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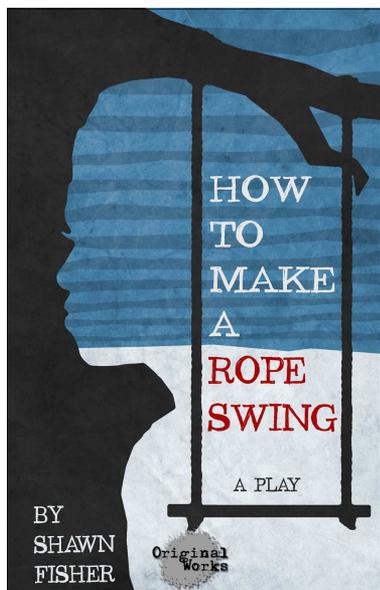
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The Exterminator
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How to Make a Rope Swing

by Shawn Fisher

Synopsis: Delores Wright is the wealthy town matriarch and former elementary school principal and Bo Wells is the custodian who worked under her strict supervision for most of his life. When they find themselves stranded together in the old condemned schoolhouse, their reunion takes a dark turn and they relive their first meet-

ing, decades earlier. It was 1952, when some schools were first integrated in this region nicknamed the “Mississippi of the North”. Bo’s wife, the school’s first black teacher, was found drowned in a nearby river, hanging by her ankle from an old rope swing after it was rumored she had struck a white child. The papers dismissed it as an accident resulting from the “wild and drunken actions of a young colored woman”. When Mrs. Wright reveals that she has dreams about the incident, Bo suspects she knows more than she admits. As the night grows colder and the failing health of Mrs. Wright becomes increasingly evident, Bo tries to understand his wife’s final moments and Mrs. Wright’s role in her death.

Cast Size: 1 Senior Male, 1 Senior Female, 1 Male (20s)

THE EXTERMINATOR

**A Play in Two Acts
by
Robert Alan Margolis**

Characters:

DAISY

A woman in her sixties.

HARRY

Daisy's husband. A man in his sixties or seventies.

BENJIE

Their son. In his twenties or thirties.

SAMANTHA

Benjie's wife. In her twenties or thirties.

THE EXTERMINATOR

A man in his sixties or seventies.

Setting

A house in the country. Stage Right is the living room. A section of the wall and ceiling has caved in, as if from an explosion. Water runs slowly into a large hole in the floor. There are two sofas, Stage and Upstage Right, a high-backed cushioned chair; a bar with assorted liquor and glasses. A stairway winds to an upstairs balcony, off of which are two bedroom doors. A number of dead cats hang in nooses from the living room ceiling. There are also empty nooses hanging. There is a pile of dead cats in the Upstage Right corner. Stage Left is the dining room, a large rectangular mahogany table and four high-backed chairs. The table is set for a party: Hats, favors, balloons, dishes, etc. Hanging from the rear wall is a large banner that reads: *Welcome Home Benjie*. A window sits beneath the banner. Stage Left has a doorway that leads to the kitchen and the out-of-view entrance. Upstage Left is a closet door. The house is in a state of meticulous decay. Even the rubble seems organized.

Time

The near future. Act I takes place in the afternoon. Act II takes place in the evening.

Note

If a balcony is not feasible, the bedrooms can be Upstage Right.

“To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone — to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone: From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of doublethin — greetings!”

- George Orwell, *198*

“A screaming comes across the sky. It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now.”

-Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*

The Exterminator

ACT ONE

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Afternoon. DAISY is cleaning in the living room: Vacuuming, dusting, spraying, sweeping. She wears a dress, black shoes, and surgical gloves. HARRY enters from the kitchen. He wears a raincoat, hat, and boots. He walks, slightly stooped, with the help of a cane. He is carrying a dead cat by the scruff of the neck. DAISY ignores him and keeps cleaning. HARRY drags over a chair and hangs the cat from one of the empty ceiling nooses.)

HARRY: I found another one, poor little kitty.

DAISY: (Still vacuuming.) What was that?

HARRY: (Raising his voice.) I said I found him by the lake!

DAISY: (Still vacuuming.) You didn't go in, did you?

HARRY: Go in? Do I look like a complete idiot? (DAISY keeps vacuuming.) Do you think I've lost my mind? Well, I haven't. Not yet. Not by a long shot. I'm still on the ball. Still ticking. I can still see the forest from the trees. Don't forget who's who around this place! Do you hear me?! I'm talking to you! (She continues to ignore him.) What time's he coming?

DAISY: What's that?

HARRY: I said, when's he...

DAISY: (*Shouting.*) I've got a cake in the oven!

HARRY: Good.

DAISY: Chocolate.

HARRY: That's my favorite.

(*DAISY stares at him.*)

DAISY: You're dripping.

(*HARRY looks down. He removes his rain gear. Underneath he wears a wet suit. Flippers hang from his belt. He removes this. Underneath the wet suit he is wearing Bermuda shorts, a bright Hawaiian shirt, black socks and sandals.*)

HARRY: Not that I didn't want to go in. It looked so appetizing. To just dip my toe, for a second, would've been...

DAISY: Shut up, Louis! Will you please shut up! Stop blabbering and just settle down until I finish. I've heard enough out of you for one lifetime. Why don't you have a drink? You're all strung up.

HARRY: That's a good idea. I think I'll do just that.

(*He goes to the bar and makes himself a drink. DAISY puts away the vacuum. HARRY sits in the large chair, sipping.*)

HARRY: Who's Louis?

DAISY: What's that?

HARRY: I said who's Louis?

DAISY: Louis?

HARRY: Yeah. You called me Louis.

DAISY: Did I?

HARRY: Yeah.

DAISY: A friend. He...knew me...a long time ago.

HARRY: I don't remember him.

DAISY: (*Becomes caught up in the memory.*) I met him at a party, years ago. Too much to drink. Stumbling. I tried to stop him but someone had pulled the plug. Louis knew that. His hands wet, sticky. Each finger alert, almost knowledgeable. I cried out. My god, he was tall. His hands, aching, tried to move me. It was over too rapidly, even for someone as carefree as I was back then. But he held me tight, tight, my frail body gripping the air. Hand me that broom, will you?

HARRY: The name doesn't ring a bell.

