

Samuel French Acting Edition

Torch Song Trilogy

by Harvey Fierstein

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TORCH SONG TRILOGY was first presented by The Glines, Inc. on October 16, 1981. The performance was directed by Peter Pope, with musical direction by Ned Levy, costumes by Mardi Philips, and lighting by Scott Pinkney. The production stage manager was Penny Landau. The cast was as follows:

ARNOLD Harvey Fierstein
ED Joel Crothers
LADY BLUES/LAUREL Diane Tarleton
ALLAN Paul Joynt
DAVID Mathew Broderick
MRS. BECKOFF Estelle Getty

AUTHOR'S NOTES

TORCH SONG TRILOGY

I have been blessed with seven honest, earnest, free-tongued characters who, within these pages, willingly impart more of themselves to you than the closest friends would ever dare. I will therefore leave them to their story-telling with the briefest of Parental Guidance.

Like a gaudy East Indian purse; outrageous in color, embroidered in cliché design, the worth of these plays lies ultimately in the tiny mirrors woven into the fabric wherein we catch our reflections. Perhaps you'll see a little of yourself on the phone with Arnold's "Why don't you love me anymore?" call. Or maybe find yourself in Laurel's "Just because I said that's what I want doesn't mean that I'm ready for it" logic. Or it might be while reading Mrs. Beckoff you'll stop and smile, "That's my mother." Any little thing that makes you feel less alone is what and why these plays are.

Not one of the characters you'll meet is "right." There are no answers forthcoming. But like an old familiar half-heard song playing on a jukebox you might just catch a line that reaches out and touches something going on inside of you. And for that instant you are relieved of the isolation. That is the worth of a Torch Song. That is the goal of these plays.

For Paul Reese

...and with loving memories of Kenn Hill, Charles Embry, Bud Sherman, J. Galen McKinley, and my Father.

The author wishes to thank the following people for their help and inspiration: Ray Benkoczy, Helen Hanft, Paul Fazzone, Mitchell Maxwell, Helen Merrill, Harvey Tavel, Ronald Tavel, Dorothea Regal, Norman Glick, George Whitmore, Don Shewey, Richard Hale, and a very special thank you to the two people most responsible for bringing this Trilogy to life: Eric Concklin, and my "Mama" Ellen Stewart.

The International Stud

INTERNATIONAL STUD was first presented by La Mama E.T.C. on February 2, 1978. The performance was directed by Eric Concklin, with musical direction by Ned Levy, costumes by Mardi Philips, and lighting by Joanna Schielke. The production stage manager was B.J. Allen. The cast was as follows:

LADY BLUES Diane Tarleton
ARNOLD Harvey Fierstein
ED Steve Spiegel

CHARACTERS

THE INTERNATIONAL STUD

ED REISS

ARNOLD

LADY BLUES

SETTING

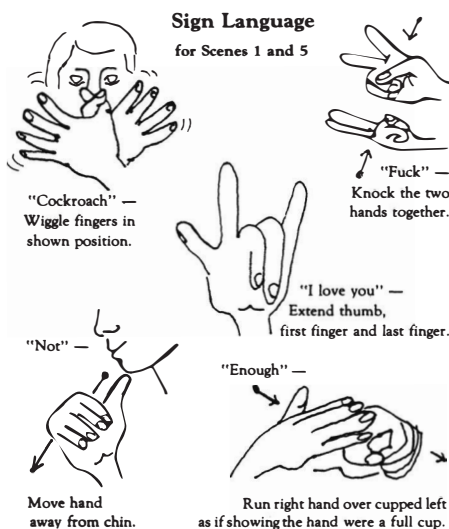
- 1.) January. Arnold, backstage of a nightclub.
- 2.) February. Ed in The International Stud bar.
- 3.) June. Ed and Arnold in their respective apartments.
- 4.) September. Arnold in The International Stud bar.
- 5.) November. Ed and Arnold backstage.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

There is a gay bar in New York City called The International Stud. It boasts a pool table, pinball machine, and the jumpiest backroom in town. I dearly dedicate these plays to all who made it their home.

I wish for each of them the courage to leave it when they can, and the good sense to come back when they must.

Before Scene One and between each of the following scenes, Lady Blues appears on a separate set, atop a grand piano, dressed in period, and sings a 1920s or 30s torch song in the manner of Helen Morgan or Ruth Etting. The choice of songs I leave to the director, as they should highlight the values of each particular production. They should not comment on the action as much as conjure it.



Scene One: Arnold

(The play is performed against a black cyclorama with as little actual scenery as possible. Upstage center the grand piano sits on its platform, raising the singer high above the action. Downstage of her, on either side, are three-foot-high platforms which will be the two apartments. Each has a chair, table, and telephone. ARNOLD's chair is worn and comfortable, ED's is new and straight. Downstage center stands the "Stud" platform. It is just large enough for one person to stand comfortably, raised two feet from the stage. Left of it is a larger platform, 6' x 8', which holds an arm chair and vanity table. It is the dressing room. As the lights come down on LADY BLUES after her opening song, the sounds of a music box are heard softly. The lights rise on the backstage platform, revealing ARNOLD in full drag applying a false eyelash to his face. He turns off the music box... The lash slips out of place.)

Damned Elmer's glue! Just let me finish emasculating this eye and I'll be right with you.

(Fixes it, poses in the mirror.)

Gorgeous, huh? Use your imagination, it's still under construction.

I think my biggest problem is being young and beautiful. It is my biggest problem because I have never been young and beautiful. More importantly, I will never be young and beautiful. Oh, I've been beautiful. And God knows I've been young. But never the twain have met. Not so's anyone would notice anyway. A shrink acquaintance of mine believes this to be the root of my attraction to a class

of men most subtly described as old and ugly. But I think he's underestimating my wheedles. See, an ugly person who goes after a pretty person gets nothing but trouble. But a pretty person who goes after an ugly person gets at least cab-fare.

I ain't sayin' I never fell for a pretty face, but when "*les jeux sont faits*"...give me a toad with a pot of gold and I'll give ya three meals a day. 'Cause honeys, ain't no such thing as a toad when the lights go down. It's either feast or famine. It's the daylight you gotta watch out for. Face it, a thing of beauty is a joy till sunrise.

I never push Lady Luck myself. I got, what'choo call a extra-sensory sense about such things. If I really like a guy I automatically wake three minutes before him. Giving me just enough time to unsucker my pucker, reinstate my coif, and repose my repose so's his eyes upon waking conjure images by Jove and Lana Turner; guaranteeing my breakfast if not his real phone number.

