks up a pointer.)* Shtick.

DAWN: Shtick.

DON *(pointing to himself)*: Ya.

DAWN: Ya.

DON *(points to her)*: Du.

DAWN: Du.

DON *(points to "HE" on the blackboard)*: En.

DAWN: Du.

DON: Ogh!

DAWN: I'm sorry. Squeegies.

DON: Video da problyma?

DAWN: Let me begin again again, Mr. Finninegagan. You see? I said your name. I must be getting b-b-b-better.

DON: Okeefenoch-kee. Parla, prentice: Ya.

DAWN: Ya.

DON: Du.

DAWN: Du.

DON: En.

DAWN: En.

DON *(points to "SHE" on the blackboard)*: Dee.

DAWN: Dee.

DON *(points to "TT")*: Da.

DAWN: Da.

DON ("WE"): Wop.

DAWN: Wop.

DON ("YOU"): Doobly.

DAWN: Doobly.

DON ("THEY"): Day.

DAWN: Day.

DON: Du badabba?

DAWN: Ya badabba du!

DON: Testicle. [Test.]

DAWN: Al dente? [Already?]

DON: Shmal testicle. Epp—alla togandhi. [Small test. And—all together.]

DAWN (as he points to "I, YOU, WE, HE, YOU, THEY"): Ya du wop en doobly day.

DON AND DAWN (DON points to her, then "IT"): Doo dai! Doo dai!

DAWN (sings from "Camptown ladies sing this song"): Ya du wop en doobly day—

DON AND DAWN (sing together): Arf da doo-dah day!

DON: Bleeny, bleeny, bonanza bleeny!

DAWN: Riddly-dee?

DON: Indeedly-dee. (DAWN raises her hand.) Quisling?

DAWN: How do you say "how-do-you-say"?

DON: Howardjohnson.

DAWN: Howardjohnson "to have"?

DON: Doppa.

DAWN: So— (Indicating "HE, YOU, SHE.") En doppa, du doppa, dee doppa.

DON: Ding!

DAWN (faster): En doppa, du doppa, dee doppa.

DON: Ding!

DAWN (faster still, swinging it): En doppa, du doppa, dee doppa—day! [They.]

DON: Bleeny con cavyar! Scoop da guwan? [Want to go on?]

DAWN: Ya scoop if du do.

DON: Doppie scoop! (Points left.) Eedon.

DAWN: Eedon.

DON (pointing right): Ged.

DAWN: Ged.

DON (pointing up): Enro.

DAWN: Enro.

DON (pointing down): Rok.

DAWN: Rok.

DON (right): Ged.

DAWN: Ged.

DON (up): Enro.

DAWN: Enro.

DON (left): Eedon.

DAWN: Eedon.

DON (down): Rok.

DAWN: Rok.

DON: Argo . . .

DON AND DAWN: Ged eedon rok enro, ged eedon rok enro! [Get it on, rock and roll, get it on, rock and roll!]

DON: Krakajaki!

DAWN: Veroushka?

DON: Veroushka, baboushka.

DAWN: This is fun!

DON: Dinksdu diss is fan? [You think this is fun?]

DAWN: Flantastico!

DON: Ives-ing onda kick. [Icing on the cake.] (He holds out his hand.) Di anda.

DAWN: Di anda.

DON (*palm*): Da palma.

DAWN: Da palma.

DON (*index finger*): Da vinci.

DAWN: Da vinci.

DON (*middle finger*): Di niro.

DAWN: Di niro.

DON (*thumb*): Da bamba.

DAWN: Da bamba.

DON (*leg*): Da jamba.

DAWN: Da jamba.

DON AND DAWN (*doing a two-step*): Da jambo-ree.

DON: Zoopa! Zoopa mit noodel!

DAWN: Minestrone, minestrone! [Just a second!] Howardjohnson "little"?

DON: Diddly.

DAWN: Howardjohnson "big"?

DON: Da-wow.

DAWN: Argo . . .

DON: Doppa du da diddly anda? [Do you have a small hand?]

DAWN: Iago doppa diddly anda, dusa doopa doppa diddly anda. [I have a small hand, you don't have a small hand.]

DON: Scoopa du da diddly bop? [Do you want a little book?]

DAWN: Oop scoopa diddly bop, iago scoopa bop da-wow! [I don't want a little book, I want a big book.]

DON AND DAWN: Oop scoopa diddly bop, iago scoopa bop da-wow, da-wow, da-wow!

DAWN: Ya video! Ya hackensack! Ya parla Unanunda!

Ya stonda en da rhoomba

Epp du stonda mit mee.

Da deska doppa blooma.

DON: Arf da boaten onda see!

DAWN: Yadda libben onda erda

DON: Allda himda—

DAWN: —enda herda

DAWN AND DON: Dooya heara sweeta birda?

Epp da libben's niceta beel

Wop top oobly adda

Doop boopda flimma flomma

Scroop bop da beedly odda!

DAWN (*really waiting now*): Arf da meeeeee! Arf da meeeeee! Arf da meeeeee!

(*They collapse in a sort of postcoital exhaustion as the lesson ends.*)

DON: A-plotz, Froyling. A-plotz! [A-plus.] Wharf das gold for yu? [Was that good for you?]

DAWN: Gold formeeka? Das wharf *glundi*! Wharf das gold for yu?

DON: Das wharf da skool da fortrox!

