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## **Cast of Characters**

SAM, the main character

HONEY, rich woman

CECILY, vapid girl

GWENDOLYN, vapid girl

CHRISSY, vapid girl

BARBIE, vapid girl

ROBIN, vapid girl

BARNABUS, body builder

ANNOUNCER, pushy salesman type

OWNER, owner of The Help Store

GENE, jogging instructor

DOCTOR SUTURE, plastic surgeon

4 LOOKSTERS, appearances experts

5 COUNTERS, accountants

3 FILMERS

TEST PERSON

5-10 CHORUS MEMBERS

*\*All characters but Sam should be over the top and farcical.*

## **Set**

Bare stage.

## Director's Notes

[NOTE: Though the notes below were written for another verse play called *Just Ask*, the principles apply to *A Little Help*.]

*Just Ask* is a short play written entirely in rhyme. Having not only written but also directed another play of mine that similarly rhymes, I can say with some authority that the convention presents both pleasures and problems. One of the pleasures of the rhyming occurred when I was writing the play. I found that I would not have arrived at certain turns of phrase had I not been trying to make the ends of lines rhyme; this created an element of surprise to the writing process. For instance, one line ending in the word “sinuses” had me stymied for a while. When the word “minuses” came to me, I was delighted with the result: “We need you to run us some plusses and minuses”—a new way to describe what the pseudo-scientists were being asked to do!

Another pleasure of the rhyme comes with memorization. The rhymes provide a built-in mnemonic device, and I found that my actors tended to memorize more quickly and more accurately than normal. In addition, an element of fun comes with simply reciting rhymed lines. The pattern obviously has human appeal, or poets wouldn't have been employing it for so many centuries. Finally, many audience members expressed pleasure in listening to the rhymes; it reminded them of children's stories and of Dr. Seuss, or it provided a music to the presentation they enjoyed.

On the other hand, the rhyming can create reactions from mild sleepiness to overt irritation. Even when the actors handle it well, some audience members will not like it. We can do nothing about this but perhaps remember the truism that you can't please everyone. However, we can make the rhyme work for most audiences if we remember three crucial letters: C.C. P. These stand for Character, Communication and Pace. The rhyme should be an enhancement of the play; it should not be the central characteristic of it. If an actor does not put character and communication first in her consideration, the rhymes will rule the delivery and become annoyingly prominent. Virtually all of the characters in *Just Ask* should be played boldly, with clear characteristics, motivations and objectives. As a satirical comedy, the play calls for extreme characters with obvious intentions behind their communications. If crucial decisions

of character and communication are made and executed, the rhyme will take its rightful place behind them.

While the rhyme will influence the pace occasionally, it should not compel the lines to become predictable and “sing-song.” Actors should not pause at the end of every line to acknowledge the rhyme, especially where there is no punctuation. Actors should pause appropriately to serve the purposes of character and communication. For instance, consider the following lines:

”Mandy: Stop. Your job is to learn  
How thin air with spin can successfully earn  
Money enough that you’ll have it to burn.  
You’ve spoken your doubts, and now it’s our turn.”

Obviously, after the word “Stop,” the actor should pause, even though that comes within the line. The next line, however, should be delivered without significant pauses, as if there were no rhyme or line breaks: “Your job is to learn how thin air with spin can successfully earn money enough that you’ll have it to burn.”

Finally, I would like to tell you a bit about the structure of the rhyme and meter. This may help with pacing and with deciding where the emphasis should come within a line. Generally, I apply two patterns of meter and rhyme. The first is the rhyming couplet—one line of approximately ten syllables rhymes with the next, such as when Mandy says, “Forgive them their gushing; they get carried away./I’m constantly having to keep them at bay.” The second pattern is structured using sets of four lines: The first is about ten syllables long and has no sound meant for rhyme at the end; the second is shorter, about seven syllables, and is designed to rhyme with the fourth line. The third, of course, is like the first. Here is an example of that pattern:

“Messenger: I am not kidding. My voice really stinks.  
Even my mother said so.  
I fibbed just a bit back when I got hired.  
I’m sorry. I needed the dough.”

In both of these patterns, the meter is mainly anapestic—that is, every third syllable is stressed: “EVEN my MOther said SO.” Again, this meter should not overrule those ever-important considerations of Character, Communication and Pace.

The last thing you may want to know about the rhyming and metrical structure of the play is that I often spread out the lines between characters. That is, one character may begin the first line of the four-line pattern I described above, but she might speak only four syllables of it. Another character will finish the final syllables of the line. While this may make the actors feel that what they are saying is no longer rhyming, they need to pay attention to how the pattern is being worked out between the characters. When the Medics come in, for example, the pattern is still rhyming couplets, but the lines are divided between several characters. For ease of understanding, I have capitalized the rhyming words. Notice that they come every tenth syllable:

“Medic: Look, look, there he is!  
Dwindle: Whoa, who’re you GUYS?  
Medic 2: Back off, get away!  
Medic 3: Make space; stand ASIDE! (*a slant rhyme with “guys”*)  
Morty: I think that he's fine.  
Dwindle: He's taking a NAP.  
Medic 1: Hand me the med kit.  
Medic 2: Don't doddle—ASAP!”

Now, I have to admit that any close scrutiny of the play will show that there are other variations to the rhyme schemes and meters I have described. Mainly, I let the sound of the lines and the desire for variety govern how I put the sounds together.

