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SF PERUSALS

Samuel French Acting Edition

Comic Potential

by Alan Ayckbourn

SAMUEL FRENCH

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presents

COMIC POTENTIAL

by
ALAN AYCKBOURN

with
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JANIE DEE MacINTYRE DIXON CARSON ELROD
PETER MICHAEL GOETZ MERCEDES HERRERO
ROBIN MOSELEY KRISTINE NIELSEN KELLIE OVERBY

set design
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costume design
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lighting design
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sound design
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original music
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ACT I

Scene 1

(The TV Studio.
The lights are bright on a hospital bed. The YOUNG MAN lies in some pain. His MOTHER stands crying. The DOCTOR is with her. In the corner lurks a NURSE holding a clipboard. Barely discernible in the gloom, watching this, are the director, CHANDLER, the programmer, PRIM, and the technician, TRUDI.)

DOCTOR. *(Gravely.)* ... I assure you, we've done everything we can, Mrs. Crayshaw. But, as I say, the bone is just too badly shattered ...

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

YOUNG MAN. *(Bravely.)* Don't cry, Mum, for God's sake don't start crying ...

MOTHER. It's so cruel ... cruel ...

DOCTOR. Surgically speaking, we can do a lot these days but we're still a long way short of miracles, I'm afraid.

MOTHER. Why my son? Why Alex?

YOUNG MAN. Doctor, will I have to lose the foot?

MOTHER. Alex, don't ...

YOUNG MAN. I have to know, Mum. It's my future we're

talking about here! If I'm never going to walk on that field again and kick another goal, I want to know about it, don't you understand that?

MOTHER. We won't give up, darling. We'll fight it. We must fight it ...

DOCTOR. *(A trifle impatiently.)* Look, Mrs. Crayshaw, you're only making things more difficult for your son. *(Clicking his fingers.)* Nurse! *(The NURSE hands him the clipboard she is holding. The DOCTOR passes it on to the MOTHER.)* There! You don't have to be an expert. Just look at these X-rays, woman. They speak for themselves. There's massive damage to the foot. I'm going to have to operate immediately. I'm going to remove the temporary pluster cust and umputate just above the unkle ...

(The NURSE laughs.)

PRIM. *(Angrily, at her console.)* Oh no ...

CHANDLER. HOLD IT! Hold it! What is it saying? Prim, what the hell is it saying now? Umputate his *uncle*? Is that what I heard?

PRIM. I'm sorry, Chance ... It's not my fault ...

CHANDLER. Umputate his *uncle*? *(Indicating the NURSE.)* And what is that one laughing at? Does anybody know?

PRIM. *(Slightly hysterical.)* I don't know.

CHANDLER. *(To TRUDI.)* Do you understand all this? You're supposed to be the engineer, enlighten me, please.

TRUDI. It sounds like random AU Subrogation to me ...

CHANDLER. In English, s'il vous plait ...

PRIM. It's replacing its A's with U's, that's all ...

CHANDLER. Is it?

PRIM. Just occasionally. It's a vowel problem ...

CHANDLER. That's all I need. A leading actor with vowel problems. Its A's with its U's?

PRIM. That's all it is ...

CHANDLER. Tremendous. We'd better keep it away from the fax machine then, hadn't we?

TRUDI. *(Checking the DOCTOR.)* The signal's clear at this end ...

PRIM. It's not the signal, it's internal somewhere. We have to do something, Chance, it's getting steadily worse ...

CHANDLER. *(To TRUDI.)* So why doesn't she fix it?

TRUDI. It's internal. I'm a technician not a cyber surgeon...

CHANDLER. *(Threatening the motionless DOCTOR.)* Useless tin hunks of—

PRIM. Don't hit it ...

CHANDLER. *(Checking the blow, returning his spleen towards the NURSE.)* And what's the matter with this nurse?

PRIM. Nothing.

CHANDLER. It was laughing its head off.

TRUDI. Yes, I noticed that.

PRIM. Well, that I can't explain. Certainly nothing to do with me. Right. Shall we try again? I've taken us back two lines.

CHANDLER. Come on then! Come on! We are two hours behind, people!

PRIM. 37 minutes behind.

CHANDLER. Let's roll it, then monsters. And, Prim, can you give me more tears from the mother? The woman is supposed to be heartbroken. Her little pride and joy's about to lose his foot and she sounds like someone with mild hay fever ...

PRIM. Check. *(She makes an adjustment, muttering.)* I just didn't want to make it gross, that's all.

CHANDLER. Gross? Since when did we worry about gross? That's what they want out there. The grossest story ever told. 16 million viewers can't be—

PRIM. 14.

CHANDLER. 14? I thought we were 16. Since when are we 14?

PRIM. Since last week.

CHANDLER. Why am I the last to hear? I am the director. Why am I not told this?

PRIM. Because you never read anything I put in front of you.

TRUDI. What's the fax machine?

CHANDLER. She's a technician. She's never heard of a fax machine.

PRIM. You have to make allowances, Trudi. Chance is technically still in the twentieth century ...

CHANDLER. What kind of a technician's never heard of a fax machine ... ?

PRIM. Nobody's ever heard of a fax machine, they went out 20 years ago.

CHANDLER. So what? The age of steam is also dead but I've still heard of steam engines. Despite genetically engineered, self-levelling grass-seed, I've still heard of a lawnmower ...

PRIM. Alright! Alright! Can we get on, please? We are now 39 minutes behind.

CHANDLER. Alright. Asses in gear. And ... action! (Immediately.) Hold it! Who says I don't read things?

PRIM. I put it on your desk. You tear it up. You set fire to it.

CHANDLER. I only burn irrelevancies ...

PRIM. You don't even know Mrs. Pepperbloom is coming today, I bet ...

CHANDLER. Carla Pepperbloom?

PRIM. Yes.

CHANDLER. The Black Death is coming here?

PRIM. Any minute.

CHANDLER. Shit! What does she want?

PRIM. She didn't say.

CHANDLER. Shit! And she didn't say what for?

PRIM. No.

CHANDLER. Shit! It's about the 14 million, it has to be ...

TRUDI. If we don't finish this episode, it'll be 8 million...

CHANDLER. Who cares? Show them an old episode, they'll never know. They're all subnormal, anyway ...

PRIM. That is offensive.

CHANDLER. Low IQ-TV. Especially produced for people who can't figure out how to turn on the set ...

TRUDI. Has he been drinking?

PRIM. Probably.

