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# Out of Sterno

by Deborah Zoe Laufer

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL  
FRENCH**

FOUNDED 1830

NEW YORK HOLLYWOOD LONDON TORONTO

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 Anita Stewart, Executive & Artistic Director  
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 Originally developed by CHERRY LANE THEATRE,  
 Angela Fiordellisi, Artistic Director

***OUT OF STERNO*** received its world premiere production at the Portland Stage Company (Anita Stewart, Executive & Artistic Director; Camilla Barrantes, Managing Director) in Portland, Maine on March 6, 2009. It was directed by Casey Stangl; the set design was by Anita Stewart; the costume design was by Chris Rumery; the lighting design was by Bryon Winn; the sound design was by Stephen Swift; and the production stage manager was Myles C. Hatch. The Cast was as follows:

DOTTY . . . . . Janice O’Rourke  
ZENA . . . . . Patricia Buckley  
DAN . . . . . Phillip Taratula  
HAMEL . . . . . Torsten Hillhouse

## CHARACTERS

**DOTTY** - 23. Childlike and loving and hopeful, bursting with intense enthusiasm for everything. She refuses to think ill of anyone.

**HAMEL** - 30s-40s. Dotty's thuggish husband. Very very very not smart. Loves his wife needs her for everything, but is prey to other urges. Much more stupefied than angry or threatening.

**ZENA** - 30s-40s The proprietress of Zena's Beauty Emporium. Miss Tri-boro Area for two years running. Tough as nails.

**DAN** - Magically transforms himself into every other character in the play, including:

**DELIVERY MAN**

**TAXI DRIVER**

**WAITER**

**MRS. CUTHBERT**

**MRS. PEABODY**

**BARB**

**SALLIE MAE**

**MAN ON THE BUS**

## PLACE

The play takes place in various locations in Sterno, a small town somewhere in America.

## TIME

The time is now.

Each location can be defined by one or two key elements which should wheel in or fly out as if by magic – the kitchen table, the Emporium sign, the cosmetics table. At the opening, the tone of the play is very bright and presentational. *PeeWee's Playhouse* meets *A Doll's House* meets *Alice in Wonderland*. As Dotty ventures further from her confines, the tone get darker and more realistic.

*To my parents, who told me all the right things.*

*With special thanks to Marsha Norman, Chris Durang and The Cherry  
Lane Alternative.*

## ACT I

*(DOTTY's kitchen table. It's a mess. Paints and clay and odd papier-mache sculptures are mixed in with pots and pans and food remains.*

*Crude but vibrant paintings and collages cover the walls. They are pictures of items we see in the kitchen itself – the table, a chair, the refrigerator.*

*There is a television set with a VCR facing the audience far downstage.*

*A clock tower chimes six times.*

*We hear DOTTY from offstage.)*

**DOTTY.** Holy Moly!

*(She rushes in covered from head to toe in paint and clay and sparkles. Her hair is up but spilling down.*

*She carries a big lump of chopped meat. Clears a space at the table with her elbows, wipes her hands on her house dress, and begins to make patties.)*

*(to the audience)*

Six o'clock! And I haven't even started Hamel's dinner!

*(She forms a lovely circular patty, then with her finger punches out two eyes, a nose, and a mouth and holds it up to show the audience.)*

Like my Mama always said, "Doesn't cost any extra to make things beautiful!"

*(She places the patty gingerly in a frying pan.)*

Hamel's a dreamboat.

*(She pulls a photo out of her pocket.)*

This is him.

*(She kisses the photo, then brings it down to the audience and hands it to someone in the first row.)*

You can pass that around. He'll be here soon, so don't worry if it doesn't get to you in the back.

*(Back to her patty-making.)*

First time I laid eyes on Hamel, I passed right out. He's got that kind of charisma. I was sixteen. He moved to our town from someplace else. No one had ever done that before so there was a lot of commotion. Every time I heard about him, I could feel my ears get hot.

Then June 3rd, 2:30 p.m., I was at Joyner's store getting myself a chocolate Yoohoo and in walks Hamel. He looks me over, does this *(click click)* with the side of his teeth and says, "Hey, kid."

Well. When I came to, I see Hamel standing over me. He goes –

*(She whistles.)*

"What a nut!"

And my life has never been the same since!

Here. I have a reenactment.

*(She goes to the TV, turns it on, presses "play" on the VCR. As it is starting:)*

This TV doesn't get channels, so I watch this a lot. The actors don't really capture the magic, but this is basically the way it happened.

*(The picture comes up and we see the scene played out with community theater-type actors. When it is done, DOTTY turns it off and rewinds the tape.)*

And a week later we were married!

Now we live in Sterno, which is a huge huge city, and Hamel works at the Mobil oil station, and we're so much in love! It's like a fairytale, it really is.

I don't exactly know anyone here, yet. Hamel doesn't much like for me to talk with other people. He's so crazy about me he wants me all to himself! I love that.

