

The Bookworm

A Romantic Comedy

by

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The Cast

- Martin Lakefield - (42) Martin is a quiet, intelligent, mild-mannered, eccentric, but personable, gentle man. Somewhat overweight.
- Elaine Appleton - (35) A caring, kind, sweet, energetic, but rather plain woman. Ideally, the actress should be a bit “Rubenesque.”
- Al Ganz - (18) A street punk; lean, mean and streetwise.
- Officer Jamison - A no-nonsense, uniformed police officer. Written here as female, she can be either sex.
- Miss Fenwick - A bureaucrat; officious, obnoxiously polite, and somewhat intimidating, intentionally. Well-dressed and carrying a briefcase. Can easily be male.

Note: Jamison and Fenwick can be played by either sex, and the roles can be doubled, reducing the company to four actors.

Synopsis

Martin Lakefield—an eccentric recluse—owns a used bookstore in the Pioneer Square district of Seattle, and he lives in the back of his shop. Elaine Appleton runs the store for him. One night Al Ganz breaks in, running from the police. When Officer Jamison barges in looking for the kid, Martin (in a moment of what he later calls temporary insanity) hides Al. Once Officer Jamison exits, Martin can't get Al to leave.

The next morning, when Elaine arrives, she immediately feels sorry for Al and wants to help him get his life back on track. Martin, by this point, wants only to expel the punk from his little world, but he is not forceful enough to make it happen, especially not when Elaine is on Al's side.

It takes a week for the pressure cooker of this situation to explode. When Martin discovers that Al has been stealing books from his private rare book collection and pawning them for extra pocket change, he brings home a pistol, determined to drive the invader out. At the showdown, Martin turns out not to have the guts to use the gun, and it is Elaine who has to save the day.

In the end, Al is expelled and Martin has begun to learn that there is something more to life than his little world of books. His platonic employer/employee relationship with Elaine has been totally knocked out of kilter by Al's intrusion and the future is looking up for a couple of nice people

The Time

Contemporary. Act I takes place over a Wednesday evening and a Thursday. Act II takes place on Thursday, one week later.

The Setting

The back room of a used bookstore in a run-down section of Seattle's Pioneer Square area. The room is below street level and outside access is off an alley. A door in the stage right end of the upstage wall opens to an exterior stairwell that goes up five or six feet to alley level. One or two small windows set high in the back wall open onto the alley at ground level, so that the audience can see people in the alley, but only from about the knees down. Near the back door is a coat rack. Stage left, a short flight of steps go up to a door which opens to more stairs leading up to the bookstore. Further upstage left, a door leads off to a bathroom. The space is old and not very nice; however it is Martin's home.

Stage left is his work area. A cluttered desk, a chair, a lamp, a telephone, a file cabinet, an old and noisy electric typewriter, and some shelves of books if there is room.

Centerstage is the living area. A Goodwill vintage sofa bed, an over-stuffed recliner, a reading lamp on a table beside the chair, a coffee table in front of the sofa bed. Behind this grouping, on the upstage wall, is a chest of drawers and possibly an old trunk. Prominently placed upstage center is a locking bookcase with glass doors which holds Martin's special private book collection.

Stage right is a small makeshift kitchen and eating area. A dinette with three chairs, a small full-sized refrigerator, a cabinet beside it with shelves on the wall above for glasses, utensils, plates, mugs, and food staples. A coffee percolator is among the things on the cabinet. Perhaps Martin has a small stove; perhaps only a double hot plate.

In the corners and out-of-the-way spaces on the set, boxes of books are piled high. Each box is labeled with large magic marker writing listing its contents. Major authors, literary classifications, catch-all types. (e.g. Shakespeare, Victorian novels, Augustans, Modern drama, westerns, gothics, horror, Hemingway, minor English poets, National Geographics.)

The place is a rat's nest, but it is the nest of a very neat rat. Although his living conditions are marginal, Martin does everything he can to make the place comfortable. Other than the clutter on his desk, the place is as tidy as it could possibly be. There are a couple of framed prints on the walls and somewhere a vase of flowers. Things on the chest of drawers and in the kitchen area are in perfect order.

ACT I

(The lights come up. **MARTIN LAKEFIELD** is at his typewriter, working. Martin is 42, a non-descript, bookish, gentle man. He wears slacks, a white shirt, a narrow tie, suspenders, a sleeveless cardigan sweater, and house shoes. He pauses to sip from a glass of wine. He notices the audience. He studies them, looking around to take them all in.)

MARTIN

I hate to be rude but... Go away. ...Please.

(A pause, to see what the audience does.)

You're not going to leave, are you?

(As he continues, he turns off the typewriter, rises, and moves around to sit on the downstage corner of his desk.)

I can't honestly say I expected you to. After all, you did pay for the dubious privilege of being here. I guess it's up to me to entertain you—give you your money's worth. I'll do my best. My name is Martin—Martin Lakefield. I'm forty-two, I have a doctoral degree in philosophy, and I run a used bookstore. Actually I don't run it—Elaine does. I own it, and live here, behind the store.

(Glancing back at his living space.)

I suspect you've concluded, from your casual observation of my chosen habitat, that I am, to be polite, somewhat...eccentric. Perhaps. However, I believe that anyone who goes through the effort and expense of obtaining a doctoral degree, then finds himself forced, by the grim facts of economic reality, into being a peddler of used books...that person—me—has the right to live however he damn well pleases.

(A shrug. "What can you do?")

I have everything I need. The store pays the bills, if I'm careful. This space is...sufficient. And I have my book. Yes, I too am writing a book. Isn't everyone? Mine is called "The Memoirs of a Modern Day Recluse." It's sort of a contemporary sequel to Dostoyevski's "Notes from the Underground," with just a touch of Garrison Keillor. I could read some of it for you. You might find that entertaining.

(He takes a binder from his desk, turns to the first page and begins to read. Martin is proud of this work. He reads carefully and precisely.)

"My world is very small. A room. Four walls, a floor, a ceiling, modest furnishings; the basic essentials of existence. For some years now I've worked to create an environment free of the unpleasantness of everyday life. I've woven a cocoon of serenity around the soft, unprotected, helpless creature that is myself, and by so doing, have extricated my being from the collective hysteria of contemporary civilization...if our present pathetic state of affairs can be called civilization. From my vantage point, my sanctuary of sanity, my cave of reason, I look out upon the relentless erosion of almost every positive aspect of humanity."

(Martin looks up at the audience and senses hostility. He closes the binder and puts it down on his desk.)

MARTIN (CONT'D)

That won't do, will it? You didn't come here for a diatribe on the decline and fall of the human race. You want entertainment. Something fast-paced, intense—with plenty of laughs, drama, excitement, danger, and of course, romance. Fat chance.

(He glances down at his waist.)

Fat... Poor choice of words. Tell me, do I look like your basic hero type? Ready and willing to face any and all emergencies?

(Another idea comes to mind.)

Still, there was that time... Yes. The one pivotal event in my otherwise placid existence. I could share that with you. Might be fun. Why not?

(As he continues, Martin takes his glass of wine, moves over to his reading chair and sits. Once he's seated, the lights fade on his desk area. His reading lamp and the area around the chair come up as the desk area darkens.)

It was...October. A Wednesday evening. Late. I was reading, for at least the third time, my autographed, first-edition copy of "The Eustace Diamonds," by Anthony Trollope. It's late Victorian pabulum, but fun. There was a sound, in the alley...

