

Parallelogram

A Comedy in Two Acts

by

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Setting

A beachfront hotel near Savannah, Georgia.

Time

Present day.

Cast of Characters

Guy Manley. An independent man, bordering on being a rebel. He can be very argumentative, accepts nothing on face value, a natural skeptic.

Gay Manley. Guy's wife, a non-confrontational romantic who wants things to be perfect instead of how they are (an anti-existentialist). An idealist, who suspects things are already perfect, we just can't see it, but need to accept it.

Sid Kicker. Friend of the Manleys, a pragmatic existentialist, ready to take advantage of whatever situation presents itself, or at least cut his losses.

Sandra Kicker. Sid's wife. She is in a constant state of emergency, a human Brownian movement from one crisis to the next. An excitable, sexy woman.

Arthur Wright. The Writer. A prim and proper man who is a control freak, and proud of it. In the beginning, his voice is as neat and clipped as he is. As he begins to lose control of the play, he loses control of his voice and his appearance.

Joe Wasserman. The Stage Crew. Wry, world-weary. Also does "Radio Announcer".

Scene Synopsis

Act I

- I-1 In a Savannah hotel, one autumn afternoon.
- I-2 Later that evening.

Act II

- II-1 Same, around midnight.
- II-2 The next morning.

Staging Notes

The Wall

The wall is certainly central to the action in the play, and making it do the things described in the script is critical. I have convinced myself that it can be done, albeit involving some very clever set design.

One suggestion is to hinge the thing, and, if possible, attach it to the floor by secure measures (bolts, etc.). At the least, control of its falling should be attainable via wire from above. Alternatively, a levered system, possibly managed upstage (from behind the upstage wall) might suffice. Probably, there should be some combination (lever and wire), to give the necessary control and safety.

The flimsy-ness of the walls (necessitated by their movement) is actually an advantage. The set should seem flimsy, maybe even comic-book. This aspect of the set design can definitely underline the major theme of the piece.

The Earthquake

Certainly flimsy walls with pictures will be easy to shake, simulating an earthquake. As much as possible, the furniture should also shake, although there is certainly an added expense if this is done. In general, however, it is probably more important that the actors provide the sense of shaking. Sufficiently vigorous actors, plus walls and picture vibration, should be enough to pull off the illusion.

Discovering the World

The upstage wall may be flown out at the end of II-2. If so, build the wall out of (hopefully) light weight flats. Again, depending on the theatre, it may make more sense to remove the wall (in two sections) sideways into the wings, rather than flying it out.

Another alternative, suggested in the script, has Joe pantomime pulling back the downstage "Fourth Wall", and have the Four Heroes contemplate the world of the audience as The Real World. This is not only cheaper to do, there's a certain air of completeness that is appealing, too.

ACT I

SCENE 1

Stage is divided into two rooms, separated by a wall with a closed door. The amount of space is not equal, the ratio of the greater to the lesser room being that of the Golden Mean. In the smaller room, there is a table upon which sits a laptop, a printer, a pad of paper, a cup with pens, a pitcher of water and a glass. A hat rack with coats and hats is behind the table. The larger room is furnished normally with a sofa and chairs, coffee table, pictures on the wall, a side table with a lamp, telephone and radio, and a small bar. A bed is against the upstage wall. A door (to the outside) is upstage, and a door to the bathroom is opposite the mid-stage wall. A man (GUY MANLEY) paces intently about the room. A woman (GAY MANLEY) sits listlessly on the sofa. She wears reading glasses, and she works a crossword puzzle. Her expression is dull.

GUY

Do you have any idea-?

GAY

Not really.

GUY

How long it might be?

GAY

No, none.

GUY crosses to bathroom door, looks inside. GAY hums "Three Blind Mice".

GUY

Is there some reason-?

GAY

None that I can see. What's a fifteen letter word for "elongated rhombus"?

GUY

And you don't have any idea what it-

GAY

I told you, Guy. Not really.

GUY

No real idea? Or no idea at all?

GAY rolls her eyes. GUY looks at his watch, paces.

GAY

What about ten letters- the clue is "Moliere or Marlowe."

GUY

I just don't get it. What's supposed to happen?

GAY

No idea. I'm sure it's all for the best, though.

GUY tries mid-stage door, which is locked from other side.

GUY

You always say that, Gay.

During next few lines, ARTHUR WRIGHT enters the other room. He is nattily dressed, wearing a bow tie and glasses. He hangs up coat, sits, pours some water and drinks, cracks his knuckles.

GAY

It's my motto. Of course I always say it. Hmmm. Six letters. "Three rings".

GUY

Well, I don't. And I don't believe it, either. Don't you feel, I don't know, trapped or something?

GAY

Like a lion in a cage at the circus.

GUY

What?

GAY

You feel trapped.

GUY

Or something.

GAY

Circus! "Three rings", okay.

GAY (CONT'D)

I don't feel trapped. Actually, right now, I don't feel much of anything at all. I just don't know-

ARTHUR takes a sip of water, gargles, and begins to write. Immediately, GUY turns in mid-stride and crosses to the radio. GAY becomes focused and alert. GUY turns on the radio, and GAY joins him there intently listening. SOUND: a loud, howling wind begins to roar.

ANNOUNCER

"No further word from the other Low Country districts. Communications are still very spotty. Where Mona will make landfall is hard to predict at this point, but it's looking like it may be just south of Savannah. We'll be trying to get in touch with Rob Henderson down that way and let you know what we know, as soon as we know it. All in all, this is shaping up to be one of the worst storms this reporter has ever reported. It looks like we have-"

GUY turns off the radio.

