

Mounting Sex in the Afternoon Zone

a comedy

by

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Characters

MATT FriesenDirector/Playwright
SUZANNE BennettStage Manager
DAVID StoffelActor
VALERIE WalkerActor, David's Mistress
CLAIRE GoodmanActor, David's Wife
(Max a theatre critic, is only seen on TV)

Setting: A theatre

Time: Now

Dedicated to - The Schwints, with love

NOTE: The playwright supports non-traditional or colourblind casting.

Should the director find the script to heterosexist the protagonist may be changed to a woman director - Amanda. This would change the Darren, Derwood, Derwin, and Dagwood lines to Daisy, Daffodil, Tulip, and Pansy. The second option is that SUZANNE is replaced by a male character, Sam.

Should the director require a strong female protagonist who is heterosexual then MATT is replaced by Amanda at the same time as SUZANNE is replaced by Sam.

Mounting Sex in the Afternoon, Zone premiered in Toronto at The Solar Stage,
With the following cast-

DirectorBernadette Jones

MATTRoss Manson
SUZANNEDenise Norman
DAVIDJohn Weisgerber
CLAIRERoseann Wilshere
VALERIEKim Kuhteubl

(Max was played by Rich Jones)

The playwright wishes to express thanks to the following people for the development of the play, Kathleen Flaherty, Marcia Kash at Script Lab, and Zelda Dean.

A one act version of *Mounting Sex in the Afternoon, Zone* premiered at Lunchbox Theatre, Calgary,
With the following cast-

DirectorMarcia Kash

MATTChris Hunt
SUZANNEValerie Planche
DAVIDWes Tritter
CLAIRELindsey Burns
VALERIENatacha Girgis

(Max was played by Louis B. Hobson Calgary Sun critic)

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Playwright Notes

This play is a farce within a sit com. Both genres being comedy, the bulimia and adultery issues should in no way be attempted to be played dramatically. The cleaner the distinction between the actors in the play and the characters the better the comedy, especially at the end.

ACT I, scene one

(The lights come up on VALERIE and DAVID at a kitchen table)

VALERIE Tea, darling?

DAVID Just a top up.

(She pours tea)

Thank you, pet.

VALERIE Did you sleep well?

DAVID Very well thank you, you?

VALERIE Like a log

DAVID I hope I didn't wake you when I came in?

VALERIE I vaguely remember hearing the shower running.

DAVID Ah, yes, I played racquet ball with Bob after work, then we went for a few pints, male bonding, that sort of thing.

VALERIE Bonding?

DAVID Yes, quite.

VALERIE Actually, darling, Bob rang up looking for you.

DAVID Bob? Bob Plackett?

VALERIE Yes.

DAVID Well, then that explains it.

VALERIE Explains what?

DAVID I wasn't with Bob Plackett, I was out with Bob Taylor.

VALERIE Really?

DAVID Yes, dear.

VALERIE But you don't like Bob Taylor.

DAVID Well, I know we haven't always seen eye to eye, but it's not the big fights we've had in the past, more like two rams gently butting heads.

VALERIE How poetic. Last night I popped out for a shandy with Marsha.

DAVID Splendid.

VALERIE She suggested we splurge on a massage and sauna.

DAVID Fabulous. Just what you need to relax you m'dear.

VALERIE We went to the club.

DAVID Really.

VALERIE It's awfully funny we didn't bump into each other.

DAVID Not really, I was at Bob's club.

VALERIE And where is his club?

DAVID In Hampton Court.

VALERIE I thought they closed it down.

DAVID Did I say Hampton Court? I mean, I meant Chillingham.

VALERIE That's quite a drive.

DAVID That's why I was so late getting home.

VALERIE Did I mention that Marsha saw you the other day at The Ship and Arms?

DAVID Really?

VALERIE Yes, she saw you with Sandy.

DAVID Ah, yes, business luncheon.

VALERIE You're the head of the corporation Michael, and Sandy is the mail room clerk.

DAVID It was National Mail Clerk day.

VALERIE I'm surprised I haven't seen all the Hallmark cards in the shops.

DAVID It's not widely publicized.

VALERIE I accidentally opened your visa bill, Michael.

DAVID Isn't that illegal, Tracy? (He laughs weakly)

VALERIE The hotel rooms?

DAVID For business conferences, dear.

VALERIE Don't you usually hold your conferences at the Hyatt Regency?

DAVID As a rule.

VALERIE The hotel on the bill was the Sleepytime Hollow in Soho.

DAVID Budget cuts.

VALERIE I don't think so, Michael. Let's stop this little charade shall we?

DAVID My goodness, look at the time, I must dash.

VALERIE No, Michael, I think not, have a second cup of tea.

DAVID No time my dear. (She pulls out a gun) On second thoughts, I could go in later. (There is a pause) On second thoughts, I could go in later. (They look at each other)

VALERIE Really?

DAVID Yes. On second thoughts, I could GO IN LATER.

 (Enter SUZANNE, script in hand)

SUZANNE Ah, Mr. Winfield. I thought I'd pick you up for work since I was in the neighbourhood.

DAVID Ah, Sandy, how thoughtful.

MATT (From the back of the theatre) Stop! Stop! Suzanne, where's Felicity?

SUZANNE She got a call from her agent. He'd got her a movie in L.A. She had to catch a 2:15 flight.

MATT What?

SUZANNE Felicity-quit-the-show.

DAVID Well, she was phoning in her performance anyway, now she can just do it from L.A.

MATT Can it DAVID, take five, I have to talk to SUZANNE

VALERIE I was feeling really good about that scene.

DAVID We have such good chemistry. (He kisses her)

MATT Take it in the dressing room.

DAVID (To VALERIE) You heard the man, he gave us a direction.
(To SUZANNE) Be a dear and knock on the door before you give the call.

 (SUZANNE gives her a withering glance as they exit stage right.)

MATT What does Equity say?

SUZANNE We have no recourse.

MATT She broke her contract.

SUZANNE No she didn't.

MATT We had a clause that said: `if a movie comes up in L.A., you have our permission to leave on the first available plane'?

SUZANNE No clause, no contract. There was a delay in Vancouver and the contracts haven't arrived yet.

MATT I don't believe this.

SUZANNE I'll go and call Equity.

MATT Thank you.

 (SUZANNE exits stage right. Enter CLAIRE)

CLAIRE Are you in rehearsal right now?

MATT (Hangs up the phone) Not at this precise moment.

CLAIRE Are you the Stage Manager?

MATT No, the writer-director.

CLAIRE Matt Friesen.

MATT (Warming slightly) Yes.

CLAIRE You're the playwright who wrote Meet you at Piccadilly. I love your work, Mr. Friesen.

MATT Matt. And you are?

CLAIRE Claire, Claire Goodman. I was in Roses and Ragtime.

MATT I read the reviews.

CLAIRE Then you know why they closed it two months early. I just arrived back, and I'm making the rounds. Here's my resume. I'd love to do an audition for you.

MATT Well, Claire Goodman (he looks at her resume) Your timing is perfect.

CLAIRE You've seen my work?

MATT No, your timing here today is perfect. As it happens, we have an opening. Hop on the stage and show me your stuff.

CLAIRE My pleasure. What would you like to see?

MATT Surprise me.

(SUZANNE enters looks at CLAIRE, looks at MATT)

CLAIRE My first piece is from Meet you at Piccadilly by Matt Friesen.

MATT The way to a man's heart is through his ego.

SUZANNE Excuse me Mr. Friesen, may I have a moment?

MATT I'm busy at the moment, Suzanne.

SUZANNE It's important.

MATT So is the recasting of this show. Go ahead Claire.

(SUZANNE goes backstage)

CLAIRE (Taking the stage) Oh, Charles, I've missed you so much, darling. How can you talk of other lovers at a time like

this? Well, okay, I did have one other lover while you were away, but it meant nothing, nothing. And there was one other with a barman in Basingstoke. That's all, I promise. Well, of course, unless you count the fling I had with the body builder and the teeny weeny liaison with the usher, but flings and liaisons can hardly counted as serious adultery...

(BLACKOUT)

MATT What the...

SUZANNE (Off) Sorry, we appear to be having technical difficulties, perhaps you could come back here and help me locate the problem.

MATT Suzanne, turn the lights back on now!

(The lights come up)

Excuse me Claire, it appears I need to have a short conference. Look, you're hired. Perhaps you'd be so good...

CLAIRE I'll wait in the dressing room maybe?

(SUZANNE appears on stage)

MATT Yes.

SUZANNE No!

MATT (Tense) Where would you suggest?

SUZANNE The coffee shop.

MATT Take the script with you, then Suzanne, or I will come and get you when we're ready to start rehearsal.

CLAIRE Great!

(CLAIRE exits, they watch her leave)

SUZANNE She's probably the worst person you could have cast in the part.

MATT She looks the part. She's worked with some good directors in some well known theatres, AND she's familiar with my work.

SUZANNE AND she's married to David.

MATT (Taken aback) I didn't know he was married.

SUZANNE Is married.

MATT But isn't he having an affair with ...

SUZANNE Exactly.

MATT This could complicate things couldn't it?

SUZANNE Tell her there's been a mistake.

(CLAIRE enters)

CLAIRE Excuse me, I just wanted to know who I'm playing in the cast. I won't bother you again. And I just wanted to say how nice that it is that you hired me. I was feeling really bad about the reviews for Roses and Ragtime and I'm really glad that didn't bias you. It's really very good of you.

MATT Ah yes. Well... (He looks at SUZANNE, helplessly)

SUZANNE (Pointedly) CLAIRE, would you say you're a professional actor?

CLAIRE Equity, twelve years.

SUZANNE I didn't ask you if you were Union, I asked if you were a professional.

CLAIRE (To MATT) Is there a nude scene?

MATT No. She means, can you conduct yourself in a professional manner, even in the most adverse of circumstances?

CLAIRE I'm not the kind who throws artistic temper tantrums, if that's what you mean. Do you want references?

MATT No need, I've already hired you. Now, Sex In The Afternoon is a three hander. A classic love triangle. Michael is married to Tracy, but having an affair with Sandy.

CLAIRE And, who am I?

SUZANNE You probably should be the wife...

MATT ...but it's too late. You're the mistress, Sandy.
Welcome aboard.

SUZANNE I'm Suzanne the stage manager. (They shake)

CLAIRE Claire Goodman. Wow, what an interesting morning this
has been.

SUZANNE And it promises to become even more interesting.

CLAIRE (Agreeing naively) I'm sure it will.

(CLAIRE exits)

SUZANNE You could have just told her you changed your mind.

MATT That wouldn't have been very nice, tell the woman, she's
hired one minute then fired the next. And she has done a
lot. (Hands her the resume to look at)

SUZANNE What's she done...(Glances at the resume) Mostly
classics, Dolls House, Hamlet, MacBeth...

 (MATT freezes SUZANNE looks at him)

 I'm sorry.

MATT I don't believe in that superstition.

SUZANNE (Smiling) No, it's bad luck.

MATT Come on, the show won't bomb just because you said the
'M' word.

SUZANNE So if you don't believe in superstition, how come you
just called it the 'M' word?

MATT (Flat) My show's going to bomb.

SUZANNE Look, if you're worried, maybe I should do the remedy,
for you. Just in case.

MATT Okay, but I don't care, really.

SUZANNE What is the remedy?

MATT Go out of the theatre, turn around three times and pour
salt over your shoulder.

SUZANNE I thought it was, turn around three times and spit.

MATT Spit?

SUZANNE Or is it, go out, turn around three times, spit, jump up and down and then come back in again?

MATT (Handing her a salt shaker from one of the tables, if it's dinner theatre or a packet from the remains of some fast food lying nearby) Here's the salt, do all three.

SUZANNE Not that you believe any of this stuff.

MATT Not for a second.

(She leaves)

Oh, God. (Loudly) Okay, you two in there, I'm calling the break. Unlock the dressing room door and get on stage. We're going to have a little chat.

(DAVID and VALERIE enter, both look a little dishevelled.)

DAVID Why are you giving the call? Where's our trusting SM?

MATT Outside jumping and spitting.

VALERIE That's the worst of working with your ex. Did you two have another fight?

