

# THE SHOCK OF RECOGNITION

JACK  
HERB  
DOROTHY  
PAWLING

JACK. I want to say, "Hello. You're sick of seeing bizarre, way-out problems of men who aren't men and women who aren't women. Here you are!"

HERB. This is your life! Right down to your bare ass and pathetic—

JACK. Herb, you don't want to do this play! *(He heads for his overcoat and starts to put it on.)*

HERB. Take it easy. Have you thought of the . . . uh . . . problem of casting . . . of auditioning for this part if Hank doesn't play it? I mean, actors are used to being turned down because they're too short or too tall. But to be turned down because their equipment is not ridiculous enough.

JACK. You're so damned prudish, you won't even call it by its right name . . . all these euphemisms. . . . Equipment. . . . Thing. . . .

HERB. What would you like me to call it?

JACK. The technical word . . . the correct word . . . is penis.

HERB. If you go around calling it that, I understand why you think of it as pathetic and ridiculous. It's a ridiculous and belittling name. You call it what you want to call it, and I'll call it what I want to call it. But I've got to tell you something . . . I called it what I did partly because of you.

JACK. What do you mean?

HERB. All the years I've known you, I still find myself apologizing when I use a dirty word in front of you.

JACK. Oh, come on.

HERB. It's the truth. There's something about you. I always find myself saying "Sorry" . . . "Excuse it." . . . And that's another reason I think you're wrong to do this. The public doesn't see you as that kind of writer.

JACK. I'm sorry as hell I've been inhibiting you all these years, Herb. That's one of the most insulting things anyone has ever said to me.

HERB. I can't help it. It's true. Just something about you.

JACK. Would you care to explain that?

HERB. *(At the intercom.)* Dorothy?

DOROTHY. *(On the intercom.)* Yes, Mr. Miller.

HERB. Will you step in a minute? *(To Jack.)* You met her, didn't you?

JACK. *(Puzzled as to what this is all about.)* When I came in, yes.

HERB. She's a Bennington girl doing her three months' stint of

learning about real life. (*Dorothy enters.*) Dorothy, you know Mr. Barnstable. . . . (*To Jack.*) She's a great fan of yours. (*Dorothy is embarrassed.*) She played in one of your plays at college.

DOROTHY. Oh, Mr. Miller. Really!

JACK. (*Trying to be pleasant.*) Which one?

DOROTHY. Oh, I was terrible!

JACK. I'm sure you weren't.

DOROTHY. (*Insistent.*) I was! I was just horrible!

JACK. What part?

DOROTHY. If I told you, you'd drop dead right on the spot. Just awful!

HERB. Dorothy, tell me something. You read Mr. Barnstable's play?

DOROTHY. Yes.

HERB. You liked it?

DOROTHY. (*Beams on Jack.*) Oh, yes, I did.

HERB. You read the stage directions?

DOROTHY. Well . . . yes.

HERB. The one in the beginning where the man comes out of the bathroom naked. . . . You see, she's blushing just from my reading the stage directions.

DOROTHY. I wasn't blushing.

HERB. You were. Mr. Barnstable here has the idea he actually wants the man to come out naked in that scene. . . . (*Dorothy giggles.*) You see, deeper blushes.

DOROTHY. (*Giggling and angry.*) I'm not blushing.

HERB. Now here's a broad-minded educated girl. . . . Her mind accepts the idea, but her soul blushes.

DOROTHY. (*Put out.*) Oh, Mr. Miller. I'm not blushing.

HERB. Okay. Would you like to pay your six-ninety to see a naked man onstage?

DOROTHY. (*Confused, she giggles.*) It's not a fair question.

HERB. Why not?

DOROTHY. Well, it just isn't.

HERB. Sounds like you got some kind of conflict going there. You would like to see him, but you don't want to admit it.

DOROTHY. Oh, no.

HERB. Do women get a boot out of seeing naked men?

DOROTHY. Oh, Mr. Miller.

HERB. Do they or don't they? (*Dorothy squirms.*) Do you . . . or don't you?

DOROTHY. Mr. Miller! (*She heads for the door, L.*)

HERB. (*To Jack.*) She's an incompetent witness. She's never seen a naked man.

DOROTHY. (*Stops.*) Mr. Miller!

HERB. Oh, then you have?

DOROTHY. You certainly don't expect a person to answer that.

HERB. All right, go out and pull yourself together . . . I just wanted to demonstrate to our playwright here what even the idea of a naked man does to you.

DOROTHY. That's not fair.

HERB. There go your matinées. . . .

JACK. Nonsense. I gave this to my grandmother to read, and her only comment was, "Let me know when it opens and I'll be there with my opera glasses." . . . Women are bored with this respectability which red-blooded but prudish men have forced on them. . . . They want to be let in on the joke.

