

Performance rights must be secured before production. For contact information, please see the Multiple Choice information page (click on your browser's "Back" button, or visit <http://singlelane.com/proplay/multiplechoice.html>)

## MULTIPLE CHOICE

By Alan Rossett

Jo-Barbara-Mom-Clara-Marjorie

Parsifal Samsondale

### ACT I

(Twilight in the living room of a house on a small lake in Michigan. A main entrance. Assorted exits.

A television set, back to the audience...We can hear the program that Jo, in her fifties, vaguely watches as she dusts furniture and sips lemonade.)

LINDA'S VOICE

Euuuh, when I went into Douglas's -

TAMMY'S VOICE (gaily)

And wham she calls him Douglas now! If I don't call that exciting, my name isn't...?

CHANTING STUDIO AUDIENCE

...Tammy Tilly Talset!

TAMMY'S VOICE

So there's Doug...

JO

You suck, Tammy...

TAMMY'S VOICE

...ready to offer you what you want, what we all want! Which is love.

DOUGLAS'S VOICE

Hey stop my wife!

(The front doorbell rings)

TAMMY'S VOICE (coldly)

If you insist, call it the warmth of a human ear?

JO (calling)  
Do come in!

TAMMY'S VOICE  
So you looked at Linda, this pathetic girl...

(Parsi discreetly enters...in his fifties as well...dressed in a Tyrolean loden coat, carrying a small suitcase...has the air of a traveler who's stumbled into a world he doesn't quite know...)

PARSI and DOUGLAS'S VOICE  
Uuuh...

TAMMY'S VOICE  
And you thought...?

PARSI and DOUGLAS'S VOICE  
Uuh. . . ?

TAMMY'S VOICE  
"Is there a shrink in the house?"

	(overlapping)	
LINDA'S VOICE	DOUGLAS'S VOICE	JO
Me?	But no!	You suck.

TAMMY'S VOICE  
This evening, from Florida to Alaska, we're all going to be Linda's shrink! If not, my name isn't...?

JO (sarcastic)  
"Tammy Tilly Talset!?"

(turns off the television set as the studio audience chants "TAMMY TILLY - ")  
Yes?

PARSI  
Uuuuh. (hesitantly) How to put it...I'm looking for my sister...on a certain level.  
(She seems confused) My sister-in-law actually. Margie...Marjorie Samsondale.

JO (uncomfortable)

Oh.

PARSI

She's my brother's wife. Sydney...?

JO

Samsondale. Yeeees. Sit down, Mr. Samsondale? You've come a long way?

PARSI

From Germany, Stuttgart...

JO

I seee, so you must be boiling.

PARSI

It beats the devil. February and weather like this!

JO

It's very unusual for us.

PARSI

I know that, I was born on this lake!

JO

Then take off your coat, it's Germanic.

(He struggles to remove the coat; she helps him:)

You're in quite a sweat. Would you like to take a shower?

PARSI

No, no, very nice of you but -

JO

We haven't been introduced. Which doesn't stop all that sweat. Let me at least offer you a glass of lemonade. (she pours) You're not the first to wander in for directions...As my house is the only one you can see from the bus stop...That is what gave me the idea of renting rooms..."Madam Jo's"...in case you need a room...? Anyway. I can let you know one thing about your sister-in-law. You won't find her around here anymore. God, man, why didn't you make any inquiries before setting out on such a trek?

PARSI (on the defensive)

Hold on, I travel when I want!

JO

She left Michigan several years ago...accompanied by her husband, your brother, who'd found some sort of work in...Kuala Lumpur...? Graphic artist, in that line...?

PARSI

But I know all this!

JO

You surely don't know that...she died in Kuala Lumpur...Marjorie Samsondale. You poor man. At least three months ago. A neighbor mentioned it...I didn't blink, I hardly knew Mrs. Samsondale. And now fate dumps you into my living room so that I have to be the one to tell you she's dead? It is odd.

PARSI

But I know it! My brother sent me a video tape of her funeral. He is a graphic artist, he redid the cassette box as a coffin...Looking at the thing...I realized that I loved Margie...loved her, you know, as a person, not romantic-type love.

JO (delicately)

Yet you hardly knew her?

PARSI

I'd met her ten times at best and ages ago...My only clear image...a Greek island, I was with my wife, my ex, my second ex, who'd splashed away with my brother into some little cove. Marjorie was climbing down the rocks in high heels...very jagged rocks...She was dressed rather formally. Well, she didn't swim. She leaned toward me as if we were at a cocktail party. Not in a snooty way, that's not Marjorie, she was always peaceful and very very lovely. (suddenly stopping...) Hey, it's peaceful here all right...now that you turned off the TV. Is that why one wants to open up to you?

JO

I thought you had no one at home who'd listen?

PARSI

I see: I'm a pest? Put on the TV, lady, bye bye!

JO (stopping him from leaving)

Don't twist my words! It's not an insult...to have sensed a terrible need for the warmth of a human ear? You don't know me, I don't know you. You have nothing to lose, I have

nothing to gain. Talk to me. Tell me things. You would if I were Tammy Tilly Talset! And she sucks. Your sister-in-law interests me...on her rock...leaning toward you...?

PARSI (falling under Jo's spell)

...She told me she was thinking about having a nose job. Just imagine: a housewife whose looks can't much matter...and she had a nice nose! I don't remember how I reacted but...fifteen years later I look into her video coffin and - Jesus Christ it's not the same nose! "Why, Margie, why?" On the rock I must certainly have asked her about it...

JO

Her answers have crept into your subconscious...

PARSI

Yes! And it does bother me! Not knowing whether she was less peaceful than she appeared? Obviously one doesn't end **up** a letter of condolence with "P.S. Broth, why did Margie have a nose job?" But...

JO

It eats into you. Which is normal: you loved your sister-in-law.

PARSI

Most people put me off!

JO

Me too! Still, they are alive and she is dead! And it's she you don't understand!?

PARSI

Just between the two of us, who has the time to understand anything? ...piling up money...night and day...piling piling...to the point where any more piles would be in bad taste, well, I'm a multimillionaire.

JO

You pooor man!

PARSI

I brought off a little deal...

JO

There's no need to apologize!

PARSI

So this morning I - (he stops, obviously bothered)

JO

"This morning I...?"

PARSI ("lightly")

I says to myself: What's it today, old man? Talc yourself with caviar?

JO (insinuating)

Or...do something...more desperate...?

PARSI (blocking out the thought)

No!...But if I went on a nose hunt! A Marjorie nose hunt! Found out about Marjorie! Could be amusing! Starting at the very spot where she met my brother. What if I went back to the old lake?

JO

...The Samsondale brothers...I vaguely remember your first names...Sydney and...

PARSI

Parsi for Parsifal. Can't imagine why, Mom never saw an opera in her life. At the table she'd say "Pass the parsley, Parsi". May she rest in peace.

JO

I vaguely remember her. (changing gears as she grabs the pitcher of lemonade)  
But I never met a multimillionaire before! That's what interests me, how to become one!  
My house is in bad need of repairs. 25 years and the same television set. Can you imagine, it isn't even in color! But don't mind me, drink down all of my lemonade, Parsi-fall

PARSI (intimidated as she rather aggressively refills his glass)

Thanks no. Thanks it's very good. Thanks, becoming a millionaire isn't complicated...

JO

Yes but how to begin?

PARSI

By fleeing the lake! Like I did when I was 19!

JO ("knowing")

You had to leave.

PARSI

Not at all! The State Tourist Office had sent a lady photographer to take some pretty pictures of the lake. She noticed me underneath a car, stretched on my back, in shorts. She began to photograph my legs.

JO (skeptical)

I don't believe it!

PARSI

No really, she called me "Gorgeous Legs"...thought I should stop greasing cars for a living and become an "industrial model"...use her contacts...go to Detroit...

