Group Therapy: A Play

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GROUP THERAPY

A Play

by

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B.A. May 1993, The University of Virginia

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ABSTRACT

GROUP THERAPY

Eleanor L. Earl
Old Dominion University, 1994
Director: Dr. Thomas J. Socha

Group Therapy is a modern drama set in Portsmouth, Virginia, a small Naval town which is part of a larger area called Hampton Roads. Hampton Roads is best known for its Naval shipyards, Naval bases, and historic landmarks. The year is 1994.

The play focuses on interpersonal communication in a setting that serves as a surrogate family. In the play, seven men and women from varied walks of life come together and share their most intimate joys and sorrows in group therapy. Together, with the assistance of a dedicated psychologist, they struggle to confront and overcome depression and anxiety.
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Chapter I

Author’s Notes

The Set

*Group Therapy* is a play that allows a great deal of directorial flexibility. The scenes that feature the group therapy sessions should be arranged in a semi-circle facing downstage. At no time should the chairs be situated in such a manner as to force lines to be delivered upstage. The audience completes the group therapy circle, which symbolizes their involvement in the group processes that take place during the play. This is why it is important that they are included in the dialogue onstage, and that the set of the play remain consistent throughout the production.

Each group member must have an assigned seat for each session. This is important for the exploration of proxemics within the group therapy setting. Detailed stage directions are provided regarding the exactitudes of the set.
Chapter II

Creative Project Statement

My creative project, a modern drama called Group Therapy, is the culmination of graduate work which focused on three areas of study: Theatre, Communication Studies, and English Literature. In addition, interviews with psychologists, laypersons, professionals, as well as outside reading, played a significant role in the development of the play.

In this work, the group therapy setting is used to examine some of the ills of society such as divorce, infidelity, abuse, and their impact on the lives of individuals within the group. The ways in which interpersonal communication takes place within an environment that encourages people to share their innermost feelings with strangers, are also considered. Each person takes a risk when disclosing information that would not normally be discussed. But the trust that develops over time in such a setting makes it less difficult for them to do so.

Initially, the group members present themselves in the manner that they want to be viewed by other members. This directly influences the way they communicate with each other and how much they are willing to share about themselves. Also, the way
people communicate depends a great deal upon the environment, and how comfortable they feel around others. I have explored the various ways people express their comfort or discomfort in Group Therapy, particularly via proxemics, the principles governing the ways in which group members use, arrange, and perceive physical space. In addition, much consideration has been given to the types of roles that group members take on upon entering therapy.

There are several types of role categories that are explored within the text. The roles that are taken on by each group member mirror those of the family of origin. Someone within the group becomes the organizer, caretaker, help-seeker, encourager, aggressor, recorder, et cetera (Benne and Sheats, 1948). Normally, each member takes on a role that is in keeping with his or her personality. These roles may change over the course of the therapy session. This is due to the fact that group members experience a number of changes as a result of introspection and the analysis of their relationship with others.

The cry for the return to family values, the cry to provide health care for all Americans, and the cry to end violence and drugs can be heard across the nation. American citizens are being pushed to a volatile point. The aforementioned environmental stressors are causing many people a great deal of mental and sometimes physical anguish. Stress, valium, depression, and prozac, have become household words. Depression, for instance, has become a term that people refer to loosely in American society. For example, “I’m so depressed,” someone would say, when
referring to having a bad day. However, both depression and anxiety are very serious illnesses. They can rob an individual of the desire to live, convince them that they are not a valuable human being, and drive them to experiment with alcohol and drugs in an effort to numb the hopelessness they feel. This is one of the many after-effects of the emotional wear and tear that many Americans endure. Despite these woes, Americans are fighting back. They are demanding explanations to unanswered questions.

A new genre of info-tainment has been developed to give the public what it wants. For example, radio and television talk shows provide their audiences, daily, with information on subjects that society often ignores. They provide forums for the discussion of sometimes taboo matters that would not ordinarily receive attention. These shows provide the audience with opinions from psychologists, medical doctors, attorneys, and other professionals at no cost. Not everyone can afford health care; therefore seeing a psychologist would be out of the question for many of the people who tune into these programs. For years, it has been the responsibility of the private sector to provide people who are not privileged to have medical insurance with services that meet their needs. Twelve-step programs, for example, are utilized to assist people with addictions to drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, and sex. Some doctors feel that these groups are the best alternative for people who lack the monetary means to attend private individual/group therapy sessions.
Various sources of information have been consulted to develop this play. I have taken two courses in English Literature. They were taken during the summer of 1994 in Oxford, England. The courses were offered by The Institute for Scholars in International Studies-Europe at Oxford University. While I was there I took two classes at the graduate level, earning twelve credits. The courses were The Modern Drama and The Contemporary Novel.

The Modern Drama course afforded me the opportunity to read and analyze plays by five twentieth century British and Irish playwrights: Oscar Wilde, Bernard Shaw, Samuel Beckett, Joe Orton, and Peter Shaffer. Our discussions covered the stylistic approaches, character development, cultural influences, and unconventionality of each play. I learned a great deal about the development of each of the plays by doing a considerable amount of outside reading in addition to the assigned readings which included, but were not limited to, essays written by the authors and their contemporaries. I would have to say that Peter Shaffer’s *Amadeus* and Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape* made strong impressions on me. In *Amadeus*, Shaffer’s use of the surreal juxtaposed against the realistic was riveting. I have attempted to apply this element to the construction of my play. *Krapp’s Last Tape* offered brilliant examples of the ways an emotion or a moment can be explored without a great many spoken lines. I also applied this element to my play.

The second course, The Contemporary Novel, focused on the development of post-war and current British novels. Several key aspects of the novel were addressed,
such as the spirit of experimentation with narrative style, structure and, technique; the insistence on a broader cultural representation; women’s writing and feminist issues, and post-modernist problems of self-definition and identity. The readings included works by six British authors: Muriel Spark, John Fowles, David Lodge, Jeanette Winterson, Julian Barnes, and Dr. Beryl Gilroy.

The one American Literature course that I took at Old Dominion University was Minority Literature. This course was intensive and provided an excellent introduction to the dilemma of minorities who reside in the United States. Acculturation, racism, and sexism were some points of discussion in the course. Group Therapy also explores these issues.

I have also taken a course called Family Communication. This course focused on the development and exploration of communication within the family. Nonverbal cues, environmental stressors, role categories, and interdependence are but a few of the topics that were covered. I explored many of these subjects in Group Therapy as well. This course has served as one of the primary influences on the writing of this play.

The Advanced Theatre Workshop has also provided me with extremely useful tools that were integral parts of the writing process. In this course, an examination of one primary text, Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman, led to various in-class projects that allowed exploration of sound, movement, rhythm, and space in relation to the play. I have injected the exploration of these elements into Group Therapy.
In this play, I have not tried to suggest that group therapy is the answer for everyone; rather I have offered an insider’s view of the processes that take place within the confines of the group therapy session. However, I do feel that support groups and group therapy can be beneficial. Neither is a place where one can go to receive all of the answers to life’s most difficult questions, but they are places where people with similar questions can ponder them together, and perhaps offer each other emotional support.

In summary, all of the graduate courses I have taken, including two Humanities courses, have contributed immensely to the development of this creative project. The interdisciplinary nature of my studies afforded me an excellent foundation upon which to develop a modern drama. I am hopeful that Group Therapy is a clear representation of the integration of each of my emphases.
APPENDIX
List of Characters

Dr. Malcom Thorogood
Christine Ross
Sue Chung
Anthony Brown
Brendon Whitmore, III
Matthew Clark
Jose Rodriguez
Vivian Alexander
Father John
Mr. Peter Chung
ACT I

Scene 1

(The time: October 1994, The place: Portsmouth, Virginia, at the Sunnyview Psychiatric Center. The scene opens with Dr. Thorogood, an African-American male of forty-six, seated in a meeting room at the Center. He stares pensively at an empty chair. It has a woman's blazer around it. Soft music is playing in the background. Brendon, a twenty-five-year-old white male, walks over to the doctor and places a comforting hand on his shoulder. They look at each other, then at the empty chair. They freeze.) Blackout. Music fades.

Enter Christine upstage center. She is dressed in all black. She sits in a chair that faces downstage. The stage is completely empty except for the one chair and the outline of a person's body that is downstage center of the chair. A large painting covers the entire upstage wall. It is vivid in color and bears the images of the group members and their doctor.

