



WILLIE THE GERM

by Murray Mednick

WILLIE THE GERM was first presented by Theater Genesis at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bouwerie on April 1st, 1968. It was directed by Ralph Cook, with lighting by Johnny Dodd, sound and visuals by Domenick Capobianco and Elfi Schuselka, and the following cast:

FLAMINIA	_____	Michele Collison
PANTS	_____	Gene Elman
CYNTHIA	_____	Delia Duke
MARTIN	_____	Tom Lillard
WILLIE	_____	Victor Eschbach
BUTTON PUSHER	_____	Pat Cook
DR. SAM	_____	Jerry Lipani

MURRAY MEDNICK, who was born in Brooklyn on August 24, 1939, grew up in the Catskills, but returned to New York at age seventeen. All his plays have been presented at Theater Genesis, beginning with *The Box*, *Mark of Zorro*, and *Sand*. With Sam Shepard and Eddie Hicks, he formed a musical group called The Heavy Metal Kid. *The Hawk*, a collaboration with Tony Barsha and the Keystone group, was also produced Off Broadway. *The Hawk*, *The Hunter*, and *The Deer Kill* (which won an Obie award) have been published in separate volumes by Bobbs-Merrill. As playwright-in-residence at Theatre Five in San Diego, Mednick wrote and directed *The Shadow Ripens*, which is based on Eskimo ritual. He has received two Rockefeller Foundation grants and a poetry award from the National Council on the Arts, and a book of his poems will soon be published by Bobbs-Merrill.

(THE SCENE: A narrow stage with a black curtain as background. A sizable area in front of the stage is roped off. To the side, near the theater entrance, is a large platform on wheels. Above the playing area are hung several mirrors. One, large, stage rear, faces the audience; the others, smaller, face the stage; all are slanted so as to reflect the action proper and each other. Portraits of George C. Tilyou and other carny heroes adorn the walls.

Ideally, the audience should be forced to stand, as they would at a freak show.

This play should be done FAST, up tempo all the way, by SPEED FREAKS—it is, in fact, a freak show in a spook house at a carnival, and everything possible should be done to create a carny atmosphere in and around it.

CYNTHIA, FLAMINIA, and PANTS sit on stools onstage. There is another stool, unoccupied. They all wear whiteface. CYNTHIA, a girl about fifteen years old, wears a mini skirt. PANTS and FLAMINIA are dressed in a style reminiscent of the commedia dell'arte. FLAMINIA has a great mane of red hair. PANTS' fly is open. They are the parents of CYNTHIA and MARTIN. MARTIN, also in whiteface, is a young man in a sharp black suit. He stands at the theater door, taking charge of the rope, ushering in the audience, while the others make faces and obscene noises.

As this is going on, the PROLOGUE, in WILLIE'S voice, is heard over and over again, outside the theater as well as in, against a background of carny sounds—cackling, barkers, crazy laughter, calliope, etc.)

PROLOGUE

I have had many weird dreams about waterfronts. Circus-type waterfronts, with sideshows and freaks. Slanting warehouses, tipsy piers, rolling promenades. Waterfronts that are carnivals, blaring on the edge of the sea. There I have a variety of nightmares, but I am always looking for the right THE END, somewhere near a bandstand in the sun, where the technicolor is real, and the black and white shadows disappear like witches into the moon. Without fail it will be beyond the next mirror, or the next, threatening, obliquely, like the Mona Lisa, to become three-dimensional. Having found my

way there during the hunt, to have happened on this circus waterfront, cringing in alleys, has never been a surprise. It is a repetitive chase played out in my brain, in which only the characters change, to protect the guilty; a recurring journey taken at night, by the subconscious.

In the beginning I walk before recognizable strangers, the puzzled faces of the waking life, those to whom one smiles through one's detachment; they who flicker in the imagination, as in shadow plays, staccato marionettes. The world rises ahead and slips away behind, without smell, without touch; I am waiting for my own soundless footsteps in what appears to be the entrance of a circus. . . .

Mirrors are signs, leading into or becoming doorways; and doorways becoming corridors, endlessly opening corridors in a gray light. Out there is the wide water without sound, the whiteness beloved of poets, upon which are dark boats floating, funeral caskets carrying the deaths of the day's enemies. What may have been is no longer the question. Time resolves it within the urgent sense of the hunted in a hunting game, like a schizophrenic clock, the melting tick of the heart. Drifting, mirrors sliding through mirrors . . . a crime has been committed! What crime?

Ah! I am the sole spectator of my distortions—the sideshows are under my direction, the freaks are in my image! The scene changes, recurs—the interlocking, perpetually embracing rings of the circus. There my ancient Self, my Ringmaster, cracks His whip and howls.

(When all of the audience is inside, the BUTTON PUSHER, an ordinary-looking, middle-aged woman wearing a white lab coat, enters and joins the audience somewhere in front. She carries a button mechanism that is attached by wire to an unseen oscillator or operates by remote control. . . .)

MARTIN secures the rope and wheels the platform to the stage so that it makes an extension jutting out toward the audience. He then takes his seat onstage with the others.

WILLIE THE GERM is rolled tightly in a ball, exactly in the right front corner of the platform.

He remains in this position for some time.)

FLAMINIA

Come on, Willie. Get up.

PANTS

Get up, Willie.

MARTIN

Rise and shine, Willie. It's not that bad.

CYNTHIA

Poor Willie.