CHANDLER. Alright, people. Let's go to work! Action!

(The lights brighten on the playing area and the action resumes.)

DOCTOR. Just look at these X-rays, woman. They speak for themselves. There's massive damage to the foot. I'm going to have to operate immediately. I'm going to remove the temporary plaster cast and amputate just above the ankle ...

CHANDLER. By jove, he's got it!

MOTHER. *(Weeping softly.)* I can't bear it, I just can't bear it ..

CHANDLER. She's a pain in the ass, this woman. Are we planning to kill her off soon?

PRIM. Certainly not. She's our most popular character ...

CHANDLER. That figures. They always are, the ones I loathe.

DOCTOR. I just don't know what more to say, Mrs. Crayshaw ...

CHANDLER. Don't say anything, doc. Quit while you're ahead ...

MOTHER. *(Still weeping.)* Oh, dear God.

CHANDLER. Hell, this is depressing. Give the mother more tears, more tears, please.

PRIM. I've already given her—
CHANDLER. More tears! Who's directing this?
PRIM. Alright! Alright!

(PRIM stabs at the console rather savagely. The MOTHER lets out a keening wail.)

CHANDLER. Better!
PRIM. We'll get letters again.
CHANDLER. Burn 'em!
YOUNG MAN. *(Yelling above the din.)* Don't turn away, Mother, you can't hide your tears from me ...
TRUDI. This is ridiculous ...
DOCTOR. *(Inaudibly, over the MOTHER.)* The point is, Mrs. Crayshaw, there have been amazing advances in prosthetic surgery in recent years ...
CHANDLER. What are you complaining about? At least we can't hear the doctor.
DOCTOR. *(Plowing on regardless.)* ... these days a hand, a foot, a whole arm can be replaced and to all intents and purposes you can forget about it entirely. Even the wearer themselves. People play squash, tennis, even go mountaineering without any ill effects whatsoever ...
CHANDLER. That damn nurse is laughing again, what's the matter with it ...?
PRIM. I've said, I don't know. I'm toning the Mother down, Chance. I can't face any more of those letters.

(She does so. Under the next, CARLA enters with ADAM. They watch until they are noticed. ADAM is fascinated. The MOTHER quietens down as PRIM re-calibrates her.)

DOCTOR. Needless to say, a lot of it is due to the immense strides we've made in the field of android develop-

ment in the past few decades. Take the hand, for instance. An android's hand, of course, is not that different from one's own. They feel the same to the touch and they are designed with equivalent humanoid movement, with all the flexibility you'd expect from a human hand. Finger muscles, wrist action—virtually indistinguishable from the real thing. Only of course about 50 times stronger, let's not forget that. *(He laughs.)* Looked at in the long term, and on the positive side, your son's new foot, once it's up and running will actually outlive the rest of him by several decades ...

CHANDLER. *(During this.)* This man could bore for Britain, do you know that?

PRIM. *(Indicating visitors.)* Chance ...

CHANDLER. What? *(Seeing them, rather over genially.)* Mrs. Pepperbloom, by all that's glorious, good morning to you!

CARLA. *(Icily.)* Good morning, Chandler. Please, don't let us interrupt ...

CHANDLER. Not at all, any interruption is most welcome. Prim, dear, could you turn the volume down a little for us? Monitor on headset.

PRIM. *(Reluctantly.)* If I must.

(PRIM and TRUDI don headsets. The hospital scene runs silently under the next during which the MOTHER leaves.)

CARLA. Good morning, Prim.

PRIM. Good morning, Mrs. Pepperbloom.

CARLA. This is Adam whom I mentioned in my memo.

CHANDLER. *(Ignoring him.)* Yes, of course. How nice.

ADAM. How do you do, sir. It's a very great honor to—

CHANDLER. A new young executive accountant, no doubt. Here to advise us humble artists on program making. Adam who?

ADAM. I just wanted to say, sir, that I—

CARLA. As I mentioned, this is Adam Trainsmith ...

CHANDLER. Trainsmith. Trainsmith?

CARLA. Lester's nephew.

CHANDLER. *(Digesting this.)* You're Lester Trainsmith's nephew?

ADAM. Yes, sir.

CHANDLER. What the hell is he doing here, Carla?

CARLA. I explained it all in my memorax, Chandler—

ADAM. I wanted to come, sir. I asked to come.

CHANDLER. Here?

ADAM. Yes.

CHANDLER. Why?

ADAM. Because of you. I wanted to meet you. As I say, sir, you're my greatest living idol. After Hal Roach and Preston Sturges, I think you're just the finest—

CHANDLER. What is he doing here? Is this about the figures? Is that what this is?

ADAM. *(Bewildered.)* I'm sorry?

CHANDLER. Has he come to take over, or what? *(Rising angrily.)* Come on sit down, kid, take my chair, what the hell. They're bringing them straight out of the playpen but then any fool can direct these days.

CARLA. Chandler!

PRIM. Could you keep it down a little, please!

ADAM. Sorry.

PRIM. I know they're only actoids but they still need to concentrate.

CARLA. Chandler, Adam is here because he's a great admirer of your work, apparently. God knows why ...

CHANDLER. An admirer?

ADAM. Yes.

CHANDLER. *(Indicating the set.)* You're a fan of Hospital Hearts?

ADAM. No. No, it's your early work. Your movies, Mr.

Tate. I've got them all. I study every inch. I try to learn from them. Your timing, your choice of angles, your editing. Your wonderful sense of comic—

CHANDLER. Alright! Yes. Terrific. So you dig up the dead, do you? What are you? Some kind of gravedigger? Get this adolescent necromancer out of here. I've got a program to make.

(CHANDLER turns away abruptly.)

CARLA. I'm sorry, Adam, I did warn you he was filled with old world charm.

ADAM. *(Confused.)* What did I say?

TRUDI. You reminded him.

ADAM. Of what?

TRUDI. The past.

CARLA. *(Running her fingers through ADAM's hair.)* He's such an innocent. *(ADAM looks uncomfortable.)* Isn't he too lovely?

TRUDI. Beautiful.

CARLA. Oh yes, of course, I was forgetting. Hardly your type. Well, I must dash, Adam, darling. I will be back. I leave you to savor the delights of Chandler Tate. I won't be long. I promised your uncle on pain of death I'd take care of you...

ADAM. I'll be fine.

CARLA. *(Kissing him on the mouth.)* Good-bye, sweet boy. I shall be back to take you to dinner. Au revoir, everyone.

TRUDI. Bye.