(Offstage we hear the sound of someone running into a couple of aluminum garbage cans.)

AL

(Offstage)

Shit!

(Someone runs down the steps to the basement door. A beam of light from a flashlight shines down the alley, not picking up the figure. We hear the sound of the door being jimmied with a knife. **AL GANZ rushes in**, pushing the door closed behind himself. He wears dirty jeans, a worn jacket and scruffy work shoes. His hair is unruly. He has a long, dangly earring in his left ear. He opens the door a crack, looking out. His focus is on the alley outside—he does not notice Martin in the room. Martin, however, is keenly aware of him. After a moment.)

MARTIN

Excuse me...

(The kid whirls around. A large and threatening pocket knife makes an appearance, open and at the ready.)

...can I help you?

AL

Huh?

MARTIN
Can I help you?

AL
Jesus! Okay, yeah—turn out the light.

MARTIN
But...

AL
Out!
(Martin turns off the lamp. The room is dark—with only a blue wash and the light coming through the windows.)
Christ! I can't see shit!

MARTIN
You want a flashlight?

AL
No! Don't move! And shut up! Not a sound!
(Outside, the officer starts down the stairs cautiously.)
Shit, he's comin' in! I gotta' hide! Where can I hide?!

MARTIN
Uh...

AL
Dammit, where?!

MARTIN
Uh, up in the store. The door's over there.

(Al moves across the room, his eyes adjusting to the dark.)

AL
Listen. When that pig comes in here, get rid of him. And don't go gettin' any ideas about openin' your mouth. 'Cause if you do, it's gonna' get messy. Real messy.

(He trips on the stairs going up to the door.)
Shit!

MARTIN
Uh, there's a couple of steps there.

AL
No funny business. You understand?

MARTIN

Yes.

(Al exits to the store.)

That kid watches too much television.

(Martin pauses He turns to the audience.)

...That was awfully flippant, wasn't it? Sometimes, when I'm under stress, I become flippant. A defense mechanism of some kind I suspect—although, come to think of it, probably not a good one. Believe me, it's more fun to read about this sort of thing than to experience it.

(The back door is thrown open and a flashlight shines into the space, but doesn't pick Martin up immediately. **OFFICER JAMISON enters**, checking first to make sure no one is hiding behind the door. Jamison is an experienced, no-nonsense police officer in her 30's. She is in patrol uniform—slacks, low quarter shoes, jacket and hat, with full utility belt. She has her revolver out and ready.)

MARTIN

Excuse me...

(Jamison reacts. The gun and the flashlight are both aimed at Martin instantly.)

...can I help you?

JAMISON

Who the hell are you?!

MARTIN

My name is Lakefield; Martin Lakefield.

JAMISON

What are you doing here?

MARTIN

This is my bookstore.

JAMISON

What are you doing here now?!

MARTIN

Uh...reading.

JAMISON

In the dark?

MARTIN

I, uh...just turned off the light a moment ago...to rest my eyes.

JAMISON

Well turn it back on.

(Martin turns on his lamp.)

You hear anybody in the alley the last couple of minutes?

MARTIN

(He rises and moves to turn on some more lights. As he does his focus is on the door behind which Al is hiding.)

Uh...as a matter of fact, yes, there was someone. A kid—kinda' scruffy.

JAMISON

You saw him?

MARTIN

He jimmed that door, with a knife--came in here.

JAMISON

(Immediately back on guard.)

Where is he?

MARTIN

Ah...

(He turns and addresses the audience. Jamison freezes.)

And right here, I made a major blunder. Why? I have no idea. Maybe it had something to do with the big gun chasing the terrified kid. Maybe I wasn't sure the lady cop could handle the situation—which was sexist...and dumb. Maybe I just didn't like the idea of being in the middle if anything happened. Anyway, what came out of my mouth was...

(Back into the scene; Jamison comes out of her freeze.)

Ah...when he saw me, he turned around, ran out the door.

JAMISON

Out here? Which way?

MARTIN

I...uh, didn't see.

JAMISON

How long ago?

MARTIN

Oh, uh, couple of minutes, at least.

JAMISON

Damn.

(She begins to put away her revolver and start out.)

Well, thanks anyway.

MARTIN

(A glance back at the door to the bookstore.)

Uh, Officer, you're not leaving, are you?

JAMISON

I better be gettin' back.

MARTIN

Uh, don't you...? Don't you need some kind of report? About the kid?

JAMISON

My partner's back at the bar. I'm sure he got a description.

MARTIN

You never know. I mean I 'm not trying to tell you your business, but...

JAMISON

(Humoring him—pulling out a pad.)

Okay, what'd he look like?

MARTIN

(Crossing to the dinette and pulling out a chair.)

Here, sit down. Can I get you something to drink?

JAMISON

(Closing the door; moving to sit at the dinette.)

Got any coffee?

MARTIN

I could make some.

JAMISON

Nah, water'll be fine.

(Martin pours some from a pitcher in the fridge. Jamison rubs an ankle, obviously in some pain.)

Wouldn't ya' know? Haven't had to chase anyone on foot in forever. Tonight I'm breakin' in new shoes—so naturally I end up chasing a punk all over hell.

MARTIN

(Giving Jamison the glass of water.)

Here you go.

JAMISON

Thanks.

MARTIN

That kid. Just saw him for a second, but he didn't look... Why are you chasing him?

(Martin moves to the far right side of the kitchen. From here, he can see the door to the shop, behind which Al is hiding. Jamison, however, is focused away from the door.)

JAMISON

Just a stupid punk. Don't know the whole story. Sounds like he wandered in the wrong bar—a rough dive. There was a fight. He busted a chair over one guy's head and cut up another one. When we pulled up, he ran out the back.

MARTIN

But you don't think he's a...dangerous criminal?

JAMISON

Nah. Shouldn't a' had the knife—but then he'd be the one going to the hospital. Hell, what's the world comin' to? People are just gettin' mean. Every time you turn around, we're called in to stop a fight, or take care of somebody who just lost one. That bar—third time this week. Same two jerks started the last one, only this time they lost.

MARTIN

So it wasn't the kid's fault?

JAMISON

Probably not. Tell ya' truth—I'd like to thank him. Maybe they'll be a little slower pickin' on the next guy. 'Course I'm not supposed to think that way. My job's keepin' the peace. Hard, when everybody else seems to want to kill each other.

(A change of subject, opening her pad.)

Christ—listen to me. You don't want'a hear this crap.

MARTIN

Oh, I do. I'm a writer. It's always good to talk to someone with a closer insight into an important aspect of the human condition, and the changes taking place.

JAMISON

Well, I'll tell ya', the human condition is changin' all right. As my dear old Grandmother used to say, it's goin' to hell in a hand basket.

JAMISON

(She jots down some notes as she gets the information.)

Your said your name was...?

Lakefield...Martin. MARTIN

And the address here? JAMISON

Four-twenty-seven Third Avenue. MARTIN

You said it's a bookstore? JAMISON

A used bookstore. Lakefield Books MARTIN

Phone? JAMISON

622-3063. MARTIN

And your home address and phone? JAMISON

The same. MARTIN

You live...here? JAMISON

Yes. MARTIN

Humm... JAMISON

(She makes a note of that.)
So he just busted in, saw you, turned around and left?