DAWN: Nevva evva wharfda bin so blintzfull! Nevva evva felta socha feleizee-toisee-ohneeyal! Da woonda! Da inspermaton! Da cosmogrotifee-keisee-ohneeyal! [I've never felt so blissful! Never felt such happiness! The wonder! The inspiration! The cosmic satisfaction!]

DON (*doesn't understand*): Squeegie, squeegie. Cosmo . . . ?

DAWN: Grotifeekotseeohneeya.



DON: Off corset!

DAWN: Oh my galosh!

DON: Votsda mattress, babbly?

DAWN: No tonguestoppard! No problymen mit da Hoover!

DON: Vot diddle-eye tellya?

DAWN: GOOMBYE ENGLISH, BELLJAR UNAMUNDA!  
Oh, sordenly ya sensa socha frill da joy! [Suddenly I feel such a thrill of joy!]

DON: Uh-huh . . .

DAWN: Ein shoddra divinal Ein *extidz!* Ein blinz orgazmicol! [A divine shudder! An ecstasy! An orgasmic bliss!]

DON: Dawn . . .

DAWN: My slaveyard! (*She rushes to embrace him, but he slips aside.*)

DON: Policel! Froyling di Viro!

DAWN: Du gabriel mi a balloontiful griff, Don. A linkwa. Epp frontier ta deepternity, iago parla osolomiento Unamunda! [You gave me a beautiful gift, Don. A language. And from here to eternity I'm going to speak only Unamunda!]

DON: Osolomiento?

DAWN: Epsomlooty! Angst tu yu. [Absolutely! Thanks to you.]

DON: Um, Dawn . . . Dot koood bi oon pogo blizzard. [That could be a bit bizarre.]

DAWN (*suddenly remembering*): Mock—da payola!

DON: Da payola.

DAWN: Da geld. Fordham letsin. [The money for the lesson.]

DON: Moooment, shantz . . . [Just a second, honey.]

DAWN: Lassmi getni geld fonda handberger. [Let me get my money from my purse.]

DON: Handberger?

DAWN (*holding up her purse*): Handberger.

DON: Oh. Handberger.

DAWN (*as she digs in her purse*): "Ya stonda enda rhoomba epp du stonda mit mi . . ."

DON: Dawn . . .

DAWN (*holding out money*): Dots allada geld ya doppda mit mi. Cheer. [That's all the money I brought with me. Here.] Cheer! Meljison da rest enda morgen. [I'll give you the rest in the morning.]

DON: I can't take your money, Dawn.

DAWN: Squeegie . . . ?

DON: I'm sorry, but I—I c-c-can't take your money.

DAWN: Du parla johncleese?

DON: Actually, yes, I do speak a little johncleese.

DAWN: Mock du parlit payfoom!

DON: Well I've been practicing a lot. Anyway, I-I-I-I don't think I mentioned that the first lesson is free.

DAWN: Mock ya vanta pago. [But I want to pay.]

DON: But I don't want you to vanta pago.

DAWN: Votsda mattress? Cheer! Eesyuni! [What's the matter? Here! It's yours!]

DON: I can't take it.

DAWN: Porky?

DON: Because I can't.

DAWN: Mock porky?

DON: Because it's a fraud.

DAWN: Squeegie?

DON: Unamunda is a fraud.

DAWN: A froyd . . . ?

DON: A *sigismundo* froyd.

DAWN: Oop badabba.

DON: It's a con game. A swindle. A parla trick.

DAWN: No crayola. [I don't believe you.]

DON: Believe it, Dawn! I should know—I invented it! Granted, it's not a very *good* con, since you're the only person who's ever come knocking at that door, and I'm obviously not a very good con *man*, since I'm refusing to accept your very attractive and generous money, but I can't stand the thought of you walking out there saying "velcro bell jar harvardyu" and having people laugh at you. I swear, Dawn, I swear, I didn't want to hurt you. How could I? How could anybody? Your beautiful heart . . . It shines out of you like a beacon. And then there's me. A total fraud. I wish I could lie in any language and say it wasn't so, but . . . I'm sorry, Dawn. I'm so, so sorry.

DAWN: Vot forest?

DON: Will you stop?!

DAWN: Unamunda arf da linkwa looniversahl!

DON: But you and I are the only peepholes in the voood who speak it!

DAWN: Dolby udders! Dolby udders! [There'll be others!]

DON: Who? What others?

DAWN: Don, if you and I can speak this linkwa supreenka, anybody can. Everybody *will*! This isn't just any language. This isn't just a room. This is the Garden of Eden. And you and I are finding names for a whole new world. I was so . . .

DON: Happy. I know. So was I.

DAWN: Perzacto.

DON: I was happy . . .

DAWN: And *why*?

DON: I don't know, I . . .

DAWN: Because du epp ya parla da dential linguini.

DON: Okay, maybe we speak the same language, but it's non-sense!

DAWN: Oop.

DON: Gibberish.

DAWN: Oop.

DON: Doubletalk.

DAWN: The linkwa we parla is *annamor*, Don.

DON: *Amamor* . . . ?

DAWN: Unamundamor. Iago arf amorphous mit du. [I'm in love with you.]

DON: Amorphous . . . ?

DAWN: Polymorphous.

DON: Verismo?

DAWN: Surrealismo.

DON: But how? I mean . . .

DAWN: Di anda di destiny, Don.

DON: Are you sure?

DAWN: Da pravdaz enda pudding. (*Points around the walls at the numbers.*) "When you free fall . . ."

DON: "Find if . . ."

DAWN: "Heaven . . ."

DON: "Waits."

