

BRIGHTS premiered at the Harold Clurman Theatre in New York City, May 1995. It was directed by Diana Gold; the set and lighting were designed by Dan Kozan. The cast was as follows:

KAREN BARNES	Dora Maxine
FRED BARNES	Jon Sperry
VERA BROUSSARD	Emilie Devezac
RICHARD MEYERS	R. J. Carlson

(The interior of a car. FRED BARNES drives. His wife, KAREN, is in the seat beside him. Behind her sits RICHARD MEYERS, while VERA BROUSSARD is behind FRED. RICHARD studies the back of KAREN's head.)

RICHARD: First the honeymoon. Now a weekend in the country. Your life's pretty much the tips.

VERA: Except for their house guests.

RICHARD: What. That wasn't rude.

VERA: You were fine up to the tips.

KAREN: Actually, I've always liked that expression. You don't hear it much anymore.

VERA: Wait. Richard's usually good for a few items that shouldn't be said at all.

FRED: Jerk. *(He squints up at the rearview mirror.)* This guy's tailgating me. With his high beams on.

(KAREN glances out the rear window.)

KAREN: No, honey. It's just the two headlights.

FRED: They're those high-low kind. They've got to be. Look how bright they are.

KAREN: *(after a beat, to RICHARD and VERA)* Fred told me you're working on a screenplay together.

VERA: Between fights.

RICHARD: Vera and I basically have zero respect for each other, so we figured we'd be partners.

FRED: Why do people do this?

(KAREN looks out the rear window again.)

KAREN: Wow. He is pretty close.

FRED: We could be towing him, for God's sake. But here's Route Eight, so . . . (He turns the wheel. A second later, the interior's flooded with light again.) Oh, terrific.

(RICHARD glances back.)

RICHARD: Maybe you are towing him.

KAREN: Sweetie, don't let it bother you.

RICHARD: Personally, as an actor, I'm very comfortable being bathed in light. Of course it only seems to happen in the back seats of cars these days. Which is why I've been reduced to writing a screenplay.

VERA: Down, Simba.

RICHARD: Skating dangerously close to self-pity, am I? What the hell. That's what weekends are for. (He leans closer to KAREN.) So how come you're still Baumgarten?

VERA: Here we go. Off to the races.

RICHARD: (to KAREN) Am I being rude?

KAREN: No.

(RICHARD gives VERA a smug "so there" look.)

RICHARD: Then what's the story? You're just not a Barnes kind of gal?

KAREN: I married Fred, not his name.

RICHARD: I was wondering about that too.

(FRED's gripping the wheel tighter and stares at the rearview mirror.)

FRED: What does this idiot want?

RICHARD: What any idiot wants, probably. No-brainer job. Comfy den—maybe in the country. A wife to bore.

(KAREN sighs, then turns to face RICHARD.)

KAREN: Have you ever been married?

RICHARD: Not to the right person.

VERA: Either time.

RICHARD: Well hell, all the keepers end up with Feds.

KAREN: If they're lucky.

RICHARD: Or figure that's as lucky as they're going to get. (VERA mouths "Back off" to RICHARD.) Off? Oh, back off.

VERA: Christ, you met the woman less than two hours ago. Can't you keep the conversation neutral till we at least get out of Connecticut? Talk about the weather. Or pets.

KAREN: How about bad movies? We can all agree on some of those.

(She smiles pointedly at RICHARD, who squirms.)

RICHARD: Beautiful day, wasn't it? I saw an Airedale outside Zabar's with a parrot on its back.

KAREN: What was that one called . . . ? Oh yeah; *Dying's Easy*.

VERA: You saw that? God, nobody else did. Not even the producer.

RICHARD: Vera.

VERA: (portentous announcer voice) "*Dying's Easy* . . . Siting through it's impossible." (KAREN laughs.)

RICHARD: Couple of goddamn sadists. (He fumes for a few beats.) It was a [redacted] job.

KAREN: And you figured that was as lucky as you were going to get?

(She and RICHARD eye each other. FRED abruptly turns the wheel again. Again the bright light fills the interior an instant later.)

FRED: Jesus God.

VERA: We've still got company, huh?