I bet it took a while for my mama to get used to never seeing or talking to me but like she always said, "Make your man the center of your world and you'll never get lost."

I haven't actually ever even left this apartment! Not since we moved in seven years ago.

*(Reacting to the audience.)*

No, no – that's a-ok with me. This is just about the greatest place on earth! All this and at six fifteen sharp, Hamel himself.

*(Looks at a kitchen clock.)*

Four minutes to Hamel time! So any of you ladies who are prone to fainting, get out your smelling salts!

*(The phone rings. DOTTY, perplexed, no longer recognizes the sound. It rings again. She hastily searches through the rubble for it.)*

Goodness, who could that be?

*(She answers the phone. We can hear ZENA's conversation as well. ZENA has a thick husky Bronx accent. She sounds like she could snap your neck with a look.)*

Hello?

**ZENA.** Gimme Hamel.

**DOTTY.** Oh, he should be here in three more minutes. Would you care to leave a message?

*(She stands poised with a pen.)*

**ZENA.** You tell him, get your ass to Jimmy's by six-thirty sharp. Zena waits for nobody.

**DOTTY.** *(taking it down)* Get your a...

*(Her pen doesn't work. Looking around madly)*

Oh fiddlesticks! My pen just gave out. Goodness, I've got paints and such everywhere, but when I want to find a pen...

**ZENA.** Six thirty sharp or he can go fuck himself.

*(She hangs up.)*

**DOTTY.** Hello? Hello? Hmmm. Well, that certainly sounded important! Can you remember what she said her name was? Zenith? Such an exotic name! Hamel meets the most interesting people.

*(The doorbell rings. Again, DOTTY is stymied. It rings again.)*

What an exciting day I'm having. Excuse me, won't you?

*(She goes to the door. DAN is there as a delivery guy.)*

**DAN.** Delivery for Mr. Hamel Burr.

**DOTTY.** Goodness! That's my husband.

*(proudly, with a wink to the audience)*

I'm Dotty. His wife.

**DAN.** Here you are, Ma'am.

*(hands her a long box)*

We're not supposed to snoop, but it sure smells like flowers!

**DOTTY.** Flowers! My!

**DAN.** Sign right here, Ma'am.

**DOTTY.** Why certainly.

*(to the audience)*

Ummm...do you have a pen?

**DAN.** Sure do, Ma'am. Comes with the job.

**DOTTY.** Thanks!

*(She signs and takes the package.)*

**DAN.** Bye, Ma'am. Someone sure must love you!

*(He leaves.)*

*(DOTTY opens the box. It's a dozen long-stemmed roses.)*

**DOTTY.** Oh my goodness good gracious me! Didn't I tell you? I'm the luckiest girl in the whole United States of America!

*(We hear footsteps down the hall.)*

Do you hear footsteps??? I hear footsteps!!! He's coming! It's Hamel! He'll be here any second!

*(HAMEL enters hurriedly. He is removing a greasy service station uniform as he enters. As he passes through the room and out to the bedroom!)*

**HAMEL.** Hey, Kid. *(click click)*  
*(He exits.)*

**DOTTY.** That was him!!! That was Hamel!!! Isn't he a dream-boat? Did you get a whiff of motor oil as he passed through? Makes me dizzy!

**HAMEL.** Hey, Kid! Dotty! Where's my magenta shirt? The shiny one.

**DOTTY.** Do you hear the way he talks? Magenta. Just being in his presence I'm soaking up so much culture and nuance.

**HAMEL.** Where the fuck is it?

**DOTTY.** Did you try the closet, Dear?

**HAMEL.** Hey, where's my Old Spice?

**DOTTY.** He's going to wear his men's perfume! Wait till you smell him. Oh boy. It's on the dresser, Dear.

**HAMEL.** Huh.

**DOTTY.** Goodness! I almost forgot! You got a telephone call!

**HAMEL.** Huh?

**DOTTY.** A Zenith I believe she said. Sounded very important.

**HAMEL.** Oh, shit. What she say?

**DOTTY.** Well, my pen ran out so I didn't get it all down, but I think it had something to do with the time, and with you making sure that...

*(HAMEL comes racing out. He is wearing his magenta shirt, very tight leather pants, cowboy boots and his hair slicked back.)*

**HAMEL.** Gotta go. Bye kid.

**DOTTY.** Go?

**HAMEL.** *(He tosses his uniform at DOTTY as he passes.)* Wash this, will ya?

**DOTTY.** Why certainly. Hamel! You look so...

HAMEL. Yeah. I got a...an important...business meetin'.

DOTTY. A business meeting? At this hour?

HAMEL. ...dinner. A business...meal! See ya kid.

DOTTY. But, Hamel.

HAMEL. Don't leave the apartment!

DOTTY. Hamel...

HAMEL. Like my Papa always said, "*Don't leave the apartment.*"

*(click click)* Bye, Kid.

