

TWO PLAYS

by

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PROTO - PENGUINS

A Play in One Act

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The dining room of an unfrequented boarding-house on the island of Røst, a barren dot of land near the Arctic Circle. The room is small and dark and, like the island, unfriendly to strangers. It is a hostile, quiet room, glowering sullenly under the uncertain gleam of a swaying oil lamp. A chill wind, sneaking past closed windows through the chinks in the wall-boards, adds to the damp dejection. A rough, rectangular, wooden table sits diffidently in the middle of the room. Six straight-backed chairs surround it. As the scene opens, the room waits sulkily, empty of characters except for OLD MAN, who sits in a chair with his back to the audience. He is gray-haired and slouched, obviously resentful at being exposed to the curious eyes of the audience. He says nothing, wilfully hoping that the curtain may, by some miracle, fall again. The chair next to him will remain empty for the duration of the play. However, we soon realize that any member of the audience could fill it comfortably.

Enter from door on left CORNELIUS SHERIDAN, his wife MYRNA, and their ten-year-old daughter JANET. CORNELIUS takes a seat at the head of the table. His wife and child sit side by side facing the audience. CORNELIUS SHERIDAN is a tall, graying, middle-aged man who is just beginning to put on weight about the waist. His fantasies have separated him irrevocably from the rest of the world, particularly from his family, although he is unfailingly courteous, kind, and friendly. His wife is a faded blonde, dowdy in an appealing way. CORNELIUS considerably rescued her from the socially unacceptable state of unwed motherhood some ten years ago, although in point of fact he hardly knew her and certainly had not fathered the child. CORNELIUS, for whom the marriage was not a significant event, has long since forgotten the scandal that attended their wedding, but MYRNA can never forget. She regards her husband with awe, is deeply devoted to him, and has implicit faith in all he undertakes. However, her practical nature is sometimes offended by her husband's refusal to consider the realities of life. Her all-absorbing admiration for CORNELIUS leaves her with little time for the child. JANET, a rosy, blonde-haired girl, stands out brilliantly in the gray, blue-green tones of the room. She adds color and innocence to its gloomy monochrome. In an atmosphere of withdrawal and age, she glows with youth and imagination. Among an array of defeated personalities, she remains unaware of victory or tragedy.

The SHERIDANS also say nothing, but begin their meal. A dish of fruit and bowls of soup already rest on the table. The atmosphere is not tense but introspective, each character involved in his own dreams and speculations. They feel no need and indeed have no desire to communicate with each other.

Enter from door on right ANDREW MARLOWE, a young man of twenty-seven. He has just arrived at the boarding-house. His hair is long and rumpled. His clothes are dirty and ragged. His eyes are searching, desperately craving something which the audience cannot immediately identify. He is polite in an eager, boyish fashion, but difficult to know. As CORNELIUS later observes, he is a youth "pursuing and protecting a vision of his own creation." He seats himself abruptly and nervously at the foot of the table. MRS. SHIELS, the landlady, enters close behind ANDREW, bearing a plate of bread and a tube of caviar. She places the plate silently on the table near ANDREW and passes out through door on left. ANDREW, feeling uncomfortable in the strange surroundings, picks up the tube and a slice of bread. He then pauses, holding the food uncertainly in his hands, hesitant about his next move.

CORNELIUS:

(In a friendly manner, anxious to welcome the newcomer)

You know, you squeeze it.

(He pauses)

On the bread.

ANDREW:

What? Oh yes, I see.

(He squeezes a small worm of paste onto the bread)

Thanks.

JANET:

It's pink. It's not black like other caviar.

MYRNA:

Janet dear, you know I like quiet little girls. Eat your dinner.

ANDREW:

(Enthusiastically)

Yes, this works beautifully.

(He spreads the caviar with his knife, anxious to show how successful he has been)

Thanks very much.

There is a pause. CORNELIUS searches for a means to save the faltering conversation. He is about to speak when MRS. SHIELS enters from door on right. She carries a large tray spread thickly with sardines and herring. The herring lie in little pools of inky oil in which round, blackcloves float, giving off a pungent, tantalizing odor. The sardines have been delicately beheaded.

MRS. SHIELS:

I've brought you our best fish. Hans brought it in this afternoon straight from the sea.

JANET:

The sea was windy today.

CORNELIUS:

Thank you, Mrs. Shiels. It certainly looks delicious.

MRS. SHIELS:

(Meaningfully)

Fresh fish is something you should put in your travel book. You don't get fresh fish everywhere.

CORNELIUS:

(Kindly)

No, I suppose you don't.

MRS. SHIELS:

(Belligerently)

It can't take forever to write a travel book.

JANET:

But what good is a travel book?

MYRNA:

(Annoyed, but careful not to openly antagonize the landlady)

Mrs. Shiels, we've been through this several times...  
(her sentence dangles hopefully, waiting for some sign of appeasement from MRS. SHIELS)

MRS. SHIELS:

(Ignoring MYRNA)

What good is it? Those books make money, not like some things I could mention.

MYRNA:

(Warningly)

Mrs. Shiels. Please.

MRS. SHIELS:

Oh, I know, I know. But the rent, and those papers all over the sitting-room, and the basement all cluttered up.

CORNELIUS:

(Authoritatively)

Mrs. Shiels, I hardly think this the time or place to discuss such matters. We will talk later.

MRS. SHIELDS:

(Beaten for the moment)

Oh, very well. But sometimes it is more than I can bear.

(She begins to collect the empty soup bowls. She talks softly, desperately, and to herself)

A travel book. A travel book would make us happy.

(She exits from door on right)

Once again no one speaks. The silence becomes constrained.

CORNELIUS:

(Making a visible effort and addressing himself to ANDREW)

Ah, you just arrived, didn't you?

ANDREW:

Yes. By the afternoon boat. Have you been here long?

CORNELIUS:

(Disturbed and suddenly reticent)

Not long.

MYRNA:

(With nervous volubility)

But I can't imagine why you have come, Mr. ...?

ANDREW:

Oh! I'm terribly sorry. My name's Andrew Marlowe.  
(He rises and extends his hand across the table to CORNELIUS, who also rises)

CORNELIUS:

How do you do? I am Cornelius Sheridan. My wife Myrna and daughter Janet.

(They all exchange smiles)

MYRNA:

(Pursuing her point)

You know, Mr. Marlowe, you've already missed the amazing birds that the island is famous for. When the season is right, there are literally tens of thousands of them flapping about on the crags and crannies. They show up white and beautiful against the gray of the ocean. But they've gone now. And all that is left of the Aurora Borealis is an unhealthy pink smear.

JANET:

Like the caviar.

OLD MAN:

(Mumbling)

Pass me the bread.

MYRNA:

(Absently)  
Hush, Janet.

ANDREW:

What did he say?

JANET:

The bread. He wants it.

CORNELIUS:

(Passing OLD MAN the bread)  
There you are.

OLD MAN deliberately takes a slice. He methodically divides the bread into four pieces. Two he hastily eats. The other two he carefully places in a paper bag beside him. ANDREW watches his maneuvers with astonishment.

ANDREW:

(In a conspiratorial whisper)  
Who is he?

CORNELIUS:

(With finality and philosophical intonation)  
Well, my dear fellow, who is anyone?

MYRNA:

You needn't whisper, you know. He's stone deaf. He thinks he's saving the bread for a rainy day.

ANDREW:

(Protesting)  
But that's insane!

CORNELIUS:

Oh come now, Mr. Marlowe. Be more tolerant. We all have our idiosyncrasies.

ANDREW:

(Remembering)  
Yes, that's true. But surely, Mr. Sheridan, some idiosyncrasies are more meaningful than others?

CORNELIUS:

Ah, that's a dangerous thing to say. Everything is only as meaningful as we believe it to be.

JANET:

(Slowly and truthfully)  
He is Old Man.

ANDREW:  
Old Man?

JANET:  
Why are you here?

ANDREW:  
(Startled)  
Well, I have missed the Midnight Sun, haven't I?

MYRNA:  
You see, my husband is writing a travel book about Norway. Mrs. Shiels, the landlady, just mentioned it. He came to Røst to see those marvellous birds. And the Northern Lights, of course. And... everything else.

ANDREW:  
As a matter of fact, I'm really not too interested in the Midnight Sun.  
(He smiles softly and sadly at no one in particular)  
I also have my idiosyncrasy. I'm looking for a man and a boat.

JANET:  
(Looking up from her plate)  
The man with the boat?  
(ANDREW turns toward her searchingly, frightened by what she has said)

CORNELIUS:  
(Heartily)  
I'm sure you will find many men and many boats up here. After all, a sea-faring people, the Norwegians. Dependent on the whims of the sea and the skill of the fisherman.

OLD MAN:  
(Mumbling)  
Pass the bread.

ANDREW:  
(Vaguely)  
Yes, I'm sure I'll find plenty of men.  
(He passes the bread to OLD MAN, who performs the previously described ritual with the same precision and fastidiousness)  
And boats. But I'm looking for a special man and a special boat. They could make me understand. I could be happy. Oh, I doubt I will find them here... or anywhere, for that matter. I've already come so far. But maybe, if I found them, I could believe in... things.  
(He smiles with some embarrassment at having displayed his discouragement so openly)



ANDREW:

(Continued)

And now, if you'll excuse me...

(He pushes his chair back from the table)

I'm very tired.

(He walks to the door and then turns to face the diners.

He speaks with sincerity, giving meaning to the traditional phrases)

It has been very nice meeting all of you. Good night.

