

Scorekeeper

The Uncertain Future of Unconditional Love

*A Comedy in Two Acts
by Robert Joseph Ahola*

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The Uncertain Future of Unconditional Love

Producer-Playwright, Christopher Mummer, is on a personal Crusade to stop the terminal “dumbing down” of America, and he will resort to any means necessary to do so... Any means!

A Comedy in Two Acts by Robert Joseph Ahola

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The Uncertain Future of Unconditional Love

Synopsis

A former Broadway and Hollywood legend as writer-producer- — Christopher Mummer — has recently become an invalid and, out of choice, has banished himself to become the Artistic Director of a small Connecticut playhouse.

Here, surrounded by his own loyal entourage of former industry players and young show-business hopefuls, he is determined to stop the terminal “dumbing down of America” in a society that no longer has a sense of itself, and the abolition of integrity in just about everything else. What’s more, often to the frustration, chagrin and amusement of all those around him, he is almost never wrong. (And he has the facts and figures to prove it.)

But beneath the veil of his outspoken social, spiritual and artistic crusades, Christopher Mummer harbors a secret — one that he will have to share eventually or lose his identity forever.

Set primarily on an undressed stage and jotted by a deliciously off-beat pair of “plays-within-a-play,” SCOREKEEPER is ultimately a story about the uncertain future of unconditional love and the search for it in a world filled with people who are increasingly self-possessed. As such it ties together the interconnective paths of seven highly individualistic, fragile, funny and very human beings.

A NOTE AND A CAUTION: *SCOREKEEPER is not for the faint of heart. It is brash, bawdy, outspoken, and often profane. So if you’re looking for the safe, tepid fare that is so often the plague of playhouses these days, stay away from this one. It might actually draw some real passion from your audience.*

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS- 4M/3 F.

Running time 105 minutes

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Character Profiles

(4 M/3 F)

CHRISTOPHER MUMMER. ("SCOREKEEPER.") Late forties to fifty-something,, over-the-hill, Hollywood dropout, ex-Tony award winning writer-director, he is now banished to a small repertory playhouse in Connecticut and feels as if the world has passed him by. He is also, due to a recent accident, confined to a wheelchair and has been officially written-off as a paraplegic. But, handicapped or not, he is resolutely determined to strike out at the minions of a nihilistic future as he sees it, and will continue to do so with every last breath in his rather windy bank of lungs.

SARAH. Mummer's very attractive but long suffering wife. A bright, often sarcastic woman, in her 40s she is powerfully bonded to him in what their best friend describes as "an orgy of co-dependency." Aware of his many affairs, she tends to be a cryptic drinker. And yet there is so much more to the dynamic of this couple than the clichés might indicate.

OWEN PAXTON. Mummer's best friend and perennial Major Domo. He seems to follow the fallen idol around as if he were his loyal retinue. Irreverent and an accomplished actor, he has also mastered the art of candor in the face of all consequences. But he also has a deeper and more heartfelt purpose to his perennial and undisputed involvement with the Mummies.

PRIM/PAULA/MODERATOR 1 A young actress of great promise, she has a rather thinly disguised crush on Mummer and a very deliberate agenda behind it. In truth, she is neither all that young nor nearly as naïve as she first appears.

COBB/ Dave/"STAGEHAND." A very bright and irreverent young actor in the repertory. He is neither impressed nor solicitous of Mummer, and in fact has his reasons for not liking him at all. Perhaps it's a similarity in Personality.

ROCK/Doug/MODERATOR 2. A balanced young actor who is, in truth, anything but balanced and not altogether certain he even likes what he's doing.

SAMANTHA ONAN. "SAM." A famous show business diva sliding down from the summit of her career, she seems to be everyone's personal Nemesis. Little doubt that she is also "the other woman." The question is who's other woman is she? Sam is also Owen Paxton's ex-wife and Nemesis, as well as someone's former lover. But whose if not everyone's? And why is everyone so terrified of her?

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Synopsis of Scenes

Act 1

Scene 1. An Undressed Stage in a theatre. A rehearsal for a One-Act play, “Proximity,” and the aftermath

Act 2

Scene 1. A minimalist stage with two announcer booths. A rehearsal for another One Act Play, “PC-DC,” and the aftermath.

Scene 2. An undressed Stage. Two weeks later.

Scene 3. An undressed Stage — with a single cone of light.

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Production Considerations

Minimalist. Since the story contains two one act plays within the play (performed as rehearsals), mainly an undressed stage and, as such, perfect for any theatre, with the following production suggestions:

- One undressed pre-production theatre set with in-stock stage accoutrement.
- Some contestant booths (or tables) for the second “play within a play” at the beginning of act two.
- Fly-space would be helpful but not necessary.
- A ramp for “The Scorekeeper” to use his wheelchair to make a couple of entrances and exits from the audience side is essential to the flow of he piece.
- A center aisle would be ideal but not absolutely necessary.

SCOREKEEPER

Act. 1. Scene 1

The set is stark and futuristic. An attractive young actress — Paula playing “Prim” - stands downstage, and announces a play within a play. She is minimalist in her attire, wears closely cropped hair, black top and tight black leotard pants, and only what appears to be electronic jewelry.

PAULA (PRIM)

Presenting “Prolixity,” A one-act play by Christopher Mummer.

She immediately assumes her role in the play, flips on an I-Pod type music player and starts dancing the music, slithering and swirling rather provocatively. As she does, a young man — Cobb — enters stage right. He too is dressed in tight black minimalist attire and wears close-cropped hair but also carries a belt a nightstick and some sort of Taser. He circles her first like a shark. She sees him but pretends not to and continues dancing. He pulls up behind her but she slithers away, continuing to dance. He eases up behind her this time and grabs her by the waist, pulling up firmly against her butt. [There is an emphasis on monosyllabic banter.]

PRIM

(Feigns nonchalance)

Hi, big boy. Is big boy hot?

COBB

Hot! You make me hot!

PRIM

We all make you hot! Cobb is always hot! Hot, hot, hot! Cobb has one thing on his mind!

COBB

You! Prim. Prim makes me hot!

PRIM

(Points mocks)

Prim. Kim. Tim. Jim. Me! She! Three! The Tree! You dickey dunk with any chunk. You're such a punk!

COBB

No dickey dunk. No dunk the dick. Just want a lick of your hot trick.

