

Premiere

a play in two acts by
Robert Locke

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I used to write on my title pages something like: “All Rights Reserved: Nobody can use this unless they contact me or my agent in writing.” But I just turned 70; so screw that. This is a good play. If you want to do some scenes from it, go ahead and be my guest. But I hope that you will at least tell me about it, and give me the writing credit for it. If I am still alive—and that’s growing more and more doubtful—contact me at boblocke@csus.edu

Spotlight on CLAIR. Light broadens throughout her speech.

CLAIR

(drab, exhausted)

The cat was a little tabby. What I mean is he had stripes on him, little gray and white stripes, except it was more brown. Some people might call him tortoise shell, I've heard that, you know when they're brown striped like that, like, you know, some glasses frames that are made, you know, from tortoise shell, but I always said he was a tabby cat because that sounds more like a cat...

(smiles drably)

...and not so much like a turtle. In fact I called him Tabby. When I called for him to come and eat, because he wasn't mine, he lived down the street but I just gave him food so he would come around, and when I called to him, I called him Tabby. "Tabby, Tabby." And you should have seen him come running, he was funny, because he wasn't a cat yet really but just more a kitten, and that's how kittens are, you know. But that was before, before my husband, see the thing about my husband is that he's got a, he's got a temper, and you know, I know now that I shouldn't have been— see I was cutting my toe nails, on the bed, and— I'm usually very careful when I do that, and I always clean away the parings, the toenail clippings, because you know it's... disgusting... but, you know, human... and it was because of Tabby because Tabby was crying that I went outside and I forgot and left the toenail clippings on the sheet and my husband came and, but see, that's no reason for him to, and well, it's not the real reason because see, I - I - I had an abor— I - I killed my baby, but it was because because, see, my husband said he would divorce me if I got fat, and, and, I was eating so much, I couldn't, and my husband, no he didn't know, and my husband didn't know, when Tabby was crying and I thought, I thought it was, it was my— and my husband got in bed, and my toenail clippings, you know my clippings were in bed with him, and he thought, and Tabby was crying, he broke his neck. Let's see, no, he, yes, he broke Tabby's neck, my husband took Tabby by the neck and broke it, his neck, broke his neck, and he took him into the kitchen and he used my knife, the knife my mother gave me, that I cut vegetables with, carrots, carrots and vegetables, and he used that knife, and...

ZEKE ROSE's voice comes over the speaker.

ZEKE (OS)

Thank you.

CLAIR

(softly, a very withdrawn personality, but very different from the monologue above)

I'm sorry?

ZEKE (OS)

Thank you. That was very nice.

CLAIR

I was almost to the end. I only had a couple of lines left.

ZEKE (OS)

That's fine. Thank you. Could you wait in the lobby, please.

Clair turns hesitantly and starts to exit.

ZEKE (OS)

I didn't recognize that piece. What's it from?

CLAIR

It's not from anything. I wrote it. It doesn't have a title.

ZEKE (OS)

Thank you.

Clair exits through one door, the StageDoor, and re-enters through another nearby, the LobbyDoor. The lights change. Clair glances obliquely around the Lobby at the other occupants (the audience), then takes one of the three empty seats actually in the Lobby Area of the otherwise bare stage. She begins rearranging her hair and makeup, leaving her audition behind and resuming her own identity.

Zeke Rose comes into the Stage Area, which is divided from the Lobby Area, SR and SL, by an invisible line. He says little during the next scenes, but we see that he is preoccupied. From time to time he tries to work on a portfolio of resumes and photographs, but he is easily distracted, and stops, runs his fingers through his hair, sits paralyzed.

LEENYA hurriedly enters the Lobby Area through the Exterior Door, all eagerness. She has a cloth suitcase over her shoulder which is like a part of her existence. She looks around the Lobby at the audience without self-consciousness, decides to sit next to Clair. She notices Clair's profile and becomes fascinated by it, stares really. Clair grows nervous, withdraws further into herself. Leenya rises, walks around Clair to get a better look.

LEENYA

Who did your nose?

CLAIR

I'm sorry?

LEENYA

Your nose job. Who did it, someone here in New York, I hope because I want one just like it.

CLAIR

Um, it's my own nose.

LEENYA

Oh. Good job.

Clair opens her briefcase and begins making notes. Leenya continues to examine her.

Zeke, on Stage Side, puts his face in his hands, utters...

ZEKE

Oh, God!

LEENYA

Listen, this is my first day in New York; can you give me the name of someone in this town who's good with noses? Like yours.

CLAIR

Um, you could try the yellow pages.

LEENYA

Huh uh, I always think a personal referral is better, don't you? Do you have a picture of that nose? I mean, I really think it's the one I want.

CLAIR

I have an extra headshot.

LEENYA

That'll be great. What's a headshot?

(Clair gives her a photo and resume)

Oh, I've only got a bodyshot.

(shows Clair her own resume)

Think that'll be okay?

CLAIR

I think they prefer a photograph instead of a xerox copy. So, you're really thinking of cosmetic surgery?

LEENYA

Huh uh, a nose job. This one I've got, you take one look at it and what goes through your head?

(Clair shakes her head)

That I'm...

(whispers)

...Jewish. Which is okay when I'm doing comedy, but now that I've decided to be a serious actress—

CLAIR

Oh, you're a stand-up?

LEENYA

I prefer humorist. Some of my funniest stuff is when I'm lying down.

CLAIR

Really?

LEENYA

Uh huh. Listen, can I ask you a question?

CLAIR

About...?

LEENYA

About my name.

CLAIR

I don't know your name.

LEENYA

(laughs and snorts)

No, I know you don't. We just met. How could you know my name, I'm not a star yet or anything. But anyway, my real name is Clarabella Schmitzelheimer, if you can believe that. I mean Schmitzelheimer, what's the first thing that says to you... ?

(whispers)

Jewish, right?

CLAIR

It could be German.

LEENYA

(insulted)

Could be German? It is German. But with this nose? What's the first thing goes through everyone's head? And Clarabella? What did my parents think they were giving birth to, a cow? But listen, my middle name is Lee, L-E-E, I mean boring, right? But listen, L-E-I-G-H, pretty huh? Three silent letters in a row. I-G-H. And then I thought, Clara, but that's so ugly, right, I mean Clara! And then Clara Leigh, I mean, Clara Leigh Clara Leigh Clara Leigh Clara Leigh, Clara Leigh down the stream. But then I was thinking, Carolyn, right? I mean, what's the first thing that says to you? Carolyn Leigh, in lights. Honest, straightforward, strong, gutsy, balls down to the ground, right? But feminine too, and beautiful. Only trouble is everyone would confuse me with Vivien.

CLAIR

You're afraid people would confuse you with Vivien Leigh?

LEENYA

You know. Scarlett O'Connor?

CLAIR

Yes, I know who Vivien Leigh is. And there's Janet Leigh too.

LEENYA

Janet Leigh? Is that somebody?

CLAIR

A film actress. She was married to Tony Curtis, and you know what his real name was?

LEENYA

Huh uh.

CLAIR

Schwartz. Bernie Schwartz.

LEENYA

(whispers)

Tony Curtis is Jewish? Jamie Lee Curtis is Jewish offspring? Oh well, it doesn't matter anyway because I already didn't change it to Leigh but to something else. See, I switched them.

(proudly gives a switching gesture)

CLAIR

Switched...?

LEENYA

The two names. Not Carolyn Leigh but...

(gestures again)

CLAIR

(takes a moment)

Leigh Carolyn?

LEENYA

Leigh Caroleen.

(Clair looks blank)

That's too long? Leigh Careen! Can I use your pencil?

(starts to correct her resume)

CLAIR

Leigh Careen.

LEENYA

Pretty, huh?

CLAIR

Only...

LEENYA

Only what?

CLAIR

Leigh Careen, doesn't it sound a little...

LEENYA

(whispers)

Jewish?

CLAIR

No, a little manly. Leigh Careen.

LEENYA

(gasps) You're right! *(gasps again)* Lena!

CLAIR

Lena Careen.

LEENYA

Lena Careena!

CLAIR

Lena Careena. You know what? Cariño means love in Spanish. Lena Cariña.

LEENYA

Lena Careenya. Leenya! Leenya Careenya!

CLAIR

Leña Cariña.

LEENYA

You are a genius.

(corrects her resume again)

Let's see, L-E-E-N-Y-A- H? No, no H. C-A-R- No, K is stronger. K-A-R-E-E-N-Y-A. Oh, that's so pretty. What's yours?

CLAIR

My name?

LEENYA

Uh huh.

CLAIR

Clair.

LEENYA

Clair. Just Clair? Oh, well that's not as ugly as Clara. Clair. Kind of pretty really. Clair ... Sky. Clair ... Lake. So what'd you pick for the other one?

CLAIR

Well, I didn't pick it. I was born with it. Schwartz.

LEENYA

(takes a moment)

Oh.

HALLIE enters through the Exterior Door. Leenya rises upon seeing her, turns her back to Hallie and lowers her voice to Clair.

LEENYA

Look at the nose that just walked through the door!

During the following dialogue, which is hushed so she cannot hear, Hallie gazes around the room, deciding where to sit. Ultimately she will take the third Lobby Area seat near Clair and Leenya, but first she searches through her purse for various items.

CLAIR

My God, it's Hallie Morgan!

LEENYA

Who's Hallie Morgan?

CLAIR

You haven't heard of Hallie Morgan?

LEENYA

I'm new in town.

CLAIR

You'd have to be new in the world not to have heard of—

LEENYA

Okay, so I'm from Kenosha, Wisconsin, and I'm just an ignorant little nothing, so who is she?

CLAIR

She is one of the greatest actresses on the New York stage.

LEENYA

You're kidding.

CLAIR/LEENYA

She's so small.

CLAIR

She's also the ex-wife of Zeke Rose.

LEENYA

Who's Zeke Rose?

CLAIR

(looks at her, stunned)

You're here to audition for a play, is that right?

LEENYA

Yeah.

CLAIR

How did you find out about these auditions?

LEENYA

There was a sign on the door downstairs.

CLAIR

You were passing on the sidewalk and you saw a sign— ?

LEENYA

Saw it...

(takes sign from her bag)

...I swiped it to make sure no one else sees it and comes up. But it looks like everyone in town's already here.

CLAIR

We've all finished. How did you get past the Equity watchdog?

LEENYA

There wasn't any dog.

CLAIR

The man from Actors Equity who asked to see your Equity card?