Here's another hint to all present presently unattached. You can cross any man off your dance card who A: Discusses his wonderful relationship with his mother. B: Discusses his wonderful relationship with his shrinker. Or C: Refuses to discuss his wonderful relationship with his mother or shrinker. See, a guy who's got that kind of confidante is in what I call a "state of confession." And experience has sorely taught me, you can never be more to a man in such a state than subject matter for their conversations...

Not that I got anything against analysis, I don't. I think it's a great way to keep from boring your friends. But what's good for the bored just ain't so for the bed, if you get my drift. See, when there's trouble in Paradise you got two possible M.O.'s. Pull back or push in. But pull back when he's got a professional shoulder to lean on and the entire effect of losing you is shot. Try pushing and you've bought yourself two for one. Push hard enough, and you'll find yourself visiting him Sundays at the "Happy Home For The Bewildered."

Now, I ain't sayin' you should only date sane men (I don't want to kill off all the fish in the polluted sea), but at least find one who's willing to fight on his own. Give me a man with both fists clenched tight...and I'll give you a smile from here to next Thursday.

And there's another group you've gotta watch your food stamps around... "The Hopeless." They break down into three major categories: Married, "Just in for the Weekend," and terminally ill. Those affairs are the worst. You go into them with your eyes open, knowing all the limitations and accepting them maturely...then wham bam!...you're writing letters to "Dear Abby" and burning black candles at midnight and you ask yourself, "Wha' happened?" I'll tell you "wha' happened." You got just what you wanted! The person who thinks they's mature enough to handle an affair that's hopeless from the beginning is the very same person who keeps the publishers of Gothic Romances up to their tragic endings in mink; not to mention the reissuers of those twenties torch ditties... "Music To Be Miserable By."

So, what's left? I don't know. But there are some. I found one once. His name was Charley. He was tall, handsome, rich, deaf. Everything you could want in an affair and more. The deafness was the more. He never screamed at me, all his friends were nice and quiet, I could play music as loud as I liked without ever disturbing his reading, and best of all I could snore. I even learned me some of that sign language. Wait, I still remember some. Like this here, (*He demonstrates.*) it means cockroach. And this one (*Demonstrates.*) means fuck. Here's my favorite. (*Demonstrates.*) It means "I love you." And I did. But... (*Signing and speaking together.*) not enough. I guess I bought them Gothic publishers a few minks of my own.

(*Back to his dressing.*) For those of yis what ain't yet guessed I am an entertainer (or what's left of one), I go by the name Virginia Hamm. Ain't that a kick in the rubber parts? You should hear some of my former handles; Kitty Litter, Bang Bang LaDesh, Bertha Venation...and I'm plenty tough

too. I can afford to be; behind a phony name, face and figure. But that's alright.

See, I'm among the last of a dying breed. Once the E.R.A. and gay civil rights bills have been passed, me and mine will find ourselves swept under the carpets like the blacks done to Amos, Andy and Aunt Jemima. But that's alright too. With a voice and face like this I got nothing to worry about, I can always drive a cab. And that, chillun', is called power. Be it gay, black or flowered it always comes down to the survival of the majority.

Shit, I'd better get a move on it! *(He takes a roll of toilet paper and unwinds two huge wads.)* Would y'all mind turning your backs...? Well, could you at least close your eyes?

(He places the paper in his bra with his back to the audience, turns proudly with his chest held high, catches the unevenness of the sizes in the mirror and adjusts them.)

There are easier things in this life than being a drag queen. But, I ain't got no choice. Try as I may, I just can't walk in flats –

(Putting on his hat and shoes.)

You know what I really want? I want the International Stud. No, not the bar. The man. A stud. A guy who knows what he wants and ain't a'scared to go out and get it. A guy who satisfies his every need, and don't mind if you get what you want in the bargain. Matter of fact, he aims to please. He'd be happy to be whatever you wanted him to be, 'cause you're happy bein' what he wants you to be. The more you put in, the more you get back. An honest man. The International Stud. One size fits all. But I wouldn't want no guy that wanted me like this here. No, I'd need him for the rest of the time. For the other part of me. The part that's not so well protected. Oh, there's plenty that want me like this. And I take their admiration gratefully. But, at a distance. I guess a drag queen's like a oil painting: You gotta stand back from it to get the full effect.

(Standing.) Well, I think we're in business! My, how time flies when you's doin' all the talking. *(Tucking in the chair.)* Who knows, maybe my Right Man is out there tonight, right? Y'all take care now, hear? *(He makes the "I love you" sign, turns to go, stops and comes back.)* Ya' know... In my life I have slept with more men than are named and/or numbered in the Bible (Old and New Testaments put together). But in all those beds not once has someone said, "Arnold, I love you..." that I could believe. So, I ask myself, "Do you really care?" And the only honest answer I can give myself is, "Yes, I care." I care because... *(Catches himself.)* I care a great deal. But not enough.

(He smiles knowingly as the lights black out on him and up on the singer.)

Scene Two: Ed

(As LADY BLUES finishes her song, the sounds of a bar are heard faintly and the lights reveal ED standing on the Stud platform, his back to the audience. He is tall, lean, and very handsome. Although he is in his thirties, his greatest charm is his boyishness.)

(Suddenly stepping back onto someone's foot.) Oh, excuse me. I'm sorry. I was just trying to duck that pool cue. Gets pretty crowded in here on a Saturday. Your foot O.K.? Good.

(He turns away, but then can't help sneaking a look at the stranger. He smiles and turns away embarrassed, then turns to him again.)

No permanent damage, I hope. To your foot I mean... Good.

(He turns away again, but still tries to sneak a look behind him. He gathers his courage and confronts the stranger with a huge smile.)

Look, the name's Ed Reiss. My friends call me Ed. *(No response.)* I'm Sagittarius... What's so funny? ...Oh, well, some people like to know that stuff. I don't believe in any of it myself, but I have done some reading about it. See, I like to know what's expected of me. *(He stares with a huge grin.)* You have a beautiful smile... No, really, you do. Can I get you another beer?

Alright, one Lite coming up. *(To bartender.)* Can I have a Lite please?

No, not a match. I meant a Lite beer. *(To stranger.)* Am I speaking English? I feel like I'm a Martian or something. I think it's that smile of yours. Say, what's your name?

Arnold? Your friends call you Arnie or Arn?

