

Illyria Street Commune



*A Play By
Fredy
Perlman*

to Donna
— *Ben*

A note on performing Illyria Street Commune

A dash at the end of a speech indicates that the next speaker begins before the previous one is finished. In general, there should be no pauses; props can be carried in and out while the action develops. Sequences in different parts of the room can sometimes be done simultaneously, depending on the discretion of the performers. If a prompter is necessary, it would be consistent with the play (“Ben’s play”) if Ben sat in a corner with a script, and intervened to correct lines, stepping out of his corner into scenes in which he takes part.

In general, only plot and character developments have been worked out; mannerisms, motions, and also actions of other people in the house, have not. Since the setting is the main room of a commune,

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much will probably be happening all the time. But in developing such actions, criteria like “This will really go over” or “They’ll lap this one up” should be left to writers of commercials and TV scripts, since such criteria contradict the content of this play. Such elaboration will probably be possible if aspiring professionals confine themselves to roles of aspiring professionals, and if drop-outs play drop-outs, although an unstunted imagination should be able to grasp both. In short, people who might have lived in such a house should develop the actions in accordance with their own potential experiences in it.

The illusion to be created is that the action takes place in a room of such a house, not the illusion that “This is Theater” or “This is Art.” If “artists” require spotlights, that’s fine; they can keep them. The best lights for the room would be bright room lights. If sunlight is to be simulated, a spotlight, or another device created by the ingenuity of the participants, may become necessary (outside the picture window, for instance), but this is dictated by the needs of the play and not by conventions which are totally extraneous to it, like Legitimate Theater conventions. With such provisos, of course, “It won’t sell.” Selling is one of the activities disparaged in the play. Some effort should go into making sure that “it doesn’t sell.”

Illyria Street Commune

(The setting is the front room of a large house on Illyria Street. The outside door is on the left; the archway on the right gives access to the kitchen, back yard and upstairs. On the wall between the exits is an enormous picture window, almost completely covered by hanging potted plants.)

1.

TAPED NARRATOR (voice of Olympia played through a tape recorder): It began with isolated strangers in the big city, hostile and suspicious individuals surrounded by shells, their tentacles warning them of constant dangers.

VOICE OF OLYMPIA (*from right*): Your garden is extremely well kept.

VOICE OF DONNA: It's what I like best about this house, especially now when the sprouts start coming up.

VOICE OF OLYMPIA: I've never seen such an enormous kitchen and so well equipped!

VOICE OF DONNA: I guess they just ran off and left all their stuff, as if the city were being invaded.

VOICE OF OLYMPIA: What's in here?

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VOICE OF DONNA: I don't know what they used this room for, but I've been putting things here I didn't have the heart to throw away.

VOICE OF OLYMPIA: That chandelier — did it actually hang somewhere?

(DONNA & OLYMPIA enter from right)

DONNA: Right in the middle of this room. But it was so old fashioned we couldn't stand it. Do you think you'll take the room?

OLYMPIA: Do I ever? I've never had such a large room all to myself. Do you mind if I have my friends over?

DONNA: Have parties if you want. (Goes to right and calls) Philip!

VOICE OF PHILIP: What is it?

DONNA: One of the new roomers is here.

VOICE OF PHILIP: Just make sure they're able to pay the rent.

DONNA: I thought you'd at least want to meet her.

VOICE OF PHILIP: Oh, all right.

OLYMPIA: Are there other applicants? Are you going to choose among them?

DONNA: I don't understand — Oh, no, nothing like that. Only one other person answered my ad, and I asked you both to come here tonight when Philip and I are both home —

(PHILIP enters, stands in archway)

OLYMPIA: I'm sorry. I guess I've filled out so many applications that I've come to suspect every new situation of being another application.

PHILIP: Hi. I'm Philip.

OLYMPIA (turning around): Oh, hi. I'm Olympia. I think this house is unbelievable.

DONNA: She's employed at —

OLYMPIA: I work part time as a waitress. I've got all kinds of projects which I intend to use my room for and they are increasing every minute — but none of them are noisy or smelly.

PHILIP: Fine. Any arrangement Donna makes is acceptable to me.

DONNA: Philip, she's trying to tell you about herself.

PHILIP: Oh. Pleased to meet you. Sorry. I'm Philip.

(PHILIP exits right)

OLYMPIA: I'm all in a sweat — I've never had such a cold reception —

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DONNA: Don't mind him. He was always a little like that — quiet, I mean — but he's gotten worse since his wife left him. That's why I'm trying to rent the rooms. Becky was the life of this house, always giving parties for her friends and her kids friends. She's had three already and she's only my age. I just turned twenty. Becky and I were friends in high school. When we graduated we both got jobs in the same office, the year of the riots. I was telling you about Philip. Two weeks ago Becky packed up her two youngest sons, left Philip with the oldest — a four year old brat — and ran off with Rick. Rick was my boyfriend.

OLYMPIA: I'm sorry.

DONNA: Don't be for me. I mean, I could see the storm brewing for the whole past year. But I guess Philip didn't see anything. Anyway, it's not because of the money that I put the ad in the paper. With Becky gone the house seemed like a tomb. She's the one who did all the redecorating and she kept changing everything every week. It was always so full of people, like a constant carnival. The kids parties sometimes got on my nerves. But I guess I understand how Philip feels. I miss the noise and the parties and Becky more than I miss Rick. He got to be such a slob, expecting me to do things —

OLYMPIA: I know exactly what you mean.

DONNA: He called me his broad and even his old lady. We did have a marriage certificate, but that's no reason. We all got married together, right in this room. Becky arranged for this Jewish priest to do a non-religious service since none of us believed any of that — You're not religious, are you?

OLYMPIA: I was brought up a strict Mormon and I've been rebelling against it ever since.

DONNA: I wasn't brought up a strict anything but I can't stand it either, all that hocus pocus about a bath. Maybe when people didn't bathe, but what's the point nowadays? Anyway, as soon as I saw what was happening I started dating Steve. He was a typewriter repairman then; he works for the phone company now and he promised to get my phone hooked up so I don't have to pay —

OLYMPIA: How does he manage that?

DONNA: I guess you can do a lot of things like that when you work for the phone company. I could tell he liked me the first time he fixed the machine in my office. He's older, I don't mean that he's old. He's in his thirties. As soon as Rick started going for Becky, my typewriter started going on the blink once a week. It was a ball until he got fired — not because of me, but because he wired the assistant manager's dictaphone to the loudspeaker system and the whole building split laughing. Steve is real shy; he must have had some bad experiences but he doesn't like to talk about it. For the whole past year Rick was arranging to meet Becky so I wouldn't know about it and I was seeing Steve at this bar near here twice a week. He walked me home for the first time last week. He likes to sit and just look at me while he sips his beer. I've never had anyone like me like that —

(Doorbells ring)

OLYMPIA: I'll get it.

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BEN (entering): I called you earlier about a room? I suppose it's the maid's room in the attic?

OLYMPIA: That's what I thought when I read the ad. You're in for a big surprise. What's your name? Mine's Olympia.

BEN: I'm Ben. Then you're not the woman who's renting? —

OLYMPIA: That's Donna. Why would you want a maid's room, Ben?

BEN: See, I work with a group that puts out an underground paper and we —

DONNA: Gosh, are you connected with those four students who were shot to death? —

BEN: You mean in Kent? No, I'm not connected, I, er —

DONNA (*disappointed*): You're not?

BEN: Maybe I am connected. What an odd question. The fact is I would have liked to see four guardsmen go down instead of four students.

DONNA: Gosh!

BEN: Are you still willing to show me the room?

DONNA (runs to right, calls): Philip! The other roomer is here! Could you show him a room?

OLYMPIA: I didn't even know there was an underground paper in this town.

(PHILIP appears in archway)

BEN: Oh, sure. It's one of the oldest in the country; it's been going —

PHILIP: How do you do?

DONNA: Ben works for an underground newspaper, Philip. Isn't that exciting?

PHILIP: What do you do for a living?

BEN: I was about to explain. I don't get paid at the underground paper. I'm on welfare. Disability.

OLYMPIA: Really? I've been trying to get on that for years!

BEN: I actually have a disability.

PHILIP: Fine. I guess we could hardly ask for a steadier source of income than the government. Would you follow me?

(PHILIP exits right with BEN)

OLYMPIA: It isn't clear to me who owns this enormous house.

DONNA: I do.

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OLYMPIA: It must be terribly expensive. Are you — I hope I'm not prying — rich?

DONNA: Me? Gosh, do I look like it? I guess you don't know how cheap these houses were selling, even a year after the riots. Come to think of it I was rich. I was the only one of us who had a bank account; that's why I got to fill out the loan application. It's funny. Philip went to college for four years and got a degree in chemistry or something, and then he spent ages filling out applications. He did finally get a job with a chemicals firm — as a shipping clerk. Becky and I had one interview during our senior year and we started working two weeks after we graduated getting half again as much as Philip gets now, and a year later I'd saved over a thousand dollars. Rick and Becky couldn't hold on to money; they strewed it around like confetti. Here comes the underground.

VOICE OF BEN (from right): You actually do chemistry experiments in your room? Couldn't you blow up the house?

VOICE OF PHILIP: Not very likely.

VOICE OF BEN: Would you be into making bombs?

VOICE OF PHILIP: I beg your pardon?

OLYMPIA: What kind of experiments?

DONNA: He makes silver, I think. Then he makes things out of it and melts them down again. And pottery.

OLYMPIA: In his room?

VOICE OF BEN: Cripes what a kitchen. My friends'll think I sold out. I can't even cook. Mind if I look at the garden?

VOICE OF PHILIP: The light switch is by the door.

OLYMPIA: What if — ?

DONNA: Shhh — I want to hear this.

VOICE OF BEN: This sure looks well kept. Just the two of you work on this?

VOICE OF PHILIP: I hate plants.

DONNA: Can you imagine?

VOICE OF BEN: And the rent — did I misread the amount?

VOICE OF PHILIP: Those arrangements are not my department.

BEN (*in archway*): You're putting me on!

DONNA: I don't understand.

BEN: Forty dollars a month for a room in this house? Half the town should have been here trying to rent it.

DONNA: If four of us each pays forty, that covers the loan, tax, utilities, plus some left over for repairs —

BEN: I know, but — are you sure you own this house?

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DONNA: Do you want to see the papers?

BEN: The plants in that window are out of sight. Did you do that?

DONNA: I'm glad you like them. I thought you underground people didn't care about things like that.

BEN: Will you still own the house an hour from now when I come back with my bags?

(BEN runs out left)

DONNA: Some people sure are odd. I did give you the keys, didn't I, Olympia? Good night.

(OLYMPIA exits left, DONNA exits right)

2.

TAPED NARRATOR: For almost a year we failed to break down the isolation. We remained strangers, tenants in an apartment house, miles apart at our jobs during the day, walled off from each other at night, polite and suspicious, unwilling to share, afraid to touch each other. One experimented in the privacy of his room, another smoked in the privacy of his, the third continued to tend her garden. The house was big — but dead. And then something happened; it started to come alive.

VOICE OF PHILIP (from right): If you break that vase one more time I'll break your ass! Play with your own things. *(Upstairs door slams)*

(OLYMPIA and TONI enter from right)

TONI: How can you expect me to move in here when you haven't even told them about me?

OLYMPIA: I thought it would go more smoothly if you helped create an atmosphere.

TONI: What kind of atmosphere? If they're all as uptight as you say —

OLYMPIA: They're not all uptight. Shh — someone's coming.

(PHILIP enters from right)

PHILIP: I guess I'm early — *(turns to leave)*

OLYMPIA: You're not early, Philip. Everyone else is late. I wanted us to try to — I don't know how to say it — Do you realize that you and I have hardly spoken to each other since the day I moved in? I thought we could — I wanted to introduce all of you to my friend Toni.

PHILIP: Good evening. Pleased to meet you. *(Sits down)*

TONI: Olympia has been telling me all kinds of things about you.

PHILIP: Oh? Who told Olympia? *(silence)* What's supposed to happen next?

TONI: *(rolling a joint)*: That's the kind of thing she told me —

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OLYMPIA: Philip, Toni's son Leon is almost the same age as Alec.

PHILIP: Congratulations.

OLYMPIA: I know it's none of my business, but Alec spends every evening locked up in your room —

PHILIP: I never lock it —

OLYMPIA: I didn't mean literally. What I'm getting at is that you and Alec don't exactly seem to get along. Don't you think he might enjoy playing with someone closer to his own age? —

PHILIP: You'd have to ask Alec.

TONI: (passing joint to Olympia): Olympia told me you take Alec to a nursery every morning and you don't even care what they teach him there.

PHILIP: What am I supposed to do? Take the kid to work?

OLYMPIA: What if you didn't have to take Alec to the nursery. What if he had a playmate right here, and someone to help? —

PHILIP: Is she going to organize a nursery at this house?

(DONNA enters from right)

DONNA: Who's organizing what?

OLYMPIA: Oh, Donna. No one's organizing anything. I was trying to introduce Philip to Toni. She happens to have a son and — well, I wanted to introduce her to you too.

TONI: Pleased to meet you, Donna. (*Shakes Donna's hand, and then passes her the joint*)

DONNA: No thanks, I don't smoke — Gosh! Is this marihuana? I've heard so much about it but I've never tried it. What do I do?

TONI: Is this for real?

DONNA: Honest.

OLYMPIA: Inhale it deeply and hold it in. That's it.

DONNA: I don't feel anything.

TONI: You will.

PHILIP: Isn't that dangerous?

TONI: For your health or your police record?

PHILIP: I understood it was bad for your health. And what if the police did happen to look in just now?

DONNA: Philip, we'd ask them to stop peeping.

OLYMPIA: The reason I wanted you to meet Toni is that she's just been evicted from her apartment, and I thought, since two of the upstairs bedrooms are empty —

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DONNA: Did Philip object to that?

PHILIP: She was telling me not to take Alec to the nursery.

TONI: It's not the nursery. It's the discipline and the brainwashing and the stifling of the child's imagination —

PHILIP: So you're against our entire educational system?

TONI: You've got it.

PHILIP: But what can you do about that?

TONI: I can keep my child out of it.

DONNA: What does this have to do with Toni's moving in?

TONI: You mean you don't object?

DONNA: Me? I think it's great. Here, let me give you keys. First of all we could each pay less rent — let's see —

OLYMPIA: Wait a second, Donna. I've been thinking about something. Let me just lay it out to see what people think —

(BEN enters from left)

BEN: Sorry I'm late. We had a meeting. Hey, is my nose hallucinating?

OLYMPIA: Oh hi, Ben. Look, people, it seems to me that someone

is getting exploited around here, and that someone is Donna. She doesn't want to play the role of landlady so she charges us ridiculously low rent and now she's proposing to lower it even more. Yet she's the one who faces all the hassles and does all the work around the house while the rest of us just stretch out in our rooms taking it all for granted.

BEN: Right on —

OLYMPIA: Now what if, for instance, we continued paying forty a month, even though there were five of us, only instead of giving it to Donna we deposited it in a common purse, a sort of house kitty.

PHILIP: I don't see —

OLYMPIA: Wait, I'm not done yet. Out of that kitty we could pay all the bills and make repairs and then decide what to do with what's left over —

PHILIP: Who would decide that?

OLYMPIA: We would, by meeting like we're doing now. The other side of the arrangement is that we'd all share the work of cleaning, mowing the lawn, maintaining the garden, repairing —

PHILIP: That doesn't sound efficient to me.

OLYMPIA: You'd rather have cheap rent and no work?

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PHILIP: All those things get done more efficiently if one person makes all the decisions, especially if that person happens to own the house.

DONNA: Well I think the idea is great! That's exactly how Becky — oops, that's just — great! As for the ownership papers, I'll have them transferred to the people living in the house. That way, Philip, you'll just do work on the part you own. I should have done this four years ago!

BEN: This is far out. I've been underestimating the revolutionary potential of marihuana.

TONI: Don't be cynical.

BEN: I'm not. This morning I was living with the straightest people in the city; I come back at night and they've all turned to heads organizing a commune.

DONNA: A commune?

PHILIP: Is that a good thing?

OLYMPIA: Won't you try even a drag on this, Philip?

PHILIP: What about all the health propaganda?

TONI: Don't they also say, "Try it and see?"

BEN: How was I being cynical?

TONI: You know perfectly well, or you ought to, that it's the people and not the pot that gets things going.

BEN: Then why have we been playing the landlord-tenant apartment house in the big city routine since I've been here? And how do you know what I know?

TONI: Olympia told me you worked on that underground rag, and if you want my opinion of those male-chauvinist counter-culture oriented —

BEN: You must be thinking about another paper which is called —

TONI: See what I mean? You're telling me what I'm thinking.

DONNA: I feel odd.

BEN: It'll get worse.

TONI: Better!

DONNA: Philip? Are you willing to give it a try?

PHILIP: I guess so. Until something better comes along.

DONNA: Gosh, Philip, are you going to go on grieving for the rest of your life?

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OLYMPIA: Honestly, Philip, are you actually content to work at your experiments behind the closed door of your room, without ever sharing your project with anyone, without interacting with the people in your own house?

PHILIP: I guess I'm willing to try it and see.

TONI: That's the spirit!

PHILIP: Am I supposed to be feeling something now?

TONI: Yes. Good.

PHILIP: I'd better go now. It's Alec's bedtime.

(PHILIP exits right)

BEN: You know, it's funny. I've been writing articles about self-organized activity since the riots. But when it actually starts happening in my own house I suddenly find myself empty, like I don't have anything to share. I don't even know how to boil an egg.

DONNA: I'm starting to float.

OLYMPIA: I'll tell you what, Ben. Why don't you not go to your greasy spoon for breakfast tomorrow morning. How can you afford to eat all your meals out on welfare anyway?

DONNA: Good night, everybody.

TONI: Good night, Donna. Thanks. You're a gem.

(DONNA exits right)

OLYMPIA: Meet me in the kitchen at 9 and I'll show you how to boil your egg.

(*OLYMPIA exits right*)

BEN: Do you have far to go?

