

## BILLY LIAR

BARBARA: In a minute. *(She opens her handbag and offers it towards him.)* Have an orange.

*(BILLY snatching the bag from her he throws it down and oranges spill out across the floor.)*

BILLY: You and your bloody oranges!

BARBARA: *(Remonstratively.)* Billy!... Darling!

BILLY: *(Placing his head on her shoulder.)* I'm sorry, darling. I've had a terrible morning.

BARBARA: Why? What happened?

BILLY: Oh, nothing. The usual. Family and things. Just that I've got a headache.

BARBARA: I'm sorry, pet. You know, you ought to see a doctor.

BILLY: I've seen doctors—specialists—I've seen them all. All they could give me was crêpe bandage. *(BARBARA, unimpressed, licks her fingers.)* You know, my darling, I think you have feelings, too. Deep down.

BARBARA: *(Examining her hands distastefully.)* Oooh, sticky paws!

BILLY: Wipe them on the cushion. *(He rises as a thought strikes him.)* You can go upstairs if you want. Use our bathroom.

BARBARA: Thank you.

## BLUE DENIM

by James Leo Herlihy and William Noble  
Arthur (15) - Janet (15)

**The Play:** First produced on Broadway in 1958, *Blue Denim* is a compassionate drama concerning the communication problem between the younger and older generations. The plot centers around Arthur Bartley, son of a retired Army Major, his mother, sister, friend Ernie, and his girl friend, Janet, and concerns the crisis that develops when Arthur finds out that he and Janet are about to become parents. Arthur is scared and alone; he can't turn to his parents for help, they just don't seem to speak the same language. When Arthur and Janet decide that an abortion is the only answer to the problem, Arthur turns to his friend Ernie for advice on how to handle the situation. Ernie advises against such action and urges Arthur to talk to his parents. They boy tries to do so, but is unable to make himself understood; his parents seem unwilling to truly listen. Ultimately, the play depicts the insecurity of youth and the failure of many parents to ever really come to know their children.

**The Scene:** Arthur and Ernie have been playing cards and generally hanging out in Arthur's basement. When Arthur's girl friend, Janet, appears, Ernie feels like the third man out. Ernie storms out, leaving Arthur and Janet alone.

**Special Note:** While the issues and concerns of *Blue Denim* remain timely, the language is that of the late 1950's when the play was written. Because of this, the play may be best served when set during that period.

BLUE DENIM

JANET: You sore?  
ARTHUR: Naw!  
JANET: For breaking up the game, I mean.  
ARTHUR: Well, okay then! *Why?*  
JANET: I just don't like to see you—the way you act when Ernie's around.  
ARTHUR: And how's that?  
JANET: Oh—*pretending* so!  
ARTHUR: Who's pretending? Ernie and me happen to like a couple of beers and a hand of poker. Why do you have to act like somebody's mother?  
JANET: I'm sorry. *(As he does not answer)* I'm sorry, Arthur.  
ARTHUR: Why don't you call me Art, like everybody else?  
JANET: All right. I'm sorry, Art.  
ARTHUR: Forget it.  
JANET: *(Searching for a topic)* Want to go down to the drugstore?  
ARTHUR: For what?  
JANET: I don't know—Coke, soda...  
ARTHUR: On top of beer!  
JANET: Oh. *(A rather strained pause. JANET joins ARTHUR near the punching bag. She makes him uneasy. He goes to the table, gathers the cards. JANET hits the punching bag with her fist)* Ow!  
ARTHUR: Janet. What'd you mean, when you said you wished your father was different? *(As she does not answer)* The way he's so funny about lipstick and stuff? And doesn't like you to date guys?  
JANET: I wish I lived downtown with Norma! I'm going to, the minute I graduate!  
ARTHUR: What the hell, lots of parents are old-fashioned and raise cain with their kids. 'Specially girls.  
JANET: Yes, but *my* father *doesn't* raise cain. He says: "How can you *hurt* me this way? How *can* you?" And then he—cries.  
ARTHUR: Cries?  
JANET: *(Nodding)* Real tears.  
ARTHUR: But your dad's a grown-up man, a college professor!  
JANET: I know. And he makes me feel so *sorry* for him. I—

