

THE AUDIENCE

A One-Act Play

by

Kevin A. Boon

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(Groups interested in performing this play should contact the author--Kevin@Boon.us)

THE AUDIENCE

CAST OF CHARACTERS

All students in their early 20's.

HYATT. A preppy intellectual.

DAVID. A brash, young man.

KAREN. An ebullient flirt.

TRACY. A sweet innocent.

UNDERSTUDY. An actress. A physical match for TRACY, dressed in identical clothes.

PUDGY. Karen's angry, bitter husband. A thin, physically unthreatening man.

THE TIME

The present.

THE PLACE

A university theater.

THE AUDIENCE

SETTING: Several rows of tiered theater seats, preferably matching the actual audience's seats. A red neon EXIT sign is lit on the side of the stage.

AT RISE: With house lights up, HYATT and DAVID, two college-aged men, take seats in the front row. A moment later, the lights onstage dim and the house lights brighten. Both men stare blankly at the audience. Both hold theater PROGRAMS with the title THE AUDIENCE printed clearly on the

Excruciatingly Long Pause during which lights slowly adjust so stage is slightly brighter than house, but house is still visible.

I don't get it.

DAVID

Shhhhhh...

HYATT

Long Pause. DAVID fidgets, flips through his program, grunts.

Would you sit still?

HYATT

DAVID tries and fails.

Hyatt, when does it start?

DAVID

(Checks watch)
It started five minutes ago.

HYATT

In a pig's butt!

DAVID

Seriously. Look. (Show him watch) The program said the play starts at <INSERT ACTUAL START TIME>. It's now <ADD FIVE MINUTES>. So, this must be it.

HYATT

DAVID squints at audience incredulously.

DAVID

You're yankin' me.

HYATT

David, I'm trying to pay attention.

DAVID again strains to see something significant.

DAVID

To *what*? It's just some dweebs sitting in chairs.

HYATT

Don't call them "dweebs;" they're *artists*.

DAVID

(Pointing to actual audience members)

What about that guy over there, the one in the <INSERT ARTICLE OF CLOTHING>, you telling me he's an artist.

HYATT

Certainly.

DAVID

And that woman over there?

HYATT

Uh huh.

DAVID

Even *him*!

HYATT

A master of his craft.

DAVID

You're out of your god. He's wooden. Stiff. Completely unbelievable.

HYATT

(Rattled)

That's probably the part he's playing. He's supposed to be unbelievable. The fact that you can't believe in him proves his genius.

DAVID

Genius, smeanius. He's not doing anything but sitting there.

HYATT

You really don't get this at all, do you?

DAVID

That's a fair assessment.

HYATT

Swartzenegger's rotted your brain.

DAVID

Don't bad-mouth the muscle-man of *Total Recall*. (w/ accent) R-neeze da single greatest actor of our age.

HYATT snorts his disapproval.

DAVID

(Pointing to program cover)

Fine, Mr. Snooty Intellectual, you tell me what THE AUDIENCE is all about.

HYATT

(Stumbling)

Well . . . it's a little early in the performance to crystallize the subtle thematic . . . I mean . . . I'd hate to do the writer an injustice by leaping to a hasty appraisal.

DAVID

Just as I thought, it's pooppy ca ca.

HYATT

"Poopy ca ca"?

DAVID

You know . . . excrement, feces, *crap*! A futile excursion into absurdity for the sole purpose of fueling banal dinner conversation. Garbage, tripe. Elitist gibberish. An huge cavernous absence of meaningful content.

HYATT

Keep your voice down; you're embarrassing me.

DAVID

(Glancing around the stage)

In front of whom? The audience is a morgue. I think you and I are the only people here who aren't related to the cast by blood.

HYATT

Look, the point of the performance is simple.

DAVID

Then explain it to me. I'm simple-minded.

HYATT

The writer is obviously trying to make a statement about . . . life.

DAVID

(Sarcastically)

That clears it up. Thanks. I was a bit befuddled before, but now that you've explained it.

HYATT

It's hard to put into words.

