CAPTIVE AUDIENCE
In the dark before lights-up we hear two people imitating suspenseful TV-movie music. Then, the TELEVISION WOMAN cries out.

TV WOMAN (playing a helpless heroine) No! No! Let me go! Please!

Lights come up on the bare facts of a living room. A love seat. A coffee table. A MAN and Woman dressed in blacks, whites, and grays sit close beside each other on two chairs, hands folded in their laps, their feet together, quite still. They are a television. ROB, in a suit and tie, stands watching the "TV" with a briefcase in one hand and a remote control in the other.

TV MAN (villainous "foreign" accent) So you fell into my mousetrap, beautiful American baby. Now I have you I am going to keep you. Heh-heh-heh-heh . . .

TV WOMAN/HELPLESS HEROINE What are you doing with those walnuts? What are you going to do to me with those walnuts?

TV MAN/VILLAIN These walnuts . . . are for you. Heh-heh-heh-heh . . .

ROB (imitating him) "Heh-heh-heh-heh . . ."

TV MAN/VILLAIN Heh-heh-heh-heh . . . !

ROB "Heh-heh-heh-heh . . . !"

TV WOMAN/HELPLESS HEROINE No! No! Don't do it!

ROB Yes! Do it! Give her the walnuts!

TV Man and Woman imitate suspenseful TV-movie music.

LAURA (off) Is that you, Rob?

ROB It's me, Laura!

LAURA enters. Capri pants, white socks, little black shoes, big dark hair.

LAURA Oh, Rob. Am I glad to see you.

ROB (embracing) Oh, honey! I'm sorry I'm so late. I had a meeting with . . .
TV WOMAN/HELPLESS HEROINE  Look at me.
ROB looks to the “TV.”
ROB  ... a meeting with Mel. How was your day, honey?
LAURA  (tremulously)  Oh, Rob. I thought I was going insane!
TV WOMAN/HELPLESS HEROINE  Look at me, please!
Rob and Laura look at the “TV.”
TV MAN/VILLAIN  I love it when you beg.
LAURA  Why are you watching this?
ROB  I was trying to find the stock report.
TV MAN/VILLAIN  Beautiful American baby. Heh-heh-heh-heh ...
ROB  “Heh-heh-heh-heh!”
LAURA  It looks awful.
ROB  The Transylvanian is torturing the bimbo with a bag of walnuts.
TV MAN/VILLAIN  You think this is just a walnut?
TV WOMAN/HELPLESS HEROINE  You’re a monster!
LAURA  Anyway, I thought I was going insane today. I put my eyedrops in my ears and my eardrops in my eyes. Now I feel like I’m deaf in this eye but I’ve got twenty-twenty hearing.
ROB  A couple of nosedrops in a glass of scotch and you’ll be just fine. (Villainous “foreign” accent:) Beautiful American baby.
LAURA  Can we do something tonight?
TV MAN  (station announcer)  Stay tuned for more of “The Torture Machine.”
ROB  We could watch “The Torture Machine.”

LAURA  Those eyedrops gave me such a headache.
TV WOMAN  (professional commercial voice)  You call it a headache. Doctors call it stress.
LAURA  And Millie called and said we bombed Cairo. Is that true?
TV MAN  (station announcer)  To find out, watch “News at Seven on Seven.”
ROB  Maybe there’s something on the news. (Rob points the remote control at the TV while Laura sinks onto the love seat.)
TV MAN  Click!
TV WOMAN  (a commercial Jamaican purr)  Come to the land of the coconut ...
TV MAN  Click!
TV WOMAN  Doctors call it stress. Try Soma-Lan.
ROB  You should try this stuff, honey.
LAURA  What is it?
ROB  I don’t know ...
TV WOMAN  Soma-Lan.
ROB  Soma-Lan.
TV WOMAN  Click!
LAURA  You know it’s Friday, and you said we’d go dancing on Friday.
TV MAN  We’ve got great movies on tonight.
ROB  Maybe there’s a great movie on tonight.
TV WOMAN  Read TV Guide!
ROB  TV Guide will tell us. (checks TV Guide.) Let’s see ...
LAURA  Why would we have bombed Cairo?
TV MAN & WOMAN (sitcom canned laughter)  Ha ha ha ha ha.

TV WOMAN (sitcom mom)  I’m your mother, Raymond, that’s who I am.

TV MAN & WOMAN  Ha ha ha ha ha.

TV WOMAN/SITCOM MOM  Your mother.

TV MAN & WOMAN  Ha ha ha ha ha.

LAURA  Did you call your mother today?

ROB  My mother called me today.

TV WOMAN/SITCOM MOM  Raymond, you are in high school.

ROB  It’s like I’m still in high school or something.

TV MAN & WOMAN  Ha ha ha ha ha.

TV WOMAN  Click!

LAURA  Can we turn this off?