That's right. MARTIN

What'd he look like? JAMISON

MARTIN

Just a kid. Seventeen, eighteen. Dirty jeans, ratty jacket... Oh, with an earring in his left ear.

JAMISON

An earring?

MARTIN

Dangly, shiny thing.

JAMISON

Anything else?

MARTIN

Don't think so.

JAMISON

You see him, call this number.

(She tosses a card on the table, then rises and heads out.)

MARTIN

(Rising, following.)

What'll happen if you catch him?

JAMISON

If he's eighteen, probably do some time for assault with a deadly weapon.

MARTIN

Just because he walked into the wrong bar?

JAMISON

With a knife. Good night.

(She exits.)

MARTIN

Good night.

(Martin closes the door. He comments to the audience.)

Poor kid. Glad I was able to help him out.

(Back into the scene.)

It's okay. You can come out now.

(Al enters. Martin opens the door for Al's exit.)

She's gone. You can be on your way.

AL

Hey, dammit! Shut the door!

MARTIN

(Martin closes it.)

She's gone... She gave up.

AL

Yeah, sure.

MARTIN

She said...

AL

I heard what she said.

MARTIN

Okay, you want to go out the front?

(He starts toward the door to the store and, at the same time, toward Al. Immediately Al is on guard, the knife up.)

AL

Hold it! Don't move!

MARTIN

But...

AL

An' shut up. I ain't goin' nowhere till I got me a plan. So why don't you just sit back down where you was and keep quiet?

(Martin moves toward his easy chair. Al crosses to the back door and cautiously looks out. After a moment.)

MARTIN

I told you...

AL

Shut up! And sit down!

(Martin sits.)

Get this straight: I like you in that chair, so you sit there 'til I say you can get up. Understand?

MARTIN

Yes.

AL

You sure?

MARTIN

Yes.

AL

An' keep your mouth shut. I ain't leaving till I'm good an' ready. So relax.

(Al moves to the window and cautiously looks out. Then he closes the blinds.)

MARTIN

(To the audience while Al is focused elsewhere.)

Did you ever get the feeling, deep down in the pit of your stomach, that you may have done something really stupid?

(Martin looks back at Al. His immediate fear gradually begins to subside as the irony and absurdity of the situation begins to sink in. After a moment, he slowly raises his right hand, like a first grader calling for the teacher.)

AL

What the...? What is it?

MARTIN

Do you mind--since I'm to sit here--if I go back to my book?

AL

Fine. You want'a read, read.

(Martin picks up his book. Meanwhile Al moves to the dinette. He stabs his knife into the tabletop for effect and then takes off his jacket. After a silence, he continues.)

How come you didn't tell the lady pig where I was?

MARTIN

I seem to remember you telling me not to.

AL

Cut the shit. How come?

MARTIN

For one thing, I didn't want to get caught between her gun and your knife. Besides—I don't know—it just didn't seem like the right thing to do.

AL

You told her you live here. That right?

MARTIN

Yes

AL

Jesus. Why?

MARTIN

I choose to. Also, because the used-book business isn't sufficiently remunerative to afford me a wide selection of alternatives.

AL

You talk funny.

MARTIN

Translation. I'm too poor to live anywhere else. Better?

AL

Hey, don't give me no shit! I understood you the first time. I was just sayin' how you said it was funny.

(Al crosses to the refrigerator. He looks in, then pulls out a jug of wine, takes a juice or water glass from the shelf, and pours some. Martin watches him over his book.)

MARTIN

Excuse me.

AL

What?

MARTIN

Since I can't get up, would you mind pouring me a refill?

(Martin holds out his glass. Al grabs his knife and crosses to Martin with the jug. He gestures for Martin to put the glass down on the side table. Martin does, and Al cautiously pours wine for him.)

MARTIN

Thank you.

AL

Where you keep the food?

MARTIN

What I've got is there, and in the fridge.

(Al looks first at the shelf, and then in the fridge.)

AL

Cereal, oatmeal, tuna fish, soup, grapefruit, yogurt! No wonder you're such a wimp.

MARTIN

I'm sorry my humble kitchen doesn't measure up to your Epicurean standards.

AL

I told you to cut the crap!

(Finding a pastry box in the fridge.)

What's this?

MARTIN

Leftovers. Elaine stops by the bakery on her way in each morning.

AL

This is more like it. Where's the TV?

(He pulls a pastry from the box and eats, washing the pastry down with the wine.)

MARTIN

I don't have one.

AL

Christ, you must be poor. Everybody's got a TV.

MARTIN

Were I as rich as Croesus, I would not own a television.

AL

Is that so?

MARTIN

I'm content with my books.

AL

You're weird, Man.

MARTIN

Perhaps, but harmless. Never in my life have I owned a weapon, much less attacked someone.

AL

They started it.

How?

MARTIN

Hasslin' me about my earring.

AL

Oh...

MARTIN

It ain't none of their goddamn business what I wear, or why I wear it.

MARTIN

That's true. You have the right to "express yourself."

AL

Damn right I do.

MARTIN

But isn't that all they were doing? Expressing themselves.

AL

They was makin' fun of me; givin' me shit!

MARTIN

Well...for some people, an earring still has certain connotations, which...

AL

Hey, watch it! I still got the knife.

MARTIN

This is nothing more than an attempt at intelligent conversation. There is no need for your knife.

AL

Just remember I got it, and don't go makin' fun of me.
(Martin heaves an exasperated sigh and goes back to his book. After a moment Al continues, trying to justify himself.)

They was lookin' for a fight. I walked in that place, I could tell they didn't want me there. None of 'em. But I wasn't gonna' let 'em scare me off. I was gonna' have one beer, just to prove I wasn't afraid of 'em; then I was gonna' split. But these two jerkoffs started in; givin' me shit. They was itchin' for a fight.

MARTIN

So you gave it to them.

AL

I sure as hell did.

MARTIN

You watch too much television.

AL

I what?

MARTIN

That sounds like something out of an old grade "D" gangster movie.

AL

Shit.

MARTIN

You really do like that word, don't you?

AL

It gets my meanin' across.

MARTIN

That's what words are designed to do. And most of them do the job with more precision and clarity and...decorum, than the particular scatological term you seem so fond of.

AL

Christ, you do talk funny.

MARTIN

How old are you?

AL

None of your goddamn business.

MARTIN

Seventeen? Eighteen?

AL

I gotta' be twenty-one to get in bars.

MARTIN

Or have a fake I.D.

AL

What's it to ya'?

MARTIN

Nothing. Just curious. ...You're family; where are they?

AL

You don't need to know.

MARTIN

You working somewhere?

AL

I was. I quit. Don't ask me where!

MARTIN

I'm ready for a refill. You want to get it, or may I?

AL

Go ahead. Just don't do nothin' stupid.

MARTIN

I work very hard at not doing "stupid" things.

(Martin rises, making some kind of jerky movement because of a spasm in his leg. Al reacts, knife at the ready.)

MARTIN

Relax. Just a cramp. I was sitting there too long.

AL

From the looks of that gut, you do a lot of sittin' around.

MARTIN

I'll have you know, throughout history, most societies have found a certain amount of...padding, to be desirable. It was a symbol of prosperity and tranquillity. You want more while I've got it out?

AL

Why not? Fill 'er up.

(He puts his glass down and backs away.)

MARTIN

Cautious, aren't you?

AL

Uh-huh.

