

Excerpt from “It’s Movie Night” – play by Stuart J. Brown

<https://stuartjbrown.com/full-one-act-plays/its-movie-night/>

Chapter 1

SCENE I

[HENRY SILVERSTEIN and his wife, TRUDY, are straightening up their living room before the meeting of the monthly movie night group arrives. There is a couch, four chairs, a coffee table, two snack tables, and a six-foot table with refreshments. The refreshment table is off to the side.]

TRUDY

Is everyone coming tonight?

HENRY

Yep. It’s a miracle. You’d think getting eight people’s schedules in sync wouldn’t be so difficult.

TRUDY

When was the last time this happened?

HENRY

I don’t think its ever happened.

TRUDY

So, Lucas is coming?

HENRY

As far as I know. Why?

TRUDY

I don’t know. It’s just that he never participates. He sits on the couch and eats popcorn. Why bother coming over?

HENRY

What does Amy say?

TRUDY

Last time I asked, she just rolled her eyes. I got that as a signal not to ask.

HENRY

He’d be a great character in one of my plays.

TRUDY

Henry, please. Everything doesn’t have to be fodder for one of your plays.

HENRY

You write what you know. Isn’t that what they say?

TRUDY

It is, but I'm tired of every facet of our life becoming fair play for one of your ten-minute creations. Our friends are getting fed up. None of the relatives wants to come over for family functions. You didn't have to make fun of Aunt Matilda in your play because of what happened at the Seder.

HENRY

Okay, maybe I went a wee overboard with Pass the Gefilte Fish. You have to admit, though, it is a great title.

TRUDY

I feel like I'm on some Bravo reality show.

HENRY

A man's gotta make a living.

TRUDY

You're retired. You don't make a living anymore. We live off our investments - thank you very much, Merrill Lynch - and your state pension.

HENRY

I don't hear you complaining when we take one of our European jaunts.

TRUDY

The point is you don't make any money from your writing. You've never made any money through your writings, and you never will. These are ten-minute plays. Ten singular minutes. Count them - 1, 2, 3, 4...

HENRY

Okay, okay, I get it. You've made your point loud and clear.

TRUDY

5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

HENRY

Satisfied?

TRUDY

Very.

[HENRY leaves the stage.]

Oh, don't go away mad. I was just playing. And don't be taking notes for a new play.

[HENRY returns with a tray of refreshments for the table.]

HENRY

Mad? I'm not mad. Why would I be mad? If I were mad, I'd be sulking and whining and storming out of the house...

TRUDY

Can you please give it a rest? I'll pay you to stop.

HENRY

Sex?

TRUDY

Stay mad.

[HENRY and TRUDY continue to straighten up.]

HENRY

Trud, you know what I just realized?

TRUDY

That you're not getting sex later tonight?

HENRY

I gave up on that thought a long time ago. No, tonight's the five-year anniversary of our movie nights.

TRUDY

Really? Time does fly by. Five years. Huh.

HENRY

I am so glad we canned the book club for movie night. It was just getting awful.

TRUDY

I know. I mean, it was always fun getting together with people, but half the time we wouldn't even discuss the book. We'd always get sidetracked. And some of the choices people made. Fifty Shades of Grey?

HENRY

What was Joan's explanation? I thought it would be fun to see what the masses are reading.

TRUDY

And then Margaret had just seen Les Misérables, so we had to slog through all one thousand plus pages. She could have at least settled for the abridged edition.

HENRY

What always bugged me is, if you're going to commit to a book club, then read the book. Duh. Makes sense, doesn't it?

TRUDY

Yes, dear, we all know how you were always prepared.

HENRY

What's that supposed to mean?

TRUDY

Oh, don't be so thin-skinned. You should see it as a badge of honor. And, I will say that your comments were always short and to the point.

HENRY

Thank you. I don't know how many times I was going to kill Craig. He would just go on and on. I felt like he was someone in the audience during one of the talk-backs for my plays. They just love to hear themselves talk.

TRUDY

Nice, the way you were able to slip in something about your plays.