MATT Suzanne said the `M' word.

(VALERIE and DAVID freeze)

Now we all know that doesn't mean anything, but Suzanne decided she just had to do the remedy. Now....

VALERIE Suzanne is in the parking lot, standing on her head, saying it backwards.

DAVID No, you don't stand on your head, you have to hop around on one foot three times.

MATT Not that it matters. Winner of a show here people.

(SUZANNE enters)

Suzanne, there seems to be some confusion here. Be a dear, go outside, stand on your head, say the `M' word backwards, then hop around on one foot three times.

SUZANNE Matt, you go outside into the parking lot, stand on your head, say the `M' word backwards, then hop around on your foot three times.

MATT You said it, not me.

SUZANNE Truckers are laughing at me.

MATT It won't work if I do it. (pause) Which foot? (SUZANNE begins to speak) Never mind. (He exits)

VALERIE Suzanne, what did Matt want to talk to us about? Is he cancelling the show because of Felicity?

SUZANNE I don't have time to chat. I've got work to do. (She exits)

VALERIE Well, if she's got work to do, the show must be going on.

DAVID That leaves us alone together. I wonder (he moves into her), for how long?

VALERIE You single minded guy. How did you ever get so far ahead in this business?

DAVID I'll come over tonight and explain everything to you?

VALERIE Why don't we go to your house for a change?

DAVID Well, it's just a small apartment.

VALERIE (Pulling away) Is there someone else?

DAVID I've told you before, my wife and I are separated. (changing the subject) I wonder what's keeping Matt? I think we should run lines until he comes back.

VALERIE (Seductively) In the dressing room?

(SUZANNE enters)

DAVID Suzanne, we're just going to do some script work in the dressing room.

SUZANNE You'll probably benefit more by keeping the lights on.

(MATT enters)

MATT Sorry I took so long I had a little altercation with the truckers.

SUZANNE As long as you didn't get arrested again.

DAVID What do you mean "get arrested again"?

SUZANNE Nothing, nothing. (To MATT) Sorry.

MATT Look it was last year. It was no big deal.

DAVID Getting arrested is no big deal?

VALERIE For what?

MATT Assault.

VALERIE You're kidding? Who?

MATT Alex Moore.

SUZANNE Excuse me I have to go to the office, I'll be right back. (She exits)

VALERIE Alex Moore who won the Dora?

MATT FOR MY PLAY, a Dora for my play. He stole it from me in University. I got angry at the ceremony and I was arrested.

VALERIE What did you do to him?

MATT I threw ice cubes at him on stage when he was accepting his award. Ice cubes. It wasn't even admissible as evidence, the weapon melted.

VALERIE How did he steal your play?

MATT We roomed together in University. The scum stole my rough draft and changed the title. He got it produced and it became a big hit and I couldn't do anything about it.

(SUZANNE enters carrying correspondence)

MATT But he hasn't had any work produced since then and I went on to write Meet you at Piccadilly.

SUZANNE Which was a huge success.

MATT Yes the critics loved it. They praised its writing style and compared me to Alex Moore.

DAVID Ouch.

SUZANNE David, Valerie, you've got work to do. Go and run lines. Matt and I need a meeting.

MATT Another one?

(DAVID and VALERIE exit)

SUZANNE Matt, we've got more problems than Alex Moore and the truckers. (She hands him a letter. He doesn't take it)

MATT Who's it from? The producer, Hilda?

SUZANNE Yes, she's checking to see that your play meets the grant requirement that she has committed to.

MATT There are requirements for the script!? When did this happen?

SUZANNE This is news to me, too.

MATT They haven't cut the funding have they?

SUZANNE No, the theatre has received the money.

MATT (Irritated) So, what's the problem?

SUZANNE It's a new government initiative. You just have to meet the requirements. (reading) "In accordance with the mandate of the Granting Body, as amended in the April 1st meeting, 1995, successful applications must meet the following requirements: 1. Be written by a Canadian citizen.

MATT Yes.

SUZANNE 2. The premiere production must be produced by a Canadian theatre company.

MATT Get to it.

SUZANNE 3. Must deal with a) a Canadian issue regarding Canada's nationality crisis; b) must be based in Canada and deal

with Canadian traditions or c) the heritage of Canada, our roots, our strengths."

MATT WHAT?!

SUZANNE The good news is, it doesn't have to be all a, b, c, just one of the three.

MATT This is all your fault.

SUZANNE Mine?

MATT You said the `M' word.

SUZANNE I did the remedy.

MATT You wouldn't stand on your head.

SUZANNE I jumped, I spat.

MATT But you didn't hop.

SUZANNE No, I didn't.

MATT Well there you go.

SUZANNE Look Matt, it'll be easy, just change the location.

MATT Base the show in Canada?

SUZANNE Right, simple.

MATT No, it's not simple! Do you think that by scratching out London, England and replacing it with Nowhere, Alberta that's all I have to do?

SUZANNE A few revisions.

MATT These characters speak with British accents. It's a whole different culture. A whole different way of life. I can't just make a few revisions. Why should I?

SUZANNE By having another hit, you'll be proving to everyone, that you're better than Alex Moore.

MATT Oh, God.

SUZANNE (soothingly) You can't cancel the show now. It wouldn't be fair, if not for you, then for Valerie and David and Claire.

MATT It wouldn't make much difference to CLAIRE , she's
only been hired a few minutes.

SUZANNE But Valerie and David are really into it. (beat) You
know what I mean.

MATT Okay, we'll try it as an exercise. The same scene over
again, and I'll Canadianize it. If I hate it, I'll pull
the show. (Shouting) DAVID, VALERIE, get dressed, I'm
coming in.

SUZANNE Maybe you shouldn't speak so loudly like that with
CLAIRE around.

MATT Oh God, I forgot.

VALERIE (Entering with DAVID) What's going on?

MATT From the top, I'm going to change the dialogue. Carry
your books.

VALERIE I thought the script was in final draft?

DAVID (Pained) I just memorized it. Please don't change it.

MATT David, don't snivel. Get your script. Suzanne, go on
book please.

(SUZANNE sits, script open. MATT goes to the back of the
theatre and calls out the necessary changes.)

SUZANNE This is an experiment. Write in pencil.

MATT From the top.

VALERIE Tea, darling?

MATT Coffee honey.

VALERIE What?

MATT The line is now "Coffee, honey?".

VALERIE (Pause, looks at him) Coffee, honey?

DAVID Just a top up.

MATT Sure, I'll have a refill, thanks.

DAVID (Mechanically) Sure, I'll have a refill thanks.
(VALERIE pours coffee)
Thank you, pet.

MATT Dear.

DAVID What?

MATT Thank you, dear.

DAVID You're welcome.

VALERIE (Butting in) Did you sleep well?

DAVID Very well, thank you, you?

VALERIE (Tentatively) Like a log.

MATT Yes.

VALERIE Like a log.

MATT No - "Yes".

VALERIE (Confused) No, yes?

MATT No. The line "like a log" is cut and replaced with "yes".

VALERIE Yes.

DAVID I hope I didn't wake you when I came in?

VALERIE I vaguely remember hearing the shower running.

DAVID Ah, yes. I played racquet ball with Bob after work. Then we went for a few pints to the pub...

MATT Drinks at the bar.

DAVID Drinks at the bar, male bonding that sort of thing.

VALERIE Bonding?

DAVID Yes, quite.

MATT Really.

DAVID Yes, really.

VALERIE Actually, darling.

MATT Honey.

VALERIE Honey, Bob rang up.

MATT Called.

VALERIE Called looking for you.

DAVID Bob, Bob Placket?

VALERIE Yes.

DAVID Well, that explains it.

VALERIE Explains what?

DAVID I wasn't with Bob Placket. I was out with Bob Taylor.

VALERIE Really?

DAVID Yes, dear.

VALERIE But you don't like Bob Taylor.

DAVID Well, I know we haven't always seen eye to eye, but it's not the big fights we've had in the past, more like two rams gently butting heads.

VALERIE How poetic. Last night, I popped out.

MATT Went out.

VALERIE Went out for a shandy with Marsha.

MATT Cooler?

VALERIE Cooler.

MATT Cola!

VALERIE Cola?

MATT Drink!

DAVID (Amused) Cooler-cooler-cola-cola drink?

VALERIE Yes, with Marsha.

DAVID (Out of character) Finally. (As Michael) Splendid.

MATT Great.

DAVID Great!

VALERIE She suggested we splurge on a massage and sauna.

DAVID Fabulous.

MATT Great.

DAVID GREAT. Just what you need to relax you, m'dear.

MATT Cut "m'dear".

VALERIE Yes, we went to the club.

DAVID Really?

VALERIE It's awfully.

MATT Really.

VALERIE Really funny we didn't bump into each other.

MATT Run into each other.

VALERIE Run into each other.

DAVID Not really, I was at Bob's club.

VALERIE And where is his club?

DAVID In Hampton Court.

MATT In Elbow Park.

DAVID You heard the man.

VALERIE I thought they closed it down?

DAVID Did I say Hampton - Glenmore Park? I meant Chillingham.

MATT Okotoks.

DAVID Okotoks?

MATT Okotoks. Edmonton?

VALERIE (To MATT) That's quite a drive.

MATT Forget it. Everyone take five. Five weeks while I do all the re-writes for tomorrow's rehearsal.

SUZANNE Valerie, the Sun wants an interview. Why don't you take this opportunity to call the reviewer?

VALERIE (pleased) Sure.

MATT Wait! Wait, Valerie. If the reviewer asks the style it not British farce, it's a Canadian comedy. Just talk about yourself, not the play.

VALERIE Any other advice? This is my first interview.

DAVID Want me to come along to help?

 (They go into a clinch.)

SUZANNE (To MATT) Stop them! Claire could walk in any minute.

MATT (To the others) Er, before you leave, I have a character exercise for you to work on. As you know, the characters you have been playing are, indeed, married. But, their relationship is strained. I think, for the good of the show, you two should practice acting that way off stage as well, just to set the characters.

DAVID But Michael and Tracy hardly touch each other!

MATT Exactly. But we must all suffer for the art. Now what you do outside the theatre is, of course, your own business, but as director, I'm afraid I must insist that, while you are in rehearsal, there'll be no carrying on whatsoever.

VALERIE And I thought this rehearsal period was going to be fun.

 (she exits)

SUZANNE Oh, by the way, Matt, you have an interview with Max Augustus Wednesday at three.

MATT I won't do it.

SUZANNE It's a T.V. spot. We need the publicity. The producer set it up for you before she left.

MATT Max Augustus intimidates the hell out of me.

SUZANNE He intimidates everyone. Matt, we need a production meeting.

MATT I thought everything was basically done.

SUZANNE You just switched continents, I expect you'll want to make a few adjustments to props and costumes etc.

MATT Give me the SM book.

DAVID What do you want me to do? I could phone around and try and find a replacement for Felicity.

MATT I've already auditioned and hired someone.

DAVID You have?!

MATT (having fun with his surprise) I don't hang around, David.

DAVID Do I know her?

MATT Not now David.

(SUZANNE gives MATT the SM book)

Here, let me look at props. We'll have McDonalds instead of fish and chips. Cut the tea towel with the union jack. I need dollar bills for pound notes, a coffee pot for the tea service, Calgary Sun for the Daily Mirror, give me an Eaton's bag instead of Harrods, and cut the London Underground map get me a map of the LRT.

DAVID I don't think they make LRT maps.

MATT Why not?

DAVID There are only two lines, it's not exactly complicated is it?

MATT Go to your room.

(DAVID exits)

MATT I want you to set up an emergency meeting with the props, wardrobe, tech and set people after today's rehearsal. We're going to cut the bowler hat and the

rolled umbrella, and the Wellington boots. I'm cutting the picture of Blackpool and I'm changing the sound effects of the television. Replacing the BBC, with CBC, Manchester United for the Calgary Flames and the Queen's Christmas Message... who can replace the Queen?

SUZANNE The Queen is the Queen.

MATT Give me somebody, anybody.

SUZANNE Barbara Frum.

MATT Somebody alive.

SUZANNE Barbara Walters?

MATT Good enough. And speaking of media, notify the publicist, tell her it's no longer a British Farce so she can change the press releases, the programmes and the posters. Now what's next?

