

THE FOURTH FLOOR FOLLIES

(A Literary Revue)

a one-act play by

F. R. Lewis

SCENE:

The fourth floor of Smithson Tower, a college dormitory, in the lounge during a women's writing conference sponsored by the Women Are Writing Union (WAWU—pronounced Wah-woo). The lounge is furnished in mostly plastic versions of "Danish Modern," none of which are in perfect condition. There is a three-person couch, a love seat, one arm chair, three end tables, a floor lamp, one table lamp with a movie star-collage lamp shade, one table lamp with a likeness of a Greek god (Zeus?) drawn on the shade in black India ink. Corridors to suites turn left and right off the top of the lounge and the stairwell—concrete-encased—occupies the middle back.

CHARACTERS:

CAROLANN, the narrator, in search of . . . something; speaks with a straight face, is a bit naive.

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN, a feminist, in her mid-40s, plump body, busty, good legs and face, salt-and-pepper hair clenched in a "Jewish Afro."

DUCKIE, the aphorist, between 35 and 45, hard to tell, short-haired, appears street-wise.

ZORINDA, the pornographer, tall, slim, blonde (bleached), around 40, has a tattoo on her right shoulder: rose with silver lightning bolt penetrating it. Her voice is high-pitched, quintessentially dumb-blonde.

OTHERS: Poet, Finding the Child in All of Us workshop leader and members, the monologist, the weaver, the tie-dyer, the readings "ringmaster," the fan dancer, the Southerner, miscellaneous women who can all be played by two or three people.

SCENE I

(Carolann sits in one of the two arm chairs and chats with the audience. A spotlight is on her, the rest of the stage is dark.)

CAROLANN: Come to find out, the other women, they have gotten together in the fourth floor lounge—right here—every night, almost, after the readings. And me? I had no idea. Not one. I must be coming off the stairwell through the wrong door or something. But there is worse. Not only do I not know what they do at night, these women, I do not even know who—besides me—even lives on the fourth floor this conference. . . . Well, no. That is not exactly true. What I mean is outside of Zorinda the tattooed woman—and the woman this morning with the poetry—I don't know.

Zorinda the tattooed woman, she is my suite mate.

(Light up on Zorinda, who is wearing a striped terry cloth robe and is carrying a douche bag.)

Zorinda the tattooed woman I have known about since right away. Zorinda is someone who even if you didn't know about her you would know about her. . . . See? . . . That little red douche bag? Every morning, Zorinda leaves that little red douche bag on the bathroom vanity like a calling card.

(Light down on Zorinda.)

The woman with the poetry I discovered this morning—or maybe it

was that she discovered me. See, the "Finding the Child in All of Us" workshop was meeting here in the fourth floor lounge . . . where the members could spread out. Well, about half-way through, the workshop leader says

(Light up on Workshop Leader.)

WORKSHOP LEADER: Each and every one of us when we were children loved to imitate animals and each and every one of us had a favorite, and if we think about it, each and every one of us still does have a favorite. So what we are going to do now is make noises and move our bodies, just like those animals we love. Pick your animals and let loose. Put your hearts into it, girls.

(The "girls"—including Carolann—are imitating calls of the wild, and the domesticated. Carolann is trumpeting like an elephant and swinging her arms, trunk-like. She cuts off mid-swing, when poet appears from left hallway, brandishing pen and paper like the proverbial whip and chair.)

POET: Scat! Damn you—I'm trying to work here. My sestina, the one that has been eluding me for months—no, years—my sestina is almost there. Please! Go play in someone else's yard.

(The animals pause in mid-imitation.)

CAROLANN: *(Reaches in her pocket and takes out a key, which she hands to the poet.)* Here. Work in my room. Back there. Four-oh-seven. The other side of the stairwell. It's concrete. The stairwell.

POET: Right. *(Pause)* Listen: Thanks. If there's no party tonight, we'll be in the lounge after the readings. Why don't you plan to join us?

(Exits to the left—the way she came. Lights down to spot on Carolann.)

CAROLANN: If you ask me, no party tonight is a sure thing. A last-night-after-the-readings party has been a WAWU conference tradition. At least for as long as I have been coming. WAWU—that stands for the Women Are Writing Union, by the way. WahWoo? Everyone looks forward to it, the last WAWU conference party, just about. The problem with the party isn't the party, it is where the WAWUers traditionally party. Which is the penthouse—the fourteenth floor—of

Smithson Tower. This tower. Not what you would call the Empire State Building, but the elevators don't run. About the only thing that does run in Smithson Tower is the women of WAWU. Up the stairs and down the stairs. And one other thing runs, too—the toilet runs, the one in the bathroom between where Jennette lives and where Zorinda and I live. Let me tell you something about Zorinda and the toilet. The plumbing is tricky—that's about the toilet. As for Zorinda . . . Zorinda is another story.

(Light up on Zorinda.)

