

Infection

A play
by
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Characters

Henderson	A man of seventy
Fletcher	A man in his twenties
Amy	A woman in her twenties

Scene

Manhattan

Scenes One, Three, Four and Six: An Upper East Side brownstone.

Scenes Two and Five: A small Upper West Side studio apartment.

Time

The present

Scene One	A September afternoon.
Scene Two	Later that night.
Scene Three	The following day.
Scene Four	A week later.
Scene Five	Later that night.
Scene Six	The following day.

Scene One

(Lights up. A large room in the top floor apartment of a New York brownstone. The walls are freshly painted a sterile "hospital" white. Upstage, a china closet is half-full of cans of sardines, and covered in a sheet of clear plastic. Downstage, there is a large television console, an armchair, and a sofa—all covered in sheets of clear plastic.

HENDERSON, a man of seventy, sits in the finely upholstered armchair, watching the television set whose glow bathes him. He is quite thin and has long white hair. He wears surgical gloves on his hands. He's dressed in silk pajamas, a silk robe, and has velvet slippers on his feet. He is giggling at the TV, first quietly, and then more loudly. Sitting on the sofa—reading a newspaper, which is up in front of his face—is FLETCHER. He's in his twenties, and is dressed in a sweater, jeans and loafers.

As Henderson starts to giggle more loudly, Fletcher lowers the paper and glares at him. Henderson is oblivious, caught up in the TV program. Fletcher raises the paper and

tries to continue reading, but Henderson's giggling leads him to lower it again and stare, quite annoyed. Fletcher shakes his head and attempts to read once again. Henderson glances over at Fletcher, with a sad, hurt expression.)

HENDERSON

What are you doing over there, eh? All the way over there...so far from me. You mad at me? I've done nothing to you. It's not fair. Come on, you can't stay mad at me! Come over. Sit by me. Watch with me, eh?

(Fletcher is silent behind the newspaper.)

HENDERSON

Ahhh...the TV is good today. You'll be cheered up in no time. The Arabs are shooting at the Jews, the Jews are firing back at the Arabs, the United Nations peace-keeping forces are shooting at both the Arabs and the Jews. It's really quite amusing. The newscasters engage in light banter in between reports of genocide. Come and see!

(Fletcher lowers the paper, annoyed.)

FLETCHER

Have some consideration, will you? I'm not interested.

HENDERSON

You never are! Never interested! What's with you? Have you no interests? Hobbies? I can't imagine what you do with yourself half the time, in that room of yours. I hate to think-

FLETCHER

Don't you worry!

HENDERSON

No, Sammy, no! I don't mean to cast aspersions! You're a good boy. I'm sure all of your...diversions...are quite safe. And wholesome, too. No offense intended.

(Pause)

FLETCHER

Christ, I hate that sound you make. That idiotic cackle. Why don't you have some feeling for *me*, huh? Doesn't it occur to you that it might grate on my nerves?!

HENDERSON

Well...hell...I'm just enjoying myself. That's what you want, isn't it? You want to see me happy, don't you? The TV makes me so happy, Sammy. I can't control myself. I'm like a kid when I've got my TV.

FLETCHER

You should do something else, you know. This does nothing for the body. What benefits do you get from sitting all day and vegetating? Not one.

HENDERSON

Don't say that. It makes me feel good. It warms me. I wouldn't feel right if I didn't watch. How the devil could I keep up my morale if I didn't *watch*?

FLETCHER

You'd be in much better spirits if you exercised.

HENDERSON

Oh God, no! Can't do that. Too fragile. If I try that, I'll collapse. My heart will stop. It's happened. There have been cases. And if you think I'm going to run that risk *now*, when I think I'm finally beginning to lick the bastards...ohhh no, not *me*!

FLETCHER

That's just a cheap excuse to stay planted in front of the set.

HENDERSON

Not true! There's evidence to back me up. The best way to combat the overpopulation of airborne bacteria is to live a sedentary lifestyle! They've written it up in journals!

(Pause)

HENDERSON

If I was running all around, can you imagine the respiratory problems I'd get? They'd love that! It would be the perfect opportunity to pounce on me. They'd fly in my ears...travel the intricate system of canals to my sinuses...then slip through the delicate membranes right into my bloodstream! I'd be finished!

(Fletcher stands up.)

FLETCHER

Come on. It's time you took a break.

HENDERSON

What? Oh no! Not me. Not now. Not with the mid-afternoon news in full swing. It's the best time to watch. I know they try to fob off the *nightly* news as something so goddamn special, but I know better. Somewhere around noon, when the sun gets its hottest, the world explodes! Terrorists! Hurricanes! Revolutions! And I've got to be here!

FLETCHER

It won't be that bad. We can talk as we move around. A nice chat. When was the last time we talked? A nice man-to-man talk.

HENDERSON

We do enough of that already, don't we? We're *always* talking, as far as I can tell. There comes a time when I want to *stop* talking and just relax...unwind...here, in front of the TV...and let all the wonderful pictures wash over me. Oh, Sammy...no conversations ever matched that. You know, I remember a world before TV. A miserable, boring, tortuous existence. You should have heard my parents, inventing conversations to fill up the dead air. "What was your day like, dear?" I wanted to puke. "Turn on the radio!" I would shout at them. "No," my mother would say. "We're going to have a nice family conversation." Have a chat, he says. Where do you get the nerve?

(Fletcher goes over to the television, and turns it off. Henderson panics.)

HENDERSON

What? What's this?! It's not time yet! You've turned off my...? Goddamn it!

(Fletcher tries to lift Henderson out of the chair.)

FLETCHER

If you rot away, who do you think's going to get blamed? I'm not having that hanging over my head!

HENDERSON

No! I can't participate in anything like this! It's out of character for me!

(Fletcher stands him up.)

FLETCHER

Do you want to be full of flab? Of course you don't.

(They begin walking in wide circles around the room. Fletcher holds Henderson up—he's as limp as a rag doll.)

HENDERSON

Think of what I'm missing!

FLETCHER

Never mind the TV.

HENDERSON

I want my news!

FLETCHER

Quiet down! You'll thank me for this. Soon you'll wake up with renewed vigor.

(Pause)

HENDERSON

(whimpering)

I'm frightened, Sammy. What if I can't handle it?

FLETCHER

Take a chance! Let loose!

(Pause)

HENDERSON

You should have seen me when I was young. Oh! An Adonis, I tell you...

FLETCHER

Of course you were. Isn't it obvious?

HENDERSON

I was a track and field man.

FLETCHER

The long jump?

HENDERSON

The long jump...the pole vault...the four hundred meters.
I was all over the map!

FLETCHER

And you worry about not being able to handle it!

HENDERSON

But so much time's gone by. They've gotten hold of
me...the bastards...they're eating me alive! I think I've
been able to keep them at bay lately by remaining very
still. You're going to ruin all that!

FLETCHER

Don't worry. Walking builds up your immunity. "Slow and
steady wins the race." A little more each day. Build up
bit by bit.

(Pause)

HENDERSON

Never get old, Sammy. It's a terrible thing. Never get
sick. You'll have a miserable existence. Trust me.

FLETCHER

Oh, stop your yapping. Haven't I made things comfortable?

HENDERSON

Yes! You've done wonders! Yes! I don't say it often enough.

FLETCHER

You don't know how lucky you are. My grandfather suffered horribly. All twisted and aching...and not a cent in the bank. We all abandoned him...let him die alone. You think it doesn't bother me, as I sit down for my French Toast every morning? It makes it goddamn hard to step in front of a mirror.

