Andre's Mother

ANDRE'S MOTHER was first performed Off-Broadway by the Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynn Meadow, artistic Director; Barry Grove, Managing Director), in New York City, on May 18, 1988. It formed part of an evening entitled Urban Blight which was directed by John Tillinger and Richard Maltby Jr. The cast was as follows:

CAL .................................................. John Rubinstein
PENNY .............................................. Faith Prince
CAL'S FATHER ...................................... Rex Robbins
ANDRE'S MOTHER ................................. E. Katherine Kerr

Four people enter. They are nicely dressed and carry white helium-filled balloons on a string. They are Cal, a young man; Arthur, his father; Penny, his sister, and Andre's mother.

CAL: You know what's really terrible? I can't think of anything terrific to say. Goodbye. I love you. I'll miss you. And I'm supposed to be so great with words!
PENNY: What's that over there?
ARTHUR: Ask your brother.
CAL: It's a theatre. An outdoor theatre. They do plays there in the summer. Shakespeare's plays. (To Andre's Mother) God, how much he wanted to play Hamlet. It was his greatest dream. I think he would have sold his soul to play it. He would have gone to Timbuktu to have another go at that part. The summer he did it in Boston, he was so happy!
PENNY: Cal, I don't think she . . . ! It's not the time. Later.
ARTHUR: Your son was a . . . the Jews have a word for it . . .
PENNY: (Quietly appalled.) Oh my God!
ARTHUR: Mensch, I believe it is and I think I'm using it right. It means warm, solid, the real thing. Correct me if I'm wrong.
PENNY: Fine, dad, fine. Just quit while you're ahead.
ARTHUR: I won't say he was like a son to me. Even my son isn't always like a son to me. I mean . . . ! In my clumsy way, I'm trying to say how much I liked Andre. And how much he helped me to know my own boy. Cal was always two hands full but Andre and I could talk about anything under the sun. My wife was very fond of him, too.
PENNY: Cal, I don't understand about the balloons.
CAL: They represent the soul. When you let go, it means you're letting his soul ascend to Heaven. That you're willing to let go. Breaking the last earthly ties.
PENNY: Does the Pope know about this?
ARTHUR: Penny!
PENNY: I love my sense of humor. Listen, you can hear him
laughing. (She lets go of her white balloon.) So long, you glorious,
lovely, I-know-what-Cal-means-about-words. . . man! God
forgive me for wishing you were straight every time I laid eyes
on you. But if any man was going to have you, I'm glad it was
my brother! Look how fast it went up. I bet that means some-
thing. Something terrific.

ARTHUR: (Arthur lets his balloon go.) Goodbye. God speed.
PENNY: Cal
CAL: I'm not ready yet.
PENNY: Okay. We'll be over there. Come on, pop, you can buy your
little girl a Good Humor.

ARTHUR: They still make Good Humor?
PENNY: Only now they're called Dove Bars and they cost 12 dollars.

(Penny takes Arthur off. Cal and Andre's mother stand with their
balloons.)

CAL: I wish I knew what you were thinking. I think it would help me.
You know almost nothing about me and I only know what Andre
told me about you. I'd always had it in my mind that one day we
would be friends, you and me. But if you didn't know about
Andre and me . . . if this hadn't happened, I wonder if he would
have ever told you. When he was so sick, if I asked him once I
asked him a thousand times, tell her. She's your mother. She
won't mind. But he was so afraid of hurting you and of your dis-
approval. I don't know which was worse. (No response. He sighs.)
God, how many of us live in this city because we don't want to
hurt our mothers and live in mortal terror of their disapproval.
We lose ourselves here. Our lives aren't fun, just our feelings
toward people like you are! A city of fugitives from our parent's
scorn or heartbreak. Sometimes he'd seem a little down and I'd
say, "What's the matter, babe?" and this funny sweet, sad smile
would cross his face and he'd say, "Just a little homesick, Cal, just
a little bit." I always accused him of being a country boy just
playing at being a hot shot, sophisticated New Yorker. (He sighs.)
It's bullshit. It's all bullshit. (Still no response.) Do you remember
the comic strip Little Lulu? Her mother had no name, she was so
remote, so formidable to all the children. She was just Lulu's
mother. "Hello, Lulu's Mother." Lulu's friends would say. She was
almost anonymous in her remoteness. You remind me of her.
Andre's mother. Let me answer the questions you can't ask and
then I'll leave you alone and you won't ever have to see me
again. Andre died of AIDS. I don't know how he got it. I tested
negative. He died bravely. You would have been proud of him.
The only thing that frightened him was you. I'll have everything
that was his sent to you. I'll pay for it. There isn't much. You
should have come up the summer he played Hamlet. He was
magnificent. Yes, I'm bitter. I'm bitter I've lost him. I'm bitter
what's happening. I'm bitter even now, after all this, I can't reach
you. I'm beginning to feel your disapproval and it's making me
ill. (He looks at his balloon.) Sorry, old friend. I blew it. (He lets go
of the balloon.) Good night, sweet prince, and flights of angels
sing thee to thy rest! (Beat.) Goodbye, Andre's mother. (He goes.
Andre's Mother stands alone holding her white balloon. Her lip
trembles. She looks on the verge of breaking down. She is about to
let go of the balloon when she pulls it down to her. She looks at it a
while before she gently kisses it. She lets go of the balloon. She fol-
sows it with her eyes as it rises and rises. The lights are beginning
to fade. Andre's Mother's eyes are still on the balloon. Blackout.)