PRIM (*pulls away from him*)

No! No licks! No tricks. Hot licks! Hot licks! Sounds! Tunes! Tunes!

(*She points to her I-Pod like toy.*)

Music! Mu-sic! Not you, sick!

COBB

I'll dicky dunk until you're sore. You're such a whore.

PRIM

You're a bore, and I'm no whore! Piss off, cop! Cobb the Cop! That's a thing you drop!

COBB

(*reaches out for her*)

But I've changed!

PRIM

(*slaps his hand*)

You're strange! You're the mangle! And you'll never change!

COBB

(*turning away*)

You talk shit!

PRIM

You are shit! You don't own me! And you can't bone me! And you can't loan me! Ever! Ev-er! Nev-er! A-gain!

COBB

I didn't loan. You went on your own! You! Went! On! Your! Own!

PRIM

To pay off your loan! To Rock!

COBB

To Rock! To the Block! To any-thing with a cock! That's your whole deal! You can't feel! It takes two men! 'Cause you're dead with one! You're done! Used up! Chewed up! Screwed up!

PRIM

One man bores me! Two or none. Got get Rock and we'll have some fun! Maybe!

COBB

Done!

PRIM

(Flips her electronic toy and starts to dial)

Call him up!

COBB

He's not on air. I know where he is. I know where.

PRIM

Get him. Get him. Or you don't get me! I'm down with three! But I'm not free! I want Rock. I like his...

COBB

(cuts her off)

Don't say it.

PRIM

Then, don't play it! You flipped this lid. It's what you did! Now it's my game. And you're to blame!

COBB

(contemptuous)

Double dick! A dicky-dunk A two-fer. That's what you fer!

PRIM

Twice the boy! Twice the joy!

COBB

Twice the toy. And I'll be back.

(Cobb exits stage left. Prim turns back to her music and continues to dance around when from stage left a older man in his fifties, enters. He is elegantly dressed in Saville Row, like the Duke of Windsor. And as such totally a creature out-of-time and obviously lost. This is Paxton.)

PAXTON

What in the hell just happened? One minute I'm having a drink with my colleagues at the science hall. We're discussing the relativity of time. And... Oh, God the drug! Yes, the bet! The future! I'm obviously dreaming. Or hallucinating or both. Well, in for a dollar... I'll go along with this... for a while, gentlemen.

(Paxton calls out to some invisible crowd, then looks over and sees Prim, lost in her music, dancing around the space. He goes over to her but she ignores him.)

I beg your pardon. I seem to be lost.

PAXTON
(Continuing, goes over to Prim)

Pardon me! I'm sorry...

(Finally frustrated that she is ignoring him, he gets in her face, and stands in front of her. Prim reacts for a moment, then punches in her code.)

PRIM
Cobb. Come-in. O-T! O-T! O-T! Code Orange.

(She stiffens up, then strikes a friendly pose, and lifts her hand with a convivial self-conscious wave.)

Hi!-Hello!

PAXTON
I'm so sorry to bother you. But it seems as if I've gotten a bit disoriented. In fact I'm afraid I'm downright lost.

PRIM
(rigid, polite, talks to her wrist radio)
And how may I help you, Old Timer? Old Ti-mer!?

PAXTON
Old timer — I suppose from one so young. Well, it does seem that I'm utterly a creature out of time. It's as if I've been teleported into another millennium. In fact, I'm relatively sure that I have been. I wonder if you could tell me where this is.

PRIM
2121! 2121! U.S. of A. Right here! All year!

(Taken by her beauty, he reacts in fascination, amused at the irony of it.)

PAXTON
My God! It's happened. Here I am. "O' Brave New world, with such creatures in it!!

(He marvels at her.)
And if you're an example of what's here, you're extraordinary! So elegant in your simplicity. So exceptionally beautiful. What a magnificent creature, you are!
(She abruptly cuts him off)

PRIM
Clear talk please. Please talk clear!

PAXTON
I'm sorry. I must be confusing you no end. It's just that I never expected anything quite as minimalist as all this.

PRIM

Mini-mini- mini? Plain words! Plain words! No big words! Plain words!

PAXTON

They are plain words. It's called language, for God's sake. Vocabulary! It's the way human beings communicate. You do speak English, don't you?

PRIM

(covering her ears)

Word man! Word man! All talk! No stalk! All squawk. No cock!

PAXTON

What are you saying? Please don't run from me like some primitive beast.

PRIM

Beast! You're the beast. Talk Beast! Words twist truth. Twist! Twist-er!

PAXTON

You're afraid of words. Oh God, it's happened! I'm finally estranged from all that's left of humankind! Have we at last become such slaves to sensation that there's nothing left to convey the poetry of thought?! Only noise, cacophony and monosyllabic grunts?!

PRIM

(covers her ears)

No! No big words! Big words lie! Big words are plots! They block. They clot! They make monsters. Mon-sters!

PAXTON

No, no, please. Words make poetry. They clarify. They are our salvation. They express ideas and render our logic valid. They communicate what's in the heart!

PRIM

(stops him, covers his mouth)

No! The heart feels. Thoughts run free. Free of words. Free like birds! Birds that fly! Into the sky! Feel your heart. Speak your heart. Show your soul. Not your E-go!

(She gestures to the sky. She rubs his heart, then rubs herself against him.)

Words are cruel. Feelings rule! Feel me, O-T. You want to feel! I can feel you want to feel me, O-T! Nice man. Soft man. Sweet breath. Soft lips.

(She pauses to kiss him.)

Taste the truth. Feel my youth.

PAXTON

Yes. Feel you.

PRIM

Get lost. In me!

PAXTON

I'm already lost...

(They go to kiss again, when Cobb reenters left with Rock, also a policeman. Rock goes to pull Paxton away, while Cobb calls in his report.)

COBB

O-T at Sec-tor 322. O-T. AWOL. Lost. No mem. No Mem. I said, "no mem!" No re-call! Out of zone! On his own! All alone. Dog a bone. Pick up. Pick Up! Out!

(Rock steps up to Paxton, feels his coat and looks him over with a sense of distaste.)

ROCK

Wool. Calf-skin. Leather. Lea-ther! Sheared sheep! Dead cow! Feel of pain! Smell of Death!

PAXTON

The jacket is Saville Row. The shoes are Bally.

ROCK

(Starts to circle him.)

