

THE DUCK POND AND OTHER SPACES

a play with or without live music

by

Luigi Salerni

THE DUCK POND AND OTHER SPACES

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THE DUCK POND AND OTHER SPACES

for Jay

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writing of this play.*

THE DUCK POND AND OTHER SPACES

CAST

CLOWN—male or female. Age flexible.

MARK FLETCHER—16-18

MARY FLETCHER (Mother)—35 plus

JAMES FLETCHER (Father)—35 plus

CHASTITY “CHARLEY” MILLER—16-18

MARY ELIZABETH “LIZ” MERCER—10 (could be played by an adult)

TWO DANCERS (if used)--flexible

CLOWN: Not a traditional cliché circus clown, but a clown in quotation marks. Either functions as a Brechtian presence or as an extension of Mark.

MARK: At an age of transition.

MARY: A wife and mother who feels lonely at times.

JAMES: Intimacy does not come naturally to him.

CHASTITY: She wants Mark to belong to her. If not Mark, it would be someone else, but she doesn't know that yet.

MARY ELIZABETH: Innocence is only temporary.

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A NOTE OF CAUTION

The play is playful. It should not be played with a sense of bitterness, negativity, or gloom. The characters all have a sense of humor. They like each other. What may appear on the surface as mean-spirited is a struggle to connect or reconnect. Mark and Chastity believe they are behaving as if mature and sophisticated. When Mark is with Liz, he treats her as an equal and never acts like a child himself.

THE SETTING AND TIME

A dark stage. A musical ensemble is playing—perhaps a jazz combo: first a tinkering childlike melody that evolves into a more layered one. The most prominent design element is an oversized horse that looks to have been taken from an old carousel. At various other locales, are other selected and perhaps oversized images suggesting childhood but not necessarily equal in their distortion from reality. There is a pile of A-B-C blocks, a sandbox, a tricycle, a teddy bear, a swing, a slide, etc. There should be no attempt to suggest a specific time or place. If a musical ensemble is used and is live, it should be as much a part of the physical environment as are the actors. If desired, actors might never leave the stage even when not directly involved in a scene; stage directions that indicate entrances or exits may be accomplished merely by a change in focus.

A more innocent time.

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ACT 1

CLOWN enters laughing and singing “A tisket, a tasket, a green and Yellow basket...” He is followed by the other characters who form a processional to the music. LIZ wears her mother’s hat and shoes; JAMES wears an old brown wool coat and carries a large well-used dictionary; MARK is wrapped in a dirty white cloak; CHASTITY carries a withered bouquet of spring flowers; MARY wears a flowered apron and carries a broom over her shoulder like a rifle. LIZ crosses to the playing blocks; JAMES sits in the swing; MARY cuddles the teddy bear; CHASTITY reclines in the sandbox; MARK sits huddled on the back of the horse. All freeze. CLOWN addresses the audience:

CLOWN. It was in the year ____ that a small child, Mary Elizabeth Mercer, died. You were there but may not remember. Images fade. Red is pink and black is gray, and time grows flowers and green. *(Laughs)* It doesn’t matter. But sometimes I wake from the dream and wonder how these things are linked together and what they mean. *(As he runs off:)* It doesn’t matter. *(We hear him laughing and singing in the distance: “A tisket, a tasket...”)*

MARY. *(without changing her position:)* Mary Elizabeth, are you out there? Your mother wouldn’t be very pleased if she knew you were wasting your lesson time. Mary Elizabeth Mercer! I’m talking to you. Do you hear me?!

LIZ. Yes, Mrs. Fletcher.

MARY. Did you hear what I said?

LIZ. No, Mrs. Fletcher.

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MARY. *(turning into the scene:)* Well, I...Oh, never mind. You can be a nuisance sometimes, you know. You'll never learn to play the piano if you don't practice. Your fingers will get stiff with arthritis when you get old.

LIZ. *(under her breath:)* I hate the piano.

MARY. You'll be sorry when you get older that you didn't work harder

LIZ. I won't get that old. I'm only nine.

MARY. Nonsense.

LIZ. Where's Mark?

MARY. At school and you know it. Now, stop stalling. I'll have no more nonsense. You have to practice and that's all there is to it. Now, play all the C-scales and then that new piece you learned last week. *(As she turns to leave:)* You know, the pretty one. *(Mary exits as Liz begrudgingly turns and begins to play an imaginary piano on one of the playing blocks. The sound filters over the stage for a while as Mark sits up and drops his cloak upstage of the horse.)*

MARK. *(calling:)* Lizzy! Lizzy Borden!!

LIZ. Don't bother me now. I'm going to be a famous piano player like Ludwig...uh... Brahms!...and everyone will pay a lot of money to see me and I'll have my name on the news and be in the movies and everything! Anyway, if I don't practice this stuff your mother will tell on me and I'll get in trouble. So, go away.

MARK. *(crossing to her:)* Can't I stay and listen?

MARY. *(calling:)* Mary Elizabeth! Are you practicing?