TONI: I take a bus.

BEN: Mind if I walk you to the station?

TONI: Not if you don't mind hearing what else I think of that pseudo-revolutionary thing you call a paper, neither vertical nor horizontal, too big to fit in a purse but too small to wrap around packages —

BEN: Are those your keys on the table?

TONI: Thanks. Another thing I've wondered about is where do you guys get your pot? I have this friend who could get it for us dirt cheap; his name is Grover —

(*TONI & BEN exit left*).

3.

TAPED NARRATOR — Five isolated particles started to come out of their shells, to shed their tentacles, to form a community bristling with life. And as soon as five of us stepped out of our prisons, other lonely, isolated individuals were drawn to us like bees to flowers.

(During the narration, ALEC and LEON have installed themselves on the floor near the picture window)

ALEC: It's my turn.

LEON: No, it's mine.

ALEC: All right, it's yours.

LEON *(Shakes and throws dice)*: My armies invade Ran!

ALEC: That's Iran. *(throws)*: My armies invade Syria!

(TONI enters from right)

TONI: What are you two doing?

LEON *(throws)*: Mine advance to the Tigers.

ALEC: We're playing a game my father gave me.

TONI: Can I just see one of those?

LEON: But we're playing!

(Alec hands Toni a sample)

TONI: Jesus, a soldier! (Runs to archway and shouts) Ben, come here a second. Look at what Philip is teaching the children.

VOICE OF BEN: I can't leave this omelet!

TONI: What's this game called?

ALEC: World Conquest.

TONI *(shouting from archway)*: It's a game called World Conquest!

VOICE OF BEN: I can't hear you!

(TONI exits right)

ALEC: It's my turn.

LEON: No, it's mine!

ALEC: Oh, all right.

(TONI and BEN enter from right)

LEON: My armies invade everything up to the sea!

BEN: That's incredible.

ALEC: My armies defeat yours! You've got to retreat.

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TONI: It's worse than television. Here they're actually involved in it.

BEN: Have you talked to Philip about it?

TONI: Ben, I've tried. Last month he had them playing a thing called Nuclear Holocaust. I could have strangled him. I burst into his room and asked how anyone could be stupid enough to buy children a game like that. You know what he told me? "The kid's eventually going to face the world that's out there, not the world that's in your head."

BEN: He sure hasn't learned anything.

TONI: As if the world that's out there were unrelated to the games parents buy their children!

BEN: I'll call Olympia. *(exits right)*

TONI: I'll be right there.

VOICE OF BEN: Olympia! Breakfast!

TONI: Are you two coming?

LEON: We're right in the middle.

ALEC: We'll be right there. My armies advance to the Indus.

(Doorbell rings)

OLYMPIA *(running from right to left)*: I'll get it!

(Mattie, DAN and LISA at the doorway)

MATTIE: Hi. We're neighbors and we saw your sign —

OLYMPIA: Come on; we mean what the sign says.

(BEN at archway)

MATTIE: We've got our little girl with us —

TONI: That's great! She can play war games with our two little boys.

DAN: War games? What kind of place is this?

TONI: We're all anti-war except the kids — almost.

DAN: Ha! Don't trust anyone under ten!

BEN: I was just fixing breakfast, could you join us?

MATTIE: We're early risers; we've already eaten.

BEN: How about just coffee, then?

DAN: Sure. I've always got room for more coffee.

TONI: Come on, I'll help you set three more places.

(TONI and BEN exit right)

LEON: What does the sign say?

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ALEC: Illyria Street Commune, Everyone Welcome. My turn.

OLYMPIA: I don't know how to tell you what kind of place —

DAN: What I meant was —

OLYMPIA: Of course. You meant the war games. That would have thrown me for a loop too. That's Philip's thing. Not even. They're his idea of being a good father by giving his son presents.

MATTIE: How many of you are there?

OLYMPIA: Seven, counting the boys. Philip and Donna are out on jobs, the boys are Alec and Leon, and you just met Ben and Toni. Ben suggested the word commune, but none of us knows enough about communes to be sure it fits. Actually each of us is into his own thing most of the time, we eat together when we can, and we take turns doing the chores — not that all of them are unpleasant. But I'd like to see us expand into other things and involve more people in the community.

DAN: What community? Do you relate to a larger group, a political organization?

OLYMPIA: It's funny you ask that. I put up my sign three weeks ago and you're the first people who've responded. I guess people read "Everyone Welcome" and think it refers to everyone who belongs to a certain club! We mean the community, the neighbors, everyone.

DAN: Aren't you afraid of drunks or cranks dropping in?

MATTIE: Dan! That could just as well be us!

DAN: You're right. We haven't even told you about ourselves. I'm Dan.

MATTIE: I'm Mattie and she's Lisa.

OLYMPIA: What did you expect when you saw the sign?

DAN: Just what we found, I guess; a commune. See, I was politically active during the student movement days. I helped typeset the campus paper, the radical one. I dropped out of everything when the sects took over. Now I study history on my own and I work part time, typesetting in a bank, doing for capital what I learned to do in the movement. Coopted. But if someone convinced me that was it, the end, I'd commit suicide.

OLYMPIA: That was beautifully put.

DAN: I've thought of getting a standalone, that's just a glorified typewriter, in our apartment so as to work at home and typeset things that interested me —

OLYMPIA: Isn't that something that could involve a lot of people?

VOICE OF TONI: Olympia! Your omelet is getting cold!

MATTIE: That's why we dropped in here —

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OLYMPIA: Would you mind joining me in there? (Shouts to right)
We're coming. Our new friends have all kinds of suggestions for projects!

LISA: Can I play with them, mommy?

MATTIE: I guess that'll be all right. But be sure not to disturb their game.

(OLYMPIA, MATTIE and DAN exit right)

LEON: Where can I put my armies now?

ALEC: You lost!

LEON: I did not either!

LISA: Can I play too?

ALEC: Only two can play this game.

LEON: You want to see our tree house?

LISA: Mommy!

VOICE OF MATTIE: What is it, Lisa?

LISA: Can I go see the tree house?

VOICE OF MATTIE: Just a second, Lisa — Oh, all right. But be sure you don't fall!

(LEON, ALEC, LISA exit right)

(TONI enters)

TONI (*rushing toward game*): I'll burn it! I'll burn it! (*picks up board*) Shoot, I can't do that either. (*Shouts to right*) Hey you guys! Come back in here and put your stupid game away!

(MATTIE enters, places game in box)

MATTIE: I spend most of my day picking up the things Lisa leaves lying around.

TONI: Well I don't! And they don't expect me to.

ALEC (*enters from right*): Where is it?

TONI: Mattie put it on the table. And Alec, do me a favor. Put that box someplace where you can't find it again. And tell Philip —

ALEC (*running out with box*): Yes, Toni. (*exits*)

MATTIE: Having two of them around must keep you all running all the time.

TONI: (*picking up glasses, ashtrays*) The kids? They're so deep into their own thing they don't even want the rest of us around. Come on, I'll show you the tree house they built in the garden. Then we can talk while I do the dishes.

MATTIE: They built it? Will Lisa be safe?

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TONI: Oh sure. We didn't even know they were building it, we're so busy with our own things; I've started to study midwifery —

MATTIE: I don't see how you find the time! Lisa takes up every second I have —

TONI: Say, aren't you pregnant? What'll you do with two? —

(OLYMPIA, BEN, DAN enter from right)

OLYMPIA: Is everything you want on this grocery list, Toni? I've got to get going. There were several other errands I wanted to run —

TONI: Add dried garbanzos; I'll make humus.

MATTIE *(exiting with Toni)*: Could you tell? I only became aware —

(MATTIE, TONI exit right)

OLYMPIA *(shouting to right)*: We think we can get the typesetting project off the ground!

BEN: I've got to split.

VOICE OF TONI: That's great. We can call ourselves the Revolutionary Birth and Type Commune.

BEN *(shouts to right)*: Revolutionary horseshit!

VOICE OF TONI: You're the one who wades in that.

DAN: Are you opposed to the typesetting commune?

BEN: Man, everything the capitalists did in the nineteenth century is called Revolutionary when we or the Chinese do it.

DAN: What do you call it?

BEN: Hasn't Nixon's visit to Chou En-lai made everything clear? Their Great Leap is a leap into capitalism, repressive, informer-dominated, right wing capitalism right up Nixon's alley, and Nixon knows it; the only ones who don't know it are leftists who —

DAN: Why do you keep bringing up China? I wasn't ever a Pee Ell-er. I wasn't advocating that we start building the Party. We were talking about independent activity, organized by the people themselves —

BEN: Shit, man, you two were talking about starting a small business in this house. Business is what the whole fucking system is all about. Independent and self-organized business. You're mangling words. You don't step out of the system to do that; you step into it. It organizes it for you from the minute you decide to play that game. You start by getting a loan for the basic equipment —

OLYMPIA: Aren't you being awfully narrow and selfish, Ben? You've got your steady welfare check and that's the only reason you don't have to worry about your survival. But we can only get part-time welfare, the rest of the time we've got to rummage in the garbage for the leavings. It's the state that gives you the vantage point from which to look down on us while we're rummaging.

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DAN: What kind of steady welfare are you on, Ben?

BEN: Disability.

DAN: Really? Mattie gets ADC; officially we don't live together —

OLYMPIA: So does Toni. I myself have been getting food stamps since they expanded the program after the riots. My point is, what's wrong with Dan wanting to get out of a bank job, and with the rest of us getting involved in something that could put us in closer touch with the community?

BEN: I think everyone should abandon banks. It's just that I object to calling wage labor revolutionary, even when it's done at home. I'll see you tonight. Welcome to the tribe, Dan.

(BEN exits left)

OLYMPIA: He'll come around. He almost has already.

DAN: What kind of name is Olympia?

OLYMPIA: It's Greek. It's actually Olympia's. But that's odd, like it's plural. I think it's a mountain in southern Greece.

DAN: I thought that was spelled with a u.

OLYMPIA: I was third generation and never learned any Greek. What do you think?

DAN: About the typesetting?

OLYMPIA: Ben criticizes everything we do around here. That's all he knew how to do until he learned to cook. But as soon as a project gets started, he works harder on it than anyone else. I think you'll get along with Ben all right. The one that's impossible is Philip. Whenever you ask him to share something, he thinks you're a dentist coming at him with pliers. At one meeting some of us suggested we might like to learn pottery making. He molds it right in his room and bakes it in the basement. He stiffened as if he'd just drunk poison. "Of course you know there are patents on these things."

DAN: How did a person like that ever get involved with a commune?

OLYMPIA: He came with the house. At an earlier meeting we were trying to deal with the transportation problem. Only two of us have cars, the two with jobs, and they sit in lots all day long. Philip would have had to get up half an hour early to pool a ride with Donna, but nothing could move him to do that. As it is, whichever of us is going to need a car has to drive Donna to work and pick her up again. Do you have a car?

DAN: An old one, but we don't mind sharing it.

(TONI, Mattie, LISA enter from right)

MATTIE: I think that's fascinating. How long have you been studying?

TONI: You still here, Olympia? I thought you had all those errands.

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OLYMPIA: Cripes, I'm always doing this. I guess I'll be seeing a lot more of you two. I'm positive that loan is going to work out. Donna's credit is as solid as a rock.

(OLYMPIA exits left)

TONI: It was Olympia who got me to actually start studying it. I only griped about doctors until then. I've learned they're a lot more vicious than I ever imagined. It's like having the Marine Corps cutting up women. Olympia is into it because she thinks it'll involve other people. I'm into it because I like kids, at any age, and I can't stand what's done to them in hospitals, or to the mothers.

MATTIE: She's been telling me about midwifery.

DAN: You people sure are into a lot of interesting shit.

(LEON runs in from right)

LEON: When're you coming back, Lisa?

TONI: She'll be here a lot, so you and Alec had better start thinking up a lot of games for three — and I don't mean war games. That Philip. When I waved Nuclear Holocaust in his face he said, "What's wrong with it? I played monopoly when I was a kid." So I said, "Don't you think it shows, Philip?" His face looked like he wished the nuclear holocaust on me.

LISA: Will you show me the witch in the tree next time?

(LISA, Mattie, DAN exit left; TONI, LEON exit right)

4.

TAPED NARRATOR: The ice was broken. Two members of the community joined us, then a third, and still others followed, even actual street people. We were no longer a green island surrounded by indifferent, salty sea; the waters receded and new land began to appear. The community around us became aware that something live and vital was stirring in its midst.

(During the narration, a typesetting machine, a desk and a chair are brought to the room. ALEC runs in from left, panting, and slams the front door. OLYMPIA runs in from right)

OLYMPIA: What's the matter? Is something wrong?

ALEC: Nothing's happening yet. Toni wanted me to get the largest pan we've got.

OLYMPIA: I know the one she means.

ALEC: Phone fixed yet?

(OLYMPIA, ALEC exit right)

(Doorbell rings. OLYMPIA runs to left. STEVE enters)

OLYMPIA: You must be Steve. Am I glad to see you!

(ALEC enters from right with pan)

ALEC: You the phone man?

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STEVE: I guess so.

OLYMPIA: Does Toni need me, Alec?

ALEC: Naw. She says one more would be in the way.

(ALEC exits left, clowning with pan)

OLYMPIA: What an awful time for the phone to go out! Mattie's giving birth.

STEVE: Donna told me she was due. I'm sorry I couldn't come yesterday. *(Starts to take apart the telephone)*

OLYMPIA: I've been dying to find out how you managed to rig us up a free phone.

STEVE: It's not a free phone. It's a regular phone with an unlisted number, bills are sent out monthly, and I'm making a standard service call —

OLYMPIA: But we never get any bills —

STEVE: That's because the bills are sent to the General Motors Corporation.

OLYMPIA: You're kidding.

STEVE: This phone is regular in every way, only it's located in an executive office at GM headquarters. This particular office isn't likely to report discrepancies —

OLYMPIA: That's ingenious!

STEVE: It's just wire and a splice. I've been trying to connect your electricity to the same office —

OLYMPIA: Do you do a lot of that?

STEVE: Not really. One time I put two people who weren't supposed to know about each other on a party line. Another time I put eight such people on a party line.

OLYMPIA: That's hilarious! I meant, do you do things like this for other friends than Donna?

STEVE: I'm not familiar with that many executive offices.

OLYMPIA: Donna told us you can fix all kinds of things.

STEVE: Oh that's what you mean! I used to fix a friend's van and he'd get me things I needed from his plant. But he retired and moved away.

OLYMPIA: Have you ever thought of relating that way to our commune?

STEVE: Donna keeps asking me that. I don't know. Recently I did some wiring for some young people like you who are setting up a printing cooperative —

OLYMPIA: An actual printing plant organized like a commune?

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STEVE: I wouldn't call it a plant. They'll be able to do a few books and brochures, nothing large. When I was done they all offered to do things for me, and I was sorry I got involved.

OLYMPIA: I don't understand.

STEVE: There, it works now. Look, they offered to do printing for me. Now why would I need anything printed?

OLYMPIA: Couldn't they offer you something more useful?

STEVE: That's just it. Why did they have to offer me anything? Everything was fine while we worked together. Then everything went foul. I became some kind of charity case.

OLYMPIA: I think I understand. What if each of us is so involved in his own thing that no one remembers to thank you?

STEVE: I'd better go now before the company gets suspicious. I'll think about it.

OLYMPIA: Dan's car is on the blink and he can't afford to take it to a garage.

STEVE: Donna could have told me that. When does he need it?

OLYMPIA: There's no hurry, he's using Donna's. Philip finally agreed to drive Donna to work.

STEVE: I'll try to get to it this weekend. You're Olympia, right?

(STEVE exits left)

OLYMPIA (Shouts left): Steve! When will you do our electric wiring?

VOICE OF STEVE: As soon as I get to it.

OLYMPIA: (*slams door and dances to phone*) We've got it made now! (*dials*) Hi, Leon. Tell Toni the phone works and I'll be right there.

(Doorbell rings)

OLYMPIA (*opening door*): Did you forget something — Oh.

VOICE OF BARRY: Hi, what's happening? We've been seeing this sign you've got, and —

OLYMPIA: Please come in.

(BARRY AND SHARON enter from left)

BARRY: Thanks. I'd like to introduce you to my girl Sharon. And your name is? —

OLYMPIA: Olympia. Won't you sit down? Would you like something? Coffee? Beer?

BARRY: Don't mind if I do. Beer will be fine.

SHARON: No thank you.

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(OLYMPIA exits right)

SHARON: You don't have to order things the minute we arrive!

BARRY: Shit, Sharon, how else are we going to find out what it's all about?

(OLYMPIA returns with beer)

BARRY: Me and Sharon, we got a pretty clear idea what a commune is. I read in the papers about this commune in West Germany, the Red Army Fraction —

OLYMPIA: Oh, we're nothing like that!

BARRY: I guess not, or you wouldn't have that sign. The way I see it, it's not a problem for me. What I mean is, I quit high school two years ago. I figured, it's boring and there's so much out there. I haven't actually reached a lot of it yet, but I've got big plans. Last year I worked as a migrant farm worker, and then I went to see what was happening up in Alaska. I've got this assembly job now, except on my day off, and in a few months I'll be going down to check out Mexico. Como esta usted? This dude I work with is clueing me in on the lingo. So it's not a problem for me, see. But now my girl here, Sharon —

SHARON: I quit high school two weeks ago. Oh, it's not Barry who talked me into it. I'm committed to experiencing the underside of life, and I'm convinced I can learn about life and people more profoundly on my own —

(Phone rings)

OLYMPIA: How old are you, Sharon?

SHARON: Sixteen, but —

OLYMPIA: (*on phone*) Hello — Dan! Yes, I'm still here. The funniest people dropped in. How is she?

BARRY: That was a little heavy, Sharon. Besides, it's Underground, not Underside.

SHARON: What do you want me to say?

BARRY: Couldn't you tell them about wanting to be an actress? They're probably into shit like that.

