

ADULT FICTION

By

Brian Richard Mori

ADULT FICTION

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To my mom and dad

Special thanks to Gabe Barabas, SuzAnne Barabas, Allen R. Belknap, Dana Benningfield, Elaine Devlin, Catherine Filloux, Ronald Fink, Paula Fiore, Stewart Fisher, Mike Folie, Vincent Gaeta, Lawrence Guardino, Lawrence Harbison, David S. Howard, Judith Joseph, Gene Kato, Eric Krebs, Dan Lauria, Rick Lawless, Peter Leehy, Jerry Marino, Howard J. Millman, Lloyd Richard Mori, Ariela Moscol, Diana Moscoso, Álvaro Pizarro, Gabriel Poémape, Charles Salzberg, MaryAnn D. Smith, Joel Stone, Aaron Vierra, Leonardo Torres Vilar, Don Westerfield, Lynn Westerfield, and Anthony Zerbe.

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PRODUCTION HISTORY

ADULT FICTION was first produced by Shelter West in a 12-performance showcase at the Van Dam Theatre in New York City. Judith Joseph, Executive Director; Vincent Gaeta, Artistic Director. The play was directed by Lawrence Harbison; set design by Tom Targownik; costume design by MaryAnn D. Smith; lighting design by Madelyn Baker; and the stage manager was Susan Baker. Earl: Lawrence Guardino. Mikie: Peter Leehy. (The Patrons were uncredited.)

ADULT FICTION was subsequently produced at Geva Theatre, New Jersey Repertory Company, and El Estudio.

Geva Theatre Rochester, New York

Howard J. Millman, Producing Artistic Director; Anthony Zerbe, Associate Artistic Director. The play was directed by Allen R. Belknap; set design by Marjorie B. Kellogg; costume design by Susan Mickey; lighting design by Kirk Bookman; and the stage manager was Catherine Norberg. Earl: David S. Howard. Mikie: Rick Lawless. Patrons: Rick Christopher, Tim Dewitt, Diramund McDonnell, and Christopher Pitts.

New Jersey Repertory Company Long Branch, New Jersey

SuzAnne Barabas, Artistic Director; Gabor Barabas, Executive Producer. The play was directed by Stewart Fisher; set design by Andy Hall; costume design by Doris Dunigan and Lina Moccia; lighting design by Jim Hultquist; sound design by Merek Royce Press; properties by Deede Ulanet; technical director by John Wenz; and the stage manager was Rose Riccardi. Earl: Jerry Marino. Mikie: Aaron Vieira. Patrons: Billy Stone and Dominic A. Gregory.

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Teatro De Lucía

Lima, Peru

First produced in Spanish by El Estudio. Álvaro Pizarro and Ariela Moscol producers. The play was directed by Diana Moscoso; the assistant director was Diego Chiri; art direction by Diana Moscoso; translation by Leonardo Torres Vilar; the light and sound operator was José Miguel; the house manager was Erik Aguirre; and the set builder was Bill Reyes. Earl (Don): Leonardo Torres Vilar. Mikie: Gabriel Poémape. Patrons: Diego Chiri, Marcelo Campos, and Jéssica Degollar.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

EARL.....A man in his mid-fifties

MIKIE.....A boy of nineteen

PATRONS.....Men of various ages, races, and social backgrounds*

TIME

Summer 1979

Act One: A hot Friday evening around six-thirty

Act Two: A little after two in the morning on the same evening

SETTING

An adult bookshop and movie arcade just off Times Square

*A minimum of two actors, doubling or tripling and perhaps understudying the two leads.

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ACT ONE

Up Center is a draped entrance-way, leading to a vestibule, which leads to a door to the street. Up Right is a cash register on a raised platform over a glass display case. The display case has a wide array of rubber goods, sex toys, novelty items, eight-millimeter reels, etc. There is a small portable fan blowing noiselessly and ineffectually on top of the display case. Down Right is a broom closet with a beaded curtain. Stage Left are video booths, a pay phone, and a high stool. Along one or two of the walls are video racks arranged by subject matter and grouped under the headings Beta and VHS. Down Center is a long table filled with adult magazines.

In medias res: EARL, sitting on a chair, behind the counter, with sweat stains visible underneath his armpits. MIKIE, standing at the table, thumbing through a magazine; PATRONS milling about.

EARL. So: how's your mom? Your mom okay?

MIKIE. *(Glancing around, embarrassed.)* Yeah.

EARL. Your mom needs anything let me know, all right?

MIKIE. She's okay.

EARL. Well, in case she does. 'Cause your mom's good people. You gotta good mom, Mike. *(Mikie nods, shrugs.)* Maybe I'll stop by sometime, see how she's doing, like.

MIKIE. She said anytime.

EARL. Yeah, well, I should. You know. Have a cuppa coffee with her. Be hospital.

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. She's okay.

MIKIE. *(Shrugging.)* Ahhh...

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EARL. Whatta you mean “Ahhh...?” She’s a good lady. Listen to her -- do what she tells you.

MIKIE. (*A little irritated.*) Okay, okay. God...

EARL. Well, you know, just stay outta trouble, that’s all I’m about... ‘cause you only got one mom, Mikie, so you might as well, uh, listen to her... (*A Patron comes up to Earl.*) How many do you want?

PATRON. Just two. (*Earl makes change for the Patron in exchange for two tokens.*)

EARL. So, hey, where you been hiding yourself, huh? Haven’t seen you around for who knows how long.

MIKIE. Ah, I’ve been out trying to find a job, but it’s been tough: there don’t seem to be any openings.

EARL. What happened to your gig bagging groceries at Gristedes?

MIKIE. Awww... got laid off.

EARL. Oh. Sorry to hear that. Why’d they do that?

MIKIE. I accidentally slugged the assistant manager.

EARL. Mikie...

MIKIE. He kept making fun of me, saying I was stupid. I couldn’t help myself.

EARL. That’s no reason to hit someone. (*Mikie shrugs and picks up another magazine.*)

MIKIE. Other than that, I’ve just been hanging around home, spending time with my buddies -- you know.

