SEXCAPADES

An Evening of One-Act Plays

by Sergei Task

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COITUS

A one-act play

by Sergei Task

CHARACTERS

HE, *a student playwright*
SHE, *a student actress*

TIME: Late afternoon.
PLACE: A small apartment.

NOTE: **Coitus**, the act of sexual intercourse, esp. between human beings. [<Latin: a coming together, uniting.]

(*A very tidy bedroom, save for a pile of clothes on the floor, which does not seem right. On a desk, a laptop computer with a glowing screen. On a couch, a couple is engaged in ferocious lovemaking.*)

HE

Is that it?

SHE

Mmmmm. Mmmmm.

HE

That's it?

SHE

Give it to me . . . yes . . . oh my God . . . oh my *God*.

HE

Ah . . . um . . . oh-oh-oh . . . Jeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!

SHE

Yes, yes, *yesssss*.

(*Residual commotion followed by a long silence. He takes a pack of Gauloise and an ashtray from the bed stand and lights a cigarette. She motions that she also wants one, and he lights it for her. They are puffing away languidly. Then*--)

SHE

Well.

HE

Yeah.

SHE

I tell you . . .

HE

Yeah?

SHE

It was like . . . you know.

HE

Uh-uhm.

SHE

Whew.

(*Beat*.)

SHE (Cont'd)

Strong stuff. (*puts out her cigarette*) Well. I'm going . . . lippety-lippety. (*she gets on her feet and loses her balance*) Oops! You get some rest, steam pump.

(*She goes to the bathroom. Having finished his cigarette, he collects her clothes scattered on the floor and routinely hangs them in the closet, next to his. He wraps himself up in a bed sheet, sits down at the computer and continues to work on something that appears to have been interrupted by this little tryst. After a while the girl is back dressed in man's bathrobe.*)

SHE

Already betraying me with this little thing?

HE

Don't tell me you're jealous.

SHE

Beware of Medea! (*He goes to the bathroom, humming a tune. She sits down at the computer and reads.*) **She: "Interesting play." He: "Thanks." She: "Do you fuck as intensely as you write?"** (*to him, loudly*) Bastard. These are my words!

HE

(*from the bathroom*)

They are?

SHE

Don't get smart with me. It's exactly what I asked you after the reading!

HE

Hm.

SHE

Only I didn't say fuck.

HE

(*appears in the doorway*)

I had to revise it.

SHE

Really.

HE

Sounds more . . . intense. What do you think?

SHE

What do *I* think? I think you're one fucking snoopy son of a bitch.

HE

Yeah, well--

(*Pause. She is reading the script.*)

SHE

You squeeze as much as you can out of it, huh?

HE

I'm sorry.

SHE

The hell you are. (*a sudden thought*) Are you saying you're going to describe in detail how--?

HE

I'll make the coffee.

SHE

I asked you a question.

HE

What was the question?

SHE

You're not really going to recap how we, you know . . . or are you?
(*he shrugs in response*) You shmuck.

HE

. . . wait a m. . .

SHE

I can't believe it!

HE

Wait--listen--listen to me--look. I'm not even using real names--

SHE

Thank you. Thank you very much.

HE

Aw, come on. Everything is going to look different on paper, can't you see?

SHE

Sure.

HE

. . . plotted out, distilled . . .

SHE

Whereas here it was messy, dirty. Where are my clothes? Where are they?

HE

. . . I . . . (*he points to the closet*)

SHE

(*incredulous*)

You hung them in the *closet*? Are you Mother Goose or something?
(*she is getting dressed without as much as a word*)

HE

(*watching her*)

It's from the army. The Red army. If they saw one crease on the bed spread, they sent you off to play chess . . . a euphemism for cleaning floors in the latrine. They usually have checkered tiles. I learned to sew white collars on my fatigues every day. Clean the buckle on my belt until it gleaned. Pluck hairs off my ears.

SHE

No.

HE

The sergeant wanted us to look like his darling babies. I think he was gay.

SHE

Gays can serve in the army there?

HE

Actually they don't say "gay" there, they say "blue." But everyone was supposed to be red, as far as the Soviet army was concerned. They didn't look in your pants--at least not on a regular basis.

(*Beat*.)

SHE

Are you saying . . . ?

HE

Practical jokes, you know.

SHE

Poor thing. When did you move here?

HE

Oh. Three years.

SHE

And then you began writing in English?

HE

Kind of.

SHE

Kind of?

(*Pause*.)

HE

You eat pancakes?

SHE

Sometimes.

HE

How do you like them?

SHE

Well done. Why?

HE

I used to fry the Russian side of my pancakes first, then I would flip them over on the English side.

SHE

You mean . . . the translation routine?

HE

Right.

SHE

But you don't do it anymore?

HE

No.

SHE

Does it feel different?

HE

(*reaching under her pullover*)

You bet.

(*They kiss.*)

SHE

So what do you think about my breasts? Linguistically speaking?

HE

Let me see. I like that well rounded phrase with a little arrogant exclamation mark . . . if I can pull one off.

SHE

A line from a future play?

HE

Want to censor it?

SHE

Depends on--

HE

--whose breasts I'm going to feature in the production?

SHE

Well . . . .

HE

The part is yours.

(*Pause.*)

SHE

(*disengages herself*)

I'm not sure.

HE

You're not sure.

SHE

It's not you, OK?

HE

(*loading the coffee maker, his back to her*)

No?

SHE

I can't play myself, can I?

HE

Why not?

SHE

Why not indeed.

HE

It's a challenge.

SHE

Yeah.

HE

It is.

SHE

Bullshit.

HE

I want you to leave.

SHE

What--?

HE

I want you to leave and make your entrance and say what you said (*he glances at his watch*) half an hour ago.

SHE

What did I say?

HE

You said, "It didn't take me *too* long?" Take it easy. We'll improvise.

SHE

Take it easy yourself.

(*She exits. He gets into bed with a paperback. A tentative knock.*)

HE

I could've grown a beard. (*loudly*) **It's open!**

(*She re-enters.*)

SHE

It didn't take me *too* long? (*pause*) What?

HE

You want me to get the whole picture?

SHE

What are you talking about?

HE

How you showered and shaved your legs while you were on the phone with a friend and then you went to borrow a pill from a neighbor because you ran out . . . .

SHE

You got all that from one innocent line?

HE

If anything, it was not innocent. You sounded like a pro.

SHE

Is that right?

HE

I mean your character sounded like a--

SHE

Foul play.

HE

. . . I apologize . . .

SHE

There are things you don't bring up. Even if they are true.

HE

So I was close?

SHE

That's not the fucking point.

HE

Being professional?

SHE

I call it trespassing.

HE

That's our job. I didn't make the rules.

SHE

Meaning there are none?

HE

Like you said: That's not the fucking point. You don't like it, you land a better job.

SHE

Playing tough, eh?

