

## SERENADING LOUIE

by Lanford Wilson

## ACT II

The play deals with two suburban couples who have been friends for years. Both have reached a crisis in their marriages: Carl loves Mary, but she is having an affair with his accountant; Alex has become distant from Gabby (he is also having an affair), and Gabby is having strange mood swings. The play traces the deterioration of both relationships as Carl and Mary try to cope with her adultery and Gabby and Alex confront their dissatisfactions with each other.

The following scene between Mary and Carl takes place in their living room. It begins with an innocuous conversation about Alex's new political career and evolves into Carl forcing Mary to admit that she is having an affair. (Their daughter, Ellen, is asleep in the bedroom.)

The play employs a number of theatrical devices such as having both couples use the same environment simultaneously, and, at times, having a character talk directly to the audience.

**MARY, enters from Ellie's room. To a very preoccupied Carl:** I'm sorry, darling. I got embroiled in a drunken question and answer session. She went back to sleep. Ellen takes more and more after you—she lacks all coherency. *Crosses to desk.* What do you make of Alex's career?

**CARL:** Has he decided . . . ?

**MARY:** Impending then. I can't decide if he isn't just seeing himself carrying a charger, advancing into battle—in which case—

**CARL:** Honey, you don't carry a charger into battle—the charger is the horse.

**MARY, crosses to fireplace:** I thought you carried a charger—like a lance. Well, that makes sense. Right then: charging in *à cheval*—with plumes—

**CARL:** He might fool us.

**MARY, Alex crosses to desk, sits:** If he's not political he'll be eaten alive and if he is political, then I've no interest in him. Why the hell doesn't he just quit and go to work for the Civil Liberties Union if he has such an overpowering social conscience? I know Gabby's confused— *(crosses to hall)*

**CARL, crosses to fireplace:** I'd think so. *As Mary starts to go:* You know I had to make a lot of quick phone-call confirmations and I knocked them off this afternoon in about ten minutes flat.

**MARY:** Good.

**CARL, opens curtain, gets poker:** And without even skipping a beat I called Donald and asked him how about knocking it off with my wife. *Freeze. Long pause. Alex dials a number. Looks at his watch.*

**MARY:** And what did he say?

**CARL, turns to Mary:** I wasn't even sure I could call him; I didn't actually know I was going to until I hung up.

**MARY:** Whatever gave you the idea there was anything to knock off?

**CARL:** No, we won't do that—

**MARY:** Won't do what?

**CARL:** Pretend. We won't pretend. Of course I'd know. I've known for months. Every Wednesday.

**MARY:** You're being awfully circuitous for someone with a degree—

**CARL:** No, Mary—

**MARY:** I go into town—I've been seeing Mom almost every week—she's no spring—

**CARL:** I'm not talking about your mother.

**MARY:** Well, then I haven't—

**CARL:** No, Mary, don't, Mary. I go by the apartment at the Commodore every Wednesday afternoon to check up and see if he's showed up. To watch the blinds turn. You turn them up and he turns them down. I told you I'd been spending lunch-hours around the Hancock Building and you never even heard me. Doubtless your mind was somewhere else; we know how one-tracked you get. We won't pretend. *Puts poker away.*

**MARY, crosses to living room:** When was that?

**CARL, closes curtain:** Months ago—three months at least; I don't know when.

MARY: Well, why on earth didn't you say something.

CARL: I didn't know (*Alex hangs up. Carl looks to him and back*) what to say. And I kept thinking it'd break off; you'd give it up.

MARY: When did—?

CARL, *without hearing*: I did try. I wrote it out once at work, what I'd say.

MARY, *sits upstage on sofa*: My god, you poor darling—

CARL: Oh, come on, now.

MARY: No, Carl, if—

CARL, *crosses right, puts lights on*: Mary goddamn it, I do not intend to discuss this rationally! I'll be damned if I will. You said what did he say. He said sure, OK, fine, and rather briefly and I hung up. And thought. Quite a lot. I thought I'm twice again his size. *To the audience*: I am, I'm about twice the man's size. *Back to Mary*: I could beat the shit out of the guy and you. And that might make me feel a little better. I'd tell Ellen mommy fell down the stairs. *Beat. Crosses to fireplace*. I just assumed, whatever he felt about you, that you managed to be in love and that it'd pass—

MARY: Oh, god, Carl couldn't I have seen him just because—

CARL: No, I don't like seen, that's too easy, say screwed, say—

MARY: All right, then, just because I enjoyed it? Without dragging romance through it? Because I dug him?

CARL: OK, it was hot stuff—better than—

MARY: —My responsibility to you hasn't altered in the least degree—

CARL: Yeah, yeah, and Ellen, I know, I know, I know, and with all this great guilt we should be even closer now; hell, I guess I should thank him, huh? No, just call it off. That's it. It's over. From now. Finis. And that's all. That's all I have to say. *A long pause. Mary?*

MARY: I couldn't do that Carl. *Carl sits with his head in his hands. Carl?*

CARL, *without looking up*: I'm here.

## THE TRIP BACK DOWN

by John Bishop

### ACT I

The play opens with Bobby Horvath returning to his hometown in the Midwest after eight years. For some of those eight years, Bobby had been a successful stock-car racer. His dream was "to be the best"; to have people recognize him and say, "That's Bobby Horvath." But after a bright start the wins came less and less often. Soon the dream turned into the reality of "havin' to race in every little Podunk that's got a track just to keep goin'. Not ever winnin' enough to really get set up right . . . knowin' . . . that for the rest of your life . . . this is goin' be it." So Bobby comes back home hoping to find some direction for his life, some meaning, perhaps from the wife and daughter he left behind, perhaps from his father and brother, perhaps from old friends or old landscapes. But no such answers are available. Finally Bobby comes to terms with himself and his ambitions, and returns to car racing.

The following excerpt is a flashback on the last argument Bobby had with his wife, Joann, before he left home. They had been married for seven years, and by this time their relationship deteriorated to the point where both harbored strong resentments but neither could communicate their feelings. Joann had just walked out in the middle of an argument about Bobby going off to race. As Bobby is about to walk out with his duffel bag, Joann reenters.

JOANN: Wait a minute Bobby! We can't keep doing this over and over. I do want to talk . . . but you don't listen.

BOBBY: You don't want me to go?

JOANN: No. You're my husband. I want you to be here. I want you to be with us. I want something solid for us all. Something solid and worthwhile.