EARL. What buddies?

MIKIE. Jerry, Bobby, Tony -- those guys.

EARL. What, ain’t them the kids that used to pick on you alla time?

MIKIE. They didn’t pick on me alla time.

EARL. And that Jerry, he’s the one who got busted for pulling that fire alarm.

MIKIE. So, one time. What, he’s okay.

EARL. He’s okay, huh? He’s a fucking ex-con, he’s okay.

MIKIE. What, ex-con? Juvie for doing that, when he was, like, ten, or something, big deal.

EARL. Big deal, huh? I’ll give you big deal... Your mom know you’re hanging around with these characters.

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MIKIE. I dunno. Jeez...

EARL. Well, does she?

MIKIE. Maybe she does and maybe she doesn't. I think I'm old enough to pick my own friends, Earl.

EARL. Yeah, well, maybe you are, but, uh... you know I don't go around telling you how to run your life, Mikie...

MIKIE. Yeah, right.

EARL. ... but, hey, these ain't the kinda kids you oughta be hanging around with.

MIKIE. Aw, come on.

EARL. Well, they ain't.

MIKIE. Yeah, well, who should I be hanging around with then, huh?

EARL. Good kids. Not scum.

MIKIE. Aw, I can take care a myself.

EARL. Yeah, but they can influence you; you can be influenced by them. Well, think about it, at least do me that much.

MIKIE. Okay.

EARL. Think about it serious, though. Don't think laughing, like.

'Cause, Mikie, you got potential. You're a good kid. (*Mikie shrugs.*) You are. But I seen it happen: some guy gets mixed up with the wrong crazy bunch: pretty soon they're going out popping hubcaps; pretty soon it's, uh, drugs. Well... it happens.

MIKIE. Yeah, but I think you got him all wrong, Earl.

EARL. Yeah, well, maybe you're right. But I'm just saying, like, you know... watch who your friends are. You know...? (*He glances over Mikie's shoulder as a Patron -- geeky, bespectacled, with half of his shirt untucked -- comes out of the booth with a guilty look on his face, then swiftly exits. Earl broods, crosses to the booth, and slowly pushes open the door. He stands there, staring at the floor, shaking his head in disgust.*) Aw, some a these guys, I'll tell you... (*Mikie laughs.*) Fucking pisses me off! (*He motions toward a nearby closet.*) Hey, hand me the mop, will ya?

MIKIE. Huh?

EARL. The mop: get it for me, huh?

MIKIE. Aw, I ain't gonna touch that thing.

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EARL. Aw, c'mon.

MIKIE. Hell, no.

EARL. You can't do me a little favor, like?

MIKIE. What, it ain't my job.

EARL. Okay, okay. Forget it then. I'll do it myself, you be like that.

(He goes to closet, takes out the mop and pail, and mops inside the booth. He looks over at Mikie and playfully flicks the mop onto one of his shoes.)

Watch your shoes. *(Mikie leaps away.)*

MIKIE. Hey, come on, man! *(Mikie quickly wipes his shoe against his pant leg.)*

EARL. *(Laughing.)* You look like a little old lady with a mouse. Whatta you think, it's gonna kill you you touch the handle even? *(He gives a wave and returns the mop to the closet.)* Ahhhhh... *(Mikie surveys the booths.)* Wanna Tab?

MIKIE. Yeah, okay. *(Earl pulls out two Tabs from a mini refrigerator that he keeps behind the display case.)* Is this one any good?

EARL. Hey, I just work here, Mikie. I don't spectator. To me, like, it's boring.

MIKIE. What, the real thing or the fake thing?

EARL. Well, the fake thing, of course.

MIKIE. Yeah, well, it's not as good as the real thing, that's for sure.

EARL. *(Handing Mikie a Tab.)* Here.

MIKIE. Thanks. *(Re the blurb and accompanying photo on the booth.)* Whatta these -- sisters?

EARL. You can't pay no attention to what it says there half the time anyway...

MIKIE. I guess...

EARL. I hadda guy, uh, come in this morning, coming in peddling some movies and magazines...

MIKIE. *(Reading the blurb, only half-listening.)* Oh, yeah?

EARL. Yeah. You know what kinda movies and magazines? You know what kinda perversions -- 'cause that's what they was -- he was doin'?

MIKIE. Uh-uh.

EARL. Kids; kid ones. Little girls and little boys, like.

MIKIE. Yeah...?

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EARL. Pre-teens. Maybe younger even. Made me feel ashamed. I told him if I ever saw him again, I'd have him arrested. You gotta have some standards, principles, else it's return to the caveman days, believe me. Certain things are sacred. Little girls and little boys are sacred. (*Earl makes change for a Patron in exchange for a dollar's worth of tokens.*)

MIKIE. What's the owner say?

EARL. Aw, he don't say nothing, he never comes in. I run it here... I seen him, what? once? one time...? I get a check inna mail, I never see him. It's a tax write-off, he don't care. I run it the way I wanna run it. And I run it good, too. Oh, I'm not saying I do a great service or anything, but, like: it's a tension reliever; it relieves tension. Some guy comes in here all tense, and he leaves, uh, with his tension behind.

MIKIE. (*With a laugh.*) And you end up having to clean it up!

EARL. Ahhh... the ones that do that, I mean it. What kinda decency is that, huh?, doing it in public, like? (*Pause.*) Awww... aw, I ain't kidding myself, Mikie, I know this ain't nothing, like I'm saying it is, or something. This ain't nothing so much I get sick inna stomach, like, knowing I have to come in here and do this. But I gotta find something good about it, else I'd end up throwing up inna morning, know what I mean? It's not something I want for me, Mikie, I have better ambitions: something respectable, like. It gets to you, you inna job you feel down in, y'know? But what can I do, huh? I need the money, like, you know...

MIKIE. Yeah...

EARL. Aw, well... (*He notices a roach by Mikie's feet.*) Watch out, there.

MIKIE. What?

