Samuel French Acting Edition

Wrong Turn at Lungfish

by Garry Marshall & Lowell Ganz

SAMUEL FRENCH

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www.SamuelFrench.com
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FOR PRODUCTION ENQUIRIES

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Info@SamuelFrench.com
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Originally produced on the New York Stage by

James Freydberg Jeffrey Ash Kenneth Greenblatt

Wrong Turn at Lungfish had its world premiere at the Steppenwolf Theatre on June 6, 1990, Randall Arney, Artistic Director, Stephen B. Eich, Managing Director.

Wrong Turn at Lungfish opened at the Promenade Theatre in New York City, in February, 1993 with the following cast (in order of appearance):

PETER RAVENSWAAL----------George C. Scott

NURSE ----------Kelli Williams

ANITA MERENDINO ---------- Jami Gertz

DOMINIC DE CAESAR----------Tony Danza

Directed by: Garry Marshall
Set Design by: David Jenkins
Costumes by: Erin Quigley
Lighting by: Peter Kaczorowski
Sound by: Tom Morse
Casting by: Lynn Stalmaster

CHARACTERS

PETER RAVENSWAAL – Early to late 60's. Virile, strong, gruff-voiced and cynical. Other than being blind, you'd never guess he's ill.

NURSE – Complaining, immature young girl who is somehow going to be a good nurse, some day.

ANITA MERENDINO – Mid-to-late 20's, early 30's, tough street girl. Very optimistic and cheerful in order to hide a low self-esteem.

DOMINIC DE CAESAR – Anita's boyfriend. Late 20's, early 30's. A good-looking, funny, charming but not brilliant street guy who can turn mean suddenly.

TIME & PLACE

The Present.
A hospital room somewhere in New York City.

ACT I

Scene 1	Noon
Scene 2	Another day – noon
Scene 3	Another day – evening

Intermission

ACT II

Scene 1	The next day – mid-morning
Scene 2	Several hours later

Wrong Turn At Lungfish

ACT I

SCENE. The time is the present and we see a single room on the third floor of a New York City hospital.

We hear BEETHOVEN'S NINTH SYMPHONY playing As LIGHTS come full up the music goes out It's around lunchtime, but there's a little sunshine coming through the room's lone window There's not much of anything in this room No flowers, no gift boxes of candy, no get well cards taped to the wall There's one hospital bed with a night table on either side of it On one night table is a pile of books, a radio-cassette player, and some audio tapes There are two doors, one leading out to the corridor, the other to a small bathroom in the room Next to the bed is a straight-back chair, and on the opposite wall is a TV set with two chairs under it There's a hook to hang coats behind night table nearest corridor door The room is empty and the door out to the corridor is open For a moment there is silence The quiet is broken by offstage SHOUTING

NURSE (*Offstage*) Mr Ravenswaal. Mr. Ravenswaal! Come back here!

RAVENSWAAL. (*Offstage*) Leave me alone!

NURSE (*Offstage.*) Mr Ravenswaal, come back—look out!

(HE bangs into something else There's a CRASH)

RAVENSWAAL. (*Offstage*) What was that?!

NURSE. (*Offstage*) That was everybody's lunch.

RAVENSWAAL. (*Offstage.*) Well, then help me!

NURSE. (*Offstage*) All right! Here. This way. I have to clean up this mess you made.

(PETER RAVENSWAAL careens into the room alone. He is in his early sixties HE wears dark glasses, a robe over his pajamas and carries a cane which HE swings dangerously Using the cane ineffectively, HE stumbles, grabbing his bed for safety HE takes off his robe and throws robe, glasses and cane on the floor The NURSE is still out in the hall cleaning RAVENSWAAL holds his head, obviously in pain, and worried, for a beat Then the NURSE enters the room and his entire attitude changes to a peppier but grouchy patient The NURSE is a young girl in her early twenties who gives the impression that nothing ever goes smoothly for her)

NURSE. (*Offstage.*) Thanks, Raul. *(Enters, begging*) Mr. Ravenswaal. I have to walk you. Why did you run away?

RAVENSWAAL I have to use the bathroom. Help me. (*HE gets off of bed and sticks out his hand*)

NURSE. You're supposed to try to get around by yourself.