BLUE DENIM

*(Looking around desperately)* Does your radio still work?  
ARTHUR: O'course. Why shouldn't it?  
JANET: *(Switching it on)* Good. Let's find some real crazy music!  
ARTHUR: You won't find anything at that end. *(Dailing for her)*  
How's this? Not very crazy, though.  
*(Dance music comes on)*  
JANET: It's fine—Arthur, dance with me.  
ARTHUR: You know I can't!  
JANET: It's no big mystery. *(Walking to him, taking charge)*  
Now—just walk in time to the music! *(After a moment)* It'll never work if you keep on being so stand-offish. Here, like this! *(Walks into his arms. As he draws back)* No, goofy, closer! *(She presses tightly against him. After a moment)* You catching on?  
ARTHUR: *(Breathlessly)* Yeah, I—think so. *(Acutely conscious of her)* We—we better stop pretty soon, huh?  
JANET: You're doing fine. Everybody's self-conscious at first.  
ARTHUR: *(Painfully)* No—I think we better— *(He breaks from her, hurries to the radio and turns it off)*  
JANET: What's the matter?  
ARTHUR: Nothing. I told you—I'm no good at that stuff.  
JANET: You'll never learn if you won't try!  
ARTHUR: Too bad Ernie isn't here. He goes to dances all the time. Real ones, downtown.  
JANET: I wanted to dance with you, not Ernie.  
ARTHUR: I'd give anything if I could be like him.  
JANET: Now why?  
ARTHUR: He's really got a smooth tongue on him. I admire that. With me things get all twisted up...  
JANET: Arthur, what sort of things?  
ARTHUR: Things I wonder about— One thing, it bothers me a lot. I tried to tell Mom about it once, but...  
JANET: But what?  
ARTHUR: Aw, every time my mother looks at me I feel like she's seeing something small and pink and wrapped up in a blanket.  
JANET: *(Moving closer to him)* Try telling me, Art.



## BLUE DENIM

ARTHUR: See...I've got this feeling I ought to be somebody—special!  
JANET: Who doesn't? I want to be a poet, and what's sillier than that?  
ARTHUR: Yeah, but you got what it takes. I'm just—ordinary.  
JANET: Ordinary! You think I'd hang around with you if I didn't think you were going to be—special?  
ARTHUR: You do?  
JANET: O'course. That's why you and I can talk.  
ARTHUR: I guess we do talk better than most people. All the kids at school—even Ernie...I mean, I figured it out, I don't really *know* anybody at all. Not even my own folks. Does that sound bats?  
JANET: Not to *me*!  
ARTHUR: Hunh?  
JANET: It seems to me the only people who really know each other are—people in love.  
ARTHUR: Maybe so.  
JANET: Arthur, how d'you suppose it feels to be in love with someone?  
ARTHUR: Don't ask me!  
JANET: (*Bravely*) Because—because I think *I'm* in love. With you.  
ARTHUR: You...! (*Sharply*) Whadd'ya want to kid like that for?  
JANET: I'm not!  
ARTHUR: You are. And I thought we were talking serious.  
JANET: Well, if that's your attitude, I'm sorry I told you! (*JANET starts to leave but ARTHUR'S voice stops her*)  
ARTHUR: Janet! Weren't you kidding? (*She turns slowly to face him, shakes her head*) But Lordie, Janet...  
JANET: Don't worry about it. At my age it's perfectly natural to have crushes on people.  
ARTHUR: Yeah, but—why me?  
JANET: Frankly, I don't know. You're not the handsomest boy in the world.  
ARTHUR: Thanks!  
JANET: You see, I'm very objective about you, Arthur. My mistake was I told you. Norma says never let a boy know you really like him.