DAVID

I'm sure the writer would agree, considering that so far nobody in THE AUDIENCE has said a word.

HYATT

A couple people coughed.

DAVID

Ahhhh . . . Flim discourse. Melodious mucous. Snot a bad idea.

HYATT

Why don't you give it a chance. Perhaps the writer's saying that real drama doesn't happen onstage, that real drama occurs in the audience.

DAVID

I'm gonna get some gum-drops. Let me know if anyone sneezes.

DAVID rises and moves toward the exit. KAREN and TRACY, two college-aged women enter by EXIT sign. DAVID spins on his heels and hurries back to his seat. Oblivious, the women take seats several rows up and back from HYATT and DAVID.

HYATT

What happened to the gum-drops?

DAVID

Bad for my teeth.

DAVID, hiding behind his program,
compulsively glances back at KAREN and
TRACY.

HYATT

What are you looking at? (Turning his head)

DAVID

(Twisting HYATT's head back)
Don't look.

HYATT

(Turning his head)
What?

DAVID

(Twisting HYATT's head back)
Don't look.

HYATT

At what?

DAVID

That girl.

HYATT

(Turning his head)
What girl?

DAVID

(Twisting HYATT's head back again)
Don't look.

HYATT

Would you stop with the head already?

DAVID

Okay, just don't look.

HYATT

Who the hell is it?

DAVID

Karen Duchamp is sitting up there.

HYATT

Duchamp? You mean Karen *Hutchinson*?

DAVID

Formerly Karen Hutchinson.

HYATT

She divorced Pudgy Hutchinson?

DAVID

Kinda divorced.

HYATT

You can't "*kinda*" divorce anybody.

DAVID

Well, she's not with him anymore. That's all that I'm concerned about.

HYATT

Don't tell me!

DAVID

Don't ask.

HYATT

You and Karen Hutchinson?

DAVID

Duchamp.

HYATT

David-- you aren't mixed up with Karen Hutchinson?

DAVID

(Emphatically)

Duchamp!

HYATT

Duchamp . . . Hutchinson . . . whatever. Tell me you're not . . .

DAVID

I'm not.

HYATT

You are!

DAVID

Don't make a big deal out of it. We just went out for a few drinks after Anatomy lab.

HYATT

And . . . ?

DAVID

And . . . we got friendly. She's really a lovely woman. Very bright. She knows more about the interventricular septum than any woman I've ever met.

HYATT

So, why are you hiding? She with Pudgy? (Turns his head)

DAVID

(Twisting HYATT's head back)

Don't look.

HYATT

You do that once more and I'm going to separate you from your interventricular septum.

DAVID

Sorry, but I don't want them to see me.

HYATT

Karen and Pudgy?

DAVID

No. Karen and *Tracy*.

HYATT

Tracy? *Your* Tracy?

DAVID

Kinda "*my* Tracy." She is "my Tracy," or, she *was* "my Tracy," but she won't be "my Tracy" soon; rather, she's already not "my Tracy" in my heart, but I haven't told her yet, so, I guess I'm still kinda engaged to her. (On HYATT's disapproving look) Only temporarily. I'm planning on breaking it off, I just haven't had a chance. This thing with Karen came up so sudden. But, I sure as hell don't want to be caught between them.

HYATT

Oh my God!

LIGHTS dim a bit on HYATT and DAVID and come up a bit on KAREN and TRACY who are staring at the audience. Both women are holding PROGRAMS for THE AUDIENCE.

DAVID

(On dimming lights)
Who's fucking with the lights?

TRACY

Oh my God!

KAREN

It's pretty dull isn't it? We should have gone and seen *The Piano* again.

TRACY

Huh? I don't mean the play. Look who's sitting in the front row.

KAREN

(Bubbly)
David and Hyatt! Let's go say hi. (Rising)

TRACY

(Pulling her back into her seat)
Are you *crazy*?

KAREN

What? (Rising)

TRACY

(Pulling her back into her seat)
Would you sit down!?