LIZ. *(to Mark:)* If you keep quiet.

MARY. What?

LIZ. Yes, Mrs. Fletcher, I'm practicing.

MARY. Well, I can't hear you. *(Liz sticks her tongue out. Mark laughs.)*

LIZ. Shhhhhhhh!!!

MARK. Oh. Sorry. *(Liz begins to play—badly, but with great enthusiasm. After a while:)* Brahms, you say?

LIZ. Oh, shut up! *(Liz plays louder but not better.)*

MARK. Want to go to the park?

LIZ. No!!

MARK. Okay, genius Brahms. See you in the newspaper and the movies.

LIZ. Mark?

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MARK. Huh?

LIZ. You like me, don't you?

MARK. *(tussling her hair:)* Of course I do, Dumb-Dumb. See ya!

MARY. *(calling:)* Mary Elizabeth Mercer!

LIZ. *(calling back)* I dropped my pencil!!! *(Liz starts to play frantically.)*
Mark, will you marry me?

MARK. Sure.

LIZ. Really?

MARK. I said yes, didn't I?

LIZ. I know, but I mean...really?

MARK. Hey, you want to go to the park?

LIZ. I'll get in trouble.

MARK. No, you won't. Mom's an old softie.

LIZ. Can we go to the duck pond?

MARK. Yeah, I guess so.

LIZ. *(not convinced:)* You're sure she won't tell my mother?

MARK. If you don't believe me, stay here and become famous. *(He starts to leave. Liz hesitates for a moment and then tosses her hat and shoes aside, runs to him and clasps his hand.)*

LIZ. I love you.

MARK. *(laughing:)* Sure you do Lizzie. Sure you do. *(They run singing either "A tisket, a tasket, a green and yellow basket" or "Lizzie Borden took an ax and gave her mother forth whacks..." as Clown emerges from the shadows, jumping a rope.)*

CLOWN. *(to the audience:)* Remember? *(He exits, laughing and singing.)*

CHASTITY. "He loves me...He loves me not...He loves me...He loves her not..."

MARK. *(as they pass:)* Hiya, Charley.

CHASTITY. Hi....

LIZ. That's a funny name for a girl.

MARK. What is?

LIZ. Charley.

MARK. What do you mean? It's a nice name. I had a parakeet once and her name was Charley. Anyway, it's better than Chastity. And a whole lot better than Ludwig-Brahms-Lizzie Borden-Mary-Elizabeth-Mercer.

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LIZ. Huh?

MARK. Forget it, Dumb-Dumb. You're too young to understand.

LIZ. I'm not either! I'm almost ten!

MARK. (*calling over his shoulder:*) Hey, Charley, want to go see the ducks?

CHASTITY. (*hesitantly:*) No thanks.

MARK. Okay, but you don't know what you're missing. (*Chastity looks at her flowers, puts them in the sand and slowly begins to bury them.*)

CHASTITY. These flowers are ugly.

JAMES. (*reading:*) "...oogenesis: formation of the egg and its preparation for fertilization and development....Oogonium: the female sexual organ in oogamous thallophytic plants, containing one or more eggs, or oospheres, which develop after fertilization into oospores.."

MARY. (*entering:*) What on earth...?

JAMES. I'm reading about the birds and the bees.

MARY. Oh. Have you seen Mary Elizabeth?

JAMES. No. (*Pause.*) This is so exciting. Once I get the information committed to memory, I'm going to sit down with Mark and tell him all about it.

MARY. (*amused:*) Mark doesn't need you to tell him about the birds and the bees as you put it.

JAMES. (*mock surprise*) You mean I'm memorizing all this "oogenesis" stuff for nothing? Not very considerate of him, I'd say.

MARY. (*playing along:*) It's very nice of you I'm sure, but don't you think it's a bit late?

JAMES. I suppose. He's got Charley now, doesn't he?

MARY. James! They're just children.

JAMES. Well, we were messing around at their age and I didn't think of us as "just children" as *you* put it.

MARY. I don't want to discuss it.

JAMES. You don't expect he's still a virgin, do you?

MARY. Please...

JAMES. If somebody's children didn't do it in the back of cars, under bushes, and behind coke machines sometimes, most of us wouldn't be

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around, you know. It isn't like it's perverse or only reserved for the Chinese.

MARY. He's our son.

JAMES. And I hope he's inherited enough sense to have tossed it out for the world to see by now. Good god, I can't believe you sometimes.

MARY. Dinner will be ready in half an hour.

JAMES. What is it?

MARY. *(smiling:)* What would you like?

JAMES. You mean steak—with lots of mushrooms?

MARY. With lots of mushrooms.

JAMES. *(embracing her from behind:)* You know what they do to me, don't you? Mushrooms. As soon as those mushrooms hit bottom, I go right out of my mind. Just the thought of it gets me... *(He turns her around and tries to kiss her.)*

MARY. *(giggling:)* Stop...stop it. You're tickling me.