CARLA. Oh, Chandler. *(CHANDLER turns to her reluctantly.)* I see the viewing figures have slumped rather dramatically. I know we're only minor league here, but 12 million is touching the bottom of the barrel, dear.

CHANDLER. Here it comes ...

CARLA. We'll have to do something about, won't we? You can't drop any lower. And if we move you sideways any more you'll be out of the building.

CHANDLER. Turn the volume up a little please, Prim. I can't hear properly. There's somebody talking over the program. Totally unprofessional behavior.

PRIM. *(As she does so.)* Just coming up to credits ...

(Music under.)

CARLA. *(Almost inaudible.)* See you later.

(CARLA goes.)

DOCTOR. *(Genially.)* Listen, old chap, I've been a surgeon here for longer than I care to remember. And I'm delighted to say, I've never lost a patient yet. And I'm damned if you're going to spoil that record, alright? Let's get that straight, shall we? This is a perfectly straightforward, run of the mill aparation.

(The NURSE laughs. The others react.)

PRIM. Oh, no ... ! Hell! Hell! Hell!

CHANDLER. *(With her.)* I don't believe it! I simply don't believe it!

TRUDI. *(With them.)* Oh no, not again!

ADAM. *(A beat later.)* What did he say?

PRIM. Shall we take it again?

CHANDLER. No. Remix the music over the top. Drown him out. Who cares?

PRIM. We can't. It was important plot.

CHANDLER. What plot? Drown him out!

PRIM. Alright.

ADAM. What did he say just then?

CHANDLER. Did you see the nurse? It was at it again. Laughing.

PRIM. I know, I know.

TRUDI. We weren't on the nurse. We were tight on the doctor.

ADAM. Did he say aparation? I thought he said aparation?

CHANDLER. Next break we have, I want that doctor booked in for cyber surgery. I don't care about the waiting list. I am not working with it in that condition again. If they won't fix it I'm writing the doctor out ...

PRIM. I'll try my best. We do have low priority, Chance. We're only—

CHANDLER. I don't care. Make it so, helmsman. *(Wheeling on ADAM.)* I'm sorry. You wanted to see me?

ADAM. Yes, but I was rather hoping to—

CHANDLER. Just ask Prim. Prim is a treasure. She'll show you. *(As he goes.)* Trudi!

TRUDI. Yes, Chance?

CHANDLER. Get that nurse on the bench, do you hear me?

TRUDI. Yes, Chance.

(CHANDLER sweeps out. A silence.)

ADAM. I was rather hoping ... Where's he ...?

TRUDI. A little liquid refreshment. Thirsty work, directing.

ADAM. Oh, I see.

TRUDI. Don't follow him. He always drinks alone. *(To PRIM.)* I'll put the Doctor on diagnostic again.

PRIM. It's something internal. It was AO that time. I adjusted for AU and he starts AO.

TRUDI. It'll be something in the speech processor.

ADAM. *(Who has been staring closely at the figures.)* These are amazing.

TRUDI. Never seen one close up?

ADAM. No. Not actually in the—flesh as it were ... Amazing.

TRUDI. Not all that amazing, unfortunately. *(Referring to the DOCTOR, to PRIM.)* Are we on manual?

PRIM. *(Switching from the console.)* Going to manual.

TRUDI. *(To the DOCTOR, brusquely.)* Come on, this way. Follow me, doc.

(TRUDI goes off. The DOCTOR follows her obediently.)

ADAM. *(Ineffectually, as they go.)* Can I help in any ... ? *(He stands, rather lost. PRIM continues tidying her console, ignoring him.)* Well. *(Regarding the NURSE.)* I wonder what she found so funny.

PRIM. How long have you been with Carla?

ADAM. Sorry?

PRIM. How long have you been with her?

ADAM. Oh. Only a few hours. She picked me up yesterday at the airport, and we drove straight here this morning.

PRIM. Oh, I see. You're not together then?

ADAM. No. *(Laughing.)* No. Certainly not. *(Considering the prospect.)* God. No.

PRIM. She has quite a reputation.

ADAM. She does?

PRIM. The Pepperbloom babes. She gets older, they get younger. Sorry if it sounds bitchy, but that's a fact.

ADAM. *(Laughing.)* I'll just have to fight her off.

PRIM. Just be careful how you say no to her, that's all. She doesn't like it.

(TRUDI returns.)

TRUDI. I've left it on diagnostic. *(To the NURSE.)* Sit, nursie!

(Obediently the NURSE sits at the console.)

PRIM. So Lester Trainsmith's your uncle?

ADAM. That's right.

PRIM. That must make you considerably rich?

ADAM. No. That makes my uncle considerably rich. I come from the poor side of the family. Well, poor compared with Uncle Lester.

TRUDI. *(Plugging in the NURSE to the console.)* Like everyone else. So what are you doing here?

ADAM. I'm a writer.

PRIM. Oh ...

TRUDI. *(Unimpressed.)* Uh-huh.

ADAM. I—simply admire Chandler Tate. I always have. I think he's just the most fantastic director.

TRUDI. Really?

ADAM. Don't you?

PRIM. Well, he may have been once but ...

ADAM. Some of his films are classics.

TRUDI. Are they?

ADAM. Have you never seen any?

TRUDI. No.

ADAM. Anyone who loves movies should see them as part of their education.

TRUDI. We're in television.

ADAM. What's the difference?

TRUDI. He wants to know what's the difference. Look around this place. That's the difference. This isn't even television. This is local television.

PRIM. Not even local, it's branch line TV.

ADAM. It seems fine to me. All this gear. The actoids ...

TRUDI. This gear is 50 years old. You need a diploma in archaeology to work it.

PRIM. I don't know why you think you're here, Adam, but this is where you come to end your career not launch it.

ADAM. I don't see it that way.

TRUDI. Lunch, then?

PRIM. You want to join us?

ADAM. I think I ought to wait here for Chandler—he said he'd be back.

PRIM. Wouldn't count on it. PM is not his strongest time of day.

ADAM. I'd better wait. Don't want to offend him any more.

PRIM. Suit yourself. Look around. Oh, and if you like his movies they're probably all in his drawer there. You know how to work the viewer?

ADAM. Sure.

PRIM. Incidentally, don't call him Chandler. He hates it. He prefers Chance.

ADAM. Oh, right. As in lucky chance?

TRUDI. As in positively his last.

(TRUDI and PRIM start to leave.)

ADAM. Oh, what about ... ?

(He indicates the NURSE.)