CHRISTINE:

As I sit here in my favorite chair, you remember,

The one with fuschia and purple stripes, and a

High back--I stare at hardwood floors and see my love. (pauses)

It is dead. Defunct.

You murdered my love and left it on my shiny floors
For me to look upon. How cruel of you!

Couldn't you have taken its remains away and discarded them?

Of course not, that is not your way of doing things.

It would have been a sign of decency. We couldn't have that.

Could we? *(She stoops beside the outline and examines it)*

It looks as though you murdered it with ease.

There are no signs of a struggle, but of course

It was not difficult for you to overpower my love.

I had imagined it to be invincible,

But you put it to shame. *(suddenly rising with anger)*

Now I know why I feel nothing!

My insides are numb with emptiness. I can never

Love again. You murdered my love!

You must pay for this heinous deed, and I swear you will

By the Diva Creed!

Anyone who violates, abuses, or kills a Diva's love must pay

With his life. And I swear that you will. *(She returns to the chair. The lights fade slowly until the red light that has been focused within the outline of the body is all that remains.)*

*Enter Sue Chung from stageleft.*
SUE:

(She is dressed in traditional Japanese attire. Traditional Japanese music plays serenely as she dances. She appears to be having difficulty with the dance, and begins to look uneasy. She looks around to see if anyone is watching her. The music changes to a contemporary, uptempo pop/hard rock American tune. She begins to dance exotically to the music, removing piece by piece of her traditional attire, which reveals the contemporary, bright American attire she is wearing underneath. She also lets her hair fall to her shoulders. This continues awhile until a Japanese man dressed in traditional attire appears onstage. At first she does not realize that her husband has discovered her. When she does, she falls to her knees begging for forgiveness in front of him as he stands above her.) Blackout.

Enter Anthony stageright.

ANTHONY:

(He enters the stage in a wheelchair, and rolls downstage center.)

I remember when I used to feel like I owned the world. Man, nobody could bring me down. I was well-respected, powerful, an insatiable lover, which all of my lady friends appreciated, (he laughs) but I lacked one thing--the sense to know when to mind my own business. (pauses) Now it's all lost! And for what?! Oh God, how many times have you listened to me complain about what I should've done? I know you're tired of listening to me, but I'm dying
inside. (pauses) I can't walk at all because of trying to help someone else. It's not fair! I mean, I had no idea that sponsoring a block party in the innercity would land me in this contraption. (He hits the side of the wheelchair) Why did it have to be me, God? Why? I haven't been the worst person on earth. I only wanted to give back to the community that gave me nothing--nothing but a hard way to go. Now look at me, and where are the punks who did it? The police say that they can't find them. That's a bunch of crap! They never looked. What does it matter to them if another black man gets his head blown off?!

"Let the niggas kill each other. What do we care? It'll save us the trouble."

(pauses) It's been a year now... What I wouldn't do to be able to run again, to... (A soft drumbeat is heard at a distance. Anthony looks as though something is happening to his legs. The sensation he feels is soothing. He smiles and rubs his legs. They become hot. He suddenly leaps from the wheelchair. The drumbeat has reached a rapid, frantic pace, and the lights are dimmed. Anthony commences to run around the entire stage as the drumbeat's volume and pace increase. He is overjoyed, but he suddenly feels unbearable pain in his legs. The drumbeat gradually slows. Anthony staggers towards the wheelchair. Upon reaching it, his legs give out on him completely. By this time the drumbeat has stopped, and Anthony collapses into the chair. The lights have returned to their brightness. Anthony looks towards heaven, then his legs, smiles, and exits stageleft.) Lights down. Painting removed.
Scene 2

[August 1994--Sunnyview Psychiatric Center.]

(There are seven chairs onstage in a semi-circle facing downstage. This is the first day of group therapy for seven of Dr. Thorogood's patients who suffer from varying degrees of depression and anxiety.)

Enter Christine, an African-American woman of twenty-six. She is well-dressed and carries a briefcase. She has an air of unconquerable confidence and sensuality.

CHRISTINE:

(She looks around the room, and glances at her watch) Well it looks as though I'm a bit early. (She crosses to stageleft and sits, pulling a book from her briefcase.)

Enter Brendon, a white British male of twenty-five, dressed in casual attire. He is carrying a portfolio and backpack. He walks into the room and sees Christine. She is reading a romance novel, and quickly hides the cover when she sees Brendon.

BRENDON:

Hello. Is this where the meeting for Dr. Thorogood's...uh...patients is being held?

CHRISTINE:

Why yes it is. (rising) My name is Christine. (She extends her hand for him to shake.) Ms. Christine Ross.

BRENDON: (clumsily dropping his backpack as he shakes her hand)
My name is Brendon Whitmore, III. It is a pleasure to make your
acquaintance. I guess we're the first people to arrive. *(He moves to stageright
and sits in the first chair.)*

**CHRISTINE:**

Yes, I guess we are. It doesn't bother me though. I'm normally ten to fifteen
minutes early wherever I go. *(pauses)* Some people believe in being
fashionably late, well I believe in being fashionably early! *(They both laugh.
She returns to her seat.)*

**BRENDON:**

I guess we both do. *(He takes a notepad and pen from his backpack.)* When I
came in, I noticed you were reading something. Might I ask what the name of
the book is?

**CHRISTINE:** *(nervously)*

Oh, this book? It's nothing really. No good at all. You wouldn't
want to read it. It's just a book that a friend of mine told me I just had to read.
*(rambling)* I'm really just reading it so I won't offend her. After all, when
someone gives you something to read, it would be unbelievably rude to just...

**BRENDON:** *(irritated)*

If you don't want to tell me the name of the book it's o.k. I was just
making conversation. *(He writes something into his notepad.)*

**CHRISTINE:** *(putting the book away)*
It's not that I don't want to tell you. . . *(She notices him writing on the notepad)*

What are you writing? Is it something about me?

**BRENDON:**

Why would you ask that?

**CHRISTINE:** *(furious)*

Well, I mean it just seems a little odd that you would write something down directly after I wouldn't tell you the name of my book.

**BRENDON:**

Look, I simply asked you about the stupid book, and you're trying to turn this into a major discussion. If you ask me, you need to be in the group therapy session for paranoid schizophrenics, not this one! *(Christine is flabbergasted.)* *(She is about to respond when two of the other patients enter the room. Silence fills the room.)*

*Enter Matthew, a white male of forty-four. He is very rugged and pensive. He sits one seat away to the left of Brendon. They exchange barely audible hellos. Vivian, a white woman of thirty who is obese, enters and sits directly beside Christine. She commences to stare at the floor. Suddenly they hear loud knocking and yelling offstage right. They try to ignore it, but the noise increases.*

**ANTHONY:** *(offstage)*

Would somebody open the door?! *(knocking)* Any day now! *(Matthew goes to open the door)*
Enter Anthony in a wheelchair.

Well hello. Hello! Hello! I'm here and I just want to say that I'm glad all of you extremely depressed people came out tonight. I'm the man with the plan who can rid you of all of your problems. I'm Doctor Feeeel Gooood!  

(They are in shock.) Yes sir, I can make you all the happiest folks in Virginny. Heck, I can do better than that--the whole world! I know you didn't think the man with the plan would be in a wheelchair my friends, but as they say... (pauses)

What do they say? Well forget what they say, I say...

MATTHEW: (interrupting)

Who are you?

ANTHONY:

My good sir, the question is... (suspiciously) Who are you?

MATTHEW: (approaching)

Look wise guy...

ANTHONY:

Now would you hit a man in a wheelchair? (with feigned weakness) A poor disabled man who can't stand up like a real man and defend himself?

(Matthew retreats and Anthony crosses to stageleft. He places himself directly to the left of Christine, who is sitting in the last chair. She appears to be horrified, and returns to reading her book, forgetting to hide the cover.)

ANTHONY: (noticing the cover)
Oh look everyone, the beautiful lady reads trashy romance novels. (laughing) I bet you have wonderful dreams about Fabio and the gang, huh?

CHRISTINE: (putting the book away)

You are disgusting! (Brendon writes on his notepad)

Enter Dr. Thorogood, an African-American male of forty-three who is very confident. He is carrying a briefcase. He takes a seat centerstage.

DR. THOROGOOD:

Good evening, everyone. I guess everybody's here? (looks round) No, we seem to be missing two people. (looks at his watch) I guess we can give them five minutes.

