

Test Patterns

by

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ACT I

SCENE ONE

A grave site. MERNA enters dressed in black, donning a veil and carrying a single white rose as Spanish guitar is heard. At the conclusion of her mourning ritual the lights cross fade to a studio apartment. VALERIE enters and sits at her typewriter.

VALERIE

"Shelter me here, shelter me now.
I seek no other prize but the prize of life
itself..."

(to audience)

I had never intended to be a recluse. It just sort of happened. You see, without warning, life began to drain me and break me down to the point where I eventually surrendered and became the hermit-like creature that you see before you today. Much like being forced to learn a new language because you've been thrown into a different environment, my detachment is an inevitability. You have no idea what I'm talking about do you?

She walks around the room, passing stacks of countless books.

To compensate for the lack all human contact I have decided to surround myself with knowledge. Art, humor, religion and poetry. It is my *experiment* you could say. It is my choice to be alone. For how long? I haven't yet decided. Looking back, even as a small child, I enjoyed my solitude. I found great comfort and peace in it.

She picks up a book and begins to read.

"The central tenets of Buddhism were developed by Siddhartha Gautama, who was born into a royal Hindu family in present-day Nepal around 563 B.C." I'm leaning towards *Buddhism* as a religion to identify with. Among the world's religions it is the cleanest. I find its founding principals very accessible and non confrontational.

Now, you are probably wondering what exactly has brought me to this reclusive phase in my life...

Eve, a striking woman in her 50's appears wearing a shawl. She carries a brandy in her hand.

EVE

Val darling, you're going to miss it! Hurry darling, hurry!

VALERIE

I'll be right there.

EVE

We're almost at peak! The papers said the colors this time were going to be simply breathtaking!

Valerie joins Eve.

VALERIE

(to audience)

For years now, Mother and I have had this ongoing tradition to watch all lunar eclipses together. It all started back when I was five and on vacation in Maine with my family...

EVE

Look Val! See the different shades of purple? I didn't realize that there were so many shades of purple!

VALERIE

(to audience)

It ended with a chronic fear of lobsters and a case of pneumonia that left me hospitalized for the remainder of the trip.

EVE

Darling, are you warm enough? You really should cover up. You know how delicate you are. Here.

Eve hands over her designer shawl to Valerie who reluctantly puts it on.

VALERIE

Are you sure? This looks pretty expensive.

EVE

Don't you worry darling, Mother has more, Mother always has more.

VALERIE

(to audience)

That was true, mother always did have more. More to the extent that she was known around her prestigious town in Long Island as 5th avenue's *queen bee* of the most sought after designer labels. Louis Vuitton, Valentino, Burberry, oh and of course, *Marc Jacobs*.

EVE

(to audience)

Have you seen his new spring line? He is *on fire* right now! On fire I tell you! The man can do no wrong.

VALERIE

(to audience)

After three doomed marriages to three *very* wealthy and distinguished entrepreneur, Mother felt she deserved a lot in exchange for *her* participation in couple hood.

EVE

(to audience)

And why not? I deserve it. I gave those morons the best years of my life.

(she sips her brandy)

VALERIE

(to audience)

Maybe she did deserve it but that wasn't for me to decide. Besides I had other decisions to make. Important ones.

EVE

Val, now that we are alone, we need to talk. Come sit here next to mother. It's all right, we still have a few minutes.

Valerie sits next to her.

EVE

Val, I'm concerned about your... how shall I put this delicately, your *personal* life.

VALERIE

Would you look at the time? I really have to be off now, don't get up.

Val begins to leave.

EVE

No Val, wait! Come back! Mother's reaching out to you. Mother's reaching out.

Eve extends her arms out as to entice a group hug. Val rolls her eyes and reluctantly returns.

EVE

I know you always think I'm prying and it is not my intention to cause problems for you but frankly darling, I'm concerned.

VALERIE

You mean because I don't have a man.

EVE

Don't be silly. You're an attractive, bright girl with a promising future. You don't need a man to make yourself happy. Although you're not helping matters by wearing your hair that way.

VALERIE

Can we get to the point mother?

EVE

My point is darling that you're beginning to retreat within yourself. You've become totally withdrawn. You're not as social as you used to be, you spend all your time cooped up in that tiny little apartment using that little, old fashioned typewriter. Why won't you let me buy you a laptop?

VALERIE

First of all Mother, I'm a writer that's where I work. I work alone and I *like* my typewriter!

EVE

Yes, but you've taken it to the extreme. You're shutting yourself out from the rest of the world. We don't spend nearly half the time we used to together. Mother misses you. Even your brother has noticed the change.

VALERIE

I appreciate your concern mother but really everything is fine. Ok? I'm fine.

EVE

Val, I want to show you something.

Eve takes out a magazine clipping from her purse and hands it to Valerie.

