

TABLOID

A Musical About the Media

Book and Lyrics

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Principles

Francis P. King (Frenchy King) -
Flamboyant media tycoon. 50's.

Sheila Acer - Frenchy's girlfriend
business partner/newscaster/
reporter. In her late 30's.

Donny O'Connelly - Early 30's.
Clean cut, short hair, attitude.

Laura Fitzpatrick - Early 30's.
Hyper and on the phone often.

Rhoda Haynes - A famous out of work
playwright. late 50's.

Blaze Haynes - Daughter of Rhoda
Haynes. 30's. Disgraced Singer.

Hubert Haynes - Husband of Rhoda
Haynes. 50's. Ex-Congressman.

Mr. Perry - Owner of Poorhouse.
Boss of the Underworld.

TrenchCoat Bob - Works for Frenchy
King. He is his nephew. 40's.

Ensemble Cast Parts

Homeless Residents - ages 17-40

Lawyer - Attractive woman in a suit.

Kids - Teens

3 Ghosts

Perry's Inmates - A collection of people
in Rhoda's memory.

PLACE -New York City

TIME - Present

MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT ONE

Tabloid
Hope and Pride
Spy's Lament
Ratings R Us
Words
Donny's Lament
Ball and Chain
You Did Me Wrong
Hubert's Song
Babel
Stubborn Woman
24 Hours

ACT TWO

There Goes the Neighborhood
Lower Slobovia
I Want My Life Back
Mr. Perry
Perry's Poorhouse
Find the Ending
Tabloid Finale

ACTS AND SCENES

ACT I: 1-6
ACT II: 1-7

SETTINGS

Streets/Park Bench
Happy Endings Homeless House/Int/Ext.
King Media/Int.
Frenchy King's Bedroom/Int.
Perry's Poorhouse/Int/Ext.
Sheila's Bedroom/Int.

ACT 1SCENE 1

AT RISE: RHODA HAYNES'S HOME OFFICE

RHODA HAYNES, a disheveled older Lucile Ball with red hair, throws darts at a picture of FRENCHY KING, an important looking man in a purple suit. Newspaper articles and pictures hang nearby - FAKE NEWS RAMPANT IN KING MEDIA, BLAZE HAYNES - FIRED FROM TV CONTRACT. Another headline glaring away - CONGRESSMAN HAYNES LOSES SEAT IN HOUSE DUE TO SCANDAL.

There are papers on the floor and a laptop computer with manual on the floor. An old typewriter sits on the desk.)

(RHODA'S husband, HUBERT HAYNES is heard off stage humming a tune as he enters with a pile of mail in his arms. He is with BLAZE HAYNES, their daughter)

HUBERT

We're back. That bus ride was murder.

BLAZE

You had to sell the car. I could've sold my jewelry you know. Or we could have had a telethon.

HUBERT

Lawyer bills. Telethon you mean like Jerry Lewis?

BLAZE

Oh for Pete's sake. Jerry Who?

HUBERT

Nothing. Well actually you are correct. Pete bought the car. You know, my intern. Mail's here dear. Darts again, well I see your aim is getting better.

(HUBERT opens mail and sorts it into waste basket, floor and desk. BLAZE paces the room.)

Lawyer bill, lawyer bill, subpoena, fan mail, letter from Frenchy's attorney, oh look Good Housekeeping magazine. WE are not in this I hope. Are we?

BLAZE

Blaze Haynes here - on the prowl for a good gig. Now that my gig has been undone by Frenchy King, I need work. Call 555-1852 and donate. Hashtag #needchashnow.

RHODA

Page 20. How was the job interview dear?

BLAZE

Lousy, Moms. I am done, finished. A squashed bug on the rotting linoleum of life.

HUBERT

Sounds like an election year. Well you think you have it bad, be a TV pundit for a day. I still have makeup in my ears.

RHODA

I think about all those good people Francis King hurt. Makes me so mad. That nice Donny O'Connelly kid, us. All those other folks he trashed. Frenchy Francis King defendant vs. Haynes et al, plaintiffs. What would Donny do? Such a good kid. He needs to sue too.

HUBERT

Well he'll have to write his own lawsuit. But our lawsuit with King Media will be over soon. I expect a decision sooner or later.

RHODA

Sometimes I wish I could just dream it all away.

SONG - "TABLOID"

RHODA

SOME FOLKS LIKE THEIR NAMES
IN HEADLINES
SOME FOLKS LIKE TO SEE
THEIR NAMES IN HEADLINES
BEING A HEADLINE
IS THAT ALL I'M GOOD FOR
BEING A HEADLINE,
BUT I WANT MORE...

IN A TABLOID...

BLAZE

YOU CAN READ ABOUT THE BIG HAIR,
BIGFOOT,
DOG MAN HOT BABE
GOT IT MADE

(DANCE SEQUENCE)

TALKING SHEEP,
IN YOUR SLEEP
YOU CAN HEAR ABOUT
THE BAD GUY
OH MY, WE CRY,
WHAT A STINKING CREEP

HUBERT

YOU CAN READ ABOUT OLD MEN,
OLD FRIENDS
BORN IN JANUARY,
DIED IN JUNE

(DANCE SEQUENCE)

YOU CAN SIGH ABOUT POLITICIANS
AND THEIR IMPOSITIONS
HERE TODAY,
GONE TOO SOON

(DANCE SEQUENCE)

BLAZE

MARY LOU HAD A BIG BANANA
AH AH

(DANCE SEQUENCE)

NOW TOMMY LOU WANTS
THAT BIG BANANA
AH AH

(DANCE SEQUENCE)

HOLD THE PRESSES
MARY LOU SHE CONFESSES

(DANCE SEQUENCE)

HE HAS A KNIFE,
SHE HAS A GUN
HE'S GETS THE SHOE
SHE'S NUMBER ONE

(DANCE SEQUENCE)

RHODA
CUZ IN A TABLOID COLORS
RUN TOGETHER
BLACK TO WHITE

NOBODY KNOWS THE WEATHER
WHAT'S WRONG, WHAT'S RIGHT
I WISH I MAY I WISH I MIGHT
WHAT CAN YOU DO.....

SPOTLIGHT

(FRENCHY KING the overbearing boss hovers
over DONNY O'CONNELLY, a younger man who
cowers.)

RHODA HAYNES

Once upon a time on page six, there was this nice young clean cut all American boy named Donny O'Connelly. He worked as a mail boy at the very important media giant called King Media. The big shot, the owner of this fine establishment was none other than a big lug called, Frenchy King. Donny and Frenchy were having a fight...

