

*HOW TO GET RICH AND THE ALCOHOLIC DRAMA*

THESIS

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by

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## CHAPTER I

### PERSONAL ESSAY

I have been writing plays for 20 years. The focus of this thesis is on the process of creating two one-act plays. I originally wrote *How To Get Rich* as a two-act play before attending graduate school at Texas State University-San Marcos. In this essay, I concentrate on the changes I made in turning it into a one-act play, motivations behind the changes, a performance of the play, the re-writing process, and conclusions. I completed *The Alcoholic Drama* during the last year of my Masters Program. This thesis describes the process of writing a new play from scratch, what inspired it, reactions to a reading of it at a local high school, themes, the editing process, and how I feel about the play now.

A friend from high school and the interactions with her younger sister initially inspired *The Alcoholic Drama*. I noticed even today that she could be very cruel to her sister and others in a way that appeared innocent on the surface. One day, while my friend was not there, her sister spontaneously picked up a doll, pretended it was her older sister, and began acting out their relationship.

In this role-play, the younger sister used the doll to show the older sister the new dress she was wearing. Instead of the positive response she was expecting, the older sister said she didn't like the dress at all and suggested she wear something completely different. The younger sister immediately put down the doll, apologized, said she would

change to another outfit, and thanked her for her feedback. This image stuck in my mind for years.

Of course, this example does not sound entirely innocent on surface but the Barbie Doll game showed a good example of how she had been treated by her older sister over the years. The younger sister was very popular in school and served as cheerleader up until her senior year. That year, she became pregnant and married at age 17. She was immediately stripped of all honors such as, "Most Popular Girl in Senior Class," and was generally shunned in the school. Her marriage to someone from a prominent Christian family turned out to be an abusive one.

Another inspiration for the play turned out to be more unusual. While doing my laundry one night, I met a woman who told me about her current experiences as a student teacher at San Marcos High School. She proved inspiring in that, rather than complaining about her challenges there, she seemed to welcome them. The aspiring teacher wanted the school to throw the worst at her as this would help prepare her for a teaching career. As a single parent of a young daughter, she was determined to teach fifth graders come hell or high water. I was inspired by her spunk, determination, and attitude. She figured nothing could get worse for her in teaching than what she was going through now.

Another influence was my former job as supervisor of an out-patient clinic for substance abusers in Hollywood, California. Having not suffered from addictions myself, I found the behavior of, not the patients so much, but the staff I supervised, to be rather odd. Most of them were former addicts and alcoholics and were furious about not being able to get high anymore. In short, the employees were much more difficult to deal with than the patients.

Each day was a daily drama and conflict for me at the clinic. “The City of Angels” contained many recovering substance abusers so I saw similar angry, manipulative behaviors outside the clinic as well. Once, at wit’s end, I asked a patient, a former heroine addict, how I could ever help “them.” He did not know I was actually referring to the people who worked there. The former junkie replied that it had nothing to do with drugs but was simply a matter of not taking responsibility. Addicts avoid responsibilities like rent and bills by spending all their time procuring and taking drugs. He said if the police would stop chasing them, they would stop doing drugs. Their need for the cat-and-mouse game with the police and the daily drama was stronger than their need for drugs or drink.

The clinic workers needed daily drama of whatever kind they could manufacture. Some say it is part of the disease. They drink because they are happy or drink because they are sad. My own theory is that, since they are killing their brain cells, they need the drama to get the neurons firing. Regardless of the motivations, my friend in question and others seem to enjoy these histrionics even at the expense of others. Of course this type of behavior is not limited to alcoholics, as “drama queens” run rampant in the theater world.

Through exploring this theme with my friend and her sister, they revealed a whole set of events from the past that I had no clue about at the time. I learned a father was molesting his daughter, a beautiful and popular high school band twirler. A father from a family I knew was molesting his two daughters. Another cheerleader from the past, who had a retarded brother, was rumored to be the real mother of this brother who was fathered by her father. The character Violet brings forth these types of repressed secrets from the other characters whether they want her to or not.

The Betty Boop connection in the play stems from a memory of a crush I once held on an older student who looked a lot like Betty Boop in her cheerleading outfit. I found the contrast between her childlike face, mature body, and sexy uniform to be extremely exotic. This seemed normal at the time but looking back, I question why women were encouraged to look and act like children while, at the same time, teasing adolescent males with cheerleading yells. Violet seems to want to return Yuma to this childlike state.

A woman I met at a weekend writer retreat essentially inspired the character of Celeste. I noticed this especially bright and talented woman was preparing food, talking about food, or eating the whole time. The superb play she wrote and shared with us that weekend expressed the verbal abuse she received from an ex-boyfriend. She seemed a great example of the creative person who has nowhere to put her creativity in contemporary American society.

A guest taught a workshop on this weekend and told us, "If you write like Beckett you will fail so you need to write like comedian, Chris Rock if you want to succeed." I decided to add this aspect as part of her character.

Out of frustration, Celeste turns to an eating disorder. Dr. John Fleming would later have me change this expression from eating disorder to, "eating to cope with anxiety." This was more exacting as I do not think the model for my character had reached the state of anorexia or bulimia yet. As with other characters from other plays, I was intrigued by her because I did not understand her and wanted to try to figure her out.

I ran into her recently at another writer function. She was holding hands with a tall, very thin, actor. I could not help but wonder if she was with him, not because she liked

him, but because she thought if she hung with him, she too could become thin like him. She did not realize that perhaps he was too thin. When asked by the function leader to introduce her and tell us something about her, she gave her name and said, “I am thinking about the ice cream in my freezer that tastes like Greek pastry.”

Fleming pushed for the need for more conflict in *The Alcoholic Drama*.

Originally I ended the play with the two doing cheerleading yells and Violet trying to cover things up by saying, “this is a great party, it’s just like high school again.”

Apparently this subtlety didn’t translate well enough to the audience.

Dr. Fleming suggested I up the stakes by showing how the night’s events affected Celeste and Yuma, by having me think about what they would be doing during the next day or two. He suggested a few options, including the possibility of having them murder Violet. I never thought of it! I liked it, but felt it might be a little over the top. We decided simply the threat of violence would be enough to make the point and would certainly increase the dramatic tension.

I increased their allegiance against Violet earlier in the play to help build to the climax. Fleming also felt my original name of Stormy was too, “on the nose,” so I changed her name to Violet. I also changed the original name of Uma to Yuma, as it gave it a more rural sound like something out of an old western. I also cut some scenes with Celeste such as her referring to her past honeymoon and the infidelity of her husband while cats screeched in the alleys of Amsterdam.

Fleming wanted me to help clarify the transition of how Celeste “sells out” and starts writing TV scripts; he also wanted me to cut her closing monologue down and make the transition less abrupt. This resulted in an unexpected change of Yuma being of

use to her in writing the “bimbo” material. This showed Yuma was smarter than she appeared and gave Celeste more humility.

The play started out as an ensemble piece. This was new for me as I find that ensemble pieces like the film *The Big Chill* do not pull together very well. I decided to focus on one character and picked Violet. The role of protagonist eventually fell to Celeste. Following my re-writes with Fleming, the characters took over the script and ended with Yuma behaving as the central figure. Fleming was helpful in making me clarify how I saw Yuma’s behavior.

During the cheerleading scene, I added stage directions describing her becoming psychotic and compliant when asked to wear the cheerleader outfit. The feedback showed me that what you have in your head does not always get on paper. I didn’t see her change coming at the end or Celeste’s struggle to write the TV material.

Fleming encouraged me to take out contemporary references to current figures like Chris Rock or Packer quarterback Brett Favre. Originally, I thought that Yuma desperately wanted Cromwell to come over but Fleming asked me to explore the backstory of why Yuma and Cromwell had broken up. Had he cheated on her? Or had he simply, “moved on,” and broken her heart? Had he been abusive? Each backstory would change the present, and since I already had her frequently checking the door to see if it was locked, I decided their former relationship had been an abusive one. This way she might fear, rather than want, him coming over to the apartment. This worked better for me.

Fleming wanted me to improve transitions so the audience would be prepared for changes in the characters. He had problems with the Attention Deficit Disorder aspects of

the characters. For example, he wanted Violet to “offer” drinks to guests instead of simply serving them. This worked as I could use the offers of beverage or food to open up more jokes in the dialogue. More specific stage actions also allowed me to give more information about the personalities of each character.

Violet brings out the true personality, frustration, and angry side of the repressed Celeste. As per Fleming instruction, with the new ending I went back to the beginning to make Yuma more consistent throughout the play. When asked if she was still spiritual, I told Fleming, that, “Yuma wants to be but others make her fight for her serenity.” To help find consistency throughout, Fleming had me read her lines alone and apart from lines of other characters. This technique proved helpful.

I could not help but think of the unintended metaphor of Betty Davis in the old film *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane* as an unconscious connection between the baby-faced cheerleader and Violet at the end of the play. Another unconscious metaphor turned out to be the cheerleading cheers at the end as a symbol of them pushing Violet away from them. Fleming added one more with his suggestion of having Yuma tell Violet to kiss off by blowing her a kiss at the end. Feedback you can trust is a rarity.

As part of my student teaching for a secondary teaching certificate in Theatre, I arranged a reading of a play at San Marcos High School for a videotaped lesson plan. I gave several plays to San Marcos High School Fine Arts Director Jack Moore and, surprisingly, he picked this one. I figured beforehand the themes might be a bit adult for adolescents. This turned out to be a wrong assumption.

The students did a decent reading of the play including the Beckett-like monologue. Constantine, a senior from Russia, even filmed it for me. Afterwards we discussed the

performance. One student said it was easy to follow because, “it was just like high school.” They could relate to the daily dramas of the characters as this is what they deal with everyday at school. Unlike Fleming, they saw no trouble with the rapid transitions, quick jumps in thought, and the lack of need to build to a climax. “High school students don’t build to a climax, they start at climax immediately,” they said.

As for their reaction to the theme, I did not get into a direct discussion with them on the subject of molestation but they certainly could relate to the concepts of substance abuse, emotional abuse, broken families, and struggles to get through school. Before I began my student teaching the next semester at the same school, Moore told me that colleges were in denial about high schools and lived in, “an ivory tower.” He said the dropout rate was much higher than documented and that many were not learning the simple grammar and math skills needed to hold a job.

Moore told me many students came from broken homes and were shifted from one family to another. Some students were forced to be the parents in the family and cared for younger siblings when they were not rushing to jobs after school. As a student teacher, many students confided in me about the emotional problems in their families and their own disorders such as Attention Deficit Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, other neurological issues, learning dysfunctions, and eating disorders.

Many non-theater students were placed in theater classes as an “easy elective,” and a single teacher sometimes needed to cope with as many as 40 students at a time. At first I thought some of the more talented theater students seemed somewhat snobby in their avoidance of the non-theater students. Later I saw the elective students were more interested in being disruptive than in showing any real interest in theater arts. Like Yuma

and Celeste in their efforts to push Violet away from them, the theater students separated themselves as a means of survival.

A Vietnamese-American woman in Houston inspired the play *How to Get Rich*. One normally does not think of Asians as having Attention Deficit Disorder but her entrepreneurial spirit led this very Americanized woman to have trouble hanging on to a job. I later changed Daffney from Vietnamese-American to make the part easier to cast. The fall in the economy and the current global takeover also help trigger this story. This has come home to roost with the recent fall of banks, companies, mortgages, government entities, and the stock market.

In the past it has been unusual for me to write completely fictional characters but this proved not to be the case with Huston. The Howard Hughes character came out of nowhere. I had no intention of writing about Howard Hughes in drag when I started the play. He simply wrote himself upon the page. Hughes turned out to be a good vehicle for a satire on a falling economy.

This idea may have come to me from someone I knew who was good friends with Hughes. The figure was oil wildcatter, Glenn McCarthy, the subject of the film *Giant*. James Dean did a great job capturing the specific details of McCarthy's personality and showed his promise as an actor. McCarthy used to tell me stories about his friend. He saw Hughes to be more like the man who forced the government to back down on national TV than as an eccentric recluse.

McCarthy shared many facts to me about Hughes including that he invented the Japanese Zero used later in World War II. Hughes offered the plans for the plane to the U.S. government. They refused them and the Japanese eventually stole the plans. I also

based Uncle Howie a little on my good friend, the late cowboy and Western author, Bill Brett.

The play came to me all at once one evening while driving to a job interview from Houston to Austin. Edward Albee, of whom I was fortunate enough to study with at the University of Houston, said he always writes plays this way. He pictures everything in his head before writing the first word down. This usually does not work for me, as I usually cannot see the play until I begin writing it down.

The original play was much different. For starters, I saw it as a two-act play. Secondly, I added many surreal touches with characters the audience could see but the couple could not. These included characters that jump out of nowhere to act out songs and commercials on the car radio including Samurai warriors committing Hari Kari, a Lawrence Welk chorus, and Hispanic wrestlers acting out a match for a commercial. The first script also contained other characters they meet on the way including a bored Pakistani convenience store attendant and a Hispanic construction worker who they accidentally run over in the road. Fleming, however, felt these characters and scenes did not add anything to the play.

Needless to say, this caused tremendous cuts in the play. Changing her from Vietnamese also cut many jokes in the play and gave me less leeway with the politically-incorrect material. *Rich* also doubled as a satire on Austin and the bureaucratic quagmire of finding employment in there.

