

**UPRIGHT**

CTY, Skidmore College  
Playwriting Workshop  
Summer, 1991

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(AT RISE: Lights up on an office. A SCIENTIST is sitting at her desk; a high-powered GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL is pacing in front, occasionally looking out the window.)

They're coming today.

SCIENTIST

I know.

OFFICIAL

The room's all set up.

SCIENTIST

I know.

OFFICIAL

SCIENTIST

The guards know as much as they should. They've surrounded the diner. They should be moving in to round the subjects up at any moment.

That's...good.

OFFICIAL

Nothing can possibly go wrong.

SCIENTIST

Great.

OFFICIAL

SCIENTIST

(Stands.)

You know how important this experiment is. We have to go ahead with it.

OFFICIAL

(Looking weary.)

I know. But...the press...Senator Franklin is up for reelection soon. Public opinion isn't good as is. The last thing she needs right now is a scandal.

SCIENTIST

No one will know about this.

OFFICIAL

But if it gets out...

(Long uncomfortable silence. A staring contest begins. Official looks away.)

SCIENTIST

You know it won't.

(Blackout.)

(Lights up on a large, empty room. TWO GUARDS enter up center followed by PEOPLE, who have been questioning them. GUARDS stand on either side of the door and usher PEOPLE inside.)

GUARD 1

I'm sorry, that's classified information.

DOCTOR

Can't you even tell us why we've been brought here?

GUARD 2

(Exasperated.)

It's none of your business.

HOUSEWIFE

Please.

(GUARD 1 looks at GUARD 2, as if to ask, "Can we tell them?")

GUARD 2

(To GUARD 1.)

No.

(GUARD 2 looks around, throws a challenging stare at PEOPLE. He leaves. GUARD 1 looks apologetic and reluctantly exits.)

(Blackout.)

(Lights up. PEOPLE have separated themselves into smaller groups who are conversing silently. Down left center is one such unit, made up of four women.)

PATRICIA

I cannot be forced to stay here. I have places to go, people to see. They even made me leave my cellular phone at the diner when they rounded us up.

JESSICA

You have a cellular phone?

MARY

(In a complete non sequitur.)

What were you eating?

PATRICIA

(Ignoring MARY.)

Of course I have a cellular phone. Doesn't everybody?

MITZI

Well, I don't. Yet. I mean I'll have one when I'm famous.

JESSICA

(Skeptically.)

Famous?

MARY

For what?

MITZI

I'm a stand-up comedienne...I just haven't gotten a job yet. I'll have to reschedule this morning's audition as soon as we get out of here. Why'd they bring us here, anyway?

PATRICIA

I don't know. Have any jokes to make about it?

MITZI

Weeeelllllll... someone has no sense of humor.

MARY

Let's not start arguing.

JESSICA

That's right. We don't know how long we'll be here.

MARY

We don't even know why.

PATRICIA

So I take it they didn't tell anyone?

(Silence. They look at one another and shrug.)

MITZI

Maybe we're all under arrest.

PATRICIA

Don't be ridiculous. I haven't done anything wrong.

JESSICA

None of us have, I'm sure.

MARY

I cheated on a test once. In fourth grade.

JESSICA

(Quickly, to cover for Mary.)

Let's introduce ourselves. I'm Jessica McClintock, and this is my sister Mary.

PATRICIA

I'm Patricia Johnson, CEO of the Fansler Group.

(Looks as if everyone should be impressed.)

MITZI

Well, I'm Jane Wolfenburgerschmidtenhoffheimer.

(Extending her hand.)

But my stage name is Mitzi Wolfe. Did'y'ever hear the one about the Rabbi and the girdle salesman?...

(JESSICA, MARY, and PATRICIA move upstage, with MITZI in hot pursuit.)

(As the women move upstage, a group which has been sitting downstage right begins to converse audibly. LOREEN, a gossiping hairdresser, sits filing her nails.)

DR. STUART

(Throughout the scene, DR. STUART gestures with his pen. To LOREEN.)

Madame, please stop that!

LOREEN

Fine. If you're going to be so testy...

(LOREEN puts nail file down beside her and DEREK, a kleptomaniac, pretends to yawn and stretch. He picks up the file and puts it in his pocket.)

SONYA

Dr. Stuart, why are we in here?

LOREEN

I heard that everyone in the diner was chosen to win one of those sweepstakes, like the kind you find on the side of a Lucky Charms box.

SONYA

What is a "sweepstake?"

DR. STUART

It is a contest in which there is an extremely low possibility of winning.

LOREEN

(Sotto voce.)

I never give up hope.

SONYA

We don't have a sweepstake in Sweden.

LOREEN

Then what do you do for fun?

DR. STUART

We're getting off the subject. Perhaps the Russians attacked?

SONYA

They would never do a thing like that.

LOREEN

Who's side are you on anyway?

DR. STUART

(Puts down his pen and begins to bite his nails.)

Maybe we were exposed to some sort of disease.

(DEREK surreptitiously purloins the pen.)

LOREEN

You really shouldn't bite your nails. Let me file them for you.

