

Good Game
A Play by John Fisher

Good Game
By John Fisher

Cast of Characters

Bill
Mark
Dave
Buzz
Carol
Diane

All the characters are in their mid-forties except Diane who is forty.

Set: The set consists of a large open area with basketball hoops at standard height stage right and left. The center area is used for the scenes. These scenes employ minimal furniture to suggest settings.

Time: The Present

The Games: Obviously the basketball games will require careful choreography. Often specific scoring (ie: someone “makes a basket”) is called for at specific moments. Hard to achieve, I know. Basically what can happen in these moments is that play can continue until the basket is achieved. The violence is sudden and should look dangerous. Any sense of “choreography” will diminish the impact. Thus the show should be choreographed but should look as spontaneous as possible.

(Lights up on BILL, center stage. He is forty-nine but looks younger. He is in good shape, dressed in jeans and a madras shirt, plus top siders. He talks to us. He is casual but not completely relaxed in front of an audience. This play is his pitch really, and it means too much to him to be a hundred percent successful. He has the measured reserve of the over enthusiastic. And it makes him into a bit of a cipher, as the story will show. In other words, he's far too nervous of losing to risk winning. He's a portrait of the draw.)

BILL

Four year's ago I had a crisis. I guess it was a long time coming. I woke up and realized I was forty-five. I lived in Corte Madera with my wife and two kids. She was a loan officer for a bank, I was a carpenter. I'd been building all my life. Since I got out of college. Don't know how I got into it. Just lazy I guess. But I'd also been writing. First stories. Got some published – that was years ago. Then plays. Had two performed. But the Bay Area isn't the place for that kind of thing. You gotta be in New York. Then screenplays. I read all the books – Syd Filed, Goldman, even the fun stuff by Paul Rudnick. I took some workshops, but I didn't dig those much because you spend a lot of time listening to the work of others. Not so interesting. Then I decided it was time to make the move. My job was flexible. I mean I could take off whenever I wanted. No set hours or schedule. Well there was, when I wanted to work. And Charlie, that's my boss, Charlie wanted me to work as much as possible. As a matter of fact that's why I never quit his job. Charlie wanted me to stay and it was easy work, no responsibility. He used to say, "Shit, you're going to quit on me, aren't you? You're the last white guy I got left working for me. Shit." Kind of fucked up that last part. But we liked each other all right. Anyways, I decided I'd written enough, you know, just *written* enough stuff, I wanted to see it produced. Actually filmed. Or at least read. By someone who mattered. But who did I know? Knew one guy. Went to school with him. He'd been in Hollywood for a decade, writing for television. Wrote for *Sex in the City* as a matter of fact. Then self-help books. You know the jokey kind. Then he inherited his father's house in Sausalito so he chucked it all and moved up here with his wife. She worked a lot. He less so. More and more he worked less and less. But he'd been a player. And I knew him. It was time to take the step. I was forty-five.

(Lights up on BILL and MARK at a table, drinking beers. MARK is exactly BILL's age but looks ten years older. He's overweight, his hair is dyed dark brown, he probably smokes, but you can't do that anymore, even in bars, and not onstage so – let it be implied. And we can see him smoke later. When he's outside. Stage cigarettes.)

MARK

The first one should be something easy. I mean, easy to take.

BILL

Ok.

MARK

Like a cop story.

BILL

What about a war story?

MARK

How do you mean?

BILL

Well, I always wanted to do something...

MARK

No, no, a war story's all wrong. Too expensive. Location shooting, the costumes. A cop story you can shoot in LA. And there are a lot of interiors.

BILL

Ok.

MARK

What do you want to write about?

BILL

Well... you said a cop story...

MARK

Well, I mean, what do you *really* want to write about?

BILL

My father.

MARK

Ok. Make him a cop.

BILL

Well, he's dead.

MARK

Oh, that's what you want to write about? His death?

BILL

Well, his dying.

MARK

Well, make the son a cop. That could be interesting... The point is, don't write a domestic drama. They only get made if there's a big star attached and you don't know any big stars. Make the story about a cop and throw in the father as a sub-plot.

BILL

Ok.

MARK

Don't waste too much time writing. It's about getting what you've written out there.

BILL

How do I do that?

MARK

Who do you know?

BILL

You, I know you.

MARK

That's not so good.

No? BILL

Well, I'm not really in it any more. MARK

But you know people. BILL

Yeah. Still... MARK

(Pause.)

Listen, Dave's coming up next weekend. Do you shoot hoops? MARK

Hoops? BILL

Basketball. Do you play? MARK

I know how. Who's Dave? BILL

He's huge. He was an agent. Then he was a producer. Now he develops his own projects. MARK

Oh, ok. BILL

He loves to play. MARK

Ok. BILL

So we can get together with Dave and shoot hoops. Get to know him. MARK

Ok. BILL

You got a ball? MARK

BILL (To audience)
And in half an hour we were on a basketball court. In the Panhandle. Mark could be slow. But when you got him moving, he moved.

(BILL is on his feet, MARK stands with a ball. He dribbles as he speaks.)

MARK

The thing about Dave, he likes to shoot hoops and be active. He loves to hang out. But you got to keep talking, he hates seriousness or awkwardness or feeling like he's hanging out with losers.

BILL

Are we losers?

MARK

Not if we keep him interested. Tell him you're a writer. I'll help. And then tell him you're going to be in LA. If the game is good he'll want to hook up down there. "Have you out to the house." If he's pissing you off, mention his son or his ex-wife. He hates them both. Doesn't want to talk about them.

BILL

I don't know anything about them.

MARK

Just ask about them. He'll change the subject back to you. Quickly. That's good.

BILL

Ok.

MARK

I'll help. Just stay positive. Are you any good?

BILL

As a writer?

MARK

At hoops.

BILL

No, I haven't played since seventh grade.

MARK

Just keep passing to me.

BILL

Who else is coming?

MARK

Buzz.

BILL

Who?

MARK

Old friend. Actually used to work for Dave. Buzz is.... Well, don't worry. I'll help you.

BILL

Ok.

MARK
So let's practice.

(BILL looks at him, confused.)

MARK
Setting me up. Just learn to set me up.

(They play. Bill passes to MARK and MARK puts it away. After a bit of this, MARK passes to BILL and BILL completely bollixes the shot. MARK sets him up again, but BILL is hopeless, can't get the ball in.)

MARK
That's a problem.

BILL
What?

MARK
Well, you've got to make some baskets.

BILL
I thought I just needed to set you up.

MARK
They'll get wise to that quick. We'll have to set you up once in a while or they'll just guard me the whole time.

BILL
Well...

MARK
Look, we can fake them out sometimes. Set you up, then back to me. That'll work. But you've got to get it in. Sometimes. A few times.

(MARK shoots him the ball. BILL tries again. Fails.)

MARK
Ok. They're not assholes. They know. If they don't feel we're competitive, that's it.

BILL
Ok.

(MARK shoots him the ball. BILL dribbles and really lunges at the hoop. It goes in. MARK takes the ball and sets him up again. In a supreme effort to sink it again, BILL wrenches something in his back. He's clearly hurt himself. The wind is knocked out of him)

MARK
You ok?

BILL (Covering)
Yeah, yeah, fine.

MARK
 You sure?

BILL
 Yeah, just out of shape.

MARK
 You're a builder for Christ's sake.

BILL
 Different kind of shape.

MARK (Shooting him the ball)
 Keep going. Best way to get in shape.

BILL
 Yeah.

MARK
 And you should start running. That'll loosen you up. (BILL gives him a look.)