JO

...move in with her...?

PARSI

Well...

JO (encouraging)

Don't knock love, Parsi!

PARSI

Oh that word! Rose - the photographer - this won't sound very nice but - her photos were lovely, so was she but, from the human point of view -

JO

She had nothing to say?

PARSI

Hey, that must be it! Not much escapes you! I probably tried to fill in Rose's void...but...I dunno...When the Army shipped me off to Stuttgart...

JO

And your next "love"?

PARSI

That word! Just say the other GI's fell for...we called them "strudels", flaky frauleins...loose ladies...you're not shocked?

JO

Nothing shocks me.

PARSI

Well, I nibbled American cheese...Elaine! A schoolteacher for the kids of the American military stationed there. She was a bit of a cow. But, you know, soldier in a foreign country in peace time, you fill up your days with what's around.

JO

"What's around" shocks me.

PARSI

I married her, eh!

JO (imitating him)

"Kind of calm today. Might as well marry the cow."

PARSI

I guess it was that, but once hooked...I dunno -

JO

She had nothing to say? Either? Women are impossible.

PARSI

You said that, not I -

JO

Count to three: one interesting woman.

PARSI ("gallantly")

You!

JO

My good sir, I see myself as far less noteworthy than "Elaine"... following her star all the way to Stuttgart...nobly sacrificing herself to mold the minds of the young?

PARSI

Elaine?...every night at dinner...burped over her time wasted on the bratty kids of bitchy wives of military career imbeciles. Not that she didn't keep me in their clutches once out of uniform. It was Elaine who got me this job as receptionist at the "Stuttgart American Students and Artists Club"...a bunch of snooty ex-patriots, GIs and crumbling ex-nazis. My main activity - bouncing the guys who tried to crash the tea dance and pick up girls...without a membership card! One rainy afternoon...I tripped into the dance myself...it was inevitable...a little Oriental doll danced into my arms...with a haze of tea and cigarette smoke circling round her delightful face..."Hoa-Bin"...

JO

..."Hoa-Bin"...?

PARSI (as Jo seems to pensively sketch in Hoa-Bin's movements)

I'd never met a real princess before! And for her I was John Wayne, the American whom John Ford had immortalized in his "liturgical Westerns". She was rich by the way, so rich that uh...

JO

She arranged for you to stop working ? well "work" Hm.

PARSI

Elaine sniffed out that affair -

JO

'cause the others?

PARSI

She knew how to get even. Coming home exhausted one night...the cow had flown the coop! For the States! Can you imagine! Taking our child with her!

JO

You're giving birth now, hold on

PARSI

...At eight months a little girl's beside the point...

JO

No wonder her mother took her away from you...!

PARSI

"Fatherhood" panicked me. I know it's hard to understand.

JO ("understanding")

Not at all, you were young. Broke. And Hoa-Bin...

PARSI

...pulled me up a notch... into a first-class jet...whizzing toward her native land...exotic far-off land...Vietnam!

JO

This is in...?

PARSI

1963.

JO

Little Parsi is shall we say "apolitical"?

PARSI

Oh I noticed right away that our honeymoon was not the usual one. Sparkling fireworks with pipe bombs on the side. I saw a man set himself on fire..and just to make his point. It made me think of a crêpe Suzette.

JO

Makes me think of Joan of Arc!

PARSI

On the plane back to Stuttgart...

JO

Whizzing already...?

PARSI

I sensed Hoa-Bin rather uncomfortable...at the same time terribly mischievous. Once home, she runs into the bedroom, slams the door in my face. I look through the keyhole. She's stark naked...swinging her hips. Not sensually, but in relief. Diamonds, real ones were dropping  
out of her... (lowering his voice) out of her...

JO

She was laying diamonds, I understand, go on.

PARSI

I didn't know how to take it. The door opened. Hoa-Bin scrutinized me. Deeply disappointed.

JO

I should think so. John Wayne doesn't look through keyholes! John Wayne doesn't covet diamonds! That must've shocked the hell out of a Vietnamese princess.

PARSI

And what about me? Losing the part of John Wayne? At those dances, suddenly she'd go on to anyone who'd listen... (Hoa-Bin's singsong) "Parsifal - that's him over there - my husband. We share the same bed, but our sexual life is dead. Who wants to know

all about the death of our sexual life? Parsi, dear, turn the music down, that way nobody will miss a word!" Two years of that rubbish.

JO ("Hoa-Bin")

"The Vietnam War has driven me mad and this s.o.b. doesn't give a shit. Meet my husband."

PARSI

Maybe that did play into it...but what with her entire royal family holed up at our place - no, when Hoa-Bin suggested a divorce, believe me I -

JO (brutally cutting him off)

Her explanations?

PARSI

What explanations?

JO

Your sexual life - its demise?

PARSI

Pure rot.

JO (insistently)

I'm listening.

PARSI

Oh, she'd say...oh.

JO

Yes?

PARSI

In bed I wasn't worth the effort! I found myself very worth the effort!

JO

She dared to disagree? Another cunt. Not impotent, are we?

PARSI (grumbling)

No, no.

JO

I don't envision you as being brutal. Did you prepare her enough at the beginning? If not, that can be a source of resentment.

PARSI

Don't you find that our conversation is beginning to get a little out of hand?

JO

We're not going to start playing polite handsy now? I have no connection to your real life. Tomorrow I'm not here. You know it's the rare occasion to get what's bugging you off your chest. Come clean.

PARSI (lowering his voice)

I have a very small prick. So there! Apparently that alienates a lady's affection.

JO

Certain ladies perhaps! Certain men have very big penises, and they hurt! If I had my way I'd lop off an inch here and there from certain men's penises.

PARSI (confused)

I step out of a bus, five minutes later, we're sipping lemonade and she's dissecting pricks

JO (philosophically)

In one way or another, don't we all have our own personal "too-little prick"? And all to the good, I daresay. It allows us to let off steam over those little things that God imposes...

PARSI

God...?

JO

...Yes, in order to make us forget the big things He can't come up with. (incisively) Not that I buy your little prick - it probably isn't all that little -

PARSI

It is, dammit! I'm used to it!

JO

And so was Rose and so was Elaine. And even Hoa-Bin...little or not... it made you into a multimillionaire!

PARSI

But no. Hoa-Bin's incessant complaints on the subject drove me out of the house...onto a nearby field...silent...empty. This was the moment when shanty towns pretending to be housing projects were in a boom abroad ...providing you could seize an empty plot of land-

JO (cynically)

More lemonade?

PARSI

With Hoa-bin losing interest in me, I understandably worried about finding myself out on the street...Thank you...So to get into the real-estate racket, I got some capital out of...well...

JO

Hoa-Bin!

PARSI

Peanuts for her...that I was able to reimburse a hundred times over! I made her so much money that we stayed on excellent terms after the divorce. Then we all began scavenging for other properties, we –

JO

Who "we all"? Hoa-Bin?

PARSI

No...My...associates. You know, people. Very nice people.

JO

Wheeler-dealers like yourself?

PARSI

You could say that.

JO

Men. Really sweet. And love, Parsi, you forgot all about love?

PARSI

Lady, that word obsesses you.

JO

Mister, that outmoded word is still in every dictionary in the world.

PARSI

No kidding? I've given it up for female strudels! After a certain age, they're less exhausting.

JO

Fast-food strudels?

PARSI

Not necessarily. For me, it's getting increasingly slow.

JO

The crust is stale.

PARSI

Who cares? I've got nothing more to prove. Thank God, I no longer feel obligated to...run after...to look for... (vague gesture)

JO

What exactly have you run after? looked for...all your life?

PARSI

I dunno. Do you know what you're looking for?

JO (incisively)

Your daughter.

PARSI (confused)

What'd'ya mean, my daughter?

JO

I wasn't able to have children. Is it naïve to think that a child can bring something into her father's life?

