

VALAISE

A Play in One Act

by

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VALAISE (və-lāz') n. from the English words valise (və-lēs'), a suitcase; and malaise (mə-lāz'), a vague sense of mental or moral ill-being.

CHARACTERS

MIKEY 20s or older.

RYAN 20s or older.

SETTING

A basement

TIME

Past midnight

ACT I

SCENE 1

(A basement. Storage shelves line the U wall. Cardboard boxes, old lamps, stack of tires, paint cans, the usual fare, are scattered about. Drop-cloths cover a couple of things. A fluorescent light fixture hangs over a workbench C. A doorframe R with a light switch next to it leads to stairs going up. A doorframe L leads to another room. A small hopper window is high up the wall UL. A folding metal chair sits RC. A low BUZZ from the light joins the sound of CRICKETS offstage.)

(AT RISE: MIKEY stands U of the workbench struggling with a screwdriver to pry open a suitcase that sits on the bench. RYAN straddles the chair, looking on.)

MIKEY

(Under his breath)

C'mon, bitch.

(He continues to fiddle with it, before pounding it with his fists.)

RYAN

Lemme try.

MIKEY

I got it.

RYAN

I'm good with this stuff. Lemme try.

MIKEY

Hang on.

RYAN

I found it!

MIKEY

I said, hang on!

RYAN

You wanted the Comfort Inn, but that place's shit.
Super 8 was my pick. That's always my luck spot. See?
Tell me it ain't!

MIKEY

Yeah, you found it, but I took it.

RYAN

We took it!

MIKEY

We took it. But I took it. More than you. Pussy.
(HE returns to working with the
screwdriver.)

RYAN

That's not gonna work. You gotta bust it. Lemme try.

MIKEY

I said, hang on! Hang on.

(HE exits L. RYAN crosses to the bench
and begins examining the suitcase
before MIKEY returns with a hammer.)

Hey! Hold up!

(HE holds up the hammer.)

Right?

RYAN

That's what I mean! You gotta pound it!

MIKEY

(Taking his place behind the bench)

Gimme room. Back it up.

RYAN

(Sitting R)

What do you think?

MIKEY

What do you think?

RYAN

What?

MIKEY

I don't know. You were saying.

RYAN

I mean, what do you think's in it?

MIKEY

Could be anything. Probably clothes.

RYAN

Yeah, clothes. Still.

MIKEY

Right?

RYAN

Yeah, like cash. Stacks and stacks of cash. Imagine?

MIKEY

Sure. Could be. Then what?

(The light flickers. They BOTH regard it.)

(Beat)

RYAN

I don't know.

MIKEY

I know.

RYAN

What?

MIKEY

We're rich. No more creeping around Super 8's for kicks. Or Comforts.

RYAN

Yeah, Hiltons, right? High class.

MIKEY

Strictly.

(HE stops pounding on the suitcase.)

MIKEY (Continued)

Damn.

RYAN

Want me to try?

(MIKEY ignores him and returns to
pounding on the lock.)

Hey, we'd keep it, right?

MIKEY

What?

RYAN

If it was money, we'd keep it. Right?

MIKEY

Yeah, why not? We earned it. I earned it.

(With a final strike, one of the locks
breaks off.)

One down.

RYAN

That's what I'm talking about! Right?

MIKEY

(Pounding on the second lock)

I got it now. I got it.

(With a final blow, the second lock
gives way.)

RYAN

(Standing)

So?

MIKEY

Prepare.

(HE stands back and ceremoniously
throws open the suitcase.)

Christ, it stinks.

RYAN

(Tries to approach the workbench)

Yeah? What do you mean?

MIKEY

Hang on! Gimme a minute.

(MIKEY begins to rummage through the tangle of balled up newspapers that fills the suitcase.)

RYAN

What is it? Looks like papers. Bunch of trash. Right?

MIKEY

I said, Hang on.

(HE continues to work his way through the suitcase contents, growing more irate until he begins to slow. HE stops. HE gazes at the suitcase contents, puzzled, and very carefully moves aside one ... more ... piece of paper. HE reels backward with a GASP, hand striking the overhead light, setting it swinging back and forth.)

RYAN

What? What is it?

(MIKEY is frozen in the shifting light, dumbfounded with eyes locked on the suitcase.)

Mikey. Mike. What is it? Hey, c'mon. Mike. What?

(RYAN slowly approaches the U side of the bench and carefully peers into the suitcase.)

Is that real? That's not real.

(HE holds his nose and carefully leans in for a closer look before sharply pulling back and crossing R.)

Is that real? Mikey? Is that ...? That's a ... what do they call it? You know, a dummy. A mannequin. Right?