DOTTY. Hamel, these flowers came and I...

HAMEL. Oh, shit! Right! The flowers.

*(He grabs them on his way out.)*

Thanks, Kid. See ya later. Don't wait up.

*Don't leave the apartment.*

*(He exits.)*

DOTTY. A business meal. My goodness. Sounds very important.

*(She thinks about this. Works just a bit harder to be positive.)*

Hamel is so career minded and motivated! He's probably off meeting someone very prominent in the... service station industry. My Hamel won't be pumping gas forever! You mark my...

*(As she frets anxiously with the uniform a picture falls out of the pocket.)*

Heavens!

*(She picks it up and stares at it.)*

A girly picture. A nude girly picture in Hamel's pocket! How in the world could that have...

*(She thinks about it a moment, recovers nicely.)*

Those guys at the filling station! Such kidders! I bet Hamel didn't even know this was in there. We'll have a good chuckle over this when he gets home, I don't mind telling you!

*(She has a good chuckle. Then happens to turn it over and read the back.)*

Zena's Beauty Emporium. Wasn't that the name of the young lady who called here earlier? What an odd coincidence...

*(brightly)* Guess I better get to the wash! Down in the basement they have three machines, can you imagine?

*(The doorbell rings.)*

Now, who could that be?

Who is it?

**DAN.** Taxi.

**DOTTY.** Taxi?

*(She shrugs to the audience, opens the door and it is DAN, now dressed as a TAXI DRIVER. Different voice, maybe Slavic. Maybe a moustache.)*

**DAN.** Here am I to pick up Mr. Hamel Burr. For destination being Jimmy's Hideaway.

**DOTTY.** *(to audience)* Wasn't that the name of the place Zenith mentioned?

*(to DAN)* Hamel already left. But he was going to a business meal.

**DAN.** Ah, yes. I see this so often in my line of work.

**DOTTY.** What?

**DAN.** The man, the husband, he says he is going to business meal. Did he bring with him the red roses?

**DOTTY.** Yes, he did!

**DAN.** Did he wear tight pants and magenta shirt?

**DOTTY.** Why yes! That's amazing.

**DAN.** Cowboy boots.

**DOTTY.** Right!

**DAN.** Ah. This is too bad. Oh well, you are young. No babies yet, yes?

**DOTTY.** Yes. I mean, no. Of course, I'm hoping.

*(to audience)*

I love children, don't you?

**DAN.** Well. It is good you wait. The next husband, no?

**DOTTY.** The next...

**DAN.** So we go, yes?

**DOTTY.** No! I'm really sorry for your trouble. I would pay you, but I don't have any money...

*(A twenty dollar bill floats to the floor.)*

Golly!

**DAN.** *(taking the twenty)* Thank you very much. So we go see husband. What he is doing, no?

**DOTTY.** I don't want to see. I mean, there's nothing to see.

**DAN.** Then you go see nothing. We have good laugh.

**DOTTY.** I don't want to laugh. I want to stay here. It's a little slice of heaven on earth and I want to stay here forever and ever. I think you should go away now.

*(to audience)*

I think he should go away.

**DAN.** Maybe you are right. Maybe it is just meal. After all, it is not like you find nude girly picture in pocket, right?

**DOTTY.** Oh dear.

**DAN.** You have maybe big hat? Trench coat? Sunglasses?

**DOTTY.** I'm not supposed to leave the apartment. I've never...

**DAN.** You change. I wait.

*(DOTTY thinks for a moment. Looks to the audience.*

*LIGHT SHIFT.*

*Tango music. Lights up on a table at Jimmy's Hideaway. The lights are seductive. There is smoke in the air.*

**HAMEL** and **ZENA** are having a heated argument which we can see but not hear. **ZENA** wears a hat, trench coat and sunglasses. She looks sexy and mysterious.

**DOTTY** enters in a hat, trench coat and sunglasses. They are far too big and she looks like a mushroom.

**DAN**, now as a waiter with attitude, approaches her.)

**DAN.** Table?

**DOTTY.** No. Thank you. I'm just looking.

**DAN.** There's no just looking.

*(A chair appears out of the darkness and DOTTY plops into it.)*

I'll give you a moment to decide.

*(He disappears. The tango music swells. ZENA and HAMEL's fight becomes more ferocious. They rise from their chairs, gesturing madly at each other.)*

**DOTTY.** *(to audience)* This is a very intense business meal! Hamel is so passionate about his work! Well, I guess I can go now.

*(As she rises to go, ZENA slaps HAMEL across the face hard, three times.)*

Heavens!

*(ZENA is about to stalk off when, tango style, HAMEL grabs her hand, twirls her around several times and throws her back into a deep dip. He holds her there for a long moment. She slaps him one more time, and then they passionately kiss.)*

Oh dear.

*(A wave of nausea hits her.)*

I think I'm going to be sick!