(Martin pours him a refill, a generous one.)

AL

All these boxes full of books?

MARTIN

Yes.

AL

You got a store full out front. How come you got so many extras?

MARTIN

I like books.

AL

I ain't too keen on readin' myself.

MARTIN

Possibly, if you were, you wouldn't be out sticking knives into people.

AL

Oh yeah?

MARTIN

Books are wonderful. They're full of exciting, temporary universes.

AL

Right.

MARTIN

No, I mean it. Each time you open a novel, you're a guest in a strange, exciting universe. You're company; not expected to do any of the work; just enjoy. You don't have to put up with the bad parts of that world, because you don't actually live there. Take this book I've been reading...

(He moves to his reading area and picks up the book.)

It's a Victorian mystery by Anthony Trollope: "The Eustace Diamonds." I'm having great fun visiting his Victorian world, with all its ridiculous goings-on, but under no circumstances would I want to go to a Victorian dentist. The visit is temporary. I come home any time I close the book.

(He puts the book down and moves to his desk area.)

Unfortunately, you can never close the book on reality. It's as if "reality" is your book; the one you're in. You can't escape. You can try; God knows I do. But reality has a way of intruding, even when you most want it to go away. So many ways; on the street, through the mail, the telephone. Sometimes it even breaks down the door.

AL

You really are weird, aren't you?

MARTIN

Perhaps. I'm definitely tired. You feel safe leaving yet?

AL

Uh...no. Not yet.

MARTIN

Suit yourself. But if you don't mind, I'll get ready for bed.

(Al gestures for him to go ahead. Martin begins to fold out the already made sofa bed.)

I have to be up bright and early tomorrow. Thursday is my day to make the rounds, looking for more books.

AL

Just what you need--more books.

MARTIN

I am a bit overstocked; so I limit myself to the special finds; the treasures.

AL

Treasures? What kind of treasures?

MARTIN

First editions, limited runs, vanity publications, autographed copies...

(Crossing back to his desk, he takes a key from the top drawer and moves to the locked case.)

I keep my special books in that case.

AL

How can you sell 'em if you keep 'em locked up back here?

MARTIN

Oh, these aren't for sale. These are for me.

(He opens the case, it's full of rare books. He selects one.)

When you were a kid, did you ever read "Winnie the Poo?"

AL

I don't think so.

MARTIN

This is a 1926, signed, first edition copy. One of these sold in London last year for...

(Realizing it might be a bad idea to talk money around Al.)

...for, uh, a good bit.

AL

How much?

MARTIN

Uh, I can't remember exactly...uh...

(Putting it back, selecting another one.)

Here's one I'm particularly fond of. It's a signed, first edition, illustrated copy of "Oliver Twist," by Charles Dickens.

AL

What's it worth?

MARTIN

...Oh, not that much. Actually, I just like the drawings.

(Holding out the book to show Al an illustration.)

See? They're all hand-tinted.

AL

What's that mean?

MARTIN

After they were printed, someone hand colored them with water colors.

AL

Le'me see.

(Martin hesitantly gives the book to Al, who flips through the pages, looking at the pictures. He begins to get interested, so he crosses to Martin's reading chair, sits, and settles in to look at the book. Meanwhile Martin locks the cabinet and puts the key back in the drawer. He crosses to his bed and finishes preparing it, then he goes to a trunk against the upstage wall and takes out pillows for the bed.)

MARTIN

Well...I need to get some sleep. ...You don't mind if I go to bed, do you?

AL

Nah; go ahead.

MARTIN

When you're ready to leave, just...let yourself out.

AL

Okay.

MARTIN

...Uh...one other thing...

AL

Yeah?

MARTIN

If you're... If you're planning to... What little cash I've got is in the bottom right-hand drawer of the desk.

AL

Christ. What kind of a shit do you think I am?

MARTIN

At this point, I'm not really sure.

AL

You're money'll be there in the morning.

MARTIN

(To the audience.)

And it was. ...And so was he.

(As Martin continues, Al closes the book and turns off the reading lamp, leaving only the blue wash and a light on Martin. Al then slips the book down into the chair, rises, and quickly uses the cushions from the sofa to make a pallet. He then takes his jacket, lies down on the pallet, covers his shoulders with the coat, and is asleep.)

When I went to bed that night, I had no idea whether or not I would wake up. But, being a trained philosopher, I decided if he were going to cut my throat, I'd rather be asleep when it happened.

(A glance at Al.)

The next morning, he was curled up by my bed like a faithful puppy-dog. Have you ever noticed how un-aggressive people look when they're asleep? I dare say that, asleep, even Attila-the-Hun didn't look overly dangerous. I let him sleep. I even skipped my morning walk. It didn't feel right, leaving him there alone. However, I did make coffee. Some things are essential.

(He crosses to the kitchen area to pour coffee. As he goes, the lights gradually come up to their daytime levels.)

He was sleeping so soundly. I couldn't help thinking it'd probably been a while since he'd had even this comfortable and secure a place to sleep.

(Martin crosses to his desk with coffee and sits.)

I went to my desk to begin writing, and got precisely nowhere. For the life of me, I could not concentrate. It'd been less than ten hours since he'd invaded my carefully planned universe, but already my beloved routine was totally obliterated. Shot to hell. I sat there lost in thought, and when I say lost, I mean

MARTIN (CONT'D)

lost. I could no more have told you what was going through my head than I could have told you whether he was a mixed-up kid or a hard-core street punk. Eventually, Elaine arrived to open up the shop.

(ELAINE APPLETON opens the back door and enters.

Elaine is mid 30's and plain, but she has a wonderful personality and lots of energy. She wears a plain dress, sturdy shoes, and a functional coat. She carries a bakery sack and her purse.)

ELAINE

Good morn...

(Martin interrupts, shushing her. He points to Al.)

Who's he?

MARTIN

He... I don't know his name. He broke in last night, running from the police.

ELAINE

The police?

MARTIN

Seems he walked in the wrong bar and some guys picked a fight.

ELAINE

He's not old enough to be in a bar.

(Taking off her coat.)

MARTIN

He was. Busted a chair over one guy's head and cut up another one.

ELAINE

Him? He must have been making up a story.

(Hanging up coat & purse.)

MARTIN

No. The police officer who was looking for him told me all about it.

ELAINE

Police officer? Here?

MARTIN

That's right.

Where was he?
ELAINE

Up in the store. Hiding.
MARTIN

You hid him?!
ELAINE

Not completely by choice. Our sleeping cherub is packing an ugly knife.
MARTIN

And you let him spend the night.
ELAINE

I didn't let him do anything. He wouldn't leave. It was late; I was tired; I went to bed. Told him to let himself out when he was ready to go.
MARTIN

But he didn't.
ELAINE

Apparently not.
MARTIN

Elaine, be careful. (Elaine moves to get a better look at Al.)

Don't! (She moves closer, leaning over Al to study him. Suddenly Al wakes with a start and jumps up. Elaine is startled. She screams. Martin shouts.)

What the...? What's goin' on?
AL

It's all right. You're still in the bookstore.
MARTIN
(Helping Elaine to sit in one of the dinette chairs.)

Who's she?
AL

Elaine. She runs the shop for me.
MARTIN

Oh. Okay.
AL

Are you all right? MARTIN

I'm fine. I just need a minute. ELAINE

I'll pour you some coffee. MARTIN

I'm sorry, Lady; but the last time I woke up with somebody that close, they was tryin' to steal my shoes. AL

It was my fault. I wasn't thinking. ELAINE

You all right? AL

I'm fine. ELAINE

Here you go. MARTIN
(He puts a mug of coffee down in front of her.)

