

An excerpt from

## **DOMESTIC TRANQUILITY**

a comedy by Rich Orloff

### *Characters*

ETHEL MILLER, a middle-aged housewife

HERBERT MILLER, her middle-aged husband

CINDY MILLER, almost 18, their daughter

LOU CALENDO, an escaped convict

TONY CALENDO, late 20's, Lou's younger brother

SPOT, an escaped convict

Also the voices of a RADIO ANNOUNCER and a POLICE OFFICER

### *Setting*

A nice home in a nice suburb. The nice 1950's.

It's the mid-1950's, and into the home of HERBERT and ETHEL MILLER and their daughter CINDY (who is days away from her 18th birthday) have barged three men who just escaped from prison: LOU CALENDO (who has committed crimes in 47 of the 48 states, and that's only because he got lost on his way to Rhode Island), Lou's younger brother TONY, and their accomplice SPOT, who grunts instead of talking. In this excerpt from Act One, it's the end of the convicts' first day of hiding out, and the family and convicts are about to have dinner together.

ETHEL

Lou, why don't you say grace?

LOU

What the hell are you talking about?

ETHEL

We always ask our guests to say grace.

HERBERT

It's how we tell the difference between a guest and a visitor.

LOU

I ain't saying no grace.

HERBERT

Well, if you don't know how.

LOU

I know how.

TONY

I can do it.

HERBERT

Good. Then you can consider yourself our guest.

LOU

*I'll do it!... Our Father, who art in heaven, looking down on us, with that holier-than-thou attitude of yours, which the nuns shoved down our throat since we was five, we thank you for this meal, which better not have nothin' funny in it or some people gonna be eatin' lead pudding for dessert.*

ETHEL

If you prefer, the three of you don't have to eat.

Spot protests.

LOU

We'll eat. But just to be safe, Tony, you serve.

TONY

If everybody'll pass their plates...

Tony serves a plate of dinner to Ethel.

ETHEL

Thank you, Tony.

Tony serves a plate of dinner to Cindy.

CINDY

Thank you, Tony.

Tony serves a plate of dinner to Herbert. Lou grabs it.

LOU

I'll take that plate.

(noticing Ethel and Cindy:)

What are you two starin' at?

CINDY

You didn't say "thank you".

LOU

I don't have to say "thank you".

ETHEL

"Please" and "thank you" are the cornerstones of a civil society.

Tony serves a plate of dinner to Herbert.

HERBERT

Thank you, Tony.

LOU

All right. The next person who says "thank you" is gonna get shot!

Spot reaches for a roll.

ETHEL

Our guests also don't reach.

Spot grunts, pointing to the rolls.

ETHEL (cont'd)

Do you mean, "Please pass the rolls?"

Spot grunts and nods.

HERBERT

Here you are, Spot.

Spot takes a roll and grunts.

ETHEL

You're welcome.

LOU

(pointing a gun at Spot:)

Did you say "thank you"?!

Spot shakes his head and grunts "uh-uh". Everyone begins to eat. After a couple of bites, Lou can't. He watches everyone eat and bursts out with:

LOU (cont'd)

Okay, everybody stop eatin'.

Everyone stops.

HERBERT

What's the matter?

LOU

Everybody's so tense. I can't digest  
when everybody's so tense.

CINDY

Maybe if you said "please" and  
"thank you", you'd digest better.

LOU

That ain't it! I know what's wrong. Nobody's  
talkin'. I want to know what middle-class  
saps like you talk about over dinner. I want  
some conversation, and I want it to *sparkle*.

ETHEL

So how was your day, dear?

HERBERT

Fine, and how was yours?

ETHEL

Fine.

HERBERT

How was your day, Cindy?

CINDY

Fine. And how was your day, Tony?

TONY

Oh, uh, fine, I guess.

ETHEL

How was your day, Spot?

Spot grunts and gives a "thumbs up".  
Then a long pause.

LOU

Ain't nobody gonna ask about *my* day?

CINDY

How was your day, Mr. Calendo?

LOU

It was...

(not knowing what to say:)

Fine.

HERBERT  
Dinner is delicious, darling.

ETHEL  
Thank you, dear.

LOU  
(pointing a gun at Ethel:)  
What did you say?!

ETHEL  
If you kill me, no dessert.

Spot shoves the gun away from Ethel's direction.

LOU  
I hate you people.

HERBERT  
I'm not surprised.

LOU  
Why do you say that?

HERBERT  
I can't say.

LOU  
Why not?

HERBERT  
You'll shoot me.

LOU  
I ain't gonna shoot ya.

HERBERT  
Promise?

LOU  
Yeah, I promise.

HERBERT  
Did everybody hear Lou promise?

Everyone responds affirmatively.

LOU  
So?

HERBERT

I think you're jealous of our life.

LOU

Ha! I ain't gonna waste no bullet over *that*.

ETHEL

(to Herbert:)

I think you're right, dear.

LOU

Hey, I think you live in a worse cell than I ever have. Havin' to go to some office every day, wearing a straitjacket and tie...

HERBERT

According to an article I read in *Reader's Digest*, most criminals don't have the confidence to make it in the business world.

