SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

This sample is an *excerpt* from a Samuel French title.

This sample is for perusal only and may not be used for performance purposes.

You may not download, print, or distribute this excerpt.

We highly recommend purchasing a copy of the title before considering for performance.

For more information about licensing or about purchasing a play or musical, please visit our website.

www.samuelfrench.com
www.samuelfrench.co.uk

SF PERUSALS

Murder at the Howard Johnson's

A Comedy in Two Acts

by Ron Clark and Sam Bobrick

A Samuel French Acting Edition



New York Hollywood London Toronto

SAMUELFRENCH.COM

Copyright © 1979, 1980 by Ron Clark and Sam Bobrick

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that *MURDER AT THE HOWARD JOHNSON'S* is subject to a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, the British Commonwealth, including Canada, and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights, including professional, amateur, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. In its present form the play is dedicated to the reading public only.

The amateur live stage performance rights to *MURDER AT THE HOWARD JOHNSON'S* are controlled exclusively by Samuel French, Inc., and royalty arrangements and licenses must be secured well in advance of presentation. PLEASE NOTE that amateur royalty fees are set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. When applying for a royalty quotation and license please give us the number of performances intended, dates of production, your seating capacity and admission fee. Royalties are payable one week before the opening performance of the play to Samuel French, Inc., at 45 W. 25th Street, New York, NY 10010.

Royalty of the required amount must be paid whether the play is presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged.

Stock royalty quoted upon application to Samuel French, Inc.

For all other rights than those stipulated above, apply to: Rosenstone/Adams LLC, 448 44th Street, New York, NY 10036.

Particular emphasis is laid on the question of amateur or professional readings, permission and terms for which must be secured in writing from Samuel French, Inc.

Copying from this book in whole or in part is strictly forbidden by law, and the right of performance is not transferable.

Whenever the play is produced the following notice must appear on all programs, printing and advertising for the play: "Produced by special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc."

Due authorship credit must be given on all programs, printing and advertising for the play.

No one shall commit or authorize any act or omission by which the copyright of, or the right to copyright, this play may be impaired.
No one shall make any changes in this play for the purpose of production.
Publication of this play does not imply availability for performance. Both amateurs and professionals considering a production are strongly advised in their own interests to apply to Samuel French, Inc., for written permission before starting rehearsals, advertising, or booking a theatre.
No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, now known or yet to be invented, including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, videotaping, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

ISBN 978-0-573-61202-2 Printed in U.S.A. #730

OPENING NIGHT MAY 17, 1979

JOHN GOLDEN THEATRE

A Shubert Organization Theatre

Gerald Schoenfeld, *Chairman* — Bernard B. Jacobs, *President*

Lee Guber & Shelly Gross

present

Tony Roberts

Bob Dishy

Joyce Van Patten

in



a new comedy by

Ron Clark and Sam Bobrick

Directed by

Marshall W. Mason

Scenery Designed by **Karl Eigsti**

Costumes Designed by **Sara Brook**

Lighting Designed by **Richard Nelson**

Associate Producers
David S. Newman and Fred Walker

General Management
Theatre Now, Inc.

CAST

(in order of appearance)

ARLENE MILLER . . . . . *Joyce Van Patten*

MITCHELL LAVELL . . . . . *Tony Roberts*

PAUL MILLER . . . . . *Bob Dishy*

ACT ONE

Scene One: Room 514. A week before Christmas.
Scene Two: Room 907. The 4th of July.

ACT TWO

Room 1015. New Year's Eve.

MURDER AT THE HOWARD JOHNSON'S premiered at the Golden Theater in New York City, May 17, 1979, directed by Marshall W. Mason, and with Tony Roberts, Bob Dishy and Joyce Van Patten among its cast.

CAST
(*in order of appearance*)

ARLENE MILLER ..... *Joyce Van Patten*

MITCHELL LOVELL ..... *Tony Roberts*

PAUL MILLER ..... *Bob Dishy*

The play takes place in a Howard Johnson's Hotel somewhere in America. The time is the present.

CHARACTERS
(*in order of appearance*)

ARLENE MILLER

MITCHELL LOVELL

PAUL MILLER

Murder at the Howard Johnson's

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

PLACE: *Room 514. A Howard Johnson's hotel.*
TIME: *Mid December. Evening.*
AT RISE: *It is a typical blue and orange Howard Johnson hotel room, with the usual hotel furnishing. Upstage, there are three windows side by side. The middle window has a desk and chair in front of it. The Stage Left window has a dresser. All three windows pivot on their centers, in frames. The bed unit is at Stage Right and includes two small bed tables on each side. One table has a telephone. There are two doors, Stage Right. The furthest Downstage is the closet door, the other, the bathroom door. The front door to the room is Stage Left. Between the bed and the front door is a floor lamp and two armchairs. There is a Christmas wreath on the headboard. A shopping bag filled with Christmas presents is on top the dresser. A TV on a stand is Downstage Left. In the background, we hear Christmas music.*

ARLENE MILLER, *an attractive woman, is seated on the bed, almost madonna-like, obviously troubled. From the bathroom we hear the bathtub water running for a few beats and then being turned off. Another beat or two and then the bathroom door opens and* DOCTOR MITCHELL LOVELL *enters.* MITCHELL *is a dentist and a contemporary of* ARLENE'S. *He's wearing a rather loud plaid jacket.*

MITCHELL. Well, the bathtub is ready. (*He goes Downstage, and brushes his hair in front of an imaginary mirror.*) What's the matter, honey? You're not nervous, are you?

