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## Cast of Characters

BARBARA LEWIS, actor: patient and amenable up to a point; laughs at inappropriate moments.

CLIVE HYATT, director: intelligent but unerringly wrong-headed; has an easy charm and self-confidence that comes from his belief that he is one of the “chosen;” speaks quickly; may carry an affectation to assist directing (riding crop, Bobbie’s whistle); directed smash hit “Walkies!” on Broadway.

SKIP TUMALU, actor: talented, though you wish he weren’t so you could dislike him more; less than patient; Barbara’s former beau and still intoxicated with her; starred in “Walkies!;” may exhibit vestigial canine mannerisms.

SAMMI SIMS, stage manager: indeterminate gender; matter-of-fact, generally disinterested.

MRS. VANDERSHUDDER’S SPECIAL GUEST STAR.

CONNIE VANDERSHUDDER, JR., actor: more than slightly unstable with a raging case of stage fright; gives you the impression she might have been chained to a bedpost since birth.

SMERELDA POPINFLAW, set/costume designer: pathologically inhibitionless.

MRS. CONSTANCE VANDERSHUDDER, Founder, sole Board Member, largest financial contributor and Artistic Director of The Vandershudder Place Theatre: vast wealth; considers herself to be of royal birth though temporarily without documentation; has determined that Connie, Jr. shall have the brilliant career in the arts that she herself was never offered but declined anyway.

DAPHNE ODORA, vocal coach: former burlesque headliner; loopy and half-present, but kindhearted; those around her often find themselves daydreaming about drowning her; attire may suggest lapses in memory.

DIRK DEVERAUX, actor: incapable of ascertaining the gist of the situation; may be physically attractive enough to interest women who should know better.

MRS. LEWIS, Barbara’s mother: Mama Rose

## Character Breakdown

It would be preferable to use 7 actors (3 Women/4 Men). If using 9 actors (5 Women/4 Men), you may un-double Connie/Smerelda and Mrs. Vandershudder/Daphne.

Actor 1: Barbara Lewis

Actor 2: Clive Hyatt

Actor 3: Skip Tumalu

Actor 4: Sammi Sims / Mrs. Vandershudder's Special Guest Star

Actor 5: Connie Vandershudder, Jr. / Smerelda Popinflaw

Actor 6: Mrs. Constance Vandershudder / Daphne Odora

Actor 7: Dirk Deveraux / Mrs. Lewis

## Author's Note

This play needs to move. (Actors like moments—audiences like momentum.)

## Acknowledgments

All production groups performing this play are required to include the following credits when possible:

*Everybody's a Critic* by Katie Forgette was originally workshopped at Intiman Theatre, Seattle, WA (Warner Shook, Artistic Director; Laura Penn, Managing Director).

# EVERYBODY'S A CRITIC

by Katie Forgette

## ACT I

### Scene 1

*(The curtain rises and we find BARBARA LEWIS sitting in a large stuffed chair. She is dressed in sweats and slippers. Her hair is untidy and she is eating while she watches television. The blue light from the TV flickers on her face and we hear the voices from a late night soap opera.)*

**MAN'S VOICE.** There he is. Pay no attention to all the tubes. Are you a relative of Dr. Tater's?

**WOMAN'S VOICE.** Yes. Doctor, is he going to be all right?!

**MAN'S VOICE.** I'm afraid he's lapsed into what we call: a coma.

**WOMAN'S VOICE.** Oh my God!! How?

**MAN'S VOICE.** He was patronizing the Artful Roger Sex Club and things got out of hand with one of the instructors.

**WOMAN'S VOICE.** Nooo... ! *(A thudding sound.)*

**MAN'S VOICE.** Nurse!! Help me, this woman has fainted.

**WOMAN'S VOICE.** Brent, Brent...

**NURSE'S VOICE.** I know this woman... She's... Dr. Brent Tater's wife!

*(Bum-Bum-Bum. "We will return to 'The Doomed & The Darling'...")*

*(There is a knock at the door. BARBARA clicks off the TV and hides food under the seat cushion. She looks through the peephole and opens the door. During the course of the scene MRS. LEWIS may arrange BARBARA's hair or begin to tidy the apartment.)*

**BARBARA.** Mom. This is unexpected.

*(MRS. LEWIS enters – she is a very tall, very handsome, man in drag.)*

**MRS. LEWIS.** *(Casing the place:)* I just had lunch with your Aunt Ruth so I thought I'd drop in.

**BARBARA.** How is Aunt Ruth?

**MRS. LEWIS.** She's married to your Uncle Buddy, how do you think she is? What happened with the audition?

**BARBARA.** I didn't get the part.

**MRS. LEWIS.** Why?

**BARBARA.** There was singing.

**MRS. LEWIS.** You can sing.

**BARBARA.** No, I can't.

**MRS. LEWIS.** Yes, you can.

**BARBARA.** No, I can't.

**MRS. LEWIS.** Yes, you can. You inherited my beautiful voice. (*She starts snapping her fingers:*) A one and a two, "Give my regards to Broadway—"

**BARBARA.** Mom...

**MRS. LEWIS.** "—remember me to Herald Square." Sing with me, Barbara!

**BARBARA.** Please don't make me.

**MRS. LEWIS.** "tell all the gang at 42nd street—" I'm not going to stop until you join me!

(BARBARA knows when she's beaten.)

**BARBARA / MRS. LEWIS.** "—that I will soon be there!"

**MOM.** That's my baby!

**BARBARA / MRS. LEWIS.** "—tell them of how I'm yearning—"

**MRS. LEWIS.** (*Stopping suddenly:*) I know I promised on your dead father's life not bring this up again—

**BARBARA.** We are not talking about that horrible play!

**MRS. LEWIS.** Juris Imprudence: The Awful Journey Toward Truth. A title I could steal for my memoirs, if anyone would read them and learn. But, nooo, *young people have to make their own mistakes!* That show had a message, but you were too busy being the class clown to notice.

**BARBARA.** I played a bimbo lawyer who argues that men are driven to violence and sexual deviancy because of the constant nagging of intellectually inferior, overly-hormonal women. And my character wins the case. The jury comes back with an acquittal for a homicidal pornographer.

**MRS. LEWIS.** Well, that's not what I took away from the evening. I think your character had the chutzpah to finally say what a lot of us have been thinking: *that women have forgotten their place in society—*

(BARBARA puts her hands over her ears and hums "Give My Regards to Broadway.")

**MRS. LEWIS.** —And in their mad dash to take men's jobs, they have lost their femininity. Regardless—to laugh like that during the summation scene on opening night...! What was that young man's name...the playwright?

**BARBARA.** Orville Thorncroft, IV.

**MRS. LEWIS.** He was quite handsome as I recall. If you'd played your cards a little differently, exerted your feminine wiles—

**BARBARA.** Don't. (She covers her ears and hums.)

**MRS. LEWIS.** Mrs. Orville Thorncroft, IV...

(The phone rings. They both try to pick it up.)

**MRS. LEWIS.** Hello? —Yes, she is, may I tell her who's calling?

**BARBARA.** Give me the phone.

**MRS. LEWIS.** What is the nature of your call?

**BARBARA.** Mother!

(BARBARA tries to take the phone from MRS. LEWIS. There is a brief struggle as they both attempt to speak into the receiver.)

**BARBARA.** I'll be right with you!

**MRS. LEWIS.** Let me talk to him. I have a way with people!

(MRS. LEWIS relinquishes the phone, but tries to listen in.)

**BARBARA.** Hello? Yes, this is Barbara Lewis—the Vandershudder Place Theatre. (Her hand over the receiver.) A job! (Back to the caller:) I love new plays—who? Clive Hyatt...

(MRS. LEWIS barks and pants.)

**BARBARA.** He directed that musical about dogs in love...Walkies! Let me see, my date book is here somewhere— (Picking up a package of Ding Dongs:) —yes, I am free those dates—thank you!—goodbye.

(BARBARA hangs up the phone.)

**BARBARA.** I got a job!

**MRS. LEWIS.** Honey!

(They hug each other and laugh. MRS. LEWIS suddenly stops.)

**MRS. LEWIS.** No laughing this time.

(BARBARA slaps herself.)

**BARBARA.** No laughing.

(They both burst into laughter. BARBARA collapses into her chair. The lights shift. An eerie rendition of "Give My Regards to Broadway" is heard. MRS. LEWIS' laugh is now distorted as she spins out of the room.)

(Lights return to normal. Then: the sound of snoring.)

(The phone rings. BARBARA awakens with a jolt. She picks up the phone.)

**BARBARA.** Hello? Mom?

(She looks to the door—to the flickering TV.)

**BARBARA.** Ohhh... I was dreaming—you were here and you looked like this guy on this show—no, I was too nervous to sleep, we start rehearsal today—. OH MY GOD, WHAT TIME IS IT? (Grabbing a clock:) NOOO! Thanks for calling! Yeah, yeah, yeah, no laughing. Bye!

(BARBARA runs to her bedroom taking her clothes off as she goes.)

## Scene 2

(Lights come up on the rehearsal room of the Vandershudder Place Theatre. There is a long table with chairs and a smaller table with coffee and an assortment of snacks. Present are: the director, CLIVE HYATT; the stage manager, SAMMI SIMS; the board, MRS. CONSTANCE VANDERSHUDDER; and her daughter and fledgling actress, CONNIE VANDERSHUDDER, JR.)

**CLIVE.** It is stunning! The muraled ceiling, the velvet seats, the Renoirs in the men's room.

**MRS. VANDERSHUDDER.** Yes. No expense was spared. I think I've created a *showplace* in more than one sense of the word.

**CLIVE.** Well stated. Mrs. Vandershudder—

**MRS. VANDERSHUDDER.** Constance, please.

**CLIVE.** Gracious lady. I understand you've finished choosing the rest of the season.

**MRS. VANDERSHUDDER.** Yes. We're going with five one-person shows. Not just for fiscal reasons—

**CLIVE.** Of course not.

**MRS. VANDERSHUDDER.** But something had to be sacrificed once the construction of the administration office came in over budget.

**CLIVE.** Correct me now if I've got them wrong, you've selected: I Am Twain; Lincoln, That's Me; Call Him Trump, de Gaulle; C'est Moi, and...what is the fifth?

**MRS. VANDERSHUDDER.** Ernestine Fugue's new one-woman show, Sailor Take Warning, or Love after 60.

**CLIVE.** Marvelous. I can't wait to work with her. I think she'll be magnificent in A Woman's Song.

**MRS. VANDERSHUDDER.** We were quite fortunate to secure her talents for two productions.

(BARBARA enters, a bit flustered.)

**BARBARA.** Hello, everyone.

**EVERYONE.** Hello. Hi. Good morning.

**BARBARA.** Am I late?

**CLIVE.** You most certainly are not. Hello there. (*Taking her hand.*) I'm your director, a man you will no doubt come to love and hate within a matter of days. Clive Hyatt. Director. A Woman's Song.

**BARBARA.** Barbara Lewis.

**CLIVE.** Good morning, Barbara Lewis. Welcome aboard. I've heard so much about you that I feel—

(SKIP TUMALU enters.)

**CLIVE.** Mr. Tumalu!

**SKIP.** (*Embracing him:*) Clive! Good God, you look terrific!

**CLIVE.** To whom shall I make out the check?

(*They laugh. SKIP sees BARBARA.*)

**SKIP.** Oh my god. Barbara, Barbara, Barbara...

**BARBARA.** Skip, Skip, Skip! I didn't know you were in this.

**SKIP.** You look like an angel.

**BARBARA.** Probably because I'm half dead (*She laughs.*) ...from lack of sleep.

**CLIVE.** You two talents know one another?

**BARBARA.** Skip and I did a show in New York together.

**CLIVE.** Which one?

**BARBARA.** James Michener's first play, North America.

**CLIVE.** Oh, yes. I heard it was a bit on the long side.

**SKIP.** Barbara was mesmerizing, incandescent, unforgettable.

**BARBARA.** It was a good cast.

*(SKIP continues to stare at BARBARA.)*

**CLIVE.** Well then *(Turning to SAMMI:)*, I think this constitutes a full roster for today. We are going to be short three, but they're a quick lot, they'll catch up in no time.

**SAMMI.** Dirk Deveraux isn't here.

**CLIVE.** Oh, yes. Dirk. Let's proceed without him. We'll do the introductions at the table. *(Pulling out a chair:)* Mrs. Vandershudder?