LEENYA

Oh, that dog, that's what he wanted. Huh! Oh, he was easy; when you're from Kenosha, you know how to get around guys like— Say... !

(reading from audition sign)

...what's this mean anyway, "One woman, any age"? There's only one part in this play?

CLAIR

That's what it looks like to me.

LEENYA

Any age? Not asking for much, are they! Hey, Ezekial Rose, that's the guy you were talking about. He wrote this play?

CLAIR

Yes, he's one of the greatest playwrights in America today. Especially for women. Every actress in New York wants this part, and the chance to work with Zeke Rose. Because he's also directing the play. Zeke Rose is the man you're about to audition for, right through that door.

LEENYA

He wrote this play and he's directing it, and he used to be married to her?

CLAIR

Zeke Rose and Hallie Morgan.

LEENYA

So he likes big noses.

Leenya stands, leaving Clair behind to get a 3-D look at Hallie's nose. Hallie notices, but tries to take no notice, until ...

HALLIE

Hi.

LEENYA

Hi.

(Leenya examines Hallie's profile for another moment, then she indicates to Clair that she wants to trade seats with her.)

Scooch over.

Clair scooches to Leenya's previous seat, and Leenya sits between Clair and Hallie, still intent on Hallie's nose. Hallie turns to her and smiles.

HALLIE

Have we met?

Leenya shakes her head. Hallie considers this. Then, made somewhat nervous by Leenya, she opens her purse, takes out a cigarette, tamps it, and drags deeply on it without lighting it.

LEENYA

(snorts)

That's not lit, you know.

HALLIE

Yes. I stopped smoking a few weeks ago. Again.

(drags deliciously)

This is just for the habit. When I'm nervous. When someone *makes* me nervous.

LEENYA

(laughs and snorts)

Why should you be nervous auditioning for your ex-husband? I mean, the guy's seen you with your clothes off!

HALLIE

I think I should find the ladies' room. Excuse me.

Hallie exits through the Exterior door. Leenya returns to Clair.

LEENYA

She's kind of pretty. But she made a big mistake letting her hair go gray. Though it's kind of pretty. But it makes her look like an old lady, and from the rest of her I'd say she's only about forty-five. What are you writing?

CLAIR

I'm making notes to myself.

LEENYA

Notes...? ...about?

CLAIR

Things.

LEENYA

Huh! Yeah, I've got some notes I've got to make too. Could I have that pencil again?

CLAIR

Here's one of your own. And here's a fresh, clean notebook. If you'd like it.

LEENYA

Wow, that's a lot of notes. But okay.

CLAIR

What did she talk about? Hallie?

LEENYA

Nothing. Cigarettes and stuff like that, nothing I can use. You want to hear my audition?

CLAIR

I think it might be a good idea to save yourself.

LEENYA

(a novel idea)

Huh!

CLAIR

It's unbelievable she's here.

LEENYA

Why?

CLAIR

Someone of her stature at an open audition. And for Zeke Rose. He knows her work better than anyone in the world. He wrote all of her best parts, he created them for her, he directed her, he made her.

LEENYA

So this, like, cuts down our chances.

CLAIR

No, that's what's most unbelievable. He surely would never cast her, not after all they've been through. What is she doing here?

LEENYA

So, what have they been through?

CLAIR

Well, it was about ten years ago—

In the Stage Area, Zeke has finally accomplished a culling of his portfolio, has exited through the StageDoor and now enters through the LobbyDoor, addressing the audience as auditioners.

ZEKE

Okay...

LEENYA

Is that him?

CLAIR

Yes. Shhh...

ZEKE

...thank you all, from the bottom of my heart. You've been very patient. I've asked you all to wait for various reasons, because in an open audition situation like this, I want to make sure I find certain qualities, certain attributes. There is an extraordinary amount of talent in this room...

(Leenya reacts proudly.)

...and for those of you whom I do not ask to remain now, for reasons of the peculiar nature of the casting of this particular play, I want you to know that I have your names and resumes, and for my next play I will be in touch. Now, the people I would like to stay...

(opens his portfolio of photos and resumes)

...Clair Schwartz...

LEENYA

That's you!

Hallie enters. Zeke is stunned silent for a long moment. Hallie resumes her seat. Zeke tries to recover, flips through a couple of resumes, then...

ZEKE

Hallie ... you stay, please.

LEENYA

Hey, but she just got here!

ZEKE

And the rest of you, thank you, it was an honor. I'll be in touch.

He opens the Exterior Door; nodding goodbye to imaginary people who exit. Leenya approaches him.

LEENYA

But hey, Zeke...

ZEKE

Thank you very much.

LEENYA

No, I didn't do anything yet.

ZEKE

(almost at same time)

I'm sorry, did you audition? I don't remember your piece.

LEENYA

No, I didn't audition yet, I'm here to audition now.

ZEKE

Oh, I'm sorry, the auditions are over.

(taking her resume)

I'll take your resume, but—

LEENYA

But you haven't seen me yet.

ZEKE

No, but the auditions are over.

(to an imaginary person leaving)

Yes, thank you, goodbye.

LEENYA

But you haven't seen me yet.

ZEKE

(utterly distracted by Hallie's presence)

I'm sorry but I have—

LEENYA

(pointing to Hallie)

You let her stay.

ZEKE

Yes, but I've seen her work.

LEENYA

But you haven't seen mine, that's what I'm saying, you haven't seen me yet.

ZEKE

Uh, all right, fine, go through that door to the stage and do whatever you do to prepare, and I'll be right in.

(Leenya goes through the LobbyDoor. Zeke gestures Hallie through but they do not actually make eye contact.)

Hallie.

Mr. Rose?
CLAIR

Yes. Uh, oh yes, uh...
ZEKE

Clair Schwartz?
CLAIR

Yes, yes, very interesting, very good work.
ZEKE

You wanted me to stay?
CLAIR

Oh. Yes, of course, please go in.
ZEKE

After the three women are gone, Zeke takes a long moment to regain his composure. He takes a package of cigarettes from his shirt pocket, takes one out, and without lighting it, inhales deeply. Then he exits through the LobbyDoor as Leenya enters through the StageDoor. The lights change.

Leenya looks around her in delight. When Hallie comes in, Leenya giggles.

LEENYA
Isn't this great? We're on the same stage together, and you're supposed to be really good.

HALLIE
It's exciting, isn't it.

Clair enters through the StageDoor.

LEENYA
(to Clair)
Isn't this great? And you must be really good too because you're the only one he asked to stay.

CLAIR
I think he was about to ask other actresses to stay, but—

LEENYA

Well, good, then it's just the three of us. Cutthroat.

(giggles)

HALLIE

(to Clair)

I'm Hallie Morgan.

CLAIR

Yes.

LEENYA

This is Clair Lake.

HALLIE

Oh, you know I've seen your work, and it's been awfully good, but somehow I don't remember... ?

CLAIR

No, it's Schwartz.

LEENYA

But she's thinking of changing it to Lake. Like Victoria.

HALLIE

Lake Victoria?

LEENYA

No, no, not Victoria. The one with all the hair all over her face?

HALLIE

Veronica Lake?

LEENYA

Yeah, that's the one. Clair Lake. Pretty, huh?

CLAIR

But— ?

ZEKE

Okay, let's get right to— Uh, Hallie, did you want to talk to me alone? Or are you here for the audition? Or...?

HALLIE

I'm here for the audition.

Zeke reaches for an out-of-sight light control in the hallway he has just come from and changes the lighting in the stage area for Leenya's audition.

ZEKE

All right then, please have a seat everybody and let's go right to your audition, uh...

(tries to read Leenya's resume)

...Lenny?

LEENYA

Leenya. Leenya Kareenya. Kareenya's Spanish for love.

ZEKE

Well then, that's quite a name. What did it used to be, something ending in berg or stein or steen?

Leenya doesn't know how to respond.

CLAIR

Zee hut genumen an andra namen menschen vill nicht visin is Yiddish.

ZEKE

Vus hus geven dine namen frier?

CLAIR

Schmitzelheimer.

ZEKE

(to Leenya)

My grandfather changed ours from Rosenberg. I've always despised him for it.

LEENYA

(recovering)

But you didn't change it back, did you, Zeke Rose?

ZEKE

(laughs) No, I didn't, Leenya Kareenya. So are you going to get a nose job too?

LEENYA

Umhmm, I'm gonna get one like she got. And I'm going to get new boobies, too.

ZEKE

Well ... Leenya ... let's see what you've done. What else you've done.

(reads resume)

Hum, you haven't done ... anything in theatre?

LEENYA

No, I'm a humorist, which is like stand up, you know? Only better? This is my first serious gig.

ZEKE

Oh, THIS is your first gig.

LEENYA

Uh huh. I just got off the bus.

ZEKE

Did you, how exciting for you. But oh I see now, you've done ... "humoristic" work?

LEENYA

Uh huh, you know parties and like that.

ZEKE

Wearing lampshades?

LEENYA

Lampshades, bikinis, you name it. Everybody kept telling me, "You're funny." "You know what, you're funny." So I came to New York. Is there any funny stuff in this play, "Premiere"?

ZEKE

Well, it is humoristic.

(starts to hand her resume back to her)

Oh, Leenya, I'm sorry, somehow I just don't think that, uh...

Seeing that she is about to be dismissed, Leenya lunges dramatically into a quite ridiculous song.

LEENYA

(sings)

I pricked my finger on a thorn. I cried myself to sleep without you. My life feels like an empty hole. I couldn't wake myself out from this deep dark sleep. What happened to the velvet sky, The dreams of castles so nearby, A man that I would die for?

(She falls on the floor as though in death, then gets up)

And that's all I have.

ZEKE

(containing his amusement)

Well that's very ... provocative. Leenya, the character you would be playing in "Premiere" has at her core a mystery, a deep dark secret. That's why the play is called "Premiere", because it is the opening of that secret. So in order to...

Leenya grabs her notepad and starts making notes.

...play this character, you understand, you must find the deep dark secret of your own, something very traumatic—

LEENYA

Oh, that's easy because I'm a dramatic actress.

ZEKE

Trau----matic ... painful that—

LEENYA

But isn't that what you're supposed to do as an actor, like act? Pretend?

ZEKE

There's more to acting than you think. Acting requires technique. For instance, this character must cluck like a chicken.

Hallie cannot help laughing. Zeke suppresses his laugh.

HALLIE

I'm sorry.

ZEKE

Yes the character clucks like a chicken, so the actress who wins the part must be able to cluck like a chicken. Can you cluck like a chicken?