HE

I am not! I'm not playing tough, for heaven's sake! This is about truth, don't you get it? That fucking come-and-get-me tease! You follow her all the way bedazzled by her baboon privates and

HE (Cont'd)

just when you think you've got your chance she's probably mating with a jerk who doesn't even care. Jesus! I must sound like Rush Limbaugh. Hey, wait! Where you going?

SHE
(*stops at the door*)

Shall I try again?

HE

Try . . . ? Oh *that*. Why don't we skip the foreplay? Cut to the chase.

SHE

You mean--?

HE
(*points to bed*)

Act Two.

(*Pause.*)

SHE

You suggest that we rehearse lovemaking?

HE

Why not?

SHE

Do all the blocking?

HE

If you want the part.

SHE

This is it? Now can I laugh?

HE

Listen. There is this scene in the play--well, there *will* be a scene --where they make love. So I proposed working on it--anything wrong with that?

SHE

I think someone here is not quite right upstairs.

HE

OK.

SHE

Really.

HE

If you say so.

SHE

Take it easy, young man. You'll live.

HE

Doctor, won't you please elaborate--?

SHE

Simple: we've just done it.

HE

So you can’t come again.

SHE

Very funny.

HE

I'm trying to follow your train of thought.

SHE

(*exaggerated patience*)

It's us. You and me.

HE

So?

SHE

So. We can't pretend it's all "acting," don't you see? As if it's not real.

HE

(*enchanted by the idea*)

True feelings, yes! I'm all for it!

SHE

It's not theatre, it's--

HE

Yes?

SHE

--it's shameless exhibitionism in front of an unknowing audience.

HE

So they *will* know.

SHE

But the cost!

HE

The cost? (*thinks it over for a moment*) Four dollars for students, five for adults. I find that reasonable for a real eye-opener. Personally, I wouldn't charge senior citizens. With their experience, they might even give us some tips.

SHE

Aha. So it *was* a joke, I see.

HE

(*draws her closer*)

Shhh, shhh.

SHE

Let go!

HE

We're stuck.

SHE

Don't make me laugh.

HE

Sit . . .

SHE

Who the hell do you think--?

HE

. . . please . . . (*she sits down, reluctantly*) I need you.

SHE

Ha!

HE

I mean it.

SHE

My Dad used to say that when I tried to sneak out of the house. Minong. Population 557. You missed your period, you were the talk of the town. And if I *were* smart enough to sneak out, the only place to go would be a diner. *The* diner. (*he crosses to the counter to make their drinks*) It's where you put your fortunes at stake. The dice, they smelled of licorice. What a game! The loser paid for the drinks. *Soft* drinks. The most memorable event of the week. Minong, Wisconsin. The ultimate paradise in your rear-view mirror. If anything can still make me run for my life it's that old familiar I-need-you routine.

HE

Here. (*he is holding two cups*)

SHE

What is this?

HE

Black Russian.

SHE

(*takes a sip*)

Wow.

HE

Kahlua and vodka. Well?

SHE

Well. (*they clink and drink*) Why would you need me anyways?

HE

Forget it.

SHE

Come on.

HE

You won't believe it.

SHE

I'll believe anything, my dear. Just warn me in advance.

HE

You see, experience . . .

SHE

What?

HE

. . . I write from experience. I don't concoct, I don't fantasize, I *go* for "it."

SHE

And--bang!--you *came*. See, and you thought I wouldn't get it.

HE

We may horse around, but that's what life is all about. It's what they go for: blood, sweat, and tears. Not some soap opera for dispepsic viewers--the real thing that hits you in the guts.

SHE

To put it bluntly, you need to prime your pipe to get your story going.

HE

If "blunt" is what you're looking for.

SHE

What are *you* looking for?

(*Pause.*)

HE

A model, I think, is a better way to put it. A model you sketch and draw and paint in private until you’re ready to display her charms to connoisseurs.

SHE

Very subtle. I'm afraid I didn't sit much.

HE

You were the best.

SHE

How many seances do you think it will take?

HE

One never knows. Five . . . ten . . . Is there a problem?

SHE

Let me see. (*she opens her memo pad*) Monday I can't. Tuesday I take two tests so I doubt I'll be up to it. Wednesday . . . I have a window between 2:15 and 3:00. You think we could squeeze it in?

HE

Hardly.

SHE

Yeah. How about Thursday? Nah, Thursday I go to Des Moines about my car insurance. Friday. Friday should be perfect. Classes are over by three, we could have dinner somewhere and then just hit the sack. You could fuck me--I mean *paint* me--till you drop dead. Damn it! Nicole, my sister, is gonna be in town. Bad luck.

HE

What about the weekend?

SHE

(*gives him a strange look*)

The weekend?

HE

Yes. Saturday, Sunday.

SHE

You think we could do it on the weekend?

HE

Why not?

SHE

I don't know. Somehow it doesn't feel right.

HE

It doesn't . . . I don't get it.

SHE

Look. Ours is a business relationship, right? Weekend is leisure time. It's when everyone else is doing it spontaneously and we simply cannot afford it.

HE

Now wait a minute, wait a. . . How are we different from everyone else? All it takes is being hungry.

SHE

(*suspiciously*)

Being hungry?

HE

Exactly. You're hungry, you help yourself.

SHE

(*shocked*)

You mean doing it for kicks?

HE

And why not?

SHE

You really don't get it or are you pulling my leg?

HE

. . . as a matter of fact . . .

SHE

Use your profession as a screen for idle lust?

HE

Hmn.

SHE

As a lame excuse?

HE

All right, all right!

SHE

It's gross.

HE

I take it back, OK? I never looked at it that way, I'm sorry. And, yes, it's a point well taken. Anyway . . . next week?

SHE

I'll be in Chicago for auditions.

HE

You must be a sadist.

SHE

Sorry.

HE

(*after an ominous pause*)

So what do I do? There's a timeline, you see.

SHE

What's the timeline?

HE

May. I have to produce it in time for the festival. So the script is due the end of April. At the latest.

SHE

Pooh. You may as well forget it, as far as I'm concerned. (*pause*)

HE

You can't walk out on me!

SHE

Listen--

HE

No *you* listen. This project, it's been approved. I got the money, I got the studio, even the date of the premiere has been set, for Pete's
sake! Who do you think I am? An asshole?

SHE

Calm down.

HE

Her sister's gonna be in town! Here's to an all-American sex-free day!

SHE

You're nuts.

HE

Holy Jesus!

SHE

Don't be a wimp. There's always a solution.

HE

Solution my ass!

SHE

Wait--

HE

What?

(*Pause*.)

SHE

It's crazy.

HE

Huh?

SHE

Forget it.

HE

Say it!

SHE

I don't even know how it crossed my mind. Well . . . I could talk to my sister.

HE

Your sister.

SHE

I can't guarantee anything.