**MRS. VANDERSHUDDER.** Constance, please.

**CLIVE.** Gracious lady.

**SAMMI.** You'll find a packet with your name on it.

*(They all find their places and sit.)*

**CLIVE.** *(Going over his notes:)* Just a couple of notes. We are missing our esteemed playwright, Mr. Hugh Limpy. He is at this moment ensconced in a suite at the Vandershudder Four Seasons where he is chasing down character and plot with the fervor of a doped-up greyhound. So as to save him valuable writing time, he will be joining us for notes on this *(He displays a red phone.)*, henceforth to be known as: THE LIMPY SPEAKERPHONE. Please, no outgoing calls. Our costume and set designer, the provocative Smerelda Popinflow is due any day from... *(Trying to read his own handwriting:)* somewhere in eastern Europe. The estimable Daphne Odora will assist us as vocal coach starting tomorrow. And I have a telegram here from Ernestine Fugue, first lady of Broadway, who will be joining us next week. The message reads: "Greetings fellow aberrations. Well, I've been extended again. My one-woman show, an evening of reminiscences of my mid-menopausal search for exotic culinary delights entitled Hot Flashes in the Pan, is a hit with a capital dollar sign. Eat your heart out M.F.K. Fisher. Pinches and smooches, Ernestine." And that's that. Let's begin. Skip will you start us off?

**SKIP.** Happy to. Skip Tumalu—accent on the second syllable, final "u" is short. Actor. I'm playing the roles of Joseph II, Cain, of Cain and Abel, Lizzie Borden's invisible friend, and the mischievous gynecologist. I've just finished a five year run of Walkies!, the fourth longest running musical—did I say that? *(He and CLIVE laugh.)* Directed by

none other than Clive Hyatt. Finding love in a puppy mill was great fun, but I'm looking forward to playing humans again.

**SAMMI.** Sammi Sims, stage manager. I'll need your coffee money by the end of the day. I get a 5 minute cigarette break every hour. This is in my contract. I don't like to be disturbed during those breaks.

*(Pause. SAMMI turns to look at BARBARA who is staring at her.)*

**BARBARA.** Oh, me. Barbara Lewis. I'm playing Woman, in A Woman's Song. This is my first show in a few months and I've very excited.

*(DIRK DEVERAUX enters, panting and disheveled.)*

**DIRK.** Sorry. Sorry. Sorry, Clive.

**CLIVE.** Tardiness may be chic in the world of soap operas Dirk, but—

**DIRK.** Got it, got it. *(To BARBARA, flirtatiously:)* Hello there.

**BARBARA.** Hello... have we met before?

**DIRK.** Maybe in your dreams? *(To CONNIE, flirtatiously:)* Hello there. *(To MRS. VANDERSHUDDER, flirtatiously:)* Hey there, cougar. *(Back to CLIVE:)* Don't let me interrupt.

**CLIVE.** We were just introducing ourselves, who we're playing, et-cetera. It's your turn.

**DIRK.** Oh, all right. Dirk Deveraux. I'm playing, oh god *(Looking for his script:)*, just a whole pack of guys, several of which have yet to show up in my copy.

**SAMMI.** In front of you. Marked "new pages."

**DIRK.** Got it. I've been doing this new soft-porn late-night drama, The Daring and the Doomed, and what with my character, Dr. Brent Tater, being in a rough-sex coma, I thought I might take the opportunity to look up the skirt of this whole "legit" world.

*(Everyone looks to CONNIE, JR.)*

**CONNIE.** Connie Vandershudder. I'm playing several characters.

*(Pause.)*

**CLIVE.** *(He stands.)* Finally: Mrs. Vandershudder—

**MRS. VANDERSHUDDER.** Constance.

**CLIVE.** (*He smiles at her.*) Constance is The Vandershudder Place Theatre's Founder and Board. Great lady, would you honor us with a few words?

(MRS. VANDERSHUDDER *rises.*)

**MRS. VANDERSHUDDER.** I love theatre. I love the people who inhabit its strange and lush terrain. I'm so pleased that I stumbled upon Hugh Limpy's play. Each of you has been hand picked for your position in this production.

That there should be a collection of perfect roles for my gifted daughter's debut makes this an extraordinary event. I thank you for letting me join you on this momentous day. (*Like a thunderclap:*) **CONNIE!!!**

(CONNIE JR. *stands, shaking.*)

**CONNIE.** Yes, Mother!

**MRS. VANDERSHUDDER.** (*Steel-melting voice:*) Don't disappoint me.

**CONNIE.** Yes, Mama. I mean, *no*, Mama. I mean— (*Indecipherable whimpers.*)

**MRS. VANDERSHUDDER.** (*To the group:*) Good afternoon.

(*She collects herself and begins to leave. CLIVE stands and gently claps; the others, tentatively, join in. Smiles and goodbyes are exchanged.*)

**CLIVE.** A true patron of the arts. Mrs. Constance Vandershudder, ladies and gentlemen. Well...on to me. (*He strolls about the room.*) Clive Hyatt. Director. A Woman's Song. Welcome. If any of you were alive the past few years then you know that after directing my last show—the musical Walkies!—I was nearly ground into paste by the weight of the awards and laudations that were heaped upon me. My gifts grew burdensome and I retired, briefly, to my little yacht, "The Footlight's Messiah." But when Mrs. Vandershudder—Constance—sent me Hugh's Limpy's script, albeit only the first three pages, I found myself fortified—nourished by this sensitive exposé of female icons through history. When Hugh told me that I was the only director, or "alchemist" I think he said, capable of transforming leaden words into that glimmer which is universal female behavior, I felt "called," "summoned," if you will, as if the angel Gabriel had been compelled to visit earth one more time. I immediately dropped my plans for the upcoming Helen Keller musical, Who Moved The Furniture?!, and decided to dedicate myself to this new—

(SKIP *raises his hand.*)

**CLIVE.** Skippy?

**SKIP.** I heard through the grapevine that this show is slated for Broadway.

**CLIVE.** There are rumors that we will be taking this show to New York. Tales of genius travel fast. But let's not become concerned with the glittering future. I will need you to be present totally. This experience will threaten to devour you. Let it. Barbara, you in particular will be asked to stand naked and weep for your sins, to unhinge the female facade and expose the guileful machinations of a weak yet alluring psyche. Do you understand?

**BARBARA.** You mean, I should allow my vulnerability to show through?

**CLIVE.** No. I mean you take your clothes off and cry on cue.

**BARBARA.** (*Shuffling through her pages:*) I don't think that's in my script.

**SAMMI.** In front of you. Marked "new pages."

(*BARBARA finds the pages and stares at them.*)

**CLIVE.** All right then my talented pack! Let us begin the iditarod—our hearts are full and so is our sled. Forward into the vast unknown—page one!

### Scene 3

(*Two weeks later.*)

(*SAMMI is ripping up tape from the rehearsal floor. BARBARA enters.*)

**BARBARA.** Morning, Sammi.

**SAMMI.** If you say so.

**BARBARA.** (*Seeing what SAMMI's doing:*) You've got to be kidding.

**SAMMI.** Smerelda Popinflow has changed the set design. Again.

**BARBARA.** How many times is that?

**SAMMI.** Sixteen.

(*DIRK enters.*)

**DIRK.** Hey, Sam.

**SAMMI.** Sammi.

**DIRK.** Sammi. (*To BARBARA:*) Miss Sensitive must have TMS.

**BARBARA.** You mean PMS?

**DIRK.** Whatever that lame-o excuse is a woman uses to be a bitch.

**BARBARA.** Dirk. I'm a woman.

**DIRK.** Are you ever.

**BARBARA.** I mean—does it occur to you that I might find that comment offensive?

**DIRK.** Is little Dirky in trouble? Maybe you should punish little Dirky.

**BARBARA.** Sammi, does the theatre own a wood chipper?

*(DIRK laughs.)*

**DIRK.** Ouch! Keep running, baby. I know how you really feel. That first day: *(Flirtatiously.)* "Haven't we met somewhere before, big boy."

**BARBARA.** I did not say "big boy"!

**DIRK.** Your eyes said "big boy."

*(BARBARA puts her head in her hands and makes tiny "I'm Going Insane" noises.)*

*(SKIP enters singing "Would You Like to Swing On a Star." He sees DIRK and BARBARA together.)*

**SKIP.** Good morning, Barbara.

**BARBARA.** Morning, Skip.

**SKIP.** You look lovely this morning. Glowing and full of life.

**BARBARA.** *(Touching her hair:)* New conditioner.

**SKIP.** Dirk, can I talk to you a sec?

**DIRK.** Skippy. What can I do ya?

*(SKIP gives DIRK a piece of paper.)*

**SKIP.** I found that rule for Equity candidates—this is your first show, right?

**DIRK.** Right.

**SKIP.** Well, this is the rule regarding hairstyles that are required for male Equity candidates during rehearsals. You'll want to read this.

*(DIRK walks away with the paper.)*

**SKIP.** *(Looking after him:)* "And all the monkeys aren't in the zoo..."

*(DAPHNE ODORA enters. She is dressed in a sort of Ray Bradbury creation. She hands out cassette tapes [or 8 track] to DIRK, SKIP and BARBARA.)*

**DAPHNE.** Daphne has arrived! I bring knowledge! Dialect tape, listen and learn. Your mouth is a temple where all peoples are welcome.

(SKIP sits next to BARBARA.)

**SKIP.** I hope Dirk wasn't bothering you.

**BARBARA.** (*Looking over at DIRK.*) Sometimes I think maybe he's just pretending to be...the way he is.

(*DIRK is reading the rules on hairstyles. His lips are moving and the expression on his face would suggest that he is passing something.*)

**SKIP.** I don't think he's pretending.

(*Pause.*)

**SKIP.** Did I mention that I saw you in Juris Imprudence?

**BARBARA.** You didn't.

**SKIP.** I did. You were great. Really.

**BARBARA.** Thanks.

(*Pause.*)

**SKIP.** Do you feel it?

**BARBARA.** What?

**SKIP.** What. This. This *energy* between us.

**BARBARA.** Skip—

**SKIP.** Don't you remember how good we were together?

**BARBARA.** It was a long time ago.

**SKIP.** Twenty-five months.

**BARBARA.** We were young.

**SKIP.** Young? I was 40, and, hell, you had to have been—

**BARBARA.** We were younger. We were in a play. We went to that wine-tasting party, and you said something about being "full-bodied with a woody top note" and I threw myself at you. These things happen.

**SKIP.** It was more than that. Much more. (*Taking her hand.*) What am I supposed to do with this magic I feel?

**BARBARA.** Make yourself disappear?

**SKIP.** You always crack wise when you're afraid. I remember that. Why did we break up?

**BARBARA.** We broke up because you're a raging malcontent who believes one man's actions can alter the world, while I'm a closeted pessimist who sees no hope for society and is strangely comforted by that.

**SKIP.** You are so good with words.

(CLIVE enters with CONNIE, JR.)

**CLIVE.** Good morning, everyone! Sorry I'm late, Sammi.

**SKIP.** Have lunch with me. I feel very uplifted by this encounter.

**BARBARA.** That's impossible.

**SKIP.** Nothing is impossible when you're involved.

**CLIVE.** Could I have your attention please? Thank you. (*Looking at Daphne's outfit:*) Daphne, is that a costume for the show?

**DAPHNE.** No.

(Pause.)

**CLIVE.** Smerelda Popinflow brought over a model of the Garden of Eden set if you'd care to take a peek.

(*They do.*)

**SKIP.** That's it? Just a papier-mâché tree?

**CLIVE.** Smerelda wants to communicate a (*Referring to his notes – rapidly:*) “stark, tormented, bleak landscape. A foreshadowing of what man's existence will be for the centuries to come.” Now. Hugh has just faxed over a couple of changes. The Amelia Earhart scene. Page 32, half way down, change “crack-pot” to “dunderheaded.” All right? Let me hear that from just the line before to the end of the page.

(DIRK is confused. BARBARA shows him where to start.)

**DIRK.** Got it. (*Starting the scene:*) Amelia! I tell you that was Howland island back there! And we're almost out of gas!!

