

Performance rights must be secured before production. For contact information, please see the *Syllogism* information page (click on your browser's "Back" button, or visit <http://singlelane.com/proplay/syllogism.html>)

SYLLOGISM

By La-Tonia Denise Willis

SCENE 1: PANOPLY OF PERSONALITIES

ARLENE, a conservatively and immaculately dressed black woman in her early thirties, lays sprawled across the couch. Her hair is woven neatly in a bun.

LEONARDO, a twenty something slacker type with a baseball cap on backwards, enters shortly afterwards. He has on a tight fitting T-shirt that appears to be one size too small pulled over a scruffy pair of jeans. He is tremendously handsome but to his detriment suffers from a graceless, buffoonish exterior. He sports a vacuous smile.

A RECORD PLAYER sits on the floor across the room with a Tchaikovsky album spinning. ARLENE hums the current suite while she fritters away her time.

ARLENE

My glasses . . . did you find them? I need my glasses. Tell me you found them.

(LEONARDO ignores her and heads across the room over to the window. In doing so he trips on an untied shoelace.)

What are you doing? Why are you messing with the window again? Stay away from there. It's fine like it is. *(Acidly.)* Now, where are my glasses?

(She guides him over to the couch like a mother would a wayward son and physically sits him next to her. Suddenly her demeanor changes from ostensibly kindness to virulence. She slaps him hard across the face. He steps back and cowers like a frightened pup.)

You know how I hate to do that don't you?

(The last piece on the Tchaikovsky album has finished and the record has begun to scratch.)

LEONARDO

You're gonna mess it up like that. Want me to change it for you?

ARLENE

No, that doesn't concern me at the moment. What does concern me is the whereabouts of a pair of Louis Vuittons that I paid a pretty penny for. I gave you a task to locate them and it seems you have failed to do so.

LEONARDO

I'm sorry.

ARLENE

Your apology is not warranted — your success was. And now — Well — Anyway, just turn the record player off.

LEONARDO

(Ponders a second.)

It's okay?

ARLENE

Sometimes I wonder about you Leonardo. All that brawn and no brains.

(As LEONARDO goes over to the record player, the adjoining door swings open and JESSICA, a pregnant teenager with a ponytail in a sweat suit, races forth rapidly in a jog around the perimeter of the room. On the top of her head is a pair of Louis Vuitton eyeglasses. ARLENE immediately tracks after her.)

ARLENE

(Frantic.)

Stop! Halt! My glasses! You tramp!

(LEONARDO has trouble finding the off switch. He searches thoroughly by flipping the record player backwards and side to side, trying to solve the puzzle.)

JESSICA

Are you following me?

(JESSICA erupts in a raucous laughter as ARLENE pursues her around the room trying to catch up and take the glasses away. On the final lap she stops short which causes a collision between them.)

ARLENE
(Snatches the glasses.)

Those belong to me and you know it. Thief! I should give you a belt across your porcelain white face Pollyanna.

(JESSICA drops to the floor and begins a series of leg exercises.)

JESSICA
You wouldn't hit a pregnant person would you? It's a sin.

(ARLENE places the glasses snugly on her face and takes a seat on the couch. Pause. She looks back at JESSICA who continues with her leg exercises. Meanwhile, LEONARDO finally locates the switch and turns off the record player.)

ARLENE
You want to talk sin, do you? Let's talk about that illegitimate carrion you have inside you. What say you to that?

LEONARDO
What's a carrion? *(He pronounces it "carry on".)*

JESSICA
It's carrion. C-a-r-r-i-o-n. As always Arlene likes to display an obnoxious tendency to make everybody else look uneducated next to her. And besides, she's wrong. Carrion means decaying flesh and my baby is very much alive inside me.

LEONARDO
I don't want to talk about dead babies. Hey!
(Attention away from record player.)
Did I tell you guys?

ARLENE
Tell us what? Your stories are rarely ever remotely interesting so perhaps you should just forego the entire thing. Dispense with the discourse.

JESSICA

Go ahead, Leonardo. Tell us what's on your mind.

ARLENE

That's a laugh.

(JESSICA finishes her last leg routine and begins pushups. LEONARDO pulls up the chair and sits backwards.)

LEONARDO

(Breathlessly.)

I'm going to be a model. I'm going to be a fucking model!

ARLENE

You got the second part right.

LEONARDO

I just can't believe it. I'm so excited.

ARLENE

(Rolls yes.)

I don't believe it. He's in diabolical denial.

JESSICA

I believe you. You're a gorgeous fella. All the girls in here think so.

ARLENE

Gorgeous or not. He lacks social graces. You can't be a model without social graces. Ask anybody. *(Points to LEONARDO.)* You have no class and you're uncouth.

