

THANK GOD I'M ME AND NOT YOU, or AVATARS

CHARACTERS:

ADRIAN, in his twenties, gay
MATILDA, in her thirties, prudish
ALICE, in her forties, daring
HENRY, in his fifties, middle of the road

SETTING: Four chairs and an oblong table plus a few appointments as necessary to suggest each scene, in the revolving American periods 1893, 1953, 1973, 2003 and a 2093 Epilogue. A complete set for each is neither possible nor desirable. Use fuller costumes, but all changes should be fast and effortless. Let the audience use its imagination to evoke the epochs, not its behind waiting for laborious set and costume changes.

ACT I, SCENE 1 America, 1893

ADRIAN (drinking tea, very insinuatingly) Oh, by the way, did you hear about Alice Louise?

MATILDA No, what? Is she not coming?

ADRIAN Something rather scandalous has happened.

MATILDA Alice Louise scandalous? I find that hard to believe, Adrian.

ADRIAN It's true nevertheless. Don't you want to hear the dreadful parts?

MATILDA I always prefer to hear something charming about people. You can be so charming, Adrian, when you wish to be.

ADRIAN Thank you, Matilda Marie, but one does so tire of charm. It crimps a fuller expression of one's true self.

MATILDA That's not entirely without profit, Adrian. I don't mean to lecture you, but sometimes you do overstep.

ADRIAN I do not! I merely try to be . . . informative!

MATILDA I should hate to think you speak of me behind my back as you seem to want to speak of Alice Louise.

ADRIAN Matilda Marie, you don't even know what it is I wish to say, and yet you think I'm speaking behind her back. That shows a rather constrained mind, don't you think?

MATILDA More tea, Adrian? (She pours him some tea.) It's Darjeeling. Father brought it back. What do you think?

ADRIAN (pushing his cup away) I don't care for more tea, thank you.

MATILDA Oh dear, I'm afraid I've hurt your feelings. I didn't intend to. Won't you have more? Please?

ADRIAN You seem to think tea will cure anything. That or apple butter!

MATILDA I do find tea and apple butter a comfort.

ADRIAN I heard that it coats your stomach with all kinds of tannic acids. Causes deformities in curates or something.

MATILDA Now, now, you're getting in one of your moods, Adrian.

ADRIAN It's so delicious and awful what I have to say about Alice Louise! How can you not want to know?

MATILDA Alice Louise is our friend, that's why.

ADRIAN Surely it is about our friends that we wish to know the most. I wouldn't dream of saying anything about someone with whom I'm unacquainted!

MATILDA I think your argument specious, Adrian. I think it best we change the topic of conversation.

ADRIAN (changing the topic grudgingly, spitefully) How do you like the weather? Is it warm — is it cold — is it tepid enough for you?

MATILDA Adrian, have some apple butter! (Offers some)

ADRIAN No apple butter, thank you! Too excessive!

MATILDA How's your mother been?

ADRIAN Oh, bother Mother! You used to be more vibrant, Matilda Marie. What has happened to you since your marriage?

MATILDA My marriage has made me a responsible woman. I must pay more heed now to the proprieties. I should not be receiving you alone like this except that you are an old, dear friend.

ADRIAN Oh, rubbish!

MATILDA My new opinions are not rubbish, but I shall ignore that. When are you going to get married, Adrian? Marriage would be good for you.

ADRIAN (after a slight hesitation) I'm not the marrying type. I think I shall go into the theater instead.

MATILDA Marriage is always good for a person.

ADRIAN By that token, five or six marriages would seem to be the prescription for total virtue.

MATILDA Adrian, please! . . . As a matter of fact, I have found in myself depths of virtue I never dreamed existed since I married Albert. I confess at first I did not find him appealing and did not wish to co-habit with him, but being with him night and day — as he is — has had a salubrious effect upon my strength of character.

ADRIAN (provocatively) Marriage seems to have had quite the opposite effect on Alice Louise.

MATILDA Truly?

ADRIAN Since marrying — lo these many years ago — she's gone quite off the beaten path, but I mustn't say onto which path of course.

MATILDA Are you trying to make me a participant in your scandal-mongering? I won't have it! I won't have it, Adrian!

ADRIAN Drat! I think we're drifting apart, Matilda Marie. Mrs. Smith!

MATILDA Why can't you say something nice about Alice Louise?

ADRIAN Because what I heard wasn't nice.

MATILDA I don't want to hear it, and there's an end of it. (She has some more tea and apple butter) This is very good indeed!

ADRIAN (seeing another approach) Of course, if you don't want to help Alice, then I suppose nobody in the whole world will.

MATILDA (seizing the bait) Help her? How can I help Alice Louise?

ADRIAN I'm mum! I would have to reveal certain shocking things — inadvertently of course.

MATILDA No, Adrian!

ADRIAN Terrible, terrible things.

MATILDA Are you certain these terrible things would be learned inadvertently in my effort to help my friend?

ADRIAN Oh, indeed.

MATILDA Then my duty requires me to learn what it is about Alice Louise that will allow me to come to her assistance.

ADRIAN Oh, good! Steel yourself. One hardly knows where to begin. I'll have some tea after all. And some apple butter (Helps himself) Now I don't remember where I heard this, but, believe me, it's reliable. It seems our friend Alice Louise Beveridge

Birdsong recently went to see Dr. Aloysius (“Ned”) Philbottam about a certain so-called health matter.

MATILDA (the news dawning) No!

ADRIAN Yes!

MATILDA It isn’t . . . ?

ADRIAN Oh, don’t ask!

MATILDA Is she . . . ?

ADRIAN Not yet.

MATILDA Not yet?

ADRIAN But, from what I’ve heard, it won’t be long.

MATILDA Oh, Adrian, whatever leads you to that conclusion? A mere visit to a doctor!

ADRIAN Now I remember who it was told me this story! Effie McBlagh, who is my mother’s laundress as well as the laundress of Dr. Aloysius (“Ned”) Philbottam.

MATILDA And so?

ADRIAN And so Effie, while fetching the good doctor’s laundry, with her own eyes saw the man examining our dear friend Alice Louise. I won’t say how she saw, but there *is* a large crack under the door of his examining room. Effie could hardly believe her eyes.

MATILDA (curious) Don’t tell me more, I beg you!

ADRIAN Only to help poor, wretched Alice Louise. One doesn’t know how to put it delicately. But the laundress — who does my shirts magnificently, by the way — said that our friend permitted the good doctor to examine her — and one repeats only what one heard — without . . . her . . . chemise.

MATILDA *Without* her chemise?

ADRIAN Without.

(Both cluck their tongues and shake their heads at this impropriety.)

MATILDA I’m flabbergasted. I don’t know what to say, Adrian.

ADRIAN What is there to be said! She’s evidently let a man see her stark naked. What kind of relationship with that doctor must she be having! Can you help her now, do you suppose? Can anyone?

MATILDA Yes! I shall help her! I must do the moral thing. I shall never speak to her again!

ADRIAN But she's coming for tea!

MATILDA Too true, too true. However can I have a woman like that in my home!

ADRIAN Now don't over-react, Matilda Marie. I find it rather thrilling. Besides, Alice Louise is late. She's probably not coming.

MATILDA I suspected as much about her! Every since she told me she let her husband do certain things to her, I've known this was coming. A woman must draw the line somewhere.

ADRIAN What things? Her husband, I mean.

MATILDA Oh, Adrian, how can you be curious about such things! They're not interesting. They're not! One puts up with them, that's all. You make me feel soiled just being in the same room with you. You are nothing but a — a gossip!

ADRIAN Only because Mother insists that I have an occupation! I fear it's my calling.

MATILDA Gossip is not a calling. Gossip besmirches everything and everyone it touches.

ADRIAN No, gossip is the manna of life. Without it, we should perish in the desert of respectability.

MATILDA What nonsense! And now that dreadful woman is coming here! You should have warned me earlier.

ADRIAN You didn't want to listen.

MATILDA Stop making excuses. I shall have to do something. (Thinks) I know! I shall send her a note telling her I'm ill — no, that I've suddenly been called away.

(Enter ALICE)

ALICE (to offstage servant) Never mind. They're expecting me. Called away, Matilda Marie? What are you two talking about! A trip? Called away where, dear?

MATILDA Alice Louise!

ALICE (coming over to kiss MATILDA on both cheeks) You're looking very pretty today, my dear. There's a blush in your cheeks.

MATILDA I'm — I'm —

ALICE Is something wrong?

ADRIAN Matilda Marie has had a terrible shock.

ALICE (obviously not liking him) Oh, Adrian! I didn't know you were coming to tea today.

ADRIAN Darling Alice, there are many things you don't know.

ALICE If that is an example of your famous wit, do warn me when it is about to occur, Adrian, so I'll be alerted and thus able to withstand the gales of laughter that otherwise will engulf me.

ADRIAN Do gales engulf, Alice? I thought they blew.

ALICE I wouldn't know what engulfs and what blows. I defer to your greater knowledge, particularly about what blows.

ADRIAN Alice Louise is always such a delight, don't you think, Matilda Marie? So free of convention. She thinks nothing of barging in unannounced like an Irish scullery maid. I find that so essentially fresh and American, don't you?

ALICE Ah, but we still haven't greeted each other today, Adrian. Do forgive me. (holding out her hand) Wouldn't you like to kiss some part of my anatomy, like the gentleman you are?

ADRIAN Shall we settle for the cheek? (They exchange frigid cheek kisses.) Your cheek is chilled, my dear. Were you aware?

MATILDA It must be from the frost outside.

ADRIAN It couldn't possibly be from her wearing insufficient clothing, could it?

MATILDA Adrian!

ALICE (aware of a meaning shared by the others) Am I missing something?

MATILDA No, dear.

ADRIAN (under his breath) Unless it's a chemise.

ALICE What is this terrible shock you've had, Matilda Marie? It isn't your husband, I trust!

MATILDA No, Albert's hard at work at the brokerage.

ALICE Nothing has happened to your child!

MATILDA No, Nurse has Toby Vachel out in the perambulator for a stroll.

ALICE Then what is it? (hypocritically) If a woman's family is safe, then surely nothing else can be that serious in her life.

ADRIAN (leading her) Yes, what is it, Matilda Marie?

MATILDA I'm afraid I've heard something indecent about someone I know.

ADRIAN A good friend, was it?

MATILDA Someone I've been close to, but someone that I fear I shall have to drop from my acquaintance.

ALICE (helping herself to tea) What has this friend done? (looking at ADRIAN)
Betrayed a confidence in some way?

(ADRIAN and MATILDA squirm a bit throughout since these answers apply to them.)

MATILDA No.

ALICE Made a convenience of you?

MATILDA No.

ALICE Married badly?

MATILDA Not that either.

ALICE Then, pray tell, what is it? Matilda Marie, you are keeping me in a fever of curiosity. Is it anyone I know?

ADRIAN Let's just say it's someone you know, Alice Louise, but someone you don't know very well.

ALICE Well, out with it! If it's that scandalous, no doubt I should cross his person off my list of acquaintances as well! (insistent) Who is it?

MATILDA It's — it's — No, I can't bring myself to say the name. (to ADRIAN) After all, what proof have I? Only idle gossip.

ADRIAN Gossip is never idle. In fact, it's quite busy.

ALICE Well, if I were you, I'd cut the person like that, with or without proof. One can never be too careful of one's reputation.

ADRIAN The bubble reputation, as Mr. Shakespeare put it.

ALICE I myself wouldn't know what he put or how. I find Mr. Shakespeare on the vulgar side. So much is so ripe! I was just saying to my husband — uh — (pausing, not really forgetting his name)

ADRIAN (prompting) Edgar, isn't it? Your husband.

ALICE — saying the other afternoon that it's shocking what they permit children to read nowadays. Even Mr. Bowdler's version leaves in things that any respectable person would wish left out! . . . By the way, where is Henry Elmer today?

MATILDA He said he wouldn't arrive until four-thirty.

ADRIAN That's why we started without him.

ALICE I do wish he were here. It would save you the painful duty of having to tell of your indecent friend twice over. But then Henry Elmer, like all of us, must be informed. An ill-informed society is a peril to itself.

MATILDA I'm not sure that I shall tell Henry Elmer.

ALICE Not tell him!

MATILDA Henry Elmer tends to forgive people.

ALICE Have you noticed that too? Henry Elmer is a marvelous man, a true Christian.

ADRIAN A saint!

(All agree.)

ALICE But then one can overdo Christ's message. Forgiving others can become a very bad habit.

ADRIAN Yes, Henry Elmer does frequently put a damper on good conversation.

ALICE It's one thing to convert the heathens, as Henry Elmer has done and indeed one must. It's quite another to try to make us feel guilty by setting such a good example.

ADRIAN I'm hardly one to talk about others behind their back, but Henry Elmer is so good that one is tempted to suspect he's hiding a very deep well of bad.

MATILDA He makes me feel like I'm such a censorious old frump, when I'm not at all! Morals, after all, are morals!

ALICE Maybe we should dis-invite him from our group. What do you think?

ADRIAN Good idea!

