San Fernando Valley State College

LACUNA
A One Act Play

An abstract submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Drama

by

James Frederick Stewart

July, 1970
The abstract of James Frederick Stewart is approved:

Committee Chairman

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ABSTRACT

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Lacuna is a play that revolves around an evening of crisis encountered by Jack and Phyllis Aldrich when they learn about the involvement of their nineteen year old son, Hank, in a campus protest movement.

As the curtain rises, Phyllis Aldrich, alone in her well furnished suburban home, is watching the six o'clock news on television. The lead story concerns a student at the local university who has been suspended from the school for writing an editorial for the campus underground newspaper, in which he calls for the violent overthrow of the college's president, Orville Hartman. It soon becomes evident that the student in question is Phyllis's son, Hank, who arrives home in the middle of the newscast. He attempts to tell his version of the events, but Phyllis refuses to listen. She is too upset to hear about it, and must calm her nerves with tranquilizers. Disgusted, Hank storms up to his room, where he proceeds to smoke marijuana. As both mother and son seek refuge in separate parts of the house, and on different forms of artificial escape, Jack Aldrich returns home from a day at his business, a thriving travel agency.
When Phyllis informs her husband of their son's suspension, Jack immediately assumes a "take charge" attitude, telling Phyllis to leave the room and that he will handle the situation. Phyllis balks at this, however, and insists on being in on the discussion. She has finally reached that point in her life where she can no longer tolerate her customary role of subservient wife and mother. Reluctantly, Jack acquiesces to his wife's assertiveness, pours himself a double shot of Scotch and calls in Hank for a conference. But, instead of settling the predicament, an angry and bitter family argument erupts, wherein father, mother, and son confront each other with several, long held, past and present domestic grievances. The row only slightly abates with the arrival of Hank's political science professor, Dr. Arnold Lewis, who has come to the Aldrich home under the mistaken impression that Jack is in accord with Hank's radicalism. He offers to help the family fight the suspension order as an issue of academic freedom.

Jack angrily corrects Lewis's misinterpretation and accuses the young professor of inspiring campus unrest. Forced into defending his ethics, Lewis discloses that he did more to dissuade Hank than encourage him. In fact, Lewis continues, he even went so far as to talk the boy out of planting a bomb in President Hartman's office. Admitting to the truth of Lewis's disclosure, Hank further reveals that he went ahead and planted the bomb in spite of his teacher's advice. Frantically, the three adults try to seek a way to prevent the explosion when they are interrupted by the ringing of the telephone. The caller is one of Hank's friends, who relates the awful news that the bomb detonated on schedule, and that President Hartman, for the first time ever, had been working late in his office and was killed instantly.

Insisting that he had not intended to kill Hartman, only scare him, the panic stricken Hank takes flight, begging his father to help him flee the country. Fearing that he might be implicated in a conspiracy, Lewis also leaves. Shortly there-
after, the police arrive, searching for Hank. Jack cannot decide whether to aid his son and risk becoming an accessory, or turn the boy over to the authorities. For Phyllis, there is no question. She tells Jack that he must protect Hank or she will walk out. As the curtain falls, Jack is still unable to make up his mind.

The above synopsis of the dramatic action in Lacuna has been provided in this abstract so that the following discussion of the play's underlying artistic intent may proceed on a more comprehensible basis.

Of the several areas of symbolic meaning Lacuna was designed to convey, the most important thematic issue it attempts to explore is the crucial problem of the seemingly unbridgeable chasm that exists today between the older and younger generations. Instead of communicating with each other, fathers and sons are standing, toe to toe, in deaf exchanges of nonnegotiable statements of position. In my view, the primary factor causing this breakdown in understanding is that the two generations perceive life in completely different ways. I illustrated this point in my play by having Jack make a futile endeavor to "relate" to Hank by drawing upon his own experiences when he was a young man at college. He is unsuccessful, of course, because he fails to realize that the world in which he grew up offered a vastly different prospect for the future than it does now. His son, for example, has never known a world without the imminent threat of global nuclear annihilation, birth control pills, overpopulation, irreversible environmental pollution, television, the widespread use of consciousness-altering drugs and opiates, or any of the other culture shattering innovations which have come about since the end of World War II. Hank, on the other hand, is equally obtuse when he blindly rejects every view his father expresses if it appears to be outdated or irrelevant.

Another symbolic device I employed to dramatize the theme
of Lacuna was the first name I selected for the Aldrich's son. As many who remember the days of big time radio might have noticed, Hank Aldrich is none other than "Henry Aldrich" brought up to date. Henry, it will be recalled, was continually getting into all kinds of incredible scrapes at school. Nevertheless, his troubles were usually straightened out by the end of each radio program, often with a great deal of help from his stern, long suffering, but basically sympathetic father. When the contemporary Henry Aldrich gets into trouble at school in my play, however, the gravely serious consequences cannot be so readily "smoothed over" by an understanding father. Apologizing to Miss Eggleston for Henry's misbehavior just is not enough any more. If today's Mr. Aldrich protects his son, he could lose his business, the house, and everything else he has ever worked for. "To Hell with all those things," implores Phyllis, "he's your son! You can't be thinking of turning him in!"

The play concludes with Jack's decision left in doubt. I terminated the drama in this manner not because I could not decide on an ending, but because I wanted the audience to respond in their own minds to the dilemma. What is the older generation going to do about the ever increasing number of young militants, radicals, dissidents, activists, and protesters who are their offspring? Will the parents keep faith with them, or will they vindictively see to it that their progeny are all sent to jail? The posing of this vital question was, for me, one of the more significant artistic intentions of Lacuna.
LACUNA
An Original One Act Play
by
James Frederick Stewart

The Characters:

JACK ALDRICH: Forty, well tailored, the owner of a thriving travel agency. He is still somewhat handsome, even though he's losing his hair and starting to get a paunch.