JAMES. Foreplay. Have you forgotten? Which way's the bedroom?

MARY. Yours or mine?

JAMES. *(tickling her more aggressively:)* Ha! Ha! I'll show you.

MARY. *(laughing:)* Stop it James! Stop it! You know it drives me wild.

JAMES. That's the idea! Come on...let the steak burn. *(Speaking in a phony French accent:)* I want you! I need you.

MARY. Stop it! James!!! Stop!! *(She breaks away and runs across the stage.)*

JAMES. *(laughing while stalking her:)* You think you can get away from me, do you? Try. Go on, Mary. Try. It makes the victory more exciting. *(He chases her around, playing keep-away like children.)*

JAMES. You always liked it this way best, didn't you?

MARY. Mark will be here any minute. James!!!

JAMES. So? He knows where he came from.

MARY. *(still joking and laughing:)* Are you sure...? *(The action freezes. Clown enters and speaks over the tableau while dancers [if used] depict a "Diary of a Marriage"—including wedding, birth, joy, separation.)*

CLOWN. *(laughing periodically throughout:)* It wasn't very long ago. Or it won't be very long from now. You didn't mean to say it. It just...slipped out, didn't it? And then it all came crashing back. All of it. The happiness:

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remember? The champagne bubbles? The flowers? Daisies, weren't they? Or roses? It doesn't matter. Your mother's tears. Your own. And when you drove away, it was all just...too beautiful. Nothing could go wrong. Nothing would. And then the baby came. Or will. A moment of passion and—presto—magic! *(Pause.)* Beautiful. Soft. Loving...DEPENDENT. "Don't leave me! Stay...Please...I need you...Lonely..." *(Building to a climax:)* "Now?...Yes...now, now...Yes...now, yes...Yes, yes! Yes!! Yes!!! Now!!!! Ahhhhhhhhhh." And you can't take it back. Or won't. *(Laughs, indicating the dancers as they vanish.)* Remember? *(Liz enters riding on Mark's shoulders. He is humming the "Lone Ranger" theme from the William Tell Overture.)*

LIZ. *(making gunshot sounds as if chasing bandits:)* Hi-yo, Silver, away! Come on, you dumb horse, they're getting away. The killers are getting away!

MARK. *(whinnies and slows down:)* I'm tired.

LIZ. Come on horse! There's water over the next hill. You can make it. Think of the reward. Giddy-up!

MARK. *(giving up:)* Last one over the hill is a rotten egg. *(He dumps Liz to the ground and runs. Before he realizes that he has lost his sense of direction, Liz is over the slide and down.)*

LIZ. I won!

MARK. You cheated.

LIZ. I did not. You just got lost. Some horse you are. Dumb. Really dumb. Off to the glue factory with you. *(Mark crosses dejectedly over to the swing and sits. He takes out a pipe, gets it lit after much difficulty only to have it immediately go out.)*

MARK. Damn. *(Liz laughs.)*

MARK. Ouch!

LIZ. What are you doing? Horses don't smoke.

MARK. They always give a horse a last smoke before they put him in the glue pot. It's part of the ceremony.

LIZ. You were a crummy horse. And too expensive to feed, and you wouldn't chase the bandits. What good were you to anybody?

MARK. After all those years of faithful service. Never failed you once. And all I get for it is the glue pot.

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LIZ. You wouldn't chase the bandits!!

MARK. *(trying to light the pipe again:)* Go away and let me die in peace.

LIZ. Let's go to the duck pond.

MARK. Sorry. I'm going to swing today. Always come out for a swing on Tuesdays and Saturdays. *(Showing off his muscles:)* Terrific for the biceps. *(Liz laughs.)*

LIZ. My father smoked a pipe. But *he* didn't look funny.

MARK. Once I get the hang of it, you won't think it's so funny. Sex appeal. That's what I'll have. Pure animal.

LIZ. You were a rotten horse. *(Pause.)* What's sex appeal?

MARK. Ask me when you're fourteen.

LIZ. Isn't ten close enough?

MARK. You're only nine.

LIZ. I'm almost ten.

MARK. Hmmmm. What do you think sex appeal is?

LIZ. Well, Linda Bennett says Mister Ball, our teacher, has it. I used to think it meant grown-up and handsome, but he's dumb looking, so it must mean something else. He's kind of bald in front and he's always twitching. Linda says he's winking at her but she's crazy. He twitches at everybody.

MARK. You're right. That's what sex appeal is all right.

LIZ. You mean you're going to twitch at everybody?

MARK. No, Dumb-Dumb. I'm going to be handsome.

LIZ. You'd make a better horse. *(She whinnies; pause.)* Let's go to the duck pond. Please!

MARK. You'll be late for your piano lesson.

LIZ. I'm not going.

MARK. Why not?

LIZ. Because Linda knows I'm supposed to be there.

MARK. So what?

LIZ. She's mad at me.

MARK. She's always mad at you. It never bothered you before.

LIZ. I made her sick this time.

