

Writer's Block

Two One Act Plays

by Woody Allen

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



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ATLANTIC THEATER COMPANY

Neil Pepe
Artistic Director

Beth Emelson
Producing Director

presents

Writer's Block

written and directed by
WOODY ALLEN

with
Kate Blumberg Heather Burns Clea Lewis
Bebe Neuwirth Richard Portnow Paul Reiser
Grant Shaud Skipp Sudduth Jay Thomas
Christopher Evan Welch

sets
Santo Loquasto

costumes
Laura Bauer

lighting
James F. Ingalls

sound
Scott Myers

casting
**Bernard Telsey Casting/
Will Cantler**

casting consultant
Juliet Taylor

production stage manager
Janet Takami

production manager
Kurt Gardner

general manager
Ryan Freeman

press representative
Boneau/Bryan-Brown

This production is presented in association with Letty Aronson.

CAST

(in order of appearance)

RIVERSIDE DRIVE

Jim.....PAUL REISER
Fred.....SKIPP SUDDUTH
Barbara.....KATE BLUMBERG

Time/Place:

Midafternoon

OLD SAYBROOK

Sheila.....BEBE NEUWIRTH
Norman.....JAY THOMAS
Jenny.....HEATHER BURNS
David.....GRANT SHAUD
Hal.....CHRISTOPHER EVAN WELCH
Sandy.....CLEA LEWIS
Max.....RICHARD PORTNOW

Time/Place:

Old Saybrook, Connecticut

Sunday afternoon

Assistant Stage Manager - Bethany Russell

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Curtain rises on a gray day in New York. There might even be some hint of fog. The setting suggests a secluded spot by the embankment of the Hudson River where one can lean over the rail, watch the boats and see the New Jersey shoreline. Probably the West Seventies or Eighties.

JIM SWAIN, a writer, somewhere between forty and fifty, is waiting nervously, checking his watch, pacing, trying a number on his cellular phone to no response. He's obviously waiting to meet someone.

He rubs his hands together, checks for some drizzle and perhaps pulls his jacket up a bit as he feels at least a damp mist.

Presently, a large, homeless man, unshaven, a street dweller of approximately JIM'S age, drifts on with a kind of eye on JIM. His name is FRED.

FRED eventually drifts closer to JIM, who has become increasingly aware of his presence and, while not exactly afraid, is wary of being in a desolate area with a large, unsavory type. Add to this that JIM wants his rendezvous with whomever he is waiting for to be very private. Finally, FRED engages him.

FRED. Rainy day. (JIM nods, agreeing but not wanting to encourage conversation.) A drizzle. (JIM nods with a wan smile.) Or should I say mizzle—mist and drizzle.

JIM. Um.

FRED. (*Pause*) Look at how fast the current's moving. You throw your cap into the river it'll be out in the open sea in twenty minutes.

JIM. (*Begrudging but polite.*) Uh-huh . . .

FRED. (*Pause*) The Hudson River travels three hundred and fifteen miles beginning in the Adirondacks and emptying finally into the vast Atlantic Ocean.

JIM. Interesting.

FRED. No it's not. Ever wonder what it'd be like if the current ran in the opposite direction?

JIM. I haven't actually.

FRED. Chaos-the world would be out of sync. You throw your cap in it'd get carried up to Poughkeepsie rather than out to sea.

JIM. Yes . . . well . . .

FRED. Ever been to Poughkeepsie?

JIM. What?

FRED. Ever been to Poughkeepsie?

JIM. Me?

FRED. (*Looks around; they're alone.*) Who else?

JIM. Why do you ask?

FRED. It's a simple question.

JIM. If I was in Poughkeepsie?

FRED. Were you?

JIM. (*Considers the question, decides he'll answer.*) No, I haven't. OK?

FRED. So if you haven't, why are you so guilty?

JIM. Look, I'm a little preoccupied.

FRED. You don't come here often, do you?

JIM. Why?

FRED. Interesting.

JIM. What do you want? Are you going to hit me up for a touch? Here, here's a buck.

FRED. Hey—I only asked if you came here often.

JIM. (*Getting impatient.*) No. I'm meeting someone. I have a lot on my mind.

FRED. What a day you picked.

JIM. I didn't know it would be this nasty.

