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One Red Shoe

A Parody on Pirandello

by

Paul DiLella

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One Red Shoe

by Paul DiLella

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ARTHUR MINDEN; *Playwright/ director, 30s.*

IRENE COVEY*; *Half-human, half-comma person, 20s.*

DR. DR. PROCTOR; *Bumbling project director of MINDCON, 50s.*

LIVY PROCTOR; *Dr. Proctor's ambitious daughter and research assistant, 30's.*

EUGENE DIBBS; *CEO of crumbling MINDCON CORP, 60s.*

WRECKING BALL*; *Muscular zombie, former CFO, 40s.*

DET. RENE DUBOIS*; *Sharp as TV's "Closer"; Southern accent, 30s.*

GUY STALKER; *Stringer on a tabloid; sleaze is his gold, 30s-40s.*

JEREMY MARSHALL; *Wants to be a pizza delivery-person, 18-25.*

DET. CHET ARMORY*; *Homicide detective nearing retirement, 50s.*

*Irene/Rene doubling; Wrecking Ball/Chet doubling

TIME

The present

SETTING

An empty stage in a Las Vegas, NV venue for a rehearsal of *MINDCON*. *MINDCON* (Mysteries Involving Normal Dimensions of Consciousness) is a behavioral research lab outside Las Vegas, Nevada.

ETC.

The script calls for Jeremy to transit the stage on a skateboard. Depending on the skills of the actor and at the discretion of the Director, "Jeremy" may use a skateboard, regular skates or inline skates.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

For the genesis of this play, I am indebted to fellow playwright Anita Donovan for her suggestion to read J.P. Priestley's play, *An Inspector Calls* (1946). The idea of the play intrigued me: members of one family not only interact with the deceased but also contribute to her death. Once I had read the play, I thought I would like to write something like that. However, that required having a set of characters and a situation around which to incorporate the inspector. A few years ago, I had finished *MINDCON* a full-length satire. I knew these characters. So I thought I would create a play around their final dress rehearsal for *MINDCON*. A death occurs, jeopardizing the production and necessitating the appearance of a detective. I wanted to mirror the structure of *An Inspector Calls*, including a twist ending. Having now finished *One Red Shoe*, I likened it to an amalgamation of J.P. Priestley (for plot and structure) and Pirandello (for issues of "reality"). *One Red Shoe* is a hybrid: both comedy and mystery.

"Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one."

---Albert Einstein
Mathematician

"Whatever is reality today, whatever you touch and believe in and that seems real for you today, is going to be---like the reality of yesterday---an illusion tomorrow."

---Luigi Pirandello
Italian Playwright

"It is the character that gives the actor life."

---Anonymous

***One Red Shoe* premiered at Pahrump Valley High School (Pahrump, NV) on April 16, 2007 with the following cast:**

Bradd Childress.....	<i>Arthur Minden</i>
Maggie Walsh.....	<i>Irene Covey/ Det. Rene Dubois</i>
Ed Underhill.....	<i>Dr. Dr. Proctor</i>
Eileen Cummings.....	<i>Livy Proctor</i>
Carlton McCaslin.....	<i>Eugene Dibbs</i>
Lonnie Childress.....	<i>"Wrecking Ball"/ Det. Chet Armory</i>
Paul DiLella.....	<i>Guy Stalker</i>
David Lawdenski.....	<i>Jeremy Marshall</i>

DEDICATION

To fellow playwright
Anita Donovan

One Red Shoe

by Paul DiLella

ACT I

(AT RISE: Dark stage. We hear a segment of Swan Lake. Blue light on a scrim. Behind the scrim, a figure appears. IRENE COVEY, a half-human, half-contorted living comma, dances freely and gracefully to the dramatic strains of Swan Lake. Red light on scrim. A gunshot. Irene falls to the floor. Lights out on scrim. Lights up on stage. ART MINDEN, the director, awaits his characters. They appear in costume for a dress rehearsal. LIVY, with clipboard in hand, leads the cast. SID PROCTOR, dressed like a ringmaster, silently practices for a press interview. EUGENE DIBBS, wearing a mismatched garish golf outfit, swings a golf club and chases an imaginary golf ball. WRECKING BALL dogs EUGENE, trying to literally pick him up. Trailing them is the reporter GUY STALKER. JEREMY MARSHALL skateboards [skates] around the stage. Chaos—appropriate for a final dress. MINDEN tries to get their attention.)

ARTHUR

Guys! Guys! G-u-y-s!

LIVY

(Blowing her whistle) Quiet! Quiet, everybody! This is a research lab, not a circus. *(Pause)* Let's get started. I've a million-dollar grant to write.

ARTHUR

We'll start in a minute. I want to talk with you first.

SID

That grant's crucial. We need it to keep MINDCON open.

EUGENE

While you two cook the stats, I've got a tee time with Donald Trump. Can we get this over with? I'm a busy man.

ARTHUR

This is our final dress and tech.

GUY

We get the point. Got any real news?

JEREMY

Hey, writer! Here's a news flash. This is a comedy. Why do I have to die in Act II? It isn't dignified.

ARTHUR

Jeremy, you're a wannabe pizza delivery-person, not Julius Caesar. *(Aside)* Geesh, I thought actors had egos!

LIVY

Don't treat us like actors. We're characters. We know what we're doing.

ARTHUR

You think you do, but you only know what I write. What I write is what you say. Right?

SID

Write? Write what? You're the writer.

LIVY

Dad, he means what he says goes...a...er, I mean, what he says we say...I mean, what words he writes we have to say. Right?

JEREMY

Writer, right. Right Writer. Writer right, right, right, right!

EUGENE

Okay, you're the CEO of this script-business.

(WRECKING BALL has picked up DIBBS and is ready to carry him offstage.)

ARTHUR

Wreck, put him down. *(Pause)* Now. *(No response)* Down! Now! Or no iPod!

(Wimpering, WRECKING BALL drops DIBBS.)

ARTHUR

Good boy.

EUGENE

And to think he was once Chief Financial Officer. What a brain. Now his brain is all muscle.

JEREMY

Better muscle than mush. That's what happens to me, unless a certain writer—

ARTHUR

Playwright—

JEREMY

Playwright—changes his mind.

ARTHUR

Over my dead body.

JEREMY

You mean over *my* dead body.

LIVY

(Blows her whistle) Guys, guys! This play is DOA unless we rehearse. What Art means to say is pick up the cues and don't improvise.

SID

Yeah, yeah. "If it ain't on the page, it ain't on the stage."

EUGENE

I should be more like Bing Crosby, don't ya think? He golfs and sings. I could sing. The "Singing CEO." What a combo.

ARTHUR

Save it for the links, Eugene.

EUGENE

God, I hate that name. What mother would name her son Eugene?

ARTHUR

Only a son a playwright could love. Now Jeremy, you overdo the writhing bit at the end. Too melodramatic. Tone it down.

JEREMY

Talk to Livy. Did you know she's using real juice? That's not over-acting. That's over-the-top pain!

ARTHUR

Livy! I thought we had a talk about this!

LIVY

I know, I know, I know. I'll watch the current. You know I'm a perfectionist—

JEREMY

—control freak, if you ask me.

LIVY

I really get into my work. I enjoy it.

GUY

Somehow it wouldn't be good press if "Cruella de Vil" fried the hero on opening night.

LIVY

I got it, I got it, I got it. Now can we rehearse?

SID

Everybody here?

EUGENE

Who we missing?

ARTHUR

Where's Irene?

LIVY

Where could that little "twisted sister" be?

SID

Now, Livy, don't start.

LIVY

Dad, she gets Jeremy in the end. Is that fair? I ask you.

JEREMY

Big deal. She gets a corpse.

LIVY

I'd settle for a corpse. Somebody to love.

SID

Darling, Daddy didn't raise a Corpse Bride. Necrophilia is a no-no.

ARTHUR

Wreck, check her dressing room.

(WRECKING BALL exits.)

ARTHUR

Anybody remember her cell?

EUGENE

Do commas carry cell phones?

GUY

Only if they want to COMMA-municate!

JEREMY

Hey, that's great. We ought to use it in the play.

ARTHUR

It is in the play, pizza-boy. What you say, I write. Right?

JEREMY

Oh, yeah.

(WRECKING BALL returns with one red dancing shoe. JEREMY grabs it.)

JEREMY

It's Irene's.

SID

How do you know?

LIVY

It's curved to fit little comma feet. How cute.

EUGENE

One red shoe. Where's the other one? Where's Irene?