BILL
 Ok.

MARK
 You're stiff.

(They play some more. More freely. BILL mostly setting up MARK. MARK occasionally setting up BILL. Finally BILL is going for a basket and MARK blocks him. Savagely. He almost knocks him down. BILL loses his balance and goes sprawling.)

BILL
 Hey, Shit!

MARK
 You ok?

BILL
 What's your problem?

MARK
 That's Buzz. He can be an asshole.

BILL
 What?

MARK
 The fourth guy. Game gets going, he'll try to kill you.

BILL
 You're kidding?

MARK
 Yeah. That's how Dave likes it. Dangerous. A little bit.

Shit. BILL

You play golf? MARK

Golf? BILL

Got clubs? MARK

My son does. Shitty little set. BILL

Well, that's Dave's other game. MARK

Shit. BILL

Yeah, golf's expensive. MARK

(Lights change. MARK stands with BILL. They are meeting DAVE and BUZZ. DAVE is very well-dressed, even for basketball. BUZZ is more ambiguous, on the small side but clearly in shape.)

Dave, Bill. MARK (Introducing BILL)

Hey. BILL (Shaking DAVE's hand)

How you doin.' (To MARK) You remember Buzz? DAVE

Sure. Hey. MARK (Shaking BUZZ's hand)

Hey. You up here now? BUZZ

Yeah, came into some property. MARK

Cool. (Shaking BILL's hand) Hey, Bill. I'm Brian. Or Buzz. BUZZ

Hey Buzz. BILL

Nice court. (It isn't – not by a long shot.)

DAVE

Sure.

MARK

Is this Golden Gate Park?

DAVE

Part of it. The Panhandle. It's called the Panhandle.

MARK

Like a little Central Park.

DAVE

There's some nice restaurant's round here.

BUZZ

In Cole Valley.

MARK

Should we play?

DAVE

Yeah, let's play.

MARK

(They start. MARK and BILL versus DAVE and BUZZ. BILL and MARK have the ball. BILL consistently sets up MARK, who always goes for the shot. DAVE and BUZZ set each other up. DAVE and MARK are clearly excellent players. BUZZ, though athletic, is not making his baskets. He looks frustrated, actually makes some noises of frustration. MARK shoots BILL knowing looks on these. DAVE just looks amused. He likes the drama. Finally MARK sets BILL up and BILL makes the basket. This really burns BUZZ. During the next play BUZZ has the ball and is charging the hoop. BILL tries to block and BUZZ sends him sprawling. It is not a natural outcome of BUZZ's charge. There is something deliberate about it. BILL recovers quickly, though he clearly is more winded than he shows.)

You ok?

DAVE

Fine. Fine.

BILL

(They resume. Now BUZZ is in his element, consistently taking the ball and charging the basket with no regard for DAVE. It's as if DAVE were not on the court. BILL tries to block BUZZ, but not aggressively. MARK on the other hand, has BUZZ's number. MARK slaps at BUZZ and consistently gets in his space. BUZZ retaliates by shoving MARK, MARK responds by shoving BUZZ. The game quickly assumes a very different texture than that of a traditional game of basketball. It is quickly reduced to a battle between MARK and BUZZ with BILL trying to stay out of it and DAVE enjoying the conflict immensely. MARK now hits on a new strategy. He steals the ball from BUZZ and shoots it to BILL for a basket. This happens twice. BUZZ gets wise and begins charging BILL and shoving him. BILL takes another bad spill. DAVE loves this – he

high fives BUZZ. BILL comes back into the game with a new spirit. MARK and BUZZ resume their battle. MARK gets the ball, shoots it to BILL and BILL charges the net. DAVE decides, unwisely, to try and block BILL. BILL, now almost in a lather himself, clubs DAVE out of the way as he charges the basket. DAVE goes sprawling and hits the ground. Hard. BILL makes the point. He looks elated. MARK loves this. They high five, a half mockery of DAVE and BUZZ's earlier one. DAVE sits up and shakes his head.)

DAVE (To BILL)

What the fuck's your problem?

BILL

What?

DAVE

You trying to kill me?

BILL

What?

DAVE

Fuck you, cunt.

(Silence. BUZZ smirks. BILL looks at MARK. MARK shakes his head. DAVE sits on the ground, shaken. MARK offers him his hand.)

DAVE

Fuck off, Mark

(Finally DAVE stands. He is winded. BILL dribbles the ball. DAVE shoots him a look. BILL stops. All are staring at DAVE.)

BILL

Sorry Dave.

DAVE

Forget it.

(Lights change. It is later. They are all standing about panting. BUZZ looks at his watch.)

BUZZ

That's time for me, gentleman.

MARK

Can't leave now, Buzz. (He says "Buzz" with childlike contempt, there is true hate here.)

BUZZ

I got a date.

MARK

Score's tied.

BUZZ

Yeah.

MARK
 Leave now you forfeit.

BUZZ
 Bullshit.

MARK
 Just saying-

BUZZ (Gearing up)
 You know what, Mark-

DAVE (Cutting in)
 That's ok, Mark. Buzz is meeting Shaun. I'll vouch for him.

MARK (Not letting it go)
Date with Shaun?

(BUZZ doesn't like this. He gives MARK a hard look.)

DAVE (Again cutting in)
 Appointment.

BUZZ (Shooting ball to DAVE)
 I'm outta here. Nice to meet you, Bill.

BILL
 Yeah, later.

(And BUZZ exits with a nod to DAVE and not a word to MARK.)

DAVE (Putting a good face on things)
 Good game. Good game.

(They all relax and catch their breath. During the following they might sit or swig water.)

BILL
 Christ, I feel like I'm going to have a heart attack.

DAVE
 How old are you, Bill?

BILL (A lie)
 Forty. Forty-one.

DAVE
 Good God. Forty-one?

BILL
 Yeah, forty-one.

DAVE
 Do you jog?

I did. BILL

Bike? DAVE

No. BILL

You should bike. DAVE

Bill's a writer. MARK

Really? DAVE

Yeah, screenplays. MARK

No shit. DAVE

Yeah. MARK

Well, nothing- BILL

MARK (Cutting him off)
He studied with Syd Field. Before he became Syd Field.

I know Syd. DAVE

Yeah? MARK

DAVE
Sure. Known Syd for years. He was at Fox when I was there. Well, at a subsidiary.

Oh. BILL

I didn't know that about Syd. MARK

Sure, good man. DAVE

Yeah. MARK

DAVE
Shit golfer. But I bet he's a good father. (He laughs: "Who would want to be a good father?")

MARK
How's Jesse? [Dave's son]

DAVE
Great. Great. At school in Santa Barbara now.

MARK
Good.

DAVE (Changing the subject)
So what did you work on with Syd?

BILL
What did I work on?

DAVE
Yeah.

MARK
Bill wrote a treatment...

DAVE
Of something of Syd's?

BILL
Yeah, just a treatment.

DAVE
Sure. Who are you with?

MARK (Prompting BILL)
I think you're between agents.

DAVE
Bad place to be.

MARK
Well, he was with Scott. Or at least they had an arrangement.

DAVE
Scott?

MARK
Arnovitz?

DAVE
Sure. CAA.

ICM. MARK

Now. [he's with ICM] DAVE

Yeah, now. MARK

Who are you with? DAVE (To MARK)

You know I've stopped all that, Dave. MARK

Really? DAVE

Sure. You knew that. MARK

Too bad. You were a hell of a writer. DAVE

Thanks, Dave. MARK

Well, next you're in LA we'll have you out to the house and we'll talk. DAVE (To BILL)

Great. BILL

We can shoot some hoops. DAVE

I'd like that. BILL

Bill and I should be down in March. Well, late February. MARK

I ski in February. DAVE

Yeah? MARK

Zermatt. You been there? DAVE

No. MARK

DAVE
Beautiful. Cheryl and I had a house a Sun Valley. But I like Zermatt.