TRUDI. It'll be OK. If it starts whistling, just pull its plug out.

ADAM. *(Doubtfully.)* Right.

(PRIM and TRUDI go out.)

PRIM. *(As they go.)* Where are we eating today?

TRUDI. Surprise me. Surprise me.

(ADAM, on his own, looks around. He is intrigued by the NURSE. He walks around her a couple of times, studying her. He opens the drawer that PRIM has indicated. He takes out a file box of small video disks. He studies their titles in turn.)

ADAM. *(As he does so, approvingly.)* Good ... oh, great... wonderful ... yes ... *(Suddenly.)* Hey, I cannot believe this. He's got *this*? He's got this. *(ADAM excitedly inserts the video disk into a slot on the desk. The sound of a silent movie piano. A large [invisible to us] screen lights up above his head.)* Oh, yes!!! *(Searching the desk.)* Fast forward? Fast forward? *(The disk screeches as it fast forwards. ADAM finds the section he wants. He watches intently. He laughs at the action. He laughs again.)* This is just so brilliant. *(He laughs. Behind him, quite suddenly, the NURSE laughs. ADAM, jumping in alarm.)* Oh, my God. You're alive? What am I going—? You're live! Are you supposed to be live?

NURSE. I'm active, yes.

ADAM. Well, are you supposed to be? Should I be unplugging you or something? I was supposed to unplug you if you whistled.

NURSE. Then I promise not to whistle. *(Looking at the screen.)* Who is this?

ADAM. This is one of the greatest silent comedians the world has ever known. His name was Buster Keaton. Have you heard of him?

NURSE. No.

ADAM. He ran his own studios for a time, way back in the early 1920s. Silent comedy. You know? Comedy without words.

NURSE. No words?

ADAM. Keaton broke new ground because—Excuse me. Are we conversing?

NURSE. Yes, I think so. I'm listening. You're talking.

ADAM. Yes. Is that—? I mean, you are a—an—aren't you?

NURSE. An actoid, yes.

ADAM. And you talk?

NURSE. Oh, yes. An actoid needs to talk. Unless they're Buster Keaton.

(NURSE smiles. ADAM smiles back.)

ADAM. This is ridiculous

NURSE. Why?

ADAM. I don't know. I just didn't expect to be having a conversation. Do you always talk to people like this?

NURSE. No. Normally people don't converse. It's quicker to direct link through the computer.

ADAM. Then why now? Why me?

NURSE. Because you're talking to me.

ADAM. And do you have a name? I mean ...

NURSE. Oh, yes. My name is currently Bridget Bonny. Nurse Bridget Bonny.

ADAM. No, that's the name of your character, surely?

NURSE. That's right. *(Slightly Yorkshire.)* I'm 24 years old and I was born in Halifax, Yorkshire but at a very early age my parents moved south to—

ADAM. But what's your real name?

NURSE. *(A little puzzled.)* My real name?

ADAM. Your real name. You must have a real name?

NURSE. Oh, yes, I see. The name I was made with. It is JC-F31-triple 3.

ADAM. Jacie? Pretty. May I call you Jacie?

JACIE. If you wish.

ADAM. I'm Adam.

JACIE. Yes, I heard.

ADAM. Tell me, Jacie. I'm interested. What made you laugh, during the filming? At the end there?

JACIE. I don't know.

ADAM. Did you find it funny?

JACIE. Yes. I'm afraid I have a fault.

ADAM. Not necessarily. Just because you laugh doesn't mean you have a fault.

JACIE. It just happened. I had no control

ADAM. No, that's natural. We see something funny, we

laugh. Involuntarily, sometimes. We can't help ourselves.

JACIE. I think I have a fault.

ADAM. You found Keaton funny, too?

JACIE. Oh, yes. In a different way. That little look he gave.

ADAM. The look? Oh, you mean the take?

JACIE. Take?

ADAM. The double take. You know about double takes?

JACIE. No.

ADAM. It's a well known comic device—the double take—or in Keaton's case the quarter take. The demi semi minuscule take. But at the other end of the scale you have someone like—let's see—James Finlayson—Finlayson's a good example. He was famous from the Laurel and Hardy movies. Do you know the—? No? Well, Finlayson would do takes where he literally took off and left the ground. Bold massive takes. Like this. *(He demonstrates badly. JACIE looks puzzled.)* Really funny. When he did them. Do you need to stay plugged in?

JACIE. Yes.

ADAM. OK, stay sitting down, I'll teach you. Right. Let's see. Imagine you're reading a book, yes?

JACIE. I'm reading a book.

ADAM. You hear me come into the room ... You know it's me, so you don't look up at once. What you don't know is that I am covered in mud. I have fallen in a puddle outside the house and I am covered in black slimy mud from head to toe. You look up casually, you see me, register my presence but your book is so interesting you go quickly back to it. You do that ... *(JACIE does so.)* Now, as you look at your book again, the image of me suddenly registers on your brain. You realize what you've seen. You look at me again. Quickly, sharply this time. Amazed. *(JACIE does so.)* Alright. Let's do the whole thing. You're reading your book. Here I come. Covered in mud.

(ADAM clumps rather heavily into the room. JACIE glances at him, then back at her book.)

JACIE. Hallo, dear, is it raining?

(She does the rest of the take.)

ADAM. *(Impressed.)* Good! Excellent. Your first double take.

JACIE. Was it alright for me to put in the line?

ADAM. —Er ... yes. Yes, that was fine. It wasn't strictly necessary but it was fine. Good. We'll make a comedian of you yet. *(They smile at each other. ADAM executes a rather clumsy comic trip.)* Whoops! *(JACIE frowns.)* Next week, the custard pie.

JACIE. The custard pie? Is that funny?

ADAM. In the right hands. It's a—it's basically just a pie. Full of custard—or usually cream. Flat on a plate. And—when someone annoys you—or gets up your nose—you know—*(Miming.)*—you take the pie and you squash it in their face and you twist it—like that—so it—

JACIE. —goes up their nose—

ADAM. You got it.

JACIE. That's funny?

ADAM. Er—not to talk about, no. It's a visual gag.

JACIE. Custard pie ... *(She copies his mime.)* Yes, that could be funny.

