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# The Idiot Box

by

Michael Elyanow



**SAMUEL  
FRENCH**

FOUNDED 1830

NEW YORK HOLLYWOOD LONDON TORONTO

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*THE IDIOT BOX* was produced by Open Fist Theatre Company (Amanda Leigh Weier and Martha Demson, producers) in Los Angeles in 2007. It was directed by Jeremy B. Cohen with sets by Donna Marquet; costumes by Alex Jaeger; sound by Lindsay Jones. The production stage management was Henry Lide with the following cast:

**FIONA** . . . . . Tisha Terrasini Banker  
**CONNOR** . . . . . David Castellani  
**VERONICA** . . . . . Corena Chase  
**OMAR** . . . . . Joe Holt  
**CHLOE** . . . . . Anna Khaja  
**RAYMOND** . . . . . Conor Lane  
**BILLY** . . . . . Dominic Spillane  
**HARVEY** . . . . . Rod Sweitzer  
**MARK** . . . . . Kelly Van Kirk  
**STEPHANIE** . . . . . Amanda Leigh Weier

The World Premiere of *THE IDIOT BOX* was produced by Naked Eye Theatre Company, etc., etc. (Jeremy B. Cohen, Artistic Director; Geoffrey Barr, Managing Director) in Chicago in 2003. It was directed by Jeremy B. Cohen with sets by Brian Sidney Bembridge; costumes by Rachel Healy; sound by Andre Pluess; lighting by Jaymi Lee Smith. With the following cast:

**FIONA** . . . . . Kathy Logelin  
**CONNOR** . . . . . Jim Slonina  
**VERONICA** . . . . . Meghan McDonough  
**OMAR** . . . . . Ansa Akyea  
**CHLOE** . . . . . Beth Lacke  
**RAYMOND** . . . . . Bradley Balof  
**BILLY** . . . . . Brad Eric Johnson  
**HARVEY** . . . . . Rom Barkhordar  
**MARK** . . . . . Joe Dempsey  
**STEPHANIE** . . . . . Lisa Rothschiller

## **CHARACTERS**

(all early-to-mid-30's)

### **THE CAST REGULARS:**

**MARK**, the Neurotic New Yorker. He's a paramedic.

**CHLOE**, the Spoiled Rich Girl. She's a curtain designer.

**BILLY**, the Sex-Crazed Dummy. He's a model.

**FIONA**, the New Age Hippie. She's an acupuncturist.

**CONNOR**, the Cynical Husband. He's an ad agency exec.

**STEPHANIE**, the Controlling Wife. She's a romance novelist.

### **THE GUEST SPOTS:**

**HARVEY**. He's a doctor in the naval reserves.

**RAYMOND**. He's a drag queen/cabaret singer.

**VERONICA**. She's an Australian dog shusher.

**OMAR**. He's a non-Caucasian PhD student.

## **THE PLACE**

New York City.

Winter.

## **PRIMARY LOCATION**

The living room of a split-level penthouse suite. The kitchen area and living room area are adjoining (think **FRIENDS**). There's a balcony upstage over-looking the city (**FRASIER**). A staircase leads to the top-floor bedrooms (**EVERYBODY LOVES RAYMOND**).

## **SECONDARY LOCATIONS**

The Kaffeine Coffee Bar, a theatre, a subway car, Raymond's dressing room, Connor's room and Stephanie's office. These locations can be suggested through simple, specific objects and sounds: for example, the Coffee Bar might be represented by a bar table and stools, the subway car by subway seats and train wheels clacking. Scene changes should be lightning quick and energetic.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

THE IDIOT BOX chronicles the deterioration of a TV sitcom as it descends into Reality. It takes familiar TV sitcom archetypes and conventions and then breaks the system down.

ACT ONE: at first, the sitcom should have the look and feel of a great, modern-day comedy. Peppy POP MUSIC should be used to link scenes. A LAUGH TRACK should be liberally employed. In terms of performance style, there might be a temptation to have the actors “act badly” like they do in “bad sitcoms.” This is not the case. Before the point at which it all falls apart, the sitcom presented here should be an efficient, likeable, smart piece of popular entertainment at the top of its game. However...

...Once the sitcom starts breaking down, the look, feel and performance style should become much more natural. The laugh track should disappear altogether. ACT TWO should be played real and honest and gritty.

## CANNED AUDIENCE RESPONSE KEY

☺ = full-on canned laughter

☹ = gentle canned laughter

☹ = fudd-up, creepy canned laughter/sound designer's choice

♥ = awww/sympathy sigh

⊠ = silence



## ACT ONE

[LIVING ROOM]. *A board game being played. FIONA: timing, BILLY: in hot seat, CHLOE: giving clues. MARK (in paramedic uniform) will soon enter from upstairs.*

FIONA. 20 seconds!

CHLOE. Boy, it's hot in here.

BILLY. Famous pick-up lines.

CHLOE. It's so hot my crust is turning brown.

BILLY. What a hooker might say. 😊

MARK. What're you guys doing?

FIONA. Playing a game.

CHLOE. Why don't you spread some butter on me?

BILLY. What a DIRTY hooker might say. 😊

MARK. *(entering)* The Pyramid? I love the Pyramid.

CHLOE. No, Billy, listen. Now that I've popped up and my crust is golden brown I'd go really good with some butter and jam right now because I'm a little slice of:

BILLY. Heaven.

FIONA. Time!

CHLOE. Toast. What A Slice Of Toast Might Say. Since when does a hooker ever say "My crust is turning brown?" Never. A hooker never says that. 😊

*STEPHANIE enters the front door, carrying a cardboard box with air holes.*

STEPHANIE. You guys are not gonna believe what I did! You know how Connor's been kinda depressed at his job lately?

FIONA. Ew, I hate Advertising. Thank God I got out of that.

**MARK.** Fiona, you're an acupuncturist. You never worked in Advertising.

**FIONA.** Sure I did. Don't you remember that whole thing where I got the promotion to Creative Director over that yucky old womanizer who didn't and then his hairdye electrocuted him and suddenly he could read ladies' minds and he got me fired from the Nike account but then felt so bad about it that we had to make out?