RAVENSWAAL. I tried. I failed. Help me!

NURSE Dr. Wells gave strict orders.

RAVENSWAAL. Dr. Wells ... In an enlightened society, that man would be killed and his body put on public display—Ow! (*During the preceding, HE heads for the bathroom, but does not see the tray table which is in his way, HE bangs into it.*) Damn it help me before I break my neck!

NURSE. (*Frustrated.*) I was told not to!

RAVENSWAAL. (*New attitude.*) You're right. I completely understand. I'll go right here. (*HE pulls out the night table drawer and makes believe he's going to urinate in it.*)

NURSE. (*Rushing to him*) All right! All right. Come on. I'll take you. But don't tell Dr. Wells. (*SHE takes his arm and leads him to the bathroom.*) Do you want to meet the people from the blind institute? *They'll* show you how to use your cane. They have—

RAVENSWAAL. (*Offstage.*) No. (*Enters bathroom*) Wait for me.

NURSE You're six steps away—

RAVENSWAAL. Wait for me!

(SHE closes the door, then pantomimes machine-gunning the bathroom door SHE seems like a kid The corridor door opens and ANITA enters ANITA is in her late twenties with an innocent-looking face and a guilty-looking body SHE's carrying a large paper bag, a purse, and a coat SHE's in a nice mood. SHE catches the nurse "machine-gunning")

ANITA. Hi.

NURSE. (*Startled*) Oh Hi! Uh ... I was just ... You came to see him?

ANITA. Yes.

NURSE. Visiting hours aren't until two p.m. Two to three p.m. ...

ANITA. (*Puts her stuff down and hands the NURSE a note.*) They gave me this.

NURSE. (*Reads and is satisfied she's okay.*) Oh. (*Then.*) You really like hanging around with these old people?

ANITA. Yes. I learn things from them. They got a lot of wisdom.

NURSE They got a lot of complaints! He's in the bathroom. Would you put him back into bed for me? It's a piss storm in here today. One nurse is out sick ... And two are testifying at malpractice suits....

ANITA. Sure I'll help him. I'm very good with the patients. How long has he been blind?

NURSE. I don't know—a couple months—and usually by *now* they try to do something by themselves. Not him.

ANITA. How come?

NURSE. I'm a nurse, not a psychiatrist and I'm done ... tell him lunch is going to be late because he knocked over the food cart ... you hear the crash? He woke up two patients from comas

(The NURSE exits ANITA looks around. SHE examines a couple of his books The TOILET flushes, and RAVENSWAAL comes out of the bathroom)

RAVENSWAAL I'm finished Another demonstration of what the handicapped can accomplish if they're given half a chance. Help me!

ANITA (*Goes and takes his hand*) Here we go.

RAVENSWAAL. *(Freezes.)* That's not you.

ANITA. No, it's me.

RAVENSWAAL. Where is she?

ANITA. You mean her?

RAVENSWAAL. Yes. Who are you?

ANITA. It's me.

RAVENSWAAL. (*Frustrated.*) It's a carnival of pronouns.

ANITA. What?

RAVENSWAAL. I don't know. Third base. Who are you?

ANITA. Oh! I'm your reader, Anita. I was here last week. Mr. Ravenswaal. (*SHE helps him into bed.*)

RAVENSWAAL. Anita? Nasal Anita?

ANITA. (*Good natured.*) That's me.

RAVENSWAAL. Anita, I'm sure you're very sweet. And for a young girl to volunteer her time reading to blind people could be considered admirable.

ANITA. Thank you. It's no biggie, the bus lets me off right at the corner.

RAVENSWAAL. But the fact is I've called and asked for a different reader.

ANITA. Oh, I know. They told me you didn't want me. But no one else will come to you no more.

RAVENSWAAL. Any more.

ANITA. No one else will come to you any more.

RAVENSWAAL. (*Mad.*) They can all go to hell.

ANITA. You know they have books on tape. Whole books on tape. Whole books read by stars of stage, screen, and television.

RAVENSWAAL. No, no. I'm afraid I can't abide Keats being read to me by Ed McMahon.

ANITA. Well, I'm what's left. (*Cheerful.*) Should I start reading something? I bought the books. (*SHE gets her paper bag.*)

RAVENSWAAL. Why did you come back? Didn't I throw pudding at you?