HENDERSON

Poor man.

FLETCHER

Oh, he was a pig. Used to tuck me into bed...and fool around with things he had no right to. But, all in all, he was a human being...I guess. There's a need for dignity.

HENDERSON

Oh, Sammy! I don't want to go like that! Not *me*! I was always a well-liked guy! They were always glad to see me! Never too busy to share a joke and a drink with me! Well-respected? *Revered*! My underlings, they would have thrown themselves under a *train* for me...I had only to ask.

FLETCHER

You're not going to die, you hear? Never. With all your precautions...and now a little physical activity, I don't see why you can't crack the 500-year mark! Now, isn't that something to look forward to?

HENDERSON

Oh, the hell you care!

FLETCHER

What does that mean?

HENDERSON

Oh, come on! Wouldn't you just love me to pass!

FLETCHER

Don't say that!

HENDERSON

Wouldn't that be a particularly nice windfall for you, eh?
After you and Werner fiddle around with the paperwork...

(Pause)

FLETCHER

Don't make me angry.

HENDERSON

You think I'm so dumb I can't put it together?

FLETCHER

You're getting me angry.

HENDERSON

You'll be well taken care of. No troubles for you.

(Fletcher throws him down in
the chair, angrily.)

FLETCHER

I am trying to be patient with you! And now you get suspicious of me?! You've got to make things difficult for me, don't you?!

(Pause)

HENDERSON

(dazed)

I...I...I...was faced with my own mortality for a second. I lost...my balance of mind. Sorry.

(Pause)

HENDERSON

Oh, Sammy...you can't say you don't have fun! You can't stand there and tell me I haven't made things nice for you. Huh? Always! Do you see where you live? Look at the clothes you've got on. Listen to the way you speak. I remade you, boy, from the ground up.

FLETCHER

O.k., but still, there's a price to pay. Most people would have walked out long ago. But me? No, not me. I'm a saint.

HENDERSON

Ah...you're my boy.

FLETCHER

No! I am a goddamn *saint*!

HENDERSON

Right you are! I'm not one to argue. Don't be angry, Sammy.

(Pause)

HENDERSON

TV, please.

FLETCHER

Sometimes, you're not worth the effort.

HENDERSON

I said, "TV, please!"

FLETCHER

I heard you! There's nothing wrong with my ears! It's my *heart* that's sick.

HENDERSON

Aw, such a baby! You're not put together too well, are you? What kind of house did you grow up in? What, no role model? No man around the house to emulate? Don't worry. I'll help out in whatever way I can. Keep a close watch on me. I'll show you the way to go. You want advice on the subject of women? No problem. You want a tip on the fifth race at Belmont You're looking at the man!

(Pause)

HENDERSON

(smiling)

Go ahead...put on the TV Do your old man a favor. Be a good boy.

(Fletcher switches on the television. Henderson leans back and smiles.)

HENDERSON

Now...how about a spray?

FLETCHER

Oh, give us a break, will you?.

(Henderson stamps a foot
angrily.)

HENDERSON

A spray! A spray! This is a command! Just the sort of
thing you're employed to fulfill! I will say it but once
more...a spray.

(Fletcher sighs, walks over
to the china closet, opens it
and removes a can of air
freshener. He walks back to
Henderson and begins
spraying, in large, flowing
movements. Henderson sits up
straight, obviously
disturbed.)

HENDERSON

And just where is the narration? Hmm? Why is my
experience incomplete? You know what's expected of you,
now goddamn it, give me the full and complete experience!

(Fletcher sighs again, and
closes his eyes, and as he
sprays, launches into what is
obviously a familiar
routine.)

FLETCHER

Let the magic of "Forest Pine" take you away to a cabin high in the Adirondacks, built with the sweat and toil of a real man; a man who can now enjoy the fruits of his labor by relaxing in front of the fireplace with a brandy and a good cigar as the hooting of barn owls fills the night air, and the crisp, cool scent of "Forest Pine" wafts through the windows and permeates his little slice of rustic heaven.

(Fletcher stops spraying and walks over to the china closet, throwing the can of air freshener back in. Henderson begins watching the television in rapt amazement. Fletcher walks back to Henderson's chair.)

FLETCHER

Just remember my feelings, all right? I don't appreciate being walked over. One day you might wake up and find there's no one around to help you out of bed. No Sammy. Sammy will be out on the streets, looking for new adventures. All gone. You won't get your TV, or your spray, or your King Oscar Sardines. You'll spend each day in bed, all day every day. Crying out into the emptiness of that dark, dark bedroom. And you'll wither away, like a piece of fruit left out in the blazing sun. Oh, it's a possibility, a very real possibility. Once you're on a downward slide, it's hard to regain your position. So don't push me around, o.k.?

(Henderson, paying absolutely no attention to Fletcher, is practically jumping up and down with excitement over something he sees on TV. Fletcher walks back over to the sofa, sits down, and

picks up the newspaper to continue reading. As soon as he does, Henderson begins giggling as he did at the start of the scene. His giggling builds in volume and intensity, as Fletcher lowers the paper to glare at him once again. Lights down.)

Scene Two

(Lights up, but low. We are in a cramped studio apartment, later in the evening. Fletcher is in bed with AMY, who's also in her twenties.)

FLETCHER

No.

AMY

Oh, come on!

FLETCHER

I've said enough already.

AMY

But nobody can hear us.

FLETCHER

I signed a confidentially agreement.

AMY

I won't tell...

FLETCHER

It's just too risky. And anyway, the guy has a right to his privacy.

AMY

You started it.

FLETCHER

I started it?

AMY

Hey, I didn't know you. A guy buying so many cans of sardines...emptying the shelves...and the gourmet \$15.00-a-can shit, too. I just asked a simple question, expressed a little simple human curiosity. And then, this guy unloads on me..."I work for this...*man*..." Couldn't shut him up, after that.

FLETCHER

I shouldn't have. I violated the agreement. Consider yourself lucky...you know how many people have asked about the sardines? Or the air freshener? All I usually do is turn away and shuffle on to the checkout line.

AMY

But not when I asked, huh? There was something about me, wasn't there?

FLETCHER

Obviously...

AMY

So, come on...I'm just curious. It *is* my field of study...

FLETCHER

Oh yeah. You lit up when I started to talk about him. The spark of scientific interest, huh?

AMY

His story would make a great term paper...

FLETCHER

Hey, no. You can't. He'll be revealed. No, absolutely not. Please.

AMY

I wouldn't include any real names, stupid. He would be "subject A" or something."

(Pause)

FLETCHER

Oh shit. What did I do?

AMY

You opened the flood gates, Fletchie. I mean, it's all old hat to you, but to the rest of us, it's so fucking strange!

FLETCHER

Psychology major. Just my luck.

AMY

Don't you care about the advancement of science?

FLETCHER

Oh, you kidding? It's what I *live* for.

(Pause)

AMY

So, what's gonna happen to us? We just go on like this? You sneak around to see me, only when he's asleep, and then when you get here you tell me you can't *talk* about him? So, we sit here, and we do what? Have a quick screw, and then what? Play backgammon? Chat about the stock market?

FLETCHER

It must be annoying, I know.

AMY

I'm not going to tolerate it.

FLETCHER

What do you mean?

AMY

If you're going to keep most of your life a secret...you can just get the hell out.

FLETCHER

What?