KAREN

(Rising)
I'm just trying to be *friendly*.

TRACY

(Pulling her back into her seat)
I don't want David to see me.

KAREN

Why on Earth not? Aren't you getting married?

No. TRACY

(Shocked)
You broke up? KAREN

Yes...kinda. TRACY

“Kinda”? KAREN

Not officially...but, in my heart it’s over. TRACY

I thought you two were in love? KAREN

We are...rather, we *were*. I suppose we still are...I don’t know. I’m so *confused*. It’s like when I was four years old. I wanted a kitten. Wanted her *bad*. I begged my parents for weeks. Finally they gave in after I promised to feed it and care for it. TRACY

What happened? KAREN

They got me a white Persian. I called him Princess. TRACY

You called *him* “Princess.” KAREN

I was only four. What did I know about sex? (KAREN nods) I loved Princess and I took really good care of him...for about three days. Then, one day I forgot to feed him. Then I stopped cleaning out his box. Little by little, my parents took over the care of Princess. TRACY

You must have been very sad. KAREN

TRACY

I'd pick Princess up, scratch under his chin, and he'd purr. Then once, after I'd ignored him for a couple weeks, I was surprised to find that when I picked him up again...

KAREN

He tried to scratch you?

TRACY

That's the odd thing. (Pause) He purred twice as hard.

KAREN

(Genuinely interested)

And what's this have to do with David and you?

TRACY

(Taken aback)

I don't know. Like I said, I'm confused. (Pause) What do you think? Should I leave David?

KAREN

I thought you left him?

TRACY

I did...in my heart.

KAREN

I evicted Pudgy from my heart years ago. The only way he could get close to my heart is to cut me open. And once or twice I think he's been tempted. But it's my own fault, I treat him so bad. Still, I don't actually leave him. What would he do without me? What would David do without you?

TRACY

True...but...but...well...I'm kinda interest in Hyatt.

KAREN

(Excited)

Hyatt? Really? Now I understand why you want to dump David. Do you love him?

TRACY

Who? Hyatt? (KAREN nods) I think so. He's so sweet.

KAREN

Then go for it.

TRACY

You think I should?

KAREN

Of course. You only live once.

TRACY

True, still, I hate to cut it off with David. We go back a long way. I've got a lot invested in him.

KAREN

So, don't cut it off . . . (on TRACY's look) . . . until you know for sure that Hyatt's interested.

TRACY

(Giddy)

You think he might be?

KAREN

Why wouldn't he be? If I was a guy, I'd be crazy for ya.

LIGHTS dim slightly on TRACY and KAREN and rise slightly on DAVID and HYATT. Both couples notice lights.

DAVID

There go the lights again. (Back to HYATT) So, you'll do it?

HYATT

You and I are friends. I'm not going to hit up on your fiancé.

DAVID

You'd be doing me a favor.

HYATT

I'm not interested in Tracy.

DAVID

You have to be interested in a girl to hit up on her?

HYATT

I do.

DAVID

(Incredulously)
Yeah, right.

HYATT

What if she fell for me? I'd be screwed.

DAVID

She's not going to fall for you. And you're *not* going to get "screwed." Trust me.

HYATT

How can you be so sure?

DAVID

(Sizing him up)
Hyatt, you're a nice guy and all, but you're not Tracy's type.

HYATT

(Mildly insulted)
What's wrong with me?

DAVID

Nothing. It's just that you don't have to worry about Tracy falling in love with you.

HYATT

If I'm so undesirable, why do you want me to ask her out?

DAVID

Because, that way she'll know she has *options*. She'll know that I'm not the only man in the world.

HYATT

That's what she thinks?

DAVID

No doubt. You should see the way she clings to me. Like I'm some kind of pet. The woman's incredibly devoted.

HYATT

I can't do it.

DAVID peeks at TRACY and KAREN who are focusing on the audience. He hunches over and begins to sneak out.

DAVID

Just think about it. I'm takin' off.

HYATT

David, I'm not doing it.

DAVID

Call me later and let me know how it went.