I saw a version of *How to Get Rich* produced at Austin's Hyde Park Theater in Austin in February 2008 as part of the Frontera Festival. I found it difficult to cast as the only actors I knew were in San Marcos and they had trouble rehearsing in Austin.

This forced me to cut down the cast to only two characters. I eventually cast it with, not actors, but two playwrights, Aimee Gonzales and Bryan Roberts. Roberts was also a member of an improvisation group and was voted as the top improv artist in Austin by the *Austin Chronicle*.

This casting served me well as I have had good luck with non-actors due to the fact they have not learned bad habits on stage. (Once I cast a play in Los Angeles almost entirely with professional comedians. This worked, as they certainly had no trouble with timing.) The production in Austin went well as the two kept the audience laughing through the whole performance. The biggest surprise was somewhat unintentional in seeing how loudly the audience laughed at any and all digs at the city of Houston. They, however, did not appreciate satire of Austin so much. All in all, we saw a great response as the packed house “got the play.”

The actress struggled with learning her lines but was helped with a few cheat notes glued to a book of maps. When in trouble, it looked to the audience as if she was simply reading a map for directions. Another logistical issue turned out to be how to show that the pet pig had defecated on Huston’s suit. I made the mistake of putting mustard on the jacket to represent feces. This irritated the theater stage managers who thought this would make too much of a mess. It did not but I wish now I had used a different substance on the jacket.

Albee once told me to keep the sets simple and put the focus on the actors. I took his advice in both plays. The biggest production problem turned out to be sound. Despite the enlistment of a professional sound person, he could not help us with the theater’s antiquated sound system. I was also pleased with “the performance” of Miss Piggy who

seemed like a living breathing character sitting between the two actors in the front seat of the car.

Fortunately, Fleming understood the characters I was attempting to satirize. He suggested I update some of the names such as changing the store from Krogers to H.E.B. I also needed to show how time was passing during their drive to Austin. Again, as with the first play, he strived for consistency, less abrupt transitions, and logical progression of the plot.

Fleming also helped me in writing improved stage directions. I learned to keep them to a minimum. By doing this, I saw that actions sometimes could be shown simply through dialogue. The tedious hours spent editing stage directions made the script cleaner, allowed it to move faster, and gave more specific directions to actors. This proved to be a skill that will be useful to me in writing future scripts.

Others seem to respond positively to the play. The Great Plains Theatre Conference in Nebraska selected *Rich* to workshop last spring. Unfortunately, my school and work schedule did not allow me to attend this conference.

I can see definite patterns in both plays. Like *Alcoholic Drama*, the play shifted from a story about Daffney to one I did not expect. The play evolved from her to Howie and Huston. Other than the obvious theme of success can corrupt, the play has a strong similarity to Violet's character. Daffney's need for adrenalin is stronger than her love for Huston just as Violet's need for drama outweighs her bond of friendship with the other two. In both plays, the two manage to destroy their relationship with those they propose to care about.

All in all, I feel good about the changes in *The Alcoholic Drama*. The re-writes worked to make the play more dramatic and focused. We will be performing the play at the Frontera Festival in January. The hardest part of the play may be in casting the Billie Whitelaw type to perform the Beckett-like monologue. Also, I love the unexpected evolution of the cheerleader changing and taking over as the major character.

The changes in *How to Get Rich* were massive for me. I found it difficult to let go of the surreal elements of the original two act. At first I could not figure how it would work as a one act as the action occurs in two different cities. Cutting it down also changed the surreal tone and the humor of the play. I learned if you change one thing, you must change the whole play.

At this point, thanks to Dr. Fleming, I think it stands up well as a one-act play. My next step is to send it again to the Great Plains Theatre Conference. This time, however, I will send them the current version. The play seems pretty timely now with the recent crash of the economy and the election of a new president. Many more today find themselves in the same shoes as Daffney and Huston.

**CHAPTER II**

*THE ALCOHOLIC DRAMA*

a play in one act

by Tommy LeVrier

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VIOLET- Age 30, speaks in loud, melodramatic voice with clear diction as if posturing on the stage. She grew up with CELESTE and YUMA and served as their, “older sister and advisor.”

CELESTE - Age 28, highly intelligent, artist type who has given up art to teach art. She eats constantly to cope with stress. Tends to dress in black to hide her weight.

YUMA - Age 27, ex-cheerleader who has moved to this college town to teach at a school for cheerleaders. She appears “sunny” and “spiritual” on surface in a New-Age sort of way.

#### TIME

Present. Shortly after midnight.

#### PLACE

Violet’s small apartment in a small, college town. Kitchen is connected to living room. Shelves full of dolls and Teddy Bears reveal someone who wants to revert to the past. A side table with mirror serves as a make-up station. A lap-top computer sits on a small table against the wall.

(As the lights come up, VIOLET cheerfully plays host to her newly arrived guests)

VIOLET

I'm so glad the two of you could come over.

YUMA

Yeah, it was good to run into you again, Violet. But I can't stay late. I've to be up early.

CELESTE

It's not often you run into people you grew up with. How rare is that?

VIOLET

I have some party foods in the fridge if you want, Celeste. I remember you were always the gourmet type.

CELESTE

No thank you. I'm not hungry. I can't stay too late either.

VIOLET

Didn't your ex-boyfriend used to live in these apartments, Yuma?

CELESTE

Last I heard, he was playing in the National Football League.

YUMA

He hurt his knee then spent a few years on the injury list with the Redskins. Now he's in rehab trying to get off pain pills.

VIOLET

Par for the course. Pain is gain, as they say.

YUMA

They want him to become a defensive back. He doesn't want to change from playing quarterback. He's thinking about going to Canada.

CELESTE

(chuckling)

Is he avoiding the draft?

YUMA

I don't get it.

VIOLET

I do.

CELESTE

I thought he went to the Packers.

YUMA

The Packers drafted him in the seventh round.

VIOLET

There's that word again.

CELESTE

What word?

VIOLET

Draft.

CELESTE

I hear its cold up there.

(THEY laugh, YUMA doesn't)

YUMA

He stuck with the Packers for a year or so. They kept him on the practice squad for a while. Then they traded him to the Redskins.

CELESTE

What were they packing?

YUMA

I don't get it.

VIOLET

I do.

CELESTE

Where did they get that name anyway?

YUMA

I think it originally came from meat packers.

CELESTE

I'm not going there.

VIOLET

Can I pour anyone a drink?

YUMA

Thank you. I'll take white wine if you have any.

(VIOLET pours YUMA a glass of white wine)

CELESTE

The Redskins...are they actually allowed to call them that? Isn't that just a tiny bit...racist?

VIOLET

Especially since they are supposed to be representing the whole nation.

YUMA

They've been sued twice by the Native, I mean, American, Indians but they won't change the name.

CELESTE

Gladiatorial killing for the masses.

YUMA

Chad says the players are exploited and treated as amusements by a blood-thirsty public...

CELESTE

Chad Troy Cromwell. The quarterback. Your dream boat.

STORMY

I took a couple of crap Sociology classes in order to, as they say, "meet the requirements for my degree." They did a study of NFL players and found a small percentage of them were suicidal.

YUMA

So?

VIOLET

They were all defensive backs.

(CELESTE peers through refrigerator in search of food)

YUMA

He would probably make a good defensive back. He hits like a linebacker.

CELESTE

I heard he was in town. Why don't you invite him over?

YUMA

He had 2500 yards of total offense. He can run and pass. They say he has poise in the pocket. That he is cool under pressure.

CELESTE

He was that all right.

VIOLET

No, don't get it started again! You know what she went through with him! He broke her heart! Don't make her go through it again! You are an awful person for even thinking that!

CELESTE

Fear is temporary. Regret is permanent. Life is risk.

(YUMA crosses to door to make sure it is locked)

YUMA

You can't always believe what you read--

VIOLET

--Would you like some white wine Celeste?

CELESTE

Betty Davis once said never trust anyone who drinks white wine.

(After an embarrassed silence, YUMA sets glass down)

VIOLET

It's improved since she died. How about a beer? Oh no, no beer, I forgot about your weight.

CELESTE

What?

VIOLET

Gin?

CELESTE

I get a little irritable sometimes on gin.

VIOLET

Lets' see, I've got bourbon and vodka. That's about it I'm afraid.

CELESTE

I'm trying to stay away from hard liquor.

VIOLET

Oh, here we go. I've got a bottle of red wine. Here, let me dust it off for you.

(CELESTE crosses to fridge, pulls out vegetables, puts them on counter as Violet pours her wine)

CELESTE

Thank you.

VIOLET

To your health.

(After toast, CELESTE slices vegetables with small meat cutter shaped like a hatchet)

YUMA

I met someone today with a lovely name. Her first name was Truly.

CELESTE

What was her last name?

YUMA

Darling.

VIOLET

Truly Darling?

YUMA

Isn't that a lovely name?

VIOLET

Remember Coral from high school? Coral Beach?

CELESTE

No, but I remember her sister Sandy.

YUMA

Ima Hogg, the governor of Texas. And her sister, Yura Hogg.

VIOLET

Yeah, I remember that joke. So...Yuma, what brings you to town again?

YUMA

Like I told you before, I'm going to teach at the cheerleaders school. Weren't you listening?

CELESTE

There are three symptoms to Alzheimer's, you know.

VIOLET

What are they?

CELESTE

The first is memory loss.

VIOLET

What are the other two?

CELESTE

I can't remember.

YUMA

I get it.

VIOLET

I think I passed by that school. Don't they also have gymnastics there?

YUMA

Yeah, I'm going to teach that too.

CELESTE

I saw this thing on one of those news shows where they were saying that a lot of high school students are getting injured doing gymnastics.

VIOLET

They do. More so than in sports, actually. It's not regulated.

CELESTE

Nothing's regulated anymore. You're not going to let them fall on their heads are you, Yuma?

YUMA

Like wrestlers.

VIOLET

What do you mean?

CELESTE

I thought wrestling was fake.

YUMA

It is. But a lot of them get injured doing the stunts. Many land on their heads and become paralyzed for life. You've got to have good karma to survive it.

CELESTE

I did not know that--

VIOLET

--So...ah, Celeste, I'm so glad to hear your parents are retiring to this area. This way, I'll get to see you more often.

YUMA

(sarcastically)

That will be very nice. Don't choke on your wine, Celeste--

VIOLET

--So, how are your parents, Celeste?

CELESTE

The same. People don't change.

YUMA

Are you still pursuing drama Celeste? Your parents were always so supportive of you. Ever since you were a child. They were so refined. So unlike everybody else in that town.

CELESTE

I've shucked theater and art of all forms.

STORMY

So, what are you going to do, Celeste? Creating art was your whole life.

CELESTE

I'm going to teach it.

VIOLET

There's more money in criticizing it than creating it. There's more money in being the middle man.

CELESTE

I'm going to sell them dreams.

VIOLET

I hear actors aren't very bright.

(After long silence, YUMA takes nicotine gum out of purse, grimaces from the taste of it as she chews it)

CELESTE

Did you quit smoking?

YUMA

Don't jinx it.

VIOLET

Cheers. To be friends forever.

(Following apathetic toast, CELESTE rummages through fridge for more ingredients)

YUMA

You mean you think he is in town?

VIOLET

Who?

CELESTE

She means. Chad. Chad Cromwell. Chad Troy Cromwell, the golden boy.

YUMA

I hear the Redskin press likes him.

VIOLET

The city with the highest murder rate and the most handguns per capita.

YUMA

They once found a homeless man there wrapped in an American flag frozen to death on the streets.

VIOLET

I saw that on C.N.N! He was a Vietnam veteran with a bronze medal around his neck. They found him dead only two blocks from the White House.

CELESTE

Why does the Redskin TV press like Chad so much?

YUMA

Because his little brother has leukemia.

CELESTE

Oh.

YUMA

Yeah that's what the public sees. But he's not always the golden boy.

VIOLET

We don't need men. We prefer them but we don't need them. We are sisters! Forever!

(THEY toast glasses with VIOLET with little enthusiasm)

YUMA

Isn't it funny? We all ran into each other at the same time, on the same night, at the same bar in the same town. I believe everything happens for a reason. Don't you?

CELESTE

I think I will have some of your avocado dip.

YUMA

You must find your bliss.

CELESTE

Bliss does not a living make.

VIOLET

What are you reading these days?

YUMA

Two books. One is called *The Seven Secrets to Spiritual Domination*.

CELESTE

What's the other?

YUMA

*The Woman who Thinks like a Cow.*

CELESTE

What's that about?

YUMA

Animals think in images, not words.

CELESTE

Oh.

VIOLET

I wish that metaphysical stuff worked for me. I'm a free spirit, I guess.

(CELESTE sprinkles sunflower seeds over what has become a huge mound of food)

CELESTE

I've read everything, I've seen everything, heard everything, I have run out. I don't want to know anything. Learn anything. There is nothing left to know. I am no longer curious about the world. The itch has been scratched. Burnt out. End of the road. Satiated. I don't want to learn anything ever again.

YUMA

The only knowledge I want is spiritual joy.

VIOLET

Cheerleading?

