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SF PERUSALS

POWER PLAYS

Three One-Act Plays

by

Elaine May and Alan Arkin

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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Under the Direction of BEN SPRECHER and WILLIAM P. MILLER

JULIAN SCHLOSSBERG, MEYER ACKERMAN,
BEN SPRECHER, WILLIAM P. MILLER
and
MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB

present

ALAN ARKIN ELAINE MAY

in

POWER PLAYS

by

ELAINE MAY and ALAN ARKIN

with

JEANNIE BERLIN ANTHONY ARKIN

set design
Michael McGarty

costume design
Michael Krass

lighting design
Adam Silverman

sound design
Andrew Keister

production stage manager
Andrew Neal

associate producer
Michael Winter

general management
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press representative
Boneau/Bryan-Brown

directed by

ALAN ARKIN

Power Plays was originally produced by A Contemporary Theatre, Seattle, Washington.
Gordon Edelstein, Artistic Director. Susan B. Trapnell, Managing Director.

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Originally produced in New York City by
Julian Schlossberg, Meyer Ackerman,
Ben Sprecher & William P. Miller
and
The Manhattan Theatre Club,
Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director
Barry Grove, Executive Producer
on April 14, 1998

THE WAY OF ALL FISH

by

ELAINE MAY

CAST
(in order of appearance)
at
THE PROMENADE THEATRE

Ms. Asquith .....Elaine May

Miss Riverton .....Jeannie Berlin

THE WAY OF ALL FISH

(An office, richly furnished: wood paneling, suede sofa, Persian rugs. MS. ASQUITH, perfectly groomed and expensively dressed, sits behind an impressive desk. MISS RIVERTON, her secretary, much less expensively dressed, stands in front of her.

MS. ASQUITH. Miss Riverton.

MISS RIVERTON. Yes?

MS. ASQUITH. Do you remember my distinctly telling you that I wanted nothing thrown out?

MISS RIVERTON. Yes.

MS. ASQUITH. Well, you've thrown out my exercise elastic.

MISS RIVERTON. Oh, I don't think so.

MS. ASQUITH. Well, here it is—in the waste basket and I didn't put it there.

MISS RIVERTON. Oh, is *that* your ... Oh, forgive me. I thought it was a piece of old rubber.

MS. ASQUITH. It doesn't *matter* what you thought it was. The point is—you threw it out.

MISS RIVERTON. Well, yes ... because I thought it was rubbish.

MS. ASQUITH. Miss Riverton, I didn't ask you to use your best judgment. I didn't say, "Throw out what you think is rubbish and keep the rest." I said, "Don't throw anything out."

MISS RIVERTON. Well ... but what about rubbish?

MS. ASQUITH. Rubbish is not your affair. I have a maid who deals with rubbish.

MISS RIVERTON. Yes, I see.

MS. ASQUITH. Your job is to see that my life runs smoothly and my appointments are kept. You are my secretary—not my housekeeper.

MISS RIVERTON. Assistant. Yes, of course.

MS. ASQUITH. You are not my assistant, Miss Riverton. You are my secretary.

MISS RIVERTON. Alright.

MS. ASQUITH. I don't like to call something something else just because it's politically correct. A secretary is a perfectly fine thing to be.

MISS RIVERTON. But I do assist you.

MS. ASQUITH. Yes, you do. And so does a secretary.

MISS RIVERTON. But ... isn't an assistant closer to what I do?

MS. ASQUITH. No, it isn't. It just uses the verb assist as a noun. You don't assist me in altering my clothes or cutting my hair or doing my nails. You assist me in the way a secretary does, a word, which you may be interested to know, originally meant "desk".

MISS RIVERTON. Yes, I see.

MS. ASQUITH. Thank you. That will be all. *(She rises, goes out, comes back.)* Where am I going?

MISS RIVERTON. When?

MS. ASQUITH. Now.

MISS RIVERTON. Nowhere.

MS. ASQUITH. Nowhere? That's impossible. It's Friday night.

MISS RIVERTON. Yes, I know.

MS. ASQUITH. Well ... how did this happen?

MISS RIVERTON. You had an engagement with Nelson Miles and then the Stradners invited you for a sail around East Hampton with Princess Agnelli and Ralph Lauren so you canceled Mr. Miles. Then the Stradners canceled because of the

weather and it was too late to get Mr. Miles back so you placed a call to your son so you could invite him to dinner but he told me he was going out of town with his father and step-mother on a long week-end to visit her parents dairy farm. Then it was today.

MS. ASQUITH. You know. Miss Riverton, when you place a call for me, I would appreciate it if you didn't discuss the purpose of my call with the person I'm calling. You shouldn't have asked my son if he was free for dinner on Friday. I didn't ask you to do that.

MISS RIVERTON. Yes, but he said "what does she want?".

MS. ASQUITH. It doesn't matter what he said. *You* should have said "one moment and I'll put her on".

MISS RIVERTON. You were on another call.

MS ASQUITH. It doesn't matter.

MISS RIVERTON. It's just that I thought you were busy.

MS. ASQUITH. I was busy. I am busy. I'm a busy woman. But it still doesn't matter. My son lives in a dorm. It takes time to get him on the phone. Time you save me by instituting ... I'm not going to be made to feel guilty because I don't personally dial every member of my family.

MISS RIVERTON. I assure you I had no intention of making you feel guilty.

MS. ASQUITH. Well, I *am* guilty. So it doesn't take much.

MISS RIVERTON. I'm sorry. It's just ...

(MISS RIVERTON breaks off.)

MS. ASQUITH. What?

MISS RIVERTON. Nothing, really. It's not important.

MS. ASQUITH. Miss Riverton, please finish your sentence. It drives me crazy when you do that. What? I want to know. What? *(MISS RIVERTON shakes her head.)* Oh, *don't* make me go through this. WHAT?

MISS RIVERTON. Well, it's just that your son ... has said ... a few times he's said ... that ... he's said that it's rude to call

someone and then make them wait while you—not you, anyone—comes to the phone. It's like knocking at the door and then leaving a sign saying "Back in a minute—stay right there."

MS. ASQUITH. *(After a moment.)* He's right.

MISS RIVERTON. He says no matter how fast someone gets there ...

MS. ASQUITH. No, no, no, he's right, he's absolutely right. I *do* do that. All the time. No wonder I'm guilty. Of course, it would just cut my day in half if I dialed all those numbers and then had to wait for a secretary to answer and tell me whether or not someone could come to the phone ... and half the time they couldn't ... and then I had to leave a message that I called ...

MISS RIVERTON. Perhaps if you just did it with family and close friends ...

MS. ASQUITH. Yes. That's a good idea. Remind me to do that. Did he ask to talk to me? My son?

MISS RIVERTON. No. He said he knew you were busy.

MS. ASQUITH. *(She sighs.)* What a lousy week.

MISS RIVERTON. It *has* been complicated.

MS. ASQUITH. Awful. The worst. First the root canal and then this hideous haircut and then I got on the scale this morning and I'd gained three pounds—because I couldn't find my exercise elastic and I was just too irritated to work out. Thank God the mammogram turned out all right. I have to keep things in perspective.

MISS RIVERTON. I'm sorry about the elastic.

MS. ASQUITH. Well ... These things happen.

MISS RIVERTON. Tomorrow night is Lincoln Center. You've been looking forward to that.

MS. ASQUITH. Tomorrow night is 24 hours away. *(After a moment.)* What are *you* doing tonight, Miss Riverton?

MISS RIVERTON. Me? Nothing.

MS. ASQUITH. Well ... would you care to come home with me and have dinner?