HYATT

I'm not...(DAVID's out of range.)

DAVID moves toward the EXIT. A soft SPOTLIGHT moves with him. He notices.

DAVID

(Whispered)
Shit! Damn play.

EXIT DAVID. HYATT continues watching the audience. LIGHTS raise slightly on TRACY and KAREN.

TRACY

There goes David. I'm going to do it.

KAREN

Break up?

TRACY

Yeah.

KAREN

Shouldn't you wait?

TRACY

No. I've got to do it while I have the courage. Will you do me a favor while I'm gone?

KAREN

What?

TRACY

Talk to Hyatt. Find out if he's interested in me.

KAREN

Okay.

(Rising) Wish me luck.

TRACY

Good luck.

KAREN

KAREN watches TRACY EXIT. HYATT continues watching the audience. Once Tracy is gone, KAREN rises, moves to get a better view of the exit. Convinced that TRACY is not coming right back, KAREN furtively makes her way to the row of chairs immediately behind HYATT. KAREN reaches her arms around, runs her hands playfully across his chest, and nibbles at his neck. HYATT starts. KAREN holds on.

(Cheerfully)
Guess who loves you?

KAREN

Karen!? Are you *nuts!*?

HYATT

(Kissing and fondling him)
Nuts for you.

KAREN

(Attempting to disentangle himself)
Would you *stop* that!

HYATT

Throughout their conversation, KAREN continues to playfully fondle HYATT, while he continues to resist.

Guess who loves you?

KAREN

If you love me, you've got a strange way of showing it.

HYATT

Ohhhh...Baby. I'm hurt. Still, I wasn't talking about me.

KAREN

HYATT
Huh? Who're you talking about?

KAREN
You won't believe what Tracy just confessed.

HYATT
What?

KAREN
She's hot for you.

HYATT
Bull shit.

KAREN
It's true. She wants you.

HYATT
You're out of your mind. She's engaged to David.

KAREN
Not for long. You aren't interested in her, are you?

HYATT
Tracy's not my type.

KAREN
(Giggling)
And *I* am, right?

HYATT
I don't know. What's this I hear about you and David?

KAREN softens her attack, and moves into
the chair next to HYATT.

KAREN
What do you mean?

HYATT
You and David.

KAREN
What are you talking about?

HYATT

Don't jerk me around. He told me all about it.

KAREN

Oh? What did he say.

HYATT

He told me you all got "friendly" after Anatomy class.

KAREN

That's all?

HYATT

(Suspicious)
Isn't that enough?

KAREN

(Relieved)
Hyatt, you're imagining things. Sure we're "friendly," we're friends. But that's all.

HYATT

He seems to think there's more to it than that.

KAREN

I can't control what David *thinks*.

HYATT

Here I am, like a fool, thinking you're trying to get away from Pudgy, and now I find out that you're messing around with David.

KAREN

I'm not "messing around" with David. And I am going to leave Pudgy.

HYATT

When?

KAREN

Soon.

HYATT

You've been saying that for three months.

KAREN

I can't help it. You just don't understand.

HYATT

Understand what? That you have no intention of leaving Pudgy? That you're just stringing me along? That I'm some schmuck you run to when you get bored?

KAREN

Honey, no. You're my lover.

HYATT

I feel like a kept man.

KAREN

(Tenderly)

Hyatt, you're the only man I love.

HYATT

Then why keep me waiting? Why do we have to keep sneaking around like this? Why don't you leave Pudgy?

KAREN

I just can't right now.

HYATT

Why not?

KAREN

It's complicated.

HYATT

I'm a pretty smart guy.

KAREN

I just . . . I'm just *confused*.

HYATT

Who isn't?

LONG SILENCE during which KAREN lovingly rubs HYATT'S arms, shoulders, chest, and face. HYATT struggles to maintain his resolve. She obviously begins to win him over.

KAREN

(Suggestively)

I *want* you.

HYATT

What?

KAREN

Let's find a place.

HYATT

Here? In the middle of a play?