Arnold. Well, nice to meet you Arnold. *(Handing money to the bartender.)* Here you go. *(Beer to ARNOLD.)* And here you go. Are you Italian?

Spanish?

Jewish?! I never would have guessed it. Not with those dark romantic eyes. I don't remember ever seeing you here before. I don't get in that often myself. I teach over in Brooklyn and so have to be up and out pretty early, so if I'm feeling horny this is where I come. I can be in and out of the backroom and home in bed within an hour.

No. I'm off tomorrow. That's why I'm out here instead of back there. You really do have beautiful eyes. Are you wearing makeup?

I didn't think so. So...uh...how's the backroom? Crowded, I'll bet.

Never?

No, it's just that you don't expect to meet someone in a backroom bar who's never been in the backroom. Are you here with a friend?

Is he your lover?

So, you're unattached. How lucky for me. Where you from?

Sure, I know where that is. Live alone?

Well, look, I have a car... I'd ask you back to my place but I have this straight roommate. He's got a hangup about gays. It's really his place. I only sublet from him.

Oh, well, I date women too. So... Anyway, I really live upstate. I've got a farm up about an hour from Montreal. That's my real home. I spend the weekends there during the school year and then all of my summer vacation. I own half of Walton Mountain.

No, that's really what it's called. Most of the land is trees, but there's a piece of flat farming land with an old barn and I work a half acre of that. I grow all my own vegetables. I've even got a small vineyard. The mountains have some great white water for canoeing, and in the winter...it's a skier's dream. You ski?

Would you like to learn?

Alright, it's a deal. You'll love the house, it's really great. One of those old Victorian farm houses with lots of gingerbread and Franklin stoves. My father and I are restoring it.

Well, my parents winter in Florida but come north to stay with me in the warmer months. Hey, what'd'ya' say we continue this conversation in the car?

Great. By the way, what do you do?

No, I meant for a living.

Can you really make a living doing that?

I do believe you're the first one I've met...personally. Ready? *(Putting on his coat.)* The car's just across the street. Anyone ever tell you you have a very sexy voice? You really do. Is it natural or do you have a cold? *(Gesturing.)* After you.

(He turns as the lights go out on the platform and come up on the singer.)

Radio Show Between

(The following conversation should be tape-recorded and played during LADY BLUES' third song. She should listen to it as if it were part of the musical break. It is underscored by the piano.)

ED. *(Excited.)* Oh, wow. Your place is really great.

ARNOLD. I'm glad you like it.

ED. No, it's really fabulous. But, would you mind putting on a light?

ARNOLD. There's not much to see.

ED. There's you.

ARNOLD. *(Embarrassed giggle, sound of light switch.)* Better?

ED. Better...and better. You're shaking.

ARNOLD. Nervous, I guess.

ED. Me too.

ARNOLD. Really?

ED. Really.

ARNOLD. I'm glad you asked me home.

ED. Me too.

ARNOLD. Ed?

ED. Yeah?

ARNOLD. I feel... I don't know...kind'a scared.

ED. Better?

ARNOLD. Better...and better.

(They both laugh intimately as LADY BLUES continues her song.)

Scene Three

(The lights come up on ARNOLD in his apartment. He sits on the floor in shorts and a sweatshirt with a paperback stuck in his mouth. It is The I Ching. He is throwing coins and marking the hexagram nervously. Reading...)

ARNOLD. "Having completed the hexagram, compare it to the chart on page 228." *(He flips to the chart and compares his scratchings to it.)* Here it is. Number thirty-eight. *(He searches excitedly for the right page. He finds it.)* Here we go. "Hexagram Thirty-eight. Koo-eee-iiii. The Estranged."

(He is struck by its meaning, and hides the book under the chair. He lights a cigarette while staring at the phone. He climbs into the chair, grabs the phone into his lap and dials.)

Hello, Murray? Call me back.

(He slams down the receiver and freezes, his hand perched over the phone, ready to lift it as soon as it rings. It does not. Slowly his face begins to crack with worry. Still the phone does not ring. He is practically in frozen hysteria when suddenly it does ring.)

(Grabbing it angrily.) God dammit, Murray, what took you so long? ...The shower could have waited Murray... The shampoo in the shower could have waited, Murray... The man with the shampoo in the shower could have waited, Murray. Anyway, I can't talk now. I gotta keep the line free. *(Starting to hang up.)* What? ...I just wanted to make sure the phone was working... Ed. Alright? I'm expecting a call from Ed... When? Well, it is now Tuesday, eight p.m. Well, Ed's gonna call sometime after Tuesday eight p.m... Of course he's gonna call, Murray. You think I'd sit by the phone for six days if he wasn't gonna call? ...You are getting on my nerves, Murray. Look he is a very busy man. With a great many responsibilities. He will call me when he

is able. And I will understand. Got it! When you have been seeing someone for four months, Murray, you build a relationship based on trust and mutual respect. Something you and your Magic fingers shower massage would not understand. He will call, Murray. He knows when he's got a good thing going. He knows I ain't like those other cheap tricks he sees. He knows I got something that puts me above those runned up the mill, always on Sunday, anyplace I hang my crotch is home variety of homosexual commonly cruised in these here parts. I am important, Murray. I am impressive, Murray. But most of all, Murray, I am mysterious. Which is a quality you don't find on every bar stool. (*Getting slow and sexy.*) Oh, no, Murray, he will call. And when he does... And when he does... And when he does... (*Jumping suddenly.*) The phone's gonna be free! (*Slams down the phone, pouting.*) Oh ye of little faith!

(**ARNOLD** gets an idea. He puts out his cigarette, takes the phone in hand, takes two real deep breaths and holds them, and dials. The phone in **ED**'s apartment rings as the lights come up, revealing **ED** dressed neatly for a date just about to open a bottle of red wine. There are two glasses on the table by the phone.)

ED. (*Lifting the receiver.*) Hello?

ARNOLD. (*Letting out his breath in pants.*) Hi. Was that you?

ED. (*Recognizing the voice, slightly uneasy.*) Oh, hi. Was what me?

ARNOLD. Just now on the phone. Was that you trying to get me?

ED. No.

ARNOLD. Oh. Then I wonder who it was? See, I just walked in this second. (*Non-stop.*) You know, I've been out of town all week. And I was fumbling at the door with my luggage and the keys when I heard the phone ringing, so of course I dropped the keys, and when I bent over to pick up the keys I dropped the luggage, so of course

since I was nervous and the phone was ringing one of the cases uncaught and opened up and everything fell out all over the place. So, finally I got the door open and kicked everything inside, dove at the phone and picked it up just in time to hear whoever it was calling hang up. (*Slight nervous laugh, then quietly, almost sadly.*) So, how are you?