MISS RIVERTON. Thank you, but ... the cook and maid are off tonight.

MS. ASQUITH. WHAT!

MISS RIVERTON. You told me ...

MS. ASQUITH. Oh, *no*!

MISS RIVERTON. ... they wouldn't be needed because of the Stradner dinner party ...

MS. ASQUITH. But the Stradners canceled.

MISS RIVERTON. Yes, but they didn't cancel until Thursday night and I didn't get the message until this morning and by then the cook and the maid were gone.

MS. ASQUITH. Oh, shit! It's just the fucking end of the world.

MISS RIVERTON. I'm sorry.

MS. ASQUITH. Don't be silly. How could you know the Stradners would cancel.

MISS RIVERTON. I was thinking about the exercise elastic. It's so awful to gain weight.

MS. ASQUITH. Forget the exercise elastic. The exercise elastic is past. The exercise elastic is just something to sustain me between sessions. The important thing is—what are we going to eat. *(Looks at her watch.)* It's too late to get into a really decent restaurant. Even for me. Oh, *God.* Can we order in?

MISS RIVERTON. Yes. What would you like.

MS. ASQUITH. I don't know. Pasta? Fish?

MISS RIVERTON. Perhaps Japanese. You like Japanese.

MS. ASQUITH. Yes. Japanese would be good. Order Japanese *(As MISS RIVERTON picks up the phone and dials.)* Order something I like. But nothing raw.

MISS RIVERTON. Nothing raw.

MS. ASQUITH. I'm afraid of parasites.

MISS RIVERTON. Well, would you like ...

MS. ASQUITH. Don't ask me what I'd like. I'm no good at that. You pick it.

MISS RIVERTON. *(Into phone.)* Yes, I'd like to place an order—322 Madison Avenue ...

MS. ASQUITH. Order shumai ...

MISS RIVERTON. ... The penthouse ...

MS. ASQUITH. Ask if they have soft shell crab.

MISS RIVERTON. ... Asquith Enterprises. Do you have soft shell crab? ...

MS. ASQUITH. Roll. Hand roll.

MISS RIVERTON. One soft shell crab roll handroll. One shumai.

MISS RIVERTON.	MS. ASQUITH
... one California	Maybe two shumai—
roll ... two	but they're small ...
shumai ... one	three shumai ... and
Manhattan roll—	three soft shell crab
three shumai ... and	rolls ... and shrimp
three soft shell crab	teriyaki. ... Did you
roll. ... No that's	tell him shrimp
two beside the last	teriyaki? .....
one. Three all to-	And maybe two
gether. Two Shrimp	California rolls ...
Teriyaki. Another	no—yes—two. And
California roll and	rice, extra rice,
extra brown rice and	brown rice and saki.
saki.	Plenty of saki.

(MISS RIVERTON hangs up.)

MS. ASQUITH. Perfect. Oh, yum. Get some plates and we'll set the desk ... *(Calling, as Miss Riverton runs off.)* ... and I opened two excellent bottles of wine for lunch before that barbarian, Charles, said no alcohol—what assholes accountants are. Now ... Let's see—where's the wine ... the wine ... Ah! Here it is. And two glasses.

(MISS RIVERTON comes back in carrying plates, napkins and silverware and heads for the desk. MS ASQUITH continues as she pours the wine:)

MS. ASQUITH. Oh, this is going to be such fun. Just like a picnic. Perhaps we should set the coffee table instead of the desk. More picnic-y.

(MISS RIVERTON stops and heads for the coffee table.)

MS. ASQUITH. But it's low.

(MISS RIVERTON stops again.)

MS. ASQUITH. Maybe the desk *is* better.

(MISS RIVERTON heads back for the desk.)

MS. ASQUITH. Oh, what if it *is* low. We'll sit on the floor. Here.

(MISS RIVERTON heads back to the coffee table.)

MS. ASQUITH. *(Holding out a glass.)* Just put the plates down anywhere and try some of this.

MISS RIVERTON. *(Setting the plates on a chair.)* Yes, Miss Asquith.

MS. ASQUITH. Perhaps you should call me Margaret for tonight. Well ... perhaps not. *(Holds out a glass.)* Well, what shall we drink to?

MISS RIVERTON. To your having a wonderful time at Lincoln Center tomorrow night.

MS. ASQUITH. Lovely.

(They clink glasses and sip.)

MISS RIVERTON. Oh, this *is* good.

MS. ASQUITH. Isn't it? I'm glad you appreciate it. So many people have no understanding of wine.

MISS RIVERTON. I know. Long ago I made a pact with

myself never to drink wine unless it was very, very good. This is excellent.

MS. ASQUITH. Really. That's fascinating. How did you develop such an interest in wine?

MISS RIVERTON. My father was French.

MS. ASQUITH. Ah. Enough said.

MISS RIVERTON. Oh, this is *very* good.

MS. ASQUITH. Hmm. *So* good. Such clarity.

MISS RIVERTON. And subtlety. The wine presents itself but not boldly. Delicately, innocently.

MS. ASQUITH. Well put. Very well put. *(Pouring more wine.)* I guess I'll be having a few additional sessions with my trainer next week.

MISS RIVERTON. May I suggest ...

(She breaks off.)

MS. ASQUITH. Yes? Oh, please. Please finish your sentence. It just drives me up the wall when you do that. This is a social evening. All the rules are changed. You just say whatever comes into your mind.

MISS RIVERTON. Well, all I was going to say is—I wonder if your trainer does quite enough aerobic work with you.

MS. ASQUITH. You think I'm fat?

MISS RIVERTON. No, no. I'm just talking ... healthwise, weight control-wise.

MS. ASQUITH. He does half an hour.

MISS RIVERTON. Well ... sometimes not a full half hour. And is a half hour on the trampoline enough?

MS. ASQUITH. You don't approve of the trampoline?

MISS RIVERTON. Oh, I do. It's just that so much of the movement is momentum. Fast walking or jogging is much more effective.

MS. ASQUITH. How do you know so much about this?

MISS RIVERTON. I'm very interested in the body.

MS. ASQUITH. You're in wonderful shape.

MISS RIVERTON. Thank you. I'm very strong for a woman.

MS. ASQUITH. You look very strong.

MISS RIVERTON. Too strong?

MS. ASQUITH. Don't be silly. You can't look too strong. The appearance of strength is the appearance of power. Do you know the real difference between men and women, Miss Riverton? *(MISS RIVERTON shakes her head.)* Strength. Sheer physical strength. Do you know that there are male fish that actually change sex when a bigger fish comes along because only the biggest fish can be male. All the rest of the fish are his harem.

MISS RIVERTON. You're joking.

MS. ASQUITH. Absolutely not. And these fish have it down to such a science they don't even have to fight—they just measure. The fish that seems most likely to inflict injury wins.

MISS RIVERTON. Well, it's ... it's certainly ... certainly a man's world if you're a fish, isn't it?

MS. ASQUITH. That's not my point, Miss Riverton. My point is that it's not whether you're a man or a woman that determines who's world it is, it's how strong you are that determines whether you're a man or a woman. Metaphorically, of course.

MISS RIVERTON. Of course. I see. Well ... I'm very strong.

MS. ASQUITH. Yes, I've seen you carry those file boxes. *(Pours more wine.)* You know, Miss Riverton—Jane—you're the best secretary I've ever had. I can't tell you the idiots I had to put up with until you came along. I don't think I could get along without you, Jane.

MISS RIVERTON. Joan. Well ... thank you. I try to do my job.

MS. ASQUITH. Joan? Oh, what a fool I am.

MISS RIVERTON. No, no, no.

MS. ASQUITH. This is so embarrassing.

