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SF PERUSALS

DIE MOMMIE DIE!

A Comic Thriller

by

CHARLES BUSCH

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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Original Off-Broadway production by Kenneth Elliott

NEW WORLD STAGES

340 West 50th Street

DARYL ROTH BOB BOYETT

present

Die Mommie Die!

Written by and Starring

CHARLES BUSCH

Featuring

BOB ARI VAN HANSIS CHRIS HOCH

ASHLEY MORRIS KRISTINE NIELSEN

Original Music by
LEWIS FLINN

Charles Busch's costumes designed and created by
MICHAEL BOTTARI *and* RONALD CASE

Scenic Designer
MICHAEL ANANIA

Lighting Designer
BEN STANTON

Costume Designer
JESSICA JAHN

Sound System Designer
KEN HYPES

Wig Designer
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ELYSE PASQUALE TIM LEVY

General Manager
ADAM HESS

Production Stage Manager
DONALD WILLIAM MYERS

Production Manager
TRAVIS WALKER

Directed by

CARL ANDRESS

DIE MOMMIE DIE! opened in July, 1999. It was produced by Kenneth Elliott and Don Fairbanks at the Coast Playhouse in Los Angeles. The production was directed by Kenneth Elliott with set design by B.T. Whitehill, costumes by Dione H. Lebhar. Mr. Busch's costumes were by Michael Bottari and Ronald Case. The lighting was by Vivien Leone, sound design and original music by Jeremy Grody, casting by Scott Genkinger, C.S.A. The stage manager was Kevin Carroll with the following cast:

EDITH . . . . . Dorie Barton
BOOTSIE . . . . . Wendy Worthington
TONY . . . . . Mark Capri
ANGELA . . . . . Charles Busch
SOL . . . . . Greg Mullavey
LANCE . . . . . Carl Andress

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

EDITH SUSSMAN
BOOTSIE CARP
TONY PARKER
ANGELA ARDEN
SOL SUSSMAN
LANCE SUSSMAN

TIME AND PLACE

1967, Beverly Hills, California

PROLOGUE

In the dark, we hear the dramatic "Die! Mommie! Die!" *theme music. The tone changes and becomes eerie and gothic. A montage of altered, "photo-shopped" photographic images appears on a scrim.*

We see the date, "1954." A posed holiday card of the happy *Sussman family, Hollywood royalty: the jovial producer, Sol P. Sussman, his lovely wife, the singer* **ANGELA ARDEN**, *and their two beautiful young children,* **EDITH** *and* **LANCE**. *"Seasons Greetings from the Sussman Family."*

A signed photograph of **ANGELA** *at the height of fifties glamour.*

A page from Variety. We "scroll" down on the page until we see a small story with the headline "Singer Angela Arden's Sister a Suicide." Tabloid photos of the covered up corpse being carried out on a stretcher and a close-up of an empty bottle of pills. More tabloid photos of a distraught **ANGELA**, *heavily veiled, being ushered into the church for her sister's funeral.*

Another Variety headline announcing, "Sol P. Sussman produces 'Song of Marie Antoinette' *to star wife, Angela Arden." Then a stunning studio photograph of* **ANGELA** *as Marie Antoinette. The photo is then superimposed with a Hollywood Reporter headline "Angie Loses Her Head. Musical Pic a Flop."*

*An ad for the highly anticipated television variety show, "*The Angela Arden Hour.*" Publicity photos of* **ANGELA** *duetting with her famous guests, Peggy Lee, Rosemary Clooney and Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin. The inevitable Hollywood Confidential headline. "TV Show Fails. What's Wrong With Angie's Voice?"*

A quick montage of posters for **ANGELA***'s increasingly desperate summer stock package tours of "*My Fair Lady*", "*South Pacific*" and "*Peter Pan.*"*

A final headline from Variety, "Angela Arden Announces Retirement." And a final haunting photographic image of **ANGELA***, in dark glasses and scarf, fleeing the press.*

Fade to black as a new date appears on the scrim. "1967, Today."

SCENE ONE

1967. The entrance and living room of the Sussman home in Beverly Hills. The spare décor should evoke as much classical Greek tragedy as it does a sixties California mansion. Offstage left is the front door. Down left leads to both the kitchen and the den. Stage right is an archway with a short landing with a few steps leading to the bedrooms. Downstage right leads to the garden. There is a sofa, an armchair and a coffee table. Behind the sofa is a narrow table with a vase and a scissors. Upstage right is the stereo and a small bar with decanters and an ice bucket.

BOOTSIE, *the warm hearted, salt of the earth housekeeper, is vacuuming.* **EDITH**, *a beautiful girl, twenty one and very mod runs on.*

EDITH. Bootsie, Bootsie, he's going to be here any minute.

BOOTSIE. Can't hear you, honey!

EDITH. Turn that thing off!

BOOTSIE. Beg pardon?

(**EDITH** *unplugs the vacuum cleaner.*)

EDITH. Get your big Hoover out of here. He'll be home any minute.

BOOTSIE. You just calm yourself down, Edie.

EDITH. How's my hair? Too high? He doesn't like when I tease it too much.

BOOTSIE. The hairdo's all right but Heavenly graces, that mini-dress is two inches shy of giving away the entire candy counter.

EDITH. Oh, he'll complain like Hell but you'll see, Bootsie, he'll never take his eyes off my legs.

BOOTSIE. As my Grandmother Newton used to say, men are like Halloween pumpkins. They may look different but inside they're all the same kind of mush.

(**EDITH** *violently twists* **BOOTSIE***'s arm behind her back.*)

EDITH. Take that back! Take it back!

BOOTSIE. Lemme go. You're breakin' my arm. I didn't mean it! I swear I didn't!