ALICE Is *he* the friend you meant to drop, Matilda Marie?

(MATILDA and ADRIAN exchange a look about ALICE.)

(Enter HENRY.)

HENRY (good-naturedly to offstage servant) I'll show myself in. Never you mind!
Never you mind now!

MATILDA Henry Elmer! So glad you've come!

HENRY I wouldn't miss our little gatherings for anything. I'm sorry my wife couldn't come — again. . . . Am I interrupting something? You all look so jolly!

ALICE We were just talking about you, Henry Elmer! Saying what an asset you are to our little group.

ADRIAN So Christ-like.

HENRY That's odd. I felt such a shiver just outside there. As though someone had stepped on my grave. Do you suppose I should pay any mind to it?

MATILDA Some tea, Henry Elmer? Apple butter?

HENRY Don't mind if I do. It's quite blustery out today.

ADRIAN (with a double meaning) But ever so warm in here!

HENRY What were you talking about when I came in? Sounded fascinating. Is it morals we're discussing today? Can always go for a good ethical discussion. Can I jump right in?

(ALICE, ADRIAN, and MATILDA look at each other somewhat guiltily since they have been talking about him.)

Is it Aristotle? . . . Not Aristippus! . . . Plato then! Ah yes, if you ask me, when it comes to ethics those Greeks had it all over those Romans.

ADRIAN (with a double meaning) All over the Romans? Sounds absorbing. I meant *sordid*, of course. Dreadfully sordid.

HENRY What a day I've been having! First I took those young lads and lasses at the settlement house for a hike. Nothing like exercise for young bodies. Then I read them several chapters of Plutarch. Can't have too much Plutarch. What's a sound body with an empty head on top? Believe me, some of those boys and girls are going to turn out all right, by gosh! They've got the stuff in them!

ADRIAN How do you put up with it, Henry? All that lower-class perspiration!

HENRY Perspiration doesn't bother me. Indeed, Sweat — pardon me, ladies — is often one's obligation.

MATILDA I believe it was Our Lord who said "the poor you shall always have with you." A case might be made for not attempting to improve their lot since it seems to fly directly in the face of God's word.

ADRIAN That's brilliant, Matilda. It's like something I would say. From time to time you are a marvel.

MATILDA Thank you, Adrian. From time to time you aren't.

HENRY This apple butter is splendid!

ADRIAN I believe Matilda Marie makes it herself — with bitters, isn't it?

HENRY Capital stuff! But look what I've done! Put the snuff on whatever it was you were all talking about. Matilda Marie, won't you fill me in?

MATILDA Well, let's see. (looks to ALICE) What was it, Alice Louise?

ALICE I can't quite remember! Was it about membership in our little salon?

HENRY Oh, are we getting some new people in?

ADRIAN Something like that.

MATILDA But not the wrong sort, naturally.

(ALICE , MATILDA, and ADRIAN all look at one another because they've been discussing HENRY.)

ADRIAN Yes, not the wrong sort.

(ADRIAN and MATILDA look at each other because they've been discussing ALICE.)

HENRY Just what is the wrong sort? I've been giving that quite a bit of thought lately. I was thinking we ought to expand our little salon here. We're down to four! What happened to George and Mabel Viola and — what was the name of that vivacious young woman who could quote from Herodotus at such length?

ADRIAN Charlotte Ida Stubbs. The last I heard she was dead.

HENRY Dead?

MATILDA Charlotte Ida dead?

ADRIAN Yes, a cough . . . took her off!

HENRY What a very bad cough that must have been. How precarious life is really!

ADRIAN (prompting) Don't you have an announcement to make, Matilda Marie?

MATILDA (after hesitating) Yes, I have something to announce. (She stands.)

HENRY Yes?

MATILDA I — I can't quite think.

ALICE Come now, Matilda Marie, it's time you told Henry Elmer.

HENRY Told me what?

MATILDA That you're —

ALICE Let me phrase it for you.

MATILDA No, I'll say it. Henry Elmer, we've decided that you don't fit here anymore.

ADRIAN If you ever did.

HENRY What?

ALICE You're rather an anchor on — how shall I put it? — the windjammer of conversation. So we've decided you should withdraw your membership.

ADRIAN There's a good fellow.

HENRY Withdraw my membership? (amazed, looking around) Is this a jest, Matilda Marie? Ho, ho, ho!

MATILDA (nods her head.) No jest.

ALICE You might as well leave now, Henry Elmer. It'll make it less wrenching for all concerned.

HENRY Don't I even get an explanation?

ADRIAN We could write one up for you later, if you like.

HENRY I'm not wanted here any longer? (hurt) I see . . .

ADRIAN You'll get over it. I do hope we haven't put a chill on your afternoon.

HENRY (covering) Oh, no . . . not at all . . . I guess I'll go then. Is that right? (He's confused by the rejection.)

MATILDA Goodbye, Henry Elmer. Awfully good knowing you.

(HENRY stands. He takes her hand.)

HENRY But — I — I — (He stops, then bows, then leaves.)

ALICE Well, that was relatively painless. Now where were we?

ADRIAN I believe we were discussing your indecent friend, weren't we, Matilda Marie.

ALICE Oh, really? Not someone with a long way to fall, I hope?

MATILDA I'm afraid so.

ALICE Well, give me a hint! Is it a man or a woman?

ADRIAN A little of both, I've heard.

MATILDA (because he goes too far) Adrian!

ALICE We'll toss whoever it is out good, won't we!

ADRIAN Can you be so heartless, Malice Louise? Oh, forgive the slip of the tongue.

ALICE (hypocritically) Being virtuous is never heartless. Who is it?

MATILDA It's you, Alice Louise! I've heard hideous things about you and Dr. Aloysius Philbottam.

ALICE Oh, no! What are they saying about me? Whatever it is, it's not true!

ADRIAN (insinuatingly) Not true about “Ned”?

ALICE (guiltily) Ned?

MATILDA (accusingly) Yes, Ned!

ALICE (caught out, pleading) I didn’t mean to let him see me without my chemise. Honestly! It just happened that when I dressed at home that morning I forgot to put it on under my dress!

MATILDA A good woman never forgets her chemise!

ADRIAN Or other people’s! We weren’t going to poison our lips repeating this. But now that you’ve brought it up, it’s better if you just go quietly. Perhaps if you hurry, good old Henry can even give you a lift in his carriage.

ALICE You are so solicitous for my well-being, Adrian. (weakening) How can you do this to me after all our chats here, our discussions, all our . . . Matilda Marie, tell me he doesn’t speak for you as well . . . does he?

MATILDA (turning her back) He does! I can’t have your kind in this house. I am with child again! (She holds herself, staggers melodramatically.)

ADRIAN (to ALICE) See what you’ve done to this mother to be!

ALICE . . . Very well. I shall leave this company. I only came because at the time I couldn’t find anybody better.

ADRIAN You needn’t explain. Simply depart.

ALICE I’ll go. I’ll start my own salon. Eventually they’ll all come to me for culture — and for tea and apple butter. I’ll destroy you both!

(ALICE exits grandly.)

ADRIAN What a melodramatic horror she is! About as subtle as a meat cleaver in a rabbit hutch! You know what this means, don’t you, Matilda Marie?

MATILDA What?

ADRIAN We shall have to add to our numbers. We can’t very well conduct a leading salon with just the two of us. Sarah Edith Throckmorton might do, at least in a pinch. And then there’s always the governor’s wife. She’s a braggart and a bore, but she does her hair well. And —

MATILDA Adrian.

ADRIAN Yes, my dear?

MATILDA Adrian, I have something to tell you.

ADRIAN What? You don't like the governor's wife's hair?

MATILDA No . . . I don't want you here.

ADRIAN Beg pardon!

MATILDA I think you should leave too. Like the others.

ADRIAN Leave? What in the world are you talking about, Matilda Marie!

MATILDA I don't want to have my salon with you anymore, Adrian.

ADRIAN But whyever not?

MATILDA Because I've never liked you. You harbor dangerous ideas!

ADRIAN Well, I've never liked you either. That's hardly a reason not to have a friendship.

MATILDA Since we're clearing the air today, I'd appreciate it if you didn't come to my home any more. It's time I put aside the follies of my youth once and for all! Is that plain enough?

ADRIAN It is indeed plain enough, just as you have always been plain enough! How will I fill up my time? I'll have to spend it with Mother, God forbid! Come to think of it, how will you fill up yours?

MATILDA I'll probably be quite lonely at times. But at least I shall have my virtue again. Take some apple butter if you like. But please go. Albert will be coming home soon and Nurse will be bringing in Toby Vachel any minute now. I must see to their needs above all things.

ADRIAN For a while I thought you had possibilities, Matilda Marie. That's why I lavished so much of my precious time on you, but obviously I was wrong. You are nothing but a dreary, ordinary little woman.

MATILDA Don't say any more, Adrian!

ADRIAN A woman who's submitted herself to her husband's "embraces" when they obviously disgust her. And why? For mere comfort and ease! You call Alice Louise indecent when you're nothing but a whore yourself. Only you have a marriage license to be one!

MATILDA Adrian, your words are vile . . . vile —

ADRIAN Tut-tut, say no more, Matilda Marie. You haven't a witty bone in your head. Don't embarrass yourself with an inept farewell. Good day, my fair friend! In other words, go piss in your apple butter, Matilda the Hun!

(ADRIAN exits.)

(MATILDA stands defiantly.)

MATILDA I don't care! I don't need you, Adrian. I don't need any of you! I have my family to look after now. That's all any woman needs. And if I need a salon, I'll have my husband's relatives over. (She winces at the thought) Or I'll have a salon with myself. Who needs other people to have a stimulating conversation! (talking to herself) "How do you do? Do come in. Have some tea, won't you? It's imported. Have you heard about Alice Louise and Adrian and Henry Elmer, former acquaintances of mine. I believe they are not invited to the best houses any longer. What did they *do*? Please don't press me on that issue. Much too unsavory. And then naturally I wouldn't say an unkind word about former friends, however despicable their actions. It's between them and their God. We must all let others judge themselves, don't you think? After all, isn't that ultimately the harshest judgment of all, the judgment we bring down upon ourselves? . . . More tea? Some apple butter? . . . How? You just take apples and crush them. . . crush them . . .

(Lights fade as she offers tea and apple butter to the audience or an imaginary guest.)

ACT I, SCENE 2
America, 1953

SETTING: Quick removal of the table cloth from the table, which is now placed on a platform. The chairs are arranged with three behind the table, with one in front for the witness.

(To allow time for costume changes, the characters return in reverse order from the way they left in the previous scene, now dressed in clothes suitable for 1953.)

HENRY (coming to the raised table, to offstage assistant or to stagehand) Is this the right height for this? Seemed higher yesterday. Want to be able to see properly. (He adjusts the table or the chairs.) (to offstage sound assistant) Be sure to record this now. That last tape, it was difficult to hear! Okay? We're having several troupes of Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts coming through here later to watch. America's future! Hey, where are the coffee and donuts?

(Enter ALICE in a sweater that accentuates her breasts and shows some cleavage, with coffee and donuts on a tray.)

ALICE Here they be! How you doing, Hank?

HENRY I'm great! (Takes some coffee and donuts) When you're helping your country, here's no feeling like it.

ALICE That is so true! How do you like my donuts? (She holds two up in front of her breasts.)

HENRY Now I call those donuts! Nice blouse, Alice! Is it new?

ALICE (turning, showing it off) You like it? It's just a little something I threw on.

HENRY Looks like you almost missed! You could be Jane Russell! Hubba Hubba!

ALICE You think so? (showing off her breasts) You don't think this is too revealing, do you?

HENRY It's perfect. Miss Mon-roe, eat your heart out.

ALICE Oh, no, that Marilyn wears those real uplift, low-cut bras with cleavage down to here. (Points lower than her own cleavage) She's such a tramp. I'd never dress like that.

(Enter ADRIAN hurriedly.)

ADRIAN Bring in the first witness! (Goes toward table)

HENRY Adrian, you're in such a rush. Have a donut! Some coffee!

ADRIAN Those things corrode your stomach, you realize. Besides, I've got to get home early today. I'm taking little Adrian to Little League.

HENRY But little Adrian's only two and half, isn't he?

ADRIAN Can't be too young with these things. Plant a seed, get a tree. Plant an athlete, get a man!

HENRY How's the little woman?

ADRIAN Great. The lazy susan and venetian blinds finally arrived this A.M.

ALICE (having coffee and donuts) Aren't they wonderful! Ed and I got a lazy susan last month, and it makes such a difference with his awful boarding house reach! (laughs) And I can't say enough good things about venetian blinds!

ADRIAN I have a doctor's appointment this afternoon as well. By the way, ALICE, how did your check-up go?

ALICE If Dr. Philbottam didn't find anything wrong, it wasn't from not looking! I swear to God there was scarcely a part of me he didn't probe with that thing of his. What's that thing of his called?

ADRIAN (a beat) A stethoscope, I believe. That is what you were referring to, ALICE, wasn't it?

ALICE (laughing) Oh, Adrian, you are such a corker! Did you hear that, Hank? His stethoscope! (laughs more)

HENRY (genially) Well, shall we get to work? American history is waiting!

