

ORPHANS

by Lyle Kessler

Treat (early twenties) - Phillip (late teens)

The Play: Treat and Phillip were orphaned at an early age. Somehow they have managed to escape the various governmental agencies who look after orphaned children, in great part due to Treat's cunning ability to look after his younger brother. Treat has been the provider. So concerned that they might lose their freedom to be together, Treat has raised his little brother to fear the outside world. He has laid out strict rules about Phillip's health, making Phillip completely dependant on him for his very life. Treat "makes the living" by stealing. It is clear that their home situation, although stable, is bizarre. Phillip watches television all day—and reads, although Treat has forbidden this. We aren't sure if Phillip is genuinely suffering from retardation or if the circumstances of his protective and dysfunctional upbringing has lead to this extraordinary behavior. Treat is like a cornered animal, constantly doubting life and expecting the rug to be pulled from under their feet at any moment. Into this relationship comes Harold, a drunk businessman, who Treat brings home to hold for ransom. Harold, however, succeeds at befriending both Treat and Phillip and sets up his own questionable business in their house, taking on Treat as a sort of helper. He too was orphaned and he seems touched and moved by their situation. As he helps the two clean up their lives, including cleaning up and refurnishing their home and buying them new clothes, Phillip warms up to Harold and begins to grow and question the status of his stifled life. In a highly dramatic conclusion, Phillip becomes the catalyst for Treat to finally get in touch with the feelings that he has covered since the loss of their mother many years ago.

The Scene: This is the very first scene in the play. Treat has been out all day, "making a living." Phillip is in another part of the house. The time is the present, the play is North Philadelphia ("Philly").

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(A spring day. An old row house. Wallpaper, faded, peeling. A cluttered living room, stacks of newspapers, a worn, frayed couch, old, broken furniture, and other litter. A small television set on the floor in the middle of the room. A table with a large empty bottle of Hellman's mayonnaise on it. On a shelf, stacks of Star Kist tuna cans. The front door opens. TREAT enters out of breath. He wears a dungaree jacket, faked khaki pants, and a bandanna around his neck. He catches his breath, looks out the window down the street, relaxes, snaps his fingers, and enters the living room. He picks up the empty mayonnaise bottle and looks at it.)

TREAT: *(calling)* Phillip? Phillip? *(Yells.)* Phillip, you hear me! *(He begins to empty his pockets of bracelets, wallets, and rings.)* You home, Phillip! I imagine you're home! Where the hell else you gonna be, huh! I imagine you're hiding from your big brother Treat! *(He inspects the jewelry.)* Come on out, Phillip! I ain't in the mood for no hide-and-go-seek game. You hear me! *Come on the fuck out!* *(PHILLIP appears from upstairs. He wears an old tattered shirt, dirty sweatpants, green sneakers with open hanging shoelaces.)*

PHILLIP: Don't tag me.

TREAT *(preoccupied with jewelry)*: I ain't gonna tag you.

PHILLIP: 'Cause I'm sick and tired of being it, Treat.

TREAT: I ain't gonna tag you. I told you. I ain't playing no games. *(He takes out a large, colored brooch and holds it up to the light. The jewels sparkle. PHILLIP stares at it.)*

PHILLIP: You said that yesterday.

TREAT: Yesterday's yesterday. Today's today. *(Places brooch on table.)*

PHILLIP: You promise?

TREAT: I promise. How long you been hiding?

PHILLIP: I don't know.

TREAT: Half the day, I bet.

PHILLIP *(moves closer to the brooch)*: I didn't keep count.

TREAT: You eat lunch?

PHILLIP: Uh huh.

TREAT: What you have?

