Noise and Trash

a one-act in 3 scenes

by

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Synopsis

What is the higher calling, helping others or working to perfect your unique talent? A teacher and a poet struggle to survive in a world of noise and trash. **Rick,** deeply in love with **Anna,** persuades her to move in with him to escape the noisy neighbors in her fancy building. Who will survive in their new setup?

Characters

RICK an English teacher in the NYC Public School System, mid 30s.

ANNA a talented published poet in her late 20s. who has some undiagnosed problems with face recognition and high-pitched sounds.

Time: the present, a Friday evening.

Place: Scene I and II: Anna's apartment in a postwar luxury high-rise on Manhattan's Upper Westside

Scene III: Rick's apartment on 225th. St. in Marble Hill, the border between Manhattan and the Bronx.

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Noise and Trash

Scene 1

AT RISE there is a blackout. We hear city noises: garbage trucks, car horns, construction sounds, the penetrating beep-beep of vehicles going backward, the sound of kneeling busses lowering their steps. The noise builds to a crescendo of police- and ambulance sirens blaring and lights flashing – sudden blackout and silence.

The lights come up on Anna's extremely neat studio apartment. RICK is grading papers. We hear a key in the door. ANNA enters. RICK watches her as she hangs up her jacket, waiting for her to speak. She doesn't.

RICK

You're soaked. Where have you been?

ANNA

I walked through the park.

RICK

You walked through the park?

ANNA

Yes, I walked through the park.

RICK

It's dark out.

ANNA

I know.

RICK

You walked through the park in the dark?

ANNA

It was beckoning.

RICK

Jesus!

ANNA

I'm here.

RICK

Excuse me, I forget - you're a poet. Everybody else in New York is scared shitless to go into the park after dark, but it was beckoning you?

ANNA

The park after dark. You're the poet.

RICK

That’s not funny.

ANNA

Looks around for her special pad. RICK holds it out to her, a ritual they have gone through many times. She jots something down.

Nothing happened.

RICK

I forbid you to ever do that again.

ANNA

You forbid me?

RICK

For crying out loud.

ANNA

I'm here. .... nothing happened.

RICK

You have no consideration.

ANNA

I'm sorry if I kept you waiting.

RICK

That’s not what I’m talking ...

ANNA

(*towel-drying her hair*)

No, wait a minute, I don't know that I kept you waiting. Most of the time the bus takes just as long - longer.

RICK

It's nearly nine o'clock.

ANNA

Oh. .... right. ... I lingered.

RICK

You lingered in the park?

ANNA

It was so beautiful, the trees glistening in the rain, no people – (teasing him) just a few shadowy figures ...

RICK

Jesus!

ANNA

.... harmless bums. When I got to the meadow it really started coming down. I had to stand under a tree for a while. It was unbelievable. Branches weaving about in this eerie light. The black lawn stretching toward Central Park South with its buildings flickering, floating behind a shroud of rain. Beautiful. So lonely. And peaceful. An island of peace. As if the rain were separating it from the rest of the world. Wait, I brought you something.

She fishes something out of the pocket of her jacket and hands it to Rick.

RICK

A pebble?

ANNA

A piece of Central Park. White and amber. Look how smooth it is. You'd think it came from the beach. From Far Rockaway.

RICK

Thank you.

(*kisses her on the mouth*.)

ANNA

A pebble from the petrified beaches of Central Park.

RICK

Thank you. What I always wanted.

He kisses her again. They get into it. Suddenly ANNA

pushes him away and jumps up. Through the open upstage western-style kitchen door we see the refrigerator. For a moment it is illuminated by a spot and looms like a white ghost as we hear its high-pitched hum magnified. ANNA kicks it.

ANNA

Stop it, stop it! You're a piece of shit, you know that? A piece of shit.

RICK

What are you doing?

ANNA

The refrigerator. Don't you hear it?

RICK

You're talking to an appliance?

ANNA

It's driving me crazy.

RICK

What? Hear what? You mean that hum? It's normal. That's the way refrigerators sound.

ANNA

No, it isn't. It's a new kind of motor. I called General Electric and this guy tells me it's a new energy saving motor, friendly to the environment. Friendly to the environment, hostile to humans. I can't take it. I can't take the high-pitched tone. Eeeeeeeeee. All on one note. Chinese torture. It comes on every other minute. First there is a thud. To get your attention, no doubt. God forbid you should be able to tune it out. I told this guy it wasn't going to save any energy if I have to be hospitalized with a nervous breakdown. He said '*the product'* was tested and that there are a few people who react like me, but they won't take it back. Did you know it's against the law to return a refrigerator? There should be a warning label. I should have a choice. I was shopping for a quiet model. It's the one thing I asked for. I specifically asked for a quiet model, and I end up with this. The sales people don't know shit. They don't care.

