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Happy Birthday, Wanda June

By Kurt Vonnegut

ACT ONE:

SCENE ONE:

SILENCE. Pitch blackness. Animal eyes begin to glow in the darkness. Sounds of the jungle climax in animals fighting. A SINGER is heard singing the first bars of "All God's Chillun Got Shoes." HAROLD, LOOSELEAF, PENELOPE, and WOODLY stand in a row in the darkness, facing the audience. They are motionless. A city skyline in the early evening materializes outside the windows.

The lights come up on the living room of a rich man's apartment, which is densely furnished with trophies of hunts and wars. There is a front door, a door to the master bedroom suite, and a corridor leading to other bedrooms, the kitchen and so on.

PENELOPE

How do you do. My name is Penelope Ryan. This is a simple-minded play about men who enjoy killing--and those who don't.

HAROLD

I am Harold Ryan, her husband. I have killed perhaps two hundred men in wars of various sorts--as a professional soldier. I have killed thousands of other animals as well--for sport.

WOODLY

I am Dr. Norbert Woodly--a physician, a healer. I find it disgusting and frightening that a killer should be a respected member of society. Gentleness must replace violence everywhere, or we are doomed.

PENELOPE

(to LOOSELEAF)

Would you like to say something about killing, Colonel?

LOOSELEAF

(embarrassed)

Jesus--I dunno. You know. What the heck. Who knows?

PENELOPE

Colonel Harper, retired now,
dropped an atom bomb on Nagasaki
during the Second World War,
killing seventy-four thousand
people in a flash.

LOOSELEAF

I dunno, boy.

PENELOPE

You don't know?

LOOSELEAF

It was a bitch.

PENELOPE

Thank you.

(to all)

You can leave now. We'll begin.

WOODLY

(to the audience,
making a peace sign)

Peace!

All but PENELOPE exit.

PENELOPE

(to the audience)

This is a tragedy. When it's done,
my face will be as white as the
snows of Kilimanjaro.

(hyena laughs)

My husband, who kills so much, has
been missing for eight years. He
disappeared in a light plane over
the Amazon Rain Forest, where he
hoped to find diamonds as big as
cantaloupes. His pilot was Colonel
Looseleaf Harper, who dropped the
bomb on Nagasaki.

(hyena laughs)

I should explain the doorbells in
this apartment. They were built by
Abercrombie and Fitch. They are
actual recordings of animal cries.
The back doorbell is a hyena, which
you've just heard. The front
doorbell is a lion's roar.

(to the wings)

Would you let them hear it please?

(lion roars)

Thank you.

PAUL, her twelve-year-old son, enters from corridor, a sensitive, neatly dressed little rich boys.

PENELOPE

And this is my son, Paul. He was only four years old when his father disappeared.

PAUL

(radiantly, sappily)

He's coming back, Mom! He's the bravest, most wonderful man who ever lived.

PENELOPE

(to audience)

I told you this was a simple-minded play.

PAUL

Maybe he'll come back tonight!
It's his birthday.

PENELOPE

I know.

PAUL

Stay home tonight!

PENELOPE

(ruefully, for they
have been over this before)

Oh, Paul--

PAUL

You're married! You've already got
a husband!

PENELOPE

He's a ghost!

PAUL

He's alive!

PENELOPE

Not even Mutual of Omaha thinks so
anymore.

PAUL

If you have to go out with some
guy--can't he be more like Dad?

(sick)

Herb Shuttle and Norbert Woodly--

can't you do better than those two freaks?

PENELOPE

(resentfully)

Thank you, kind sir.

PAUL

A vacuum cleaner salesman and a fairy doctor.

PENELOPE

A what kind of doctor?

PAUL

A fairy--a queer. Everybody in the building knows he's a queer.

PENELOPE

(knowing better)

That's an interesting piece of news.

PAUL

You're the only woman he ever took out.

PENELOPE

Not true.

PAUL

Still lives with his mother.

PENELOPE

You know she has no feet! You want him to abandon his mother, who has no husband, who has no money of her own, who has no feet?

PAUL

How did she lose her feet?

PENELOPE

In a railroad accident many years ago.

PAUL

I was afraid to ask.

PENELOPE

Norbert was just beginning practice. A real man would have sold her to a catfood company, I suppose. As far as that goes, J. Edgar Hoover still lives with his mother.

PAUL

I didn't know that.

PENELOPE

A lot of people don't.

PAUL

J. Edgar Hoover plays sports.

PENELOPE

I don't really know.

PAUL

To only exercise Dr. Woodly ever
gets is playing the violin and
making that stupid peace sign.

(makes the peace sign
and says the word effeminately)

Peace. Peace. Peace, everybody.

Lion doorbell roars.

PENELOPE

(cringing)

I hate that thing.

PAUL

It's beautiful.

He goes to door, admits WOODLY, whom he loathes openly.

WOODLY

(wearing street
clothes, carrying a
rolled-up poster
under his arm)

Peace, everybody--Paul, Penelope.

PAUL

You're taking Mom out tonight?

WOODLY

(to PENELOPE)

You're going out?

PENELOPE

Herb Shuttle is taking me to a fight.

WOODLY

Take plenty of cigars.

PENELOPE

(an apology, secret
from PAUL)

We made the date three months ago.

WOODLY

I must take you to an emergency
ward sometime--on a Saturday night.

That's also fun. I came to see
Selma, as a matter of fact.

PENELOPE

She quit this afternoon.

PAUL

We don't have a maid any more.

WOODLY

Oh?

PENELOPE

The animals made her sneeze and cry too much.

WOODLY

I'm glad somebody finally cried. Every time I come in here and see all this unnecessary death, I want to cry.

(winking at PAUL,
acknowledging PAUL's
low opinion of him)

I don't cry, of course. Not manly, you know. Did she try antihistamines?

PENELOPE

They made her so sleepy she couldn't work.

WOODLY

Throw out all this junk. Burn it! This room crawls with tropical disease.

PAUL

Everything stays as it is!

WOODLY

A monument to a man who thought that what the world needed most was more rhinoceros meat.

PAUL

(hotly)

My father!

WOODLY

I apologize. But you didn't know him, and neither did I. How's your asthma?

PAUL

Don't worry about it.

WOODLY

How's the fungus around your thumbnail?

PAUL

(concealing the thumb)

It's fine!

WOODLY

It's jungle rot! This room is making everybody sick! This is your family doctor speaking now.

(unrolling the poster)

Here--I brought you something else to hang on your wall, for the sake of variety.

PENELOPE

(reading)

"War is not healthy for children and other living things." How lovely.

WOODLY

No doubt Paul thinks it stinks.

Lion doorbell roars.

WOODLY

I hate that thing.

PAUL

(going to the door)

Keeps fairies away!

He admits HERB SHUTTLE, who carries an Electrolux vacuum cleaner.

SHUTTLE

(to PAUL affectionately, touching him)

Hi kid.

(seeing WOODLY)

Would you look what the car dragged in.

WOODLY

I'm glad you brought your vacuum cleaner.

SHUTTLE

Is that a fact?

WOODLY

That maid just quit. The place is a mess. You can start in the master bedroom.

PENELOPE

Please--

SHUTTLE

He's not anybody to tell somebody

else what to do in a master bedroom.

PENELOPE

I'll get ready, Herb. I didn't expect you this soon.

(to all)

Please--won't everybody be nice to everybody else while I'm gone?

All freeze, except for PENELOPE, who comes forward to address the audience. Lights on set fade as spotlight comes on.

PENELOPE

Most men shunned me--even when I nearly swooned for want of love. I might as well have been girdled in a chastity belt. My chastity belt was not made of iron and chains and chickenwire, but of Harold's lethal reputation.

SHUTTLE comes into the spotlight.

SHUTTLE

I keep having this nightmare--that he catches us.

PENELOPE

Doing what?

SHUTTLE

He'd kill me. He'd be right to kill me, too--the kind of guy he is.

PENELOPE

Or was. We haven't done anything wrong, you know.

SHUTTLE

He'd assume we had.

PENELOPE

That's something I suppose.

SHUTTLE

All through the day I'm so confident. That's why I'm such a good salesman, you know? I have confidence, and I look like I have confidence, and that gives other people confidence. People laugh sometimes when they find out I'm a vacuum cleaner salesman. They stop laughing, though, when they find

out I made forty-three thousand dollars last year. I've got six other salesmen working under me, and what they all plug into is my confidence. That's what charges them up.

PENELOPE

I'm glad.

SHUTTLE

I was captain of the wrestling team at Lehigh University.

PENELOPE

I know.

SHUTTLE

If you want to wrestle, you got Lehigh. If you want to play tennis, you go to Vanderbilt.

PENELOPE

I don't want to go to Vanderbilt.

SHUTTLE

You don't wrestle if you don't have supreme confidence, and I wrestled. But when I get with you, and I say to myself, "My God--here I am with the wife of Harold Ryan, one of the great heroes of all time--"

Pause.

PENELOPE

Yes?

SHUTTLE

Something happens to my confidence.

PENELOPE

(to the audience)

This conversation took place, incidentally, about three months before Harold was declared legally dead.

SHUTTLE

When Harold is definitely out of the picture, Penelope, when I don't have to worry about doing him wrong or you wrong or Paul wrong. I'm going to ask you to be my wife.

PENELOPE

I'm touched.

SHUTTLE

That's when I'll get my confidence
back.

PENELOPE

I see.

SHUTTLE

If you'll pardon the expression,
that's when you'll see the fur and
feathers fly. Good night.

PENELOPE

Good night.

Blackout.

SCENE TWO:

SHUTTLE and WOODLY argue in pitch darkness, with PAUL
listening, and lights come up gradually to full on the
living room the same evening.

SHUTTLE

You've got to fight from time to time.

WOODLY

Not true.

SHUTTLE

Or get eaten alive.

WOODLY

That's not true either--or needn't
be, unless we make it true.

SHUTTLE

Phooey.

WOODLY

Which we do. But we can stop doing
that.

The lights are full. SHUTTLE and WOODLY are bored with each
other, WOODLY looks out the window, speaks to an imaginary
listener who has more brains than SHUTTLE. PAUL hates them
both, but prefers SHUTTLE's noisy manliness.

WOODLY

We simply stop doing that--dropping
things on each other, eating each
other alive.

SHUTTLE

(calling)

Penelope! We're late!

PENELOPE

(off, in master
bedroom suite)

Coming.

SHUTTLE

(to PAUL)

Women are always late. You'll find
out.

WOODLY

(thoughtfully)

The late Mrs. Harold Ryan.

SHUTTLE

I'm sick of this argument. I just
have one more thing to say: If you
elect a President, you support him,
no matter what he does. That's the
only way you can have a country!

WOODLY

It's the planet that's in ghastly
trouble now and all our brothers
and sisters thereon.

SHUTTLE

None of my relatives are Chinese
Communists. Speak for yourself.

WOODLY

Chinese maniacs and Russian maniacs
and American maniacs and French
maniacs and British maniacs have
turned this lovely, moist,
nourishing blue-green ball into a
doomsday device. Let a radar set
and a computer mistake a hawk or a
meteor for a missile, and that's
the end of mankind.

SHUTTLE

You can believe that if you want.
I talk to guys like you, and I want
to commit suicide.

(to PAUL)

You get that weight-lifting set I
sent you?

PAUL

It came yesterday. I haven't
opened it yet.

WOODLY

(musingly, attempting
to find the idea
acceptable, even
funny, in a way)

Maybe it's supposed to end now.
Maybe God wouldn't have it any
other way.

SHUTTLE

(to PAUL)

Start with the smallest weights.
Every week add a pound or two.

WOODLY

Maybe God has let everybody who
ever lived be reborn--so he or she
can see how it ends. Even
Pithecanthropus erectus and
Australopithecus and Sinanthropus
pekensis and the Neanderthals are
back on Earth--to see how it ends.
They're all on Times Square--making
change for peepshows. Or recruiting
Marines.

SHUTTLE

(to PAUL)

You ever hear the story about the
boy who carried a calf around the
barn every day?

WOODLY

He died of a massive rupture.

SHUTTLE

You think you're so funny. You're
not even funny.

(to PAUL)

Right? Right? You don't hurt
yourself if you start out slow.

WOODLY

You're preparing him for a career
in the slaughterhouses of Dubuque?

(to PAUL)

Take care of your body, yes! But
don't become a bender of horseshoes
and railroad spikes. Don't become
obsessed by your musculature. Any
one of these poor, dead animals

here was a thousand times the
athlete you can ever hope to be.
Their magic was in their muscles.
Your magic is in your brains!

PENELOPE enters from the bedroom, dressed for the fight.
She wears barbaric jewelry HAROLD gave her years ago, a
jaguar-skin coat over her shoulders.

PENELOPE

(brightly)

Gentlemen! Is this right for a
fight? It's been so long.

SHUTTLE

Beautiful! I've never seen that coat.

PENELOPE

Seven jaguars' skins, I'm told.
Harold shot every one. Shall we go?

WOODLY

(sick about the slain jaguars)

Oh no! Wear a coat of cotton--wear
a coat of wool.

PENELOPE

What?

WOODLY

Wear a coat of domestic mink. For
the love of God, though, Penelope,
don't lightheartedly advertise that
the last of the jaguars died for you.

SHUTTLE

She's my date tonight. What do you
want her to do--bring the poor old
jaguars back to life with a bicycle
pump? Bugger off! Ask Paul what
he thinks.

(to PAUL)

Your mother looks beautiful--right?

(PAUL pointedly
declines to answer)

Kid?

(PAUL walks away from him)

Doesn't your mother look nice?

(he goes to PAUL,
wondering what is wrong)

Paul?

PAUL

(smolderingly)

I don't care what she wears.

SHUTTLE

Something's made you sore.

PAUL

Don't worry about it.

SHUTTLE

You bet I'll worry about it. I
said something wrong?

PAUL

(close to angry tears)

It's my father's birthday--that's
all.

(facing everybody,
raising his voice)

That's all. Who cares about that?

SHUTTLE

(horrified, raising
his hand to swear an oath)

I had not the slightest inkling.

(to PENELOPE, feeling betrayed)

Why didn't you say so?

PAUL

(bitterly)

She doesn't care! She's not
married any more! She's going to
have fun!

(to PENELOPE)

I hope you have so much fun you can
hardly stand it.

(to WOODLY)

Dr. Woodly--I hope you make up even
better jokes about my father than
the ones you've said so far.

SHUTTLE

(reaching out for PAUL)

Kid--kid--

PAUL

(to SHUTTLE)

And I wish you'd quit touching me
all the time. It drives me nuts!

SHUTTLE

(reaching out again)

What's this?

PAUL

(recoiling)

Don't!

SHUTTLE

(aghast)

You sure misunderstood something--
and we'd better get it straight.

PAUL

Explain it to them. I'm bugging
out of here.

He grabs a jacket from a chair. SHUTTLE is in his way.

PAUL

Don't touch me. Get out of the way.

SHUTTLE

Men can touch other men, and it
doesn't mean a thing. Haven't you
ever seen football players after
they've won the Superbowl?

PENELOPE

(to PAUL)

Where will you be?

PAUL

Anywhere but here. I'd just sit
here and cry about the way my
father's been forgotten.

SHUTTLE

I worship your father. That
stuffed alligator your mother gave
me--the one he shot? It's the
proudest thing in my apartment.

PAUL

(at the door)

Everybody talks about how rotten
kids act. Grownups can be pretty
rotten, too.

He exits through front door, slams it.

SHUTTLE

(heartbroken)

Kid--kid--

WOODLY

It's good. Let him go.

SHUTTLE

If he'd just come out for the
Little League, the way I asked him,

he'd find out we touch all the time--shove each other, slug each other, and just horse around. I'm going to go get him--

WOODLY

Don't! Let him have all the privacy he wants. Let him grieve, let him rage. There has never been a funeral for his father.

PENELOPE

I never knew when to hold it--or who to ask, or what to say.

WOODLY

Tonight's the night.

SHUTTLE

If he'd just get into scouting, and camp out some, and see how everybody roughhouses around the fire--

WOODLY

What a beautiful demonstration this is of the utter necessity of rites of passage.

SHUTTLE

I feel like I've been double-crossed.

(to PENELOPE, peevishly)

If you'd just told me it was Harold's birthday--

PENELOPE

What then?

SHUTTLE

We could have had some kind of birthday party for him. We could have taken Paul to the fight with us.

WOODLY

Minors aren't allowed at fights.

SHUTTLE

Then we'd stay home and eat venison or something, and look through the scrapbooks. I've got a friend who has a whole freezer full of striped bass and caribou meat.

(going to the front door)

I'm going to bring that boy back.
He exits through front door.

WOODLY

(going to PENELOPE)

This is very good for us.

PENELOPE

It is?

WOODLY

The wilder Paul is tonight, the
calmer he'll be tomorrow.

PENELOPE

As long as he keeps out of the park.

WOODLY

After this explosion, I think,
he'll be able to accept the fact
that his mother is going to marry
again.

PENELOPE

The only thing I ever told him
about life was, "Keep out of the
park after the sun goes down."

WOODLY

We've got to dump Shuttle.

(pointing to the
vacuum cleaner)

He brings his vacuum cleaner on dates?

PENELOPE

That's the XKE.

WOODLY

The what?

PENELOPE

It's an experimental model. He
doesn't dare leave it in his car,
for fear it will fall into the
hands of competition.

WOODLY

What kind of a life is that?

PENELOPE

He told me one time what the
proudest moment of his life was.
He made Eagle Scout when he was
twenty-nine years old.

(clinging to him suddenly)

Oh, Norbert--promise me that Paul

has not gone into the park!

WOODLY

(pause)

If you warned him against it as much as you say, it's almost a certainty.

PENELOPE

(petrified)

No! Oh no! Three people murdered in there in the last six weeks! The police won't even go in there any more.

WOODLY

I wish Paul luck.

PENELOPE

It's suicide!

WOODLY

I'd be dead by now if that were the case.

PENELOPE

Meaning?

WOODLY

Every night, Penelope, for the past two years, I've made it a point to walk through the park at midnight.

PENELOPE

Why would you do that?

WOODLY

To show myself how brave I am. The issue's in doubt, you know--since I'm always for peace--

PENELOPE

I'm amazed.

WOODLY

Me, too. I know something not even the police know--what's in the park at midnight. Nothing. Or, when I'm in there, there's me in there. Fear and nobody and me.

PENELOPE

And maybe Paul. What about the murderers? They're in there!

WOODLY

They didn't murder me.

PENELOPE

Paul's only twelve years old.

WOODLY

He can make the sound of human footsteps--which is a terrifying sound.

PENELOPE

We've got to rescue him.

WOODLY

If he is in the park, luck is all that can save him now, and there's plenty of that.

PENELOPE

He's not your son.

WOODLY

No. But he's going to be. If he is in the park and he comes out safely on the other side, I can say to him, "You and I are the only men with balls enough to walk through the park at midnight."

(pause)

On that we can build.

PENELOPE

It's a jungle out there.

WOODLY

That's been said before.

PENELOPE

He'd go to a movie. I think that's what he'd do. If I were sure he was in a movie, I could stop worrying. We could have him paged.

Lion doorbell roars.

WOODLY

I hate that thing.

He opens the door, admits SHUTTLE, who carries a bakery box.

PENELOPE

Did you see him?

SHUTTLE

Yeah.

PENELOPE

Is he all right?

SHUTTLE

Far as I know.

PENELOPE

Is he coming home?

SHUTTLE

He ditched me. He started running, and I started running, then he lost me in the park.

PENELOPE

The park!

SHUTTLE

It's dark in there.

PENELOPE

And that's where he is!

SHUTTLE

I figure he ducked in one place and ducked out another.

PENELOPE

(disgusted with him)

You figure!

SHUTTLE

Then I saw this bakery store that was still open, so I bought a birthday cake.

PENELOPE

A what?

SHUTTLE

For Harold. When Paul comes home, we can have some birthday cake.

PENELOPE

How nice.

SHUTTLE

They had this cake somebody else hadn't picked up. It says, "Happy Birthday, Somebody Else."

WOODLY

"Happy Birthday, Wanda June!"

SHUTTLE

We can take off the "Wanda June" with a butter knife.

PENELOPE

Did you talk to Paul?

SHUTTLE

Before he started to run. He said his father carried a key to this apartment around his neck--and

someday we'd all hear the sound of
that key in the door.

PENELOPE

We've got to find him.

(preparing to exit
through front door)

I want you to show me exactly where
you saw him last.

(to WOODLY)

And you stay here, Norbert, in case
he comes home.

(to SHUTTLE)

That's all he said--the thing about
the key?

SHUTTLE

He said one other thing. It wasn't
very nice.

PENELOPE

What was it?

SHUTTLE

He told me to take a flying fuck at
the moon.

Blackout.

SCENE THREE:

DARKNESS. Lights come up on living room. WOODLY is alone,
asleep on the couch.

HAROLD lets himself and LOOSELEAF in through the front
door--quietly. HAROLD has a full beard and a paunch.

LOOSELEAF is skinnier. He has a handlebar moustache. Both
wear new sports clothes and smoke expensive cigars. HAROLD
is calm. LOOSELEAF is nervous, confused. They prowl the
room cautiously, checking this and that. HAROLD awakens
WOODLY by playing with his feet.

WOODLY

(startled)

Ooops.

HAROLD

(to LOOSELEAF, very amused)

Ooops.

WOODLY

Can I--uh--help you gentlemen?

HAROLD

(moving downstage,

feeling at home)
Gentlemen--that's nice.

WOODLY

(to LOOSELEAF)

You startled me.

LOOSELEAF

Yeah. We just got here.

WOODLY

I thought you might be burglars--
but you're not, I hope.

LOOSELEAF

Nope.

(idiotically,
incapable of deception)

I got a lot of stuff.

WOODLY

(looking at him closely)

You do?

HAROLD

The door ws unlocked. Is it always
unlocked?

WOODLY

It's always locked.

HAROLD

But here you are inside, aren't you?

WOODLY

You're--you're old friends of
Harold Ryan?

HAROLD

We tried to be. We tried to be.

WOODLY

He's dead, you know.

HAROLD

Dead! Such a final word. Dead!

(to LOOSELEAF)

Did you hear that?

LOOSELEAF

Yup.

Telephone rings. WOODLY answers, keeping his eyes on the
bizarre guests.

WOODLY

Hello? Oh--hello, Mother.

HAROLD

(to LOOSELEAF)

Hello, Mother.

WOODLY

...Who?... Did she say how far
apart the pains were?... When was
that?... Oh dear.

HAROLD

Oh dear.

WOODLY

Call her back--tell her to head for
the hospital. Tell the hospital to
expect her. I'll leave right now.

He hangs up, faces the intruders.

WOODLY

Look--I'm sorry--I have to go.

HAROLD

We'll miss you so.

WOODLY

Look--this isn't my apartment, and
there isn't anybody else here. Mrs.
Ryan won't be home for a while.

HAROLD

Oh, oh, oh--I thought it was your
apartment. You seemed at home here.

WOODLY

I'm a neighbor. I have the
apartment across the hall. I have
to go to the hospital now. An
emergency.

HAROLD is unstirred.

WOODLY

I mean--I can't leave you here.
You'll have to go. I'll tell Mrs.
Ryan you were here. You can come
back later.

HAROLD

Ahh--then she's still alive.

WOODLY

She's fine. Please--

HAROLD

And still Mrs. Harold Ryan?

WOODLY

Will you please go? An emergency!

HAROLD

She still has just the one child--

the boy?

He moves slowly toward the front door, with WOODLY trying to hustle him and LOOSELEAF out.

WOODLY

Yes! Yes! The boy! One boy!

HAROLD

(stopping)

And what, exactly, is your relationship to Mrs. Ryan?

WOODLY

Neighbor! Doctor! I live across the hall.

HAROLD

And you come into Mrs. Ryan's apartment as often as you please, looking into various health matters?

WOODLY

Yes! Please! You've got to get out right now!

HAROLD moves a little more, stops again.

HAROLD

Just her neighbor and doctor? That's all?

WOODLY

(at the end of his patience, blurting)

And her fiancé!

HAROLD

(delighted)

And her fiancé! How nice. I hope you'll be very happy--or is that what one says to the woman?

WOODLY

I've got to run!

He turns out the overhead light.

HAROLD

You wish the woman good luck, and you tell the man how fortunate he is. That's how it goes.

WOODLY

(holding open the front door)

I've literally got to run!

HAROLD

I won't try to keep up with you.
I'm not as fast on my feet as I
once was.

All three exit. A moment later, HAROLD lets himself and LOOSELEAF in again with a key. He turns on the light again, roams the room, reacquainting himself with his beloved trophies. LOOSELEAF is jangled by the adventure. HAROLD chucks a lioness under her chin.

HAROLD

Miss me, baby?

LOOSELEAF

I dunno, boy.

HAROLD

Hm?

LOOSELEAF

It's a bitch.

HAROLD

(quietly)

A bitch.

LOOSELEAF

Didn't recognize you.

HAROLD

We've never met.

LOOSELEAF

I wonder who'll recognize us first?

They'll wet their pants.

HAROLD

I hope the men do. I would rather
the women didn't.

LOOSELEAF

I'm gonna wet my pants.

He laughs idiotically.

HAROLD

(looking around himself)

Home, sweet home.

LOOSELEAF

One thing, anyway--at least
Penelope didn't throw out all your
crap. I bet Alice threw out all my
crap after I'd been gone a week.

HAROLD

We'll see.

HAROLD, who wants to savor the early moments of his homecoming alone, now tries to get the very jumpy LOOSELEAF

out of the apartment.

HAROLD

It appears that we're going to have to wait awhile for any more action here, Colonel. Why don't you run on home while the evening's young.

LOOSELEAF

Home. Jesus.

(makes his hands tremble)

I'm like this. Home!

HAROLD

Home is important to a man.

LOOSELEAF

You know what gets me?

HAROLD

(absently)

No.

LOOSELEAF

How all the magazines show tits today.

HAROLD

Um.

LOOSELEAF

Used to be against the law, didn't it?

HAROLD

(fed up with LOOSELEAF)

I suppose.

LOOSELEAF

(making no move to leave)

Must have changed that law.

Silence, while HAROLD attempts to be alone, even though LOOSELEAF is still present.

HAROLD

(thoughtfully hefting
a broadsword,
admiring its balance
and strength)

Home.

LOOSELEAF

You know what gets me?

HAROLD does not respond.

LOOSELEAF

You know what gets me?

HAROLD

(to himself)

Oh, shit.

LOOSELEAF

(finding enough
encouragement in this)

How everybody says "fuck" and
"shit" all the time. I used to be
scared shitless I'd say "fuck" or
"shit" in public, by accident. Now
everybody says "fuck" and "shit,"
"fuck" and "shit" all the time.
Something very big must have
happened while we were out of the
country.

HAROLD

(flatly)

Looseleaf--will you get the hell home?

LOOSELEAF

At least we found the diamonds.

HAROLD

At least!

LOOSELEAF

I'd really feel stupid if we didn't
bring anything back home.

HAROLD

It's enough that you've brought
yourself home!

LOOSELEAF

I wish you'd tell Alice that. And
that Goddamn Mrs. Wheeler.

HAROLD

(hotly)

Tell them yourself!

LOOSELEAF

You don't know my mother-in-law, boy.

HAROLD

After eight years in the jungle
with you, I know Mrs. Wheeler
better than I know anybody in the
universe!

LOOSELEAF

I didn't tell you everything.

HAROLD

The time we were in a tree for
fourteen days, you certainly tried

to tell me everything about Mrs.
Wheeler.

LOOSELEAF

I didn't even scratch the surface.
You're lucky, boy. You come home,
and nobody's here. When I go home,
everybody's going to be there.

HAROLD

This room is full of ghosts.

LOOSELEAF

You're lucky, boy. My house is
gonna be filled with people.

HAROLD ignores this, attempts to savor the ghosts in the room.

LOOSELEAF

You know what gets me?

HAROLD

Go home!

LOOSELEAF

Thank God we found the fucking
diamonds!

HAROLD

The hell with the diamonds!

LOOSELEAF

You were rich before. This is the
first time I was ever rich.

HAROLD

Go home! Show them how rich you
are for a change!

LOOSELEAF

Can I have the Cadillac?

HAROLD

Take the Cadillac and drive it off
a cliff, for all I care.

LOOSELEAF

What'll you do for transportation?

HAROLD

I'll buy a hundred more Cadillacs.
Go home!

LOOSELEAF

You know what gets me about that
Cadillac?

HAROLD

Go home!

LOOSELEAF

When I drive it, I feel like I'm in the middle of a great big wad of bubblegum. I don't hear anything, I don't feel anything. I figure somebody else is driving. It's a bitch.

HAROLD

Go home.

LOOSELEAF

I'm liable to find anything!

HAROLD

That's the point! Walk in there and find whatever there is to find--before Alice can cover it up.

LOOSELEAF

I know, I know. I dunno. At least she's in the same house. Sure was spooky, looking in the window there, and there she was.

HAROLD

So long, Colonel.

LOOSELEAF

You know what gets me?

HAROLD

(taking hold of
LOOSELEAF and
steering him to the
front door)

Let's talk about it some other time.

LOOSELEAF

How short the skirts are.

HAROLD

(opening the door)

Good night, Colonel. It's been beautiful.

LOOSELEAF

Something very important about sex must have happened while we were gone.

HAROLD shoves him out of the apartment and shuts the door. HAROLD starts to roam the room again, but the lion doorbell roars.

HAROLD

(going to the door)

Hell!

HAROLD opens the door. LOOSELEAF comes in.

LOOSELEAF

You know what gets me? Those guys who went to the moon! To the moon, boy!

HAROLD

Leave me alone! After eight years of horrendously close association, the time has come to part! I crave solitude and time for reflection-- and then a reunion in privacy with my own flesh and blood. You and I may not meet again for months!

LOOSELEAF

Months?

HAROLD

I'm certainly not going to come horning back into your life tomorrow, and I will not welcome your horning back into mine. A chapter has ended. We are old comrades--at a parting of the ways.

LOOSELEAF

(bleakly, shrugging)

I'm lonesome already.

He exits.

HAROLD

(roaming the room again)

The moon. The new heroism--put a village idiot into a pressure cooker, seal it up tight, and shoot him at the moon.

(to his portrait)

Hello there, young man. In case you're wondering, I could beat the shit out of you. And any woman choosing between us--sorry, kid, she'd choose me.

(pleased with the room)

I must say, this room is very much as I left it.

(sees the cake)

What's this? A cake? "Happy Birthday, Wanda June"? Who the

hell is Wanda June?

Blackout.

SCENE FOUR:

MUSIC indicates happiness, innocence, and weightlessness. Spotlight comes up on WANDA JUNE, a lisping eight-year-old in a starched party dress. She is as cute as Shirley Temple.

WANDA JUNE

Hello. I am Wanda June. Today was going to be my birthday, but I was hit by an ice-cream truck before I could have my party. I am dead now. I am in Heaven. That is why my parents did not pick up the cake at the bakery. I am not mad at the ice-cream truck driver, even though he was drunk when he hit me. It didn't hurt much. It wasn't even as bad as the sting of a bumblebee. I am really happy here! It's so much fun. I am glad the driver was drunk. If he hadn't been, I might not have got to Heaven for years and years and years. I would have had to go to high school first, and then beauty college. I would have had to get married and have babies and everything. Now I can just play and play and play. Any time I want any pink cotton candy I can have some. Everybody up here is happy-- the animals and the dead soldiers and people who went to the electric chair and everything. They're all glad for whatever sent them here. Nobody is mad. We're all too busy playing shuffleboard. So if you think of killing somebody, don't worry about it. Just go ahead and do it. Whoever you do it to should kiss you for doing it. The soldiers up here just love the shrapnel and the tanks and the bayonets and the dum dums that let

them play shuffleboard all the
time--and drink beer.

Spotlight begins to dim and carnival music on a steam
calliope begins to intrude, until, at the end of the speech,
WANDA JUNE is drowned out and the stage is black.

WANDA JUNE

We have merry-go-rounds that don't
cost anything to ride on. We have
Ferris wheels. We have Little
League and girls' basketball.
There's a drum and bugle corps
anybody can join. For people who
like golf, there is a par-three
golf course and a driving range,
with never any waiting. If you
just want to sit and loaf, why
that's all right, too. Gourmet
specialties are cooked to your
order and served at any time of
night or day...

Sudden silence.

WOODY WOODPECKER VOICE

Ha ha ha ha ha!

(pistol shot)

You got me, pal.

Silence.

Spotlight comes up on LOOSELEAF HARPER, who wears the
clothes he will wear in the next scene--new sports clothes,
a shirt open at the neck. As always, he is friendly and
embarrassed.

LOOSELEAF

When Penelope asked me to say
something about dropping the bomb
on Nagasaki, I didn't give a very
good answer, I guess. It's a very
complicated question. Jesus--you
know? You have to explain what
it's like to be in the Air Force
and how they give you your orders
and all that. What it feels like
to be in a plane, what the world
looks like down there. After I got
home from the war, the minister of
my church asked me if I would speak

to a scout troop that met in the church basement. So I did. They met on Thursday nights. I used to belong to that troop. I never made Eagle Scout. But you know something? It's a very strange kind of kid that makes Eagle Scout. They always seem so lonesome, like they'd worked real hard to get a job nobody else cares about. They get a whole bunch of merit badges. That's how you get to be an Eagle Scout. I don't think I had over five or six merit badges. The only one I remember is Public Health. That was a bitch. The Boy Scout Manual said I was supposed to find out what my town did about sewage. Jesus, they just dumped it all in Sugar Creek.

(laughs idiotically)

Sugar Creek! That was a long time ago, but it's all coming back to me now. There was another merit badge you could get for roller skating. There used to be a roller rink at a bend in Sugar Creek, up above where the sewage went in. I got in a fight there one time. I had on roller skates, and the guy I was fighting had on basketball shoes. He had a tremendous advantage over me. He was a little guy, but he beat the shit out of me. I had to laugh like hell. Don't ever fight a guy when you've got on roller skates.

(silence)

Jesus--I remember my mother used to make me chew bananas for a full minute before I swallowed--so I wouldn't get sick. Makes you wonder what else your parents told you that wasn't true.

Blackout.

SCENE FIVE:

SPOTLIGHT comes up on HAROLD. He sits on the front seat of an imaginary car. The seat is covered with zebra skin.

HAROLD

The night I met Penelope, I had no beard--so imagine me, if you can, without a beard. Actually, I wasn't as good-looking then as I am now. And, if anything, my health has improved. At any rate--I had just come home from Kenya--to discover that my third wife, Mildred, like the two before her, had become a drunken bum. In my experience, alcoholism is far more prevalent among women than men. So I got into my automobile--

He pantomimes turning the ignition key. The sound of a starter and a powerful engine responds. He pantomimes putting the car in gear and driving away from the curb. Appropriate sounds are heard.

HAROLD

I drive through the night, until I was attracted by a sign which said--

Spotlight comes up on PENELOPE, who wears a skimpy carhop outfit she has had on under her coat in the previous scene.

HAROLD

"Hamburger Heaven."

PENELOPE

Heaven.

HAROLD pantomimes swerving into Hamburger Heaven. Tires squeal. He pantomimes a stop, kills the engine. He blows his imaginary horn. A real horn blows the bugle call for "charge." PENELOPE crosses to HAROLD.

PENELOPE

Can I help you, sir?

HAROLD

I think so, daughter. How old are you?

PENELOPE

Eighteen--

(pause)

and a half.

HAROLD

A springbok, an oryx, a gemsbok--a gazelle.

PENELOPE

Sir?

HAROLD

Raw hamburger, please--and a whole onion. I want to eat the onion like an apple. Do you understand?

PENELOPE

Yes, sir.

(to the audience)

It was a very unusual automobile. It was a Cadillac, but it had water buffalo horns where the bumpers should be.

(to HAROLD)

And what to drink?

HAROLD

What time do you get off work, my child?

PENELOPE

I'm sorry, sir, I'm engaged to be married. My boyfriend would be mad if I went out with another man.

HAROLD

Did you ever daydream that you would one day meet a friendly millionaire?

PENELOPE

I'm engaged.

HAROLD

Daughter--I love you very much.

PENELOPE

You don't even know me.

HAROLD

You are woman. I know woman well.

PENELOPE

This is crazy.

HAROLD

Destiny often seems that way.

You're going to marry me.

PENELOPE

What do you do for a living?

HAROLD

My parents died in an automobile accident when I was sixteen years old. They left me a brewery and a baseball team--and other things. I live for a living. I've just come back from Kenya--in Africa. I've been hunting Mau Mau there.

PENELOPE

Some kind of animal?

HAROLD

The pelt is black. It's a kind of man.

Blackout.

SCENE SIX:

CURTAIN rises on empty living room. PAUL lets himself in with a key.

PAUL

Mom?

(silence)

Herb?

(silence)

Dr. Woodly?

(advances into room uneasily)

Hello?

(sees the cake)

A cake? Who's Wanda June?

HAROLD enters quietly from the kitchen, holding a can of beer.

PAUL

Anybody home?

HAROLD

As a matter of fact--

PAUL

(nearly jumping out
of his skin)

Sir?

HAROLD

As a matter of fact--I am home.

PAUL

(thinking HAROLD may
be a burglar)

Hello.

HAROLD

(simply)

Hello.

PAUL

Are you--

His voice fails him.

HAROLD

(hoping to be recognized)

You were about to ask a question?

PAUL

Are you--do you--

HAROLD

Ask it!

PAUL

(blurting)

Do you know who Wanda June is?

HAROLD

Life has denied me that thrill.

PAUL

Do you mind if I ask who you are?

HAROLD

Mind?

(aside)

God, yes, I mind.

(to PAUL)

I'm your father's friend. A man claiming to be the family physician let me in a while ago.

PAUL

Dr. Woodly.

HAROLD

Dr. Woodly. I should make a little list.

PAUL

Is anybody besides you here now?

HAROLD

The doctor was called away on an emergency. I think it was birth.

PAUL

Where's Mom?

HAROLD

You don't know where your mother is? Does she put on a short skirt and go drinking all night?

PAUL

She went to the fight with Herb Shuttle, I guess.

HAROLD

You think you could find me a pencil and paper?

PAUL

I'll see.

He rummages through a drawer.

HAROLD

And you've been roaming the streets while your mother is God-knows-where?

PAUL

I was going to a funny movie, but I changed my mind. If you're depressed, laughing doesn't help much.

(gives HAROLD pencil
and paper)

When did you know my father?

HAROLD

Man and boy.

PAUL

Everybody says he was so brave.

HAROLD

Even this--"Herb Shuttle", you said?

PAUL

He worships Father.

HAROLD

(pleased)

Ah! And what sort of man is this worshiper?

PAUL

He's a vacuum cleaner salesman.

HAROLD

(deflated)

I see.

(recovering)

And he came into the apartment one day, to demonstrate his wares, and your mother, as it happened, was charmingly en deshabille--

PAUL

She met him at college.

HAROLD

(startled)

College!

PAUL

They were in the same creative writing class.

HAROLD

College?

PAUL

She has a master's degree in English literature.

HAROLD

What a pity! Educating a beautiful woman is like pouring honey into a fine Swiss watch. Everything stops.

(pause)

And the doctor? He worships your father, too?

PAUL

He insults him all the time.

HAROLD

(delighted)

Excellent!

PAUL

What's good about that?

HAROLD

It makes life spicy.

PAUL

He doesn't do it in front of me, but he does it with Mother.

(indicating HAROLD's portrait)

You know what he called Father one time?

HAROLD

No.

PAUL

"Harold, the Patron Saint of Taxidermy."

HAROLD

(measuring his opponent)

What does he do--of an athletic nature?

PAUL

Nothing. He plays a violin in a

doctors' quartet.

HAROLD

Aha! He has a brilliant military record, I'm sure.

PAUL

He was a stretcher-bearer in the Korean War.

(pause)

Were you in a war with Father?

HAROLD

Big ones, little ones, teeny-weeny ones--just and otherwise.

PAUL

Tell me some true stories about Dad.

HAROLD

(unused to the word)

"Dad?"

(accepting it)

Dad.

(to himself)

The boy wants tales of derring-do. Name a country.

PAUL

England?

HAROLD

(disgusted)

Oh hell.

PAUL

Dad was never in England?

HAROLD

Behind a desk for a little while.

(contemptuously)

A desk! They had him planning air raids. A city can't flee like a coward or fight like a man, and the choice between fleeing and fighting was at the core of the life of Harold Ryan. There was only one thing he enjoyed more than watching someone make that choice, and that was making the choice himself. Ask about Spain, where he was the youngest soldier in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. He was a famous

sniper. They called him "La Picadura"--"the sting."

PAUL

(echoing wonderingly)

"The sting."

HAROLD

As in "Death, where is thy sting?"
He killed at least fifty men,
wounded hundreds more.

PAUL

(slightly dismayed at
such murderousness)

"The sting."

HAROLD

Ask about the time he and I were
parachuted into Yugoslavia to join
a guerrilla band--in the war
against the Nazis.

PAUL

Tell me that.

HAROLD

I saw your father fight Major
Siegfried von Konigswald, the Beast
of Yugoslavia, hand to hand.

PAUL

(his excitement rising)

Tell me that! Tell me that!

HAROLD

Hid by day--fought by night. At
sunset one day, your father and I,
peering through field glasses, saw
a black Mercedes draw up to a
village inn. It was escorted by
two motorcyclists and an armored
car. Out of the Mercedes stepped
one of the most hateful men in all
of history--the Beast of Yugoslavia.

PAUL

Wow.

HAROLD

We blacked our hands and faces. At
midnight we crept out of the forest
and into the village. The name of
the village was Mhravitch.

Remember that name!

PAUL

Mhravitch.

HAROLD

We came up behind a sentry, and your father slit his throat before he could utter a sound.

PAUL

(involuntarily)

Uck.

HAROLD

Don't care for cold steel? A knife is worse than a bullet?

PAUL

I don't know.

HAROLD

The story gets hairier. Should I stop?

PAUL

Go on.

HAROLD

We caught another Kraut alone in a back lane. Your father choked him to death with a length of piano wire. Your father was quite a virtuoso with piano wire. That's nicer than a knife, isn't it--as long as you don't look at the face afterwards. The face turns a curious shade of avocado. I must ask the doctor why that is. At any rate, we stole into the back of the inn, and, with the permission of the management, we poisoned the wine of six Krauts who were carousing there.

PAUL

Where did you get the poison?

HAROLD

We carried cyanide capsules. We were supposed to swallow them in case we were captured. It was your father's opinion that the Krauts needed them more than we did at the

time.

PAUL

And one of them was the Beast of Yugoslavia?

HAROLD

The Beast was upstairs, and he came running downstairs, for his men were making loud farewells and last wills and testaments--editorializing about the hospitality they had received. And your father said to him in perfect German, which he had learned in the Spanish Civil War, "Major, something tragic seems to have happened to your bodyguard. I am Harold Ryan, of the United States of America. You, I believe, are the Beast of Yugoslavia."

Blackout.

SCENE SEVEN:

SILENCE. Pitch blackness. The sounds of a Nazi rally come

up slowly:

comes up on MAJOR SIEGFRIED VON KONIGSWALD, and officer in the dreaded SS. He is in full ceremonial uniform. The sounds fade.

VON KONIGSWALD

(sadly, resignedly, remembering)

Ja ja. Ja ja.

(pause)

I am Major Siegfried von Konigswald. They used to call me "The Beast of Yugoslavia," on account of all the people I had tortured and shot--and hanged. We'd bop 'em on the head. We'd hook 'em up to the electricity. We'd stick 'em with hypodermic syringes full of all kinds of stuff. One time we killed a guy with orange juice. There was a train wreck, and two of the freight cars were loaded with oranges, so we had oceans of orange juice. It was a

joke--how much orange juice we had. And we were interrogating a guy one day, and he wouldn't talk, and the next thing I know--somebody's filling up this big syringe with orange juice.

(pause)

There was a guerrilla war going on. You couldn't tell who was a guerrilla and who wasn't. Even if you got one, it was still a civilian you got. Telling Americans what a guerrilla war is like--that's coals to Newcastle. How do you like that for idiomatic English? "Coals to Newcastle."

(laughs)

That Harold Ryan--he says he spoke to me in perfect German? He talks German like my ass chews gum. I'm glad to hear the wonderful thing he said before he killed me. I sure didn't understand it the first time around. I figured he was a Lithuanian or something, which will give you an idea of how wrong you can be. All I knew was he was very proud about something, and he had a machine pistol, and it was aimed at me. The woods were full of all kinds of nuts who were proud of some damn thing or other, and they all had guns. They were always looking for revenge. You find a way to bottle revenge--that's the end of Schnapps und Coca-Cola.

(pause)

Harold Ryan said he killed maybe two hundred guys. I killed a hundred times that many, I bet. That's still peanuts, of course, compared to what that crazy Looseleaf did. Harold and me--we was doing it the hard way. I hope

the record books will show that. There should be a little star or something by the names of the guys who did it the hard way.

(pause)

I'm up in Heaven now, like that little Wanda June kid. I wasn't hit by no ice-cream truck. Harold Ryan killed me with his bare hands. He was good. My eyes popped out. My tongue stuck out like a red banana. I shit in my pants. It was a mess.

(pause)

When I got up on the day I died, I said, "What a beautiful day this is. What a beautiful part of the world." The whole planet was beautiful. Up here I meet guys from other planets.

(laughs)

We got some really crazy-looking guys up here. Their planets weren't anywhere near as nice as Earth. They had clouds all the time. They never saw a clear blue sky. They never saw snow. They never saw an ocean. They had some little lakes, but you couldn't go swimming in them. The lakes were acid. You go swimming, you dissolve. We got some guys up here who got shoved in them lakes. They dissolved.

(pause)

Harold Ryan stopped talking German to me there in Yugoslavia. He switched to English, so I finally got some kind of idea what he was so burned up about. He wanted revenge for the guy we killed with orange juice. I don't know how he ever found out about it. There was just three of us there when we did

it--me and two regular military doctors. Somebody who cleaned up afterwards must have squealed. If I'd lived through the war, and they tried me for war crimes and all that, I'd have to tell the court, I guess, "I was only following orders, as a good soldier should. Hitler told me to kill this guy with orange juice."

Blackout.

SCENE EIGHT:

DARKNESS. Lights come up on living room. HAROLD has just finished telling his true war story to PAUL.

HAROLD

Mhravitch. Remember that name.

PAUL

Mhravitch.

HAROLD

The name will live forever. It was there that Harold Ryan slew the Beast of Yugoslavia. Mhravitch.

PAUL

When I grow up, I'm going to go to Mhravitch.

HAROLD

It's rather a disappointment these days. It isn't there any more.

PAUL

Sir?

HAROLD

The Germans shot everybody who lived there, then leveled it, plowed it, planted turnips and cabbages in the fertile ground. They wished revenge for the slaying of the Beast of Yugoslavia. To their twisted way of thinking, your father had butchered an Eagle Scout.

(abruptly)

Play lots of contact sports?

PAUL

I wanted to go out for football,

but Mom was afraid I'd get hurt.

HAROLD

You're supposed to get hurt!

PAUL

Dr. Woodly says he's seen hundreds of children permanently injured by football. He says that when there's a war, everybody goes but football players.

HAROLD

Does it bother you to have your mother engaged to a man like that?

PAUL

They're not engaged.

HAROLD

He seems to think they are. He told me that were.

PAUL

Oh no, no, no, no, no. It can't be. How embarrassing.

HAROLD

(unexpectedly moved)

You're a very good boy to respond that way.

PAUL

No, no, no, no, no.

HAROLD

I'd like to use the sanitary facilities, if I may.

PAUL

Go ahead.

(as HAROLD exits)

No, no, no, no.

PENELOPE and SHUTTLE enter through front door. They are tremendously relieved to see PAUL.

PAUL

Thank God!

SHUTTLE

What a relief!

PENELOPE

(going to PAUL)

My baby's safe!

PAUL angrily avoids her touch.

PENELOPE

What's the matter now?

SHUTTLE

We got a birthday cake, kid. Did you see the cake?

PAUL

Are you and Dr. Woodly engaged?

PENELOPE

(stunned)

Who have you been talking to?

PAUL

What difference does that make? Is Dr. Woodly going to be my father now?

Pause.

PENELOPE

Yes, he is.

PAUL

(a stifled, gargling cry)

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

SHUTTLE

(sick)

That goes double for me.

PAUL

I don't want to live any more.

SHUTTLE

I feel like I want to yell my head off--just yell anything.

(yelling)

Bulllllllllllllllllll-dickey!

PAUL

I'll kill myself.

SHUTTLE

The wife of Harold Ryan is going to marry a pansy next? This is the end of Western Civilization as far as I'm concerned. You must be crazy as a fruitcake.

PENELOPE

Possibly.

SHUTTLE

How long has this been going on?

PENELOPE

A week. We were waiting for the right time to--

SHUTTLE

I feel as though I had been made a perfect chump of.

PENELOPE

I'm sorry.

SHUTTLE

Marry me instead.

PENELOPE

Thank you, Herb. You're a wonderful man. You really are. Everybody respects you for what you've done for scouting and the Little League.

SHUTTLE

You're saying no.

PENELOPE

I'm saying no--and thank you.

SHUTTLE

I didn't make my move fast enough. That's it, isn't it? I was too respectful.

PENELOPE

You were wonderful.

SHUTTLE

What's so wonderful if I lost the sale?

(turning to PAUL)

You poor kid.

PAUL

Don't touch me.

SHUTTLE

Wouldn't you rather have your mother marry me than him?

PAUL

No.

SHUTTLE

(moving dazedly toward the front door)

All my dreams have suddenly collapsed.

(pause)

We did have a lot of laughs together, Penelope.

PENELOPE

It's true.

SHUTTLE

Well--it was nice while it lasted.

Thanks for the memories.

He exits.

Silence. A toilet flushes loudly and complicatedly.

PENELOPE

Is Norbert still here?

PAUL

No.

PENELOPE

Then who flushed the toilet?

PAUL

Father's friend.

PENELOPE

What's his name?

PAUL

Don't know.

PENELOPE

For Heaven's sakes!

HAROLD enters, still adjusting his trousers.

PENELOPE

How do you do?

HAROLD

How do you do, Mrs. Ryan? I'd heard you were beautiful, and so you are. Am I intruding here?

PENELOPE

Not at all.

HAROLD

I couldn't help overhearing that you were about to get married again.

PENELOPE has now recognized him, but attempts to protect herself from shock by pretending that she has not.

PENELOPE

Our family physician has asked me to marry him. Paul needs the guidance and companionship that only a man can give. He isn't at all like Harold. But then again, I'm not the woman I was eight years ago.

She slumps into a chair, buries her face in her hands.

PAUL

Mom?

PENELOPE

(pointing weakly)

That man is your father.

PAUL

What?

PENELOPE

There stands the loins from which
you've sprung.

PAUL

I don't get it.

PENELOPE

It is you, isn't it, Harold?

HAROLD

(enjoying the drama hugely)

Yes, wife, it is.

(to PAUL)

Come here, boy. Your father is home.

PAUL

Sir?

PENELOPE

Go to him.

PAUL goes to HAROLD dazedly. They embrace clumsily.

HAROLD

PAUL

Son, son, son...

Father, father, father...

They part, unsatisfied and confused. HAROLD goes to
PENELOPE, his arms outstretched.

HAROLD

Wife, wife, wife...

PENELOPE struggles to her feet, her face blank. HAROLD
embraces her, finds himself wrestling with a rigid,
unresponsive object.

HAROLD

Wife, wife, wife...

HAROLD lets go, backs away from her.

HAROLD

What's the matter?

PENELOPE

(tearful)

Give us time.

HAROLD

Like hugging a lamp post.

PENELOPE

Give us time, Harold--to adjust to
your being alive.

HAROLD

You were well adjusted to my being
dead?

PENELOPE

We adjust to what there is to
adjust to. Perhaps Paul, being
young, can adjust to joy or grief
immediately. I hope he can. I
will take a little longer. I'll be
as quick as I can.

HAROLD

What sort of time period do you
have in mind? Half an hour? An hour?

PENELOPE

I don't know. This is a new
disease to me.

HAROLD

Disease?

PENELOPE

Situation.

HAROLD

This reunion isn't what I imagined
it would be.

PENELOPE

A telegram--a phone call might have
helped.

HAROLD

Seemed the most honest way to begin
life together again--natural,
unrehearsed.

PENELOPE

Well--enjoy the natural, honest,
unrehearsed result--surgical shock.

HAROLD

You feel that you're behaving as a
woman should?

PENELOPE

Every fuse in my nervous system has
been blown.

Lion doorbell roars.

PENELOPE

Who's that? Teddy Roosevelt?

PAUL answers the door, admits WOODLY.

WOODLY

(to PAUL)
Safe and sound, I see.
(to HAROLD)
Oh--you came back.
HAROLD
I came back.
PENELOPE
You know each other?
WOODLY
We met here earlier this evening.
PENELOPE
How neat. How keen.
HAROLD
How was the emergency, Doctor?
Profitable, I hope.
WOODLY
A policeman delivered the baby in a
taxicab.
HAROLD
Tough luck. You'll have to split
the fee.
WOODLY
(puzzled by PENELOPE's
mood)
Are--are you crying, Penelope?
HAROLD
She's crying because she's so happy.
PENELOPE
That's why I'm crying.
PAUL
Dr. Woodly?
(indicating HAROLD)
You know who this is?
WOODLY
I didn't get his name. A friend of
your father?
PAUL
He isn't any friend of Father.
WOODLY
He isn't?
PAUL
He is my father.
WOODLY
No!

PENELOPE

Eeeeeeeeeeee-yup. Dr. Woodly--I would like you to meet Harold, my husband. Harold, this is Dr. Woodly, my fiancé.

She crosses to the door of the master bedroom, kissing each male lightly as she passes.

PENELOPE

Good night, dear. Good night, dear.

She stands in the doorway.

PENELOPE

Stay or go, talk or sulk, laugh or cry--as you wish. Do whatever seems called for. My mind is gone. Good night.

She exits into bedroom, closes the door firmly, locks it audibly.

WOODLY

(dazedly)

I feel the same way. What next?

HAROLD

What next? You leave promptly, of course. There is no question as to whose home this is--

WOODLY

None.

HAROLD

Whose son this is, whose wife that is. A fiancé is the most ridiculous appurtenance this household could have at this time. Good night.

WOODLY

(crushed, without any possible comeback)

Good night.

He exits through the front door. HAROLD goes at once to PENELOPE's door, tries it, finds it locked.

HAROLD

Penelope! God damn it! Penelope!

He considers kicking down the door, thinks better of this, turns away.

HAROLD

Wants to fix up her makeup, no doubt.

PAUL

Is Looseleaf Harper alive?

HAROLD

Alive and hale. He's throwing a little surprise party for his own family. Is your mother often this unstable?

(not waiting for an answer, calling again)

Penelope!

PAUL

She's a real heavy sleeper sometimes.

HAROLD

Why don't you go to bed--son.

PAUL

I can't take my eyes off you.

HAROLD

Tomorrow's another day.

PAUL

You know what my English literature teacher said about you?

HAROLD

Can't it keep till morning?

PAUL

She said you were legendary. I wrote a theme about you, and she said, "Your father is a legendary hero out of the Golden Age of Heroes."

HAROLD

That's nice. You thank her for me. Go to bed and get lots of sleep, and then you thank her in the morning.

PAUL

Tomorrow's Saturday. Anyway, she's dead.

HAROLD

Penelope!

PAUL

She was killed in the park two months ago--in the daytime.

HAROLD

Penelope!

PAUL

She was on her way home from a

meeting of the African Violet Society, and they got her.

HAROLD

(sharply)

Will you go to bed?

PAUL

(stung)

Yes sir. If you can't wake Mom up, I've got double-decker bunks.

HAROLD

(stamping his foot)

Scat!

PAUL exits hastily down the corridor to his room. HAROLD goes to PENELOPE's door, attempts to woo her through it.

HAROLD

Penelope--darling--can you hear me?
Wife--you know what kept me alive
all these fevered, swampy,
nightmare years? Your heavenly
face, Penelope, my wife--shimmering
before me, coaxing me up from my
knees, begging me to stagger one
step closer to home. Has love ever
reached so far? Has love ever
overcome more hardships than mine?

(silence)

Has love ever asked more manliness
of a man, more womanliness of a
woman? Has ever a man done more
for a woman's reward?

The bedroom door opens, revealing PENELOPE.

PENELOPE

(hollowly, to the
world at large)

There is no one in here of any
earthly use to anyone tonight.
Tomorrow is another day.

She closes the door and locks it.

HAROLD

(to audience)

End of Act One.

Blackout.

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE:

DARKNESS. PAUL, alone in the living room, hammers on his mother's door. He wears pajamas.

PAUL

Mom! Mother! Mom!

Toilet flushes. Lights come up on the living room. It is morning.

PAUL

Dad's got jungle fever, Mom.

What'll I do? Mom!

HAROLD

(a moment of exhaustion)

Damn.

PAUL

Mom?

Door to the master bedroom suite opens. PENELOPE appears in the doorway. She has decided during an almost sleepless night that she owes it to PAUL and to her own self-respect to explore the possibility of beginning her life with HAROLD anew. She is terrified of him. She hopes that if she can keep calm and open, her fears will diminish. Perhaps she can love him again.

PENELOPE

(attempting to behave
mechanically as a
good wife should)

What are his symptoms?

PAUL

Shivers and sweats and groans. His
teeth chatter. What'll we do?

PENELOPE

What does he say to do?

PAUL

He can hardly talk.

HAROLD

(responding to a last
twinge of nausea)

Bluh.

PENELOPE

You'd better get Dr. Woodly.

PAUL

Really?

PENELOPE

It is an emergency, isn't it?

PAUL

(uncertainly)

Yeah.

PENELOPE

Then get him.

PAUL

(thinking she has
made a mistake)

Okay.

He exits through front door, leaves door open. We hear him knocking on a door in the hallway.

PAUL

Dr. Woodly?

HAROLD enters, drained but recovering. He chews on a root. He has slept in the shirt and trousers he wore the night before. He is barefoot. PAUL knocks again.

PAUL

Dr. Woodly?

There is the sound of WOODLY's door opening. WOODLY and PAUL speak unintelligibly, WOODLY evidently inviting PAUL in for a moment. WOODLY's door closes.

HAROLD

What's that all about?

PENELOPE

We thought a doctor might help.

HAROLD

Your old beau?

PENELOPE

We thought it was an emergency.

HAROLD

I don't want that chancre mechanic
in here.

PENELOPE

He's a very decent man, Harold.

HAROLD

We all are.

PENELOPE

Shouldn't you lie down?

HAROLD

When I'm dead--

(throwing it away)

or fucking.

PENELOPE

Paul said you were awfully sick.

HAROLD

I was, I was. It never lasts long.
He hears WOODLY's door open, is alert to WOODLY's approach,
continues to speak to PENELOPE absently.

HAROLD

The Indians call it "Zamba-
keetya"--the little cloudburst.

WOODLY and PAUL enter. WOODLY is correctly professional and
carries a little black bag.

WOODLY

Ah! You're ambulatory!

HAROLD

What a brilliant diagnosis!

PENELOPE

You know what I want?

(all look at her)

I want you both to be friends. I
know you both, respect you both.
You should be friends.

HAROLD

Nothing would please me more.

PENELOPE

(believing him)

Thank God!

WOODLY

(pleased but careful)

Well now--what seems to be the
trouble with the patient today? A
touch of malaria, perhaps?

HAROLD

I know malaria. Malaria isn't
caused by the bites of bats.

WOODLY

You've been bitten by bats?

HAROLD

Colonel Harper and I once shared a
treetop with a family of bats.
There was a flash flood. There
were piranha fish in the water.
That's how Colonel Harper lost his
little toe.

WOODLY

You have chills?

HAROLD

Chills, fevers, sweats. You can describe it and name it after yourself: "the Woodly galloping crud."

WOODLY enjoys the joke and the blooming friendship.

HAROLD

You can also describe its cure. I'm eating its cure.

WOODLY

I was going to ask.

HAROLD

Pacqualinincheewa root.

WOODLY

Would you say that again?

HAROLD

Pacqualinincheewa root. Means "cougar fang." Cures anything but a yellow streak down the back.

WOODLY

I've never heard of it.

HAROLD

Congratulations. By crossing twenty-eight feet of cockroach-infested carpet, you've become the third white man ever to hear of it.

WOODLY

(fascinated)

Are you've seen it work cures?

HAROLD

Hundreds.

PENELOPE

I'm so glad you like each other. I was so scared, so scared.

HAROLD

(breaking off a piece, offering it)

Have some.

WOODLY

Thank you. Thank you very much.

PENELOPE

I believe in miracles now.

HAROLD

Wasn't that sweet of me?

WOODLY

More and more we find ourselves
laying aside false pride and
looking into the pharmacopoeias of
primitive people. Curare,
ephedrine--we've found some amazing
things.

HAROLD

We have, have we?

WOODLY

That's an editorial we, of course.
I haven't turned up anything
personally.

HAROLD

Everything about you is the
editorial we. Take that away from
you, and you'd disappear.

PENELOPE

Harold!

HAROLD

I could carve a better man out of a
banana!

PENELOPE

Please--

HAROLD

You and your damned bedside manner
and your damned little black bag
full of miracles. You know who
filled that bag for you? Not
Alice-sit-by-the-fires like
yourself. Men with guts filled it,
by God--men with guts enough to pay
the price for miracles--suffering,
ingratitude, loneliness, death--

WOODLY

(off balance)

Good Lord.

HAROLD

I can just hear the editorial wee-
wee-weeing when Looseleaf and I
start flying in pacqualinincheewa
root. I can hear the Alice-sit-by-
the-fires now: "We discovered it in
the Amazon Rain Forest. Now we
cure you with it. Now we lower our

eyes with becoming modesty as we
receive heartfelt thanks."

HAROLD suddenly goes to WOODLY, takes his hand and pretends
abject gratitude.

HAROLD

Oh, bless you, Doctor, bless you--
oh healer, oh protector, oh giver
of life.

WOODLY withdraws his hand, examines it as though it were
diseased.

PENELOPE

He doesn't deserve this! You don't
know him. It isn't fair!

HAROLD

He thought he could take my place.
It is now my privilege to give an
unambiguous account of why I don't
think he's man enough to do that.

WOODLY

I thought she was a widow.

HAROLD

You were wrong, you quack!

PENELOPE

Awful.

(approaching WOODLY,
but not getting too close)

I can't tell you how sorry I am.

HAROLD

Say hello to your mother.

PENELOPE

(fervently)

Do say hello to your mother.

WOODLY

I'm taking her to the airport a few
minutes from now. She's going to
East St. Louis--to visit an aunt.

PENELOPE

Tell her to have a nice trip.

WOODLY

(moving towards the
front door)

Thanks.

HAROLD laughs. This stings WOODLY to a cold, peace-loving
anger.

WOODLY

I'm going to have to report you to
the Department of Health.

HAROLD

What for?

WOODLY

Quarantine, possibly. You may be
suffering from a loathsome disease
which the American people could do
without. Goodbye.

He exits instantly.

HAROLD

Now that's what I call fun.

PENELOPE

Ghastly, cruel, unnecessary.

HAROLD

You'll get so you enjoy twitting
weaklings again. You used to eat
it up.

PENELOPE

I did?

HAROLD

We were one hell of a pair--and
we'll be one again. What we need
is a honeymoon. Let's start right
now.

PENELOPE

A trip, you mean?

HAROLD

I had a trip. We'll honeymoon here.

(to PAUL)

Go out and play.

PAUL

Play?

HAROLD

Your mother and I do not wish to be
disturbed for three full hours.

PENELOPE

He hasn't had breakfast yet.

HAROLD

Buy yourself breakfast.

(takes his billfold
from his hip pocket,
hands PAUL a \$100 bill)

There we go.

PAUL

A hundred dollars!

HAROLD

The smallest thing I've got.

PAUL

Can I get dressed first?

HAROLD

Make it fast.

PAUL exits to his bedroom. HAROLD turns to PENELOPE.

HAROLD

Honeymoon! Honeymoon! Say it:

Honeymoon!

PENELOPE

It's so--so stark.

HAROLD

You used to like it stark!

PENELOPE

Just--bang--we have a honeymoon.

HAROLD

(beginning to stalk
her cunningly)

I'm not going to strike you. I am
going to be as gentle as pie--as
lemon meringue pie. You mustn't
run away now. This is your loving
husband approaching. I'm your
husband. Society approves!

PENELOPE wants to run, but doesn't.

HAROLD

Good! You held your ground.

HAROLD is very close now, but not touching her.

HAROLD

Now--turn around, if you would.

PENELOPE

Turn around?

HAROLD

(laughing)

I'm not about to introduce to you a
jungle novelty. What I have in
mind is massage--a perfectly decent
massage. Turn around, turn around.

PENELOPE obeys.

HAROLD

I'm going to touch your shoulders
very gently now. You mustn't
scream.

(touches her
shoulders gently, expertly)
So tense, so tense.

PENELOPE
You shouldn't have talked to
Norbert that way.

HAROLD
You're thinking with your brain
instead of your body. That's why
you're so tense! Forget Norbert.
Relax. It's body time.

PENELOPE
I have a brain.

HAROLD
We all do. But now it's body time.
Relax. Ideally, the body of a
woman should feel like a hot water
bottle filled with Devonshire cream.
You feel like a paper bag crammed
with curtain rods. Think of your
muscles one by one. Let them go
slack. Relax. Let the brain go
blank. Relax. That's the idea--
that's my girl. Now the small of
the back. Let those knots over
those kidneys unsnarl.

PAUL
(entering, dressed to
go out and play)
Dad--

HAROLD
(hanging on to
PENELOPE, but knowing
the mood has been broken)
Couldn't you have vanished quietly
out the back door?

PAUL
A hundred dollars for breakfast?

HAROLD
Leave a tip.

PENELOPE

(suddenly twisting
away, having been
nearly hypnotized)

I have some change!

HAROLD

Ram it up your ass!

He realizes at once that his violent side has severely
damaged the side of him which is the great seducer.

PENELOPE and PAUL are straight as ramrods.

HAROLD

I do beg your pardon.

(sincerely)

Those words were illy chosen.

There is tension in all of us here.

Something you must both understand,
however, is that the head of this
household is home, and he is Harold
Ryan, and people do what he says
when he says it. That's the way
this particular clock is constructed.

Lion doorbell roars.

HAROLD

Sometimes even I hate that thing.

PAUL goes reeling to the door in terror, admits LOOSELEAF,
who has also been sleeping in his clothes.

LOOSELEAF

(walking right in)

I've been looking at motorcycles.

HAROLD

Go home!

LOOSELEAF

You ever own a motorcycle?

HAROLD

(to PENELOPE)

You're right! We'll take a trip.

A trip is what we'll take.

(to LOOSELEAF)

I don't want to talk about
motorcycles. I don't want to talk
about tits. Go home!

LOOSELEAF

Haven't got one.

PENELOPE

(to LOOSELEAF)

And you went home unannounced, too?

LOOSELEAF

I dunno. Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! I did.

HAROLD

And how were things?

LOOSELEAF

Let's talk about something else.

PENELOPE

(to HAROLD)

Alice got married again.

LOOSELEAF

She did?

PENELOPE

You didn't even find that out?

LOOSELEAF

There was so much going on.

PENELOPE

She married an accountant named Stanley Kestenbaum.

LOOSELEAF

So that's it! "Kestenbaum, Kestenbaum." Everybody was yelling "Kestenbaum, Kestenbaum." I thought it was some foreign language.

HAROLD

Otherwise, how are things?

LOOSELEAF

I sure didn't expect her to drop dead.

PENELOPE

Dead!

LOOSELEAF

Jesus.

PENELOPE

(sick)

Alice is dead?

LOOSELEAF

No, no--shit no.

(stops short)

Excuse me, Penelope.

PENELOPE

For what?

LOOSELEAF

For saying "shit." Or is that okay now?

PENELOPE

(shrilly)

Who's dead?

LOOSELEAF

My mother-in-law. Fire engines,
pulmotors, doctors, cops, coroners--

PENELOPE

What happened?

LOOSELEAF

Well--I walked up to the front door.
I was still alive. Big surprise.
I rang the doorbell, and old Mrs.
Wheeler answered. She had her
Goddamn knitting. I said, "Guess
who?" She conked right out.

PENELOPE

How horrible.

LOOSELEAF

Yeah--cripes. I never did get any
sense out of Alice. She found me
holding up the old lady, dead as a
mackerel. It was a bitch. You
know--maybe Mrs. Wheeler was going
to die then and there anyway, even
if I'd been the paper boy. Maybe
not. I dunno, boy. That's
civilian life for you. Who knows
what kills anybody?

HAROLD

Could have happened to anybody.

LOOSELEAF

First Nagasaki--now this.

HAROLD

How about breakfast, wife?

PENELOPE

Breakfast?

HAROLD

(as though to a waitress)

Scrambled eggs, kippered herring,
fried potatoes--and a whole onion.
I want to eat the onion like an
apple. Do you understand?

PENELOPE turns away.

HAROLD

And lots of orange juice--oceans of orange juice.

PENELOPE

Mrs. Wheeler is dead.

HAROLD

All right--bring me a side order of Mrs. Wheeler.

(regarding LOOSELEAF,
resigning himself to
being stuck with his
company for a little
while longer)

Oh, hell--sit down, Colonel.

Penelope will bring you some chow.

PENELOPE

That is the most heartless statement I ever heard pass between human lips.

HAROLD

(honestly mystified)

Which one?

PENELOPE

(chokingly)

"Bring me a side order of Mrs. Wheeler."

HAROLD

She's up in Heaven now. She didn't hear. She is experiencing nothing but pure happiness. There's nothing nicer than that.

(suddenly, angrily,
slamming a table with
his fist)

Chow! Harold Ryan wants chow!

PENELOPE

What a honeymoon.

HAROLD

Honeymoon temporarily canceled.

(catching sight of
PAUL, whose physical
appearance really
offends him)

The boy should still go out and exercise. I have the impression he

never gets any exercise. He simply
bloats himself with Fig Newtons and
bakes his brains over steam radiators.

PENELOPE

You're wrong.

HAROLD

Then let me see him go out and get
some exercise.

(explosively)

Right now!

PAUL goes reeling in terror to the front door, opens it.

PAUL

(to HAROLD, abjectly)

What kind of exercise?

HAROLD

Beat the shit out of someone who
hates you.

PAUL exits. HAROLD pounds on a table.

HAROLD

Chow, chow, chow! God damn it--
nutriment!

PENELOPE

We're all going to have to go out
for breakfast. The cook quit
yesterday.

HAROLD

You're a woman, aren't you?

PENELOPE nods.

HAROLD

Then we have a cook.

PENELOPE hesitates.

HAROLD

Cook, by God! Cook! You're the
nigger now.

PENELOPE

People don't use that word any more.

HAROLD

Don't lecture me on race relations.
I don't have a molecule of
prejudice. I've been in battle
with every kind of man there is.
I've been in bed with every kind of
woman there is--from a Laplander to
a Tierra del Fuegian.

If I'd ever been to the South Pole,
there'd be a hell of a lot of
penguins who looked like me. Cook!

PENELOPE

You leave me so--so without--
without dignity.

HAROLD

People now have dignity when frying
eggs?

PENELOPE

They don't have to feel like slaves.

HAROLD

(grandly)

Then go now--and fry with dignity--
sunnyside up.

PENELOPE attempts to respond to this, but is too enraged.
She exits, making a tiny mosquito-like hum.

LOOSELEAF

I dunno, boy.

HAROLD

The educational process.

LOOSELEAF

I guess. You're lucky you don't
have any old people around here.

HAROLD

She was about to get married again.
She locked me out of the bedroom
last night.

LOOSELEAF starts to laugh. HAROLD shuts him up.

HAROLD

What's funny about that?

LOOSELEAF

(apologetically)

You know me, boy.

PENELOPE enters from the kitchen with a question on her lips.

HAROLD

I should have torn that door off
its hinges. Should have scrogged
her ears off. Should have broken
the bed.

(seeing PENELOPE)

What do you want?

(words fail her)

Well?

PENELOPE

I--I was wondering--is there anything you shouldn't eat--because of jungle fever?

HAROLD

I could eat a raw baby crocodile.

(turning to LOOSELEAF crassly)

The way to get your wife back is in bed. Do such a job on her that she'll be lucky if she can crawl around on all fours.

(to PENELOPE)

We're starving. Do you mind?

PENELOPE exits dumbly, detesting the word "scrog," which she has never heard before.

HAROLD

She had two lovers, by the way.

LOOSELEAF starts to laugh again, stops the laugh as HAROLD glowers.

LOOSELEAF

Excuse me.

HAROLD

One of them is the doctor, whose weapons are compassion, unselfishness, peacefulness--maudlin concern.

LOOSELEAF

Huh.

HAROLD

He and his love are like a retiarius. Do you know what a retiarius is?

LOOSELEAF

He's a kind of gladiator who fights with a knife and a net and doesn't wear anything but a jockstrap.

HAROLD

(amazed)

How do you know that?

LOOSELEAF

You told me.

HAROLD

When?

LOOSELEAF

When we were up in the tree so
long--with the bats.

HAROLD

Oh. I'd forgotten.

LOOSELEAF

Fourteen times you told me. I
counted.

HAROLD

Really?

LOOSELEAF

You'd get this funny look in your
eyes, and I'd say to myself, "Oh,
Jesus--he's going to tell me what a
retiarius is again."

HAROLD

(acknowledging a flaw
in a manly way)

Sorry.

PENELOPE enters, is about to speak. HAROLD stops her with a
raised finger.

HAROLD

Let me guess--breakfast is served?

PENELOPE

No.

HAROLD

What then?

PENELOPE

I do not wish to be scrogged--ever.
I never heard that word, but when I
heard it, I knew it was one thing I
never wanted to have happen to me.

HAROLD

That's what you're supposed to say.

PENELOPE

This is not a coy deception. I do
not want to be scrogged. I want
love. I want tenderness.

HAROLD

You don't know you want. That's
the way God built you!

PENELOPE

I will not be scrogged. I remember
one time I saw you wrench a hook
from the throat of a fish with a

pair of pliers, and you promised me that the fish couldn't feel.

HAROLD

It couldn't!

PENELOPE

I'd like to have the expert opinion of the fish--along with yours.

HAROLD

(shaking his head)

Fish can't feel.

PENELOPE

Well, I can. Some injuries, spiritual or physical, can be excruciating to me. I'm not a silly carhop any more.

(an unexpected, minor insight)

Maybe you're right about fish.

When I was a carhop, I didn't feel much more than a fish would. But I've been sensitized. I have ideas now--and solid information. I know a lot more now--and a lot of it has to do with you.

HAROLD

(sensing danger)

Such as?...

PENELOPE

The whole concept of heroism--and its sexual roots.

HAROLD

Tell me about its sexual roots.

PENELOPE

It's complicated and I don't want to go into it now, because it's bound to sound insulting--even though nobody means for anybody to be insulted. It's just the truth.

HAROLD

I like the truth. I wouldn't be alive today if I weren't one of the biggest fans truth ever had.

PENELOPE

Well--part of it is that heroes basically hate home and never stay

there very long, and make awful messes while they're there.

HAROLD

Go on.

PENELOPE

(blurting)

And they have very mixed feelings about women. They hate them in a way. One reason they like war so much is that they can capture enemy women and not have to make love to them slowly and gently. They can scrog them, as you say--

(pause)

for revenge.

HAROLD

You learned this in some college course?

PENELOPE

I learned a lot of things in college. Actually--it was Norbert who told me that.

HAROLD

(darkly)

The doctor.

PENELOPE

Yes.

HAROLD

And what is his most cherished possession?

PENELOPE

(not sensing the drift of the conversation)

His most cherished possession? His violin, I guess.

HAROLD

And he keeps it in his apartment?

PENELOPE

(still at sea)

Yes.

HAROLD

And no one's there now?

PENELOPE

I don't think so.

HAROLD

That's too bad. I would rather have him at home--to see what I'm going to do.

PENELOPE

(suddenly catching on, sick with fear)

What are you going to do?

HAROLD

He did his best to destroy my most precious possession, which is the high opinion women have of me. I'm now going to even that score. I'm going to break in his door and I'm going to smash his violin.

PENELOPE

No you're not!

HAROLD

Why not?

PENELOPE

Because if you do--I'll leave you.

HAROLD

(promptly and emotionlessly)

Goodbye.

Blackout.

SCENE TWO:

SPOTLIGHT comes up on VON KONIGSWALD and WANDA JUNE, dressed as before. They have become close friends.

WANDA JUNE

We have this new club up here in Heaven.

VON KONIGSWALD

Yes, we do.

WANDA JUNE

We only have two members so far, but it's growing all the time.

VON KONIGSWALD

We have enough for a shuffleboard team. In Heaven, shuffleboard is everything. Hitler plays shuffleboard.

WANDA JUNE

Albert Einstein plays shuffleboard.

VON KONIGSWALD

Mozart plays shuffleboard.

WANDA JUNE

Lewis Carroll, who wrote Alice in Wonderland, plays shuffleboard.

VON KONIGSWALD

Jack the Ripper plays shuffleboard.

WANDA JUNE

Walt Disney, who gave us Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, plays shuffleboard. Jesus Christ plays shuffleboard.

VON KONIGSWALD

It was almost worth the trip--to find out that Jesus Christ in Heaven was just another guy, playing shuffleboard. I like his sense of humor, though--you know? He's got a blue-and-gold warm-up jacket he wears. You know what it says on the back? "Pontius Pilate Athletic Club." Most people don't get it. Most people think there really is a Pontius Pilate Athletic Club.

WANDA JUNE

We're going to have jackets, aren't we?

VON KONIGSWALD

You bet! "The Harold Ryan Fan Club." Pink, eh? With a yellow streak up the back.

(both laugh)

We got very good tailor shops up here. They'll make you any kind of uniform, any kind of sweatsuit you want. Judas Iscariot--he's got this black jacket with a skull and crossbones over the heart. He walks around all hunched over, and he never looks anybody in the eye, and written on the back of his jacket are the words, "Go take a flying--

WANDA JUNE punches him in the ribs.

VON KONIGSWALD

leap at the moon."

MILDRED, HAROLD's third wife, enters. She is voluptuous, blowzy, tough--about forty-five. She has trouble with alcohol. VON KONIGSWALD is expecting her.

VON KONIGSWALD

Aha! Hello! You're Mildred, right?

MILDRED

I heard you were looking for me.

VON KONIGSWALD

You were Harold Ryan's third wife.
Right?

MILDRED

Yes.

VON KONIGSWALD

You want to join the Harold Ryan
Fan Club? Wear a pink jacket with
a yellow streak up the back?

MILDRED

Do I have to? Who's the little girl?

WANDA JUNE

Mr. Ryan just borrowed my birthday
cake. I don't really know him.

MILDRED

Thought you were another wife, maybe.

WANDA JUNE

I'm only ten years old.

MILDRED

That's what he wanted--a ten-year-
old wife. He'd come home from a
war or a safari, and he'd wind up
talking to the little kids.

WANDA JUNE

Won't you please join our club?
Please?

MILDRED

Honey--Alcoholics Anonymous takes
all the time I've got--and Harold
Ryan is an individual I would
rather forget. He drove me to
drink. He drove his first two
wives to drink.

VON KONIGSWALD

Because he was cruel?

MILDRED

(covering WANDA
JUNE's little ears)

Premature ejaculation.

VON KONIGSWALD

Ach sooooooooooooo.

MILDRED

No grown woman is a fan of premature ejaculation. Harold would come home trumpeting and roaring. He would the kick the furniture with his boots, spit into corners and the fireplace. He would make me presents of stuffed fish and helmets with holes in them. He would tell me that he had now earned the reward that only a woman could give him, and he'd tear off my clothes. He would carry me into the bedroom, telling me to scream and kick my feet. That was very important to him. I did it. I tried to be a good wife. He told me to imagine a herd of stampeding water buffalo. I couldn't do that, but I pretended I did. It was all over--ten seconds after he'd said the word "buffalo." Then he'd zip up his pants, and go outside, and tell true war stories to the little kids. Any little kids.

VON KONIGSWALD

That is sad.

MILDRED

(blankly)

Is it?

(pause)

I have this theory about why men kill each other and break things.

VON KONIGSWALD

Ja?

MILDRED

Never mind. It's a dumb theory. I

was going to say it was all
sexual..but everything is
sexual...but alcohol.

(making peace sign)

Peace.

VON KONIGSWALD

WANDA JUNE

(making peace sign)

(making peace sign)

Peace.

Peace.

Blackout.

SCENE THREE:

SILENCE. Darkness.

WOODY WOODPECKER VOICE

Ha ha ha ha ha!

(pistol shot)

You got me, pal.

Silence. A baby cries. Silence. The lights come up.

LOOSELEAF

Go to the funeral?

HAROLD

Of course! Not only go to it but
go to it in full uniform! Rent a
uniform!

LOOSELEAF

That's against the law, isn't it?
I can't wear a uniform anymore.

HAROLD

Wear your uniform and every
decoration, and let them despise
you, if they dare.

LOOSELEAF

Alice would be absolutely tear-ass.

HAROLD

When I was a naive young recruit in
Spain, I used to wonder why
soldiers bayoneted oil paintings,
shot the noses off of statues and
defecated into grand pianos. I now
understand: It was to teach
civilians the deepest sort of
respect for men in uniform--
uncontrollable fear.

(raises his glass)

To our women.

LOOSELEAF

I didn't know we had any women left.

HAROLD

The world is teeming with women--
ours to enjoy.

LOOSELEAF

Every time I start thinking like
that I get the clap.

Lion doorbell roars.

HAROLD

(going to the door)

This could be my next wife.

He admits HERB SHUTTLE, who carries a bouquet of roses.

SHUTTLE

(puzzled by HAROLD)

Hello.

HAROLD

How are you, honeybunch?

SHUTTLE

Is Penelope in?

HAROLD

The posies are for her?

SHUTTLE

I wanted to apologize.

HAROLD

You've come to the right man.

SHUTTLE

I forgot my vacuum cleaner.

HAROLD

I forget mine for years on end.

SHUTTLE

(suddenly realizing
who HAROLD is)

Oh my God--

(pause; points)

And you are Looseleaf Harper.

LOOSELEAF

Hi.

SHUTTLE faints.

HAROLD

(crowing)

It's what I've dreamed of all my
life, Looseleaf! To have a grown
man realize who I was--and faint!

(to audience)

End of Act Two.

Blackout.

ACT THREE

SCENE ONE:

MILDRED enters drunkenly up aisle, sits precariously on apron of stage and speaks to audience.

MILDRED

Two days later. The afternoon of the day of Looseleaf Harper's mother-in-law's funeral. You got it? Two days later.

(pause)

You know what happened in Heaven today? There was a tornado. I'm not kidding you--there was a Goddamn tornado. Tore up fifty-six houses, a dance pavilion and a Ferris wheel. Drove a shuffleboard stick clear through a telephone pole. Nobody got killed. Nobody ever gets killed. They just bounce around a lot. Then they get up--and start playing shuffleboard.

(pause)

I never saw a tornado when I was alive, and I grew up in Oklahoma. There's this big, black, funnel-shaped cloud. Sounds like a railroad train without the whistle. I had to come to Heaven to see a thing like that. A lot of people got photographs.

(pause)

After the tornado was over, a man had some film left and he wanted to take pictures of me--to use up the roll. I don't like people who go around taking pictures of everything. Nothing's real to some people unless they've got photographs.

(pause)

Two days later--right?

She exits clumsily, the way she came. Silence. Lights come up on the living room, which has become a pigpen. LOOSELEAF, HAROLD, SHUTTLE and PAUL sit around a dinner of nearly raw beefsteak set on the coffee table. LOOSELEAF wears an ill-fitting uniform, which he has rented.

LOOSELEAF

I told you the uniform wouldn't help.

HAROLD

It helped more than you know. Down deep, people were deeply affected.

LOOSELEAF

You keep on saying "deep" and "deeply." I wish something good would happen on the surface sometime.

SHUTTLE

I can't get over how you guys are my friends. Harold Ryan and Looseleaf Harper are my friends.

HAROLD

Our pleasure.

SHUTTLE

Eight years you guys were together--through thick and thin.

HAROLD

For seven and a half of those years we were heavily drugged--or we would have been home long before now, believe me. We were saved from starvation by the Lupi-Loopo Indians, who fed us a strange blue soup.

SHUTTLE

Blue soup.

HAROLD

It sapped our will--made us peaceful and unenterprising. It was a form of chemical castration. We became two more sleepy Indians.

LOOSELEAF

(to PAUL)

So, kid--how they hanging? Or don't you say that to a little kid?

HAROLD

He's a man.

(to PAUL)

Tell him you're a man.

PAUL

I'm a man.

HAROLD

We've got to do something to make this boy's voice change. I wonder if we couldn't get bull balls somewhere, and fry 'em up.

(to PAUL)

Still miss your mother?

PAUL

(weakly)

No.

HAROLD

You're free to go to her, if you want. If you'd rather be a woman and run with the women, just say the word.

SHUTTLE

Are we really going to find out where the elephants go to die?

HAROLD

I'd rather go to Viet Nam.

SHUTTLE

Would somebody please pass me the catsup?

HAROLD

What you say is, "Pass the fucking catsup."

SHUTTLE

Pass the fucking catsup.

LOOSELEAF gives it to him. SHUTTLE dumps catsup on his steak.

SHUTTLE

I keep thinking about Africa--and the elephants.

LOOSELEAF

I don't think I'll go.

HAROLD

Of course you'll go! You're going to fly the helicopter.

LOOSELEAF

I dunno.

HAROLD

You're so low! Look at that beautiful red meat. You haven't touched it.

LOOSELEAF

Sorry. At least you've got a place to come back to. I don't have a place to come back to anymore.

HAROLD

All the more reason to go to Africa.

LOOSELEAF

I dunno. You know.

(pause)

I used to really love that Alice. Do you know that?

HAROLD

You know her for what she is now-- garbage.

LOOSELEAF

I dunno.

HAROLD

She was always a rotten wife! She was against everything manly you ever wanted to do.

(to SHUTTLE)

He was the most daring test pilot in the country at one time, and his wife made him quit. She made him become a life insurance salesman instead.

SHUTTLE

I'd think any woman worth her salt would be proud to be married to a test pilot. I know I would.

LOOSELEAF

She tried to like it. She was a very nervous woman.

SHUTTLE

I could tell that at the funeral.

(to PAUL)

Would you please pass the fucking catsup again? Was it dangerous testing planes?

LOOSELEAF

I dunno. Who knows? You know--

you're up there, and you're in some plane nobody ever flew before. You put her into a dive, and everything starts screaming and shaking, and maybe some pipe breaks and squirts oil or gasoline or hydraulic fluid in your face. You wonder how the hell you ever got in such a mess, and then you pull back on the controls, and you black out for a couple of seconds. When you come to, everything's usually fairly okay--except maybe you threw up all over yourself. It's just another job, but you try and tell Alice that.

HAROLD

Insurance!

SHUTTLE

You actually sold insurance!

LOOSELEAF

I tried.

(indicating HAROLD)

I sold him some. That was the only insurance I ever sold.

Hyena doorbell laughs.

SHUTTLE

What an awful sound!

HAROLD

Get used to it.

(to PAUL)

Back door, Paul.

PAUL exits to the kitchen.

HAROLD

(to SHUTTLE)

It's possible, of course, that you'll die in Africa.

SHUTTLE

I've considered that.

HAROLD

Selling vacuum cleaners isn't the best preparation you could have.

SHUTTLE

I just want one true adventure before I die.

HAROLD

That can be arranged.

PAUL appears at the mouth of the doorway. He has something amazing to announce.

PAUL

Dad?

HAROLD

Who was it?

PAUL

It's Mom.

He steps aside. PENELOPE appears. HAROLD and SHUTTLE stand, HAROLD angrily.

LOOSELEAF

(openly, cheerfully)

Hi, Penelope.

HAROLD

(to LOOSELEAF)

Shut up, you ninny!

(to PENELOPE)

You were never to come here again--
for any reason whatsoever!

PENELOPE

I came for my clothes.

HAROLD

Sneaking in the back door.

PENELOPE

I rang. It seemed like the proper
door for a servile, worthless
organism to use.

HAROLD

Your clothes are at the city dump
by now. Perhaps you can get a map
from the Department of Sanitation.

PENELOPE

I came for Paul as well.

HAROLD

If he wants to go.

PENELOPE

You took him to the funeral, I hear.

HAROLD

He'd never seen a corpse. He's
seen a dozen now.

PENELOPE

A dozen?

HAROLD

It's a big and busy funeral home.

PENELOPE

(to PAUL)

Did you like it, dear?

HAROLD

It isn't a matter of liking. It's a matter of getting used to death-- as a perfectly natural thing. Would you mind leaving? No woman ever walks out on Harold Ryan, and then comes back--for anything.

PENELOPE

Unless she has nerve.

HAROLD

More nerve than the doctor, I must admit. He hasn't been home for two days. Has he suddenly lost interest in sleep and color television--and the violin?

PENELOPE

He knows you shattered his violin.

HAROLD

I'm dying to hear of his reaction. The thrill of smashing something isn't in the smashing, but in the owner's reactions.

PENELOPE

He cried.

HAROLD

About a broomstick and a cigar box--and the attenuated intestines of an alley cat.

PENELOPE

Two hundred years old.

HAROLD

He feels awful loss--which was precisely my intention.

PENELOPE

(moving toward the violin, and, incidentally, placing herself much closer to SHUTTLE)

He had hoped that someone would be playing it still--two hundred years from now.

HAROLD

(echoing, expressing the futility of such long-term expectations)

Hope.

He spots the vacuum cleaner, probes it with his toe, asks SHUTTLE with seriousness.

HAROLD

Do you hope with all your heart that someone will be using this vacuum cleaner two hundred years from now?

SHUTTLE starts to answer, but stops, supposing that he is being made sport of.

HAROLD

Fifty years?

SHUTTLE

You're making a joke.

HAROLD

(not joking)

I'm interested in long-term expectations.

SHUTTLE

(flatly, protecting his dignity)

It's engineered to last about fifteen years.

HAROLD

(downstage center, addressing the civilized world)

Things. Oh--you silly people and your things. Things, things, things.

PENELOPE

(to SHUTTLE, as HAROLD reflects majestically on the emptiness of materialism)

You and Harold are friends?

SHUTTLE

(revealing how mixed

and worried his
feelings are)

He's the most wonderful guy I ever
met, Penelope. He's the most
complicated guy I ever met. I
can't believe it, but he's going to
take me to Africa with him.

HAROLD

Things.

PENELOPE

You feel I've done a dreadful
thing--leaving him?

SHUTTLE

(almost hypnotized)

If I were married to him, I sure
wouldn't walk out.

HAROLD

(directly to the audience)

Never mind the condition of your
body and your spirit! Look after
your things, your things!

PENELOPE

(to LOOSELEAF)

And you, Colonel? Let me guess:
You don't know.

LOOSELEAF

I dunno.

HAROLD

(to the audience)

Go live in a safe-deposit box--with
your things.

LOOSELEAF

Jesus--I wouldn't want to be
married to him. You know?

HAROLD

What's this?

LOOSELEAF

I wouldn't want to be married to me.
We're too crazy. You know?

HAROLD

In what way, pray tell?

LOOSELEAF

I didn't like that violin thing.
That was sad.

HAROLD

Tit for tat--as simple as that.

LOOSELEAF

You never played a violin.

HAROLD

You did?

LOOSELEAF

Yeah. I practically forgot. But after you busted that thing, I got to thinking, "Jesus--maybe I'll start the violin again." That didn't just belong to Woodly. That belonged to everybody. Maybe he would have sold it to me, and I could have some fun. After you busted the violin, boy, and Penelope walked out, I thought to myself, "Jesus--who could blame her?"

HAROLD

Maybe it's time you got out.

LOOSELEAF

Me?

HAROLD

You.

LOOSELEAF

Okay.

(pause)

Okay.

HAROLD

You're an imbecile.

LOOSELEAF

I know you think that.

HAROLD

Everybody thinks that.

LOOSELEAF

Anybody who'd drop an atom bomb on a city has to be pretty dumb.

HAROLD

The one direct, decisive, intelligent act of your life!

LOOSELEAF

(shaking his head)

I don't think so.

(pause)

It could have been.

HAROLD

If what?

LOOSELEAF

If I hadn't done it. If I'd said to myself, "Screw it. I'm going to let all those people down there live."

HAROLD

They were enemies. We were at war.

LOOSELEAF

Yeah, Jesus--but wars would be a lot better, I think, if guys would say to themselves sometimes, "Jesus--I'm not going to do that to the enemy. That's too much." You could have been the manufacturer of that violin there, even though you don't know how to make a violin, just by not busting it up. I could have been the father of all those people in Nagasaki, and the mother, too, just by not dropping the bomb.

(pause)

I sent 'em to Heaven instead--and I don't think there is one.

HAROLD

Goodbye, Looseleaf.

LOOSELEAF walks around and gathers his things.

LOOSELEAF

So long, you guys.

PENELOPE

What will you do, Colonel?

LOOSELEAF

I dunno. Marry the first whore who's nice to me, I guess. Get a job in a motorcycle shop. So long, you guys.

PENELOPE kisses LOOSELEAF. Everybody but HAROLD acknowledges his departure is some way. HAROLD turns his back. LOOSELEAF exits, closes door. Silence.

SHUTTLE

Who's going to fly our helicopter now?

HAROLD

(blackly, tautly)

What?

SHUTTLE

We got to get another pilot.

HAROLD

For what?

SHUTTLE

For Africa.

HAROLD

Do you really think that Harold Ryan would go to Africa with a vacuum cleaner salesman?

SHUTTLE

You invited me.

HAROLD

To make an ass of yourself.

SHUTTLE

What went wrong?

HAROLD

We're ahead of schedule, that's all. You're finding out here what you would have found out in Africa-- that you are a rabbit, born to be eaten alive.

SHUTTLE

Gee whiz--

HAROLD

It would have been fun to see you drop your rifle and run the first time an elephant charged us.

SHUTTLE

I wouldn't drop my gun.

HAROLD

You're hollow, like a woman.

SHUTTLE

I'm smarter than Looseleaf.

HAROLD

He can shoot! He can hold his ground! He can attack! You're in your proper profession right now-- sucking up dirt for frumpish housewives, closet drunkards every one.

SHUTTLE

(close to tears)

How do you know how I'd act in Africa?

HAROLD

Look how you're acting now! This is a moment of truth, and you're almost crying. Slug me!

SHUTTLE

You're my buddy.

HAROLD

Out! Out!

SHUTTLE

No matter what you say to me, I still think you're the greatest guy I ever knew.

HAROLD

Out!

SHUTTLE

You--you aren't going to have any friends left, if you don't watch out.

HAROLD

Thank God!

He propels SHUTTLE out the door and slams it. He faces PENELOPE and PAUL, speaks with malicious calm.

HAROLD

Well--what have we here? A family.

PENELOPE

Almost a Christmas scene.

HAROLD

Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye.

PENELOPE

Just one favor.

HAROLD

Money? There's plenty of that. Mildred got the brewery. You'll probably get the baseball team.

PENELOPE

I want you to tell me that you loved me once.

HAROLD is about to dismiss this request majestically, but PENELOPE cuts him off with a sharp, dangerous warning.

PENELOPE

I mean it! I must have that, and so must Paul. Tell him that he was conceived in love, even though you

hate me now. Tell both of us that
somewhere is our lives was love.

HAROLD experiments inwardly with responses of various kinds,
obviously saying them to himself, directing himself with his
hands. Nothing quite satisfies him.

HAROLD

Testimonials of that sort are--are
beyond my range. I don't do them
well.

(sincerely, not
liking to fail in any way)
That's a failing, I know.

PENELOPE

(accepting this ruefully)
I see.

PAUL

I don't care. I don't care if
there was love or not. That's all
right. I'm going to go to my room
and close the door. I don't want
to hear any more.

PAUL exits wretchedly to his room.

HAROLD

See how you've upset him. He was
so merry and hale before you came
home.

PENELOPE

How unhappy he's going to be--alone
in his room.

HAROLD

He'll play with his rifle, I expect.
That will cheer him up.

PENELOPE

Rifle?

HAROLD

I bought him a twenty-two
yesterday--on the way home from
Hamburger Heaven. And where is the
good doctor? Have you two
feathered a love nest somewhere?

PENELOPE

He's in East St. Louis with his
mother--visiting an aunt.

HAROLD

Last I heard, his mother was going alone.

PENELOPE

He's afraid of you, Harold. He knew you'd want to fight him. He doesn't know anything about fighting. He hates pain.

HAROLD

And you, a supposedly healthy woman, do not detest him for his cowardice?

PENELOPE

It seems highly intelligent to me.

HAROLD

What kind of a country has this become? The men wear beads and refuse to fight--and the women adore them. America's days of greatness are over. It has drunk the blue soup.

PENELOPE

Blue soup?

HAROLD

An Indian narcotic we were forced to drink. It put us in a haze--a honey-colored haze which was lavender around the edge. We laughed, we sang, we snoozed. When a bird called, we answered back. Every living thing was our brother or our sister, we thought. Looseleaf stepped on a cockroach six inches long, and we cried. We had a funeral that went on for five days--for the cockroach! I sang "Oh Promise Me." Can you imagine? Where the hell did I ever learn the words to "Oh Promise Me"? Looseleaf delivered a lecture on maintenance procedures for the hydraulic system of a B-36. All the time we were drinking more blue soup, more blue soup! Never stopped drinking blue soup. Blue soup all the time.

We'd go out after food in that honey-colored haze, and everything that was edible had a penumbra of lavender.

PENELOPE

Sounds quite beautiful.

HAROLD

(angered)

Beautiful, you say? It wasn't life, it wasn't death--it wasn't anything!

(anger still mounting)

Beautiful? Seven years gone--

(snapping his fingers)

like that, like that! Seven years of silliness and random dreams! Seven years of nothingness, when there could have been so much!

PENELOPE

Like what?

HAROLD

(becoming dangerously physical, seizing a battle-ax)

Action! Interaction! Give and take! Challenge and response!

He splits a coffee table with the ax.

PAUL

(rushing in with his .22 rifle at a high port arms)

Mom?

HAROLD

What's this?

PAUL wilts instantly, attempts to make his rifle inconspicuous, harmless, meaningless.

HAROLD

What's this?

PAUL

Nothing.

HAROLD

That's a rifle you have?

PAUL

No.

HAROLD

Of course it is. Is it loaded?

PAUL

No.

HAROLD

Open the bolt!

PAUL obeys. A cartridge pops out.

HAROLD

That's a cartridge, if I'm not mistaken. Gunpowder, bullet, cartridge case, and fulminate of mercury percussion cap--all set to go.

PAUL

I was cleaning it.

HAROLD

Pick up that cartridge and slip it back into the chamber--where it belongs.

PAUL

Gee whiz, Dad--

HAROLD

Welcome to manhood, you little sparrowfart! Load that gun!

PAUL

(bleatingly)

Dad--

HAROLD

Too late! It's man to man now. Protecting your mother from me, are you? Protect her!

PENELOPE

He's a child!

HAROLD

With an iron penis three feet long. Load it, boy.

PENELOPE

You're begging him to kill you?

HAROLD

If he thinks he's man enough.

PENELOPE

(amazed by sudden insight)

That's really what you want. You become furious when people won't make you dead.

HAROLD

I'm teaching my son to be a man.

PENELOPE

So he can kill you. You hate your own life that much. You beg for a hero to kill you.

HAROLD

I plan to live one hundred years!

PENELOPE

No you don't.

HAROLD

If that's the case--what's to prevent my killing myself?

PENELOPE

Honor, I suppose.

HAROLD

What a handsome word.

PENELOPE

(wonderingly)

But it's all balled up in your head with death. The highest honor is death. When you talk of these animals, one by one, you don't just talk of killing them. You honored them with death. Harold--it is not honor to be killed.

HAROLD

If you've lived a good life, fought well--

PENELOPE

It's still just death, the absence of life--no honor at all. It's worse than the blue soup by far--that nothingness. To you, though, it's the honor that crowns them all.

HAROLD

May I continue with the rearing of my son?

(to PAUL)

Load that gun!

PAUL shakes his head.

HAROLD

Load it!

PAUL refuses.

HAROLD

Then speak, by God! Can you fight with words?

PAUL

I don't want to fight you.

HAROLD

Get mad! Tell me you don't like the way I treat your mother! Tell me you wish I'd never come home!

PAUL

(weakly)

It's your house, Dad.

HAROLD

(throwing up his hands)

Everybody simply evaporates!

(including the audience, inviting it to share his indignation)

There are guest issues to be fought out here--or to be argued, at least. The enemy, the champion of all who oppose me, is in East St. Louis with his mother and his aunt! I have so far done battle with a woman and a child and a violin.

PENELOPE

The old heroes are going to have to get used to this, Harold--the new heroes who refuse to fight. They're trying to save the planet. There's no time for battle, no point to battle anymore.

HAROLD

I feel mocked, insulted, with no sort of satisfaction in prospect. We don't have to fight with steel. I can fight with words. I'm not an inarticulate ape, you know, who grabs a rock for want of a vocabulary. Call him up in East St. Louis, Penelope. Tell him to come here.

PENELOPE

No.

HAROLD

(emptily, turning away)

No.

Pause. He contemplates PAUL.

HAROLD

And my son, the only son of Harold Ryan--he's going to grow up to be a vanisher, too?

PENELOPE

I don't know. I hope he never hunts. I hope he never kills another human being.

HAROLD

(to PAUL, quietly)

You hope this, too?

PAUL

I don't know what I hope. But I don't think you care what I hope, anyway. You don't know me.

(indicating PENELOPE)

You don't know her, either. I don't think you know anybody. You talk to everybody just the same.

HAROLD

I'm talking to you gently now.

PAUL

Yeah. But it's going to get loud again.

PENELOPE

He's right, Harold. To you, we're simply pieces in a game--this one labeled "woman," that one labeled "son." There is no piece labeled "enemy" and you are confused.

Lion doorbell roars. PAUL goes to answer it.

HAROLD

There won't be anybody out there.

That's the new style: nobody anywhere.

PAUL, aghast, admits NORBERT WOODLY. WOODLY is high as a kite on his own adrenaline.

PENELOPE

(aghast, chokingly)

Get out of here.

WOODLY

It's really that bad?

He comes farther into the room, bravely.

PENELOPE

You fool, you fool.

WOODLY

Oh--look at the poor, crucified
violin, would you?

HAROLD

It died for your sins.

WOODLY

This little corpse is intended as a
lesson?

HAROLD

There's a certain amount of
information there.

WOODLY

Lest we forget how cruel you are.

PENELOPE

(moving to the telephone)

I'm going to call the police.

HAROLD

(frighteningly)

Don't!

WOODLY

I agree.

WOODLY closes the door. PENELOPE backs away from the phone,
drifts toward PAUL, who still holds his rifle.

HAROLD

This is man to man.

WOODLY

It's healer to killer. Is that the
same thing?

HAROLD

What brought you back?

WOODLY

The same hairy, humorless old gods
who move you from hither to yon.

"Honor, " if you like.

HAROLD

(to PENELOPE)

He's a champion after all.

WOODLY

Of the corpses and cripples you
create for our instruction--when

all we can learn from them is this:
how cruel you are.

PENELOPE

This is suicide.

(to PAUL)

Go get the police.

HAROLD

Stop!

PAUL stops.

HAROLD

There's going to be no bloodshed
here. I know how he'll fight--the
only way he can fight: with words.
The truth.

(to WOODLY)

Am I correct?

WOODLY

Yes.

HAROLD

I can defeat him with anything from
flavored toothpicks to siege
howitzers. But he got it into his
little head that he could come here
and demolish Harold Ryan with words.
The truth! Correct?

WOODLY

Correct.

HAROLD

What an hallucination!

(laughs)

Oh, dear, dear, dear, dear. Oh
dearie me.

WOODLY

You haven't heard me yet.

HAROLD

You intend to crack my eardrums
with your voice? Will I bleed from
my every orifice? Who will clean
up this awful mess?

WOODLY

We'll find out now, won't we?

PENELOPE

No, we won't. No matter how it
begins, it will end in death.

Because it always does. Isn't that always how it ends, Harold--in death?

HAROLD

There has to be a threat of some sort, nobility of some sort, glamour of some sort, sport of some sort. These elements are lacking.

WOODLY

You're a filthy, rotten bastard.

HAROLD

(pretending to be wounded)

Oooooo. That hurt.

WOODLY

You're old--so old.

HAROLD

Now who's being cruel?

WOODLY

A living fossil! Like the cockroaches and the horseshoe crabs.

HAROLD

We do survive, don't we? You're going to have to apologize, of course, for calling me a bastard. That's a matter of form--not allowing you or anybody to call me a bastard. No rush about that. Just remember to apologize sometime soon.

PENELOPE takes the rifle from PAUL.

WOODLY

You're a son of a bitch.

HAROLD

Yes--well--uh--that's another one of those statements which more or less automatically requires an apology. Whenever you feel like it. It's sort of like turning off an alarm clock that's ringing loudly. Your apology turns off the alarm.

PENELOPE

(leveling the gun)

I'm turning off the alarm. I'm turning off everything.

HAROLD

Ah! The lady is armed.

PENELOPE

I want you to get out of here,
Norbert. Harold--I want you to sit
down in the chair, and not lift a
finger until Norbert is gone.

HAROLD

(to WOODLY)

Whoever has the gun, you see, gets
to tell everybody else exactly what
to do. It's the American way.

PENELOPE

I mean it!

HAROLD

Then you'd better fix your bayonet,
because there aren't any bullets in
the gun.

PENELOPE

(to PAUL)

Where's the bullet?

PAUL makes no move to help.

HAROLD

Help your mother find the bullet.

PENELOPE

(to PAUL, pointing to
the floor)

There it is. Give it to me.

PAUL obeys.

PENELOPE

How do I load?

HAROLD

(to PAUL)

Load it for her.

PAUL shakily obeys.

HAROLD

Cock it, too.

PAUL obeys.

HAROLD

Give it to her.

PAUL obeys.

PENELOPE

All right! Am I exceedingly
dangerous now?

HAROLD

The National Safety Council would
be appalled.

PENELOPE

Then listen to me.

(angrily)

You're both disgusting--with your
pride, your pride.

(to WOODLY)

I hate you for coming here--like a
federal marshal in a western film.
I loved you when you stayed away.
But here you are now--high noon in
the Superbowl! You fool, you fool.

WOODLY

Everything's going to be beautiful.

PENELOPE

You fake! You're no better than
the dumbest general in the Pentagon.

(pause)

You're not going to beat Harold.
You're not going to beat anybody.
You're not going to stay here,
either--yammering and taunting
until you're most gloriously killed.
Go home!

HAROLD

She's right, Norbert--go home.

WOODLY

I haven't said all I have to say.

PENELOPE

Out!

WOODLY

I haven't told you, Harold, how
comical I think you are.

HAROLD

(hit squarely,
absolutely unable to forgive)

Comical?

PENELOPE

(to HAROLD)

Sit down or I'll shoot!

HAROLD goes over to her, easily takes the gun away)

HAROLD

Give me that Goddamn thing! Now

get out of here, or I might kill
you. Who knows?

PENELOPE

(terrified)

You've killed women?

HAROLD

Seventeen of them--eleven by
accident. March! Move!

(to PAUL)

You, too!

PENELOPE and PAUL move toward the front door.

PENELOPE

Norbert--you come, too.

(to HAROLD)

Let him go, Harold. Let him go.

HAROLD

Of course he can go--if he'll just
go down on his hands and knees for
a moment--and promise me that he
does not find me comical in the
least degree.

PENELOPE

Do it, Norbert.

WOODLY

Hands and knees, you say?

HAROLD

And terror, if you don't mind.

PENELOPE

Do it!

WOODLY

(to PENELOPE, simply,
decisively, unafraid)

Goodbye.

HAROLD

(before she can
protest any more)

Goodbye! Goodbye!

He bellies and bullies PENELOPE and PAUL out the front door.

HAROLD

Get the police! No time to lose!

He slams the door, turns to WOODLY.

HAROLD

You're in one hell of a jam. You
realize that?

WOODLY

I'm high as a kite.

HAROLD

Glands. You're supposed to be happy when you die. Call me comical again.

WOODLY

You're a clown. You're a clown who kills--but you're a clown.

HAROLD

I love you! Have a cigar!

WOODLY

(ignoring the cigar)

Evolution has made you a clown--with a cigar. Simple butchers like you are obsolete!

HAROLD

I'm to be left behind--in primordial ooze?

WOODLY

If you're at home in the ooze, and nowhere else.

HAROLD

This is going to become very physical. Are you prepared for that?

WOODLY

You're not such a creature of the ooze that you'd hurt an unarmed man.

HAROLD

I'm an honorable clown?

WOODLY

King Arthur.

HAROLD

You hope.

WOODLY

In any event, I will not beg for mercy.

HAROLD

No quarter asked.

(taking a sword)

No quarter given.

WOODLY

Don't you laugh even inwardly at the heroic balderdash you spew?

HAROLD

(offering sword)

Cut me open. Find out.

WOODLY

I've struck my blow.

HAROLD

With spittle?

WOODLY

I've poisoned you.

HAROLD

(pointing at WOODLY

in horror)

Lucretia Borgia?

(looking around frantically)

Something I drank or touched?

(understanding)

You refused a cigar. That's it!

Potassium cyanide in the humidor!

Treacherous lover of peace!

WOODLY

I put a poisoned thought in your

head. Even now that poison is

seeping into every lobe of your

mind. It's saying, "Obsolete,

obsolete, obsolete," and, "Clown,

clown, clown."

HAROLD

Poison.

WOODLY

You have a very good mind, or I

wouldn't have come back. That mind

is now asking itself, cleverly and

fairly, "Is Harold Ryan really a

clown?" And the answer is, "Yes."

HAROLD

(touching his

forehead experimentally)

I--I really must congratulate you.

Something is happening in there.

WOODLY

You can never take yourself

seriously again! Look at all the

creatures you've protected us from!

Did you shoot them on the elevator,

as they were on their way up here
to eat us alive?

HAROLD

(blankly, as though
in a dream)

No.

WOODLY

The magic root you gave me--I had
it analyzed. It was discovered by
a Harvard botanist in 1893! He
explored your famous jungle for
five years, armed with nothing but
kindness, a talent for languages,
and a pocketknife.

HAROLD

(blankly)

I see.

WOODLY

You aren't going to hurt me. You
aren't going to hurt anybody any
more. Any violent gesture will
seem ridiculous--to yourself!

HAROLD

(quietly)

Don Quixote.

WOODLY

My violin is avenged!

HAROLD

Something seems to have happened to
my self-respect.

WOODLY

And the hell with it. It was so
tragically irrelevant, so
preposterously misinformed.

HAROLD

The new hero is you.

WOODLY

I hate crowds, and I have no
charisma--

HAROLD

You're too modest.

WOODLY

But the new hero will be a man of
science and of peace--like me.

He'll disarm you, of course. No more guns, no more guns.

HAROLD

Was I ever of use?

WOODLY

Never. For when you began to kill for the fun of it, you became the chief source of agony of mankind.

HAROLD picks up the rifle, considers it, offers it to WOODLY.

HAROLD

Here. Finish the job.

WOODLY

I'm utterly satisfied.

HAROLD

You're making a mistake. Obsolete old carnivores like me are most dangerous when wounded. You've wounded me.

WOODLY

More clowning! Don't you see?

HAROLD

We never quit fighting until we're dead.

WOODLY

You'd be killing a friend. Don't you know how much I like you?

HAROLD

I'm going to shoot you now.

WOODLY

No!

HAROLD

My self-respect is gone--and my soldier's honor with it. It is now very easy for me to shoot an unarmed man.

WOODLY

New dignity can be yours--as a merciful man. You can change!

HAROLD

Like the saber-toothed tiger.

WOODLY

(sickened)

Oh God--you're really going to kill me.

HAROLD

It won't hurt as much as the sting
of a bumblebee. Heaven is very
much like Paradise, they say.
You'll like it there.

WOODLY

Can I beg for mercy--on my knees?

HAROLD

If you want to be found that way.

WOODLY

What is this thing that kills me?

HAROLD

Man, as man was meant to be--a
vengeful ape who murders. He will
soon be extinct. It's time, it's
time.

WOODLY

Don't shoot.

HAROLD

I've enjoyed being man.

He aims the rifle tentatively.

WOODLY

No.

(goes down on his knees)

No.

HAROLD

Get up.

WOODLY

No.

HAROLD

Have it your way. We'd both be
better off dead now.

HAROLD begins to squeeze the trigger, falters, lowers the
rifle.

HAROLD

Can't do it.

WOODLY

Thank God.

HAROLD

Crawl home.

He turns his back on WOODLY, who stands shakily.

WOODLY

Thank you--for my life.

HAROLD

It's trash now, like mine.

WOODLY

New lives begin!

HAROLD

Somewhere in this city. Not here,
not here. Tell Penelope I loved
her--in my clownish way. And Paul.
Tell him to be a healer, by all means.

WOODLY

What are you going to do?

HAROLD

Use the sanitary facilities, if I may.

WOODLY

Leave the rifle here.

HAROLD

I'll put it in Paul's room, where
it belongs.

WOODLY

Give me your word of honor that
that's all you're going to do.

HAROLD

For what it's worth now, Harold
Ryan, the clown, gives his sacred
word.

HAROLD exits into corridor. WOODLY looks after him
helplessly, apprehensively. Silence.

WOODLY

Harold?

VON KONIGSWALD, MILDRED, and WANDA JUNE enter from the side
stealthily. VON KONIGSWALD, pantomimes that his companions
are to be quiet and to listen for something wonderful. All
ghosts cup their hands to their ears.

WOODLY

Harold?

There is a shot offstage. VON KONIGSWALD is delighted.
MILDRED is sickened. WANDA JUNE is dazed. WOODLY collapses
in grief. HAROLD enters from the corridor, shaking his head.

HAROLD

I missed.

VON KONIGSWALD expresses disappointment. MILDRED covers her
face. WANDA JUNE sucks her thumb.

HAROLD

The end.

Curtain.