OLYMPIA (*on phone*): I can bring it and be right over with it! — That's silly! Just tell me where it is! (*hangs up*) Please go on. I'm sorry about the interruption. One of us is giving birth.

SHARON (*gesticulating with her arms*): Oh how exciting. I love newborn things —

BARRY: It's probably a kid, Sharon —

SHARON: and particularly babies.

OLYMPIA: You said you wanted to experience the underside of life
—

Illyria Street Commune by Fredy Perlman

SHARON: Well — that's only half of it. When I was little I dreamed of being a movie actress. And last week I got my first job — in a clothing factory.

OLYMPIA: As a start, you mean?

BARRY: You blew it, Sharon.

SHARON: Ever since two weeks ago I've been staying at Barry's. But we both feel we can experience life more profoundly if we continue to live independently.

OLYMPIA: You mean you're looking for a place to stay?

BARRY: Aw, Sharon, you really blew it.

SHARON: I'm not just out looking for a room. I know I'll be able to do everything that's done in a commune. I've seen Dr. Zhivago and —

OLYMPIA: We have an empty room and you're welcome to it. The thing is, do you foresee any difficulties?

SHARON: You mean I can move in? I promise there won't be any difficulties. I told my parents to fuck off — I mean, they've messed up their own lives and I don't want them messing with mine!

BARRY: I hope you don't get the wrong idea, Miss — Sister — I'm not just dumping Sharon on youse here. I'll come around and see what's happening.

(DAN, LEON enter from left)

DAN: All right, Leon, go and play your war game in the tree house.

LEON (*plays the “marine,” stops in front of Barry*): I’ve seen you on the corner! You’re the one with the motorbike.

BARRY: Cool it, kid.

LEON: Bang. You’re dead.

(Leon Exits right, running)

OLYMPIA: I could have brought Toni’s things, Dan, if you’d told me —

DAN: I needed the walk. Mattie’s just gone into labor. Toni’s really competent, and Ben is being very helpful. Even Alec and Lisa are helping. Compared to their usual energy level they’re like robots. But Leon of all people is a royal pain in the ass. Are these the people who dropped in?

OLYMPIA: This is our newest member. Sharon is moving into the empty room. She’s an actress.

SHARON: Pleased to meet you.

DAN: Charmed, I’m sure.

OLYMPIA: And this is Sharon’s chaperone, Barry.

DAN: Her what?

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OLYMPIA: I'm not joking!

BARRY: What's happening, man?

DAN: Fine, thanks. I'd better go look for Toni's things.

(DAN exits right)

OLYMPIA (*shouts from archway*): I've just spent the most exciting afternoon! Everything's happening all at once —

VOICE OF DAN: You mean there's more than Sharon?

OLYMPIA: There's Sharon's acting and the puppet theater Toni's been talking about. Barry's an experienced farm worker and he'll probably help us grow our own produce in the garden. And that's only a start. You can drop that service contract with IBM —

VOICE OF DAN: Sharon doesn't own IBM!

OLYMPIA: Donna's friend Steve, the phone repairman, used to repair typewriters, and he'll fix it free of charge. He also knows some people starting a revolutionary printing commune, so you can consider those brochures we've been talking about as good as printed —

DAN (*entering from right*): You're putting me on.

OLYMPIA: This coming weekend Steve's going to fix your car, and if you act as if you take that for granted he'll teach us all to fix cars and we can open a revolutionary garage, solve our transportation problem once and for all, and start something the community could really get involved in.

DAN: Ben will flip when he hears about the revolutionary garage.

OLYMPIA: Ben isn't the only one. Philip's ears perked up when I asked if I could photograph his silver plates before he melted them back down. Watch his ears when we tell him we can put those pictures in a printed brochure with typeset texts explaining what they are!

DAN: I can't take it all in. Are you coming?

SHARON: Do you have a name picked out yet?

DAN: Dimitri if he's a boy, Rose Anne if she's a girl.

SHARON: Do I call you Brother now?

DAN: I'd rather you called me Dan.

SHARON: Being as I'm a member of the commune now, Dan, can I come and watch the birth? I've never seen one.

DAN: Sure. Let's all go. *(to right)* Leon, coming with us?

VOICE OF LEON: Don't come any closer! You'll never get me alive!

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(OLYMPIA, DAN exit left)

BARRY: I told you that actress bit would do it.

(SHARON, BARRY exit left)

5.

TAPED NARRATOR: Strangers became friends, formerly hostile enemies became allies tied by bonds of common projects, formerly warring tribes were drawn together in a federation of kinsmen, brothers and sisters. If the initial suspicion and hostility still survived, it was only a diminishing residue.

(An easel and a crib are placed near the typesetting machine)

(BEN, MATTIE with ROSE ANNE in her arms, enter from right, sit)

MATTIE: Your kish was wonderful, Ben. Dan sometimes succeeds with a pie, but whenever I try making something with a crust it somehow never comes out right. Were you always a good cook?

BEN: (rolls joint; smoking continues during the scene) Before I came here I knew how to cook instant coffee, and that was all.

MATTIE: You're kidding! No, you look like you mean it. Come to think of it, I could say the same thing about myself. I never realized how deeply other people affected what one does. Before, I couldn't find the time to read even newspaper headlines in between running

after Lisa, feeding her and changing her. When I was pregnant with Rose Anne I thought things would get twice as bad, and they would have if we hadn't met you people. Suddenly I've got the time to read and to do some typesetting and Olympia is even pushing me to learn to paint —

(SHARON enters from left)

SHARON: Did I miss everything? Those bastards kept us overtime.

MATTIE: You almost missed Ben's delicious kish but I think there's a slice left.

SHARON: Good, I'm starving. *(runs out right)*

MATTIE: I'd never have agreed to have Rose Anne at home if I hadn't thought Olympia and Toni would consider me a spoil sport

—

(PHILIP enters from right. MATTIE hands him joint & he smokes)

MATTIE: Wasn't that meal something?

PHILIP: It was good.

BEN: I liked the melted peanut butter dish you made the other day. Where did you get the recipe?

PHILIP: Cook book.

BEN: Where are the kids?

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PHILIP: Toni took them to a farm to look at pigs.

(DAN, OLYMPIA enter from right; OLYMPIA takes ROSE ANNE)

DAN: You sure go through a lot of pans when you cook, Ben.

BEN: I guess my teacher neglected that part of my education.

MATTIE: You'll learn when you have to clean after yourself —

OLYMPIA: How's my little Rose Anne, the first full-fledged com-munard?

MATTIE: Thanks to you! Although by rights I should be con-sidered the first; I came alive thanks to this place several months before she did. *(Places Rose Anne in the crib)*

OLYMPIA: We haven't yet reached the point of giving out certifi-cates. Philip, why don't you bring your surprise?

PHILIP: Donna isn't here.

OLYMPIA: Neither is Toni but who knows when either of them will turn up. Besides, didn't Donna say she might work overtime today, and then eat out with Steve and Barry?

PHILIP: All right. *(Exits right)*

OLYMPIA: Oh, did we tell you Steve connected our electricity to the same GM office that pays our phone bills?

DAN: That's far out! Do you suppose he'd be willing to do the same thing for our apartment?

OLYMPIA: Ask him. Barry worked with Steve on that. Maybe Barry should do it. He's been picking things up at lightning speed.

MATTIE: How could Barry ever find the time, with all the garage work he's been doing? Dan, isn't it time you brought the booklets from the car?

OLYMPIA: No, no, wait until Philip comes back.

DAN: Maybe I'll talk to Barry about our electricity.

(PHILIP and SHARON enter from right, carrying trays with colorful, fat candles)

SHARON: How can you find it again after that?

PHILIP: The wax always stays separate.

SHARON: I'd think you'd get soup. Can I watch you sometime?

PHILIP: Sure, that's how Olympia learned.

SHARON: Where should I set this?

OLYMPIA: Here, Sharon, I'll take it. I'm glad you're so interested, I had thought you weren't into the things we do around here.

SHARON: You mean because I had a date that night when you —

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OLYMPIA: Oh, no, of course not, Sharon. I'm sure Philip will be glad to show you everything he showed me. Well, go on everybody, take your choice. There's a candle here for everyone in the commune; the bitty one is for Rose Anne.

MATTIE: (*taking one*): My, they're gorgeous. Who could blame Sharon for wanting to learn to make them? I'd like to learn myself.

PHILIP: I wasn't exactly intending to start a school.

OLYMPIA: Hmm. That's an idea.

DAN: They're so colorful. These are out of sight, Philip.

PHILIP: Olympia made them.

MATTIE: You mean she didn't just watch you?

OLYMPIA: I watched Philip shape two, then I melted those down and started again on my own.

PHILIP: She's a fast learner.

OLYMPIA: Get the books now, Dan.

(*DAN exits left*)

MATTIE: Unfortunately everyone knows what the next surprise is.

SHARON: I don't.

OLYMPIA: No one's actually seen the finished product. (*DAN returns with carton*) Let's see how they came out.

(*DAN passes out brochures*)

BEN: It looks far out.

SHARON (*reads*): "Metamorphoses, Illyria Street Commune."
What is this?

OLYMPIA: The first genuine commune production, created by communards at every single stage.

SHARON: Aren't these Philip's vases?

OLYMPIA: Those are printed reproductions of photographs of Philip's objects.

PHILIP: It's a record of a finite portion of the infinite metamorphoses of an initial given quantity of raw matter.

SHARON: I see — I think.

DAN: Olympia photographed Philip's objects before he melted them down again to make other objects with a different combination of the same materials and with other processes. At least that's how I understand it.

OLYMPIA: Ben wrote poems for some of the objects and edited Philip's technical texts explaining some of the processes. Dan typeset all the textual material, and we printed it at the cooperative print shop run by Steve's friends.

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DAN: Olympia and Barry did the printing.

SHARON: Barry worked on this? He never told me anything.

BEN: Maybe he wanted one person to be surprised.

(DONNA, STEVE, BARRY enter from left)

DONNA: I'm sorry we're so late.

OLYMPIA: You're just in time for the biggest surprise.

DONNA: Barry's been telling me about it. *(examining brochure)* It's unbelievable. I never expected anything like this to happen when I advertised rooms three years ago. Did you, Philip?

PHILIP: It's very well reproduced considering it's only in two dimensions. Do you see this grayish outline? It's the shadow cast by this elevation located at the opposite extremity.

OLYMPIA: I was sure you'd be pleased, Philip.

MATTIE: I should hope so! It's beautiful.

BARRY: Hey, Sharon, what's happening?

SHARON: Nothing at all, Barry. You don't even live here and you know more of what's going on than I do. Why didn't you tell me about this book?

BARRY: Busy, Sharon, Busy.

OLYMPIA: Isn't it your turn now, Mattie?

MATTIE: Mine's going to seem so plain compared to what you all did.

DAN: It's the valleys that make the peaks.

MATTIE: Oh, Dan, it's the first one I actually finished.

DAN: Did I say valleys were bad?

MATTIE (*turns easel around; it contains a reproduction of the crib standing next to it*): Well, there it is. I'm not sure it's worth sharing.

OLYMPIA: You finished it!

MATTIE: I rushed to get it done by the time the brochure was printed.

OLYMPIA: Your technique has really improved.

PHILIP: It's obvious why you picked that subject.

OLYMPIA: It's nearly a perfect reproduction, Mattie.

(*BEN has been distributing sheets to all, and people are reading them*)

BEN: I've been saving a little surprise of my own.

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OLYMPIA: Oh? What is it?

BARRY: Hey, it's poetry.

SHARON: Who's the cool lady?

DAN: Do you know the Italian word for lady?

PHILIP: It's also clear from "her sumptuous rooms, plant-cluttered window, precious garden" —

BEN: " — conspiratorial smile."

DONNA: I'm going to kiss you, Ben.

BEN: That's what I hoped you'd do when I wrote it. (*DONNA kisses him*)

DONNA: I'm going to cry.

SHARON: I've been saving something too — for the commune.

BEN: Good for you, Sharon.

(Sharon exits right)

DONNA: They're no longer mine to give, the rooms, the window, the garden. And they were all I had to give.

BEN: There's still the smile; that'll always be yours to give.

DONNA: You're sweet.

STEVE: I think it's really nice for a person to be able to make this kind of gift to another.

OLYMPIA: I think the poem is as corny as the conversation. But I certainly am surprised. "The Cool Lady"! Ben, I thought you and your newspaper preached the liberation from wage labor.

BEN: I thought so too.

OLYMPIA: Donna, how long have you worked in your office?

DONNA: I guess it's going on five years. But I don't understand what that —

OLYMPIA: Have you ever thought of quitting?

DONNA: I can't imagine what I'd do with myself. The company organizes my time better than I ever could. Why do you —

OLYMPIA: I was asking Ben about his paper.

BEN: That's not very cool, Olympia.

(TONI, GROVER, ALEC, LEON & LISA enter from left, all high)

LEON: Mattie, can Lisa spend the night here?

LISA: Can I, mommy?

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MATTIE: Actually, I think it's time for us to leave.

TONI: You two can't leave. I brought you something.

MATTIE: Oh all right, Lisa. But don't be too rowdy.

(LEON, LISA & ALEC exit right)

TONI: I'm sorry I missed it all. Grover and his friends insisted that we all try samples of everything. Oh, is this the brochure? It looks great! Mattie, you finished the crib!

MATTIE: And you probably want to know why.

TONI: If you could paint something imaginary with as much realism it would really be out of sight.

DAN: Olympia gave each of us a candle.

(SHARON returns, sets a second easel on stage, sits down near it)

DONNA: And Ben wrote me a poem. Could one ever give anything nicer?

TONI: I bet I could. That's why I dragged Grover in. I wanted to give him.

PHILIP: Give him what?

TONI: Don't play dense, Philip. Doesn't anyone get it? I'm giving him. I've kept him to myself all these years through no fault of my own, and now I'm sharing him —

GROVER (*auctioneering*): ...going twice, going three times, sold; the left arm goes to the lady in the back row. Now the head; do I hear a nickel...?

TONI: Stop clowning, Grover. Why is this so obscure? It's gift giving day, so I'm giving Grover. I mean, he's the gift — I'm giving him to — to everyone — to the commune —

PHILIP — But why? Or what for? What does it do? Sing? Lay eggs?

TONI: I've never in my life —

BEN: You're keeping something from us, Toni. Are you asking us to reintroduce cannibalism?

TONI: I'll be damned if I'm not on the verge of tears. I've been raving to Grover about the only bunch of genuine radicals in the world, the only ones who didn't treat a person as some kind of thing, and all you want to know is what the thing is for and how it tastes! I'm not reintroducing cannibalism! You are cannibals.

BEN: Worse, Toni. Ten thousand years of progress worse —

TONI: Grover is my best outside friend and my resource person and it's thanks to him that I always have free pot and —

PHILIP: Say, what kind of farm did you take the kids to?

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GROVER: We've been to a cabbage farm. That's what it says on the sign. Head cabbage. And that's all you see growing when you drive up to it either way. But that cabbage is for the pigs. The cabbage for the heads is Michoacan and Acapulco gold and Colombian —

PHILIP: Are those the brands of marihuana you had Alec sample?

GROVER: Man, that's the only kind of farm I'd ever want to get close to —

BEN: Why haven't you brought him around before, Toni?

GROVER: That, my man, was executed at my request. Why would you want to weld a U-haul to your car when you were pulling it all right with a hitch and chain?

BEN: I don't get it.

GROVER: Look, my man, the connection, to be on the safe side —

BEN: Why did you want to be on the safe side?

GROVER: Now we're getting to the historical nitty gritty, as my business associates call it. The fact is, it's not just the pot that's being watched nowadays. Anyone that even looks like someone from a commune has five investigators assigned to him at every airport in the country. Remember the French revolution of 1968? Well me and this other dude ran M-38's across the border and our companeros on the loyalist side shot the bodies of priests full of holes and burned Notre Dame to the ground. Now if the pigs ever added two plus two together, they'd get the connection. Dig?

DAN: I'd thought not a single shot was fired in France in 68.

GROVER: That's what everyone thought, but that was the most successful media blitz in history. The news was kept under such tight control that even the companeros themselves didn't know that those large bricks they kept passing each other were actually crates loaded with machine guns —

TONI: The first thing you should all know about Grover is that he's a terrific storyteller. But he's got contacts all over this city who can make his stories come true. When I told him what Steve had done with our phone and electricity —

GROVER: I figured, why stop with the corporations, my man? The State's the biggest corporation of them all and Agnew is up there in the vanguard, raising our consciousness about some of the possibilities.

BEN: Don't you mean Nixon?

PHILIP: Didn't you know, Ben? The vice-president was found guilty of defrauding the government of several thousand dollars. I thought you followed these things.

BEN: I do, but not up close.

GROVER: You know what's even better than free phone and electricity? Listen to this. I know this lawyer who could rig up papers and they'd look like the cabbages on this farm, everything legal from the road but don't invite your neighbors for lunch. I'm not talking about paying no tax on this building; I'm talking about neg-

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ative tax, about getting huge checks from the government, refunds, like when you run your gas meter backwards with a vacuum cleaner —

DONNA: I think your friend is hilarious —

TONI: He's hardly gotten started yet. Grover could help that type-setting co-op get off the ground.

DAN: Really? In what way?

GROVER: Without exaggerating I'd estimate that every radical in this town goes through me for one thing or another, and they're the wordiest people you'd hope to find —

DAN: But how could we make contact?

GROVER: Easiest thing in the world, my man. Next time a dude starts telling me about his newest theory, I'll just ask if I can borrow it so as to get an estimate. That way you can decide if it's up your alley before taking it on. Dig? I could keep a whole room full of you at your machines round the clock —

MATTIE: Oh, wow, from rags to riches!

STEVE (*near Sharon's easel*): It's very moving. Did you do it?

SHARON: I intended it as my gift to the commune.

BEN: When did you bring this in, Sharon? I've never seen anything like it. It's fantastic!

GROVER: I understand some of you are into the business of repairing the four-wheeled life preservers marketed by Ford and General Motors. Say, do you have something to soothe a parched throat, something a little stronger than beer?