LEONARDO

(Puzzled.)

Un-what?

JESSICA

Do you always have to be such a bitch Arlene?

ARLENE

Oh my, so uninventive. *Bitch*, from the colloquial signifying female dog. We all know Leonardo is awkward and clumsy. He has the talents of a circus clown.

JESSICA

You're downright insensitive.

(Casually rubbing stomach.)

JESSICA (Cont'd)

I wish I could model. It seems like so much fun walking down the catwalk and pretending to be another personality. Maybe, if my body gets back into shape after the baby is born.

(Rising from floor.)

I'm beginning to think I shouldn't have had those two plates at breakfast. It's so hard when you're pregnant. You get so hungry and lose control.

(She crosses the room over to LEONARDO and begins to massage his head. He finds it quite soothing.)

JESSICA (Cont'd)

That's how I'm going to stroke my baby when she cries. Nice and lovingly. A mother has to be that way you know. A mother has to show patience when the baby cries and cries and keeps on crying. I have to be careful not to get upset.

ARLENE

Yeah, right.

JESSICA

You're a bitter woman. No wonder your husband left you.

ARLENE

At least I had a husband. You got knocked up by the high school quarterback in the back seat of your father's Chevy. You lost your cherry in the Chevy *(Snickers.)* That's rather melodic.

LEONARDO

I thought it was the English teacher who did it under the bleachers?

JESSICA

(Blushes and covers mouth to stifle laugh.)

You're both wrong. It was Professor Plum in the billiard's room with a candlestick. Or was it Colonel White in the kitchen with a cheese grater?

ARLENE

You're crazy.

JESSICA

Takes one to know one.

LEONARDO

Growing up I had this cat. He liked to pee in Pop's favorite armchair.

ARLENE
(*Cringes.*)

That's disgusting. Do we have to talk about this? It makes my skin crawl. Anything that's untidy and unsanitary gives me hives. I can't stand it.

LEONARDO

No, no, you see he couldn't help it. He had this bladder problem. The doctor said so. Even put him on medication and everything.

ARLENE

Oh boy. It seems we have reached a plateau in our discussions; such is the incontinence of felines.

JESSICA

You're not the only person who has interests. Freedom of speech, you know. It's guaranteed by the Constitution.

ARLENE

Well, it just seems to me that I'm the only one with ever anything significant to say.

JESSICA

More like the only one with a chip on her shoulder the size of Texas.

ARLENE

Oh like you really want to hear about his little tabby.

LEONARDO
(*Sullen.*)

But I loved that cat—the only thing in the house that cared for me and Pop knew it. That's why he poisoned it behind my back.

JESSICA

You show such compassion.

ARLENE

Where did compassion get him? Or passion for that matter. In feudal times marriage was merely a financial contract. Social not familial. My husband made love to me every night like a wild animal. I grew to despise him for it. I only put up with it because I thought we were building an empire. My advertising firm was doing extremely well and I thought he was also in a high place. The moment I discovered he was an imposter (*Gestures.*) Caput. Finito. Adios amigo.

JESSICA

Wait a minute. He left you.

ARLENE

Yes but not for the reason you think. He couldn't bear the shame of my knowing his error.

JESSICA

Wow, somebody's projecting like crazy.

ARLENE

Imbeciles, all of you. I need some fresh air.

(She scoops record player up in arms.)

JESSICA

Aren't we the possessive one? What? You think we're gonna eat it or something?

ARLENE

What's mine stays with me. It's better that way.

(ARLENE exits. JESSICA stops the massaging and plops down on the couch. She appears lethargic.)

LEONARDO

You okay?

JESSICA

Fatigue, it comes with the territory.

LEONARDO

I really am going to be a model. It won't be like last time. They made me do smut. I didn't wanna do it.

JESSICA

I know.

LEONARDO

I thought—

JESSICA
(Solemn.)

I know.

LEONARDO

Why does Arlene hate me?

JESSICA

Don't sweat it kid, Arlene has issues. She doesn't hate you really. It's just that she likes herself more. *(Leans over.)* I took her glasses last night from the dresser drawer to teach her a lesson.

(LEONARDO pulls a piece of a paper from his back pocket and hands it to JESSICA.)

LEONARDO

It's the contract. The modeling people gave it to me to sign. You think it looks okay?

JESSICA

(Skims document and gives it to LEONARDO.)

Well, I'm not a lawyer but I think you'll be fine. Sign it.

LEONARDO

Can I rest my head in your lap?

JESSICA

Sure, just don't hurt the baby.