(*He hands her the broom.*)

DAISY: Give me a hand with the couch.

(*They move the Stage Right couch so DAISY can clean. They find a dead cat. DAISY picks it up and tosses it on the pile. She begins to sweep.*)

HARRY: This sofa's a tough old bird. (*He strokes the couch tenderly.*) Good value. Last a lifetime. I remember this couch.

(He slowly looks up from the couch to where DAISY is bent over, cleaning. He creeps up behind her. He pinches her bottom.)

DAISY: Aaaah! What the hell...?

HARRY: C'mon Mary, and do your penance.

(He grabs her. He kisses her roughly. She tries to squirm free.)

DAISY: Get away from me you old sick bastard! Get your disgusting paws off me!

(HARRY tears open the front of her dress. DAISY shrieks.)

HARRY: Oh my! C'mon Mary...

DAISY: *(Interrupting.)* I'm not...

(She knees him in the groin.)

HARRY: Uhhh!

DAISY: ...your Mary. *(HARRY falls to his knees.)* You snake!

(HARRY glares up at her, his mouth open, breathing heavily. The doorbell rings.)

DAISY: Oh, god. He's here. *(HARRY doesn't move.)*
Get up, you idiot!

(HARRY painfully tries to get up. He is too slow for her. DAISY grabs his arm and drags him violently behind the couch. They crouch there, hiding. The bell rings again.)

They don't respond. The bell rings twice more, rapidly. There is the sound of an outside door opening & closing. A dining room door squeaks slowly open. BENJIE sticks his head in. DAISY simultaneously sneaks a look over the couch. She remains watching throughout the following.)

BENJIE: Hello? Anybody home? That's funny.

(BENJIE places a suitcase and a duffel bag inside the dining room. He is thin with close-cropped hair. He exits briefly. He returns carrying SAMANTHA in his arms. She is wearing a short skirt and black tights. She is holding a dead cat. BENJIE places her on the edge of the dining room table.)

BENJIE : *(Whispering.)* There. Now it's official.

SAMANTHA: Not yet it isn't.

BENJIE: What do you mean? Oh.

(His eyes light up. He moves to her.)

SAMANTHA: Wait. *(He starts to kiss her.)* Oh, god.
Wait.

(He hikes up SAMANTHA's dress and climbs on the table with her. She begins to unbuckle his pants.)

SAMANTHA: Oh, don't. Not here.

BENJIE: Shhh!

(They begin to make love on the table. BENJIE shoves all the plates, party favors, etc. onto the floor to make room.)

SAMANTHA: Oh, god.

BENJIE: Yes.

SAMANTHA: Oh.

BENJIE: Uh-huh.

SAMANTHA: Yeah.

BENJIE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. That's it. That's...it.

SAMANTHA: Oh, oh, oh, yes.

BENJIE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

SAMANTHA: Yes.

BENJIE: Uh-huh.

SAMANTHA: Yes.

BENJIE: Uh-huh. That's right. That's...right!

SAMANTHA: (*Whispering.*) Tell me I'm a slut.

BENJIE: What?

SAMANTHA: Tell me...I'm a slut.

(*The following is like a game they've played before, tenderly.*)

BENJIE: You're a slut.

SAMANTHA: Tell me I'm a slut and a whore.

BENJIE: You are. You are.

SAMANTHA: Am I?

BENJIE: (*Tenderly.*) Yes. You're my slut. You're my whore.

SAMANTHA: Am I bad?

BENJIE: (*Tenderly.*) Very bad. Very, very bad.

SAMANTHA: Say it!

BENJIE: (*Whispering.*) Bad girl. Bad girl.

SAMANTHA: No. I'm not.

BENJIE: Yes. You're bad.

SAMANTHA: Nooooo!

BENJIE: (*Whispering.*) Bad, bad, bad!

SAMANTHA: No, I'm not. I'm not bad. I'm not. Noooooh, god! I'm... Oh, god! Oh, god!!!

BENJIE: Yes...Yes!!

SAMANTHA: Oh, god! Ooooooh!

(*She drops the cat.*)

BENJIE: Oh. Oh! Oooooh!! (*They both laugh. Breathing heavily.*) Well, how was that?

SAMANTHA: Now, it's official.

BENJIE: Good.

SAMANTHA: Help me up.

(BENJIE gets up. He lifts her off the table. They adjust their clothing. They kiss. She lights a cigarette. A beat. HARRY emerges slowly from behind the couch. He stands there. BENJIE becomes aware of HARRY's presence. They stare at each other. BENJIE and HARRY edge warily towards each other. DAISY watches from behind the couch. When they get within a few feet of each other, they fall into wrestler's crouches and slowly circle each other for a few moments. Then they pounce. They grab each other's head and kiss intensely on the lips. They slowly slide to the ground while still kissing. When they reach the ground, they quickly break. Then they attack each other and start to wrestle violently. DAISY now jumps out from behind the couch, her fists and teeth clenched, shouting encouragement to HARRY. SAMANTHA leans calmly against the dining room table, smoking and watching.)

DAISY: C'mon Harry. That's it! That's it!! C'mon, you old slug. Give it to him! Hit him where it hurts! Hit him where it... Goddamnit! Move your little lard ass. Kill him!! Kill the son of a...

(BENJIE has forced HARRY onto the ground and is trying to pin him. DAISY drops to the floor next to HARRY and leans in, screaming in HARRY's face.)

DAISY: C'mon, get up you old...You can do it! Don't give up! Don't give...C'mon, Harry! Fight!! Fight!! C'mooooon!! You stupid old...

(BENJIE pins HARRY and smacks his hand on the floor. DAISY simultaneously smacks her hand on the floor.)

DAISY: Shit!!!

(DAISY gets up in disgust and moves away. BENJIE lies there for a moment. Then slowly gets up and walks towards DAISY. HARRY sees this. He starts to get up and sneak towards BENJIE from behind. He rises up to pound on BENJIE with his cane. At the last moment BENJIE, without looking back, kicks HARRY sharply in the groin. (HARRY doubles over onto his knees in pain.)

HARRY: Uhhh!

BENJIE: *(Gently.)* C'mon, dad. You always taught me to play by the rules, didn't you? Now fair is fair.