## BLUE DENIM

ARTHUR: Norma doesn't know everything.  
JANET: She knows plenty!  
ARTHUR: (*Stunned*) When did you find out? I mean, about me?  
JANET: (*Turning to him, excited*) I can tell you the exact second. It was this morning. Remember the English test? I saw you trying to decide whether or not to copy from Billy Robinson's paper... Turning sideways, leaning back... And all you had to do was look over! But you didn't. I started to laugh. At least I thought I was—but I was starting to cry. Now, almost everything you do is funny...and at the same time...*not* funny. (*She turns away*) Well—*say* something!  
ARTHUR: I don't know what to say!  
JANET: I guess you don't—  
(*She wanders away from him*)  
ARTHUR: (*Joining her, taking her arm*) Don't be—mad.  
JANET: I'm not mad.  
ARTHUR: Yes you are.  
JANET: I really made a fool of myself, didn't I?  
ARTHUR: No. God no. If you feel like that, and if—  
JANET: Norma was right.  
ARTHUR: No! (*He kisses her quickly, awkwardly. Then, laughing self-consciously*) Our noses got in the way.  
JANET: (*Softly*) Goofy. Like this.  
(*She tilts her head slightly, kisses him on the lips*)  
ARTHUR: (*Joking breathlessly*) You seem to know a lot about kissing.  
JANET: (*Also breathless and joking*) Enough to keep my nose out of the way. (*They stand holding each other at arm's length, each on the verge of hysteria. Then JANET draws a sharp breath. As though this were a signal, they move suddenly together and cling*) Arthur... (*Into his shoulder*) I bet you like me a lot more than you think you do!  
ARTHUR: Maybe—I do. (*She draws back, smiles at him, then self-consciously pushes away and wanders to the table, where she sits*) I feel—funny. Do you?  
JANET: Kind of.  
(*ARTHUR sits at the table*)



## BLUE DENIM

ARTHUR: Janet. I want to ask you something personal. Only don't get sore.

JANET: I won't.

ARTHUR: Well—a guy's bound to wonder!

JANET: *(Pleased)* You're jealous!

ARTHUR: You're crazy!

JANET: Yes you are! Well, you don't have to worry, Arthur.

ARTHUR: You've never?—Not that I'd *blame* you, understand, I'm broad-minded.

JANET: I've thought about it for a long time, though. *(Flaring)* And that's perfectly biologically normal, too! Lots of countries' kids our age are already married and raising families.

ARTHUR: Sure they are.

JANET: *(Quietly)* With me, I always get to a certain point—listening to somebody's line and kissing, and petting—then I get scared or disgusted and... *(A helpless gesture)* Do you think I've got a sex blockade or something?

ARTHUR: O'course not! *(Then treading softly)* You simply didn't love those other guys.

JANET: Arthur. Have you slept with lots of girls?

ARTHUR: Oh, the—the regular amount for a guy fifteen, I guess.

JANET: Is it—was it like you thought it'd be?

ARTHUR: *(After a moment's deliberation)* More or less.

JANET: When it happened, were you in love with those girls?

ARTHUR: Hell, no! *(Explaining)* A man doesn't have to be.

JANET: That's not fair! *(Suddenly)* Art, let's not talk about it any more!

ARTHUR: *(Following)* What's the matter?

JANET: I think if we talk about it, it's going to spoil something.

ARTHUR: Okay, Jan.

JANET: *(Sitting on the cot, frowning, her tone violent)* I wish I was eighteen right this minute and knew all about everything!

ARTHUR: 'F you were, you wouldn't like *me* any more.

JANET: I suppose. *(Looking at him)* That's so hard to believe, though...

## BLUE DENIM

*(They stare at each other for a long moment)*

ARTHUR: You're so— *(Unable to find a fine enough word)* Why didn't I know before what you were like?

*(They kiss tenderly, then nuzzle, forehead to forehead)*

JANET: *(After a moment, softly)* Are your eyes closed?

ARTHUR: Yes.

JANET: I love you, Arthur!

ARTHUR: *(Crooning)* Janet, little Janet, Jan...

JANET: Arthur... Teach me how to love you?... *(He draws back and looks at her, slowly comprehending her meaning)*

ARTHUR: Jan, you don't mean?—

*(JANET reaches up, covers his eyes with her hand so that he can't see her face)*

JANET: Yes, Arthur. *(Then, to ARTHUR'S mortification and surprise, he starts to cry, knuckles fiercely at his eyes)* Why, dearest... What's the matter?

ARTHUR: *(Sharply)* Nothing! Don't look at me. *(After a moment he draws a long, shuddering breath, wipes his eyes, and tries to smile at her)* Now, why'd I do a crazy thing like that?

JANET: Is it my fault?

ARTHUR: *(Strongly)* No!

JANET: Then what?...

ARTHUR: *(Whispering, panic-stricken, his face averted)* Janet—I don't know about anything!

JANET: What do you mean?

ARTHUR: I made it all up. About other girls.

JANET: *(Tenderly, her voice shaking slightly)* Why, you—you big phoney!

*(She breaks into a slight hysterical laugh. After a moment they are laughing together, briefly, softly, with panic underneath. Then ARTHUR'S breath goes out of him in a long sigh. He kisses her, straining his body against hers.)*