Enter Jose, a Puerto-Rican male of thirty-four. He is very handsome and speaks with a heavy Hispanic dialect. He sits beside Matthew. Sue Chung, a Japanese woman of thirty-seven, enters and sits beside Dr. Thorogood. She is dressed conservatively, and looks very sad.

Great, you're here. Let's get started. (He removes a notepad from his briefcase) First of all, I trust that each of you is here because you believe that there's hope. All of you are experiencing some type of emotional pain that has caused you to feel hopeless at times, but I'm so glad to see that you're willing to pick up the pieces and pursue a happy, well-adjusted life. (He passes a leaflet to everyone) Since this is the first meeting, I'd like to briefly address a few matters of business; then we'll spend the remainder of the hour acquainting
ourselves with one another. *(Christine fixes her make-up, Brendon writes something down, and Vivian wrings her hands while staring at the floor)* Has everyone gotten a copy? *(pause)* Well, you're looking at a contact sheet. My home telephone number, which is to be used only in case of an emergency, is listed as well as various crisis hotline numbers throughout the Hampton Roads area. Please make every effort to keep this list handy, but of course it's my hope that you won't ever have to use these numbers. They're just available in case you do.

**ANTHONY:**

Yeah, we know, Doc! Most of us have probably called all of these numbers before anyway. Heck I know most of the crisis hotline counselors on a first-name basis myself. *(he laughs)*

**DR. THOROGOOD:** *(amused)*

Well, Anthony, I'm glad you feel comfortable with this. Maybe you might not need to use them as much, as we progress... So as I was saying, feel free to call me. I want all of you to know from the onset that I plan to be very accessible. Are there any questions?... Now let's move on to the basic rules that we want to abide by when we meet each week... We only meet for an hour so it's important that we maximize every moment of our time together. So, for the next few weeks we'll have specific goals that we're going to set for the group as a whole and individually... I'd like each of you to relax if you haven't
already, and I want us to talk about the goals that we expect to reach in the next eleven weeks. . . On second thought, I think we should establish the rules for the group first, then we'll go back and discuss our goals. Would someone volunteer to write them down?

JOSE: (raising his hand)

I'd be glad to, Doctor.

DR. THOROGOOD:

Great Jose. . . (he hands him a notepad and pen, and sits) O.K, let's talk about the way we want to run this ship. Who's going to start?

MATTHEW: (hesitantly raising his hand)

I will. . . Well first of all, I think it's important that everybody respect each other. . . I mean, in the way we talk to each other. . . I've been in other groups like this, and sometimes you have those wise guy types (he looks at Anthony) with big mouths and a lot of wind, who feel they can talk to people in any way they want. Well I ain't havin' it! I get talked to like a dog enough on my job every day, so I'm not comin' here and gettin' disrespected too!

BRENDON:

I think you have a valid point there, chap. Those are my sentiments exactly. . .

No one has the right to come in here posing as someone we should all listen to just because he has the biggest mouth, and. . .

ANTHONY: (interrupting)
Doctor, I'm sorry for cutting in, but I feel that another rule should be activated right now! (looking at Matthew and Brendon) We need to demand that anyone who has a complaint against someone has to direct it to that person. They can't talk in circles and allude to a gripe! And I feel that those two (he points) are doing that right now. They're jumping on the poor, defenseless black guy!

MATTHEW:

That's a bunch of bull! Doctor before you came in, this man offended all of us with his loud, rude mouth! . . . He came in here like he was the Lord Jesus Christ himself returnin' for His people! Heck, he showed no respect for us, and definitely not for himself!

CHRISTINE:

Is this what I have to look forward to for the next few months?! If so, I may as well leave now. . . I didn't come here to hear a bunch of grown men fight! (she stands to leave)

DR. THOROGOOD: (blocking her)

Christine, please wait. We'll work this out. (She is obviously affected by him, and returns to her seat)

CHRISTINE: (flirting, The doctor is unmoved.)

All right Doctor, but I'm only doing it because you say so

DR. THOROGOOD: (sarcastically)
I can see we're off to a smashing start... Where were we? Oh yes,... For now I think we need to stick to setting rules, not throwing stones at anyone. I'm sure each of you gentlemen would like to forget your little tirades, and want to move on to more adult matters? I thought as much, so what other rules would you like to add to the list? (silence) Nothing else? Well I think a very important rule is that no one for any reason can disclose anything that we share in these meetings. I cannot stress the importance of confidentiality enough. Also, please don't feel like you have to raise your hand before you speak, we're all adults here, so just jump right in and test the water. Jose, can we have a recap of those rules?

JOSE: (eagerly)

Yes sir! The rules for the first meeting are as follows:

1. We must show each other respect in the way we speak to each other.
2. We must never act as though we are in a position to tell everyone here what to do. We're all in this together... I added that part.
3. We must never tell anyone about what we discuss in our meetings. That goes for friends and family members too.
4. We do not have to raise our hands before we speak. That's it!

DR. THOROGOOD:

Boy, was that impressive or what? Thanks again, Jose. (Jose smiles) Did everyone commit those to memory? I hope so. Now let's briefly pinpoint some
of our goals. You can suggest some of your personal goals or those for the group.

**CHRISTINE:** *(boldly)*

Well my main objective, if you will, is to gain a better understanding of myself. I want to know why I repeat the same mistakes over and over again. I also want to understand people better. Why they hurt me? Why am I always so depressed when everyone tells me I have it made? . . . Everyone here probably wants to know the same thing. *(some voice their agreement)* I think our main goal as a group and as individuals is to get answers to some of the questions that have been weighing us down.

**DR. THOROGOOD:** *(obviously moved)*

Thank you, Christine. I think you said it all. . . That's what you're all here for, to find some answers to some of life's most difficult questions. I'm merely here to assist you in reaching that goal, and you have the necessary tools to begin the work. *(pause)* Now's a good time for you to introduce yourselves. Just tell us a little something about yourself--your occupation, age, et cetera. Brendon let's start with you and work our way around the room. Oh, and feel free to stand up and walk around when you talk--I know it's difficult to sit in these hard chairs for so long. *(laughter)*

**BRENDON:**

Hello my name is Brendon Whitmore, III. I'm twenty-five years of age, single,
and pursuing a B.A. in Studio Art at Old Dominion University. I'll graduate this spring if I can stay focused. . . uhm. . . I suppose you can detect an accent. . . I'm from merry old London, England. . . I've been in America since 1990, and I'm looking forward to return. . . *(abandoning the thought)* That's it.

**DR. THOROGOOD:**

Welcome, Brendon. I'm glad you decided to come.

**MATTHEW:** *(standing)*

My name is Matthew Clark, and I've been workin' as a pipefitter at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard for the last twenty-four years of my life, and I'm forty-nine. . . I'm straight out of Rocky Mount, North Carolina. *(proudly)* We lived a simple life there. Yes sir, those were the good old days. . . Anyway, *(he stands behind his chair)* this is one of the many groups that I've been to over the last year or so. . . You see my wife of twenty-five years dumped me last year for some young uptown punk! *(choking up)* It just wasn't right! . . . I haven't been the same since then. I can't seem to get my life back on track. . . I. . . I just want to feel alive again. *(he sits)*

**DR. THOROGOOD:**

Well, Matthew. We're going to see what we can do about that.

**JOSE:**

My name is Jose Rodriguez, and I was voted businessman of the year in 1993, and I'm in my early thirties. . . I think I'm going through the "mid-life crisis"
right now, and it's making my life miserable. My wife just isn't supportive at. . .

(pause) I'm really hoping group therapy will help me out of the mess I'm in, or
I may not make it to see 1995. (he looks down)

DR. THOROGOOD: (encouragingly)

You have to hang around until 1995 Jose, or you'll miss the award ceremony.

I'm sure they're already planning for you . . O.K. it's my turn. What should I
tell you?

ANTHONY: (joking)

Don't hold out on us!

DR. THOROGOOD: (standing)

I'm Dr. Malcolm Thorogood, a resident psychologist at Sunnyview. I'm
forty-six, married, and the proud father of three girls. . . Oh yes, and most
importantly, I'm a lifelong fan of the Cavaliers, who by the way will kick Navy's
butt this weekend! (laughter) My undergraduate and graduate degrees were
taken from The University of Virginia, so you can understand my devotion. . .
Anyway, I counsel all of you on a one-on-one basis, but I felt that a group such
as this would help each of you. . . I'm sorry, I inadvertently changed the subject
from me to you. (He sits.)

ANTHONY:

I think that was intentional.
DR. THOROGOOD:

No, it was simply force of habit... I think that was all I wanted to say about myself. Next.

