

## THE LIBRARY DUETS I: BIG FLIES

*(A library, with books and a stereo in shelves along the back wall. A ladder leans against the shelves. A liquor cabinet. Two armchairs where Steve and Jerry sit, a table between. Upstage left is the library door.)*

*(They sit a full minute, their heads back and eyes closed. Finally Jerry lifts his head and becomes increasingly agitated.)*

JERRY

*(Yelling.)* Turn the music down. *(Pause.)* I said could you please turn the music down!

STEVE

*(Also yelling.)* What?

JERRY

The music! Can you turn down the music?

STEVE

Oh, yeah, I'll turn the music down. It's loud, isn't it? *(He goes to adjust the knobs.)* God, that's better. Why didn't you say something?

JERRY

Well, I did, you know, I guess I mean I meant to. The music kind of crept up.

STEVE

Yeah, it does that. Something to do with the remote, even when the remote's on the table, nobody near it. See, there it is, on the table. I don't even think the batteries are alive.

*(A long pause.)*

JERRY

Alive?

STEVE

Well, you know, not dead, alive. Except in this case; they're not alive; they're dead.

JERRY

I thought maybe "active." "Fresh," maybe.

STEVE

Yeah, maybe "fresh," but it doesn't matter because I took the batteries out last week anyway. So they wouldn't leak.

JERRY

What does it matter if they leak, Steve? You said the remote's already screwed up.

STEVE

Yeah, but if battery crud has leaked everywhere the warranty's no good.

JERRY

*(Picks up the remote.)* Yeah, acid. Battery crud. Acid.

STEVE

It gives them life, Jerry. Acid. Like DNA. Deoxyribonucleic battery acid.

JERRY

I'm not sure I know what you mean, Steve.

STEVE

I'm not sure I know either. In fact I don't know.

JERRY

We were talking.

STEVE

I know, Jerry.

JERRY

We were talking, and then you put the music on.

STEVE

Well, yeah. Something about what you were saying. I wanted to show you the...you were saying something about Melissa...

JERRY

Melinda.

STEVE

Something about Melinda, sorry, and I needed to play the Tellemann to show you something, the flute...now I can't really remember.

JERRY

I wasn't sure. It wasn't a flutist, flautist, she left with. It was a real estate salesman.

STEVE

God, I'm sorry, Jerry, I can't remember. Maybe if we play it again.

JERRY

It doesn't matter. Don't worry, Steve. I really didn't need to bring it up. You never even met her.

STEVE

No, not really.

JERRY

Not just "not really," Steve, you've never even heard me mention her. I've never even shown you her picture. I haven't seen you, talked to you, since the Florida thing, the fishing trip.

STEVE

God, the fishing trip. Florida. The fishing trip. God. Boca.

JERRY

Key West, but it rained.

STEVE

God, didn't it?

JERRY

I don't remember. Steve...

STEVE

Jerry? What is it, Jerry? When you called...I thought... What is it you need? What is it? You look like hell. I've already said that you look like hell. I'm sorry, but, God, you really do. I wouldn't have said it if I weren't concerned.

JERRY

I didn't call because I needed something. I just called. *(Pause.)* It's not that there's nothing I need.

STEVE

What?

JERRY

It's not that there's nothing I need.

STEVE

I understand, but what? If it's not nothing, what is it, the something, you need? What do you need?

JERRY

If I knew what I needed I'd know why I'm here. But I don't.

STEVE

Know...

JERRY

Why I'm here.

STEVE

I think what you need is a drink.

JERRY

What I need is a beer.

*(Steve moves to the cabinet, which opens into a bar. He looks around for a beer, an opener, a glass, ice, liquor, the right swizzle stick, etc.)*

JERRY

What I told you is true. On the phone. I told you I wasn't looking for a job. I don't even want a job now. I don't need a job. I could use some money. But that's not why I called.

STEVE

*(Mixing the drinks.)* I might be able to do something with money. If that's really what you need. Like a hundred maybe, if that's what you need.

JERRY

No, not a hundred, that's not why I called, a hundred isn't what I need. That's really not why I called.

