

THE GINGHAM DOG

by Lanford Wilson

ACT I

Lanford Wilson's play is a portrait of a dissolving interracial marriage on its final day. Gloria, a black woman, and Vincent, her white husband, are dividing up the belongings of their East Village apartment. The air is full of recriminations and painful accusations as Vincent packs his things. Vincent's sister, Barbara, has come by to help her brother move. She is a young, naïve southerner who has been in New York only a short time. Vincent has just exited to get more packing boxes, leaving Barbara and Gloria alone. Gloria is upset and tries to ignore Barbara's attempts at conversation. As the scene progresses, the underlying hostilities the two women feel toward each other are revealed.

GLORIA: Barbara, Barbara, Barbara, before you get all snug and cuddly there—I've got a lot to do and I don't want to be rude, but I just don't feel like a chat. To be perfectly frank I've never liked you and I can't pretend to—

BARBARA: Oh, I don't blame you, actually. I've known you didn't like me really. But I've always liked you. A lot. I didn't want to chat or anything. I just—

GLORIA: I just don't care to talk about my private life with you.

BARBARA: I'm not interested in your and Vincent's sex life—

GLORIA:—Oh, my god—

BARBARA:—Anyway, I'm sure that it was probably just as normal as anyone. I just wanted you to know that I'm sorry you and Vincent are divorcing like this. ~~Gloria looks at her.~~ I still feel that if you had talked about it, you wouldn't have to be, is all.

GLORIA: Vince and I have spent the whole day avoiding talking about it and I think that's best. The thought of a girl-to-girl chat nauseates me.

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BARBARA, exiting to the bathroom quite cool: I know why you don't like me—and I don't think it's fair, really.

GLORIA, to herself in the second she is gone: Phoney white tramp.

BARBARA, reentering a few minutes later, drunk: You feel that I'm Southern. Because I speak the way I do; you feel I'm just a typical Southerner.

GLORIA: Barbara, I don't think of you as typically anything—exactly.

BARBARA: Yes you do, you think I sound like a hillbilly and you're right: I can tell I don't talk as well as you, that I don't sound like people in New York. Are these his?

GLORIA: Yes. Barbara, in you a hillbilly accent is charming. In my brother, or one of my sisters, it would be a sure sign of stupidity. You can be vapid and dumb and wide-eyed as all hell but if Cynthia or Nora looked wide-eyed it would be comical. They have to practically *squint!* It's a joke.

BARBARA: Well, they joke about hillbillies, too. I don't think it's so damn charming. And you're wrong about people laughing at the way Negroes talk. I haven't heard a good colored-people joke in two years—And on TV the only people who can put on a dumb accent anymore are Negroes.

GLORIA: Yes. Well, we've earned the privilege.

BARBARA: Is Cynthia and Nora the names of your sisters? I didn't know you had more than one sister, Gloria.

GLORIA: I have four sisters and two brothers living.

BARBARA: I didn't know that. How old are they?

GLORIA: I don't know. I haven't seen them in a long time; Cynthia's fourteen; Nora's eight or nine.

BARBARA: Why did you say "living?"

GLORIA: One brother died at birth and a sister died in infancy.

BARBARA: Oh. I didn't know that.

GLORIA: Well, you asked—

BARBARA: I didn't—

GLORIA:—It's an occupational hazard of being a poor Harlem Black. You shouldn't trouble yourself with it—

BARBARA:—Well, not just Black—

GLORIA:—It's something the "outside" shouldn't and doesn't trouble itself with. What did you say?

BARBARA: I said, not just Black. Not just the poor Harlem

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Black. Back home—our home, near Louisville—they aren't city slum or black, they're just poor. But they have baby after baby dying like flies. They have—every shack along the road has a screaming, dirty, skinny mess of kids on the porch, and a grave plot alongside the house with four or five markers. It's no different.

GLORIA: It's a great deal different, when it's your own sister dead on the bed in front of you, my dear.

BARBARA: You don't think about other people, Gloria, you never once do; and you're very smart, actually, about other things—

GLORIA:—When every apartment is wall-to-wall screaming and filth, every pore of the rotting building you live in is death, you don't consider other people's misery, Barbara. I *lived* in misery.

BARBARA: Well, so did millions of other people. *Worse*. Not me, although it wasn't much better. It's not so crowded in Harlem as it is in Indonesia. In Indonesia people, millions of people, are living on just one bowl of—

GLORIA:—Fuck Indonesia! ~~Fuck~~ Fuck the Indonesians. What the hell are the Indonesians to me?

BARBARA: Well, I'm not saying you didn't. We sound like a contest of who knows the worst conditions. I didn't want to start something like that. I just came here to help Vincent.

GLORIA: Well, everything is between Vince and me; I didn't intend to go into my dingy family heritage for you.

BARBARA: I didn't know you had a brother and sister that died.

GLORIA: Well, now that you do, I'm sure you won't let it trouble you any.

BARBARA: Of course it will. Maybe I can think that that helps to explain how you feel about—

GLORIA: It doesn't explain anything about me!

BARBARA: It's you're so—I honestly don't know! You tell me all that like you were *proud* of your sister dying and *proud* of—

GLORIA: *I AM! PROUD! I am proud!*

PATIO/PORCH

by Jack Heifner

Set on the porch of an old Victorian house somewhere in Texas, *Porch* depicts the relationship between Dot and Lucille. Dot is a cranky, irritable old woman who dominates her spinster daughter. Throughout this one-act play their dialogue reveals the frustration and mutual torment they inflict on each other.

This scene takes place at the end of the play. Dot is complaining about the noisy fan Lucille uses in her room. The argument quickly turns into accusations and threats as mother and daughter attack each other with their arsenals of long-standing grievances.

DOT: That thing sure is loud.

LUCILLE: Yes.

DOT: I can hear it running at night. I can hear it running in your room.

LUCILLE: So?

DOT: You have this buzz fan for coolness, don't you?

LUCILLE: Sure.

DOT: I don't suppose you use it to drown out noise?

LUCILLE: What?

DOT, *yelling*: What do you do in your room?

LUCILLE: Nothing.

DOT: Good.

LUCILLE: Why good?

DOT: I'm glad to know nothing's going on that I shouldn't hear. I don't want you sneaking around on me. You don't do sneaky things do you, Lucy?

LUCILLE: No . . . well, no. Well, sometimes Helen comes over. It's not sneaky, she just comes in.

DOT: When? Helen? Helen who?

LUCILLE: Helen . . . from down the block. I went to school with her and sometimes she drops by when she gets off work at the movie.

DOT: At night?