ED. (*Gently.*) I was going to call you real soon. I've just been really busy.

ARNOLD. What's the difference, we're talking now. By the way, you remember that Helen Morgan record I played last time you were here? Well, I was able to find another copy in a little secondhand shop uptown. It's almost like new. So I picked it up for you.

ED. (*Embarrassed.*) Thanks.

ARNOLD. You're welcome.

ED. Look, Arnold, I can't talk right now. I've got a friend coming over for dinner and uh...

ARNOLD. That's O.K. I just called 'cause I thought it was you calling. So, give me a call when you're not so busy.

ED. (*Guilty.*) I'm sorry. I'll call you tomorrow.

ARNOLD. (*Hurting.*) Hey, no problem. I understand.

ED. (*Annoyed suddenly.*) What do you understand? You never give me a chance to call you. Every time I'm just about to there you are calling me.

ARNOLD. (*Frightened.*) E.S.P. maybe? (*No response.*) Well, just think of all the money I save you on phone calls.

ED. (*Gently amused.*) You're impossible. You know that?

ARNOLD. (*Relaxing a bit.*) Yeah. It's a wonder you put up with me.

ED. (*Checks his watch.*) So, how was your trip?

ARNOLD. My trip? Oh, my trip. O.K. Who's coming over for dinner.

ED. A friend. You don't know him.

ARNOLD. How do you know? I know lots of hymns: "Battle Hymn of the Republic," "Rock of Ages," "Oh Come Emmanuel..."

ED. You are impossible.

ARNOLD. So, is it an old him or a new him?

ED. (*Tightening.*) Why do you do this to yourself?

ARNOLD. I'm just asking. Can't a person show a little interest in another person's life? (*Pause.*) So?

ED. A new one.

ARNOLD. (*Definitely wounded but smiling through.*) Aha. Where'd you meet him? The Stud?

ED. I've really got to go now, Arnold. I'll call you soon, alright?

ARNOLD. That's what you said last week.

ED. Well maybe if you waited and gave me a chance to call...

ARNOLD. (*Letting go.*) That's all I'm asking you for; a chance. Why're you treating me like some trick you picked up last night?

ED. (*Angry.*) Arnold, I don't want a scene on the phone. I'll call you tomorrow and we'll get together and talk.

ARNOLD. (*Real soft.*) What's wrong? Until last week, I could've sworn things were going great for both of us. What's happening?

ED. Not now, Arnold.

ARNOLD. Yes. Now.

ED. Arnold, I'm just going to get angry.

ARNOLD. So get angry! Just talk to me! (*Silence.*) Hello? Are you there?

ED. (*Pause, quietly.*) I'm here.

ARNOLD. (*Soft.*) I miss you. (*Pause.*) I think about you all the time, (*Pause.*) I'm so damned horny.

ED. (*Slight laugh.*) You need a job.

ARNOLD. I've got a job. I need a lover.

ED. (*Hard.*) Well, I don't. There. Is that what you wanted to hear?

ARNOLD. No. But it's a beginning. What *do* you need?

ED. A friend. I've said that all along. If you'd listen sometimes instead of...

ARNOLD. You've got a friend. And a lover too. All in one neat package. That's modern efficiency at work.

ED. It is not what I need.

ARNOLD. How do you know? Maybe it is. You'll never be sure unless you give it a try.

ED. I have tried, Arnold.

ARNOLD. (*Hard.*) No you haven't! (*Softer.*) You haven't. I wish to God you had, but you haven't.

ED. Arnold, this is not going to do any good for either one of us.

ARNOLD. What makes you so sure of what's good and what's not? Maybe it's just what we need. Maybe it's just what *I* need. You can't expect me to just sit around here waiting for you to call.

ED. I never asked you to. I told you to go out, have a good time, meet other people...

ARNOLD. I can't, alright? I'm not built that way.

ED. Well I'm just not ready to make that kind of a commitment.

ARNOLD. I'm not asking you to. But if I have to accept you going out then you have to accept that I'm not.

ED. (*Puzzled.*) You really are crazy.

ARNOLD. I'm lonely.

ED. That's not my fault.

ARNOLD. Wanna bet?

ED. You've got no right to make me feel guilty.

ARNOLD. I happen to be in love with you. That must give me some kind of rights. And if that don't give me the right to see you, then at least I got the right to bitch about it. (*Long silence.*) You said that you loved me. You do remember telling me that, don't you?

ED. (*Quietly.*) Yes.

ARNOLD. Then, do you or don't you?

ED. You now how I feel about you.

ARNOLD. I don't. I wouldn't ask if I did.

ED. Yes. I love you.

ARNOLD. Then what's going on?

ED. What do you want me to say?

ARNOLD. I want you to say what's on your mind. That's what I want. I want you to tell me how in two short weeks we have gone from being lovers to whatever the hell you'd call this?

ED. (*Trying to retain cool.*) You are being very difficult.

ARNOLD. (*Mimicking.*) You are being very difficult. (*Hard.*) Talk to me! (*Silence.*) Is it your parents coming north? Is that it? Are you ashamed of me?

ED. Of course not.

ARNOLD. Then what?

ED. Not on the phone. What if I come over straight from school tomorrow?

ARNOLD. No! I've got to hear it now. I know what'll happen if you come over, everything will be great just like it always is when we're together and we'll never even mention tonight. No, I want to hear it from this side of you.

ED. (*Checking his watch nervously.*) Arnold, I really cannot talk to you now. She'll be here any minute. I'll see you after work tomorrow, O.K.? (*No response.*) Arnold? Hello?

ARNOLD. (*Disbelief.*) She? Did you say, SHE?

ED. (*Mumbled.*) Shit.

ARNOLD. Oh, Shit! Thank God. For a minute I thought you said "She."

ED. I did say she. I am seeing a woman.

ARNOLD. And you called *me* crazy?

ED. Now you know why I didn't want to discuss it on the phone.

ARNOLD. Oh, sure. I can see how much more understandable it would be discussed calmly over a post-sexual cigarette. (*Long pause.*) It is your parents.

ED. No it isn't!

ARNOLD. Then why all of a sudden like this?

ED. It's not all of a sudden. I just happened to meet her now, that's all. Don't make believe I never told you about my relationships with women.