AMY

You heard me. If you can't *share* with me, if some contract you signed two years ago overrides anything we might have...even when you *know* nobody's going to find out...then what the hell am I to you? A gas station on the interstate? Little Fletchie pulls in to get his oil checked, his tires rotated?

FLETCHER

It's my *job*. I could lose it. I'm not supposed to be jabbering away about the sensitive details of his life. It's that kind of scrutiny that he's trying to escape from! Being here with you, right now, could get me fired, absolutely! All he has to do is wake up from a bad dream, and find me not there. I'm toast.

AMY

I weep for you.

(Pause)

AMY

Well, come on...get your things together...

FLETCHER

You're really throwing me out?

AMY

Go home to your mystery man...

FLETCHER

All right! *Jesus!*

AMY

I want to know how it started.

FLETCHER

How what started?

AMY

His *condition*.

FLETCHER

Oh, I see...you want Genesis...the whole "In the Beginning..."
jazz, huh?

AMY

Come on, spill it.

(Fletcher sighs, defeated.)

FLETCHER

All right...

(Lights up on Henderson in his chair, facing the audience. Fletcher and Amy watch him as he speaks.)

HENDERSON

I was healthy once. I was unstoppable. You should have seen the deals I was making. Gobbling up companies in trouble...liquidating the assets...using the equity to buy other companies...and on and on and on. God, it was beautiful. I was doing it before there was even a name for it. And still, I was well-liked. There was always a good word for me in *Fortune*, the *Wall Street Journal*. My firm...they all worshipped me. You should have heard the reverent silence when I walked down the hall. The secretaries...bowing like Geishas. And why not? I was a kind boss, generous. What worries did I have? Not a single one. A house, in Westport. Right on the Sound. A slip for yachts. Fourteen rooms. And what a staff. Nicholas, my gardener. Made the grounds the envy of the neighborhood. Carlotta, my cook...fluent in all cuisines...French, Japanese, Moroccan, just name it. And Winston. Ah Winston. The best damn butler you'll ever find. By the end we were working as one...he anticipating my every need. God, do I miss him.

(Pause)

HENDERSON

One afternoon, I was in my study. A beautiful study. Deep pile carpeting...mahogany desk...antique globe...like something out of a decorating magazine. Winston came in, to announce the phone call I had been waiting for all day. Good old Dan from the London office. I took the call, didn't hesitate. But it wasn't good old Dan from the London office. It was this voice...this dark, booming voice.

HENDERSON (Continued)

Thick. Rumbling. "I just want you to know, we'll never forgive you for what you've done," he said. I wanted to cry out, "Who's this?! Identify yourself, goddamn it!" But I didn't dare. "You cruel bastard," he said. The blood drained from my face. "We had a nice little company. Small, family-like. We kept a lot of people in this town alive. Kept their children fed. We were a part of this community. We weren't an hors d'oeuvre to be gobbled up. You could have helped us, but instead you stripped us bare...left a carcass to rot. Padlocks on the factory doors. We didn't want to be bought off...we wanted to *survive*. You think we can't get to you? You think there isn't a price to pay? There is. And we're going to make sure you pay it. We've got men everywhere. Watching you. Following you. When the time is right...we'll move in. And then...we'll tear you apart...piece by piece...pick you apart like a Thanksgiving turkey. Count on it." I slammed the phone down. I couldn't stop trembling. Sweat forming on my forehead. I took a moment to steady myself. Come on now, what was that all about? A prank! Some loony. But wait...what if it was real? So what! Disgruntled losers! Can't handle the game, sit on the sidelines. But, who were they? The cowards wouldn't identify themselves. I've done dozens of deals, how am I supposed to remember the petty problems of losers?

(Pause)

HENDERSON

Later that night...in my library...my easy chair, my brandy, the fireplace. My *sanctuary*...but not that night. It started as a tickle in the back of the throat. Then the cough came...this great heaving cough...battering my lungs...it would not stop. Then, the chills, the burning, itchy eyes, the ringing in the ears, dizziness, heart palpitations, then going all numb in the extremities. I called out for

HENDERSON (Continued)

Winston...he rushed in, carried me to bed. I couldn't go back to the office. I couldn't do my work. I couldn't function. My doctor said it was nothing. As soon as he told me that, all became clear. He had been gotten to. Poor man. Threatened, no doubt, to keep quiet about my true condition. And why? I suddenly realized why. The bastards were attacking me...from *inside*. Eating me alive, from deep within my body. How did they do it? Good God, imagine the microbes at their disposal! These were not small-time entrepreneurs...I had underestimated them. They were obviously connected...to a large far-reaching organization...with inexhaustible resources.

(Pause)

HENDERSON

I had to save my life. I had to go where they couldn't find me...abandon the house, the ostentatious lifestyle. Had to find a place where I could treat my condition in peace. By myself...not with doctors, no. Doctors are only human...they can be threatened...how can you trust them? Had to vanish instantly. Couldn't say a word to my people...not even poor Winston. He would be vulnerable...to blackmail, interrogation...and worse. I couldn't do that to him. The first idea was to disappear into the woods...a cabin in the mountains, perhaps. But no, these men were not idiots. That's the first place they would look. No, the answer was to blend into the throng. Join the masses. Situate myself right in the middle of a city of millions. A nondescript building on a nondescript street. And never emerge. Never. Stay within the walls of my fortress. They could be anywhere. Stay out of sight, that's the answer. Become invisible, by being right in the center of things. It's so obvious, they'd never think of it.

(Amy looks amazed, but Fletcher, having heard this many times before, registers little emotion.)

AMY

Wow...

HENDERSON

Do you know how many years ago that was?

AMY

How many?

HENDERSON

Too many! Look at what it did to me. It broke me. Made my hair go white.

AMY

The bastards!

HENDERSON

You never know who you're dealing with.

AMY

There's no justice in this world.

(Lights down on Henderson.)

FLETCHER

Satisfied?

AMY

Incredible! And the money? He still has all that money, huh?

FLETCHER

Oh yeah. He's got a lot of it in offshore accounts, you know, doing a number on the IRS. I don't think the guy's paid taxes in, like, 20 years. But the stuff that's immediately accessible is more than enough for us to live on.

(Pause)

AMY

So, when are you going to let me see the place?

FLETCHER

Christ! You're still asking that question?! What have I been telling you? I can't bring anyone in. He's got this lawyer, Werner...handling the money, other business matters. Werner and the old man have this arrangement where Werner pops in every so often, to check up on things. He see me doing anything out of the ordinary, I'm history. You understand? He looks through my room, making sure I'm not lifting things from the old man. Counts the *silverware*, for God's sake. He sees *you* there? Forget it. I'm gone. No guests. Never. That's the rule. And even if Werner doesn't pop in, the old man would just get upset and disoriented by seeing someone suddenly there. You think I want to deal with *that* fallout?

(Amy cuddles up to Fletcher.)

AMY

Come on, Fletch...why do you have to be so mean? I'm not asking a lot. I just want to see where you work...where you *live*. Don't you want a relationship based on openness and honesty?

FLETCHER

Look, when I signed up for this, I wasn't thinking of *relationships*. I was barely alive. I was ready for seclusion. Away from worldly temptations. A monastic retreat. He took me off the street. Gave me some where to live, clean clothes to wear, decent meals. I had dropped out of school. Fell in with a bad crowd. Shoplifting...pickpocketing...petty criminals, usually too stoned to do much of anything. Werner saw me give a bum on the street a sandwich one day. I don't know why I did it, 'cause I was dying for the fucking sandwich. He was impressed. So he approached me, gave me his card. Said he might have an opportunity for me...working for his "client". Free room and board. Good salary. Clothes allowance. Do you see? This old fucker changed my life. I owe him.