PHYLLIS ALDRICH: His wife, thirty-nine, trim and attractive, but hardened.

HANK ALDRICH: Their son, nineteen, a radical student activist. He wears the uniform of the young militant: longish hair, blue denim work shirt, vest, Levis, and boots. (Although it is not always indicated in the script, throughout his lines, Hank should continually interject the phrase, "y'know??")

ARNOLD LEWIS: Thirty, a professor of political science. Stocky, energetic, he wears tweed jackets with leather patches on the elbows. He smokes a pipe, and sports a bushy moustache.

REED PORTER: A television newscaster.

ORVILLE HARTMAN: President of State University, sixty-three (and looking every year of it), he wears a gray suit with vest.

TWO DETECTIVES: Middle thirties, short hair, otherwise nondescript; they wear tan overcoats.
The Time: Very much in the present.

The Place: An overly mortgaged, two-story house in the middle income suburb of a medium sized city on the west coast of the United States.

The Scene: The living room and upstairs bedroom of the Aldrich home. The furnishings and decor are of Mediterranean style, and suggest an interior decorator was consulted. If a conventional, proscenium arch is used (box set), the living room might be arranged in the following manner — Rear wall: right corner, bookcase; right center, front door; left center, entrance to stairway; left corner, bar. Left side wall: color TV/stereo phonograph console. Right side wall: center, kitchen door; downstage of door, desk with lamp and telephone. Center stage down right: couch, coffee table, two easy chairs. Above the rear wall, at the top of the stairway, is where HANK's bedroom is located (it can only be seen when he turns on the light and occupies it). In this room is a bed, desk with lamp and telephone, typewriter, bookcase, dresser, and portable phonograph with headphones. On the wall is a red and white pennant with the word "STATE" emblazoned on it, and a large, black and white photo poster of Che Guevara.

(The lights come up on the living room. It is early evening. PHYLLIS ALDRICH, in pants and blouse of contrasting pastel shades, is seated on the couch. She is watching a news program on television)
TELEVISION SET

(Picture: a slide depicting a clock face with the hands pointing to six o'clock. Sound: announcer's voice over) It's six o'clock, and time for Reed Porter and the news. (Picture: newscaster with cleft chin and thick, curly gray hair. Sound: he speaks) Good evening to you, ladies and gentlemen. Reed Porter, here, with a full hour of the latest events — from around the world to around the corner! The top local story today is, once again, from troubled State University. An angry demonstration this afternoon as student dissidents protest the suspension of the radical editor of that campus's underground newspaper, The Fist. (Picture: film of distinguished looking man, several microphones are being thrust in his face. Sound: newscaster's voice over) President of the college, Orville Hartman, holds a news conference in response to the protest, and our cameras were there ... 

PHYLLIS

(Jumping up and crossing to TV set) Suspended!?

TELEVISION SET

... As police stood guard outside, President Hartman is asked by our reporter what his reasons were for suspending the student editor ... (Sound: Hartman speaks) I have, here, a copy of the recent issue of an unauthorized publication which was illegally distributed on campus this morning to students as they arrived for classes. In and of itself, such distribution is in strict violation of State University regulations. On the front page of the aforementioned publication, however, is an article — signed by the editor — in which he calls for the violent — I repeat, violent — overthrow of the administration of this college. The language used is abusive, often profane, and generally inciteful. As a result, I have notified the editor of his immediate suspension from this university, pending a full investigation and hearing on the matter.
PHYLIS

Kid, you've really done it this time.

TELEVISION SET

(Picture: film of student demonstration. Sound: newscaster's voice over) Meanwhile, it's a tense moment for police outside the administration building. Several angry speakers...

(HANK enters through front door, he is flushed)

(Simultaneously)

TELEVISION SET

... denounce the president's action. Among them, leftist political science professor, Arnold Lewis... (Picture: film shows Lewis on speaker's platform, in front of him is a microphone. Sound: Lewis speaking) We have witnessed today the usurpation of the Constitution! President Hartman's suspension order is an outrage to the principles of a free press and due process! As a faculty member, I must speak out against this latest repressive tactic by--

(HANK

Damn, I wanted to get home before the news, so I could tell you myself.

PHYLIS

Your father... (She massages her temples) is going to blow his top when he finds out.

HANK

Yeah, I know. Look, I had to do it. That bastard, Hartman, had to be shown up for what he is--

PHYLIS

Don't tell me about! I can't take it right now! (Snaps off TV set)

(HANK

You could at least read what I wrote! You could at least find out
what they're throwing me out of school for! (Pulls out a copy of a small tabloid — headline: "A MANIFESTO FOR CHANGE" — and slams it down on the bar)

PHYLLIS

(Screaming) Don't you yell at me!! (Controlling herself) Don't ... you ... dare ... yell ... at me.

HANK

(Disgusted) Wouldn't you know it! Pop two pills and the world doesn't exist! (Wheels around and exits upstairs)

(PHYLLIS crosses back to coffee table, and sinks onto couch. She tilts her head back, and stares at the ceiling — she is waiting for the pills to take effect. Upstairs, HANK enters his bedroom, turns on the light. He goes to desk, opens a drawer, and pulls out a small water pipe and a plastic bag. The bag contains what appears to be marijuana. He takes a pinch out of the contents of the bag, tamps it into the pipe, and lights up. He turns on the phonograph, puts a long-playing record on the turntable, places the needle on the record, and dons the headphones. He sits on the bed, drawing deeply and noisily on the pipe — he, too, is waiting for an effect. JACK ALDRICH enters through front door. The following exchange of greeting between JACK and PHYLLIS should suggest that it is a nightly, and meaningless, ritual)

JACK

(Removing his coat) Hi, kiddo, how's it goin'?

PHYLLIS

Just fine, tiger. How was your day?

