

THE LIBRARY DUETS III: MOSQUITOES

(The stage is dark. Sounds of two women, Lou and Sam, entering through the library window.)

LOU

Ouch.

SAM

Keep it down. What's wrong?

(They whisper.)

LOU

Nothing. I think I cut myself. Ouch. Cut my finger. Some broken glass.

SAM

You mean through your gloves? You cut yourself through your gloves?

LOU

I don't know. It's too dark. Maybe if I can't see it, it doesn't matter.

SAM

Just don't leave blood everywhere. Here's the flashlight.

LOU

(She switches on the flashlight and examines her hand.) What does it matter about leaving blood? I thought fingerprints were the problem.

SAM

Not any more. They can trace your DNA from anything you leave behind. Blood, saliva, semen.

LOU

I'll be careful. Besides, I never heard of them doing that. Maybe in the future sometime.

SAM

God, Lou, don't you ever read the papers?

LOU

Well, yeah, you know, casting notices.

SAM

Yeah, I know, auditions. Are you through with that light? Let me see it. *(She takes the flashlight and aims it around the room.)* Let's get this done and get going.

LOU

I'm going to sit down until we know what we're doing. *(She sits in a chair, then jumps up.)* OH!

SAM

(Yelling.) What are you doing? Turn that off!

LOU

I don't know how. I didn't do anything. Wait, what's this?

(Sam comes over with her flashlight.)

SAM

It's a goddam remote control. *(Pushing buttons.)* Where's the off button?

LOU

(Continuing to shout.) It's just getting louder!

SAM

OK, there! There! There! *(She aims in different directions.)* Where do you point this thing?

LOU

Over there, over there!

(Sam aims at the bookcases and pinches the control. They both sigh with relief and pause a few moments to listen.)

(Normal voice.) Thank God. *(Whispering.)* Thank God.

SAM

(Normal voice.) I don't think it matters any more how we talk. Do you?

LOU

No, I guess not. Do you think we can turn on the lights?

SAM

We may as well. After that noise we can probably turn on anything we like. Look for the switch.

(They search.)

LOU

I wouldn't call it noise exactly. I thought you liked the flute.

SAM

It's not a flute when it's that loud. It's a siren. *(She finds the light switch.)* OK, good.

(The light comes on. Lou and Sam are dressed in dark pants and sweaters, with cheekbones blackened.)

Let's do some reconnoitering.

(She sits in an armchair and lights a cigarette, providing her own tiny ashtray.)

What've we got here?

LOU

(Exploring the room.) I don't know, Sam. *(Lowering her voice.)* Do you think it's OK to use your name?

SAM

I'm not too worried; most homes aren't wired.

LOU

I thought you said there'd be paintings. These hammered brass platter things look a little heavy.

SAM

Yeah, they're kind of hard to roll up, too. What about those books? Anything interesting over there? Incunabula, maybe?

LOU

Talk English, Sam, please. This is hard enough.

SAM

Old books. Really old books. You know, movable type. God, look at all that leather.

LOU

Don't you think books are too heavy? Besides, how do we decide which ones...

SAM

Yeah, I know. Damn, those paintings should be here. Frank was sure.

LOU

When was the last time Frank was in here? Maybe they sold the paintings. Maybe they donated them somewhere. A tax deduction.

SAM

They're in the house. I can practically smell the linseed oil. *(She rises and moves toward a door behind the bar.)* We just have to go through all the rooms. Methodically.

LOU

You said this would be easy.

SAM

What's wrong, are you working too hard? You should be having fun.

LOU

I'm still bleeding. Do you have a ...

SAM

(Trying the door.) It's locked. The stupid door is locked. They go off with a window broken, a window that slides right up, and they lock the door to the rest of the house. But the doorknob turns; God, they've padlocked us in.

LOU

So we know the paintings are in there.

SAM

We don't *know* that the paintings are anywhere. After all, we've never seen any paintings. I doubt if Frank even knew what he was talking about. The fuck.

LOU

Maybe we should just get out of here. My finger's still...

SAM

(*Goes back to her chair.*) Now, wait. Let's not move too fast. Let's see what's here. There's the stereo...