(Pause)

FLETCHER

I do owe him something...

AMY

Who would ever know? Just sneak me in. One little time. After he's asleep. You tell me he sleeps for hours and hours. Can't I just see him? I won't make a sound. I just want to watch him as he sleeps. What's the harm?

(Fletcher glances around the room.)

FLETCHER

Where are your books?

AMY

What? Books?

FLETCHER

The textbooks. "Understanding the Sick and Twisted Human Mind" or whatever it is you use in those classes. I never see any of your books around. It's a tiny place, I wonder where you could put them. Your term papers...you don't have a computer, do you?

AMY

What is this, the fucking housekeeping police? I'm organized. I've got a place for everything, so fucking what? You want to look through my closets?

FLETCHER

Sorry.

AMY

Don't change the goddamn subject!

(Pause)

FLETCHER

There's nothing I can do. Sorry.

(Pause)

AMY

You're just a naughty boy...in need of reconditioning...

(She drapes a leg over him.)

AMY

There are tried and true methods of altering problem behavior...

FLETCHER

Uh oh...you learn this in class, did you?

AMY

Time to put my theories into practice..

(Fletcher starts to recline
flat onto the bed, with Amy
suddenly on top of him.)

FLETCHER

Oh, boy..

(Lights down.)

Scene Three

(Lights up. It is the next day. Henderson is watching TV again, when suddenly we HEAR the sound of a door being opened offstage. Henderson turns and looks off nervously.)

HENDERSON

Well, come on! What the hell are you *doing*?!

(We hear the door slam shut. Fletcher enters, carrying two bags of groceries. He places them on a small table next to the china closet.)

HENDERSON

Why don't you close the goddamn door quicker? You leave it open...hanging open...swinging in the breeze...leaving me vulnerable.

FLETCHER

Don't start this again! The door was open one damn second.

HENDERSON

I'm not going to be put at risk because of your clumsiness! If you don't watch out, you'll put me in jeopardy! I'm a marked man as it is!

FLETCHER

Be quiet! I didn't spend an hour at the market to be harangued—

HENDERSON

Unpack them.

FLETCHER

I will, in a minute. Let me rest, for Christ's sake!

HENDERSON

There's that tone again! I refused to be addressed in that vicious tone of voice! Who do you think you're talking to? What nerve!

FLETCHER

I carried those bags eight blocks! The market delivers, you know. Why should I have to go? If you're so damn afraid of me being followed, let them send a delivery boy.

(Henderson chuckles.)

HENDERSON

Naïve little fool. Have them send a delivery boy? You realize what that means? Tell them our address? Have them send someone over? Assassins, you imbecile!! Filipino poison-dart throwers! Turkish swordsmen! Tibetan sharpshooters! It's like you've never learned a thing. Why have I wasted my time?!

(Pause)

HENDERSON

Come on, we've dicked around long enough. Unpack them! Now! Show me! Show me that you got them!

FLETCHER

For Christ's sake, you know that I got them. If there's anything that you can be certain of...it's that I got them. They are safely snuggled in these bags, with no other purpose than to be devoured by you in those private moments in front of the TV at four in the afternoon! Now, let me take a fucking breath, goddamn it!

HENDERSON

Unpack them. I'll thrash you, so help me. Unpack them!

(Fletcher starts taking out
cans of sardines from the
bags, quickly and angrily.)

FLETCHER

All right! You want to see them? Here! Can after can of
freshly packed Norwegian fucking sardines! Are you quite
satisfied?!

(He stops removing them.)

HENDERSON

(timidly)

"King Oscar Sardines"?

(Fletcher resumes his violent
unpacking.)

FLETCHER

Yes! Once again, we have the pleasure of King Oscar's
company! Old King Oscar, kindly sovereign to the good
people of Norway!

(Fletcher stops, winded by
his exertion.)

HENDERSON

Very good. That was very reassuring. I feel quite at
ease.

FLETCHER

Oh joy, the universe finally has meaning!

HENDERSON

You know I love you, Sammy.

FLETCHER

Sammy's *gone*, dear. I'm the *new* one. I have succeeded Sammy. Must we go through this *again*?!

HENDERSON

I don't mean to be cruel, Sammy, but I'm fighting for my life. It's so very important...sometimes I forget my manners...

(Pause)

HENDERSON

The time?

FLETCHER

(Looking at his watch)

Five thirty.

HENDERSON

Spray, please.

FLETCHER

No kidding.

(He reaches into one of the grocery bags and takes out a can of air freshener.)

HENDERSON

Be thorough. Please be thorough. I don't mean to castigate you, Sammy dear, but I've been noticing that you've been slacking off. Your spraying has been...barely adequate. Remember...shoddy housekeeping is a germ's best friend.

(Fletcher begins spraying around the stage with sweeping, exaggerated motions. He speaks in a very calm and even tone as he sprays.)

FLETCHER

You'll like this one. It's called "Sea Breeze." After two straight months of "Forest Pine," I thought you might appreciate a change. It's been a while since you've had something this refreshing, hasn't it?

(Henderson starts breathing deeply.)

FLETCHER

Yes, that's it. Take it all in. Enjoy. Live life to the fullest. Now, doesn't that remind you of the shore? Doesn't it take you back to those idyllic July afternoons in the Hamptons? When life was simple...uncomplicated. Not fraught with danger, as it is today. Simple pleasures they were. Brunch on the yacht, followed by an afternoon swim, cocktails at the cabana, and perhaps a tryst in the reeds with a Barnard coed. Remember?

(He stops spraying, and puts the can down.)

HENDERSON

Beautiful.

FLETCHER

That should do you for a while.

HENDERSON

You're too good, Sammy. Salt of the earth. I don't know what would become of me if you weren't vigilantly by my side at all times.

FLETCHER

Between the stink of your sardines, the goddamn "Sea Breeze," and your constant babble, I'm ill. I'm a sick person. Not all of us are as privileged as you...to have such a durable constitution. Not all of us were track and field men. Some of us suffer.

HENDERSON

You know where the pills are, Sammy.

FLETCHER

Yes baby, I know.

(He exits.)

HENDERSON

The TV is good today. You'll be cheered up in no time. An earthquake in Pakistan. The ground's opened up and swallowed about two thousand wogs—hey, that was my grandfather's name for them, don't look at me like that! He was over there for twenty years, serving the King of England, trying to keep those buggers in line. I'm not a hateful man, I just like that word..."wogs." The best part is the little thing in the corner of the screen..."Terror From Below," and that mournful music they play. Smashing!

(Fletcher enters with two aspirin and a glass of water.)

FLETCHER

Once again, not interested.

(He pops the aspirin into his mouth and gulps down some water.)

FLETCHER

Listen to me...we have to talk about making some changes.

(Pause. Fletcher waits to see some sign of interest from Henderson. He gets none, but after a deep breath, he continues.)

FLETCHER

I realized long ago that making you a functional human being was the ultimate exercise in futility, but I was willing to keep at it. I was young...I had pluck. But now—

(Henderson has become engrossed in something on the TV, and is not paying any attention.)

HENDERSON

Will you look at that! That policeman's clubbing that young man over the head again and again! And look! He's put black tape over his badge number! Police brutality! Deliberate cruelty! Beautiful!