MARK
Cheryl get the house?

DAVE
Sure. Sure. She should have it. She loved it.

MARK
Well, we'll be back and forth all Spring so we can catch you some other time.

DAVE
April. April's always good for me.

MARK
April.

DAVE
Yeah, have to be in town pretty much the whole month. Summer wraps, Fall line-ups. But you come out to the house. I'll have Buzz around. We can play two on two.

BILL
You have a court?

DAVE
Sure. Sure. Put one in for Jesse. But you know. Not his thing.

MARK
He was a golfer.

DAVE
He could be. You know, he just whacks around. Doesn't give a shit. He's at that age.

MARK
Yeah.

BILL
Difficult age.

(MARK hands BILL and DAVE beers in bags. MARK and BILL swig.)

DAVE (Looking around)
Is this all right?

MARK
Sure. It's in a bag.

(DAVE swigs.)

DAVE
I feel like a bum.

MARK
 You look like a bum, Dave.

DAVE (In fun)
 Fuck you. Mark.

(They swig.)

DAVE (Changing the subject)
 I like this stuff. What is it?

MARK
 Anchor Steam

DAVE
 I see that.

MARK
 Local.

DAVE
 I love it up here. I do. It's so... Well, you can see why Robin likes it.

MARK
 He's from here.

DAVE
 No shit?

MARK
 Long ago.

DAVE
 I knew that. At one time I knew that.

(During the following DAVE and MARK will exit and BILL will put on sweats.)

BILL (To audience)
 The thing was that even after Dave left, Bill and I continued playing. It was our game. We enjoyed it. And we knew when we got south that Dave would expect us to be better or he wouldn't want to play again. So we were determined. Also, this Buzz guy would be there. On the court. In L.A. And we hated Buzz. Fuckin' hated him. It was nice... Nice to hate him. So we played a lot. Mark had said don't waste time writing but that's what I loved. I loved to write. I loved seeing my words flow onto the screen and to look up and see that an hour, two hours, an afternoon had disappeared. That's what lazy people have a problem with. Time. It seems to pass too slowly. Because they don't do anything, or they hate what they do, which means they don't do it well, so time passes slowly. That's how my life had passed. But when I wrote, my life went into fast motion. It's how I imagine life on cocaine is. I'd never done it. Not in college when it was offered to me. By this gay guy who I think wanted to have sex. (Excited) Hey, maybe we'll do coke when we get to LA. Anyway, I had to write and, as Mark said I had to focus on getting my stuff out there – that meant copying shit and mailing shit and getting shit copyrighted – and I had to shoot hoops with Mark. So there wasn't much time for work. So I worked less. Four hours a day some days. Other days not at all. It's all right. Carol works. Loves her job.

And I still have some bonds my father left me. Nice thing about having a father who wasn't lazy. Or a writer. (Pause. He is now seated with his lap-top on the home sofa.) And Carol. Nice to have Carol. Well, I mean, not have... Anyway, good that she likes her job and being mom. We've been together forever. She's, well, she's supportive, ya know?

(CAROL enters. She is the same age as BILL. They are comfortable with one another. They have begun to look alike, like siblings. BILL sits typing on his lap-top. CAROL enters with groceries, not a lot of stuff. Her shopping always looks like it was done in small doses, hurried – two bags full. Right now she looks harried. As she speaks she sets stuff down, recovers herself from an endless day. BILL gets up to help her but she waves him away, not annoyed, just efficient.)

I was at school. CAROL

Really? BILL

Yeah, I talked with Lisa's teacher. Well, all her teachers. Nice people. CAROL

Is everything ok? BILL

Fine. Fine. Oh, you mean... No, it was parents' night. Nothing unusual. She's fine. CAROL

Oh, shit, parents night. BILL

It's ok. Don't worry. I just went so she'd feel good. You know. CAROL

Yeah. (Pause.) So how is she? BILL

Who? CAROL

Lisa. How is she? At school? BILL

Oh, you know. CAROL

What? BILL

Trying to fit in. Apparently... CAROL

What? BILL

CAROL
Nothing. Just she whines. “Whining.” One teacher said. Big surprise.

BILL
Yeah.

CAROL
How are you?

BILL
Good.

CAROL
I had a hell of a day.

BILL
Yeah?

CAROL
Yeah, Robertson’s leaving for Honolulu next week and the office is crazy. Crazy. Jessica’s out on maternity. And Felice, well, you know... She never does anything.

BILL
Why doesn’t Robertson...

CAROL
Oh, you know, he can’t fire her. It just would be... Well, where would she go?

BILL
Yeah.

CAROL
I mean... Well, we can’t recommend her to anyone else so... We can’t fire her.

BILL
That makes sense.

CAROL
Listen...

BILL
Yeah?

CAROL
I hate bringing this up...

BILL
Uh-huh...

(Silence.)

CAROL
Well, um... You know what, never mind.

BILL
I...uh...

CAROL
Yeah?

BILL
Mark and I are going to LA.

CAROL
Oh... When?

BILL
This week. Well, Wednesday.

CAROL
What about work?

BILL
Well, I'm going with him so...

CAROL
I... Look, I hate to mention it...

BILL
No, it's ok.

CAROL
I just... Well, I need some money.

BILL
Yeah, yeah, I figured. I'm sorry.

(Silence.)

CAROL
Well, actually, I need some before the 31st.

BILL
I can... I can sell some stocks.

CAROL
You want to do that?

BILL
Do you need money?

CAROL
Yeah, well... Are you done with Charles?

What? BILL

Are you still going into work? (Pause.) It's fine if you're not. CAROL

I know it is. BILL

(Pause.)

I... You know, whatever... I could use a check. Before you go. No biggie... CAROL

How much? BILL

Um... CAROL

Do you have any idea? BILL

Yeah, A thousand. A thousand would be good. CAROL

Ok. BILL

I... I'm sorry, I'm beat. CAROL

Yeah, yeah, go to bed. BILL

How's it coming? CAROL

What? BILL

Well, the screenplay. CAROL

Um, fine... you know. BILL

What's it about? CAROL

A lot of things. BILL

Uh-huh. CAROL

My father. But that's only part of it. BILL

Uh-huh... CAROL

Anyway, it's really just a cop story. BILL

Uh-huh. CAROL

But there's other things going on. BILL

Yeah. CAROL

That sounds kind of lame. BILL

What? CAROL

"It's a cop story." BILL

Does it? CAROL

But it's complicated. Hard to explain. BILL

Yeah. CAROL

You should... turn in. BILL

Ok, yeah, I'm outta here. CAROL

Good night. BILL

Uh, tomorrow, I'm up at 600 and then after work I have to shop and take Bill to that meet. CAROL

Yeah, ok. BILL

So... CAROL

Uh-huh. BILL

So I won't see you. If you're leaving early on Wednesday. CAROL

Yeah, very early. BILL

So, just... CAROL

Well, I'll see you tomorrow night. BILL

Ok. CAROL

We can have a drink. BILL

A drink? CAROL

Here. BILL

Oh, yeah, sure we can. That'd be nice. CAROL

We'll do that. BILL

Yeah. Good. Boy... I'm beat. CAROL

Go. Go to bed. BILL

Ok, 'night. CAROL

'night. BILL

(She leaves. BILL looks after her.)