SUZANNE What about the intermission music you picked out?

MATT Cut Sting, Rod Stewart and the Beatles, I'll have Rita McNeil, K.D. Lang and Burton Cummings.

SUZANNE Burton Cummings?

MATT Brian Adams?

DAVID (entering) Suzanne do you want to run the new lines with me until Valerie gets back.

SUZANNE I'm a tad busy right now, David. Matt has made just a few minor alterations to the production.

MATT Suzanne go and get the new actor back in here, she can go over her scenes with him.

(SUZANNE exits)

DAVID So Matt what's with the new cast member? When did you hire her? Who is she?

(CLAIRE enters)

MATT Ah, Sandy.

CLAIRE DAVID!

DAVID CLAIRE!

MATT Excuse me. I have some re-writes to do. (He exits hastily.)

 (CLAIRE crosses to DAVID. They hug awkwardly)

DAVID Claire, when did you get in?

CLAIRE Into the play or into town?

DAVID Into town.

CLAIRE About ten this morning.

DAVID Into the play?

CLAIRE About one this afternoon.

DAVID Amazing.

CLAIRE Isn't it? When I was at home I noticed plants were all dead and the fish tank was empty at least the cat ate.

DAVID Tiddles is at the vet, an accident with the vacuum, very nasty, but a few stitches and he'll be fine.

CLAIRE And you're playing Michael? You didn't tell me.

DAVID Wasn't your run supposed to end on the fifteenth?

CLAIRE They closed the show.

DAVID I'm not surprised, with reviews like "Roses and Ragtime wilts and misses the beat".

CLAIRE (Coldly) Thank you dear.

DAVID Sorry.

CLAIRE So onwards and upwards, who's playing Tracy? Anyone I know?

DAVID No.

CLAIRE (Waiting for a name) Anyone you know?

DAVID No, no! (Realizes he's come on too strong, back pedals)
Er, her name is Valerie Walker.

CLAIRE As in Hilda Walker?

DAVID Yes.

CLAIRE What relation, daughter?

DAVID Just because she's the producer's niece, er, that's not why she got hired.

CLAIRE Uh, huh.

DAVID No, she's okay. Just got her BFA.

CLAIRE She just graduated?

DAVID Yes.

CLAIRE And she's playing your wife?

DAVID So, I'll have an older mistress.

CLAIRE Thank you, dear.

DAVID So, you're playing Sandy.

CLAIRE The husband and wife team are working together again. This is going to be fun, isn't it?

DAVID (No) Yes, yes, yes it is.

(Enter SUZANNE and VALERIE)

SUZANNE Valerie Walker meet Claire Goodman.

VALERIE (Smiling) Hi, I'm the wife.

CLAIRE (Offers her hand, they shake) Mistress.

DAVID I need a coffee. (Gets the constant cup of coffee he has with him, when he's not on stage)

VALERIE (To CLAIRE) And you've met David Stoffel.

SUZANNE Oh, yes, they've worked together before.

CLAIRE Yes, we even did a wedding together.

VALERIE (Thinks A Wedding is the name of a play) I didn't see that, was it a good production?

CLAIRE At the time, I remember thinking so.

VALERIE David, did you enjoy it?

DAVID (Almost choking on his coffee) Yes, yes.

SUZANNE I'll go and find Matt and then we can start rehearsals.

VALERIE So, would I have seen you in anything?

CLAIRE I just finished Roses and Ragtime.

VALERIE Oh, I read the reviews, "Roses, Ragtime and Retching", and the lead got crucified! What part did you play?

CLAIRE The lead.

VALERIE Oops.

CLAIRE And have you ever been reviewed, Miss Walker?

VALERIE (Deflated) Er, no, this is my first professional show.

DAVID Game, set and match.

(MATT enters)

MATT Okay, ladies and gentleman, we'll start with Scene Two.

CLAIRE I haven't finished reading it all yet.

MATT That's okay I'm making changes, just go with it.

SUZANNE Page eight, middle.

(MATT jumps off the stage, calling blocking and moving between the tables or chairs in the audience.)

MATT Okay, we'll take it from "Did I mention Marsha saw you the other day". Tracy and Michael at the table, Sandy enter stage right.

(They go to their places)

VALERIE Did I mention that Marsha saw you the other day at the Ship and Arms?

MATT Denny's.

VALERIE Did I mention that Marsha saw you at Denny's the other day?

DAVID (as DAVID) Marsha sounds confused. (as MICHAEL) Really.

VALERIE Yes she saw you with Sandy.

DAVID Ah, yes, business luncheon

MATT Cut the chun.

DAVID What?

MATT No chun, just lunch.

DAVID (scribbles tensely on his script) Cut chun.

VALERIE You're the head of the corporation Michael and Sandy is the mail room clerk, clerk (British pronunciation, then Canadian) isn't she?

DAVID (making fun of VALERIE) It was national clerk, clerk day.

VALERIE I'm surprised I haven't seen all the Hallmark cards in the shops, stores.

DAVID It's not widely publicized in the shops, stores.

VALERIE I accidentally opened your Visa bill Michael.

DAVID Visa bill, Tracy?

DAVID Isn't that illegal? (He laughs weakly)

VALERIE The hotel rooms?

DAVID For business conferences, dear.

VALERIE Don't you usually hold your conferences at the Hyatt Regency?

MATT Palliser Hotel.

VALERIE Palliser Hotel.

DAVID As a rule.

VALERIE The hotel on the bill was for the Sleepy Time Hollow in (she looks out at MATT)

MATT Bowness.

VALERIE Bowness.

DAVID Budget cuts.

VALERIE I don't think so, Michael.

DAVID Oh.

VALERIE Let's stop this little charade, charade (British pronunciation, then Canadian), shall we?

DAVID (singing) You say charade, I say charade, You say...

MATT DAVID!

DAVID My goodness, look at the time, I must dash.

MATT Go.

DAVID I must `go' too.

VALERIE No, Michael, I think I'd like you to stay so that we can finish our discussion.

DAVID No time, my dear. We'll have a nice little chat on the weekend.

(VALERIE pulls out a gun)

On second thoughts, I could go in later.

CLAIRE (Entering, lower-British accent) Ah, Mr. Winfield, I thought I'd pick you up for work since I was in the neighbourhood (VALERIE hides the gun under the table and we get the idea from DAVID's reaction that it is pointed directly at his crotch)

DAVID Ah, Sandy, how thoughtful.

MATT Drop the accent, Claire.

CLAIRE Oh, no accents today?

MATT Ever.

SUZANNE (The peacemaker) Valerie your line.

VALERIE How did you get in, dear? Did he give you a key?

CLAIRE Don't be daft. Your char lady let me in.

MATT Okay, folks. Listen up. I want you to Canadianize it naturally as you go along. Suzanne, mark the changes. If I hear something I don't like, I'll let you know. Continue.

CLAIRE Oh, tea...

VALERIE It's coffee.

CLAIRE Oh, coffee! I'm dying for a cup. (She crosses to the sideboard, then turns) Mr. Winfield, do we have time for a quick one?

(VALERIE pokes him with the gun)

DAVID ERH!!

VALERIE You look like the kind of girl who'd help herself to anything she took a fancy to.

CLAIRE Would anyone else like one?

DAVID Er, no. We must be off (looks at MATT) We must go. (He is nudged) Sure, sure, love one.

CLAIRE (Crossing to him) Hot and creamy, just how you like it. (Indicating coffee) Mrs. Winfield?

VALERIE (To Michael) Cold and bitter obviously.

DAVID No, sweet, very sweet.

CLAIRE One spoonful, or two?

MATT You can put sugar in yours, too, Sandy.

(CLAIRE does but doesn't drink it)

VALERIE How do you know how my husband takes his coffee?

CLAIRE Oh, didn't he tell you? He promoted me. I'm his personal secretary.

VALERIE His personal secretary.

CLAIRE Yes, I try to meet all his needs.

VALERIE (Sweetly to MICHAEL) And how is she?

DAVID She's, er, she's adequate.

CLAIRE (Crushed) Oh, Michael, I mean Mr. Winfield.

DAVID (To SANDY quickly) She's terrific. (He is nudged by TRACY with the gun) Well, no, I wouldn't say, terrific exactly, more like....

CLAIRE } Yes?
VALERIE } Yes?

DAVID (Opens his mouth, tries, nothing comes out, changes tactics) Oh, dear, I'm feeling rather ill.

VALERIE Maybe you'd better not go in today then, dear.

DAVID (Agreeing) No, no.

CLAIRE But you have to give your presentation today and what was it you told me, you wanted to stroke the bumps?

DAVID Smooth over the bumps. Er, no.

VALERIE You mean....

DAVID Yes! No, oh, God.

MATT Take a piece of toast, Claire.

(CLAIRE picks up toast and does everything, but eat it.)

DAVID Dear, I really have go to work and I'm going to work and that's all. And then I'll come home.

VALERIE I don't think so, Michael. (She prods him)

DAVID Or not.

VALERIE Sandy, why don't you hurry along dear and Mr. Winfield will be along later, if he's feeling better.

CLAIRE Aren't you feeling well?

DAVID No, I've developed a sharp pain.

CLAIRE Oh, dear, where?

DAVID In my er, chest.

CLAIRE Probably just indigestion. Come on.

DAVID No, I don't think so.

CLAIRE Michael, I mean Mr. Winfield, you're sweating, oh, my God, he's having a heart attack. Quick. Let's lie him down.

MATT Claire go behind him and try to pull him up. Valerie pull him down.

VALERIE He's alright, really.

CLAIRE No, no, no. We must lay him down, legs up.

VALERIE A position I'm sure you're familiar with.

CLAIRE Call 999? 911!

DAVID (as DAVID) I'll be dead by then.

VALERIE No, don't call.

CLAIRE Do you want to kill your husband, Mrs. Winfield?

DAVID Do you, Tracy?

VALERIE (Exposes gun) The thought had occurred to me.
(SANDY squeals and faints)

MATT Fall back on the chaise, Claire. David get up and go to her.

DAVID Now look what you've done. She's banged her head.

VALERIE That's not all she's banged is it, Michael?
(The phone rings, this can be at the front of house or a cel phone)

SUZANNE (To MATT) Sorry, Matt . Hello?

MATT That's okay. Take two everyone; I'm seeing some really nice tension developing here.

SUZANNE An E-mail just came in for you it's marked urgent.

(She Exits. The cast sit at the edge of the stage for notes, DAVID between the two women)

MATT Now the attitudes are all going in the right direction. David, you could play up Michael a bit more, after all, he is trapped between his wife and his lover.

DAVID (Mini pause) Yes, I imagine that would be difficult.

MATT And he does break into a sweat. Don't forget, there's a gun at his crotch. He really is a protagonist in a pickle. Think about his motivation. Why is he screwing around in his marriage? Are there problems at home? What is it about this mistress that attracted him? Was it this particular woman or would any woman have done? Was it because she was easily available?

DAVID (Pause, very uncomfortable) Do I have to answer all that now?

MATT No, just think about it, for your character.

(SUZANNE enters)

MATT Okay, Suzanne's back. Scene three everybody.

SUZANNE I think we should call a break, Matt.

MATT No, I think we've had enough breaks today. We'll fall behind if we're not careful.

SUZANNE I think a short recess is in order.

MATT Suzanne, I'd like to get through the rough blocking of Act One today.

SUZANNE We have to have a meeting.

MATT (Turning to the others) Why do I even try arguing with the Stage Manager. Okay, take ten. (SUZANNE coughs) Twenty? (She shakes her head) Okay, go for coffee. We'll call you when we're ready.

(CLAIRE, DAVID and VALERIE exit)

MATT This had better be important.

SUZANNE It's from the producer.

MATT Wait, don't tell me. She's got another relative she wants to hire, so she's requested I add another character.

SUZANNE Nope.

MATT Let me see. She's in New York and seen a show she wants to produce so she's cancelling this one.

SUZANNE You're getting warmer.

MATT What!

SUZANNE "Dear Matt. While in New York, I have been overwhelmed by the wonderful theatre and had the opportunity to meet Mr. Andrew Lloyd Weber.