(Finally WILLIE moves. He uncurls slowly, in bits and pieces. We hear heavy breathing on tape, the body breathes in unison. He opens his eyes. He attempts to rise, fails, tries again, gets up on his knees. He waves to himself in the mirror several times, each time with more despair. He laughs at the audience. The freaks laugh at him. His final gesture is hopeless. He is dressed in a white busboy's jacket and baggy black waiter's pants, no shoes, no whiteface. He contemplates his image.)

WILLIE

What crap . . . the corpse . . .

(He slowly lifts his right arm, in such a way as to avoid the edge of the platform.)

. . . moves . . .

(Staring straight ahead, he approaches, carefully, the edge, with his right hand. He hesitates an inch away. He takes the plunge. Instantly there is tremendous static and a flashing strobe light. WILLIE pulls back his hand, as if burned, and howls with pain. The others laugh.)

FLAMINIA

I told you not to fuck with the energy around here, Willie.

MARTIN

No liberties, Willie, no fringe benefits.

PANTS

You ought to know better by now, Willie.

WILLIE

(A harsh whisper)

. . . through a strange dream . . .

CYNTHIA

(Giggling)

See if you can get it up, Willie.

WILLIE

. . . composed of a series of temptations . . .

MARTIN

What?

WILLIE

. . . in which he tries to be good. . . .

MARTIN

Oh?

WILLIE

That's correct, Martin.

FLAMINIA

Well, how do you feel, Willie?

WILLIE

I feel all right. How do you feel?

FLAMINIA

I feel fine . . . a bit tired, maybe.

WILLIE

It's a bit sticky. . . .

PANTS

It's a bit damp. My feet hurt.

CYNTHIA

It's dark. I'm scared of the dark.

MARTIN

Get on with it, Willie.

WILLIE

Get on . . . with it . . . *(He tries a little dance, sings.)* It was Willie what got drowned . . . *(Fails, gives up.)*

CYNTHIA

That's not it, Willie. (*Sings*) It was Willie what got drowned in the deep, blue sea. . . .

FLAMINIA

Very good. That's very good. Not bad at all, dear.

WILLIE

I can't sing.

MARTIN

Try harder, Willie.

PANTS

You got to make an effort, kid.

WILLIE

My voice is changing. (*Horried*) It's getting higher!

MARTIN

Then sing higher!

(*They laugh. FLAMINIA comes forward.*)

FLAMINIA

Try this one, Willie.

(*She sings, in falsetto:*)

Gonna build me a log cabin

on a mountain so high

so I can see Willie

as he goes riding on by . . .

(*She stops, flustered.*)

WILLIE

(*Cracking up*)

I can't do that one either, Flaminia!

MARTIN

(*Embarrassed*)

Mother!

(*He hands her a broom.*)

FLAMINIA

Uh . . . yes . . . (*Harshly*) Here, then sweep!

WILLIE

Here, sweep . . . (*He sweeps.*) Here, sweep . . . (*he smells something, stops to sniff*) sweep. . . . (*Drops the broom, begins sniffing himself*) Uh, oh . . . I'm disturbed . . . spiritually fucked up . . . and stone-broke on top of that . . . and I have a cold . . . and my overcoat was stolen in the employment agency—I can't believe it! Black cashmere! Warm as hell! No coat! No boots, either! I lost my boots in the Port of Authority . . . in the dead of winter . . . twenty below! That's life . . . but I'm a working man again . . . I've got a job! . . . I'll be nice and people will like me . . . I'll give up drugs . . . I'll get ahead in the world. . . .

(*He has sniffed himself up and down until he ends up with his head between his legs, looking to the rear. A pause.*)

Wow . . . there is an evil biped in the premises. There are several evil bipeds in the premises. I'd better watch my ass.

(*FLAMINIA picks up the broom and whacks him across the buttocks with it. The others laugh.*)

OW!

(*He recoils to the edge. Static. He gets a shock.*)

OW!

FLAMINIA

Sweep.

WILLIE

(*Sweeping*)

Okay, I'll sweep. You don't have to come on that way about it . . .

(*Looks seriously at the audience*) You don't have to come on so strong . . . I'll sweep . . . (*Whispers, sweeping*) Which of you is the

Button Pusher? . . . I piss on you . . . (*He finishes sweeping, stops, turns to the others*) I think of Willie what got drowned, walking

on a cloud in the sky, wearing a bowler hat and a loincloth.

(*Applause*)

PANTS

Excellent.

FLAMINIA

You did a good job.

CYNTHIA

Bravo, Willie.
(*Other appropriate ejaculations*)

MARTIN

Oh, for God's sake! What did he do? He didn't do a damn thing!

WILLIE

Well, I tried.

MARTIN

(*Stalking him with the broom*)
Try harder.

WILLIE

(*Sinking to his knees*)
Okay, Mart.

MARTIN

(*Eyeball to eyeball*)
Do something!

WILLIE

Yuk a luck, fuck a duck. I feel stuck in the muck with a shmuck.
When you don't have a buck, you suck.

MARTIN

(*Thrusting the broom handle into WILLIE's mouth*)
You suck!
(*Applause. He returns to his stool. CYNTHIA comes forward.*)

CYNTHIA

Poor boy, poor boy. Hang around, be a clown. Poor boy, poor boy,
hang around, be a clown.
(*Returns. FLAMINIA comes forward.*)

FLAMINIA

Ladies and gentlemen, this unregenerate person has been rescued
from the street, by us, for your amusement. He's something of a
wise guy, but he's getting hip.
(*Returns. PANTS comes forward.*)

PANTS

I agree wholeheartedly and one-hundred cents' worth with my very
high and very esteemed wife.
(*He returns, cuffing WILLIE on the way.*)

WILLIE

Your fly is open, Dad.
(*PANTS turns, glares.*)

FLAMINIA

That's enough for now. It's almost lunchtime.