YUMA

This is our spiritual space suit in our earth dance of life. We are all connected to the universe. Our bodies are only here to house our spirits as we leave our carbon footprints on this planet. We all share the same universal unconscious. The same hopes and fears. The universe offers everything. All we have to do is ask for it. We are complete as we are.

(VIOLET and CELESTE roll their eyes at this comment)

VIOLET

I'm so glad the two of you came over. I'm sick of solitude. Hey, that's catchy. Sick of a sea of solitary solitude in silence.

(YUMA pulls small book from purse and reads out loud)

YUMA

This is from, *The Book of Eternal and Esoteric Spiritual Secrets*. "Pessimism will bring you bad results. If you want a candidate to win, you should vote against him. You are what you resist."

CELESTE

But how do you apply all that? I mean in real life? Not in elections. Those are rigged anyway. They just run so they can pocket the campaign money.

VIOLET

I don't get it. I don't see the difference between all that and prayer.

CELESTE

I don't "i" ther.

YUMA

I never understood that. Which is correct, either or "i" ther?

VIOLET

Celeste always thought that European crap was sophisticated. Like those boring-ass movies she used to watch late at night on TV. I hate sub-titles.

CELESTE

I quit going to the movies. There's nothing out there now. Nothing but escape. Blow up something or have your life solved in the end through romantic love.

VIOLET

Everything I see looks like a sketch from *Saturday Night Live*. Rock sounds like Country. Country sounds like pop. It all runs together. I stopped listening.

CELESTE

It's not about music. It's about choreographed dancing as you sing. I was looking at the so-called Best Seller List the other day. I noticed none of them were novels. They were all murder mysteries. What does that tell you?

VIOLET

I like warped murder mysteries.

YUMA

There are some good Spiritual Romance writers out there. That is, if you like that sort of thing. It's a new genre.

CELESTE

Movies used to be a step above TV. An art form of sorts, if you will. Now the movies imitate TV. You can't escape TV.

CELEST (CONT'D)

There's nothing to see, nothing to hear, nothing to read.

YUMA

There's a better world ahead of us. This world is only an illusion.

VIOLET

I want everything to stay the same as it is now. In this pleasant little town, with its pleasant little college, and pleasant little river where you can tube and lie in the sun everyday and drink, ad infinitum. I want to just stay in my pleasant administrative job at the pleasant little college and never have to return to the real world again.

CELESTE

I can't take anymore escape.

VIOLET

A river runs through it. Get it? Not a serious school. A party school. Sort of like L.S.U.

CELESTE

The river is shallow. Like relationships today.

YUMA

Maybe you should call one of your plays that title, Celeste. What do you think?

CELESTE

What?

YUMA

A river runs through it.

(A long silence follows)

CELESTE

I don't write anymore. There is no place for my kind of writing anymore. Or my painting. Or my fiction. Or my poetry. There is no place for the experimental anymore. Nothing is new. No one is open to innovation. It's all formula. Structured into a left-brain hell run by left-brain Nazis. Expressionism is dead. There is no place for me or what I value in this culture.

YUMA

I've always wanted to live in India.

VIOLET

I feel sad that college didn't work out for you, Celeste Not as you had hoped, anyway.

CELESTE

Sad ain't the word, Jack--

VIOLET

--Yuma, why don't you do one of your old cheers from high school?

(YUMA checks door lock)

CELESTE

Why do you keep checking the front door? You've done it several times. Are you expecting someone to break in or something?--

VIOLET

--The sounds of the river rushing over the rocks helps me fall asleep at night.

YUMA

Have you tried Melatonin?

CELESTE

College seemed to me to be like one big franchise. Like Starbucks. Even the police got into the action. Giving out all those traffic tickets. They fed off the students like tits on a hog.

VIOLET

My grandpa used to say that.

YUMA

Yeah, I remember him. Riding his tractor. Back in the days when there were farms and cows and horses.

CELESTE

Your family had a daily drama everyday, Violet. Everyone in your family was always fighting. Every time I went over there.

VIOLET

There wasn't a day gone by when me or my siblings weren't beaten.

YUMA

A long line of alcoholics dating back to the fifth century.

CELESTE

What your family thought was normal was nothing more than drinking and fighting and...

VIOLET

They thought that was normal. They thought everybody was like that.

YUMA

Yeah, so did most of the rest of the town.

VIOLET

The drama of our lives. As the world turns.

CELESTE

Wasn't there a book called that? I can't remember who wrote it.

YUMA

Was it Mickey Rooney?

CELESTE

There are no defined steps in drama. No certainties. No guarantees.

YUMA

The drama of our lives.

VIOLET

You were so pretty as a teenager, Yuma. But you had no confidence. If you had any, you would have been head cheerleader. I always thought you were so much prettier than your sister.

YUMA

That's a very nice thing for you to say, Violet. Thank you for reminding me of that fact. Thank you for reminding me that everything turned to gold for her and turned to shit for me.

VIOLET

You're welcome.

CELESTE

Tell me, Yuma. I always wondered something. When you got married before graduating from high school, was that just to get away from your sister? And your family?

(YUMA checks door on way to kitchen. She pours glass of wine and chews a new wad of nicotine gum)

VIOLET

Her first husband had to be beating her in order to have an orgasm.

CELESTE

What?

YUMA

She's making a joke. Violet always had a weird sense of humor.

VIOLET

(giggles)

Celeste, you were so smart in high school. I'm sorry we used to call you, "the brain."

YUMA

It paid off. That's why she got that scholarship up north to that fancy girls' college.

VIOLET

The one for snotty, rich lesbians. That's where she got that aloof manner. That's why she smacks her lips now when she eats--

YUMA

--Celeste, let me pour you some more wine.

(YUMA pours wine slowly into glass as CELESTE stares at floor)

VIOLET

Yuma, you were so much prettier in high school than your short, ugly, sister.

YUMA

I think you said that earlier, Violet.

CELESTE

Yes, you did say it earlier, Violet.

VIOLET

That's not true. I never repeat myself. I repeat. I never repeat myself.

YUMA

I get that joke.

CELESTE

So do I.

(Silence as NEITHER laugh at HER joke. VIOLET changes subject)

VIOLET

Celeste, would you do one of your monologues for us? Please? Just for us? Please?

CELESTE

No!

YUMA

Why not? I haven't seen you act since high school.

CELESTE

(mumbling reluctantly)

I am a seagull. No, that's not it. I'm an actress. No, I'm a seagull...an actress...no, a seagull...no, I'm an actress...torment! I have nothing else, where are my steps going? I AM LOST! Scattered!

VIOLET

No, not that Chekhov crap or whoever that is. Something you wrote yourself. Something unique and original. Something that comes from the real you. Something unlike anyone else.

YUMA

You are the gift to the world. We all are gifts to the world. You, me, I, we are the gifts to the world. Who we each are is what we have to give to the world.

CELESTE

The world does not want my gifts.

YUMA

Yes, Celeste. Please show us some of your new work. Something new that you have written.

(Lights dim to show only CELESTE'S face as she performs a Samuel Beckett-like monologue)

CELESTE

(speaking rapidly)

Hurdling through space to no where. Through time zones. Dark, always dark. Save the sparkling stars that whiz by me, not bothering to acknowledge the fathom before them.

(screams loudly)

Mass confusion. Voice, voices in my head. Mother voice, father voice, sister voice, brother voice. Ex-boyfriend voice. Every voice but my own. My voice disappears. Not paying rent in my head. Live there for free. I let them live there for free.

(screams)

No there, there, no me there, like Oakland, California, quicksand. Sinking into mediocrity. Make your art safe. So people can digest it. But don't dare call it art. Don't be a threat. Make it silly. Talk in a funny voice and you'll succeed as a comedian. Don't write like Strindberg.

CELESTE

Write like Sitcoms! Breathe!

(panting rapidly)

Not mediocre enough to succeed. Better roles off Broadway. Not allowed to talk as a child. Everything criticized. Everything still criticized. Crucifixion, only I am not in heaven. Survive, Survivor TV show. Not survival of the fittest. The weak destroy the fittest. Gang up on them. The fittest have neurological issues.

## CELESTE (CONT'D)

Make them fit between the lines. Proper format. Don't help you. Won't help you. Fall between the cracks. No one to pull you back.

(screams)

Coal in stocking. Should have been a boy. Third child, unwanted child. Accidental child. One child too many. One more than two. Always outside the family. Stayed that way. Outside the world as we know it. Don't understand relationships with others. Best friend, the TV.

(screams)

Breathe!

(panting loudly)

Live for art. Art died. No curiosity about the world. Seen it, heard it, read it. Nothing more. Didn't work out. What will gravestone say? Education good. Education bad. Done it. Itch has been scratched. Time to get off. Nothing more to do. Leap off the edge of the earth into the deep, dark hole of space. Breathe!

(panting)

Outside the cage. Cackling, cackling women. Everywhere. Tried office job. Gossips drove her to suicide. Pulled into whirlpool. Computer taken over. Wait for computer to ding before moving forward.

(screams)

Must stay out of whirlpool. News flash. Ex-boyfriend. Eat myself to death. Past drags behind me like a heavy, Navy duffle bag.

(pants)

Dragging baggage with me across the airport. Ruled by sadistic, mediocrity. Cooking for him. Cleaning for him. He burps after dinner. Unbuttons his belt buckle.

(screams, then pants)

Therapist can't stop reality. See the fish flounder. See the fish flop and die. Real funny stuff. They take, take, take. I give, give, give. She's a jerk humanist. A do-gooder.

(panting)

Every man for himself. The American way. Can't stop eating. Eat, tear flesh, jaw crashing down, grinding, in act of aggression. Like a shark. Attack, tear, retreat, attack, rip jaws side to side, retreat rapidly in the ocean before the currents change.

(screams)

I watch sniper movies for entertainment. Picture self stabbing him in the throat when he enters room. Someone keeps calling my name. I turn and they aren't there. Striving, striving, push the rock up the hill, watch it roll back down.

## CELESTE

Squirrel cage spins going nowhere. No cheese at end of corridor. Rage, rage, Add to stockpile of rage. File it there. Nothing more can do. Keep moving. Move on to next disappointment. Be dead some day. All will be over. Breathe!

(pants)

CELESTE (CONT'D)

Pulled into mud of mediocrity with them. Went to therapist, tried to pork me, then told me I was a manipulative Borderline Personality-type. Therapist can't stop reality. Better parts Off Broadway. Allergic to everything. Can't breathe. Boredom, boredom, stifling, air cut off, suffocating. Maybe I've got TB. Crawl forward toward the inevitable cliff. Leap, like the sheep over the edge, follow the herd with one great leap. Breathe!

(screams, then pants)

(Lights come up to reveal CELESTE, head down, wet with sweat, breathing heavily, as VIOLET and YUMA stare in shocked silence)

VIOLET

That was very nice.

(VIOLET elbows YUMA and they applaud softly)

CELESTE

You mean you liked it?

YUMA

I liked it a lot.

VIOLET

I think you found your niche. You should go back to it. I mean it. Really.

YUMA

Yeah, I've never seen anything like it.

CELESTE

Did you think it was visceral? Guttural? Primordial? Existential?

YUMA

I thought it was deep.

CELESTE

You don't think it was too esoteric?

VIOLET

No, it was just esoteric enough.

CELESTE

I didn't think anyone would like anything these days that doesn't sound like bad TV. Something without dick jokes or diamond-engagement rings at the end. Stuff for those that can't get past the emotional age of twelve.

YUMA

A lot of people can't. A lot of people are afraid to leave college. I think I'll have some more wine. Can I get anyone anything while I'm up?

VIOLET

Yes, Yuma. I'd still like you to do one of your yells from high school.

(YUMA shakes head no, checks door, crosses to kitchen, pours a full glass of wine)

YUMA

Celeste, have you ever thought about going into drama therapy? You could help others I'm sure. With your insights and all.

CELESTE

Help is a dirty word. Codependent I think they call it. Those who help are sick.

VIOLET

Oh, I had forgotten the drama-therapy thing. I remember you showed us the thing with the Teddy Bear puppets once. After you went into therapy, Yuma.

CELESTE

After you were molested by your father.

VIOLET

What? You were?

YUMA

She's making a joke. I guess your sense of humor is wearing off on her. That wasn't me! It was someone else. Yeah, I'd forgotten about the puppets. Thanks for bringing it all back up.

CELESTE

I remember that phase. My parents sent me to therapy too. They thought I was too obsessive.

VIOLET

Show us again, Yuma! Please? Oh, please? It was so much fun. We used to role play with dolls forever. It was like they were living, breathing things.

YUMA

Phase? Did you say phase?

VIOLET

Yuma, are you frowning? It takes less muscles to smile. If you smile, the world smiles with you.

CELESTE

Let her frown if she wants to. Frown and the world frowns with you.

VIOLET

Yuma was always frowning. Back in high school, you were pretty and smart. Your sister was short and chubby. There was nothing appealing about her but she was always surrounded by boys and you were all alone. There was nothing appealing about her and you had everything going for you. Well, I guess she did have personality.

YUMA

She was personality personified! Everybody loved her! Everything turned to gold for her and turned to dirt for me. I've had to work hard for every single little thing. Meanwhile, everything was just handed to her! It's always been that way and it will always be that way!

(YUMA crosses quickly to a shelf, grabs two Teddy Bears, and shoves one of them into CELESTE'S hands)

CELESTE

But I don't feel like playing Teddy-Bear puppets. I'm not in the mood for pop therapy of any form. That crap never worked for anybody.