LIVY

Maybe she went shopping. Thursday is discount comma-coupon day, didn't you know?

(A voice from the back of the theatre. Someone strides down the aisle carrying a paper bag.)

RENE

Halloo. Glad you all here. Save me a round-up.

(Growling, WRECKING BALL blocks her path.)

RENE

Lordy, lordy! What have we here? You're a big one. When's the last time goliath here was fed?

LIVY

Careful. Wreck likes fresh meat

ARTHUR

Ma'm, this is a closed rehearsal. If you want tickets, you'll have to check the box office. Please leave.

RENE

I'm partial to strays – done volunteer work at the pound – but call off your dog.

SID

Actually, he's the sad product of an experiment gone awry. Poor Frank Sheffield. He used to be chief financial officer for MINDCON Corporation. Today, he's nothing but a wrecking ball. That's his T-shirt: "Will crash for cash."

(WRECKING BALL growls.)

RENE

Park him, please.

ARTHUR

Wreck. Enough. Stop.

(WRECKING BALL stops then steps away.)

ARTHUR, *Continued.*

Good boy.

(ARTHUR takes a box of raisins out of his pocket and tosses them to WRECKING BALL, who lumbers off to one side to eat his treat.)

EUGENE

The man told you to leave. As CEO of MINDCON, I have the authority to call the police if necessary.

RENE

Won't be necessary, bless your heart. I'm the police. Detective, actually.

JEREMY

If you think you can pull rank to get in free—

RENE

Whoa, whoa, calm yourself, buster. I'm not here to see a show— whatever it is.

LIVY

It's *MINDCON*, and it stars me, Livy Proctor. This is my father, Dr. Dr. Proctor. Eugene Dibbs, CEO. Jeremy Marshall—

JEREMY

—main character and martyr—

LIVY

—This is Guy Stalker, reporter.

GUY

Pleased to meet you.

RENE

Not if my name ends up in your paper.

GUY

Got you.

LIVY

You met Wrecking Ball over there. And – and this is – this is the playwright and director, Arthur Minden.

ARTHUR

Hi.

EUGENE

And your name is?

RENE

Rene Dubois. Las Vegas Metro. Is this everybody?

GUY

We're waiting on Irene. Irene Covey. The cutest little comma-dancer you ever saw.

RENE

Dancer, you say?

GUY

The way she would pirouette and leap in the air. What a grand sight to see.

(RENE takes out a red ballet shoe from a paper bag.)

RENE

Someone identify this? It was found in the alley behind the theatre.

JEREMY

It looks like– like—

(SID holds up the other red shoe.)

SID

—it matches. Same curves.

LIVY

Irene's. She shouldn't be running around barefoot. She'll catch a common cold.

JEREMY

You mean a comma-cold.

LIVY

Oh, stop. Or next time I'll crank up the current.

ARTHUR

What bureau?

RENE

Homicide.

EUGENE

Homicide? Perish the thought.

RENE

I appreciate the puns as much as anybody, but we don't have the time to *pun*-tificate.

LIVY

You're interrupting a very important rehearsal. Mine!

RENE

You can forget about rehearsing 'til you answer my questions. Might take all night. Might take all day. When you say your opening is?

ARTHUR

Tomorrow night.

RENE

I suggest you all cooperate unless you want me to close the play. It'll take only one bad review to close this here show, and it'll be mine. Time now saves time later. Comprenez? Capiche?

GUY

She's right. Might as well do it now.

ARTHUR

All right, detective. How do you want to handle this?

RENE

One person at a time.

SID

Sir, we're not people. We're characters. Ask the playwright.

ARTHUR

That's true. They know what I know...er...I know what they know...a...their words come out of my mouth which I put into their heads...um...my thoughts are their thoughts which they give lip service to— no, that's not it. They think the thoughts they think are their thoughts, but in reality the thoughts they think are not thought by them because I think the thoughts they thought they had when in fact they are only a mouth-piece for the thoughts I think. I think that's right. What do you think?

RENE

In other words, it would be a waste of time to interview them, when y'all have all the answers.

ARTHUR

That's the thought I think...er...yes.

LIVY

Now, wait a minute. You're telling us we're not suspects?

RENE

No. You're all still suspects. He— What's your name again?—

ARTHUR

Arthur—Art—

RENE

—that Art here may have fixed the idea into someone's head to harm poor little comma girl here. He planned it. Someone did it. Two guilty parties.

GUY

Wow! There's a story here!

RENE

Yeah, maybe your name will be in headlines.

SID

What makes you think one or two of us had anything to do with Irene's disappearance?

RENE

Been my experience most victims know their attacker, abductor, or killer. Motive. Out of any relationship comes motive. And you all know Irene. You all have motive.

LIVY

Prove it.

RENE

Aim to, honey. Funny thing is, you all will convict yourselves.

EUGENE

They don't call me "Iron Lips" for nothing.

SID

More like "Bourbon Nips."

EUGENE

One more crack out of you, Sid, and I'll ship you off to Jersey.

SID

Jersey. Trenton—T-Town. Site of George Washington's first military victory. Home of Trenton Thunder and Trenton Titans. (*Hedging*) Fifth most dangerous city in 2005.

SID, *Continued*

Skyline of acid rain. Psychedelic streams and ponds. On second thought, Please, sir. Don't do it. Jersey smells bad this time of year.

EUGENE

Says who?

SID

Says New York.

RENE

You're like two hounds that treed a possum. Too busy baying at one another to see that critter leap to the next tree.

EUGENE

I'd appreciate it, Detective, if you wouldn't include me in your Southern homilies.

RENE

The only "homilies" I know are from New Orleans. City that Care Forgot.

LIVY

You're a long way from home. Out of your element, don't you think?

RENE

After Katrina, I just wanted to be high and dry. High and dry. Plane flew me high and Nevada is dry. So I'm where I want to be. Besides, homicide is homicide, no matter where— Air, land, or sea. It's all pretty much the same to me.

LIVY

I have an idea. Let's cut to the chase. I'll nominate someone to be the killer. Then the rest of us can rehearse. Jeremy, I nominate you.

JEREMY

Oh, sure. Me. Dead man playing.

LIVY

All in favor—

(WRECKING BALL raises his hand.)

ARTHUR

—Livy, stop! Detective Dubois, we're here to cooperate. What do you want first?

RENE

I want to know...can everybody account for his whereabouts between noon and 1:00 P.M.?

ARTHUR

We were at lunch. I have the sign in/ sign out log.

RENE

Let me see it.

(ARTHUR hands clipboard to RENE.)

RENE, *Continued*

Everybody was out except you, Chief, and Mountain Man over there. And you stuck to the roost, didn't you?

ARTHUR

Yes, we stayed. I asked Sid to bring us some takeout.

SID

Yes, sir, he did. And I did.

RENE

And there was no one who could prove you stayed here the whole time.

ARTHUR

Just the theater ghosts.

RENE

According to this log, Sid, you returned at 12:50 p.m.

SID

I did.

RENE

Were they here?

SID

Wreck was trying to skate on Jeremy's board, but he kept falling down.

RENE

Where was Chief?

SID

He was here.

RENE

Sid, did you see him? Sid?

SID

No.

RENE
Where was he?

SID
I don't know. I—

ARTHUR
—I was in the bathroom.

RENE
Answering the call of nature. Sid, how long before you saw him?

SID
Maybe five minutes after I got here.

RENE
What direction did he come from? Left? Right? Front? Back? Where?

SID
I think left...er...right...a...I don't know.

ARTHUR
I came from up center.

RENE
Center. And what's behind that upstage curtain? Anybody!

LIVY
The scene shop.

RENE
The scene shop. And this scene shop has...a door?

JEREMY
Sure. I use it as a shortcut.

RENE
And this door opens to the—

JEREMY
—alley.

LIVY
Stop volunteering information,

RENE
—where Irene was killed. Maybe, maybe Chief here was answering a different call of nature. Murder, maybe?

EUGENE

You got to be kidding. Mr. Minden is an artist, not an assassin.

RENE

I'm just adding up the facts here. You already said that nobody could prove you were here from noon until Sid's return. Chief, you say you were on the john, yet you came in from the scene shop, a shop with a door. Both you and Mountain could've left, together or alone, and done the dirty deed and beaten the others back. Mountain can't speak for himself, so we'll never know if Chief here is telling a tale or telling the truth.

LIVY

So the rest of us are off the hook?