MATT She can't afford his shows.

SUZANNE "As you know, I can't afford his shows, but it has occurred to me that in order to keep our audience in our non-subsidized theatre, we will have to pander to the masses".

MATT Pandor to the masses? It's a 140 seat house!

SUZANNE "So I propose, since you are still in the creation of your wonderful, little farce, that we spice it up with a peppering of songs (she almost whispers) and turn it into a musical.

MATT A MUSICAL?!

SUZANNE "I realize, for most playwrights, this would be almost impossible, but to a man of your great creative talents, this would only be a challenge. And since budget will not permit the hiring of a musical director, or pianist, this affords you the wonderful opportunity not only to score your own music, but playing it every night.

MATT She's completely out of her mind.

SUZANNE There's more.

MATT I won't do it. I quit. I'll pull the show, then I'll personally blow up her precious little theatre.

SUZANNE You don't have to. She gave you an out. "I have met up with a charming playwright here who says that he can accommodate my need for small cast, small scale

musicals, Perhaps you know the artist, Matt. His name is (SUZANNE looks up at him and winces.) Alex Moore.

MATT Alex Moore? Alex H. Moron!?

SUZANNE Look if his stuff isn't that good, let him have this spot. He'll bomb and the producer will crawl back to you, begging forgiveness.

MATT No.

SUZANNE Matt, I think you're about to make a big mistake here.

MATT (Maniacal calmness) Nope, the choice is easy. Sex in the Afternoon will now be a musical.

End of scene one

ACT I, scene two

(The lights come up as MATT plays the intro and DAVID, CLAIRE and VALERIE sing and dance, SUZANNE prompts the choreography from time to time)

DAVID *Some people get a quickie in before breakfast
Some very fortunate have affairs over lunch
Most wait for night by the light of the moon
But me I'm having sex in the afternoon*

*Why wait for weekends vacations or payday
Or Christmas New Years or only on your birthday
Carpe diem seize the moment seize the day
Seize the secretary lock the door and have your way*

*I know it's good for business I haven't any doubt
If I can pull it off and my wife doesn't find out
Until I'm discovered which could be any time soon*

*I'm having sex in the afternoon
Yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah
Sex in the afternoon*

CLAIRE *We know what goes on behind office walls
By appointment only hold the phone calls
We've xeroxed our bodies and faxed to each other
And played peel off the Post-It to see what you uncover*

*I once mistook glue stick for chap stick oh what a mess
And the fly on his pants got stuck on my dress
We've done it on the floor desk and swivel chair
I've broken my nails and messed up my hair*

*We've even done it in the executive boardroom
We're having sex in the afternoon
oh oh oh oh oh
Sex in the afternoon*

VALERIE *Works late yet his pay cheque stays the same
I'm deeply suspicious his excuses seem lame
I started insisting he come home by six
Hoping his adulterous problem I'd fix*

*He made marriage vows that he can't keep
I listen closely when he talks in his sleep
His affairs are his affairs but I think he's having one
So I went out and bought a tiny hand gun*

VALERIE *I think I'll burst his little balloon
He's having sex in the afternoon
no no no no no
Sex in the afternoon*

*He says he's always busy after lunch
I've got a hunch*

DAVID *Tracy suspects! What will I do?
If Sandy comes here out of the blue?*

CLAIRE *Tracy doesn't know that Michael's my lover*

DAVID *When Sandy gets here she'd better take cover*

VALERIE *So now I've got a hunch and I've got a gun
And when Sandy gets here we'll have a little fun*

DAVID *I've got a problem!*

CLAIRE *I've got a secret!*

VALERIE *I've got a gun!*

DAVID) *Oh! she knows we're having sex in the afternoon*
CLAIRE) *No one knows we're having sex in the afternoon*
VALERIE) *I now know he's having sex in the afternoon*

VALERIE *What a bastard!*

CLAIRE *Hold the phone calls!*

DAVID *Tracy knows now!*

ALL *Sex in the afternoon!*

SUZANNE *Hey that was great!*

MATT *I hate it, I hate it, cut the number.*

ALL *What?!*

MATT *I hate it!*

SUZANNE *Look Matt, you've been working too hard you've lost your objectivity.*

DAVID *(whining) You can't cut it, I just memorized it.*

VALERIE *Ah, Matt, I really like it, it'll be a hit really.*

CLAIRE You just haven't slept for three days, doing all the re-writes, the new lyrics and composing the score.

SUZANNE Matt, you've cut the last three numbers. If you cut this song as well, I estimate the running time for act two, to be twelve minutes long.

MATT Oh my God, you're kidding?

SUZANNE Eleven minutes for sure, twelve minutes tops.

MATT The number stays.

DAVID Hallelujah!

VALERIE Matt, I can't dance in this skirt, it's too tight.

MATT Suzanne, have wardrobe put pleats in everything so that the actors can move. Do I have to think of all these tiny details?

SUZANNE (gritting her teeth, writing it down) Pleats.

CLAIRE (To MATT) Speaking of costumes, I didn't know my skirt was going to be this short, can we do anything about this?

MATT Length is fine.

CLAIRE But my legs are so fat.

MATT Your legs are fine. Suzanne, call lunch, you and I will go over the choreography for act two.

SUZANNE Lunch! Half hour.

CLAIRE I have to jog, I'll be back. (She exits, jogging)

SUZANNE (exiting with MATT) I wish you'd hired a real choreographer instead of getting me to do this, with all the changes I have more than enough to do...

MATT You got a dance minor in University ...

VALERIE What's with Claire? Why is she so uptight all the time? She never seems to sit still.

DAVID Claire has problems.

VALERIE What problems, is she sick she looks so thin?

DAVID She's an anorexic/bulimic, compulsive exerciser.

VALERIE That's why she never eats with us. How long has she been like this?

DAVID Years, it just gets worse when she's under stress. She binges on sugar, candy bars. Then she'll throw it all up and exercise to get rid of the calories. Also, she gets very cold, she wears flannel pyjamas even in the summer.

VALERIE How do you know what she wears to bed?

DAVID Oh, it came up in conversation when we were car pooling together.

VALERIE Does she live close by your house?

DAVID Close, very close.

VALERIE I brought a picnic, for us. Shall we dine outside or the dressing room?

DAVID Speaking of burning up calories...

VALERIE What if Claire comes back and wants to use the dressing room?

DAVID She'll jog until the next call, I know my w..(wife) why don't we, lock the door though, just to be discreet.

 (As DAVID and VALERIE exit to the dressing room, SUZANNE and MATT enter with lunch on cafeteria trays)

SUZANNE I don't know how David has succeeding in keeping the women from finding out about each other.

MATT I don't think he has time for either of them, at the moment with all the new line changes and lyrics and choreography to learn.

SUZANNE You're not worried about what will happen when they find out about each other.

MATT What I'm worried about is the time factor. Let's work the actors through lunch.

SUZANNE Equity rules state...

MATT Look, ask them. If they say no, fine.

SUZANNE Claire has gone jogging.

MATT So ask David and Valerie. We'll try out the new scene I gave them yesterday.

SUZANNE (looks through book) Which one was that again?

MATT Scene six, it's double sided, I ran out of paper at home. Remind me not to leave the theatre without stealing some computer paper from the office.

SUZANNE (makes note) Remind Matt paper. I'm doing this under protest. Okay I'll go and get them. (She jumps on the stage and heads for the dressing rooms as MATT works on a few notes on the piano. SUZANNE returns after a few seconds with DAVID and VALERIE)

MATT David, you're all flushed.

DAVID We were going over a few dance moves backstage.

SUZANNE Uh huh.

MATT (to SUZANNE) See? They were working through lunch anyway. Okay guys, I want to block scene six. I hope you have it down, like I asked.

DAVID Stayed up 'til three in the morning memorizing the sucker. I didn't get to the cues yet, (to VALERIE) so whenever you pause I'll just jump right in.

VALERIE We'll figure it out.

MATT Good job. Suzanne can you stand in for Claire, please?

SUZANNE (sarcastically) I'd be delighted, I have nothing else to do.

MATT (ignoring her) Good, good. Okay from the top of scene six, just move on instinct with the lines and I'll call out any blocking.

SUZANNE (jumping of the stage) You'd like me to record the blocking.

MATT Of course.

SUZANNE And act and come up with new choreography for this afternoon?

MATT Suzanne, we're all working hard. Valerie...

VALERIE You'll never guess what I found in the bedroom Michael. A gold charm, this gold charm. And you'll never guess where I found it ... in the bed.

DAVID (crouching on the stage) Here I'll help you with the turret. We can make a drawbridge and a moat if you like and we can use sea shells to decorate the outside.

VALERIE (looks out to MATT, but continues) A present? Do you really think I'd fall for that story? It's not a present. It's hers isn't it?

DAVID If you pass me some of that seaweed, I can make a tree out of it.

VALERIE (confused but keeps going) Michael, this is the last straw - I want a divorce.

DAVID I'm just trying to take your mind off your grandfathers death.

VALERIE I want the house, the car, the dog and the cat, and alimony, what do you say to that?

DAVID Fish and chips.

VALERIE I've contacted the lawyers.

DAVID You can eat them, just the way you like them, with lots of vinegar.

SUZANNE Aren't you going to stop them?

MATT I'm going to see how long it takes them to realize.

VALERIE And, I've been having an affair with Bob Placket.

DAVID Auntie Madge gave me her ration book. We can get some chocolate to eat in your air raid shelter. Ours is flooded at the moment.

VALERIE (trying to improvise) I don't care about the air raid shelter Michael, I want a divorce, I want your money and I've been having an affair with Bob Placket.

DAVID I'll be glad when this damn war is over.

VALERIE (calling out) Excuse me, Matt?

MATT Yes.

VALERIE I don't think we have the same scripts.

DAVID What?

MATT Whatever gave you that idea?

VALERIE It sounds like David is on a beach in World War Two.

DAVID This is the scene that you gave me yesterday.

SUZANNE You memorized the wrong side.

DAVID The wrong side? What..

MATT I ran out of paper and printed the scene on the back of an old script.

SUZANNE Meet you at Piccadilly.

MATT There's a Michael in that play too, unfortunately.

DAVID Do you mean to tell me I've memorized another show?

MATT Uh huh.

VALERIE Didn't you notice the other characters name was (she turns over the page) Stella?

DAVID There have been so many changes I, I..

VALERIE You just memorised the lines that said Michael?

DAVID I thought he'd just changed the play again.

(CLAIRE enters carrying an exercise bike)

CLAIRE Am I late? I just went to get this, I thought we had a half an hour.

SUZANNE We did, we're just working through the break.

DAVID (to MATT) This isn't my fault, if you're stupid enough to have two Michaels...

(overlapping lines, but not on top of each other)

MATT I don't appreciate your tone of voice DAVID .
 CLAIRE Two Michaels? What's he talking about?
 VALERIE David memorized a scene from Meet you at Piccadilly.
 DAVID I can't take any more changes, I'm not great at memorizing to begin with
 CLAIRE (to SUZANNE) I asked him to run lines with me last night in bed, but he said he wanted to go it alone.
 MATT (to DAVID) We can't take a day off, the critics are going to be here in six days and we haven't started act two yet.
 VALERIE (to CLAIRE) You asked him to run lines with you in bed?
 SUZANNE (to MATT) I think we need to start rehearsals again quickly.
 CLAIRE (to VALERIE) Yes, but he wanted to stay in the study.
 MATT Okay everyone lets start after the first number in act two.
 VALERIE (to CLAIRE) He was at your house?
 SUZANNE Everyone on stage!
 CLAIRE (to VALERIE) It's our house.
 DAVID (realizes what's going on) Matt let's review this chorography.
 (MATT Starts to play intro)
 VALERIE YOU LIVE TOGETHER?! (music stops)
 SUZANNE Oh, dear.
 MATT (in command) Page 42. Places!
 VALERIE You're his wife.
 MATT (trying to keep things going) No, no, you're the mistress.
 CLAIRE (it dawns on her) ...and you're his mistress.
 MATT (still pretending that everything is okay) No, you're the wife.
 SUZANNE Oh, MATT!
 MATT (Hopefully) Lights up - go?
 (CLAIRE and VALERIE turn to DAVID)

DAVID (weak laugh) Actors nightmare.