BARRY: Come with me and pick out what you want, Grover. Yes, we're into fixing cars —

(GROVER & BARRY exit right)

BEN: You can really paint.

SHARON *(gesticulating wildly)*: It's all of you who did it to me, doing all kinds of things you've never done before.

DAN: Have you honestly never painted before? This is so powerful it stands off the canvass —

SHARON: It's not even canvass; when I started I didn't know —

TONI: It's so naively expressive, so perfectly unspoiled. Have you seen it, Philip? She had to quit school to express herself like that; if she'd stayed two more years they would have squeezed it out of her, boxed her imagination, conventionalized her perception —

PHILIP: It certainly is original. I think it's good.

TONI: Admit that it's good in spite of what she was taught in school.

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PHILIP: Was Sharon educated on samples of five different brands of marihuana? —

TONI: You're evading the issue, Philip!

OLYMPIA: I thought you wanted to be an actress, Sharon. How do you find time to develop your acting and also to paint?

SHARON: I don't know, Olympia, but I know that every morning I wanted to go on until it was finished; I even got up before dawn —

OLYMPIA: Oh, Sharon, the paint is already cracking; any number of people could have showed you how to mix paint properly —

SHARON: You're right, I didn't have time to learn all that. Once I started I wanted to give all my time to it and my job became unbearable. I set my alarm for six hours after I reached bed, and I rushed up every morning —

TONI: Don't get so excited, Sharon, you'll knock something over!

OLYMPIA: Oh how could you, Sharon? This is a sheet of paper, stapled to a frame.

(BARRY enters from right)

BARRY: Hay Steve, come here a second. This dude Grover says he could get us cheap car parts — the garage would have it made.

STEVE: I could use a strong drink —

(STEVE & BARRY exit right)

SHARON: When I started I didn't know there was a right way to do it.

TONI: There isn't.

SHARON: I just started the painting on the back of one of Barry's travel posters, but after a point it started to curl so bad I almost gave up. The man who sold me the easel showed me how to mount canvass to a frame, but by then I loved what was here — I just stapled the poster to the frame. The paint cracked when the sheet flattened, but I liked that so well I was intending to start with another travel poster —

OLYMPIA: But part of the painting curves around the frame and continues on the back, and has staples going through it.

SHARON: I thought it was honest to let the painting tell how it became the way it was.

OLYMPIA: Toni, your friend sure is a bullshit artist. I don't see why everyone's so taken in.

PHILIP: He's a blabbermouth. And probably dangerous. He admitted he was a dope dealer.

DAN: You have the impression he wont come through with the typesetting, Olympia?

TONI: Don't worry about that. He'll come through.

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OLYMPIA: Even if he does, is that the kind of basis we want? What do you think, Ben?

BEN: He uses the word Business an awful lot: garage business, typesetting business —

DAN: Aw, Olympia, why are you winding Ben up on that track? I thought we'd resolved that, and it's the first time I actually have a prospect of quitting that bank job —

(GROVER, STEVE, BARRY enter from right, BARRY with tea pot)

BARRY: I made tea for everybody that wants some.

GROVER (standing in front of Sharon's painting): I picked up from Toni that you people were into some fancy shit, but I never expected anything like this. You're Olympia, right?

OLYMPIA: Yes, but —

GROVER: You probably know this without my telling you, but there isn't a painting can hold up a candle to this in any gallery in town. This is post-naive post-abstract expressionism post-everything.

BARRY: Tea, anyone?

OLYMPIA: I'll have some.

SHARON: Me too, Barry.

(BARRY pours for each and sets SHARON'S cup on a surface between Sharon and her painting)

GROVER: The only painter I know who did anything like this is Kahlo, that Mexican woman who'll outlive her husband Diego Rivera. She went right off the canvass and painted all over the frame and the easel and probably the wall, although they don't bring the wall in on the traveling exhibits. But this has a different kind of power. Did you do this yourself? How did you get that cracked paint effect?

OLYMPIA: Actually it's Sharon who painted it. She started with a large sheet of paper, a travel poster in fact. I'm sure she'd love to tell how she got the paint to crack.

SHARON (gesticulating): It's because I didn't know you couldn't lay thick layers of oil paint on paper. It started to shrink and curl and whenever I tried to straighten it —

(SHARON's arm flies wildly into her tea cup, sending cup and tea into her paper painting)

GROVER: Sorry I asked.

STEVE: Maybe it can be fixed.

TONI: Poor Sharon. Your arms. They're so uncontrolled.

BARRY: They're always like that when she's excited.

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GROVER: Now don't cry, kid. You did one, you can do more. Now this one dude I know, his whole house burned down and he lost —

SHARON: I have an awful feeling that I did something wrong, but I don't know what it is! (Runs out right)

GROVER: Well, I guess I did my harm for tonight. See you around. Thanks for inviting me, Toni.

BARRY: Can you wait a second, Grover? I thought of some more things I wanted to ask about the car parts. You coming, Steve? I'm counting on you for a ride.

(GROVER, BARRY, STEVE exit left)

DAN: Oh, shit, I thought of some things I wanted to ask him too. (DAN exits left)

MATTIE: I guess I'll just leave Lisa up there.

TONI: Don't worry, Mattie. She's so high she won't know where she slept.

(TONI exits right)

MATTIE: It's really too bad about the accident.

OLYMPIA: Don't lose sleep over it.

(MATTIE with ROSE ANNE exits left)

PHILIP: I melt mine down after I finish them.

OLYMPIA: Yes, I suppose it's the same principle.

PHILIP: Too bad you didn't take a photograph.

(OLYMPIA, PHILIP, BEN exit right)

6.

TAPED NARRATOR: At last the isolated fragments were unified into a community, a federation, a union — but the unity was still fragile. Generations of isolated growth had left their scars; outwardly unified, the community still bristled with resistance toward the launching and implementation of common projects.

(DAN enters from left, begins typesetting. Door opens at left)

VOICES (from left): Come on Grover. A little sunshine won't hurt you.

GROVER (to left): Me and flowers is like icicles and ice cream. Tell me when you get to the poppies. Closes door) Hey, my man, how's business?

DAN: I'm trying to finish that paper on "Non-hierarchic demythologized forms of subversion." It's as boring as anything I typed at the bank.

GROVER: I thought you looked them over before taking them on.

DAN: I figured I could have part of it typeset during the time I

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spent reading it. Listen to this. “The whole notion of harmony and fulfillment, separated from their hypostatization in the form of systematization to a functionalization became a purposeless purposiveness —”

GROVER: Don’t knock it, man; that dude was fired from three universities for not being scholarly enough.

DAN: At least in the bank you could see the point, once you knew where you were. But this shit — Oh, hell, at least I can work on my own hours. How’s that tax refund scheme going?

GROVER: Still working on it; give me two or three more weeks.

(OLYMPIA enters from right)

OLYMPIA: Where’s the boiler repairman?

GROVER: Who’s that?

OLYMPIA: Your friend —

GROVER: Oh, him. He couldn’t make it, seeing as it’s Sunday and his only day off.

OLYMPIA: But he can’t come on a weekday because he works then!

GROVER: Six days a week. That’s what I mean. You can’t expect a dude like that to work on his free day too, can you? Now don’t get upset, Olympia. Actually, he taught me all he knew about boilers, and then some. In fact, I knew a lot about them myself. Fixing them

is the easiest thing in the world. All you really have to worry about is that the temperature of the water doesn't rise above 212 degrees Fahrenheit. Let's get to it; where's this boiler located?

OLYMPIA: Grover, are you sure you've seen a boiler before?

GROVER: I would have brought the boiler school diploma nailed up above my bed if I'd known you'd —

OLYMPIA: I suppose you're right; there can't be that much to it. Why don't you go study it; I'll get the others.

GROVER: Where's this thing at?

OLYMPIA: In the basement, Grover!

GROVER: This one dude I knew had one of these things explode on him. (*GROVER exits right*)

OLYMPIA: Can you come now, Dan?

DAN: I've got five pages left of this paper, and I've got —

OLYMPIA (shouting left): Come on, everybody! Boiler repair time!

(*PHILIP & BEN enter from left*)

BEN: I didn't see Grover come with anyone.

OLYMPIA: His friend couldn't come, but Grover says he knows about boilers.

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BEN: Good luck. Holler when you need us. (Exits left)

OLYMPIA: Isn't anyone else coming? Grover is already downstairs.

PHILIP: Grover knows about boilers?

(PHILIP & OLYMPIA exit right. DAN typesets. MATTIE enters from left, goes to archway)

MATTIE *(calls right)*: Lisa!

VOICE OF LISA *(from right)*: Yes, mommy!

MATTIE: When are you coming out?

VOICE OF LISA: Right away, mommy.

MATTIE: You should come out too, Dan, it's such a beautiful day.

DAN: I'd rather get this done before getting my hands dirty.

MATTIE: You should see how Donna does it. She digs a separate hole for each seed.

DAN: Of grass?

MATTIE: No dummy. We're planting flowers all along the wall and the fence.

(MATTIE exits left. Dan typesets)

VOICE OF OLYMPIA (from right): Dan, Ben or somebody!

DAN: What is it?

VOICE OF OLYMPIA: Turn on the faucet!

DAN:(Opens door) Hey Ben. Could you give the boiler crew a hand? I'm trying to get this thing typed.

(BEN enters from left, exits right. Dan typesets)

VOICE OF BEN *(from right)*: Which faucet?

VOICE OF OLYMPIA: The hot water, Ben.

(TONI enters from left)

TONI: Are Leon and Lisa in the tree house?

DAN: I think they're in your room watching TV.

TONI: Oh damn! (Goes to right and calls) Leon, come outside, it's the first day of spring!

VOICE OF LEON: Just a second. We're coming.

TONI: What's that you're doing?

DAN: A boring paper I'd like to finish by tomorrow.

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TONI: Busy as beavers, aren't we? At least I don't have a birthing today. Barry and Steve are trying to have a car rebuilt by tomorrow.

DAN: They've been spending seven days a week in that garage.

TONI: I guess they've both got money problems. Steve got fired — one splice too many, I guess. And Barry's saving up for his next trip; he keeps saying he's glad to have a Base to come back to.

DAN: Does he mean us or the garage?

TONI: He means us, Dan; he's a generous guy. Where are those damned kids? (to right) Leon!

VOICE OF LISA: Toni!

TONI: What is it?

VOICE OF LISA: Leon wants me to ask what Expletives Deleted means.

TONI: Who the hell cares! Tell him to get his ass out here! We're planting flowers!

(BEN enters from right)

BEN: Have you ever thought of sabotaging that TV?

TONI: I've thought of it, but sometimes they show a program I'd like to see.

VOICE OF OLYMPIA: Ben!

VOICE OF GROVER: Holy shit!

BEN: what's the matter?

TONI: Sounds like they're having fun.

(BEN exits right. TONI exits left. DAN typesets)

VOICE OF GROVER (from right): Where's the central spigot?

(OLYMPIA runs in from right, dripping)

OLYMPIA: The basement's flooded! (exits left)

DAN: Oh no! (to right) Is there anything I can do?

VOICE OF GROVER: Shut the water off!

VOICE OF PHILIP: The oven is ruined.

(MATTIE & TONI enter from left, cross to right)

MATTIE: Lisa! Come down here this minute)

TONI: Leon!

(MATTIE & TONI exit right)

VOICE OF GROVER: We're drowning!

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(STEVE, BARRY & ALEC run in from left)

BARRY: That Grover sure is a trip.

(STEVE, BARRY & ALEC exit right)

(DONNA & OLYMPIA enter from left; BEN in archway on right)

DONNA: You're acting as if it were my fault!

OLYMPIA: We've been talking all week long about having the boiler repairman over on Sunday. And we were all going to take part so as to know what to do in case it ever broke down again.

DONNA: Well I've been looking forward to doing the planting for the past three weekends, and this is the first day it hasn't rained.

OLYMPIA: It's a question of priorities, Donna.

DONNA: It's a question of getting the seeds into the ground before summer! (She walks toward archway)

BEN: Are you going to plant the garden now?

DONNA: Let her do it. I'm going to have a drink. (Exits right)

BEN: Did you want all of us to learn how to flood the basement?

OLYMPIA: I didn't see either of you down there when the trouble started.

(GROVER enters from right, dripping)

DAN: What happened?

GROVER: Had a little accident.

OLYMPIA: Where's Philip?

GROVER: Trying to salvage his oven.

VOICE OF BARRY (from right): Is anyone up there?

VOICE OF TONI: What do you want?

VOICE OF BARRY: Try the hot water.

VOICE OF TONI: It works!

GROVER: Well, it looks like we've got things under control.

(PHILIP enters from right, dripping)

OLYMPIA: What about the flood?

PHILIP: Steve found the drain; it was plugged up.

OLYMPIA: And your oven?

PHILIP: I don't actually know what water does to it.

GROVER: I guess that wasn't the right connection —

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OLYMPIA: It's not your fault, Grover. Who would have known all that water would gush out as soon as —

PHILIP: I knew.

OLYMPIA: Well fortunately it was only water.

GROVER: That's what I say. This one dude I knew had one of these things blow — I guess I told you that one. You know, Philip, I've been giving a careful look at that brochure you people made —

PHILIP: I'd better go up and put some dry socks on —

GROVER: If you want my opinion, I don't think you should melt that shit down. It's good. What I like best are the caricatures of religious objects, like the one of god playing with his dingy —

OLYMPIA: That's what I've been telling him, but he's so modest.

GROVER: I'm serious. That shit could sell. Now if you just built some shelves here, this room would make an ideal space for a display: hand-molded pottery and shit like that.

PHILIP: Do you really think so?

GROVER: Of course you'd need better light; maybe we could take some of that vegetation back out to the country; and more space —

BEN: Look, Grover, I think you misunderstand —

(MATTIE enters, takes Rose Anne from crib)

MATTIE: You people look like wet rags: We'd better get started, Dan; your brother is supposed to arrive in half an hour.

DAN: Oh, shit, I'll never finish this.

MATTIE: If you'll be planting the back later this afternoon, I'll try to come back.

OLYMPIA: I don't think Donna is up to any more planting today. How about tomorrow?

MATTIE: I thought Donna couldn't make it on a weekday.

OLYMPIA: Oh, that's right. What if we schedule it for next weekend?

MATTIE: Could you call Lisa, Dan.

(MATTIE exits left. OLYMPIA, PHILIP & BEN exit right)

DAN (in archway, shouting): Lisa! (exits right)

7.

TAPED NARRATOR: The scars left by the environment of hostile and split individuals became open sores. The community closed in on itself, discouraged and demoralized. The fragile unity almost fell to pieces. Inertia set in as the resistance to common projects hardened; creative breakthroughs were no longer made; the period of the commune's growth seemed to be over.

(From right enter SHARON, DONNA & LEON, now 7 or 8, carrying the components of a puppet stage which they assemble during the scene)

LEON: It ought to go here.

DONNA: Then here it goes. It's your show.

SHARON: The greatest thrill is being involved in every part of it. Imagine having to just learn lines, or just paint scenery. That would take all the fun out of it.

DONNA: I can see why everyone's so eager to show you things, Sharon; you're so full of enthusiasm.

LEON: Steve has a crush on her.

SHARON: Leon! Don't —

LEON: Everyone can see it!

DONNA: I haven't seen Steve so happy since I've known him.

SHARON: I'm sorry — Steve's been so helpful. So has Philip. Everyone's been so wonderful — I never thought Steve would —

DONNA: Don't be childish, Sharon. Steve and I are good friends, as we've always been, and we need each other less now than we ever did before; we both know so many other people now. I used to meet Steve in a bar years ago when my husband took up with another woman —

LEON: That was Alec's mother, wasn't it?

(STEVE & PHILIP enter from right carrying bookshelves which they align along one wall and assemble during scene)

SHARON: Leon! I'll —

LEON: Not if you don't catch me!

PHILIP: Do you need my help setting up the puppets?

LEON: Not yet; we want to change some things when Lisa comes.

DONNA: Sharon's been telling me how helpful you both are — even you, Philip.

PHILIP: Sharon's a fast learner.

SHARON: It's like building a complete world with your own two hands. I'm doing things I never dreamed I'd be able to do.

PHILIP: Me too. I fixed my car yesterday, with Steve's help.

STEVE: I only watched.

DONNA: You, Philip?

PHILIP: It's a lot simpler than I thought.

(TONI enters from right, arranges blanket with 17 pillows on floor)

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TONI: Ben thinks we won't all fit in the kitchen and that sitting on the floor will be in the spirit of the meal.

LEON: What's he making — dog biscuits and catnip?

TONI: We're preparing some Japanese specialties.

SHARON: Steve, can you show me how this joint is supposed to fit? I wish we were doing all these things just for ourselves, especially the puppet show. Why does Grover have to bring people tonight?

PHILIP: Grover said they were people who'd be highly sensitive about the kinds of things we're doing here.

TONI: And we all know that Grover's word is as reliable as inflated money.

PHILIP: I happen to be interested in finding out what other people think —

TONI: I could care less.

STEVE: I agree with Toni.

SHARON: So do I. The puppet theater is ours and it's only meant for us. I can't imagine what outsiders are going to see —

PHILIP: Maybe that's true of the puppet theater.

SHARON: I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking of your things. Somehow I can never say the right —

TONI: Let's drop it. What's Olympia doing in the garden?

PHILIP: She told me she wanted to improve the soil.

TONI: But it's freezing out.

DONNA: What was wrong with the garden before?

PHILIP: How should I know. She says if we wanted to grow our own food, we should do certain things to the soil —

(From left, enter LISA, now 7, MATTIE with ROSE ANNE, now three)

LEON: Come on, Lisa, and you too Sharon. We've got to change the faces of the two presidents.

LISA: Did you and Alec decide if we're going to erase them or cover them with paint?

LEON: Alec thinks we can't erase them.

LISA: You want to come with us, Rose Anne?

(ROSE ANNE cries. Leon and Lisa exit right with Rose Anne)

SHARON: I'll be right up. Steve, where does this dowel go? Oh, that's right. Those kids are out of their minds.