GUY

We may have to think about leaving. It might not be safe anymore.

GAY

Guy, they always say it's the worst storm they've ever seen. It's weatherman one-upmanship.

GUY

You're probably right. But if we are forced to leave, I don't want to have to just run out. We need a plan.

GAY

Okay, here's my plan. Relax, unwind, have a drink and watch the storm. I love a good storm, even on vacation. Especially on vacation.

There is rapid knocking on the upstage door and a voice (SID KICKER) calls.

SID

Guy! Guy, are you and Gay in there? Let us in!

GUY opens door and SID and SANDRA KICKER rush in. They look worried. SID wears dark sunglasses, SANDRA wears thick glasses. She is clutching a small suitcase. SOUND: While door is open, howling wind is much louder.

SANDRA

Are you guys all right? We're all packed, at least everything I could carry in this little bag.

SID

I wouldn't let her take the big bag. Too much to deal with. Need to travel light, just in case.

GUY

In case of what, Sid?

SID

In case of what? In case of what?! Where have you been, man? You do realize that the biggest hurricane in history is barreling down on us even as we speak.

GAY

Y'all are getting too worked up. It's only a storm.

SANDRA

Gay, it's a hurricane, for Chrissakes. You know, two hundred mile an hour winds? Roofs blowing off of houses? Weather Channel guys standing in the street while SUV's go sailing by?

SID

It's definitely time to get the hell out of Dodge. But, man, I wish I had the plywood concession. Folks are gonna be nailing that stuff up like crazy.

SANDRA

For once, Sid, I wish you'd forget about trying to make a buck on something. For once, I wish you'd just panic. Like a reasonable person.

GUY

Look, Sandra, I'll grant you a storm is coming. But we don't know it's coming right here, do we? The radio just said it's most likely gonna hit further south. Why don't we do like Gay says, and sit tight?

ARTHUR stops writing for a moment, looking off into space. EVERYONE in the other room sort of stop for moment, too, looking at each other.

ARTHUR snaps his finger, begins writing again, and they start up.

GAY

This could be a beautiful thing, you know. A tropical storm comes raging in off the ocean, the incredible power of nature, the ecstasy of facing nature's majestic dangers.

SANDRA

The agony of dying horribly. Gay, I love you to death, but you need some reality lessons. This is definitely Panic 101.

SID

Sandra's the one to teach the course.

GUY

Look, we only got here this afternoon. It's stupid to run off and leave without even giving it chance. I for one am definitely not going to forfeit the two hundred dollar deposit on this room without a lot more proof.

Upstage door suddenly blows open, wind and rain blow in. SOUND: louder howling wind. GUY pushes door closed. SANDRA grabs SID and starts to leave.

SANDRA

You want proof, you got proof. We're leaving!

GAY stops them.

GAY

Wait, wait, wait. It's only a little wind.

SANDRA

Yeah, and the Titanic only hit a little iceberg. Come on, Sid.

GUY

Why don't y'all turn on the radio and see what the reports say? It's silly to get completely nutso if it's not even going to hit here.

KICKERS look at each other

SID

Guy's got a point, Sandra. We'd feel pretty doggone stupid if we gave up our weekend-

GUY
And your deposit.

SID
And our deposit, for no reason at all.

SANDRA
But, Sid-

SID
It won't hurt to find out.

SID turns on radio. GAY joins them and GUY walks over next to mid-stage wall, shaking his head bemusedly. During ANNOUNCER'S speech, GUY leans against the wall, shaking his head. The wall begins to fall towards ARTHUR, when he looks up and notices, writes furiously. The wall stops, and then returns to an upright position. GUY looks wide-eyed at the wall, then back at OTHERS, then back at the wall.

GAY
I'm sure the whole storm will blow over before you know it.

ANNOUNCER
"-and so it appears Mona has blown over much of the whole region, and you know, it couldn't be much worse for folks in the mid-south area. Trees and power lines are down everywhere. FEMA has urged everyone to move to higher ground-

SANDRA
Higher ground?!

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
"-where your chances are definitely going to be much better in dealing with this storm..."

GAY
Sandra, we're on the third floor.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
"-unless of course you're already on higher ground. FEMA defines 'higher ground' as the fourth floor or higher. Other reports-

SANDRA clicks off radio.

SANDRA
See? What good is your third floor?

GAY

Sandra, y'all are on the tenth floor. If things get really bad, we'll come stay with you.

SANDRA

Hah! Just try to get it in. It's gonna be every man for himself, sister.

GUY

(amazed)

Did y'all see that?

SID

See what, Guy?

GUY

(looks at wall)

You didn't see the wall?

GAY

We see the wall fine. How could we miss it, it's right there in front of us.

GUY

It wasn't a second ago.

SID

What are you talking about?

GUY

The wall! The damn wall fell over, then it just- rose back up again.

SANDRA

It's the hurricane! We're all going to die! Come on, Sid!

ARTHUR stops writing again, tapping his pen. SANDRA stares at SID while he taps. ARTHUR begins writing again.

SID

For God's sake, Sandra, we're not going to die. Unless maybe you have a heart attack.

SANDRA clutches her chest.

SANDRA

Jesus, maybe I am having a heart attack. And no way to get to the emergency room. I don't feel right.

SANDRA collapses on sofa, fanning herself.

SID

You are definitely not right.

GUY

Doesn't anybody care this damn wall almost fell over?

GAY

Guy, the wall is solid as a rock.

GAY bangs wall, GUY tries to stop her. ARTHUR types something, paper comes out the printer. JOE enters ARTHUR's room, gets bellhop hat and coat from hat rack, walks behind him and takes paper from ARTHUR's hand, crosses to the door and knocks. SOUND: wind fades out.