FRED. Don't you watch the weather on TV? Christ, it seems that all they talk about is the goddamn weather. You really care on Riverside Drive if there are gusty winds in the Appalachian Valley? I mean, Jesus, gimme a break.

JIM. Well, it was nice talking to you.

FRED. Look—you can hardly see Jersey—there's such a fog.

JIM. It's OK. It's a blessing . . .

FRED. Right. I don't like it any better than you do.

JIM. Actually I'm joking—I'm being—

FRED. Frivolous? . . . Flippant?

JIM. Mildly sarcastic.

FRED. It's understandable.

JIM. It is?

FRED. Knowing how I feel about Montclair.

JIM. How would I know how you feel about Montclair?

FRED. I won't even bother to comment on that.

JIM. Er—yeah—well—I'd like to get back to my thoughts.

(*Looks at watch.*)

FRED. What time you expect her?

JIM. What are you talking about? Please leave me alone.

FRED. It's a free country. I can stay here and stare at New Jersey if I want.

JIM. Fine. But don't talk to me.

FRED. Don't answer.

JIM. (*Takes out cell phone.*) Hey look, do you want me to call the police?

FRED. And tell them what?

JIM. That you're harassing me—aggressive panhandling.

FRED. Suppose I took that cell phone and tossed it right into the river. Twenty minutes it'd be carried off into the Atlantic. Of course, if the current ran the other way it'd wind up in Poughkeepsie. Do I mean Poughkeepsie or Tarrytown?

JIM. (*A bit scared and angry.*) I've been to Tarrytown in case you were going to ask me that next.

FRED. Where'd you stay there?

JIM. Pocantico Hills. I used to live there. Is that OK with you?

FRED. Now they call it Sleepy Hollow—sounds better for the tourists.

JIM. Uh-huh.

FRED. Cash in on all that Ichabod Crane crap. Rip Van Winkle. It's all packaging.

JIM. Look—I was deep in thought—

FRED. Hey—we're talking literature. You're a writer.

JIM. How do you know that?

FRED. C'mon—it's me.

JIM. Are you going to tell me you can tell because of my costume?

FRED. You're in costume?

JIM. It's the tweed jacket and the corduroys, right?

FRED. Jean-Paul Sartre said that after the age of thirty a man is responsible for his own face.

JIM. Camus said that.

FRED. Sartre.

JIM. Camus. Sartre said a man assumes the traits of his occupation—a waiter will gradually walk like a waiter—a bank clerk gestures like one—because they want to become things.

FRED. But you're not a thing.

JIM. I try not to be.

FRED. Because it's safe to be a thing—because things don't perish. Like *The Wall*—the men being executed want to become one with the wall they're put up in front of—to lose themselves in the stone—to become solid, permanent, to endure, in other words, to live, to be alive.

JIM. (*Considers him—then.*) I'd love to discuss this with you another time.

FRED. Good, when?

JIM. Right now I'm a little busy . . .

FRED. Well, when? You want to have lunch, I'm free all week.

JIM. I don't really know.

FRED. I wrote a funny thing based on Irving.

JIM. Irving who?

FRED. Washington Irving—remember? We had talked about Ichabod Crane.

JIM. I didn't know we were back on that.

FRED. The headless horseman is doomed to ride the countryside, holding his head under his arm. He was a German soldier killed in the war.

JIM. A Hessian.

FRED. So he rides right into an all-night drugstore and the head says—I have a terrible headache—and the druggist says, here, take these two Extra Strength Excedrin—and the body pays for them and helps the head take two. And then we cut to them later in the night, riding over a bridge, and the head says, I feel great—

the headache is gone—I'm a new man—and then the body begins to get sad and thinks how unlucky he is because if he gets a backache, he can't find relief, not being attached to the head—

JIM. How can the body think anything?

FRED. Nobody's going to ask that question.

JIM. Why not? It's obvious.

FRED. That's why. That's why you're good at construction and dialogue but you lack inspiration. That's why you have to rely on me. Although it was a pretty sleazy thing to do.

JIM. Do what? What are you talking about?

FRED. I'm talking about money—some kind of payment and a credit of some sort.

JIM. Look, I'm meeting someone.

FRED. I know, I know, she's late.

JIM. You don't know and mind your own business.

FRED. All right—you're meeting a broad—you want to be alone? Let's get the business end of it out of the way and I'm off.