MISS RIVERTON. Not at all.

MS. ASQUITH. To have had you as my secretary for so long and not know your first name.

MISS RIVERTON. Well, you don't call me by my first name. And you were very close. Jane ... Joan.

MS. ASQUITH. I'll bet you know my first name.

MISS RIVERTON. Well, yes. But I make out all your checks and handle your mail.

MS. ASQUITH. There's that. But no—that's the easy way out. I don't know your first name because I don't notice anything. That's a terrible failing of mine. I don't really notice people unless they're directly in my line of vision, part of what I'm focusing on. That was one of the reasons for my divorce. One day I handed my husband an envelope and said, "Mail this for me." And he said, "Can't your secretary mail it?" and I said, "Oh, I'm sorry, darling. I didn't realize I was talking to you."

MISS RIVERTON. That doesn't seem so awful ... I mean, awful enough for a divorce.

MS. ASQUITH. Well—it wasn't just that ... that discussion. It turned out he'd been very miserable for a very long time. But, of course, I didn't notice. I'm very insensitive. And everyone has to forgive me. Until they don't.

MISS RIVERTON. I think you're wonderful.

MS. ASQUITH. Well ... thank you, Joan. But it's a shortcoming—being blind to others. Power in a relationship belongs to whoever wants to leave first—and you can't anticipate that unless you notice the other person. The irony is that I wondered for years if I didn't make a mistake marrying him, if I couldn't have done better, if it wasn't a waste of my time—all those vacations, and dinners, and preludes to sex. And the minute he said he wanted a divorce I realized that I loved him madly. Madly. And it was too late.

(There is a brief pause.)

MISS RIVERTON. Shall I get the other bottle of wine?

MS. ASQUITH. Yes. Thank you. *(Watching MISS RIVERTON rise.)* You know, Joan, I'm having just a wonderful

time. I'm *glad* the Stradner's canceled.

MISS RIVERTON. This is very pleasant.

MS. ASQUITH. So you're from France

MISS RIVERTON. No. I'm from Michigan. My father was from France.

MS. ASQUITH. Michigan! I've heard so much about Michigan. We always went to Italy or the South of France. But I wish we'd gone to Michigan. It sounds lovely.

MISS RIVERTON. And I wish we'd gone to the South of France. Life is funny.

MS. ASQUITH. Very.

(MISS RIVERTON pulls the cork out of the second wine bottle with a pop.)

MISS RIVERTON. Good sound. That's very important. My father taught me that. He was a room service waiter in Cannes. He started the same year as the film festival.

MS. ASQUITH. How interesting.

MISS RIVERTON. It was all before I was born, of course.

MS. ASQUITH. Of course. That's when everything interesting happens.

MISS RIVERTON. But seeing the south of France and Italy ... that must have been interesting ...

MS. ASQUITH. It wasn't. Not to me. I'll tell you a secret that no one else knows. I was a fat child.

MISS RIVERTON. No!

MS. ASQUITH. And a fat teenager. I went to school in Switzerland and Swiss food is just butter looking for a reason. By the time I was thirteen I was so fat they called me petite vache yanquee.

MISS RIVERTON. Petite vache yanquee?

MS. ASQUITH. "Little Yankee cow". Switzerland can be very cruel.

MISS RIVERTON. Oh, Miss Asquith—underneath everything I think you're a very vulnerable woman.

MS. ASQUITH. Well, I'm not. I can't tell you how much I hate that word. I have no idea why everyone thinks it's so special to be vulnerable. It's a self-pitying, time-consuming pre-occupation and every one has it. Hitler was vulnerable. He sobbed on Mother's Day. What does that tell you?

MISS. RIVERTON. I didn't know that about Hitler. Well, that changes things. I always thought he was just this awful man.

(MS. ASQUITH stares at her ... then laughs.)

MS. ASQUITH. Very good. I must remember that. *(Slugging back her wine.)* So tell me more about Michigan.

MISS RIVERTON. Well, there's not a whole lot more to tell. It was very cold. In the winter. And then in the summer it got hot. Not a good climate.

MS. ASQUITH. No. *(She pours more wine.)* So you came to New York.

MISS RIVERTON. Yes. That's right.

MS. ASQUITH. Wonderful story. Well, I can tell you I'm hungry.

MISS RIVERTON. It's a pretty boring story.

MS. ASQUITH. No, no. Not at all.

MISS RIVERTON. I've had a pretty boring life.

MS. ASQUITH. Nonsense. With a father who worked in Cannes and traveling from Michigan to New York ...

MISS RIVERTON. When I was young I so wanted to be someone special.

MS. ASQUITH. Well, you are someone special.

MISS RIVERTON. I mean, you know, someone, special, who everyone knows is special. I guess what I'm saying is I wanted to be famous.

MS. ASQUITH., Ah, well.

MISS RIVERTON. Because being famous is ... like being immortal, isn't it?

MS. ASQUITH. Well—only if you're very famous for a very long time.

MISS. RIVERTON. But you can be. Anyone can be. And I know how. You know how? You can kill someone famous. Of course, it has to be someone *really* famous and people have to be convinced that you're not part of a conspiracy. And meeting someone famous isn't so easy. When I was younger that's all I thought about—who can I kill who's famous and how can I meet him. Probably I should have been thinking how can I meet who's famous and how can I kill him—but I was just a kid. *(She pours some wine.)* I thought of killing the president but everyone who tries to kill the president is such a slug. I mean, I made a list of successful presidential assassins who still had some kind of stature and you know who there is. Booth. Because he killed Lincoln. And where are you going to find another Lincoln? And—I don't know—it just seems like such a failure of imagination to go right to the president: kill someone famous—kill the president. Duh. Of course, Jack the Ripper is still famous and he just killed a lot of totally unknown prostitutes. But that may be because no one knows who he really is. And Charlie Manson is still famous and he just killed a starlet and some hairdressers. But who knows if he'll stand the test of time. I mean, you can easily kill someone and just be overlooked—unless you kill a lot of people, or kill a few people but in a really ghastly way—but it would have to be so ghastly.

MS. ASQUITH. You ... you've given this a lot of thought.

MISS RIVERTON. I have. I mean, if there was another way—but I *can't* write a novel, I *can't* become a movie star, I can't invent a vaccine—because I have no talent. Not that talent is any guarantee of fame, but with talent I'd have had a shot at it, an honest shot. And I'd have taken it. I didn't want an easy way out. I didn't *want* to resort to murder. But fame is fame. The important thing to me is not to ... just pass through. To leave a mark. To change the world. To have people's consciousness enlarged to include me. And it wasn't for material gain, I didn't want to get rich. I wasn't going to live well from my crime. If I got caught I'd probably

be electrocuted. So, in a way, I would have been sacrificing my life for immortality—just like an artist or a scientist does. I would have been driven to kill not for the reward, but because there was nothing else I could do to fulfill myself—the same reason an artist creates. My curse has always been that I'm a special person with no special ability.

MS. ASQUITH. Yes. That ... is a problem.

MISS RIVERTON. And then, as the years passed, I realized how hard it is to meet someone famous and I thought maybe if I just killed someone rich and important or socially prominent. But by then I knew I was compromising. I was just after fame, not lasting fame. I told myself some fame is better than no fame— *(Shrugs, sighs.)* —and I was probably right.

MS. ASQUITH. Well ... not ... not necessarily. Lasting fame is ... is by far ... but why all this talk about fame. There's ... there's so much more. To life. Than fame. There's ... self esteem, how well you've done with what you've had ... love. Love is important.

MISS RIVERTON. That's just what Oprah said.