**MARK.** That was Helen Hunt in *WHAT WOMEN WANT*.

**FIONA.** Yes, and I love that movie. ☺

**STEPHANIE.** Okay, back to me and the gift I just bought my sad husband.

*The women crowd the box. ♥*

**STEPHANIE.** It's a puppy! So he'll feel better. Isn't he the cutest?

**FIONA.** Cutest? This puppy is like sunshine in a box.

**CHLOE.** And he'll go with any color combination. Maltese?

**STEPHANIE.** Peekapoo!

**MARK.** Alright already. What about us?

**BILLY.** Yeah, I wanna peek at the peekapoo!

*Now BILLY and MARK reach down to pick up the pup. It BARKS and GROWLS like crazy.*

**MARK.** My God, that thing is vicious!

**STEPHANIE.** Hey! Bad boy! You are a very, very bad boy.

**BILLY.** Now *there's* something a hooker would say. ☺

*BLACKOUT. We just witnessed a sitcom "teaser". Next, the THEME SONG plays and each of the six regulars are spotlighted in a fun and familiar montage. Then, LIGHTS UP on [LIVING ROOM]. BILLY's reading a cereal box. MARK stands over him, drinking coffee.*

**MARK.** Can I read that when you're done?

*BILLY hands the box over as a tired CHLOE enters from upstairs.*

**CHLOE.** Don't say it, I know. I look terrible. My clothes don't match, I have a hair bump and I think I just brushed my teeth with Neo-Sporin.

**BILLY.** Plus your shirt's on backwards.

**CHLOE.** (*realizing he's right*) Crudge!

**MARK.** What's wrong?

**CHLOE.** I'm exhausted, that's what's wrong! I couldn't sleep last night. Actually, for the past couple of weeks. I think something's on my mind. Just haven't figured out what it is yet.

**MARK.** Coffee?

*MARK goes to get her some, but CHLOE thinks he's offering her his coffee and takes it. ☺*

**CHLOE.** Oh, what am I gonna do, Billy? I've got the biggest presentation of my life tomorrow – six clients from ABC carpets coming in to see *my* new curtain designs. I can't stumble in looking like Margot Kidder off her medication.

**MARK.** Or on.

**CHLOE.** I have to sleep tonight. I'm desperate.

**BILLY.** You wanna get some sleep, do what I do: Go see a play. ☺

**CHLOE.** Funny. ...You're serious.

**BILLY.** Think about it. You got your comfy seats, warm temperature, it's dark but not too. And nothin's more boring than theatre. All those "trained" actors talking in stuffy accents about "important things" that're supposed to make you "think", it's like having your own personal lullaby right in front of you.

**CHLOE.** Really?

**BILLY.** If there's one thing I learned from being a model, it's how to take care of yourself. We can catch a matinee right now. You'll sleep. I'll sleep. We'll wake up refreshed and camera-ready.

**CHLOE.** I dunno.

**BILLY.** I thought you were desperate.

**CHLOE.** I am desperate. (*looking at the open newspaper*) Okay, fine. Why don't we do... **THREE SISTERS?**

**BILLY.** Before or after the play? ☺

**CHLOE** *exits as* **STEPHANIE** *and* **CONNOR** *enter.*

**STEPHANIE.** Aw, hun, wasn't this just the best morning?

**CONNOR.** It sure was – thanks to that 6AM walk with Sunshine.

**MARK.** You're in a good mood.

**CONNOR.** Why shouldn't I be? My brilliant romance novelist of a wife took a cue from the plot of the very first book she ever wrote and got her depressed husband a dog to cheer him up.

**MARK.** Speaking of books, Connor says the new one's almost done?

**STEPHANIE.** He-zell yeah. My writing hero, LaVyrle Spencer, author of **THAT CAMDEN SUMMER**, better watch her ass! I have been on fire with this love story! Phrases, paragraphs, metaphors: they've been coming out of me like... like... you know, some *thing* that comes out really, really fast. ☺

**CONNOR.** See? We're all in a good mood. Thanks to a little walk with Sunshine. Which we'll be doing again tonight at the park.

**STEPHANIE.** Pick you up at the cafe at 7. 7:15. Gotta stop off and get my ex-stepbrother a Bar Mitzvah present. Oh, and a kong. For Sunshine. Not my ex-stepbrother. Whatever. 7:15!

*She blows* **CONNOR** *a kiss, exits. And a hurt* **CONNOR** *hops to couch.*

**CONNOR.** Ow, ow, ow... ☺

**MARK.** What's with the bunny-hop?

**CONNOR.** Sunshine.

**BILLY.** Your new puppy?

**CONNOR.** My new evil puppy. If I wasn't depressed before, I

am now. Look what he did to my leg!

**BILLY/MARK.** Dude!

**CONNOR.** He's like a piranha with fleas. I'm telling you, Sunshine hates me.

**MARK.** Not just you. He went after me and Billy yesterday.

**BILLY.** Came this close to plucking the berries right off my branch. I need the berries! ☹

**MARK.** You gotta take that mutt back.

**CONNOR.** I can't. It makes Stephanie happy to see me happy even if I *am* miserable. Look, Sunshine probably just needs to get used to me. I'll take him for a walk on my lunch break and we'll sort this thing through.

**MARK.** Hey, on your walk – will you return this DVD for me?

**CONNOR.** Aw, man.

**MARK.** C'mon, it'll save me a trip. Besides, do you really want to say no to a paramedic, that brave public servant who –

**ALL THREE.** – saves lives sometimes at the risk of his own?

**CONNOR.** PATCH ADAMS?

**MARK.** What, I happened to be in the mood for a light dramedy about a med student who heals patients with laughter.

**BILLY.** You went to rent a porno and chickened out again, didn't ya? How many times I gotta tell you: just make a bee line for the backroom.

**MARK.** Hey, I'm making progress! At least I'm not stuck way back in New Releases anymore. I've moved up! I'm in Classic Drama now, baby!

**CONNOR.** So *that's* why we had to watch ZORBA THE GREEK! ☺

*FIONA and her boyfriend HARVEY – who's carrying a half-eaten breakfast tray – descend the stairs.*

**CONNOR.** Oh. Creepy boyfriend alert.

**BILLY.** Creepy? I think Harvey's cool.

**CONNOR.** Smart, nice *and* a doctor in the navy reserves?

No. There's something about him I don't like.

**MARK.** You don't like anyone your sister dates.

**CONNOR.** I liked sweaty Lloyd from Montana.

**MARK.** Didn't he die of a heart attack three dates in?

**CONNOR.** And it was such a shame. ☺

*HARVEY and FIONA arrive. HARVEY hands out three bags to:*

**HARVEY.** Connor. Billy. Mark. Thought of you while I was in Jakarta.

**CONNOR.** Gourmet fish crackers. Gee, thanks Harvey.

**MARK.** Well, I better get going. (*to CONNOR*) Don't forget to return the you-know-what.

**HARVEY.** I'm headed uptown if you gentlemen care to share a cab.

**BILLY.** Gentlemen? Yeah, sure.

*HARVEY kisses FIONA; exits with BILLY and MARK.*

**FIONA.** Whoo! Is that tush not yummy on a stick? I'm telling you, Harvey could be the guy. *The* guy. You know what I got this morning? Breakfast in bed. We're talking pancakes, mochaccinos and a surprisingly poignant JUDGE JUDY.

