

THEIR TOWN**(in THE CHELSEA GIRLS)**

Shot at the Factory and on location.

Summer 1966

Color, and black and white, 16mm sound and silent, 24fps

The full length of this film, with its alternative versions and shorter rolls, has not yet been determined.

A 70 minute print was released in 1966, and since September 15, 1996 a 35 minute version (restored in 1989, 33 minutes) has been a sequence of **THE CHELSEA GIRLS**.

Sharp focus, with still camera, and with moving camera

with:

Toby: Eric Emerson Davis
and International Velvet (Susan Bottomly), Pepper, Ingrid
Superstar, Mary Woronov, etc.

Lighting: Billy Linich (Billy Name)

Musical Score: The Velvet Underground

Directing, Camera, Technical Assistants: Billy Linich, Daniel Williams, The Velvet Underground, Gerard Malanga, Paul Morrissey, Andy Warhol

Andy was concerned about an article in Life called The Pied Piper of Tuscon^{*}, that dealt with a short (5'1") and strange, young lover named ~~Richard Schmidt~~ ^{Charles Schmid} who'd killed a number of teenage girls over a period of years and buried them in the desert. His attention was nailed from the start with the fact that "the townspeople," as he put it, "knew about the murders and never said anything - including the mothers of the girls!"

Before letting me see it, Andy primed me for this oddity's profile with his excited emphasis, a mixture of the mesmerism in the bizarre and his consignment to violent eschatology. And I must say that I myself was taken even before reading it by the prospect of a town that turned the other way.

The importance that Andy attached to this project is evident in its premeditation, its being the most elaborately produced of his films. No other was tried out so many times or with so many different approaches. And there were plans for rear projections of its murder sequences as silent flashbacks, to accompany a static present of heavy dialogue. It would be easy to think that the dumb-show footage is yet another attempt to skirt the opposition of performers not serious or intelligent enough to learn lines, but some of these rolls have sound, and sound or silent they were a cinematic idea that I trace to Gerard from the start. Though apparently never realized - i.e., no reels of THEIR TOWN shot against rear projections have as yet been uncovered - the shorter, unreleased rolls that do survive show the effort that was made to get this tale of eery mayhem right. Mary, among others, incidently, appears in a few of the prospective backdrops, but not in the eventually selected, dialogued feature. The work's originality stems in great part from Billy Name's gelling, shrewdly, multiply reflected in the glass-chipped disco ball, a street-found object that was a fixture at the Factory, and that he rotated on the floor for the shootings.

My own subconscious familiarity with the material surfaces in the seeming choicelessness with which I almost immediately eased

into the visual and symbolic representation of a town, and an America, that turned its back on the repeated dispensation of death. Most likely written in late March and early April of 1966 (or possibly in mid May), THEIR TOWN took me two full weeks to complete, the longest I'd ever spent on a Warhol screenplay. But that was not because the weight of gory details sandbagged its progress with impasses so much as nightmares. The ghosts of the slain girls haunted my restless sleep, and the sleeplessness made it difficult to stay chained to my desk long enough to get much done the next day. I also became thoroughly paranoid, and worried about how the accused would receive news of what I was doing. During the developing of THEIR TOWN into a rock-music drama for The American Place Theatre in 1968-69, I communicated with Schmidt, and though he did not object to my writing about him (as you might predict from his cries for attention in the script), he did threaten to fly the pen via levitation should I not do justice by him, and "get" me. He was passing his time in unfamiliar isolation by carving leather miniatures which he offered as gifts to those still willing to pay him mind, among them a perfect and very elaborate show saddle. In addition, and rather unnervingly, he wrote short stories himself, largely megalomaniacal fantasies in which he fell asleep in caves, and schemed of killing girls - both in the caves and out. He asked if I wouldn't rewrite them for him, making any improvements I saw fit, particularly in the schemes. I drew blanks.

The visual authority that crisscrosses theme and problem in THEIR TOWN required a matching verbal equivalent. That is found in how the characters often do not seem to hear each other, or hear a pun instead and so pick up on a group linking, but alternate meaning. I belonged to a choral speaking club when I was in junior high, and I thought of the cast's rhythmic ensemble work here as choral speaking. Hence, but for the film's theme as well, its rhyme that they hear rather than the word itself, as in "people" being heard as "steeple."

As for who really directed this movie while I was in California, Billy says, as of HANOI HANNA, "We all did!": meaning the

actors along with The Velvet Underground and Williams, Morrissey, Malanga, Andy, etc. But Billy's lighting and sensitivity in drawing out Eric Emerson's touching, humane performance is what dominates this film. Pepper, Susan Bottomly (screen named, International Velvet), and a large cast all fall into adequate line, but Ingrid makes a pain of herself throughout, affecting gross boredom which she might have evaded by living in Tuscon.

The Velvet Underground's score recommends itself for its intense beauty. The film's technicolor outcome, a kind of light-show in itself, would lead Andy into a new eschatological series: of color skulls and the like, placing THEIR TOWN, so far as it is a Warhol work, squarely in his death and violence genre.

The story editor at Paramount, Michael Silverblatt, KCRW-FM's "Bookworm," and other of the interested identify BOY ON THE STRAIGHT-BACK CHAIR, the stage version of THEIR TOWN, as the work that launched the serial-killer genre. So its importance to me as a pronouncement on mythic America, death and America, and Americana in general, is incalculable; and as Andy's imprint on me beyond The Ridiculous, his extensive legacy.

THEIR TOWN was released as a feature, but subsequently incorporated into THE CHELSEA GIRLS. (For more on this, and the split screen, see The Roots, etc. essay.)

Some details:

The Never Marry a Blonde song: I grew up near Coney Island where, as a kid, I was fascinated with a burlesque queen named Tirza, a classy and willowy, statuesque blonde who showered in wine. She sang a song that began with a semblance to this admonition and went on to elaborate in ways now lost to me. That "mother" appears to Toby much as Tirza did to me over the years, and as other, half-forgotten figures that filled my dreams while writing THEIR TOWN.

How forthright the absence of fathers and murdering of only teenage girls: facets of a mother-problem first explored in THE LIFE OF LADY GODIVA, written approximately seven months

before this screenplay, and partially felt, partially reflected on as an adjustment to Thornton Wilder's criminal action in writing OUR TOWN.

* Life, Vol.60, No.9, March 4, 1966

THEIR TOWN

a scenario by Ronald Tavel

characters: Toby, Romeo, Bad Butch
Mary, May, Maude
Stella, Della, Ray

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(Toby is the lead, dark, handsome, short statured; he plays his part for the most part standing on a chair. Open with TOBY standing on chair upstage center. Stella seated on chair to his right; Della on chair to his left.)

STELLA: When ya come thru our town, 35 miles a hour please.

DELLA: M (mean) Might pass it up if ya go any faster.

STELLA: Our town's fabulous far west affair. We got quite a strip.

DELLA: Beg ya pardon.

STELLA: This here's a clean place to live and raise up yer kids. People are doin' it all the time. Nice clean western affair. Boys got crew cuts, school girls wear skits in this here town they do, not like over in Vegas. But we got our strip like Vegas. Full of gas stations and hamberg joints, wash & dry, stop at the red star, general motors and provisions, speed limit 35 miles a hour. Nice clean all-american town bring yer kids up right straight around these here parts ya can.

TOBY: (carefully applying make-up) My face is my own creation. Some folks are born with faces. The squares are; the squares settled for their faces. Not me. I made my face. I use man-tan over a neat pancake base, whitened my lips and embroider it with the consummation of a large, well placed mole, Dye my hair, dye it black, Rudolph Valentino

black. But my deep set, beautiful blue eyes are my own, all my own. I keep lookin' for the action.

STELLA: Wonder what kinda action he means. That boy worries me. He's short. Toby Short. We like our men-folk big, big, you know what I mean? But Toby's short, he keeps lookin' for the action.

SINGER: (rock n' roll outfit plays)
Toby's short, short, short;
Short-limbed, short-lived,
He want out from this ol' dive.
Toby's lookin' for the action,
Action, action....

STELLA: In school, Toby's an indifferent scholar and a differen ath-e-lete. By which I mean to say, he can play ball but he's dumb.

TOBY: What ya mean dumb? I am famous for ma highfalutin lingo. I can manifest ma aironautical ascendancies, give in to my gourmet gogettednesses among the cholla and amidst the saguaro, and emancipate my eterosexual inclinations in a hundred different ways ask any chick in our town.

DELLA: It's boring in our town.

TOBY: I'm bored.

DELLA: Toby's bored. I think he has cancer.

TOBY: (crying) Probably, probably.

DELLA: Don't cry Toby, you'll ruin your pancake base. We all feel sorry for you.

TOBY: (consoled) I'm glad for that; cause even tho I'm a hero figure, still I thrive on feelin' sorry for myself. My pa was a skid row habitue in Denver and my ma a Vegas stripper, so ya can feel plenty sorry for me if ya want to.

STELLA: Ya ma's a Vegas stripper?

TOBY: Stella, do ya feel sorry for me?

STELLA: Yeah.

(A STRIPPER comes out and does a hot number to rock n' roll.)

STRIPPER: (dancing and singing)
Never marry a blonde, boy,
Never get fond of a blonde, boy,
When ya get to bed with a blonde, boy,
Enough said, enough said, enough said, boy....

STELLA: Like I said, nice respectable town. Wanna bring yer kids up here, ya do. Don't ya, Della?

DELLA: I ain't married.

STRIPPER: Never marry a blond boy.
(she exits)

DELLA: There goes yer ma, Toby.

TOBY: So long, ma.

STELLA: What ya do last nite, Toby?

TOBY: I looked for the action.

DELLA: What ya find, Toby?

TOBY: Jist ma cat. Tied a string around his tail and swung him against the wall couple a times.

STELLA: I feel compassion.

TOBY: You feel compassion---why?

STELLA: It's a warm, sweet feelin'. Yer a swingin' cat.

(TOBY continues applying make-up, swings a yo-yo during the bit about the hung cat; this can be ominous.)

DELLA: Our kids say Sir and Madam, play stick ball, eat strawberries and cream, they cream, they stick, they go to bed at 10:00 out here in the great West, that's how the West was won, that's how it often was, goin' west, they're good to their folks, have nice table manners, good leanings, fine learnerments, got respect, they are flowers all of them, castus flowers. Toby, would ya stop swingin' that yo-yo! Ya gimme the chills. What's a nice boy like you goin' and wantin' to swing that yo-yo fer?

TOBY: (ominous) Gettin' nervous, Della?

DELLA: What me nervous? Never been nervous a day in ma life! What's there to be nervous about in a nice western town like this?

STELLA: Good, clean Arizona air. Best air in the country. Folks come out here with asthma to die. Got them stock piles here, too.

DELLA: Whatcha say about piles, Stella?

STELLA: Ranch-type houses, sprawling supermarkets, fresh fish frozen, shiny chrome, home sweet home, yes sir, this is the land of the big rock candy mountain, the land of milk and honey, the promised land, get along little doggie, yippie aie eh!

DELLA: Now, Toby, I asked you to stop swingin' that there yo-yo! You deef or somethin'?

TOBY: Better close yer trap, old girl, if ya know what's good for ya!

DELLA: Old girl!

TOBY: Missed yer appointment at the beauty salon this week, didn't ya? It shows.

DELLA: But you didn't miss yours, did ya? Notice yer hair is jet black, black as an Injins.

TOBY: Rudolph Valentino-black.

DELLA: Well, I always preferred Rudy Vallee, more wholesome.

TOBY: Shows what taste you got. What do you know anyway? All yer good for is doin' the town's dirty laundry!

DELLA: Nice town, nice clean town, got fine laundry.

STELLA: Why don't ya get yerself a job, Toby, and stop swingin' that yo-yo, like Della tells ya? She tells ya good, Toby.

TOBY: What job? Ain't no jobs for us kids: the semiretired asthmatics pick up all the parttime work at minimum wages. The old gizzards are crowdin' us out. There's too many ancients around. The schools are real fancy, modern, stream-lined, -but small, ya dig, small!!!

STELLA: Short.

TOBY: Us kids are on split session, we're on the loose from noon on, or from 6PM till noon next day. Idle hands are Edgar Allan Poe's workshop. He wrote somethin' about a swingin' cat once, didn't he? I get a lot of ideas from what I read. I'm a voracious reader. A voracious reader and the leader - the leader of the high school set.

STELLA: But you're 42 years old.

TOBY: And I know how to hump a hundred different ways.

DELLA: Well!

(MARY, a young girl, comes on the set, dressed high school style)

TOBY: Hey, there, Mary Mary quite contrary, how does yer garden?

MARY: Needs some rakin', rake.

TOBY: Come here, and give us a kiss, Mary.

(MARY walks over to his chair, her head on a level with his crotch. She stares at it blankly.)

MARY: Where?

TOBY: Wise guy, huh? (he bends down and kisses her long and sexy in this peculiar position; kiss should go on as long as possible)

STELLA: Fine, right, up-standin' kids.

TOBY: Yer quite a gal, Mary, too bad yer so short.

MARY: Well, I'm not a grown-up yet.

TOBY: Where ya been, Mary Lamb?

MARY: Jist come from a boondock. 50 kids swillin' beer out in the desert. Kid's stuff.

TOBY: Lookin' for some grown-up fun, eh, Mary?

MARY: I'm lookin' for anything, Toby, I'm bored.

TOBY: Ya try pickup-palace?

MARY: Yeah, it's a come-down. Hey, why don't ya come down?

TOBY: Not me, I'm always high, flyin' high that's me, never got ma feet on the ground. Need a phony I.D., Mary?

MARY: Anytime.

TOBY: Got \$2.50?

(They conclude the deal; she puts the card up her sleeve. }
From the shadows behind the chairs, Romeo, a young hood, emerges.)

ROMEO: At Motel Mama's ya can frug, dog, swim, and jerk away the night. Me and Motel Mama prefer the whip dance, or the gobble. At the malted milk drive-ins and pizzeria stands, our cars endlessly circulate, mufflers rumbling, we check each other out. We check each other out. We are out of work; out of line, out of combat, out of pity, and bored. Man, we're bored. Nothin' to do in this town. Less to do in life.

TOBY: Lookin' for somethin' to do, Romeo?

ROMEO: Lookin' for the action. Lookin' for the action. No action in this town. Less in life.

MARY: If the boys look bitchin', we pull up next to them in our jallopy, roll down the window and yell: 'Hey you studs got a dollar for gas?'

ROMEO: Then we slip the birds a dollar. Nothin' to do.

MARY: So the studs slips us a buck; and we let 'em take us to Cookie's for a Coke.

ROMEO: Some of us kids got problems. Sad problems.

TOBY: Sad, deep, intricate, unravellable problems. These are my people.

STELLA: The steeples of our churches are lovely, lovely things.

DELLA: Oh, I think churches are.... beautiful!

TOBY: But I got money... plenty of money from my folks the bloks. I got a car, right? And I'm willin' to spend my bread, spend lots of it....

MARY: On anyone that'll listen to him.

ROMEO: Jist so long as ya listen to Toby.

TOBY: Y'all better be listening to me. Someday I'm gonna be heard.

STELLA: He's a bird, he's a bird, he's a bird dog.

DELLA: Oh, yes, real town for pets this is: birds, dogs, cats...

TOBY: And I got a pad of my own. Furnished real cute.

MARY: Toby throws parties at his pad. Interminable parties.

TOBY: Like to party, Mary?

ROMEO: Like to party, Mary?

MARY: Toby's got impeccable manners. He's always anxious to help out a friend, to do in a foe. Toby sends me flowers when I'm sick. Came up to the hospital to see me when I had the chicken pocks. Dribbled all over the sheets, he did.

TOBY: Cute nurses in the hospital. Nurses know a lot about life, about death.

ROMEO: About life, about death. Nothin' to do in this town. Bored, baby, bored, anxious.

TOBY: Notice somethin' funny about people: everybody ya meet seems a little nervous, a little afraid, just a little afraid....

STELLA: Little afraid, everybody just a little afraid.

DELLA: Nervous. Anxious, ya might say.

ROMEO: Yeah, ya might say anxious.

TOBY: My people.

MARY: Toby's more mature than most of his friends.

STELLA: He's also older. He's in his twenties.

TOBY: I'm 24 years old, look 25, and feel 40.

MARY: He feels like a man of 40.

DELLA: (indignant) Well!!

TOBY: And if I wear make-up----well, at least, I'm different.

MARY: Yeah, Toby's different. I'll go to Cookie's for a coke with anybody, so long as he's different.

TOBY: You'll go further than Cookie's.

MARY: Yeah, I'll go far.

DELLA: I think Toby's a creep.

MARY: He is a creep. But to us kids, bored and lonely, he's a kind of hero. A hero creep. To the delinquent, the dropout, the drop in, the ~~drop~~ dead, the chick with a Mary Antoinette hair-do,

ROMEO: The cats with acne and long awkward, lanky legs,

MARY: He's a creep hero.

TOBY: A hero sandwich to you, babe, you swallow it.

DELLA: Anxious, everybody's anxious. And a little afraid.

TOBY: Creep? That's what people say about somebody who's more stagey, who's more dramatic, who's more intriguing than they are.

ROMEO: Some people are dropouts from life. Ever realize that, Toby? Ever really realize anything, Toby?

TOBY: Hey, Romeo, do me a favor, will you, and hand me that rock like a good boy, will you?

(ROMEO bends down and lifts up a huge rock and walks over to TOBY and lifts it up to him; TOBY takes the rock, weighs it and seems to find it serviceable.)

ROMEO: Wanna stuff it in yer boots, do ya, Toby.

TOBY: (calmly) Not exactly, Romeo, not exactly.... Wanna do me a favor encore? Bring Mary over here.

ROMEO: Oh, Mary, wanna come with me for a minute, huh, Mary, like a nice bird, like a nice little feathery thing?

MARY: Got a buck for gas?

ROMEO: Sure, sure, anything, Mary.

MARY: First I gotta ask my mama if it's O.K.

STELLA: It's O.K., Mary, you can go with Romeo.

MARY: (anxious) Ya sure, mama, ya sure I can go with Romeo?

STELLA: Of course, I'm sure dear. Go with the boy.

MARY: But, mama, I'm afraid.

STELLA: (off-hand) Silly, child, what's there to be afraid of?

MARY: Mama, please! please!

STELLA: Hush, child, hush.... go with the boy..... goodbye, Mary.... Such a nice quiet town. Very quiet. Little too quiet at night. Little too quiet.

ROMEO: Come on, Mary.

TOBY: Engineer her over here, Romeo, where I can reach.... Hold her hands behind her back, will you....

ROMEO: Like this?

TOBY: That's fine. Move her over little bit more. Fine.

(ROMEO obeys, holding MARY's arms helpless behind her back, and imprisoning her directly under TOBY. TOBY raises his arms, holding the rock on high and brings it down cruelly on her head. Again and again. All the town's people are looking the other way, smiling into the camera, no one notices a thing. No music during this sequence, and preferably no sound from anyone. MARY drops lifeless to the floor.)

TOBY: (calm) Wanna get a shovel, Romeo, and bury the broad behind my chair, like a nice boy?

ROMEO: Yer kinda extreme, ain't ya, Toby?

TOBY: Are ya with me? You are with me. Yer as much a part of this as I am. Yer as much a part of this as Mary's mother.

STELLA: Quiet town. Real quiet town. Been real quiet since Mary run away....
(ROMEO drags the body behind TOBY's chair and we can hear the evil sound of shoveling)
Sometimes, now and again, I think of my little girl, my little girl who run away.... wonder where she is, Mary, where are you, little girl, late at night, middle of the night, Mary, Mary?----Is that you? Is that you, Mary? Keep thinkin' I hear Mary comin' up the front steps, keep thinkin', keep thinkin'..... guess I just think too much these days, think too much at night, but, ah, the night is lonely since my little girl run away. I had such plans for her. You shoulda seen the graduation dress I had picked out for my little girl, pretty white thing it was, with flower with a

bright little flower emblem, you know the kind, a flower pasley design, a green center with a thin red border running around in a... in a... yes..... You know the kind.... had nice buttons, simple buttons, sham pearl they was I think..... in a.... I used to love pearl when I was a kid, always dreamt of having a graduation dress with pearl buttons when I was a kid.... Course, we couldn't afford real pearl buttons for Mary, wouldn't have been practical anyhow, you know how kids are, always pullin' a button, gettin' it caught in somethin' and then before ya know it, pop, and it's lost, gone, gone forever, lost, jist like that.... nothin' easier, nothin' easier than losin' a button on a dress, pearl button or what have ya..... pearl buttons get lost easy as plain ones, sure they do, ask anyone, anyone knows that, why any fool knows that..... Quiet, real quiet around here. Don't hear a sound. Not a sound. Nary a sound. Hard to hear. Hard to hear things around here, hard to hear a sound. Course, I'd be complainin' if there was noise; somebody'd be complainin' if there was noise, still, ya know, it's not bad to hear a little sound once and again, now and then, keeps, gets lonely..... sorta lonely without even a little, little..... little?..... small?..... my baby..... hmmm..... Mary? That you, Mary? No, that ain't Mary: that's the neighbor's girl, May.

(MAY emerges from the shadows, ROMEO watches her, completely taken. TOBY is back to swinging the yo-yo ominously.)

MAY: I have a premonition that when I come back, when I'm reincarnated, it'll be as a cat.

ROMEO: You smell good, May, ya wearing perfume?

MAY: No, silly, it's just me. No perfume at all. Just me.

TOBY: Romeo's a lover boy. Didn't think we call him Romeo for nothin', did ya?

ROMEO: Ah, Toby, be quiet, will ya!

MAY: Tomorrow's a big day for me. Big exam tomorrow morning, important. Gotta be up before 6 in the morning.

DELLA: May's a better than average student. She takes school seriously. Sweet girl. Everyone likes her.

ROMEO: I like her.

TOBY: I had her.

ROMEO: Don't say that, Toby, don't say that if ya don't mean it.

- TOBY: How do ya know I don't mean it? How do ya know I didn't have her? Sure, I had her.
- MAY: I plan on goin' ahead to college. I'd like to be an anthropologist. I dig around a lot in the desert outside of town. It's interesting. Fossils and all. I want to work in a museum, a big famous museum like the ones they got in New York. New York's quite a place, things to do every night. Once, I visited New York with my parents and it was great.
- ROMEO: Ya smell sweet, May, yer lovely.
- MAY: I'm sensitive, too, everyone says I'm sensitive cause I read a lot of romantic novels, Dumas, Bronte, the Brontes, and Sir Walter Scott and Walpole and them.
- TOBY: And Tom Jones and Fanny Hill and Traveller's Companion.
- MAY: And ladies' home journal and diary of chambermaids.
- STELLA: And chamber music, I love chamber music, what do you think about chamber music? ---Romeo, I'm talkin' to you!
- ROMEO: (absorbed in MAY) While walkin' thru the park one day, in the merry, merry month of May---
- STELLA: I loved them novels when I was a girl, used to sit up all night in bed readin' them. Nothin' like a good book late at night. May nights, too.
- MAY: And I take long walks in the Arizona desert at night, May night.... I suffer from melancholia, though, they call it adolescent melancholia, think about death and suicide and space and the empty desert air. But I hope I'm reincarnated as a cat. People don't seem to know what I mean when I say that. Cats are... and desert cats. Mountain lions. There's a lot to say for them.
- TOBY: Sure there is, May, lots to say for cats; swingin' them. Original. I want to be original.
- ROMEO: You are the original, Toby. You sure are the original.
- TOBY: No, I ain't, Romeo. Not quite. Nearly, but not quite, no. But that's what I'm workin' for. To be original, first, the starter, preferably one of a kind.
- DELLA: Our kids is ambitious.
- STELLA: Because us elders sets the good example.
- TOBY: That is true. We abide by the example our elders set.
- MAY: I tried to teach my parents the Monkey.

ROMEO: What was it like when you had her, Toby?

TOBY: Same as any other crevice, same as any other burrow.

ROMEO: Gee, she's lovely. Pure. And sensitive. Everyone says she's sensitive.

MAY: Everyone says I'm sensitive.

TOBY: Yeah, she is sensitive. She baths herself at night and washes her hair; her long lovely hair...

ROMEO: What do you think about Toby, May?

MAY: He's a creep; he makes me feel icky; but he can be nice when he whats--- excuse me--- when he wants to.

ROMEO: What do you think about me?

MAY: Who thinks about you.

ROMEO: Ah, come on. Tell me. Please?

MAY: You're weird, Romeo, everybody knows that. Everybody in town. They say you had some affliction when you were little that scabbed up yer whole body and that to stop you from scratchin' they had to tie you to the bed at night or else you would had scratched yerself till ya bled to death in yer sleep.

ROMEO: Don't that make ya feel sorry for me?

MAY: You nuts? Why, it's like bein' a leper. Would I love a leper?

TOBY: Ya oughta, Mary. Things would go easier for ya if ya did. In a way, I feel sorry for ya, May.

ROMEO: Please, May, go out on a date with me. To the pizzeria.

MAY: Which one? Besides, you give me the crawls. They say yer so conditioned, that even now you have to be tied to bed in order to sleep each night. Think I'd be caught dead with someone like that? What if you got sleepy? I'd have to tie you up.

ROMEO: Don't make fun of me, May. Bein' tied up by you would be a pleasure, it would be a dream.

MAY: I'll bet. Beat it, boy, you bug me. I'm sensitive.

TOBY: (laughing) You scratch her the wrong way, Romeo. Big guys bully you and you bully guys littler than you. That's old hat, man, scram, I mean outta mah way afore I step on you and squash you to ----

ROMEO: Don't threaten, Toby, remember what I got on you!

TOBY: What, Buster, what? Who'd believe it? Who'd care?

ROMEO: That's a dumb thing to say!

TOBY: Is it? Nobody cares, man, nobody cares what the hell ya do around here. Nobody listens, nobody watches, and ain't nobody cares. I'd do anything to get someone to care. I already did everything. The worst. The absolute worst, right? And who cares? Who knows? Who looks?
(shouting to STELLA and DELLA and all present)
Listen, you people out there!!!! I killed somebody! I killed a girl! I killed Mary! Listen to me, look at me, turn around and look at me, won't you! Won't somebody? Hey, hey, help!!!!

(None of the persons on stage looks. TOBY's arms are outstretched in a frantic plea. STELLA smiles into the camera; DELLA knits.)

DELLA: Won't be long now afore I finish this here sweater. Gonna give it to my little girl. She's the sweater girl. Name's Rita. Or Lana.

MAY: Yes, her name is Rita. But she's not sensitive.

ROMEO: Only you are sensitive.

MAY: Well, I wouldn't say that exac----- well, yes, I would. I'm sensitive and I realize that things are weird around here and cat-like and that's why I feel like I'm coming back as a cat.

TOBY: Good thing ya got plans to come back, May, real good thing for ya that ya got plans to come back....

ROMEO: Whatcha mean, Toby?

TOBY: You thick or somethin'? Whatcha think I mean, whatcha think ah am insinuat' by sayin' good thing she's comin' back? Obviously, because she's goin' first. May got plans fer comin' back, and ah got plans fer May's goin' away.

DELLA: How pinpointed his eyes is when he says that!

STELLA: Pinpoint eyes, piercing eyes, looks right through ya. Beautiful eyes. Deep set they are, very blue. Ocean blue. Wish I were by the ocean, wish this town were by the ocean, seems things wouldn't seem so bad then, not so bad at all if we was by the ocean.

TOBY: Clean dark waves smashing up against the beach, white spume ridin' the waves and sprayin' the shore. Makes everything clean, white-washed, carries the truth back into the sea. Not like here in the desert; things remain here in the desert, don't move, stay right where ya bury them; don't even have to bury them:- nobody'll see, no one notice, no one care. Funny world, isn't it? where no one cares about killin'. The world endorses violent death, confederates to guarantee its realization.

MAY: I sense a strange conspiracy in the desert air; a doom in all things natural, a mesmeric yearning toward the open plain, the windy whisper of the saguaro and the cholla....

(MAY begins to wander about, as if toward the desert, she moves unheeding dangerously close to TOBY. TOBY raises the heavy rock in his trembling hands as MAY slips about him. The others grow tense with a horror they are unable to feel accurately and, therefore, express; their lines are weighed with inarticulate anxiety and guilt:)

ROMEO: May, hey, May, May hey, where ya goin'?

STELLA: What's she wanderin' around out there on the desert fer?

DELLA: She must have wanderlust, wanderlust I call it....

ROMEO: May, wanna a hamburger, a cookie Coke, a pizza --- wanna come with me for some--- let's get somethin' to eat, May, May....

STELLA: May is maddening in the Arizona desert; other places, other Mays have rigorous riots of violets to boast, this state has only the steady, hiatusless evergreen of the neurotically water-hoarding cactii to---

DELLA: Time was a body could detect the difference in the seasons here. But now I get confused, time rushes and returns, autumn miscegenates with spring and winter abbreviates the vaguely sprawling limits of the central summer mon---

STELLA: Where is Ray, where the hell is that woman? Doesn't she give a hoot about her daughter? Ray, Ray, ya shoppin' on Main, playin' cards? Deal yerself out this dealin', Ray, ah, Ray!!!

MAY: Wonder what blocks the clarity of night?- like a huge true tree in the links of the sandy stretch- (she is standing directly under TOBY, trying to reach around him to the space behind) What is it stands between me and---

ROMEO: May, I got a present for ya -- wanna see it? Here, here, I got it right in---

MAY: You say somethin' Romeo? Whatcha got?

ROMEO: (trying desperately to draw her away from TOBY's deadly reach) You never seen the likes before, May, not in this town, not in New York where ya once went with ya parents, May-- here, look, come and get it!!

(ROMEO unzips his fly, his desperate and only means to lure her attention, to turn her out of the path of the threatening rock. MAY turns to him, fascinated and appalled by his gesture; she starts back and so moves out of the range of the rock that

TOBY smashes down at that moment. ROMEO rushes forward and grabs her, a profound confusion between rescuing her and assaulting her, but to MAY and the others it looks naturally like criminal assault. RAY emerges from the chairs upstage at this moment.)

MAY: Romeo, let me go! I'll tell my---

RAY: May, child, where are you? I told you never to go out.

ROMEO: May, be still will you, don't make a sound. You almost-

MAY: Let me go! Help! Help! Ma!

STELLA: Oh, God, where are our daughters??

DELLA: Give to save the children fund! This is "Save Our Souls Week"! Give, give, good people!!

TOBY: (singing) Give praise to the Lord,
Our hope and our salvation!
The Lord is my light---

RAY: I'll give you hell, May, a-comin' out here all alone
without yer ma! Why, there's mountain lions out here!

MAY: I ain't afraid of cats, ma, I'm a cat, a cat, a cat!!!

RAY: You ain't alone, either! That freak is with you!

ROMEO: Now wait a minute, Mrs. Mixer, I ain't no freak.

RAY: Fiend! Assault! Battery! Belligerence! Bellicose!!

DELLA: Bad, plain bad!

STELLA: Bad! Buxom! Blossom! Bloom! Boom! Doom! Death!

ROMEO: Ya got me wrong- why, if it wasn't fer me, May would
be--

TOBY: (singing) If it wasn't fer me
May would be
After June
And whose balloon
Would bust yer bubble
On the double---

(The STRIPPER comes out wildly throwing articles of clothes to the audience and adding new confusion to this scene:)

STRIPPER: (singing and dancing) Does yer engine need a battery?
Does yer carburetor run on gas?
If I thumb a ride, will ya brake
for me?
If ya pick me up, how safe's my--

RAY: I know your type, Romeo Rancour, and you don't have
to fib with me! I'm calling the police. The trouble
around here is that too many folks let trash like you

run around on the loose and have their way.

ROMEO: What way?

TOBY: This is the way.

RAY: This is your way: to waylay innocent girls who don't know the facts of life, out here on the prairie!

STRIPPER: (singing) The lusty, trusty facts of life
Are many as the days in May.
They're full of juice and full of strife,
Each one I'll list, each one I'll say.

MAY: Ma, stop embarrassing me. Of course, I know the facts of life. I'm 15. 15, 14, 36.

ROMEO: Yer daughter needs protection from---

RAY: You in the shakedown business, too, sonny?

STELLA: Grab him, grab the pervert, don't let him ride off into the desert.

DELLA: Make our town safe for democracy! Seize the scrubby tumbleweed!

(STELLA, DELLA, and RAY rush at ROMEO and a struggle ensues; they beat him with their pocketbooks, pull his hair, tear at his sleeves; ROMEO attempts to elude them, he does not strike back.)

RAY: Deal the dingo double trouble!

DELLA: Douse the dullard duely round!

STELLA: Sound the cry to curfew caution; meet the monster, match and scratch.

DELLA: Kill, crush, mix, mush!

RAY: Squeeze, tease, please yerself!

STELLA: Fix with tricks, confuse, abuse! Lust and dust, strike, hike the rents, rent his shirt!

(The STRIPPER dances during this capture scene, and her song is simple enough: she keeps presenting her body to the audience and declaiming: "This is the first fact of life! This is the second fact of life", etc., etc., until she reaches the thirty first, about the time that the three women are tying ROMEO to the chairs upstage:-

STELLA, DELLA, and RAY subdue ROMEO and drag him upstage to the rows of chairs. They tie him spread-eagle to four chairs as if they were bed-posters, similar to the description of him given by MAY as being secured to his bed in order to sleep. All this time, TOBY is calmly applying make-up, combing his hair, stuffing newspapers and tin beer cans in his boots to make himself taller, etc. He is never phased by the struggle, although the STRIPPER disturbs him somewhat. Order is restored.)

STELLA: Ladies, ya wanna clean up the Vegas strippers around here.

TOBY: (off-hand) Could go harder on yer beds if ya do.

RAY: We'll attend to the morals problems in good time.

DELLA: Yes, we shall look into these strippers.

ROMEO: Please, listen to me! May is in danger! Grave danger!

STELLA: Not any more now that yer tied up!

ROMEO: Yer wrong, you ladies got it all wrong! I never meant May no harm; I love her, why should I hurt her?

RAY: Of course, you love her:- that's why you attacked her:- you love her and you wanted to make love to her! It's love that we got to watch out for, girls, love that waylays our daughters and drags them into clumps of sage and tumbleweed for a tumble.

STELLA: Oh, the thought of it stirs my blood!

TOBY: As spring stirs frozen lakes. What a downpour penetrate our unprepared prairie. Stella, Della, Ray.

DELLA: We done our duty as we seen it, right, Stella?

STELLA: We are always right, Della. What do you think, Ray?

TOBY: Stella, Della, Ray.

RAY: Let's notify the department of health, education, and welfare, Stella.

STELLA: Let's notify a New Jersey mystic, Della.

DELLA: Let's notify the community bulletin board, Ray.

TOBY: Mary, May, Maude. Stella, Della, Rayburn.

STRIPPER: And the thirty-first fact of life is that strippers get looked into....

RAY: We'll look into this matter of the strippers.

STRIPPER: See you boys in Vegas. Bye, Toby, my boy.

TOBY: Bye, ma.

(The STRIPPER exits. STELLA, and DELLA resume their seats. RAY takes a chair near DELLA. MAY wanders downstage.)

MAY: What did ya tie Romeo up that way for, ma? I'm sensitive and don't like to see things like that happen to dumb human beings, dumb animals; I'm a cat.

- RAY: Why, May, child, we done it for Romeo's own good. You know Romeo can't sleep unless he's tied up spread-eagle to his bed on account of he is conditioned that way since he was a child and had leprosy and had to be tied up and restrained from scratching hisself during the bydee-by hours of the night, scratchin' all them awful sores, unsightly sores, and we did want him to catch a bit of bydee-by, he's had a long day, Romeo has.
- ROMEO: It's sweet o' ya to be thinkin' on me that way, Mrs. Mixer. Sweet o' ya to be lookin' after my health and seein' to it that I gets some shut-eye. Mind ya keep an eye on May now cause she's in danger and the danger is damn close bydee-by.
- STELLA: Real community feelin' in this here town. We elders always looks out fer each other's kids.
- RAY: Gladly, gladly, I might add.
- MAY: (hearing ROMEO snoring) Soft ye now, mine lover sleeps. Sleep doth lie upon him as a torrential downpour of the spring upon the roughest wintry scrub in all the plain below.
- TOBY: Bellow. Listen to him bellow.
- DELLA: Romeo bellows in his sleep for his lady love.
- RAY: And quiet steals upon the town....
- STELLA: Toby steals too. Or so I heard tell. Steals his opportunities from the jaws of stiff competition.
- RAY: Steals keepsakes, tips from barroom counters....
- MAY: Steals girls hearts with his deep, beautiful eyes.
- RAY: Hush, child, do not speak of amorous matter.
- TOBY: Mary, May, Maude. I know how to make love a hundred different ways. I have made love a hundred ways. Everything I do is an act of love. Look, this beauty mark:- it is huge, isn't it? Why would a man paint such a mark if not for love, in the name of love, because of love, because he wants love, and this beauty mark is love. The people know it, too. Everyone in town knows it: that's why they say I'm too short, that I can't reach up high enough to get a piece of love for myself. Because it's too much trouble for them to return it, really. Everything is easier is for them:- manhunts, murder trials, death in the family. But I can't be stopped by that, I can't afford to let that stop me, if I had let things like that stop me I wouldn't have gotten up as high as I am now. And I'm pretty proud of my accomplishments. I am a self-made man. I am where I am on my own initiative and stick-to-it-ness, and I think everybody knows that.

MAY: But I get bored even at Toby's pad. I'm sick of flipping thru Playboy, sick of flipping, sick of those same old Enis Penis records, sick of sipping beer, beer brewed with clear mountain valley water.

TOBY: I read this novel, "Horny, the Woman-Weasal" where a chick commits suicide over a guy. I dream of some chick, maybe Mary, May, Maude, committing suicide over me.

DELLA: Well, girls are slow to that kind of romanticism these days, Toby, sometimes they have to be helped along.

TOBY: I will, I'll help them along. I decided I liked blondes best--

MAY: That's true, Toby made me jealous when he dyed Maude's hair blonde. Then he dyed Maude's younger sister, Lynn's, hair blonde. Then he got engaged to both of them on the same day.

TOBY: I went out and bought them both diamond rings, for \$11 each.

STELLA: Father John gave Toby the Gospel According to St. John to read, said it would do him a wealth of good, John being the poet's apostle; Toby said:

TOBY: Religion is the opiate of the octageraniums--

RAY: And he tore John up and burned him in the streets.

(MAUDE emerges from the chairs behind, followed by LYNN, her younger sister. Both have obviously dyed blonde hair. LYNN is very young looking, MAUDE a frump.)

MAUDE: I think girls are fools who go out with fellas and don't get paid for it.

TOBY: Hi ya, Maude. That's Maude. I'd like to kill her.

LYNN: My older sister Maude once showed at a formal with some dressed like beatniks. That's guts; Maude's dreamy. She cuts classes and got recommended for psychiatric help.

TOBY: Hi ya, Lynn.

LYNN: Hello there, fiancé.

TOBY: I'd dig killing her, too. Then I could really love May, really, like Romeo does. But I need help, I need a particeps criminis, I can't reach them from here. You my girl, Maude?

MAUDE: Sure, Toby, we're engaged, aren't we?

TOBY: Who ya goin' with now, Maude?

MAUDE: Bad Butch.

TOBY: Bad Butch, huh? He could be helpful.

MAUDE: Whatcha mean, helpful? Ain't ya jealous? Look, I don't want ya lettin' me go out with other goofs, I want ya to call me on the phone, I don't like it when yer late, I'm suspicious of you.

TOBY: (calculating) That's great, Maude, it's cool....

STELLA: Toby and Maude are made for each other.

MAUDE: Hi, May, where's Romeo?

MAY: He's tied up at the moment.

MAUDE: I'd as soon see her dead as anything. Why not?

ROMEO: (groaning in his sleep) May! May! May's in trouble, she... is... in danger....

TOBY: Maude's a harlot. I suspect she got venereal disease.

STELLA: (shocked) Why, Toby, I'm shocked! What makes you think so?

TOBY: Oh, I dunno. Anyway, I wrote a letter to the department of health and told them Maude was contaminated and spreadin' it all around town.

DELLA: Ya done yer duty, son. To family and country.

RAY: In his way, Toby does set an example.

TOBY: Maude, can ya find Butch for me? I need him in a hurry.

MAUDE: I don't run nobody's notes. Find him yerself.

TOBY: Hey, Lynn, wanna help me out?

ROMEO: (in his sleep) May, poor May, look out....

LYNN: Right away, romantic Toby; I'll get Butchy-boy for you.

TOBY: Thanks, Lynn, yer a real trooper. And I shall reward you for this.

(LYNN goes upstage to the chairs where she picks up BUTCH.)

ROMEO: (in his sleep) Careful, May, very careful be....

BUTCH: You old enough to date now, Lynn?

LYNN: Sure 'nough; but yer too late, Butchy boy; I'm engaged to Toby.

BUTCH: What is it, Sir Tob?

TOBY: While yer still back there, Butch, I need a rope, huh?

ROMEO: (tossing as much as possible in his nightmare) Please, May, please watch out... don't go near the clover, roll, roll over....

BUTCH: Sure thing, Tob, easiest thing in the world.

(ROMEO's moans attract BUTCH's attention and he unfastens one of the ropes binding ROMEO's hands. BUTCH, bearing the rope, comes forward with LYNN on his arm.)

LYNN: I dig the idea of goin' out with other guys; specially if they're older.

BUTCH: This what ya need, Tob?

TOBY: Great, Butch, that'll do jist fine. Give it here, will ya?

BUTCH: Whatcha got in mind?

TOBY: I'll ask the questions, babe. I'm still runnin' this outfit and this town, too. Get it?

BUTCH: A little bit too well; but you don't; not the rope at any rate. I don't take no lip from anyone, Tob, not even you, Tob; here, Lynn, I'm givin' ya enough rope to--- (he gives the rope to LYNN)

TOBY: You don't seem to get the hang of it---

STELLA: (agitated) I hired private dicks on this case. No one puts much stock in it, but I'm certain my little girl has come to foul play, even as you have--come to a foul play. The dicks have been hanging around Toby's pad lookin' for a lead. Once a beer can came flyin' out the window and hit one of them in the head. That made them suspicious.

BUTCH: Yer in a bit o' boilin' water, Sir Tob, some strange tough guys been hangin' around yer place. They seem to be suspicious.

TOBY: They are suspicious. They're on my trail. But they're on the wrong track.

STELLA: Them dicks'll find something, I know they will, they'll find my little girl, they'll find out what happened to my little girl. The local authorities say she just ran away, but I know that's not true. I have a premonition. I have supper on now.

DELLA: She's got a premonition and she's got every right to it:- it makes it more proper to claim her daughter come

by foul play than to admit she jist run away. And we in this here town is nothin' if we ain't respectable.

ROMEO: (in his sleep) May's the most respectable girl I ever met... she's sensitive... she.. is.. in mang... mangy... eeeeeee.....

TOBY: Wanna do me a favor, Butch, and hold up Lynn?

BUTCH: That'll be a pleasure:- her small nubile bubs in the palm of mah hand-

(BUTCH sweeps LYNN up off her feet and offers her up to TOBY. LYNN is still holding the rope in her hand.)

LYNN: Weeeeeeeee.... what a ride! I always wondered what the air was like way up around you short fellas.

TOBY: And what do you discover it to be like now that yer up here with me, little girl?

LYNN: Oh, it ain't much different from the air everybody else breathes.

TOBY: That's what I wanted to hear.

LYNN: You know, Toby, you ain't so special, even if you are my fiancé.

TOBY: (taking the rope out of her hands) I know that, Lynn-chin.

BUTCH: I tried to contact the attorney general about your activities, Tob.

TOBY: (fixing the rope around LYNN's neck) You would, Butch, it's jist like you, babe.

ROMEO: (tossing) May, May, run for yer life---run fer it!!

TOBY: (garrotting LYNN) Lynn-chin gonna have a hung chin.

RAY: There'll be a hung jury over this.

MAY: How's the family, Maude?

MAUDE: Home hangs me up, you know that, Maude.

MAY: I'm hip, May.

TOBY: Mary, May, Maudlin. Stella, Della, Rayburn.
(he lets LYNN's limp body relax in BUTCH's arms;
BUTCH lowers the corpse to the ground)

MAY: I'd look after my fiancé if I was you, Maude. Never could tell but when he'd be foolin' around with other girls. Girls younger and more desirable.

MAUDE: You don't have to tell me how to hang onto a guy.

DELLA: Whatcha fixin' fer supper tonight, Stella?

STELLA: Corn.

RAY: On the cob?

DELLA: On the cob?

STELLA: No, mixed with beans; green beans. Whatcha call it-- suckertash.

RAY: Titillating, ain't it?

TOBY: Better take that rope off her neck; it looks sorta suspicious.

BUTCH: Whatcha gonna do with her?

TOBY: Nothin'. Jist leave her there. It'll look like she's sleepin'. Nobody'll notice.

BUTCH: Seems like somethin' ought to be done.

TOBY: What for? Wasted energy. Got better things to do.

BUTCH: Like what?

TOBY: Bring her sister over here, will ya?

BUTCH: Oh, no, not me! Not me again. Ya can't fool me twice.

TOBY: I really don't need you that much, Butch. She'll come by herself if it comes to that. I mean, so you might as well bring her. It'll give ya a sense of accomplishment.

MAY: I attend to my fiancé if I was---

MAUDE: But you ain't- so mind yer own business. ~~Hammmmm~~, think I'll see what Toby is up to.
(she meanders over to BUTCH and TOBY)

BUTCH: Hey there, Maude, we was expectin' ya.

MAUDE: Oh, yeah? What fer?

TOBY: Kinda hard to explain.

BUTCH: Ya wouldn't understand.

TOBY: Oh, she'll understand. Jist might not appreciate it, that's all. Too unsophisticated. Takes somebody really on top of it to appreciate the senseless.

MAUDE: Who ya callin' senseless?

TOBY: Nobody, babe, come on up and I'll knock a little sense into yer thickness. I'll knock ya up.

(MAUDE needs no encouragement, she steps over her sister's corpse and hops up on TOBY's chair. In the meantime, ROMEO awakes, sits up and finds one hand unbound; he proceeds to untie the other ropes that hold him with considerable nervousness.)

ROMEO: May, May, he's killin' her! Hey, look, the ropes are loose, jist like in a chapter.

TOBY: Easy, Maude, it won't take long-
(he presses his thumb on her windpipe)

MAUDE: Take yer time, I got all my life; nothin' to do in this here town, anyway.

BUTCH: Yeah, it's boring as all get-out.

RAY: Well, ya have to know how to entertain yerself.

DELLA: Watch TV or somethin'.

STELLA: I like the champagne hour, jist about like the champagne hour most of all.

MAY: Oh, you parents talk about the dullest things. It's simply impossible!

BUTCH: Lynn's stiff is beginnin' to stink.

TOBY: It is human to smell; when we're dead we smell more; that means that when we're dead we're more human; that's why I don't have any compunctions about killin' people; that's why I'd like to be dead myself.

BUTCH: But what are ya goin' to do about Lynn's stiff?

TOBY: We'll throw it in the trunk of my car. We'll throw Maude's stiff in their there too, soon as I'm finished killin' her. That's the most obvious place I can think of: I want them in the most obvious place because I jist don't care any more. I can always ditch the car and wipe it clean.

MAY: Ditch the bitches.

(MAUDE screams -a blood curdling cry that shakes the stage; at that moment ROMEO comes rushing out from behind toward down-stage. The others are wavering weakly between ignoring the crime and turning slightly toward it.)

ROMEO: Help, police, help! Toby's murderin' May!!!

RAY: (nervously) Don't be silly, Butch, May's right here.

ROMEO: It's me, Romeo!

MAY: It's me, May!

RAY: It's thee, Romeo; wherefor wert thou?

ROMEO: Asleep! asleep like everybody in this town!

STELLA: Now, now, Romeo, don't go around makin' irresponsible accusations. We all try to do our duty as citizens, we all do our duty as we see it.

(MAUDE is dead and TOBY begins slowly lowering her corpse.)

ROMEO: Yer duty is to open yer eyes and yer ears of the world. And turn around and look at what's happening!

(The crowd makes an effort at turning around toward TOBY's chair but their necks seem to be stiff: they can't quite turn fully around. In the meantime, TOBY is busy depositing the body at the base of his chair.)

DELLA: Stiff neck, that's what it is... must have caught a draft, a-a cross ventilation draft in mah car in the drive-in the-a-ter the other night.

MAY: Downed a draught, draught after draught in the beer parlor. The other night. Last night, maybe it was.

ROMEO: Turn, turn around for God's sake!!!

TOBY: Is this for God's sake, or will God punish me for this?

STELLA: God punishes you for not recitin' yer prayers at night....
(very confused)
late at night, before ya turn in, no matter how late, three or four in the morning, ya oughta still recite yer prayers.... Now I lay me.....

TOBY: Down to doom, down to the ships in sea salt and tears-

ROMEO: Turn, turn, I beg of you, away from this insouciance and toward that Dali chair upon the desert wastes. He wastes thy daughter's life.

RAY: His infatuation for my daughter has made him wax poetic. But he takes poetic license in making such brash accusations. Take care Romeo, talk like that, malicious rumors can ruin innocent peoples' lives.

(The bodies of the two sisters now lie stretched out together on the floor- BUTCH helps in the arrangement. At this moment, the STRIPPER reappears dancing wildly-)

STRIPPER: (singing) I'm gonna take it off,
I'm gonna doff
My garb,
I'm gonna show yis what I got
Like it or not
-Look if yis can-
Look if yer a man!

DELLA: Oh, how disgusting- I can't look!

(The rock n' roll outfit accompanies the STRIPPER at first, then goes off into its own music and themes, adding not so much counterpoint as confusion-)

SINGER: (singing) Lay me down
On the ground
Stretch me out
Leave no doubt
That the place
I want to lie
Is where my sister died.
I know ya went and lied,
Said my sister never died.

STELLA: That Vegas woman -- she's jist too obscene for words--
I can't look her in the eye!

RAY: Really revoltin'. We must protect our children from
such a sight!

ROMEO: Strippers do make a guy uneasy: it's you and breasts
all alone together.

MAY: What a debased woman. She's vulgar.

DELLA: Common, pornographic, illicit, prurient, salacious,
delicious, spaghetti sauce, what cheek, what sauce--

RAY: Tart, smart tart, hussey, ruth and rue the day--

(The crowd, unable to face the STRIPPER prancing before them, is now force to turn their faces away: as they do so, they are forced to notice the bodies of MAUDE and LYNN:)

STELLA: Will ya look at that:- laid out-- the two of them!

RAY: What a sight- turns yer stomach!

MAY: My school mates-- dead! Dead!! Gee....

DELLA: Never a dull moment round here, eh?

BUTCH: Wonder if they notice anythin' unusual....

ROMEO: See, now you see: both sisters murdered!

(The others get up and move cautiously toward the bodies and begin examining them. ROMEO stands somewhat behind the crowd, proclaiming his restored reputation:)

RAY: They're dead for certain- deader than door nails.
But that they was murdered is jumpin' to conclusions.

ROMEO: Sure they was murdered-- and Toby done it.

DELLA: Now, now, Butch, don't get carried away if ya jist
tryin' to get even with Toby for some slight he
done ya.

STELLA: Murder's a pretty serious accusal.

MAY: Gosh, don't they look ugly. Dirty and mangled and all.

ROMEO: What kinda accusal? There's Maude and Lynn laid out killed and there's Toby standin' right next to them! If he didn't do it, who did?

TOBY: (off-hand, applying make-up) Thanks, Romeo.

STELLA: Now jist because Maude and Lynn is laying next to Toby don't mean he killed 'em necessarily.

RAY: Call that circumstantial evidence, don't ya?

ROMEO: What?- are yis all crazy?

STELLA: Now don't get me wrong: of course, Toby mighta killed them. But so might any one of us here. Or somebody not here.

DELLA: How come yer so anxious to point the finger of guilt at Toby? What's yer motivation in tellin' all this to us? Maybe you done it, Romeo.

STELLA: Yeah, maybe you done it, Romeo, and yer jist tryin' to throw us off the track.

MAY: Sure- after all, Toby's a nice guy, he may be a little creepy, but that's no reason to be prejudiced for him. People who are jist a little different from everybody else are always the scape-goat.