FLETCHER

Would you listen to me, please?

HENDERSON

Not now! Can't you see I'm, busy? Incredible, fascinating events are unfolding all over the globe...and I've got to keep track of them!

FLETCHER

This is important!

HENDERSON

Stop shouting at me! Can't you see that *I'm* involved in something important? Now, go on...busy yourself somewhere else!

(Henderson turns back to the TV.)

FLETCHER

You old bastard. You make me sick. If you want me, I'll be in my fucking room.

(Fletcher exits. Henderson sits there, totally wrapped up in what's happening on the screen. Lights down.)

Scene Four

(Lights up. It is the following day. The china closet is now completely filled with sardines and air freshener. Henderson is in the chair again, and the television is on. Fletcher is standing at the table, wearing rubber dishwashing gloves, angrily mashing up sardines on a plate. After a few seconds, he finishes and turns to Henderson, offering the plate, along with a straw. Henderson, once again caught up in what he's watching on TV, does not notice him. Fletcher is clearly annoyed.)

FLETCHER

Here.

(Henderson is unresponsive.)

FLETCHER

Eat your goddamn sardines for Christ's sake!

(Henderson turns to him.)

HENDERSON

You won't believe this! A man murdered his wife, cut her body into little pieces, and then fed those pieces into a...a...uh...uh...

FLETCHER
(glancing at TV screen)

Wood chipper?

HENDERSON

Yes!

FLETCHER

Eat your sardines.

(Henderson remains oblivious
to the sardines.)

HENDERSON

Yes, he fed pieces of his wife into a wood chipper. All that was left were tiny bone fragments, maybe a thin sliver of flesh here and there, but the most remarkable part is how the anchorwoman got her voice to quiver on the word "butchery," as if she had some emotional investment in the story. Remarkable! Do you think she practiced many hours to be able to do that?

FLETCHER

If you don't eat these fucking sardines, I'll administer them anally!

HENDERSON

Oh sardines! How nice! How lovely! Thank you, Sammy!

(Henderson takes the plate
and the straw and begins
sucking up the fishy pulp.)

FLETCHER

We should have a serious talk.

(Pause)

HENDERSON

Oh! Wonderful! These are beyond description!

FLETCHER

Are you listening? The only reason I bring this up while you're eating is that it's the only time your eyes aren't fused to that goddamn box...

(Pause)

HENDERSON

Ah! So delicious...

FLETCHER

Pay attention! Don't ask me to repeat this later on.

(Henderson suddenly catches sight of something on the screen.)

HENDERSON

Hey! Make a note of this. Eight O'clock tonight...another documentary on the...final solution. Oh...the allies are liberating Auschwitz. Ohhh! That's terrible! Bodies piled upon bodies! Oh, this really makes our complaints seem so utterly trivial, doesn't it, Sammy?

(Fletcher quickly moves to the TV and turns it off. Henderson becomes enraged.)

HENDERSON

You turned it *off*! Have you lost your senses! You must never, never turn it off! The last one tried to turn it off, and I took care of him, let me tell you! Yes, and he tried to walk me around the room, and he—

FLETCHER

I'm not going to be ignored...not now.

HENDERSON

Sammy! Sammy! Turn it on!

FLETCHER

No.

(Pause)

HENDERSON

I'll thrash you! I swear to God! I'll give you a proper thrashing!

FLETCHER

Shut up.

(Pause)

FLETCHER

I'm leaving.

(Henderson tries to stand. He trembles terribly, dropping the plate of sardines. He then attempts to take a step towards Fletcher. Instead, he falls back into the chair. Fletcher, fully expecting Henderson to be unable to perpetrate any violence, just stares at him, virtually expressionless.)

FLETCHER

Are you done?

(Pause)

FLETCHER

Let me ask you a question. Where do you think I go all these nights? Do you realize you're alone? Do you ever awake in the middle of the night, call out for Sammy, and Sammy's nowhere to be found?.

HENDERSON

Sammy! My boy. Why? What have I done?

FLETCHER

No, not Sammy. This is *me*. You know who I am. Let me tell you what I do...when I tiptoe down the stairs...

HENDERSON

Sammy...I don't feel well. What...what is it you're trying to say? I don't understand you anymore. Help me...

FLETCHER

There's a girl. Do you remember them? Women? Well...there's a girl I've met...on one of my many trips to get you your goddamn King Oscar Sardines. Blah, blah, blah...to make a long story short...she wants me to be with her. She wants me to *live* with her.

HENDERSON

"Live," Sammy? Why? Do I deprive you? Don't I give you money? You never had so much wonderful money! More? All right...go into my bank accounts...all of them. Take, Sammy. Take what you need. But don't...

FLETCHER

You've got it wrong. I need an escape. I need a release. I'm going to live with her. You should be happy for me.

(Pause)

HENDERSON

Ohhh...betrayed because of a *whore*!

FLETCHER

Hey! Watch what the hell you're saying!

HENDERSON

Sammy, don't do it! It's a mistake! A pitfall! It never turns out well! I have the scars to prove it.

FLETCHER

This is different.

HENDERSON

Oh, it always seems different at first. "This one will work," you tell yourself. "She is perfect for me. How happy we will be!" Rubbish, Sammy!

FLETCHER

Too late. I'm going ahead with it. I talked to Werner...he put an ad in the paper. A boy called...very interested in the position. Werner's done an extensive background check. Things look promising. We'll ask him to start immediately, eh? It's all for the best.

(Pause)

FLETCHER

He's young. I know you like them young, don't you?

HENDERSON

How can I live with anyone else? No, Sammy, never!
They'll do terrible things to me!

FLETCHER

What are you talking about? Of course you can live with
someone else...what about all the others before me? What
about your precious "Sammy"? Just keep calm. Everything
will be fine...

HENDERSON

I won't be here to take you back when she tears your soul
apart! I'll probably be dead from infection! Yes, Sammy!
Infection! You're dooming me to death! I'll be eaten
alive by bacteria! They'll win, the dark men in the
shadows...I nearly had them licked...we're so close...

FLETCHER

Sure, sure, bacteria...men...shadows...right. Can't you come
up with anything new?

HENDERSON

I knew you'd do this to me! I could see it the day you
walked in here...the odor that came off you!

(Pause)

HENDERSON

My boy hates me!

FLETCHER

You'll never get any better. There's nothing I can do for
you. I don't want to spend my life like this...

HENDERSON

You try to raise them right...

FLETCHER

You'd like her.

(Pause)

FLETCHER

Please don't make this any harder. I need to have someone. Please...I can't sit here anymore and listen to you...night after night. Christ, I'm so lonely...could you ever understand that? I'm so lonely...

HENDERSON

You do all you can. You give them everything, and...and then the day comes...

FLETCHER

If you could only meet her. If you weren't so damn afraid...you would like her, I bet...

HENDERSON

The day comes...

FLETCHER

Let's leave things on the best possible note. No bitterness, eh?

HENDERSON

...when they abandon you to die!

FLETCHER

Christ, I've had enough of this shit! Every day! I'm fucking sick of it! Cut it out! You're not going to get out of this! Are you listening? This is going to *happen*!

HENDERSON

I feel sick again...

FLETCHER

I'm going to my room...to pack. I don't want you disturbing me...calling for your goddamn sardines...or a fucking spray! You had your chance...

(Pause. Fletcher halts, closes his eyes, takes a deep breath, tries to calm down.)

FLETCHER

This is the best thing. That's not bullshit. That's *truth*. Accept it.