VALERIE} I can't believe you, David ! Is this true? All this time
Claire is your wife and you never told me.

CLAIRE} I leave you alone for three months and you have an
affair. This is the limit. And with her?

VALERIE What do you mean with her?

SUZANNE Matt, do *something*.

MATT Like what?

VALERIE He told me he was separated!

CLAIRE I was doing a show in Toronto!

DAVID Oh, God.

VALERIE You told me, you loved me, David.

CLAIRE You stupid girl, he's an actor, he was acting.

VALERIE Is it true?

DAVID What true?

CLAIRE And now he's acting dumb, pretending he doesn't know
what's going on.

MATT (to SUZANNE) I should get this dialogue down, I could
use it for the third act. (He starts to make notes)

SUZANNE (to MATT) You're a sick man.

DAVID (pretends that comment was meant for him) Yes, I've been
sick, taking a lot of headache pills. I've been very
confused.

CLAIRE Taking Tylenol doesn't make your genitals accidentally
slip into someone else's.

VALERIE It wasn't an accident, it was very deliberate. We had
great sex!

CLAIRE Wait....(for it)!

MATT Ooh.

VALERIE David say something.

DAVID I understand how you both feel.

CLAIRE No, you don't.

DAVID You resent me.

CLAIRE I hate you.

DAVID Right, you hate my guts.

CLAIRE No, I hate all of you.

DAVID You wish I were dead.

CLAIRE I'm considering doing the job personally.

DAVID (trying to make light of things) Look a lot of men have affairs, it doesn't have to lead to murder.

CLAIRE Let's start a trend.

DAVID I've been under a lot of pressure lately.

CLAIRE You haven't been under pressure, you've been under her!

VALERIE You're a bitter woman, no wonder he left you.

CLAIRE Left me? Who do you suppose he slept with, last night?

MATT Oooh!

DAVID Look, can we talk about this after rehearsal? I know Matt's anxious to get going.

MATT Take all the time you need David.

(DAVID shoots MATT a "Traitor" look)

VALERIE How do you know he isn't acting with you and it's me he really loves?

CLAIRE When you make stupid comments like that, I'd like to waste your life too. But then again, with your talent, your life is already wasted.

MATT Ooh.

SUZANNE Okay, enough. You two women fighting over David, is making the hairs on the back of my neck stand up.

CLAIRE Shave.

SUZANNE Look at him, he's probably enjoying this.

DAVID No, not really.

SUZANNE You both are bright, intelligent, good looking women and you're fighting over... him! It's offending every feminist value I have.

CLAIRE Oh, I'm sorry if finding out my husband is committing adultery, is offending your feminist values!

SUZANNE I'm sorry I didn't mean it like that Claire. But you're arguing with each other, when it's DAVID you should be angry with.

MATT This is probably an inappropriate time, but I was wondering if, as professional actors, you could remember this feeling and bring it to the characters you're playing. I think it would help the play.

SUZANNE MATT! How dare you use this moment to benefit your play.

MATT Sorry, yes, but if we could work this out later I would actually like to see the next scene.

SUZANNE Matt, I don't even know if we have a cast here.

CLAIRE I have never quit a show in my life.

VALERIE Me neither.

DAVID The show goes on.

MATT Right then.

CLAIRE But I have a request.

MATT Go ahead.

CLAIRE I told you when I took this job, that I'm a professional. I'm not the kind that disrupts the rehearsal process. I'm sorry you had to see this, but I'd like you to consider it as an audition for the role of the wife.

MATT You'd like to change roles?

CLAIRE Yes I would.

VALERIE Me too.

MATT David?

DAVID I'll stay in the same part.

MATT Wise. (beat) David are you okay with the re-casting, it's you I'm worried about at this point, you have expressed quite clearly that you can't accommodate any more changes at this point of the rehearsal process.

DAVID I can handle it.

MATT Claire why do you want to change roles?

CLAIRE Surly having me as the wife will make the character of Michael squirm more on stage. It will be realistic. Good for the performances.

SUZANNE Matt, this is a big change, are you sure you want to make it?

MATT As Claire says, it'll be best for the show. Trust me.

End of Act One.

Act Two, scene one

(The lights come up on everyone a spilt second later
SUZANNE exits, grumbling)

MATT Now is everyone okay putting everything else aside while we get on with the rehearsal?

CLAIRE We've just changed characters, I think it best we get started right away, unless the less experienced cast member would like one.

VALERIE I'm young, I can handle changes. Lets go.

MATT Okay, scene six, top.

CLAIRE You'll never guess what I found in the bedroom Michael, a gold charm. This gold charm. And you'll never guess where I found it ... in the bed.

DAVID (reading from his script, nervous about the scene with the cast changes) Oh, dear that was one hiding place, I thought you'd never find. Well now your birthday surprise won't be a surprise.

CLAIRE A present. Did you really think I'd fall for that story? It's not a present. It's hers isn't it?

DAVID No, I thought you'd like a playboy charm, really.

CLAIRE Michael, this is the last straw, I want a divorce.

DAVID I don't know what you mean my love.

CLAIRE I want the house, the car, the dog, the cat and alimony. What do you say to that?

DAVID That car is mine!

MATT That's not the line David. Michael says "What ever are you talking about Tracy?"

DAVID Whatever are you talking about Tracy?

CLAIRE I've contacted the lawyers.

DAVID You're being melodramatic, Honey. Have another cup of coffee and a slice of cake.

MATT Take the cake Claire, eat it calmly as you tell him your news.

CLAIRE (doesn't eat the cake) And I've been having an affair with Bob Placket.

DAVID Bob Placket, my best friend?

CLAIRE Yes.

MATT Eat the cake Claire, you're completely unperturbed by any of this.

CLAIRE (waves the cake around on her fork) Man of honour at our wedding.

DAVID You're not serious?

CLAIRE You know when you two were in the navy together?

DAVID Yes.

CLAIRE And you got drunk in a port in Hong Kong.

DAVID Yes.

CLAIRE And you both got tattoos.

DAVID Yes.

CLAIRE Do you want me to describe his?

DAVID You've played with his little...?

CLAIRE Anchor? Yes.

MATT Michael cross to the liquor cabinet. Claire, props brought the cake today, it's fresh.

DAVID (crossing) You Bob? Bob you?

CLAIRE Yep.

MATT That would be a good place to take a mouthful, Claire. Sandy enter from the bedroom.

VALERIE Michael, I couldn't stay under the bed a moment longer, you have to tell her.

DAVID Not now Sandy.

VALERIE Then I'm going to tell her about us.

CLAIRE Here I think this belongs to you. (hands her charm)
Coffee? Cake?

VALERIE (to TRACY) You know? (to MICHAEL) Your wife doesn't seem
very upset.

DAVID Apparently not since she's bucking fob.

MATT I beg your pardon? Bucking fob?

DAVID Sorry, when I get nervous I sometimes reverse the
letters, it won't happen again.

CLAIRE Anchors away!

MATT Claire, eat the goddamned cake!

CLAIRE (takes a small bite, but doesn't swallow) I can't do it.
(runs off)

(SUZANNE enters as CLAIRE exits)

SUZANNE I just had to catch the publicist with the cast changes.
What's going on? Is CLAIRE okay?

MATT I think I pushed things too hard.

SUZANNE (sarcastically) Oh, Matt and usually you're so
sensitive.

DAVID She was afraid.

SUZANNE (to MATT) What did you say to her?

MATT Me? I think it's the adultery thing.

SUZANNE Adultery thing?

DAVID No, it wasn't you.

MATT Right, it was you!

DAVID No.

VALERIE It was me.

DAVID No.

SUZANNE Well it wasn't me.

DAVID It was the cake.

MATT The cake.

DAVID (sighs) She's afraid of the cake.

MATT Someone poisoned the cake?

DAVID No, it's the calories.

SUZANNE I get it.

MATT You get it? What's to get?

SUZANNE She's anorexic.

DAVID Bulimic, compulsive.

SUZANNE Oh, dear.

MATT What?

SUZANNE She's-afraid-of-the-cake.

MATT Her last show bombs, the critics crucify her, she finds out her husband is having an affair, she opens in six days, in a role she took on three minutes ago, and a *piece of cake* sends her screaming from the room?

SUZANNE Yep.

MATT Uh huh. (long pause) You didn't hop.

SUZANNE (teeth gritted) No, I didn't.

MATT (throws up his arms) See what happens when you don't hop.

VALERIE Maybe if you'd stood on your head.

DAVID No, its the hopping that does it.

SUZANNE David, Last I heard you thought Michael was in World War Two. I suggest you concentrate on you. Get off the beach, forget about Stella, sand castles and fish and chips. Get back into this play, the one that opens next week.

VALERIE I'll run lines with you in the dressing room, David.

SUZANNE No, you don't! You just became the mistress. You start learning your lines in the coffee shop. I don't want to see you together in that dressing room lights, on or off. Got it?

VALERIE (meekly) Yes.

SUZANNE Now go. I'll go and track down Claire.

DAVID She'll be in the bathroom, spitting out the cake.

MATT Just a minute, before you all leave, I'm having a problem here.

DAVID You're having problems?

MATT Yes with act two. I just can't seem to make it work any more. I think I'm going to have to break the cardinal rule and ask the actors for suggestions. I'm stuck. Normally, if this happens, I don't think about it for a couple of weeks and the answer comes to me. But I don't have two weeks. You guys know the characters really well by now, you can help.

SUZANNE Matt, David thought he was Sergeant Michael McWhirter from Meet you at Piccadilly. And Valerie has only been the mistress for ten minutes, so to speak.

MATT I'm desperate. Valerie, David if you were writing this script, what would you do differently?

(SUZANNE shows contempt)

MATT Think. Valerie?

VALERIE You're not going to like my answer.

MATT Tell me anyway.

VALERIE Well, it seems to me, that we all get caught up in relationships so much. I mean look at me. I found out that my boyfriend is still married, but in the big picture, well I think we should get upset over the bigger issues.

MATT Such as?

VALERIE The environment.

MATT The environment, hummm (he writes it down) Thank you.
DAVID ?

DAVID Okay, well I think the characters need more...how can I put this...we're doing a show called Sex in the Afternoon but it's not really a sexy play. All the sex part takes place in the board room or the bedroom...

MATT (writing) Good point. Sexy. More sex. Suzanne?

SUZANNE No.

MATT But I don't have an ending.

SUZANNE Surprise me.

MATT Yes! Yes!

SUZANNE What?

MATT A surprise ending! Sexy, environmental and a surprise ending!

SUZANNE Look, I'm off to find Claire. Valerie let me find you a nice quiet table in the coffee shop, come on.

(SUZANNE and VALERIE exit)

DAVID Matt?

MATT (looks up from writing his script) What?

DAVID What am I going to do?

MATT You can get this new stuff down in time. I have faith in you.

DAVID I'm not talking about the script.

MATT Don't ask me, I'm famous for making bad decisions. Well, they don't seem wrong, at the time. It's the old - you don't realize what you've got 'til it's gone - song.

DAVID Should I stick with Claire?

MATT David, I don't know, I'm a playwright not a marriage councillor. But if I had to do it over, I'd do it differently.

DAVID Are we still talking about Claire, or are we talking about Valerie now?

MATT I was talking about Suzanne.

DAVID Suzanne? But, you drive each other crazy! You don't get along.

MATT I know, I know but that doesn't mean I don't- (love her) It doesn't make sense to me either.

SUZANNE (Enters) David, what are you still doing here? Go into the dressing room.

(DAVID exits with his script)

(prompting him) How's Claire?

MATT What? Oh, sorry. How's Claire?

SUZANNE I think she'll be fine. Her eating disorder is tied in with her stress level. You know that don't you?

MATT Actually, I didn't.

SUZANNE I've put her in the office, with her script, and a diet coke.

MATT Good.

SUZANNE Do you want the theatre to write in or can I start hanging the lights? Don't forget you have that interview soon. The camera's are setting up by the marquee.

MATT Why are you hanging the lights?

SUZANNE Tech is overloaded. Although the good news is that the tape of the Queen's Christmas speech arrived today!