**BARBARA.** Fred, when I want your dunderheaded opinions, I'll ask for 'em.

**DIRK.** Amelia, you're drunk! Give me the controls and I'll get us back to Howland!

**BARBARA.** I'm a risk taker, baby. Pass me that other flask, will ya? Hey, what happened to that sound the engine makes when it's running??

(CLIVE has been listening intently with his eyes closed as though he were tuning a piano for Vladimir Horowitz.)

**CLIVE.** Excellent. (*Going back to his notes:*) The Lizzie Borden scene is gone. Smerelda wanted a tremendous amount of blood for the murder of Lizzie's parents—a kind of carotid tsunami—and I'm afraid we just weren't able to accommodate her vision. Barbara, the Shirley Temple scene. Let's not forget what Hugh's research tells us: she was, more than likely, a manipulative, power-mad, 40 year old midget. And a little advice regarding Eva Braun—one word: mastermind. Now. A stroke of brilliance from Hugh and Mrs. Vandershudder. Ready? Each night a very secret, very special guest star will appear in our show. Opening night will feature a radiant celebrity from the world of music—for instance, Yo-Yo Ma—I'm not saying it is Yo-Yo Ma—but someone as big or bigger.

**SKIP.** This smells like a marketing tool to bring people in.

**CLIVE.** Precisely my first impression, Skip. But Hugh assures me that he is seamlessly blending this appearance into the arc of the play.

**BARBARA.** What will the star do?

**CLIVE.** He or she will appear briefly at the end of the Marie Antoinette scene, utter a few words from the collective consciousness of all women, and then vanish.

**SKIP.** What if the audience doesn't recognize the star?

**DIRK.** Yeah, like who's this Yo-Yo guy?

**CLIVE.** Not to worry. Super titles.

**SKIP.** Like at the opera?

**CLIVE.** Bingo.

**DAPHNE.** Maybe we should try to enlist the services of people who are even more famous. Ronald Coleman, Alan Ladd, Betty Grable. (*She does Grable's WWII poster pose.*) Wouldn't it be something if they showed up?

**BABARA / SKIP / CLIVE / SAMMI.** Yes.

**DAPHNE.** I'll go call Betty now.

**CLIVE.** Daphne, you can call her later. I'd like to push on. Let's run through the Adam and Eve scene once without stopping. Hugh has, wisely I think, taken out the role of the Surly Grounds Keeper and replaced him with the story's traditional Snake. Sammi will read the role of the Snake until Ernestine Fugue arrives.

**DAPHNE.** Clive, I'd be happy to step in for Ernestine.

**CLIVE.** A trooper, that's what you are. Very low to the ground, wriggling, hissing, you get the picture?

**DAPHNE.** Crystal clear.

**CLIVE.** Complete quiet and concentration, People! Barbara will be doing this one naked.

*(Everyone looks at BARBARA. BARBARA raises her hand.)*

**BARBARA.** Clive, I'm not really ready to do it naked.

**DIRK.** I'm ready to do it naked.

**CLIVE.** No, Dirk, as I said before, Hugh feels that Eve alone should be naked.

**BARBARA.** Why is that?

**DIRK.** Yeah, why is that?

**SKIP.** Yeah, why is that?

**CLIVE.** I don't know, but it's right here in bold print: "Eve enters naked and proud. When Adam enters he is fully clothed."

**BARBARA.** I'd really like to talk to Hugh about this. When will he be calling?

**SAMMI.** He was scheduled to call 30 minutes ago.

**CLIVE.** The Limpy Speakerphone should be buzzing any time now. As you know, he's up to his neck with the changes for the Eleanor Roosevelt love scene. Make a note Sammi: why only Eve naked?

**SAMMI.** "...why only Eve naked..."

**CLIVE.** Barbara, how would you feel about just trying it once in your...underpanties? As we peel back the layers revealing the character, you also peel off your clothes?

**BARBARA.** No.

**CLIVE.** Fine, I won't rush you. *(Clapping:)* Alright people, let's try and crack this puppy! Sammi!

**SAMMI.** And we hear the voice of God saying: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception." And music fades out.

*(BARBARA and CONNIE enter.)*

**EVE.** Abel, honey—

**CLIVE.** Remember, Barbara, she's a saucy wench.

**EVE.** *(Saucy:)* —Mama wants to talk to you.

**ABEL.** I don't feel like talking.

**EVE.** Don't you like your Mama, Abel? Don't you think your Mama pretty? Nice hair. (BARBARA touches CONNIE's hair.)

**CONNIE.** Excuse me, I have to go to the bathroom.

(CONNIE quickly exits.)

(Awkward pause.)

**CLIVE.** She's a little nervous.

**BARBARA.** Of course.

**CLIVE.** First show.

**BARBARA.** Yes.

**CLIVE.** Lovely entrance, I thought.

**BARBARA.** Yes.

(CONNIE returns.)

**CONNIE.** False alarm.

**CLIVE.** With talent comes the unexpected. Again from the top!

**SAMMI.** (*Rapid:*) And we hear the voice of God saying: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception." And music fades out.

**EVE.** Abel, honey, Mama wants to talk to you.

**ABEL.** I don't feel like talking.

**EVE.** Don't you like your Mama, Abel? Don't you think your Mama pretty? Nice hair. (BARBARA touches CONNIE's hair.)

**ABEL.** Please, Mama, don't. I've gotta go tend the sheep.

**EVE.** Oh, thou masterful keeper of sheep.

(DIRK and SKIP enter as ADAM and CAIN.)

**ADAM.** Thou calleth that tilling the ground?

**CLIVE.** Hold just a moment. Dirk, I don't believe in giving line readings, but the operative word in that sentence is "that." Let's take your entrance again.

(SKIP takes two steps back and then forward. DIRK copies him.)

**ADAM.** Thou calleth that tilling the ground?

**CLIVE.** Dirk, Dirk, I'm sorry, perhaps I didn't make myself clear. It's "Thou calleth that tilling the ground?"

**DIRK.** Got it.

(Again, a couple steps back, then forward.)

**ADAM.** Thou calleth that tilling the ground?

**SKIP.** At this point the law of averages is on our side.

**CLIVE.** Let's keep going, Skip.

**CAIN.** What is this I see? Brother Abel, why do you stand with Mother so?

**ADAM.** Thou art blind to the real evil.

**CAIN.** Oh, yeah?

*(SKIP chases CONNIE off.)*

**ADAM.** *(Looking off:)* I believe I see Cain rising up against Abel and slewing him—

**DAPHNE.** *(Waving a hand at CLIVE:)* Pardon, but shouldn't that be "slaying"? I think the audience would be more inclined to make this journey with us if our language were more inviting.

**CLIVE.** Make a note, "Hugh, slew or slay?"

**SAMMI.** "Slew or slay?"

**CLIVE.** Going on. Remember, these are real people, People. Cain re-enters.

*(SKIP returns.)*

**CAIN.** Come unto me Mother.

*(Pause.)*

**BARBARA.** I'm sorry, is that me?

**SAMMI.** No, it's Adam's line, "Shouldn't thou—"

**DIRK.** I know it's my line. Will the teleprompters be in that area over there where the people can't see you?

**CLIVE.** In the *wings*? No. You'll have to have your lines down.

**DIRK.** I have my lines down.

**CLIVE.** Marvelous. Let's take it again. From Cain.

**CAIN.** Come unto me Mother.

*(Pause. They all look at DIRK.)*

**DIRK.** Line!

**SAMMI.** "Shouldn't thou be—"

**ADAM.** Shouldn't thou be tilling the ground?

*(Loud hissing noise from DAPHNE as she wraps herself around SKIP.)*

**SKIP.** Excuse me, but could you please not do that?!

(*DAPHNE continues, lost in her character.*)

**CLIVE.** Daphne? Daphne?!

**DAPHNE.** Yes, Clive?

**CLIVE.** Not quite so much noise. And keep your distance.

**DAPHNE.** I'm sorry you feel that way. I see the Snake as an ally of Cain's. The Snake sees in Cain the potential for evil and therefore intervenes when—

**CLIVE.** Daphne, Ernestine Fugue will be playing the part of the Snake.

**DAPHNE.** Believe me, Ernestine is going to make the same choice. Maybe if Pip would try to play off of me a bit—

**SKIP.** Pip? We're not doing "Great Expectations" grandma. The name is Skip.

**DAPHNE.** Forgive me. If Mr. Skip Tumalu would play off of me—

**SKIP.** That's TU-MAH-LA, Daphie!

**DAPHNE.** That's Daphne, Pip!

**SKIP.** Skip, it's Skip, not Pip! Skip!!

**CLIVE.** All right! All right! Daphne, Pip...Skip. Compromise. Please. Compromise is the very foundation of all great art. Daphne, don't wriggle quite so close and lower the volume and intensity.

**DAPHNE.** I'll try to work with that.

**CLIVE.** Sammi?

**SAMMI.** "Shouldn't thou be tilling the ground?"

**ADAM.** Shouldn't thou be tilling the ground?

**CAIN.** Unto you I say: just because you gave names to all the cattle and to every beast, and thou fowled the air, doesn't mean that you—

(*BARBARA giggles.*)

**CLIVE.** Would you care to share the joke with us, Barbara?

**BARBARA.** Forgive me, I'm sorry, but...isn't that a typo?

**CLIVE.** What?

**BARBARA.** "Thou fowled the air?" I'm pretty sure it's Adam gave names to every fowl of the air. That's what I remember from CCD.

**SKIP.** I think she's right.

**CLIVE.** Sammi. Note to Hugh, "Did Adam name the fowl of the air or did he, in fact, pass wind?"

**SAMMI.** Noted.

**BARBARA.** And while we've stopped, one quick question. Are we to believe that Eve seduces Abel?

**CLIVE.** I think that's where he's headed, yes.

**BARBARA.** What justification do we have for that?

*(Pause.)*

**CLIVE.** Sammi.

**SAMMI.** Got it.

**CLIVE.** Why don't we let this part of the scene have a rest, since we seem to have so many questions. Give me just a moment here.

*(CLIVE goes to confer with SAMMI. DIRK approaches BARBARA who is going over her script. SKIP attempts to join them, but DAPHNE cuts him off and takes him roughly by the arm.)*

**DAPHNE.** I have some dialect notes for you, Flipper.

**SKIP.** Sweet Jesus...

*(DAPHNE leads SKIP off.)*

**DIRK.** I bet you look great naked.

**BARBARA.** Pardon?

**DIRK.** You shouldn't be ashamed of your figure, Barbie.

**BARBARA.** I'm not ashamed of my figure.

**DIRK.** You looked really hot in that show in New York...uh, Judy Impudent.

**BARBARA.** Juris Imprudence.

**DIRK.** Right, that was it.

**BARBARA.** You go to theatre?

**DIRK.** I try to get out of it if I can, but I was dating this extra on the set of Boca Raton General and she had comps. And that wasn't all she had. Man, she was something—looked just like Loni Anderson, only trashier, with a much bigger chest.

**BARBARA.** Lucky you.

**DIRK.** Don't get me wrong. I like real women too.

**BARBARA.** Real women?

**DIRK.** Women who don't look like centerfolds.

**BARBARA.** Ah.

**DIRK.** Honest. You should see some of my old girlfriends.

**BARBARA.** What time does the zoo open?

**DIRK.** Sassy. I like that.

(BARBARA returns to her script.)

**DIRK.** Hey, I know it can be tough out there. You get lonely, you put on a little weight. Shit, a few years back you could have found me packing away a pound of M&M's watching those cheerleading contests on ESPN, then a little self-nooky and off to dreamland.

**BARBARA.** (*Looking up.*) I'm sorry, are you still talking to me?

**DIRK.** Ouch. I bet you're a hellcat in the sack.

**BARBARA.** You'd think that wouldn't you? But, no. Very little hellcat. I'm selfish, lazy, unimaginative. I forget who I'm with. And my toenails... Am I dissuading you at all?

**DIRK.** Ohhhh, yeah.

**BARBARA.** "Dissuade." To put off...

**DIRK.** Ohhhh...no. We are so much alike.

**BARBARA.** I don't believe this.

**DIRK.** And I'm not just talking about the sex. We have a lot in common. You're a dreamer. I'm a dreamer.

**BARBARA.** (*Closing her eyes.*) I'm having a dream right now.

**DIRK.** You know, there are things I want to be.

**BARBARA.** Let me guess—exhibit A in the Scope's Monkey Trial?

(DIRK laughs.)