O-T is Retro! Ret-Ro! O-T is Retro Man!

PAXTON

Yeah. And you all look like a bunch of crickets.

ROCK

(grabs Paxton, starts roughing him up.)

Well, O-T. You like the twat? Like what you got? Think she's hot?

PAXTON

I beg your pardon?! Gentlemen, who are you?! And must all you speak in these ridiculous couplets?!

ROCK

(turns to Cobb)

Word snob! Head job! No mem. No recall — at all!

(Noting, Cobb punches data into his palm computer.)

COBB

Got that.. Flat line. Flat... Old O-T. Over fif-ty. Fif-ty!!

(Rock pulls Paxton away from Prim.)

PAXTON

Get away from her and explain yourself, you cretin! What kind of Neanderthals are you? Can any of you even string a cohesive sentence together?!

(He steps between the cops and the woman. Cobb and Rock confront him, towering over him.)

ROCK

Oooh... Word man! Wordy man! Wordy, wordy, word!

COBB.

Talky talk.. Talky talk. Talkity, talk, talk!

PAXTON

Oh, God I've died and gone to hell!

ROCK

All hell! Hell is swell! Hell of a guy! Big and tough. Wants to dicky dunk young stuff.

COBB

Hell, yes!

(Amused the two jab one another in the ribs. At the same time, they surround him front and back.)

PAXTON *(haunted)*

God, it's finally happened. Culture and reason and sensibility have died the death. Now all we have are these sub-literate relics!

ROCK

(Pulls out his stick, clubs him with each word.)

No big words! No more big words!

(He starts pounding with the stick.)

You have the right to shut up! Shut... the... fuck... up! You have the right to a law rep. Law rep! Got that!?

PRIM

No! No! Don't hurt him. He's a nice O-T. Nice O-T. Let him be! For Dog's sake. Please!

(She tries to restrain Rock but Cobb yanks her aside, while Rock continues to pound Paxton who lies jack-knifed on the ground.)

ROCK

Bad O-T. Runs away! Runs A-Way!

COBB *(simultaneous, explains)*

O-T is a runaway. Run -A- Way! We have orders. We have "OR-DERS!"

ROCK (*simultaneous*)
Bad! Bad! No more run-away! No more! No! More!

PRIM
(*simultaneously tries to stop Cobb.*)
No!! Not good!

COBB
(*simultaneous*)
Yes! Let go! Let GO!!

(*Finally, Paxton begins clawing his way back up Rock's pants, trying to hold on, trying to explain.*)

PAXTON
No! You don't understand! I'm not O-T. I'm from another time, and place. I'm from the 20th Century!
(*His declaration suddenly freezes the others. PRIM gasps. And They all shrink back from Paxton, and he suddenly gets back to his feet.*)

For Gods sake! I'm waking up in a nightmare! This is the end of the world, and I'm in Fifth Circle of Dante's bloody Inferno! What's wrong with you people?!!

(*The three now view him as a creature of quarantine. They back away from him as if he had the plague, while Cobb goes back to his hand-held communication center.*)

COBB
Alert! O-T. is time-travel. Time Tra-Vel!! Check, check! Done. Done!
(*Cobb turns back to Rock.*)
It's a "T," Rock! It's a Q-T "T."

ROCK
Thought so.
(*Prim sadly steps back as the two cops circle Paxton once again, this time with Tasers out, signaling each other in a more serious.*)

COBB
Careful! May have germs! Use gloves!

ROCK
Gloves. Check! Germs! Germ Bomb! Check!

PAXTON
What?! You people are insane! I'm fastidious as hell. Anal compulsive, in fact. My God, what's wrong with you? Is there anyone here with one tick of common sense?! Jesus Christ!

COBB

Careful, he's a God man too! God men are all whack! All whack! Could attack!

ROCK

God man! Wordy man! Worst kind!... Careful! Care-Full!

PAXTON

Gentlemen, please! I'm not some half-mad Cape Buffalo! Good God!

(As Cob and Rock circle Paxton, Prim, now lost in her hand held media fantasy, is tuning out, covering her ears and eyes.)

PRIM

Three Monkeys. Three Monkeys. Don't hear. Don't see. Won't tell! Never in hell! Not my mon-key! Not me!

PAXTON *(simultaneous)*

Don't do this, men. Don't do this to yourselves. Don't please. Save yourselves! Your-selves! Oh, God!

(The two cops circle Paxton warily as he tries to face them both. Finally, Rock lunges toward him with the Taser, shocks him and takes him to ground. Cobb joins him. And as they both shock him, he shudders and collapses, unconscious. Meanwhile, Prim is lost in her media immersion.)

PRIM *(simultaneous)*

Sale! They have a sale at The GAP! Mega-Sale! GAP Sale! Me-ga! Sale!!!

(At her announcement. The two men look up from shocking Paxton virtually to death.)

COBB

Sale?! How much off?

PRIM

80%! Eighty off! Next three hours. Next three Only. ON-LY!

(Cobb and Rock completely forget their punishment of Paxton, sheath their Tasers and step over his now still body to join Prim.)

ROCK

There'll be bunches! There'll be scrunches!

COBB

Yeah, but we are cops. And "cops are tops!"

PRIM

So are cops' props!

ROCK

First in. First out. We're what it's all about! Oh! Wait one...

(He remembers, and goes back to check the now still Paxton. He calls in on his bracelet phone.)

ROCK *(continues)*

O-T. O-T. COD. Sector 322. Clean up Clean Up! Right. 322. Whack job. Right. He's a bundle! He's a T. C-O-D. OR-DER 19! Out.

(He puts his com device back up and joins the others. The three begin to leave again, when Prim pulls away and goes to look down on him sadly.)

PRIM

Sweet O-T. Nice O-T. Gone bye-bye! Bye-bye! Makes me sad – real sad. Big Words! Big Words. Now. no words...

COBB *(interrupts.)*

I've got words. SALE! MEGA-SALE!

PRIM

(rallies, happily remembering)

SALE! Whale of a Sale! Sexy Sale!

(She runs over and locks arms with the men.)

ROCK

Sex-E Sale! SEXY!

PRIM *(giggles)*

No sale. No Sex.

COBB

No sex. No sale...

(All three, laughing, ribbing each other, exit. Paxton plays dead, then sits up, and shakes it off.)

PAXTON

Damn! It's a good thing I didn't say sesquipedalian.