**CONNOR.** That's nice. Out of curiosity: how's Harvey's heart? ☺

*BLACKOUT. LIGHTS UP ON [A THEATRE]. Sounds of a BAND PLAYING as Chekhov's THREE SISTERS is being performed offstage. BILLY's sleeping, but CHLOE... is riveted, moved. In a thick Russian accent:*

**ACTRESS (OFF-STAGE).** O, the band plays so bravely – you feel you want to live! Sweet Masha, dear Irina, don't you see? Time will pass, and we shall be forgotten, but our sufferings will turn to joy, kind sisters, for those who live after us. O, how the band plays! Another moment,

and we shall know why we live and why we suffer... If only we could know. If Only We Could Know!

*Audience APPLAUDS, "house" lights go up. CHLOE wipes away her tears. BILLY wakes up, applauds along. Then he notices:*

**BILLY.** Oh my God.

**CHLOE.** I know. Look at me, I'm still shaking.

**BILLY.** You see her, too?

**CHLOE.** What?

**BILLY.** That superhot chick over there. She's totally checking me out. You're okay getting home without me, right? 😊

*BILLY exits. An emotional CHLOE looks to the stage: it's a surprisingly non-sitcom moment. CHLOE exits. There's the sound of WIND blowing as OMAR runs in, just missing her. Another non-sitcom beat, and BLACKOUT. LIGHTS on [KAFFEINE COFFEE BAR] as we find STEPHANIE, at a bar table, reading LaVyrle Spencer's SEPARATE BEDS.*

**STEPHANIE.** Oh, LaVyrle. How do you do it?

*CONNOR enters, limping. STEPHANIE notices.*

...What's with the limp?

**CONNOR.** Foot's asleep. What's with the telescope?

**STEPHANIE.** It's the present for my ex-stepbrother. Remember, he's having his Bar Mitzvah this weekend?

**CONNOR.** Oh, right.

**STEPHANIE.** I need you to box it up and send it out for me.

**CONNOR.** Sure.

**STEPHANIE.** And *not* pass it off onto someone else.

**CONNOR.** Like I ever do that.

**STEPHANIE.** Seriously? There's wrapping paper in the hutch. Don't use the one with the bunnies on it. Make sure you use scotch tape, not –

**CONNOR.** Masking. And use the good scissors.

**STEPHANIE.** Who knows me? Okay, we ready for that walk with Sunshine?

**CONNOR.** Yeah, about that. Listen, Steph, I –

**STEPHANIE.** What's wrong? Connor, do you not want to go to the park? (*gasps*) Do you not like Sunshine? ☺

**CONNOR.** No. No-ho-ho! I, I love Sunshine. I was... I just was hoping for a little you and me time. You know, one on one.

**STEPHANIE.** Ohhh, one on one. Maybe this will hold you over.

*She kisses him. Audience goes "WHOOO!"*

How was that?

**CONNOR.** Well... my participle's no longer dangling. ☺

**STEPHANIE.** OH MY GOD, what happened to your neck? (*spins him around*) There are scratches all over you! First you don't want to go to the park, now this. Connor, what is going on?

**CONNOR.** Okay, now, there's a really good explanation for this. And by good I mean bad because, well, um, you know that... new laundry detergent you got? I'm allergic to it!

**STEPHANIE.** Of course. And it's making you scratch, isn't it?

**CONNOR.** Like a dog! ☺

**BLACKOUT. [LIVING ROOM - NEXT DAY].**

**FIONA, BILLY** and a yawning **CHLOE** play the Pyramid once again.

**FIONA.** And... time!

**BILLY.** Countries in South America! Easy answer! Totally woulda gotten it if you had slept at the play like I said.

**CHLOE.** Billy, Anorexia and Bulimia aren't countries in South America.

**BILLY.** Then where are they? ☺

*CHLOE goes to get coffee just as CONNOR descends the stairs. His pants are torn.*

**CONNOR.** Okay, that is it! I am done playing with Sunshine. Why? I'll tell you why. Because he bit my ass, that's why!

**FIONA.** I guess you'll be wanting this then.

**CONNOR.** I don't think a business card's gonna stop the bleeding.

**FIONA.** No, see, one of my clients, I opened up her third chakra today – actually, I was totally going for the second when my hand slipped... this new oil I got is way too –

**CONNOR.** Good God, are we there yet?

**FIONA.** She's got a sister who can help you. Some world-famous dog trainer from Australia. Veronica something. She's in town taping a special for her show.

**BILLY.** Not Veronica Beecham?

**FIONA.** You know her?

**BILLY.** Everybody knows her. She's the Dog Shusher. ☺

**CONNOR.** The what?

**BILLY.** The Dog Shusher. She's like the Dog Whisperer, only quieter. This lady's amazing. She's like the whole reason people stopped saying "the dingo ate my baby."

*House phone RINGS. BILLY leaps to answer.*

**BILLY.** I got it I gotitgotit! (*answering*) Yo! Heyyy, Ramona! I did? Oh. No, no, don't send it. I'm free now. Why don't you come straight over to my apartment after you get off work? Aw, come on. Come on, Ramona. Ramonaaa! ☺ Great. See you later. (*hangs up*) That was Ramona. I hooked up with her at the play last night. Left my wallet at her pad. She's bringing it by.

**CONNOR/FIONA.** Oh.

**BILLY.** Which is a total relief – not the wallet, the hooking up – cuz I been kinda off my game lately.

**CONNOR/FIONA.** Oh?

**BILLY.** Truth is, we never *really* hooked up, not in the umbilical sense. I mean, she brought me back to her place,

but we never did it, not even close. She never even took her shoes off.

**CONNOR/FIONA.** Oh!

**BILLY.** But we did make out. For hours! Good kisser. Nice lip action, adventurous tongue style. Anyway, at some point she looks at her watch, gets all serious and goes, "You better leave." So I'm thinking either virgin or... well, virgin. ☺ Which is why I accidentally-on-purpose left my wallet behind so she'd have to see me again. Smart or what?

**FIONA.** Wait a minute. This woman: was she wearing a ring on her left hand?

**BILLY.** Yeah, why?

**CONNOR.** And did you notice any manly stuff laying around anywhere?

**BILLY.** Come to think of it, I did see a jockstrap in the bathroom. And I used a little of the Speed Stick that was hanging out by the sink.

**CONNOR.** Dude, she's married.

**BILLY.** Oh my God. You're right.

*CONNOR and BILLY look to each other. A serious beat and then: they high-five!*

**CONNOR/BILLY.** Dude! ☺

**BILLY.** (*running upstairs*) I got myself a Married Girl! I better go find my Sexy Mix Tape!

**FIONA.** Alright, I'm outta here. Harvey's cooking me dinner and I don't wanna be late.

**CONNOR.** Dinner? Didn't he just take you out for lunch yesterday?

**FIONA.** You know what? I like Harvey. I like him a lot. And it wasn't lunch, it was high tea. We ate buttermilk scones and talked for three hours. I'm happy. It's time you stop digging around my dates for sniggly little nitpicky flaws.