(LEONARDO stretches out on the couch. JESSICA cuddles his head in her lap. They doze off to sleep and are awakened as ARLENE enters on a cell phone.)

ARLENE

(On cell phone.)

I'm not about to lose hundreds of thousands of dollars Todd. You told me the market was safe.

(On cell phone.)

"Keep investing," you said. The company was solid. I took everything I had. All my savings. Todd, I liquidated all the stock and invested everything in TETRIC. It was supposed to be the best damn electric company on the exchange.

JESSICA

(To LEONARDO.)

She knows what happened.

ARLENE

(On cell phone.)

. . . Hello? What happened? Why did you do this to me? It looks like I don't know what I'm doing when something of this magnitude happens. I have an MBA and a PhD for heaven's sake. Things like this are not supposed to happen to sensible people.

JESSICA
(To LEONARDO.)

Too sensible for her own good if you ask me.

ARLENE
(On cell phone.)

I'm ruined. What will people think?

JESSICA
(To LEONARDO.)

I could have told her TETRIC was a loser. The guy who owns it looks like a snake oil salesman in a three-piece suit. She thinks she knows everything about finance but I could have told her to sell.

ARLENE
(Throws phone across room.)

. . . Bastard!

LEONARDO

Jes, what's the baby's name gonna be?

ARLENE

Well, let's see . . . She can call it Suzie-Q.

JESSICA

Say, who was that on the phone?

ARLENE

It doesn't concern you. (*Wearily.*) I'm not going to enjoy being poor. It's not in my nature. I didn't know it when I married him but my husband was poor. He inflated his stature to impress me. Well, he had to. I wouldn't have dealt with him otherwise. I thought he was the owner of a successful chain of restaurants. Instead he was the waiter of a chain of successful restaurants. He pulled the wool over my eyes, the big sonofabitch! I could have killed him. (*Pause.*) He left me before I had the pleasure.

(All the while ARLENE speaks JESSICA imitates the world's smallest violin and plays mockingly.)

LEONARDO

Couldn't you still love him? Why'd money matter?

ARLENE

Are you serious? Honey money always matters. Money talks and bullshit walks. (*Sits in chair.*) It's what makes the world go around. How are you going to be a model and not know that? What do you expect them to pay you with? Peanuts?

LEONARDO

No, I—

ARLENE
(Stoic.)

My great great grandfather was a slave. My father taught me that money meant everything to us because it was economic power. That's the only thing that matters in this country, the almighty dollar.

JESSICA

You're not poor. You lost a bundle, yeah, sure. But you're not poor. I've seen poor people and they don't look like you. They don't know where their next meal is coming from. Look at you, Donna Karan dress. Anne Taylor shoes. Louis Vuitton glasses. You're a walking showroom. If you want to put suffering on the table I'm the one to put it on.

(She grabs her belly and gets lost in the thought. A painful expression registers across her face and she lifts LEONARDO's head from her lap. She rises, carefully, grimacing and engaging in breathing lessons.)

LEONARDO

You gonna have it now?

JESSICA

At six months? I gotta go to the bathroom.

ARLENE

Last time you said it was seven months. Before that, five. Do you even know?

(ARLENE pulls out an emery board and begins to obsessively file her nails. JESSICA rolls her eyes.)

JESSICA

A mother always knows. Leonardo, could you help me to the door?

(LEONARDO assists her to the door.)

LEONARDO

You got any of those chocolates left?

JESSICA

You're in luck cowboy.

(JESSICA exits.)

LEONARDO

There goes a swell gal.

ARLENE

So you like little Miss. Saccharine, that's so sweet.

LEONARDO

Oh no not like that. She's like my big sister, only she's little . . . but I'm in love though . . . with somebody else. *(Bows head.)* I can't say.

ARLENE

On the subject of Miss. Saccharine, you do know what she's done, right? Everybody knows.

LEONARDO

I don't understand.

ARLENE

Honey, I know you know. We all do.

LEONARDO

She's going to have a baby.

(ARLENE stops filing her nails and follows after him, taunting.)

ARLENE

She killed it, you know.

(LEONARDO covers his ears and turns away.)

Hello? Anybody home?

(LEONARDO begins to sing "Tra la la la" over and over.)

Stop it! Stop that insane cacophony of blather! She killed it!

(LEONARDO continues his shenanigans. Furious, ARLENE grabs him and shakes him violently while urging him to stop it. Ad Lib. She holds her hand up to strike him but he grabs her and kisses her instead.)

LEONARDO

(Realizing what he's done.)

Oh, no. Don't hurt me. I'm sorry. I—

(ARLENE is suddenly very quiet. She stares into deep space.)

Say something. Call me stupid. Please, so you can feel better.

