

Tables and Chairs

A Comedy by Stanley Rutherford

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The characters

Multi-racial casting requested

| | |
|----------------|---|
| ALICE | A woman, innocent and naive, rather plain, completely unaware of the ruthless machinations of the real world, very neurotic, desperate to please, very wealthy. |
| HOWARD | A strangely charismatic man, oddly attractive, inexplicably sexy, the perpetual bad boy, a charmer and manipulator, the kind of guy every woman's mother always warned her about. |
| SPENCER | A faded, jaded man-of-the-world, the same age as Howard, rather dull but not unlikable, pretentious and demanding, essentially harmless. |
| NAOMI | Vivid and extravagant, a bit dangerous, the possessor of a vicious wit, a woman who has seen the beginning and the end, the same age as Howard and Spencer, always the bridesmaid, never the bride. |

The setting

All scenes take place in a room of Alice's home. There is one entrance, up-stage center. The furnishings consist of a table and four chairs. A second table is added for Act Two, a third table for Act Three, and a fourth table for Act Four.

ACT ONE

The table is set with linens and dishes. ALICE enters. She hurries around arranging the flowers on the table and arranging and rearranging the table settings to her satisfaction.

In time HOWARD enters. He is dressed in a silky, blue bathrobe. He stands for a moment just inside the doorway and then is noticed by ALICE.

ALICE: **[Lovingly]** Good morning, Howard. **[Pause, then brightly]** Good morning, Howard. **[Pause, then concerned]** What would you like, Howard? Coffee and an egg? **[Beat]** Howard? **[Beat]** Howard talk to me. **[Beat]** Please talk to me. Are you all right?

[Pause, as HOWARD sits down at a place at the table stage left and stares, rather blankly, ahead]

ALICE: Is it something I've said? Is it something I've done? **[Beat]** I didn't mean anything by it, Howard. I didn't intend to hurt you. Howard? **[Pause, then confused and hurt]** Howard, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Howard?

[ALICE turns away and resumes arranging and rearranging the table. She exits and enters bringing in more items for the table. Throughout the play this is ALICE'S Ritual, this is her Art, this is her Neurosis. She arranges and rearranges. HOWARD sits impassively, silently, and in time SPENCER enters, immaculately dressed in a suit and tie. He carries an armful of newspapers and periodicals. ALICE approaches him cautiously.]

ALICE: Good morning, Spencer.

SPENCER: Good morning, Alice.

ALICE: Howard's not talking. Is it something I've said?

[SPENCER looks with annoyance over to HOWARD]

ALICE: **[To SPENCER]** Is it something I've done?

SPENCER: Howard is having one of his "quiet" days. Howard doesn't talk on his "quiet" days.

ALICE: It's something I've done, isn't it.

SPENCER: It's nothing, Alice...it's Howard's problem, not yours. **[SPENCER sits down at the table]**

ALICE: Would you care for an egg, cheese Danish, French toast?

SPENCER: I'll have an egg, please.

ALICE: One, two?

SPENCER: Just one, please.

ALICE: Fried, scrambled, poached?

SPENCER: Boiled...very softly.

ALICE: Wheat toast, English muffin?

SPENCER: Just an egg, please, Alice.

ALICE: One egg, boiled, softly.

SPENCER: Very softly.

ALICE: **[To HOWARD]** Would you like an egg, Howard?

[With a very minimal expression, HOWARD indicates a "no." ALICE turns and exits and instantly returns with an egg in a cup on a tray, which she takes to SPENCER. Throughout the play ALICE's exits and entrances occur in an instant—whatever she needs is at hand just beyond the doorway. There is no provision for "real" time.]

SPENCER: Thank you, Alice.

ALICE: It's my pleasure.

SPENCER: You're entirely too kind and generous, Alice.

ALICE: It's my pleasure.

SPENCER: **[Indicating his suit]** The suit is beautiful.

ALICE: You look wonderful in it.

SPENCER: ...the shirt, the tie...

ALICE: It's my pleasure.

[ALICE watches benevolently as SPENCER proceeds to open and eat his egg. Egg-eating is SPENCER's Ritual, it is his Art, it is his Neurosis. So is newspaper-and-periodical-reading. After a

moment NAOMI enters, all decked out in a dynamite 40's ensemble, high-heeled shoes and a hat. ALICE and SPENCER gasp with delight. NAOMI models her outfit.]

NAOMI: Tell me what I need to know.

ALICE: It's wonderful!

SPENCER: It's dynamite.

NAOMI: It's not too...

ALICE: It's wonderful.

SPENCER: It's dynamite.

NAOMI: ...bold?

SPENCER: Be bold. **[He returns to his egg-eating ritual.]**

ALICE: I think you look wonderful.

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** The context here is a job interview. The context here is trying to get a job as a secretary-receptionist part-time. Light phone, heavy typing...

SPENCER: Be bold.

ALICE: Do you want to try the other outfit...it's bolder.

SPENCER: Be bold.

[ALICE exits and reenters immediately carrying an even bolder outfit on a hanger]

SPENCER: Try it on.

ALICE: Do you like it?

SPENCER: Try it on.

[During the following dialogue NAOMI proceeds to change her outfit, assisted by ALICE. NAOMI is wearing dynamite 40's underwear]

NAOMI: **[While she's changing, to ALICE]** It's got to be just right. Dressy, but not too dressy. Striking, yet professional. This is a big opportunity.

ALICE: This is so exciting.

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** Honey, these are fabulous. Where do you get these things?

ALICE: **[Modestly]** I'm a collector.

NAOMI: You've got great stuff.

ALICE: I love to see people wear them.

SPENCER: You've got marvelous taste.

NAOMI: Exquisite taste.

SPENCER: We can't begin to express our appreciation.

NAOMI: You're the nicest person we've ever met.

SPENCER: We're not used to being treated so nicely.

ALICE: It's my pleasure.

NAOMI: We're not used to such kindness and generosity.

ALICE: I'm thrilled to have you as guests in my home.

[NAOMI models the new outfit]

NAOMI: Tell me what I need to know.

SPENCER: It's a killer.

NAOMI: You think so?

ALICE: It's a killer.

SPENCER: It's dynamite.

ALICE: It's fabulous.

NAOMI: **[Turning toward HOWARD]** What do you think, Howard? Do you like this?

ALICE: **[Beat, then softly to NAOMI]** Howard's having a "quiet" day.

NAOMI: **[To SPENCER]** This is getting on my nerves. **[To HOWARD]** I don't see you going out there trying to get a job.

ALICE: **[Trying to calm NAOMI]** Naomi...

NAOMI: **[To HOWARD]** I don't see *you* ever doing any , *pro-duc-tive, mon-ey ma-king work.*

ALICE: **[To NAOMI]** Would you like an egg?

NAOMI: **[Declining]** I'm having a job interview.

ALICE: You should always start the day with a good egg.

NAOMI: I'm having a job interview.

ALICE: You can't go to a job interview without any fuel.

NAOMI: I can't digest.

SPENCER: You have to relax.

ALICE: How about some French toast?

NAOMI: **[Irritated, to ALICE]** I cannot digest. I cannot keep anything solid in my stomach for more than fifteen seconds.

ALICE: How about a cup of coffee...cream and sugar, a touch of cinnamon?

NAOMI: Cream and sugar, please, two lumps, no cinnamon.

ALICE: **[To SPENCER]** Coffee, Spencer?

SPENCER: Another egg, please.

ALICE: Boiled?

SPENCER: Very softly.

ALICE: **[Loudly to HOWARD]** Howard, would you like an egg?
[HOWARD indicates a "no"]

ALICE: How about some coffee?
[HOWARD indicates a "yes"]

ALICE: Mocha java, French roast, house blend..?
[HOWARD stops her/indicates "yes"]

ALICE: Cream and...

NAOMI: **[Irritated]** Alice!
[ALICE turns and exits/enters instantly bearing a tray with an egg in a cup, two cups of coffee, cream and sugar. She serves the items, quite elaborately, first to NAOMI]

NAOMI: Thank you, Alice.

ALICE: It's my pleasure. **[Then she serves SPENCER]**

SPENCER: Thank you, Alice.

ALICE: It's my pleasure.

[ALICE crosses and serves HOWARD, who smiles, and ALICE smiles benevolently and touches HOWARD with a motherly touch. There is a long pause as NAOMI, SPENCER and HOWARD pursue an egg-eating and coffee-drinking ritual. ALICE looks on radiating benevolence. Then in time...]

ALICE: **[To NAOMI]** May I get you something else?

NAOMI: No, thank you.

ALICE: I would very much like to get you something else if you would like to have something else.

NAOMI: No thank you.

ALICE: I want to be of assistance.

NAOMI: We're having a "quiet" period now.

[Pause, as ALICE backs away from NAOMI and turns to HOWARD]

ALICE: **[To HOWARD, loudly]** Are you sure you don't want an egg?

NAOMI: **[Annoyed]** Alice...

ALICE: **[To NAOMI]** I think Howard should have an egg.

NAOMI: We are having a quiet period now.

ALICE: Howard should have an egg.

NAOMI: **[Emphatically]** We are having a quiet period.

ALICE: **[Emphatically]** Howard should have an egg.

NAOMI: Alice, Howard does not deserve an egg.

[A pause]

SPENCER: You know, Dante, the great and wonderful Dante, was leaning against a wall one day in the Boboli Gardens in Florence back in the early

14th century, and a stranger approached him, a man whom Dante had never met. And the Stranger said, "Master...what is the best food one can eat?-- Qual'e la meglio cosa che si po mangiare?" **[Beat]** And Dante thought for a moment and said, "Uovo--an egg," "Grazie, Maestro," said the Stranger--"Thank you, Master." And he turned and walked away. **[Beat]** A year passed by. And then one afternoon at the very same spot in the Boboli Gardens, Dante once again was leaning against the wall and the Stranger approached him, the same man who had approached him the year before, and he said, "Maestro...con che?--Master...with what?" "Con sale," said Dante-- "With salt." And the Stranger thanked him and turned and walked away.

[Pause, as SPENCER returns to his newspaper reading ritual]

ALICE: That was a wonderful story.

SPENCER: It's a true story.

ALICE: Isn't that wonderful.

SPENCER: It was my mother's story.

ALICE: **[Utters an oohh of appreciation]**

NAOMI: **[Utters a sarcastic oohh of mock-appreciation]**

SPENCER: And her mother's before that. My mother told it every morning.

ALICE: **[Utters an oohh of appreciation]**

SPENCER: In Italian.

ALICE: Isn't that wonderful.

NAOMI: **[To SPENCER]** Your mother wasn't Italian.

SPENCER: Every word, every gesture...

ALICE: I just love Italian.

SPENCER: ...tutte le parole, tutti gesti.

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** He's not Italian.

SPENCER: Every morning the story and every morning the egg.

ALICE: I've eaten an egg every day of my life.

SPENCER: With salt...con sale.

ALICE: **[To NAOMI]** Would you like an egg?

NAOMI: Alice, we are having a quiet period now. When we have a quiet period it means that we don't talk. It's our tradition. It's our little way of doing things...

ALICE: I'm sorry.

NAOMI: It helps us get through times of stress and uncertainty.

ALICE: If there's anything I can do....

NAOMI: I am having a job interview. It's the first one I've ever had.

ALICE: You're going to do just fine.

NAOMI: I'm a sensitive and highly emotional person.

ALICE: You've got looks, brains and personality.

NAOMI: And I can type.

ALICE: And you can type.

SPENCER: **[To NAOMI]** You can't type.

NAOMI: I can too.

SPENCER: You can't type.