SUE: (mechanically)

My name is Mrs. Sue Chung, and I'm a partner with one of the largest law firms in the area. I've been with them for a little over three years, and I'm thirty-three years of age... (hesitating) That's all I have to say. (She sits. There is a long pause.)

DR. THOROGOOD:

Thank you, Sue. (There is a long pause.)

VIVIAN: (Realizes Sue is finished.)

Oh, I didn't know you were finished. I'm so sorry everyone. (She wrings her hands.) My name is Vivian Alexander, I'm fat, thirty-years-old, I have a fifteen-year-old son, I'm a cashier at a gas station, and I've never been married. My daddy has always said that I'm not very smart and my mother's never objected. I guess that makes it true... I still live with them too, so that means I get to hear that a lot. I tried to leave once, and I ended up on welfare with my son... My parents let us come back after a year or two, but things were worse... Daddy said no daughter of his was going to stay on welfare like all of those lazy black folk (she realizes blacks are in the room) Oh, I'm sorry! I'm so stupid, I shouldn't have said that. (she begins to cry) I was just repeating what my
daddy said. He talks about everyone who's not white that way. I don't feel that way about you people. . .

**DR. THOROGOOD:** *(offering her a handkerchief)*

We believe you, Vivian. Would you like to go to the ladies room?

**VIVIAN:** *(pulling herself together)*

Yes, I would like that. . . I'm so sorry I. . .

**DR. THOROGOOD:**

It's through that door and down the hall on your left. *(she exits stageleft)* O.K., Christine.

**CHRISTINE:** *(with great dignity)*

My name is Christine Ross, Ph.D., and I am neither on welfare, nor am I an unwed mother. I am the proud owner of a several coveted businesses, and I'm only twenty-seven years of age! And one thing I detest most is racism and the people who perpetuate it! *(pause)* My, wasn't that interesting? . . . Forgive me if I tarry here just a bit longer, but I'm sure this little exhibition is still very much on our minds. . . I would just like to set the record straight for all of you who may subscribe to similar beliefs about black people. . . *(standing)* First of all, there are actually just as many whites on welfare as there are blacks. *(walking around the room)* Now I'm sure this doesn't seem feasible to you, but that's because the general public is constantly fed the results of study after study that portray blacks as a large group of lazy beggars! How can we be the source of
every economic and social problem in this country when we make up such a
minority of it? I'm sick and tired of turning on the television, listening to the
radio, and going to the movies, only to see my people mocked! . . . (standing
behind her chair) I apologize if I've been verbose, but I hope. . . (frustrated,
she sits) Nothing!

Enter Vivian. (She sits.)

ANTHONY: (applauding Christine)

Boy, if I could give you a standing ovation I certainly would! First impressions
are truly misleading sometimes. . . Well, I'm last and maybe least too
(laughs). . . My name is Anthony "Dream lover" Brown. I'm thirty-eight,
divorced, lovable, brilliant, fashionable, eclectic, religious, handsome,
muscular, and I could go on and on, but I won't due to a lack of time. I haven't
worked since my mishap, but I'm hoping to get enough courage. . . to get
enough strength to move back to Philadelphia. That's where I was born and
raised. . . I owned a construction company, and in my spare time I sponsored
various projects to help kids in the innercity until. . . a stray bullet shattered my
spine, and my dreams. . . I . . . (Anthony continues talking as the lights fade,
and music plays softly in the background.) Blackout. Music fades.

END OF ACT I
ACT II

Scene 1

(Brendon sits center stage facing stageright. An easel is in front of him. He is painting. When he speaks he does not address the audience, rather he speaks aloud to himself. The group painting is in place.)

BRENDON:

Depressed? Who me? . . . Sorry, you’ve got the wrong chap. Why on earth would I be depressed? . . . I’m lonely, my last three girlfriends cheated on me, I’m in debt and can’t see my way out of it, and oh let’s not forget--I was orphaned at the age of thirteen. (reflecting) Mom and dad, they were the best. . . . And just like that (He snaps his fingers) they were gone. . . . When I’m in England, after all these years, I still can’t bare to drive down Great Clarendon Street--I have flashbacks of the big truck and. . . (standing) No! No! I don’t want to remember! (He resumes painting, but in a rage.) That doesn’t work! (He wipes away some of the paint.) That doesn’t work either! Nothing works! Nothing! (He knocks over the easel, pauses, and looks downstage right in the direction a desk. He approaches it, opens the drawer, removes a gun, then pauses. He places the gun to his temple.) Blackout.

VIVIAN:

(Vivian is seated downstage center at a table. She faces upstage. The table is covered with various types of food. Vivian hears voices from her past and
present in her mind. The voices are heard over an intercom.)

**VOICE #1:** (male voice)

Vivian, stop it! . . . Stop crying--I didn’t hit you that hard!

**VOICE #2:** (male voice)

You and your brother act like animals. *(She slowly turns and faces the audience. She examines the food, eating a small amount.)*

**VOICE #3:** (male voice)

You’re what? . . . Pregnant?! *(A loud slap and scream are heard.)* That’ll teach you to go sleepin’ around! *(She begins to eat large portions of food faster. The voices increase in volume and intensity.)*

**VOICE #4:** (male voice)

Marry you? . . . Are you crazy, how do I know if the baby’s really mine?

**VOICE #5:** (male voice)

I told you to get that illegitimate child and you out of my house! *(She eats more food.)*

**VOICE #6:** (female voice)

I’m sorry Vivian, I can’t stop your father from putting you out.

**VOICE #7:** (female voice)

I’m sorry Ms. Alexander, you just don’t have enough education for this job. . .

**VOICE #8:** (female voice)

You don’t have any type of medical insurance? . . . Well I’m sorry, we can’t see
you. *(Vivian has opened every bag on the table and eaten from them. She is crying.)*

**VOICE #9**: *(female voice)*

Vivian, you look like you’ve gained fifty pounds since I last saw you!...

*(laughing)* And that was just last year! *(The laugh continues until it stops when the lights go down. Vivian lowers her head with one quick movement. The lights simultaneously blackout.)* Painting removed.

*[Time: September 1994  Place: The Center.]*

*(The scene opens with the group therapy session in progress. A chorus of laughter is heard.)*

**DR. THOROGOOD**: *(standing)*

O.K. you guys *(laughing)* that's enough. No more knock, knock jokes. But, Anthony, I've got to hand it to you; that was one of your better jokes.

**JOSE**: *(laughing)*

Come on, Doctor, you know they say laughter is good for the soul... One more joke won't hurt.

**DR. THOROGOOD**: All right, just one more, but this time I want someone who hasn't told a joke since we've been meeting. *(He looks directly at Vivian, then Sue. They both look away.)* What about... Brendon?!
BRENDON:

Sorry, I don't have a joke for you, but I do have something I'd like to share with you. *(He reaches into his portfolio and pulls out a stack of reproductions of a drawing. He stands and looks at Dr. Thorogood)* May I?

DR. THOROGOOD: *(sitting)*

The floor is yours.

BRENDON:

Well, we've been meeting for little over a month now, and I'm sure that during the course of this time some of you have noticed that I take a lot of notes each week... A few of you have gone so far as to question me about my scribbling... Tonight I'm going to show you what I've been working on... But first, I'd like to say that I believe we're all getting better. This whole therapy thing hasn't been as bad as I thought it would be... Well anyway, I'm fumbling for words to express the way I feel—So why don't I say it the best way I know how?... I hope you like it. I put together a drawing that reflects some of the private things about ourselves we've shared. *(joking)* Of course some of you have told us more than we ever wanted to know... So here it is, an abstract drawing by Brendon Whitmore, III, titled "Group Therapy." *(He holds the drawing up and they applaud and cheer.)* Wait, thank you. I'm so glad you like it, and I'd like to give each of you a print of it. *(He hands one to each of them.)* Are there any questions about it?
DR. THOROGOOD: (examining the picture)

First of all, this is incredible work... I had a feeling that you were this
talented... Could you explain the various images? How did you approach it?

BRENDON:

I'll answer your last question first... I drew ideas for the drawing from the
notes I've been taking. Every week I've written down anything I've found
interesting about each person in the group... You know, their idiosyncrasies,
et cetera. Then I started creating images for the words, and I decided to
arrange them in a circle to represent our family--that's what we are. I mean,
we've definitely become interdependent and in spite of the fact that we fight like
we're enemies, we always come back--just like a family... And your family
accepts you for who you are. They love you when no one else will... That's it!
I just wanted you to have something to remember me by when you're all old.