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PHILLIP: I had Star Kist tuna.
 TREAT: Mayonnaise?
 PHILLIP (*closer to brooch, TREAT watches him*): Uh huh. Hellman's.
 TREAT: How much mayonnaise you have?
 PHILLIP: Couple of tablespoons.
 TREAT: If you only had a couple of tablespoons, how come we're out of it?
 PHILLIP: Hellman's goes fast, Treat.
 TREAT: It goes fast, all right. A half a bottle a day. (*TREAT tags PHILLIP suddenly.*) You're it, Phillip.
 PHILLIP: No!
 TREAT: You're fucking it! (*He runs to the other side of the room, laughing.*)
 PHILLIP: You promised.
 TREAT: I had my fingers crossed.
 PHILLIP: I come out 'cause you said you wouldn't.
 (*PHILLIP chases TREAT around the room. He catches him and tags him.*)
 TREAT: Time out!
 PHILLIP: No!
 TREAT: Fucking time out, Phillip. The game's over. (*PHILLIP throws himself down on the couch, sulking.*) Where were you?
 PHILLIP: I ain't telling.
 TREAT: Come on.
 PHILLIP: No, it's my secret.
 TREAT: I know where you been anyway.
 PHILLIP: Where?
 TREAT: In the closet.
 PHILLIP: How you know that?
 TREAT: It's your favorite hiding place. (*He pulls more booty out of his back pocket, a couple of wallets, a gold chain.*)
 PHILLIP: I was hiding in there waiting for you to come home.
 TREAT: Just standing and waiting, huh?
 PHILLIP: Uh, huh.

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TREAT: Just standing and hiding in the darkness, waiting for your big brother Treat to come home.
 PHILLIP: I like it in there. It's warm.
 TREAT: I wouldn't know.
 PHILLIP: It's got all of Mom's coats in there.
 TREAT: We ought to get rid of them.
 PHILLIP: No!
 TREAT: What good they doing hanging there all these years?
 PHILLIP: I want them.
 TREAT: They ain't doing nobody any good.
 PHILLIP: They're not bothering anybody, Treat. They're just hanging there.
 TREAT: People find out about you, they're gonna put you away.
 PHILLIP: They won't put me away!
 TREAT: A grown man standing all day in a dark closet.
 PHILLIP: I done other things.
 TREAT: What other things you do?
 PHILLIP: I looked out the window.
 TREAT: Good.
 PHILLIP: I seen some things.
 TREAT: What you see?
 PHILLIP: I seen a man and a dog, a man walking a big black dog. (*PHILLIP gets on his hands and knees and imitates the dog, crawls a few steps, raises one leg. TREAT, inspecting the booty, half watches, mildly amused.*)
 TREAT: What else?
 PHILLIP: I seen a woman, a tiny, tiny woman. (*Compresses his body, and walks with tiny steps.*)
 TREAT: Anything else?
 PHILLIP: Plenty else.
 TREAT: Go on.
 PHILLIP: A man with two big boys, man in the middle, a boy on each side.
 TREAT: What were they doing?
 PHILLIP (*walking like man*): Goin' swimming maybe, goin' to the

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movies, probably. Gonna see John Wayne in *The Halls of Montezuma*.
 TREAT; You got an imagination.
 PHILLIP: I seen other things. I seen a man with a woman, man walking arm and arm with a woman. Woman had long red hair. (*Strokes his hair like the woman, walks, swishing from side to side.*)
 TREAT: Long red hair, huh. Was the man balding?
 PHILLIP: Man was balding, right.
 TREAT: Woman had bangles dangling from her wrist, woman loaded with bangles, am I right?
 PHILLIP: You're right, Treat.
 TREAT; I seen that couple! (*He holds up a piece of jewelry.*) What else you do?!

PHILLIP: I watched TV.
 TREAT: What did you watch?
 PHILLIP: I watched reruns. I watched "The Price is Right."
 TREAT (*turns to him*): That's a woman's show!
 PHILLIP: They have fabulous prizes, Treat.
 TREAT: You'd like to win one, I bet.
 PHILLIP: They won a hi-fi stereo combination, a year's supply of l.p.'s and cassettes; they won a mahogany dining room set, they won an Electro Lux golf cart and a Bendix freezer filled with five hundred filets mignons.
 TREAT: You remember all that.
 PHILLIP: They won a year's subscription to *National Geographic*. They won a ...
 TREAT: That's enough!
 PHILLIP: I'd like to get that *National Geographic*.
 TREAT (*stops and stares at him*): What would you do with it?
 PHILLIP: I'd look at it.
 TREAT: You'd read it?
 PHILLIP: You know I couldn't read it, Treat. I'd look at the pictures, though. They got real nice pictures, pictures of all kinds of animals and primitive tribes.
 (*PHILLIP, crawling hand over hand, makes jungle sounds: birds, monkeys... TREAT begins to put the booty away.*)