DONNY

Now see here Mr. King I have worked for you for five years and this is the thanks I get. You're a crook and I had to tell the world just how unethical you were.

FRENCHY

Facebook, Twitter now I got the FCC and the NSA after me. That guy in the embassy too. You're fired. Get out before I throw you out.

DONNY

Well.... Fine... but just remember what comes around goes around. Karma. You'll see. You shouldn't go making up stuff about people.

SPOTLIGHT

RHODA

It all began with "it was a dark and stormy night".

(Rhoda go dark. Lights up on "HAPPY ENDING HOMELESS HOUSE" SIGN.)

(A wind blows. DONNY fights the cold and braves the wind. He spots a light and the sign that reads, HAPPY ENDINGS HOMELESS HOUSE. COME IN. The place is a rundown mess.)

DONNY

Finally. I'll just try this place.

(DONNY hurries to the front door and knocks. The door opens and the young man rushes in.)

RHODA

God he is in bad shape. But there had to be a silver lining.

(A lot of time has passed at the Homeless House.)

(Suddenly flower pots and bright yard signs appear.)

(In front of the Homeless house a crowd of BYSTANDERS, REPORTERS with cameras gather.) Truck signs reading CNN, FOX, KING MEDIA.)

(KIDS and RESIDENTS crane to see what is up. Just then, the front door opens.)

(DONNY O'CONNELLY, A clean cut young man, 30's, short hair, twinkle in his eye sporting a college preppy suit hangs a large sign that says "Grand Reopening of the Happy Endings Homeless Shelter" as the new owner.)

(DONNY hugs his girlfriend LAURA FITZPATRICK, 30's, hyper college graduate, impatient as she grabs a quick text message. She hugs him back.)

(SHEILA ACER, 30's, a lanky blonde in a tight red dress, stands to the side with her CAMERAMAN. She fixes her hair and pulls her dress down.)

(SHEILA is wearing outlandish platform shoes. She takes the shoes off and pulls a pair of red high heels out of a bag. They are still over the top but not as high.)

SHEILA

It's good to dress for the story. You know blend in.

CAMERAMAN

(sarcasm)

Oh yeah... that really makes you look like the common man.

(Sheila gets up and drags her CAMERAMAN over to DONNY and shoves a microphone in his face.)

(LAURA turns to a BYSTANDER standing next to her.)

LAURA

Oh God, there's that disgusting Sheila Acer.

BYSTANDER #1

Yeah. Nasty Ace.

LAURA

Oh yeah... she's sure interested in Donny. Seems like a lot of media for just a homeless shelter. She must buy her clothes from hookers.

SHEILA

(really surprised to see him)

So Mr. O'Connelly, it's you. Well, I guess you went up in the world.

DONNY

What are you doing here? This is where I ended up after you and Mr. King tossed me out into the street. If it wasn't for the nice old man and Laura, I don't know what I would have done. I guess you never have been homeless.

SHEILA

(surprised by question)

Oh, sure lots of time... there was the time I got overbooked in Cancun and had to camp out at the pool. All night under the stars.

DONNY

Sounds tough.

SHEILA

I spilled coffee on my mink. She was scarred for life.

DONNY

Sorry to hear that. Minks make nice pets.

SHEILA

It was dead.

LAURA

(to herself)

Where's my taser?

DONNY

Wow, some coffee.

SHEILA

(changing subject)

You must be proud of yourself. Care to make a statement for our viewers?

DONNY

Well yeah. We really cleaned up the joint. It all started like this.

(MORE)

DONNY (CONT'D)

SONG - "HOPE AND PRIDE"

I WAS UNEMPLOYED,
 DOWN ON MY LUCK
 MAN IT'S A LIFE THAT
 CAN REALLY SUCK
 THE SIDEWALK WAS
 CLOSIN' IN ON ME
 I MUST CONFESS
 I WAS A MESS
 BUT THANKS TO HOPE
 AND A BAR OF GOOD SOAP

(TINY JAZZ BAND plays)

I SMELL SWEETER
 I GOT THE GROOVY SCENT OF PRIDE

CHORUS

HOPE AND PRIDE
 HOPE AND PRIDE
 OOOH,OOOH

DONNY

GOTTA CLEAN SET OF CLOTHES
 AND A GIRL AT MY SIDE
 AND A SECOND CHANCE
 EVEN LEARNED TO DANCE
 HOPE AND PRIDE

CHORUS

HOPE AND PRIDE
 HOPE AND PRIDE

DONNY

NOW I'M THE NEW OWNER
 I KNOW EVERYONE...
 I KNOW EVERYONE...
 WE GOT HOMELESS SINGLE LADIES
 PRETTY MOMMAS WITH THEIR BABIES
 GROUCHY EMO KIDS IN PINK HAIR
 WHO SAY THEY DON'T CARE
 SOCIAL WORKERS WITH THEIR MASTERS
 KEEPING US FROM ALL DISASTERS
 DID I LEAVE SOMEONE OUT
 NOW THAT WOULDN'T BE FAIR

CHORUS

HOPE AND PRIDE
 HOPE AND PRIDE
 HOPE AND PRIDE
 HOPE AND PRIDE
 HOPE AND PRIDE
 HOPE AND PRIDE

(KITCHEN WORKERS pass out plates to the
 rhythm)

DONNY

HAPPY ENDINGS ARE US
 SO COME ON, TAKE A BUS!
 WE'LL BE KNOWN FAR AND WIDE
 GIVING OUT MEAT LOAFS OF HOPE
 WITH A SIDE OF PRIDE
 GIVING OUT MEAT LOAFS OF HOPE
 AND A SIDE OF PRIDE!

CHORUS

HOPE AND PRIDE
 HOPE AND PRIDE

DONNY

GIVING OUT MEAT LOAFS OF HOPE
 AND A SIDE OF PRIDE

CHORUS

HOPE AND PRIDE
 HOPE AND PRIDE

DONNY

GIVING OUT MEAT LOAFS OF HOPE
 AND A SIDE OF PRIDE

CHORUS

HOPE AND PRIDE
 HOPE AND PRIDE

DONNY

HOPE AND PRIDE

HOPE AND PRIDE
HOPE AND PRIDE

CHORUS

HOPE AND PRIDE

DONNY

HOPE AND PRIDE
HOPE AND PRIDE

CHORUS

DONNY

Thanks for all your support. We now have a decent place for people to live when they're down in their luck.

(The CAMERAMAN holds up a placard with the Twitter hashtag #ALLACE.)