NAOMI: Very, very fast.

ALICE: Isn't that wonderful.

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** My parents gave me lessons when I was young, years of lessons... I was a prodigy... very fast fingers. I won awards...

ALICE: **[Gasps]**

NAOMI: Big awards at regional, state and national competitions...

ALICE: **[Gasps]**

NAOMI: With my picture in the paper and a contract with a big typing agency...very big...first class all the way...

ALICE: I wish I could type.

NAOMI: Years of practice, Alice...years of repetition...

ALICE: I'd give anything if I could type.

NAOMI: Timing and nuance...it's an Art.

ALICE: I just don't have the follow-through.

NAOMI: Rhythm and technique...

[NAOMI illustrates with the appropriate hand motions. ALICE watches completely enthralled; she oohhs and aahhs].

ALICE: Isn't that wonderful.

NAOMI: You could do it.

ALICE: I don't think so.

NAOMI: **[Still typing]** Of course you could.

ALICE: I can't coordinate like that.

NAOMI: It takes concentration.

ALICE: I can't differentiate. **[Getting quite hysterical]** I can't! I can't! I don't have the dexterity, I don't have the skills...

NAOMI: Alice!

ALICE: **[Very worked up]** And I look in the mirror and I say, "Alice, Alice...what can you do? *What can you do?* And every day, I get more discouraged, not totally discouraged, I mean, I love life, I love people, I love beautiful things...but when I assess my skills...

NAOMI: Alice, you are very talented.

ALICE: I'm simple.

NAOMI: You are very, very talented.

ALICE: I'm simple.

NAOMI: You know how to do many things, many things.

SPENCER: You do a great number of things, Alice.

NAOMI: Very well.

SPENCER: I think you do more things well than anyone I've ever met.

NAOMI: You're very talented.

ALICE: I am?

SPENCER: Very talented.

NAOMI: You are *nice*.

SPENCER: You are very nice, Alice...*ideally* nice...and you have a way of making people feel at ease...that is a gift...very few people have that gift...

NAOMI: And you have it.

ALICE: **[Beat, then excited]** This is what I want. This has been my vision. I want the people I love to be comfortable, to be happy, to know that I care, that I'm here to help...

NAOMI: You're very helpful, Alice.

ALICE: I want to create a beautiful environment that is a home for all of us...a beautiful home with beautiful food...a gathering place for beautiful people, stimulating and exciting people, artists and writers, financiers....people who can *talk*...people who can *communicate*...I love conversation...I love dialogue and discourse...the sharing of ideas and experiences...

[Pause]

[To NAOMI] Don't you like discourse?

[Pause]

Aren't you stimulated by new ideas and new ways of looking at things?

NAOMI: I don't like new ideas.

SPENCER: Naomi likes old ideas.

NAOMI: I was born too late.

SPENCER: Naomi's time has come and gone.

NAOMI: Paris in the 20's.

SPENCER: The cafes, the night spots, the music...

NAOMI: They drank more in those days.

SPENCER: They had less guilt in those days.

NAOMI: They had more fun in those days.

SPENCER: It's over.

NAOMI: It's all over.

SPENCER: Time to get a job.

NAOMI: Steady, *part-time* employment.

SPENCER: But one has to type.

NAOMI: I can type very fast.

SPENCER: You can't type.

NAOMI: Look, Spencer, it's the challenge I'm after, not the money...the money is incidental.

SPENCER: **[With disgust]** Money.

ALICE: **[With disgust]** Money.

NAOMI: Not that money isn't important...

SPENCER: The employer might not always be able to pay the employee.

NAOMI: As the employee I will have infinite trust in the employer...

SPENCER: It might be an awfully long time before the employer can pay the employee.

NAOMI: The job gets done, pay or no pay...I want to work.

SPENCER: Not just any work, I trust...I trust you feel that this is the right work for you, the best work for you, the work for which you feel the most qualified, about which you have the most enthusiasm, the most confidence that you can fulfill the demands that will be made of you and can assume the heavy responsibilities that you will be expected to take care of in an *exemplary* and *cost-effective* manner.

NAOMI: I type very fast and I say hello very nicely...hello, hello, hello...

ALICE: **[To NAOMI, concerned]** Do you really need the money?

NAOMI: I have no income.

ALICE: I'd be happy to help you out...any way that I can be helpful.

NAOMI: Thank you, Alice.

ALICE: You don't need to get a job. I can give you all the money you need.

NAOMI: Alice, I *want* to have a job. I want to experience the "World of Work." And Spencer has provided me with that opportunity. Spencer has decided that he needs a secretary/receptionist, part-time, isn't that right, Spencer...a job for which I am ideally suited in terms of temperament and talent...

SPENCER: **[To ALICE]** I've decided to write my memoirs.

ALICE: **[Gasps]**

NAOMI: And I'm going to type them up...

SPENCER: ...quite voluminous...quite demanding in terms of logistics and scope...

NAOMI: And I'm going to deal with the *correspondence to and from the agent* and the *publisher*, and deal with the *incoming calls* from the *media* and from the *big business people* in *Hollywood* and *Palm Springs*...

ALICE: **[To SPENCER]** I didn't know you were a writer.

NAOMI: He's not a writer.

SPENCER: Years of struggle and pain...

NAOMI: He's never written a word...

ALICE: **[To SPENCER]** If there's anything I can do...any paper or pencils or pens or refreshments...

SPENCER: **[To NAOMI]** Maybe *Alice* could answer the phone.

NAOMI: *I* can answer the phone.

SPENCER: Maybe Alice could answer the phone with a voice that is pleasant and business-like and not quite so...sarcastic.

NAOMI: **[Illustrating her most professional voice]** Hello, hello...

ALICE: **[Earnestly to SPENCER]** I think Naomi has a wonderful voice, a perfectly appropriate, well-modulated, professional voice, yet a warm and friendly voice.

NAOMI: Hello...hello...

ALICE: And Howard thinks that Naomi has a wonderful voice. **[Looks at HOWARD]** Don't you Howard?

NAOMI: Howard doesn't like my voice.

ALICE: **[To NAOMI]** Howard thinks you have a lovely voice.

NAOMI: **[Insistently]** Howard can't stand my voice. **[To HOWARD]** Isn't that right, Howard. **[Beat]** Remember "The Night of the Mother of the Stars?" **[To SPENCER]** Remember "The Night of the Mother of the Stars?"

SPENCER: **[To ALICE]** It was one of Howard's movies.

ALICE: **[Gasps]**

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** Truly dreadful.

SPENCER: Awfully bad.

ALICE: **[Amazed/thrilled]** I didn't know Howard made movies!

NAOMI: Truly dreadful.

SPENCER: Awfully bad.

NAOMI: "The Night of the Mother of the Stars" was the worst.

SPENCER: It was the end of Howard's career.

NAOMI: It was the end of *my* career.

ALICE: **[Amazed/thrilled]** You had a career?

NAOMI: I'm an actress.

ALICE: **[Gasps/delighted]**

NAOMI: I was the star of all of Howard's movies.

SPENCER: An awfully vivid actress.

NAOMI: Very vivid...and in "The Night of the Mother of the Stars" I was the *medium*.

SPENCER: This was Howard's "Moby Dick"...very epic...

NAOMI: Awfully epic...awfully excessive...very, very...what was that?

SPENCER: Surrealistic.

NAOMI: Awfully surrealistic...and Howard didn't like my voice.

SPENCER: He liked your voice...it just wasn't a *medium's* voice.

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** He liked Andrea Melton's voice.

SPENCER: Andrea Melton sounded like a medium.

NAOMI: Andrea Melton *was* a medium... **[To ALICE]** ...my body, my face, my expressions and nuances and electrifyingly moving portrayal...with Andrea Melton's voice.

SPENCER: **[To ALICE]** Andrea had a *mellifluous* voice...

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** We were filming for weeks...*on location*...at Redondo Beach...*Redondo Beach*...in the rain...pouring rain, late February...and Howard had me running about naked, literally, draped with seaweed, crawling around in the sand, *in the rain*, ranting about something...**[to SPENCER]**...what was that?

SPENCER: Something prophetic.

NAOMI: Incantations?

SPENCER: That's it...

NAOMI: ...about the weather?

SPENCER: You'd lost your daughter, I think.

NAOMI: I had a daughter?

SPENCER: You had a daughter with the Wind God.

NAOMI: Ohhh! **[It's beginning to come back to her]**

SPENCER: It was out of wedlock.

NAOMI: *That* was the Wind God?

SPENCER: Wind and Thunder, I think.

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** Howard didn't believe in telling any of us who was who or what was going on.

SPENCER: Very improvisational...

NAOMI: Very advanced...

SPENCER: Very *ad lib*

NAOMI: Awfully *ad lib*...

SPENCER: *Ad-lib* is the "New Art."

NAOMI: I think *ad lib* is overrated...

SPENCER: It is the "New Art."

NAOMI: It is overrated and it is not an art.

SPENCER: It is the *New Art* and being the New Art means that it is *not quite* an Art, but *almost* an Art, and it *will be* an Art almost any day.

ALICE: **[With profound earnestness]** I can't tell you how exciting it is for me to have such talented and stimulating people staying with me here in my home...

NAOMI: Thank you, Alice.

ALICE: I love the Arts, I love the Drama and the Film...I had no idea Howard was an artist.

NAOMI: Alice, Howard is not an artist, he is a maker of Bad Movies.

ALICE: **[To NAOMI]** And you're an actress!

NAOMI: I was a child star.

ALICE: **[Gasps]**

NAOMI: I was the New Shirley Temple.

SPENCER: You were almost the New Shirley Temple.

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** I had gotten *the phone call*. **[To SPENCER]** Do you remember *the phone call*? **[To ALICE]** It was the studio people...this was a very *big call*, very *long distance*...and they said that they wanted me *now*, that they wanted me to be the New Shirley Temple.

ALICE: **[Thrilled]** Isn't that wonderful!

NAOMI: I told them "no." I didn't want to be Shirley Temple.

SPENCER: How could *anybody* want to be Shirley Temple.

NAOMI: I wanted to be Lana Turner, but they already had Lana Turner, and they said that it was either Shirley Temple or nothing at all. **[Beat]** *That* was the end of my career.

ALICE: You must make a come-back.

NAOMI: **[Shaking her head]** No, no...

ALICE: You must act in more movies, more of Howard's beautiful films. **[To HOWARD]** Why didn't you tell me you made beautiful films? I would love to see your beautiful films.

NAOMI: All of Howard's films have been eaten away by a fungus.

ALICE: **[Horried]** Oh, no!

NAOMI: It's a tragedy.

ALICE: **[Rushing over to HOWARD]** You must make more films, Howard...
please make more films.

NAOMI: Howard doesn't have the money.

ALICE: **[With disgust]** Money.

NAOMI: And Howard's not ever going to get the money, unless Howard gets
off his b-u-t-t and gets himself a j-o-b.

ALICE: Howard shouldn't have to work. I have money. Howard can have my
money...and you can have my money. You should all be making
beautiful films.

NAOMI: We don't do films any more.

SPENCER: We haven't done film in years.

ALICE: But you *must* make more films.

SPENCER: We only do *ad lib* now.

NAOMI: Just *ad lib*.

ALICE: **[Disappointed]** No film?

SPENCER: Alice, darling...we are not normal people.

ALICE: You don't like films?

SPENCER: We're...different.

ALICE: I thought everyone liked films.

NAOMI: Spencer and Howard and I are very troubled people...

SPENCER: ...very confused people.

NAOMI: We are people who have never been...**[to SPENCER]**...what do you
call that?

SPENCER: Assimilated.