EDITH. (*Releasing* **BOOTSIE***'s arm*) He's not like other men. He's unique. An original. For God's sake, Bootsie, you're talking about my father!

BOOTSIE. Edie, you got me all wrong. Nobody thinks more highly of your Pa than me.

EDITH. Daddy's a great man. A producer of classic motion pictures. Nobody appreciates Daddy like I do. Nobody loves him like I do.

BOOTSIE. If I recall correctly, the man does have a wife. I think that lady is also known as your mother.

EDITH. My mother's known as L.A.'s best dressed whore.

BOOTSIE. Hush now. You shouldn't say such a thing.

EDITH. Mother has brought dishonor to the name of Sussman.

BOOTSIE. Edith, only bad tidings can come to a house divided. A crop of bitter hatred passed down from generation to generation and now unto the Pepsi generation.

EDITH. Bootsie, sometimes – sometimes I wish my mother were dead.

BOOTSIE. Edie, such thoughts are the devil's kindling.

EDITH. I don't care. I swear I'll wring her neck if I hear her say one more time that she's singing better than ever.

BOOTSIE. She was a great singer. Gotta give her that.

EDITH. Was a great singer. You've heard her lately. She's got a vibrato as wide as Mister Ed's asshole.

(*Doorbell rings.*)

EDITH. That must be Daddy. He's always losing his keys.

(*She opens the door.* **TONY**, *a very handsome, sophisticated man in his mid-thirties, appears.*)

TONY. Oh, hello.

EDITH. (*Sarcastically*) Tony, you look surprised. Didn't think I'd be here?

TONY. It's a lovely surprise. However, aren't you usually in class at this hour?

EDITH. On Tuesdays I just have Psychology. I suppose you should know that Daddy's coming home today. He should be arriving any minute.

TONY. I thought his plane was coming in at four.

EDITH. He decided to take an earlier flight. Rather inconvenient, isn't it?

TONY. No. Delightful. I haven't seen your Dad in a long time.

EDITH. It's been so considerate of you keeping my mother company while my father's been away.

TONY. We wouldn't want her to be lonely.

EDITH. That seems to be your stock in trade, amusing wealthy older women.

TONY. I'm known to have quite a flair with the younger ones.

EDITH. I'm afraid your suave, continental charm is sadly out of date.

TONY. Smart girl. Never trust anyone over thirty. Not with that shape. Hello, Bootsie.

BOOTSIE. (*Coldly*) I've got chores to do.

TONY. (*Amused*) You don't care much for me, do you, Bootsie?

BOOTSIE. Don't you be sniffing up my skirt. I'm not one of your sexed-up, big-breasted bunnies.

TONY. Not even a prayer for a lost soul?

BOOTSIE. I'm saving my prayers to send Dick Nixon to the White House in '68.

(**BOOTSIE** *exits into the kitchen with the vacuum cleaner.*)

TONY. Where's your mother?

EDITH. Where do you think? Out in the garden or in that crummy potting shed experimenting with her disgusting fertilizers and insect poisons.

TONY. Your mother is a wonderful gardener. She invented a new species of rose.

EDITH. It's a mutated daisy. The Angela Arden Sussman Rose is as phony as her youth.

TONY. Have you always felt so kindly towards your mother?

EDITH. (*Tormented*) I guess deep down I've always known the truth about her.

TONY. What truth?

EDITH. I don't have to tell you anything. You're not my shrink.

TONY. (*With intensity*) What secret did you learn? Tell me. Why do you hate her so much?

EDITH. (*Confused*) I hate her because she's – because she's – because she's a money grubbing selfish bitch who ruined my father's life. And she's a promiscuous slut who spends my father's hard earned money on trash like you.

TONY. That's not good enough.

ANGELA (O.S.). Goodbye dear, and God bless.

TONY. I think I hear her coming in from the garden.

(**ANGELA** *enters. She's a beautiful, glamorous woman of indeterminate age. Although working in the garden, she's wearing a fabulous ensemble of slacks and an over-skirt. She carries on her arm a basket full of beautiful flowers.*)

ANGELA. Forgive my appearance. I've been up to my elbows in manure. Hello, Tony.

TONY. Are those flowers from your garden?

ANGELA. Goodness, no. Just now while I was pruning my Clerodendrum, this lovely woman stopped her car and handed me this extraordinary bouquet. She said she was a great fan of mine, had all my records and wanted to thank me for the pleasure I'd given her over the years. People can be so kind

EDITH. Mother, if she was your fan, she must have been very old.

ANGELA. She managed to hobble out of the car despite her dowager's hump.

(**ANGELA** *crosses to the table behind the sofa. She cuts the stems of the flowers and arranges them in the vase.*)

ANGELA. It's such a sunny day. One could almost walk around nude.

EDITH. Mother, you would.

ANGELA. Edith, there's nothing wrong with nudity. Tony frequently visits a nudist colony at Big Sur.

TONY. It feels good letting everything hang in the breeze.

EDITH. That's revolting.

ANGELA. My darling daughter, you sound like a square from Squaresville.

EDITH. I suppose I'm square to you because I don't sleep around with every delivery boy or gas station attendant.

ANGELA. You're affecting a rather severe tone, young lady.

EDITH. Severe to a woman who rubs cocoa butter on Sammy Davis Junior.

ANGELA. Sammy is a cherished friend of this family. I refuse to justify my actions to you.

EDITH. Because you can't.

ANGELA. Oh Edie, why must we be forever at each other's throats?

TONY. Edith, can't you meet your mother half way? She's a good egg.

EDITH. You've never been a real mother to me.

ANGELA. How can you say that? I indulged your every whim; the ponies, the dogs, the rodents. Not to mention the surgery to pin back your jug ears.