So much for my poetry and acting lessons. Ultimately, I simply hope you have fun reading and perhaps producing “Just Ask.” Break a leg!

### **Prop Notes**

Three video or movie cameras.

Oversized credit card.

Bob—a dummy.

Various bits of machinery hand carried by cast members to create the credit machine.

# A LITTLE HELP

by Alan Haehnel

*(Lights up to a series of colorful platforms. SAM, a girl, comes on after a few seconds, looking around as if making sure she is safe.)*

**SAM.** Forgive me, please, for hiding.  
and no, it's not from you. It's just I've been having some troubles—  
in fact, I've had quite a few.  
Hang on a sec;  
I just need to check...  
it looks like the coast is clear.  
You never know when a horde of them  
will suddenly just appear.  
But you don't know what I'm talking about;  
I'm sorry for being so crass.  
I guess I'm a little shaken up  
by events in my just-recent past.  
It looks like I'm safe, at least for right now,  
and I feel I owe you some what, where and how,  
some explanation of just what is up,  
why I am cowering like a poor beaten pup.  
I have to admit, I started it all.  
I was feeling, you see, a teensy bit small—  
a hair on the low side, a smidgeon dejected;  
a shade of the blues had me feeling rejected.  
Now, don't get me wrong; I was 92 parts fine;  
when I look back from here, I had no cause to whine.  
But that's all just hindsight, water past the dam;  
I did what I did; I am who I am.  
Oh, speaking of that, for the record, I am Sam.  
But here is my story, and why I'm now on the lam.  
One day while I was watching the videotube,  
an ad came on for this place.

*(ANNOUNCER enters and stands stage right, speaking straight out as if he is an announcer on television. He, and all of the other characters, wear striped, colorful clothes reminiscent of Dr. Seuss illustrations.)*

**ANNOUNCER.** Say, say, what's the trouble? I'm talking to you!  
The one with the down-drooping face.

**SAM.** Who, me? I thought, and he said, slick as grease...

**ANNOUNCER.** Yes, you my friend.  
Want your troubles to cease?  
If you're smart, and you are, you won't hesitate;  
you'll jump from your couch like fish after bait.  
You'll walk, ride or run here to solve all your woes.  
We'll fix you right up, from your hair to your toes.  
Just come to The Help Store, four blocks from the zoo.

**TESTIMONIAL PERSON.** (*Appearing next to ANNOUNCER.:*) I  
went! Now I'm happy! And you will be, too!

**ANNOUNCER.** That's right! That's our business! The Help Store's  
for you!

(*ANNOUNCER and TESTIMONIAL PERSON exit.*)

**SAM.** I thought, well, why not?  
I'm not feeling red hot.  
This Help Store's close by and maybe they've got  
some cure for this mild little sadness I've caught.  
So I marched myself over,  
passed the zoo on my right,  
then kept stomping on  
till the sign came in sight.  
"The Help Store" it screamed, in bright neon pink,  
though the "p" on the "Help" had started to blink.  
I pushed on the door and took one slight step in  
When out popped the owner with his bright neon grin.

(*OWNER appears and aggressively approaches SAM. Several  
CHORUS MEMBERS also peek around the platforms, trying to  
steal a glance at the newcomer.*)

**OWNER.** Well, zoink up my oinkers, if it's not you at last!  
Come in, come in; too much time has gone past.

**SAM.** Do I know you, sir? I'm not sure we've met.  
(*Aside:*) His face was the type you'd never forget.

**OWNER.** Met you? Of course! Though not in specific—  
But my knowledge of your type is more than terrific.

**SAM.** Oh, really?

**OWNER.** Oh, yes; you're a wide open book.  
One glance and you're pegged; that's all that it took.  
Your name is Sam Target, for a girl a bit strange,  
but better than being called "Kitty with Mange."  
Your mother's named Martha, your father is Ted;  
and your Siamese cat likes to sleep on your bed.  
You have thirteen secrets you've kept for two years  
and having them known is the top of your fears.  
You play the trombone; your Aunt Bea thinks you're funny;  
It grosses you out when your eggs are too runny.  
Shall I go on?

**SAM.** How'd you know all that stuff?

**OWNER.** Oh, come, come, come, come—it isn't that tough!  
Your statistical profile is standard enough.  
Plus, you've got a computer, have you not? You're online?  
So your info's for sale, for a very small fine.  
Enough of this small talk; you didn't come for chatter.  
You came because something is deeply the matter.

*(During this pseudo-religious speech, CHORUS MEMBERS join together and hum in the background.)*

**OWNER.** You came to The Help Store, this beacon of hope—  
this savior of souls, this great bar of soap  
that lathers your troubles and washes your cares  
and answers your thousands of desperate prayers!  
You've come in your need, in your hour of despair,  
when no one, but no one could be found to care!  
All broken and...

**SAM.** Uh, sir?

*(CHORUS MEMBERS stop humming and look critically at SAM.)*

**OWNER.** Don't interrupt. My spiel just got rolling.  
I've got two more virtues that still need extolling.

**SAM.** Continue, then, I apologize.

**OWNER.** Do it again and I'll poke out your eyes.

*(CHORUS comes in with humming again.)*

**OWNER.** All broken and destitute, you've come seeking aid...  
and for you and your pain was The Helping Store made.  
So talk to me, child, unburden your soul,  
for helping the weary has always been our goal.