BILL

(To audience)

Well, we didn't have that drink. She was too wiped out when she got home next night. We drink too much anyway. Middle-aged people need too much booze – to set the mood, to relax, too connect. A swig of water is all you need to play – move forward, don't pull back. (He is now pulling off his sweats and revealing his shorts and t-shirt. MARK joins him, holding a ball and making calls on his phone.) We weren't off the plane before Mark whipped out his phone and started setting things up – just announcing us, making meetings, but the most important meeting was always with Dave because, if he liked you, according to Mark, if he liked you he could make things happen. But the game, the game had to be good. That Saturday, at 800, we were up.

(MARK and DAVE will play behind BILL through the following.)

BILL (Cont)

It was always me, Dave and a fourth party. Mark could get rough, but never with Dave, always with the fourth person. Usually this got us invited back the next time, but not the other guy. Mark and I took meetings all over town, we'd generate pages, we wrote pilots, we even did some episodes on spec. But Mark kept reminding me that the reason we got in the door of these places, the reason we ever got anywhere is we were friends of Dave's, he was greasing the wheels. And we had to stay in with Dave. If Dave was out of town we went to parties, constantly. Player parties. Case Study Houses in the hills. And we always had to arrive with something – be good guests, something expensive for the wife, the girl friend, the kid, the dog – a case of Veuve-Cliquot - relatively cheap, a dog toy from Tiffany's - still reasonable, a fuckin' fresh melon from Japan – flown in by special carrier that morning - that killed us. A fuckin' melon. So, yes we were guests but I was going broke on the fuckin' gifts. And the months flew by, which was great. Actually. My life stopped crawling by and went into hyperspace. I was home on the weekends and then, because airfare was killing me, not at all. I have to save money for those presents.

(DAVE and BUZZ enter and meet MARK and BILL.)

DAVE

Welcome, gentlemen.

MARK

Hey, Dave.

BILL

Thanks for having us, Dave.

MARK

Buzzy. (This is phony cordiality, dripping with sarcasm.)

BUZZ

(Instantly defensive)

You arrogant fuck.

MARK

I missed you, Buzz, I did.

BUZZ

You never change.

Hey Bill. DAVE

Dave. BILL

Buzz- MARK

Let's just play BUZZ

(And they're playing. Same as before, essentially a battle between MARK and BUZZ with BILL sometimes involved but DAVE always left out of the rough stuff. First MARK charges the hoop and loses the shot because BUZZ trips him. MARK falls hard. BUZZ has the ball but MARK wrenches it away from him and makes the basket. He is triumphant. He charges the hoop again and BUZZ trips him again. This time MARK keeps his balance, remains upright. This enrages BUZZ even more than if MARK had made the shot. MARK is now back in the court taunting BUZZ, not taking the shot, not charging the hoop, just dribbling around trying to annoy him, occasionally shooting to BILL but when BILL tries to charge the net, BUZZ blocks him, so he shoots back to MARK. Once MARK is in possession he just dribbles about annoying BUZZ. DAVE is looking frustrated but MARK's mission seems now just to annoy BUZZ. We hear a cell ring. Everyone looks around to see if it's his. Except MARK who uses the distraction to charge the net and sink one. BUZZ makes a furious noise like an ape. He is clearly on the verge of exploding.)

DAVE
(Laughing)
Hold that thought, Buzz. It's mine.

(DAVE jogs to a garden table nearby and picks up his flip.)

DAVE
(Into phone)
Hey, What? What the hell are you doing calling me here? What? I told you... Now you listen to me, you little fuck... No, I... What? Forget it. Forget it. No fucking way. No. Not here you won't. No. Ask your mother. Ask her. Ask that witch. You want her number? Yeah, fuck you too.

DAVE
(He throws down his phone.) Shiiiiiiiiit! (They all stare at him. Silence. DAVE is not letting the phone call go.) Shit!

(Suddenly BUZZ lunges at MARK and grabs the ball. DAVE tries to grab it back but BUZZ digs his free hand into DAVE face, palm up, it looks like just a back-handed punch. MARK cries out. BUZZ darts away and makes a basket. He's laughing. DAVE and BILL look confused about what happened. MARK pulls his hand away from his face. There's blood. Not a lot, but it's from more than a scratch on his cheek. DAVE smirks. BUZZ smiles at DAVE, then looks at MARK.)

BUZZ

Whoops. (And, as he dribbles the ball around MARK in a circle, he removes his wedding ring with his mouth and slowly shoves it in his pocket with his free hand. His “whoops” was meant to sound like he accidentally failed to remove his ring before the game, but of course it sounds sarcastic like he always intended to leave it on so he could grind it into MARK’s face. DAVE laughs out loud at this. Then he smiles at BUZZ and shakes his head in admiration, almost pride.)

DAVE

You always know how to take my mind off of things, Buzz.

BUZZ

Your son?

(DAVE nods.)

BUZZ

Kids. The little fucks. Sometimes I think we throw out the babies and keep all that shit that pours out of the bitch’s asshole later.

DAVE (Smiling)

Kids. (To MARK) I’ll get you a towel. (To BUZZ) You staying for lunch?

BUZZ

(To DAVE but said to MARK and BILL)

Love to.

(A light isolates BILL and MARK.)

BILL

You all right?

MARK

Yeah. I’ll see you in the morning.

BILL

Mark, I don’t think I can play tomorrow.

MARK

Oh, you’ll play.

BILL

No, I mean, I have to go up to see Carol.

MARK

You better be rested tomorrow.

BILL

I don’t-

MARK

You will. I know you.

BILL

(To audience)

It's weird. At first I was in LA on the weekends, then I was down here for whole weeks and at some point, well, I got a place, someone moved out, someone wanted me someplace early. It just made sense. And then I was visiting home on the weekends... visiting my family. And then I was just here. All the time. For months. And I didn't really notice. Too much... Too much other shit to think about. And then I got a summons. Well, it wasn't really... I mean... Carol. Called me. She wanted me to visit. And not because she wanted to see me. Well, she did... But she wanted to talk. I could just barely fit it in. A trip north. If I rushed.

(During the preceding he has changed from light clothes to a sweater and khakis and has sat on CAROL's sofa. CAROL enters, her usual harried self – all bags and struggling with her keys and purse and thinking about the next phone call she has to make. BILL stands. She is surprised to see him.)

Oh, oh, hi. CAROL

Hey. BILL

I didn't... CAROL

Yeah, I... BILL

I didn't expect you till tonight. CAROL

I got an earlier flight. BILL

Oh, CAROL

I have to get back. BILL

Yeah, yeah, sure. CAROL

I still... I still have a key. BILL

Yeah. CAROL

(Awkward pause.)

The place looks nice. BILL

It doesn't. CAROL

Did you redecorate? BILL

Uh, no, actually... CAROL

Well... BILL

I just... CAROL

What? BILL

I just... CAROL

You can tell me. You really can. BILL

No, not yet. CAROL

Not yet what? BILL

Wow, let me catch my breath. I thought I'd have some time before you arrived. CAROL

Are you ok? BILL

Just not ready. Um... Ok... How do I put this? CAROL

You can tell me. BILL

Well, it's about this LA... thing. CAROL

Yeah? BILL

Ok, I guess we're talking about this. (Pause.) CAROL

CAROL

And, well... I didn't. I stopped. So I could work for Davis. Then Robertson. And that's where I am.

BILL

Yeah.

CAROL

But, I can see it. It's like a... A dream.