PHILIP: Really? In what way?

SHARON: They're such a trip when they're together. If any of you think I contributed anything to the play, you'll be dead wrong. I can hardly keep track of my own parts, and Alec changes half the play every other day! He's probably changed it again since I've been down here.

(PHONE rings. TONI answers)

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TONI (*shouts to right*): Olympia! Barry's on the phone. Ben, do you need me yet?

(*OLYMPIA enters from right*)

VOICE OF BEN: In about ten minutes; I'm washing the vegetables.

OLYMPIA (*to phone*): Did you find it? — Can you cut through it? — Well can you find a way to climb over it? — Yes, everything here is almost ready. (*Hangs up*)

DONNA: Aren't you going to join us with the preparations, Olympia?

OLYMPIA: I'm busy with preparations of my own. And you're a funny one to ask, Donna. That time when I was inside working on the boiler you told me the garden was your priority.

SHARON: I guess I'll go up and join the kids. (*Exits right*)

DONNA: I'm sorry I asked.

(*OLYMPIA exits right*)

STEVE: You want to put up the shelves now?

PHILIP: If you don't mind, Steve.

MATTIE: Can I start putting my things in the finished shelf?

(*MATTIE, STEVE & PHILIP exit right*)

DONNA: What was wrong with the garden before, Toni?

TONI: Nothing, Donna. It was beautiful.

DONNA: Did you ever sit inside the arbor on a hot summer day and eat the grapes right off the vine?

TONI: I guess I never found the time.

(STEVE & PHILIP enter from right carrying a second bookshelf which they assemble along the other wall)

STEVE: Sharon sure does enjoy those kids.

PHILIP: Ever since they started the puppet theater they've been extremely creative.

TONI: No thanks to school.

PHILIP: What do you mean?

TONI: The imagination of an eight year old is unbounded if it's left to develop on its own and not stunted by repressive education and that idiotic television —

PHILIP: It so happens that Alec is an inveterate TV watcher and he's well into his third year in school —

TONI: But Leon and Lisa aren't!

PHILIP: Many of the ideas are apparently Alec's.

TONI: Do you think he learned them in school? What schools produce are — are people like you, Philip!

PHILIP: Thank you.

TONI: You're not actually a good example, since the conditioning is breaking down. And you're not the only one whose conditioning is breaking down. I'll read you something.

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(TONI exits right and returns with a copy of the Underground paper's version of the campus paper)

PHILIP: If it's from the underground, you can skip it.

TONI: It's the campus paper; Ben brought it home yesterday. The biggest educator in town quit his job. Listen to this. "Citing what he called the massive dehumanization which distinguishes this and every other university, the 57-year old administrator said he could no longer justify a single day more at the helm of the state's third largest university."

PHILIP: Let me see that.

TONI: He admitted that "the university's real function is the socialization of individuals into unquestioning acceptance of the status quo."

PHILIP *(takes paper and examines it)*: "The repressive power of the system rests on sold labor" — This must be a bluff!

TONI: Who's bluffing, Philip? The only two of us who still sell their labor every single morning —

PHILIP: How often do I have to be reminded? TONI: Are you and Donna.

DONNA: And I'm almost convinced —

TONI: All the rest of us are finding it' possible to get along by contributing as little as possible and if possible nothing at all.

(GROVER enters from left)

GROVER: Well! The place is really looking up! (*Picks up the paper*)
Ha! You've seen the gag perpetrated by the local hippies.

PHILIP: I thought so!

TONI: I'd better go help Ben. (*Exits right*)

GROVER: Remember that tax scheme? This lawyer I know had all the details worked out and we were about to get the first check from the state —

DONNA: And what happened?

GROVER: It fell through. Our contact in the government fell with the rest of Nixon's crew. But I've got another scheme worked out which is almost as good — .

(*MATTIE enters from right, with tray full of ceramic houses*)

MATTIE: Where are your guests, Grover?

GROVER: They'll be here. Ah, Philip, you've been baking houses.

PHILIP: Mattie made those.

MATTIE: Philip watched me but I shaped them myself.

(*SHARON enters from right*)

SHARON: The puppets are ready now, Philip — Oh, hi Grover. Why do you have to bring people tonight?

PHILIP: We'd better get these shelves filled.

(*PHILIP & MATTIE exit right*)

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GROVER: These aren't just ordinary people, Sharon. I've been telling them about the things we do around here, and they can't wait to see them. And speaking of those things, I don't see any of your new paintings around.

SHARON: There aren't any. I've been spending all my time on the kids' puppet theater. That's closer to my life's dream.

GROVER: Aw, Sharon, I've been telling them how good you were: self-taught artist, a genuine modern primitive or post-primitive —

(BEN & TONI enter from right carrying platters of sliced vegetables and batters, which they distribute on the blanket)

SHARON: I wouldn't have wanted people like that looking at my painting.

GROVER: Get off it, Sharon. All of us want people looking at our stuff, and the more people the better.

BEN: Are you also bringing culinary experts to sample my meal —

GROVER: Ben, I never could understand —

BEN: I agree with Sharon. We've only just started to learn to share as if we mattered to each other, without being creative geniuses entertaining a passive public —

GROVER: What about your paper preaching to masses of passive readers —

(PHILIP & MATTIE enter from right with trays of ceramics, plates, pottery, which they place in the shelves)

BEN: A thousand readers aren't a mass.

PHILIP: Sour grapes.

GROVER: Hey, those shelves are out of sight. That's a great display. Ben. But it's not for us.

(BARRY enters from left)

BARRY: Damn, Grover. Next time you have a lead, check it out before sending someone out on it. (*Goes to right and calls*) Olympia, what should I do with this shit?

GROVER: What happened? The price wasn't right?

BARRY: I got it free and it seems organic, all right, but Jesus, Grover, I'm rushing to get in on things that are happening over here, and this shit is located on the other side of a six foot barbed wire fence, with me and my wheel barrow standing on the wrong side —

GROVER: Ever heard of wire cutters, my man?

BARRY: Sure, if you'd told me ahead of time. I filled the wheel barrow by throwing shovelfuls through the fence and got the stuff all over me; I was sure I'd get caught but I made such a mess on the sidewalk that people crossed the street and held their noses the other way.

(OLYMPIA enters from right)

OLYMPIA: Where is it?

BARRY: Out front, but the drive way is all blocked up; we'll have to take it to the back tomorrow.

OLYMPIA: But I spent all day preparing to get it on the ground today!

Illyria Street Commune by Fredy Perlman

BARRY: We can't get through, Olympia.

OLYMPIA: Can't you bring it through here?

BARRY: I guess so, but I'll need a hand —

OLYMPIA: Grover, couldn't you help?

(BARRY, GROVER & OLYMPIA exit left)

MATTIE: I'm starting to feel the way Ben does.

PHILIP: About his paper?

MATTIE: About this display not being for us.

(OLYMPIA enters from left, followed by GROVER & BARRY with wheelbarrow)

OLYMPIA: Don't set your shoe on the blanket, Grover!

(GROVER removes shoe while he and Barry lift the wheelbarrow over the blanket; avoiding a platter, GROVER'S foot slips and the contents spill)

OLYMPIA: Oh my god!

GROVER: Looks like a little accident. SHARON: Barry, you bas —

BARRY: If you'd waved your arms a second sooner, Sharon, you could have kept it from spilling.

(Doorbell rings)

GROVER: Good, here they are — and not a second too soon.

BEN: This is it for me. Never again.

(BEN exits left, leaving door open. Action freezes)

8.

TAPED NARRATOR: On the very night when the lowest point was reached and the commune was on the verge of disintegrating altogether, a new spark of life was injected into it, and it came from the larger community.

(Action unfreezes)

GROVER *(at door)*: Well come on in. I'll introduce you to my friends.

VOICE OF ANASTASIA: I see we didn't wear the right clothes.

GROVER: Don't worry about that. These people won't even see what you're wearing so long as it's not a priest's smock or a nun's habit.

(LYMAN & ANASTASIA enter, wearing nightclub clothes)

BARRY: What do we do now?

OLYMPIA: Let's carry the whole thing out.

(BARRY & OLYMPIA raise the blanket)

BARRY: We'd better remove the plates and silverware before dumping it.

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(BARRY & OLYMPIA exit right with blanket)

GROVER: Lyman, Anastasia, I'd like to introduce you to my closest friends. That over there is Toni, the one picking up the pillows. Her specialty is —

TONI: You leave me out of this, Grover.

GROVER (shouting to right): Hey, Olympia. I'd like to introduce you to my friends.

VOICE OF BARRY: Bad timing, Grover.

DONNA: I'm going to the bar.

GROVER: For Christ's sake, what's the matter with everyone tonight? I thought we could all display some of our things for our friends here —

DONNA: I don't have anything to display.

GROVER: Aw, Donna, set a couple of your plants in those shelves for decoration; they'll go for that.

DONNA: Nothing of mine will ever be in these shelves.

(DONNA exits left. OLYMPIA & BARRY enter from right)

ANASTASIA: You must be Olympia. Grover has been telling us about the wonderful set of alternative institutions you run in this house and —

OLYMPIA: Then Grover's been up to his usual fibs. I personally don't run anything —

LYMAN: Please don't misunderstand us. Grover made it perfectly clear that each activity is altogether spontaneous, initiated and organized at the grass roots level by the participants themselves.

PHILIP: That's very well put.

OLYMPIA: I guess I did misunderstand your statement.

ANASTASIA: Anastasia.

OLYMPIA: Welcome to our commune, Anastasia.

ANASTASIA: What I find hardest to believe are the things you do with children.

OLYMPIA: That's the same as our other activities. You see, we don't believe in one person running things, and we're convinced such a variety of different activities could never arise if one individual —

GROVER: (To Sharon & Steve, who are moving toward the door) Hey, you two aren't leaving, are you? You haven't even met —

SHARON: We're not in the right mold to meet anyone, Grover.

PHILIP: And the puppet show?

(SHARON waves her arms; she and STEVE exit left)

LYMAN: Do you mind if I examine some of this pottery?

PHILIP: Not at all. Some of it is Mattie's.

TONI (*to right*): The show is off, kids! (She exits right)

LYMAN: Anastasia, have a look at this. I believe nothing like it has ever been exhibited.

Illyria Street Commune by Fredy Perlman

OLYMPIA: Really? We all consider Philip extremely original, but I never thought —

(DAN enters from left, with the sign “Illyria Street Commune, Everyone Welcome)

DAN: This was on the ground; I guess it fell off.

OLYMPIA: Oh, that sign. Throw it out. I’m sick of looking at it.
(DAN props it up)

GROVER: Meet our new friends, Dan. Lyman, Anastasia, this is Dan, the typesetting man.

DAN: Pretty fancy get-up.

GROVER: Yeah, they’re on their way back from a costume party this other friend of mine was giving and —

MATTIE: What took all day, Dan?

DAN: Strangest meeting. They decided to dissolve the group, and half of them are going to do a critique of political organizations; I said I’d typeset it.

ANASTASIA: Politics is something I could never understand.

PHILIP: Neither could I.

GROVER: Say, Dan, you’ve been turning down everything I’ve been sending your way.

DAN: I’ve decided not to type any more papers for profs, Grover, but I appreciate the effort you went to. It’s too much like a job.

GROVER: Isn't that like cutting off your nose to —

DAN: Maybe it is, Grover. But I'd rather stick to stuff that interests me. We got this place together so as to get away from that crap, and then I started to bring the crap inside here —

OLYMPIA: You're starting to sound just like Ben.

LYMAN: I take it the designs on these plates are all your own originals?

OLYMPIA: Philip's.

LYMAN: They're simply marvelous. Don't you agree, Anastasia? Grover tells me you melted down the objects displayed in your first brochure. What a shame.

PHILIP: They were just experiments.

GROVER: While we're on the brochure business, Lyman here was asking me if we'd be into making a second brochure, only this time the pictures would show things that are actually available —

OLYMPIA: That's an excellent idea; we were so together when we did the first one.

GROVER: In this time we could run several thousands instead of a measly two hundred —

MATTIE: Why in the world would we need that many?

LYMAN: You don't seem to understand how much potential interest there is in the creative work you've been hiding behind these walls.

Illyria Street Commune by Fredy Perlman

GROVER: There's a hungry public out there, Mattie, just begging to see this stuff. Could you see your way to typesetting it, Dan?

DAN: I guess so.

MATTIE: I'm not sure Ben would be willing to write the texts.

GROVER: That's a shame. But Lyman here can compose a snappy text or two.

DAN: Who'd want to print thousands?

OLYMPIA: I'd gladly do the printing, if Barry agrees to work with me.

BARRY: Any day, Olympia. Man, I'd really like to make some of this stuff.

OLYMPIA: I'm sure Philip would be glad to show you.

BARRY: These plates really are out of sight, Philip. I never really looked at this shit before.

ANASTASIA: This — ?

GROVER: Oh, that's just a commune expression, a type of shorthand.

LYMAN: You certainly don't have the best light for looking at it.

OLYMPIA: Grover has mentioned that several times. We're working on the lighting.

LYMAN: Have you ever thought, Philip, how much you might want to charge for one of these yeses?

PHILIP: You mean moneywise?

DAN: Hey wait a minute! Are all these things in shelves because they're for sale?

MATTIE: That wasn't my idea when I helped put them there only an hour ago.

OLYMPIA: I don't see what's gotten into you two.

DAN: Maybe I sound like Ben, but I have a feeling that something I don't like is creeping all over me.

BARRY: So do I, but I know what mine's from.

DAN: I thought we'd never reach the point of actually selling our stuff —

OLYMPIA: Don't be a bore, Dan. We settled that question years ago and you're being hypocritical —

DAN: What did we settle years ago?

OLYMPIA: Please don't play the fool, Dan. You're the one who argued most loudly against Ben on the question of selling the typesetting.

Do I have to remind you that Toni's birth center, the garage, your own typesetting co-op —

DAN: All revolutionary businesses.

GROVER: I need a drink. (*Exits right*)

Illyria Street Commune by Fredy Perlman

OLYMPIA: Call them what you like. They were set up to cover their own expenses and support the people engaged in them so that those people could be liberated from the mindless jobs done for poisonous corporations —

BARRY: Unreported to boot, so that we could draw unemployment and welfare while earning —

DAN: It's no liberation if we transform this space into a poisonous —

OLYMPIA: You're being so narrow, Dan. Why is something cool when you and Toni do it, but not when Philip or I do it?

DAN: All the shit I brought here in trickles, you're proposing bringing in by truckloads —

LYMAN: Do you often have political arguments?

DAN: What do you call political? I'm talking about our fucking lives!

OLYMPIA: Dan, do you need to shout at our guests?

DAN: Sorry, I thought I was asking a question.

LYMAN: You'd easily win with me, Dan, since I couldn't put up a fight. I've never been able to wind my way through the contorted mazes of a political labyrinth.

PHILIP: That's a good word for it.

LYMAN: If you don't mind my changing the subject, Philip, I wanted to ask about these house-shaped ceramics.

ANASTASIA: They certainly do look out of place in the midst of all those expressive motifs —

LYMAN: It's not that they lack originality —

OLYMPIA: Those aren't Philip's.

MATTIE: Let's go, Dan. I see that standards are being set, judges are being appointed, and it's a contest I never agreed to be in.

(MATTIE exits left)

DAN (shouts to right): Lisa! Rose Anne! We're leaving.

VOICE OF LISA: Just a second!

(DAN exits right)

ANASTASIA: What I found most exciting of all that Grover told us was the educational experiments you've been carrying out with children.

OLYMPIA: I don't know as I'd call them experiments. The kids are into their own things, just like the rest of us.

ANASTASIA: That's exactly what I mean.

OLYMPIA: I don't know what we could show you. That's a puppet stage Philip helped the kids design and build.

ANASTASIA: You certainly are a mine of original ideas, Philip.

PHILIP: Actually, the kids had the ideas.

ANASTASIA: Are any of the kids here?

Illyria Street Commune by Fredy Perlman

OLYMPIA: I think two are about to leave, but maybe we could introduce you.

BARRY: Come on up.

(BARRY, ANASTASIA, LYMAN exit right)

PHILIP: I think I've reached a decision.

OLYMPIA: What is it, Philip?

PHILIP: I've decided to give my notice at the shipping department.

OLYMPIA: Philip, congratulations! I must say it's about time.

PHILIP: That way I could devote more of my time to my work.

(OLYMPIA picks up the sign; she and PHILIP exit right)

(Puppet stage, etc., have been gradually removed)

9.

TAPED NARRATOR: The larger community became increasingly involved in the activities of the commune, giving rise to new projects and enlarged perspectives, while old members, whose participation was ever more marginal, resisted the changes with a growing ferocity. Something like a fight to the death began between the dynamism of the new people intent on pushing the commune in new directions and the stultifying negativism of the freeloaders intent on bringing all activity to a dead halt. This was one of the historical instances when the living were not crushed under the weight of the dead.

(OLYMPIA enters from right, removes a plant from the picture window. DONNA enters from right)

DONNA: Please be careful with that one! (*Donna takes down another*)

PHILIP (*enters from right, removes a plant*): This is the greatest move we've made in years.

OLYMPIA: Where do you want them?

DONNA: Just set them on the floor. I'll arrange them later.

(*OLYMPIA exits right with plant*)

DONNA: Philip, please do be careful. (*Exits with plant; then PHILIP*)

(BARRY enters from right with pail, starts cleaning the cleared portion of the window)

BARRY (shouts to right): I never even knew there was glass here!

Illyria Street Commune by Fredy Perlman

(OLYMPIA & PHILIP & DONNA return from right, repeat plant removal)

OLYMPIA: Oh, wow, what a workroom! No painter's studio could be brighter than this.

PHILIP: Give people a chance to actually see what we do here.

BARRY: Anastasia and Lyman said they'd be here about now.

PHILIP: Maybe something came up. They've sure made a lot of useful suggestions.

OLYMPIA: What I'd like to know is, where are the other people who are constantly talking about improving this place?

