

ACT II

SCENE 1

*We hear a hot 1920's foxtrot as the lights come up on the room, back to normal, a few days later. On the Right side of the coffee table are pencils, pens, watercolors, a drawing-board, masking tape, and illustration board, all recently set in order by Tansy. At present, shoeless, she lounges in an armchair, reading wanted ads in the Washington Post. Axel, looking sour, stands next to Willum's stereo, auditioning the record whose music we hear. It ends and rejects.*

AXEL. I can't figure it. He buys a seven-hundred-dollar stereo system, then the only records he plays on it are sixty years old and chiseled out of granite.

TANSY. Ax, don't you realize? That's one of the things that have kept the three of us together. We're old-fashioned. All of us, in different ways.

AXEL. Oh?

TANSY. Sure. Look at us. Willum with his records — me with my quaint little notions that you chide me for, about "gumption," and so on. And you — you know, there's another word you don't hear much these days — "curmudgeon." You, Ax, are a classic curmudgeon.

AXEL. "A classic curmudgeon" — sounds like a murder weapon.

TANSY. And listen to the way we talk — the way we all use outdated slang, have you noticed that?

AXEL. Aw, tie that bull outside. That's a bunch of malarkey. *(He reads a headline from the back of Tansy's paper.)* "Surprising Giants Shut Down Atlanta." *(A little alarmed.)* I hope that's the sports section.

TANSY. It is, yes. *(We hear an automobile outside.)*

AXEL. Who comes here?

TANSY. Is it both of them?

AXEL. *(At the window.)* No — his lordship's alone, for once.

TANSY. Wonder how he managed.

AXEL. Maybe he finally took my advice and showed Rick the river from the roof of the Mercantile Exchange. *(Willum, having thudded up the stairs, enters wearily. He is, beneath his exhaustion, a trifle*

*wild-eyed. A portfolio is under one arm, and he drops it on the table.)* TANSY. Hey, Cutie, how's it goin'? *(Willum, whom nobody else would have called "Cutie," forces a little smile but seems unable to speak.)* AXEL. Where's the Amityville Horror? Still around? *(Willum shrugs.)* You don't want to talk about it? *(Willum touches his nose, the charades signal for "You guessed it." He takes out his "beeper," pushes a button, and listens as he loosens his tie.)*

WILLUM'S VOICE. This is Willum, November tenth. Leave any messages for me — or for Rick Steadman — as soon as you hear the tone. Thanks. *(The tone sounds.)*

RED GRAHAM'S VOICE. Hey, Boy. This is Red Graham again; now by this time I realize you're not just achin' to do this Alexandria job, but now let me try this out on you. S'pose I was to offer you — *(Red's voice cuts off abruptly, and we hear the thunder of a microphone being blown into. Then several percussive taps. Then —)* RICK'S VOICE. Testeen' one, two, three, four. One, two, three, four. Seems to be worken' fine. *("Click.")*

RED GRAHAM'S VOICE. — that's my new unlisted number, and you can call me there anytime. 'Preciate it. So long. *(Tone sounds.)*

WALDGRAVE'S VOICE. Hello, this is Waldgrave; look, can you do me one thing as soon as you get in? There's a company in Lincoln, Neb — *(Again, the tape is interrupted.)*

RICK'S VOICE. *(After a tambourine sounds.)* 'Kay, it's the Ri-i-ick Steadman Show! *(Tambourine sounds again.)* Okay. Uh — Wait a minute. 'Kay, the Rick Steadman Show, and to-

day, for today's show, uh — for — the — uh, today's special guest, for today — uh — *(Willum has blindly made his way to the bottle of Jack*

*Daniel's, which he shakily tries to pour into a glass.)* is — goeen' — to —

bee — Willum the Dopey Duck! Okay? Hey. *(Tambourine. Willum gives up trying to pour, drinks directly from the bottle. Then, bottle still in hand, he trudges, mesmerized, toward the machine.)* Hi, Willum.