EARL. By your feet. (*Mikie looks down, mutters "Sheee," and takes a step back as Earl tries to stomp on it with his shoe.*) Goddamn sonsuvabitches. (*He grabs a can of roach spray and tries to spray the roach as it slithers under a booth. A Patron comes out, coughing from the fumes.*)

PATRON. Hey -- ! What the hell -- ?!

EARL. (*Sheepishly.*) Sorry... (*He and Mikie exchange a chuckle.*) They give me the something or others.

MIKIE. I know what you mean.

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EARL. I got ‘em in my apartment, like mice so big, I swear to God, Mikie, I mean it. I go to my landlady about ‘em, I says: “Mrs. Bauer. There is cockroaches in my place the size of” -- you know...

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. “You think you can do something about ‘em?” I’m saying this nice, like. I ain’t mad. “Whatta you want me to do about ‘em?” she says. I says: “Mrs. Bauer. Mrs. Bauer,” I says... “They’re fucking eating the bristles offa my toothbrush. I get up inna morning I have to tippie toes it’s so bad.” She goes: “I’m sorry, I’d like to help you, but what can I do? I got ‘em, too. Everyone inna building got ‘em; everyone inna City. Why doncha get a canna something; Raid, or something?” This feds me up, Mikie, I have to put up with this. I know it ain’t her fault, but this is un-right. I don’t pay rent for no roaches.

MIKIE. No.

EARL. Sooooo... I buy the fucking canna Raid, right?

MIKIE. What, no good, huh?

EARL. Ahhh... they’re coming outta the woodwork, doncha see?

MIKIE. Yeah... *(Pause.)* I knew a guy usta butterfry ‘em and eat ‘em.

EARL. No shit?

MIKIE. I swear. Just for laughs. *(They laugh.)*

EARL. *(Shaking his head.)* There a lotta crazy people in this world, Mikie... *(A Patron enters: either he’s shabbily dressed or a hustler on the prowl.)* A lotta crazy people. But my basic thing: people are okay you get to know ‘em.

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. How you gonna get to know ‘em you don’t get to know ‘em? *(Mikie shrugs.)* It can’t be done.

MIKIE. *(Picking up a magazine and thumbing through it.)* No...

EARL. Oh, sure, there are some, you know, basic scum, sure, you get ‘em.

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. You can’t help it.

MIKIE. No.

EARL. Like, uh, your friend Jerry Romano.

MIKIE. Aw, c’mon!

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EARL. Well, I don't wanna get into that.

MIKIE. Good.

EARL. But my thing, lotta people don't take the time, that's the problem. *(Pause.)* "People who know people are lucky people": Barbra Streisand -- am I right?

MIKIE. *(Not quite following.)* I dunno.

EARL. People are interesting people, y'see?

MIKIE. Yeah. *(Earl makes change for a Patron in exchange for tokens.)*

EARL. I usta hack; I usta be a hacker, you know.

MIKIE. Oh, yeah?

EARL. You bet your bootie. *(Pause.)*

MIKIE. Do what?

EARL. Cabby; I usta cabby.

MIKIE. Aw, I didn't know that.

EARL. What, I usta drive a cab? Oh, sure... *(Pause.)* You a cabby you get to know people.

MIKIE. I'll bet.

EARL. *(Gesturing over his shoulder.)* Well, they're sitting right b'hind you.

MIKIE. That's what I mean.

EARL. I booked, like, six, seven, eight hundred dollars a week, something, like. Tips like a buck onna four, no shit. It adds up. Grunts giving me tips, little old ladies even. And they don't tip no one. That's 'cause I knew how to talk to 'em, I hadda gift a gab. Aw, I'd listen, too, if I hadda. You know... *(Pause.)* One a the best things for having a gift a gab is knowing when to listen.

MIKIE. *(Overlapping.)* Yeah, uh-huh, I --

EARL. *(Overlapping.)* They wanna talk, let 'em talk --

MIKIE. *(Overlapping.)* -- there was this one time, I --

EARL. *(Cutting him off.)* Who's to stop 'em?

MIKIE. *(Ironically.)* Nobody.

EARL. You're right. *(Pause.)* Aw, I did okay, y'know? Yeah, I did all right for myself.

MIKIE. Why'd you quit then?

EARL. *(Shrugging.)* Aw, well, the hours...

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MIKIE. Uh-huh.

EARL. ... the traffic.

MIKIE. Uh-huh. (*Pause.*)

EARL. Got so I couldn't stand those fucking people I hadda lug around all day long. Goddamn people piss your ears off!

MIKIE. Yeah... (*A Patron comes up to Earl.*)

PATRON. Got any chicks with dicks?

EARL. Movies or magazines?

PATRON. Movies.

EARL. Beta or VHS?

PATRON. Beta.

EARL. Over by the wall, there.

PATRON. (*Looking around.*) Wall...?

EARL. Where it says "Beta."

PATRON. Oh...

EARL. (*Staring after him, muttering to himself.*) Genius... (*Then he glances over at Mikie, immersed in a magazine.*) You like that stuff, doncha?

MIKIE. What stuff?

EARL. That pornography stuff.

MIKIE. (*Defensively.*) No, you know: girls.

EARL. Well, yeah: just pictures, though.

MIKIE. Still... some of 'em, man, I'm telling you.

EARL. Hey, I may work here, but I ain't dead. (*Pause.*)

MIKIE. I wanna meet somebody, you know, Earl? Somebody nice.

EARL. What, settle down? Settle down, huh?

MIKIE. Nah. I like my freedom.

EARL. Sure... (*Pause.*)

MIKIE. Maybe someday, though.

EARL. What, settle down?

MIKIE. The right girl comes along...

EARL. Uh-huh.

MIKIE. The girl.

EARL. Oh, sure.

MIKIE. Not now, though.

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EARL. No, not now.

MIKIE. Just for -- you know...

EARL. Yeah... (*A Patron comes up to Earl with a twenty dollar bill.*)

PATRON. Four.

EARL. Got anything smaller? (*The Patron searches his pockets.*)

MIKIE. (*Sheepishly.*) No, but I dunno, like. It's more than just that. I'd like to be able to... to care about someone... and to have someone care about me... y'know what I mean?

