

THE PSYCHIATRIST AT THE COCKTAIL PARTY

A Play In Monologues

By Frederick Feirstein

Frederick Feirstein
525 East 86th Street
New York, N.Y. 10028

(212) 876-6111

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CHARACTERS

BEN STRUTHERS -- the psychiatrist

LARRY -- the host of the cocktail party

BEA -- Larry's mother

JOYCE -- Larry's fiancée

STEVE -- Joyce's son

RENEE -- Larry's friend from college

MEATO -- owner of meat markets and Renee's husband

RENEE'S DANCE PARTNER

JAUREZ -- The Guest of Honor, a rebel leader from Quistador

JIMINEZ -- the second in command, Jaurez's "right hand"

"THE OLD MAID" -- the point of view character

JOE -- a "headhunter"

MARK STERN -- owner of a business selling New York City souvenirs

One set: Larry's living room

The present

LARRY CORNERS THE PSYCHIATRIST

Look who's standing in my bedroom door!
Give me your coat, Ben. Glad you could come
To one of my fund-raising bashes.
This one is for that man from Quistador.
Startling, these guys in khaki and mustaches.
Try an hors d'oeuvres. The catering is yum.

Where's Mary? ..., Jeez, does she have a fever?
I hope it's just the flu and nothing more.
Even you'd be a hypochondriac
With my mother — it was so hard to leave her.
I wish Mary wasn't flat on her back;
I wanted her to see my new decor.

It's Pop-Colonial, a parody:
Brighton bamboo, but painted Third World red.
The knicknacks are from 42nd Street,
Las Vegas, and Disneyland: *our* ivory
But crafted out of plastic — Go on, eat —
And not one single elephant shot dead.

Mary would have loved our rebel guest,
An illustration of her Ph.D.
On Latin intellectuals *cum* killer.
I think this baby far outstrips the rest.
He has a Harvard social work degree
And still reads shrink books. God, I think he'd thrill her.

The women love him, so he said to Joyce
Jokingly. Doc, while I still have your ear,
I want to tell you something. Please don't smirk.
I think I may be making the wrong choice
In getting married. (Hi, Steve.) Come stand here.
Each time I get engaged, my goddamn quirk

Obsesses me — is that the proper word?
Some aspect of her body starts to look
— Her breasts, her neck, even the way she walks —
Like Mom's or Sis's. Isn't that absurd?
I've haunted bookstores, looking for a book
About this. You know my shrink never talks

But simply nods or says, "In time we'll see."
Except that lately I can't get it up!
When Joyce lies on her side, her torso's curve
Is Mom's! I know what you must think of me.

Our little Larry got a crazy kup.

Our little Shmedipus ain't got the nerve,

I hear my coffee magnate father say,
That's why I left a trust fund for the jerk.
He can't support himself in love or work.
That's not the truth. You want to hear it, Ben?
You want to hear the only, maddening way
A woman makes my soldier stiffen?

Remember when I first came on to Joyce?
— Before her husband died, when she was his..
Exactly when I first came on to Liz,
Nancy, and Beth. All mothers of a boy
Rebelling as I was! I should keep my voice
Down. Can you hear me? I hope this won't destroy

Our friendship, Ben. Don't smile. I'm serious.
Joyce was your student, sort of like your child.
You see Renee dancing? It drives me wild
To watch her luring her husband. It
Makes me absolutely delirious.
I think deep down I can't leave Momma's tit.

I'm boring you, you hear this every day
And write that sex is often infantile.
I will not toddle down the wedding aisle,
Hoping that once your Joyce becomes my wife
This craziness will somehow go away,
And that at forty-two I'll change my life!

Please think about this as you mingle here.
Joyce shouldn't have to tough this out with me,
Her husband dead. I bet her son is gay.
I wonder if I have a buried fear
Of "hamasexuality," as Dad would say.
I can't believe that I am fidgety

Around Renee, and that the Meat King
Her husband — that fat, that ignorant, that crass
Wholesale butcher is what I really crave,
That somewhere in me I am conjuring
His slipping a long bratwurst up my ass.
I am my mother's not my father's slave!