JACK

(Loosening his tie) Aw, you know, same old rat race. Anything new and exciting with you?
PHYLIS

(Clearly, but without emotion — she is still staring at the ceiling)

Nope, not much ... oh, yes, there was too ... our young son was
suspended from college.

JACK

(Vaguely aware that what he just heard holds more importance than
the flat tone in PHYLIS's voice implied) Hmm? What did you say?

PHYLIS

Your son, Che Guevara, was thrown out of State University today for
... (raising her arm and extending the middle finger of her hand)
verbally giving the finger to President Hartman.

JACK

(Squinting his eyes at her) What?!

PHYLIS

(Rising, crossing to kitchen door) On the bar you'll find a sus-
piciously radical looking tabloid called, _The Fist_. On the front
page is an article written by the editor — your pride and joy.
They kicked him out of school for it.

JACK

Wait a minute ...

PHYLIS

(As she exits) I'll get you some ice.

JACK

(Crosses to bar, picks up HANK's newspaper, reads for a moment, then
calls upstairs) Hank? ... Hank, are you home?

(HANK is oblivious to everything except what he hears
through the headphones).

JACK

(Fills a small glass with Scotch. Still reading the paper, he crosses
down to coffee table) I can't believe it ... (Drinks, reads) This
is incredible ... (Drinks, reads) What!? ... (Downs the rest of his drink)

PHYLILIS

(Returning from kitchen with ice tray) Couldn't wait for the ice, I see. (Crosses to bar) I didn't think you would. (Pills ice bucket)

JACK

(Crossing back to bar) Have you read this?

PHYLILIS

Didn't have to. It was all on the six o'clock news. It's abusive, profane, and inciteful.

JACK

(Around speechless) ... On television? ... Where is he? Has he come home yet?

(Upstairs, HANK takes the needle off the record, removes headphones, and places pipe back in desk drawer)

PHYLILIS

He went up to his room ... (A wry chuckle) Probably to make a bomb.

JACK

(Crosses to stairway) I don't think this is something to joke about.
(Calling upstairs) Hank!

PHYLILIS

(Crossing to couch) Ah, I see you're about to assume the role of "concerned father" — firm, but understanding. Don't you think you ought to have another drink before the curtain goes up? (Sits)

(Upstairs, HANK removes a can of room deodorizer from the same drawer into which he put the pipe. He hurriedly sprays the room)

JACK

Hank! — I want to talk with you! (Starts to go upstairs)
HANK
(Frantic) O.K., Dad, I'll be right down!

JACK
(Returning to living room) This is a hell of a mess.

PHYLLIS
You really should have another drink.

JACK
(Crossing down to chair next to couch) I don't need another—You're on those pills again, aren't you. (Annoyed) How many this time?

PHYLLIS
(Sarcastic) The whole bottle.

JACK
I wouldn't doubt it. Look, why don't you start fixing dinner or something. This suspension is a serious matter, and I--

PHYLLIS
And you want to have a straight-from-the-shoulder, man-to-man, no-mothers-allowed discussion with your son...

(Upstairs, HANK opens door of his room, hesitates as he hears the conversation below, and listens for a few moments)

PHYLLIS
... so why don't I just trot on off to the kitchen and rustle up some grub. No, Jack, not tonight. Tonight we are going to pretend that I am an adult human being. Rather than humiliate myself by listening at the kitchen door, I am going to stay right here. (With mock dramatic emphasis) I may even express some of my own views on the subject.

JACK
For Christ's sake, Phyllis, this is serious.

PHYLLIS
(A small smile) I know. That's why I'm staying. If it wasn't
serious you wouldn't have told me to beat it.

JACK

That's not true!

PHYLLIS

All right, so sometimes you wait until I've gone to the grocery store. What a dummy you must think I am! Do you really believe I'm so dim-witted that I haven't noticed that every time an important decision about Hank comes up, I get told about it later? (Imitating JACK's pompousness) "That's for dinner, dear? Oh, by the way, while you were out, Hank and I got to talking, and we've decided that he's going to take up brain surgery."

JACK

Can I help it if he always comes to me about things instead of you?

PHYLLIS

But why doesn't he ever come to me? Because you've made him think of me as some kind of brainless simpleton, that's why!

JACK

Now wait a minute! Whenever Hank's showed the slightest bit of disrespect for you, I've called him on it.

PHYLLIS

(Sarcastic) Oh sure. (Imitating JACK's pomposity again) "Don't tell your mother to shut up, son. Is that a nice way to treat the woman who washes your clothes and cooks your meals?"

(By this time, HANK has switched off the light in his room and quietly slipped downstairs. He now stands at the foot of the stairway)

HANK

Did you want to talk to me? If I'm interrupting an argument or something, I can— (Starts to go back up)
JACK

Hey, no, come back here. Look, Phyllis, do you mind ... ?

PHYLLIS

I'm staying!

JACK

(A sigh of resignation) O.K. (To HANK, with awkward fatherliness)

Sit down, son.

(HANK crosses to chair next to sofa, sits)

JACK

(Gesturing with HANK's newspaper) Now, what's this I hear about you being suspended from college? I'm told that everybody who watched the news on television tonight knows more about it than I do. This kind of shocks me, Hank. Since I didn't see the news — and since I think I have more of a right to know — suppose you fill me in on how it all happened. Your mother says it's because of this article you wrote.

HANK

(Still a little high from the marijuana) Well ... it's, uh, a little ... involved, y'know?

JACK

(Coming closer to HANK, peering at him) Say, your eyes are all red. Have you been crying?

(PHYLLIS bursts out laughing)

JACK

What's so goddamn funny? This has really hit him hard. It's O.K., son, you know how your mother gets when she's upset. Just take your time.

PHYLLIS

(Rising, to JACK, furiously) There, you see?! That's what I mean! Pay no attention to mother, she's wacky! Well, get set set for another shock. The reason his eyes are red is because, while he was
in the bedroom, he was getting hopped-up on pot!

HANK

Hopped-up?! Oh, wow.