(He exits. Pause.)

HENDERSON

Don't leave me...*Fletcher*. Don't.

(Lights down.)

Scene Five

(Lights up. Fletcher and Amy in Amy's apartment, sitting on the edge of her bed, later that evening. She is massaging his shoulders.)

FLETCHER

The look on his face...

AMY

You had to tell him.

FLETCHER

I never saw that look before.

AMY

What were you gonna do? Not tell him? It had to be done. Right?

FLETCHER

Of course. What have I been saying all this time?

AMY

Exactly.

FLETCHER

My mind's not with it anymore. I can't give it the attention it deserves.

AMY

So why should you stay? You should go.

FLETCHER

But then, I start to think...maybe I can see this thing through. Don't be such a crybaby. Just do it.

(Pause)

FLETCHER

And then, he'll say some ridiculous shit about what's on TV, or he'll demand a spray...or complain about some bacteria that he can feel marching across his skin. I tell you, I want to hurt someone...or break something.

AMY

You shouldn't put up with that. You have every right to lead a normal life. But, you can't help feeling guilty, right? So, I've got a plan. Here's what you should do. Put his mind at ease. Let him see what it is you're leaving for. Bring me in...let me meet him. Let him see I'm just a human being...not some monster...carrying you away against your will. He'll see that we want to be together. He'll remember somewhere in the back of his mind what that's like. Makes sense, doesn't it?

(Fletcher, annoyed, breaks away from her and gets off the bed.)

FLETCHER

You're not bringing this up again, are you? Goddamn it! You can't "see" him. How many times do I have to say it? In the middle of all this, with him telling me I've betrayed him, how he'll die without me there...you walk in. Oh, goody. He's going to love that. What's he going to do, serve you a cup of tea? Bring out a plate of finger sandwiches? The man can't handle it!

AMY

Come on...being a little melodramatic, aren't we Fletch? How do you know what he can really handle until you-?

FLETCHER

By being there, day after day...being the one who has to comfort him when he wakes up screaming...the one who has to organize every fucking detail of his life so that he doesn't experience a second of anxiety. His food, the temperature of the house, the scents in the air. What, do you think he has some hidden reservoir of coping skills? You think that buried deep beneath the psychotic delusions is a well of rational thought? No. Beneath the delusions are more delusions, each one more insane than the one before. This isn't like introducing my high-school sweetheart to my parents. "Mom, Dad, meet Betty Lou. I'm a takin' her to the prom!"

(Pause)

FLETCHER

I just want to get out. I don't want any *scenes*.

AMY

I'm trying to help you, fool. Let me ease the transition a little. You seem to care what this crazy old fucker thinks of you, so why can't I help it go a little more smoothly? Look at yourself, you're panic-stricken.

FLETCHER

You know what I need from you? You want to help me? Just be there tomorrow. Noon. With the car. O.k.? I've got two heavy suitcases...help me with *that*. I know he's the psychological find of the century, but we're closing down the sideshow. "Move along folks, nothing to see here!"

AMY

You're a real pain in the ass, you know that?

(Pause. Fletcher checks his watch.)

FLETCHER

He'll be waking up soon.

AMY

Go to him. Go on, what are you waiting for?

FLETCHER

Everything will be different after tomorrow. Am I a drag to be around these days? I'm sorry. Just wait until tomorrow. I'll be a new man once I'm out of there. I promise. Everything's going to be different. Lighter. We'll have a lot more fun. My mind will be at peace.

AMY

He's waiting for you.

(Fletcher sighs.)

FLETCHER

I know.

AMY

Well, then...do your job.

(Fletcher and Amy stare at each other. He seems unable to move. Lights down.)

Scene Six

(Lights up. The next day. Henderson remains in his chair. The TV is off. He sits there, sulking and silent. Fletcher enters, hesitant.)

FLETCHER

I'm packed.

(Pause)

FLETCHER

He should be here soon...the boy.

(Pause)

FLETCHER

You'll like him. He sounds nice over the phone. Checked out his references...they say he's very responsible...worked summers at a...nursing home. Um...I know it seems strange, him moving in right away, without the two of you meeting first...but there's really no sense in me staying any longer, after yesterday, and all that...

(Pause)

FLETCHER

She'll be picking me up. She has a car. A small...car...

(Pause)

FLETCHER

Oooh...stuffy in here, wouldn't you say? Yeah, needs a spray.

(He lifts up the plastic wrap on the china closet, and takes out a can of air freshener. He begins spraying, straining to get a reaction out of Henderson.)

FLETCHER

Mmmm. "Sea Breeze." Recapture your youth, when all the possibilities were at your command. Your body was nimble. Your mind was agile...

(He notices that Henderson is not reacting, so he stops spraying, and puts the can on the table, embarrassed. He moves to the sofa, and sits down, picking up a newspaper that's lying there. He opens it up and makes a crudely obvious show of pretending to read it.)

HENDERSON

Perhaps you should wait...*outside*...

(Fletcher puts down the paper.)

FLETCHER

Oh, well, if that's what you want.

HENDERSON

I'd like that, yes.

(We hear the sound of a buzzer offstage.)

FLETCHER

There's your boy.

(Fletcher exits. Henderson watches inquisitively. After a moment, there is the muffled, distant sound of Fletcher's voice, high pitched and nervous, alternately pleading and arguing with someone. The voices become progressively louder, as if they are coming up a staircase toward the room. Then, after a quite audible groan, Fletcher enters with Amy. Fletcher awkwardly introduces her.)

FLETCHER

Uh...guess what? This is Amy. The girl. She's decided to come up. I...I...I asked her to wait for me *downstairs*...but she'd decided to...come up. Imagine that. Heh, heh. Don't be afraid.

(whispering, to Amy)

Speak in an evenly modulated tone of voice, and everything will be fine. And no sudden movements!

AMY

Hi. I've heard so much about you.

FLETCHER

No, well...it's not like I said all that much. Don't worry. I was discreet. I...I...I'll get my bags.

(Fletcher exits. Henderson watches him go. Amy leans down and speaks softly to him.)

AMY

Well...how are we today?

(Pause)

HENDERSON

Little girl...he's killing me.

AMY

No! How can that be?

(She sits down on the sofa.)

HENDERSON

Oh, look at you. A trusting soul. You've been taken in, haven't you?

AMY

What are you talking about? What could he have done?

HENDERSON

He's done terrible things to me. Cruel, vicious things...purposely, to inflict pain. He enjoys it.

AMY

You don't say! Beatings? Well, well...this is quite interesting...

HENDERSON

I'm a proud man...wouldn't normally admit a thing like this...but I'm fighting for my life! And look at you, you're so pretty. You have the face of an angel. Like the nuns back at school. Sister Carmelita...I could always tell her my troubles.

AMY

Unburden yourself to me. It's all right.

HENDERSON

He's denied me my television!

AMY

He's done what?! Your television? A poor housebound old man like you?

HENDERSON

I need that connection to the world!

AMY

Of course you do! You've got to be on top of things.

HENDERSON

Yes, but I can't touch the television, or he'll beat me! Yes, beatings! Horrible. I could show you welts and bruises that would repulse you!

AMY

I can't stand to see poor defenseless creatures mistreated. Old dogs, old men...it's all the same in my eyes. I'm right on the phone to the police...or the humane society, whichever applies.

HENDERSON

Oh, thank you, Jesus! Well then, we've got to act fast before he—

(Suddenly, Fletcher enters
with suitcases.)

