

The beginning of

PUBLIC PARTS (from **COME AGAIN**)

a play in one act

by Rich Orloff

Place: A hotel room
Time: Evening
Characters: CHLOE, mid-20's
ELEANOR, 30's

A hotel room shared by two occupants, both female. On the two nightstands is evidence of two distinctly different reading habits. On one nightstand is a small pile of "how to get ahead in business" books and one of those unreadable classics that's read by people who love to read unreadable classics. On the other are the kind of celebrity magazines read by women who don't like to read.

As the play begins, we hear in the hallway:

ELEANOR (o.s.)
See you in the morning.

CHLOE (o.s.)
Nice meeting you.

The door opens, and ELEANOR and CHLOE enter. They both look as if they've been to one of those business cocktail receptions, which makes sense because that's where they've just been. Both are dressed fairly conservatively. Eleanor, in her forties, looks natural in such a wardrobe. Chloe, about 30 or so, looks as if she's wearing an uncomfortable uniform.

ELEANOR
And we're done.

CHLOE
How'd we do?

ELEANOR
We aced it.

CHLOE
High five!

High five! ELEANOR

They give each other a "high five" slap, but their hands stay touching as:

High four! CHLOE

High four! ELEANOR

High three. CHLOE

High three. ELEANOR

High two. CHLOE

High two. ELEANOR

High one. CHLOE

High one. ELEANOR

During the above, they've removed one finger at a time, so that by the end, each of them has one finger raised high and touching the other's finger. The energy has softened during the process. The "high one" is quiet and sweet.

CHLOE
I didn't think I could do it, Eleanor.

ELEANOR
You were great.

They kiss.

CHLOE
More.

ELEANOR
I need to get out of this dress.

CHLOE
Even better.

They start getting ready for bed, perhaps occasionally popping into the bathroom. Eleanor changes into silk pajamas. Chloe changes into an oversized t-shirt.

CHLOE (cont'd)

So the people in your company –
do they *always* act like that?

ELEANOR

I told you they were straight-laced.

CHLOE

I've never been in a room where
everyone kept drinking and drinking
but still acted sober. What's with that?

ELEANOR

That's what they're like.

CHLOE

Wow, people actually choose to be that way.
Go figure.

ELEANOR

Guess what? McNally said he'd put a word
in for me for Wilson's old position.

CHLOE

Really?! High five!

ELEANOR

High five!

CHLOE

High four!

ELEANOR

High four!

CHLOE

High three.

ELEANOR

High three.

CHLOE

High two.

ELEANOR

High two.

CHLOE

High one.

ELEANOR

High one. Of course, I'm still far from getting it.

CHLOE

I really did okay?

ELEANOR

You were wonderful. Sober.

CHLOE

You know, there were two hundred people there. There had to be one other dyke besides us.

ELEANOR

I don't think so.

CHLOE

(with the enthusiasm of discovery)

What about that woman from Denver with the buzz cut?

ELEANOR

She's recovering from cancer.

CHLOE

Lesbians do that. Oh oh, what about that large gal from Cleveland who said her favorite singer is K.D. Lang?

ELEANOR

I've met her husband.

CHLOE

Lesbians do that, too.

ELEANOR

She's also having an affair with Ralph.

CHLOE

Wow, she's really in denial.

ELEANOR

I don't think so.

CHLOE

So I really did o—

ELEANOR

How many times do I have to reassure you?

CHLOE

I really didn't know if I could do it.

ELEANOR

You behave yourself at work, don't you?

CHLOE

I thought so. Last week Helverson warned me I was getting too "quirky".

ELEANOR

Well, you better list—

CHLOE

Hell, it takes all my will power to squeeze myself into "quirky" for eight hours.

(with youthful exuberance)

I know. Let's check out the porn.

Chloe turns on the TV.

ELEANOR

I need my rest.

CHLOE

Come on, this is a nice hotel. I'm sure one of the channels has some girl-on-girl action.

Eleanor turns off the TV.

ELEANOR

Not tonight.

CHLOE

Please? I was so well behaved tonight.

I didn't swear. I didn't flash anyone.

I didn't offer to lick a single clit.

ELEANOR

Were you ever tempted?

CHLOE

(thinks, then:)

Okay, that made it easier. But you know, sometimes I say it just to be social.

Chloe turns on the TV.

CHLOE (cont'd)
Oh, this looks like it'll be good.

ELEANOR
Turn off the TV.

CHLOE
But I've been repressed for three hours,
and as you always say, life's about balance.

ELEANOR
Not to—

CHLOE
Five minutes.

ELEANOR
(losing her temper)
Turn it off!!!

Chloe turns off the TV.

ELEANOR (cont'd)
(collecting herself)
I don't want that on my bill.

CHLOE
Got it.

