

THE RESTAURANTS ARE SCREAMING

a play by

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CAST

JOE PLOTNIK.....A factory worker, late forties
MARCIA PLOTNIK.....JOE's wife, same age
LUDWIG SCHILLER.....MARCIA's father, late eighties
MAN.....A black man, ambulance
attendant
MR STARK.....A social worker

Under the title "Draw Me a Picture", this play was the subject of an National Endowment for the Arts fellowship in 1977.

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(An industrial suburb of a large industrial city. The time is “V-J Day”, 1945, early evening. The kitchen of JOE and MARCIA’s apartment. There is a bedroom door, UR and a bathroom door UL. A door to the front part of the apartment and the outside is DL. There is a window, R. Besides the usual kitchen furnishings of the time, there is a stand-up radio console, a table and two chairs. JOE is reading a paper. MARCIA is writing in a school notebook.)

MARCIA

Joe, can we turn on the radio?

JOE

No, you’ll wear it out.

MARCIA

We haven’t had it on for a whole week now.

JOE

What do you want it on for?

MARCIA

We might get something.

JOE

It’s broke.

MARCIA

It’s not always broke. Sometimes it goes for a real long time without getting fuzzy.

JOE

You know what you get.

MARCIA

What?

JOE

Everybody kissing everybody else in Times Square and throwing paper out of windows.

MARCIA

People feel like celebrating. What day is it?

JOE

You don't know what day it is?

MARCIA

It will be a "V-Something Day". Like when the Germans surrendered they called it "V-G Day".

JOE

V-E Day. Victory in Europe. Nobody called it "V-G Day".

MARCIA

That's right. V-E Day. I'm so dumb. Where do I get my dumbness from?

JOE

Your old man.

MARCIA

Joe, that's not nice.

JOE

If there was a war in Denver, you'd call it "V-D Day".

MARCIA

No, I wouldn't. You're making fun of me.

JOE

What are you doing now?

MARCIA

I'm writing. It's more little things I like.

JOE

Poetry?

MARCIA

Just little thoughts. I'll read it to you... "The factory is a dusty skeleton, waiting and fast asleep..." It's my impression of the old linoleum factory by the river, closed down and waiting for someone to come and give it life again.

JOE

Who's going to do that?

MARCIA

I don't know, Joey. It's just an impression of a way I feel deep inside.

JOE

You've been hanging around those old barges again.

MARCIA

I went exploring. The tide was out. I could see all the way to the front gate, where the driveway had sunken down. I listened. I heard chains and things swinging in the wind and the rattling sounds the fiddler crabs make running over the mud. Then I heard something else. Only I didn't hear it with my ears. I felt it. It was a sleeping sound. Like the factory was sleeping. Waiting for someone to come and wake it up.

JOE

You're telling me that big empty thing out there is asleep?

MARCIA

It's dreaming. It's waiting. That's what I say in my little thought.

JOE

Prince Charming is going to come and kiss the factory and wake it up?

MARCIA

This is my hobby. When things look grim and dark, that's the time to have a hobby.

JOE

What do you mean, grim and dark? What do you know that's grim and dark?

MARCIA

When things bother you and you don't understand, you have to have something.

JOE

What's bothering you?

MARCIA

I get feelings.

JOE

Boy, you got a case. What kind of feelings you get?

MARCIA

I don't know what kind.

JOE

Something's bothering you and you don't know what it is?

MARCIA

Yes. You feel like that too sometimes.

JOE

No I don't.

MARCIA

Yes you do but you never say anything. You're the Mystery Man.

JOE

That's a lot of bunkum. Something's bothering me and I know what it is.

MARCIA

Tell me. Let me in on the secret.

JOE

Your father has been living in my bedroom for three months.

MARCIA

That's what bothering you? That's the big secret?

JOE

Yeah.

MARCIA

Where else can he go?

JOE

Send him back to your brother's.

MARCIA

I can't do that. They hate each other. Eric threw him out.

JOE

I don't blame him one bit for that move, believe me. I'd've bounced him out of here a long time ago, but he's your father.

MARCIA

We can't afford to send him anywhere nice.

JOE

What do you mean "we"? There is no "we". I don't have to afford anything. He's your problem. I just try to help out.

MARCIA

I could fix him up a cot out here.

JOE

If you fix him up a cot anywhere, fix him up a cot in the bathroom. That's where he spends all his time when he's not in the sack. Back and forth, back and forth, he drives me crazy.

MARCIA

Joe... When we first met, you used to draw pictures. All the time. You'd draw pictures of people. You'd draw with dark black ink...

JOE

India ink.

MARCIA

You drew pictures with ink from India.

JOE

New Jersey.