WILLIE

Lunchtime? Lunchtime?

FLAMINIA

Yes, yes, of course. Get moving!
(*WILLIE tries to escape. Static, a shock, etc. The others move their
stools to the platform and make a circle. What follows is an exagger-
ated pantomime of a meal, a grotesque one, with sounds—grunts,
moans, grabbing, gurgles, etc., with WILLIE acting as servant. He is
kept busy and humiliated, setting the table, serving the food, pleasing
FLAMINIA, and so on. WILLIE has a running monologue throughout,
sometimes to himself, sometimes to the audience, sometimes as if in
answer to something someone has "said."*)

WILLIE

Oh, certainly . . . yes, you may . . . with pleasure, my dear . . . but,
of course . . . very good! . . . thank God it's dead . . . yes, aren't you
glad you didn't have to go out and kill it yourself? . . . no? . . . yes?
. . . more blood, perhaps? . . . your belly hurts? . . . already? . . .
don't eat so fast . . . pig! . . . what now? . . . she wants cream cheese
for her celery . . . right away, my sweet . . . here you are . . . a
banana for your mouth . . . and a mushroom for your hot little
pussy . . . remember me in bed . . . itch! . . . You'll never be satis-
fied . . . oh, that's nice . . . eat! eat! . . . tomorrow you die . . . up
against the wall! . . . aw, Martin, you're depressed . . . too bad . . .
he needs a new convertible and an M-16 rifle—he's a big man on
campus . . . tch, tch . . . Mr. Pants, here, is a pinball operator . . .

that's right . . . he's got three machines—Big Blonde, Little Blue Baby, and Heavy Hippie Momma . . . he used to have quite a few more, but they're disappearing . . . it's very strange . . . meanwhile, he's giving Doctor Sam a screwing . . . five-hundred-dollars' worth . . . success! . . . he's terrified . . . Flaminia is quite pleased . . . but suspicious . . . he's holding out . . . she expects me to spy on his wheelings and dealings . . . it's not my line, exactly . . . eat! eat! . . . shit! shit! . . . never fear while Willie's here! . . . I flush their toilets and perfume their corpses . . . I oil the machine . . . I'm axle grease, that's what! . . . ha! . . . not rare enough for you? . . . you like it rare? . . . hmmm . . . horny little animal, aren't you . . . there, there . . . don't get excited . . . it's only food, after all . . . you say you're paying for the service? . . . no denying that, is there? . . . I'll do my best, sir . . . half prune juice, half hot water? . . . a compote for the missus? . . . Pepsi for Martin? . . . hot chocolate for little Cynthia? . . . coming right up! . . . eat! eat! . . . oh? . . . you don't say? . . . tell me all about it . . . yes, indeed . . . go fuck yourself . . . die in bed, why don't you? . . . and you, you little cunt, shove a chocolate bon-bon up your . . .

CYNTHIA

(Leaping into language)

Recite a poem!

WILLIE

(Breathless)

Recite a poem?

PANTS

Yeah, a short one.

MARTIN

Make it topical.

FLAMINIA

Make it rhyme.

WILLIE

It's not my job.

PANTS

Make it fast.

FLAMINIA

We'll have it with our tea.

WILLIE

I think of Willie what got . . .

CYNTHIA

Not that one, a new one!

FLAMINIA

Will you pour?

MARTIN

Certainly, Mother.

FLAMINIA

All right, begin.

WILLIE

Yes . . . uh . . .

CYNTHIA

Go on!

WILLIE

Well . . . uh . . . I was sitting between two windows. Two windows.

Yes. I was sitting between two windows, in an ordinary room.

But the windows were mirrors. Okay.

(Playing with his reflection in the mirrors)

I was sitting between two windows,

in an ordinary room,

but the windows were mirrors.

PANTS

That's no poem.

CYNTHIA

Come on, Willie, I want more.

FLAMINIA

Terrible, Willie. Let's go. *(Leading the others back)* You get worse and worse, I must say.

CYNTHIA

Shit, Willie, why don't you write about love?

WILLIE

Love?

MARTIN

Get on with it.

WILLIE

(Turning to audience)

See, the windows faced each other perfectly. That is to say, they were directly opposite. One another. Naturally, a person likes to look out the window from time to time. Or climb out on the fire escape. Or open the window for a little air. It's a natural thing, to want to do that. But the fucking windows were mirrors.

FLAMINIA

So you cracked up.

WILLIE

Yes, I did.

PANTS

It's certainly not art.

MARTIN

Certainly not. Come along, Cynthia, it's time! *(Exits)*

CYNTHIA

It's all right, Willie. I really do like it. *(Exits)*

WILLIE

If only I could get my head through . . . *(Stares at the audience.)*

FLAMINIA

Clear the table!

WILLIE

(Contorting)
OW!

FLAMINIA

Clear the table, clear the table, shut your mouth and clear the table! *(WILLIE stops and approaches the edge. He hesitates, pulls back, regards the audience.)*

WILLIE

I would sometimes see faces in the window . . . *(Sits in the yoga position, meditates a moment, rises.)* But it would turn out to be an illusion . . . every time. . . .

(Again he approaches the edge. He touches and gets a shock, as before, whispers:)

Which of you is the Button Pusher?

(He addresses the audience with an apologetic bow.)

