

BARREL OF MONKEYS
a play in one scene (2001)
by Mark Noonan

Characters:

Tracy
Francis
Security Guard
Lou
Raymond
Charles
Old Woman
Astrid

Scene: Late December in a municipal library. Center, a wooden rectangular table, short end to audience. On each long side are two sturdy wood chairs with cloth seats and backs.

Lights up.

Seated down-right is Tracy. Books and notebooks on the table; he reads a book, closely guarded, from his lap. Enter Francis, from left, he looks around, notices Tracy's table, moves to it carrying a duffel bag, plastic bags, and a stack of books and magazines. He sits diagonally from Tracy and drops the stack on the table. Tracy puts the book in his knapsack and takes another from the table, he pretends to read. Francis opens a magazine and reads. Long pause.

FRANCIS
It's really snowin' out there...

Long pause.

FRANCIS
I like snow...You like snow?

Pause.

FRANCIS
Hey, kid! You like snow?

TRACY
No. (whisper)

FRANCIS
Why not?

TRACY

I just don't.

FRANCIS

Hmmmm...

Pause.

Tracy holds his book upright as a shield. Francis watches him, then imitates Tracy. Francis laughs, goes into a coughing fit and sneezes, twice.

TRACY

Bless you. (from behind book)

FRANCIS

Thank you.

Francis rummages through his duffel bag, takes out a thermos, unscrews the cap and pours a drink into it. He drinks it down, settles.

FRANCIS

Damn cold...Snow's nice...Pretty even, sometimes...But it's bitter fuckin' cold out. You can feel it in yer bones, ya know?

Pause.

FRANCIS

Gotta stay warm. Gotta stay inside.

Pause.

FRANCIS

Hey, kid. Merry Christmas to ya!

TRACY

(grunt)

FRANCIS

What're ya Jewish? Ya don't look Jewish. Well, Happy Hanukkah anyway.

TRACY

I'm not Jewish. I just don't like Christmas very much.

FRANCIS

What? How can you not like Christmas? You're a kid. Christmas is alright.

TRACY

I guess.

Francis looks off right, notices something, puts away the thermos. An African-American Security Guard walks past, barely noticing the two, both of whom are now reading. Once off left the Guard says:

GUARD

Excuse me...Excuse me, sir...Wake up, please. There's no sleeping...

LOU (also Af-Am)

Fuckin' CIA! Fuckin' niggahs! My uncle's got somethin' comin', gonna fuck shit up! Fuckin' FBI...(it trails off)

GUARD

Sir, please, if you could just keep it down...

LOU

...fuckin', yeah, yeah...

GUARD

Thank you, sir.

FRANCIS

(whisper) Crazy Lou. Always sits at the same spot, in that cube. He's crazy about somethin're other.

TRACY

I guess...

FRANCIS

I guess? Kid, you guess a lot. You know it's okay to talk in here, ya know.

TRACY

I thought libraries were supposed to be quiet?

FRANCIS

Most libraries maybe. The little ones. Not this one. Ain't you ever been here before, kid? No, I never seen you. I woulda seen you too.

TRACY

I'm on break.

FRANCIS

Ahhh...From school, hun? What're ya a junior or senior?

TRACY

Freshman.

FRANCIS

Freshman. How old are you?

TRACY

Nineteen.

FRANCIS

Shit! You're nineteen, kid. I thought you meant high school. College, hun?

TRACY

Yeah.

FRANCIS

How's that goin' for ya?

TRACY

Fine, I guess...

FRANCIS

You guess? What's with all this guessin'? Dontchya know?

TRACY

Fine. It's fine.

FRANCIS

Good. Straightforward. To the point. There ya go. I'm Frank.

He waits.

FRANCIS

Your turn...

TRACY

I'm...Tracy.

FRANCIS

Alright, Tracy, good tah meet ya. Tracy, hun? You like that name?

TRACY

Well, it's my name.

FRANCIS

Fair enough. Kindof a girl's name, though, dontchya think? I mean it's okay. It's not like you named yourself that. You just got stuck with it. Not yer fault. Hell, my name's Francis,

that's pretty girlie too. Always used to get picked on causa my name. Guys pick on you?

TRACY

No. Not really.

FRANCIS

No? Hun. I always used tah get picked on. Get in fights. Then it became Frank. Ya kick 'em in the balls a few times it becomes Frank.

Tracy rolls his eyes.