MIKEY

(HE approaches the bench, stills the swinging light with his hand and carefully peers inside.)

No. The eyes. They're ... That's real.

RYAN

Shit, Mikey! So what?

MIKEY

So what? What?

RYAN

What do we do now?

MIKEY

I don't know!

RYAN

This is you! I told you not to take it!

MIKEY

What?

RYAN

I said, Leave it alone.

MIKEY

No, you didn't!

RYAN

It was you. It's always you!

MIKEY

What the hell are you talking about? You found it. You tracked it down. Pointed it out like some bitch dog!

RYAN

Jesus. I mean ...

(They both stand motionless, staring at the suitcase. Beat.)

We gotta get rid of it. Just ... put it back.

MIKEY

What do you mean?

RYAN

Put it back. Where we got it.

MIKEY

What? Why? How does that --

RYAN

Someone's missing it. Right?

MIKEY

Well, yeah, someone missing it. For sure. It belongs to someone. But I don't think they need it anymore! We just dump it. Somewhere.

RYAN

Yeah?

MIKEY

Way up in the woods. Right? I mean ...

RYAN

We gotta call someone. Mikey? Right?

RYAN

I mean, call the cops.

MIKEY

Seriously? Are you serious?
Right now? Are you serious?
What? Hey, cops, we were
over at the Super 8 creeping
around, we stole this thing
and, well, turns out --

RYAN

Yeah.

MIKEY

Are you stupid? No cops.

RYAN

Well, no, we do it ... What ... Like, um, privately. I
mean, we don't tell them who we are. We say ... And
then we just leave it somewhere for them.

MIKEY

No cops.

RYAN

Anonymously! We call them
anonymously!

MIKEY

No cops! Period. That's shit-stupid.

(Beat. And another beat. MIKEY exits
L.)

RYAN

Mikey?

(RUSTLE and a small CRASH off L. Then
SILENCE.)

Hey, Mikey?

(Beat)

Mike? Hey, Mikey.

MIKEY

(Entering from L carrying duct tape. HE approaches the U side of the bench.)

You gonna stand there?

(The light blinks off. Darkness.)

RYAN

Shit.

MIKEY

Shit.

MIKEY

(HE fiddles with the florescent tube and it rolls back to life.)

Gimme a hand.

(RYAN doesn't move.)

I said, Gimme a hand!

(RYAN approaches the workbench. They struggle to close the suitcase and secure it shut by wrapping it in duct tape.)

RYAN

What if --

MIKEY

Just shut up and follow me.

(MIKEY snatches the suitcase off the bench and crosses R.)

MIKEY

I said, Follow me!

(RYAN hesitates before following MIKEY off R. MIKEY SNAPS off the light on his way out.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE 1)

ACT I

SCENE 2

(The same scene some time later.)

(As MIKEY enters R, HE SNAPS the light switch. RYAN follows him into the room. Both move slow, fatigued as the florescent light flickers on.)

(The suitcase sits on the bench.)

(They freeze. MIKEY slowly cross U of the bench, eyes fixed on the suitcase.)

MIKEY

You think this is funny?

(Crossing R to RYAN)

Is this funny to you? Huh? Answer me!

(HE shoves RYAN.)

Do you think this is funny?

(HE shoves him again, harder. RYAN falls to the floor.)

RYAN

What? Mikey. I didn't ... How ...?

MIKEY

Is this Pete? Pete in on this? You and him? Some joke?

RYAN

What? No! This ain't no joke.

MIKEY

(Pacing the room, moving boxes)

Is he here? Is Pete fucking here?

RYAN

Pete's not here, Mikey. Why would Pete be here?

MIKEY

(Crossing L, calling offstage)

Pete? Hey, Pete? Where are you? You can come out now.

MIKEY

(HE exits L. Offstage.)

You better hope I don't find you. Bitch? Show your face!

(The sounds of RUMMAGING offstage L)
 You can't hide down here. I'll fucking kill you. You know that right? Pete?

(A CRASH offstage L. Beat. RYAN has approached U side of the bench as MIKEY enters L.)

RYAN

That's not it. It's not the same one. Right? It's different. The other one. There was a sticker.

MIKEY

What're you talking about?

RYAN

And a scuff. Along the side. Right here. Right?

MIKEY

(Approaching the bench)

I dunno. I don't remember.

RYAN

The other one. That's miles ... miles up in the woods. Right? I mean. That's a 45-minute walk. More. Mikey, we were gone an hour. At least. Way up in the woods. No one's finding that.

(MIKEY starts to peel off the duct tape from the suitcase.)

What're you doing? Mikey! What're you doing?

MIKEY

It's not the same one, right? Right, Ry? No worries, because this isn't it. Right?