Hallie laughs louder at each "cluck like a chicken", and finally Zeke can't help laughing. Leenya is unsure what the joke is.

ZEKE

Sorry, Leenya, it's just that Hallie and I go back a long way, and ... Tell her the joke, Hallie.

HALLIE

Well, it's no joke, it's just... it's stupid, I can't believe you're using that, Zeke. But anyway, Leenya, when I was a little girl, I used to play out in the backyard a lot, back by this wooden fence which separated our backyard from the neighbors, and they had chickens. And I used to play outside from early early in the morning until late at night, and I was kind of lonely because

there weren't any kids around to play with, and I started having conversations with the chickens on the other side of the fence. I started imitating the sounds they'd make, and we'd just cluck together, and they'd say stuff and I'd say it back to them. *(laughs)* Chickens!

LEENYA

Gee, that IS funny.

ZEKE

And this is what a playwright does, Leenya, is incorporate things from life. For “Premiere”, I've created a scene in which our character, Sue Devine, at the age of five hunkers down by the back fence and clucks with the neighbor chickens. Then later in the play Sue Devine clucks in a ... quite different context.

(glances at Hallie, who is stunned.)

So, Leenya, let me hear you cluck like a chicken.

LEENYA

Bock?

ZEKE

Well, uh huh. Cluck like a chicken, Hallie.

HALLIE

(angry)

You know I can cluck like a chicken.

ZEKE

Yes, but I want Lena to hear.

(to Clair)

Cluck like a chicken.

Clair crows like a rooster

ZEKE

Well, that's a kind of chicken, a male chicken, a rooster, a cock.

(turns to Hallie)

Cluck like a chicken.

HALLIE

No.

ZEKE

This is an audition for a character who clucks like a chicken. I'm auditioning all the applicants to see if they can cluck like...

HALLIE

You know I can cluck like a chicken.

LEENYA

Come on, we did it, it's not so bad.

CLAIR

(afraid of a scene)

We did it.

ZEKE

The other auditioners clucked, and so must you.

HALLIE

Chickens cluck when they're contented.

ZEKE

Chickens cluck when they're laying eggs!

LEENYA

Cluck like a chicken.

HALLIE

Chickens squawk in pain when they're laying eggs!

ZEKE

Well then squawk like a chicken!

LEENYA

Squawk like a chicken.

CLAIR

(pleading)

Squawk like a chicken.

ZEKE

Squawk like a chicken or your audition is over!

Hallie squawks angrily in Zeke's face.

ZEKE

So this is a lovely display of anger. Remember it, remember where the anger comes from because you're going to use it. Because next to the anger is the pain.

(to Leenya)

Squawk like a chicken.

(Leenya squawks. Then to Clair)

Squawk like a chicken.

(Clair squawks. Then to Hallie)

Squawk like a chicken.

(Hallie squawks. Then to all three)

Now all together, and don't stop until I tell you to. Squawk like a chicken.

Zeke laughs, then the tension dissolves into laughter.

ZEKE

And remember the humor, because the humor is next to the pain.

LEENYA

(making a note)

So it's anger pain humor?

ZEKE

You don't have to be that precise. They're all in the same neighborhood, they're all old friends. Leenya, I was very impressed by what you did with your song. Did you say you wrote that?

LEENYA

I made it up.

ZEKE

You made it up. What...? Is there a difference between writing something and making it up?

LEENYA

Well, I just said it. It's not down on paper. Yet. But I always keep my notebook on me.

ZEKE

Uh huh, well as I started to explain earlier, one of the things that I expect of an actor or actress—

Leenya starts to write.

You don't have to write down everything I say, Leenya. —is to reach back to that most traumatic event and recreate the emotions of the moment. Now what was your most traumatic event?

LEENYA

You want me to tell about it or re-create it?

ZEKE

Whichever you want. Share it with us. Go ahead, take centerstage.

LEENYA

Is this centerstage?

ZEKE

In this space, centerstage is wherever you make it.

LEENYA

Well, there was this class I was taking and I don't remember what kind of class it was because this was the last day I went to class after this happened. I think it was a speech class because I went up in front of the class and ...

(starts to laugh)

... I started, you know, to give the speech and I coughed

HALLIE

You what?

LEENYA

Coughed. And when I coughed, I pooted.

All laugh. Leenya starts to sit.

ZEKE

So what, no, get back up, tell us, so you pooted and how did you feel?

LEENYA

I just remember feeling stupid, and I was bright red and I pretended like it wasn't me, and they were all looking at me.

ZEKE

And this was the worst, the worst thing that ever happened to you?

LEENYA

Yes! Yes, yes, yes.

ZEKE

And how did you feel? One word.

LEENYA

Mortified.

ZEKE

All right so we can use mortification, but... Hallie, help her out, tell her the most traumatic—

LEENYA

Can I sit?

ZEKE

Yes, go ahead and sit, but listen to her. Hallie tell her the most traumatic thing that ever happened to you.

HALLIE

The time my husband told me he had been sleeping with someone else for a year.

All stop. Clair keeps her eyes down. Leenya watches Zeke.

ZEKE

Uh... yes. I suppose that would have eclipsed all earlier trauma. I meant the Dogwood story.

HALLIE

Yes, I know what you meant.

ZEKE

Well, do us a favor then, Hallie, and tell Leenya the Dogwood story!

During the following, there is great tension. Leenya keeps glancing at Zeke to see if he will blow. Zeke turns his attention more and more to Clair who listens quietly, self-consciously.

HALLIE

One time I was riding in my car. And I was pregnant. And I had my dog in the back seat. And I was worried because we had just been evicted from our apartment, and I knew that in five months I was bringing a human being into the world and we were living in the back of this truck that Zeke had... that my husband had fixed up with a roof and walls. And here I was driving along in my car when I saw some friends coming down the highway in the other direction, so I pulled my car up by the side of the road, and got out to talk to my friends. And I took Dogwood out of the car, out of the passenger side, and wrapped his leash around the door handle and had about a half hour conversation with my friends then got back in the car and drove off. With Dogwood still strapped to the doorhandle.

Leenya and Clair gasp. Clair begins withdrawing into herself, wraps her arms around her chest, averts her eyes.

Zeke watches Clair alertly. He crosses, during the following, until he walks into Clair's averted stare.

HALLIE (CONT)

And I heard this frantic honking behind me and looked in the mirror thinking what is that witch behind me doing, and she was gesticulating wildly, and I realized right then what I had done and stopped the car and got out and went around to the passenger side, and Dogwood was still on his feet, and he just looked at me...

Zeke walks into Clair's stare. Their eyes lock.

...with these eyes that said, "How could you?" Then he just fell over.

ZEKE

Clair, remember your response to that. Your response was very—

LEENYA

But wait, did Dogwood die?

HALLIE

No, but his paws were shredded. A veterinarian friend of ours bandaged him up and we put plastic baggies on all his paws, and all day long in that dark, dismal room on the back of that truck, while Zeke was off at work at the golf course, Dogwood would just lie there and watch me. I felt so terrible. I mean, I was the sole responsibility for this human life inside me, and I couldn't even take care of my dog.

ZEKE

Well, not the sole responsibility. That human life became our daughter Zel, and there was a devoted father in the picture. Clair... what was the most traumatic event in your life?

CLAIR

(tries to laugh)

I knew you were going to get to me. Nothing.

ZEKE

Nothing?

CLAIR

I've had a very nice life. Nothing traumatic has ever happened to me.

ZEKE

Nothing. Not even a little mortifying poot? Oh, don't worry, Leenya, I won't hold it against your audition. Okay, on your feet please, I'd like to see a little versatility. By way of callbacks, I'd like to do a few exercises.

LEENYA

What's callbacks?

ZEKE

Callbacks means you've made it past the first cut.

LEENYA

I knew you'd like me!

ZEKE

Now, our character, Sue Devine, unfolds as "Premiere" unfolds. We see her at several points throughout her life, not necessarily in chronological order. But for this exercise, let's do in chronological order. I want to do a series of improvizations—

LEENYA

What's improvizations?

ZEKE

Improvization is when you act without a script.

HALLIE

Play betend.

ZEKE

That's right, so play betend now that you are five years old, all three of you, walk around like a five year old. Don't look at me, Leenya, stay in the moment.

LEENYA

What's that, stay in the moment?

ZEKE

The moment is you are five years old, and I'm not in the picture, so don't look at me. Stay in that moment, not this moment. You are at a birthday party.

"Premiere" has many improvizational moments, night after night. Change the situation from "birthday party" to "first day of school" or "in the playground" or "at a picnic", etc, to change the improvization each night.

There is a short improvization here. The points that need to be made are: Clair does not do well, has no real memories. Clair will fabricate things about how much better she is, goes to private school, got a pony for her birthday, and two hundred kids

came to her birthday party. Leenya keeps looking at Zeke for approval, but when she commits, she's actually quite inventive. Hallie is always perfectly in the moment.

ZEKE

Okay, that wasn't bad for the first time working together. Next time we do this, Clair — I'm not going to do it now, but next time we do five year olds, bring a little more of the physicality of a kid... the way kids talk, and they keep grabbing the conversation...

(imitates a child)

Um, you know what? You know what, Clair? You know what? Um, I like to bubble my butt. And you know what, you know what? Okay, so good. Now, Clair ... are you presenting yourself the way you remember your life was, you were?

CLAIR

Um, yes.

ZEKE

Do you come from a wealthy family?

CLAIR

Um...

ZEKE

I mean, you seem to be lording it over these other children. No matter what any of the other children say, you had it better. A clown came to your birthday party, you got a pony, you're not going to public school but to a private school. Did you come from a wealthy family?

CLAIR

Yes.

ZEKE

How lucky for you. All right. You are eleven years old, no, you're thirteen, just going into puberty, with your hormones going all crazy, and your body developing in new ways. And it's a birthday party.

(or "first day back at school after summer vacation", or "at your first dance", etc.)

This improv is about boys, and French kissing, and is very lively with lots of teenage screaming and highjinks, Clair taking part delightfully. It ends with Leenya planting a kiss on Clair, giggling.

ZEKE

Okay, let's stop. Clair, you were much more accessible here than in the earlier improv. Do you know what I mean?

CLAIR

Um, no.

ZEKE

Well, with Hallie I saw the five year old growing into the thirteen-year-old, and with Leenya, too—that was good work, Leenya, very inventive—I saw the five-year-old becoming the thirteen-year-old, but with you, Clair, it's like there was a schism between five and thirteen. You were no longer in a class above these other two girls, you were one with them. Why would you suddenly change your relationship with the rest of the world?