BILL

Yeah.

CAROL

I just...

BILL

What?

CAROL

It's not important.

BILL

You can say it. (Pause.) Really.

CAROL

(Actually near tears but never gives in to them)

I just thought... If I waited... that you'd get over it. You'd stop. You'd go back to work for Charlie. Charles. Charlie, whatever. And it would be ok. We'd be ok. We'd be fine.

BILL

Yeah.

CAROL

But you didn't.

BILL

No.

CAROL

So, um...

BILL

Look...

CAROL

What?

BILL

Do you want a divorce?

CAROL

No, I don't.

Ok. BILL

But, uh, you're not contributing anything, I mean, you haven't in what, nine months... CAROL

Yeah. BILL

And you don't live with us. CAROL

No. BILL

And, you know, Lisa, well, never mind that... CAROL

What? BILL

Forget it. CAROL

You can tell me. BILL

You know, Bill is older. He is. But Lisa. She just, she just asks me a lot of questions... CAROL

I bet. BILL

And I don't know what to say. CAROL

Yeah. BILL

I don't lie, but... CAROL

(Pause.)

I mean, frankly, I'd like to know the answers... myself. CAROL

Shoot. BILL

Shoot? CAROL

BILL

You have to live in LA, Carol. You do. And it's a full time job. Or vocation. Avocation. I do work at it.

CAROL

I just...

BILL

What?

CAROL

I haven't... I haven't given a shit about you... I haven't... I haven't loved you in years. I haven't. (That was hard to say – maybe even a little rehearsed sounding. But it gets her rolling.) And you give me nothing. You give nothing to the family. Nothing. It's incredible. I guess I was just being lazy. Like I thought you were the same and this [the discussion they're having] was all bullshit, and I do. I do think this is bullshit. But, you know, I didn't want a lot of scenes and crap and all that shit that everyone goes through.

BILL

No.

CAROL

And now, we have to do it anyway. It's unavoidable.

BILL

Yeah.

(She finally sits down, more throws herself down. A moment.)

CAROL

It's like... When we had the kids and the house and you worked I could ... I don't know, I could pretend we were friends, I mean I never really... I don't know, I'll speak for myself, I loved you... I can actually say that, I loved you. Not some crazy passion or anything, but I thought you were fun and cute and kind. I thought you were a good guy. But, Bill, I don't think... I don't think I ever really believed that you gave a shit about me. I just don't. And, I don't know, I just decided, at some point, that that was bullshit so I didn't love you. I mean, you're... you were my husband, and you... couldn't be bothered, you couldn't even *act* bothered. Well, you did. You *acted* it, but it was pretty half-assed. So I just stopped, I... I don't know. Tried to focus, I tried to focus on the kids. (Pause. She shakes her head, shaking off a thought.) I wish you'd... I don't know, ask me a question.

BILL

What do you mean?

CAROL

Show some interest.

BILL

Ok... Do you love the kids?

CAROL

I don't know. No. I don't know. I don't... I don't honestly think I do, but... Well, I spend my whole day, well when I'm not working, trying to be a good mother... to them. So

maybe I do. That's what I think. My actions are loving. So I guess I do. Do I sit around thinking how wonderful they are? No. I'm... I don't know... I'm either too worried or too tired.

BILL

Worried about them?

CAROL

Them or me or money... Usually, mostly money.

BILL

Well. That kind of... that kind of sucks, Carol.

CAROL

I guess it does. And you are... I don't know, living in LA, going to parties, cooking up screenplays, dreaming of doing stuff, I guess I'm jealous.

BILL

It's a pretty fucked up existence down there, Carol. I live in a studio.

CAROL

I know.

BILL

I live in a studio, Carol. I'm a forty-seven year old man, I live in one room.

CAROL

In Pacific Palisades.

BILL

Behind a Carl's Junior, Carol.

(Pause.)

CAROL

Well, I just felt like... I don't know... When I was in college I felt like there was supposed to be something more. More than existence. But most of the time I just feel like an animal. I feel like an animal trying to... survive. You know.

BILL

That's how I feel. I do. I feel like my life is ticking away and nothing's happening. And the people who do what I want to do are all younger than me and have been doing it for a decade already and I'm just... tired. Old guy.

CAROL

Do you love the kids?

BILL

I don't know. I guess not. I don't do anything for them so... I guess no.

CAROL

That's horrible, Bill.

BILL

Yeah, but they're kids. They'll figure it out. My father didn't know I existed. He couldn't give a shit.

CAROL

You want them to feel like you did?

BILL

I don't want them to feel anything. I don't... I don't care. I guess I really don't care. I mean, I'd love to hear that something great happened for one of them like they won a prize or got into a good college or something. But I don't care. I don't.

CAROL

Nothing great's going to happen for them. Bill.

BILL

Why do you say that?

CAROL

Well, they're not special and we're certainly not rich. It's just, they're just going along. Bill, there are no miracles. It's not like Hollywood. There's not overnight success. Not in their lives.

BILL

Lisa. She could go to a good school. She's smart, isn't she?

CAROL

She works hard. But she's not smart. Yeah, she could go to a good school. But that's no guarantee she's going to be happy. Or successful.

(He sighs.)

CAROL

Do you have to be somewhere?

BILL

I always have to be somewhere. It's crazy but I do.

CAROL

You must like it?

BILL

I like what it could mean. What I could become if the right hundred things happen in a row.

CAROL

It must be more exciting than carpentry.

BILL

I never finish anything. At least as a builder you build things. This is all speculation.

CAROL

I didn't mean what I said.

BILL
About what?

CAROL
About... About me not loving you.

BILL
(Embarrassed)
Oh, come on.

CAROL
No...

BILL
It's embarrassing...

CAROL
Well, it's true. I thought it was great when you started writing and wanting to be a writer. I was happy for you. I thought, I thought you were special somehow.

BILL
Carol, I don't write. I play basketball and schmooz. That's not writing. I drink beers with people and spend money I don't have and go home drunk when I don't even like to drink. I'm not a writer. I'm not even a player. I'm *trying* to be a player. That's why I live in a studio in Pacific Palisades, so I have the address. That's why I juggle credit cards. So I can take people out. That's why two weeks every month I work. Yeah, I build. In LA. I'm a carpenter in LA. So I can make minimum payments on my cards and keep at it. So, ok, now you know. You can sue me for child support, I make money. Just enough. But enough. I really am sueable for divorce.

CAROL
You don't sell *anything*?

BILL
Screenplays?

CAROL
Yeah.

BILL
No, Carol. I don't. Well one, maybe, but probably not. But certainly nothing so far. I haven't made a dime down there. Except in construction. I work more than two weeks a month. Last month I worked almost full time. Some months I work sixty-hour weeks.

CAROL
You must like it? Building.

BILL
I don't think I ever have. My father was an attorney, for Christ's sake. He was paid \$150 an hour in 1984. I hate construction, Carole. I do. I only did it because I didn't want to do anything that was a career. Now I can't do anything else. You at least exist for the kids, that's what you work for. I work for myself. That's all. It's pretty... it feels pretty awful. Most of the time. That's how it feels.

(She sighs. He looks at his watch.)