*(LIGHT SHIFT)*

*(DOTTY's apartment, the next evening.)*

**DOTTY.** I'm so confused about last night. Was that really Hamel? It was so dark. And what was the name of the lady who called? It's all jumbled in my head now. The one thing I feel certain of is that there's an excellent explanation for all of this, and all my Hamel needs is the opportunity to explain. Like my Mama always said, "There's nothing so horrible it can't be explained away!" I'll be tough, but fair. I'll say...

*(Dream music plays. HAMEL enters in his uniform.)*

Hamel, are you aware that you never came home last night?

**HAMEL.** I didn't?

**DOTTY.** Are you aware that there are nude girly pictures in your uniform pocket?

HAMEL. Those guys at the station!

DOTTY. Are you aware that your business meal at Jimmy's took on a very unbusinesslike tone?

HAMEL. Dotty, Honey. Let me explain.

DOTTY. Yes?

HAMEL. It was just someone who looked like me!

DOTTY. Really?

HAMEL. We were just rehearsing a play!

DOTTY. Really?

HAMEL. It was the lighting, you were hallucinating, it was a dream, it was my evil twin, you didn't really see what you thought you were seeing at all!

DOTTY. *(to the audience)* I knew there had to be a good explanation.

HAMEL. May I kiss you, my darling?

DOTTY. Put on the magenta shirt and then I will be kissed.

*(He runs off.)*

HAMEL *enters from the other side.*)

HAMEL. Hey, Kid. *(click, click)*

*(He walks through, hardly giving her a nod.)*

DOTTY. Hamel...Where have you...

HAMEL. *(from offstage)* Got a business meal.

DOTTY. *(gathering her resolve)* Listen. Hamel. Are you aware that...

HAMEL. Hey, kid. Where'd you put my turquoise shirt?

DOTTY. *(to the audience)* Not the turquoise shirt!

HAMEL. Where the fuck is it?

DOTTY. The second drawer. Hamel, last night, I looked in your pocket and...When the roses came I thought... And then this phone call from a....

*(HAMEL strides through in his turquoise shirt. He throws*

*DOTTY his uniform.)*

HAMEL. Wash this, would ya?

DOTTY. Hamel...

HAMEL. Don't leave the apartment, Kid.

**DOTTY.** Hamel. Dear.

**HAMEL.** Like my papa always said, “*Don’t leave the apartment.*”  
(*click click*) Later.

(*He is gone.*

**DOTTY** looks in the pocket. She finds another picture.  
She looks on the back. A wave of nausea hits her.)

(*LIGHT SHIFT*)

(*A sign drops down – “ZENA’s Beauty Emporium.”*

**DOTTY** enters terrified.)

**DOTTY.** Here I am outside Zena’s Beauty Emporium. I feel certain that there’s been some huge mix-up, don’t you? Like my Mama always said, “Don’t believe what you see, believe what you’re told!”

(*She knocks timidly on the door.*)

I’m sure this Zena is a lovely person and her connection with my husband is purely innocent and we’ll all have a hearty laugh about this soon!

(*She gives the audience a brave wink and a hopeful, winning smile.*

*The door bursts violently open and ZENA’s head appears.*  
*She is furious.*)

**ZENA.** Keep ya friggin pants on!!! I’m tryin ta meditate here! Christ!

(*She disappears inside and slams the door behind her.*)

**DOTTY.** Mama also said, “Keep your head in the sand and you won’t get a sunburn!”

(*She begins to slink away when the door opens again and ZENA comes out. She now has the poised and elegant air of the proprietress of Zena’s Beauty Emporium. Even the faint scent of Britain mingles with the Bronx.*)

**ZENA.** Mrs. Cuthbert. So sorry to keep you waiting, but if I don’t give my meditation it’s due, I frown, and with frowns comes wrinkles. Such is the way with spirituality! You *are* a tad early. Please, come in.

**DOTTY.** Actually, I’m not Mrs....

**ZENA.** (*cutting her off*) No no, of course not. The customer is always right. If you say you're not early, *I'm* the moron.

**DOTTY.** No. I was just...I'm not actually Mrs...

**ZENA.** (*rapid fire, without a breath*) Now, I have you down for just a manicure today, Mrs. Cuthbert, peach passion I'm thinking with your delicate coloring, but as a new customer to Zena's Beauty Emporium, you are also entitled to 25% off our spring-into-spring facial.

**DOTTY.** No, I'm not...I actually came to talk to you about my husb...

**ZENA.** Of course, here at Zena's Beauty Emporium there is no sales pressure, and absolutely no obligation for you, the customer, to improve yourself in areas that you are not yet prepared to improve.

**DOTTY.** I think there's been a mistake.

**ZENA.** (*quietly furious*) *Fine. No facial. No sweat off my nose.*

*(A manicure table and two chairs appear.)*

SIT!

*(DOTTY does. ZENA takes out a bowl of soaking solution.)*

Soak.