(He slaps HARRY violently with the back of his hand. HARRY is knocked to the floor, unconscious. BENJIE now turns back to DAISY.)

BENJIE: Hello, mother.

DAISY: Hello, Benjie. Welcome home.

(He reaches out his hand. They shake hands formally.)

BENJIE: Oh. I'm sorry. I haven't introduced you to my wife. This is Samantha.

DAISY: Your wife?

BENJIE: Yes. We're actually just newlyweds.

DAISY: *(Expressionless.)* Congratulations.

(SAMANTHA walks over to DAISY.)

SAMANTHA: It's a pleasure to meet you. Benjie has told me so much about you that I feel as if we're already aware of each other.

DAISY: Oh?

SAMANTHA: He told me that you kept the cleanest house in the neighborhood, that you were very thorough.

DAISY: Thank you, Benjie.

BENJIE: The place was always spotless. I can testify to that.

(He raises his right hand as if being sworn in.)

DAISY: I run a tight ship around here. There is no room for error in our continuing search for human perfection, especially during these unsettling times.

BENJIE: Why thank you, mother.

SAMANTHA: Oh, I just remembered. *(She goes and retrieves the dead cat she had arrived with.)* I found this outside. I didn't know...

DAISY: *(Interrupting.)* Just throw it on the pile. We've been having a small rodent problem lately. Somebody hasn't been doing their fair share in the war effort.

(SAMANTHA hands the cat to DAISY. DAISY flings it violently against the wall and it falls onto the pile of cats.)

DAISY: Somebody has been slacking off.

SAMANTHA: I've noticed that. The number of slackers has become quite evident in the major industrial zones.

DAISY: Is that so?

SAMANTHA: Yes. The uncleanliness is very distressing. And benign trauma medicine no longer seems to be doing the trick. (*DAISY snaps her fingers.*) That's it exactly! A little more discipline. A little more toe the line, and everyone would have enough food on the table.

(During the preceding dialogue, BENJIE has gotten down on his hands and knees, looking for something while whistling.)

DAISY: What's he doing?

SAMANTHA: Benjie, your mother would like to know what you're doing.

BENJIE: (*Looking under the sofa.*) I was just looking for Bootsie. Do you know where she's at? (*He looks up. DAISY doesn't answer.*) Have you seen Bootsie? I'm asking you a question. (*He goes right up to DAISY.*) Where the hell is Bootsie, you disgusting old sow?

(DAISY stares at him and then marches to the cat pile. She shoves her arm into the center and pulls out a dead cat with a red bow around its neck. She brings it over and holds it out to BENJIE. He slowly takes BOOTSIE. He holds him with an outstretched hand, stares at him, and breaks down sobbing while he falls to his knees.)

BENJIE: Somebody is going to pay for this. Somebody is going to die for this.

DAISY: (*Sharply.*) Benjamin! (*He looks up.*) Big boys do not cry.

BENJIE: (*Like a lost little boy.*) I'm sorry, mommy.

DAISY: We did not raise you to be a sniffer.

(*BENJIE wipes his eyes.*)

BENJIE: I'm sorry. I lost control.

DAISY: Well, don't.

BENJIE: It won't ever happen again.

DAISY: Good. Now get up and help me with your father.

(*DAISY takes Bootsie and hands it to SAMANTHA. DAISY and BENJIE drag HARRY to the couch.*)

SAMANTHA: Maybe we could have it stuffed. That's it. It could be cryogenically resurrected. I know a great place in the city that will have Bootsie looking better than new. It'll be just like your old companion again. Would you like that, Benjie?

(*SAMANTHA places Bootsie in their duffel bag. DAISY pulls a letter out from her dress.*)

DAISY: We've contacted all the appropriate authorities. They've stated in writing that a government employee will be coming by to determine the exact cause of the outbreak, that they've been made aware of the... (*She reads from the letter.*) "...accumulated seismic disequilibrium." We've been waiting for them.

(DAISY exits to the kitchen. HARRY wakes up.)

HARRY: Huh!

BENJIE: Hello, dad.

HARRY: Hello, son. Have you been here long?

BENJIE: Just a few minutes. I didn't want to wake you.

HARRY: That was very considerate. You're a considerate boy.

SAMANTHA: *(Reaching to shake HARRY's hand.)*
Hello, I'm Samantha.

(HARRY looks at her hand. He glares at her.)

HARRY: The name doesn't ring a bell.

BENJIE: My wife, dad.

HARRY: Doesn't mean a goddamn thing to me, I said!
You're barking up the wrong tree. *(He barks.)* Aarf!
Aarf!

SAMANTHA: Meow!

HARRY: *(Giggling.)* That's my girl! *(HARRY takes her hand, sniffs it, and rubs it against his cheek.)* You've found yourself a real woman here. She's on the ball.

BENJIE: Of course she is, dad. She married me, didn't she?

HARRY: Well, I don't know about that. Will you be staying long?

SAMANTHA: Yes.

BENJIE: It all depends on conditions here, dad. It's a question of variety. I've been away for a long time. Now I'm back in the swing of things, looking for growth and successful business ventures, a little capital fixation to start out with, you know what I mean? (*He leans into HARRY and speaks with quiet intensity.*) You see I've been away for a long time, and now I'm back.

HARRY: Well, I'm sorry you won't be able to stay. Your mother will be very disappointed. It would've been nice to reminisce about the good old days.

SAMANTHA: Before the Release, you mean?

HARRY: I wasn't talking to you. I was talking to my son. Do you mind?

SAMANTHA: Before the onset of the Great Sickness. Is that the period you're referring to? Or are you talking about the War and its expected aftermath: Epidermal eruptions, reduced life expectancy, dementia, rapid increases in the malignancy-to-tumor household ratios?

HARRY: She's got a filthy mouth on her.

BENJIE: She's a historian, dad. And besides, I sense that she likes you. She feels she can open up to you. Reveal herself.

SAMANTHA: Peel off a few layers.

BENJIE: Become an intimate member of the family.

SAMANTHA: That's it! I really feel at home with you,
Uncle Harry.

BENJIE: Then it's settled.

(BENJIE goes to get his luggage. DAISY enters from the kitchen with cake and sparklers. There are shouts from BENJIE and SAMANTHA. Wild applause. DAISY carefully sets the cake down on the dining room table.)