RICHARD: Chill, Freddy. You're getting that old I'm-a-goner look. (to KAREN) I've seen it every week for the last two years. But your hubby's a terrier. Mark my words, the day's going to come when he does beat me at racquetball.

VERA: Then what'll you do—find a new partner?

RICHARD: Hell no. I love Fred. He's everything I'm not. Polite. Reasonable. Employed. The man's a pussycat. Not to mention a totally open book. With Fred Barnes, what you see is what's really there.

(All three look at FRED, who stares up at the mirror with genuine dread. KAREN's disturbed.)

KAREN: Honey, forget the car. We'll get to the house whether there's an [redacted] on our tail or not. (to VERA and RICHARD) Excuse me.

RICHARD: Hey, there's an [redacted] on everybody's tail.

VERA: (under her breath) She's sure got one behind her.

RICHARD: That's another thing. By now, most guys would've hit the gas and lost this prick. Not Fred. Nope. He's got his way of doing things, and that's that. Right now he's driving, which means he'd rather cross the whole damn country with this moron on his butt than do it any different.

FRED: (to KAREN, shaky) I swear I didn't want this to happen.

RICHARD: (sotto voce, to VERA) He must go to pieces if the magazine section's missing from the Sunday Times.

KAREN/VERA: Shut up.

KAREN: I'm sorry. I just wish you'd . . . shut up.

RICHARD: Fine. No problem. (muses bitterly) You know why people don't like me?

VERA: Absolutely.

RICHARD: It's because they can't stand me reminding them of the one thing I care about above all others.

VERA: Yourself.

RICHARD: The truth! It's too tough to swallow. And too dangerous to bring up. God forbid someone has to deal with a point-blank shot of honesty. Or an audience does. That's why the hell I'm not working.

KAREN: Maybe you're just not talented enough.

RICHARD: That's [redacted]

KAREN: Have you seen Dying's Easy?

FRED: No, no, no . . . (He can't tear his eyes away from the rearview mirror)

KAREN: Goddamn it, Fred, would you please . . . ? (She trails off, upset.)

RICHARD: Ah. Now I get it. You know, I could never figure out why after forty-some-odd Thursday nights of racquetball, Fred never asked me to come meet his new fiancée. But it just hit me: he was afraid.

FRED: Oh Lord.

RICHARD: Afraid I'd stir you up—get you thinking about stuff best left tucked away.

KAREN: Like what?

RICHARD: The life you really wanted.

KAREN: (*to VERA*) Are all actors like this?

VERA: The ones who can't get work are.

RICHARD: What did you dream about when you were a kid? Growing up and finding a guy who'd fall apart when he was tallgated? I don't think so.

KAREN: Gee, this ought to be a terrific weekend.

RICHARD: You want heat. Light. Size. Something new to reach for all the time, even if you can't always get your hand around it. I know, because that's how I am. But you know what the difference is between us?

VERA: She's a human being.

RICHARD: I'm still grabbing at the world. You're settling for that cozy den—and a guy who'll sit in it.

KAREN: I love Fred!

FRED: (*distracted*) Huh? What?

RICHARD: Then you're in great shape. Because this is exactly how the ride's going to be for the next forty years. Smooth and steady and way too slow for the people with the brights.

(*KAREN'S shaken. VERA glances at RICHARD.*)

VERA: Nice work.

(*FRED suddenly screams at the rearview mirror.*)

FRED: Damn you!

KAREN: Will you stop it!?

FRED: It's them.

RICHARD: What, in the car behind us?

FRED: Who else can it be? Someone who just happened to take Nine G, Route Eight and Marconi Road the same time I did? No.

VERA: Are you saying this car's following us?

FRED: Following. Chasing. It doesn't really make much difference how you put it now.

RICHARD: (*a bit spooked*) You're nuts. Who'd chase you?

FRED: Them.

KAREN: Fred, you're scaring me. Why would people be after you?

FRED: Because of what I did.

RICHARD: Relax. They don't sic goon squads on people for having overdue library books.

FRED: (*to KAREN*) I didn't go to my Aunt Gussie's cottage in Vermont last summer. I was in Marseille.

KAREN: France?

FRED: And Tangiers. I was . . . helping a friend, but something went wrong.