GUY

Wait, don't do that!

GAY bangs wall again.

GAY

Heck, it's the solidest thing in here. Especially when you count-

GAY cocks her thumb towards SANDRA. GUY examines wall closely, feeling it gingerly. GAY goes to comfort SANDRA, SID sits in chair looking at GUY. JOE crosses to connecting door and knocks. SOUND: wind fades out.

SID

Who could that be? We're the only ones we know here.

GAY

Where does that door go, Guy? Is it connected to another room?

GUY

I don't think so. It was locked a while ago.

JOE knocks again.

GUY (CONT'D)

Who is it?

JOE

Parallelogram!

GAY

A telegram? Who'd be sending us a telegram?

GUY

No idea.

(shouts through door)

It's locked! Can you come around?

JOE

I think if you give it a good jerk, it'll open.

GUY

I did try it and—

GUY turns knob and door opens easily. He stares at knob.

GUY (CONT'D)

Do you have a key?

JOE

(steps briskly in)

Not to this door. I do have a parallelogram for Mr. Guy Manley.

GUY

(still looking at door knob)

That's me. I could have sworn—

JOE

Here you are, sir.

GUY

Oh, thanks. Wait, here you go.

GUY hands him a tip

JOE

No tips from the patrons, sir. All tips go in the other direction. Have a nice day, sir.

GUY closes door. JOE exits, ARTHUR chuckles and writes.

SANDRA

Have a nice day! Where has that idiot been?

GAY

What's it say, Guy?

GUY

(reads)

"Going great. Stop. Keep up the good work. Stop. Don't stop. Stop.

(MORE)

GUY (CONT'D)

Remember that you have a bathroom, too. Stop. Arthur." Who's Arthur? And why does he care if we use the bathroom?

SID

I don't know, but all of a sudden I sure need to.

SID, SANDRA and GAY rush to bathroom.

SANDRA

Me, too!

GAY

Me, too.

ALL collide trying to get in.

SID

I was first.

GAY

So be a gentleman and let a lady through.

SANDRA

Yeah, get out of the way.

GAY

I meant me. It's my bathroom.

SID

I have really got to go, y'all. I'm dying here!

GUY

Hey, what happened to the wind? It just quit.

OTHERS all look at him. ARTHUR looks up in surprise, then quickly scribbles. SOUND: wind abruptly starts, very loud. Thunder is mixed with wind.

GUY (CONT'D)

What the hell?

GUY tries mid-stage door. It's locked again. Opens upstage door. JOE is standing there, surprised. He holds a big piece of tin, which he rattles to make thunder noise. Wind and rain blow GUY back across sofa. JOE quickly closes the door.

SANDRA

Oh my God! Mona is among us! We're gonna die!

SID

She might be right this time! Let's get out of here, Sandra!

GUY

Wait a doggone minute! Just hold on. Something strange is going on around here.

SID

And we're going gone.

SID grabs suitcase and SANDRA's arm, goes to door. At that moment, ARTHUR begins furiously typing. SOUND: wind stops suddenly.

SANDRA

Why did it get so quiet? Are we in the eye? Is there a tornado?

GAY walks backwards to where she was before telegram arrived.

GAY

Eye of what? I'm thinking eye of round. Or maybe some scallops.

SID & SANDRA also back up to their previous positions. GUY starts to go to mid-stage door, then stares at OTHERS. ARTHUR starts writing.

SID

I could go for some seafood. Or a steak. Man, I am suddenly so hungry!

SANDRA

Me, too. It must be getting close to suppertime.

SANDRA hums "Three Blind Mice".

GUY

What the hell is going on? One second, you're fleeing for your lives from a hurricane, the next, you're ready to put on the feedbag like nothing's happened.

ARTHUR frowns at door, then writes very deliberately.

GAY

Hurricane? You mean that little thunderstorm?

GUY

What do you mean, thunderstorm? A minute ago, Sandra was so scared she was ready to call in the Marines.

SANDRA

I was not scared. I don't like lightning, sure, but who does?

GAY

Oh, I love it. Nothing like a summer thunderstorm to whet the appetite. You know, I'm famished, too. What'll we do for supper? I feel like Italian.

GUY

I don't believe this. One minute, we're in the middle of the worst hurricane of the century, the next y'all are discussing menus.

SID

Well, it might have been a bad storm, but I don't think "worst hurricane of the century--"

GUY opens upstage door.

GUY

Look out there, will ya?

JOE stands in door holding a large painted sun in front of his face.

SANDRA

Looks great to me. Sunshine daydream. Let's get ready to go, what do you say? Gay, can I use your bathroom?

GUY looks out, then closes door.

GUY

This is too weird.

GAY

Right. Guy, you and Sid decide where we're going to eat, okay?

SANDRA exits to bathroom with suitcase, GAY pulls suitcase from under bed and opens it. ARTHUR types on his typewriter, JOE enters, puts on bellhop hat, and brings a message to the door.

SID

Like I said, steak is what I want.

GUY

I just want some sanity. You don't remember a hurricane just a second ago?

SID

Hell, I can't remember what we came here for. Vacation, wasn't it? A vacation is no time for a hurricane, man.

GUY

Like we have a choice about what weather we get.

JOE knocks on door.

GUY (CONT'D)

Again? What's with this door? Who is it?

JOE

Parallelogram delivery.

GUY

You already delivered it.

JOE

It's another one. Could you open the door, sir?

GAY

Open the door, Guy. It's not polite to keep people waiting.

GUY tries the door.

GUY

It was locked again a minute ago, I don't think—

Door opens, JOE steps in. GUY examines both sides of the door.