(He exits through the door on left. The SHERIDANS and OLD MAN continue eating)

## SCENE TWO

The sitting room of the boarding-house. The time is late afternoon of the following day. The sky, seen through a partially open window, is gray and damp. The sitting room, like the dining room, is poorly lit. We can barely discern the outlines of the furniture, of elephantine proportions and covered with wild, dark patterns. CORNELIUS' papers are scattered messily about on desks and chairs. The atmosphere of the room is careless and foreboding. A dying fire wavers hungrily at back, left. JANET is crouched in front of it, partly turned away from the audience, staring into the darting, blue-orange flames. She is wholly absorbed by her fantastical surroundings, entranced by the crazy dance of the fire. Her figure is disguised by the gloom and only her hair, reflected by the fire-light, is clearly visible. Her back is to ANDREW, who reclines in one of the huge, grotesquely deformed chairs, perusing a well-thumbed book.

ANDREW:

Janet.

(She ignores him)

Janet? Please, Janet, will you talk to me?

JANET:

(Doesn't want to be interrupted)

I'm playing!

ANDREW:

(Disconcerted)

Oh, playing? But you haven't any dolls.

(JANET refuses to respond)

I thought all little girls played with dolls.

JANET:

(Without turning around)  
I'm not a little girl. And I have lots of dolls. They're  
in there.  
(She gestures toward the fire)

ANDREW:

(Misunderstanding)  
You threw your dolls in the fire?

JANET:

No. They live in there.

ANDREW:

(Obviously not seeing)  
Oh, I see.  
(He waits a moment)  
Janet.  
(Suddenly his voice becomes urgent and pleading)  
Janet. The man with the boat. Is he still here?

JANET:

(Surprised that ANDREW should ask her this)  
No, he left. He never waits.

ANDREW:

(Sadly)  
No, he never waits.  
(Suddenly angry)  
Do you see this?  
(He waves the book. JANET does not bother to look  
at it. ANDREW continues, speaking more and more to  
himself)  
I thought the book would lead me. I thought I would be  
successful where everyone else had failed. I thought I  
would finally understand what it is all about. I thought -  
oh, I thought too many vain, meaningless things. I started  
out so  
(Wonderingly)  
gay... so confident, so... free. I felt so sure of myself.  
I was safe because I had a mission. I thought I could reach  
for the final, beautiful truth and hold it and protect it.  
(He laughs bitterly)  
But, you see, I never found the man and his boat. What are  
they but a promise? All I really have is the book. Oh, I  
haven't given up. I don't suppose I can give up. I'll read  
the book again. Look at it! Its pages are covered with  
the senseless little notes I've scribbled in the margins.  
Each time I read it I see something I missed before. Each  
time I think I have unraveled its significance. But, my  
God, how can I be sure? Maybe I've misread it. Perhaps  
this is not what it means at all. I've got to understand!

ANDREW:

(Continued)  
But I doubt the world. And a search is, by definition, a futile undertaking.

(Abruptly switching his train of thought)  
Janet, did you see him?

JANET:

(Speaking to the fire)  
Yes.

ANDREW:

Will you show me where?

JANET:

What are you reading?

ANDREW:

It's the book.  
(He laughs self-consciously and says with some irony)  
My guide to redemption.

JANET:

There are flames climbing all over the cover.

ANDREW:

(Desperately)  
Janet, will you take me?

JANET:

Give me your book.  
(ANDREW hands the book to her slowly, as if hypnotized, half-rising out of his chair to do so)  
My people have never read a book.  
(She tosses it onto the flames, which begin to devour it)

ANDREW:

Devil! I am lost!  
(He jumps out of his seat and, thrusting JANET to one side, reaches toward the book. The intense heat of the fire forces him to withdraw his hand. His face is ghastly pale, drawn and distorted with pain and anger)

JANET:

(Not understanding ANDREW'S rage)  
But it was burning on its cover.

ANDREW:

(In a hoarse, anguished whisper)  
Get the poker.

JANET scrambles to her feet. She fumbles for a moment with the poker on the opposite side of the fireplace and then hands it to ANDREW. He has, meanwhile, been gazing desperately into the fire, already sensing that the book is ruined.

JANET:  
Here.

ANDREW tries to brush the book past the grasp of the flames. However, as soon as he touches the book, it crumbles.

ANDREW:  
Oh God. It's too late. Everything is ruined. My God, my God, there's nothing left.

JANET:  
(She has remained standing beside ANDREW. Timidly, she places her hand in his)  
I'll take you tomorrow. Before the others are up. It's all right.

ANDREW bemusedly pushes the ashes with the poker. He then turns his gaze from the ruined book and stares at the child's face. Suddenly the loss of the book is not so shattering.

### SCENE THREE

ANDREW and JANET are standing by the waterfront. It is the morning of the next day. To the right of them stand huge, wooden racks, stretching a hundred feet into the air, on which fish are drying, baked in the feeble sun. The air smells of fish and salt and the sweat of men. The gray ocean touches the gray skyline and their dreary, hopeless colors mingle and intertwine. Rough, sea-urchin-covered pilings rise from the murky water. On its surface, dirty, oily skiffs float emptily, devoid of purpose. Their nets are torn, their decks unscrubbed. They are dilapidated, old, forgotten, like the island itself.

ANDREW:  
He was really here?

JANET:  
(Tearing at a fish hanging from the rack)  
Have a piece of fish.

ANDREW:

(Taking the fish and biting into it)  
 You know, I have never even seen him. I suspected that my life was one vast, hypocritical process of self-delusion and deception. I had begun to believe I was chasing my own dreams.

JANET:

Everyone dreams. I dream about lions with soft paws walking over me.

ANDREW:

But the man and the boat - they aren't dreams, are they?

JANET:

I believe in them,

ANDREW:

Then I must find them. But the book is burned.

JANET:

If you find them, you can do it without the book.

ANDREW:

The ideas, the interpretations. And the book is destroyed.

JANET:

(Insistently)  
 But you don't need it.

ANDREW:

Oh, everyone needs a book. Look at your father. He has the travel book he is writing. And I had my book. Everyone needs a book.

JANET:

About my father. I have to tell you. He isn't writing a travel book. That was a lie. My father is a great scientist. I am his little helper.

ANDREW:

(Skeptical)  
 A great scientist?

JANET:

He has discovered how to change people into penguins.  
 (ANDREW gives her a quizzical look, but decides to humor her)  
 It is a great discovery. That is why we lied. No one must know until he gets a patent. Only Mrs. Shiels knows. And she doesn't believe it anyway.

ANDREW:

(Smiles tolerantly)

Of course. I won't tell anyone.

(Seriously)

I'm honored that you have entrusted me with this knowledge.

JANET:

I do trust you.

ANDREW:

(Once again impressed by her innocence and charm)

You know, besides being a child, you are remarkable as a person.

JANET:

(Still bothered about his concern for the loss of the book)

But the book?

ANDREW:

(He feels completely liberated. Suddenly he doesn't give a damn about the book. He speaks scornfully and proudly)

Who needs the book? We're human beings, aren't we?

(He embraces her passionately, ecstatic that she has renewed his faith in his vision)

I can find the man and the boat.

JANET:

Without the book.

ANDREW:

(Rapturously)

Without the book!

#### SCENE FOUR

The sitting room. CORNELIUS occupies the same chair that ANDREW used in Scene Two. He is absently leafing through a handful of papers which he has gathered from various pieces of furniture. MYNRA is perched on the couch opposite him. MRS. SHIELDS sits in a chair toward center, back. She is half-shrouded by the poor, uneven light the flames cast. She is knitting and, although she frequently participates in the conversation, she never raises her eyes from her work.

MYRNA:

You heard nothing from the patent office.

CORNELIUS:

No. But any day now.

MRS. SHIELDS:

(Sarcastically)

How long do you expect to keep on saying that?

MYRNA:

You know, I thought Mr. Marlowe was a spy. I was afraid he had come to steal the invention. You must be careful, Cornelius. After all, what sort of person could want to come to a place like this?

MRS. SHIELDS:

He's half-insane, if you ask me.

CORNELIUS:

Myrna, you are too suspicious of people. How could Mr. Marlowe possibly know of my device? Anyway, Mrs. Shields has, with her usual remarkable analytical ability, come to the crux of the matter. Mr. Marlowe is slightly mad. His great search for the boatman who will bring him safety and happiness is pure fantasy.

(Thoughtfully)

Of course, it is a beautiful idea. I might almost wish it were mine. But how frustrating it must be for him. A lifetime of perpetual searching.

MYRNA:

Then he isn't a spy?

CORNELIUS:

A spy? A spy for whom? Our Mr. Marlowe is far too interested in pursuing and protecting a vision of his own creation to bother about the inventions of others. Really, Myrna, you with your incessant babble about spies and Mrs. Shields with her multi'million dollar scheme for a travel book are completely destroying my mental equilibrium.

MRS. SHIELDS:

I don;t mean to worry you, Mr. Sheridan. But, if you'll pardon me for saying so, what kind of future is there in turning people into penguins? If you could only listen to me... Believe me, no one is interested in penguins. Now a travel book - they are popular. You never know, Røst might attract swarms of tourists, I could expand the boarding house, we would all become rich...

CORNELIUS:

(Interrupting)

You've been very kind to us, Mrs. Shields. More kind than I can say. But you must remember. I am a scientist. My duty is to science, not to the accumulation of wealth.

MYRNA:

But Cornelius, what will happen when your discovery is turned loose on mankind?

MRS. SHIELDS:

How do you know it works? Have you ever actually turned a person into a penguin?

CORNELIUS:

(Horrorified)

I wouldn't think of it! I have nothing to do with the application of my discovery. That is not my affair.

MYRNA:

Some evil genius might pervert it to works of destruction. Look at the atom bomb. Look at germ warfare. Who knows what will happen? Oh, Cornelius, you never seem to think about these things.

CORNELIUS:

(Gently)

Myrna, what brutal tyrants or ignorant politicians do with the invention is not my concern. That I have discovered it is enough. It is all anyone who calls himself a scientist can ask.

MRS. SHIELDS:

(Ominously)

There's no money in it. Now a travel book...