CLAIR

It's an improv. These are my friends, my old friends.

ZEKE

Yes, but you changed a fundamental relationship with these friends Why?

CLAIR

I was acting.

ZEKE

Yes, I'm sure. And very good acting as a pubescent. But you had utterly no grasp of the five-year old, as though you had no memories, not even sense-memories to guide you. And earlier when I asked you about your most traumatic event, you couldn't find even one memory.

CLAIR

I have memories. I just don't have bad memories.

ZEKE

Tell me about your father. When you were five.

CLAIR

He was ... tall. And my mother was beautiful. She had blond hair just my color, and she was tall like me. She—

ZEKE

What else about your father?

CLAIR

He was just like you might expect.

ZEKE

When he was alone with you?

CLAIR

He was ... funny. He sang me a lullabye about mockingbirds and diamonds.

ZEKE

There's been a lot in the news lately about people suddenly remembering things from their childhood, traumatic things that their subconscious had blocked. Could you be blocking? Could you be—

LEENYA

(eagerly)

Oh, I know, I know what you want. You wanted my most dramatic event, I've got a real good one, better than pooting. My friend Virginia and I were very boycrazy, to the point of being stupid. And I never did anything, but I wanted to kiss...

As Leenya continues her story, Zeke watches Clair closely, circles her practically, watching her reaction which is to withdraw. Leenya strives to get his attention.

...these boys, uh, Zeke.

(Zeke turns to her.)

And one boy, Dan Roundtree, asked us if we wanted to go for a ride in his Honda which was the very first Honda car, and you know was this tiny, and so Virginia and I thought this was just the greatest adventure, Zeke.

(Zeke turns to her again, away from Clair.)

So we piled into the Honda and Virginia sat in back and I sat in front, and we started driving into the woods, and he kind of put his hand on my leg and was rubbing it, and pretty soon he looked into his mirror at Virginia, and said, "Would you mind getting out of the car for a while?" And we were so young that we didn't understand, so we looked at each other and said, "Okay", and he dropped her off at the fair and we drove back into the woods, deeper and deeper and then there was no one around, and he pulled his car over and said, "Let's go for a walk" and we got out, and all of a sudden there was this fear started coming into my body that this was not right and I wasn't safe anymore.

(now getting deeper into her story, really remembering it)

So we got to this like sand patch, and we sat down in the sand and he started to kiss me, and you know the kissing was fun at first but there was this fear, and pretty soon he had me laying in this sand pit with all the sand going down my pants and shirt and he was sitting on top of me and had me pinned and he was trying to take my pants off, and I put my hands up to him, and I said, we had lied about our age and said we were fourteen, and I said, "I'm twelve," and he pushed me back down and said, "Don't worry, we're not going to have intercourse", that was the word he used and I didn't know what the word meant but that it was something very bad, or at the time, and I pushed him and I went to slap his face and he grabbed my arm and said, "I wouldn't do

that." I said, "Let me up, just let me up, and get the sand out from under me and I'll do what you want." So he let me up and I got up and I started to walk back to the car and he said, "Wait, wait, you said you'd do what I want." But I walked on and he didn't come after me but stayed down there and did, I guess, something to himself. Because then he came up and took me back, and I didn't get raped, or killed.

ZEKE

Now, this is a story, Leenya! Why you didn't tell me this instead of the "pooting" story.

LEENYA

(manipulatively)

I guess I blocked it?

ZEKE

I guess maybe you did. Clair, does this help, what you've just learned from Leenya?

CLAIR

Help what?

ZEKE

Does it open up anything for you, any blocks?

CLAIR

I don't have any blocks.

ZEKE

How can you be sure?

CLAIR

I would know.

ZEKE

But if you were very successful at blocking, there would be no way to know, there would be no clues.

(She looks away.)

Or would there?

CLAIR

If I had almost been raped at twelve, I would know it. But I would have had the good sense not to go into some sand pit with some boy.

LEENYA

Well! Feel better?

ZEKE

(puts his body between them)

How is it... in your audition you were able to create a very very traumatic situation, but you have no trauma in your life?

CLAIR

I was acting.

ZEKE

And you're a good actress. But you wrote that piece. You weren't just interpreting someone else's work, you created that, and it comes from nothing?

HALLIE

Zeke. What are you doing?

ZEKE

(taken aback)

What are *you* doing?

HALLIE

I thought this was an audition. When did you start using psychoanalysis in your—

ZEKE

When did you start messing into the way I run my auditions?

(a moment of embarrassed tension for all, then he turns away)

Okay, go neutral.

LEENYA

What's neutral?

ZEKE

Don't do anything, just be there and let me shape you with my words. You are eighteen. Walk about like eighteen-year-olds—

Clair goes to Hallie to thank her.

—do not talk to each other, you are not in the same vicinity, and remember please that you are not here to win friends and influence people, you are in competition for the role of your life.

(The women pause, Hallie angry, Clair and Leenya confused.)

Come on, I want to see an eighteen-year-old walking. You've just graduated from high school, you've got the world before you, it's your first day in New York City. And you're a prostitute.

(They stop, they change radically.)

You've had one client tonight. Your earnings, five hundred dollars.

(They change subtly.)

LEENYA

I've learned how to French kiss.

ZEKE

You've learned how to French kiss and do other French things. You're a very adept little hooker. Now, you are twenty-eight, ten years have passed you by, count them, Hallie. Count the ten years, how do they change you, year by year.

Hallie counts 18-28, changing emotions as she counts.

ZEKE

Clair, count the years. Not the ages but the years, each long year as it passes.

Clair counts to 1-10, changing to different emotions.

ZEKE

Count the years, Leenya.

Leenya counts 1-10, flirting with Zeke openly, sitting on his lap.

ZEKE

You're very bold, Leenya, you make bold choices.

(she is nervous)

I like that.

(she is smug)

Okay, you are twenty-eight. You've been working the streets hard tonight, and you've serviced five tricks already. I want to see all five of those men.

(The women change with each element Zeke adds.)

Your earnings, fifty measly dollars. Your pimp has taken all fifty. And he's beaten you black and blue. The telephone rings.

(None of the three move to answer it.)

Ring. Ring. Isn't anyone going to answer this damn phone? Ring.

(Hallie finally makes a move, picks up an imaginary telephone.)

Thank you, Hallie.

HALLIE

(answering phone)

Yeah?

ZEKE

Hi, honey.

Who is this?
HALLIE

Don't you recognize my voice?
ZEKE

Get real.
HALLIE

Hallie, it's your father.
ZEKE

Zeke turns his attention to Clair, who flinches in her continuing portrayal of the beaten prostitute.

Daddy.
HALLIE

How are you, honey?
ZEKE

I'm fine. Where are you?
HALLIE

I'm in New York. I thought maybe we could see each other.
ZEKE

Sure, that'd be great. When?
HALLIE

Leenya, writhing on the floor as her beaten prostitute, sees that Zeke has eyes only for Clair. She abandons her character angrily and sits up to glare at Zeke, who does not even see her.

I thought maybe tonight.
ZEKE

Oh, no, I can't tonight, I've got this really important ... class that I'm taking tonight.
HALLIE

Oh, you're in school?
ZEKE

HALLIE

Not really school, it's just this kind of class I take, but let's think of another time.

ZEKE

Well, what's good for you?

HALLIE

How about, what's today, how about Sunday, next week.

ZEKE

Well, maybe we can go to church?

HALLIE

Yeah, we could do that?

ZEKE

Shall I pick you up?

HALLIE

(starts to cry)

Daddy?

Zeke turns his eyes from Clair to Hallie.

ZEKE

Hum?

HALLIE

Can you come tonight?

ZEKE

You okay, honey?

HALLIE

No.

ZEKE

Very nice, Hallie, thank you. Clair— It was good to work with you again, Hallie. Clair, the telephone rings.

CLAIR
(picking up an imaginary phone)

Yeah?

ZEKE

Clair!

CLAIR

Yes.

ZEKE

Hi!

CLAIR

Hi.

ZEKE

Do you recognize my voice? This is a voice from your past, Clair.

CLAIR

From my past. Grandpa?

ZEKE

Yeah. How are you?

CLAIR

Well, I'm doing ... how, how are you?

ZEKE

Fine. Now this is very interesting, Clair. Grandpa, why did you say Grandpa?

CLAIR

I visited my grandfather last week and I thought of him.

ZEKE

Umhmm. Where does your grandfather live?

CLAIR

Brooklyn.

ZEKE

And where does your father live?

Vermont.

CLAIR

So you're from Vermont?

ZEKE

Yes.

CLAIR

Umhmm. What town?

ZEKE

It's a very small town. Littleton.

CLAIR

Littleton, umhmm. What does your father do for a living?

ZEKE

He's a baker.

CLAIR

He's a baker? That's where he makes all his money?

ZEKE

He's a banker.

CLAIR

Oh, he's a banker. Are your father and mother still together?

ZEKE

They separated. A few years ago. They waited until I was raised.

CLAIR

Why are you lying?

ZEKE

Zeke!

HALLIE

Zeke!

ZEKE

What are you hiding, Clair, why are you afraid?

CLAIR

(overlapping)

Nothing. I'm not afraid.

HALLIE

Zeke!

ZEKE

(very angry, faces Hallie a long moment, then turns away)

Go neutral! You are ninety years old. Let me see you walk like a ninety-year-old.

(Hallie crosses to her bag.)

Hallie, walk like an ninety-year-old!

HALLIE

I'm going for a prop.

ZEKE

Then go for a prop like a ninety-year-old.

Hallie walks like an old lady. So does Clair. Leenya, angry at being ignored, doesn't even try.

ZEKE

Leenya, walk like— Oh, I suppose that's asking too much too soon. Watch Hallie. Watch what she does. Take it onto your own body.

Hallie has put on bifocals and now takes an old-lady-sweater out of her bag, pulls it on slowly and carefully.

It is your ninetieth birthday. Leenya, is it your party?

LEENYA

I don't think so.

ZEKE

Stay in the moment!

LEENYA

(old lady voice, still angry)

No siree, Zeke. Not me, not me, no sir.

ZEKE

Clair?

CLAIR

(old lady voice)

If this is how ninety feels, I don't want to get there.

ZEKE

As my father always said, the only person who wants to be ninety is the one who's eighty-nine. All right, Hallie, it's your birthday. Grandma Hallie?

Hallie does a terrific old lady.