(Suddenly the voice of Christopher Mummer bursts in from the director's booth)

MUMMER (VO)

That would be curtain. It should be curtain. But it's still too long! We've got to tighten up!

(Hearing this, Paxton, crosses his legs and burying his head on his knees.)

PAXTON

It's a ten-minute play, Chris.

(Suddenly, a man in a wheelchair comes wheeling down the middle aisle; he is being pushed by an attractive woman in her forties but leaves her behind as he wheels up the ramp to the stage. This is Christopher Mummer with his wife Sarah.)

MUMMER

And it's over twelve minutes. And it's too damn long! That's the whole reason for it. Because the attention span of the average American is about forty-seven seconds.

SARAH

Aren't you being generous, dear?

MUMMER

(ignores her, continues)

...And unless you shock them, kick their ass, or stuff their face with popcorn, you're going to lose them! They'll be checking their voice mail, stepping out in the lobby to take a call, or just leave.

PAXTON

I don't know. I think having three-way sex and pounding someone into ground chuck is about all you can expect in ten minutes.

SARAH

Or less, knowing most men.

PAXTON

Fucking or fighting?

SARAH

Both, I think...

MUMMER

(again, ignores her)

Besides this is a Ten-minute play festival. And next year there'll be a five-minute play festival! And the year after that there'll be a hummingbird fart festival, because nobody can concentrate for more than a nanosecond, because the whole fucking world has A-D-D!

PAXTON

What? [Just kidding.]

MUMMER

You think it's funny? 28% of all male Americans under the age of 30 have A.D.D. Most of it undiagnosed.

SARAH

Primarily caused by too much cheese pizza.

MUMMER

You're not that far off. God! Play 10 – Actors 0! We're getting nowhere!

PAXTON

Tell it to the kids. I'm too old for this shit.

MUMMER

You're right. Let's bring them back out...

(He calls out.)

Children! Back on, please!

(The three young actors come back onstage: Paula [was PRIM]. Doug [was Cobb]. David [was Rock]. Mummer becomes effusive.)

Thank you all so much! Nice job! I think we're all getting closer. Paula!

PAULA *(was PRIM)*

Yes, Mr. Mummer.

MUMMER

You were spot on as Prim. Perfect sense of meter. [She is a muse in her own way. And you got that.] And just the right mixture of vulnerability and shallow sensuality. Lovely!

PAULA

It's such an honor to work with you, Mr. Mummer. I so respect your work.

MUMMER

Chris! Please call me Chris.

PAULA

Yes, Chris.

MUMMER

There are just a couple of little places. I'd like to polish up with you, if we could set aside a little time later on...

PAULA

Of course. Whatever you say...

SARAH *(aside)*

Well, we all know what that means...

MUMMER

(aside to Sarah)

Oh, please! I'm a cripple for God's sake!

(He quickly goes back to his notes, looks up to the other actors.)

Gentlemen. A little crisper on your back and forth. Remember this new language is like a Rubix Cube. Each word fits into the other. They connect. Pieces in a puzzle. But they have to connect quickly. That's what makes it work. This is a ruthless new society. Everything is judged with brutal efficiency.

DAVE (*was* COBB)

It either tracks, or it gets the ax. We got it.

MUMMER

Touché! Good.

DOUG (*was* ROCK)

We get all that. But why the title? Prolixity. What does it mean?

MUMMER

Well that's the point, isn't it?! "Prolixity" means "a tiresome overuse of words." But it's no longer a word, because The ENCARTA fucking DICTIONARY, the new standard for the English language didn't even deem it necessary to list it any longer! Because our language is dying. We lose hundreds of words a year because we're drowning in an epidemic of monosyllabic hip-hop shit foisted on us by a "dumbed down" America that doesn't even know it's been had by the greatest ongoing conspiracy of anti-intellectualism the world has ever seen!

PAULA

You are so right, Mr... Chris!

DOUG

But we get new words. We get them all the time.

MUMMER

Oh yes. We sure do. But at what cost? We lose "rodomontade" and we get Kotex.

SARAH

(aside)

Works for me.

MUMMER

We lose "Rabelaisian" and we get "shit-stirrer." We loose poltroon and get Paxil. We lose viands, and get Vioxx. We lose aver dupois, and get...

PAXTON

Thin? [Never mind.]

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MUMMER
(Presses on)

We lose...

DAVE
(breaks-in)

Red Stockings and get Red Sox. We lose corsets and get thongs. We lose carriages and get cars.

MUMMER
(notes the put-down)

Touché! I see we have a linguistic Darwinian among us. Well...

(Rallying, he claps his hands together and changes the subject.)

Very good job, people! By and large, we're all getting very close. You've got the sense of it. And that's important. Thank all you so much for coming. Same time Monday?!

(The three young actors go to leave, but PAULA turns back one last time.)

PAULA

I agree with everything you say! You're just so right. So right!

MUMMER

Thank you, Paula.

(Reluctantly, she goes to leave. He calls after.)

Oh, Paula!

(She turns back.)

There's another small piece called "PC-DC" that we're doing. You'd be perfect for the female lead in that. Would you like to give it a try?

PAULA

Oh, I'd love to! Well... of course. Who wouldn't?!

MUMMER

Good. Could you wait around for a minute? I'll be just a minute.

PAULA

I'll be just outside.

SARAH

I think I'll make some tea.

(PAULA *exits.*)

(MUMMER *buries his head in his hands.*
PAXTON [*remaining*], *flips out a tin of aspirin*
and takes two.)

PAXTON

And I get Tylenol and hopefully lose "headache."

MUMMER (*looks up*)

God! They suck! We all suck! I'm 30 miles outside of New York City, and I can't even find a decent actor. Of course, we can't tell them that. Because all they have to live on is their youth and their hope. At least when they're out here in the sticks, they don't have a chance to see just how bush league they really are.

SARAH

Present company excepted, Owen.

PAXTON

Thank you, I think.

MUMMER

God! I'm in bloody Siberia!

SARAH

We're in Connecticut, and it's your playhouse.

PAXTON

And your choice. You could be anywhere you want. You could have gotten a grant to build a playhouse anywhere in North America, and you chose here. So, quit bitching and deal with it! Or move in closer to the City.
(*He pops another aspirin.*)

MUMMER

What are you taking!?

PAXTON

Tylenol.

