

SQUARE KNOT
(A scene for four characters)
By Richard Balthazar

There is no period or setting given, nor stage directions for other than entrances and exits. Like musicians playing jazz, the director and cast may, indeed must, interpret their lines as they will.

CHARACTERS *(in order of appearance)*: John, Mary, Anna, and Charles

(JOHN is onstage. MARY enters.)

JOHN: Hi. I thought I might be seeing you about now.

MARY: I rushed over as soon as I heard. Have you gotten yourself together?

JOHN: Oh, don't worry. I've thought out all the details.

MARY: We've got a while yet if you want to talk about it.

JOHN: Not long enough! That woman has an uncanny talent for bad timing, don't you think?

MARY: Well... Could've been a hell of a lot worse. Like yesterday before we got it from him.

JOHN: Doesn't matter one way or another. What's so hard to understand how I feel about her?

MARY: Because you keep doing the same stupid thing. The other day was ridiculous.

(Enter ANNA, abruptly.)

ANNA: Hi, guys! What's up?

JOHN: Same as always. You seem to have gotten over your little difficulty now.

ANNA: We can hope. It certainly wasn't easy.

MARY: I expect not. By the way, we're waiting for, you know, an unexpected arrival.

ANNA: Good for you. Think you'll get what you want?

JOHN: Most likely, but I bet we'll regret it.

ANNA: That's not so! Of course, as a man, you'd take his side, you snake!

JOHN: Would not. I'm open-minded. Ask anyone.

MARY: So open-minded you didn't even think there was a problem.

JOHN: Hey! I just remembered something he told me to do. Sorry, ladies, back in a bit.

(Exit JOHN.)

ANNA: So she wants to after all? How very accommodating.

MARY: Wouldn't you know! Just when we had it made in the shade.

ANNA: But when you promised her, everything was fine.

MARY: Until that bastard showed up, and it hit the fan. Big-time!

ANNA: It was inevitable. Never fails... Every time...

MARY: He got a kick out of it, you know, just like a man. I spent four days getting it back.

ANNA: How'd you do that? I'd have hated getting surprised like that—out of the blue.

MARY: Not exactly out of the blue. She warned me, but I wouldn't listen. I managed a lot better when I saw him next, but could tell...

ANNA: Have you asked him why he wanted it?

MARY: Who cares? We still get along fairly well.

ANNA: I'm not that adaptable. I wouldn't put up with that for a minute! So how's she handling not having her way this once?

MARY: Not too gracefully. She'll never let us forget.

(Enter CHARLES.)

MARY *(cont'd.)*: Man, am I glad to see you.

CHARLES: Like I believe that... Greetings, gals! Have I missed anything earth-shattering?

MARY: Not recently. As though you'd care.

ANNA: We're expecting her any minute. Look on the bright side. Besides, nothing you can do.

CHARLES: Still, I'll make an honest effort. Long as they do. Deal?

MARY: Okay. So what should we say about it? Anything at all?

CHARLES: I'd rather keep mum. Why does she even need to know?

ANNA: Oh, you know... I say spill the beans—for his own good.

MARY: Let's not rush into this. What if we were to say...

(Enter JOHN.)

JOHN: Say what to whom about whom, pray tell? Oh, I can just imagine. *(to CHARLES)* And what are you doing here? I'm not quite finished yet.

CHARLES: Might be good if we had a little talk—beforehand.

JOHN: With me—or her? Talking's not much good at this point.

ANNA: Now, boys, try to be adults about this.

JOHN: I just want us to keep our motives clear.

MARY: You two better get it sorted out. When she gets here, we'll have to stick to our guns.

ANNA: As far as she knows, we're all mixed up in this. Let's make the best of it. Right, guys?

CHARLES: Eternal optimist. So what's going to happen when she gets here?

JOHN: I'll break it to her. Just watch out for the explosion.

ANNA: Can't wait! Maybe I should also tell her why we got it in the first place.

JOHN: No, I'll do that too. I'm good at getting around her.

MARY: Sure. Can't you be honest with her once in a while?

CHARLES: When he's so successful with deceit? Why change tactics now?

JOHN: Let's not go there. You're on thin ice, friend, after what you said about me yesterday.

CHARLES: I never mentioned you even once—only the gist of the situation.

MARY: So the rest of us are the culprits. Thanks for the favor, traitor.

CHARLES: I'm not here to be accused and abused. Let me know if you survive.

(Exit CHARLES.)

MARY: What did I tell you? He won't face up to anything.

ANNA: What else can he do? *(to JOHN)* And how are you doing on that score?

JOHN: You should keep your nose out of other people's business. Forgive my bluntness.

MARY: I always have. I doubt she will.