I was attracted to Renee in school,
Before the Meat King crawled into her bed.
But then I wasn't rich enough, an heir;
Just a Momma's boy, a cheerleader, a fool.
But now, however, I am debonair,
A boy to flirt with, now that my father's dead.

TO LARRY WHO DOUBTS HE SHOULD MARRY

Larry, imagine after dying that your soul
Wakes up in a barren, rural home
In Quistador — genetically a gnome,
But smart, aware of living in a hole

From watching t.v., watching men like you
Throw parties where they somberly confess
They feel powerless when they undress,
Or get excited by some rebel's coup.

Imagine *being* like you're feeling, Larry,
And think concretely of your peasants' lives,
The helplessness they suffer with their wives,
And how they'd laugh to hear you might not marry

Because you're too "obsessed" to make a home
With Joyce who gives you what you'd rather give
Politically — to strangers. Larry, live
As if you're not inhabiting a gnome.

All day I hear my patients curse their fate,
How psychologically they re-create
Their parents tyrannizing them with guilt
Until their penises refuse to tilt,
How history seems passed down in their genes:
Oedipus zipping down his gabardines

And, like you, finding Guess who? Mother!
Abel getting all A's, despite his brother
Who beats him nightly when the lights are out,
And wakes up in adulthood wracked by doubt.
I don't speak glibly when I say rejoice,
Suffer your neurosis. But marry Joyce.

LARRY'S MOTHER

You're Doctor Struthers, aren't you?
The former mentor of his fiancée.
I'm Larry's mother. Call me Bea.
Larry never thinks of introducing me,
As if he's lying and I might give him away,
Or set up an intriguing rendezvous.

Though Larry' Harvard, I am crass
And all his friends find me refreshing. So,
What do you think? You like the merchandise?
You're puzzled, but you giggled twice.
Am I a psychiatric type that you don't know,
Or just an agèd piece of ass?

I was a Catskill comedienne.
True. Always "on," always playing a part
Till Larry's father, may he rest in peace,
Insisted on calling me, not Bea, but Beatrice,
And that I had more than a mouthpiece — a heart.
That isn't cockamamie, Ben.

If I might be presumptuous
(Who me?), I'd like to solicit
(Please no blushing, no erection)

Your thoughts about this insurrection
Larry's supporting now in Quistador. No thoughts on it?
Try the stuffed shrimp: they're scrumptuous.

Tell me if this is self-destructive: Quistador
Borders the country where we import
Our coffee beans. Larry says
To me, only to me, Juarez
Will leave our crops alone if we support
His cause, if we serve schnapps to the señor.

But now, of course, I overhear my Larry
Talk only of ideals to everyone.
Did he reveal this other side to you?
He's not your patient, there is no taboo
Involved. Believe me, it ain't fun
To ask you. Your pet Joyce he plans to marry

Don't know, or else won't say. That shrimp is good.
The caterer was my lover. So,
Knowing Larry, what do you think?
What will you have to drink?
Take your time, but tell me what you know.
Our coffee business now is thriving, knock on wood.

But if it goes, and I am gone,
What happens to my son? How will he fend
For himself — he's never done it — on his wits?

Under pressure Larry quits.
You know how as a kid he used to defend
Himself in school? He'd befriend the scum,

Or give them money so they wouldn't beat him up.
Like now — I never thought of it!
You see what happens even talking to a shrink?
Your golden silence made me think!
He's buying protection, the little shit.
Let me pour *our* coffee in your cup.

JOYCE

Hello, Doctor ... Why am I looking glum?
I didn't realize, Ben. Show me the look.
I'm glad that you could leave your work and come ...
See patients on a Saturday? Silly,
I thought you might be working on your book!
Where's Mary? I hope she isn't ill. She
Doesn't take much care of your ... her body. Larry
Is somewhere back there asking someone if
He finally ought to take the plunge and marry.
What do I want to do? Pour me a stiff
Drink and I'll tell you. Sometimes, Mine Herr Shrink
— Always — I want to run away in time
And be your fawning student, whoops! I think
There's more than scotch and soda in this. I'm
Getting high on talking to you. I hate
Larry's parties for these dwarfs of history
Like that one with the beard, that second-rate
Castro with his obligatory bad-
Mouthing America. Here's my son.