We have to talk. CAROL

We're talking. BILL

No, there's something else. CAROL

Ok? BILL

I don't want to sue you for divorce. If I do you'll have to work full time just to make the child support. CAROL

Ok. BILL

But I can't do it. Not alone. There's not enough money. I finally sat down and figured it out and there's just not enough money. CAROL

Ok. BILL

So you gotta take Lisa. I can support Bill. I can't hang onto the house, well, it's mortgaged to the hilt anyway, we don't even own it... CAROL

We don't? BILL

No, Bill. CAROL

I didn't know that. BILL

Where did you think the money was coming from? CAROL

I don't know. BILL

My job at the bank? CAROL

I don't know. BILL

CAROL

Anyway, I can't hang onto the house. There's no equity left in it, so soon I'll have to start paying rent on it, to the bank. Anyway, I can move into some place small, an apartment with Bill. He can stay at Redwood because he started there, but Lisa would have to go to San Rafael. That's the only place I can afford to move. And that's awful. It's an awful school.

BILL

Ok.

CAROL

You pay taxes, I assume you pay taxes in Pacific Palisades. They have good schools. She can live with you. We'll just, we'll all just live apart.

BILL

Couldn't we scrape together something for a private school?

CAROL

What?

BILL

For Lisa? Private school in Marin.

CAROL

No.

BILL

Why not?

CAROL

It's fifteen thousand dollars a year. I might as well hang onto the house.

BILL

Aren't there scholarships?

CAROL

No, Bill, she's not going to get a scholarship.

BILL

Well...

CAROL

And I can't move in with two kids. Not into an apartment. It's selfish, but I can't. Not with those two.

BILL

So why with Bill?

CAROL

I... I just can't do this with Lisa. I'm sorry but I just don't want to. She bugs me. She just does. I don't like her. It's awful but... Bill is fine. He's boring. He hangs out with his friends, they... I don't know what they do. Drugs I guess.

BILL

He does drugs?

CAROL

Weed. He smokes weed. Anyway, he's fine. He's just boring, but he's not annoying. Lisa is, Lisa's...

BILL

You think I want to live with someone annoying?

CAROL

I think she wants to live with you. She'd be better, happier. She likes LA.

(Silence.)

CAROL

Well....

BILL

Jesus Carol.

CAROL

Look... Um, we kind of have to do this because... Because, well, of money. And I'm sick of it. I'm sick of the whole thing. Either she moves in with you-

BILL

Into a studio?

CAROL

Let me finish. (Pause.) Either she moves in with you or we file for divorce and you'll end up paying twice as much to support two kids and I might even get a settlement. Which I'd have to ask for if they're going to live with me because I'd have to hang onto the house. So... I mean you can think about it but the house is already pretty much sold...

BILL

It is?

CAROL

Yeah, we've been showing it, that's why it looks different. And I have to close with the realtor and pack up at the end of next week. I can't afford movers so we're moving ourselves. I just, I just want to talk to Lisa before I tell Bill what's happening, before I announce the move.

BILL

Jesus, Carol.

CAROL

She's just a little girl. I can't... I can't stand her. I never could. She's needy, and depressed all the time... But, I don't know, maybe she'll be better with you. Bill I can live with.

BILL

Jesus. (He looks at this watch.)

CAROL
You have to go?

BILL
Unless I take a cab. Which I can't afford.

CAROL
No.

BILL
(Looking again at this watch)
Shit. (He grabs his bag.)

CAROL
I think... Ok. That's it. That's decided. I just wish...

BILL
What?

CAROL
Nothing.

BILL
You can tell me.

CAROL
No.

BILL
You can.

CAROL
Please stop saying that! Ok? Just stop. I... I'll see you. I have to lie down. (She exits.)

BILL
(To audience, laughing nervously)
The rest is a little confusing. It... I made that game at Dave's, barely. I was exhausted. And Lisa, as it turned out, would join me at the end of the week. But that came later. (BUZZ, MARK and DAVE have entered upstage and are playing as BILL talks. When he's finished he joins them. It's been a rough game, more pushing and shoving than before; the parameters have now been set. Mostly the in-game violence is between MARK and BUZZ, who both want to impress DAVE. DAVE is hands-off when it comes to the violence in the game. But he clearly enjoys it and it is obviously done for his benefit. The sense is DAVE will invite the more violent one back to his house for next week's game. Thus whoever stays in the game will "stay in the game." BILL is dragged into the violence sometimes but MARK makes every effort to protect him. This dynamic becomes clear in the course of this game. As the game ends BILL has the ball and BUZZ is on him. In an effort to shield BILL, MARK gets between him and BUZZ. BUZZ grabs MARK and throws him to the ground. DAVE smiles.)

DAVE
You're Jakin' him, Buzz.

Stay outta my way, dick!
 (To MARK)
 BUZZ

Fuck you...
 MARK

Protecting your girl friend, queer bait?
 (Raging)
 BUZZ

Fuckin' Jake.
 (Simultaneously, as he examines an elbow wound)
 MARK

He'll be here next week.
 DAVE

What?
 BUZZ

Jake. From New York.
 DAVE

(Pause. DAVE, BUZZ and MARK are all looking at each other. BUZZ smiles. BILL is left out.)

Mark, you know Jake.
 BUZZ

Of course.
 (Unconsciously touching his nose)
 MARK

I...
 (Confused)
 BILL

You played Jake once, didn't you?
 BUZZ

You know I did. (Pause. They regard one another.) Cunt.
 MARK

Fuck you, bitch.
 BUZZ

(And BUZZ is at MARK – in an instant. But BILL knew something was coming so he gets between BUZZ and MARK. DAVE only starts laughing, it is an ugly laugh. He is enjoying this far too much, in a childish way. Even in the midst of the confrontation BILL takes in DAVE's response.)

BUZZ

Fuck that butt wipe. Fuckin' girl scout. You can kiss my ass, you washed up piece of shit! *Sex in the City? Sex in the Twat City?* Fuckin' girl show you wrote for six years ago!

(DAVE loves this. He is giggling and dancing about like a moron. MARK breaks away from BILL. He moves in a big circle counter to BUZZ who is also circling. In the middle are BILL, still confused, and DAVE, still giggling.)

BUZZ

How's your nose, little girl? Never thought ass licking could get your nose busted, did ya faggot? Not till you met Jake.

(MARK grabs ball from DAVE and starts to dribble. BILL moves to MARK's side. DAVE joins BUZZ and soon, without any more words and with great tension and excitement in the air, they are playing once again. There is an energy we haven't seen before. It's almost as if BUZZ and MARK realize that their respective projects are on the line here – based entirely on how they play the game. DAVE makes a drive for the basket, MARK tries to block him and BUZZ, instead of even pretending to guard MARK just elbows him in the cheek. DAVE makes the basket. Now BUZZ makes a charge at the hoop, but MARK actually punches him in the stomach to relieve him of the ball. MARK makes a basket. Now it is BILL who has the ball. He is headed for the net. BUZZ just slaps his face hard, as he passes, and BILL loses the ball and sprawls.)

BILL

(As he hits the ground)

Fuck!

BUZZ

This is nothing, bitch bite. Nothing! Wait'll you meet Jake. Ask Nancy here (indicating MARK) about Jake and fuckin' noses. Ask why he quit the game! (DAVE howls with laughter.)

(And MARK is on top of BUZZ – it is another fast, furious movement. One moment they are both up right, the next MARK is on top of BUZZ, with his knees holding down BUZZ's arms. He grabs the ball and shoves it against BUZZ's nose.)

BUZZ

(Truly freaked)

Fuck, shit man. Get the fuck off of me. What the fuck. Dave! Bill!

MARK

Ya wanna know what it felt like? Bitch! The feeling? Like this, but much, much faster.

(MARK, pinioning BUZZ to the ground with his body, is slowly, very slowly pushing the ball against BUZZ's nose. He applies the pressure ever so slightly but deliberately. DAVE stands with his mouth hanging open, amazed at what he is watching but too fascinated to stop it. BILL just looks confused.)