MATT (Looking at her but not really listening) But we don't need the queen any more... oh, right.

SUZANNE (annoyed) Matt, make a decision, are you going to write in here, because I have work to do. I have to help out with lights, wardrobe, props, set. And why can't I be an

effective stage manager? Because I'm teaching the cast how to dance!

MATT (softly) Why?

SUZANNE IT WAS A FAVOUR FOR OLD TIMES SAKE!

MATT Why did we break up anyway?

SUZANNE Your ego didn't fit in the apartment any more.

MATT Suzanne, I need you, I'm worried. I can't top myself, the success of Meet you at Picadilly. I have concerns about Sex in the Afternoon I've lost my objectivity. I don't know if it's any good any more. Do people really think playwrights set out to write a bad play?

SUZANNE It just turns out that way all by itself?

MATT (Pause, looks at her) Okay. So I don't always make the right decisions.

SUZANNE Especially, letting Claire and Valerie switch roles at this late a date.

MATT Why did you leave me for Derwood?

SUZANNE His name is Darren. And I didn't leave you, you left me.

MATT Why?

SUZANNE Because you're self centred that's why. You don't think about other people. (pause) You didn't think about me.

MATT What does Donald give you that I don't, didn't?

SUZANNE Darren and I are best friends, we talk.

MATT We talk.

SUZANNE About you.

MATT Does Dagwood do any of the, crazy things, we did?

SUZANNE With Darren life is calmer.

MATT Sounds boring.

SUZANNE To you.

MATT Why do you think I chose to premiere Sex in the Afternoon here? To work with you again. The other produces begged me "Matt do Sex here" (SUZANNE laughs) Made you laugh.

SUZANNE And you also made me cry, but mostly you drive me crazy.

MATT It's fun though isn't it, working together?

SUZANNE It doesn't seem fun at the moment. MATT , I've got a million things to do...

MATT Okay, maybe not fun now. But in hindsight, you'll look back on this play and it was a great time. Come up here with me. (She gets up on the stage) What do you see?

SUZANNE I see seats, a fire extinguisher.

MATT Do you see them? The people in the seats? (Shakespearean) The audience, it's a phantom audience. I do battle with that apparition.

SUZANNE I think you need some sleep.

MATT Can you feel them? They're watching us. There are the watchers and the watched. Some people would rather die than get up on a stage, but not us.

SUZANNE We should be a couple again because we both work in theatre?

MATT Think about it?

SUZANNE Oh, Matt. I have to get back to work. And you've got your interview with Max.

MATT Cancel it.

SUZANNE We need the publicity.

MATT I haven't written the music for act two yet.

SUZANNE It's a live feed, where are they going to get someone else at such short notice? Besides you don't want to tick him off, since he will also be reviewing us in a few days.

MATT What am I going to tell him when he questions me about the changes?

SUZANNE Tell him, you had a co-writer and it was all their idea! I don't know. Look, you like to be watched, get out there and be watched!

MATT Okay, I'll send out the cast, you can plug in the TV on the stage and all watch me. (He exits running)

SUZANNE What an ego. (She turns the TV around)

(CLAIRE enters)

CLAIRE You knew, all the time that David was screwing around with Valerie (SUZANNE nods) A real feminist would have told me.

SUZANNE You're right. I'm really sorry.

(DAVID and VALERIE enter from different sides)

DAVID Matt said something about a live feed, and to get out here.

VALERIE Well, if it's a *live feed*, it probably has nothing to do with Claire.

CLAIRE What a charming dress, Valerie. I used to wear clothes like that, before I got good paying jobs.

VALERIE How complimentary, you really are a nice person and everyone said you were such a bitch.

SUZANNE Ladies, please!

DAVID Look, here's Matt.

(VALERIE, DAVID, CLAIRE and SUZANNE watch the TV, SUZANNE turns up the volume. The intro show music fades out and we see MAX and MATT in front of the theatre)

MAX We're here tonight with playwright Matt Friesen, the well known author of Meet you at Piccadilly. Mr Friesen, you were born in England weren't you?

MATT (guarded) Yes.

MAX And you came to Canada in (he consults his notes) in 1995?

MATT Yes.

MAX You studied playwriting at York University where you wrote, directed and produced your first efforts on campus.

MATT Yes.

MAX And you were, what one might call, obscure until you received all the press and news coverage in 1978.

MATT Ah, you would be referring to the great reviews I got for my play Meet you at Piccadilly, which had a sold out run at the Royal Alexander.

MAX Actually I was referring to the press you received before that at the Dora's. When Alex Moore was making his acceptance speech for best new play and you threw ice cubes at him and were arrested for creating a disturbance.

MATT (deflated) Yes.

MAX Are you a hockey fan?

MATT What? Yes.

MAX Don't you know there are penalties for icing? Ha ha ha.

MATT Oh, God. Look, Moore stole my play and passed it off as his own. I'm tired of no one believing me. The best I could do is go on and produce my own work afterwards. Look, Moore hasn't had a successful show since my play and I've had a smash hit, doesn't that count for anything?

MAX Alex Moore's new show premiered last week in Ottawa, apparently it's a raging success. Do you have any comment?

MATT (surprised) I didn't even know someone had produced him. And I certainly didn't read the notices.

MAX His new play is a Canadian musical comedy, the traditional love triangle. Now tell me about your new original piece (he consults his notes) Sex in the Afternoon.

MATT My new work is completely different.

MAX Different than what? I thought you didn't read the notices?

MATT I didn't.

MAX Oh, this is interesting...it says here on this press release that your show is a Canadian musical comedy, starring three actors, not a love triangle?

MATT Oh, God.

MAX I'm wondering Mr. Friesen and I am just a theatre critic and not a sleuth but would you have happened to have copied Alex Moore's show to exact your revenge or and this would seem preposterous, but will you claim that he did it again, that he stole your new show?

MATT Neither!

MAXA bizarre coincidence wouldn't you say?

MATT No sh..(beeped by TV)

MAX Well, why don't you tell us about your play, it says here it's also a Canadian musical comedy.

MATT (grabs the press release) Is that what it says? No, my play is... science fiction.

OTHERS What!?

MAX Science fiction?

MATT Yes.

MAXA Canadian - science fiction - musical - comedy?

MATT (slight wince) Yes.

MAX Sex in the Afternoon, what an interesting title.

MATT It's a typo.

MAX Typo?

MATT Yes my play is called Sex in the Afterzone.

CLAIRE He's lost his mind.

MAX Must have been the spellcheck.

MATT Must have been.

CLAIRE Someone help him.

DAVID Someone kill him.

MAX Well, tell us about it.

CLAIRE Yes do!

MATT Well, it takes place on the bridge of a space ship, but I really don't want to give the plot away.

CLAIRE You don't have a plot.

DAVID You don't have a clue.

MAX Well, we could just talk about your past then. Tell us about your night in jail, that evening of the Doras...

MATT Well on this spaceship the leader is a women called Valmer. The other two characters are Davedrum and Clarieic, Cleric McDonald. And they're all trapped on a broken down space ship.

DAVID Shoot him before he does any more damage.

MAX This is quite a departure for you, what accounts for this radical change?

MATT Oh, that would be my co writer.

DAVID A gun, somebody must have a gun.

MAX Co-writer?

SUZANNE I was just kidding.

MATT Yes.

MAX And this co-writers name is?

MATT Mary.

MAX Mary...?

MATT (quickly) Magdalene. (winces)

DAVID A stick, anything.

MAX Really?

MATT (laughs) No, that's just what we call her. Actually she wants to keep her name off the script...

SUZANNE Oh, MATT .

MATT ...she's more of a ghost writer.

CLAIRE I'll say.

MAX How long have you known her?

MATT All my life really.

MAX Are you two close?

DAVID Close? It's the same person!

MATT About as close as two people can get. Look I'm a little dry, could I have a glass of water please?

MAX Water for Mr. Friesen please and hold the ice, ha ha ha. Well this has been Max Augustus with playwright Matt Friesen for the Arts report. We'll be back after these messages.

(SUZANNE turns off the TV, CLAIRE hands out ice from her diet coke drink)

CLAIRE The ice man cometh. Let's get him when he comes in!

DAVID (small voice) We have to learn a whole new show?

(MATT enters)

MATT Did you see me? What did you think?

(They pelt him with ice cubes)

(lines back to back)

SUZANNE} Go back on and tell them it's a joke!
 DAVID} Davedrum, Valmer and Cleric Mcdonald?
 CLAIRE} Science Fiction? A space Ship?
 VALERIE} Sex in the Afterzone?

MATT Wait, wait hold it, It's not as bad as it seems - it's the same basic plot, but set on a space ship. I'm going to have the characters do something about the environment, throw in a little more sex and a surprise ending, but everything will be the same.

(lines back to back)

VALERIE} How can it be the same in outer space?
 CLAIRE} The environment? Sex appeal? Surprise ending?
 DAVID} I don't want any more line changes.
 SUZANNE} What about set? Props? Costumes? Music? Programmes?
 Posters? Advertising?

MATT We'll throw mylar over everything, rig up some Christmas lights, sew some sequins on the costumes. I'll do basically the same music on the synthesizer instead-minor, minor changes. A little spray paint on the props. The names of the characters will change, and some other few lines. Now everyone back to work! Valerie go to the coffee shop, David..

(VALERIE exits)

DAVID I know, I know. (He exits)

MATT Claire..

CLAIRE Office. (She exits)

MATT Suzanne, track down the publicist.

(SUZANNE starts out reluctantly)

Quick! It's no big deal. Everything will be fine, just fine. Six days is a long time. No, problem. (She is gone) Oh my God, what have I done?

End of scene one

Act Two scene two

(Sci fi music can play while everything is covered in mylar. Lights up on a frenzy of activity, CLAIRE is on her exercise bike, DAVID is going over some dance steps with MATT, and VALERIE is walking through some blocking. Everyone is mumbling lines or singing. SUZANNE rushes on, a tape measure around her shoulders, carrying her SM book and maybe a few props. She tries to measure CLAIRE while she peddles furiously)

CLAIRE That was the worst dress rehearsal in the history of theatre.

MATT My poor show. I have to run away.

DAVID (with real hope) Take me with you.

MATT (to SUZANNE) Where was the gun? That was a dress rehearsal, we should have had all the props.

SUZANNE It's missing, there wasn't time to replace it. I'll try and have something ready for curtain.

MATT The audience is gong to start coming in, in 38 minutes. (CLAIRE Peddles faster, DAVID goes into a frenzy of dance steps, VALERIE is relatively calm) I don't care what you have to do, just get a gun.

SUZANNE This is Canada, where am I going to get a hand gun?

MATT Use your initiative, improvise something. And make sure it looks like it came out of the 24th century.

SUZANNE (sarcastically) Right, no problem, anyone got a hair clip and a couple of pipe cleaners? This is the worst experience of my career. Why is this happening?

ALL YOU DIDN'T HOP!

DAVID (stops dancing, crosses to MATT) Speaking of the 24th century- is that line about the two rams butting heads, still relevant? and just know if Claire points her fingers and goes "bang" I won't fall down dead, and I won't come out for the curtain call.

VALERIE I think Claire stole the gun, to replace it with real bullets.

DAVID (nervous) Stop kidding around.

VALERIE Who's kidding?

SUZANNE Oh, Matt, I forgot to tell you. The people who oversee the grants, are coming to the opening.

MATT Well, we pretty well lost most of the Canadian content when we went with the space ship idea. David, can you handle one tiny line change?

DAVID (makes the sign of the cross) NO! BACK!

MATT Valerie add some Canadian content through out, improvise, you can handle it.

VALERIE No problem.

MATT David I know you're still shaky with the lines. And I'm aware you have pages of script hidden in the Engineers report.

DAVID Just for security's sake.

MATT Suzanne, let's talk tech.

SUZANNE I have been here since five this morning. I'm taking a break, in fact I'm going to meet Darren, in the coffee shop and clear my head for 15 minutes, before I start the preset.

MATT You brought Darren to the opening?

SUZANNE I told him it probably wouldn't be a long run.

MATT The problem with the show is- its under produced, under designed, there aren't enough production values. I don't want a few lighting and sound cues, I want special effects. I want strobe lights, dry ice, mirror balls, the works.