Cheers! (he sits.)

DR. THOROGOOD:

Again, thank you, Brendon. I'm sure everyone is as deeply touched as I am...

This provides a great segue into our little discussion tonight... (standing) For
a little over a month now, we've been setting, exploring, defining, and
redefining our group and individual goals. Many of you have shared the
changes in your life that have taken place in such a short time, and others have
complained of stagnation... And that's fine, because we've got to acknowledge
when it's time to take a different approach. . . This brings us to what I'd like to begin tonight. . . You know, one of the first steps to recovery from a debilitating illness is to confront the issues and people who are contributing to your condition. In other words, I feel you're all ready to begin the process of identifying the Whos? Whats? and Whys? of your problems. Because our ultimate goal is to equip you with the ammunition you need to confront the negative people and things in your life. (pause) (enthusiastically) So let's have a volunteer. Someone who's ready to explore new territory! (Vivian timidly raises her hand.) Wonderful Vivian! . . . I'd like you to sit in this chair. (He places a chair centerstage, facing stageright. She sits.) And I want you to know that people who care about you are surrounding you. . . remember Brendon's drawing? . . . If at any point you feel as though you want to stop, just let me know. . . We're here only for you right now. You're our top priority. O.K.? (She happily agrees.) Vivian, I want you to begin by telling us how things have been with your brother Chris and your parents lately. Has anything significant taken place since last week? (He sits in a chair adjacent to her.)

VIVIAN: (wringing her hands, etc.)

Last Thursday my brother Chris tried to overdose on cocaine. . . (outbursts of shock come from the group.) And I was the one who found him (choking up) He. . . He was so pale. . . I thought he was. . . dead. (pause) He's doing a little better now that the doctors at Maryview Hospital are looking after him.
Maybe this... maybe this time will be the last time. *(She wipes away tears.)*

**DR. THOROGOOD:** *(interjecting)*

Vivian, I want you to close your eyes, and tell us how it made you feel when you walked in and found your brother. Where was he? What emotions did you feel? *(She obeys.)*

**VIVIAN:**

He was in his bedroom... It's beside my son's room in the back of the house... He was just lying there with blood coming out of his mouth and nose, and...

*(trembling)* I... I felt scared... And angry!

**DR. THOROGOOD:** *(urging her on)*

All right, you're doing fine, Vivian... Isn't that right, everybody? *(They agree.)* So you were angry with whom? or what?

**VIVIAN:** *(Her hands are in tight fists at her sides.)*

At them!

**DR. THOROGOOD:** *(urgently)*

Who, Vivian!? Who?!

**VIVIAN:**

My parents!... It's all their fault. *(She starts shouting and crying.)* It's all their fault! *(She opens her eyes, and hangs her head, exasperated. Brendan rises and offers her a Kleenex.)*
BRENDON:

It's going to be all right, Viv. *(He returns to his seat.)*

DR. THOROGOOD:

Vivian, would you like to tell your parents how you feel?... *(She responds, yes.)* Well, we can do it here, tonight. *(She looks at him confused.)* Christine and... Matthew, I need your help. Would you come forward? Bring your chairs with you. *(Dr. Thorogood arranges the two additional chairs adjacent to Vivian, and facing stageleft. He removes his chair.)* You can have a seat... *(He stands upstage of them.)* What are your parents' names?

VIVIAN: *(sniffling)*

George and Emily.

DR. THOROGOOD:

Now, Vivian, I want you to imagine that Christine is no longer Christine, but your mother. And Matthew is no longer Matthew, but your father. Can you do that? *(She agrees.)* Christine and Matthew, I want you to respond to Vivian in the way she's told us her parents respond to her whenever she tries to confront them... And address each other by your new names--Emily and George... You can start when you're ready. *(Long pause)*

MATTHEW: *(clearing his throat.)*

Vivian, you asked your mom and me to sit down and listen to you, but you haven't said one blasted thing! What's wrong with you?!... I've got better
things to do than to sit here lookin' at your stupid face! . . . I sure hope it's some
good news—like you, your son, and that good for nothin' brother of yours are
movin' out of my house! . . . And don't think I'm goin' to bail you out like I did
last time! All of you can go to . . .

CHRISTINE: *(interrupting)*

Now, George, stop it! Please!

MATTHEW: *(in her face)*

Don't you talk to me that way, woman! Who do you think you are?! I pay the
bills in this house. . . This is my kingdom, and don't you forget it, or I'll kick
you out with them! . . . *(He grabs Christine's arm.)* Then you'll all be on
welfare, and I'll finally have the house to myself, and I can move one of my
mistresses in here to replace you!

VIVIAN: *(shouting)*

Stop it! . . . Stop it! . . . You listen to me! *(pointing to Matthew)* I'm sick and
tired of this! I can't take it anymore! *(catches her breath)*

CHRISTINE: *(to Vivian)*

You can't take what anymore?! What?!

VIVIAN:

The fighting! The hate! . . . My brother's in the hospital right now, barely alive,
and you two don't care! *(pause)* Dad, I'm tired. . . I'm tired of you calling us
bad names, hitting mama, cheating on her in public, coming home stinkin'
drunk, and all the other stuff you've been dishin' out!

MATTHEW: (threateningly)

Missy, there's more where that . . .

VIVIAN: (cutting him off)

Shut up! I'm talking now! (She stands.) You've gone too far this time, and I'm not letting you ruin my life anymore! . . . You're evil. That's what you are--of the Devil! . . . All you've ever done is sit back and criticize everything and everybody around you!

MATTHEW: (standing, moves closer to Vivian)

You better take all of that back right now, or I'll . . .

VIVIAN: (interrupting)

Or you'll what?! Hit me? . . . (Her anger increases.) Hit me like you do mama?! Stomp me with your heavy, steeltoe work boots until I can't breathe?! . . . (emphatically) Is that what you'll do, Daddy?!

MATTHEW: (to Christine)

Emily, I demand you to say somethin' to your daughter right now!

VIVIAN:

Oh yeah, go ahead and scare Mama . . . make her take your side, that's what you always do! . . . And she falls for it every time! . . . (mimicking her mother) "Yes George, whatever you say . . . You've got every right to beat the kids until they're blue in the face! . . . To tell Vivian how ugly and stupid she is! . . . To
tell Chris his real father never wanted him, so why should his stepfather care if he lives or dies?!”  *(Vivian falls to her knees, sobbing uncontrollably. She swings at Matthew's legs violently. Dr. Thorogood walks over, stoops down beside Vivian and restrains her. Brendon places a comforting hand on her back. Christine takes her in her arms, and cries with her. The others gradually join in a close, multi-leveled circle around Vivian. Music plays softly in the background, and the lights fade slowly.)*

**Scene 2**

*(Matthew sits centerstage at a table facing downstage. He is talking on the telephone with his doctor, who has just run a battery of tests on him. He is receiving the results. The group painting is in place.)*

**MATTHEW:**

So doctor what is it?! . . . Am I crazy or something? . . . *(pause)* Are you absolutely sure there’s nothin’ medically wrong with me? *(listens)* Wait a minute! What about the numbness and tinglin’ in my hands and feet, the headaches, the times when I can hardly breathe. . . *(with urgency)* The times my chest hurts so bad I feel like I’m dyin’? . . . What about all of that? . . . *(listens)* No? Well, what is it then? What causes it?! Is there a name for it? *(listens)* It’s called psycho what? . . . *(listens)* a psychosomatic illness. . . caused by severe depression and anxiety? . . . Are you tellin’ me all of the
doctors I’ve gone to have been for nothin’?! . . . I’ve been to cardiologists, radiologists, neurologists, and every doctor in between--and this is caused by depression and anxiety?! . . . Well is there some type of medicine or somethin’ you can give me? . . . (listens) You want me to go to therapy? When? . . . (The lights fade. Matthew is heard talking until the lights are completely down.)

(Jose is seated downstage facing stageleft. He is in a confession booth. A clergyman is seated on the other side of the booth.)

JOSE:

Father, I have sinned, (He crosses himself) I didn’t really commit the act, but I’ve done so in my heart. . .

FATHER JOHN:

Go on my son.