(LOREEN looks around for her nail file.)

Hey! Where'd my nail file go?

DR. STUART

(Who has been looking for his pen, patting his pockets, etc.)

How strange. My pen is gone too.

(He looks towards DAMIEN, who has been sitting alone, writing in a journal. DR. STUART makes a proclamation in an important tone of voice.)

I believe there is a thief among us.

(DR. STUART and his GROUP move away from DAMIEN, leaving PETER, FRANCES, and DOUG the most downstage group. FRANCES and DOUG are talking, PETER is sitting nearby, when GINNY walks up.)

GINNY

Hi, Frances. Hi, Doug.

DOUG

Hi...

FRANCES

Ginny.

(Uncomfortable pause. Everyone realizes how fake they are all being.)

PETER

I sense tension here. I feel a negative interplay of forces.

FRANCES

What are you talking about? We've been friends for years.

GINNY

Nothing to hide here.

PETER

Be calm. Everything will be made one in the end.

(GINNY, DOUG, and FRANCES look at each other, puzzled.)

DOUG

One what?

(DAMIEN, sensing the suspicion of DR. STUART's GROUP, edges away from them and closer to the speaking GROUP.)

GINNY

Who's he?

PETER

I sense trouble surrounding him.

(All stare at PETER, then at DAMIEN.)

(JULIA, TRICIA, and CLEO begin speaking audibly.)

CLEO

These people kidnapped us. I hope you know that.

JULIA

Actually, it's called unlawful imprisonment. They should be sued, and will be, just as soon as we get out.

TRICIA

How can we worry about getting out before we know why we're here?

CLEO

Those people who brought us here didn't explain anything at all. I have no clothes except these, no

makeup, and we're in here with all these bizarre people. Have you noticed that weird guy with the notebook?

TRICIA

That's nothing to pick on him for. I write in a journal too.

CLEO

He hasn't said a word to anyone.

JULIA

That's his right.

(GUARDS have entered and are wandering about, checking on PEOPLE, and receiving nasty stares. GUARD 1 is obviously upset.)

GUARD 1

I think I have to tell them. No, I know I have to tell them.

(GUARD 2 levels an icy stare at GUARD 1, and watches her as she relents and exits.)

(STEVEN, SUSAN, and ANGELICA, a clean looking family, are distressed to find themselves sitting next to LAURA JANE, a disgusting, tobacco chewing young woman.)

SUSAN

(Watching LAURA JANE chew tobacco revoltingly, like a donkey.)

Would you please cease that horrid, smelly, germ-spreading habit? I have a frail constitution and you are endangering my very life.

(LAURA JANE laughs, spits repulsively into a tuna can, her portable spittoon.)

Do you mind!

STEVEN

Now, now, my dear, calm yourself.

LAURA JANE

At this rate, you're in bigger danger from a heart attack than any infectious disease.

ANGELICA

(Mumbling embarrassedly to herself.)

Oh, mother, shut UP!

STEVEN

You just control yourself, young lady. And stop harassing that platypus!

SUSAN

Why are we being forced to associate with... with such scum?

LAURA JANE

People with frail constitutions shouldn't rile themselves up in the company of scum.

STEVEN

Dear, calm DOWN!

DAMIEN

(To himself, from journal.)

I don't know why I'm here. None of us do. The last few hours have melted into total confusion, and I'm not quite sure what to make of this anymore. As usual, I sit alone while all others clump together out of...necessity? But I don't mind being excluded again. At least it gives me time to think. And I believe I will need to be able to think.

(Lights fade to black.)

(Lights up. PEOPLE are lying around the stage, apparently asleep. GUARD 1 suddenly bursts into the room, waking the PEOPLE.)

GUARD 1

Listen up, everyone, quickly! You've been brought here for quarantine. The food stock at the diner was infected with a virus.

DR. STUART

What virus? What are its effects?

GUARD 1

We don't know yet...

GUARD 2

(Bursting in.)

You told them!

GUARD 1

Yes. I did.

(GUARD 2 hesitates in the doorway, then exits again, to alert their supervisors.)

Wait!

(GUARD 1 follows him out.)

PATRICIA

(To JESSICA, MARY, and MITZI.)

We're all going to die.

JESSICA

How do you know that?

MARY

What did they mean, unknown effects?

MITZI

Good God, what an epitaph. "It was something she ate."

MARY

Are those two guards the only ones keeping us here?

(The OTHERS stare at MARY.)

(JULIA, CLEO, and TRICIA begin to speak audibly.)

JULIA

I can't believe you're questioning my knowledge of the law!

CLEO

But you can't sue the guards, they're not responsible for this. We don't know who is. We just don't know!

(CLEO is becoming hysterical.)

TRICIA

You're so worked up.

(To JULIA.)

Oh my God, maybe she has the virus!

JULIA

Any of us could.

CLEO

(Hyper.)

No no no no no no no no no! That's not true that's not true it's not it's not!

TRICIA

Look how hyper she is! We don't want to end up like that. It's probably a symptom.

(Grabs JULIA's arm and tries to pull her further away from CLEO.)