(ARLENE laughs uneasily and LEONARDO joins in thinking everything is all right. He is taken off guard when she slaps him and rushes out the door. He rushes out after her.)

Blackout.

SCENE 2: DISCOMFORT OF DISILLUSIONMENT

Lights up. JESSICA enters carrying a box of chocolates.

JESSICA

(Looks around the room.)

Where did everybody go?

(She turns to face the wall and pretends to examine herself in a mirror that's not there.)

Jessica Lynn Parker, what a big belly you have.

(She runs her fingers over her stomach and stuffs some chocolates in her mouth. The cell phone interrupts her.)

Oh, all right.

(She wobbles across the room to pick up the cell phone on the floor.)

Hello? Who is this? Yeah . . . It's Jessica . . . I don't know where the others are. Huh? . . . Arlene? . . . Yeah, I'll tell her.

(She clicks the phone off and takes it with her to the couch. ARLENE enters.)

ARLENE

It's hot in here. Or is it cold? *(Pause.)* Yes, it's cold in here. I'm so glad he's gone.

JESSICA

You gotta take the phone back. They called.

(She makes an uncertain move and drops the box of chocolates, then sighs heavily and bends down to pick up the scattered pieces.)

ARLENE

They who?

JESSICA

Them.

(ARLENE decides to help JESSICA in locating the many chocolates sprawled across the floor and under the couch. They move about the room during the gathering, on their knees traipsing all around. During certain intervals, ARLENE will eat a piece of chocolate instead of putting it in the box.)

ARLENE

I just borrowed it.

JESSICA

Just like I borrowed your glasses.

ARLENE

That's different.

JESSICA

Just the same you gotta take it back.

ARLENE

(Blurts out.)

Leonardo kissed me. That idiot put his lips on me.

JESSICA

Are you fretting over a little thing like that?

ARLENE

No one touches me. You know that. It's my condition.

JESSICA

The Queen Bee is too dignified to be touched. Aw shucks.

ARLENE

I'm not like you, morally loose and underemployed.

JESSICA

Didn't you ever want a baby?

ARLENE

For what? All babies do is cry and want you to take care of them. Isn't that what happened to you? The depression.

(They recover the final piece of chocolate and pull themselves up from the floor to the couch.)

JESSICA

(Long, awkward pause.)

I felt this strong sense of pain, very sharp. But I couldn't cry. I wanted to cry. The tears never came. It was a week before I cried. I was going to be a track star, you know, maybe get to the Olympics, you know. Jessica Lynn Parker, future national talent. A kid with a future, that's what all the school papers said. All American runner. How could she be so stupid? You gotta be a moron to fall in love with the high school Principal.

ARLENE

You must be some kind of fool to fall in love period as far as I'm concerned. *Love* is not the kind of emotion you should rely on.

JESSICA

I remember when I was twelve. There was this boy in the neighborhood who I had a crush on. Only he didn't know I was alive, or so I thought. To get him to notice me I started showing up everywhere he went. I wanted him so much to notice me, to act like he cared. Would it have killed him to act like he cared, just once?

ARLENE

A teenage stalker in the making.

JESSICA

Then one day I showed up at his baseball practice and all the kids started ripping him about me being there. He was so embarrassed. What I didn't know was this boy really like me too but he was just afraid to say anything. He kept it a secret, denied the passion. Why do we have to deny our passion? It's a part of life. Built-in. Why didn't he just tell me he loved me? Oh well, in the end I guess he proved it after all.

(ARLENE moves away as JESSICA attempts to lay her head on her shoulders.)

ARLENE

What do you mean in the end he proved it?

JESSICA

It was in his suicide note three years later.

ARLENE

Well, I could never have anything with Leonardo.

(Eats chocolate.)

He's a gay man.

JESSICA

He's not that way. Who told you this?

ARLENE

He did gay porn didn't he?

JESSICA

Just because he did gay porn doesn't make him gay. Besides, it was just one movie. Only one time.

ARLENE

Once is all it takes. You can never be a half-virgin.

JESSICA

It wasn't his fault. It was his father's . . . what he did to him. You can't blame him. He's so gentle.

ARLENE

Why do people think that "being gentle" is some kind noble characteristic? I've never understood that ridiculous notion. Take cartoons for an example, all the weak characters get that 20-ton anvil dropped on their heads. And Wile E. Coyote spends his life buying useless Acme products while the Road Runner makes a mockery of him each time. He should fall from the cliff. He deserves to die for being weak.

(Eats chocolate.)

In the animal kingdom the predators eat all the weak ones sooner or later. It's the rule of the jungle.

JESSICA

(Clears throat.)