RICK

Anna, Annie, come here, come over here. Sit down.

(*he massages her neck and shoulders*.)

Let it go. Just let it go. The construction across the street, that I can understand. It gets to me too, even the fan on the roof above your window - but the refrigerator?

ANNA

I'm sorry, I'm tired. It doesn't bother me as much when I'm not so tired. Harold's been bugging me. He is constantly bugging me with his deadlines. Any poems I want included

in this cycle have to be on his desk by the fifth, revised. He calls me every other minute to make sure I'm working. I want my old editor back. What did she have to go and die for? Lynn never pressured me like that. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Have you been waiting long?

RICK

It doesn't matter. I brought my work. I was very productive. I got all their essays graded.

ANNA

Were they moronic?

RICK

I don't use that kind of term.

ANNA

You did the last time.

RICK

I didn't.

ANNA

You said your brain was going to shrivel if you had to read one more moronic essay.

RICK

Did I really say that? I shouldn't have.

ANNA

Rick, it doesn't matter.

RICK

It matters to me. My students are not moronic.

ANNA

The essays, not the students.

RICK

Actually, some of them were very interesting, riveting, even. "Why We Must Vote." You should hear their arguments why we mustn't. Raw but relevant. These kids wrestle with life every day, not just words. Your father could learn something. When I think of the sound bites and empty slogans he puts in the governor's mouth, now those are moronic. Did you see the latest campaign commercial, the one with inauguration crowds in the background?

ANNA

You know I don't watch television.

RICK

He must think we're all morons.

ANNA

Rick, you promised. We agreed not to talk about my father.

RICK

We did. I'm sorry, but that one takes the cake. I know, he's just a speech writer making a living, not responsible for the policies.

ANNA

That's right.

RICK

Just for promoting them. Sorry.

ANNA

(*visibly upset*)

I am not responsible for my father. I haven't talked to him in six months.

RICK

I shouldn't have mentioned it. I apologize. Forgive me? I get mean when I get hungry. There's nothing in your fridge. Maybe that's why it beeps at you, in protest of its useless existence.

ANNA

Very funny.

RICK

Let's go eat. How about Chinese? Or do you want to grab a burger across the street?

She doesn't answer. He takes a contract out of his worn, bulging briefcase.

And Annie, please sign the lease. It was due today. I thought you signed it. I was already in their office when I noticed you hadn't.

ANNA

Takes the lease but doesn't look at it, puts it down and starts undressing.

I'd better change. It'll take me a minute. I'm all damp. I was waiting for the cross-town at Third and Sixty-seventh. The traffic was horrendous. It rains a little and there is chaos. Why is that? A little gentle rain and: gridlock!

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A cold harsh light intensifies on ANNA.

Everybody leaning on their horns. Those goddamn horns. Unbelievable. They must have held a contest: 'Who can come up with the most jarring, penetrating, earsplitting, nerve wrecking sound in a car horn?' It makes me so angry I want to kick the fuckers. You stand there waiting for these *things* to go by, this endless stream of noise-machines to pass you. I broke my umbrella hitting one of them. That's why I got so wet.

RICK

Annie, you didn't.

ANNA

As if the traffic would go any faster if they blow their horns. Isn't there a law you can't use your horn unless someone is in imminent danger of being run over? Why don't they ticket these idiots? Why don't they? Can you tell me that? I should call the traffic commissioner.

RICK

Good idea.

ANNA

No, the mayor. Quality of life my foot. Forget the panhandlers and the windshield wipers, go after the car-horn-blowers. The city could make a mint. They could balance their goddamn budget. Why don't they go after these polluting sons-of-bitches? They're the ones with the money.

RICK

That's probably why.

ANNA

Just think of the potential revenue. A virtual goldmine. They could hire more police. To issue more car-horn-blower tickets. They could fix up the schools, so your students can write moronic essays in an asbestos- and lead-free environment.

RICK

Annie!