MARK. You make everyone sick. So what? *(Liz looks at Mark sheepishly.)* Worse than last week, huh?

LIZ. Uh-huh. *(Starting to laugh:)* It was really funny.

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MARK. So, come on. You're driving me nuts.

LIZ. I baked her a cake.

MARK. (*impressed:*) That's nice! Did she help?

LIZ. No. (*Proudly:*) I did it all by myself.

MARK. That's terrific. Will you bake me one?

LIZ. You wouldn't like it.

MARK. I love cake. Especially chocolate. Make me a chocolate one.

LIZ. You wouldn't like it.

MARK. Why not?

LIZ. I made it with laundry soap.

MARK. Did she eat it?

LIZ. Uh-huh. Two pieces. (*They both break up. Mark kneels down. Liz climbs on his back.*)

LIZ. To the duck pond, horse. Hi-Yo Silver away! (*MARK whinnies. They're off....*)

CLOWN. (*appears behind the carousel horse carrying a switch and climbs on.*) You rode a horse once, too. Remember? Went out to the park where they had horses to ride. For twenty-five cents you could pick a slow one, a medium fast one, or, if you were really brave, a very fast one. They had a huge circular track divided into lanes by low white fences so the horses wouldn't cross over. You'd never been on a horse before so you chose the slowest lane. They put you on a horse and slapped it once to get it going. (*Laughs*) But they had trained it to run in the fast lane, and so when they pushed it out into the slow one, it didn't know what to do, so it jumped over the fence to the lane it was used to and ran full-speed around the fast lane. They beat the horse when you got back to the start. (*His laughter stops instantly; pause*). That's why I made the carousel: the horse couldn't jump over the fence anymore, and no one would beat it even if it did. It worked too—for awhile. Until I began to wish it was a real horse that would take me away from that one single circle the horse kept making. 'Round and 'round and 'round; always the same. So I took a stick and...Slap! Slap! Slap!...I beat the horse and beat it and beat it until I couldn't swing the stick anymore. And I was happy. Then I looked up and saw a tear running down the horse's face...But when I looked closer I saw that it was your own tear seen through the reflection of the horse's glass

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eyes. You started to laugh because the happiness was gone. In time, the dream faded too. Remember? *(Laughing:)* Slap! Slap! Slap! *(He exits as Mark is heard singing “Lizzie Borden took an ax and gave her mother forty whacks and when the job was nicely done, she gave her father forty-one...” as he slides down the slide onto the floor. Chastity follows.)*

CHASTITY. That’s an awful song.

MARK. What’s awful about it?

CHASTITY. Somebody chopping up their mother.

MARK. Well, she did!

CHASTITY. What?

MARK. Lizzie Borden chopped up her mother.

CHASTITY. Oh, you are disgusting.

MARK. I’m not disgusting. She really did. Chopped up her dear old Mom and put her in the freezer or something.

CHASTITY. Really?

MARK. Made the headlines in all the newspapers.

CHASTITY. How come I never heard of her?

MARK. Sheltered.

CHASTITY. What?

MARK. Don’t you ever say anything else? What, what, what! I said, you’re sheltered. Besides being a prude.

CHASTITY. I’m not a prude. *(Pause.)* It’s an awful song to sing in front of Mary.

MARK. I’ve never sung it in front of my mother.

CHASTITY. Not your mother, numbskull. Mary Elizabeth—Liz. She’s just a kid.

MARK. She’s no kid; she’s almost ten. Besides, she’s the one who taught the song to *me*.

CHASTITY. I don’t believe you. It would be just like you to teach her something like that. I’ll bet you’ve told her your full battery of dirty jokes and bawdy ballads, too.

MARK. Yep.

CHASTITY. You haven’t!

MARK. Make up your mind, Dumb-Dumb. Either I did or I didn’t. Which one is it going to be?

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CHASTITY. Did you tell her?

MARK. Maybe.

CHASTITY. Don't call me Dumb-Dumb.

MARK. You act like a Dumb-Dumb, I'll call you a Dumb-Dumb.

CHASTITY. But you call Mary Elizabeth that!

MARK. What?

CHASTITY. Dumb-Dumb!!! Dumb-Dumb... *(Catching herself:)*
Ohhhhhhh...

MARK. Jealous, aren't you?

CHASTITY. Jealous? Of who?

MARK. See. I told you. I didn't say "who". Besides, the word is "whom", "of whom". You said "who". You're jealous of Lizzy Borden, that's who. You're jealous of the term of endearment I afford her because you don't have one.

CHASTITY. You call me Charley. That's as close to one of your terms of endearment that I care to get, thank you very much.

MARK. I never thought of it quite like that. But I suppose it is a term of endearment in a warped sort of way. Round-about sort of, but a term of endearment, nevertheless. Not as good as Dumb-Dumb, but for you, it's not too bad. Pretty nice name: Charley. I mean in comparison to Chastity.

CHASTITY. *(obviously hating her own name:)* What's the matter with Chastity?