PHYLLIS

Walk into his room right now and take a whiff. I'll bet it reeks of pine scent.

JACK

(Very confused) Pot? Pine scent ... ?

HANK

How do you know so much about how my room smells?

PHYLLIS

He smokes the stuff in a brass water pipe. Afterwards, he inundates his little opium den with pine scented room deodorizer to cover up the smell. I used to worry about his eyes being all red and bloodshot, too. I thought it was from studying — that maybe he needed glasses — until a couple of months ago when I read an article in Cosmopolitan magazine. It was called, "Is Your Teenager Hooked on Drugs? Danger Signals to Watch Out For." And there it was, "Danger Signal Number Five: Reddened, bloodshot eyes." Then there was "Danger Signal Number Six: Does your teenager's bedroom always smell like an oriental curio shop? He may be burning incense to cover up the tell-tale odor of marijuana smoke."

HANK

So that's what happened to all my sandalwood incense. What makes you think you've got the right to go sneaking into my room?!

PHYLLIS

Because you and your father are so goddamn sanctimonious about how much ... medication I take for my nerves. Medication, I might add, for which I have a prescription from a doctor!

HANK

That headshrinker never told you to go poppin' two or three caps at
a time!

JACK

(Bellowing) Both of you!! Shut up and sit down!

(They do, PHYLLIS a little hesitantly)

JACK

Now then -- let's talk about one thing at a time. I don't know what this drug business is all about, but we'll have to settle it later. And believe me, we will. Right now all I want to do is find out exactly how and why Hank was thrown out of school.

HANK

Because Hartman's a fascist dictator, that's why.

JACK

Hank, I'm not interested in wild accusations--!

HANK

But he is, Dad. Will you just listen to me for a minute? Hartman's pissed-off because of the newspaper we started. About a month ago, a bunch of us got it together at school one day and decided that since the regular student paper is nothin' but a lot of propaganda garbage for the administration, we'd start our own. I was made editor 'cause I got the highest grade of any of us in Freshman English last year — which is a mind blower, 'cause I barely got a B. What's really a joke, is we made Brown publisher 'cause he's got an old mimeograph machine at home in his garage. Anyway, we put out the first issue with a big story on Hartman — about how he's refused to allow students to have a voice in university policy. Then we ran off a petition demanding his resignation. We knew he wouldn't do it, of course, but we thought it might shake him up. Wham! As soon as he found out about it, he comes down hard and says we're breaking the regulation on unauthorized publications.

JACK

(Sighing) But you kept on anyway.
HANK
We came on stronger. After he banned it on campus we had to run
off twice as many copies. Then, Hartman sends everybody on the
paper this letter, warning that he'll take disciplinary action.
That's when I wrote the "Manifesto." First thing this morning, we
flooded the school with it. So, around noon today, this campus
cop comes up and tells me I've been suspended from the university,
and if I don't get off state property he's gonna bust me. So, I
got off. Pretty soon, though, the word gets around, and all of a
sudden there's this gigantic demonstration in front of the Admin
Building. Hartman freaks and calls in the pigs.

PHYLLIS
(Sarcastic) And by six o'clock, sonny boy's little scandal sheet
is the hottest item on television.

JACK
It's a scandal all right. Maybe you'll get a second chance. Isn't
there some sort of board of review or something?

HANK
The disciplinary board? Forget it. That's nothin' but a big shuck.
They've never gone against Hartman's orders. I told you, he's a
dictator.

JACK
(Crossing to desk) Don't be so hopeless. It might surprise you to
know that a very good customer of mine is on the Board of Governors.
In fact, he was just in the other day making the final arrangements
on his vacation. (Thumbs through phone book) I'll give him a call
and maybe we can start getting this mess smoothed over.

HANK
Smoothed over?!

PHYLLIS
(Sarcastic) Of course. Your daddy has influential friends in high
places. Owning a travel agency makes him a big shot with the jet
set.
JACK
All right, Phyllis, that's enough...

HANK
If you think I'm gonna' cop out---! (Suddenly) Hey! What time is it?

JACK
(Glancing at his watch) A little after six thirty. Why?

HANK
(Relaxes) Oh, nothing... I just wondered, that's all.

JACK
I'm probably going to interrupt Ted's dinner, but we have to get started on this right away.

HANK
It's not gonna' do any good, Dad. I've been kicked out for leading a student revolution, and that's that. You can't smooth it over. I'll go back to school after Hartman's been fired or pressured into quitting.

PHYLIS
Can you beat that? Our little boy—a revolutionary leader.

JACK
(Missing the sarcasm of her last remark) He's not a revolutionary. He's only a sophomore college student who's gotten a little too involved in radical politics. It happens all the time. (Crosses to coffee table, picks up HANK's newspaper) What's he done, really? This "Manifesto"? Overzealous rhetoric, that's all.

PHYLIS
(Taking newspaper from JCK) Let me see that. (Reads silently for a moment) "... and if Hartman calls the pigs on campus, students should pick up the gauntlet, storm the administration building, and remove this fascist dictator from his office by any means necessary. Violent force will be met with retaliation of equal violence."!!
Overzealous rhetoric, my eye! It's an overt provocation to commit mayhem!

JACK
I admit he went a little overboard. But that's what happens in college. Hell, when I was a student, I was always up in the clouds — petitioning for this, campaigning against that, fighting for the underdog ... You see, that's why I didn't want you involved in this discussion in the first place. You can't possibly know what Hank's going through. You haven't experienced it.

PHYLLIS
Only because you wouldn't let me! You know goddamn good and well how much I've wanted to go to college!

JACK
All right, all right — let's not go into that again.

PHYLLIS
You brought it up! You're the one who threw it in my face! You're the one who forgot how many times you've told me that being a wife and mother is a full time job!

JACK
Not now, Phyllis, please. We're getting way off the track.