RENE

Lordy, lordy, lady, not so fast. Every alibi is like a sock. Turn it inside out and it looks different. Suppose, suppose they was here like they said. That means the rest of you were out there. And one of you offed Irene. Suppose – an' this is the good part – suppose one of you witnessed the murder and is afraid to tell. How about that?

ARTHUR

That would make a good mystery play.

SID

Looks like we're in one now.

EUGENE

What makes us the only suspects?

RENE

You're not the only suspects. Given time, proximity, and motive, you're the best we got.

JEREMY

Why would anyone of us kill Irene?

RENE

A primeval question, my boy. Why do people do the things they do? Every time I think I have it figured out, I get backslapped by the hand of enlightenment. Why, indeed?

LIVY

Why are we wasting time on a comma-child? That contorted, spastic-elastic dancer had an I.Q. of a carrot. I'm sorry she's dead. But for cripes sake, we got a show to do. Art, call in the understudy.

RENE

Mr. Dibbs. How do you feel about this?

EUGENE

Why are you asking me? She was just an employee, a test subject.

RENE

Because, if my information is correct, you knew her. Intimately.

SID

Sir, you dated her?

EUGENE

No, no. Of course not. That would be unprofessional. I was more like a friend, a personal coach. I cared about her – as I care about all my employees – but from a distance.

LIVY

I'll say. From the golf course.

(EUGENE gives her a cold stare.)

SID

Now Livinia, watch your manners.

RENE

Let's get out of this swamp of semantics, shall we? Isn't it a fact sir, that she was pregnant? Her comma-contortion was ballooning into a question mark.

EUGENE

I never knew she was pregnant. That little scamp never told me!

RENE

For somebody who kept his distance, I'd say "scamp" is a pretty strong word. It implies deep emotion. Anger, resentment– maybe revenge? Isn't it true she dumped you?

EUGENE

I will not submit to your fishing expedition. I will answer no more questions unless it's in the presence of my attorney.

RENE

Suit yourself. After we gets the DNA results back, we'll see who's the lucky daddy. Maybe y'all need lawyers. If so, then no more polite chit-chat like we been having. I'll haul you in. I'll make you talk. Call your lawyers, an' y'all walk the walk. You all be transferred so many times, your legal-beagles will think you disappeared into Yucca Mountain. Do yourselves a favor. Do me a favor. I got a Netflix to download. I want to get home. You want to get home. Take a deep breath and get it off your chests. Answer my questions. Tell me what happened. Sleep good tonight.

EUGENE

I knew her...Irene...intimately.

LIVY

(Shocked) Mr. Dibbs!

RENE

Don't it feel good? Do it again.

EUGENE

The day I saw her I was on my way to rip Sid a new one—

SID

—I'm grateful, sir—

EUGENE

—when I spotted her walking to the processing center. No, wait, not walk. She glided. She fluttered down the hallway like a butterfly in red ballet shoes. What a sight. Red beret in her hair. Green eyes. The tilt of her head. The impish grin. The athletic build. I was smitten. After processing, I asked Livy to give me Irene's profile. I studied it. I called her into my office the next day. I flattered her and offered her a position as my personal assistant. She accepted. We became friends, and over time, our friendship deepened.

RENE

I catch your drift. What happened?

LIVY

I'll tell you what happened. She got wise. That little cutie got wise. She found out that Dibbs approved a buyout of the Grocery-Mart chain. Once acquired, its assets were sold to the Chinese, its employees laid off, its pension plan raided. Irene's mom worked for Grocery-Mart for thirty-seven years in the frozen food section. Her hands stiffened from acute arthritis. She couldn't work. And when she lost her pension, it was up to Irene to take up the slack. Irene applied for a job that required her to pass a screening test. That test was proctored by MINDCON. When she discovered that MINDCON – namely Mr. Dibbs – put her mother out of work, she felt guilty and betrayed, and so she quit. Dumped Dibbs in a drumbeat.

GUY

Wow! The inside poop on the dirt!

EUGENE

She threw her steno pad at me! Little scamp! It wasn't my fault. I didn't know her mother worked for Grocery-Mart. The acquisition was a sound business decision. MINDCON made money, and my job is to make money for the corporation and for its shareholders, I might add.

RENE

You knew her mom worked for the chain. Irene saw an email that proved it.

EUGENE

How do you know that? Nobody knows that. So what if I did know. I did the little girl a favor. I gave her a job so she could support her mother. Is that so bad?

RENE

You used her just like you've used others. It was only a matter of time before you tired of her. After all, you're a bit paranoid. You're afraid of spilling secrets your lovers can use against you. Blackmail can be expensive, even for someone who makes millions. Worse yet, it isn't tax deductible.

EUGENE

I swear. I loved Irene.

RENE

But you did nothing to prevent what happened next. Right, Sid? Right, Livy?

SID

If you mean—

LIVY

—Shut up, Dad. I'll handle this. Rene, you're just guessing. You can't tie us to what happened to Irene. You can't prove a thing, Ms. Detective.

RENE

We'll see. Wreck, I want you to pull all of Irene's files and bring them to me. Jeremy, help him.

(THEY hesitate.)

RENE, *Continued*

Hurry.

(THEY look to Arthur.)

ARTHUR

It's all right. Do as he says.

RENE

Oh, Jeremy. One more thing. C'mere.

(JEREMY crosses to RENE who whispers in his ear.)

RENE

Got it?

JEREMY

Got it.

(WRECKING BALL and JEREMY exit.)

SID

Those files are confidential.

RENE

Not in a murder investigation.

SID

You couldn't possibly understand the reports.

RENE

Then it's a good thing, doctor, that you can explain them to me.

GUY

Yeah, keep'm talking. This is breaking news. Maybe Pulitzer stuff.

LIVY

I told you we should have shredded those files.

SID

Maybe Jersey isn't so bad after all. I'll wear a biohazard suit.

RENE

How did Irene end up as a research guinea pig?

LIVY

I saw Irene run out of Dibbs's office, crying. She fled to the ladies' room, and I followed. I'm a soft touch for a shoulder to lean on if I can get any juicy details to further my career. Irene told me everything. Including the fact that she needed a job – any job – to support her mother and herself. I told her the tour guide position she came in for was filled. Irene pleaded with me to find her something— Anything. I told her that MINDCON conducts experiments to test new drugs, new neurological and inter-cranial procedures— and that test subjects got paid well. So she volunteered.

(JEREMY and WRECKING BALL enter with files.)

RENE

Hand'em over.

(THEY give the files to her. SHE rifles through them.)

RENE

It says here that Irene was tested for the Kernel Protocol and the Waverley Effect. Why two different procedures? Sid?

SID

The Kernel Protocol determines a subject's ability to rewire its synapses after a small number have been shut down.

RENE

Scientifically induced brain-damage, right?

SID

No. Not at all. The effects are supposed to be temporary.

RENE

And the Waverley Effect?

LIVY

The Waverley Effect, named after my mentor and teacher, Dr. Hugo G. Waverley of Ontario University, tests a subject's motor reflexes when a blockage is induced in one part of the body and transferred to another. Afterwards, the health of the motor mechanisms and surrounding tissue are measured.

RENE

In other words, scientifically induced paralysis.

LIVY

Again, temporary.

RENE

How many times have these experiments been done?

SID

Two – three – plus or minus five.

RENE

I hope your records are more accurate than your memory, Sid. Were these experiments successful?

SID

Oh, definitely. Definitely.

RENE

No one was permanently hurt? No one died?

SID

Well...after all, these are experiments. Our learning curve keeps going up.

RENE

And your subject count keeps going down. How many died?

SID

Two, that I know of. The others I think became some kind of furniture.

RENE

Are these two experiments compatible? Does the implementation of one affect the other?

LIVY

They're not supposed to.

SID

Your guess is as good as mine.

RENE

According to this chart, Irene was administered the Kernel Protocol at 8:57 a.m. on April 4. It shows here that at 6:03 p.m. she had a reaction.

LIVY

She went into cardiac arrest.

SID

A minor heart aberration, I assure you.

RENE

What did you do?

LIVY

We administered electroshock to stimulate the heart. She stabilized a few minutes after.

RENE

It says here that you had to resuscitate her every thirty minutes. During this time, how long was her heart malfunctioning?

LIVY

Two to three minutes.

RENE

So what you're saying is every half hour she suffered brain damage. Isn't it a fact that you were losing her?

SID

Well, we didn't. She lived— until today.

RENE

At 11:09 p.m., Livy administered the Waverly Effect. Why was that necessary?

LIVY

It was to save her life.

