

# RIGHT FROM WRONG

by Sherrie Ahlin

Sherrie Ahlin  
Tampa, FL

BIO: After graduating from her home state's University of South Florida with a degree in both Theatre and English, Ms. Ahlin moved to New York City and studied acting at HB Studio and The Lee Strasberg Institute. She soon earned her Equity Card doing summer theater. Years later, when she moved to New Jersey to start a family, she also started directing at local community theaters including Summit Playhouse where she directed *Brooklyn Boy*, *Murder in Green Meadows*, *All My Sons*, and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*. Ms. Ahlin was also nominated for a Perry Award for best director for *Urinetown*. She joined SDC, and became involved in play development, working with playwrights and directing staged readings for three different companies. During this time, she got a master's degree from Montclair State in Theatre and Speech and started teaching Communications at Kean University, and Theater and Acting at William Patterson and several junior colleges. She also directed four student productions at William Patterson.

Ms. Ahlin is now retired, but is an active and involved volunteer and grandparent as well as an amateur writer. Acting, directing, and academic resumes are available upon request.

[shahlin@rocketmail.com](mailto:shahlin@rocketmail.com)  
973-634-8008

Switching to the first person! What's keeping me positive? My husband, children and granddaughter, of course. But it's hard to be positive nowadays. It's work. Trite by true, being grateful help. I volunteer at The Crisis Center of Tampa Bay and was May's volunteer of the month! Twelve months in a year and my number came up. Still, it gave me a lift.

Yes, you can publish this.

# CHARACTERS

KAREN: Woman in her early 20s. An heiress, she has no airs. She's studying improv, but only as a hobby. She is not a native of New York City.

RICHARD: Man in his early 20s. An aspiring actor, Richard attends the same acting class as Karen. A bit of a braggart, Richard is nonetheless loveable.

## TIME

Scene I: Summer 1984  
Scene II: Thirty Years later

## PLACE

Front stoop in Greenwich Village on a warm summer afternoon

## NOTE

(/) indicates overlapping dialogue, where the following character begins.

KAREN runs on, clearly the winner and out of breath. She is carrying a duffel bag which she throws on the stoop before looking back.

KAREN  
Come on!

(RICHARD runs on, also out of breath.  
It should become clear that KAREN and  
RICHARD are great friends; RICHARD  
a bit smitten.)

The best moment? When you pounded the table, I knew I had transferred the rage.

RICHARD  
And I meant it. That guy was so toast. I'd kill that guy.

KAREN  
You would?

RICHARD  
Of course.

KAREN  
I mean, in life.

RICHARD  
Well, yeah. If that's what I did. Oh, man. We could start our own company. Work up some bits.

(beat)  
Where are we going tonight?

(KAREN sits on the stoop.  
RICHARD joins her.)

KAREN  
Got a better offer.

RICHARD  
Oh? Oh, ho?

KAREN  
She's cute.

RICHARD  
Give me one other adjective.

KAREN  
Damaged.

RICHARD

Didn't see that coming.

KAREN

Smart. Funny.

RICHARD

Good for you. What's her name?

KAREN

Dawn.

RICHARD

Don't?

KAREN

Dawn. Like the morning. Dawn. She has a son.

(pause)

Richard, your wise guy was so spot on. The authority. You actually seemed older.

RICHARD

You had a breakthrough up there.

KAREN

(teasing, but clearly pleased)

Listen to you. "Breakthrough."

RICHARD

There are two things we both bring to our work, now.

KAREN

"Bring to our work."

RICHARD

Two things. I'm working out more, so I'm more relaxed. I notice that in you, too.

(RICHARD flexes his muscles.)

KAREN

And the other?

RICHARD

Observation. Ob-ser-va-tion. Tell me you didn't channel someone else. Someone more. . .

KAREN  
More what?

RICHARD  
Less. Less like you. More, flirty. God, I don't know.  
(A bit of a brag.)  
And I'm not unfamiliar with guys like that. Wise guys.

KAREN  
So you keep saying.

RICHARD  
Well, it's true.

KAREN  
You take this improv thing such so much more seriously than I do. I pay my money. I have fun. But I'm much too awkward to ever make it. Let's get real. I can't sing or dance.

RICHARD  
(getting up)  
I'll give you the singing.

KAREN  
Shut up.

RICHARD  
Karen, Karen. C'mere.

KAREN  
What?

RICHARD  
Just get up.

KAREN  
There are people around.

RICHARD  
See. You have to get over that. Here we go. Step, step, step, touch. Same foot after the touch. Step, step, step, touch. Step, step, step, touch. Now back. Step, step, step, touch. Step, touch. Step, touch, and hop. Now start over.  
(KAREN is imitating RICHARD  
for a couple more rounds.)  
That's it. Now put some attitude in there. See? Anybody can dance.