PHYLLIS
Then don't tell me I can't talk about young Karl Marx, over here, because I haven't been to college!

HANK
(To JACK) Are you sure your watch is right? I better check the kitchen clock ... (starts to get up)

JACK
Stay right where you are! (Looks closely at his watch) There's nothing wrong with my watch. It is now twenty-one minutes before seven, O.K.? I don't know what's the matter with you two. Why in the hell can't we stick to the subject? (To HANK) You don't seem
to realize how close you are to being expelled. I'm almost certain I can fix things up, but you've got to cooperate with me.

HANK

Dad, didn't you hear a word I said? I don't want anything "fixed up." I'm not on that trip.

JACK

Son, I'm fully aware of how you feel about this. You're fighting for a cause, and you're unwilling to compromise. As I was trying to tell your mother, I went through the same phase when I was at the university. You want to know how far out on the limb I went? At one time I actually went so far as to campaign for the Socialist Party! I recall an incident that happened during football season. It was the homecoming game, I think. Or was it? At any rate, it was a game that was played only a couple of weeks before election day. Now, listen to this: We snuck into the opposing team's cheering section ... (he chuckles) and sabotaged their card stunts. What we did, was rearrange the cards in one corner of the section, see, so that no matter what number series their yell leader called out, there'd always be this one little corner on every stunt that always came up reading, "Vote Socialist!"

PHILLIS

(Sarcastic) Oh, rah, rah! You were a real firebrand, weren't you?

JACK

(Quickly on the defensive, but strong) Yes I was! (Softer) In those days, yes I was. That was a very conservative school. If I'd been caught, they'd have thrown me out for sure.

HANK

And for what? Messing up some stupid card stunts. What would that have proved? Big deal.

JACK

I was merely attempting to give you an example of how we were just
as involved in political action as you are. O.K., so maybe nowadays the game's played a little rougher—

HANK

Game?! Is that all it was to you, a game? Tell it isn't to me! It's for real!

PHYLIS

I'm sorry, but do you know who silly you both sound? What has either one of you ever done to really change anything? (To JACK) He's right, you know, about that card stunt story. Every time you tell it, you manage to make it sound more and more significant.

JACK

I didn't tell that story just now for your benefit. Anyway, it wasn't the only thing I did. There were other things. What about that time I—

PHYLIS

I've heard all those stories, Jack, and I still want to know what changes you've brought about. (To HANK) The same goes for you, too.

HANK

Me?! Look who's talkin'! In my whole life I've never seen you get involved in anything, except maybe a soap opera on television or somethin'. What've you ever changed?

PHYLIS

Listen, Mr. smart mouth, I'll tell you what I changed. And plenty of. Your dirty diapers!

HANK

(Disgusted) I should've expected that.

PHYLIS

Your father's right. What have you done besides write a lot of empty, whining words? "Up against the wall. Power to the people. Right on, brother." Nothing but idiotic slogans.
HANK

(Seething) You think so, huh? ... Don't bet your life on it.

PHYLIS

What's that supposed to mean?

HANK

You'll find out.

(Doorbell)

HANK

(Jumping up, crossing to stairs) If that's somebody looking for me, tell 'em I'm not here.

JACK

(Rising, crossing to door) Wait a minute! Where are you going?

(Doorbell)

HANK

Upstairs. I'm expecting a phone call. (Exits upstairs)

JACK

But we haven't finished——

(Doorbell. JACK opens door. It is ARNOLD LEWIS, pipe in hand)

JACK

Yes?

LEWIS

(Energetic) Mr. Aldrich?

JACK

Yes?

LEWIS

Didn't get you up from the table, I hope.

JACK

(A little annoyed) No, but——
LEWIS

Good! My name's Lewis, Mr. Aldrich, Arnold Lewis. I'm a professor over at the university. Mind if I come in? (He enters) Your son, Hank, is a student of mine.

(Upstairs, HANK enters bedroom, switches on light, sits on edge of bed)

JACK

(Slightly bewildered) What is it that you---?

LEWIS

(Sees PHYLLIS. Crossing to her) Mrs. Aldrich?

PHYLLIS

(Intrigued) Yes. How do you do.

(JACK closes door)

LEWIS

(Surveying the room) This is, uh ... a beautiful home you've got here ... Really, uh, ... (Ending up looking directly at PHYLLIS) quite nice.

PHYLLIS

Hank's up in his room. Shall I tell him to come down?

LEWIS

No, don't bother. I dropped by mainly to see you people. And to offer whatever help I can.

JACK

(Crossing to couch) That's very generous of you. I don't believe Hank has ever mentioned your name to me, Mr. Lewis. What subject do you teach?

PHYLLIS

(Answering before LEWIS can, happy to know something JACK doesn't) Political Science.
... uh, that's right. Hank's in my class on Contemporary Political Issues.

(Upstairs, Hank stretches out, face up on bed, one arm shading his eyes)

PHILLIS
(Rising) Have a seat. Can I fix you a drink?

LEWIS
Say, that sounds great. I could sure use one. This has been a hell of a day, hasn't it? (Sits on couch, feels the material)

PHILLIS
(Crossing to bar) You look much better in person than on television.

LEWIS
(Taking out tobacco pouch) Do I? How do you know that?

PHILLIS
(At bar) I saw you on the six o'clock news. You were making a speech.

LEWIS
You mean at the rally this afternoon? No kidding. I saw the cameras there, but I didn't think they'd have it on so soon. Sorry I missed it.

PHILLIS
Maybe you can see it at eleven. Sometimes they rebroadcast—

JACK
If you don't mind, I'd like to get something straight. (Sits on chair opposite Lewis) Now, there was a student demonstration out at the college today, right? You were involved in it?

LEWIS
(Searching his pockets for watches) It was beautiful. I don't know how they made it look on television, but it was great. (Finds
matches) You can be proud of that kid of yours. He really set old Hartman back on his heels. I can't remember ever seeing that old codger so panicked. (Lights his pipe)

JACK

I should feel proud??--

PHYLLIS

What would you like, Mr. Lewis, Scotch, bourbon, or a martini?