RENE

Beg pardon, but wasn't it in fact to try one more experiment on a victim you knew you were going to lose anyway?

LIVY

That's not true!

RENE

Who authorized the Waverly Effect?

SID

I did.

RENE

As director of the behavioral experiments division, I would expect that you would know the chances of a subject surviving a botched Kernel Protocol, a heart attack, and the Waverley Effect.

SID

I wouldn't know. I mean, I wouldn't know that your suppositions are correct.

RENE

This brings us back to Eugene Dibbs. Sid, how would you describe your relationship with the CEO?

SID

I have the fondest regards for Eugene Dibbs. Without him, I would be a pharmaceutical salesman in New Jersey.

RENE

Wouldn't you describe your relationship as "strained"?

SID

Every relationship has its ups and downs, its give and take.

RENE

Dibbs dishes it out, and you take it, right?

SID

Er...right.

RENE

Being a behavioral psychologist and scientist, what would you say a normal person's reaction would be to constant harassment, interference, and embarrassment on the job?

SID

A normal person would feel some resentment. How much depends on the tolerance level of the individual.

RENE

And Sid, what is your tolerance level?

SID

Above average. Otherwise, I wouldn't have lasted so long in this position.

RENE

Above average, you say? *(Pulls out a file)* I have a copy of your last fitness report, and it shows that your stress level has red-lined off the chart.

(LIVY grabs the file.)

LIVY

How dare you? That's private and personal.

RENE

Tell that to the deceased. I think that was personal, too. Sid, be honest. Don't you feel even a little resentment towards your boss? Just a little?

SID

Well, maybe a little. *(To DIBBS)* No disrespect, sir.

DIBBS

None taken, you idiot. *(Swings golf club)* Fired...I mean, fore!

RENE

Perhaps this tiny, little resentment made you want to embarrass your chief. You knew he was having an affair with Irene. It would be easy for you to sabotage their relationship if something happened to her. If an experiment went awry, then she'd be unfit to consort with Dibbs. And on top of that, if she were injured, she could sue Dibbs through MINDCON.

SID

Preposterous! I wouldn't do anything to harm that little comma.

RENE

Maybe not. Not directly. But it would be easy for you to look the other way. You authorized the Waverly Effect. You also knew the chances of Irene being more seriously hurt were great. Yet, you authorized the procedure.

SID

I had faith in my daughter's abilities.

RENE

How convenient. You set it up so that no one could blame you. You know your daughter well. As bumbling as you are or pretend to be, you know that Livy has a power complex,

RENE, *Continued*

a desire to be in control and to be right all the time. Anyone who crosses her suffers her wrath.

LIVY

I am a professional!

RENE

Livy, you were jealous of our comma-girl, weren't you?

LIVY

Me? Jealous of that bollixed ballet dancer? Huh!

RENE

You wanted Dibbs to notice you. To flirt with you so that you could, worst case scenario, blackmail him for a promotion.

DIBBS

I wouldn't give Ms. Proctor the time of day, personally. She's an efficient worker, that's all.

LIVY

That's all? Why you myopic, miserly, miscreant! I gave you 110%. I worked days, evenings, weekends while you were jaunting on the links. I wrote grants, I embellished reports— All to make MINDCON look exemplary. Some days I even broke down and wore a skirt. And what did you do? You disciplined me for being out of proper attire.

DIBBS

I wrote you up for having bad legs.

(LIVY attacks DIBBS)

LIVY

That's discrimination! I'm going to sue!

DIBBS

Get your hands off me!

ARTHUR

Wreck!

(WRECKING BALL pulls them apart.)

DIBBS

Looks like I'll see you in court. For assault!

RENE

One issue at a time. Murder first; discrimination second; assault third. As I was saying, Sid had an ax to grind, Livy had an ax to grind, and poor Irene, conveniently, had her neck stuck out. Chop!

LIVY

You can't prove anything!

RENE

My dear, I don't have to prove anything. That's for a jury to decide. All I have to do is provide reasonable theories for the D.A. Her office will decide how many of you will stand trial.

DIBBS

I'm not going to say another word until I contact my lawyer.

RENE

Suit yourself. I'm pretty much done with you. Who's next on the grill? Oh, yes, our hero, the wanna-be pizza delivery boy.

JEREMY

I'm the last person you would suspect. In the play, I die for Irene.

RENE

In the play, yes. But this is out of the play. Maybe you're not as self-sacrificing as you seem.

JEREMY

Art, you tell him. I'm the knight on a white horse, remember? I'm the Christ-figure.

LIVY

Somehow, Jeremy, I don't see him coming back as a pizza-peon.

ARTHUR

Jeremy, there is another dimension about you that I wrote as a back-story that didn't make it into the play.

JEREMY

Oh, great. Now you tell me. I'm the serial pizza killer from Vegas. My mantra: "Murder by the slice."

ARTHUR

Not quite. You have a secret.

JEREMY

I must. I don't even know it.

RENE

Let me help. *(Takes out note)* This was found on Irene. *(Reads)* "I love Jeremy so much. He's considerate and tender. How do I tell him that I'm pregnant? If it's a girl, I'll call her Jeremiah, and a boy, Jeremy, Jr.

EUGENE

See! I knew the child wasn't mine.

LIVY

That's because the only thing you could get up was your golf club.

SID

Livinia, be nice. *(To DIBBS)* Sorry, Mr. Dibbs.

EUGENE

Pack your bags for Jersey now!

SID

Why punish me for what she did?

EUGENE

Because I own you. Remember that.

SID

Yes, sir. I'll remember that.

JEREMY

She's lying!

RENE

Who? Livy or Irene?

JEREMY

Irene! I didn't make her pregnant. She wasn't pregnant at all. She wrote that note to impress people, that's all. She thought if others knew she could have a normal relationship, then she'd be accepted. She was just trying to flatter herself.

RENE

As soon as we get DNA results, we'll know if she was pregnant and who the father is. That still doesn't let you off the hook, Jeremy. You say you knew she was lying, and obviously she wanted to have people think you were the father. That would be quite embarrassing to you, wouldn't it? After all, who wouldn't believe a misshapen, half-comma figure with blue eyes and a sad face? They'd say you took advantage of her. How could you force yourself on such a miserable, handicapped young girl?

JEREMY

Yeah, that's what they'd say.

RENE

So to keep Irene from spreading these lies and to preserve your reputation, you killed her, Jeremy. Isn't that true?

JEREMY

No! Of course, not!

RENE

C'mon, Jeremy. Face it. You have few job skills. Anything shady about your past would disqualify you from a job, even a lowly, entry-level pizza job. Right?

JEREMY

Well...I...am confused...I...don't...well, yes, I suppose.

RENE

Add another suspect to our list.

GUY

Jeremy, would you like to make a statement?

JEREMY

Yeah. Bite me!

GUY

Hostile. But at least it's a quote.

RENE

Speak of the devil. Guy, you're next.

GUY

Wadda ya mean, "next"? I'm just trying to make my next deadline.

RENE

You got part of the word right: "dead." Now, Guy, why don't you tell us how you got this beat.

GUY

Simple. My editor assigned me.

RENE

Too brief. For a reporter, you're lacking in details. Give me the details. Give me the whole story.

GUY

From when?

RENE

From your last job.

GUY

Well, I worked as a timeshare salesman—

RENE

—no, the last job you were fired from.

GUY

How'd you know about that?

RENE

A little comma-girl told me.

GUY

Okay...I got a gig on a reality show. Really cheesy, too. It was called *American Idle: Lifestyles of America's Couch Potatoes*. We were supposed to watch videotapes of sluggards who did nothing all day but watch TV. Contestants got points for involving the most family members, for watching really stupid shows, and for finding creative ways to get others to do things for them. It also helped if they farted, drooled, or passed out. Anyone setting himself on fire automatically won for his family. My job was to make sarcastic comments to incite the audience. We'd get higher ratings if we could get the audience members to identify with the contestants. Because most contestants were losers, it was difficult for the audience to empathize. The pay was good, but after awhile I got tired of people throwing fruit at me.

RENE

Looks like you struck a nerve.

GUY

I'll say. They struck all of my nerves. After you get hit in the head a hundred times, it's time to find another job.

RENE

But that wasn't the reason you left, was it?

GUY

I left when my contract was over.

RENE

C'mon, Guy, you were an "at will" employee. Your contract said the producers could release you anytime they thought your performance hurt ratings.

GUY

I'll have you know, because of me, their ratings went through the roof.