(ADRIAN AND ALICE go to their chairs at the table. HENRY goes to the edge of the stage and calls off.)

HENRY Tell the first witness to come in, please.

(HENRY takes his place at the table. They adjust papers, microphones if practical, take on an official look. It now becomes clear that they are a committee of some kind. After a few moments, MATILDA enters.)

MATILDA (hesitant, frightened) Is this the hearing room?

HENRY Take a seat, Madame. (Points to witness chair below the table.)

(MATILDA sits, nervous.)

HENRY (to others on panel) Who'd like to go first this time?

ADRIAN I would. State your name, please.

MATILDA Matty Marie Smith.

ADRIAN Occupation?

MATILDA Homemaker.

ADRIAN /

ALICE / HENRY How wonderful!

ADRIAN Do you wish to make a preliminary statement in these hearings, Mrs. Smith?

MATILDA No, except that it's all a terrible mistake, my being here. I love this nation!
(Stands and recites) "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands —"

ADRIAN Thank you, thank you, Mrs. Smith! But we have some questions here about your political affiliations of the past several years.

MATILDA (scared) Yes?

ADRIAN Is it not true that you and your husband took a vacation in Vienna, Austria six years ago, in 1947?

MATILDA Art had just gotten out of the Army and we wanted to celebrate and we hadn't started our family yet and —

ADRIAN Do you know what a fellow traveler is, Mrs. Smith? Were you aware at the time of this so-called vacation that Vienna, Austria lies on the border with certain countries?

MATILDA Certain countries? No, I wasn't.

ADRIAN Certain Communist countries?

MATILDA All we did was ride on that big ferris wheel.

ADRIAN I see. Nothing else?

MATILDA Not that I can remember.

ADRIAN Do you plead the Fifth? (to others) Take note that the witness refuses to answer the question.

MATILDA Wait! I'll answer. We had some hot chocolate. Yes, we got it on the black market, I know, but it was our honeymoon and we were so young.

ADRIAN So you admit you had black-market hot chocolate! (insinuatingly) *Mit schlag?*

MATILDA I beg your pardon?

ADRIAN *Mit schlag!* Surely you and your husband know Russian when you hear it.

HENRY (to ADRIAN in a whisper) I think that's German. Yeah, German.

(ADRIAN and HENRY confer until finally ADRIAN is convinced.)

ADRIAN So you speak the language of our late enemy, Mrs. Smith! You visit borderline foreign nations! You do frivolous things like ride ferris wheels and have illegal hot chocolate! Did you or did you not vote for Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932, 1936, 1940, and again in 1944! (Holds up her voting record)

MATILDA I didn't! You have my records mixed up with some other Smith!

ADRIAN We never mix up records!

MATILDA We've always voted properly!

ADRIAN I hold in my hands a list of known members of — (looks at the list) "Pinkos for Peace." Were you or were you not a member?

MATILDA I was never a member, nor was my husband.

ADRIAN But you were for *peace*, right!

MATILDA Just at the end there, when everybody else was!

ADRIAN Is it not true that you have a statue of a bird in your back yard?

MATILDA What?

ADRIAN A bird with long, skinny legs and a large curved bill?

MATILDA . . . Yes? Why?

ADRIAN The bird known as the flamingo. In your case a *pink* flamingo! Possibly a *pinko* flamingo?

MATILDA . . . When we first moved to the neighborhood we didn't have one. But the neighbors wouldn't talk to me. The kids at school chased my son Toby home and even blackened his eye. So Al and I got a pink flamingo and a little stone elf so we'd fit in. You know the kind I mean? (holds hands up to demonstrate the elf) Some people call them fairies.

ADRIAN I know nothing about elves and even less about fairies. (Looks around guiltily)
I have no more questions at this time.

ALICE Well, I do. Mrs. Smith, are you now or have you ever been what might be called a
“hipster”?

MATILDA No, never.

ALICE Have you ever personally known an undesirable?

MATILDA Certainly not.

ALICE Have you ever had espresso coffee?

MATILDA No, just normal coffee.

HENRY Would you like some coffee?

MATILDA Don't mind if I do.

(They get her the coffee. MATILDA sips.)

MATILDA Excellent coffee.

ALICE (to the committee) She didn't ask for espresso. (They nod) Now, I am going to
give you another test, Mrs. Smith. Say the first thing that comes into your head.
Don't think. Just answer.

MATILDA All right.

ALICE Organized crime, as revealed by Senator Kefauver and his committee?

MATILDA Bad! . . . Is that right?

ALICE Good, Mrs. Smith. What about Senator Joseph McCarthy?

MATILDA Good?

ALICE Very good, Mrs. Smith. Are you aware that there are known homosexuals in the
United States government?

MATILDA No, I didn't! How awful! . . . What are homosexuals?

ALICE They are those men who . . . but let's not give filth a hearing here.

ADRIAN (obviously hiding something about himself) Right!

MATILDA Are they those security risks that must be weeded out and uprooted and deprived of
their jobs and stigmatized for life for the disgusting perverts they are?

ADRIAN Hear! Hear!

MATILDA If I ever see one, I'll be sure to tell you!

ADRIAN Ah, but that's the point, Mrs. Smith. You can't always tell them. They are very clever at hiding themselves. You might be sitting right next to one and you wouldn't even know it. Until they start infiltrating their Commie ways into our system. The Big Three, Mrs. Smith, the Big Three: Atheism, socialized medicine, and birth control!

MATILDA Oh, no!

ALICE I'm afraid it is so, Mrs. Smith. And as a woman and as a wife and as an American I have to say it makes me sick — sick!

(The others applaud ALICE for her sentiments.)

ALICE That's all I have to say at this time. Thank you, Mrs. Smith, you've been a friendly witness.

MATILDA Thank you. (Starts to leave)

HENRY I have just a few questions.

MATILDA Oh, of course. (Sits back down)

HENRY Although I'm certainly not for unnatural behavior, I myself have found these hearings rather excessive sometimes, I mean in the way some questioners have probed into areas that I believe our Founding Fathers did not want probed. (Looks at ADRIAN and ALICE) Nevertheless, I want to do what's right for this nation, and so I want to ask you, Mrs. Smith, if you have ever protested about this committee, anywhere or at any time?

MATILDA Oh, no! I wouldn't dream of it.

HENRY Thank you. And have you ever belonged to any front organizations for those who would overthrow the government by violence?

MATILDA I have not.

HENRY And have you ever done anything you wouldn't want us to know about?

MATILDA Never!

HENRY You don't look like the sort who would, Mrs. Smith, let me assure you of that right now!

MATILDA Thank you.

HENRY And just so that the committee here knows where you stand, or in your case sit, have any of your other activities ever at any time been un-American?

MATILDA Un-American? (quivering) I ate some Greek food once.

HENRY Will the committee overlook that?

(The three confer and then nod judiciously that they will.)

MATILDA Thank you so much. May I have a donut?

HENRY You may. (They give her one and she gobbles it) I for one am glad to see you eating American.

(The other panelists nod their agreement.)

HENRY How about the other “un’s”? Anything un-wholesome?

MATILDA (eating her donut throughout) No.

HENRY Unworthy?

MATILDA No.

HENRY Unbecoming?

MATILDA No!

HENRY Unhealthy?

MATILDA No.

HENRY Unfriendly?

MATILDA No.

HENRY Untoward?

MATILDA I’m sorry, I don’t know what that means, but I’m sure I haven’t done it.

HENRY I’m sure you haven’t. Have you ever done anything unfeminine?

MATILDA Oh, heavens no!

HENRY Very good, Mrs. Smith. You have been a most cooperative witness.

MATILDA Oh, thank you, thank you! I did disobey my husband once. I forgot to tell you!

(The committee confers.)

HENRY Just how did you disobey your husband, Mrs. Smith?

MATILDA Well, I was doing the dishes and burping Toby, my son, and trying to polish my floors all at the same time. It was a Monday night and I thought I would like to watch “I Love Lucy,” but my hubby didn’t want to that night. But I flipped it on anyway.

HENRY Has this kind of disobedience been repeated?

MATILDA Oh, no, it was just that one time.

(The panel confers very seriously.)

HENRY We'll overlook it, Mrs. Smith, if you promise this behavior won't occur again in your lifetime.

MATILDA (breaking down) Oh, how can I ever thank you? If I ever find out anything else about anybody I know I'll be sure to tell you! I promise! For instance, my cousins! Or my awful sister? How about my mother?

HENRY Thank you, Mrs. Smith. You may be excused.

MATILDA How about the neighbors down the street? My minister is quite suspicious —

HENRY Thank you, thank you! We'll get back to you.

(MATILDA exits.)

I call for the next witness — Mrs. Alice B. Birdsong.

ALICE (on the panel) Me?

ADRIAN Yes, you. Nobody is above suspicion. Are you?

ALICE Well, no.

(ALICE leaves her place on the panel and takes the witness chair.)

HENRY State your name, please.

ALICE You know my name!

HENRY For the record.

ALICE You've said it already.

ADRIAN We'd like to hear you say it.

ALICE I am not saying it! I resent this questioning.

ADRIAN Why, do you have something to hide?

ALICE I do not!

HENRY According to our sources, Mrs. Birdsong, you are married, is that correct?

ALICE I used to be.

HENRY What does that mean?

ALICE I'm recently divorced.

ADRIAN /
HENRY (shocked) Divorced!

HENRY You admit to being a divorced woman?

ALICE It wasn't a good marriage.

ADRIAN What has that got to do with anything? Marriage is a sacred institution, and once you make that commitment, it's for life.

ALICE That's a lot of hooley! My husband, Ed, and I never got along all that well. He was — but never mind about him and his shenanigans.

ADRIAN Never mind what? You had better tell this committee, Mrs. Birdsong. National security may be at stake.

ALICE I think you're just snoopin', that's what I think! You've got your nerve probing into my personal life!

HENRY Mrs. Birdsong, do you not realize that an Iron Curtain has descended?

ALICE Where? Around my rights?

HENRY Everybody has to give up some of his rights in a time of national emergency.

ALICE It's always a time of national emergency!

MATILDA (returning from offstage) See what divorce leads to! A total breakdown of the family and society!

HENRY Mrs. Smith, your testimony is over! Please sit down.

MATILDA But somebody's got to speak up. It's plain, ordinary citizens like me that have got to be heard if the world is to hear plain, ordinary ideas!

ALICE Would you butt out, please.

MATILDA Look at her sweater! Do you know what that kind of clothing leads to?

ALICE You're nuts!

MATILDA And you're indecent! You just want one thing. Pleasure! Pleasure! Pleasure!

HENRY Ladies, please.

MATILDA Well, she does! I want to ask her a few questions. (MATILDA takes the empty seat at the table) I bet you don't even have any children. Admit it!

HENRY Mrs. Smith!

ADRIAN Please, this is not an open committee!

MATILDA (ignoring them) You afraid I'll ask some real questions here? Huh? What are you all afraid of?

HENRY Well, maybe we'd better let her ask just a few, do you think?

MATILDA That's more like it. Why didn't you stay with your husband — that's what I want to know! How can we keep this country together if people like you can't even keep your marriage together!

ALICE I refuse to answer you.

MATILDA You know the kind of people who take the Fifth! Freethinkers and free-lovers, that's who! Weirdoes and oddballs and people who are ashamed to —

HENRY Mrs. Smith, we appreciate your zeal on behalf of our country, but we really must ask you to desist.

MATILDA What's that mean?

ALICE Shut up.

MATILDA But I'm not nearly finished yet!

ALICE I won't put myself through this. (Starts to leave)

MATILDA Oh, yes you will, you — you divorcee!

ALICE Get off that stand!

(ALICE goes toward MATILDA. They fight, pulling each other's hair. Should be wild.)

HENRY Ladies! Ladies, please! This is unseemly behavior! Stop that!

ADRIAN Ladies, please! You're getting tufts of hair in the committee's notes!

(The women continue to scratch and bite and pull hair, falling to the floor.)

HENRY (to ADRIAN) What are we going to do?

ADRIAN I don't know. We could call the bailiff.

HENRY I have an idea.

ADRIAN What is it? Anything! Hurry!

HENRY I call the next witness — a surprise witness!

(The women abruptly stop fighting to listen.)

MATILDA /

ALICE Who is it?

ADRIAN Yes, who?

HENRY I call Henry Middleton to the stand!

(HENRY leaves the platform and takes the witness chair.)

HENRY I am here.

HENRY (hurrying back to be a panelist) As chair, I have a few questions I'd like to ask you. Are you now or have you ever been a member of a subversive organization?

HENRY (running back to be witness) I have not.

HENRY (running back to be a panelist) Are you sure? Why are you out of breath? Do I make you nervous?

HENRY (running back to be the witness) I apologize. I'm not nervous!

HENRY (running back to be panelist) Are there any other questions from the committee?

MATILDA I have a few.

ADRIAN Mrs. Smith, you're not part of this committee!

MATILDA Oh, but I am! You trying to stop the truth from getting aired here?

ADRIAN I am an elected member of this body.

