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## **Cast of Characters**

JOAN, a high school girl with a secret;

HER MOTHER, with a secret of her own;

A MAN, a neighborly Trotskyite;

SUSAN, Losin' Susan;

and Joan's other pals:

MARTA, KATE, BERTHA, and GRISELDA;

RICHARD, alias PANDA HANDS, Joan's date to the prom;

MISTER BARFLY, a teacher at a fashionable boys' school in  
Cleveland;

THE MAYOR OF CLEVELAND, a man in a difficult fix;

and a STRANGE MAN with a wand.

## **Setting**

The play takes place in Cleveland during the prom season and in the dream-time of Joan.

## **Production Notes**

The appearance of an asterisk within a speech indicates that the next speech begins to overlap at that point.

Mirandan whisper-talk consists of consonants only, except for an occasional ending. Mainly sibilants and fricatives. Vowels are free. C is pronounced like "ch" in church.

At the BACA production (1986) a narrator (the strange man of Scene Seven) introduced all the scenes and gave most of the stage directions. Anne Bogart's direction involved, therefore, a thorough and ongoing response to these introductions as an integral part of the author's text. Therefore, for the adventurous these introductory scenic texts are given, in order, below. The narrator's text in Scene Seven is identical in both versions.

For those who prefer a more conventional staging, the original configuration of the play is reproduced as a basic text.

**NARRATOR.** Scene one. Welcome to the theater. X all the way to X', a whole hell of a way. You ever wonder what the world'd be like if a circle were defined as a round straight line with a hole in the middle? Joan and her mother live in Cleveland. Joan writes in her diary. Later her mother sneaks a look at what her daughter has written. Far away in the land of Tlpccc, it is said there are no secrets between mother and daughter. Music plays. It is "nice" music.

**NARRATOR.** Scene two. The kitchen. The mother is trying to unclog the sink with a plunger. The sink makes strange noises. Joan is trying to do her homework at the kitchen table. More nice music. Far away, the Plain of Qqqsmccttu is littered with little stone jars filled with light.

**NARRATOR.** Scene three. The same as before. The kitchen. The man is using the plunger now. The mother looks on philosophically. More nice music. Joan is daydreaming. A long pause. As heavy with meaning as a herd of grazing rhinodraconopeds.

**NARRATOR.** Scene four. The mother is back at the sink, with the plunger. Joan enters, singing a bit of her strange song.

**NARRATOR.** Scene five. Darkness. A wind of other worlds. Far away and far ago. Joan's dream. She is dressed as a Trotskyite Anti-pope. Losin' Susan, a blue Anti-pope, lies in an open coffin. The other Anti-popes are, respectively: Marta, black; Griselda, white; Bertha, green; Kate, yellow. Mister Barfly is now Joan's Swiss Guard. He carries a halberd. The room is full of lethal whispers.

**NARRATOR.** Scene six. Next day. Again the kitchen. The mother is seated at the table reading a college catalogue. Joan is preparing an after-school snack. The snack is an unusually grotesque sandwich. On the wall there is a picture of the Massacre of Innocents. Perhaps at Skyeyesqll. The picture is tilted. How odd!

## Author Notes

After I wrote *Albanian Softshoe* and began to show it around, through the usual and inevitable means of public reading, I began to hear people say that I should write an entire play in the vein of the more accessible first act. Now, this had been conceived, initially at least, as a parody of soap opera. But parody considered not simply as a negation, but almost as an homage; so that a new, unforeseen kind of drama might come into being. So I made up *Cleveland*, specifically for my friend Anne Bogart. Her production at BACA Downtown was the first time I got to see a script of mine really come alive.

# CLEVELAND

by Mac Wellman

## Scene 1

*(JOAN in a pool of light. Writing in her diary. Her MOTHER reading it aloud, simultaneously, in another pool of light. Nice music plays.)*

**MOTHER.** Dear Diary. I feel like I'm losing my mind. Like Losin' Susan. I feel sure Johnny will ask me to the Prom. Johnny on the Spot. If not him, then Panda Hands. I will end it all if he does. I do not wish to go to the Prom because since we have lost all our money we are no longer fashionable. As we once were. Ahead lies a life of meaningless drudgery and not the glitter and champagne of high society. Sigh. I do not love Johnny. But I do love Jimmy. In my secret heart of hearts. Sigh. Jimmy the door. Way to my dreams. I'm not sure I want that. My dreams scare me... Jimmy goes to the Boys Prep School and I go to the Catholic Girls School. Our Lady of the Bleeding Knuckle. Our Lady of the Runny Nose. A chasm of religion divides us. And he will not ask me to the Prom. Yes, because I am not fashionable. If Mother could read this she would know, yes, all my unclean thoughts. To tell the truth, dear diary, I feel quite fed up with life since Dad died and did not go to Heaven. Strange things are afoot in the heavens.