HALLIE

Yes, Zekey?

ZEKE

How does it feel to be ninety? Tell Clair and Leenya.

HALLIE

Well, take the shoulders. When you put on your sweater...

(puts on her sweater)

...which I just happened to bring along because when I read "One woman, any age", I just imagined the director would want to see ninety or a hundred, you betcha ... you see that you don't just whip into it the way a young person will.

ZEKE

Have a seat, Grandma.

HALLIE

Now don't rush me, Zekey. When you're ninety you don't want to be rushed 'cause you might fall and break a hip, and then it's Goodnight, Sailor. Also, when you turn around — young people can just snap their neck around, you know, they'll be headed in one direction and turn around to say something to you and just their little neck'll swivel, but when you're ninety, my friend, you have to turn your whole body.

(demonstrates)

ZEKE

Have a seat, Grandma.

HALLIE

Zekey, that's very nice of you and I believe I will.

(demonstrates)

And see that you don't just pop down but let the weight of your derriere, so to speak, make you fall back a little bit. And the same when you get up, you want to push yourself with your arms,

'cause your legs just don't do it no more. And always always, there's a little step there, you know just a little hitch, 'cause you started to tumble no matter how careful you were.

Zeke has watched Hallie with some pride mingled with amusement over her improv.

ZEKE

Very nice, Hallie. Clair—

HALLIE

Now Zekey, I'm not finished! And this is the most important thing about being ninety and even up-ards, and it's not exterior to the body, but inside here, and your Sue Devine is going to need to know this. When you're of advanced age you have a calmness about you, a peace. You sit back and watch. The competitive edge is dull. You reminisce, sweet remembrances. You think back on—

Zeke's amusement has turned to anger over Hallie's interference with his character of Sue Devine.

ZEKE

And then of course you have the rest of your old lady shtick, the voice, the frog in your throat, and when you turn ninety you automatically take on a southern accent. You are not auditioning for “Driving Miss Daisie”, Hallie, this is Sue Devine, an innocent at five who becomes a prostitute by eighteen, entrepreneur by forty, Congresswoman by fifty, the first serious female contender for the presidency by sixty-five. What is Sue Devine at ninety?

HALLIE

You tell me!

Hallie, meanwhile has angrily packed up her bag.

ZEKE

Are you going somewhere? You're all packed up.

HALLIE

(hesitates)

I thought I'd ... get a drink of water.

ZEKE

You know where it is.

(Hallie turns to go.)

You can leave your things here.

Hallie recognizes the challenge, turns to confront him. Zeke knows he may lose her at this moment.

HALLIE

I like to keep them with me.

Hallie goes out the door. Zeke watches the door intently, starts after her, stops himself, stands a long moment in trembling hesitation. Meanwhile we see Hallie come through the Lobby-side to the Exterior door, prepared to leave. She hesitates in the doorway.

LEENYA

Zeke?

(pause)

What about us?

(pause)

You want me and Clair to do ninety?

ZEKE

No. Yes. Clair ... Grandma Hallie says you reminisce, sweet remembrances. What is it that you remember at ninety. Think.

CLAIR

Nothing.

ZEKE

Think. Break into it.

CLAIR

Nothing, really, nothing.

ZEKE

Break into it!

CLAIR

Nothing!

ZEKE

Break it down!

CLAIR

Nothing, nothing, nothing!

HALLIE

(who has returned)

Zeke, for God's sake leave her alone!

ZEKE

Hallie, tell Clair your most traumatic event!

HALLIE

I told the Dogwood story.

ZEKE

No, the new one, with your husband. Share it with Clair.

HALLIE

No.

ZEKE

(intent on Clair)

When your husband told you that he had been sleeping with someone else for a year. With a man.

LEENYA

With a guy?

ZEKE

Yeah, Leenya, with a guy!

(to Hallie)

What did you feel at that instant?

HALLIE

It wasn't an instant. Life doesn't— !

ZEKE

At the moment that he told you! Break it down.

HALLIE

(for Clair's benefit)

He didn't tell me in a moment. It takes longer than a single moment to ... understand ... a thing like that.

ZEKE

All right, the moment that you did understand, the moment that it came clear to you what your husband in his bumbling words had been trying to say to you, what did you feel at that moment! One word.

HALLIE

Sick.

ZEKE

(pouncing on her)

Good, sick. Because it was a man instead of a woman, you felt revulsion!

HALLIE

No, sick, just sick! I felt like I'd been kicked in my stomach.

ZEKE

(to Clair again)

Sick to vomit.

HALLIE

Yes, I was afraid I was going to vomit, but I wasn't revolted. That it was a man was irrelevant. It was the betrayal, a year of betrayal. It was like an enormous earthquake, there was nothing I could trust anymore, nothing I could hold onto.

ZEKE

Leenya, your husband tells you he's in love with a man, what do you feel, what do you do?

LEENYA

I'd spit in his eye.

(recovering for Zeke's benefit)

I mean, you know, it sorta depends on who the guy is. Some kind of guy, I'd understand it.

(for Hallie's benefit)

But my ex, Jackie? I'd spit in his eye.

ZEKE

Clair?

CLAIR

(intent on Hallie)

I need to know more. I don't know who I am. I don't know who my husband is. I don't know where we are.

ZEKE
(gestures to Hallie)

Ask. Find out.

CLAIR

Well... it doesn't... ?

HALLIE

Go ahead.

CLAIR

Did you love him?

HALLIE

Oh, yes.

CLAIR

Did he love you?

HALLIE

I can't possibly say now.

ZEKE

Oh, for pity's sake.... *(recovers)* Go ahead.

CLAIR

Before... did he seem to love you?

HALLIE

He had been ... a wonderful husband, a wonderful father. He was ... wonderful.

CLAIR

Then why did he do it?

ZEKE

Ahhhhh... this is not dealing with that moment, that emotion she felt, that sickness to vomit, at that moment. You've established the relationship between these two people, it's clear to any fool... Leenya, is it clear? The relationship between this man and this woman?

LEENYA

Uh, they love each other.

ZEKE

And he tells her?

LEENYA

He's been screwing some guy.

ZEKE

That, at least, is clear.

CLAIR

But I need to know...

ZEKE

What! What else?

CLAIR

The setting. Where are we when he tells me? Where are we coming from, where are we going, what have we been doing?

ZEKE

(gives the floor back to hallie with a wave, then:)

Wait. This is an exercise, a new exercise. You're a man. No, Leenya, you're the man. You've been having an affair with another man for a year. Why a man?

(Leenya is blank.)

Leenya, why a man? What can this man give you that this woman cannot?

LEENYA

A man's understanding?

ZEKE

What about his body?

LEENYA

Well, yeah.

ZEKE

His chest? His arms?

LEENYA

His thing?

ZEKE

Yes, yes. His smell. God, his smell. The way he holds you.

LEENYA

The way he knows you, because he's the same as you.

ZEKE

Yes. When you're with him, you feel intense ... exhilaration. Yet guilt. You know you must tell your wife, whom you love along with your daughter more than you love ... you love ... them, you love them. You need to share with your wife this part of you that you've been so afraid, this dear part, this essence of you. And perhaps more than anything you want to share with her this man! Whom you love too! So much. You've had a year to plan it, how to tell her, when to tell her, where to tell her. What do you choose as the setting?

LEENYA

(moved by his intensity, searching)

A fag bar?

ZEKE

(intensely disappointed)

Clair? Where does it happen? Where does he tell you ... this?

CLAIR

We're in our bed.

ZEKE

Yes!

CLAIR

We've just made love.

ZEKE

Yes.

Zeke backs away, looks toward Hallie who is rigid.

CLAIR

He's holding me. I'm so happy. I love him so much ...

ZEKE

Leenya ... play me.

Leenya is unsure how to proceed, approaches Clair hesitantly.

LEENYA

We're in bed together?

ZEKE

Yes.

CLAIR

Couldn't we start later? After we get up?

ZEKE

All right, you're sitting on the bed together. You've just made love.

Leenya and Clair take seats beside each other, both very uncomfortable.

LEENYA

God, how do you say it?

ZEKE

(overlapping)

Stay in the moment!

LEENYA

(overlapping)

You told her in bed? After you made love? God!

ZEKE

(overlapping)

Stay in the moment!!!

LEENYA

I don't know how a man holds a woman!

ZEKE

(new idea)

You're lesbians. Sue Devine is thirty, or she's in her thirties. And there's a love scene with her lesbian lover.

LEENYA

(a noise like wow, but not wow)

Whoa.

CLAIR

I thought there was only one part. One woman, any age.

ZEKE

No, there are two women. There's Sue Devine ... and her lesbian lover ... Dorothy. Lamour. No, that's the actress. Lillian Lamour. Lilith Lamour!

(turns excitedly to Hallie)

Oh, God, that's to die for, Lilith Lamour, "the night monster love". And Lilith Lamour is one of the other prostitutes, and Lilith Lamour seduces Sue De— No! Sue Devine seduces Lilith Lamour, she lures her up to her room, and she puts on that...

Frenzied with invention, he goes to tape recorder and searches through cassettes.

...that soprano duet from Lakme, that uh, "Viens Mallika!" She puts on "Viens Mallika"! Yeah, I know, they used it in that trashy vampire movie, but we're going to make it different, and it's going to be so much better on stage!

Zeke puts on a cassette, several measures before the duet begins. As the music sets itself, he returns to the actresses, sees the confused expressions on their faces.

So there are two parts. And the two actresses who are cast must play, the two actresses who are cast must be willing to play, do you hear me, Leenya, willing to play this love scene ... together. And the actress who is most seductive will be Sue Devine. And so the music resolves itself into the duet ... and the seduction begins.

The two voices on the cassette join in the duet. Clair and Leenya are hesitant, almost a moment of "Chicken" before they begin the mutual seduction. It's a very tender scene, light, tentative, electric touches and responses.

ZEKE (CONT.)

And the scene is played in the nude.

The two women freeze a moment, then Leenya starts to undress Clair. Clair allows her for a moment, then stops her, gently. Leenya backs away, then begins to unbutton her own blouse. Breathing hard, Clair begins to undress herself.

Eyes locked, the two women continue to undress, seducing each other now, as the lights on them dim out.

The lights remain on Zeke and Hallie for a moment longer, Zeke intent on the scene, Hallie intent on Zeke.

CURTAIN END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

The very next moment. Lights come up first on Zeke and Hallie, as they were at the end of ACT I, then on Leenya and Clair in the same seductive tension. Leenya starts forward to kiss Clair on the lips, then breaks into embarrassed giggles.