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TREAT: I bumped into that woman and man today. Man was balding, woman had long red hair.
 PHILLIP: That's right.
 TREAT: I had a real good day today, Phillip. I'm gonna go out, tonight, gonna celebrate!
 PHILLIP: We all outta mayonnaise, Treat. You go out, will you bring home an extra large bottle of Hellman's Mayonnaise?
 TREAT: Yes sirree, had a hell of a day, Phillip. You interested? (*He gathers the jewelry, and places it in a dresser drawer.*)
 PHILLIP: I'm interested, Treat. Only thing is I got a real taste in my mouth for that Hellman's.
 TREAT (*picks up more jewelry*): Guy wasn't carrying much, just a few bucks, but he had a real nice wristwatch. Whadaya think?
 PHILLIP: It's nice.
 TREAT: Man had good taste, woman didn't have bad taste either. Look at this! (*a woman's wristwatch*) Tiny little wrists, tiny little dainty little wrists.
 PHILLIP: She wore this?
 TREAT: No more! Bumped into another fellow earlier today, Fairmount Park. Fellow put up a struggle.
 PHILLIP: No kidding.
 TREAT: I said, "What you gettin' violent about, Mister, no point in gettin' violent!"
 PHILLIP: What did he say?
 TREAT; He kicked at me.
 PHILLIP: He kicked you?
 TREAT: Right in the shin. (*He rolls up his trouser.*) See. Gonna be fucking black and blue.
 PHILLIP: I'll get the hydrogen perioxide. (*He dashes off.*)
 TREAT (*calling after*): You remember all them brand names!
 PHILLIP (*off*): Uh huh.
 TREAT: How come you can do that?
 PHILLIP (*returns with bottle*): I don't know.
 TREAT: I mean you don't have much of an intellect for anything else, but you know them brand names and the names of all them various

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prizes. *(He pours hydrogen peroxide over his leg.)*
 PHILLIP: It just comes to me.
 TREAT: I said, "Listen, Mister, I don't appreciate getting kicked in the shins like that."
 PHILLIP: What did he do?
 TREAT: He cursed at me.
 PHILLIP: He cursed you?
 TREAT: All kinds of names, names I wouldn't even repeat. Terrible fucking filth came out of that man's mouth.
 PHILLIP: What did he look like?
 TREAT: Dressed real nice, had on a suit and tie. Must have driven over to Fairmount Park. It was a real nice spring day, today, Phillip. Too bad you couldn't go out and enjoy it. Man figured he'd take a little walk in Fairmount Park.
 PHILLIP: What happened?
 TREAT: Had a lot of money on him, that's why he put up a struggle, I guess, must've had three, four hundred dollars.
 PHILLIP: Where is he?
 TREAT: Left him there, had to cut him though. Not bad, just superficial. Warned him! In fact, said, "Mister, you're gettin' me pissed off kickin' me like that."
 PHILLIP: Did you show him the bruise?
 TREAT; I didn't have to show him the bruise. Got me pissed off. I had to take out my knife, had to cut him. *(He takes a switchblade out and demonstrates.)*
 PHILLIP: Did he bleed?
 TREAT; Just a little bit, Phillip. It's amazing, how people stop struggling once there's a little blood. *(Sticks switchblade into the table.)*
 Paper come?
 PHILLIP: Uh huh.
 TREAT: Let's have it.
 PHILLIP: Come early this morning. *(Hands it to TREAT.)*
 TREAT *(reading it)*: What's this, Phillip?
 PHILLIP: What's what?
 TREAT: How come this word is underlined?