LOU

Oh, yeah? Well, maybe you didn't become a criminal because you lack guts.

HERBERT

I didn't *want* to become a criminal.

LOU

You lack the guts.

HERBERT

I have the guts to become a criminal.

LOU

Yeah, sure.

HERBERT

Honey, do you think I have the guts to become a criminal?

ETHEL

You cheat on your income tax.

HERBERT

See?

LOU

Small potatoes.

HERBERT

Not in my bracket.

TONY

(to Cindy:)

Pass the rolls.

HERBERT

(to Lou:)

I think *you* don't have the guts  
to risk life in the working world.

LOU

Look, Herbie, I became a criminal  
because I *wanted* to become a criminal.

CINDY

And why's that?

LOU

Because no other life gives you  
as good a life or as good a death.

CINDY

I don't understand.

LOU

Listen, girlie, growin' up, my family was dirt  
poor. Then the Depression came, and the  
bank repossessed our dirt. In my neighborhood,  
everybody was broke, and likely to stay that  
way. The only good time any of us had was  
at the movies. I must've seen certain movies  
twenty, thirty times; I especially liked those  
flicks about guys who were able to pull themselves  
up by the bootstraps, inspirational flicks like  
*Public Enemy*, *Scarface*, and *Little Caesar*.

HERBERT

Didn't all those criminals die at the end  
of the movie?

TONY

We all die, Pops.

HERBERT

Not like they did.

LOU

At least they died with flair. One winter both  
our folks got pneumonia and died in the gutter.  
But when I saw Edward G. Robinson get  
shot on that big silver screen and say,  
"Mother of Mercy, is this the end of Rico?!",  
I knew, that's the death for me.

CINDY

Wow. You're the most unforgettable  
character I've ever met.

HERBERT

I think you're just making excuses  
because you didn't do well in school.

LOU

Oh, yeah? Well, maybe I didn't get  
the breaks that saps like you got.

HERBERT

Maybe you just didn't study as hard.

LOU

Maybe my teachers hit me so often that  
school wasn't an attractive proposition.

HERBERT

Maybe if you had behaved,  
they wouldn't have hit you.

LOU

Maybe if they weren't sadistic nuns, they  
would've found a better way to inspire behavior.

HERBERT

Maybe if you had the guts, you  
would've stayed with it anyway.

LOU

Maybe if you had the guts, you  
would've known school was for losers.

HERBERT

At least I know where Rhode Island is!

LOU

Okay, conversation's over!...  
I'm done. Gimme dessert.



Ethel doesn't move.

LOU (cont'd)

I said, gimme dessert.

CINDY

There's still food on your plate.

LOU

So?

ETHEL

Everyone in my family and my *guests* know I only serve dessert to members of the Clean Plate Club.

Spot finishes dinner, licks his plate and shows it to Ethel.

ETHEL (cont'd)

You can have dessert, Spot.

TONY

I'm done.

ETHEL

You can have dessert, too, Tony.

HERBERT

I'm done.

CINDY

Me, too.

Everyone looks at Lou.

LOU

I don't want to eat any more of this crap;  
I want dessert!

ETHEL

How dare you?! Let me tell you something,  
Mister Big Shot Criminal. You can frighten us;  
you can hurt us; you can kill us if you want.  
But *nobody's* getting dessert until you  
apologize for insulting my dinner!

Spot begins to growl.

TONY

Apologize, Lou.

LOU

Why should I?

TONY

Because I want dessert. I risked life and limb to get the us out of the slammer, and unless you're prepared to whip up somethin' as delicious as the chocolate cake I saw on the kitchen table, I want you to apologize!

HERBERT

They serve chocolate cake much in prison, Lou?

LOU

Yes, they do.

TONY

It's dry.

LOU

He didn't ask that!

TONY

It's good grub, Lou. Admit it.

LOU

Never.

Spot begins to growl again.

ETHEL

Then no dessert for anyone.

LOU

(rising, pulling out his gun)

Oh, yeah? I'm goin' in there, and I'm gettin' that cake, and nobody's gonna stop me.

Lou exits into the kitchen. Ethel begins to cry.

CINDY

Don't cry, Mom.

ETHEL

He's just so mean.

HERBERT

According to an article in *The Saturday Evening Post*, life in prison can destroy your taste buds.

CINDY  
Dinner was great, Mom.

ETHEL  
(pointing to Tony and Spot:)  
They didn't like it.

Spot rubs his belly and then puts his fingers to his lips and sends them out with a kiss, as if to say "Magnifique!"

ETHEL (cont'd)  
Tony?

TONY  
It was the best meal I've had in eight-to-ten.

Lou enters, eating his first bite of Ethel's cake.

LOU  
Hey, this is swell.

ETHEL  
You like it?

LOU  
It's yummy.

ETHEL  
You really think so?

LOU  
Forget what I said. You're a good cook.

ETHEL  
Would you like a big scoop of ice cream on that?

LOU  
Yeah... Thanks.

ETHEL  
(cutting him down)  
I knew I could get you to say "thank you".

Ethel gloats as she exits into the kitchen. Lou glowers.