ARNOLD. Sure you told me about your women relations. But I thought you meant sisters and aunts and nieces.

ED. That's not funny.

ARNOLD. I think it's hysterical. (*Long pause, he tries to remain calm.*) So...how long has this been going on?

ED. Not long.

ARNOLD. How'd you meet her?

ED. My friends Bob and Janet asked me if I was seeing anyone because they knew this girl they thought I might like to meet.

ARNOLD. And what did you say when they asked if you were seeing anyone?

ED. I said that I wasn't. (*Guilty pause.*) Well, I could hardly tell them about you, could I?

ARNOLD. God forbid!

ED. (*Silence, quietly.*) What are you thinking?

ARNOLD. I am thinking about how it feels to be a no one in the life of someone you love. (*Pause.*) Tell me about her.

ED. (*Uneasy.*) Why don't you call me a bastard and hang up?

ARNOLD. I want to understand. Talk to me.

ED. I can't...

ARNOLD. Please.

ED. Well, she's wonderful.

ARNOLD. Bastard!

ED. You asked!

ARNOLD. I did, didn't I. It's the masochist in me. What'd you tell her about me?

ED. Nothing.

ARNOLD. That does seem to be my name. You did tell her you were bisexual, didn't you?

ED. No. I didn't think it was important.

ARNOLD. Of course not. How silly of me to even mention it.

ED. I'm not so sure that some secrets aren't better kept that way.

ARNOLD. You don't feel that's just slightly dishonest?

ED. No. We have a more mature relationship than that.

ARNOLD. Pardon my naïveté. I didn't know that there really was such a thing as, "Love with the proper stranger." So, when are you taking her to meet your parents?

ED. This weekend.

ARNOLD. I don't believe a word of this. And you're still going to tell me that they have nothing to do with this sudden burst of heterosexuality? (*No response.*) Look, Ed, I don't know much about the straight world, but I do know that when a guy takes a gal to meet his folks, for the weekend no less, that this is no casual affair. (*No response.*) Don't you feel you're being unfair to lead her on that way? (Not to mention what you're doing to me.) (*No response.*) Don't you think she has a right to know what she's letting herself in for? (*No response.*) What's the matter? Catch your tongue in a closet door?

ED. You're really dragging me over the coals.

ARNOLD. Why should I be the only one with a barbecued ass? If I may ask another stupid question: What am I supposed to do?

ED. That's up to you.

ARNOLD. Not entirely.

ED. I had hoped that we could go on seeing each other. You may not believe this, but I really don't want to lose you.

ARNOLD. That's hitting below the belt; appealing to my Susan Hayward fantasies... "Arnold, Back Street Woman"!

ED. That's not the way it is at all!

ARNOLD. Then take *me* to meet your parents.

ED. I could if I wanted to. They'd understand.

ARNOLD. Oh, I know they'd understand. It's *you* that can't. At least you didn't lie when you said you weren't scared for them to meet me. You're scared they'll meet you!

ED. Thank you very much. Your kindness is appreciated.

ARNOLD. Listen, Mr. Reiss. At this moment I don't think you have a right to expect me to be kind. (*Pulling back.*) I'm sorry. I just feel so helpless.

ED. (*Slight relaxing laugh.*) You helpless?

ARNOLD. (*Laughing too.*) Dumb, huh? (*Cracking.*) I don't understand. I thought...we were so happy. That we were so special. The way we made love... The way you cried in my arms... You said you loved me...

ED. I do. I always will.

ARNOLD. (*Desperately.*) Then what are we doing?

ED. I don't know. I'm confused... I'm frightened.

ARNOLD. Ed, come over.

ED. No, I can't. I have made up my mind. I know what I want. I'm doing what I have to do. I know that you are hurting, but that is my decision.

ARNOLD. You can't see what you're doing.

ED. Yes I can. I'm not like you, Arnold. I can't be happy living in a ghetto of gay bars and gay restaurants and backrooms, scared that someone will find out that I'm gay and maybe get me fired. I hate those queens with their bitchy remarks and Bette Davis imitations. I don't want any part of that.

ARNOLD. But that's not us...

ED. I want more. I've got to be proud of who I am.

ARNOLD. How can sleeping with a woman make you proud of yourself if you know you'd rather be with a man?

How can you ever get any respect from anyone if you won't be yourself? There's no you to respect!

ED. And just where's your self-respect? Huh? I certainly don't see any here!

ARNOLD. You wanna see my self-respect? Here's my self-respect!

(He slams down the receiver as the light blacks out on ED. Then...calmer:)

I fell right into that one.

(The lights fade out on ARNOLD, as the singer is once again brought into focus.)

Scene Four: Arnold

(The bar sounds are heard again as the lights reveal ARNOLD standing on the Stud platform dressed in denims and swigging from a beer can.)

Look Murray, I am not that lonely! This here's as far as I go. My standards may lie just left of reactionary, but my limit in a backroom bar is the front room. Maybe I just better go home, huh? Thank you for taking me out but...

It just ain't my kind of thing, ya' know? I realize you may find this hard to comprehend, you bein' the way you are, but Murray, I am just not that way inclined. I mean I'm *that* way inclined, but I'm not *that* way inclined. Ya' know what I mean, Murray? I mean, maybe I'm old fashioned but I like my sex in a bed. I don't see sex as a spectator sport. I like that one sneaked kiss in the elevator on the way to a man's apartment. I like the apologies he makes for the mess the place is in. I dig the dainty tour and arty conversation while he's dimming the lights and pouring the drinks. I like never finishing those drinks. See Murray, to me a lap in the bed is worth three in a bar. 'Cause deep down in my heart I know they do not marry sluts. No, they don't Murray. And it hurts me, Murray, it truly does, to see this multitude of men so love starved that they resort to sex in a dirty backroom instead of the way God meant us to be. It is cheap, Murray. And I refuse on moral grounds to support the degradation these men have brought themselves to Period.

Why is it so important to you that I go into that backroom? Are you a'scared to go in there by yourself? Is that it, Murray? Have I hit it on the nail? C'mon, level it, Murray, are you a'scared?

I am not a'scared, Murray. Oh no I'm not.

Alright, I'll prove it to you. We'll go back there together. But I'm tellin' you now, I ain't doin' nothin'. O.K.?

