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Clyde Must Die

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Bard College

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Clyde Must Die

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts of Bard College

by
Megan Dara Lacy

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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THANK YOU...

To my Mom and Dad, the best teachers and parents I could ask for.

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begin with.

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another play. You make me feel like a dyke in dreamland.

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rent. Filthy freeloaders. Meow meow meow.

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To everyone who believed in me when I couldn't. I love you.

A Foreword: On Killing Mediocre Men and Why It's Okay

I would like to start by saying that I, Megan Dara Lacy, have never killed a man. It is not in my post-graduation plans to do so, nor is it on my bucket list. Every suspicious thing I Google is for artistic purposes. Legally speaking, this title is a joke.

When building *Clyde Must Die*, I knew I wanted to work with *The Muppet Show* and *Columbo* as inspiration. I have, like many, loved Henson's work since I was a child. All of it, from *Sesame Street* to *Dark Crystal* to his Wilkins Coffee commercials, holds a whimsy and freedom that I strive to hold within myself. My attachment to *Columbo* is less grandiose. I like mystery-solvers, and I like when they're silly little guys. I hold Fred Jones, Columbo, and Fox Mulder very dear to my heart. However, even with my love for these shows, I often find myself feeling alienated as a queer feminine viewer. Perhaps it is the dated nature of the media I love, but I find that even in progressive mainstream artwork, the feminine is persecuted. Miss Piggy is too masculine and too feminine at the same time. Daphne is frivolous. The women of *Columbo* fill a variety of tropes, from homewrecker to scorned woman — though, shockingly, I find that *Columbo* is the least egregious in its sexism. I find I can only find comfort from this alienation in the art of weird homosexuals, leaving me to pray to the altars of Alison Bechdel and John Waters. Within *The Muppet Show* itself, Richard Hunt called to me through the likes of Janice and Scooter. I think back to the Elton John episode — my favorite as a child. I knew very little of his music, and nothing about the man himself, but when I saw him, surrounded by Muppets, decorated with feathers and rhinestones and more colors than I'd ever seen before, I think something in my soul was unlocked.

I am from Tulare, California. It is a farm town in the Central Valley. I am not from Los Angeles, thankfully. No matter what I try to write, I always find Tulare bleeding in. Though I hold little love for my hometown, it is tattooed onto my soul. It's complicated, but what familial relationship isn't? Being a strange, autistic, queer child in a conservative area certainly takes its toll.

I feel conflicted when I think about my childhood. I yearn to return to it with such desperation that it makes me sick. But what is it that I crave? Nowadays, I'd die without socialization, but I was a loner as a child. At the same time, though, I was much happier with my solitude at the time. I threw myself into books and online games, always searching for a

fantastical world to throw myself into. In third grade, I was obsessed with dragons, wolves, and Persephone. In third grade, I stabbed a boy in the shoulder blade with a mechanical pencil. The graphite broke off. In third grade, my teacher yelled at me for crying too hard at the ending of *Stone Fox* by John Reynolds Gardiner. I hated the book. Why did the dog's heart explode? What did Stone Fox owe white men? Why should they get to have his people's land? It didn't make sense to me.

I have no connection with my Indigenous heritage. It was stolen from my great grandmother, Zelma Molly Nunnelee. She was born on the Choctaw reservation in Oklahoma. Her father left, and her mother, Birdie Ethel Hughart, soon passed away, leaving Molly orphaned at the age of three. She worked as a housemaid until the age of twelve, when she married my then-sixteen-year-old great grandfather and became Molly McGhee. Together, they moved to California. She gave birth to seven children, the seventh being my grandmother, Barbara. My grandmother, of course, married my grandfather, became Barbara Kane, and gave birth to my mother, LeAnn, the middle child of three. Hi Mom!

I hold my matrilineal line close to my heart. It is a messy lineage of trauma. It is beautiful evidence of survival. It is an ancient Rube Goldberg machine made up of vile atrocities and the softest joys one can have in life, all cascading together to form the thing that is me. I do not know how this line will continue. I've never held a baby, and I have a mild fear of pregnant people. Maybe I am the culmination. Maybe I am just another leaf on the tree. Frankly, I find the latter more comforting than the former. Don't get me wrong, I'd still like to be a very prominent and lovely leaf that is admired for years to come, but the final stop is a little too much for my shoulders. In a way, I think my art is the real culmination. Maybe I'm just trying to compensate.

I have said a lot of things here, but I promise you that this is all very important and relevant. Trying to sort out my thoughts and inspirations for *Clyde Must Die* feels like trying to unmix paint. It is the pain of my matrilineal line. It is the agony of hitting puberty before hitting double digits. It is the queer alienation from things I love. It is the love and joy of my parents. It is the comfort of my cat. It is falling asleep after a long, lonely day to Elton John singing "Crocodile Rock" on *The Muppet Show*.

When I was a little girl — though I am not a girl now — I found the Afghan Hound Muppet to be the height of beauty, alongside *Lady and the Tramp*'s Lady and Peg. They have the joys of femininity without being condemned to a sexualized body. I love women. I hope to live

my life surrounded by them, in friendship, in work, and in love of every kind. But being treated as a woman has made me crazy. I have seen too many girls murdered by the prison of womanhood, and it's given me a desire for revenge, no matter how far I try to distance myself from that desire. I do not want to be cruel. I do not want to be violent. I wouldn't exist without violence. I want to be seen as a Muppet. I want to exist carefree and lovingly. I am violent and nonviolent. I can blow everything up and ruin the sketch and tell bad jokes and I will be back in the theatre again next week and nobody is hurt and everyone will be happy that I am there. I want to be abstract and soft to hold, made of felt and feathers.

I am tired of living in fear of the violence of men. I am tired of women being murdered for saying no. I am tired of constantly striving to do something so big, so beautiful, and so bright that I will stop being the terrible thing that I am, when mediocre men are given Heaven and Earth all for being born a man and not having any qualms with that. I am so tired, and I do not think I can rest until the mediocre man is dead.



Clyde Must Die

by Megan Dara Lacy

SETTING

1978, New York City. The play starts in February and ends in May.

CHARACTERS

Bianca Ward Woman. 28. Human. A model fighting to be an actress.

Maxine Hartman/Dragon Butch. 30. Human. A private eye.

Sheri Blanc/Fish/Sally Woman. 22. Human. Clyde's most recent ex. A model.

Red Butch. Late 30s to early 50s. Puppet. The stage manager. A chainsmoker.

Sandy/Female Guest Woman. 20s. Puppet. The assistant stage manager. Doing her damndest.

Mae/Puppet 1 Woman. 50s to early 70s. Puppet. Afghan hound. An aging starlet. Cici's big sister.

Cici/Goose Woman. 30s to 50s. Puppet. Afghan hound. The house costumer. Mae's little sister.

Frankie Man. 50s to early 70s. Puppet. Tuxedo cat. British accent. Secretly born in a cardboard box on the streets of Boston, MA.

Clyde/Bear/Mustardseed/Man 1/Male Guest Man. Early 30s to late 40s. Puppet. White sock. Inspired by too many men to name.

Berele/Hippo/Cobweb/Man 2 Boy. 18 to mid 20s. Puppet. A nice young Jewish boy.

Baby/Moth/Boa 1 An ensemble role of any gender or age.

Leg/Hen/Peaseblossom/Boa 2/Puppet 2 An ensemble role of any gender or age.

NOTES

- A slash / indicates that the next line should start.
- Improvisation and ad-libs are encouraged, particularly in the various "parades" and crowds that happen. Remember to keep the tonal flow in mind.
- The multicasts are merely how everything played out in the first production, and as such, are mostly just a suggestion. The exception is Sheri, who will always play Sally.
- Many set, costume, and stage direction notes are simply how I wrote the play in my mind's eye, but do not necessarily reflect the choices made in the original production. Do what speaks to you and what you can afford.
- Remember that puppetry is about play.

ACT I

SCENE ONE: COLD OPEN

[Upper stage. BIANCA is finishing her makeup. RED enters.]

RED Five minutes until curtain!

BIANCA Thank you five!

RED How're you likin' the Caruso?

BIANCA Oh, it's a lovely theatre. I haven't had much time to explore, what with my nerves and all. It's very... very historic.

RED First time on TV, huh?

BIANCA I've been in a couple of commercials here and there, and I've done a couple of news spots back home, but nothing like this.

[RED laughs a smoker's laugh.]

RED Take it from me. There *is* nothing like this.

BIANCA Why does that sound so scary when you say it?

RED Eh, this industry... It's a monster. It can kill you if you're not careful.

BIANCA Well? How do I survive it, then?

RED Want a cigarette?

BIANCA No, thank you. I don't smoke.

RED Yup. It'll kill you.

[RED takes a drag of her cigarette.]

Break a leg, kid.

[As RED closes the doors, BABY and LEG are revealed.]

BABY If you insist!

[BABY chases LEG with a bat around the room. BABY taunts, LEG screams, BIANCA is caught in the chaos. The lights fade to black.]

SCENE TWO: FRANKIE'S INTERVIEW

[*Lower stage. FRANKIE and BIANCA sit center stage. BERELE and CLYDE hover behind FRANKIE.*]

FRANKIE Hello everyone, it's your friend Frankie here. When I see all of your smiling faces, I just know we're going to have a great show. And it *will* be a great show, as we are joined by an ever-glamorous girl tonight.

CLYDE You may not know her name, but you know her face.

BERELE And what a face it is!

FRANKIE You've seen her in countless commercials and on billboards across the country.

CLYDE Don't forget the magazines!

BERELE How could I? I get Gams Monthly, well, every month!

FRANKIE Welcome to the beautiful Bianca Ward!

[*BIANCA enters. She is smiling. She is sexy, but not slutty. Glamorous, but not vain. Feminine, but not a girly girl. She can't be motherly, but she has to want kids. She exists in a tiny square of acceptability. If she steps out of it, she's dead. She knows and loathes this. FRANKIE and BIANCA greet each other as old friends.*]

FRANKIE Good evening Bianca my darling! It's a pleasure to have you on the show.

BIANCA It's a pleasure to be here.

FRANKIE Now we go way back, don't we, Bianca?

BIANCA Yes, yes, it's been what, ten years now?

CLYDE You must be older than I thought.

FRANKIE I remember it like it was yesterday. It was my first time directing community theatre; I was part of this young artist group based in New York City that sought out, eh, artistically underprivileged communities and flew out to serve them theatrically. It didn't live long, but by Gods, we were passionate. We were sent to a wonderful Steinbeckian little town in the middle of California. It was, eh, an enlightening experience, where I directed a production of *This Little Lady's Goin' to London!* and met the one and only Bianca Ward. How old were you then, darling?

BIANCA I was 17.

FRANKIE Oh, just a wee babe! And it was there when I first learned that not only are you a gorgeous woman, but you also sing and act!

BIANCA Yes – two skills which unfortunately don't translate well to a still camera.

CLYDE Oh yeah? What other skills of yours are better in motion?

FRANKIE Clyde, let our guest speak.

[BIANCA *starts to speak, but FRANKIE continues.*]

Bianca, darling, tell us how you came about these talents of yours.

[BIANCA *starts to speak. It happens again.*]

Everyone from Los Angeles to Paris knows about your brazen / modeling –

CLYDE Mrrreeoowrr!

FRANKIE One more sound from you and Berele's taking your place.

BERELE Oh boy, really?!

[CLYDE *squeaks and his face scrunches in fear.*]

FRANKIE Everyone from Los Angeles to Paris knows about your *bold* modeling career, but the people of America want to know more about you.

BIANCA Ah, where to start?

FRANKIE Perhaps the beginning?

BIANCA Wise man. I was born in California, but my parents are from Oklahoma—

BERELE Oklahoma? Gee, does that mean you'll sing—

FRANKIE Aht, we don't have a license for that one.

BERELE Darn!

BIANCA Oh don't fuss, Berele. I'm going to sing you some of my favorite folk songs tonight.

BERELE Would you dedicate one to me?

BIANCA If you stop interrupting.

[BERELE's *face scrunches to match CLYDE. Maybe a little more pathetic.*]

I was born in California, but my parents are from Oklahoma. I have three brothers, one older, two younger.

FRANKIE You hear that one fellas? She comes with armed guards.

[CLYDE reacts in fear to this one.]

BIANCA Being the only girl, of course my mom loved to play dress up with me. She wanted me to sing for the church, but I didn't quite get along with the two girls in the choir.

FRANKIE And you let those two chase you away? What about the rest of the choir?

BIANCA They were the rest of the choir.

FRANKIE Ah. I see.

BIANCA Still, we would sing at home. My dad worked on a dairy, and when he'd come home, he'd sit on the porch, pull out his banjo, and sing, and our old dog would sit and howl. Well, we all hated Dad's singing, sounded like he was getting the devil beaten out of him, so we'd all join in to cover it up. But there's where it all started.