BILL

(Moving towards them)

Mark. Hey. Mark, man...

(DAVE gives him a "don't get involved" gesture. BILL takes the warning. He looks back at MARK and BUZZ for MARK, BILL realizes, is slowly, very slowly, breaking

BUZZ's nose with the basketball. We don't hear crunching sounds as the nose collapses into the skull cavity but we hear BUZZ crying out at each snap of his nose cartilage. It takes almost a full minute, or at least as long a time as even DAVE can stand to watch it.)

DAVE

Mark, maybe...

MARK

Shut up, Dave.

(DAVE shuts up. MARK slows the process. It seems he is going to stop. He relaxes. BUZZ is crying. But he seems relieved that it is over, whimpering. MARK smiles, enjoying it. Suddenly MARK gives one heavy push to the ball. BUZZ screams, high pitched. DAVE jumps. BILL just watches. MARK bounds off of BUZZ. BUZZ's hands shoot to his nose. There is an incredible amount of blood. BUZZ writhes. MARK just looks down at him. DAVE makes a half-hearted attempt to kneel to BUZZ. MARK holds up his hand to indicate DAVE shouldn't move. DAVE stops. And then BUZZ passes out. DAVE instinctively pulls out his phone and dials 911. He looks at MARK. MARK looks at him. Silence.)

MARK

(Suddenly to BILL, leaving)

Come on, let's go.

BILL

We can't...

MARK

Fuck this. Dave will handle it.

DAVE

Yeah. (To MARK) Oh, I'll see you Saturday.

MARK

Yeah. Yeah.

(Lights shift to isolate BILL and MARK.)

BILL

What the fuck, Mark.

MARK

Fuckin' Jake.

BILL

Who the fuck is Jake?

MARK

Sadist. Fuckin' New York sadist.

BILL

Why the fuck did you do that?

(MARK just smiles.)

BILL

You just smashed his face. What the fuck?

MARK

Dave will tell Jake.

BILL

What?

MARK

Jake's fuckin' insane. I want him to fear me. Before he even sees me. One look at Buzz, he'll fear me. I'm... Fuck it man, I'm getting drunk. (MARK exits.)

BILL (To audience)

That was a month ago. (Blackout. Spot on BILL. And he dials his cell and waits. Eventually he hangs up and redials. He will do this a number of times in the following speech.) Then, before I really knew what was happening, Lisa was living with me. Later that same week actually. Nice little girl, friendly. Quiet. But definitely, well... not the horrible thing I thought it'd be. And the game on Saturday... went well. Jake... well, more of the same... Not the kind of story... Shit! (He can't get through to whomever he's calling.) Anyway, not the kind of story... Let's put it this way, you can imagine. Frankly, I've never seen anything like it... I was, through most of the game, well... Scared. But not. Exhilarated too. (Pause. He looks confused. And disturbed. He shakes it off.) Anyway, the following Monday... Jake wanted to talk, he was ready to do something, And Mark and I, we went into overdrive – actually writing now. Suddenly Dave was out of the picture and Jake, Jake was breathing down our necks and... Shit. (He is frustrated with the phone call not going through. He keeps trying.) And it was all I could do, after an exhausting week and a horrible night, to squeeze in a call to Carol this morning just to keep her posted. Well... (He can't finish for whatever reason. So he just dials his cell again.)

(We hear a ring. Lights up on CAROL in Marin, hustling about as always. She hears the ring and answers her phone.)

CAROL

Hey, Bill.

BILL

Hey.

CAROL

Hey.

BILL (Feigning surprise)

I got you.

CAROL

What?

BILL

I got you on the-

Oh, oh, yes, great. CAROL

Are you ok? BILL

Yes, No. I mean, shit, I'm busy. What's up? (She was trying to put on a new pair of shoes but lost her balance – always in a rush to get in or out the door.) CAROL

Where are you? BILL

Well, I'm at home, for three minutes. Then I'm going out. CAROL

Where? BILL

What? CAROL

You're going- BILL

Bill, I don't got time for this. I'm going to a cocktail party with the head of the bank. It might mean promotion. I really don't have time for this. CAROL

For what? BILL

Bill what is it? Please just tell me so I can get off the phone. Please. CAROL (Desperately impatient)

Jesus, Carol. BILL

Bill... CAROL

I'll. Call... I'll call back BILL

No... CAROL

You're so stressed. BILL

I am stressed. It's ok. What is it? CAROL

Nothing. It's nothing. BILL

Are you ok? CAROL

I'm fine. BILL

How's Lisa? CAROL

She's fine. BILL

Is she settling in? CAROL

To what? BILL

To school. CAROL

I think so. BILL

Do you like... Does she like it there? CAROL

I... No, actually, I don't think he does. BILL

Why? Has she said anything? CAROL

No. BILL

Then you're just guessing. CAROL

No, I'm not. BILL

You should talk to her. CAROL

I will. BILL

Maybe she likes it. CAROL

She didn't come home last night.
(Pause.)

What?

She didn't come home.

Bill...

She's fine. She's here now. She's fine.

What happened?

She's ok, she's-

Bill.

She's fine, Carol.

Bill...

She's inside now, she's all right.

Bill, stop telling me she's ok and tell me what happened. Right now. Quickly.

She didn't come home. I called everyone I could think of. Yesterday. This was yesterday. I finally called the police. A woman detective came over here and spent the night with me. We tried some more people. Numbers where she might be. I think... I think the detective thought I'd done something with her. I... Anyway, then she showed up this morning. She'd gone home with a friend. Someone I didn't know.

Why didn't you call me?

I didn't want...

She might have been here. Why didn't you call me?

I...

BILL

Why didn't the detective call me?

CAROL

I told them you were in Europe and I didn't know how to reach you.

BILL

Why?

CAROL

I didn't want you to know... I figured she'd come home. I didn't want you to worry.

BILL

Why did she go?

CAROL

What?

BILL

Bill, why did she stay out all night? Tell me.

CAROL

I don't know. She's unhappy.

BILL

Why?

CAROL

I don't know.

BILL

Give her to me.

CAROL

What?

BILL

Put her one the phone. Bill.

CAROL

(He exits with the phone and returns without it. CAROL waits and then speaks into her phone.)

CAROL

Lisa. It's your mother. It's mommy. Are you all right, honey? What? I can't hear you... Oh. Are you all right? Why did you stay out last night? What? No, tell me why you stayed out all night and didn't call your father. Lisa, sweetie, please stop whining.... Stop it. Lisa... where were you all night? Uh-huh. And why didn't you call your father? I see. You didn't think he'd be worried about you? Of course he was. We both were. We were worried sick, Lisa. What? No. No. In a few weeks, Lisa. You can come up and visit in a few weeks. For a *visit* Lisa. A visit. Lisa. Do you have my number? Do you? I want you to keep it with you. All the time, Lisa. And if you don't want to call Daddy. Or if you

can't reach him. I want you to call me. Ok? Read me the number, Lisa. That's right. What? You have it memorized? Good. Then call it. The next time you're upset and want to stay out all night – you call me.

(During CAROL's phone conversation with LISA, BILL sneaks to his computer and turns it on. He goes through the motions of checking his e-mail and quickly responding to several messages. He types quickly, furtively, as if he is sneaking in some extra business when nobody's looking. There is a manic quality to his messaging. He sits. Then he gets up and crosses to the landline. This he dials. He waits.)