MARK. Nothing. It's terrific. If you like it, it's terrific. Except that it's like parents naming their son "Sterile". Other than that, it's a nice name, like I said. Really beautiful. Rings in your ears: Chastity Miller...Ding! Ding! Ding! Beeeeee-you-tee-full. If you'd like, I'll start calling you Chastity. No more Charley: I'll watch myself very carefully so I don't slip up. It'll be hard at first, but I'll get used to it.

CHASTITY. It'll be better than calling someone "Stupid".

MARK. I don't call anyone "Stupid". There's a lot of difference between "Stupid" and "Dumb-Dumb". A world of difference. It's like night and day.

CHASTITY. Okay. Okay. Have it your way. *(A beat)* But it's still an awful name. *(Mark is too self-satisfied to respond. A long pause.)* Did you hear what happened to Jeanette Marcelino?

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MARK. What about her?

CHASTITY. She's pregnant.

MARK. How do you know?

CHASTITY. Carson Montgomery told me.

MARK. Oh, brother! And how does she know? Was there watching when they were banging away at each other, probably. Carson Montgomery: information bureau. Amazing how one person can preside over every balling in town. She must never sleep, she's so busy peering in every car window, bedroom, and behind every bush. Amazing dexterity, that one. Really terrific.

CHASTITY. Don't be disgusting.

MARK. Disgusting? Me? You act as town smoke signal to the latest "News of the Week" by roving reporter Carson Montgomery, and I'm disgusting.

CHASTITY. Forget I ever said it. *(Pause.)*

MARK. When did she get pregnant?

CHASTITY. I didn't give you a detailed breakdown of events; I just mentioned that she was pregnant, that's all. *(Pause.)* Why are you so interested all of a sudden?

MARK. *(trying to get out of the trap:)* You must have had a reason. Somebody just doesn't go skipping around town shouting that someone else is knocked-up without a reason. So, tell me. *(He starts panting lewdly.)* Who did it? Who did it to Jeanette? Who did it? Who did it?

CHASTITY. Forget it.

MARK. Come on...**CHASTITY.** You started it! Show and tell time....Show and tell. *(He starts to advance on her. She backs away before turning to run.)*

MARK. Ah, come on, Charley. Come on! Don't be chicken. Show and tell. Show and tell time.

CHASTITY. Stop it now, Mark! Stay away from me. You're perverted. *(They are laughing. Chastity trips; Mark grabs her. They wrestle amidst much merriment. Ad lib: "Come on, Charley!" "Don't Mark, you're tickling me!" "I can't stand it!" Chastity breaks away, runs around in an attempt to avoid Mark. At times they are laughing so hard they have difficulty moving about. Somewhere in the shuffle, Chastity's blouse is torn*

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open in front. Neither Chastity nor Mark notice it until Mark finally catches her from behind, his hand resting on her breast. The action and laughter immediately stop. The moment is both awkward and funny, but the following scene must be played quietly and gently and not for comic effect. Chastity looks down at his hand on her breast:) What are you thinking about?

MARK. Oh, Jesus. *(He crosses behind the horse; Chastity remains still.)*

CHASTITY. Mark?

MARK. Yeh?

CHASTITY. Did you ever touch a girl before?

MARK. *(awkward:)* Where?

CHASTITY. On the breast. *(Pause.)*

MARK. No.

CHASTITY. *(awkward:)* Did you like it?

MARK. What?

CHASTITY. Touching my breast. *(Pause.)* Did you?

MARK. Jesus.... *(Blurring it out:)* Yes!...Yes...Yes, I liked it...sure. *(Chastity crosses to him.)*

CHASTITY. *(softly:)* Would you like to do it again?

MARK. Again?

CHASTITY. Yes. Touch me again?

MARK. You really want me to...to touch you?

CHASTITY. Yes. *(Mark turns around slowly to stare into her eyes. His eyes move to her breast. Chastity takes his hand and places it to her. She leans to him and tenderly kisses him on the mouth.)*

CHASTITY. Hold me, Mark. Just hold me.

MARK. Carson Montgomery might be watching. *(Chastity turns sharply away.)* I'm sorry, Charley. I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. Honest. *(Turning her gently around to face him:)* I didn't mean it. *(He kisses her eyes. She puts her arms around him; they kiss.)*

MARK. You're beautiful, Charley. You're really beautiful....*(Tableau.)*

JAMES. *(sitting on top of the slide reading a newspaper:)* I wonder how much the paper magnifies things.

MARY. What things?

JAMES. You know. The facts. Just for sensation's sake to attract readers.

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MARY. I don't know. You hear about things all the time that are hushed up before the paper even gets hold of them, so I'm sure worse things happen than what they actually report every day. Though it's hard for me to imagine what they might be. What with all the rapes and murders...small children...It's all too terrible. They ought to do something with them.

JAMES. With the children?

MARY. No. With the criminals. You hardly feel safe anymore. You don't know who's going to be the next victim—or worse, who's going to be the next murderer or rapist. It's frightening. They ought to do something.