*(MOTHER looks puzzled. JOAN whistles her song from Scene Seven.)*

I dreamed last night I was Pope Joan. And a Trotskyite, like Dad.

## Scene 2

*(The kitchen. MOTHER is trying to unclog the sink with a plunger. The sink makes strange noises. JOAN is trying to do her homework at the kitchen table. More nice music.)*

**JOAN.** Mother, how can I concentrate on my homework with you making that noise?

**MOTHER.** I'm sorry dear. It doesn't drain. Mr. Barfly the plumber was supposed to come fix it, but he never did.

**JOAN.** But I'm trying to do my homework.

**MOTHER.** Joanie, there's nothing I can do.

*(Pause.)*

**JOAN.** Mother, what's the largest moon in the solar system?

**NARRATOR.** Why, Triton, dear. A moon of Neptune. Not a very hospitable place. My, this sink is hopeless. Miranda's much prettier.

**JOAN.** Thanks. Mr. Delaplane's science class is really hard.

*(Loud crash outside.)*

What's that noise?

**MOTHER.** *(Going to look:)* Just some commotion in the street.

**JOAN.** Who is Pope Joan? Bet you don't know.

**MOTHER.** Haven't the faintest, dear.

*(Phone rings.)*

**JOAN.** Oh, God, what if it's Panda Hands asking me to the prom.

*(Rings.)*

**MOTHER.** I thought we weren't fashionable enough to be invited.

*(Rings.)*

**JOAN.** Well, I still want to go. It depends. You get it.

**MOTHER.** Silly girl.

*(She gets the phone:)*

Hello? No, he's dead. That's right. Dead. No, we don't need any. Thank you. Good bye.

*(Hangs up. Pause.)*

Well, it wasn't Panda Hands.

*(Knock at the door.)*

Who could that be?

**JOAN.** If it's Panda Hands I'm not here.

**MOTHER.** *(At door:)* Yes? Can I help you?

*(A MAN enters.)*

**MAN.** Lady. Your front porch. It ah. Fell into the street. Somebody's underneath. In a car. One of those imports. Squashed flat.

**MOTHER.** Oh, how terrible. Well, come in.

**MAN.** Thanks. All you can see is the hubcap.

**MOTHER.** The phone's right there.

**JOAN.** Mother?

**MOTHER.** It's all right, Joanie. The front porch fell into the street and it seems there's a car underneath.

**MOTHER.** What's the police number?

**MOTHER.** Haven't the faintest.

*(He reads it off the phone and dials.)*

**JOAN.** Mother, what if Jimmy asks me and not Panda Hands?

**MOTHER.** Then I expect you should go. Even if we're not fashionable.

**MOTHER.** No one answers at the police. Strange. *(Hangs up.)*

**MOTHER.** That is strange.

**JOAN.** Very strange. Hey, can I go look?

**MOTHER.** If you're very careful.

*(JOAN skips out.)*

**MAN.** I'll call the wrecking company. You got a Yellow Pages?

**MOTHER.** Sure, right here.

*(Shows him. She goes to the sink and plunger.)*

You know, I think I want to go back to school. Learn a skill. I'm tired of being a drudge. And since my husband died. It's rough being alone.

**MAN.** You're young to be a widow.

**MOTHER.** He was a Trotskyist.

**MAN.** *(On phone:)* Acme Wrecking? Yeah, part of a house's fallen across River Road near Willoughby. Traffic's already backed up pretty far. And I think there's someone trapped underneath. Yeah, in a car.

*(Hangs up.)*

**MOTHER.** He was a Trotskyist.

**MAN.** So am I. Thanks, lady.

*(He goes out. She goes back to the sink. JOAN enters.)*

**JOAN.** Oh, you should see it. Everything's all smashed. It's really neat. Say, do you suppose someone's dead under all that pile of rubble?

**MOTHER.** Could be, darling. Could be. Wash up, it's dinner time.

**JOAN.** If Jimmy calls I'm here. If Johnny calls I'm not. If Panda Hands calls I'm dead.

**MOTHER.** Yes, dear.

*(Pause.)*

**MOTHER.** You know, Joanie. I think I want to go back to school.

**JOAN.** You'd be a great student. And I'll do the grocery shopping. We'll trade.

*(They giggle.)*

**MOTHER.** So. What's the biggest moon in the solar system?

**JOAN.** Miranda.

**MOTHER.** Miranda's the prettiest. Triton's the biggest.

**JOAN.** Darn. Well you tell me who is Pope Joan.

**MOTHER.** Never heard of her.

*(They giggle.)*

**JOAN.** I want to be like Pope Joan. Only I want to be a Trotskyist.

**MOTHER.** This sink is disgusting.

*(The MAN enters again.)*

**MAN.** Lady, can I use the phone again.

**MOTHER.** Sure.

*(He dials. Pause.)*

**JOAN.** If he's on the phone all the time how's Jimmy going to call me?

**MOTHER.** Ever think it might be Panda Hands?

*(They giggle.)*

*(Blackout.)*

### Scene 3

*(The same. The MAN is using the plunger now. MOTHER looks on philosophically. More nice music. JOAN's daydreaming. A lengthy pause.)*