ARLENE. I was just thinking, Mitchell. This is going to be the first Christmas in thirteen years that Paul and I won't be spending together.

MITCHELL. You've got to stop thinking about it, sweetheart. You've got to keep your mind on what we're doing.

ARLENE. If only he didn't love me so much. It would be a lot easier if he didn't love me so much. But, oh, God, how he loves me.

MITCHELL. (*Sits down on the bed next to her.*) He doesn't love you any more than I do.

ARLENE. Of course he does. He loves me more than any woman deserves to be loved.

MITCHELL. Well, if he loves you so damn much, why don't you stay with him?

ARLENE. You're jealous.

MITCHELL. Of course I'm jealous. I never felt this way before. I can't stand the thought of anybody but me touching you. I'm a dentist, Arlene. You know I can have any woman I want. But all I want is you.

ARLENE. Oh, Mitchell.

MITCHELL. I never told you this before, but remember when I put in that bridge for him and he went home in terrific pain? I purposely did that to him. I put in the wrong sized bridge. I wanted to hurt him.

ARLENE. I love you, Mitchell. (*They embrace passionately.*)

MITCHELL. I've got to have you, Arlene.

ARLENE. No please, not now. (*Rises.*) I've got too much on my mind. I wouldn't be any good.

MITCHELL. You may be right. (*Rises.*) Okay, let's go over the plan once more. One, I open the door.

ARLENE. Two. I say, come in, Paul, and don't ask any questions.

MITCHELL. Three. I hit him over the head with a lamp.

ARLENE. Four. I give him a karate chop in the neck.

MITCHELL. Five. I hit him over the head with a chair.

ARLENE. Six. I shove a handkerchief in his mouth so he won't scream.

MITCHELL. Seven. I give him the injection and he sinks to his knees. (*They heighten the pace.*)

ARLENE. Eight. We drag him into the bathroom.

MITCHELL. And nine, we dump him into the bathtub face down and hold his head under water for as long as it takes.

ARLENE. (*Embracing* MITCHELL *excitedly.*) Kiss me! Kiss me! I've got to have you, Mitchell.

MITCHELL. Not now, Arlene. You wouldn't be any good, remember? (MITCHELL *goes into bathroom.*)

ARLENE. Poor Paul. He's going to hate this so much. But what about me? Am I not entitled to life? Don't I deserve to know tenderness, warmth and passion without having to get up in the middle of the night, get dressed and take a taxi home? (MITCHELL *comes out with a doctor's bag.*) Oh, Mitchell, I don't know if happiness will ever be in the cards for a woman like me.

MITCHELL. We've got to think positive, Arlene . . . Where the hell is he? He said he'd be here at six.

ARLENE. Not if he's in the middle of a deal. You know when you're selling used cars, you can spend a whole day promising a guy the moon.

MITCHELL. I know. I bought my mother's Oldsmobile from him. The day after the warranty expired the motor fell out.

ARLENE. Paul used to tell me after he had a few beers that when you buy a used car, you're buying somebody else's troubles.

MITCHELL. Well, I'm getting even this time. He thinks he's coming up here to make a deal on some stolen cars.

ARLENE. I used to love him. I think I used to love him more than he loved me. Then suddenly things started to reverse themselves. I found myself being loved more than I

could love in return. Do you have any idea what it's like being loved more than you can possibly love in return?

MITCHELL. Of course I do.

ARLENE. It drives you crazy. So you force yourself to love that person more than you do and before you know it you hate him for putting you through all this. Do you know what I'm saying?

MITCHELL. Thoroughly. God, when you two first came into my office to have your teeth checked, I would have sworn you were the happiest couple on earth. (*Closes the drapes.*)

ARLENE. (*Primping in Downstage imaginary mirror.*) When I met Paul Miller, I was young, I was foolish, I was innocent . . . But then I started reading. At first newspapers. Then magazines . . . and suddenly, before I knew it, books. Little by little, I outgrew him. He went to the right, I went to the left. He went in. I went out. I went up. He went down. I went here, he went there . . .

MITCHELL. I couldn't live with a man like that.

ARLENE. Yet, he tried his best. He gave me everything. A house, furniture, clothing, silverware . . . I have five watches.

MITCHELL. No one needs five watches.

ARLENE. Of course not. Oh, sure, Paul and I were happy at first. I didn't know any better. My eyes were still closed. I hadn't awakened as a person yet. And then when I met you, the whole thing really crystalized. I wasn't the same girl that Paul had slept with thousands and thousands and thousands of times.

MITCHELL. Arlene, I don't want to hear numbers.

ARLENE. Mitchell, he still is my husband.

MITCHELL. Well, that's all going to change today.

ARLENE. Kiss me. Kiss me. (*They kiss passionately. There is a knock at the door.*) That's him.

MITCHELL. Bad timing.

PAUL. (*Offstage.*) Mr. Zapata!

MITCHELL. (*Fake voice.*) Uno momento! (ARLENE *looks at* MITCHELL *puzzled.*) I told him on the phone, I was Mexican.

ARLENE. You have a very good accent.

MITCHELL. Thank you.

ARLENE. (*Goes to him.*) Oh, Mitchell. I can't help but wonder. Do we really have the right to take another person's life?

MITCHELL. Of course not. That's why it's called murder. You want total happiness, don't you?