Thank you. ELAINE

Say, where's the...the john? AL

Back through there. MARTIN
(Al exits. Martin & Elaine wait until he's gone. Then...)

Oh, that poor child. ELAINE

Elaine... Last night that "poor child" put two grown men in the hospital. MARTIN

You said it wasn't his fault. ELAINE

MARTIN

But it happened.

ELAINE

You were right. Taking him in, hiding him.

MARTIN

Now don't get sentimental. We'll give him breakfast and send him on his way. Then everything can get back to normal.

ELAINE

How can you be like that?

MARTIN

Like what?

ELAINE

So insensitive. So unfeeling. Don't you have any compassion?

MARTIN

Last night I lied to a police officer. The legal term is harboring a fugitive and it has serious consequences. I've been compassionate enough.

ELAINE

Martin...

(Al returns, interrupting their discussion. He makes a beeline for the coffeepot. As he's pouring himself a cup...)

MARTIN

Uh, help yourself to some coffee, if you'd like. Say, we never got around to introductions last night. I'm Martin Lakefield.

AL

I know.

MARTIN

You know?

AL

I heard you tell the pig.

MARTIN

Oh...

(Martin waits for Al to volunteer his name. He doesn't.)
And you've met Elaine. Elaine Appleton.

AL
Yeah.

MARTIN
...And you're...?

AL
Al.

MARTIN
Al?... Just Al?

AL
That's right.

ELAINE
Well, Al, I've got some pastries from the bakery, if you'd like one.

AL
Yeah, sounds great.

ELAINE
Sit down. I'll get it.
(She moves to kitchen area to serve pastries.)

MARTIN
It seems you decided not to leave last night after all.

AL
Yeah.

MARTIN
Uh, why not?

AL
'Cause I didn't feel like it.

MARTIN
...Oh.

ELAINE
Oh, Martin, I almost forgot.
(She has a small tabloid newspaper.)
I brought you a copy of my little neighborhood weekly.
(Handing him the paper.)

ELAINE (CONT'D)

There's a notice of a book sale at the Nineteenth Street Community Center. It's Saturday. I thought you could come over. Maybe have lunch at my place...we could go. It might be fun.

MARTIN

Community book sales never have anything but junk.

ELAINE

Well, I wanted you to know about it.

MARTIN

Thanks anyway.

ELAINE

You could still come over for lunch.

MARTIN

I don't know. Let's talk about it some other time.

ELAINE

(Serving Al a pastry, with a fork and a napkin.)

Here you are, Al.

AL

...Thanks.

ELAINE

You're welcome. You want to split the other one, Martin?

MARTIN

No thanks.

(He moves back toward his reading chair with the tabloid.)

AL

Um, this shit's real... ...Uh, this pastry's real good.

MARTIN

There may be hope for you yet.

ELAINE

(Getting the other pastry and coffee for herself, she joins Al at the dinette.)

There's always hope for everybody.

(To Al.)

Oh, Martin told me about last night, and how it wasn't your fault.

AL

Yeah. They started it.

MARTIN

You shouldn't have been there in the first place.

AL

I wanted a beer.

MARTIN

But if you hadn't...

AL

Listen! Nobody tells me where to go or what to do! Understand?

ELAINE

Um, this does look delicious. You sure you don't want to taste it?

MARTIN

No thanks.

(He sits and begins to glance through Elaine's tabloid.)

ELAINE

Mr. Floyd calls it "Sweet Delight." Must be at least a hundred calories a bite, but who's counting? ...Ummm, that is wonderful.

MARTIN

Good grief.

ELAINE

What?

MARTIN

Listen to this. it's from...

(Looking at the heading.)

"Police Crime Watch." "A man carrying a pizza in the two hundred block of Broadway was approached by a man in his teens, who hit him in the shoulder, took the pizza, and ran off. The pizza, valued at sixteen-fifty, was a super special with anchovies."

AL

Wow. Public enemy number one strikes again.

MARTIN

It's still a crime. He shouldn't have done it.

AL

Maybe he was hungry.

ELAINE

Sure you don't want even a bite? It'll make you feel better.

MARTIN

No, thank you. "A woman returning home in the seven hundred block of Harvard Street saw a small boy, approximately eleven years old, entering her house through a basement window. The woman screamed and four boys, the same age, scrambled out of the window, jumped over the back fence, and fled. Entry had been made through the broken basement window. The locked door into the kitchen had been chopped through, apparently with a small hatchet. No report of missing items was made."

AL

Boy, they start early in your neighborhood. Eleven-year-old mobsters.

(Martin rises and crosses to pour more coffee. He puts the tabloid on the dinette. As the conversation continues Al picks up the paper and begins to look at the Crime Watch.)

MARTIN

Kids breaking into houses with hatchets. What's the world coming to?

ELAINE

Children aren't born bad. The parents ought to be held responsible.

MARTIN

They usually are. You should move to a safer neighborhood.

ELAINE

I'm safe. My cousin, Stanley, is a policeman. When I moved here, he insisted on choosing my apartment. It's on the third floor of a security building. He put so many locks on my door, I can hardly lift my key ring.

MARTIN

What about outside? On the street?

ELAINE

My bus stop's only half a block, and I never go out alone at night.

MARTIN

Still...

AL

Talk about a chump. "A man walking in the three hundred block of Belmont Avenue East, at nine-twenty PM, was approached by a man in his teens, who pulled a large kitchen knife and demanded, 'Give me all your money.' The man did. Then he demanded his cigarettes. The man gave them to the thief, along with his lighter, and the robber fled south of Belmont." Now there's a guy who don't know his business.

MARTIN

What do you mean?

AL

Workin' with a kitchen knife. I mean, you get to runnin' from somethin' an' fall, you could hurt yourself real bad. An' then, hittin' a guy up on the street, odds are he ain't gonna' have no real cash on him anyway, unless he's a pusher, an' then he's gonna' have a piece. If you gonna' do it, think about what you're doin'.

MARTIN

Sounds like the voice of experience.

AL

What the hell you mean by that?

MARTIN

You seem to know a lot about being a thief.

AL

Hey, look. I didn't hit on you last night, did I?

ELAINE

Of course you didn't. He didn't mean anything.
(Changing the subject. Always the peace maker.)
You finished?

AL

Yeah. ...That was great. ...Thank you.

ELAINE

You're welcome. Al...uh, what do you do? I mean when you're not... During the day?

AL

Nothin'. Hang out. Fu... Mess around.

ELAINE

Don't you go to school or something?

Nah. AL

What about work? ELAINE

I was workin'. I, uh, got fired. AL

Last night you said you quit. MARTIN

I got fired. AL

How are you living? ELAINE

Uh...pan handlin' mostly. AL

That's horrible. Where do you sleep? ELAINE

I was stayin' with some friends, but they got thrown out of their place. Couldn't pay the rent. I been lookin' for a job but I can't find nothin'. Most people, they just look at me and they say no. AL

But why? ELAINE

I guess I just don't look right to 'em. AL

That's no reason not to hire you. ELAINE

I try to tell 'em that, but they won't listen. AL

It's...discrimination. It's not fair. ELAINE

(Martin grabs his checkbook from a desk drawer.)