ANITA. Yeah, you missed.

RAVENSWAAL. Of course I missed. I'm blind. So why did you come back?

ANITA. I don't know. I guess I never met a college principal before.

RAVENSWAAL (*Correcting.*) Dean.

ANITA. Anita.

RAVENSWAAL. What?

ANITA. Me.

RAVENSWAAL. Go back, go back! You said "principal." I said "dean."

ANITA. (*Firmly.*) Anita.

RAVENSWAAL. Stop that!

ANITA. (*Yells.*) Is your first name Dean or not?

RAVENSWAAL. No. My name is Peter. I was the dean of a college.

ANITA. Ohh ...

RAVENSWAAL. That's why you came back?

ANITA. Yeah. I never met a dean before.

RAVENSWAAL. No doubt. I could tell that from the way you read.

ANITA. (*Agrees.*) Yeah.

RAVENSWAAL. I just insulted you.

ANITA. (*Cheerful.*) I know. You insult everybody. Kills me. So how are you? Did you see the doctor today?

RAVENSWAAL. Yes, I consulted all three of those ... geniuses.

ANITA. What did they say?

RAVENSWAAL. That's none of your business. (*Curtly.*) You'd better go.

ANITA. Okay. I was just chatting. The nurses say you don't get no visitors.

RAVENSWAAL. Any visitors.

ANITA. Yeah. I feel sorry for you. I take an interest in all my patients.

RAVENSWAAL. You don't have any patients. You're a girl who comes on her lunch hour and reads to any poor slob who can't see.

ANITA. Yeah. I like to say "my patients." It makes me feel more important. You know like I'm *doing* something. It gives me ...

RAVENSWAAL. (*Interrupts.*) Some sense of purpose in your otherwise trivial existence.

ANITA. (*Glad he got it SHE puts bag in drawer.*) Yeah! You figured me out.

RAVENSWAAL. But why did you choose to do *this*?

ANITA. Why? (*Enthusiastic*) That's an interesting story ...

RAVENSWAAL. An interesting *short* story?

ANITA. Yeah, short. My grandmother was blind. So when I was a little girl I read to her, the magazines. *Soap Opera Digest* She liked to know everybody's business. Then she was in a home with *other* blind people, so I started reading to the other blind people ...

RAVENSWAAL. How long was your grandmother blind?

ANITA. The last ten years of her life.

RAVENSWAAL. (*Quietly.*) Not the best ten.

ANITA. (*Kindly.*) Must be hard to get used to, huh?

(SHE touches his arm gently but HE pulls his arm away abruptly.)

RAVENSWAAL. (*A beat*) What books did you bring?

ANITA. What you had me write on the list. The one by Schopenhauer. (*Pronounces "Schop" to rhyme with "hop"*)

RAVENSWAAL. Schopenhauer.

ANITA. (*Corrects.*) Schopenhauer. John Keats, "The Poems." And I couldn't find the baseball book.

RAVENSWAAL. Baseball book?

ANITA. Yeah. The one by Casey Stengel. "Reds and the Blacks."

RAVENSWAAL. (*Bewildered*) Casey Stengel ... (*Realizing*) That's Stendahl! French novelist. 19th Century. Sten*dahl*! (*Enraged*) Where's the pudding? (*HE gropes around for pudding*)

ANITA There's no pudding!

RAVENSWAAL. Go, goodbye. Go. Please go. (*HE turns on cassette player We hear BEETHOVEN'S NINTH.*)

ANITA. (*Crosses to purse and coat on hook*) Okay. I'll see you next week. Here's your change from the books. Oh, I got that other book too.

RAVENSWAAL. What other book?

(SHE puts change, one dollar and coins, in his drawer and pulls the "other" book, which is a small paperback, out of her purse)

ANITA. *A Hooker By Choice* (*Reads.*) "The story of a college girl who graduated erotica cum laude." (*SHE says "loud" for laude, then adds the "ee" sound*)

RAVENSWAAL. I know what it's about. You bought that book?

ANITA. You told me to.

RAVENSWAAL. (*A beat.*) Sit down. (*HE turns off cassette player Surprised*) You bought that book?