ZORINDA: That's right. An auxiliary policeman. In the City. New York? Anyway, the week before I came up here, the department, they called to come to the 92nd Street bridge. On a Monday morning. Before work. For a drug bust. The cops needed me to direct traffic. Oh, it was inspirational. Truly inspirational.

(Light down on Zorinda.)

CAROLANN: Now, this very same woman . . . the one who directed traffic around a drug bust during the rush hour on a Monday morning? . . . This very same woman? . . . in six days she has not mastered our toilet. See, what happens is Zorinda starts the flush okay, but there is no follow through. None. Which maybe wouldn't matter, except for the flow, that the flow does not cease when the ballcock rises. And the cascade! I mean, the cascade, you hear it and you come to believe there is enough energy being generated to run the elevators, both of the elevators. And not just for the duration of WAWU, but forever. But it is only the toilet of fourth floor west—and Zorinda—in residence. That Zorinda! she never hears it, the water. All you can figure is her mind, Zorinda's mind just simply has not been on the toilet. Where it must have been, Zorinda's mind, is on this story. . . .

(Light up on Zorinda. Zorinda is sitting in her room, at the desk, with her fingers standing on the keys of a big typewriter—the kind you see in offices—like they are waiting for the next word to rise.)

CAROLANN: So, anyway, there I am last night trying to sneak into my room past Zorinda's door. . . .

ZORINDA: Hey. Carolann. You don't want to go in yet. Come on. You gotta see this story. It is incredible, this story. I have written a truly incredible story right here at this conference. And I am going to read

this story tomorrow night. Is that not incredible? Tell me.

CAROLANN: (*Thinking more of being snared by Zorinda than of what Zorinda has said.*) Incredible.

ZORINDA: You have to read my story, Carolann. Don't you want to read my story? What I've done so far?

CAROLANN: Oh, no. I'd much rather hear you read the story. Really I would. When it's all finished. Besides, I'm so sleepy I don't believe I could grasp it.

ZORINDA: Did you know—in town they rent typewriters? I was just so thrilled with the idea for this incredible story (*she fans the pages*). I jogged all the way into town—well, it's not all that far, really—and I have just been composing away, all afternoon. . . .

(*Light down on Carolann, as though she has zipped into her room. Zorinda goes back to her typing. Light down on Zorinda and up on Carolann.*)

CAROLANN: Let me tell you, those creation urges were rampant on Smithson Tower fourth floor west. Zorinda must have been up half the night finishing that story. And she never did close her door, which for Zorinda was a first and only, at least as far as I ever saw. I mean this woman, she locks her door just to go to the bathroom, even when she is only going to brush her teeth. And it is not like you can't see down the corridor if someone were trying to get into your room, or anything. Now this is scarcely worth note, I would be the first to agree, were it not for one thing. Around her neck, Zorinda wears this really thick, really gold chain. And on this chain she has police whistles, two of them, and besides the police whistles she has what sounds like dozens of keys. Now, every time Zorinda locks and unlocks—which is every time—this lavalier of hers hits the door with a thunk you can probably hear in the farthest corner of the farthest corner. The weird thing is that you never hear where the whistles and the keys hit on the return trip. God!—her chest must be a wreck.

Not her room, though, that is not a wreck. There was her door wide open this morning and you could scarcely even tell there is a person living in that room. Zorinda is in the room okay, tucked into her bed like a knife in a sheath. I mean without so much as a ripple in the blanket. That bleached blonde head sticking out of the covers was the only thing in the room saying, "Person." Now a lot of WAWUers—

the poets especially—they bring stuff like pillows (*fancy not sleeping*) and bedspreads and photographs and little pots and jars of vitamins and face creams and some of the black women bring these sashes and scarves from their tribes in Africa. I have things, too. A typewriter. Well, a portable printer, really. Six pounds. Ideal for traveling. And what I plan to do on the printer is write my own stories. Or maybe articles, for magazines. And I have a camera, too, and a tape recorder. All miniatures. Little necessities. But in Zorinda's room: Nothing personal. Not even the little red douche bag is showing.

(Lights down for a beat or two, then up again.)

SCENE II

CAROLANN: Well, at last it is tonight and time for the readings, the last readings on the final night of WAWU convening. Before the readings start comes another WAWUian tradition. This one woman who writes these mainstream tragi-comedies, she delivers this monologue to get the festivities underway. At least she had delivered a monologue at every conference I have been to, which is not every conference since the beginning, but close enough. Now, I think the monologue tonight is really funny, which is no surprise. What is a surprise—a surprise to me—is that everyone else seems to find the monologue hilarious, too. Believe me, all the women laughing could not possibly live on the fourth floor of Smithson Tower. All the women laughing could not even squeeze into the fourth floor lounge before bed time. Not together. WAWU just does not run that kind of a conference.

(Light up on monologist.)