I think there is something written somewhere about the meek inheriting the earth.

ARLENE

That's ridiculous. To be weak and docile is to be a natural victim. Haven't you listened to anything I've said? I refuse to celebrate victimization. Richard the Lionhearted wasn't weak. Neither was Alexander the Great . . . or the Pharaohs of Egypt. I have nothing but contempt for the timid and disgust for the ill informed. Frailty perpetuates weakness of spirit and sloth of mind. In some countries they execute the weak, did you know that?

JESSICA

Really?

ARLENE

All I'm saying is in order to make any significant gains in life one must show great fortitude and strength of character.

JESSICA

(Half-smile.)

But you lost over three hundred thousand dollars in a Corporate Ponzi scheme.

ARLENE

Yes, but despite my lapse of judgment and despite the undulations of the marketplace, I remain true to my character. *(Silence.)*

(JESSICA grabs ARLENE by the arm and rolls the sleeve of her dress back midway to reveal a bandage wrapped around the wrist that extends all the way up to her forearm.)

ARLENE (Cont'd)

(Angrily tugs arm away.)

What the hell do you want from me?

JESSICA

To prove you're like the rest of us. Vulnerable.

ARLENE

I don't like being psychoanalyzed.

JESSICA

Isn't that why we're here?

ARLENE

This place is a joke. I don't hate my mother or want to sleep with my father. I'm not a part of some Greek tragedy.

JESSICA

It's better than the alternative.

ARLENE

Is it really? At least in the other place you know where you stand. In the other place they don't care what your inner demons are. All that matters is you must follow the rules to fill out your time. The demarcations are clear and the regulations are succinct. You are there for one purpose and one purpose only and you can't delude yourself into thinking something different. I understand that kind of punishment but therapy. . .

JESSICA

There's just no sense of hope in the other arrangement.

ARLENE

Don't be silly. What is hope now to any of us?

JESSICA

Is that really how you feel?

ARLENE

I don't feel. Everything is lost and nothing matters anymore. It's merely a fool's game of going through the motions.

JESSICA

By George, I think I've got it.

ARLENE

What have you got? An epiphany?

JESSICA

No silly. I know why I chose you. You remind me of my high school typing teacher. Mechanical. A bit of a stiff. So, why did you choose me?

ARLENE

What are you babbling about?

JESSICA

In here — why me? Why Leonardo? Actually, I think it's simple why you chose him. You're a sadist and he's a masochist. Perfect compliment.

ARLENE

You think I want to go through with these ridiculous shenanigans every day? I didn't choose you. It was just a matter of circumstance.

JESSICA

You mean happenstance?

ARLENE

I'm quite capable of selecting the appropriate term, thank you very much. The first day you showed up I knew you were trouble.

JESSICA

It was just you and him then. You needed a third.

ARLENE

It was his idea. He wanted a "family". (*Makes air quotes.*)

JESSICA

Does that make me your daughter or your sister?

ARLENE

You know Pollyanna, I get the strange feeling that you don't want this to ever end.

JESSICA

So you do care?

ARLENE

Stop it. You're making me—

JESSICA

— angry or just desperate? Admit it. Show a sign of unease.

ARLENE

Fuck you! You simple little fresh faced tart. Getting by all your life with the toss of your hair. Until now, now you have to pay the piper.

JESSICA

Aha! Gutter speech, there you go. We all have something shameful locked away.

ARLENE

Don't you get it? It gives them pleasure to know that. They pride themselves on probing us daily to get to the root of the problem so that they may dispense forth their brand of psychobabble. I can see them now preparing for a new dissertation and labeling us Experiment A. We are nothing to them but test subjects. We have failed ourselves and are now at their mercy. Isn't it ironic? I still don't think it was my fault.

JESSICA

What wasn't your fault?

ARLENE

You know what?

JESSICA

Yes, but do you?

ARLENE

I was here first. I'm the one in control.

JESSICA

What control? You don't scare me. You're funny to watch. Like a television farce. You huff and puff but you can never blow the house down.

ARLENE

One of these days Miss. Saccharine, one of these days I'll make good on my threats. One of these days you might not wake up.

JESSICA

Don't be silly, we can never be apart, not even then. I'd haunt you like the Ghost of Christmas Past. *(Laughs.)*

WOMAN'S VOICE *(Offstage.)*

Leave me alone! Go away! Fuck off! Fuck off!

(The CRIES emanate from the door and are quite disturbing as they crescendo. ARLENE advances toward the door screaming, "Shut up, you hag!" trying to combat or compete with her opponent.)

JESSICA

I think that's the lady who gave me her breakfast this morning. She's —

ARLENE

— a crazy madwoman.