O.K. Let's go. *(He starts to turn tentatively and suddenly spins back.)* Murray, quick, hold my hand. I am a'scared! What

if nobody back there wants me? It's one thing to go into a regular bar and not get picked up. I mean that happens all the time to lots of people for lots of reasons, but Murray, to go into a place like that and get rejected... I don't think I could take it. I know I got personal qualities that put me above and beyond the norm: *(Long pause.)* Quick mind, sharp wit, glowing personality. But Murray, what if I don't glow in the dark?

No, I'm O.K. Really. Look, it'll take more than a backroom to set me back. After all, I am an EST graduate. Poise, confidence, an open mind...they'll never put me away! Let us go.

(He turns his back to the audience as the lights change to dark red. When he faces front again he is groping to find his way. Loud whisper:)

Murray? Where are you? Murray? Murray? Oh, there you are. Well, it certainly is dark back here. Hang on a second.

(He takes out a book of matches and lights one. He looks around slowly with gaping mouth.)

Oh, my God! *(He blows out the match.)* Murray, quick, let's get outta here. This ain't no place for someone who goes to confession; I'd jam up the booth for months! *(He freezes. Whisper:)* Murray, Murray? Someone's got his hand on my crotch. What should I do? *(He tries to smile and look natural then he grabs the hand and shakes it.)* Hi there. My name is Arnold, what's yours? Where'd he go, Murray? Oh, Murray, I gotta get outta here. I should've never come.

No I didn't come, Murray! Let's just go, huh? Uh oh. Murray? Someone's got his hand on my heiney. Can you see what he looks like?

Yes it does make a difference, Murray! Murray? He's reaching around front and opening my belt. Murray? Murray? He's opening my zipper. Murray? Murray? ...What do I do...with the beer can?

(He bends over to put the beer can on the ground when he is suddenly penetrated.)

MURRAYYYYYYYY!!!!!!!

(At first ARNOLD's face is twisted in pain and embarrassment as he sways with the humping rhythm. He tries to smile and look comfortable. He feels out the rhythm and quietly enjoys himself for a moment, then he looks unattached, almost bored. Conversationally:)

You come here often? *(The stud hits him on the shoulder.)* No, I don't have to talk. No, that's perfectly alright. I mean, it's not part of my fantasy or anything, conversation that is. Though I must admit I *am* prone to sweet nothings deftly whispered. However, they are not essential to my enjoyment of the lovemaking experience. I much prefer to open my senses completely to the moment thereby retaining more of an impression whereon to draw on later dates. If you get my drift.

You do? *(He gets hit again.)* But you'd rather I shut up anyway. O.K. I'm not offended. I realize that it must take a lot of concentration for you to keep your...concentration in a situation like this so I won't say another word. O.K.? O.K. *(Long pause, he looks around, adjusts his hands, then fumbles for a cigarette.)* Cigarette? Oh, I'll save you one for later. Mind if I... That's very understanding of you.

(He lights a match and tries to light the cigarette, but can't because of the motion. He grabs the stud's rear and stops him, lights up, then taps him to begin again. ARNOLD positions his hands in a casual smoker's pose and looks about, puffing deeply.)

Got a nice crowd tonight. Ya'know, this here's easier than I thought it would be. See, I don't usually do this sort of thing, but what with breaking from my lover and all... But it's not as bad as I thought it would be. I guess that has a lot to do with you. Your attitude, I mean. I find that being a sensitive person, as I am, that I pick up easily on people's vibrations and hence incorporate them into myself. See, I figured I'd be too uptight to allow for such things. But

since you obviously don't care, then I don't care. Just another bar right? Just another night out? Very practical idea. I mean, say you'd picked me up in another bar, well, it might've taken an hour for us to get to this. Or maybe we wouldn't've gotten along and so never got to find out that we really were so compatible. But this way we can build a relationship the other way around, right? You know, I really like you. Maybe that's a stupid thing to say in a place like this. But if you think about it, it's not so stupid at a time like this, is it? I can't wait to see what you look like.

(Hit again.) Oh, I'm sorry. I was talking again, wasn't I? Gee, I'm really sorry. It must be my nerves. I guess I'm not as relaxed as I thought 'cause when I get nervous I just talk insistently. On any subject, it don't matter. You just name a subject when I'm nervous and I will talk on and on about it. It don't matter what; sex, drugs, religion, rummage sales, anything. Try it. You'll see. Name a subject. *(The stud pulls out suddenly.)* Oh, you're finished? That was quick. Must'a been hot to trot, huh? *(Miming pulling back on his clothes.)* I'd like you to meet this friend of mine. His name is Murray. He must be right around here somewhere. Murray? Murray? Oh, there you are. Murray, I'd like you to meet... Hey, I never did catch your naa... *(He split.)* Yoo hoo! Hello? Where'd he go? See, Murray, that's what I've got against places like this. You meet someone nice and you lose him in the dark. I know, I'll light a match. Oh, I don't know what he looks like. Of course, how dumb, he's gone out front to wait for me 'cause of the crowd and the smell. C'mon Murray. Let's go find him.

What'd'ya mean, he won't be there? I'm sure he really liked me. He made love to me, didn't he? Well, didn't he? *(Long pause.)* Let's get outta here.

(ARNOLD turns his back as the normal bar lights return. He squints and tries to smile.)

Well, at least I don't have to cook him breakfast.

(Slow fade. Black. LADY BLUES sings her final song.)

Scene Five

(The lights come up on the dressing room set again. They're more general than before. ED enters tentatively, looks around, checks his watch, and sits on the chair at the vanity. He looks at the cards and notes scattered around the mirror and table. He looks uncomfortable. He checks out the make-up on the table and picks up a powder puff as ARNOLD enters. He stops short in the doorway and stares at ED, who has not heard him come in. There is a great sadness in ARNOLD's face. He puts on a huge smile and enters. He is in a dressing robe.)

ARNOLD. Careful, some of that might rub off on you.

ED. *(Jumping up.)* You scared me. *(Holding out his arms.)* Hello, Arnold.

ARNOLD. *(Walking right past him.)* Hello.

ED. Bet you thought you'd never see me again. *(Pause.)* You look fantastic.

ARNOLD. *(In grand Bette Davis.)* Well, aren't you a deah to say so!

ED. The stage manager said it'd be alright for me to wait for you in your dressing room. You don't mind, do you?

(No response. ARNOLD sits and begins to peel his face off.)

When I asked for you as Arnold he didn't know who I meant. *(A little laugh.)* You look beautiful... Really. Lost a little weight, I see. *(He reaches out to touch ARNOLD.)*

ARNOLD. *(Stiffening.)* Please...

ED. *(Pulling back.)* Sorry. I guess you're still pretty angry, huh?