FLETCHER

Well...how's everything out here?

AMY

You should be ashamed!

HENDERSON

I told her about you.

FLETCHER

You did what?

AMY

This poor, defenseless creature...

HENDERSON

I illuminated your true nature.

FLETCHER

(to Amy)

Uh, oh...what's he been telling you? You know he's a—

HENDERSON

I told her about—

FLETCHER

I'm talking to *her*!

AMY

I've heard things I can't believe. You...beat him?

FLETCHER

What?! Beatings? No! No!

(to Henderson)

Take it back! You son of a bitch!

AMY

Hey! Don't speak to him that way!

FLETCHER

No, no...I told you all about this. Remember? It's his mind! I told you all about the things he says. The ridiculous nonsense...

AMY

I don't know what you're talking about. I wouldn't sit there and let anybody call a poor sick old man names.

HENDERSON

No, she'd call the...uh...ASPCA, right quick, boy!

FLETCHER

Of course we did. What's the matter with you? Come on...I told you...that's why I'm leaving. We've been over this a hundred times.

AMY

Are you calling him a liar?

FLETCHER

Yes! I absolutely am calling him a liar, goddamn it! What do you think I've been saying? He's sick...he's a sick, sick man...

(to Henderson)

But that's all right, because a fresh-faced young man, full of hope and enthusiasm, is on his way up here as we speak. Don't you worry, o.k.? We'll just slip away and you need never think about us again, o.k.? In the meantime, be very quiet, o.k.? Can you do that? Shhhhh.

AMY

He said there were bruises. He said I would be sickened.

HENDERSON

Repulsed!

FLETCHER

Uh, o.k....you don't seem to be listening to what I'm saying. The man is *demented*. He wouldn't know the truth if it bit him on-

AMY

Is vicious name-calling the only response you can offer?

FLETCHER

Bruises. That's what he said, right? Bruises? All right, you want to see bruises? Let's see the tell-tale evidence.

(to Henderson)

Show us. Come on, let's take a look. Off with the clothes.

HENDERSON

He wants me to disrobe! Christ, the humiliation!

AMY

You're *not* making him strip! That's sadistic!

(Fletcher, about to explode, tries very hard to contain himself, rubbing his temples, taking a deep breath, etc.)

FLETCHER

All right...let's take a "time out", shall we? You were affected by his stories...you got worried. That's no surprise. Anybody with a heart...meeting him for the first time...it's a normal reaction. But, remember...they're just stories...absurd stories. There's no evidence to support any one of them. There's no point in getting worked up when there's no evidence, right? In this case, you have to trust me. Me, you see? Not him. Me. You don't really know him. You don't know a single thing about what it's really like to be around him twenty-four hours a day. But, you know me. I'm Fletchie. You trust Fletchie, don't you? Now, you go downstairs. Wait in the car. I'll wrap up everything here. The new boy should be here any minute. All will be fine. We can leave.

AMY

I'm not going anywhere until I get to the bottom of this. How could I live with myself?

HENDERSON

You couldn't.

AMY

I think the proper authorities should be called.

HENDERSON

Ah, there you go! Springing into action!

FLETCHER

No, no! No authorities! It's a *hoax*! I don't understand why you can't see that.

AMY

I wish I could. I'm all confused, now. I'm beginning to wonder who you are. If I left with you, now...If I let you into my home...for good...I'll always have this nagging voice in the back of my head. "What's he capable of?" "Why is he looking at me that way?" "When is he going to finish me off?"

FLETCHER

I really don't believe this...

HENDERSON

Of course you don't! It's not easy to accept when the long arm of the law catches up with you! When your criminal schemes have been uncovered. I imagine this is how Dillinger felt at the end.

(Fletcher drops onto the sofa, exhausted, and seemingly defeated.)

FLETCHER

(whining)

But, we have to *go*...

AMY

I'm not leaving him in this condition.

FLETCHER

This is his *natural* condition. This is how I found him. I swear to God...on my mother's life...

AMY

My heart tells me something different.

FLETCHER

Your...heart? No. I explained everything. The sardines. The spray. The TV. You begged me to tell you...every little detail. I didn't want to. You made me.

(Pause)

FLETCHER

You knew all about this. You *knew* it.

HENDERSON

Discreet, huh? Told her everything. My private condition, fodder for gossip! I feel all violated!

(Pause)

FLETCHER

There's a boy coming. A well-qualified boy.

HENDERSON

(to Amy)

A stranger! Hopped up on God knows what! One of his old cronies, some of that street trash he used to run with before I cleaned him up and gave him a home! The minute this new one gets here, he'll probably knock me out cold, walk away with everything that's not bolted down. I watch those consumer investigations on Channel 2 news. "Elderly at Risk!" A three-part series. Very informative.

FLETCHER

That's not true. Werner gave him a thorough background check.

HENDERSON

Werner! The snake! That shyster's probably in cahoots with you.

(Pause)

FLETCHER

(to Amy)

We're moving in together. I think one of us may have even said the word "love." I think it was me. We have something here. A future. You won't even take my side...against...ridiculous stories...from an old...?

(to Henderson)

You had to give the knife one more twist.

HENDERSON

I don't know what the hell you're talking about. I saw this angelic, sympathetic face...and I felt a need to...*unburden* myself.

FLETCHER

(to Amy)

Let's go. Please. I've got to get out of here. I'm so close to getting out. Please.

HENDERSON

Oh, angel of mercy...

AMY

Are you talking to *me*?

(to Fletcher)

Don't you love the way he expresses himself?

HENDERSON

Let me make you a proposition...

FLETCHER

Oh, Christ...

HENDERSON

I need to be taken care of...

FLETCHER

Uh oh...

HENDERSON

He's made a right cock-up of the whole situation. I need a young, respectful, caring, open-hearted sort of person...

FLETCHER

He's going to say it. I can feel it.

HENDERSON

I love being around youth. Their zest...their vigor...their new, bold ideas...

FLETCHER

I feel my head...exploding...

HENDERSON

Stay here...with me...be my...aide-de-camp...

(Pause)

HENDERSON

You'll never want for anything.

AMY

What? Here? Me? I...I...I'm overcome.

FLETCHER

Oh...no...he didn't say that...did he?

HENDERSON

Rid yourself of this louse. Send him away. Start life fresh...with me..

AMY

You sweet, kind-hearted darling! That you would have such faith in me...after only a few minutes...

(Fletcher leaps up from the sofa.)

FLETCHER

You don't want her! She's got no experience! She's never been a caretaker! You know what she wants to be? Oh, you're gonna love this...a psychologist! Go, on ask her!

HENDERSON

What? A quack head-shrinker? Oh no. No, no! I don't want to be around one of those bloodsuckers! They can see inside your mind...it's like your head was this great big glass fishbowl. They muck about with your brains until you admit to all sorts of perversions! Oh no, girlie...if that's your game, you can take it on the arches right now!

AMY

Wait a minute...he's making that up! I don't know what he's trying to pull. Psychology? Good God, I have no interest in *that*.

FLETCHER

She's going for a degree! Only six credits away! One day, she wants to have a practice on the Upper West Side!

(to Amy)

Thought I was down for the count, didn't you? There was one more arrow left in the quiver.

(to Henderson)

Can you imagine her endless questions? The probing...the twisting of every little thing you say...

HENDERSON

I will not have it!

FLETCHER

(to Amy)

He will not have it!

AMY

What are you rambling on about? A degree? When did I ever mention...*psychology*?