LOU

But we don't have anybody to buy it. You said we only have an art, you know, fence. God, that word sounds funny. Fence, barbed wire fence, picket fence, split rail fence...

SAM

First of fence.

LOU

Stop it. Do you think there're any bandaids around here?

SAM

God, are you still bleeding everywhere? Can't you just keep wiping it off?

LOU

(*Looking behind the bar.*) No, Sam, I can't risk an infection. I need my hands for that job next week.

SAM

That job. What was it again, Desdemona, Gabler?

LOU

Don't, Sam.

SAM

No, wait, the Palmolive lady! Dishsoap. Lots of closeups. The satin skin of Lou's domestic hands.

LOU

It's still acting; it's still a job.

SAM

A callback isn't a job. If a callback was a job you wouldn't be doing *this*. (*She's relaxing in the chair, her head back.*)

LOU

I've got a steady job and I'm here, aren't I?

SAM

Of course. Bellhop.

LOU

Desk clerk.

SAM

Right, you swore you'd never live off tips. Bellhop, waitress. The actor's nightmare: stiffed by some fat guy with a cigar in the no-smoking section.

LOU

You can waitress if you want; I don't have to...

SAM

I thought you told me "waitress" wasn't a verb. "Wait," you said. Just "wait."

LOU

(*Still behind the bar.*) There's nothing back here but dusty glasses and old newspapers. I guess I could tear off some newspaper. There's some old used pieces of scotch tape.

(*Lou takes off her gloves. She begins tearing off newspaper and wrapping her finger. Suddenly, though, she stops, tenses, and stares at the phone. Sam doesn't change her relaxed posture for a moment, but she finally starts to rise from the chair.*)

SAM

I'll get it. *(She moves toward the phone.)*

LOU

What do you mean? You can't answer somebody else's phone. Not somebody that you're...

SAM

Relax, Lou, I hate to hear a phone ring. *(She picks it up.)* Yeah?

Yeah?

Yeah, we got in, does it sound like we're still in the driveway?

Yeah.

No.

Yeah.

LOU

(Whispering and heading for Sam and the phone. She still clutches the newspaper.) What's going on? Who is it?

SAM

Hang on. *(To Lou.)* Hey, I'm trying to talk here. I'll be off in a second.

(Lou paces.)

Yeah, yeah.

No.

No, I said yeah.

I don't think so.

Yeah, I think so.

Do you think?

No.

No.

No.

No.

Okay. good.

(She hangs up.)

They're coming over.

LOU

What!? Who? Who's coming over? Jesus Christ, Sam.

SAM

Don't worry, it's only Frank.

LOU

Only Frank? You said "they."

SAM

Well, yeah. They're both coming.

LOU

Both who?

SAM

You know. Frank. And Doris.

LOU

Who the hell is Doris? I'm getting out of here.

SAM

Wait, now, relax. It's only Doris.

LOU

(Panic level rises.) And Frank. God, he'll slice his head on that glass, they'll get DNA all over the place...

SAM

Lou, for Christ's sake, don't worry. He's got a key.

LOU

(With increasing panic.) A key! If he's got a key, how come we had to...

(Sam rips the newspaper out of Lou's hand and draws it back. Lou pulls away.)

SAM

For God's sake, Lou. It's only Frank. Do you want to blow this whole thing?

LOU

(Subdued.) What whole thing? What is this, anyway? Frank...Doris...

SAM

It's Frank and Doris, Lou. It's only Frank and Doris. They can't believe it about the paintings.

LOU

About the paintings?

SAM

Yeah, and they agree; these hammered brass platter things aren't worth the trouble.

LOU

They're not?

SAM

And he doesn't know anybody who'll buy the stereo. Besides, he's right. We have bigger fish to fry.

LOU

Frank said that?

SAM

Yeah. So they're bringing a crowbar. They want us to do the rest of the house.

LOU

I thought you said he had a key. Why do we need a crowbar?

SAM

(During this and the next speeches, both Sam and Lou begin to swat themselves, unselfconsciously, on their arms and the backs of their necks. The swatting frequency gradually increases.)

Think about it, Lou. He parks the Rambler on the street. They get out and slam their doors like nothing's wrong, bam, bam. They walk quickly up to the front door, the crowbar hidden under Frank's coat. He opens the door. The house is dark, but Frank knows where all the switches are. He and Doris glide quietly down the Oriental runner along the hall, avoiding the boards that squeak...

