

## AT HOME

by Conrad Bromberg

### SCENE 1

This short play takes place in the New York apartment of Bob and Nancy, a young couple who have been married for five years. Bob is a struggling actor who has had "exactly four paying jobs in the last six years." Nancy is an assistant editor on a trade journal. Bob is trying to memorize his part in an Off-Off Broadway play. Nancy begins to help him. What starts out as an innocent attempt on her part to clarify a section of the script for him turns into a family spat about their sex life. From here they move through a series of confrontations concerning their true feelings about themselves and each other.

**BOB:** practicing lines: "Oh, really?" *Thinks of other character's line, then:* "Why do you do that?" *Other's line:* "That's really something." *Other's line, then he can't remember his response:* "Uh. . . ." *Mutters other's line:* "That's very brave of you . . . that's very brave of you . . . beg pardon?" *Consults script.* Is that right? No! "What?" Of course, "what?" Not the hardest word in the English language. "What?" *Reads other character's next line, then reads:* "That's very brave of you." *Hmmm. He thinks, then calls out to Nancy:* You about done?

**NANCY:** Be right there.

**BOB,** to himself, musing over it: "That's very brave of you." Jesus, avant-garde plays.

**NANCY,** entering from kitchen: What?

**BOB:** This play doesn't make much sense. *He hands her script.* She sits across from him on sofa. Doesn't relate to anything. I have to make up stories to justify every line.

**NANCY:** You wanted to do it.

**BOB:** To be doing something.

**NANCY:** It's good practice.

**BOB:** For what, "The World Cellar Theater Festival"? Jesus, I've been in more plays in more cellars and more lofts. Lofts and cellars. If I ever get a job in a real theater, I'll probably go down to the boiler room out of sheer habit.

**NANCY,** pertly: Don't worry, you'll get something soon. Where shall we start?

**BOB:** Page 15, from the top. *He rises.* The two guys are standing there after the booth light goes off, we do the thing about what I like to do, then I say, "What do you like to do?"

**NANCY,** reads: "Promise you won't tell?"

**BOB,** looking out toward imaginary booth: "Promise."

**NANCY:** "I like to pee in the middle of the bowl."

**BOB,** paces a bit as he works: "Oh, really?"

**NANCY:** "It sounds like a thousand waterfalls."

**BOB:** "Why do you do that?"

**NANCY:** "The danger. Someone might be listening."

**BOB:** Uh . . . "That's really something." *To her:* Is that right? *She nods.* "That's really something."

**NANCY:** "That's very brave of you."

**BOB,** stops, thinks: "What?"

**NANCY:** "Say it. That's very brave of you."

**BOB:** "That's very brave of you."

**NANCY:** "Louder."

**BOB:** "Louder . . . louder . . . do I say it again?" *She nods.* "That's very brave of you."

**NANCY:** "With gestures."

**BOB,** gestures wildly: "That's very brave of you!" *Flops his arms down.* Shit, I don't understand this at all. What does he want? Why am I doing this for him?

**NANCY:** Well, he's your boss, isn't he?

**BOB:** In the studio, yes.

**NANCY:** And he's insecure.

**BOB:** Yes, but what a ridiculous thing to applaud a man for peeing in the middle of the bowl.

**NANCY:** It's that kind of play, dear.

**BOB:** It's totally unbelievable. So unrelated to life.

**NANCY:** Oh, I don't know. It does strike a note.

**BOB:** Nancy, come on. Where did you ever hear two people talking like that?

**NANCY:** Maybe not like that, but . . .



BOB: Or even close to it.

NANCY: Well . . . *(suddenly remembers, in all innocence)* as a matter of fact I can think of something. You know when you and I make love? And you say to me, "Do you know what I'm doing to you?" Well, of course I know what you're doing to me, but you want me to say it, so I say it.

BOB: That's lovemaking. These two guys aren't making love.

NANCY: But it's the same thing is all I mean.

BOB: Not at all. The situation's different, the relationship is different. *Goes to her, takes script.* See here, when I say, "That's very brave of you"? The stage direction reads "uncomfortably," as if there's something holding me back, as if I don't want to say it. That's not the case with us. You love to say it. *She is silent. He waits for her to affirm what he's said.* Don't you?

NANCY, *a bit uncomfortable*: Well . . .

BOB: You always said you did.

NANCY, *trying to gracefully retract*: I love to please you.

BOB: No, you've said time and again that you love to talk dirty in sex.

NANCY: Well, I do . . . sometimes.

BOB: Sometimes? What about the other times?

NANCY: Well . . . look, Bob, it's not important. I only raised it to make a point about the play.

BOB: It is important. You're saying that for five years of a marriage, you've been doing something you don't like to do.

NANCY: I didn't say that.

BOB: You implied it.

NANCY: I only meant that I get pleasure from pleasing you.

