

# Risky Business

(Comedy/Adventure) (1983)

© 1999 by Raymond Weschler

## Major Characters

Joel.....Tom Cruise

High School senior living with his upper middle class parents in a nice Chicago suburb.

Miles.....Curtis Armstrong

Joel's intelligent and somewhat irresponsible friend.

Barry.....Bronson Pinchot

Another loyal friend of Joel's.

Lana.....Rebecca De Mornay

A beautiful prostitute that Joel calls up while his parents are away on vacation.

Guido.....Joe Pantoliano

Lana's violent and crazy "manager."

## Plot summary

This is a movie about upper middle class high school kids in Chicago in the year before they leave for college. In particular, its about Joel, a friendly and personable senior, and the adventures he gets into during the time his parents leave on vacation. As a typical, sexually frustrated senior with typical sexually frustrated friends, Joel gets into *lots* of trouble.

The real problems start after Miles calls a prostitute, and tells her to come visit Joel at his parent's house. She is not exactly Joel's taste, but the idea sticks in his head, and Joel soon finds himself with his "dream date." Unfortunately, his dream girl is Lana, who steals his mother's very expensive glass egg. In his desperation to get it back, Joel ends up multiplying his problems. Among his biggest concerns is Guido, Lana's manager, who is furious at Joel for taking Lana away from him.

After Joel accidentally drives his dad's very expensive car into Lake Michigan, he must quickly think of a way to pay for the repairs. Lana suggests that since she has lots of friends that are prostitutes, and he has lots of friends who

would love to use their services, he should turn his parent's home into a house of prostitution for a single night. It's a very risky thing to do, especially since his extremely conservative parents will soon be returning. But Miles has taught Joel that once in a while, you just have to take risks in life, or as Miles would say, sometimes you just have to say "what the fuck..."

## Words and Expressions that You may not Know

*Joel Goodson reflects on his future...*

I ring, but nobody answers.

Note that a phone can ring, or you can ring a door bell.

I go upstairs, to see what's what.

A colloquial way of saying to see what the situation is.

It's a dream...so I go with it.

A colloquial way of saying "I accept the premise, and continue..."

Enthusiastic.

An important word for excited, or showing a lot of interest.

It's hard to see through the steam and stuff.

"And stuff" is a common way to end sentences when the speaker is not being very specific. "Stuff" means "things."

College boards.

Exams that high school students take to get into college.

5 card draw....split high/split low...deuces and aces wild.

Various terms used in the card game of poker: If "a deuce is wild," this means that the deuce (the number 2) is worth whatever number the player wants it to be. If you really want to learn the vocabulary of poker, ask a friend to teach it to you before you play!

She plops down right on the kitchen floor.

"To plop down" somewhere is to sit or lie down, usually quickly.

I think you got the hell out of there, and then you wacked off.

"To get the hell out of" someplace is a very slangy way of saying to leave quickly. "To whack off" is an interesting and very slangy phrasal verb meaning to masturbate.

No guts!

"Guts" are intestines, but is used as a slang word to mean courage.

It could've worked out.

If something "works out," it is done well, or accomplished successfully.

Sometimes you've got to say "what the fuck."

The key words of the film: Here, it means that "you can't take life too seriously, and sometimes you have to take risks." It could express other emotions, such as disappointment, depending on the context.

It's easy for you to say. You're going to Harvard.

Harvard is considered by many to be the best university in the United States (located in Boston, Massachusetts).

Did you get your SAT scores?

Scholastic Aptitude Test. The key test for getting into universities.

570 math, 560 verbal.

The SAT is divided into mathematical and verbal sections (800 is the best score you can get on each section. These scores are decent, but not great).

***As Joel's parent's prepare for their vacation, Joel assures them that the house will be in good hands, and that there is nothing to worry about.***

Did you pack my mace?

A type of noxious gas that people carry in small containers to protect themselves against attackers (it's also used by the police).

A preponderance of bass.

An "excess amount." In this case, meaning the bass on the stereo is set too high.