JOSE:

It’s been hard keeping everything in perspective since I’ve been in the U.S. . . . It’s nothing like Puerto Rico. . . Most of the time, I don’t feel truly welcome here. . . I don’t mean to sound ungrateful, but all you hear everyone complaining about is the fact that Hispanics are coming here taking their jobs from them. They don’t want us to come to America. . . What’s wrong with us coming here? They did it a few hundred years ago. They came and took land from the Native Americans, but did anybody go around demanding that they keep them out? . . . (frustrated) I just don’t get it! What’s wrong with us?!
We’re good people! . . . We know what they say about us. . . They say we’re mean, thieves, rapists, ignorant. . . I can’t believe people can actually buy into those stereotypes! . . . Everybody, no matter what race, has people in it who have evil in them and will do wrong. . . It’s not because of their ethnicity!

Thank God everyone doesn’t feel that way, or I wouldn’t have a job right now. . . (pause) Don’t misunderstand me, Father; I love this country--it’s mine now. There are more jobs here, better homes, opportunities are abundant, but. . . for some reason my wife and I are growing apart--She’s different now--I am too--but I had to change. . . I had to fit into an environment where I wasn’t really wanted in order to keep a job--I’ve had to do it. . . But her. . . She’s just become lazy! She won’t cook for me anymore and never spends time with the children--All she wants to do is shop. . . Oh, she doesn’t have a problem spending my money, but if I ask her to do anything else I’m out of line in her opinion! . . . I tell you, she’s been poisoned by those American friends she has. . . They’re filling her with ideas that don’t apply to her. . . She doesn’t understand that there are a different set of rules for us. . . (pause) Father John, I don’t know if I have the courage to tell you this, but. . . I . . .

FATHER JOHN:

You’ve done well expressing yourself. . . Continue.

JOSE: (bowing his head)

I’ve been thinking of having an affair. . . I know it’s wrong. . . I’d never
forgive myself! . . . I have everything I want materially--four new cars, a beautiful home. . . But my wife and I lost each other somewhere between the dreams we had in Puerto Rico and success in America. . . (Lights fade.)

Blackout. Painting removed.

[Time: September 1994, One week later.]

(The group therapy session is in progress.)

DR. THOROGOOD:

Vivian, how do you feel about what took place last week? Did you feel that it helped you in any way? Do you think you could start considering the possibility of confronting your parents?

VIVIAN:

To tell you the truth, I don't know how I feel about it. . . I didn't think about it much. . . I can't right now. (She looks down.)

MATTHEW:

I think she's tryin' to say that last week was a little hard on her. . . She really hasn't had the chance to get into all those emotions that came up. . . I think she's thought about it more than she's lettin' on though.

DR. THOROGOOD:

Is that right, Vivian? (She reluctantly agrees.) I think that qualifies as progress. . . At least now we have you looking in the direction of confronting them. Before now, it would never have been an option. . . (to the group) What
did the rest of you think about the role playing exercise?

ANTHONY: (humorously)

For a minute there, I thought Vivian was going to beat the crap out of Matthew if he didn't shut his mouth. . . She really surprised me with her anger. I wouldn't have guessed she could be intimidating.

CHRISTINE:

Yes, she was definitely into the moment--we all were. I really surprised myself. I would never have taken that type of treatment from any man, but as her mother I had to stand there and take it. . . It was very unsettling. . . At some point I really felt that I had become her mother--that was a scary. What about you, Matthew?

MATTHEW:

Basically, I felt the same way. . . I went into it knowin' that I wanted Vivian to have a breakthrough. But honestly, I had no way of knowin' that it would get that deep. I mean. . . well no offense, Vivian, but you haven't been very willin' to take risks. . . that definitely added to the shock factor.

JOSE: (jumping in)

I really felt afraid for her the entire time. . . I didn't know if she could handle all of that. . . that pushing from Matthew. . . I knew they were role playing, but it seemed so real. It was like watching a private family argument without them knowing we were right there--witnessing everything.
BRENDON:

You're right Jose.

MATTHEW:

It reminded me of the many times I was on the other side... I was in the chair
tellin' my ex-wife how badly she hurt me when she walked away... *(He
reflects in silence.)*

DR. THOROGOOD:

So, is everyone saying that role playing has definite benefits?

MATTHEW:

Personally, I think it's all right... Like I said, I've done it before... I was
in an inpatient program not too long ago... we would spend hours doin' this
stuff... I haven't mentioned it to you guys before, but I used to have a drug
problem. That's what landed me there... It's somethin' I can't undo, but I beat
it...

ANTHONY: *(teasing)*

We have something in common after all Matthew--*(seriously)* I was an addict
too--you're not alone... I still attend those Twelve-Step meetings every week
that God gives me breath... They keep me alive.

MATTHEW: *(to Anthony)*

Keep livin' the dream man--one day at a time.

ANTHONY: *(saluting Matthew)*
You, too. (pause)

**DR. THOROGOOD:**

Thanks for sharing that gentlemen... Now, since everyone seems to agree, I'd like to continue the role playing exercise this evening. Would someone like to volunteer? (He looks around the room.) Sue, what about you?

**SUE:** (coldly)

No, I have nothing to say.

**MATTHEW:** (irritated)

Doctor, forgive me for buttin' in, but I couldn't help noticin' that Sue hasn't said a whole lot for all the weeks we've been meetin', and I've got a problem with that.

**DR. THOROGOOD:**

Don't tell me how you feel, Matthew. Tell Sue.

**MATTHEW:** (cautiously)

Sue, would you mind lookin' at me for a minute?... (she does.) I know you heard what I just said, but I'll say it again... I don't feel that you've opened up to us at all... You've got this huge wall all around you, and none of us can get over it... We're all tryin' to help each other... We care about whatever's causin' you so much pain... Would you let us over the wall?

**BRENDON:**

Matthew isn't the only one who feels that way--I do too.
VIVIAN: *(timidly)*

If it helps any, the role play stuff did help clear my head a little... I left with a little less pressure on my chest that night, too... Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that I'm ready to confront my parents anytime soon, just that--I never would've thought of doing it in this lifetime if it wasn't for last week... *(pause)*

I guess I'm saying you should try it.

ANTHONY:

Wait a minute, people. I know there are benefits to this, but we don't have the right to tell her what to do... It has to be her choice... Heck, it might not even work for her anyway...

BRENDON: *(irritated)*

Must you always be the voice of negativity?

ANTHONY: *(defensively)*

I'm the voice of reality... You just don't know it when you hear it... What's your problem with me, Brendon? You've been acting really funny with me since the first day of group... Do you have a problem with black people or something? Is that it? *(taunting)* Is the little British boy a closet racist?

BRENDON: *(defensively)*

No, I'm not! Is that all you talk about?!

CHRISTINE: *(angrily)*

Anthony, why are you trying to start something? You know that's absurd.
Brendon’s not like that!

ANTHONY:

How do you know? Have you gotten to know him as well as you’ve gotten to know every other man?

CHRISTINE: (enraged)

I refuse to dignify that with a response! . . . (probing) Anthony, what’s the real problem with you? . . . You come here week after week causing trouble!
We’re all trying to get along, but you. . . you ruin everything! . . . You know what I think--I think you’re a loud mouth, pathetic excuse for a human being!
And on top of that you’re insecure! (sarcastically) Isn’t that right Anthony?

ANTHONY: (irritated)

How did the subject switch from him (pointing to Brendon) to me? That’s what I want to know?

MATTHEW:

Anthony, you really didn’t have to say what you did. . . Brendon’s not a racist or nothin’--anybody can see that. Christine’s right, you’ve got a problem. You sound like the racist to me.

ANTHONY:

Oh, that’s just perfect. Me, the oppressed, is accused of being the oppressor. . .

(laughing loudly) Give me a break!

BRENDON: (to Anthony)
I’d like to give you something all right.

**DR. THOROGOOD:** *(firmly)*

O.K., that’s enough. We’ve gotten completely off track.

**CHRISTINE:**

We most certainly have, Doctor.

**DR. THOROGOOD:**

I think it’s good that you all are candid in these sessions, but let’s not get carried away. When we get to the point where we’re insulting each other unnecessarily, we need to take a deep breath and start over again.

**MATTHEW:**

What were we talking about before this started?

**VIVIAN:** *(timidly)*

The benefits of role playing.

**MATTHEW:**

Yeah, that’s right. We need to stay on the topic... or we won’t accomplish anything.

**DR. THOROGOOD:**

I think we got off track when someone asked if this exercise would work or not... Oh yes, Anthony felt that role playing may not work for Sue.

**JOSE:**

Maybe Anthony has a point this time... I mean, it’s not like Vivian has made
any drastic improvements since she did it last week. . . I'm not minimizing her efforts, but whose to say we should force Sue into it? . . . I know I'm not ready to do it myself.