LEENYA

This is gross!

ZEKE

(springs at her)

Stay in the Goddam moment! You had it. It was terrific! Goddamit! Goddam you, you stupid little shit!

Leenya bursts into tears.

HALLIE

(overlapping)

Zeke! Stop it! I said stop it!

Zeke turns away, stands as if stunned.

HALLIE

Leenya, Clair, take a break, go on into the lobby.

LEENYA

What about the audition?

HALLIE

We'll be out. I want to talk to Zeke alone.

LEENYA

But—

HALLIE

I want to talk to my ex-husband alone.

LEENYA

Well—

(bursts into tears of frustration)

I hate this!

Leenya rushes out through the StageDoor. Clair tentatively follows.

CLAIR

I'll be in the lobby.

Leenya comes out the LobbyDoor, goes straight through the lobby and out the Exterior Door. After a moment, Clair comes through the LobbyDoor, looks around, then takes a seat in Lobby Area with her own Lobby lighting.

On Stageside, in Stage lighting, Zeke stands with his back to Hallie.

HALLIE

What is wrong with you! I've never you seen you like this. This isn't an audition, you're brutalizing them. Zeke, you're acting — you're acting insane.

Zeke puts his face in his hands, trembles. Hallie approaches him hesitantly, puts a hand on his shoulder.

Is it the stress of—?

ZEKE

Get your hands off me! Don't start coming at me with your Mother Theresa. What the hell are you doing here?

HALLIE

I'm here to audition. I want the part.

ZEKE

An open audition? Why didn't you phone?

HALLIE

I was afraid you'd say no.

ZEKE

You're damn right. A call out of the blue. "Hello, it's Hallie." "Hello, it's Hallie." The years I waited for that call.

He goes to turn off the music.

HALLIE

I'm an actress just like any other. You've got a part, I want it.

ZEKE

There aren't any other parts in New York? No other plays?

HALLIE

Don't do this to us, Zeke. You know why I'm here. You couldn't have missed my reviews. That string of lovely bombs I've quote-unquote performed in.

ZEKE

Hell, I went to see the bombs themselves. You've sure wasted ten years of your life, Hallie.

HALLIE

Well, then... then don't ... humiliate me. I want a director. I want a part. I want a play.

(after a moment)

But you don't have one, do you?

ZEKE

Sure, I've got a play. It's called "Premiere". You're auditioning for it.

HALLIE

Huh uh. Who is this Sue Devine you're looking so hard for? You don't have her, do you?

ZEKE

(resignedly)

No, I don't have her. Words, that's what I've got. Words, words, words—

(laughs suddenly)

—in the immortal lines of fucking immortal Shakespeare. "The play's the thing." Well, I don't have a play; all I've got is so many words.

HALLIE

That's why you're going after Clair. You're hoping she's going to give your your play, this ridiculous mystery at the core of Sue Devine. Well, you're not going to get it from Clair, Zeke. You open in five weeks. What are you going to do?

ZEKE

Cast "Premiere". Rehearse "Premiere". Open "Premiere".

HALLIE

You can't stall?

ZEKE

I've stalled all I can. The money's all there, everything's in place. They're banking on the name Zeke Rose; he's never let anyone down yet.

(looks at her)

HALLIE

No, Zeke Rose has never let anyone down.

ZEKE

Except two, huh?

(beat)

How is Zel?

HALLIE

Fine.

ZEKE

Oh, good, she didn't die or anything. Of course, I knew she was alive as of last January when I paid her tuition. Isn't she ever going to graduate?

HALLIE

She's going after her MFA.

ZEKE

I went up to Yale, to see her in Twelfth Night.

HALLIE

Did you? Did she see you?

ZEKE

No, of course not. I sat in the back. I saw you. The back of your head. You're really gray.

HALLIE

And you're not?

(beat)

What did you think of her?

ZEKE

I've always wondered if she would have her mother's talent. She does.

HALLIE

Oh, she's got more than that..

ZEKE

She's ... luminous. Smart. She needs a director though.

HALLIE

Um hmm.

ZEKE

So she's getting an MFA. To do what with?

HALLIE

Whatever she wants.

ZEKE

Yeah, yeah, whatever Zel wants. Is she married?

HALLIE

No.

ZEKE

Does she have a boyfriend? —or girlfriend?

HALLIE

Yes.

ZEKE

Does he or she have a name?

HALLIE

Philip.

ZEKE

Philip and Zel.

HALLIE

(with a little laugh)

Zel and Philip.

ZEKE

(with the same laugh)

Hallie and Zeke. Zeke Rose and Hallie Morgan. Hallie and Zeke and Zel. Zel, Hallie, Zeke. Zeke and Artie. Art and Zeke. ... Zeke.

Hallie takes out a cigarette, drags on it, unlit.

ZEKE

(as he takes out one of his own)

What brand are you not smoking these days?

HALLIE

Shermans.

ZEKE

Oh, classy. I switched to camels, myself. I figured go for the worst, what the hell. Hey, let me try one of those. Trade you a camel for it.

(She gives him a Sherman, he takes a drag.)

Hmm, not bad. I wonder what our little auditioners are doing.

Meanwhile, Clair has gotten up and looked out the Exterior Door.

CLAIR

Clarabella?

Clair exits through the Exterior Door.

ZEKE

Would you even tell me if she got married?

HALLIE

I would ask her if she wanted to tell you.

ZEKE

Well, that would be thoughtful of you, to remind her that there IS a father of the bride. Then, of course, whatever Zel wants.

HALLIE

Stop it. I don't want to talk with you about Zel.

ZEKE

No, you could take off this arm and if I asked what you did with it, you could just say "I don't want to talk about it."

HALLIE

Zel is not your arm, she's not just an appendage of you.

ZEKE

No, but she's a big chunk of my heart.

HALLIE

Zel is her own person. She makes her own decisions. I have nothing to do with those decisions.

ZEKE

No, of course you don't. The betrayed mother, weeping night after night alone in her bedroom, has nothing to do with the decisions of the daughter.

HALLIE

You know that's not how it was.

ZEKE

That's exactly how it was! No, I don't think you deliberately turned her against me, but you did turn her against me, face that!

HALLIE

What was I to do with my grief!

ZEKE

You're an actress, cover!

HALLIE

I buried it in the Goddam graveyard! I chewed it back till it choked me! You were with us for four months watching me chew it back, trying to make it work, lying in bed beside a man who loathed my body next to him.

ZEKE

When I would reach out to touch you, you would freeze.

HALLIE

Knowing that you didn't want me.

ZEKE

I was there! I wanted you!

HALLIE

You promised me you wouldn't go back to him.

ZEKE

I didn't promise. I said I would try.

HALLIE

I didn't ask you to say that. You're the one who said it. You chose it.

ZEKE

You made me choose.

HALLIE

But you went sneaking back to him.

ZEKE

I didn't sneak. I came home and I told you.

HALLIE

Zeke, I gave you trust! You grow up with someone, you think you know him, you love him and he betrays you.

ZEKE

It's not betrayal to discover—

HALLIE

And then I gave you trust again, even after that and you—

ZEKE

I needed to talk to him. Artie was a human being too, you know? Artie needed me too.

HALLIE

And then to bring him to Zel's birthday party—

ZEKE

He was my lover. My daughter invited me to her birthday party. I brought the person I loved with me.

HALLIE

And you wonder why she never invited you again? Zeke, it was her thirteenth birthday! You know how ... fragile kids are at that age, with all of her friends around, and to sit there with your arm around him! What did you expect of her?

ZEKE

I didn't expect her to throw me out of her life, I didn't expect her never to come to the fucking phone again, never to even let me talk to her.

HALLIE

She was too raw, Zeke. It was too soon. The wound was too fresh.

ZEKE

Who was keeping it fresh? Niobe all tears. And how about ten years, the wound is still fresh after ten years? If Artie had been a woman—

HALLIE

You know that wasn't it. You pushed too hard, too far. She grew up in the theatre; gay men were all around her from the time she was born.

ZEKE

They weren't her father. They didn't quote-unquote betray her mother. Oh yeah, pretend on, Hallie, but you know if Artie had been a woman, I'd still have my family.

HALLIE

You wouldn't, I'm telling you you wouldn't. It didn't matter to me if it was a man or a woman! You can't have it both ways, Zeke. You wanted him and us too, and you couldn't have it.

ZEKE

Only because you wouldn't let me. You're the one who stopped it. You're the one who threw everything away, everything we had. You tell me that it was better for Zel not to have a father. You tell me that! Would I have been so terrible? She would have had two fathers. Artie would have loved her. She'd have loved Artie. But your pride couldn't stand it.

HALLIE

Pride had nothing to do with it.

ZEKE

You couldn't stand it that I needed something more than you, something you could never provide. You say I wanted it both ways. Yeah, and why not? Why not take out of life all you can get, provided you don't take something from someone else, provided you don't hurt anyone—

HALLIE

I wasn't hurt? Zel wasn't hurt?

ZEKE

I wasn't hurt? You didn't try to take away from me my very identity?

HALLIE

It wasn't your identity when I married you. It wasn't your identity when we were growing up.

ZEKE

It was! I just didn't know it. I never tried to deny you your identity, I never denied you anything.

HALLIE

Except faithfulness.

ZEKE

I was always faithful to you!

HALLIE

Any moment you spent in his bed—

ZEKE

Any moment I spent in his ARMS I was faithful to you. The love I had for you was always there as rich and as full and as deep as ever. And that's all that faithfulness is. It has nothing to do with what I do with my body, which is none of your business, you don't own it, you never did, I wasn't a possession. But my heart was always yours, and my soul is now and has always been and will always be entwined with your soul. And you can live on the other side of town, Hallie, you can rot on the other side of town, but this isn't finished. You're going to meet up with me over there, you know where I mean, over THERE! Artie's dead, yes, but he's waiting for us, for me and for you, and we're going to, we're going to ... get this settled. And Zel. Zel, too.

HALLIE

(after a moment)

I read in the Times about his death. I thought about calling you. I'm sorry.

ZEKE

Oh, death was the easy part.

HALLIE

Was he ill long?

ZEKE

Only a little less than a year, off an on. It's an interesting disease, always something new. Just when you think you know what you've got, you've got something else on top of it. You don't want to get AIDS, Hallie, you don't want to get it. Did you get tested?

HALLIE

Of course.