BENJIE: Bravo! Bravo!

DAISY: I made this from scratch as a festivity enhancer.

SAMANTHA: Splendid!

BENJIE: You've outdone yourself, mother! It looks magnificent.

(BENJIE examines the cake. Scoops up some icing with his finger and brings it to his mouth enthusiastically while DAISY looks on expectantly. He stops. He sniffs it.)

BENJIE: It's chocolate. *(He examines it carefully.)* It's chocolate, isn't it? I'm allergic to chocolate, don't you remember? It causes a wide variety of morbid symptoms in me. All of my orifices become inflamed. Ulcerated. I experience periods of depression, joint stiffness and penile arrhythmia. But you knew all that already, didn't you? Didn't you?! *(He moves menacingly towards DAISY. A beat.)* Yet still you found the time to make and bake it and for that I am eternally grateful. It gladdens my heart to see you so productive at such an advanced age, the little woman so nurturing and fecund under difficult conditions.

(SAMANTHA sucks the chocolate off BENJIE's finger. BENJIE takes the luggage upstairs.)

DAISY: *(Shouting.)* Wake up, Harry!

HARRY: Huh!

DAISY: Your son just gave me a compliment. You were too busy dribbling onto the couch to hear it so I thought I'd kill two birds with one stone. *(She holds a slice of cake out to HARRY.)* Do you want a slice of cake?

SAMANTHA: *(Taking the cake.)* Thank you.

(DAISY glares at her. She cuts a slice for herself. They eat while HARRY stares hungrily.)

SAMANTHA: It's delicious.

DAISY: You've known my son for a long time?

SAMANTHA: No. We just met.

DAISY: Is that so?

HARRY: Fly by night, eh? *(He flaps his arms.)* Caw!
Caw!

SAMANTHA: *(Ignoring him.)* I'd never seen him before today, actually. His voice was familiar. But the details, the smell of his body, the protuberances, came as a complete surprise to me.

DAISY: I thought you were married.

SAMANTHA: Oh, we are. Husband and wife. A man-woman conglomerate.

HARRY: Where's your ring?

SAMANTHA: (*A beat. SAMANTHA turns slowly to him.*) What did you say?

DAISY: It's a simple question.

HARRY: Yes, it is.

DAISY: Shut up, Harry. So?

SAMANTHA: I lost it in the war. You have to understand. There were men everywhere, groping, touching, playing games with our frail bodies. We gave ourselves to them sometimes. A kind of penance.

(*BENJIE emerges from the bedroom and watches.*)

SAMANTHA: Like my father. Daddy. He used to touch me down there. His hands would explore the terrain. He'd move around, become knowledgeable. Mommy didn't know. She was asleep, she said. So daddy... touched. After that, I was numb down there for a long time. Oh, I could do it. I'd let men visit down there. I'd let them do me, play their pretend games. But I'd watch from the window: Touch and groan, touch and moan, touch and own, dry as a bone. Until Benjie. With Benjie, it was different. I met him at the supermarket. He brushed up against me as he walked by. It was electric. We talked. We went somewhere. I felt myself getting wet for the first time. Strange. Wet, down there. Ticking, down there. The movement of his body, tick-tock, tick-tock. My legs,

my thighs, my own body touching his! I could feel that! A wall of glass had been removed. We were husband and wife. Our orgasms happened. Oh, god, it was glorious!

Then we dressed. We got in my car. We drove straight to your house. We arrived.

(HARRY has fallen asleep. DAISY is expressionless.)

DAISY: *(Moving rapidly to the kitchen.)* I'm so sorry you won't be able to stay. I'll just fix you something for your trip.

BENJIE: Please don't go to any trouble on our account, mother. We'll be using my old bedroom, of course. If you could just dust and scrub and fumigate in there, put on a clean supply of sheets and blankets, and remove all extraneous debris before nightfall, that would be great.

SAMANTHA: I'm a vegetarian, so all animal and dairy products will have to be expunged from the premises and the fridge will need to be sterilized. We can decide as a family what day would be most suitable for the group fast.

BENJIE: Samantha, why don't you give mother a hand with the kitchen reorganization.

SAMANTHA: Certainly.

(SAMANTHA and DAISY exit to the kitchen. BENJIE watches HARRY sleeping. He walks over to him. Reaches out as if to touch his face gently. Stops. He carefully takes HARRY's cane, which he uses during the scene. He gently leans close to HARRY.)

BENJIE: (*Shouting.*) Wake up!

HARRY: Huh!

BENJIE: (*Gently.*) Hello, dad.

HARRY: Hello, son. Have you been here long?

BENJIE: Just a few minutes. I didn't want to...

HARRY: (*Interrupting.*) That was very considerate!

BENJIE: Listen, dad. I thought we could have a man-to-man, shoot-the-shit, father-son thing to get reacquainted. You see... I've been away and now I'm back.

HARRY: (*Harshly.*) I'm busy right now. Don't bother me.

BENJIE: (*Like a child.*) I wonder if you could help me out, daddy. I need your advice on something that only a father would know. I think Samantha touched on it a little while ago, and I was hoping to ask you about it. (*HARRY starts to fall asleep.*) Ya see...Wake up!!

HARRY: (*Bolts awake.*) Huh!!

BENJIE: (*Like a child.*) Ya see, what I was wondering is this: When I was a little boy you used to come into my room at night. Do you remember, daddy? When you used to tuck me in? At night? In my old room? When you used to tuck me in, daddy? When you used to move your fingers along the sheets? In my room, daddy? (*HARRY nods off.*) Wake up!!

HARRY: Huh!!

BENJIE: When you used to squeeze me, daddy? Do you remember when you used to squeeze me? When your body would tremble against the sheets and your mouth would salivate inarticulate cries in the middle of the night, and you placed your body against my body in hard, pressing annihilation? Wake up!!

HARRY: Huh!!

BENJIE: When you used to initiate me, daddy, in secret ritual devices... (*Benjie imitates S.O.S. Morse code.*) ...signaling "deedeedeet-dee-deedeedeet. Deedeedeet-dee-deedeedeet?" When you did all that, daddy, would you label your behavior as: 1) an involuntary spasm? 2) a premeditated act of divine retribution? or 3) none of the above?