MYRNA:

Suppose people don't want to become penguins.

MRS. SHIELDS:

You haven't paid the rent in months.

CORNELIUS:

People never know what they want. They have to be told.

MRS. SHIELDS:

A travel book would make us all rich and famous. If only you would write it.

MYRNA:

Cornelius, I love you very dearly and I admire you as a great man and a great scientist. I know you are interested only in the good of mankind, but sometimes I feel...

CORNELIUS:

(Interrupting)

The good of mankind. What a nebulous term that is! Who can possibly judge the good of mankind? No, man's welfare holds no attraction for me. The abstract, absolute beauty of an equation falling into place. The results of an experiment. The proof of a theory. These are the things I understand.



MYRNA:

(With conviction)

You know that isn't true, my dear. I have never met a kinder, more humane man than you, Cornelius.

MRS. SHIELDS:

Or a poorer one.

MYRNA:

It will be all right, Mrs. Shiels. When the patent comes, we will be able to sell Cornelius' invention.

CORNELIUS:

Whether we sell or not is immaterial. I have told you repeatedly that I only need the patent in order to convince the world of the validity of my design.

(With a wry smile)

How foolish I was. I expected the great men of learning to make obeisance at my feet. No one would even publish my findings.

(Sadly)

The only journal willing to even consider publication was a science fiction magazine.

MYRNA:

Oh, don't feel discouraged, Cornelius! No one believed Columbus either.

CORNELIUS:

I'm not upset, dear. Once the United States Patent Office grants me a patent, the whole world will be forced to acknowledge the soundness of my invention.

MRS. SHIELDS:

But a patent office needs a working model.

(Dubiously)

And I know you didn't...

CORNELIUS:

(Interrupting impatiently)

Of course I didn't! The whole patent system is antiquated and out of date. A working model indeed! Why, it's absurd! Do you think Einstein could have given them a working model of the theory of relativity? Could Eddington have produced a working model demonstrating the temperature of the core of the sun? Rubbish! My invention embodies a principle far too universal to be encumbered by clumsy approximations.

MYRNA:

He doesn't need a working model. He'll get a patent without one.

CORNELIUS:

(In a pacifying tone)

Don't worry any more, Mrs. Shiels. We can't begin to tell you how much we have appreciated your hospitality. You have been like a mother to us. When the patent comes... you'll see.

MRS. SHIELS:

All I see is that there's no money in penguins. And I don't much care for penguins anyway. What will we do with a world full of penguins? You might have chosen something useful.

CORNELIUS:

(Smiling indulgently)

Science cannot be guided by the whims of the people.

MYRNA:

(She turns to CORNELIUS and smiles worshipfully at him)

No. Science is guided by great men.

CORNELIUS:

(Correcting her)

Science is guided by the forces of reality. Its course is predetermined by the universal pattern. No single man can change this course or arrest its motion. The scientist's function is merely to fulfill the promise of the imagination.

There is a pause. MRS. SHIELS feels it is futile to continue her urgings. MYRNA, as usual, has succumbed to her husband's eloquence and authoritative manner.

MYRNA:

(Still a bit doubtful)

Cornelius dear, were people really intended to be penguins?

CORNELIUS:

(Smiling happily, sure of himself and his discovery. Yet his answer must also reflect the skepticism and cynicism which are the products of an incessantly questing mind)

Who can doubt it?

## SCENE FIVE

The dining room. The guests are once again seated about the table. It is early afternoon of the fourth day. A plate of bread and the tube of caviar rest on the tablecloth. A bowl of fruit forms the centerpiece. The meal is already in progress.

ANDREW:  
(Busily spreading caviar)  
I'm leaving today.

MYRNA:  
So soon?

ANDREW:  
I must go far.

OLD MAN:  
(Mumbling)  
Pass me the bread.

MYRNA:  
(Reaching out the bread plate to OLD MAN, who takes a slice and cuts it up, depositing half in his bag)  
We will be sorry to see you go. It is very lonely here at times. A new face is a pleasure. I'm only sorry that you picked this season to visit Røst. Well, when my husband finishes his long-overdue travel book, we must send you a copy to let you know all that you've missed.

CORNELIUS:  
(He has been troubled and silent throughout the course of the meal. He now abruptly interrupts his wife)  
Myrna! Enough! Mr. Marlowe, I must say this. I like you too much to keep silent. I am not the creator of travelogues, whatever my wife would have you believe. I am a scientist.

ANDREW:  
(Starting and glancing sharply at JANET)  
A scientist?

CORNELIUS:  
I have just made a great discovery. I have discovered how to transform people into penguins.

ANDREW:  
(Dazed, convinced of CORNELIUS' insanity)  
Yes, I know.

MYRNA:

Janet told you.

ANDREW:

Yes.

MYRNA:

You won't steal his invention? It means so much to him...  
to all of us.

ANDREW:

(Honestly surprised)

Is that what you thought? That I was here to steal it?  
How wonderfully absurd!

(He begins to chuckle delightedly. Then he looks at  
MYRNA and realizes that she is perfectly serious. Her  
distress is not simulated. He hastens to reassure her)  
No, no dear Mrs. Sheridan, I would never dream of stealing  
the invention. After all, what use have I for penguins? I  
am pursuing a man and a boat.

MYRNA:

(Ashamed)

I am very sorry, Mr. Marlowe. I never wanted to lie to you.  
I only wanted to protect my husband. He doesn't realize how  
cruel, how evil men can be...

(Her voice fades unhappily)

CORNELIUS:

There, Myrna. Everything will work out for the best. The  
patent, you know.

(Brightly)

Any day now.

ANDREW:

(Seriously)

Don't ever give up hope.

CORNELIUS:

No. I'll be receiving it very soon.

ANDREW:

(Sincerely)

I'm sure of it.

No one speaks. Although ANDREW does not believe in the  
SHERIDANS' discovery, he admires and loves their courage. The  
SHERIDANS, while convinced of ANDREW'S madness, are terribly  
fond of this young man so determined to achieve his goal. All  
feel unwilling to say a final farewell. In the silence,  
OLD MAN'S voice rings out with unaccustomed clarity)

OLD MAN:

Bread.

ANDREW and JANET reach for the bread plate simultaneously. Their hands touch and they smile at each other.

ANDREW:

Let me. Because I'm leaving.

(He gently and respectfully hands OLD MAN the bread. OLD MAN performs his ritual with meticulousness. ANDREW continues, whispering softly and kindly, with the assurance of a man who believes that his life will be truly enriched)

Poor Old Man. I like you very much.

CORNELIUS:

Come, Mr. Marlowe, we will walk you to the door.

(ANDREW and the SHERIDANS rise and begin to move slowly toward door on right)

ANDREW:

Goodbye, Old Man.

(More briskly, as if shaking himself out of reverie)

Yes, I must be off. The man and the boat, you know. He won't wait.

CORNELIUS:

I believe you will find him.

JANET:

He never waits, Mr. Marlowe.

MYRNA:

(Afraid that JANET will discourage ANDREW)

Hush, Janet. In the end, they'll meet.

CORNELIUS:

(Kindly, expansively)

Come along now. Whatever the man and his boat may do, certainly the afternoon steamer will not wait.

MRS. SHIELDS:

(Calling from offstage, right)

Mr. Marlowe! Mr. Marlowe! You must hurry.

(ANDREW and the SHERIDANS exit through door on right)

OLD MAN:

(Rising from his straight-backed chair and turning to face the audience. He enunciates distinctly)

Boats. Penguins.

(Suddenly, the absurdity of the situation overcomes him. He begins to laugh in great, gasping sobs, desperately clutching his bag of breadcrumbs)

CURTAIN

PAPER BOATS

A Play in One Act

by

Johanna Freedman

A park in one of the rougher sections of a large city. The area is poor, run-down, dissipated. Opposite the park a row of broken houses stares with shattered eyes at the smog-filled, beaten landscape. Black, heavy sweat rises in the distance from a factory. Housewives in faded prints sit on their uneasy porches and haggle over the cost of their faded lives. On Sunday afternoons they send their children to the park to avoid hearing their high-pitched arguments. The park was the idea of a city planner who arrived after the city had already been built. He tried faithfully to realize his schoolboy dream of spacious avenues, experimental playgrounds, and housing structures a la Le Corbusier. But the city council appropriated only enough money for a small park in a neglected neighborhood. The young city planner became bitter and hard. He paid little attention to the construction of the park and, in a manner of speaking, let it build itself. As a result, the park is timid, careworn. Its trees are undernourished and deformed. They grow, twisted, resentful, at hastily planned intervals throughout the park. The benches, with curved, uncomfortable backs, badly need a coat of paint. The grass is dingy and discouraged. Its green hue has been carefully burned away by the summer sun.

The park's main attraction is a large fountain, rising from the ground like a huge, proud phallic symbol. Its shooting water falls into a quiet pool, disturbing its placid calm. The water of the pool is not blue, but moss-green. Algae grows gaily up the sides. Fat, dead flies, eyes bulging and blind, float on the surface, as well as an assortment of other winged creatures trapped by the lure of the cool water. The unsanitary condition of the pool never disturbs the swarm of children who on a Sunday afternoon adorn the old fountain, splashing, throwing leaves, sailing boats, dropping crumbs. They also, when no reprimanding adult is in sight, urinate in the scummy water. On this particular hot and sultry afternoon, sweltering under a humid haze, we see only one boy at the rim of the fountain. His name is JULIE and he is a recent arrival to this fair city. He is about eight years old, small for his age, with a hint of baby-fat still clinging to his wrists and ankles. His hair is combed long, by a dotting mother, over his forehead. His skin is beautiful and tawny, his eyes deeply brown and luminescent. He is wearing only a pair of rumpled shorts and he is barefoot. He crouches by the side of the pool, happy, deeply absorbed in a game of his own.