EARL. Sure, I know exactly what you mean. (*Pause.*) Whatta you, eighteen, nineteen?

MIKIE. Nineteen.

EARL. Yeah, well, you're young yet. You got time. Don't worry about it.

MIKIE. I'm in no hurry. (*Pause.*)

EARL. What, nineteen, huh?

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. You got plenty a time.

MIKIE. Sure... (*The Patron finds a dollar bill and hands it to Earl. Earl changes the dollar for four tokens.*)

EARL. You don't wanna miss out, though.

MIKIE. No.

EARL. You don't wanna miss out.

MIKIE. Uh-uh. (*Earl sinks sadly onto the chair.*)

EARL. I missed out.

MIKIE. Don't say that, Earl.

EARL. Aw, hey, it's true, Mikie.

MIKIE. No it ain't.

EARL. I don't got nothing. Never been married. Never had no one but myself.

MIKIE. Don't say that.

EARL. (*Giving a wave.*) Aw, hell... (*Pause.*)

MIKIE. You knew girls, though.

EARL. Huh?

MIKIE. You been with girls. Hey, some a those stories, huh?

EARL. Aw, there was one or two...

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MIKIE. See?

EARL. But it didn't end up to nothing, y'know?

MIKIE. Yeah... *(Pause.)*

EARL. I am fifty-five years old.

MIKIE. So, what's wrong with that?

EARL. You ever try being fifty-five? *(Pause.)*

MIKIE. No.

EARL. Then don't ask. *(Pause.)* Ahhh, fuck. My life's fucked. Just look at it.

MIKIE. No...

EARL. Aw, hell, I fucked up somehow along the way, what can I tell you, huh?

MIKIE. Don't say that, Earl, man.

EARL. Well, I ain't gonna belly-ache about it.

MIKIE. You can't.

EARL. But I am resigned to that fact, Mikie.

MIKIE. "Resigned."

EARL. I really am. What am I? I'm fifty-five years old...

MIKIE. So...?

EARL. *(Nodding to one of the booths.)* ... and I go around mopping up... cum. *(Mikie thinks a long moment.)*

MIKIE. You make change, too.

EARL. Aw, fuck change. *(Pause.)*

MIKIE. Somebody's gotta do it.

EARL. Huh?

MIKIE. Somebody's gotta do it.

EARL. Yeah, but why me, huh? *(Pause.)*

MIKIE. I wouldn't mind doing it.

EARL. Huh?

MIKIE. I wouldn't mind having your job.

EARL. Hey, this ain't nothing for you, Mikie.

MIKIE. Beats sitting around with my thumb up my ass.

EARL. You gotta future.

MIKIE. What future? I barely made it outta high school. What future? Hell...

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EARL. School. Ain't. Everything.

MIKIE. No?

EARL. Life: that's everything. School don't teach nothing about life. School don't teach nothing about what it's like in the real world. *(Pause.)*
"What, uh, year did Christopher Columbus discover America?" *(Pause.)*
"Who invented the cotton gin?" *(Pause.)* That's chicken shit.

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. You remember that.

MIKIE. I will. *(Pause.)* Remember what?

EARL. That. Life. Is. Everything.

MIKIE. Oh...

EARL. Don't forget it.

MIKIE. I won't.

EARL. Life, Mikie.

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. Is. Everything.

MIKIE. I won't forget.

EARL. Good... *(A Patron comes up to Earl and hands him a video. Earl takes the box and goes up behind the counter. He turns the box this way and that, looking for a price.)* Twenty-nine ninety-five. *(The Patron hands Earl a twenty and a ten.)* Outta thirty. *(Earl rings it up, puts the video into a brown paper bag, tapes the bag shut with scotch tape, and hands the bag along with the nickel change to the Patron. The Patron exits. Earl stares after him a moment, then turns back to Mikie.)* You know, Mikie, you oughta know this one girl I know. *(This gets Mikie's attention.)*

MIKIE. Oh, yeah?

EARL. Yeah. She's around your age. *(Pause.)*

MIKIE. What, you mean she ain't married or going with no one, like?

EARL. Aw, she was... but now she ain't.

MIKIE. What, married?

EARL. No, going with someone.

MIKIE. Oh...

EARL. Complicated situation, doesn't like to talk about it: but a good girl.

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MIKIE. Yeah? What's she do? I mean, how d'ya know her from?

EARL. She's a waitress.

MIKIE. A waitress, huh? Where at?

EARL. Over at whaddayacallit street, 28th Street. IRT to West 28th, a block or two East: Cynthia's Coffee Shop. I been going there regular; happened on it by accident, like; kinda took to it -- you know. Ah, it's an all-right place: good people, good food, reasonable prices. They got this breakfast thing, six to eleven:

MIKIE. In the morning?

EARL. *(Pause.)* Yeah. *(Pause.)* Two eggs, home fries, and, uh, toast -- choice a juice or coffee -- ninety-nine cents. *(Pause.)* Can't beat that.

MIKIE. No. *(Pause.)* She ain't one a those girls, you know, like trying to be an actress, is she?

EARL. No, like I'm saying: this is a good girl.

MIKIE. Yeah... *(Pause.)* What's her name?

EARL. Annnn.

MIKIE. Ann, huh?

EARL. Yeah, I go in there, kid around with her, like. She's good company.

MIKIE. Yeah. *(Mikie sits.)*

EARL. You feel like talking to a waitress you sit atta counter. They don't pay no attention to you you sitting inna booth. It's like you in another country, or something, as far as they're concerned.

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. Ah, go in, sit atta counter, order something: it don't have to be much. *(Pause.)* You drink coffee?

MIKIE. Sometimes.

EARL. Well, go in, order a cuppa coffee. Say: "Just a cuppa coffee." They'll serve you.

MIKIE. Oh, yeah?

EARL. They have to. It's the law.

MIKIE. Huh.

EARL. Oh, sure... *(Pause.)* Coffee's a good thing to get you wanna talk. Something about coffee gets the talking muscles going. Y'know?

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Caffeine maybe, I don't know. (*Pause.*) Talk to her, make some time.
"How you doing," like?