FRANKIE And what about the modeling? It's hard to imagine a beautiful girl such as yourself working on a dairy.

BIANCA Well, I did. But Gramma figured I looked better as a rodeo queen, and nobody can argue with Gramma. Then I was modeling western wear for a while, and then fashion happened. Cowboy boots became gogo boots and mini skirts and bumped hair and all that. One thing lead to another, and here I am.

FRANKIE And you being here brings us so much pleasure.

[CLYDE folds in on himself in an attempt to contain any comment on this phrasing.]

Well, darling, have you had enough of this chit chat?

BIANCA Oh, I'm absolutely dying over here. Please.

BERELE Aw, I liked it..

FRANKIE Then we *absolutely* must move on. Stay seated folks for our first tune sung by the lovely, lovely, Bianca Ward!

[Lights dim as everyone scrambles to make the scene change. You don't have to hide it – the scene changes between onstage performances are diegetic. Let them happen, let them be silly.]

SCENE THREE: I BOUGHT ME A CAT*Traditional Folk Song*

[BIANCA stands alone in front of the stage. All other action happens behind her on the lower stage. A blue bed sheet simulates a sky – one with clouds would be divine. Bright green cardboard grass and a red barn are in the back. The barn really only has to be big enough for the puppets to “enter” through smoothly. Banjo, folksy brush drumming, and maybe washboard or something auxiliary like that. Spoons?! A jug?!?!]

BIANCA Well, Berele, I suppose this one is for you.

BIANCA et al.

[Sung. Every animal enters through the barn when introduced, and then joins the group in singing. When a sound is made for the first time, the animal making it should be the loudest. FRANKIE enters through the barn. He happily stands next to BIANCA and joins the song.]

I bought me a cat
 The cat pleased me
 I fed my cat under yonder tree
 The cat went fiddle-i-fee
 Fiddle-i-fee

[HEN enters. She clucks.]

I bought me a hen
 The hen pleased me
 I fed my hen under yonder tree
 The hen went chipsey chopsey
 The cat went fiddle-i-fee

[FISH enters and makes a bubbly sound.]

I bought me a fish
The fish pleased me
I fed my fish under yonder tree
The fish went splishy sploshy
The hen went chipsey chopsey
The cat went a fiddle-i-fee

[GOOSE *enters proudly.*]

Well I bought me a goose
The goose pleased me
I fed my goose under yonder tree
The goose went waaw waaw
The fish went splishy sploshy
The hen went chipsey chopsey
The cat went a fiddle-i-fee

[MAE *enters, unhappy to play the part of simply "DOG." She sings unenthusiastically.*]

Well I bought me a dog
The dog pleased me
I fed my dog under yonder tree
The dog went baow baow
The goose went waaw waaw
The fish went splishy sploshy
The hen went chipsey chopsey
The cat went a fiddle-i-fee

[BEAR *enters, to the displeasure of the prey animals. BIANCA does not mind nor question it.*]

Well I bought me a bear
The bear pleased me
I fed my bear under yonder tree

The bear went raah raah
 The dog went baow baow
 The goose went waaw waaw
 The fish went splishy sploshy
 The hen went chipsey chopsey
 The cat went a fiddle-i-fee

[HIPPO *enters with much pomp and circumstance.*]

Well I bought me a hippo
 The hippo pleased me
 I fed my hippo under yonder tree
 The hippo went hruh hruh
 The bear went raah raah
 The dog went baow baow
 The goose went waaw waaw
 The fish went splishy sploshy
 The hen went chipsey chopsey
 The cat went a fiddle-i-fee

[DRAGON *enters, dancing in the sky.*]

Well I bought me a dragon
 The dragon pleased me
 I fed my dragon under yonder tree
 The dragon went wrhuaaaaaauggghhhhwgh
 The hippo went hruh hruh
 The bear went raah raah
 The dog went baow baow
 The goose went waaw waaw
 The fish went splishy sploshy
 The hen went chipsey chopsey
 The cat went a fiddle-i-fee

[RED enters. She's still smoking a cigarette.]

Well I bought me a woman
The woman pleased me
I fed my woman under yonder tree
The woman cried honey honey
The dragon went wrhuaaaaaaaaauggghhhhwgh
The hippo went hrhuh hrhuh
The bear went raah raah
The dog went baow baow
The goose went waaw waaw
The fish went splishy sploshy
The hen went chipsey chopsey
The cat went a fiddle-i-fee
Fiddle-i-fee

Well I bought me a baby –

[Spoken. Actually, screamed.]

A baby?!

[BABY bursts through the barn. Everyone freezes.]

BABY WAAH WAAH!

[Everything descends into chaos. Maybe the baby tries to eat someone. This should be comically noisy. I'm talking car crash sounds. Fade to black.]

SCENE FOUR: CHATTER

[Upper stage. All of the puppets from the previous sketch file through, loudly chatting. CLYDE is already there. SANDY enters from the opposite direction, causing FRANKIE, MAE, and RED to stop. BIANCA enters, out of breath, but cheerful.]

SANDY Wow Bianca, that was out of this world!

CLYDE Yes, it was certainly alienating.

MAE For once I have to agree with the swine –

CLYDE I'm a sock!

MAE Acting as some barking hound is not what I'm here for!

FRANKIE I'd hardly call it acting.

MAE Cram it, you alleycat.

FRANKIE You were stellar, Bianca.

RED Alright, alright, we all did a great job, okay?
Flowers to everyone. Sandy, you got 'em all ready?

SANDY I got it, boss! Everyone's ready to go for the
Pregnant President sketch!

RED Jesus fucking christ. This used to be a show. Lights
cue 18, go.

[RED starts to exit.]

SANDY Oh, Red, you were lovely onstage by the way!

RED Thanks doll. You're a terrible kiss-ass.

[RED exits.]

BIANCA Oh, don't let her get down on you, Sandy.

SANDY No, she's right, I was just being a kiss-ass. You really were dazzling though! I don't know why you don't act more!

[SANDY scurries off after RED.]

BIANCA Yeah. Me neither.

CLYDE I have some ideas.

FRANKIE What was that, Clyde?

[FRANKIE genuinely did not hear the comment.]

CLYDE I have some ideas. For. Uh. The show.

MAE We don't get paid for ideas, Clyde.

FRANKIE Well, yes, but Clyde is our television star. I'm sure he has some insights that us theatremakers don't. Come walk with me.

[The two exit.]

MAE That bastard. That little bastard. That two-faced, long-whiskered, scraggly-furred, declawed, pretentious, weak-willed, backstabbing, neutered little bastard!

BIANCA Something wrong, Mae?

MAE That horrible little fleabag never listens to my suggestions. He doesn't even pretend to! Oh, we're friends Mae, come get drinks with me Mae, but God forbid you have an opinion! And then Mister Soap Opera opens his mouth and the motherfucker's ears perk up like he's heard a can opener! He

doesn't even like that shitstain! And I've been on Broadway, Bianca! Broadway!

BIANCA Oh, yes, I saw you in *The Silly Girl's Shoes*. It changed my life.

MAE Oh, good heavens, next you're going to say you've loved me since you were little, huh?

BIANCA Oh, please, I was already 20 when I saw it.

MAE I can't imagine such an ancient age.

BIANCA I'm sorry about Frankie. He's... well, I don't have to explain him to you.

MAE Don't apologize for him. God knows he won't. It's important to know when to sheath one's claws, but I have never apologized for a man. The difference between acting and lying is that you believe what you're saying when you act. You feel it in your chest and in your toes and in the pit of your stomach. Lying is bullshit. And apologizing on behalf of a man is bullshit. And I don't engage with bullshit.

BIANCA Are you able to do that?

MAE Not when I was your age, I suppose. But now? Now I'm Mae Marx, star of stage and screen! And Mae Marx does not bother with managing men.

BIANCA I just... I thought Frankie was different from that.

MAE Mm, we can always hope, but they will always disappoint.

BIANCA I don't think I can live in a world where that's true.

MAE Oh, don't worry about it too much, darling. We're tough. Hardy. I've been in this game for ... you know. I've fought my way through, and I will continue to do so.

Now excuse me.

I have to go to Cici for a quick clown shoe fitting.

[MAE *exits, leaving* BIANCA *alone.*]

SCENE FIVE: ROMEO AND JULIET

[Lower stage. There is a tower on one side of the stage. There is a starry bed sheet backdrop. CLYDE is below the tower.]

CLYDE He jests at scars that never felt a wound.

[A spotlight on BIANCA in the tower window.]

But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?

It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.

Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,

Who is already sick and pale with grief,

That thou... uhh... thou art far more of a babe than she! And the moon's a little bit of a jealous prude, so, come on down here baby! Look at those eyes! Oh, your eyes! They're like, they're like stars, baby! Wouldn't anybody fall in love with a star?

[BIANCA puts her head in her hands.]

Oh! Oh! See, how she leans her cheek upon her hand!

O, that I were a glove upon that hand,

That I might touch that cheek!

BIANCA Ay me!!

CLYDE She speaks! O, speak again, bright angel! for thou art as glorious to this night as, uh, as an angel is to, uh, a heaven's bosom!

BIANCA O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

CLYDE Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

[Throughout the following speech, CLYDE gets bored.]

BIANCA 'Tis but they name that is my enemy;
 Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
 What's Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot,
 Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
 Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
 What's in a name? that which we call a rose
 By any other name would smell as sweet;
 So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
 Retain that dear perfection which he owes
 Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
 And for that name which is no part of thee
 Take all myself.

CLYDE Hey baby, I'm not Romeo if you don't want Romeo!

BIANCA Wat man art thou that thus bescreen'd in night
 So stumblest on my counsel?

CLYDE Call me whatever you like, dollface, as long as you
 call me.

BIANCA My ears have not yet drunk a hundred words
 Of that tongue's utterance, yet I know the sound:
 Art thou not Romeo and a Montague?

CLYDE Anything that gets you going.

BIANCA How camest thou hither, tell me, and wherefore?
 The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,
 And the place death, considering who thou art,
 If any of my kinsmen find thee here.

CLYDE Death? Look at these arms. I'll fight 'em off.

BIANCA If they do see thee, they will murder thee.

CLYDE Nuh-uh.

BIANCA I would not for the world they saw thee here.

CLYDE Live fast, die young?

BIANCA By whose direction found'st thou out this place?

CLYDE I've got a nose for dames. I'm like a bloodhound.

BIANCA Thou know'st the mask of night is on my face,
 Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
 For that which thou hast heard me speak to-night
 Fain would I dwell on form, fain, fain deny
 What I have spoke: but farewell compliment!
 Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say 'Ay,'
 And I will take thy word: yet if thou swear'st,
 Thou mayst prove false: at lovers' perjuries
 Then say, Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo,
 If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully:
 Or if thou think'st I am too quickly won,
 I'll frown and be perverse an say thee nay,
 So thou wilt woo; but else, not for the world.
 In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond,
 And therefore thou mayst think my 'havior light:
 But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true
 Than those that have more cunning to be strange.
 I should have been more strange, I must confess,
 But that thou overhead'st, ere I was ware,
 My true love's passion: therefore pardon me,
 And not impute this yielding to light love,
 Which the dark night hath so discovered.

[CLYDE *has completely zoned out and gone off on his own journey during this monologue. There is a moment before he realizes it's his line.*]

CLYDE Oh! Uh. Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear
That... uh...

BIANCA O, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon,
That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.

CLYDE What shall I swear by?

BIANCA Do not swear at all;
Or, if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,
Which is the god of my idolatry,
And I'll believe thee.

[CLYDE *drops his line.*]

Well, do not swear: although I joy in thee,
I have no joy of this contract to-night:
It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden;
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
Ere one can say 'It lightens.' Sweet, good night!
This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet.
Good night, good night! as sweet repose and rest
Come to thy heart as that within my breast!

CLYDE Aw, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?

BIANCA What satisfaction canst thou have to-night?

CLYDE The exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine.

BIANCA I gave thee mine before thou didst request it:
And yet I would it were to give again.

CLYDE Don't be like that, baby! Why, why're you being like that, baby?

BIANCA But to be frank, and give it thee again.
And yet I wish but for the thing I have:
My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep; the more I give to thee,
The more I have, for both are infinite.

MAE (off) Yoohoo! Juliet!

BIANCA I hear some noise within; dear love, adieu!
Anon, good nurse! Sweet Montague, be true.
Stay but a while, I will come again.

[BIANCA *exits.*]

CLYDE Again? How'd I miss the first time?!

[*Fade to black.*]

SCENE SIX: CONFIDE

[Upper stage. BIANCA paces back and forth in a rage.]

BIANCA I can't do this Frankie. I'm serious. I can't make it through the show like this.

FRANKIE It's been two skits, Bianca. Give us a chance.

BIANCA Listen, I—I didn't say anything about the rehearsal hours, or doing my own hair and makeup, or—or the pay, but the man barely knows his lines!