**MAN.** Jesus, lady, what'd you put down here, cement?

**MOTHER.** I'm afraid some bones got stuck. Last week. Rather large game fowl.

*(Five of JOAN's friends enter. The MAN continues plunging.)*

**MARTA.** Guess who lucked out and got Jimmy?

**SUSAN.** Jimmy the Door!

**KATE.** Losin' Susan here.

**SUSAN.** It's on account of I can cha cha.

*(They laugh.)*

**BERTHA.** I got Jewel Rude Dude. He's such an elegant dresser.

**GRISELDA.** Very neat.

**MARTA.** What about you, Joan?

**JOAN.** No one's called yet.

**SUSAN.** You end up with Johnny on the Spot.

**JOAN.** No way, Santa Fe.

**KATE.** Oh, yes. I foresee it. Written in the sky.

**GRISELDA.** Sorry, he asked me.\* I thought you knew.

**MARTA.** Sneaky Sneaky\* secret keeper.

**KATE.** Well that leaves me and you and\* you know who invited me? Guess!

**MARTA.** I shall be out of town. Thank God.

**JOAN.** Fiji Three Eyes.

**KATE.** Who's that?

**MARTA.** I'm really not interested.\* I'm going away for a college weekend. At Denison. Party school.

**KATE.** You shouldn't call him that.

**BERTHA.** But he's so cute.

**GRISELDA.** The name's not cute.

**SUSAN.** Last prom before I move\* to Albuquerque.

**JOAN.** Who cares?

**MARTA.** That leaves you. *(To JOAN.)*

**KATE.** Guess!

**GRISELDA.** That leaves only\* Panda Hands.

**SUSAN.** Oh, Jimmy and I shall bop the night away.

**MARTA.** Groan.

**JOAN.** Groan indeed.

**GRISELDA.** Coming to cheerleader practice?

**JOAN.** No, our porch fell off.

**KATE.** I wondered what all that garbage was in the street.

**BERTHA.** Come on. Let's get going.

**GRISELDA.** Okay. Okay. If it's got to be it's got to be. Johnny on the Spot.\* Yech.

**KATE.** So. No one wants to know\* who invited me?

**BERTHA.** *(To GRISELDA:)* You got any gum?

**MARTA.** If I had any gum I wouldn't give it to you.

**SUSAN.** That leaves only\* Panda Hands.

**JOAN.** That leaves only Panda Hands. Yech.

**SUSAN.** Too gross for words.

*(They laugh. The MAN stops plunging.)*

**MAN.** Well it's pretty much cleared. I guess.

*(The GIRLS trail out. JOAN with them.)*

**SUSAN.** So long, Mrs. P.

**MOTHER.** Bye bye, Susie. Have fun. Don't be too late, Joanie.

*(He sits wearily.)*

**MAN.** Howzabout you and me go down to party headquarters and lift a few?

**MOTHER.** What about the front porch?

**MAN.** It's not going anywhere. Say, what's your name?

**MOTHER.** You wouldn't believe if I told you.

**MAN.** Try me.

*(They laugh. She approaches.)*

**Scene 4**

*(MOTHER is back at the sink with the plunger. JOAN enters whistling a bit of her song. The MOTHER suddenly stops plunging.)*

**JOAN.** I thought that guy fixed the sink.

**MOTHER.** He did. For a while. It's the thing in there that that grinds stuff up. It's strange.

**JOAN.** At least most of the wreckage is gone from the street.

**MOTHER.** How was practice?

**JOAN.** Nifty. Anyone call?

**MOTHER.** Nope. No one ever calls anymore.

*(Pause.)*

Why is it so dark out today?

**JOAN.** It's that time of year, Mom. Honestly...

*(Pause.)*

Mom, why don't you ever talk about it?

**MOTHER.** About what?

**JOAN.** You know. Dad. All that stuff.

*(Her MOTHER goes back to the plunger.)*

I know we're not fashionable. Okay, Mom, but. But Christ. There's a limit. You could talk.

*(Pause.)*

I mean it looks as though I'll be going to the prom with old Panda Hands himself, but I'll go. I don't hold it all inside.

