

THE SWITCH

By Arthur Kraft

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CHARACTERS

JOEL COOPER	age 30's, high school psychologist; idealistic, uptight.
CELIA COOPER	age 30's, JOEL's supportive and cheerful wife.
GEORGE BENTLEY	age 30's, high school music teacher, carefree, makes up tall tales on the spur of the moment.
MARTHA BENTLEY	age 30's, GEORGE's wife, not taken in by him.
RUFUS CASTERBROCK	age 60's, CELIA's uncle, wealthy, brash.
A WAITER	nosey
A POLICEMAN	gruff
MISS THORPE	age 50's, school secretary, an iceberg.
FRED	a serious teacher
HARRIET	a gushy teacher
GUIDANCE COUNSELOR	serious
STELLA CARSON	a severe, old-maid teacher.
RALPH HIGGINS	the ebullient principal.
HEPHZIBAH HIGGINS	his dumpy wife with coke-bottle glasses.
NANCY	student, a beginning trombone player, must be able to actually play.
TOM BRADFIELD	student, an experienced trombone player.
HARRY	student, a wise-guy clarinetist.
CHARLOTTE	student, a serious violinist.
STAGE MANAGER	a student, earnest.
PETER MACKINTYRE	student, wily
ALVIN	student, fearful
YVETTE NICHOLSON	student, defiant
DAN BAILEY	student, somber, in love with CHARLOTTE.

PROPS

2 portable phones (Celia/Bentley)

2 bowls of hors d'oeuvres

Teacher's mailboxes (cubbies)

Small box with room keys (Thorpe)

Clipboard with sheet of paper (Thorpe)

Pen (Thorpe)

Sun glasses (Joel)

3x5 card (Joel)

Waste basket, see-through

File box or cabinet

Papers in file box

Pile of music manuals

"Whiskey" in glass

Tape recorder (Joel)

Mail (Bentley)

Cell phone (Rufus)

"Sally's Salon" poster

Music stand

Trombone music

3x5 pass slip (Tom)

2 trombones and cases (Nancy, Tom)

Rorschach cards

Yellow lined pad and pencil

Small pad for pass slip (Bentley)

4 box lunches on cardboard trays

Towel (Celia)

violin and case (Charlotte)

clarinet and case (Harry)

baton (Joel)

Orchestral score (accordion type)

Note (Charlotte)

Phone book

Cup (coffee)

Regular phone, black, for pay phone

Blanket

Paper, pen for letter (Joel)

Checkbook, pen (Rufus)

TIME & PLACE

Anywhere in present time U.S.A. A unit set represents multiple locations, all suggested by a few chairs and a desk or whatever is needed so that they can be changed in seconds allowing the flow of the play to be continuous.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Furniture is indicated only the first time a set is used. Suggestion: Joel's scenes--his living room, the music room--are stage right while Bentley's are stage left.

Do Not Copy

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ACT I

SCENE 1

At Rise: About 15 seconds of the beginning of the Prelude to Carmen are heard before the Lights come up. JOEL's living room: two chairs by a table and nearby phone. JOEL and CELIA COOPER are seated at the table. JOEL, mid-thirties, glasses, light hair. His face is dirty--or is HE growing a beard? CELIA, early thirties, straight, platinum blond hair.

CELIA: Your beard is coming along nicely, Joel.

JOEL: Thank you, Celia.

CELIA: I mean, considering it's only been three weeks.

JOEL: Maybe now people will stop saying, "What's the matter with your face?"

CELIA: That must be annoying. Do you think it's worth it?

JOEL: Of course it's worth it, Celia. I think a beard will give me a different--uh--personality.

CELIA: You don't want to be you any more?

JOEL: That's not what I mean. It's just--well--as a psychologist, I've always wondered why people have to live with just one personality--you know--be just one person.

CELIA: **(cheerful)** How many people would you like to be, Joel?

JOEL: That's not what I mean. What I mean is, well--take you. You're always cheerful, you know, upbeat, whereas I, I'm--I'm--

CELIA: **(factually, not a put-down)** You're a worry wart.

JOEL: I was thinking more along the lines of obsessive-compulsive.

CELIA: And perfectionistic. Don't forget perfectionistic.

JOEL: Yes. Right. Well, why couldn't I be cheerful and upbeat?

CELIA: You want to be me?

JOEL: That's not what I mean.

CELIA: What do you mean?

JOEL: I mean why couldn't I have a different personality once in a while?

CELIA: I don't know. Why couldn't you?

JOEL: It would be fascinating, a whole new experience. Be like someone else!

CELIA: Who would you like to be, Joel?

JOEL: **(carried away)** What I mean is there's so much to life! If we weren't constrained by habit, if we were more spontaneous, we could react differently. We could lead several different lives!

CELIA: I know you're the psychologist but isn't that called schizophrenia?

JOEL: If only we could react to the here and now. You understand what I'm talking about?

CELIA: Not really. **(The phone rings, SHE answers; on phone)** Joel and Celia Cooper residence. Celia speaking. Oh, hello, Uncle Rufus! **(to JOEL)** Joel, it's Uncle Rufus. **(JOEL clasps his forehead. "Uncle RUFUS" spells trouble! SHE continues on the phone.)** You're where? **(to JOEL)** I'm asking him where he is. **(on phone)** You're here? **(to JOEL)** He's here.

JOEL: **(looks around)** Where?