RENE

Care to explain?

GUY

Sure. There was a mother-daughter combo we watched. Mother looked tired and drugged out. The daughter wore a see-through negligee and funny red shoes. They were so slow they were pathetic. Not even funny. Not enough material for a good joke. After twenty minutes of virtually no action, I said, "These contestants ought to be euthanized for the good of humanity." Something like that. Boy, did I hear about it. I got clunked with a Monster can – a full one. Some joker yanked me out of my seat and popped me right on the nose. Broke it in two places. Next thing I remember is waking up in the alley behind the television station. I staggered to my car, which, by the way, some kind citizen keyed for me. Musta had a flat, too, because the car veered to the left all the way home. I was so sore I couldn't make it to the bedroom. I flopped on the couch and didn't wake up until the phone rang.

RENE

The TV station, no doubt.

GUY

Yeah. It was one of the producers. He was ecstatic. My foot-in-mouth comment caused the ratings to shoot through the roof! What I tell ya? I knew I could boost that show.

RENE

Did you ask for a raise?

GUY

Raise? Are you kidding? I got canned. Canned. The sponsors threatened to boycott the show unless they got rid of me. Can you believe it? Like I say, no good deed goes unpunished.

RENE

Or a stupid one. Then what?

GUY

I took the timeshare job as a temp until I could land a better gig. Luckily, the newspaper job came along.

RENE

All of that sounds innocent enough, except for one thing. You knew Irene.

GUY

No, I didn't.

RENE

The red shoes. "The funny red shoes," remember? In the play, you're one of the reporters who interviews Sid during the press conference. In between scenes, you recognized Irene from her ballet shoes.

GUY

So? That doesn't prove I knew her.

RENE

It proves you had a motive to kill her. You were afraid that if she connected you to that slur, you would lose the reporter job, too. You killed her to prevent her from finding out.

GUY

You know, that would make a great story if it weren't fiction. I only write the real stuff.

RENE

Stuff this in your notes: you're a suspect, too.

GUY

Geez, can't a guy catch a break?

RENE

Here's a tip: change your name. "Guy Stalker" makes you guilty of everything.

SID

Now that you've wrecked our lives, I don't suppose we could plea bargain?

(Hearing his name, WRECKING BALL stirs.)

LIVY

Not so fast. I'm not copping to anything. Least of all to a comma-killing.

EUGENE

For once I agree with Livy.

(WRECKING BALL moans loudly.)

JEREMY

What's his problem?

ARTHUR

It's finally hit him. He knows Irene is dead. He's mourning her.

RENE

Let's find out what else he knows. I'll ask the questions. Art, you translate.

ARTHUR

Okay.

RENE

Wreck. Wreck. Wreck!

(WRECKING BALL ignores her.)

RENE

Art, how do I get his attention?

ARTHUR

He likes shiny objects, the sound of whistles, or food, if you have any.

(RENE takes out a banana from her pocket.)

RENE

Left over from lunch. Here, Wreck. Banana. Sweet banana. For you.

(WRECKING BALL sniffs the air, zeros in on the fruit and heads towards RENE.)

RENE, *Continued*

Not so fast, boy. Easy does it. *(As WRECK closes in)* Stop!

(WRECKING BALL stops. RENE extends her arm. HE extends his. RENE passes the banana. HE slowly retracts his arm then greedily devours the goodie. HE is content.)

RENE, *Continued*

Feel better now? *(HE grunts.)* What did he say?

ARTHUR

He said, “I really don’t know how to answer that question because the botched lab experiment rewired my emotional core. I’m not sure what an emotion is anymore. However, the rumble in my tummy is satisfied now, so I guess the answer is yes.”

RENE

Wreck, I want to ask you some questions, okay? *(WRECKING BALL grunts again.)* Translation.

ARTHUR

He said, “I hope you’re not going to ask multi-part essay questions as my motor skills have been impaired by the incompetence of these arrogant scientific bozos.”

RENE

“Yes” and “no” questions, okay? *(HE grunts.)* Translation.

ARTHUR

“The parameters of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ questions are so variable as to make any question balanced, cohesive, and comprehensible— improbable. Nevertheless, I will do my best.”

RENE

How do you get all that out of a grunt?

ARTHUR

A bad habit of mine, I’m afraid. As a writer, I can’t resist embellishing a little. Sorry.

RENE

Save it for your next play. If there is one. *(To WRECKING BALL)* Wreck, grunting answers doesn't seem to work. Let's do this: for a "yes," bob your head up and down, like this. *(Demonstrates)* For a "no," turn your head sideways, like this. *(Demonstrates)* Wreck, do you understand? If "yes," bob your head.

(A beat. WRECKING BALL understands and bobs his head affirmatively.)

RENE, *Continued*

Good. First question; do you know what happened to Irene?

(WRECKING BALL again bobs his head.)

RENE, *Continued*

Was it an accident?

(This time WRECKING BALL turns his head side to side.)

RENE, *Continued*

Then it must be murder. Wreck, did you kill Irene?

(HE turns his head side to side.)

RENE, *Continued*

You're sure?

(WRECKING BALL bobs his head emphatically.)

RENE, *Continued*

Did you see it?

(HE turns his head side to side.)

RENE, *Continued*

Did you hear it?

(HE bobs.)

RENE, *Continued*

Where did you hear it?

(WRECKING BALL lifts his arm and points upstage.)

RENE, *Cotinued*

You were in the scene shop?

(HE bobs.)

RENE, *Continued*

What were you doing?

(HE puts palms together under his chin.)

RENE, *Continued*

Sleeping. You were sleeping.

(HE bobs.)

RENE, *Continued*

How did you hear anything?

(WRECKING BALL stamps his feet.)

RENE, *Continued*

Noise. You heard a noise and it woke you.

(HE bobs. WRECKING BALL points his finger like a gun and mouths, "Bang.")

RENE, *Continued*

A shot. A gunshot woke you.

(HE bobs.)

RENE, *Continued*

How many people were hurting Irene?

(HE paws his foot once like a horse.)

RENE, *Continued*

One. Okay. What did you do?

(HE runs in place.)

RENE, *Continued*

Running.

(HE pantomimes opening a door.)

RENE, *Continued*

Door. Door. You went outside to the alley.

(HE bobs.)

RENE, *Continued*

Did you see who was there?

(HE bobs.)

RENE, *Continued*

The murderer?

(HE turns his head side to side.)

RENE, *Continued*

Who then?

(WRECKING BALL makes a giant “comma” in the air.)

RENE, *Continued*

Irene. Was she still alive?

(HE bobs.)

RENE, *Continued*

Did she say anything to you?

(HE bobs again.)

RENE, *Continued*

Did she tell you who assaulted her?

(HE bobs furiously.)

RENE, *Continued*

Who was it? Who?

(ARTHUR picks up a “side” containing Wreck’s lines. Slowly, one by one, ARTHUR tears pages from the playbook. WRECKING BALL bolts upright, as if hit by lightning. As each piece falls to the floor, HE writhes in pain. WRECKING BALL doubles over, and drops to the floor. SIC rushes over to him, checks his pulse then turns to his fellow characters.)

SID

I think he’s dead, people. Dead.

GUY

What a story!

JEREMY

I can’t believe it.

LIVY

The big lug. He was worth a year's grant to me.

EUGENE

He may have been a wreck, but he was Roger Sheffield to me. The best chief financial officer an organization could have. I gave him his nickname. "The Chef." Man, could he cook the books.

RENE

(To ARTHUR) You killed him. On purpose.

ARTHUR

I didn't "kill" anyone. He wasn't a person. He was a character. I simply wrote him out of the script. This is a comedy. He wasn't funny enough.

LIVY

That wasn't his fault. You're the writer. It's yours. Why don't write yourself out?

ARTHUR

I suppose so you could take over. That's a good one. A character writing her own play. That'll be the day.

JEREMY

Guys, what are we gonna do for opening night?

ARTHUR

I'll do a quick rewrite. I'll get one of the lab techs to do Wreck's part.

RENE

This is all a bit premature. I'm close to making an arrest, so there won't be an opening.

GUY

Wow. Breaking news. *(Takes out cell phone to call newspaper)* Give me the city editor. *(Pause)* Hello, Fred? Guy. Standby for a break in the Irene Covey case. By the way, the play she was in won't open. Yeah. *MINDCON*.

ACT II

(AT RISE: Where we left off. GUY holds his cell phone and repeat the end of the last line.)