MUMMER

For every Tylenol, Advil or aspirin you take, you get a proportionate degree of liver damage.

PAXTON(*defiantly takes another*)

I'd switch, but I'm out of heroin.

MUMMER

But not Vicodin.

PAXTON

The doctor said I had to take it when I work with you. But I considered Preparation-H, because you're such a pain in the ass!

SARAH

You know it's for his back, Chris.

MUMMER

Every American over the age of fifty takes an average of 9 different prescription drugs, most of which are unnecessary. All because we've become pathetic puppets to the great pharmaceutical conspiracy to hock our economic futures by turning us into a nation of drug addicts!

PAXTON

(pops another)

And every Hollywood dropout, Oscar nominee, ex-Tony Award-winning paraplegic writer-director-slash-theatrical artistic director is 98% paranoid, and 100 % full of shit.

MUMMER

(starts to laugh)

You're just not going to cut me any slack at all, are you?

PAXTON

I think some people will do anything to get a good parking place.

SARAH

I think I'll make some tea.

MUMMER

Well, we all know what that means!

SARAH

Okay. So, it's Long Island Tea. And I don't think any of us knows anything any more except that we're all just suffering from some pre-production jitters, and that dark night of the soul that comes when everything looks its worst. But you just like to sit here and stitch-and-bitch because it makes you feel better about yourself.

MUMMER *(gets emotional)*

Sitting... just seems to be all I can do these days.

SARAH AND PAXTON

(mocking)

Awww...

MUMMER

(Starts to wheel himself away.)

Fuck you! Fuck both of you!

SCOREKEEPER

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Where are you going? PAXTON
(aside)... As if we didn't know.

MUMMER
I'm going to work with what's her name... Paula, on that new piece because she's the only actor in this entire repertory who shows any promise at all...

SARAH
(calls after)
I'll wheel you out!

MUMMER
That! Is something I can do on my own!

SARAH
Christopher! I love you....
(Mummer doesn't answer but pauses for just a moment, then wheels himself off, stage right.)
Well... So, much for the light touch.

PAXTON
That was what he demanded from us. Remember? No-o-o sympathy!

SARAH
God, I feel like such a failure.

PAXTON
For what? For being the best thing that ever happened to him despite the fact that he still goes chasing after every woman who ever comes within range of his mythical reputation. Even though he can't do anything about it, any more.

SARAH
Oh, but he can.

PAXTON
You're kidding.

SARAH
Nope. He can still get a woody. Only one in every 96 in his condition can, and he's one of them — a statistic he will quote at every given opportunity. Slightly more than one percent, and he has beaten the odds, yet again.

PAXTON
Chris Mummer and his statistics. God, he's amazing. Does he keep score on everything.?

SARAH
It's just his way of getting through it, Owen. Come on! You know that!

PAXTON

Why is it that every womanizing asshole in the world has a doggedly loyal, extraordinarily beautiful, incredibly compassionate wife that any other man would give his eye-teeth to be with? That's Emerson's Law of Compensation to perverted extremes.

SARAH

You love him and you know it. God knows he loves you.

PAXTON

I'm not so sure any more.

SARAH

I am. In many ways he's more tender and loving since it happened. He's certainly more passionate. Even though he shouldn't be.

PAXTON

You're kidding.

SARAH

No I'm not. Before, he used to be what I'd call "domestically impotent." He seemed to be able to have that old sexual magic everywhere but home. But now, he can't seem to get enough of me. It's almost like first love... innocent in a way.

PAXTON

Don't do this Sarah. Don't do this to yourself.

SARAH

It's not that hard. Not at all. In a way, it's what I deserve, wouldn't you say?

PAXTON

What do you mean?

SARAH

Never mind.

PAXTON

Well, let's talk about deserve levels, and who deserves what. And long-suffering doesn't suit you in the least. Not your style.

SARAH

Maybe it's gotten to be.

PAXTON

How can you stay with him?

SARAH

How could I leave him, especially now?

PAXTON

Very simple. You put one foot in front of the other.

SARAH

Katharine Hepburn to Anthony Hopkins in A Lion in Winter.

PAXTON

What?

SARAH

Same line. Eleanor of Aquitaine to Richard while wrapping her Christmas connivances.

PAXTON

God, have we become such media cliché's that we no longer have an original thought?

SARAH

Chris would say so. "We are no longer our own creatures. We are extensions of electronic fantasy. Soulless clones of the box.

PAXTON

And we are soulless clones of Christopher Mummer. Codependent to the last!

SARAH

That is such a cheap shot, Owen. Christ! We're all co-dependent by the broad definition. I believe in something higher — a love that rises above condition.

PAXTON

Unconditional love! How can I argue with logic like that? However flawed it may be.

SARAH

By being the loyal friend you always have been.

PAXTON (*interrupts*)

How can you call me loyal when you know how I feel?

SARAH

You promised you'd never bring that up again.

PAXTON

And I'm keeping my word.

SARAH

While you dance around behind your silent scream.

PAXTON

You've always seen through me.

SARAH

I see through all of you.

PAXTON

All of us but him.

SARAH

Oh my God no! He's the easiest of all. Why do you think I've stayed married to him all these years? All that complexity's just a mask. In his way, he's the simplest man I've ever known.

PAXTON

And the most transparent. I can just hear him now with sweet young thing — seduction scenario 143: "You have what so few actors have – the ability to be unselfish. That's the difference between a great actor and an actor who is merely good. There are a lot of good actors, but only a handful of great ones. Only the great ones can lose themselves in the dynamic of the play or film. You [fill in the blank] have that gift. I see it in you. And it's not something you can teach..."

SARAH

(picks up the satire)

"...Oh, Mr. Mummer. Do you really think so?"

PAXTON

(lays it on thick)

"Oh, yes my dear. And if you'll just bend over the back of this couch and grab your ankles, I'll impart some of my wisdom..."

(They both start to laugh uproariously. Sarah regards him fondly.)

SARAH

It's so funny. Why does it make me so sad?

PAXTON

Because, dear lady, you have fallen in love with your own perversions.

SARAH

I don't know. Is loyalty a perversion?

PAXTON

Now, that reeks of codependency.

SARAH

Ah, the new STD — co-dependency. I can see clinics springing up everywhere!

PAXTON
(points to his crotch)

And I have the antidote right here.