BILL

Hey, Mark. Hey. No I haven't. I got wrapped up in something else last night. A treatment. Well, it's an old obligation. A TV thing. I'll do the rewrites this weekend. Yeah. Uh-huh. Tonight? Not likely. Well, I'm just beat and I... Well, maybe later. Like at ten. 930, ten. Yeah. Where is it? (He writes.) Where do I park? Shit, Mark, can you invite me to another party with valet parking. Shit, I'm going broke on parking. Yeah, yeah, yeah... See you tonight. No, I won't bring pages. I'll have them for you on Monday. Yes. What? She likes what? Where do I get those and don't say Bulgari. Ok, yes, I'll pick some up. Yes.

(When he is finished he hangs up the phone, closes his laptop and exits in the direction he took the cell phone. He returns with the phone to his ear. CAROL finishes the above speech just as he exits. He re-enters almost immediately with the phone to his ear.)

CAROL

Bill, if we fuck this up, if we end up with a little girl who's dead or on drugs or turns into a prostitute we're really going to have screwed this whole thing up. We're going to feel like shit. Do you know that? Do you?

BILL

Ok.

CAROL

Bill, I can't deal with this right now.

BILL

Ok.

CAROL

You've got to talk to her. Spend time with her. Pick her up at school. She needs a shit load of attention. I know that.

BILL

Ok.

CAROL

Bill, I can't deal with this right now. I'm in the middle... I'm trying to get a fucking promotion. I need the money. You know that. They gave me a raise at work, I'm still broke. I can't handle this drama right now.

BILL

Ok.

CAROL

You just have to be a mensch, Bill. You have to take her out. You make her dinner. You have to fucking deal with it Bill. Be an adult.

BILL

Ok.

CAROL

This is a major fuck up. I have to go. I just have to go. But Jesus. *You've* done this Bill. You've got me working sixty-hour weeks and chasing corporate stress jobs I don't want so I can pay for orthodontia and everything else... Alone, Bill. I'm alone raising a kid. Do you understand that? You have to raise that one. *You* have to. Do you understand that? I don't want that brat back in my life. I can't take that Bill. You're a fuck up Bill. Ok? You are.

BILL

Ok.

CAROL

Don't call me with this shit. I don't want to hear. It happens again, don't call me. I don't want to know. Call me if she dies, Bill. Call me then. Otherwise, I don't want to know. (She hangs up. He closes his phone, looks at it and walks off left, inside to Lisa.)

(Light change. DAVE and MARK enter from right, dressed for a game. They cross the stage, from right to left. They exit left. That's all. A moment. BILL enters dribbling. He stops. He is looking off stage left, after MARK and DAVE. He just stands there. His body goes limp.)

BILL (To audience)

That stuff with Lisa was a mess. That was... last week. No, the week before. A lot's changed. Lisa... well, we worked that out. Last week. (Perking up) But today for instance, a game with Jake. Nothing happening much with the screenplay. Dave thinks a game with Jake will... How do you put it? Animate him. We actually meet in MacArthur Park. Early. To be... I don't know, exotic, I guess. (He looks off left. He doesn't move. BILL just dribbles. Idly. DIANE enters. Forty. Not gorgeous, but attractive. Fit. Confident. There's something appealing about her. Maybe it's just that she's dressed to sweat and doesn't mind that it's not the most flattering outfit. She holds a basketball. Obviously a player. A basketball player.)

DIANE

Hey.

BILL

Hey.

DIANE

Waitin' for someone?

BILL

Um, actually, I think... (He gestures off left, then drops it.) No. I'm not.

(She just dribbles. Then she shoots. It goes in. Not an easy shot. She shoots again. It doesn't go in. Rebounds to him. He takes it and shoots. Now he's dribbling it. He sets up for another shot. But she starts maneuvering around him. He feints. Then charges the

basket. She blocks. It doesn't go in. Now she's got the ball. He is all over her. Maybe mad that she blocked the last one, maybe something else. But now they're playing. And she's excellent. She's all over the court. She doesn't hurry to the basket. She's wearing him down. When she charges he is so winded he can barely keep up. She makes it easy. He smiles. He liked that. She's strategic. She starts again. Now he surprises her. Suddenly he has the ball. He moved quick. He charges the basket. No build-up. She tries to block. He knocks her away. He makes the shot but she goes sprawling. He recovers the ball. He looks concerned. But she bounds to her feet. She's fine. Or at least she's ready to continue. He stops.)

BILL

Sorry.

DIANE

's cool. Accident. (She smiles.) Diane.

BILL

Bill.

(He dribbles. Does she want to go on? Yeah, it seems she does. He charges again, she blocks him and now she has the ball. She moves away and again she's wearing him down. And so they play. MARK enters and watches for a minute, unseen. BILL notices him and stops, but only after he's made a basket.)

BILL

Hey.

MARK

Hey.

BILL

Whassup?

MARK (Gesturing off left)

Jake's here. And Dave of course. You didn't see us?

BILL

Actually, yeah, but...

MARK

You going to...

BILL (Gesturing)

Diane.

MARK (To DIANE)

Hey. Mark.

DIANE

Hey Mark.

MARK

How you doin'?

(She smiles.)

MARK

I... Uh...

BILL (To DIANE, gesturing to MARK)

Friend of mine.

DIANE

Sure.

(Pause. They are all looking at each other.)

MARK

Just passin.' Saw Bill.

DIANE

Ok.

MARK (To BILL)

So, I'll see you up at Brennans's.

BILL

Brennan's?

MARK

Sunday night.

BILL

Oh, hell.

MARK

What?

BILL

Can't.

MARK

Can't?

BILL

Naw.

MARK

Well, it's Syracuse. I think there's even a barbecue. And his wife will be there. You know who she is.

BILL

Yeah.

MARK

You can't, huh?

I'm working early Monday. BILL

Oh. MARK

Yeah. Big place in Malibu. A roof. BILL

Oh. Well we can hook up next week. MARK

Yeah. BILL

Diane. MARK (Saying goodbye as he starts to leave)

Mark. DIANE

Oh, how's Lisa? MARK (Stopping)

Good. Really good. BILL

Settling in finally? MARK

Actually, she's back with her mother. BILL

Really? MARK

Yeah. BILL

Damn, I wanted to have her over. To play with Deb. MARK

You got Debbie with you now? BILL

Yeah. For the weekend. MARK

Lisa's with her mother. Carole missed her. BILL

Ok. Well... MARK

BILL

Later.

MARK

Yeah.

(MARK leaves. DIANE starts dribbling. And they play. Till she makes a basket, then blackout but for a light on BILL.)

BILL (To audience)

When you build a house or redo a condo or whatever... You make something. You create. You complete. There's nothing speculative about it. It's not at all theoretical. And for some reason it's necessary. I mean, there's pretty much always work. People are always improving their property. Even when times are shit. People want their property to retain value. It's like a child. I mean, no matter how bad it gets, you have to feed the kids. That's what it comes down to. You have to make sure they're happy. Or as happy as possible. Given the circumstances. (Pause.) Well, even that's not absolutely necessary. Their happiness... But building. Building's necessary. It's not like writing. It's not entertainment. It's necessary. Shelter. It's simple that way. Even if it's a design for rich people, it's like growing food. It has to happen. You're involved with something necessary. And there's no deal. There's no backstory. There's little prep. You just swing your hammer. And something happens. Especially if you're just an employee. Part of a team.

(He spins and shoots. One quick move. Whether or not it goes in he turns to audience, shrugs, and smiles. He exits. The basketball he leaves. On the court. Hopefully it doesn't roll into the audience. Fade to black.)

End of Play