EDITH. You're such a saint, Mother. We really ought to cut off your big toe and use it as a shrine.

ANGELA. Don't reject me, Edith. Some day I'll be gone and you'll regret these lost moments.

EDITH. I'll take my chances. (*She exits.*)

ANGELA. I seem to have a green thumb for everything but raising children.

TONY. It's just a phase, Angie. All kids go through it.

ANGELA. When did it start? When did it all go wrong?

TONY. After your sister Barbara died?

ANGELA. Why should you say that?

TONY. Sometimes a death in the family, the death of a beloved Aunt, can be a traumatic experience for a child.

ANGELA. Perhaps something did happen that summer. One can feel the memory lingering like the smog over the canyon. Whatever it was, I've paid for it dearly. What about you, Tony? Have I paid enough for you?

TONY. Stop it! Stop it right there. That's not funny. You know you're my girl.

ANGELA. Am I? You ask me to throw away everything safe and secure for a man whose reputation is that of a highly paid gigolo.

TONY. I've always been the sort of guy people spread rumors about. Hell, there was a certain "big" rumor about me that made you reach for the phone in the first place.

ANGELA. Why, you contemptible –

(*She starts to slap him but he catches her arm.*)

ANGELA. Who are you, Tony Parker? You've slipped into my life as easily as Vermouth into a glass of Gin. Quickly and just a bit too smooth. Your life is a locked file cabinet of dark ugly secrets.

TONY. (*He grabs her violently*) What have you heard?

ANGELA. I have it on excellent authority, by way of every hair burner in West Hollywood that the favors you've received were not only courtesy of the ladies but *les garçons* as well.

TONY. Get this straight. I'm no fag. I've torn men apart for saying less.

ANGELA. Darling, listen to us. We were nearly arguing. I've never desired any man as I've desired you.

(*They kiss.*)

TONY. Now listen, Angela. A friend of mine found us a townhouse in New York. It's small and quite intimate, with no room for secrets. Oh and I nearly forgot. There's a magnificent grand piano in the music room where you can practice your singing and rehearse that new act.

ANGELA. The new act. The mere mention of it is enough to fill me with terror.

TONY. Tony's here to hold your hand. When can you meet me in New York? Next week?

ANGELA. Next week? I don't know. There's so much to consider.

TONY. The only thing to consider is our happiness.

ANGELA. Happiness? I doubt I'd even recognize it.

(**EDITH** *and* **BOOTSIE** *both run in from different directions.* **EDITH** *carries a wrapped gift.*)

EDITH. He's here! He's here! I saw his car pull up from the window.

BOOTSIE. (*Overlapping*) So he is. The master is home.

(*The front door opens and* **ANGELA***'s husband,* **SOL SUSSMAN***, enters.* **SOL** *is a movie mogul in his late fifties, a big, jovial personality masking an essential darkness of character.*)

EDITH. Daddy! You're home! You're home! (**EDITH** *kisses him all over his face.*)

SOL. How's my little girl?

EDITH. She's missed you so much.

BOOTSIE. Mr. S, it's good to have you home. Have you had your lunch? Because I can rustle up some victuals faster than Man 'o war kicked up the dust at Hialeah.

SOL. Bootsie, I dream of your cooking day and night. Oy, I tell ya, that airplane food was pure drek. Even in First Class. Every morsel was poison.

BOOTSIE. Then I'd best scoot into the kitchen right now.

SOL. Bootsie, my stomach is a little "mishkit." Perhaps later.

BOOTSIE. Well, your Royal Highness, I'm at your command. (*Vulnerably*) Anything you want. At any time. Nothing's too much for your Bootsie. (*Catching herself*) Good gravy, I'd better skedaddle and think about my supper. (*She exits*)

ANGELA. Welcome home, Sol.

SOL. Tony Parker, what brings you here?

TONY. Mrs. Sussman left her scarf at the club.

ANGELA. It was most kind of you to return it.

SOL. So Tony, how's the acting career? Still dry?

TONY. (*tongue in cheek*) I'm holding out. It's not easy finding another TV series that has the range and class of "Squad Car Thirteen." I really should get back to the club. I have to give a tennis lesson to a very spoiled ten year old named Gwendolyn.

EDITH. Who knows? Maybe she gets a big allowance.

ANGELA. EDITH! That was mean and common.

TONY. That's all right. Edie and I enjoy ragging each other. It's like a good volley of tennis. Smacking that ball to the right and smacking it to the left. Over and under. But remember, Edie, don't get too close to the net.

SOL. What the hell's that supposed to mean?

TONY. Mr. Sussman, it's good having you back. (**TONY** *exits*)

ANGELA. Sol, was your trip successful?

SOL. It used to be easy raising money for American pictures in Europe. But now it's dried up like a plate of blintzes in the Sahara. No, my dear wife, it was not a success.

ANGELA. I'm so sorry to hear that, Sol. While you were gone, I –

EDITH. Daddy, how will this affect the movie? Your heart and soul is in this one.

SOL. We've run so over budget. I needed additional funds. The money men tell me styles have changed. There's not much interest in a thinking man's epic. We were forced to shut down production.

EDITH. Oh no! Oh no!

SOL. We sent everyone home. Thousands of actors, technicians, artisans and lepers. In thirty-five years in this business, this is a first.

EDITH. It'll get finished. It must. "Abraham and Sarah" is a timeless story that'll provide inspiration to millions of people in its domestic and worldwide release.

SOL. The story of an honest man of unshakable integrity pitted against the corrupt bureaucracy.

EDITH. You're a modern day Abraham, Daddy. Tell me again about how you defied the Hollywood blacklist.