MARTIN

Well, it's about time for you to open up. We'll be leaving in a few minutes.

AL

Where we goin'?

MARTIN

"We're" not going anywhere. But I've got to go out, and I don't want to leave you here alone.

AL

Elaine'll be here. I was hopin' I could use your shower 'fore I took off.

MARTIN

Well...

AL

She'll make sure I don't steal nothin', if that's what's botherin' you.

MARTIN

That's not it. It's just that...

AL

What?

MARTIN

I don't think Elaine would feel comfortable with you here.

AL

Oh, bullsh...

(Catching himself. To Elaine)

Sorry. You know you ain't got nothin' to be scared of with me, don't ya'? I ain't gonna' hurt ya'.

MARTIN

No, I'm sorry. I can't allow it.

AL

How ya' gonna' stop me?

MARTIN

All right! I won't go! I'll stay here. You can have your shower. Then you can get dressed. Then you can get the hell out of my life!

ELAINE

You don't have to change your plans. I don't mind.

AL

See? No problem.

MARTIN

But, Elaine...

ELAINE

He's just a child.

MARTIN

Tell that to the two men in the hospital.

AL

How many times I gotta' tell you?! They started it.

ELAINE

He didn't do anything to you while you were asleep.

MARTIN

That doesn't prove anything. He could be dangerous.

ELAINE

He "could" be, but if you miss your book buying day, I know you'll be totally unbearable.

(She gets his coat and holds it out for him to put on.)

AL

I ain't gonna' do nothin' to this nice lady. I swear.

MARTIN

Oh, all right. If you're sure you'll be...

(Moving to put on the coat.)

ELAINE

I'll be perfectly safe. He wouldn't dare do anything to me.

MARTIN

How do you know?

ELAINE

I can tell by looking at him. Besides, if he did, you could tell the police exactly who did it.

MARTIN

A lot of good that'll do you.

You've got your wallet?

ELAINE

Yes.

MARTIN

And your checkbook?

ELAINE

Yes.

MARTIN

Then you're all set. Have a nice day.

ELAINE

Yeah, have a good one.

AL

I'll be back before closing time.

MARTIN

We'll be fine.

ELAINE

She's right about me being able to give the police a description of you.

MARTIN

I'm gonna' have another cup of coffee, take a shower, and split.

AL

(Martin looks at them a second, then makes a move as if to go. He opens the door and then closes it, remaining inside. As Elaine cleans up and Al pours more coffee for himself, Martin addresses the audience.)

And, despite my better judgment, I left. From what I found out later, they had quite a day of it.

MARTIN

(Martin stands near the door and watches quietly as the scene continues. Elaine moves to straighten the sofa bed.)

I wonder where he keeps the pillows.

ELAINE

AL

Last night he got them out of that trunk back there.

ELAINE

(She takes the pillows and puts them away in the trunk.)

You know, as long as I've worked for Martin, I've never seen this sofa bed open. I didn't even know if he had pillows; much less where he kept them.

(She returns to the sofa bed and straightens the covers.)

AL

He's a real weirdo, ain't he?

ELAINE

Martin? He's a very nice man.

AL

But strange.

ELAINE

Some people might consider him...slightly eccentric.

AL

Livin' down here ain't exactly what you'd call normal.

ELAINE

Maybe not, but he's happy.

(She starts to close the bed.)

AL

Here, le'me help ya' with that.

ELAINE

Thank you.

(Together they close the bed and replace the sofa cushions; then Al replaces the coffee table, as Elaine continues...)

Martin's very intelligent. He has his Ph.D in philosophy. He could be teaching at a university or...or almost anything. But he chooses to live a very simple life. I run the shop. He spends most of his time back here, working on his book.

AL

Don't he never go out?

(Once they've straighten up, Elaine sits on the sofa and Al sits on the arm at one end.)

ELAINE

Of course. Every Thursday, he goes shopping for books. Sometimes he goes to a movie, or to the theatre. He has dinner out most evenings--there's a little place down the street he's very fond of.

AL

But most of the time he stays here, like some kind of hermit or somethin'.

ELAINE

He's comfortable. Has everything he needs...everything he wants. He's one of the few really contented people I've ever met. Maybe the only one. No, Martin's not what you'd call normal. He's kind, sweet, gentle--wouldn't hurt a fly.

(She realizes that is an awkward thing to say to Al.)

Oh! I didn't mean anything by that. I mean about you...

AL

No problem. How long you been workin' for him?

ELAINE

Two years, almost.

AL

You like him a lot, don't you?

ELAINE

...Yes, I do.

AL

Sounds like you like him an awful lot.

(Elaine is uncomfortable with that topic. She rises and moves to the kitchen area, finding something to do.)

ELAINE

Tell me, what kind of job have you been looking for?

AL

(He makes this up as he goes along.)

...Anything I can get.

ELAINE

Such as?

AL

Uh...clerkin', stockin', that sort 'a stuff.

ELAINE

Many in the want ads?

AL

Uh, mostly I just walk inta' places where I am--ask if they'll hire me.

ELAINE

No wonder you can't find a job. I tell you what. I need to open up. After you shower, go get a paper. We'll look at the want ads together?

AL

Yeah, great.

(He starts for the shower.)

ELAINE

There are clean towels in the cabinet under the sink.

AL

Thanks.

ELAINE

(Grabbing the pail of dirty dishes.)

Would you take these back, and put them by the sink?

AL

(Taking the pail from her.)

Sure.

ELAINE

I'll do them later.

AL

(He continues out. Almost out, he stops and turns.)

You know something? Marty's real lucky to have a friend like you, an' real stupid not to see what he's got goin'.

(Al exits, to the shower. Elaine does one more quick look around to see that everything is in order, then goes to the desk and takes the cashbox from the bottom drawer of the desk and then exits to the store.)

MARTIN

(To the audience.)

I tried to warn her. You heard me. I tried to tell her not to get involved. But did she listen?

MARTIN (CONT'D)

(Thinking back on the events of that day.)

It was not one of my better days. My body may have been out there looking for rare old books, but my mind never left this room. Elaine... why did she...? I mean Al, he's such a... As I see it, the only possible explanation is frustrated maternal instinct. I've noticed that quality in Elaine before--the way she babies me around here sometimes, but I've never said anything. In fact, I've kind of enjoyed it. But she shouldn't let it wreck her judgment. That kid; no telling what he might be capable of. ...Anyway, I got back a little after five.

(As he nears the end of this speech, Martin casually reaches over and takes a couple of books from the top of the bookcase. When he's finished, he opens the backdoor and then closes it, as if just arriving, and moves back into the scene.)

Hello, I'm back.

(There's no response. He looks toward the shop door.)

Hello? ...Elaine?

(He begins to rush toward the shop door and is almost there when Elaine opens the door and enters.)

ELAINE

Ah, Martin, how was your day?

MARTIN

Oh, I found a few things. How was yours?

ELAINE

...Uh, fine.

(She's working hard at sounding casual.)

MARTIN

(He moves down to the desk and puts down the books.)

He's gone then?

ELAINE

...Yes, he's gone.

MARTIN

Thank God.

ELAINE

Martin... We need to talk. The shop's empty. I'll lock up, be right back.

(She exits to the shop. Martin crosses up to hang up his coat, then moves back to the desk. He sits, opens a small file box, and pulls out a couple of blank index cards. Elaine returns from the store.)