**BARBARA.** You know what that is?

**DIRK.** No. You said the word "monkey."

(DIRK continues to laugh.)

**CLIVE.** All right then. I'd like to move on to the apple eating, please. I think we're on firmer ground there. Remember, some of you have new lines for this section. Daphne, I'm sure you don't want to do the Snake again, and believe me, I don't blame you one bit.

**DAPHNE.** I'd love to do the Snake again.

**CLIVE.** Feel free to decline. I'll understand.

**DAPHNE.** It would be my pleasure. You know, I don't mean to brag, but I began my career as a chorus girl in Frankie Finger's Female Follies. I played a peasant girl who dances for Pontius Pilate in an attempt to save the Son of God from an early death. And as I whirled and leapt before the killer of Christ, bits of my tattered dress would drop to the floor revealing the nubile innocent beneath—

*(DAPHNE begins to dance and sing a little song. ["Big deal, so you're the Boss, don't nail Him to the Cross—"])*

**CLIVE.** That's fine, just fine. Thank you. Thank you so much... for sharing all of that. Barbara... *(Carefully:)* would you like to try this part naked?

**BARBARA.** No, Clive, look, I've got to be honest. I don't see myself doing any of this naked. When I signed my contract Eve was wearing a costume.

**DAPHNE.** Would it help if the Snake were naked?

**CLIVE.** No. I don't think it would. *(To BARBARA:)* How about this. Imagine yourself naked. Feel it. Sense the air on your firm buttocks and between your milky thighs.

**DIRK.** Oh, yeah...

**CLIVE.** *(Clapping:)* And on we go! Eve is basking in the sun...in the beautiful garden. Feel that sun. Bask in it.

*(BARBARA feels the sun and basks in it. DAPHNE is on her stomach trying to make her way across the stage. She is not making much headway.)*

**DAPHNE.** *(To CLIVE:)* I think I'd better stand.

**CLIVE.** Do.

*(DAPHNE stands. She attempts to wriggle as she walks. The motion is disturbing.)*

**SNAKE.** Hey there. Try one of these apples. They're delicioussssss.

**CLIVE.** Remember the air on your body, Barbara.

**BARBARA.** God hath forbade us the apple tree. No looky, no touchy lest we die.

**SNAKE.** Oh, come on. Eat thereof and your eyes shall be opened.

**EVE.** Well, ok. *(She picks apple and bites.)* Tasty. Hey Adam!

*(DIRK enters.)*

**ADAM.** *(Looking her up and down, front and back:)* You calleth.

**BARBARA.** *(Laughing:)* What are you doing?

**DIRK.** That's not the line, beautiful. (To SAMMI:) What's Barbie's line?

**BARBARA.** No, why are you looking at me like that?

**DIRK.** Wrong again, gorgeous. Barbie's line please. (To BARBARA, *secretly*;) Write your lines on your hands.

**SAMMI.** Eve says: "Where have you been?"

**BARBARA.** No. This is me, Barbara talking. Dirk, why are you looking at me that way?

**CLIVE.** Barbara, I believe he was admiring what I am sure is your very attractive naked form. Nice choice, Dirk. Bold yet inviting. Pull back just a little though. Deny yourself.

**DIRK.** Great. Can I fondle her? 'Cuz I was thinking, you know, she obviously wants it, plus Barbie's naked, I'm naked—

**BARBARA.** (*Calmly, sweetly*;) It says in the script that you are not naked and after I, Barbara, talk with Hugh, I won't be naked either.

**CLIVE.** Now, sweetheart, let's not get hysterical. For the moment, let's assume it's a go with the nudity. At least until we talk with Hugh. If he agrees with you, then you'll wear some lovely frock. Fair enough? (*Clapping*;) On we go. Let's keep it moving. Let's pace this puppy. We don't want to lose them. Sammi?

**SAMMI.** Eve says: "Where have you been?"

**EVE.** Where have you been?

(DIRK looks at the page in his hand, smiles and kisses BARBARA.)

**BARBARA.** (*Pushing him away*;) Dirk!

**CLIVE.** Barbara, is there a problem?

**BARBARA.** Yes, I don't think they should kiss.

**SKIP.** I agree. It reads false to me.

**CLIVE.** Did you get the new page five?

**BARBARA.** There's a new page five?

**CLIVE.** Sammi...

**SAMMI.** New page five.

**CLIVE.** Top of the page.

**BARBARA.** "Adam and Eve kiss passionately and wantonly."

**CLIVE.** Shall we give ourselves a running start?

**BARBARA.** Clive?

**CLIVE.** Yes?

**BARBARA.** (*Not knowing what to say:*) Nothing.

**CLIVE.** Moving along then, Sammi...

**SAMMI.** From Adam's entrance?

**CLIVE.** That'll do. Dirk.

(*DIRK enters.*)

**ADAM.** You calleth?

**EVE.** Where have you been?

(*DIRK kisses BARBARA who is tense and unresponsive. SKIP runs from the room.*)

**CLIVE.** (*Pulling them apart:*) Alright, break it up. Barbara, I think Eve is receptive to this kiss.

**DIRK.** I think she's begging for Adam to do her.

**CLIVE.** Yes, well, semantics. Anyway, a bit more open to his charm, all right? Again.

**ADAM.** You calleth?

**BARBARA.** Where have you been?

(*DIRK kisses BARBARA.*)

**CLIVE.** Unclench your fists, Barbara. Drop your shoulders. Don't squinch up your face.

(*CLIVE goes to them.*)

**CLIVE.** Cease! Barbara. (*He puts his arm around her.*) I want to be delicate here—do you watch French films at all? This kiss is, shall we say...“animalistic.” Allow Adam “in.” Let his mouth “consume” you. Are you all right? You look ill.

**BARBARA.** Fine.

**CLIVE.** (*Clapping:*) All right then. Adam and Eve are ravenous for one another, People. There are no limits to their desire.

**DIRK.** Come to Papa.

**CLIVE.** Let's give it another go. Dirk.

**ADAM.** You calleth?

**EVE.** Where have you—

(*SAMMI stands.*)

**SAMMI.** Cigarette break!

**CLIVE.** (*Looking at his watch.*) Oh, yes, so it is.

(*SAMMI starts to exit.*)

**CLIVE.** If the Limpy Speakerphone rings we'll come fetch you?

**SAMMI.** Please read my contract regarding possible repercussions for anyone attempting to disturb me during my 5 minute cigarette breaks.

(*She exits.*)

**CLIVE.** All right then. Yesterday's run-thru notes. Quickly! Gather 'round my pups! Mush, mush! Shirley Temple scene. Barbara. You really must make some attempt to appear shorter. Slouch, pretend you're a monkey, I don't care, but do something.

(*DIRK is laughing.*)

**CLIVE.** Yes, Dirk?

**DIRK.** You said the word monkey.

**CLIVE.** Barbara. Eva Braun. The accent. Skip. Hitler's line!

**SKIP.** (*As Hitler.*) I thought you said you wanted to go to Paris!

**BARBARA.** (*With an unusual German accent.*) Not "go," "possess"!! I want to own Paris!

**SKIP.** But, Eva, baby, I've no interest in western Europe.

**BARBARA.** Well, get an interest!! Or else I tell Goering about your plans to give Poland back!!

(*Pause.*)

**CLIVE.** Daphne. Emergency dialect session.

**DAPHNE.** Yes, Clive.

**BARBARA.** Clive, shouldn't Hitler have a German accent, too?

**CLIVE.** Barbara, please. Enough nit picking. (*Back to his notes.*) The Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus scene.

(*The phone rings.*)

**CLIVE.** Oh, my god. The Limpy Speakerphone!!

(*CLIVE pushes a button.*)

**CLIVE.** Hello, Hugh? Is that you, Hugh?

**HUGH.** It's me, Clive.

**CLIVE.** Welcome! People, Hugh is with us! Wordsmith and seer. Storyteller and shaman. Welcome!

(CONNIE comes out from the wings.)

**CLIVE.** Hugh, this is Barbara, our leading lady.

(CLIVE nudges each actor to the phone.)

**HUGH.** Hello.

**BARBARA.** Hi, nice to meet you.

**CLIVE.** Dirk Deveraux. Our Adam, et al.

**DIRK.** Super play. Kinky. Weird. I love it.

**HUGH.** Thank you.

**CLIVE.** Next we have Connie Vandershudder Jr., a new light on the theatrical horizon.

**HUGH.** Hello.

**CONNIE.** (*Having trouble:*) ...excuse me.

(*She exits.*)

**CLIVE.** Daphne Odora, our vocal coach and stand-in Snake.

**DAPHNE.** Perhaps you saw my one-woman show, Mr. Limpy. A touching portrayal of a sexual surrogate who recounts her work with impotent State Patrolmen entitled, What Seems to Be the Problem, Officer?

**CLIVE.** Let's discuss our resumes some other time, Daphne.

**HUGH.** I'm faxing over some new pages, Clive.

**CLIVE.** (*Clapping:*) Everyone, Hugh is faxing new pages! Marvelous. Now, Hugh, we have a few questions for you.

**HUGH.** They'll have to be brief, I have a production meeting with Mrs. Vandershudder.

**CLIVE.** All right, quickly then. Hugh, why is Eve naked and not Adam?

**HUGH.** Male nudity—the phallus—is too overpowering an image for an audience. They can't be expected to hear the play and deal with the awesome spectacle of the male organ.

**BARBARA.** Hugh, excuse me, but I'm really not comfortable being naked on stage.

**HUGH.** Why don't you start working out?

**BARBARA.** This isn't about what my body looks like. I just don't feel it's called for.

**HUGH.** If nudity isn't called for in the garden of Eden, when is it called for?

**BARBARA.** But then Adam should be naked.

**DIRK.** Damn straight.

**HUGH.** Fine. You're both naked.

**BARBARA.** No...

*(BARBARA looks at CLIVE who makes a placating gesture.)*

**CLIVE.** We'll talk about this later, Hugh. Now, is it slew or slay?

**HUGH.** Whatever I've written is what it is.

**CLIVE.** Fine and dandy. Did Adam name the fowl of the air as Barbara remembers it from the Bible, or did he expel some gas as you've written?

*(Pause.)*

**HUGH.** Adam has a flatulence problem.

**CLIVE.** *(Looking to DIRK:)* Dirk...?

**DIRK.** I love Mexican food.

**CLIVE.** And finally, regarding Eve as the seductress. How do we wrap the logic around her sleeping with Abel?

**HUGH.** Adam and Eve had two sons, so how did the earth populate itself? She had to sleep with one of them.

**BARBARA.** So, you're saying that we are all begotten from a single incestuous union?

**HUGH.** Yes.

**CLIVE.** Fascinating.

**DAPHNE.** That would certainly explain the state of the world today.

**CLIVE.** Hugh, can we expect Mrs. Vandershudder at a run-thru?

**HUGH.** No. There won't be an invited run-thru. I want to insulate our process until we can offer it whole and confident.

**CLIVE.** Wise choice.

**HUGH.** I've got to go.

**CLIVE.** Yes, yes, of course. My best to Constance. Thank you so much Hugh. See you this evening. Good bye.

*(CLIVE looks down at the new pages in the fax machine.)*

**CLIVE.** My god. Marvelous. Everyone—Leona Helmsley tells her story from prison—title: How I Was Railroaded By The Little People. But first, back to the garden of Eden!

### Scene 4

*(Two weeks later.)*

*(Marie Antoinette scene.)*

*(DAPHNE and SKIP are talking while CLIVE is giving DIRK notes. DIRK's hairstyle would suggest that he has read Skip's "Equality Rules Regarding Rehearsal Coiffures.")*

**DAPHNE.** You know, Pippy—

**SKIP.** Skip. The name is Skip.

**DAPHNE.** Oh, where is my mind? Although I think Pippy is peppier.

*(DAPHNE laughs.)*

**SKIP.** I prefer Skip.

**DAPHNE.** And Skip it shall be. You know, you remind me of my third husband. An irascible and deeply troubled man—what about Rip?

**SKIP.** What...?

**DAPHNE.** As your name. You know, Bogie was called Rip in Dead Reckoning, although poor Lizbeth Scott always made it sound like "Wip"—she had a lazy tongue, you know—"Oh, Wip!" she'd say. "Oh, Wip!" just like that. Are you going over my notes?