PARSI

Her? Jesus. (pause) OK, OK. it's true that...one fine day, I had an...inexplicable desire to make her acquaintance. She was four at the time. She lived in Nebraska with her mother. You should have seen the look on Elaine's face when I showed up on her doorstep without warning.

JO

Mine would've have knocked you dead.

PARSI (slyly)

I'd never written to her about my big killing in real estate. Only about my divorce from Hoa-Bin. Therefore -

JO

She assumed you were broke? That way she wouldn't ask you for any money'? Clever!

PARSI

So broke she thought I wanted to move in with her! Her? A cow in an Afro hairdo now? No, I had come for "Prudence", you're right, Prudence is my daughter's name.

(pause)

JO

And??

PARSI

And nothing. She was just a little rabbit...with my face. Back in Stuttgart, I sent Elaine an enormous check. From then on year after year: an enormous check.

JO

Thus fulfilling all responsibilities as a father?

PARSI

...I was sorry about the little rabbit, really. One day, twelve, thirteen years later?...suddenly I found myself choked up with this, this...

JO

'Inexplicable..."?

PARSI

Tenderness, yes, toward my child. I wrote to Prudence, inviting her to spend the summer with me in Germany. She wrote back that she had no desire to set foot in that "shitty country" The child wrote "shitty". I'm about to start college, I'm very busy. Nothing stops you from visiting us but..."

(He stops, troubled)

JO (imitating the young girl)

"I hope you don't think you can move in with us."

PARSI

Was it necessary...to hurt her poor old Daddy's feelings?

JO (harsh)

Yes.

PARSI

So up hers...and yours too! She'll come to a bad end. She has already. Last month...how to explain...A multinational group makes me a kind of tricky offer: sell them all my shares behind my associates' backs. After which...

JO

Hurrah Parsi's a multimillionaire!

PARSI

Something wrong with that?

JO

Oh nothing...In Stuttgart, they must've taken you off the best-liked list?

PARSI

Stuttgart, Jeez, who cares?

JO

Therefore, it's in your interest to leave, fast, before your associates gun you down?

PARSI

Oh, just say... well. .

JO ("gaily")

Bang bang?

PARSI

OK. Yesterday...

JO

Bang!

PARSI (dodging her)

A nifty little flight to New York. And then -

JO

Your daughter lives there?

PARSI

She's in "communications". I was shocked. A young woman, Prudence, 29. Has her own office, her secretary - and my face!

JO

And a color TV at least. And hi fi. Bravo, Prudence!

PARSI

Madam Jo, I'd hardly walked in, she asks me how much I'm worth. Her mother had let her know that the answer was...

JO ("hateful")

"TOO MUCH!"

PARSI

Hm, I'm going to have a word or two with that bitch of a mother!  
(imitating "Prudence") "Very unlikely, Father, she has throat cancer."  
(he stops, troubled) Elaine?

JO (echoing his emotion)

The cow?

PARSI

All right, she had been my wife. But Prudence, not the sort to waste a hanky, abruptly asks me for money! As she has this idea that she's "potentially a world class marketing marketeer", she wants to form her own company. "Ah gee kid, money, sorry it's the wrong moment" I told her. "I've just sold all my shares."

JO (imitating "Prudence")

"For how much, Daddy?"

PARSI (mechanical reply)

"Twenty million dollars,.kid."

JO

"Then it's the right moment. How do you legally intend to sign it all over to me, Daddy?"

PARSI

"Honey...we should get to know each other a little. Go on vacation with me. I'll show you Europe! (Jo-"Prudence" glares at him.)

Asia...? (another glare) If you prefer...South America?! (idem. Cowed:)  
At least have lunch with me... Come on..."

JO ("Prudence")

"Without your money, Father, I've lost my appetite."

PARSI (suddenly struck)

How do you know - that she more or less said that?!

JO

'cause that's what I would've said! Your Daddy act – now-you-see-me-now-you-don't - couldn't interest her less. As a walking piggy bank, you'd interest anyone!

PARSI

Is that the way it is? Then not a penny! That's what I said!

JO ("Prudence")

"Once you're dead, I'll have it all."

PARSI (confused)

Were you hiding under her desk yesterday?

JO

Course not. I encourage people to talk, I listen and figure out you refuse to hear - you dishonest son of a bitch!

PARSI

Who?

JO

I suppose you then threatened to "completely disinherit" her.

PARSI

Would you leave your estate to a snotty girl who won't have lunch with you? No! I'll go directly to Fink! My terrifying lawyer! And change my will. Leave everything to...to...uh...to..

JO ("Prudence", harshly) "

I wouldn't try that if I were you, Father. I know all the lawyers in New York. Fink's a pretty sippy one. Why, he's like you: has-been.

PARSI

Madam Jo, I don't pretend to have led a very moral life...but at her age, I was adventurous.

JO

You left town.

PARSI

Anyway, does she really need my filthy lucre? She's pretty clever...my daughter. She's my daughter!

JO ("Prudence")

"And if I. have cancer tomorrow...you wouldn't even know. And your money could've saved me...Daddy?" (incisively) Is that so, "Samsondale Comma Parsifal". Your money.

(very definitively, the verdict:) It all boils down to that.

PARSI

"Samsondale Comma..." (staring intently at her) What are you driving at, lady?

JO (plays confusion)

Me ?

PARSI

Yes;

JO

Personally?

PARSI

Yes.

JO

Why, Mr. Samsondale. I'm merely burbling away!...adding a touch here and there to your true life confessions...

PARSI

My...

JO

...it draws out the peaceable end of, this has been a lovely day, hasn't it! I'm a nice little lady, you know, straight-forward. It' you that's up to something.

PARSI

Up to something??

JO

Yep, yep, yep. You chatter away like a magpie and why all the blither, I ask myself?

PARSI

"Blither"??

JO

Trying to arouse my curiosity, is it?

PARSI

"Curiosity"?!

JO

Hold on. I get it!

PARSI

"Blither"!

JO

I figured the whole thing out! You're on the make.

PARSI

The make?? For who??

JO (beams "knowingly")

You old fox you, with all your blither, oh my God oh I get it! You're out for me.

PARSI

It isn't true. I give it to this woman from the guts, like to no one ever before. My loves, my daughter, my heartrending grief! She strap me into a state of trauma and then she blandly-

JO

I just listened to relax you a little.

PARSI

I 'M NOT NERVOUS!!

JO

Any straightforward little lady would've done the same. But you! You screwed-up man. First you imagine that I must have a subterfuge as well. I must want to - I don't know - get to know you better to... to...Ah! To get to know how to manipulate you...AAH!!

PARSI

Ah?

JO

To rent out one of my rooms! That's it! Ah!

PARSI (edging away)

Nah nah nah! I have no intention of staying here.

JO

Night's falling, you won't find another pad. But, to "rent a room" is still too simple for you. You have to start thinking: "Once night falls - with her husband away - "

PARSI

Husband?

JO

You get me, Casanova: my husband. Night watchman the next town over. For you that reads: "Seeing as we're completely isolated, she of the opposite sex and no prude, guess I'll have to go to bed with her, even though I find her particularly unattractive. OK, frump, let's go, pray God I can get it up and that she comes quickly." Don't protest, I know you now! There's one little hitch. My husband doesn't appreciate that form of politeness toward his wife. And he might come home earlier than expected. He's a big-barreled brute, my husband. His name is Bill. All the bestial qualities one associates with the letter "B" you'll find in Bill. Just as you, with your letter "p", you are a poor puny poopster. Perhaps a Papa? Pass the parsley, Parsi. Let's not exaggerate. "p" can also be "passenger, parachutist, pariah". Ah that's a "P" I prefer! 'less, of course, you lied to me before and Parsi is a pseudonym, your peregrinations are just passing phantasies...and your "P" adds up to paltry practical joker pleading for a pad who departs peremptorily before PM time, leaving the bill PP - positively un-paid.