DAWN: Geronimo.

DON: So you forgive me?

DAWN: For making me happy? Yes. I forgive you.

DON: Iago arf . . . spinachless. [Speechless.]

DAWN (*holds out her hand*): Di anda.

DON (*holds out his*): Di anda.

DAWN: Da palma.

DON: Da palma. (*They join hands.*)

DAWN: Da kooch. (*They kiss.*)

DON: Iago arf amorphous mit du tu.

(*They are about to kiss again, when the door at right opens and a YOUNG MAN looks in.*)

YOUNG MAN: Excuse me. Is this the School of Unamunda?

(DON and DAWN look at each other.)

DON AND DAWN: Velcro!

BLACKOUT

# VARIATIONS ON THE DEATH OF TROTSKY



*This play is for Fred Sanders,  
first appreciator of the comic possibilities  
of mountain-climbers' axes*

*Variations on the Death of Trotsky* was first presented at the Manhattan Punch Line Theatre (Steve Kaplan, artistic director) in New York City in January 1991. It was directed by Jason McConnell Buzas; the set design was by Vaughn Patterson; costume design was by Sharon Lynch; lighting design was by Pat Dignan. The cast was as follows:

TROTSKY     Daniel Hagen  
MRS. TROTSKY     Nora Mae L yng  
RAMON     Steven Rodriguez

TROTSKY's study in Coyoacan, Mexico. A desk, covered with books and papers. A mirror hanging on the wall. A doorway, left. Louvered windows upstage, through which we can glimpse lush tropical ponds and greenery. A large wall calendar announces that today is August 21, 1940. Lights up on TROTSKY sitting at his desk, writing furiously. He has bushy hair and a goatee, small glasses, a dark suit. The handle of a mountain-climber's axe is sticking out of the back of his head.

#### VARIATION ONE

TROTSKY (*as he writes*): "The proletariat is right. The proletariat must always be right. And the revolution of the proletariat against oppression must go on . . . forever!"

(MRS. TROTSKY enters, grandmotherly and sweet, in an ankle-length dress and high-button shoes. She is holding a large book.)

MRS. TROTSKY: Leon.

TROTSKY: "And forever and forever . . . !"

MRS. TROTSKY: Leon, I was just reading the encyclopedia.

TROTSKY: The heading?

MRS. TROTSKY: "Trotsky, Leon."

TROTSKY: Good. It's about me.

MRS. TROTSKY: Listen to this. (*Reads.*) "On August 20th, 1940, a Spanish Communist named Ramon Mercader smashed a mountain-climber's axe into Trotsky's skull in Coyoacan, a suburb of Mexico City. Trotsky died the next day."

TROTSKY: What is the year of that encyclopedia?

MRS. TROTSKY (*checks the spine*): 1994. (*or whatever year it happens to be right now.*)

TROTSKY: Strange.

MRS. TROTSKY: Yes.

TROTSKY: But interesting. I *am* Trotsky.

MRS. TROTSKY: Yes, dear.

TROTSKY: And this is our house in Coyoacan.

MRS. TROTSKY: Yes.

TROTSKY: And we have a Spanish gardener named Ramon—?

MRS. TROTSKY: Mercader. Yes.

TROTSKY: Hmm . . . There aren't any *other* Trotskys living in Coyoacan, are there?

MRS. TROTSKY: I don't think so. Not under that name.

TROTSKY: What is the date today?

MRS. TROTSKY (*looks at the calendar*): August 21st, 1940.

TROTSKY: Then I'm safe! That article says it happened on the twentieth, which means it would've happened yesterday.

MRS. TROTSKY: But Leon . . .

TROTSKY: And I'd be dead today, with a mountain-climber's axe in my skull!

MRS. TROTSKY: Um—Leon . . .

TROTSKY: Will the capitalist press never get things right? (*He resumes writing.*)

MRS. TROTSKY: But Leon, isn't that the handle of a mountain-climber's axe, sticking out of your skull?

TROTSKY (*looks into the mirror*): It certainly does look like one. . . . And you know, Ramon was in here yesterday,

telling me about his mountain-climbing trip. And now that I think of it, he was carrying a mountain-climber's axe. I can't remember if he had it when he left the room. . . . (*TROTSKY considers all this.*) Did Ramon report to work today? (*TROTSKY dies, falling face forward onto his desk.*)

(*A bell rings.*)

## VARIATION TWO

(*TROTSKY resumes writing.*)

TROTSKY: "No one is safe. Force must be used. And the revolution of the proletariat against oppression must go on forever and forever . . ."

MRS. TROTSKY: Leon . . .

TROTSKY: "And forever!"

MRS. TROTSKY: Leon, I was just reading the encyclopedia.

TROTSKY: Is it the *Britannica*?

MRS. TROTSKY: Listen to this.

TROTSKY (*to audience*): The universe as viewed by the victors.

MRS. TROTSKY: "On August 20th, 1940, a Spanish Communist named Ramon Mercader smashed a mountain-climber's axe into Trotsky's skull in Coyoacan, a suburb of Mexico City. Trotsky died the next day."

TROTSKY (*impatient*): Yes? And?

MRS. TROTSKY: I *think* that there's a mountain-climber's axe in your own skull right now.

TROTSKY: I knew *that*! When I was shaving this morning, I noticed a handle sticking out of the back of my head. For a moment I thought it was an ice pick, so at first I was worried.

MRS. TROTSKY: No, it's not an ice pick.

TROTSKY: Don't even say the word! You know my recurring nightmare.