PHILIP: Who else knew about this?

OLYMPIA: Grover, for instance.

BARRY: Yea, Grover has a big mouth, but when it actually comes to doing the work he's fifty miles away turning someone else on to a project.

DONNA: There won't be enough sun in my room to keep all these plants alive.

OLYMPIA: You could get one of those lamps.

PHILIP: You're not changing your mind, are you?

DONNA: No, Philip. It's the first house-decorating idea you've had since you've been here, and I agreed.

(OLYMPIA, PHILIP & DONNA exit right with plants. MATTIE enters from right)

MATTIE: Do you know where iodine and bandages are kept, Barry?

VOICE OF OLYMPIA: They're in the bathroom cabinet.

BARRY: Cut yourself?

MATTIE: Rose Anne bruised her knee climbing to the tree house. Spring cleaning?

BARRY: Sort of. We're removing the plants.

MATTIE: Permanently? But that window is such a perfect place for them; they get sun during most of the day —

BARRY: Yea, but look at the landscape you can see now.

(OLYMPIA, PHILIP & DONNA return from right, remove last plants)

MATTIE: The landscape! Is that why you're doing this? You can see the same landscape by opening the front door, by sitting on the lawn, by walking — I'm sorry to see those plants go, especially now that I've finally gotten Rose Anne to stop trying to pull them down.

OLYMPIA: If you like them so well, Mattie, why don't you put some up in your living room.

MATTIE: Thanks for the suggestion. Maybe I'll do that. *(Exits right)*

OLYMPIA: What a crock that is. She doesn't only stay away from the work, but she's full of good ideas about how I ought to do my work.

Illyria Street Commune by Fredy Perlman

PHILIP: It's true that Mattie hasn't been very cooperative lately. She used to be so interested.

DONNA: Do you ever wonder why, Philip?

OLYMPIA: Once this is clean, we'll have to schedule our next steps.

DONNA: All I want to know is when you schedule the planting.

(PHILIP, OLYMPIA & DONNA exit right with plants, DAN enters from right)

DAN: What a change!

BARRY: Yea, you'll be able to see what you're typesetting.

DAN: I suppose so. But I never had trouble before.

BARRY: You too?

DAN: Me too what?

BARRY: Never mind.

(OLYMPIA & PHILIP enter from right, clean with Barry)

OLYMPIA: Dan, I know you're awfully busy, but do you think you'll find the time to fit our brochure in between all those political things you're doing?

DAN: I haven't been doing much of anything, Olympia, and I didn't know you were in a hurry for it. When Philip gave me the manuscript he said he wanted me to look it over.

PHILIP: That was two weeks ago. Did you look it over?

DAN: Yes. I suppose I could start on it next week. When do you want the typesetting done?

PHILIP: What did you think of it?

DAN: Frankly, I liked the first brochure we did a lot better. In spite of his whiney politics, Ben writes intelligent texts and good poetry, whereas your friend Lyman —

OLYMPIA: We're a commune, Dan. When did we start discriminating between your friends, my friends, his friends?

DAN: When didn't we? I can't stand this character and I don't consider him my friend, comrade, fellow communist —

BARRY: You don't even know him, Dan.

DAN: He's a hack, a PR man, an author of advertising copy, and his material stinks; the whole thing reads like an advertising brochure. I thought you might be willing to ask Ben to write the texts.

OLYMPIA: We'll think about it.

(DAN exits right)

PHILIP: I didn't see anything wrong with Lyman's texts.

OLYMPIA: I think they're much more to the point than Ben's were.

PHILIP: Then what's there to think about?

OLYMPIA: Wait. I have an idea.

(SHARON enters from left, in overalls)

SHARON: Has anyone seen the lug wrench? It's not in the garage.

Illyria Street Commune by Fredy Perlman

OLYMPIA: Yes, it's in the kitchen; I needed it as a pry bar.

SHARON: What did you do to Donna's plants?

BARRY: What did we — we smashed them, Sharon, that's what we did.

OLYMPIA: Of course you wouldn't know, would you Sharon? Ever since your Hollywood movie romance started you haven't had time to find out what's going on around here.

SHARON: I do my share, and more —

OLYMPIA: Don't we all, Sharon. But we don't all criticize the work other people are doing. Why do you decide you like the window dirty the moment when someone finally starts cleaning it? Why do you decide you're no longer interested in improving this place the moment when people with fresh ideas start making improvements?

SHARON: I — I don't know. *(Runs out left, without lug wrench)*

OLYMPIA: Speak of negative energy! She wants tomatoes in precisely the spot where you're planting parsley, and it you'd put tomatoes there she'd talk your head off about parsley.

BARRY: She's always been like that. I don't see how Steve can work with her.

OLYMPIA: He's another person who's had his head up his ass since that great romance began.

(GROVER, ANASTASIA & LYMAN enter from left)

GROVER (roaring with laughter, waving a newspaper): Has everyone seen this morning's news? "Easter Canceled. Christ's body found." Look at this picture! "The feet that once walked the Sea of Galilee here protrude from the mud, still showing the nail scars."

BARRY: Let me see that.

PHILIP: We're almost done.

LYMAN: I'm terribly sorry we're so late. Grover's car broke down and —

OLYMPIA: And you probably had to wait for him for an hour. We know Grover. What do you think?

ANASTASIA: It's fantastic!

LYMAN: What a transformation!

BARRY (*reading*): This is a riot!

OLYMPIA: Grover, what do you think?

GROVER: About what?

OLYMPIA: The window!

GROVER: Oh, the window! The vegetation is gone.

PHILIP: Is that all?

GROVER: The thing I like least about plants is that people who already believe God exists point to a plant and tell you it proves he exists; makes me associate plants with religious icons.

Illyria Street Commune by Fredy Perlman

OLYMPIA: The three of us have been discussing the exposition you suggested, Lyman, and we don't think we could have it together in less than six months.

PHILIP: We wouldn't want to have it in summer.

OLYMPIA: Barry and I have barely started photographing Philip's new creations, and Philip wants to revise several old ones and make a whole series of new ones.

LYMAN: I didn't have any kind of deadline in mind. The sooner the better, I say.

OLYMPIA: There's a minor bottleneck. Have either of you ever typeset on a machine like this one?

ANASTASIA: Certainly. It's an ordinary office typewriter.

OLYMPIA: I know, but it has some special attachments.

ANASTASIA: It has that device on the right if you want to justify copy; my friend Lamia operates a machine just like this one; she's a secretary.

OLYMPIA: Do you think Lamia could typeset the texts for the brochure?

ANASTASIA: I know she could; she'll be flattered to be asked. I've told her about you and she's absolutely thrilled about your programs. She has an interest in primitive mythology and art, and particularly in modern revivals of ancient forms.

OLYMPIA: That's wonderful. Then there is no bottleneck. (Shouts right) Dan! Could we talk to you for a second?

(DAN enters from right)

OLYMPIA: Could you return the brochure manuscript to us sometime today? There's no hurry. We've had a change of plans.

DAN: You're going to reconsider the texts?

OLYMPIA: We're going to reconsider everything. We're playing with the idea of having the commune women prepare an exposition.

DAN: The idea seems good.

OLYMPIA: I knew you'd think so. Of course we'll want the women's group to do all the work that's involved.

DAN: I understand. I'll bring the manuscript by after lunch.

OLYMPIA: And the machine is going to be in use some of the time.

DAN: Obviously. I don't have many projects now, so that won't inconvenience me.

(DAN exits right)

PHILIP: A women's exposition?

OLYMPIA: Of course we'll still exhibit your things, Philip, but we'll take care of all the other arrangements, isn't that right, Anastasia?

GROVER: I don't get it.

OLYMPIA: Let it settle gradually, Grover. It's such a beautiful day, why don't we discuss this some more while walking. We should also talk about our schedule for the coming months.

(OLYMPIA, PHILIP, ANASTASIA, LYMAN & GROVER exit left)

10.

TAPED NARRATOR: It took most of a year to get together all the elements required by the commune's first and most memorable exposition. The continuing indifference, and even outright hostility, of the numerous passive onlookers who had nothing better to do with their time than cripple our commune's project, did not help expedite the various tasks. That the event took place at all is almost a miracle, and is entirely due to the profound involvement of the larger community and its devotion to the commune's continuing development.

(DAN enters from left, typesets. TONI enters from right)

TONI: Well, it's Dan.

DAN: Hi, Toni. *(They embrace)*

TONI: You're almost a stranger. Find new friends?

DAN: No I haven't, Toni. But I have felt like a stranger. I couldn't take Olympia or Philip greeting me with another Political Pamphlet Dan. And I didn't want to get in their way.

TONI: That's been Philip's sole concern for the past months — that the commune not get in the way of his Expo.

DAN: I heard it took place this past weekend.

TONI: Didn't they invite you? No, I guess they wouldn't have. They know how you feel about the friends Philip has been waiting for all his life.

DAN: How did it go?

TONI: I didn't go either, although they did invite me. Have you seen the brochure? (Hands him one from a surface)

DAN: I see they left Lyman's texts. I thought it was supposed to be a women's project.

TONI: That's news to me. I thought it was Philip's coming out party. He acted like a kid all last week; it must have been the greatest experience of his life. Remember when he used to melt down his objects and you could only see them in pictures? That's ancient history. Now he's prolific. He produces art objects by the crate. What are you typing?

DAN: Can't you guess?

TONI: "Another political pamphlet, Dan? When will you political people learn to put your ideology into practice?" That's exactly what she puts into practice: her ideology.

DAN: That's actually more than I've been doing.

TONI: Something happened?

DAN: Not exactly. My unemployment ran out and I had to get a part time job. In a print shop, with no window facing the outside. I really like it here now. I thought there'd be some interesting things to set, but it's all ads. And you?

TONI: The same. I heard that Lisa started school.

DAN: Just this year. And Leon?

TONI: We're still holding out. But it's impossible with no other kids around. Leon has the TV schedule memorized and he's glued to the tube all day. It's ten times worse than school. At least in school you're with others and you can rebel. He just sits and watches.

Illyria Street Commune by Fredy Perlman

DAN: What about all the projects he and Alec had going?

TONI: Alec's in boarding school.

DAN: Really? I didn't know.

TONI: Philip didn't want anyone or anything between him and the Expo.

DAN: Did Donna take part in the preparations?

TONI: Are you kidding? Donna's like a ghost. She lives here but no one sees her.

DAN: She used to be such a lively person.

TONI: She was a real trip when I first came here. I'll never forget her "Gosh, is that marihuana? I've heard so much about it — what do you do?"

DAN: That's cute.

TONI: It's true. She used to be excited by everything and interested in everyone. Funny how people change. She still cares for the garden; she comes alive once a year, when the seeds get planted. The rest of the time she goes from her job to the bar and back.

DAN: I remember she was already a little like that years ago, that night Ben wrote a poem to her.

TONI: I remember that night too, and I've always regretted missing Ben's reading because of Grover's antics. At that time I thought those two would make a go of it.

DAN: Ben and Donna? Are you kidding? The radical hippie and the straight secretary?

TONI: It wasn't so ridiculous then.

DAN: I remember she thought him "sweet."

TONI: After her miserable high school marriage, Donna apparently didn't want to get involved. But around the time of Ben's poem, I know she would have accompanied Ben to a farm commune in Saskatchewan or Mongolia. But except for his poem, Ben never made a move nor said a word, and over the years they drifted apart.

DAN: I saw Ben a couple of weeks ago; I had some research to do at the underground paper. I hadn't seen him in over a year. He hasn't changed. He still thinks a revolution would only make things worse, so why do anything? Maybe that's why he never approached Donna, because that's pointless too if you practice the politics of despair.

TONI: At one time I agreed with you, Dan, but now I know you're wrong. I was very close to Ben for almost two years. He's someone who doesn't just talk about independent human beings — he actually believes it. He thinks a revolution will be significant only if it's made by independent individuals who act on their own. If they can be talked into it then they can be talked out of it, and worse, they can be talked into believing they got it when they didn't. That's why he rejects all kinds of propaganda. And that's why he never tried to convince Donna to quit her job or join us in our projects or move to Mount Tabor or wherever. Poor Donna was dying to be convinced, to be invited, but Ben wanted her to decide on her own. His poem wasn't an invitation. It was a gift, a love offering; Donna accepted it as that and disappointed Ben by continuing to repeat her crummy routine. She waited for his invitation to make a move, but the invitation never came. Donna remained the "Cool Lady" to Ben and Ben remained "sweet" to Donna.

Illyria Street Commune by Fredy Perlman

DAN: You're a generous person, Toni. I'm sorry I never really got to know either of them. I never even knew about you and Ben.

TONI: We never loved each other. Ben and I are too much alike; we're too movementy for each other's tastes. Ben and Donna loved each other. It's sad.

DAN: When did you break up with Ben?

TONI: I didn't. Ben broke up with the house when the new friends started dropping by. I guess Ben expected me to drop out too, or to spark a confrontation or make a scene or at least let him know he wasn't alone. And I guess I disappointed him the same way Donna did. Nothing was clear to me.

DAN: Does Ben really have nothing to do with the commune?

TONI: It's just a house now, Dan. And it's a hotel to Ben. He leaves in the morning and comes back at night. If he runs into any of us he greets us the way he'd greet the hotel receptionist or elevator operator. It isn't what you call despair. Ben is full of hope, but his hope is constantly disappointed.

(BARRY enters from left)

BARRY: Ah, Dan. Nice to see you're coming around again.

TONI: Yes, we do so much to make our friends feel at home here, don't we?

BARRY: Why so sarcastic on such a lovely morning, Toni?

TONI: Who's being sarcastic? Dan told me he'd heard through the grapevine that a commune event took place last weekend. Thank god for grapevines.

BARRY: We told you about it, Toni, and you didn't come.

TONI: Did you also tell Donna about it? And Ben?

BARRY: Neither of them has taken part in any commune activities in years, and you know it.

TONI: I bet Sharon would have loved to work on the preparations.

BARRY: Tony, have you ever tried working with Sharon? I tried for years and believe me it's impossible.

TONI: You never had trouble working with Steve. Why was he excluded?

BARRY: Who's excluded, for crying out loud? You're making a political ideology out of your own paranoia. Ever since his great romance, Steve dropped out of everything.

TONI: Mattie worked all right with everyone, she hasn't had a great romance in recent years, and she was really into the pottery for a while; why wasn't she —

BARRY: Is this a third degree? Look, I hate to say this, but Olympia, Philip and I don't enjoy working with Mattie.

DAN: Since when?

BARRY: If you've got to know, it's because she gives off the wrong kind of energy, negative energy —

TONI: So some people are excluded because they're too eager and others because they aren't eager enough.

BARRY: No one's excluded from anything; you've got a butterfly in your noodle this morning, Toni.

Illyria Street Commune by Fredy Perlman

TONI: Why did Dan have to learn about the event from the grapevine?

BARRY: This discussion is a waste of time. Look, a couple of people gave a small party for their friends. That's common enough, right? It so happens that Dan wasn't the best friend of some of the friends. For crying out loud, Dan, I thought you couldn't stand Lyman Sanders! Don't you ever give parties? Do you invite everyone you know in the whole city? Look, I've got some work to do. (Exits right)

DAN: I'll be damned.

TONI: Won't we all. Were you calling this a commune?

DAN: How long has this been going on?

TONI: Long, I think. You were still one of the friends when it started.

DAN: You mean when I sided against Ben about the typesetting?

TONI: Even before that, I suppose. But why ask me? I was one of the friends until last week. My work was a bona fide commune project, it didn't interfere with their preparations, and I didn't exude any negative energy —

DAN: You mean you didn't question anything they were doing.

TONI: It can't be that simple, since Mattie didn't either.

DAN: Mattie said something when they were taking the plants to Donna's room, and she knew at the time —

TONI: Is that it? And I always thought Mattie was such a meek person.

(GROVER enters from left.)

GROVER: Man, am I glad it's you two.

TONI: Why us two? Doesn't the whole town love you any more? Cops after you? This is the last place they'd look, you know.

GROVER: Have you heard about the shit that went down last weekend?

TONI: We've been waiting for you to clue us in. But why the sudden fury? I thought you were one of the impresarios.

GROVER: There was all this talk about the women's group doing all the work.

TONI: If it hadn't been for such talk, you would have worked your ass off, wouldn't you, Grover?

DAN: I thought you were one of the women, Grover — you and Philip and Barry and Lyman —

GROVER: How was I to know that Mattie, Sharon and Toni and Donna weren't in on it?

DAN: what happened?

GROVER: Women's art exposition, my ass. It was a religious revival, a mystical seance, and we'd better confront them —

TONI: Welcome to the club.

DAN: A seance? Are you serious?

Illyria Street Commune by Fredy Perlman

GROVER: I thought it couldn't be serious. That's why I went along. I kept waiting for the twist, the April fool's joke. But it was no joke. They were serious.

DAN: What kind of seance? I can't believe it.

GROVER: Anastasia brought down these friends of hers: a woman called Lamia, who turned out to be some kind of palm reader, and this dude Earl who's supposedly into self-publishing.

TONI: Presumably you didn't know any of Anastasia's friends when you first brought her here —

GROVER: All I knew was she was into the shit we did here.

DAN: Go on, Grover. The seance.

GROVER: Anyway, Anastasia starts it all up with a rap about this commune being a return to the origin, resurrecting the spirit of our earliest ancestors. I could go along with her shit because I thought it was some kind of poetry. Then she introduces this Lamia as someone with powers to put us in direct contact with the dead ancestors.

TONI: Oh wow, you are serious. And here I was thinking that Sharon and Mattie and Steve would have loved to take part in the preparations. Wrong track again!

GROVER: Candles, burning incense, hands on the table, the whole thing, and Olympia saying "Oh how exciting, I've never contacted an ancestor before." I laugh and ask if there's a translator in the room to tell us what the mummy says. Philip and Barry are sitting there transfixed, like they expect a Neanderthal to walk in any second. Then Lamia gets into this incoherent rap, like she's oh deed on LSD although I didn't see her take anything, and it turns out she's the ancestor.