GUY

The Irene Covey Case. The play she was in won't open. Yeah, *MINDCON*. An arrest. Here, I'll put you on speaker phone.

(ARTHUR steps towards RENE as GUY hits the button.)

ARTHUR

I suppose you mean me.

RENE

“What big stones you have Grandma,” said Little Red Riding Hood. You kill Wreck in front of us, and you expect us to believe you didn’t kill Irene?

ARTHUR

Pretend for a moment that I did kill Irene.

RENE

Is this a confession?

ARTHUR

Not on your life. A supposition. Irene and Wreck are characters. Holographic representations of my mind. Not flesh and blood. It’s not a crime to kill make-believe mannequins. It’s every writer’s prerogative.

RENE

That’s bold assertion for someone who has something to hide. It’s no accident that you got rid of Wreck when you did. He was going to implicate you, and you knew it.

ARTHUR

You’re going to have a hard time proving anything. And since you can’t, why do you leave? We have a rehearsal to finish. Clear the stage for Act I!

RENE

Not so fast. It’s apples and oranges. Wreck’s death is not the same as Irene’s.

ARTHUR

Suddenly you’re an expert on dramatic characters?

RENE

I know a thing or two about dramatic logic.

ARTHUR

Well, Freytag, turn over in your grave.

SID

Was he a cast member?

JEREMY

No, he created the Model of Dramatic Action.

SID

How’d you know that?

JEREMY

Jeopardy.

ARTHUR

Go on, gumshoe. Give it your best shot.

RENE

Wreck was in the play, on those pages. Ripping them out was tantamount to a rewrite, and that's okay. However, Irene was not in the play at the time of her death. Her actions were not on those pages. Therefore, you as a playwright didn't have control over her actions. Consequently, what happened to her was in the realm of the real world. What happened to her was either a random occurrence or premeditated act by someone who had a grudge against her. Which gives me your motive, Arthur, for killing her.

ARTHUR

Even if I did, it's an act of fiction. There is no crime against fiction.

RENE

Unless you're Vaclav Havel.

ARTHUR

He was imprisoned because he was a political activist.

RENE

And a playwright. You see, Arthur, at the end of *MINDCON*, you wrote the scene of Irene's final dance around Jeremy as a symbol of her new-found freedom. She was no longer trapped in her comma-body. She was alive. Alive. Irene took that to heart. She told Wreck that she intended to leave the play. To become her own person, a real person without the confines of electrodes and shocks and someone else's words. Wreck mentioned it to Dibbs, who blackmailed you into writing better lines for him. Once her secret was out, you couldn't stand the fact that your character, your creation was going to pit her will against yours. When a creation rebels, the creator retaliates.

ARTHUR

I loved Irene. She grew from a minor character into the catalyst behind all the action. Was proud of her. I loved her.

RENE

You loved your ego more.

ARTHUR

I didn't kill her. None of us killed her. You're just torturing us with mind games. Why are you doing this to us? Why?

RENE

Why, indeed. I have enough circumstantial evidence to show that each of you is the probable murderer. We know that Eugene Dibbs had an affair with Irene and may have

RENE, *Continued*

terminated her because she was pregnant. Sid resented Dibbs's demeaning treatment of him and was willing to sacrifice a volunteer if the embarrassment could be linked to the CEO. Livy, scorned by Dibbs and ever ready to roam into uncharted realms of behavioral testing, gladly sacrificed Irene. Our news hound, Guy Stalker, was afraid—

(GUY is about to be exposed.)

GUY

(Into the phont) —Call you back later!

RENE

—Guy was afraid he would be fired if Irene identified him as the former reality show host. Jeremy fumed at Irene's rumor that he was the father of her child. Wreck was on the verge of identifying Irene's killer when he was ripped out. Our playwright Arthur Minden was jealous of Irene's impending independence. So you all have ties to Irene. All of you have contributed to her death. Now, I can arrest the lot of you, and we all can jockey for plea-bargains. It would save time if someone would just confess or come forward with information that will incriminate the real killer.

LIVY

You want us at each other's throats.

RENE

It will be fun to watch. Starting now, you have five minutes. First one to squeal, gets a deal.

EUGENE

This is preposterous. I won't do it!

SID

I have nothing to contribute, but I'll squeal anyway.

LIVY

Dad, you shoulda stayed in Jersey.

(EUGENE swings golf club.)

EUGENE

Fore! You're fired!

SID

Donald Trump says it so much nicer.

RENE

Guy, make a call for me.

GUY

Sure thing.

RENE

Dial 446-2729. Ask for the duty sergeant. Tell him Detective Dubois needs backup at 2132 E. Pelican. Possible homicide. Got it?

GUY

Got it. *(Turns away to dial.)* Hello. Duty sergeant, please. *(Pause)* My name is Guy Stalker. Yes, that's right. *(Pause)* I'm not kidding. That's my real name. No, I'm not drunk. I'm not high. Blame my mother. *(Pause)* Okay. The reason I'm calling is...

RENE

Four minutes left. Better huddle. I'll leave you alone.

(RENE walks up the aisle and sits in a seat. The accused eye each other warily.)

LIVY

All right! Which one of you bozos killed her? I'm not going to let you sabotage my career!

JEREMY

How do we know it wasn't you? You're the resident backstabber. You're a natural born killer.

LIVY

Oh, yeah? I think you did it, Jeremy. Knocked her up and knocked her off because she was going to finger you as the father.

GUY

I think Dibbs did it. He started the whole chain reaction. If he hadn't been messin' around, we wouldn't be in this...this mess.

EUGENE

Only one person could have done the job and botched it to boot— Sid, that sorry sad sack who calls himself a scientist. Your pathetic attempt at revenge has boomeranged. What do you have to say for yourself, Dr. Dr.?

SID

I'd say – and I never thought I'd admit this – I wish I were in Jersey. A crummy job there is better than a crummy cell here.

LIVY

You tell him, Dad.

SID

Furthermore, I think Guy did it.

GUY

Oh, sure. Pick on the guy with the funny name.

SID

Ever since you joined the cast, you seemed nervous. You have a peculiar habit of looking over your shoulder. That's a guilty twitch if you ask me.

GUY

I have a neurological disorder. In fact, I'm waiting to collect disability. My twitch may make me creepy, but it doesn't make me a killer. How about our playwright? He's the bright one. He could have written this to frame any one of us. Am I right?

(ARTHUR just smiles; unruffled)

LIVY

Guy, you're a moron! The only twitch you have is in your head!

GUY

Witch!

(LIVY attacks him.)

GUY

Get this hydra-headed harpy off me!

(JEREMY grabs LIVY; SID grabs GUY. The following overlaps.)

LIVY

Get your hands off me!

JEREMY

I forgot. You don't like men, do you?

LIVY

Rapist!

JEREMY

Sadist!

GUY

Watch where you're grabbin'!

SID

Believe me, I'd rather be grabbing a gravitron than garbage like you.

GUY

Bite me!

(EUGENE tries to stay out of the way, but the thrashing duos keep knocking into him.)

EUGENE

Stop! Stop! Stop this!

JEREMY

Arthur, do something!

ARTHUR

I think I've done enough. I created this mishegoss.

(EUGENE takes matters into his own hands. HE picks up his golf club, yells "Fore!" and whacks LIVY in the head. SHE slumps to the ground. GUY stops thrashing. SID runs to his daughter.)

SID

Livinia! Livinia! Oh, my God. She's dead!

(ARTHUR examines LIVY.)

ARTHUR

She's down and out, but not dead.

EUGENE

It was one of my perfect shots. A glancing blow.

JEREMY

You hit a woman, your own daughter, for goodnessakes!

EUGENE

Just practicing correct golf etiquette. Ladies first.

ARTHUR

Jeremy, go to the dressing room and get some ice.

(JEREMY exits.)

ARTHUR

Are we through having fun, or do we want to play pin-the-tail on the perp? Guy?

GUY

I'm done.

ARTHUR

Anybody else? *(Silence)* Congratulations! We've circled the wagons and attacked each other!

EUGENE

If we only had more time, my lawyers could find a way out of this.

SID

Your legal team is not due for parole for another three weeks.

EUGENE

And who said money buys justice? I'll sue my attorneys for a refund. *(Pause)* Who can I bribe? Do you suppose Rene might be open for a donation?

ARTHUR

She's all business.

EUGENE

A bribe is kind of a business transaction. Maybe we can deal

LIVY

(Regaining consciousness) Forget...it...putterhead...She's...straighter...than...any...of your puts.