LEWIS

Just a little vodka on the rocks, if you've got it.

PHYLLIS

(Nocks Russian accent) Waadkah, of course. I should've known, comrade.

JACK

Would you please explain to me exactly what's been going on at that college?

LEWIS

(Quite surprised) You don't know?

JACK

All I know is what I found out when I got home tonight ... (Picks up HANK's newspaper) and was handed this. I'm told that my son has been suspended from school for writing it, that he's somehow caused a campus riot, and that the whole mess has been on television. Then, you arrive, and tell me I should feel proud that my son is involved in a scandal that could ruin his future.

LEWIS

Wait a minute, Mr. Aldrich. I think I've got to get something straightened out here, too. I came over here tonight expecting a completely different attitude from you. A long time ago, when I asked Hank if you approved of him belonging to the Radical Action Front, he said there was no problem. So, naturally, I assumed ...
PHYLLIS

(Crossing to couch with drinks) That you would find my husband to be the perfect example of the enlightened father. Progressive, understanding — more like a pal than a parent. (Hands LEWIS a drink, sets JACK's drink on coffee table)

JACK

Why don't you just shut up. I've had enough of your sarcastic comments for one evening.

LEWIS

(Sets drink down without tasting it, rises) Look, I'd better be going. It's obvious I've made a mistake. I was misled into thinking you were in favor of your son's activism — that you might want my help in planning strategy ...

(PHYLLIS laughs, sits)

LEWIS

So, if you'll excuse me ... (Starts to leave)

PHYLLIS

(Grabs LEWIS's arm) Oh, sit down. Drink your drink, and enjoy the situation. It's very funny you know.

LEWIS

Funny?

JACK

You'll have to forgive my wife. She takes medication for a nervous condition. It tends to make her a little irrational.

LEWIS

Please, I should go. I really didn't mean to butt in on a family squabble ...

PHYLLIS

Of course not. (Laughs) You just wanted to help us celebrate our son's battle with the establishment. That's what's so funny. That
you came here expecting to find a couple of middle aged bolsheviks dressed in black turtle neck sweaters — or whatever it is middle aged bolsheviks wear — a bare light bulb dangling from the ceiling, old copies of the Daily Worker piled in the corner ...

(In spite of himself, LEWIS smiles, sits)

PHYLIS
You should have seen the look on your face when you walked in and saw all these comforts of ... bourgeois respectability — color TV, wall-to-wall carpeting — it's hilarious.

LEWIS
(Shaking his head, trying to repress his smile) You have an interesting sense of humor, Mrs. Aldrich.

JACK
Well I don't. I fail to see the humor in any of this. Maybe it's because I'm the only one around here who gives a damn whether Hank gets back in school.

LEWIS
That's not true, Mr. Aldrich. I care very much about your son's education. That's my job. That's what I get paid for. But Hank was suspended for breaking rules and regulations, remember, not because he couldn't make it scholastically. The fact is, he's an excellent student.

JACK
But there has to be rules and regulations. Otherwise it's anarchy. What the hell kind of political science teacher are you, anyway?

LEWIS
I try to be an honest kind of political science teacher, Mr. Aldrich. Sometimes my students force me to be. When I was discussing the differences between despotism and democracy, for example, it was your son who saw the similarity between how a dictator runs a country, and the way Hartman administers the university.
JACK

So, you tell them they're right. That he is a dictator.

LEWIS

No, they tell me. Now they're telling Hartman — loud and clear.

PHYLIS

Those who are still in school are telling him, you mean.

JACK

And the language they're using. (Waves HANK's newspaper) Have you seen the obscenities in this? The threats of violence?

LEWIS

They've only resorted to that because Hartman's refused to listen to anything softer. The students are fed up, Mr. Aldrich, and I can't blame them.

JACK

But you don't have to encourage them — egg them on.

LEWIS

I can't sit on the fence. After all, I'm their teacher. They come to me for guidance.

JACK

A fat lot of good your guidance did my son.

LEWIS

I didn't suspend Hank, it was Hartman! You're trying to make me out to be some kind of Svengali — when the truth is, if it hadn't been for me, your boy would be in a lot worse trouble.

JACK

What do you mean?

LEWIS

He wanted to do something ... else. Something ... more dramatic. I persuaded him not to do it.
JACK

Not to do what?

LEWIS

Don't force me to betray his confidence, Mr. Aldrich.

JACK

Betray his confidence?! How could you betray his confidence by
telling me? Why, ever since that boy was old enough to talk, he's
come to me with his problems. Every important decision he's made,
I've been in on it.

PHILLIS

(Sarcastic) The Chamber of Commerce even voted him Father of the
Year, once. Would you like to see the bronze plaque?

JACK

I thought I told you to shut up! (Crossing to stairs, calling)
Hank, get down here! (To LEWIS) I can't believe he would confide
in you anything he wouldn't tell me. (Calling upstairs) Hank, did
you hear me?

HANK

(Jumping up from bed, crossing to door of bedroom) Can it wait?
I'm expecting a really important phone call.

JACK

I've waited much too long as it is! Now, get down here, right now!

HANK

(Snaps off light in bedroom, comes down stairs, enters living room)
What's the big-- (Sees LEWIS) Lew! What're you doin' here?

LEWIS

Hello, Hank. That's a good question.

PHILLIS

Lew?! (Laughs) Step aside, dear, your son has indeed found a new
pal.
HANK

(Crossing to couch) 'That's goin' on here?

JACK

Is that the way you refer to a professor, as Lew?

HANK

Are you kidding? Everybody calls him Lew.

JACK

(Crossing to couch) I see. (To LEWIS) So, that's how you do it. Things are beginning to get a lot clearer ...

HANK

What's the hassle?