STEVE

I know it's not, Jerry, I know it's not. I know that...I know... *(He has spotted something in the air, follows it with his eyes.)* Bastard.

*(Without looking, Steve puts down the drink paraphernalia, picks up a newspaper, folds it meticulously, steps out from behind the bar.)*

STEVE

*(With increasing volume as he stalks.)* Bastard. Bastard. Bastard. Bastard.

*(On the last "bastard" he lunges at the bookcase with the newspaper. He lunges again and misses.)*

STEVE

*(Breathing hard, he sits back in his chair.)* They're giants, the fuckers are giants.

JERRY

*(Getting up to work on the drinks.)* I guess; I didn't see them.

STEVE

Him. Just one this time. And I'm the brave little tailor.

JERRY

The what? What did you say?

STEVE

Just a splash in there, Jerry, just a splash.

JERRY

*(At the bar.)* The guy wore one of those gold jackets, Steve. A blazer. With the name of the real estate company on the pocket. He came to the door wearing his real estate blazer. *(Never stops working at the bar.)* His hair was thin on the top of his head, twenty-five blond hairs stretched over the top of his head. They didn't even keep the porch light from shining off his scalp. His face was pudgy and tired, like somebody tried to stiff him on a commission. But, goddam, he had that middle button buttoned. He had his real estate blazer all buttoned. *(By this time he has mixed two drinks for Steve and poured himself one or two beers. He brings them all over to the table.)*

STEVE

What was his name?

JERRY

What do you mean, what was his name?

STEVE

You know, his name. Do you know his name?

JERRY

What? Do you think maybe you know him or something? He's an asshole in a solid gold real estate blazer. He drives a Monte Carlo. He wishes he drove a Mercedes. He's five nine, O positive. He gets ringworm every summer. He's a Capricorn. He smokes too much. He's a great fuck.

STEVE

What's his name?

JERRY

His name's Frank.

STEVE

Frank the Fuck.

JERRY

Yeah, something like that.

STEVE

He's not somebody you know, right? The first time you met him he was there, shining in the porch light, his blazer buttoned to show respect.

JERRY

No, I'd seen him before. I saw him the week before. I told Melinda I'd play tennis with her; she didn't have to just go by herself and hit it against the wall. She *wanted* to go hit it against the wall, but I made her take me. Well, there was somebody there already, hitting it against the wall. Nice ground strokes. He left after we started playing.

STEVE

The guy sounds like an asshole.

JERRY

Why, because he plays tennis?

STEVE

No, it's that thing with his hair.

JERRY

Well, he *is* an asshole, you're right. You're very perceptive.

STEVE

Yeah. (*Spots something.*) Bastard. Big giant bastard. (*Reaches for his paper, goes stalking, eventually to the bar where he swings and breaks a glass or two. He swings again.*)

Hah! (*He comes over to Jerry with his trophy flattened onto the newspaper.*) Take a look at him.

JERRY

(*Backing off.*) Yeah, thanks. God, Steve. Which one is he? There's dozens of them.

STEVE

Huge, right? I told you they were giants.

JERRY

No, but what's this paper? How old is this thing? (*He takes the paper and unfolds it gingerly.*) What is this?

STEVE

New York Herald Tribune. May 8, 1915. Sinking of the *Lusitania*. I collect, you know. I get pissed off just reading this one. Feels good to draw blood.

JERRY

That paper, how much is that thing...? You're right, these are damn big flies. Lot of, um, blood.

STEVE

Damn right. You remember what's black and white and red all over? A newspaper. Except this one is sort of yellow and red and green.

JERRY

And black. Mostly black.

STEVE

Oh, yeah. The, the skin. Ought to make a coat or something out of these pelts.

JERRY

So where do they get in?

STEVE

Get in? Who?

JERRY

The flies. How do they get in? This place is air conditioned...

STEVE

Of course it's air conditioned. For the books. It doesn't matter so much for me and Doris. We don't curl up like the books. It's hot around here, it's moist. It breeds mosquitoes.

JERRY

And flies. Who's Doris?