BOB, *pained*: I thought it excited you. *She doesn't respond.* Didn't it? *No response.* It didn't.

NANCY: Not really. *He is crestfallen. She rushes in to retrieve the situation.* It's just that I'll be feeling something and thinking something, and then, when you ask the question, it sort of distracts me. It's like patting your head and rubbing your tummy at the same time. I was never very good at that. *She rises, goes and embraces him, fondly.* Bobby, it's not a big thing, really. Please, let's go on with the cueing. *He's not convinced.* I love making love with you. *She takes the script and returns to the sofa.* Shall we go back?

BOB, *muted thinking*: No let's go on.

NANCY: All right.

BOB, *she looks to him, waits. He flails his arms feebly as his character*: "How brave of you."

NANCY, *correcting him*: "That's very brave of you."

BOB, *repeats*: "That's very brave . . ." *Thinks.* I won't do it anymore.

NANCY: Do what?

BOB: Ask you that question in bed.

NANCY, *shyly*: It's all right if you do.

BOB: No, you should have your own pleasure undistracted by me. *Catches himself.* What am I saying? I'm the one you're making love with. What I mean is, I shouldn't impose on you something you don't like. Never again.

NANCY, *softly*: All right. *A moment of silence.*

BOB, *a bit concerned*: What'll I do instead?

NANCY, *shrugs*: Just make love.

BOB, *nonplussed*: Without talking? Just go at it in silence?

NANCY: What's wrong with that?

BOB: It's lonely.

NANCY: Well, we can say things like "Oh, Bob," "Oh, Nancy."

BOB: You never say, "Oh, Bob."

NANCY: But I will, if you like it.

BOB: I don't want you to say it, because I like it. That's the point of all this.

NANCY, *after a moment*: Why do you feel the need to talk at all?

BOB: I enjoy it. It's . . . ribald. It's festive. Like the guest and the hostess exchanging toasts. "Do you know what I'm doing to you?" "Yes, you're blah-blah-blah!" Cheers! *He looks at her.* *She is unconvinced.* I don't know why I like it. I guess to make

some sort of contact. That's usually why people talk.

NANCY: But I'm there with you.

BOB: Yes, I guess I don't trust it enough. I look at you, and you seem to be into your own world. Not really with me.

NANCY: I'm with you. *Then quickly.* It's not a big problem. Let's do the lines. *She picks up script again.* All right, from the last "That's very brave of you."

BOB, *again the feeble flopping of arms*: "That's very brave of you."



NANCY: "Yes, I feel myself, strong, capable, defiant."  
 BOB, *by rote*: "Very good."  
 NANCY: "I assert my individuality."  
 BOB, *stops, shakes his head*: Gee, I really liked those lines.  
 NANCY: Which, these last?  
 BOB: No, "Do you know what I'm doing to you?" etc., etc.  
 Sorry, go ahead.  
 NANCY: Take it back. You say, "Very good."  
 BOB: "Very good."  
 NANCY: "I assert my individuality."  
 BOB: Uh, "You're quite an individual."  
 NANCY: "Louder."  
 BOB, *louder*: "You're quite an individual!"  
 NANCY: "With gestures!" *Bob stops, studies her, thinks. What is it?*  
 BOB: Do you think I'm insecure?  
 NANCY: No. Why?  
 BOB: Before, you described this character as insecure, because he had to have my character applaud him all the time. Do you think that's what my sex talk reflects?  
 NANCY: No!  
 BOB: But you said it. You related it to us.  
 NANCY: I was talking about the play. Only the play.  
 BOB: If the analogy fits, we have to wear it.  
 NANCY, *sighs*: Bob, you are not insecure.  
 BOB: Why not?  
 NANCY: Why *not*?  
 BOB: I have every reason to be.  
 NANCY: But you're not!  
 BOB: Wait. Listen to this. Pretend I'm speaking of a stranger. *He paces. In his six-year career he's has exactly four paying jobs. In one he actually spoke the author's words. For the rest he did a variety of parts. Can you ever forget his performance as "Passerby"? Or his stirring portrayal of "Third Juror"? He is thirty years old (a moment of silence for that). Every other month he gets a check from his younger brother, the real estate whiz! And last but not least his monthly rent check is signed by his wife! In the face of all that why would this man not be insecure?! She starts to respond, but he continues:* I'll tell you why! Because he runs! Winter and summer, fair and foul weather, he suits up and runs. He runs two miles a day. He regards it as the

test of his character and strength. And every day he passes the test! That's why he's not insecure! Any man who can run two miles a day is not insecure! In the face of that why are you implying I am insecure?!

NANCY: I'm not! I don't understand why you're suddenly so defensive.

BOB: I'm not! I just want it clear that if there is a sex problem between us, it doesn't stem from my need for applause.

NANCY: I never said it did. I don't think there's any problem.