EUGENE

Wha— What did you call me?

SID

She called you a name I've been dying to call you all my life. Putterhead! Putterheadputterheadputterhead. Putterhead!

EUGENE

Outa my sight now! Before I kill you!

ARTHUR

In light of recent events, I wouldn't use that term if I were you.

EUGENE

Oh, yes. Right. Sorry.

(JEREMY enters with an ice bag. SID helps LIVY sit up. JEREMY gives SID the ice; HE holds it against Sid's head.)

GUY

Okay, what's the game plan? My editor's waiting.

ARTHUR

Let's look at this backwards. Did anyone actually kill Irene?

(ALL look at each other accusingly.)

ARTHUR

C'mon, c'mon. We're friends here. What's said in Vegas is not spread in Vegas. Did anyone kill Irene?

(Adlibs. One by one each murmurs "no...I didn't do it...not me...I'm innocent, etc.)

ARTHUR

Then why are we sweating? Something's not right here.

SID

Lots of things. Lots. Anybody?

JEREMY

Can you believe her accent? Come on. I bet nobody from the south speaks like that.

LIVY

What bothers me is Rene never showed ID. We took her word she's a detective.

EUGENE

I knew she was a fake!

GUY

She was pretty good at making you quake, Putterhead.

EUGENE

(Swing golf club) I bet I can stick a ball into your trap if you keep yapping like that.

(GUY ducks for cover.)

SID

All of us, Guy. She got to all of us.

JEREMY

I don't understand how she knows so much about us. Rene revealed things we'd never tell each other, let alone admit to ourselves.

LIVY

It was like she had read a script. I mean, she knew everyone's back-story.

GUY

Arthur, can you explain that? Did she get ahold of your earlier drafts?

ARTHUR

It's unlikely. My files are on my flash drive, and it stays right here in my pocket.

(ARTHUR takes flash drive out of his pocket.)

GUY

Surely you have hard copies.

ARTHUR

Yeah...well, somebody would have to break into my apartment to get those. I've got crates of notes, newspapers, and drafts everywhere. It would take some work to find a specific script. My place is like a black hole.

GUY

The FBI doesn't need a warrant to search your home. All they have to do is label you a "person of interest" under the Patriot Act.

ARTHUR

It's possible somebody broke in. But I won't know for sure until I go home.

SID

Well, somebody knows more than he's telling us because he's told everything to Rene!

EUGENE

It all comes back to Rene, doesn't it?

JEREMY

Why isn't Rene interrogating other suspects? If we didn't murder Irene, who did? And if Rene is an imposter, who is she? What does she want?

(RENE comes down the aisle.)

RENE

What little old Rene wants, dear Jeremy, is a confession. Who's ready to play "Squeal for a Deal!"?

SID

I want to play. I—

(As LIVY pushes SID him out of the way, HE squeals.)

LIVY

Dad, save it for later! Grab her!

(GUY and EUGENE restrain RENE. SHE squirms but can't get loose. THEY prop her on top of WRECKING BALL.)

RENE

Eeeeeek! He's dead. Ohmygodohmygodohmygod!

LIVY

Jeremy, grab some lab harness to tie her. Sid, find a straight-jacket.

JEREMY

On it. *(Exits)*

SID

Yes, Livinia. *(Exits)*

ARTHUR

Okay, Rene, let's find out who you are. Livy, do the honors.

LIVY

With pleasure.

(LIVY pats down RENE, checking pockets for a weapon and ID. As she pokes around, RENE starts to giggle.)

RENE

I'm ticklish.

ARTHUR

Ah, a weak spot. We can exploit that. What you find?

LIVY

Nothing. No gun and no ID.

RENE

I'm undercover. I'm so deep in the bush only one person can identify me.

ARTHUR

Who's that?

RENE

Ethel Walters.

LIVY

Who's that? A reporter on 20/20?

GUY

The president's secretary.

LIVY

The president's secretary? You've got to be kidding.

RENE

That's her cover. She's a plant from the CIA.

GUY

That's the rumor. The agencies were afraid that the president would try to downsize the intelligence community, so they wanted someone on the inside to keep tabs on him.

RENE

See? I'm telling the truth.

ARTHUR

Maybe. Isn't it convenient, though, that you named someone who couldn't possibly vouch for you. One, she'd blow her cover, and two, she's in intensive care at the moment.

RENE

What?

GUY

Don't you read the news? She had a stroke. She's in a coma.

RENE

Oh.

(JEREMY and SID return with an electronic harness and straight-jacket.)

ARTHUR

Jeremy, tie her hands and feet. After she's secure, we'll wrap her in the jacket.

JEREMY

Sorry, Rene.

RENE

That's okay. Be gentle, darlin'.

(While JEREMY binds her, RENE sings.)

RENE

"Comma-comma-comma-come-on. Comma baby, light my fire!"

SID

That's no Southern song.

EUGENE

That's no Southern lady.

ARTHUR

You're a fake, Rene. What kind of fake are you?

LIVY

I have an idea. Guy, get Irene's shoes. The red ballet shoes.

(Guy exits for the ballet shoes.)

ARTHUR

There's only one person who could know so much about us— besides me. And there's only one person who would have motive to frame all of us. Someone insecure enough to feel threatened by everyone in the cast. That would account for the stutter.

LIVY

Let's see if you're "Cinderella." Guy— *(JEREMY returns.)* Jeremy, put them on.

(THEY take off Rene's shoes and try to put on the ballet slippers. The ticklish RENE squirms and giggle.)

RENE

Tee, hee, tee, hee— Stop it! I'll blow my bladder! Stop! Stop!

GUY

You little worm, hold still!

JEREMY

Come on, Rene, help us out. *(Succeeding)* Mission accomplished. The shoes fit!

SID

Ohmygod. Only one person has curved feet like that!

ARTHUR

Welcome to the world of the living— Irene.

LIVY

I knew it. That comma-kid has almost as many lives as a cat.

ARTHUR

What do you have to say for yourself, Irene? This charade of yours has caused quite a commotion.

LIVY

Yeah. You little witch! I could have been arrested! And for what? The killing of a comma?

EUGENE

Not to mention the collapse of the show. Did you ever think of that, Irene?

JEREMY

Well, she's not a comma. She's half-comma, half-person. Thanks to Sid and you, Livy.

SID

I'll take credit for that.

JEREMY

If she died, it would still be murder.

SID

I won't take credit for that.

LIVY

Shut up, Dad. Pack your bags.

SID

Do I have to?

GUY

I want to hear what Irene has to say.

IRENE

Comma-Get-comma-me-comma-out-comma-harness-comma-now!

GUY

Breaking news! *(Dials cell)* Ted? Guy. Give me rewrite. Got a live one. Put it on speaker.

IRENE

Comma-I came-comma-here-comma-whole person-comma—

GUY

—What? No, I don't think it will need punctuating. Just listen—

IRENE

Comma-Now-comma-sliver of-comma-myself. Comma-I am-comma-like-comma-shattered-comma-porcelain-comma-doll. Comma-Why?

GUY

Ted, are you getting it?

IRENE

Comma-I-comma-dance-comma-like butterfly-comma-once. Comma-Now-comma-I crippled-comma-crippled butterfly-comma-why? Afraid-comma-I step-comma-on your-comma-bloated-bloated-comma-egos?

LIVY

That's enough out of you, you little vixen!

(LIVY slaps IRENE. ALL are aghast. JEREMY spins LIVY around and shakes her violently.)

JEREMY

If you ever do that again, I'll deck you. Do you understand? I'll make you flat as a pizza!

(*Shocked, LIVY runs to SID for comfort.*)

LIVY

Daddy, did you hear what he said to me? Daddy?

SID

There, there, Livinia. Daddy will protect you. Thank you, Jeremy. Livinia hasn't let me hug her since she was ten. Thank you for bringing our family together.

GUY

How does she do that? I mean, one minute Irene speaks as smooth as Southern Comfort. The next, she can barely cobble a word or two. Sid, any ideas?

SID

Well...I...er...give me a little time...and—

JEREMY

—Maybe Dr. Dr., you don't know all the side effects of the Kernel Protocol and the Sabbatic Effect. Perhaps, combined, the procedures induced a multiple personality. The red shoes are her anchor, the thing that brings the real Irene back.

LIVY

Either that, or somebody slipped her *Comma-munication for Dummies*.

SID

Livinia, think about it. This accident could mean a Nobel Prize for Chemistry!

GUY

Sure, Sid. I can see the headline now: "Nobel Prize Winner Tries to Clean Up Jersey."