NAOMI: ...into what is generally regarded as the "productive channels of
society."

SPENCER: Howard and Naomi and I are members of the "Liberal Arts Generation"...young idealists who studied the liberal arts and then found out that there was nothing for us to *do*.

ALICE: I think you should make more films.

SPENCER: We did film. We did theater. We did Performance Art and Guerrilla Art and Hit-and-Run Art..

NAOMI: And now we do something called Survival Art.

SPENCER: **[Beat]** Alice, Howard and Naomi and I grew up together.

NAOMI: We were children together.

SPENCER: We *developed* together.

NAOMI: It's a sordid and tragic story...

SPENCER: We have no steady income...

NAOMI: No permanent address...

SPENCER: No socially recognized occupations...

NAOMI: We just get up in the morning and *ad lib*.

ALICE: **[Excited/urgent]** I would like to endow your entire operation. I would like to provide you with any amount of money you need both personally and professionally, so that you can pursue your beautiful creative endeavors..

SPENCER: We couldn't do that, Alice.

ALICE: I want to give you money. I want to help you. I want you to be able to create.

SPENCER: **[With disgust]** Money.

ALICE: *Please*.

NAOMI: We couldn't, Alice. You're too nice.

ALICE: I would like to be *involved*. I've never been part of an artistic collaboration or part of any collaboration. I've always been alone. And my father was a photograph on a wall, and my mother was a distant voice over the telephone every few weeks from a different hotel on a different continent...and there was the maid and the cook and the day nurse and the night nurse and the nanny and the house with a hundred rooms, but no one for me to play with...and I didn't understand how you ever got to know someone to play with because

the nanny and the day nurse and my mother, when she was there, wouldn't let me talk to anyone or be seen by any one, "It's too dangerous," she said, "Strangers..." she said, and she talked about kidnappings and abductions and groups, "groups are dangerous"...and I watched out the window and saw groups of children playing together having fun, and I wanted to have a friend just like the other children had a friend...but I didn't know how to behave, I didn't know what to do or say and I still don't know what to do or what to say...the procedures about when it's my turn to talk and what I'm supposed to say...

NAOMI: You're doing just fine...

ALICE: I don't want to say the wrong thing and I don't want to do the wrong thing...I live in terror...*I am embarrassed every single moment of my life!*

NAOMI: Alice...

ALICE: **[Very upset]** Embarrassed! Embarrassed! It is not a comfortable emotion...

NAOMI: Alice, we're all embarrassed.

ALICE: Not as embarrassed as I am.

NAOMI: Being a human being is a very embarrassing proposition.

ALICE: I'm not a real person...I am not an authentic person...

NAOMI: I would like to be your friend.

ALICE: **[Gasps]**

SPENCER: And I would like to be your friend. *I am your friend, Alice.*

[ALICE is thrilled and humbled, near tears]

NAOMI: I think of you as my best friend.

ALICE: **[Deeply moved]** I want both of you to know how thrilling it is for me to have you here in my home.

NAOMI: It's lovely, Alice.

SPENCER: It's the very nicest home we've ever been in.

ALICE: My home is your home.

NAOMI: Alice...**[She embraces ALICE]**

SPENCER: Alice...**[He embraces ALICE]**

ALICE: It is our home.

NAOMI: We're very happy here.

SPENCER: I've never been happier.

ALICE: **[Troubled]** Howard's not happy.

NAOMI: Howard doesn't want to be happy.

ALICE: I want Howard to be happy.

NAOMI: Howard doesn't deserve to be happy.

ALICE: **[Troubled]** Howard says that happiness is the "Opiate of the Unenlightened."

NAOMI: **[To HOWARD, annoyed]** Did you say that, Howard.

ALICE: Howard says that happiness is a Myth perpetrated by the Uninformed.

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** Darling, don't listen to Howard. Never listen to a thing Howard says.

ALICE: **[Rushing to HOWARD, desperate]** Is it something I've done...is it something I've said?

NAOMI: Alice!

ALICE: **[To NAOMI]** I love Howard.

NAOMI: Alice...

ALICE: I love Howard and Howard loves me.

NAOMI: Alice, Howard is a man who uses people indiscriminately...especially women...especially attractive women who can offer him food and shelter and "entertainment"

ALICE: **[Upset]** I'm not very entertaining.

NAOMI: Alice...

ALICE: **[To HOWARD]** I'll try to be more entertaining, Howard...I want to be more entertaining...I'm sorry, Howard, forgive me, forgive me...

NAOMI: Alice, don't ask *him* to forgive *you!*

ALICE: **[To HOWARD]** I'm not what you want.

NAOMI: Alice!

ALICE: **[Crying out]** I'm too dumb!

BLACKOUT

ACT TWO

The stage is set with two tables (the second identical to the first). They are laid out with props for an office--books, blotters, calendars, and so forth (but no typewriter). It is a very surreal, highly aesthetic office. HOWARD, dressed in a business suit, sits silently at the table stage left.

Shortly ALICE enters and bustles around, arranging and rearranging the objects of the office. She exits/enters carrying in more objects which she arranges and rearranges. She hurries around in a state of high-pressure, busy-office efficiency.

Presently, SPENCER enters, dressed like a high-powered business executive--the blue suit, the shiney-shoes, the power tie, the briefcase and an armful of newspapers and business periodicals.

ALICE: Good morning, sir.

SPENCER: Good morning, Alice.

ALICE: Would you care for some coffee, sir?

SPENCER: Yes, thank you, Alice.

ALICE: Cream, sugar, a touch of cinnamon?

SPENCER: Just cream, please.

[ALICE exits/enters with coffee. SPENCER settles into his newspaper-reading ritual. ALICE serves the coffee elaborately.]

SPENCER: Thank you, Alice.

ALICE: My pleasure, sir. **[Beat]** Sir, the applicant for the position of secretary/receptionist/part-time is here to see you.

SPENCER: Can she type?

ALICE: Very fast, sir.

SPENCER: Show her in, please.

ALICE: It's my pleasure.

[ALICE exits/enters ushering in NAOMI. NAOMI is dressed in a manner that would stop traffic]

ALICE: **[To SPENCER]** Sir, I'd like to introduce you to Miss Naomi.

SPENCER: **[Standing]** How do you do.

NAOMI: **[Extends her hand/they shake]** I'm very fine, thank you, sir. And you, sir?

SPENCER: I'm very fine too.

NAOMI: It's a lovely afternoon, isn't it.

SPENCER: It's a marvelous afternoon. Won't you please be seated.

NAOMI: Thank you, sir. **[ALICE offers NAOMI a chair and NAOMI sits, executing a considerable amount of womanly/job-seeker/somewhat-provocative settling in]**

ALICE: **[To NAOMI]** Would you care for some coffee?

NAOMI: Cream and sugar, two lumps, no cinnamon.

ALICE: How about an egg?

NAOMI: **[Very politely]** No, thank you.

[ALICE exits/enters with the coffee, serves it. NAOMI and SPENCER sit silently. NAOMI smiles inanely at SPENCER]

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** Thank you, very much.

ALICE: It's my pleasure. **[Then to SPENCER]** Will you be needing me for anything else, sir?

SPENCER: That will be all, Alice. Thank you.

[ALICE retreats to a spot further upstage. There is an awkward silence.]

SPENCER: Now, Miss Naomi...do you have a re-su-mé?

NAOMI: A resume?

SPENCER: Your job history, your vi-ta, the positions you've held, your experience...

NAOMI: **[Beat]** I've never really had a job...but I have drive and vitality. I've had a calling to be a secretary.

SPENCER: **[Very dryly]** I see.

NAOMI: A secretary/receptionist/part-time.

SPENCER: Really...

NAOMI: I've had a great deal of what you'd call life experience...I know people, I understand their insecurities and doubts and I want to help them, I want to be kind to them, and advise them. I want to put myself in a position where I can meet the public.

SPENCER: You like the public?

NAOMI: The public needs me.

SPENCER: And you're good on the phone?

NAOMI: **[Demonstrating]** Hello... hello... hello... hellooo... good day... good day... one moment please... one moment please... will you hold, please... please hold...are you holding?

SPENCER: Very nice.

NAOMI: **[Demonstrating]** I'm sorry he's not in his office at the moment...I'm sorry he's in conference just now...may I have him call you back...is there something I can do...perhaps I could take a message...

SPENCER: Very nice.

NAOMI: **[Demonstrating]** I'm sorry he's out of town this week...I'm sorry he's out of town for the whole month...who did you wish to speak to...Mr. Who?...Could you spell that, please...I'm sorry there's no one here by that name...I'm sorry, you have the wrong number...

SPENCER: Awfully good.

NAOMI: Good bye...good bye...thank you for calling...have a nice day...do call again.

SPENCER: That's excellent.

NAOMI: **[Assuming a new job-seeking pose]** As a little girl, when I used to dress up in my best little sweater and skirt and pearls...and I set up a card table by the front door of our house, and I pretended that it was a large insurance company...and I took calls and made calls and welcomed the visitors and took their coats. **[Turning to ALICE]** This was when we were in grade school, early puberty, and Howard and Spencer were still little boys riding around on their bikes playing juvenile games, whereas I had matured and wanted to try out more adult roles, such as secretary/receptionist/part time. **[She turns back to SPENCER and smiles]**

SPENCER: And can you type?

NAOMI: **[Flexing her fingers]** Very fast.

SPENCER: **[Calls]** Alice!

ALICE: **[Stepping forward]** Would you care for a refill, would you care for a cheese Danish?

SPENCER: We'd like a typewriter, please.

ALICE: Smith Corona, Olivetti, IBM?

SPENCER: The IBM.

NAOMI: Is that the one with the self-correction feature?

SPENCER: Is that what you'd like?

NAOMI: It's a classic of its era, as am I. **[She smiles]**

[ALICE exits/enters with a big, ugly black IBM. She place it in front of NAOMI and plugs it in]

NAOMI: Thank you, Alice. **[She settles into her seat, squirms around for awhile getting herself into a very correct typing posture. Then she attacks the keyboard furiously with great style and flair. She types about 250 words per minute. ALICE and SPENCER stare on in complete wonderment. NAOMI stops and pulls the paper dramatically out of the typewriter and hands it with a flourish to SPENCER]**

SPENCER: **[He studies the paper for a moment, then...]** You can't type.

NAOMI: I can too.

SPENCER: You can't type!

NAOMI: I can too!

SPENCER: **[Pointing to the paper]** Not so that you can distinguish one single intelligible word! **[He thrusts the paper back to NAOMI]**

NAOMI: **[Grabbing the paper, looking at it, then screaming]** You can't read!

ALICE: **[Earnestly to SPENCER]** I thought Naomi did very nicely...I thought that was very, very fast. Why don't you give her another chance, why don't you let her try...

SPENCER: **[Turning away]** I'm having a "quiet" period now.

ALICE: I think Naomi could handle the job very nicely.

SPENCER: **[Annoyed]** Alice, I'm having a "quiet" period now.

[Pause]

ALICE: **[To NAOMI]** Thank you for coming in, Miss Naomi. We'll let you know in a few days if you have the job.

NAOMI: **[Stubbornly]** I'm not going to leave. I'm going to sit here until I've been given the job I'm entitled to...

SPENCER: You can't type.

NAOMI: ...the job that is my destiny and my birthright.

SPENCER: You're too sassy.

NAOMI: And you're too goddamned stupid to recognize an A Number One Class Act when it walks through the door and says hello...
[demonstrating] ...hello...hello...

SPENCER: **[Sighing]** You can't type.

NAOMI: **[Screams]** You can't do anything!