SHEILA

Isn't that sweet. Well you heard it here. This is Sheila Acer for King Media.

(SHEILA pushes away the camera man and walks away but then her phone rings. She answers it.)

Yes doll. Well, how about the twin deal... no, we did that last month... ah that one I didn't like it, the other one is OK, but I think we were there last year. It's getting to be lean pickings Frenchy lean... the usual suspects are scarce. I don't know where they went just scarce.

(getting aggravated)

No, I covered that, no that is over the top even for you. We need to go local. You know everyone is going local these days That's called being a locovore. I gotta go. By the way, guess who runs this new homeless house? Donny O'Connelly. The old man just up and died. The kid has been living here since we fired him. He's the new owner.

(A man named TRENCH COAT BOB brushes past her as she continues her conversation.)

Frenchy, Listen I need to discuss our tactics. I want to go local this time. Something different. I am bored with the same old same old. Gotta go.

(She hangs up the phone and summons
TRENCH COAT BOB. He comes over and
something gets passed between them.)

SHEILA (CONT'D)

Bob, where have you been? I am standing here waiting for you.
I need a story, you need to get me one, find me a good one
for the boss. We got a deadline. If Frenchy wasn't your
uncle, I'd can you.

(She walks away. BOB lingers in the
crowd. The crowd moves away, BOB stands
alone in a shadow.)

RHODA

There he is. The relative. Also a codefendant. Not the
sharpest tack in the tool box.

TRENCH COAT BOB

(mocking)

If it wasn't for being Frenchy's nephew I'd can you. That
woman needs a lobotomy. I get no respect. I went to college
well, online. I got a degree. Well, kind of. Frenchy doesn't
have a degree. Well, it was a good forgery. I made it
myself. I'll show them.

SONG - "SPY'S LAMENT"

TRENCH COAT BOB (CONT'D)

I'LL SHOW'EM
I'LL SHOW'EM,
I REALLY WILL
I'LL SHOW'EM
IT'S A SAD AFFAIR
PULLING STORIES
FROM THIN AIR
SUCH A MOCKERY
TO BE SPYING JUST FOR FREE
I COULD FIND A STORY
GET SOME FREAKING GLORY
AND I WILL, AND I CAN

(BOB harasses BYSTANDERS minding their
own business.)

GIMME THIS, GIMME THAT
TELL ME THIS, SHOW ME THAT!
I AM JUST A PLAYTHING TO THAT MAN

MAN CHASES WOMAN
 WOMAN RUNS FROM MAN
 SUSIE ROBS THE TRUST FUND
 MOMMY'S NOT AWARE
 BUT REALLY DO I CARE?

(A MAN chases a Woman, BOB snaps a picture)

I DON'T GET THE CREDIT
 IT'S ALL ABOUT HIM
 SHOULDN'T LET IT GET TO ME...
 OH MY PSYCHIATRIST WILL BE CROSS
 BIG MAN, BIG TALK, BIG FOY
 BIG JERK HATES MY WORK!
 LIKE ALL CREATIVE GENIUSES
 WE WANNA HAVE OUR SAY
 BUT LITERARY BREAKTHROUGHS
 DON'T HAPPEN EVERY DAY

(Sneaking up on PASSERBY)

SO I MADE SOME MISTAKES
 BUT I KNOW WHAT IT TAKES
 INSTINCTS, FOCUS, VERBAL
 HOCUS POCUS
 FIND A PATH, MAKE A PLAY
 DOORS WILL OPEN ANY DAY
 NO MORE GIMME THIS
 GIMME THAT, YES I CAN!

(Sneaking up on another PASSERBY)

TRENCHCOAT BOB

(musing)

Now where is my GPS. What does this map say poor huz? Is that a b or is that p or d?

(The GPS beeps as BOB fumbles with a map.
 He runs off.)

LAURA

That made me ill. Come on Donny let's go inside before she comes back.

DONNY

I can't believe they came here. Couple of sleaze bags. Mr. King is not gonna like this. The Feds are still hassling him about that fake Haynes story. I had to turn him in. It was only right.

LAURA

Yeah, you were pretty brave going up against Francis King.

(The crowd breaks up. DONNY and LAURA enter the homeless shelter front door.)

(RHODA flips through a newspaper)

RHODA

Oh yes, now to the juicy part.

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE

ACT 1

SCENE 2

SETTING: KING MEDIA - High rise office

TIME: AM

(SHEILA ACER walks in with a cup of coffee. A stunning RECEPTIONIST sits at a desk typing on a computer.)

(A dominating looking figure sits in a huge chair playing with a selfie stick. The figure spins around. The very imposing FRENCHY KING is playing ANGRY BIRDS on the computer tablet. He lights up when SHEILA appears throwing down her coat. She finds a letter on the desk and reads it.)

FRENCHY

(agitated)

Hi Sheila. Well what happened? Yeah, that's another subpoena from the FBI. Damn O'Connelly. I want to wring his neck!

SHEILA

Calm down.

(She gives him a kiss. The RECEPTIONIST gets her cue to leave and shuts the door behind her. ACE sits on the desk.)

FRENCHY

Damn birds. I don't get this game. Did you talk to him, did you interview him?

SHEILA

Yeah, he told us in so many words his tale of redemption. CNN was there so was that other one with that great looking guy Todd. But, I can't see why he was there. Such a waste of great ass on the screen. But I'll tell you Donny O'Connelly's girlfriend looks like a piece of work.

FRENCHY

Girlfriend? He's old enough to have a girlfriend?

SHEILA

A social worker at the home. A real do gooder and man those shoes. I'd put her on the World's Biggest Loser if there was such a thing for shoes. I gave Bob his task. He was late as usual. So... are they here yet... where's the ratings?

FRENCHY

Out treasure hunting again? I wonder what he's looking for. Here's the latest report.

SHEILA

Yeah, give it to me.

(FRENCHY stands up. Nearby is a coat rack with several jackets hanging up. He takes down a purple jacket and tries it on. Outlandish looking. He takes a selfie of himself with his selfie stick.)

FRENCHY

How do I look?

SHEILA

Like a plum with stretch marks.

FRENCHY

Great isn't it? For my next congressional hearing? But, Congressman, I didn't know the bathroom was bugged.

SHEILA

It makes you look fat. You don't look good in patterns. Don't wear that when you go before the Feds. So, you were saying about the ratings? Maybe the kid's right.

FRENCHY

(horrified at the thought)

What? Now, see here, let me tell you missy.

SHEILA

OK I am listening because you are going to give pearls from your great intellect.