MARCIA

New Jersey?

JOE

You think "china" comes from China?

MARCIA

You drew lots of things... cars, tea cups, animals. Once you drew one of me and Edger... sitting on a park bench. I still have that one. I have it in my cedar chest.

JOE

What the hell are you driving at?

MARCIA

You should have a hobby.

JOE

I don't want to have a hobby. You waste your time with that stuff. And you shouldn't be hanging around places like that old factory, either. That's trespassing. You could get arrested or something. Besides, it's dangerous. People get hurt hanging around there. They get stuck in the mud and they drown.

MARCIA

They do not.

JOE

Sure they do. Remember the Merrell kid last year? They say he fell through a hole in one of the barges, went up to his knees in that oozy mud, couldn't get loose and nobody

around to help him. The tide comes in and it goes right over his head and he drowns. They went looking for him for a week. They never found him. I bet the crabs ate him, got his eyes and everything.

MARCIA

You're making fun. You shouldn't make fun of that.

JOE

I don't make fun of that. I make fun of you. Every once in awhile you come up with this thing about Edger, "he disappeared". He was twelve years old. He's been gone ten years. Maybe he fell in the river like the Merrell kid. He hasn't been seen since.

MARCIA

My son didn't drown. He ran away. Like my brother Eric. Eric ran away when he was twelve. Eric and Dad used to fight. One night Dad beat him unconscious. The next day Eric ran away.

JOE

I ain't seen him since. Have you seen him since? He fell in.

MARCIA

I got this card. A penny postcard. I've had it for weeks. It's from him...

JOE

Show me.

(MARCIA takes a postcard from within her notebook and gives it to JOE. He reads it.)

JOE

"Dearest Mother. I want to come and see you." What the hell kind of a card is that?

MARCIA

This is hope. Do you know what Ernie Kupidelowski does for a hobby? He makes airplanes out of tissue paper, sticks and glue. He makes them so they can fly by themselves. When he sees his planes go up, his hopes go up with them...

(JOE turns on the radio while she is talking. She is interrupted by squeals of static. A few words are intelligible.)

(RADIO)

"...cheering wildly... crazy...Harry?... Yes, they are, Mel... official...V-J Day...Times Square...wonderful...crazy..."

(Static and voices continue.)

LUDWIG enters from the bedroom.)

LUDWIG
Is there milk?

MARCIA
What, Dad?

LUDWIG
Milk? Milk?

MARCIA
Milk gives you too much mucous.

LUDWIG
What?

MARCIA
Mucous.

LUDWIG
Milk? Do you have milk?

JOE
For Christ's sake!

MARCIA
Milk gives you too much mucous.

LUDWIG
It is for the ulcer.

MARCIA
I'll make you some tea.

LUDWIG
What is that on the radio?

(JOE turns the volume down.)

JOE
The war is over. Japan surrendered.

LUDWIG
Eric says, do you know my son Eric? He says the English bombed Hamburg. They dropped bombs and bombs until there was nothing left. People were burning alive in the

streets and screaming. Dresden too they bombed. Do you know Dresden? They made china there. Did you ever hear of Dresden china? Well that was where it was coming from, Dresden. What was that on the radio?

JOE

Football game.

LUDWIG

There is nothing on the radio today but the sports and this Crazy music. I only listen to Wagner, or The Lone Ranger. I think I'll go and take my nap now.

JOE

Christ's sake.

MARCIA

What about your tea, Dad?

LUDWIG

I don't want any tea. I take a nap now, to look my best when the doctor comes.

JOE

Doctor? What doctor?

LUDWIG

I was not feeling well, so a doctor is coming to see what is wrong.

MARCIA

I didn't call any doctor, Dad. You imagined it.

LUDWIG

What is the doctor's name?

MARCIA

I did not call any doctor.

JOE

Smith. The doctor's name is Smith.

LUDWIG

Smith. Is he Jewish?

JOE

For Christ's sake!

(JOE moves to exit DL.)

MARCIA

Joe, where are you going?

JOE (facetiously)

I'm going into the parlor to wait for the doctor while I work on my hobby. I'm going for a walk. Call me when the factory wakes up.

(JOE exits.)

LUDWIG

Maybe he is Swedish. Maybe he is English. If he's English, he could be Jewish. He could have changed his name. A lot of Jews change their names because they are communists and they like to make trouble. When Doctor Smith comes, I don't want to see him. Are we having tea?

MARCIA

Dad you've been staying here for three months. How would it be if Joe and I moved back into the bedroom and I could fix you up a nice cot out here?

LUDWIG

With Margaret and Eric, I always had my own room. Everything was just so.

MARCIA

I can fix it the way you like it.