HERB. Dorothy, do you find a man's sexual equipment ridiculous and pathetic?

DOROTHY. Mr. Miller! (*She runs out gasping and in confusion.*)

HERB. Do you think she meant "yes" or "no"?

JACK. You're a cruel bastard. That's a cheap way of getting your kicks.

HERB. She's kind of cute, isn't she?

JACK. Getting yourself all worked up, talking about the great Forbidden. That's what I'm driving at.

HERB. I'm sorry if I didn't keep it on a high intellectual plane. . . . But people just aren't going to. A baby . . . a naked male boy, age two . . . they'll goo-goo over, blush a little and say "Isn't it cute?" But by age three it's already indecent.

JACK. (*Good-naturedly annoyed.*) You insist on thinking of it as sexy.

HERB. And you insist on pretending we're in a laboratory where everyone is going to be so high-minded. Look, we'll get the designer to do the set so that the bathroom is downstage . . . and there's this piece of furniture just below it . . . and he comes out just above it . . . and he's covered to just below his belly button. But we'll know he's naked, because she says, "For God's sake, put something on."

JACK. You can hear a man's wife saying that?

HERB. Yes.

JACK. What would her motive be?

HERB. She just wants him to put something on.

JACK. Come on, Herb . . . you've called me often enough on motivation. . . . It would mean that the thing is some kind of monstrosity frightening to the eye . . . or that she's prudish and doesn't like her husband appearing naked in front of her. Neither of these things is true of my couple. . . . You see, Herb. . . .

HERB. Look, you got a lovely, sensitive play here, except for this one moment.

JACK. This one moment is what makes the whole play real. . . . Look, people go to European movies, or art movies . . . not because of art but because of Life. They know there's some chance that the story will break through to the absurdities and truth of life. . . . You want to know a scene I've got in my notebooks that I've never seen? I've lived it, but I've never seen it. . . . A guy is giving a girl a snow job. He's almost got her where he wants her . . . and the timing is everything. He can't let a moment pass, or the mood change, or he's lost her. It's the end of the evening, and he's kissing her and fondling her . . . and she's smiling "yes" but telling him to run along home like a good boy. The only trouble is that this guy is running a race with his bladder. . . . And he's finally got to go, and he's lost it. . . . Didn't that ever happen to you? (*Herb gives him a look and turns away.*) Now that's real life. . . . But when are we gonna see that scene in an American movie or in the American theatre? I feel like going to the edge of the stage, like Mary Martin in *Peter Pan* . . . and saying to the audience . . . "Do you believe in life as it is lived? . . . Don't you want to see it?" I think they want to see the ironies, the paradoxes . . . the absurdities. . . . Hell, Life is a tragedy played by comedians. They know it. Let them see it on-stage.

HERB. Look, Jack, you know more about tone than I do. . . .

TONE. . . . You can't shift tone like that in a play.

JACK. You do it in life . . . at least in my house. One moment we're making love . . . the next minute we're wrangling about something . . . and then the dog gets excited and pees on the carpet . . . and we break up laughing.

HERB. That's your house! Your assumption is that what you ex-

perience in your house, they experience. I don't go around naked in my house. This is your assumption.

JACK. I would assume that at least in a man's bedroom and bathroom he goes naked occasionally. I don't walk around the living room or the kitchen, as a rule . . . I've done it a couple of times in the summer when the kids are away. It's okay. . . . Gave me a feeling. . . .

HERB. (*Flips on the intercom.*) Dorothy.

DOROTHY. (*Over the intercom.*) Yes, Mr. Miller?

HERB. Any actors out there?

DOROTHY. (*Over the intercom.*) Yes, Mr. Miller.

HERB. Send one in.

JACK. What's this all about?

HERB. If we're gonna get this show on the road, we're gonna have to start seeing actors. (*Jack takes off his coat.*)

DOROTHY. (*Enters from the door, L.*) Mr. Richard Pawling. (*He doesn't follow at once. She calls him.*) Mr. Pawling! (*Richard Pawling enters. He is thirty-five. He is overeager, self-explaining, and anxious. Dorothy exits.*)

HERB. (*Shaking hands.*) Hello, Mr. Pawling.

PAWLING. How do you do?

HERB. This is Mr. Jack Barnstable.

PAWLING. (*Awed and pleased.*) Oh. . . . (*Crosses to shake hands very appreciatively with Jack.*) How do you do, Mr. Barnstable. It's a pleasure. A *real* pleasure! I . . . uh . . . didn't really expect to be seen by anyone . . . I was just bringing some new pictures of myself around for your files.

HERB. That's all right, Mr. Pawling. Please sit down.