LOU

I thought we didn't have to worry about noise.

SAM

They don't take time to examine the other rooms; they move quietly and quickly to the library door...

LOU

I don't like this; I don't like this at all.

SAM

Frank examines the latch. *(Swats herself.)* Like us he's wearing gloves. *(Swat.)* He lifts the crowbar and pushes it, slides it, under the padlock. *(Swat.)* He uses leverage, not force. *(Swat.)* He leans, that's all it takes. *(Swat, swat, swat.)* Goddam.

LOU

(Also swatting.) Mosquitoes.

SAM

(Swatting.) Sons of bitches.

LOU

Aren't they're females?

SAM

Females?

LOU

The ones that bite, aren't they...

SAM

(Still swatting.) Sons of bitches!

LOU

So why does Frank have to break the lock...?

SAM

He's not breaking the lock; he's pulling the latch out of the door.

LOU

Why does he have to pull out the latch? Why can't we climb back out the window and come in the front door.

SAM

(Incredulous.) Climb in the front door?

LOU

Come in the front door. Walk. Like Frank and Delores. Just walk in, for Christ's sake.

SAM

For Christ's sake? For Christ's sake? And what are we supposed to look like? Black sweaters, black grease; we're groping the walls and you're bleeding all over the light switches, dripping on the Oriental runner?

LOU

(Examining her finger.) I think it's about stanced.

SAM

Stanced. God, I'm glad you're getting it good and stanced. And you want to know why, for Christ's sake, we can't climb in the front door. *(Swatting herself.)* Bastard. Bastard. Bastard.

LOU

Yeah, I want to know why we can't climb in the front door.

SAM

You don't understand anything, do you? You live in that stupid fantasy theater world of yours, your elbows on that fleabag front desk at work, leaning over, cuing yourself to learn lines you'll never get to recite until somebody a lot better than you gets the runs one Sunday matinee.

LOU

(Calmer than ever.) I want to know about the front door. Just tell me about the front door. Why can't we go in?

SAM

I'll tell you something, Lou. All the world is not a stage; it's a goddam, a goddam *(looking around)* library. With goddam hammered brass platters.

LOU

(Heading for the window.) I'm going in the front door. You can come if you want.

SAM

(Calmer.) Well, you can't.

LOU

Why not, Sam?

SAM

Because of the window, Lou. We need the window. They need to identify the point of break-in.

LOU

We've already *broken* in.

SAM

The window was broken before we got here. That's how the mosquitoes got in. And now we're providing all their little nutrients. Sweat, your blood, *our* blood. We've already changed the whole ecosystem in *this* room. But once we smear DNA through the rest of the house they'll know we had a key. They'll know about Frank.

LOU

All right, so it's like this. (*Getting into the spirit.*) Frank comes. Frank and Darlene. They close the Rambler doors, bam, bam. Frank keeps a crowbar stiff under his coat, just like Darlene wants. They open the front door like they own the place, the porch light glints off Frank's shiny...

SAM

The bulb's gone, the porch light's off.

LOU

...They find all the right switches, after all, Frank's the guy who sold the house. They glide down the Oriental runner. They don't squeak. He pulls out the latch and hands us the art. Impressionism.

SAM

Expressionism.

LOU

Abstract. Frank pushes the nails of the latch back into place. He and Donna turn. They kiss. They move back, unswitching, unsqueaking, wiping where necessary. Turning, pulling, watching, backing, turning, stepping. Bam. Bam.

SAM

Bam. Bam. So now we wait. (*Sinks into a chair.*)

LOU

(*Pacing along the bookcase, she begins unwrapping the newspaper from around her finger. She pulls off the paper bandage and stops. She examines her finger.*)

(*Overacting*) "Yet here's a spot. What, will these hands ne'er be clean?"

SAM

Try some of that Palmolive dishsoap at your job next week. (*She has picked up the newspaper and a pencil to work on the puzzle.*)

LOU

"Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!"

SAM

(Intent on the puzzle.) Sing it out, Lou. Make it hurt.

LOU

"To bed, to bed! there's knocking at the gate."