**DOTTY.** No, really. I need to...

**ZENA.** SOAK!!!!

*(DOTTY plunges her hands into the solution.*

*Zena's charm returns)*

You're probably surprised that Zena herself is acting as manicurist.

**DOTTY.** Well, I didn't...

**ZENA.** (*Grabbing DOTTY's hand from the solution and filing furiously.*) I was forced this morning to fire my third assistant this week. When you're a perfectionist in the beauty industry...

**DOTTY.** Ow!!

**ZENA.** *Don't move and you won't get hurt!* When you're a perfectionist as I am, it's very hard to tolerate incompetence or insubordination. Now, about the facial...

**DOTTY.** The thing is...

**ZENA.** How would you like that dry, age-pocked skin to glow like the day you were twenty-four?

**DOTTY.** But I'm twenty-three.

**ZENA.** You're *twenty-three*?!

**DOTTY.** Yes.

**ZENA.** You're twenty-three.

**DOTTY.** Yes.

**ZENA.** Jesus.

**DOTTY.** Why?

**ZENA.** Please, let's just continue with your nails.

*(She takes DOTTY's other hand and begins filing.)*

**DOTTY.** Does my skin...Is there something wrong with my face? Am I...

**ZENA.** May I ask you something of a personal nature?

**DOTTY.** Uhhh...Yes?

**ZENA.** How do you cleanse your face? Epoxy?

**DOTTY.** Epoxy?

**ZENA.** Sulfuric acid? Or maybe you just take a little sandpaper and rub it on your face?

**DOTTY.** Oh no! I use soap.

*(ZENA gasps, stricken.)*

Is that...is that wrong? Should I...

**ZENA.** May I ask you another personal question?

**DOTTY.** Uhhh...

**ZENA.** Do you *hate* your face?

**DOTTY.** Hate my...no. No, I...

**ZENA.** Strengtheners?

**DOTTY.** Huh?

**ZENA.** Two dollars extra. I'm doing you a favor. Believe me.

*(She begins applying the nail strengthener.)*

Now, I'm not telling you what you should do...

**DOTTY.** No! Please, tell me. See, where I come from, we wash with soap. I didn't...what should I be...

**ZENA.** (*A bottle appears.*) Zena's Beauty Cream. Look at my face. Closer. Do you see any pores?

**DOTTY.** What's a pore?

**ZENA.** Exactly. And you know what did that?

**DOTTY.** Zena's Beauty Cream?

**ZENA.** I'm sorry, you said the peach passion?

**DOTTY.** Well, I don't know. Do you think, with my...

**ZENA.** I'm going to apply the nail strengthener, two coats of peach passion, a hardening agent, and a layer of sheen. Your nails are disgusting. It's a miracle they haven't broken off down to the stem. I'm nauseated looking at them, I really am.

**DOTTY.** Oh my!

**ZENA.** Now hold very still. Don't even breathe.

(*DOTTY holds her breath as ZENA works.*)

Shall I put you down for a 16 ounce bottle or the 32?

**DOTTY.** Well, I don't...How much does it...

**ZENA.** We can discuss this while you're drying.

**DOTTY.** In fact, how much did you say my nails were going to...

**ZENA.** Mrs. Cuthbert, can you really put a price tag on your appearance?

**DOTTY.** Gee, I guess not...

(*The door opens and DAN, dressed as MRS. CUTHBERT, an elegant older woman, enters.*)

**ZENA.** No off-the-streets. Call for an appointment.

**DAN.** I beg your pardon, I have an appointment. Mrs. Eugenia Cuthbert here for my 11:30 manicure.

**DOTTY.** Oh dear.

**ZENA.** (*to DAN*) Look, Lady, I don't know what friggin' game you're playin', but this here

(*indicating DOTTY*)

is Mrs Cuth....

**DOTTY.** No, wait. See, there's been a mix-up. I'm not actually Mrs. Cuthbert. I'm...

ZENA. *What????*

DOTTY. I was trying to tell you. I'm not Mrs. Cuthbert. I came here today to talk to you about...

ZENA. I'm sitting here like an a-hole, excuse me, Mrs. Cuthbert, giving you priceless tips on beauty management, and you're not Mrs. Cuthbert???

DOTTY. Please...it's all a terrible...

ZENA. *Out of my Emporium!!!*

DOTTY. I'm so sorry...I...

ZENA. You pay me and get the hell out of here. And no 25 percent bullshit for you.

DAN. Oh my!

DOTTY. Please. I only have...

ZENA. With the strengthener it's \$7.76. Ten dollars even with the tip.

DOTTY. See, I was trying to tell you...I only have a dollar thirty-seven.

*(She starts to reach into her pocket and then remembers her nails.)*

If you could just reach in...I don't want to get my lovely nails...

ZENA. You don't even have the money????

*(She grabs DOTTY by the collar with one hand and begins lifting her off the ground.)*

You come in here passing yourself off as Mrs. Cuthbert...