YUMA

We're playing Teddy-Bear puppets! This is what she wants and we are doing it! My sister was not the only one with personality, god dam it!

CELESTE

So...who do you want me to play? What do you want me to do with this bear?

YUMA

Just play the stupid game! The one I had to play out with that stupid therapist! The one that was getting his training for his doctorate in counseling! The only one we could afford! The one that filmed me like I was some sort of guinea pig to use as his thesis! So, you play "daddy" god damn it! I thought you were supposed to be some kind of actress or something? So act, god dam it!

CELESTE

All right. Got it. Let's see, play the father. OK, just give me a moment to get in character.

(THEY sit in chairs facing each other. CELESTE clears her throat, takes a deep breath, closes her eyes, and mumbles to herself to figure out how to play the part)

YUMA

Well Celeste, now that you are breathing from your diaphragm...

(CELESTE opens eyes)

CELESTE

I'm ready.

YUMA

(in little girl voice)

Are we going to play Teddy Bear games now daddy?

CELESTE

Of course, Yuma my dear. Every little girl has their own private Teddy Bear, you know. Lots of little girls sleep with their Teddies.

YUMA

But I am tired of playing Teddy Bear, daddy.

CELESTE

But why? Everyone plays it. You don't want to be different from the other girls, do you?

YUMA

But daddy. I don't know anyone else who plays hide-the-Teddy Bear with their daddies.

CELESTE

Hide?

YUMA

But why daddy? Why will you not let me talk about hide-the-Teddy games with anyone else?

CELESTE

What? I don't think...

(Yuma violently yanks bear from CELESTE, puts both bears in her lap, facing each other)

YUMA

OK daddy. I won't talk to anyone about it, ever.

YUMA (AS DADDY)

That's my good little girl. Now, you get ready for bed and I will come in a little while to tuck you and your Teddy into bed.

(YUMA'S manner changes to a near-psychotic state)

YUMA

No daddy...no, it's not right. Other children sleep with their Teddy Bears not with their daddies...not like we do...they sleep with it. They don't hide it...no daddy, it hurts...please stop...I don't like the Teddy-Bear-game anymore.

YUMA (AS DADDY)

You don't want to be sent away from daddy do you?

YUMA

No, daddy. I don't want anything to ever come between us, except for Teddy.

(CELESTE rises abruptly)

CELESTE

Enough! Game over! I need to heat up that baked potato I saw in the fridge!

(CELESTE crosses to kitchen. VIOLET pauses, then politely applauds the puppet performance)

VIOLET

What a great job! I loved it! Now...look, Yuma, I need to give you a present. One that I have been saving for you all these years.

YUMA

What is it?

(VIOLET crosses to top shelf, grabs box, opens it, and hands YUMA a cheerleader outfit from high school. YUMA stares at it in shock)

VIOLET

Remember when we broke into the gym and stole it? You're the only one from high school who could still wear such a thing. Despite your high school pregnancy.

(CELESTE crosses from kitchen with meat cutter sticking out of her back pocket. SHE holds whole potato in one hand and head of lettuce in other and takes healthy bites from each)

CELESTE

What? Did you say pregnant?

YUMA stares, eyes fixed, like a zombie.

VIOLET

Just kidding. Quick, Celeste, let's make her up for her cheer yells!

(VIOLET applies makeup to YUMA, making her look like Betty Boop with red rouge and lipstick, pale make up, mascara that makes her eyes look very large, and puts her hair in tight pigtails)

CELESTE

I don't know, Stormy. It's a bit...I'm not so sure if this is...she kind of looks like a corpse.

VIOLET

(giggles)

Nonsense, it's fine the way it is. Well, what are you waiting on, Yuma? Put the uniform on!

(YUMA strips compliantly to her underwear and puts on outfit in slow movements as if hypnotized)

VIOLET

Wait, let's play some marching music to go with the cheer! Something like John Philip Sousa.

CELESTE

Yuck.

(VIOLET plays loud music that sounds like a high-school-football game)

CELESTE

I'll help you, Yuma! Let's do the yell for Violet! Real loud for Violet!

(CELESTE and YUMA stand in middle of room and act out cheer yells in synchronized way)

YUMA AND CELESTE

Go team go! Go team go! Go team go!

(YUMA holds tightly to Teddy Bear as CELESTE bites into potato and lettuce and spits out bits of food as SHE yells)

VIOLET

Remember the pep squad!

(VIOLET puts on white gloves in imitation of the high school pep squad and claps along with the yells)

YUMA AND CELESTE

Defense! Defense! Defense!

(THEY push hands outward as if pushing someone away)

VIOLET

You both remember the movements so well!

YUMA AND CELESTE

Push'em back, push'em back, way back! Push'em back...

(THEY advance toward VIOLET who straightens back nervously as THEY get closer to her)

VIOLET

(giggles nervously)

You're bringing it all back! I'm so glad you both came over tonight!

YUMA AND CELESTE

Defense, defense, defense!

(THEY advance toward VIOLET, pushing, arms out)

VIOLET

(shifting weight)

That's so funny. I'd forgotten how comic it all was back then. We took it all so seriously.

YUMA AND CELESTE

Push 'em back, push 'em back, push 'em back, way back, push 'em back, way back!

(THEY get closer and closer to VIOLET)

VIOLET

Oh right I get the point. If you are going to act like this then maybe you should just leave.

YUMA AND CELESTE

Hold that line! Hold that line! Push 'em back, push 'em back, way back!

VIOLET

Look, I'm sorry, maybe I shouldn't have brought any of this up.

(VIOLET lowers head and holds up hands to fend THEM off as THEY continue toward her)

YUMA

You've said you were sorry many times in the past, Violet. I'm beginning to think you didn't really mean it.

VIOLET

Look, I'll change. It's not too late. I want to preserve the friendships. You're the only permanence I have left in the world.

CELESTE

They don't have permanence anymore. That went out of fashion a long time ago.

YUMA

Edgy is "in" now. The brattier you are the better!

VIOLET

Look, I'm sorry. I was just trying to help. Help both of you. Like a big sister would.

(YUMA yells in high voice, holds Teddy Bear in one hand, as THEY jump up and down between yells)

YUMA AND CELESTE

Defense, defense, defense! Hold that line! Hold that line! Hold that line! Push 'em back, push 'em back, way back! Push 'em back! Way back! Push 'em back, push 'em back, way back!

(THEY get closer to VIOLET who slumps to floor. CELESTE pulls meat cutter from her back pocket, raises it over head to strike a blow to VIOLET)

VIOLET

No! Don't! Please don't! No!

(The meat cutter shakes in CELESTE's trembling hand. SHE swings ax forward, stops mid-way, and then tosses it to floor)

CELESTE

No, we're not going to kill you. You could go to prison for that. I'm not willing to go to prison for you or anyone like you.

(looking at YUMA)

Are you OK, Yuma?

(YUMA removes cheerleader outfit. Stripped to her underwear, she crosses room and sits at small table)

YUMA

I'm fine. Couldn't be better.

(YUMA undoes pigtails, brushes hair, wipes off makeup. SHE speaks in deeper, level, voice. HER manner seems more mature)

CELESTE

You sound different. Sort of serene like.

YUMA

I'm used to this. This is the way you have to treat people before they will leave you alone. You have to tell them what they want to hear. Once you've done that, they will leave you alone and you can go back to what you were doing before. It's what you have to do to get through the day. So you can go home to your cave at night and be left in peace.

CELESTE

That's profound. I wish I had said it. You mean you were in control the whole time? Wasn't she pushing your buttons? I thought you were losing it for a minute there.

YUMA

A little. Some.

CELESTE

You're a real survivor.

YUMA

I prefer spiritual warrior.

CELESTE

Yeah. Spiritual warrior. I like that. How do you become one of those?

YUMA

I've had to deal with people like her my whole life. They want you in the mud with them. I'm not going to be stopped by the likes of her kind. Let her live in her world of warm shit. See if I care. I say throw your worst at me. Bring it on. I can deal with the worst they can dish out. I'm going to teach kids to be cheerleaders. Eventually, I'll move on to teaching them something else. But I am not going to be dragged down by the likes of them. She is not going to piss on my parade. No one is ever going to again.

CELESTE

Me neither!

(CELESTE throws head of lettuce at VIOLET. It strikes HER but SHE barely stirs)

YUMA

So, now that I know what I'm going to do. What are you going to do?

CELESTE

Huh?

(YUMA brushes hair. CELESTE looks at VIOLET then looks back at YUMA)

YUMA

I'm waiting.

CELESTE

Aw, screw 'em. There's no money in that Brecht business. I'm going where the money is. Piss on all of them. I can write that TV crap. A lot better than them. I'll take over Hollywood and become a mogul. I can do it. Beat them at their own game. I'm tired of the abuse. If they want empty-headed, airhead crap, I'll give it to them. In spades. I'm tired of wearing this hair shirt. I could write that Sex-in-the-City dog shit in my sleep.

YUMA

I'm sure you can. It's not like you're selling your soul to the devil.

(CELESTE drags computer table and chair to middle of room, sits, fixes hair in bun, puts on glasses, and narrates as she types on small laptop)

CELESTE

Let's see, I'll start with having my female characters "doing lunch" somewhere...somewhere like...Beverly Hills.

YUMA

Brunch might be better. It sounds more European.

CELESTE

Yeah, more sophisticated. Thanks. Now let's see, brunch, where? Oh...let me think...

YUMA

How about the Four Seasons?

CELESTE

Of course, the Four Seasons! Why didn't I think of that?

(CELESTE begins typing)

YUMA

Is she a journalist?

CELESTE

How did you know? She writes for a fashion magazine for women.

YUMA

Kind of glossy? But not too deep?

CELESTE

Yeah, lots of pop psychology articles on subjects like...

YUMA

Like, "10 mistakes women make with men?"

(CELESTE acknowledges the idea and types rapidly in deep concentration)

CELESTE

Let's see. Where were we?

YUMA

They're having brunch.

CELESTE

Oh yes, brunch. Let's see, what could they be eating? What DO dumb asses that are trying to be sophisticated eat?

YUMA

How about flaming crepes?

CELESTE

Excellent! Let's see, I need her to be interviewing someone. Someone like a celebrity.

YUMA

How about a famous fashion designer?

CELESTE

Right, his new line of fashion is out! Got it! Now, I guess he needs a name.

YUMA

How about Izada?

CELESTE

Yes, like the alligator-shirt thing. OK, she interviews Izada about his hot new fashion line. After that, I guess I will need a profile on someone else...

(CELESTE stares at computer screen as YUMA checks makeup in mirror)

YUMA

How about a pop star? They're big today as role models. No matter how bad their music is. As long as they can dance.

CELESTE

Yes, it's so obvious, thank you. What should I, ah, we, call her? How about Bristol...Adams?

YUMA

That's a good rock star name..

CELESTE

I'm glad you think so. Now, let's see, I need an angle for the article.

YUMA

How about her political views?

CELESTE

Yes, the election! Politics, that will get the masses stirred up!

YUMA

Now, that she's out of rehab.

CELESTE

I like it...

YUMA

Fans can look to her for direction.

CELESTE

Good. Now that she's out of rehab...fans can look to her for direction. And then she...

YUMA

Does she get her nails done after the brunch?

CELESTE

Nails done? Yes, of course she does. Her nails. She goes to a spa...where she meets the other girls. At the salon on...Santa Monica Boulevard...

YUMA

No, Melrose Ave.

CELESTE

Melrose Avenue. Yes. Where they get their nails done...and drink...

YUMA

Chocolate Martinis?

CELESTE

They toast and have girl talk about...

YUMA

Their boyfriends.

CELESTE

Yes, their boyfriends. What should I name the other characters? How about...Mad..e...son? Madison.

YUMA

Or Blythe.

CELESTE

Blythe? Yes, Madison and Blythe.

YUMA

One of them could have a boy toy.

CELESTE

Boy toy? Yes, right. Boy toy. Blythe, no Madison, has a boy toy, half her age...a budding soap opera star...who gave her a diamond ring...which is not an engagement ring...she would refuse it otherwise...to keep her independence. To keep her independence.

YUMA

Does Blythe have a penthouse?

CELESTE

Blythe, meanwhile, says she may divorce her corporate-attorney husband because he will not allow her to paint their penthouse chartreuse, which is the latest rage.

YUMA

(whispering)

Her lover on the side...

CELESTE

Her lover?

YUMA

She doesn't mind the divorce so much.

(The script is turning more into a game of Charades with YUMA feeding the lines)

CELESTE

Because..this allows her to spend more time with her lover...

YUMA

French. French lover. Rich.

CELESTE

(speaking more quickly)

I got it. Besides, this will give her a chance to spend more time with her lover, the French con man who has amassed a fortune in paintings through food-stamp fraud.

YUMA

Yes, that's it.

CELESTE

Lying on a table with a mud pack and cucumbers over her eyes, she is startled when someone hands her a cell phone.

CELESTE (CONT'D)

Her dutiful assistant is on the line to remind her she needs to be at the Spielberg reception that evening for the release of his new superhero film...

YUMA

*Tarantula Man.*

CELESTE

*Tarantula Man.* But...what am I, uh, she, going to wear for an outfit and accessories? How about black with a pearl necklace?