(ARLENE opens the door and takes a deep breath as if she's auditioning for a monologue.)

We have enough trouble around here lady without your constant breakdowns! Now do us all a favor and get it together! Your situation is what it is — accept it, deny it, or make up your own little games like we do but for God's sake, "Shut the fuck up!"

(ARLENE very quietly then closes the door and walks over to the couch to retrieve the cell phone.)

I should take it back?

JESSICA
(Disconnected to present events.)

Yeah, they called you know.

Blackout.

SCENE 3: *ARDOR OF ASSIGNATION*

Lights go up but remain dim. Night. LEONARDO enters into an empty room. He is barefoot and dressed in a pair of pajamas.

LEONARDO
(Shivers.)

They can't do that. They can't turn off the heat.

(LEONARDO pulls the chair near the closed window. Removes a toy soldier hidden in his pants. Draws the shades back to reveal THICK METAL BARS encasing the window. The SOUND OF CRICKETS filters throughout the night air. He leans over to press his face against the bars, as an infant would nuzzle a parent.)

Why'd you do it Pop? I promised to be a good boy.

(LEONARDO stops short and holds up the toy soldier. A strange look overcomes him. He begins to beat the head of the soldier against the bar of the window. He does not notice ARLENE when she enters.)

ARLENE

What are you doing?

(She is wearing a long expensive nightgown set complete with robe and matching slippers.)

LEONARDO
(Stuffs toy soldier back in pajamas.)

Nothing. I swear it was nothing. Why? Did it look like something? *(In awe.)* You look beautiful.

ARLENE

You just couldn't rest until you did it.

LEONARDO

But I wanted to see . . .

ARLENE

See what? A brick wall? What does it matter? It's better not to know or you go crazy.

LEONARDO

Didn't you ever do anything bad?

ARLENE

(Sits on couch.)

I hang out with losers like you and Miss. Saccharine.

(On that note JESSICA enters in an extremely short nightgown. It is evident she is no longer "pregnant".)

Speak of the devil.

JESSICA

Oh is he here too? He wasn't invited.

LEONARDO

Jes, you had the baby. Congratulations.

JESSICA

It's a boy. I'm so happy to report my son's birth.

ARLENE

I thought it was a girl?

JESSICA

(Joins ARLENE on the couch.)

No, it's a boy. I know a boy when I see it.

ARLENE

From Immaculate Conception to spontaneous delivery. You should be in the history books.

LEONARDO

It'll be nice to have a kid around. I could teach it so many things.

ARLENE

I doubt that.

JESSICA

Arlene, you know that phone call you had earlier?

(All of a sudden JESSICA jumps up and plants herself in front of ARLENE and refuses to move.)

You couldn't have been talking to your accountant Todd Birnbaum. Todd Birnbaum is dead. He was found dead after the stock for TETRIC collapsed and the scandal hit the papers.

ARLENE

He can't be dead.

JESSICA

Oh but he is. I'm sure of it. Come to think of it, it wasn't an accident.

ARLENE

Did you see the body?

JESSICA

(Sits down.)

It happened at your house at a big fancy party.

ARLENE

I throw so many parties. It's hard to remember.

LEONARDO

I'm afraid to die.

ARLENE

There's nothing wrong with dying. Living — that's the hard part. I don't know how some people do it.

JESSICA

Don't be so melodramatic.

LEONARDO

I'm not gay.

JESSICA

Would you like to be my son's godfather?

ARLENE

Don't make me laugh.

LEONARDO

Did you guys hear me? I'm not gay.

ARLENE

Nobody cares about your sexuality. (*Shifts gaze decisively back to JESSICA.*) How dare you insinuate that I . . . You think it's my fault . . . You blame me for Todd's death?

JESSICA

Who said he was dead?

ARLENE

Stop playing games. You did. You said he was dead.

JESSICA

Oh yeah right. Isn't that what I heard in Group?

ARLENE

You've got no right . . . It's against the rules.

JESSICA

What rules? The only rule is there is no rule.

LEONARDO

I like games.

ARLENE

(*Moves around the room.*)

I hate you all.

JESSICA

You love us all. We're all you've got.

ARLENE

Then I should kill myself.

JESSICA

Not that again.

LEONARDO

Please Arlene, don't say that.

ARLENE

Why not? It's a valid point. This place sickens me. I hate everything about it. Hate! Hate! Hate!

JESSICA

And yet we go on.

ARLENE

We don't have to. It would be a mercy killing.

LEONARDO

Attention! I love Arlene. I'll shout it to the world. Can't we all just get along?

JESSICA

Arlene can't love you. She's cold inside — like a Popsicle!

