

Characters

ITCHY

KNEE

Scene

Reflex Action is a satire of self-conscious theatre. In this opening scene, two generic characters named Itchy and Knee try to unravel the meaningless mystery of Woodpecker Plateau. They run through some dramatic clichés, use the mime phone which is kept under the blue special, deliver an impassioned monologue and then stichomythize...uh, stichomythiasize...stichomythipate...

(Enter ITCHY and KNEE.)

KNEE. You know, I've noticed that most drama is just two people talking.

ITCHY. Really?

KNEE. Yes, and they generally chatter aimlessly until something happens.

ITCHY. Is that so?

KNEE. Yes.

ITCHY. Except for the occasional long pause.

(Long pause.)

KNEE. Then what happens?

ITCHY. Hmm?

KNEE. After the pause.

(Pause.)

KNEE. I said, "And then what happens?"

ITCHY. Oh, generally a cue.

KNEE. Like what?

(A phone rings.)

ITCHY. I'll get it.

KNEE. No, don't. There's no suspense if you answer it right away.

ITCHY. Oh.

(It rings again.)

KNEE. You know the funny things about phones in theatre, as opposed to the real life phones you and I enjoy and use almost daily, Itchy, is that they so rarely ring at regular intervals.

(He pauses. The phone finally rings.)

KNEE. They seem to wait for the character to finish his lines. *(Long pause.)* And then they ring.

(The phone rings.)

ITCHY. I'll get it, Knee. *(Pause.)* Where do you keep your phone?

KNEE. I keep it over there. Under that Special.

ITCHY. The what?

KNEE. The blue light.

(A blue special shines down.)

ITCHY. I still don't see it.

KNEE. *(Moving to answer the phone:)* Right here.

(He answers the phone and hands the invisible receiver to ITCHY.)

KNEE. It's one of those mime phones.

ITCHY. Oh. I was going to buy one of those m'self. Hello? Yes? Yes? Really? When? Well!

(He hangs up.)

KNEE. You know, it's strange that you didn't give him time to answer any of your questions.

ITCHY. Yes, wasn't it? Even more strangely, I heard everything he said.

KNEE. Who was it?

ITCHY. It was my Arch-Nemesis, Professor Unfrenabulous, Master of the Dark Domain.

KNEE. How did he get my number?

ITCHY. I have "Call Forwarding."

KNEE. Ah.

ITCHY. Well, you don't want to miss an important call like that one.

KNEE. What did he say?

ITCHY. He just called to introduce The Conflict. He's planning to drop by later with his Hideous Army of the Putrefying Undead. He says that he will have some information that will be of great interest to me, and that he plans

to wreak horrible revenge on me and to torment and kill us both. And then the zombies will eat our eyeballs.

KNEE. Well! What an interesting and dare I say Dramatic Premise!

ITCHY. I know. If this were a play, which it is not, but is, in fact, real life, we could now do a number of things.

KNEE. What are our options?

ITCHY. Well, we could become more and more tense as the pressure wears at us, until finally the thin veneer of Western civilization peels away, leaving us shouting at each other in a feral sort of way.

KNEE. Never happen.

ITCHY. Yes, it could.

KNEE. No.

ITCHY. I said, "Yes."

KNEE. How would you know?

ITCHY. I do have a Masters degree, you know. I majored in Pinter.

KNEE. Always dragging out that damned degree, aren't you, Itchy? You know, I'm sick of hearing about it.

ITCHY. I'm sick of your resentment!

KNEE. I advance on you!

ITCHY. I respond!

KNEE. I'm sick of your superior attitude. Why don't you just cut out this crap—this CRAP!—and reveal the hidden underpinnings of our relationship?

ITCHY. All right! I will! Ever since I got drunk at that Frat Party and my boyhood sweetheart lost her virginity to another man on the same day that my father gambled away the family homestead while drunk on overproof rum, and YOU failed to assuage my wounded soul and live up to my lofty hero worship of you, I have felt...less than adequate.

KNEE. I had no idea. Is it too painful to discuss?

ITCHY. Very nearly. It makes me want to pause.

(Pause.)

KNEE. The man who—with your sweetheart...who won your family farm, was he...could he have been...Professor Unf—

ITCHY. Don't! Don't go on!

KNEE. I'm sorry. I'll comfort you during a long pause.

(He comforts him during a long pause.)

ITCHY. Thank you. That was cathartic.

KNEE. For me, too. How about we introduce a new element? What else would we do if we were in a theatre, which, of course, we are not in. And if there were an audience watching us, which, obviously, there is not one.

ITCHY / KNEE. Let's think.

(They think.)

ITCHY. We could resort to speaking to each other in short lines.

KNEE. Ah. Stichomythia.

ITCHY. I beg your pardon?

KNEE. Stichomythia?

ITCHY. What?

KNEE. Sticho—

ITCHY. —mythia?

KNEE. No.

ITCHY. Yes.

KNEE. No.

ITCHY. Yes. Why?

KNEE. Why?

ITCHY. Yes.

KNEE. 'Cuz.

ITCHY. Ah.

KNEE. Understand?

ITCHY. I don't—

KNEE. —don't see.

ITCHY. Never say

KNEE. That? Never?

ITCHY. Say? Never see!

KNEE. See never?

ITCHY. *(Making wavy motions with his hands.)* Never sea.

KNEE. Yes.

ITCHY. No, no.

ITCHY / KNEE. Long pause.

(Long pause.)

KNEE. Woodpecker.

ITCHY. Wood pecker?

KNEE. No. No woodpecker.

ITCHY. What?

KNEE. Never, see?

ITCHY. Never. See.

KNEE. Woodpecker. Never.

ITCHY. Uh... *(Pause.)* Sorry. Are we still...stichomythicizing? I was enjoying it until the woodpecker. What woodpecker?

KNEE. It all happened so long ago. Do you mind if I deliver a monologue about it?

ITCHY. Go ahead. You were really patient with my Pinter thing.

KNEE. Thanks. Long ago, I was small. It's funny, isn't it, how we start out small and then we grow bigger? So many important things happen when you are small. So many things happen for the first time not long after you are born. Well, I lived in Northern Ontario, where I could hear the sounds of the loons *(Waits for the sound effect:)* and the wind amongst the pines. *(Again. He moves DC. The light favours him.)* I used to live in an old-fashioned place, where you would often hear the sound of an old fiddle player adding atmosphere. *(Fiddle music.)* The place was called Woodpecker Plateau. Do you know, I used to wonder why they called it that. So, I asked my brother. "Why?" I asked him. "Why is this place called Woodpecker Plateau?" He did not know. I asked my father and my mother. When I was small, they were very big. I felt sure that they would know. "Why is this town, this small town in Ontario, with the rustic ambiance, called Woodpecker Plateau?" Their answer seems to echo in my mind, even as I say it. *(Man and woman's voices echo his lines as he speaks:)* "We do not know, Knee," they said. "It's just called that. It's just called that!" To this day, it plagues me. It jumps on my brain when I least expect, causing me to emote, to *emote!* Woodpecker Plateau! Woodpecker Plateau! Even as I enunciate its consonants clearly, it torments me. Wuuh. Ppppppuh. Wwwwooddd Pppeckkkerrr. When I eat. When I sleep. When I make love to a woman. Woodpecker Plateau! Woodpecker—! But there was not a plateau, Itchy. And there was not! a single! woodpecker!! Ever! Not a single one. Do you see now? Do you see?

(He appeals to ITCHY, who has fallen asleep.)