You know Dr. Struthers. How's the party, Steve?
I'm glad you like the Guest of Honor. He
(Larry claims) will soon take over Quistador
And bring equality to everyone.

Larry is raising money for his war.
Yes, try your Spanish out on him. I'm glad
You're interested. But tell me when you leave.

What is he doing? Just driving me mad.
But I don't want to talk about Steve yet.
The music's playing, and I want to dance.
I want to close my eyes and fantasize
That I'm in college with the power to
(Don't laugh) destroy your analytic stance.
That's what I thought when I looked up at you
This way, knowing of course you liked the look.
I knew because you'd either rub your eyes
Or look for something (safety?) in your book,
Or ask me questions like you're doing now.
I haven't laughed all week. *Stop, Joyce. Ask him how*
His patients are. How's Mary? Glad she's healthy,
And Larry's well, and Larry's very wealthy.

RENEE'S HUSBAND

I'd like to introduce you to my wife
Who's in the powder room. Her name's Renee.
She's beautiful but needs to live in strife
— Only with me, a charitable man.
Doctor, would you snatch a canape
For me, by reaching over if you can?

Why should I suffer? When I was a child
My mother would always battle
Not with my father, not with my brother — *me*,
Though I never acted wild.
She'd hollar when I'd shake my rattle,
Or suddenly shake me violently.

But I want to get back to my wife.
Doctor. As you'll see when you see her mood
Swings, swinging from bad to good,
She gives me no calm in my life
Which I need with a mother like that.
Do we choose our mates from the past,
Looking for love that can't last?
She's like an acrobat

Not in bed, but with emotions.
I want her on medication
— True Women's Liberation
From all her crazy notions

Of how I'm black and white, of how I,
Deprive her, showering her with gifts.
She yells it is for *me* I give her little lifts,
And why don't I let her die?

Renee, come meet this fine psychiatrist.
I didn't catch your name at first.
Put that drink down. I insist.
Have a coke if you're "dying of thirst!"
These canapés are great. Aren't they, Doc?
Not gin and tonic! Tell her it's no good,
On top of these ups for her mood,
To drink, that they'll put her into shock.
What she buys from these dealers is shlock!
It's better she mix food:
Liverwurst, frankfurters. Would
You bite them like you bite my cock!
What do you mean? He's used
To hearing words like this!
Tell him how you bite when we kiss,
When you're getting, like now, juiced.

Please, Doc, don't wander off.
I know you don't like talking,
You guys — silent types who cough
Ahem, ahem. Don't start walking

Away from me, or else I'll give you you-know-what.
Don't stare like her who's cool,
Especially when I'm hot.
Don't treat me like an infantile fool
Who, when he's rattled, will shake.
I'm not the kind of man
Who'd rather bend than break
But will do everything he can.
Why am I talking like this,
When I'm asking for your assistance
To help my wife, not piss
You off with what she calls my butcher's persistence?

So here I've introduced you to my wife
Who's eating like she should to keep her health.
We'd like a consultation. Please, your card.
The fee's no matter. I'm a man of wealth
Who'll pay what's necessary till this strife
Between us ends. You'll be her bodyguard
Because one day I'll go, I'm scared,
Out of control, if she keeps acting mad
At me, at what's inside her, at the wall
She always bangs when we're embattled,
When I act cool, when I call her on all
Her manipulations, when I refuse to get rattled.

Put that drink down. Where are you going?
A mood swinging her to that good-looking man.

Dance with him, bitch. Stand up if you can.
Do you see how she's showing
You, spitefully, how nuts she can be,
Deserting me like this,
Giving that stranger a kiss?
Look at what she does to me!