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. You go in there a couple, few times a week, they get to know you, you become a regular, like old friends. That's how you get to know 'em.

MIKIE. Sure...

EARL. Leave 'em a little something, too.

MIKIE. Okay.

EARL. You having a meal, though, leave the regular. What's that, ten, fifteen percent?

MIKIE. Something like that.

EARL. But something small: a cuppa coffee, a doughnut...

MIKIE. Yeah...

EARL. Cuppa coffee's, what? Forty-five cents? Well, leave a dime. Leave fifteen cents. Not much, but a helluva lot more than that ten, fifteen percent thing. They remember that, you know.

MIKIE. Oh, sure. (*Pause.*)

EARL. One time I wanted to make a good impression I left a silver dollar for a dime's worth a coffee.

MIKIE. What?!

EARL. Ended up taking her out.

MIKIE. Oh, yeah?

EARL. You betcha.

MIKIE. So, how'd it go? (*Earl has to think a moment.*)

EARL. Aw, nothing came from it, but you see what I'm getting at?

MIKIE. Sure... (*Pause.*)

EARL. Respect. That's all. You give 'em a little something it shows a kinda respect. It says: here's a little extra: for talking to me... for, uh, being pretty... for -- whatever...

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. ... for doing a nice job... for being you.

MIKIE. Uh-huh.

EARL. Talk nice; polite, like. Say "please" once inna while, "thank you." I do.

MIKIE. Well, so do I.

ADULT FICTION

EARL. Well, good then. (*Pause.*) Anyway... back to her. I think I got offa what I was on.

MIKIE. Yeah, Ann; what's she like?

EARL. A good girl.

MIKIE. No, what's she look like, I mean?

EARL. Well, she ain't heavy or nothing.

MIKIE. Wait -- she's fat?

EARL. Nah. She's just got these big bones.

MIKIE. (*Warily.*) Uh-huh.

EARL. Nothing to worry about, though.

MIKIE. It's not?

EARL. She's nice.

MIKIE. Is she?

EARL. Oh, yeah. Nice girl. Nice face. A kidder. (*Without realizing it, he uses his hands as if to indicate that she has large breasts.*) Nice, uh...

MIKIE. (*In anticipation.*) Yeah...?

EARL. ... personality.

MIKIE. (*Disappointedly.*) Oh...

EARL. I think you'd like her.

MIKIE. Sure... (*He crosses to the pay phone.*) Hey, you know what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna call her up.

MIKIE. Huh?

EARL. I'm gonna call her up.

MIKIE. Why?

EARL. To introduce you.

MIKIE. What?!

EARL. Sure, why not? Couldn't hurt. (*Earl picks up the receiver.*)

MIKIE. Oh, forget it, man.

EARL. What?

MIKIE. Forget it. Just like that?

EARL. Sure...

MIKIE. You gotta be kidding me. Just like that, huh?

EARL. Well, of course.

MIKIE. I dunno. Lemme, lemme go down and check her out first. Pretend I'm a customer, or something.

ADULT FICTION

EARL. (*Hanging up the phone.*) Oh, c'mon, Mikie! You're acting like a little kid!

MIKIE. I am not!

EARL. I'm trying to do you a good thing here, and you're being a little kid about it.

MIKIE. Hey, I didn't ask you to do nothing, Earl. You're the one that started this.

EARL. What, I'm the one that started this? You're telling me you're having trouble getting a girl...

MIKIE. (*Looking around, embarrassedly.*) I never said that...

EARL. ... and I'm trying to do you a favor.

MIKIE. Yeah...

EARL. I am.

MIKIE. Okay.

EARL. Well, I am.

MIKIE. All right already! (*Pause.*)

EARL. What, you telling me you don't wanna maybe go out with her, or something?

MIKIE. (*Sheepishly.*) No.

EARL. All right then.

MIKIE. (*Shrugging.*) It's just -- I dunno. First dates are hard, y'know?

EARL. Huh?

MIKIE. First dates...

EARL. Is that what's bothering you?

MIKIE. I never know what to say or do.

EARL. Well, it's tough, I'll admit it.

MIKIE. I'll say. (*Pause.*)

EARL. You want some advice?

MIKIE. Like what?

EARL. Ask 'em questions about themselves.

MIKIE. Yeah?

EARL. They like that.

MIKIE. What, to talk, huh?

EARL. 'Specially about themselves.

MIKIE. Yeah...

ADULT FICTION

EARL. “How’s everything, how you doing,” like. “How’s your job?”
Let her talk.

MIKIE. Okay.

EARL. “Whatta your interests, what kinda music you like?”

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. You don’t even have to listen.

MIKIE. You don’t?

EARL. Nah. Just nod slightly, think up questions as she gabs along. She asks you something and you miss it, say, “Huh?”

MIKIE. “Huh?”

EARL. Or “What?”

MIKIE. “What?”

EARL. She’ll repeat it.

MIKIE. Sure... (*Pause.*)

EARL. Make compliments.

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. “That’s a nice, uh, dress you’re wearing.”

MIKIE. Uh-huh.

EARL. “You gotta lovely hair-do.”

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. Let me hear you say that.

MIKIE. “You gotta lovely hair-do.”

EARL. They like that.

MIKIE. Oh, sure they do.

EARL. They're vain as hell.

MIKIE. You’re telling me. (*Pause.*)

EARL. Don’t be getting too personal, though. Like: “Nice, uh, breasts you got.” You call ‘em “breasts” when you’re around ‘em. They don’t go for “tits.”

MIKIE. Yeah. (*Pause.*)

EARL. You don’t wanna get too personal.

MIKIE. No.

EARL. Just a first date.

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. Don’t be ‘specting pussy onna first date.

ADULT FICTION

MIKIE. No?

EARL. Uh-uh.

PATRON. (*Who has been standing by the counter waiting to pay for some magazines.*) Excuse me.

EARL. I'll be with you inna minute.

MIKIE. What, second, third...?

EARL. (*Thinks a moment.*) Uh... third or fourth.

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. Varies.

MIKIE. Yeah?

EARL. They like it you spend a little money on 'em first.