JIM. What business?

FRED. In a minute you're gonna tell me this whole thing is Kafkaesque.

JIM. It's worse than Kafkaesque.

FRED. Really? Is it—postmodern?

JIM. What do you want?

FRED. A percentage and a credit on your movie. I realize it's too late for a credit on the prints that are already in distribution, but I should have a royalty on those and a cut and my name on all subsequent prints. Not fifty percent but something fair.

JIM. Are you nuts? Why should I give you anything?

FRED. Because I gave you the idea.

JIM. You gave me?

FRED. Well—you took it from me—

JIM. I took your idea?

FRED. And you sold your first film script—and the movie seems like a success and I want what's due me.

JIM. I didn't take your idea.

FRED. Jim, let's not play games.

JIM. Let's not you play games and don't call me Jim.

FRED. OK—James. Written by James L. Swain—but everyone calls you Jim.

JIM. How do you know what everyone calls me?

FRED. I see it, I hear it.

JIM. Where? What are you talking about?

FRED. Jim Swain—Central Park West and Seventy-eighth—BMW—license plate JIMBO ONE—talk about vanity plates . . . Jimmy Connors is Jimbo One, not you—and I've seen you trying to hit a tennis ball so don't try and con me.

JIM. Have you been following me?

FRED. That mousey brunette—that's Lola?

JIM. My wife's hardly mousey!

FRED. OK, "mousey" was the wrong word—she's—not rodentine exactly—

JIM. She's a beautiful woman.

FRED. It's all very subjective.

JIM. Who the hell do you think you are?

FRED. I'd never say it to her face.

JIM. I'm her husband and I love her.

FRED. Then why are you cheating?

JIM. What?

FRED. I think I know what the other one looks like. She's a little on the cheap side, no?

JIM. There is no other one.

FRED. Then who are you meeting?

JIM. None of your goddamn business, and if you don't get out of here I'm going to call the police.

FRED. That's the last thing you want if you're having a clandestine rendezvous.

JIM. How did you know my wife's name is Lola?

FRED. I've heard you call her Lola.

JIM. Have you been stalking me?

FRED. Do I look like a stalker?

JIM. Yes.

FRED. I'm a writer. At least I was years ago. Till my visions overtook me.

JIM. Well, your imagination is too creative for me.

FRED. I know. That's why you ripped me off.

JIM. I didn't steal your idea.

FRED. Not just my idea. It was autobiographical. So in a way you stole my life.

JIM. If there were any similarities between my film and your life, I assure you, they're coincidental.

FRED. I'm not the kind of guy who sues. Some people are litigation-prone. (*With some suggestion of menace.*) I like to settle between the parties.

JIM. How did I take your idea?

FRED. You overheard me tell the plot.

JIM. To who? Where?

FRED. Central Park.

JIM. I heard you in Central Park?

FRED. That's right.

JIM. To who? When?

FRED. To John.

JIM. Who?

FRED. John.

JIM. John who?

FRED. Big John.

JIM. Who?

FRED. Big John.

JIM. Who the hell is Big John?

FRED. I don't know—he's a homeless guy. Was. I heard he got his throat cut in a shelter.

JIM. You told some tale to a homeless man and you're saying I overheard you?

FRED. And used it.

JIM. I never saw you in my life.

FRED. Christ, I've been stalking you for months.

JIM. Stalking me?

FRED. And I know everything about you but you never even noticed me. And I'm not a little guy. I'm big. I could probably snap your neck in half with one hand.

JIM. (*Nervous.*) Look—whoever you are, I promise—

FRED. The name's Fred. Fred Savage. Good name for a writer, isn't it? For Best Original Screenplay, the envelope please—and the winners are Frederick R. Savage and James L. Swain for *The Journey*.

JIM. I wrote *The Journey*. And it was my idea.

FRED. Jim, you overheard me telling it to John Kelly. Poor John. He was walking on York Avenue and they were hoisting a piano and the rope came undone—God, it was awful . . .

JIM. You said he was knifed at a shelter.

FRED. Foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds.

JIM. Look, Fred—I never stole anybody's idea. First, I don't need to because I have my own ideas, and second, I wouldn't even if I ran dry, OK?