MS. ASQUITH. Did she? Well, she's a very wise woman in many ways.

MISS RIVERTON. She's very famous.

MS. ASQUITH. Yes, indeed.

MISS RIVERTON. She'd be a good one to kill.

MS. ASQUITH. Excellent. Yes. You'd want someone that famous.

MISS RIVERTON. Sometimes that backfires.

MS. ASQUITH. Hardly ever.

MISS RIVERTON. Oh, yes. The celebrity of the victim is so great it overshadows the assassin. That was the real triumph of Charles Manson. He killed people who were just rich and famous enough. That, of course, was what I didn't realize when I was a kid. I aimed too high.

MS. ASQUITH. You know, Joan—may I call you Joan?—

MISS RIVERTON. Of course, Miss Asquith.

MS. ASQUITH. Margaret, Please. You know, Joan, things don't always work out as happily as they did for Charlie Manson. Sometimes there's a terrible murder and it's fun for a while—and then people forget—or there's another, worse murder and they're distracted. And, meanwhile, the poor murderer is imprisoned or electrocuted with no real reward for his crime. What was so important to him—or her—has been forgotten by everyone else. How far away is this restaurant you ordered from? Tokyo? Just joking. But it has been a long time since you ordered.

MISS RIVERTON. I've made you nervous, haven't I?

MS. ASQUITH. What? Not at all.

MISS RIVERTON. Yes, I have. I've ruined everything. We were having such a nice time, one of the nicest times I've ever had and I ruined it.

MS. ASQUITH. Nonsense. You've ruined nothing. Talking about murder is ... just a little ... always a little ... edgy ... but it's been such a long day ... and I'm sure we're both ... Would you like some music? Why don't I put on some music? *(She rises.)* That's interesting. I can't move my legs. I have no feeling from the waist down. Something very strange is happening to me ...

MISS RIVERTON. Miss Asquith ...

MS. ASQUITH. ... It's as though somebody has put something in my food or drink ...

MISS RIVERTON. Miss Asquith! You've had half a bottle of wine on an empty stomach. And I've had the other half. We're both going to feel strange.

MS. ASQUITH. Oh, yes. I forgot about the wine. How quickly the brain cells die. Now let's see—the music— *(She staggers over to the remote, presses it, and "A Night on Bald Mountain" blares out.)* Wrong music. *(She presses the button again. "Death and Transfiguration" comes on, then a Philip Glass piece.)* Don't I have one fucking song in this whole stupid collection?

MISS RIVERTON. You asked me to get classical. You said it would serve the clients better.

MS. ASQUITH. Oh, of course. I was just talking to myself.

MISS RIVERTON. Oh, Miss Asquith, I think I should go. I've really upset you. Your hands are shaking.

MS. ASQUITH. Well, I haven't eaten and it's late ... so you might want to go ... because it's late. But you certainly shouldn't go because you think you've upset me.

MISS RIVERTON. You know, this was just a hypothetical discussion It's not like I would really kill someone. I'm not like some madman who gets fired from the post office and shoots everyone for revenge. I have no reason to do anything bad to anyone.

MS. ASQUITH. That's right. And you never will.

MISS RIVERTON. I'm just this little secretary who makes $30,000 a year and that's all I'll ever be. Because that's all I'm worth. I've accepted that.

MS. ASQUITH. No! Joan! What are you talking about. You're worth ... everything.

MISS RIVERTON. But you're only paying me $30,000 and I don't think you'd pay me less than I'm worth.

MS. ASQUITH. I ... I ... would ... pay you more ... if I could ...

MISS RIVERTON. But why should you? I make so many mistakes ...

MS. ASQUITH. Well, now, Joan, that's true, isn't it?—a little true. You do make mistakes. So I tell you what—when you stop making so *many* mistakes—I'm going to give you a very nice raise.

MISS. RIVERTON. Oh, Miss Asquith ... do you think ... maybe someday I can become an assistant?

MS. ASQUITH. Yes! Well! How about today?

MISS RIVERTON. Do you mean it?

MS. ASQUITH. Absolutely. I'm not going to pay a mere secretary more than $30,000 a year—and that's what you'll be getting when I give you your raise—more than $30,000 a year.

MISS RIVERTON. How much more?

MS. ASQUITH. We'll see.

MISS RIVERTON. Some secretaries make a hundred thousand a year.

MS. ASQUITH. Very, very few.

MISS RIVERTON. I ... I wish I could be sure you're not doing this because ... in some way ... I made you nervous. I would feel so awful if you were just being nice to me as ... a kind of ... out of fear.

MS. ASQUITH. Don't be ridiculous. Do I seem to you to be the kind of person who would be intimidated into giving an employee a raise? And why would you make me nervous? Because when you were younger you wanted to kill someone famous? Hey! Who hasn't wanted to ... pick up a gun and shoot a few famous people ... at one time or another ...

MISS RIVERTON. Actually, I was only going to shoot a man. If it was a woman I was going to stab her or strangle her. Weaker victim, lighter weapon.

MS. ASQUITH. So many rules. And so fair.

MISS RIVERTON. Oh, yes. Of course, it's risky to be fair. If you try to stab or strangle a woman and her strength is too close to yours she can inflict so much injury you won't get the knife in. That's one of the reasons I got so strong

(The phone rings. MISS ASQUITH leaps up.)

MS. ASQUITH. I'll get it. *(Snatching up the phone.)* Hello? ... Hi, Charles. How are you. Where are you? ... Martha's Vineyard? What fun. ... Miss Riverton and I are just finishing the wine you wouldn't let me drink this afternoon. We're having dinner together. In the office. Just the two of us.

(There is the sound of a buzzer.)

MISS RIVERTON. That'll be the food.

MS. ASQUITH. *(Into phone.)* And the delivery man is here and Miss Riverton is just going out to get our food now. She's

walking out of the room ... she's ... *(As MISS RIVERTON exits MS. ASQUITH whips up the remote and turns the music on again; then speaks softly under it.)* Charles! Miss Riverton is psychotic. She just told me she wants to kill someone famous—but now she just wants to kill someone important to be famous—she's just terrifying. ... No, no, no, I can't fire her. She's talking about the post office. I'd have to spend the rest of my life with a bodyguard. ... I want you to give her a raise. Give her a raise! She's playing some kind of Machiavellian game with me, some kind of brilliant cat and mouse game, but I think I'm safe if I just do whatever she says ...

(She breaks off as MISS RIVERTON enters with the food.)

MS. ASQUITH. I have to hang up now, Charles. Miss Riverton is back and I don't want to keep her waiting.

(MISS ASQUITH hangs up and clicks off the stereo. MISS RIVERTON begins unloading the food.)

MISS RIVERTON. We have everything! Everything we could ever want.

MS. ASQUITH. It smells very good.

MISS RIVERTON. This is so nice, isn't it? I mean, this means so much to me. Well, I don't want to embarrass you.

MS. ASQUITH. *(Studying her.)* No.

MISS RIVERTON. Here's to a whole new ... what?

MS. ASQUITH. You name it.

MISS RIVERTON. Oh, I'm so bad with words.

MS. ASQUITH. I think you're pretty good.

MISS RIVERTON. Well, thank you. *(She looks up.)* You're looking at me ... so ... so hard.

MS. ASQUITH. Well, you're in my line of vision.

MISS RIVERTON. Ballgame! Is that a good word?

MS. ASQUITH. Excellent. That's an excellent word. And now that you're in my line of vision ... I begin to see ... how

very clever you are.

MISS RIVERTON. Careful—or I'll ask for that raise now.

MS. ASQUITH. How very, very clever. Miss Riverton, you're fascinating. This is fascinating. This is almost relaxing.