HE

But you could talk to her?

SHE

I guess I could.

HE

How old is she?

SHE

Does it matter?

HE

No. I guess it doesn't.

SHE

Seventeen.

HE

Seventeen?

SHE

She's come of age, if that's what you were thinking.

HE

It's not what I was thinking. Is she a virgin?

SHE

At seventeen? Who is a virgin at seventeen these days!

HE

Is that an answer to my question?

SHE

It's a general statement.

HE

Get it straight: it's about fucking art, not the art of fucking. I have a business relationship, I finish my play, it's over. No strings attached. I don't mess with some cherry who’s going to hold me responsible for her husband's impotence and her lousy extramarital sex.

SHE

And why should you?

HE

So back to first base: Is she a virgin?

SHE

No. (*pause*) Yes.

HE

I'll pass. She wouldn't go for it anyway.

SHE

How do *you* know?

HE

A cherry? With a total stranger?

SHE

Not a *total* stranger. She saw you last fall when she came to visit. At the Monday night in-house reading.

(*It takes him a few moments to pin her down.*)

HE

That puny thing? You're kidding, she must be thirteen!

SHE

Don't be ridiculous, she'll be sixteen in October.

HE

I thought I heard seventeen.

SHE

I must have been thinking of Lisa. Lisa is seventeen.

HE

Hey, what is this, the Woman's National Figure Skating Championship? And your third sister will be what--twelve?

SHE

You have options, Mr. Grumble?

HE

You know I don't, which is what makes your teasing all the more insulting.

SHE

Teasing! Didn't I say I was gonna talk to her?

HE

If you *are* serious then you're not being realistic.

SHE

Are you listening? She saw you, she liked you!

HE

She liked me.

SHE

Weird, huh?

HE

She liked me?

SHE

Imagine that.

HE

As a playwright?

SHE

Frankly, I doubt she cares much about your play. Or any other play, for that matter.

HE

So she liked me as a--?

SHE

As a man, yes.

HE

She told you that herself?

SHE

Who else.

HE

Hm.

SHE

I'm her big sister, she listens to me. Not that I would ever dream of pushing her into this, you understand.

HE

Right.

SHE

But she'll tell me if, for whatever reasons, she chooses to go for it.

HE

She wouldn't.

SHE

Maybe she will.

HE

Never.

SHE

She might.

HE

No.

SHE

Yes!

HE

Not for love or money.

SHE

Yes she would! She will! I know it!

HE

How do you know?

SHE

'Cause she told me, dummy.

HE

How could she tell you before you even asked her?

SHE

I didn't have to *ask* her. She said it to me in the middle of that stupid *reading* six months ago.

(*Beat*.)

HE

You’re saying . . . Are you saying that you slept with me so that she could--?

SHE

Now you know.

HE

(*after a short pause*)

Come on. I bet you just made it up.

SHE

You may win the title of Major League nitwit before you know it.

HE

Why would she need a go-between? She wanted it so badly, she could--

SHE

Yes?

HE

I don't know. There are lots of ways a girl can--

SHE

Not when you're seventeen . . .

HE

. . . fifteen . . .

SHE

. . . *sixteen* and a virgin and highly selective about the person she's going to--

HE

Oh brother. I'm the Lucky Prince on whom she's going to bestow her virginity.

SHE

She may be a little fussy about it but isn't that what rubs the ego of you men? Come on, admit it. You are flattered to be the chosen one.

HE

Said Abraham to his son Isaac as he picked up his axe.

SHE

Big deal. It’s not gonna kill you.

(*Pause.*)

HE

How long's she gonna be around?

SHE

As long as you need her to keep the project alive. She has an extreme sense of responsibility.

HE

You must like her a lot.

SHE

I'd do anything for her.

HE

Well. I don't know.

SHE

She needs you, you need her, it's perfect. And come to think of it: you may be the first man ever to reach twin climax--in life and in a play. It's a win-win situation.

HE

Hm.

SHE

Are you going to work on a daily basis?

HE

If she can handle it.

SHE

Can *you* handle it?

HE

I have to meet the deadline.

SHE

Of course.

HE

Look, do you mind if I . . . . (*he points at the computer*)

SHE

Go ahead. I was about to leave anyway.

HE

No no no. Please. It's eh . . . just a thought. Won't you finish your coffee?

SHE

I may as well.

(*A long pause. She is sipping her coffee, he is expertly running his fingers across the keyboard. Then*--)

HE

Funny.

SHE

What?

HE

This whole thing.

SHE

Yes?

HE

I could utilize it.

SHE

You could utilize it?

HE

It's a veritable play. A writer starts an affair. He is using this girl. Until he finds out *she* was using *him*. Then this other girl comes forward. You know. It's quite a plot.

SHE

The other girl?

HE

The real thing. Her sister.

SHE

Her sister?

HE

Nicole.

SHE

There's no Nicole, I thought you knew it all along.

HE

You mean--?

SHE

I made her up five minutes ago.

HE

How witty. (*pause*)

SHE

You know this show I'm in?

HE

Which one?

SHE

Set in the Bronx? Late sixties?

HE

So?

SHE

I play this girl who is not there. Lives in her dream world. Mixes facts and fiction. Well . . . I work on my character, I make things up.

HE

(*a short pause*)

Not bad. Not bad at all.

SHE

You think it's a joke?

HE

No. I think it's a *good* joke.

SHE

Here. (*she produces a notebook from the pocket of her slacks*)

HE

What's that?

SHE

Character study.

HE

(*turning pages*)

Huh . . . well . . . really . . .

SHE

See?

HE

Yep. So who was that puny thing anyway?

SHE

Daughter of the girl I share the apartment with. She was my responsibility that day so I took her along with me. I should've known better. Five minutes through the reading, and her ears were the color of your national flag.

HE

I didn't know there was someone underage until I was finished.

SHE

You're not mad at me?

HE

No.

SHE

Didn't mean to offend you.

HE

No offense taken.

SHE

Friends?

HE

Friends.

SHE

(*a sigh of relief*)

For a moment, you know, I thought you could kill me.

HE

Uh-uh.

SHE

You had that face.

HE

Yeah?

SHE

Like, Lady, you're in trouble!

HE

No no. You took me in completely, and . . . I'm thrilled.

SHE

A while ago someone implied I was a bad actress.

HE

Who? I?

SHE

Said I sounded like a pro.

HE

I meant "professional."

SHE

You meant "prostitute."

HE

Absolutely not! You're a marvel. I'm taking my hat off to you. I mean it. At any rate, we are even.

SHE

Even?

HE

You were late for today's reading.

SHE

Five minutes.

HE

You missed the announcement.

SHE

What announcement?

HE

That Mike Lipshit was meeting with his agent to negotiate a deal with Universal. You ever heard of a Lipshitz who's lost his "z" down the road?

SHE

(*ignores it*)

So?