MARTIN

I did make one very good buy today. A first edition, autographed copy of Hemingway's "Nick Adams Stories." Mint condition, only a hundred and sixty dollars. The autograph says, "To James, who, in so many ways, reminds me of young Nick."

ELAINE

(Moving down into the middle of the room. She's obviously got something on her mind.)

Nick Adams...I'd almost forgotten him.

MARTIN

Horribly romantic, devil-may-care, Hemingway as an adolescent... All the trouble he gets into; and of course he grows into a better man from the experiences.

ELAINE

Sounds a lot like Al.

MARTIN

Not a bit.

(Martin realizes something is up. He rises and moves to lean on the corner of his desk.)

When did he leave?

ELAINE

...Just after lunch.

MARTIN

Lunch?!

ELAINE

He got a paper...I helped him check the want ads...we had lunch...he went out job hunting.

MARTIN

You shouldn't have gotten involved.

ELAINE

You don't know him. We had a long talk. He's a nice boy. It's just that he's had some bad luck.

MARTIN

Sounds like he's got a great sob story.

ELAINE

Well, his father...

MARTIN
Elaine, I'd just as soon not hear it.

ELAINE
But his father...

MARTIN
He's out of my life. That's all that's important.

ELAINE
...He's coming back.

MARTIN
...He's what?

ELAINE
I promised to help him fill out the forms.

MARTIN
Elaine! How could you?

ELAINE
He doesn't know how to apply for a job. I offered to help.

MARTIN
That was a stupid thing to do.

ELAINE
He needs help.

MARTIN
Let him get it somewhere else.

ELAINE
Martin, I've very disappointed in you.

MARTIN
Well I'm rather upset with you too.

ELAINE
I was just trying...I was just trying to help.

(Elaine is upset, angry, and on the verge of tears. She sits on the sofa and turns away from Martin, beginning to cry.)

MARTIN

Elaine...for Heaven's sake, don't.

(Martin sighs, exasperated, and turns out to the audience.)

Men, as a generalization, do not have the capacity to cope with female tears. Bachelors, having less experience with said tears, are even less able to rationally handle this particular tactic.

(Back to Elaine.)

Elaine... Stop; please. ...It's obviously my fault. I never should have left him here. Damn.

ELAINE

He was very sweet today.

MARTIN

Yesterday he was cutting people up; today he's very sweet; I wonder what he'll be like tomorrow? No! I don't! As long as he's some place else. When's he due back?

ELAINE

Before six.

MARTIN

When he comes, do the applications as quickly as possible. Understand?

ELAINE

I knew you weren't as mean as you were being.

MARTIN

In this case, I intend to be a perfect bastard. I want that punk out of my world today!

(Martin decides he wants a glass of wine. He goes to the fridge, pulls out the bottle and is about to pour himself a glass when the back door opens and Al enters. He is wearing his jacket. Under that he has on new slacks and a new shirt. His hair is neatly combed and he looks a lot better. He carries a grocery sack.)

AL

Evenin'

ELAINE

Hello.

(Martin nods to him.)

AL

Hey, Marty, pour me a glass while you're at it.

(Martin gives Elaine an aggravated grimace, then turns to pour a second glass.)

ELAINE

How was the job hunting?

AL

(Putting the sack down on the dinette.)

Fantastic.

ELAINE

You got a job?

AL

(Taking off his jacket and hanging it up.)

No, but I got in a lot more doors than I usually do. I'm sure it was the new clothes you bought me.

MARTIN

New clothes?

AL

Yeah; these. Elaine got 'em for me so I'd look decent for job huntin'.

ELAINE

It wasn't anything. They were on sale.

(Al reaches into the sack and pulls out a rose.)

AL

Here you go. For you.

(He gives her the rose, then heads back for the grocery bag.)

And I hope you like baklava.

ELAINE

I love it.

AL

(Pulling out a bakery box and placing it on the table.)

Here you are. One dozen baklava.

Oh, Al...

ELAINE

If you eat all that you'll be sick.

MARTIN

Hush. Thank you so much, but you shouldn't have.

ELAINE

AL
(Back into the sack for a jug of very cheap wine. He holds it out for Martin to see., then puts it into the fridge.)
And...to make up for what I drank last night.

MARTIN

That wasn't necessary... Say, I thought you were broke. Where'd you get the money for all this?

AL

I got a little. Not much, but some.

ELAINE

You shouldn't have spent it on us. It has to last till you get a job.

AL

I'll get by.

MARTIN

So you picked up some job applications today?

AL

Got 'em right here.
(He pulls them from the grocery sack. Elaine rises, takes them, and looks at the forms. Meanwhile, Martin begins to casually look around the room for something.)

ELAINE

They're pretty standard. but they need to look good. I'll use the typewriter, if that's okay.

MARTIN

Uh, sure.
(Elaine crosses to the typewriter, sits and inserts a form into the machine. Al grabs one of the chairs from the dinette and follows Elaine. He puts it down and sits in it backwards.)

Say, Al...

AL
Yeah?

MARTIN
That book you had last night...what'd you do with it?

AL
It's over there.

MARTIN
Huh, don't see it. I'd hate to lose it.

AL
It's there. It's got to be.

MARTIN
I hope so.

AL
What the hell do you mean by that?

MARTIN
Nothing. Just hate to lose it; that's all.

ELAINE
What book are you looking for?

MARTIN
"Oliver Twist."

ELAINE
Your special copy?

MARTIN
Yes.

ELAINE
Oh, it's got to be here somewhere. Where were you reading?

AL
In that chair. You think I took your goddamn book, don't ya'?!?

MARTIN
No, it's just...

AL

(He starts toward the door rapidly.)

The hell you don't! Shit!

(Elaine finds the book, buried in the chair.)

ELAINE

Here. Here it is.

AL

See.

(He takes the book from Elaine and throws it on the sofa in front of Martin.)

Here's your precious book. Christ.

(Martin quickly picks up the book and begins to examine it. Al continues to the door, grabbing his jacket.)

ELAINE

Where are you going?

AL

Gettin' the hell out of here, before I lose my temper and hurt somebody.

ELAINE

What about the applications?

AL

Forget it. I'll manage.

(To Martin)

For your information, I sold some blood. That's where I got the goddamn money!

(Al opens the door.)

MARTIN

Al; wait!

(He has trouble apologizing. Elaine encourages him silently.)

I'm...sorry. Let Elaine help you with the forms.

ELAINE

Martin didn't mean anything. He was upset. That book's from his special collection. It's worth more than two hundred dollars.

MARTIN

(Trying to cut her off, unsuccessfully.)

Elaine! ...It doesn't matter what the book is worth. I was wrong ...I'm sorry.

ELAINE

Don't go. Let me help you with the forms first.

(A pause. Al looks at Elaine, and then at Martin. He realizes that Martin is trying to keep the value of his special collection a secret. When he continues, he is casual, agreeable, almost affable.)

AL

...All right. Why not? No harm done.

ELAINE

(Moving quickly back to the desk.)

We've got to hurry. I haven't got much time.

(Al puts his coat back on the rack and follows Elaine. As he passes the special bookcase he glances at it, doing a quick evaluation. Elaine doesn't notice, but Martin does. Al sits back down as Elaine begins to work. Martin turns to the audience.)