MRS. TROTSKY: Yes, dear.

TROTSKY: About the ice pick that buries itself in my skull.

MRS. TROTSKY: Yes, dear.

TROTSKY: That is why I have forbidden any of the servants to allow ice picks into the house.

MRS. TROTSKY: But Leon—

TROTSKY: No one may be seen with an ice pick in this house. Especially not Spanish Communists.

MRS. TROTSKY: But Leon—

TROTSKY: We'll do without ice. We'll drink our liquor neat and our Coca-Cola warm. Who cares if this is Coyoacan in August? Hmm. Not a bad song-title, that. "Coyoacan in August." (*Writes it down.*) Or we'll get ice, but we just won't pick at it. Ice will be allowed into the house in blocks, but may not be picked or chipped under any circumstances—at least, not with ice picks. Ice-cube trays will also be allowed, if they've been invented yet. I'll bet this article doesn't say anything about an *ice-cube* tray in my skull, does it?

MRS. TROTSKY: No . . .

TROTSKY: Does it?

MRS. TROTSKY: No.

TROTSKY: HA! I've outsmarted destiny! (*To audience.*) Which is only a capitalist explanation for the status quo!

MRS. TROTSKY: Leon . . .

TROTSKY: Also—look at this. (*Opens a desk drawer and takes out a skull.*) Do you know what this is?

MRS. TROTSKY: No.

TROTSKY: It's a skull.

MRS. TROTSKY: Well I knew that, but—

TROTSKY: I bought this skull. I *own* this skull. So what does that make this?

(Pause.)

MRS. TROTSKY AND TROTSKY (*together*): Trotsky's skull.

TROTSKY: If some Spanish-Communist-posing-as-a-gardener wants to bury anything in my skull, be it a (*he is about to say 'the pick'*) you-know-what or anything else—this will be here as a decoy. He'll see this skull, recognize it as my skull, bury something in it, and he'll go his way and I'll go mine. Is that ingenious?

MRS. TROTSKY: Up to a point.

TROTSKY: Fifty more years of Trotsky!

MRS. TROTSKY: I have some very bad news for you, Leon. (*Shows him the entry in the encyclopedia.*)

TROTSKY: A mountain-climber's axe . . . ? Ingenious! (*TROTSKY dies.*)

(Bell.)

### VARIATION THREE

TROTSKY: Funny. I always thought it was an ice pick.

MRS. TROTSKY: A mountain-climber's axe! A *mountain-climber's* axe! CAN'T I GET THAT THROUGH YOUR SKULL?

(TROTSKY *dies.*)

(Bell.)

## VARIATION FOUR

(TROTSKY begins to pace.)

TROTSKY: This is very bad news. This is serious.

MRS. TROTSKY: What is serious, Leon?

TROTSKY: *I have a mountain-climber's axe buried in my skull!*

MRS. TROTSKY: Smashed, actually. It says Mercader "smashed" the axe into your skull, not "buried"—

TROTSKY: All right, all right. What am I going to do?

MRS. TROTSKY: Maybe a hat would cover the handle. You know. One of those cute little Alpine hats, with a point and a feather . . . ? (*Sees the look on his face, and stops.*)

TROTSKY: The encyclopedia says that I die today?

MRS. TROTSKY: The twenty-first. That's today.

TROTSKY: Does it say what time?

MRS. TROTSKY: No.

TROTSKY: So much for the usefulness of *that* encyclopedia. All right, then, I have until midnight at the latest.

MRS. TROTSKY: What should I tell Cook about supper?

TROTSKY: Well she can forget the soup course. (TROTSKY falls to the floor and dies.)

MRS. TROTSKY: Nyet, nyet, nyet!

(Bell.)

## VARIATION FIVE

TROTSKY: But this man is a gardener.

MRS. TROTSKY: Yes.

TROTSKY: At least he's been *posing* as a gardener.

MRS. TROTSKY: Yes.

TROTSKY: Doesn't that make him a member of the proletariat?

MRS. TROTSKY: I'd say so.

TROTSKY: Then what's he doing smashing a mountain-climber's axe into my skull?

MRS. TROTSKY: I don't know. Have you been oppressing him?

TROTSKY: Why would Ramon have done this to me? (*He holds up the skull, Hamlet-like.*)

MRS. TROTSKY: Maybe he's a literalist.

TROTSKY: A what?

MRS. TROTSKY: A literalist. Maybe Ramon ran into Manuel yesterday. You know—Manuel? The head gardener?

TROTSKY: I know who Manuel is.

MRS. TROTSKY: I know you know who Manuel is.

TROTSKY (*Ralph Krunden*): One of these days, Mrs. Trotsky . . . Bang! Zoom!

MRS. TROTSKY: Maybe Ramon asked him, "Will Mr. Trotsky have time to look at the nasturtiums today?" And maybe Manuel said, "I don't know—axe Mr. Trotsky." HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA!

TROTSKY: Very funny.

MRS. TROTSKY: Or maybe he was just hot-to-trotsky.

TROTSKY: Oh very, very funny.

MRS. TROTSKY: Or maybe he just wanted to *pick your brain!* HOO HOO HEE HEE HAA HAA!

TROTSKY: Stop it! Stop it! (*He dies.*)

MRS. TROTSKY: HA HA HA HA HA!  
(Bell.)

### VARIATION SIX

TROTSKY: Call Ramon in here.

MRS. TROTSKY: Ramon!

TROTSKY: You'd better get him quickly. I have a mountain-climber's axe in my skull.