*(Sounding exactly the same.)* Hi, Rick. *(As the host again.)* Hi. So, um, tell us, Willum, first of all — how are you? *(As Willum the Duck.)* Oh . . . *(A very long pause.)* fine . . . *(Willum turns off the*

*volume, sits. Nobody speaks for some time.)*

WILLUM. *(Finally.)* Six days. Has it been just six days? To think — only a week ago, the day before my birthday *(He gives a sad little laugh.)* Tansy was leaving, the hotel design was being

rejected and rejected . . . I found out I was being audited by the IRS — and in my folly I imagined myself unhappy. *(He takes*

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another *siég.*) He . . . he follows me. He seems to have unlimited time, unlimited funds—brother Bob's life savings, I guess—he takes an interest in my work, he goes with me into town. The other day—I'm not sure I can even talk about this yet—the other day, I had to take a commuter flight to St. Louis—that's where they're building the outside elevator for the Regency—and Rick wanted to come along. So I said, well, okay, it won't be much fun, but— . So, Rick came along. Everything's fine, he's sitting next to me on the plane, a DC-8, I think. He's wearing a little pilot's hat he bought at the airport; he's leafing through a bound copy of *Redbook*. Then suddenly—suddenly the plane starts shaking, the safety-belt lights come on—people are in fact starting to get alarmed. So what happens in the middle of this? Rick jumps up, stands in the middle of the aisle, and shouts . . . (*Finding it difficult to say.*) and shouts—"Urinate! . . . Urinate, or your kidneys will explode!" Honest to God. And I think—I mean I'm really pretty sure—some people *did*. I mean, he was wearing this dumb little pilot's hat, and that white shirt and tie he always wears. And, you know, in a panic situation like that— . Anyway, naturally, the next thing we hear is the pilot saying, "We experienced a little turbulence back there but we're out of it now, and we'll be landing in St. Louis in one minute." And Rick just sat down again, with no idea how many of those people wanted to murder him. I think he only escaped because the ones who really had the grounds didn't want to stand up.

TANSY. Unbelievable.

WILLUM. It's a hundred things a day like that. Little things mostly, but they're starting to take their toll. I'm becoming irrational, snappish— . I lie awake. After the shoes-and-socks party, it took me two days to square things with Waldgrave; and by then I was such an exhausted, cowering wreck at work—I've just been agreeing to everything; look at this. (*He takes a rendering from the portfolio.*)

AXEL. What's this?

WILLUM. That's the Regency. As of this morning.

TANSY. Pretty stark.

AXEL. Looks like a huge air conditioner.

WILLUM. I know, I know. I—well, I just keep telling myself, no matter how it ends up, it's still mine. It still has my name on it. And that's—something, I guess.

AXEL. I guess.

TANSY. Look—if this Rick person is ruining your career and your life, you have to do something about it, that's all.

WILLUM. I can't. I can't hurt his feelings. I owe him too much.

AXEL. Well, maybe he'll just drift away one of these days.

WILLUM. I don't think so. He's been dropping hints about what he'd like for Christmas.

TANSY. Oh, no.

AXEL. What does he want?

WILLUM. A "Mister Microphone."

AXEL. All right—something's obviously got to be done. What are the rules? We can't hurt his feelings, right?

WILLUM. That's right.

AXEL. All right, that makes it a little tricky. Here's one idea. See what you think of this. All right—you know when you travel, you spend time in a foreign country? I mean, it's fun, but it also puts a hell of a strain on you. I mean, people are talking different, they've got different customs, they all remember different things than you do. They eat weird things. Pretty soon you're glad to get back home. And the more bizarre the place is, the faster you get homesick.

WILLUM. So?

AXEL. So—just an idea—but I'm thinking, why couldn't we hit Rick with a dose of culture shock? I mean, what if we start confronting him with some rituals, and memories, and traditions he's never seen before?

WILLUM. (*Skeptical.*) Ax, how do we know what rituals and traditions Rick's never seen before?

AXEL. We make them up.

WILLUM. Oh, Ax.

AXEL. Really. I think we could do it.

WILLUM. What, in other words, leave him out.

AXEL. No, invite him to join in. If he gets fed up with us—hey! I bet if we could find things to do that are stupid enough, or strange, or boring enough—I betcha money Rick'll be on the next Amtrak back to Silverheels. What do you think?

WILLUM. I think that sounds really cowardly.

AXEL. I thought you'd like it. When do we rehearse?

WILLUM. We're not going to rehearse.