MARTIN

That was a major tactical blunder. If I'd kept my mouth shut for thirty seconds, he'd have been gone. But I couldn't. I was wrong. I thought the rose, the wine, and all that baklava were compliments of my poor little "Oliver Twist." I couldn't let him go like that, after I'd virtually accused him...unjustly. I wish I could have. God, I wish I could have... Anyway, he and Elaine went to work on his forms.

(He crosses to the table beside his reading chair and picks up his copy of "The Eustace Diamonds.")

Me? I had the absurd fantasy that I would read.

(He starts to sit in his chair, then realizes it is too close to Al and Elaine. He crosses and sits at the far end of the sofa, trying to read, but being distracted by Elaine and Al.)

ELAINE

Name? Last name first.

AL

Ganz; Al.

ELAINE

(She types the information in as she gets it.)

Just Al?

AL

Well, it's Alan, but I go by Al.

ELAINE

Alan is much nicer. ...Age?

(Martin looks up, waiting for his answer. Al notices his interest, but tells Elaine anyway.)

AL

Eighteen.

(Martin smirks to himself, then goes back to his book.)

Nineteen next month.

ELAINE

Address?

AL

Uh, don't have one right now.

ELAINE

Where are you staying?

AL

Like I said, my friends got evicted. Haven't found a new place yet.

ELAINE

Where do you sleep?

AL

Don't worry about it. Next question.

ELAINE

...Telephone number?

AL

Next question.

ELAINE

No address, no phone; how can they reach you?

AL

Guess I'll have to check back with 'em.

ELAINE

Why don't you use my address? You can check in with me.

(Martin reacts, but silently. He is horrified that Elaine would tell Al where she lives.)

AL

That's real nice of ya'. I won't be no trouble.

ELAINE

You can use my phone number; and since I'm here every day, Martin...?

(He looks up, knowing what is coming.)

Is it all right if I put the store number down as a contact for Alan? I'll take the messages. It won't bother you at all.

(They wait for his answer. He turns to the audience.)

MARTIN

"It won't bother you at all." The hell it won't. Something is wrong with me. There must be. I want to say no. I know I should. I desperately want my mouth to open and say, not only no, but hell no. Still...with both of them looking at me like that...

(Back into the scene. Overly casual and genial.)

Why not?.

ELAINE

See, he can be a nice man when he wants to. ...Social security number?

AL

Let's see...

(He reaches for his wallet.)

MARTIN

(To the audience.)

They worked on that form...forever...

ELAINE

There.

(She pulls the form from the typewriter.)

AL

Looks great.

ELAINE

Want to see?

MARTIN

No, thank you. Elaine, have you noticed the time?

ELAINE

Oh gosh; my bus.

(In a rush to go--not a panic, but she does need to go.)

ELAINE (CONT'D)

These are basically the same. I'll finish them tonight. You can pick them up tomorrow.

(She starts for her coat. Al rises.)

AL

Great. Don't forget your rose and the baklava.

ELAINE

Say, Alan...

MARTIN

(To the audience.)

I guess she had to think of it.

ELAINE

Where are you staying tonight?

AL

I got a place.

(He grabs the dinette chair to put it back in place, en route to refill his wine glass.)

ELAINE

Where?

AL

Don't worry 'bout it.

ELAINE

I am worried. Where?

AL

I know an empty house with a back door that don't lock too good.

ELAINE

You sleep in an abandoned building?!

AL

Uh-huh.

ELAINE

That's illegal. What if the police catch you?

AL

The pigs can't catch everybody.

ELAINE

It's not just illegal--It's dangerous. What if there's a fire? Or somebody could attack you--a vagrant or somebody.

AL

People on the street don't beat up on each other too much.

MARTIN

Professional courtesy?

(Al gives him a dirty look. Martin smirks, then rises and crosses to put his book back on the table beside his reading chair. He continues to to his desk.)

ELAINE

Where do you keep your things?

AL

In a locker at the bus station.

ELAINE

Not any more. Until you get settled you're staying with me.

MARTIN

He most certainly is not!

ELAINE

(To Al)

You are.

(To Martin)

Let me take care of this, okay?

MARTIN

Elaine, be sensible. You... You've always said your place was so tiny.

ELAINE

We'll manage.

MARTIN

But, Elaine... Al, tell her no. It won't work.

AL

Why not?

MARTIN

It just won't!

AL

Look, if she wants to give me a place to stay and I want to take her up on it, I don't see where it's none of your business.

MARTIN

It's my business because she's my friend.

ELAINE

Well, Alan's my friend, and I intend to be a friend to him.

MARTIN

Elaine...

ELAINE

Unless...

MARTIN

Unless what?

ELAINE

Well, my place is small. ...There's lots more room here.

MARTIN

...Take him. He's all yours.

ELAINE

Martin, he'd be so much better off here. Just for a few days.

MARTIN

No.

ELAINE

Have you got some kind of bedroll?

AL

An old sleepin' bag.

ELAINE

He could sleep on the floor. He'd be job hunting all day. At night he could...go to a movie or something. You'd hardly see him.

MARTIN

No. It won't work.

ELAINE

How do you know if you won't give it a chance?

AL

Ah, give up. He ain't gonna' change his mind. You got a TV?

ELAINE

A small one.

AL

I'd rather stay with you anyway.

ELAINE

(Suddenly remembering something.)

Oh gosh! I forgot.

MARTIN

What?

ELAINE

I was in such a hurry to lock up, I didn't close out the register.

(She quickly starts out to the store.)

MARTIN

But...

ELAINE

It'll just take a second.

(Elaine exits to the store.)

MARTIN

I don't like what you're doing.

AL

Tough.

MARTIN

I've got half a mind to call the police.

AL

Oh yeah?

MARTIN

Yeah.

AL

What happens when I tell them where I was last night? Where I was when the pig was in here, and you told her I was gone?

MARTIN

But, but you can't stay with her!

AL

Why not? Maybe you want'a?

MARTIN

What?!

AL

You afraid I'll move in on your territory? Man, if you ain't got in there yet, you ain't gonna'.

MARTIN

(He is speechless.)

You... you...

AL

Might be fun--me an' her. She ain't really my type, but what the hell?

MARTIN

You wouldn't?!

ELAINE

(Elaine returns with the cash box and puts it on the desk.)

I'll balance up before I open tomorrow.

(To Al)

Let's go.

(She starts for the back door.)

MARTIN

No, wait. ...Maybe he should stay here.

AL

Hey, I want to stay with her.

ELAINE

(Putting on her coat.)

There's lots more room here. You can borrow my TV.

AL

But...

ELAINE

(Grabbing her purse, and the forms.)

I've got to go!

AL

But...

MARTIN

Don't get any idea this is a long-term arrangement. Three days--that's the limit. Understand?

ELAINE

Don't worry; we'll get him situated.

(To Al)

Come on. Walk me to the bus stop--then go get your things.

(Al gives Martin a look, then exits.)

Oh, Martin, don't look so sour. Everything will work out fine. Just wait. You'll see.

(She exits, closing the door.)

MARTIN

(To the audience, exasperated.)

"Everything'll work out fine." How could I have been that stupid? If Elaine wanted to help him, that was her business. I could have stayed out of it. I should have stayed out of it; whatever "it" turned out to be. But somehow I couldn't. Elaine... she... I... Damn!

(Martin looks out at the audience, lost in his own thoughts, as the lights fade to black.)

END OF ACT I