JOHN: Indeed, but what can I do? *(to ANNA)* You won't mention the other stuff, will you?

ANNA: Can't promise anything—so much depends on her right now.

MARY: Then maybe you ought to let us deal with this.

ANNA: You wouldn't think I was copping out? It would be easier, maybe.

JOHN: Stay or not, tomorrow will get here one way or another.

ANNA: I'll check back later then. Good luck.

(Exit ANNA.)

JOHN: So, you going to tell me what he's up to now?

MARY: Not like it really matters.

JOHN: Not to you, it seems.

MARY: Nor to anyone else in the long run. Well, well, look who's coming!

CURTAIN

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SLIP KNOT

(A scene for three characters)

By Richard Balthazar

There is no period or setting given, nor stage directions for other than entrances and exits. Like musicians playing jazz, the director and cast may, indeed must, interpret their lines as they will.

CHARACTERS *(in order of appearance)*: Jane, Charles, Mary

(JANE is on stage, and CHARLES enters hurriedly.)

JANE: So... What on earth are we supposed to do now, Charles?

CHARLES: Interesting problem, no? How to cope with a conundrum? Any bright ideas?

JANE: That's why I asked. You're always so intuitive about these things. I don't know what's going to work now, considering all that's come down, so to speak.

CHARLES: How amazing that it should come to this. There was every chance of it working out the way we hoped. Look at this mess! Why, Jane? Why?

JANE: Let's not start that again. We need a plan of action! We can't just sit idly by at a time like this. Should I say something, you know, subtle to her?

CHARLES: I don't think it's our responsibility, dear. Besides, she'd hold it against me.

JANE: But if you said anything to him, he'd hold it against me.

CHARLES: You'd like that, wouldn't you?

JANE: No. How'd we ever get into such a fix? Can we really just let it ride?

CHARLES: I don't think I can. They'll think they got off scot-free, and that just isn't right.

JANE: Okay, how about an anonymous letter?

CHARLES: No. They'd see right through it.

JANE: Yes. We're the only other ones who know. Or are we?

CHARLES: I haven't said anything to anyone. Have you told someone else?

JANE: Nobody. Oh, hell! I say let's drop it—call it water under the bridge. What's done's done. Let 'em get away with it!

CHARLES: Oh, come on. Do you want her to look at you and think such things?

JANE: It doesn't bother me what she thinks. Long as he has no inkling, I can live with it.

CHARLES: Well, it bothers me. It's not like I want revenge, more like justice.

JANE: Is simple justice worth the price? I agree they should know what they did, but where does that leave us?

CHARLES: Exactly. I wish I could just chalk it up to sad experience.

JANE: I still think we should go over there and act like everything's still the same. Besides, I've got better things to think about.

(Enter MARY.)

MARY: Hi, guys. Where have you been? I've been looking all over for you.

JANE: We've been here for a while, taking it easy mostly. How about you?

CHARLES: Nice to see you, Mary! We missed you last night.

MARY: Couldn't make it. We've both been busy as bees. Never a moment to waste.

JANE: You really should slow down a bit. Lower your stress.

CHARLES: When we didn't see you, I thought maybe you'd gone to his place.

MARY: Sorry about that, Charles. We took a detour to another nice place he knows.

JANE: A perfectly lovely view? I know it well.

CHARLES: Indeed. We had a wonderful time there last year, the bunch of us.

MARY: That's what he said. So we're back! Nose to the grindstone and all that.

CHARLES: Have you guys talked over that little scene the other day?

JANE: It doesn't matter, dear. *(to MARY)* Ignore him, honey—he's a bit disturbed right now.

CHARLES: Am not—just hurt.

MARY: You poor thing. Tell me all about it.

JANE: You don't want to know, believe me. Besides, she didn't think it mattered.

MARY: Probably not to her anyway. How about to you, girlfriend?

JANE: I'm fine. Just fine. I'm not the one with my pants in a bunch.

CHARLES: I've got every right to be angry, Mary. After all...

JANE: Wait a minute. I thought you really wanted—

MARY *(interrupting)*: —Of course he did! Didn't you, Charles?

CHARLES: No more than anybody else. *(to JANE)* Does it frighten you?

JANE: Let's drop it! Charles, knock it off!

MARY: Let's not drop it. I want to know why he does stuff like that.

CHARLES: He's just confused. Probably even more so now this has happened.

MARY: Oh dear, when I went over there the other day, I hope I didn't...

JANE: You shouldn't feel like it was your doing. He started it all with his ridiculous attitude.

CHARLES: Well, dear, yours was no better.

JANE: Don't give me that! I thought I was being perfectly rational when you...

CHARLES: Okay, I'll admit I was almost as involved as he was. So sue me!