SPENCER: I'm management!

[Pause. SPENCER turns away, resumes his reading. NAOMI, turns away from him, takes off her jacket, sits down, disgusted.]

ALICE: **[Comforting NAOMI]** Maybe this just wasn't the job for you...maybe there's something else that's more in your line...everything works out for the best.

NAOMI: **[Dryly]** Does it.

ALICE: I'm sure you'll find something else.

NAOMI: **[Dryly]** Really?

ALICE: ...a woman of your talents...

NAOMI: Alice, this is a dog eat dog world...you've got to bark like a dog and you've got to bite like a dog...and I am not a dog.

ALICE: **[Beat]** I'd be happy to give you any amount of money you need.

NAOMI: I want to experience the World of Work.

ALICE: I'd be happy to support you.

NAOMI: I am trying to break out of the vicious cycle of poverty and uncertainty.

SPENCER: Our sources of funding fluctuate heavily, Alice.

NAOMI: I am trying to lift myself out of the swamp of dependency.

ALICE: You can have any amount of money you'd like.

NAOMI: I want to experience the World of Work.

SPENCER: The World of Work is the New Medium of the New Age.

NAOMI: **[To SPENCER]** You don't know one single goddamned thing about the World of Work.

SPENCER: In the New Age the Worker will be the New Artist and Work will be the New Art.

NAOMI: I thought *Ad lib* was the New Art.

SPENCER: *Ad lib* is the New Art and the World of Work *will be* the New Art after that.

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** I could be a trend setter.

SPENCER: And the New Worker will be the New Artist and the workplace will be the New Medium, and the typewriter will be Art, and the blotter will be Art, and the telephone will be Art, and the business suit will be Art, and the business transaction will be Art. **[He arranges the objects on the table and rearranges them as though engaging in the New Art]**

NAOMI: **[Gazing coldly at SPENCER's arrangement]** This is *not* Art.

SPENCER: This is the *New Art*.

NAOMI: This is *NOT* Art!

ALICE: Howard says that the...

NAOMI: Alice, if Howard wants to say something, he can say it for himself...isn't that right, Howie. **[She glares at him]**

ALICE: **[Pause]** Howard is very shy.

NAOMI: Howard is a Neanderthal.

ALICE: Howard is the man I love. **[She stares at Howard lovingly]**

NAOMI: **[Beat]** Alice, Howard has been married about seventeen times, maybe more...

ALICE: Howard is the man of my dreams.

NAOMI: The longest marriage lasted about seven weeks, the shortest one exactly eighteen hours...remember her, Howard? Gloria Garton?

SPENCER: **[To NAOMI, trying to remember]** The dental Hygienist?

NAOMI: The ventriloquist. And then there was Mary Louise Menderman and Mieu-Mieu Rohrbach and Allison Kildaire..

ALICE: **[Pause]** Naomi...Howard has asked me to be his bride.

NAOMI: **[With a deep sigh]** Oh, Alice...

ALICE: Howard has asked me to join him in eternal wedlock...**[ALICE clutches HOWARD's head to her breast, kisses his forehead, and then looks up, eyes delirious]**

NAOMI: Alice, you need professional help.

ALICE: Howard wants to sanctify our love.

NAOMI: **[Sadly]** Alice, Alice, Alice...

ALICE: He wants to marry me.

NAOMI: Alice, Howard wants to marry everybody...it's his plan for world peace. A world with one husband and five billion wives. Five billion wedding ceremonies with five billion wedding presents. Howard plans to return all of the wedding presents and use the cash to eliminate all international debt.

ALICE: **[Gasps]** Isn't that wonderful!

NAOMI: It's sick.

ALICE: **[Stroking HOWARD's head]** Howard will win the Nobel Prize.

NAOMI: Howard will be indicted for polygamy. Howard will spend the rest of his life behind bars...

SPENCER: That's where he belongs, I'm afraid.

NAOMI: ...handcuffed, tethered and gagged. **[Beat, then gently to ALICE]** Alice, Howard is a psychopath.

ALICE: I love Howard.

NAOMI: He's a sociopath.

SPENCER: He has no conscience.

NAOMI: Absolutely none.

SPENCER: He's a barbarian, Alice...

NAOMI: ...who preys on unsuspecting women, especially those with a healthy bank account.

ALICE: I have bags of money.

NAOMI: That's what Howard wants.

ALICE: Howard can have it all.

NAOMI: He wants it all.

ALICE: Isn't Howard wonderful.

NAOMI: Alice, Howard is a Casanova who has ruined the lives of countless women...Mieu-Mieu Rohrbach, Mary Louise Menderman...

ALICE: I love Howard.

NAOMI: ...Conchita Rodriguez, Melonie Wemberley...

SPENCER: ...Lola Leerman...

NAOMI: ...Mimi Nash...

ALICE: Howard and I are going to be married this evening. And I would like you to be my maid of honor...and Howard would like Spencer to be his best man.

NAOMI: **[Clutches her side and gasps/moans]**

ALICE: **[Concerned]** What's wrong?

NAOMI: It's nothing.

ALICE: Can I get you something?

NAOMI: **[Bravely, but still clutching her side]** It's nothing.

ALICE: Bicarbonate of soda, aspirin, chamomile tea?

SPENCER: **[To ALICE]** Naomi doesn't like weddings.

NAOMI: I'll be okay.

ALICE: We wanted it to be a surprise...just Howard and I and our very special friends, Naomi and Spencer. Howard wants me to wear his mother's wedding dress...

NAOMI: Alice...

ALICE: The very dress that she wore when she married Howard's father.

NAOMI: Alice, Howard wants everybody to wear his mother's wedding dress. I'm surprised he's not going to wear it himself...

SPENCER: Everyone else has....

NAOMI: Mieu-Mieu Rohrbach, Melonie Wemberley...

SPENCER: ...Conchitta Rodriguez...

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** Have you ever seen Howard's mother's wedding dress?

ALICE: Howard wants it to be a surprise.

NAOMI: Alice, Howard's mother was a saint, God knows...but she had a hump, a very large hump back here...**[she indicates]**...and so does the dress...you'll have to pad yourself to fill it out.

[ALICE is starting to have doubts]

SPENCER: Alice, we have known Howard since infancy...and he was the same then as he is now..

NAOMI: He's still an infant...Honey, Howard's greatest claim to fame was his role as a donkey in our Sunday school Christmas pageant, when he pulled down his pants and did a b.m. in the middle of the manger scene...

SPENCER: Howard was ahead of his time.

NAOMI: Howard needs help.

SPENCER: He's never been able to really take care of himself...

NAOMI: ...and Spencer and I have graciously taken responsibility for his care and protection...

SPENCER: Howard is our life's burden.

NAOMI: He's our ward.

SPENCER: We're his guardians.

ALICE: **[Beat, confused]** Howard says that he takes care of you.

NAOMI: We take care of him.

SPENCER: It's a long story, Alice..

NAOMI: Awfully long...

SPENCER: Awfully tragic...

NAOMI: Howard needed someone to take care of him after his mother died..

SPENCER: So Naomi and I adopted him.

NAOMI: Howard is our son.

SPENCER: We're his parents.

NAOMI: We'll be your in-laws if you marry him.

ALICE: **[Beat, very confused/upset, to HOWARD]** Howard?

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** Honey, Howard's having one of his quiet days.

ALICE: Howard, talk to me.

SPENCER: Howard, talk to her.

NAOMI: **[To SPENCER]** *He's having one of his quiet days.*

ALICE: **[To HOWARD]** I need some answers, Howard...simple answers to some simple questions.

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** Honey, all of Howard's answers are simple.

ALICE: **[Utterly distraught]** Howard...Howard...**[She clutches him and shakes him, imploring]** Howard talk to me. Please talk to me. Please Howard, say something... anything, Howard, anything, just talk to me...please...**[She's near tears]**

[Long pause as ALICE recovers her composure and moves away from HOWARD and crosses to NAOMI for comfort]

ALICE: **[To NAOMI]** I don't know why I love him.

NAOMI: Honey, he's not worth it.

ALICE: Don't you love Spencer?

NAOMI: No.

ALICE: Doesn't Spencer love you?

NAOMI: No.

ALICE: Don't you want to have Spencer's child?

NAOMI: No.

ALICE: **[Beat, confused]** I thought you loved Spencer. I thought he loved you. **[To SPENCER]** Don't you love Naomi?

SPENCER: No.

ALICE: Not at all?

SPENCER: No.

ALICE: Why not?

NAOMI: Alice, this is life...this is *real* life. This isn't like anything your mother ever told you about.

ALICE: My mother never told me anything...that's the problem.

NAOMI: Love is heartache.

SPENCER: You're better off without it.

NAOMI: It's overrated.

SPENCER: It's an enzyme. You can get the same feeling from eating chocolate.

ALICE: **[Pause/stunned]** I didn't know.

NAOMI: I didn't either. I had to learn.

ALICE: **[Neurotically]** ...and I've watched and I've listened trying to learn the movements, the attitudes, the right things to say and do, when to say it, when to keep it to myself...

NAOMI: **[Comforting]** Honey, you're doing just fine.

ALICE: I'm not a real person. I'm a pretend person.

NAOMI: You're a very nice person, Alice. Too nice.

SPENCER: Much too nice.

ALICE: **[Hysterical]** *I am not a person!*

NAOMI: Honey, you've got to relax.

ALICE: *I have no personality!*

NAOMI: Alice, honey, you don't need a personality to be a person.

ALICE: *I want a personality.*

NAOMI: Personality is a completely overrated commodity.

ALICE: **[To NAOMI]** I want to be like you. You're fun.

NAOMI: I am?

ALICE: Everyone thinks you're fun.

NAOMI: I didn't know that.

SPENCER: You're awfully fun, Naomi.

ALICE: I want to be fun too.

NAOMI: You *are* fun.

ALICE: No, I'm not. I'm neurotic.

NAOMI: Alice...

ALICE: I'm neurotic!

NAOMI: Alice, I don't like that word.

ALICE: **[Loudly]** *I am neurotic!*

NAOMI: **[Louder]** *I don't like that word!*

ALICE: **[Screams into NAOMI's face]** *Neurotic!*

NAOMI: **[Beat, then patiently]** Alice, there are certain words that I simply cannot tolerate being used in my presence, and that word is one of them. It is a bad word, Alice.

ALICE: I'm manic-depressive.

NAOMI: Alice...

ALICE: I'm schizophrenic.

NAOMI: **[Loudly]** Bad words, Alice! Bad, bad "psychology" words!

ALICE: **[Shocked]** *I love psychology!*

NAOMI: *Psychology is dead!* **[ALICE is pretty stunned by this news]** There is no more psychology...they've told us to forget the whole thing.

ALICE: I love psychology.

SPENCER: They did away with it quite some time ago, Alice. You can't even major in it any more.

ALICE: **[Pause, very stunned/confused]** What am I supposed to do?

NAOMI: Forget about it.

ALICE: I disappear when other people leave the room. I vanish. I am a planet. I have no light source of my own. I need other people, light-giving people off of whom I can reflect.

NAOMI: You need to eat more chocolate.

ALICE: I need Howard.

NAOMI: **[Annoyed]** Alice...

ALICE: **[To NAOMI]** I need you. **[She opens her arms to NAOMI]**

NAOMI: **[Warmly, embracing ALICE]** Alice.

ALICE: I'd like you to be my sister.

NAOMI: I don't like that word.

ALICE: I've never had a sister.

NAOMI: It's not you I don't like, it's the institution.

ALICE: We'd be so close.

NAOMI: We are close.

ALICE: Even closer.