SAM

(Buried in the puzzle.) Don't worry, Lou. I told you Frank had his own key.

LOU

(To Sam) "Come, come, come, come, give me your hand. *(Pause, then slowly.)* What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed...." Sam, I want to be in bed.

SAM

What's done cannot be undone, Lou. Just sit tight; enjoy yourself. Check out those platters. *(Lou comes around and sits despondently in the other chair. Sam continues with her puzzle.)* "Hired killer." Four letters, begins and ends with "O."

LOU

God, Sam, oh God, Sam, oh God.

SAM

"German diver." Five letters. Starts with "U."

LOU

(Startled.) Wait. Did you hear that? A Rambler?

SAM

Nothing there, Lou. Nothing there. "Itinerant soothsayer." Coupla y's.

LOU

(Excitement rising.) It stopped, Sam. It stopped outside. They cut the engine!

SAM

Calm down, Lou. Keep the peace. "Arboreal..."

LOU

(Out of the chair.) Wait, listen for the doors.

SAM

(Folding the newspaper, rising.) I said keep it down, Lou.

LOU

(Almost hysterical.) Bam! *(Pause.)* BAM!

SAM

(Swats Lou hard on the face with the newspaper; pauses.) Bam.

(Lou falls back into the chair with her hand to her face.)

I think I need to tell you something, Lou. I need to tell you something before you get us both in a lot of trouble.

LOU

Aren't we already *in* a lot of trouble?

SAM

No, Lou. We're just sitting here trying to finish up a crossword puzzle. Just a couple of gals with some up's and down's.

LOU

Across and down's. Don't you mean *across* and down's?

SAM

Now, hang on Lou. *(Lifts herself out of the chair, starts downstage.)* You know that telephone call? That call we got? I got to tell you something about that call.

LOU

Yeah, Frank. Frank's call.

SAM

Yeah, Frank's call. But, Lou, that wasn't even Frank on the phone.

LOU

It wasn't?

SAM

No, of course not; why would Frank call?

LOU

No Frank? (*Comes down to face Sam.*) What about Denise?

SAM

It's Doris, Lou, Doris. But just forget there even *is* a Doris.

LOU

Then who was that? Who was that on the phone?

SAM

Nothing, Lou. Just a wrong number. Happens all the time.

LOU

(*Moves to the library door as if she hears something.*) But the front door, don't you hear the front door? It just closed!

SAM

(*Increasingly cold and calm.*) It's an old house, Lou. Lots of noises.

LOU

(*Increasingly agitated.*) And somebody's talking, somebody's out there kissing. Don't you hear them?

SAM

From what *I* hear, Lou, you need to go out the same way you came in.

LOU

You just don't want me in on this, this caper anymore. You think just because I cut my hand...

SAM

(Moving in on Lou, her voice rising.) Come on, Lou, let's just clear out of here. Out the window. You first. I'll grab some books.

LOU

(Backing against the door.) I'm not going out that window. I'll never see you again once I go out the window. *(Listens.)* Wait, they're turning on switches.

SAM

(Angry.) Let's move, all right? Now come on.

LOU

They're gliding down the hall. They're squeaking.

SAM

(Grabbing Lou's shoulders.) That's enough, Lou. We're getting out of here. Now!

LOU

(Starting to laugh with relief as she fights off Sam and listens at the door.) There's something hard against the door. He's pushing under the latch. Frank! Frank!

(She waits, then slowly all the tension drains from her body. She leans her head against the door. After a long pause, she slaps the back of her neck. Sam has backed away but now comes and grips Lou gently by the shoulders.)

I think I just want to go to bed.

SAM

(Calming her.) I know you do. We'll get you home. Out the window and through the woods we'll go. *(Begins walking her slowly toward the window.)*

LOU

It's not that we didn't try. It's not that we didn't wait.

SAM

We did all that we could. They couldn't ask for anything more.

LOU

Frank and Doris?

SAM

They couldn't ask for anything more.

LOU

It's just the blood, you know. I've probably lost too much blood.

SAM

We've both lost a lot of blood. All these mosquitoes.

LOU

It's this awful broken window. Somebody ought to fix that thing. *(She climbs out the window.)*

SAM

(With a last look around.) Goddam broken window. Somebody should.

Blackout