YUMA

Too much like the movie. They will think you are trying to hide your weight. Besides, black went out years ago.

CELESTE

Pink? No, too trendy. Too...

YUMA

Marie Antoinette?

(YUMA applies lipstick, checks lips in mirror)

CELESTE

Right, I'll get that in here. How about...a peach gown...very L.A...jade earrings...China is big now...they are about to take over, and white pumps, since this is an election year and white is like the White House...or maybe...

(YUMA turns toward VIOLET, presses lips together as if to say, "kiss off," to the motionless VIOLET)

(Lights fade out)

END OF PLAY

**CHAPTER III**

*HOW TO GET RICH*

a play in one act

by Tommy LeVrier

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CHARACTERS

HUSTON - 30s, overly educated, fastidious, and composed but becomes more and more unraveled.

DAFFNEY - Wife of Huston, 30s, pretty, suffers from Attention Deficit Disorder, an entrepreneur, dresses a little frumpy.

UNCLE HOWIE - Over 100 in age but looks decades younger. Despite a moustache, he dons a dress and a lady's wig as a disguise.

OFFICER SUE - Austin cop, 30s, her low voice makes it hard to tell what gender she is.

MISS PIGGY - Their pet, Pot-Bellied Pig.

TIME

The present. Late at night in first scene. Last scene occurs several days later during morning hours.

PLACE

Daffney and Huston traveling from Houston to Austin in their convertible Volkswagen Bug in First Scene.

Second Scene, they return to their small, cluttered, Houston apartment. Kitchen connects to a living room that contains coffee table, couch, arm chair, computer, phone, TV.

SCENE ONE

(Lights rise on HUSTON and DAFFNEY loading suitcases, suit hanger, and other bags into convertible Volkswagen Bug. SHE carries their pet, "MISS PIGGY," in her arms)

HUSTON

Hurry up! We've got to get going! We don't need everything. It's just for one day.

DAFFNEY

Where did you say we're going? It's late. I'm tired. I've had a long...

HUSTON

Well, if you would answer your cell phone! I thought you would never get home. They want me to go to the Human Resources Department in Austin tomorrow morning.

DAFFNEY

I told you over and over! The cell phone is dead! I can't afford new batteries for it! Or a new charger! The phone is outdated enough as it is! And if I don't pay Sprint soon, they are going to cut me off again!

HUSTON

I thought you'd never get home! They want me to be in Austin at the University of Texas Human Resources Department early tomorrow morning!

DAFFNEY

The University of Texas? That's the job you wanted!

HUSTON

We have to hurry. The interviewer is leaving for vacation in the morning. We got to catch him before he leaves.

DAFFNEY

Why don't you go in the morning? I'm too tired. I've taken meetings all day...

HUSTON

If we did that we would have to leave at four a.m. I'd be dead by the time I got there. Look, I told you, if you can't make it, I'll go without you.

DAFFNEY

Without me?

HUSTON

We'll grab a motel and I can get a few hours sleep before the meeting.

DAFFNEY

I hope you remembered your dark blue suit and your red power tie.

(THEY jump in Bug and HE starts engine)

HUSTON

You're not bringing Miss Piggy are you? It's got a cold. It breathes too loud. I can't stand all that snorting.

DAFFNEY

She's not an it! I'm not leaving her alone. Besides, it's too late to get a sitter. Don't worry. She'll stay with me at the motel while you're at the job interview.

(Their neighbor HOWIE, wearing a dress and a lady's wig, approaches HUSTON and hands him a briefcase in somber manner)

UNCLE HOWIE

You'll need these, Huston.

DAFFNEY

What are they?

UNCLE HOWIE

Resumes. That sort of stuff. I found them lying on the sidewalk. Ya'll making enough racket out here to raise the dead.

HUSTON

Thanks Howie. I must have dropped them. Sorry for the noise. Wish us luck.

UNCLE HOWIE

Here, let me give you a little something to sweeten up your trip.

(HOWIE reaches into wallet and hands him a handful of bills)

HUSTON

That's OK, Howie, we'll be all right. Thanks anyway. See you in a day or so.

(HOWIE shrugs and puts money back in wallet)

UNCLE HOWIE

Well...bye, bye.

(THEY honk horn and wave as they "drive off."  
HOWIE waves goodbye)

DAFFNEY

That guy gives me the creeps.

HUSTON

There's always a neighbor like that no matter where you go.

DAFFNEY

If you say so. I'll be careful with Miss Piggy. I won't let her...she won't wreck your job interview.

HUSTON

It's not exactly a job interview.

DAFFNEY

What is it then?

HUSTON

It's sort of...a typing test.

DAFFNEY

Didn't you take the typing test already at The Work Source in Houston?

HUSTON

They said it was the wrong test.

DAFFNEY

Why didn't they give you the right one?

HUSTON

They didn't have the right one. They said if I want to be considered for the job I need to drive to Austin and take the U.T. Typing Test.

DAFFNEY

I never heard of the U.T. Typing Test.

HUSTON

The Worksource hadn't heard of it either.

DAFFNEY

What about the Texas Work Force Commission? Didn't they have the test?

HUSTON

They never heard of it either. Nor had Work in Texas or Texas Health and Human Services. Apparently, only U.T. has the U.T. Typing Test.

DAFFNEY -

Let me get this straight. We're driving to Austin to take a typing test? Why so early?

HUSTON

I told you, we have to get there early in the morning. That's the only time they offer the test.

DAFFNEY

Why didn't you go to Monster.com?

HUSTON

Don't start.

DAFFNEY

I hope you get it after all this.

HUSTON

(reads road sign)

OK, Beltway 8. That's what we need. We have to negotiate Beltway 8.

DAFFNEY

Why aren't you getting back on the Beltway? You're on the feeder road.

HUSTON

And I'm staying on the feeder road! I'm not paying for toll roads! We've paid for these roads 10 times over already with our taxes!

DAFFNEY

OK, OK. Have it your way.

HUSTON

Besides, we can't afford to pay for the tolls.

DAFFNEY

Looks like the Beltway is about to dead end.

HUSTON

They never finished building it. We've got to somehow get on to 290 East. But the map didn't tell you how to get on it from here.

DAFFNEY

We'll figure it out.

HUSTON

Look at all these freeways crossing. It reminds me of that silent film, "Metropolis." Their vision of the future is here. Why won't they put up any signs to tell us where we need to turn?

DAFFNEY

There, there's the 290. Go under that bridge, now veer to the right, now, quick, take the left lane on to the 290. Good, that's the on ramp, yes, take that, hit the gas pedal, if we can make it up the ramp we will be on the freeway.

HUSTON

Thank god. We did it. Somehow, we finally made it out of Houston.

DAFFNEY

I don't know why you think Houston is such a godforsaken hellhole. I've got my family there, my part-time CPA business at tax time, and the property that I'm going to put my ranch on.

HUSTON

You left out your new real estate business based on the possibility of buying foreclosures. Don't worry, we'll find some more property in Austin if you feel you MUST do the rural trip. God, there's nothing out here but empty space. It's so dark.

DAFFNEY

Rural trip?

HUSTON

I don't know why I'm bothering. White male, over 30, overqualified. I'm willing to take the low pay. I'm afraid they'll feel threatened. Besides men aren't hired anymore. We're the last on the list.

DAFFNEY

But you could do the job.

HUSTON

What's that got to do with it? I just hope someone there will be half-way fair. Most of them are only feathering their own nests.

DAFFNEY

You can say that again, that's what happened to me at that insurance job I just got fired from.

HUSTON

They don't care about the job, they'll only hire someone who doesn't threaten their cozy little set up.

DAFFNEY

Control freaks.

HUSTON

It's naive of me to bother but I really want this job. It could be a good long-term gig. And out of Houston.

DAFFNEY

I know, we'll storm the gates, Braveheart, mythic-hero style. Star Wars...U.T...is the empire.

HUSTON

Only the privileged few can enter those gates.

DAFFNEY

Or athletes on steroids.

HUSTON

Who am I kidding? They've already got a person picked. A 24-year-old U.T. graduate that types and doesn't think. A young, female automaton they can work to death and not pay. Or someone with an English accent. They think that's very sophisticated.

DAFFNEY

Americans will buy anything. I did a damn good job at that insurance business! I turned it around. They made money for the first time and expanded. My thanks? Fire me, that's what! How are we going to pay the rent? I did everything right. The way you are supposed to. I joined the Rotary, I gave to the church...and now I got the I.R.S, the credit cards, and Country Loan finance on my ass! I just wish they would all fall into bankruptcy!

HUSTON

Doing a good job has nothing to do with it. Everything is the opposite today. Your friends are your enemies, your enemies are your friends. The government has declared war on its own. It's like something is in the middle causing both sides to clash. Creating chaos. I'm getting depressed.

DAFFNEY

Organized chaos. No regulations. An Orwellian fake-war. I wish I brought the little TV. We could watch a western.

HUSTON

We'll storm the gates Rommel style...

DAFFNEY

I need to learn more about what they, the cowboys I mean, do on a ranch. First, I need to buy a bull, then a herd of milk cows, then a horse so I can separate them, then a truck and a trailer to take the cows to market.

HUSTON

For the fourth time. They are not called milk cows. Milk cows give milk. You want to buy BEEF cows not MILK cows. You aren't starting a dairy.

DAFFNEY

Oh yeah, I keep forgetting. Beef cows, beef cows, beef steers...

HUSTON

God, we've been driving forever. I need to think. I'm getting sleepy.

DAFFNEY

I have some Bees Wax, B-12, Ginseng, herbal tea, and some of those energy bars you hate so much.

HUSTON

I'll get some coffee.

DAFFNEY

I'm getting hungry. Come to think of it, I haven't seen a gas station for miles. We better fill up. I would hate to run out of gas before we reach Austin.

HUSTON

I have a feeling we aren't on the right road. I think we missed our turn to Austin.

DAFFNEY

I thought this road looked awfully small.

HUSTON

How are we going to pay for the gas? You wouldn't happen to have those gas coupons with you would you?

DAFFNEY

We have a five-dollar coupon from CITGO and one five-dollar coupon from Phillips 66. We haven't used them this quarter yet.

HUSTON

Which one merged with Mobil?

DAFFNEY

I don't know. Maybe Texaco. I get it mixed up as to who has bailed who out. I just wish someone would bail us out.

HUSTON

I see a sign for Austin. Thank god. We've only another 30 minutes or so to go. We better find a motel as soon as we get there. Do you still have those coupons for the motel discounts?

DAFFNEY

(examines coupons)

They're not good on Fridays.

HUSTON  
What time is it?

DAFFNEY  
It's almost three.

HUSTON  
God. OK, we'll speed up. We're almost there.

DAFFNEY  
Look, a freeway! Take it!

HUSTON  
Which way.

DAFFNEY  
Right.

(THEY lean together on right-swerve turn)

HUSTON  
OK, we're on the freeway. And we're almost there.

DAFFNEY  
Motels are cheaper on the outskirts of town. Let's start looking.

HUSTON  
I haven't seen one anyway. I don't think they have motels in Austin.

DAFFNEY  
Look! I see one!

HUSTON  
Where?

DAFFNEY  
Over there to the right in the distance. Oh hell, we passed the exit.

HUSTON  
I'll get off here at the this exit. We'll make a u-turn and come back.

DAFFNEY  
We can't.

HUSTON  
Why?

DAFFNEY  
It says detour.

HUSTON

Oh hell, we're going to have to take the side streets to get back to the motel.

DAFFNEY

Look out!

HUSTON

What is it?

DAFFNEY

It's a sea horse.

(THEY swerve together)

HUSTON

I don't think they call them sea horses. What do they call them? Sawhorse, that's it, they call them sawhorses.

DAFFNEY

That's good to know. Man, they have a lot of construction in this place.

HUSTON

I heard they have a traffic problem in Austin.

DAFFNEY

I think we're on a one-way street.

HUSTON

So?

DAFFNEY

I think we're going the wrong way.

HUSTON

(slamming brakes)

Why didn't you say something before?!

DAFFNEY

Look, I'm having a bad day.

HUSTON

Not now. Look, there's the sign for the motel. All we have to do is make a U, then back up the wrong way down a one-way street, jump the curb, and slide in between the sea horses, uh, saw horses, on that dirt road, and then pull in between all those paint buckets.

DAFFNEY

Where did the motel go? It was just here. I saw it.

HUSTON

So did I. I saw the sign but I can't figure out how to get to it.

DAFFNEY

Maybe we should make another U and come back again.

HUSTON

We better go find where my interview, uh, typing test is going to be first. Then we can come back. It can't be that far. The campus is somewhere near downtown.

DAFFNEY

It's a start. It's got to be near there. Look, stop here, I'll get the map out of the glove compartment.

(THEY stop car, park under a freeway near downtown Austin. SHE throws trash out of car in search for phone and map)

HUSTON

Hurry!

(OFFICER SUE approaches DAFFNEY and stands over her. DAFFNEY continues throwing trash then looks up to see cop)

DAFFNEY

Oh, hello officer.

SUE

Good evening, uh, morning.

DAFFNEY

Uh, hello, I'm Daffney and this is Huston. What's your name, ah, officer? If you don't mind me asking.

SUE

My name is Sue. How do you do?

HUSTON

Fine, how do you do?