NAOMI: **[Grasps her side and moans.]**

ALICE: You need a bromide.

NAOMI: **[Still holding her side, in pain]** I'll be fine.

SPENCER: Naomi has a very delicate gall bladder.

NAOMI: **[Clearly in pain]** Everything's going to be fine.

SPENCER: It always acts up whenever there's a wedding.

ALICE: **[Excited]** I want both of you to be in my wedding so very much.

NAOMI: **[Gasps, grabs her side again.]**

SPENCER: We may have to operate.

NAOMI: I think it's my spleen.

SPENCER: It could be your liver.

NAOMI: It might be my entire intestinal tract.

SPENCER: **[Shaking his head sadly]** This may require major surgery...major exploratory surgery.

ALICE: **[Looking at Howard]** I'm so happy.

NAOMI: Alice...

ALICE: I want to have babies...

NAOMI: Alice...

ALICE: And I want them to look like Howard...

NAOMI: Alice...

ALICE: Howard's eyes and Howard's nose...

NAOMI: Alice...

ALICE: I want them to sound like Howard and smell like Howard...

NAOMI: I may be dying...

ALICE: **[Oblivious]** ...and I had been through times of great troubles with the lawyers and the people from the bank, and I didn't know where to turn, who I could trust, and one person would warn me about another person and then that person would warn me about the first person, and there are things called "bonds" and there are things called "funds" and "front-load" and "back-load" and "no-load" and fluctuations and unpredictables and people who call themselves experts who aren't experts, and then there was that wonderful moment when I opened my door and saw this beautiful man standing on my doorstep, and my heart was pounding, I could barely speak, and then he smiled and asked me if I wanted to buy a vacuum cleaner...

NAOMI: He'd stolen it, Alice.

ALICE: He said his name was Howard and he asked if he could come in and then he said he wanted to marry me and make babies, and then he told me how he and his friends had fallen on hard times and needed a place to stay and maybe I might be able to spare some food. **[Beat]** I was thrilled. I was paralyzed with fear and joy. I'd always wanted someone who needed me, who wanted me, because my life had been nothing but pain and loneliness and every day was solitude and terror in the face of an enormous and terrifying world and I had nothing to hold on to, no one to tell me that things were going to be all right...

NAOMI: Alice, Howard and Spencer and I are not nice people...

SPENCER: We can't stay here very long...

NAOMI: We're on the run, Alice. We're fugitives.

SPENCER: We're wanted in all 50 states...

NAOMI: ...shoplifting, petty theft,...

SPENCER: Everything seemed to be going fine for a while...

NAOMI: ...it's been hell.

SPENCER: ...and then everything fell apart...

NAOMI: ...there are posters out with pictures of us...

SPENCER: ...there was a great deal of media exposure...

NAOMI: It was the Howard-the-Evangelist episode that pushed us over the edge...

SPENCER: ...an awful period, Alice...

NAOMI: ...we'd set up a 900 number...

SPENCER: ...and Howard was passing himself off as a television evangelist...

NAOMI: ...call Howard and find salvation...

SPENCER: ...he wasn't washing his hair...

NAOMI: ...and he'd let his fingernails grow to record-breaking lengths, even for Howard...

SPENCER: ...and you could dial the 900 number and get a pre-recorded message from Howard...

NAOMI: ...an "inspirational" message...

SPENCER: ...it was quite lucrative...

NAOMI: ...they're after us for fraud...

SPENCER: **[Beat]** Alice, we've had to resort to a life of crime.

NAOMI: It's the New Art.

ALICE: **[Momentarily confused/troubled, but then resolved and enthusiastic]** I want you to know that you can stay here forever. I will hide you and feed you and we'll create our own beautiful world safe from the outside.

NAOMI: You'd be aiding and abetting.

ALICE: I *want* to aid and abet.

NAOMI: **[Grasps her side and moans—a very profound, dramatic moan]**

BLACKOUT

ACT THREE

The stage has been set with three tables covered with white sheets and laid out to suggest an operating room. The center table is covered with a sheet beneath which has been placed an array of body parts. An operating lamp hovers over the table. Sponges and dressings are arranged on the table, stage right.

HOWARD sits at the table stage left. He is dressed in a surgical gown with a surgical mask covering his face.

ALICE enters, dressed as a nurse, a surgical mask over her face. She carries a tray of surgical implements which she arranges on the table with the sponges and dressings. She arranges and rearranges these items. She bustles around full of surgical importance, bringing in more items and arranging them to her satisfaction. Presently, SPENCER enters, dressed like a surgeon, his face covered with a surgical mask. He holds his hands away from him as though they had just been scrupulously scrubbed for surgery.

ALICE: Good day, doctor.

SPENCER: Good day, Alice.

ALICE: How are you feeling, doctor?

SPENCER: Excellent, thank you.

ALICE: May I get you anything, doctor? Coffee? Tea? A turkey sandwich?

SPENCER: Surgical gloves, please.

ALICE: It's my pleasure.

SPENCER: Thank you, Alice.

[ALICE gets the gloves and with much ritual puts them on SPENCER]

SPENCER: **[Loudly, with great authority]** The Surgical Assistant will prepare for Major Surgery.

ALICE: It's my pleasure, doctor.

[ALICE flies into a flurry of preparatory activity. SPENCER stations himself next to the center table]

SPENCER: **[After a moment of meditation]** Is the Surgical Assistant ready?

ALICE: The Surgical Assistant is ready.

SPENCER: Is the patient ready?

ALICE: Please take every precaution, doctor.

SPENCER: Everything's going to be just fine, Alice.

ALICE: The patient is a very, very dear friend of mine. She's a very special person, very talented...

SPENCER: Alice, Naomi needs your help.

ALICE: I want to help.

SPENCER: And I need your help.

ALICE: **[Excited]** I have never been needed before. I have always wanted to be needed...

SPENCER: Please bring the patient in.

ALICE: I have had a calling to *assist*, to *help*...

SPENCER: *Please*, bring the patient in.

ALICE: It's my pleasure.

[ALICE exits/enters escorting NAOMI in an ever-so-nursely manner. NAOMI is in a surgical gown. Her head is wrapped in a big bandage. Her make-up is ghostly white. She is a very, very dramatic patient. ALICE leads her to a spot at the up-stage head of the center table and positions her there with much gravity]

SPENCER: **[To ALICE]** Is the patient ready for major surgery?

ALICE: The patient is ready.

NAOMI: Wait a minute.

ALICE: **[To NAOMI]** Is there anything I can get you? Is there anything I can do?

NAOMI: I'd like some anesthesia.

ALICE: **[To SPENCER]** The patient would like some anesthesia.

SPENCER: Light Anesthesia or Heavy Anesthesia?

NAOMI: Heavy Anesthesia.

SPENCER: **[Loudly]** The Surgical Assistant will bring the Heavy Anesthesia.

ALICE: It's my pleasure.

NAOMI: Thank you, Alice.

[ALICE gets the Heavy Anesthesia from the preparations table, returns to the center table and readies herself]

SPENCER: **[Loudly]** The Surgical Assistant will inject the Heavy Anesthesia.

[ALICE injects NAOMI with the Heavy Anesthesia. She stands back. ALICE and SPENCER study NAOMI intently.]

ALICE: **[Then, sweetly to NAOMI]** Would you like some more?

[NAOMI gives no response]

SPENCER: **[Leaning closer toward her]** Have you had enough?

[NAOMI gives no response]

ALICE: Are you all right?

[NAOMI gives no response]

SPENCER: Can you *feel* anything?

[NAOMI gives no response]

SPENCER: **[To ALICE]** I'll have some too.

ALICE: It's my pleasure.

[ALICE injects SPENCER with Heavy Anesthesia. A smile of contentment slowly spreads across his face]

ALICE: **[Turning to HOWARD]** Howard, would you like some Anesthesia?

[HOWARD eagerly indicates "yes"]

NAOMI: **[Protesting]** Alice!

ALICE: **[To NAOMI]** Howard would like some Anesthesia.

NAOMI: Howard can't have any Anesthesia.

[HOWARD bangs on the table to indicate his displeasure]

ALICE: **[Upset]** Howard *needs* his Anesthesia!
[HOWARD bangs on the table to indicate his need]

ALICE: **[Rushing toward Howard]** Howard...

NAOMI: **[Shouting]** Alice! Stop it!

SPENCER: **[Shouting]** No, Alice, no!
[ALICE stops, conflicted]

SPENCER: Alice, Howard has had extensive problems with substance abuse.

NAOMI: He's abused them all.

SPENCER: We've had to cut him off from all psychoactive medications...

NAOMI: **[Clutches her side and groans loudly/poignantly]**

SPENCER: **[Commanding]** More Anesthesia!

NAOMI: **[Still moaning, imploring]** More Anesthesia.

ALICE: **[Rushing over to NAOMI]** More Anesthesia! **[She injects NAOMI with more anesthesia. NAOMI's moaning subsides.]**

SPENCER: **[Loudly]** Is the patient ready for Major Surgery?

NAOMI: **[Bravely]** Please be gentle. Please be swift.

SPENCER: Is the Surgical Assistant ready for Major Surgery?

ALICE: The Surgical Assistant is ready.

SPENCER: Then let's get on with it.

NAOMI: Let's get on with it.

ALICE: Let's get on with it.
[SPENCER and ALICE reposition themselves, but then...]

ALICE: **[Earnestly to SPENCER]** I can't begin to tell you how thrilling it is for me to be associated with such talented and exciting people...

SPENCER: Thank you, Alice.

ALICE: **[Still earnest]** ...people who *do* things, *meaningful* things... I feel confident that if law enforcement only *knew* how dedicated and talented and brilliant you were they'd overlook everything else.

SPENCER: Thank you, Alice.

ALICE: I have never trusted law enforcement.

SPENCER: Thank you, Alice.

ALICE: I have always thought....

NAOMI: **[Annoyed]** Alice!

SPENCER: **[Beat, then too NAOMI]** Now, we're going to cut you open and take a good look around, and then we'll take some things out and move some other things around, and maybe we'll put a few things back in. **[Then commandingly to ALICE]** Scalpel!

ALICE: Scalpel! **[She gets the scalpel from the preparation table and hands them to SPENCER]**

SPENCER: Thank you, Alice.

[SPENCER positions the scalpel just above the center line of the sheet that covers the body parts, but then...]

SPENCER: **[To NAOMI]** You realize of course that this is going to cost you a great deal of money.

NAOMI: I don't have any money.

SPENCER: No money?

NAOMI: Not a dime.

ALICE: I have money.

SPENCER: **[To ALICE]** You're not the patient.

ALICE: I have bags of money.

SPENCER: Naomi is the patient.

ALICE: I want her to have everything she needs.

NAOMI: Thank you, Alice.

ALICE: I want her to be comfortable and happy and well.

NAOMI: Thank you, Alice.

ALICE: I have bags of money, lovely money... **[She exits/enters carrying a big bag, which she takes to the table stage right. She opens the**

bag and starts to spread the money over the table] ... beautiful money, all different sizes and colors and shapes, and denominations, a vast collection of currencies from around the world...

SPENCER: **[Staring on amazed]** Alice!

NAOMI: **[Amazed/delighted]** Alice!

ALICE: **[Fingering the money/showing it off]** Some of these are very rare, very antique, very valuable like these orange ones...see...the birds? And the spaniels? And these purple ones are Roman...and these are landscapes of Kenya...and the rulers of Abyssinia...

NAOMI: **[Troubled, to ALICE]** I don't feel quite right about this.