DAN. *(very alarmed, rushing from the shop)* Heavens!

ZENA. *(dropping DOTTY)* No! Mrs. Cuthbert! Wait!

*(But MRS. CUTHBERT is gone. Turning on DOTTY)*

You rat. You scum. Not only do you try to cheat me outta ten bucks, you lose me my client. What should I do to you?

DOTTY. If I could explain...

ZENA. I should call the cops.

DOTTY. No! Please. I'm not supposed to be out of the apartment!

**ZENA.** I should perm your hair till it falls out in clumps!

**DOTTY.** No!

**ZENA.** I should apply the tightener without the relaxant!

**DOTTY.** No, please!

**ZENA.** I should, but I'm just too goddamned sweet. It's my tragic flaw, it really is.

**DOTTY.** Oh, thank you so much! I wish I could repay you, but...

**ZENA.** Oh, no. You're gonna repay me. Believe you me. Let's see...the nails and Mrs. Cuthbert should tally up to about a week's worth of slave labor. Be here tomorrow ten A.M. You're my new assistant.

**DOTTY.** Me? In the beauty business?

**ZENA.** Now, amscray before I change my mind and just exfoliate you.

**DOTTY.** Oh thank you. Thank you so much!

**ZENA.** *Out!!!*

*(ZENA's Beauty Emporium flies off.)*

**DOTTY** *turns to the audience, exuberant.)*

**DOTTY.** Me, a beauty care provider??? I think my head might explode!

*(She takes a moment to try to take this all in.)*

Isn't she remarkable? Zena. She's the most remarkable person I ever met. Such confidence. Such sophistication. And she's so beautiful and smart and – did you see her nails??? Everything about her was perfect.

*(relieved and delighted now)*

Well! I feel more certain than ever I was wrong. What would a woman like Zena possibly see in my Hamel? Like my Mama always said, "You won't see a swan mounting a duck!"

*(LIGHT SHIFT)*

*A toilet appears. DOTTY is on her hands and knees before it scrubbing the floor with a toothbrush, cheerily humming "I'm a Little Tea Pot."*

*We hear ZENA yell from offstage.)*

**ZENA.** When you finish the bathroom, start in on the closets. And hurry up, it's almost closing!

*(The phone rings.)*

**DOTTY.** Right you are, Chief! Should I do the coat closet or just the...

**ZENA.** Shut up! I'm on the phone here. Christ!

**DOTTY.** Oky-doke!

*(She looks up and sees us.)*

Hey! Here I am at Zena's Beauty Emporium, cleaning the bathroom floors with a toothbrush! The week has just flown by. Like my Mama always said, "There's a special room in heaven for girls who clean toilets!"

**ZENA.** *(From offstage. Her voice reverberates with a God-like, booming tone. DOTTY looks up and out to address her.)* Hey! You!

**DOTTY.** Yes, Zena?

**ZENA.** *(entering)* You still want that facial?

**DOTTY.** Me? Want a personal beauty treatment by...

**ZENA.** You want it or not?

**DOTTY.** Yes!!! Oh, yes! Of course!

*(to us)*

It just gets better and better!

**ZENA.** Monday morning Mrs. Peabody is comin in for "the works." Head to toe glamour. It's a two-man job. I need someone to pedicure while I perm, moisturize while I exfoliate, wax while I pluck.

**DOTTY.** Are you still talking about the floors?

**ZENA.** You're obviously not the ideal choice. In fact, you're the bottom of the barrel, but you're pliable and cheap.

**DOTTY.** Wow. Thanks!

**ZENA.** You look like crap. Here in Zena's Beauty Emporium there's no looking like crap in the client's presence. So take care of that before Monday.

**DOTTY.** What should I...

**ZENA.** Here's this month's "Beautiful or Bust."

*(A magazine falls to DOTTY's feet from the ceiling.)*

Memorize the article on page 57.

**DOTTY.** *(thumps through and finds the article)* "How to Kiss Up to Your Hard-to-Please Female Employer." Yowza!

**ZENA.** Now get the hell outta here. I'm off to Atlantic City for the weekend.

**DOTTY.** Yes, Ma'am!

*(She gets up and begins to leave.)*

**ZENA.** Hey. What's your name anyway?

**DOTTY.** Well, my proper name is Dorothea, but...

**ZENA.** Sucks. No je ne'sais qua. I hate it. Your new name is...Peaches.

**DOTTY.** Peaches???

**ZENA.** It'll give you something to aspire to.

**DOTTY.** Wow! A goal!

**ZENA.** Now scram.

**DOTTY.** Yes, Ma'am!

*(LIGHTS SHIFT)*

*(DOTTY is outside the shop, looking at the magazine cover with her mouth agape.)*

Holy Moly! You should see this girl! Her dress is down to here and there's a slit up to there, and you can see almost everything in between.