MONOLOGIST: Ladies, this year we live among three kinds of women. First, we have those paragons, the most devoutly-to-be-wished for suitemates: the flushing non-smokers. And nearly as good, the relatively benign, only half-bad smoking flushers. Finally—beware, oh beware—those challenges of challenges to one's health and sanity that shall hereforth and forever be known as the smoking non-flushers.

CAROLANN: Well, she goes on and on in that way she has and wraps it all up with a suggestion.

MONOLOGIST: So next year, women of WAWU, confreres—or should I say *consouers*—I propose we should all return here tattooed. Not with ordinary tattoos. Oh no! Not flowers or naked men or sentimental sayings for the likes of us. For us, women of WAWU: BLOOD WORDS. Mother. Father. Love. Hate. Marriage. Son. Daughter. But one caution—not more than one tattoo at a time.

(Light down on the Monologist and up on the Readings Ringmaster.)

RINGMASTER: Before the final readings of the seventh annual Women Are Writing Union Conference begin, we have some extra-special treats: a Japanese fan dance, a small fashion show, the photography workshop, a wool spinner, and Hasi Hentov-Kopen.

(The spotlight is taken on a small blonde or red-haired woman wearing a kimono. The woman is neither Japanese nor graceful in performance. At the conclusion, she tucks her fan into the sleeve of her kimono and speaks.)

FAN DANCER: I know you didn't forget what I have for you in my room, women. Well, tonight—and tonight only—I will be selling the few genuine, all-silk kimonos that remain—the ones I sell regularly for two hundred and eighty dollars for the full-length and one hundred and eighty dollars for the jacket—for fifty dollars less. Per. My room is 1004. And I'll be waiting. *(She laughs and fans.)*

(Lights down on Fan Dancer.)

(Lights up on two "models" wearing or carrying tie-dye skirts, blouses, jackets. They stand to either side of the tie-dye woman who speaks with a German accent.)

TIE-DYE WOMAN: In my room, I am selling the rest of my stock—in one size fits all. For fifty PER CENT off, you can have them. And I am in Smithson 518. *(Lights down on the fashion show.)*

(Lights up on Carolann.)

CAROLANN: And the sheep-to-shawl demonstration by the woman who says she raises sheep, only not in her room, and the photography

person who introduces every last member of her workshop and every last member of her workshop stands and they all get applauded only we can't even look at their pictures until intermission. And last—but never ever to be confused with least—Hasi Hentov-Kopen.

(Light up on Hasi Hentov-Kopen.)

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: I know that many of you were bitterly disappointed when the somewhat limited supply of my invaluable handouts was rapidly depleted. Therefore, you will be immensely relieved to learn that on the WAWU table in the campus center of this splendid women's college—you all know where that is, aye?—you will find additional copies of the maps and guidelines from my extremely popular courses in "Loving Our Bodies" and "Getting to . . . Perhaps."

(Light down on Hasi Hentov-Kopen.)

CAROLANN: Well, at long last, come the readings. Here is a confession: I doze off for stanzas at a time.

(The words "poetry," "chapters," "essays," "poetry," "short stories," "poetry," etc., are flashed on a scrim, with Carolann nodding off here and there. Then light up on Zorinda at lecturn. She wears a stretch tank top which, when she half-turns to the audience, shows off her tattoo—a mauve rose outlined in black and pierced by a glittery silver arrow. She "deals" her pages onto the lecturn one at a time.)

CAROLANN: But, let me tell you, I am awake for Zorinda, my tattooed suitemate. Who could sleep through that voice of hers? But that voice of hers. . . . No kidding, she is at least one whole page into the story before I get it, what she is reading with that voice. . . . And what is she reading? This story, Zorinda's story that she is reading aloud in a room full of women tells about a prostitute who . . . uh . . . sucks. In the lollipop sense. During the ten minutes WAWU allots each reading, the prostitute practices her specialty on a dirty trick and bumps off three guys. Of these three guys, one is the sire of the prostitute's off-spring, Charelle—who daddy believes was aborted long before. As for the remaining two, they are gangsters hot to recover this satchelful of loot. Bundled fifties and hundreds, the loot, stolen by Charelle's rigormortified daddy. A good mom, the prostitute, she takes off, money in hand, thinking as she pussy-foots amid bodies and gore. . . .

ZORINDA: Finally for Tiara, there will be a bountiful Christmas.

(Zorinda collects the pages of her story and looks out into the audience expectantly. Only silence greets her. Suddenly, someone crunches a cheeseball into the quiet, an odd clap or two and scattered titters follow. Light down on Zorinda and up on the RingMaster.)

RINGMASTER: That's all folks. Now it's time to celebrate. And don't forget your bucks for the num-nums.

(Lights down. The sound of buzzing and shuffling as the women leave the readings.)

SCENE III

(Carolann stands at the non-working elevators.)