PARSI

You amuse me.

JO (very severe)

My good man, I do not run a shelter for the needy. The price of the room is already a sacrifice but if I don't cover my expenses I'll have to close the joint. I've been had once too often by your sort. No deposit on the room and you'll sleep outdoors, under the stars, where our local prowlers will further reduce the size of your insignificant little prick. The deposit...suppose it's too much to've hoped you have a credit card?

PARSI

Of course I have a credit card.

JO

Ah, now that's good! Very good! I don't take credit cards. Your checkbook, you made a point of "forgetting" I suppose?

PARSI

You wanta see it?!

JO

Couldn't do any harm. (He shows it. She abruptly tries to snatch it from him.  
He recoils. She laughs good-naturedly.)  
Adorable. He thinks I'm gonna steal it. Parsi, can't you see that I'm just cutting up! Making fun of you!

PARSI (trying to smile)  
That's what I was thinking.

JO (lightly placing a pen, between his fingers)  
You will write me a deposit though?

PARSI (lightly)  
How much is the room?

JO  
Why?

PARSI  
I intend to pay it in full right now. That way we won't mention it again.

JO  
Ah, no! I never accept having the room paid in full before the lodger's passed the night.

PARSI  
But I can very well...

JO  
House rule! If I asked for the full amount the lodger would find me petty and thus have a too good opinion of himself! Nosireee!

PARSI  
There's no problem...I have plenty of money...

JO  
No kidding...? Your stories...they were jokes weren't they? C'mon, you can tell me, I won't like you the less! That company that supposedly bought yours. You made that up!

PARSI  
Of course I didn't.

JO

I don't believe you. The total amount they gave you for selling out...what was it again...the exact figure?

PARSI

Twenty million dollars.

JO

...Let me drool...twenty million...For you that must be banal...Excuse the ignorance of a little lady from the sticks...but could such a large figure be written on a single check?

PARSI

I run the checkbook, lady.

JO (savoring it)

"I run the check - " Write me that check.

PARSI

What?

JO

Write twenty million dollars to the order of Josephine Bungler-Smyth.

PARSI

You're joking!

JO

Yes. In the deep sense of the word "joke". For once in my joke of a life, I'd like to see my name sitting next to that kind of figure. Oh please, please! Of course we'll destroy it after. Go on, make me feel good, write me that check.

PARSI

No!

JO (laughs at his embarrassment)

Is he ever cute! He's afraid of me. If he could see his jaw dropping.

PARSI

Afraid, me?

JO

A guy who bounced the rabble out of the American Swastika Circle and he wets his pants at the idea of scribbling the name of a little lady on a fragile piece of papyrus! I don't know when I've had so much fun!

PARSI (almost to himself)  
There are days when...

JO  
C'mon c'mon.

PARSI  
...one lacks willpower. (He writes.)

JO (looking over his shoulder)  
Is the number too difficult for a big boy like you?...Twenty million dollars. AaahJosephine Bunger-smyth. B.u.n.g.e.r DASH!!! Smyth. Ah, yeh...! Good thing I don't have a heart condition. Is this ever good... Oh, the date - so I'll believe for one second that it's not a fake.

PARSI (to himself)  
...Maybe I have suicidal tendencies...

JO  
Sign it, little fellah...That-a-boy. Now detach it. BUT SLOWLY! So that I can hear the furling paper giving way! Ptachptachptach!!

PARSI (to himself)  
...I must be in bed in Stuttgart...and I haven't woken up yet?

JO  
Put it under my nose... let me smell it.  
(He holds out the check. She makes an abrupt grab for it for it; but he recoils. Laughing gaily:)  
I scare him! How wonderful! Get your dukes up!  
(She takes a boxer's stance. Recoiling - suddenly she's left the room.)

PARSI (very disquieted)  
Where are you?

JO (off)  
Why are you so nervous? I didn't go to fetch Bill's old musket.  
(She gracefully reenters, holding a carved wooden box in front of her.)

Is this Bill's old musket? The motif is of entwined toenails. I did the carving myself...so as to sell it at the orphans' charity bazaar. I spread the bottom with needles from our silver-blue pines. As no one bought it... (holding the box up to his nose)  
Remember that odor? If you'd put the check in...

PARSI

Me...put...

JO

...in the box, on the bed of pine needles. We'll place it on the TV...for the night. It will be your deposit for the room. Tomorrow, when you're paid in full, we'll burn the check on the bed of pines. The aroma will smell so good, hallelujah you'll think it's the body of Christ. Put the check in, Parsifal.

PARSI

...There's a catch...

JO

I don't see one. Oh, you wonder if the box doesn't have a trick bottom. Enabling me to make off with your check? No. Everything is simple in my house! Monolithic. Verify it. Go on. It's you who could do me a bad turn: Wait 'til I'm asleep, come back here on tiptoe, recover the check, fly away with the dawn. But you won't do that. Because you don't wish to disappoint me. You, above everything else, want me to think of you as "a nice guy".

(The check seems to fall by itself into the box.)

That's it: "why not". Well, close it. Go on.

(which he does)

Lock it.

(She turns the key and suddenly bounds away from him, threatens to stuff the key in her bodice.)

PARSI

NO!!

JO (slowly holds out the key to him - which he takes)

You see that I trust you. I so want trust to flow into thy soul as well. Fear not.

(closing the front door, which clangs disquietly)

No one enters before midnight.

PARSI

Midnight?

JO

Hmmm. I'm going to arrange a little interview with Destinée.

PARSI

Destiny...whose?

JO

Destin-ée McPherson. She's my bosom buddy - and very palsy-walsy with your sister-in-law.

PARSI

Who?

JO

God, he's completely forgotten his sister-in-law: Marjorie Samsondale, with whom he never had a real conversation? Therefore, she's the only woman in the world he still respects. You came here out for clarifications about Marjorie's nose. Destinée can get them for you. Cross her palm with silver and she'll damn well get Marjorie for you - in person.

PARSI

But Marjorie is dead.

JO

And Destinée's a bit of a witch...if you cross her palm. At midnight...she will spiral the circle of the moon around the oval of the lake. The rectangle of that TV set will go bumpity-bump. It's the dead. A check like that on top, they'll rush back in like a pack of bloodhounds. If you agree.

PARSI (a moment)

...but...

JO

That's right..."Why not?"...Good. I advise you to get a little rest before midnight. I'll show you to your room. This way, sir.

PARSI

How much is the price of the room? Just to know.

JO

A thousand bucks a night.

PARSI (stops short)

A thousand dollars!!?

JO

That's less than the Ritz at Stuttgart, I presume.

PARSI

You presume wrong!

JO

And what with the warm weather, you won't get any heating out of me - you lucky man! there goes another supplement! The outhouse is in the backyard to the left. There's a basin in the room but peeing in it is not allowed.

PARSI

Madam Jo.

JO

Yep, yep, yep. You're not the first man who's stayed the night. Pissing in the basin makes you all feel you're accomplishing a revolutionary act. Save it for the Ritz. Do that in my basin, I have ways of knowing. I risk losing my usual calm and become frankly disagreeable. And at midnight...Destinée arrives...'til then - would you like a cup of coffee?

(They're offstage)

PARSI

How much does that cost?

JO

Filter or instant?

PARSI

I smell...damp...

JO (offhand)

It's the dead.

BLACKOUT

END OF ACT I

ACT 2 – Scene 1

(A dog howls. A woman screams. Stereotyped music from a horror movie...coming out of the TV set which Parsi half-dozes over; Lighting from the black-and-white film flickers on his face.)

A WOMAN'S VOICE IN THE FILM (flat)

"You are a werewolf, my son."

(Parsi snores.)