PAWLING. Thank you . . . I've got my hair long because I'm up for a part in a Western series . . . but I can cut that. . . . And the mustache is temporary . . . for a commercial. I'm a doctor, and I guess they feel it gives more dignity, you know. (*He rises.*) "One out of every two doctors recommends . . ." (*He laughs nervously and sits again.*) I . . . uh . . . worked for you once, Mr. Miller.

HERB. Oh?

PAWLING. About five years ago. I understudied Steiger. . . .

HERB. (*Not registering at all.*) Oh, yes.

PAWLING. (*There is awkward silence, as Jack watches Herb and Herb waits.*) Uh . . . what kind of part is it, if I may ask?

HERB. It's a very good part . . . the lead. (*Jack is aghast and goes to sit at one side of the room.*)

PAWLING. (*Worried that he is giving the wrong impression, he follows Jack.*) I can be taller . . . I don't have my elevator shoes on . . . Or shorter. I mean . . . I can pretty well adapt. The hair is dark now, but you may remember, Mr. Miller, it was blond when I worked for you last.

HERB. Oh, yes.

PAWLING. (*Going on nervously.*) I'm pretty well tanned up because of this Western . . . I told you . . . but if I stay away from the sunlamp for a couple of days . . . I . . . well . . . look more . . . intellectual, Mr. Barnstable . . . if that's what you're looking for. Also, I have my contact lenses in now, but I do have glasses, if that's closer to the image. (*He whips his glasses out and puts them on. He is thrown off balance by the two sets of lenses. After a moment, he takes them off.*) And, of course, I do have other clothes. . . . And my weight's variable . . . I mean, if you're looking for someone thinner.

HERB. Actually, we're looking for someone rather . . . well, someone who can look a little pathetic and ridiculous.

PAWLING. (*Without a moment's hesitation.*) That's me . . . I mean, put me in the right clothes . . . a little big for me . . . and I look like a scarecrow . . . I can shrink inside my clothes.

HERB. The question is, can you shrink inside your skin?

PAWLING. (*Looks from one to the other, smiling.*) I can if I think it. If I can think it, I can be it. . . . You see, here's my composites, the pictures I was leaving with the girl. (*Whips out a photo sheet and shows it to Herb at the desk.*) A doctor . . . a cowboy . . . a soldier . . . businessman . . . small-town grocer. . . . You can't notice it, probably, but I'm wearing a hairpiece . . . I look quite different without it. Do you want me to. . . . (*He makes a move to strip off the very obvious hairpiece.*)

HERB. No, no. You don't have any pictures of you in a bathing suit, do you?

PAWLING. No. I . . . uh. . . . When are you planning on doing the play?

HERB. No dates yet.

PAWLING. I could work out in a gym from now until then. I can put on quite a bit of muscle in a few months.

HERB. That wouldn't be necessary. "Ridiculous," I said.

PAWLING. Oh, yes. I forgot. Well, as I said, I *do* look ridiculous.  
HERB. Jack, why don't you fill Mr. Pawling in? Take over. After all, it is your idea.

JACK. I don't think Mr. Pawling is exactly the type.

PAWLING. (*Coming to Jack.*) I can look a lot younger. (*He "acts" younger.*)

JACK. It isn't that.

PAWLING. Or older. (*He slumps.*)

HERB. (*Egging Jack on.*) I think you owe it to Mr. Pawling to go into the part and the requirements. I mean, I don't think we should jump to any conclusion as to whether he's right or wrong. Particularly in this part, with its special requirements . . . I don't see how we can know until we've really seen Mr. Pawling.

PAWLING. Perhaps if I could read the script, I could come in looking more like . . . I mean, you know . . . dressed more for the part.

HERB. (*Seeing that Jack is not going to do anything.*) Well, Mr. Pawling . . . this is an unusual part. It's a husband, and. . .

PAWLING. Well, I've been married three times. (*He laughs nervously.*)

HERB. And in the opening scene, it's right after breakfast, and his wife's in bed, with the newspapers and coffee, and the husband is in the bathroom, which is adjacent to the bedroom . . . where the wife is lying in bed, having coffee, reading the papers. It's morning, you see, and she's having her morning coffee . . . and the husband is in the bathroom, and he's brushing his teeth, and the water's running . . . you know, while he's brushing his teeth . . . and she's talking to him. . . . Why are you smiling?

PAWLING. Well, I mean . . . that's a situation I know like the back of my hand. My wives . . . they could never get it through their heads that you can't hear when the water's running.

HERB. That's his first line. He turns off the water, and he comes out and says, "Honey, you know I can't hear you when the water's running."

PAWLING. Well, you've got every husband with you from then on . . . I didn't say "honey," but I remember distinctly saying "For Christ's sake, how many times do I have to tell you I can't hear you when the goddamned water's running?" (*Turns to Jack.*) Excuse me, Mr. Barnstable.

JACK. (*Burning.*) Why did you say "excuse me" to me?