HE

So he couldn't read his play. So he asked me to read it for him. So I did. We are best friends, you know. (*Pause.*)

SHE

Lottery?

HE

Mmm.

SHE

It's not your play?

HE

Uh-uh.

SHE

You stole your friend's limelight.

HE

I confess my sin, Mother Superior.

SHE

You *are* a jerk, and you can quote me on that.

HE

Not in bed though?

SHE

No, not in bed.

HE

Why, thank you. The game *was* worth the candle, don't you think?

SHE

I don't know. I need some time to get my thoughts together.

HE

Speaking of time, we should get out of here before he's back. (*he crosses to closet to dress up*)

SHE

Who?

HE

Mike. (*Beat.*)

SHE

It's *his* apartment?

HE

His apartment, his bathrobe, his computer. His bed too. I couldn't possibly invite you to where I live.

SHE

You stole everything from your best friend.

HE

As a matter of fact, he gave me the key so that I can use his laptop once in a while. But the news that I screwed his aficionado in his own bed might upset him.

SHE

So you'd rather not tell him?

HE

There is a proverb in my home country: "Simplemindedness is worse than stealing." He is a very nice kid even if he is abhorrently tidy, as you have shrewdly noticed. (*he begins to make the bed, she joins him a moment later*) I hope he struck this deal with Universal. They'll rent him a place on location, you know, so he can do the rewrites--

SHE

--while you work on *your* play in *his* bed.

HE

Well let's just look at it objectively in terms of acting space. Isn't it perfect? I mean it's just right for two--maybe even three actors.

SHE

I see your point.

(*She collects their cups. She will rinse them in the sink, put them away and wipe the counter.*)

HE

And?

SHE

You think your artistic method will be readily accepted by Actors' Equity?

HE

Are *you* ready to accept it?

SHE

Do I have a contract?

HE

We'll work something out.

SHE

I'm sure we will.

HE

We can discuss it over the dinner. How about The Kitchen?

SHE

Sounds good.

HE

Then off we go? (*he lights a cigarette, sitting on couch*)

SHE

What about the computer?

HE

What about it?

SHE

Aren't you worried that Mike is going to read your notes? The things we did, the things we said. . . ?

HE

(*with surprising indifference*)

It's all fiction. If he can use it--fine. In a sense, it all belongs to him, right?

(*Sitting beside him, she borrows his cigarette, takes a drag, gives it back to him.*)

SHE

The notes?

HE

Yes.

SHE

But not me?

HE

No, not you. Definitely not you.

(*Lights fade to half. As a song* Froggie Went A-Courtin' *picks up, we see a red glow of a cigarette being passed back and forth in the dark. It could be the end of the play, but it isn't. Lights go up again.*)

HE

Well?

SHE

I didn't see any problems.

HE

I said *things*. There appear to be *things* that may *lead* to a problem.

SHE

Not to *my* knowledge.

HE

You don't have to walk on tiptoe around me.

SHE

I'm not walking on tiptoe around you! You may of course change a thing or two, I mean if you feel like it, but it's definitely moving in the--

HE

A thing or two, huh?

SHE

Oh don't get paranoid.

HE

No no no, *tell* me.

SHE

There's nothing to tell, really.

HE

No "emotionally inadequate behavior" this time, I promise.

SHE

Well--

HE

Fire out.

SHE

I don't know. Little things like--

HE

Yes?

SHE

--Mike Lipchitz.

HE

Mike Lipchitz?

SHE

He's our landlord.

HE

So?

SHE

The guy in your play is screwing “his aficionado” in “his” apartment--so?

HE

He’ll never know.

SHE

You gonna shoot him in the foyer?

HE

(*covers his stomach in mock fright*)

“They shot me in the foyer!” (*he is doing an imitation of their landlord*) He’ll think the foyer is French for the underbelly. Are you kidding? The man’s never been to a live show.

SHE

Honey--

HE

Okay, I’ll make it Zissimopoulos. What the hell, they’re going to skin me alive anyway. It’s a big joke! It’s not touching, it’s not funny--

(*She hugs and rocks him like a little child*.)

SHE

Shhhh, shhhh.

HE

(*voice muffled*)

It’s stilted, it’s tacky--

SHE

No.

HE

--it’s clunky, it’s fuzzy, it’s sleazy, it’s schlocky, it’s--

SHE

Shhh, baby.

HE

I could choke on my own words.

SHE

Not if you saw the last rehearsals. We tried things out when she comes from the bathroom--whew!

(*He raises his head showing some interest*.)

HE

Yes?

SHE

It's dynamite.

HE

Hmn.

SHE

It's shaping up faster than you know it.

HE

Right. I had a thought about her Minong, Wisconsin monologue. (*he chuckles*) *Really* weird.

SHE

You just keep fishing where the fish are biting.

HE

Speaking of fish.

SHE

Mmm?

HE

I love you, trout.

SHE

Love you, mackerel.

(*He sprawls out comfortably on the bed in his shoes*.)

Honey? Do you realize that the only time you ever made this bed was when we here worked on your play today?

(*He ignores it*.)

HE

There's one other thing.

SHE

(*with a sigh*)

Yes?

HE

That opening scene--?

SHE

Their lovemaking.

HE

Right. I've been thinking . . .

SHE

Oh.

HE

Like, the chemistry?

SHE

Go ahead.

HE

It's all so . . . *rehearsed*, you know what I'm saying? Like you guys are really *working* on it. Take us. *We* don't work on it do we? It just . . . happens, I guess.

SHE

You want to throw it out?

HE

As a matter of fact--

SHE

You know what they'll say. They'll say you chickened out.

HE

Come on . . .

SHE

No fancy stuff with my dear little wifie.

HE

That's bull!

SHE

It's theater. People talk.

HE

Well that's exactly out of the play: shameless exhibitionism in front of the--

(*Telephone rings.*)

SHE

Sorry, hon.

(*She gets it.*)

Hello? Oh how do you do. (*she covers the mouthpiece*) It's Lipchitz. (*into phone*) Yes. Oh thank you, thank you very . . . (*to husband*) Shoot. He knows about the show. (*into phone*) Yes, that's correct, a week from now. Friday. Are you really? Oh that's wonderful. (*to husband*) That asshole's gonna fuck it up! (*into phone*) Maybe we can, eh, (*bravely*) give you a complimentary tick--*two* tickets, of course. Oh, no trouble at all, we'll be delighted to . . . What is it about? Oh,

boy meets girl, girl meets boy, you know . . . Actually, at his *friend*'s apartment, but she doesn't . . . (*her smile wilts, replaced by a growing dismay*) Mr. Lipchitz . . . Mr. Lip. . . shit. . .

HE
(*alarmed*)

What?