MISS RIVERTON. Is it?

MS. ASQUITH. Oh, yes. Because there's nothing I can do, is there?

MISS RIVERTON. I think ... I'm not following you too well.

MS. ASQUITH. I mean once someone wants something more than life—they win. There's nothing you can threaten them with.

MISS RIVERTON. Like the Arabs who blow themselves up so they can go straight to paradise.

MS. ASQUITH. Yes. See? You are following me, after all. We all have our version of paradise, Miss Riverton. Yours is fame. And mine is to live. I'll do anything to live. So I lose.

MISS RIVERTON. Maybe you should eat something before you drink the saki.

MS. ASQUITH. I wonder if this is what Dostoyevsky meant when he wrote about the voluptuousness of surrender. Have you ever read Dostoyevsky's journals, Miss Riverton?

MISS RIVERTON. Who's Dostoyevsky? Stalin?

(There is a stunned pause.)

MS. ASQUITH. What?

MISS RIVERTON. Is Dostoyevsky Stalin?

MS. ASQUITH. No. He's Dostoyevsky.

MISS RIVERTON. Oh, I just thought ... you were talking about Hitler before. So I thought ... maybe Dostoyevsky is Stalin.

MS. ASQUITH. Then who would Stalin be?

MISS RIVERTON. I don't know. I thought maybe that was his real name—Stalin's. Like Tito was only a nickname for ... whoever Tito was. So I thought maybe Stalin was a nickname for Dostoyevsky.

MS. ASQUITH. No.

MISS RIVERTON. Well ... I didn't know. I don't think that's such a big mistake—not knowing who Dostoyevsky is. I know who Stalin is—and he's the famous one.

MS. ASQUITH. Miss Riverton, I don't think I can submit to you if you go on with this.

MISS RIVERTON. What do you mean?

MS. ASQUITH. I mean, I can't play cat and mouse with a bimbo.

MISS RIVERTON. Please don't call me a bimbo, Miss Asquith. That really upsets me.

MS. ASQUITH. Well, what else can I call you when you suddenly sound like every chauffeur I've ever been to bed with. It just makes me wonder if you're really as crazy as you pretend to be. Or as strong.

MISS RIVERTON. I don't know what you're talking about.

MS. ASQUITH. I'm talking about your strength, Miss Riverton, this strength with which you're going to strangle or stab a woman. And I'm wondering if the idea of presenting yourself as strong didn't come from my saying that the appearance of strength is power. And then ... just building from there...

MISS RIVERTON. I'm not presenting myself as anything. *(Rising.)* I'm not a bimbo. And I'm very strong.

MS. ASQUITH. As strong as I am?

MISS RIVERTON. As strong as you are? *(She laughs.)* Oh, I think so!

MS. ASQUITH. But you also think Dostoyevsky is Stalin so your opinions aren't as informed as they might be.

MISS RIVERTON. You saw me carry the file boxes.

MS. ASQUITH. No, I didn't.

MISS RIVERTON. You said you did.

MS. ASQUITH. I lied.

MISS RIVERTON. Well ... I carried them.

MS. ASQUITH. Really? So did I.

MISS RIVERTON. You carried file boxes?

MS. ASQUITH. Yes.

MISS RIVERTON. How many.
MS. ASQUITH. How many did you carry?
MISS RIVERTON. When?
MS. ASQUITH. Any time. The time you carried the most.
MISS RIVERTON. Six.
MS. ASQUITH. So did I.
MISS RIVERTON. You carried six file boxes?
MS. ASQUITH. Absolutely.

(MISS RIVERTON studies her for several moments ... then drops to the floor.)

MISS RIVERTON. Can you do this?

(MISS RIVERTON does several marine push-ups.)

MS. ASQUITH. Yes.
MISS RIVERTON. Let's see.
MS. ASQUITH. Take my word for it.
MISS RIVERTON. You can't, can you? I'll bet you don't have the strength to do even one.
MS. ASQUITH. Sheer physical strength isn't that necessary, Miss Riverton. Will counts, too.
MISS RIVERTON. No, it doesn't. Because a strong person can make a weak person do something *against* his will. He can destroy a weak person's will by using physical force. And then the weak person is always in his power.
MS. ASQUITH. Isn't that just a wee bit dramatic for what is, essentially, a push up contest?
MISS. RIVERTON. Get down on the ground and try a push-up, Miss Asquith. I challenge you.
MS. ASQUITH. I don't accept challenges. It would mean I have something to prove.
MISS RIVERTON. You'll accept this one. It's time for us to measure. *(Taking a step toward her.)* I'm afraid I have to insist.

(MISS RIVERTON takes another step.)

MS. ASQUITH. *(Quickly.)* Well, if it's that important to you ...

(MISS ASQUITH gets slowly down, brushes away some dust on the rug, sits back up.)

MISS RIVERTON. See? You can't do it. But don't give up trying. Keep using that will of yours. You see? ... *(She picks up the exercise rubber.)* This is trash. I put it right where it belongs. In the trash basket. It doesn't do anything. It doesn't make you strong. It's just a toy that gives you the illusion of strength—a personal trainer's silly invention for silly rich women. You know what makes you strong? Carrying file boxes, climbing three flights of stairs to a walk-up so you can afford to live in Manhattan, lugging groceries, walking miles to save money on subways, doing your own housework, wheeling your mother around when you visit her because you can't afford a nurse, painting your own ceiling, fixing your own pipes because the plumber costs so much. Hard, terrible labor—that's what makes you strong. And it's insane to think that God would create a world so lopsided that a multi-millionaire who hires a trainer to get her little hour of physical labor would be as strong as someone who actually ...

(MISS RIVERTON breaks off as MS. ASQUITH suddenly rises up in a marine push-up ... and then another ... and then another ... and then another.)

MS. ASQUITH. You're right! It's not will. But it *is* that personal trainer. And I've been skipping sessions. *(Exultantly.)* It would be very hard to get that knife in me, Miss Riverton, I'd inflict a lot of damage—if you were looking for a victim I mean. You'd have to stab me in the back and break your rules—and I know you wouldn't do that. You see, Jane, I'm afraid

God *did* create a lopsided world. In that way he's very much like Tito. *(MISS RIVERTON turns away.)* Well, now don't cry. That's no way to end a contest. Don't cry . It's not so bad. Although that walk-up doesn't sound wonderful. But look at those leg muscles. Oh, that food smells so good. *(She sits down and pats the sofa; MISS RIVERTON rises, obediently, and sits down beside her.)* Think of it this way. Everything's just the same as it was this morning. And you weren't crying then. Now let's have our picnic, shall we? It's getting late. And get my exercise elastic out of the trash.

MISS RIVERTON. You're not going to fire me?

MS. ASQUITH. Never. You're going to be the reason I stay in shape.

END OF PLAY

VIRTUAL REALITY

by
ALAN ARKIN

CAST
(In order of appearance)
at
THE PROMENADE THEATRE

De Recha .....Alan Arkin

Lefty .....Anthony Arkin

AUTHOR'S NOTE

There are only two real props in this play: a pencil and a piece of paper. Both are carried by Lefty. All other props are imaginary.

VIRTUAL REALITY

(A man comes into a room. It is dark. We don't see him clearly. From the other side of the room there is a cough. The man who has just entered, whose name is LEFTY, speaks.)

LEFTY. Hello?

DE RECHA. Who's there.

LEFTY. It's me. Lefty.

DE RECHA. Identify yourself.

LEFTY. What?

DE RECHA. Identify yourself.

LEFTY. I just did.

DE RECHA. No you didn't.