*(Her MOTHER stops plunging. Pause.)*

**MOTHER.** I would like just once to do something original. Just once is all I ask. Even if we're not fashionable anymore.

**JOAN.** Mom, don't talk like that.

**MOTHER.** Maybe go back to school. Earn valuable career credits. An exciting career in robotics may await me.

**JOAN.** Mom, please talk to me.

**MOTHER.** That nice man who fixed the drain-pipe was a Trotskyist like your father. It makes me nervous...

**JOAN.** Mom, I don't care if we're not fashionable. I love you.

*(Pause. Her MOTHER sits.)*

**MOTHER.** Well. All right. We were in New York for the party congress. We had just met the Mayor of Cleveland. Of course he wasn't a Trotskyist. He was far too fashionable for that. A fine, big man he was, with a fine, big, round head. He said to your father: "Fine work. That report on solid waste." Then he introduced himself to me. It was an awkward moment because, of course, your father had no idea what the mayor was talking about. It seems he was at the wrong hotel. "We're Trotskyists." We said. "My apologies." He said. "May I buy you a drink?" And he did. One of those elegant little sidewalk cafés. Lovely.

*(A sad moment.)*

We were sitting on the sidewalk. Or, rather, at a table on the sidewalk. And your father leaned over to make a point and spilled his espresso. As he moved forward with the saucer in his other hand the heel snapped off his shoe and well he slid back into the chair. Of course the coffee got over everyone. And the chair leg broke and, it was quite remarkable, he did a nice, little, wholly unintentional back-flip into the street. I shall never forget the sight of his shoes, the soles of them, as they lifted high into the air. He was trying to save the cup, poor dear. But it shattered in the street, and then the first car ran over it. And the saucer which had been undamaged miraculously up to that point. He was a quite fastidious man. The second car ran over your father. Quite a large car. A limo, I think. "My word." Said the mayor. What a strange thing to say. Of course he was dead. Your father, I mean. That's about it. More coffee.

**JOAN.** At least now I know. The truth.

**MOTHER.** Yes. That's the least of it. Now you know.

*(She goes back to the plunger. The phone rings. JOAN gets it.)*

Panda Hands.

**JOAN.** Hi. Sure. I guess.

*(She grimaces to her MOTHER.)*

*(Black.)*

### Scene 5

*(JOAN's dream. Dressed in red as a Trotskyist Anti-pope. LOSIN' SUSAN, a blue Anti-pope, lies in an open coffin. The others are, respectively: MARTA, black; GRISELDA, white; BERTHA, green; KATE, yellow. BARFLY is JOAN's Swiss Guard. He carries a halberd.)*

**JOAN.** Are we prepared, Barfly?

**BARFLY.** Yes, excellency.

**JOAN.** Bring them in.

**BARFLY.** Singly. Or together? Excellency?

**JOAN.** En masse. We might as well deal with them all at once.

*(BARFLY goes. Returns with the others. They arrange themselves about the room. Pause.)*

Bertha, you look well.

**MARTA.** No need for small talk, Joan.

**KATE.** What are the conditions you propose?

**JOAN.** Ah, Griselda, I hear you are fully recovered.

**GRISELDA.** Tolerably.

**BERTHA.** What is to be the final disposition of the Matriarchate of Cordoba? Merged with Cadiz?

**JOAN.** Not quite.

**KATE.** And Tunis, Carthago, Malta?

**JOAN.** That depends on your decision, my dear.

**KATE.** My decision! It is not apparent from my information that your decision to summon this conclave, this silence of Anti-popes, has been informed to the minutest degree by a regard for my opinion.

**MARTA.** Be still, Kate.

**GRISELDA.** Hibernia? What of Hibernia?

**BERTHA.** Macedonia. The Sanjak of Novi Bazaar?

**MARTA.** And what of the Eastern Matriarchates? We who provide a buffer between you all and the Turks? Have you considered the possible consequences?

**JOAN.** Of course, Marta. Of course.

**MARTA.** Now that Diotima has passed on.

**JOAN.** You are referring to Losin' Susan. (*Who sits up in her coffin.*)

**SUSAN.** I don't want to move to Albuquerque. (*Lies down.*)

**KATE.** That isn't Latin. Is it Ladino?

**BERTHA.** Be still, dear.

**JOAN.** I have called this silence of Anti-popes because there is a traitor in our midst.

**BERTHA.** Explain yourself.

**JOAN.** If you allow\* me.

**MARTA.** Preposterous.

**GRISELDA.** Let Joan speak. (*Pause.*) There. Go on.

**BERTHA.** All this beating around the bush is tiresome.

**JOAN.** I suspect one of you of fomenting an antireformation.

**KATE.** No!

**BERTHA.** Impossible.

**GRISELDA.** How can this be?

**JOAN.** It is true. These (*She shows the document*) are a set of 496 antitheses concerning our canons of heteroclite unorthodoxy. Found nailed to the door by one of my Swiss Guards, Jimmy. Some one of you has sought a codification of the undreamed of, the unspoken, and the unthinkable. It is signed with a crow's feather. Thus.