SHE
(*into phone*)

You see, my husband didn't use *your* name, sir. It's a coincidence, a very *unhappy* coincidence, but we're going to take good care of it, sir. In fact he has already changed it to . . . to . . . (*she desperately motions for a clue, but neither of them is able to think of a single name*) So there's really no . . . What do you mean he doesn't have to?

(*Her face assumes an expression of utter disbelief.*)

HE
(*panicky*)

What?!?

SHE
(*into phone*)

I see. I see. That's a very brave decision, sir. (*to husband*) He's changing *his* name. . . .

CURTAIN

ANTHROPOIDS

A one-act play

by Sergei Task

CHARACTERS

BIG BEN
CHI CHI
ZA ZA
CINDY
SANDY

(*In the darkness, we hear a campy potpourri of popular tunes, then loud cheers. Lights come up. We see the Great Ape House. Floor covered with mats. Ropes and flying trapezes dangle from the ceiling. A high platform, up left. Down left and right, lie ski poles. Center stage, a stack of books and magazines; torn-out pages are scattered around.*

With cheerful cries, actors dressed in unitards swing on the ropes and trapezes, do leapfrog and cartwheels and somersaults. Sounds of the zoo, at first barely recognizable, then increasing in volume, finally arrest their attention. Actors stop their pranks and give ear to the animal sounds; their shoulders sag, they stoop, etc., transforming into monkeys.

This goes on for a while until BIG BEN *gives a warning grunt. They come forward, pick up ski poles and, one after another, with a hateful, embittered scream, drive them into the floor, upright, to form two rows of cage bars.*

Blackout.

Lights up again. We see the two smaller gorillas, CINDY *and* SANDY*, facing the audience. As far as these two are concerned, there is no audience, not yet. The zoo is to open in about half an hour.*

SANDY *is scratching* CINDY'S *back with the remarkable precision of someone who has been doing it for years. She must be secretly enjoying it, in her own way, judging by how she shifts her body, signaling another sensitive spot.*

Excited grunts and howls from the adjacent cage suggest that breakfast has arrived. The two gorillas seem to pay no attention; their expression is that of aloofness and quiet melancholy.)

ATTENDANT
(*offstage*)
Easy, easy. There's enough for everyone. Hey, what do you think you're doing? Stop it! Now. I'm *not* giving you your bananas until you say how sorry you are. (*whimpering sounds*) Are you ashamed? (*more whimpers*) All right. I want my belt back, and someone better zip my pants before I really get cross.

CINDY
What's so special about them? (*pause*) I'm talking about them orangs? (*pause*) He treats them like Chinese mandarins.

(SANDY *is scratching her back.*)

I'm not even sure they are from China. (*she shifts her body*) That is *Imperial* China. Confucius, koans . . . you know.

SANDY
Want me to do your butt?

(*She half-rises to allow him better access.*)

CINDY
Boy, can they be mean! Remember that story? The Murder on . . . whatever. Edgar Allan Poe.

(*She sits up, thus indicating the scratching routine is over. She picks up torn-out pages from the floor and reads at random. He lights a cigar, puffs away, then offers it to her.*)

SANDY

Wanna try a Cuban? They are the best.

CINDY

You want me to throw up again.

SANDY

Nah. You got sick on dope. Dope is *hello*cinogenic.

CINDY

Hell o' *what*?

(*He rummages through his books stacked up downstage.*)

SANDY

I think it's Latin.

CINDY

You looked it up?

SANDY

Za Za told me.

(*Pause. She reshuffles the pages in what she thinks is the right order, then scans them as she speaks.*)

CINDY

How would *she* know?

SANDY

She and Big Ben, they did drugs in L.A. before they were moved
up here. Went into therapy. It was pretty bad. You could be a retard, you know.

CINDY

What about you?

SANDY
(*reluctantly*)

Me too. Unless my Mom's Chi Chi.

(*He picks up a telephone directory and begins to read it, while she goes down on all fours looking for a missing page.*)

CINDY

She didn't do drugs?

SANDY

She comes from Albuquerque. So-so zoo, very tight security. A man slipped a candy through the bars, they cut his balls off.

CINDY

No kidding.

SANDY

You might like it. (SANDY *passes her the cigar,* CINDY *takes a puff, goes into a coughing fit. He pats her on the back.*) There, there.

(*Enter* CHI CHI *from what appears to be a shelter in the same cage, upstage. She wears a poncho, red glass beads and a charm bracelet. She is peeling a banana.*)

CHI CHI

(*suspiciously*)

What's going on here? Cindy, you can spare me your little spectacle. (CINDY *takes offense and retreats to the far corner where she produces hair ribbons and sets to work on her "weirdo."* SANDY *smartly sits on his cigar.* CHI CHI *gives him the once-over.*) You may not realize it, but we are opening in (*glances at her one-dollar watch*) half an hour. (*about to leave*)

SANDY

Chi Chi?

CHI CHI

(*munching*)

Hmm?

SANDY

Why do you say we?

CHI CHI

(*points at her banana*)

Because I have a sense of responsibility. (*She smells something in the air, crosses to* SANDY *and sniffs him all over.*) Sandy?

SANDY

What?

CHI CHI

You stink.

SANDY

I'll ask them to smuggle in a bottle of shampoo.

CHI CHI

Wise guy.

(*She exits. Pause.*)

SANDY

She's so damn self-righteous I feel like I'm frying in hell.

CINDY

It's only a cigar.

SANDY

Eh? (*He retrieves the stub from under his seat and buries it in the sand, then opens the directory again.*) Another work day, huh?

(CINDY *comes over*.)

CINDY

Sandy--

SANDY

Mmm?

CINDY

Do we have to do it . . . upside down?

(*She gives him a nudge to make him look at her weird hairdo, he does, without much interest, and goes back to his reading*.)

SANDY

Tut tut tut.

CINDY

It's so--

SANDY

You think *I* like it?

CINDY

Then why--

(*Having finished the page, he tears it out without taking his eyes off the next one*.)

SANDY

'Cause they pay for it. They are primitive, they are dumb, but they are eager to learn. Why do you think we attract the biggest crowd?

CINDY

I'm not sure.

SANDY

You saw that watch on Chi Chi's wrist?

CINDY

Anyone can steal a watch.

SANDY

Well she didn't. It was a tip for her performance. And was she good!

CINDY

Phew. (*pulls a headband over her ears*) I think I'm going to wear this.

SANDY

(*looking up briefly*)

I don't care.

CINDY

Maybe you do.

(*He slams the book shut*.)

SANDY

You want me to be jealous of some sucker in Bermuda shorts who doesn't even have hair on his chest?

CINDY

(*changing subject*)

I think you lied to me about--what's that word again?

SANDY

Which one?

CINDY

It starts with a "V."

SANDY

Oh yes. (*looks it up*) Voyeurism.

CINDY

It doesn't make sense. I mean it's like watching someone else eat a lollipop while your mouth is watering.