LEWIS

Your father wants you to—

JACK

I'll handle this. Sit down, Hank.

(HANK sits)

JACK

Professor Lewis and I just had a long conversation about—

PHYLLIS

Aw, let's be chummy, dear. He's Lew. (To LEWIS) He's Jack, and I'm Phyllis. If you'd like, you can call me Phyl.

JACK

I told you to cut it out! I'm trying to get to the bottom of this! (Quickly) Now, Hank, Professor Lewis says you told him that you wanted to do something a lot worse than what you've done already. Something you haven't even told me about. Is that true?

HANK

(To LEWIS) Did you ... ?

JACK

Never mind him, you're talking to me. If you want me to help you,
I've got to know everything.

(A pause)

HANK

... O.K. ... I told him that I wanted to put a bomb in Hartman's office.

JACK

A bomb!!

PHYLIS

(Totally disgusted) — Oh good God.

JACK

I can't believe it. A bomb. What did you possibly think that would accomplish?

HANK

Blow up his office.

JACK

(Angered) Don't get smart! You know what I mean——

PHYLIS

One thing's certain, Jack. It sure beats sabotaging a card section.

JACK

Hank, listen to me. For God's sake, try and get some perspective on this. You've gone too far as it is. You're intelligent; you get good marks, you could graduate with honors. That's worth something. But starting riots, and being branded as a troublemaker, what'll that prove? Don't you see? You're tossing away your future, protesting over something that ten, fifteen years from now, you'll look back on and wonder what all the excitement was about.

HANK

(Wearily) Dad, I want to finish college. I want to get an education. But what I learn has got to mean something to what's going on. People are dying all over the world, while I'm studying thirteenth-century
poetry!

PHYLIS

Will somebody please put a tourniquet on that bleeding heart! (To HANK) Who the hell do you think you are — some goddamn special case? What makes you so different from everybody else? You act like you're the only person who's ever lived who felt that what he was doing was meaningless.

JACK

Phyllis—!

PHYLIS

—If you tell me to shut up just one more time, so help me, I'll crack your skull open with something! (To LEWIS) You want to know about dictators? Just ask me! I've been married to one for twenty years! (To HANK) You're so upset because you can't find meaning in your school work! How'd you like to trade places with me? Do you think there's any meaning in cooking, and cleaning, and going to the supermarket? (Mocking) The president of your college won't listen to you — too bad! For twenty years I've tried to express my opinions, only to be told that I didn't know what I was talking about! You should thank your lucky stars that you've at least had an opportunity to go to college! You ought to get down on your hands and knees and beg to be let back in!

HANK

Me? Beg that asshole? If anybody's gonna' be brought to his knees, it's gonna' be Hartman, not me! No way!

JACK

Your mother didn't mean you should literally get down and beg...

PHYLIS

Go to hell, you sonofabitch! I meant every goddamn word, and don't you dare tell him I didn't! This self important little punk wants to relate his education to the big, cruel world. Then let him take the first lesson — which is to learn how to grovel! Yes, dear. I'm
-29-

sorry, dear. Anything you say, dear!

HANK

(To PHYLLIS) You're sickening, you know that? You're really sickening! Nobody's gonna' make me eat shit, not you or anybody! You wanna' know somethin' else? That bomb Lew thought he talked me out of putting in Hartman's office? Well, I got news — it's under his desk, right now.

JACK

What?!!!

LEWIS

Holy Jesus Christ!

PHYLLIS

I don't believe you. You don't have the guts.

HANK

Oh yeah? What do you think that phone call is I've been waiting for?

JACK

You fool! You crazy fool!

PHYLLIS

He's lying. He's trying to scare us.

LEWIS

(Prantic) Like hell he is! Hank, when is it supposed to go off?

JACK

(Dashing to phone) Right! Maybe we've still got time to—

HANK

Forget it, Dad! What time is it?

JACK

(Looking closely at his watch) Two minutes after seven.

HANK

It should've gone off two minutes ago. Homer's in the library. As
soon as he hears the explosion, he's gonna' call me.

LEWIS

We still might have a chance! Sometimes those timing mechanisms are faulty.

JACK

I'm calling the police! (Picks up receiver, starts to dial)

HANK

(Jumps up, dashes over to JACK, grabs receiver out of JACK's hand, slams receiver back on the cradle) No!!!

JACK

(Struggling to get phone back from HANK, who holds it away from him) Give me that phone!!!

(The phone rings. Frozen silence. The phone rings again)

HANK

I told you it was too late. (Picks up receiver) Hello, Homer? ... What? ... Hey, talk a little slower, I don't think I heard you right. What'd you say? ... What?!! (Almost a scream) YOU'RE PUTTING ME ON!! (He turns white with terror, drops phone, staggers back, his palms tightly placed to the sides of his head)

JACK

What is it?! What happened?!

(HANK, eyes bulging, is unable to speak)

LEWIS

(Dashes to phone, picks up receiver) Hello, Homer? Don't hang up! This is Lou! What happened? ... Are you absolutely positive?!! ... (All expression gone from his face, he looks at HANK) I don't know, Homer ... I don't ... know. (Hangs up phone, places it on desk)

JACK

Did it explode??!!
(Still trying to comprehend) Hartman ... he's never done that before ... was working late in his office ... He was killed instantaneously.

JACK

Oh ... my ... GOD!!!

PHYLILIS

(Barely audible) Dead? Just like that. Dead.

HANK

What am I gonna' do?! I didn't want to kill him!

PHYLILIS

They'll say it was murder.

HANK

Dad, you gotta' help me! I didn't mean to do it! It was an accident!

PHYLILIS

But they'll say you murdered him.

JACK

And they'll be wrong! It was an accident!

LEWIS

They'll never believe that.

HANK

I gotta' cut outta' here! I'm the first one the cops'll look for. I gotta' hide.

PHYLILIS

You'd better move fast.