ARLENE. Yes, yes.

MITCHELL. Well, he's keeping you from total happiness.

ARLENE. I'm so confused.

MITCHELL. Look, would it make you feel any better if we tried talking to him first? Who knows, he might even agree to a divorce.

ARLENE. Never. The poor guy loves me too much.

MITCHELL. Let's try. If he says no and we have to kill him, at least we'll have a clear conscience. (*There is another knock at the door.*) Uno momento! (*To* ARLENE.) What do you say, Arlene?

ARLENE. Okay, we'll try it, but don't get your hopes up.

MITCHELL. I love you, Arlene.

ARLENE. I love you, Mitchell.

MITCHELL. Think positive.

(*He turns on more lights in the room, opens the door and stands behind it.* PAUL MILLER, *a man a year or two older than his wife, is standing there. He is wearing a grey overcoat, a grey suit, and a grey tie. When he sees* ARLENE *he is completely confused.*)

PAUL. Arlene!?!?

ARLENE. Come in, Paul, and don't ask questions.

PAUL. (*Entering.*) Arlene, what are you doing here? I was supposed to meet a Mr. Zapata.

MITCHELL. (*Closes door.*) Hi, Paul, how's business?

PAUL. Doctor Lovell! What's going on? Where's Zapata?

MITCHELL. I'm Zapata.

PAUL. You? You're our dentist. You don't make enough money overcharging us? You have to operate a stolen car ring, too?

ARLENE. Paul, give me your coat. Dr. Lovell has something to tell you. (*To* MITCHELL.) Go ahead, honey. (*She takes* PAUL'S *coat and hangs it up.*)

PAUL. Honey? Who calls a dentist honey?

MITCHELL. Paul, here's the story. I love your wife. Your wife loves me. We're all adults. These things happen. What more can I say?

PAUL. You mean there are no hot cars?

MITCHELL. (*To* ARLENE.) You talk to him.

ARLENE. Paul, I want a divorce.

PAUL. A divorce!

MITCHELL. What do you say, huh, Paul? A nice clean split. We let the lawyers handle everything, we stay friends, and from here on in, all your dental work is fifty percent off.

PAUL. A divorce? I don't understand, Arlene. I'm really thrown. Just the other night we had sex like it was gangbusters. (MITCHELL *gives* ARLENE *a look.*)

ARLENE. (*To* MITCHELL.) I thought it was going to be his last time. I tried to make it special.

PAUL. (*Sits on foot of bed.*) A divorce!

ARLENE. What about it, huh, Paul! Yes or no?

MITCHELL. Otherwise we have to get rough.

PAUL. (*Stunned, to* ARLENE.) You and Doctor Lovell are in love?

ARLENE. I'm afraid so.

PAUL. In love with a man who butchered my mouth. It still hurts from that lousy bridge he put in.

MITCHELL. So don't pay me.

PAUL. (*Rises.*) I didn't.

ARLENE. Fellas, please . . .

PAUL. I can't believe it, Arlene. After all we've meant to each other. (*To* MITCHELL.) I love that woman. I treat her like a goddess. Whatever she wants, I get for her. You know, I bought her . . .

PAUL and MITCHELL. Five watches.

PAUL. I'd buy her anything. You know that, Arlene. Name me one thing you want that you haven't got.

ARLENE. Happiness.

PAUL. Arlene, you're talking about a very small part of life. I've failed you, haven't I?

ARLENE. No, Paul, it's not that simple. It's just that . . . well, some people change.

PAUL. (*Proudly.*) I didn't.

MITCHELL. Well, some people change and some people don't.

ARLENE. What I'm trying to say, Paul, is simply that it's not there anymore. The magic, the violins, the sunsets . . . the rain on my face, the moonlight walks . . .

MITCHELL. (*Sighs.*) I love all that stuff.

PAUL. I'm stunned. I'm really stunned. Why, Arlene, why? What's the real reason? Where did I go wrong? Was I too strong? Too weak? Too lenient? Too strict?

ARLENE. It doesn't matter now. It's all yesterday's news.

PAUL. What do you mean yesterday's news? I just found out about it. I have to know. Is it because I have no sense of humor?

ARLENE. No, of course not. A wife doesn't have to laugh all the time.

MITCHELL. (*Interested.*) Then what is it, Arlene?

ARLENE. (*A little annoyed.*) I met you.

MITCHELL. Of course.

PAUL. (*Sits again.*) I'm stunned. I'm really stunned.

MITCHELL. Oh, come on. You mean you didn't suspect anything? Your wife goes to a dentist two or three times a week, sometimes even on Sundays, doesn't come home till midnight and you don't suspect anything?

PAUL. I trusted her.

ARLENE. He was good that way.

PAUL. (*Rises.*) Something is wrong here. You're keeping something from me. A woman doesn't walk out on the perfect husband without a reason.

ARLENE. There are a lot of reasons, Paul. You're shallow. You're dull. You're gloomy. You never smile . . .

PAUL. You have a good memory.

ARLENE. The other day I went into your closet. Did you know your entire wardrobe is grey? You go into Mitchel's closet, there's color, there's life. There's reds and greens and yellows . . .

MITCHELL. And plaids and checks and stripes . . .

ARLENE. There is adventure in Mitchell's closet, excitement, a lust for life.

MITCHELL. I've got wide lapels, narrow lapels, flared pants, pants with cuffs. You name it. I'm ready for all fads.