ZEKE

I wrote ... that letter when Artie first got sick. As soon as I knew ... he had it. I figured, when you didn't get back in touch, that you must have gone down and tested and it was negative. Right?

HALLIE

Well, you know that anyway. The Times article said you were negative, so there was no way I could get it, I mean there hasn't been ... anyone ... since you.

ZEKE

(softly)

Oh, that's a shame, Hallie. It's a shame for you and a shame for any man. You know, Hallie, I'm ... sorry for so much. I'm not, I'm not sorry for what I did, I'm not sorry for the decision I made. I'm just sorry that it all turned out so bad. I'm sorry for Zel, and I'm sorry for you. And I'm so sorry for Artie. I miss you all so much I ache.

(goes to her, kneels before her)

And I'm sorry, so very very sorry that you never knew him. You would have loved him, everything about him would have given you such ... pleasure. And he'd have loved you. We all lost that.

Zeke cries, clutches her. Hallie strokes his back a moment. Slowly she begins to make soft noises. After a moment, it becomes clear she is clucking like a chicken. Zeke laughs, pulls himself away.

Oh God, Sue Devine!

Zeke reaches through the StageDoor and gets a box of tissues.

I've got some kleenices back here I keep for overdramatic actresses.

Clair re-enters through the Exterior Door, hesitates then resumes her seat in the Lobby.

HALLIE

Zeke, I need you to understand this. I didn't think I owned you then. You and I could always go out from each other. Explore things alone, meet new people. We wanted that for each other. But when we got cold or fell down, we always came back to the one person who could make it better, who loved us no matter what we did, what kind of assholes we had been. And there we always were ... Hallie and Zeke.

(Zeke starts to say something.)

I know there are all kinds of ways people are together in the world— and I'm not saying ours was the only way or the best way but we chose to be married to each other. That was how WE wanted to be together.

(Zeke starts to say something.)

Just let me get this all out. I didn't own you, but I lived beside you. I felt closer to you than to anyone else. We had a history. We loved the same people, fought for the same causes, I mean we marched against the war together! We held each other up. I trusted you. I loved my life with you. When you told me about Artie, that you wanted to bring him into our life... I knew he must be wonderful; you chose him. I wanted to be able to do that for you. Every night for those four months I would lie there beside you trying to WILL myself into that picture. But everything would have changed. It wouldn't be me in there. I couldn't share what you and I had together. I couldn't share that.

Leenya comes back through the Exterior Door with determination, stops when she sees Clair.

LEENYA

Oh. You're still here.

CLAIR

Yes. They're still in there.

Leenya starts for the LobbyDoor, loses some of her determination, returns, sits instead.

HALLIE

So what will Zeke Rose do now? You want my advice?

ZEKE

Yes.

HALLIE

First get rid of Sue Devine.

ZEKE

No, I want to do a life of—

HALLIE

The name, not the character. It's a tawdry joke, and you know it. And Lilith Lamour?

ZEKE

Hallie, Lilith Lamour is inspired.

HALLIE

Is “Premiere” a farce?

ZEKE

“Premiere” is ... a serious comedy ... with explorations into ... the universality of life.
(Hallie laughs.)

And the absurd.

HALLIE

This is a new direction for you.

ZEKE

Well ... one hopes one grows.

HALLIE

Well, if it's a farce, the names could work. I mean, what's more absurd than Sue Devine?

Hallie collects Zeke's tissue and heads out the StageDoor.

LEENYA

(up and pacing)

Sue Devine! I'll give him Sue Devine!

HALLIE

(turning back)

Unless it's Lilith Lamour.

(exits)

LEENYA

Lilith what's her face!

CLAIR

Lamour. It means "love" in French. And Lilith means "night monster" in Hebrew.

LEENYA

You know, I'm not stupid. I watch "Cheers" too.

CLAIR

It wasn't on "Cheers". Lilith was Adam's first wife.

LEENYA

Adam? On what show?

CLAIR

In the Bible.

LEENYA

Oh, that show.

Hallie returns with two cups of coffee, handing one to Zeke.

ZEKE

God, thanks.

HALLIE

Okay, I'll buy Sue Devine, but the character's all over the place. Now you want to show her life, good, you've chosen good points, five, thirteen, eighteen, twenty-eight, you said fifty she's a Congresswoman, sixty-five, running for president?

ZEKE

It doesn't matter, it's all up for grabs.

HALLIE

No, this will work, it's a good frame. And Zeke, I want to play this woman, do you hear me?

ZEKE

Yeah, I hear you.

HALLIE

But only "If Cast" right? Okay, fair game. So let's look at her at fifty. What does this woman want at fifty? Tell me.

LEENYA

So are you trying to make me believe there was some woman before Eve? I am sure!

ZEKE

I'm not the one who wrote all those women, am I? You did.

LEENYA

(goes back to her notebook)

How do you spell Lilith?

HALLIE

That's generous of you, Zeke, but I don't think so. Look at the roles you've created since. Ida.

(more significantly)

Elena. Without me.

ZEKE

(reflects, realizes at last)

Artie gave them to me, in the same way that you gave me Hilda ...

(laughs)

... Trudy.

HALLIE

(not without jealousy)

Artie was Elena.

ZEKE

No, no, no, of course not, Artie was ... *(laughs)* ... a man, Artie was Art. But he gave me Elena. Huh! I'm just a medium, I'm ... nothing.

HALLIE

Oh, shut up. What does this woman want at fifty?

ZEKE

She wants ... to get back what she's lost.

HALLIE

Yes!

Zeke and Hallie go into thoughts. During the next Hallie makes notes. Zeke watches her with painful emotions.

CLAIR

(very timidly)

Could I offer you some advice?

LEENYA

You?

CLAIR

This business can destroy you. People like Zeke Rose are everywhere, and they want to use you but never touch, not really. You have to protect yourself. Do you want to know how I do it? I make believe I have a web, a protective web, an icy cool web of protective covering that nothing can get through. And when someone tries to get at me, I wrap the web around me, one layer at a time.

LEENYA

Is everyone in New York nuts?

CLAIR

(hurt, withdrawing)

It works.

LEENYA

And whatever works, huh?

CLAIR

(coming out again, timidly, bravely)

Can I tell you something else? Your nose is pretty. It's pretty in your face. And you shouldn't change it. And something else? It's not bad to be Jewish. And it's not bad to be *thought* Jewish. And honey, you're in New York now.

LEENYA

New York's not so great. And you guys think you run New York? I'm gonna take New York, and I'm gonna break New York. And Zeke Rose can— You know what I'm gonna tell him? I'll tell you what I'm gonna tell him. I'm gonna tell him, "You can't push me around. I've got more talent in my baby toe than Hallie Morgan or Clair Schwartz or anyone else you're ever going to lay your stupid eyes on." I'm acting my heart out and he's watching you. He doesn't think I see? What does he think, I'm stupid? That's what I'm going to tell him, and I'm going to tell him right now.

Leenya starts for the LobbyDoor again.

CLAIR

Leenya.

(Leenya stops.)

I don't think that's a good idea. If you want this part?

A short pause. Leenya returns to her seat for more deliberation.

ZEKE

Okay, try this—

(interrupts himself)

—by the way, I love the lesbian scene, what did you think?

HALLIE

Absolutely. That's your first act ending. What do you think of using Leenya and Clair?

ZEKE

Absolutely.

HALLIE

(not without jealousy)

Um hmm.

ZEKE

Leenya keeps surprising me, and Clair has ... something, don't you think?

HALLIE

Um hmm.

ZEKE

So try this, we come back from intermission, we jump ahead, she's fifty, her lover has died of ... ?

HALLIE

Best would probably be breast cancer.

ZEKE

Perfect, breast cancer, it's a hot lesbian topic right now, getting out the word to your friends. She's running for Congress.

HALLIE

Why do you have to kill off her lover?

ZEKE

Because lovers get— No, I don't have to kill off her lover. So, Lilith Lamour lives. And Sue Devine is fifty, and she's running for Congress, and her pimp shows up. And of course he tries blackmail.

HALLIE

Zeke ...

ZEKE

No, you're right that's facile. Her father shows up ...

HALLIE

Zeke.

ZEKE

(seeing from her face that it's something else)

What?

HALLIE

Zel will finish her MFA in December. She wants to come to New York. She wants to talk with you.

ZEKE

(gasps, would cry, but ... controls it)

She wants to talk to me?

HALLIE

She wants to work with you.

ZEKE

Oh, she wants to talk about work in theatre. She sent you to soften me up?

HALLIE

She doesn't know I'm here.

ZEKE

So, she's ... fifty, and she's running for Congress and her pimp, no we decided her father shows up—

HALLIE

Zeke, it's a step. She's coming to you. You hurt her like she hurt you. You gave her an ultimatum. she took it. Zeke, life is too short!

Zeke looks at her, makes up his mind to say something. But Hallie, who doesn't see this, moves into her agenda.

Zeke ... something else ... something I want the truth about. You can't imagine how many times I've wanted to come to you, how many times I've actually picked up the telephone, dialed numbers, but hung up. The very first time I heard about AIDS— my God it seems a lifetime ago — and they said it was attacking gay men, all I could think of was you. And then your letter. I had already been tested, I went down first thing. I knew I didn't have it, so probably you didn't. But then here comes your letter and then I wasn't sure. I should have answered but—

ZEKE

No, why should you, no answer was the answer I wanted, it meant everything was okay

HALLIE

Then when the Times article came out and it said right there in black and white that you were negative, that you were fine, it was such a relief, I could believe that. And I did. But I know you, Zeke. I don't think you've ever said one true word to the Times. When you asked me just now how I tested, you weren't sure. Because you've got it, don't you?

He musters a smile.

Oh, Zeke, Oh, Zeke, no.

She drops to her knees, pounds the floor with her hand.

ZEKE

Oh, you just learn to live with it, Hallie.

HALLIE

(looking up at him)

Have you been sick?

ZEKE

Not as sick as I'll probably be.

She cries. He goes to her, sits on the floor with her, embraces her.

ZEKE

Shhh, shhh, shhh. And you know, the new meds keep coming.

LEENYA

So what are you just ... sitting there, wrapping yourself up in your webs? Ugh.

Clair doesn't respond except to physically demonstrate, like a knowing teacher, how to wrap oneself in an icy web. Leenya, who will try anything, tries her own wrap. It works like a dance under Zeke's quote from Macbeth.

ZEKE

Listen, now, I know this disease, I've lived with it. Today you're one way, and tomorrow—
(chuckles)
...and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace from day to day—

HALLIE

Zeke, I don't want theatre!