DAFFNEY

How do you do. Are you Indian?

SUE

I've heard that joke before.

DAFFNEY

He's got to get to a typing...I mean, job interview, at the college by eight in the morning. That's why we are hurrying. We lost the map.

SUE  
(looking at watch)  
Which one?

DAFFNEY  
Which? Oh, colleges. How many are there here?

SUE  
More than you can slap a billy club at.

DAFFNEY  
Oh, you're making a joke. Huston, did you hear that? The police officer is making a funny joke.

(HUSTON frowns as SUE sticks head inside car)

SUE  
Is that blood?

HUSTON  
What? Oh my god! My red pen dripped down my shirt!

DAFFNEY  
You've got your suit in the back. The jacket will cover the stains.

SUE  
That suit?

(DAFFNEY pulls suit from back seat. HUSTON sees suit is covered with pig feces)

HUSTON  
What the hell? I told you to not bring that damned dumb-ass pig!

(MISS PIGGY squeals loudly, DAFFNEY comforts her)

DAFFNEY  
It's OK, Miss Piggy. Daddy didn't mean it.

HUSTON  
I hate that dam pig. Great. Now what in the hell am I going to do for a suit?

DAFFNEY  
You still have your dress shirt. And your tie. It's just a typing test.

HUSTON  
(in sarcastic high voice)  
It's just a typing test!

DAFFNEY

(quickly changes subject)

Ah, tell me, Officer Sue, do you happen to know of any cheap, foreclosure properties in the area?

SUE

We could stand to clean up a few crack houses.

DAFFNEY

Great, I'll give you a finder's fee.

SUE

Is that a bribe?

DAFFNEY

Bribe?

SUE

That's a joke.

DAFFNEY

Oh, you had me going. You could be a comedian.

SUE

Well...

DAFFNEY

You are a comedian! I knew it. This is your day job! You moonlight at night as a...

SUE

Everybody in Austin is either a performer, a musician, or an artist of some form. You'll find that out soon enough when you move here. If you move here.

HUSTON

Or a tree huger.

DAFFNEY

Maybe Austin will mellow him.

HUSTON

Not at this rate.

DAFFNEY

There is a devil!

HUSTON

I believe you.

DAFFNEY

Say, where do you perform your comedy act? When's your next gig?

HUSTON

Gig?

SUE

Thursday night open mike at the Chihuahua Room.

DAFFNEY

We'll come see you. Where? What time?

SUE

Sixth Street. Upstairs between the boxing gym and the Cuban cigar store.

DAFFNEY

We'll be there man. That is, if he gets the job. We have no friends in Austin. You'll be our first.

HUSTON

We don't have any friends in Houston either.

DAFFNEY

Nobody has any friends in Houston!

HUSTON

I thought you liked Houston?

DAFFNEY

I just told you that to shut you up! Nobody likes Houston!

HUSTON

Tell me, can you please tell us how to get to the Shambala Motel?

SUE

You want to stay in that neighborhood? Well, let's see. Get on 35, when you pass 183, get on the feeder, make a U, and come back down the other feeder. Before the light, jump the curb and head down the dirt road through the construction site. Then slide between the trash and empty paint cans and you're there.

DAFFNEY

That's what I thought.

(THEY are interrupted by a voice on police radio.  
SUE answers in official manner then hangs up)

SUE

Got to scoot. Good luck with the interview, I mean typing test.

HUSTON

Thanks. We really need the gig, ah, job.

DAFFNEY

We're behind on paying traffic tickets and our car insurance is...

HUSTON

She's trying to make a joke.

SUE

Is that what it was. I meant good luck finding the motel. Maybe they'll give you a finder's fee.

DAFFNEY

I don't get it. Thanks officer, we'll see you at the Chihuahua Room.

SUE

You might be the only ones there. Just remember, don't forget to laugh.

(SUE exits. HUSTON starts car and THEY drive away)

HUSTON

What the hell am I doing? We don't have time to drive to that stupid motel. I need to find this place. Got to get ready...got to take the typing test...got to focus, concentrate...got a cramp in my forearm at the last typing test...used to a laptop. They didn't give me enough room...my elbows kept hitting the table on my right and the potted plant on my left...they need a new software program...told me to concentrate on speed not accuracy. Did 51 words with 58 errors...

DAFFNEY

I just hope you get the job and you see your glorious Austin is not what you cracked it up to be. It's yesterday baby! A bunch of ex-hippies and their imitators. Legislative crooks and computer nerds. And college co-heads!

HUSTON

It's coeds not co-heads! As opposed to Houston. The dead end cow town still stuck in the eighties.

DAFFNEY

That's better than the seventies! The eighties is one decade ahead!

HUSTON

Cheer up. At the rate we're going I'll be lucky if I can even find the place.

DAFFNEY

OK, let's just find it. Now, where did you say the Human Resources building was again?

HUSTON

Guadalupe and...near...18th Street...behind the Advanced Technical Building for Environmental Studies.

DAFFNEY

18th Street! I see it! Looks like you can only turn right. It's got to be this way.

(HUSTON turns wheel sharply)

HUSTON

I'm going to pass this test. Going to storm the gates Braveheart style. If you make enough noise, they'll hire you. Make it impossible for them not to hire me. The squeaky wheel gets the grease...

DAFFNEY

Look, there it is, that glass building.

HUSTON

Where?

DAFFNEY

The sign that says, "We don't discriminate."

HUSTON

Like hell.

(HUSTON stops car, wraps Samurai bandanna around head, and revs engine)

DAFFNEY

What are you doing?

HUSTON

I'm going to crash the gates...like Braveheart...make it impossible for them not to hire me. Throw water on the witch...expose the Wizard of Oz...Here, take the wheel. Now put your foot on the gas pedal. Push the pedal all the way down.

(HUSTON pushes car in gear, stands up in seat, screams as they race toward pane glass window of H.R. building)

HUSTON

Aahhhh!...

(Lights fade to black. Loud sound of crashing glass followed by softer sounds of falling, tinkling, bits of glass. Sound of anguished squeals then soft oinks from MISS PIGGY. Police siren is heard in distance)

SCENE TWO

(Lights come up to reveal DAFFNEY and HUSTON in their small apartment a few days later. HUSTON practices Tai-Chi in living room with black eye, large bandages on hands and forehead as DAFFNEY rushes about checking computer, TV, answering machine, and work in kitchen)

DAFFNEY

I'm tired of buying meat from the nearly rotted meat bin! And dented cans of fruit. And 50-cent packages of hot dogs! I want the all-beef wieners! I deserve them! There's no telling what they put in those discount wienies.

HUSTON

(under breath)

Sinclair Lewis said they put in whatever falls to the floor in the meat packing plant.

DAFFNEY

Dining out to us is a \$1.25 burrito. Thanks to your Braveheart stunt at U.T! We have to drink the H.E.B. blend diet-cherry cola for 50 cents for a two-gallon bottle!

HUSTON

That's why my potassium is low. I think they call it a two-liter bottle these days, Daffney, not two gallon. It's part of the global takeover.

DAFFNEY

I don't know how we're going to pay the rent. The I.R.S. vultures are threatening to withhold my wages and hit my I.R.A. And now we have to pay the legal bills to keep you out of jail. I'll never live this down.

HUSTON

They say we didn't have these financial problems until the I.R.S. came along.

DAFFNEY

Or the Federal Reserve. "The Fed," as they say.

HUSTON

The Fed. That makes them sound almost friendly. Did I ever tell you the conspiracy theory regarding "the Fed" and the reason for the construction of the Titanic. It sunk because...

DAFFNEY

No, you didn't tell me and, frankly, I don't want to know. The movie was enough.

HUSTON

You can say that again. Oh, and by the way, the answering machine light is blinking. Someone or something is trying to call us.

DAFFNEY

I know it's on. I turned off the sound. I don't have to answer it to know what it's going to say. One call says we'll be charged \$50 if we don't get the rent in by tomorrow, another says \$35 if we don't get the credit card paid by Monday, \$15 if we don't get the water bill in, one call for a new satellite TV set up, and at least two credit cards trying to sell us their travel plan or their new program to protect us from identity theft.

HUSTON

I feel like they did steal my identity.

DAFFNEY

I don't know how we're going to pay all these bills. I know, I'll pray.

(DAFFNEY kneels to pray but interrupted by knock at door. THEY look at each other as if they don't want to answer it)

HUSTON

(whispering)

I hope it's not Howie.

(DAFFNEY slowly opens door)

DAFFNEY

Howie! How are you? Come on in!

(HOWIE brushes couch with tissue, sits, takes off wig, and tosses it on coffee table)

UNCLE HOWIE

Dam thing is too hot. Who hit you with the train?

DAFFNEY

He got that from his typing test.

UNCLE HOWIE

Typing test?

HUSTON

I'm not the right type.

DAFFNEY

It didn't matter anyway. After several follow-up calls someone finally confessed they had someone hired anyway. The job was only posted for legality sake.

UNCLE HOWIE

A little honesty never hurt.

DAFFNEY

It's a switch.

UNCLE HOWIE

Where Miss Piggy?

DAFFNEY

I gave her to a couple with a farm far out in the country. She was getting too big. She needed room to roam. She needed to be free. Besides, she shit all over Huston's suit.

HUSTON

My allergies are better since the pig left.

UNCLE HOWIE

Guess you not moving to Austin after all.

HUSTON

I can't seem to ever move to Austin. Every time I try something like this happens. Maybe there is a devil down there after all.

DAFFNEY

There is a devil. And please don't make fun of my Catholic religion.

UNCLE HOWIE

The Vatican. That's where they hid the stolen money. The Pope sits on it.

DAFFNEY

What stolen money?

HUSTON

We were just finishing breakfast. Would you like some toast?

(HOWIE nods. DAFFNEY brings him toast on a plate from kitchen)

DAFFNEY

Here, it's 26-grain from the Earth Moves Bakery Thrift Shop. I put some Weight Watchers Margarine on it.

(HOWIE covers hand with tissue and grabs plate from Daffney)

UNCLE HOWIE

Thank you.

DAFFNEY

What's the matter?

UNCLE HOWIE

The margarine doesn't seem to be melting.

HUSTON

It doesn't melt.

DAFFNEY

Look, if you don't like my cooking...

(HOWIE hands toast back to her. DAFFNEY offers toast to HUSTON who waves her off. DAFFNEY takes toast to kitchen)

HUSTON

She's upset. She's been trying to figure out how much we owe the IRS for back taxes. We're years behind.

UNCLE HOWIE

Don't pay them. It's an illegal tax. You don't owe them. They owe you. You don't have to pay it.

DAFFNEY

It's illegal? But you have to pay it...do you pay it?

UNCLE HOWIE

Haven't paid it for the last 35 years.

DAFFNEY

Maybe we should ask for an extension.

HUSTON

Tell me, Howie, I always wanted to ask you. You seem to know a lot about financial stuff, what did you do before? For a living I mean.

UNCLE HOWIE

I was...sort of a pilot.

DAFFNEY

The Pilot Club? I used to be a member...

HUSTON

He means airplane pilot.

DAFFNEY

Who do they say you look like?

HUSTON

Daffney, it's rude to tell people who they look like. They hear it all the time. They get sick of it.

DAFFNEY

I can't remember who you look like anyway. Some movie star...but I can't quite place him.

UNCLE HOWIE

Or her.

DAFFNEY

You didn't happen to invent the brassiere did you? The electric hospital bed? The Jap Zero?

HUSTON

You can't say Jap these days, Daff.

UNCLE HOWIE

Nor Oriental neither. No, the Nipponese Zero was invented by someone else I'm afraid to say.

DAFFNEY

Would anyone like some music?

(After long silence, phone rings, DAFFNEY looks at phone)

HUSTON

Maybe you should answer it.

(DAFFNEY reluctantly picks up phone)

DAFFNEY

Yes, we know. No, it's not due until Thursday. Yes, I know we have to give it five business days to get there. Don't worry, we'll get it in. No, we don't want the chance to win the trip to Orlando, Florida. No, we don't want life insurance.

(HUSTON motions with hands in wild manner to get her attention)

HUSTON

(whispering)

The credit limit. See if they will raise the limit above 500 dollars.

DAFFNEY

Say, can you raise our credit limit? Oh, well, thanks anyway, we'll get the check in the mail. Yes, we know we'll be charged \$35 if late and another \$35 if we go over our credit limit. Yes, I know the late charge will put us over the balance. You have a nice day as well. I'll try to have a nice day too.

(DAFFNEY slams down phone)

HUSTON

It's like they are trying to bankrupt us all.

UNCLE HOWIE

They are.

HUSTON

I read an article that one third of people in Texas don't file a tax return. And that it is higher than that in other states.

DAFFNEY

This country needs the IRS! We need the taxes for health care and schools!

HUSTON

If only they would spend it on that. All the IRS taxes go to debts to foreign countries. America is a bankrupt corporation.

DAFFNEY

I've heard that line somewhere before.

HUSTON

The government has sold out to the world banks. It's all a shell game. Our currency is worthless. Americans have become mercenaries for foreign countries that want to take over the entire...

DAFFNEY

No more conspiracy theories!

(covering ears, shouts)

No more conspiracy theories! No more conspiracy! La, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la! I'm going to continue until you stop talking about conspiracy theories!