ANITA You asked me to.

RAVENSWAAL. I was being facetious.

ANITA Is that like horny?

RAVENSWAAL. No, that's like facetious.

ANITA. I was kinda surprised a dean would like this.

RAVENSWAAL. Read. I'm sure you'll have no trouble with these words.

(SHE opens the book as HE takes the cassette out of the player)

ANITA. There's no pictures. You're not missing anything. (*SHE gives him a playful poke*)

RAVENSWAAL. Don't poke. Read.

ANITA. (*Reads.*) "Chapter one. Cathy liked kicks" Well they get right into it, don't they? "Ever since the day she snuck into the football team's shower room and saw them soaping up their muscular firm bodies Then the water ran down and revealed their young manhood, glistening in the fluorescent shower lights as if to say, 'I'm a boy no longer.' "...

RAVENSWAAL. (*A long beat, then*) What happened? Did I go deaf too?

ANITA I'm sorry. I can't read this stuff.

RAVENSWAAL. You're offended?

ANITA. No. I don't want to read about sex right now. How about a little Schopenhauer?

RAVENSWAAL. I'm not going to do anything. If I couldn't even hit you with the pudding, I'm hardly a sexual threat.

ANITA. I wasn't worried about you being a sexual threat, Mr. Ravenswaal. I just don't like to think about sex.

RAVENSWAAL. You don't like sex?

ANITA. I like it. It's just bad for me to think about it too much.

RAVENSWAAL. Are you homely?

ANITA. (*Insulted.*) No. It's ... it's personal.

RAVENSWAAL. Try one chapter. Then we'll move on to something else. I love the style of writing, it amuses me. Besides, I'm getting used to the nasal quality in your voice.

ANITA. Thank you. I'll try. (*Reads.*) "Cathy's first experience was with Homer, the school's burly janitor. Homer's small brain was more than compensated for by his..."

RAVENSWAAL. Beethoven was deaf.

ANITA. What?

RAVENSWAAL. The music I was just playing ... Beethoven's Ninth Symphony ... He wrote it when he was deaf.

ANITA. Who did?

RAVENSWAAL. Beethoven!

ANITA. He was deaf?

RAVENSWAAL. Yes. It makes me wonder. How would a man—deaf—at the end of his life—a life dominated by depression—write anything so uplifting—so optimistic as the "Ode to Joy"?

ANITA. Yeah, it sounds pretty fishy.

RAVENSWAAL. No. It's not "fishy." I don't suspect him of some deception—read.

ANITA. Now, you got me thinking. He wrote nine symphonies and he was deaf. I couldn't write one. And I had the highest score in the eighth grade hearing test.

RAVENSWAAL. How fascinating ... then you must have heard me ask you to read.

ANITA. Sure. It's very interesting talking to you, though. I'm going to enjoy coming here, this is fun.

RAVENSWAAL. I'm dying.

ANITA. Huh?

RAVENSWAAL. It won't be that much fun. The same thing that made me blind is now going to make me dead.

ANITA. (*Shaken*) When did they tell you?—

RAVENSWAAL. This morning. Read.

ANITA. Isn't there anything—

RAVENSWAAL. Read!

ANITA. "Homer's small brain was more than compensated for by his" ...

(LIGHTS slowly dim)

Scene 2

It's around lunchtime of another day in Mr. Ravenswaal's room RAVENSWAAL stands on a chair under the hospital room TV The TV hangs from the ceiling across from the bed The TV is not turned on HE has his arms protectively around the TV The NURSE

hangs up phone and is obviously having a disagreement with Mr RAVENSWAAL

NURSE. (*On phone.*) All right, I'll try. (*Hangs up phone and crosses to Ravenswaal*) I am a nurse! I am in a position of responsibility and you have to do as I say.

RAVENSWAAL. You are not a real nurse. You're a student nurse. And if you *become* a real nurse I will lose a five dollar bet with Doctor Wells.

NURSE. (*Surprised*) Dr. Wells bet on me. Wow.

RAVENSWAAL. Young lady ...

NURSE. What?

RAVENSWAAL. I have the same *rights* in this hospital as Mr Santoni. Why should he receive better treatment?

NURSE. Because he's nicer and everybody likes him more.