FRED. But the story's all there. My breakdown, the straitjack-

et, my last-minute panic—the rubber between my teeth, then the electric shocks—my God—of course I was violent—

JIM. You're violent?

FRED. In and out.

JIM. Look, I'm starting to get a little alarmed.

FRED. Don't worry, she'll be here.

JIM. Over you, not her. OK—if you think you're a writer—

FRED. I said years ago—before my collapse—before all that unpleasantness occurred—I wrote for an agency.

JIM. Unpleasantness?

FRED. It's morbid, I don't want to relive it.

JIM. What kind of an agency?

FRED. An ad agency. I wrote commercials. Like that idea for the Extra Strength Excedrin one. It didn't fly. We ran it up the flagpole but it just didn't fly. Too Cartesian.

JIM. And you became—unhinged.

FRED. Not over that. Who cares that they reject my idea? Those gray flannel philistines. No, my problem arose from other sources.

JIM. Like what?

FRED. Like small cadres of men who had banded together to form a conspiratorial network—a network dedicated to my undoing, to my humiliation, to my defeat both physical and mental. A network so vast and complex that to this day it employs undercover agents in organizations as diverse as the CIA and the Cuban underground. Forces so malevolent that they cost me my job, my marriage, and what little bank account I had left. They trailed me, tapped my phone, and communicated in code with my psychiatrist by sending electrical signals from the top of the Empire State Building, through my inner ear, directly to his rubber raft at Martha's Vineyard. So don't give me your goddamn sob stories

and deal with me like a mensch!

JIM. I'm frightened, Fred—I gotta level with you. I want to do the right thing by you—

FRED. Then do it. There's no need to be scared. I haven't been off my medicine long enough to lose control—at least I don't think I have—

JIM. What do you take?

FRED. A number of antipsychotic mixtures.

JIM. A cocktail.

FRED. Except I don't drink it out of a stemmed glass.

JIM. But you can't just go off those things—

FRED. I'm fine, I'm fine. Don't start accusing me like the others.

JIM. No, I'm not—

FRED. Let's talk turkey.

JIM. I had intended to prove to you logically I couldn't have taken your idea—

FRED. My life, my life—you stole my life.

JIM. Your life—your autobiography, whatever. I think I can show you step by step—

FRED. Logic can be very deceptive. You stole my life, you stole my soul.

JIM. I don't need your life. I have a fine life of my own.

FRED. Who are you to say you don't need my life?

JIM. I didn't mean to insult you.

FRED. Look, I realize you're under personal strain.

JIM. I am, yes.

FRED. And she's quite late—that's a bad sign.

JIM. I'm surprised. She's usually punctual.

FRED. She must sense something's up. I'd keep alert if I was you.

JIM. I am. I just want to point out that my film—

FRED. Our film—

JIM. *The* film—is it OK if I say *the* film? *The* film is about the evils of one particular mental institution which I happened to set in New Jersey.

FRED. Been there, done that.

JIM. But surely many people had similar experiences. This could be their story as easily.

FRED. No—no—you heard me tell it. I even said to Big John Kelly it would make a swell film—especially the part where the protagonist lights the fires.

JIM. Is that what happened in your life?

FRED. You know the details.

JIM. I swear I don't.

FRED. I was under instructions to burn down several buildings.

JIM. Instructions, from who?

FRED. The radio.

JIM. You heard voices over the radio?

FRED. Do I hear the barest trace of skepticism in your voice?

JIM. No—

FRED. I was not always—whatever was their term—

JIM. Paranoid schizophrenic?

FRED. What'd you say?

JIM. I was trying to be helpful.

FRED. Everyone's so damn technical. That's all semantics. It used to be dementia praecox—actually that's prettier. It's worse than semantics, it's cosmetics. A girl brings her fiance home to meet her parents and says, folks, this is Max, he's a manic-depressive. You can imagine how they take it. Fantasies of their darling child wed to a guy who on Monday tries to jump off the Chrysler

Building and Tuesday tries to buy every item in Bloomingdale's—ah, but say, this is Max—he's bipolar. It sounds like an achievement—like an explorer—bipolar like Admiral Byrd. No, Jim—they diagnosed me in more prosaic terms. Not screwy or off his rocker—we're not talking vaudeville here—they said Fred Savage is homicidal—an unpredictable psychopath.

JIM. Homicidal?