UNCLE HOWIE

Let me show you this little thing I got here in the mail. Maybe you could use it.

HUSTON

(reading)

It's a credit card application. Says here, 0 percent interest on all transfers from other credit cards for ninety days or more as long as you are not late on your payments. If late, the interest rate will be raised to 33 percent, along with all other credit cards in your name. This action has been approved by both the House and the Senate.

DAFFNEY

We'll never get accepted. Our credit rating is too low. We paid an agency \$500 to improve our credit but we haven't heard back from them yet. It's been six months.

UNCLE HOWIE

Maybe this one will approve. Give it a whirl.

(DAFFNEY pushes buttons on phone, answers prompt questions, pushes more buttons, then finally reaches a real person)

DAFFNEY

We just want to know if we're approved. Sure, take your time. We are? We're approved? You're kidding!

(stifles excitement)

Ah, how much? \$6,000? Uh...yes. Of course that's enough...for now, it's enough...do I what? Want another card for a family member?

(HOWIE and HUSTON nod in exaggerated manner)

Yes, another card. One for Huston....no, not Houston, Texas...Huston John...no, not John Huston...Huston John....middle initial...well, it's sort of, we wanted to keep my maiden name so we changed his middle name to Tron...yes, Huston Tron John...and I'm Daffney...Daffney Tron John...sounds like a train doesn't it? What? Oh, yes, When can we transfer balances from other credit cards? Now? You're kidding, right?

(HOWIE and HUSTON nod vigorously)

Oh yes, we would like to transfer.

(DAFFNEY and HUSTON scramble to find other credit cards)

That's right. \$5,000 on the Target card, the number is 000007, dash 00366, dash 7900000, no that's five zeroes, 6464. Yes, thanks for reading it back to me. Yes, we would like to transfer \$5,000.

HUSTON

What else do they offer?

DAFFNEY

What else do you have? Yes, we'll try the program that provides discounts on movie tickets, air travel, rental cars, and restaurants that aren't located in our area. Thank you. Do I want to transfer more credit cards?

(THEY look to HOWIE for advice)

UNCLE HOWIE

Leave a little room in there.

DAFFNEY

Thank you for all your help. If you want to give us more credit, please feel free to call us anytime.

(hangs up phone)

We've got one thousand dollars left on our credit balance. Maybe we should use that to pay...

UNCLE HOWIE

That's plenty. Hang on to spending that for now. Now, take a cash advance on that, and use it to open a savings account at your bank. I'll explain why later.

DAFFNEY

We don't have a savings account.

HUSTON

Then we'll open one.

(HOWIE nods to her silently. DAFFNEY calls bank and instructs them to transfer money from credit card)

DAFFNEY

Thank you, yes, I know, I know that our checking account is standing at 33 dollars. Yes, we know there is a fee if we go under zero. Yes, a fee for each bounced check.

(HUSTON motions to DAFFNEY to not hang up phone)

UNCLE HOWIE

Now, have them transfer you to the credit department.

(HUSTON motions for her to follow HOWIE'S instructions)

DAFFNEY

But why? They won't give us a loan. We've already tried twice.

UNCLE HOWIE

Tell them you want a short-term loan for one thousand dollars. Tell them you want to use the money you got in savings as collateral.

(DAFFNEY talks on phone while HUSTON and HOWIE chat)

HUSTON

Then what? That is, if they will give us the loan.

UNCLE HOWIE

Take the one thousand you borrowed and open a checking account with it at another bank. Borrow one thousand off that. Take that thousand, set up another account at another bank. You now have credit at three banks. That will improve your credit immediately. Plus, you have your new credit card with a thousand worth of room in it.

DAFFNEY

Uh, what else can we do? To improve our credit I mean.

UNCLE HOWIE

Don't worry about credit. Everybody's got bad credit these days. Here, chunk me that little phone thing.

(DAFFNEY throws him the phone. HUSTON tries dialing but get frustrated. HUSTON give DAFFNEY a piece of paper with number to call. DAFFNEY dials number then slowly hands the phone to HOWIE)

DAFFNEY

Here Howie. They're on the line.

(HOWIE turns back, speaks softly on phone for what seems like forever to THEM, then hands phone back to DAFFNEY)

UNCLE HOWIE

He wants you to transfer your car loan balance over to this other account. After that, call your car loan people and tell them to send you your car title, now that you have paid it off.

(DAFFNEY talks on phone to arrange more credit, hangs up, then calls car loan company)

DAFFNEY

Yes, I would like to arrange to pay off...what? You did? It's already paid? It is? What about the title for the vehicle? You can send it to us? You can? Oh, thank you! Thank you very much!

(DAFFNEY hangs up. DAFFNEY and HUSTON dance and jump around the room in joy)

HUSTON

I can't believe it. We actually own a car! Outright! With title and all.

DAFFNEY

We're not going to be re-possessed after all. We own something for the first time!

HUSTON

Plus all this credit. Now, we can pay some of the IRS bill before they throw us out into the street like they did with that little old lady we saw on TV.

UNCLE HOWIE

Hold on paying that IRS business for now. I'll call someone on that for you. See if I can get it cleared up. What else you got?

(HUSTON quickly grabs bills, credit cards, and anything else he can find)

HUSTON

We're way behind on our property tax, which pays for other people's kids to go to school and learn technical skills so they can take away our jobs. So they can graduate and start at \$40,000 a year at age 18. Or like that guy from India that I trained who took away my job. Now he and his numerous family members own a chain of convenience stores and motels.

UNCLE HOWIE

Property tax? This is an apartment.

HUSTON

It's for the property that Daffney bought. The one that she wants to put a ranch on. The cattle ranch.

DAFFNEY

What about the ranch? Say, Howie, I've been wanting to ask you something. You said you spent time on a ranch as a boy. What was the name of that brand of cattle that your family said they invented? I think I want to buy one of those to start my ranch.

UNCLE HOWIE

The Santa Gertrudis. The finest bull man can buy.

DAFFNEY

What color are they?

UNCLE HOWIE

Red, a deep red. A large animal, proud, majestic, the Spanish cowboys that worked for daddy called his finest bull, "El Rey," which means, "the king."

DAFFNEY

Let me look it up on the Internet. I'll Google it. Here it is. Wow...I didn't know they were so big. Bulls weigh 1,000 pounds or more...a cross between the Brahmer and the Red Brangus...look a hump on his back, big horns...he does look like a king! I want one! You can make a lot of money cow breeding you know. But, are they scary?

UNCLE HOWIE

(snickering)

You got to get them when they're little. Raise them yourself until they are as gentle as a lamb and can walk on a leash not much different than a big ole dog. But first you got to be able to show them who is boss right off the bat.

DAFFNEY

Oh, I can show them who's boss all right. You saw how well Miss Piggy turned out.

(HOWIE and HOWIE roll eyes)

Howie, you can do just about anything on the Internet these days. While we're on the subject is there any other financial advice you could give us? That is, if it is not too much trouble.

UNCLE HOWIE

Get all them banks to give you credit cards with their name on it.

UNCLE HOWIE (CONT'D)

Tell them you want to transfer them other credit balances you got to their credit cards. I'll give you some good names for references. But keep my name out of it.

DAFFNEY

Right on it. Huston if anyone calls, tell them you want to pay the bill with our new credit card. You have 30 days before they charge you for being over limit.

(DAFFNEY sits at computer and types in rapid manner)

UNCLE HOWIE

It's not like it's real money.

HUSTON

What? What do you mean?

UNCLE HOWIE

It's all play money. The dollar hasn't been backed by gold or silver for years. It's all a shell game. There's no regulation. Ronald Reagan made sure of that.

HUSTON

You could run this game of transferring credit to someone else for years. I feel guilty somehow.

UNCLE HOWIE

Don't. The bank isn't risking anything to loan you money. You are the collateral. The government owes you. You are the creditor not them.

HUSTON

Tell me, could you sign for, I mean act as a reference for a loan from our credit union so we can consolidate some of these debts? Don't worry, we'll pay on time. We won't burn you or anything. I promise. You've done too much for us.

UNCLE HOWIE

Which me? Do you mean the real me or the straw man me? The number assigned to me by the government.

DAFFNEY

Don't start that Matrix stuff again!

UNCLE HOWIE

Forget this personal credit card crap. I'll see if I can help you get some corporate credit. It's easier to get.

HUSTON

Corporate credit? We'll never get that. Besides, we don't HAVE a corporation. And our credit rating is below par to put it lightly.

UNCLE HOWIE

Corporate credit is not influenced by personal credit. How do you think the rich do it? You think they paying all them bills you paying? You paying for their bills, their golf games, their airplane tickets, their girlfriends...

(DAFFNEY rushes to hand HOWIE cell phone)

DAFFNEY

There, Uncle Howie, oh, I mean I called you Uncle Howie. I guess, it's with my parents dead and all I needed to...do you mind if I call you Uncle Howie?

UNCLE HOWIE

That would be quite all right with me little Daffney. I don't have anybody.

(HOWIE sneezes loudly several times)

HUSTON

Get him some more Kleenex.

(DAFFNEY hands Howie a tissue)

UNCLE HOWIE

(looking at phone)

How you work these things anyway?

HUSTON

You push that little button that looks like a telephone. Then you push that little arrow when you want to make the call. No, don't push that button. It will start filming people for Homeland Security. There, that's it. You're doing it. Now, in a few seconds you will hear it ringing but don't hold it too close to your ear.

UNCLE HOWIE

Hey, this is Howie. Say, do me a quick favor. Set up an account there, under Huston Tron John. Yeah, that's his real name. Sounds funny, don't it? Yeah, set up the answering service in Las Vegas. Now, I want one corporation set up. Call it... Santa Gertrudis Enterprises. Set up another as a holding company and one for credit. Any divisions? Yeah one, for cattle, uh, cattle breeding. That's all for now. Just send the bill, I'll take care of it.

HUSTON

What, what did you just do?

UNCLE HOWIE

Did what the fat cats do. Set up a corporation for you in Vegas. That's where all the big international deals are made. And set up another offshore so the IRS can't reach you.

HUSTON

What were all those other things you were setting up for us, Howie?

UNCLE HOWIE

Another as an equity corporation to hold all your assets. That way they can't sue you. We'll put everything you own into this separate holding tank. That way you can say you don't own it. The corporation owns it. You are just an employee of the corporation. You don't own ANYTHING. It all belongs to the corporation.

DAFFNEY

You mean we're employed?

UNCLE HOWIE

You are now on the board of directors for the new Santa Gertrudis...

DAFFNEY

Enterprises, you called it. Now, once again, what kind of business is it?

HUSTON

What was that third, uh, corporation you set up?

UNCLE HOWIE

That was for credit. They like to loan to new companies because you haven't messed up your credit yet.

DAFFNEY

So, now that we are a corporation, does that mean we can buy wholesale at Sam's Club?

UNCLE HOWIE

You can't but your corporation can buy wholesale wherever it likes.

DAFFNEY

We need to buy a leather couch. Leather is good for his allergies.

UNCLE HOWIE

Fine, but you need to tell them this living room is your office.

DAFFNEY

Not a problem. Say, there was one other thing. You used the word, division. What's a division?

UNCLE HOWIE

Division is a division of the first corporation. If it folds, you can declare bankruptcy without affecting credit of the other two corporations. You can have as many divisions as you want.

HUSTON

And as many corporations as you want. If one goes bankrupt, it doesn't affect the others.

UNCLE HOWIE

Catching on pretty pronto.

DAFFNEY

So, this division, you said...cattle breeding?

UNCLE HOWIE

We can change it to something different.

DAFFNEY

Oh no, I want the cow breeding division.

HUSTON

Wait, there was one other. There were three corporations and one division. The third was...

DAFFNEY

Credit.

HUSTON

And that is for?

DAFFNEY

Credit. He uses that corporation strictly to build up credit, obtain a tax I.D, and not affect the main corporation.

UNCLE HOWIE

I got a man working on it.

DAFFNEY

We get the credit...we draw on the credit. We pay ourselves as employees...

UNCLE HOWIE

Most don't break even for two years.

DAFFNEY

We have two years.

HUSTON

Thank god. We can finally get health insurance and not have to go to that awful, smelly county health clinic named after somebody named "Squatty." I've never seen so many pathetic people in my life.

DAFFNEY

Including us.

HUSTON

This must cost a fortune. Are you sure we can afford to pay you back...

DAFFNEY

How much will this cost us?

UNCLE HOWIE

Oh, let's see, \$15 filing fee in Vegas, another \$15 for business license, \$50 for answering service, \$100 for each corporation, \$35 for the division, a little change for postage...

DAFFNEY

(adding numbers on calculator)

Let's see that's \$100 per corporation, \$15 filing, altogether that's \$415, plus postage.

HUSTON

That's all? Look, we can pay you all of it in two weeks. When we get our unemployment checks and the advances on her IRA Account.

UNCLE HOWIE

Cash in the IRA Account before they rob you blind. Pay me back with that. The stock market is just another scam to sucker you in. Buy gold, silver, and platinum in the future. Hold off on any more real estate until things settle down a little. Meanwhile, hold off on paying your other bills. Pay them with the credit cards for now.

HUSTON

Got it. Pay with corporate credit cards.

UNCLE HOWIE

You paid them enough all ready. As it is, you're just supporting other people whether they working or not.

HUSTON

Or if the CEO is causing the corporation to lose money.