STEVE

I don't know, I think they breed in here somewhere. It's a damn big house, you know. Climate absolutely controlled. A little ecosystem. We give the spiders free rein, and they take care of most of the problems. The insect problems. Once we even *introduced* spiders, some kind of shiny black ones, not black widows, but still nothing takes care of a big green fly like...

JERRY

But Doris, who's Doris?

STEVE

Doris, of course, you know, Doris.

JERRY

Doris.

STEVE

My wife, Doris. You met her. She came to the door.

JERRY

Nobody came to the door. It pushed open and I yelled.

STEVE

But Florida, Boca, you met her in Boca Raton. When it rained. You and Doris met on the Florida thing. Fishing. It rained.

JERRY

Key West, Steve. And that was no Doris you were with. A Ginger maybe. A Paulette.

STEVE

It rained a lot. (*Pause.*) The window's broken. Over there. The window in the goddam library's broken. Look at that.

JERRY

Yeah, well, I wondered about that. I didn't want to say...

STEVE

Don't worry. It's been that way. It was like that when we bought the house. Most of these books were already curled up from the moisture. Can't pull them out of the shelves.

JERRY

When you bought the house. You and Doris.

STEVE

Yeah, Doris and I. She's a handsome woman, don't you think?

JERRY

That's the word I'd use.

STEVE

So, that's where they get in, do you think?

JERRY

Maybe they just knock, and the door pushes open. Maybe Doris lets them in.

STEVE

Doris would do that, you're right. You know her better than you think. Doris doesn't have much sense when it comes to ecosystems.

JERRY

Maybe she's part of the ecosystem. I mean, the more you're part of something, the less you know about it. Raccoons don't know they're part of an ecosystem, but they still eat your goddam garbage.

STEVE

Yeah, they do, they still eat your goddam garbage. I can see Doris now, prying off a trashcan lid, digging down for some tidbit but always washing it first.

JERRY

When you answered your phone, I thought I had the wrong number. Then I recognized you

STEVE

When I answered the phone, I thought you had the wrong number, too. Not a voice I'd heard before.

JERRY

I look like hell, and my voice looks like hell too.

STEVE

You've been through a lot, Jerry.

JERRY

No. Just something. Past tense. Ancient history.

STEVE

You called. You were thumbing through the phone book and you called.

JERRY

No.

STEVE

You were thinking about Florida, maybe you wanted to go fishing in Florida again, and you called.

JERRY

No.

STEVE

You need another beer. Are you ready for another beer?

JERRY

Steve, when I called, I didn't know it was you.

STEVE

Didn't know who was me?

JERRY

You. *(Pause.)* Doris's husband. I called and I didn't know I'd know Doris's husband.

STEVE

*(Very slowly.)* But you did.

JERRY

Did?

STEVE

Know Doris's husband.

JERRY

Yeah. It was you.

STEVE

*(Still slowly, the truth dawning.)* I'm Doris's husband?

JERRY

Yeah. You are.

STEVE

*(Angry.)* And you're Jerry the Fuck?

JERRY

Yeah, I guess that's me.

STEVE

*(Still slowly.)* Part of the ecosystem.

JERRY

A vulture maybe. A laughing hyena. *(Pause.)* So what do we do now?

STEVE

That's a hell of a question, Jerry. That's a hell of a question.

JERRY

Yeah, but what do we do now?

STEVE

I don't know. *(With exaggerated graciousness)* Do you need a beer?

JERRY

Yeah, give me that beer now. I could use it.

STEVE

*(Getting up for drinks, still speaking sarcastically)* I hope I didn't say anything.

JERRY

No, you didn't say anything.

STEVE

About Doris, I mean. About eating garbage and all that.

JERRY

It doesn't matter. I won't tell her. We don't talk that much anyway. Mostly... Well, we don't talk much about you. If we did, well, I'd have known, I guess.

STEVE

That I'm Doris's husband. That Doris is Steve's new wife.

JERRY

Right. I'd have known that.

STEVE

When you called. You'd have recognized my voice. Old Steve's voice.

JERRY

Steve.

STEVE

I guess she'll be ready in a minute. If there's one thing about Doris, she's punctual.