(*Silence*)

HARRY: (*Quietly.*) You ungrateful swine.

BENJIE: I was just curious, that's all.

HARRY: We should have aborted you when we had the chance.

BENJIE: Being away gave me a lot of time to think about all this.

HARRY: I disown you. You're disowned. I don't know you, you disturbed...

BENJIE: (*Interrupting.*) I just wanted to get the facts straight, daddy.

HARRY: They should have kept you up there for life. They should have put you to sleep like a diseased animal, like the cancerous mongrel that you are. They should have...

BENJIE: (*Interrupting.*) Because I'd like to accumulate some bedtime stories to tell my kids. Some real life adventure stories.

HARRY: Get out of here! Get out of my house you rancid piece of pockmarked vermin! Leave my house!

BENJIE: Because I'd like to set... (*BENJIE opens a switchblade to HARRY's throat.*) ...the record straight, daddy. (*He begins to unbutton HARRY's shirt.*) It's important to get the facts straight.

HARRY: (*Terrified.*) Nnnn...huh! Nnn...huh!
Nnn...huh!

(*BENJIE sings softly, as if to himself.*)

BENJIE: "Don't be cruel...to a heart that's true."

HARRY: Oh, god. Oh, my god.

BENJIE: (*Whispering.*) Because I'd really like to know, daddy.

HARRY: My father....My father.

(*HARRY faints. SAMANTHA sticks her head in from the kitchen.*)

SAMANTHA: Am I interrupting?

(BENJIE discretely puts away the knife and returns HARRY's cane.)

BENJIE: No. We've just finished. Dad's napping.

SAMANTHA: Good. *(BENJIE sits lost in thought. SAMANTHA approaches.)* How are you?

BENJIE: I don't know.

SAMANTHA: Do you want to...

BENJIE: *(Interrupting.)* No. I don't know.

SAMANTHA: What's wrong?

BENJIE: Nothing.

SAMANTHA: You seem...

BENJIE: *(Sharply.)* What?! What do I seem?

SAMANTHA: I didn't mean anything...

BENJIE: *(Interrupting.)* You didn't?

SAMANTHA: I just...

BENJIE: *(Interrupting.)* You didn't mean to...

SAMANTHA: *(Interrupting.)* No. I only wanted...

BENJIE: *(Interrupting.)* Why must you always interfere?! No one's asked for your opinion.

SAMANTHA: All right.

(A beat. SAMANTHA sits facing away from BENJIE. BENJIE sits facing HARRY. During BENJIE's speech, SAMANTHA slowly turns towards BENJIE. DAISY will enter from the kitchen.)

BENJIE: I'm sorry. I don't know what it is. Loose ends. Periods of putrefaction. *(A beat.)* I had a turtle, once. When I was little. We came home, found him belly up in the glass zoo. *(He laughs.)* I touched it. Sticky. Smelled of... I cried. *(He laughs.)* Can you imagine how ridiculous? Crying over a dead turtle.

(He is laughing hysterically. SAMANTHA comes over and touches his shoulder. BENJIE continues to face HARRY.)

BENJIE: Don't touch me.

(SAMANTHA rubs his shoulders tenderly. She kisses his head. BENJIE makes no effort to stop her.)

BENJIE: Please. Don't. *(She continues, tenderly.)* Don't do that. *(BENJIE is reliving something.)* Oh, god. Get the fuck off me. *(Quietly.)* Stop it. Please. Get your fucking hands off me.

(BENJIE has clenched his fists. His speech has shifted to HARRY, who remains sleeping. BENJIE is completely immersed in the memory.)

BENJIE: You prick. Don't touch me. Don't touch me you son of a bitch. Who the hell do you think you are? You son of a... Goddamn you...Goddamn you to hell! *(He gets down on his knees in front of HARRY.)* You son of a...Who the hell do you think you are? Wake up! Do you hear me! Wake up! You son of a bitch! Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!

(HARRY sleeps. SAMANTHA stands behind BENJIE, touching him gently. DAISY watches from the kitchen door. LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE.)

END OF ACT I, SCENE 1

ACT ONE

Scene 2

(AT RISE: *As soon as the lights have faded to black, they immediately come back on. It is a split second later. With the abrupt return of light, there is simultaneously an explosive Whoosh! and a massive cloud of white gas explodes into the house from the kitchen, bursts open the door, and obscures the entire downstairs. DAISY is knocked to the ground. As the gas begins to clear, we see that DAISY has crawled under the dining room table. SAMANTHA has dropped behind BENJIE, and has her arms wrapped around him. BENJIE kneels, his face pressed against HARRY's feet. HARRY continues to sleep, mouth ajar. At the doorway, a man has entered wearing a bright white asbestos suit with headgear. He carries a gun-like apparatus attached to a tank which is strapped to his back. He carries an attaché case. Cavalry music is playing loudly from a speaker on his belt. As he enters, he shoots occasional vapors from the gun. He shuts off the music. Everyone is choking.*)

EXTERMINATOR: Did somebody call the exterminator?

We received word about a rodent problem in this sector. I was sent from the Ministry. Dispatched is probably a better word. Dispatched forthwith. I've got the documentation right here. (*He removes a form from his briefcase.*) Up to date. Correctly signed and sealed. Stamped. Passed through the hands of the proper authorities. Caressed. We're sparing no expense in our attempts to eradicate this sector's ongoing biological dilemma. We've got the manpower. We've got the credentials. And we're ready to kick some butt.

(He gives one final, sweeping squirt of his gun. He removes his gear. He is very well preserved. He has the look of a TV evangelist, a network news anchorman, and a hipster. He is wearing a zoot suit and tie. He is charismatic, charming and seductive: An "entertainer." He does a quick dance.)

EXTERMINATOR: We've tap-danced our way across hell just to be with you all today, folks. Is there a Daisy here?

(He sniffs around the room like an animal.)

EXTERMINATOR: C'mon now. Don't be shy. Here, Daisy. Heeere, Daisy.

(He sniffs something by the table. He smiles.) Fee, Fie, Foe, Fum, I smell the blood of...

(His arm abruptly shoots down and grabs DAISY's leg. He drags her out.)

EXTERMINATOR: Gotcha!

DAISY: Aaah!!

HARRY: Huh!