**SKIP.** No. I've done all these dialects before.

**DAPHNE.** Pride goeth before the Fall. You know, when I was starring in Mame at the Winter Garden—

**SKIP.** Ok, hold it right there. Angela Lansbury starred in Mame.

**DAPHNE.** You are absolutely right, Scooter. I was just a laundress at the theatre, but on this night Miss Lansbury and her understudy became—mysteriously—locked in an industrial washing machine in a subbasement at the Winter Garden. I was inducted to go on at the last moment. *(Suddenly singing:)* "IF HE WALKED INTO MY LIFE TODAAAAAY!"

**CLIVE.** Ladies and gentlemen!—where's Connie Jr.?

**DAPHNE.** Restroom.

**CLIVE.** Oh, all right. *(Calling off:)* Barbara, can you hear me?

**BARBARA.** *(From backstage:)* Yes. We're still trying to get it to stay on.

**CLIVE.** Excellent. A brief note: on advice of counsel, Hugh is cutting the Leona Helmsley scene. Also, Smerelda brought over the model for Versailles if you'd care to take a gander.

**SKIP.** Oh, come on. Versailles Palace is a bit more posh than this.

**CLIVE.** The real Versailles, yes. But, Smerelda believes that as seen through the eyes of the King and Queen it is (*Referring to his notes:*) "a stark, tormented, bleak hell of nihilistic daydreaming." Now. You are all holding a complete re-write of the Marie Antoinette scene. I wouldn't go so far as to say that our past rehearsals have been for naught, but I'm afraid that we won't have the luxury of sitting around the table yapping about objectives and given circumstances. Some of you are rusty on your French Revolution. You know who you are. I am going to ask you to trust your instincts. Go with your gut. Do. Act. React.

**SKIP.** (*Going through his script:*) Where's the ghost of Joseph II?

**CLIVE.** He's been cut, Skip. Hugh discovered that Marie's brother wasn't actually dead yet, so instead the ghost will be of Marie Antoinette's mother, Maria Theresa.

**SKIP.** I'm playing some guy named Leonard?

**CLIVE.** Not "some guy," Skip. He was the Queen's personal "physiognomist."

**SKIP.** He was her hairdresser.

**CLIVE.** A hairdresser with enormous power and amazing genius. He and Mademoiselle Bertin created complex coiffures for the Queen. One day there might be a lavish ball reenacted on her head with guests and an orchestra. The next day there would be an elaborate garden in her hair with tiny animals frolicking, fruit trees, topiary...a working well.

**SKIP.** A working well?

**CLIVE.** Perhaps I'm crediting him a smidge heavily but my point is, he was as much a force in Marie's life as was her brother, Joseph.

**SKIP.** Then why doesn't Dirk play Leonard and I'll play the King?

**DIRK.** I can't play a fag. No one'll believe me in the role.

**SKIP.** And that would alter things how?

**CLIVE.** Dirk, Hugh wants us to explore the weak side of Louis. The strange, retarded, overfed child within. Louis as a feckless stump of royal gristle.

(*DIRK is confused. He consults his script.*)

**SKIP.** On second thought I'll stay with Leonard. But I have some definite ideas, Clive.

**CLIVE.** Wonderful. I welcome ideas. Barbara? How are we doing?

(BARBARA enters wearing an enormous wig/hat that appears to be a cage with a cake inside it. SAMMI enters with her "spotting" the headpiece.)

**BARBARA.** I can't wear this one either. It's smaller but it's too heavy.

**CLIVE.** It's still a scoach on the massive side isn't it?

(SMERELDA POPINFLAW enters with a leather bustier. She speaks with a fairly thick accent, though one would be hard pressed to pick her country of origin.)

**SMERELDA.** I bring push-up womanizer for Maria Theresa.

**DAPHNE.** Oh dear.

**CLIVE.** Just the person we need. Smerelda, Barbara is having a problem with the wig.

**SMERELDA.** There is no problem with wig.

**BARBARA.** Well, actually there is, Smerelda. It's almost impossible to walk and have it stay on my head.

**SMERELDA.** (*Going to her:*) Posture you need. Strength. This is wig for Queen. Head high.

(BARBARA attempts to take her instruction.)

**SMERELDA.** Now, walk and rule this snooty country your baby husband cannot rule.

**SAMMI.** Excuse me, but on the chance that that hat is referring to the expression "let them eat cake," I think you should know those words are often and *incorrectly* attributed to Marie Antoinette. (*Pause.*) Just thought you should know.

**BARBARA.** (*Reaching up to take it off:*) Thank God!

**SMERELDA.** Stop!!! Do not remove masterpiss from head!!

**BARBARA.** But Marie Antoinette didn't say it.

**CLIVE.** Barbara, I'm afraid I agree with Smerelda. We have to ask ourselves—what is more important? Whether, in fact, she said it or whether people believe she said it.

**BARBARA.** But it won't stay on my head.

**CLIVE.** Barbara, darling —

**BARBARA.** Clive, this is the third *masterpiss* I've tried—

**CLIVE.** I know it is—

**BARBARA.** And I have tried—

**CLIVE.** I know you have—

**BARBARA.** And you said that—

**SMERELDA.** Enough! I alter hat for you.

**BARBARA.** Thank you.

**SMERELDA.** I hear seductress what touches own son wants outfit.

**BARBARA.** (*Getting it:*) Oh, Eve! Yes. Just a leaf or two. Or three.

**SMERELDA.** Fine. I give bossy actress leaves.

**CLIVE.** Smerelda, my angel, thank you.

**SMERELDA.** Marie Theresa? (*DAPHNE steps forward.*) This for you!

**DAPHNE.** Oh dear, I don't think she'd wear this.

**SMERELDA.** (*Seeing her, finally:*) Impostor!! Ernestine Fugue, she will wear!

**CLIVE.** (*Leading DAPHNE away:*) Daphne, don't trouble yourself with costumes. How are the dialect lessons coming?

**DAPHNE.** Not well. I have created a system of very specific mental images for each actor. It saddens me to report that, on occasion, I have been mocked for this.

**CLIVE.** (*Clapping:*) People, please! If Daphne has gone to the time and trouble to come up with mental images for you to use, use them. Barbara, Hugh has made it clear Marie Antoinette's accent in particular, must be dead on. How is the Austrian/French combo coming?

**BARBARA.** Good—um, the King doesn't have an accent because...?

**CLIVE.** Barbara, please—it's a devastating metaphor.

**DIRK.** (*Going through his script:*) Hold it! Clive, Louis XVI (*He pronounces it lou-iss ex vee eye.*) doesn't have as many lines as Marie.

**CLIVE.** True. But what Louis XVI lacks in words, he makes up for in attitude. We can almost hear him brooding over the invectives his wife hurls at him. (*Pause.*) He's hurt and cranky 'cuz she's saying bad things about him.

**DIRK.** Can I make noises to show that I'm thinking and brooding? (*He demonstrates his "thinking" noises.*)

**CLIVE.** Let's hold off on that for now.

**SMERELDA.** I speak to Dick, please.

**DIRK.** That's Dirk.

**SMERELDA.** You big baby king. Here, diaper.

*(She hands him a giant diaper with giant safety pins attached.)*

**DIRK.** I'm not wearing any diaper, lady.

**SMERELDA.** You will do as told, expendable actor!

**CLIVE.** Dirk, Dirk, Dirk. Remember what I said. Hugh has rewritten the King. He wants you to get in touch with the stunted, prepubescent dauphin. *(Pause.)* He's a pudgy man-child.

**DIRK.** Ok, but I'm talking to Hugh about this. I've got some definite ideas, too, my friend. *(Going toward SMERELDA:)* And as for you—

**CLIVE.** *(Separating them:)* You're a pro that's what you are. This may be your first play, but you'll have to pardon the critics when they assume you've been on Broadway doing the classics.

*(DIRK is pleased.)*

**CLIVE.** All right then. Let's leap off the cliff and build our wings on the way down. Hugh has written us an amazing scene, let's mine the riches. If you have a question, ask it. No question is stupid.

*(DIRK raises his hand.)*

**CLIVE.** Yes, Dirk.

**DIRK.** Were these real people?

**CLIVE.** Yes. These were real people. All right then, we are in France. Versailles. The Queen's apartment. It is October, 1789. Allons-y! Vite, vite, mes amis!

*(DIRK's hand goes up.)*

**CLIVE.** Yes, Dirk.

**DIRK.** Was 1789 a big year in France?

*(CLIVE momentarily changes his stance on capital punishment.)*

**CLIVE.** Yes. Yes, it was... a big year. *(He puts his arm around DIRK and speeds through the explanation:)* France is falling apart. The average joe is mad at the King and Queen. He wants more out of life—like food and shelter. So, he is protesting. Raising hell, if you will. He takes to the streets, drinking and hollering with his destination being the palace. That's where you come in. The King is in the palace with his wife. But he can't decide what to do about the hungry citizens who are outside screaming. And the Queen is upset with him because he can't decide what to do.

**DIRK.** Gotcha.

**CLIVE.** Sammi...

**SAMMI.** Places please! We hear music and lights up and music fades out.

*(BARBARA as MARIE ANTOINETTE sits in front of a vanity attempting to arrange her hair. DIRK as the KING sits slumped in a chair.)*

**SAMMI.** A loaf of bread is hurled through the center French doors. There are sounds of unhappy citizens shouting.

*(SAMMI and the others make shouting noises. BARBARA stands, picks up the bread and yells out the door.)*

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** You must not be very hungry if you can afford to throw away a PERFECTLY GOOD BAGUETTE!!! *(Closing the door:)* Will you please DO SOMETHING!

**KING.** *(Fearful:)* What? What can I do?!

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** Oh, I don't know, maybe you could try... RULING!

**KING.** It's an angry mob for pete's sake. I could get hurt!

*(The ghost of MARIA THERESA, Marie Antoinette's mother, appears.)*

**MARIA THERESA.** *(In a Brooklyn accent:)* Would it kill you to just try to get along with him?

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** Go away mother.

**KING.** *(Scared:)* Is she back?

**MARIA THERESA.** You never learn, do you? You enjoy being a snippy little pill.

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** He's a King for God's sake. This entire revolution could be squelched with a firm hand.

**KING.** You mean these hands? *(He looks at his hands and screams.)*  
—Clive, I liked him better before the re-write. He got to touch her more and he gave her a hard time. Why does he have to be such a wimp?

**CLIVE.** He has to be a wimp, because the playwright has written him that way! Daphne, do I detect a Brooklyn accent?

**DAPHNE.** Yes, Clive. I see her as the caring, patient mother we so often find trapped in one of the five New York boroughs.

**CLIVE.** For now, let's stick with here being what she was: Austrian.

**DAPHNE.** What if I sang the role in a plaintive low register to signal her posthumous discontent?

**CLIVE.** No. Now. Let's go from the top and Barbara, I'm not sure the accent is right. Daphne, would you assist us please?

**DAPHNE.** Certainly.

**CLIVE.** Just your first few words, Barbara. Sammi.

**SAMMI.** "You must not be very hungry..."

**CLIVE.** "You must not be very hungry..."

**BARBARA.** (*Ninotchka-ish:*) You must not be very hungry.

**CLIVE.** (*To DAPHNE:*) Now, that sounds Russian to me.

**DAPHNE.** Barbara, remember in our session how we toured the world on a magic carpet called "the vowel change express"? Head west, dear.

**BARBARA.** (*Italian-y:*) You must not be very hungry.

**CLIVE.** Too far south, I think. Head north.

**BARBARA.** (*Indian-y:*) You must not be very hungry.

**CLIVE.** Well, that's bit Indian, isn't it?

**BARBARA.** (*Mexican-y:*) You must not be very hungry.

(*SMERELDA can no longer take it.*)

**SMERELDA.** You have left continent. Turn magic carpet 'round. Go back.

**BARBARA.** (*Irish-y:*) You must not be very hungry.

**SMERELDA.** That is island where drunks live. Put carpet in reverse.

**BARBARA.** (*Impaired:*) You must not be very hungry.

(*Pause.*)

**SMERELDA.** People do not live where she goes.

**CLIVE.** Sammi, let's find some time for Barbara to work with Daphne.

**SAMMI.** Noted. Shall we start from the top?

**CLIVE.** No, let's push on and try to get to Leonard's entrance. Concentration people, please!

**SAMMI.** The King says: You mean these hands?

**KING.** You mean these hands?

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** Ferme votre bouche.