PAUL. Doctor Lovell, what the hell kind of a man goes around stealing wives?

MITCHELL. Put yourself in my place. You're a perfectly healthy, normal, good-looking, dentist. An attractive married woman walks in one day, sits on your chair, you start examining her. Before you know it you're having drinks together and the rest is history.

PAUL. (*To* MITCHELL.) My respect for you has hit a new low.

MITCHELL. So don't recommend me.

PAUL. I never do.

ARLENE. Paul, I'm only flesh and blood. You expected too much of me.

PAUL. I expected you to behave like a wife. Didn't I satisfy you sexually?

ARLENE. Sometimes you did and sometimes you didn't.

PAUL. And you don't call that a good batting average? Arlene, marriage is like baseball. Sometimes you pitch. Sometimes you catch. Sometimes you hit a home run.

Sometimes you strike out. Sometimes you go into extra innings. Sometimes it's called on account of rain. But the sport goes on year after year after year after year.

MITCHELL. (*Interested.*) And then what?

PAUL. And then it's football season . . .

ARLENE. Paul, I'm not happy with you.

PAUL. I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that.

ARLENE. Of course you didn't hear that. You don't listen. Mitchell listens. He's interested. He cares. He wants to know what makes me tick. There are lots of things bothering women like me these days. Things that seem unanswered in our lives.

PAUL. Like what? I'll answer it.

ARLENE. Like what makes us feel so restless? What makes us feel so incomplete? What makes us feel so lost?

PAUL. Who can answer all that?

ARLENE. At least with Mitchell at night when I talk, he doesn't fall asleep.

MITCHELL. How can you possibly fall asleep with this woman next to you?

PAUL. I'm tired. Marriage takes a lot out of a person.

MITCHELL. Take time to smell the roses, Paul?

PAUL. Shove the roses. (*To* ARLENE.) You don't think I was disappointed from time to time in our marriage?

ARLENE. Like when?

PAUL. There were times. Lots of times. Like reading in bed all night long with the lights on. That bothers me. You always leaving the table before I finish eating. That bothers me. Some of the phone calls you take in private. That bothers me. Your using all my wooden hangers . . . I could go on and on.

MITCHELL. I really think this is getting too personal.

PAUL. I know his kind, Arlene. He's going to break your heart. He meets too many women in his line of work.

MITCHELL. Oh, yeah? Well, in fifteen years of medical practice, I've only had three affairs with married patients.

PAUL. You hear that?

ARLENE. He's only human, Paul. I admire that in a man. You, you never even looked at another woman. That's not natural.

PAUL. Why should I look at other women? I hate women.

MITCHELL. Well, I love women, and I especially love Arlene.

ARLENE. Did I get lucky, Paul?

PAUL. Look, Lovell, I know what Arlene is to you. A quick jump in the sack. A wham bam, thank you ma'am. Love is a lot more than pretty words. You single guys make me sick. Love! What do you know about love? What have you bought her in the last month?

MITCHELL. What do I know about love? That's a laugh. Who's winding up with Arlene, you or me?

PAUL. That's not love. That's sex.

MITCHELL. Sex *is* love.

PAUL. Sex is sex. *Love* is love.

ARLENE. I think basically you're both saying the same thing.

PAUL. Arlene, you don't think I could have affairs? There are women coming to buy cars all the time. All I have to do is knock two hundred dollars off the sticker price and I'm in business. But I'm loyal. And as long as there's an ounce of breath left in this body, you're going to be loyal too. Get your coat! (*He gets his coat.*)

MITCHELL. Paul, for the last time, are you or are you not going to give Arlene a divorce?

PAUL. Never. Get your coat. (MITCHELL *and* ARLENE *look at one another.*)

MITCHELL. Well, we can't say we didn't try.

ARLENE. (*Goes to door, takes the "Do Not Disturb" sign and places it on the outside of the door. She then locks the door.*) Paul, what happens from here on in is your own doing.

PAUL. What are you talking about?

ARLENE. Do you want to tell him?

MITCHELL. No, you tell him.

ARLENE. Okay, Paul, as cruel as this may sound at first, and as cold blooded as it may appear and as callous as . . .

MITCHELL. (*Impatient.*) Tell him already!

ARLENE. (*Her arm around* PAUL.) We're going to kill you, Paul.

PAUL. Say that again.

MITCHELL. We're going to kill you, Paul. (*He pulls out a white dentist jacket from his bag and proceeds to put it on.*)

PAUL. (*A beat. Looks at them.*) Get your coat, Arlene.

ARLENE. We're serious, Paul. We're going to kill you.

PAUL. Don't make me laugh.

MITCHELL. She's not kidding, Paul. The party's over.

PAUL. (*Chuckling.*) Let me get this straight. You're going to kill me? You two amateurs are going to kill me?

MITCHELL. We're amateurs now, but when we leave here we'll be seasoned veterans.

PAUL. This, I gotta see.

ARLENE. You don't think we're going to do it, huh?

PAUL. I don't think you're going to do it. I don't think you can do it. You think it's easy to kill someone? To stop their hearts from beating? To take their life away? People like us don't go around killing people. We're much too middle class for that.

MITCHELL. Who the hell are you calling middle class? I'm a professional dentist with diplomas all over the wall.

PAUL. You want to kill me? Okay, go ahead and kill me. What do you want me to do, sit in a chair while you tie me up? (*Takes off his coat and hangs it up.*)

MITCHELL. Well, we really weren't going to do it that way, but it's not a bad idea.