**MARTA.** It's a hoax.

**KATE.** Yes. Joan, it must be?

*(Weeps.)*

**GRISELDA.** Griselda, please.

**KATE.** No, you're Griselda. I'm Kate.

**GRISELDA.** Sorry.

**BERTHA.** So emotional...

**MARTA.** I don't trust you, Joan. Are you accusing one of us, and if so, which? If you have charges, present them. I have my Nuncios and Legates with me. In the antechamber...

**JOAN.** That will not be necessary, Marta.

**MARTA.** I knew it was a mistake to come. This is a trap.

**JOAN.** Be quiet.

*(Pause.)*

In at least 98 of the aforementioned 496 antitheses there is incontrovertible evidence of the Mirandan heresy.

*(Gasps.)*

**KATE.** Impossible.

**GRISELDA.** That was stamped out centuries ago.

**KATE.** How can you be so sure?

**JOAN.** There are numerous quotations in the demotic script of whisper-talk, the Mirandan cipher.

**BERTHA.** If that is true, then perhaps you are the author of these documents. You are, after all, the world's leading expert on whis-pertalk...

**GRISELDA.** Be still, let her speak.

**JOAN.** I cannot tell who it is.

**MARTA.** Of course not.

**JOAN.** Therefore I have taken steps, with sadness, but also with a firm sense of determination and duty, to abolish all of your matriar-chates. From now on there is only one Anti-pope, and I am she.

*(BAREFLY bars door.)*

**MARTA.** I knew it.

**GRISELDA.** But Joan, how can you be capable of this?

**MARTA.** Damn you, Griselda, for ever talking me into attending this silence. I was foolish ever to trust a Trotskyist Anti-pope. My fastness at Antioch could have held out forever against her rhino-draconopeds.

**KATE.** Will you ransom us?

**BERTHA.** Sorry Joan. A legion of my best fusiliers are deployed in the Great Hall, just beyond those doors. If I blow on this Anti-papal secret clerical dog whistle they will rush to our defense.

**JOAN.** Two legions of my Swiss Guard surround the palace grounds, Bertha. You have no choice but to renounce your powers and accept me as the supreme Anti-pontiff.

*(Pause.)*

You see, Bertha, all your fusiliers are dead.

**BERTHA.** I don't believe you.

*(JOAN snaps her fingers. BARFLY opens the doors to the Great Hall. JOAN points down the corridor.)*

**BERTHA.** I still don't believe you.

**JOAN.** You are aware, I presume, of the symptoms of ergotic poisoning?

*(All look down the corridor and gasp.)*

**MARTA.** Demon.

**JOAN.** Twitching and quaking.

**SUSAN.** *(Sitting up in her coffin:)* I don't want to move to Albuquerque.

**KATE.** Be quiet, fool. Your character would never say that.

*(SUSAN lies down.)*

**JOAN.** Diotima here was the guardian of the Glassy Sphere. With her voices at my command I do not need your approval. My word is law. Whichever one of you is the Mirandan agent I don't know. It hardly matters. The ransom will be a million obuluses. Each.

**GRISELDA.** Each?

**KATE.** Each! But that's absurd.

**MARTA.** You'll never get away with this, Joan.

**JOAN.** Except for you, Marta. You will remain here till the next intersection of the Seven Cosmic Circles. Then Diotima's disembodied voice will tell us who is behind all this heretical wispertalk. It may be a long time.

**KATE.** But we trusted you, Joan.

**BERTHA.** I never trusted her.

**MARTA.** Oh, what a fool I am.

*(Blackout.)*

## Scene 6

*(The next day. The kitchen again. MOTHER at the table intently reading a college catalogue. JOAN preparing herself an after-school snack.)*

**JOAN.** The prom's tomorrow.

**MOTHER.** You must be very excited.

**JOAN.** What's that?

**MOTHER.** Catalogue for Polytechnical College.

**JOAN.** (*Looks over her shoulder:*) "Human Body Fluid and Advanced Polymerization." Golly, Mom.

**MOTHER.** Just looking at what courses are available.

**JOAN.** Gee, when you said you wanted to go back to school I thought you meant something like, Business I or Creative Writing.

**MOTHER.** How was cheerleader practice today?

**JOAN.** Fine. Learned some new tricks.

*(Pause.)*

Only. Mom.