*(She thinks.)*

Why would ladies want to look at these pictures?

Maybe they just buy it for the articles.

*(LIGHT SHIFT)*

*(DOTTY's kitchen table. HAMEL is sitting with his feet up on the table, reading "Service Station Weekly" and eating cheese doodles. DOTTY is working on an extravagant papier-mache model of a toilet, and climbing the walls.)*

**DOTTY.** Hamel is here!

*(She looks at him with misery and disbelief.)*

It's Sunday afternoon and I haven't had a second to memorize "Beautiful or Bust" or to work on not looking like crap.

**HAMEL.** Hey, Kid?

**DOTTY.** Yes, Hamel Dear?

**HAMEL.** You know what would go good with these doodles?

**DOTTY.** No, Sweetheart.

**HAMEL.** A brew.

**DOTTY.** Good thinking, Hamel!

*(to the audience)*

Ever since I've been out of the apartment, when I'm in it seems so small. And Hamel takes up so much of it. There's barely enough air in here for the both of us.

**HAMEL.** Hey! The beer!

*(She grabs one and hands it to him.)*

**DOTTY.** Here, Hamel Dear. Whenever he goes to the bathroom I try to sneak glimpses of "Beautiful or Bust," but I'm just not a quick reader. Oh, what will I do tomorrow? What will I wear? What does exfoliate mean?

**HAMEL.** *(looks up as if suddenly he heard that)* Huh?

**DOTTY.** What?

**HAMEL.** Whatchu say?

**DOTTY.** Oh, nothing...

**HAMEL.** *(noticing the toilet for the first time)* Hey.

**DOTTY.** What?

**HAMEL.** Hey.

**DOTTY.** Yes, Dear?

**HAMEL.** What the hell is that?

**DOTTY.** This?

**HAMEL.** What the hell you makin there?

**DOTTY.** Umm...this is papier-mache, Hamel Dear.

**HAMEL.** What is it?

**DOTTY.** It's...ummm, it's a commode.

**HAMEL.** It's a toilet.

**DOTTY.** Yes, that's right. A toilet.

**HAMEL.** That's a toilet.

**DOTTY.** Yes.

**HAMEL.** Whose toilet is that?

**DOTTY.** It's...It's our toilet, Hamel Dear.

**HAMEL.** That ain't our toilet.

**DOTTY.** It is...

**HAMEL.** Do I look like an idiot to you?

**DOTTY.** Well...

**HAMEL.** Whose toilet is that?

**DOTTY.** It's...

**HAMEL.** You're doin' someone else's toilet!

**DOTTY.** No. No, this...

**HAMEL.** Where you seen someone else's toilet?

**DOTTY.** I didn't! I just...

**HAMEL.** You been out of the apartment? You been out seeing other people's toilets?

**DOTTY.** No! No, I...It's...It's from...from my memory! It's from my memory! Of a toilet...Of a toilet from...from when I grew up. That's it. It's my childhood toilet.

*(to the audience)*

Oh my lord! I'm lying! I've never lied to Hamel before!  
And I'm so good at it! Oh my lord!!!!

**HAMEL.** Oh.

**DOTTY.** Yes. It's my childhood toilet!

**HAMEL.** Oh. Okay.

**DOTTY.** Yes.

**HAMEL.** I like it. It's good.

**DOTTY.** Thank you Hamel.

**HAMEL.** You should do some more. Toilets. It's good.

**DOTTY.** All right, Dear! I will! Thank you, Dear.

(**HAMEL** returns to his magazine.)

He liked it! Hamel's never noticed any of my artwork before. Not even the mosaic of our bathroom sink, my best effort, I think.

(*She considers the toilet.*)

I wonder what he sees in this toilet?

(*She thinks.*)

Has Hamel suddenly become an aesthete?

**HAMEL.** (*holding up the empty bag*) Hey, Kid, you got more doodles?

**DOTTY.** Yes, Dear!

(*She lifts some debris from the table and finds another bag of cheese doodles.*)

Or is it *me*? Is there something different about me now that I've left the apartment and seen other toilets?

I feel different. About this apartment. About Hamel. About everything. And when I'm walking to Zena's Beauty Emporium, and I pass by other people, I want to see their toilets. Their refrigerators, their sinks, their kitchen tables. I have a curiosity about things I never had before. A hunger. A yearning. So many questions. And I just know the answers are in "Beautiful or Bust" if Hamel ever leaves so I can read it!!!!!!

**HAMEL.** Hey Kid, think I'll go out. You need anything?

**DOTTY.** Oh, thank you Lord!

**HAMEL.** Huh?

**DOTTY.** Umm, yes! I need more construction paper. And finger paints and glitter and paste and tape.

**HAMEL.** How bout that stuff you made the toilet with? Can I get you mora that?

**DOTTY.** I could use some more flour to make the paste!

**HAMEL.** You betcha. I sure do like that toilet.

**DOTTY.** Oh, and Hamel, Dear?

**HAMEL.** Yeah?

**DOTTY.** Could you get me some hair spray?

**HAMEL.** Huh?

**DOTTY.** To...to help for my...my...it's ummm...for my papier-mache...eh...to dry?

*(to us)*

My! I'm an artful deceiver. I'm shocked at my aptitude for duplicity and guile. And now that my true nature has surfaced, there's no knowing the level of chicanery I'm capable of! Heavens!