FRENCHY

It's an inaconvertable fact.

(FRENCHY cops a pose)

SONG - "RATINGS R US"

FRENCHY

WE'RE NUMBER ONE IN THE RATINGS GAME

SHEILA

NUMBER TWO

FRENCHY

OK WE'RE ALMOST AT THE TOP OF THE PACK
OUR COMPETITION IS ON THE RUN
CUZ WE GOT THE GOODS THAT THEY LACK

SHEILA

YOU MEAN THAT PURPLE COAT OFF THE RACK JACK

FRENCHY

I LOVE THIS COAT

SHEILA

YEAH YOU WOULD
THAT PURPLE COAT OFF THE RACK JACK

FRENCHY

IT'S MINE!
WE GIVE THE PUBLIC WHAT THEY WANT
ANXIETY AND HEARTBURN
AND WHAT THEY WANT TO HEAR

SHEILA

I GET IT

FRENCHY

WE ALL KNOW THAT FUNNY FEELING
THAT COMES FROM
PARANOIA, BLOOD LUST
AND FEAR MY DEAR

SHEILA

OH YOU ARE SO THE BOMB!

FRENCHY

RATINGS R US RATINGS R US
TELL CNN WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS
PHOOEY ON STANDARDS, STANDARDS AIN'T FUN

SHEILA

GRAMMAR

FRENCHY

PHOOEY ON STANDARDS, STANDARDS AIN'T FUN

SHEILA

THERE'S THAT GRAMMAR AGAIN

FRENCHY

WHO NEEDS JOURNALISTIC INTEGRITY
WHEN YOU CAN HAVE ALIENS,
TALKING DOGS AND KILLER BEES

SHEILA

OH PLEASE

FRENCHY

WHEN IT'S GOOD FOR RATINGS
IT'S GOOD FOR US
RATINGS, RATINGS

WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS
WHEN IT'S GOOD FOR RATINGS
CUZ RATINGS R US!
WELL DID YOU HEAR THE STORY
RATINGS R US!
BLA WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS?
RATINGS R US!

OH YOU ARE SOMETHING

SHEILA

R US!

I'm going to bury that kid!

FRENCHY

I'm not sure I like the sound of that.

SHEILA

Now Sheila.

FRENCHY

What Frenchy?

SHEILA

Turn about is fair play.

FRENCHY

What are you trying to say?

SHEILA

You know what to do.

FRENCHY

Oh the hell with you.

SHEILA

Sheila my dearest.

FRENCHY

Don't pout, I hate it when you pout.

SHEILA

You're my other half.

FRENCHY

Yeah you could say we are the Jackie and Hyde of media.

SHEILA

(The phone RINGS. SHEILA picks up the phone and listens attentively to TRENCH COAT BOB on the other end. FRENCHY combs his hair gazing into a pocket mirror.)

SHEILA (CONT'D)

It's our wondering boy. Bob, did you get me a story? We need to be sure you can make it stick. Boss is out for blood. Can it be credible? And you heard it where again?

TRENCH COAT BOB

I heard it all while I was standing by the ally, walking my ah, my dog and I heard it. Money laundering, oh my, who would of thought such a nice kid. Embezzlement it just gets more interesting.

SHEILA

Sounds good. Now, don't screw up. Any ten-year old can do this.

TRENCH COAT BOB

Yes, yes, I know.

SHEILA

Thanks, we'll be in touch.

(SHEILA hangs up and FRENCHY'S ears are burning.)

FRENCHY

Well? Bury him!!!

SHEILA

Looks like we got us a story. We hope. Oh boy.

A STREET SIGN

(TRENCH COAT BOB, standing by a street sign, pulls out a map and a magazine from his huge pockets. He looks longingly at a strange map.)

TRENCH COAT BOB

Any ten year old can do this. Any ten year old can do this. The nerve of her. I am family, not her. I want to find this place. What does this say? Door house? Is that a P or a B?

(He stands in the receding light until it fades to END OF SCENE.)

ACT 1SCENE 3

SETTING: SHEILA'S BEDROOM / FRENCHY'S OFFICE

TIME: EVENING

*(Back at the office, FRENCHY KING
talks to SHEILA on the phone.
SHEILA is at home and the stage
is split.)*

FRENCHY

So what's in a word? You know Ace I have used every word ever written.

SHEILA

Oh sure you have.

FRENCHY

No it's true. A word is a universe within itself.

SHEILA

You're so full of BS.

FRENCHY

Take the word embezeller. It connotes a universe of intrigue and secrets. So what's in a word?

SHEILA

The word is embezzler.

FRENCHY

I said that.

SHEILA

No you said embezeller.

FRENCHY

Mind your own bidness.

SHEILA

No...

FRENCHY

Can it, Sheila.

SONG - "WORDS"

FRENCHY

A WELL TURNED PHRASE
 IS A WONDERFUL THING
 SO MULTI SLABIC
 REALLY DRAMATIC
 GRAMMERLY PURE
 JUST MAKES MY HEART SING

WORDS CAN BE PRETTY
 WORDS, WORDS
 WORDS CAN SOUND SHITTY
 WORDS, WORDS
 THE VOWELS AND THE VERBS
 WORDS, WORDS
 THE WORDS THAT DISTURB
 WORDS, WORDS

EMOTIONAL BLISS
 WHEN IT'S WRITTEN JUST RIGHT
 YOU CAN LAUGH WHEN
 THEY CAN CRY
 WHEN THEY FEEL YOUR SPITE
 DAY AFTER DAY OF
 EMBELLISHING WORDS
 RISING WITH SUNSHINE AND
 CHIRPING OF BIRDS...
 GEE DID I SAY THAT?

SHEILA

A WELL TURNED PHRASE CAN
 DO SO MANY THINGS
 WORDS SHOULD BE PRETTY
 WORDS, WORDS
 ISN'T IT A PITY
 WORDS, WORDS
 EMOTIONAL WRECK
 WHEN YOU SAY IT JUST RIGHT
 YOU CAN SNORE ALL YOU WANT
 WHEN I CRY IN THE NIGHT
 DAY AFTER DAY
 I'M BURIED IN WORDS
 NO HAPPY SUNSHINE OR BIRDS
 WORDS, WORDS

FRIEND OR BOSS
 WITH THOSE WORDS, WORDS

WHATEVER THE COST
 SOMETIMES YOU ASK AN IMPOSSIBLE GAME
 AND SOMETIMES I ANSWER WITH DOUBT
 SOMETIMES THE WORLD SERVES
 US DAGGERS AND RAIN
 BUT WE ALWAYS FIGHT OUR WAY OUT
 WORDS, WORDS
 FRIEND OR BOSS
 WITH THOSE WORDS, WORDS
 WHATEVER THE COST
 WHAT CAN I DO
 IF I SAY TOO MUCH
 IT'S ALWAYS SHEILA
 MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS!