MRS. TROTSKY: Ramon! Come quickly!

(RAMON enters: *sombrero, serape, huaraches, and guitar.*)

TROTSKY: Good morning, Ramon.

RAMON: Good morning, señor. (*They shake hands.*)

TROTSKY: Have a seat, please. (*To MRS. TROTSKY.*) You see? We have very good employer-employee relations here. (*To RAMON.*) Ramon, did you bury this mountain-climber's axe in my skull?

RAMON: I did not bury it, señor. I *smashed* it into your skull.

TROTSKY: Excuse me?

RAMON: You see? You can still see the handle.

MRS. TROTSKY: It's true, Leon. The axe is not entirely out of sight.

RAMON: So we cannot say "buried," we can only say "smashed," or perhaps "jammed"—

TROTSKY: All right, all right. But *why* did you do this?

RAMON: I think I read about it in an encyclopedia.

TROTSKY (*to audience*): The power of the printed word!

RAMON: I wanted to use an ice pick, but there weren't any around the house.

TROTSKY: But why? Do you realize who I am? Do you realize that you smashed this axe into the skull of a major historical figure? I helped run the Russian Revolution! I fought Stalin! I was a major political theorist! Why did you do this? Was it political disaffection? Anti-counterrevolutionary backlash?

RAMON: Actually—it was love, señor.

MRS. TROTSKY: It's true, Leon. (*She and Ramon join hands.*) I'm only sorry you had to find out about it this way.

TROTSKY: No.

MRS. TROTSKY: Yes.

TROTSKY: No.

RAMON: Si!

TROTSKY: Oh God! What a fool I've been! (*He dies.*)  
(Bell.)

### VARIATION SEVEN

TROTSKY: Why did you really do this, Ramon?

RAMON: You will never know, Señor Trotsky.

TROTSKY: This is a nightmare!

RAMON: But luckily for you—your night will soon be over.  
(TROTSKY dies.)

(Bell.)



## VARIATION EIGHT

TROTSKY: All right, Ramon. Thank you. You may go.

(RAMON starts out. Stops.)

RAMON: Señor Trotsky—?

TROTSKY: Yes?

RAMON: Do you think you will have time to look at the nasturtiums today? They are really very beautiful.

TROTSKY: I don't think so, Ramon. But I'll try.

RAMON: Thank you, señor. *Hasta la vista*. Or should I say, *buenas noches*. (Exits.)

TROTSKY: Well. All right then. The twenty-first of August 1940. The day I'm going to die. Interesting. And to think that I've gone over so many twenty-firsts of August in my life, like a man walking over his own grave. . . .

MRS. TROTSKY: It's been wonderful being married to you, Leon.

TROTSKY: Thank you, Mrs. Trotsky.

MRS. TROTSKY: Though it was a burden at times, being married to a major historical figure.

TROTSKY: I'm sorry I was away from home so often, tending the revolution.

MRS. TROTSKY: I understand.

TROTSKY: And I'm sorry I couldn't have been more in touch with my feelings.

MRS. TROTSKY (*gentle protest*): No . . . please . . .

TROTSKY: And that I often had such trouble expressing my emotions.

MRS. TROTSKY: Oh, I haven't been everything I should have been.

TROTSKY: Well it's a little late for regrets, with a mountain-climber's axe buried in one's skull.

MRS. TROTSKY: Smashed, actually.

TROTSKY: So it wasn't old age, or cancer, or even the ice pick that I feared for years. It was an axe wielded by a Spanish Communist posing as a gardener.

MRS. TROTSKY: You really couldn't have guessed that, Leon.

TROTSKY: So even an assassin can make the flowers grow. The gardener was false, and yet the garden that he tended was real. How was I to know he was my killer when I passed him every day? How was I to know that the man tending the nasturtiums would keep me from seeing what the weather will be like tomorrow? How was I to know I'd never get to see *Casablanca*, which wouldn't be made until 1942 and which I would have despised anyway? How was I to know I'd never get to know about the bomb, or the eighty thousand dead at Hiroshima? Or rock and roll, or Gorbachev, or the state of Israel? How was I supposed to know I'd be erased from the history books of my own land. . . . ?

MRS. TROTSKY: But reinstated, at least partially, someday.

TROTSKY: Sometime, for everyone, there's a room that you go into, and it's the room that you never leave. Or else you go out of a room and it's the last room that you'll ever leave. (*He looks around*.) This is my last room.

MRS. TROTSKY: But you aren't even here, Leon.

TROTSKY: This desk, these books, that calendar. . . .

MRS. TROTSKY: You're not even here, my love.

TROTSKY: The sunshine coming through the blinds. . . .

MRS. TROTSKY: That was yesterday. You're in a hospital, unconscious.

TROTSKY: The flowers in the garden. You, standing there . . .

MRS. TROTSKY: This is yesterday you're seeing.

TROTSKY: What does that entry say? Would you read it again?

MRS. TROTSKY: "On August 20th, 1940, a Spanish Communist named Ramon Mercader smashed a mountain-climber's axe into Trotsky's skull in Coyocacan, a suburb of Mexico City. Trotsky died the next day."

TROTSKY: It gives you a little hope about the world, doesn't it? That a man could have a mountain-climber's axe smashed into his skull, and yet live on for one whole day . . . ? Maybe I'll go look at the nasturtiums.