**MOTHER.** Yes, dear.

**JOAN.** I had a kind of bad dream last night.

**MOTHER.** I shouldn't have told you. So explicitly.

**JOAN.** No, it wasn't about Dad. It was something else.

**MOTHER.** The sink is fixed again. There's fresh coffee.

**JOAN.** It was all kinda confused. All about Pope Joan and stuff.

**MOTHER.** I have to mend your dress for the prom. Why don't you try it on?

*(She goes out for the dress.)*

**JOAN.** (*Off:*) Mr. Delaplane said you know a lot about astronomy but that nobody knows the orbital eccentricity of Triton. It's too far away.

**MOTHER.** I knew it. I should never have told you the details. About your father's death.

**JOAN.** Was it ever fashionable to be a Trotskyist?

**MOTHER.** Yes, dear. Once it was very fashionable.

*(She enters in a bright red prom dress. Her MOTHER sets about mending a hem. Pause.)*

**JOAN.** How come you know so much about astronomy?

**MOTHER.** And we were personal acquaintances of the mayor. If things had only worked out a little differently. We might still be fashionable.

**JOAN.** Mom, would you tell me something?

**MOTHER.** Our kitchen sink might not have been stopped up. Our front porch might not have...fallen into the street. Poor dear, you know they haven't tccmbbd the body yet.

**JOAN.** What? What did you say?

**MOTHER.** Slip of the tongue. They haven't identified his body yet.

*(Pause.)*

**JOAN.** Have you seen that man? Again?

**MOTHER.** What man?

**JOAN.** The man that fixed the sink.

**MOTHER.** Once. Briefly. But it won't happen again.

*(Pause. MOTHER finishes her mending.)*

**JOAN.** Did you sleep with him?

**MOTHER.** What do you want from me? Do I tell you how to live your life? No, damn it. Is that how they teach you to think at that fancy Catholic school? Just because we're Trotskyists and you feel socially embarrassed. Just because we were once fashionable but aren't anymore. Just because I want so desperately, once in my life, to do something, anything, original...

**JOAN.** Okay. Okay. Just curious.

*(Pause.)*

**MOTHER.** He's had an accident. Very serious one. He won't be back.

**JOAN.** Mother, who are you?

**MOTHER.** Another cup of coffee?

**JOAN.** Really.

*(Pause.)*

**MOTHER.** Since you ask. My name is Bqbpqstu, Emissary of Larav, Empress of the Sshhs, who live on the world you call Miranda, a moon of Uranus. Very very far away. I'm here on a secret mission.

*(Her aspect becomes strange and unearthly.)*

My world, Miranda, is in danger. Triton sleepstickers and stick-walkers. Hammer-headed and creased foot splutch. The rain skies up and the suns dump on fells. That and the rats. They sqssqu and shake. Badass hocus pocus. Snsps. Pssps. Qvspt. Xxp. Tsspqqctsm! Sks. Polymers. Xxxxxs. Plplp. Qsssp. Sskllpc. Hssssssp. O. Ppbbppsspc.

**JOAN.** I knew it, pure whispertalk. You should know. I am immune to the subtle poison of whispertalk.

**MOTHER.** What, who are you, to know our way?

**JOAN.** What did you do with father?

**MOTHER.** *(Holding up a clear glass vial:)* Only the purest spinal fluid for the wind machines of Larav. Empress Larav.

**JOAN.** Dad? And Mr. Barfly too? You fiend.

**MOTHER.** Mr. Barfly. And the man who fixed the sink. And Mr. Delaplane next. And then the Mayor of Cleveland. And soon you, my dear. Qsssmsssssplxmnsxsxsxsssxku!

**JOAN.** *(Squaring off:)* Xtr. Tr. Rqnrhrdtt. C!

**MOTHER.** Tritonian? I suspected. Show your glide wave number and fight.

**JOAN.** I am Becky Brighteye, girl space cop, and I'm taking you back to Triton, world that you and your kind have despoiled. With your wind machines and inverted energy schemes. All of it Xxqmmntnp, as you say it in your dialect.

**MOTHER.** Once I get your time feather, you're finished.

**JOAN.** Try and get it.

*(They fight.)*

Qqkwvll. Llllgpppvvmvptzc.

**MOTHER.** Hsstu. Psspmpsstmpt. Ptzc.

**JOAN.** Bhtsspssbh.

**MOTHER.** Filthy girl. I should've scwwpsst you in your sleep. Sleep hsp.

**JOAN.** Tsststtp to you. What's your real name before I take your feather.

*(She defeats her MOTHER.)*

**MOTHER.** Inglefinger. Fourth Dyad. Tenth moeity.

**JOAN.** One of the unclean ones? That's how desperate you are.

**MOTHER.** Wolfing, we'll destroy you yet.

**JOAN.** I've got a hot pllptpccclpu waiting for me. In a small apple grove in Indiana. Then it's clear sailing back home. With your time feather. You'll be out cold for a week.