SOL. Well, my precious, in 1960 I waged battle with my own conscience when I found myself in the untenable position where I –

ANGELA. EDITH, you've heard those stories a million times. Your father is tired. Sol, while you were gone, I –

EDITH. Daddy, I have a welcome home present for you. (*She hands him the present*)

SOL. This exquisitely wrapped package is for me? It's almost a criminal act to tear the paper.

(**SOL** *unwraps the package.*)

ANGELA. Oh my, it's an epic production to rival "Abraham and Sarah."

SOL. You can tell this gift was wrapped with love.

(*He finishes unwrapping it. It's a framed photograph.*)

SOL. Look at this. What a gorgeous photo. Simply gorgeous.

EDITH. It's the two of us last summer.

SOL. On that beautiful terrace in Carmel. With the ocean behind us. Father and daughter.

ANGELA. Wasn't I in that photo? I could swear it.

EDITH. I had to cut you out of it, Mother. Your head ruined the composition.

SOL. This is a gift from the heart of which I shall always treasure. (*He kisses her.*) I tell you what, Princess. Get yourself dolled up. I'm taking you to lunch at Chasens.

EDITH. Just the two of us?

SOL. Just the two of us. And Edie, wear a skirt long enough to cover your little "tuches."

EDITH. Oh Daddy. (**EDITH** *runs out of the room, giggling.*)

SOL. My God, I'm proud of that kid. She is my legacy.

ANGELA. Your son was cast in the lead in his college musical "Oklahoma."

SOL. Was he?

ANGELA. Yes, Lance phoned last week with the big news. He was so excited.

SOL. "Oklahoma," a good show.

ANGELA. He's breaking new ground. He got the Theatre Department to cast him as Ado Annie.

SOL. Why is this not a surprise?

ANGELA. He can never please you, can he? You'll destroy him as you've destroyed everyone else.

SOL. I've destroyed him? You turned the kid into a pathetic weakling with your smothering. Not to mention the screwed up wiring in his brain.

ANGELA. I will not have you malign my son.

SOL. Face it. He's a wierdo. The head aches. The sudden rages. You did this to him.

ANGELA. By loving him too much?

SOL. It was all those goddam pills you were taking when you were pregnant. The Benzadrine, the Dexadrine, the Seconals. The doctors warned you it might hurt the baby. It's a miracle the kid didn't end up with two noses.

ANGELA. It's a miracle he didn't end up with your nose. (*beat*) Lance isn't the only one with big news. I've received an offer to sing in New York.

SOL. At a nightclub?

ANGELA. No, at a resort in the Catskills.

SOL. The Borscht Belt?

ANGELA. After being away so long, I thought it prudent to break in a new act away from the scrutiny of the New York critics.

SOL. How much money is this place offering?

ANGELA. We haven't worked out all the details but I'm sure it won't – .

SOL. When will you be leaving?

ANGELA. By the end of the week, I imagine. The top arrangers and musicians are all in New York.

SOL. You're a rotten liar.

ANGELA. Sol!

SOL. Nobody would hire you to sing at a dogfight. Not with that wobble.

ANGELA. That's not true. I've been practicing every day with my vocal coach, Madame Finzi-Contini. I no longer crack on that high F over middle C. Now if you'll excuse me, I have peonies screaming for attention.

SOL. I know why you're so eager to get to New York and it ain't to sing at any bar mitzvahs. You've got a lover. And he's rented a townhouse for you both in Greenwich Village. Care to know the floor plan?

ANGELA. No, though I'm mildly curious to know the identity of my secret paramour.

SOL. Does the name Tony Parker ring a bell?

ANGELA. Tony? Tony Parker? (She bursts into laughter)

SOL. Don't you dare laugh.

ANGELA. But really, it's so amusing. Me. Run off with Tony, a failed TV actor and a notorious lothario. You should give me more credit than that.

SOL. Tony Parker is known to have the biggest cock west of the San Andreas fault. I should've known a tramp like you would come begging for it.

ANGELA. I will not remain here to be insulted.

SOL. You're not going anywhere. I had a detective follow you. He's taken pictures, lots of pictures. Pictures that made even a hard-boiled gumshoe reach for a Pepto Bismal. All these years you played the great lady with me. I thought you were frigid and here I see Parker schtupping you like a cocker spaniel. Take a gander.

(*He takes a folder of photos out of his briefcase and hands it to her. She glances at the explicit photos.*)

ANGELA. Well, these are certainly grounds for a divorce?

SOL. Never. I'm sentencing you to life imprisonment, baby and I'll be the warden. What I've got on you would destroy any hope of a career outside of a Tijuana brothel. We're a famous couple, Angela. We're gonna stay that, in public if not in private.

ANGELA. And that will bring you happiness?

SOL. Nobody makes a laughingstock out of Sol P. Sussman.

ANGELA. You don't know what you're saying.

(**SOL** *slaps her across the face.*)

SOL. Am I making myself clear? You're my possession. I own you the same as I own every toilet in this house.

ANGELA. What did I do to make you hate me so? It began long before Tony came into our lives.

SOL. Don't dredge up the past. A bad strategic move.

ANGELA. After my sister died, there was that brief moment when there seemed to be a cease-fire in our war with

each other. I thought there might be a chance that we could have a life together.

SOL. It came too late. Too much blood had been shed.

(*He feels a sudden pain in his stomach.*)

ANGELA. Sol, are you all right?

SOL. Don't get your hopes up. It's not a heart attack. Just this damn constipation. I haven't taken a decent crap since I landed in Madrid. Now you will excuse me, Mrs. Sussman. I don't want to keep our daughter waiting. (**SOL** *starts to leave but then turns back with an after thought.*) Oh, and Angela, if you think you'll forget your troubles by indulging in a shopping spree, think again. I'm canceling all of your charge cards. From now on, all requests come through the warden's office.