CAROLANN: No elevators, no party. No suprise. Even the women who didn't take "Workouts for Writers" have had enough exercise for one conference, I guess. But that's all right with me. Now I will meet the women who have been gathering in the fourth floor lounge. I can hardly wait.

SCENE IV

(When the lights come up on the lounge, a woman is sitting yoga-style—lotus position—on the love seat against stage left wall. Actually, she is not "seen." She is surrounded by smoke. The ashtray in front of her is overflowing. When the smoke clears, Duckie is sighted briefly, then is fogged in again on the exhales. Duckie wears a white polo shirt with the collar up, a pair of red canvas gym shorts, no shoes. She has close-cropped hair, freckles, no make-up. She carries cigarettes in the pocket of the shirt and in the waist band of the shorts. Carolann enters from the stairwell on the right. The Poet follows.)

POET: You know Duckie?

CAROLANN: I met her the first night, outside "How to Confer."

(Spotlight on Duckie. She walks over to Carolann and stands very close to her, leaning down to read the nametag. Everyone at the conference has a nametag, except Duckie.)

DUCKIE: So . . . Carolann . . . so, Carolann, you can call me Duckie. Here, have one of these. *(Duckie thrusts a black, satiny-looking matchbook at Carolann.)*

CAROLANN: A matchbook? But—uh—I don't smoke.

DUCKIE: Yeah. That's okay, Carolann. Just turn it over.

CAROLANN: "Put your message in the prospect's hands. Call Duckie in Freehold." Catchy. You sell matchbook advertising.

DUCKIE: Very good. I write aphorisms, too, Carolann. You know what an aphorism is, right? *(Carolann looks dubious but nods "yes," anyway.)* Sure you do. Listen to this, Carolann: I have an aphorism coming out next month. In a book of sayings to live by.

CAROLANN: That's just great, Duckie. What's the name? . . .

(Duckie returns to the love seat without answering.)

CAROLANN: She never said what the name of the book is. She never said what her name is. I mean, I could read her aphorism just by way of reading aphorisms and never know the aphorism was hers. *(To the Poet.)* Does she go to anything? Like meals?

POET: I don't know. I've only seen her here. I'm going to get what's left of my food and drink. Be right back.

(Poet goes off left. Carolann looks around her, bounces slightly on the balls of her feet, looks generally expectant. Duckie appears and disappears, as she lights new cigarettes from the butts of their predecessors. Zorinda bounds in from the right and starts a seemingly endless jog around the room, knees almost striking her chin as she goes. She continues her circuit as other women enter singly and in small groups and the get-together gets together. The small groups look around, then

leave. Other small groups form from the women who stay. The sheepless Sheep Woman with her spinning wheel sets up and begins to spin. Her back is half-turned to the audience. Carolann reacts with surprise, pleasure, amazement, shrugs, etc., as people come and go. Finally, Hasi Hentov-Kopen enters.)

CAROLANN: *(To the audience.)* Hasi Hentov-Kopen! I can't imagine that anyone—even I—wouldn't know where to find Hasi Hentov-Kopen.

(Hasi Hentov-Kopen pauses by the lampshade with the head of Zeus India-inked on it, then—with appropriate flourish—turns the face to the wall. She arranges herself in the most comfortable, least vinyl looking chair. Meanwhile, the Poet returns with a bottle of scotch, containing about two inches of liquid. She sets the bottle down on the coffee table near Duckie. She heads back to her room.)

DUCKIE: *(Reaches out from her smoke cloud. In one hand she holds a Dunkin Doughnuts "Big One" styrofoam cup and a cigarette. With the other she takes the bottle.)* Mmmm. Aged. Good stuff. Must've brought it all the way from home. Does great things for one's sestinas, I hear. *(She empties the remains of the Scotch into the cup.)*

POET: *(Returns carrying a shot glass, a paper plate, and two pieces of fruit: a largish plum and an ample peach.)* My husband sent a gorgeous fruit basket. It's our anniversary. The thirty-eighth. He had the basket delivered right here to my room. A doll, no? This is what's left.

(She sets the fruit on the end table near Hasi Hentov-Kopen and then attempts to pour scotch into her shot glass from the empty bottle. Seeing no scotch fall from the bottle, she sticks her nose in and takes a big sniff. Hasi Hentov-Kopen, who has been watching Zorinda prance around the room, turns her attention to the fruit. She selects the plum and begins to nip and suck at it with great appetite. Carolann meanwhile has scampered off to her room and races back with cheese and crackers.)

POET: Anyone have a knife? I'll divide the peach.

DUCKIE: Wait. *(Pads off to the right of the stairwell, in her bare feet and a shroud of smoke.)*

CAROLANN: *(To Zorinda.)* Does anyone else live on this floor, besides who's here?

ZORINDA: Oh listen, Carolann, we get visitors all the time.

(As if brought by magic, a voice with a thick Southern drawl speaks from the vicinity of the stairwell.)

SOUTHERN VOICE: Hasi Hentov-Kopen? Y'all here?