ALICE: **[Spreading out more money]** ...and these are Prussian, 19th century, and here's a picture of Bismarck, and Queen Isabella, and here's the Royal Navy, and Catherine the Great, and a picture of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg...

NAOMI: **[Protesting to ALICE]** Alice, you barely know us.

ALICE: Money is only good if you share it with those you love.

NAOMI: You've already done so much...

SPENCER: You've been awfully generous, Alice, awfully kind...

ALICE: I want you to have my money.

NAOMI: **[Near tears]** You don't know what we've been through...

SPENCER: Years of desperation, Alice...

NAOMI: Will there be food? Will there be a place to sleep?

SPENCER: Every day's been a struggle to survive...

ALICE: I want you to have everything you need, anything you want.

[HOWARD has taken an interest in what's going on and has risen from his chair and crossed to the money table]

NAOMI: **[Noticing HOWARD]** Howard, sit down.

ALICE: **[Noticing HOWARD]** Would you like some money, Howard?

[HOWARD indicates "yes"]

SPENCER: **[To ALICE]** Howard does not know how to spend his money..

NAOMI: ...or manage his money.

ALICE: I think Howard should have his own money.

NAOMI: **[Grabs her side, cries out in anguish]**

SPENCER: Emergency! Emergency! Code Blue! Code Blue!

NAOMI: I'm going to die.

SPENCER: Prepare for major surgery!

NAOMI: I don't want to die.

ALICE: The Surgical Assistant is ready. **[She scurries to her position]**

NAOMI: Please don't let me die.

SPENCER: Places everybody! **[ALICE and SPENCER position themselves around the surgery table] Lights! [The lights shift dramatically to a more surgical environment] Camera! Action!**

[SPENCER readies himself and positions the scalpel in just the right way above the sheet that covers the body parts...it's all very serious. Suddenly SPENCER plunges the scalpel into the sheet and simulates cutting the sheet open as ALICE pulls the sheet upward uncovering the body parts. There is another light shift. The table lies exposed revealing an array of internal organs of a beautiful, but peculiar sort...like nothing you've ever seen before. SPENCER, NAOMI and ALICE stare on amazed. ALICE gasps with amazement]

SPENCER: **[After a moment of scrutiny]** Very interesting...very, very interesting.

ALICE: **[Still amazed]** This isn't at all what I expected.

NAOMI: **[Pointing]** What's that?

SPENCER: **[Studying what NAOMI has pointed at]** That's the Meridian of Hope.

ALICE: **[Gasps]**

NAOMI: **[Pointing]** What's that?

SPENCER: That's the Meridian of Indifference...and these are the Lobes of Envy and Pride. **[He probes the Lobe of Envy]** Do you feel that?

NAOMI: No.

SPENCER: **[Prodding something else]** Do you feel that?

NAOMI: I don't feel a thing.

SPENCER: That's the Isthmus of Lust.

ALICE: **[Gasps]** I had no idea...

NAOMI: Where's Happiness and Good Fortune?

SPENCER: **[Looking quite hard]** I think they're...here...and...here. **[He and NAOMI and ALICE focus in on something quite small]** ...and here's Playfulness and Whimsy and Wit...

NAOMI/
ALICE: **[Pleased]** Oh!

SPENCER: ...and there's a nice Mound of Frivolity right here...

NAOMI: **[Giggles as though being tickled]**

ALICE: **[Giggles too]**

SPENCER: **[Troubled]** ...but what's this?

NAOMI: **[Concerned]** What's what?

SPENCER: **[Looking closely]** This nasty looking blob.

NAOMI: **[Looking on]** Which blob?

SPENCER: **[With a note of dramatic finality]** It's Claustrophobia.

NAOMI: **[Looking]** My God...

ALICE: **[Concerned]** Is something wrong?

SPENCER: **[Troubled]** ...quite a developed Claustrophobia...very enlarged...

NAOMI: **[Upset]** Oh my God...

SPENCER: **[Still probing]** ...and here's some Sultriness, I think. **[Probing it]** Quite a lot of Sultriness...with an abundance of Intrigue. **[He palpitates her Intrigue]**

NAOMI: I can feel that.

SPENCER: Do you like it?

NAOMI: Yes.

SPENCER: Do you want me to rub it harder?

NAOMI: I want you to squeeze it.

[SPENCER does so and NAOMI moans. It gets quite torrid. NAOMI'S moans escalate, but then...]

SPENCER: We'll have to take it out.

NAOMI: **[Shocked]** We'll have to take what out?!

SPENCER: Your Intrigue.

NAOMI: You will *not*.

SPENCER: **[Loudly]** Prepare for removal of Intrigue!

NAOMI: Don't you dare touch my Intrigue!

SPENCER: It's about to burst...

ALICE: **[To SPENCER]** Couldn't we try something homeopathic?

SPENCER: **[Loudly]** Prepare for removal of Intrigue!

NAOMI: **[Bargaining, pleading]** Take away Adventure. Take away Romance. Take away Pleasure and Thrills, but *leave me my Intrigue*.

SPENCER: **[Loudly]** Prepare for removal of Pleasure and Thrills!

NAOMI: **[Pleading]** Take away Abandonment, take away Intoxication and Candlelight-dinners and Dancing-cheek-to-cheek....

SPENCER: It's all going to have to go.

NAOMI: **[Resigned, dramatically brave]** Take them away.

SPENCER: **[Loudly]** Prepare for removal of Candlelight-dinners and Dancing-cheek-to-cheek

ALICE: **[Praying]** O, Holy Mother of God, guard and protect...

NAOMI: **[Protesting]** Alice...

ALICE: ...thy beautiful child, Naomi...

NAOMI: Alice, please don't...

ALICE: ...whose beautiful body is about...

NAOMI: **[Shouts]** Alice!

ALICE: **[Beat]** I can't bear to see you suffer.

NAOMI: I am dying, Alice.

ALICE: I can't bear to see you die.

NAOMI: **[Bravely]** It's not for us to decide.

SPENCER: It's all in someone else's hands now...

NAOMI: **[To SPENCER, commandingly]** Take them out. Take them all out.

ALICE: I don't think you should take out anything unless it needs to be taken out...**[then to SPENCER]** Isn't that right, doctor?

SPENCER: **[Studying the body parts]** I think most of this should go...

NAOMI: Take it all out.

SPENCER: ...this Disappointment, this Desperation...

NAOMI: Take it out!

SPENCER: ...this fatty little glob of Neediness.

NAOMI: **[Screams]** Take it out!

ALICE: **[Praying]** Oh Holy Mother of God, please...

NAOMI: Alice, I have been the victim of emotions my entire life...tired emotions, worthless emotions...

SPENCER: **[Brandishing the scalpel and removing NAOMI'S Intrigue]** Intrigue. **[He holds it up and then hands it to ALICE]**

ALICE: **[Holding the Intrigue, confused]** What should I do?

SPENCER: Get rid of it.

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** I want you to have it.

ALICE: I couldn't.

NAOMI: I insist. I want you to have all the things you've never had.

ALICE: I wouldn't know what to do with it?

NAOMI: You'll find out.

SPENCER: Adventure! **[He hands it ALICE]**

NAOMI: Take it, Alice, take it.....

[ALICE places the Intrigue and the Adventure on Howard's table, stage left. SPENCER continues to operate, removing each organ, handing it to ALICE, who places it on Howard's table. NAOMI moans during each removal]

NAOMI: **[Moans]** I have been a slave...

SPENCER: Romance!

NAOMI: **[Moans]** I have been held captive...

SPENCER: Pleasure and Thrills!

NAOMI: **[Moans]** I have been tormented by feelings and thoughts...

SPENCER: Candlelight-dinners and Dancing-cheek-to-cheek!

NAOMI: **[Moans]** I have been trapped in a body, imprisoned in a mind...

SPENCER: Disappointment...

NAOMI: **[Moans]**

SPENCER: Desperation...

NAOMI: **[Moans]**

SPENCER: Neediness...

NAOMI: **[Moans]**

[HOWARD has been studying Naomi's Intrigue and has picked it up and started rubbing it on his body. He moans. The others look over]

SPENCER: **[Shouts]** Howard!

ALICE: **[Rushing toward him]** Howard, stop that!

[HOWARD continues to rub himself with Naomi's Intrigue, and moans. It gets pretty suggestive]

NAOMI: You put that down, Howard!

ALICE: **[She grabs the Intrigue from him and slaps his hand]** That's very bad, Howard...

SPENCER: **[To HOWARD]** You should be ashamed of yourself, Howard.

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** Howard has always had an abnormal interest in body parts.

SPENCER: It's an obsession.

NAOMI: **[Suddenly gasps and holds her side]**

SPENCER: What's wrong?

NAOMI: Complications.

SPENCER: Oh, my God...

NAOMI: Hemorrhaging...

SPENCER: Difficulty breathing?

NAOMI: Pounding heart...

SPENCER: Erratic pulse?

NAOMI: I'm sinking fast...I'm failing...

SPENCER: Time for Intensive Care!

NAOMI: I think it's too late.

SPENCER: **[Commanding]** Time for Intensive Care!

ALICE: Intensive Care! **[ALICE grabs a bottle of Jack Daniels and pours a glass for NAOMI, gives it to her, she drinks it.]**

SPENCER: **[Cautiously to NAOMI]** How are you feeling?

NAOMI: There's no hope.

ALICE: More money?

SPENCER: More money!

NAOMI: More money!

[NAOMI, SPENCER and ALICE all rush to the table with the money and frantically carry piles of it back to the surgery table and stuff it, madly, desperately into the nooks and hollows of the body parts. There is a brief pause as they stare at the body.]

NAOMI: **[Shaking her head sadly]** There are some things money can't buy.

SPENCER: **[Calling out]** Time for Last Rites! Call the priest!

NAOMI: Let me die with dignity.

ALICE: Please don't die.

NAOMI: I'm fading.

ALICE: Please don't leave us.

NAOMI: The light is getting dim.

ALICE: We love you, Naomi. We love you...

NAOMI: **[Weak, confused, blind]** Where am I?

ALICE: **[Sobbing]** We'll never forget you.

NAOMI: **[Trying to make contact]** Hello?

ALICE: **[Desperately]** Hello!

NAOMI: Hello? Hello? Hello?

ALICE: Hello!

[NAOMI takes one last dramatic gasp of breath and then "dies."]

SPENCER: **[Pause, then to ALICE]** Call the coroner.

ALICE: **[Praying]** Oh, Holy Mother of God...

SPENCER: Call the mortician.

ALICE: ...guard and protect...

SPENCER: **[Gently to ALICE]** Make the funeral arrangements and call the florist.

ALICE: ...thy beautiful child, Naomi...

SPENCER: Prepare for Mourning and Bereavement.

ALICE: ...take her unto thy bosom...

NAOMI: Alice, try not to take this too personally.

ALICE: I'm going to miss you so very much.

NAOMI: I'm not going very far.

ALICE: **[Confused]** You're not?

SPENCER: She'll be back.

ALICE: **[To NAOMI, confused]** You will?

NAOMI: I'm noted for my Resurrections.

ALICE: **[Gasps]**

SPENCER: Very vivid Resurrections.

NAOMI: Awfully vivid.

SPENCER: She comes back "bigger" than before.

NAOMI: More vivid.

SPENCER: A larger personality.

NAOMI: More dynamic.

SPENCER: More extravagant.

NAOMI: An even greater sense of style.

ALICE: **[Getting the idea, to NAOMI]** Maybe you'd like a nice bed jacket.

NAOMI: Nothing too lacy.

ALICE: How about the Ginger Rogers?

NAOMI: I'm feeling more like the Myrna Loy.

ALICE: How about the Loretta Young?