DAN: Incredible.

GROVER: That's bad enough. But then I start recognizing bits and scraps of her rap, and it turns out it's not even original; it comes out of an old Life magazine article on the Aztecs that I happen to have read. I keep expecting someone to say something. I look at Philip, but he thinks he's seeing Kukulcan on Illyria Street. Finally I can't take it any more so I get up. Lamia snaps out of her trance and says I broke the spell, and the others look at me as if I'd set the house on fire. So I split.

TONY: That's heavy.

GROVER: I phoned Lyman yesterday to ask about the meaning of what went down. Listen to this. "I hope you don't feel embarrassed," he tells me, "not everyone is strong enough to support such an experience." Can you dig that? It turns out that Lamia and this Earl character bought \$500 worth of Philip's pottery, so my splitting didn't break the spell.

DAN: Philip sold his pottery?

TONI: What did you think the Expo was for?

DAN: Then the brochure texts sounded like ads because they were ads.

TONI: It settles slowly, doesn't it?

GROVER: It's not the sale that bugs me —

TONI: That's why we considered you one of them, Grover.

GROVER: It's the religious shit that gets me. Is that what we've been building up to? I think you people in the house had better get it together; I've got to split.

Illyria Street Commune by Fredy Perlman

TONI: Why we people? Why not everyone who ever related to the commune?

GROVER: That's what I'm talking about. There's got to be some kind of confrontation over this seance business —

TONI: The seance and the selling and the exclusions — Are you still free on weekends?

GROVER: Weekday nights, weekends anytime, but be sure you tell me in advance. (*Exits left*)

TONI: I had an idea when Grover started talking.

DAN: So did I. What's yours?

TONI: It has to do with going back to the origins.

DAN: That's it. We're too Movementy for each other, Toni.

TONI: We could have a resurrection — our version of one. Remember that Japanese meal Ben and I were preparing?

DAN: Sounds great!

TONI: And the puppet play that was never performed, and the alternative to school that never got off the ground, and the commune that almost started to be real, and the —

DAN: Too much has been lost to get all that back, Toni. But I know Mattie will be eager to try; she's literally been doing nothing at all, what with two kids, and Rose Anne home all day long.

TONI: I'm sure Steve and Sharon will be willing, even Ben, and I know Donna is longing to go back to one of the intersections where she failed to make a turn; she's not the only one.

(OLYMPIA enters from right, rushing)

OLYMPIA: Oh hi Dan. Working on another political pamphlet?

TONI: Cripes, Olympia. He's hardly been here for a year.

OLYMPIA: Really? I hadn't noticed.

DAN: Thanks a lot.

OLYMPIA: Oh, nothing personal, Dan. I've been so busy with so many exciting projects and friends —

TONI: Some of us would like to talk to you about those projects and friends, Olympia.

OLYMPIA: I was on my way out, Toni. What is it?

TONI: I don't mean now. I mean when everyone could be present — everyone who wasn't invited to last weekend's event.

OLYMPIA: I don't have time to discuss anything with those people; there's too much else to do in life.

TONI: That's one of thing things we'd like to talk about: how and when some of my friends became "those people".

OLYMPIA: I have no idea what you're hinting at.

TONI: I'm not hinting! What you call "those people" now includes everyone who helped make this place what it once was. And I'm intending to give a party for all "those people."

OLYMPIA: You can give all the parties you want, Toni, anytime you want. How does that concern me?.

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TONI: Some of us have questions that concern you, like critiques of last weekend's Expo.

OLYMPIA: The Expo was the commune's most significant event so far.

TONI: We heard all about it from Grover.

OLYMPIA: What did Grover tell you about it?

TONI: He said it was a seance.

OLYMPIA: He should have talked to me first!

TONI: Why should he? If that type of thing is taking place in this house, we should all know about it and we should talk to each other about it at a meeting where everyone is present.

OLYMPIA: I told you I was in a hurry.

TONI: We'll walk you to the car. Are you afraid to defend your seance —

OLYMPIA: I happen to have nothing to hide. Let's meet tonight to talk about the scheduling —

TONI: We'd like to schedule it right now.

OLYMPIA: Fine. I'm free the day after tomorrow.

TONI: It'll have to be over the weekend; Donna can't meet on weeknights.

DAN: Neither can I.

OLYMPIA: Well I'll be out of town this coming weekend. The following weekend then. I'll shift what I intended to do then to midweek —

(OLYMPIA, TONI & DAN exit left)

11.

TAPED NARRATOR: *(Sound of rewinding tape. Then:)* ...expedite the various tasks. That the event took place at all is almost a miracle, and is entirely due to the profound involvement of the larger community and its *(Stop)*

(OLYMPIA, PHILIP, BARRY, LYMAN, ANASTASIA, EARL, LAMA enter from right, laughing and chatting)

LYMAN: You really ought to attend that fair; I'm sure you'll get some marvelous ideas for your next exposition.

OLYMPIA: Philip and I are seriously considering it.

BARRY: I'll be sorry to miss it, but I've already got plane tickets for next week.

(MATTIE enters from left)

MATTIE: Oh gee, don't stop. I didn't mean to put an end to the conversation. *(Silence)*

PHILIP: Those people are always late.

MATTIE: I thought the meeting started at two.

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PHILIP: It's ten after two.

(GROVER, STEVE & SHARON enter from left)

GROVER: Is everyone here already? I thought we were early.

PHILIP: You're not.

GROVER: Then let's get this show on the road. I take it the purpose of this meeting is to discuss what went down two weekends ago —

OLYMPIA: Is that the purpose of this meeting? (Silence)

PHILIP: There are far more important things to talk about.

GROVER: But I thought —

OLYMPIA: Lyman has a friend, a painter, who was scheduled to have his first show in a downtown gallery. It was to open in a week. But for some mysterious reason the gallery turned him down at the last minute. So Lyman suggested he might be able to rent space from the Illyria Street Commune — only this room, obviously.

MATTIE: (to Grover) But she can't! What about our party?

GROVER: Hey wait a minute. Toni and Donna aren't here yet.

PHILIP: How long are we supposed to wait?

(TONI enters from right)

GROVER: Not long, Philip. Olympia is talking about renting this place —

TONI: Are you crazy? She can't rent it! It's in all our names —

OLYMPIA: I meant all of us.

TONI: What's going on here? I thought we were going to talk about certain critiques —

PHILIP: We've discussed that already.

BARRY: We put our critiques into action, Toni.

TONI: What the hell does that mean, Barry? And what do you mean, You've discussed that already? Did you resolve it all in fifteen minutes? Grover alone —

GROVER: I started to bring it up —

(BEN enters from right)

OLYMPIA: I hope we don't let this meeting degenerate into a shouting match. We were discussing the possibility of renting this room to an artist —

TONI: You can't and that's that. Let's talk about real things now —

OLYMPIA: We can't, Toni? Don't you think it's up to the entire commune to decide that?

EARL: May I ask, have we ever turned anyone down before? I understood that the principle of openness —

TONI: We? Who the hell are you?

OLYMPIA: Oh, I'm terribly sorry. This is Earl. He's gotten deeply involved in the commune and has numerous ideas on how to improve it. Earl, this is Toni. Shall we go around the room saying our names —

MATTIE: I don't believe in it.

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BARRY: In answer to your question, Earl: No, we've never excluded anyone before. But then, I don't think we've ever gotten that kind of request before.

TONI (to Sharon): How does it feel to be invisible?

SHARON (to TONI): Must be the same as being dead.

LYMAN: Of course my friend agrees to pay whatever reasonable rent we ask, and he also assured me he would rectify any changes he felt it necessary to make.

TONI: Of course.

MATTIE: Do you need the money or something? Why are you doing this? Are you going to become landlords?

PHILIP: No, Mattie, we don't need the money.

OLYMPIA: I personally don't think we should become landlords —

TONI: Then why are we discussing this?

MATTIE (to Toni): I'd better led Dan get in on some of this. I can see I botched something by keeping my mouth shut when it started. (She exits left)

BARRY: We're discussing the principle of excluding someone.

TONI: Oh is that what we're discussing? In that case let me bring up some cases that aren't hypothetical!

OLYMPIA: We haven't settled this matter, although I personally feel that, since we don't need the money —

BARRY: That's true. Philip made a good point.

LYMAN: Fine. I'll tell him the commune decided against it.

PHILIP: What's next on the agenda?

TONI: Have you gone off your rockers? Since when do we have an agenda?

LAMIA: Well I've never in my life —

BARRY: I can't imagine what's gotten into you today, Toni. You're so uptight. Obviously there's no agenda. We haven't become a parliament. That was just Philip's way of asking if there were other matters that concerned the whole group.

(DONNA enters from right)

OLYMPIA: We must make a terrible impression, Lamia. We're not usually so rowdy. I hope we don't spend any more time on trivialities. I wanted to bring up a question we've been discussing for years, and one which certainly does concern the whole commune. That's the question of space and light for our work, our displays and even for parties. Several years ago Grover suggested the possibility of enlarging this room. This wall, for instance, blocks direct access from the front room to the kitchen.

BARRY: If we could knock a three foot hole through it, and put a doorway right here —

STEVE You'd better not put it there, Barry; that's where the chimney passes through.

LYMAN: What about putting it over here?

GROVER: To hell with a three foot hole! Why aid don't we knock the whole wall down? The room between here and the kitchen serves no other purpose than to accumulate garbage anyway. Once

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we took care of the kitchen wall we could have light coming in from both sides. Think of all the shelves we could put in — and our work area would still be twice as large as it is now.

(DAN enters from left)

LYMAN: How do you propose to remove this wall, Grover?

GROVER: Easiest thing in the world if you've got the right tools, isn't that so, Steve?

STEVE: I guess so — if you've got the right tools.

GROVER: Mm. Let me see. It shouldn't take but three or four hours to take the whole thing down; patch up the paint and rough spots, and throw out the crud in that room.

LYMAN: But how?

GROVER? How? That's the least of it. Nowadays they've got all kinds of machinery for crap like that. They've got these small bulldozers — isn't that right, Steve?

STEVE: How would you get a bulldozer in here, Grover?

GROVER: Let's see. Ah, that's it. We'd remove the front window. Nowadays they've got demolition units rigged just like those snow removal outfits that melt the snow and cart it off as water. With that kind of unit we could get the wall down in two seconds flat, and then we apply this huge suction unit —

STEVE: And you'll cart it all off as liquid plaster, wood, nails —

GROVER: That's right! And while we're on that front window —

DAN: Have you gone out of your mind, Grover? Why are you talking about tearing this place apart three weeks before our party? I thought there were all kinds of other questions —

LAMIA (*to Anastasia*) Who's that?

ANASTASIA (*whispers to Lamia*): Another crank.

DAN: Another what?

BEN (*who sits near Anastasia — loudly*): Another crank!

OLYMPIA: Dan, do you think we should never make changes in the space where we live and work?

GROVER: Somehow we got into this other subject, Dan, and the fact is that Lyman here has a whole theory about that picture window.

LYMAN: I wouldn't exactly call it a theory. It's my feeling that if you're going to use this room as a display area, the presence of that window defeats your purpose.

DAN: If we're going to do what?

GROVER: What Lyman means is this, Dan. With that window there, we can't focus the spectator's eye on our work. Now if I had my business laid out off those shelves, I sure as hell wouldn't want the spectator's eyes wandering off to look at the landscape!

DONNA: But you had them remove my plants because you said you wanted more light.

GROVER: That's right, Donna, but that was years ago, and I forgot it would be natural light that streamed through that window. What art needs is artificial light.

Illyria Street Commune by Fredy Perlman

TONI: Grover, you are such an incredible bullshit artist —

OLYMPIA: Is that really true, Toni? I hear Grover trying to make the commune's expositions even livelier and more meaningful than the first one —

GROVER: Holy shit! I've got an appointment ten minutes ago! If anyone gets that demolition equipment be sure to let me know; I'd like to be in on that. (Grover exits left)

BEN: That's the sickest farce I've ever seen.

ANASTASIA (*to Olympia*): Who's he?

BEN: Yet another crank, lady. This place is infested.

OLYMPIA: I don't understand what you're calling a farce, Ben. We've been discussing improvements that have been needed for at least five years, and I personally think the various suggestions are creative and exciting.

TONI: Even though you know it's all bullshit.

OLYMPIA: Do you think it's bullshit, Toni, to improve the space where we spend most of our working hours?

BEN: I don't want to get sucked into the debate about the walls; I have my own opinion about its significance.

OLYMPIA: Could you give all of us a glimpse — ?

BEN: No, I couldn't, Olympia. Something else bugs me. I thought there were some things we all took for granted. I thought some things were repulsive to all of us. I thought we made certain compromises only in order to survive. Recently I learned —

PHILIP: If this is the beginning of another arid political debate, I'm leaving.

OLYMPIA: Wait a minute, Philip. I'd like to know what Ben learned recently.

BEN: I heard you were applying for a State grant to the arts.

BARRY: Where did you hear that?

DAN: Cut the innocent act, Barry. I heard about that grant over a year ago.

OLYMPIA: Ben, you seem so agitated. I've never seen you like this. Are you really so upset about a nonexistent grant, or are there other things?

PHILIP: Perhaps your own political frustrations, Ben?

DONNA: I don't understand what's going on. Olympia, you talked to me about such a grant two years ago. I didn't see what was wrong with accepting it. But why are you three acting as if Ben were crazy?

OLYMPIA: Oh, Donna, I didn't know you were here. Yes, that's just the point. All the people in this room have been talking about that grant for the past two years. That's why I don't understand Ben's surprise, his sudden agitation.

TONI: Two years! Then how come this is the first time I've heard anything about it?

BARRY: Where have you been, Toni?

SHARON: I haven't heard about it either.

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OLYMPIA: Well, now everyone is acting as if I'm crazy. Dan and Donna seem to have known all about it.

TONI: Who else knew all about it?"

OLYMPIA: Apparently everyone in the community except you, Toni. I myself discussed this question with almost everyone in this room.

BARRY: I don't see the relevance of this discussion.

BEN: Do the world a favor by dropping the word "community," Olympia. Your newest circle of friends, concerned as they are with our displaying and marketing our commodities — that's not community; it's the exact opposite.

OLYMPIA: You're hurting people's feelings, Ben.

BEN: A state subsidized art business — that's not community; that's what tears community to shreds, which has been happening right here; it's like that demolition machine Grover invented earlier.

OLYMPIA: Are you finished?

BARRY: You don't even know what you're talking about, Ben, and this isn't either the time or the place —

TONI: When is?

PHILIP: Labyrinthine, that's what this discussion is. Byzantine. Ben, you sound just like a political crank resurrected from the sixties.

OLYMPIA: Surely you're exaggerating, Philip. But honestly, Ben, your outburst certainly does seem irrational and unmotivated. The fact is, and you know it, we've never received any type of grant from the State and we're not getting such a grant now.

BARRY: Which means, Ben, that there's nothing to discuss, and you've been wasting everyone's time.

DAN: What happened? Did the State turn you down?

OLYMPIA: Why Dan, I don't understand your tone. You thought the grant such a great idea when I discussed it with you.

DAN: I — I hadn't thought out its implications.

LYMAN: Excuse me for intervening on this matter, but this debate seems to be taking place in a vacuum. Many people here seem to be unaware that there are no implications to this grant, there are absolutely no strings attached. And secondly, we did not get turned down. Many of the commune's programs are eligible for funds earmarked for precisely such programs. We didn't receive a grant for this fiscal year only because we submitted the application too late —

BARRY: Lyman, this isn't the time or the place for that —

OLYMPIA: I'm thoroughly confused. Your words to me, Dan — I don't remember them exactly — were: "What's wrong with us ripping off the State for some bread if we can get away with it?"

DAN: I guess the verb tripped me up. I should have asked: What's wrong with us being financed by the State.

OLYMPIA: I don't see the difference.

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DAN: It's what Ben was trying to say. You get so you depend on the State to support a community independent of the State, and finally you make friends with bureaucrats like these two dudes to help you apply for larger grants.

PHILIP: I won't have you insulting our friends, Dan. They have as much right in this community as you do, and it so happens I've felt more comfortable working with them than I ever felt with you.

TONI: When will you introduce us to the rest of your community, Philip — the politicians on the city council, the corporation directors?

PHILIP: I haven't met any of them yet.

BEN: But you'll call them the community as soon as you meet them.

PHILIP: I'm not able to contend with this harangue of political rhetoric, and its volume hurts my ears. I take it that the meeting is over.

(LYMAN, ANASTASIA, EARL & LAMIA exit left)

PHILIP *(at door)*: Are you coming, Olympia? Barry?

OLYMPIA: I'd like to get to the root of these rumors being spread behind my back. People should really have come to me first.

PHILIP: We'll be at Lyman's.

(PHILIP exits. TONI gets up and follows him, shouting)

TONI: You asshole. It's your ignorance that makes you shout about politics as if it were something you didn't do! You and Olympia are the biggest politicians here!

(TONI exits)

DAN: Toni said it! You and Philip have been throwing the word politics in my face for years, but I've never in my life seen a dirtier pair of politicians than you two, I've never been to a political meeting where I've felt more manipulated than at this afternoon's wall-moving session, I've never seen one person wind up another the way Grover was wound up. Machines that liquefy walls! Jesus! Now that you and Philip —

OLYMPIA: Is this what I stayed to hear? Have I really been throwing things in your face for years?

DAN: Now isn't the best time for you and Philip to denounce politics. You'd learn to cover your game better if you studied a little politics. Like the politics of Friends —

OLYMPIA: Please leave our friends out of this; it's no secret you have no great love for them.

DAN: I'm about to split, Olympia. But first I'd like to tell you something I read about the politics of friends. Long ago the members of ancient Macedonian tribes called each other friends. Later each tribe started to have a matriarchal chief, and her advisers were called the friends of the tribe. Finally one of the chiefs became queen, and her consort became king, and the top officials of the court were known as the friends of Macedonia. Friendship wasn't a personal relation any more; it became an office to which you got appointed by the queen or her consort. If a friend was ousted, he was considered an outsider, a traitor, a crank. Your namesake was the most famous of the Macedonian queens; she went through friends the way we go through kleenexes; she blew her nose in them and threw them away. That's about all I had to say. Good bye, everybody.