ANNA

I saw the bus coming. It was stuck near Second. It couldn't budge because the air-polluting noise polluters always double-park their SUVs. There was such a cacophony, a car horn symphony. 'The orchestra of frustration, now playing in midtown.' Free of charge. It will only cost you your sanity. I started walking. They were still tuning up when I got to Fifth.

The light is still intense but changes to a warm glow.

ANNA is in her underwear, fixing her hair etc.

The park had its mouth open, dark and friendly. The entrance lined with empty benches gleaming in the rain, curving into the quiet. Silent trees reaching out wet welcoming arms.

(*she smiles at Rick*)

So I went in.

RICK

(*starts kissing her*)

Shut up you crazy nitwit. You're getting me very horny.

(*pulling her down on the sofa*)

Open up, let me in, you're my park, my refuge.

(*ANNA pulls away*.)

What?

ANNA

I hate it when you say things like that.

RICK

(*kissing her*)

Why?

ANNA

(*kissing him back, murmuring*)

It interferes.

RICK

What? With your imagination? Thanks for the compliment. I won't say another word. Just wrap your branches around me.

They get passionate. We hear someone in the apartment above practicing the flute in high shrill tones, repeating the same short fast phrase over and over. ANNA bolds upright, sits stock-still.

ANNA

(*slowly, deliberately, in a low tone*)

I want her to die. I want her to meet with some horrible accident. I want her to be run over by an SUV.

RICK

You don’t mean that. I didn't even notice.

ANNA

You don't hear this?

RICK

I was concentrating on something else. Now that you point it out.

ANNA

Once she starts, she goes for hours. The marathon champion of scales. Not once have I heard her play a piece of music.

RICK

Look, Annie, soon you will be out of here. You will be living with me, in my nice quiet apartment, with a nice quiet, old-fashioned refrigerator that only purrs in low tones, in an old-fashioned, pre-war building with thick walls. Which reminds me...

ANNA

I can't wait.

RICK

... sign the lease. Now. I want to get it in Monday morning. They're closed tomorrow. I hope to God they'll still accept it Monday. I'm lucky they're letting me renew for five years. I don't want them to change their minds.

ANNA

I will. I will. What would I do without you?

ANNA puts her head under his shirt to drown out the flute. He starts laughing and struggling because he is ticklish. ANNA now tickles him on purpose. It turns into an almost violent struggle.

RICK

Cut it out! Help! Help! Jesus!

ANNA

Jesus won't help you, you renegade!

He frees himself, grabs a pen without letting go of Anna's arm, forces the pen into her hand and shoves the lease in front of her.

Here, sign - on the dotted line.

ANNA

You're full of couplets tonight. Don't you think I should read it over?

RICK

What for? It's stabilized, it's large, it's quiet. They won't let me add your name later. Now is your chance. What have you got to lose? You're miserable here.

ANNA

I don't know if I can write in your place. You know I have to be alone to write. I'm only thinking of you. I write at the strangest times.

RICK

You can't write here. Everything about this place bugs you.

ANNA

You're right. You're always right. I love you. Let's get out of here. I'm famished. I'll sign it when we get back. Word of honor. I'll have a look at it. My father told me never to ....

RICK

Your father.

ANNA gives him a look, and he drops it. He checks his phone while she finishes dressing.

ANNA

Anything good?

RICK

Yes, Karen, reminding us about the party on Sunday. I'll pick you up at four. I can't wait for them to meet you.

ANNA

Party, music and talking at the same time. I suppose I have to go?

RICK

Yes. I'm the guest of honor. I want you to be there.

ANNA

I never know what to say to people.

RICK

Are you kidding? I've seen you. You hold forth. Everybody is fascinated.

ANNA

I run off at the mouth. Out of sheer panic. I hate it when I do that. Parties scare me half to death. People scare me. You know that.

RICK

What are you talking about?

ANNA

I can't remember their faces.

RICK

I'll be right there beside you. I'll remind you who is who. You remember Karen, right? And Jonathan.

(*she stares at him blankly*)

The lawyer who is in the retraining program for professionals to teach in underprivileged schools? How can you forget Jonathan? A prince of a man - very handsome, slightly balding? I introduced him to you at your reading. Never mind. Teachers always yak their heads off, you won't have to say a word if you don't want to. You won't have to do a thing, you just sit there and take it all in. Fodder for new poems. You'll love it. You'll be the star. They're all dying to meet my prize-winning poet friend.

ANNA

Lover.

RICK

What?

ANNA

Your prize-winning poet lover. No, you're right, certainly not prize winning in that department.