SARAH
Oh, Owen, you are sick! And what would I do without you?

PAXTON
Very nicely, I think. I think you always will.

SARAH
Well then...
(she walks over and hooks her arm into his)
And how would you like your tea?

PAXTON
Industrial strength.

SARAH
Laced and leaded it is...

(The two stroll out arm in arm.)

(Following their exit from stage right, the young actress, Paula comes back out. She has changed clothes but looks around uncertainly.)

PAULA
Hello! Anybody still here? Mr. Mummer... Chris?

(From off stage, MUMMER calls.)

MUMMER
That's better. I wouldn't have come if you'd kept calling me "Mr. Mummer."
(He wheels himself back in from stage left.)

PAULA
"Chris," of course. It's just so hard knowing I'm talking to one of the living gods of stage and screen.

MUMMER
A minor deity, I'm afraid. Fallen—and rather far from the top of the mountain at that.

PAULA
Oh, I don't think so.

MUMMER
But I still have judgment. And I like to believe I still have insight.

PAULA

I could see that in what you just put on. I mean language and culture have died the death. I can see it all around us. You can't help but feel it. It's like an insidious disease. You're so right!

MUMMER

I knew you'd get it. I knew you'd know what I meant by all this.

PAULA

Oh, absolutely!

MUMMER

I mean, words are like colors on a palette. We use them like an artist uses them to paint images. If we lose them, we lose the texture and tone of who we are. And it's something worth fighting for.

(She tilts her head in affiliation, then crouches at his knee.)

I wonder if you'd mind.

PAULA

Mind?

MUMMER

Pulling up a chair next to me. I'd like to have you here at eye level.

(He blushes and looks away.)

I'm sorry. I'm a little self-conscious, I guess.

PAULA

Oh, please don't be.

(She makes elaborate show of pulling up a chair in front of him, in a position to lean forward and hang on his every word.)

MUMMER

This is all a little new to me. In my own mind I'm still six feet tall, still able to stand on my own two feet.

(He looks away bitterly. She leans over to take his hand and kisses it. He lifts her face and cups it.)

You break my heart. You truly break my heart.

PAULA

I would never do that. And you'll rise again. I know it.

MUMMER

Don't say that, please! Don't give me hope. I don't think I could take it.

PAULA
(leaning over into him)

But that's just what you do need. You need someone to believe in you.

MUMMER
You do get me, don't you. Thank you for that.

PAULA
I get a great deal more than you think.

MUMMER
I know. I know.
(Beat)
Then do you get just how gifted you really are?

PAULA
You really think so?

MUMMER
You have what so few actors have – the ability to be unselfish. That's the difference between a great actor and just a good actor. There are a lot of good actors, but only a handful of great ones. Good actors are good to themselves, but in the end they make the vehicle come to them. Only the great ones can lose themselves in the dynamic of the play or film. They create the pace of it. They infuse the vehicle with life and energy without any thought of themselves. You... Paula... have that gift! I see it in you!

PAULA
You really think so?

MUMMER
I know so... But it has to be developed, nurtured, given proper care and attention — the right discipline!

PAULA
Oh, I want that discipline. I'm ready for it. Whatever it takes!

MUMMER
You're sure?

PAULA
Discipline me!

MUMMER
I can be tough sometimes.

PAULA
Tough as you want to be.

(He plays to it, takes her hands and kisses them.)

MUMMER

I just want you to be everything you see for yourself. All that and more!

PAULA

I'm there for whatever you want. Whatever you dish out, I can handle it!

(By now they're already canoodling, holding hands, and nuzzling faces, when suddenly Mummer raises up as if he just felt a Poltergeist. In the back by a fly-space, another woman has just stepped inside the door. Mummer knows she's there and officializes his behavior.)

MUMMER

(to Paula)

We'll get together tomorrow and start working on technique and some basic things that I know will make you better.

PAULA

Just let me know.

(She leans over to kiss him on the forehead, then goes down to the cheek. But before she kisses him on the mouth, he pulls back in the chair and grows remote. He knows they're being watched, but somehow his reluctance excites her even more. She stands up but is breathing heavily.)

MUMMER *(long suffering)*

Tomorrow then. 7:00 a.m.

PAULA *(repeating)*

7:00?

MUMMER

A test of your dedication.

PAULA

Test away! I'll be there!

(She holds out her hand so that it touches his for as long as it can. Then she gathers her scripts and exits left of stage. From the shadows of the fly space, right of stage The woman starts applauding. As she emerges, we see Samantha Onan, a sultry sexpot in her early forties, cynical, attractive and very well-dressed in haute couture.)

SAM

I swear to God you could be on your deathbed, and you'd still have your hand halfway up some starlet's crotch.

MUMMER

Samantha Onan! The New Millennium's answer to Mercedes Acosta. How is the Sewing Circle these days?

SAM

Well, if you're going to insult me, at least be accurate. Mercedes Acosta was a director and a self-confessed lesbian.

MUMMER

How forgetful of me.

SAM

I, on the other hand, am an actress and will fuck anything [except you of course]!

MUMMER

And have. [Except me, of course.] In fact, we have some farm animals out back that crave affection.

(Overnight case in hand she saunters over.)

SAM

What kind?

MUMMER

Sheep, I think... or goats. Some of each.

SAM

Ah, livestock! Well that's more your specialty...

(She bends over and kisses him on the forehead.)

So, have you flown me in to save you from yet another potential theatrical catastrophe? And by the way, you look charming in chrome and leather.

MUMMER

Well, not even you can save this run of speed-bumps they now call theatre. A ten minute play festival! And they tried to make it "mixed media" at that.

SAM

Well, noting the bunch of hunks you have in your repertory, they can "mix my media" anytime.

MUMMER

Oversexed as ever, I see.

SAM

Oh, Chris Mummer, baby! Pot to kettle!

MUMMER

Ever notice how all conversations ultimately boil down to matters of sex and money?

SAM

Well, they're the only two things people can agree about any more. You certainly can't have a civilized conversation about politics. And as for religion well... God only knows!

MUMMER

Well maybe that's just it. Maybe God doesn't know. Maybe God's lost his leverage, and his sense of premonition.

SAM

You mean a "lesser god?"

MUMMER

Did you know that more people believe in angels than believe in God? Only 84% of all Americans believe in God, but nearly 91% believe in angels or angelic beings.