A MAN'S VOICE (excessive)

"No!! I want to be a normal man!!!"

(The bong bong of midnight begins on the soundtrack of the film. Jo enter; a little bathroom rug draped "Egyptian-style" around her head.)

WOMAN'S VOICE

"As a child you were bitten by a werewolf."

(Jo cuts off the sound which brings . up straight.)

PARSI

Excuse me, I was asleeee - Madam Jo, you have a bathroom rug on your head.

JO

I am not Madam Jo.

PARSI (pause)

Gosh.

JO

At midnight, I am Destinée. (vague mumbo-jumbo) Mappa-potty-potty-mama.

PARSI (smiling)

Do you go this way often, Josephine?

JO

A little respect! Don't you feel it's weird?

PARSI (trying to stifle a laughing fit)

Oh, yeh, that I do.

JO (threatening)

You'd better not laugh at me - or I shall go and get...!

PARSI

...Bill's old musket?

JO

My paddle. To spank the naughty-naughties who dare poke fun at supernatural!!

PARSI

A thousand pardons, Destinée. My knowledge of the "unknown" is too rudimentary to properly appreciate a little lady with a throw rug in her hair who mutters mappa-potty-potty-potty...if you cross her palm, that is.

JO

Every genuine mystic has a gimmick that gets the ball rolling. I was seven...playing hide-and-seek with three other brats in a abandoned house...imagine dust everywhere and cobwebs...a fridge...door hanging open...rolled up inside, this old rug. This very one. From the shadows...snickering! My little chums, eh? Annoyed, I put the rug on my head and declaimed "Mappa-potty-potty-rnama. Come out in the open or I shall curse you all with a horrible death!" They came out. A little uncomfortable...one of them was sucking his thumb...To press my advantage, I predicted a series of horrible deaths beginning with my Aunt Caroline. And then...

PARSI ("direfully")

The following day - she was found dead!

JO

Yes.

PARSI

Really?

JO

Oh, I think at the hospital she already had one foot in the grave. But I didn't know that...consciously. I imagine my parents must've talked about it in front of me...but in that tone of voice which tells children "Don't listen to this one, you're too young." Of course

that really makes our ears perk, even though we pretend we've gone deaf. We're not ready yet to grasp the meaning of words which accordingly get squashed down into our bodies...where they spread roots...from which stalks grow, crowned with strange flowers. Intoxicated by their aroma, we stop "intellectualizing" and float up toward another world. A world we so much need.

PARSI

I can't see why.

JO

Do you dare pretend that, unlike the rest of us, you're not seeking some explanation for your presence on Crap Planet?

PARSI

Crap?

JO

You have said it. Not that God's ever deigned explaining anything to anybody. "Hey God where're ya hiding? Can't you read the despair on Parsifal Samsondale's face?" After a while we accept His divine silence; we don't have much choice...hoping for some clarifications after death. It's the hope of finally understanding the least little bit of anything at all that draws us to the world beyond...toward those who have a knack for bridging the two worlds! It works better when you pay us. It encourages us to do a professional job.

PARSI

Oh! Can you materialize Lotti Klust who died in Stuttgart two years ago?

JO ("listens")

...She doesn't want to talk to you. Sorry.

PARSI

But I want to talk to her!

JO

She says "Fuck off". In German. Sorry.

PARS (slyly)

Destinée...I just made up the name. "Lotti Klust" doesn't exist.

JO (floundering)

...I know...that it's a name made up to correspond - as all "sounds" do- to a remembered image. You said "Lotti"...because your subconscious flashed the image of a little girl who...playing with a balloon...it blows away...She runs after it in the street...

PARSI (surprised)

...How...?

JO

...and she's run over by a car. Her name was Naomi. She said "Fuck off" 'cause you called her "Lotti". Her parents didn't like Germans.

(Pause)

PARSI

All the kids on the lake knew about that horrible accident!! - meaning you as well!! That's supposed to prove you're endowed with mystic powers? Balls!

JO

A woman runs...a woman who loved you.

PARSI (pause)

...don't underst....

JO

She became a woman...who's still running in your thoughts...the way she ran with you...as a child...

PARSI (pause...very cautiously)

She' s.... dead then ?

JO

No. She's asleep...but so deeply one would think she was breathing inside the cocoon of her death to come. She can be brought back to life by a single kiss..."A kiss, Parsi."

PARSI (troubled)

...No...?

JO

Yes! We're going to meet again. "A kiss, Parsi".

PARSI

And have lots of children and ride on a horse into happily-ever-after land...Me and...Wanda Beckleman?!

JO

Her name is not Wanda Beckleman. Stop setting me traps! I'm here to help you. Somewhere on earth, she lives! Yes! Barbara lives!

PARSI (recoils as if he'd been struck)

How do you know...what no-one can know. Unless...

JO

Yes?

PARSI

It's you! You are Barbara! That is possible.

JO

I am not. "Josephine" is written on my terrestrial carcass. **Wou** to see my driver's license? It's so simple. Barbara has flowed "A kiss, Parsi?"

PARSI

Is this true?

JO

It's all true.

PARSI

Am I in another world?

JO

I come from another world.

(She turns off the TV which produces  
a BLACKOUT)

Scene 2

(Sound of something falling.)

VOICE OF PARSI

Ouch!

(Jo, lighting a lamp, holds her hands out toward Parsi who's fallen to the floor.)

JO (a completely different tone, simple , open)

Of course I remember you. The large courtyard of our old school ended in a wall. In the center of it, an opening giving onto a vast, mysterious field. We kids didn't have permission to go through the opening. Absentmindedly I went through...into the field. Under the scorching sun, under a leafless tree, traced on the ground: a magic circle.

PARSI

A dried-up well.

JO

Nonchalantly, I climbed down...rung by rung...Once at the bottom... flat dry. OK...I tried to climb up... My little arms were too weak. "Help!" Nothing. I pretended to cry. Nothing. From the sizzling day above, a sudden shower of gold rained on my blond tresses.

PARSI

I was peeing into the well.

JO

"Help!"

PARSI

I looked into the well. Nuts! I hadn't finished.

JO

"Don't you know how to hold it in yet? Come down quickly." And you did. Braving the unknown to save me. Offering your hand to my hand. Pulling me, rung by rung. Our hands entwined. Two beings becoming one as they rose to the surface. "I'm going to give you a kiss."

PARSI

I run.

JO

"Run, Parsi, run." You were the sleeping beauty then. But being awakens you. For the rest of your life! Before me, you never thought of girls. After me, you'll never think of anything else! Run, little Adam! Not God, but Eve chases you out of the field of Eden...back into the courtyard. Where, far away, other children watch.

PARSI

Stop!

JO

Ah yes, the y can see that Barbara's found her mate.

PARSI

Six years old?

JO

Love exists for those who dare to seize it. Ah, let me embrace you. Ah, kiss, kiss, what passion.

PARSI

What discomfort.

JO

What delight: our mutual discovery of shame. Your knickers fall. They're too big for you. So are your under shorts.

PARSI (a child now)

My Mommy took them from my older brother.

JO

My reply is to lift up my skirt. I drop my panties. Together we discover that each has an element the other one lacks. Oh, why do you pull your knickers up, pretending to be dancing the boogie-woogie?

PARSI (embarrassed, clutching his pants, "calling to the others")

"It's she that wants to kiss, not me. I'm dancing the boogie-woogie."

JO

There you've done it: peed in your pants.

PARSI

No! No!

JO

Pissing, so as not to get a hard-on? Pretty clever.

PARSI

No! No!

JO

If only your little prick had accepted flowing upward, as gracefully as the neck of a swan. Then, later, as an adult, you wouldn't've had to get it up for those other ladies, mere accidents every one of them. Why do you think that - fifty years later - you still occasionally

project the moment in your mind's X rated movie house? The clip begins, re-begins, eternal bottom of a well, grassy field, I chase you, rewind, you run, grass tickling your ankles, field, rewind -

PARSI

Wait. No - a flat dirt field.