*(CHORUS ends its humming.)*

**SAM.** That was nice.

**OWNER.** I know. Sends shivers right on through ya.  
Most folks when they hear it will shout hallelujah.

*(OWNER and CHORUS MEMBERS look at SAM expectantly.)*

**SAM.** *(After a pause:)* Hallelujah.

**OWNER.** You're slow.

**SAM.** I know.

**OWNER.** But let's go!

**CHORUS.** Let's go! Let's go! Let's go, go, go, go!

**CHORUS MEMBER 1.** You're here with your dumbness and we're  
in the know.

**CHORUS MEMBER 2.** We know what to keep; we know what to  
throw.

**CHORUS MEMBER 3.** We know what to chop; we know what to  
grow.

**CHORUS MEMBER 4.** We know what to make high and what to  
make low.

**CHORUS MEMBER 5.** Now you look droopy, but soon you'll just  
glow!

**FULL CHORUS.** We're here just to help, so let's go, go, go, go!

**OWNER.** You're here to be aided for whatever's ailing!

So let's break some wind and get ourselves sailing!  
What's your trouble? What hurts? What's torturing you?  
Whatever's busted, why, listen—we've got the glue!

**SAM.** I wouldn't say that I'm busted.  
I'm not really feeling that bad.  
I just think that, well, I might do a bit better,  
have more than before I have had.  
Does that make much sense, when you hear what I say?  
I basically think I'm not far from okay.

*(OWNER and CHORUS MEMBERS laugh uproariously.)*

**OWNER.** Okay? Okay? You've no idea what you say.  
You're deficient, my friend, in every way.

**SAM.** I am?

**OWNER.** Oh, you're lacking. You're lacking and slacking;  
your very foundation is in dire need of jacking.  
But you're here; that's the first step.  
You've realized your crime.  
Now you're asking for help,  
and you're doing it with rhyme.  
So humbly I offer my talents and my time.

**SAM.** I...

*(The 3 FILMERS enter.)*

**FILMER 1.** Hey, who is this girl? Get the cameras.

*(The other 2 FILMERS exit, then come back quickly carrying cameras. They hand one to FILMER 1.)*

**OWNER.** I forgot.

**FILMER 1.** You forgot? You forgot?  
You do this a lot.  
We probably missed the very best shot.

**SAM.** The best shot of what?

**OWNER.** *(To FILMER 1:)* Quit griping and use that equipment I bought.

**FILMER 2.** (*Circling SAM:*) Hey, sister, look here! Now give us a smile!

**FILMER 3.** That's beautiful, yeah; now I'll just twist this dial...

**FILMER 2.** Put your arm up like this...oh, that's the style.

**SAM.** What is this?

**OWNER.** They're filming. You'll find in a while you won't even notice, though now they seem vile.

**FILMER 1.** I heard that!

**OWNER.** Just joking!

**SAM.** I don't want to be put on video.

**OWNER.** We film every client.

**FILMER 2.** So suck it up, kiddy-o!

**FILMER 3.** If you're not on the camera, you're nothing—doncha get it?

**FILMER 1.** Life just ain't worth living without a good edit!

**FILMER 2.** Act natural. Be calm. We'll just catch the action.

**FILMER 3.** You gotta move over here, just a tad of a fraction.

**FILMER 2.** That's good. Carry on like we're not even here.

**OWNER.** It's true. It's as if they just disappear!

**FILMER 1.** (*To OWNER, pushing him back:*) Back off! Back away! You're standing too near!

*(From this point on, FILMERS move around catching the action as it happens, occasionally moving people or rearranging positions to get better shots.)*

**OWNER.** Now, what was I saying before they came in? I wish they would do it without such a din.

Ah, yes—that's it... (*To SAM:*)

I'm here for you now! Just ask and I'll answer; in the ballet of helping, I'm the principle dancer.

**SAM.** Are you done?

**OWNER.** With what?

**SAM.** With your speech about helping?

**OWNER.** No need to get snitty. You're the one who came yelping.

**FILMER 1.** Nice footage! She's getting a bit hostile.

**FILMER 2.** I'm catching the flare of her little left nostril.

**SAM.** Know what? I'll be going. I shouldn't have come.

**OWNER.** Now, now, don't be stupidly, foolishly dumb!

Of course you belong here. It's like coming home.

Look, I'm your mommy, your toothbrush, your comb.

Just tell me, my sweetie, what troubles your heart;

we'll make it all better as soon as you start.

**SAM.** I guess that I wish...

**OWNER.** Wish what, little dish?

I'm hanging on every letter.

**SAM.** I think that perhaps I would feel more content if I looked just a little bit better.

**CHORUS.** She wants the look, the look, the look,  
the look that's on every channel and book.

We'll give her that look, that look, that look;

we've got here the line, the bait and the hook!

**OWNER.** Oh, looks is it? Well! I tell you, that's swell,

'cause we've got the help that you need!

Just come over here; I'll ring for the crew

who'll fix every flaw, yes, indeed!

*(Calling off:)* Oh, Looksters! Oh, Lifters! Oh, Makers of the Beauty!

I've got here a gal and she's hardly a cutie!