ELEANOR
I don't get why you like porn so much.
Women aren't supposed to be
as visually stimulated as men.

CHLOE
Oh my God, I'm not normal!

ELEANOR
By the way, I floated by Errickson the idea of him
and his wife and us getting together for dinner.

CHLOE
And?

ELEANOR
He seemed open.

CHLOE

He did?! High five!

ELEANOR

High five –

(rushing through the rest, fatigued:)

Four, three, two, one.

CHLOE

Aww.

ELEANOR

I'm tired. So how about if I suggest Tuesday night?

CHLOE

Can we make it some other night?

ELEANOR

What's wrong with Tuesday?

CHLOE

Nothing. It's – If it's important to you,
I'll be there for you.

ELEANOR

Thank you.

CHLOE

You'd do the same for me, right?

ELEANOR

Haven't I already proven that?

They kiss simply. By now, Eleanor is in bed, ready for sleep.

CHLOE

(disappointed)

Good night.

ELEANOR

Look, just because I don't have the
energy to be horny, if you need to –

CHLOE

That's okay.

Eleanor turns off her lamp. Chloe's is still on. Eleanor turns over and shuts her eyes. Chloe walks over to the minibar and opens it. She just looks. Eleanor turns and sees her but says nothing. Chloe shuts the minibar door.

ELEANOR

Was tonight that rough?

CHLOE

No, tonight was fun.

ELEANOR

What's Tuesday?

CHLOE

It can wait.

ELEANOR

(as in, "Trust me")

You can tell me.

CHLOE

Well..... Remember how I used to complain about being a waitress?

ELEANOR

Uh-huh.

CHLOE

I hate my job even more.

ELEANOR

You want to go back to waitressing?

CHLOE

No, it's, it's just I, I... I have a job interview scheduled for Tuesday late afternoon. I'll switch it.

ELEANOR

That's great! Why didn't you tell me –

CHLOE

It just happened. And this weekend is about you.

ELEANOR

That's sweet... It's also crap. Why didn't you tell me?

CHLOE

It just happened.

Silence.

ELEANOR

I'm listening.

CHLOE

I wasn't planning to say anything else.

Silence.

ELEANOR

I'm still listening.

CHLOE

I sure wish you listened to me this well
when I was actually talking.

ELEANOR

Chloe.

CHLOE

Okay, okay, okay. Remember when...
Boy, you're listening really well.

ELEANOR

Go on.

CHLOE

Remember when you went to Kansas City
a couple of months ago?

ELEANOR

Painfully.

CHLOE

Well, Sally and I were going to go to a movie,
but we checked the paper and well, Sally
and I, we went to an amateur strip contest.

ELEANOR

You told me you went to a poetry reading.

CHLOE

And I was shocked you believed me.

ELEANOR

(putting it together:)

Did you – you –

CHLOE

I was great. I was in the zone.
You would've loved it.

ELEANOR

I don't think so.

CHLOE

You loved when I starting stripping
for you the night we met.

ELEANOR

That was different.

CHLOE

It wasn't completely –

ELEANOR

It was a dyke bar.

CHLOE

So it's a little dif–

ELEANOR

It was safe.

CHLOE

(silenced a moment, then:)

Point taken.

ELEANOR

So what's the job interview?

CHLOE

It's – you know, we can get into this now,
but you'll sleep better if we fuck.

ELEANOR

I think we're already into this.

CHLOE

Well, you know like, if I wanted to be a waitress,
well, a waitress can work at a diner or a four-star
restaurant, and there's a big difference.

ELEANOR

But you don't want to be a waitress.

CHLOE

No, it's just –

ELEANOR

(incredulous)

You... Do you want to be a stripper?

CHLOE

Now remember, there are diners and there are –

ELEANOR

You can't become a stripper.

CHLOE

I knew that's what you'd think, but I asked me, and I had a different opinion.

ELEANOR

It's a demeaning, degrading job.

CHLOE

So's every job I ever had.
At least this one tips better.

ELEANOR

The job I got you isn't demeaning.

CHLOE

The cubicle I work in feels like a tomb. Every day I go to work, die for eight hours, and come home.

ELEANOR

If you work hard enough, you'll work your way up –

CHLOE

To like what, a crypt?

ELEANOR

If you applied yourself –

CHLOE

I have.

ELEANOR

If you applied yourself *harder* –

CHLOE

I have, but guess what? I only have a limited supply of *you* in me.

ELEANOR

This is the stupidest idea –

CHLOE

(with pride:)

I won the contest.

ELEANOR

How do you know it wasn't a fluke?
You go one time to a –

CHLOE

I went three times.

ELEANOR

Have you and Sally gone to *any* of the
foreign films you said you've seen lately?

CHLOE

Sorry.

ELEANOR

Did you win those contests, too?

CHLOE

I got a second place and a dishonorable mention.