ALICE If you don't sit down or leave, we'll have you removed bodily.

MATILDA Bodily — that's the worse kind! But you people are letting everybody off! How about him? (pointing at ADRIAN) He hasn't even been asked any questions? All the rest of us have!

ADRIAN Questions of me? That's preposterous.

HENRY You know, I hate to admit it, but she's right, Adrian.

ALICE You wouldn't mind, would you?

ADRIAN Mind? Of course I wouldn't mind.

HENRY Well, would you take the witness stand then?

(ADRIAN reluctantly takes the witness stand.)

ADRIAN If you ask me, this is . . . this is . . .

MATILDA He looks like he's hiding something, if you ask me!

HENRY Are you, Adrian?

ADRIAN Hiding something?

ALICE As a matter of fact, we have had our sub-committee investigating you and we've come up with some rather suspicious facts.

ADRIAN Suspicious facts? (Gulps)

ALICE You — Adrian Walpurgis — have been observed — let's see — observed entering a bar known to be frequented by questionable types.

ADRIAN I can't imagine what you mean.

MATILDA He looks like one of those questionable types to me. So question him.

HENRY You have also been writing checks to one Sonny Lewiston. \$100 per week. What was the purpose of these checks?

ADRIAN I don't recall any such checks.

HENRY But they have been verified by your bank. Are these not your signature?
(Holds them up)

ADRIAN Oh, now I remember. Sonny Lewiston is — is a young man I befriended. I've been paying him for — for various chores he's performed around my home — cleaning out the lawn, mowing the garage, that sort of task. (Nobody notices his slip)

MATILDA For \$100 per week?

ADRIAN He works very hard.

MATILDA Nobody gets that much nowadays for mowing a garage — I mean mowing a lawn.

HENRY Madame, we'll handle this, if you don't mind. Now tell us, Adrian, why you felt it necessary to maintain a separate checking account for these checks?

ADRIAN Well, I . . . I . . .

ALICE Adrian, you aren't trying to hedge, are you?

ADRIAN I just find it difficult to recall . . .

ALICE Just who was or is this Sonny Lewiston?

HENRY Yes, according to our investigation of him, he is a known male — how shall I put it? A male —

ADRIAN No, that's not true! He just mows for me!

MATILDA I'll bet! And empties your garage, huh?

ALICE You haven't ever 'used' this Sonny Lewiston's services, have you, Mr. Walpurgis? Please say you haven't!

ADRIAN I refuse to answer!

HENRY You can't refuse to answer now, Mr. Walpurgis. Think how it will look.

ADRIAN Why should I care how it looks? The bubble reputation! I am a married man. A happily married man. I have a son. He's in Little League! I have venetian blinds!

HENRY Mr. Walpurgis, we're not questioning your credentials as an upstanding member of society, but this Sonny Lewiston business looks a little odd. Let's clear it up.

ADRIAN I told you already.

ALICE Is it possible that this Sonny Lewiston had certain information that he was using against you?

ADRIAN No, never! I deny that categorically!

MATILDA Ah, a denial. Now we're getting somewhere!

ADRIAN Back off, you censorious old frump!

HENRY Adrian, control yourself!

ADRIAN She's hounding me! I don't know any Sonny Lewiston. I don't know any young men! I have never known any young men in my life!

HENRY But, Mr. Walpurgis, you just admitted a few moments ago that you did know Sonny Lewiston. He mows your . . . lawn.

ADRIAN You leave my lawn out of this!

HENRY Do you want us to summon Sonny Lewiston to these hearings?

ADRIAN No, please don't! Please, please!

ALICE Get a grip on yourself, Adrian.

MATILDA You'd better come clean, and pretty quick! Tell us about that so-called lawn he mows!

ADRIAN (sweating) I just went into that bar because I wanted a drink, one little drink on my way home to my wonderful wife and son. I didn't know what kind of place it was. Honestly. I could barely see because of all the smoke and dim lights. There wasn't even a sign outside. I just sat down and ordered a drink, and this young

man with short hair sat next to me. He said his name was Sonny. I never did anything! But then he started hounding me, coming to my house, threatening to expose me if I didn't give him \$100 a week. What could I do? I didn't want anybody to think I was one of "those." I wasn't! I swear on my mother's grave and all that I hold sacred that I wasn't one of those! I am perfectly normal. You must believe me! You must! You must . . .

(He breaks down, sobbing.)

MATILDA I am sorry to say I have finally met an undesirable.

ALICE Adrian, you shock me. How could you? How *could* you?

HENRY One in our very midst and we didn't even suspect? Oh, Adrian, you — Oh, there's nothing I can say that is adequate to this occasion. We had better adjourn this hearing for now.

MATILDA He isn't going to get off, is he? We aren't safe with people like that in our country! Oh, my God, you goddamn Commie symps! How dare you be nice to him! I'll have you all put in jail! (She runs over and starts beating ADRIAN with her purse.) Confess! Confess, you slimy, awful queer! Confess! Confess! What would George Washington or Abraham Lincoln say! (She sings as she beats him) "God bless America, land that I love. Stand beside her and guide her, with a light — " Etc.

HENRY (to ADRIAN lying on the floor) Well, Adrian, what have you got to say for yourself?

ADRIAN (melodramatically) . . . I'm afraid it's all too true. It wasn't my lawn Sonny Lewiston mowed. It was *me* he plowed!

(MATILDA, ALICE, and HENRY are all standing, staring at ADRIAN with their hands at their mouths, deeply shocked.)

HENRY/ ALICE /

MATILDA (as one) Oh, no! Not that!

(Slow fade as they stare at ADRIAN, who weeps.)

INTERMISSION

ACT II, SCENE 1
America, 1973

(Enter ADRIAN carrying a box and a sign, now dressed as in 1973.)

ADRIAN (rhythmically) Out of the closet now! Not tomorrow — now! Out of the closet now! Not tomorrow — now! 2-4-6-8, how do you know your grandma's straight!

(He sets up his sign saying GAY IS GOOD near the table, places his leaflets out for passersby.)

Sign up here! Right over here, folks! Sign up now! Out of the closets.

(He takes a handful of hangers out of his box of supplies.)

(MATILDA enters, walks cautiously past the table. ADRIAN sees her, offers her a hanger.)

A hanger, ma'am?

MATILDA No, never! What do you think I am! (She hurries away, upset.)

ADRIAN (holding up a hanger) These are the only things that belong in closets!

(Enter ALICE carrying a sign and a container of leaflets, handing them out to the audience.)

ALICE (rhythmically) Women's liberation now! Not tomorrow — now! Women's liberation now! Not tomorrow — now! Fifty-nine cents on the dollar — do you call that fair?

ADRIAN Hangers here! Pamphlets! Leaflets! Gay rights are your rights too! (to ALICE) Hanger?

ALICE Reproductive rights now! Reproductive rights now. No more abortions in back alleys! What are these hangers for? (She knocks some of them off the table.) A woman like me can't even go to her doctor and choose to terminate her own pregnancy. I ask you, whose body is it anyway? It's mine, that's whose!

ADRIAN Hey, hey! These are not what you think they're for! I'm for human rights!

ALICE (seeing his banner) Oh, that's different. Right on!

MATILDA (offstage voice) What about fetus rights?

ADRIAN (to ALICE) You want to share a table?

ALICE Great! I brought a few things. (ALICE joins him at the table, placing a ton of materials out.) I think it's so brave of you, out here on the streets like this! I want you to know I marched with Friends and Family of Fruits just last week.

ADRIAN (correcting her gently) Gays.

ALICE Oh, right! Friends and Family of Gays. Sorry.

ADRIAN I appreciate it. I marched with Women and Girls Against Sexist Oppression yesterday.

ALICE Girls?

ADRIAN They looked under twelve. I'm sorry. I mean Women and Pre-Women Against.

ALICE We all forget sometimes. That's great, you being there. I didn't see you.

ADRIAN I thought Betty was fabulous when she spoke about changing the mystique. It's just about the best speech I've ever heard.

ALICE She was good, wasn't she? Did you hear Bella on menstruation? She was so right on I couldn't believe it!

ADRIAN I had to leave early. I wish I'd been there! You want a joint?

(He takes out a joint, lights it, and shares it with her.)

ALICE Hey, now you're talking! . . . I need this.

(MATILDA enters from where she last exited, passes by the table, stealing glances, obviously curious but pretending not to be.) (ADRIAN and ALICE hide the joint from MATILDA, but they don't try too hard.)

MATILDA (sniffs very suspiciously at the marijuana)

ALICE (to MATILDA) Can I help you? Have you read this? (Holds out some materials)

MATILDA (terrified) Oh, no! I'm normal!

ALICE Go on! It's so full of insight. End exploitation!

MATILDA No, thank you! No! No! I'm not exploited!

(MATILDA leaves again hurriedly. ADRIAN and ALICE continue to share the joint, passing it back and forth, feeling daring.)

ADRIAN What's wrong with her?

ALICE Afraid to lose her chains. I've seen so many like that.

ADRIAN You think she's dangerous?

ALICE I'm not sure. Don't I know you from somewhere?

ADRIAN Maybe.

ALICE Did you go to Washington High?

ADRIAN I did! Did you?

ALICE You were in the theater! I remember you!

ADRIAN That was me! The only boy in theater in high school.

ALICE You used to be so, so — I wouldn't have recognized you!

ADRIAN Yes, terrified out of my skin that somebody would find out about me. But you've changed too! Didn't you used to wear sweaters that emphasized your — (points to her chest)

ALICE I could die when I think of the way I used to flirt with guys. I'm bisexual now.

ADRIAN Really?

ALICE Still married, but now I find I can only really relate to women. They are so loving and giving.

ADRIAN Aren't they, though!

ALICE Naturally Eddie, my husband, didn't like it when I told him it was all over. Do you know what he said? That he'd wait for me!

ADRIAN That was thoughtful.

ALICE Thoughtful? That was the most sexist thing I ever heard him say, and I've heard plenty. What he was really saying is that I'd come back for his cock when I got tired of cunt. I prefer the real words, don't you? None of this euphemistic crap — pee-pee and pubic and —

ADRIAN You are so with it I can't believe it!

ALICE Enough about me! What about you! Weren't you married?

ADRIAN For a while. But then I realized I was just living in a convention I'd never made.

ALICE Isn't it the truth!

(They nod and puff away.)

ADRIAN So I got divorced and found the baths! I have never been so fulfilled in my life! I didn't know sex could be like this, did you?

ALICE I was just fooling myself with Eddie. Thank goodness I didn't have any kids.

ADRIAN I had my record expunged and started going to Gay Lib meetings, and the rest is history, as they say.

ALICE Your record?

ADRIAN I was arrested in a bar by the Vice Squad. Plainclothes!

ALICE How awful!

ADRIAN And when they fired me from my job for being gay, that's when I finally took to the streets.

ALICE And about time too! Where do they get off! I'm going back to school — in medicine. They wouldn't let me before.

ADRIAN Good for you! You show 'em how to operate

(MATILDA comes back through, takes a look at one of the leaflets on the table, then guiltily hurries off.)

ADRIAN That woman looks familiar too. Do you know her?

ALICE Yeah, she reminds me of somebody too.

(Enter HENRY with a sign and a package.)

HENRY Freedom now! F. U.! Freedom now! F. U.!

ADRIAN /

ALICE Right on!

HENRY Do you mind if I stop here for a while?

ADRIAN What are you for?

HENRY (showing his sign) I'm for F. U.

ALICE F. U.? I've never heard of it.

(MATILDA enters, stares at the three, circles them widely.)

HENRY (to ADRIAN and ALICE) Fetishists Unlimited. Can I speak openly?

ADRIAN Down with the tyranny of the past! Speak out, my brother!

HENRY (still a bit afraid of MATILDA, who is glowering at them.) My name is Hank Middleton. I'm the head of a new organization to help boys and girls from an early age to think well about themselves, now matter who or what they like to sniff.

ALICE Of course! Why should it be all right to sniff perfume or coffee but not anything else? What sorts of sniffers do you represent?

HENRY We try to be eclectic.

ALICE Eclectic sniffers. Good, good. What kind are you? You mind saying?

HENRY (whispering) Well, I personally like wearing used women's underthings under my other clothes. (Gives them a peek.) And sniffing them — in public.

ADRIAN How courageous!

HENRY Of course if they're new they don't do a thing for me. I've worn them for years, but I never told anyone before a month ago! My wife understands. All she asks is that I not do it in the living room when her relatives are over. I think that's reasonable.

ALICE I think it's wonderful when a man can admit he likes to wear women's clothes. As long as you're appreciative.

(HENRY takes a package from under his arm.)

HENRY Thanks. I need the support. It's not easy sometimes, especially in my size. I have a further confession to make. I prefer . . . Here! (Holds out package)

(ADRIAN and ALICE sniff it.)

ALICE Yes? What is it?

HENRY She lives in Altoona. We exchange through the mail. Special Delivery so that when it arrives, it's still — you know — warm and aromatic. (He sniffs at his package.)

MATILDA (from a distance) I heard that! You're disgusting!