If you can't use it properly, you're not to use it at all

Note the grammatical construction: This is the way people with power talk to those without it ("You are not to do that").

I'll never get into Princeton.

An excellent university in the State of New Jersey.

Tell him about "Future Enterprisers."

The name of the club that Joel is in, which encourages students to be creative business people, or "entrepreneurs."

The ficus in the living room.

A type of plant.

Use your best judgment.

Another way to say "use common sense."

He must have aced his boards.

"To ace" an exam is to get an A on it. "Boards" refer to college board exams, which are often critical tests needed for entrance to a university.

A Harvard MBA makes 40 grand.

An MBA is a person with a "Master's in Business Administration."

A "grand" is a very common colloquial way to say \$1,000.

Dermatologist.

A doctor who specializes in diseases of the skin.

That much money...just for squeezing zits?

A slangy word for pimples.

I want to serve my fellow mankind.

What idealists feel, and dishonest politicians say.

Marketing and sales.

Business terms referring to the promotion and selling of a product.

I thought it would look good on my record.

Here, referring to high school records (grades, test scores and student activities, which all universities look at when deciding whether to admit a student).

You're going to get your ass kicked if you miss it.

"To kick someone's ass" is a very common way of saying to physically hurt them. It's often said sarcastically.

**Annoying**

A common alternative to irritating.

If you read me, grunt twice.

In the right context (often when two people can't see each other), "Do you read me?" means "do you understand me?" A "grunt" is a deep guttural sound, made both when having sex, or, for example, when being hit by a baseball.

Porsche.

A very expensive and well known type of German sports car.

He bopped her, then he fucked her.

"To bop" someone is a funny way to say hit, though here, it is being used to mean have sex with. A redundant and ridiculous sentence.

Sublime breasts.

An educated word for extremely beautiful, or "awe inspiring."

Come on, pussy!

"Come on" is perhaps the greatest and most versatile phrasal verb in the English language, meaning everything from "Please continue" to "Be serious." Here, it means "Stop being a coward. The word "pussy" is a crude word for coward, and is also used to refer to female genitals.

Hit it!

In this context, "Step on the gas! (Start driving!)"

***Miles explains to Joel his philosophy of life, which is that sometimes you just have to take risks and have fun.***

You've done the old man's car bit. That's a good start.

Someone's "old man" is very colloquial for their father.

A "bit" in this context means "a little adventure"

(A "bit part" in a play is a small part for an actor).

Chicago's finest dominants and submissives!

Refers to the sexual roles people play

(Common terms in sexual personal ads).

Come on Joel, spank my bare bottom.

"To spank" someone is to slap or hit their ass (Mothers will spank a child in order to punish, but here the context is obviously sexual).

It's succinct, to the point, and down to business.

Three good ways to say very simple and straight forward, or direct.

"Jackie."

The name of the transvestite that later arrives at Joel's door.

Give me the number, god damn it!

A very common and crude way to express anger.

You're an asshole

A crude but common insult (You'd be safer saying jerk or idiot).

Got to go. Check you later.

Note "have got to" in rapid speech---->"gotta"

The second phrase is very colloquial for "talk with you later."

Shithead!

Another crude and colorful insult (And along with dumbfuck and dumbshit, a personal favorite of mine).

Oh God.

A common way to express fear, anger and/or other strong emotions.

Joel stepped out for a moment.

"To step out" is to leave, often from a house.

Get your ass over here!

Crude and rude for "come here."

We'll come to an arrangement. I'm in no mood for complaining.

Here, meaning a business agreement.

When you put your money down, you expect to get what you want.

A complicated way of saying "spend money."

My infinite patience and understanding. 75 dollars.

An interesting way to say "great tolerance and compassion."

It's what every white boy off the lake wants.

This refers to the affluent neighborhoods near Lake Michigan.

Do exactly what we say and nobody gets hurt.

The standard expression that both bank robbers and police use.

Get off the baby-sitter!

---Just a funny thing to say.

Glencoe.

The Chicago suburb where Joel lives.

***Lana arrives at Joel's house, and he soon learns that if you're going to see a prostitute, its probably not good to meet her at your house.***

Is this your house? :: My folks', actually.

A sort of old fashioned but not uncommon way to say parents.

I got a bond in the bank that I can cash.

A note that guarantees a debt, which can easily be changed into money.

That egg was worth a hell of a lot more than \$300!

A slang way to intensify the word that follows

Note in rapid speech, "hell of a"----> "helleva."

A trig midterm.

A test on trigonometry (which is a type of advanced math)

A midterm is usually about 1/2 way through the school semester.

What about experiencing the dark side, and all of that?

This refers to the decadent side of life (prostitutes, drugs, etc.)

That was **bullshit**.

The quintessential obscenity: Nonsense, lies, distortions, etc.

Although you should avoid overusing these types of words, this one is so useful in everyday life that it is almost a necessary part of a modern vocabulary. If hesitant, you can compromise and say "B.S."

At least she knows **we're on to her**.

"To be on to someone" is to know where they are or what it is that they are really doing.

***Joel and Miles meet Lana's manager....***

I need a lift.

A "lift" for a ride in a car is common in England, but a "ride" is much more widely used in the US.

Joel, better get moving.

Note that "better," is the only adverb in the English language that can function as a modal verb! It simply means "should."

Hey buster!

A common word for "guy," but it implies that the speaker is angry.

...Like excitement, Miles?

Put here to show you that people often speak elliptically (ie..."Do you..." is implied, but not actually said).

Oh Guido, big man with a gun!

Here, a sarcastic and angry way of saying "I'm not afraid."

A pimp.

The male manager of a prostitute. Generally speaking, pimps are dangerous people that it is best to avoid.

Are you always that quick, Joel?

Here, meaning smart (though it's usually means fast).

I'm sick, I got a trig midterm tomorrow,  
and I'm being chased by Guido, the killer pimp.

---A funny thing to say (explanations listed previously).

Miles, I think I can take him.

Here, meaning "I can go faster than him."

I think I'm going to throw up...on you, Joel.

"To throw up" is the most common way of saying to vomit.

"Porsche: There is no substitute."

This was the advertising slogan for Porsche in the 1980s.

Just checking in, dear.

"To check in" is a way of saying to call in order to make that everything is OK.

Aunt Tootsie? Her hip is much better.

The bone between the waist and thigh (old people often break them)

What about my mother's egg? :: You figure it out.

"To figure out" something is a common way to say try and understand it.

Guido's got me locked out of the apartment.

"He has my keys."

A pop quiz, to see if you read those chapters.

A small test, given without warning.



Term papers are due on Friday.

The major research papers students do for a class.

You did it with her, didn't you?

Here, "it" implies to have had sex with her.

Ask her about Vicki! I owe you one!

"I owe you a favor for what you did for me."

We're not exactly ripping you off, or anything.

"To rip someone off" is a very common way of staying to steal from them, or perhaps to charge them way too much money.

50 goes to the house. You're the house.

"The house" in this case is the "whorehouse," where prostitutes work. This expression also refers to casinos. You should also know that if something is "on the house," it's free.

In a sluggish economy, never fuck with another man's livelihood.

"Sluggish" is slow, or lacking energy. In this context, "to fuck with" someone is a crude way of saying to harass or bother with.

If I can get my stuff, I can get my egg.

Another word for "things" (often overused by people with limited vocabularies).

It's a workshop on free enterprise. We make a product & market it.

An educational seminar (or series of educational meetings).

Actually, its fucked.

Here, meaning stupid, and a waste of time. Of course, "fucked" is a classic and very crude adjective that, depending on the context, can mean anything from unfair to worthless. Also keep an ear out for its crude and noble cousin, "fucked up."

***Joel, Lana, Barry and Vicki decide to have some fun  
at the local park, but it soon isn't that fun for Joel.***

Do you ever get high, Joel?

"To get high" is the goal of using drugs such as marijuana.

Are you stoned? Wasted?

Common terms for "the high" or intoxicated feeling that one gets on certain drugs, such as marijuana or cocaine.