JAMES. Whoever *they* are.

MARY. What did you say?

JAMES. Nothing.

MARY. Yes, you did. I heard you.

JAMES. Well, if you heard me, why ask me to repeat it?

MARY. I heard you, but I didn't hear what you said...exactly.

JAMES. I said, "whoever *they* are".

MARY. Whoever who are?...Is...Ohhhhh.

JAMES. You said "*they* ought to do something". I just wondered who *they* were and what *something they* should be doing.

MARY. *They* are the police—or whoever is in charge of protecting people from.... It's the children I worry about. Who knows what kind of pervert is lurking around ready to offer candy to them.

JAMES. We do it every year.

MARY. We don't do any such thing.

JAMES. We most certainly do too. Every Halloween. Giving those little beggars candy and gum to rot their teeth. That's probably how child molesters get started in the first place. Get tired of giving the brats what they want and start giving them what they deserve. A very sensible approach, if you ask me. Besides, it's the parents' fault. If they kept the little bastards—*dears* home where they belong, they'd cut the temptation to murder them in half.

MARY. You're a parent.

JAMES. I hardly think Mark's of an age to go trick-or-treating, so I'm safe from being faulted.

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MARY. He went trick-or-treating with Mary Elizabeth last month.

JAMES. Oh. Well, I'm still safe. He's too old to attract child molesters. *(Chuckling:)* Though it won't be too long before he's old enough to be one.

MARY. That's an awful thing to say.

JAMES. I was only joking.

MARY. Well, kindly reserve your sense of humor for the gym.

JAMES. I don't go to a gym.

MARY. *(smiling:)* Precisely. *(James resumes reading the newspaper. (Tableau.)*

CLOWN. *(seated on the horse, slapping it with a stick, trying to get it to move. He stops.)* Carousels lie dormant in the winter, you know. It's too cold and the horses won't run. And even if they did, no children would come. Parents keep them at home these days. *(Laughs)* They're all too old now. Images fade. Red is pink and black is gray, and time grows flowers and green. *(Pause.)* Remember making a baseball field out in the street in front of your house? Or playing hopscotch with bobby-pins or long chains that kept sliding out of the squares? Or war games? Those were the most fun. You probably called it "guns" then. *(Laughing, he makes gunshot sounds as he uses his finger as a pistol.)* I got you! You're dead! *(Laughs)* Kick-the-Can. Mother-May-I. House. But you were getting a little older by then...and stopped playing the other games. House. You're still playing that one. There's a new name for it now, though. *(Laughs; pause)* Come on horse, MOVE! *(He hits the horse repeatedly with the stick.)*

Slap!...Slap!!...Slap!!!!....

MARY. It's getting colder now. We should get some wood in. *(James doesn't answer.)* Would you like pork chops for dinner? *(James doesn't answer.)* I could take some strawberries out of the freezer and bake some biscuits for shortcake. You always liked that. *(She crosses directly in front of the slide.)* James Fletcher, I'm talking to you! *(James doesn't answer.)* James!! *(Without looking up from the newspaper, he slides down; Mary moves just in time.)*

JAMES. *(with a bad English accent:)* You rang Malady?

MARY. You didn't hear one word I said.

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JAMES. Yes I did. You said “JAMES!!” (*He gives her a kiss on the forehead.*)

MARY. (*chuckling:*) Sometimes I wonder why I put up with you

JAMES. Because I am irresistible.

MARY. Oh, brother.

JAMES. Besides, after all these years, I’m comfortable.

MARY. Comfortable?

JAMES. Yes. You’re used to me.

MARY. That, my dear husband—irresistible as you are—is a galloping untruth. I’ll never get used to you.

JAMES. Well, I’m used to you. You’re comfortable to *me*.

MARY. Thank you, my darling. Just what I always dreamed of being: comfortable.

JAMES. There are a lot of marriages that are uncomfortable. I think we’re very lucky. We never fight...I mean, not real knock-down-drag-out battles like we used to have when we were first married.

MARY. (*sadly:*) I know.

JAMES. You miss fighting?

MARY. I do...now and then.

JAMES. You do?

MARY. Not really....I just get lonely sometimes. (*Pause.*)

JAMES. (*gayly:*) Well, throw a dish once in awhile if it will make you feel better.

MARY. (*gayly:*) I’d love to.

JAMES. What’s for dinner?

MARY. Pork chops and mashed potatoes.

JAMES. With gravy?

MARY. Yes.

JAMES. Good. Those were always the best dishes to throw. We’ll get goo all over the walls.

MARY. (*laughing:*) Do you mean it?

JAMES. Do I ever say anything I don’t mean?

MARY. I hope so.

JAMES. I’ve never once said “Let’s throw dishes at each other” when I didn’t mean it. My hands are itching for those dirty plates. Let’s go!

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MARY. And then, can we make-up...like we used to?

JAMES. Just like we used to. *(They are both laughing. Mary is the first to stop.)*

MARY. Do you think we've forgotten how?