RICK

I have no complaints.

ANNA

Really? I shall be honored to be the guest of the guest-of-honor, teacher of the year, eradicator of the moronic essay, champion of the overlooked, uplifter of the downtrodden.

RICK

Cut it out.

They leave in high spirits. The stage is empty for only a moment. We hear the key and ANNA reenters. RICK stops in the doorway.

ANNA

They make me so goddamn mad.

RICK

Forget about it.

ANNA
Why can't they put their fucking garbage down the chute? That's what it's there for.

RICK
You had to go check.

ANNA
The door was propped open. I couldn't help see.

RICK
So you walk on by.

ANNA
(*writes something on a paper with a magic marker*)
It'll take me a minute. I'd like to know who took my sign down.

RICK
It's not your problem. It's the super's problem. They've got a huge staff in this building. They'll sort it out. It'll give them something to do. Keep them employed. Think of it that way.

ANNA
(*looks around for scotch tape*)
It's everybody's problem. What's the matter with these people? They can't be bothered to separate their garbage? That's asking too much? They have to leave their soggy shit in the paper bin?

RICK
I'll hold the elevator.
(*he exits*)

ANNA
(*reading her sign*)
"This is not a garbage dump! Put your trash down the chute!" Good. I'm coming.

- - -

Scene 2

Two days later, Sunday afternoon. Anna's apartment. The door to the hall is propped open. The window is open. We hear sounds of sledge hammer drilling from the street. Three signs, one large, two smaller ones, are propped on the sofa. The big one reads:

SEPARATE YOUR GARBAGE
IT'S THE LAW

The two smaller ones read respectively:

ONLY PAPER, CARDBOARD, NEWSPAPERS
AND MAGAZINES HERE
⬇️

ONLY <u>RINSED</u> GLASS, CANS
AND PLASTIC HERE
⬇️

ANNA, wearing a sweat suit, enters dragging a half-full, blue, round, plastic garbage can, which she leaves in the middle of the room. She disappears into the hall, reenters immediately with an empty rectangular, blue plastic basket meant for paper.

ANNA
Pigs! You'd think it was brain surgery.
(*slams the window shut*)
Goddamn construction. Unbelievable.
(*opens the window again and screams out*)
It's Sunday! Stop it! Noise polluters!
(*slams the window shut*)
Unbelievable, how can this go on on a Sunday, unbelievable!

She pours the content of the garbage can on the floor and starts sorting it out. It's a real mess. The intercom rings.

ANNA
Yes? ..... You're here already? ..... I'm not dressed. ... No, no, ... Rick!! .... Don't come up, wait in the coffee shop. ..... I'll just be a minute. I'll jump in the .... Don't come up, I'll be right there.

She hangs up and heads for the bathroom, turns back, frantically starts sorting the garbage, picking out paper items, abandons it.

The potato salad, oh no, the potato salad!

She turns toward the kitchen, changes her mind, runs into the bathroom. Sound of water running. After a few moments we hear keys in the door. RICK enters, dressed in his best clothes.

RICK

Oh my God!

He sniffs, opens the window, sees the lease on the table, checks if it has been signed. It hasn't. He puts it back. ANNA enters wrapped in a towel.

ANNA

I told you to wait in the coffee shop.

RICK

I wonder why?

ANNA

Sorry, I lost track of time.

(*She heads for the window.*)

RICK

Don't close that window! The stench - Jesus! Have you lost your mind completely? You lost track of time? You've lost it - period.

During the following ANNA is in and out of the bathroom, getting dressed, searching for her earrings etc.

I taught you how to meditate. I gave you a mantra. Do you do it? No, you react. How do you think I'm able to teach in an inner-city school? How do you think I am voted teacher who made the most difference - by the students, by the kids? You can't react. You have to go with the flow. You can't fight the world morning, noon and night.

He takes his jacket off and starts picking the recyclables out of the garbage, punctuating his speech by throwing soda cans, etc. back into the bin, for example, with every *not* and *no*.

This is other peoples' garbage. It is <u>not</u> yours! It is <u>not</u> your responsibility! I told you, you

have a B1 deficiency. I do the research for you. I buy you Adelle Davis. Do you read it? No! I told you to take Brewer's Yeast. Do you take it? No! If you just did your twenty minutes of meditation twice a day.

ANNA

Why should I follow the teachings of a corrupt Guru? You were in a deep depression for two years when you found out. You told me yourself.