FRED. Don't you just love labels?

JIM. Er—look, Fred, aware as you are of being delusional you can then see why I might think your theory, that I took your idea, may not be based on reality.

FRED. Who's to say what's real? Are we particles or rays? Is everything expanding or contracting? If we enter a black hole and the laws of physics are suspended, will I still need an athletic supporter?

JIM. Fred, you're obviously an educated man—

FRED. Phi Beta Kappa. Brown University. I can read Sanskrit. Ph.D. in Literature. Dissertation on the Positive Results of the Triangular Tension Between Goethe, Schopenhauer and Schopenhauer's Mother. So what was I doing in an ad agency, you ask? Having nervous breakdowns—not just because the hacks failed to see the brilliance of my Extra Strength Excedrin concept but because they were blind to the originality of my thought in general. Example: eight whores are sitting around in a brothel. A john comes in and surveys them up and down. He finally passes them all up and selects the umbrella stand in the corner. He goes down the hall with it in his arms, takes it to bed and has intense and passionate sexual intercourse with it. Cut to him driving off in a VW Beetle and we flash on the screen—Volkswagen—for the man with special taste. God, how they hated that one. By now I was in and out of institutions like I had a season ticket. And when I lost my

job, my girlfriend, Henrietta, who I believe only put up with me because she had a severe disorder of her own, which might charitably be characterized as thermonuclear masochism, kicked me out. Yes, Jim—I was very upset. I wept. Salty tears descended these rubicund cheeks—and in an effort to woo her back I went searching for an appropriate offering with which to hopefully mollify her newly discovered feelings of disgust for me. Aware of her taste for antique jewelry I surmised an old pin or Victorian brooch might turn the trick, and having selected just the right one in a Third Avenue antique shop, I by chance came across a very stylish 1940s radio, perfect for my kitchen. Red plastic it was—a Philco. And when I got it home and tried it out, I was surprised to hear an announcer's voice commanding me to burn down the very ad agency I had formerly worked for. It was the most fun I've ever had. Am I losing you?

JIM. This is a very sad story.

FRED. I loved that girl, Henrietta. And while her attention deficit disorder made any conversation between us longer than forty seconds impossible, something in our contact buoyed my spirits. That's why I can empathize with your pathetic love life.

JIM. My love life is just fine.

FRED. Jim—you're talking to your writing partner.

JIM. You're not my writing partner.

FRED. You need a collaborator.

JIM. I've never collaborated in my life.

FRED. You're good at the nuts and bolts—but you need someone who can light a fire. I'm an idea man. OK, some may be a little avant-garde for Mr. and Mrs. Front Porch.

JIM. I have my own ideas.

FRED. If you did you wouldn't have swiped mine.

JIM. I didn't swipe it.

FRED. Genius is in the chromosomes. Did you know my personal DNA glows in the dark?

JIM. What makes you think I'm so uninspired?

FRED. I think you're very—professional. It's very solid—notice you do a lot of adaptations—not originals—I, on the other hand, am a true original—like Stravinsky—or ketchup. That's why my idea was the first thing you ever did that meant anything. It had juice—it had spark.

JIM. I thought of it in the shower.

FRED. (*Turning on him violently.*) Don't give me that jive! I want my half!

JIM. For Christ's sake, stay calm.

FRED. And don't tell me your love life's fine. Because what the hell are you doing sneaking around on Lola?

JIM. That's not your affair.

FRED. No, it's your affair.

JIM. I'm not having an affair.

FRED. What's wrong with Lola?

JIM. Nothing.

FRED. Apart from a certain—what is it I mean—is it a ferret?

JIM. Keep your mouth shut. You're talking about the woman I love.

FRED. What's wrong there?

JIM. Nothing.

FRED. Jim.

JIM. Nothing.

FRED. Jim, c'mon.

JIM. It was fine till we had the twins.

FRED. Right—two perfect look-alikes—a grizzly omen.

JIM. They're adorable boys.

FRED. Boys—at least twin girls you can dress cute.

JIM. They're cute—they're cuddly—they're—

FRED. Exactly identical?

JIM. So what?

FRED. And they both have Lola's gerbil-like visage?

JIM. Before they came we had a perfectly good marriage.

FRED. Says who?

JIM. I'm telling you, it was fine.

FRED. Just fine? Not great?