**HAMEL.** You got it.

*(He kisses her on the forehead.)*

See ya, Kid. Like my Papa always said, "*Don't leave the apartment.*"

*(He's gone.)*

**DOTTY.** Bye, Dear!

*(She dives for her magazine as the lights fade.)*

Holy Moly!

*(There is a flash of lightning, the crash of thunder and the sound of rain.*

*We see DOTTY rushing to work. She is soaked to the skin, her hair plastered to her head, clutching "Beautiful or Bust" and muttering to herself, We hear ghostly voices amidst the rain and thunder.)*

**VOICES.** Anti-oxidants.

Pore refining cleanser.

Volumizing, replenishing and balancing.

Time released moisturizers.

Alpha and Beta Hydroxys with gentle micro beads.

Naturally derived polymer.

Rich in vitamins for visible radiance.

**DOTTY.** *(under the voices)* Mood boosting perfumes. Tooth whitening. The natural renewal process. Energizing, anti-fatigue, holistic, luminosity-intensifying, volume replenishing...Holy Moly!

*(She races off.)*

*(ZENA's Beauty Emporium. There is lightning, thunder and rain, reminiscent of Dr. Frankenstein's lab. MRS. PEABODY [DAN] is stretched out in the beautician's chair reading "Dazzling Divorcee" magazine. We cannot see her face or hair. ZENA is hard at work as MRS. PEABODY talks.)*

**DAN.** So I said to him, Elsworth, if that's how you want it, you can pack your bags and there's the door.

**ZENA.** Good fa you, Honey. Turn.

**DAN.** And he said, But Sweetheart, how could you throw away forty years of marriage, our house, our cars, our equity?

**ZENA.** No, turn this way.

**DAN.** And I said, Elsworth, you take the forty years, I'll take the rest.

**ZENA.** Beautiful. Don't move.

*(DOTTY bursts in dripping wet.)*

**DOTTY.** I'm so terribly sorry I'm late, Zena. I spent two hours giving my hair ample voluminosity but then it started raining, and I don't have an umbrella, and...

**ZENA.** Excuse me, Mrs. Peabody.

*(She rushes at DOTTY in a fury, hissing like a broken boiler.)*

*What in the hell?! You look like a wet pig! I can't have the client see you like this!*

**DOTTY.** I'm so very, very sorry, Zena, but...

**ZENA.** *Clam it!!!!* Go put on the ensemble hanging in the back room. Pronto. I need you on Mrs. Peabody's feet. *Now!!!!*

**DOTTY.** Great! Thanks! Sorry again about this. Thanks!

**ZENA.** *NOW!!!!!!*

*(DOTTY rushes off and ZENA returns to MRS. PEABODY.)*

Alright, Mrs. Peabody. My assistant will begin your pedicure in a moment. Why don't you begin soaking and I'll get to work on your face.

*(She puts MRS. PEABODY's feet in a basin of water and begins applying a green paste to her face.)*

**DAN.** Then I made kissy kissy and when he left for his Sunday golf league, I had all the locks changed.

**ZENA.** Beautiful. Always change the locks first. Well, the bank accounts and then the locks. I learned the hard way, believe you me. With the first two, I was an idiot and came away with nyet.

*(DOTTY comes rushing back in wearing a leopard skin jumpsuit that hangs in all the wrong places and a matching leopard skin turban.)*

**DOTTY.** Here I am! All set to beautify!

**ZENA.** Dry Mrs. Peabody's feet, Peaches. And then start painting. The kissable coral.

**DOTTY.** With your coloring, the kissable coral is an exquisite, radiant, replenishing, moisturizing, beta hydroxizing choice, Mrs. Peabody!

**ZENA.** Paint, Peaches!

**DOTTY.** You betcha!

*(She gets to work during the following, but is quickly finished.)*

**ZENA.** The first two husbands were a nightmare. The next three I made out like a bandit. In fact, Zena's Beauty Emporium is a monument to my gains.

**DOTTY.** Holy Cow!!! You had *five* husbands?!

**ZENA.** Paint, Peaches. Don't talk.

**DOTTY.** Right. Sorry.

*(under her breath)*

Holy cow. *Five* husbands? Holy cow.

**DAN.** Are you married now, Dear?

**ZENA.** Right now I'm between husbands. But of course, I'm looking to change that. I very much believe in the sanctity of marriage.

**DAN.** Oh, so do I.

**ZENA.** I've got number six on the hook. Just got to reel him in.

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