SAM

So, God is experiencing some slippage. Well, don't lament the old boy too much. It was only two or three decades ago that people were declaring Him dead. Actually He's made something of a comeback.

MUMMER

Coming back from the dead to be trivialized. Is that a comeback at all, I wonder?

SAM

Are we drawing parallels in some way here? God knows you did come back from the dead in that car crash. But did you go and get religion in the bargain?

MUMMER

Let's just say I got faith. Faith in something higher than myself.

SAM

And even at that you're critical of it.

MUMMER

Not critical. Analytical. I know. I just want to know more. But I do believe. At last I do.

SAM

Well, I'll let that be our little dark secret.

(Seemingly put off, she pats him and walks away, turning back to him almost visibly upset.)

SAM (*Continuing*)

You know I've always suspected you of being a lecherous prude. And now you've sort of gone Franz Liszt on me — half womanizer, half monk. Well, why not? Everybody has to be somewhere...

MUMMER

Perhaps... it's the only place to be.

SAM

Too heavy for me. And why is it our conversations have to escape to some higher plane? Is it because we've never made it? So, when you're with me, all you want to talk about is "meaningful things?" Give me a good healthy fuck and a cigarette anytime. Then, and only then, does the world take on perspective.

MUMMER

Is that a proposition?

SAM

Oh, good heavens no! What would we do with each other Chris, if we were to demolish the only safe haven we have?

MUMMER

It won't happen anyway. Did you know the odds of a man and woman actually getting it on diminish exponentially after about a dozen occasions of contact? You sort of cross that critical mass and then the need to couple sort of starts to slide away.

SAM

Says the proponent of the quick strike seduction. Well, we've certainly passed that "Point of No Return" a long time ago. So that pretty well makes you the only person alive who understands me, and doesn't give a damn what I do.

MUMMER

Indifference does that.

SAM

Careful! Comes perilously close to unconditional love — that "indifference" thing.

MUMMER

Well my unconditional love does come out when you act. And I do know your great power to project yourself into the role.

SAM

Some power we have now, Chris. I've fallen off the "A" List to "off-off Broadway." And you've fallen off the face of Planet Earth and into New Jersey.

MUMMER

Connecticut.

SAM

Well all these New England states look the same anyway – autumn leaves and quaint country inns and chubby people in faded Ivy league sweats.

MUMMER

But we did make it, you and I. We did make it into the Sun, even if we singed our wings and fell.

SAM

(mockingly cocks her ear)

I'm sorry, I can't hear you. I only deal in present tenses.

MUMMER

And the present tense is that we're doing a ten-minute play festival in Bumfuck!

SAM

Seen only by blue-hairs and jerk-off queens. And we'll stun them with our brilliance!

MUMMER

Genius in the ruins!

SAM

Ending up where we started out with nothing but our passion and the clothes upon our backs!

(She comes over to him, and they high five one another.)

And I'll bet you didn't even tell my ex-husband you were bringing me in.

MUMMER

Owen? God no! You know how he hyperventilates whenever anyone mentions your name. How is it, I wonder, to have to marry your Nemesis?

SAM

I wouldn't know, and neither would you, since the only way either of us could do that would be to marry each other. And we're both much too smart for that. Still, he does go completely postal whenever he even catches a glimpse of one of my movie posters. And seeing me in person?! Well, I hope you've provided me with body guards. Oh, never mind, I think I've covered that one myself...

SAM

(Continuing, whips out her cell phone)

Oh, David! Would you be a darling? I need some help with my effects.

MUMMER

(shaking his head in disbelief)

You are amazing!

SAM

Not really, dear heart. I just like to plan ahead. And I hope you have as well. The usual finest hotel? [If that's not a contradiction in terms here in Stepford, or wherever it is we are...]

MUMMER

Already done.

(He starts to wheel over to the door when the young actor, Dave comes in, accompanied by Doug.)

DAVE

Oh, Ms. Onan, I hope you don't mind. I brought my friend Douglas Harker along to help.

SAM

Mind? Dear boy, *Ménage* is my middle name.

DOUG

(goes to shake her hand)

Oh, Ms. Onan.

SAM

(taking pleasant note of Doug.)

Oh, Douglas please! Call me... "Your Majesty."

DOUG.

I'm such a fan. I mean, you're every young actor's...

(He pauses blushes.)

SAM

Say it! [God, men who blush turn me on!]

DAVE

(mumbles) wet dream.

I started to say...

(Immediately she takes him by the arm.)

SAM

Young man, nocturnal emissions are such a waste! Let us help you learn to re-channel your precious energies!

MUMMER

Just re-channel them at rehearsals on Monday.

DAVE

Hopefully with something more challenging.

MUMMER

You never use “hopefully” to begin a sentence. It defines nothing. Like acting that doesn’t understand itself defines nothing. Learn to handle what you’ve got. Then you can be opinionated.

SAM
(noting)

Dissent? From the acolytes? You’re slipping.

MUMMER

Mr. David Danielson apparently doesn’t approve of my artistic direction.

DAVE

Not at all. I have great respect for all has been producers who are trying to bone my girlfriend.

MUMMER

A) She’s not your girlfriend. B) I’m not in a position to “bone” anybody. And c) the only reason I put up with your brutal, self-congratulatory candor is the fact that you have the potential to channel that anger into some reasonably good acting.

DAVE

Damn! And I thought I had you fooled.

MUMMER

No. But you have yourself fooled. And so far the ruse is working.

(Sam steps into their midst and takes over.)

SAM

Gentlemen, please! There is entirely too much truth in the air for a Friday afternoon. It’s time for cocktails and nonsense, “Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.”

(She hooks the two young actors under the arms, and starts walking away with them.)

Come lads, and help me with my things. Because the only baggage this lady has actually has clothes inside it.

(They exit. Mummer wheels away and starts to go down the ramp leading to the stage when Paxton comes bounding onto the set, clearly outraged.)

PAXTON

Tell me you didn’t do it!

MUMMER
(not turning)

I did it.

PAXTON

Good God Chris! You know how I feel about this!

MUMMER

No, I've never figured that out. She's certainly more of a threat to me than she is to you. And yet you're the one who gets hyperemotional!

PAXTON

What do you mean?

MUMMER

(remembering)

Oh, you wouldn't know, of course.

PAXTON

I can't believe you did this! Surely not for this crappy little one-act play festival. Surely you don't need her to get over. That's throwing a hand grenade in a coffee pot!