RAVENSWAAL. (*Victorious.*) Ah! That's the very essence of democracy. The protection of the disliked.

NURSE. Look. It's simple. Mr. Santoni watches a lot of TV. His set flickers. You never turn yours on. So we're switching yours with his. What's the problem?

RAVENSWAAL. You've given everything I own to Mr. Santoni. You gave him my tray table, my hangers, and my best chair. Next you'll be giving him my clothes! I'll be damned if he gets my TV!

NURSE. I'll have Raul come in here when you're sleeping and he'll yank it out.

RAVENSWAAL. I'll smash it first. Scorched earth policy.

NURSE. Fine. But do you know why you have a student nurse? Because the real nurses won't come to you

anymore. And if you stay up there much longer, I'll move your furniture around to different places!

(SHE storms out and bumps into ANITA as she goes NURSE looks at him ANITA holds coffee cup)

NURSE. Would you believe he won't give up his TV set and he can't even see? It's a zoo. Look at him!

ANITA. He looks pretty frisky today.

NURSE. Yeah, they've pumped him full of pills and he went climbing. See if you can get him down. (*To Ravenswaal*) I'm going down to the gift shop now to buy Mr. Santoni a present!

(NURSE exits ANITA walks toward Ravenswaal SHE is amused)

ANITA What are you doing up there, Mr. Ravenswaal?

RAVENSWAAL. I'm exercising my territorial imperative.

ANITA. Good. Whatever you said. Would you like to come down here with me?

RAVENSWAAL. Physically, yes. Intellectually, not without scuba gear.

ANITA (*Amused SHE takes his arm*) That was a shot at me wasn't it? (*SHE's helping him down*) I understand. If someone tried to take my TV I'd go crazy. What's your favorite show?

RAVENSWAAL. Off.

ANITA What?

RAVENSWAAL. I never watch.

ANITA. Oh, like my grandma. You just listen. She loved the game shows.

RAVENSWAAL. Did she?

ANITA. You should probably go on those shows. You'd be a whiz. And you're blind, that's very good. They like people with a gimmick.

RAVENSWAAL. (*Laughs*) I'll keep that in mind. Thank you.

ANITA. Ready for reading?

RAVENSWAAL. Yes ... (*Then.*) Anita, I hope my behavior the other day didn't upset you. I was a little depressed that day and I shouldn't have made that your problem.

ANITA. No, that's all right. (*SHE starts to pick up books.*) You know, a lot of people are not really sure you're dying.

RAVENSWAAL. (*Interested*) Who?

ANITA. Me and my friends.

RAVENSWAAL. Your friends? They're doctors?

ANITA. No. Two are from shipping, one's a receptionist. We were talking how a number of times on TV somebody is told they're dying, and it's a mix-up of the X-rays. Once even on the "Honeymooners," Jackie Gleason *heard* he was dying, but it was his mother-in-law's cocker spaniel. And they told Gleason he was gonna get sick and lay by the stove and drink warm milk from a saucer. And when he found out it was a cocker spaniel, did they laugh. Maybe that's what happened to you.

(Pause. RAVENSWAAL stares at her a moment in disbelief Calmly HE raises his eyes to the ceiling)

RAVENSWAAL. Are you listening to this?

ANITA. That's nice, you talk to God.

RAVENSWAAL. When he talks back we've got something.

ANITA. It's good though ... in case you're really dying. He could get you into heaven. He could put you on the good list.

RAVENSWAAL. You know all about heaven?

ANITA. Sure. I'm a Catholic. The nuns told me.

RAVENSWAAL. Tell me about it.

ANITA. (*Reacts.*) Tell you? You know.

RAVENSWAAL. (*Putting her on HE crosses*) I'm old now. I forget things. Tell me the whole story. Dying, heaven, the "good" list, everything.

ANITA. (*Enthusiastic.*) Oh, it's wonderful. First you die.

RAVENSWAAL. A given.

ANITA. Then your soul leaves your body.

RAVENSWAAL. My soul?

ANITA. Yeah. It looks like you only you can see through it.

RAVENSWAAL. Okay. I'm out of my body. A floating transparency.

ANITA. And then you start to go up. (*Getting into it*) Higher than the stars. And then you come to the gates. And then he meets you.