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: Yes. Here.

(A blonde woman wearing a velour robe and matching slippers and carrying a crystal captain's decanter and two glasses. She floats floorward at Hasi Hentov-Kopen's feet—or where Hasi Hentov-Kopen's feet would be if they were not tucked up on the chair.)

SOUTHERN VOICE: Hasi Hentov-Kopen, I have come here tonight to ask you a question—and you are the only person at this entire conference who can answer this question.

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: And who, may I ask, are you?

SOUTHERN VOICE: *(As if she feels Hasi Hentov-Kopen should have heard of her.)* Why, I am Sandra-Sue Kelsey, Hasi Hentov-Kopen.

(Hasi Hentov-Kopen waves a hand . . . pontiff-like.)

ZORINDA: *(To Carolann)* See, I told you. All the time visitors.

SANDRA-SUE: What I want to know, Hasi Hentov-Kopen is . . . Hasi Hentov-Kopen, am I a feminist now?

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: *(Appears to be considering her reply.)* I couldn't say . . . Ms. . . .Kelsey, was it? *(Sandra-Sue nods.)* What is it—exactly—that you do?

SANDRA-SUE: Well now . . . when I mentioned to someone at dinner this evening that I have raised not one but two liberated sons and trained one liberated husband as well, why she said to me, Sandra-Sue Kelsey, you are one swell feminist, and that's the truth.

ZORINDA: *(On the prance.)* Gee, that's what I'm going to do, too—

liberate my husband and sons. The minute I get home. (*Sandra-Sue and Hasi Hentov-Kopen behave as though Zorinda has not spoken.*)

SANDRA-SUE: So I was wondering what you, Hasi Hentov-Kopen would say. . . .

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: Yes. Well I say that's very nice. Commendable. But WHAT IS IT THAT YOU DO?

SANDRA-SUE: Do? Let me see. By my very own self I have accounted for more than sixty-eight percent of all the genuine true-to-life confessions and romances that comfort and instruct ladies. Ladies of every age and across the very length and the very breadth of America.

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: Very profitable, I'm sure. But I believe that political activism is required of a true feminist. I, for example, speak out in print. I LECTURE the length and breadth of Canada. I am interviewed on television and radio and for the newspapers and periodicals. I organize. I demonstrate. I march. . . . Now, bearing all this in mind, I ask you again: What is it that you do?

SANDRA-SUE: I am a kind of an officer. . . .

ZORINDA: (*Who prances by in time to hear Sandra-Sue's declaration*) Oh, wow, me too!

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: WHAT KIND of an officer?

(*Duckie returns to stand by the stairwell in her cloud of smoke.*)

SANDRA-SUE: Well—a kind of sub-officer? With the Florida State Republicans. . . . (*Her voice rises as though this last is a question.*)

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: Are you paid? (*Before Sandra-Sue can answer and as an aside to the other women*) Of course she's not paid. They never are.

SANDRA-SUE: (*Proudly*) I, Hasi Hentov-Kopen, am a volunteer.

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: NO WOMAN SHOULD VOLUNTEER HER SERVICES! A WOMAN MUST ALWAYS BE PAID FOR THE WORK SHE PERFORMS.

SANDRA-SUE: But they are very nice to me. VERY nice to me, Hasi Hentov-Kopen. Very VERY nice. *(She vigorously lifts and lowers her chin.)* I would go so far as to say that they are GRATEFUL, Hasi Hentov-Kopen. Really.

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: Yes, I'm sure they are. But you have not yet told me what it is that you do.

SANDRA-SUE: Letters. I write letters, and I talk to folks. That is what I do, Hasi Hentov-Kopen. Mostly.

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: Hmmmmm. On women's issues, perhaps?

SANDRA-SUE: Well, no. Not precisely, Hasi Hentov-Kopen. It's more like money . . . and things. For the party.

(Hasi Hentov-Kopen sniffs elaborately, turns a shoulder to Sandra-Sue and returns her attention to the prancing Zorinda and the partially eaten plum [which she continues to eat with aplomb]. Sandra-Sue lowers her head toward the goblet into which she pours wine and from which she sips as she sips as she lifts only her eyes—to search the lounge for supportaudience. Neither is immediately forthcoming, but as Zorinda comes near. . . .)

ZORINDA: But Hasi Hentov-Kopen, everything that Sandra-Sue gets published is to help women, isn't it?

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: Help them remain prisoners, slaves . . . is that what you mean, aye?

(Zorinda shrugs and keeps running. Sandra-Sue eases herself up and mumbles something about seeing who's partying on the fifth floor and departs. She passes Duckie, who steps into the lounge and returns to her perch on the love seat.)

DUCKIE: Okay, here goes.

(Duckie pulls a fighter's knife from a silver-trimmed scabbard that she shielded from view as she crossed the lounge. The edge of the knife catches the light and gleams. The women are staring at the knife as if gore drips from it.)