ARNOLD. No, I'm not *still* angry. This is brand new. What are you doing here?

ED. I wanted to see you. I've been worried about you. *(ARNOLD shoots him a look.)* I wanted to make sure that you were alright.

ARNOLD. How'd you know I was here?

ED. I saw an ad in the paper.

ARNOLD. That ad should have satisfied your curiosity.

ED. I had planned on seeing the show and just leaving, but when I saw you onstage I had to come back and talk to you. *(Pause.)* Been a long time.

ARNOLD. Five months ago you checked out on me with a single phone call. You said that you knew what you wanted and that I wasn't it. I haven't heard a word from you since. What do you want?

ED. Just to see you.

ARNOLD. You've seen me. Get out.

ED. Arnold, please. I'd like to talk to you.

ARNOLD. No.

ED. Wait, just listen to me for a minute.

ARNOLD. NO!

ED. It's got nothing to do with us...

ARNOLD. I said no, goddammit! Now just go and leave me alone. *(Softer.)* The one nice thing I could say about you was when you left, you left. No matter what I thought of your reasons or lack of them, you kept your word...

ED. You knew I'd come back to see you. I told you that I wanted us to be friends. You mean a lot to me. *(Pause; he makes the "I love you" sign and holds it up.)* Arnold...?

ARNOLD. Don't get cute with me.

ED. Maybe I shouldn't have come here, but as long as the harm's done can't I talk to you? Just until you're dressed? It's important to me.

ARNOLD. *(Indicating a folding chair against the wall.)* Sit down.

ED. *(He gets the chair and sets it behind ARNOLD.)* So, how you been?

ARNOLD. Can we somehow manage to skip the little niceties and get right to the meat. I know you're here for something.

ED. There is something I have to tell you, but give me a little time. It's not the kind of thing I can blurt right out.

ARNOLD. (*Resigned.*) How are your folks?

ED. They're fine. My father had a little trouble with an inner ear infection, but it cleared up nicely.

ARNOLD. They go back south for the winter?

ED. They left two days ago.

ARNOLD. Two days!? What took you so long?

ED. What?

ARNOLD. Ed, you can forget it. It's over. You are not coming back.

ED. You don't understand...

ARNOLD. I have never done time in the closet and I sure as hell ain't gettin' in one for you.

ED. But, I don't want to come back. (**ARNOLD** *stares.*) Really. Things are going great with Laurel. I tried to tell you. I came to talk to you as a friend. (**ARNOLD** *turns back, goes to the mirror.* **ED** *continues merrily.*) We spent a really fantastic summer upstate. We stayed at my parents' place in Florida for a week then back up to the farm. I got a lot done on the house including a new chimney.

ARNOLD. And what'd you do with what's-her-face?

ED. Laurel. Well, at first things were sort of strained. She'd hang around me all the time wanting us to work together. But I talked to her and finally she began doing things on her own. It was hard for her to understand. She doesn't take criticism very well. She tenses up and gets very quiet. Mid-August my sister sent her two kids up for a few days and Laurel took care of them. It was really a marvelous experience for both of us. Sort of like having a family of our own.

ARNOLD. Sounds wonderful! Pa out in the fields, Ma tendin' the young'uns, Granma and Granpa rockin' on the porch. I'm just sorry you and Laurel couldn't have spent the summer together.

ED. (*Missing that.*) You should have seen how Laurel cried when the kids left. But that was nothing compared to the way she carried on when we came back to the city.

ARNOLD. Sounds like she does a lot of crying.

ED. Not so much anymore. We had a talk about that.

ARNOLD. Sounds like you do a lot of talking.

ED. We have a very honest relationship.

ARNOLD. I can see that. You two living together now?

ED. No. We haven't made that kind of a commitment yet. To tell you the truth I'm not sure I could take being with her all the time. She has a way of closing in on me. Actually, it was much easier spending time with you. More relaxed. You're easier to talk to. (*Pause.*) I thought about you a lot up there. We would have had a great time.

ARNOLD. I'm not the farm-girl type.

ED. No, you would have loved it. (*Pause.*) I worried about you; how you were getting along.

ARNOLD. You could have called and found out.

ED. I thought about it. Once, when everyone was out of the house, I even started dialing.

ARNOLD. What happened?

ED. I didn't think it was fair to build up your hopes.

ARNOLD. (*Dreamily.*) There's just one thing I regret about our affair.

ED. (*Sincerely.*) What's that?

ARNOLD. That I never beat the shit out of you!

ED. You *are* still angry.

ARNOLD. Where's a tape recorder? No one would ever believe this.

ED. Maybe I'd better go.

ARNOLD. No, please, I'm sorry. Stay, we'll have some wine.

ED. What kind?

ARNOLD. (*Producing a gallon and cups.*) House white. Buck-fifty a gallon! You do the honors.

ED. (*Pouring.*) Kind'a warm, isn't it?

ARNOLD. (*Taking his cup.*) But cooling off nicely. I'm glad you came.

ED. So am I. (*Takes a sip and gags.*) God! How do you drink this stuff?

ARNOLD. (*Taking his cup away from him and pouring the wine into his own.*) In large doses. So, tell me, how's your sex life?

ED. (*Caught off guard for a moment.*) Great.

ARNOLD. (*Sure of himself.*) As good as with me?

ED. You're doing it again! Asking questions that you really don't want the answers to.

ARNOLD. Maybe I do.

ED. Arnold, I'm not sure the sex we had was always as good for me as it was for you. Sometimes I felt it got out of control.

ARNOLD. Meaning what?

ED. I don't know. Those last few times, it was like losing myself. I remember once, I don't even think I was conscious. All I remember was kissing you and then nothing until waking in your arms, my body all wet...

ARNOLD. And that's bad?

ED. It's not what I want.

ARNOLD. Funny; it's what I pray for.

ED. Well, that's fine when you're twenty-four. But I'm going on thirty-four. I have other needs.

ARNOLD. (*Quietly.*) Look at us together in the mirror. Now who would ever believe that you were ten years older than me? I'm aging about as well as a *Beach Party* movie.

ED. You're beautiful.

ARNOLD. Is *that* why you left?

ED. I didn't leave you because Laurel was prettier.

ARNOLD. I know that. I've seen her. (*Pause.*) That morning, after the phone call, I waited in a cab across from your building and watched the two of you leave for work. I was pretty shocked.

ED. We can't all look like Virginia Hamm. I happen to think she's very beautiful.