VALERIE

What is this? It looks like a cartoon from the "New Yorker."

EVE

It is. Now look at it. Look at it closely and tell me what you see.

VALERIE

What I see?

EVE

Please darling, look at it closely and tell Mother what you see.

VALERIE

(she examines the cartoon)

I see a whole bunch of ducks at least I think they're ducks. Yes I'm pretty sure they're ducks and they all seem to be sitting in little chairs. All except the big one. I think the big one might be a chicken or a goose.

EVE

Yes darling, good. Now, does any of this make you think about anything in particular?

VALERIE

(looking again)

Not really, no.

EVE

Let me put it to you another way. Do the ducks *remind* you of anybody?

VALERIE

No. They're ducks.

EVE

Oh darling how blind can you be? This cartoon is us! It totally represents our relationship.

VALERIE

This cartoon here? This represents our relationship?

EVE

Our relationship. Give that to me.

(frustrated, she takes the cartoon from her)
I'll try to explain it to you the best way I can.
Now, do you see all the little ducks that are
all dressed up in their smart little dinner
jackets and hats? They represent *me*.

VALERIE

You.

EVE

Yes. Now if you look closely you will see that all
the little, well-dressed ducks are all being
yelled at by the big Goose wearing the *Ralph
Lauren* sweater. That represents *you*.

VALERIE

That's me? The goose is me?

EVE

Yes, and the reason *why* the little ducks are being
yelled at by the big goose is that the *big goose*
thinks that the little ducks have too many
clothes, and are frivolous, vain, and drink way
too much. So there it is in a nutshell. Our
relationship.

VALERIE

What?

EVE

Don't get defensive darling, it's okay.
Really it is.

VALERIE

I have no idea what you're talking about.

EVE

Darling, I know this is hard for you
to swallow but that's how you treat *me* a lot of
the times. Like a child.

VALERIE

(studying the cartoon one more time)
Mother this is a political cartoon addressing
the war in Iraq.

EVE

It is?

VALERIE

Yes, it is. And those aren't dinner jackets the ducks are wearing they're military uniforms!

EVE

No...

VALERIE

..and correct me if I'm wrong but I certainly don't think that just because the goose has an American flag on his sweater means that we should automatically assume he's wearing Ralph Lauren!

EVE

Really?

VALERIE

Yes really!

EVE

(looking once again)
But the little hats are so cute.

VALERIE

(flailing her arms)
This is unbelievable. Is this how you really see me? As a duck? As a big screaming duck?

EVE

Goose darling, you're the goose. I'm the ducks.

VALERIE

That's not the point!
(she gains composure)
The point is Mother, that I can't believe this is how you see us. How you see *me*.

EVE

It's not how I see you *all* the time darling. I just wish that you could learn to trust me more and let me in. Not to be so hard on me all the time. If you did you'd find I'm not as bad as you think. You'd find that I am a good listener. If you only gave me half a chance.

VALERIE

(to audience)
Maybe she was right. Maybe I had been showing signs for concern and she *did* want to help. Maybe for the first time in her life maybe she was

VALERIE (cont...)
trying to be genuine. Sure she's self involved and has disappointed me in the past but that doesn't mean people can't change. Maybe I *should* let her in. Maybe my isolation *was* causing more harm than good. Maybe the lunar eclipse and the duck cartoon were a legitimate plea for communication. I've already broken my code of silence. Why not take it one step further? There was only one way to find out.

Hopeful, Val returns to Eve.

VALERIE
Mother?

EVE
Yes dear?

VALERIE
I would like to share something very important with you.

EVE
By all means dear, what is it?

VALERIE
I...

Suddenly Eve's cell phone rings.

EVE
Excuse me darling, just a minute.
(on phone)
Hello? David, is that you? My goodness this is a surprise... nothing much, where are you? Really? Tonight? Sounds all very mysterious... hold on, I'll be right back okay?
(to Valerie)
Val darling, David has driven out from the city and wants to take me to a cocktail party in Sag Harbor. You don't mind do you?

VALERIE
Go ahead.

EVE
Are you sure darling? This is suppose to be our night. The eclipse and all... I'm telling him to go without me.

VALERIE

It's fine.

EVE

Are you sure?

VALERIE

Have a good time.

EVE

I'll make it up to you I promise. Do you need a lift to the station?

VALERIE

Don't worry. I've got it covered. Go. I'll be fine.

EVE

(kissing her on the cheek)

I'll call you in a few days with the plans for your birthday dinner.

VALERIE

Sounds good.

EVE

Thank you darling, Mother loves you.

(back to phone)

David? I'm all yours. Now where are we going and more important *who's* going to be there?

VALERIE

Wait, you forgot your... shawl.

Eve exits. Valerie alone sits and looks up at the eclipse. Shades of purple illuminate her face.

VALERIE

Wow.

BLACKOUT