And so, you see, I had nowhere to turn, for a change of scene, but inward. It is a deliciously abysmal direction. Into a bottomless pit. Yes, that's what the doctor said: "a bottomless pit." Exactly . . . You see, the hum in your head is the sound of your nervous system. Oh, something else: I have always considered the phrase "nervous system" to be kind of perverted . . . as if the system was being nervous . . . a question of describing the energy of the process, rather than its form . . . or something . . . its structure. . . . And that is because . . . I am a very nervous person . . . it seemed to me a highly accurate analysis of the situation. . . .

(He is violently interrupted by PANTS, who seems to have had a sudden anxiety attack.)

PANTS

Hey! Cut it out, will ya? Cut it out! What are you trying to do? Huh? Huh? You wanna get me in trouble or something? Huh? Huh? *(Implying FLAMINIA, behind them)* With the old lady? Just keep it cool, you understand? Keep it cool, you understand? You understand?

WILLIE

What are you talking about, Pants?

PANTS

Huh? You know what I'm talking about! You know what I'm talking about! Doctor SAM! Okay? Doctor SAM! Okay? Okay? I gotta go! Okay? I gotta go!

(He exits hurriedly, waving and smiling at FLAMINIA, who waves and smiles back.)

WILLIE

I mean . . . as I was saying . . . I present myself to you all. . . . (He feels his body.) I present my . . . SELF . . . SELF . . . to YOU . . . to YOU . . . all . . . in various guises . . . of which I am not sure . . . SELF . . . of which I could never be sure . . . SELF . . . and I have the feeling that I have overstayed my presence. . . . (Disgust at his body. He howls.)

FLAMINIA

What's the matter with you?

WILLIE

I can't make it. (Diddling his lower lip) I can't make it, Flaminia!

FLAMINIA

(Coming forward)

Well, stop it. Here, have some of this. (She produces a small tin-foil packet.)

WILLIE

I don't want any.

FLAMINIA

Go on, it'll make you feel better. (She sniffs a pinch of white powder from the packet.) I'll have some with you.

WILLIE

I don't want any.

FLAMINIA

Go ahead, Willie. I'm trying to help you.

WILLIE

Yeah? (He takes the packet and sniffs greedily.) Help is on its way.

FLAMINIA

Besides, I need you to do something for me.

WILLIE

(Snorting)

I thought so.

(CYNTHIA re-enters, a finger in her mouth, and stands by FLAMINIA. We hear a tape recording of MARTIN giving CYNTHIA a beating. Horrendous wailing and shouting.)

WILLIE

What's that?

CYNTHIA

It's me. I'm being beaten up.

(FLAMINIA strikes an innocent pose. WILLIE and CYNTHIA stare at one another until the beating is over.)

WILLIE

That's a shame.

FLAMINIA

It's a family affair.

PANTS

(Rushing in as CYNTHIA runs off)

Flaminia! Flaminia! Where's Martin? Huh? They're after me! The heat's on! I can feel it! They're after me! (Rushes off.)

FLAMINIA

What? Who's after you? Come back here! Pants?

WILLIE

Maybe he's right, heh, heh.

FLAMINIA

Yeah? (Grabbing the packet) Look, Willie, Pants isn't what he used to be. I don't think he can handle it. He's a little off his beam.

WILLIE

So?

FLAMINIA

I want you to contact Doctor Sam, and change the code.

WILLIE

Why don't you send Martin?

FLAMINIA

Martin goes to college.

WILLIE

Oh, I forgot. Heaven forbid.

FLAMINIA

I wouldn't want him to blow his thing, after all.

PANTS

(*Offstage*)

Flaminia! They're after me! The heat's on! I can feel it! They're after me! Flaminia! (FLAMINIA *exits left.*)

WILLIE

(*Shouting after her*)

I'll think about it!

PANTS

(*Entering right*)

Where's my wife? Huh?

WILLIE

How should I know?

PANTS

She was just here. I can smell her remains.

WILLIE

She left.

PANTS

That woman is up to something. Where'd she go? Huh? Huh?

WILLIE

She didn't say.

PANTS

(*Cuffing him*)

What's going on? Huh? Who is in on it? Come on, come on, what are you trying to do to me? Huh? Huh?

WILLIE

We were talking about an old face we used to know. A bad face, come to think of it. From the old days. Don't do that.

PANTS

(*Hitting him*)

Who? Who? Tell me! Tell me, or I'll drown you in a pinball machine! So help me. I'm gonna take you, and I'm gonna wire you to one of my machines, and I'm gonna dump you in the ocean!

WILLIE

Stop that. My left eye twitches for hours when you do that. Don't do that.

PANTS

Okay, let's have it. Out with it!

WILLIE

Doctor Sam.

PANTS

(*Terrified*)

Doctor Sam? Yeah? Doctor Sam? Yeah? So? So?

WILLIE

So, nothing.

PANTS

What do you mean, nothing? Nothing?

WILLIE

Just talk, Pants, I swear it. A reminiscence. Your fly is open.

PANTS

(*Running off right*)

I'll kill her!

WILLIE

(*Pointing left*)

She went that way!

(PANTS *reverses direction, runs off left.*)

PANTS

I'll kill her!

WILLIE

Shmuck!

(FLAMINIA comes back in right.)

FLAMINIA

Listen, now do what I tell you, or else. I want you to take the following message to Doctor Sam.

WILLIE

No. Doctor Sam? No.

FLAMINIA

Yes. Tell him: The Cowboy is dead. Period.

WILLIE

No, I don't want to. I'm scared.

FLAMINIA

Here, have another snort. There's nothing to be afraid of. You got that? The Cowboy is dead. Repeat after me: The Cowboy is dead.

WILLIE

The Cowboy is dead.