FRANKIE I know, I know. Trust me, he's going to hear about it.

BIANCA Is he always like this?

FRANKIE He's going through a hard time right now. His...

[FRANKIE takes a moment to decide if he should/will share this.]

His girlfriend, Sheri, left him. He's really bent out of shape about the whole thing.

[CLYDE walks through backstage. His face is scrunched up.]

CLYDE If anybody needs me... I'll be in my dressing room... all alone... with nobody to talk to... nobody to help me with my makeup...

[HEN pops up.]

HEN I'll help you with your makeup, Clyde!

CLYDE No, not you!

[HEN disappears.]

Eugh... I'll be brooding if anybody needs me...

[CLYDE exits.]

BIANCA I spent so much time in rehearsal, Frankie.

FRANKIE That's the industry for you, kid.

BIANCA He made a cum joke, Franklin! This is supposed to be a family show, Franklin! Is that the industry for you?

FRANKIE While I agree that it was in poor taste, double entendre is a longstanding form of comedy. Shakespeare himself actually often included some bawdy humor in his writings!

BIANCA Did he really.

FRANKIE Yes! I'm surprised you didn't know that Bianca, you're such a Shakespeare buff.

BIANCA I can't see why you're making excuses for him. He's your leading actor and he missed nearly every single line in what is arguably Shakespeare's most famous scene. Doesn't that reflect poorly on you at any point?

FRANKIE You're being quite harsh, Bianca. After all, you missed a line yourself.

BIANCA What? Which one?

FRANKIE Your last one. You said "stay but a while" when the line is actually "stay but a little." Don't worry, it happens to every beginning actor. I can see you're really worked up about this. How about you take a few deep breaths and keep your chin up, hm?

[FRANKIE exits. BIANCA looks around in shock, offense, and disbelief. She throws a silent tantrum. SANDY enters and observes for a moment.]

SANDY Bianca?

BIANCA Sandy!

SANDY Were you talking to Clyde?

BIANCA No, Frankie.

SANDY Was Frankie being mean to you?

BIANCA No, no, he wasn't being mean, he just – he means well.

SANDY Right, right. No, I know, he's just, he's old school and he's overworked and he's in charge of so much with the show and... Um, are you okay though?

BIANCA I'm alright. Thank you.

[BIANCA *means her thanks.*]

SANDY Just between you and me, he *can* be a real pain sometimes. I know he's America's favorite precious little kitty cat and a theatre legend, but... well... I shouldn't say... but you're friends so you probably already know, but. Okay so. He keeps a stash of wet food in his dressing room. And all hell breaks loose if there isn't a fancy little plate for him to eat it off of. And all these little plates have the tiniest, most delicate hand painted flowers you've ever seen. Beautiful pastel pink and baby blue blooms clustered up in bouquets. Some of the plates have gold on them. Frankie says it's real gold. And then I have to put this damn wet food on it. And it's this horrible orangey-beige color and the smell is so – it's just – eugh! It's bad. It's *bad*. And then it plops onto this stupid little saucer with the nastiest, wettest slap you've ever heard. Y'know, I, I offered him wet food in a bowl once, and he knocked it out of my hands! He's a bigger diva than Mae. She'd understand how hard it is to get wet food off of a good sweater... I miss that sweater...

BIANCA I'm... That sucks. You don't deserve to be treated like that.

[SANDY breaks into tears. BIANCA hugs her. Fade to black.]

SCENE SEVEN: SIR BABICUS AND THE DRAGON

[Lower stage. There is a tower – this should be on the opposite side that it was in the previous scene. It is, after all, a different castle. BIANCA is in the tower with her back to the audience. BERELE is on the other side of the stage, reading from a large storybook.]

BERELE Once upon a time, there was a beautiful princess.

[BIANCA turns around in her tower, brushing her hair.]

She was known as the most beautiful princess in all the lands. In order to protect her and her beauty, her father locked her up in a tower, and with his kingly powers, found a dragon to protect her.

[DRAGON appears in front of the tower.]

DRAGON The dental plan is stellar.

BERELE Though many tried to slay the beast and win the princess's hand in marriage...

[GOOSE appears. He poses and brandishes his sword before charging DRAGON. DRAGON releases a jet of fire at GOOSE.]

BERELE None succeeded.

DRAGON Oh Princess! I made dinner!

[DRAGON places a cooked goose with garnishes on the tower sill. BIANCA appears in the window.]

BIANCA Suitors again?

DRAGON They're an important part of a healthy diet!

[DRAGON begins to devour the meal.]

BERELE As the years passed by, the princess only grew more and more beautiful.

BIANCA You flatterer.

BERELE Village people would gather and gaze upon the princess as she looked out her window. Even at a distance, they could see her beauty.

[A cluster of puppets gather, including CLYDE.]

But none dared to brave the dragon.

[The meal has disappeared. DRAGON burps, causing all of the puppets to flee, leaving CLYDE standing alone, bearing a sword. DRAGON comes to a resting state.]

None except for Sir Clydiaus, the bravest knight in all the land!

CLYDE Squire!

[BABY pops up, also with a sword.]

BERELE And, of course, his squire, Little Babicus.

CLYDE Babicus! Come here, Little Babicus.

BABY Abababa

CLYDE Oh, don't fret Little Babicus, this dragon may seem big and scary to a young squire such as yourself, but to an experienced knight such as I, it's no challenge.

[DRAGON coughs up a knight's helmet.]

BABY Abapbbt

CLYDE He clearly was not an experienced knight. Like me.

BABY Gagababooba

CLYDE Yes I know that is the King's emblem! It is – it is of no concern to me. I have fought many a foul beast for many a fair maiden. This ain't my first rodeo, kid.

BERELE So, the knight set forth to slay the dragon!

[CLYDE and BABY carefully approach DRAGON.]

CLYDE Hm... hm... would you look at that? The stupid thing is asleep!

BIANCA Who's out there?

CLYDE Oh! Oh! Fair princess, tis I, the great knight: Sir Clydiaus!

BIANCA Who?

CLYDE Sir Clydiaus!

BIANCA Not ringing a bell.

CLYDE I'm Sir Clydiaus! The bravest knight in all of the land? The slayer of the Millibeast? The most handsome man in the kingdom as voted in 1432?

BIANCA Well, I didn't vote for you. Besides, my mother always warned me not to talk to strangers.

CLYDE I'm not a stranger, I'm Sir Clydiaus! Back me up here, Babicus.

BABY Goobabababa

BIANCA Well, Sir Clydiaus, you really ought to leave before the dragon wakes up. I'm really not in the mood for more suitors.

[*She pushes the empty plate off of the sill.*]

CLYDE Oh, yes, the dragon, yes!

[*CLYDE prepares to slay DRAGON. DRAGON wakes up.*]

DRAGON What do you think you're doing?

CLYDE Uhh, I... uh... He set me up!

[*CLYDE points to the baby.*]

BABY ppppppbbbbbbbtttttt

DRAGON Is that so? Well then, I suppose I'll just have to serve both of you for dinner!

BIANCA Drat!

CLYDE Noooo! Look at what you've done, Babicus! I always knew you were a whelp of a squire. You can't even lift a sword! And now you've gotten us both eaten.

BERELE The dragon reared his head, and smacked his lips, his big sharp teeth gnashing together. He was ready to devour the knight and his squire, when suddenly, Babicus opened his mouth, and...

BABY WAAH WAAH!

[*DRAGON dies dramatically.*]

BERELE With his foul cries, Little Squire Babicus demolished the dragon!

CLYDE What? Huh? What? Oh! I did it! I did it!

BIANCA Oh, Little Babicus, you saved me! You did it!

BABY Ababa?

CLYDE Well, well, Babicus is my squire. I taught him everything he knows. Plus, he's a bit young for you. Therefore, dearest princess, hottest of dames, would you... take my hand in marriage?

BIANCA What? No. Absolutely not. I'm having dragon for dinner!

BERELE And so, Little Babicus and the princess celebrated the victory with a delicious culinary experience, while Sir Clydiaus left to wander the kingdom, forever in search of a bride as beautiful as she.

CLYDE What?!

BERELE The end!

CLYDE What? That's it? That's all I get?

[BERELE blows a raspberry at CLYDE, laughs mischievously, and scurries offstage. CLYDE screams after him.]

They get to eat dragon and I get nothing? Who marries the princess?! I've been robbed, I say! Robbed!!!

[The lights fade to black as CLYDE whines.]

SCENE EIGHT: PREY

[Upper stage. BIANCA's dressing room. She is alone at her vanity. There is a light knock at the door.]

BIANCA Come in!

[CLYDE enters.]

CLYDE I was hoping you would say that.

BIANCA Oh. Hello Clyde.

CLYDE Hello, Bianca. Could you help me with my makeup?

BIANCA I think it looks fine.

CLYDE Frankie said I needed a touchup.

BIANCA Um, didn't Henrietta offer to help you?

CLYDE She's onstage now.

BIANCA Really? What're they doing right now?

CLYDE The Lint Brush sketch.

BIANCA I didn't think Henrietta was in the Lint Brush sketch. I can't imagine it's easy to lint brush feathers.

CLYDE She wasn't. But she is now. That's how theatre goes, darling. You haven't performed much, have you?

BIANCA I have.

CLYDE Mm, like in college, right? Did you go to college?

BIANCA I really need to be getting ready.

CLYDE You know Bianca, I can't seem to shake the feeling that you just don't like me.

BIANCA I wonder why.

CLYDE I just think that if you got to know me, well, I think you'd like me. What're you doing after the show?

BIANCA I'm busy.

CLYDE Busy with what?

BIANCA Business.

CLYDE You know, I thought models were supposed to be fun. Aren't you supposed to be fun, Bianca? Don't you want to be an actor? Actors say yes. That's the first rule of improv.

BIANCA And the first rule of seduction is to not bring up improv. I have to get ready for the next sketch.

CLYDE Who said anything about seduction? Showing your cards, Bianca.

BIANCA Please just let me get ready.

CLYDE They haven't even gotten to the Noah's Ark sketch yet. We have plenty of time.

BIANCA I need the time for my process.

CLYDE Come on, Bianca. Let me teach you a real actor's process.

BIANCA No. You need to leave right now.

CLYDE Woah, woah, calm down! I'm just trying to help you break into the industry. Despite what everyone thinks, it's not easy for a young girl like you to become a star.

BIANCA Are you serious? Slimy chauvinistic men like you are the reason "the industry" is a goddamned nightmare.

CLYDE Oh, Christ, don't have a woman moment on me! I'm being nice to you. Having a bit of conversation. You feminist types are so reactionary. Do you know what a bit of conversation with me can do? I can make you be someone. *Actually* be someone. You think you can act? Your job is to be pretty. You're set dressing, sweetheart! If you were with me, people would at least pretend to respect you. Without me, you're just some fuckable mannequin.

BIANCA Who the fuck do you think you are?

CLYDE I'm Clyde / Clankin.

BIANCA I KNOW YOU'RE CLYDE CLANKIN. You think I'm goin' to take acting advice from fuckin' Clyde Clankin? You can't bring me respect. You're an egocentric, self-involved primadonna. You're a melodramatic, overacting, condescending, misogynistic fucking pig. When was the last time Clyde Clankin was at the Oscars? When was the last time someone said Clyde Clankin was their favorite actor? Better yet, when was the last time someone said Clyde Clankin was a good actor? You're just some goddamned guy!

CLYDE You know what Bianca? I really don't appreciate this tone you're taking with me.

[FRANKIE *enters the lower stage.*]

FRANKIE Noah's Ark onstage please!

CLYDE You're just – you're just getting overemotional and trying to think of the most hurtful things to say. Stop acting like a catty teen. Start acting like an adult.

[A *cavalcade of animals file through the lower stage two by two. It is cacophonous. In this same moment, BIANCA lets out a*

guttural scream. Years of rage bubble over. She strangles CLYDE. It is brutal. Once the animals have gone through, BIANCA stands alone in silence, grasping the sad little sock corpse in her hands. After a long moment, the silence is broken by a loud, authoritative knock. BIANCA screams in response and hides the body behind her back.]

BIANCA Come in!

[RED sticks her head in.]

RED You and Clyde are on next. Have you seen him?

BIANCA No, I've been trying to avoid him.

RED Hah. Smart move.

BIANCA I think he was alone in his dressing room moping about his makeup again.

RED He's even worse at the stuff than I am. I checked his room though. Little shit wasn't there.

Eh.

He's probably snuck off with Sheri again.

[BIANCA's urge to share with RED wins out against her better judgment.]

BIANCA They broke up.

RED They did? Good for her! That means he's on the prowl again. I tell you, these stagedoor girls just go crazy for Clyde. I'm sure he's found some new girl to toss around for a few months. He always has one by intermission.

BIANCA That's horrifying.

RED What's even worse: he takes these girls into the bathrooms. Have you seen these bathrooms? They're inventing new STDs in there, I swear. Little bastard's probably in there now. I give it five minutes.