JULIE:

Then they have a battle.

(A pause as he frantically waves two leaves together until one is broken from its stem)

He's won every battle. Even if he's little.

(He picks up another leaf)

Then they have another battle.

(In deadly earnest, he initiates a violent struggle between the leaves)

A sound of laughter, offstage left, makes him pause and look up. We hear loud children's shouts, quarrelsome and excited. JULIE hurriedly drops his leaves and runs to hide in wings right. Enter from left four boys, FRED, NICKY, TOMMY, and ROBB. MARCIE, NICKY'S sister, follows slightly behind, obviously an outcast. FRED is the oldest of the group. Having just celebrated his twelfth birthday, he is slightly embarrassed to be caught in the company of kids. He is stocky and square, freckled, sunburnt, with legs like furry pillars. His voice whines and curls with a sickly-sweet sound. He carries a toy motorboat under his arm but is definitely not looking forward to using it. He is sulky and defiant. NICKY, a ten-year-old, is incredibly thin with a loose, swarthy skin spread easily over his skeleton. He resembles a monkey. He is agile and gay, always smiling and laughing, always ready for a prank. MARCIE, his twin, is a little taller than NICKY, but not as gay. She is resentful because, although a dedicated tomboy, the boys have excluded her from their games. NICKY is armed with the latest in nautical vehicles, bearing a highly mechanized, stream-lined submarine, but MARCIE has only a half-walnut shell with a dainty mast, which she pretends is a majestic sailing vessel. TOMMY is five. He has a perfectly round face encircled by a ring of flaxen hair, enhanced by a pair of ice-blue eyes. His cheeks are fiery, his skin soft and powdery. TOMMY is really too little to play with the others. He is always the first to fail, the first to get hurt, the first to cry, the first to tire. But it is impossible to get rid of him. Like an eager leech, he clings to the other boys and their mysterious games. He too holds a toy rubber boat. ROBB looks like a Raphael painting. In appearance he seems other-worldly and intense, but he is actually no more creative or perceptive than any other child. He clutches jealously and tenderly a dove-white sailboat.

FRED:

(Entering)

Who wants to play this stupid old game, anyway?

ROBB:

The boats look great in the water. They sail around like fairies.



FRED:

Fairy yourself!

NICKY:

(Skipping ahead)

My boat's gonna be the first in the pool. I got the best boat here.

ROBB:

My boat's the most beautiful.

NICKY:

Yeah, but I bet it can't sink a Jap.

(Proudly)

My boat's a sub.

TOMMY:

(Warily)

I'm not gonna be the Japs.

FRED:

Are we gonna play World War Two again?

NICKY:

You gotta better game?

ROBB:

My boat's gonna take a trip. It don' wanna be in any war.

MARCIE:

(She has heard the answer several times)

Can I play?

FRED:

Naw, you're a girl.

MARCIE:

So what? I can't help it.

TOMMY:

(Suspiciously)

I don' wanna be the Japs.

NICKY:

You ever seen a girl in the navy? War's only for men.  
Ladies stay home and sew things.

MARCIE:

I don' know how to sew.

FRED:

Aw, shut up. You're always yakkin'. Come on. Let's play.  
Tommy, you're gonna be the Japs.

ROBB:

(Fondly)

Marcie don' haveta be in the war. She can come take a trip with me.

TOMMY:

(Plaintively, near tears)

How come I'm always the bad guy, Fred?

FRED:

'Cause you're little. And Japs is little. And yellow.

MARCIE:

But I wanna be in the war. Come on, Nicky. I'm gonna tell Me if you don't.

By this time, the children have put their boats in the pool.

TOMMY:

Not yellow.

NICKY:

(Thrusting his sub through the water)

Brrmmm! Brrmmm!

FRED:

Hurry up and put your boat in the water, Tommy.

TOMMY:

I don' wanna be the Japs.

ROBB:

Marcie, don'tcha wanna take a trip with me? I'm gonna go to Africa. Ever been to Africa?

MARCIE:

You never been there, stupid.

ROBB:

Sure I have. That's where the black people live. It's real hot and jungley. There's monkeys and lions and tigers and elephants and lots of other things. Nobody's got clothes either. And they don't got cars so they swing around in the trees like Tarzan. Didn't you ever see Tarzan do it?

FRED:

(Disgustedly)

What a dope.

ROBB:

(Unabashed)

Well, how'd I know all that if I wasn't there?

NICKY:

(Triumphantly)

Gotcha, Tommy! I sunk ya.

TOMMY:

(Wailing)

Not a Jap.

FRED:

(Indignantly)

Hey, wait a minute. Whatcha doin', Marcie?

MARCIE:

(Defiantly)

I'm playin' with you.

FRED:

Jees, Nicky, tell your dumb sister to get outa here.

MARCIE:

I got just as much right here as you.

FRED:

Well, but I sure don' haveta play with you. You and that dumb little peanut of a boat.

MARCIE:

(Insulted)

I don' wanna play with you anyway.

(She gets up and walks around to the other side of the fountain)

FRED:

Come on, Nicky. Let's blow up Tommy.

NICKY:

But I already blew him up.

ROBB:

Tommy, wanna go to darkest Africa?

FRED:

(Patiently)

Well, if we only got one Jap, we gotta keep blowin' him up, don't we?

ROBB:

(Pretending TOMMY has accepted his offer to see Africa)

Watch out, Tommy! Your boat's gettin' sucked in by a whirlpool. You're gonna drown!

TOMMY:  
 (Deeply unhappy)  
 Don' wanna drown.

MARCIE:  
 (Shouting from the other side of the fountain)  
 I'm gonna tell Ma, Nicky. Just wait. You're gonna  
 be sorry.

NICKY:  
 (Importantly)  
 Aw, for pete sake. Whatcha gonna do with a little sister?

MARCIE:  
 Just as old as you.

While the exchange between MARCIE and her brother is going on, JEREMY SPOONER walks onto the stage from left and seats himself on a bench near the fountain. He is about thirty-five, too old to be a teenage rebel, too young to be celebrating a last fling before death. He is emphatically not suffering from middle-aged restlessness. He has just quit his job in a bookstore, selling verbal fantasies to uninterested people, because he felt that, without his knowing it, he had died. Naive and romantic, more child-like than children, he has undertaken the great adventure, fraught with danger and excitement and the wonder of discovery, to find out how to live again.

JEREMY:  
 At heart, we are all of an age.  
 (He addresses the world at large, eager to make  
 contact with everyone, but the children stop playing.  
 Even TOMMY stops crying and looks up in amazement)

ROBB:  
 You talkin' to us, mister?

JEREMY:  
 I think I should talk to you more than anyone else.  
 You're so young, so unblemished. You haven't forgotten  
 how to live.

FRED:  
 (Suspiciously)  
 What's that supposed to mean?

JEREMY:  
 Well, look at it this way. You may be ten...

FRED:

(Indignantly)  
I'm twelve and two days.

JEREMY:

(Unheeding)  
... and I may be thirty, but at heart there is really no difference at all between us. Like you, I enjoy the park, I relish the splash of the water on dead grass and the swish of the fallen leaves. I like to see the boats eddying about in the pull of the suction. I love popcorn and pierced hotdogs. I like to laugh and I love a rousing argument. I smell a dog or a baby and I'm happy. Am I really so adult?

NICKY:

(Bewildered)  
I don' know.

JEREMY:

That was a rhetorical question, boy.

(Thoughtfully)  
I can't call you "boy." Oh, I can go out and face the rest of humanity and call them "sir" and "miss" and "hey you." Because they're just part of the Big Machine which is killing us all. But the Machine hasn't gotten you yet. You're still a free individual. You need an individual name.

(Frightened)  
You do have one?

NICKY:

Sure.  
(Carefully and self-consciously)  
Nicholas Korillsky.

JEREMY:

Well, Nicholas Korillsky...

NICKY:

(Hurriedly)  
But everybody calls me Nicky.

JEREMY:

(Patiently)  
All right then - Nicky. You see, underneath my sophistication and my wrinkles, I still know how to love life. I haven't lost that yet, at least. But it's buried. Buried under an office manner, a prestigious job which obeys all the rules. And the rules are designed to kill you. Oh, it's subtle, I'll admit. You don't really die. But you don't know you're alive, so what good does it do you?

NICKY:  
 (Totally lost)  
 I don't know.

JEREMY:  
 (His attention drawn back to NICKY)  
 But you, Nicky. You can show me how to get back to life. You still possess a clear and pure soul, uncorrupted by the world's pettiness, untainted by life's gall. You've not yet lost your natural creative instincts. You are responsive, inventive, superbly honest...

NICKY:  
 (Under his breath)  
 Oh, sure.

JEREMY:  
 ... without knowing it, you're a rebel against the senseless conformity of society. You are not afraid to rejoice in the gala spirit of the world, taste the gods' nectar, and awake each morning in love. Are you then such a child?

MARCIE:  
 (Intrigued by the stranger's conversation, she comes around from the other side of the fountain)  
 Don't bother askin' him questions. He don't know nothin'. He does lousy in school.

JEREMY:  
 I don't want him to know anything. Education is a great corrupter. It is an assembly line of mass production, forcing every free and independent mind into the same ugly mold. With your first lesson, you are already beginning to die a little.

FRED:  
 My ma says you can't get no place today without an edjagation.

JEREMY:  
 Your mother is quite right. Society only has room for those who have been machined to fit. The real question is - where do you want to go? And why?

ROBB:  
 Where do you want to go, mister?

JEREMY:  
 I don't know. I only know where I don't want to go. I don't want to go where people have forgotten to be alive, where every stifling day is exactly like the day before and the day to come.  
 (intensely)  
 I don't want to go there.

ROBB:

(Hopefully)  
Ever been to deepest Africa?

FRED:

Well, what're you doin' here if you don' know where you're goin'?