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PHILLIP: I don't know.
 TREAT *(scanning paper)*: How come there are underlined words in this here *Philadelphia Inquirer*!
 PHILLIP: I have no idea, Treat.
(TREAT crosses to PHILLIP, holding the paper.)
 TREAT: Here's a word, *dispensation*. You underline this word?
 PHILLIP: I didn't touch that word.
 TREAT: You read this word?
 PHILLIP: No.
 TREAT: You got a dictionary, Phillip?
 PHILLIP: I got no dictionary.
 TREAT *(stalking him)*: You sure you don't have no pocket dictionary somewhere in this house? You sure you ain't spending the day reading the newspaper and books, underlining words, looking up the meaning of particular words, getting yourself an education?
 PHILLIP *(running from him)*: I got no education!
 TREAT: You know the alphabet?
 PHILLIP: No!
 TREAT; I bet you know the fuckin' alphabet. *(Hits him with the rolled up newspaper.)* I bet you're holding out on me.
 PHILLIP: I ain't holding out on you, Treat.
 TREAT: What's this word mean, what's this fuckin' *dispensation* mean?
 PHILLIP: I don't know, Treat.
 TREAT *(hitting him)*: Who underlined this fuckin' *dispensation*!
 PHILLIP: It wasn't me! *(He pulls away.)*
 TREAT: Someone come in the house while I was away?
 PHILLIP: I don't know.
 TREAT: You would have heard him.
 PHILLIP: I was in the closet.
 TREAT: Someone steal in the house while you were standing in the closet and underline this word?
 PHILLIP: Maybe.
 TREAT: Where is he?
 PHILLIP: I don't know.

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TREAT: Is he still here?
PHILLIP: He might be.
TREAT: Find him.
PHILLIP: All right.
TREAT: Kill him! *(Hands PHILLIP the knife.)* I want him dead, you understand! Man stealing in my house like that.
(PHILLIP runs around the room looking under tables and chairs and other unlikely places.)
PHILLIP *(stops)*: Maybe he's upstairs.
TREAT: Yea, maybe.
PHILLIP: Maybe he's hiding under the bed.
TREAT; I wouldn't put it past him, hiding under the bed, waiting for us to go to sleep.
PHILLIP: I'll get him!
(PHILLIP rushes upstairs, holding out the knife like a sword. TREAT sits on the couch, lights a cigarette. The sound of a crash is heard from upstairs. TREAT doesn't react. More noise, something breaking.)
PHILLIP *(off)*: Son of a bitch!
(PHILLIP appears, disheveled, holding his arm. He walks unsteadily a couple of steps, then slips, slides, tumbles down the stairs. A great death scene. TREAT, smoking, ignores him. PHILLIP on the floor.)
That son of a bitch!
TREAT: You get him?
PHILLIP: No Treat, he got me.
TREAT: Whadaya mean?
PHILLIP: I'm bleeding. I was looking under the bed and he came out of the closet.
TREAT: Let's see. *(PHILLIP shows his arm to TREAT.)* That ain't bad. That's just a scratch.
PHILLIP: I jumped back and banged into the night table. The lamp fell over.
TREAT: I heard it.
PHILLIP: If I hadn't jumped back he would have stabbed me right through the back, Treat.
TREAT: Lucky for you. Where is he?

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PHILLIP: He leaped out the window.
TREAT: He got away?
PHILLIP: Yes.
TREAT: What did he look like?
PHILLIP: Errol Flynn.
TREAT: Errol Flynn?
PHILLIP: The movie actor.
TREAT: I know Errol Flynn!
PHILLIP: He could've broke a leg leaping outta the window like that, Treat. He must be some kind of athlete.
TREAT: Maybe I better put on some hydrogen peroxide.
PHILLIP: No, Treat, it burns.
TREAT: You don't want it to get infected. *(He picks up the hydrogen peroxide.)*
PHILLIP: It's not gonna get infected.
TREAT: You don't wanna lose your arm.
PHILLIP: I ain't gonna lose my arm.
TREAT: Come here, Phillip. Let me help you. Let your big brother Treat take care of you.
(TREAT stands holding the bottle of hydrogen peroxide. PHILLIP walks slowly toward him.)