JOE

Parallelogram for Mr. Sid Kicker.

SID

(brushes past GUY)

That's me. But how did you know I was in their room?

JOE

It's says so on the message. Messages always go where the person is.

SID

Oh. Hey, this could be the deal I've been working on. I'll take it.

JOE

Yes, sir.

GUY

What did you call that?

JOE

Call what, sir?

GUY

This message. You didn't say telegram.

JOE

I didn't? Well, I guess it's not, then. Have a nice evening, Mr. Manley.

JOE tips his hat, pulls door closed behind him, puts up hat and exits. ARTHUR resumes writing.

GAY

What does yours say, Sid? I hope it's better than the one Guy got.

GUY

What did he mean by that, "I guess it's not"? That guy is weird.

SANDRA enters wearing a robe.

SID

You think he's weird, listen to this: "Not focused enough. Stop. Think Death of a Salesman. Stop. Sexual overtones wouldn't hurt. Stop. Arthur."

SANDRA

They never hurt me. Of course, it's been a while since you tried any on me.

GUY

It's that Arthur dude again. Who the hell is Arthur?

SID

Who cares who he is. I just want to know why he thinks I'm not focused.

GAY

I want to know what "Death of a Salesman" has to do with anything.

SANDRA

(nuzzles SID)

I want to know what overtones he had in mind.

SID

(pushes her away)

Not now, Sandra. "Death of a Salesman" must have something to do with that deal I was talking about. Hey! Maybe "Arthur" is just Jerry using a code name.

GUY

Why would your boss use a code name? And why would he send me a pelagram, or whatever it was, and tell me to use the bathroom? I don't work for Jerry. It doesn't make any sense. None of it does, especially when a hurricane just ups and vanishes in mid-blow.

ARTHUR frowns and scratches his head. GUY scratches his head.

GAY

I wish you'd quit with this hurricane joke.

GUY

But—

GAY

Besides, I need to get ready for dinner. And you do, too. I tell you, for some reason I'm hungry as hell.

GAY takes clothes into bathroom.

SID

I'm going up to our room and call Jerry. Something's cooking, and I don't mean supper.

SANDRA

Couldn't you wait until tomorrow, Sid? We're on vacation.

SID

No way. This deal could mean an endless vacation from now on. You wait here, honey. I'll get ready for supper while I'm upstairs.

SID kisses her cheek and exits.

SANDRA

But, Sid— oh, great! I swear, that man makes me so mad sometimes, I could just scream. Honestly, if I had the slightest bit of sense, I'd have found somebody who wouldn't treat me like a floor mat.

ARTHUR pauses and looks up. So does SANDRA. ARTHUR smiles a sly smile, then hums "Love the One Your With" as he writes.

SANDRA smiles slyly and crosses to GUY, who stares at door.

SANDRA (CONT'D)
Guy, could you scratch my back?

GUY
Huh? Sure, where's it itch?

SANDRA
It's all over. Just kinda scratch everywhere.

SANDRA faces bathroom as GUY absently scratches her back, still looking at the door.

SANDRA (CONT'D)
I wonder what that Arthur guy meant by "sexual overtones." Ooh, just a little lower, on the right. Yeah, there. Harder. Harder. Oooh, yes, that feels sooo good. Honestly, sometimes I think Sid wouldn't know a sexual overtone if it kicked him in the butt— Oh, yeah, that's the place.

SANDRA lowers her robe, exposing her shoulder.

SANDRA (CONT'D)
Get this spot up here.

GUY
Sandra, watch it, will ya? Your robe could fall off, and then what?

SANDRA
Who knows? Just scratch real hard there. I mean a sexual overtone, what's that? Is it the way people talk? Or what they do with their hands, or what?

SANDRA turns to GUY. His hands, which had been on her shoulders, are suddenly hovering over her breasts.

GUY
Sandra, what are you doing?

SANDRA
I think it's what they do with their hands. Oh, Guy!

SANDRA pulls GUY close, kisses him

GUY

(breaks away)

Sandra, I don't know what's come over you, but—

SANDRA

Me either, but it has definitely come all the way over me. I want you, Guy!

GUY

But I don't want you.

SANDRA advances toward GUY, backing him up to mid-stage wall, as ARTHUR stops writing, walks over to door, glares at it. Then he stomps back to table, looks at door, slaps the table in frustration, then writes.

GUY (CONT'D)

I mean, you're nice looking and everything, don't get me wrong, but— Sandra!

SANDRA chases GUY around sofa.

SANDRA

We can't fight it anymore, Guy.

GUY

Fight what? I'm not fighting.

SANDRA

Good!

GUY

I mean, I *am* fighting. I want to fight. But I don't want you to do this.

SANDRA

Well, I want you to, I want you to a lot! How did I miss seeing it before?

GUY

Sandra! Calm down, will ya? We're both married, remember?

SANDRA is suddenly uninterested, as ARTHUR writes.

SANDRA

Oh. Well, never mind, then.

SANDRA sits sofa, reads a magazine

SANDRA (CONT'D)

No big deal. It was just a passing thought. What time is it?

GUY

Six-thirty. Sandra, are you feeling okay?

SANDRA

Sure, I feel fine. Why shouldn't I?

GUY

But just now, you were, you know...

SANDRA

Oh, that. Maybe it was the weather. Weird weather we're having.

GUY

I'll say.

SANDRA

Don't give it a second thought.

GUY

I didn't give it the first thought.

GAY enters from bathroom

GAY

Didn't give what a first thought?

GUY

Nothing! I was only— This is the weirdest afternoon I can ever remember.

GAY

I thought you were going to get ready for supper.