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE

ACT 1

SCENE 4

SETTING: HAPPY ENDINGS HOMELESS HOUSE

TIME: NEXT DAY

(DONNY and LAURA do housework. A nervous female helper named HELEN comes running in with a computer tablet in her hand. She motions to LAURA.)

HELEN

Laura, you have to look at this. I found this news posting on the Internet.

LAURA

(reading)

The Happy Endings Homeless Shelter has been implicated in criminal activity in embezzlement and money laundering for a well known drug cartel. Oh, my God, who wrote this?

HELEN

You know people always do that. It's probably some kid in his bedroom playing a prank. I wouldn't pay any attention to it. Stupid hackers.

DONNY

Oh, I don't know about that.

LAURA

Come on Helen can you help me in the kitchen. I have a bad feeling...

DONNY

(visibly angry)

Hackers. No, it's that King, he's got to be up to something.

LAURA

And that Acer woman. Snake in high heels.

(HELEN and LAURA exit. RHODA, BLAZE and HUBERT quietly watch from a secluded place. DONNY is left alone with his broom. He paces nervously near the TV.)

SONG - "DONNY'S LAMENT"

DONNY

SO WHAT AM I S'POSSED TO DO NOW?
 HE'S GOT ME IN A CORNER
 IT'S ALL IN A DAY'S WORK
 BEING CUT DOWN TO SIZE
 IT'S ALL IN A DAY'S WORK
 BEING BURIED IN LIES
 IT'S ALL IN A DAY'S WORK
 TO CLAW MY WAY OUT OF THIS HOLE
 THEY SAY IT'S A SIN
 TO COMPLAIN ABOUT HIM
 BUT I'M RUNNING IN VAIN
 AND I'M GOING INSANE
 MY DAD ALWAYS TOLD ME
 THEY'D TAUNT ME AND SCOLD ME
 SO SPEAK OUT THE TRUTH
 CHASE THE DEMONS AWAY
 NOW I'M BAD, THEN I'M GOOD
 JUST MISUNDERSTOOD
 HOLD MY GROUND
 I COULD BE OK

KNOW THE RULES, GO TO SCHOOL
FEED MY HEAD, GO TO BED
GET A WIFE, GET A LIFE
IT'S ALL IN A DAY'S WORK
SOME PEOPLE LIVE FOR ANSWERS
IT'S ALL IN A DAYS WORK
SOME PEOPLE REWRITE THE QUESTIONS
TO THE ANSWERS
SO WHAT'S IT WITH HIM
MAKE ME DANCE ON A PIN
BUT IT'S ALL IN HIS DAY'S WORK
BEING A SOLID GOLD JERK
HOW DID THAT MAN BECOME AN EXPERT
ON THE TRUTH
THAT HE HAD TO REWRITE IT
AND WE HAD TO FIGHT IT
SO IT'S ALL IN A DAY'S WORK
AND TODAY HIS TARGET IS ME
HE THINKS HE HAS WON
BUT I SAY HIS WORK IS DONE

(DONNY stands defiant. He exits. RHODA
enters)

RHODA

Then there was that incident that was later likened to Nixon
and the hotel. Something something Gate. It was discussed on
page 45 under the heading "Did It Happen?"

END OF SCENE

ACT 1SCENE 5

SETTING: FRENCHY KING BEDROOM

TIME: NIGHT

(FRENCHY is texting and watching TV. Suddenly, all the lights go out. Frenchy is quite alarmed. There is a large TV in the room that is on the floor. A white face appears in the screen then a white hand. Annoyed moaning is heard from TV. A ragged figure begins to shimmy out of the screen and slides to the floor. FRENCHY does not notice at first because he is yelling at his iPad screen.)

FRENCHY

Ah, dammit, I almost had ya.

(The ragged figure is handed a ball and chain by another white hand that has just shown up in the screen.)

(The ragged figure dons the ball and chain and it suddenly clanks to the carpet with a dull thud.)

(Frenchy looks up. His jaw drops he drops the iPad and rubs his eyes. He is staring at the GHOST WITH CHAINS)

(In the meantime two other pale figures slither from the screen. One gets helped out. One "ghost" has a great makeup job looks like a glamour ghost. The other looks like an old ghost, not a great job.)

GHOST WITH CHAINS

(New York accent)

Frenchy King, Frenchy King. Whoooo. The Council has decided to pay you a visit.

FRENCHY

I knew there was something wrong with this TV. The 3-D Hi Def baloney. Doesn't work.

GHOST WITH CHAINS

You must be judged for crimes against society and little old ladies and nice girls and kindly gents.

FRENCHY

Where's that manual? Where did I put it?

(Frenchy rummages around in the stuff on the bed. GHOST WITH CHAINS approaches the bed, reaches out to touch FRENCHY.)

FRENCHY (CONT'D)

(shrieks)

You're real!

GHOST WITH CHAINS

We are real.. Whooo. As are your crimes Frenchy King.

(The OLD GHOST prods the GLAMOUR GHOST to the front. GHOST IN CHAINS gives the ball and chain to the GLAMOUR GHOST.)

SONG - "BALL AND CHAIN"

GLAMOUR GHOST

DA DA DA DA DA DA
 DA DA DA DA DA DA
 THEY SAY TIME HEALS ALL THINGS
 SO I'VE BEEN TOLD
 LIKE IN A MOVIE
 LIKE IN STORIES OF OLD
 BUT THEN YOU CAME ALONG
 AND CHANGED THE GAME

(OLD GHOST points to a picture of
 (Frenchy)

YOU BROUGHT WITH YOU
 A BALL AND CHAIN AHH

(OLD GHOST and GHOST WITH CHAINS begin to pantomime the door and it being opened)

WELL YOU KNOW I OPENED THE DOOR

BECAUSE I COULD
 WELL THE WOLF AT THE DOOR SAYS
 HE'S MISUNDERSTOOD
 I CRIED OUT AS LOUD
 AS LOUD AS I COULD OHH
 BUT I CRIED OUT IN VAIN
 CAUSE THE ONLY SOUND HEARD
 WAS THE CLANK OF THAT CHAIN
 DOO DOO DOO DOO DOO DOO
 DOO DOO DOO DOO DOO DOO
 DOOO DOOO
 DOO DOO
 BALL AND CHAIN
 WHAT HAVE YOU DONE
 I HAD MOUNTAINS TO CLIMB
 AND RACES TO RUN
 BA DA DA DA
 WHAT WILL I DO NOW
 WHAT WILL I DO
 WITH THIS STUPID
 BALL AND CHAIN?
 WHEN YOU GIVE UP THE GHOST
 YOU GIVE UP THE CHAINS
 JUST ASK THE MAN

(OLD GHOST takes keys from Frenchy's bathrobe pocket. The bathrobe is nearby.)