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. Depends on the person, circumstances... how you hit it off.

MIKIE. Uh-huh.

EARL. So don't be 'specting it.

MIKIE. I won't. (*Pause.*)

EARL. If it comes, take it.

MIKIE. Sure.

EARL. Otherwise...

MIKIE. Uh-huh. (*Pause.*)

EARL. You wanna make sure you use protection, though -- you don't wanna get her pregnant.

MIKIE. No... (*The Patron clears his throat.*)

EARL. (*To the Patron.*) One sec, I haven't forgotten you. (*Then back to Mikie.*) So, I'll go ahead and make that call then, huh?

MIKIE. (*Shrugging.*) If you say so. (*While Earl drops in a dime and starts to dial, the Patron, having waited impatiently all this time, stalks out in anger, muttering to himself.*) Yeah, but I don't wanna talk to her, though; you talk to her.

EARL. (*Pressing down the receiver button with his finger.*) Oh, Jesus, Mikie!

MIKIE. Well, I don't.

EARL. Why not?

MIKIE. 'Cause I don't wanna, that's why.

EARL. How am I gonna introduce you you're not gonna talk?

ADULT FICTION

MIKIE. You can just mention me.

EARL. Oh, c'mon. Gimmie one good reason why you don't wanna talk to her? *(Pause.)* Well...?

MIKIE. *(Shrugging.)* I dunno. I'm not prepared.

EARL. You're not prepared.

MIKIE. No.

EARL. Y'don't gotta be prepared.

MIKIE. You don't?

EARL. Fuck prepared. You can't think.

MIKIE. You can't?

EARL. You start thinking and it'll mess you up. You gotta take things as they come.

MIKIE. Yeah?

EARL. Why, sure... *(Pause.)* What, I usta think.

MIKIE. Yeah, didja?

EARL. What good's it do you? Worry, headaches... I usta take Pepto Bismol like there was no tomorrow, so help me. So, I says to hell with it. No more thinking, no more worry... and I've felt better ever since. I mean, internally. *(An aside to a Patron who has been taking his time thumbing through a magazine.)* Hey, Shakespeare, this ain't no libary. *(The Patron frowns, puts down the magazine, and wanders away.)* You ever hear a predestiny, Mike?

MIKIE. Predestiny? Uh-uh.

EARL. Predestiny is like -- it's like something that's predestined, y'know? *(Mikie shakes his head without comprehension as Earl searches for the right words.)* Well, it's like, uh... something destined that's preed. *(Mikie nods his head, but still without fully comprehending.)* Give you an example:

MIKIE. Okay.

EARL. Uh... World War II.

MIKIE. World War II?

EARL. Yeah. Well, take, uh, World War II -- that was predestined. *(Mikie stares at him, perplexed.)* Well, like, uh... well, take us talking here. That was predestined. *(Pause.)*

ADULT FICTION

MIKIE. Whatta you talking about? What, you knew I was coming in here, is that it?

EARL. No, not me -- The Book.

MIKIE. What book?

EARL. There are books, Mikie, there are books -- and everyone's got one -- that tell everything that's gonna happen to you in your lifetime. That's predestiny.

MIKIE. Books...?

EARL. This is a fact. Soon, I think, to be proven. And these books were written -- I mean, so far back it ain't even funny.

MIKIE. And everyone's got one a these, uh...

EARL. Everyone dead or alive -- everyone since the beginning a time.

MIKIE. What, and it has, uh...

EARL. Everything. Everything that's gonna happen to you in your lifetime. Oh, well, maybe it leaves out some stuff -- like going to the bathroom, or something. But mostly: your whole life wrapped up in one book. (*Pause.*)

MIKIE. You think maybe God wrote 'em, or something?

EARL. Possible; it's possible.

MIKIE. What, you think they're in English?

EARL. (*Mysteriously.*) No one knows. I figure each book is maybe six, seven, eight hundred pages: small print. Maybe even a couple thousand pages, who knows? Prob'bly depends on how long you live.

MIKIE. Yeah, prob'bly. Hey, I wouldn't mind getting a hold a mine.

EARL. Hey, yeah, me either. Just to know what's gonna happen next, y'know?

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. But you won't unless it says so inna book. If it says so inna book you will.

MIKIE. Yeah...?

EARL. The book knows all, Mikie, it can't be changed. Well, it's just common sense...

MIKIE. Uh-huh. (*Pause.*) So where you think they are?

EARL. Huh?

MIKIE. Where you think they're at?

ADULT FICTION

EARL. Oh, I don't know. Fucking Egypt, or something. Inna pyramid, maybe.

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. Maybe under a pyramid, hell if I know.

MIKIE. Yeah.

MIKIE./EARL. (*Shaking their heads in unison.*) Something... (*Pause.*)

EARL. Fucking A-rabs getta hold of 'em they'll fucking blackmail the whole fucking world!

MIKIE. Hey, you ain't kidding! Boy, them A-rabs 're something, huh?

EARL. But my thing, maybe, my fucking thing: maybe they gotta couple books already -- maybe the A-rabs found, uh, one or two lying around someplace -- maybe they got Jimmy Carter's book -- that's why we're letting 'em hold our dicks!

MIKIE. Yeah!

EARL. It's not the oil, it's the goddamn books!

MIKIE. Yeah!

EARL. Well, something to think about anyway then, huh?

MIKIE. Yeah...

EARL. Something, ain't it?

MIKIE. God...

EARL. It's unbelievable, I'm telling you, but it's true.

MIKIE. No, I believe you.

EARL. There's been some books on it; and I think there's even been a couple a made-for-T.V. movies.

MIKIE. Yeah, I think I remember, uh...

EARL. This ties in, so to speak, with that school thing we was talking about earlier. You know...

MIKIE. How's that?

EARL. Life... (*Pause.*)

MIKIE. Oh, yeah.

EARL. I'm talking about a Plan a Life, Mikie.

MIKIE. Uh-huh.

EARL. Why, Life is one of the most important things in living. Without Life, what is there? (*Pause.*) Huh?

MIKIE. (*Flustered.*) What, what was the question again?