SANDY

Which is exactly what we did when we spied on our folks.

CINDY

I didn't enjoy it.

SANDY

Of course.

CINDY

It may have been . . . informative, but such a grind.

SANDY

One learns to appreciate these things.

CINDY

The beauty of it?

SANDY

Why not.

CINDY

The high art?

SANDY

Yes.

(CINDY *retrieves dirty cards from a little cache under the mat.*)

CINDY

Hmn . . . there must be something to it.

(*Cards are falling down, she does not seem to notice.* SANDY *is promptly on his knees anxious to put the cards away before he is caught red-handed.*)

SANDY

Thief!

CINDY

Pervert!

(*Enter* BIG BEN, *a striking stud. He is stretching after a nap. Young monkeys freeze.*)

BIG BEN

Shoo.

(SANDY *hastily retreats.* BIG BEN *collects the cards and studies them reflectively, paying no attention to the young monkeys bickering in the background.*)

BIG BEN (Cont'd)

Well. Try that out and you'll wind up in the emergency room. Now *this* would work--with some skill and Penzoil. Big Ben done it all. Gimme a sleeve joint with a reverse thread, and I'll screw my way into it. Come over, Sandy boy!

(SANDY *approaches him timidly.* CINDY *grabs the end of a dangling rope and begins to sway, watching the other two from afar.* BIG BEN *gives* SANDY *a box on the ear.*)

SANDY

Ow!

BIG BEN

Where'd you get ’em?

SANDY

I--

BIG BEN

The truth!

SANDY

Mr. Finch.

BIG BEN
(*shuffling cards*)

Your new pal. He'll teach you. Cripples are the worst kind. I'll be damned if he didn't show you X-rated movies. Hunh? Sure. (*smacks* SANDY *who has offered his ear dutifully*) They don't know nothin’. Except what they learned from us apes. (*louder, for* CINDY'S *benefit*) Evolution my ass. Your Darwin wouldn't stand a chance against marsupial rats, fuckwise.

(CINDY *snorts.* BIG BEN *spreads the cards like a fan.*)

'Cause them humans live in this shitty--

(*He turns to* CINDY *for help.*)

CINDY

Habitat.

(BIG BEN *motions for* SANDY *to make his pick.* SANDY *sheepishly takes a card.*)

SANDY
(*mumbles*)

Habitat . . .

BIG BEN

There.

SANDY

What about our habitat?

BIG BEN

We’re here by choice. Nothing to be ashamed of.

SANDY

Their choice.

BIG BEN

Only because we let ’em. We allow ourselves to get caught to save the human--

(*He turns to* CINDY *for help.*)

CINDY

Species.

(BIG BEN *has spread the cards, and* SANDY *takes one*.)

SANDY
(*mumbles*)

Species?

BIG BEN

--species from biological death.

CINDY

Why would they die? According to recent--

BIG BEN
(*solemnly*)

'Cause they don't know how. We’re here to give it to them--A to Z. Sheer and clear. They’re dumb, OK? You wanna kill ’em for that? Next thing we’ll see a pack of fucked-up sex-crazed bipeds start a demolition derby. Ain't there enough wackoes running loose?

(CINDY *jumps off the rope and crosses to him.*)

CINDY

I don’t have to make a fool of myself so they can learn about lovemaking! It's not my idea of enlightenment. And I hate their cheap tokens of affection!

(*She dumps her headband and storms out. Beat.* BIG BEN *stands up.*)

BIG BEN

Smart bitch. What's wrong with you guys? Since when has it become hard labor? You need days off? You need a sanitarium to recoup? I been twenty years on the job, I know the ins and outs, and here’s my friendly message: fuck you. F-U-K is how I spell it, and I don’t need you guys to tell me if I’m wrong. You have a clue how many hours of showtime you had to do for one banana in my day? One goddamn stinking banana! Now they swamp you with presents, you have books, you have TV after hours . . . and look at you! No work ethic. None. Hey, dick-wit? What’s the shifting from foot to foot about?

SANDY

I--I'm horny.

BIG BEN

You are?

SANDY

It must be Pavlovian. Conditioned reflex. Just thinking of them watching me, hands on iron bars, eyes popping out . . . I get so virile. Almost like you. The ultimate primate. My own strength almost scares me, but it also fills me with pride. For a moment I forget I'm their captive, their monster plaything safely caged away with others of my kind. I am a gorilla! Isn't it a wonderful feeling?

BIG BEN

Mmmm. (*he turns to go, confused and short for words*)

SANDY

Big Ben?

BIG BEN

Huh? (*he stops*)

SANDY

What's so special about them?

BIG BEN

Who?

SANDY

Men.

BIG BEN

A pile of shit.

SANDY

What makes you say that?

BIG BEN

Case closed.

(*He is ready to enter the shelter when* CINDY *appears in the doorway. Her expression changes, she looks frightened. She throws her arms around* BIG BEN'S *neck.*)

What. Huh. (*tries to set himself free*) What's got into you?

SANDY

It's that man in Bermuda shorts that she--

BIG BEN

Shut up. (*to* CINDY) What is it?

CINDY

Oh! It's so brutal!

(BIG BEN *is struggling to shake her off.*)

BIG BEN

Mmm?

CINDY

How can they!

BIG BEN

Who are you talkin' about?

CINDY

Nobility. Princes of blood.

SANDY

She's out of her mind.

CINDY

They relish it!

(BIG BEN *finally breaks away.*)

BIG BEN

You better make sense, gal.

CINDY

In China--

BIG BEN

China?

CINDY

They have these tables with a hole in the middle, the size of a head, so only the top of it would show. And-- (*she falls silent*)

BIG BEN

What?

CINDY

It is the ultimate delicacy. A pleasure of the palate. They would tie up a poor monkey under the table, slice off the top of its head, and
eat its brains!

(*She has covered her face, her body shaking badly. He puts his hand around her.*)

BIG BEN

Shhh.

CINDY

While it is still alive!

BIG BEN

They would, huh? As we speak?

SANDY

Last time, about twelve hundred years ago. The T'ang dynasty.

(BIG BEN *uncovers* CINDY'S *face; her eyes are dry.*)

BIG BEN

There's not much that we can do about it now, can we?

(*He brushes her aside and stoops to enter the shelter. Something going on there arrests his attention. He turns to* CINDY, *who looks away. It becomes clear that her act was only a cover-up for something* BIG BEN *was not supposed to see.*

Pause.

BIG BEN *picks up a stick and weighs it dangerously in his big palm.*

To the sounds of "Makin' Whoopie" by Ray Charles, enter ZA ZA, *unperturbed, wearing a blouse with a low cleavage, a wrap-around polka dot skirt, which she is tying up at the moment, and high heels; dangling from her neck on a chain are three pairs of glasses she uses to quiz her opponents. She takes the stick from* BIG BEN *and does a little tap dance routine.*

In her step follows CHI CHI, *flushed but reassured by her girlfriend's cockiness. She slips into her poncho and nervously tugs at it as if trying to cover her nakedness.*

Ready for a spectacle, the young monkeys climb ropes for a better view.