KAREN

I may smack you. That's enough. We're getting serious stares.

(BOTH sit. KAREN is suddenly solemn.)

I have to tell you something. And you have to never tell anyone I told you.

RICHARD

I can do that.

(pause)

What?

KAREN

That story was real. That guy is real. Look at the information I gave you.

RICHARD

The prop?

KAREN

Yeah, "the prop".

(RICHARD takes a piece of paper out of his pocket. Unfolds it and reads.)

RICHARD

Benjamin Grossman.

KAREN

There's an address there.

RICHARD

The story's real?

KAREN

Yeah.

RICHARD

No, way!

KAREN

Happening now. He's out there. Active.

RICHARD

The story is . . . ?

KAREN

All true.

RICHARD  
(suddenly angry)  
Is anybody bothering you?

KAREN  
No! Dawn's son was molested.

RICHARD  
Geez!

KAREN  
She got caught up with a charming serial child molester.

RICHARD  
Caught up?

KAREN  
Yes, Richard. Women get caught up sometimes when they have responsibilities and few options. Fairstein won't touch it. No witnesses. He meets women in churches, townhall meetings, whatever, anywhere there will be parents.

(Pause. RICHARD turns the piece of paper over in his hands.)

RICHARD  
That grooming you were, your character was talking about. True?  
(KAREN nods.)  
I'm sick.

KAREN  
What if I have access to money.

RICHARD  
Do you?

KAREN  
I have a fantasy.

RICHARD  
Okay?

KAREN  
It may not be something / you want to

RICHARD

If you have a fantasy, I want to hear it.

KAREN

Alright. What if you could hire it done?

RICHARD

What done?

KAREN

Offing Grossman.

RICHARD

Well, I think you can.

KAREN

And these guys you “observe,” they might be pros.

RICHARD

Might be.

(Shakes his head. Pie in the sky.)

It’s interesting. You know that argument around going back in time and meeting Hitler. Would you off him?

KAREN

Eww. No! Not the same. Stop! . . . It trivializes both things in different ways. I can’t / even

RICHARD

I’m sorry. I guess I hit a nerve.

KAREN

And this is not some thought experiment to me.

RICHARD

Really? Alright. Well. First of all. It would be a *lot* of money.

KAREN

I have money.

RICHARD

You said—

KAREN

I know what I said. I’m poor. I’m rich. Both are true.

RICHARD

—you didn't have any money.

KAREN

I have a lot of money.

RICHARD

I had no idea.

KAREN

But it's in a trust so, technically, I won't see any of it until I'm thirty.

RICHARD

Thirty?

KAREN

There's are exceptions. I can borrow against the trust if I find something I really want to invest in. When I got to New York, I tapped in for first and last, new clothes, pictures, . . . some marijuana, a little cocaine.

RICHARD

(mock)

I'm shocked. Laundered money.

KAREN

That theatre company you keep saying you're going to start?

RICHARD

What about it?

KAREN

Theater companies are money pits, non-profit write-offs. Daddy might be intrigued. If that doesn't interest him, I'll think of something. Someway. So, if one could get the money. . .

RICHARD

One could have someone offed.

KAREN

And you could find out how much that would cost?

RICHARD

I don't know. If I was in a situation where I really wanted someone killed to the point where, you know, I didn't care about the . . .

KAREN  
About the what?

RICHARD  
The moral side of it.

KAREN  
The moral side?

RICHARD  
Yes. Just listen. If I really wanted to, it's possible I could get a number.

KAREN  
Then really want to. Just find out how much. That's all I'm asking.

RICHARD  
It's just that . . . I have this uncle with a restaurant and it is rumored, blah, blah. And I do have a good relationship with these guys, but truth be told, they're just rich and nobody knows what they do. Even the character. It is a true observation, don't misunderstand me, but it's an amalgam.

KAREN  
You are so full of shit.

RICHARD  
Yeah.

KAREN  
Yeah. . . I didn't think you could help me.

(KAREN gets up and absentmindedly  
does the choreography RICHARD just  
taught her.

RICHARD  
We don't have to abandon this. Let me see what I can find out. Run this by my uncle strictly as, excuse me, but for now, a thought experiment, fantasy, whatever. He did have an uncle who we really know / was a

KAREN  
(still dancing, but subdued)  
Your uncle had an uncle. Step, touch. Step, touch. Step, jump.

RICHARD  
But those guys who come in. I'm telling you. Why not go for it? Try to find out.

KAREN

(stops dancing)

There. All I'm saying. What is that in your bag?

(Happy to change the subject,  
RICHARD gets up.)

RICHARD

It's a trumpet. God my butt's killing me. Fucking stone stoop. It's for Charlie.

KAREN

Stoops are New York's porches.

(RICHARD unzips his bag to reveal  
a shiny trumpet.)

RICHARD

I'd rather a porch with cushy chairs.

KAREN

I'll get you a pillow next time. Candy-ass.

(RICHARD holds up trumpet.)

RICHARD

Look at that! My uncle also knows a guy that has a pawn shop.

KAREN

Of course he does.

RICHARD

Charlie's playing Louis in *The Trumpet of the Swan*. E. B. White? Children's theatre. They gave him this fucked up kid's horn. You need a real horn to play Louis. You never heard of it? My mom used to read it to me.

KAREN

No. Beautiful horn, though.

RICHARD

Isn't it? It's a symbol of hope. Goodness. Trumpeting in a new day.

(Long pause.)

So, the other thing, was that true, too?

KAREN

What other thing?

RICHARD

The monologue about your father?

KAREN

Oh, no!

RICHARD

Oh, good! That would have been. . . You were so believable. So imaginative.

(pause)

But, this is a true.

KAREN

Yes! Dammit, Richard. Why would I lie?

(RICHARD is fingering the “prop”.)

Don’t you have to memorize the info and eat it or something?

RICHARD

(amused)

I don’t think so.

KAREN

(picking up the trumpet)

Offing Grossman – that’s his name; you can make this shit up – would be the start of trumpeting in a new day. It would be like eradicating just that little bit of evil. Like chipping away at the devil.

RICHARD

You’ve got to be careful who you talk to like that.

KAREN

I know.

RICHARD

So, you’re an heiress. You have no idea how attractive I’m finding you right now.

(KAREN laughs. She gets up and marks the steps again. RICHARD joins her. At some point RICHARD takes KAREN’s hand and they dance together.)

(LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK)

(END OF SCENE)

EPILOGUE. Lights come up on RICHARD in a chair center stage holding the trumpet. It is thirty years later. He speaks to the audience.

RICHARD

Buying a gun is easy if you have a lot of cash. Don't get me wrong. I funneled most of it back into my company. Even then, I couldn't keep it afloat. But we had a good run. I'm proud of the work we did. I digress. This isn't easy to talk about. You see, the main thing is to be cold and patient. Very patient. Track the hit. What are his patterns? What are the patterns around him? Grossman lived in the Wall Street area, a ghost town evenings and weekends back then. They shot a number for "Sweet Charity" on Wall Street. Did you know that? Grossman lived in a small building. Just three apartments and the super had the basement. The old woman on the first floor was deaf as a post. The couple on the second went out of town for the weekend about once a month, and the super did drugs. It was just a matter of biding my time. The perfect moment was just waiting for me. There was no intercom, so his friends had a pattern, three shorts and a long. When the moment came, I didn't even know whether I was going to do it. Be patient, but stay focused and move when the time comes. Would I wimp out at the last minute? I didn't know. Three shorts and a long. Up I went, knocked on the door, saw his fat face, saw my priest in his fat face and blew him away. It was like his head blew up. I ran down the stairs and I . . . I hit my head. Broke the skin. I dropped the gun off one of the piers and went home and burned my clothes in bathtub. I'd done it. Don't be seen and leave no evidence. And I'm not sorry. Even now. I saved some kids. That's the human race, I guess. Just free will and blood and guts and throw it all around.

(RICHARD reaches into his jacket and takes out the "prop" and unfolds it.)

I keep the address between the tens and the ones in my wallet. All these years. It reminds me that I can never stand among the innocent again. The trumpet? Well, my uncle's friend never asked for it back. Forgot about it, I guess. Gabriel blows a horn, you know, at the end of *Fences*. But nothing comes out. A symbol of hope and good. But, then, just silence. I guess that's symbolic, too. Hey! Anyone who gets to keep a thing like this, this beauty, that's a symbol all by itself. . . I got married not much later. Always held a torch for Karen, though. What are you going to do? Divorced now, but the wife and I produced this beautiful daughter. I'm so proud of her. She became a cop. Yeah, went to NYU, and then decided to become a cop. Can you beat it? Joyce is in cold case now because she has little kids. Eighteen months and one five years. Quite a handful. Yeah. I'm a Grandpa. Anyway, she can make her own hours. No emergencies in cold case. The thing is, she wants to talk to me. That's not unusual, but she sounded so serious, which is unusual. She wants to talk about the company. Do I keep any books? Books? No. So I'm supposed to write down what I can remember. Not to worry, she said. They just have to eliminate me in this one cold case. DNA is so much more sophisticated now. We're meeting for dinner. And I'm not worried. Maybe I should be, but this trumpet is sort of my lucky charm. I might not be able to herald in a new day, but I did chip away at the devil.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF PLAY)