FLAMINIA

Right. That's all. I'll be back. *(Exits)*

WILLIE

The Cowboy is dead. Terrific.

(He sinks to his knees, rolls his eyes, clasps his hands, and prays.)

Doctor Sam? Doctor Sam? Doctor Sam?

VOICE OFF

(Deep business-head drawl)

Yes?

WILLIE

Doctor Sam?

VOICE

Yes?

WILLIE

(Astonished)

Doctor Sam?

VOICE

(Annoyed)

I hear you, boy!

WILLIE

(In tears)

Doctor Sam?

VOICE

What!

WILLIE

Why . . . it's a terrible thing that's happened, sir . . . a terrible, terrible thing, sir. . . .

VOICE

Yes? Go on.

WILLIE

Yes, sir . . . it's about the Cowboy, sir, the Cowboy . . . he was going down the road, just going down the road, sir, minding his own business. And he was riding his favorite horse, Spot, sir . . . and he was enjoying the peace, sir, of the early evening, and feeling nice and relaxed . . . smoking a cigarette, as a matter of fact, sir . . . riding off into the night . . . and . . .

VOICE

Yes?

WILLIE

Yes, sir . . . and he was riding quietly into the night . . . and . . . and he was attacked by Indians, sir. . . .

VOICE

Go on, son.

WILLIE

And the Indians attacked him, sir . . . and . . .

VOICE

Yeah?

WILLIE

And . . . and . . . and they ate him, sir.

(*A silence*)

VOICE

(*Slow and even*)

Listen, boy.

WILLIE

Yes, sir. Yes, Doctor Sam. I'm listening, sir.

VOICE

Don't bother to call here no more, boy. Tear up my number. You read me, boy?

WILLIE

Yes, sir. I read you, sir.

VOICE

You are no longer useful to the industry, boy.

(*Click*)

WILLIE

Yes, Doctor Sam. . . .

(*A pause. He whispers:*)

Which of you is the Button Pusher?

(*PANTS enters, distraught.*)

PANTS

Something is fishy around here. I can feel it in my bowels.

WILLIE

You need an enema.

PANTS

(*Hitting him*)

I told you not to make smart remarks! Didn't I? I told you that, didn't I? Huh? Didn't I?

WILLIE

Yes, you did. You did. You told me, Pants.

PANTS

Now, be quiet—I've got to concentrate. I'm getting shafted. You hear me? They've been stealing my machines. That's for sure. You hear me? I just don't know who! Who! Who! Who! I've got to think!

WILLIE

Oh, I have a telegram for you.

PANTS

A telegram? A telegram?

WILLIE

Yes, it's from Doctor Sam.

PANTS

(*Hitting him*)

Doctor Sam? Doctor Sam? Why didn't you tell me before? Huh? What's the matter with you? Huh?

WILLIE

I just got it, Pants! Leave me alone! I just got it!

PANTS

Okay, read it to me. Fast.

WILLIE

(*Produces telegram, on a matchbook cover, reads fast.*)

To: Mr. Pants. Spook house. Coney Island. Brooklyn. Big Blonde down. Gives good head. Dead Little Blue Baby. Watch your Heavy Hippie Momma. Perpetually yours. Stop. Doctor Sam. Hollywood, California.

PANTS

What? What? That's too fast! Read it again! Fast!

WILLIE

To: Mr. Pants. Spook house. Coney Island. Brooklyn. Stuff bad. Death rate up. Fifteen-per-cent margin. Watch your ass. Blow your beak. Perpetually yours. Stop. Doctor Sam. Hollywood, California.

PANTS

(Backing off)

What? What? What? Oh, my God!

(Rushes off left. FLAMINIA enters right. They have a very rapid face to face rap.)

FLAMINIA

What was that all about?

WILLIE

Nothing. He smells a rat——

FLAMINIA

He smells his own crap in the wind——

WILLIE

You shouldn't talk like that in front of people——

FLAMINIA

You're highly sensitive, aren't you?

WILLIE

Highly. See? My right eye twitches. It's my nerves——

FLAMINIA

Too much speed——

WILLIE

Yeah. You're probably right——

FLAMINIA

You ought to get off it for a while——

WILLIE

I know. It's not easy——

FLAMINIA

Too bad. You're ruining your health——

WILLIE

I know——

FLAMINIA

Maybe you could switch to No-Doz——

WILLIE

I did try Benzidrex one time——

FLAMINIA

No good, eh?

WILLIE

No good——

FLAMINIA

How'd you get started, Will?

WILLIE

Oh, I was working as a hairdresser, up in the mountains——

FLAMINIA

In the mountains. No kidding. What town?

WILLIE

South Fallsburgh——

FLAMINIA

Shit, I know that town. There's a traffic light at the bottom of a hill next to a movie house. The Rivoli. Then one short, frantic street ending with another traffic light——

WILLIE

That's the town, Flames! I started with them one-a-day green-and-white spansules. Just to make it, you dig——

FLAMINIA

Sure, I can see how you'd need them, working as a hairdresser up there——

WILLIE

And the soda jerk in the drugstore next door was feeding me ben-nies. Irving, his name was——

FLAMINIA

Irving Murgatroy?

WILLIE

You know Irving?

FLAMINIA

Sure, sure I know Irving. He was the best busboy in the mountains at one time. Before he retired. Very strung out on pills, though.

WILLIE

That's right!

FLAMINIA

Good friend of mine. We used to sit on his station, for goodness sake, every season, season after season, at the old River View Hotel—

WILLIE

That's right!