**DR. THOROGOOD:** *(sternly)*

One thing I think you're all overlooking is that everything worth having takes a lot of time and effort to get. . . *(standing)* This isn't a magical factory where you can churn out immediate results at the wave of a wand. . . It takes time, and each small victory gives you the courage to keep plugging away at it. . . You'll have to continue doing it after we've ended our meetings. . . The process is ongoing. . . The techniques you gain here will teach you how to cope with life's crises--And don't be mistaken, you will have problems to face in the future, but you'll be better equipped to keep control over your emotions and the situation. *(Long pause)*

**SUE:** *(blurting it out)*

All right. . . I'll do it. . . I do have something I need help with. . . I've been facing something really devastating all alone for a long time.

**DR. THOROGOOD:**

Good, Sue. . . Who do you need to talk to about the problem? Your husband perhaps?

**SUE:** *(looking down)*

Yes, my husband Peter.
DR. THOROGOOD:

All right. . . Jose would you mind playing Sue's husband?

JOSE: *(shocked)*

Uh... why sure. If that's what Sue wants.

DR. THOROGOOD: *(to Sue)*

Is it O.K. with you?

SUE:

Yes.

JOSE: *(moving to centerstage)*

What do I have to do?

DR. THOROGOOD:

Exactly what Christine and Matthew did last week with Vivian. . . Just respond to Sue the way you think her husband would. . . Remember the few details we do know about him. . . He doesn't really care for her newfound independence and individuality. He hasn't been particularly happy in the U.S., and he still practices traditional Japanese customs, unlike Sue.

JOSE:

I'm ready. *(Dr. Thorogood places two chairs downstage center. The chairs face each other. Sue and Jose sit.)*

DR. THOROGOOD:

I may jump in occasionally, but don't lose your concentration. . . Sue, whenever
you're ready. *(There is a long pause.)*

**JOSE:**

Sue, you said you wanted to discuss something with me, what is it? . . . I have to finish fixing one of the boards on the deck before it gets dark. . . Could this wait until later? *(The lights begin to dim.)*

**SUE:**

Jose. . . I mean, Peter, I have to tell you something that is going to devastate you, and I hope that someday you'll be able to forgive me. . . *(becoming emotional)* I love you. . . I know I haven't told you that in years, but I do.

**JOSE:**

Of course I know. . . Sue, what is this about? *(Jose is obviously overplaying her husband's stuffiness.)*

**SUE:**

You may not think that I do after I tell you what I've done.

**DR. THOROGOOD:** *(reassuring)*

Sue, you're doing just fine. . . Take a moment before going on--just breathe. . . Now, whenever you're ready I want you to tell your husband what's causing you so much pain. *(Sue hangs her head and wipes a tear from her face. Jose takes her by the hand.)*

**SUE:**

Peter, I haven't been entirely honest with you about a lot of things. . .
(searching for words) I haven't been very happy in our marriage for a while now, but I kept telling myself it would pass... I didn't want to admit that we were heading in two different directions from when we first came to America together... I've grown to love this culture--I've embraced it as my own, but you--you remain the same... (pauses) Don't misunderstand me, I love Japan, and I'm proud to be a Japanese woman, but I can't keep living a lie!...

JOSE: (pressing)

What is it that you've done that makes you think I'll be so angry? (All lights have gone down onstage, except for the lights on Sue and Jose.)

SUE:

Remember when you were determined for us to have a baby about two years ago?... And it all came to an end when I had miscarried while you were away on business?... Well, I lied to you Peter... God help me, but I lied. (She begins to cry.)

JOSE: (bewildered and angry)

What do you mean, you lied? About what?

SUE: (blurting it out)

I didn't miscarry (pause) I had an abortion! (Jose leaps to his feet and walks downstage right. He stands with his back to her. Sue remains seated, gathering herself.) That's not all, I've done worse to you!

JOSE: (walking over to her)
I don't want to hear anymore!... You're lying! It's not true! *(he walks away.)*

*Sue follows.)*

**SUE:** *(aggressively)*

Yes it's true, and you have to listen to me before it's too late!... I... I won't be around to answer your questions about...

**JOSE:** *(interrupting)*

What are you talking about?... Oh you're leaving me too?!

**SUE:**

No... Yes!.. I'm not leaving the way you think I am... Look at me! *(She grabs him by the arm and forces him to stand face to face with her.)* I'm dying Peter... *(sobbing)* I have AIDS!...

**JOSE:** *(stunned)*

What... What are you talking about, Sue? *(Jose is no longer in character.)* *He feels empathy for Sue. He takes her into his arms.* Come on Sue,... It's all right... *(She tries to gather herself)* forget about being in character now, talk to me! How... Are you sure?...

**SUE:**

Yes... Yes!.. *(pauses)* I've shamed my husband, my family, my country, Jose!... I'm a common whore! I deserve to die!...

**JOSE:**

Stop it!... No, don't say that... It's not your fault!
SUE:

It is... If I hadn't been so easily seduced, I would have a future.

JOSE:

What are you saying?

SUE:

I'm telling you I had an affair a year ago with one of the partners in the firm... We thought we were in love, but he told me he couldn't divorce his wife--he'd lose everything... I told him I'd wait forever if I had to... Well, things cooled off between us. He left the firm, and I buried myself in my work... Then four months ago, out of the blue, he asks to meet me... I did, and... and he told me he was dying of AIDS, and that I... I more than likely had it, too... I was tested, and he was right. Oh Jose, how can I face my husband?! How can I tell him, when I've probably passed it on to him too?!... (with chilling determination) I'll die first... I swear I will... (Jose, at a loss for words, takes Sue into his arms. They freeze. Music plays softly as the lights fade. When the lights are completely down, a blinding white light, "death light," quickly flashes on and off Sue and Jose.) Blackout. Music fades.

END OF ACT II
ACT III

(The lights are dim onstage, but highlight the group painting. Dr. Thorogood is standing downstage center. A spotlight is on him.)

DR. THOROGOOD: (to the audience)

The other day a young woman interviewed me for the Virginian-Pilot & Ledger-Star--She asked me some questions that I hadn't really thought about in awhile. . . One question she asked me was what role I felt therapy plays in our society today? She wanted to know if I felt that it's become commercialized.--Would it really benefit people to seek therapy? (He walks down the stairs to the audiences level. Spotlight follows.) Well, I told her the truth. . . I believe therapy has its definite benefits, but those benefits, as to what type, are contingent upon the person involved. The same results cannot be expected for everyone. . . I also told her that people are seeking answers in society more than ever because of the many societal problems that are presented on a daily basis. . . Crime, unemployment, sickness, drugs, guns, divorce, abortion--and I could go on and on--are some of the issues that put people on the edge of sanity. . . They can either fall over that edge, or they can take a few steps back and try to address their problems.--Therapy is simply a way of helping people sort through potentially overwhelming circumstances. . . It can help them evaluate themselves and those they surround themselves with, and
make changes where necessary. . . And I know everyone can’t afford a private therapist, but there are other programs available that provide a service free of charge for people to have the chance to talk about what’s bothering them.-- That’s what we as a society, need to do more of--talk--but not just talk--we need to listen to each other too. . . (pause) Well, it’s been an interesting twelve weeks. . . I hope you all feel you’ve grown. . . Thanks for coming, and remember, there’s hope for everyone, but you’ve got to fight for it!

(He walks down the main aisle of the theatre through the rear exit door. As he exits the lights slowly fade, the spotlight is removed, and the other lights fade slowly when he has left the theatre.) Curtain. The painting is removed.

(The Time: October 1994 Place: The Center, on the last day of group therapy. Everyone is present except Sue.)

CHRISTINE: (holding a teddy bear)

Dr. Thorogood, this seems a little strange. . . I don’t mean to be difficult, but I just don’t see how holding this bear is supposed to make me say something profound. . .

DR. THOROGOOD:

It’s like I explained earlier--We’re not expecting you to say or do anything in particular; you’re just supposed to hold the bear and share who or what it reminds you of. . . It’s that simple.
BRENDON:

It’s really a little liberating, Christine… Come on, it’s our last night together. Loosen up.

CHRISTINE:

Just give me a moment to really get into this. (She holds the bear close to her and closes her eyes. She pauses.) This bear reminds me of someone I really cared about… Someone very special…

DR. THOROGOOD:

Who was that person, Christine? Tell us about him or her. Why was this person so special?