ARLENE. No, not at all. Thank you, Paul. (*Pulls chair to Center of Stage.*) Listen, you sit right here. I'll be right back. You'll see how cleverly we planned this whole thing. I think you're going to get a kick out of this. (*To*

MITCHELL.) Don't kill him till I get back. (*She exits into the bathroom.*)

PAUL. (*Sits in chair.*) Come on. Tie me up. Let's kill me.

MITCHELL. All right. What's the catch?

PAUL. (*Rises.*) I don't think you can do it. I don't think you have the guts. If you can, go ahead. But if you can't, then Arlene walks out of here with me, and we get a new dentist.

MITCHELL. Leave it to a used car dealer to come up with a scheme like that.

PAUL. Have we got a deal?

MITCHELL. You're on. (*They shake hands.*) Have a seat. (PAUL *sits down again.* MITCHELL *takes his own tie and begins tying* PAUL'S *hands behind his back and to the chair.*)

PAUL. You know what my wife's problem is? It's those damn women's magazines she reads. They're too honest. They confuse her. They make sex look like a fun thing.

MITCHELL. (*Finishes tying* PAUL'S *hands.*) Is that too tight?

PAUL. No, it's fine.

MITCHELL. I'm going to have to borrow your tie.

PAUL. Take it. I've got a dozen more just like it. (MITCHELL *removes* PAUL'S *tie and begins tying his feet to the chair.*) Maybe it's her age. You know how women are about losing their youth. It's tough on a woman when she hits thirty-eight.

MITCHELL. (*Stops and reacts.*) She's thirty-eight?

PAUL. Didn't she tell you?

MITCHELL. I didn't know she was thirty-eight. How do you like that. I'm two years younger than her.

PAUL. Does that mean it's all off?

MITCHELL. Of course not. But why would she lie to me?

PAUL. People lie. They lie to each other. Sometimes on the lot I even have to do it. Me, Honest Paul Miller! All life is a lie. When you're a kid they tell you there's a Santa

Claus, that there's a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. They tell you if you work hard, you'll be a success, if you find the right woman, you'll be happy. I'm living proof that everything's a lie. Everybody shafts you. But unlike Arlene, I've learned to live with it.

MITCHELL. At times, Paul, you come off as a very bitter person.

PAUL. I'm not bitter. I'm just realistic. I know that . . . (*Winces in pain.*) Oooooow!

MITCHELL. What's wrong?

PAUL. It's that lousy bridge you put in.

MITCHELL. (*Goes to bag and gets some dental instruments.*) Here, let me have a look.

PAUL. No, no. It's all right.

MITCHELL. Open wide. (*Looks into* PAUL'S *mouth.*) Have you been using your water pik?

PAUL. Who's got time?

MITCHELL. You're lucky you're going to die, Paul. You need twelve hundred dollars worth of work there.

PAUL. I wouldn't go to you if you were the last dentist on earth.

MITCHELL. Paul, for you, I am the last dentist on earth. (*The bathroom door opens and* ARLENE *comes out wearing a floozie wig.*)

ARLENE. (*To* PAUL, *playing a sexy hooker.*) Hello, big boy. You want to have some fun?

PAUL. What the hell is this?

ARLENE. It's me, Paul, Arlene.

PAUL. (*Annoyed.*) I know it's you.

ARLENE. This is how I registered downstairs as Kitty Latour. So that when they find your dead body, they'll connect it to this girl. (*Points to herself.*)

MITCHELL. You really look sexy in that wig.

PAUL. I think she looks cheap. She looks like a hooker.

ARLENE. Of course. That's what I'm supposed to be.

PAUL. You would associate my death to a hooker?

MITCHELL. It's the perfect crime. You came here to meet this hooker, you had sex in the bathtub, you hit your head and you drowned.

PAUL. Sex in the bathtub? And how will you explain my being tied to a chair?

ARLENE. Grow up, Paul. There are people who have sex like that every day.

PAUL. (*Shocked.*) Every day? What a world!

MITCHELL. The bathtub's all filled with water and all we have to do is drag you in there and dump you in, face down. (*To* ARLENE.) Then you and I can go out and get something to eat.

PAUL. Why don't we order something up?

ARLENE. (*Goes to phone.*) Great idea. Ever since we thought of killing you at Howard Johnsons, I've had a taste for fried clams.

MITCHELL. Arlene, hang up.

ARLENE. You love ice cream. They have twenty-eight flavors.

MITCHELL. I had my desert. I had a Milky Way before I came up.

PAUL. A Milky Way. What a baby. (*Taunting.*) You're a baby. Little baby . . .

MITCHELL. Hang up, Arlene. We'll eat when we're finished. Maybe I'll even take you dancing.

ARLENE. (*Into phone.*) Never mind. We're going to go dancing. (*Hangs up.*)

MITCHELL. I love dancing, Paul. I just love it. (*Starts dancing.*) One two, One, two, three.

PAUL. Well, I hate it. I'm on my feet all day, all night . . . Why should I want to dance? I want to sit and relax.

ARLENE. Well, I didn't. That's what ruins marriages, Paul, more than anything else.

PAUL. What? Not dancing?

ARLENE. No, not doing things together!

PAUL. Okay, so we'll do things together.

ARLENE. It's too late. You are who you are and you've gone as far as you can go. The big difference between us, Paul, is that you're tied down and I'm free. I've found myself. You didn't even go out looking.