MARY: Don't blame yourself. She'll never know what she missed.

JANE: Well, not quite never. A while ago I did happen to mention that—

CHARLES (*interrupting*): —You didn't! Oh, shit! Now I look like a fool!

MARY: Nobody will think that, Chuckie! You'll just have to try harder next time.

JANE: I guess I could have said it differently, but that wouldn't change things. We've either got to do something about this or get off the pot!

MARY: We could try, if that would make you feel better.

CHARLES: I'm willing to take the chance. How about an anonymous letter?

(*All laugh.*)

CURTAIN

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HALF HITCH

(*A scene for five characters*)

By Richard Balthazar

There is no period or setting given, nor stage directions for other than entrances and exits. Like musicians playing jazz, the director and cast may, indeed must, interpret their lines as they will.

CHARACTERS (*in order of appearance*): Anna, John, Jane, Charles, and Mary,

(*ANNA, JOHN, and JANE are onstage.*)

ANNA: Isn't it just so perfectly exciting? I can't wait!

JOHN: Of course you can, Anna. Give it a try, girl.

JANE: It's about time he decided to give it back!

ANNA: That's putting it mildly. It's gotten to the point I'm ready for anything.

JOHN: You should have warned me, Jane.

JANE: Now, John, don't go getting cold feet!

JOHN: Not to worry. So where are we supposed to go?

ANNA: To that place over by that shop that sells... you know, those little things for your—

JANE (*interrupting*): —I know right where it is.

JOHN: Good, Jane. You know, I wonder why he had such a hard time figuring it all out.

ANNA: Don't be silly. You wouldn't have done any better.

JOHN: Would too. Why don't you get off my back? At least for a minute.

ANNA: It's for your own good. Oh, it's so exciting!

JANE: You're repeating yourself. Remember, patience is a virtue.

JOHN: And virtue is its own reward.

ANNA: Must you always be so cynical, John?

(*Enter CHARLES and MARY.*)

CHARLES: Is he being cynical again? What is it this time?

JOHN: They're at it again.

MARY: Is everybody ready?

JANE: Looks like you're ready for anything too. Just like Anna.

ANNA: I simply can't wait a second longer!

JOHN: So then don't.

CHARLES: Now, now. I'm looking forward to this too you know.

MARY: Don't gloat. Do you have everything you need, guys?

JANE: That'll be the day. How much longer we got?

CHARLES: Not much. Wait till you see this place!

JOHN: We have. A perfectly lovely view. For what that's worth.

ANNA: Well, I think it will make the experience that much better, John. It will!

MARY: You two should try to get along.

CHARLES: Can't expect folks to agree about everything, Mary.

JANE: You are the realistic one, aren't you, Charles?

JOHN: Besides, that place is perfect for our purposes.

ANNA: Yeh, we can go in one at a time and then out the back way afterwards.

CHARLES: Who wants to go first?

MARY: We really have to get this right.

JANE: Are you sure we can do this?

JOHN: It's a little late to be asking that, Jane.

ANNA: Let's cross that bridge when we come to it.

CHARLES: Who thinks he or she should go first? And why?

ANNA: I suppose I should. I got the idea in the first place.

MARY: Not if he hadn't asked you about it in the first place.

CHARLES: Should I go first? I figured out how to do it.

JANE: You go first for all I care. We mustn't lose this opportunity.

JOHN: She's right. Just do it, somebody!

ANNA: You're going to love it! Let's let Charles go first!

MARY: Maybe you'd be better.

JANE: You're so good at handling him. Go on!

CHARLES: What if I don't want to? He and I've never—

JOHN (*interrupting*): —What's to want to, man? It's your duty!

JANE: Yeh, it'll only take a minute or two. Anna can go next.

ANNA: That probably won't make much difference.

CHARLES: I'd sure think it would.

MARY: Yes, he might think so. He's always liked you.

JOHN: Mary, please don't be that way. He likes you too.

JANE: We can hope so. At least he used to.

MARY: Well, that wasn't my fault.

CHARLES: So why don't you go first? You can do the dirty work.

ANNA: Maybe John should start. He's fairly neutral about the whole thing.

JOHN: Thanks a lot. Has anyone given any thought to what we'll do when we've got it?

MARY: That's another bridge for later, dear. First we get it...

CHARLES: You really think I should?

ALL (*together*): Just do it!

CURTAIN

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SHEEP SHANK

(A scene for four characters)

By Richard Balthazar

There is no period or setting given, nor stage directions for other than entrances and exits. Like musicians playing jazz, the director and cast may, indeed must, interpret their lines as they will.

CHARACTERS (*in order of appearance*): John, Mary, Anna, Charles

(JOHN is on stage when MARY enters.)