ARLENE

Trollop!

JESSICA

Ice queen! See what fun that is. No rules.

ARLENE

I can get better I know it. I'll show them all. I can make them believe me. I'm very persuasive. When I get better I can go back to lovely mansion high on the top of Mt. Olympus, looking down at all you scoundrels and not feeling the least amount of pity.

LEONARDO

(Shouts through window bars.)

I love Arlene!

ARLENE

(Slaps him.)

What's wrong with you?!

WOMAN'S VOICE *(Offstage.)*

I love Arlene!

ARLENE

Look at what you've started. She's agitated again.

JESSICA

You can't keep hitting him like that.

ARLENE

Why not? He likes it. Tell her.

LEONARDO

I love you Arlene. I really do.

(JESSICA grabs LEONARDO by the arm and pulls him away from the window. ARLENE steps forward.)

ARLENE

Where are you going with him? He's mine.

JESSICA

I won't let you hurt him anymore. He's not your personal whipping boy. I'm rescuing him.

(JESSICA and ARLENE jockey for position as they pull LEONARDO in opposite directions.)

ARLENE

He's a big boy. Stupid but big.

(ARLENE and JESSICA pull LEONARDO all over the room and in the process they all slip on the floor.)

LEONARDO

That was fun!

ARLENE

This is your fault Mary Poppins.

(ARLENE and JESSICA begin a stare contest. They finally jump one another and tussle. As they go at it LEONARDO starts to masturbate through his pajamas.)

LEONARDO

(Masturbates.)

Yeah, yeah, don't stop . . .

(PANDEMONIUM ensues. DR. MASON, the lead psychiatrist at the facility enters to find the patients in a mess. She is a woman of about fifty-five. She is carrying a clipboard and there is a whistle around her neck attached to a string.)

DR. MASON

(Blows whistle.)

People! . . .

(ARLENE and JESSICA break up their fight and rise to attention. LEONARDO is caught in the act.)

LEONARDO

Dr. Mason.

DR. MASON

Oh no, Mr. DeLeon. Please tell me you aren't doing what I think you're doing?

ARLENE

He's disgusting. Sophomoric.

DR. MASON

And what's your excuse Mrs. Morrison?

ARLENE

Ms. Not Mrs.

DR. MASON

If you like. Now Mr. DeLeon, we talked about this in Group, remember? Masturbation, while certainly a normal sexual response, has both its time of appropriateness and inappropriateness. Suffice it to say the day room fits into the latter. You must respect the boundaries.

LEONARDO

Yes, ma'am.

DR. MASON

Miss. Parker, I see you've removed the pillow.

JESSICA

I feel incomplete somehow.

DR. MASON

We'll discuss it in Group tomorrow. It's a good thing I discovered you three were missing and not one of the other staff members.

JESSICA

We happened to run into one another.

DR. MASON

Now Miss. Parker, you know that's not true. You three have been joined at the hip for months now. You don't pay any attention to the other residents.

ARLENE

You mean inmates. Look, Dr. Mason these two pathetic sycophants are a constant thorn in my side. Hardly a day goes by that they aren't constantly interrupting my thoughts with nonsense. I'm exhausted. Tired of their tirades. The useless harangues. I need peace not

an entourage.

DR. MASON

(Flips page on clipboard.)

Let's see . . . *(Reads.)* Arlene Morrison shows an overwhelming tendency to subjugate and reprimand others at will. Possessive. Obtrusive. Egoist. Dilettante.

(JESSICA giggles. DR. MASON clears her throat and turns the page.)

DR. MASON (Cont'd)

Moving on. *(Reads.)* Jessica Lynn Parker. Ostensibly the teenager extols virtues of sincerity and a willingness to help fellow human beings. Internally, however, Miss Parker is crippled by an overwhelming burden of guilt and loss. She will do anything to alleviate her pain, usually by focusing on others. Classic transference.

ARLENE

(Claps.)

Bravo.

(LEONARDO cowers. DR. MASON flips the page.)

DR. MASON

(Reads.)

Leonardo DeLeon. Mr. DeLeon has questions concerning his sexuality due to his lack of a masculine projection. As a result of recurring physical abuse in his past he continues to regress to a child-like state.

JESSICA

Do we have to go to bed now?

DR. MASON

I'll make an exception on one account. Shall we have an impromptu Group?

JESSICA

Oh yes.

LEONARDO

Sure.

ARLENE

No, no and no.

DR. MASON

You're outnumbered Ms. Morrison.

ARLENE

Always in a league of my own Dr. Mason.

(DR.MASON takes her place in the chair and crosses her legs. LEONARDO wedges in between ARLENE and JESSICA on the couch.)