(RYAN crosses R as MIKEY throws open the suitcase. HE dumps the contents onto the bench, tossing the suitcase aside. Newspaper scatters the bench, but something heavy rolls off and strikes the floor. Sure enough: It's a human head. RYAN pulls a mobile phone out of this pocket and begins to dial, before MIKEY dashes R and smacks it out of his hand. Beat.)

Clean that up.

RYAN

What?

MIKEY

Clean it up. Put it back in the case. All of it.

RYAN

MIKEY

But --

All of it. Put it all back.

Now.

(RYAN hesitates before moving to collect the papers and stuff them back into the suitcase. MIKEY exits L. HE returns after RYAN's finished putting the papers back into the suitcase. HE carries a shovel and flashlight. The head remains on the floor.)

You forgot something.

(Beat)

Well?

(RYAN doesn't move. MIKEY sets down the flashlight and tightens his grip on the shovel.)

I said, You forgot something.

(RYAN pulls some paper out of the suitcase and uses it to avoid touching the head as he picks it up from the floor and places it in the suitcase. MIKEY joins him at the bench and the two reseal the suitcase with tape. And more tape. MIKEY grabs the shovel and flashlight and crosses R.)

This time we bury it.

(RYAN reluctantly picks up the suitcase and exits R. MIKEY SNAPS off the light, as he follows him off R.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE 2)

ACT I

SCENE 3

(The same scene some time later.)

(As MIKEY enters R, HE SNAPS the light switch. RYAN follows him into the room. The florescent light flickers on. Both are wiped out. Sweat stains and dirt soil their clothes.)

MIKEY

(Dumping the flashlight and shovel at the bench as he crosses L)

Still stinks in here.

(HE exits L. Offstage)

Open a window. Plug in the dehumidifier.

RYAN

(Looking around the room. To himself)

Humidifier.

(Calling off L)

I don't see a humidifier.

MIKEY

(Offstage)

Dehumidifier, dummy. Under the drop cloth.

(RYAN crosses UR to a dehumidifier underneath a sheet. HE pulls the sheet off, revealing ... the suitcase. Offstage)

Find it?

(Entering L with a bucket and mop)

You find it?

RYAN

What is this, Mikey? What is this?

(He flies at MIKEY in a rage)

Are you doing this? Is this you? What?

(MIKEY cuffs RYAN beside the head before RYAN shoves him to the floor. RYAN crosses UR, finds his mobile phone on the floor, picks it up and dials. But MIKEY has risen from the floor and grabbed the shovel.)

HE crosses R, swings and cracks RYAN on the back of the head with the shovel. RYAN collapses in a heap, motionless.)

(Beat)

MIKEY

Ryan. Ryan. Ry.

(Poking him with the shovel)

Hey, Ryan. Ry. Fuck.

(HE drops the shovel and paces the room, rage turning to tears.)

Fuck!

(HE sits in the chair R, struggles to pull a pack of gum from his pants pocket, sticks a piece in his mouth and chews. Standing, HE marches UR and regards RYAN's body. HE turns to the suitcase. And then back to RYAN. HE drags RYAN by his feet offstage R. He returns for the suitcase, carrying it off R. And returns again for the shovel and flashlight. Standing at the door R, he regards the room for a moment before SNAPPING off the light and exiting.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE 3)

ACT I

SCENE 4

(The same scene some time later.)

(Entering R, MIKEY SNAPS the light switch. Nothing happens. HE SNAPS it again, and again, and once more. Nothing. A moment passes before he turns on the flashlight and uses it to illuminate a narrow swath DC where he crosses and collapses, sitting on the floor D of the workbench, shovel in his lap. HE sets down next to him the flashlight -- its bulb pointed against the floor. It only barely brightens the R side of MIKEY. HE is filthy, exhausted, broken.)

(Beat)

(Suddenly, the florescent light flickers to life with a BUZZ. MIKEY looks up to acknowledge it, but cannot see the suitcase that sits on the workbench just behind him.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF PLAY)

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

(SPOILERS BELOW)

All productions need to employ at least two identical suitcases so one may be pre-set under the drop cloth before the play begins.

Securing a third suitcase is ideal, so it can be set without a moment's hesitation by a stagehand entering and exiting L between Scenes 1 and 2, and before the final scene.

Blackouts between scenes need to be genuine blackouts. The surprise is spoiled if the audience sees the suitcase reset between Scenes 1 and 2, or before the final scene.

When placed on end, the suitcases should approximate the dimensions of a dehumidifier. Modern carry-on models with wheels and collapsable handle, such as those made by Away®, might do nicely.

Operating the light switch should return a sharp "snap" heard easily by the back row. Alternately, and only as a last resort, a sound effect should be used.