PAUL. Arlene, I work twelve hours a day, seven days a week. I don't have time to find myself. You think I'm doing it for me? I'm doing it so I can buy you things. I don't need anything. All I need are shoes so I can continue to work to buy you those things.

ARLENE. Paul, you'll never understand. The basic fact is that I've outgrown you. I've matured. I've blossomed.

MITCHELL. That reminds me, Arlene. He said you were thirty-eight.

ARLENE. Paul, you're a very petty person.

MITCHELL. Do you think I care about age? Nobody cares about age anymore.

ARLENE. You're as young as you feel. And I feel like a spring bride. I want to go. I want to do. I'm restless. I can't be contained. I want to write. I want to paint. I want to take ballet lessons. I want to go around the world.

PAUL. (*To* MITCHELL.) Doctor Lovell, do you have any idea what that's going to cost you?

ARLENE. I've spent too many years just sitting around waiting. Waiting for something to happen. Waiting for something to begin. Waiting! Waiting! Waiting! Well, my plane's on the runway, my seat belt is fastened and I'm ready to take off.

MITCHELL. And this time you're going first class.

PAUL. (*Trying to get loose—frightened.*) Goddamn it, you really got me tied up here.

MITCHELL. That's the name of the game.

PAUL. Arlene, look in my left pocket.

ARLENE. Why?

PAUL. Just look. What have you got to lose?

ARLENE. (*Reaches into his pocket and takes out a small gift wrapped box.*) Oh, Paul, you shouldn't have. I didn't

get you anything for Christmas. I didn't think I'd have to. (*She sits down on nearby chair and unwraps the gift.*)

PAUL. I didn't have time to buy a card. (*To* MITCHELL.) How late are the stores open?

MITCHELL. 'Til nine o'clock, but I don't think you're going to make it. (PAUL *manages to move himself and chair next to* ARLENE.)

ARLENE. (*Taking a watch out of the box. Disappointed.*) Another watch! He bought me another watch. (*Reprimanding.*) Paul, do you take pleasure in tormenting me?

PAUL. That's a digital. You don't have one like that.

ARLENE. I don't want this watch. (*Puts it back in box.*) You take it back where you bought it.

MITCHELL. How can he take it back? Let me see that. (*Takes the box from her and looks at the watch.*) Not bad. How much did you pay for this?

PAUL. A hundred bucks.

MITCHELL. Bullshit! It's a Timex.

PAUL. You want to buy it? I'll take fifty.

MITCHELL. I'll give you twenty.

ARLENE. (*To* MITCHELL.) Why do you want a lady's watch?

MITCHELL. It's for my mother. I like to buy her things.

PAUL. For your mother? What a baby! He's a baby. Little baby . . .

MITCHELL. We'll see who's a baby. (*Takes a hypodermic needle from his bag.*) Ahhh, here it is. (*Squirts out some of the liquid into the air.*)

PAUL. (*With growing concern.*) What the hell's that?

MITCHELL. Novocaine. I give you a shot in both arms. I give you a shot in both legs, and before you know it you're a ball of rubber and all we have to do is bounce you into the bathroom.

ARLENE. Your only hope is to hold your breath in the bathtub and try to stay afloat, but how long can anyone do that?

PAUL. Arlene, get your coat. We're going home.

ARLENE. If you could only let me go. Give me a divorce.

PAUL. Never!

MITCHELL. (*Studying* PAUL.) We have a problem here. You're going to have to take off your jacket and roll up your sleeves.

PAUL. Oh, yeah? And who do you think I am, Houdini?

MITCHELL. Let's see if I can work something out here.

(*While holding the needle in one hand, he proceeds to push* PAUL'S *jacket off his shoulders and unbutton his shirt so that he can expose his arm for the needle.*)

PAUL. It's the insurance, isn't it?

MITCHELL. What insurance?

PAUL. My life insurance. That's the real reason you're killing me. Now it makes sense. I knew it had nothing to do with love.

ARLENE. Paul, Mitchell doesn't need your money.

MITCHELL. Well, how much is it, exactly?

PAUL. Two hundred thousand dollars. (MITCHELL *whistles. He's impressed.*)

ARLENE. Paul, I thought you only had fifty thousand.

PAUL. Well, last month I thought it over and I didn't think it would be enough.

ARLENE. Paul Miller, you're a good man.

PAUL. And that's only the beginning. If I die in a plane crash, it's double.

MITCHELL. Well, we can't get a plane in here, so let's get on with it.

PAUL. (*To* ARLENE.) You had a good thing being married to me. I don't care how you felt about it. The trouble with people like you is that you're never satisfied. Don't you realize nobody has it perfect. Look at that wedding band you're wearing. I remember you wouldn't even get married unless I got you that ring. You wanted everyone to know

that you were Mrs. Paul Miller. That you belonged to me. That I belonged to you. That I owned you and that you owned me. That we owned each other. (*To* MITCHELL.) And you, Doctor Lovell. You'll live to regret not remaining single. If I can't make my marriage work, what chance have you got?

MITCHELL. Love conquers all.

PAUL. Love conquers shit! Arlene, if you wanted to have an affair, all you had to do was come to me and ask me. I would have said "no" and that would have been the end of it.

MITCHELL. (*To* ARLENE.) Help me get his pant legs up. (*As* MITCHELL *and* ARLENE *roll up* PAUL'S *pants, they discover he's wearing garters.*) Garters! Who wears garters! Now that tells you something about the man.