HENRY

Again, thank you. And then, there was the food.

TRUDY

I always thought the food and drink were great.

HENRY

That was the problem. Each host thought they had to outdo the previous host. It got ridiculous. Like, that one time at Judy's house, we had bacon-wrapped scallops, honey-glazed chicken wings, and butternut squash pod stickers because the previous meeting we had bruschetta, beef wellington bites, and stuffed mushrooms.

TRUDY

Seems you remembered those rather fondly.

HENRY

I didn't say I didn't like them. Anyway, out with book club and on with movie night. So, trivia time - do you remember the first movie night film we all watched?

TRUDY

You think I can remember that far back? I can't even remember what we watched on TV last night.

HENRY

Give it a try.

TRUDY

How about a hint? Just a teensy-weensy one?

HENRY

And you complain about being left off my pub trivia team. Okay...the theme that night was political thrillers.

TRUDY

Oh, I got this. I got it...The Manchurian Candidate?

HENRY

Great guess...no.

TRUDY

All the President's Men?

HENRY

One more try.

TRUDY

Don't tell me. Don't tell me. Three Days of the Condor.

HENRY

I didn't say Robert Redford movies.

TRUDY

He was dreamy back then.

HENRY

Can't believe he's no longer with us.

TRUDY

Real dreamy.

HENRY

The answer is...Seven Days in May.

TRUDY

Seven days in what?

HENRY

Seven Days in May. Kirk Douglas, Burt Lancaster, Ava Gardner. C'mon. It's a classic. You don't remember? Burt Lancaster is Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He's plotting a coup to overthrow the government because he doesn't want the President to sign a nuclear disarmament treaty. It was a great first pick, thank you very much.

TRUDY

Robert Redford, yes. Political thrillers, no. I tell you what I do remember about that first night - waiting for the red envelope from Netflix with the DVD to arrive in the mail.

HENRY

That's right. I'm so used to streaming nowadays that I forgot all about that. I always got a thrill when it came in the mail. How times have changed.

TRUDY

It was something better than all the junk mail we receive.

HENRY

A bold statement coming from the catalog queen.

TRUDY

Would you rather go traipsing with me through the mall?

HENRY

Point taken. By the way, whatever happened to the DVD player?

TRUDY

What we do with all the stuff we have no use for anymore - Goodwill.

HENRY

Too bad. I hear DVDs are making a comeback.

TRUDY

I can understand that. All the money we spend on subscriptions to streaming services is criminal. It's much cheaper to just go to the library and check out movies and TV shows on DVD.

HENRY

We still had our VCR back then, too. Come to think of it, don't we have boxes of the kids' shows on VHS in the basement?

TRUDY

I think you volunteered to clear those out last summer.

HENRY

Right...No. This weekend. Goodwill, get ready for Barney, Teletubbies, Arthur, and my personal favorite, Bear in the Big Blue House. Well, everything looks ready.

TRUDY

Chairs.

HENRY

Set.

TRUDY

Snack tables.

HENRY

Check.

TRUDY

Refreshments.

HENRY

Extra Popcorn to satisfy Lucas, pretzels, chocolate chip cookies, soda, seltzer, wine...

TRUDY

Do we have something besides your Rieslings? I thought I asked you to get a few bottles of Pinot Gris.

HENRY

Cool your jets. They're on the table. And what's wrong with my Rieslings?

TRUDY

They're too sweet. No one drinks it.

HENRY

They do in New Zealand.

TRUDY

That's fine, but we're not in New Zealand.

HENRY

It brings me back to my youth, traveling through the Marlborough region, sipping the nectar of the vine with the locals. Regaling them with my adventures...

TRUDY

That's great, Magellan. I'll make sure to throw a shrimp on the barby.

HENRY

That's Australia.

TRUDY

What's the difference?

HENRY

Did you know that New Zealand has no land mammals? Just bats. And no snakes. I learned that when I hiked through the wilds of Queensland.