ZEKE

No, listen now, it's truth; the old man really knew what he was writing about. Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time and all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle. Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

Leenya stands suddenly.

LEENYA

Darn it! No, I'm not going to sit here in any icy web. Zeke!

She exits through the LobbyDoor and re-enters through the StageDoor, Clair following her.

LEENYA

Okay, you. I've had it up to here with you. You can't push me around. I've got more talent in my baby toe than Hallie Morgan or—

She stops when she sees Hallie. Clair stops cold when she sees Zeke with Hallie crumpled in his arms together on the floor.

LEENYA

Jeez, Hallie! What's wrong? What'd you do to her?

ZEKE

Shhh, shhh, it's okay. It doesn't hurt.

Clair gasps, backs away through the StageDoor into the hallway, offstage.

CLAIR

(sobbing)

It doesn't hurt! It doesn't hurt!

Hoarse screaming and violent sounds of things crashing to the floor come from the hallway.

ZEKE

My God!

Both Hallie and Zeke go through the door to help Clair. But Zeke recoils back again in alarm at another outburst from Clair.

My God!

Zeke returns and goes to Leenya who has recoiled into a corner, trembling.

Leenya, what happened out there!

LEENYA

Nothing! She's nuts!

ZEKE

What did she say? Did she tell you anything?

LEENYA

No, she's nuts! Just about wrapping herself up in a web, this icy web.

ZEKE

(reaching for her)

Are you okay?

LEENYA

No! You guys are all nuts! New York is nuts! I want to go home.

Leenya tries to flee, but the only way is through the hallway where Clair is still screaming with Hallie trying to calm her. Leenya careens back into the stage area. Zeke grabs her, holds her firmly, but softly.

ZEKE

It's okay, it's okay. It's only a crazy day. You're going to forget about today and then you'll have tomorrow. Tomorrow... tomorrow is for getting better. And next time someone asks you about your most traumatic event, you tell them about your first day in New York City. Your first gig.

Hallie comes back in through StageDoor.

HALLIE

Zeke, she's calling for Daddy. Could you ...

ZEKE

Yeah, yeah. Here, take this one.

Hallie comes to Leenya as Zeke goes into the hallway. In a moment, we hear him singing the lullabye, "Hush, Little Baby, Don't Say a Word..."

HALLIE

(helping Leenya to a chair, speaking as though to a little girl)

Come on over here. What's wrong? What happened to you?

LEENYA

I don't like people screaming. No one in my house screams.

HALLIE

Well, I think the screaming's over. Listen, he's singing. That's better, isn't it?

LEENYA

Why were you crying? What did he do to you?

HALLIE

No, he didn't do anything. I just found out everything I've lost.

LEENYA

You didn't get the part? He's not going to give it to her, is he, she's nuts.

HALLIE

No, there's no part. Not yet.

LEENYA

Huh?

HALLIE

There's no play.

LEENYA

Yeah, it's called "Premiere", that's why we're here. Hey, you're not going nuts on me too, are you?

HALLIE

He's not happy with what he's written. We're going to work on it.

LEENYA

'Cause of me?

HALLIE

No. Actually he's thinking of rewriting it in order to cast you. He likes you.

LEENYA

Yeah, the way he yelled at me? Oh, I'm used to it, people getting all nuts, people all doing and saying funny things, all backing off and looking away and, I mean, how come, is my breath so bad or something? Like you, "I think I'll go to the ladies room." You didn't have to go to no ladies room, you just wanted to get away from me. So how come?

HALLIE

Stand over there.

LEENYA

So it IS my breath.

HALLIE

No, watch me.

Leenya stands in the center of the floor. Hallie does a very good and comic impersonation of Leenya, coming up to Leenya, standing too close, examining Leenya's nose. Leenya backs away.

LEENYA

Do I do that? God! I just want to be friendly.

HALLIE

(kindly)

You can be friendly without getting into somebody's skin.

Leenya readjusts, considers her whole being (as well as she can).

LEENYA

You know what, Hallie? Your nose is pretty in your face.

HALLIE

Well, thank you. I don't know where else I might put it.

LEENYA

You know what else? You made a big mistake when you let that man out of your life. I've seen a lot of men go by, and that man loves you.

HALLIE

Well, thank you for your words. My daughter is going to be coming to New York soon and— See, she's never really forgiven Zeke, but—

LEENYA

Well, she should just get over it too. She's got the rest of her life to live, and it's nice to have a father. God, what would I do without my father. He tells me I talk too much and nobody ever hears me, but he's still my dad. Life is too short, you know?

HALLIE

(fighting back tears)

Yes, yes it's too short.

Zeke enters.

ZEKE

Oh, wow.

HALLIE

How is she?

ZEKE

I think she's sleeping. Oh, that poor girl.

HALLIE

What?

ZEKE

Well, I was almost right on target. She... what a block. I mean it was like waves of memories, like photographs coming out of her.

HALLIE

What triggered it?

(to Leenya)

Did something happen out there?

ZEKE

No, it was you and me, it was the way we were on the floor together, the way I was holding you, the words I said, the exact words her father said. She was in her bedroom and—

Clair has entered behind him.

CLAIR

(almost calmly, understated, rather like her monologue)

I was in my bedroom. I heard my mother's voice. It sounded so calm, just like every day. "Ben, don't." That's all she said, just like that, "Ben, don't." And then I heard gunshots, three gunshots. I went into their bedroom. My father was holding my mother. He was touching these bullet holes in her nightgown. There was blood soaking into her gown all over her chest.

(sudden wave of distress)

Oh, mommy!

(becomes calm again)

And my father looked up at me and said, "It's all right. It doesn't hurt." Then he put the gun in his mouth.

(sudden wave of new remembrance, a soft scream)

Daddy! His head, bones and stuff and blood, splattered all over the wall, ran down the wall.

LEENYA

(going to her, embracing her)

Oh, Clair.

ZEKE

Come in and sit down. Hallie, can you get a wet cloth from the hallway? Under the sink, you know where it is.

CLAIR

Daddy, daddy, daddy.

ZEKE

(kneeling before Clair, holding her tightly, singing)

Hush little baby, don't say a word, papa's gonna buy you a mockingbird, if that's mockingbird don't sing—

CLAIR

Mommy.

Hallie returns with a wet cloth and takes Zeke's place in front of Clair. Zeke backs away as Hallie tends Clair.

CLAIR

Why did he do that? He loved her. I remember... I remember how much he loved her.

HALLIE

Maybe he loved her so much he had to take her with him.

CLAIR

But I need her. I need him. I'm too little.

Leenya takes Hallie's place in front of Clair. Hallie turns to find Zeke.

LEENYA

You know what, Clair? Clair, you know what? You know what? You know what I was thinking? ...

ZEKE

(overlapping Leenya)

My God, Hallie. What have I done? She's too little. Zel was too little.

HALLIE

She'll be all right.

LEENYA

...You know what I was thinking?

CLAIR

(more a sob)

What?

LEENYA

Hallie says Zeke doesn't have a play after all? But you know what? What's been going on tonight with us? This was really great stuff. That way we could all be in the play. Huh, Clair? And Zeke, you're trying to get through this actress's block, well boy, you got through in spades. You can use this.

ZEKE

Oh no, Leenya, you can't use someone's life like this.

LEENYA

But that's what you said, you said a playwright incorporates out of real life. And Clair can play herself.

ZEKE

But, but you can't ask an actress to go through something out of her own life like this, night after night.

CLAIR

(weakly)

But couldn't ...?

HALLIE

What?

CLAIR

What if Leenya played me? And I played Leenya.

LEENYA

Oooh, yes, yes, yes!

ZEKE

No, Clair—

HALLIE

But Zeke ... if Clair wants to ... It could be like play therapy, like—

LEENYA

Yeah, the shrinks do it, why not us? And I'd be real good at it, huh Clair?

HALLIE

We could ... change parts every night, couldn't we, Clair? And use improvization? And when we're doing five-year-olds, you'll have memories. The circus, remember?

CLAIR

The circus.

HALLIE

The park? The merry-go-round?

CLAIR

The merry-go-round.

LEENYA

Ken and Barbie, remember?

CLAIR

But I hate Ken and Barbie.

HALLIE

Then you don't have to remember them. And when you remember your father and mother, remember the good times. Remember the way they loved each other, the way they loved you. Your birthday party, remember?

CLAIR

Oh, yes. They loved me.

ZEKE

Okay then, okay. Leap with me. So we ...

(goes to adjust the lights)

... start in black. A single light comes up on Clair performing her monologue?

LEENYA

I'm Clair. It's "Premiere", the opening of my cocoon.

Leenya begins unwrapping the layers of icy web.

ZEKE

Meanwhile on the lobby side of the stage, Leenya comes in. What's your real name?

LEENYA

Clarabella Schmitzelheimer, but you're not going to put that in?

ZEKE

A playwright incorporates from real life. Enter Clarabella Schmitzelheimer. Hallie ...

Hallie picks up Leenya's suitcase and enters like a klutz.

HALLIE

It's "Premiere", startin' a new career!

ZEKE

Then the playwright's ex-wife comes in. Can you stand it, Hallie?

HALLIE

Only if I write her lines.

ZEKE

Deal. Clair, you want to?

CLAIR

(weakly but gamely)

The legendary Hallie Morgan in "Premiere", the rebirth of a career.

ZEKE

And then ...

(holding out his hands like God manipulating the three women with beams from his fingers)

... enter the playwright. "Premiere", birth, death, and resurrection.

LEENYA

And the next night we switch parts again!

(imitating Zeke's Godlike gesture)

And then ... enter the playwright. Hey, but wait, if the audition's for one woman any age, then you're always stuck as the playwright.

HALLIE

You could do it in drag!

ZEKE

Wow.

LEENYA

Oh yes, and the lesbian love scene!

ZEKE

It won't work with me in the nude!

LEENYA
This is fun, huh Clair?

HALLIE
This is! This is fun!

LEENYA
This is fucking fun!

ZEKE
Okay, okay, give me some quiet, and let me think.

LEENYA
What's to think about, Zeke? We gave you your play tonight.

HALLIE
We gave you your women, Zeke.

CLAIR
We are your women.

LEENYA
(surprised, reflective)
We are ... your women.

HALLIE
We ... are ...

LEENYA
We ... are ...

CLAIR
We ... are ...

Zeke contemplates the three women opposite him, joy alternating with trepidation. As the lights begin to fade, he utters...

ZEKE
Huh!

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK
THE END