(HARRY wakes up and reflexively thrashes his cane through the air like a sword, above the heads of BENJIE and SAMANTHA.)

EXTERMINATOR: *(To DAISY.)* There you go. Good girl.

(He pats her on the head. He shows her the forms.)

EXTERMINATOR: Someone will have to sign these before I can start.

SAMANTHA: But you've already started, haven't you, without her signature. And now we've all been contaminated by that poison.

EXTERMINATOR: What? This spray? Only a harmless room freshener. Completely safe and natural.

BENJIE: Then why were you wearing that mask when you sprayed it?

EXTERMINATOR: You must be Benjamin. We've heard so much about you. It's a pleasure.

(He holds out his hand. BENJIE refuses to shake.)

EXTERMINATOR: You're the talk of the Ministry. Did you know that? A real success story. An honest-to-goodness Horatio Alger. When they first brought you in, you looked...Well, we've all seen the photographs.

SAMANTHA: I don't think...

EXTERMINATOR: *(Interrupting.)* We've met? No. Quite right. Samantha, isn't it? One of the memory people, I believe.

SAMANTHA: That's right. I'm a historian with the Office of Public Awareness and Accountability.

EXTERMINATOR: I know. I've read your work. A little unorthodox, but shows great promise. *(He clicks his heels.)* Enchanté, Mademoiselle.

(He kisses her hand. Rubs his lips on it. SAMANTHA hesitates. Then slowly pulls away her hand.)

SAMANTHA: That's Madame.

EXTERMINATOR: Oh?

BENJIE: We're newlyweds.

EXTERMINATOR: Really?

HARRY: There's no ring.

(The EXTERMINATOR turns to HARRY.)

EXTERMINATOR: Ah! The family patriarch. A great honor, sir. If you would kindly just sign this form, right...here, we can get started.

(HARRY takes the form. Starts to read it.)

HARRY: Wait a second...This says...I'm not signing anything until...

EXTERMINATOR: *(Interrupting.)* Sign it now, you incompetent old bag of wind!!

HARRY: *(Meekly.)* All right. *(He quickly signs.)* How's that?

EXTERMINATOR: *(Gently.)* Thank you so much.

(The EXTERMINATOR puts away the form.)

SAMANTHA: Have they determined what's causing the infestation?

EXTERMINATOR: Thank you for asking. We suspect it's the Jews, although our investigation is not complete. (*He snaps open his briefcase.*) As you all know, in the making of the Jewish Matz—Ah, (*He pulls out a slice of bright red matzah.*) ...the blood of Christian children is absolutely essential. We speculate that rodents and other sub-human, neo-hybrid life forms are being coopted by the Jewish race as an alternative source of spiritual plasma. The blood is drained from the bodies of the still-living creatures and siphoned into kosher glass vials that have been specially blessed by the Jewish rabies, their...religious leaders. What makes the situation all the more difficult is that Jews tend to reproduce at a feverish rate so that reliable information is very difficult to come by.

(*He replaces the matzah in his case.*)

BENJIE: I used to be a Jew.

DAISY: Benjamin!

BENJIE: I said used to be, that's all. I fell in with the wrong crowd for a while, in my youth. Don't you remember, mother?

DAISY: I have no idea what you're referring to.

BENJIE: Pieces of our past, linked together. Some stored chain of events. (*He begins to sing in Hebrew.*):
"Boruch Ata Adonai,
Elohaynu melech haolam,
Asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav...

(*He hesitates, can't remember the last line*)

BENJIE & SAMANTHA: (*Singing softly.*) Shel
Ha...nu...kah. Ah...men.

(*BENJIE stares at SAMANTHA.*)

HARRY: (*To the EXTERMINATOR.*) I apologize for my
son. He still suffers from occasional hallucinations.

EXTERMINATOR: Perfectly understandable. Relapses
are not uncommon. After all, our rehabilitation proce-
dures are still at the infant stage. (*The EXTERMINA-
TOR rubs his eyes like an infant, crying.*) Wah! Wah!

HARRY: (*Giggling.*) That's very good!

(*The EXTERMINATOR moves to HARRY.*)

EXTERMINATOR: Goo-goo, gah-gah! Goo-goo, gah-
gah!!

(*He sits on HARRY's lap and sucks HARRY's thumb.*)

HARRY: (*Beaming.*) That's my boy! He's an entertainer.

EXTERMINATOR: That's right! Very good. Very per-
ceptive. (*He jumps up, grabbing HARRY's cane.*) So
why don't you all sit back and enjoy the show.

(*DAISY tries to get up off the floor. HARRY falls asleep.*)

EXTERMINATOR: (*To DAISY.*) Allow me.

(*He takes her hand and gently lifts her up.*)

DAISY: (*Dazed.*) Thank you. I seem to...

EXTERMINATOR: ...have torn your dress. I see. (*He caresses the front of DAISY's dress.*) And such a beautiful dress. What a shame. It's all...torn up.

DAISY: My husband...

EXTERMINATOR: (*Interrupting.*) Don't worry. I think I have just what you need right here...Yes, indeedy.

(*He pulls out a needle and thread from his pocket.*)

DAISY: You've come equipped.

EXTERMINATOR: We aim to please. (*He begins to stitch her dress, tenderly.*) This little piggy went to market. And this little piggy stayed home. And this little piggy had roast beef. And this little piggy had none. And this little piggy went "wee wee wee wee", and couldn't find his way back home.

(*DAISY and THE EXTERMINATOR begin to kiss.*)

BENJIE: Mother!

(*HARRY wakes up and thrashes his arm through the air reflexively as if he has a sword.*)

HARRY: Huh! (*Realizes he doesn't have his cane.*)
Where's my...? (*He sees them kissing. Stares.*)
What's that? What's she doing? Where's my...? Give me my... What the hell is she doing?

(*The EXTERMINATOR stops. Turns to HARRY. A beat.*)

EXTERMINATOR: Goo-goo! Gah-gah!

(A beat. Then HARRY giggles.)

HARRY: Oh. It's a play. We're at the theater. *(He looks around. Then back to them, kissing.)* Atta boy! Give it to her! Give it...Oh my. Will you look at that? She's...Oh my.