TRUDY

I think you've told me that...at least a dozen times. Did you put out the brie and crackers with my homemade peach jam?

HENRY

How could I forget?

TRUDY

Don't say it like that. You love my homemade jams.

HENRY

I know, but it's not really movie night food.

TRUDY

Not everything has to be direct from the concession stand. It adds a bit of class to the evening.

HENRY

Funny, class doesn't pop up when I think of our movie nights.

TRUDY

It hasn't been that bad.

[HENRY stares at TRUDY in disbelief.]

HENRY

Bad? When has it been good?

TRUDY

We've had lots of fun and good discussions these past five years.

HENRY

That's not what I'm referring to.

TRUDY

What? Those things? They've just been silly incidents. I don't think you need to make a federal case out of them.

HENRY

Have I been attending the same movie nights as you? For instance, what about earlier this year when Kevin decided to reenact James Caan's death scene from The Godfather by shooting up the Johnson's living room with a paint gun?

TRUDY

It did add a bit of realism.

HENRY

Then there was our discussion from Wait Until Dark, where we held it in complete blackness. Amy almost killed herself when she went for more raisinettes.

TRUDY

I didn't like that movie. Too scary, even if Audrey Hepburn was great.

HENRY

Do you sense a pattern here?

TRUDY

Let me see if I understand this. You're saying we haven't had one good movie night in five years. If that's how you feel, then why do we keep doing it? Shouldn't we just stop?

HENRY

No, I'm not saying that exactly. It's just...

TRUDY

What?

HENRY

I always hold out hope that, at least once, we'll have a quiet, relaxing evening with our friends while we enjoy a robust, neh, spirited conversation about a classic film. Maybe a snifter of brandy, while smoking a finely rolled Cuban cigar. Is that too much to ask?

TRUDY

Can you talk like a normal human being and not like a character from one of your plays? I'm begging you.

HENRY

Maybe we could be toasting marshmallows gathered around a crackling fire...

TRUDY

I'm begging you.

HENRY

In all seriousness, just a normal night.

TRUDY

You have to admit, they at least always start out that way. I don't know why things happen to gum up the works.

HENRY

It is always nice to see everyone. We're all so busy, but then something always seems to go awry.

TRUDY

Right. At the very least, it's a good way to catch up with what's happening with everyone. For example, until the other day, I didn't know that Kevin and Joan were about to become grandparents.

HENRY

First I've heard of it. Lucky them. Maybe one day we'll know that feeling.

TRUDY

Please don't start with that again.

HENRY

What am I starting? I'm just making a statement.

TRUDY

You know what I'm talking about. Give it a rest.

HENRY

As our oldest daughter would say, just saying.

TRUDY

I wonder what else we don't know about our friends? I think it's the people who are the closest that have the most to hide.

HENRY

So, what are you hiding from me? Is there something I should know?

TRUDY

That's between me, myself, and I.

HENRY

Well, there are a few things you don't know about me.

[TRUDY laughs.]

TRUDY

Henry, darling, you are the worst person on this planet at keeping something hidden. Who needs email or Instagram, or whatever social media outlet? Just tell Henry Silverstein.

HENRY

I resent that.

TRUDY

You referenced your gossiping ways in one of your plays. Remember?

HENRY

I forgot about that. Well, I don't necessarily need to know everyone's secrets.

TRUDY

I'm not talking about everyone's secrets. That's the last thing I'd want to know. I don't care if someone's having an affair or is the head of some satanic cult.

HENRY

Wait a minute. Who's the cult person? Lucas. Right? It's always the quiet types.

TRUDY

There's another reason why we need to continue with movie night. You know why?

HENRY

ChatGPT told you so?

TRUDY

No, because there was an article in The New York Times.

HENRY

Well, The New York Times. Who can argue with an article that is published in The New York Times?

TRUDY

It said the secret to a longer life is maintaining your social connections. It's critical for keeping up our physical and mental health.

HENRY

So, that's why we need to continue with movie night?

TRUDY

Exactly! It can protect us against heart attack, dementia, and even lower our stress level.

HENRY

It doesn't seem to be working for Kevin. That guy is one stressed-out dude.

TRUDY

High tech is a pressure-filled world.

HENRY

Well, I think I'll live longer if no one's shooting paintballs at me.

TRUDY

I think movie night has gotten better since we started having each couple just pick the month's movie instead of us voting from a thematic list.

HENRY

Some of the themes people came up with were just inane.

TRUDY

Not our lists, of course.

HENRY

Who would even think that?

TRUDY

What was one of my favorites? Oh, yeah, Clint Eastwood comedies.

HENRY

That was a boring night.

TRUDY

I'm having a horrible flashback to the theme - Really Bad Sci Fi Movies. I could have killed Amy and Lucas.

HENRY

Ah, come on. They were classics. I mean, The Blob had Steve McQueen, even if it was kind of stupid. The Queen of Outer Space starred Zsa Zsa Gabor. Besides Green Acres, where else would you see her?

TRUDY

It was her sister Eva who was in Green Acres, not Zsa Zsa.

HENRY

I stand corrected.

TRUDY

Thank god Plan 9 From Outer Space didn't win. I saw that at college, at one of those midnight screenings downtown. It deserves the title of worst movie ever made.

HENRY

At least The Thing was chosen, and fortunately, it was the original, not that god-awful John Carpenter remake. And it wasn't bad. There were chills and thrills. I mean, who doesn't like a murderous seven-foot vegetable terrorizing a remote Arctic research base?

TRUDY

A fun fact that wasn't brought up that night. The Thing was the inspiration for the first Alien movie.

HENRY

Is that a fact?

TRUDY

According to ChatGPT, it is.

HENRY

And why did Carter and Brenda always come up with themes dealing with the Black experience?

TRUDY

Where did that come from?

HENRY

I'm just making an observation since we're talking about past theme nights, that's all.

TRUDY

Maybe because they're Black? Maybe they wanted to share some of their heritage with the group? Maybe they just liked those movies.

HENRY

Did we always ram Jewish-themed movies down people's throats?

TRUDY

That's a bit harsh, saying they rammed the movies down our throats. They gave us a list to choose from, and the group chose. It was as simple as that.

HENRY

You know what I mean.

TRUDY

Actually, I don't.

HENRY

I just thought sometimes they picked movies with the sole intent to educate us or make us be more socially aware. It's not like we don't understand the problems they face.

TRUDY

If I remember correctly, you were the one who came up with the theme of controversial winning Oscar documentaries.

HENRY

We both came up with the list.

TRUDY

The point is, we were looking to do the same thing you're accusing Brenda and Carter of doing.

HENRY

Apples and oranges.

TRUDY

You can be so exasperating.

HENRY

You know what I remember from our choices? Michael Moore's Roger and Me and the film Hoop Dreams weren't even nominated. You're talking two of the best documentaries ever, and they get snubbed by the Oscars.

TRUDY

Don't change the subject.

HENRY

I'm just adding some color commentary to the discussion.

[TRUDY goes off-stage, HENRY readjusts the chairs. After a few moments, TRUDY returns with more items for the refreshment table.]

TRUDY

Look, from an abstract point of view, we can recognize what Carter and Brenda might be experiencing. But we're not living it day-to-day. What their kids had to deal with growing up here. So, I don't know if it's accurate to say we would really understand their issues. And this is all, as you say, colored by the fact they live in a community which is, what, eighty percent White?

HENRY

We know what it means to be persecuted. That's all I'm saying.

TRUDY

It's not the same thing.

HENRY

Sure, it is. There weren't many Jews at my schools. Growing up, you know how many times I was beaten up or made fun of because I was Jewish? A lot. I remember an incident at wrestling practice one time. A kid from the rural part of town, once he found out I was Jewish, asked to see my horns. And he wasn't kidding.

TRUDY

How many times have you been pulled over by the police because of the color of your skin?

HENRY

That's different.

TRUDY

Why is it different if it doesn't fit within your neat rubric? I'll tell you what, why don't we just stop right now? I'll call everyone and say we're canceling tonight.