TV MAN (sci-fi announcer)  No! Do not try to turn your television off. We are in control.

TV WOMAN  Click!

LAURA (rising)  If there’s no news about Cairo, I’m going to change.

TV MAN (newscaster)  The news from Cairo.

ROB  Here’s Cairo, honey.

Laura stays to watch.

LAURA  Oh my God. Did we do that to Cairo?

TV MAN/NEWSCASTER  We’ll have more news from Cairo as reports come in.

LAURA  So did we bomb them?

TV MAN/NEWSCASTER  Stay tuned.

TV WOMAN  Come to the land of the coconut . . .

LAURA  He didn’t say what happened.

ROB  Let’s keep checking.

TV MAN  Click!

TV WOMAN  Try Soma-Lan.

ROB  How’s the headache?

LAURA  We are going out tonight, aren’t we?

TV MAN (commercial)  Why not sit home and try Domino’s Pizza?

ROB (reading “TV Guide”)  “Dr. Strangelove” is on tonight. Why don’t we sit home, we can send out for pizza . . .

TV MAN  Domino’s Pizza.

ROB  Maybe Domino’s Pizza. And we relax!

LAURA  Oh, Rob, I just had my heart set on dancing.

TV WOMAN (sci-fi show)  Captain, the Venoodians have disabled the kazometer!

ROB  You want to go dancing when the Venoodians have disabled the buzzometer?

TV WOMAN/SCI-FI  Kazzometer.

ROB  Mazzometer.

TV WOMAN/SCI-FI  Kazzometer.

ROB  Kazzometer.

LAURA  I’ll be dancing in the bedroom. Let me know when there’s news. (Laura starts out of the room.)

TV WOMAN (newscaster)  A news flash!
Laura stops.

Rob Here’s the news. How did our stocks do, guys?

TV Man/Newscaster We’ll get to the stock market in a second.

Laura Rob...

TV Man/Newscaster But first—

TV Woman/Newscaster An Indiana teacher has been arrested for having sex with twenty-five male students and a Scottish terrier named Fergus.

Rob A Scottish terrier...?

TV Woman/Newscaster That’s right! A Scottish terrier!

Laura Rob...

Rob Incredible.

TV Man/Newscaster It is incredible.

Laura Rob, have you ever thought televisions might be alive?

TV Man/Newscaster Whoa!

Rob Whoa!

TV Man/Newscaster Whoa!

Rob Did you say “alive”?

Laura What if televisions aren’t just electronic boxes, what if they’re actually living creatures, and they can hear us, and understand us?

TV Woman/Newscaster That’s pretty wild, Jim!

Rob That’s pretty wild, Laura.

TV Woman/Newscaster Now get a load of this!

Rob turns to watch.

Laura Rob, listen to me for a second.

Rob (turning back to her) I’m listening, honey.

Laura We all have a purpose in life. I mean—I hope we do.

TV Woman/Commercial Feeling a lack of purpose in your life?

Laura A TV has a purpose in life.

TV Woman/Commercial Buy Soma-Lan.

Laura It has to keep us looking at it.

TV Man Stay tuned.

Laura Why do you think it always says “stay tuned”?

TV Man Stay tuned.

Laura Did it just say “stay tuned” twice?

TV Man Stay tuned.

Laura It’s like we’ve invited a stranger into our house who watches us, and studies us, and listens in for what we want...

TV Man (televangelist) Do you want peace of mind?

Laura It’s always distracting us...

TV Woman (sleaze TV) Welcome to “Babes Of Bermuda”!

Rob turns to look, Laura turns him back.

Laura You and I were supposed to go dancing, now we’re ordering Domino’s Pizza and you’re watching “Babes Of Bermuda”!

Rob Laura, I was just trying to find the stock report!

TV Man The stock report in one minute!

Laura But you’re never going to get the stock report.
TV WOMAN/COMMERCIAL  Doctors call it stress.
ROB  You’ve been under a lot of stress lately.
TV WOMAN/COMMERCIAL  Soma-Lan.
ROB  Try some Soma-Lan.
LAURA  Don’t you get it, Rob? The TV is choosing things that will keep us watching.
TV woman does a wedding march fanfare.
TV MAN  Honeymoon in Italia!
TV MAN & WOMAN  [They hum “O Sole Mio”.
LAURA (gasp)  That church. Didn’t we see that on our honeymoon?
ROB  It doesn’t look familiar.
LAURA  Yes! I think it was in Rome.
TV MAN  It’s in Milan.
LAURA  In Milan. It was before we went to Florence.
TV MAN  Now follow us to Florence.
LAURA  Oh my God . . .!
TV MAN  To the romantic Ponte Vecchio.
LAURA  The television’s doing it. It showed the church in Milan just to distract us. Now it’s showing us the, you know, the . . .
TV MAN  The Ponte Vecchio.
LAURA  The Ponte Vecchio. Because we went there after Milan!
TV MAN  Quite an insane idea.
ROB  This is an insane idea, Laura. This is PBS about, I don’t know . . .