FRANCIS

What! What Goddamitt! Don't roll yer eyes at me, you little fuck!

TRACY

I'm sorry--I didn't mean it--I really didn't.

Francis gathers his breath, sighs, and then sits back down.

FRANCIS

That's alright, Tracy. It's alright. I didn't mean to fly off the handle at ya. Tracy's an alright name, like Francis.

Francis settles, then coughs violently. He takes out the thermos and pours a drink. Tracy looks around for security. Pause.

Enter Raymond from right wearing a green jumpsuit and big glasses.

RAYMOND

Frank, Frank, hey, Frank, I was lookin' for you...

FRANCIS

Hey, Ray, how's it goin'?

RAYMOND

Did you bring the tape?

FRANCIS

Ray, this is Tracy...

RAYMOND

Oh, hi, how are you?

TRACY

Fine. Hello.

RAYMOND

I saw you earlier, over in the S section...

TRACY

Oh, yeah. I was getting some books...

RAYMOND

The S E X section--

TRACY

Oh, no, it wasn't that, I was just looking for a printbook, an artbook...

RAYMOND

That stuff's over on the second floor in the painters section. The painters and drawers section...

TRACY

Oh, no, I was just--

RAYMOND

It's okay. Not my business, the S E X section, it's okay.

TRACY

No, really, that's not what it was--

RAYMOND

It's okay. Frank, do you have the tape? Did you remember?

FRANCIS

Yeah, Ray, I brought it. I brought it just for you, like I said I would.

RAYMOND

Can I hear it? Can I hear the song?

FRANCIS

Sure you can, just not right now, Ray, wait a little while, security's everywhere.

RAYMOND

Well, then?

FRANCIS

In a little while Ray, come back...

RAYMOND

Okay, I'll be back...did you think anymore about what I said, about me and you in a place...about finding me--

FRANCIS

I'm working on it, Ray, like I told you, just come back in a little bit.

RAYMOND

Okay. Okay, Frank, I'll be back--You got the tape, right? You got it with you? For sure?

FRANCIS

It's in the player as we speak...

RAYMOND

Okay, I'll be back. Okay, bye. Okay, bye, Tracy...

TRACY

Bye.

Raymond exits right.

FRANCIS

That's a real pretty girl over there. About yer age, Tracy, I think.

TRACY

Hmmm.

FRANCIS

You didn't notice her?

TRACY

Well, no, not really. (Pause) Well, no, I mean, I did. I saw her.

FRANCIS

So you saw her? She's pretty dotchya think?

TRACY

Sure.

FRANCIS

Sure? No, this is a really pretty girl. Great face. Real bright. Give it another look, you'll see what I'm talkin' about.

TRACY

No, I saw her. I did.

FRANCIS

What color are her eyes? Although it's hard to tell right now...

TRACY

Blue? Blue.

FRANCIS

I think they're blue. Here, I'll look away so you can look.

TRACY

No, it's okay, I saw her.

Francis turns and looks the opposite direction. Tracy sneaks a quick look. Their faces drift back to the table.

TRACY

(whisper) She's real pretty.

FRANCIS

Yer goddamn right she is, right?

TRACY

Yeah...

FRANCIS

Great bones for a young girl, dontchya think?

TRACY

She's got a really uh...full mouth...

FRANCIS

Yeah, great color. Pretty blond hair, real blond...

TRACY

Nice hands too...

FRANCIS

Hmmm. Yeah, I s'pose, I didn't really notice, but I guess so...

TRACY

Oh, don't guess, she does. Great hands...

FRANCIS

(laughing) Fuck off! You little fuckin' bastard, Tracy. You guess, I guess. Oh, yeah, you think you're funny, hun?

TRACY

No, I just...(laughing, enjoying himself)

FRANCIS

Psst...Zip.

The Security Guard walks past. They put on the same act. He exits.

TRACY
So much security.

FRANCIS
To keep the crazy ones from goin' crazy.

Pause.

FRANCIS
It's really snowin' out. It's like a blizzard out there. Nice and warm in here though, Tracy, right?

TRACY
Right.

FRANCIS
Yeah, lotsa security, Tracy. Like the Po-lice. Not like the Po-lice, though. Ya gotta be careful, they'll throw yer ass outta here.

TRACY
For talking?

FRANCIS
No. Not for talking. They'll just say, 'Excuse me, could you please keep it down, sir,'--Charlie! How are ya?