JEREMY:

I'm just sitting.

NICKY:

How come?

JEREMY:

I'm waiting.

ROBB:

What'cha waitin' for?

JEREMY:

I'm not sure.

FRED:

(Pompously)  
Are you waitin' for the best things in life? My ma says if you wait for the best things in life they never come.

JEREMY:

(Slightly ironic)  
Is that so? Your mother sounds like a very insightful person. I'm sure she never stops to wait for anything.

FRED:

(Truculently)  
Why should she?

MARCIE:

Hey, mister, don'tcha really know what you're waitin' for?

JEREMY:

In a way, I'm waiting to discover how to live again. I'm waiting for someone, maybe like you, who hasn't forgotten how to live. You know, you go through life and you are extremely busy, unbelievably busy all the time. You feel full of mission and purpose, but you're never really sure if you've accomplished anything. All my life I sold books of fantasy to uninterested people and I never bothered to ask myself why. I sold heavy books and all that time I was too busy to smell the sky or dance on dandelions.

NICKY:

What's the sky smell like?

JEREMY:

(Amazed)

Haven't you ever smelled it?

FRED:

Aw, you can't smell the sky. You only look at it.

JEREMY:

(Disillusioned)

Even you don't remember to smell the sky.

ROBB:

(Taking a big breath)

I think it smells like darkest Africa.

NICKY:

(Captivated by the new game)

Smells like grass.

(He takes a whiff)

Hey, that's pretty funny. How come the sky smells like grass? Wonder what the grass smells like.

(He bends down and buries his nose in the grass)

TOMMY:

(Worried)

Smells like it's fulla Japs.

FRED:

(In a superior tone)

Sky smells like air to me.

MARCIE:

Air don' smell like nothin'. You don' get it, Fred. We gotta say the sky smells like somethin', huh, mister?

JEREMY:

(Poetically)

The sky. The sky smells like a lady in love. It smells like a lavender bouquet and a delicatessen. It smells like a dance and a laugh. It smells of people.

FRED:

Ma says it's indecent to talk about the way people smell.

JEREMY:

What's indecent about the way I smell? It convinces me I'm still alive.



ROBB:

(Persistently)

In Africa, they got lotsa smells. They got lilacs -

(Hesitating a moment)

hey, mister, is lilacs a smell?

JEREMY:

(Amazed)

Is lilac a smell? Lilac is one of the most sensuous, maddening, tantalizing, spring-ridden smells that was ever created.

ROBB:

(Impressed and inspired)

Well, they got that smell in Africa.

(He looks at MARCIE lovingly)

And Marcie can smell it all she wants.

FRED:

(Nauseated)

Ever heard anything so sick? Who wants to sit around all day and talk about smells anyway?

(He turns back to the fountain and pushes his boat through the water with great force)

JEREMY:

That's a dangerous-looking boat you have, Nicky.

NICKY:

(Happily)

Can blow up anything.

JEREMY:

Where has it gone?

NICKY:

(Startled)

Where's it gone?

JEREMY:

Where have you sailed it? What endless seas has it traversed, what unknown lands has it discovered?

NICKY:

Well, gee, mister, it's just a toy. I mean, it don' really do nothin'. It just sits around in my room.

ROBB:

My boat's been places. Been to Africa. And castles in Europe where fat ladies sit around wearing diamonds and jewels and things. And it's been to the Pacific Ocean. That's the one Balboa found.

**JEREMY:**

I've seen the Pacific too. You sit on a desolate bluff and watch the mighty waters "roll on, roll on." For an instant you are suspended in time and you think you are Balboa and the whole world is sitting out there waiting to be discovered.

**NICKY:**

(His interest in the conversation flagging)  
Hey, Tommy, better watch it. Almost got your boat.

**TOMMY:**

Don' wanna be a Jap.

**ROBB:**

There's Africa! My boat's gettin' closer and closer.

**MARCIE:**

Robb, are they really naked?

**ROBB:**

Well, I'm gonna find out in a second. Gotta stop and look.

**JEREMY:**

Go ahead, Robb. Stop and look. Go ahead while you still have the chance. Don't forget, don't put it off, because you may never get a chance again. People don't object if you play the "Stop, look, and listen" game when you're a kid. They even teach it to you. Before crossing each street you must "Stop, look, and listen," to protect yourself from the uncaring wheels of the road. Then it's just a game. But, like most rules taught us when we're young, we're counselled to forget this one as soon as we grow up. We are no longer advised to stop, look, and listen. In fact, it's even dangerous to do so. People don't want to stop and think any longer. It's so much easier for everyone if you affably let yourself be run over by the traffic jam. People are afraid if you stop because we don't have a looking, listening type of life. We are expected to haphazardly stumble across the street, risking all and not even bothering to wonder what we've gained.

Toward the end of JEREMY'S speech, a businessman, IRVING AMADEUS GOOCH, enters from left. He carries a briefcase in one hand and a hat and overcoat in the other. Unlike most businessmen, weighted down by tax worries, strike threats, and the stock market, MR. GOOCH is pompous, confident, and brisk on this particular morning as he strolls through the park. He has never stopped to question the world and would be insulted if anyone asked him to do so. He instinctively realizes that it is dangerous to stop and wonder.

JEREMY:

(He happens to look up and observes GOOCH'S ostentatious smile of satisfaction. The smile, and GOOCH'S overall confidence, intrigue JEREMY. He hails GOOCH gaily and hopefully. Throughout this scene, the children continue to play by the fountain, giving occasional shouts and exclamations)

Excuse me! I couldn't help noticing how proudly you're walking through the park. Could you tell me - what exactly have you gained today? Why are you so satisfied?

GOOCH:

(Excessively polite)

Excuse me. I don't believe I know you.

JEREMY:

No. But I want to know you.

GOOCH:

(Not surprised)

Many people want to know me. But I don't want to know many people. I already know almost everyone worth knowing.

JEREMY:

But everyone is worth knowing. Don't you feel that?

GOOCH:

Let go of my arm. I have an important luncheon engagement...

JEREMY:

But I don't even know your name yet. Don't you believe in a little brotherhood? After all, today is Sunday. Lunch can wait a moment. I want to find out what makes you so content.

GOOCH:

Are you trying to intimidate me?

JEREMY:

For God's sake! I just want to look at you, listen to you. Take a few minutes out of your life and talk to me.

GOOCH:

(Wavering, torn between his desire to fulfill his appointment and his natural curiosity)

Well...

JEREMY:

I'm Jeremy Spooner. I'm an admirer of life.

GOOCH:

I distrust people who say things like that. It sounds odd.

JEREMY:

Don't distrust me, Mr. ...?

GOOCH:

The name's Gooch. Irving Amadeus Gooch.

JEREMY:

Not a musician?

GOOCH:

No, oh no. My parents, they admired Mozart and Irving Berlin. Funny combination, huh? But I was never musically inclined myself.

(He pauses a moment, visibly beaming with self-satisfaction)  
I'm vice-president of the Hudson Company. You've heard of it. We make women's lingerie. Right now our most popular stock is the form-fit Bra Beautiful...

JEREMY:

(Interrupting, slightly disturbed)

A prospering businessman.

(Then insistently)

But you're not like the others. You don't look like the others.

GOOCH:

What's the matter with the way I look?

JEREMY:

(Hurriedly)

Nothing, nothing. I mean you look happy, satisfied, not harassed, not crushed by life.

GOOCH:

Sure I'm happy. Why should I complain? I've got a good position, a comfortable wife, two cars, a fine house...

JEREMY:

(Interrupting)

I know the list too. Member of the Rotary Club, honorary Boy Scout Chief, volunteer fireman. I know the list because yesterday I was on it too. Money, security, respect.

(With certainty)

But they aren't the things that make you happy. Mr. Gooch, there must be something else. Something that gives you that proud-to-be-alive grin all over your face.

GOOCH:

Well, as a matter of fact, there is something that made me pretty happy.

JEREMY:

I knew it. I looked at you and I felt that you were truly a human being, that you had found the secret.

(He pauses)

Mr. Gooch, you must tell it to me. I need to share your happiness. Yesterday, I was only another cog in the Machine. My life was buried in trivia. I was selling books to dull old ladies and bored housewives and impressing them with my verbosity and friendliness. Everyone said I had a great future in the store. I had such a literary way about me - that's what they said. I could sell senile senior citizens a copy of Fanny Hill or dreamy-eyed girls, Das Kapital. But this morning - this morning I woke up afraid. I suddenly felt that nothing was real any more. My life had become a chapter in a book. I wasn't real, the customers weren't real, life wasn't real.

GOOCH:

Are you trying to tell me something?

JEREMY:

No.

(Desperately)

I have none of the answers. All I have are questions. Gooch, you must help me.

GOOCH:

I don't get it. You got a good, steady job and you walk out on it...

(He pauses uncomprehendingly)

What do you want out of life, anyway?

JEREMY:

I want what you have. I want the joy of knowing I'm alive.

Mr. Gooch,

(Intensely)

what was it?

GOOCH:

(Completely baffled and slightly annoyed)

What was what?

JEREMY:

What made you so happy? You are a man of soul and inspiration. You've found where life was hiding between the file cabinets.

GOOCH:  
 (Chuckling lewdly)  
 You can say that again.

JEREMY:  
 (Not paying attention)  
 What was it, Mr. Gooch?

GOOCH:  
 (Eager to boast)  
 Well, I hardly think it's something you could emulate,  
 young man.

JEREMY:  
 I'll try anything.

GOOCH:  
 (Ruffled)  
 It's not a thing just anyone can try, You see, young man,  
 the mayor has personally asked me to address the city  
 council on the dangers of federal aid. Why, I helped  
 build the lingerie industry from scratch and I can tell you...