JULIA

(Pulling her arm away from TRICIA warily.)

Yeah...probably.

(Focus shifts to another group.)

SUSAN

(To STEVEN, sweetly.)

Honey?

STEVEN

Yes?

SUSAN

You know how I said all these years that I was going to die?

STEVEN

Yes?

SUSAN

And how you told me that I was crazy for worrying?

STEVEN

Yes?

SUSAN

(Explodes and slaps him.)

I told you so, but did you believe me? No!

LAURA JANE

Well, he believes you this time. Looks like we could all die.

ANGELICA

(To her parents, dropping her adolescent "cool.")

And you're not going to do anything? You're just going to sit...sit...sit and wait for...whatever? I'm your child!

(Pause. SUSAN moves toward ANGELICA and hugs her.)

STEVEN

We have to do something.

SUSAN

Since when have you cared about the welfare of this family? You're never even home.

STEVEN

You think I'm happy with that? You don't even know what I'm dealing with.

SUSAN

What are you talking about?

(Catching on to what STEVEN means.)

Oh my God, Steven.

(Pause.)

LAURA JANE

What, is he gay or something?

SUSAN

(Viciously.)

YOU SHUT UP!

(In a surprise move, the focus shifts again to GINNY, PETER, FRANCES and DOUG.)

FRANCES

(To DOUG and GINNY.)

Well, at least this will get you two out of bed.

GINNY

(Indignantly.)

I never slept with him!

FRANCES

Hah! I've seen those looks you give each other!

GINNY

Sure I was jealous when he married you but I would never do anything like that to you. We're supposed to be friends. I can't believe you thought it was me he was sleeping with...

DOUG

Oh man.

FRANCES

I knew there was someone else.

PETER

Be calm. You must ready your spirit for passage to the other world. And bring your platypus.

GINNY

We're not dead yet.

(In another surprise move, DR. STUART once again becomes the center of attention. What a ham.)

DR. STUART

I cannot believe the government is being this irrational! Keeping us together only makes things worse. Some of us might not have been exposed yet.

LOREEN

I still can't find my nail file.

DR. STUART

We have to find some way out of here before the disease spreads.

SONYA

My mother told me to go to Germany, but noooooo, I had to come to America!

LOREEN

I knew you were un-American.

DEREK

Maybe we can talk to the guards -- tell them not all of us are infected.

DR. STUART

(Cranky.)

Symptoms, symptoms! We have to look for symptoms!

LOREEN

Could one be crankiness?

DR. STUART

(With a look towards DAMIEN.)

Anti-social behavior patterns...

DEREK

Or violence...

DAMIEN

(Once again, in his journal, as a crowd forms around DR. STUART.)

They're all tense -- frantic, like caged rats. A little while ago, one of the guards "let slip" that we're here because we've been exposed to some new sort of virus, and now fear hangs in the air like an ugly cloud. I don't buy the virus story, though. It's a wonder that anyone does. Why aren't we being tested? And if it's contagious, why have we been put together? I am afraid, but not of the virus. A desperate person is dangerous.

DR. STUART

(Addressing the massed PEOPLE.)

Ladies and gentlemen. The time has come for us to take action. This situation has been handled in a manner which runs in direct opposition to common sense, let alone health and well-being. It is imperative that we move on our own behalf. I will not detail the entire medical situation, but you may be assured that this situation presents an extreme danger to each of us. We are being kept in an unregulated, unsafe, and unhygienic state, and we must escape. The answer is obvious. It should be a simple matter for us to overcome the guards...

DAMIEN

Stop! Stop and think! You can't always take the easy way out. Did it ever occur to you that just because they claim we have a virus, it might not be true? We're not talking about a little struggle here. Someone is going to get hurt. Chances are, someone is going to get killed. It's too simple not to take the blame when you're in a mob. I don't bleed on my hands.

DR. STUART

I believe, sir, you will find yourself in the minority here. No one cares to listen to a sociophobe and a thief.

PATRICIA

(To DAMIEN.)

You're not talking sense. You don't seem to realize what we're all facing here. I don't know about you, but most of us have lives worth continuing.

JULIA

(To DAMIEN.)

But you obviously don't care about anyone but yourself. We've been here over 24 hours and these are the first words you've said to anyone.

CLEO

I haven't liked him from the moment I set eyes on him. He's a freak.

DAMIEN

Ok. Point the finger at me if you want. Find your scapegoat. But don't do this. Dead. Do you know what that means? Do you really understand what you're about to do? Those guards...those are people out there. Just people following orders. Don't make them suffer for what could damn well be a mistake.

DR. STUART

I say we escape, and to hell with him!

STEVE

Let him try to stop us...

MITZI

Maybe he's part of the plot to keep us here!

LOREEN

He's the only one who's really sick!

DEREK

I say he goes with the guards.

LAURA JANE

He stands in our way, we rip him apart. I ain't dyin' down here.

TRICIA

(Quietly at first, then shouting over the noise.)

Wait... Wait... WAIT! If one of us is hurt, the guards have to come in.

CLEO

So...