Charles enters from right. He wheels a dolly with suitcases, bags, extension cords, tennis racket covers, an army bag, lens cases, metal tubing, plastic yellow lightbulb covers, a reflector vest, plastic bags, etc...Wearing a big puffy down coat, he looks like an eccentric biology professor coming from a lake with all his gear.

CHARLES
Frank.

FRANCIS
So, how goes the work?

CHARLES
It's difficult to say, Frank. For as you know, when you're dealing with an evolutionary change, over so much time, all of history really, um, the change takes time to discover, the change, um... (he gets lost)

FRANCIS
Charlie, this is Tracy.

TRACY

Hi.

CHARLES

Charles. Hello.

FRANCIS

We were just talking about...What were we talking about?

TRACY

The weather.

FRANCIS

Ah, yes: the weather. All the snow out there.

CHARLES

That's a good thing to talk about (lost). Nice to meet you, Tracy.

TRACY

Nice to meet you too, Charles.

FRANCIS

So, um...

CHARLES

Yes, well, I better get back to work. Tracy. Frank.

Charles exits left.

FRANCIS

Charlie's a real character--

LOU (off left)

Fuckin' CIA! Fuckin' niggahs tell me around! My uncle's gonna fuck you a thing or two...

FRANCIS

Crazy Lou!

TRACY

Frank. Psst.

They put on their act again. The Guard enters from left, eyes them suspiciously, then exits right.

FRANCIS

That was close. Good job, Tracy--Shit! Here he comes again.

Same routine.

GUARD
Excuse me, sir.

FRANCIS
What? Uh, hmm, oh, yes...

GUARD
Could you please keep it down, sir.

FRANCIS
Oh. Oh, I didn't know we were being--Did you know we were being loud?

TRACY
No. Not at all.

GUARD
Please, sir. I know that you were being loud. If you could just keep it down, that would be fine.

FRANCIS
Who said we were being loud?

GUARD
No one, sir, it's just--

FRANCIS
Was it the blond girl over there?

GUARD
No, sir, I'm not gonna say--

FRANCIS
'Cause if it was, we'll be quiet, we'll be quiet as a mouse, won't we?

TRACY
Sure.

GUARD
That would be fine, sir.

FRANCIS
Could you just tell her from us--

GUARD
Sir...

FRANCIS

--That we're really sorry and we'll try to be as quiet as possible. My name's Raoul, and this is my friend, Lionel, and we'll just keep it down.

GUARD
Fine, sir.

FRANCIS
Could you tell her, our humblest apologies...from Lionel and Raoul? (whisper-shout) We're sorry!

GUARD
Sir, that's not nec--

ASTRID (off right)
It's okay... (loud whisper, then giggle)

GUARD
Sir...

FRANCIS
You see, everything's uh, um...

TRACY
Okay.

FRANCIS
Right. Okay. It's okay. I'm sorry, I have a tendency to ramble, what's your name?

GUARD
Lionel.

FRANCIS
Lionel. Hun. Well, Lionel, let me introduce you to your long lost brother, Lionel--

TRACY
Hello.

GUARD
Sir...

FRANCIS
Okay, Lionel, it's okay, everything's okay. Alright?

GUARD
Okay. Good, sir. Thank you. Just try and keep it down.

FRANCIS

Sure. No problem. We'll just--

TRACY

Zip. (he zips his mouth shut with his hand)

FRANCIS

Right. Zip.

GUARD

Okay, sir. Thank you, sir.

Guard exits left.

FRANCIS

That was close. (whisper)

TRACY

Zip.

FRANCIS

Right. Zip.

Francis looks around, takes out his thermos and pours a drink, keeping it on his lap. He downs it. Pours another, slides it to the middle of the table. Tracy nods his head, 'No, thanks.' Francis gestures, 'No, go ahead.' Tracy: 'No, it's okay.' Francis: 'Please...' Tracy takes it, smells it, looks over at Francis.

TRACY

Vodka?

FRANCIS

Zip. (he motions to just down it)

Tracy nods, pushes it back center. Frank unzips.

FRANCIS

Just one. Keep ya warm...

TRACY

(unzip) No. (rezip)

FRANCIS

(unzip) Come on... (rezip)

TRACY

(unzip) No... (rezip)

FRANCIS
(unzip) You hurt my feelings... (rezip)

TRACY
(unzip) No... (rezip)

FRANCIS
(starts fake crying, loud)

TRACY
Shhhhhhhh...Hey! (he downs it) Ughhhh.