FLAMINIA

Yes, indeed. Those were the good old days. Legit. He had a younger brother named Eddie, as I recall. Irving did—

WILLIE

That's right!

FLAMINIA

It's a small world—

WILLIE

Sure is—

(A pause. MARTIN appears on the floor area. FLAMINIA, seeing him, slaps WILLIE across the face, hard.)

FLAMINIA

Later, Willie. (Exits)

(WILLIE, on his knees, holds his face and regards the audience. Whispers.)

WILLIE

Where are you? The one with the button? Don't worry, I'll get you. I'll get you, motherfucker!

(He feels around the floor of the platform, putting his fingertips

to his nose and snorting. He gives up, crawls to the edge, almost touches, changes his mind, withdraws. MARTIN, watching him, goes over to the BUTTON PUSHER, with whom he has a casual conversation. The lights dim out.)

WILLIE

Aha! Hey, Martin! Is that you out there, Martin? This is for you, Martin. . . .

(He takes a prayer candle from his jacket pocket, lights it, contemplates it in the dark.)

This is how it all began, Martin, see? With a light in the dark, that's all . . . it's lovely . . . it's a lovely fountain, see . . . nothing else is necessary . . . nothing . . . you never get bored, looking at a prayer candle. When your head is right. (A long pause. Voices) And then I heard voices, Martin . . . which disturbed my peace. But I said to myself: "Go on, man, go out and join the others . . . express your joy with them. . . ." (He rises. Music—"The End," by The Doors—begins here and builds until CYNTHIA's line.) Oh, it was marvelous, Martin! Dancers! Musicians! Drums! Flutes! Tambourines! Vibrations! Lights! Moving pictures! Magical blue guitars!

(He dances, growing more ecstatic, the candle in his hand. CYNTHIA enters, draws him into dancing with her, tempting him severely. The music builds to a crescendo and then fades down.)

CYNTHIA

Can you get it up, Willie? (No reply) See if you can get it up, Willie, come on. . . . (Giggles) Come on, Willie. . . .

WILLIE

Can I get it up? Can I get it up? No, I can't.

CYNTHIA

Oh, Willie . . . poor Willie . . . too bad. . . . (A pause)

WILLIE

I don't mind. (Another pause)

CYNTHIA

I'll tell you a secret, Willie.

WILLIE

What's that?

CYNTHIA

Promise not to tell.

WILLIE

Okay, I promise.

CYNTHIA

I hate my parents, because they don't like Negroes. And I love Negroes. *(A pause)*

WILLIE

Negroes?

(PANTS rushes in, with MARTIN.)

PANTS

Silence!

(The music stops. WILLIE blows out the candle.)

WILLIE

Darkness!

MARTIN

Cynthia!

CYNTHIA

(Annoyed)

What?

(A spot comes on to reveal WILLIE crawling to the edge of the platform. Static, a shock, etc. He freezes.)

MARTIN

Willie is a bad man. He never sees the good side of things. He's maladjusted. When he looks at a flower, he sees death. When he looks at people, he sees creeps. He is mentally deranged and morally demented. You shouldn't play with him.

CYNTHIA

I can play with him if I want to!

MARTIN

No, you can't!

(He leads CYNTHIA off.)

FLAMINIA

(Offstage)

CYNTHIA!

(A pause. WILLIE and PANTS are alone.)

PANTS

(Hitting him as the stage lights come back up.)

Listen, you! I don't like little men in general. *(Hits him.)* They're sly and they have sneaky ways. I like you even less. There's something wrong with you.

WILLIE

I have eyes. That's what's wrong with me. If I didn't have eyes, that would be wrong with me. And people would say: Look at Willie, he ain't got no eyes. But I do. I have eyes.

PANTS

I think I'm going to have to get rid of you.

WILLIE

Get rid of me?

PANTS

You heard me. My son says you're not functioning properly.

(MARTIN enters.)

WILLIE

Get rid of me? YAAAAAAA! That's a joke.

MARTIN

You're not functioning properly.

WILLIE

(Pointing at his eyes)

These aren't eyes, they're marbles. Really. One's a puree and one's a jumbo.

MARTIN

That's what I mean. We allow you to stay here, but you rave. . . .

WILLIE

You allow me to stay here?

MARTIN

And you have to behave yourself.

WILLIE

(*Incredulous*)
Here?

PANTS

You got it, kid.

MARTIN

Correct.

WILLIE

Thanks. That's nice of you. Why don't you just turn me loose? You know, I don't want to be a hassle to you folks. I'm crazy, anyway. Why don't you just get that woman with the button out of here and fire me, let me go? But first you got to get rid of that goddamn Button Pusher.

MARTIN

You know that's not up to us, Willie. It's up to Doctor Sam.

WILLIE

Where is she? (*He looks.*) He'll do it for you, Pants. Won't he? You're a big man. Why don't you ask him?

PANTS

(*Hitting him*)

That's fast, smart talk, Willie. I told you about smart talk, didn't I, Willie? Ain't gonna do you a bit of good. Might even get you iced, Willie. Iced! Ha, ha!

WILLIE

(*Hysterical*)
Ha, ha, ha!

MARTIN

This is a new scene, Willie, a new era. We are undergoing tremendous change. Technological change, teleological change, metaphysical change. These, of course, will cause sociological chaos. Momentarily. Political, economical, societal, and sexual evolution. Not revolution, mind you, evolution.

WILLIE

I can't wait, kids. Sounds like a riot. Lots of fun for the boys in East New York. Me? Just let me go my own way. I'll go back to the mountains. I was a damn good busboy once. Maybe I'll even make waiter this time.

