

THE TOWNHOUSE

by David Libman

A Manhattan townhouse. Staircase leading to upstairs bedrooms.
Everything tending toward modern; very chic.
A place that exhibits a refined taste.

A somewhat eccentrically dressed woman enters.
She removes a cape, a coat, and a sweater.

WOMAN

(Turning towards entrance)

See your feet are thoroughly wiped.

(Pause. A vague, shabbily dressed man enters.

He has warmed but is still shivering.

Respectfully, he takes a shapeless hat off)

Take your coat off.

MAN

(He will speak with a moronic pitch
yet doesn't seem retarded)

Dat's okay.

WOMAN

Take it off. You got it wet when you fell.

(The man removes a threadbare topcoat. He looks
around him with subdued awe. The woman goes off
and returns with a plastic bag. She spreads it as
he neatly folds topcoat and carefully lays it in.
His gravely formal expression causes her to smile)

WOMAN

Never been in a palace like this, have you?

MAN

Oh yeah - I been in a palace like dis only recently.

WOMAN

If you're going to lie, I'll have to ask you to leave.

MAN

No - some old guy, he took me up to it.

WOMAN

Don't pop fantasies at me, mister.

MAN

No - it was just like here - wid a staircase goin' up and all dese
pictures on de wall....And sculptures - he had sculptures all over
de place. And behind dis big velvet curtain...he has dis nursery
room fulla toys and dis big crib and dis big rockin' horse.

Yeah, which he later rocks on, but first - he gets dressed up like a baby - including a diaper. And dese criss-crossed yellow booties on his feet....

WOMAN

And you watched all this?

MAN

Then he gimme a list of instructions. What it was is every time he cries, I was supposed to pick him up and sit him on my lap and say - "Cocorico Little One. Cocorico."
And he would call me **(baby voice)** "Mooley Man."

WOMAN

(Imitating)

Mooley Man.

MAN

Dat's what it sounded like.

WOMAN

(Baby voice)

Mooley Man.

MAN

(Baby voice)

Mooley Man.
(Pause)

WOMAN

And he never offered any explanation for all this?

MAN

Nah, he just went ahead and did it. I guess he liked it.
It...made him feel goods.
(He has out her in a good humor)

WOMAN

You know some weird people.
What did he do next, rape you?
(Pause. She knows she has insulted him)
(She softens)

What did he do? He give you money?

MAN

Yeah - he gimme fifty bucks and a pair of sneakers. He made me a bowl of oatmeal before I left. He was okay.
There wasn't no harm in him.
(Pause. She contemplates him)

WOMAN

You hungry - Mooley Man?
(Pause)

MAN
Nah.

WOMAN
You feeling better?

MAN
Somewhat.

WOMAN
You dropped like a sack of potatoes. You could have gotten run over by a car.

MAN
I blanked out. T'ank you takin' compassion on me.

WOMAN
Too much vino? Tell the truth.

MAN
I swear to you, lady. I ain't an alcoholic. I don't abuse alcohol. Come on - smell my breath.

WOMAN
No thanks. Who beat you up recently?

MAN
Just some guy.

WOMAN
A friend of yours?

MAN
Dis fat guy widout a nose. He stole my winter coat and landed me in de hospital wid dis-**(points to bruised cheekbone)**--and a hairline fracture of de skull. No kiddin' - I was a citizen! I had my own room and everyt'ing. And a steady restaurant job! Sometimes I even busboyed! But I lost it all while I was in de hospital. I might just as well be an alcoholic, but I ain't. **(Pause)**

WOMAN
What do you mean - without a nose?

MAN
Yeah - he didn't have one. He was noseless.

WOMAN
(Can't imagine it)
What did he have in place of a nose?

MAN
(Shrugs)
Scar tissue.

WOMAN

He must be very ugly. (**The man stumbles over a cushion**)
Watch yourself!

MAN

(Rising)

He ain't so ugly once you got used to him. (**Pause**)

WOMAN

Why don't you eat something?

MAN

I just ate a couple of hours ago.

WOMAN

So eat again. I'm not billing you for it. (**Pause**)

MAN

I try to keep control of my appetite and not my appetite in control of me.

WOMAN

More money for booze, right?

MAN

I keep tellin' you, lady. I ain't an alcoholic.
Go ahead - offer me some alcohol. Put it in a glass.
Put the glass in my hand. See if my hand shakes when I lower it on
the table! (**Pause**)

WOMAN

Then you must be a crazie. Out of where? Central Islip?
Creedmore? (**Pause**) Big shot. (**Pause**) You want a shower,
Big Shot? (**Pause**)

MAN

(Meaning, no thank you)

Dat's okay.

WOMAN

You can have one if you want.

MAN

Dat's okay.

WOMAN

You need a shower! (**Pause**) How old are you, Big Shot?

MAN

I ain't dee age what you t'ink I am. Guess what age I am.

WOMAN

..Forty...two?

MAN
Guess again.

WOMAN
Forty...six?

MAN
Twenty six.

WOMAN
You're no twenty six!

MAN
The day after George Washington's birthday, I'll be 27.

WOMAN
I thought you were a contemporary of mine.

MAN
I'm still a young fella.

WOMAN
You're only a boy.

MAN
But I suffered a lot.

WOMAN
Oh yeah - who didn't?

MAN
But I suffered an especially large amount, I t'ink.
I was born a deaf mute and was put into this institution for the retarded soon after birth.

WOMAN
You don't seem especially retarded.