GUY

Well, I couldn't very well undress with Sandra right here, could I?

SANDRA

That's okay. I'll go in the bathroom and change. Gay, could you scratch my back?

GUY

No!! She can't! I mean, you need to get dressed. And me, too.

SANDRA

Geez, what a grouch! Somebody's back sure needs scratching.

SANDRA exits to bathroom.

GAY

What was that all about?

GUY

I don't have a clue. I tell you, this is the absolutely weirdest afternoon.

GAY

You just said that. What's so weird about it? We had a little thunderstorm. We're going out to eat. We're on vacation. That about sums it up.

GUY

It was a blasted hurricane, I tell you! What's wrong with y'all, you can't remember a hurricane?

SID enters singing "Three Blind Mice"

SID

"See how they run, see how they run." Man, oh man, oh man. I am gonna be floating in gravy.

GAY

Your deal work out?

SID

Not yet, but it's cooking, man, it is sizzling! Sexual overtones, my foot. We're talking sexual undertow! Jerry's found these two little ol' software startups, one's a literature generation site, specializing in romantic fantasies, the other's a real-time party pit, complete with role-playing 3D interaction. If we can get 'em hooked up— with the right management team, of course— Look out, mama! The sky's the limit!

GAY

That good, huh?

SID

Better. So much better, in fact, that dinner's on me.

GUY

That's great, Sid, but what about Arthur—?

SANDRA enters from bathroom.

SANDRA

Everybody ready? What about you, Guy? Weren't you getting dressed?

GUY

How did you get dressed so fast? You only walked out a second ago.

SANDRA

I don't know. Didn't seem fast to me.

GAY

Forget getting dressed. You look fine. We're taking Sid up on his offer before he changes his mind.

GUY

But—

GAY grabs his arm.

GAY

Come on.

SANDRA

What offer? What celebration?

GAY

We'll tell you in the car. Come on!

ALL exit, leaving the door open. ARTHUR sits up, surveys his work, then scribbles. GUY reenters, looks around room with a puzzled look. He exits. ARTHUR brushes his hands together.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 2

ARTHUR sits looking at paper, pencil in ear. Other room is dark. After a moment, ARTHUR writes a few words, and GAY, SID & SANDRA enter and turn on lights. SID plops on bed, pulling SANDRA with him. GAY falls to couch.

SID

What a feast! I am stuffed to the gills.

SANDRA

Watch it, I'll barf all over you.

SID

Please, I'm not that kinky.

GAY

Yes, you are. But we're all much happier when you do it in the privacy of your own room.

SANDRA

What happened to Guy? I thought he was right behind us.

GAY

He stopped by the front desk. I think he was going to ask the manager about those telegrams and see if there was anybody named Arthur around here.

SID

Yeah, that's all he talked about all through supper.

SANDRA

That and his hurricane. Honestly, you'd think the man could look around Savannah and see for himself. The place looks like a postcard.

GAY

He kept going on and on about it. That, and that Arthur dude.

SID

Has Guy been acting strange at home, Gay?

GAY

What do you mean, strange?

SID

Well, you know. Under pressure, talking to himself, getting angry for no reason- stuff like that.

GAY

Sid, if you're trying to suggest that Guy is going bonkers, forget it! He's the sanest person I know, and the strongest. Things don't phase him.

SANDRA

I don't think Sid meant he was crazy. Maybe he's just a possessed maniac.

GAY

Possessed!?

SID

Maniac! What are you talking about, Sandra?

SANDRA

Possessed. You know, like with the hurricane. Won't let it go, talks about it all the time. I read about it. They call it manic-possessive.

GAY

Obsessive, Sandra, not possessive.

SANDRA

Whatever.

SID

Jeez.

GAY

Guy is not possessed, he's not obsessed, and he's not a maniac. Most of the time.

SANDRA

Then maybe he's just hallucinating. According to the book, that would make him schizophrenic. Could be he's just schizo.

SID

Sandra, you read too much. Stick to the comics. More pictures. You like pictures.

GAY

He's fine, I tell you, Guy is no more disturbed than the man on the moon.

GUY bursts in and goes immediately to ARTHUR's door and tries it repeatedly. It is locked. He stoops to examine door closely.

SID

It's the man on the moon.

GAY

Guy, what're you doing?

GUY

Checking this door. The man at the desk said they don't have telegram delivery here. Don't even *have* bellhops or anybody wearing little caps like that.

SID

I wouldn't worry about. So this Arthur dude sends us a couple of telegrams, no big deal.

SANDRA

Yeah, Guy. No need to get all possessed about it.

GUY

I'm not possessed! The thing is, I don't understand how that little guy keeps getting it unlocked. There's not even a keyhole.

GAY

Maybe there's one on the other side.

GUY

No, I checked when he delivered his last telegram, or pelagram, or whatever it was.

SID

That guy didn't strike me as a crook or anything. Just a harmless joke, that's all. Forget it.

GAY

I thought he was kinda cute.

ARTHUR beams. GAY notices a piece of paper in the couch pillows.

GAY (CONT'D)

What's the—? Will you look at this? It's another telegram from Arthur.

GUY

What? Let me see that!

GAY

No, it's addressed to me. Well, isn't that sweet?

SANDRA looks over GAY's shoulder.

SANDRA

What does it say, Gay?

GAY

"Couldn't have improved you one bit. Stop. So far, you're my favorite. Stop. Don't stop. Stop. PS, try to keep Guy on track. Stop. Arthur." What do you make of that?

GUY

He's been in here again.

SID

He must have a key. Probably worked something out with the hotel.

SANDRA sees telegram on the radio.