(She smiles at him and laughs. He smiles and laughs, too. They stare at each other. ADAM looks away, rather embarrased suddenly. The lights fade:—)

Scene 2

(The same. Later that day.
The team are all assembled and in the midst of more recording.
The DOCTOR is in full flow. JACIE as the nurse, hovers in attendance. The YOUNG MAN, still in bed, listens weakly. CHANDLER, slightly the worse for drink, sprawls in his chair, watching disinterested. PRIM and TRUDI are beavering away doing all the work. ADAM watches intently like a child in a toy shop.)

DOCTOR. ... but I'm afraid there's also some bad news, Alex ...

YOUNG MAN. Doctor? Is it my foot? Is it ... ?

DOCTOR. No, as I say, the foot's a runaway success. We'll have you chasing around again in a matter of weeks. No, I'm afraid it's something rather more serious than that. It's your mother, Alex. I'm afraid she's—well, to put it absolutely bluntly, I'm afraid she's dead.

CHANDLER. Hooray!

YOUNG MAN. Dead?

PRIM. They're not going to like this, Chance, she was the most popular character ...

DOCTOR. In the car park. An umbulance on a mercy mission. It was very quick.

PRIM. Oh, sod it! *(To the others.)* Sorry.

DOCTOR. She felt nothing. I'm so very sorry.

CHANDLER. We'll put some music in here. Big strings.

(CHANDLER whistles tunelessly.)

TRUDI. We'll be down to 5 million by the weekend.

DOCTOR. Now then. Let's have a look at those stitches, shall we? Nurse! Pull back his bedclothes, will you?

JACIE. *(Moving to do this.)* Yes, doctor.

CHANDLER. Come in close on the boy, Trudi.

TRUDI. Yeah, I got it.

CHANDLER. Tears! Prim, I want more tears from that asshole ...

PRIM. *(Irritably.)* Alright, alright.

(The YOUNG MAN sobs helplessly. JACIE draws back the bedclothes. She glances down at the YOUNG MAN. She executes a double take. It favors the excesses of Finlayson rather than the niceties of Keaton.)

CHANDLER. *(As it happens.)* ... that's good ... that's better ... I like it—*(Seeing JACIE, yelling.)* WHAT THE HELL IS THAT NURSE DOING? Hold it, hold it! Stop everything. *(Losing it.)* Prim! Have you no control over these things at all? You're supposed to be a programmer, what are you playing at?

PRIM. It wasn't me! That wasn't me!

ADAM. Listen, I think that was—

CHANDLER. The nurse doing takes like Zero Mostel on speed, a programmer who can't do her job—

ADAM. Listen, I think that was—

CHANDLER. You shut up! No wonder the place is running down. I'm surrounded by incompetence every place I turn.

PRIM. *(Angrily.)* Don't you blame me, I'm not the one who changes a successful storyline just for the hell of it—

CHANDLER. That's called—

PRIM. —cuts out characters just because they're popular—

CHANDLER. —is called artistic choice, woman. Not that you'd know anything about that—

PRIM. That's what's known as pig-headed, bone-stupid crassness ...

CHANDLER. You're a fuck useless artisan, what do you know?

PRIM. *(Indicating the actoids.)* And don't swear in front of them, please! I'll be editing swearwords out of every episode on top of everything else ...

CHANDLER. Oh, namby, pamby. Wah! Wah! Wah!

PRIM. Yes, well, somebody has to do it, Chance. If it wasn't for people like Trudi and me, you'd have been in the street years ago.

CHANDLER. Oh, ball suckers. I was making major movies when you were ...

PRIM. You come in drunk, you shout, you swear, you expect everything to happen just by magic and you never even bother to say thank you!

CHANDLER. Alright! Thanks for nothing. How about that?

PRIM. You drunken—pig. I don't have to work with you. I have—qualifications. Which is more than some people.

CHANDLER. Well, piss off, then and take your qualifications with you, you pair of talentless dykes.

PRIM. *(Tautly.)* Right. That's it. That is sexual provocation and harassment, I am going straight to the commission and I am going to have you indicted. Run the program on your own. See how you get on.

(PRIM stomps off.)

TRUDI. *(Following her off.)* Sometimes you go too far, Chance, you really do.

ADAM. *(Muttering.)* I think that—I think that was probably my fault.

CHANDLER. *(Quiet again now.)* I used to make movies, you know.

ADAM. Yes, I know, I'm a great fan of—

CHANDLER. I had this vast crew—in those days ... Cameramen, carpenters, gaffers, electricians, best boys ... You name it. They were all there. Assistant directors. Hundreds of assistant directors. Ten a penny. And I'd come on the set and it'd be like God had arrived, you know ...

ADAM. I can imagine...

CHANDLER. And there'd be this silence. As they all waited for me—me!—to speak. And I'd say very quietly—I never raised my voice on the set—people listened, they wanted to listen, they wanted—even the actors—they wanted to learn—and I'd say, "Alright, people, let's go to work—" *(He pauses dramatically.)* And they'd mark the scene and I'd say—"Action!"

(Immediately, the action starts up again on the floor. The YOUNG MAN resumes crying, the DOCTOR moves in to examine him as JACIE steps back from the bed.)

DOCTOR. Now then, let's have a look at it, old chap, shall we? See how it's healing—

CHANDLER. *(Furiously.)* Shut! Shut up! Shut up!

DOCTOR. Oh, yes. This is really looking very healthy indeed. No worries here, nurse ...

(CHANDLER lunges at PRIM's control panel in an attempt to stop all this.)

CHANDLER. *(As this happens:)* Damn to hell! Damn it!

(CHANDLER finally achieves something. The dialogue stops and the DOCTOR exits abruptly. Rather more incongruously, the YOUNG MAN also gets out of bed and hobbles off on his one good foot.
Only JACIE remains.
CHANDLER and ADAM stare.)

ADAM. What did you do?

CHANDLER. I don't know. I think I must have hit the fire alarm. What was I saying?

ADAM You in the studio ...

CHANDLER. Oh, yes. Look at me. Now where am I?

Mechanical actors. And an entire technical department of two ball-breaking shrews. They're a pair, did you gather that?

ADAM. Yes, well, that's fine. I have no problem with that.

CHANDLER. I have no problem with that. Except there's nothing in it for me. I could never quite warm to a woman when there was clearly nothing in it for me, you know. There needs to be a promise of something, however remote, don't you think so? Otherwise what's the point?

ADAM. No. I don't quite see it that way. But each man to his—

CHANDLER. *(Confidentially.)* I tried to make it with Prim once, you know ...

ADAM. Really?