JO

In the court yard - three boys watch.

PARSI

No. Stop. A flat dirt field.

JO

My darling - the mobile of memory is always strung on contradictions. Our only dead certainty: ourselves. Oh, Parsi, Parsi. Why did you step out of my life?

PARSI

But it was you. You chased me up to the door of the school. Inside, I waited, waited. I'm still waiting. My whole life! Waiting for Barbara.

JO

Oh, well, what did you expect? I headed for the basin in the outhouse

PARSI

What basin?

JO

After what you did, I had to wash my hair. And-then-and-then-and... it was my last day at that school.

PARSI (suddenly)

You're lying!!

JO

No. My parents had bought this new house.

PARSI

Liar!

JO

Which was only three miles down the road! I would've thought that you'd've gone after my scent. I did shriek my name to you - "Barbara" - didn't I? You wasted your life. I wasted mine. All this waste is your fault. It's insane!

PARSI

Mine? Tears in my eyes, I threw the phone book in my mother's face. Begged her to find "Barbara, Mommy, Barbara"!

JO

And your mother?

PARSI

...pointed out that..."You're not being reasonable, Parsi"..."  
(Jo breaks away from him)

JO (another voice, somber, as to a father confessor)  
Yesterday my son asked me to help him find (darkly) "Barbara..." It made me understand that my role as "The Woman of His Life" was coming to an end. As had already happened with his older brother. What was I going to do with all my time? I count too...don't I? Last night, I prayed to (wicked smile) well, I called him "God"!... to let me keep my son the way he'd always been: little. (snickering) I believe the prayer worked...on a certain level.

PARSI

If she could've done that, it would have been monstrous.

JO

"Chew on my parsley, Parsi. I told you to forget that Barbara."

PARSI (as if trying to wake from a bad dream)

That's not my mother's voice

JO ("Mother")

"I'll grant the girl a certain...girlish charm! But, let's admit she lacks experience. (spreading herself out, lasciviously) Come to bed with your mother. Be reasonable. The first time is so important. Chew on my parsley, Parsi."

PARSI

Parsley. Parsi! CHARLATAN!

JO

That's the limit! I come all the way back from the hereafter and what does he want? A music hall mom! I am your real mother. The one that all little boys carry in their imagination. Like it or not, we're your first sex bomb. Into my bed, pint size, step on it!

PARSI (grumbling)

...doesn't prove anything...since all little boys go there.

JO

Your mother caressed you, didn't she?

PARSI

She turned her back to me, satisfied!

JO (leaning against his back)

So you'd press yourself against me...I was warm. Ah...I smelled good, huh?

PARSI

If she stank, do you think I would have jumped into her bed every afternoon?

JO

Every...Ah...!

PARSI

We had a pact! As soon as she dozed off, I'd quietly sneak out of bed so as not to wake her. And she always dozed off in less than thirty seconds. In the most ladylike way.

JO

Didn't it occur to you...I was faking it? Near to me...too near...that little bump. Oh, very little. It was rubbing against me like a grown-up.

PARSI

No memory!!

JO

And you thought I took it for a plastic button? No, I pretended to doze off for decency's sake. If I'd turned round then, asking: "What's that thing down there supposed to be?" - Good God, what would you have been like later on?"

PARSI

If you'd explained my body to me a little? Perhaps I wouldn't have continued to sneak quietly out of women's beds.

JO

As an adult?

PARSI

Uuhh...

JO

...so as not to disturb your mother?

PARSI

Uuuh. . .

JO

Before the good moment?

PARSI

Uuuh. . .

JO

God Almighty! Oh well, a woman always has one child that doesn't work out.

PARSI

Thanks, Mom, thanks a lot.

JO

OK, OK, I screwed you up. Still, after all this time, you are going to forgive me for the horrific things I did to you. A son's forgiveness...upstairs (gesture to the Heavens) they give us a gold star for that. Come on, dance with me. The waltz of goodbye. (She takes him in a dance) Hold me in your arms, son, harder, tighter. Hold your Mother until she makes you want to puke. A son's revulsion? Upstairs, they give us scads of gold stars for that!

PARSI (trying to get her off of him)

Let me go! I'm revolted enough as it is.

(They struggle violently)

JO (glued to him)

Not enough to get me gold stars! (She manages to press her lips against his) Disgusted? (Parsi violently pushes her away, then:)

JO ("someone else")

Pssst! Calm down sir! Your Mother! Pssst! has dematerialized.

PARSI (catching his breath)

Ahhh.. .

PARSI

Psst. It's my turn.

PARSI (appalled)

Your - ?

JO

Psst! We never danced together! You can calm down psst!

PARSI

Who are you supposed to be now?

JO (sickeningly sweet personality)

At the senior prom...I saved my fox trot for Freeeed.

PARSI (confused)

...Fred?..

JO

Of course, my suitor Freeeed, 19 years old, manicured fingernails, wave-set hair. But no position. My parents, alas, preferred Phil, 32 years old, manicured fingernails, wave-set hair. But with a good position. I had my little plan: flee with Freeeed after the prom to the Justice-of-the-Peace who'd marry us like in Paramount Pictures. "The End".

PARSI

How did this ninny get into my nightmare?

JO

Yes. It's then that you enter my life.

(She dances as if with an invisible partner)

PARSI (confused)

Me...? Your...?

JO

A young man seated, sweating a bit...I didn't even notice you. Never ever saw your face. But, with one liquid gesture, you raised your arm

(mechanically he raises his left arm)

The right arm! (he raises his right arm)

...hand to forehead to wipe away sweat. As I gracefully twirled

(she turns in slow motion)

I was jolted by the image of dirt underneath the nail of your thumb.

("Young", indignant", to herself)

There's a boy who doesn't scrape out the dirt from his nails before coming to the senior prom! Mind you...t'might be interesting...very interesting...thrilling!! To date a boy who dares flaunt his dirt at the senior prom. Ah, this boy must be filthy. Oh, he wallows filth he does!!

PARSI (more and more confused)

I do clean my nails...but as I work on cars at a garage...

JO

YOU SHUT UP YOU this is my big moment! The only one where you no importance! The moment where I get to understand - all right, thanks to your old fingernail - I get to see that life does not boil down to a choice between two boys with clean fingernails.

(Dancing in circles)

Oh yes, I've many choices in front of me...choices...choices...I could even...Oh! You're not there anymore! Oh, well, since you have no importance...

PARSI

Then why?..

JO

Leaving the prom...in the direction of "Spooky-Square-Dark-At-Night" - my rendez-vous with Freeeed - suddenly a car screeches up (laconically) A man's fingers - my brother - seizes me - I scream. I resist. A little later. Honeymoon. With Phil, of course. Grand Canyon. Looking down into the chasm. Dizzying. Phil grabs me. On his thumb, I see your nail. Not for the last time. I see it on other people's fingers. In their eyes. On their walls. in a martini, like a green olive. It's kinda interesting - to keep intact the image of (with uncharacteristic fervor) the last moment when I believed it was possible to change anything in my life. (drippingly sweet) Even dead, I see your nail...

PARSI (moved)

What's your name?

JO

...No, it wouldn't've worked between us. I'm not your predestined love.

PARSI

My what?

JO

But if - at the senior prom - rather than dancing away, I'd crept over to you?..."Bye bye Freeeed"...Just for a few minutes. Both our lives would have been shifted out of their grooves...just for a few minutes! Changed for all eternity! Imagine that I'd introduced myself with "Hii you there I'm Clara". You would have taken me in your arms -

PARSI

Not so sure! (Therefore it's she who latches on to him)

Stop!

JO

...in a mad polka.