RAVENSWAAL. Who?

ANITA. Well, St. Peter meets the Catholics.

RAVENSWAAL. I'm an Agnostic.

ANITA. Oh. I'm sure they got someone around who meets Agnostics Anyway, they check the list. And the good list goes to heaven, and the bad list goes to ... we

don't want to get into that right now ... (*Wistful.*) And when you get to heaven, everybody is there, like your parents and they're not mad at you anymore and they tell you that they really love you and they don't hit you anymore. (*Pause. A thought.*) Oh. Be sure to wear warm clothes to heaven.

RAVENSWAAL. A nun told you that?

ANITA. No, Mrs. LiCausi. She was there.

RAVENSWAAL. Where?

ANITA. In heaven! Mrs. LiCausi was there once for one minute.

RAVENSWAAL. A whole group went? Club Med? What are you talking about?!

ANITA. No. I'll tell you the whole story. Mrs. LiCausi went to Orchard Beach with her son, Paulie—I hated him. He had ringworm and he only had hair on one side of his head—and he was always rubbing—(*SHE rubs side of her head*)

RAVENSWAAL. Short! Short!

ANITA. I'm sorry. Anyway, she went to Orchard Beach and she went in the water too *soon* after eating a sausage and cheese sandwich ... she loved her provolone. (*RAVENSWAAL taps his cane on the floor to hurry her up*) Sooooooo, she started to drown. The lifeguard pulled her out and gave her mouth-to-mouth and brought her back to life. (*Dramatic. To center*) And she told us that while she was dead for one minute, she went to heaven. And in heaven, she was walking through a long tunnel, towards a door. And in the tunnel she was very cold, 'cause she only had on a bathing suit. So she said, when it's time for me to die, I should bundle up. (*To him.*) So, that's all you

need to worry about. Other than that, heaven is terrific. Make you feel better?

(SHE leans down to him as SHE finishes. HE gently raises his hand to find her head, then suddenly pulls her hair)

ANITA. Ow! You hurt my hair!

RAVENSWAAL. I'm sorry. I'm very sorry. I've never done anything like that. (*Trying to regain control of himself*)

ANITA. Then why'd you do it?

RAVENSWAAL. It's the way you think. The dog's X-rays, Mrs. LiCausi running around heaven in a wet bathing suit. Those are just pat, smug, easy answers to *questions* that have *consumed* the thoughts of the greatest minds of every generation. It's astrology, it's cult worship, it's .

ANITA. I thought it was hope.

(Pause)

RAVENSWAAL Hope! Read. Read or go home Baudelaire.

ANITA. Which Baudelaire? There's two.

RAVENSWAAL. The Poems!

(SHE picks up a bunch of books, then glares at him Suddenly SHE walks deliberately over to him and silently makes funny, ugly faces at him HE senses she is doing something but doesn't know what it is Satisfied that SHE has silently insulted him, SHE goes and sits down on the straight-back chair at stage right SHE puts other books under chair, then reads

Baudelaire. SHE reads from a book-marked spot. SHE doesn't read terribly well, but competently.)

ANITA. (*Reading*) "The Clock. The Clock. Terrible Clock! God without mercy, mighty power! Saying all day, Remember and beware." (*Stops reading and yells to him.*) You're lucky Dominic doesn't know you pulled my hair. (*Reads*) "There is no arrow of pain but in a tiny hour. Will make thy heart—" (*Stops reading.*) He'd break your knees with a baseball bat. (*Reads.*) "Will make thy heart its target and stick and vibrate there towards the horizon—" (*Still angry.*) Dominic's my boyfriend you know. Since the eighth grade. (*Reads.*) "Toward the horizon all too soon and out of sight." (*Begins to sniffle SHE is holding back tears.*) "Vaporous pleasure ..."

(SHE gets up to get tissues SHE is no longer able to read RAVENSWAAL refuses to acknowledge her anguish SHE continues to try and not cry, but finally tears come)

ANITA. Who knows where he is. He could be hanging on a meat hook somewhere, his guts ripped out ... "Vaporous pleasure" ... (*Then through her tears, SHE takes tissues and blows her nose*)

RAVENSWAAL. (*Sighs)* Young lady, I know at this point, it is expected of me to feign interest in that which is obviously distressing you. I will not. In whatever *number* of days I have remaining, I am determined to *occupy myself* with the great beauty which I will soon never hear again. My time is too precious to investigate this tale of yours, which sounds both hideous and banal at the same

time. Please take a moment to compose yourself or we'll have to call it a day.