BIANCA Thank you, five!

RED HAH! Good one. Hey, knock 'em dead out there, alright?

[RED exits and BIANCA exhales. She turns and contemplates the corpse. She holds it aloft for a moment.]

BIANCA Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio. A fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fantasy. . . No. No jest in you. Only threats. And bad cologne?

[She leans in for a sniff. After a moment, she processes what she's doing, she freaks out and drops the body.]

Shit.

Shit! Okay. Fuck. *Fuck*. Okay. Deep breathes, Bee.

[She looks around the room for solutions. She realizes there is one answer. She stands up and takes a deep, deep breath. She bends down and touches her toes, and then rolls her spine up, one vertebrae at a time. When she stands, she is holding the corpse.]

Okay.

[She dons a pair of fairy wings and the corpse of CLYDE before heading out.]

B.A.C. Showtime.

SCENE NINE: A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

[Lower stage. BIANCA "sleeps" on a bed of flowers. The bed sheet curtain is a starry one. There are cardboard trees on both sides of the stage. Clyde wears a paper donkey mask.]

Bianca As Clyde (B.A.C.) *[Sung.]*

The ouzel cock, so black of hue,
With orange-tawny bill,
The throstle with his note so true,
The wren with his little quill—

BIANCA *[Spoken.]* What angel wakes me from my flow'ry bed?

B.A.C.

The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,
The plainsong cuckoo gray,
Whose note full many a man doth mark
And dares not answer "nay" —

[Spoken.] for, indeed, who would set his wit to so foolish
a bird? Who would give a bird the lie though he cry
"cuckoo" never so?

BIANCA I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again.
Mine ear is much enamored of thy note,
So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape,
And thy fair virtue's force perforce doth move me
On the first view to say, to swear, I love thee.

B.A.C. Methinks, mistress, you should have little
reason for that. And yet, to say the truth, reason
and love keep little company together nowadays.
The more the pity that some honest neighbors will

not make them friends. Nay, I can glee upon occasion.

BIANCA Thou art is wise as thou art beautiful.

B.A.C. Not so neither; but if I had wit enough to get out of this wood, I have enough to serve mine own turn.

BIANCA Out of this wood do not desire to go.
 Thou shalt remain here whether thou wilt or no.
 I am a spirit of no common rate.
 The summer still doth tend upon my state,
 And I do love thee. Therefore go with me.
 I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee,
 And they shall fetch thee jewels from the deep
 And sing while thou on pressèd flowers dost sleep.
 And I will purge thy mortal grossness so
 That thou shalt like an airy spirit go.—
 Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed!

[Enter four Fairies: PEASEBLOSSOM, COBWEB, MOTH and MUSTARDSEED. These characters may be played by other ensemble puppets or have their own dedicated puppets.]

PEASEBLOSSOM Ready.

COBWEB And I.

MOTH And I.

MUSTARDSEED And I.

FAIRIES Where shall we go?

BIANCA Be kind and courteous to this gentleman.
 Hop in his walks and gambol in his eyes;

Feed him with apricots and dewberries,
 With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries;
 The honey-bags steal from the humble-bees,
 And for night-tapers crop their waxen thighs
 And light them at the fiery glowworms' eyes
 To have my love to bed and to arise;
 And pluck the wings from painted butterflies
 To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes.
 Nod to him, elves, and do him courtesies.

PEASEBLOSSOM Hail, mortal!

COBWEB Hail!

MOTH Hail!

MUSTARDSEED Hail!

B.A.C. I cry your Worships mercy, heartily.—I beseech
 your Worship's name.

COBWEB Cobweb.

B.A.C. I shall desire you of more acquaintance, good
 Master Cobweb. If I cut my finger, I shall make
 bold with you.—You name, honest gentleman?

PEASEBLOSSOM Peaseblossom.

B.A.C. I pray you, commend me to Mistress Squash,
 your mother, and to Master Peascod, your father.
 Good Master Peaseblossom, I shall desire you of
 more acquaintance too.—Your name, I beseech
 you, sir?

MUSTARDSEED Mustardseed.

BIANCA Come, wait upon him. Lead him to my bower.
The moon, methinks, look with a wat'ry eye,
And when she weeps, weeps every little flower,
Lamenting some enforcèd chastity.
Tie up my lover's tongue. Bring him silently.

SCENE TEN: PUPPET DANCE

[Lower stage. This scene is a dance between two puppets. One is silly, and one is serious. There should be no dialogue. In the original production, I chose to create a dance between a pair of feather boas to an excerpt of Amilcare Ponchielli's "Dance of the Hours," but performers and directors should follow their hearts' desires. This is puppetry, after all!]

SCENE ELEVEN: HARES ON THE MOUNTAIN

Traditional Folk Song

[Lower stage. BIANCA stands just to the right of center stage, alone. Behind her is a white, backlit screen. As she sings, SALLY appears on her left. She is a shadow puppet of a young woman.]

BIANCA *[Sung.]*

Oh Sally my dear, it's you I'd be kissing
 Oh Sally my dear, it's you I'd be kissing
 She smiled and replied, 'You don't know what you're missing'

Oh Sally my dear, I wish I could wed you
 Oh Sally my dear, I wish I could bed you
 She smiled and replied, 'Then you'd say I'd misled you'

[SALLY disappears. As the next verse starts, rabbit shadow hand puppets appear on the left.]

If all the young men were hares on the mountain
 If all the young men were hares on the mountain
 How many young girls would take guns and go hunting?

[SALLY reappears on the right with a gun. She shoots the rabbits, and they fall. She disappears again. Then, bird shadow hands appear where the rabbits were.]

If the young men could sing like blackbirds and thrushes
 If the young men could sing like blackbirds and thrushes
 How many young girls would go beating the bushes?

[SALLY appears with a bat. She beats the birds down before disappearing again. When she leaves, fish appear.]

If all the young men were fish in the water
If all the young men were fish in the water
How many young girls would undress and dive after?

[SALLY appears with a spear. She spears the fish, and disappears.]

But the young men are given to frisking and fooling
Oh the young men are given to frisking and fooling
So I'll leave them alone and attend to my schooling

[BIANCA takes out a book and begins to read. The light fades from behind BIANCA, leaving her in darkness.]

SCENE TWELVE: CONSOLE

[Upper stage. RED, CICI, BIANCA, and a chorus of puppets fill the scene. The puppets chatter.]

RED Alright, everyone onstage for the pool table sketch, let's go, let's go! Lights 47, standby.

[A chorus of puppets hurries through backstage.]

RED Lights 47, go.

[RED exits, leaving CICI and BIANCA alone backstage together. BIANCA does not see CICI at first, and relaxes for a moment. She jumps out of her skin when she sees her.]

BIANCA Oh heavens Cici, you nearly scared me to death, there!

CICI Sorry, Bianca. May I adjust your costume?

BIANCA Oh, of course. Should I put my arms up, or?

CICI Don't worry about it.

[They stand in silence for a moment as CICI fusses with BIANCA's costume.]

 You have a Cancer moon, don't you?

BIANCA Why, yes, I do!

CICI I can tell in your ankles.

BIANCA Thank you?

CICI May I look in your eyes for a moment?

BIANCA Uh, alright.

[CICI looks intensely into BIANCA's eyes.]

CICI Mmm... that Scorpio rising has caused you some trouble, hasn't it?

BIANCA What do you mean?

CICI You look haunted. Are you haunted, Bianca?

BIANCA I don't believe in ghosts.

CICI Many ghosts don't either.

[BIANCA *evaluates* CICI *before beginning.*]

BIANCA When I was a little girl, I saw my dad slaughter a calf for the first time.

His name was Basil. His eyes were so brown. When I saw him walkin' on the end of the lead, I just knew somethin' was wrong. I think he knew too. I dunno how. Because Dad didn't seem any different. He had the same flannel, same jeans, same hat on. Same boots as always. His boots were always so dirty. Mama always made him take them off on the porch. I know everyone has their place on the food chain. But it... I dunno.

His eyes were so brown. Finest lashes I'd ever seen. I couldn't look away. I wanted to.

So. I guess that. Haunts me. One could say.

Gee, what a downer, huh?

RED (off) Two minutes until the Engineer Song!

BIANCA I have to go. I'm almost on.

CICI I slipped a bit of obsidian in your pocket. It'll do you some good, dear.

BIANCA Thank you, Cici.

[CICI *exits.* BIANCA *watches.*]

SCENE THIRTEEN: I'M GONNA BE AN ENGINEER

Written by Peggy Seeger

[Lower stage. BIANCA stands alone as the lights come up.]

BIANCA *[Sung.]*

When I was a little girl, I wished I was a boy,
I tagged along behind the gang and wore my corduroys,
Everybody said I only did it to annoy
But I was gonna be an engineer.

[BIANCA wields a tool – something hefty like a hammer. MAE enters.]

Momma told me,

MAE

'Can't you be a lady?
Your duty is to make me the mother of a pearl.
Wait until you're older, dear, and maybe
You'll be glad that you're a girl.'

[MAE exits and takes BIANCA'S hammer. A typewriter appears in front of BIANCA.]

BIANCA

When I went to school I learned to write and how to read,
Some history, geography and home economy.
And typing is a skill that every girl is sure to need
To while away the extra time until the time to breed,
Then they had the nerve to say, 'What would you like to be?'
I says, 'I'm gonna be an engineer!'

[BIANCA produces a wrench and places it in front of the typewriter, or something to that effect.]

No, you only need to learn to be a lady,
The duty isn't yours for to try and run the world.
An engineer could never have a baby!
Remember, dear, that you're a girl.

[FRANKIE enters, gives BIANCA some kisses, and then takes the wrench.]

Then Jimmy came along and we set up a conjugation,
We were busy every night with loving recreation.
I spent my day at work so he could get his education
And now he's an engineer!

He says,

FRANKIE

'I know you'll always be a lady,
It's the duty of my darling to love me all her life.
Could an engineer look after or obey me?
Remember, dear, that you're my wife.'

BIANCA

Well, as soon as Jimmy got a job, I studied hard again,
Then, happy at my turret-lathe a year or so and then:
[Two babies are handed to BIANCA. She struggles to hold them in one arm.]

The morning that the twins were born, Jimmy says to them,

FRANKIE

'Kids, your mother was an engineer.'

BIANCA

You owe it to the kids to be a lady,
Dainty as a dish-rag, faithful as a chow;
Stay at home, you got to mind the baby,
Remember you're a mother now.

[BIANCA *starts to crack as a colander, a sewing kit, and a broom are handed to her. On the last line of the following verse, BIANCA screams and drops everything she's holding.*]

Well, every time I turn around there's something else to do,
It's cook a meal, mend a sock or sweep a floor or two;
I listen in to Jimmy Young, it makes me want to spew,
I was gonna be an engineer!

[FRANKIE *looks on in horror.*]

Don't I really wish that I could be a lady?
I could do the lovely things that a lady's s'posed to do,
I wouldn't mind if only they would pay me,
And I could be a person too.

I been a sucker ever since I was a baby,
As a daughter, as a wife, as a mother and a 'dear'.
But I'll fight them as a woman, not a lady,
Fight them as an engineer!

[BIANCA *pulls out a blowtorch. She chases FRANKIE offstage.*]

SCENE FOURTEEN: APPLAUSE

[Upper stage. FRANKIE is preening. BIANCA enters with CLYDE.

FRANKIE immediately runs over to fawn over them.]

FRANKIE Congratulations my dears! How do you feel?

BIANCA Exhilarated! How do you feel?

FRANKIE Fantastic! Bianca, darling, you were absolutely alive onstage tonight! And Clyde – my goodness, Clyde! In all your years here, this was your best performance yet! Have you been taking classes, you sly dog?

B.A.C. Oh yes, well, the Meisner technique and all that.

FRANKIE You're a Meisner man! Well, it has paid off, my friend. You must join Mae and I for drinks tonight.

MAE (off) That little creep is NOT invited!

FRANKIE Yes he is!

MAE (off) Then so is Bianca!

FRANKIE Oh! Oh, of course! I'm sorry Bianca, I didn't mean to exclude you. Obviously you're invited too.

BIANCA Thank you, that's very kind of you. I'm not sure if I should, it's been such a busy week, you know.

B.A.C. C'mon Bianca, we'd love to have you with us!

BIANCA Okay, okay, if you all insist. Who am I to turn down such hospitality anyways?

FRANKIE Wonderful! Mae and I have drinks after every show. When the show is good, we go to Goldie's Lounge. When the show is... less good, we go to Foggy's Freaky Flop.

BIANCA The Triple F for tonight, then?

FRANKIE Oh, darling. I'll see you at Goldie's.

[FRANKIE *kisses BIANCA's cheeks. He hesitates with CLYDE, settling on a masculine shoulder pat. He exits.*]

BIANCA Well, Clyde, looks like I'm moving up, aren't I?