PANTS

Oh, yeah? Where'd you ever work?

WILLIE

All over. Zalkin's Birchwood Lodge. The Avon Lodge. The Nevele Country Club. Chester's Zunbarg. The River View. . . .

PANTS

The River View? The River View?

WILLIE

Damn right.

PANTS

The River View? No kidding?

WILLIE

Yeah. I was the head children's busboy. Captain of the busboys in the children's dining room.

PANTS

Now, that's something. Used to go there myself. As a guest, of course. Let's see, the waiter's name was Tosh. Harry Tosh. That's something. Comes back to me now. Sure, he had the best busboy in the mountains, as I remember . . . best busboy in the entire mountains . . . name was——

WILLIE

Irving.

PANTS

Irving! That's it, Irving! They called him . . . They called him—

MARTIN and PANTS

Murgatroy Box!

PANTS

Murgatroy Box! Because his feet stunk, heh, heh. You get it? Damn good busboy!

MARTIN

I was a waiter at the Concord!

PANTS

That's right!

WILLIE

Big deal. It's the worst joint in the mountains. I know that place. It's a gigantic nuthouse. Twenty-five a weekend for group therapy with two thousand strangers just like you. Meanwhile, all the help is at each other's throats, hustling the inmates. You have to fight for your goddamn silverware to set the tables with! And the coffee cups! Forget about the coffee cups! And take shit from a whole race of degenerate dining-room employees, mountain rats! Not to mention the guests—those whining women with metal hair! And their fucked-up slobbering kids! And their fat husbands trying to act like *machers!*

PANTS

Machers?

WILLIE

You could puke from it! And in the kitchen it's worse! Everybody takes it seriously! It's life or death! Waitresses push you around . . . cooks scream at you . . . dishwashers spit at you . . . and . . .

MARTIN

You're just bitter, Willie. I did all right.

WILLIE

I bet you did.

MARTIN

I worked my way through college.

WILLIE

(*Spitting into a hand*)

Here's a medal for you.

(*Wipes his hand on MARTIN's jacket*)

Now, take it home and show it to your mommy now, before it dries.

MARTIN

You'll be sorry you did that, Willie.

WILLIE

I'm sorry already.

MARTIN

I will finish what I began to say.

WILLIE

Straight ahead, Marty.

MARTIN

I have studied carefully, and thought hard. I have many friends who think as I do. We are armed and in contact with the best in the country. The cream. It will take a bitter effort and struggle to get rid of the scum, but once we get control the transition will be easier. Hard times, discipline, love of country, better business practices, new markets, and states' rights! (*Makes the Nazi salute.*)

PANTS

Stick around, kid.

WILLIE

Oh, fuck that, man—what if I don't want to?

PANTS

We'll have to cut your balls off.

MARTIN

We just might have to do that.

(*A pause*)

WILLIE

(Searching the audience)

Changes . . . I go through changes all the time . . . what's that? . . . First they ask for hot prune juice, then they give you shock treatments, then they cut your nuts off. What's that? *(To MARTIN)* Where'd you learn all that stuff?

MARTIN

In school.

WILLIE

It figured. I'm getting out of here! *(He leaps for the edge—static, a shock, flashing lights.)* Shit. *(To the audience)* Whoever you are, I'll get you. Remember me, I'll get you. I'll get your children and your children's children and your nice little grandma in your home town. A plague on you, and all your house. A plague on you.

PANTS

(To MARTIN)

Listen to that! *(To WILLIE)* We don't like your attitude. It's uncooperative and resentful. No wonder you had so many different jobs.

MARTIN

Right. Resentful and uncooperative.

WILLIE

Hey, man, I was just getting the hang of things around here.

MARTIN

I'm out of school now, Willie. Don't forget that. It's time to get serious. It's time to move.

PANTS

(Hitting him)

We're not fuckin' around!

WILLIE

I can tell! I can tell!

PANTS

You've got to be more humble, kid.

MARTIN

There's money to be made in intellectual circles these days, Willie, and important political work to be done. We've got to get this country moving forward again. You're not stupid.

WILLIE

Yes, I am. I'm just an uneducated meth freak, Martin.

MARTIN

We want nothing less than a new breed of man, a new breed altogether!

PANTS

And new markets.

WILLIE

Martin?

MARTIN

What!

WILLIE

Please don't yell. It makes my eyes twitch. By the way, who is the Button Pusher?

MARTIN

We will tolerate no insubordination, no questions, no diversions, no unclean thoughts, and no kinks!

PANTS

That's a fact.

WILLIE

I believe you, I believe you.

MARTIN

And our women must be protected. It's a question of good upbringing, bad influences, and strange temptations. Purity is the only desirable state, in the long run.

PANTS

For a woman, for a woman . . . uh . . . and for everybody else, too—right?

MARTIN

Right.

WILLIE

Look, boys, purity is the last thing I need right now; if you don't mind, I'd just as soon split.

PANTS

We took you in, kid. We gave you a home.

WILLIE

I was abducted.

MARTIN

It is a proper domicile.

WILLIE

A what?

PANTS

Take a look around. You see any dirt? Not a particle of dust or a blemish—anywhere.

MARTIN

Mother is a good woman.

PANTS

It's spotless.

WILLIE

What about Doctor Sam? What about the Cowboy?

PANTS

(*Frightened*)

Doctor Sam? The Cowboy?

MARTIN

(*Uptight*)

I believe only in the epistemologically clear!

WILLIE

What?

MARTIN

The cut of the real, goddamn it!