RICK

That has nothing to do with it.

ANNA

The Rolls-Royces, the Swiss bank accounts, sex with the disciples. Three years of your life wasted at the Ashram in service to the Master!

RICK

Just because the teacher is corrupt doesn't mean the teachings are invalid. We are talking about wisdom passed down through centuries. Once I worked through the depression, I came out of it the better for it. It made me who I am. It made me the teacher who is being honored with this party today.

ANNA

So now you can flow with it. Leave the world in the rotten shape it's in. We're drowning in noise and garbage.

We hear the beep-beep of a construction vehicle going backward. She slams the window shut. RICK opens it.

The whole world is beeping at us. All on the same pitch. It's evil. You get into the elevator, every floor a piercing beep. Are you going to tell me blind people missed their floors for the last hundred years because the elevators didn't beep? I can't ride the bus anymore. Every stop there is this ear-splitting sound when the step is lowered. People can't step up? We are becoming a nation of the weak-muscled, overweight, hearing-impaired. I mean fine, if you're on crutches, but do we need a sound effect? When is the last time anybody was crushed under a moving bus step? Have we gone insane? Everybody sits there, nobody reacts, nobody seems to hear it. Half deaf already from all the noise I suppose. And I'm a nervous wreck trying to anticipate the next beep, trying to get my fingers into my ears in time.

RICK

Annie! Just get dressed. You're a regular comedian. You should do stand-up. Ever thought of writing for Saturday Night Live? When did you eat last? Probably your blood sugar is low.

ANNA

Please. It's got nothing to do with nutrition. I go to the movies; the trailers are so loud I need earplugs. I can't take aerobics class; you go deaf building your muscles. They're

called health clubs! But why bother building muscles, they'll be hauling us on the bus with caterwauling cranes next. And let's not forget the screaming turnstiles in the subways.

RICK

Lucky for you, you can afford cabs.

ANNA

I can't. I walk. Whenever possible through the park.

RICK

Well, there is always daddy to help out, isn't there? Who, forgive my mentioning it, is working for an administration which has set antipollution laws back by thirty years. Not to minimize your concern, but what's a little noise and mixed-up garbage compared to the tons of pollutants being spewed into the atmosphere by big business? Not to mention the moral pollution, the corruption, the war profiteering, merchants of death, selling weapons all over the globe. Get me a bag.

ANNA

What?

RICK

A garbage bag, I need a garbage bag.

ANNA

Just leave it, we have to go. We're late. We have to go. Your shirt. Oh no! Is your jacket going to cover this? Oh god!

RICK

Gets a garbage bag, broom and dustpan from the kitchen and furiously starts sweeping the trash together.

You can't leave this. The place will be crawling with roaches.

ANNA

Who cares? I'm moving out.

RICK

Is that why you haven't signed the lease?

ANNA

Just leave it. We have to go.

RICK

Thrusts the bag at her, she holds it open, he puts the trash in and ties the bag.

You know something, you're full of garbage.

(*picks up the lease and throws it back down*)

How often have I asked you to move in with me? When it comes down to it, you prefer your fancy doorman building to Marble Hill, noise or no noise.

ANNA

(*rubbing at his shirt with a wet cloth*)

What are you talking about? You are so wrong.

RICK

Have you given notice? You can't tell me you've given notice, can you?

ANNA

No. I haven't. And I won't. I don't intend to give up this apartment. I'll sublet it. I'd be crazy not to. My God, the rents they're getting in this building. We can live rent free. I'd be crazy to give it up.

RICK

Find a sucker. Cash in on it. Why not? It's the American way.

ANNA

Would you prefer the landlord takes the profit? If I don't, he will.

RICK

(*wrestles the cloth from her*)

Let me. I'll do it. Let me do it. Will you let go? I'll do it! Forget it. I can't show up like this.

ANNA

You cannot not go. You're being honored. You have to go. You cannot not go.

(*practically in tears*)

Nobody cares about your shirt. Think of Karen, all the trouble she went through.

RICK

I'm not in a party mood anymore.

ANNA

I was going to make my mother's potato salad for the party. I was going to surprise you with it. I already boiled the potatoes, I just got sidetracked. I'm sorry. I'm sorry I'm such a fuckup. I'm so sorry. Rick, you're so wrong. I want to move in with you. I want to live with you. I do. I love you. I get so lonely, you have no idea. Sometimes I think I'll die from lonely. I was only thinking of you. My crazy habits. You know? My writing habits

and everything.