WHO KEEPS THE KEYS IN HIS HAND
 IT'S HARD TO CROSS A RIVER OF STONE
 IT'S HARD TO GET BACK
 YOU'RE NAME WHEN IT'S
 RIPPED TO THE BONE
 DOO DOO DOO DOO
 DOO DOO DOO DOO
 DOO DOO DOO DOO
 DOO DOO DOO DOO

(GHOST WITH CHAINS opens her shirt we see bones.)

BALL AND CHAIN
 WHAT HAVE YOU DONE
 I HAD MOUNTAINS TO CLIMB
 AND RACES TO RUN
 BA DA DA DA
 WHAT WILL I DO?

WITH THIS STUPID
 BALL AND CHAIN
 BALL AND CHAIN
 WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?
 I HAD MOUNTAINS CLIMB
 AND RACES TO RUN
 BA DA DA DA
 WHAT WILL I DO NOW
 WITH THIS BALL AND CHAIN

GHOST WITH CHAINS

Well, well, here we are again in the presence of the great Mr. King. Or should we call you the Sun King? Now that's a good nickname for a pompous ass as yours truly. Do you know who I am your majesty?

(FRENCHY cowers in fear and utter shock.)

FRENCHY

What are you talking about? What man? No I don't know you! What the hell are you? No, it must be the bad sushi. You aren't here.

GHOST WITH CHAINS

(dramatic New York accent)

You will be visited by some casualties. So enjoy the show. It's a reality show and you are the star.

FRENCHY

OH really, so when is that going to happen?

(thinking)

Hasn't that been done before?

GHOST WITH CHAINS

Done before, done before? Geez, a critic.

FRENCHY

Why am I talking to a damn hallucination!

GHOST WITH CHAINS

Oh contraire.

(GHOST WITH CHAINS stalks FRENCHY around the room scaring him.)

GHOST WITH CHAINS (CONT'D)

Anytime now !!!

(The bedroom goes away and out comes a TINY NIGHTCLUB WITH CHAIRS AND TWO TABLES.)

(FRENCHY still in his pajamas is pushed into a chair by RHODA who has entered)

(HUBERT and BLAZE enter. BLAZE in a long red dress steps up to a mike.)

RHODA and HUBERT sit at another table looking like tourists.)

FRENCHY

What the heck is going on here?

(He fidgets nervously.)

SONG- "YOU DID ME WRONG"

BLAZE

YA KNOW I HAD A CAREER
 I WAS ON TOP BUT YOU CAME ALONG
 IT ALL STOPPED
 WHILE SITTING IN THE MEDI-SPA
 I SPIED A MAGAZINE
 ON THE COVER
 SCORNED AND ALONE
 MY FACE PUCKERED COFFEE STAINS
 DRIPPING INNUENDO
 AND THE CAPTION READ
 BLAZE HAYNES
 CAUGHT LIP SYNCING
 AFTER PARAGRAPH TWO
 THE PHONE RANG
 IT WAS MY AGENT
 WHO SAID "I QUIT"
 YOU DID ME WRONG, FRENCHY
 YOU DID ME WRONG, FRENCHY
 YOU TOLD A TALE, FRENCHY
 IT WAS A WHALE OF A TALE
 I WENT TO JAIL
 WELL NOT REALLY

IT JUST FELT THAT WAY
 YOU KNOW ITS HARD
 READING ABOUT YOURSELF
 WHEN YOUR FACE, YOUR FACE
 IS ALL OVER THE SHELF
 THERE'S NOT ENOUGH WORDS
 IN THIS SONG
 TO TELL HOW YOU DID
 YA DID ME WRONG
 ITS HARD, IT'S HARD
 WHEN THE WORDS
 ARE SO LONG
 THEY WON'T FIT
 IN THIS SONG
 DOO DOO DOO DOO DOO DOO
 YOU DID ME WRONG!

(RHODA stands up and applauds.)

RHODA

Wasn't she great. Give her a big hand.

(SOUNDS of CLAPPING like in a big crowd.)

FRENCHY

Why does that sound familiar? Are you done yet? I want to go back to bed.

(FRENCHY tries to stand up and leave but he seems glued to the chair by an invisible force.)

(HEADLINES begin floating in the air that say "CAR CRASH - UP NEXT".)

(The tiny nightclub changes color SIRENS SCREECHING and a CRASH sound.)

HUBERT

Oh my. I remember that. Blaze and I.

RHODA

Yes and it was not a fun time for me either. Damn King reporters chasing you.

(The headlines change to read -
 CONGRESSMAN HAYNES AND LOVE CHILD, THE
 FAMOUS CHANTEUSE, BLAZE, ALMOST KILLED IN
 CAR CRASH. CHASED BY KING MEDIA
 REPORTER.)

FRENCHY
 I DIDN'T DO IT!! IT WAS THOSE OTHER GUYS !!

(BLAZE wants to keep singing.)

BLAZE
 YOU, YOU DONE ME WRONG
 (big finish)

FRENCHY runs off terrified. RHODA and
 HUBERT clap and holler. BLAZE bows.

BLAZE (CONT'D)
 What a sore sport.

RHODA
 Now Hubert. You're up next. Break a leg.

(FRENCHY runs like he is escaping. For a
 moment he thinks he's alone and collects
 his breath.)

FRENCHY
 That was a dream. I was dreaming about those awful Haynes
 people. Why? Where am I?

(FRENCHY stands alone in the dark.)

(Suddenly HUBERT is standing by a chair
 on a dark stage. He has a floor length
 gavel he holds like a flag and there is a
 light on him.)

(HUBERT turns to FRENCHY.)

HUBERT
 FRENCHY KING, ISN'T IT TRUE
 YOU THINK THE WORLD BELONGS TO YOU?

FRENCHY
 Ahhh... no?

HUBERT

Exhibit A. Headline - *Hubert Haynes is a crooked Congressman*. Now that wouldn't be because we tried to investigate your questionable journalistic practices, would it?