SANDRA

Look, another one! And this one's for me!

SID

You're kidding. Why would he send you one?

SANDRA

"The overtones were a mistake. Stop. Forget Tennessee. Stop. Think classical. Stop. Arthur." Classical what? Does he mean like oldies?

GUY

This is freaking me out. What kind of weirdo is this, keeps sending messages to everybody? I don't get it.

GAY

Stay on track, Guy.

GUY

Stay on what track? To where? Why should I stay on track?

SID

Because Arthur said so. Hell, look what he did for me. Thanks to his tip, I've got this sweet little internet deal waiting in the wings.

SANDRA

To stay on track, or not to stay on track, that's what you should be asking yourself. We're all just strutting and fretting. It's a stage we go through. Pretty soon, say an hour or so, nobody hears us anymore, and—

GUY finds another telegram on bar.

GUY

My God! Another one! This one's to me again. "Subtext is very important. Stop.

(MORE)

GUY (CONT'D)

Try and build some personal history. Stop. You're not following directions. Stop. Arthur." What's wrong with my personal history?

ARTHUR stands, puts on his coat, straightens, tie, picks up the script and goes to the door.

SID

Here's another!

GAY

And another!

SANDRA

Here's another!

GUY

They're all from Arthur. Who the hell is Arthur!?

ARTHUR knocks on door. ALL stop and stare at it.

GAY

Answer it.

SANDRA

No way. You answer it, Sid

SID

I'm not answering it.

GUY

I am. And I'm gonna find out who's sending that little creep.

Opens door and ARTHUR steps in.

GUY (CONT'D)

Who are you?

ARTHUR

I am Arthur. My card.

GUY

(reads card)

"Arthur Wright, THE Playwright." The playwright?

ARTHUR

As far as you're concerned.

GUY

Now listen, Mr. Wright, or whoever you are, I'm-

ARTHUR

You're Guy Manley. Naturally I know that.

GUY

Naturally. You've been sending all these telegrams, so you must know—

ARTHUR

Parallelograms.

GUY

Excuse me?

ARTHUR

They're called parallelograms, not telegrams. They're my little way of trying to get you people more in the proper swing, to move things along, you see.

GAY

Swing of what things, Mr. Wright?

ARTHUR kisses her hand.

ARTHUR

Please, call me Arthur, my dear. Why, the swing of this play I'm writing. I am the playwright, you know. Like it says right here.

ARTHUR hands her a business card.

SANDRA

A playwright! How cool. You write plays, huh?

SID

No, Sandra. He rights wrongs. Jeez.

ARTHUR

Oh, that's very good, if I do say so myself. Yes, I've been working on a new play all week. Originally, I was going to call it "Storm Over Savannah", a sort of steamy examination of passion and sexual tension against the backdrop of an impending hurricane.

SANDRA

Oh, I like that. Do you like that, Sid?

SID

Not now, Sandra. Hurricane, huh? You ought to get together with Guy here. He's been obsessing about a hurricane all day.

GUY

It's not an obsession, it's a fact.

GAY

So, you didn't like "Storm Over Savannah"?

ARTHUR

Well, I couldn't make the storm thing work out like I wanted. I've decided to turn it into a character piece. Now I'm concentrating on the dramatic tension, sexual overtones, you know.

GUY

Sexual overtones.

ARTHUR

Two couples on vacation, discovering secret longings they weren't even aware they had, that sort of thing.

GUY

Two couples on vacation.

ARTHUR

Now I call it "Doozy In the Machine".

GAY

That's a doozy of a name.

ARTHUR

It's a play on words. It means—

GUY

Look, this is all very fascinating. But what about the parallelograms? What do they have to with us?

ARTHUR

The parallelograms are messages I use to communicate with the characters in the play. Parallel, like "parallel universe." That's what I call them.

SID

I think what my friend wants to know, Arthur, is why are you sending paragrams to us?

SANDRA

Not that we don't appreciate it. T'would be folly to looketh a gift horse in his mandibles, and I knowest that verily.

ARTHUR

Excuse me a moment, if you please.

ARTHUR goes back to his computer, writes a message. OTHERS look questioningly at each other.

SID

Where's he going?

GUY

Down the rabbit hole. With the rest of us.

SANDRA

Whither goest he? He has vanish-ed into thin air, and we must give the devil his very due, even though he parted in such sweet sorrow, and tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow-

ARTHUR enters, gives her message.

ARTHUR

Here.

SANDRA

"Drop the murdering Shakespeare bit. Stop. Bathrobes are better for you. Stop. Arthur." Oh. Okay. Should I go change into one now?

ARTHUR

It's not necessary.

GAY

But why write these parallelograms to us?

GUY

Yeah, you haven't said yet what "Dizzy Machine" has to do with us.

ARTHUR

I didn't? How stupid of me. It's simple really. You see, you're the play.

GUY

We're the play.

ARTHUR

Completely. The characters, this set, your costumes, your lines, stage directions, motivation, all of it. "Doozy In the Machine." The play's-

SANDRA

-the thing, and ready or not, here we come, king!

ARTHUR

Now don't make me put you in a bathrobe immediately. Remember, forget Shakespeare.

GUY

I don't believe this.

GAY

I've always wanted to be in a play!

SID

Let me get this straight. You're writing a play, and we're in it. So whatever happens in the play, happens to us.

ARTHUR

That's right.

GUY

I don't believe this.

SID

Now, wait a second, Guy. This could be all right. Okay, you write the play, so you decide what happens. Can you make it so we get this hotel room for free?

ARTHUR writes in script.

ARTHUR

No problem.

Phone rings. SID answers.