JIM. We shared a lot of interests.

FRED. Name two.

JIM. Weekends in Connecticut and macrobiotic food.

FRED. I'm falling asleep here.

JIM. We liked to scuba dive and discuss the great books.

FRED. You discussed books underwater?

JIM. And she plays piano and I play baritone sax.

FRED. Thank God it's not the other way around.

JIM. Go ahead—make fun of me.

FRED. What about your sex life?

JIM. That's none of your business.

FRED. Those two big front teeth of hers—do they hurt?

JIM. Why must you be a vulgar smart-ass?

FRED. I'm trying to grasp your situation. How often did you make love?

JIM. Often. Till the twins were born.

FRED. I'd say you were basically a missionary position man, am I right?

JIM. (*Annoyed*) We did our share of experimenting.

FRED. What do you call experimenting?

JIM. Why must you know?

FRED. We're a team.

JIM. (*Annoyed*) That's right. (*Slight pause.*) We had a three-

some once, OK?

FRED. Who was the other woman?

JIM. It was a guy.

FRED. Are you bisexual?

JIM. I never touched him.

FRED. Whose idea was the threesome?

JIM. Hers.

FRED. I wonder why.

JIM. We'd seen it on the porn channel one night.

FRED. You watch that consistently?

JIM. Of course not. But sometimes you can get some good ideas.

FRED. Aha—so you do use other people's ideas.

JIM. And once we did it at her parents' house during the Thanksgiving dinner.

FRED. Did the other dinner guests look up from their turkey?

JIM. We were in the bathroom!

FRED. So there was a certain spontaneity.

JIM. I don't know why you think I'm so lackluster.

FRED. Did Lola have an orgasm?

JIM. I don't think I'll dignify that with an answer.

FRED. They have been known to fake it, you know.

JIM. Why on earth would she fake it?

FRED. Bolster your confidence. She doesn't want you to know you're not satisfying her.

JIM. I'm completely secure about my sexual prowess.

FRED. You know what they say.

JIM. What?

FRED. A dog doesn't see its own tail.

JIM. What the hell does that mean?

FRED. Maybe you think you're better than you are.

JIM. That's not true.

FRED. Then why would Lola fake it?

JIM. You said she faked it.

FRED. That's the message I'm getting.

JIM. What message?

FRED. From the top of the Empire State Building. I'm feeling those rays—those electrical charges from the big antenna on the Empire State Building and all those photons are saying—Lola was pretending to come.

JIM. Hey look, I'm trying to have a rational—

FRED. And then came the twins—David and Seth.

JIM. Carson and Django.

FRED. Really?

JIM. Lola's a big fan of Carson McCullers—

FRED. And you play jazz so—

JIM. So they *weren't* conventional names.

FRED. And you love them.

JIM. I'm crazy about them. But Lola's too crazy about them. Suddenly everything changed—it all became about the twins—there was never any time for me anymore—for us.

FRED. No more underwater discussions of Proust.

JIM. Naturally the sex fell off.

FRED. And you started cheating.

JIM. Yes—yes—

FRED. Hmmm . . . that explains a lot. Look—take my advice, call it quits with your mistress—it can only lead to heartache.

JIM. I don't need your advice. That's what I planned to do today. If she ever gets here.

FRED. Maybe she senses you want it over so she's not coming.

JIM. She doesn't have a clue. She'll be stunned.

FRED. Oh great, I think I'll stick around and watch this.

JIM. What the hell am I doing having an affair? Six lousy months of dark restaurants, dingy bars, and cheap hotel rooms. Not to mention the furtive phone calls and the tension and self-hate.

FRED. What does your psychiatrist say?

JIM. He said stop.

FRED. And you—

JIM. I stopped—seeing the psychiatrist.

FRED. It's just as well, most of them have hidden tape recorders.

JIM. Last night I came home and I saw Lola sitting on the sofa, curled up like—like—

FRED. A tiny guinea pig?

JIM. I wasn't going to say that. Like a sweet, decent woman who's been my closest friend my whole life.

FRED. Did you ever lead this woman on? Make any promises, tell her you loved her or that you might leave your wife?

JIM. Absolutely not—in no way—not for a second.

FRED. I don't know why, but I'm sensing a vibration that says maybe you did.

JIM. That's nonsense.