SUZANNE There isn't time.

MATT You're a professional, we have the equipment, just use them that's all. I'll set some cues with you now, quickly.

SUZANNE No. I'm going to meet Dagwood DARREN! I'll be back in 15 minutes.

MATT I'll send Claire out and tell him you've been detained.

SUZANNE You just want to prevent me from him Darren. Is what this is all about? Is this the reason for all the changes, all the marathon rehearsals, the late hours - so you can be with me?

MATT Don't flatter yourself.

SUZANNE I'm taking a break, deal with it.

MATT This isn't about you. It's about me, my show.

SUZANNE Of course it is! It's always about you! It's always about your show. Nothing changes with you Matt. We've

all worked very hard for you and your show. And you've put us through hell. Do you know what? I just had a great idea, you know the cues, you can run the show!

MATT No!

SUZANNE I quit! I have worked my buns off for this production, or should I say productions, because I feel like I've done four shows in two weeks, a British farce, a Canadian comedy, a musical and a science fiction play. Not only am I trying to please you, I'm trying to keep together cast and crew.

The publicist won't even take my phone calls any more. She's changed the press releases four times. First she mailed them out, then she couriered the changes, faxed the third draft and finally hand delivered the fourth lot with flowers and her personal apologies. The last time I passed her office she hid under her desk!

The printers have printed so many inserts the programme looks like a phone directory.

I'm on my third wardrobe person and the motor in his sewing machine is burned out. You'll be lucky if the costumes are even stapled together. The props man isn't even civil. Last time I asked him for a change he said "Afterzone this!".

The techie hasn't had time to label the tapes. In revenge the set designer put mylar all over my car!

And that's just the crew! I've got a cast that's way over the top in rehearsal hours, when Equity finds out about this they're going to start litigation. David can't even remember his own name. Claire is exercising herself into a frenzy. And Valerie, Valerie is having a ball - because this is her first show ever and she's too stupid to know that LIVE THEATRE ISN'T SUPPOSED TO BE LIKE THIS!

MATT Okay, go for coffee.

(SUZANNE exits)

VALERIE Live theatre isn't supposed to be like this?

MATT Claire? Claire, honey, stop peddling, okay? I want you to rest up for tonight's show. Go into the dressing room

and relax. And I mean, relax, no aerobics in there, just sit and quietly look over your script, have a diet coke.

CLAIRE If I must. (She exits)

DAVID (to VALERIE) Follow her, see if she has the gun hidden somewhere.

VALERIE You don't honestly think she's going to, wait a minute I think I saw something. (She runs to the garbage can in the theatre) Look!

MATT What is it?

DAVID An empty box of bullets!

MATT Calm down, you don't actually think the woman is going to shoot you live on stage?

VALERIE Shouldn't that be, shoot you dead on stage

DAVID (agitated) Angry wife, missing gun, empty box of bullets. I don't know about you but I'm seeing a pattern here.

MATT This isn't a murder mystery, David.

DAVID It might end up one.

MATT It's not too late, we can change the genre of the play, if you like?

DAVID WHAT?!

MATT I was just kidding, relax.

VALERIE I agree with Matt, she won't shoot you, in front of an audience.

DAVID The woman hasn't talked to me since she found out.

MATT Have you talked to her?

DAVID There hasn't been time. I've spent every waking second memorizing the new scripts. I think I've over loaded my memory banks.

MATT I know but it isn't my fault, I feel very self assured on that point.

DAVID It is your fault, Mr. Self Assured.

MATT No, I think the show is just jinxed, I don't really know what went wrong.

DAVID (a Cleese rant) I'll tell you what went wrong. First you changed it to a Canadian comedy because of a grant requirement, a musical because of Alex Moore and Canadian, science fiction, musical because of Max Augustus! I'd say a man who makes that many changes isn't self assured at all. In fact I'd say you were insanely insecure. If there was a society for the prevention of cruelty to actors, I'd call and report you. Playwrights like you should come with a government warning stamped on your forehead "warning, this man's plays can seriously damage your mental health." Shows like this make me wish I'd taken my fathers advice and been a farmer. Because right now, I'd rather be stuck hip deep in manure fending off a run away tractor with one hand and a raging bull with the other, than be here in your show, Mr. Big Shot Crazy Playwright Director Matt Friesen!

MATT We'll consider that a cathartic rant and a vocal warm up. Feel better?

DAVID I'll feel better after this show has closed, which with any luck, will be the day after the reviews come out.

VALERIE Hilda won't close it, if it's bad will she?

DAVID If it's bad?

VALERIE The show is bad?

DAVID Listen dear, I realize this is your first time out, and I don't want to be the one to tell you, but the show is bad.

VALERIE But my parents are coming tonight.

DAVID My sympathies.

VALERIE And all my aunts and uncles and cousins. My half brother, my niece, my boyfriend..

DAVID Boyfriend?

VALERIE Yes. Don't be silly, ours was just a show romance. Leading men always fall in love with the leading ladies.

Especially when there's an age difference, it's good for their egos. When you've been around as long as I have, you find everyone knows that! (She exits to the dressing room)

MATT Oooh.

DAVID Don't you oooh me.

MATT You make your bed... speaking of which, just where have you been sleeping these past nights?

DAVID In the dressing room.

MATT Did they know that?

DAVID I wanted each one to think, I was at the others house, until I made up my mind.

MATT (Sarcastically) Smart.

DAVID Now what do I do? Why am I asking you? Your life is a mess. I'm going to get a coffee. (He exits as SUZANNE enters)

MATT (calling out) Bring me one back too, please.

SUZANNE Okay, I'm back early, don't gloat.

MATT David seems to think that Claire is going to shoot him on stage tonight.

SUZANNE I'm sure he's going to die on stage but I doubt the gun will have anything to do with it.

MATT You're probably right.

SUZANNE You don't think I'd let them use a live gun do you?

MATT Why do I feel you know something I don't?

SUZANNE I saw Claire and Valerie together, the other day when David wasn't around and I saw Valerie plant the empty bullet box in the garbage.

MATT Plant?

SUZANNE They've lead David to believe the gun is real and loaded and that Claire wants revenge.

MATT That will make for some real tension which...

BOTH Will be good for the show.

 (VALERIE enters looking worried)

SUZANNE What's wrong?

VALERIE It's Claire.

SUZANNE What's happened?

VALERIE She's gone on a binge. It's all the pressure of opening night, I found her passed out, candy wrappers all around her make-up chair, a piece of red liquorice hanging out of her mouth.

SUZANNE I'll go. Valerie you come with me, Matt stay here.

MATT I'm coming too.

SUZANNE You stay here. You're not good in a crisis and sensitivity is not your strong point!

VALERIE Besides puking may be involved.

MATT I'm right here if you need me.

 (VALERIE and SUZANNE exit as DAVID enters with two coffees)

DAVID What do you mean, I'm right here if you need me?

MATT Claire's been on a sugar binge.

DAVID You wouldn't let her bike.

MATT I suppose you're going to blame Valerie's boyfriend and Claire's homicidal fantasies on me too.

DAVID You don't really think...?

MATT You know Claire better than anyone, are we going to have to cancel the show?

DAVID You wish. No, the show goes on. She'll be really groggy when she comes out of it. Then one of two things will happen either, she'll feel really guilty about what she did and exercise like mad....

MATT So, what you're telling me is don't be surprised if she starts doing aerobics in the second act.

DAVID Or, she'll feel so guilty that it will send her on a bigger binge than before.

MATT Or, she'll eat all the food props and maybe the costumes and the set?

DAVID Hey, this is my wife we're talking about.

MATT You don't defend Valerie the way you defend Claire. I'd say that was your answer.

DAVID I'm going to see if she's alright. (He exits, bumping into SUZANNE with a box of tapes)

MATT I wonder what else can go wro-?

SUZANNE Oh, no.

MATT What?

SUZANNE I had these all in order.

MATT It won't take you five seconds to organize them again.

SUZANNE Not if they were labelled.

MATT Maybe we should hold the curtain a few minutes.

SUZANNE In my theatre we always start on time. (She starts to exit)

MATT Wait! (He kisses her) break-a-leg.

SUZANNE You too, I'll close the curtain so that fount of house can let in the audience. (She hops off)

MATT It doesn't count NOW!

(MATT stands alone on stage, as the curtains slowly close. The lights go to black. The stage lights go up as the intro music starts. The curtain opens and dry ice pours from the stage. CLAIRE, VALERIE and DAVID are in their uniforms DAVID and CLAIRE wear `communicators.`)

CLAIRE *In the water they first put fluoride
Which started us on the slippery slide
Now additives there are quite a few*

And Earth's water looks more like stew

*Next they added estrogen
It made our men more feminine
But it's cured over population
Salt peter stops our need for copulation*

CLAIRE *Celibacy is all I've ever known
But they're having sex in the Afterzone
No no no no no
Sex in the Afterzone.*

DAVID *On earth one can't reproduce without permission
But since I've been on this mission
Strange changes are taking place
I'm growin' hair all over my face*

*And other things are sowing
It's not just muscles growing I feel like such a manly
man
I'll enjoy it while I can*

*I've been working myself to the bone
I'm having sex in the Afterzone
yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah
Sex in the Afterzone*

VALERIE *I studied so hard at Star Fleet Base
This is my maiden voyages in space
I though that sex was procreational
Now I know it can be recreational*

*I see now I was repressed
I'd rather slowly be undressed
And learn lots of things that's new
I'm shaking and I've turned to goo*

*Now I never want to be alone
I'm having sex in the Afterzone
oh oh oh oh oh
Sex in the Afterzone*

CLAIRE *They must have stopped drinking the water*

VALERIE *Can't stop now though I oughta*

DAVID *So what of responsibilities we're ducking*

VALERIE *We're too busy f....*

CLAIRE (drowning out last word) *They're breaking earth bound law*

VALERIE *I've never felt like this before*

DAVID *I've found that I love sweating*

VALERIE *And I love heavy petting*

DAVID} *We're having sex in the Afterzone*

CLAIRE} *They're having sex in the Afterzone*

VALERIE} *I'm having sex in the Afterzone*

ALL *Yeah no oh oh oh
Sex in the Afterzone!*

(they exit as the Voice Over tape plays it's CLAIRE'S voice)

VO Captains' official log. This is the Starship Afterzone. Star date 10 67 891 This is Cleric McDonald standing in for the captain who was killed when we had the explosion in the engine room. The situation looks grim. We continue to have engine trouble though Engineer Davedrum and Valmer continue to work around the clock to repair the damage. We still have our precious cargo, the anti-pollution machine, that we borrowed from the Unchsha and are bound for earth, though we have only enough life support left for two days. Captains' personal log. I'm worried about the amount of time my husband and Valmer are spending together, I'm not sure they are working on the engines all the time. I intend to confront Davedrum over morning rations.

(CLAIRE and DAVID enter. CLAIRE is carrying a tray of blue coloured liquid and blue sponge cake)

CLAIRE More RBS?

DAVID Huh?

CLAIRE Rations - Breakfast Sustenance.

DAVID Sure, I'll have a refill thanks.

CLAIRE Did you sleep well?

DAVID Yes, I hope I didn't wake you when I got in.

CLAIRE I vaguely remember hearing the Body Cleansing Machine working.

DAVID Ah, yes I went to the recreation deck with Bob after my shift, then we had a few drinks on the Star deck lounge. Male bonding, that sort of thing.

CLAIRE Bonding?

DAVID Yes.

CLAIRE Actually, Bob called to the bridge looking for you.

DAVID Bob? Bob Placket?

CLAIRE Yes.

DAVID Well, that explains it. I wasn't with Bob Placket, I was with Bobber the Hun.

CLAIRE But he's an Unchsha.

DAVID Yes.

CLAIRE We've been at war with the Unchsha, on and off for years!

DAVID Well, I know we haven't always seen eye to eye. But it's not the big fights we've had in the past more like two heads gently ramming butts.

CLAIRE (corpsing) I beg your pardon!

DAVID I mean two butts gently ramming hea- NO!

CLAIRE (still trying to control herself) Don't you mean, two rams gently butting heads?

DAVID YES!