JAMES. How to fight?

MARY. No....How to love each other. *(Tableau.)*

CHASTITY. *(Mark is lounging on or around the playing blocks, studying. Chastity is riding the tricycle.)* Come on, let's blow this joint. We could make a mile and a half a day on this thing and be in Paris in forty-three years. *(She lowers the shoulder of her dress in a mock sexy pose.)* Come on, big boy. What do ya' say?

MARK. Shut up.

CHASTITY. Pardon me, handsome. I thought you were a swingin' stud-muffin.

MARK. You are going to flunk the chemistry exam tomorrow, smart ass

CHASTITY. I could study that junk from now 'til Good Friday 2083 and still flunk it, so why bother.

MARK. You're right. But if it is all the same to you, sexy, I've got to pass this mess to graduate. So kindly keep your clothes on...for a change.

CHASTITY. Foul Mouth Fletcher is at it again.

MARK. You started it.

CHASTITY. Did not!

MARK. Did too! "Swingin' stud-muffin"..., remember?

CHASTITY. Can I help it if the rest of the girls are jealous?

MARK. How would they know?

CHASTITY. I told them, of course.

MARK. What?!

CHASTITY. I said, "I told them, of course." Deaf?

MARK. Call me Foul Mouth, will you? While you're blabbing our sex life all over town.

CHASTITY. I am not! Only on the west side of town.

MARK. Discriminating at least. I should have known. Chastity, the misnomer, wearing her white hood and isolating her good news to the Wasps on the west side of town. Burn any crosses lately? "This is New

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Monitor reporting. Tell us, Ms. Chastity, do you really go around dropping your underpants on street corners?"

CHASTITY. Okay, I give.

MARK. Not yet, you don't. Remember that black bra of yours I thought was so sexy? The one you thought you lost? Who ever heard of a girl losing a bra? There you are on the corner of Main and Spring Streets dropping your underwear to the passers-by, and nobody even paying attention. "Hey, big-boy, wanna see something?" Drop. "Honey, how 'bout this?" Drop. "And this?" Drop. Trailing your underpants across the intersection and swinging on the lamppost. And nobody pays any attention. *(He is laughing uncontrollably.)*

CHASTITY. You are a rat. Shut up. *(Mark can't stop laughing.)* What about my black bra?

MARK. Jack Cutter has it.

CHASTITY. He doesn't!

MARK. Okay, he doesn't.

CHASTITY. How'd he get it? I never—

MARK. Didn't have to. I gave it to him.

CHASTITY. You what?! *(Mark is laughing so hard now that he can't speak. Chastity pounces on him, punching and hitting him. Ad lib:)* You're rotten! What a nasty thing to do. I'll teach you....*(They roll around scuffling until Mark finally gains enough composure to hold off Chastity's swings.)*

MARK. Jack Cutter....that's really too funny. What did you expect me to do? Poor guy. He wanted a bra; I felt sorry for him, so I gave him your best one. It was a very unselfish gesture on my part.

CHASTITY. What did he want my bra for?

MARK. How should I know? He just has this thing about your bras....Maybe he wanted to wear it. *(They both get the image at the same time and start laughing again.)*

MARK. I can't stand it. I'm going to be sick...

CHASTITY. Can't you just see Jack Cutter parading around in my bra? *(They burst into laughter again. Ad lib: "Oh, Ohhhh, I can't stand it, It hurts too much..." etc.)*

MARK. It probably fits him better than it fits you.

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CHASTITY. What do you mean by that crack?

MARK. Anyone who'd by a size D-cup for a size A-boob. Figure it out.

CHASTITY. I don't buy a size D-cup! (*Pause.*) And I don't have a size A-boob.

MARK. Right again. You have two size A-boobs.

CHASTITY. (*climbing back on the tricycle:*) Oh, I hate you.

MARK. Can I go back to my chemistry book now?

CHASTITY. Do what you like, brassiere freak. (*Long pause.*)

MARK. (*referring to his book:*) Did you do this?

CHASTITY. What?

MARK. Write in the margin of this book.

CHASTITY. Write what?

MARK. "I love you, passionately, endlessly..."

CHASTITY. I most certainly did not. Must have been one of your other...friends.

MARK. I borrowed this book from Jack.

CHASTITY. Seems a fair enough trade: my bra for a book. Maybe he wrote it to you.

MARK. No time. He's too busy wearing your bra. Besides, it wasn't in here yesterday. You shouldn't go around writing cryptic little notes in the margins of other peoples' books.

CHASTITY. If he can wear my clothes, I can write in his book!

MARK. So, it was you!!

CHASTITY. (*caught:*) Ohhhhhh.

MARK. Come here....Come here. (*She crosses to Mark; sits.*)

MARK. Prove it.

CHASTITY. What?

MARK. If you go to all the trouble to write it...