*(Enter four LOOKSTERS.)*

**LOOKSTER 1.** We're here!

**LOOKSTER 2.** We're ready!

**LOOKSTER 3.** We'll take over now.

**LOOKSTER 4.** Just show us the ugly.

**LOOKSTER 1.** Bring on the cow.

**OWNER.** Here she is, in her glory, such as it is.  
Give her some help. After all, that's our biz.

**LOOKSTER 2.** Ooooh, what a mess! The proportions are sick.

**LOOKSTER 3.** I've got just one word: Ick. Ick, ick, ick, ick, ick!

**LOOKSTER 4.** Oh, geez, what an arm. It's floppy as Jello.

**LOOKSTER 1.** You call this a body? I mean, like, hell-o!

**LOOKSTER 2.** All right. Here's the deal: A diet is needed.

**LOOKSTER 3.** I believe that one statement might just be repeated.

**LOOKSTER 4.** No grains, no veggies, no cheese and no sweets;  
no milk and no water, no fruit and no meats.

**LOOKSTER 1.** Oh, no, like, that's wrong! You're completely on  
drugs.

The diet she needs is all about mugs.

**LOOKSTER 4.** Mugs? What's your problem? You're out of your  
nut!

**LOOKSTER 1.** Mugs of pea soup will shrink up that gut.

**SAM.** Gut? What do you mean? Am I really that bad?

*(All laugh.)*

**LOOKSTER 2.** Bad? Oh, my goodness. That's funny.

**LOOKSTER 3.** But so sad.

**LOOKSTER 4.** We all have our theories on how you should lose...

**LOOKSTER 2.** I'm big on kumquats!

**LOOKSTER 1.** My diet you should choose.

**LOOKSTER 4.** But as to your question, is it bad as all that?  
I think we agree:

**ALL LOOKSTERS and CHORUS.** You certainly are fat!

**LOOKSTER 3.** Try fasting!

**LOOKSTER 1.** Try grapefruit!

**LOOKSTER 2.** Try milk from a flea!

**LOOKSTER 3.** But whatever you do, just don't let it be.

**LOOKSTER 4.** Right now, your look is, well...

**LOOKSTER 1.** Gross comes to mind.

**LOOKSTER 2.** Your body is sort of like dirt. Unrefined.

**SAM.** Well, I thought that I might start in working out.

*(Enter BARNABAS, who clumsily crashes past LOOKSTERS, pushing them aside.)*

**BARNABAS.** I'll help with that! I'm Barnabas Clout.

I'll shape you and mold you and turn you to rock;

my system of training will reverse your clock.

*(Pushing SAM down to the floor:)*

Now get down and give me three hundred push 'em uppers.

We'll work off those Twinkies and too many suppers.

Don't quit on me now! You've only done two!

You'll be fit or dead once I'm done with you!

**FILMER 2.** Okay, now, come on—let's see some sweat!

**FILMER 3.** Get down, get dirty, get good and wet!

**FILMER 1.** *(To BARNABAS:)* Shove over, Beefcake; you're blocking my view. I want a clear shot of the girl, not of you.

**GENE.** *(Enters, jogging.)*

Barnabas Clout, you've got cheese in your noggin.

Get up, little girl; let's get you out joggin'!

**BARNABAS.** Jogging's for sissies, you bag of manure.

What she needs is my training, and that's for darned sure.

**GENE.** Your system of training will break her in pieces.

Remember what you did to your very own nieces?

**BARNABAS.** I didn't hurt them! They're right back in action.

So what if they spent just a few months in traction!

**GENE.** You lunkhead!

**BARNABAS.** You dummy!

**GENE.** You cyborg!

**BARNABAS.** You nerd!

*(DOCTOR SUTURE enters, pushing past the others and pulling SAM aside.)*

**DOCTOR SUTURE.** Now, all of this quarreling is clearly absurd. Excuse me, please, gentlemen; go sweat over there. You must be exhausted. Come, sit in this chair.

*(DOCTOR SUTURE grabs a CHORUS MEMBER, makes him get down on all fours, pushes SAM down to sit on his back.)*

**DOCTOR SUTURE.**

My apologies, really, for this fuss you've endured.  
One day, we just wish all fanatics would be cured.  
We're here to talk body; we're here to talk looks.  
Their faith is in grunting. Mine is in books.  
Books that have taught me that all of this strife  
over image can be fixed with the right type of knife.  
Cutting, my dear, now that is the ticket!  
The scalpel's your friend when you know where to stick it!  
You don't look so good. So what? Not a prob.  
Ugly's made beautiful with a proper slice job!  
Sign on the line, just a simple decision,  
and then all that's left is my artful incision.  
We'll suck some from here, and these we'll enhance,  
next thing you know, you're the star of the dance.  
Why fret over cake and work off your butt...  
just go the easy way: Let me cut, cut, cut, cut!

**FILMER 1.** *(To SAM:)* Don't hang your head, now—show us your grief.

**FILMER 2.** Do you think you could make your hand shake like a leaf?

**FILMER 3.** Look, you, just work with us.

**FILMER 2.** Show us your feelings.

**FILMER 1.** This footage so far is like old apple peelings.

**FILMER 2.** Boring.

**FILMER 3.** Soggy.

**FILMER 1.** Tired.

**FILMER 2.** No pop!

**FILMER 3.** We'll make you a star! You'll rise to the top!

**SAM.** Now, wait just a minute. I'm feeling a bit lost.

I'm especially afraid I can't handle the cost.