(*picks up the lease*)

Look, I'm signing it. Here!

She takes the garbage out in a few quick trips. Rick just stands there. She returns with two empty cartons.

For books! I'll get a few more from the super. Books is practically all I have to pack, and my clothes. I can move tomorrow. Why don't I start packing? Why don't you go to the party and I start packing? Yes. It will be so wonderful living together. You're right. You're always right. I don't know why I even hesitated. I'll pack, you party. And tonight, we'll have our own private little party at your house. We'll celebrate. Do you want me to call Karen, tell her you're on your way?

RICK

She wants to talk to you about teaching a poetry workshop for the kids.

ANNA

You didn't tell me that.

RICK

I didn't want to scare you off. Look, Annie, you're so gifted, you're such a wonderful writer, do something with it. A few hours a week, that's all.

ANNA

I am doing something with it. I'm getting published.

RICK

I mean something useful. You know what I mean.

ANNA

Do you have any idea how hard it is to get published, especially poetry!

RICK

That's exactly why. A published writer. You're a great role model for the kids. Think about it, you're someone they can look up to, a successful writer, a published writer. You can do it, Annie. I know you can. You'd be surprised how creative they are. They just don't have an outlet for it. It's wasted, all wasted, such a waste. A few hours a week. And it would be good for you too. Get your mind off yourself, push your limits. It could take your work in a whole new direction.

ANNA

I am not you. I am not a teacher. I'm not good with people, you know that. Don't do this to me. I was a total failure last year as a visiting scholar. I didn't think I'd make it through the semester. They hated me.

RICK

They did not.

ANNA

They hated me. I hated them. I was a total failure.

RICK

You were not. We're not talking about a bunch of spoiled rich kids at an ivy league college. We're talking about fifteen-year-olds from the ghetto. Just hear what Karen has to say.

The flautist upstairs starts in with her scales. Rick pounds the ceiling with the broom handle, screaming at the top of his lungs.

Shut up, up there! Cut it out! Do you hear? Cut it out! Shut up, you windbag!

The scales stop. RICK and ANNA look at each other in amazement. Lights fade to black.

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Scene 3

A few days later, early morning

RICK's one-bedroom apartment on Marble Hill, old, spacious, casual-looking. The northern light gives it a serene quality. A few unpacked cartons and an oval basket full of books indicate that ANNA has moved in. Music, maybe Mozart, is playing during the scene change. When the lights come up, there is total silence in the room. ANNA, sitting at a table is working with great concentration, writing in longhand. After a while she leans back in her chair and reads the poem she's been working on, first silently, then aloud.

ANNA

weightless
when he lifted her up
and put her on the ground
(writes in a change.)
to
to put her on the ground.

when he lifted her up
to put her on the ground
in the bushes
off the reservoir.

The only thing that hurt
was his belt buckle
big silver belt ...
(makes another change)
metal
big metal belt buckle
don't know the face
and the rap of his
knuckle on her cheekbone
when she lifted her head.
Want me to get my knife out?
It left a bruise.
(reconsiders)
Barely left a bruise.
It left a bruise.
(settles on)
It barely left a bruise.

RICK

enters from the bedroom, kisses ANNA on the neck from behind, surveys the table.

Where are my papers?

ANNA

What?

(*reading to herself*)

Did what they all do
went home took a bath
in the shower for hours

RICK

My papers!

ANNA

Your papers?

RICK

What did you do with my papers?

ANNA

What papers?

RICK

The essays I corrected last night.

ANNA

Oh, they must be over there.

RICK

Where? - Over where?

ANNA

Over there, in the basket.

RICK

Right.

ANNA

Rick, honey, I'm sorry. I have to finish this. I have to get this to Harold today. Just ignore me. Please.

RICK

Okay, I'll make breakfast. How about French toast? I'm in the mood for French toast. I need the fortification of French toast today. Yes, that'll sooth the savage beast. French toast.

ANNA

Will you shut up about French toast.

(*Rick exits into the kitchen*)

In the shower for hours.

RICK

(*calling from off-stage*)

What?

ANNA

Nothing!

RICK

(*off-stage*)

There is nothing here. Nothing. No eggs, no bread, no milk, no nothing.

(*re-enters holding Mrs. Butterworth*)

Only syrup. I thought you shopped yesterday.

ANNA

Rick, just go. Can't you have breakfast at the school cafeteria?