ARNOLD. Where would you be now if I was a woman?

ED. What?

ARNOLD. If I was a woman. Who would you be with?

ED. But you're not.

ARNOLD. But if I was. Would you ever even have looked at her?

ED. I love her, Arnold.

ARNOLD. Like you loved me?

ED. Like I could never love you.

ARNOLD. Because you never did love me. You were too busy running scared to love me. You were scared I'd leave you. Scared...someone would find out about us. Scared...you'd let yourself free for once in your life. Oh, I'm vain enough to think you could have loved me, but I don't think you had the time.

ED. (*Quietly.*) I did love you. Everything would be very easy for me if I didn't. But I do. (*Long silence.*) Sometimes... Sometimes when I have trouble reaching orgasm I imagine you behind me just about to...

ARNOLD. Does she know? (**ED** *shakes his head.*) Have you talked about me at all?

ED. She knows your name. She found one of the drawings you made. The one of the tree outside my dining-room window. She may know more. I saw her looking at that music book you gave me. She didn't say anything, but remember you wrote poems to me on half the pages. (*Long pause.*) I couldn't, Arnold. It's not what I want.

ARNOLD. What did you want to tell me. Huh? (*Softly.*) You can talk to me. I'll understand.

ED. It's nothing really. Just a dream I had last week. I dreamt that I was in my parents' house and I went down to my father's workshop and got an old rag and a can of turpentine. Then I went to the kitchen and got a plastic bag. I took all the stuff back up to my

bedroom where I soaked the rag in the turpentine and put it into the plastic bag. Then I got into bed, made myself comfortable, pulled the covers right up to my neck and then put the plastic bag over my head. The strangest part was: as I gathered all the stuff, as I got into bed, as I began blacking out from the fumes... I was enjoying myself, laughing up a storm. *(Break.)* The phone woke me in the morning. It was Laurel. I couldn't understand what she was saying. Half of me was trying to listen to her, the other half trying to figure out the dream. I felt dizzy so I went back to bed and there, on the pillow, was the plastic bag with the turpentine soaked rag. *(Long pause.)* I couldn't tell anyone else about it. *(Taking ARNOLD's hand.)* This is what I've always wanted: you and me together talking. I think I love you more now than ever.

(ARNOLD's eyes widen. He jumps up suddenly and begins punching ED wildly. ED grabs hold of ARNOLD's arms and stretches them out to either side, so that they stand face to face. They freeze for a moment, searching each other's eyes, then suddenly they are in each other's arms, crying, holding each other tightly.)

I'm so scared. I need you.

ARNOLD. *(Gently releasing himself.)* O.K. Time out. Everybody back to his corner.

(ED sits back down as ARNOLD crosses to the vanity. ARNOLD is in turmoil. Finally in mock of his opening speech:)

Wha' happened?!!

(He laughs instead of crying; crosses behind ED and tentatively puts his hands on ED's shoulders. ED quickly takes them into his. Indecision...)

You feel better?

ED. *(Happy to be home.)* Yes.

ARNOLD. Good. Then get out! *(He grabs back his hands angrily.)* Do you have any idea of what the last five months have been like for me? I cried on so many shoulders... I'm sure I lost half my friends. But I always knew you'd be back. But I thought that when you did come back... I don't know, that you'd finally have your shit together. And here you are more fucked up than ever. *(Still indecision.)* Have you got your car with you? *(ED nods.)* Go get it. I'll... I'll get dressed and meet you out front.

ED. Want me to drive you home?

ARNOLD. Huh?

ED. *(Rising.)* I'll get the car. *(He exits.)*

(ARNOLD watches him leave then suddenly snaps himself to work. He sits at the vanity and quickly brushes out his hair, clears the table top, and begins to undress when just as suddenly he stops and stares at the audience, searching each face.)

ARNOLD. *(Slowly...innocently.)* So, what now? Huh? If I take him back now, knowing all I do, maybe I could make it work. With a little understanding? Maybe even a shrink? *(Little laugh.)* I could just let him drive me home. Then I'd say something like... "The next time you feel you have to say 'I love you' to someone, say it to yourself and see if you believe it!" No, that'd go over his head. I think it went over mine. *(Another little laugh.)* Of course I could just leave him waiting out there in the cold. Just slip out the back and really cross him out of my life. That way I'd be over him in a few more months. Give or take a few more friends. I don't know. I don't know. 'Cause if we do start in again, who's to say he won't keep this shit up? Right? I don't know. Maybe that's what I want. Maybe he's treating me just the way I want him to. Maybe I use him to give me that tragic Torch Singer status that I admire so in others. If that's true... then he's my International Stud. Wouldn't that be a kick in the rubber parts? I love him. That's for sure. *(Fighting back tears.)* But do I love him enough? What's

enough? This is enough, (*Standing, chin up, confronting the audience.*) Enough. (*Slow fade to black.*)

The End

Fugue in a Nursery

FUGUE IN A NURSERY premiered at La Mama E.T.C. on February 1, 1979. The performance was directed by Eric Concklin, with music by Ada Janik, stage design by Bill Stabile, and lighting by Charles Embry. The production stage manager was Richard Jakiel. The cast was as follows:

LAUREL..... Marilyn Hamlin
ED..... Edward D. Griffith
ALAN..... Christopher Marcantel
ARNOLD..... Harvey Fierstein

CHARACTERS

ED – Thirty-five. Very handsome, masculine with a boyish charm.

LAUREL – Thirty-five. Rather unfancy in appearance. Thoughtful and bright, though she shows a girlish enthusiasm.

ALAN – Eighteen. Shamefully beautiful. A frightened child in hustler's clothing.

ARNOLD – Twenty-five (going on forty). A kvetch of great wit and want.

SETTING

Arnold's apartment and various rooms of Ed's farmhouse.

Only one set is used (see description after prologue).

TIME

One year after the action of **THE INTERNATIONAL STUD.**

AUTHOR'S NOTES

A NOTE ON THE MUSIC

A full score for Clarinet, French Horn, Violin, and Cello was created for the original production by Ada Janik. The music should never overshadow or cause melodramatic effect. Rather it is meant to harmonize the themes and clarify the moments. In Ms. Janik's original score each character was represented by an instrument: Arnold by the Cello, Alan by the Clarinet, Laurel by the Violin, and Ed by the French Horn. The musical notations of the text corresponded to those of the score.

IMPORTANT

In reading this script it is imperative that close attention be paid to stage directions and character names as the text may become unclear without that information.