[*Lights down.*]

SCENE FIFTEEN: SCHMOOZING

[MAE and FRANKIE sit at a table, chatting, on the lower stage. MAE has hard liquor. FRANKIE has some colorful cocktail. BIANCA enters the upper stage on the opposite side with CLYDE.]

MAE Oh, Bianca! Yoohoo, over here!

BIANCA Oh! Um..

[BIANCA exits and re-enters onto the lower stage. She joins the pair.]

Hi. Sorry I'm late. Clyde took forever finding his keys.

MAE And you waited for him? How generous.

FRANKIE We're just glad that you made it! It's not often others join us for drinks, you know.

BIANCA Well then, I am honored.

B.A.C. What about me, hm?

FRANKIE Oh, God, how many years has it been since we've gone out together Clyde? Honestly, I'm a tad shocked you're here.

MAE Are we finally good enough for you?

[MAE sips her drink.]

B.A.C. I just have such a busy schedule. You know I love to spend time with you, Frankie.

FRANKIE Really? I thought you don't like to... how did he say it, Mae?

MAE 'Walk through the pansies.'

B.A.C. Ah. Did I say that?

FRANKIE You did. It's not an uncommon sentiment, but, eh, quite unwise to say to the man who writes your paycheck, isn't it?

B.A.C. I'm sorry, Frankie.

[FRANKIE *is ready to deliver a multitude of scathing retorts. He is stunned into silence.*]

MAE What was that?

B.A.C. I'm sorry? That was incredibly cruel of me to say. I'm honored to work with you, Frankie.

MAE Kiss ass.

FRANKIE Thank you, Clyde.

B.A.C. And thank you for listening to my ideas earlier today. I think our theatre runs best as a collaborative machine.

FRANKIE You do?

[MAE *scoffs.*]

B.A.C. Oh, yes. Why, I think Mae herself has had some wonderful ideas for the show.

MAE How did you know that?

FRANKIE Really? Mae, why didn't you tell me?

MAE Must've been stagefright.

FRANKIE You must tell me all about it during the cab ride home.

BIANCA Do you two live together?

MAE Oh heavens no.

FRANKIE Absolutely not.

MAE We live in the same artists' housing. It's a lovely building – I'd actually say you'd be a great fit, Bianca.

BIANCA Oh, no, I'm not sure I even want to live in the city.

FRANKIE Oh? Where would you go?

MAE You want to be an actress, don't you?

FRANKIE Mae.

BIANCA I do! I do. It's... it's very big here.

[FRANKIE and MAE laugh.]

It is! It's shocking. Every little twinkling light is a person. It's overwhelming.

MAE Oh, but isn't it wonderful? You're surrounded by a million lives! You're a mote of dust and the goddamned sun and moon at the same time. You're nobody and everybody. I mean, don't get me wrong, I've encountered fans in some truly strange places, that's just how it is when you're a star of stage and screen, but to truly just disappear in a crowd – there are few other places in this country to do it.

BIANCA I suppose so. Though if I never walked past a construction site again in my life, it would be too soon.

MAE I'll drink to that.

[MAE takes a drink.]

FRANKIE Yes, they are quite noisy, aren't they?

BIANCA Well, yes, but / I was thinking -

MAE My Gods, she means the men, Frankie! Really, have you never walked side by side with a woman before?

FRANKIE I prefer to walk behind and get a good view.

BIANCA Frankie!

FRANKIE Oh, see, this is the problem! Everyone wants me to like women, and then when I do, they get mad at me.

MAE You're such a pig.

FRANKIE And you, my dear, are a dog.

[They clink their glasses together and drink.]

B.A.C. I've given up on trying to understand your friendship.

MAE Oh, yes, how in the world could a man and woman be friends?

B.A.C. No, I just mean - you're awfully rude to each other.

MAE What is wrong with you today? Have you joined the sainthood?

BIANCA Clyde and I talked throughout the show, and I think he's just, he's just thinking about some life things.

B.A.C. I've been reading Nietzsche.

FRANKIE I think it's a lovely change. Give peace a chance and all that, hm? Say, Clyde, whenever I see you talking to those big groups of yours, you're always telling stories. Maybe a story could soothe the waters between you two, hm?

B.A.C. I'd hate to monopolize the conversation.

MAE Would you?

FRANKIE Come on, give us a story!

BIANCA Oh dear, would you look at the time! I just remembered, I have to get home, I, I promised my neighbor that I would, uh, look after his puppy while he's working his, his night shift.

MAE I didn't know you worked with children!

FRANKIE How charitable of you.

B.A.C. A lady mustn't walk alone at night at this hour! May I escort you?

BIANCA Oh, well, I suppose I wouldn't mind some company.

[BIANCA *feigns a giggle. She stands.*]

 It really has been lovely.

FRANKIE Of course!

MAE You must join us again sometime, Bianca.

FRANKIE You too, Clyde.

[MAE *grumbles.*]

BIANCA I'll see you two around!

B.A.C. Ciao!

[BIANCA *exits with CLYDE. FRANKIE and MAE lean and watch them. They snap into a conspiratorial huddle once they watch the pair leave.*]

FRANKIE Are they..?

MAE They must be.

FRANKIE They *can't* be.

MAE Well they are!

FRANKIE She was telling me how much she couldn't stand him during the show!

MAE Hate, love, love, hate. It's all the same thing, really, isn't it?

FRANKIE No! No it's not!

MAE Oh, Frankie, just tell me you've never known passion and get on with it.

FRANKIE I've known passion! Why, I met this lovely calico from Sonoma County the other day, and / we -

MAE Stop! Stop immediately.

FRANKIE So you don't want to hear about what happened when her street cat boyfriend walked in?

MAE Considering your lack of having been beaten to a pulp, I have a guess, and I'd like to stop picturing it immediately.

FRANKIE You really think Clyde and Bianca are... you know?

MAE Are you kidding me? That disgusting little man has a blatant human fetish and it's downright perverted.

FRANKIE You would know, being an expert in perversion.

MAE I am a goddess of theatre!

FRANKIE A goddess of sin.

MAE I'll drink to that.

[They clink their glasses together. Lights out.]

SCENE SIXTEEN: CORRESPONDENCE

[BIANCA enters in front of the stage. She tosses a pile of mail center stage, followed by CLYDE's body. She stretches.]

BIANCA Ugh. Fuck.

[She walks across the stage and slips accessories and layers off until she's in the base layers of her outfit. She disappears through the other side of the stage. She re-emerges in pajamas. She makes her way to the pile of letters and plops down. She sorts through them. It's all bills and ads – and then, a letter from her parents.]

BIANCA Oh, shit.

[She tears the letter open and unfolds it with fear. She takes a moment before she speaks.]

I'm gonna read this letter out loud now, so's that the audience can hear it.

Dear Bianca,

Hi Baby! It's your Mama, but I know you know that. At least, I hope you haven't forgotten your address already! I'm just writing this letter because I miss you so much. At least I used to see your face at the beauty shop, but now I have to wait for a show to air? I know you're busy with your auditions and what-not, but I don't think it'd kill you to send a postcard every now and again. You know I say it with love! (And here she's, uh, she's drawn a heart.)

As for what's happening here, it's the same as usual. The corn is coming along nicely. God willing, this might just be a good year. Winnie had puppies. Five of them. We were hoping for full blue heelers, but Lord help us, the little things take

after the dachshund (Spelled "D-A-H-S-K-O-U-N-D," by the way. Uh, the dachshund) from down the road. Your Pop is not too happy about that, but I told him that if little blue dachshunds were God's will, so be it! Still, if you could pray for the little things next time you're at church, it wouldn't hurt.

[BIANCA *makes a face. She does not go to church anymore.*]

Speaking of church: Maude Dixon's cousin Doris came in all the way from San Francisco, and please don't think me a gossip, but I just happened to overhear them whispering, and Lord help me if she didn't come into town because she got divorced. I knew she'd be trouble from the moment I saw her makeup. The woman's eyelashes looked like spider legs, Bianca. Spider legs! And don't get me started on the horrible (all caps) shade of red she had on! I suppose it's just best to let the Dixons be the Dixons though, isn't it? Glenn Wayne says hi. He's working at the Black Bear Diner now. Isn't that something? (A man gets a job and my mama loses her mind. Next thing I know she'll be asking me to marry him.) He's got a real nice smile (here we go) and a little birdie told me that his last girl ran away to Oregon to join some lesbian sex cult (all written very tiny), so I bet he's just in dying need of a hug. All I'm saying is, next time you're in town, you should stop by the diner. (There it is.)

That's about all that's new. I'm sure you've done so many things in Hollywood that you haven't even been able to begin to write them down. If you ever get the chance to entertain your lil' (L-I-L apostrophe) ol' (O-L apostrophe) mama, you know where to write me.

Love and miss you,

Your Mama (And she's drawn another heart.)

[BIANCA lets the letter drop to the floor. She ruminates for a moment.]

Oh Bianca.

We don't go to church. We don't have a boyfriend. We don't write our mom back.

How are we getting out of this one?

[She continues to mentally cook. She puts CLYDE on. She stares at him.]

Not so full of comments now, are you, Mr. Celebrity?

B.A.C. Don't look at me. You got us into this mess.

BIANCA Yes. Well. Scorpio rising and all that.

B.A.C. You women, always obsessed with your stars and other frivolous little fantasies!

BIANCA Why are you like that, Clyde? This can't be who you are anymore. You have so... so much power. Do you realize that? Do you comprehend it? Every dipshit little theatre major thinks he's going to be you. Every director who only casts girls he wants to fuck. Every little boy who wants to act. He sees you and the vile poison you spit. And he puffs his chest up and he puckers his lips and he spits. And he hopes it stings and burns and destroys. Just like you. Does it make you proud? When little hearts and little minds turn to rot? Y'know, little girls get hit with that poison. And it stings. And it burns. And it destroys. Sometimes it rots away will. Kills and stamps down anything beautiful and shining. Sometimes it rots away your summer days and your walks around town and everyone starts lookin' at you funny and it rots and its rots until nothin's left but the jagged edges of pure anger.

You gotta change Clyde.

Yeah. You gotta change.

SCENE SEVENTEEN: BARK AND BITE

[Upper stage. SANDY and RED are chattering while MAE warms up.

BIANCA enters with CLYDE. Everyone stops and looks.]

SANDY Oh! Bianca! You're here again!

BIANCA Yes! Yes. I am.

SANDY Oh! Cool. Cool.

RED Why?

BIANCA Well, you see, Clyde and I have fallen in love.

RED What?

MAE WHAT?

BIANCA Yes, at first Clyde and I had our differences, but after we got drinks last week, we found ourselves talking, and one thing led to another, and now we. Are in love.

MAE Bianca. Darling. I mistook you for a smart woman with a good head. Now it's clear that you only have the latter.

RED That still doesn't explain what you're doing here.

BIANCA I'm helping Clyde rehabilitate his image.

MAE Oh, I see! You think you can fix him.

SANDY Good on you, Bianca.

MAE No, no, you cannot possibly be supporting this! Red?

RED I don't like to get involved in showmance drama.

[RED takes a long, long drag of her cigarette.]

MAE Bianca, darling, if you need help, you can always talk to me and Cici in the costume shop. You know that, right?

SANDY If this is what makes you happy, then congratulations! I think you'll make a lovely couple.

MAE Don't be a kiss ass, Sandy.

BIANCA Thank you. We just thought... oh Clyde, why don't you do the talking?

MAE Oh good! Give your voice up too!

BIANCA I'm not — I'm not giving up my voice. Clyde and I did a lot of talking, and he realized that as a focus of the public eye, he has to set a better example! He has influence, and it's his duty to use that influence to better the future.

MAE I'll believe it when I hear it from him.

B.A.C. It's true! Bianca says it so well, she opened my eyes to the horrors of my past behavior.

MAE So have you decided to jump off of a bridge yet?

SANDY Mae!

MAE What?

SANDY You gotta stop telling people to kill themselves!

MAE God, I'm surrounded by fucking prudes!

[MAE leaves, but turns to face everyone before exiting.]

Spineless, weak-willed, ineffectual prudes!

[MAE exits.]

BIANCA I think we should go upstairs now.

[CLYDE *starts to leave with BIANCA following. RED gets in between them and stops BIANCA.*]

RED Hey. Stay safe kiddo, okay? I know Mae just bitched you two out, but it's because she cares. I think she cares about you.

BIANCA You *think*?

RED Yeah. I do. I've worked with Mae for years now. This is, what, our fourth season?

SANDY Fifth.

RED Fifth! Jesus. Who's funding this shit? Well, listen: I know she's... abrasive. But she cares. We all do. You're a good egg, Bianca. We're here if you ever need us, okay?

[RED *pats BIANCA's shoulder. She turns to see CLYDE behind her.*]

RED Jesus fuck! Personal space, Clyde. C'mon Sandy, we're needed in the booth.