ANITA (*Composing herself*) I'm sorry. I'll read. (*Looks for her place.*) It's just that the last time I saw him, he was jumping out a window in his underwear ... Oh, never mind.

(SHE finds her place, and starts to read HE seems to be listening calmly)

ANITA. "Vaporous pleasure like a syl .. syl ..." I don't know how to say this word. *(Spells.)* S -Y-L-P-H-I-

RAVENSWAAL. It's no use.

ANITA. No, if you just help me ...

RAVENSWAAL. No. I'm sitting here thinking, "Why did he jump out the window in his underwear?"

ANITA. Oh Mr. Ravenswaal, it was terrible! Last month we were—(*Sincere*) You don't want to hear my problems.

RAVENSWAAL. (*Waves to her to come over to him*) I can't concentrate. Tell me!

ANITA Okay. I haven't seen Dominic in three weeks. I have this apartment. It's almost a three, but it's really a two-and-a-half, the fridge is in the living room.

RAVENSWAAL. Please ... (*HE raps cane on floor to hurry her)*

ANITA. Okay, *short.* So Dominic was sleeping over that night. We do that sometimes. We're still *just* engaged, but we ... you know.

RAVENSWAAL. I approve.

ANITA. Thank you. I heard a noise in the other room...

RAVENSWAAL. Dominic didn't hear it?

ANITA. I had his ears covered ... (*Giggles at the memory, then hesitates to explain.*) He likes me to ...

RAVENSWAAL. (*A beat*) Go on, go on.

ANITA. (*Slowly, to build the tension.*) I went out in the living room ...

RAVENSWAAL. With the fridge, yes!

ANITA. And just then a shotgun blew off my front door.

RAVENSWAAL. What?

ANITA. (*Nods.*) Yeah, and two guys with ski masks burst in. I screamed. They ran for the bedroom and got there just as Dominic was going out the window. They shot at him, but I saw he got away. So they punched me in the stomach and tried to rape me. Anyway, it's been three weeks now. I don't know if he's alive—

RAVENSWAAL. They tried to rape you?

ANITA. Yeah. But the police came and they ran.

RAVENSWAAL Thank God.

ANITA. Yeah Only then the police got mad because I wouldn't tell them where Dominic was so one of them shoved me on the floor and they left. What a night. I couldn't get back to sleep. I was tossing and turning and ...

RAVENSWAAL. (*Frustrated*) Wait a minute Go back! You were beaten and nearly raped!

ANITA. I know I was there.... You're not getting the point.

RAVENSWAAL. I got the point. The point is, this fiancé of yours got himself into some kind of extreme jeopardy and rather than face the consequences of his unsavory actions, he abandoned you to be beaten and raped.

ANITA. (*Thinks a minute.*) You got the wrong point. My point is, we love each other and I miss him and I'm worried about him.

RAVENSWAAL. You're worried. Who worries about you?

ANITA. I'm okay. You know, I feel better that I got it off my chest. Thank you. (*Picks up book, sits.*) Back to Baudelaire.

RAVENSWAAL. I'm afraid that your little anecdote has rendered poetry temporarily irrelevant.

ANITA. I'm sorry. (*Then to make up, SHE grabs a book from under chair and whispers.*) Psst. You want me to read from the *special* book?

RAVENSWAAL. (*Whispers back.*) Oh, all right. Yes.

ANITA. (*Starts reading.*) "Leland cupped my breast in his hand before he even said 'Hello.' Leland, I thought, was someone to be reckoned with. As his tongue darted between my half-parted lips I was no longer aware of anyone else in the whole restaurant ... I knew he cared for me ...

RAVENSWAAL. (*Interrupting.*) Wait a minute, I know why you don't like to think about sex. The boyfriend jumped out the window three weeks ago and since then you have no outlet for your physical urges. Correct?

ANITA. Right.

RAVENSWAAL. (*Smiles*) I broke the code ... Thank you very much. Go on.