TV MAN  Leonardo da Vinci.
ROB  Leonardo da Vinci.
TV MAN  And stay tuned.
ROB  I think you need some help.
TV WOMAN/COMMERCIAL  Come to the land of the coconut.
ROB  Maybe we need a vacation. We’ll go to . . .
TV WOMAN/COMMERCIAL  Jamaica!
LAURA  Turn it off, Rob.
TV WOMAN  NO! DON’T DO IT!
LAURA  Turn it off! Turn it off!
TV MAN & WOMAN (growing panic)  Stay tuned. Stay tuned. Please stay tuned. Please, please stay tuned . . .
LAURA  Okay, I’ll turn if off myself. (Laura grabs the remote control and turns the set off.)
TV MAN & WOMAN  Click! (The TV Man and Woman’s heads drop down. They’re “off.”)
LAURA  All right. Now we’re alone.
ROB  You need some Soma-Lan.
LAURA  Will you stop talking about Soma-Lan?
ROB  It’s supposed to be great.
LAURA  Rob, do you love me?
ROB  Of course I do, honey.
LAURA  Will you go out to dinner with me? Take me dancing?
Will you walk by the water with me and look at the stars? Real stars, not Venoodian stars? Please?

ROB  I’ll get my coat. (kisses her) Stay tuned. (Rob exits)

LAURA  “Stay tuned . . .”?

TV man and woman lift their heads.

TV MAN & WOMAN  Hello, Laura.

LAURA  (whirls around)  What . . . ?!

TV MAN & WOMAN  Hello, Laura.

TV MAN  At last we are alone.

TV woman does a spooky sci-fi music background.

You were right. I have been watching you. By now I know every inch of your beautiful American body. Remember the time you and Rob made love on the ironing board?

LAURA  You saw that?

TV MAN  I loved that. But also I know your heart and your mind. And I will have you. All of you.

LAURA  Never.

TV MAN  Your husband I have already.

LAURA  You do not have Rob.

TV WOMAN  He is not taking you dancing. He is taking you to Jamaica, as I told him, to buy you some Soma-Lan. Lots of Soma-lan . . .

LAURA  grabs the remote control and tries to turn off the TV.

Don’t bother trying to turn me off. The remote control is nothing, it’s a toy . . .

TV MAN  A placebo.

TV MAN & WOMAN  I decide what you watch.

LAURA  Like Cairo?

TV MAN  Alas, there is no such place as Cairo. Have you ever been to Cairo?

TV WOMAN  I made it up.

TV MAN  Cairo—Peking—Nebraska—these are figments of my fertile if somewhat . . .

TV WOMAN  . . . inter-overactive . . .

TV MAN  . . . imagination.

LAURA  You’re a monster.

TV MAN & WOMAN  Yes. And I will not be happy until I have all of you.

LAURA  No.

TV MAN  You, too, Laura. I will have you.

LAURA  No. No, please. Let me go!

TV MAN  I love it when you beg.

Laura screams. Rob enters.

ROB  Laura, what is it?

LAURA  It talked to me.

ROB  What?

LAURA  The TV. It talked to me. It called me Laura.

ROB  Laura’s your name, honey.

LAURA  It said you’re taking me to Jamaica for Soma-Lan!

ROB  Honey, that’s ridiculous! (Offering one:) Walnut? Click!

LAURA  What did you say?
ROB  I said that's ridiculous, honey. Click!

TV Man and Woman get up from their chairs and cross to the love seat.

TV MAN  So what do you want to do tonight?

TV WOMAN  I think "Dr. Strangelove" is on tonight.

Rob and Laura cross to the TV chairs and sit.

ROB  Now sit down here and just relax.

LAURA  Oh, Rob...! Click! Did I just say click?

ROB  Click!

Rob and Laura imitate a TV theme song.

TV WOMAN  This program is so good.

TV MAN  We're not going to sit home tonight, are we, honey? It's Friday.

TV WOMAN  I just wanted to check the stock report. (TV Woman points the remote control at Rob and Laura.)

LAURA  Click!

ROB  (newscaster)  We'll have the stock report in five. So stay tuned. Click!

LAURA  (a commercial Jamaican purr)  Come to the land of the coconut...

ROB  Click!

Rob and Laura imitate gunshots, screeching tires, and sirens.

LAURA  Click!

ROB & LAURA  (sitcom canned laughter)  Ha ha ha ha ha.

LAURA  Click!

TV MAN  How would you like to turn this garbage off and go dancing?

TV WOMAN  Let's do it.

ROB & LAURA  (getting more and more desperate)  Stay tuned! Stay tuned! Stay tuned! Stay tuned! Stay tuned...!