PAUL. So help me God, if you go through with this I'll come back and haunt you from the grave. (*Makes weird whistling sounds.*)

ARLENE. (*A little suspicious.*) What do you think, Mitchell?

MITCHELL. He's just bluffing.

PAUL. You want my personal opinion of this whole thing?

MITCHELL. Sure.

ARLENE. Yes.

PAUL. (*Yelling.*) Help!

MITCHELL. Are you crazy? You're gonna bring everybody up here.

PAUL. Help!

ARLENE. What's the matter with you, Paul?

PAUL. Help!

MITCHELL. Quick! Bring me a washcloth.

ARLENE. What for?

MITCHELL. I want to gag him.

ARLENE. Right.

PAUL. Help! Help!

MITCHELL. Hurry! (ARLENE *rushes to the bathroom.* MITCHELL *puts his hand over* PAUL'S *mouth to quiet him.*)

PAUL. Help!

MITCHELL. Will you stop that! (PAUL *bites his hand.*) Owwww! (*Pulls back in pain.*) Son of a bitch bit me.

PAUL. Help!

ARLENE. (*Rushes out with the washcloth.*) Quiet, Paul! (*Hands towel to* MITCHELL.) Here. (MITCHELL *takes the washcloth and hands her the needle.*) Here. (*He starts shoving washcloth into* PAUL'S *mouth.*)

PAUL. Help!

ARLENE. (*To* MITCHELL.) I can't get over how clean the bathrooms are here. I wouldn't mind coming back again. (PAUL *stops shouting.*)

MITCHELL. There!

ARLENE. (*Impressed.*) That's very good. I didn't think that would work.

MITCHELL. (*Backs up to admire his work and accidentally backs into needle that* ARLENE *is holding.*) Owwww!

ARLENE. I'm really sorry. Thank God you weren't facing me.

MITCHELL. Forget the novocaine. Let's get this over with.

ARLENE. (*Looking at* PAUL *who seems to be sinking fast.*) Mitchell, would you mind very much if I said goodbye to him first?

MITCHELL. No, just hurry it up. (*He goes into bathroom.*)

ARLENE. (*Walking around* PAUL. *She tries to be very tactful.* PAUL *winks at her furiously, trying to get her to free him.*) You know, Paul, there are things in life that are very difficult to justify. You haven't been a bad husband. I'll bet a lot of women would have traded places with me. Unfortunately for you, you were the wrong guy at the wrong place with the wrong woman. I'd hate to have you go out thinking this is all your fault. Is it so wrong for a person to put her

personal needs ahead of everyone else's? (PAUL *shakes his head.*) You're probably right, but everybody's doing it. I'd give anything not to have to go through with this. Anything. If only you weren't so possessive. If only you weren't so in love with me. If only you would give me a divorce. How about it, Paul? (PAUL *shakes his head furiously indicating that he won't. He tries to move himself and the chair toward the door.*) I've got to hand it to you, Paul. You're a "one woman man."

MITCHELL. (*Coming out of the bathroom. He's limping as a result of the novocaine in his rear.*) Let's get this over with. Okay, Paul. It's time for your bath. (*The two drag* PAUL *in the chair, into the bathroom.*)

ARLENE. Do you think we should add some hot water? He hates a cold tub.

MITCHELL. What's the difference? I hate this kind of work. (*They're now in the bathroom. There's a beat followed by a loud splash. A moment later,* ARLENE *comes out followed by* MITCHELL.) Are you all right?

ARLENE. I think so. Is he dead?

MITCHELL. (*Glancing back into bathroom.*) I guess so. He's kind of blue. Let's get out of here.

(*They go about gathering their things quietly. We hear the faint sound of Christmas music.* MITCHELL *gets his coat and his doctor's bag.* ARLENE *gets her coat and her shopping bag. The two manage not to look at one another until they get to the front door.* MITCHELL *unlocks the door.* ARLENE *looks at him.*)

ARLENE. Merry Christmas, Mitchell.

MITCHELL. (*Opens door.*) You'd better drive. My ass is asleep.

(MITCHELL *turns off the lights and shuts the door behind them. There is a beat. Suddenly* PAUL *comes staggering out of the bathroom. The chair is still attached to*

him. He has the shower curtain wrapped around him and is soaking wet. The gag is gone from his mouth.)

PAUL. That's it. Tomorrow morning we're seeing a marriage counselor. (*He slumps down in chair as the Christmas music swells. The CURTAIN COMES DOWN.*)

END OF SCENE 1

ACT ONE

SCENE 2

Room 907, the same Howard Johnson hotel. The room is identical except for different color drapes and a different color bedspread. The floor lamp has been replaced by a low, round table. It is the 4th of July, six months later. Early evening. There is a red, white and blue bunting on the headboard, replacing the Christmas wreath. In the background we hear patriotic march music.

AT RISE: ARLENE *is pacing back and forth, nervously. She goes to her handbag and takes out a vial of pills and goes to the phone. The march music fades out.* ARLENE *dials the phone.*

ARLENE. (*On phone.*) Hello, Mitchell. This is Arlene. Don't ask questions. I'm at the Howard Johnson's, room 907. Hear this? (*She shakes the pills into the mouthpiece.*) These are sleeping pills. I just want you to know I'm killing myself. (*She hangs up. There is furious knocking at the door.*)

PAUL. (*Offstage.*) Arlene! Arlene! You didn't do it yet, did you?