CHANDLER. Before I realized she was with Trudi. She gave me this lecture. About dignity. Respecting her dignity. I didn't do anything to her, you understand. I just said to her—you've got terrific tits, how about it? Anyway. So she gave me this lecture. When I was in the studio—the make up girls were queuing nine deep, you know. To make it with me.

ADAM. Really.

CHANDLER. Still. That was then. This is now. Right?

ADAM. Dead right.

CHANDLER. Something to do with age, I guess. You ever seen any of my movies?

ADAM. I've seen them all.

CHANDLER. Did you ever see THE PASSIONATE PLAYBOY?

ADAM. THE PASSIONATE PLAYBOY is one of my most...

CHANDLER. Some of the best comic playing ever. On screen or off screen.

ADAM. I agree.

CHANDLER. And the most interesting thing is that last shot—you remember the last shot—when she comes back to him—remember it—?

ADAM. All in one take ...

CHANDLER. All in one take ... Did you ever see that movie?

ADAM. Twenty three times so far.

CHANDLER. You need to have seen the movie to appreciate it. They're all dead now. One singe take. *(He stares at the motionless JACIE.)* Did you see that just now? That—thing over there. I swear it did a double take. A good old fashioned double take. Looked like it'd been watching too much James Finlayson. Do you know who I mean by James—?

ADAM. Yes.

CHANDLER. Old vaudeville actor, before your time. He's dead now as well.

ADAM. I'm afraid that was me.

CHANDLER. What? You mean you killed him?

ADAM. No, I taught her the take. I showed her how to do a double take.

CHANDLER. When did you do that?

ADAM. At lunchtime.

CHANDLER. You've got to understand about those things. You do something, they'll copy it. You undo your zipper to scratch yourself you'll find the Doctor's doing it in the next scene. They're quite undiscriminating. They're jackdaws. They see something, hear something, they'll pick it up, they'll use it. They're recording machines on legs, that's all they are.

ADAM. *(Indicating JACIE.)* I think that one is rather more than that.

CHANDLER. That one? They're all identical. Thousands of them. Different shapes and sizes but they all operate the same. They're actoids.

ADAM. I swear that Jacie has—a sense of humor. She laughs.

CHANDLER. They can all laugh. It's part of the programming.

ADAM. No. Jacie laughs—spontaneously. She finds things funny and then she laughs.

CHANDLER. What do you call it? Jacie?

ADAM. She told me that was her name. Jacie something Triplethree.

CHANDLER. No, that's its registration number. It just told you its number.

ADAM. Number?

CHANDLER. J.C. That stands for Juvenile Character, then probably F for female and then its number ...

ADAM. *(Disappointed.)* Oh, I see.

CHANDLER. It has no sense of humor. How can a machine have a sense of humor?

ADAM. I swear.

CHANDLER. What are you doing here anyway? You sleeping with Carla? Her entrée for the week?

ADAM. No, I'm really not, I'm—

CHANDLER. What are you? Her packed lunch?

ADAM. No, I'm here because I want to write comedy.

CHANDLER. *(Stunned.)* Comedy?

ADAM. Yes. Real comedy. Like it used to be. Like you used to make it.

CHANDLER. Sonny boy, didn't anybody tell you?

ADAM. What?

CHANDLER. That's deader than this business. That's seriously buried. You think these things can produce comedy? Oh, they can do funny things—if you tell them. That's not comedy. That's just being funny. But comedy—you want to know about comedy?

ADAM. That's why I'm here ...

CHANDLER. Comedy is two things. First, it's surprise. You're like a magician. They're expecting this—but you give them that. Yes?

ADAM. Yes.

CHANDLER. We know it's going to happen, but not when it's going to happen or just as important how it's going to happen. That's comedy.

ADAM. Right!

CHANDLER. That double take you taught it. Now that's a basic double take. You can't use that, not any more. Everybody knows it. Every joker in the pub does a double take ...

ADAM. Oh, I know. I was only ...

CHANDLER. What you have to do is look for variations ... I love this one. I'm in here on my own, working. Suddenly, you come into the room. You're—I don't know—something's happened to you. You're—

ADAM. Covered in mud?

CHANDLER. That'll do. So you come on in and just stand there. Watch that. *(ADAM makes as if he has entered the room. CHANDLER does a series of small mini-takes on ADAM; finally, he makes as if to leave the room himself and at the last moment does a final take on ADAM. JACIE laughs. CHANDLER stares at her.)* It's laughing.

ADAM. I know.

CHANDLER. Why is it laughing? *(Fiercely, to JACIE.)* What are you laughing at?

JACIE. It was funny.

CHANDLER. *(Shaking his head.)* It's not possible. It's a fault, there's a flaw in it somewhere. These things are full of glitches they're always breaking down. Why did it laugh, for God's sake?

ADAM. You heard her. She thought it was funny.

CHANDLER. Not she. It. It's an it. It's a dishwasher. It's a floor polisher. It's a tumble dryer, that's all it is.

ADAM. I'd like to try and write something for her. In between, obviously, when you're recording. I'd like to—borrow it. Try some things out. Would that be possible? I have some ideas I'd like to try. *(CHANDLER stares at him.)* Isn't this the way you started? Someone gave you a chance? Please.

CHANDLER. You've been here 20 minutes, you cheeky bastard.

ADAM. I know. If my script turned out any good—would you direct?

CHANDLER. *(After a pause.)* You do it in your own time at your own expense, alright?

ADAM. Absolutely. It's a deal then? *(He shakes CHANDLER's hand.)* Thank you, Mr. Tate, thank you.

CHANDLER. Chance. Call me Chance. I think I've just been conned. *(ADAM smiles.)* I'd better go and fetch those people back. Apologize to them. Again.

ADAM. Has it happened before?

CHANDLER. About once a week. I'll surprise them this time. I'll cover myself in mud.

(CHANDLER starts to leave.)

ADAM. Excuse me, Chance ...

CHANDLER. Uh?

ADAM. You said that comedy was two things. The unexpected and ... What was the other?

CHANDLER. *(Shaking his fist.)* Anger.

(CHANDLER goes out.)

ADAM. Did you hear all that?

JACIE. Yes.

ADAM. We're in. We're on. We're going to do it.

JACIE. Yes.

ADAM. Are you excited?

JACIE. *(Considering for a moment.)* Yes. I'm excited.

ADAM. Then get excited.

JACIE. *(Jubilantly.)* YES!!!!

ADAM. That's better. I never thought he'd say yes. But the man's a rebel. It's the sort of gamble that would appeal to him.

JACIE. I think you're both similar.

ADAM. Really? I'd like to think that. Really?