RICK

What about you?

ANNA

I don't want anything. Just go. I'm sorry, I don't want to interrupt the flow. I was still half asleep this morning, you know that state when you're not sure you're dreaming, when I saw it happening.

RICK

What?

ANNA

The rape. How it happened. How it could happen.

RICK

What do you mean how it happened? You mean the rape at my school last week?

ANNA

I think I know how to fix it.

RICK

Rape cannot be fixed, honey, but if you could talk to Alicia. Oh Annie, that would be wonderful, that is a great idea. There is nothing a man can say, nothing. But if somebody like you talked to her. Support from someone like you just might help, a little, at least a little. It's worth a try.

ANNA

Rick! I couldn't talk to that girl. Are you crazy? I couldn't possibly. What would I say to her? What could I possibly say to her? How can you even think it? I would *like* to talk to her to get details, but I can't do that to her. That would be so callous. How can you even think it?

RICK

Didn't you just say you want to help fix it?

ANNA

The poem, fix the poem - my rape poem. I want to fix my rape poem. Harold tells me the title is too generic. *'Rape'* is too generic. Can you bear it? Rape is rape. That's what it is. What else would I call it? Do you know another word for rape?

RICK

Violation?

ANNA

Like in traffic? It's rape. That's the word for it. There is no such thing as a generic rape. What a stupid thing to say.

RICK

Did you tell him?

ANNA

I was too astounded. People have this notion all rapes are like the ones you hear about on television. The rapist is a degenerate animal and the victim feels abject terror. Well, maybe what this victim felt was lightheaded, strangely weightless, unreal. Harold doesn't have a clue.

RICK

And you do?

ANNA

Maybe. Maybe I do.

RICK

Maybe you do? Do you want to enlighten me?

ANNA

No.

(*after a long pause*)

I'm a writer. I have imagination. I have empathy.

RICK

Sure you do.

ANNA

Rick, it's a poem. Either it works or it doesn't. According to Harold it doesn't.

(*hands him the pad*)

Why don't you tell me.

RICK

(*reading*)

Going my way?
Big grin on fat lips
eyes blank. She
in a state, lost,
looking for her cat
lost in Central Park
of all places.

She felt lightheaded
weightless
when he lifted her up
to put her on the ground
in the bushes
off the reservoir.

The only thing that hurt
was his belt buckle
big metal belt buckle
- don't know the face -
and the rap of his
knuckle on her cheekbone
when she lifted her head.
Want me to get my knife out?
It barely left a bruise.

Did what they all do
went home took a bath
in the shower for hours.
Her husband didn't want
to know. Nobody
going her way.

Stopped talking
about it. Tried to stop
thinking
about it.
She had - had
a tampon in.
Perhaps it
didn't
count.

(*RICK is shaken, stares at her*)

It works.

(*after a pause*)

Fat lips, isn't that racist?

ANNA

Oh for Christ sake, you want me to write a politically correct poem about rape?

RICK

I don't want you to write about rape at all. I can't even think about it. It makes me crazy.

ANNA

(*excited*)

I just thought of a better title. AN UNREPORTED RAPE. Yes, 'An Unreported Rape' great. What do you think? I think Harold will like it. Great. Thanks. Thanks for reading it. It helped. Now, if I can only get my *daddy* poem fixed. Sylvia's got the market cornered on that one. Rick, why don't you go and have a nice breakfast with your colleagues. I feel like I could really work now.

RICK

Collegiate banter over stale donuts, I don't think I can take it today. I don't feel up to it. I'm not up to it. I'm just not up to it. I'll take the day off. I'll call in sick.

ANNA

You can't. I can't have you here. This place is great for writing, as long as you're not in it.

RICK

Thanks. I'm so glad you like it. I could always hang out at the corner or take a walk in Inwood Park.

ANNA

Rick! You, miss class? It's not like you. You're not really sick, are you?

RICK

No.

ANNA

Then what?

RICK

I don’t know. Afraid. Perhaps I am afraid. Perhaps that’s what I am.

ANNA

Of what?

RICK

I don’t know. Everything. Things are not right. I don’t know what’s happening anymore. Something’s not right, all over the globe, all over the world. Everywhere. Mayhem everywhere. What is going on?

ANNA

Nothing’s going on. It’s always been like this.