**CONNOR.** What are you, Mother Goose?

**FIONA.** Okay, that's it. When it comes to Harvey, you're getting the mute button.

**CONNOR.** I'm your big brother! You can't mute me.

**FIONA.** What? Huh? Your lips are moving and all I hear is... bye!

**CONNOR.** Mute me all you want, he's still no dead sweaty Lloyd! ☺

*CONNOR follows FIONA out. Finally, silence. A beat as CHLOE rests. Then, the sound of WIND... and a KNOCK at the door.*

**OMAR (O.S.).** Hello? Anybody home? Hello? Look, um. If you can, can hear me, I'm looking for a, uh, Chloe Schaeffer? Hello? Look, I just. I know how this is gonna sound – weird, um, odd – but I wrote her this letter. Nothing huge, just... thoughts. You know, thoughts. Anyway. Gonna slip it under the door. If you could, could just see that she gets it, I'd be... yeah.

*OMAR exits. CHLOE picks up the envelope. Looks at it. BLACKOUT. [KAFFEINE - THAT NIGHT]. CONNOR and BILLY with coffees as an excited MARK enters, hiding something behind his back.*

**MARK.** Gentlemen, you are looking at a changed man. Not only did I walk straight back to the Porno Section like I owned the joint... I bought, baby, I bought!

*He pulls out a GARBAGE BAG full of DVDs.*

**BILLY.** Oh my God! It's like Christmas for perves. ☺

**MARK.** And you're not gonna believe who I bumped into. Harvey.

**CONNOR.** Harvey?

**MARK.** Harvey! He had an even bigger porno stash than me. And his selections? Let's just say they involved women of great size.

**BILLY.** Some men find large women very attractive.

**MARK.** Not large, Billy. Not zaftig. These women, they were all at least two hundred pounds overweight. You

should have seen the titles: PLUMP FRICTION. SHE'S ALL FAT.

CONNOR. Oh my God.

MARK. YOU'VE GOT WHALE. ☺

CONNOR. Of course. It all makes sense now. The mochaccinos, the scones, the dinners... Fiona's dating a chubby chaser.

MARK. A what?

CONNOR. A chubby chaser. Men who only date overweight women.

BILLY. But Fiona's not –

CONNOR. Yet.

MARK. You don't think...?

CONNOR. Harvey's trying to fatten my sister up? Yes, yes I do.

MARK. Connor, this is serious. You better go tell her now.

CONNOR. I'm not telling her anything. She muted me.

BILLY. (*gets coat*) I know where Harvey lives. I'll go tell her.

MARK. Before you do, Ramona called.

BILLY. She did?

MARK. Twice. Said she really, really, really wants you to call her back.

CONNOR. You know what that means. She wants to tell you the truth and break it off. Your wallet's going back in the mail!

BILLY. No it's not. Because I am *not* calling her. Now Ramona will have to stop by here after work, at which point I'll go *to* work... my mojo that is. I ain't lettin this Married Girl go.

MARK. Wait a minute. Ramona's a Married Girl?

ALL THREE. (*serious beat, then high-fiving*) Dude! ☺

VERONICA BEECHAM (*the Australian-accented Dog Shusher*) enters. Audience APPLAUDS the famous guest star.

VERONICA. Oh, g'day. I'm looking for a Connor Dash. The doorman said I might find him here.

**BILLY.** It's Veronica Beecham!

**MARK.** You're even hotter in person did I just say that out loud?

**CONNOR.** I... I'm Connor Dash. I think.

**VERONICA.** Your sister told me about Sunshine. Case of the barkies, eh? Well, you're in luck. I've got a few hours before I'm needed back on the set, so let's take a geek at that pup of yours.

**CONNOR.** What about saving Fiona from the chubby chaser?

**BILLY.** Eh, she's a big girl. ☺

*As they exit, BLACKOUT. [LIVING ROOM]. CHLOE's sitting at the top of the stairs, holding OMAR's unopened envelope. She tucks it away as VERONICA – carrying Sunshine in the box – enters with MARK and CONNOR. As VERONICA places the box downstage center:*

**VERONICA.** I think I have an idea of what's wrong with Sunshine. Just need to conduct a little experiment. You're all going to stack up shoulder to shoulder, facing Sunshine. You, too... Chloe is it? (**CHLOE** nods) Okay, Connor, Mark. I want you both to march right up and pet the dog.

*CONNOR and MARK go to pet the dog. It BARKS wildly.*

**CONNOR.** You see? You see?!

**MARK.** I didn't even touch him!

**VERONICA.** Back to your original spots. Okay, eyebags, now you.

*CHLOE pets the dog. It makes calm, friendly WHIMPERING noises. Then, the DOOR OPENS and CONNOR over-reacts with:*

**CONNOR.** Don't freak out, Steph, I can explain – Fiona! What are you doing here?

**FIONA.** (*Entering.*) I just broke up with Harvey.

**CONNOR.** You did? Really? That must've been pretty awful.

**FIONA.** Actually, it was pretty easy. I just told him I was a country in South America. ☺

**VERONICA.** (*rising*) Ah, yes. Well, Connor, it *is* just as I thought. See, the problem with your dog is –

*DOOR OPENS! It's an out of breath* **BILLY.**

**CONNOR.** It's not what you think, Steph, I can – Billy! Way to go! Fiona totally freaked me out. You're supposed to warn me when Stephanie's coming.

**BILLY** *nods.* **CONNOR** *realizes.*

It's my wife. She can't see you. Hide!

**VERONICA.** Hide?

**EVERYBODY.** Hide! ☺

*CONNOR* *shoves* **VERONICA** *into the closet as everybody else assumes "casual" positions: laying on the couch, reading at the table. As this is happening, OMAR comes up to the door; sees CHLOE. She sees him. They stand still, connecting through the chaos. But then he exits, just as STEPHANIE enters.*

**STEPHANIE.** I called you at work today, why didn't you pick up?

**CONNOR.** Why? Why? WHY? Because... there was no work. It's... a holiday.

**STEPHANIE.** I'm not aware of any holiday.

**CONNOR.** No, not a holiday. But a holiday of sorts. It's... my birthday.

**EVERYBODY.** HAPPY BIRTHDAY! ☺

**STEPHANIE.** No, it's not.

**CONNOR.** No, it's not. Not here. Not in the real world. But at the agency it is. Eleven years ago today marks the first day I started working there. My work-birthday. Or as it's referred to in ad lingo: my wuhbuhday.

**EVERYBODY.** HAPPY WUHBUHDAY! ☺

**STEPHANIE.** I'm taking a bath. Whatever you've done with

my husband, make sure he's returned when I get out.

