

# PROJECT PAPERS

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KENWARD ELMSLIE

## SCHLOCK 'N' SLEAZE R&B

### Scenario:

Two tourists, Anne and Karen, lured by a billboard advertising the "Fantabulous Lavinia Sanchez", find themselves trapped in the Sweet Patootie Lounge in the sub-sub-basement of the notorious Palais Bimbo, Bimboville. In the deserted lounge, Dr. Moon drugs them, and enlists them as surrogate Lavinias to replace his murdered inamorata, the original Lavinia, a transsexual he has created out of Vernon Itkin, retired busboy.

### ANNE

Your eyes are the eyes  
Of a terrifying bug  
Invented by Heironymous Bosch,  
A tarantula part of me wants to hug  
And the rest of me wants to squash.  
If only I knew some magic hocus pocus  
To tenderize  
The focus  
Of your eyes.

*(Spoken)*

How can I ever thank you enough. How much do I owe you...spoiling me rotten...  
Dr. — Dr. —

*(ANNE conks out. DR. MOON turns to KAREN, snaps her out of her semi-comatose state)*

### DR. MOON

You're Lavinia, babe,  
The original mould. You're no Xerox.  
Pure Lavinia, babe.  
Wanna smother you with rubies and rare rocks.  
Lickin' your fangs with your Lavinia tongue,

Caught in a squeeze  
Between Schlock 'n' Sleaze.

Wow, Lavinia, babe.  
Got a come-hither look like a cobra.  
Pow, Lavinia, babe.  
Love your black leather scanties and no bra.  
A nutso flake, a poco poco too young,  
Caught in a squeeze  
Between Schlock 'n' Sleaze.

Hang your scuzzy thumb from your wound of a mouth. Flirty flirty.  
Whisper x-rated come-ons. Then get down to it dirty.

### KAREN

I want out, Doc.  
Spelled O-U-T, out. Pretty please.  
Not my route, Doc.  
Sure do miss the birdies and bees.  
Pull the lever. Press the button.  
Catch you later. Thanks for nuttin'.  
Stuck in a crock  
Between a rock and a hard place.  
Caught in a squeeze  
Between Schlock 'n' Sleaze.

Lemme go, Doc,  
Back home so I can catch some zzzzs  
Yoho-ho, Doc.  
I'm havin' an identity crise.  
I don't need your heeby-jeebies.  
Stuff your psychedelic freebies.  
Stuck in a crock  
Between a rock and a hard place.  
Caught in a squeeze  
Between Schlock 'n' Sleaze.

Keep climbin' up slimy walls. Sounds worse than fingernails  
Scratchin' a blackboard.  
Deep in my brain, phoney phone-in voices yackety-yack,  
Yackety-yack. Bored!  
Terminal ennui  
Is closin' in on me.

I want out, Doc.  
Spelled O-U-T, out. Pretty please.  
Hallucinatin' zombies in trees.  
Next you'll cram me in a body bag with seamless seams,  
Then gag me so the screams I scream are screamless screams.  
Stuck in a crock  
Between a rock and a hard place  
Caught in a squeeze  
Between Schlock 'n' Sleaze.

*(DR. MOON brandishes Lavinia's severed head,  
cornering ANNE & KAREN)*

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Music by Steven Taylor  
from PALAIS BIMBO,  
a musical adapted from BIMBO DIRT (Z Press, 1981)  
by Kenward Elmslie and Ken Tisa.

This scene was first performed in May, 1987, at HOME for Contemporary Theatre and Art, 44 Walker St., by Steven Taylor, k. Funk and Anne Jacobsen. Directed by Mac McGinnes. Sets and Costumes by Ken Tisa. Lighting by Frank Moore.  
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MAXINE CHERNOFF

## JURY DUTY

I had spent the first part of the summer distraught, writing a story about a woman I know, a lesbian, who had a baby. I wanted to do the subject justice, nothing preachy or high-toned, just honest observation and discussion. The story was boring. It was boring to me when I was writing it, and I assumed it would be boring to anyone who might read it. Brenda and Mary were portrayed as loving, concerned future parents, the problems of pregnancy discussed with sympathy. Integrity was my byword. In my story Brenda was fertilized at a medical center by a doctor she called The Inseminator. The best scene involved the couple sitting at the breakfast table, sharing a muffin, telling insemination jokes. They weren't male stand-up comic jokes that someone like Tom Driessen might tell but a scenario involving a series of movies called The Inseminator. Arnold Schwarzenegger would fertilize whole cities, metropoli, continents. This was the comic relief. In art, as in life, accidents happen, and Brenda lost her baby. I kept hoping as I wrote the story that I wasn't punishing her by resolving the plot in that way. I went through the list of all my friends who'd miscarried and felt reassured that at least in real life justice plays no role.