SANDY Okey dokey, artichokey!

RED I'm no fuckin' artichoke.

[SANDY *and RED exit. BIANCA stares after them before looking at CLYDE.*]

BIANCA What did you do, Clyde?

[*Lights out.*]

SCENE EIGHTEEN: x1.5

[Lower stage. A jaunty vaudeville tune plays. The puppets mime through the show with a male human guest. The music gets quicker as this continues, and the whole thing is like a chaotic ballet.

When the song ends, everyone takes a bow. Lights out.]

SCENE NINETEEN: PROMOTION

[BIANCA stands backstage. A slew of puppets come through. She congratulates them as they pass by. Somewhere in the mix is the male guest. Slightly after everyone else, FRANKIE enters.]

FRANKIE Bianca! Darling, did you enjoy the show?

BIANCA Oh yes, it was lovely.

FRANKIE Yes, yes, it was something, wasn't it? But as I was watching from the wings, I began to think: we only ever have one human on the show at a time. I mean, you are a difficult lot to wrangle! And so *breakable* with your bones and ligaments and all. And there are just some, eh, cultural differences that some of our guests struggle with, and some of these actors today are just so... so spoiled! And their agents book them and I try to vet them, but then they come on the show and they're just so... so awkward and uncomfortable and uncharismatic the whole time! But you, Bianca, you are such a warm and lovely woman, people just open up around you! You're a book opener.

BIANCA What're you saying, Frankie?

FRANKIE What I'm saying is: I'd like you to join Frankie and Friends full time.

BIANCA Oh my God. Frankie. Are you serious?

FRANKIE Deadly. Of course, I know you're trying to get your start, and I don't want this to stifle you. I want this show to be the soil that helps the flower of your skills grow!

BIANCA You want me on? Every week?

FRANKIE Yes. You'll even get your own dressing room.

BIANCA What'll I do?

FRANKIE Oh, appear in sketches, sing, everything everyone else does — with the added bonus of helping our guests feel a little more at home.

BIANCA Wow. Yes. Yes, of course.

FRANKIE I'll send the contracts to you right away. Miss Ward, I am thrilled to be working with you again.

[FRANKIE shakes BIANCA's hand and exits. BIANCA stands center stage. The lights shift so that she is solo in a spotlight, with the rest of the stage blacked out.]

BIANCA Holy shit.

I'm doing it.

I'm fucking doing it!

[She squeals and jumps in joy. It is a moment of pure, childlike whimsy and bliss. Lights out.]

Intermission.

ACT II

SCENE ONE: DIRTY LAUNDRY

[Upper stage. A laundromat. BIANCA throws clothes into a laundry machine one piece at a time. MAX enters with a bag of clothes and stands symmetrically with BIANCA.]

MAX Good afternoon, miss.

BIANCA Good afternoon.

MAX You're Bianca Ward, aren't you?

[BIANCA smiles.]

BIANCA Yes, yes I am.

MAX Sorry, eh, I'm never good with this sort of thing. Y'know, I met Richard Nixon once, said 'bout near the same thing, except, y'know, Richard Nixon instead of Bianca Ward, and next thing I know, all these guys in suits are crawling out of the woodwork to push me away. Guess I looked like some sort of national threat or something.

Sorry. Here I am rambling on. I, uh, I caught you and Clyde Clankin on, uh, uh...

Gee, what is it called? The, the, it's a cop show.

BIANCA Officer Court?

MAX Officer Court! Yes, yes, that's it. Yes. Officer Court. You were great. Absolutely killed it. I know the characters aren't exactly developed, but, eh, you brought so much dimension to it! I felt like I was watching a real person, which, let me tell you, not what I was expecting from Officer Court. Great, great stuff.

BIANCA Thank you.

MAX And Clyde! Wow. Y'know, I've never seen a performance like that from him. No offense, Miss Ward, but I've never really been a big Clankin fan. I just, ehh, I've never really gotten the, the charm, y'know? A, uh, manly man is not necessarily my type, you see.

[BIANCA takes in MAX. She shifts as she realizes that she is not talking to a man. Her thoughts complicate exponentially. She sees the world in color for the first time. Dorothy enters Oz.]

BIANCA I see.

MAX I mean no offense, miss, really. When I watched that episode – wow. Wow! I've never seen him give a performance like that. The emotional depth! The body language! If I didn't know any better, I'd have thunk it was someone else entirely.

BIANCA No offense taken. He's grown a lot.

MAX Sure, I'm sure. I've heard he's investing in charities now, yeah?

BIANCA Oh, yes. Hospitals, animal rescues, orphanages.

MAX The classics. But even beyond that! Y'know, I've got some friends in the industry. Nothing impressive to you, I'm sure. Stagehands, lighting, camera operators, people like that.

BIANCA We wouldn't run without them. I hardly know how a camera works. I think if someone set me in front of a lightboard, I'd probably blow the whole theatre up.

[MAX laughs.]

MAX And what about the stagehands?

BIANCA Mm. I like when people do things for me.

MAX Say, you need any quarters for that?

BIANCA I think I'm alright, thank you.

MAX Anyways, my friends – these guys say that Clyde Clankin is nicer than he's ever been.

BIANCA You almost sound suspicious.

MAX No, no, not suspicious, just curious about what causes a guy to turn around like that.

BIANCA He realized he had to change.

[The two fall into silence.]

MAX I really do mean what I said, just so you know. I don't even really care for Officer Court. I know it's popular, but I think I'm just too nitpicky for it.

BIANCA Nitpicky? How so?

MAX I'm a private investigator, you see.

BIANCA I see.

MAX It's just one of those things. The little inaccuracies, they just, uh, they get to me. I'm sure you feel the same way when us regular people talk about you famous folks. But my brother, he loves Officer Court, so I watch it with him, and that episode was the best by far.

BIANCA You're too kind.

MAX I mean it.

[They look at BIANCA intensely. They do mean it. BIANCA looks down at her laundry bashfully. MAX opens their own bag. Immediately, they make a face and a series of dramatic hand gestures.]

Would you look at that? Gee. I really gotta get more observant. This is the wrong bag of laundry!

[MAX packs the bag up, slings it over their shoulder, and makes their way to leave. They pause as they're about to exit.]

See you around, Miss Ward.

[MAX exits. BIANCA has an internal crisis in silence for a good few moments. Then, MAX bursts back in and breaks it.]

MAX Oh, uh, just one more thing! Just as a, uh, curious fan – are you and Clyde, uh...

[MAX makes a vague hand gesture. BIANCA gives a strained smile.]

BIANCA Yes. Yes we are.

MAX I see. Well, eh, thank you for your time and for entertaining us simple folk.

[MAX takes their hat off and smiles before leaving. BIANCA's crisis increases tenfold. She buries her face in her laundry basket and makes a noise of distress. Lights out.]

SCENE TWO: CORRESPONDENCE REDUX

[Front stage. BIANCA enters with her laundry. She drops it quickly. She paces.]

BIANCA Fuck. Shit. Fuck!!!

[She stops pacing.]

I'm forgetting something.

[She thinks. It is hard to sort thoughts with a racing mind.]

My mail! Fuck!

[BIANCA exits. After a moment of silence, she returns in a huff with mail. She sits down and throws the mail next to her. She stares out, catching her breath. Suddenly, CLYDE pops up on the lower stage.]

CLYDE Hello, Bianca.

[BIANCA screams.]

Oh, come on, doll, I can't look that bad!

BIANCA Okay. Okay. I'm losing it.

CLYDE And you weren't losing it when you strangled me?

BIANCA It sounds like you deserved it.

CLYDE But you're not sure, are you?

[BIANCA stares at him. After a moment, she turns to her mail.]

BIANCA I don't have to listen to this.

CLYDE Yes you do. It's in your head.

BIANCA Oh, look! A letter from Mom. Great.

CLYDE Has she noticed that you're a fraud?

BIANCA Ahem. Here we go:

Dear Bianca,

Hi Baby! It's Mama. I've been watching all your programs. Who'da think you could act like that!

CLYDE Not me!

BIANCA (Shut it.) When you were on Officer Court, we got everyone over to the Gomes' house and got to see you and Clyde in color TV!

CLYDE Wait, we were on Officer Court? How'd we get on Officer Court?

BIANCA (Guess they thought I could act, huh?) I ain't never seen Glenn Wayne look so jealous — though I still think you and Glenn would have cuter babies than you and Clyde.

CLYDE Hey, my genes are those of an Adonis!

[BIANA *mimes vomiting.*]

BIANCA Speaking of Clyde, you best bring him home sometime soon.

CLYDE Now that's what I'm talking about!

BIANCA Since you're up with the movie stars now, I'm sure you'll be coming to Hollywood sometime soon. It's only a few hours drive!

By the way, Winnie's puppies are all growing up nice and healthy. Once folks in town heard they could get a genuine puppy from Bianca Ward, them little things were picked up faster than feed in a chicken coop. There were four girls and one boy.

The girls went to the Hills, the Johnsons, the Stevens, and the damned Dixons. The boy was going to go to some family in Corcoran that's friends with the Waynes, but I'll be damned if I didn't find your Pop with a dog biscuit in his mouth trying to get the little fella to come out from under the table! We're calling him Petey. Winnie's a great mom, just like I'm sure you would be.

[BIANCA *stares at the letter.*]

CLYDE So, you wanna have a litter, or what?

[BIANCA *screams. She crumples the letter up and throws it at CLYDE.*]

Hey, hey, woah, woah! I'm just a little ghosty guy, don't throw things at me! Jesus, woman!

BIANCA Listen to me, you little fucking cretin. I'm in charge here. You should be busy rotting in hell.

CLYDE Line's long. Figured I could kill some time. Besides, Clyde can't die, baby.

BIANCA You can and you did.

CLYDE And yet, I'm more famous than ever.

BIANCA Because of me! You're only anything right now because of me! Without me, you'd be rotting in a grave.

CLYDE Without you, I would still be alive.

BIANCA I thought you couldn't die?

CLYDE Oh my God, stop picking apart everything I say! Jesus, you're so pedantic.

BIANCA I don't have to take this.

[BIANCA reaches over and grabs CLYDE. She pulls the sock off— do everything you can to make the hand underneath unseen. She puts the sock on her own hand.]

There we go.

B.A.C. Oh, dear. I was just starting to feel like my old self again!

BIANCA Sounds like I intervened just in time. Come along, Clyde, we have a meeting to get ready for. It's about time the press and I have had a little chat about your new image.

[BIANCA takes a few deep breaths and centers herself. She looks at Clyde. The two nod in time. She exits.]

SCENE THREE: CONFERENCE

[BIANCA stands on the upper stage with CLYDE. RED stands to the side with a cigarette in her mouth. On the lower stage is a gaggle of reporters, both human and puppet.]

BIANCA Good afternoon, everyone!

EVERYONE Good afternoon, Bianca!

BIANCA Oh, you're a kind crowd, aren't you? It's such a beautiful day out, I think there's a good mood in the air. That's good – it's a day for good news! Today, Clyde and I are here to address the speculation and rumors surrounding our relationship. We are happy to announce that we are, in fact, dating! It's a very wonderful thing for both of us. I would like to say that no, we are not living together! Clyde has his home and I have mine. However, as we also work together, we end up spending a lot of time together! Um...

[BIANCA looks to RED.]

RED Alright, we got any questions?

[The crowd erupts into a clamor.]

Okay, okay, one at a time! Uhh, you, buddy over there.

PUPPET 1 Why hide your relationship in the first place?

BIANCA Well, we weren't hiding anything necessarily, it just didn't come to our minds to tell the press until we saw all the rumors.

PUPPET 2 Is this your first time dating a movie star, Bianca?

BIANCA As far as I know.

MAN 1 How're you liking it, Mr. Clankin?

B.A.C. She... she makes me a better person.

MAN 2 Mr. Clankin, is it true that you cheated on your last girlfriend with Bianca?

BIANCA That is ludicrous. I didn't even meet Clyde until after they had broken up.

MAN 1 So you think Sheri is lying?

BIANCA What? No, I've never met her, I don't know a thing about the woman.

BABY Bianca, after your performance on Frankie and Friends, some of us in the crowd noticed a recurring anti-baby sentiment. Would you describe yourself as a feminist?

BIANCA Why, yes, I would. But I wouldn't —

PUPPET 2 What about Mr. Clankin's denouncement of feminism on Late Night with Jim Jambles?

B.A.C. That was years ago. I've learned and grown since then. The fact is that this country has a consistent and systemic problem with widespread discrimination against women.

MAN 2 Do you have any statistics to back this up?

BIANCA Um, I think we're getting a bit off topic.

BABY What about your anti-baby bias, Bianca?

[The crowd bursts back into questions.]

RED Okay, okay! No more questions, we're done here! Get outta here! Out!

[RED chases the reporters out, exiting with them. SHERI remains on the lower stage.]