ANITA. (*Reads.*) "I knew I was powerless to deny him whatever his hot throbbing loins required." Whew. "I accepted that he was total master as he slipped beneath the table. His hand searched my calf, then my thigh, then ..."

(Quietly, the NURSE enters ANITA is aware of her, and hiding the book, SHE, without hesitation begins ad-libbing the other book as if reading.)

ANITA. Tick-tock where's my clock said Baudelaire. Remember, remember.

RAVENSWAAL. What the hell—

NURSE. Mr. Ravenswaal, you're scheduled for X-rays in ten minutes. If you don't come nicely, I'll get Raul to drag you. (*NURSE exits, staring back oddly at Anita.*)

ANITA. She's gone.

RAVENSWAAL. Oh, very clever thinking, Anita. You demonstrated a grace under pressure seldom found amongst the abysmally ignorant.

ANITA. I didn't want her to know we read that stuff.

RAVENSWAAL. (*Sincere apology.*) I'm sorry. I didn't mean that.

ANITA. That's all right.

RAVENSWAAL. Apparently my skills in the social graces have degenerated at the same rate as my kidneys.

(HE goes into the bathroom SHE goes to his closet and looks through his clothes)

ANITA. How come you got no visitors?

RAVENSWAAL. (*Offstage.*) *Have* no visitors.

ANITA. How come you *have* no visitors?

RAVENSWAAL. (*Offstage.*) I don't know anybody.

ANITA. When did your wife die?

RAVENSWAAL. *(Off, surprised)* Did I *tell* you my wife died?

ANITA. (*Caught*) Uh ... yeah .

RAVENSWAAL. (*Offstage.*) No, I didn't.

ANITA. No, you didn't *tell* me. I figured it out. You got a wedding ring and uh ... you know, she's not here, so...

RAVENSWAAL. (*Offstage.*) Oh ... good work, Holmes.

(FLUSHING sound from bathroom.)

ANITA. Holmes? ... Oh, Sherlock Holmes! (*Enjoys it, then crosses and sits on window sill*) Hey ... that's a good one.

RAVENSWAAL. (*Enters from bathroom.*) She died a year ago.

ANITA. Any children?

RAVENSWAAL. (*Pause*) No. "My students were my children." That's from *Goodbye Mr. Chips* What an idiot he was.

ANITA. Did you try?

RAVENSWAAL. No. We were teachers. We were waiting till we achieved financial security.

ANITA. No friends?

RAVENSWAAL. None.

ANITA. That's a lie.

RAVENSWAAL. I beg your pardon.

ANITA. The head nurse told me. A couple of people came to see you. Your old students. Another teacher. Why don't you let them come up?

RAVENSWAAL. I'm too busy.

ANITA. Come on.

RAVENSWAAL. "When a man takes to his bed, many of his friends have a secret desire to see him die; some to

prove that his health is inferior to their own, others in the hope of being able to study a death agony."

ANITA. Ick. Where'd you hear that?

RAVENSWAAL. (*Laughs.*) Baudelaire. The same man who wrote, "Tick-tock, where the hell's my clock?"

ANITA. Didn't you have, like, favorite students? Teacher's pets?

RAVENSWAAL. You mean like Ben Weinstein?

ANITA. He was your favorite student?

RAVENSWAAL. No. He was one of my colleagues. He was dean at Hofstra before me. *He* had favorites. What a funeral they had for him. The wailing, the weeping. Over a thousand students showed up. He of course had the funeral on a *school* day.

ANITA. Was he a good teacher?

RAVENSWAAL. What he knew about Chaucer you could stick in your eye and not have to blink for ten years.

ANITA. But they must have liked him.

RAVENSWAAL. (*Crosses and sits on the stage right chair she was sitting on. There are books under this chair.*) Of *course* they liked him. He dedicated his life to being popular ... I, on the other hand, dedicated *my* life to holding people to a rigid standard of intellectual honesty .. which should make for a sparse gathering at my grave-side. No, the only students who could visit me are those who have a pathological need to *behave* well.

ANITA. But you educated them. That's a splendid thing.

RAVENSWAAL. Is it? I don't know. Do you see any evidence that the various institutions of higher learning have raised anything higher—other than tuition?