Finally BIG BEN *comes to his senses*.)

BIG BEN

You!

(ZA ZA *taps, ignoring him.*)

ZA ZA

Don't let your brain teach your feet--they always seem to know how. And what can it tell them anyway but a (*she does a line of steps*) one-two-three-four *and* one-two-three-four . . . Ah, my dancing class. I didn't take it behind bars, I tell you.

BIG BEN

Watch your tongue, Za Za.

ZA ZA
(*dancing*)
Imagine a ballroom with a shining floor. And mirrors, many mirrors. When you were awkward, it came back to you tenfold, but when you did it right--ah, the sensation of falling in love with your own body! Its litheness, its . . . completeness.

(*She stands still, center stage, caressing her body.*)

I knew everyone was watching my (*she chuckles*) step.

CHI CHI
(*pleadingly*)
Za Za . . .

(*She makes an attempt to stop* ZA ZA*, who just waltzes out of her embrace.*)

ZA ZA
Andy did. Andy who certainly didn't look apish by a long shot.

BIG BEN
(*menacingly*)
Now--

(*He makes a move to hit her, but* CHI CHI *is quick to intervene. Sensing danger,* SANDY *climbs even higher.*)

ZA ZA
He took me to this bar where you order three drinks and they give you your next one for free. I was zapped in no time. I say, Andy, I could probably do it with you . . . but I'd rather do it with your sister. He was shocked.

(*Pause.*)

You see, they had sex, he and his sister, three or four times, and she . . . well . . . she always fainted. Passed out even before it really got started. Now that wouldn't exactly qualify as "having sex," would it? And here someone was comparing them, and even worse, in her favor. It drove him absolutely crazy.

(*Pause.*)

But he wanted me bad. So he set us up. In his apartment. And, well, it was just . . . great. I mean no fainting or anything. So I ask Chris, What's this about your fainting? And she says, Oh I cannot stand that foreign thing inside me.

(*She laughs softly; even* CHI CHI *smiles cautiously.*)

BIG BEN
Funny, huh? (*The young ones are also giggling, which irritates him all the more.*) Are you trying to make a fucking point or what?

ZA ZA

Why yes, I think I'm trying to make a fucking point: We are not what we claim to be.

(*Beat*. SANDY *loses his grip and goes down with a thud*.)

SANDY

How do you mean?

BIG BEN
(*glaring at* ZA ZA)

You're going to regret this.

SANDY

What *are* we?

ZA ZA

Big Ben is on the warpath. I saw you in all your glory, my dear. Are you saying you have a surprise for me?

CHI CHI
(*a warning*)

Za Za--

ZA ZA

Sandy, this may dishearten you, but you are not a gorilla. Indeed, no one in this cage is, in spite of our somewhat unrefined manners.

(*Beat.*)

CINDY
(*sliding down*)

Well. (*she crosses to the iron bars*)

ZA ZA
(*to* BIG BEN)

Do you know something? You are a milksop--like any big man. Tons of muscles concealing a faint heart. Wasn't it fear of failing as a man that brought you here? And fear of flopping as an ape that got us pregnant?

(*With a loud cry* BIG BEN *lunges for* ZA ZA, *but finds* CHI CHI *in his way. While he struggles with her,* ZA ZA *unties her skirt, which drops to her ankles leaving her in a unitard, kicks off her heels, gets hold of a rope and makes it onto the high platform.* BIG BEN *makes an attempt to intercept her but finally leaves her alone, exasperated.*)

BIG BEN

All right then.

ZA ZA

THE GORILLA FAMILY GROWS BIGGER. You made the headlines and secured your future.

BIG BEN

What about yours?

ZA ZA

Inadvertently, yes. For which I never really extended my thanks to you, did I?

(SANDY, *still unclear about who he is, is feeling himself all over*.)

SANDY

(*incredulous*)

Are you telling me that I am *not* an ape?

CINDY

Sandy, she may have drawn, indeed, some hasty conclusions, as far as you are concerned.

(*She gives him a pinch, which is supposed to awaken him to reality, then moves about the cage, touching the walls, experiencing with renewed bitterness the sensation of claustrophobia.*)

SANDY

Ouch! Until this minute I thought I was a smart monkey, and now I'm what, a dumb human being?

CHI CHI

Darling, I feel that way every time we do it before the audience.

BIG BEN

Milksop, ha! What brought *you* here? Spunk?

ZA ZA

Indifference? After Chris died in a car accident I was a wreck. I didn't even have the pep to kill myself, much less hang on. At least they made decisions for you here.

CHI CHI

C'mon, sis. Admit it.

(*Pause.* SANDY *is studying himself in* CINDY'S *looking glass, which he has found under the mat.*)

ZA ZA

So I like the public. But back then, in front of that cage, it was the last thing on my mind. I wasn't even sure that man was talking to me. "Can you picture yourself on the other side of the grille?" "Yeah, why not." I mean I didn't care, period.

BIG BEN

Ha!

ZA ZA

Are you saying that this pathetic act of jejune commotion, those lamentable excercises in gland secretion are supposed to be fun? I wish I knew!

(*Pause.* BIG BEN, *who has lost interest in the argument, is sniffing coke. Once the storm has passed,* CHI CHI *gets her yarn and knitting needles and sets to work. Still crouching,* CINDY, *as though she is dazed, is moving along the grating, downstage, catching glimpses of the "free world" through the bars.*)

SANDY

Listen. Hey. You've lost me.

ZA ZA

Yes, dear?

SANDY

We are *not* gorillas?

ZA ZA

Not quite.

SANDY

We are *pretending* that we are?

ZA ZA

As best we can.

SANDY

What about them?

ZA ZA

Them?

SANDY

Spectators. The audience. Are they pretending they don't know?

ZA ZA

Ask your father.

(*She sprawls out comfortably.*)

SANDY
(*to* BIG BEN)

Are they?

BIG BEN

It's a screwed-up world. When I entered this monkey business some twenty years ago it was a mine field. Anthropoids' stronghold. You were lucky to live through the day. A lotta shit hit my fan, son, but here I am. Big Ben he made it.

SANDY

What about others?

BIG BEN

It took a while. Like with them Indians--apes were losing their territory. Man always gets his way once he sets his mind to it.

CINDY

(*angered*)

But we are the *only* anthropoids in here!

BIG BEN

Right, now it's our turf. We kicked them out, every last one of them.

CINDY

What about--? (*she points to the other cage*) What about the orangutans?

BIG BEN

Who knows.

(*Beat.*)

(*After coke he appears subdued and harmless.* CINDY *joins* SANDY*, and they prepare to listen to what* BIG BEN *has to say much like a child would listen to a bedtime story*.)