SHERI I have a question. How dare you?

BIANCA Um, I'm sorry, I don't think we've met.

SHERI Sheri.

BIANCA Oh.

[BIANCA stops herself from saying "oh shit."]

SHERI You say you stand for women? What about me, huh? What about every woman that that piece of shit has hurt? Should I consider myself lucky that I was just abused and manipulated and only a little bit assaulted instead of full on violently raped? You gonna fucking interrogate me and pick me to shreds until I'm just a used up butchered jumble of flesh and bones? I bet he's told you about what a crazy, obsessive, clingy bitch I am, right? That I asked for ridiculous things, like, I don't know, "Can you do your laundry please?" or "Can you come home before 4 am?" or "Can you treat me like a person? Can you see me? Can you see me fucking screaming? Can you see the fear and guilt I feel every time you touch me? Have you noticed that my hair is falling out? Will you only notice when it makes me ugly?" You know. Crazy bitch things like that.

BIANCA I'm sorry.

SHERI You should be. And what about you?

[She gestures to Cylde. There is an uncomfortably long pause.]

Yeah. Hah. Okay. That's about what I expected. But you're a feminist now, right?

Do you know how many times I see you? I see you every fucking day. It's embarrassing to think that... that I was convinced that I liked you. That I thought you were something. You don't stand out in a crowd. You are the crowd. It's oppressive. It suffocates me. And then I get disgusted with myself for being scared of you. For letting you have that power over me when you aren't worth the dirt underneath my boots. It twists my stomach into knots and ties up my throat. I can feel my skin crawling and my blood rushing and my muscles tensing. I hate you. I fucking hate you. And every time I see a shadow of you I feel sick to my fucking stomach. I want you to apologize to me. I want you to know what you did wrong. I want you to beg for forgiveness. I want to claw your eyes out. I want your mom to be disappointed in you. I want to walk past you without a second thought. I want – more than anything! – for you to be nothing more than a speck of dust. Not in my mind. Not in my heart. And not in my sight.

I wish you were dead.

I can't wait for you to be dead.

Fuck you Clyde Clankin.

I hope your obituary goes unread.

[SHERI *flips them off and exits*. BIANCA *stares after her*. *Lights out.*]

SCENE FOUR: DYKES IN DREAMLAND

[Blue lights fade in. If there can be a disco ball, there is. BIANCA lays asleep in front of the stage. MAX idly dances on the upper stage to some light and bare tune. Maybe it's just drums or a plucked bassline. Instead of their usual detective outfit, they're decked out in wizard robes. BIANCA slowly wakes. She takes in her surroundings. She is not startled by MAX, but confused.]

BIANCA It's you.

[The music stops. A spotlight on MAX, who turns to face BIANCA with jazz hands.]

MAX It's me!

BIANCA What're you doing here?

MAX What are any of us doing here?

BIANCA Do you think I killed Clyde?

MAX Oh yeah. Big time.

BIANCA I didn't. I swear.

MAX Oh, no, you can't lie to me here. I know you killed Clyde. Strangled him Simpsons style.

BIANCA What?

MAX You'll get it in a decade.

BIANCA Oh. Are you going to arrest me?

MAX I'm not a cop. I'm a private investigator. I just investigate. Privately.

BIANCA Are you going to tell the cops?

MAX I dunno. Probably not. I'm kind of on some new shit.

[MAX *gestures to their attire.*]

BIANCA Oh. Um. Are you... a wizard now?

MAX Yeah. Pretty much.

BIANCA Cool, cool... Um... I'm sorry for killing Clyde.

MAX Clyde's not dead, baby.

BIANCA He died. I felt it happen. He was in my hands. It happened in my hands.

MAX Nah. You're not getting it.

BIANCA Help me. Please.

MAX Can't you feel the air around you? Can't you feel how it crushes you? It infects your lungs and twists through your body, down to your very cells. Poisoned oxygen living in you, breathing through you, just waiting for you to exhale and help it spread.

BIANCA I think I'm sick.

MAX Of course you are. You must be exhausted. You've been running for years. Lilith ran from Adam. Helen ran from Troy. You, little Bianca, ran from home, didn't you?

BIANCA How did you know?

MAX I'm a fucking wizard, alright?

BIANCA Alright.

MAX Okay. Now make a wish.

BIANCA Do wizards grant wishes?

MAX This one does.

BIANCA I want to be loved. Please.

MAX Happy to oblige.

[MAX descends to BIANCA's level. BIANCA is nervous, vulnerable, and desperate yet terrified to be herself. The baby femme during her first time at the lesbian bar. MAX is confident and suave. The cool butch who's here every night.]

BIANCA I'm scared.

MAX Why are you scared?

BIANCA What if I don't like it?

MAX Then we can stop.

BIANCA What if I do like it?

MAX What do you mean?

BIANCA Well, I've, y'know, uh... been with boys. Men, I guess. And I... I don't like it. It makes me feel like I don't own my skin. Like I'm watching everything happen through somebody else's eyes. Like I'm watching a movie. Everyone says I just need to find the right man, so I try to convince myself that I'll like it or that it'll be different, and sometimes the little details are different... Some are blonde, some brunette, some tall, some short... Some nice. Some not. But the big picture is the same.

You confuse me. I hate men in brown suits. It's boring. There are so many colors in the world! But on you... it's captivating.

I think you're the most handsome person I've ever seen. When I look at you, my chest aches and my stomach twists in knots and I just wanna smash my face into yours and crawl into your skin and find safety in your ribs.

I think this is what it's supposed to feel like.

I guess I always assumed that everyone knew, everyone agreed that women are just... better.

More attractive.

My family would never talk to me again. Not that I talk to them now, but that would... that would seal it. And I know that it's, it's, God or morality or something, but I just, I don't get it. How can I ignore it when there's, there's a magnet pulling me towards you? I feel like I'm on fire. I feel like tearing myself apart. I think you're the only thing that can fix it.

How can it be wrong when it's the most natural thing I've felt?

[MAX and BIANCA stare at each other in silence. BIANCA kisses MAX.]

MAX Are you still scared?

BIANCA No. Not at all.

[Lights out.]

SCENE FIVE: ANALYSIS

[Upper stage. RED and SANDY are preparing for the show. CICI is fussing with MAE's costume. BIANCA enters. She is visibly off.]

SANDY Oh! Hey Bianca! Where's Clyde? I haven't seen you come in without him since, well, the first time you were here, I guess!

BIANCA Oh. Um.

[BIANCA fumbles behind her back for a moment before CLYDE pops up next to her.]

B.A.C. Evening ladies! I, uh, found a lucky penny. Took me a moment to catch up.

CICI Heads or tails?

B.A.C. Huh? Uh, tails, I think?

[CICI shakes her head.]

CICI That's too bad.

MAE Why you would stop to pick up any penny, God only knows.

B.A.C. We all know you wouldn't dare to dirty your paws for a cent.

MAE No, I would not dirty my paws for a cent. I dirty them enough doing this nonsense.

CICI Don't get it on the costumes, please.

MAE God, it's metaphorical, Cici!

CICI I don't want that on the costumes either.

[BERELE *enters.*]

BERELE Hi guys!

BIANCA Hi, Berele.

[BERELE *waits for anybody else to say hi.*]

BERELE Okay! Well! Uh, did anybody hear about what happened last week at the stage door?

BIANCA I dunno, what happened last week at the stage door?

BERELE There was a fight!

BIANCA I don't get it.

BERELE No, no, it's not a joke! Some guys were yelling for you, Bianca, and then some other guy started yelling at the biggest guy, and then they got in each other's faces and started yelling like crazy, and then – wham! The first guy punches the second guy, and suddenly the whole thing was like a boxing ring! It was crazy. Well, I ran out when I heard the crazy yelling, but Henrietta and Legthony saw the whole thing.

CICI That's terrible.

RED Who won?

BERELE The second guy. He was a weird little guy too, I wasn't expecting it! He shrugged off that first slug like water off a duck and had the other guy on the ground with just a few hits! Bam, bam bam!

[BERELE *mimes the punches.*]

Course, once the first guy was down, everyone kinda froze up, cuz I don't think anyone was really betting on this

weirdo in a trenchcoat. And then the guy looks around like he's embarrassed! Like he didn't just unleash a can of kickass! And then he just tips his hat and rushes off! He was like some kind of disheveled superhero. Hey, that could be a good sketch, don't you think, Clyde?

B.A.C. Um, yeah, could be a good base for something! Stretch the big and squish the small. Maybe a bug can beat up a bunch of bears!

RED Jeesh. A fight. And I wasn't there. I can't believe it. It's been ages since I've gotten to kick some sonofabitch off the premises.

BIANCA Uh, we're going to go upstairs.

B.A.C. I need the time for my process.

SANDY Remember to sign in on the call sheet!

[BERELE leaves. BIANCA starts to leave, but is stopped by RED.]

RED Everything okay, kiddo? You look like shit.

BIANCA Thank you, Red.

RED You know what I'm saying.

BIANCA I just had some weird dreams.

RED Ah. I've been there. I couldn't sleep for a week after I saw *Calamity Jane*.

BIANCA I'm sure I'll be right as rain once we've gotten through the show. Dreams are just dreams.

[CICI pops between the two, causing BIANCA to make a startled sound.]

CICI Actually, dreams can be quite the window into the subconscious. When we're unable to process things on a conscious level, it's quite normal for those things to start manifesting in the dreamscape. I know you have to get ready, but you can always talk to me in the costume shop.

RED Oh, Cici is a real stellar dream analyst. For three months, I kept having these fuckin' evil monkey dreams where this goddamned capuchin just kept – ohhh, he pissed me off!

CICI It's okay Red, you don't have to talk about it.

RED Well, the point is that I talked to Cici about it. Turns out – anxiety and discomfort around personal identity and how it influences my casual cruelty. I only had one more dream after that, where I took the tommy gun out of that little bastard's monkey paws, and gave him a big ol' hug. Bam! No more evil monkey dreams!

BIANCA That is. A real psychological insight. Do you have a lot of weird dreams?

RED Like you wouldn't believe.

CICI It is impressive. Red here is a real gateway into the dream realm.

BIANCA I'm sure a humble non-gateway such as myself will be fine.

MAE Cici! Can you *please* come finish this hem? I need to do my makeup!

CICI I'll be right there! You know where to find me.

[CICI *lovingly pats* BIANCA's arm and *scurries off* with MAE.]

RED You really should take her up on that. She's a gem.
C'mon Sandy.

SANDY Okay!

[RED exits with SANDY. BIANCA stands alone, looking distressed.
She looks at CLYDE.]

B.A.C. I dunno. I don't really believe in shrinks.

BIANCA Oh, that's enough out of you.

[BIANCA exits in a hurry. Lights out.]

SCENE SIX: x2

[Lower stage. The same jaunty vaudeville tune plays again, at twice the speed. The puppets mime through the show with a female human guest and BIANCA. The music gets quicker as this continues. It is more chaotic than ever. The world around BIANCA is crumbling. It once again ends in a collapse, with BIANCA remaining, breathing heavily. She awkwardly bows and runs out. Everyone Lights out.]

SCENE SEVEN: CONFRONTATION

[Upper stage. BIANCA is doing her makeup. There is a knock at the door.]

BIANCA Come in!

[MAX enters.]

Oh. It's you again.

MAX The show tonight was wonderful, ma'am.

BIANCA Am I ma'am now? And please, don't compliment me if you're just going to accuse me of murder. It feels a bit disingenuous when people do that.

MAX Do people often accuse you of murder?

BIANCA Only phony detectives.

MAX I'm not — Okay. You actor types are so distrusting. Always ready for everyone building you up to turn around with the hammer that's bringing you down. Well, Miss Ward, not all of us are professional pretenders. Really, I was laughing the entire time. You're magnetic. It's great stuff.

BIANCA If you're just here for my autograph, you could've waited at the stage door like everyone else.

MAX Ah, you know, it's funny that you say that, it actually reminds me of one of the little things that's been bugging me. You don't stage door —

BIANCA Is that it? You're here to complain that I don't go out there to the, the hoards? Do you know how many men have shown up to the theatre hoping they could talk to me? And then

you expect me to just waltz out there after an exhausting show? Really, Detective.

MAX You can call me Max.

BIANCA Max.

MAX I completely understand why you don't do it. It seems so tiring. You do a show, you do the whole thing, with your hair and your makeup and your dress, and then you gotta go out there — You know, I'm a little embarrassed to admit it, but I've been waiting out there for you the past couple of weeks now.

BIANCA Oh? You're that much of a fan, hm?

MAX And I see what you mean about the men. I heard some of 'em complaining myself. Entitled fuckin' pricks. "Where is she? Where's Bianca?" So I turned to 'em and I said "Leagues above you bozos!" And then it turned into this whole thing —

BIANCA Oh, Berele was telling me about some sort of fight that happened last week.