MUMMER

By any means necessary, Owen! You used to understand that.

PAXTON

Spare me the self-serving shit!

MUMMER

I have a reputation...

PAXTON

(interrupts)

For unmitigated ego!

MUMMER

(trying to control it, but losing it)

For excellence! And I will do whatever is necessary...

PAXTON

(interrupts again)

Tell me you didn't put us both in the same piece?! Not the PC-DC piece? No! No way!

(Paxton throws up his hands and starts pacing while Mummer wheels to face him with delight.)

MUMMER

Perfect energy dynamic wouldn't you say?!

PAXTON

You did this on purpose! You ruthless sonofabitch!

MUMMER

I think I like that. I would prefer pragmatic. But “ruthless” will do.

PAXTON

I’m not going to do it.

MUMMER

Of course you are. Or you can’t come sniffing around my wife any more. And I don’t know why you object so much to your ex-wife coming here when you spend more time with mine than I do myself.

PAXTON

I can’t help it. I’m driven to it by pity and compassion.

MUMMER

Not to mention hormones and obsession. And that’s okay. Because I can understand your passion. Because I can love unconditionally. And you cannot! And that’s the difference between us and always will be.

PAXTON

Do you ever stop congratulating yourself for everything you do?

MUMMER

I need the validation.

PAXTON

You infuriating prick!

MUMMER

I know but you love me.

PAXTON

I think you’re a fucking asshole!

MUMMER

But I’m your fucking asshole.

PAXTON

“Beyond the Sea.” Bobby Darin’s entourage. Borrowed line.

MUMMER

Life imitates art yet again — and again and again...

PAXTON

There’s nothing left of any of us is there?

MUMMER

No. There’s something. There’s still something. That’s what we’re fighting to preserve, old friend. And that’s why I brought her in. That’s the only reason.

PAXTON

I mean, how can you even tolerate her for God's sake?!

MUMMER

(Shrugs it off)

You treat her like you would any diva. You put your ego in a drawer. You put your head down and say "yes ma'am" whenever spoken to.

PAXTON

So you'd do all that just to get the product you want?!

MUMMER

Anything short of a pact with the devil. "The play's the thing!"

PAXTON

And the only reason I'll continue to embrace this bizarre scenario. And you.

MUMMER

So you'll do it.

PAXTON

Under protest. And very conditionally: that the only time I have to see her is during rehearsals and the actual performance. {God willing, it's brief!}

MUMMER

That's the only time I planned on it. But that's up to you, my friend.

PAXTON

I wonder. I wonder if anything is up to us any more.

(He goes to leave but stops to turn around.)

Why did you do it, Chris? You knew she'd come.

MUMMER

Resolution, Owen. We're all entitled to it are we not?

PAXTON

I think you're the only one who wants it.

MUMMER

No. I'm just the only one who'll admit it.

PAXTON

That's about all the truth I can handle for one day. I think I'll go get drunk.

MUMMER

You're not staying for tea?

PAXTON

I'm afraid of who might show up.

(Paxton exits, passes Sarah, without comment, on the way out.)

SARAH

Tea, Owen?

(Notes as he breezes by her.) Owen?

(To Mummer.)

Well, was it something you said?

MUMMER

It doesn't take much these days. In fact in this age of political correctness, it's virtually impossible to get through a single day without insulting everyone about something.

SARAH

Well if anyone can be the poster Marine for that, it's you.

MUMMER

(starts wheeling away)

I'm going outside for a smoke.

SARAH

But you don't smoke anymore. At least you better not.

MUMMER

No, but I can reminisce.

SARAH

Well, all this delicious tea...

(Sam suddenly appears in the wings.)

SAM

A shame to waste it. Is it high tea, then?

MUMMER

(noting her return)

Well, I thought you'd be "finger cuffs" by now.

SAM

Oh Chris. People don't have sex anymore. They only talk about it. Besides, it's hard to seduce all these young people when they're constantly groveling around in front of you as if you were some deity.

MUMMER

Such reformation. I don't think I can stomach the purity.

SCOREKEEPER

Ahola

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(He wheels offstage. The two women wait and then regard one another. Sarah turns to tend the tea.)

SARAH

I heard you'd come in to do this.

SAM

Well Chris Mummer is one for his little agendas. Calculated to the last dotted "i."

SARAH

No. He just hates loose ends.

SAM

Loyal to the end. God I love you for that! That and everything else.

SARAH *(pouring)*

Well, I've suddenly gotten irresistible in middle age. One lump or two?

SAM

Is it spiked?

SARAH

Oh, Sam. People don't drink anymore. They only talk about it.

(Sarah turns to present the tea. Sam joins her, takes the tea, sips it and gives her a kiss on the cheek.)

SAM

Delicious

SARAH

Glad you like it.

SAM

I didn't mean...

SARAH *(Cuts her off)*

I know what you meant...

(She moves away from her.)

Very unsubtle of you, thank you very much. And very disrespectful.

SAM

Disrespectful?

SARAH

Of me! Of my wishes.

SAM

God forbid I should be disrespectful of your wishes — or Owen's. Or Scorekeeper's! Or anyone else's! God forbid!

SARAH

No! Sarah forbid! And that's final!

SAM

(repentant, bows her head)

I'm sorry. God I'm so sorry for everything. All I've ever done is screw up people's lives. I can't act anymore. But I can still act up! Oh yeah!

(Sam sets down the tea and begins to cry. Trying to hide it like a little girl, she turns away and rubs her eye. She pulls out a handkerchief.)

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I look like shit when my mascara smears.

(She starts to laugh in the midst of the tears. The gesture, so endearing draws Sarah over like a magnet. She sets down the tea and goes to Sam, turns her around and holds her. Sam collapses onto her breast and the two women embrace. Sarah kisses her on the forehead in a motherly fashion. Sam kisses Sarah on the cheek in a sisterly fashion. And suddenly the women are kissing on the mouth in a way that is neither sisterly nor motherly. In fact, they are locking lips and cleaning each other's teeth. Passion at a peak, Sarah bursts away and crosses across the stage, shaking Sam.)

SARAH

No you don't! NO YOU DON'T! This is not going to happen!

SAM

Oh, Sarah, sweetheart. It is all going to happen. All of it!

Blackout.

End of Act 1.