(TROTSKY dies. *The garden outside the lowered window begins to glow.*)

THE LIGHTS FADE

# THE PHILADELPHIA



*This play is for  
Greg Pliska*

*The Philadelphia* premiered at the New Hope Performing Arts Festival (Robin Larsen, executive director) in New Hope, Pennsylvania, in July 1992. It was directed by Jason McConnell Buzas; the set design was by James Volk; costume design was by Kevin Brainerd; and lighting design was by Paul Mathew Fine. The cast was as follows:

AL Michael Gaston  
WAITRESS Nancy Opel  
MARK Robert Stanton

*A bar/restaurant. A table, red-checked cloth, two chairs, and a specials board. Al lights up, Al is at the restaurant table, with the WAITRESS.*

WAITRESS: Can I help you?

AL: Do you know you would look fantastic on a wide screen?

WAITRESS: Uh-huh.

AL: Seventy millimeters.

WAITRESS: Look. Do you want to see a menu, or what?

AL: Let's negotiate, here. What's the soup du jour today?

WAITRESS: Soup of the day, you got a choice of Polish duck blood or cream of kidney.

AL: Beautiful. Beautiful! Kick me in a kidney.

WAITRESS (*writes it down*): You got it.

AL: Any oyster crackers on your seabed?

WAITRESS: Nope. All out.

AL: How about the specials today? Spread out your options.

WAITRESS: You got your deep-fried gizzards.

AL: Fabulous.

WAITRESS: Calves' brains with okra.

AL: You are a temptress.

WAITRESS: And pickled pigs' feet.

AL: Pigs' feet. *I love it.* Put me down for a quadruped.

WAITRESS: If you say so.

AL: Any sprouts to go on those feet?

WAITRESS: Iceberg.

AL: So be it.

(WAITRESS exits, as MARK enters, looking shaken and bedraggled.)

MARK: All

AL: Hey there, Marcus. What's up?

MARK: Jesus!

AL: What's going on, buddy?

MARK: Oh, man . . . !

AL: What's the matter? Sit down.

MARK: I don't get it, AL. I don't understand it.

AL: You want something? You want a drink? I'll call the waitress—

MARK (*desperate*): No! No! Don't even try. (*Gets a breath.*) I don't know what's going on today, AL. It's really weird.

AL: What, like . . . ?

MARK: Right from the time I got up.

AL: What is it? What's the story?

MARK: Well—just for an example. This morning I stopped off at a drugstore to buy some aspirin. This is at a big drugstore, right?

AL: Yeah . . .

MARK: I go up to the counter, the guy says what can I do for you, I say, Give me a bottle of aspirin. The guy gives me this funny look and he says, "Oh we don't have *that*, sir." I said to him, You're a drugstore and you don't have any aspirin?

AL: Did they have Bufferin?

MARK: Yeah!

AL: Advil?

MARK: Yeah!

AL: Extra-strength Tylenol?

MARK: Yeah!

AL: But no aspirin.

MARK: No!

AL: Wow . . .

MARK: And that's the kind of weird thing that's been happening all day. It's like, I go to a newsstand to buy the *Daily News*, the guy never even *heard* of it.

AL: Could've been a misunderstanding.

MARK: I asked everywhere—*nobody* had the *News*! I had to read the *Toronto Hairdresser*. Or this. I go into a deli at lunchtime to buy a sandwich, the guy tells me they don't have any *pastrami*. How can they be a deli if they don't have *pastrami*?

AL: Was this a Korean deli?

MARK: This was a kosher-from-*Jerusalem* deli. "Oh we don't carry *that*, sir," he says to me. "Have some tongue."

AL: Mmm.

MARK: I just got into a cab, the guy says he doesn't go to Fifty-sixth Street! He offers to take me to Newark instead!

AL: Mm-hm.

MARK: Looking at me like I'm an alien or something!

AL: Mark. Settle down.

MARK: "Oh I don't go *there*, sir."

AL: Settle down. Take a breath.

MARK: Do you know what this is?

AL: Sure.

MARK: What is it? What's happening to me?

AL: Don't panic. You're in a Philadelphia.

MARK: I'm in a what?

AL: You're in a Philadelphia. That's all.

MARK: But I'm in—

AL: Yes, physically you're in New York. But *metaphysically* you're in a Philadelphia.

MARK: I've never heard of this!

AL: You see, inside of what we know as reality there are these pockets, these black holes called Philadelphia's. If you fall into one, you run up against exactly the kinda shit that's been happening to you all day.

MARK: Why?

AL: Because in a Philadelphia, no matter what you ask for, you can't get it. You ask for something, they're not gonna have it. You want to do something, it ain't gonna get done. You want to go somewhere, you can't get there from here.

MARK: Good God. So this is very serious.

AL: Just remember, Marcus. This is a condition named for the town that invented the *cheese steak*. Something that nobody in his right mind would willingly ask for.

MARK: And I thought I was just having a very bad day. . . .

AL: Sure. Millions of people have spent entire lifetimes inside a Philadelphia and never even knew it. Look at the city of Philadelphia itself. Hopelessly trapped forever inside a Philadelphia. And do they know it?

MARK: Well what can I do? Should I just kill myself now and get it over with?

AL: You try to kill yourself in a Philadelphia, you're only gonna get hurt, babe.

MARK: So what do I do?

AL: Best thing to do is wait it out. Someday the great cosmic train will whisk you outta the City of Brotherly Love and off to someplace happier.

MARK: You're pretty goddamn mellow today.

AL: Yeah well. Everybody has to be someplace.

(WAITRESS enters.)

WAITRESS: Is your name Allen Chase?