POET: I'm not going to touch that thing. *(Nobody else makes a move toward the knife, either, and, in fact, draw away from it.)*

DUCKIE: I'll do it. I'll do it. Don't get yourselves worked up. Everyone having some? Not you, HHK.

(Everyone nods—except Hasi Hentov-Kopen, who does not look pleased with the appellation and is busy with her plumb. Duckie carves the peach like she is a brain surgeon, precisely and delicately. First she traces lines on the peach's skin. Then, as she cuts into the flesh, she licks at the juice that beads up around the edges of the cut and runs down her fingers and collects in between them. Everyone is VERY QUIET. Then, as though it has been choreographed, or was a ritual, the women in the fourth floor lounge—including the Sheep Woman who stops spinning and Zorinda who stops jogging—move together, in step, toward Duckie. Duckie goes around the circle—not moving from her position, just turning—bestowing on each in turn her portion of the peach. The women then move backward in unison, and each returns to where she had been sitting. Duckie removes the final piece with the knife and brings it to her mouth. She rubs the knife across her hip, examines it, pulls out a piece of shirt bottom to finish wiping the blade. When she is satisfied, Duckie returns the knife to its scabbard, then approaches Zorinda, pointing the silver tip toward Zorinda's middle.)

DUCKIE: Let's do a little . . . self-defense, Zorinda. What do you say?

(Duckie rotates the knife suggestively. No sooner does Zorinda nod than Duckie—whose nose reaches approximately to the middle of Zorinda's tattoo—moves in to stab Zorinda in the heart.)

DUCKIE: *(Handing the knife to Zorinda.)* Now you try.

(Zorinda and Duckie continue but Zorinda cannot penetrate Duckie's defense. Duckie grabs the knife from Zorinda.)

DUCKIE: My turn again. *(This time, Zorinda bobs, shifts, feints, while everyone watches—they are the audience, after all. Hasi Hentov-Kopen is still at her plum, giving good shlorps at the dramatic moments—not being one to sacrifice the spotlight to another, even to a confrere [consouer?].)*

DUCKIE: Good! You're not so easy now.

(Duckie paddles backwards, out of range of the knife and Zorinda's swinging key ring. Finally, Zorinda puts the knife on the coffee table next to Duckie's overflowing ashtray. Duckie sits on the love seat, lights up. Zorinda does another circuit of the lounge, then settles on the floor near the stairwell, opens her backpack, extracts a cigarette paper and fills the cigarette paper from a small muslin drawstring pouch [another treasure from the backpack]. When she lights up, the air fills with sickly-sweetish smelling smoke. Zorinda leans against her backpack, head back, and emits little grunts of pleasure.)

DUCKIE: *(Elaborately taking in a breath of Zorinda's smoke.)* You know, Carolann, what they say is true. These cops, they always do get the best grass.

CAROLANN: In the City people know these things, I suppose? *(Duckie disappears in a cloud of smoke.)*

(Zorinda takes a couple of drags then pinches off the hot tip between her thumb and forefinger. She does not flinch. She wraps the roach in some brown paper and returns it to her backpack. Zorinda pushes herself forward so that she has some space to stretch out on the floor—cigarette burn-pocked carpeting. She begins an exercise routine. First she's flat on her back, then her legs are up and she's pumping. Then she's up and down and twisting and bending and stretching and kicking. Now it's sit-ups, then push-ups. The routine continues, with intermittent jogging, as conversation resumes.)

CAROLANN: *(To Duckie, who responds again by expelling smoke from her not-grass cigarette.)* I always thought mellow was the object of grass.

CAROLANN: *(To Hasi Hentov-Kopen.)* Is your novel with an agent?

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: Lettie Rogerson.

ONE OF THE WOMEN: Wow! That's really impressive. Lettie Rogerson I hear is virtually impossible to place a manuscript with.

A SECOND WOMAN: I've had three stories published in three respectable magazines and she wouldn't even talk to me, much less read anything.

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: (*Snorts*) Hmmp. My first finished draft of the novel was seven hundred and forty-six pages. The writing and the revising of that draft occupied me for three years. Then Lettie said, 'Cut,' so I cut. I sculpted my novel down to a trim five hundred and eighty-eight pages. That revision took almost seven months to complete. This is the third month since I returned the manuscript to Lettie and I have not heard one word from her. Not even a postcard. I know she is sitting on my novel while she hatches other projects.

DUCKIE: (*To Carolann.*) That one wrote a novel?

CAROLANN: Yes.

DUCKIE: What would that one have to write a novel about? Life on the lecture tour?

CAROLANN: (*In a hissy stage whisper, not wanting to miss anything that might be said.*) Her mother's death. That was the chapter she read tonight. Watching her mother die. Cancer of the womb, the one she, the daughter, came out of. You would know if you went to the reading. And an affair, too, with a hardened criminal, a convicted manslaughterer. That chapter she read last year.