The diets, the training, your help with the dances;  
they all would put strains on my meager finances.

**CHORUS.** Cha-ching! We hear it! The cry of the wallet!

**CHORUS MEMBER 1.** Sam just wants to fill up her purse!

**CHORUS.** Cha-ching! We knew it! It's the old empty pocket!

**CHORUS MEMBER 2.** It's the same need from cradle to hearse!

**CHORUS.** Cha-ching, cha-ching, cha-ching, cha-ching,  
Nothing else matters when money's the thing!

**OWNER.** Oh, it's money you're after; it's moola you seek.

That's what's giving your boat such a leak.

Why didn't you say so? I'll send off this bunch.

*(He pushes off LOOKSTERS, BARNABAS, GENE, and DOCTOR SUTURE.)*

**OWNER.** Go, go, all you people. Go get me some lunch.

**LOOKSTER 1.** But nothing for her! She shouldn't eat for a year!

**OWNER.** Enough, already! Just clear out of here!

**BARNABAS.** Want to see my new muscles? I got them last night.

**OWNER.** Just clear out right now. Get out of my sight.

Oh, they are eager, but not what you crave.

Your dirt road of money is in need of a pave.

We've got a whole passel of great finance guys;  
But don't let me tell you—you can see with your eyes.

*(The five COUNTERS enter, a very somber bunch.)*

**OWNER.** Here they all come—and fun, oh, the laughter!  
The jokes just keep coming, one after the after.  
Now, don't cut up much, you rowdy money dudes;  
She needs some good help, not just silly moods.

**SAM.** Hello. Nice to meet you.

**COUNTER 1.** You're in some deep trouble.

**COUNTER 2.** Your income-to-debt is next nearly to double.

**COUNTER 3.** According to projections, you'll be bankrupt by noon.

**COUNTER 4.** No, update that figure. By ten to.

**SAM.** So soon?

But what have I done? I try to be thrifty.

**COUNTER 5.** She tries to be thrifty.

**COUNTER 1.** Now isn't that nifty.

**COUNTER 2.** Thrifty means nothing when you make less than fifty.

**SAM.** Fifty a week? I make much more than that.  
In fact, I make fifty a day.

**COUNTER 3.** Well, isn't that quaint. How impressive you are.

**COUNTER 4.** You're all set. What more can we say?

**SAM.** Wait, wait! Don't leave yet! What do you imply?  
That fifty a day's not enough?

**COUNTER 5.** Enough if most needs you want to deny  
And like living life off the cuff.

**SAM.** Well, then, fifty what? Fifty dollars by when?  
By the hour, is that what you mean?

**COUNTER 1.** By the hour is fine if you want to get by...

**COUNTER 2.** By the half hour is still living lean.

**COUNTER 3.** Fifty a minute is the least one can hope  
If a future is something that matters.

**COUNTER 4.** Even then, of course, things can fray like a rope  
And leave your investments in tatters.

**SAM.** Fifty a minute! You're out of your mind!  
I'll never pull down such a salary!

**COUNTER 5.** Then life for you is just going to be  
Like a duck in some shoot-'em-up gallery.

**COUNTER 1.** Say, that was clever. We should sell off that line.

**COUNTER 5.** I'll post it on E-bay for \$81.99.

**SAM.** Okay, then, but please, what should I do?  
I don't want to be poor all my days.  
And I enjoy my job.

**COUNTER 2.** What point is that?

**COUNTER 3.** A job is as good as it pays.

**SAM.** I don't really think I need piles of dough;  
enough to get by, with some comforts, you know.

**COUNTER 4.** Getting by, of course, is quite a relative term.

**COUNTER 5.** Getting by isn't easy, we're here to confirm.

**COUNTER 1.** And comforts you mentioned; I heard you say that.

**COUNTER 2.** And comforts are a horse of a whole different cat.

**CHORUS.** A whole different cat, a whole different cat!

**CHORUS MEMBER 1.** A cat that won't scat!

**CHORUS MEMBER 2.** It'll lay like a mat!

**CHORUS MEMBER 3.** A cat that'll scratch!

**CHORUS MEMBER 4.** But it won't touch a rat!

**CHORUS.** We say it's a whole different, whole other cat!

**COUNTER 3.** One who gets by needs a house, bed and food—  
and all of top quality, nothing rude, nothing crude;

only that which maintains an upper class mood.

**COUNTER 4.** A house in the suburbs, a bed of pure silk...

**COUNTER 5.** ...and food from the finest French chefs and their ilk.

**COUNTER 1.** That's just to get by—to survive, to subsist!

**COUNTER 2.** The comforts you want—that's a whole other list!

**COUNTER 3.** The comforts, of course, depend most on Honey.

**CHORUS.** On Honey, on Honey, on Honey divine.  
When it comes to the comforts, she's wonderfully fine!

**SAM.** On Honey?

**COUNTER 4.** Honey Jones. She dictates the money.

**SAM.** Dictates it? How?

**COUNTER 5.** By her stuff, naturally.

**SAM.** I guess that right now I'm confused as can be.

**COUNTER 1.** You've heard of Honey, of the Keep-Up-With clan?

**COUNTER 2.** Oh, here she is now.

**HONEY.** Have you seen my new van?  
It's bright red and shiny and holds 52;  
it's next-next year's model—newer than new.  
(*To SAM:*) Well, hello there, neighbor. Honey Jones is my name.