*She goes to hang up her coat in the closet.*

**CONNOR.** Here, let me get that for you.

**STEPHANIE.** I got it.

**CONNOR.** I never get to hang up your coat. Come on, I insist.

**STEPHANIE.** Since when are you an insister?

**CONNOR.** Since my wuhbuhday. ☹

**STEPHANIE.** Connor, stop. You know there's a certain way I like to hang my coat, besides there's stuff in the pockets and –

*She opens the closet door, finds VERONICA holding a telescope. Audience GASPS.*

**STEPHANIE.** Aha! I knew it! You *have* been been having an affair!

**CONNOR.** What?

**STEPHANIE.** The scratches down your back? The weird behavior? The woman I'm standing across from who's hiding in our closet? If she's not your mistress, then who is she –

**VERONICA.** Veronica Beecham.

**STEPHANIE.** – and why is she holding my ex-stepbrother's Bar Mitzvah present? You were supposed to box that telescope up and send it out. What happened?

**MARK.** Uh, Connor... that box was yours?

**CONNOR.** Yeah, why?

**MARK.** I kinda used it to stash my porno.

**CHLOE.** Oh my God. Connor, remember when you asked me to wrap up the box at the foot of the stairs and send it out?

**CONNOR.** Oh my God.

**MARK.** Oh *my* God! My porno! It's the Bar Mitzvah present!

**FIONA.** Where are you going?

**MARK.** Where else? Temple Beth El!

**EVERYBODY BUT STEPHANIE.** I'll go with! ☺

**STEPHANIE.** Everybody stay! (*to CONNOR*) I can't believe you. Passing the buck, hiding a mistress, making me drop my coat!

**CONNOR.** Steph, please. You don't understand. She's not a mistress, okay? She's... the Dog Shusherer. Her name's Veronica Beecham and she fixes bad dogs.

**VERONICA.** Your husband's telling the truth.

**MARK.** Seriously. Sunshine's been biting Connor ever since you got him. Right, Chloe?

**CHLOE.** Huh? Oh, yeah. That's why he asked me to send out the gift.

**FIONA.** If you're gonna blame anybody, blame me. I told Connor to call Veronica.

**STEPHANIE.** So those scratches... they're because of Sunshine?

**CONNOR.** I'm sorry.

**STEPHANIE.** Why didn't you tell me?

**CONNOR.** I don't know. I thought I could fix him before you found out. You did something so nice for me and I didn't want you to be disappointed, so I lied.

**STEPHANIE.** Oh, Con. I've been lying, too. My writing hasn't been going as well as I'd like. I'm nowhere near done with my romance novel. Bet my hero LaVyrle Spencer, author of *A HEART SPEAKS*, never has writer's block. Anyway: I'm sorry.

**CONNOR.** Best Wife Ever.

**STEPHANIE.** Best Husband Ever.

*They hug. ♥*

But the next time I get you a dog and he starts attacking you, just tell me.

**VERONICA.** Oh, it's doubtful you'll run into that problem again.

**CONNOR.** What do you mean?

**VERONICA.** I'm afraid Sunshine is a masculinus odiumnus. A man-hater. That's why he tried to disembowel the blokes but he's a lamb with the sheilas. It happens. Some male dogs just turn on their own gender. I think it'd be best if I found Sunshine a new home. I know of a lesbian commune in Sydney that'd love to have him. You understand.

*They all nod. And just as VERONICA walks off with the box of Sunshine, RAMONA – clearly a man in drag – enters.*

**RAMONA.** Oh. Hello. I'm here to see –

**BILLY.** Hey, Ramona! It's Ramona everybody!

**RAMONA.** Oh, what a cute dog.

*As she leans over to see it, Sunshine BARKS more fiercely than ever! And CONNOR leans over to BILLY with:*

**CONNOR.** Looks like your Married Girl is a Single Guy. ☺☹

*BLACKOUT. This marks the end of an episode. But as OUTRO music plays and everyone exits, a confused CHLOE stays put. THEME MUSIC comes up again, but distorted now. Static CRACKLES. Lights FLICKER. ☹*

**CHLOE.** Wait. What's happening? Where's everybody going? Hey! Stephanie? Come back. Fiona! I'm talking. Can't you hear me? *(looks up)* Oh God. Oh God, no!

*The fun house is a madhouse now. Then: MUSIC cuts short, LIGHTS go UP. Silence. A DOORKNOCK. A beat (and it's real). A KNOCK again. CHLOE goes to the door, but doesn't open it.*

**CHLOE.** ...Who is it?

**OMAR (O.S.).** Hello?

**CHLOE.** Who is it?

**OMAR (O.S.).** Oh, uh. Hi. You don't know me, but.

**CHLOE.** Yes?

**OMAR (O.S.).** I'm ...looking for Chloe Schaeffer.

**CHLOE.** Are you that...?

OMAR (O.S.). Yes.

CHLOE. From before?

OMAR (O.S.). Yes.

CHLOE. I'm sorry. Do I know you?

OMAR (O.S.). No, like I said.

CHLOE. How did you get up here?

OMAR (O.S.). Oh. Your doorman. I hope it's okay. I'm not going to hurt you.

CHLOE. Hurt me?

OMAR (O.S.). If that's what you're worried about.

CHLOE. I wasn't.

OMAR (O.S.). Good, because I'm not. I'm very, you know... I have a cat. My point being I know this seems a little strange, but.

CHLOE. Look, I really should.

OMAR (O.S.). If you give me a minute to explain. Just a minute. Please.

*A beat, and CHLOE opens the door. OMAR stands before her. The two are rapt. Then:*

CHLOE. You were going to –

OMAR. Right.

CHLOE. – explain.

OMAR. Right. Um. Last week. I saw you at the theatre. THREE SISTERS? I'm afraid I was watching you throughout most of the performance.

CHLOE. Oh.

OMAR. So I came to –

CHLOE. Right, no.

OMAR. – say I'm sorry.

CHLOE. I see.

OMAR. Did you get my letter?

CHLOE. Yes.

OMAR. You did?

CHLOE. Yes.

OMAR. Because in it.

CHLOE. I didn't open it.

OMAR. No?

CHLOE. I don't know you. No offense.

OMAR. Right.

CHLOE. I'll open letters from people I know, acquaintances, fabric representatives even, but strangers –

OMAR. No, right. Well. It just said I'm not stalking you. In the letter. Among other things. Thoughts. But emphasizing that I'm not a stalker. I mean, I did follow you home and it took me a while to get your name from the doorman. But that's it.

CHLOE. Ah. Relief.

OMAR. Believe me, I never do this sort of thing. Ever. But... here I am.

CHLOE. There you are.

OMAR. ...I'm sorry. I'm gonna. Sorry.

*He exits. But just as CHLOE is about to close the door:*

No, wait. Please. The thing is. I was watching the play and somewhere toward the end of the first act I happened to take my eyes off the stage for a second and... I saw you sitting across from me and you were so completely "in it", I mean, leaning forward, tears in your eyes, you know, and I was thinking, Yes! That's the power of Chekhov. How he manages to just nail it. All the hope and dread and joy and secrets we keep locked up inside our hearts and our heads and never say out loud and Moscow, oh, Moscow. Which all sounds like a line, a very bad line, but it's not and I know I don't know you, it's just that you left the theatre so quickly and I wanted to tell you that I felt the same way, too. ...I would really like to spend even just an hour getting to know you. You must be the most extraordinary person. And I must be a complete idiot for talking all this time and not introducing myself. Omar Jackson. Blabbermouth.

**CHLOE.** Chloe Schaeffer. Insomniac.

*Then, in the distance, a SOUND CUE that is CHLOE's warning: peppy BRIDGE MUSIC approaching.*

You wanna go for a walk? Quick.

*They exit. BLACKOUT. BRIDGE MUSIC louder as LIGHTS UP on FIONA and STEPHANIE at the couch: STEPHANIE on her laptop, FIONA reading a novel. CONNOR bounds downstairs just as the MUSIC turns to crackling STATIC, then SHORTS OUT. ☹ The machine has broken. But our friends don't know it. Yet. For now, there's just... this feeling.*

**CONNOR.** ...Wifey, Sistery. Whatcha reading there?

**FIONA.** Steinbeck. THE GRAPES OF WRATH.

**CONNOR.** Funny. ...You're serious.

**FIONA.** Don't you remember how obsessed I was with this book in high school? Remember I dressed up in farmer clothes for like two months? Took all your flannel shirts?

**CONNOR.** THE GRAPES OF WRATH? Really?

**FIONA.** You'd like it. There's a brilliant scene at the end where this woman breast feeds an elderly man who's starving to death. It's all very Tragedy meets Sensuality.

**CONNOR.** Boobies? Cool. ☹ Boobies. Cool.

*Still ☹. Odd. Then: MARK and BILLY rush down the stairs. Also, they're both in bad fake police officer costumes.*

**MARK.** Bye!

**BILLY.** See ya!

**CONNOR.** Whoa, hold on... Police caps, billy clubs, shiny badges. Is there a Village People concert I don't know about? ☹

**MARK.** You are not gonna believe this.

**BILLY.** We were in the car and got pulled over for speeding.

**FIONA.** That *is* unbelievable! ☹

**MARK.** He's not done.

**FIONA.** There's more?!

**BILLY.** We got pulled over by these two gorgeous – I mean GEE-orgeous ladycops. They're this close to giving us a ticket, but Mark talks them out of it by saying, get this, we're *also* cops.

**MARK.** Cops from Loozeeanna. On vacation in the big city. Away from our wives, our kids.

**BILLY.** No responsibilities, no ties.

**MARK.** Now we're meeting them for drinks in what could possibly be the best scheme ever!

**STEPHANIE.** Wait a minute. You guys pretended to be married cops to get out of this ticket and now you're going on a double date?

**CONNOR.** Aw, Steph, let them have their fun.

**STEPHANIE.** Fun?

**CONNOR.** Uh-oh.

**STEPHANIE.** Deceiving women in hopes of scoring? Pretending you've got a wife at home that you look forward to cheating on? That's what you consider fun? That's how little you regard marriage?

**CONNOR.** Jeez, what's with you?

**STEPHANIE.** Me? Why is it always "what's with me?" What's with you? Just because I've been trying to write this stupid romance novel for a whole year and –

**STEPHANIE.**

– and the only thing that has come out of me is a desire to eat more and more Pringles making me fatter and sadder and more blocked by the day no matter how many times I try to channel my hero LaVyrle Spencer doesn't mean anything is *with* me and you smothering me like some fucking retarded two-year-old doesn't help!

**CONNOR.**

I know, hun.

You're beautiful.

It's okay.

**CONNOR.** ...What did you just say?

**STEPHANIE.** I, I don't know.

**MARK.** (*lightening the mood*) Okay! We better hit the subway if we want to make that movie.

**CONNOR.** What movie?

**MARK.** You know, the movie that will cheer your wife up and not make us all so terrified she's going to skin us alive.

**STEPHANIE/CONNOR.** Ohhh, that movie.

*BLACKOUT. A spotlight shines on RAMONA (the drag queen). She's in full cabaret regalia, singing a song in the style of Carey & Fischer's "You've Changed".*

**RAMONA.**

EVERYTHING'S DIFFERENT NOW  
I CAN FEEL IT IN THE AIR AND HOW...  
COULD YOU DO WHAT YOU DID  
AND SAY WHAT YOU SAID  
AFTER ALL OF THE TIMES  
YOU'D GIVEN ME... YOUR FRIENDSHIP  
YES, EVERYTHING'S DIFFERENT NOW

*LIGHTS UP on the gang in [A SUBWAY CAR].  
RAMONA sings to them. They can't see her. Like a fairy godmother, RAMONA crosses over to them, singing in their ears...*

**RAMONA.**

DON'T YOU REMEMBER WHEN  
WE SWORE OUR AIN TRUE LOVE AND THEN  
O, HOW THE BIRDS DID SING  
BUT YOU HAD TO GO AND BLOW EVERYTHING  
NOW EVERYTHING  
IS DIFFERENT NOW

**RAMONA** *exits.*

**MARK.** Did you guys hear that?

**BILLY.** Hear what?

**MARK.** Nothing.

FIONA. Hm.

MARK. What?

FIONA. Nothing. ...Maybe it was –

MARK. Yes!

FIONA. – nothing.

CONNOR. No! It was something.

STEPHANIE. What was something?

CONNOR. That nothing.

BILLY. That nothing was something?

MARK. Something is off.

STEPHANIE. Me.

BILLY. What?

STEPHANIE. I'm off. To the office.

CONNOR. You're leaving?

STEPHANIE. Right.

CONNOR. Me?

STEPHANIE. Write.

CONNOR. You are?

STEPHANIE. Write. I can't write.

FIONA. She's blocked.

BILLY. She's off.

STEPHANIE *has exited.*

MARK. Something is wrong.

CONNOR. My wallet's gone.

MARK. See?

BILLY. You better report it.

MARK. I'm an officer.

FIONA. Funny.

MARK.

Maybe you should. I was  
gonna say. You go. No,  
you. You. Stop it!

CONNER.

Maybe you should. I was  
gonna say. You go. No,  
you. You. Stop it!

**MARK.** You stop it!

**CONNOR.** You stop... okay.

**MARK.** I was gonna say, just borrow some money.

**CONNOR.** No, I think I'm just gonna get off here. I, I can't breathe.

**MARK.** We'll come with. It's our stop anyway.

*Everyone but FIONA exits. She stays behind, sighs.  
Relief? A beat, and HARVEY enters.*

**HARVEY.** (*surprised*) Fiona?

**FIONA.** Harvey?

*BLACKOUT. [LIVING ROOM]. CHLOE and OMAR  
enter from their cold walk outside.*

**CHLOE.** A walk in the dead of winter, whose dumb idea was that? I'll take your – thank you.

*As she hangs the coats up and, ever the good host, makes  
Cheez Whiz 'n crackers:*

**OMAR.** I can't believe all six of you live here.

**CHLOE.** Yep. Six friends, eight rooms, one big penthouse in the Big Apple.

**OMAR.** This really is amazing. How did you find this place?

**CHLOE.** Oh. Well, Mark's grandmother gave it to him but only on the condition that Mark would be married by his 25th birthday so Mark (who had no serious girlfriend at the time but wanted the penthouse really bad) asked his best friend Connor to ask his sister Fiona if she'd pretend to be his wife – Mark's, not Connor's, because that would be incest and ewww – so Fiona said yes but only on the condition that Mark would give not only her but Connor and his wife, Stephanie, a place to stay rent free because, as luck would have it, this was right when Connor and Stephanie's apartment had burnt down in a freak grease fire and Fiona's whole building suddenly went condo, but the day of the wedding Fiona got cold feet and couldn't go through with it even though it was a fake wedding so Mark grabbed

his high school yearbook, closed his eyes, pointed to a page and picked guess who, me, called me up, asked if we could make this arrangement and I said yes right away because oddly enough this was the very same day that I quit the family business – rubbers, don't ask – and my father threw me out and I had nowhere to go so I took off right away but by a strange twist of fate there was traffic and I ended up being late for the ceremony and that's when Mark's grandma Shirley showed up so Mark had no choice but to introduce Connor's wife Stephanie as his bride-to-be and of course that's when Fiona – who didn't know about Stephanie's involvement – stepped forward and introduced herself as Mark's bride-to-be, which was followed a second later by me introducing myself as – yep – Mark's bride-to-be, which of course made Mark look the world's biggest bigamist, and that's when Billy – who was at the time just one of the caterers coincidentally passing by – pretended to be Fiona's husband, saying that she was drunk and possibly bipolar and Connor did the same with Stephanie just so the whole cover wouldn't be blown which thankfully it wasn't because it's what got us all started living together as one big family.

**OMAR.** Wow. That's really fortunate how everything resolved itself in the end.

**CHLOE.** I never thought of it like that but, yeah, I guess it is.

**OMAR.** So Mark's grandmother still thinks you two are married?

**CHLOE.** Who? Oh, yeah. She doesn't come around that much, though. Just in like November and May. Sometimes February. You want something to drink? Beer? Wine? We've got a bottle of scotch here somewhere.

**OMAR.** I'm good.

**CHLOE.** Or, you know, if you're not a drinker we've got milk. Ah, yes, here we are. A very nice two-percenter. (*smells the milk; it's bad*) Apparently vintage.

**OMAR.** Really, I'm fine.

CHLOE. So... nothing?

OMAR. (*sensing her discomfort*) Maybe some, yeah, I'll take some water. Where are the glasses? I'll –

CHLOE. That's okay. I got it.

*BLACKOUT. [SUBWAY CAR].* FIONA *with* HARVEY.

HARVEY. So can I ask you something?

FIONA. Actually, no. I'm just gonna pretend you're not here and sing a royalty-free song from the public domain:  
*I ain't got nobody –*

HARVEY. How come you don't return my calls?

FIONA. *Nobody cares for me, nobody –*

HARVEY. And why'd you break up with me like that? Huh? A person doesn't do that, a *person* doesn't tell her boyfriend at a romantic dinner that she's bulimic as a means to break up. And, and mind you, it's not even true. You're neither bulimic nor anorexic. But I let you go anyway, because you were so freaked out by my fetish and all.

FIONA. Is that what that is, a fetish?

HARVEY. Yeah. I like fat women.

FIONA. No, you like skinny women who you can make fat.

HARVEY. It's called Feeding.

FIONA. What?

HARVEY. It's called Feeding. Technically, I'm a Feeder. The term has its roots in agriculture – livestock, what have you – but in a Feeder's case it applies to girlfriends.

FIONA. Okay, gross.

HARVEY. Hey, I only do it if they're into it. Most are. Last girl I dated gained like eighty pounds. It was awesome.

FIONA. Well I'm not into it. Hence, the bulimia.

HARVEY. Okay, point well taken. Not for you. I was wrong, I should have been more up front about my motives and for that I apologize. Truth is, I thought you were enjoying yourself. You never complained.

FIONA. Had I known what you were doing, I would have. It's disgusting.

**HARVEY.** What's disgusting? Two consenting adults exploring the body? I guarantee you there's nothing more intimate. My second wife, right? When we first started doing it – late at night in bed, we'd just lay around and listen to the pores of her skin expanding. It was beautiful. This breathy little squeak became a metaphor: as my wife grew, so did our love.

**FIONA.** Oh my God. What is wrong with you?

**HARVEY.** Don't do that, don't turn this on me.

**FIONA.** I'll do whatever I (want) –

**HARVEY.** There's more to you, Fiona. I know there is. And I'm not talking just sexually. Deep down... you are a complex character.

*A beat. She's caught.*

**FIONA.**

*Hummala bebhuhla  
zeebuhla boobuhla  
hummala bebhuhla...*

**HARVEY.**

Wow. That is so fucking pathetic. Just when I thought I couldn't feel any sorrier for you.

**FIONA.** You feel sorry for me?

**HARVEY.** Yeah. You act like a child. And when you don't act like a child, you act like an idiot.

**FIONA.**

Are you – whuh – are you kidding me? You try to fatten me up and when you can't get your sicko fetish way you try to pressure me into –

**HARVEY.**

You're in your thirties for godsakes! Aren't you exhausted, all this I'm gonna stand over here and sing crap?

**HARVEY.** I'm not talking just sex! Sex is just one component. One thing you choose to keep hidden. I am talking about you. *All* of you. The whole Fiona. I see what you hide in your bag. The books you read.

**FIONA.** Everybody reads Steinbeck.

**HARVEY.** No. Not everybody reads Steinbeck, Fiona. Not

everybody reads *The Economist* – cover to cover – every week.

**FIONA.** Okay.

**HARVEY.** Not everybody drives five hours to hear Noam Chomsky lecture on –

**FIONA.** Okay.

**HARVEY.** – market democracy or registers with the ACLU or goes to –

**FIONA.** All right! Jesus!

**HARVEY.** – goes to exhaustive measures to pretend she's some flighty, wind-in-her-hair hippie just to cover up the fact that she's really, what, a scared little girl who's afraid her friends won't like her when they discover there's actual sophistication rattling around in that ditzzy little skull (of hers).

**FIONA.** Okay. Stop. I'm gonna stop you right there. You know, just because we went out a few times, don't presume you know me and don't presume I don't know what I'm doing. How much money you think you spent on me when we were dating? Five hundred? Eight hundred? No. It was more. Much. Men buy me dinners, Harvey. Men buy me drinks. I get into the best clubs. Best concerts. Premieres, fashion shows. I've dated A LOT of hot boys and for the past eight years, I've had free rent in a Manhattan penthouse. I haven't had to pay for anything – quite literally – since I was TWELVE. That's what being a so-called flighty, wind-in-her-hair-hippie has gotten me.

**HARVEY.** Good for you. Looks like it's come with no price at all.

**FIONA.** Sarcasm? Really?

**HARVEY.** You're a fraud.

**FIONA.** Why? Because I choose to keep some things private?

**HARVEY.** Because nobody, not even your closest friends, know *you*.

**FIONA.** Nobody needs to know me. I'll let people in when I

want to let people in.

**HARVEY.** And when will that be? When will you finally decide to let us in?

**FIONA.** Oh, Harvey. FUCK OFF.

*A beat, and then just before she exits the subway car:*

**FIONA.** You coming?

*BLACKOUT. [LIVING ROOM]. CHLOE and OMAR on the couch.*

**CHLOE.** I guess I've always liked it. It's fun, lifting them up, separating them. The biggest challenge, of course, is to keep them from sagging. And I always go with gold tassels because it makes people want to touch 'em all the more. Anyway. That's how I got into the curtain making business. What about you?

**OMAR.** Just finished my dissertation.

**CHLOE.** Oh, a professor.

**OMAR.** Not yet. One day.

**CHLOE.** What's it on?

**OMAR.** Media stuff. It's really boring.

**CHLOE.** I like being bored. I've seen COLD MOUNTAIN six times.

**OMAR.** Trust me, it's a date killer.

**CHLOE.** Is that what this is? A date?

**OMAR.** Informally.

**CHLOE.** So let's make it formal.

**OMAR.** All right. Would you like to go out?

**CHLOE.** Lemme think about it.

*As CHLOE thinks, MARK (unseen by them) heads down from upstairs. His hair's messed, cop uniform's unbuttoned. He stops when he sees CHLOE with OMAR. Observes instead.*

**OMAR.** Come on, dinner and a play. It's nothing.

**CHLOE.** Yeah, sure, what the heck.

OMAR. Great. This will be our post-date nightcap. I've already picked you up and taken you out to eat.

CHLOE. Pizza?

OMAR. Seafood.

CHLOE. Smart.

OMAR. I did my homework.

CHLOE. And a great choice of theatre.

OMAR. Again, homework.

CHLOE. Everything was just wonderful. I felt lousy for ditching you.

OMAR. Hm?

CHLOE. At intermission. I really needed to pee.

OMAR. That's okay. It gave me time alone to work through self-esteem issues.

CHLOE. Hey, that's what I was doing. Well, that and the peeing.

OMAR. A multi-tasker.

CHLOE. I was stressed.

OMAR. First dates are hard.

CHLOE. Impossible.

OMAR. All those awkward pauses...

CHLOE. Second guessing...

OMAR. Not to mention the attempts to impress.

CHLOE. I'm still kicking myself for saying "The mahi-mahi was yummy-yummy."

OMAR. And then there's the kiss.

CHLOE. I was nervous.

OMAR. So was I.

CHLOE. I'm glad we got it out of the way early.

OMAR *kisses* CHLOE. *It's magical. Then:*

OMAR. Functionality and Representation of Ethnicity in 21st Century American Storytelling.

CHLOE. Hm?

OMAR. My disserta –

**CHLOE.** – tation, right. Right.

**OMAR.** It's a critique on how, in modern media, Blacks, Latinos, Asians, Middle-Easterners and so on, continue to be used as mere plot devices, existing only to give the white leads permission to change – usually by inciting them to act upon their sexuality or fear or anger or whatnot. Just once, I'd like to see a story where a non-white person comes in and he – or she – doesn't end up changing the lives of the white people he (or she) surrounds. (*then:*) What?

**CHLOE.** Nothing.

**OMAR.** It's boring, isn't it? Pretentious.

**CHLOE.** Not at all.

**OMAR.** What?

**CHLOE.** I like you. You're not funny.

*BLACKOUT. [KAFFEINE].* **CONNOR** *sits, waiting. Nervous. VERONICA enters.*

**CONNOR.** Thanks for coming on such short notice.

**VERONICA.** No worries. Don't need to be on the set till half-past.

**CONNOR.** Mate. ☹

**VERONICA.** Huh?

**CONNOR.** Mate. You know, everybody says "mate" in Australia. "No worries, mate." "Hand me the crate, mate." ☹

**VERONICA.** You mentioned an emergency.

**CONNOR.** Yes. My wallet was stolen today.

**VERONICA.** Aw, that's a shit house.

**CONNOR.** And as I was walking back from the police station, I. I couldn't stop thinking. About Sunshine. I mean, this dog. He hates men, right? But he's a *man* himself. A male of the species. I think – and I'm no Dog Shusher – but I think the reason Sunshine hates men is because he hates what is male about himself.

**VERONICA.** That's the emergency? You needed to pose a theory?

**CONNOR.** No. No! Well, yes, but it's no theory. It's true.

Because if anyone knows where he's coming from, it's me. Which makes me the only one.

**VERONICA.** The only one what?

**CONNOR.** The only one can save him. Veronica, I can save Sunshine.

**VERONICA.** Okay, Connor, let's not – I mean, look. Even if you're right, even if Sunshine does hate what is male about himself, it doesn't matter. Next week he'll be Down Under at a lesbian commune, never to be around another man again.

**CONNOR.** Right, but see: why? Why isn't it a good thing to be around men? You're around them all the time, aren't you, on the set? Isn't it a good thing?

**VERONICA.** Connor, this (isn't) –

**CONNOR.** When did it stop being good? To be around men? To be a man? And why am I so depressed? I wake up in the morning and my head is so heavy I can barely lift it off the pillow. But I slap on a smile and I go to work and I pay my bills. Every day. And I come home. Every day. To a wife. Who is controlling and hostile. To me. But I make love to her anyway. Because this is what a man is supposed to do. So I do it. I do all these things – smile, work, bills, love – every day of my goddamn life, and still, *still* I get pick-pocketed.

**VERONICA.** Connor...

**CONNOR.** So this dog. This dog. If I can just get him to, if I can get him to stop barking at men, at his own man-ness... maybe I can find a way to do the same for myself.

*He hands VERONICA an envelope.*

Stephanie doesn't know about it, but I've been keeping this money aside, in a separate bank account, you know, just in case. You know. Anyway. I called your agent.

**VERONICA.** (*pulls out a check*) You giving me the razz?

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