JACIE. You live for your dreams ...

ADAM. That's right.

JACIE. I read somewhere that dreams are merely glimpses of the reality we all could share if we only had the courage—

ADAM. *(Rather startled.)* Yes?

JACIE. But we can find that courage together, can't we?

ADAM. Yes. You bet.

JACIE. Oh, it's such an exciting dream, David ...

(A burst of music seems to emanate from her.)

ADAM. David, who's David? I'm Adam. What's that?

JACIE. I'm sorry?

ADAM. The music?

JACIE. Oh.

(The music stops as abruptly as it started.)

ADAM. What was it? Where was it coming from?

JACIE. Me.

ADAM. You?

JACIE. It's a program. It was intended at one time that we'd provide our own background music. But the unions objected. It's never used. Except when—

ADAM. When what?

JACIE. Sometimes, when I produce strong emotion—joy, sadness, even anger—it just starts inside me. I can't control it. *(Worriedly.)* I think I have another fault.

ADAM. You know, I'm beginning to love your faults.

(CARLA enters briskly.)

CARLA. Here I am at last. Sorry I've taken so long. I hate downsizing meetings. All those tears and recriminations. Why can't people just accept that they're no longer wanted? Bleating on about their pension schemes ... Ready?

ADAM. I—

CARLA. I thought we'd do something really exciting this evening. I've commandeered Lester's jet. I took your name in vain, I'm afraid. I said you were dying to see the Paris operation. We can be there for dinner. You ready? Then in the morning, I thought I'd take you to—

ADAM. I'm sorry, Carla, but I think I'm going to be staying here.

CARLA. What?

ADAM. Thank you, but I've just set something up. I'm writing, you see, and I've just been promised the use of this studio so I think I need to take advantage of that, thank you all the same.

CARLA. You've been offered the use of this studio?

ADAM. In a way.

CARLA. By whom?

ADAM. Well—by Chance. Mr. Tate.

CARLA. Chandler is an employee of this company. He can't offer the use of a studio—

ADAM. I don't want to get him into any trouble, it was just—

CARLA. How can he possibly offer the use of a studio? How dare he?

ADAM. Well ...

CARLA. What do you intend to do in it? *War and Peace* or something?

ADAM. No, no. Just small scale. Something I'm writing.

CARLA. Adam, dear, you badly need to learn the facts of television life. This is not how you go about things. If you want to make a program, the first thing you do is submit the idea in writing to our storyline department. If they approve it, then they will pass it on to our script department. Storyline have a big backlog at present so this can take up to six months. In turn, the script department will then consider it and if they're enthusiastic—and they also have a huge backlog, so add an-

other six months at least—they will contact you and suggest that you develop your idea to what we call P.F.S., the Primary Full Synopsis. This is unpaid, and there is no guarantee at the end of it that the idea will go forward from there. But assuming it's approved, and that's a very big if because the competition is frightening, you will receive a down payment commissioning a first draft. Scripts can go to four or five drafts, generally more. This process can take anything up to two years. At the end of this time, if we can find an interested director, the piece might actually be made. Though I should warn you that for every hundred scripts that reach their final draft stage, only fifteen are made and of those usually five are shelved before transmission. And unless it's transmitted, under the new agreements, you will not, of course, receive your full and final fee. Welcome to modern television, Adam.

ADAM. In which case, I think I stand a better chance here.

CARLA. You stand no chance at all because I won't allow it to happen.

ADAM. Why not?

CARLA. Because I am the overall Regional Director here, Adam, and things are done my way. And I don't care if you're the chairman's mistress, you can bloody well toe the line like everybody else, now are you coming?

ADAM. In that case, I might have to go over your head ...

CARLA. I think you should know that I'm very upset about this, Adam—

ADAM. ... I might phone my uncle and see what he says.

CARLA. You're really prepared to drag Lester Trainsmith into this?

ADAM. If necessary. I haven't met him for 20 years but he seems to have my interests at heart.

CARLA. I underestimated you. You're a pushy little bastard, aren't you?

ADAM. Only if I'm pushed.

CARLA. What is this program, anyway?

ADAM. It's—not fully developed yet but—I'm writing something for Jacie.

CARLA. Who?

ADAM. Jacie. Jacie—Tripplethree.

CARLA. Who the hell is Jacie Tripplethree?

JACIE. Me.

CARLA. *(Startled.)* That? You're writing for that?

ADAM. Yes.

CARLA. That's an actoid. You can't write a special for an actoid. They're only used for daytime soaps. And tiny parts. You can't use them in proper programs.

ADAM. We feel that Jacie has potential.

CARLA. Who do?

ADAM. Me and Tate.

CARLA. Rubbish! What's it ever done, for God's sake?

JACIE. I've starred in some of the most successful daytime serials that have ever been produced by this network. In THE MARKET GIRLS I played Tracy, a fun-loving teenager—

CARLA. Shut up!

JACIE. *(Unintimidated.)* —who came to a tragic end when she drowned herself off Wapping Pier clasping the baby that nobody wanted her to have ...

CARLA. Listen, I– Will you tell it to shut up?

ADAM. I don't know how to shut her up.

JACIE. —I then went on to join the very successful TEEN TIME where I played Marcie, the bookish frump, who was later transformed by her love for Derek into a glamorous bride. Unfortunately, their marriage ended prematurely when their car overturned in Sicily.

CARLA. *(At the console.)* Bloody machine. Cut it off! How do I cut it off?!

JACIE. Next to the police series FAIR COPS when I played Helen Dudgeon, the rookie with a sexual hang-up and a grudge—for which I received very favorable reviews despite the show's brief run ...

(CARLA manages to shut off JACIE who stops abruptly.)

CARLA. There! *(She glares at ADAM.)* And you're proposing to work with that?

ADAM. Yes.

CARLA. I thought we had an understanding between us, Adam. I'm very disappointed in you. I'm very, very upset. And hurt.

ADAM. I'm sorry.

CARLA. I thought we were ... I took a lot of time and trouble over our arrangements tonight. That restaurant has a three month waiting list.

ADAM. Well. Perhaps you should have consulted me first.

CARLA. I don't ask, Adam. I take. And no one says no. I don't give a stuff if you want to make a fool of yourself but don't think you can make a fool of me. Clear? *(She goes to the door. To JACIE:)* And I'll have you melted down as well, you ugly little actoid.

(CARLA storms out, passing CHANDLER accompanied by PRIM and TRUDI.)