(*He exits. Alone,* **ANGELA** *feels trapped. She knows in her heart what she must do.*)

END OF SCENE

SCENE TWO

The following day. **BOOTSIE** *is spray waxing the coffee table. She takes a short break and looking around to make sure the coast is clear; she takes out a small flask and sneaks a nip of whiskey. The phone rings. Startled, she quickly puts away her flask. She is about to answer the phone when* **SOL** *runs out and grabs it from her.*

SOL. No! No! I got it! (*On the phone*) Yeah, I'm here… I'm doing the best I can. I'm scrambling. I'm … Monday? That's only a few … It's impossible … Abatelli, you gotta give me more time …You gotta …(*the other end hangs up*) My God. My God.

BOOTSIE. Mr. S, are you sick? Should I call Doctor Mandel?

SOL. Nathan Mandel I don't need. Thirty-five years in this business. Thrice honored with the Star of David Medallion by the United Jewish Appeal. A citation from President Kennedy for fighting prejudice and discrimination on the screen. The recipient of a Thalberg Award.

BOOTSIE. Talk to Bootsie. Let her help.

SOL. You know as well as anyone that I haven't had a hit, a real hit in ten years. The Gods have turned against me.

BOOTSIE. Tell Bootsie everything.

SOL. Where do I start? I had a solid commitment from MGM to do The Billie Holiday Story. A blistering expose of racism in this country. Picture Elizabeth Taylor as Lady Day. The NAACP starts making noises and the deal evaporates. I haven't been so betrayed

since I was fucked over for the rights to the stories of Sholom Aleichem. Picture Cary Grant as Tevye the milkman. (*Lowering his voice*) He's part-Jewish, you know. It's Angela. She's a witch. She's the one who put the curse on me.

BOOTSIE. Mr.S, he who is slow to anger is better than the mighty. Proverbs, 16. Or as your people would say, "Es vet zich oys-hailen far der chasseneh. Azoy vert dos kichel tzekrochen." (trans: *It will heal in time. And that's how the cookie crumbles.*)

SOL. You're right. Angela. She's not worth it.

BOOTSIE. I wouldn't dream of saying anything against the Missus, but she does seem to have her own peculiar style of being Mrs. Sol P. Sussman. I was raised on the belief that a wife's first obligation is to her husband's happiness and complete satisfaction. Now, tell me what's causing you such "spilkus."

SOL. The only way I could finance this new picture, "Abraham and Sarah," was to borrow money from …let's put it this way, from less than reputable associates.

BOOTSIE. The mob?

SOL. Everything's gone wrong. A fire destroying the tower of Babel. The leading lady gets kicked in the face by a mule. Now the movie's fallen apart and this fellow, this mob boss, Abatelli, is threatening to bathe me in cement if I don't pay up. I need twenty million dollars by next Monday. Bootsie, you're looking at a dead man. What am I going to do? What am I going to do?

BOOTSIE. Mr.S., he who is without hope must find sustenance in the bounties of the earth. You come with me into the kitchen. Got some chocolate chip cookies still warm from the oven just the way you like 'em. March into that kitchen. You heard me, Mr. S. March!

(**SOL** *exits through the kitchen door. Just before* **BOOTSIE** *follows him, she sneaks one more sip from her flask. After they're gone,* **ANGELA** *enters from the garden. She's holding a tiny vial full of white powdered arsenic. As she examines it, a sting of harpsichord music is heard.*)

ANGELA. Sol? Sol? Are you there?

(**ANGELA** *heads for the stairs. The doorbell rings.*)

Bootsie? Bootsie, will you be answering the door? Is that too much to ask?

(*When it's clear that* **BOOTSIE** *is nowhere near,* **ANGELA** *opens the door. It's* **TONY**.)

TONY. Angela, why aren't you dressed?

ANGELA. Dressed? For what?

TONY. Your tennis lesson.

(*She tries to hide the vial of arsenic in her hand.*)

ANGELA. Forgive me. I completely forgot. I'll dash upstairs and change.

TONY. First, let me show you this snapshot. It's of our Greenwich Village love nest.

ANGELA. Tony, really. Sol could walk in at any moment.

TONY. Just sit down for a minute. (*He pushes her onto the sofa.*) Such beautiful hands. (**TONY** *tries to take both of her hands in his.*) Now the other. Both hands get kissed for the price of one.

ANGELA. Tony, I think I see someone out in the garden.

(**TONY** *looks away.* **ANGELA** *quickly stuffs the bottle of arsenic between the cushions on the sofa.*)

ANGELA. Must have been the shadow of the Bougainvillea. Now may I see the photo? (**TONY** *hands her the snapshot.*)

TONY. What do you think? Heaven?

ANGELA. Yes, it's quite charming.

TONY. What's wrong, Angela? You sound funny.

ANGELA. Do I?

TONY. (*Harshly*) Everything's all right with us, isn't it? You're not giving me the bum's rush? I wouldn't take too kindly to that.

ANGELA. No. No. I suppose I'm just a bit tense what with Sol back home.

(**SOL** *enters from the kitchen holding the newspaper.*)

TONY. Hello, Mr. Sussman.

SOL. Whatcha got there? (**TONY** *snatches the photo away from* **ANGELA**)

TONY. I was showing your wife photos of my little niece. My sister Grace just had a baby.

SOL. Congratulations.

ANGELA. Tony's here to drive me to my tennis lesson.

SOL. You make this guy shlep all the way out here to drive you back to the club? Ridiculous.

TONY. It's no bother. Some people are just afraid to drive.

SOL. But she used to drive all the time. She was a hell of a good driver. She drove herself to Cedars Sinai while she was in labor giving birth to Edie.

TONY. (*to* **ANGELA**) You told me you never learned to drive.

ANGELA. I suppose I was afraid you would think me a mad eccentric.

SOL. She's a kook. Angie was a perfectly good driver until her sister died. Then suddenly she developed a phobia about it.

TONY. Did your sister die in a car accident?

SOL. No, an overdose of pills.

ANGELA. My sister Barbara and I were extremely close. Her death changed so many things. I'll run upstairs and toss on my tennis togs. I'll be but a moment.

(*She wants to retrieve the vial but* **SOL** *is now seated on the sofa reading the paper. She attempts to retrieve the vial by rearranging the pillows behind* **SOL'S** *back.*)

SOL. So Tony, this morning I was in the mood for a cigar and I noticed – Angie, what the hell are you doing?

ANGELA. Need I remind you, Sol, that Dr. Mandel said you should always have proper support for your back?

SOL. I don't need to be reminded of a lot of things. Just leave me the hell alone.

(**ANGELA**, *defeated in her attempt to retrieve the vial, exits up the stairs.*)

TONY. Mr. Sussman, I owe you an apology. During your absence, I helped myself to a few of your delightful Havanas. I fully intend to restock your humidor.

SOL. They don't come cheap. I'll just have to wait 'til you get yourself a new series.

TONY. It's easier striking oil than a hit series. I'm weighing a film offer. A secret agent spoof shot in Mexico. My agents tell me it's time to laugh at myself before everyone else does. I guess I'll wait for Mrs. Sussman outside in the garden.

(**TONY** *exits into the garden. The front door opens and it's* **LANCE**, *Angela's son. He's a good looking nineteen year old, carrying a large duffel bag and has a guitar strapped to his back. Unaware that* **SOL** *is in the room, he heads for the bar and is about to take a bottle of scotch.*)

SOL. Lance, what are you doing home from college?

LANCE. Daddy! Didn't you read about it in the paper?

SOL. Read what?

LANCE. The anti-war demonstration. The students barricaded themselves in the Dean's office. They sent us kids home until further notice.

SOL. Son, I'm a great believer in challenging our government's policies when conscience dictates. Did you participate in the demonstration?

LANCE. I burned down the gymnasium.

SOL. Did you? Lance, I paid for that gymnasium.

LANCE. You did?

SOL. There's a big sign on top of the entrance that says, "The Sol P. Sussman Physical Education Center."

LANCE. I guess I never looked up there. Daddy, aren't you glad to see me?

SOL. Of course I am, son. (**SOL** *rises and hugs him.*) Oy gavalte, you smell like a sturgeon that's been left too long on the buffet.

LANCE. I hitch-hiked all the way from Iowa.

SOL. You hitch-hiked? You might have been killed.

LANCE. It was fun. This really cool truck driver named Vic picked me up near Denver. He insisted on driving me all the way to Los Angeles. He let me share his sleeping bag.

SOL. Son, aside from your anti-war activities, are you getting along any better in school? No more trouble?

LANCE. Professor Billman doesn't seem to be holding a grudge.

SOL. He shouldn't after all the money I doled out to shut him up. Lance, I hope you've learned that you can't go around belting teachers because they criticize you in class.

LANCE. Professor Billman called me a Hollywood pea brain in front of the entire lecture class. Suddenly, I started getting dizzy and hearing these loud banging noises in my skull and the next thing I knew I was grabbing Professor Billman by the fringe of his bald head and pounding it against the podium. I'm sure glad he's all right. He seems to be enjoying his new Porsche. Did Mom tell you that I got into the school play? "Oklahoma."

SOL. That's right. Ado Annie.

LANCE. I guess I've got stage blood in my veins.

SOL. Lance, why don't you turn off that lamp? The sun's out. No need to be burning up electricity.

(**LANCE** *turns off the lamp, but gets into an OCD trance and begins turning on and off. On and off. On and off.*)

SOL. There are some people living in this house who are under the misguided impression that money keeps growing like roses. Lance, what are you doing?

LANCE. Nothing.

SOL. Just turn off the goddam lamp!

LANCE. My therapist says that tyranny can sometimes be

mistaken as a form of parental love.

SOL. That headshrinker is nuttier than you are.

LANCE. Dr. Pincus is not a nut. He says you have no right to speak to me like that.

(**LANCE** *returns to turning the lamp on and off.* **ANGELA** *enters dressed in her tennis togs.*)

SOL. This is my house and I'll speak to you in any goddam way that I – stop it! Leave the lamp alone. Screw Irving Pincus! If you can't act normal, we're gonna shut you away in an institution!

ANGELA. How dare you talk to your son like that?

SOL. It's my shame to have borne such a son.

ANGELA. The great man. The conscience of the industry. How about some tolerance and sympathy for your own family.

SOL. I've got no sympathy for you, baby. Or him. My son, the loser!

LANCE. You're the loser! The flop!

(**SOL** *belts him across the face.* **LANCE** *is stunned.*)

ANGELA. Lance!

SOL. If you'll both excuse me, I have to make some phone calls to keep you poor, mistreated innocents in the style you're accustomed to. (*He exits up the stairs.*)

LANCE. It's good to be home. (**LANCE** *throws himself down on the sofa.* **ANGELA** *crosses to him and hugs him.*)

ANGELA. Oh darling, I wish there was something I could do to make things better.

LANCE. What can anyone do?

(**ANGELA** *crosses to the bar to fix herself a drink. In grabbing the sofa cushion,* **LANCE** *stumbles upon the vial of arsenic. He opens it while* **ANGELA** *talks, he pours a little of the white powder on a line on the coffee table.*)

ANGELA. (*oblivious*) Your father has an absolute genius for jangling my nerves. I shouldn't let him upset me so. He really does mean well. Where would we be without him? And he's had a dreadful time of it in Spain. His picture was shut down and he…

(**ANGELA** *turns around and sees* **LANCE** *sniffing the poison.*)

ANGELA. Lance! Don't! It's poison! Drugs are poison!

LANCE. What's it doing here?

(**ANGELA** *grabs it away from him.*)

ANGELA. Darling, you must promise that you'll never start taking things. (*She scoops the poison back into the vial.*) Now you know that I'm not one of your friend's square old ladies. I toured with a band. I'm quite familiar with cocaine and fully acquainted with its dangers.

LANCE. You're the coolest Mom ever. But where do you think this coke came from?

ANGELA. You really want to know? Bootsie. The poor dear. It's been going on for years. Addicted to the nose candy. Snow, as they call it on the streets.

LANCE. Bootsie? I can't believe it.

ANGELA. Believe it, darling. Her sinus membranes have as many holes as a lace nightie.

LANCE. It looks so much like that poison you use to kill the snails in your garden. Amazingly similar. In fact, if the two were lined up side by –

ANGELA. Young man, stop evading the subject. What are you doing home from school?

LANCE. The anti-war demonstration. The students took over the President's office. They sent the rest of us kids home.

ANGELA. Oh, really? (*She sits next to him on the sofa.*)

LANCE. It's true. My friend Ruth gave the Associate Dean a salt-water enema.

ANGELA. Bottoms up. (*She downs her drink and puts her legs up over his lap.*) Be honest. Have you ever seen such gorgeous gams?

LANCE. Well, maybe on the Homecoming Queen.

ANGELA. You can tell me the truth. Do you think I'm looking old?

LANCE. No. You're still pretty.

ANGELA. Really? I look in the mirror and I don't recognize myself anymore. I don't see any face at all. Just hair and makeup and some very important jewelry.

LANCE. When I look at you, I can see you at every age.

ANGELA. That's a rather profound thing to say?

LANCE. Maybe I'm not as stupid as everyone thinks.

ANGELA. Of course, you're not. I think you're bright and sensitive and terribly, terribly dear.

LANCE. I almost forgot. I have a present for you.

(**LANCE** *rummages through his duffel bag.*)

ANGELA. What could it possibly be? Earrings from Cartier? An Hermes scarf?

(*He takes out a record album.*)

LANCE. Your 1954 Christmas album.

ANGELA. Darling, you shouldn't spend your money on such silly things.

LANCE. Don't worry. I got it for a dollar at a flea market. Let's put it on. I'm dying to hear you sing "The Little Drummer Boy."

ANGELA. Lance, you know I loathe and detest hearing my old records. You should know better. I've banished all my yesterdays.

LANCE. Mother, I told you a lie. I didn't come home because of an anti-war demonstration. They kicked my ass out of that college. The bastards.

ANGELA. They can't do this to you. Your father built them a very expensive gymnasium just to get you enrolled. I'm calling the Dean right now.

LANCE. Don't, Mother. They said I was a bad influence.

ANGELA. On the other students?

LANCE. On the faculty. They said I was a sexual magnet.

ANGELA. I imagine it was some predatory older woman.

LANCE. Dr. Crenshaw is a man.

ANGELA. You were alone with him?

LANCE. Not alone. There were eight of them. The entire math department, in fact. The Dean said – well, he said I instigated a homosexual orgy in the faculty lounge. They found me being spun around nude on the Lazy Susan.

ANGELA. Lance, just tell me one thing. The truth and I'll be behind you one hundred per cent, no matter what you say. Are you – are you a cocksucker?

LANCE. Oh Mother, who the Hell cares? I'm a mental cripple. A cripple!

ANGELA. Don't ever say that!

LANCE. I'm different. I've always been different, since I was born. I'm sick! Twisted! A freak!

ANGELA. That's not true. And you have two parents who adore you.

LANCE. You know my father hates me. And he hates you too. Why can't he just die?

ANGELA. Op bit. Cou dow ou're fy gavorite hittle joy. (*translation: Stop it. You know you're my favorite little boy.*)

LANCE. I don't want to do it. Stop.

ANGELA. Ome lon, malk nour ecret panguage. (*trans: Come on, talk our secret language.*)

LANCE. This secret language is so silly. Kids stuff.

ANGELA. Quonly rose sith tagic can veak wit. (*trans: Only those with magic can speak it.*)

LANCE. Xa yagic zowers at ban cefeat da ark. (*trans: The magic powers that can defeat the dark.*)

ANGELA. Lance, the most your father and I can do is prepare you for tomorrow. Mark my words, you will be reinstated in that school, even if your father has to dole out a million smackers for another goddam building.

(**BOOTSIE** *enters ready to dust.*)

BOOTSIE. Well, if it isn't the Crown Prince. What are you doing home from school?

(**LANCE** *snatches the vial out of* **ANGELA***'s hand and hands it to* **BOOTSIE**.)

LANCE. We found it. Your stash. Oh Bootsie, don't do this to yourself! Your sinus membranes must have as many holes as a lace nightie.

BOOTSIE. What are you talking about? Where did you find this thing?

(**ANGELA** *snatches the vial away from* **BOOTSIE**.)

ANGELA. Does it matter? Bootsie, this will not do. It will not do! Illegal drugs in my home. Let's not even discuss it. You can be assured I won't say a word to Mr. Sussman. No, please. I'm off to my tennis lesson. Young man, you take all this junk upstairs to your room right now.

LANCE. Yes, Mother. (**LANCE** *carries his duffel bag and guitar upstairs.*)

BOOTSIE. Now wait just one minute, Mrs. S. If you think that I –

ANGELA. *Je ne veux plus jamais discuter cela!* And I mean it!