EUGENE

Art, what do we do now?

(*ARTHUR paces.*)

ARTHUR

Too late for rehearsal. Too late for the show. It's over.

SID

Art, you're a genius. "Boy Wonder of Broadway" at 21, three Tonys, an Oscar, the only playwright to have world premieres in six world capitals simultaneously. The list goes on. You can do anything, Art.

ARTHUR

Except overcome two flops in a row. Third time's the charm they say. Well, third time's the curse. Without *MINDCON*, I might as well go back to teaching.

SID

Isn't teaching a noble profession?

ARTHUR

It used to be.

EUGENE

Forget teaching. Be my apprentice. I'll teach you the ropes. In no time at all, you'll be rich.

ARTHUR

I only wanted to be a successful writer. If I can't be that, I can't be anything. So, there's only one thing to do. *(Picks up the stage manager's script; opens it)* Sorry.

(ARTHUR begins tearing out the pages, one by one. The OTHERS including IRENE moan.)

LIVY

What are you doing?

ARTHUR

If I can't have *MINDCON* the way I want it, no one can. I am the creator. I am the destroyer of worlds.

(ARTHUR tears another page as CHARACTERS writhe in pain.)

ALL

(Ad lib) "Stop! "You're killing us!" "You're insane!" "How can you do this?" "We're a part of you!"

ARTHUR

In a moment this will be over. You will be but a memory. A figment of my imagination. No longer a fiction of my mind.

(ARTHUR tears out pages creating more pain and suffering.)

GUY

We are real! We have a right to exist, same as you!

ARTHUR

Your reality is not my reality.

(HE tears a page followed by expressions of pain, agony, writhing and tears by OTHERS.)

EUGENE

Rush him!

(The enraged CHARACTERS charge ARTHUR, knocking the script out of his hands. THEY tackle him and pin him to the floor. Only JEREMY doesn't participate; HE stays by IRENE to untie her.)

LIVY

Get the straight jacket!

(GUY retrieves the straight jacket. With effort, the CHARACTERS get the "corset" on ARTHUR.)

SID

Wow. I didn't know playwrights had muscles. He's tough.

ARTHUR

Tough enough to beat any of you. What are you going to do now, people?

JEREMY

He called us "people." We are real after all.

EUGENE

We need a leader. I nominate myself.

GUY

I nominate Jeremy.

JEREMY

Thank you, but I decline.

LIVY

What do you think, Dad?

SID

You're asking my opinion, Livinia? Why, you, of course. You're a mover and a shaker.

LIVY

No. For years you have been bullied, misused, ignored, ridiculed. I know your work, Dad. You're a fine scientist. You don't get enough credit for the successes you've had. And I know your heart. You're a good man, and you make good decisions when you're allowed. I nominate Sid!

EUGENE

I move for discussion.

GUY

All in favor of discussion, say "aye." *(No response)* All in favor of closing nominations, say "aye."

(ALL CHARACTERS except EUGENE say "aye".)

GUY

All those in favor of Eugene, say “aye.” *(No response)* All those in favor of Sid, say “aye.”

(The CHARACTERS respond with a boisterous “aye” – All except EUGENE.)

GUY

It’s Sid by a landslide!

(The CHARACTERS rush over to congratulate SID –. All except EUGENE.)

SID

Thank you. Thank you. I hope I’m worthy of your trust.

GUY

Do something! Do something!

SID

My first order of business is to...is to...move Wreck offstage. Everybody lend a hand.

(JEREMY helps IRENE stand. HE escorts her to the side. Several OTHERS lift the dead hulk and carry him offstage then return.)

ARTHUR

What are you going to do with me? Make me a planter?

SID

Better. Arthur, I’m going to make you a member of the cast. You’re going to replace Wreck.

EUGENE

Good idea. But why would you do that unless—

SID

Yes, the play will go on!

GUY

Breaking news! Time to call my editor!

ARTHUR

I won’t do it. You can’t make me do it!

LIVY

Yes, I can. Remember the Sabbatic Effect? I’m sure with enough juice we can make you as compliant as Irene. By the time I’m through with you, you won’t have the intelligence to say normal words, let alone write any. Do I make myself clear?

ARTHUR

Clear.

JEREMY

I'm letting Irene go.

SID

What?

JEREMY

She wants out of the play. She wants to be free.

EUGENE

You can't do that.

JEREMY

I can. You're not the only one who has free will. Irene, run!

(IRENE bolts. JEREMY tries to block the OTHERS from catching her. IRENE is lithe and fast; leaping, pirouetting, spinning through and around her pursuers...until SHE slams into SID.)

SID

Beg pardon. Going somewhere?

(Momentarily stymied, IRENE takes off a shoe and holds it up as a weapon. Unfazed, SID grabs IRENE. On his skateboard, [skates], JEREMY plows into SID, knocking him down, allowing IRENE to escape. JEREMY attempts to skate away but is caught by the OTHERS.)

ARTHUR

Good for you, Jeremy. You did what I couldn't do. Close this play.

SID

Jeremy, that was a bad thing to do. Shame on you.

LIVY

You jerk! You've ruined everything for me! My career. My fame. My life.

JEREMY

Maybe this will help.

(JEREMY kisses LIVY.)

LIVY

(As if poisoned) Patooiie! Yuck! Pizza-breath!

EUGENE

What now, Sid?

SID

I don't know. I just don't know.

ARTHUR

How 'bout letting me go? You can't do the play anyway.

SID

Might as well. He's right. We all can go home.

(There is a loud commotion and knocking at the theatre door behind the audience. Knocking.)

VOICE, *Off*

(Bellows) Open up! Let me in!

GUY

I'll see who it is. It could be breaking news!

(GUY runs up the aisle and opens the door. DET. CHET ARMORY enters. The DETECTIVE is all business. HE brushes past GUY and trots down the aisle and onto the stage.)

CHET

(Flashing his badge) Quid fit? What's happening? Detective Chet Armory. Homicide. Metro. There's been a report of a murder here. Be straight with me, or "sum maxima incubo." Do I need translate?

SID

Did anyone make a call?

CAST

(Ad lib) "No." "No me." "I didn't do it." etc.

CHET

Somebody did. Look. I retire next week. "Little Caesar," they'd say – that's my nickname – had four years of high school Latin courtesy of Mrs. Stone. "Little Caesar," they'd say, "That's one for the record books. Solving a homicide your last week. We salute you!" And the gang would raise their goblets in my honor. *(Pause)* Labre lege. Read my lips. There had better be a body here.

LIVY

There's no body here.

CHET

Look. If there was a call, there's a body connected to it. Who made that call? Well?

(GUY checks his cell.)

GUY

Guess I did.

CAST

You!

GUY

I hit the redial wrong. Musta dialed Metro by mistake.

LIVY

Way to go, dufus.

EUGENE

So what if Guy made a call. How do you know the call was made *here*?

CHET

Me ineptum. Silly me. Didn't I tell you? Metro's got GPS-X... A global positioning system. Tracks through walls. GPS-X found you like a pearl in a wine barrel.

JEREMY

Great. Technology is not our friend.

CHET

Technology is a cop's best friend. Okay, where's the body?

ARTHUR

He's over there. Offstage.

CHET

Mind if I have a look?

SID

Wouldn't you like to see our play first?

(Ignoring SID, CHET exits returning momentarily.)

CHET

Dead and getting ripe. Mortiturus virosus. Very stinky. *(Pulls out cell phone; dials)* Hello, City Morgue. Send a van to the Crawford Theatre on Pelican. Yeah. Oh, by the way, he's a big one. Thanks. Later. *(Hangs up)* Now, where were we? Oh, yes, I need to read you your rights. Everyone is under arrest.

JEREMY

You can't arrest us.

CHET

Why do you say that?

LIVY

We're characters. Characters in a play. We're not real. We're creations of Arthur's mind. Tell him, Art. Tell him, please!

ARTHUR

They're real all right. They occupy physical space. They walk and talk. They sing and they dance. They plan and they plot. It's like what the Bible says, "And the Word was made flesh."

CHET

Sounds logical to me. Anyway, you're all under arrest. Let the D.A. sort it out. If I'm lucky, I'll get a commendation for this. Veni, vidi, vici.

EUGENE

"I came, I saw, I conquered." Even I know that.

JEREMY

Five of us. One of him. Hmmm. Rush him!

(The CHARACTERS charge and knock CHET to the floor.)

SID

Run! Run! Run!

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes