

Panych's text delivers: It is funny, philosophical, often poetic.

—GLOBE AND MAIL

The laughter and tears live so closely together that one can't speak too loudly for fear of drowning the other out. ... Twenty years after its creation, *7 Stories* seems more entertaining and yet more relevant than ever. It's the kind of fate that every author should enjoy.

—TORONTO STAR

A sweet and funny little play about a man on an apartment building's window ledge whose deliberations, presumably about whether to jump, keep being interrupted by nutty residents who poke their heads out of windows. How do you know this is a well-conceived work?

Because each of those interlopers seems interesting enough to be the subject of a play as well ... Panych renders all these encounters with a wry incongruity ... the humor [is] restrained enough that the lovely, subtle conclusion doesn't seem out of place.

—NEW YORK TIMES

DRAMA

\$17.95 Canada / USA
ISBN 978-0-88922-281-6

51795



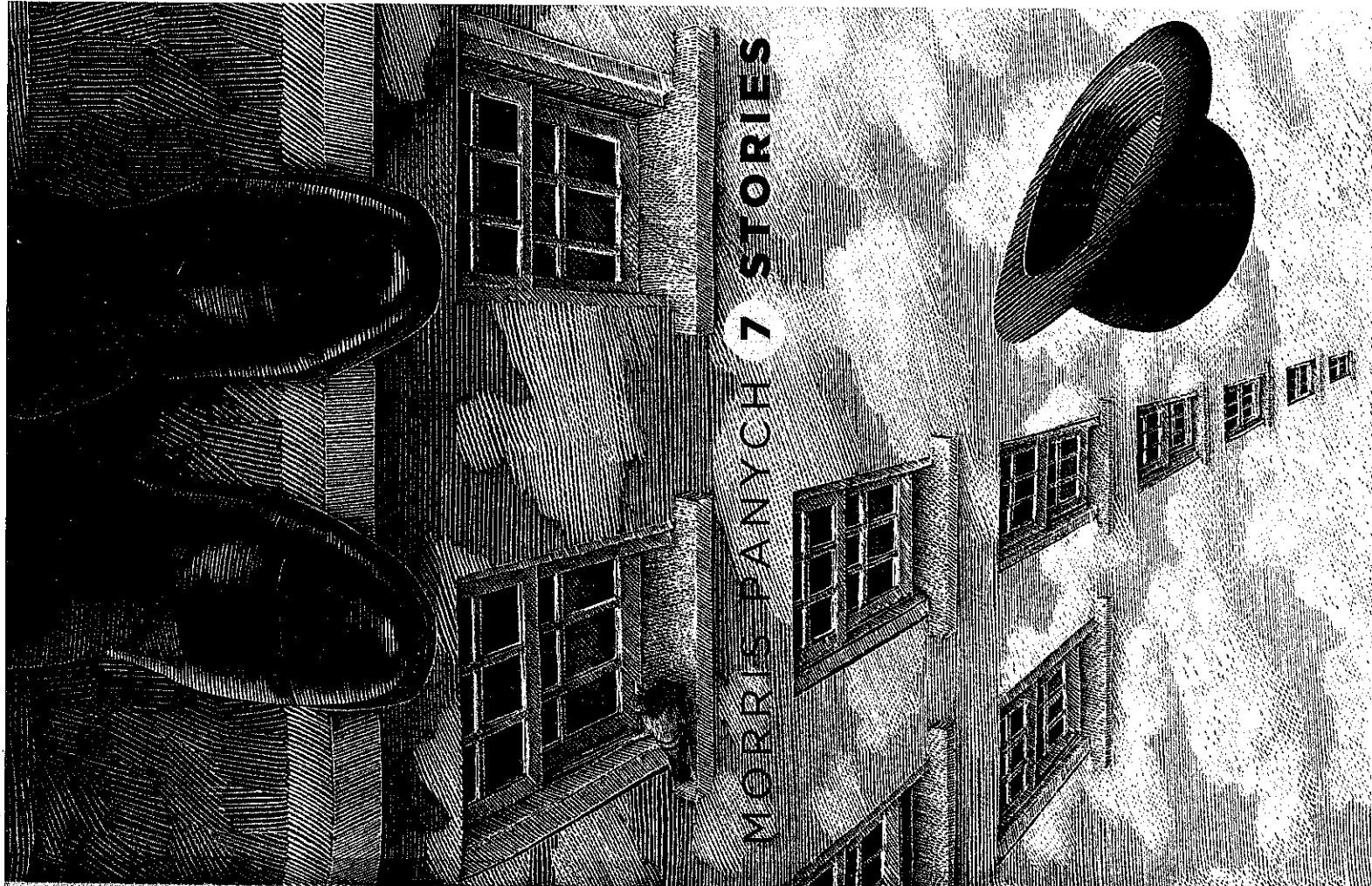
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PANYCH

7 STORIES

TALON

MORRIS PANYCH 7 STORIES



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Talonbooks

9259 Shaughnessy Street, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada V6P 6R4
www.talonbooks.com

Typeset in Frutiger.

Printed and bound in Canada on 100% post-consumer recycled paper.

Typeset by Typesmith. Cover design by Scott McKowen.

Eleventh printing: June 2022

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Talonbooks gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund, and the Province of British Columbia through the British Columbia Arts Council and the Book Publishing Tax Credit.

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Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Panych, Morris.
Seven Stories

A play.

ISBN 0-88922-281-9

I. Title.

PS8581.A65S4 1990 C812'.54 C90-091222-7
PR9199.3.P36S4 1990

7 Stories was first produced at the Arts Club Theatre in Vancouver, British Columbia, in May 1989 with the following cast:

MAN	Peter Anderson
CHARLOTTE	
JOAN	Sherry Bie
NURSE WILSON	
RODNEY	
MARSHALL	David King
PERCY	
JENNIFER	
LILLIAN (MRS. WRIGHT)	Wendy Gørling
RACHEL	
LEONARD	
AL	Norman Browning
MICHAEL	

Directed by Morris Panych

Set Design by Ken MacDonald

Lighting Design by Marsha Sibthorpe

Costume Design by Nancy Tait

Original Music by Jeff Corness

Stage Management by Marion Anderson

CHARACTERS

MAN

CHARLOTTE

RODNEY

JENNIFER

LEONARD

MARSHALL

JOAN

MICHAEL

RACHEL

PERCY

AL

NURSE WILSON

LILLIAN (MRS. WRIGHT)

POLICE (*megaphone voice*)

FOUR NEIGHBOURS

EFFIE (*offstage voice*)

7 Stories

The action of the play takes place outside an apartment building -- on the ledge, outside various windows of the seventh storey. As the play progresses, the lights emphasize the time elapsed between early evening and late night.

As the play opens, we hear a party in progress from one of the windows. MAN stands on the ledge, in a state of perplexity, contemplating the depths below. He seems disturbed, confused. Then he comes to what seems to be a resolution. He prepares to jump. When he is about to leap, the window next to him flies open. CHARLOTTE appears. She holds a man's wallet, which she attempts to throw out the window. RODNEY, charging up from behind, grabs her hand. A window-ledge struggle ensues.

CHARLOTTE

Let GO of me!!! Let GO!!

RODNEY

(threatening) So-help-me-GOD, Charlotte ...!!

CHARLOTTE

(daring him) What?? WHAT??!!

RODNEY

Give me back my wallet!

She tries to throw it again. They struggle.

RODNEY

What's WRONG with you? Are you CRAZY?!

CHARLOTTE

YES! YES, I AM!!!

RODNEY

MY GOLD CARD is in there!!

CHARLOTTE

Oh? Is it? Is your GOLD CARD in here ...

She searches through his wallet as he tries to retrieve it.

Oh my goodness! So it is!! And your RACQUET CLUB membership!! Oooo! And a LOVELY picture of your LOVELY wife! We mustn't drop THAT, must we? We wouldn't want someone picking HER up off the street!!

RODNEY

Give it here!

CHARLOTTE

Leave me alone, or I'll call the police!

RODNEY

You wouldn't dare.

CHARLOTTE

HELP! POLICE!

RODNEY

SHUT UP!!

CHARLOTTE

You STRUCK me!!

RODNEY

I did not!

CHARLOTTE

Yes you did! He STRUCK me! HELP!

RODNEY

I did not!! SHUT UP!

CHARLOTTE

Yes you did! You bastard!

CHARLOTTE goes to strike him. They struggle violently out the window, as MAN watches in terror. RODNEY manages to grab CHARLOTTE by the throat and starts to strangle her.

CHARLOTTE

HELP! Helgpjhghghp!

RODNEY

(strangling her) You're quite unattractive when you're dying. Did you know that, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

Gddldjkiqk!!!

RODNEY

(calmly) You lose all your CHARM! You lose all your SPARKLE! Charlotte! I believe you're turning blue! It's most unbecoming!

CHARLOTTE

Gahhghh!

RODNEY

Is that all you've got to say, Charlotte? Ordinarily you're so outspoken. One might even say LOUD and CONSPICUOUS! What's that you say, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

Grrghaah!

RODNEY

Yes, the view from here is BREATHTAKING, isn't it!

MAN

Excuse me.

RODNEY and CHARLOTTE are stopped cold.

MAN

Would you mind letting go of her. You're hurting her.

RODNEY

(with feigned surprise) Hurting her?

He looks at CHARLOTTE.

Am I hurting you, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

Yeghhgg!

RODNEY

*(letting go) What's that, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

(hoarsely) Yes!

RODNEY

I am sorry! (to MAN) You were right. I was hurting her. And thank you for pointing that out. Why don't we go inside, Charlotte? We seem to be attracting a crowd.

CHARLOTTE

I am not going anywhere with you! You tried to KILL me!

RODNEY

Kill you! Really, Charlotte! Now why would I do that? (to MAN) She has an overactive imagination, you know. Dabbles in the creative arts.

MAN

Oh.

CHARLOTTE

Dabbles!

RODNEY

You're misinterpreting the facts once again, Charlotte. (to MAN) Apparently she misunderstood my intentions. Come inside, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

Misunderstood, nothing! You tried to kill me, Rodney. He saw the whole thing. Didn't you?

MAN

I -

CHARLOTTE

He's a key witness. And we know all about key witnesses, don't we? (to MAN) Rodney's a lawyer.

MAN

Oh.

RODNEY

Charlotte! I'm warning you -

CHARLOTTE

And of course we know all about lawyers, don't we?

MAN

Actually, he's the only one I've ever met.

CHARLOTTE

Really?!

RODNEY

Oh for heaven's sake!

CHARLOTTE

Well, in that case, let me fill you in. Lawyers are the people who BORE you to death with the facts. (to RODNEY) By the way, Rodney. Why would you go to all the trouble of strangling me, when you simply could have BORED me to death?

RODNEY

You're making a public spectacle!

CHARLOTTE

My goodness, that would have been the perfect crime. I would have died, slowly, over the course of one of our romantic evenings together. Hanging, as it were, on his every word -

RODNEY

I need a drink.

CHARLOTTE

Would you like a drink? (to **RODNEY**) Fix us a drink, would you, Rodney?

RODNEY goes.

MAN

I -

CHARLOTTE

Yes ... I suppose you're wondering why I don't just leave him.

MAN

Well, I -

CHARLOTTE

That's a very good question. (to **RODNEY**) Rodney! What the gentleman wants to know is why I don't just leave you.

RODNEY

Does he?

MAN

I don't really -

CHARLOTTE

Shall I tell him?

No answer.

CHARLOTTE

He's not answering. He's standing there, giving me that LOOK again. (to **RODNEY**) Don't just stand there giving me that stupid LOOK. I'm not threatened by you in the least. (to **MAN**) He thinks I'm threatened. (to **RODNEY**) In case you forgot, I have a key witness here who fully intends to testify at your attempted murder trial.

MAN

I don't think I'll be around, I -

CHARLOTTE

You won't? Why not?

RODNEY

(*now at the window*) What a pity, Charlotte. Your KEY WITNESS won't be here. (to **MAN**) I can quite understand your reservations. Considering her history. (to **CHARLOTTE**) Get in here!!

CHARLOTTE

Don't listen to him. He'll say anything. He spins a web of lies, like a spider.

RODNEY

Really, Charlotte. I'm surprised at your use of such a tired metaphor. And you call yourself a poet.

CHARLOTTE

You see! He tries to make you lose your train of thought.

RODNEY

I shouldn't think you'd need any help with that.

CHARLOTTE

Where's my drink?

RODNEY

Haven't you had enough. (to **MAN**) She loses count after ten cocktails. (to **CHARLOTTE**) Anyway, I'm leaving.

CHARLOTTE

(to **MAN**) Ha!

RODNEY

Where are my Italian brogues?

CHARLOTTE

(to **MAN**) Most people wear shoes. (to **RODNEY**) I have no idea. Perhaps I threw them out the window.

They all look down.

RODNEY

Did you?

CHARLOTTE

I honestly can't remember.

RODNEY

You've hidden them. Where are they? (to MAN) What's she done with my shoes?

MAN

I -

CHARLOTTE

I TOLD you - I can't remember. Besides - you happen to be interrupting our conversation.

RODNEY

Oh really? I'm sorry.

He goes.

MAN

It's quite all right!

CHARLOTTE

Don't pay any attention to him. As I was saying ... the reason I don't leave here is because Rodney and I are inseparable. The question of leaving, although it arises constantly, is - dare I say - moot. (to RODNEY) MOOT? Is that right, Rodney?

RODNEY

WHAT!!?

CHARLOTTE

Can I say "the question of my leaving is MOOT"?

RODNEY

You can say whatever you like.

CHARLOTTE

He's not usually so generous with my word usage. He finds himself correcting just about everything I say.

RODNEY

(correcting her) Irrelevant!

CHARLOTTE

What?

RODNEY

The question of your leaving is irrelevant.

CHARLOTTE

Thank you. (to MAN) You see.

MAN

Yes, I see.

CHARLOTTE

But I suppose you don't think the question is irrelevant? Since he just tried to kill me.

MAN

Well -

CHARLOTTE

Rodney!

RODNEY

WHAT, for heaven's sake?!

CHARLOTTE

He doesn't think the question of my leaving is irrelevant.

RODNEY

Who doesn't?

CHARLOTTE

He doesn't.

RODNEY

Well, he doesn't know the facts.

CHARLOTTE

Oh. Apparently you don't know the facts. Only Rodney, of course, knows the facts. "The World According to Rodney." My God. Where would we be without all those specific details? Life would be so - vague. Perhaps even meaningless.

MAN

Yes.

CHARLOTTE

When you come to think of it, the Rodneys of this world are man's salvation in a way. They build us the ramparts, stone by stone, each one another absolute little certainty. Another "fact." All piled high against the onslaught of the absurd truth!

RODNEY

(*appearing with two drinks*) Really, Charlotte. You sound like a cheap novelist.

CHARLOTTE

IT'S POETRY!! (*taking drinks*) Thank you. (*giving MAN one of the drinks*) Naturally, he despises poetry. He despises all art. Because art is the act of climbing to the top of that ridiculous wall of his – and standing on the ledge – to look out into a cruel and pointless world – devoid of meaning – where fact is merely fiction. And anybody with any courage would simply leap off the edge and be done with it.

RODNEY

I could give you a little push if you'd like.

CHARLOTTE

Go ahead and push me!

RODNEY goes.

MAN

I wouldn't provoke him.

CHARLOTTE

Oh good heavens. That would be much too quick for him. He'd rather kill me little by little than all at once.

RODNEY approaches from behind and points what seems to be a gun at the back of CHARLOTTE's head.

RODNEY

One more word and I'll blow your head off.

CHARLOTTE

I do hope that's a gun, Rodney, and not just your finger.

RODNEY

That's our little secret. Now come inside. I don't want any witnesses this time.

CHARLOTTE'

Will you excuse us?

CHARLOTTE slowly closes the window. After a brief moment, a shot rings out.

As MAN stands, martini glass in hand, JENNIFER appears from the party window.

JENNIFER

Was that gunfire?

MAN

Uh – I don't ...

JENNIFER

(*looking down*) Was somebody gunned down, or what?

MAN

I'm not sure.

JENNIFER

I just LOVE your neighbourhood. It's so ... third world!

LEONARD appears from his window, dressed in pajamas.

LEONARD

SHUT UP!! SHUT UP for GOD'S SAKE!! SHUT UP!! I'm TRYING to get some SLEEP!!

JENNIFER

Oh, I know! I tried that once. Scary isn't it?

LEONARD

What's she talking about?

JENNIFER

I was just lying there ... and I could hear myself breathing?
You know? I thought "Oh God! I can hear myself breathing!!"
I'll never try THAT again!

LEONARD quietly closes his window.

JENNIFER

Wow! Your friend is so intense!

MAN

He's not –

JENNIFER

(looking down) Do you ever feel like throwing yourself out
of a building?

MAN

(pause) ...

JENNIFER

Whenever I get too close to the edge, I just feel like jumping.
Isn't that wild?!

MAN

(pause) ...

JENNIFER

It's probably symbolic.

MAN

(pause) ...

JENNIFER

Will you excuse me. It's not that I don't like you or anything –
'cause I really do – it's just that there's too many pauses in this
conversation.

*She disappears, closing the window. After a
moment, LEONARD opens his window.*

LEONARD

Listen, lady ... where did she go? She wasn't even there.
Oh my God! *(to MAN)* She wasn't even there!

*He closes his window again. After a brief moment,
he opens it again.*

LEONARD

What do you want?

MAN

Uh ...

LEONARD

A likely story! What?

MAN

I think there might have been a murder committed.

LEONARD

A murder! So THAT's where she went.

MAN

No. Your neighbours.

LEONARD

My neighbours murdered her!?

MAN

No.

LEONARD

She murdered my neighbours?

MAN

It's got nothing to do with her. I think there's been a murder
committed. I think you should call the police.

LEONARD

Let me get this straight. You murdered the neighbours?

MAN

I didn't say that!

LEONARD

Yes, you did. Are you trying to tell me I'm hearing things? Is that what you're saying? I distinctly heard you say you murdered my neighbours. That it had nothing to do with her!

MAN

All I said was: "I think there's been a murder committed." There was an argument. Didn't you hear the gunshot?

LEONARD

Gunshot! I didn't hear any gunshot! Are you sure it was a gunshot?

MAN

Positive.

LEONARD

Oh dear. This is a new twist. Usually I'm hearing things. Now, I'm *not* hearing things. Oh dear. I've gone deaf.

MAN

Hadn't we better call the police?

LEONARD

Did you say something just now?

MAN

Yes.

LEONARD

Are you sure?

MAN

Of course I am. I said, "We'd better call the police."

LEONARD

Oh good. Well, I heard that quite distinctly. Every word of it.

MAN

Look - this could be serious.

LEONARD

Do you think so? I'm only a little tense. That's all. If I had some sleep I'd be just fine. Maybe it's just a little wax buildup.

MAN

What are you talking about?

LEONARD

What are you talking about? Aren't we both talking about the same thing?

MAN

I was talking about your neighbours. About the gunshot.

LEONARD

The gunshot! Yes! About whether I heard it or not.

MAN

Look - that doesn't matter.

LEONARD

It matters to me!

MAN

There was a gunshot. That's all that matters. Just call the police!

LEONARD

Now how can you expect me to do that? I didn't even hear a gunshot. What am I supposed to tell them - when and if they answer? Am I supposed to *admit* that I didn't even hear a gunshot from twenty feet away? Or am I supposed to pretend that I'm hearing things. They'll think I'm insane!

MAN

What difference does it make?

LEONARD

They ask for your name. Am I supposed to lie about that as well? They'll just find out anyway. Because they'll trace the call back to me. Why did I have to get dragged into this?

MAN

Why are you taking it so personally? It's got nothing to do with you.

LEONARD

Oh, that's right! Accuse me of being one of those!

MAN

One of what?

LEONARD

Those people who shut themselves off from the rest of the world.

MAN

Good God! I wasn't accusing you of anything.

LEONARD

Yes you were!

MAN

No I wasn't!

LEONARD

Are you positive about that?

MAN

Of course I am. I don't even know you.

LEONARD

There was a tone of accusation in your voice. You have to admit it.

MAN

I think you're just being paranoid.

LEONARD

Why would you say that? (pause) You don't know anything about paranoia. What experience do you have in that field - if any?

MAN

None.

LEONARD

A likely story! (pause) What did you say?

MAN

I said I don't have any experience in the field.

LEONARD

What's that supposed to mean?

MAN

I mean I don't know anything about paranoia.

LEONARD

Implying that I'm paranoid.

MAN

Not at all.

LEONARD

By inference. Saying that you don't know anything about it. Inferring that I know a great deal.

MAN

You said so yourself.

LEONARD

I did not.

MAN

You indicated as much.

LEONARD

This is a trap! You're trying to trap me into something. Aren't you? You think I'm insane! That I've completely lost my grip on reality. And that's where you're wrong. I happen to be painfully cognizant of the world around me. I might be going deaf, but I'm not blind. I'm a qualified professional, and I'm trained to keep my eyes wide open.

LEONARD instantly falls asleep. MAN studies LEONARD for a moment, then looking at his martini glass, goes back over to CHARLOTTE'S window. He raps on the pane. RODNEY opens the window.

RODNEY

What do YOU want?

MAN

Is everything all right?

RODNEY

Couldn't be better.

MAN

I heard a gunshot. I thought maybe there'd been an accident.

RODNEY

Charlotte!

CHARLOTTE

(inside) What?!

RODNEY

The gentleman heard a gunshot. He thought there'd been an accident. Isn't that amusing?

CHARLOTTE

Ha! Ha!

RODNEY

As a matter of fact there was a bit of an accident. I aimed for her head and accidentally hit the wall. But thank you for your concern.

RODNEY slams the window shut, waking LEONARD.

LEONARD

Ah! What happened?

MAN

I don't know. You fell asleep.

LEONARD

No I didn't. What?

MAN

You - fell - asleep.

LEONARD

I did? Well, of course I did! What did you expect?

MAN

I don't know.

LEONARD

That's right, you don't. I haven't slept more than two hours in the past month. I never sleep. I work nights.

MAN

So why don't you sleep during the day?

LEONARD

Why do you want me to go to sleep?

MAN

I don't. It makes no difference to me.

LEONARD

Just what are you planning?

MAN

Me? I'm not planning anything. I was only thinking ... for your well-being ...

LEONARD

My well-being? You think I'm not well.

MAN

I never said that.

LEONARD

Somebody told you something, didn't they?

MAN

No. Nobody told me anything.

LEONARD

Why didn't they? Why would they want to keep YOU in the dark?

MAN

Who?

LEONARD

I don't know!! Has it occurred to you yet that you could be an innocent pawn in all this? A dupe?

MAN

No.

LEONARD

Well, you see! You're naive. You're the perfect candidate for them to carry out their insane plan.

MAN

What insane plan?

LEONARD

Well, they didn't tell you of course. They wouldn't want YOU to know!!

MAN

Know what? Who's they?

LEONARD

You said you heard a gunshot. Right?

MAN

Yes. I did. But ...

LEONARD

Coming from where?

MAN

Your neighbours, but ...

LEONARD

Well, they're in on it too. Don't you see?

MAN

No. It's all been a mix-up. I mean, I heard a gunshot, but it turns out it was nothing.

LEONARD

Nothing? You don't know what's going on in the world, do you?

MAN

I used to think I did. I don't know. No ... I don't.

LEONARD

I suppose you think all these things happen by chance? Just one GREAT BIG HAPPY coincidence. Gunshots are fired. Then they're not fired. A woman appears who was never there. That light in that apartment over there. I guess you didn't notice that either. Because you don't think these things are important.

MAN

Light?

LEONARD

Over there. It just went on. Don't look.

A slight pause as MAN considers this.

MAN

And?

LEONARD

And!? And WHAT?!

MAN

I don't get it.

LEONARD

Of course you don't get it. You don't know the code. Fortunately - I do. I have deciphered the code. I know EXACTLY what's going on. Ah. There goes that other light. Don't look.

MAN

There are lights going on and off all over the place. You don't think everybody's in on it.

LEONARD

In on WHAT? There IS something, isn't there?

MAN

I'm not really sure anymore.

LEONARD

And you think I'm confused!

MAN

I never said you were.

LEONARD

Well, who said I was, then?

MAN

Nobody.

LEONARD

Well, where did you get the information?

MAN

I have no information. I don't know anything.

LEONARD

Oh. (pause) Well, I don't know anything either. In fact, I don't even know what we were talking about.

MAN

That makes two of us.

LEONARD

Two of us?

MAN

I don't know what you're talking about either.

LEONARD

Oh. (pause) You don't?

MAN

No.

LEONARD

Was I being incoherent?

MAN

I don't know what to say.

LEONARD

What does that mean?

MAN

You're bound to take it the wrong way.

LEONARD

What?

MAN

Whatever I say.

LEONARD

What are you going to say?

MAN

Nothing.

LEONARD

You can tell me. What is it? Is there something I should know about myself?

MAN

Look - it's none of my business.

LEONARD

What? What's none of your business?

MAN

You asked if you were being incoherent. I don't know what to say. If I tell you you were, you'll fly into a panic. If I tell you you weren't, you'll think I'm trying to hide something from you. You take everything I say the wrong way.

LEONARD

You think I'm insane.

MAN

Now, there's a case in point. I don't think you're insane. I don't think anything. The word "insane" didn't even enter into it.

LEONARD

Yes it did.

MAN

Well, you said it. I didn't say it. I'm in no position to judge the state of your mind. I'm not a psychiatrist.

LEONARD

A psychiatrist? Why did you mention a psychiatrist? I never said anything about a psychiatrist.

MAN

I was only making a point.

LEONARD

Well, you can make a point without mentioning a psychiatrist, can't you? You could have mentioned a proctologist.

MAN

Why would I do that?

LEONARD

Precisely!

MAN

Very well, then. Have it your way. Let me correct myself. What I meant to say is, I'm in no position to judge the state of your mind. I'm not a proctologist. Is that better?

LEONARD

Why are you making fun of me?

MAN

I'm sorry.

LEONARD

Do you find psychiatry amusing? Well, let me tell you - it's no joke.

MAN

I didn't say it was.

LEONARD

Oh, I realize it's an easy target for satire. One might even say an obvious one. But it's serious work, involving a lot of time and dedication. And we don't get paid nearly as much as you'd like to think.

MAN

You're a psychiatrist?

LEONARD

Why do you say it like that? What are you implying?

MAN

I'm not implying anything. I'm a little surprised. That's all.

LEONARD

Why should you be? Do you think there's something strange about it? Why are you looking at me like that?

MAN

I'm not even looking at you.

LEONARD

Why aren't you looking at me? Are you afraid of me? Are you afraid I'll find something out about you? Some dark, terrible secret? You can tell me - I'm a psychiatrist. Here - why don't you take my card. You can set up an appointment with my secretary. I work nights at the loony bin. But I have a private practice in the mornings. I've got to run now. It's time to get up and go to work. I haven't slept in three years, but what difference does that make to them? They're all on drugs. They sleep all the time. I hate insane people. They drive me crazy. I don't mean literally crazy. You didn't take that literally, did you?

MAN

No.

LEONARD

Are you patronizing me?

MAN

No.

LEONARD

In the future, don't patronize me. I'm the doctor, and I'll do all the patronizing. You'll find, once we've begun to develop a professional relationship, that you'll come to rely on me for emotional support. I'll be carrying the weight of all your problems, so that you can feel free to let go. You won't have to hang on to your sanity. I'll be the one who's hanging on. That's my job.

LEONARD closes the window. The MAN studies the card. As he is pocketing the card, MARSHALL, wearing a tuxedo, opens another window and climbs out onto the ledge. Without noticing the MAN, he takes out a cigarette and lights it. For a moment, he luxuriates in this obviously great pleasure. As he exhales, he notices the MAN looking at him. MARSHALL speaks with a very "theatrical" accent

MARSHALL

Oh pardon me. I hope you don't mind my smoking. It's my last cigarette.

MAN

That's all right.

MARSHALL

Would you like one?

MAN

I don't know. I've never tried one before.

MARSHALL

Here. Be my guest. You can take them all.

MAN

(making his way a little along the ledge) I guess it can't do any harm now.

MARSHALL

And I certainly won't be smoking them.

He hands the MAN his cigarettes.

Suddenly, LEONARD's window opens once again, behind him.

LEONARD

I have a question I forgot to ask you. *(not noticing that he has moved)* My God! He wasn't even there!

MAN

I'm over here. I'm having a cigarette.

LEONARD

Who's that?

MAN

A gentleman. I don't know his name. We only just met.

MARSHALL

It's Marshall. Actually, it's Mike.

LEONARD

Well who is he?

MAN

I don't know. We only just met.

He moves along the ledge, a little way back to

LEONARD's window.

MAN

What was your question?

LEONARD

What question?

MAN

You have a question you forgot to ask me.

LEONARD

What sort of question?

MAN

I don't know.

LEONARD

Well what? Was it a personal question?

MAN

You were the one who wanted to ask it.

LEONARD

Then it was personal.

MAN

I really don't know.

LEONARD

Could I have a word with you for a moment?

MAN

What is it?

LEONARD

(sotto voce) What does he want?

MAN

I don't think he wants anything. I think he's just having a cigarette.

LEONARD

Does he know about our conversation?

MAN

No. I don't think so.

LEONARD

Well, don't say a word to him. Keep it private.

MAN

All right.

LEONARD

We must pretend that we never spoke.

MAN

We're speaking now.

LEONARD

Act like you don't know me.

MAN

I don't.

LEONARD

Otherwise he might get the wrong idea. He'll think that just because you're seeing a psychiatrist that you're insane. And that kind of information can get into the wrong hands.

Without saying another word, LEONARD slowly closes the window, putting his finger to his lips like they now share a secret.

MARSHALL

(who has been watching) Friend of yours?

MAN

No. I don't know him.

MARSHALL

Best to keep it that way. People know far too much about each other these days. I much prefer to form my own false impressions. Don't you?

MAN

I really don't like to speculate.

MARSHALL

What difference does it make? The truth is irrelevant. One's own opinion on the other hand is far more appealing. One should always form a strong opinion, one way or the other. Regardless of the facts.

MAN

That seems to be a popular theme around here.

MARSHALL

After all, it's about the only thing people are entitled to. Except for me. I've completely relinquished my personality. I've even relinquished my hair colour. Can you believe it?

MAN

That's not your real hair colour?

MARSHALL

Oh, there's no need to pretend you didn't know.

MAN

I didn't.

MARSHALL

I won't be offended if you don't like it. I'm not that sort of person. But you can decide what sort of person I am for yourself. And anyway – it's got nothing to do with me. It's my wife's decision really. Well, it's not really a decision. But then, she's not really my wife, is she? Not yet. But almost.

MAN

You're getting married.

MARSHALL

Yes. In a little more than half an hour, my life, as you and I know it, will be over. Finished. Butted out. Extinguished.

MAN

I suppose congratulations are in order.

MARSHALL

Don't be absurd. Congratulations aren't in order at all. On the other hand, I don't expect any sympathy. You wouldn't feel the least bit sorry for me if you knew the whole story. (*suddenly switching to another, more natural voice*) Is my moustache on straight?

MAN

It looks fine.

MARSHALL

(*returning to accent*) Of course it doesn't look fine. Don't be ridiculous. I'm only asking if it's straight. This damn glue doesn't stick properly.

MAN

You mean it's false?

MARSHALL

(*normal voice*) Couldn't you tell?

MAN

No.

MARSHALL

(*accent*) Oh good. Of course I suppose it'll fall off in the middle of the ceremony, and that'll be the end of it. I really ought to have grown one. But I can't stand moustaches. The itching drives me mad. Oh God. I've only got half a cigarette left! It seems to be burning awfully fast. Isn't that always the way? You're not smoking yours.

MAN

I'm sorry. I don't find it very pleasant.

MARSHALL

(*normal voice*) Well, don't waste it, for God's sake. Here. I'll finish it.

MARSHALL now has two cigarettes, which he smokes alternately.

MARSHALL

(*as he continues to speak, he gradually loses his accent*) If I had the time, I'd smoke the whole pack. But the best man is waiting for me. He thinks I'm in the bathroom. Thank God for bathrooms. Where would we be without them, eh? Those little private oases in the desert of eternal wedlock. Wedlock! There's a good name for it. Sounds like "padlock," doesn't it? What a perfect description for marriage. Wed – Lock. The penitentiary of betrothal! I imagine I'll be spending the rest of my life locked in a bathroom somewhere. Oh, there's no need to be concerned about it. The house has seven different bathrooms. Excluding the ensuites.

MAN

No. It's not that.

MARSHALL

What is it then? You look troubled.

MAN

I'm sorry. It's no business of mine, but why are you wearing a false moustache?

MARSHALL

Well, it's part of my character, isn't it?

MAN

It is?

MARSHALL

He wears a moustache. His hair is auburn. And he doesn't smoke, among other things. And his name is Marshall. And I keep losing my accent.

MAN

You mean to say that's not your real accent?

MARSHALL

(*accent*) Well, it is now. Now that I've fully adopted this character.

MAN

You had *me* fooled.

MARSHALL

That's the idea.

MAN

It's so realistic.

MARSHALL

(*changes to normal voice*) Well, there's a lot at stake, isn't there?

MAN

There is?

MARSHALL

About a hundred and fifty million, I'd say. Give or take a million. But who's counting?

MAN

Dollars?

MARSHALL

Dollars. Debentures. Stocks. Bonds. Futures. Securities. You name it.

MAN

Yours?

MARSHALL

If I play my part well enough. If the moustache doesn't fall off at the altar.

MAN

And what if it does?

MARSHALL

Then they'll wonder, won't they? Wouldn't you?

MAN

Well, yes. I'm wondering now.

CHARLOTTE bursts forth.

CHARLOTTE

Help!

MARSHALL

(*assuming accent again*) Are you in some sort of trouble, madam?

CHARLOTTE

Help me.

MARSHALL

Should I call the police this time?

CHARLOTTE

He tried to kill me!

MARSHALL

Oh dear. Again?

MAN

Again?

Offstage, we hear a little girl's voice.

EFFIE

Marshall!! Marshall!!

MARSHALL

(*own voice, to MAN*) It's that horrible little flower girl. Will you excuse me? (*He goes.*)

MAN

Again?

CHARLOTTE

What?

MAN

You mean to say he's tried to kill you before.

CHARLOTTE

On several occasions. Not the least of which was my BIRTHDAY!!

RODNEY

(*from off*) Oh for heaven's sake ... get in here!!

CHARLOTTE

Don't you think that's insensitive?

MAN

Well yes, I ...

CHARLOTTE

Rodney!

RODNEY

What!?

CHARLOTTE

This gentleman thinks it's incredibly insensitive that you tried to kill me on my birthday.

RODNEY

Oh, does he?

MAN

I -

RODNEY

He doesn't know the whole story.

CHARLOTTE

Oh. You don't know the whole story.

RODNEY

And what's more, it wasn't your birthday.

CHARLOTTE

It was MY BIRTHDAY!! He has a tremendous sense of occasion.

RODNEY

You're distorting the facts once again.

MAN

Why do you treat each other this way?

CHARLOTTE

It's all words and gestures. Pomp. There's absolutely no substance to it.

MAN

He was choking you to death.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, that. It gives him a tremendous sense of power to hear me gasping helplessly for air.

MAN

And the gun?

CHARLOTTE

Blanks.

MAN

You were both just pretending?

CHARLOTTE

Oh, I don't know. There's such a fine line between truth and fiction, isn't there? It's the subject of a number of foreign films. (*to RODNEY*) Oh for God's sake, Rodney. What are you doing now?

RODNEY

I'm killing all your goldfish.

CHARLOTTE

Did you hear that? He's killing all my goldfish.

MAN

Yes. I heard.

CHARLOTTE

The neighbours can hear you, Rodney.

RODNEY

What? Killing a fish?

CHARLOTTE

He's not really doing anything. He's standing there looking at my goldfish. Giving them that LOOK. That DEADLY LOOK. Yes. I was only acting.

MAN

Pardon?

CHARLOTTE

I was pretending to die. He finds it amusing.

MAN

Oh. Well, I don't.

CHARLOTTE

Then why were you watching us?

MAN

I happened to be here. That's all.

CHARLOTTE

I see.

RODNEY

(inside) Come inside, Charlotte. I've got a knife and I want to cut your head off.

CHARLOTTE

(to RODNEY) That knife isn't even sharp. You'd have to poke my head off with that!

RODNEY

Now there's an idea!

CHARLOTTE

He's threatening to cut my head off with a butter knife. Can you imagine?!

MAN

No, not really.

CHARLOTTE

Well, at least it's something. I suppose there's a certain affection in it. It keeps the relationship alive anyway. It used to be one of those dreary, mindless little affairs that start with a bang and end with a whimper. We weren't even lovers anymore. Just zombies. You can't imagine. He started reading the paper at dinner. I started having another affair. You can't believe how complicated that is. Cheating on the man you're cheating with. Anyway – it had all the trappings of a marriage. Which is precisely what both of us were trying to escape. We began to dread seeing one another. Finally, I suppose out of sheer exasperation, dear Rodney, the boring lawyer, tried to run me down with his car. It's hard to explain, but as I lay on the curb, half-conscious, I felt – revitalized. We both did. And we've been trying to kill each other ever since.

RODNEY

Charlotte ...?

CHARLOTTE

(to MAN) It's not entirely an act. We really do hate each other. But there's something to be said for that, isn't there? There's a certain zeal to it.

CHARLOTTE leaves.

MARSHALL returns, now speaking in his normal voice.

MARSHALL

They're quite an item, those two.

MAN

You know them?

MARSHALL

I've seen them around. She tried to stab him to death in the hallway last week. It's really an incredible love story.

MAN

Love?

MARSHALL

What would you call it?

MAN

I -

MARSHALL

Oh. I forgot. You don't like to speculate on these things.

MAN

No.

MARSHALL

I do. I think they're deeply and passionately in love, and I think that one day soon, quite by accident, there will be casualties. It's not my kind of love, mind you. I'm much more inclined toward the romantic. The sentimental. The sort of love that brings a tear to the eye. Like a good television commercial. Counterfeit emotion is really my style. Counterfeit everything.

MAN

Like your moustache?

MARSHALL

It is perfect when you think about it.

MAN

What is?

MARSHALL

This masquerade.

MAN

Wouldn't it be easier just to be who you are?

MARSHALL

I wonder what that would be? Anyway - it wouldn't be what she wants. This is what she wants, so this is what she gets. After all, I'm being well compensated for it. So what do I care? It's no worse than what I was doing. Just a little more involved.

MAN

What were you doing?

MARSHALL

Acting. I was acting for a living.

MAN

Oh. You're an actor.

MARSHALL

Well, not anymore. I've forfeited that as well. Along with my name. It used to be Mike. Michael Merchant. I take it you've never heard of me.

MAN

I, uh ...

MARSHALL

But then, why would you have? I was never really very good. Quite second-rate, in fact. I've played all the great roles, but I've played them all very badly. Acting is such a desperately futile profession anyway. Playing out the lives of other men. Knowing of their failures and successes long before they ever do. Living, suffering, murdering, dying ... all in the space of three hours. Sometimes only two. And in such a confined little area. And over and over again every night. Can you imagine anything more perfectly stupid? Squeezing a whole existence into a measly evening's entertainment on the stage? And not only that - in the middle of it all - pausing for an intermission. It makes one's own life seem unbearably preposterous, doesn't it?

MAN

Yes. I suppose it does.

MARSHALL

So I'm more than happy to give it up.

MAN

But you're acting now.

MARSHALL

Well, yes, but this is different, isn't it?

MAN

Is it?

MARSHALL

Most certainly and definitely. This is one play where the curtain never goes down. I will play this character until I die. Or until she does. But that's another story.

JOAN and MICHAEL burst forth from another window, struggling with an antique vase.

JOAN

No. No, Michael. Please!

MICHAEL

Pull yourself together, Joan. Be a little more objective.

JOAN

Michael ... Michael ...

MICHAEL

Joan!

In their struggle, the vase breaks.

JOAN

Oh no. It was family!

MICHAEL

Yes, but it was completely out of fashion.

JOAN

It meant a great deal to me, Michael.

MICHAEL

My mother meant a great deal to me, Joan, but she didn't go with anything either.

They go.

MAN

I don't get it. I just can't understand why your fiancée would want you to be someone else.

MARSHALL

She doesn't want me to be someone else. As far as she's concerned, I am someone else. I'm Marshall. She doesn't know anything about Michael Merchant, and she never will. In about five minutes from now, Michael Merchant will disappear from the face of the earth. He'll be nothing but a fleeting memory.

MAN

Where will he go?

MARSHALL

That's probably a very interesting philosophical question. But I'm not a philosopher. I'm Marshall.

MAN

So you said.

MARSHALL

Yes. Well, it doesn't hurt to remind myself. (*normal voice*) She first met me, that is, she first met him one night about a year ago. I was playing Horatio and, as usual, playing it very badly. Not only that – but on this particular evening, I was also playing it very fast. The flights of angels had never so quickly sung poor Hamlet to his rest. I had a date with destiny, you see. Actually, I had a date with a sailor.

MAN

A sailor? A *male* sailor?

MARSHALL

Yes. It's funny, now that I think about it. Well, it's all an act anyway. Isn't it? The whole stupid dumb show. Life, I mean. His

name was Marshall. And it was him I was thinking about, as I dashed from the theatre, still in makeup and in this ridiculous hair colour, and moustache, when this sleek, red Mercedes came roaring around the corner ...

MAN

So she hit you.

MARSHALL

Almost hit me. But she'll never know. I must say – it was a much better performance than the one I'd just given. And I thought – well, a Mercedes ... there's got to be a little money here somewhere. And as it turns out, there was. Quite a little.

MAN

A hundred and fifty million.

MARSHALL

It does come trippingly off the tongue, doesn't it? Like the name Marshall. It seemed to suit the scenario. More like the name of the sort of person who might be worth her while. Anyway, it worked. She loved the name, she loved the hair colour, and she adored the moustache. And the rest of the character just slowly fell into place, until it was exactly what she wanted. She couldn't have done better if she'd ordered me from a catalogue, which is just the sort of thing she usually does. Who'd believe it, eh?

MAN

I would think she's bound to find out the truth.

MARSHALL

Well, as I say. Who'd believe it?

MAN

But what about family and friends?

MARSHALL

They go with the forfeit. Vanish into thin air.

MAN

They'll see you in the street.

MARSHALL

We'll hardly be travelling in the same circles. And if they ever do see me, I'll simply remind them of someone they used to know.

MAN

But what about records of birth, that sort of thing? Don't you have to prove who you are? Even to get a marriage licence?

MARSHALL

I have a friend in props. He's very good.

MAN

Well, you can't just appear out of nowhere. What about parents?

MARSHALL

Yes. Those were difficult parts to cast.

MAN

You mean there are others in on this?

MARSHALL

Oh, just a couple of old actors, in need of a steady job. I have to admit she's a bit of a ham. Calls me "son" too much. But I've passed it off as eccentricity. The in-laws find them terribly charming. And there's an uncle. He's an old friend of mine. I owe him a few favours, so he's part of the family now. It's quite a collection. Between them, they've come up with more than a few fond memories of my childhood.

MAN

This is total fraud!

MARSHALL

Well, we're looking at it more like a long run.

MAN

What's more, it's immoral!

MARSHALL

Don't be ridiculous. It's nothing of the kind. It's simply patronage of the arts. It all depends on your point of view. And anyway, no one's doing anyone any harm.

MAN

But you've given up your family. Your friends. You're making a complete mockery out of your existence. A joke. Doesn't your life mean anything?

MARSHALL

Well, I've lived so many, haven't I? Lives are just short little episodes. You're on and then you're off. Just like that. Which reminds me. I'm off.

Just as MARSHALL is leaving, RACHEL opens her window.

RACHEL

Oh, excuse me.

LEONARD reappears as RACHEL closes her window.

LEONARD

Oh good. You're still here. *(producing pills)* Here take a couple of these.

MAN

What are they?

LEONARD

Oh, you know. The usual.

MAN

There's nothing wrong with me. Nothing – psychiatric. I don't really have any of the necessary symptoms.

LEONARD

(another bottle) Then you'll want to take a couple of these first before you take a couple of those. Otherwise, there's no reason to take any of those. These ones pick you up and those ones bring you down. So it's really better if you take them both at the same time. That'll keep you more or less balanced until I get back from the booby hatch.

He goes. MAN studies the pills. RACHEL opens her window.

RACHEL

How long are you going to be out there? Roughly speaking?

MAN

Huh?

RACHEL

Are you going to be out there for long?

MAN

I have no idea.

RACHEL

Oh. Well, don't rush. I can wait.

Pause.

RACHEL

Will it be more than ten minutes?

MAN

What?

RACHEL

Will it be more than ten minutes, or less than ten minutes?

MAN

I don't really know.

RACHEL

Oh.

A pause. She watches, as he contemplates the depths.

RACHEL

So you really don't know how long you'll be.

MAN

Does it make any difference?

RACHEL

No. I suppose not. Not if you're preoccupied.

MAN

Preoccupied?

RACHEL

With your thoughts.

MAN

Oh. Yes. I am.

RACHEL

You have your thoughts and you need somewhere to think them. Someplace private. I understand.

MAN

You do?

RACHEL

Well, of course. I value my privacy, too. A person needs to be alone with God.

MAN

God.

RACHEL

So go ahead. I'm not going to bother you anymore.

As he contemplates, she lowers money on a string.

MAN

(muttering to himself) Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday ...
(noticing the money) What are you doing?

RACHEL

(retrieving money) Oh, it's nothing. Really.

MAN

What is that?

RACHEL

What?

MAN

In your hand?

RACHEL

Are you asking me what I've got in my hand? Is that what you want to know?

MAN

Yes. Well, no. Well, I know what you've got. You've got some money.

RACHEL

Well, then you don't need to ask.

MAN

On a string?

RACHEL

I thought you had some thinking to do?

MAN

I do. But I just couldn't help noticing. That's all.

RACHEL

I'm sorry if I was distracting you.

MAN

Well, it's not my place, really. I mean - I don't belong here. It's your business what you do with your money. If you want to lower it on a string, that's your business.

RACHEL

It does seem odd from this perspective, I'll admit; when you see it from above. You're getting the seventh-storey perspective. If you were on the sixth storey, this would look quite different.

MAN

Yes. I'm sure it would.

RACHEL

But please don't let me interrupt. You were in the middle of prayer.

MAN

No, I wasn't. In fact, I'm not even sure I believe in God.

RACHEL

Sometimes in a person's life, they're not really sure. They lose their faith. They become pragmatic about things. They need hard evidence of God's existence. But the evidence of God is everywhere.

MAN

Where?

RACHEL

Well, since you asked about the money, I'll tell you. There's a man here. Just below us. On the sixth floor? Last night, he turned to God for help. He's in a great deal of trouble. He drinks quite heavily, you see. His wife left him three years ago. Then he lost his job. He was a carpet wholesaler, or a carp-fish processor. I'm not really sure. He slurs his words quite a bit. Last year, his son was killed on a motorbike. Or murdered with a knife. And six months ago, a close friend of his was killed in what sounds like a freak accident, involving either a stray piece of glass, or the spraying of some gas, or a suspension bridge collapse. And now, they're evicting him. He's asked for money. And God is answering. Could the evidence be clearer?

MAN

It's not clear to me.

RACHEL

Unfortunately, you're on the wrong floor. I can't help people up here on the seventh storey. But the people on the sixth and fifth are well looked after.

MAN

You're answering all their prayers?

RACHEL

Not all. I try to spread things around a little. A toaster here, an electric heater there. Besides, they can't have everything they ask for. I've only got so much. And I wouldn't want them taking it for granted. Miracles don't just happen, you know. They require a great deal of prayer. Even little miracles.

MAN

But you can't expect people to believe that this is God's work. They might as well believe in Santa Claus! And what's the procedure if they don't believe? Do you lower down overdue electric bills and eviction notices?

A pause.

MAN

You didn't!

RACHEL

What difference does it make?

MAN

You sent him that eviction notice?

RACHEL

I'm giving him the rent money. Everything will be fine now. He was lost and now he's found.

MAN

Lost! The poor man lost his wife, his job, his son, his best friend. Isn't that punishment enough? You weren't involved with any of that, were you?

RACHEL

That's so typical.

MAN

What is?

RACHEL

It's just so easy to be cynical, isn't it?

MAN

Under the circumstances.

RACHEL

These people's lives have changed! You've never heard so many prayers as the ones that rise up from directly below this window.

MAN

No. I don't doubt it.

RACHEL

And that is the power of faith!

MAN

What is? Hoping for a toaster? How do you know it isn't the power of greed?

RACHEL

I don't know who you are, and I don't know who sent you, but I have a pretty good idea. And you're not going to alter my relationship with God.

MAN

I have no interest in your relationship with God.

RACHEL

You want to make me say something, but I won't.

MAN

I don't want to make you say anything. Don't be ridiculous. What on earth would I want you to say?

RACHEL

Oh, you know perfectly well.

MAN

No I don't.

RACHEL

Yes you do.

PERCY appears from the party window.

PERCY

Say – where did you get that drink? I've been looking everywhere. Nobody's drinking anything. Is this a new trend or what? First nobody was smoking, so I had to give up smoking. I never really liked smoking, you know, but everybody was smoking, so I started smoking, and then I got hooked. Then everybody was quitting so I had to quit. And now it looks like nobody's drinking. Everybody's walking. Everybody

used to run. I'm glad that's over. Now everybody is walking. Nobody's running anymore. Well, I guess because everybody's getting older. Well – nobody's getting younger, that's for sure! Yeah – everybody's in the same boat, and nobody's rocking it anymore. Everybody used to rock the boat. Everybody used to be different from everybody else, so nobody would be the same. But that didn't work, because everybody was the same, because everybody was different. Now everybody is just plain "the same." Except for you. You're drinking. I wish I was.

RACHEL

You've got your priorities all wrong, mister. You don't need a drink. You need God.

PERCY

God? Nobody's doing God! Okay – some people were doing God, but not everybody. And that was before everybody was doing sex and hardly anybody's doing sex anymore. Everybody's doing children. Children – and walking – and gas ranges. Not God!

He goes.

RACHEL

He's the devil.

MAN

No, he's not.

RACHEL

Well, he's not actually the devil. The devil doesn't make personal appearances. He acts through people.

MAN

What? You don't think that people are capable of acting on their own? You think the devil sent me?

RACHEL

Can you think of any other explanation?

MAN

Yes. I can.

RACHEL

Well, of course you can. You could probably come up with at least a dozen reasons why you're standing on the ledge outside my window. He's very good at making even the most perverse things seem perfectly reasonable.

MAN

Well, if you must know the truth ...

RACHEL

The truth! How clever! Go ahead. Try and seduce me.

MAN

Seduce you. I haven't got the slightest interest in you.

RACHEL

You know what I mean.

MAN

No. I don't.

RACHEL

Try and convince me that God doesn't exist.

MAN

Why would I do that? No. Really. Why would I try and convince you that God doesn't exist? In the first place, I don't care whether you believe in him or not. In the second place, I'm not really sure myself.

RACHEL

This is amazing! You are so devious. Pretending that you don't care. Even pretending that you sort of believe in God yourself.

MAN

But I'm not pretending.

RACHEL

And even pretending that you're not pretending.

MAN

This is hopeless.

RACHEL

Yes. It's hopeless. You won't make me say it.

MAN

Say *what*?

RACHEL

Well, I'm not going to say it, am I?

MAN

How do I know if I don't even know what you're going to say?

RACHEL

I have to admit that you're very shrewd. You think that if you act stupid enough, that somehow I'll confess to my doubts. But you'll never make me.

MAN

If I'm not mistaken, you already have.

RACHEL

I have not.

MAN

You said that you'll confess to your doubts.

RACHEL

You've turned this whole thing inside out.

MAN

Well, I won't argue the point. I really don't care. I was merely concerned about the effects of your faith on other people. Especially poor, desperate people.

RACHEL

What do you know about desperate people? When have you ever been desperate? Ask *me* about desperation. I'll tell you all about it. God has tested my faith in many horrible ways! He has sent me almost every disease imaginable. He has crippled me, and bruised me, and pushed me around. And, as if that isn't enough, he shoved my mother down a flight of stairs, and turned her into a human vegetable. I had to care for her. I had to change her dirty clothes and feed her like a baby. She was my

daily torment for sixteen years until finally, out of sheer divine mercy, he gave her an overdose of two thousand milligrams of diazepam!

RACHEL cries. The MAN is in shock at what RACHEL has just told him. Another window opens. JOAN, holding two bolts of cloth, leans out the window.

JOAN

It's even worse in the street light, darling. There's red in it!

MICHAEL

(from inside) Oh please! Are you blind?

JOAN

It's not beige at all. It's pink! Look!

MICHAEL

(appearing) Why do I even argue with you? It's pointless!

JOAN

But can't you see the red?

MICHAEL

It's the reflection of the neon, dear. There's too much bounce out here from the lights. Where's your sense of colour?

JOAN

Well, what's wrong with this other shade?

MICHAEL

It's not a *shade*! It's a tint for heaven's sake! Please!

JOAN

What's wrong with it?

RACHEL cries.

MAN

(to RACHEL) Stop crying for heaven's sake!

MICHAEL and JOAN stop and notice the MAN, who smiles back

JOAN

Are we interrupting something?

MAN

No. Nothing. Sorry. Carry on.

RACHEL

No one will ever destroy my faith! Not you – not even God!

JOAN

At least let her have her faith, for heaven's sake.

MAN

She can have it. I'm not stopping her.

JOAN

What sort of faith are we talking about anyway?

RACHEL

My faith in God.

JOAN

Oh. How interesting. Well, I know what it's like.

MICHAEL

Yes. She has absolutely no faith in me!

JOAN

Don't be ridiculous, Michael. Of course I do!

MICHAEL

Then why don't you believe me when I tell you this has absolutely no pink tones?!

JOAN

Because it does! *(to RACHEL and the MAN)* Would you mind giving us your opinion?

MICHAEL

Really, Joan! You're not serious. You can't be!

JOAN

I'm only asking.

MICHAEL

This is an outrage!

He leaves the window.

JOAN

Oh dear. I've upset him. Excuse me. *(she leaves)* Michael!

MAN

That's murder, you know.

RACHEL

What is?!

MAN

Giving your mother an overdose of diazepam. That's cold-blooded murder.

RACHEL

I didn't give her an overdose. She took the pills.

MAN

Oh!

RACHEL

She wanted to die, so God gave her the strength to do it.

MAN

Suicide is not an act of God.

RACHEL

How do you know?

MAN

Because it's a human act. It's the one act that defies all pre-destiny. And it's got nothing to do with anybody else. It stands alone. Complete and of itself. What are you doing?

RACHEL

I'm praying.

MAN

Well, please don't. You're wasting your time. Unless there's somebody just like you up on the eighth floor. Look. Please. Don't bother.

RACHEL

Do you want to go to hell someday?

MICHAEL returns, leaning out of the window, sulking.

JOAN

(from behind) Michael. Please. I'm sorry.

RACHEL

Well, I can't help you if you want to go to hell.

JOAN

I'm sorry, darling.

MICHAEL

Go ahead and make a fool out of me. See if I care.

JOAN

Nobody's trying to make a fool out of you.

MICHAEL

(referring to the MAN) What does he know about hue? About value, or intensity? About pair interpretation, for that matter? It's all subjective with him. Low and common. Is that what you want? The lowest common denominator? Consensus? A thousand people all shouting, "Beigel Beigel!" And who asks the all-important question, "Which beige?" Someone's got to ask that question, Joan. Or the world becomes nothing. Just an ugly great wash!

RACHEL

(to MAN) If you change your mind and decide to go to heaven, let me know.

RACHEL closes her window.

MICHAEL

Heaven? My goodness – she has a very high opinion of herself.

MAN

She was speaking theologically.

JOAN

(to **MICHAEL**) Am I forgiven, then?

MICHAEL

You must stop questioning my stylistic perceptions.

JOAN

I don't.

MICHAEL

You can't just go out and buy an ashtray – or a vase.

JOAN

I can't help it.

MICHAEL

You've got to learn to disassociate yourself with your emotions a little and finally come to terms with style.

JOAN

I'm trying, Michael. I'm really trying.

MICHAEL

And you can't just go asking any idiot off the street what he thinks.

JOAN

Well, he looked like he might be objective.

MICHAEL

But what does he know about the physiological capacities? What does he know about black, about white? About anything at all, for that matter? He's nothing but an animal, in an animal world.

They both study the MAN.

MICHAEL

Look at the way he's dressed. Can you seriously take his word for anything?

MAN

What's wrong with the way I'm dressed?

JOAN

Nothing darling. You look perfectly charming.

MICHAEL

There's no thought. There's no justification. It's all mood. Stream of consciousness.

MAN

I beg your pardon ...

MICHAEL

He's a walking fatality. A casualty of function!

MAN

Excuse me ...

JOAN

Yes?

MAN

Well, I couldn't help overhearing you.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry. I was just being emphatic.

JOAN

Michael is very emphatic.

MAN

If I'm not mistaken, you called me an idiot.

JOAN

Try not to take it personally, darling.

MICHAEL

I wasn't referring to you. You're no more idiotic than the next person.

MAN

I don't mind being called an idiot. It's not that. It's just that you don't know me.

MICHAEL

Well, no. I don't. Why on earth would I?

MAN

Well, if you don't know me, how do you know I'm an idiot? What if I said you were an idiot?

MICHAEL

You'd be an idiot for saying it. (*back to JOAN*) Now, let's discuss this green thing for a moment. I'm not entirely averse, but you must remember that unlike nature, where it's so pervasively vital, green can take on a role of defensiveness and obstinacy. It has its devious side.

JOAN

But don't you think it reflects my character?

MICHAEL

The character of a colour depends entirely on the colours around it. You can't take a colour out of context.

MAN

Just how is it that you can call me an idiot, but if I call you an idiot, then I'm an idiot for saying it?

MICHAEL

(*to MAN*) Do you mind? (*to JOAN*) Who is this man?

JOAN

I suppose he's a neighbour. Are you a neighbour?

MAN

No. And there's nothing wrong with the way I'm dressed, either.

MICHAEL

Nobody said there was. I don't make value judgments. I'm not a fascist.

JOAN

Michael never makes value judgments.

MAN

I didn't say you were a fascist.

JOAN

He's just being sensitive, aren't you Michael?

MICHAEL

I'm not *being* sensitive. I *am* sensitive.

JOAN

Of course you are.

MAN

I merely took exception to your sweeping generalizations. About me – and about the world at large. After all, you said I was nothing but an animal, in an animal world.

MICHAEL

I can't deal with this, Joan.

JOAN

Of course you can't. You go inside for a moment, darling, while I send the gentleman away.

MICHAEL goes.

MICHAEL

I just can't deal with it.

MAN

What's he so upset about? I'm the one who's been insulted.

JOAN

Of course you have. Can I write you a cheque or do you want cash?

MAN

Why would I want cash?

JOAN

Good. I'll write you a cheque, then.

MAN

I don't want a cheque either.

JOAN

No? Well, what do you want?

MAN

Nothing.

JOAN

Oh. How interesting.

MAN

I certainly don't want money.

JOAN

I'm sorry if my offer offended you. It's just that ... so often, in situations involving Michael, it's much more expedient to simply buy one's way out.

MAN

Does he always go around insulting people?

JOAN

Michael is an artist. People don't understand him. He's intensely visual. The sight of red with yellow gives him heart palpitations. Certain shades of magenta make him physically nauseous. He can feel the space around him so much that he becomes the space. The presence of Dacron gives him the flu. So you can imagine how difficult he is. Very hard to keep up with. He's cost me a fortune but it's worth it. Left on my own, I couldn't decorate a closet. I have absolutely no imagination. But I admire a perfect work of art. Although it's something we've yet to achieve. Since I've known him, Michael and I have redecorated my apartment eighteen times. Including this one. Eighteen times. Top to bottom. We're only halfway through this one and already I know we'll have to start again. So I hope you can understand the frustration. And if Michael insulted you, I - we - apologize.

MAN

Well, thank you for explaining the situation. Although as situations go, I have to admit, I don't really get it. Why would you go to all the trouble?

JOAN

It is a lot of trouble, of course, yes. There are times when I've felt like giving up. Michael gives me the inspiration to keep searching for that perfect constellation of form, texture, and colour. We look on it as a lifetime challenge.

MAN

A lifetime is a lot of time.

JOAN

There are a lot of choices. Probably too many.

MAN

It sounds to me like you'll never be satisfied.

JOAN

Yes. It does, doesn't it? But one day we'll find what we're looking for.

MAN

And then what?

JOAN

Oh. What an interesting question. Perhaps it's a little too interesting. (*calling*) Michael!

MICHAEL

I won't be compromised!

JOAN

Nobody's compromising anybody. (*to MAN*) He thinks you're putting in your two cents' worth about the apartment. People usually do. They think they know how to decorate because they think they know what they like. I used to be the same. But I'm trying not to have any opinions now. Sometimes it's difficult to be objective though, isn't it? But one has to be. Especially if you live in it. After all, on a purely subjective level,

my apartment looks ridiculous. And I don't even have a decent, comfortable bed to sleep in. So you can understand why it's necessary for us to disassociate ourselves from our personal feelings. Personal feelings are so difficult anyway. Whereas style is absolute. Whether it's absolutely this, or absolutely that.

Another window opens, and PERCY leans out. He emits an audible sigh. Inside, behind him, a party is in full swing.

PERCY

Dreary, isn't it?

MAN

Sorry?

PERCY

My God I feel like jumping. Right here and now. I'd rather splatter my guts all over the pavement than go back in there.

JOAN

Oh, don't do that, darling. You leave too much up to chance. If you want to convey the right message, you may want to slash your wrists over a simple, pale cotton print, for instance. It has a stronger impact. More clarity.

MAN

You don't really want to jump, do you?

JOAN

Of course he doesn't. People don't jump from buildings anymore.

MAN

Why not?

JOAN

The trend is much lighter. More whimsical.

MAN

He's talking about suicide.

PERCY

No I'm not. I'm talking about dying of boredom.

JOAN

Well, if you'll excuse me ...

She starts to go.

PERCY

I wonder if you could do me a favour?

JOAN

Yes?

PERCY

I wonder if you could call next door here in about five minutes, asking for me and sounding quite urgent. Say your name is Rhonda. I'll give you the number.

JOAN

I'd love to oblige you, darling, but I no longer have a telephone. It didn't fit in with the decor.

JOAN leaves and closes her window. The MAN and PERCY are left alone.

PERCY

Everybody has a telephone. Nobody doesn't have a telephone. How on earth does she survive?

MAN

It wouldn't be so bad.

PERCY

I'd be lost. I wouldn't have a single friend. As it is now, I have 940.

MAN

Friends?

PERCY

Yes.

MAN

You have that many friends?

PERCY

Yes. Isn't it fabulous? People are always saying, "I can't count the number of friends I have!" When what they actually mean is that they only have a handful. Maybe two, three hundred. But I can, and I've got 940.

MAN

I didn't think it was possible to be intimate with that many people.

PERCY

Who said anything about being intimate? I couldn't care less about most of them.

MAN

Well, then they're not really your friends, are they?

PERCY

Why not?

MAN

The whole idea of friendship is that you like someone.

PERCY

Why would I like them? They're awful. What an odd notion!

MAN

You don't like any of them.

PERCY

"Like" is a big word. If we're counting friends that I *like*, I've actually got more sweaters. I've got 268 sweaters, but actually sort of *like* three of them. Of the friends I have - uh ... let's see ... (thinks) No. I don't really like her, but I *love* her work. Uh ... can I count you?

MAN

What? As a friend?

PERCY

No. As a friend I *like*. I already count you as a friend.

MAN

But I'm not.

PERCY

I beg your pardon.

MAN

I'm not your friend.

PERCY

Oh. Well, I guess I'll have to put you in the "don't like" column, then.

MAN

Don't put me in *any* column.

PERCY

What?

MAN

I don't want to be in one of your columns.

PERCY

Well, where would you suggest I put you?

MAN

Don't put me anywhere. You don't own me. I'm not a sweater.

PERCY

What are you taking about? Of course you're not a sweater. You're not even wearing a sweater.

JENNIFER pokes her head through the same window.

PERCY

Jennifer. I want you to meet a friend of mine.

MAN

I'm not his friend.

JENNIFER

Well, any friend of Jack's is a friend of mine.

MAN

I'm - not - his - friend!

PERCY

That's all right. I'm not Jack.

JENNIFER

You're not? Why aren't you?

PERCY

Because I'm Percy.

JENNIFER

Yes - well ... It's the details that start to ruin a perfectly good relationship. I like to know as little about a person as possible. Preferably nothing at all.

Now AL leans out the same window.

AL

I hope you guys don't think this is the way out.

PERCY

Not unless you want to jump.

All laugh.

MAN

What's so funny about that?

AL

(to MAN) Hi! Don't I know you?

MAN

No.

AL

Are you sure?

MAN

Of course I'm sure.

JENNIFER

I don't know a soul.

PERCY

Well, I can introduce you. They're all my friends.

AL

Are they? Well, they're certainly not mine.

JENNIFER

I don't even know which one is the host.

AL

I am.

JENNIFER

Oh! Well, it's a fabulous party. I wasn't invited. That's the only reason I'm here.

PERCY

It's the best party I've been to in a long time. I've been to 111 parties this year, and this is one of the best. Oh! Look! I think I see a friend of mine. Excuse me, will you?

PERCY leaves.

AL

Who's he?

JENNIFER

(referring to MAN) A friend of his.

AL

Oh!

MAN

No. He's not.

AL

Well, whoever he is, I hope he leaves and takes everybody else with him. Except for you two, of course.

JENNIFER

I'm afraid I can't stay. As much as I'm enjoying this one, I'm due at another party any minute now.

AL

Oh? Whose party?

JENNIFER

I'm sure you know her.

AL

Probably.

JENNIFER

But I can't remember her name. I'm not sure I even know her address. It's ... somewhere.

AL

I'd love to come.

JENNIFER

Why don't you? Why don't you both come?

MAN

I wasn't invited. I don't even know what you're talking about.

JENNIFER

(to AL, referring to MAN) I just love your friend. (as she goes) He's so specific.

AL

Isn't he!

She's gone.

AL

Who's she?

MAN

I haven't got any idea.

AL

You meet the worst people at your own party.

MAN

Then why give a party?

AL

Well, I don't want to be anti-social. Don't get me wrong. I love parties. If only it wasn't for the people at them. But this is really the worst part, isn't it?

MAN

What is?

AL

The actual event. It's always such a crushing disappointment. From the minute the first guests arrive, I just want to evaporate into thin air. At my last party, I had to start a fire in the kitchen to get rid of them.

MAN

You started a fire!

AL

Just a small one. But there was a lot of smoke. It cleared the place out quite nicely. It wasn't fifteen minutes before I was finally alone again.

MAN

Someone could have been seriously hurt.

AL

Oh, the fire department was there instantaneously. I called them ahead of time. But I'll never try that one again. There was a hell of a mess. This time I'm taking a more subtle approach. There's no food, no drinks, and the music is far too loud. Lots of people have already left.

Another window opens. NURSE WILSON pokes her head out.

NURSE WILSON

Turn that godawful music down!

AL

I was actually planning on turning it up!

NURSE WILSON

Oh, were you? Well, we'll just see about that!

AL

Why don't you call the police, if you don't like it?

NURSE WILSON

That's exactly what I intend to do!

AL

If you do call, though - please don't tell them about all the drugs.

NURSE WILSON

Drugs!

She goes inside.

AL

Well, thank God for the neighbours. This thing might have gone on forever, and we've got that other party to go to. You don't happen to remember the address, do you?

MAN

No.

AL

Well, someone else is bound to know. That's where all these people will be going after they've been herded out of here.

MAN

Why would you bother getting rid of them, just to follow them to another party?

AL

I'm always hearing about parties I didn't go to. How great they were. What a fabulous time everybody had. The ones I miss are always the good ones. So I never miss one now. Are you coming?

MAN

I don't like parties.

AL

Why did you come to this one, then?

MAN

I didn't.

AL

Well, what are you doing here?

MAN

Actually -

AL

You're not thinking about jumping, are you? It's seven storeys.

MAN

Yes. I know.

AL

A guy could kill himself.

MAN

Well ... yes ... he could, but ...

The next window opens.

NURSE WILSON

I called the police!

AL

This guy's gonna jump, lady.

NURSE WILSON

Really!

AL

You sure you wouldn't rather go to this party?

NURSE WILSON

If he wants to jump, why don't you let him?

MAN

Look – I didn't say I wanted to. I don't know what I'm doing. I really –

NURSE WILSON

Would you like us to convince you?

LILLIAN

(a voice from inside) Is that Albert?

NURSE WILSON

(to LILLIAN) No. It isn't Albert. It's a man. He's thinking about jumping off the side of the building.

LILLIAN

(inside) Why doesn't he then?

NURSE WILSON

(to LILLIAN) That's what I asked him.

MAN

Look – this has nothing to do with either of you. Why don't you both go inside and just carry on with your lives?

AL

You don't mind if I go to this party, then?

MAN

No. Of course I don't mind.

AL

It's not that I don't care about your plight or anything. It's just such a downer – that's all. Anyway, this lady looks pretty serious. Maybe she can talk you out of it.

NURSE WILSON

I am serious and I'm not talking him out of anything.

AL

Look – the police'll be here any minute. Just hang on until they get here. I gotta go. I don't even know where I'm going so who knows how long it'll take to get there.

AL goes, closing his window.

NURSE WILSON

Some friend.

MAN

He's not a friend.

LILLIAN

(inside) Albert?

NURSE WILSON

(to LILLIAN) It's not Albert, Mrs. Wright. Albert's gone! He FLEW AWAY!!

LILLIAN

Why?

NURSE WILSON

You know why. Because he's a bird. (to MAN) God, I hate old people.

LILLIAN

(inside) Who's a bird?

NURSE WILSON

Albert! Albert's a bird. We let him go, remember? We let him go because he was unhappy.

LILLIAN

(inside) Oh!

NURSE WILSON

She remembers the whole thing.

LILLIAN

(inside) No I don't!

NURSE WILSON

She's supposed to be deaf but she can hear the grass growing. So what's stopping you?

MAN

Hub?

NURSE WILSON

What's stopping you from jumping? Wait – let me guess. You're afraid of heights. Now that's a pity. Letting a little thing like that stand in the way of your suicide, when really it's such a perfectly logical thing to do.

MAN

Logical?

NURSE WILSON

I started out my career thinking I wanted to save people's lives. Imagine!

MAN

I think that's very noble.

NURSE WILSON

A lot you know. Where's the nobility in watching people hang on to the last shred of a meagre existence? Hooked up to every imaginable medical apparatus. Jumping is the only way to go these days, otherwise you run the serious risk of a protracted survival. My! Doesn't the sidewalk look inviting from here!

MAN

I'd rather not look down if you don't mind.

NURSE WILSON

Aren't you even the least bit curious?

MAN

I can imagine what it's like.

NURSE WILSON

I suppose you expect me to ask you what your reasons are for jumping.

MAN

You're probably not interested.

NURSE WILSON

You're probably right.

MAN

Nobody seems terribly interested.

NURSE WILSON

Why should they be? Death isn't terribly interesting. I work in a hospital when I'm not here cleaning up after this thing and I can tell you first-hand, death isn't the least bit interesting. In fact – it's very routine. Besides, people are too busy to be interested in other people's problems. These days you have to pay someone to be interested.

MAN

Busy doing what?

NURSE WILSON

Finding reasons not to jump themselves.

MAN

So what's your reason?

NURSE WILSON

Me? I'm a humanitarian.

MAN

You don't seem the type.

NURSE WILSON

Oh? What type is that?

MAN

You don't seem very – well – very friendly.

NURSE WILSON

Why should I be friendly? I despise almost everyone I meet.

MAN

I thought humanitarians were supposed to like people.

NURSE WILSON

I like people on the whole. It's individuals I can't stand.

LILLIAN

(*from inside*) Has he jumped yet?

NURSE WILSON

No. He's vacillating.

LILLIAN

(*inside*) What?

NURSE WILSON

He hasn't made up his mind yet - one way or the other.

LILLIAN

He shouldn't be so tentative.

MAN

I have made up my mind.

NURSE WILSON

Oh. (to *LILLIAN*) He has made up his mind. The police will be here soon. You'd better go now or they'll definitely talk you out of it. They're experts. They listen to all your problems. They sympathize with every one of them. Eventually, they convince you that life has some meaning. That there's some little thread to hang on to. So you hang on, as they slowly reel you in. But you never let go again, not for the rest of your life. The next thing you know, you're old, and by that time you've been hanging on so long and so tightly to that little thread that it practically has to be pried loose.

MAN

You know something - you're astonishingly morbid.

LILLIAN

(*close to the window*) What seems to be the problem?

NURSE WILSON

I already told you, Mrs. Wright. I'm not going to tell you again.

LILLIAN

(*appearing now in window*) Well, get out of my way then.

NURSE WILSON

You're not supposed to be up and around.

LILLIAN

Where is this man?

NURSE WILSON

Die of heart failure. See if I care.

LILLIAN

She doesn't really want me to die, because then she'd have to fill out a form.

NURSE WILSON

I've already filled it out!

LILLIAN

I'm a hundred years old. Does that impress you?

MAN

That's very old.

LILLIAN

Yes. They send people like her to look after me.

MAN

She's not very nice.

LILLIAN

She doesn't have a very nice job. Looking after sick people. Waiting for them to die. So she thinks that she has to pretend she has no feelings.

NURSE WILSON

I haven't!

LILLIAN

But she's afraid.

NURSE WILSON goes.

LILLIAN

Don't pay any attention to her. (*pause*) Oh my, what a lovely evening.

MAN

I never noticed.

LILLIAN

I haven't looked out this window in years. I used to go out on evenings like this. I walked down to the end of that street and took the streetcar as far as it went. Up where there weren't any houses. That's where we stopped. That's where the streetcar turned around. As though the world was flat, and that was the end of it, where you fell off. That was about seventy years ago, so I imagine the houses go quite a bit farther now. But not far enough, of course. I imagine the streetcar eventually stops somewhere and turns around.

MAN

* There isn't any streetcar.

LILLIAN

There isn't?

MAN

There hasn't been one for about thirty years.

LILLIAN

Well, that just goes to show you what I know. I haven't gone out since ... well, in about fifty years.

MAN

Fifty years?

LILLIAN

Well, as I said – you can really only go out so far, and then you've got to turn around and come back. I find that somewhat limiting. I prefer to go nowhere at all. As it turns out, my apartment is much larger than I thought. In fact, it's enormous.

MAN

It can't be more than a few hundred square feet at the most.

LILLIAN

Yes. It's almost too much to grasp, isn't it? Of course it looks a lot smaller now. Since she came to look after me. She cleaned it all up. Put everything in order. Kicked Albert out. She has a very sanitary point of view. Doesn't like pigeons. I imagine he'll come back though. When he's had enough of flying.

NURSE WILSON

(inside) He's not coming back in here.

LILLIAN

I used to have all kinds of things piled up against this window. Until *they* came and took everything away. And once Albert saw the window, there was just no keeping him. After all those years, his little head was suddenly filled with big ideas.

MAN

All what years?

LILLIAN

Those years.

MAN

Pigeons don't live that long.

LILLIAN

How long?

MAN

How many years are we talking about exactly?

LILLIAN

Oh, I don't know. About fifty.

MAN

That doesn't make any sense.

LILLIAN

No. It doesn't. (pause) Must be a riddle.

Pause.

MAN

I don't get it.

LILLIAN

Neither do I. Well – it's just a story. It's not important. People attach too much importance to these things. That reminds me of another story.

MAN waits as she loses her train of thought. Finally, he coughs, which rouses her.

LILLIAN

Oh my! What a lovely evening.

MAN

You were going to tell me something?

LILLIAN

What about?

MAN

I don't know. Something reminded you of a story.

LILLIAN

A story? – Let's see ...

A long pause.

MAN

I guess you don't remember. It's not important. Really. I thought – I thought it might be – well – important, somehow.

LILLIAN

You're looking for something important.

MAN

No. Well, I – I need – I'm looking for something, yes.

LILLIAN

I don't have anything. Just an empty room. It'll be coming up for rent soon, if you're interested.

MAN

No. I'm not looking for a room.

LILLIAN

It's a place to hang your hat. To sort out all your shoes.

MAN

I don't need to sort out my shoes. All my shoes are the same. Every pair identical. All seven pairs. I have seven hats also. All like this one. I have one for every day of the week. Only I can't remember what day it is.

LILLIAN

Oh.

MAN

I've lost track, you see. I went to sleep and I had a dream. I – I think it was a dream. I dreamt that I got up, and made my way to work, and when work was over I came home and went to bed. And then I woke up. I think I woke up.

LILLIAN

It's Wednesday.

MAN

It is?

LILLIAN

I don't know, but I thought it would make you feel better.

MAN

(now he speaks slowly and deliberately, in an attempt to understand his own words) Not really. You see – my faith in the days of the week has been seriously undermined. When I woke up this morning, I wasn't exactly sure what day it was. And for that brief moment – it was only a matter of seconds – I think it was seconds – I stood – or I should say I "lay" – on very shaky ground. After all – how could I act with assuredness? How could I rise up and plunge headlong into Friday's world, if it was actually Saturday? And so I lay completely still for a moment, pondering this question. That's when I noticed my hands. I'd never noticed them before. How they moved with amazing dexterity. But this flexibility, this movement of hands, can never extend beyond the boundaries of its own flesh – can only reach as far as the fingertips and no farther, much as the movement of time is restricted by the days of the week. So I got up and tried to erase these things from my mind. I tried to get dressed. But then I began to understand other things; for example, the meaning of shoes. They were little prisons for my feet. Absolute definitions of space. I could run a million miles, in any direction, and still not escape them. And my hat – forming a firm idea around my head, as if to say, "Well, that's about

the size of it." My mind could expand into infinite space, and still never change the shape of my head. I saw in the mirror a condemned man, serving a life sentence inside his body. Even the car – I drove – to work. My car. This thing. This instrument of liberation. It wasn't freedom. It was merely the idea of freedom, bound in metal. A kind of hope, but with a speed limit attached to it. Now I was travelling an unknown route along a familiar road. It led in exactly the direction I was going, but not by coincidence. The asphalt was not laying itself a path in front of me. I was merely following a prearranged course and then something happened, something that had never happened before. When I finally arrived in town at my usual space it was taken. I was late for work you see and there was another car in my space. Someone had taken my space, you see. I sat in my car for a moment, not knowing where to go. Just staring straight ahead. And then I put my car into gear and drove into it. Drove right into this other car. There didn't seem to be any other choice. No place else to go, you see. So I put my car in reverse, backed up, and rammed into this car again. And then again, and again and again, until finally this other car – this intruder of my space – was smashed up against the side of the building like an accordion. So now I had my space back, and I parked. I got out of the car, and turned to head for my office. That's when I realized. It wasn't my space at all. Somehow I got completely turned around. This wasn't anywhere near where I work. I didn't know where I was. I hadn't any idea. I had always depended on the road which led there. The way I've always believed that one thing leads to another. Then I saw this building. I thought I'd come up here to get a better perspective on my exact situation. And from here the view is quite clear. There are no spaces left, you see. I have no place to park my car.

LILLIAN

Have you tried The Bay?

MAN

Don't you understand?

LILLIAN

Of course I understand. You didn't need to make such a long speech. When you're a hundred years old you'll understand everything. And then you'll die.

MAN

Why wait?

LILLIAN

Something interesting might happen. But then again, it might not. I think you should jump now.

MAN

You do?

LILLIAN

If that's what you want to do, I think you should do it.

MAN

There really is no reason to live, is there?

LILLIAN

Not really.

MAN

(as he prepares to jump) It's sort of disappointing. I wonder where they'll tow my car.

LILLIAN

Oh. Now I remember!

MAN

(stopping) What?

LILLIAN

That story. Some years ago, I went to Paris to see the *Mona Lisa*. It's in the Louvre, the largest building in the world, probably. But the *Mona Lisa*, as it turns out, is very small. So naturally I couldn't find it. I kept looking for something – big. Then I saw a huge crowd of people all standing around – looking disappointed. And there she was – smiling as if she knew.

MAN

That's it? That's the whole story?

LILLIAN

You do like a long story, don't you? Let's see. There was a young Frenchman standing next to me, in a terrible state of despair. He began talking to me as if he'd known me all his life. I didn't understand a word he was saying, but he didn't seem to take any notice. I thought I'd lose him in the crowd, but he followed me right out of the museum. He told me a very long and involved story, often punctuating the words with his fists. Occasionally, he would sink into a sadness the like of which I'd never seen. And then he would start raving again. The farther we walked, the more distressed he became – the more enraged. By the time we reached the Pont Neuf he was sobbing uncontrollably. It seemed very clear that he wanted me to say something. We hadn't walked halfway across, when he started to climb over the side of the bridge. I didn't know what to say. So I blurted out the only thing in French that I'd ever learned. "La pamplemousse est sur la table." I don't even know what it means. But he responded very positively. He thought about it for a moment, and then smiled. After that his mood changed considerably. In fact, he was delighted. Whatever it was I said, it seemed to be something for him to hang his hat on. And he walked away a new man. Determined, it seemed, to live by this philosophy the rest of his life.

MAN

It doesn't mean anything

LILLIAN

It must mean something. I learned it in school.

MAN

"The grapefruit is on the table"?

LILLIAN

Oh. Is that what it means? (pause) Well, that's not a bad philosophy to live by. As philosophies go. It has a certain – preciseness.

MAN

How have you managed to stay alive so long?

LILLIAN

I forget.

MAN

Shut up in your room like that? Never going out?

LILLIAN

There are other places to go besides *out*. There's *in*. There's *around*. There's *under*. *Over*. *Between*.

MAN

Down.

LILLIAN

Well, you might go down. But you might go up. If you're going to go to all the trouble of jumping, you might as well try going up and see what happens. Albert went up. Straight up.

MAN

Albert was a pigeon.

LILLIAN

He didn't know that. Not for sure. He'd never flown a day in his whole life, not until the day we let him go. You could be the first of a kind. Imagine what a story that would make! You'd be interviewed by just about every newspaper in the world. You'd travel around giving lectures. You'd be an inspiration to others. There'd be people flying all over the place. That sort of thing has to start somewhere. It might as well start with you. If you're going to give your life up anyway, you may as well give it up to something. The principle is very simple. You just have to let go and let the wind currents do the rest. You know about airflow, don't you?

MAN

I really don't think ...

No. Don't think. The important thing is to just let it happen. Let it take you where it wants. Don't try to go anywhere special this first time. Just do a circle once around the building, and come back. Once you get a better feel for it, you can go a little farther.

POLICE MEGAPHONE

LILLIAN

MAN

POLICE MEGAPHONE

LILLIAN

MAN

LILLIAN

POLICE MEGAPHONE

MAN

POLICE MEGAPHONE

MAN

88

5

All right - I'm going.

Then go!

Goodbye!

MAN

As the lights come up, the MAN flies with the aid of his umbrella. He then lands on the ledge of another building. Four neighbours open their windows.

We saw that

what?

We saw you fly over here from that building across the street.

You did?

We've been watching the whole thing.

You have?

Yes. We have.

We saw you talk to that old lady.

FOUR

To all those people.

TWO

We saw the whole thing from beginning to end.

THREE

And then we saw you fly over here and land!

FOUR

There's just one thing ...

TWO

We don't get it.

ONE

What's the flying supposed to represent? Is it an existential statement or what?

TWO

It's a Jungian thing, isn't it?

THREE

I don't agree. I think it's political.

ONE

Is it about enlightenment?

THREE

There's a suggestion of mass revolt.

TWO

There's an archetypal quality about it.

ONE

I detect strong religious overtones.

THREE

It's a struggle against tyranny, isn't it?

FOUR

I think it's just weird.

MAN

Will you excuse me?

Suddenly the MAN is airborne, and he flies through the stars. He then returns to the original window ledge. LILLIAN is gone. Below, an ambulance light flashes. The MAN knocks at the window.

MAN

Hello! HELLO - O!!

NURSE WILSON appears.

NURSE WILSON

Yes?

MAN

The old lady. I'd like to speak to her. I have to tell her about - something - something quite incredible!!

NURSE WILSON

Yeah ... well, she's gone.

MAN

Gone?

They look down.

MAN

So sudden? She was here just a few minutes ago.

NURSE WILSON

Yeah, well ... that's the way it always happens. So - what's this "something incredible"? As if I really want to know.

MAN

It was ... it was nothing.

NURSE WILSON

I thought you were going to jump off the ledge.

MAN

I did.

NURSE WILSON

Oh. You did, did you?

MAN

Yes, I did. I flew across the street to that building and back.

NURSE WILSON

I suppose you want to come inside now.

MAN

I'm just fine where I am.

NURSE WILSON

You can't stay perched out there forever.

MAN

Why not?

NURSE WILSON

Because it's abnormal behaviour.

MAN

Not for a pigeon.

NURSE WILSON

You're not a PIGEON!!

MAN

Yes ... I know that now.

She goes.

MAN

But for a moment ... for a brief ... moment ... I didn't know. And the wind carried me up and took me along for a ride. And I forgot. I forgot my own story ... and I flew ... flew on the wings of someone else's.

POLICE MEGAPHONE

This is the police.

MAN

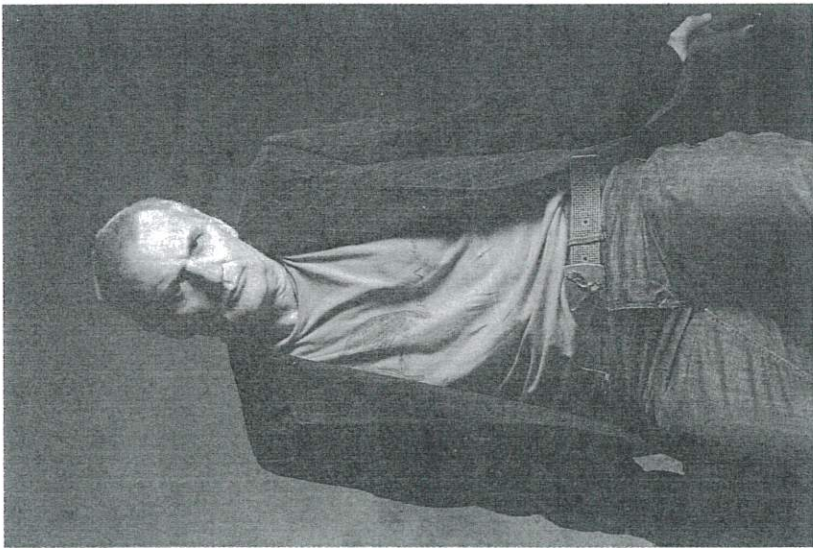
I have to forget ... try ... to forget everything. Forget everything that has ever happened to me ... everything that ever *will* happen ... everything ... and wait ... just wait for the wind again ... and do nothing ... nothing ... and ... wait ... just ...

The sound of the wind and the music increases as the lights fade. In the blackout we hear the police megaphone.

POLICE MEGAPHONE

All right, ladies and gentlemen – break it up. Just break it up now and go home. Come on, move along – move along now, ladies and gentlemen. Everything will be fine. Everything's under control, so let's just disperse with this little gathering and go home. The show's over.

END



Playwright, actor, and director Morris Panych has been described as "a man for all seasons in Canadian theatre." He has appeared in more than fifty works for the stage and in numerous television and film roles. He has directed more than thirty theatre productions and written more than a dozen plays that have been translated and produced throughout the world. He has twice won the Governor General's Award: for *The Ends of the Earth* (Talonbooks, 1993) and for *Girl in the Goldfish Bowl* (Talonbooks, 2003). Panych has won the Jessie Richardson Theatre Award fourteen times, for both acting and directing. He has also been nominated six times for the Dora Mavor Moore Award and three times for the Floyd S. Chalmers Canadian Play Award.