(**ANGELA** *exits through the garden. Alone and very confused,* **BOOTSIE** *starts to dust the coffee table. She notices some of the powdery residue left on the table. She dips her finger in it and tastes it. She starts to gag. It's clearly not cocaine. She glances meaningfully in direction where* **ANGELA** *just exited.*)

END OF SCENE

SCENE THREE

Late that night. **SOL** *sits on the sofa in his underwear with his robe on.* **EDITH** *comes down the stairs in her short baby doll nightgown.*

EDITH. Daddy, are you okay? It's after two in the morning.

SOL. Of course, my treasure. I just had trouble sleeping. Your mother's in the kitchen fixing me some warm milk.

EDITH. That should tax her culinary abilities. I'll go make it for you.

SOL. No, no. Let her do it.

EDITH. I'll make it special, with a little bit of cinnamon.

SOL. No, no, not necessary.

EDITH. A sprinkle of nutmeg? I'll toast some marshmallows on top.

SOL. No, no, no.

EDITH. A splash of rum. Make it a hot toddy. Daddy, please, let me make it special.

SOL. It would be special enough because you would have put love in it. But no, let your mother play at being a cook. Go on back to bed, my darling.

EDITH. You seemed so tired and sad during dinner. What's wrong, Daddy? Any more news about the movie? You can tell me. We're soul mates.

SOL. You really want to know? It's this God-awful constipation. This Spanish quack prescribed a high powered suppository. I'm supposed to take it before I go to sleep. Nobody said it was going to be easy being an old Jew.

EDITH. Now that you're home, maybe you should have a complete physical.

SOL. My God, you sound just like your grandmother Basha. It's a pity you never knew her. Never forget that you're half Sussman. The other half, the strange Canadian goyishe flotsam, that you can dismiss.

EDITH. It's your blood that I'm proud of.

SOL. Looking back on my life, my precious one, I can say with no undue modesty that I've made some good films that have been a credit to the industry. Films that aspire beyond mere entertainment to attempt to change the world. Mine has been a life long battle to fight prejudice; a plea for tolerance for the plight of the Jew, the Negro, the immigrant Italian, the disenfranchised of society. Today, these films are made a mockery of by pretentious fag and bull dyke film critics. But you, my darling daughter. You are my legacy. You hold the keys to my kingdom. What is our motto?

EDITH. Make it big. Give it class. Leave 'em with a message.

(**ANGELA** *enters from the kitchen holding the glass of milk. She's wearing a glamorous negligee. She looks significantly at the mug of milk. Another sting of harpsichord music.*)

ANGELA. My, we have a visitor.

EDITH. I'll be leaving.

ANGELA. Edith, we don't have to be enemies. Now that you're almost a woman, we can be friends. You know, I. Magnin is having a sale on go go boots. We could make a day of it.

EDITH. Go go boots are as dated as a hoop skirt.

ANGELA. Then I could use your able assistance as fashion consultant.

EDITH. Then my advice to you would be to cancel your next face-lift and start acting your age.

(**LANCE** *enters from the garden and attempts to sneak up the stairs.*)

ANGELA. Not so fast, young man. You're out awfully late.

LANCE. I was searching for Bucky. He ran away again. I asked everyone for miles if they'd seen a white German shepherd.

EDITH. Daddy put Bucky to sleep over three years ago. Lance was out with his boyfriends. I've seen them. They're creepy. They wear more eye makeup than Mother.

LANCE. I hate you, Edie. I wish you'd die a cruel death.

SOL. Don't talk to your sister that way. Go to your room. I can't even look at you. You disgust me.

LANCE. When have you ever looked at me? You've never been a real father.

EDITH. Lance!

ANGELA. Darling, please go to bed.

SOL. Let him denigrate his father. He's sick. We should take pity on him.

LANCE. (*Screaming*) Stop calling me that. I am not sick! I am not sick! I am not siiiiiiiiick!!!!!

ANGELA. Darling, please, you'll strain your voice.

LANCE. (*Suddenly calms down*) You're so right, Mother. I must conserve every bit of my vocal resources for my upcoming Ado Annie. Good night. (*He exits to his room.*)

EDITH. Daddy, forget everything he said. I know the kind of man you are and I love you so much it burns like a brand against my flesh. Pleasant dreams. (*She kisses him and exits upstairs.*)

ANGELA. This family frankly exhausts me. It's time I also got to bed. Now, drink your milk before it gets cold.

(**SOL** *picks up the glass but stops just before it reaches his lips.*)

SOL. Oh, by the way, an envelope arrived for you today. It was the contract from Kutscher's Resort. It turned out you weren't lying about that singing engagement in the Catskills.

ANGELA. You opened my mail?

SOL. I phoned them today, acting as your agent. Regretfully, they couldn't meet our requests and were forced to cancel the gig. Sorry, dear. Just trying to help.

ANGELA. You do seem to be holding all the cards. Aren't you going to drink your milk?

SOL. I hate warm milk. Take it away.

ANGELA. Is it because I suggested it?

SOL. I'm telling you, I hate warm milk. Makes me gag.

ANGELA. It will help you sleep.

SOL. I can't sleep because of the constipation. What I've gotta do is take this frigging suppository. (*He takes the huge wrapped suppository out of the pocket of his robe.*) How are you supposed to open this damn thing?

ANGELA. Let me do it.

(*She takes the suppository from him and begins taking the wrapper off.* **SOL** *walks away from her.*)

SOL. Angela, Angela, what time has wrought. I remember when I first laid eyes on you and your sister. The two of you were in a sound booth in that forcokta recording studio on Fifty-Third Street. So young and so fresh. If a

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