RICK

Not like this. Not all over the world. Not everywhere. Look at my school. First the incident with the custodian. You should see the place. Talk about trash - you'd go bananas. Funny, I never noticed. The kids don’t have books, and this guy is off in the Caribbean, taking it easy on his private boat. It's so corrupt. It's under investigation, and that's where it’s going to stay. Every few years there is another custodian scandal, and nothing ever changes.

ANNA

Rick, you’re beginning to sound like me. I need you out of here. I need to work. Go to work. You’ll feel better.

RICK

Then the rape. It’s so horrible I can’t allow myself to think about it if I want to carry on. I’m so angry. If I can’t deal with it, how are my students supposed to? I almost strangled that guy last night. I wanted to do him physical harm, me, a pacifist. I wanted to hurt him, pound him, shake some sense into him.

ANNA

What guy? Strangle who? They caught the rapist?

RICK

No, no, Yusuf's brother. He threatened me. How dare he threaten me. And all because I give a damn.

ANNA

Your student threatened you?

RICK

He waited for me outside the school. He is not my student. He is not even in the school. Some loudmouth, big-shot piece of trash dealing drugs. Listen to me. This is awful. I need to meditate. He told me he's going to *smoke* me, *"smoke me",* if I don't pass his little brother, his little six- foot-seven brother, whom everybody wants to be a basket-ball star, including the principal. I have to fail him. Somebody has to act responsibly.

ANNA

You don't have to fail him. What you have to do is teach. It's what you do best. I'm sure your students prefer you alive. You can't fight the world morning noon and night. Isn't that what you told me? Get out of here. Go to work. You'll love it once you're there. You know you will.

RICK

Are you throwing me out?

ANNA

Yes. How can I compose a loving dedication to you with you hanging around, pestering me?

RICK

You're dedicating the book to me? Oh honey!

ANNA

'To Rick, who rescued me from noise and trash and gave me shelter.' Absolutely, except that it's got to be shorter. Harold wants it short. He abhors long dedications.

RICK

What does he want?

ANNA

Never mind. I'm going to stand my ground for once. This is one point I'm not going to concede to him. I won't. It's bad enough my father is going to be mentioned on the jacket. I'm not going to dedicate the book to him. Absolutely not.

RICK

Is that what he wants?

ANNA

'to daddy' in small letters, just that, nothing else, just - *to daddy* - on a blank page. That's what he wants.

RICK

But why?

ANNA

Because of the nature of the poems. Harold thinks it sets up tensions, you know, something reviewers can latch on to, something they can speculate about, something to titillate the literary establishment, the reading public. Echoes of Sylvia. It's just a marketing strategy. My father being well-known and all.

RICK

You'd prostitute your work like this?

ANNA

I said I won't. Didn't I just say that? He means well. Nobody reviews poetry any more. He's trying to sell me. It would be nice to be read by more than five people.

RICK

(*gathers up his things*)

I'll leave you to it then.

ANNA

When do you think you'll be home?

RICK

I'm out early today, at three, but I think …

ANNA

That early?

RICK

I'll pay Yusuf's Mom a visit. I think she's working. I may have to wait for her. I don't know when I'll be home. Probably late. Don't wait with anything.

ANNA

Great. Knock'm dead! Excuse me, no pun intended. I love you.

(*blows him a kiss. RICK exits. ANNA resumes work*)

There are a series of blackouts to denote the passage of time. Lights go to black, lights come up: ANNA is sipping tea. ANNA meditating on the floor in the middle of the room. ANNA at the window, Mozart is playing.

ANNA

(*at the table*)

To Rick. To my beloved Rick. How original. To Richard William Lee. The whole name, so there is no doubt who I'm talking about. To Richard William Lee. Too formal, too cold. Oh God, why is it so hard to write a dedication? Keep it short. To Rick - my love, my inspiration, my pure one, salt of the earth. Salt of the earth? No clichés. Harold hates

clichés. Oh, what the hell, it's true and from the heart. *To Rick, my love, my inspiration, my pure one, salt of the earth.* That's it. If Harold doesn't like it, he can lump it.

(*she addresses a big FedEx envelope*)

Lights go to black. In the blackout we first hear street noises, then gun shots ring out, police car- and ambulance sirens come to a screaming crescendo, much like in the beginning of the play. Red lights are flashing wildly all over the stage. The sound of the sirens recedes. It is quiet again. Lights come up on the apartment.

ANNA
(*sitting very still, listening to the quiet*)
Rick, where are you? Where are you, baby? You can come home now.

Slow fade to black.

end of play