

Soft Click of a Switch: The Blowjob American Terrorists

by CHARLES MUDEDE



On the stage, there are three sets: a bar, an office, and an apartment. The play, *Soft Click of a Switch* by Carter W. Lewis, opens with light thrown on the bar—the other sets are in the dark. Standard American rock music flows out of a jukebox. A bartender barks at drunks. Two men sit next to each other. Ed (Brandon Ryan) is young; Earl (Mark Fullerton) is in the late part of his middle years. Ed breaks the ice, but Earl does not want the ice to be broken—he wants to be left alone to drink in peace. Ed tries to shock Earl with his big plan to blow up a mall. Eventually, Earl opens up and engages with the young man's dark fantasies. The two get very drunk, and at the end of the night, Ed gives Earl a blowjob. This is how the friendship between two American terrorists begins.

The play, directed by Peggy Gannon, is short, smart, and economical, and it never loses your attention, though it is about two predictable losers. Earl is a spiritually dead employee of some generic American company. He lives in an RV, his wife dumped him, he always carries a pistol in a lunch bag, he drinks like a fish. Earl has used up his future. Ed, on the other hand, has a future but does not know what to do with it. He is unemployed and spends his free time watching the couple that lives next to him through a secret crack in the wall. These men are dead ends.

On the night I watched *Soft Click*, a group of terrorists entered a mall in Nairobi and opened fire on innocent people. Al-Shabaab, an Islamic group that has ties to Al Qaeda and is at war with Kenyan troops in Somalia, claimed responsibility. It's reported that the terrorists did not kill Muslims in the mall. If you had a Muslim-sounding name, or if you knew the name of Muhammad's mother, they allowed you to leave and live. These terrorists were acting with a sense of purpose. The terrorists in *Soft Click*, however, appear to have no purpose. Indeed, Earl agrees to commit an act of terror with Ed on the condition that it is not politically motivated. This is the key to the play: Earl imagines that an act of terrorism can be apolitical. This is nothing but madness. In the way the terrorists in Kenya operated with the fiction of a God directing and blessing their crime, the terrorists in the play operate with the fiction that their crime can be executed with no political implications or consequences. ★