(DAN exits left)

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OLYMPIA: And good riddance.

BARRY: People who never do anything around here come up with the most brilliant critiques —

BEN: You've got a bucket of shit in your mouth, Barry, and you know it.

BARRY: You know something? I've been asking myself all afternoon: What's Ben doing at this meeting? You announced years ago you didn't want anything more to do with this place.

BEN: Why do you say that with such glee? If you're thinking "good riddance" why are you pretending to reproach me with it? And why don't you bother to remember the circumstances in which I said that? You had spilled shit all over —

BARRY: You're not going to dig up that little accident again!

BEN: Maybe it's because of little accidents that so many people are turned off from working here.

OLYMPIA: Why bring up the past? Can't we just let bygones be bygones? We've always had respect for you, Ben, all of us. We respected your opinions even if we didn't always adopt them, and whether or not you helped with the work. I personally was almost heartbroken when you turned against the community. If you'd stayed with us, we would never have waded through a mass of bureaucratic forms to apply for a State grant, because you would have made the implications of such an application perfectly clear to us. I'd still like you to clarify some things for me. Every person in the commune has accepted checks from the State. If I'm not mistaken, even you —

BEN: You know damn well —

OLYMPIA: Of course I know. We all know. You've collected monthly welfare checks from the State ever since I've known you. You haven't drawn a pay check for the past eight years —

BEN: If you don't know, or no longer know the difference —

OLYMPIA: Of course, Ben. Your illness. No one can reproach you with that. What I don't understand is how you can sit there and lecture to us about how evil we would be if any of us ever accepted a check like that.

BEN: Can I talk now?

OLYMPIA: Of course, Ben. I asked for your opinion.

BEN: I've been postponing a decision for a couple of years. I finally made up my mind this afternoon, while Grover was demolishing the wall and the front window. I'm going to leave this house as soon as I get my suitcase packed —

OLYMPIA: Surely you don't think we were trying to push you —

BEN: I'll be moving to Kentucky — not to a commune, not to join striking miners. Just a shack with a yard.

OLYMPIA: What about your paper?

BEN: Thanks for your concern, Olympia. The paper can survive without me. Some six years ago this place, the commune, became my main commitment, but that ended some time ago. I'd like to make sense out of what happened to us during the past eight years, to figure out how much was real and how much an illusion I kept reviving in my own mind. I don't think it was all illusion. I'm fairly sure that not a single one of us, except maybe Philip, started out wanting to be a potter or a painter or a writer or any other thing that fits into the slots of this society. We didn't start out being an

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Artists' Commune. Just a commune. We only wanted to be human beings to each other. We each had something to give, but nothing to sell. At least nothing to sell voluntarily. We accepted paychecks and welfare checks because otherwise we couldn't survive in the prison we're still in. You used to know that, Olympia. I fantasied that we didn't create this commune as a further extension of that prison, but as a break from it —

OLYMPIA: That wasn't a fantasy, Ben. That's truer now than it ever was.

BEN: I fantasied that we didn't want to sell our creations, our ideas, our dreams as if they were merchandise, and that this was the free space where we didn't have to do that, the free space where we didn't have to do pottery displays or art shows or whatever the contract called for, the free space where we could share what each could give. But that was just my own private fantasy.

OLYMPIA: How can you say that, Ben? Barry and Philip and I have lived by those principles.

BEN: Philip's principles came out of his mouth this afternoon. If he didn't sell himself before, it was only because there weren't any buyers. If he treated us as human beings, it was only because he hadn't met the better set yet. As soon as the first opportunity appeared, Philip was ready to sell himself and the commune and to throw the rest of us in on the bargain — or else to dispose of us as trash.

BARRY: You're raving, Ben. You couldn't be more wrong about Philip.

BEN: I don't know where you're coming from, Barry, nor where you're going. I was talking to Olympia. Sure I'm raving. Weren't we called cranks this afternoon? Isn't that what cranks do — rave? Dan was right, Olympia. You and Philip don't reject politics. You chaired the meeting, intimidated the opposition, determined the agenda,

excluded all relevance, squelched all critique. You've got so much politics the whole house reeks of it. Principles are what you and Philip don't have. Why not call things by their names? What Philip can't stand about Dan or Toni or the rest of us is that there are certain things we won't sell, for any mount of money.

OLYMPIA: Are you done? I promised to meet Philip.

BEN: Almost. I'd like to ask a favor. If you continue not to see the difference between a welfare check and a state grant to an art bazaar, between a commune and a merchandising mart, between a relatively free human being and a salesman, forget that I was ever a friend of yours. That's the favor. Because I intend to forget that you were ever a friend of mine.

(BEN walks toward archway)

DONNA: *(weakly)* Ben?

BEN: Donna. I'm exaggerating. It wasn't all hell. I won't ever forget the moments I spent with you. But by staying on here you'll just get — oh hell, you've got to figure that out for yourself.

(BEN exits right)

DONNA: *(to the empty archway)* You'll never make it all alone, Ben. Take me with you.

BARRY: Man, what a stuffed shirt he's become.

OLYMPIA: He's no great loss either. Let's go.

DONNA: Olympia?

OLYMPIA: What is it, Donna? I'm in a hurry.

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DONNA: Why didn't you tell me you were doing the planting last Sunday?

OLYMPIA: Didn't anyone tell you?

DONNA: You had to tell me, Olympia, since you decide —

OLYMPIA: Donna, how can you expect people to keep telling you about events if you never show up at any of them?

DONNA: I haven't missed a single planting, ever, since I bought the house ten years ago; I look forward to it all years long —

OLYMPIA: None of us can tell what you look forward to, Donna, since none of us are mind readers. I personally know that you were told about at least five work sessions, and there was neither hide nor hair of you at any of them. How can you expect us to keep considering you a working member of the commune? Admittedly you still live here, but you've become marginal.

DONNA: Me, marginal?

OLYMPIA: Maybe that's not the word. But I don't see how you can blame me. Honestly. You go to the bar whenever you feel like it; you're not obliged to tell me or anyone else. And I do my gardening whenever I feel like it —

(DONNA runs out right)

OLYMPIA: As if I were under some kind of obligation to tell her when I intended to brush my teeth or make my bed.

(OLYMPIA & BARRY exit left)

SHARON: (to the closed door) Everything we built together is your garden now, isn't it Olympia?

(SHARON & STEVE exit left, their arms around each other)

12.

TAPED NARRATOR: (*Sound of rewinding tape. Then:*) ...hostility still survived, it was only a diminishing residue. At last the isolated fragments were unified into a community, a (Stop)

(Phone rings. TONI enters from right)

TONI (*on phone*): Yes — Yes, I'm her sister — What hospital? —

Oh my god! — Wait while I get a pencil. Could you tell me the wing and room number again? I'll be right there. (*hangs up. Shouts to right*) *Olympia!*

VOICE OF OLYMPIA: Telephone for me?

TONI: No, it's Donna. She's in the hospital. She was hit by a car.

VOICE OF OLYMPIA: Really?

TONI: She tried to commit suicide!

VOICE OF OLYMPIA: I'll tell Philip. Maybe he'll be interested.

(*TONI throws pencil at picture window and exits right*)

13.

TAPED NARRATOR: *(Sound of tape rewinding. Theme)* ...like bees to flowers. The ice was broken. Two members of the community joined us, then a — *(Stop)*

(MATTIE enters from right with a tray full of ceramic houses and some plates. She dusts them and slowly places them in the shelves)

(TONI enters from right, arranges a blanket and eight pillows in the center of the room. DAN enters from right with trays of vegetables, which he places on the blanket)

MATTIE: I can't get over it. How can someone build all that and then smash it — all those friendships, all those dreams, all that work?

DAN: I read about this monarch who had his eye cut out, his collar bone fractured, his hand and leg mutilated —

TONI: I heard about a woman who did everything for her kid until he started to become independent — then she hacked him to death.

(DAN & TONI exit right. MATTIE wipes. SHARON & STEVE enter from right carrying the components of the puppet stage. Sharon borrows a rag from MATTIE and starts to dust them)

MATTIE: Something's missing, isn't it?

SHARON: Steve went with her once, you know. She was younger than I am, but married. How does this joint fit, Steve? — Oh, I remember.

MATTIE: You two be sure to drop over, you hear? I'm home just about all the time. It would be such a shame to let everything die out —

SHARON: We will, Mattie, but it'll have to be on a weekend. We're both working now.

MATTIE: So's Dan. He's typesetting books now. It's a lot more interesting than his previous two jobs.

STEVE: That can be a trap too.

MATTIE: In what sense, Steve?

STEVE: Well, it's interesting, but it's not your interest; it's good enough, but it's not good — and you keep on doing it.

(TONI & DAN enter with bowls of batter, dishes)

DAN: I think we're ready.

TONI *(to right)*: Grover! Leon! Rose Anne! Supper's ready.

VOICE OF GROVER: We'll be right down! MATTIE: Did they exclude you, Sharon?

SHARON: I didn't want to be in it. Without Alec or Lisa it's not the same.

MATTIE: Lisa just insisted on going to her girlfriend's; I'm sorry.

SHARON: Don't be. Lisa is so much older now. I'd feel embarrassed.

TONI: *(to right)* Grover! For crying out —

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VOICE OF GROVER: I'm on my way.

TONI: I bet!

(GROVER enters from right)

TONI: And the kids?

GROVER: Well Leon got us started watching this program, and we got all engrossed —

SHARON: And the play?

GROVER: Oh Christ, the play! You know I could do this gag I did once when —

DAN: Skip it, Grover.

TONI: Leon!

VOICE OF LEON: Coming!

TONI *(lights joint)*: Maybe this'll give us an appetite.

MATTIE: I sure need one.

STEVE: When Ben first came here she called him the Underground.

SHARON: Ben thought she was an heiress, can you imagine?

STEVE: She told me he made her feel like an heiress, made her feel like giving her fortune to some cause, only she never had a fortune.

SHARON: He thought she was renting him the maid's room.

GROVER: Yea, she was a good kid. I know this one woman who had an accident when —

TONI: Oh shut your trap, Grover!

VOICE OF LEON: It's almost over!

MATTIE: Aren't we trying to do the same thing they did at their Expo?

DAN: Only we don't have a Lamia.

GROVER: Hey wait a minute! This isn't —

TONI: It isn't, Grover. We're trying hard, but we're not succeeding. We cooked Ben's meal, but Ben won't help us eat it.

SHARON: Alec was eight, Leon was seven and Lisa was six when we made that stage. I had just turned nineteen, but I was the youngest of the four.

MATTIE: Donna's "gosh" is in the air and I keep looking around for her.

TONI: Philip accused me of "politicizing" her death by calling it suicide.

STEVE: Does Barry know?

TONI: He was already on his trip when it happened. Poor Barry.

SHARON: Misplaced pity.

TONI: I'm not sure. He kept talking about having this base to come back to. Maybe he was just trying to be sure it was still there when he came back, only he didn't know how to do that.

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STEVE: Maybe.

SHARON: I thought he knew everything when he first brought me. I was all excited and afraid. He told me police sirens would wake me in the middle of the night, and their guns would shoot holes in the walls, and I'd have to run down through the secret passageway and then through the city's sewers with my machine gun.

TONI: Did you really believe that?

SHARON: I couldn't get over how peaceful you all were, how quiet the house was. I tried to put it all in my painting because I couldn't say it in words. What I expected and what I found and what I had wanted but no longer did because I knew I'd hate it when I got it.

GROVER: Hell, I remember that painting. That was the best —

SHARON: I don't think you ever saw my painting, Grover. I think only Ben understood the things I was trying to say. They're the kinds of things Steve and I can talk to each other about, sometimes without even saying any words, sometimes by deciding to go out and eat sometimes only by looking at each other. I never dreamed my painting would be graded without anyone seeing it, like I was in school: C for grammar and E for punctuation; I thought I had quit school.

TONI: Ben said something similar a few days ago.

DAN: Did you see Ben?

TONI: I finally reached him by phone a few days ago; I tried to talk him into coming to our "memorial for Donna."

DAN: And he couldn't?

TONI: Wouldn't. He said he felt guilty and didn't want to infect us with his guilt. He also said he was writing her a memorial of his own.

SHARON: What else?

TONI: He said we couldn't go back to the origin because there was no origin. We had started something beautiful — but none of us knew it, none of us supported it, none of us protected it and none of us developed it; we had involved ourselves in a project, but none of us carried it — “except maybe Sharon and Donna,” he said. Donna carried it in her eyes, she tried to speak to us with her eyes, with the smile in her eyes, but none of us knew how to hear her. It sounded mystical to me when Ben said it.

SHARON: Ben didn't know how to hear her either, did he Toni? Steve did. And I took Steve away from her.

(Doorbell rings. GROVER opens door. LAMIA & EARL enter with suitcases)

LAMIA: I hope I'm not imposing. I'm sorry to do this when Olympia and Philip are away, but it was my only free night.

GROVER: What are you about to do?

EARL: Lamia has the intention of moving into one of the empty rooms. I believe this was all arranged.

GROVER: Beats me. *(LAMIA & EARL exit right)*

GROVER: Is that woman moving in here?

TONI: Looks like it.

GROVER: Was this brought up at a house meeting?

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TONI: What's the point, Grover? Sharon spends most of her time at Steve's, and I'll be moving out soon.

GROVER: You'll be moving? Where to? TONI: I don't know yet.

DAN: Shall we start the meal?

MATTIE (pacing): For some reason I'm not at all hungry.

(LAMIA & EARL enter from right with a large box)

MATTIE: Aren't those Donna's plants? You're not throwing them away?

EARL: Well we certainly aren't going to keep them. They look like they've been dead for years.

(The lights go out)

14.

TAPED NARRATOR (sound of rewinding, somewhat lengthy. Stop. Then): It began with isolated strangers in the big city, hostile and suspicious individuals surrounded by —

(LYMAN turns off the tape recorder on his desk after the lights go on)

(Same room. The shelves contain sandals, plates, pottery and packaged commodities. The desk no longer contains a typesetting machine. In the place of the picture window there is a wall. A large portrait occupies the center of the wall — a portrait of Philip, somewhat older and in a suit. The remainder of the wall contains the following statements:)

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(LYMAN SANDERS, considerably older, sits at the desk, which contains the tape recorder, an intercom box, and of course paper. A reporter, with a pad, sits on the other side of the desk. Both are dressed as befits executives)

REPORTER: So the enterprise remained unified until the founder's mysterious death. Did he simply vanish?

LYMAN: It is believed that the founder died in an accident in connection with his last interest, horses, but the causes are unknown.

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REPORTER: Did his wife take over immediately after his demise?

LYMAN: Not immediately. Their son managed the business for a brief period, and I must add, to his credit, that he kept it unified. But in other respects he left a mess by perpetrating innumerable disturbances and untold upheavals with his gang of motorcycle friends.

REPORTER: He was awarded some kind of medal for distinguished service, if I'm not wrong.

LYMAN: That's correct. He did heroic service in the Far East. He died in Iran.

REPORTER: Is it true that he died of a fever contracted from a drinking orgy?

LYMAN: I believe that story is apocryphal.

REPORTER: So the founder's wife salvaged the operation —

LYMAN: I wouldn't put it that way. The founder's wife did step in on two or three occasions during the stormy interregnum that followed the demise of the son —

REPORTER: So the real work of salvage —

LYMAN: That's correct. The real work of salvage is due entirely to the efforts of the three friends — I could almost say kinsmen — of the founder.

REPORTER: Among whom you were the senior member.

LYMAN: Correct again. We established a partnership. However, centrifugal forces soon made themselves felt, and ultimately these forces tore asunder what had once been a unified enterprise.

REPORTER: Two of the partners established competing empires —
LYMAN: In actual fact the competition was minimal. One of the partners set up Alternative Media Enterprises and specialized in all the lines related to self-publishing, but this was at a time when ISC was playing down the share of those lines, and at this point we've gotten out of them altogether. The other partner detached the part of our activity that was inherently non-competitive, namely the educational sector, and that enterprise, the Alternative Schools Corporation, recently merged with an institute of behavioral psychology; as you probably know, their largest contracts are with the Pentagon.

REPORTER: Is it true that both of the successor enterprises are now larger than the original home base?

LYMAN: It depends on what you mean by larger. ISC retains the vast wealth of accumulated tradition, and we continue to have an edge over the other two in the more, shall we say, philosophical and artistic manifestations.

REPORTER: I'm deeply grateful, Mr. Sanders —

LYMAN: On the contrary, the pleasure was all mine. Will I be able to see the material before publication?

REPORTER: I'll see to it. And the typescript?

LYMAN: Yes of course. (Presses button of intercom)

VOICE OF LAMIA (through intercom): Yes, Mr. Sanders.

LYMAN: Lamia, would you see to it that the gentleman from the News is given a typescript of the Foundation Tape?

VOICE OF LAMIA: Yes, Mr. Sanders.

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(REPORTER exits after handshake. Intercom' buzzes)

LYMAN: What is it, Lamia?

VOICE OF LAMIA: Lyman, are you ready to hear the day's report now?

LYMAN: Shoot away, Lamia.

VOICE OF LAMIA (Light and sound fade during this exposition):
Two hundred pairs of sandals, 76 with straps; assortments of pottery, mainly vases, amounting to 137 pounds; forty eight paintings, half of them for the sepia version of number nineteen; a problem order for frozen yogurt, much too large for us to fill — a rush order from a natural foods cooperative in northern Wisconsin for 500 cases of frozen yogurt, and as you know our total weekly production is 50 cases...

(Lights and sound fade out)

End

Illyria Street Commune by Fredy Perlman

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*This play was written and performed in Detroit in 1979. For another
take on collective living and other anti- authoritarian issues see the
play *Revolutionary Purity Showdown* by Richard Aides*