BOB: Right! Okay, let's go on. *She looks for place in the script, but he starts in again:* In fact, the more I think about it, there's nothing wrong with talking during sex. I mean outbursts, exclamations, things like that. What if, in the heat of it, I burst out "I love you!" What's wrong with that?

NANCY: Nothing!

BOB: Would it distract you?

NANCY: Well, no, of course not . . . not really.

BOB: Not *really*?

NANCY: Not at all.

BOB: Wait a minute. You said not really. Just exactly what are you thinking of when we make love?

NANCY: Nothing!

BOB: But before you said you were!

NANCY, *rises*: I don't like this conversation. It's silly and dangerous. Do you want to run lines or not?

BOB: I want to know your thoughts while in bed with me!

NANCY: I have none!

BOB: Nancy, I can tell when you're evading! I need to know for my peace of mind!

NANCY: It won't give you peace of mind! *It's out of the bag. Both stand there shocked at it in the air between them.*

BOB, *with dreadful quiet*: Tell me.

NANCY, *falls back on sofa*: Do you remember Youssef?

BOB: Your old boyfriend from college?

NANCY: Yes, from the Arab legation. Well, when we made love, which was only a few times, he did a certain thing for me . . .

BOB: Which I do for you, too!

NANCY: I know! And every time you do it, it starts me thinking of Youssef!

BOB, *turns away*: Oh, shit!



**NANCY, goes to him:** It's terrible, I know. I didn't want to tell you.

**BOB:** I'm competing with the ghost of a talented Arabian!

**NANCY, with wholehearted honesty:** Oh, Bob, you're every bit as good as he was! Better!

**BOB:** Then why don't you think of me?

**NANCY:** I don't know! It's just that every time you start, there's Youssef! I've thought about it constantly! I'm just so guilty about it, I don't know what to do! But I can't stop it!

**BOB, sits, shakes his head:** Terrific. Five years of innocent pleasure gone, wiped out. Replaced by the leering smile of a Syrian economist.

**NANCY, drops to her knees beside him:** I'm sorry.

**BOB:** Don't be. I pursued it and I got it. *A silence.* Let's forget it. Let's do the lines. Where were we?

**NANCY, consults script:** "I assert my individuality."

**BOB:** Is that the line?

**NANCY:** What?

**BOB:** Is that the line or are you saying it?

**NANCY:** It's the line. I'll take it back further. "Yes, I feel myself, strong, capable, defiant."

**BOB:** "Very good." *He thinks.* About the sex thing. It's not a problem. Let's forget it.

## THE TIGER

by Murray Schisgal

Ben is a disgruntled New York City mailman who is outraged and feels victimized by the unfair "system" that forces him to carry mail for a living. In an attempt to assert his power he kidnaps a young suburban housewife while she is in town for her weekly bridge game. This is the beginning of a rather strange

and humorous relationship between an initially unwilling woman and her seemingly ferocious abductor.

The scene that follows opens the play. It is a stormy night. Ben enters his basement apartment with Gloria thrown over his shoulder. His raincoat is over her head.

**GLORIA, muffled voice, kicking her legs:** For your own sake . . . Put me down. Put me down . . .

**BEN, carries her across to bed:** Stop it! Stop it! Do you think I'm playing games with you? Is that what you think? Ha! That's a laugh. This is strength you're feeling on your bones, lady, primitive, animal strength. There's no arguing with that. Oh, no. *Gloria is seated on edge of bed, Ben turns on lamp.* Now you stay there. Don't move. Don't budge an inch. I'll be right with you. In a minute . . . In a minute . . . *He runs to door, closes it, pulls curtains over small window above bureau.* Gloria rises, moves blindly about the room. Ben grabs her, drags her to the wooden chair. Come back. Come back here. *He ties her wrists behind the chair with the belt of his raincoat.*

**GLORIA, muffled voice:** What are you doing? Take this off. Please. I can't breathe under here, I can't . . .

**BEN:** Scream; scream all you want. You have my permission. It's not going to help you, though. Not here, it won't. We're quite alone. Quite, quite alone. No conditions. I insist on that. I don't accept conditions of any kind. That's a point for you to keep in mind. *She is tied to chair, he moves around to face her.* There; that's it. Each of us in his proper place. *Removes raincoat from her.* You like flirting, don't you, lady? Do anything for a good time. I had those propositions before. Don't make any mistake about that. *He takes towel from line, wipes his face.* **GLORIA:** But I never flirted with you. I didn't. I swear, that's the truth. This is silly. Please, let me go.

**BEN:** Go? Let you go? After all that trouble of dragging you through those back alleys? After getting my new pants wet? Oh, no. Not a chance. Not tonight, lady. I've got something else in mind for you.

**GLORIA:** I don't know what you want; really, I don't. But I won't tell anyone anything. I promise. So far as I'm concerned none of this ever happened. I didn't see you. I kept my eyes