JERRY

Steve.

STEVE

Do you want me to go call her? Maybe she doesn't know you're here.

JERRY

She knows I'm here, Steve. She let me in.

STEVE

No, she didn't. You rang the bell and pushed.

JERRY

Well, when I pushed she was pulling.

STEVE

*(At the bar, Steve takes the newspaper, begins unfolding it and refolding it neatly.)* So you push and Doris pulls, is that it?

JERRY

Yeah, I guess you could say that's what happens. Give and take. *(Pause.)* She says you're not very good at that, Steve.

STEVE

At give and take. Maybe I just can't get the rhythm right. It is a matter of rhythm, isn't it? *(Continues to fold, very meticulously.)* I said, is it a matter of rhythm? *(Rhythmically begins waving the folded paper in the air.)* Give and take. Up and down. In and out.

JERRY

Now wait a minute.

STEVE

*(Moves elegantly around the stage, waving the newspaper.)* To and fro. Round and about. You know, there's something very symmetrical about it all. I'll bet it's...it's beautiful.

JERRY

God, Steve.

STEVE

*(He has danced over to Jerry and waves the newspaper around Jerry's head.)* Jerry and Doris.

JERRY

*(Parrying a blow with his arm.)* Think about it, Steve. Think about it. You're the one who wanted the ecosystem. Everything in balance.

STEVE

And we're all a part of it, Jerry, all a part of it. *(Feinting at Jerry's head with each item.)* Raccoons, vultures, fieldmice, paramecia...

JERRY

C'mon, Steve, that thing's got flies all over it.

STEVE

...big green bluebottle flies. *(Almost catches Steve on the side of the head with the flat of the paper.)* Or any of a number of fifteen thousand fly species found in North America. The larvae begin metamorphosis in a moist, nurturing environment, rotting meat for example, or even the internal organs of other living animals. *(Jerry has recoiled, come out of his chair, and backed away from Steve. Steve, however, hands Jerry the paper and returns to the bar for another. He holds up the headline for Jerry to see.)*

Embattled Nixon Resigns. *He continues speaking as he circles the room, climbing the ladder, flattening fresh flies. He returns to Jerry and they duel, Steve thrusting with the Nixon paper, Jerry parrying with the Lusitania.)*

Once out of maggotry, they take their familiar bodily forms. They buzz, they light, they leave specks. They polish their little wrists together. Some feed on fruit *(thrust)*, some on blood *(thrust)*, some on shit *(thrust for a solid hit on the side of Jerry's face)*.

JERRY

Jesus! *(He pushes Steve away and throws his paper down.)*

STEVE

*(Goes to the bar and gets their drinks. Brings the beer to Jerry, who pushes Steve away again.)* That's a real face full you've got there. Let's bring Doris in to clean you up. *(Moves toward the door, upper left.)*

JERRY

No, you don't. *(He has his handkerchief out.)* I'm not seeing Doris like this.

STEVE

No, I don't suppose you should. I don't think she's here anyway. Was her car outside?

JERRY

I don't know. What does she drive?

STEVE

Oh, a Metropolitan, I think.

JERRY

*(Returning to his chair.)* Well, there was no Metropolitan out there, I'll tell you that.  
*(Pause.)* A Rambler, maybe.

STEVE

*(Returns to his seat. Puts the drinks on the table.)* Yeah, good, I like that. She drives a Rambler. Late fifties maybe. A white Rambler with those vertical fins. Like a shark.

JERRY

*(Takes a drink of his beer.)* Florida plates.

STEVE

Yeah, Florida plates. No wonder the woman knows how to fish so well.

JERRY

What do you think, redhead, maybe?

STEVE

Definitely. A real one, if you know what I mean.

JERRY

I know. I know what you mean. Steve.

STEVE

Yeah, Jerry?

JERRY

Put that music on, will you?

STEVE

Music?

JERRY

Yeah, the flute thing. That flute thing.

STEVE

Yeah, sure, Jerry, sure. Here we go.

*(He reaches for the remote control, flicks it at the stereo, puts it back on the table. Steve and Jerry put their heads back to listen.)*

*Blackout*