SID

Hello? Really? The whole week? And our meals! And bar tabs, too? Well, thanks! Thanks a lot!

SID hangs up the phone.

ARTHUR

You're welcome.

SID

Say, this is all right!

GUY

Sid, listen to what you're saying. You act like you believe this nut case. We're not in a play. We're in Savannah.

GAY

Which is a lovely place for a play, if you ask me.

SANDRA

Are you God, Mr. Wright?

ARTHUR

(chuckles)

I wish. Do I look like God? Believe me, if I were God, the first thing I'd do is make myself look like God.

GAY

What does God look like?

GUY

How the hell would he know? Gay, listen to yourself.

ARTHUR

Oh, Charlton Heston. Or Bear Bryant, I can't make up my mind which.

GUY

Try making a little sense, that would help.

ARTHUR

(turns on GUY)

I have been trying to. But *somebody* keeps messing with my plot. Plots. No matter what I write, somebody starts going his own way, like it was *his* play.

SID

Uh, I think he's talking about you, man.

GUY

You people are all crazy. Or maybe I am. This is not a play. This is life.

ARTHUR plops on floor and writes.

ARTHUR

Not a play, eh? Not a play, well, all right, try this on for size.

GAY crosses to bar.

GAY

I'm thirsty, crossing to bar, and pouring a drink. Anybody else?

SANDRA rubs her temples, joins GAY

SANDRA

I could use a stiff drink, rubbing her temples, she joins Gay, this is all giving me a headache. One good thing though. I never did like Shakespeare. I'm glad that's over, scratching her shoulder.

GUY crosses to ARTHUR.

GUY

What are you doing, crossing to Arthur?

GUY claps hands over his mouth.

ARTHUR

Showing you who's boss.

SID sits on bed.

SID

Whoa, this reminds me of college, man, sitting on bed. Must be tripping, I guess, rubbing his eyes. Only difference, no tracers.

GUY

I said, what are doing? And how are you doing it?

SID falls back on bed.

SID

Falling back on bed, hey! I think I'm starting to get some colors now.

ARTHUR

I'm writing the dialogue, your dialogue, but I'm leaving out the parentheses from the stage directions. So, it reads just like dialogue brandishing his pen at Guy.

**ARTHUR puts hand to mouth, looks at pen, quickly writes something.
GUY jumps up.**

GUY

You can't do that, jumping up in horror!

GUY covers mouth, sits back down.

ARTHUR

Ha! Watch me.

GUY crosses to bar, gets a drink.

GUY

Guy crosses to bar in a daze, takes drink from Guy, downs it in one gulp.

GAY

Hey, I said I was thirsty, slapping Guy.

GUY

Ow!, reeling into Sandra.

SANDRA

Watch it, you clumsy oaf, slapping Guy.

GUY

Recoils to bed, falls beside Sid.

SID

Don't mess with my trip, Guy, pushing him off bed.

GUY

Guy staggers to Sandra, who pours her drink into his mouth.

GUY sputters.

SANDRA

You poor baby, caressing his brow.

GAY

Don't you "poor baby" him, you crazy bitch, slapping Sandra.

SANDRA

Don't you crazy bitch me, pulling Gay's hair. Catfight ensues. They fall on top of Sid.

SID

Damn, sitting up straight, can't a guy have a nice little hallucination without everybody going crazy?

GAY & SANDRA

No! beating him on the head with their fists.

SID

Defending himself, raises arms over his head, Ow! You hit me! Don't hit me! Ow!

GUY

GUY starts down right. Stop it! Stop it, all of you, right now, crossing down right- crossing down- crossing down left. Left. I am damn well crossing-

With great effort, GUY forces himself down left.

ARTHUR

(frowns, erases and rewrites)

Left. Guy crosses down left. And begins doing pushups.

GUY does them.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Gay slaps herself for good measure, then takes a hefty swig right out of the bottle.

GAY slaps, drinks and burps.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

And burps. Sandra goes into bathroom to change into a bathrobe.

ARTHUR finishes writing with a flourish. SANDRA exits into bathroom.

SANDRA

Thank God! I'm about to melt watching Guy do those pushups.

ARTHUR

Any questions?

GUY collapses, gets up from floor.

GUY

Okay, so you can do mass hypnosis. That does not make you master of reality. It just means you should be in a sideshow somewhere. Not here.

GAY

Guy, maybe you shouldn't talk to Mr. Wright like that. After all-

ARTHUR

You are a tough nut to crack, aren't you? Okay then, buster. Deal with this. Hurricanes aren't enough for you, I guess you need a full blown act of God.

As ARTHUR writes furiously, walls begin to shake, paintings falling. Furniture shakes, and bottles fall from bar. EVERYONE but ARTHUR is also vibrating up and down. When they speak, their v-v-o-i-c-e-s sh-sh-ak-e. SOUND: loud earthquake roaring. SID sits up.

SID

Damn! This must be some good shit.

SANDRA rushes in, in a robe.

SANDRA

Sid!! It's an earthquake! Save me!

SID

You're incredibly perceptive, you know that, Sandra?

GAY

Guy, make it stop! Do something!

GUY

Like what? I can't do anything! I can't do anything!

ARTHUR

And now for the *piece de resistance*! "Wall begins to collapse".

The middle wall starts to fall.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Wait!

ARTHUR runs over, moves his table.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Okay, go!

Wall collapses. There is silence.

GAY

Is it over?

GUY

It's over.

SANDRA

Oh, thank God! I thought we were gonna die!

ARTHUR

Satisfied now, mister tough guy? If you don't mind, I need to get on with this play. I'm supposed to have it finished by tomorrow.

GAY

Why tomorrow? What's tomorrow?