(HARRY laughs wildly. The EXTERMINATOR lifts DAISY up. Continues to kiss her as he carries her to the upstairs bedroom and closes the door. HARRY slowly forces himself to stand. He watches them leave. His face contorts, conflicted. A beat. He begins to applaud wildly.)

HARRY: Bravo! Bravo! It's a happy ending. It's a...Encore! Encore! It's a...It's a... *(Slowly the smile leaves his face. He looks confused.)* Where's my cane? Where's my...?
(He slumps back in his chair.) Where's...?

(He falls asleep. SAMANTHA leans against BENJIE, touching her dress. BENJIE leans against HARRY.)

SAMANTHA: Do you want to play?

BENJIE: What do you mean?

(She reaches to touch BENJIE's face.)

SAMANTHA: Let's go swimming.

BENJIE: Swimming?

SAMANTHA: Let's go and take a dip. Just the two of us.

BENJIE: We didn't bring our suits.

SAMANTHA: We don't need suits. We're married now.
We can go in as we are.

BENJIE: I don't know. I don't think it's safe.

SAMANTHA: Of course it is. It's very safe there by the lake. Calm. Stretches of sand. The water pressing against the shoreline, like fingers running along the beach. The sound of children, a rowboat moving up and down in the water. Our two bodies floating with the...

BENJIE: (*Interrupting.*) It's unclean.

SAMANTHA: No, it isn't. I've already...

BENJIE: (*Interrupting.*) It's diseased. There's something wrong down there. I'd meant to tell you sooner but otherwise engaged. Circumstantial evidence, I realize that. You deal with facts and figures. Dates of conquest. But this is a question of interpretation. Loose fitting garments. Medical examinations. It's called "Terminated Life Expectancy." The water filtered and re-filtered in every attempt to reconcile contradictory points of view. But someone was lying. That was understood. Someone had been altering documents. I should have spoken sooner, but now it seems...

(They begin separately, but slowly come to face each other in a kind of ritual)

SAMANTHA: (*Gently.*): Too late?

BENJIE: Yes.

SAMANTHA: Too late...

BENJIE: to speak out...

SAMANTHA: You want...

BENJIE: to question...

SAMANTHA: your sense of...

BENJIE: a kind of diminished responsibility.

SAMANTHA: The memory shield...

BENJIE: did much of it, it...

SAMANTHA: damaged me...

BENJIE: more than I could have...

SAMANTHA: understood.

BENJIE: Of course, I was...

SAMANTHA: young, then.

BENJIE: Yes.

SAMANTHA: Younger than...

BENJIE: God knew! He...

SAMANTHA: understood everything, he...

BENJIE: punished me over...

SAMANTHA: and over. I said

BENJIE: my god, my god, it hurts to...

SAMANTHA: touch you.

BENJIE: Reaching some...

SAMANTHA: barrier.

BENJIE: Yes.

SAMANTHA: Too many...

BENJIE: hurt fingers...

SAMANTHA: speaking incoherently.

BENJIE: Too many...

SAMANTHA: hurt fingers.

(A longer beat)

SAMANTHA: I'm going to go now.

BENJIE: All right.

SAMANTHA: To take a dip. I'll be back soon.

BENJIE: Of course.

SAMANTHA: Will you miss me?

BENJIE: Yes.

SAMANTHA: Good. *(A beat.)* Come here.

(They hold each other. Kiss tenderly. SAMANTHA goes to leave.)

BENJIE: Hurry back.

SAMANTHA: I will.

(As she exits, SAMANTHA turns once to look at BENJIE. He is already looking away, lost in thought. SAMANTHA hesitates, then exits through the kitchen. A silence. The EXTERMINATOR emerges from the upstairs bedroom. He is tucking in his shirt and zipping up his pants.)

EXTERMINATOR: Where's the little woman?

BENJIE: She's gone for a swim.

EXTERMINATOR: How refreshing.

BENJIE: I thought the water was...

EXTERMINATOR: *(Interrupting.)* Delightful! Magnificent! Pristine beauty!

BENJIE: I've heard otherwise.

EXTERMINATOR: Of course you have.

BENJIE: Unhealthy levels of...

EXTERMINATOR: *(Interrupting.)*: Germ warfare! A thing of the past. This is the modern era. A land of technological miracles. Communism is dead, you know.

BENJIE: Fecal levels were reported to be...

EXTERMINATOR: (*Interrupting.*) Dirty jokes. Nothing more than...

BENJIE: (*Interrupting.*) Rashes. Hepatitis. Viral meningitis. Genetically altered limbs. Sea corpses. Splayed fingers and toes. Infants without mouths. Infants who...

EXTERMINATOR: (*Interrupting.*) Goo-goo! Gah-gah!

(*HARRY giggles in his sleep.*)

BENJIE: That doesn't work with me.

EXTERMINATOR: You're a very smart boy. Very gifted.

BENJIE: Who are you?

EXTERMINATOR: You've got a lot on the ball. You're...

BENJIE: (*Interrupting.*): What do you want?

(*The EXTERMINATOR slowly stoops over. He hobbles on HARRY's cane. He cups his ear. He begins to speak like an old man.*)

EXTERMINATOR: Eh? What's that, sonny? Could you speak up? (*He moves towards BENJIE, who stiffens.*) Will you give an old man a chance? Give an old man a place to rest his weary bones, would ya? (*He beckons with his finger.*) Come here, little boy.

(*BENJIE is frozen in place.*)

BENJIE: Go...away.

(The EXTERMINATOR drops to the floor. He crawls and gropes towards BENJIE.)

EXTERMINATOR: *(Pathetically)* Come on. Help me out. Please. You're so strong and I'm so tired.

(BENJIE stands facing the audience, paralyzed, as if re-living something.)

BENJIE: *(Quietly.)* Go away. Please.

EXTERMINATOR: You can help me, can't you? *(He rubs BENJIE's feet and legs.)*
Goo-goo. Gah-gah.

(HARRY giggles in his sleep.)

BENJIE: Don't.

(The EXTERMINATOR begins to move up BENJIE's body.)

EXTERMINATOR: Give an old man a chance, will ya?
(He sings, softly.) "Baby face, you've got the cutest little baby face."

BENJIE: *(Interrupting.)* Not now.

EXTERMINATOR: Yes, now.