JEREMY:  
 (Unbelieving)  
 A speech before the city council? Is that what made you so proud?  
 (He begins to laugh hysterically)

GOOCH:  
 Just what do you find so funny?

JEREMY:  
 (Wildly ironic)  
 My savior!  
 (He embraces GOOCH, who pulls away with distaste)

GOOCH:  
 I don't know what you're talking about.

JEREMY:  
 (Bitterly)  
 I find I know you very well, after all, Mr. Gooch,  
 (Suddenly he is terribly bitter that he had been  
 deluded by GOOCH'S meaningless happiness)  
 Mr. Gooch, did you ever want to climb a sheer ice peak?  
 Did you ever want to write a sonnet to stir the souls of  
 men? Did you ever want to live before you wanted to sell  
 lingerie?

GOOCH:  
 (Irritated)  
 I don't understand you. And I have an...

JEREMY:

(Interrupting)

No, you won't understand me. You don't like me to talk about my own fear and uncertainty because you suspect they may belong to you too. You're afraid to ignore that appointment, afraid to resign from the Rotary Club or let the Cub Scout headquarters burn down. You're afraid to look for the answers.

GOOCH:

Are you accusing me of something?

JEREMY:

(Self-righteously)

Yes! I'm accusing you of being sucked under by the meaningless, ritualistic traditions of society. You don't even have the intelligence to understand that it is you, not I, who have lost.

GOOCH:

(For a moment he is speechless with indignation. Then he slowly looks at JEREMY. Suddenly his face lights up and he looks less mystified)

Look here, young man, you didn't quit, did you? The boss fired you and you're having a rough time making ends meet. You're bitter against the whole world. Listen, if you wanted a hand-out, why didn't you say so to begin with?

(His tone is truly sympathetic. This dilemma is one he understands)

All this business about brotherhood.

(Then heartily, having no wish to destroy JEREMY'S illusions)

Sure, we're all brothers under the skin, aren't we? It's a hard time to be alive. Unemployment on the rise, inflation. We can't all make it. And I guess a lot of deserving guys get the axe. I'll admit I've had my share of breaks.

(He begins to pontificate)

And I feel it is my duty as a prosperous member of this community to lend a helping hand. Now just hold on a sec...

(He fumbles with his coat)

Got a ten in my wallet. Glad to see you have it.

JEREMY:

(Dully)

I have enough money.

GOOCH:

Oh, that's all right. I know it's embarrassing, but, well...

(He gropes for a well-worn platitude)

Like the minister said this morning, your need is greater than mine.

JEREMY:

(Shouting, almost screaming)  
But I don't want your money! Can't you see? I don't want it.

GOOCH:

(Kindly, but a little hurt)  
You don't have to pretend with me. Now that I look at you, you do seem sort of pale. What you need is a good square meal to set you up. A shave and a haircut might not be out of place either. You'll feel like a new man. You'll be able to swing a job in no time. Why, I might even be able to...

JEREMY:

(Interrupting with a barely controlled calm)  
I've had enough to eat. And I don't want a job. I don't need a job.  
(GOOCH looks at him quizzically, pantomiming "Oh yeah?"  
JEREMY'S tone becomes more desperate and imploring)  
What I need is to touch someone...  
(He grasps GOOCH'S arm)

GOOCH:

(Remembering the embrace)  
Hey, what's the matter with you?

JEREMY:

... to really look at someone, to know people are people...  
(He pauses, then smiles bitterly)  
Never mind, Mr. Irving - Amadeus - Gooch. Never mind. I don't think you quite understand.

GOOCH:

(Drawing away with revulsion)  
You bet your life I understand. Stopping respectable men in a park, talking like a lunatic. Damn queer!  
(He has started walking angrily away to right. Now he stops and turns to JEREMY)  
You know what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna talk to the city commissioner and I'm gonna get this park cleaned up!  
(Scornfully)  
Did I ever want to write a sonnet? How the hell should I know?

As GOOCH speaks his last lines, ELLIE KAKABIAN enters from right. She is pretty, young, and forthright. She is dressed freely, with utter contempt for current fashions. She starts slightly as she sees GOOCH.

ELLIE:

Mr. Gooch! What a surprise to bump into you like this.



GOOCH:  
 (Abruptly)  
 What are you doing here?

ELLIE:  
 I could ask you the same question. You know, people of reputation never walk in this park.

GOOCH:  
 (Flustered, embarrassed)  
 I was late for an important meeting so I decided to take a short-cut...

ELLIE:  
 (Interrupting)  
 You don't have to explain anything to me, Mr. Gooch. I don't even work for you anymore.

GOOCH:  
 You shouldn't complain. It seems to me we've worked out a satisfactory arrangement.

ELLIE:  
 (With disgust)  
 Pig!

GOOCH:  
 Now look, Ellie, what's past is past. Forget about it. We all make mistakes.

ELLIE:  
 Screw you.  
 (A slight pause)  
 Funny I should put it like that, isn't it, Mr. Gooch? God, it makes me sick to look at you. No wonder your wife won't sleep with you.

GOOCH:  
 First a lunatic, then a foul-mouthed little slut. I'm a decent, respected citizen. I don't deserve this.  
 (He begins to exit at right)

ELLIE:  
 (Furious, shouting)  
 Pig!

GOOCH:  
 (He is about to disappear from the audience's view. He turns about coldly and speaks with measured calm)  
 Remember, Ellie. You keep your mouth shut or the checks stop. I'll see to it that you never get another job around here as long as you live. I'll make sure no man is

GOOCH:

(Continued)

brave enough - or fool enough - to marry you. I'll make your life hell. So just keep your mouth shut.

(He falters)

My God. You're no better than a common whore. Why do you keep persecuting me?

(He exits at right)

ELLIE:

(She sees JEREMY sitting on the bench. She speaks hesitantly, embarrassed by the previous scene. In a light, joking, nervous tone)

Are you the lunatic?

JEREMY:

(Smiling)

Maybe I am.

ELLIE:

I'm the foul-mouthed little slut, in case you were confused.

JEREMY:

(Terribly friendly)

My name's Jeremy Spooner.

ELLIE:

I'm Ellen Kakabian.

JEREMY:

An interesting name.

ELLIE:

Only one in the phonebook.

JEREMY:

May I call you Ellie?

ELLIE:

If that old bastard can, I don't see why you can't.

There is a slight pause. JEREMY looks at her for awhile, then speaks.

JEREMY:

It took courage to defy Gooch like that.

ELLIE:

Oh, that. I don't defy him. Hell, he supports me. It's just that it shakes me to see him conveniently shelve me with a monthly check and pretend I never existed.

JEREMY:

(Unheeding)

In defying him, you rebel against the whole impersonal, standardized society which created you. And now you're happy. I want to share that happiness.

ELLIE:

(On the defensive. She thinks this is a pick-up)

If anyone's happy, I'd say it was you.

JEREMY:

I'm not happy. I'm still looking for the answers.

(He hesitates, then goes on in a puzzled tone)

But I am happy because I see that the world is beautiful and holy.

ELLIE:

The world's only beautiful if you have enough money to make it that way. Don't kid yourself. There aren't any answers.

JEREMY:

There must be answers. Look at it - the great, glorious world. The sun swirling like fire. The streets dancing and wandering all over the earth.

ELLIE:

That's not an answer. Sure the world is beautiful, but it can be damn ugly too. There's no way to escape it.

JEREMY:

Have you ever wondered what would happen if people bothered to love the world? I want to embrace all of it - its music, its tragedy, its light.

ELLIE:

(Skeptically)

Are you just going to sit here and love it?

JEREMY:

(Uncertainly)

I don't know. I want my life to be a paean of glory and praise. But I don't know to what. I want to exist as a human being, not a cog in the Machine. I want my life to be worthwhile and meaningful but I don't know how to make it that way. Ellie, I need you to show me how. You must show me how to escape into freedom.

ELLIE:

It's senseless to talk about a meaningful life. Life just is, that's all.

(A pause. She continues suspiciously)

What's your angle? Why are you telling me all this?

JEREMY:

(He does not catch the note of fear in her voice)  
 Because you are simple and unhurried. You are not mass-produced,  
 you are not many girls, you are not even beautiful, you are  
 only loving and gay. When you speak I hear the glitter of  
 Paris cabarets and the solemnity of a Catholic mass. I hear  
 the frenetic gasp and convulsion of gaiety, the searing sigh  
 of prayer.

ELLIE:

(Bewildered)  
 You talk like you were in love with me.

JEREMY:

I am. I love the whole goddamned world. I just don't  
 understand how to make it love me.

ELLIE:

(Anxious to get away. Her voice too loud)  
 It's getting dark.

JEREMY:

The sun's abandoned us again. I wonder - will it ever  
 despair of salvaging this grotesque sphere? Twilight is  
 never real, you know. Shadows lurk in the people, the  
 wind rises, and the heather blows.

ELLIE:

(Intimidated. Starts to rise)  
 You speak like a poem.

JEREMY:

(His words detain ELLIE. He speaks a little desperately)  
 And you are a poem. A poem which needs no words, a  
 symphony without notes, a hymn without praise, a lover  
 without substance.

(ELLIE, rising, begins to edge away in fear)  
 Ellie, tell me you are these things. Don't be afraid.  
 I only want you to help me.

ELLIE:

You're like a little child. You won't see things the way  
 they are. You want me to be your golden dream, but I'm  
 like everybody else, trapped by a grubby life. There are  
 no lucky ones.

(She pauses, abashed by her outburst)  
 I have to go home.

JEREMY:

(Pathetically)

I'd forgotten you have a life to return to. Well, go back. You were never free anyway. Remember, Ellie. Once you've stopped, to look and listen, they won't let you go back.

ELLIE:

(Apologizing without knowing why)

I'm sorry. Goodbye.

(She exits at left)

JEREMY:

(After she has left)

Goodbye, Ellie. You too were afraid to understand me. I thought you'd broken loose, but you were really no different from Mr. Gooch. Only your image was different.