MAN
T'ank you. I may not be retarded at all. It was on account of my ears. I was born wid both of them stopped up. This funny kind of wax in dem. Stopped up, tight as a drum. So I just laid dere for years and nobody could get a rise outta me. Then along comes this doctor when I was eight years old and discovers the wax and takes it out just like dat.

WOMAN
And you could hear?

MAN
Yeah.

WOMAN
Everything?

MAN
 Evryt'ing there was to hear. (**Pause**)

WOMAN
 What was it like?

MAN
 What do ya mean?

WOMAN
 The first instant you could hear - what was it like? (**Pause**)

MAN
 It was hilarious.
 I never laughed so much in my life. I couldn't stop from laughin'
 all day. All dem noises - it was summertime. Bird in de trees.
 Jackhammers. (**Imitates one to amuse her**) But...after a while...the
 novelty wears off. Yeah - it wore off. I got used to it.
 Now I don't like too much noise. (**Pause**)

WOMAN
 (**She likes him**)
 You got a name - Mister Hilarious?

MAN
 Jimmy's my name. What's yours? (**Pause**) You don't wanna tell me?

WOMAN
 It's Gracie.

JIMMY
 Pleased to meet you, Gracie. (**Pause**)

GRACIE
 If you want a shower, you can have one.

JIMMY
 T'ank you. (**Pause**) Can I have a bubble bath?

GRACIE
 A what?

JIMMY
 A bubble bath. Wid bubbles in the water, ya know?

GRACIE
 What do you want a bubble bath for?!? It's not enough I offer you a
 shower?!? A shower's not good enough for you?!?
 (**Pause - He's taken aback by her vehemence**)

JIMMY
 No offense, missus.
 (**Pause**)

GRACIE

No - you can't have a bubble bath! If you still want a shower, you can have a shower!

JIMMY

(Extra politely)

Yes ma'am, I'll take the shower.

(Pause)

GRACIE

Use one of the dark blue towels and...whatever soap you like. But don't even think of looking in the medicine cabinet...I'm trusting you.

JIMMY

Okay.

GRACIE

Remember - I'm trusting you.

JIMMY

You can trust me.

GRACIE

I hope so.

JIMMY

I know so.

GRACIE

That remains to be seen, Mister Hilarious. I am nobody's fool - remember that.

(--Phone rings-- Both freeze. Gracie makes no move to answer it. --It rings six times--)

You can also have a shampoo if you want one. There - it's down that hallway to the right.

JIMMY

(Why didn't she answer the phone!?)

What?

GRACIE

The bathroom. The bathroom. What are we talking about? A shower, right?

JIMMY

Right. Okay. T'ank you.

GRACIE

And remember - you have given me your word to be responsible.

JIMMY

Okay - I'll take a short shower.

GRACIE

You can take a long shower if you want to. We're okay until three-forty-five.

JIMMY

What happens at t'ree-forty-five?

GRACIE

The kid comes back from school.

JIMMY

(Understanding it)

You don't want the kid to see me?

GRACIE

I don't want the kid to see me either. You don't really think I live here, do you?

(Pause)

JIMMY

(Totally confused)

You don't live here?

GRACIE

(A testimonial to her own ingenuity)

One Summer afternoon the Princess Melissa dropped her keys in the park.

And I picked them up

And I followed her

First to Starbucks

Then to her music lesson at the Chelsea Hotel

Then back over here.

Then for a month - rain or shine - I would spend every day casing this place.

There are four occupants, including the maid.

There's the father who gets dropped off by a limousine never earlier than six.

There's the mother who comes home various ways but also never earlier than six.

Then there's the aspiring Princess herself.

If she comes home straight from school

That's never earlier than three-forty-five.

I want us to be out of here by three-fifteen, just to be on the safe side.

(Pause. She is amused at his gaping wonder)

The trick is to leave the place as you found it, and to eat no more than small portions of anything.

I've been coming here for almost four months,

Every Wednesday, the Maid's day off.

JIMMY
(**Wonderstruck**)

I t'oght you lived here.

GRACIE
Well I don't. I'm out there just like you, Big Shot.
Al fresco.

JIMMY
(**Suddenly attracted to her**)
Hey Gracie - you wanna take a shower together? Save time and help
the water shortage?

GRACIE
ARE you nuts? What do you think I am?

JIMMY
(**Abashed**)
I just t'ought of it.

GRACIE
Well, think again. I ought to throw you right out on your ashcan.

JIMMY
I'm sorry, Gracie. I didn't mean no harm by it.

GRACIE
(**Reaching under her skirts**)
You see this? (**She withdraws a large kitchen knife**) That's for
wiseguys like you.

JIMMY
(**Backed up**)
I'm not a wiseguy. I was only makin' a suggestion.

GRACIE
I know what you were makin', mister.

JIMMY
You got my sincere and...humble apologies if I offended you.
(**Pause. There's an innocence about Jimmy
that appeals to her**)

GRACIE
I accept your apology.

JIMMY
T'ank you. (**Pause**)

GRACIE
If you want a shampoo, you may have one. You'll notice there's a
wide variety. In your case, I'd suggest a medicinal shampoo - the
blue and white bottle. And don't be afraid to make the water hot.
You don't exactly smell like a rose.

T'ank you.

JIMMY

And stop saying t'ank. Thank. Thank.

GRACIE

Okay.

JIMMY

Try it.

GRACIE

Thank.
(He succeeds nicely)

JIMMY

Jimmy.
(He turns back)

GRACIE

If it gets nice and steamy, I may come in and join you.

(She watches him go down hallway. Sound of door opening and closing. BLACKOUT)