(*Pause.*)

**CLIVE.** And the Lady in Waiting announces Leonard. Connie Jr.?

**SKIP.** Connie just ran to the restroom.

**CLIVE.** Good God, my parakeet has a bigger bladder.

**DAPHNE.** Clive, I can easily do both—

**CLIVE.** Thank you, but we need a body. Sammi.

*(SAMMI takes the script and goes to make Connie's entrance.)*

**CLIVE.** And on we go. We're going on.

**SAMMI.** Your Royal Highness, he has arrived! Voila, Monsieur Leonard!

*(SKIP enters as LEONARD, the hairdresser.)*

**LEONARD.** Toinette!

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** Leo, quel dommage! *(Indicating the cake on her head:)* Le gâteau has got to go!

**LEONARD.** Mais oui, certainement!

**CLIVE.** Great. Skip, nice. Nice. Let's explore, from the get-go, Leonard's softer side.

**SKIP.** *(Knowing what he means:)* What do you mean?

**DIRK.** I can tell you what he means.

**CLIVE.** Oh, you know. A lighter presence.

**SKIP.** You mean, you want him flaming.

**CLIVE.** No, not exactly—

**SKIP.** Why is it that male hairdressers have to be played as grotesque caricatures?

**SMERELDA.** Because they are weird, little, baby girls!

**CLIVE.** Smerelda—

**SMERELDA.** You will do as dictator says, actor!

**CLIVE.** That's director, Smerelda.

**SMERELDA.** In my country you would be taken to desolate field and—

*(CLIVE attempts to show SMERELDA out.)*

**CLIVE.** Smerelda! I'll meet you tomorrow to go over notes with Hugh.

**SMERELDA.** *(Referring to SKIP:)* I get him to do what you say—

**CLIVE.** *(Guiding her out:)* No, no. I've got it covered. Really. Thanks so much. Safe home. Bye, bye.

*(SMERELDA leaves.)*

**SKIP.** (*Imitating SMERELDA:*) Costume designer is giant nutball.

**CLIVE.** Genius is often peculiar.

**SKIP.** Peculiar? During my costume fitting she took my inseam measurement with a notched machete.

**CLIVE.** It's a harmless family heirloom, Skip. She carries it for good luck.

**DAPHNE.** It's the poor carpenter who blames his tools.

**SKIP.** It's the old lady who wakes up dead.

**DAPHNE.** Well!

**CLIVE.** Please, Skip, Daphne. We're behind. The play, please. Now then. Skip. Let us assume that there are hairdressers who are effeminate, all right? And let us further assume that Leonard just happens to be one of them.

**SKIP.** I want to talk to Hugh about this.

**CLIVE.** Fine. We'll make a note. Sammi.

**SAMMI.** (*Writing:*) Must Leonard be flaming?

(CONNIE JR. *returns.*)

**CLIVE.** Connie, wonderful. We're going to take it from your entrance announcing Leonard.

**CONNIE.** Ok.

**CLIVE.** Barbara.

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** Fermez votre bouche.

(CONNIE *enters, breathless, wide-eyed and trembling.*)

**LADY IN WAITING.** (*In a voice only God could hear:*) Your Royal Highness. He has arrived. Monsieur Leonard.

(CONNIE *runs off.* CLIVE *dashes after her and brings her back, his arm around her.*)

**CLIVE.** Connie. Connie. The greatest actresses in the world suffer from stage fright. Laurette Taylor, Lillie Langtry, Pat Nixon. All terrified ladies. But, the first rule in theatre: stay on stage when you have lines. Can I count on you Connie?

**CONNIE.** Yes, Clive.

**CLIVE.** Excellent. All right People. As my ex-wife used to say to me: let's pretend that didn't happen, and try it again. Barbara.

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** Ferme votre bouche.

**LADY IN WAITING.** Your Royal Highness. He has arrived. Monsieur Leonard.

(CONNIE *turns to bolt.*)

**CLIVE.** Connie! Stay!

(CONNIE *freezes.* SKIP *enters.*)

**LEONARD.** Toinette!

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** Leo, quel dommage! Le gateau has got to go!

**LEONARD.** Mais oui, certainement.

**CLIVE.** Are flies attacking the cake on your head, Barbara? Always be aware of how your environment may be affecting you. Keep going.

(BARBARA *swipes at the imaginary flies.*)

**LEONARD.** I bring with me many trinkets and surprises.

**CLIVE.** Be in the scene, Dirk.

(DIRK *makes a growling sound.*)

**CLIVE.** But without making noise. Keep going Antoinette and Leonard.

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** (*Chasing LEONARD:*) Trinkets and surprises?

**LEONARD.** (*He pulls a tiny horse out of a bag.*) The horse races at the Bois de Boulogne!

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** Oh, Leonard, I am so full of despair. You can't possibly know the pain of being imprisoned by society all because you're pretty and have a penchant for high stakes poker.

**CLIVE.** And hold it right there. Lovely. Skip you're fighting me on this. We'll talk. Now, then. I have in my hands a little surprise. Hugh has just faxed over some lyrics to a haunting melody he had composed. Barbara, a little bird told me that you have quite a set of pipes.

**BARBARA.** (*Laughing:*) Well, that little bird is a big fat liar. I can't sing.

**CLIVE.** Yes, you can.

**BARBARA.** No, I can't.

**CLIVE.** Yes, you can.

**BARBARA.** No, I can't.

**CLIVE.** Sing with me...

**BARBARA.** (*To no one:*) Let me guess.

**CLIVE / BARBARA.** (*CLIVE drowns out BARBARA:*) "Give my regards to Broadway—"

**CLIVE.** Lovely. Sammi, lyrics!

(SAMMI *hands* BARBARA lyrics.)

**SAMMI.** Lyrics.

**CLIVE.** Music!

(SAMMI *hits the play button.*)

**SAMMI.** Music.

(*We hear a fast tempo, moronic tune played by two fingers on a piano.*)

**BARBARA.**

I AM A QUEEN, I AM A QUEEN, CAN'T YOU SEE!  
LOOK AT THIS HAIR, LOOK AT THIS FACE, TRES JOLI!

(CLIVE *makes a slashing motion across his neck to SAMMI and then goes to BARBARA and puts his arm around her.*)

**CLIVE.** Let's stop there. Interesting choice, but you know, I don't think she's making fun of the song.

**BARBARA.** I wasn't making fun.

**CLIVE.** (*Pause.*) Say no more. Give me a moment to cogitate. (*Pause.*) Skippy? You remember "Singing in the Rain" don't you?

**SKIP.** Clive, I am on cast albums. The American public knows my voice.

**CLIVE.** Skipper. I hate to bring up anything resembling a debt, but I put you in "Walkies!" which led to appearances on Sesame Street and the Home Shopping Network, *n'est ce pas?*

**SKIP.** What do you want me to do?

**CLIVE.** Good sport. Place yourself behind Marie—dismantling the "let them eat cake" scene—and you'll be able to sing the song without having your mouth seen. Lyrics for Skippy!

**SAMMI.** (*Giving them to SKIP:*) Lyrics for Skippy.

**SKIP.** (*To BARBARA:*) This is how much I love you.

**CLIVE.** Music!

**SAMMI.** Music!

(SKIP *hides behind BARBARA's head as he mimes taking off the cake cage and putting in its place the race track. BARBARA lip syncs. CLIVE yells out notes: "Saw your lips, Leonard... Don't be afraid to gesture, BARBARA..."*)

**LEONARD / MARIE ANTOINETTE.**

I AM A QUEEN, I AM A QUEEN, CAN'T YOU SEE!

LOOK AT THIS HAIR, LOOK AT THIS FACE, TRES JOLI!  
 BUT I'M SO BORED, YOU KNOW "ENNUI," SACRE BLEU!  
 SWAPPING MENUS WITH THE GIRLS FOR SNAIL FONDU!—

(CLIVE *makes the slashing motion again to SAMMI.*)

**CLIVE.** Lovely. We'll get back to that. Now. Let's block the appearance of Yo-Yo Ma, or whoever our opening night star happens to be. The song ends. Suddenly, a fog rolls through the French doors and voila! Our man has arrived! Everyone says the guest star's name—trust me, you'll all recognize this person—and at the same time the super title flashes on. Star says his line. Barbara, take in those words—let them reverberate—and we go to black. Terrific. I have some announcements and then we'll break. Oh, Barbara, special fitting with Smerelda in ten minutes. Punctuality counts with her.

(*They all gather—CLIVE "addresses the troops."*)

**CLIVE.** People. Mrs. Vandershudder has informed me that on opening night we are going to have some very special individuals out front. Now. Another director might not tell you this, but I feel an extra ounce of adrenaline can be the difference between a very good show and a brilliant one. Mrs. Vandershudder has invited the major theatre critics from Los Angeles and New York. This includes Callow from the Times and Wimple from the Post. Also—some date changes. I realize that we are hurtling toward tech week like a rabid Yorkie, but...there will be no previews. Risky? Yes. The action of a naive thrill seeker? Perhaps. But Mrs. Vandershudder has spoken. An additional tidbit to keep you on your toes: all audience members will be invited at the opening night party to fill out review cards. Quotes from these will be used in the advertising. Wise, I think. The common man touch. Now. I need to call Hugh, so get some fresh air and Sammi will fetch you when we're ready to start.

(*The cast gather their things and exit. Only SAMMI and BARBARA are left.*)

**BARBARA.** Sammi?

**SAMMI.** What.

**BARBARA.** I'm having a hard time telling what it is we have on our hands here. With this play, I mean. You know how it is. Sometimes what seems dry and unnecessary and sexist in rehearsals can prove to be riveting and full of purpose in performance. I guess I'm just wondering, this play, do you think it's—

**SAMMI.** Any good?

**BARBARA.** Yeah.

**SAMMI.** (*Getting cigarette and lighter:*) This isn't a play. I don't know what it is, but it isn't a play.

**BARBARA.** I knew it! Why don't I ever trust myself?

(*SAMMI lights a cigarette and squints at BARBARA.*)

**SAMMI.** Could I have seen you in a show in New York a couple of years ago?

**BARBARA.** Juris Imprudence.

**SAMMI.** That was it! You looked different.

**BARBARA.** Red wig. Skirt the size of a band aid. (*In a high breathy voice:*) "Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury, how much must men sacrifice to please these female vultures?"

**SAMMI.** I thought that play had a message.

**BARBARA.** My mother would agree with you. Sammi, how do you think I'm doing in this thing?

**SAMMI.** You really want to know?

**BARBARA.** Not when you say it like that.

**SAMMI.** I wouldn't go so far as to say that you are wholly without talent. But you really don't have *it*. That thing you have to have to make the audience want to watch you. Charisma, stage presence, whatever. You're just not remarkable enough on any level to command the attention of a paying house. (*Indicating the cigarette:*) I've got to take this outside, wanna join me?

**BARBARA.** No thanks.

(*As SAMMI exits, we hear:*)

**SMERELDA.** Where is ball-buster Queen? I do not stand for the lateness!!!

(*SMERELDA enters. A large pair of scissors hang from her neck and on her wrist is an enormous pin cushion with extra-large pins.*)

**SMERELDA.** Ah, there you are!

(*She pulls the notched machete out of its scabbard.*)

**SMERELDA.** Time to measure!!!!!!!!!!!!

(*BARBARA screams.*)

(*Blackout.*)

*End of Act I*

## ACT II

### Scene 1

*(Opening night.)*

*(The curtain rises to reveal the unlit Adam and Eve set and, off to the side, the lit wing area of "backstage." BARBARA enters backstage very flustered. She is wearing her Eve costume but can barely move in it. SMERELDA has constructed a tight fitting suit with arms sewn to the side and the crotch at about calf level. Also, it is covered in leaves.)*

**BARBARA.** I can't believe this! I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS!! I'll kill her. That's what I'll do. I'll take that machete and I'll chop her into tiny little evil chunks of dead designer! *(She begins to take deep breaths.)* Relax. It's a short scene. Relax. "Abel, honey, Mama wants to talk to you... Don't you like your Mama, Abel?... You must not be very hungry..."...no... "You must not be very hungry—"

*(CLIVE appears.)*

**BARBARA.** Oh my God, Clive! Look at me!

**CLIVE.** Stunning. How's the house?

*(CLIVE draws back a portion of the curtain at the proscenium and looks out at the audience.)*

**BARBARA.** Clive! Look! This is not the costume I was fitted for. I can't walk, Clive!

**CLIVE.** Make the best of it, dear. Rise above. Have we gotten places yet?

**BARBARA.** Ten minutes ago.

**CLIVE.** Look at them! Not an empty seat in the house. Nine hundred and fifty little critics. There's Callow from the Times, and Wimple from the Post—my God, has he put on weight. Ask me if I'm excited.