(HEADLINES appear in the air)

FRENCHY

No, I don't know how that headline got there.

(HUBERT assumes lawyer role)

SONG - "HUBERT'S SONG"

HUBERT

IS IT TRUE FRENCHY KING
IS IT TRUE?
YOU CONFOUNDED THE PEOPLE,
DID YOU?
WITH OUTRAGEOUS, BALONIUS
GOSH DARN FELONIOUS,
TALES...

(Four pink haired KIDS enter. HUBERT looks annoyed.)

KIDS

OF INTRIGUE... OUR EARS ARE BURNING!
IS IT TRUE
WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT YOU?

HUBERT

READERS AND TWEETERS
MEDIA BELIEVERS
IS IT TRUE
WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT YOU?

FRENCHY

NOW THIS IS ALL VERY
INTERESTING
NOT!
BUT I REALLY WANT TO GO BACK TO BED

KIDS

NOT SO FAST
WE SAVED THE BEST FOR LAST

FRENCHY

Is this that crazy ghost thingy. Are you going to show me the error of my ways or what?

(Hubert raises the gavel over Frenchy's head.)

(HUBERT swats FRENCHY with the gavel.)

HUBERT

I thought this was my scene.

KID #1

You are over your head gramps. We're your backup.

HUBERT

Do you know any soft shoe? None of that stuff you kids do on your heads.

KID #1

Hit it boys.

(Dance routine soft shoe as Hubert speaks.)

HUBERT

Now where was I? I would like to sing about a number of things that come to mind.

HUBERT (CONT'D)

I WAS ONCE AN UPSTANDING CONGRESSMAN
NEVER HAD A WORRY OR A DOUBT
EVERYBODY LOVED ME
EVEN WHEN THEY SNUBBED ME
I HAD A JOB THAT HAD
WELL, YOU KNOW... CLOUT
WHILE SITTING IN THE MEN'S ROOM
I READ A MAGAZINE
AND TO MY SURPRISE
I GAZED INTO MY EYES
GAZING BACK AT ME

IN LIVING COLOR WAS ME ME ME!
AND THE CAPTION READ

HUBERT HAYNES CAUGHT RED HANDED!
KIDS

(KIDS keep dancing looking bored.
Suddenly they break into a hip hop
routine to an unseen boom box.)

KID #1
You're putting us to sleep Gramps. Let's show em how its
done.

HUBERT
Now wait a minute who's side are you on?

(The KIDS break out into a wild dance
number dragging HUBERT and FRENCHY into
it.)

(The mood becomes raucous and weirdly
supernatural when RHODA and BLAZE enter
the scene.)

(Dazed and confused finally FRENCHY
breaks free and runs off.)

END OF SCENE

ACT 1SCENE 6

SETTING: PARK BENCH

TIME: LATER ON

(RHODA, BLAZE and HUBERT, looking their normal selves, are sitting on a park bench in deep discussion.)

RHODA

That was a splendid performance. No one ever really knew if all that actually happened

BLAZE

You should write a play about it. Call it The Flatbush Little Dickens.

HUBERT

Doesn't the Scrooge character have a change of heart? That reminds me of a story... We were trying to convince this Congressman to change his vote..

RHODA

Yes dear... I think it's time he met the game changer.

STREET

(There is laughing heard. 4 KIDS saunter in and gather around a lamppost. One KID lights up a cigarette. Another KID is reading something on his IPHONE.)

KID #1

Did you know the Clapper thingy and Chia Pets are really alien techno?

KID #2

Now that is buzz worthy.

KID #3

Did you read about the pizza drone that blew a guys's apartment up because he had the wrong change. That's nasty.

KID #4

Serves him right. Pizza drones. How do you suppose the King Media dudes get their information? Spies? Drone spies?

KID #1

They get it from the aliens dude. Pizza drones came from aliens.

(RHODA, BLAZE and HUBERT listen in on the banter. Just then SHEILA ACER walks along the street. She sees the kids and tries to avoid them nervously.)

(The kids recognize her as she walks down a dark street at night as she is getting out of work.)

(SHEILA tries to avoid them. The KIDS circle around her kind of slow but not menacing.)

The KIDS pick up items in the street and use them as percussion instruments.)

KID #1 (CONT'D)

Well lookie here. We talk and voila she shows up. The Queen of mean and in between. Can I escort you to somewhere?

SHEILA

Now boys don't get up on my account.

SONG - "BABEL"

KID #1

EACH DAY I TURN IT ON
BEFORE I GO TO SCHOOL
THEY SAY I NEED TO WATCH THE NEWS
DON'T WANT TO BE A FOOL
THE LADY IN THE TIGHT DRESS
HER HAIR IS PRETTY COOL
BUT ALL I HEAR IS
BLAH, BLAH BLAH BLAH,
BLAH BLAH BLAH,
BLAH BLAH
BLAH, BLAH BLAH BLAH

KID #2

THIS BLONDIE GOT A SWAGGA ON HER
 SHE'S SUCHA PRETTY PICTURE
 YOU COULD PUT A FRAME ON HER
 KINDA LIKE MY SISTER
 BUT ALL I HEAR IS
 BUY A CAR, BE A STAR
 BUY A FROZEN DINNER
 TAKE A POLL, ROCK N ROLL
 I TOO CAN BE A WINNER
 BUT ALL I HEAR IS
 BLAH, BLAH BLAH BLAH,
 BLAH BLAH BLAH,
 BLAH BLAH
 BLAH, BLAH BLAH BLAH

KID ROUND

FLASHY
 AND KILLIN'
 THRILLIN'
 AND A LITTLE MORE

FLASHY
 AND KILLIN'
 THRILLIN'
 AND A LITTLE MORE

KID #3

SIAMESE TWINS FACE
 FIRING SQUAD
 NOW. NOW, NOW
 WHY THAT'S PRETTY ODD

KID #4

THERE GOES BIG FOOT
 HE'S LOOKING FOR A THRILL
 I WOULD LIKE TO TALK TO HIM
 I GUESS I NEVER WILL
 DID YOU READ ABOUT YEAH YE
 DID YOU HEAR ABOUT YEAH YE
 DID YOU READ ABOUT YEAH YE
 DID YOU HEAR ABOUT YEAH YE
 ALL CREATIVE CAN YOU GET

IT'S ALL POTENTIALLY BELEVABLE

IT'S ALL POTENTIALLY BELEVABLE

ALL YA WANNA DO IS BIMBAMBOOZ ME
 ALL YA WANNA DO IS BIMBAMBOOZ ME
 ALL YA WANNA DO IS BIMBAMBOOZ ME
 ALL YA WANNA DO IS BIMBAMBOOZ ME
 AH AH AH I BETTER REWIND
 ALL YA WANNA DO IS BIMBAMBOOZ ME
 ALL YA WANNA DO IS BIMBAMBOOZ ME
 ALL YA WANNA DO IS BIMBAMBOOZ ME
 ALL YA WANNA DO IS BIMBAMBOOZ ME
 AH AH AH I BETTER REWIND

BABEL

IT'S SO MUCH BABEL
 YOU THINK WE'RE RIFF RAFF
 YOU THINK WE'RE RABBLE
 IT'S SO MUCH NOICE TO ALL US
 CITY GIRLS AND BOYS

AH AH AH I BETTER REWIND

SHEILA

You are just a bunch of hoodlums. Leave me alone.