HENRY

We can't do that. Everything's set. People are expecting movie night.

TRUDY

The way you're talking? You can't have it both ways, Henry. If you're gonna attack our friends and, I may add, our dearest friends, why do you want to continue to socialize with them? And you haven't even told me what you really think of everyone else. I'm surprised movie night has lasted this long.

HENRY

Okay, let's cool your jets. Simmer down. Take a breather. Settle down..

TRUDY

Henry!

HENRY

Excuse me, but if I can't have a discussion with you, then who can I?

TRUDY

Is that what this is? Seems like a full frontal attack.

HENRY

Did I say I dislike Brenda and Carter? Did I?

TRUDY

No.

HENRY

Did I at all insinuate that I didn't want to be with them?

TRUDY

Well, no, but...

HENRY

No buts, please. And I wasn't attacking them personally. I'm rather offended you thought so.

TRUDY

Then what were you doing?

HENRY

Expressing myself. Isn't that what two married people are supposed to do with each other? Have a free exchange of ideas without being judged?

TRUDY

Don't try to justify yourself.

HENRY

Let me turn back the pages of time to, I think it was last week, when you were making fun of Joan's guttural throat-clearing sounds. That wasn't very nice or neighborly of you. Did I admonish you? No.

TRUDY

That is so totally different. Joan is one of my best friends. I would never hurt her.

HENRY

In public, yes. But behind closed doors? Me's think a different story emerges. And I'm not pleading my innocence. Far from it. But that doesn't mean Carter can't be one of my best friends, too. We've known both of them for how long?

TRUDY

Probably thirty years.

HENRY

Thirty-one, but who's counting? They were the first people to welcome us to the block. They had small kids. We had small kids. He liked Star Trek. I liked Star Trek. He saved my life..

TRUDY

Don't be so dramatic.

HENRY

Well, he did...okay, the shark wasn't that close to shore, but he did swim out to warn me.

TRUDY

Let's see, so we've known the Johnsons for thirty..

HENRY

Thirty-one..

TRUDY

Thirty-one years. Kevin and Joan for how long?

HENRY

The Millers for twenty-five years. I remember they moved in just after you gave birth to Charlotte. Amy and Lucas were a few months after Y2K failed to materialize.

TRUDY

I'm impressed.

HENRY

Dates and Broadway trivia. My specialty.

TRUDY

They're gonna be here any minute. Anything else you want to get off your chest before they arrive?

HENRY

Just that I will try to behave.

TRUDY

Thank you. I greatly appreciate that. So, getting back to movie night, what'd you think of Brenda and Carter's pick for this evening?

HENRY

I will admit I was a bit surprised.

TRUDY

Why is that?

HENRY

You know, it wasn't some 1970's Blaxploitation flick.

TRUDY

I thought you said you were going to behave.

HENRY

Just kidding. But I wasn't that surprised. I mean, they are both uber Disney fans.

TRUDY

Aren't they Magic Key club members?

HENRY

Not only are they part of the Magic Key, but Carter told me, maybe a couple of months ago, that an opening became available to join the exclusive Club 33.

TRUDY

I never heard of that.

HENRY

Only for the real Disney fanatics. They now have access to private lounges across the parks, one-of-a-kind perks, and fine dining options.

TRUDY

Isn't that an oxymoron?

HENRY

You know they got married at Disney World?

TRUDY

Yes, Brenda has told me about it many times.

HENRY

If it were me, I would have picked a spot with more...charm and atmosphere.

TRUDY

Why, what's wrong with It's a Small World? It's one of my favorite rides.

HENRY

There you go. Now you've done it.

TRUDY

Done what?

HENRY

Mentioned It's a Small World. Now I'll never get that tune out of my head tonight.

TRUDY

Well, I for one was very happy with their choice for tonight.

HENRY

I guess so. I don't think I've seen it since the kids were young.

TRUDY

I mean, Mary Poppins. What could possibly go wrong with that?