ARTHUR

It's— it's the day I'm supposed to be finished, that's all. Tomorrow. Deadlines. You know how deadlines are.

GUY

You've got until tomorrow to finish our lives. You almost finished us off today!

GAY

You mean, we're going to be on stage?

SANDRA

How exciting! When?

GAY

Where?

GUY

Why??!

ARTHUR

Sure, it's going to be on stage. As soon as I finish it. But I am way behind at the moment, thanks to *this* stubborn mule.

GUY glares at him.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Sorry, sorry. We're all on the same team, now, right? Right. Look, I apologize about the earthquake. Come on, we'll go down to the bar, y'all can have a drink on me.

SID

We already got free drinks.

ARTHUR

Okay, I'll change the colors of the sunset or something. Whatever. We just need to get cracking on this play.

GUY

What do you mean, we? What do we need to do? You're the playwright.

ARTHUR

Now, that's better. The playwright. Come on, we can discuss your characters. I'm a reasonable man, open to reasonable suggestion.

GAY

I guess it won't hurt, will it, Guy?

GUY looks glumly at GAY, then everyone follows ARTHUR out. GUY is last, and just before he exits, the bathroom door opens and JOE sticks his head in.

JOE

Psst! Hey, Manley, wait a minute.

GUY

Who are you? Do you work for the hotel?

JOE

Hotel? No way. Joe Wasserman. Besides "Parallelogram Boy", which is a bit of a stretch considering my, uh, maturity, I'm the stage crew.

JOE shakes GUY's hand.

GUY

Naturally. Stage Crew. Of course. WHAT IS HAPPENING TO ME?? I've lost my frigging mind! I must be in a padded cell somewhere. And my medication is wearing off.

JOE

Nah. You're okay. You're just fighting things too hard, that's all. If you'd just let him have his way, it'd all be over soon. The trick is don't fight it.

JOE raises wall, cleans the set.

GUY

Don't fight it. You're telling me my whole life is being controlled by some- some *playwright*, and I'm just supposed to calmly accept whatever happens. I'm not blind.

JOE

Then pretend you're blind. It'll be better for you in the long run.

GUY

Maybe for me, but what about Gay? I can't just let him do whatever he dreams up with her. She's my wife, for God's sake.

JOE

Is she? Is she really? Says who? Says, Arthur, that's who. Whatever tune Arthur plays, we all dance. May as well go with the flow, it's all a reasonable person can do.

GUY

Oh? And what might an unreasonable person do, what about that, huh?

JOE

(pauses and considers GUY)

Do you know what they call a play where the main guy tries to beat Fate? A tragedy. And you know what happens to the heros in tragedies? They die, and most everybody around 'em, too.

GUY

How do you know so much? Are you a writer, too?

JOE

Me? A writer? Ha! I wouldn't be caught dead trying to write this crap. No, I'm one of his old characters. Matter of fact, I used to be the protagonist. Hell, he only had one. And one plot. And one conflict, over and over and over.

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

He's a one trick pony, and it's not even a good trick. He thinks it is, but if you ask me, the man is strictly pedestrian. Predictable, derivative, stale.

GUY

You sound like a critic.

JOE

Please! But who's in a better position to criticize than the ones on the inside of the play, the ones who have to suffer all these outrageous slings and shit. Well, that was then. Now, I'm definitely a minor character. Pretty good radio announcer, though, don't you think?

GUY

You were the radio announcer, too?

JOE

"Where Mona will make landfall is hard to predict at this point, but it's looking like it may be south of Savannah." That's my specialty. Parallelogram delivery is strictly walk-on, walk-off stuff. But mainly, I just move sets around and make earthquakes and make thunder and make wind. Just an old fart, that's me. Listen, Guy. Go with the flow. Believe me, it's much easier in the end.

GUY

But he's a wacko! An amateur wacko is running my life. There is no way I'm gonna live with that.

JOE gestures to wall, fallen paintings.

JOE

Does this look like the work of a wacko? Okay, maybe it does. But it's the work of a wacko who wields a mighty powerful whack. And listen to me. Arthur is a desperate wacko, and that's the most dangerous kind.

GUY

What's he got to be desperate about? All he has to do is write another line, another stage direction, and Voila! Problem solved.

JOE

He took a big advance to write this play. The producer put up lots of thousands of dollars so Arthur could come down here and write in solitude. "Near his sweet inspiration," he says. Well, those inspirations are all gone, and so is that advance, but he still doesn't have a play. Oh, yeah, he is a desperate man.

GUY

He's desperate. He's desperate. I'm fighting for my life here, my sanity. My mind. I think I might be a little more desperate than some guy who's only worried about his paycheck.

JOE

(suddenly angry)

It's not just his paycheck, I'm telling you! He's got his pride, too. Maybe that's why he's written you in this time. Maybe that explains why you— Well, anyway, I only wanted to give you some friendly advice. Take it or leave it, your choice.

JOE moves to leave.

GUY

Thanks, Joe. But I just can't let Arthur Wright write my life for me. It's not the kind of guy I am.

JOE

Hmm. I wonder if our Shakespeare wannabe knows what sort of problem character he's invented this time? Good luck to you, Guy Manley.

JOE exits. GUY walks over to wall, tests it, then picks up a fallen message. SID pops in the door. He is dressed in a smoking jacket, and holds two enormous bags with "\$" signs on them. On each arm are SANDRA and GAY, in bathing suits, who strike a pose.

SID

Hey! Look what Arthur gave me! Man, oh man, oh man! This is going to be a great play!

SANDRA & GAY

Oh, Sid!

GUY buries his head in his arms.

CURTAIN