CLAIRE How poetic. (Back in control) Well anyway, I went out for a drink with Septer.

DAVID Splendid, er Great.

CLAIRE We also went to the Star deck lounge.

DAVID Really?

CLAIRE Funny, we didn't see each other.

DAVID Did I say Chillingham?

CLAIRE No, you said Star Deck Lounge.

DAVID Ah, I meant (pause) another place!

CLAIRE I see. Did I mention Septer saw you the other day in the hologram deck with Valmer?

DAVID (checks his script) It was work, we were checking the frequency energy levels in order to divert power to the engines.

CLAIRE Good. Shouldn't your assistant have been helping you instead?

DAVID Well, I must go to the office.

CLAIRE Is there an office in the Engine room?

DAVID Yes, a, a, small one.

CLAIRE Ah ha.

DAVID Bye!

CLAIRE I don't think so. (She pulls out a hair dryer which has been covered in tin foil, it is obvious DAVID wasn't expecting this, he is amused and relieved)

DAVID Are you going to blow me away?

CLAIRE Not with this, (she throws the hair dryer aside and produces the gun)

DAVID Arugh! Where did that come from?

CLAIRE The twentieth century, do you like it?

VALERIE (Entering as if she has been pushed on stage from behind, CLAIRE hides the gun at his crotch) Ah. Hello.

CLAIRE (referring to the entrance) You're early!

VALERIE Yes! Hello Engineer Davedrum, everything all right? I thought I'd drop by the bridge, to drop off these progress reports to Cleric McDonald. (out to audience) I notice we're still in the Maple Leaf Sector. (Back in) I thought I'd accompany Davedrum to Engineering.

CLAIRE How did you get on the bridge? You don't have the security clearance to be here.

VALERIE Engineer Davedrum gave me clearance when I got promoted to his personal assistant. (out to audience) I know the pass code sequence O-T-T-A-W-A. (Back in) Ah, RBS. I'd love a mouthful. I hope we have time for a quick one.

DAVID Er, yes, no, yes.

CLAIRE Well I'd love some (She drinks a whole glass)

DAVID We must go. Engines to replace. Have to get back to Earth.

(He goes to rise CLAIRE pokes him with the gun and he sits back down again)

VALERIE You're sweating, (out to audience) like the underdog at the Stanley Cup (back in), you're not ill are you Davedrum?

DAVID No, I've just discovered a sharp pain. (DAVID tries to signal to VALERIE that the gun is real)

VALERIE He's having a heart attack, I'll communicate to sick bay.

CLAIRE (Wiping her mouth with the back of her hand and reaching for the other drink) NO!

VALERIE Do you want to kill your husband, Cleric Mcdonald?

DAVID Do you Claire? Ic McDonald?

CLAIRE The thought had occurred to me.

(DAVID looks to VALERIE for help who mouths the words "Me Too". CLAIRE pulls out the gun)

VALERIE Oh look, an antique.

(Red lights flash on stage, nobody expects this, they cover)

Incoming communication. It's from the Unchsha maybe they suspect we've stolen the anti pollution machine.

CLAIRE They can't know we have it. We have to save humanity.

VALERIE Put them on screen.

(They all turn towards the screen, a TV screen that has been recessed into the set. We see a test plate that reads- A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM HRH THE QUEEN. Then we see The Queen saying something like "This year my husband Prince Philip and I travelled to Newcastle for the christening of the QE 4...)

CLAIRE Valmer, I think we're having transmission problems.

VALERIE (pushing imaginary buttons) I'll try and fix it.

("...while in Newcastle we also opened a new children's hospital. And it was there I was reminded of the true spirit of Christmas." The screen goes to static and the cast look momentarily relieved)

Old stale airwaves, floating around, must have picked them up.

(The screen now flashes to the 20/20 logo and Barbara Walters saying something like this "Good evening I'm Barbara Walters, Hugh Downs is on vacation - Tonight, a look at sperm banks, the story of one mans donation...)

CLAIRE Valmer, call SUZANNE in the Engine Room.

(and an exclusive - Mick Jagger" The screen goes blank)

DAVID Thank God.

CLAIRE (trying to cover) I'm sure the Unchsha were trying to communicate with us about their suspicions that we've stolen their anti-pollution machine.

(CLAIRE and VALERIE stare at DAVID, he panics and fumbles for the script, hidden in the Engineer report.)

I'm sure you were going to ask a question about the machine Davedrum.

DAVID Ah, yes (nonchalantly flipping through his report, finds his place) What kind of machine is it?

VALERIE It's on the cutting edge of technology, developed by the Unchsha in the Gretzky sector. (CLAIRE rolls her eyes) It's a machine that consumes pollutants. It literally

sucks them out of the air and water, purifying everything it surrounds.

DAVID (reading his "notes") Ah, yes I see, no wonder Earth needs it so desperately.

CLAIRE I see you're reading the engineer reports, Davedrum. Why don't you let me have them so that I can go over them?

DAVID I haven't finished reading them yet.

CLAIRE (waves the gun significantly) I said, give me the reports.

(DAVID gives them to her reluctantly)

These are classified! You can't read these. (She rips up his script, DAVID gives an audible intake of air) You'll never guess what I found in our sleep quarters, this personal communicator. And you'll never guess where I found it...in the bed.

DAVID Oh, dear, it was supposed to be a birthday present, surprise.

CLAIRE Oh it was a surprise all right. And do you know who this belongs to?

DAVID Valerie?

CLAIRE No, it's Valmers.

DAVID Oh, er yes.

CLAIRE This is the last straw, I want a divorce.

DAVID (speaking honestly, to CLAIRE) I'm sorry it will never happen again.

CLAIRE I want the sleep quarters, the shuttle and the cat.

DAVID Tiddles isn't back from the vets.

CLAIRE I've contacted the interplanetary lawyers.

DAVID Really? Already? (realizes he's way off text and tries to get back on) Fish and chips?

CLAIRE Obviously you didn't hear what I said? Do you know who I am?

DAVID (Completely disorientated) Auntie Madge? Stella?

VALERIE It must be space sickness!

DAVID Ah! Sandy, (rambling) Sandy beaches, the ration book, the air raid shelter.

CLAIRE Davedrum, I've been having an affair!

VALERIE (whispers) Bob Plackett.

DAVID (confidently) Bob Plackett!

CLAIRE Matt Friesen!

(There is an audible gasp from behind the piano)

DAVID Matt Friesen?!

CLAIRE Yes!

DAVID No.

CLAIRE You know when you were in space ship academy together?

DAVID No.

CLAIRE And you got drunk on the planet Zanzer?

DAVID No.

CLAIRE And you both got body holograms together?

DAVID No.

CLAIRE Do you want me to describe his?

DAVID (back on track) You've played with his little..

CLAIRE Rocket launcher. (Starts to eat all the cake in front of her)

VALERIE Davedrum, you have to tell her.

DAVID Not now Sandy.

VALERIE Valmer! Then I'm going to tell her all about us.

CLAIRE Here I think this belongs to you (She hands her the communicator) RBS?

VALERIE You don't seem very upset.

CLAIRE We're getting a divorce.

VALERIE Your wife doesn't seem very upset.

DAVID Apparently not since she's Mucking Fat!

VALERIE (trying not to laugh) Don't you mean Bucking Fob?

DAVID No, she said Matt.

VALERIE (Loosing it) Oh. (She turns away her shoulders moving up and down, DAVID looks at her hopelessly. CLAIRE continues to eat)

DAVID I'll be glad when this damn war's over.

(intro music starts to play they all look surprised but never the less they get into position anyway. CLAIRE and VALERIE know the steps, DAVID follows two steps behind, turns the wrong way, etc)

ALL *There's a build up of residue in cargo bay six
Lets hope it's a problem that engineering can fix
It's overflowing the air ducts and heater
It's fluoride, estrogen and salt peter!*

CLAIRE *But first we have to get the Unchsha of our back
If we can out manoeuvre their attack!
A cloaking device up front
Now there's a cunning stunt!*

ALL *It's the machine It's the machine
It's making all our drinking water clean.
It's sucking out pollutants what'd ya know
And all that leaves behind is H2O*

VALERIE *But first we have to get the Unchsha of our back
If we can out manoeuvre their attack!
A cloaking device up front
Now there's a cunning stunt!*

*Well this has been a big surprise
It's the reason out libidos are on the rise*

DAVID *Why I've developed a beard*

And other things have appeared

VALERIE *Why I feel a stirring in my bust
Why other places just feel lots of lust*

DAVID *But first We'll have to get the Unchsha off our back
If we can out manoeuvre their attack!
A cloaking device up front
Now there's a stunning cunt!*

(VALERIE squeals)

CLAIRE (trying to cover) *Don't you mean a cunning stunt?*

(all dissolving into giggles, music stops)

CLAIRE (Trying desperately to get back on track, DAVID hides under the table) *Wait a minute! If the same machine that saves earth from air pollution is going to clean the water of birth control...*

VALERIE *So the earth will get over populated again.*

CLAIRE *I bet Davedrum was just about to say "And if we make men masculine again they will spend valuable production time copulating."*

DAVID (from under the table) *Yes.*

VALERIE *Never mind that, manly men fight and that means wars.*

CLAIRE *So do we take it back and save earth from pollution but risk over population and wars again? Davedrum I bet you were going to say "I vote to keep it on board and live our lives out in space. I'm not drinking earth water again."*

DAVID (still under) *Yes.*

CLAIRE *In the Afterzone the more water we drink the more we purify our bodies.*

DAVID (coming out of hiding, an exit line) *To the Pub, I mean the Star Deck Lounge!*

(They run off and we hear the voice over of CLAIRE again)

VO *Captains' log: star date 14 23 579. We managed to get the engine repaired after much delay. We've had a battle*

with the Unchsha and won. We're on our way to earth with the machine. So it's up to humanity to decide what it wants to do.

Captains' personal log: I've decided to divorce Davedrum. After purifying my body I've reawakened my sexuality and will be setting up home with Valmer.

(Black out. Lights up on stage. SUZANNE is on stage striking props and MATT enters)

SUZANNE The audience has left. Well, most left after the first intermission, but one couple (/table six/ if produced for dinner theatre) got drunk and stuck it out to the end.

MATT (entering) Suzanne, you know that you missed a few cues and the final captains tape came on about twenty minutes too soon.

SUZANNE You skipped five musical numbers.

MATT Directors prerogative.

VALERIE (entering) Shortest show in the west.

(DAVID enters with CLAIRE)

DAVID (to SUZANNE) Did we skip some? It seemed really short to me.

(SUZANNE throws up her arms in desperation)

DAVID (to CLAIRE) Tell me you were just joking about Matt.

CLAIRE I was just joking about MATT .

MATT Do we want to watch the late news? Max may have a review.

SUZANNE Masochist.

(MATT fiddles with TV on the set)

MAXMATT Friesen, normally known for his witty British farces has decided to surprise us all with a Canadian Science Fiction musical. And what a surprise it was. If it had been set in Banff it might have been called the Rocky Mountain Horror Show. Instead it was set in a space ship flying over (he sends it up) Saskatchewan. One must

admire a playwright who pushes the limits of live theatre like the Becketts and Ionescucue who have gone before. But this wasn't an absurdist piece, it was just bad. So while the writing was horrible, the set was cheesy the only mildly positive thing I can say was there seemed to be moments of real tension in the cast (the cast clap) Out of 10 I'll give it a half. (MATT switches off the TV)

VALERIE Do we still have a show tomorrow?

MATT 11:00 AM. call.

CLAIRE We have a matinee?

MATT Nope, I'm pulling this show. If you are all game, we'll start a two week rehearsal on a little known British farce.

SUZANNE Sex in the Afternoon?

MATT Are you still with me?

VALERIE Sure we are.

DAVID (to CLAIRE) Will you still play the wife.

CLAIRE (considers this) Yes.

MATT Good, good.

SUZANNE Matt, I'm sorry about your show.

MATT (lightly) Yes it's a tragedy. Do you suppose I should change Sex in the Afternoon into a tragedy?

(They all freeze.)

SUZANNE Not unless you want to do it as a one man show.

(SUZANNE picks up the prop gun and points it at him)

Black Out