Where did he get that type of change?

A cynical way of asking how he got so much money.

You people have a lot of bonds.

As said before, legal notes representing a government or corporate debt. Said here by Lana to remind Joel that he comes from a much wealthier economic background than she does.

You can be a little enterpriser.

The club is called "future enterprisers," but the more common term for a self-employed businessman is an "entrepreneur" (A French word).

I'm not pushing you on the idea or anything.

"To push someone on an idea" is to try to convince them of it

I left home because my step father kept coming on to me.

"To come on" to someone is to make sexual advances toward them.

Stop laying these little judgments on me while you're leaning on your dad's \$40,000 car.

"Stop trying to make me feel guilty."

Whose the U-boat commander?

---A funny line: U-boats were German submarines during World War 2.

Nurse Folley, if you write "unexcused," it will wreck my grade point average.

High school nurses can have the power to keep kids out of trouble who miss classes by telling teachers they were sick.

"To wreck" is a good little verb meaning to destroy.

I met this girl, a call girl actually.

Another clever line: A "call girl" is a prostitute.

I put my father's car into lake Michigan. Just give me a break!

A truly great idiom: Here, it means "Be nice to me," but in other contexts, it can also mean "that's bullshit!"

I've spent the last four years of my life busting my butt in this shit hole.

Joel's crude and colorful way to say that he's been "working very hard...in this horrible place."

He was suspended for five days.

When a student is "suspended," he's not allowed to go to school.

They trashed his whole record.

"To trash" something is to destroy or ruin it.

Jesus, Glenn, come on! Give him the bike!

Extremely common way to express anger, fear, or any other strong emotion at the beginning of a sentence. Contrary to what you might think, used by just about everybody, except perhaps, really conservative...Christians!

***Joel and Lana discuss business, and soon a little party is planned for Joel's parent's house.***

It was great the way her mind works: No doubts, no guilt, no fear.

"The way she thinks about things..."

Just the shameless pursuit of immediate gratification.

A clever little expression, meaning here that "the only goal is instant physical pleasure." A direct attack on religious concepts of sexual guilt,

We made Barry our treasurer.

The person in charge of managing the money.

Lana did production, and I concentrated on sales.

Here, a business term referring to the actual creation of a given product, rather than its promotion.

You're in for roughly 60 odd dollars.

"You've already spent about 60 dollars."

He was glad to get that knowledge.

Here, referring to sexual experience.

College girls can smell ignorance like dog shit.

Very crude, but a clever line implying that girls can sense inexperience in their sexual partners.

I just don't want to spend the rest of my life in analysis.

Refers to psychoanalysis (The process of seeing a psychologist).

You're on, honey.

Here, meaning "its your turn."

***A Princeton recruiter comes to speak with Joel, but its hard to give a good interview while simultaneously managing a warehouse.***

"Mr. Bitterman."

The recruiter from Princeton. A university recruiter is a person who goes around the country looking for the best high school students to bring to his university.

Catch the phone, will you?

Here, "to catch" the phone is to pick it up ("Can you catch that?" is often used). Note that "you"-----> "ya" in rapid speech.

52 in class rank. That places you in the 84th percentile.

The level a student is, compared to other students in his class.

And you wish to **major in**...business?

"To major in" a topic, such as history or biology, is to focus on that topic when selecting college classes.

Varsity track team, Yearbook staff, Student Council.

The type of pursuits that students do during school which universities look at. "Varsity" is the principal team representing a school. "Track" is short for "track and field," and refers to sports like running. The "yearbook" is the annual book with pictures of students, and "student council" is a part of student government.

Your stats are very respectable, but its not quite Ivy League, is it?

"Stats" is short for "statistics," which here refers to grades and test scores. "Ivy League" refers to a group of very prestigious Universities on the East Coast of the US, including Harvard, Yale and Princeton.

It looks like the University of Illinois!

This is a respectable school, but definitely not as good as an Ivy League school such as Harvard, Yale or Princeton.

They're very good talkers.