RICHARD: Christ, this sounds like something out of our god-damn screenplay.

FRED: All I had to do was pick up the package and drop it off someplace.

KAREN: A package. What was in it?

FRED: Money. Maybe drugs. They never told me what I was cartying.

VERA: "Never told you?" This was some kind of regular gig?

FRED: (*nods*) Since nineteen eighty. No, eighty-one; I remember. It was just after I got my Sears card.

RICHARD: Jesus.

VERA: You got paid and all?

FRED: They treated me like royalty. They really did. First-class flights. Five-star hotels. Always. And after, when they handed me my money, they'd say "Thank you so much, Mr. Barnes." I think that's why I kept doing it. I liked how it felt being Mr. Barnes.

(KAREN looks at FRED as if for the first time.)

KAREN: Mr. Barnes. (FRED meets her gaze.) What happened in Marseilles?

FRED: The delivery was supposed to be at a bakery. The back door. In an alley. Only nobody answered when I knocked, and when I turned around there were two kids standing there. Kids. They were built like a couple of Mike Tysons, but still, they really were only kids.

VERA: Who ripped you off.

FRED: No, that's just it. I fought back. And killed one of them.

RICHARD: Get the [redacted] out of here.

FRED: It wasn't a plan. I didn't hate the boy. My hands ended up on his throat, though. And I squeezed, and kept squeezing till his tongue flopped out and his slobber was all over my sleeve. When I let go, he dropped like a sack of sand. Finished.

(Silence. VERA turns to RICHARD.)

VERA: This is better than our screenplay.

RICHARD: Wait a minute. How do you know the jerk-off wasn't just passed out?

FRED: I know.

RICHARD: How!

FRED: I smashed his skull with a brick.

KAREN: Fred.

RICHARD: (not wanting to believe) Where'd you get the brick?

VERA: The other kid got away.

FRED: (nods) And told his people, who obviously found these people (indicates the following car) who found me. Found us.

RICHARD: What's this "us" crap? You're the Marseilles strangler.

FRED: But you're with him.

KAREN: My God.

VERA: I think I'm . . . Yeah, I'm definitely going to throw up.

RICHARD: Hold it, hold it. This is [redacted] Fred Barnes, drug mule to the stars? Bare-handed killer? Come on. This is a guy who can't win a stinking racquetball game in two years, for Christ's sake.

(KAREN's eyes seem to glow a little brighter.)

KAREN: I think it could've happened.

RICHARD: Okay, even if it did, we're supposed to believe that out of all the cars in the world, this one's got the bad guys in it? No, sorry. I don't buy it.

KAREN: (looking ahead) Honey. Puffon Lane.

(FRED turns the wheel sharply. Everyone looks behind them. An instant later the light floods the interior. RICHARD and VERA scream.)

RICHARD: Stop the car! Stop the goddamn car!

FRED: You'd be dead before your shoe touched the ground.

VERA: (to RICHARD) You had to keep hocking him to invite us up to the country, didn't you?! Moron. Idiot!

KAREN: Fred, what are we going to do? The driveway's just over this hill.

FRED: I know, I know.

RICHARD: The driveway?!  the driveway! Just go. Drive. Floor it!

FRED: We'll never be able to outrun these people.

(He reaches under the seat and comes up with an antitheft club, which he holds weapon-like.)

KAREN: You're going to fight them?

FRED: What else is there?


VERA: That's it. See you. Good-bye.

RICHARD: , !

(FRED tries to smile at KAREN.)

FRED: Some surprise, huh? I'm sorry.

KAREN: There's the driveway.

FRED: You do know I love you, right? (KAREN nods, terrified—and a bit turned on.) Hang on. (He wrenches the wheel and slams on the brakes.) Come on, you sons of !

(VERA and RICHARD scream and duck out of sight. But as KAREN and FRED whirl to face their pursuers, they're stunned.)

KAREN: They kept going. (RICHARD and VERA pop up. All four react with a jolt.)

VERA: And now they turned their brights on. (VERA, RICHARD and KAREN stare at FRED, still clutching his weapon. KAREN shows the beginnings of a smile.)

END

R.A.W.

(('CAUSE I'M A WOMAN)

Diana Son