ELEANOR

Oh now that's –

CHLOE

I'm résumé-building.

ELEANOR

Are you that starved for attention?

CHLOE

You don't need to be starving to enjoy a
good meal. You just need a healthy appetite.
And I got one. And that's why you love me.

ELEANOR

That's not why –

CHLOE

I make you feel sexy.

ELEANOR

That's not it.

CHLOE

Does anybody at work make you feel sexy?

ELEANOR

No, but –

CHLOE

Do any of the folks at the LGB-whatever-it's-called make you feel sexy?

ELEANOR

No.

CHLOE

Does anybody in your family make you feel sexy?

ELEANOR

Of course not.

CHLOE

Then by process of elimination, it's me.

ELEANOR

Okay! Yes, you turn me on.

CHLOE

I didn't say "turn you on". I said "made you feel sexy". That's when you feel *you're* turning *me* on.

ELEANOR

If you get that job and anyone from my company finds out –

CHLOE

It means they showed up.

ELEANOR

Do you know how hard it has been for me to gain acceptance in this company?

CHLOE

Look, your boss suggested you bring me here. Doesn't that mean something?

ELEANOR

Not that they're open-minded. That it's a test.

CHLOE

A test?

ELEANOR

Everyone knows I'm the *best* person for Wilson's job. What they're not sure of is if I'm *right*.

CHLOE

Of course you're –

ELEANOR

Honey, this company still thinks it's a big deal to hire *women* executives, they haven't worked their way up to "lesbian" yet.

CHLOE

But they see how well you –

ELEANOR

Chloe, you really want to spend all day with guys staring at your cleavage?

CHLOE

Guys already stare at my cleavage; I'm just sick of it being a non-profit enterprise.

ELEANOR

And how do you think I'll feel when I go to bed with breasts which have been flung in guys' faces all night long?

CHLOE

You'll be the only one touching them.

ELEANOR

This is the stupidest –

CHLOE

No!

ELEANOR

Stupidest.

CHLOE

Just because I didn't finish college, I'm not stupid. You spent six years getting your degrees; I spent six years partying. I learned a hell of a lot, and I didn't end up with student loans.

ELEANOR

Chloe, listen to me. This would be a big mistake. Not just for me, but for you.

CHLOE

Maybe, but I want to –

ELEANOR

How many times have you said to me,
"Thank you, Eleanor, you were right."

CHLOE

(thinks, then:)

How many times have you said to me –
(building to an orgasm:)
"Oh God, oh God, oh God, ehggghhh*"?

(*This should sound slightly clogged and constricted.)

ELEANOR

I don't think we –

CHLOE

The first time I heard you climax I thought
you had swallowed your tongue.

ELEANOR

I won't rescue you this time –

CHLOE

I'm not asking you to –

ELEANOR

You will!

CHLOE

Look, Eleanor, I, I can think of a thousand
reasons *not* to be a stripper – and I'm sure
by the end of the night you'll mention most
of them. But you can't say anything to make
me forget that, that I felt *alive* during those
contests. More alive than I've felt in any job.

ELEANOR

So you do it at parties –

CHLOE

And so I asked myself, how would
Eleanor approach this –

ELEANOR

You do it with friends –

CHLOE

And I ordered a DVD on belly-dancing –

ELEANOR

You do it privately –

CHLOE

And I'm reading this book on
Gypsy Rose Lee, who did very well –

Chloe has opened her nightstand drawer and taken out a book.
Eleanor takes it and throws it across the room, as:

ELEANOR

Will you grow up?!!

CHLOE

(terrified)

Stop it!!

ELEANOR

You, you know I would never do anything to hurt –

CHLOE

No, I don't.

ELEANOR

(forcefully)

How can you say that?!

CHLOE

Well, for one thing, I say something
like, "No, I don't", and instead of
showing concern, you yell at me.

ELEANOR

I'm sorry. I have a temper, I know,
but I, I do love you, Chloe.

CHLOE

Sometimes I wonder.

ELEANOR

Didn't I get you your job?

CHLOE

Yes.

ELEANOR

Didn't I help sober you up?

CHLOE

It was a phase.

ELEANOR

A long phase.

CHLOE

(retrieving her book, a little pouty:)

You hurt my book.

ELEANOR

When I first met you, the only thing
you ever read was porn.

CHLOE

It was erotica.

ELEANOR

Porn.

CHLOE

Erotica.

ELEANOR

Porn.

CHLOE

When lonely straight guys write it, it's porn.
When women write it, it's erotica.

ELEANOR

Look, when we get home, we'll figure out
the smartest –

CHLOE

No! Eleanor, I want your support, and I want it now.

ELEANOR

Did Sally tell you to say that to me?

CHLOE

Word for word.

ELEANOR

We need to talk about your friends.

CHLOE

That's fair. They sure talk about you enough.