UNCLE HOWIE

He'll get a raise if they do.

DAFFNEY

Howie, Uncle Howie. At what point can I acquire this bull? Start my ranch? I know, we can make our office there. We can put a trailer house there. Just temporary, we'll get a real house later. After I get more cattle, a horse to separate the cattle, a truck and a trailer...how much credit do we have left?

HUSTON

We're working on that now, Daff.

DAFFNEY

And where do I find a Santa Gertru...hey, wait, I know who you are! You're the man who invented the oil well, aren't you!? I thought you were dead. You've been in hiding, just like Elvis! That's why the dress and wig!

UNCLE HOWIE

Invented the what?

HUSTON

Daffney, he didn't invent the brassiere or the hospital bed, or any of that other stuff you think he invented. It's her imagination, Howie. She does that.

DAFFNEY

OK, I'll stop. Maybe I was wrong.

HUSTON

Thank you. He's not who you think he is.

DAFFNEY

So, when can I start?

UNCLE HOWIE

Start what?

DAFFNEY

Breeding.

UNCLE HOWIE

Hand me that little phone thing again.

(DAFFNEY hands HOWIE phone. HE wraps napkin around phone and dials carefully)

DAFFNEY

You have to hold it up to your ear.

UNCLE HOWIE

Yeah, have 'em send that trailer. Yeah, the one we not using right now. Have Grady run it over to...

(DAFFNEY grabs phone out of HOWIE'S hand)

DAFFNEY

Old Skunk Road, off Farm to Market 777, adjacent to the old Gulf oilfield road, past the vacuum truck business but before the trailer house that sells dirt. You're welcome. When will...today? This afternoon? Oh my god!

HUSTON

What?

DAFFNEY

(ignoring Huston)

Look, I'll meet you there. Just so you won't miss it. I'll be waving a red rag like those you get at a gas station. Yes, I know red mean control, yellow is sanguine and means shallow...yes, yellow means happy too. Yes I know yellow shows up better than other colors. That's why they use it so much in advertising. No, I want to use a red rag. Thank you for the feedback. I'll be there in 20 minutes, make it 30.

(DAFFNEY hangs up phone)

HUSTON

(sarcastically)

Don't wear melancholy colors.

DAFFNEY

Oh shut up. I've got to get ready. I didn't expect this to happen so fast. Where are my new cowboy boots? I'll need the mosquito spray. I remember what happened last time. And the Poison Oak lotion. What else? Oh yes, my western hat. Look, Uncle Howie, I'll pay you as soon as the corporate credit comes in.

HUSTON

Daffney, there's something. I've been thinking. I don't think I want to move to the rural area. I don't want to live in a trailer house. I want to stay here. I need, I want, to learn what Uncle Howie has to teach. Besides, I want to stay here and look after him. You know he's had that bad cough and the bad back from the airplane crash.

DAFFNEY

Airplane crash?

HUSTON

I don't think I am ready to move to a trailer house not just yet.

DAFFNEY

We need to move now. Before they take it away from us. You know we are behind on our payments and our taxes. Besides, we can put all the moving expenses on the new Santa Gertrudis account.

HUSTON

Let's go into it a little more slowly. Now that Howie has shown us, we can, we don't have to be in such a hurry. He's taken the weight off our shoulders. We know how to do it now. What's the hurry?

DAFFNEY

I've been planning this for two years. I need to go now. I need to start that ranch. I need to start my cattle business. And my real estate business. The economy is falling apart. You can't make enough money to live on at a job these days even if you can find one.

HUSTON

Howie has created a job for us. Now, for the first time, we can be our own boss. We don't have to be kicked around anymore.

DAFFNEY

Then they'll steal your life savings out from under you. People can do whatever they want these days and there is no one to stop them. There's no regulation anymore. No laws. The police won't help you. They're too busy giving traffic tickets. I don't want to buy the H.E.B. brand forever. I need to start buying foreclosed properties, cattle...a new truck...

HUSTON

Maybe Howie can help us with all those traffic tickets.

DAFFNEY

And maybe the legal costs incurred out of our fabled trip to Austin.

HUSTON

There's one other thing. I'm not sure if I feel good about acquiring property seized by the IRS or by the government or moving people out of their homes for poorly planned freeways built only so they can break even more laws.

DAFFNEY

You're doing them a favor by buying the foreclosures. You're saving their credit rating and keeping them from going bankrupt.

HUSTON

Maybe we're going in different directions. I don't need the University of Texas now. They can keep their longhorns. I'm learning how to do it on my own. Howie will show me. You're talking about small-change stiff. Howie's in to the big money. He's in the big leagues.

DAFFNEY

Look, I'm going. You knew I was an entrepreneur when you married me. I need the adrenalin. I need the projects. Otherwise I stagnate. I'm going. I need to catch the trailer-hauler dude. I need to leave now.

UNCLE HOWIE

And the bull.

DAFFNEY

The bull? You're sending me a bull too?

UNCLE HOWIE

It'll be there directly. You got a good fence?

DAFFNEY

Yes, my property is fenced. I won't let him get out.

(DAFFNEY hugs, kisses HOWIE, and heads for door)

DAFFNEY

I'm an entrepreneur. What can I say?

(DAFFNEY exits, long silence from HOWIE and HUSTON)

HUSTON

She's gone and she's not coming back.

UNCLE HOWIE

Happens.

HUSTON

Yeah, but I didn't think it would happen to me.

UNCLE HOWIE

Usually the other way around.

HUSTON

What do you mean?

UNCLE HOWIE

Usually they leave you when you fall out of money not in to it.

HUSTON

She did leave me when I, we, fell into...it's funny, now that I know how to make money, thanks to you, I don't seem to care about it. Now that I have it. It seems less important. SHE seems more important somehow. Or at least she did before this. Maybe money is the only thing there is.

UNCLE HOWIE

Some things are more important than money. I've known people with money stacked to the ceiling but they were still unhappy.

HUSTON

I just wish I had met you a long time ago Howie. You could have saved me a lot of grief.

UNCLE HOWIE

Why come you liked her so much?

HUSTON

One minute it's a real estate deal. The next minute something else. I remember when I first knew her. She was helping me with something. Some forms I needed to get in right away. It was late and we couldn't find a place open that had a copy machine. We finally found one at a Wal-Mart at one in the morning. She stopped in the Wal-Mart lobby to watch some teenagers play a steam-shovel game, picking up cheap toys with the shovel. She was totally absorbed in watching them. So were they. They kept putting more and more quarters in, determined to pick up stuffed animals they could have bought for next to nothing. But they didn't care how much they were worth. They just wanted them. Daffney was mesmerized by those operating the steam shovel and I was mesmerized by watching her watch them. I fell in love with her right then and there in the lobby of a Wal-Mart at one in the morning.

UNCLE HOWIE

You can't buy that sort of charm.

HUSTON

She was the whole package. I realized that someone like her was the most important thing in the world. We could be a couple, facing the world together, and sharing two lives. At the same time, even then, I felt a terrible, primal, fear of losing her.

UNCLE HOWIE

Sort of like Ava.

HUSTON

What? Who?

UNCLE HOWIE

Nothing. Keep on with your story.

HUSTON

But now that's she's gone...my worse fear is not as bad as I thought. Doesn't feel like I thought it would.

UNCLE HOWIE

No, it usually don't.

HUSTON

You knew didn't you? You knew all along, didn't you? How did you know?

UNCLE HOWIE

I used to have this ole Bloodhound dog. I noticed there were some people that he wouldn't let pet him no matter what. Every one of those people turned out to be bad.

HUSTON

So, what are you saying?

UNCLE HOWIE

I started studying that old lazy hound dog, and noticing when his ears perked up.

HUSTON

Your conclusion?

UNCLE HOWIE

One day I switched places with him, gave him the leash, and put his collar around my neck. Soon I got to where I could know what he was thinking even before his ears perked up. My ears started perking up too. This here was one of them kind of times.

(HOWIE motions with his hands as if he has big ears above his head like a Mouseketeer)

HUSTON

I guess I need to grow ears like that.

UNCLE HOWIE

It wasn't just ears. It was a nose too. That old Bloodhound didn't miss nothing. This ole airplane pilot started listening to that old dog. I was wrong sometimes but that ole dog never was.

HUSTON

It's probably for the best that she's gone. She didn't care about me. Not really.

UNCLE HOWIE

I guess I better get to getting. Got to get that ole bull down to the trailer house. Times a wasting.

HUSTON

Well, thanks for everything Uncle Howie. I feel... like...you're the only one in the entire world that is on my side.

(HOWIE checks knife and pistol strapped to each leg, puts on wig, rises, steps forward, then staggers as he tries to walk)

UNCLE HOWIE

I told them that airplane could fly!

(HOWIE collapses on the floor flat on his back)

HUSTON

Howie, Uncle Howie!

(HUSTON rushes to HOWIE, falls on his knees, hits HOWIE on chest with one fist and then with both fists)

HUSTON (CONT'D)

Howie, Mr. Hughes!

(HUSTON continues hitting HOWIE on chest with both fists)

HUSTON

Uncle Howie! You can't die! I need you to live, you're the only one left on my side! Please don't die! Don't die Uncle Howie!

(HUSTON puts head on HOWIE'S chest to listen for signs of breathing. Weeping, HUSTON continues to beat desperately on HOWIE'S chest. HUSTON stops, listens to chest again. HOWIE stirs, turns head, and mumbles)

UNCLE HOWIE

Ava!

(HUSTON shakes HOWIE vigorously)

HUSTON

Don't leave me, Howie. You're all I've got!  
(continues to scream and pound on HOWIE'S chest)

Don't die Howie! Don't die on me Uncle Howie!  
(breathing loudly, continues attempts to revive HOWIE)

Don't die on me Howie! Howie!

(BLACKOUT)

END OF PLAY

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

My studies of directing, technical theater, acting, and theater history have allowed me to see dramatic writing from a different perspective. In writing, one tends to see plays and characters from the inside. These subjects have helped me see plays from the outside. This will be a helpful skill I can use in future writings.

Upon graduating, I intend to concentrate more on the business side of writing. This is a part of the picture that I do not enjoy as much. The sad reality is that it looks more and more these days that marketing is more important than talent. My next step is to focus more on selling my work, sending out scripts, and seeking agents and managers to represent me to help me in the task of selling my work.

I enjoy watching all types of movies but I have found writing them to be somewhat boring. This has changed for me a little bit with the advent of filmmakers such as David Lynch, Hal Hartley, the independent movement, and pioneers such as Jean Luc Godard. These types of character-driven stories I can see myself writing as opposed to the traditional plot-driven, formula, Hollywood screenplays. Several filmmakers are currently filming a short script I wrote called *Maissey the Professional Student*.

Jack Moore has shown an interest in everything I write. We have submitted two of my plays to U.I.L Competitions. He hopes to produce two, Ain't *Hattie* and

and *Commedia De Escape* at San Marcos High School in the spring. One student has expressed a desire to direct *Commedia*.

I vowed to myself I would never teach. Now that I finally gave in to it, I have found that I really enjoy teaching playwriting at the high school. I hope to continue teaching at secondary schools and eventually the college level. I'm fortunate to have known great teachers in Edward Albee, Lanford Wilson, Sir Peter Hall, Maria Irene Fornes, John Fleming, and my close friend, the late film director (director of Marlon Brando and Sidney Poitier), Hubert Cornfield.

Unfortunately, few jobs in teaching theater are available at this time. This has forced me to look at another side of education. I feel dramatic writing can be an effective tool in schools. Many of the students I have taught seem barely literate and need to be approached from another angle. My sense is they relate better to learning that is more visual, audio, or kinesthetic over traditional reading and lecture classes. I can see myself using dramatic writing to create video materials that can be used in the classroom. By getting their attention in this manner, including interactive materials, they can grasp concepts better and hopefully become more motivated to find out more about a subject through reading and research.

Another dream of mine is to form a non-profit theater company in order to produce new original works. Without original work, I see theater dying on the vine. The advantage of plays is that you can always write them. I will probably write them until I drop dead.

## VITA

Thomas LeVrier was born in Daisetta, Texas, a small town that produced his father, painter Elbert G. LeVrier, his twin brother, author and member of the Stock Car Racing Hall of Fame, Philip LeVrier, actor Blue Deckert, and Western author Bill Brett. Daisetta is better known for the national attention brought forth for its recent development of a sinkhole large enough to swallow the Astrodome. After gaining a degree in Psychology from the University of Houston, Thomas worked as a counselor and produced three documentaries on emotional disabilities including one with Linda Gray of the TV show *Dallas* and the Directors Guild of America. He returned to the same college to study with Edward Albee, Lanford Wilson, and Sir Peter Hall and saw two of his plays, *Rapture Among the Oysters* and *Jesus and Phoebe* produced by Albee. A second career as a journalist followed and included four years as a news reporter with the Houston Chronicle. He wrote more than 1,000 articles including early coverage of the O.J. Simpson murder, “while the blood was still wet.” His awards include the statewide honor of the Lone Star Award for Journalism and finalist in the Nicholl Fellowships in Screenwriting at the Academy Foundation. His acting credits include the TV show, *Capitol News* with Lloyd Bridges. LeVrier’s plays have been produced in Los Angeles, Seattle, New York, Austin, and Houston.

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