**SAM.** And I am Sam Target.

**HONEY.** (*Looking at SAM's feet:*) Isn't that a shame?

**SAM.** A shame? How is that?

**HONEY.** Oh, nothing; it's fine.  
I just see your shoes aren't as fancy as mine.  
You could go out and buy some—they're pricey, but hey!  
To keep up with fashion, you've just got to pay.  
Do you want to know how many shoes I have got?

**SAM.** I don't really care if you tell me or not.

**HONEY.** You don't really care? Now just who is this?

**COUNTER 3.** Excuse us, please, Honey; we'll fix what's remiss.

**FILMER 1.** (*Focusing on HONEY:*) Honey, that's great. Hold on to that pout.

**FILMER 2.** You are what capturing pain is about.

**FILMER 3.** The anger!

**FILMER 1.** The shock!

**FILMER 2.** The abject disgust!

**FILMER 3.** You show all that but your hair stays unmussed.

**COUNTER 4.** Now listen, Miss Target, you've an interest in comforts.

**COUNTER 5.** You said that!

**COUNTER 1.** You did!

**COUNTER 2.** Don't deny it!

**SAM.** I won't. I admit I would like to have some.

**COUNTER 3.** Then hear Honey's list...

**COUNTERS and CHORUS.** ...and then buy it!

**SAM.** But why should I want all the stuff that she has?  
Her comforts are hers and not mine.

**COUNTER 4.** You just don't know what comfortable means!

**COUNTER 5.** It means not getting behind.

**CHORUS.** Keeping pace!

**CHORUS MEMBER 1.** Saving face!

**CHORUS.** Staying in the race!

**COUNTER 1.** Even better is pulling out front!

**COUNTER 2.** The greatest of comforts is buying a thing  
that sends Honey out on the hunt!

**COUNTER 3.** But that is advanced.

**COUNTER 4.** You can't hope to do that 'til you've caught up with dear Honey Jones.

**COUNTER 5.** And that, by the way, is America at its best—patriotic clear down to the bone.

**COUNTER 1.** Honey, she's ready! Tell her of your shoes and anything else you're proud of.

**COUNTER 2.** Miss Target was ignorant of all that she needs and all that she's currently out of.

**HONEY.** Well, shoes—I've a thousand, if you're counting in pairs, for walking and sitting and running up stairs.

My wardrobe equips me for every occasion not to mention what's needed when I go on vacation.

Speaking of that, have I got some news!

I just returned from a wonderful cruise!

We sailed the Caribbean, then on to Peru, and went to a restaurant known for tofu.

After that, Alaska—so wild and untamed.

Mr. Jones got so frisky—we'll leave that unnamed.

The sights and the food and the wonderful smell!

Oh, you just have to go, that I can tell.

We brought back some gifts for child one and two

A trunk full for each; nothing less would do.

Oh, gifts, gifts, gifts, gifts—Christmas is soon!

And buying for Christmas is...like a typhoon!

What a wonderful time, a blizzard of gifts.

My, how my shoppingly spirit it lifts.

We generally spend nothing less than eight grand on each of the kids—you understand.

They need to have trinkets, they need to have fashion, they need what the TV will tell them is passion.

And I'm glad to provide. It gives me great joy.

I get tears when they open their three-hundredth toy.

**SAM.** Wait, wait; just a second. I'm feeling an overload. I need all of this? I just might explode.

**HONEY.** Well, listen, my dear, don't let it depress you. Some people might tell you all this to impress you.

I am just sharing because my life is so good.  
And yours should be equal, in this neighborhood.  
So don't be a stranger, Sam—come and have tea.  
I'll show you my china from North Sicily.  
Well, ta-ta for now—got to get in my van.  
I'll be trading it in just as soon as I can.  
'Bye, bye!

**COUNTERS and CHORUS.** So long!

**COUNTER 3.** That's a beautiful wax job!

**COUNTER 4.** We'll see you next month for our scheduled tax job!

**COUNTER 5.** So, now that your financial picture is clear,  
Where do you think you'll be going from here?

**SAM.** Going? From here? Straight to the gutter.  
The funds that I lack I can't even utter.

**COUNTER 1.** I think that she's ready.

**COUNTER 2.** I tend to agree.

*(COUNTERS 1 and 2 exit.)*

**SAM.** Ready for what?

**COUNTER 3.** Be patient. You'll see.

**COUNTER 4.** You don't have the means to make piles of money.

**COUNTER 5.** You clearly, right now, can't keep up with Honey.

**COUNTER 3.** With a handy device my colleague will return  
that might help make up for what you can't earn.

**COUNTER 4.** Ah, here it is now. Our lovely machine.

*(COUNTERS 1 and 2 come in with a machine. This is comprised of  
CHORUS MEMBERS, carrying props to create the machine.)*

**COUNTER 5.** Someone's not been keeping it perfectly clean.

**COUNTER 1.** When can we clean it? It's always in use.  
I barely can tighten the screws that get loose.

**COUNTER 2.** Stick your hand here. It won't hurt you a bit.

**SAM.** What's it do?

**COUNTER 3.** Just determines if you might be fit.

**SAM.** Fit for what?

**COUNTER 4.** To receive the marvelous gift.

**COUNTER 5.** Remember? We're trying to give you a lift.  
You said you felt low, felt you couldn't compete.  
Felt, in terms of money, you weren't complete.