**BARBARA.** Are you excited?

*(CLIVE smiles and nods with insane pleasure.)*

**CLIVE.** Say, have you seen our secret guest star back here?

**BARBARA.** No. If you're interested the crew is taking bets in the quick change booth. Jose Carreras is the odds on favorite. Daphne has the lone bet on Mario Lanza.

**CLIVE.** *(Still canvassing the house:)* There she is. Mrs. Vandershudder. What a great lady. Oh, I see Sammi is ready to go.

(CLIVE *waves to the booth, then turns to BARBARA and takes her hands.*)

**CLIVE.** All right darling! Quite a night we have before us. I still can't believe that Ernestine Fugue backed out on us so late. And she'd just received a completed script.

**BARBARA.** Clive, we're about to start.

**CLIVE.** Oh, yes, yes. Don't be timid. Do. Act. React. And don't let this worry you, but Dirk seems a bit, oh, I don't know, *psychotic*. Television actors! (*Walking away:*) Rise above it. Remember, you're lead dog on this sled. Kisses and lots of luck! See you at the Tonys!

**BARBARA.** (*Calling after him:*) What do you mean psychotic?!

(CLIVE *has gone and now SKIP enters in costume.*)

**CLIVE'S VOICE.** Don't dawdle Skippy, we've got places.

**SKIP.** I can't take it anymore. I have to know what I mean to you. Where we're going.

**BARBARA.** Skip, we're starting!

**SKIP.** To hell with the play. I've got to hear from the woman I love.

**BARBARA.** Skip, go to the other side of the stage. Please!

**SKIP.** It's Dirk, isn't it?

**BARBARA.** Are you out of your mind?

**SKIP.** He told me, but I didn't believe him.

**BARBARA.** He told you what?

**SKIP.** That you've been whispering poetry to him.

**BARBARA.** That's a lie!

**SKIP.** Did you or did you not ask him to go nude horseback riding with you in the rain?

**BARBARA.** I "asked" him to shower more because he smelled like a donkey.

**SKIP.** So you're saying he got it wrong?

**BARBARA.** He got it wrong.

**SKIP.** Then there's still hope for me!

**BARBARA.** No. There isn't.

**SKIP.** What are you trying to tell me?

(*The light begins to fade.*)

**BARBARA.** I'm trying to tell you WE'RE IN A PLAY THAT'S STARTING! GO!

**SKIP.** Ok. Ok. I'll go. And you want to know why? Because I'm fed up with your ambivalence! We're finished! That's right, FINISHED! Break a leg!

*(SKIP runs off—then quickly runs back on.)*

**SKIP.** AND I DO MEAN: BREAK A LEG!!

*(Lights fade out.)*

**CLIVE'S VOICE.** I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception.

*(A song like, "Call Me Irresponsible" fades out as the lights come up on the Adam and Eve set.)*

*(BARBARA is "trapped" in her costume, barely able to move. CONNIE JR. looks stricken. DAPHNE, in a snake costume, is off to the side writhing [if you can call it that].)*

**EVE.** Abel, honey, Mama wants to talk to you.

**ABEL.** I don't feel like talking.

**EVE.** Don't you like your Mama, Abel? Don't you think your Mama pretty? Nice hair.

*(BARBARA attempts to stroke CONNIE's hair but is unable to lift her arm that high. CONNIE lowers her head to BARBARA's hand.)*

**ABEL.** Please Mama, don't. I've gotta go tend the sheep.

*(CONNIE attempts to exit early. BARBARA blocks her, then blocks her again and so on until it appears they are doing some weird biblical dance.)*

**EVE.** Oh thou masterful keeper of sheep.

**ABEL.** I've gotta go. Real bad, Mama.

**EVE.** Not quite yet, you...masterful keeper of sheep, you.

*(DIRK and SKIP enter. DIRK's arms and hands are covered in writing.)*

**ADAM.** Thou calleth that tilling the ground?

**CAIN.** What is this I see? Brother Abel, why do you stand with mother so?

**ADAM.** Thou art blind to the real evil.

**CAIN.** Oh yeah?

(SKIP *chases* CONNIE *off*.)

**ADAM.** I believe I see Cain rising up against Abel and slawing... slooping him. Shit.

(SKIP *enters*. DAPHNE *begins to "writhe" toward him*.)

**CAIN.** Come unto me mother.

(BARBARA *"Penguin Walks" toward him*.)

**ADAM.** Shouldn't thou be tilling the ground?

(DAPHNE *begins to make a hissing sound as she wraps herself around SKIP's ankles*.)

**CAIN.** (*While trying to discourage DAPHNE*;) Unto you I say, just because you gave names to all the cattle and to every beast, and thou fowled the air doesn't mean—

(DIRK *makes a flatulence noise*.)

**CAIN.** (*To DAPHNE, sotto voce*;) Would you please not do that!

**ADAM.** It's in the script—remember? I fowl the air.

**CAIN.** I'm not talking to you, needle-dick!

**ADAM.** Who are you calling—come with me brother.

(DIRK *pushes* SKIP *off stage*. DAPHNE *attempts to wriggle over to the fruit tree where BARBARA is standing*.)

**SNAKE.** Hey there. Try one of these apples. They're deliciousss.

**EVE.** God forbade us the apple tree. No looky, no touchy lest we die.

**SNAKE.** Oh, come on. Eat thereof and your eyes shall be opened.

**EVE.** Well, ok.

(BARBARA *cannot pick the apple off the tree because of the limitations of the costume*. DAPHNE *slowly rises and picks the apple, holding it to BARBARA's mouth*.)

**SNAKE.** I am a powerful Snake...and can grow limbs at will.

**EVE.** Tasty. Hey, Adam!

(DIRK *is shoved on stage*. His eyes *take a stroll all over BARBARA*. She *begins to laugh as she tries to get her line out*.)

**EVE.** Where have you...where have you...

**ADAM.** ...BEEN.

(DIRK *picks her up and kisses her with great force*.)

(SKIP *runs on and tries to pry BARBARA out of DIRK's arms*.)

**SKIP.** Get your greasy mitts off my girlfriend, monkey-boy!

*(DIRK hears the word "monkey" and starts laughing.)*

*(DAPHNE tries to imperceptibly shrink back down to a snake.)*

*(Lights fade and we hear a song like, "It's All Right With Me." Music fades and during the scene change we hear:)*

**DAPHNE'S VOICE.** Kiss me. Again.

**DIRK'S VOICE.** Oh Eleanor, Eleanor. Do you think Franklin knows?

**DAPHNE'S VOICE.** What, "Mr. New Deal" notice that I'm alive and have needs? Please. Besides, he's thousands of miles away at some crony klatch in Malta.

**DIRK'S VOICE.** You mean Yalta?

**DAPHNE'S VOICE.** Malta, Yalta, whatever. Get on me!

*(Lights come up. DAPHNE tiptoes out and does a freeform dance. She begins to discard parts of her outfit:)*

**DAPHNE.** *(Singing:)*

BIG DEAL, SO YOU'RE THE BOSS,  
DON'T NAIL HIM TO THE CROSS,  
IF YOU LET YAHWEH LIVE,  
THERE'S NOTHING THIS PEASANT GIRL WON'T GIVE—

*(SKIP comes out and grabs DAPHNE. There is a brief struggle before he hands her off to someone in the wings.)*

*(Blackout.)*

*(During the continued scene change we hear Christmas music, sleigh bells and:)*

**SANTA CLAUS.** Ho, ho, ho. What a wonderful night of gift giving that was. And I finished ahead of schedule! I wonder what Mrs. Claus and the elves are up to.

*(Sound of a door opening and helium-voiced elves.)*

**SANTA CLAUS.** Dear god, no!

**MRS. CLAUS.** Shit! Fatso's home early. Everybody off!

*(Sound of disgruntled elves.)*

*(A song like, "That's Why The Lady Is a Tramp" fades out as lights come up on the Versailles scene.)*

*(DIRK is sitting in his chair and we see that he has taken some liberties with his character. He is wearing his diaper but it is made of combat fatigue material. He also sports a ripped t-shirt [covered*

*in writing] with cigarettes rolled up in the sleeve, ID bracelet and leather boots. There is a skull and cross bones tattoo on his down-stage bicep. His hair, however, still adheres to "equity rules.")*

*(BARBARA is caught trying to enter the upstage French doors. The new "wig" is larger than its previous incarnation – think Macy's Day Parade – and she is having difficulty stooping low enough to make it through the archway. She finally succeeds, goes to the chair in front of the vanity, when she is hit from behind with a loaf of bread. The tape of disgruntled citizens is played.)*

**VOICES OF DISGRUNTLED CITIZENS.** Merde!! Mon Dieu! Nous voulons frommage! Je suis moving to Canada!

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** You must not be very hungry if you can afford to throw away a PERFECTLY GOOD BAGUETTE!

*(She closes the French doors.)*

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** Will you please DO SOMETHING!!

**KING.** *(Truculent:)* What? What can I do?

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** Oh, I don't know, maybe you could try... RULING!

**KING.** *(Sarcastically imitating a coward:)* It's an angry mob for pete's sake. I could get hurt! *(Turning to the audience:)* Yeah, right!

*(DIRK laughs a homicidal laugh. Looks for his next line on his t-shirt.)*

*(The ghost of MARIA THERESA appears.)*

**MARIA THERESA.** *(Singing:)*

WOULD IT KILL YOU TO JUST TRY TO GET ALONG WITH HIM?

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** Go away, Mother!

**KING.** *(Intense anger:)* IS SHE BACK?!

**MARIA THERESA.** *(Singing:)*

YOU NEVER LEARN, DO YOU? YOU ENJOY BEING A SNIPPY LITTLE PILL.

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** He's a King for God's sake. This entire revolution could be squelched with a firm hand.

**KING.** *(Approaching BARBARA, murderously:)* You mean these hands?

*(BARBARA, frightened, moves away from DIRK, trying to keep her wig on.)*

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** Fermez votre bouche.

(Pause. No CONNIE.)

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** (*Louder:*) Fermez votre bouche!

(CONNIE enters.)

**LADY IN WAITING.** Your Highal Royness. He has arrived. Lonsieur Meonard.

**LEONARD.** Toinette!

(CONNIE turns to leave but is stopped by SKIP as he prances in. SKIP's hair is arranged in a very feminine bouffant and his make-up is ala Tammy Faye Baker.)

**LEONARD.** Oh, no. Stay right there little Miss Lady in Waiting.

**LADY IN WAITING.** (*Turning to BARBARA:*) But I have to go number two, your Majesty!

**LEONARD.** Toinette!

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** Leo, quel dommage! Le gateau has got to go!

**LEONARD.** Mais oui, certainement! I bring with me many trinkets and surprises.

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** (*Instantly happy:*) Trinkets and surprises!?

**LEONARD.** The horse race at the Bois de Boulogne!

**MARIE ANTOINETTE.** (*Instantly sad:*) Oh, Leonard, I am so full of despair. You can't possibly know the pain of being imprisoned by society all because you're pretty and have a penchant for high stakes poker.

(The music for the song begins. As BARBARA opens her mouth to sing, SKIP steps forward and sings the song to the audience. BARBARA does her best to stand in front of him and lip sync, but at some point she gives up.)

**LEONARD.**

I'M A QUEEN, I'M A QUEEN, CAN'T YOU SEE!

LOOK AT THIS HAIR, LOOK AT THIS FACE, TRES JOLI!

BUT I'M SO BORED, YOU KNOW "ENNUI", SACRE BLEU!

SWAPPING MENUS WITH THE GIRLS FOR SNAIL FONDU!

NO ONE KNOWS THE REAL MOI!

AND MY BED IS TRES FROID!

I'M A QUEEN, I'M A QUEEN, CAN'T YOU SEE?!

(BARBARA collapses in the chair. SKIP takes her hand and begins kissing it madly.)

