

NOTES

The Three Step Method is a quirky comedy which examines the fine line between sanity and insanity. Scot Augustson gives us a glimpse into the world of psychiatry via a psychiatrist who gives his intern a quick lesson in how to turn a fairly sane patient into a dependent, disoriented hysteric using three simple steps. This short play could be performed as either a Humorous Interpretation or Duo Interpretation. To perform as a Duo Interpretation, simply eliminate the character of Arthur, the intern. The true success of any comedy lies within the actors' abilities to react to the situation at hand. Facial expressions and acute comic timing will be the driving force behind the success of this off-the-wall comedy!

The Characters:

Dr. Sival, a psychiatrist

Arthur, an intern

Carolyn, a patient

The curtain rises to reveal a psychiatrist's office with a desk, couch, and also two men, Dr. Sival and Arthur.

Doctor: Arthur, my boy, today you are entering a very special step in your education. You are about to watch a trained professional in action.

Arthur: Yes, sir.

Doctor: You'll get to watch the patients and learn how to draw them slowly, bit by bit, to a nervous breakdown.

Arthur: Breakdown, sir?

Doctor: Yes, breakdown. In order to rebuild. You can't fix a watch until you pry the back off, can you?

Arthur: Uh, no sir.

Doctor: Mmmmmmmmm, yes, psychiatry is entering a new and exciting phase.

Arthur: Sir?

Doctor: Well, when it all got started the psychiatrist had the scalpel and wasn't afraid to use it. Oh, not a real scalpel, of course. But the Doctor could dig and hack. Chopping out the bad and letting the blood spew where it may. Ah! The good old days. And then came the Seventies. Oh, self-help books. I'M OK, YOU'RE OK. If you were so damned okay, why did you bother to buy the book? The whole thing became so...so, namby pamby. Let me ask you a question. Why are you here?

Arthur: To...to help people?

Doctor: You want to help people? Go work in a library. You are here to learn what makes people tick. Do you ask them what's wrong?

Arthur: Yes?

Doctor: Would you ask a car that's in the shop what's wrong? NO!

Arthur: So how do you find out what's wrong with a patient?

Doctor: Ah! That's where my three step method comes in. I believe you'll get a chance to witness it this afternoon. The first step is to be very accepting. Go along with everything he or she says. The second step is to shake them up, let them know something is wrong. And then, when they are teetering on the edge of doubt, BANG! You crack 'em open like a walnut.

Arthur: Then they're cured?

Doctor: Heavens, no. But they're reduced to a shell of what they were. A limp rag. A sorry excuse for a human being. And they're completely vulnerable and dependent of weekly visits with you. Often for years. Just you wait and see. *(He presses the buzzer on his desk.)* Ruth, send in the patient.

(Carolyn Weaver, the patient, enters.)

Carolyn: Hello.

Doctor: Do come in, Mrs. Weaver.

Carolyn: Oh, do call me Carolyn.

Doctor: Certainly, Carol. May I introduce you to Arthur Optin. He's the intern who you agreed to let observe our little chat. Now, Carol, you sit right here on the couch, and I'll be with you in one second. *(To Arthur)* We begin with step one. Going along with everything. *(He crosses back to Carolyn.)* Now what is the problem?

Carolyn: Well, I get so tense and depressed sometimes.

Doctor: I was just going over your file, and believe me, you have every reason to be depressed. It's usual for someone in your place.

Carolyn: In my place?

Doctor: Your age, your background, your education, your looks.

Carolyn: I think about suicide.

Doctor: I'd be surprised if you didn't.

Carolyn: Please, don't think I'm crazy. But I hear voices.

Doctor: Little voices? Voices that seem to come out of nowhere?

Carolyn: Yes.

Doctor: And they seem so real?

Carolyn: Yes.

Doctor: And no one else hears them?

Carolyn: No, they don't.

Doctor: Or at least they pretend not to hear them.

Carolyn: What?

Doctor: It is so refreshing to meet someone else who admits to hearing

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By Scot Augustson

them.

Carolyn: You hear them, too?

Doctor: All the time.

Carolyn: So I'm not crazy?

Doctor: Well, I didn't say that.

Carolyn: This is going to sound silly, but every once in while, I have this feeling that someone is following me.

Doctor: So that's why you had your two friends walk you here?

Carolyn: No, I came alone.

Doctor: Those two men weren't with you?

Carolyn: No.

Doctor: *(The Doctor crosses to the window.)* They're still there. What? That's funny. They saw me and ducked behind the corner.

Carolyn: Oh, then I was right. What can I do, Doctor?

Doctor: Well, be very careful. If I were you, I'd stay indoors as much as possible. Maybe a disguise. You know, a wig, sunglasses. Maybe even take a change of clothes wherever you go.

Carolyn: At least I'm not crazy.

Doctor: I'll make that decision. Now, shall we try a little test?

Carolyn: Okay.

Doctor: One moment. *(He crosses to Arthur.)* Step two, shake them up. *(He crosses back to Carolyn.)* Now, let's try some word association. Know how to play?

Carolyn: You say a word, and I just say the first thing that pops in my head.

Doctor: Okay. Let's begin. *(Pause)* Carol? Go ahead.

Carolyn: I'm sorry, but I didn't catch the word.

Doctor: The word was rabbit.

Carolyn: Oh, um...bunny.

Doctor: Hmmmmm. Black.

Carolyn: White.

Doctor: Down.

Carolyn: Up.

Doctor: Man.

Carolyn: Woman.

Doctor: Gun.

Carolyn: Shoot.

Doctor: What? Shoot? What kind of a—

Carolyn: *(Confused)* You said "gun" and I said "shoot."

Doctor: I did not say "gun." What I said was "Mother." Now, I think we should stop and talk about your relationship with your mother.

Carolyn: I could have sworn you had said "gun."

Doctor: Sometimes we hear what we want to hear. Now, lie back. We'll do a little bit of regression. You had better slip off your rings and any