**MOTHER.** No, no. *(Faints.)*

*(JOAN drags her halfway off. Her feet remain visible. Doorbell rings. RICHARD [PANDA HANDS] enters, dressed formally. He wears panda gloves and carries her corsage.)*

**PANDA HANDS.** Hi, Joanie. I heard someone whispering. So I didn't come in. So I just stood outside. Here's your corsage.

**JOAN.** Oh, that's beautiful, Richard. But the prom's tomorrow night.

**PANDA HANDS.** The fifteenth. That's what it says on the card. That's tonight. Gee, what's wrong with your mother?

**JOAN.** One of her fainting spells. Don't worry. Let me just get my coat.

**PANDA.** Like my gloves?

*(She puts on her coat.)*

Shouldn't we, like, call the doctor?

**JOAN.** You warm up the car. I'll be right out. It's all right.

**PANDA HANDS.** I'll go warm up the car. Okay? *(He goes. Pause.)*

**JOAN.** Fthr. Fthr. Qskmpplptu. Pxp.

**MOTHER.** *(Groaning:)* Glpplmpa. Gld. Dddd.

*(She holds up a strange feather. JOAN snatches it in triumph. PANDA HANDS re-enters.)*

**JOAN.** Shall we go.

**PANDA HANDS.** Golly. Sure. What's that?

*(Points to the feather. She puts it in her purse.)*

**JOAN.** Skip it.

*(Blackout.)*

## Scene 7

*(The prom. In the men's room. Nice prom music in the background. The MAYOR OF CLEVELAND, a chaperone, stands to one side. His head is wedged in the towel machine. He is formally attired. A STRANGE MAN enters with a wand.)*

**MAN.** I am the Imperial Fsqqtu for Becky Brighteye. I think I deserve better than this. Plopped down on a contemptible third-rate planet. Populated by third-string coat hangers and hat racks. When I talk to one of you you say many things, but all you ever mean is "I believe in pop music. I believe everything I hear on the radio." In my earthly aspect I perform a boring and meaningless task over and over. All your solutions to problems are simpleminded. You want to look inside things, but the insides of most things are the same. One, two. On, off. Boy, girl. Cat, dog. All the same and very boring. Pleasure is on the surface. Pleasure is not boring. On my world people go mad from excessive happiness, which you would never understand. Nor would you ever understand what a Fsqqtu is, which is why I am not going to explain. When the screws from

the big bank come to close this circus down they'll show fire and say: "We've come. We're taking everything you've got." I wanted to build a system, to perfect an art. And look what I've got. Out of control *stuff* a rat shoot at the county dump, an endless prospect of indigestible cheese.

*(He shudders.)*

On this world one can deduce nothing on the basis of looking at the sky. That is not so where I come from. Everything depends upon the sky. I would like, yes, I would very much like to talk about the sky. But you would not understand. So...

*(Pause.)*

I glide the way and skin the smooth, in case any more Mirandans show up. This is the men's room of Panda Prep. The prom, remember? If you listen carefully you can hear music in the background. Cheesy band. Golden oldies, in the local argot.

That's the Mayor of Cleveland. A chaperone. He's drunk. Looks like he got his head caught in the towel machine. How'd he manage that? I haven't a clue. Sh. I hear people coming.

Sh.

*(Backs into a stall and disappears. LOSIN' SUSAN enters. Realizes mistake and exits. PANDA HANDS enters. Urinates. Washes hands. Exits. Returns. Does a doubletake. Re-exits. Pause. Re-enters with JOAN.)*

**PANDA HANDS.** Will you get a load of that?

**JOAN.** What's wrong with him?

**PANDA HANDS.** It's the mayor. Looks like he's had an accident.

*(A teacher, MR. BARFLY, enters.)*

**BARFLY.** Pardon me.

*(He exits hurriedly. Re-enters.)*

Hey. What's going on here?