FLETCHER

(to Henderson)

New York University!!

AMY

Are you out of your mind? NYU? Hey, I think I once took a drink at the water fountain outside their library...but, you think I'm a *student*? Based on what?

FLETCHER

(To Henderson)

She told me all about it. Research...term papers...

AMY

What? Have you read any of these papers? You ever see me crack a textbook? Hey, you've been in my apartment, you ever see any books? Papers? Student ID cards lying around?

FLETCHER

Well...you said you were neat. I asked about the goddamn books...

(Pause)

FLETCHER

You said you were...neat...

AMY

(to Henderson)

He thinks I'm some college co-ed? Let him prove it.

(to Fletcher)

Call up NYU. Ask if they've ever heard of me. If I'm enrolled, they'll have everything...name, social security number...address. Call them up.

(Pause)

FLETCHER

What? You mean...you're not...? You never were...?

(Fletcher drops back down onto the sofa.)

AMY

I really don't know where he gets it. Pulls it out of thin air.

HENDERSON

Ah, he's your garden-variety psychotic. I'm used to it by now.

AMY

I'm not the slightest bit interested in psychology. I would never mess around with anybody's *mind*.

HENDERSON

Oh...what a relief.

(to Fletcher)

Had to slander the one pure soul left in this god-forsaken world, didn't you? Viper!

(Pause)

HENDERSON

(to Amy)

Well? I'm waiting...

AMY

I suddenly feel a duty...an *obligation*...to say "yes." But, I'm not sure how to-

HENDERSON

Oh now, don't worry. I'm easy to care for. My needs are simple and few. I've pared down my life to only the most essential elements. If you've got a brain in your head, it will all come very easily.

(indicating Fletcher)

He picked it up with no trouble, so what does that tell you?

(Pause)

FLETCHER

(quietly)

I knew him first...not fair...

AMY

What did you say?

FLETCHER

You think you can come here and start doing this job, just like that? You have no experience. You're going to need guidance...instruction. Don't listen to him. It's not the easiest thing in the world to wait on him hand and foot...to anticipate his every need...to respond to his crises. I'll tell you what we can do. If you're so moved...if you want to help the poor unfortunates of the world...let me be your guide. I'll stay on. We'll take care of him together. We'll be a team. We'll stay here and do the job, until you get bored, and realize how incredibly annoying all his little quirks and habits are...and how his inane chatter makes you want to stick a fork in your eyeball. At that point, we can leave. You can say you did your best...the old college try. All right? I give you a month...two, tops.

HENDERSON

Oh, no! If he's part of the bargain, just forget the whole deal! Haven't I suffered enough? Can't I ever escape his clutches?

AMY

Well, Fletch...there's not much I can do for you. Sorry. You heard what the man said.

(Pause)

FLETCHER

But...what's going to happen to *me*?

AMY

Aw, listen to him! So *forlorn*. A young, healthy male in the land of opportunity has no right to whine.

(She digs into her pocket, and takes out a ring of keys. She holds them up for Fletcher to see.)

AMY

Here. A studio apartment, all to yourself. You can just put my things in storage...I don't think I'll need any of that junk any time soon. And a *car*. Don't forget that. It's a piece of crap, I know, but it's something. You can drive, can't you? Take it.

(She gets ready to toss the keys over to Fletcher, but suddenly stops and turns to Henderson.)

AMY

You say I won't want for anything?

HENDERSON

I'm a man of means. I won't deny it. If you are loyal to me, you will be rewarded. You have only to ask, and it's yours.

AMY

Well, then...

(She tosses the keys to a dazed Fletcher, who doesn't even try to catch them. The keys hit his chest and fall into his lap.)

AMY

(to Henderson)

When do I begin?

HENDERSON

In my heart, you already have.

(Fletcher stands up.)

FLETCHER

I just want you to know I see what's going on. I see.

AMY

I don't have the slightest idea what you're talking about.

(to Henderson)

Do you, dear?

HENDERSON

Sammy, don't take all this the wrong way. No hard feelings, eh? I just want you to disappear forever. That's all. I just want to forget your rotten, stinking treacherous face. Let's end on a positive note. What do you say?

AMY

(to Fletcher)

You're free. Isn't that what you wanted?

(Pause)

FLETCHER

I spent two years here. Never a thought for myself. Did my job. Played by the rules. I just want that on the record. Two years out of my life. Two years of loyal service.

(Pause)

FLETCHER

I never did anything wrong.

(Amy moves over to
Henderson.)

AMY

I'm sorry things couldn't have worked out between us. But, it looks like there would have been issues arising eventually. Serious personality clashes. We avoided some unpleasantness down the road, getting things out in the open here, don't you think? Dodged a bullet, I'd say.

(Fletcher lifts the
suitcases, pauses for a
moment to look at Henderson,
and then exits. Henderson,
smiling, begins to wave.)

HENDERSON

Goodbye, Sammy! Good luck!

(Amy turns to Henderson.)

AMY

Oh, darling. What I went through for you. What I had to endure to get here. Listening to him prattle on, night after night, about nothing. God. I wanted to throw myself out a window, just to have something to take my mind off the boredom.

HENDERSON

Well, what do you say we get started? Now, you just switch on that television and we'll be all—

AMY

I just want to make a few things clear...set some guidelines.

HENDERSON

TV, please!

AMY

I'll be glad to give you my full attention and dedication. But you have to do some things for me.

HENDERSON

It's very easy. You just push that button there. We used to have one of those clicky things you point at the TV, but I don't know where it's gone. I think he hid it. Yeah. He hid it. Can you believe that? The bastard.

AMY

Now, first you get on that phone to that Werner guy. You tell him that I'm the new one. We'll send that boy home when he gets here. You tell Werner that boy's not for you. I'm the new one. You tell him to draw up the papers. And you let him know you don't want any background checks done. If he insists, you remind him who's paying his retainer. Let him know who's boss. If you believe that I'm the new one, you have to show me evidence of that. It's only fair, isn't it? It's a show of good faith. You have faith in me as a kind, humane soul. I need to have faith in you...in your generosity. You shouldn't hold back from giving me the things I want. That would be disrespectful. For this to work, I need my position respected. I need you to put yourself in my hands. No hesitation. No second-guessing based on the vicious gossip of outsiders. You have to believe in me, and everything I tell you. You just lie back and enjoy. These are your golden years. Leave everything to me. Do you understand? I'm in charge now, darling.

HENDERSON

(impatiently)

Yes, yes, that's fine. TV, please!

(Amy walks over to the television, and turns it on. The glow washes over Henderson, as we hear a faint murmur of a newscast.)

HENDERSON

Ah, yes, I feel this is going to be a wonderful period in both our lives. Don't you?

(Amy walks over to the sofa, and sits down.)

HENDERSON

Soon it will be time for my sardines. King Oscar sardines, you know.

AMY

Yes, I know.

(Amy picks up the newspaper that's lying on the sofa. She opens it up, and begins looking through it—holding it open so that the paper blocks her face. Henderson is once again entranced by the TV program. He begins to giggle, as in earlier scenes—first (very quietly, then quickly building in volume. Suddenly, Amy pulls the paper down from in front of her face, and shoots a disapproving look at Henderson.)

AMY

Enough.

HENDERSON
(timidly)

Yes...I'm sorry...

(She raises the paper again
and continues reading.
Henderson continues watching
TV, covering his mouth to
stifle further giggles when
the excitement becomes too
much for him. Lights fade
slowly.)

END