ADULT FICTION

EARL. Without Life, what is there?

MIKIE. Death...?

EARL. Nothing.

MIKIE. Oh-ohhh...

EARL. There ain't nothing without Life.

MIKIE. Ohhh...

EARL. Why, sure... (*Looks down at the receiver in his hand, perplexed.*)
What the hell...?

MIKIE. You was gonna call What's-her-face.

EARL. (*Slapping his palm against his forehead.*) Oh, yeah. What am I thinking? (*He hangs up, extracts the dime, drops it in, and redials.*)

MIKIE. What, you know the number off by heart?

EARL. Yeah, I usually like to call up and let 'em know ahead a time when I'm coming in and what I feel like having -- that way I don't have to sit around and wait for it. Good procedure.

MIKIE. Yeah, but you do the talking.

EARL. (*Giving a wave.*) Yeah, yeah... (*Finishes dialing, waits...*) It's ringing. (*Into phone.*) Hey, there, Josey. Guess who? Is Annie there? (*Pause.*) Yeah, put her on, will ya? (*Aside to Mikie.*) That was Josey. New girl. Poor thing. Her beauty's in bad shape, I don't mind telling you. (*Back to phone.*) Hey, there, Annie, it's me, Earl. (*Pause.*) No... no, I don't want no meat loaf. (*Chuckles...; aside to Mikie.*) Wha'd I tell you about her being a kidder, huh? (*Back to phone.*) No, no, I just, I don't want anything, I just called to talk. Uh, ya busy? (*Pause.*) Well, good. Listen, so, uh, what's the latest with you and Larry? (*Pause.*) Still the same, huh? Over with pretty much? (*Winks at Mikie.*) Aw, that's too bad. (*Pause.*) Yeah, you're prob'bly right. You are better off. He didn't sound to me like he was all that special to begin with anyway, to tell you the truth. (*Pause.*) What...? Uh, just wondering... Well, the reason I'm asking is, I got to thinking, and I know a guy -- friend a mine -- and I thought maybe -- well, who knows? -- maybe you two'd hit it off.

MIKIE. (*Embarrassedly.*) Jeez...

EARL. Yeah, he's a good friend; good kid. Name's Mikie.

MIKIE. (*Whispering.*) Michael, say Michael. (*Pause*)

ADULT FICTION

EARL. What, you think I'd fix you up with an old guy like me? Hah! (*Chuckles...; aside to Mikie.*) She, she's a masterpiece, I swear to God, an absolute masterpiece! (*Back to phone.*) No, no, he's, uh...

MIKIE. (*Ibid.*) Twenty-one.

EARL. Twenty-one...? (*Mikie nods, shrugs.*) He's twenty-one. (*Pause.*) Yeah...

MIKIE. (*Ibid.*) Good-looking. (*Earl looks at Mikie; Mikie adds defensively.*) Well, kinda, you know...

EARL. (*Back to phone, mumbling.*) Uh, good-looking kid. (*Pause.*) What...? (*Pause.*) Well, I don't know when, uh... (*Glances at Mikie.*) Well, he's right here, you wanna talk to him...?

MIKIE. (*Moving away.*) No...!

EARL. Yeah, he's right here with me.

MIKIE. No, Earl, man, you promised...!

EARL. I'll put him on.

MIKIE. Hey, c'mon, uh-uh...!

EARL. Here he is. (*He cups his hand over the mouthpiece, then holds out the receiver for Mikie to take. Mikie vehemently shakes his head and waves his arms, wanting no part of it. Earl broods, sets down the receiver, and casually walks away as Mikie's chin drops. He stares at the phone, looks over at Earl, who is standing there grinning, then back to the phone. Realizing that it's not some sort of joke, that there's no way he can easily get out of it, he hesitantly moves towards the phone, picks up the receiver...*) Life... (... and slowly brings it to his ear.)

MIKIE. Hel... hello? (*Pause.*) Yeah, hi. This is kind of, uh... (*Pause.*) Yeah, I know whatcha mean. (*Laughs nervously.*)

EARL. Wha'd she do, kid ya?

MIKIE. (*Turning his back on Earl.*) Well, listen, uh... you wanna maybe do something sometime? (*Pause.*) Oh, yeah, you do?

EARL. She does, huh?

MIKIE. Well, how 'bout, uh... you doing anything maybe, uh... (*Pause.*) Huh? (*Pause.*) Tonight? (*Pause.*) No, tonight's, uh... I thought, you know, maybe give it a week or two if, uh -- but, no, tonight, tonight's fine, yeah. (*Pause.*) O-kay. (*Pause.*) No, I was just thinking nine o'clock's kinda late, isn't it? (*Pause.*) No... no, I don't have to get up early or

ADULT FICTION

nothing: nine o'clock. (*Pause.*) No, I'll meet you there, that's fine. (*Pause.*) Yeah, Earl told me. (*Pause.*) We'll go out, or something then; do something. (*Pause.*) Good. (*Pause.*) Okay, then, uh... I'll, uh... I'll see you, uh... (*Pause.*) Yeah, okay, yeah, b-bye... (*He slowly replaces the receiver.*)

EARL. Well...?

MIKIE. Jeez...

EARL. ... what?

MIKIE. ... I can hardly believe it, y'know?

EARL. Tonight, huh?

MIKIE. And she doesn't even know me -- that's the thing!

EARL. Yeah, well, that's why she's going out with you -- to get to know you! And, like, me, too, you know. She knows I ain't scum. She knows I wouldn't feed her scum. She's a valuer a my judgment.

MIKIE. Uh-huh. (*Pause.*)

EARL. Hey, you know what would be nice?

MIKIE. What?

EARL. Maybe get her a little something, huh?

MIKIE. Like what?

EARL. Aw, I don't know, think a something. (*Mikie thinks.*) You know, candy, flowers...

MIKIE. Ohhh...

EARL. The thought, that's all.

MIKIE. Sure, I get it.

EARL. Candy, flowers, doesn't matter.

MIKIE. I see. But, like, which would you get if, you know, you were me?

EARL. Ahhh... get her the candy.