ADRIAN Sexual diversity is God's plan for the universe!

MATILDA You all ought to be locked up!

HENRY Oh, dry up! (He waves his aromatic package at her.) (MATILDA leaves offended.) (to ADRIAN and ALICE) Do I smell a joint? Can I have some?

(ADRIAN and ALICE look at each other, not sure at first, then agree.)

ALICE Why not!

(They share the joint with him.)

ADRIAN Here you go, Hank.

HENRY Thanks. I've got some booze. Want some? (He takes a flask out of his inside pocket and offers it to them. All three have a slug.) Isn't this great? Booze and a joint. And sharing this moment in history together, the three of us like this!

(Re-enter MATILDA.)

MATILDA I'm going to get a policeman after you! This is public property.

ADRIAN Well, we're not leaving. (Pulls a chain out of his box, chains himself to the table)
You'll have to drag me off!

ALICE Me too! (She pulls a chain out of her container and chains herself to the table.)
I'm not chained to the past any longer. I'm chained to the future!

HENRY All right, I've gone this far! (He takes off his clothes, revealing his women's
undergarments.) There! At last! Call me Henrietta when I'm in this mood!

MATILDA (about to faint) I'm going to faint! Oh, this is terrible! I am pregnant! I'm going to!
I'm going to faint! (She finally faints.)

HENRY (looking at MATILDA's body) What should we do? Do you think she hurt herself?

ADRIAN Let her be. (looking at MATILDA's body) You want to try her shoes on?

HENRY Oh, no, I have my own. (Takes women's high heels from inside his clothing, puts
them on)

ADRIAN (about the women's clothes) How does it feel?

HENRY (thrilled, walking in high heels) I can't tell you!

ADRIAN Most people would think you're gay for doing this, and yet you're 'straight.'
I myself have never wanted to wear women's clothing. I'm so glad we're finally
clearing up all these misconceptions!

ALICE You know what I've always wanted to do?

HENRY What?

ALICE Oh, I shouldn't say.

HENRY Come on. You can tell us.

ADRIAN Sure. (looking at the unconscious MATILDA) She won't hear. She's out of it.

ALICE Well . . . I always wanted a vibrator. The kind in the ads, with the woman patting it
on her cheek.

ADRIAN Why don't you get one? I've got one!

ALICE With an attachment.

ADRIAN They come with lots of attachments. You wouldn't believe!

(MATILDA stirs in her faint. They look at her, a trifle worried about her interference,
then go on.)

HENRY What sort? Those French ticklers on the end?

ALICE No.

ADRIAN The double whammy kind? With volts?

ALICE No. . . . I've always wanted a vibrator with a buffalo's dick on the tip.

ADRIAN Well, why not! Where the buffalo roam! Not *real* buffalo, of course?

ALICE Oh, no, artificial. Aren't they an endangered species? Do you know where I can get one? I've looked everywhere.

ADRIAN There's a Whole Earth catalogue in here somewhere. (He searches through his box, finds it, gives it to her.)

ALICE Oh, wow!

ADRIAN You know I've always had a secret longing myself. (to an offstage passerby) Hey! Two! Four! Six! Eight! Gay is good! Gay is great!

HENRY What is it?

ADRIAN Sure you want to hear?

HENRY /

ALICE Of course!

MATILDA Ohhhhhhh.

(MATILDA stirs in her faint again. They look at her, then go on.)

ADRIAN I want to have an orgasm on Mt. Rushmore.

ALICE Outdoors?

ADRIAN Not just outdoors. On Abraham Lincoln's nose.

HENRY Do it! These progressive periods don't last that long. I've read Toynbee.

ADRIAN But you have to hang down from Lincoln's eyebrow to get to his nose, I think.

ALICE How did we get this far, by being afraid to be ourselves?

ADRIAN Actually, there's a little more to it. Sure you want to hear?

(They nod.)

HENRY It's a time to share.

ADRIAN I can't explain it or anything. I mean, Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves and was a great man, and somehow I just want to shoot my sperm *out of his nose* before I die. It would be the ultimate liberation. . . . Am I asking too much?

ALICE Not at all. I just wish there were some women's faces on Mt. Rushmore. Why not Emma Goldman's face up there?

HENRY It'll happen one day, you watch!

ALICE Women have had it rough!

HENRY Like no one else.

ALICE Though I like men.

HENRY Thank you.

ALICE Some of them.

HENRY Actually, men haven't exactly had it easy themselves.

ALICE Just all the power and all the privileges for centuries.

HENRY Now wait a minute —

ALICE Haven't had it easy! Why, being a man is nothing but a piece of cake!

HENRY Well, maybe that's —

ALICE Simplistic! Did you hear him call me simplistic? So you think women don't have any brains, huh?

HENRY I didn't say that.

MATILDA (jumping up suddenly, joining ALICE) But you were thinking it! I know your type.

HENRY My type?

MATILDA Men! That's the type! All you want to do is get on top of us and — and — shoot your vile, vile juices into us!

HENRY I do not!

MATILDA Probing and poking and pleasuring yourselves at our expense.

HENRY Hey, wait a second now. That's just human nature. God's plan —

MATILDA Men's plan! Oh, why didn't I see it before!

ALICE What's gotten into you?

MATILDA I don't know. I just feel freer somehow, and I never cared for all that physical stuff anyway. . . I don't know to put this, but do you want to be . . . intimate with me?

ALICE What?

MATILDA Me and you, Alice.

ALICE . . . Well . . . ah . . .

MATILDA I know I've been a little standoffish, but I'm willing to give it a try. (She holds out her hand.) Of course I'll probably go back to men eventually.

ALICE Well . . . all right, I suppose.

(ALICE and MATILDA hold hands.)

MATILDA To think I've come this far — a temporary lesbian!

ADRIAN (a bit ticked off) How trendy!

MATILDA I don't believe we asked your opinion. (to ALICE) Should we become a rock group?

ADRIAN Who do you think made it easy for you to be a temporary lesbian! Me, that's who! With my demonstrations and my chains and my —

MATILDA Well, nobody forced you to!

ADRIAN This isn't just some novelty in my life! This is my life, and you're cheapening it!

MATILDA (to ALICE) I feel strong. I think I'll change my name to Matt. I'll cut my hair real short. I'll — the possibilities are endless!

HENRY I hope you're not going —

MATILDA Take those women's clothes off right this minute!

HENRY What?

MATILDA Stop mocking women. You — you drag queen!

HENRY I am not a drag queen. I am a transgenderist!

ADRIAN Yeah!

MATILDA (to ALICE) How can you associate with these men, Alice?

ALICE Oh, they're not so bad, as men go.

MATILDA Not bad? They're hateful. Come over here right now.

ALICE I'm chained. (Shows her chain)

MATILDA I'll free you! (She removes the chain.) Sisterhood is powerful! Now come here. From now on, we are separatists!

ALICE We've got to stick together! The world has barely heard our message.

MATILDA We don't need them. (Points to ADRIAN and HENRY)

ADRIAN You may later on. You've joined the ranks of the outcast now.

MATILDA You and he may be outcasts, but we're women! We're in the majority.

ADRIAN How nice for you. Can I be a temporary woman?

MATILDA Ha! Move along. Some of us have business to finish here.

ADRIAN What!

MATILDA I've been held down long enough.

ADRIAN Now, Matt. I was here before —

MATILDA I couldn't see the stars because I was so busy doing the shit work for you men.

HENRY I tried to get women to —

MATILDA Oh, sure you did! I ought to whack your wienie off! And they say I've got penis envy!

(MATILDA lunges at him. He jumps back.)

ADRIAN Lady, please —

MATILDA That's all I am to you — a lady, a piece of meat to screw and have your babies and scrub your floors and play second fiddle while you get all the promotions and all the jobs and then we're supposed to hold your hand and make ourselves available to your every whim, while we stay locked in your houses, forced to make coffee and watch soap operas hour after hour, day after day!

HENRY (to ADRIAN) What can we do?

ADRIAN Nothing. She's gone into hyper-bitch.

MATILDA Oh, yeah, if a man speaks up, he's brave. If a woman does it, she's a bitch! It's all so plain to me now!

HENRY Maybe you'd better sit down for a moment —

MATILDA Oh, sure, make the little woman sit down. She's acting like a woman! Better yet, make her lie down. Then get on top of her and bounce up and down. Well, let me tell you something, Mister, you're not sticking that thing in me ever again!

HENRY Please stop.

MATILDA You threatening me?

HENRY No! Can't we be friends?

MATILDA Don't make me laugh!

ADRIAN (to HENRY) I don't think that's possible.

MATILDA (turning on him) Are you saying I'm humorless? Huh? Huh?

ADRIAN (backing away) Wouldn't dream of it. You're funny. I mean —

MATILDA Oh, so now I'm funny? What do you mean, *funny*? Women are not funny! Bouncing up and down on women is not funny! Fifty-nine cents on the dollar is not funny!

ADRIAN I take it back.

MATILDA Which part?

ADRIAN (not sure what to answer) All of it.

MATILDA Oh, giving in because I'm a woman! You don't take me seriously. Think I can't take it because I'm not a man! Look at that, Alice. Next thing you know — he'll be humiliating us by opening a door for us!

ADRIAN (terrified) Oh, no, I wouldn't! I'd never open a door for a woman!

MATILDA I've seen you with my own eyes, you chauvinist pig! (She knocks something over.)

HENRY Are you satisfied now?

MATILDA Are we satisfied, Alice?

ALICE I'm satisfied.

MATILDA I won't be satisfied until I have a child out of wedlock! (Makes her stomach into a mound like a baby) I've always liked the name Toby! I'm leaving Al!

HENRY Let's all go to a singles bar, what do you say?

ALICE (not that pleased about it) I can't. We're separatists.

HENRY Oh, come on. Ease up a little. Please.

ALICE (to MATILDA) What do you say?

MATILDA No!

HENRY It can be fun.

ADRIAN I'm game. I'll watch you people and see what you do. I'll try anything!

MATILDA I don't know. Convince me.

ALICE If these guys go along to a bar, then we can seem to be with somebody, but if we meet somebody we really like we can go off with *them*.

ADRIAN Thanks.

MATILDA (in a dither of indecisiveness) Oh, I don't know. I don't know!

ALICE Come on! Be liberated!

MATILDA I haven't even been a temporary lesbian yet.

ADRIAN (taking out a small bottle) How about some poppers before we go?

MATILDA What's that?

ADRIAN Try it. (as she starts to drink it) You don't drink it.

HENRY I'll have some.

(ADRIAN hands HENRY the bottle to sniff.)

HENRY Ooo! That's olfactory!

ALICE Let me try it. (ALICE takes a sniff of the bottle.) A good year!

ADRIAN Yeah! 1973! (ADRIAN takes a sniff, enjoying it) Hmm-hm!

(HENRY, ALICE, and ADRIAN all groove on the poppers, start feeling each other up, nibbling and stroking.)

HENRY Now this is more like it.

ALICE Wow, what is this stuff! I feel like I'm in — (ALICE rubs her breasts sensually.) My breasts feel like ripe pomegranates.

ADRIAN I feel polymorphously perverse! Come on, Matt. Try it.

MATILDA (holding back) Anything that gives that much pleasure can't be good for you.

HENRY Feel my underwear! (He holds his women's undergarments out.)

ADRIAN Let's use our chains! What do you say? (He arranges his chain and ALICE's around himself, ALICE, and HENRY. They form a triangle, rubbing their backs against each other, sniffing poppers. MATILDA is off to the side, not sure.)

HENRY Oh, Bacchus, Aphrodite, Don Juan, Timothy Leary, this is it! Let's let it out. Let it all out!

MATILDA Let what out?

HENRY What we most want to happen to us — our greatest fantasies!

MATILDA (tempted I don't think fantasies are good for us.

HENRY I'll start. Ooo, I want to explore my . . . feminine side. (dreamy) . . . I want to be a big juicy orchid and feel a big, thick bumblebee land on my white, sticky stamen and take my golden, luscious nectar!

(All groove on this image, except for MATILDA, who tries, but can't quite make it.)

ALICE (dreamy) . . . I want a wild, warm rainstorm to sweep up my . . . vagina and stay there and hold there and dwell there, erupting at last into a never-ending, cascading, bubbling volcano of hot chocolate fudge that looks like _____ (Name a 1973 male sex symbol).

MATILDA Oh, gosh! Think of those calories!

ADRIAN Now me! (dreamy) I want a fire engine a block long to go into my urethra and up through my body until it fills me up and makes my brains into little pitchforks that pop out of the top of my head and turn into pulsating male members, semen shooting out like all the fountains of Versailles turned on all at once!

MATILDA Oh, dear! What will people think!

ADRIAN The bubble reputation. The mere bubble reputation. (to MATILDA) Now you!

MATILDA Me?

HENRY /

ALICE Yeah! Come on!

MATILDA Okay. (at last joining them, back to back, but still prissy) I want to fly up to a big mountain.

ADRIAN (encouraging her) Go on. You're up there!

MATILDA And on the mountain I want a big, big . . .

ALICE What?

MATILDA Egg.