CHRISTINE:

His name is Steven… He’s a wonderful young man who attended the same undergraduate university with me… What makes him special?… I guess it would have to be the way he treated me… I never felt more beautiful and respected than when I was with him… He never hurt me the way… the way all of the others have… (Her eyes open. Suddenly she feels extremely uncomfortable. She places the bear in her lap.) That’s it. That’s who the bear reminds me of.

DR. THOROGOOD:

Just a minute--Let’s talk about the other people who’ve hurt you… You’ve told us about the married men, but I sense there’s still something you’re holding
inside--something you won’t share. . . Why not leave here tonight, your last
night with the group, with this weight off of you? Release it, Christine. . . Who
is it?

CHRISTINE:

I don’t want to discuss it. . . it’s too painful. . . (choking up) Anyway, he’s out
of my life now--forever.

BRENDON:

I think you want to tell us, but you’re afraid.

CHRISTINE: (irritated)

Believe what you want! . . . (calming) Maybe I just don’t want to. . . Look, the
final story is that I loved someone with all my heart, and he dropped me.

That’s it. . . Two months after he broke it off, he was married. . . I couldn’t
believe it! He cheated on me, the diva of all divas!

ANTHONY: (flirting)

My lady, that’s truly hard to believe. . . I never would’ve done that to such a
beautiful, intelligent, woman like you.

MATTHEW and JOSE: (together)

Me neither!

CHRISTINE: (loosening up)

Thanks guys I needed that, but you know, that’s what they all say. . . As soon
as our back is turned, you men are looking at someone else. Then, you stomp
on our love until it bleeds to death. . . I swore I’d never let another man treat me that way. . .

VIVIAN: (sadly)
I can relate to that. . . It’s been done to me a few times, too.

DR. THOROGOOD: (interrupting)
Thanks for sharing, Christine, but remember--people can hurt you, but you decide how much you’ll let it impact your life. You can let it deprive you of happiness, or you can let it roll off of your back. . . (lightly) That’s enough last minute teaching from me. . . Let’s move on. . . Matthew, you’re last right?

MATTHEW:
Christine, could you toss me the bear? . . . (She tosses the bear and it hits him in the face.) Thanks, I didn’t mean for you to try and take my head off. (He laughs and holds the bear up to the light, examining it.) This bear reminds me of my ex-wife--It’s plump, cute, cuddly, (coldly) but it’s got nothin’ much on the inside. . . (He takes the bear by the throat and chokes it.)

DR. THOROGOOD:
Matthew, come on now. . . calm down. (Matthew stands and steps on the bear. Dr. Thorogood restrains him.)

MATTHEW:
I’m all right! (out of breath) I guess I got carried away. . . My imagination kicked into high gear--I actually saw her face for a second. . . (He sits.)
ANTHONY: (playfully)

Remind me never to get into a fight with you.

DR. THOROGOOD:

Well. . . (He looks at his watch.) It’s almost time for us to go, but first I’d like to (enthusiastically) congratulate all of you on hanging in there! We’ve worked really hard these twelve weeks--and I don’t believe your labor has been in vain. . . You’ve just started a job that will last you the rest of a lifetime, but now you’re better equipped. . . It’s like learning to play the piano. . . Most people don’t start off knowing how to read music, but after learning the rudimentary information like note values and time signatures, you’re better able to read music. You’ve just been given twelve weeks of intensive training that has given you the rudimentary skills that you need to read music better than you have in the past. . . (pause) Before we go, I’d like everyone to give us a quick update on what’s happening in your lives. . .

BRENDON: (standing)

Well, before I started this group, I was planning to commit suicide--Life just didn’t seem like it was worth living--but now--. . . Now I’m painting more, I’ve met a new young lady who I think really has my best interest at heart. . . Good luck to all of you. . . You’re like family to me--the only family I’ve really got (He sits. Various group members give applause of encouragement.)
VIVIAN:

I wanted to tell you all that I’ve been “born again.” I’m going to a wonderful church, and I’ve accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior—I’m happier than I’ve been in my life, and as of next week—I’ll be moving into a place of my own with my son. (They congratulate her.) Thank you.--Thank all of you—especially Dr. Thorogood—you’ve been wonderful. . . God bless you. (She begins to cry.)

MATTHEW: (standing)

In spite of the display I had a minute ago—I’m doin’ all right. (laughter)

But seriously, I still have panic attacks and they seem like they’re gettin’ worse--They happen at least twice a day now. . . I don’t know what it’s gonna take for me to get over this. The anti-depressant is supposed to help, but it hasn’t yet. . . Anyway, it’s been great knowing most of you. (He looks indifferently at Anthony and sits.)

CHRISTINE:

I’d just like to give each of you one of my cards. . . (She passes them out to everyone except Anthony.) Call me if you ever need anything—I’m just a phone call away--and if you’d just like to go to lunch or something. . . And maybe I’ll try praying since it’s working for Vivian. . . (She sits and then pauses) Things haven’t changed that much for me. I’m still finding it difficult to trust another man—I’ve dated a few guys since we started group, but
nothing’s come of any of them. I don’t know how long it’s going to take--

(sadly) Maybe I’ll never find Mr. Right.

JOSE: (standing)

I’m happy to announce that my wife and I are expecting! (Everyone cheers and applauds.) We just found out yesterday-- The baby’s due in late June of next year! I’m so happy! . . . I guess you know that this means things have been going very well with my wife. (Matthew stands and gives him a manly pat on the back. The others ooh and aww!) O.K., guys, cut it out. Anyway, I’m glad I became a part of this family. . . It’s helped me more than you’ll ever know.

(He sits.)

ANTHONY:

Well personally, this group has been a complete waste of my time--Don’t get me wrong, you’ve definitely entertained me. . . None of you knew what you were talking about most of the time--(mockingly) I get more out of my Twelve-Step group than meeting with you loony toons. I haven’t seen an improvement in any of you. (Several group members express their shock aloud.) No offense to you Doc.

DR. THOROGOOD: (standing)

None taken, Anthony--You’re entitled to your opinion. I’m just sorry it didn’t work out for you. . . (to the group) Thanks everyone for being so open. . . I don’t think we can leave without acknowledging the absence of one of our
other members who didn’t make it through the twelve weeks. *(pauses)* I know we were all heart broken when we found out about her death, but I’m really proud of you for finding the strength to keep coming back. . . That could have convinced many of you that this wasn’t the place for you. . .

**BRENDON:** *(interrupting)*

You’re right. . . For a while I thought that I was wasting my time by coming here. . . To tell you the truth, when I first thought of coming it was simply out of curiosity--I wanted to see why so many Americans go to see psychiatrists as much as they go to the dentist. . . *(sarcastically)* In England, we don’t see television commercial after television commercial telling you where to get psychiatric help and why their place is the best! It’s just not something that we make a top priority. . . but now that I’ve experienced it first hand, I can definitely see the benefits. . . so when Sue committed suicide I thought to myself --see this thing of therapy doesn’t work or she’d be alive! *(pauses)* I told myself I wasn’t coming back, but I did. . . What I discovered was shocking, and that’s what made me believe in this whole process. . . I saw that we were a family who had lost someone we loved--We were no longer people who just happened to be put together--we were a family, and we grieved as families should for the loss of a loved one--right here, in our home. . .

**DR. THOROGOOD:**

Well Brendon, I think you gave us the perfect closing remarks. . . We’re all
saddened by her death, but we’ve found hope where there was only hopelessness to be found. . . Well, good night everyone. . . Oh, the cleaning people said they found this blazer in this room--They said it’s been here for the last five weeks--Who does it belong to? (He holds it up.) Anyone? . . . (Everyone gradually exits.) (remembering) Oh yes! It’s. . . it was Sue’s. . . I remember her wearing it--(He walks over and places it around the chair Sue sat in each week. He sits in a chair directly beside it and stares at the chair.)

Brendon, who forgot his notepad, enters stageright. He notices the Doctor staring at the chair. He walks over to him and places a comforting hand on his shoulder.)

Brendon: (encouragingly)

It’s all right Doctor--You can’t always save everyone. (They look at each other, then at the empty chair. They pause.) Doctor, why don’t you let me buy you a cup of coffee? Maybe it’ll cheer you up.

Dr. Thorogood:

Well I don’t. . . (giving in) I’d like that, Brendon.

(They exit stageright. Music plays softly in the background, and the lights slowly fade.)

Blackout. Music fades.

THE END
BIBLIOGRAPHY