One way of saying that "they talk impressively, but they don't actually do what they say."

God knows, they needed the service.

A somewhat poetic way to say "certainly."

Right now, you're one hot shot future enterpriser.

"Hot shot" is a slang term for a person who is very successful.

And you've got a girlfriend, to boot.

An interesting expression placed at the end of sentences which basically means "in addition."

If there were logic to our language, "trust" would be a 4 letter word.

A "4 letter word" refers to obscene words such as fuck and shit (which, not coincidentally, are 4 letters!). A good expression for people who can't bring themselves to use the actual obscene words!

Finally, it was time to close shop.

One way to say to close a store or business.

She wanted to make love on a train: Who was I to say know?

A pretty grammatical construction (often used when sarcastic).

***After the party, there is one last disaster that  
Joel must deal with before his parents return.***

They stole the God damn house!

A crude intensifying expression used to express anger.

I'll get back to you. Ciao.

A very European way of saying goodbye.

Maybe she's on the choo-choo.

A sarcastic way to say "train" (This is a word that children use).

Listen to me, buster, you A-hole!

Short for "asshole." Crude, and not common.

Listen to me, you little fuck!

Another interesting and crude insult. Note that when certain people are really angry, they place the "you" pronoun immediately before the offending insult noun.

You not only take my two best girls, you call me names!

"To call someone names" is to insult them, or to scream obscenities at them.

If I had any self respect, it wouldn't just be  
your furniture, it would be your life!

Guido's way of saying "I really should kill you."

How about some women's outfits?

Note that in rapid speech, "about" --->"bout."

Can we get through this, please?

"To get through" something is to complete or finish it.

Some glass artsy-fartsy thing.

A crude expression for art or furniture that is expensive and snobby.

Let's go 40-300, and I'll spot you the 300

"To spot" somebody money is to loan them it,  
or to allow them to pay it back later.

Here's wishing you good luck on your future as a businessman.

A somewhat poetic way of saying "I wish you..."

I don't think you should mix centuries.

Here, refers to mixing Chinese and Greek  
artifacts that Joel's mom has in her house.

Give me a hand with the luggage.

A common way to ask for help or assistance.

Why don't you put in some yard work?

"To put in" some time doing something is to spend some time  
at it. People "put in some serious time" when doing a serious project.

***Joel learns that there are lots of ways to get  
accepted by a great University like Princeton.***

Apparently, you two had quite a meeting.

When used like this, "quite" means very interesting or successful.

You're as good as in!

"It's certain that they will accept you..."

Every once in a while, You've got to say "what the heck."

The conservative parent's way of saying "what the fuck." You should  
know that "what the heck" is not at all crude and certainly safer to use,  
but "what the fuck" is both more fun and common!

We're both going to make it big.

If a person "makes it big," they have achieved a great success, often in a financial or business sense.

Was our night together just a set-up?

A "set up" is a plan designed to cheat or fool somebody. This is an interesting expression that can be used as a noun and a phrasal verb.

Decorative planters for \$70.

A container to put plants in.

Are you going straight home now?

This means directly home, without going anywhere else first.

I deal in human fulfillment.

"My business is satisfying people's desires."

I grossed over \$8,000 in one night.

The "gross" refers to the money you make *before* paying expenses.

The "net" is the money made *after* paying expenses.

Time of your life, huh, kid?

A nice way of saying "a fantastic time."

# **Risky Business**

## **Possible Topics for ESL Class Discussion**

- 1. Are Joel and Lana a good couple?  
Should they get together later in their lives?**
- 2. Between Joel's father and Guido, who would you want  
to spend a week on a desert island with?**
- 3. How are prostitutes viewed in the United States? What about in your  
country? For example, could Lana ever run for elected office in either the US  
or your country?**
- 4. Are teenagers basically the same all over the world?  
Would Joel's party have been possible in your country?**
- 5. How is "The American Dream" portrayed in this movie?**
- 6. Joel's dad's attitude is "what the heck." Miles' attitude is "what the fuck":  
How are these approaches to life different?**