BIG BEN (Cont'd)

Maybe it *is* fear. I was a misfit. In school, teachers made me talk so that everyone could have his laugh. I didn't last long. (*pause*) In the Marines, there was this ensign who was on my ass, so I took a fire-pump and washed him overboard. (*pause*) Then there was that film company. Hard-core porn. They warmed you up, filed in a single line, like it's a beauty contest or something, and you paraded back and forth: you lost your erection, you lost your job.

ZA ZA

But you did fine, my dear.

BIG BEN

I did fine. I got my stall in their stable of studs.

ZA ZA

Man's language. The heady aroma of horse dung.

CHI CHI

So what happened?

BIG BEN

What do you mean what happened? Nothing happened. She was there (*he points to* ZA ZA), she knows. "Take One," and you're pumping away, no questions asked.

CHI CHI

I mean why did you quit?

BIG BEN

I didn't.

ZA ZA

You did too.

BIG BEN

Well it's not like--

ZA ZA

Yes?

BIG BEN

Okay, so I quit. (*pause*) It was the producer's wife.

CHI CHI

Aha!

BIG BEN

Yeah, but he was the one who made me do it, like it was my other job. She was a hag. A scarecrow. And the guy was with her for fifteen years? Fifteen years just having her around, not to mention *this*? I mean the guy was lucky to get impotent. He couldn't have a better excuse for backing out of it, could he?

(*Pause.*)

Well, he tells me the story of his life over a beer, after we killed a bottle of serious stuff, and he slips that contract across the table, with this provision about his old hag, and I sign it, like it's a joke. I mean I didn't even know how ugly the bitch was.

ZA ZA

Snatches and pitfalls, that's what man's world is all about, children.

(*Sensing no danger, she gets down by way of a rope to join her friend* CHI CHI.)

CHI CHI
(*to* BIG BEN)

So you're doing your other job.

BIG BEN

So I'm doing my other job, but I'm taking it half seas over, like I'm two balls short. Very low key. Sure enough, the bitch is whining, the boss threatens to take me to court, and I'm trying to figure out if I can put her away without going to jail. So one night I come over to their fancy condo, the boss is out of town, and I set to work. I screw her and I screw her till she's screaming her frizzy head off and then she's crying her eyes out and then she goes limp in my arms, and I just can't stop, this hate is driving me on and on. Next thing I know it's dawn and she's stiff as a board. I sneak out and I leave the door ajar to alert the neighbors, you know, so they can take care of the stupid bitch.

(*Pause.*)

BIG BEN (Cont'd)

Well, two hours later we're shooting this hot movie and I'm a happy man. Except for one cloud in the sky: the phone. The phone's not ringing. Late afternoon and there's nothing in the wind. The bitch is stiff, for chrissake, and no one seems to care.

(*Pause.*)

So after we're done I drive back to their condo. The door is shut, no trace of police, nothing. So I open the door with my key, which came with the job, and the first thing I set my eyes on is the crazy bitch, very much alive, in a see-through gown. She takes me by the hand and she leads me to the dining-room where I see a table laid for two, the whole nine yards, not to mention burning incense sticks. And I'm like a piss frozen in midair, my mind's a blank, and she says . . . with that screwy smile on her face . . . she says, You scratch my back, I scratch yours.

(*Pause.*)

CHI CHI

I see.

SANDY

I don't.

ZA ZA

You never told me she was in a see-through gown.

BIG BEN

I have no regrets. At least here you're on salary, plus fringe benefits.

CINDY

But we are not monkeys!

ZA ZA

(*implying the audience*)

They too have been maintaining this for the past one hundred thousand years, and it may well be the biggest hoax in the history of civilization.

CINDY

(*up on her feet*)

I want out of here!

ZA ZA

No you don't.

CINDY

Now!

(*Beat.*)

ZA ZA

Benny?

BIG BEN

She didn't mean it.

ZA ZA

Cindy?

CINDY

Don’t you know me?

ZA ZA
(*to* BIG BEN)

She means it.

(BIG BEN *gets up slowly and moves downstage to the cage grating. He gets hold of two ski poles. His muscles bulge in a painful effort, but nothing seems to be happening. And then he pulls the poles out making the opening wide enough to slip through.*)

(*Pause.*)

ZA ZA

Cindy? What are you waiting for? We’ll soon be open to the public.

(CINDY *approaches the opening and halts. Everyone is watching her in silence.*)

CINDY

I'm sorry.

(*Pause.*)

ZA ZA

It's nothing. Big Ben hasn't had his final say. (*to* BIG BEN) Have you, dearest?

(*With a mighty outcry,* BIG BEN *drives the poles back in their place.*)

ZA ZA

There you are.

CINDY

What are we going to do now?

ZA ZA

Nothing, God help us.

CINDY

Didn't you accuse Big Ben of--

ZA ZA

Duplicity is all I accused him of. You found out who you are? *Now* you can live in peace.

(SANDY *gets up and crosses downstage to inspect the grating*.)

CINDY

But we are a laughing stock, Mother!

ZA ZA

We are the best.

CINDY

Ha.

CHI CHI

Do you know how long the waiting list is just to make an interview which may not even get you here? Or any other ape house, for that matter?

CINDY

Come on, Chi Chi.

CHI CHI

It's worse than Al Italia in high season.

CINDY

Really.

CHI CHI

We are talking about people who care. People who work like horses and die like dogs. Zoos, national parks--they are everywhere. They will go out of their way to preserve an endangered species.

CINDY

Are you saying--?

CHI CHI

I was not locked up. Neither was Za Za. Or Big Ben. It was our decision, and not an easy one. You may fail to recognize it as a mission, but at least you can respect our choice.

SANDY

Chi Chi is right. (*he beckons* CINDY *to come over and shows her how easily one can pull the bars apart*) If you can walk away it's not like you're in prison. I'm free.

CHI CHI

Which is why they come to you, and not the other way around.

BIG BEN

They know they can learn from us. They sure do.

(*A distant buzz of a crowd growing louder by the minute. Silence in the cage.* ZA ZA *finally breaks the silence by doing a few bars of a Ray Charles song, very quietly.*)

ZA ZA
Another season
Another reason
For makin' whoopie . . .

BIG BEN
Time.

(*They warm up, all except* CINDY*, who is immobile and unresponsive*.)

SANDY
Cindy? Is there anything I can get for you?

CINDY
(*vaguely*)
Fruit, flowers.

SANDY
What?

(*The other three come to a standstill to listen*.)

CINDY
When Walter de la Mare was on his deathbed, his daughter asked him, Is there anything I can get for you? To which he weakly replied: Too late for fruit, too soon for flowers.

(*Hubbub of the excited crowd outside. The inhabitants of the Great Ape House demonstrate the wonders of sexual acrobatics*.)

CURTAIN