[This is an immediate crowd pleaser; they all squeal with delight]

ALICE: And the coffin?

NAOMI: Nothing too ornate.

SPENCER: Something solid and imposing.

ALICE: How about the Joseph Stalin?

NAOMI: How about the Eva Peron?

ALICE: Why not the Princess Grace?

[They all squeal with delight. And ALICE flies into a flurry of exiting/entering and produces a dark purple cloth to cover the corpse, some candles, a cassette recorder that plays a lugubrious dirge, and finally, mourning outfits for herself,

NAOMI, SPENCER and HOWARD. Sadly, and with great ritual, they all change their clothes. NAOMI dons the Loretta Young bed jacket. The men change into black suits. And ALICE changes into something ridiculously matronly and black with a Queen-Mother-in-Mourning hat. They form a tableau around the corpse. NAOMI and ALICE are moved to tears. HOWARD, apparently quite moved, rises from his chair and moves closer to the corpse.]

NAOMI: Sit down, Howard.

SPENCER: Howard, sit down.

[HOWARD doesn't move]

NAOMI: Howard, we are in mourning. We are paying our respects to the recently departed...our dear friend Naomi. **[ALICE sniffles]** Do you have nice memories of our dear friend Naomi? Do you remember the many wonderful exciting times you had with her...the romance? Howard, do you remember the sweet and lovely romance that you had with Naomi and how Naomi fell in love with you in the heat of adolescent confusion, and how you violated her virgin body and used her for your own pleasure, and how she didn't understand that you didn't really care for her, and how she used to cry herself to sleep every night for years while you were out pursuing other women...do you remember that, Howard? **[Pause]** Howard, you broke Naomi's heart. You destroyed that beautiful vivacious young girl's life. You opened the gate to the Garden of Romance, carried her across the threshold into the world of Love-For-The-Very-First-Time where she offered herself to you, naked and vulnerable, innocent as a child, wholly trusting that you would love her and cherish her forever. **[Pause, as she wipes her tearful eyes]** Howard...Naomi is gone. **[ALICE wails]** Naomi is no more. No more fun, no more sophistication and wit, no more joie de vivre...**[Beat]** You're all alone now, Howard...alone and friendless, no one to care for you...

ALICE: **[Beat, then to HOWARD]** I'll take care of you, Howard.

NAOMI: **[Annoyed]** Alice..

ALICE: **[To HOWARD]** You're not alone, Howard.

NAOMI: **[Sternly]** Alice!

[They all return to mourning]

NAOMI: **[To HOWARD]** Is there something you'd like to say to our dear dead friend, Naomi, before she's put away for ever and ever until the moment of her beautiful and dramatic resurrection? **[Beat]** Maybe you'd like to say "good-bye"... "thank you, Naomi"... "forgive me, Naomi"...would you like to say something like that?

ALICE: **[To HOWARD]** Tell Naomi that you love her.

NAOMI: Why don't you say, "Forgive me for all the hurt I've caused you and all the inconvenience..."

ALICE: Say something nice, Howard.

[HOWARD moves in closer to the corpse and looks like he might be about to say something]

ALICE: Say something from your heart.

[HOWARD moves closer to the corpse, looks at it mournfully, then emits a raucous-raspberry sound]

ALICE: **[Shocked]** Howard!

BLACKOUT

[Just after the black-out, the "Wedding March" begins to play and continues through the scene change, fading as the lights come up on Act IV.]

ACT FOUR

The stage is set with four tables, laid out for a wedding—the cake, the flowers, the nut cups, the mints, the punch bowl and champagne. HOWARD and SPENCER are standing together close to the table. They are dressed in their finest wedding formal wear. SPENCER is wearing a clerical collar and is perusing a prayer book. HOWARD is pacing the floor like a nervous groom.

SPENCER: **[In his best clergyman's voice, to HOWARD]** Marriage is a solemn, yet joyous occasion, a time of union and harmony, a time of circumspection, yet a time of celebration, the joining of the man and the woman in a union of body and soul, and whereas before there had been two, now there is one. **[Beat]** It is a sacred and honorable institution, an institution upon which the Heavenly Father has granted his greatest blessing...

[Toward the end of Spencer's speech, NAOMI enters dressed in a dynamite maid-of-honor dress—the flounce, the ruffle, the hat-with-the-mini-veil, the dyed-to-match-shoes-that-don't-quite-fit.]

NAOMI: Tell me what I need to know.

SPENCER: **[Looking at her]** It's fabulous.

NAOMI: Too much veil?

SPENCER: Don't touch a thing.

NAOMI: Too much bosom?

SPENCER: Marvelous bosom.

NAOMI: Enough to tease, but not enough to offend? **[She fiddles around with her neck line for a bit and then turns to HOWARD]** What do you think, Howard? Too much bosom? **[Beat, then to SPENCER]** Is Howard still in a funk? **[Then to HOWARD]** Are you still in a funk?

SPENCER: Howard's a little nervous.

NAOMI: **[To HOWARD]** Honey, relax...

SPENCER: He's taking an awfully big step...

NAOMI: **[To HOWARD]** Have fun, Howard. Enjoy yourself. You're getting everything you want. **[She fusses again with her bosom]**

SPENCER: **[To NAOMI]** I think Alice is going to bring out the best in Howard.

NAOMI: **[Still fussing with herself]** Alice is a saint.

SPENCER: I think Alice just might be the one to turn things around for old Howard.

NAOMI: Howard's never going to change...

SPENCER: I think Alice might make him a new man.

NAOMI: **[To HOWARD, as she fusses with him, straightening his tie and so on...]** Howard, Alice is in love...do you know how painful that can be?

SPENCER: I'm proud of Howard.

NAOMI: **[To HOWARD, still fussing with him]** She's a virgin, Howard. Do you know how painful *that* can be?

SPENCER: **[Calling back]** Is the bride ready for the ceremony?

NAOMI: **[Fussing with herself]** Wait a minute...

ALICE: **[Calling out]** The bride is ready.

SPENCER: **[Calling back]** Just a minute, Alice.

NAOMI: **[Calling back]** Honey, I'll be right there.

SPENCER: **[To HOWARD, directing him]** Now, the groom will stand over here...

NAOMI: Howard, please try to do this right...

SPENCER: **[To HOWARD]** ...and you're to stand here quietly and calmly and reflect upon the impending arrival of your beautiful and virginal bride...

NAOMI: **[To HOWARD]** ...this is a *big* moment for Alice...

SPENCER: **[To HOWARD]** Try to look loving, yet strong, tender, yet forthright.

NAOMI: **[To HOWARD]** This is the moment that she's always dreamed about, and you can either make her the happiest woman in the world or the most miserable...

SPENCER: **[Very seriously to HOWARD]** ...that's a lot responsibility, Howard...do you think you can handle that much responsibility?

NAOMI: And commitment?

SPENCER: It's a lifetime commitment...

NAOMI: We're talking about monogamy, Howard...

SPENCER: Do you know what that is?

NAOMI: Howard, we've been drifting for years, always on the run, and here is a chance to settle down and be real people in a real home and have a real life...

SPENCER: ...an awfully nice life, I think...

NAOMI: **[To HOWARD]** ...if you could learn to behave yourself, learn to think about someone else's needs other than your own...

SPENCER: We're at a crossroads, Howard...

NAOMI: Open your heart, be loving, be kind...

ALICE: **[Calling out]** The bride is *ready!*

SPENCER: **[Calling back]** Just a minute, Alice.

NAOMI: **[To Howard]** ...try to show her that you care...

SPENCER: **[Calling loudly]** Places, everybody!

NAOMI: **[Sighing deeply as she turns to exit]** There's only so much a mother can do...

SPENCER: **[Calling loudly]** Let the ceremony begin!

[NAOMI exits. SPENCER starts the music (a small tape deck) and the wedding march begins. Shortly NAOMI enters doing her best maid-of-honor hesitation step. She does the whole act—the rancid smile of alleged happiness, the hint of despair in her eyes—it's very dramatic. She stops at her appointed place next to the groom. Then ALICE enters, as SPENCER and NAOMI gasp with delight. ALICE, of course, is the consummate bride—the perfect dress, the perfect veil and train, the perfect pink roses with baby's breath, the radiant smile, the slight trembling of the lips, the look of silent terror. She stops at her place next to HOWARD. NAOMI starts to cry. The entire party suddenly becomes very solemn as the music fades. There is a pause.]

SPENCER: **[Reading from the prayer book in his deepest, most reverent, ministerial tone of voice]** Dearly beloved...we are gathered here to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony which is an honorable estate and is not to be entered unadvisedly or lightly...

[HOWARD leans over and tries to kiss ALICE]

SPENCER: **[Aside, firmly]** Howard.

NAOMI: **[Aside]** Howard, stop that!

ALICE: **[Protesting sweetly]** Howard!

[HOWARD withdraws]

SPENCER: **[Aside to HOWARD]** Howard, you are to stand here, and you are to remain standing here, and you are to look loving, yet strong, tender, yet forthright, is that clear? **[Beat, then continuing in his ministerial tone, reading]** ...to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony, which is an honorable estate and is not to be entered unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently...discreetly...advisedly... soberly...

[NAOMI starts to weep and sniffle]

NAOMI: **[Weepingly, to ALICE]** This is the nicest wedding Howard has ever had.

ALICE: **[Weeping too]** I'm so happy.

NAOMI: **[Clutching ALICE's hand]** I want you to know that whatever happens I will always be your friend. **[She and ALICE stand there weeping, holding each other's hand as though their lives depended on it]**

SPENCER: **[Reading]** And into this holy estate these two persons present come now to be joined, to have and to hold, to love and to cherish, to honor and obey, and if any person can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold his peace.

NAOMI: **[Painfully conflicted, but then bursting out, tearfully and confessionally to ALICE]** Alice, Howard is a pornographer...

SPENCER: **[Protesting]** Naomi...

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** Howard is the King of Porn...

SPENCER: **[To NAOMI]** Alice doesn't...

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** Howard is a major producer, distributor and star of video-cassette filth.

SPENCER: It's awful, Alice.

NAOMI: Complete sleaze...

SPENCER: Absolute trash.

NAOMI: He specializes in "wedding night" videos. He likes to film the virgin bride surrendering to the heartless, horny groom.

SPENCER: **[Shaking his head sadly, chastely]** There's a whole series...

NAOMI: **[Still tearfully, to ALICE]** You're going to be sitting there, drinking champagne, all flushed and giggly in your Claudette Colbert negligee, and Howard's going to turn around and smile his Clark Gable smile and tell you that he wants to capture the whole, wonderful, what he likes to call "first experience," on full-color, full-sound videotape.

SPENCER: **[To ALICE]** Say, no, Alice.

NAOMI: We've tried to get help for him, we really have...

SPENCER: Trouble is all Howard seems to know...

NAOMI: We've tried to help him find the right path...

[HOWARD nuzzles ALICE's shoulder sweetly]

ALICE: It's going to be different now

NAOMI: **[Shaking her head sadly]** No, it's not, Alice...

ALICE: Howard wants to change his ways.

NAOMI: No, he doesn't...

SPENCER: Howard is an animal.

NAOMI: He's always been an animal.

SPENCER: He'll always be an animal.

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** Alice, *all* men are animals, that's what you've got to understand.

[HOWARD sinks to his knees and nuzzles ALICE's mid-section]

ALICE: **[Stroking his head]** Howard wants to abandon his life of sin and corruption and enter onto the path of love and repentance.

NAOMI: Alice, that's what they *all* say.

[HOWARD starts to hump ALICE's leg, dog-like]

SPENCER: Howard!