(They dance in fast motion)

"Perspiration-pearls-my-brow-shall-we-sit-no-thanks-don't-get-me-anything-to-drink-I-said-no-the-punch-is AWFUL!!" and-so-on-chitchat. For five minutes. Five minutes later - in this version of our lives - Version Number Two -

PARSI

Number Two?

JO

Yes. Where everything is shifted five minutes later. My rendez-vous with Freeeed, "Spooky-Square-Dark-At-Night"? Shifted five minutes later. At his steering wheel, my brother sees me approach. Having accumulated five minutes more of impatient rage, he accelerates too violently. In this version, he loses control. In Life Number Two, I die on the sidewalk! bathed in blood...my inert father is lying on me, gushing blood...my brother wails out his very guts. All this thanks to your nail. Good one.

PARSI

Jeez.

JO

As for your second "five minutes later" life...the following day, you're under a car at work, all greasy, same as in the first version. But, as five minutes have passed, your face emerges for a breath of air, you feel a little ray of sun passing overhead at that moment only, your tongue licks your upper lip, it's dry. So you go inside for a coke and are not there when Rose by chance happens to pass by. Remember Rose? The lovely photographer?

PARSI

Oh yes.

JO

Forget her. You come back but she's already gone. You never meet. Your first wife, Elaine, with the five-minute time shift - you never meet. Your daughter, Prudence, has to wait for another life to get born; her name will be George. In this life, you return to Michigan after the Army. In '63 you open an auto shop, spare parts, with Pete Meadow. One night

PARSI

Pete who?

JO

Doesn't matter, you're going to meet. One night, the two of you are off together to a house of ill repute...two men, five girls, one mattress. Bouncing about - you realize that your "spare part" is bigger than Pete's!!

PARSI (pleased)

Gosh.

JO

Obviously you immediately enter the best period of your life. Age 31, you're at a barbeque: Fourth of July, beer, "You Are My Sunshine", transistor. There'll be a girl there. She's not bad actually...on the cock-teasing side...at least to you...so you marry her. It's as if you'd always known her.

PARSI

She's not Barbara?

JO

You don't remember your first encounter in a well. She recognizes you immediately. This Barbara is not an easy lady. You soon find that out. Behind her placid features, a tempest brews. The frustration of having wasted so many years before you condescended to get back into her clutches. Your relationship will be explosive. With this Barbara, you never have a child. With this Barbara, you won't become a multimillionaire. With her, all you can expect are paws in the kisser, lightening! sex! you know: love. That disastrous project between two seemingly normal human beings who actually think they can become one. Ah, that bitch of a Barbara'll make you happy...you lucky dog you. Ah...Anyway, that's Life Number Two. (pedantically) Life Number Three...

PARSI

Three? Stop! Barbara!

JO

She isn't in the Three.

PARSI

What? Then I want the Two! The Two!

JO

It's too late for two. Or too early.

PARSI  
My God! Which? (coming at her) Which?

JO  
I don't know anymore. (suddenly reeling about) Oh help! Help!  
at (grabbing Parsi – they wildly zigzag around the room as  
a storm at sea:)  
Help! God is zapping!

PARSI  
Zapping?

JO  
He does get carried away every now and then. Oh stop God! Oh Oh! God has zapped  
us  
into - (abruptly pulls up so short they both nearly fall - Pause.)

Life Number One.

PARSI  
No not the One. I messed up Life Number One.

JO  
Messed up? You? How's that?

PARSI  
A mess. A mess. I didn't get Barbara in Life Number One! (suddenly)  
And you damn well know it, sly as you are. That's what it all boils down to, right? The  
horror of my existence! The emptiness!

JO ("dumb")  
What emptiness?

PARSI  
You who love the word love - there's not a touch of it in Life Number One.

JO  
What do you mean? All those women whose flesh you stroked...hoping they'd hold out  
their hands to you?

PARSI

Which I refused to take!

JO

And rightly: they weren't your predestined love. But to deduce that love was totally absent...come off it.

PARSI

Oh shut up, you know my life's a waste. Girls, gelt, what good did it do? Who am I really. I don't have the least to you. It's all your fault. Who am I?

JO

But it's obvious: you are mediocre, and you stay mediocre in all your lives straight through to kingdom come. Happy?

PARSI

Happy?

JO

There are worse than you.

PARSI (morose)

Get lost. I'm a hopeless case.

JO

Bravo! You've recognized your limits. With a little generosity toward yourself...then toward others...Bingo. Your life will start spinning all by itself.

PARSI (breaking down)

I am all by myself. Leave me alone. In peace. Dear God, a moment's peace from you.

JO ("defensively")

That I'll go along with. I'm pooped, Destinée is. She's told you everything and you've understood nothing! No sense of cooperation, Parsifal Samsondale. Me thinks a little beer would revive M'lady Destinée...

(begins to switch back on the "normal" lighting)

You can have a beer too, I'm finished.

PARSI

Not one clear answer to a single "why".

JO

Have a beer, on the house. I won't make you pay through the nose!

PARSI (pause, then suddenly, stubbornly)

The nose - the nose - the nose!?

(Pause.)

JO (gives him a dirty look.)

Marjorie's...? I haven't forgotten. Jeeez, you're impossible. OK. The nose is on its way. It's terribly near. (groaning) I'm exhausted!! (pulling herself together) OK. Let's go. (flatly)

"I am Marjorie. So I climb down the rocks...peaceful and lovely...in my stiletto heels...  
(she teeters dangerously)

...Syd Samsondale is down there: he's my husband and your brother, for those who missed the beginning of the film. And Hoa-Bin is there. She's my sister-in-law. And Parsi, my brother-in-law. I haven't talked much to brother-in-law today. Come on, Marjorie, make an effort." I'm going to pass out from fatigue! "Come up with a subject of conversation. Parsi I think.. .I'll have a nose job."

PARSI (hardly dares to breathe)

...Why?

JO (as if lost, then to herself)

"Why not? It might be pretty, and if it's yuck, I'll screw the old one back on. So I ordered it, the stupid nose...It arrived in that box.

(points towards the box, which seems to set off a trembling in the tips of her fingers; it spreads into her arms)

"...Oh, it hurts. Doesn't it hurt you?"

(moaning "supernaturally"...flailing...)

"It's the nose...my nose...it doesn't like being disturbed! We'll have to tackle it."

(She manages to pick up the box. Violently surging toward him, holding the box out to him...)

PARSI (instinctively recoiling)

NO! !

JO

It is true that the well-brought-up young lady does not change her nose in the presence of her brother-in-law.

(She exits with the box. Voice off:)

"So I had a nose job." Marjorie did. Bye-bye, Parsi. I'm Jo Bunger-Smyth again.

(She enters with a deadly-looking old rifle aimed straight at Parsi.)

JO

The seance is over.

PARSI (recoiling)

AAAAAHHH -

JO

Your contribution to expenses - twenty million dollars – undeclared. Give me the key that opens the box, so I can take all your money.

(He seems paralyzed. Sinister:)

Throw the key over here.

(He takes the key out of his pocket.)

PARSI (a spurt of energy)

Put down that rifle or...I'll swallow the key.

JO

Asshole...I have a duplicate.

(chuckling, she produces the duplicate)

Everything's duplicate in my house. Don't you just love my duplicity!

PARSI

It isn't fair! You told me! You promised me!

JO

Tccch, tcchhh, tcchh. You're rich. I'm poor. Correction. You were rich, and for once, I'll be correctly paid for a night's lodging. (Like a cat waiting for the night's lodging.

Like a cat waiting for the right moment, he's begun to sidle toward her. Laconically)

I'm not the sort who backs down. One more step and I shoot.

PARSI

What about the body? Didn't think of that, huh? Dumb as a duck!

JO

Ho hum, I'll bury you in the backyard. No one saw you come in here.

PARSI

They did! Everyone!

JO

Who? A single name.