(He speaks softly, bitterly, vindicated)

They're afraid when I stop them and because they are afraid, they hate me. The world goes spinning by like a mad, gay top, but no one wants you to find out which end is up. We must all sit at identical desks, think identical thoughts, lead identical lives. I can't seem to find the free, independent spirits of the earth. Maybe they don't exist any longer. Maybe I'm chasing a fantasy. Maybe Ellie was right. Maybe there is no way out.

(He raises his voice in self-mockery)

Ladies and gentlemen. Come and witness the mechanized monster who thinks he's a human being. He fouled up the whole world because one day he just stopped and began to think, thereby producing instant calamity.

(He smiles)

God. What an epitaph that would be.

(JEREMY stretches and leans back on the bench.

Meanwhile, the children by the pool have unwrapped sandwiches and are eating)

MARCIE:

You know what I think? I think maybe you talk so much because you didn't have nothin' to eat this morning.

JEREMY:

You may be right.

NICKY:

Wanna apple?

(He tosses JEREMY an apple. JEREMY catches it deftly and takes a bite)

JEREMY:

How many people bother to taste an apple? Its skin is bloody red, hard and slick. You tear the skin and discover pure white, woody meat. A sweet, tart juice tickles your tongue and excites your salivary glands. The apple is no longer a whole. You've destroyed its complete symmetry. Look at the gaping hole. Neither round nor square, it is pointed, curved, smooth, rough, large and small all at once.

NICKY:

(Comprehending the general gist of JEREMY'S speech)  
Yeah, it tastes pretty good.

JEREMY:

I should have asked Mr. Gooch if he knew what an apple tasted like. You know, he was really afraid of me. He hated me.

(With self-satisfaction)

If I'd given him the slightest provocation, he would have killed me. And Ellie was really no better, only more timid. God, it's dangerous to stop, look, and listen. Society regards me as a threat to its empty, conventional, planned blueprint for life. But I don't want to convert anyone. I just want to find meaning, or even the promise of meaning.

As he is speaking, JULIE walks out slowly from right. He longs to join the other boys. He approaches them diffidently)

JULIE:

(Speaking with a bravery he does not feel)  
Hi. I'm Julie.

FRED:

(Unkindly. A big boy to a younger one)  
So what?

NICKY:

(Merely observing)  
Julie's a girl's name.

JULIE:

It's not a girl's name. It's my name.

FRED:

(To JULIE)  
Little girls can't play our game.

MARCIE:

How come? Whatsa matter with girls anyway?

JULIE:

I'm not a girl.

NICKY:

(Chanting, delighted with the results of his taunting)  
Julie Julie Julie. Julie Julie. Where's your dress?

FRED:

(Taking up the chant)  
Julie Julie. Julie Julie Julie Julie. Where's your curls?

JULIE:

I'm not a girl.

NICKY:

Where's your doll?

MARCIE:

(Sympathetically)  
Gee, Julie's not a bad name.

ROBB:

(Tactfully)  
If we let him play, he won't bother us no more.

NICKY:

(Quickly changing tactics)  
Oh, sure. I was just kiddin'. He can be another Jap, Fred.

JULIE:

Lemme play.

FRED:

Who needs you?

ROBB:

Wanna take a trip to Africa, kid?

FRED:

He can't play if he don't got a boat.

JEREMY:

He has a boat.

JULIE:

I do?

JEREMY:

Certainly.  
(He begins to fold a newspaper he has found under his bench)

ROBB:

It's not a boat unless it has a name.

JULIE:

What's its name?

JEREMY:

You must give it one.

MARCIE:

Can it be just any name?

JEREMY:

Of course not. Everything in the world has a name all its own. Do you think Mount Kilimanjaro could have any other name? When you say "Kilimanjaro," you see high, steep whiteness, the vision of the infinite, and the carrion smell of death. You see the promise of the world and the tragedy of man's fallibility. You see the majesty and the failure, the nobility and the despair. You hear the song.

ROBB:

What song's that?

JEREMY:

The song we're all looking for. The song this boat will sing if you give it the right name.

MARCIE:

Will it really sing? I never heard a boat sing.

JULIE:

I'm gonna call it The Tramp.

JEREMY:

In my honor?

NICKY:

Is that the kind of name that sings?

JEREMY:

See what is written on its bow: "Enemy casualties reach level high. Pentagon jubilant." Most certainly it is a tramp vessel. Its song is buried in death. And I - who want only to find a way out of the death and the terror - it was I who made it.

JULIE:

(Walking gingerly toward JEREMY, his hand outstretched)  
Can I have it?



JEREMY:

You don't even stop to think about its dead song.  
 (With something akin to despair)  
 If you understand what I'm looking for, you're afraid,  
 and if you don't understand, you remain aloof.

FRED:

(To JULIE)  
 Well, you gotta be a Jap. We only got one.

TOMMY:

Don' wanna be a Jap.

NICKY:

(To JULIE)  
 You can be a freighter. Tommy'll protect you.

TOMMY:

(Brightening)  
 Honest? I'm gonna protect him?  
 (He begins vigorously trying to protect the ungainly  
 newspaper vessel with gallant, dramatic movements  
 of his own ship)

ROBB:

Hey, Julie, don'tcha wanna come to Africa, where me and  
 Marcie is?

MARCIE:

I'm not goin' to Africa. I wanna be in the war.  
 (To the other boys)  
 Can't I please be in the war?

FRED:

Go to Africa with your boyfriend.

MARCIE:

He's not my boyfriend. And I'm gonna sink your ship in  
 about two minutes, Fred, if ya don' let me play.

FRED:

(Bored)  
 Oh, get outa here.

JULIE:

Hey, Tommy, you're supposed to protect me. How come you  
 went and got sunk?

NICKY:

He's a Jap. He's gotta get sunk.

**TOMMY:**  
How come you don' never get sunk?

**NICKY:**  
I'm the good guys.

There is a considerable pause while TOMMY pauses to think this over. Then he defiantly charges FRED'S ship.

**FRED:**  
Hey, why'd you sink me?

**TOMMY:**  
(Bravely)  
I'm sicka bein' Japs.

**FRED:**  
Lousy punk.

**JULIE:**  
I don' mind gettin' sunk all the time.

**NICKY:**  
Forget it, Fred.

**FRED:**  
(Getting up abruptly)  
Aw, who wantsa play this stupid old game anyway? Sailing boats is fer girls. I'm gonna go down to the ball park.  
(He strides off to left and exits)

**ROBB:**  
Fred's a dope.

**NICKY:**  
Yeah. Who needs him?

The boys push their boats through the water. However, their hearts are no longer in it. That insidious element of doubt, the challenge to their masculinity, once introduced cannot be erased.

**TOMMY:**  
Whatsa matter? Aren't we gonna play no more?

**ROBB:**  
(Without enthusiasm)  
Oh, sure.

NICKY:

(Rising hesitantly)  
Well, I don' know about you guys but I'm sorta sick of boats. Think I'll walk over to the diamond and see what's doin'.

(He begins walking over casually to left. Near the fountain he pauses and looks back)

JULIE:

Guess I' come with ya. Don't much like boats anyway.  
(He gets up and starts walking toward NICKY. His newspaper boat lies forgotten in the water)

MARCIE:

(Pleading)  
Nicky, you know I'm a great pitcher. You practice with me all the time...

NICKY:

(Interrupting, embarassed)  
Aw, shut up.

MARCIE:

(Paying no attention. Rising)  
I'm gonna go with you. Can't stop me.

NICKY:

(Making a face. He knows from previous experience it is futile to try to dissuade her)  
Well, come on if you're coming.  
(The three exit)

ROBB:

I don' care. They're no fun. Hey, Tommy, wanna go on a trip?

TOMMY:

Where to?

ROBB:

Darkest Africa -  
(Suddenly despondent)

- I guess.

(A pause as he propels his boat about disconsolently)  
Aw, what the heck! Come on, Tommy. Hey, you guys, wait for us!

(ROBB and TOMMY exit running at left)

**JEREMY:**

Even children. Afraid to stop for a moment. They belong to society as much as Mr. Gooch.

(He rises from the bench and walks slowly over to the fountain. He picks up the newspaper boat, now water-logged and soggy, and begins to unfold it carefully)

Where are the free ones, the ones who've escaped?

(Speaking to the boat)

They've forgotten you. Run off and left you behind. Oh, you tramp vessel, you had no song to sing.

(He glances at the paper)

You and your murders and your swindles and your wars. You aren't free. You're permanently docked at the port of society.

(He drops the paper in the water with disgust. For some minutes he stands by the fountain, looking abstractedly into the bubbling water)

The lights slowly, imperceptibly dim. JEREMY walks dejectedly back to the bench and sits down. A single street lamp jerks on and sheds a sinister, yellow beam on his face. Immersed in thought, he does not notice the three thugs, who appear from the shadowed area to back. They are leather-jacketed, greasy, young. KAYN, the most clever, dropped out of high school three years ago. He has not regretted the decision. He enjoys controlling and manipulating the lives of others. He enjoys evading and eluding the forces of authority, whether these be narco agents, cops, or parents. He is careful, cold, and wary. BUDDY, a hulking twenty-year-old, is noteworthy principally for his incredibly stupidity. Slow-moving and uncertain, he has never understood the world. The product of a broken home, a drinking mother and an impotent father, he has sought refuge in the world of toughs. Here he can imagine himself important and significant. He is agreeable, kindly, and eager. DODDS, the last member of the trio, is dark, thin, persecuted. He feels rejected by conventional society. He realizes that the world has turned a cold, unsympathetic shoulder to him. It has ignored his problems, shrugged at his tears, failed to notice his doubts. DODDS thinks of himself as cruel and unscrupulous, but basically he is no less uncertain than BUDDY. He is a desperate human being. He refuses to understand that he is a product of the very world he loathes. The thugs approach JEREMY, looking for trouble.