ADRIAN Egg? Is that it? Is that your fantasy?

MATILDA No, my egg is in a . . . nest.

ADRIAN /

ALICE /

HENRY Yes?

MATILDA And I — Matilda Smith — am sitting on it. On a big egg in a warm nest.

ADRIAN And what do you do, Matilda? What do you do?

MATILDA Do? . . . Why, I sit there. I sit there and sit there, and then one day I go to heaven.

HENRY /

ADRIAN /

ALICE Matilda!

MATILDA It's better than yours!

HENRY They're all just fantasies. They don't hurt anybody, Matilda. Mostly all people do is get up early and go to monotonous jobs and come home to monotonous lives, watching TV and emptying the garbage and hearing airplanes flying high over their heads to some place they're never going to go. A few minutes with the wife or hubby in the sack every now and then before they go to sleep and get up and do it all over again. People get so little out of life! So seldom get anything even remotely close to the deepest, most private, heartfelt yearnings of their souls!

MATILDA (perky) I do!

BLACKOUT

ACT II, SCENE 2

America, 1993

(The table is now set up for a TV talk show, with a desk, a plant or two in evidence, plus a pitcher of water and some drinking glasses, Alice's book, with three chairs arranged in a row for the guests.)

OFFSTAGE

VOICE (pre-recorded) It's "The Henry Middleton Show," with Henry Middleton! Today's guests are socio-therapist Dr. Alice Birdsong, actor Adrian Walpurgis, and special guest Matilda Smith. And now here's Henry!

(Enter HENRY dressed conservatively for 2003, surely in a suit and tie. He nods agreeably to the audience, who should be encouraged to applaud for him.)

HENRY Well, hello there! So glad you could join us! What a wonderful studio audience we have with us today. (Gestures at the audience) So many bright, handsome faces out there! (He applauds for the audience) And what a show we have lined up for you folks! Three terrific guests! Then a little later on Candace will be doing her usual exercises with you. I think she's doing the inner thighs today. Is that right, Candace? (Looks towards the wings, gets a silent confirmation) I'm right! It's inner thighs! And then we'll be doing a little gourmet cooking. Chef Dominick will be here again, showing us all how to make a casserole for eight using just bread crumbs! Sound like fun? Well, hang in there. We'll be right back!

(HENRY drops his “on” persona once the TV camera is off, goes to the table.)

HENRY (to unseen “staff”) That monitor’s not working right. (He adjusts his body microphone) Did I sound all right? This mike seems a little strange today. (He fiddles with it) You sure it’s all right? (Shades his eyes as he talks to offstage or downstage “staff.”) Do you have that PSA ready? We’re going to be tight, I think. (Getting a signal that he is about to go back on the air) All right. I’m ready. (He assumes his “on” persona as he sits at the desk.) Hi, we’re back! My first guest today is Dr. Alice Birdsong, M.D., of Herpes Anonymous, formerly of the Plague Project. Please give a warm welcome to Dr. Birdsong!

(Enter ALICE conservatively dressed. She and HENRY very ostentatiously kiss at the side of each other’s cheeks, no bodily contact. Make it obvious that touching is now out of fashion.)

ALICE (sitting in the chair next to HENRY’s table) It’s so nice to be here again, Henry!

HENRY Well, our listeners enjoyed your last appearance so much they insisted we have you on again. By the way, how is the Plague Project doing?

ALICE Just wonderfully, I hear! They finally have distributed condoms in every prison in the United States.

HENRY They encountered some resistance there, I believe, didn’t they?

ALICE Some people thought that prisoners shouldn’t be up to any hanky-panky, and no doubt they shouldn’t, but boys will be boys! Prisoners were having “experiences” in prison and then having conjugal relations with their wives and not telling them. Without condoms, naturally the plague was spreading like wild-fire, almost as bad as AIDS, which, as you recall, was the plague right before the current one.

HENRY (Makes a “tsk, tsk” sound) And what’s this new project you’re involved in? It sounds fascinating.

ALICE Well, Herpes Anonymous is an outgrowth of my work with the Plague Project. We discovered in working with plague victims that those of us who’d had herpes needed a network so that we could air our fears and concerns, and so just gradually I eased over into herpes counseling.

HENRY Do you yourself still have herpes, Dr. Birdsong?

ALICE I’m happy to report that I visited my personal physician — can I plug Dr. Philbottam? — this morning and he says I have only a few blisters left. He has invented this marvelous new laser. They should be gone by the end of the month. (Shows the laser, which looks like a dildo.)

HENRY (to audience) Isn’t that good news! (encourages the audience to applaud) What a courageous lady we have here. Tell us, Dr. Birdsong, was it difficult admitting you had herpes?

ALICE I was into denial for a long time there, but it's not as hard as people think. I remember my first time at Herpes Anonymous. I was sweating profusely —

HENRY (sexually intrigued) Sweating? How much were you sweating?

ALICE But I just got up in front of that first group and said it out: "I am Alice Birdsong and I have a virus."

HENRY And how did your husband take this?

ALICE Edgar has been a god-send all through this.

HENRY Yes, aren't married partners something! Tell us now. Will sexually transmitted diseases ever be a thing of the past, Dr. Birdsong?

ALICE Well, I'm cautiously optimistic. But I want to stress to your listeners that auto-eroticism is still the safest type of sex we know at this time. And self-pleasuring can be fun too! Don't think of it negatively. People shouldn't be ashamed if they don't have a date or a partner. After all, each of us is ultimately our own best friend.

HENRY I just thank my stars every day that I never got into that wild scene of the old days. My wife and I have become closer ever since we had a little scare a few years ago.

ALICE What scare was that, Henry?

HENRY Well, let's just say it was personal.

ALICE We shouldn't be afraid to discuss the personal. After all, that's what television's for.

HENRY (slightly embarrassed) I know, I know, but I'd rather not say. Doctor, you are such a hoot as a guest. We're talking to Dr. Alice Birdsong of Herpes Anonymous. And we'll be right back. So stay tuned.

(HENRY stays "on" until the camera is off.)

HENRY (to ALICE) I would appreciate it if you didn't bring my private life into this.

ALICE Why not? Last time I was here you mentioned your interest in sweat.

HENRY I did not!

ALICE But, Henry, you did!

HENRY (keeping his voice down) I certainly did not mention any such thing, Alice!

ALICE I sat here and heard you. What are you ashamed of?

HENRY I'm not ashamed. You misunderstood me.

ALICE Well, we could play back the tape and see what you said.

HENRY I don't keep those tapes! History is bunk, as somebody said. It just makes one self-conscious. (Smiles to camera) We're back! And we're talking to Dr. Alice Birdsong of Herpes Anonymous. Are there any new cures of sexually transmitted diseases that we should all know about, doctor?

ALICE Several in the developmental stage. There's a new all-purpose viral vaccine. And a new wonder drug for those who have been celibate for the past few years. It's called Repressofed.

HENRY Repressofed? And what does it do?

ALICE It's for people who have decided to do without sex of any kind in hopes of staying disease free. It relieves headaches, migraines, shoulder pains, backaches, neurasthenia, hysteria, both localized and holistic, depression, and general irritability.

HENRY Is it available without a prescription?

ALICE Not at this time, but we're working on it.

MATILDA (offstage) Not if I can help it!

HENRY (nervous about MATILDA, falsely laughing) That must be one of my other guests waiting back there! So, doctor, what's this I hear about this book you've written. (He holds up her book.)

ALICE Yes, I've been working on *Sex in the New Millennium* for some time.

HENRY (to cameraman) Get a shot of the cover, Bill. (HENRY holds the book so a close shot is possible) What's your book about? Herpes?

ALICE No, it's bigger than herpes! It's a study of the major modalities of sexual expression: pre-sexual, heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual, asexual, post-sexual, and questionable.

HENRY Well, it certainly sounds comprehensive. Do you think the public is ready for this book?

ALICE There was a time when it may not have been, but now I've just signed the contract. My book is going to be turned into a major motion picture starring _____! (Name an unlikely star of the day)

HENRY That's great, Dr. Birdsong.

ALICE Isn't it nice that we're finally expressing our totality? There's even talk that my book may be turned into a TV series and I'm negotiating for two sequels — with, I might add, a handsome advance!

HENRY Well, I can't think of a nicer person to make money from all this, doctor.

ALICE When I think of all the people who've gone before me, fighting sexual taboo and dishonesty, all that suffering and frustration, and unhappiness over the years, why, (with downcast eyes) all I can say is that it makes me positively humble.

HENRY Of course we should probably point out to our listeners that you're a happily married woman, isn't that right, doctor?

ALICE Edgar and I have been together for fifteen years.

HENRY Isn't that something. My wife and I have been together for over twenty.

ALICE Over twenty! That's so healthy of you, Henry.

HENRY We try. That's all I can say.

ALICE I hope all your listeners try too. Of course they'll want to be in a monogamous, loving, and long-term relationship, but I'm sure they'll also want to be informed about the latest wide-ranging findings in sexual research. A well-informed society is a healthy society!

HENRY Well, I want to thank you, doctor, for stopping by today. Your visit has been most enlightening, as always. I hope you'll stay around while we talk to our next guest. Who is none other than the well-known star of motion pictures and the Broadway stage. Won't you welcome, please — Adrian Walpurgis!

(Enter ADRIAN dressed in a masculine style, suitable for a closeted gay man of 2003. He kisses the air beside ALICE'S cheek, as she does the same, ritualistically, then shakes hands in a hearty manner with HENRY before turning and acknowledging the applause of the audience. He sits in the chair ALICE has just vacated. She has moved one chair down the line.)

HENRY (meaning the audience response) They love you, Adrian. Tell me, how do you manage to live with all the adulation you must get? (ADRIAN demurs that he gets any) Oh, come now. You're one of the country's biggest stars. Two Oscars. A Tony award. Several Emmys. Tell the truth now. It must make your head swell up a bit sometimes.

ADRIAN (overly sincere) You know what keeps me from going overboard, Henry? Because I realize I've been incredibly lucky in my career. And I realize it could all be taken from me — like that. (Snaps his fingers) I just consider myself incredibly fortunate to be able to entertain people, because after all isn't that what it's all about — making people incredibly happy?

HENRY Wasn't that well said, folks? (Encourages applause from audience) On top of everything else, Adrian, you're articulate. (with a smile) I hate you, guy!

ADRIAN I hope nobody really hates me. If I have been given talent and looks, I just hope people will let me share these with them. Because that's what truly makes me happy deep down inside.

HENRY I know what you mean. Such a star and such a nice man, too! (More

applause from audience.) How's your lovely wife, Adrian?

ADRIAN (slightly irritated but hiding it) Her name isn't Adrian. Mine is. She couldn't be better.

HENRY (irritated but hiding it) I knew it wasn't Adrian. You're Adrian. How long have you been married now? Several years, isn't it?

ADRIAN Three whole years!

HENRY Isn't that something! You didn't marry for a while there, Adrian. Why was that?

ADRIAN (with big phony smile for the audience) Just couldn't find the right girl.

HENRY But you finally did.

ADRIAN I finally did.

HENRY And where did you two lovebirds meet?

ADRIAN Actually, that's a very funny story. My wife — this was before she was my wife — worked for the studio where I was making a picture. We were introduced by my agent, and we just suddenly looked at each other, and there it was!

HENRY (laughs even though the story isn't that amusing) That is a funny story! Any little Adrians coming along one of these days?

ADRIAN We're working on it! (Laughs like the stud he's pretending to be)

HENRY Tell us if it's true that you're besieged by fan mail. I heard that you get some pretty wild offers from the women out there!

ADRIAN Well, I read every letter I receive, but that's as far as it ever goes. After a hard day making a picture or rehearsing a play, I find all I want to do is spend some time with my wife. Neither of us drinks or does drugs. (Pours himself a drink of water from the available pitcher.) She likes to bake bread and I like to water the lawn, and we just sort of enjoy each other's company.

HENRY Isn't that something, folks. Here is this big star and he likes to do things just like most people. And you can tell sincerity when you see it. That TV camera doesn't lie. But surely, Adrian, there must have been a time in your life when you were a little — shall we say, reckless?

ADRIAN I personally have never found excess necessary. No, I take that back. I did do something bad once.

HENRY Oh?

ADRIAN I confess I once sniffed an illegal substance. But only one.

HENRY Really? What was it?

ADRIAN Coffee.

HENRY (shocked) No!

ADRIAN I'm afraid so. Of course this was before coffee was banned.

HENRY All that caffeine! All that artificial stimulation!

ADRIAN I know it's not pretty. I have to confess I even drank a few cups.

HENRY Oh, that makes me ill! Adrian, how could you?

ADRIAN I know, I know. But now all I drink is water. (He toasts the host and the audience and takes a swallow) God, that's good!

HENRY (pouring himself some water) I'll have some water too. You know what I've discovered this really goes well with? Bread. Just plain white bread. I tell you there's nothing better in the world.

ADRIAN (sincerely) Bread and water! I'll have to try that.

HENRY Do! It's great and it's good for you. We're talking to Adrian Walpurgis. We'll be right back after this brief message.