**COUNTER 1.** If this light goes green, you will lose all that care.

**COUNTER 2.** The gift will come out from that little slot there.

**SAM.** Well, what if the little light doesn't go green?

**COUNTER 3.** That frankly hasn't happened since 1915.

**COUNTER 4.** Whoops, there it goes! That wasn't so hard!

**COUNTER 5.** And now it will spit out...

**ALL COUNTERS and CHORUS.** ...your first credit card!

*(All gather around the card as if it were a newborn child.)*

**COUNTER 1.** Isn't it lovely?

**COUNTER 2.** So plastic, so cute!

**COUNTER 3.** The perfect little baby—useful and mute.

**COUNTER 4.** So, there you go—just sign on the reverse.

**COUNTER 5.** As far as finances—we've lifted the curse.

**SAM.** No. I don't want it.

*(The "machine" falls apart at this point.)*

**All COUNTERS and CHORUS.** Don't want it?!

**CHORUS MEMBER 1.** What gall!

**COUNTER 1.** It's perfectly good! It'll work in the mall!

**FILMER 3.** *(To SAM:)* Just hold out your hand and say again, "No!"

**SAM.** Get away! I don't want to be part of your show.

(*To COUNTERS:*) My parents have told me to not go in debt.

**COUNTER 2.** Your parents' advice, to be frank, is all wet!

**COUNTER 3.** You have to go in debt; there's no other way!

**COUNTER 4.** Unless you can lure in some rich guy who'll pay.

**COUNTER 5.** Do you have any prospects for hot, loaded guys?

**SAM.** Hardly. I don't tend to catch many eyes.

**CHORUS.** Ah-ha and oh-ho, ahem and tee-hee!

**CHORUS MEMBER 1.** Now we know what is up with this chick!

**CHORUS.** Just let out a howl; she's out on the prowl!

**CHORUS MEMBER 2.** She's hoping to find her next pick!

**OWNER.** Oh, now we see! It's as plain as can be!

All that other, just return to sender.

It's not about looks or keeping your books;

Your worry is the opposite gender!

Okay, all you counters, you money-crazed guys,

Be gone! Go find some coin junkies.

This girl just ain't interested; no, she's got the eyes

That are looking for lip-locking hunkies.

**SAM.** Now, hold on a second. You've got me all wrong.

**OWNER.** Oh, please, don't be shy. We all sing the song.

**SAM.** The song?

**OWNER.** Oh, yes. That song of the ages,

The one sung and whistled by paupers and sages,

By kings and by beggars, by nobles and tramps,

By Bach and by Hendrix, who cranked up the amps.

That song primeval, that song ever playing,

That song that even gets mules in to braying.

It's love.

**SAM.** Love?

**CHORUS.** Yes, it's love!

**OWNER.** Love, love, love, love.  
It's the root of all sighs, when push comes to shove.

**SAM.** But I'm not in love.

**OWNER.** That's the trouble, is it not?  
That's the biggest of things that you haven't got.  
I can help, never fear. In fact, love's our main business.  
It's the area in which we get the greatest gee-whiz-ness.  
Oh, Matchers! Oh, Cupids! Engineers of Affection!  
The official name of the ones in that section.  
Ah, Cecily.

**CECILY.** That's me!

**OWNER.** And Gwendolyn.

**GWENDOLYN.** Ready to go!

**OWNER.** And Chrissy and Barbie and Robin.

**CHRISSEY and BARBIE and ROBIN.** Hello!

**OWNER.** I'd like you to meet our client, Miss Target.

**BARBIE.** Now there is a name we might not forget.

**CHRISSEY.** Oh, Barbie, you're a riot!

**BARBIE.** Chrissy, you're a stitch!

**OWNER.** All right, everybody, let's focus, for a switch.  
Miss Target needs help of the relational sort.

**CECILY.** And wouldn't you know that's our favorite sport!

**ROBIN.** Oh, Cece, don't confuse her. It's not like baseball.

**GWENDOLYN.** But you might get a touchdown if you give it your  
all!

**CHRISSEY.** Gwen, that was great!

**GWENDOLYN.** Oh, Chrissy, do you think?

**SAM.** This isn't for me.

**OWNER.** No! They're the missing link.

In the chain of your needs, they're the iron that binds.  
They may seem quite airy, but there's genius in those minds.

**SAM.** I don't know.

**OWNER.** But I do! You stay and be tutored.

**ROBIN.** That's better than being my dog. He was neutered.

**ALL FIVE ENGINEERS OF AFFECTION.** Aww!

**OWNER.** I leave now Miss Target, in your capable hands. *(Exits.)*

**BARBIE.** And that's a big responsibility, we understands.

**GWENDOLYN.** So Miss Target, what's your first name?

**SAM.** It's Sam.

**CHRISSEY.** Oh, that's good!  
Samantha is pretty and light like...driftwood.

**ROBIN.** Oh, yeah, I see oceans and waves and sand dunes.

**CECILY.** "Samantha." It's rounded, like seashells and moons.

**SAM.** It's Sam, not Samantha. I go by plain Sam.

**CECILY.** Oh, well, that's unique.

**ROBIN.** I see...a log jam.

**BARBIE.** But that is all right! "Sam" can be cute.  
Like the name you might give to your favorite flute!

**CHRISSEY.** Oh, yes, I can see that—root, toot, toot, toot!

**GWENDOLYN.** Chrissy! You're musical!

**CHRISSEY.** Oh, I am not.

**GWENDOLYN.** Are too, you big tooter. I know it a lot!

**SAM.** This is too much. I have such a huge headache.

**BARBIE.** That's from your frustration. It's like a big lake.  
A lake of your love that's held back by a dam,  
And we're going to break it. Together, we will, Sam.