MAX I know, I know, embarrassing that I lost my temper like that.

BIANCA I admire the chivalry.

MAX You're too kind, Miss Ward.

BIANCA Call me Bianca.

MAX Bianca.

[Pause.]

But, eh, there's something still bugging me.

BIANCA Which is?

MAX You don't stage door. That I get. Why doesn't Clyde?

BIANCA Oh, I don't know, we've never really talked about it. He always has those masses of girls after him. That probably has something to do with it.

MAX That's what's got me curious. For years, and I mean years, Clyde Clankin goes out after his shows, and revels in the worship. I've heard story after story. Playbills he's signed, pictures he's taken, girls he talked to, girls he hugged, girls he kissed, girls he signed, girls he took home. I mean, really, it's never stopped.

BIANCA He's bettering himself now.

MAX Is he?

[BIANCA *is silent.*]

Every good deed he's done, he's done with you. Not a single one of them alone. Isn't that a bit funny?

BIANCA Why would that be funny? We're... partners.

MAX Partners. Right, right. And are you happy? Being responsible for a man? And I mean, jeesh, such a pig-headed one that.

BIANCA It's my duty to better the world.

MAX And this is how you're doing it?

BIANCA Yes. That, and my art.

MAX Your art?

BIANCA The world is ugly and cruel. But as an actor, I get to say and do such lovely things. Even when it's violent, it's

lovely. I get to be eloquent and clever and sharp and witty and dangerous and funny. And sure, the acting's important, but there's only so much you can do with a shitty script. But something good – it lives in you! I can feel it in my heart and in my bones. It courses through my veins, hot and thrumming like blood. I love when I get to be a vessel for something beautiful.

MAX I think we've strayed a bit.

BIANCA Mmm. What was the original question, again?

MAX Did you murder Clyde Clankin?

BIANCA Detective. You need to leave.

MAX Am I making you uncomfortable?

BIANCA You're accusing me of murder.

MAX Well, uh, I suppose I am.

BIANCA That makes me uncomfortable!

MAX Why? Do you regret it?

BIANCA What is there to regret? You've, you've seen him! You've heard him! You'll have a hard time sentencing me for murder when nobody has died, Max.

MAX I know what you're doing, Bianca.

BIANCA I'm going to call Red.

MAX No, no, I'm on my way out. Nice talkin' to you.

[MAX leaves. BIANCA stares after her. Lights out.]

SCENE EIGHT: PARLEY

[MAX exits from BIANCA's dressing room onto the upper stage.

They fumble through their coat pockets. They pull out a cigarette and place it between their lips. They continue to search their pockets. Finally, a lighter. They try to light their cigarette. Adjust. Try again. Cup a hand up. Try again. Adjust. Try again. The lighter is definitely dead. RED enters with a cigarette in her mouth.]

RED Hey! No smoking backstage.

MAX Ope, sorry about that, sir. My light's dead anyways.

RED Good. An open flame in this building is a couple words short of a death sentence.

[RED lifts a second cigarette to her mouth and takes a drag.]

Now. Mind telling me what you're doing snooping around my backstage?

MAX Oh, I was just visiting Bianca.

[If RED could raise an eyebrow, she would.]

RED You were visiting Bianca?

MAX Yes. I just had to ask her a few questions.

RED About?

MAX Your friend Clyde.

RED Clyde is not my friend.

MAX Well, you work with him. He's been acting different, hasn't he?

RED Sure. I haven't had to deal with an HR nightmare in weeks. What's that got to do with Bianca?

MAX Plenty. Aren't they a couple?

RED Well, that's what I was told, and then I see you out here, and now I'm not so sure. And, I mean, really. Come on. Can you picture *them*? Together?

[RED *makes a vague gesture.* MAX *responds with a grimace.*]

MAX I'd rather not.

RED It's strange! Bianca's a bright young woman. She's old for Clyde, but I look at her... and she's just a baby. Why does she have to better a man that's pushing forty? This is the start of something for her. She should have a real career. It wouldn't be fair if a little something like Clyde dragged her down, you know? I'd hate to see the girl get hurt.

[MAX *and* RED *hold eye contact, both trying to figure the other out.* RED *takes another drag.*]

MAX I think we're more on the same page than you think.

RED Are we?

[MAX *tips her hat.*]

MAX I'm on my way out. Don't worry about me.

[MAX *walks past* RED, *who turns and stops her.*]

RED Wait. Here.

[RED *hands* MAX *a lighter.*]

Keep it. I have a million.

MAX Thanks. I'll see you around.

[They both nod. Butch sees butch. MAX exits. Lights out.]

SCENE NINE: COUNSEL

[Upper stage. CICI is fussing over MAE, who wears a robe and stands in a T-pose.]

MAE Don't you dare stab a pin into me.

CICI You just need to stay still.

MAE I am staying still!

CICI Ah, the robe must be moving on its own, then.

MAE Since when did you learn about sarcasm?

CICI I read a book.

MAE Of course you did.

OW! Cici!

CICI Sorry.

MAE That was on purpose!

CICI Mae.

MAE You never stab Berele this much!

CICI Berele stands still.

MAE That cannot possibly be true.

CICI When have I ever told a nontruth?

MAE Just say lie, Cassandra.

CICI I will use whichever words I please, Mildred.

MAE What did you just call me?

[The pair erupt into barks, biting at each other's faces. BIANCA slips in with wide eyes.]

BIANCA Guys?

[They silence immediately and both snap to look at BIANCA.]

Is this a bad moment?

MAE In this room? Always.

CICI Oh, Mae. Come in, Bianca! I'm just placing a few last pins. You're here to talk about something.

[CICI continues to fuss over MAE, who settles back into a T-pose.]

BIANCA Yes, I am.

CICI I know. I wasn't asking.

BIANCA Oh, um. Okay.

So. I have. A friend. And this friend, she did something really bad. And so she lied to cover it up. But now the lie is hurting people too. But if she tells the truth. Uh. She's fucked.

MAE Drama!

CICI You know, Bianca, it's hard to give advice when you dance around the truth.

BIANCA It's hard to explain.

CICI You have to tell somebody.

BIANCA I can't.

CICI It'll kill you.

BIANCA I killed Clyde.

MAE What?

CICI No you didn't.

BIANCA What??

CICI I can see him. He's haunting you. You killed the body that is Clyde, but not the idea.

MAE Are you saying that even in death we can't get rid of that pathetic little whelp?

BIANCA Did you know the whole time?

CICI I felt it happen. It's hard to explain.

MAE She's woo-woo.

BIANCA What about you?

MAE Mm, well, I definitely noticed the change in him. I just assumed he was pulling out one of his little tactics on you, you know? I really had no idea that you've just been piloting his dead body this entire time.

[BIANCA *winces at her actions.*]

BIANCA Are you going to call the cops?

MAE Oh heavens no. Clyde was a vile, sad, limp little man, with a disgusting penchant for preying on 18-year-old girls. He dodged consequences for years – it only makes sense that it would all build up to this.

CICI The police are just another militaristic arm of our colonialist government.

BIANCA Oh. Um. Okay. Okay, cool.
So. Uh. What should I do?

CICI You need to kill him.

MAE Cici, darling, she's already done that dance.

CICI You need to destroy his body. His image. The myth of Clyde Clankin needs to be extinguished. Only then will you be free.

BIANCA How am I supposed to do that? I can't imagine his disappearance would create *less* attention.

MAE Audiences do love a good scandal. If only he could pitter out with a string of failed B-movies and die the sad, quiet death of the disgraced actor, condemned to forever live in the shadow of his most glamorous co-star.

CICI This is your journey, Bianca, but remember, that doesn't mean you don't have to ask for help.

BIANCA I know. That's why I'm here.

CICI I can't help you past this.

BIANCA Why not?

CICI That's just not how our lives intertwine.

BIANCA Who can help me?

CICI I think you know.

BIANCA It doesn't make sense.

CICI It will.

[BIANCA *assess* CICI *for a while.*]

MAE Oh, for God's sake, can somebody do something?

BIANCA Yeah. Okay. I trust you Cici.

[*Lights out.*]

SCENE TEN: INVITATION

[Front stage. To the right, there is a desk. MAX is lounging in a chair with their feet kicked up on the desk. Their trench coat is draped over the back of their chair. Their eyes are closed, and they hum to themselves. BIANCA enters.]

BIANCA Detective Hartman?

[MAX startles, and fumbles into a regular sitting position.]

MAX Miss Ward! I told you to call me Max.

BIANCA And I told you to call me Bianca.

MAX So you did. What can I do for you, Bianca?

BIANCA You don't have any questions for how I found you?

MAX Even movie stars get the yellow pages, don't they?

BIANCA I didn't even have your last name.

MAX No offense, but hunting people based on extremely limited information is the majority of my work.

BIANCA I suppose this is an accomplishment to you like a school talent show is to me then, isn't it?

MAX A beautiful analogy. I was in a school talent show once. I froze up and ran off the stage crying.

BIANCA How old were you?

MAX Seventeen.

BIANCA I'm so sorry.

MAX Just be sorry that it was Catholic school.

BIANCA You were raised Catholic?

MAX Yes ma'am.

BIANCA Southern Baptist.

MAX Oh brother. Want a drink?

BIANCA Funny. I was going to ask you the same thing.

MAX Oh?

BIANCA I'm here to invite you to dinner.

MAX On whose behalf?

BIANCA My own.

MAX And where shall we be going this fine evening?

BIANCA Don't think me too forward, but I was thinking my place?

MAX Bianca, you flatter me.

BIANCA I figure what we have to talk about isn't exactly suitable for Gino's Pastas and Steaks.

MAX Eh. I've done business in stranger places.

[MAX stands up and puts their coat on. They find a cigarette.]

You smoke?

BIANCA No, not cigarettes.

[MAX looks up and smiles. They tuck the cigarette behind their ear.]

MAX I hear ya.

[MAX walks over to BIANCA and offers their arm.]

Listen, my car is pretty beat up, but I promise I am a taxi of squeaky clean repute. Any address you give me, I'll take you there.

[BIANCA takes their arm.]

BIANCA Why, would you look at that! It seems chivalry isn't dead.

[They exit together. Lights out.]

SCENE ELEVEN: OUT WITH A BANG

[Front stage. BIANCA and MAX stand side by side. MAX smokes a cigarette. There is a toy car with CLYDE's corpse in the driver's seat. Perhaps there's a bottle of alcohol with him.]

BIANCA Are you sure this will work?

MAX Positive.

BIANCA I figured this would be the kind of thing that you're nitpicky about on TV. It's so... dramatic.

MAX Yeah, but, eh, life's a stage, right?

BIANCA Right.
Nobody else will get hurt, right?

MAX Right.

BIANCA Do you think it's too suspicious?

MAX It's a Ford Pinto. The fuel tank's fucked. The thing's bound to explode on its own anyways. It's a tinderbox on wheels. Nobody'll know we gave it a push.

BIANCA And then... poof. No more Clyde.

MAX No more Clyde.

[Silence.]

You send the letters out?

BIANCA Yup.

MAX What'd they end up saying?

BIANCA Clyde and I couldn't make it work. He didn't change. It was all just for show. When I broke up with him, he left in a drunken rage.

MAX Drama until the end.
You ever get a response from Sheri?

BIANCA Yup.

MAX What'd she say?

[BIANCA takes a letter out of her pocket and passes it to MAX. They unfold the paper and read it. They laugh, and then show the paper to the audience.]

It says "Light the bastard up."

BIANCA Do you think I'm going to be okay? So many people know now.

MAX It's not that many.

BIANCA Four people is a lot to know about a murder.

MAX Well, you've got some insurance on me, at least.

BIANCA I guess.

[They stand in a contemplative silence.]

Is this going to be goodbye?

MAX You're in control of your fate.

BIANCA And you, yours.

MAX It doesn't have to be goodbye.

BIANCA Groovy.

[*Silence.*]

Okay. I think I'm ready.

MAX Okay. Bye-bye, Clyde.

[*MAX flicks their cigarette onto the car. BIANCA kicks it off. The lights shift – they flare bright and burn on in orange. There's a loud explosion sound. BIANCA and MAX react accordingly – BIANCA moreso. A fire crackles on.*]

BIANCA That's it, huh?

MAX That's it.

[*They watch the fire together. Lights fade out.*]

SCENE TWELVE: SLOW DANCE

[Front stage. MAX reads a newspaper at their desk. BIANCA dances to a slow accordion tune. They exist without speaking for a bit.]

MAX Oh shit.

BIANCA Hm?

MAX His obituary.

BIANCA Oh shit.

MAX Clyde Clankin—

BIANCA Don't read it.

MAX Okay.

BIANCA Dance with me?

MAX Okay.

[MAX sets the newspaper down. They adjust their tie. They approach BIANCA, bow, and offer their hand. BIANCA takes them up on it. The two dance together. Lights fade out.]