ADRIAN (*sotto voce*) How's it going?

HENRY Great, great.

ADRIAN Don't forget to mention my new movie.

HENRY I hear it's having some problem with its rating.

ADRIAN We're trimming a few controversial scenes — where I said damn. It should be all right.

HENRY Do you want to go into that?

ADRIAN No, no —

HENRY We're back! And my guest is Adrian Walpurgis. Is it true you have a new movie about to be released, Adrian?

ADRIAN How nice of you to ask about that. Yes, it's my first James Bond role. And I must say it's a terrific movie. Excitement! Exotic locales. Not to mention beautiful women!

HENRY How I envy you, Adrian. Those love scenes with those glamorous gals that you get to play!

ADRIAN Well, what can I say? Just lucky, I guess.

HENRY Can you give us a hint about the story?

ADRIAN I'm afraid I'm sworn to secrecy, Henry. Let's just say it's a story of love and the triumph of the human spirit.

HENRY Sounds terrific. Well, we know you have to be running along, Adrian, a rehearsal or some other —

ADRIAN No, I don't mind staying.

HENRY (momentarily caught out) Well! Isn't that lucky. He can stay.

MATILDA (offstage) What about my turn?

ADRIAN Who's that over there?

HENRY Adrian, I'm sure you won't mind letting our next guest have that chair, will you. You can sit right next to Dr. Birdsong. We'll be right back after these messages!

ADRIAN (off-camera) Do I really have to move?

HENRY Well, I did promise some time to — (Points offstage to MATILDA)

ADRIAN I don't know why you're giving air time to cranks like that.

MATILDA (showing herself a little bit) I'm not a crank, you candy-butt!

ADRIAN (to HENRY) Keep her off here! Keep her off!

ALICE She does have a right to her opinion.

MATILDA I'm coming out there!

ADRIAN Over my dead body.

MATILDA That can be arranged!

HENRY (nervous about the studio audience's reaction, the fight) Now, now, calm down, you two!

MATILDA (appearing part way) Wait till I get out there!

HENRY (escorting her offstage) Madame, not yet!

ADRIAN (standing) All right, I'm leaving. You obviously don't know how to treat a star! (He starts to go, but —)

HENRY (hurrying back to his chair) We're back!

(Surreptitiously waves ADRIAN back to one of the other chairs. ADRIAN reluctantly puts on his public face and sits.)

ALICE (to ADRIAN, patting his arm) It'll be all right. It'll be fine.

HENRY — And now, ladies and gentlemen, it's my extreme pleasure to introduce a woman who's recently been making headlines in every major publication you can think of. Won't you welcome, please, Mrs. Matilda Smith!

(Enter MATILDA, now dressed in an extremely severe style suitable for a prude of 2003 — drab colors, perhaps a knit cap pulled tight over her hair.)

HENRY (starts to kiss to the side of MATILDA'S cheek.)

MATILDA (pulling back exaggeratedly) Don't you touch me! Don't you know bodily fluids are death! No touch!

HENRY I wasn't going to make contact. Honest! Won't you have a seat, please?

MATILDA (inspecting the seat where ADRIAN just sat, sniffing) Maybe. Never know what's been here ahead of you!

ADRIAN Oh, really now! This is — (bites his tongue as ALICE calms him)

HENRY (after MATILDA finally sits) So tell us, Mrs. Smith, about your campaign. You certainly have created quite a storm of interest all across the country.

MATILDA All I want is a disease-free America. That's my message in a nutshell. I just want people to stop it. Just stop it!

HENRY That's what seems unclear about your campaign, Mrs. Smith. Stop what?

MATILDA It's not unclear at all! Whatever you're doing out there, stop it! Promiscuity? Stop it! Extra-marital affairs? Stop it! (looking at ADRIAN) Candy-butt stuff? Stop it! (looking at ALICE) Blisters inside your you know what! Stop it! Just stop it, stop it, stop it!

ALICE But surely, Mrs. Smith, you have compassion for those unfortunate enough to contract some venereal malady.

MATILDA Compassion? They should die! That's what they should do. Die! Pornography? Stop it! Self-abuse? Stop it! All that funny stuff in marriage? Positions here and positions there. Stop it! Stop it, stop it, stop it!

HENRY There has to be some room in your campaign for a little leeway.

MATILDA How do you get a child to stop playing with that electric socket after you've told him and told him? By telling him the principles of electricity? Ha! If you don't want your child dead in your arms — like it could be my little Toby — and you weeping over his little electrocuted body, you will teach him never to touch that socket. Never! Never! Never! Who needs electricity anyhow!

ADRIAN Madame, you're nothing but a censorious old frump!

MATILDA You bet your sweet behind I am! When did this country go wrong? When it got away from its first principles. Don't do it! Don't do it! Don't do it! Cotton Mather knew what he was talking about. And Moses, I might add, had the right idea about moral hygiene. Virginity — both male and female. That's what made this country strong. Children born in wedlock! Now wouldn't that be a novelty!

ALICE But all taboos need to be examined from time to time.

MATILDA There can never be too many taboos! Do you realize that this country hasn't had a new taboo in over two hundred years?

HENRY I didn't realize that.

MATILDA People say I tend to be negative. But I'm here to show everyone that that's all a pack of lies. I'm not just offering old taboos, as good as they are. I'm here with a plan for a whole bunch of brand new taboos!

HENRY Well, this country is always open to new ideas. Would you mind sharing yours with us?

MATILDA Not one little bit. (significantly) Lips!

HENRY I beg your pardon?

MATILDA Using the lips for sensations.

HENRY You mean kissing?

MATILDA I mean a whole lot more than that!

HENRY Would you be a little more explicit?

MATILDA Are children listening to this program? I wouldn't want them to learn about lips.

HENRY Perhaps you can word what you have to say very carefully.

MATILDA I always word what I say very carefully! I just don't want any youngsters out there picking up ideas. Most children don't even know they have lips until some perverted adult starts making all these smacking noises. That's how it starts! But once my new taboo is introduced no lips will be used in public – nor in private eventually. Never again will a young child face the temptation of those sensitive areas around his oral cavity. In time, the lips of all but the most incorrigible will wither away from lack of use.

ADRIAN But how will we eat?

MATILDA It's just like your kind to bring up stuff like that!

ADRIAN But what's the answer?

MATILDA Answers, huh? Let me tell you something. We've had enough answers in recent years!

HENRY Will this no-lip state be a good thing for America?

MATILDA A great thing! One less area to become infected. Infected — do you know the meaning of that word, Mr. Middleton! Do you have any idea of the number of people carrying germs from their bodies to the bodies of other people! (She pours some water from the pitcher over her hands, washing them furiously) I tried to wash my hands of the whole business a few years ago, but then I realized that I couldn't hide my head in the sand any longer. (Maniacally) Somebody — somebody needed to get out here and bring people to their senses about filth. Somebody had to restore some basic hygiene! (The three others quake at her intensity.) Unclean! Unclean! Rid yourselves — rid yourselves of your bacteria!

(MATILDA splashes water at the others, who duck.)

ADRIAN Hey! Watch it!

MATILDA Best thing that ever happened to you, fluff-butt!

HENRY Do you have any other new taboos, Mrs. Smith?

MATILDA I'm working on several. My latest is about . . . nostrils.

HENRY Nostrils?

MATILDA Those little holes in people's faces.

HENRY Yes, I know what they are. What did you have in mind for them? (to "staff") Can we say nostrils on the air? We can? (to MATILDA) You were saying?

MATILDA Mr. Middleton, have you ever looked inside one of those things?

HENRY No, I can't say that I have.

MATILDA (to ADRIAN and ALICE) Have you two?

ADRIAN /
ALICE (shake their heads no in response) No . . .

MATILDA I'll just bet you haven't! Do you have any idea, any idea at all, how much filth is in your typical nostril? And what are most people doing about it? Not a thing! They just carry that filth around with them, and they even breathe through it. Can you imagine — taking God's good, clean air and dragging it through those slimy, moist caverns. It's enough to make me hold my head over the side of this earth and vomit.

HENRY And what do you propose to do about the nostril problem?

MATILDA Do? I've already done it! (She pulls nose clips out of her purse) These!

HENRY What are they?

MATILDA Nose clips. Put 'em on. Come on, come on! Everybody!

(She throws some at the audience, helps the other characters clamp their noses closed.)

HENRY (talking as though he has a cold with his nose pinched shut) Do you really think these are the answer?

MATILDA I always thought pornography was the worst, but *this* is the real smut! (She clips one on her own nose) Don't you feel cleaner already?

ALICE (in funny voice) But I can't breathe this way.

MATILDA (in funny voice) Breathe through your mouth, the way God intended, but don't use your lips!

(They all try breathing through their mouths, not using their lips.)

ADRIAN (in funny voice) But aren't there, my dear woman, microbes in the human mouth as well?

MATILDA (in funny voice) We're working on that! I have almost completed an antiseptic that will scald and purify the inside of the mouth and render it totally free of anything that even looks like a microbe!

ADRIAN (in funny voice) I don't think this is going to work.

MATILDA Naturally you wouldn't! I saw you using your lips there. I bet you're all for nose rights, aren't you! (about his nose) Sticking that thing out there with all those vile, vile creep-crawlies inside it trying to get out and get into other people's noses. Into my nose! I know what you'd all like to do to my nose!

HENRY (trying to calm her) Mrs. Smith.

MATILDA (not calmed) I know!

HENRY Mrs. Smith.

MATILDA See no evil. Hear no evil. Speak no evil. And now — at last — smell no evil!

HENRY Mrs. Smith, do you really think that's possible?

MATILDA Anything is possible if you just put the human mind to it! That's what makes us a great race!

ALICE I think you're a crackpot.

MATILDA What did you just say?

ALICE I said you're a crackpot.

MATILDA And you, missy, are the very type of person who has caused the death of innumerable human beings from horrible diseases, diseases that could have been avoided if only people had listened to crackpots like me!

ALICE People need information, not all this — this —

MATILDA Yeah, tell ‘em what they want to hear. The other stuff doesn’t work. Why don’t you face it? Monogamy, commitment, fidelity — they work!

ALICE But sex is more than hygiene. You’ve got to consider male and female physical and psychological differences and the stresses that occur in overly couple-oriented relationships —

MATILDA That’s too complicated!

ALICE — and the fact that people need different things as they grow and change —

MATILDA Who cares what they need! What does society need? Clean bodies, that’s what. Morals, after all, are morals!

ALICE You’re just like Procrustes, cutting off people’s legs and lips and god knows what else to make them fit.

MATILDA Sounds like he had the right idea to me.

ADRIAN This woman is dangerous!

MATILDA I’m dangerous? You don’t see me putting candy in my butt, do you!

ADRIAN I do not put candy in my butt!

MATILDA You can make fun of me all you like. But you all know I’m right! Admit it! Admit it!

HENRY (fearing he’s losing control of the show) What does the studio audience think about all this? Does Mrs. Smith have a point or doesn’t she? What a lively show, isn’t it? Well, thank you for stopping by, Mrs. Matilda Smith. You —

MATILDA You’re not getting rid of me that easy.

HENRY But the show is almost over.

MATILDA You think you can just shut me up after you’ve had your fun with me. You have me come on and expose myself, and then you think I’ll just leave. Well, I have a few more choice things to say.

ADRIAN We’ve heard enough already.

MATILDA (standing) Ladies and gentlemen of the studio audience, ladies and gentlemen of the viewing audience, I have a public service announcement to make.

HENRY Hey, just a minute now —

MATILDA Naturally you don't want me to say any more, because you know what I'm going to say.

HENRY No, I don't.

MATILDA All three of you know in your hearts.

ALICE Know what?

MATILDA What you've done.

ADRIAN What we've done?

MATILDA (going behind the chairs of the three and pointing at them, one by one and collectively) I have incontrovertible proof that you are all practicing members of a Satanic anti-health cult.

HENRY A what?

MATILDA A cult of devil-worshipping child molesters!

ALICE That's nonsense.

MATILDA (pulls a tape out of her purse) I have the testimony of the children themselves. Two, three, and four year olds, and they name all three of you. You, Alice Birdsong, fondled in places where no decent woman fondles! You called it comforting the little children, I suppose, in whatever vicious lie it was you told yourself. But what you did was unspeakable — and thus we will not speak of it!

ALICE But —

MATILDA Let's just say it involved lips! Do you deny that you touched your lips to these little children, some of them not old enough to walk yet!

ALICE Well, I may have upon occasion —

MATILDA It's all on the tape! You don't have to sicken the audience here with the details about your use of lips! Your day in court will come! And as for you, Adrian Superstar, your name comes up again and again on this tape. Do you deny it?

ADRIAN But a mere accusation doesn't mean anything —

MATILDA Are you accusing these innocent little children, many of them orphans, many of them autistic and ethnic, of not telling the truth? Did you or did you not making an appearance at several schools for toddlers?

ADRIAN Yes. But —

MATILDA Ostensibly to entertain them at Christmas time, like the wholesome hypocrite you

pretend to be. Yet in reality to take advantage of their precious little mucus membranes by breathing on them!