Then two things happened. First, my good friend Lois told me that the woman on whom I'd based Brenda had fallen in love with the man who'd gotten her pregnant. In real life Brenda hadn't gone to a doctor at all. She'd gone to the Drake Hotel, and when her basal temperature was perfectly adjusted, had made love to her friend's friend, Mark, a book designer. She's the kind of person who cuts corners. Her night of heterosexual passion led to Kyle, who's now almost two, and is said to resemble Mark more strongly than Brenda. Meanwhile, Mark had begun to call. It was only natural that he'd be interested in his son. They had dinner a few times and one thing led to another. Now Brenda's wearing makeup again, seeing Mark regularly, and having very little to do with Mary, the woman with whom she was supposed to be raising Kyle.

Lois spared no details. The makeup she can accept. After all, who doesn't want to look nice? Why should women deny themselves what's best from the past to make a statement about the present that's finally puritanical? "No, the makeup is great," Lois said. "Besides, even men wear makeup these days. My butcher wears something that keeps his skin looking tight and young. It's the damned shoes."

"The shoes?" I asked.

"She buys shoes to match all her outfits now. She's a regular Imelda. And the hair. It's sleek. It's contemporary. It could co-anchor the news without a face to hold it up."

"Good for her," I said, thinking that my story was probably too weighty and moralistic. "As long as she's happy."

"Good for Kyle that the father's interested. Old Brenda's too ditzy to raise that child herself."

"So it's a happy ending."

"Not really. It's a crying shame. Why is it love that always changes women? Even in the highest art. Even in Jane Austen. Why can't it be nautical adventure, or politics or ideas?"

I was thinking this over Monday morning when I arrived for jury duty. It was the Municipal Court, where I hoped I might get involved in a short, interesting case that would yield a story. Twelve weeks on Claus Van Bulow didn't appeal to my immediate sense of my future self. I had stories to write, dinners to cook, a tennis backhand to improve. Give me a small murder, I thought, an unambiguous kidnapping. Give me a purse thief with musical abilities or a man who's pruned his neighbor's tree while high on angel dust. Let me be out of here by rush hour.

I spent nearly the entire week of jury duty sitting on the bench. Twice I was asked not to read. Many potential jurors snored blissfully around me. None were asked not to sleep. The third time I began reading nobody bothered me. I was set in my ways. Besides, the book was non-fiction. I was a serious person. The book's cover was navy blue. The title was engraved.

While sitting on the bench waiting to be called, I spent part of each day staring at a pregnant woman. She was small and dark, maybe Indian or Pakistani, and sweated profusely. I wondered if she really had to endure the week or could have used her pregnancy as an excuse. I wondered if she would have liked my story about Brenda. I began thinking of pregnancy itself as a form of jury duty. I remembered when I had my first child. The nurse held her up to my face, but because I wasn't wearing glasses and was

dopey from labor, I thought the nurse's elbow was part of my daughter's back, a protrusion. "She's beautiful," they assured me, but I was overcome by fear and unable to ask about what I suspected until a second viewing.

At the time of my jury duty I was on a medication for my nerves. I'd been having panic attacks in unlikely places. One, for instance, had been in a women's locker room at a YMCA. Its origin remained a mystery. The others—before speaking to audiences, while driving to work, visiting my mother at the hospital—I could explain. Not understanding my latest one sent me straight to my physician.

"Can you help me?" was all I wanted to know.

Before he answered, he made his eyes small and meaningful and told me all about his own panic, panic while giving a medical paper on liver disease, panic at his father's funeral.

"Did he have liver disease?" I asked.

"A boating accident," he replied and wrote me a prescription for a new drug that nips panic in the bud. No more adrenaline coursing through my system like a commuter train to Tokyo. It was his metaphor, and I thanked him.

The trial on which I actually served as an alternate involved a gang shooting in February. I mention the month because crimes of passion seem barely plausible in winter. A bloodless killer, I concluded, a sociopath. Even before the gun with his fingerprints had been introduced and the witnesses gave their testimony, my mind was made up. I'd rewrite the story. Mary would kill Brenda for having betrayed her. It was plausible. It was justice. It would happen in August.