LEFTY. I don't know what you mean.

DE RECHA. What do I need a thesaurus? You know what identify yourself means. How do I know it's you?

LEFTY. How does anyone know who's anybody?

DE RECHA. Look, we don't have time for oriental philosophy right now. We're in a sensitive situation here. All I'm asking for is a simple i.d.

LEFTY. I left my wallet at home.

DE RECHA. You left your wallet at home.

LEFTY. That's right.

DE RECHA. That was smart wasn't it?

LEFTY. No one said anything about bringing i.d.

DE RECHA. You wander around the streets with no i.d?

LEFTY. Sometimes.

DE RECHA. What would you do if a cop stopped you?

LEFTY. I don't know.

DE RECHA. How would anyone know where to take you if you were in an accident?

LEFTY. They'd take me to a hospital like they take anyone. What is this bullshit?

DE RECHA. What about the insurance?

LEFTY. What about what insurance?

DE RECHA. Medical insurance.

LEFTY. What's this got to do with anything? I have no i.d. o.k?

DE RECHA. So give me something else.

LEFTY. Like what? If I have no i.d. what can I give you? What other kind of thing do I have that you could want?

DE RECHA. What have you got?

LEFTY. What do you want to see? You want to see a fingerprint? A hair sample? You want to look at my shoe? What do you want to see?

DE RECHA. Listen—what the hell did you come here thinking? We're in a sensitive situation. You don't know me, I don't know you, there's got to be some kind of way of identifying you. Otherwise you could be anyone.

LEFTY. You want to hear about my past? Specific little things from my youth? What do you want?

DE RECHA. No, I would have no way to corroborate them.

LEFTY. Why not?

DE RECHA. I'd need extensive files. Things to refer to. I don't have shit here. All I have is a couple of items in my head that they gave me.

LEFTY. Like what?

DE RECHA. I can't tell you.

LEFTY. Who the hell asked you to tell me? Use them to *question* me. You said you have items in your head. What good are they if you don't use them?

DE RECHA. They don't pertain to the question of the i.d.

LEFTY. Then what *do* they pertain to?

DE RECHA. They pertain to things we're supposed to discuss once the i.d. has been ascertained.

(There is an uncomfortable pause.)

LEFTY. So what do you want me to do?
DE RECHA. Give me a minute. I gotta think this through. *(He thinks for a minute.)* Come over here.
LEFTY. *(Suspiciously.)* What for?
DE RECHA. So's I can get a look at you.
LEFTY. Then what will you know?
DE RECHA. I'll know *that.*

(LEFTY sighs and walks over to DE RECHA out of the gloom. They look at each other for a long time. Nothing seems to have been resolved.)

LEFTY. So?

(There is a pause. DE RECHA seems to be thinking, but we don't really know.)

LEFTY. *(Continuing.)* So?
DE RECHA. I'm lost.
LEFTY. You want me to come in again?
DE RECHA. No.
LEFTY. It might clear your head.
DE. RECHA. Shut up a minute. I'm trying to sort this out.
LEFTY. I'm coming in again.

(He starts to go out.)

DE RECHA. *(In an attempt to stop him.)* Wait. Wait.

(LEFTY comes in again. They stand. LEFTY seems to be getting slightly impatient.)

LEFTY. Now ask me.

DE RECHA. Ask you what?

LEFTY. Ask me to identify myself for Christ's sake.

DE RECHA. Why? We'll be in the same boat as before.

LEFTY. I'll try something different.

DE RECHA. But I will still do the same thing. So where will we be then? *(LEFTY pauses for a long time, staring at DE RECHA, then starts to leave.)* What's this now? Where you going?

LEFTY. There's confusion here. There's disarray. It makes me uncomfortable. I like to work in an atmosphere of mutual respect and camaraderie.

DE RECHA. Don't run off on me. Don't take it personal. I can't have you on this job without knowing who you are. I have to be sure. You'd do the same thing in my place. Come on don't be like that.

LEFTY. Well, I have to be sure too. This is not my normal operational context. I'm not used to working with people I don't know either.

DE RECHA. Please. Don't start showing off now. Don't use this slight awkwardness as an opportunity to throw fancy words at me. That's a power ploy. I don't like that.

LEFTY. I'm getting really, really pissed off.

DE RECHA. What for? What did I do?

LEFTY. You're confusing me. I don't like confusion. I don't like mental disorders of any kind. I don't like disarray.

DE RECHA. Are you accusing me of mental disorder?

LEFTY. No, no. Mental *disorders*. Disorders. I don't like chaos.

DE RECHA. I'm only doing what they told me to do. You work for them too. I take orders from them, you take orders from me, that's the way it works.

LEFTY. Well, they picked the wrong guy to give orders.

DE RECHA. They picked me, so maybe they picked the right guy. What are you, upset because they didn't pick you?

LEFTY. Don't psychoanalyze me. Now or ever. I'm not

getting into my inner workings with you. I came here to do a job. No one told me about any fucking I.D.'s, no one told me about wallets, they told me to show up.

DE RECHA. And what they told *me* is about asking you to identify yourself. We're in the same boat.

LEFTY. But I *did* identify myself.

DE RECHA. No you didn't.

LEFTY. Yes I did.

DE RECHA. No you didn't, and please try not to get upset. I asked you for identification and you couldn't give me any. Do you remember that?

LEFTY. You asked me who I was. Do you remember that?

DE RECHA. Yes I do.

LEFTY. So who did I say I was.

DE RECHA. You said you were Lefty.

LEFTY. So?

DE RECHA. So what?

LEFTY. So what do you think identifying yourself means? And what the fuck do you think I did? You asked me who I was, I told you. Right?

DE RECHA. Right.

LEFTY. Who were you expecting?

DE RECHA. Lefty.

LEFTY. So; you asked me, I told you, that's that. We're straight, we're organized, we know who we are.

DE RECHA. O.K. O.K. When you're right you're right. Maybe things got a little bit out of hand.

LEFTY. Don't worry about it.

DE RECHA. You see, I'm new in this particular job; I've never done anything like this before and I want to do it right. Identify means I.D. to me. I wish they'd have told me a simple giving of a name would be enough. But there's no harm done. We're straight now. *(He waits for some corroboration from LEFTY, a look, something ... nothing comes.)* Anywho. Let's get on with it.

LEFTY. Fine by me.

DE RECHA. Let's go over the job.

LEFTY. Let's do it.

(They both take off their jackets, look for places to hang them, find none, both put jackets back on.)

DE RECHA. O.K. We start. First thing; the equipment comes.

LEFTY. Check.

DE RECHA. We examine it carefully, making sure all parts are as specified.

LEFTY. Check.

DE RECHA. To do that, we check it against the way bill.

LEFTY. Check. Where's the way bill?

DE RECHA. It's with the equipment.

LEFTY. *(Looking around.)* And where's the equipment?

DE RECHA. It's on its way.

LEFTY. On its way where?

DE RECHA. It's on its way here.

LEFTY. When?

DE RECHA. Right now.

LEFTY. Well, that's good, because if the schedule is going to be adhered to, we don't have a hell of a lot of time.

DE RECHA. It's going to be close. Don't think I'm not aware of that fact. *(LEFTY checks his watch. They sit. They scratch. They surreptitiously scrutinize each other.)* O.K. While we're waiting, let's go over the equipment.

LEFTY. The equipment isn't here.

DE RECHA. I know what it *is.*

LEFTY. But *I* don't know what it is.

DE RECHA. So I'll tell you what it is.

(LEFTY is beginning to get tense. A peculiar dislocation begins to appear in his eyes.)