HENRY Careful of the language now!

MATILDA And you, Mr. Henry Middleton, talk show host and general, all-around nice guy, well, your days of fooling the public are over. Your name came up four times as often as these other two's!

HENRY Well, that's because I'm on television all the time. Kids hear my name.

MATILDA A likely story! Tell it to the Marines.

HENRY Oh, my god, what are you doing to me!

MATILDA This man is the leader of this cult. He has tied little children to their playpens and had his way with them. He's threatened to mutilate their teddy bears and their puppies if they said anything about his atrocities. (Holds up tape) It's all right here in black and white! And if all that wasn't enough, this man, this so-called pillar of the community, this man with influence over the minds of millions, in broad daylight made these little children sit in front of him and go to the potty! And then you know what else he did — he sniffed them! He is a known potty-sniffer!

HENRY (holding his head, overcome, not because it's true, but because of the awfulness of the charges, groaning) Oh — oh . . .

MATILDA You see, he doesn't even deny it! And I haven't even gotten to the sweat part yet!

HENRY How can I deny something that's so — so . . .

MATILDA You'll pay for what you've done. You'll pay dearly. Goodbye, Mr. Talk Show Host! (to ALICE) Goodbye Ms.-Dr. Socio-Therapist! (to ADRIAN) Goodbye, Mr. Big-Time Movie Star! Goodbye to all of you. Your days in the spotlight are over! Over! For now the world knows you for what you really and truly are! The bubble reputation at last has burst!

(ADRIAN, ALICE, and HENRY are speechless, benumbed, in shock, embarrassed, even though none of what she has accused them of is true.)

MATILDA (madly, to camera) AND NOW THESE FEW BRIEF MESSAGES!

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS UP

EPILOGUE

(In full view of the audience, ADRIAN, MATILDA, ALICE, and HENRY gather some of the props and partial costumes (not all of them) from the previous scenes, using the table and chairs as necessary. They are to run through the major parts of the play with the same blocking and business as earlier, only now at breakneck speed.)

ADRIAN /
MATILDA /
ALICE /
HENRY (announcing together) The Epilogue!

ADRIAN (in 1893 style) Oh, by the way, did you hear about Alice Louise?

MATILDA I always prefer to hear something charming about people.

ADRIAN I'm not the marrying type.

MATILDA Marriage is always good for a person.

ADRIAN Inadvertently of course.

MATILDA (shocked about ALICE) No!

ADRIAN Yes!

ADRIAN Without her chemise.

MATILDA I shall never speak to her again.

ALICE (entering) Called away where, dear?

MATILDA Alice Louise!

ALICE There's a blush in your cheek.

ADRIAN Matilda Marie has had a terrible shock.

(ADRIAN and ALICE exchange frigid cheek kisses.)

Let's just say it's someone you know, Alice Louise, but someone you don't know very well.

ALICE Well, out with it!

ADRIAN The bubble reputation, as Mr. Shakespeare put it.

MATILDA He makes me feel like such a censorious old frump. Morals, after all, are morals!

ALICE Is he the friend you meant to drop, Matilda Marie?

HENRY (after entering) Is it morals we're discussing today?

ADRIAN Sordid.

HENRY Nothing like exercise for young bodies.

MATILDA But not the wrong sort, naturally.

HENRY Withdraw my membership? (bows, leaves)

MATILDA A good woman never forgets her chemise! I am with child!

ALICE I'll destroy you both. (Exits)

ADRIAN You are nothing but a dreary, ordinary little woman.

MATILDA Adrian, you are vile, vile!

ADRIAN Matilda the Hun! (Exits)

MATILDA (Offering tea, apple butter) You just take apples and crush them.

HENRY (now in 1953 style) America's future!

ALICE (with coffee and donuts) How do you like my donuts?

HENRY Nice blouse, Alice.

ALICE I'd never dress like that.

ADRIAN (entering hurriedly) Bring in the first witness!

HENRY How's the little woman?

ALICE Ed and I got a lazy susan last month!

ADRIAN How did your check-up go?

ALICE Oh, Adrian, you are such a corker!

HENRY American history is waiting!

MATILDA (entering) "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America."

ADRIAN Vienna, Austria six years ago, in 1947?

MATILDA All we did was ride on that big ferris wheel.

ADRIAN *Mit schlag!*

MATILDA We've always voted properly!

ADRIAN Were you or were you not a member?

MATILDA So Al and I got a pink flamingo and a little stone elf.

ADRIAN I have no more questions at this time.

ALICE Have you ever had espresso coffee?

MATILDA No, just normal coffee. . . . Don't mind if I do.

(They get her coffee.)

ALICE Are you aware that there are known homosexuals in the United States government?

MATILDA What are homosexuals?

HENRY Have you ever done anything unfeminine?

MATILDA Oh, heavens no!

HENRY You may be excused.

ALICE (taking witness chair) I resent this questioning.

HENRY You admit to being a divorced woman?

ALICE It wasn't a good marriage.

MATILDA A total breakdown of the family and society!

(ALICE and MATILDA fight, pull hair.)

HENRY Ladies! Ladies, please!

MATILDA You're letting everybody off!

ADRIAN Suspicious facts?

ALICE Just who was or is this Sonny Lewiston?

ADRIAN I have venetian blinds!

HENRY Let's clear it up.

MATILDA Ah, denial. Now we're getting somewhere!

ADRIAN I swear on my mother's grave and all that I hold sacred that I wasn't one of those! (Sobs)

HENRY Well, Adrian, what have you got to say for yourself?

HENRY /

ALICE /

MATILDA Oh, no! Not that!

ADRIAN (jumping up, now in 1973 style) Out of the closets now! Not tomorrow — now!

ALICE I ask you, whose body is it anyway?

ADRIAN You want a joint?

ALICE Hey, now you're talking!

MATILDA (sniffs suspiciously)

ADRIAN But then I realized I was just living in a convention I'd never made.

HENRY Here! (Presents package for them to sniff)

MATILDA You all ought to be locked up!

ADRIAN Isn't this great? Booze and a joint.

ALICE I'm chained to the future!

MATILDA I'm going to faint! I'm pregnant! I'm going to faint! (Faints)

ALICE I've always wanted a vibrator.

ADRIAN I want to have an orgasm on Mt. Rushmore.

ALICE Though I like men.

MATILDA To think I've come this far — a temporary lesbian!

ADRIAN This isn't just some novelty in my life! This is my life.

MATILDA From now on, we are separatists!

ALICE The world has barely heard our message.

HENRY Can't we be friends?

MATILDA Don't make me laugh!

HENRY (sniffing poppers) Ooo! That's olfactory!

ALICE (sniffing) A good year!

(They feel each other up, nibble, and stroke.)

HENRY Feel my underwear!

MATILDA I don't think fantasies are good for you.

ALICE _____ (Name same 1973 male sex symbol)

ADRIAN The bubble reputation.

MATILDA On a big egg in a warm nest.

HENRY People get so little out of life!

HENRY (now in 2003 style) Please give a warm welcome to Dr. Birdsong!

(ALICE enters; they kiss elaborately at the side of each other's cheeks, no bodily contact.)

ALICE Which, as you recall, was the plague right before the current one.

HENRY Do you yourself still have herpes, Dr. Birdsong?

ALICE And he says I have only a few blisters left. (Shows laser dildo)

HENRY What a courageous lady we have here.

ALICE After all, each of us is ultimately our own best friend.

HENRY Let's just say it was personal. We'll be right back.

ALICE We could play the tape.

HENRY History is bunk. We're back!

ALICE A new wonder drug.

HENRY (holding up ALICE's book) The cover, Bill.

ALICE Into a major motion picture!

HENRY A happily married woman, isn't that right, doctor?

ALICE Monogamous, loving, and long-term.

HENRY Adrian Walpurgis!

(ADRIAN enters, kisses the air next to ALICE, shakes hands with HENRY, sits)

ADRIAN And I realize it could all be taken from me — like that. (Snaps fingers)

HENRY Such a star and such a nice man, too!

ADRIAN Just couldn't find the right girl.

HENRY But you finally did.

ADRIAN We're working on it!

HENRY (about sniffing coffee) No!

ADRIAN Of course this was before coffee was banned.

HENRY (pouring himself some water) I'll have some of that.

ADRIAN (approvingly) Bread and water!

HENRY We'll be right back after this brief message.

ADRIAN Let's just say it's a story of love and the triumph of the human spirit.

MATILDA (offstage) What about my turn?

HENRY We'll be right back after these messages!

ALICE patting ADRIAN's arm) It'll be all right.

HENRY Won't you welcome, please, Mrs. Matilda Smith!

(Enter MATILDA.)

MATILDA (sniffing seat)

ADRIAN Oh, really now!

MATILDA That's my message in a nutshell.

ADRIAN Nothing but a censorious old frump!

MATILDA That's what made this country strong.

ALICE But all taboos need to be examined from time to time.

MATILDA Lips! Do you realize that this country hasn't had a new taboo in over two hundred years?

ADRIAN But how will we eat?

MATILDA Somebody has to restore basic hygiene!

(MATILDA splashes water at the others.)

MATILDA Do you have any idea how much filth is in your typical nostril?

(MATILDA hands out her nose clips, throws some at the audience.)

HENRY (in funny voice) Do you really think these are the answer?

MATILDA Anything is possible if you just put the human mind to it!

ALICE I think you're a crackpot.

MATILDA Monogamy, commitment, fidelity — they work!

ALICE But sex is more than hygiene.

MATILDA A Satanic cult of devil-worshipping child molesters!

ADRIAN But a mere accusation —

MATILDA (holding up the tape) It's right here in black and white!

HENRY (holding his head, groaning) How can I deny something that's so — so . . .

MATILDA A potty sniffer!

(Now they slow to normal speed for these projections into the future. The discrepancy between what occurs here and what obviously does not exist in the world should be the dominant color of the scene — a poignant one, no doubt.)

(ALICE brings in a large ornamental loving cup with at least two handles and throws confetti, has a noisemaker.)

ALICE Happy New Year! Happy Two thousand and ninety-three, everybody! Happy New Year! (Holds up a sign with: 2093)

HENRY (joining her, with confetti and noisemaker) Happy New Year, Alice!

ALICE Henry! Good old Henry. I haven't seen you for ages. How are you?

HENRY Couldn't be better. I've opened another exercise studio. I am getting so rich I can't believe it!

ALICE You have finally learned to make sweat pay!

HENRY What can I say. How about you? What's new in your life? Still sassy?

ALICE I'm making loving cups now. (Shows hers) Handmade, just a few at a time.

HENRY I heard about those! Don't you have some special new beverage that comes with it?

ALICE (offers the cup) Have you tried it?

HENRY (taking the cup) What do you call this?

ALICE I was thinking about calling it "Kindness." What do you think? Too corny?

HENRY A cup of Kindness! I like it. (taking a sip) It's nice.

ADRIAN (entering in Pope garb) May I have some?

ALICE Of course. (recognizing him belatedly) Adrian, is that you? You look wonderful! So theatrical!

ADRIAN (sipping from the cup, modestly) Perhaps you've heard. I'm the Pope now. My lover's Assistant Pope.

HENRY /
ALICE Congratulations! Wonderful!

ADRIAN Yeah, it's been a long time coming.

(Enter MATILDA. The other three start to cringe.)

ADRIAN /
ALICE/
HENRY Oh, no!

MATILDA Do you recognize me?

ALICE /
ADRIAN /
HENRY (resigned to her ways) We do.

MATILDA What's that stuff you're drinking?

ALICE Something new. Very rare. It's germ-free, by the way.

MATILDA (after a bit of a struggle) . . . Do you mind if I have a sip?

ALICE You actually want to?

MATILDA I've never tried a loving cup before. May I?

(ALICE, ADRIAN, and HENRY look at each other, surprised.)

ALICE Sure.

(Hands it to MATILDA cautiously) (ALICE, ADRIAN, and HENRY watch her, very curious about the result.)

(MATILDA takes a long sip from the cup, runs her tongue over her lips, testing the taste.)

(A beat while everyone wonders what she'll say.)

MATILDA You know, that stuff's not . . . half bad. (She smiles warmly, for the first time in the play, toasting them quietly) To your health!

(The others smile in return and then come together and pass the loving cup from one to the other, taking sips and toasting each other.)

ADRIAN Wouldn't it be nice if this were really happening?

ALICE Wouldn't it.

HENRY Ah, yes, wouldn't it.

MATILDA It's not happening?

(The other three shake their heads.)

ALICE Just a dream, an interlude. We'll return to what we were.

HENRY What we . . .

ADRIAN . . . Are.

MATILDA No, I want to change!

(They smile at her, shake their heads.)

ADRIAN See you soon, everybody.

ALICE /

HENRY See you.

(ADRIAN, HENRY, and ALICE wave and go their separate ways.)

MATILDA Wait! I don't want to be myself anymore. Wait! (They don't wait. MATILDA looks at the audience sadly.) (the No's rise in intensity) No! . . . NOOOOOOOOOO! (The last word is a cry from the heart that she doesn't want to be born again as herself.)

BLACKOUT

THE END

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