**KAYN:**

Dodds, Buddy! What do we have here?

BUDDY:

(Seriously)

Looks like some guy on a bench.

KAYN:

(Jovially)

Buddy boy, you got more brains than I gave you credit for.  
It is a guy on a bench.

DODDS:

What're you doing out so late, little man? Wife might worry.

JEREMY:

(He looks at the thugs almost hopefully. They seem to embody all the necessary qualities of successful rebels. JEREMY feels that at last he has found someone who can free him from society. He speaks eagerly and amiably, anxious not to offend them)

I don't have a wife.

KAYN:

Just sitting here thinking, huh?

JEREMY:

(Eager to be friendly)

As a matter of fact, yes.

KAYN:

Well, maybe we'll just sit down and think with you.

(At a signal from KAYN, DODDS and BUDDY sit down on either side of JEREMY, so close that they almost touch him. KAYN remains standing, looking down with amusement at his victim)

DODDS:

(Familiarly)

Had any good thoughts lately?

JEREMY:

(Hopefully)

You're some sort of hoodlums, aren't you?

DODDS:

(He does not like the word "hoodlums")

Mind your own damn business.

BUDDY:

(Proudly)

We're a gang

JEREMY:

(Without condemnation)  
And you terrorize society?

DODDS:

Mister, you're asking too damn many questions.

KAYN:

Take it easy, Dodds. We're a fascinating bunch. The gentleman's got a right to be curious.

DODDS:

I just don't like him calling us hoods. It makes us sound cheap and low.

JEREMY:

(Anxiously)  
It's not just curiosity. I don't regard you as some type of strange animal. I'm asking you questions because I need to know.

KAYN:

We don't usually give answers away for nothing.

DODDS:

(Suspiciously)  
You don't need to know nothing.

JEREMY:

(Intensely)  
Are you happy?

DODDS:

What's it to you?

JEREMY:

Does your life mean something? Do you know you're alive?

BUDDY:

(Easily)  
Sure I'm alive.

DODDS:

Shut up, Buddy. You don't have to answer nothing. He's not a cop.

KAYN:

Wait a minute. This sounds interesting. What's my life supposed to mean?

JEREMY:

I want you to tell me that your life is free, that it is yours to do with as you will, that you know no laws except ones of your own making.

BUDDY:

I don't get it. You a social worker?

JEREMY:

(Frantically. He is beginning to feel that these thugs are no more free than he)  
I'm not trying to help you. I'm trying to help me!

DODDS:

(Warily)  
I'm free. Nobody tells me what to do.

JEREMY:

But what about your life? Is it the way you want it to be?

KAYN:

(Mildly)  
It's as good as any other.

DODDS:

Why don't you lay off the questions? My life's my own business.

JEREMY:

But I want to make it my business. I want you to tell me that by breaking free from society, by openly defying the conventional world, you've found a sense of personal identity.

KAYN:

Come again?

JEREMY:

(Shouting)  
Tell me you know who you are.

BUDDY:

Well, mister, I know who I am. I'm Buddy.  
(He turns to KAYN for approval)  
Right, Kayn?

KAYN:

Sure, Buddy. That's right.  
(He turns to JEREMY)  
Look, mister. You've got to face it. Nobody's ever happy or satisfied. Nobody's free. We just get by the best we can.

DODDS:

(Tensely)  
It's not true. I'm happy.  
(He repeats it, as if to convince himself)  
I am happy.

JEREMY:

(Unsure)

Are you?

(DODDS, quivering with anger and fear, does not respond.

JEREMY, permanently disillusioned, becomes cynical and bitter)

Did you really reject society? Or did society create you?

DODDS:

You don't know what you're talking about.

JEREMY:

Maybe you're really an inseparable part of the society you pretend to bully.

KAYN:

We do a pretty good job for only pretending.

JEREMY:

(Distraught)

My God! My God! Are we all doomed? Must we all remain the prisoners society makes of us? Mr. Gooch will forever be a prospering businessman, Ellie will always be the injured, hard-bitten girl, the kids will be just like the parents who produced them. And you. All of you.

DODDS:

Will you shut up!

(He is deeply agitated and fumbles with his jacket)

JEREMY:

(Bitterly disillusioned. He speaks, hardly realizing the effect his words have on DODDS)

You con yourselves into thinking that you want no part of the world. But you are so much the product of your world that you depend on the kicks it provides for you: the illicit thrill, the immoral sex act, the threat of the police...

KAYN:

(Unperturbed)

If you think I like having the cops breathing down my neck, you're crazy.

JEREMY:

You're no more free than the men you rob or the girls you rape. Your sense of individuality is complete illusion. Like the rest of the goddamn, stinking world, you are mass-produced, made to order. You only fulfill a need within society. You don't work against society, you're indispensable to it.



DODDS:

(Desperately)

You're wrong. I'm free. It's my decision. I'm free.

JEREMY:

(Shattered)

I will always approach the wrong person. My God. There are no rebels, only pawns.

KAYN:

We're as rebellious as they come.

JEREMY:

(No longer listening)

All this time I felt it was dangerous to stop and look. I thought it was dangerous because I posed a challenge to the rest of plodding humanity.

(Laughing hysterically)

A challenge! How beautifully absurd. It's only dangerous to stop and look when you discover that there is no such thing as a challenge.

DODDS:

It's not true. We challenge society.

JEREMY:

(Dully)

It's only dangerous when you realize that we have no escape. (Speaking to the three thugs)

We have no hope.

DODDS:

(With a cry of anguish, he jumps at JEREMY and knifes him)

It's not true! You filthy bastard, you filthy bastard!

(JEREMY cries out and slumps forward)

Nobody controls me. I'm free. I'm free. I'm free.

(Each time he utters this refrain, DODDS drives the knife into JEREMY'S lifeless body. KAYN, shocked and for the moment stunned out of his cool, pulls DODDS off)

BUDDY:

Hey, Dodds, I think you killed him.

KAYN:

(Quietly)

You dumb bastard. You dumb, stupid bastard. Why the hell did you do that?

DODDS:

(Almost sobbing)

I hated him.

KAYN:

(Just as he did not understand JEREMY'S theories, he is now bewildered by DODDS' violence)  
You're crazy. You're really nuts.

DODDS:

(Turning on KAYN savagely)  
Shut up! Shut up!

KAYN:

Take it easy. All I want to know is how come you knifed the guy? What'd he do, Dodds?

DODDS:

He was laughing at me.

KAYN:

What the hell! He was just talking. The guy was a poet or something.

BUDDY:

(Puzzled)  
You never done nothing like that before, Dodds. I mean, not to a guy that just talked.

DODDS:

He said I didn't have a real life. He talked like I didn't have any choice.

BUDDY:

He was okay. He was just being friendly. You shouldn't of stuck him, Dodds.

DODDS:

(Appealingly)  
Kayn, he was laughing at me.

BUDDY:

I didn't see him laughing.

KAYN:

So what? You gonna stick every guy that laughs at you? Of all the damn fool things to do.

DODDS:

I hated him. Prying, nosing his way in.  
(A pause)

Kayn, I'm free, aren't I? I don't have to be this way.

KAYN:

(Wearily)

Oh hell, how should I know? You should've asked him.

(Gesturing to the body)

He was the poet.

(The thugs look silently at JEREMY'S body. Then KAYN continues dully)

Oh hell. You might as well frisk the guy, Buddy.

(BUDDY does not move)

Damn it, did you hear what I said? Get his wallet.

BUDDY:

(He slowly approaches the crumpled body. He awkwardly fumbles at the pants pocket, but finds it empty)

Nothing here, Kayn.

KAYN:

Look in his jacket, idiot.

BUDDY:

(Obediently, he looks in the jacket and pulls out a wallet)

Credit card. Driver's license. Some business card.

KAYN:

Let me see it.

(BUDDY hands it to him. KAYN reads it out loud with forced irony)

Standard Bookstore, Avenue of the Patriots. And his name shoved in the corner - Jeremy Spooner. Elegant.

(He laughs with well-simulated scorn)

BUDDY:

Social security card. Hey, here's a picture.

(He turns it over curiously and reads slowly, in the tone of a third-grader)

"To my darling husband, with love. Marjorie."

KAYN:

(Unaccountably uncomfortable)

Thought he said he wasn't married.

BUDDY:

(Miserably)

Here's a ten.

KAYN:

That all?

BUDDY:

Some change.

KAYN:

(Suddenly furious)

For a lousy ten! A lousy ten! You stuck him for a lousy ten!

DODDS:

I couldn't help it, Kayn. Why'd he have to say those things?

A rustle is heard offstage left. The three thugs start.

KAYN:

Shit.

(Quickly)

Somebody's called the cops. We gotta get outa here.

DODDS:

(Bemused)

I'm free. I'm free.

The rustle is heard again.

KAYN:

Oh Jesus. Snap out of it, Dodds. You want them to find the knife right in your hands? For Christ's sake, Dodds, let's get the hell out of here.

The thugs exit to right. For a moment the stage is empty, except for JEREMY'S body, slumped against the side of the bench. Then NICKY enters from left.

NICKY:

Hey, mister! You still here? I left my boat in the fountain. Boy, it sure is late.

(He picks up the submarine. In the dim light, he does not realize that JEREMY is dead)

I hadta sneak out through the window after Ma put me to bed. Boy, if she knew I was out here now she'd have a fit. Always worryin' about me gettin' mugged or somethin'. Hey, what's wrong? Don'tcha wanna talk?

(He shrugs his shoulders expansively)

Well, that's okay with me. I guess you did enough talking today to last you the rest of your life.

(Laughing at his own humor, he exits at left, holding the boat close to his chest)

CURTAIN