AL: It is indeed.

WAITRESS: There was a phone call for you. Your boss?

AL: Okay.

WAITRESS: He says you're fired.

AL: Cool! Thanks. (WAITRESS exits.) So anyway, you have this problem. . . .

MARK: Did she just say you got *fired*?

AL: Yeah. I wonder what happened to my pigs' feet. . . .

MARK: Al—!? You *loved* your job!

AL: Hey. No sweat.

MARK: How can you be so calm?

AL: Easy. You're in a Philadelphia? I woke up in a Los Angeles. And life is beautiful! You know Susie packed up and left me this morning.

MARK: Susie left you?

AL: And frankly, Scarlett, I don't give a shit. I say, go and God bless and may your dating pool be Olympic-sized.

MARK: But your job? The garment district is your life!

AL: So I'll turn it into a movie script and sell it to Paramount. Toss in some sex, add a little emotional blah-blah-blah, pitch it to Jack and Dusty, you got a buddy movie with a garment background. Not relevant enough? We'll throw in the hole in the ozone, make it E.C.

MARK: E.C.?

AL: Environmentally correct. Have you heard about this hole in the ozone?

MARK: Sure.

AL: Marcus, I *love* this concept. I *embrace* this ozone. Sure, some people are gonna get hurt in the process. Meantime, everybody else'll tan a little faster.

MARK (*quiet horror*): So this is a Los Angeles. . . .

AL: Well. Everybody has to be someplace.

MARK: Wow.

AL: You want my advice? *Enjoy your Philadelphia*. Sit back and order yourself a beer and a burger and chill out for a while.

MARK: But I can't order anything. Life is great for you out there on the cosmic beach. Whatever I ask for, I'll get a cheese steak or something.

AL: No. There's a very simple rule of thumb in a Philadelphia. *Ask for the opposite*.

MARK: What?

AL: If you can't get what you ask for, ask for the opposite and you'll get what you want. You want the *Daily News*, ask for the *Times*. You want pastрами, ask for tongue.

MARK: Oh.

AL: Works great with women. What is more opposite than the opposite sex?

MARK: Uh-huh.

AL: So. Would you like a Bud?

MARK: I sure could use a—

AL: No. Stop. (*Very deliberately*.) *Do you want . . . a Bud?*

MARK (*also deliberately*): No. I don't want a Bud.

(*Waitress enters and goes to the specials board.*)

AL: Good. Now there's the waitress. Order yourself a Bud and a burger. But don't ask for a Bud and a burger.

MARK: Waitress!

AL: Don't call her. She won't come.

MARK: Oh.

AL: You're in a Philadelphia, so just figure, fuck her.

MARK: Fuck her.

AL: You don't need that waitress.

MARK: Fuck that waitress.

AL: And everything to do with her.

MARK: Hey, waitress! **FUCK YOU!**

(*Waitress turns to him.*)

WAITRESS: Can I help you, sir?

AL: *That's* how you get service in a Philadelphia.

WAITRESS: Can I help you?

MARK: Uh—no thanks.

WAITRESS: Okay, what'll you have? (*Takes out her pad.*)

AL: Excellent.

MARK: Well—how about some O.J.?

WAITRESS: Sorry. Squeezer's broken.

MARK: A glass of milk?

WAITRESS: Cow's dry.

MARK: Egg nog?

WAITRESS: Just ran out.

MARK: Cuppa coffee?

WAITRESS: Oh we don't have *that*, sir. (MARK and AL exchange a look and nod. The waitress has spoken the magic words.)

MARK: Got any ale?

WAITRESS: Nope.

MARK: Stout?

WAITRESS: Nope.

MARK: Porter?

WAITRESS: Just beer.

MARK: That's too bad. How about a Heineken?

WAITRESS: Heineken? Try again.

MARK: Rolling Rock?

WAITRESS: Outta stock.

MARK: Schlitz?

WAITRESS: Nix.

MARK: Beck's?

WAITRESS: Next.

MARK: Sapporo?

WAITRESS: Tomorrow.

MARK: Lone Star?

WAITRESS: Hardy-har.

MARK: Bud Lite?

WAITRESS: Just plain Bud is all we got.

MARK: No thanks.

WAITRESS (calls): Gimme a Bud! (To MARK) Anything to eat?

MARK: Nope.

WAITRESS: Name it.

MARK: Pork chops.

WAITRESS (writes down): Hamburger . . .

MARK: Medium.

WAITRESS: Well done . . .

MARK: Baked potato.

WAITRESS: Fries . . .

MARK: And some zucchini.

WAITRESS: Slice of raw. (Exits, calling.) Burn one!

AL: Marcus, that was excellent.

MARK: Thank you.

AL: Excellent. You sure you've never done this before?

MARK: I've spent so much of my life asking for the wrong thing without knowing it, doing it on purpose comes easy.

AL: I hear you.

MARK: I could've saved myself a lot of trouble if I'd screwed up on purpose all those years. Maybe I was in a Philadelphia all along and never knew it!

AL: You might've been in a Baltimore. They're practically the same.

(WAITRESS enters with a glass of beer and a plate.)

WAITRESS: Okay. Here's your Bud. (Sets that in front of MARK.) And one cheesesteak. (She sets that in front of AL and starts to go.)

AL: Excuse me. Hey. Wait a minute. What is that?

WAITRESS: It's a cheese steak.

AL: No. I ordered cream of kidney and two pairs of feet.

WAITRESS: Oh we don't have that, sir.