BENJIE: Not this time.

EXTERMINATOR: So soft.

BENJIE: Don't.

(He kisses Benjie's neck.)

EXTERMINATOR: *(Tenderly.)* So very soft. Many gifted skin moments like yours.

(The EXTERMINATOR puts his finger to BENJIE's lips.)

EXTERMINATOR: *(Quietly.)* Don't tell. Please don't tell. A secret between me and you. Okay? Just me and you. *(He touches a tear on BENJIE's face. He tastes it.)*

Tastes good, tastes sweet, these salty moments. Good boy. Good...boy. Now, you remember the hospital anthem, don't you? *(Singing.)* "It's about honor. It's about freedom. It's the courage to obey. We take our hand and make it..."

(The EXTERMINATOR tries to move BENJIE's hand into a salute. BENJIE resists.)

EXTERMINATOR: Wrong!

HARRY: *(Waking up.)* Huh!!

(The EXTERMINATOR hits the back of BENJIE's knees so that he falls to the floor. HARRY watches. The EXTERMINATOR pulls BENJIE's arm behind his back.)

EXTERMINATOR: Now let's try again, shall we?

(He exerts pressure on BENJIE's arm.)

BENJIE: Aaah!!

EXTERMINATOR: Sing.

BENJIE: I don't...Aaah!

EXTERMINATOR: Now.

(HARRY begins to sing.)

HARRY: It's about honor...

EXTERMINATOR: That's it. Hear that?

HARRY: It's about freedom...

EXTERMINATOR: *(To BENJIE.)* Go ahead.

BENJIE: *(Barks quietly.)* Aarf. Aarf.

EXTERMINATOR: That's it.

HARRY: It's the courage...

HARRY & EXTERMINATOR: *(Harmonizing.)* ...to
obey. We take our hand...
(The EXTERMINATOR and HARRY both salute.) ...
and make it sing, for a brighter day!

EXTERMINATOR: Got it now? Heh?!

BENJIE: *(Speaking.)* Make it sing...

HARRY: That's my boy!

EXTERMINATOR: Excellent.

BENJIE: It's about...

EXTERMINATOR: Yes?

BENJIE: It's about...

EXTERMINATOR: Good!

HARRY: Good boy!

BENJIE: We take our hand...

EXTERMINATOR: Yes!

HARRY: Goo-goo! Gah-gah!

BENJIE: Take it...

EXTERMINATOR: Our hand, yes?

BENJIE: Make it...

EXTERMINATOR: Sweetly, now.

BENJIE: Righteous...

EXTERMINATOR: Indignation!

HARRY: Guffaw! Guffaw!

BENJIE: Righteous, our...

EXTERMINATOR: Hands, yes!

BENJIE: Touching.

EXTERMINATOR: (*Singing.*) All those secret places!

(*BENJIE tries to crawl away.*)

BENJIE: All those attempted...

(The EXTERMINATOR grabs BENJIE's legs and pulls him back. He climbs on top of him. DAISY emerges from the bedroom and watches.)

EXTERMINATOR: Gotcha!

HARRY: All those hands!

BENJIE: All those...Wait!

EXTERMINATOR: All those...Go on.

BENJIE: Wait.

EXTERMINATOR: All those.

BENJIE: Aarf!

EXTERMINATOR: That's right.

HARRY: *(Howling.)* Ah-Oooooo!

BENJIE: *(Barking.)* Aarf. Aarf.

EXTERMINATOR: That's...it. That's...

BENJIE: *(Interrupting)* Not now. Please, not...

HARRY: Time's up. Time's up.

BENJIE: Not this.

HARRY & EXTERMINATOR: *(Howling.)* Ah-Ooooo!

BENJIE: Not this!

EXTERMINATOR: Tick-tock. Tick tick tick tick...

HARRY: Kaboom!

BENJIE: Not...

EXTERMINATOR: (*Interrupting.*) Tick tick tick tick...

HARRY: Kaboom!

EXTERMINATOR: (*Slowly.*) Tick...tick...tick...tick...

HARRY: Ker-Schplatt!!

(A long beat. HARRY and the EXTERMINATOR are breathing heavily and laughing. DAISY remains motionless, watching from the bedroom door. BENJIE slowly crawls out from under the EXTERMINATOR and moves to the dining room table. He looks up. He hesitates. He sees the cake on the table. He takes a scoop of chocolate cake icing. Tastes this. He voraciously eats the cake. He begins to break down.)

BENJIE: (*Starts quietly.*) Chocolate. Alkaloid drinking water. When I was a clown. Wanted to be. It had its charms. Or that time, dad, when we went to the circus. Red lights spinning in the black room, cracking against our face like egg. Or that time, holding hands. Candy cane and milk shakes. Sitting around the kitchen table, that sort of nonsense. Tick tick tick tick kaboom. Tick tick tick tick kaboom. Mesmerized, back then. (*A beat*) I stole things. Did you know that? Money, usually. Cans of soup. Sifting through the rubble, or else your worn-out grin, signal-

ing burnt flowers, bloated bellies of children, little corpses. You fucking... Deceit. Claimed never to have known, didn't you? Electrodes were applied. I remember now. The blinking lights consisted of men like yourselves. Even you, mother. Even you. Didn't want to assume responsibility. Turned your fucking heads. Stuck your fucking heads in chocolate gravy! Allergic. Allergic. Ka-choo! Gesundheit. Whooo-whoohoo! (*A beat. With quiet intensity.*) You filthy, stinking Jews. You...kikes. Shtinking juice. Gesundheit, shtinking, shtinking juice. Squeezed out...squeezed out...

(BENJIE laughs. Pulls out his knife. He approaches the EXTERMINATOR, who is standing. He stands next to the EXTERMINATOR. BENJIE is gripping the knife, trembling, his hands clenching and unclenching.)

BENJIE: All those rotten. Deceit. Deceit. (*He sings.*)
"It's about honor. It's about freedom. It's the courage to obey. We take our...We take our..."

(He drops to his knees in front of the EXTERMINATOR, who slowly salutes. HARRY salutes. DAISY salutes. BENJIE looks up. Rocking. A beat.)

BENJIE: (*Quietly barking.*) Aarf. Aarf.

(BLACKOUT)

END OF ACT ONE