JACK

No — you can't run away! Then they will think it was intentional!

HANK

You gotta' get me out of the country, Dad. You can do it. Fix up a phony passport — get me a plane ticket.
PHYLIS
Go upstairs and pack a bag. Just some underwear and a change of
clothes. Take the station wagon. The keys are on my dresser.
Hurry!

(HANK quickly crosses to stairs)

PHYLIS
There's some money in my purse!

JACK
No! This is madness!

(HANK exits upstairs to bedroom, begins packing)

PHYLIS
What do you want him to do, turn himself in?

JACK
He can plead guilty to manslaughter or something. We'll get the
best lawyer we can find.

PHYLIS
Jack, use your head! (Picks up HANK's newspaper) He wrote this,
remember?

LEWIS
She's right. With that kind of evidence, they'll never allow him
to plead manslaughter.

JACK
But ... if we help him escape ... we'll be accessories!

PHYLIS
Jack, what difference does it make? He's your son! You said you
wanted to help him. Right now, you're the only one who really can.

JACK
This is all happening so fast. Let me think ... !

LEWIS
You're going to have to make up your mind pretty quick. The police
PHYLLIS
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wanted to help him. Right now, you're the only one who really can.

JACK
This is all happening so fast. Let me think ... !

LEWIS
You're going to have to make up your mind pretty quick. The police
have been on this since this afternoon. It's not going to take them very long to get arrest warrants for the members of the Radical Action Front.

JACK

But, if I help him get away, it'll look like I'm ... condoning what he did!

PHYLLIS

You don't have any choice, Jack! Either you help him, or ... You can't be thinking about turning him in!!

JACK

We'll lose everything -- the business, the house ... 

PHYLLIS

You MONSTER!!

LEWIS

Look, I've got to get out of here before the police arrive. I'm afraid if they find me here, they'll think it's some kind of conspiracy -- 

JACK

Why, you two-faced bastard! You're in this thing up to your neck!

LEWIS

I can be more help to Hank out of jail than in!

PHYLLIS

You're both a couple of despicable cowards! That kid is counting on you, and you're running out on him like rats!

(Finished packing, car keys and bag in hand, HANK returns downstairs to living room)

HANK

I took some credit cards, too. Now, I won't be able to call you to tell you where I am -- they'll probably tap the phone -- but I'll get word to you.

PHYLLIS

Hank ...
HANK
Goodbye, mom. Lew, thanks for everything. Dad, I'll see you later.

JACK
Hank ...

HANK
I've really gotta' split. (Exits through kitchen door)

(PHYLLIS begins crying)

LEWIS
I have to go, too. Believe me, I didn't think things would turn out ...
... this horribly. I'm sorry. If there's anything I can do--

PHYLLIS
You go to hell!!

JACK
Get out of here!!

LEWIS
(At the door) I'm ... sorry. (Exits)

(Silence. PHYLLIS manages to control her tears. JACK
stares at the floor)

PHYLLIS
What ... are you ... going ... to do?

(A pause)

JACK
... It's like ... like ... no ... I don't know what it's like.
(Picks up his drink, downs it) ... All the plans ... Everything
I've worked for ... (Crosses to bar) It just doesn't seem ... pos-
sible.

PHYLLIS
What are you going to do?!

JACK
(Pouring a triple shot) Phyllis, a man is dead! Hank killed him.
Whether he meant to or not ... he killed him. (Downs his drink)

**PHYLLIS**

Jack, I'm begging you — I'll get down on my hands and knees if you want ...

**JACK**

That fucking Lewis. He used Hank, you know that? He got a hold of an idealistic, immature kid, and used him for his own ends.

**PHYLLIS**

Then, don't you do it, too.

**JACK**

What do you mean?

**PHYLLIS**

Use Hank for your ends. To Hell with the business and the house ...  

**JACK**

If only he'd come to me ... talked to me! None of this would have—

**PHYLLIS**

It's too late to think about that. He needs you now.

**JACK**

He should've come to me ...

**PHYLLIS**

Jack! It's not like he's been a naughty boy! You're not sending him up to his room without dinner — you're sending him to jail! If he escapes, he'll spend the rest of his life a fugitive. Isn't that punishment enough?

**JACK** ...

He killed someone!

**PHYLLIS**

You don't give a damn about that! All you care about is that he did something without telling you!

(Silence)
JACK
My son ... my wife ... total strangers.

(Doorbell, loud pounding on door)

PHYLLIS
Jack, what are you going to do?

(JACK goes to door)

PHYLLIS
I'll go, too, I swear it. You'll be all alone!

(JACK opens front door, revealing two men in overcoats)

FIRST DETECTIVE
(Showing badge and warrant) Homicide division. We have a warrant.

(The two men push JACK aside, and enter)

SECOND DETECTIVE
(Reading directly from warrant without looking up) We're looking for a ... let's see ... "male Caucasian. Age: nineteen years. Height: approximately six feet, zero inches. Weight: approximately one seven zero pounds. Hair and eye color: unknown. Last name: Aldrich. First name:"

JACK
He's not at home.

FIRST DETECTIVE
(Eyeing JACK suspiciously) You his father?

JACK
Yes.

FIRST DETECTIVE
You know where we can locate him?

(Silence. JACK looks at PHYLLIS)
SECOND DETECTIVE

We have a warrant, so you'd be wise to cooperate.

FIRST DETECTIVE

Look, the president of State University was killed in a bomb explosion tonight. We have reason to believe your son can give us some information about it. We just want to question him, that's all. You know, strictly routine.

JACK

He ... (Looks at PHYLLIS, an imploring expression on his face) I ... (PHYLLIS only stares at him)

SECOND DETECTIVE

Hey, pal, didn't you hear what my partner said? There's been a homicide. We want to know where we can find this ... (Reads from warrant) Henry Aldrich.

(All stand motionless and silent, as the lights dim out)

CURTAIN