MIKIE. Yeah?

EARL. She'll like that.

MIKIE. Sure.

EARL. And appreciate it, too.

MIKIE. Who wouldn't?

EARL. So, get her the candy.

ADULT FICTION

MIKIE. Okay. I will then. *(Pause.)* Why candy? Instead a flowers, I mean.

EARL. Flowers die.

MIKIE. They do, yeah.

EARL. Candy says: here, eat this, break out, get fat, doesn't matter. I'll still like you anyway.

MIKIE. Oh.

EARL. Why, sure. You can't eat flowers.

MIKIE. No way.

EARL. It'll make you sick. They eat it, they like it, they like you for giving it to 'em. This is even before you getting to know her even.

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. Nice gesture. A definite plus.

MIKIE. Uh-huh.

EARL. The thought, that's all. *(Pause.)*

MIKIE. So, where you think we should go?

EARL. Hah?

MIKIE. Where you think I should take her?

EARL. Whatsa matter with you? Ain't you never been out with no girl before, Mikie?

MIKIE. *(Defensively.)* Sure, I been out with plenty of girls.

EARL. Yeah? So why you ask?

MIKIE. I just thought, you know, maybe you know what she likes, is all.

EARL. Huh? Ahhh, I don't know... *(Pause.)*

MIKIE. *(Feeling Earl out.)* Maybe bowling, huh?

EARL. Mm...?

MIKIE. Maybe I'll take her out for a little bowling. *(Mikie mimes bowling a bowling ball.)*

EARL. *(Less than thrilled by the idea.)* Oh...

MIKIE. Whatta you think?

EARL. *(Shrugging, noncommittal.)* Hey, it's up to you, you know, whatever...

MIKIE. Yeah... *(Pause.)* Does she, uh, bowl, you know?

EARL. Uh... I don't know -- well, maybe not, Mike.

MIKIE. No...?

ADULT FICTION

EARL. You gotta remember, too, she's just getting off an eight-hour shift. She might not like that standing on her feet all night.

MIKIE. Yeah, you got a good point there. So, what then: maybe a movie, or something?

EARL. There you go -- take her to a movie.

MIKIE. I will.

EARL. No sex stuff.

MIKIE. No, I know.

EARL. Well, some skin's okay. But no penetration. Makes 'em queasy, like.

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. PG, R.

MIKIE. Huh?

EARL. PG, R.

MIKIE. Oh, yeah.

EARL. A little's okay. You don't wanna fall asleep.

MIKIE. No...

EARL. Fuck Disney, fuck G.

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. Fuck X.

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. Pick something you can both enjoy. (*Pause.*) Uh... you like Eastman?

MIKIE. Who?

EARL. Clint Eastman?

MIKIE. Eastwood.

EARL. 'Cause they gotta double whatchamacallit playing around the corner. Two Clint Eastman spectaculars: Dirty Harry and Magnum Force. You seen 'em?

MIKIE. I seen the one, I'm pretty sure.

EARL. Which one's that?

MIKIE. Dirty Harry.

EARL. Well, that's the most famous.

MIKIE. Didn't see the other one, though.

EARL. What, Magnum Force?

ADULT FICTION

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. Good picture.

MIKIE. What, Magnum Force?

EARL. Well, both a them. Lotta action, a little skin: no penetration. ‘Cause this guy, this guy, Mikie, he puts duty first; he don’t be going around screwing with broads -- leastwise showing it. Now, that’s not to say he don’t get some on the side, mind. Oh, he gets plenty, no question about it. No, this is just, uh, what you call, good taste.

MIKIE. Uh-huh. (*Earl smiles.*)

EARL. You know why they call him “Dirty Harry,” doncha?

MIKIE. Uh-uh.

EARL. ‘Cause he takes every dirty job that comes along.

MIKIE. Yeah?

EARL. They love him, you know.

MIKIE. Who?

EARL. Girls. They think he’s God’s gift to the universe, or some such. (*Mikie laughs.*) So, what’s it gonna be, Mikie?

MIKIE. Huh?

EARL. Whatta you gonna take her to see?

MIKIE. I think I’ll take her to see ‘em.

EARL. Yeah, what, Dirty Harry and Magnum Force?

MIKIE. Yeah.

EARL. Hey, good pictures. Good choice. I think she’ll go for ‘em.

MIKIE. Yeah, me, too. (*Earl looks past Mikie at the magazines in disarray on the table, then shakes his head and frowns.*)

EARL. Aw, will you look at these fucking jerk junkies...? If they ain’t gonna buy the magazines, least they could do is put ‘em back where they b’long. (*Earl rearranges the magazines.*)

MIKIE. Well, if you don’t mind, I’m gonna go home then; get ready.

EARL. Good idea.

MIKIE. You know, change clothes; shave, shower...

EARL. Aw, you gonna take a shower, huh?

MIKIE. Yeah...

EARL. (*Tickling him under his arms.*) Don’t forget to get under here!

ADULT FICTION

MIKIE. Ah, come off it, will ya?! (*They break apart, giggling, and then regard one another, shyly. The lights begin to fade.*)

EARL. I hope you like her, huh?

MIKIE. Yeah, me, too.

EARL. You got enough money?

MIKIE. I'm okay.

EARL. 'Cause if you don't, you know, I'll help you out.

MIKIE. No, I'll be fine, thanks.

EARL. Well, have a good time, huh?

MIKIE. We will.

EARL. You two kids have a good time, you hear?

MIKIE. Thanks again, huh, Earl?

EARL. Sure, anytime. Maybe you can, uh, 'cipricle me one a these days.

MIKIE. Yeah, maybe.

EARL. Who knows?

MIKIE. Okay, see ya.

EARL. Bye, ya, kid... (*Mikie exits. Earl stares after him, smiling, complacent, brimming with pride; and then, as he slowly takes in his surroundings, his smile fades, his body sags. He moves to one of the booths, listens a moment, then pounds on the door with his fist.*) Hey, turn on the projector in there! (*The sound of a projector goes on from inside the booth.*) That's better.

Blackout

END OF ACT ONE

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