**GWENDOLYN.** You betcha we will. We're big love dam-breakers!

**CHRISSEY.** We'll give to you, Sam. We're givers, not takers.

**BARBIE.** Now, who are you after?

**CECILY.** What's he like? Is he strong?

**SAM.** That's just it. There's no one.

**ROBIN.** Oh. You're not that far along.

**GWENDOLYN.** Okay, to the basics. Bring in the male dummy.

**CHRISSEY.** We don't start with real ones; they can upset the tummy.

*(CHORUS MEMBERS bring in a large dummy of a man. This can also be played by a cast member who is made up to look like a doll.)*

**BARBIE.** Oh, there is our cutie. We call him Bob.

**CECILY.** He's silent. And tall.

**ROBIN.** But Bob's not a snob.

**GWENDOLYN.** So go ahead, Sam; approach him. We'll watch.

**CHRISSEY.** Imagine that Bob is the yummiest catch.

**BARBIE.** The pick of the litter that the rooster could hatch.

**CECILY.** Like a great big éclair you're just dying to snatch.

**ROBIN.** Sh, sh; let her work. Let's stop talking so much.

*(SAM approaches "Bob." She looks back at the ENGINEERS. They urge her to make her move.)*

**SAM.** *(To "Bob":)* Uh...hi. *(Pause.)* I'm Sam. *(Pause.)* How's it going today?

**GWENDOLYN.** Oh, dear. She is bad.

**CHRISSEY.** Does she think Bob is gay?

**SAM.** So what do you think of the current welfare system?

**BARBIE.** Oh, no!

**CECILY.** Such mistakes!

**ROBIN.** So many I can't list 'em!

**GWENDOLYN.** Sam, that's enough. Get Bob out of here. He may be a dummy, but she'll hurt him, I fear.

**SAM.** What's the trouble? What are you panicked about?

**CHRISSEY.** Forgive us, forgive us—we didn't mean to shout.

**BARBIE.** It's just that we've never had a case quite like you.

**CECILY.** Do you have some sort of a foreign-made flu?

**ROBIN.** You do want a guy. That's right, isn't it? You know that's what it means to be a girl.

**GWENDOLYN.** If you're not attractive and flirty and cool...

**CHRISSEY.** ...that you might just as well be a squirrel?

**BARBIE.** Squirrels are so cute, though—they are, don't you think?

**CECILY.** Skunks would be cuter, if only they didn't stink.

**SAM.** Now, look—no, I don't agree with that statement, That a girl only lives to find a boy. I don't need romance to be a whole person; I don't need to flirt and be coy.

**ROBIN.** Oh, dear; you're in trouble. You need deep therapy.

**GWENDOLYN.** Or shocks to the brain might be needed.

**CHRISSEY.** You know, we're all like gardens sometimes And yours really needs to be weeded.

**BARBIE.** But Sam, now listen, we're not giving up! We'll work till we find your cure!

**CECILY.** And then you'll be the cutest little Sam!

**ROBIN.** The boys will be trouts to your lure.

**GWENDOLYN.** "Trouts to your lure." That was just way poetic!

**CHRISSEY.** Do you think so?

**SAM.** Oh, man; this is just so pathetic.

**OWNER.** (*Enters:*) Well, how are we doing with Miss Target, my sparrows?

**BARBIE.** Us Cupids were just getting set with our arrows!

**SAM.** No, no—no more arrows. No help, no aid.  
I'm done with this place. Just let it all fade.  
You can all just pretend I never came through the door;  
My body, my money, my loving...no more!  
I'm fine! I'm just fine! I was wrong to come by.  
With any more help I'm afraid I might die!

**OWNER.** Oh, everyone come and gather 'round our dear client.  
She's just hit that point when she's feeling defiant.  
My dear sweet Miss Target, this is common. We know.  
It hurts when you first learn you're lower than low.  
But we're here to help. We just can't let you go!

**ALL.** You're low, we know. We can't let you go!

**SAM.** Oh, you can, and you will. I'm telling you, enough!  
I may have some problems but I can't take all this stuff  
That you're claiming I lack.  
I feel like I'm under attack.  
So thanks. I'm no good at goodbyeing.

*(SAM attempts to leave. The others try to keep her, becoming increasingly physical until they have her pinned to the floor.)*

**OWNER.** You're not leaving here still full of denying.

**SAM.** You can't keep me trapped! I am leaving!

**CHORUS MEMBER 1.** It's only yourself you're deceiving!

**SAM.** No more help. Let me go!

**CHORUS MEMBER 2.** We're telling you, no!

**SAM.** I'm fine!

**CHORUS MEMBER 3.** No, you're ill!

**SAM.** I'm okay!

**CHORUS MEMBER 4.** Just hold still!

**FILMER 1.** This is great!

**FILMER 2.** This is sweet!

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

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