**PANDA HANDS.** Sorry Mr. Barfly. Sir. It's the mayor.

**BARFLY.** The mayor. Why so it is.

**JOAN.** He's stuck.

**BARFLY.** How the devil'd he do that?

**JOAN.** Beats me.

**BARFLY.** What are you doing in here young lady?

**JOAN.** We were looking for him. He got drunk and threw up in the punch bowl.

**BARFLY.** The mayor?

**JOAN.** Sad to say.

**BARFLY.** Tony, what are you doing in there?

*(Muffled noises from the MAYOR.)*

**PANDA HANDS.** What do we do Mr. Barfly?

**BARFLY.** This has to be done discreetly. A lot of fashionable people are out there.

**JOAN.** It sure calls for discretion. Maybe we can find a crowbar in the custodian's room.

**PANDA HANDS.** This is too much.

*(He exits.)*

**BARFLY.** Young lady what are you staring at?

**JOAN.** It's pretty amazing if you think about it.

**BARFLY.** Watch the door. No one must know.

**JOAN.** Discretion. Right.

*(She tries to enter. She blocks the door.)*

You can't come in.

**BARFLY.** No, no, no. Don't do that.

**JOAN.** You said I should watch the door.

**BARFLY.** Where's Richard?

**JOAN.** Went for a crowbar. Or a more appropriate tool. A Phillips screwdriver perhaps.

**BARFLY.** This is ridiculous.

**JOAN.** I find it very interesting.

**BARFLY.** Could be the ruin of a fine public figure.

**JOAN.** Never been in the men's room before.

**BARFLY.** Tony, are you all right? For Christ's sake what happened?

**JOAN.** This sure is a fashionable school. I go to Our Lady of the Bleeding Knuckle.

**BARFLY.** Why don't you be quiet?

**JOAN.** Just trying to lighten the mood. Sorry.

**BARFLY.** Where'd he go?

**JOAN.** You mean Panda Hands.

**BARFLY.** Richard.

**JOAN.** Beats me. Maybe he went home. We call him Panda Hands because he paws all the girls.

**BARFLY.** Tony, help is coming.

**JOAN.** The band sure sucks, doesn't it?

**BARFLY.** Why don't you go away?

**JOAN.** This is a fascinating experience. Wouldn't miss it for the world.

*(PANDA HANDS enters with the rest of the girls.)*

**GRISELDA.** Oh, look!

**KATE.** Wow!

**SUSAN.** What's wrong with him?

**PANDA HANDS.** Everybody's looking for you, Mr. Barfly.

**BERTHA.** I've never been in the men's room before.

*(The door opens.)*

**A MALE VOICE.** *(Off.)* Sorry.

*(Closes. Reopens.)*

Hey, what's going on here?

*(The girls hold the door shut.)*

**BARFLY.** *(To RICHARD:)* Would you get them out of here? Did you bring a screwdriver?

**PANDA HANDS.** This was all I could find.

*(It's a hammer.)*

**BARFLY.** What good is that? Go find a screwdriver. A Phillips screwdriver.

**PANDA HANDS.** But where?

**BARFLY.** Look. Use your imagination, Richard.

*(PANDA HANDS exits.)*

**JOAN.** Quite remarkable, isn't it.

**KATE.** Very

**SUSAN.** Never seen anything like it.

**KATE.** That band's lousy, isn't it.

**BERTHA.** The pits.

**GRISELDA.** This sure is a fashionable place. Did you see all the ivy outside?

**SUSAN.** He threw up all over everything. Really gross.

**BARFLY.** He's the mayor. Remember. Show some respect.

**SUSAN.** *(To MAYOR:)* Sorry, sir.

**BARFLY.** *(To JOAN:)* And you. Keep an eye on that door.

**KATE.** Want some gum?

**JOAN.** Sure.

**BERTHA.** Is there a party after the prom?

**GRISELDA.** Who knows?

**SUSAN.** Jimmy the Door's such a good dancer.

**GRISELA.** Johnny on the Spot's stepped all over my feet. See.

**KATE.** Wow. That's awful.

**BERTHA.** Can I have a stick of gum? (*KATE doesn't reply.*)

**JOAN.** Mr. Barfly, sir, do you have a relative who's a plumber?

**BARFLY.** Why, yes, do you know him?

**JOAN.** We had some trouble with our kitchen sink. (*Muffled sounds from the MAYOR.*)

**BARFLY.** Easy now, Tony, we'll have you out of there in a jiffy.

**JOAN.** Sir, Mr. Barfly, what if we greased his head with a stick of butter? I'm sure we could find a stick of butter.

**BARFLY.** Very funny.

**BERTHA.** I'm bored.

*(She goes out.)*

**KATE.** Let's go back to the dance.

**BARFLY.** Not a word of this to anyone. Promise.

**GRISELA.** Sure.

**BARFLY.** I mean it.

**KATE.** Mum's the word.

**SUSAN.** I've never met a real mayor before.

**GRISELA.** Good night. Mr. Mayor. Good luck!

**SUSAN.** Goodbye, Joan. See you soon.

*(They troop out except for JOAN, MR. BARFLY, and of course the MAYOR.)*

**BARFLY.** What are you staring at young lady?

## **THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!**

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