(ARLENE *opens the door and lets* PAUL *in. He is wearing a grey summer suit, white shirt, black shoes and a striped grey tie with a touch of color. He is carrying a paper bag.*)

ARLENE. Hello, Paul.

PAUL. (*Still standing at the door.*) I would have been here sooner but I got caught in the mob out there waiting for the fireworks to start. (*Looks around.*) Are you alone?

ARLENE. Yes.

PAUL. Are you sure? (*He peeks around the door.*)

ARLENE. Yes, I'm killing myself. I'm not throwing a party.

PAUL. (*Enters and closes the door.*) Why are you killing yourself? If it's about the divorce, my lawyer's working on it. He's slow. What can I tell you? I'm trying to work it out so that you get everything.

ARLENE. I'd rather not talk about it. I just wanted you to be the last person on earth to see me alive.

PAUL. That's very thoughtful. (PAUL *starts to empty contents of the bag onto the round table. It's a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken and a six-pack of beer.*) I got you some chicken and beer. I thought it might cheer you up.

ARLENE. That's a very nice tie.

PAUL. (*Standing and admiring his own tie.*) Yeah, I'm into colors now.

ARLENE. Very becoming. (*She sits down at the table.*)

PAUL. Yeah, I thought so too. I bought five others just like it.

ARLENE. (*Picking up a piece of chicken.*) You remembered. Extra crispy.

PAUL. (*Takes off his jacket and sits down.*) I missed you, Arlene. It's been a long time.

ARLENE. Yes, it has. Almost six months.

PAUL. Six months, thirteen days and twenty-three hours.

ARLENE. (*Looking through bucket of chicken.*) They gave you all wings.

PAUL. Everyone in this world shafts you. I wanted breasts.

ARLENE. (*Rises.*) Paul, do you still love me?

PAUL. How's that?

ARLENE. Do you still love me? I would like to go out knowing someone still loves me.

PAUL. (*Rises.*) Do I still love you? Do I still love you? Arlene, that's my life loving you. I never stopped loving you. (*Goes to bathroom door and quickly opens it and looks in. He does the same with the closet door.*) Even last December when you drowned me, I never stopped loving you.

ARLENE. Poor Paul. How I must have hurt you. (*She grabs her pills, leaps over the bed and rushes for the window.*) I'm a rotten person. I deserve to die.

PAUL. (*Rushes to her and pulls her away from the window.*) No, no, Arlene. (*He embraces her.*)

ARLENE. Do you want to know my plan? I'm going to take a bottle of sleeping pills, sit on the window sill and stab myself.

PAUL. That's a good plan. That would work. (*He takes the pills from her, looks at vial and puts them in his pants pocket.*)

ARLENE. I didn't want to take any chances. (*They both go back to the table and resume eating.*) Oh, Paul, isn't life strange the way it takes so many twists and turns? It's like a roller coaster. You're up, you're down, you veer to the right, you veer to the left, you hope to God you don't fall out . . .

PAUL. Hey, that's what I'm studying in school.

ARLENE. You're going to school?

PAUL. Two nights a week. I know one of the reasons you left me was because you thought I was shallow. (*Rises.*) I'm not shallow anymore, Arlene. You know what I'm doing? I'm taking a self-realization course.

ARLENE. I'm very impressed.

PAUL. I've got a terrific teacher. You should meet him. You'd love him. His name is Malcolm Dewey. He's only

twenty-five years old and very short, but he seems to know everything. You'd never kill yourself if you met Malcolm Dewey. (*Sits.*) I swear, Arlene, I'm now able to grasp the meaning of life and in only one month.

ARLENE. That must be so encouraging.

PAUL. He sums up his whole philosophy in two words. "Me first!" "If you're good to yourself you're good to the world." A truly healthy, selfish person would never commit suicide. Repeat after me. A truly healthy, selfish person would never commit suicide.

ARLENE and PAUL. A truly healthy, selfish person would never commit suicide.

ARLENE. There's no cole slaw.

PAUL. Another shaft. Next week we go on to physical awareness. He actually gets you to talk to parts of your body. It's great for lonely people. (*To hands.*) Hello hands. How are you? Hellow elbow. Hello knees . . .

ARLENE. That's . . . fascinating. They didn't give you any napkins.

PAUL. Another shaft.

ARLENE. (*Rises.*) I've got Kleenex.

PAUL. (*Rises and follows her.*) I'm a changed man, Arlene. I even stopped drinking.

ARLENE. I didn't know you started. (*She gets Kleenex from her handbag.* PAUL *takes one and the two of them begin wiping each other's mouth.*)

PAUL. Yeah, for a while I was going through a case of beer a day, trying to forget you.

ARLENE. It's a wonder you didn't put on any weight.

PAUL. I cut out potatoes.

ARLENE. You love potatoes.

PAUL. Yes, but potatoes don't help you forget . . . So, it's over. So it's over between you and the dentist . . . It's over.

ARLENE. I haven't told you everything.

PAUL. No kidding. He hurt you, right? Let me see the bruises.

FINISH READING THIS SCRIPT

Visit our website to purchase the full script or to explore other titles.

www.samuelfrench.com
www.samuelfrench.co.uk

To stay up to date on all that we are doing, follow us on social media:



*Titles for licensing are subject to availability depending on your territory.

SF PERUSALS