CELIA: **(on phone)** Where is here? **(to JOEL)** I'm asking him where here is. **(on phone)** The airport? **(to JOEL)** He's at the airport, Joel. **(on phone)** Yes, of course we could meet you for dinner.

JOEL: How can we meet the old geezer for dinner if we just finished eating ten minutes ago?

CELIA: Yes, certainly. The Martinique? **(to JOEL)** Joel, he wants us to meet him at the Martinique. **(JOEL rolls his eyes. SHE continues on the phone.)** Okay, we'll meet you there in 20 minutes. **(to JOEL)** I told him we'd meet him in 20 minutes. **(on phone)** All right, 15 minutes. **(to JOEL)** He wants us there in 15 minutes. **(on phone)** Bye. **(hangs up; to JOEL)** I hung up.

JOEL: Why do we have to drop everything we're doing and jump when your uncle Rufus?

CELIA: Because he has eight million dollars and no children to leave it to and I'm one of three nieces.

(JOEL jumps up from the table. HE and CELIA head off. Lights down.)

SCENE 2

At Rise: The Martinique Restaurant. Two sets of chairs in semi-circles facing downstage representing booths. The left booth has three chairs; the right booth has two. Each has a table. RUFUS CASTERBROCK, 65, rotund, brash, sits in a chair of the three-chair booth. The WAITER stands by. JOEL and CELIA enter from left. The waiter nods to them, tweaks his mustache--which HE does every few seconds--and stares at JOEL's face.

JOEL: What?

WAITER: Nothing, sir.

JOEL: You were staring at my face!

WAITER: I'm sorry, sir.

JOEL: I'm growing a beard, okay?

WAITER: Yes, sir.

JOEL: See? **(rubs his face)**

WAITER: Very masculine. A table for two?

JOEL: It's all right. I see our party.

WAITER: Yes, sir.

(WAITER leaves. JOEL approaches RUFUS, extends his hand to shake but RUFUS looks at his watch.)

RUFUS: I said 15 minutes. It's almost 17.

JOEL: I'm sorry, Uncle Rufus, we seemed to hit every light on the--

RUFUS: I am not your Uncle Rufus, Joel. And what's the matter with your face?

JOEL: Oh, I'm--uh, growing--going to grow--

RUFUS: **(sees CELIA standing behind JOEL)** How are you, Celia? You look lovely.

(RUFUS stands to give CELIA a warm hug, then motions JOEL and CELIA to sit. HE sits afterwards; CELIA is in the middle.)

RUFUS: **(continuing)** I don't have much time between planes, so I've ordered for you already. Shrimp creole.

(JOEL is annoyed but CELIA smiles cheerily.)

CELIA: Well and what have you been up to, Uncle Rufus?

RUFUS: Oh, you know how it is. I keep telling the oil company I'm retired and they keep bringing me back to make one more deal here, one more deal there. It's hard to turn down a hundred thousand dollars for a few weeks' work. **(JOEL's eyes bug out.)** Now they've got me running all over the globe talking to companies with potential drilling sites. **(to CELIA)** And what about you? You're not working, are you?

CELIA: No. But next year I might go back to teaching.

RUFUS: Doesn't Joel make enough to support you? **(to JOEL)** What are you doing for a living these days anyway?

JOEL: I'm still a school psychologist. **(proudly)** Twelve years now.

(GEORGE and MARTHA BENTLEY enter, cross behind JOEL, who does not see them sit in the two-chair booth. BENTLEY, mid-thirties, full beard, dark hair, bow tie, sweater. His build is similar to JOEL's. Unlike JOEL, HE is devil-may-care and sarcastic. MARTHA, with curly, flaming red hair, is straightforward, takes no nonsense from her husband. BENTLEY sits back to back with JOEL.)

RUFUS: **(disbelief)** Twelve years doing that?

JOEL: Well, actually, I have thought of doing something else--in a sense--

CELIA: Just tonight Joel said he would like to have two personalities.

(JOEL winces.)

RUFUS: I didn't know he had one.

JOEL: What I meant was, why should people be limited by habit? I mean, people just automatically do today what they did yesterday. Why couldn't someone--I mean, me--be like somebody else? Have a new experience?

RUFUS: Good idea. Do it.

JOEL: Do what?

RUFUS: Be somebody else.

JOEL: Well, it's not that simple--

RUFUS: All talk and no action as usual.

JOEL: Huh?

RUFUS: You said it would be good to make a change, have a new experience, be somebody else. Well pick someone! **(looks behind JOEL)** How about this fellow here?

(JOEL is puzzled but BENTLEY has heard RUFUS and now turns around.)

BENTLEY: Joel Cooper!

JOEL: **(turns, his eyes widen as HE sees BENTLEY)** How did you recognize me?

BENTLEY: By the back of your head. It's pointed.

JOEL: George Bentley. **(squints, puts on glasses)** Is that really you?

BENTLEY: You remember my wife, Martha? **(turns to MARTHA)** Martha, this is Cooper, the school shrink.

(JOEL is annoyed by the term "shrink.")

MARTHA: How do you do, Mr. Cooper?

JOEL: Joel. Pleased to meet you. This is my wife, Celia.

BENTLEY: Hi, cutie!

MARTHA: George!

CELIA: And this is my uncle, Rufus Casterbrock.

RUFUS: Good evening to you.

(ALL nod.)

CELIA: I think I remember you from the faculty party at the Donaldsons.

BENTLEY: I'm the principal.

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