**SKIP.** Forgive me, my darling! Forgive me! Forgive me!...

*(Fog rolls through the French doors and walking through the fog strides a man. The cast looks at him but is confused. En masse they discreetly scoot downstage to look up at the super title. It says, "Orville Thorncroft, IV.")*

**CAST.** ORVILLE THORNCROFT, IV!?

*(BARBARA turns to look at him.)*

**ORVILLE.** Remember me?

**BARBARA.** AAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH-HH!!!!!!!

*(CONNIE moves downstage center and looking out says:)*

**CONNIE.** Mama, I don't want to act anymore.

*(She then squats. DIRK and SKIP run to CONNIE screaming "No!" They each grab an arm and hustle her off stage. )*

*(Blackout.)*

## Scene 2

*(BARBARA is sitting in her dressing room stunned.)*

*(SAMMI enters, head in hands, convulsing.)*

**BARBARA.** Oh, Sammi. Sammi, please don't cry.

*(SAMMI lifts his/her head and throws off the wig revealing ORVILLE.)*

**SAMMI.** Who's crying?!

*(He laughs uncontrollably.)*

**BARBARA.** Oh my God, you're—

**ORVILLE.** Sammi. No, Orville. Sammi. Orville. "My sister, my daughter, my sister, my daughter." Somebody pinch me, 'cuz I've died and gone to heaven!!

*(He laughs, barely able to control his excitement.)*

**ORVILLE.** All me! All of it! The play, Clive, you naked, you singing! Me! Me! Me! And me again!!

**BARBARA.** How did you... I mean, how did you...

**ORVILLE.** That sounds like dialogue Hugh Limpy might have written. Didn't you just love getting those phone calls?! I know I loved making them! Thank God smokers still have rights.

**BARBARA.** How were you able to do it?

**ORVILLE.** (*Having difficulty taming his glee:*) Oh, boy...give me just a second here. (*He begins to laugh again.*) Ok. Well. It's a simple story, really. A tale of monumental luck and abject despair, a tale of—

**BARBARA.** Just tell it!

**ORVILLE.** (*Instantly serious:*) After you ruined my New York debut, I took a job teaching playwriting at the Vandershudder Community College. Day after day I read unpunctuated, incoherent tirades written by teenagers, and all I could think was: what if Barbara Lewis, the woman who ruined my career, had to star in one of these plays? Then, one fateful night, I met the great lady herself, Constance Vandershudder, at a faculty wine and cheese party. I can still see her standing there, three sheets to the wind, reaching out her bejeweled hand to pinch my ass. We began a slow, old-fashioned courtship that very evening. The next morning she rolled over and suggested we open her theatre with my latest play. Being modest, I said, "oh, now honey, really, I don't think—ok!" I insisted on a *nom de plume* to protect her reputation—hence the birth of Hugh Limpy.

**BARBARA.** You seduced a 70-year-old Republican to get back at me?

**ORVILLE.** It was worth every stinky smooch. Especially when she began to give me more and more control over the production. Guess which ideas were mine? Don't be a poor sport. Come on. Guess.

**BARBARA.** Daphne.

**ORVILLE.** Angela Lansbury has a restraining order out against her.

**BARBARA.** Dirk.

**ORVILLE.** I'm all for hiring the handicapped, but come on!

**BARBARA.** Smerelda.

**ORVILLE.** Personal designer to Nicolae Ceaucescu.

**BARBARA.** Orville, why?

**ORVILLE.** YOU DESTROYED MY CAREER! You laughed during the summation scene of Juris Imprudence. Which made the guy playing the judge laugh. Which made the actors playing the jurors laugh. And overnight I became the laughing stock of off-Broadway.

**BARBARA.** Orville. I admit I laughed. But your play was...bad. It was a bad, bad play. None of the critics mentioned my laughing. They mentioned dialogue so irritating that it could induce seizures; they mentioned characterizations of women that Larry Flynt would frown upon; they mentioned—

**ORVILLE.** The bearer of truth is often crucified. Playwrights like myself are gifted. We have the ability to hear and the guts to transcribe the fundamental truths that we are told by the Muse.

**BARBARA.** And what Muse would that be? “Windbag, God of Fatuous Observation?”

**ORVILLE.** Actors. Just what is it you do anyway? Speak the words written for you—

**BARBARA.** (*Overlapping:*) “Transcribed from the Muse.”

**ORVILLE.** —wear the costumes made for you, remember the direction hand-fed to you after it has been dipped in flattery and then you can’t even be counted on to make it through an opening night performance without succumbing to a “laughing fit”! And because of that, because of your unconscionable lack of professionalism, I am now a substitute teacher living in my parent’s attic with my mother calling up to me, “lunch is ready, Orville. Chipped beef on toast” and always her advice, “maturity is knowing when to give up that for which you have no discernible talent” and on and on and on until I think her voice is AN ICE PICK CHISELING ITS WAY INTO MY BRAIN!!!

**BARBARA.** You’re mad.

**ORVILLE.** Mad? Mad did you say? (*He laughs maniacally.*) I don’t think so missy. Oh, the world is finally beautiful again! I feel ready to forgive all of the lousy actors who have ruined my plays through the years! You have been crucified for their sins, you little Christlike girl, you. Speaking of which, how about that dance of Daphne’s? (*He sings and twirls:*) “Big deal, so you’re the boss, don’t nail Him to the cross—”

**BARBARA.** Orville, you’ve gotten your revenge, all right?

**ORVILLE.** Oh, no. Not quite. Not until the day I stop for a red light in my new BMW and catch a glimpse of you in the window of some insurance office downtown—bear with me, won’t you? This is my favorite fantasy. It will be long past quitting time, your extra 50 pounds oozing over the ergonomic secretary’s chair, a king-sized chocolate bar at your side as you clack away at the home row. Overtime on a Friday night. What else can a girl do on \$20,000 a year—gross? Finally, you’ll push your pronated, piggy feet into your tennis shoes, hoist yourself onto the packed bus, be met at the door of your studio apartment by your obese Wiener dog and settle down for an evening of Tom Cruise movies and all the Twinkies and Ding Dongs you can cram into your gelatinous tub of a body; a body that

no man, no matter how sharp the blade at his child's throat, no matter how big the bag over your head, would deign to touch.

*(He stares at her, then: starts to laugh.)*

**ORVILLE.** I'm kidding! You're right. I've gotten my pound of flesh. And contrary to what my therapist says, revenge is much sweeter than forgiveness.

*(A commotion is heard. It is the voice of MRS. VANDERSHUDDER coming from the hallway outside Barbara's dressing room.)*

**MRS. VANDERSHUDDER'S VOICE.** YOU!... YOU, FAKE!!

*(CLIVE appears in the doorway.)*

**CLIVE.** Constance—

**MRS. VANDERSHUDDER'S VOICE.** DON'T YOU EVER CALL ME BY MY CHRISTIAN NAME! YOU'RE NOT A DIRECTOR, YOU'RE JUST A CONGENITAL IDIOT WHO'S MASTERED THE TRICK OF ENDORSING PAYCHECKS!

**CLIVE.** But, but—

**MRS. VANDERSHUDDER'S VOICE.** YOU DARE TO INTERRUPT CONSTANCE VANDERSHUDDER!? AN IMBECILE RAISED IN AN ASYLUM WOULD HAVE KNOWN THAT THIS PLAY WAS A STEAMING PILE OF EXCREMENT—AND SPEAKING OF STEAMING PILES, LET ME TELL YOU A LITTLE SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR BELOVED MUSICAL WALKIES!

**CLIVE.** Oh, no, no, please...

**MRS. VANDERSHUDDER'S VOICE.** NO ONE GIVES A SHIT IF A CRIPPLED CORGI AND A SADISTIC WHIPPET END UP HUMPING EACH OTHER!!

*(CLIVE turns and knocks, weakly, at Barbara's open door. He carries with him a fistful of review sheets. His hair and shirt are damp.)*

**CLIVE.** May I enter?

**BARBARA.** Come in, Clive.

**CLIVE.** *(To ORVILLE:)* Ah, Hugh, there you are. Congratulations on being the Special Guest Star. Sorry about the super title mix-up.

**BARBARA.** Clive, this is not Hugh Limpy, this is—

**CLIVE.** Please, Barbara, I've been meeting with the man for weeks I think I know who he is.

**BARBARA.** His real name is Orville Thorncroft—

**CLIVE.** A nom de plume, I understand—

**BARBARA.** —he orchestrated this entire evening in an attempt to punish me.

**CLIVE.** Well, I'm sure there's a very interesting story there and I'd love to hear it after the Xanax kicks in. I've just spoken to Constan — *Mrs. Vandershudder*. We won't be performing A Woman's Song after tonight. She thinks there might still be time to book Linda Hunt in The Bad Seed. I'm sorry Hugh. You might as well learn it now, theatrical mavericks like ourselves are often persecuted by our inferiors.

**BARBARA.** I'm so sorry, Clive.

**CLIVE.** After Mrs. Vandershudder tossed her drink in my face, she pummeled me with these audience reviews. Cover your ears, Hugh.

(BARBARA takes several of the review sheets from CLIVE.)

**BARBARA.** (*Reading from a piece of paper:*) "During this evening's performance I felt my cancer return..."

**CLIVE.** "Regarding Mr. Limpy's right to exist, I can only quote his betters: 'God made him, therefore, let him pass as a man.'"

**BARBARA.** "If there is Justice in this world, you will all be rendered sterile."

**CLIVE.** This one is troubling, it just says: "I know where you live."

(CLIVE lets all the reviews fall to the floor.)

**CLIVE.** Most of the critics left before the end. I was able to tackle Wimple from the Times. He handed me this. (CLIVE *uncrumples a piece of paper he has stashed in his pocket.*) It's a sketch of the Hindenburg. Not a bad rendering, really, see the tiny people trapped in the burning dirigible? Oh, the humanity! (*Suddenly angry:*) Mrs. Vandershudder told me that everyone was after A Woman's Song! The Taper, Lincoln Center. Spielberg was frantic to get the rights! Lies, all lies in a massive conspiracy to discredit my life's work!

**BARBARA.** (*Going to CLIVE:*) Calm down, Clive. There was no conspiracy against you.

(CLIVE begins to weep.)

(SMERELDA and DAPHNE enter. DAPHNE is wearing a skirt, shoes and a turban filled with fruit but she has forgotten her blouse.)

**SMERELDA.** Such massive slaughter! I never witness great cities leveled, but this must be close to Dresden!

**DAPHNE.** Clive, I'd like to apologize for the Eleanor Roosevelt love scene. Do you think anyone noticed?

**CLIVE.** What? That you were wearing your costume for the Carmen Miranda scene?

**DAPHNE.** Yes.

**CLIVE.** I'm sure none of the BLIND SUBSCRIBERS NOTICED! As for your surprise dance routine—

**DAPHNE.** Did you like it?

*(CLIVE leaps up to attack DAPHNE. SMERELDA puts him in a head lock.)*

**SMERELDA.** Suppress instincts, Dictator!

*(Another commotion is heard. DIRK and SKIP appear at the open door, both struggling to get past each other. SKIP is dressed as Hitler and DIRK is in a Santa Claus suit. They become wedged in the archway.)*

**SKIP.** BACK OFF SANTA!

**DIRK.** SHE'S IN LOVE WITH ME! HAVEN'T YOU SEEN THE LOOK ON HER FACE?

**SKIP.** THAT'S CALLED NAUSEA!

*(They burst forth, falling at Barbara's feet. DIRK looks up, gasping.)*

**DIRK.** We're a hit, Barbie!

**BARBARA.** Are you insane?

**SKIP.** No, lugnut here is right! Look! Look at this.

*(SKIP hands a business card to BARBARA.)*

**BARBARA.** Tommy Drake. Head of Programming. The Colossus Network.

**DIRK.** I made the deal, Barbie. He recognized me from my fungus commercial and called me over.

**SKIP.** This guy loved the show! He said—and I quote—"it skewers fascist egalitarianism and the paper truce between the sexes." He sees it as a half hour sketch comedy series.

**DIRK.** *(Not to be outdone:)* Yeah, and then he said—and I quote... some other big words... which ended with, "18 episodes to start!"

**SKIP.** But, we all have to go—that's the condition—I said, "yes" *(Indicating DIRK:)* missing link here said "yes," when we asked Connie,

**THIS PLAY IS  
NOT OVER!**

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