FRANCIS
(unzip) It'll put some hair on yer chest. (rezip)

TRACY
Great.

Tracy pushes the cup back to Francis. He puts it away. Pause.

Francis writes on a piece of paper. He holds it up:

'Hey, Lionel! It's really snowing out!'

TRACY
Yes.

An Old Woman with hunched back enters from left carrying a big stack of Egyptian picture books.

LOU
Fuckin' CIA! Fuckin' niggahs! (etc.)

FRANCIS
Crazy Lou! (whisper)

FRANCIS
Hey, where're ya goin'?

Tracy stands up and walks to the Old Woman.

TRACY
Can I help you?

WOMAN
Oh, yes. Thank you, dear.

They exit right.

FRANCIS

That sly kid. (he pours another drink, downs it) Smooth...

Francis waits and watches Tracy off right. He is gone for about thirty seconds.

Tracy returns and sits back in his chair. Francis motions (with his head) for Tracy to move left. Tracy switches seats so they are opposite each other.

FRANCIS

(whisper) So, what'd she say?

TRACY

Who?

FRANCIS

The girl, you talked to her...

TRACY

Thank you.

FRANCIS

That's it?

TRACY

And she said she was sorry the security guard came over to us.

FRANCIS

What a great girl, I knew it the moment I saw her. Great girl.

TRACY

She does have really pretty hands, long and smooth. Red nail polish...

FRANCIS

Red nail polish. Whoo. She's a vixen. What're you gonna do?

TRACY

Whaddaya mean?

FRANCIS

You gotta get her number, ask her out, somethin'. You could get her number...

TRACY

No...

FRANCIS

Hey, a girl like that doesn't come around very often...Did you get her name?

TRACY
Astrid.

FRANCIS
Astrid? Wow, she is a vixen. That's German, isn't it? Probly into leather and all sorts of strange stuff--you gotta jump at this.

TRACY
No...she's here with her grandmother...

FRANCIS
Why not?

TRACY
No, I just can't...

FRANCIS
You want me tah do it?

TRACY
No! No, no...

FRANCIS
Well then you do it...

TRACY
No, I can't...

FRANCIS
Why can't you?

TRACY
I just can't, I'm not allowed...

FRANCIS
What are you Mormon? Are you in some cult?

TRACY
No, no, nothing like that...

FRANCIS
Are you queer?

TRACY
No, no, no...

FRANCIS
Are you sure?

TRACY

Yeah, I'm not gay...

FRANCIS

Then what's the problem?

TRACY

It's complicated...

FRANCIS

What isn't?

TRACY

I got into some trouble at school, I'm not supposed tah...

FRANCIS

You can't talk to girls?

TRACY

Well, no, not really, not that...

FRANCIS

What kinda school do you go to?

TRACY

No. It's not anything strict, it's just...

FRANCIS

Just fuckin' spit it out, I'm getting' a headache... (goes to thermos)

TRACY

I'm kindof suspended from school...

FRANCIS

Oh, you're a wild one hun? You don't look it, it's always those quiet ones...

TRACY

No. I'm kindof suspended for uh...sexual harassment, I guess...

FRANCIS

Did you rape somebody?

TRACY

NO!! No.

FRANCIS

Sorry...

TRACY

No. I was just wrestlin' around with this girl and, my roommate's girlfriend, he was even there in the room, and then, next thing I know, they say I sexually harassed her. It's a big, drawn out thing.

FRANCIS

So you got kicked out?

TRACY

No. Well, they might let me back, er, I don't know. It's all up in the air right now.

FRANCIS

What'd you do to her?

TRACY

Nothing. We were just horsin' around. Wrestling, kind of...

FRANCIS

And her boyfriend was there?

TRACY

Yeah, isn't that strange?

FRANCIS

Hun. (here)

TRACY

No...

FRANCIS

Go on...

Tracy takes the drink and downs it.

FRANCIS

Good boy. Did you feel her up or somethin'?

TRACY

No. I just...I mean our hands were all over the place, we were wrestlin' ya know?...She's a real bitch anyway, I just wanted to scare her a bit so she'd stop teasin' me, stop makin' fun of me. She's a real supreme--

FRANCIS

Bitch. Yeah, there's a lotta them out there. I can understand. (Pause) I still think you should talk to that girl, she's a real pretty one...

Tracy shrugs, puts his head down on the table.
Guard enters from left.