KAREN stares out at the audience.

KAREN

They won't even notice.

HYATT

(Considering her offer)

What if someone sees us?

KAREN

Come on, Baby. No one'll see us.

HYATT

What about Pudgy?

KAREN

He's at his mother's.

HYATT

We can't.

KAREN

Please! I want you so bad. (Running her hand suggestively across his leg)

HYATT

David and Tracy could come back in any moment.

KAREN

I don't care. I want you to do me.

HYATT

Karen, for Christ's sake.

KAREN

Please!

HYATT

No! Not here. Not now.

KAREN

I can't believe you're turning me down. You've got a woman begging for sex and you're saying no.

HYATT

It's not *you* . . . we're in a theater. You can't have sex in a theater.

KAREN

(Pouting)

You don't really love me.

HYATT

That's nonsense.

DAVID ENTERS by the exit. He is looking back over his shoulder as if he's trying to get away from someone. HYATT notices him.

HYATT

Crap! It's David. Quick, get back to your seat.

KAREN lingers a moment, courting discovery, then runs her hand, one last time along Hyatt's inner thigh, grins mischievously and sneaks back up to her seat. A moment later, DAVID, hunched over, slips in front of HYATT, heading for the other side of the stage.

DAVID

(In passing)

I'm not here.

ENTER TRACY from other side of stage. DAVID and TRACY meet face to face.

DAVID

Tracy! Good Heavens. What are you doing here?

TRACY

(Suspicious)

David, are you trying to avoid me or something?

DAVID

Don't be silly. Why would I do that?

TRACY

I don't know, that's why I'm asking.

DAVID

No, no. I'm excited to see you. (They HUG and KISS awkwardly) What are you doing here? I thought you were going to a movie.

TRACY

I ran into Karen. She wanted to see this play.

DAVID

(Glancing at audience)

I can't imagine why. It's as dull as real life.

TRACY

(Serious)

David, I'm glad I ran into you.

DAVID

Me too, Babe.

TRACY

I wanted to talk with you.

DAVID

(Worried)

Oh?

TRACY

We've been together now for quite some time.

DAVID

(Increasingly more nervous)

Yeah, so?

TRACY

And I was just thinking . . .

DAVID

Just thinking what?

TRACY

I was just thinking that, well . . . we'll always love each other, right?

DAVID

Of course we will.

TRACY

Sure, and if we love each other that much then we'd still love each other even if we spent some time apart.

DAVID

(Frightened)

What are trying to say?

TRACY

I just thought that maybe we should spend some time apart. You know, date other people.

DAVID

You want to date other people?!

TRACY

I thought it might make our love stronger . . . we'd be certain, not that I'm not certain now, but, if we really love each other, which, of course, we do, then what could it hurt?

DAVID

(Shocked)

I can't believe this.

TRACY

It's nothing personal.

DAVID

(Loudly)

The fuck it isn't!

TRACY

Shhhh! David, we're in a theater.

DAVID

(Looking at audience) Like they care. (To Tracy) Who is he?

TRACY

Who's who?

DAVID

Who's the guy you're dumping me for? I'll rip his heart out.

TRACY

I'm not dumping you for another guy.

DAVID

Sure. And Nixon had America's best interests at heart.

TRACY

(Emotional)

It's not like that.

DAVID

What else could it be?

TRACY

I just need some time to sort things out.

DAVID

What things? Why can't we sort them out together?

TRACY

(Tearing)

I'm just so confused.

DAVID

(Tenderly)

Honey, whatever it is, we can work through it. I'm your lover. The man you're going to spend the rest of your life with. Whatever's troubling you, I'm sure we can work through it *together*.

TRACY

Oh, I don't know. I just don't know!

TRACY EXITS. A beat later DAVID looks over at HYATT who's engrossed in the audience. DAVID looks up at KAREN. She's watching him. She smiles and motions him up to her. DAVID glances about, convinces himself that TRACY and HYATT are otherwise occupied, then takes a seat next to KAREN.

KAREN

(Seductively)

David! This is a pleasant surprise.