PANTS

Exactly right. I'm behind you one hundred percent, son.
(*FLAMINIA enters. WILLIE rushes up to her.*)

WILLIE

Flaminia! You've got to do something. Call Doctor Sam!

FLAMINIA

It's time you kicked, Will. Calm down, Martin.

WILLIE

What? I don't want anything. Nothing! I'm out of my skull! I'm no good to anyone in this . . . condition. . . . Turn me loose!

FLAMINIA

Oh, Willie—it's beyond our control. We just work here. You know that.

PANTS

We do the best we can, making ends meet, pleasing the public. Brooklyn ain't what it used to be, you know.

WILLIE

I'm tired. I want to go to the country. I need a rest. What's happening?

PANTS

Hang in there, kid.

FLAMINIA

Leave it alone, Will . . . it's better that way.

PANTS

Yeah, don't worry so much. We're going to get everything straight. Aren't we, son?

MARTIN

We sure are, Dad.

FLAMINIA

(*To PANTS, as they return to their stools, arm in arm*)
 Button your fly, dear. Where's Cynthia? Oh, here she comes.
 (CYNTHIA enters, carrying a whip. WILLIE sinks to his knees.)

CYNTHIA

Oh, Willie. It's too bad, you know . . . Poor Willie . . . (*She joins her parents.*)

MARTIN

Take it easy, Willie. (*He jumps off platform and leaves area.*)

WILLIE

(*To audience*)
 I piss on you
 (PANTS, FLAMINIA, and CYNTHIA wave and make faces at the audience.)

WILLIE

(*Toward the stage*) Listen to me! So I finally put my head through the window, and it bled! It bled for hours . . . (*To the audience*) He didn't feel a thing . . . he saw a head smash through the window streaked with blood, like war paint. It made an exquisite sound, the sound of broken glass cutting the flesh. . . .
 (The "telephone" rings. WILLIE answers despondently.)
 Hello.

VOICE OF DOCTOR SAM

Listen, boy.

WILLIE

I'm listening, Doc.

VOICE

Somebody is trying to confuse my mind.

WILLIE

It ain't me.

VOICE

I don't take kindly to it.

WILLIE

What happens next, Doc?

VOICE

Oh, nothing out of the ordinary, Will. It's business as usual. Like to know who's been playing with my head, though.

WILLIE

It ain't me, Doc. I swear!

VOICE

Never did like that sort of thing.

WILLIE

Well, how do you think I feel?

VOICE

How do I think you feel? . . . That's vague, boy. That's irrelevant. Nothing to do with the problem.

WILLIE

They want to clean up the mess down here, Doc. Everything's gonna be nice and white. No garbage, no losers.

VOICE

That's all right with me. I like clean streets.

WILLIE

Sure, Doc.

VOICE

We'll change the uniforms.

WILLIE

Groovy.

VOICE

So long, son. Be good, now. (*Click*)
 (WILLIE bows his head. A silence. He looks up, raises his arms to the audience. His eyes are twitching.)

WILLIE

THE FREAKS ARE . . . PER-PETUALLY . . . HUNTED . . . (He is having difficulty getting the words out. He tries harder as the others begin to razz him.) I WALK . . . ALWAYS . . . I WALK . . . STRANGERS . . . MIRRORS . . . DRIFTING . . . MY IMAGE . . . (The others get louder, taunting him: Get on with it, Willie. More, Willie. Say it, Willie, etc.) I . . . I . . . MY . . . SELF . . . SELF . . . HOWLS . . . ON . . . MARION-ETTES . . . MAR . . . I . . . OH . . . NETTEES . . .

(Finally he can no longer speak at all. He rasps and growls, attempting to speak. He cannot. The others come forward. They become as animal trainers, with WILLIE as the terrified animal. He screams and froths at the mouth. He attacks and is driven back. MARTIN helps the others from the floor, shouting and beating on the platform, until WILLIE is cornered. Then he sets up a soapbox and microphone on the floor in front of the audience.

WILLIE makes a last desperate attempt to break the invisible barrier around the platform. A loud, long blast of static, etc. WILLIE screams and crumples into a heap.

A silence.

The BUTTON PUSHER suddenly rushes under the rope and out of the theater.

PANTS, FLAMINIA and CYNTHIA wheel the platform back to its original position. The stage lights go out and a spot comes on the soapbox and microphone. MARTIN climbs the box officiously, clears his throat, tests the microphone, and speaks.)

MARTIN

I have never asked the impossible. Nor have I promised it. Not to myself, nor anyone else. Consequently, I have no illusions. I deal only with reality, with the issues before us. A fantasy is a cold in the mind, after all. Dreamers are not to be trusted, are usually failures, and carry little weight in the community. We need strong, firm men of high character—men who will not flinch at responsibility—men who will shoulder the burden of a new society, a righteous, purified one, one organized according to the highest principles of order and light; in a word, of Christian virtue. The time to begin is NOW. Thank you very much.

(The spot goes out. We hear the snapping of fingers at one-second intervals three times. On the third snap the stage area is brightly illumined with silvery light. There, as if clipped onto the black wall, is a perfect effigy of WILLIE THE GERM. He is naked from the waist down, arms stiffly at his sides, eyes staring straight ahead. His balls are bleeding. High static.

Three seconds. The light goes out, the curtain closes on the effigy, the stage lights come back up. The FREAKS wheel the platform up to the stage, as before, and take their places.)

FLAMINIA

Come on, Willie. Get up.

PANTS

Get up, Willie.

MARTIN

Rise and shine, Willie, it's not that bad.

CYNTHIA

Poor Willie.

(They all freeze.)