DE RECHA. *(Continuing.)* First thing. The equipment gets

delivered right over here. There will be three boxes. Inside the first box will be the way bill, the manual for the materials and our specific instructions, among other things. So that's it. Let's do a dry run.

LEFTY. Of what?

DE RECHA. Of assembly. Let's see how long it will take us.

LEFTY. To do what?

DE RECHA. To get everything organized and put together.

LEFTY. We don't have anything here.

DE RECHA. We'll do a mock up.

LEFTY. We can't do that.

DE RECHA. Yes we can.

LEFTY. No we can't. A mock up is when you have a dummy of the real thing. We don't have a dummy of the real thing. We don't have anything.

DE RECHA. We will in a minute.

LEFTY. So we'll do it then. When it comes.

DE RECHA. No, there won't be time.

LEFTY. So you want us to do a check right now of imaginary things but when the real things get here we're not going to bother? We just go with the flow? Is that what I'm hearing?

DE RECHA. I want to do a dry run. Do you have a problem with that? Did I get the terminology o.k? Did you like my wording?

LEFTY. I'm not going to do this.

DE RECHA. *(Holding on to himself, and the beginnings of his own frustrations.)* Look, I gotta tell you, I'm getting a little tired of being stonewalled. You're bucking me on every turn. I keep getting this resistance. Are you aware of that? Is that something you do on purpose or is it an unconscious thing with you?

LEFTY. I'm not stonewalling anybody. I just want to do what I was hired to do. I don't want to do pantomimes.

DE RECHA. The problem with you is insubordination. I don't think you like me. You want to be boss of something. I gotta remind you that I take orders from you know who, and you take orders from me. That's the way it works. What's the

deal? Is that so hard to understand?

LEFTY. I don't take orders from anyone. I was hired to do a specific job, for which I am highly qualified, and then I do what I do. In my own way. You supply the equipment, you give me the time of occurrence and any particulars that you might need, and the rest is up to me.

DE RECHA. Why don't you take orders from people?

LEFTY. I just don't take orders from people. I work for myself. I'm a lone wolf. That's what I am, that's what I do.

DE RECHA. What's the big deal about taking orders from people?

LEFTY. I don't like it. I don't do it and I don't like it. End of report.

DE RECHA. Everybody takes orders from somebody. That's the way it works.

LEFTY. That's not the way I work. I'm not talking about this.

DE RECHA. That's the way the whole world works. What are you some kind of outcast from society? You can't work within a structure?

LEFTY. Right.

DE RECHA. You'll never amount to anything. You'll be doomed to a life of loneliness. The whole world calls out to accept, to join in, to be part of a larger thing, and you're going the other way.

LEFTY. *(Losing his patience completely.)* Okay, let's go. Let's do the pantomime. Where's the fucking box?

DE RECHA. I don't know if it's a good idea now.

LEFTY. Come on, stop the guilt making. Let's open the fucking boxes.

DE RECHA. What's the sudden shift in the attitude? Are you interested in opening the boxes now because you want to or because I told you to?

LEFTY. What difference does it make. Let's open the boxes. Where are they? Where are the boxes? *(He looks around for the imaginary boxes.)* Come on let's go. Let's do it. Let's go.

DE RECHA. You didn't answer my question.

LEFTY. I said what difference does it make?

DE RECHA. It makes a difference my friend because attitude is everything. The way you approach work is the way the work turns out. You have a negative attitude it affects everyone and everything around you.

LEFTY. Screw you.

DE RECHA. Yeah, right. Screw me. Very good. *(He laughs.)* This from a guy who will have my life in his hands in about an hour. Screw me. Is that supposed to have me brimming over with feelings of confidence? And you wonder why I'm concerned about your attitude?

LEFTY. I don't give a shit what you wonder about. Come on, let's open the fucking boxes.

DE RECHA. I've lost my incentive. I don't really feel like doing it now.

LEFTY. Let's open the fucking boxes!

DE RECHA. O.K. but remember this is your idea now. I've lost my zest for it.

LEFTY. Let's just open the fucking boxes.

DE RECHA. O.K. We'll open the boxes.

LEFTY. *(Eager to get on with it.)* Where are they?

DE RECHA. Right here.

LEFTY. O.K. good. Let's get started. Where's box number one?

(LEFTY looks around.)

DE RECHA. Right there.

LEFTY. O.K. so here it is. Here's box number one. *(He points somewhere in the air.)* Let's dive in, we'll get the bill of lading and we're off.

(LEFTY starts opening a box.)

DE RECHA. You gotta pry it open.

LEFTY. So then it's not a box. It's a crate.

DE RECHA. It's more than likely a crate.

LEFTY. So we're opening a box, a crate, what?

DE RECHA. Let's say it's a crate.

LEFTY. O.K., we're saying it's a crate. And we pry open the crate with what?

DE RECHA. They'll more than likely leave us a crowbar.

LEFTY. They'll more than likely leave us a crowbar. *(And he addresses an imaginary assistant.)* O.K. hand me that crowbar, Joe, thanks a lot, Joe, now I'm prying open the crate. *(LEFTY starts prying open a good sized crate. He's not too good at the pantomime, but he's trying to behave himself.)* O.K. The crate is open. And here's the bill of lading. O.K., O.K. everything looks good.

DE RECHA. I gotta look at it.

LEFTY. O.K., pardon me, here you go; give the way bill a little look. *(DE RECHA takes the paper from LEFTY looks at it forever. LEFTY waits and waits and then.)* This is bullshit. I gotta get out of here.

(LEFTY starts to head for the door again.)

DE RECHA. *(Irate.)* Now what's wrong?

LEFTY. What's wrong? I wouldn't know where to begin.

DE RECHA. What set you off this time?

LEFTY. I don't want to talk about it.

DE RECHA. I think we should talk about it.

LEFTY. I don't want to talk about it.

DE RECHA. You have to talk about it.

LEFTY. I don't have to talk about shit.

DE RECHA. Is that what I tell the boys upstairs? They ask me, "What happened?" I say, "He took off." "Why?" they ask. I say, "He took offense at the way I looked at the way bill." What do you think they're going to go through when I tell them that?

LEFTY. Is that a threat?

DE RECHA. It's a fact of life and it's a question.

LEFTY. It's a threatening question.

DE RECHA. It's a legitimate question. You run off; I'm left holding the bag. What do you want me to do, lie? You want me to take a fall for you? I don't even know you.

LEFTY. You took a half an hour reading the fucking way bill.

DE RECHA. So?

LEFTY. So there's nothing there. You're standing there reading thin air. That's what ticked me off. Think about it for a minute. Think about what that looks like. There's nothing in there. I'm standing here like some moron, watching you reading your fucking fist. You're holding up nothing and you're reading your fucking fist.

DE RECHA. I'm reading the way bill.

LEFTY. So read it faster.

DE RECHA. There's got to be about fifty items on there.

LEFTY. When it *gets* here.

DE RECHA. That's right.

LEFTY. So when the real list gets here, read that one slow. This one read fast.

DE RECHA. There won't be time.

LEFTY. O.K. read it any way you want. What do I care. *(He paces.)* Listen, let me tell you something. I'm beginning to feel manipulated. I'm beginning to think you're not as dumb as you're pretending to be, that there's some insidious purpose behind all of this bullshit. That's what I think. You're freaking me out. And on top of that, I think you're doing it on purpose.

DE RECHA. I don't do anything on purpose.

LEFTY. Whatever that means. Go ahead and read the way bill.

DE RECHA. What will you be doing while I'm reading the way bill?

LEFTY. What will I be doing? Say! I have an idea! Why don't I open up the other crates!