DR. MASON

I simply want to know what each of you did today?

ARLENE

The same thing we do every day. You have the schedule. What an idiotic question even for a doctor.

DR. MASON

I mean beyond the perfunctory routine of this facility.

ARLENE

You mean institution.

DR. MASON

All right, if you will.

JESSICA

She means our family ties.

DR. MASON

That is exactly what I mean Miss. Parker.

LEONARDO

I told Arlene I loved her.

ARLENE

Yeah he did. It was embarrassing. I gave him a good smack for it.

DR. MASON

Why? Is it because he declared his love for you? Or could it possibly be because you are frigid and castigating others is a way in which you have sublimated all that stagnant sexual energy?

ARLENE

That's your diagnosis, not mine.

DR. MASON

That's right. You refer to it as "your condition". Let's talk about your accountant . . .the one who couldn't swim . . . discovered in your pool.

ARLENE

Actually, let's not.

LEONARDO

Dr. Mason, Jessica had her baby.

DR. MASON

Did she now? What a blessing that must have been especially since Baby Jane was laid to rest three months ago. How does that make you feel Miss. Parker?

JESSICA

Empty inside. I did everything a mother is supposed to do. Something happened to my baby. I'm going to burn in Hell.

ARLENE

This is Hell.

DR. MASON

Does it bother you Miss. Parker that the jury didn't accept your dissociation order defense brought on by way of postpartum depression?

JESSICA
(Pause.)

Maybe they're right and I'm wrong.

LEONARDO

What about me?

DR. MASON

Of course, Mr. DeLeon. Do you miss your father?

LEONARDO

He was my father.

DR. MASON

Yes but he molested you for years. He broke down every mode of defense you had.

LEONARDO

I guess then, he was a bad man.

DR. MASON

You could certainly say that. Why are you here?

LEONARDO

(Unsure.)

Because . . .

ARLENE

He belongs here the same as us. Another stupid question.

DR. MASON

I'm afraid that is not entirely the case. Is it Mr. DeLeon? Would you like to tell her? Inform the lady who thinks she knows everything?

LEONARDO

I can't.

DR. MASON

Okay, then I will. You see, he killed his father in self-defense, in the middle of an attack. The court exonerated him. *(To LEONARDO.)* That means not guilty. You are free to leave here anytime you wish. Yet each time we send you home you check yourself back in. It's a perpetual cycle, as if this is your own private purgatory. So again, I ask you. Why are you here?

ARLENE

I don't care what you say. He is guilty, guilty, guilty. I mean, he harbors fantasies about being a model and he carries around a blank piece of paper in belief that it's some kind of modeling contract. You can't tell me that's not crazy.

DR. MASON

Not criminally so.

JESSICA

Dr. Mason, we need him for survival.

DR. MASON

And so we come to the heart of the matter.

ARLENE

Of course, the psychoanalytic reason. Bah-humbug!

DR. MASON

Does anyone know what a syllogism is?

ARLENE

It's when you form an opinion based on two premises. Duh.

DR. MASON

Not an opinion Ms. Morrison but a logical conclusion. Each proposition in a syllogism is designed to produce a reasonable deduction. Now in studying Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* the whole thing can get pretty complicated. For our sake, we'll just stick to the surface material. I will use you three as the propositional terms. Let's take the equation: NOT ARLENE & JESSICA. If I were to say: IF ARLENE, THEN LEONARDO. That's one element. Secondly—IF LEONARDO, THEN JESSICA. That's another element. Leonardo is the common denominator that unites the whole. Without him the entire paradigm falls to pieces because ARLENE IS THE NEGATION OF JESSICA. And the converse is true.

ARLENE

Wait a minute. In that proposition Leonardo can't be the negation of himself. That doesn't make sense.

DR. MASON

You must remember that my categorical syllogism only uses the three of you as terms since there is no fourth person in the Group to serve as a linked term. Therefore, Leonardo is the third side of the dramatic angle.

ARLENE

Would that be an isosceles triangle? Really, Dr. Mason this theory of yours . . . It's like saying the square root of Tuesday. (*Laughs.*)

DR. MASON

Then you disagree? Yet it is evident that removing a key ingredient from the unit you all have established causes a rift in the whole. Well now, I think that's enough logic for tonight.

LEONARDO

See you guys, Eternity House for the Criminally Insane's not all bad.

JESSICA

It's the worst kind of punishment . . . except for all the rest.

Curtain.

THE END

Performance rights must be secured before production. For contact information, please see the *Syllogism* information page (click on your browser's "Back" button, or visit <http://singlelane.com/proplay/syllogism.html>)