NAOMI: Howard, stop that!

ALICE: **[Concerned]** Howard?

NAOMI: Howard, stop that this instant!

[SPENCER tries to restrain HOWARD, who's on all fours, panting, his tongue hanging out]

NAOMI: **[Urgently to ALICE]** Get a leash.

SPENCER: **[Holding onto HOWARD, urgently to ALICE]** You have to restrain him.

ALICE: **[Confused]** Howard?

NAOMI: **[Screams at ALICE]** Get a leash!!

[ALICE backs away and runs/exits to get a leash]

SPENCER: **[Holding HOWARD]** Shame on you, Howard...

NAOMI: This is the wedding, Howard, *not* the honeymoon.

SPENCER: Bad dog, very bad dog...

[ALICE reenters with a dog leash--a chain choker--and hands it to NAOMI]

NAOMI: **[To HOWARD]** Here...**[She puts the chain over HOWARD's head]** You want to be a dog, you'll get treated like a dog. **[She yanks on the choke-chain]**

SPENCER: **[Apologetically to ALICE]** This always happens when he's under too much stress.

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** You have to be firm, Alice. You're the owner, he's the dog. Never forget that.

SPENCER: **[Kicking HOWARD]** Down, Howard, down.

ALICE: **[Alarmed]** Howard?!

SPENCER: It's okay, Alice. **[He kicks Howard again]**

NAOMI: Sometimes you have to be brutal. **[She kicks him]**

SPENCER: **[Still kicking]** Bad dog, Howard, very bad dog!

[Pause, as they all stare down at a very subdued HOWARD]

ALICE: **[Upset]** Howard?

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** You'll get used to it.

SPENCER: Marriage is a demanding institution.

NAOMI: Husbands are like this.

SPENCER: They demand a great deal of attention.

NAOMI: **[To HOWARD]** Would you like a dog dish, Howard?

SPENCER: They're all wants and needs and desires...

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** He needs a dog dish and a nice can of dog food. **[ALICE hurriedly exits]**

SPENCER: ...they can't take care of themselves.

NAOMI: **[Calling to ALICE]** He likes meaty beef or chunky chicken.

[ALICE reenters with a big dog dish and a can of food, which she places on the floor. HOWARD starts to devour it]

SPENCER: **[To ALICE]** He'll be okay.

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** Sometimes he's the nicest when he's a dog.

SPENCER: **[Pause, as they watch HOWARD for a moment, then...]** He can be quite affectionate. **[He starts to pat him, but HOWARD snarls at him]**

NAOMI: Howard!

[Pause as they all watch HOWARD devour the dog food]

ALICE: **[Enraptured]** Howard is such an amazing man.

SPENCER: Alice, if you want to change your mind, we'd all understand.

ALICE: No!

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** You can't marry a dog, Alice.

ALICE: I love Howard! **[She strokes his head, he nuzzles her]**

NAOMI: **[Protesting]** Alice...

ALICE: Howard loves me.

SPENCER: **[Watching HOWARD nuzzling]** He loves her.

ALICE: **[To NAOMI]** Please be my friend.

NAOMI: Honey, I *am* your friend.

ALICE: And please be Howard's friend. **[She's stroking his head]**

NAOMI: Alice, I *am* Howard's friend, I've been Howard's friend for many, many years, and I'm *your* friend...and I'm being your very *best* friend when I tell you that to Howard you are a table and a chair and a free lunch and a nice selection of body parts.

ALICE: **[Earnestly, to HOWARD]** I was a lonely house, an empty room, a stairway and a hallway...and I waited for someone to come along who would look in my window and knock on my door and open it and come inside and turn on the light and look into my eyes...

[Suddenly, HOWARD, like a magician, pulls a bouquet of white roses from within his coat and presents it to ALICE]

ALICE: **[Thrilled]** Howard!

NAOMI: **[Exasperated]** Howard.

ALICE: **[Gazing lovingly at HOWARD]** Isn't he wonderful.

NAOMI: **[Sighing]** Oh, Alice...

SPENCER: **[Reading]** And will you, Howard, take this woman as thy wedded wife, to live together in the estate of Holy Matrimony? To love her and honor her in sickness and in health...so long as ye both shall live?

[HOWARD suddenly pulls a small jewelry box from his coat and presents it to ALICE. ALICE gasps. HOWARD then opens the box and present ALICE with a lovely diamond ring]

ALICE: **[Adoringly/thrilled]** Howard!

NAOMI: **[Suspiciously]** Where did you get that, Howard?

ALICE: **[Deliriously]** I'm so happy.

NAOMI: Did you steal that, Howard?

SPENCER: **[Reading]** And will you, Alice, take this man as thy wedded husband...

NAOMI: **[With resignation, to ALICE]** Honey, don't blame me.

SPENCER: ...to live together in the estate of Holy Matrimony?

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** Please don't say I didn't warn you.

SPENCER: Wilt thou love him, honor him in sickness and in health...so long as ye both shall live?

ALICE: I will. **[HOWARD gazes at ALICE with rapt devotion]**

NAOMI: **[Sighing, to herself]** I guess a lot of women marry dogs and live to tell about it.

SPENCER: **[Reading]** For as much as Howard and Alice have consented together in holy wedlock, I pronounce therefore that they are man and wife.**[Beat, then To HOWARD]** You may kiss the bride.

[ALICE and HOWARD kiss—a sweet, perfect bride-and-groom kiss.]

NAOMI: **[Getting into the spirit of things, a parody of the perfect wedding guest]** Time for the champagne! **[She goes to the table and gets a bottle]**

SPENCER: **[Sincerely]** Congratulations, Alice. **[He gives ALICE a ministerly kiss]**

ALICE: Thank you, Spencer. It was a lovely ceremony.

NAOMI: Time to cut the wedding cake! **[She hands the champagne bottle to SPENCER, and goes to the table and gets some glasses]**

SPENCER: **[To HOWARD]** Congratulations, Howard.

NAOMI: Time to open the presents!

SPENCER: **[To ALICE and HOWARD]** I hope you'll both be very happy. **[He opens the champagne]**

NAOMI: **[To ALICE sincerely]** Congratulations, Alice. **[They hug]**

ALICE: Thank you, Naomi.

SPENCER: Time for the dancing and singing! **[He is pouring the champagne]**

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** I hope you'll be very happy. You deserve to be happy. You're a wonderful person.

SPENCER: Time to throw the confetti!

NAOMI: Time to throw the rice!

SPENCER: Time to take the pictures! **[He grabs a camera and snaps a photo of the radiant bride and groom]**

NAOMI: Time to cut the wedding cake!

SPENCER: Time to throw the bridal bouquet!

[ALICE throws the bridal bouquet right to NAOMI, who catches it and ALICE and SPENCER cheer]

ALICE: **[Deliriously]** I'm so happy.

NAOMI: **[Tearing up again]** I'm going to cry.

SPENCER: **[Offering a toast]** Here's to a long and wonderful life, to Alice and Howard and their many generations of beautiful offspring...a new road, a new life together, two souls united in eternal wedlock, each day, each moment, until they die.

NAOMI: **[Raising her glass]** Amen.

[HOWARD and ALICE kiss again and then stare intensely, romantically into each other's eyes near-freeze like a bride and groom on top of a wedding cake]

NAOMI: **[Pause as she and SPENCER look at HOWARD and ALICE with parental satisfaction. Then, to SPENCER]** It's been such fun watching Howard develop.

SPENCER: All those years we worried about him...

NAOMI: I'm so glad we found a good home for him.

SPENCER: What he needed was a good environment.

NAOMI: **[Pulling up a chair and sitting down with a sigh]** For the first time in years I feel like I can relax.**[She takes off her shoes]**

[SPENCER pours more champagne for him and NAOMI. ALICE stares at HOWARD with a beatific smile, both of them completely oblivious to SPENCER and NAOMI]

SPENCER: **[To NAOMI]** I think our time has come and gone.

NAOMI: It's so hard to let go...

SPENCER: Howard has to make his own decisions now.

NAOMI: You get so used to worrying about him...

SPENCER: Howard has to make his own mistakes, his own discoveries...

NAOMI: He'll always be my little boy.

SPENCER: Howard doesn't need us any more.

NAOMI: **[Fighting back tears]** I don't know what to do.

SPENCER: There isn't anything for us to do.

NAOMI: I've lost my role.

SPENCER: We'll just grow old now and wither away.

NAOMI: I should have died young.

SPENCER: It's all a long slow steady journey toward gray hair and gray skin and gray-white bones.

NAOMI: I guess we're all just props in the big drama of life.

SPENCER: **[Beat, then to HOWARD and ALICE]** Would the bride and groom like some more champagne?

NAOMI: **[To SPENCER]** I think they're having a quiet period now.

SPENCER: Alice? More champagne?

NAOMI: They're having a quiet period.

SPENCER: **[Staring benevolently at ALICE and HOWARD]** It was Beatrice who led Dante into Paradise.

NAOMI: They want to be alone.

SPENCER: Beatrice was the "light" of truth and intellect...

NAOMI: **[Pulling SPENCER by the hand]** Come on, Spencer...

SPENCER: La luce della verità é la...

NAOMI: Time for mom and dad to go to bed...

SPENCER: I just wanted to tell my story.

NAOMI: You've already told your story.

SPENCER: This is a different story.

NAOMI: It's always the same story, Spencer. It's been the same story since the beginning of time.

ALICE: **[Turning to NAOMI and SPENCER, deliriously]** Howard and I are about to spend the first night of every night through all eternity wrapped in each other's arms, our hearts beating as one. **[She stares dewy-eyed at HOWARD and he stares dewy-eyed back]**

SPENCER: **[Watching them for a moment, then]** I think Howard's a changed man...

NAOMI: **[Sincerely, to ALICE]** Just call out for us in the night if anything too terrible happens...

SPENCER: **[To HOWARD]** ...I think you've finally found the right one...

NAOMI: **[Suddenly troubled, to SPENCER]** I don't want to be burden.

SPENCER: Who's a burden?

NAOMI: *We're a burden.*

ALICE: **[Turning to NAOMI]** You're not a burden.

NAOMI: Alice, you're generous, you're sweet and loving, and we're just trash....**[She starts weeping again.]**

ALICE: You're my family, I love you...I want to take care of you for the rest of your lives.

NAOMI: **[To ALICE]** You shouldn't spend your money on us.

ALICE: Why not?

SPENCER: Why not?

NAOMI: It's not right.

ALICE: What's not right?

SPENCER: **[To NAOMI]** I think Alice should be able to spend her money any way she wants to.

ALICE: I have bags of money.

SPENCER: She has bags of money.

NAOMI: **[To SPENCER]** What if she runs out?

ALICE: I'm not going to run out.

SPENCER: She's not going to run out.

ALICE: **[Sweetly, naively]** I'll just print up some more.

[Pause]

NAOMI: **[To SPENCER]** Say "good night," Spencer.

SPENCER: Good night, Alice.

ALICE: Good night, Spencer.

NAOMI: Good night, Alice.

ALICE: Good night, Naomi.

NAOMI: I wish you the very best. You deserve the best. **[They hug]**

SPENCER: **[To HOWARD]** Good night, Howard.

NAOMI: **[To HOWARD]** Good night, Howard.

ALICE: **[To HOWARD, sweetly]** Can you say "good night," Howard?

NAOMI: **[Coaxingly, like to a child]** Come on, Howard, just one little "good night."

ALICE: *Please, Howard...*

[They all look with anticipation at HOWARD]

HOWARD: **[Pause, then to the audience]** Good night.

BLACK OUT