DE RECHA. Good thinking. Have you got a pencil?

LEFTY. Yes. *(He hands DE RECHA a real pencil. DE RECHA makes notes with the real pencil on the imaginary*

way bill. The crate tops are open. With each crate the miming gets a bit better. Continuing.) The crates are opened.

DE RECHA. All of them?

LEFTY. Every last one.

DE RECHA. They're completely open?

LEFTY. They couldn't be more open if they tried.

DE RECHA. Alright then.

LEFTY. You ready?

DE RECHA. I'm ready.

LEFTY. O.K. start calling off the items, I'll find them, you check them off.

DE RECHA. The other way around. You find an item, you call it out, I check it off.

LEFTY. I can't do that.

DE RECHA. Why not?

LEFTY. Because I don't know what's in the crates. That's why not.

DE RECHA. *(He sighs.)* Just look in the fucking crate, pull an item out, name the item, I check it off the list, on to the next. What's so hard about that?

LEFTY. What's the address here?

DE RECHA. 243 and a half Hope Street, why? *(LEFTY pulls out a piece of paper from his pocket and studies it carefully. He puts the paper back in his pocket. Continuing.)* Everything O.K?

LEFTY. *(Trying to be intimate and warm.)* Look. Let me be honest with you. I'm lost. I can't work this way. I'm used to a certain pattern. I've been doing things one way for a long time, and for better or for worse, it works for me that way. This is ... this is ... well, I don't know what this is. This is something different. And it's probably great, it's probably some new and innovative ... thing ... but I'm kind of an old fashioned guy and I just can't get with this. It's too convoluted.

DE RECHA. Which means ... ?

LEFTY. Which means—and I hate doing this to you, being that it's such short notice and everything—but I've got to get

out of here. I have to give notice. No hard feelings, I go my way you go yours, and we forget about the whole thing.

DE RECHA. Wait a minute now. This is very bad news you're giving me.

LEFTY. Well, I can't help it. It can't be helped.

DE RECHA. Can't be helped? You're leaving me a sitting duck with no support system. I'm in a deep hole because of you. I'm completely unnerved now.

LEFTY. I hate doing it to you.

DE RECHA. Also, you've been given a very generous advance. What happens with that?

LEFTY. I'll get it back to you.

DE RECHA. That's not the issue. You were given the advance to secure your services. To guarantee them. We start moving in ninety minutes. Who am I going to find to replace you in ninety minutes?

LEFTY. Look, you're calling on my honor as a professional, and that's a serious issue. But I'm telling you, the way things are going I'm not going to be able to function with any degree of precision. You want that? You want me flustered and confused?

DE RECHA. I just want you to comply with what's being asked of you, which is to be flexible for a few minutes in a test situation.

LEFTY. It's an unorthodox test situation.

DE RECHA. Does that make it wrong?

LEFTY. It makes it uncomfortable.

DE RECHA. That's why we're doing the test. To make it comfortable. Is that such a big deal?

LEFTY. No.

DE RECHA. Okay then. You want to find me an item?

LEFTY. All right then.

DE RECHA. All right then. *(Grudgingly, LEFTY starts digging into a box. He pulls something out and looks at it for a while. Continuing.)* Well? *(LEFTY continues to look at the item in his hand. Continuing.)* What's the problem?

LEFTY. I can't tell what this is.

DE RECHA. Oh for Christ's sake.

(DE RECHA walks over and pulls the thing out of LEFTY's hand. He looks it over, then throws it back at LEFTY disgustedly, and checks off something on the way bill.)

LEFTY. What is it?

DE RECHA. An inflatable air mattress. You ever seen an inflatable air mattress before?

LEFTY. Yeah.

DE RECHA. So why do you have trouble identifying an inflatable air mattress? Do you have a problem with indecisiveness? Well, this is a hell of a time for me to find out, isn't it? *(No answer.)* Isn't it?

LEFTY. Yes. But I have to say that an inflatable air mattress is not something I would have expected on this assignment.

DE RECHA. Well, when *you* pick the equipment, you leave out the inflatable air mattress. When *we* pick the equipment, we put in whatever we Goddamn well please. Once again I have to remind you that my life is going to be in your hands in about an hour. Now do you want to go and meditate on that in a corner somewhere, or can we continue what is really a very simple procedure?

LEFTY. Sorry.

DE RECHA. That's all right. Give me the next item.

LEFTY. *(Holding up the air mattress.)* Where do I put this? *(No answer.)* Is there any particular place you'd like me to put it? *(No answer.)* I'll just sit it down over here, then.

(LEFTY puts the air mattress down, somewhere away form the crate. He goes back to the crate and digs out the next item. He looks it over.)

DE RECHA. And? Well?

LEFTY. It's confusing.

DE RECHA. In what sense?

LEFTY. It's got a lot of different attributes.

DE RECHA. So describe the attributes.

LEFTY. Well, it's fairly light weight, and I can't tell what material it's made out of.

DE RECHA. Is it soft or hard?

LEFTY. It's kind of in between.

DE RECHA. You want to give me some fucking definition? So I can find something vaguely corresponding on the way bill? You want to give me a little hint?

LEFTY. O.K., o.k. I think it's plastic. It's ... it ... it seems to be plastic.

DE RECHA. It *seems* to be plastic.

LEFTY. Yes. It seems to be plastic.

DE RECHA. Seems to be ... ? You want to go completely crazy and say it's plastic?

LEFTY. Let's call it plastic. *(No response. Waits.)* It's plastic. It's definitely plastic.

DE RECHA. *(With enormous sarcasm.)* Good boy! Way to go! O.K! We got plastic! Does it open up? Has it got a thing on it that opens?

LEFTY. I ... I ... *(He's freezing up a bit.)* I can't tell. *(DE RECHA goes over to LEFTY, takes the item out of LEFTY's hand, opens and closes a latch and then sets it down. He goes back to his place and checks it off on the way bill. Continuing.)* What was it?

DE RECHA. A first-aid kit.

LEFTY. Right. Right. That was my hunch. I had a feeling that's what it was, it kind of felt like a first-aid kit, but it wasn't like the kinds of first-aid kits I've seen before.

DE RECHA. It was a plain first-aid kit, like you get in a drug store. Like you get in a hardware store. Like you get in an automotive supply store.

LEFTY. Well I don't spend a lot of time in any of those places.

DE RECHA. Oh I see.

(DE RECHA goes over to where he put down the kit, picks it up and puts it under LEFTY's nose.)

LEFTY. What?
DE RECHA. What does it say?
LEFTY. *(He tries to read.)* It says ... first-aid kit.

(DE RECHA throws the kit back on the floor.)

DE RECHA. Next.

(LEFTY digs into the box. He pulls out an item. Holds it up.)

LEFTY. What's this? An alarm clock. *(DE RECHA shakes his head no. Continuing.)* A timer of some kind? With wires coming out of the back.
DE RECHA. Oh, yeah, timer, I got it.
LEFTY. A timing device. *(He looks at it suspiciously.)* What are we doing with a timing device? What do we need that for?
DE RECHA. We'll discuss the action after we make sure of the material.
LEFTY. A timing device. That's a little out of left field, to me.
DE RECHA. Next.
LEFTY. Books.
DE RECHA. What kind of books?
LEFTY. A Sanskrit/English dictionary.
DE RECHA. Check.
LEFTY. *Walden.* By Henry David Thoreau.
DE RECHA. Check.
LEFTY. Nice edition.
DE RECHA. Next.
LEFTY. It starts to make an odd kind of pattern, doesn't it?
DE RECHA. Not to me.
LEFTY. Well, to me it starts to suggest things.

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