PRIM. What on earth have you done to her, Adam?

ADAM. I'm afraid I said no.

PRIM. Oh, dear.

TRUDI. She won't like that.

PRIM and TRUDI. *(Together, triumphantly.)* Yeah!

CHANDLER. She's a dangerous enemy, boy. Don't get on her dark side. *(With a glance at JACIE.)* That includes you, Triplethree. OK, people, let's go to work.

JACIE. Yes, sir!

(They stare at her for a second, surprised. Then, as they go about their tasks, the lights fade.)

Scene 3

(The same. Some days later. We are witnessing a rehearsal of ADAM's script.

Everyone is there, CHANDLER, PRIM, and TRUDI all in their places with ADAM hopping about nervously. The "cast" has undergone personality changes but, owing to their obligations to the regular series, they have made only token attempts to alter their appearance. They include the DOCTOR, now playing the FARMER; the MOTHER, now playing the WIFE and JACIE playing herself. The set has been moved around slightly. The bed is there together with two tables, one to represent a stove and another a kitchen table. There are also a couple of chairs. At the start, the FARMER is bringing an unconscious JACIE into the house.)

FARMER. *(Calling.)* Mother ... Mother ... Quickly! Give me a hand here.

WIFE. *(Rushing to help.)* What is it, Father? What's happened?

FARMER. I don't know for certain. I found her lying by the side of the road. It may have been a hit and run. Come on, get her on to the bed. *(Struggling, they get JACIE to the bed and lay her down.)* There! That's it!

WIFE. She doesn't look right.

FARMER. She's not right. We may need to fetch a doctor.

WIFE. He's twenty miles away. He'll never get through this snow.

FARMER. Aye, true. Three meters deep it is up at Hegg's Bottom.

WIFE. *(To JACIE.)* Are you alright, love? Can you hear

me? Oh, she's that cold, poor little thing. I'll get her a rug, Father ... *(JACIE makes feeble little noises, as if trying to speak.)* What's she saying? *(To JACIE.)* Are you trying to tell us something, love? *(More noises from JACIE.)* What's she trying to say, Father?

FARMER. If you shut up a minute, Mother, we might be able to hear her. *(They lean close to JACIE to hear.)* Come on, lass, what are you trying to say?

JACIE. *(Speaking with great difficulty.)* I—fell—off—the truck ...

WIFE. What did she say?

FARMER. She fell off a trick ...

PRIM. Damn! Sorry!

CHANDLER. Hold it! Hold it! *(The actoids freeze except for JACIE.)* Good. That's an improvement.

JACIE. Was that better?

CHANDLER. Much better, good. Less is beautiful, alright? Get that into your tiny tin brain, Jacie, less is better, yes?

JACIE. Yes, sir.

PRIM. I'm sorry, Chance. I'm trying to compensate, but the fault is so occasional ...

CHANDLER. Don't worry, Prim. Do your best. You can do no more than your best.

PRIM. Thank you. *(To TRUDI.)* He's so cheerful today.

TRUDI. Won't last.

CHANDLER. Listen, clear, please—Prim, will you clear them all except Jacie?

PRIM. *(As she works the console.)* They'll be here any moment, Chance ...

CHANDLER. Do it. We've got time. Keep an eye out for them, Trudi. *(The FARMER and the WIFE go off. So does TRUDI.)* You happy, Adam?

ADAM The happiest man in the world.

CHANDLER. My God. A happy author. We're in big trouble people!

PRIM. I'm leaving Jacie free the whole time, Chance. Is that what you want?

CHANDLER. We can't feed her, she's got to do her own thing. Just run the others.

PRIM. Right, as long as you know I'm not answerable—

CHANDLER. Understood. *(To JACIE.)* Now, listen. Don't get clever, don't get smart. You've got good instincts, and most important you've got natural timing. But when it comes to judgment, you've got to trust me a little, alright?

JACIE. Yes, sir.

CHANDLER. You notice I'm always wanting you to do a little bit less, you're always wanting to do a bit more, yes?

JACIE. Yes.

CHANDLER. You won't be the first actor to do that. You may be the first actoid, but not the first actor. You have to learn control, yes?

JACIE. Yes, sir.

CHANDLER. You show these people today what you can do, they will be knocked out. But don't try to show off, don't pander to them in any way. Always keep the comic truth. Because once they stop believing, they go home. So you listen to me. One day you'll be a big star you can tell me to go screw myself but right now you're just a smart kid with potential—*(Indicating ADAM.)*—like him. The boy genius.

ADAM. What did I say?

TRUDI. *(At the door.)* There's a van pulling in.

PRIM. They're here, Chance.

CHANDLER. One more thing ...

PRIM. Chance, they're here ...

CHANDLER. *(Yelling.)* One damn minute!

TRUDI. It's alright, they still have to unload the chair ...

CHANDLER. OK, quickly. When you pick up the hot kettle, you know where I mean?

JACIE. Yes, sir.

CHANDLER. In a comedy, you've got a choice of ways you can burn yourself. You can do it big, or you can do it small. You have a choice. You can pick it up like this: *(CHANDLER picks up the kettle and drops it with a great yell and hops about.)* Or. Alternatively. You can choose to do it like this. *(He repeats the business. This time he replaces the kettle and walks away mouthing a silent scream.)* You know which choice I want you to make?

JACIE. The little one.

CHANDLER. Aren't I predictable? The one thing never to choose is the middle ground. *(This time he picks up the kettle and reacts with genuine pain.)* Now that hurt. You leave that till you play Saint Joan. Nobody laughs at that except sadists and weirdos and them we can do without. The other choices can still be as true but with either of them we're reassured you're not going to die from major burns. Yes?

JACIE. Yes, sir.

CHANDLER. Good. Thank you for listening to me. I am incredibly grateful. I appreciate it. I am very old and you have talent and potential which will outlive me but most of all I love you for calling me sir. *(To the others.)* Who told her to call me sir?

PRIM. Nobody. She just decided.

CHANDLER. I think everybody should call me sir. Why not?

(CARLA has entered.)

CARLA. Good morning, sir.

CHANDLER. Ah, Mrs. Pepperbloom. Come to prejudice the proceedings, no doubt?

CARLA. I'm sure Lester is quite capable of making his own decisions. May I have your attention, everyone? Very briefly. As you know, Mr. Trainsmith is incapacitated. Although his hearing is excellent he will be conversing with you today through a third party. Please respect Mr. Trainsmith's personal space and do not invade it. On no account attempt to make

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