FRED. Um, I don't know . . .

JIM. She wanted me to go to the Caribbean with her—for five days. I was to lie to Lola and say it was a business trip.

FRED. And you agreed?

JIM. Not exactly—I said I'd think about it. It was a moment of weakness. Our clothes were off and I'd had three margaritas and there was so much salt on the rim of the glasses and I'm on a salt-free diet . . . So I suddenly got a sodium rush.

FRED. (*Folding paws downward in front of him, mimicking LOLA.*) But when you got home and saw your precious darling . .

JIM. Exactly—it was at the moment I was supposed to lie that I knew that I loved Lola despite all our problems and I was a fool.

FRED. This could get ugly.

JIM. Nothing's getting ugly. She's an adult and I'm an adult.

FRED. You said she was headstrong.

JIM. I never said any such thing.

FRED. I heard some voice say it, I *thought* it was yours.

JIM. Look, these things happen. People break off their affairs every day—don't they?

FRED. So that's why you picked such a secluded spot—you're anticipating a scene.

JIM. Hey look—why am I discussing women with you? Your view of everything is skewed.

FRED. I was married once.

JIM. *You were?*

FRED. I don't remember much about it—all that AC/DC through my head plays havoc with your memory but I do recall she was forever dialing 911.

JIM. You know what? Here's what I think—

FRED. Come in.

JIM. I think you should just leave and get back on your medicine. I'm not fooling—I'd say megadoses if possible—I don't want you around here when she comes, I can manage by myself.

FRED. OK, fine. Then let's settle our business and I'm history.

JIM. What business? We have no business. I didn't steal your idea.

FRED. Maybe on the next one you could make it up to me with an adjusted fee and top billing.

JIM. There is no next one. I don't collaborate. I work alone. I—oh—(*Notices BARBARA approaching.*) Oh oh...oh...oh...walk-

away...go, go...

FRED. You're all white.

JIM. She's coming.

FRED. All right, don't panic.

JIM. You got me so distracted.

FRED. All I said was I think you're in for rough going.

JIM. Why do you say that?

FRED. Empire State Building.

JIM. No, it's going to be fine. I practiced my speech in the shower. I was in there an hour and a half. I know exactly what I'm going to say. Get out of here!

(BARBARA is there now.)

BARBARA. Sorry I'm late. Who's this?

JIM. Oh—I don't know . . .

(JIM gesturing with his head, trying to signal FRED to leave.)

BARBARA. Are you having a neck spasm?

JIM. *(Hands FRED money.)* Er—here's the buck you asked for, fella, go get a square meal—good luck, buddy . . . ha, ha . . .

FRED. Fred. Fred Savage. I'm a friend of Jim's.

BARBARA. You didn't say anything—

JIM. He's kidding.

FRED. I'm his writing partner.

BARBARA. Writing partner?

FRED. We collaborated on *The Journey*—it was my idea—he did the actual screenplay. *(Calling off.)* Come in.

BARBARA. What? What's going on?

FRED. Tell her, Jim.

BARBARA. Tell me what?

JIM. Fred—leave us alone.

FRED. I'm afraid you'll pussyfoot.

BARBARA. Jim, is something wrong?

FRED. The best way is to be direct.

JIM. Get out of here, Fred.

FRED. Barbara, Jim has something to tell you.

BARBARA. About what? What is this?

FRED. About your extramarital affair.

JIM. Fred's crazy—he's a street lunatic.

FRED. Tell her, Jim, or I will.

BARBARA. What's going on here?

JIM. This is none of your business.

BARBARA. I didn't know you had a writing partner.

JIM. I don't.

FRED. I'm the idea man, Jim handles the construction and dialogue. Although I'm not bad at dialogue. I wrote a great copy line once for these wonderful Japanese air conditioners—

JIM. Fred—

FRED. "They're sleek, they're silent, they'll freeze your ass off." Company would not go for it.

JIM. Let's go someplace where we can be alone.

FRED. He can't go to the Caribbean, Barbara—too attached to his wife.

BARBARA. Jim—

FRED. He wanted to tell Lola but when it came time to confront her the boy lost his resolve.

BARBARA. I don't believe this.

JIM. Barbara, try and understand.

BARBARA. Is this true? Is everything off?

JIM. I can't do it, Barbara, I've made a decision.