GUARD
You can't sleep.

TRACY
I wasn't--I'm sorry--I'm awake.

Guard exits right.
Tracy puts his head back down.

FRANCIS
It's reeeeeaally snowin' out...It's like Dayton...Blizzard of fifty-four. Fifty-two? Fifty-three? No, fifty-four. That was the year...God, there was snow everywhere--it musta snowed for somethin' like a week straight--Nobody went to school, nobody went to work--Nothin'. God...was that it?...Yeah, that was the time...that was it...I think that was it...God, memory gets crazy sometimes...with the windows...Yeah, that was the blizzard...everything was shutdown...I was a stupid kid...dumb...big ole Wright-Patterson Air Force Base...throwin' rocks at windows...God, we mustah broke a dozen windows...who was that?...what were their names?...Billy and...Fr...Mike?...Tim... Yeah, we broke all those windows during that blizzard...God, that was fun...real funny...til Dad found out and had tah pay for 'em...somehow...that was sad...too bad...guilty...as charged...such stupid stuff just causa the weather...Old Mother Nature borin' us tah death...

Enter Raymond from right.

RAYMOND
Hey, Frank, it's real quiet, can we do it now?

Tracy sits up.

FRANCIS
Ray, um, well, yeah, I suppose...Here, sit down.

RAYMOND
Okay...

Francis takes out an old cassette player from his duffel bag.
Raymond sits next to Francis.

RAYMOND
Is it them? You got 'em? The right song? The tape's right?

FRANCIS

Yeah, Ray, I think so, hold on...

Francis holds the player close to his ear as he fastforwards, only he can hear the music.

FRANCIS

Okay, Ray, it's all set...

RAYMOND

Okay...

FRANCIS

Now we've gotta keep this low, Ray, alright?

RAYMOND

Yeah, yeah...

FRANCIS

Now just keep it here, hold it up to your ear...

RAYMOND

Okay...

Raymond holds the player to his left ear.

FRANCIS

Alright, here we go, are you ready?

RAYMOND

Yeah...

FRANCIS

Are you sure?

RAYMOND

Yeah, yeah, yeah...

FRANCIS

Okay, here we go...

Francis presses play. Ray waits, then the song kicks in, only he can hear it. He gets excited. He goes to turn it up a little bit.

FRANCIS

Ray! No...

Francis turns the music back down. Raymond mouths along. He moves the radio to his right ear and then, quick, turns the volume up, full blast: it's The Beach Boys: Little Honda. Ray sings along, stands up, dances.

FRANCIS

Ray! Raymond! Stop it! Ray, get over here!

RAYMOND(sings)

First gear, it's alright,
Second gear, a lean right,
Third gear, hang on tight...faster...

FRANCIS

Ray! Give me the radio! Ray...come here...

Francis stands, moves after him. Raymond moves to the other side. Tracy rises and tries to help.

TRACY

Come on, Ray...

FRANCIS

Raymond!

RAYMOND

...It's more fun than a barrel of monkeys that too will bite...

Raymond keeps singing, dancing, dodging them. The Guard enters from right.

FRANCIS

Now you've done it...Ray!

GUARD

Sir...Sir...SIR...HEY!

FRANCIS

Ray, stop it...

TRACY

Come on, Ray...

GUARD

I'm not playing these games!

FRANCIS

Ray...

The Guard tackles Raymond onto the table. Ray screams.

GUARD

What is your problem?! Shut up!

RAYMOND

Whhahhhh!

FRANCIS

Hey, it's alright...

TRACY

It's okay. Hey...

The Guard pins Ray to the table in a half-nelson.

GUARD

I don't ever want to see you in here again! Alright?! NEVER!

FRANCIS

Hey!

Francis pushes the Guard off Raymond and punches him, knocking the Guard out cold.

Pause. Silence (when the song ends, the cassette player stops)

FRANCIS

Shhhhhit!

TRACY

Jesus...

FRANCIS

Come on, Ray, we gotta get outta here. Ray, come on...Ray!

TRACY

Frank...

FRANCIS

Tracy, do you have any money?

TRACY

Money? Yeah, sure...here.

Tracy gives Frank money from his wallet.

FRANCIS

Okay, we gotta go, Ray, come on!

Francis and Raymond grab their things and run off left. Tracy kneels down to check the Guard. Astrid enter from right.

ASTRID
Is he okay?

TRACY
I don't know.

BLACKOUT