DAVID

Karen, what are you doing here?

KAREN

Watching a play, silly.

DAVID

With *Tracy*? Are you out of your mind!

KAREN

(Baffled)
What do you mean?

DAVID

You came here with Tracy!

KAREN

So? Tracy and I are friends.

DAVID

Yeah, but . . . what about you and me? The other night? After anatomy lab?

KAREN

(Obviously excited by the memory)
You were an animal.

KAREN moves suggestively close to
DAVID.

DAVID

Would you stop!?

KAREN

(Sharply)
What's the problem?

DAVID

The *problem!*? The *problem* is that you brought my fiancée here with you.

KAREN

What's the big deal?

DAVID

She could see us.

KAREN

She won't see us. (Sarcastically) Besides, we aren't doing anything.

DAVID

God, I hope I wasn't wrong about you.

KAREN

What's *that* supposed to mean? I thought you were a sweet guy, but, I swear, you're beginning to sound just like Pudgy.

DAVID

That's crap! I'm nothing like Pudgy. Pudgy's a self-interested putz.

KAREN

I'm beginning to wonder. Maybe you don't really care about me, the way you said. If you cared about me you'd try to understand what I'm going through instead of focusing on yourself all the time.

DAVID

What are you going through?

KAREN

You wouldn't understand. You're a *man*. That's why I asked Tracy to come with me tonight. I needed someone who could understand me.

DAVID

(Softening)

Karen, come on. I could understand you, if you'd give me a chance.

KAREN

I'd like to believe that. I'd like to believe that there's at least one man who wouldn't judge me all the time.

DAVID

(PAUSE)

Karen, I'm sorry. I care about you. I really do. I'm just so tense with all this Tracy business and this Pudgy business. Things would be so much simpler if it were just you and me.

KAREN

(Sincerely)

I want that. I really do. I think we would be wonderful together.

DAVID

The other night was pretty wonderful.

KAREN

Oooooo, yeah. I get chills thinking about a second time.

DAVID

Stop it. I'm getting excited.

KAREN

Really?

DAVID

Really.

KAREN

Good. When can we be together again?

DAVID

We're together now.

KAREN

(Playfully)

That's not what I mean.

DAVID

I know. We'll get together soon. I've just got to go slow with Tracy.

KAREN

Why?

DAVID

I don't want to hurt her. Right now she's vulnerable. She can feel me drifting away and she's hanging on.

KAREN

She can't be hanging on that tightly.

DAVID

Why do you say that?

KAREN

Just something I know.

DAVID

What?

KAREN
Just that she may have interests elsewhere.

DAVID
What kind of interests?

KAREN
You know . . . *interests*.

DAVID
Are you telling me Tracy's interested in other guys?

KAREN
Guy. Singular. And if you tell her I told you, I'll castrate you.

DAVID
You're out of your mind.

KAREN
Okay, if that's what you want to believe.

DAVID
You're serious?

KAREN
Of course, I'm serious. Why would I make it up?

DAVID
Who is it?

KAREN
What difference does it make?

DAVID
Just tell me who it is.

KAREN
Hyatt.

DAVID
Hyatt? (KAREN grins) (BEAT) Bull shit! Hyatt's not her type.

KAREN
O-*kay*.

DAVID

She wouldn't fall for him. He's an egg-head.

KAREN

O-kay. Don't believe me.

DAVID

She wouldn't do that to me.

KAREN

I thought you wanted to break up with her.

DAVID

I do . . . but, *Hyatt*. (Eyeing the back of HYATT's head) That's ridiculous.

KAREN

O-kay.

As DAVID is eyeing HYATT, HYATT looks over his shoulder and notices DAVID and KAREN together. HYATT stares at them quizzically. On HYATT's blind side, a young woman (UNDERSTUDY) resembling Tracy and dressed in the same clothes approaches HYATT.

UNDERSTUDY

Hyatt? (HYATT turns, but does not recognize the woman) May I talk to you for a minute?

HYATT

(Tentatively)

I guess.

UNDERSTUDY

I don't want to impose, or anything. I just so *confused*. David and I are . . . not getting along. Mainly because of you. Not that you've done anything. It's not like that. It's just . . . well, you see, Hyatt, I *like* you. And I was wondering if, well . . . I was wondering if you like me? Not like love, or anything, but, to date.

HYATT

(Completely confused)

Who the hell are you!?

UNDERSTUDY

(Off Balance)

Why . . . Hyatt . . . you know *me*. I'm Tracy. As in, "David and Tracy."

UNDERSTUDY is clearly dumb-founded by HYATT's refusal to accept her in the role of Tracy. UNDERSTUDY grows increasingly nervous, glancing now and then at the audience. HYATT never breaks character.

HYATT

What is this, a joke?

UNDERSTUDY

(Nervous cough)

Hyatt . . . I *like* you. And . . . I was wondering if, well . . . I was wondering if you like me? Not like love, or anything, but, to date.

Long PAUSE. HYATT stares blankly at rattled UNDERSTUDY.

UNDERSTUDY

(Between clenched teeth)

Cue.

HYATT

What?

UNDERSTUDY

(Between clenched teeth)

Cue. Cue. That's your *cue*!

HYATT

What "cue"? What are you talking about?

UNDERSTUDY

(Between clenched teeth, breaking character a little)

You're supposed to say, "Tracy, I don't know. David and I are friends. How could I do such a thing?"

HYATT

If this is a gag, it's not working.

UNDERSTUDY

(Between clenched teeth)

You're screwing up the scene. Just say it!

HYATT

I'm not playing.

UNDERSTUDY

(Full voice)

Oh, Hyatt. You're probably thinking about how you and David are friends . . .

HYATT

Am not.

UNDERSTUDY

(Struggling to stay in character)

And . . . and wondering how you could do such a thing. Well . . . well, I appreciate your loyalty to David, but I wish you'd reconsider?

LONG PAUSE

UNDERSTUDY

Hyatt . . . ?

HYATT

What?

UNDERSTUDY

Are you reconsidering?

HYATT

No!

UNDERSTUDY

(Angrily, completely breaking character)

Fine! This is great. I sit back in the wings waiting for an opportunity to exercise my craft, to make my contribution, I finally get my chance, and I have to be matched up with a psycho, a nut case who can't stay in character, or . . . or some *method* actor who can't roll with the punches.

HYATT

I have no idea what you're talking about.

UNDERSTUDY

We're supposed to be professional actors here.

HYATT

Calm down. You're just a little confused. (Gestures at the audience) That's the play (Gestures at stage) This is the audience. (To audience) Those are actors. That's make believe. (To stage) We're real people and this is real life. Now, suppose you tell me where Tracy is.

UNDERSTUDY

There is no Tracy, you moron. "Tracy" is a character. The figment of someone's imagination. She's not *real*!

HYATT

Yet, just a minute ago you said you were Tracy.

UNDERSTUDY

It's a part, you putz. Emma Snodweather was playing it, but she got nauseous, so I took over. Get it!

HYATT

No. You can't just put on the same clothes and come here and take her place. People are unique individuals. Someone gets sick, you can't just slip someone else into her place and expect everyone to adjust. People are not interchangeable.

UNDERSTUDY

AMATEURS!

UNDERSTUDY storms off stage. HYATT watches her leave then slowly turns his attention back to the audience. He stares at them suspiciously. KAREN rises and, dragging DAVID behind her, joins HYATT. She positions herself between the two men.

KAREN

Hi, Hyatt. We thought we'd join you.

HYATT

(Eyeing David)
Oh?

KAREN

It's so silly to sit apart. The three of us together is much more . . . *interesting*.

HYATT

I don't know . . .

KAREN

Don't be rude.

From one side of the stage, TRACY and UNDERSTUDY ENTER talking.

TRACY

You're kidding!?! He wouldn't deliver his lines?

UNDERSTUDY

Completely blew me off. I think he's demented.

They stop some distance from HYATT, KAREN and DAVID. Occasionally TRACY and UNDERSTUDY glance at the other three.

TRACY

He acted so normal during rehearsals.

UNDERSTUDY

He's not normal. Trust me. He's a real wacko.

On the opposite side of the stage, a thin man with a physically non-threatening build, PUDGY, enters. He scans the seats until he locates KAREN flirting with HYATT and DAVID.

KAREN

Now, there's no reason why we can't all be *friendly*.

PUDGY approaches angrily.

PUDGY

(Gruffly, with false bravado)
Karen? What's going on?

Though surprised to see her husband, KAREN smiles brightly.

KAREN

Pudgy, honey. What are you doing here?

HYATT and DAVID grow uncomfortable, pulling back from KAREN.

PUDGY

I got home early--found you're note. You said you were going to a play with Tracy. I don't see Tracy.

KAREN

Now, Baby. Don't start one of your scenes.

PUDGY

(Angrily)

This ain't no scene. You tell me you're going to a play with Tracy and I find you here with these schmucks.

DAVID

(Insulted)

Hey!

HYATT

David, stay out of it.

KAREN

Pudgy, you're so silly. I ran into Hyatt and David here.

PUDGY

You bitch. I'm sick of your lies.

KAREN

Don't call me "bitch"!

DAVID

She's telling you the truth. We ran into each other here. Ask Hyatt.

HYATT

It's true. She sat down two seconds before you showed up. (Noticing TRACY across stage) Look. There's Tracy. She'll tell you. (Motioning) Tracy! Over here.

TRACY and UNDERSTUDY approach.

KAREN

He won't listen to her. He believes what he wants to believe.

PUDGY

(To Karen) You promised you wouldn't screw around with assholes anymore.

DAVID

(Standing)

That's it. I don't have to listen to this.

HYATT puts himself between DAVID and PUDGY.

PUDGY

Come on, buzzhead. You want a part of me? I'll rip your heart out and show it to you.

HYATT

(To DAVID) Take it easy.

TRACY and UNDERSTUDY join the rest.

KAREN

Tracy, would you please assure Swartzenegger here that you and I came together?

TRACY and UNDERSTUDY

(Unison)

We did.

TRACY and UNDERSTUDY look at each other, questioning who's supposed to be in character.

PUDGY

Like I'm going to believe Tracy, the two-faced liar?

TRACY

Don't talk to me that way!

UNDERSTUDY

Yeah, who do you think you're talking to?

DAVID

I've had enough of his lip.

CHAOS erupts. DAVID lunges for PUDGY. PUDGY assumes a boxing stance. TRACY and UNDERSTUDY fling insults at PUDGY. DAVID screams threats while HYATT tries to talk him down. After a few moments of insanity, KAREN screams long and hard at the top of her lungs . . .

KAREN

STOP!

The house LIGHTS go out leaving the audience in the dark. The stage LIGHTS go up full. EVERYONE on stage freezes, then slowly turns their attention to the audience. They begin to APPLAUD the dark house. Slowly, on their applause, the house lights come back up. They smile at the audience. After a moment TRACY and UNDERSTUDY walk off together while applause onstage slowly peters out.

TRACY

You know, you're very easy to get along with.

UNDERSTUDY

Well, we're a lot alike, you and me.

TRACY

True, true.

TRACY and UNDERSTUDY EXIT.
KAREN gently grabs PUDGY's arm and leads him away.

KAREN

You know, I think you were really jealous.

PUDGY

I'm sorry, Baby. You know how I get. It's only because I love you.

KAREN

I love you too.

KAREN and PUDGY EXIT. HOUSE LIGHTS go out. HYATT and DAVID stretch and yawn as if after sitting through a long production.

HYATT

What do you think?

DAVID

I still don't get it.

They head out. Near the EXIT Hyatt asks:

HYATT

Where exactly is the interventricular septum anyway?

DAVID turns. They pause, motionless.

DAVID

(Matter-of-factly)

It's in the heart.

They EXIT.

CURTAIN