DUCKIE: (*Raises an eyebrow in Hasi Hentov-Kopen's direction, flicking the tip of her tongue at the corners of her mouth.*) This is a feminist?

CAROLANN: Committed. No question. Her husband knows. She told him. They're very close. It's okay. Or so she says.

(*Zorinda plops herself on the floor next to the chair where Hasi Hentov-Kopen is rearranging herself. Hasi Hentov-Kopen scowls at Zorinda.*)

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: Tell me, Zoe-rinda, what—exactly—is the point of the story you read last night. (*Zorinda starts to say something, but Hasi Hentov-Kopen keeps talking, undeterred.*) By which I mean to say that a story—to be a story—requires more than suck and shoot.

(*Zorinda shrugs.*)

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: DO NOT SHRUG! You write well, Zoe-rinda.

Technically, you are very skillful. Proficient. But—and this is a big but—you must have something to say.

ZORINDA: *(Her face assumes an expression that could be interpreted as mock-horror, were one to assume that humor—intentional humor—is Zorinda's mode.)* Oh, no! Listen. . . . *(Gets on her knees and leans toward Hasi Hentov-Kopen as if they are conspirators. The others also lean toward toward Hasi Hentov-Kopen, to suggest that Zorinda is speaking so softly they cannot otherwise hear her. Hasi Hentov-Kopen does not—of course—lower her voice. So, the group is back and forth like the tide rolling in and out.)* Listen, Hasi Hentov-Kopen—the men's magazines?—they are really into dominants. That's all they're buying now. Dominants. Really. *(Tips her head away from Hasi Hentov-Kopen and looks up at her, batting outrageously long eyelashes. One could suspect that the dumb blonde voice has become ever so slightly dumber-sounding, maybe a little sing-songy.)* You do know what a dominant is, right, Hasi Hentov-Kopen?

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: *(Appears to consider the question before answering.)* Once, on the campus of a college where I was the featured speaker—a seminar on body-image and eighteenth century literature—I met a professor of romantic poetry. The professor suggested that we meet in my hotel room. He indicated that he would be especially pleased were I to prepare for his arrival by dressing myself in leather. That is what you mean, ay? Leather.

ZORINDA: Oh, yeah! The dominant, she dresses in leather. The best is the leather with studs. And she beats the guy. Maybe he wants her to do . . . other things . . . too. *(She smiles. Not a lascivious smile, but one that is sweet. Almost beatific.)* It's fun.

DUCKIE: *(It is not clear to whom she speaks, unless she addresses her cigarette.)* I told you she is into kinky sex.

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: So, the professor telephoned me and telephoned me. The day did not pass without its telephone call from the professor. He called me the most exquisite creature he had ever had the great fortune to behold. He begged that I meet him. He said that he existed only for the moment when we would be together. . . . Finally, I asked the professor to describe me. Tall, he said. Slender, but sumptuous, he said. Flowing raven tresses, he said.

DUCKIE: *(Sounding like she is going to choke.)* What a keen observer!

So, HHK? Did you meet him?

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: After he had pestered me for a number of weeks, I suggested that I would meet him at the time and in the place he chose, but that one condition had to be met. 'Anything,' he said, 'I will promise you anything.' I said that I would be there only if I could bring my husband. I never heard from the professor again.

ZORINDA: So the professor wasn't into three's. So what? It happens. But you should have done it. You should have met him anyway. Husband or no husband. You should have met him. . . . Take it from me, Hasi Hentov Kopen: You would have LOVED it.

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: I don't think so, Zoe-rinda. To me this sounds very athletic, and I am quite lazy. Really quite lazy. Besides, leather is hot. And heavy.

CAROLANN: You could wear Ultra-Suede®.

SHEEP WOMAN: I can't wait to use THAT line when I spin my conference tales!

(Carolann beams at the compliment.)

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: *(Clears her throat, as if to call attention back to where she believes it belongs.)* Even with Ultra-Suede®?—consider the start-up costs.

ZORINDA: Sometimes the man, you know, he will provide what equipment he wants. But even so, Hasi Hentov-Kopen, bringing your own kit is a good idea.

CAROLANN: She could carry it in a black leather bag. Like a doctor's.

DUCKIE: Yeah, or a metal suitcase. Like an exterminator's.

(Zorinda—as if Duckie's comment reminds her—pulls the wrapped roach from her backpack, unwraps and relights the roach, and inhales, her head back, her eyes closed. Hasi Hentov-Kopen shakes her head, disapproving.)

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: LISTEN TO ME, Zoe-rinda! *(Zorinda's eyes pop open.)* I direct a small progressive college in a large, stimulating

city. . . . I am forty-six years old and tri-lingual. (*Hasi Hentov-Kopen is on her feet, orating.*) . . . My husband and I own a chalet. In Vermont. . . . Our children are virtually grown. . . . I have paid sick leave. . . . I have eight weeks vacation. Paid vacation. . . . I have a dental plan. . . . I have eye care coverage. . . . A truly enormous pension awaits me. . . . I. . . .

ZORINDA: Big deal. With dominants, just one shot—so what if you're a beginner?—and you would earn five hundred dollars. Bare minimum. For a half hour—maybe an hour—of your time. No publisher is going to pay you that, Hasi Hentov-Kopen. And. . . . (*Has been wrapping the joint while she speaks and pauses here to put it in the backpack.*).

CAROLANN: And? . . .

ZORINDA: AND—you never have to pay any taxes.

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: (*Gets back into the chair, tucks legs up, and speaks warmly, caressingly.*) No taxes. Mmmm. You know, my accountant does say my taxes are about three times what she feels they should be.

ZORINDA: Hasi—Hasi—Hasi. (*Hasi Hentov-Kopen sniffs at the looseness of the address.*) You are a big strong woman. . . . Hasi Hentov-Kopen. And—let's face it—you have got one GREAT pair.

DUCKIE: Great is the word.

(*There is general snickering-behind-the-hands.*)

POET: A custom-made-bras pair. Nothing less.

(*Hasi Hentov-Kopen pushes the great pair forward, looking down her nose to examine them, and crossing her eyes. The others—except Zorinda—laugh as if on cue. Zorinda hugs knees to chest and springs erect. Her neck-weight slams into her next-to-flat, apparently braless chest.*)

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: (*With a snort of derision. Zorinda is doing what looks like shadow-boxing or maybe self-defense movements with her shadow.*) I can hardly deal with knowing about the Southern confessor's outrageous income, so please don't tell me that you make a living writing filth like "Tiara's Christmas"? Aye, Zoe-rinda?

ZORINDA: (*On the bounce.*) Not yet, I don't. Right now I'm an executive secretary to the vice president of sales at an insurance company. A big one. When he doesn't want me, I write. . . . In the office, that is. In the office, there is a real nice Wang.

DUCKIE: (*Stage-whispers to Carolann.*) Can't do it at home, you know. Nothing but an old Underwood there.

ZORINDA: There are these two stories—I just sold them—that I didn't write in the office actually. Those I wrote in a motel on a beach on Long Island. In the Hamptons. I rented this room for two weeks and I wrote and I wrote. And the whole time I could hear the ocean through my window. Lap. Lap. Lap. Oh it was just a beautiful experience. (*She starts moving again, then pauses mid-thrust and parry and stands above Hasi Hentov-Kopen, looking down.*) You know, Hasi Hentov-Kopen, a woman like you would be busy ALL THE TIME. You would NEVER have to worry about bookings. Never.

(*Hasi Hentov-Kopen yawns a chasm. The yawn sounds as though she is saying, "Enough already"—at least that is how it sounds to the other women who begin to chat among themselves—but that is not how it sounds to Zorinda.*)

ZORINDA: And the truth is, Hasi Hentov-Kopen, when you are turned on, everything is fun.

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: (*Almost spitting.*) FUN! TURNED ON?

DUCKIE: (*Emerging from her shroud of smoke.*) Hey, HHK—you want the knife?

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: (*In control and icy.*) You're "turned on" now, aren't you, Zoe-rinda?

(*Zorinda just grins at Hasi Hentov-Kopen, a grin that is lop-sided and looks more than a little dopey. Hasi Hentov-Kopen draws herself erect, which does great things for her great pair.*)

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: There is more to literature than fun, Zoe-rinda.

ZORINDA: I'll bet Sandra-Sue has fun what with all that confessing.

HASI HENTOV-KOPEN: There is more to LITERATURE than fun, Zoe-

rinda. Should you have serious ambitions, should you intend to go further than some third-rate men's magazine—should you want to acquire a respectable agent—make no mistake, you had best be turned on to something more than slime.

(Zorinda is back on the floor, leaning on her elbows, rotating her feet and cracking her ankles.)

ZORINDA: Gee, Hasi Hentov-Kopen, I have something to tell you, too. Honest, Hasi Hentov-Kopen, I enjoy myself. I REALLY enjoy myself. *(She pulls the unfinished joint from her backpack, unwraps it and lights it up again, and inhales deeply.)*

CAROLANN: *(Lights are down on all but Carolann, who stands and walks downstage to speak to the audience.)* That's pretty much it for the last night of WAWU and this gathering and these women—at least that's it for what I can tell you. *(The snick-snick-snick of the spinning wheel ceases as Carolann speaks.)* There haven't been any more visitors and Hasi Hentov-Kopen looks drowsy all of a sudden and Duckie hasn't struck a match for at least five minutes. No one is saying a word to anyone else, like each of the women is intent on just holding her thoughts to herself. Trying to sort this out, I don't know. But what occurs to me is—that while the show is going on, sometimes there are things that you miss.

(Lights down and out.)