PARSI

Uhhh...Uhhhh...The...the driver of the bus who dropped me off.

JO

He's my chum. I'll slip him a hundred bucks, he'll look elsewhere.

PARSI

And all the passengers on the bus are going to put on blinders?

JO

The whole world's going to thank me for mowing down your kind of paranoiac.

PARSI

And Bill! Your husband! He comes back from work and finds that his loving wife has blown off the head of a lodger? What will he think?

JO

That we're finally going to have a color television set!! "Take the legs of that thing, Bill. We'll bury it in the backyard. That's what our marriage's been missing: a project in common! Bill, we're going to be able to redo the plumbing, wallpaper our bedroom. I was right, wasn't I, in shooting that asshole? What is your opinion, darling? Really I'd like to know." ("Bill" - tone of a massive moron) "Uuuh duhr-ling, I think...that the asshole is dead. Therefore it's a little late to think you should have left it alive." A modicum of co-operation, Samsondale, and Bill and I will spare you that regrettable scene. If you have any reproaches to make, now's the time. Didn't I arrange you a lovely séance?

PARSI

Your stinking - (She growls like an animal. Backing down:)  
No offense meant but twenty million dollars and you didn't even turn a table.

JO

Ahhh! That's what he wants...for me to turn a table. Bring that little one over here.  
(coily, gesturing with the rifle) I have my hands full.

(He brings the table over.)

You see how easy it is: you just turned a table yourself. You want hocus-pocus. Alas, all I have to offer is scrupulous authenticity! Instead of riding me, you should thank me for accepting your money. That's a good idea. On your knees! Thank me, or else...

PARSI

I won't say thank you! You can shoot me! I still have a shred of human dignity, you know what you can do with it.

JO

Yeh, stuff it up your ass, after which follows the barrel of my gun. There's no way to communicate with this chap, it's sad. OK, even my patience has its limits. (gesturing)  
Into the cellar, buster, hip hop!

PARSI

Cellar?

JO

During your nap before, I was in the cellar, laying out sandwiches, cokes, shit paper, enough to keep you happy while I'm in Detroit, cashing your check. Button that lip, babe! Into the cellar. I've taken enough of your shit as it is. Get moving, dwarf cock!

PARSI

...God is listening.

JO

He's shitted enough on me too.

(Parsifal disappear~ Insane, she shrieks after him:)

I'm going to have a color TV! Me as well! !

BLACKOUT

EPILOGUE

(Daylight.

The TV has changed. Its colors play over Jo's face. She watches, relaxed, sipping tea. She wears a long wool poncho.)

ANNOUNCER on TV ("melodiously")

It's time to adjust the color on Channel 35. Blue – yellow - rose! rose! rose-red flamingos flying overhead!

JO (to herself)

...Pretty colors.

ANNOUNCER

...criss-crossing in blue skies.

JO (to herself, fiddling with the clicker.)

And if I brought out the red...

ANNOUNCER

...melting into the golden sun...

(Parsi comes through the front door in a summer shirt, carrying a small suitcase. )

JO

It's even prettier... (noticing Parsi) Yes?

PARSI (noticing the TV)

Yep.

ANNONCER

The rose color of rose-red flamingos...

JO (turning off the sound)

Can I be of service?

PARSI (shivering)

...I'm freezing.

JO

Wouldn't have thought it possible in mid-August. The weather this year has been most unusual. A spot of tea would warm you up. Would you a spot?

PARSI

No...thanks...thank you...Well, with a drop of cream if you must. wished to. I simply wished to...thank you.

JO

Yes?

PARSI

It's difficult...beginning.

JO

Yes?

PARSI

Obviously last February, I left here in a state of shock! Conscious though of Bill's snickering and your "Go fuck yourself". I considered "going" directly to the nearest police station!! But where would I find a cop stupid enough to believe one word of my true story? Once on the road...whistling with the birds...Lovely chirping...I had to admit that...four days locked into your cellar while you robbed me blind and - whadd'ya know - I felt...lightheaded...freed...starved. Poking into that twisted-toenail Pandora's box you forced me to take - "Gift, Goonhead, grub" - I found a plane ticket. Detroit-New York one way. Your idea, I suppose, that I should throw myself on my daughter's mercy. I was almost disappointed...I'd got used to the idea of wandering like a Jew in the desert who, arriving at the dead sea, hops the Flying Dutchman's freighter. While with this plane ticket...I'd feel obligated to take it to New York, seek out Fink, my lawyer, and get together with him to fuck you and your jerk-off of a husband once and for all.

JO (disappointed)

Sir.

PARSI

A co-op pro gram with Madam Jo loosens the tongue. Imagine my surprise finding Fink in a state of apoplexy...having learned about my ruin from Prudence...my daughter...who'd been standing on her head, trying to locate me...just to thank me for having sent to her this weird woman, bizarrely bent on personally putting into Prudence's hands my gift of twenty million dollars.

JO

Yeeees.

PARSI

With the price of a color TV deducted. This one?

JO

Yes. Yes.

PARSI

Pretty. (As Jo turns off the set and, troubled, wanders away from it) My daughter finally realized that she was not completely indifferent to her father. She's given me to understand that love cannot be bought but twenty million bucks makes a good start. At all events, in rechecking her calculations...Prudence estimated that she could get her company going with only half of my "donation"...if she began small. "Prudence, is this your way of telling your old Daddy that you're going to reimburse me ten million bucks, bless you?" "Not at all: you couldn't know how to make your money work for you the way I do. I'm going to invest it and then grant you an annuity". Thanks to you, Ma'am, my daugh-

ter and I...are...uncomfortable with each other. I never know what to say to her. She treats me like a nice old wreck. Next thing she'll chuck me into a wheelchair. But it's alright...better than before...We manage to exchange a few ideas, gossip. Elaine died shortly after. You'll be glad to hear that I made my peace with her...as much as I could. Anyway, once set up in New York in my new life with my daughter...to get away a little from New York and from my daughter, I says to myself "you know what I should do? Go back to the lake, thank that good old Madam Jo. That's it." Thanking someone ...it's not easy. No, but I am in a good period. Just between us, I think my penis is a little bigger.

JO (coldly)

Bully for you.

PARSI

It's just an impression...I haven't had the opportunity to test it.

JO

I'll put the television back on.

PARSI

Is your husband around?

JO

What's that?!

PARSI

I'd say howdy to good old Bill.

JO

Bill's asleep I think. Night watchman. Would you like to have breakfast with him tonight? Bill isn't my husband.

PARSI

Ah. I see.

JO

I don't think so. The Madam Jo you met has of late been going increasingly..."mystical"...as if possessed by another person. You must admit it can be a kind of disease. All Jo's thoughts seemed to be pulled toward the "world beyond". After a feverish day, she'd got used to cooling herself off in the lake - at all hours. Past midnight...a full moon...the glacial waters of the month of May...she dived..."Jo" married the lake. She didn't come back to the house.

PARSI

She sent you in her place..."Destinée"...?

JO

Destinée McPherson? (smiles tolerantly) No, Destinée drowned with Jo. She's dead. Both of them. I've heard your story..."Parsi", that is your name? My sister, Jo, told me all about you. There's never the slightest secret between twin sisters...even ones whose personalities are radically opposed. Our parents were determined to make of us not photocopies but independent natures - awesomely strong. No question of identical goo-goo clothes, or even attending the same school. We got along but...she was "mystical" - and it killed her. I couldn't care less about the supernatural. I didn't approve of her methods with you. She married Bill. I'm a single lady. Her name was Jo.

(She is staring at him very intently.)

PARSI

Barbara...?

BARBARA (not without rancor)

It's about time!

BLACKOUT

THE END

Performance rights must be secured before production. For contact information, please see the Multiple Choice information page (click on your browser's "Back" button, or visit <http://singlelane.com/proplay/multiplechoice.html>)