JOHN: Hi, Mary! I thought I might be seeing you about now.

MARY: How are you managing today?

JOHN: Oh, don't worry. I've been hard at it all day.

MARY: Well, John, I'm never sure if you'll do what you say you'll do.

JOHN: That's not fair! Can we talk about it? We've got a while yet.

MARY: Not long enough, if you ask me.

JOHN: Well, I think she's not sticking to our agreement.

MARY: Now, don't be that way...

JOHN: What's so hard to understand about the way I feel, Mary?

MARY: Why keep doing the same stupid things? The other day was ridiculous—really!

JOHN: Oh, yeh? I thought it was a lot of fun. So did they.

MARY: I didn't. At least it wasn't about anything important.

(Enter ANNA.)

ANNA: Hi, guys! What's up?

JOHN: Same old thing. Have you gotten over that little difficulty now?

ANNA: We can hope. It sure wasn't easy. He wouldn't cooperate at first.

MARY: I expect not. I mean... So we're just hanging out here waiting for her.

ANNA: Good. What do you think she'll do? Will she want something?

JOHN: Whatever she can get. Take it from me—and she probably will.

MARY: Kill-joy! *(to ANNA)* Let's talk about it later when he's out of the way.

JOHN: I guess I can take a hint.

ANNA: Touchy, touchy! It's just with you being a man, you'd take his side in whatever.

JOHN: Would not. I'm open-minded. Ask anyone.

ANNA: You didn't even see that there was a problem.

MARY: That's right. You should think about what effect you have on people.

JOHN: I can tell when I'm not wanted. I'll just wait for you out there.

(Exit JOHN.)

ANNA: So she's coming here to do it? Why on earth?

MARY: Just when I thought we had it made in the shade.

ANNA: But I heard him say everything would be fine.

MARY: It was for a while. Until he showed up by accident, and it hit the fan.

ANNA: Never fails—when you least need something...

MARY: When he finally got it, things really started popping.

ANNA: Boy, I feel sorry for her. I'd have hated a surprise like that—out of the blue.

MARY: Oh, he warned me, but I didn't listen. Anna, I could just kick myself.

ANNA: Well, I noticed he really got a kick out of it.

MARY: Yeh. That really pissed me off.

(Enter CHARLES.)

MARY *(cont'd.)*: Charles! Am I glad to see you!

CHARLES: Likewise, ladies. Have I missed the show?

ANNA: Nope. She should get here pretty quick. Anything to report before she does?

CHARLES: I got in to see him for a minute just a bit ago. He wasn't concerned about it.

MARY: I imagine not. What a sorry excuse for a—

ANNA *(interrupting)*: —Mary! It's none of our business. Let bygones be...

CHARLES: Look on the bright side, Mary. It's not your problem anymore.

MARY: Oh, isn't it? That's a relief. Thanks a lot.

CHARLES: So what do you think she's going to do?

ANNA: Whatever she does probably won't be very gracious.

MARY: Let's just try and ignore her attitude and get through with it!

CHARLES: Okay, I'll make an honest effort. But I'd like to—

MARY: Don't you say a word to her, you hear!

ANNA: Oh, go on and spill the beans!

(Enter JOHN.)

JOHN *(to CHARLES)*: What are you doing here, Charles?

CHARLES: I thought it might be good if I came by for a talk beforehand.

JOHN: So you've got some beans to spill? She likes beans!

ANNA: Stop it! You two need to grow up! Nobody's going to say anything to her.

MARY: Right, Anna. And we're all used to her tricks.

JOHN: As far as she's concerned, we're all mixed up in this. I should set her straight.

CHARLES: Don't you dare! I think I'd better get out of here.

JOHN: Coward. You know, one of these days she'll get you too.

CHARLES: Always better later than now, John. I'm off to fight another day.

(Exit CHARLES.)

MARY: Just what I expected. He won't face up to anything!

ANNA: Why should he? *(to JOHN)* But what have you got to say for yourself?

JOHN: I've had only the best of intentions all through this mess.

MARY: But you couldn't keep your nose out of other people's business.

JOHN: Now wait a minute. It was my business. And I really don't like her doing this!

ANNA: Well, I'm not very happy about her plans either. I feel like telling her off.

JOHN: You know, Anna, maybe you ought to let us deal with her.

ANNA: Not a half-bad idea. You wouldn't think I was copping out, would you?

MARY: Not in the least. I just wish I could. Ciao.

ANNA: Good luck.

(Exit ANNA.)

MARY: Looks like it's just you and me, babe—again.

JOHN: So would you like to tell me what he's up to now—before she gets here?

MARY: It's not like it really matters, John. Not anymore. Not in the long run.

CURTAIN

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