RAY: That's true. Why don't we ask Toby if he done it?

ROMEO: Yeah, why don't ya? I will. Toby, you killed these girls, didn't you?

TOBY: Hi ya, Romeo, how ya doin'? Sorry, Romeo, I ain't sayin' nothin' till I see my lawyer.

STELLA: That's good, that's a good boy. Toby knows his rights.

MAY: You could be arrested for slander, Romeo, willfull slander. You could go to jail for that.

ROMEO: I don't care- not as long as Toby goes too.

DELLA: I don't like the sound of that:- why are ya so anxious to see Toby tossed in the clink?

ROMEO: Cause that way he can't get at May. May was the next victim:- he planned to murder May next.

RAY: What do ya mean? How do ya know that?

MAY: (seeing ROMEO hesistate) Yeah, how do ya come by that, cornball?

ROMEO: (haltingly, embarrassed, feeling his argument to be weak) Because I dreamt it... I dreamt he was goin' to kill ya, May-- a lot of times, I dreamt it a lot of times..... I love you, May, when people love somebody and they dream about them, what they dream about them is always true..... it's like ESP or somethin'..... you know....

STELLA: We don't know. That's as full of holes as everything else you've said.

DELLA: Yes, but apparently there has been a crime around here, and until we're sure there wasn't it's our duty to make arrests and start an investigation.

RAY: Yes, that makes sense. That's solid horse-sense. Good old western horse-sense.

STELLA: Indeed. But who will we arrest?

DELLA: Well, considerin' the circumstances of the case, I suppose we should arrest both Toby and Romeo and then have a thorough investigation of both of them.

MAY: See what yer big mouth got yerself into, Romeo?

ROMEO: I don't care, May, I don't care for nothin' jist as long as yer safe.

MAY: Bull- pure bull. What a snow job.

STELLA: (to the rock n' roll outfit) Will you boys make the arrest and take them to the sheriff's office?

SINGER: Sure 'nough, m'am.

RAY: What about Bad Butch? Maybe he had somethin' to do with this messy affair. What a mean scandal for our town.

DELLA: Nah, Bad Butch couldn't a had nothin' to do with it. He ain't the type. Them what got the reputation fer bein' bad like Bad Butch, never does nothin' bad actually.

DELLA: O.K., boys, take them two into custody.

TOBY: This is gonna be a bit of a come-down fer me....

(The rock n' roll outfit puts hands on ROMEO and they begin to lift TOBY down from his chair.)

MAY: Always wanted to see jist how short that shrimp was.

SINGER: Here ya go, Toby, now come along real peaceful like and ya won't get hurt none.

MAY: Ha! Why he's no higher than my bubbies!

RAY: Hush, May, watch yer language. It don't show proper upbringin' to taunt someone whose got a bit of a hard time ahead of him. Now is when you should be most sympathetic toward Toby, your townsman and schoolmate.

MAY: He ain't my schoolmate. He graduated a couple of years ago. But I am sympathetic to him, moreso than to Romeo anyhow. Toby's nice. He's got charm.

DELLA: O.K., enough talk. Let's head for the sheriff's.

TOBY: (standing on the ground at last, a little uncertain of his steps, trying out a gait) Grounded at last. On the same level as everybody else. What more could a fella ask for?

SINGER: Come on, you two.

ROMEO: What a fix, what a goddamn fix to be in!....

TOBY: Don't worry, pal, now you and me are on an equal footing. Feels great, don't it?

STELLA: What a day, what a sick day fer our whole town. Why did this have to happen in our town?

DELLA: Yeah, ya could see it in Chicago or New York or some place, but not here. Jist don't make sense here. Why did it have to happen here?

(The entire cast exits, leaving only the STRIPPER alone on the stage amid the rows of chairs. She looks about a bit bewildered, shrugs her shoulders and finally begins to sing and dance half-heartedly on the darkening downstage:)

STRIPPER: (singing) Well mah daddy kept his chair, chair,
warm for me-
Well mah daddy waited and he had to be
Mah daddy cause he kept his chair warm for
me.

And I'd love to be cozy on that chair
with him,
Stead o' sitting all alone on the edge
o' the rim-
Well at least he kept that chair, warm, warm,
I'm gonna sing and dance me up a storm!
I'm gonna sing and dance me up a storm!

C U R T A I N.

BOY ON THE STRAIGHT-BACK CHAIR

a play by Ronald Tavel

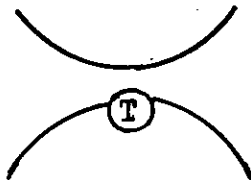
characters:

Stella
Della
Ray
Mary
May
Maude
Lynn
A Stripper

Toby
Romeo
Bad Butch
A Singer
A Rock n' Roll Group (optional)

set:

The set is an arrangement of chairs: two semi-circles of chairs, one with its ends curved around toward downstage, the second with its ends curved back toward upstage. If extras are available, all the chairs, if possible, should be filled. Toby stands on the centermost chair in the first semi-circle.



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LYRICS FOR
BOY ON THE STRAIGHT*BACK CHAIR

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No.1 Page 2; Male Singer and Rock 'n Roll Outfit

Action! Action!
Toby's lookin' for the action!
He don't let no mere distraction
Work addition or subtraction
In the manhunt for the action!
Action! action!

Toby's short, short, short!
Ain't no way he can contort,
Sport a cap or shoe support
Gonna make him look less short--
Short! short! short!

Toby's lookin' for the action!
Action! action!

No.2 Page 2; Stripper

Never marry a blonde, boy,
Never get fond of a blonde, boy,
Never abscond with a blonde, boy,
Never marry a blonde, boy!

Blondes'll eat ya -- lots o' head!
Nibble on yer ginger-bread,
Stuff yer shorts with thoughts o' bed,
Make ya hunger to be wed:-
But they'll lead ya, sore-misled,
To an alter never red--
They will treat ya, underfed,
To a banquet over-spread!

(Repeat chorus)

No.3 Page 14; Toby - singing as a hymn

Give, give good people
What they think they want;
High upon the steeple
Sits a marathon---

No.4 Page 14; Toby

If it wasn't fer me
May would be
After June:
Then whose doubloon
Would bust yer bubble?--
Whose would pay
Abortion trouble?---

No.5 Page 14; Stripper

Does yer engine need a battery?
Yer accelerator activity?
Does yer carburetor run on gas?
And slow ya down at Hyman Pass?

If I jack yer fender up for free,
Will ya screw the rubber on for me?
Ease the brake, and wax the brass,
Slow down drivin', save my----

No.6 Page 15; Stripper

Yeah! the merry, many facts of life
Are many as the days in May,
Merry May! Yeah! Merry May!
Now some of you ain't got no wife,
So I'll list the facts of life
In a startling expose
In the merry month of -- Yeah!! -- May!

No.7 Page 24; Stripper

I'm gonna take it off,
I'm gonna doff

My garb,
I'm gonna show yis what I got
Like it or not!
Hey! Hey! Hey!
Look, if yis can---
Look! Look! Look!
Look, if yer a man!

No. 8

Page 25; Stripper

Hey, let me lay far away
From where she went down today;
Stretch me out, out 'n out--
Leave little left to doubt
How the bed below in hell
Is to where our sister fell;
After her, after her, after her!

No.9

Page 28; Stripper

Well mah daddy kept his chair, chair, warm for me-
Well mah daddy waited and he had to be
Mah daddy cause he kept his chair warm for me.

And I'd love to be cozy on that chair with him
Stead o' sittin' all alone on the edge o' the rim-
Well at least he kept that chair warm, warm,
I'm gonna sing and dance me up a storm!
I'm gonna sing and dance me up a storm!