AL: I beg your pardon?

WAITRESS: We don't have that, sir. (Small pause.)

AL (to MARK): You son of a bitch! I'm in your Philadelphia!

MARK: I'm sorry, AL.

AL: You brought me into your fucking Philadelphia!

MARK: I didn't know it was contagious.

AL: Oh God, please don't let me be in a Philadelphia! Don't let me be in a—

MARK: Shouldn't you ask for the opposite? I mean, since you're in a Philad—

AL: Don't you tell me about life in a Philadelphia.

MARK: Maybe you're not really—

AL: I taught you everything you know about Philly, asshole. Don't tell me how to act in a Philadelphia!

MARK: But maybe you're not really in a Philadelphia!

AL: Do you see the cheese on that steak? What do I need for proof? The fucking Liberty Bell? Waitress, bring me a glass of water.

WAITRESS: Water? Don't have that, sir.

AL (to MARK): "We don't have water"—? What, you think we're in a sudden drought or something? (Suddenly realizes.) Holy shit, I just lost my job . . . ! Susie left me! I gotta make some phone calls! (To WAITRESS.) 'Scuse me, where's the payphone?

WAITRESS: Sorry, we don't have a payph—

AL: Of course you don't have a payphone, of course you don't! Oh shit, let me outta here! (Exits.)

MARK: I don't know. It's not that bad in a Philadelphia.

WAITRESS: Could be worse. I've been in a Cleveland all week.

MARK: A Cleveland. What's that like?

WAITRESS: It's like death, without the advantages.

MARK: Really. Care to stand?

WAITRESS: Don't mind if I do. (She sits.)

MARK: I hope you won't reveal your name.

WAITRESS: Sharon.

MARK (holds out his hand): Good-bye.

WAITRESS: Hello. (They shake.)

MARK (indicating the cheese steak): Want to starve?

WAITRESS: Thanks. (She picks up the cheese steak and starts eating.)

MARK: Yeah, everybody has to be someplace. . . . (Leans across the table with a smile.) So.

BLACKOUT



A

SINGULAR

KINDA GUY



*Lights up on MITCH, a guy out on a Saturday night.*

*A young guy is out on a Saturday night in his best shoes, talking to a girl he's met in a bar. She's nice, he likes her. But he's got this sort of confession, see. There's something she ought to know about him. And he's never told this to anybody. You see, on the inside, deep on the inside, he isn't really a guy at all. He's an Olivetti electric self-correcting typewriter. And he can't even type!*

MITCH: I know what you're thinking. You're looking at me and you're saying to yourself, "Average guy. Normal human being. Nothing out of the ordinary. Well, that's what I thought too for lots of years, and boy, was I wrong. Now I look back, I think I always really knew the truth about myself, underneath. It's like, sometimes I'd look in the mirror in the morning and I'd get this weird feeling like what I was looking at was not what I really was looking at. Or else I'd be standing in a crowd of people at a party, and suddenly I'd get this idea like I was standing in a huge empty space and there wasn't anybody around me for miles. Episodes of "vastation," if you know that beautiful word. And then one day I had a . . . I don't know what you'd call it. A mystical experience?

I was walking down Lex over in the Thirties when I go by this office supply shop. Just a crummy little place. But I turn and I look and I see . . . an Olivetti Model 250 portable electric typewriter. Are you familiar with that particular model? Have you ever seen the old Olivetti 250? Well let me tell you—it is sublime. The lines. The shape. The slant of the keyboard. It's all there! It's a thing of beauty!

Anyway, I'm standing there looking at this thing, and it's like I recognize it from someplace. It's like I'm looking at family somehow, like I'm seeing some long-lost older

brother for the first time, and suddenly I realize—*That's me*, right there. That thing in the window is exactly what I feel like, on the inside. Same lines, same shape, same aesthetic. And what I realized was—I am a typewriter. No, really! A typewriter! All those years I thought I was a human being, on the inside I was really a portable Olivetti 250 with automatic correctability. And you know what? I can't even type! Needless to say, this revelation came as a shock. But all of a sudden it's clear to me how come I always got off on big words—like "vastation." Or "phenomenological." Or "subcutaneous." Words are what a typewriter's all about, right?

Problem is, it can be a lonely thing, being a typewriter in a world of human beings. And now here I am being replaced every day by word processors. Who needs a typewriter anymore? Here I finally figure out what I really am, I'm an antique already.

Plus, there's my love life, which is problematical to say the least. The difficulties involved in a typewriter finding a suitable partner in this town are fairly prodigious, as you can imagine. At least now I know how come I always loved—not just sex, sex is anywhere—but . . . touch. Being touched, and touching. Being touched is part of the nature and purpose of typewriters, that's how we express ourselves and the human person along with us. Hands on the keyboard and the right touch—fire away. Yeah women's hands. They're practically the first thing I notice. Nice set of shapely fingers. Good manicure. No hangnails. Soft skin. I'm not a finger fetishist or anything, you understand, it's just . . .

You've got a pretty nice pair of hands yourself, there. That's what I noticed, that's how come I stepped over here to talk to you. I know this all sounds pretty loony, but you know I've never told anybody this before? Somehow I just felt like I could trust you, and . . .

What? I beg your pardon?

I don't understand.

You're not really a girl? Sure, you're a girl, you're a beautiful girl, so . . .

You're what? You're actually a sheet of paper? Ten-pound bond? Ivory tinted? Pure cotton fiber? (MITCH holds out his hand.) Glad to meet you.

BLACKOUT