CHASTITY. Oh, I get it. Sorry, Big-Boy, but this chick is on vacation. (*Mark leans over to blow in her ear.*)

CHASTITY. (*the true innocent:*) Will you still respect me? (*They almost burst into laughter but it is smothered in a lingering embrace.*)

CHASTITY. (*breaking away:*) How's your mother?

MARK. (*still pursuing:*) Fine. How's yours?

CHASTITY. She seems a little on the nervous side lately.

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MARK. Lack of loving. I'm nervous too. Worry about *me*. Kiss me.

CHASTITY. Chemistry exam. Remember?

MARK. Forgot for a moment there. Got my chemistries confused. Your succulent body drives me wild. I have no control.

CHASTITY. I can understand why.

MARK. *(returning to his book:)* I don't understand these formulas at all.

CHASTITY. I'm glad.

MARK. Aren't you the kindred soul.

CHASTITY. Glad. G-L-A-D. Glad. Happy, joyful, thrilled. It doesn't make me feel so dumb to know there is another lost soul on the highway of life as stupid as I am. It's very reassuring. It shows how much you really love me. It's nice.

MARK. If that's the case, I wish I cared for you less and understood formula B a little more. *(He returns to his book as Chastity starts to sing the children's song heard at the opening of the play. She moves away from Mark who is now deep in thought.)*

CHASTITY. *(quietly, as if in conversation with herself:)* I wish...I wish...I wish. I wish my father was....*(Pause.)* He's so quiet. Hardly ever says a word. It's like he's a million miles away all the time and I'm part of a world he doesn't live in at all. Smoking his cigarettes and looking far away like he could see through the walls of the house and everyone in it to some faraway place that's very peaceful and kind. My parents are beautiful together. They don't need to speak a word to each other, but you can just tell how much they're in love. *(Pause.)* Yes. That's what it is. It must be. Love. They smile and touch and they don't have to say it. Dad just sits there and smokes and Mom walks by and smiles at him. It sounds really dumb but it isn't. It's the most love I've ever seen. I wish I was like that. But I talk all the time. Mostly I'm not saying anything and I catch myself and Dad smiles and it's like he sees right through me. It scares me sometimes, too. He's not laughing at me. Not him. Somebody else. I get all funny inside and I want him to hold me and tell me it's all right. I know he loves me, but sometimes I just want to hear it. Especially when I'm really lonely or feel lost or scared because I'm not sure who I am. *(Saying her own name very carefully:)* Chastity Miller. Will the real Chastity Miller please stand up? Someday he'll say it. He'll be so proud of me that he'll

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walk up to me in the middle of a big crowd and say “You’ve made your dream come true, Charley. I’m proud of you and I love you.” And all the rest won’t make any difference because...I’ll know it’s true. *(Pause as Chastity crosses to Mark and sits next to him.)* Mark. Hold me. *(Mark distractedly puts his arm around her as she leans into his embrace.*

Clown’s arms appear first from behind the giant teddy bear and then his head rises as we hear him crying quietly; he is not entirely sincere. When he speaks, he may appear to be painfully unhinged as his voice is intermittently in a rhythm that builds in ferocity and speed.)

CLOWN. *(his tears turning to laughter:)* Moment of truth! Moment of truth! *(Referring to the teddy bear:)* The eyes are gone. Moment of truth! Moment of truth! Can’t see. Blind. Dumb. No brain.

Dumb...blind...dead...sorry. Hold me...hold me...hold me! See the dog...see the ball...run, dog, run...Remember?

Dead?...No...Why?...Yes...Sorry. *(Pause.)* Moment of truth! Moment of truth! Moment of truth! Who did it?...Who did it?...Not I...Not me...Not you...Who? Moment of truth! Moment of truth!...Moment of truth...Don’t be afraid...don’t be afraid...hold me...hold me...hold me...can’t see...he’s blind...he’s dumb...he’s got no

brain...dumb...blind...dead...Sorry. Remember? *(Laughs)* No?...why? Can’t see it...can’t see it...Won’t see it... Never...Now?...No...Why?... Sorry...dead...No, dying?...Yes, dying...Why? Hold me...hold me...hold me! Moment of truth...Moment of truth! Had it once...had it

once...Where? Dead...Sorry. *(Pause.)* See the baby...hold the baby...not now...never...Why?...Yes, dying...yes, Sorry *(Laughs)* Moment of truth! Moment of truth! *(Laughs)* Can’t see. He’s blind. He’s dumb. He has no brain. Moment of truth! Moment of truth! Moment of truth! Who did it?...Who did it?...Not I...Not me...Not you...Who? Moment of truth! Moment of truth!...Don’t be afraid...Don’t be afraid...hold me...hold me...can’t see...I’m blind...I’m dumb...I’ve got no brain...dumb... blind...dead!

(He suddenly stops, goes stiff as if shot, emits a soft cry and crumples to the ground, dead. As the lights slowly begin to fade on him, he rises, and begins to chuckle. As the chuckle builds to a full laugh, the stage goes dark.)

END OF ACT I

THE DUCK POND AND OTHER SPACES

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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