KID #1

She called us hoodlums. That hurts my feelings. You can dish it out but you can't take it. Better run sister. So where were we?

(SHEILA runs away. The KIDS run off.)

(BLAZE, HUBERT and RHODA are left alone sitting on the park bench.)

BLAZE

My, they really don't like her. I sure don't like her.

HUBERT

I should say not.

RHODA

Today's youth. Well even they have a story

HUBERT

Somewhere between Twittering and that other Book thing.

RHODA

Facebook. I can't rightly blame because... they have to stand their ground. Be stubborn.

HUBERT

Stubborn you mean like you can be.

(RHODA stands up and begins to pace. She is lit by one light.)

SONG "STUBBORN WOMAN"

RHODA

ALL THROUGH HISTORY
 SINCE TIME BEGAN
 THERE'S BEEN A MESS
 BETWEEN SOME
 WOMAN AND SOME MAN
 CLEOPATRA HAD A GUY
 MARY SHELLY HAD A THING
 EVEN OLIVE OIL HAD A FOIL
 LOOK AT ME EVEN I'VE HAD A ROIL
 YOU KNOW I'VE HAD MY RUN IN
 WITH DRINKERS AND THINKERS
 AND DANDY HOODWINKERS
 BUT I'LL DO JUST FINE
 CAUSE I'M A STUBBORN WOMAN
 YOU KNOW A STUBBORN WOMAN
 YOU WOULD AGREE IT TAKES
 A STUBBORN WOMAN LIKE ME
 WIMPS AND SHRIMPS AND
 SIMPY GALS
 YA GOTTA HAVE JUNK
 IN YOUR TRUNKS
 LISTEN UP PALS
 YOU THINK IT'S BAD
 ALL THIS FUSSING AND FIGHTING
 YOU THINK YOU'RE MAD
 THINK YOU'RE SAD
 WELL I SAY YOU THINK TOO MUCH
 JUST FLICK IT OFF YOUR SHOULDER
 BEFORE IT MAKES YOU OLDER
 BE A STUBBORN GIRL
 AND FIND A WAY
 THERE'S BEEN A WOMAN
 SINCE THE WORLD BEGAN

SOME STUBBORN WOMAN
 BEATING UP SOME MAN
 SO BE A STUBBORN WOMAN
 GET UP BEFORE YOU FALL
 I KNOW CAUSE I'VE DONE IT ALL
 SO BE A STUBBORN WOMAN
 LIKE ME

HUBERT

As much as I hate to say this, he needs you know.. a chance.
 I know... twenty-four hours. That always sounds
 sportsmanlike.

BLAZE

I'd just hire a hit man.

HUBERT

Oh my... That reminds me of the time... No forget it.

END OF SCENE

ACT 1

SCENE 7

SETTING: FRENCHY KING'S BEDROOM

TIME: NIGHT

*(ON FRENCHY'S TV SCREEN. We see a
 commercial playing)*

*(Just then the TV comes to life. Another
 TV GHOST is in the screen.)*

SONG - 24 HOURS

TV GHOST

I AM GHOST OF THE BACK PAGE
 I AM THE GHOST OF MADE UP NEWS
 IS IT TRUE, IS IT NOT

AM I DEAD OR JUST FORGOT?
 INVENTION IS MY HOBBY
 I'M A SHODDY DISEMBODIED

FRENCHY

The back page?

TV GHOST

24 HOURS THAT'S ALL YOU GET
 24 HOURS NOT TEN OR TWO
 24 HOURS AND IT'S OVER FOR YOU!
 OH BOO HOO!
 THESE BLOOD THIRSTY FACES
 WAITING TO GREET YOU
 THERE'S CREATURES THERE
 HAPPY TO MEET YOU
 HAPPY TO SEAT YOU MAYBE TO EAT YOU
 IN A FRENCHY BOUILLABAISSE!!

FRENCHY

Where? You're the ghost of fake news, maybe your warning is fake too.

GHOST

THAT'S FOR ME TO KNOW AND
 YOU TO FIND OUT
 24 HOURS THAT'S ALL YOU GET
 24 HOURS NOT TEN OR TWO
 24 THEN IT'S OVER FOR YOU

FRENCHY

What should i do?

GHOST

RETRACTIONS!
 HA HA HA

(FRENCHY KING jumps out of bed in a panic.)

(SOUND of howling wolves. FRENCHY jumps.)

Aahhhh!!

FRENCHY

BLACKOUT

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE 1

SETTING: STREET

TIME: NEXT DAY

(DONNY is being chased by news people. The MAYOR is there and he is orchestrating the chase with NEWS PEOPLE and LOOKY LOOS. RHODA watches from the sidelines.)

SONG - THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD

NEWS PEOPLE

YOU THINK YOU KNOW A PERSON
 BUT THEN YOU DON'T
 THEY SAY THEY WILL,
 BUT THEN THEY WON'T
 WE HAD SUCH HIGH HOPES FOR YOU KID
 BUT LOOK WHAT YOU DID
 THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD
 THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD
 I CAN SEE IT IN THE HEADLINES
 THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD
 WE KNOW WHAT YOU DID,
 THIS CROOK IS A KID

NEWS GUY #1

HE WON THE HOMELESS SHELTER
 IN A GAME OF POKER
 BEGINNERS LUCK CAUSE HE'S MEDIOCRE

I GOT THIS INFORMATION
FROM A REAL ESTATE BROKER

THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD
THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD
I CAN SEE IT IN THE HEADLINES
WE KNOW WHAT YOU DID
THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD
THIS CROOK IS A KID

DONNY

NO!! I DID NOT!
WHY CAN'T YOU LEAVE US ALONE?
YOU INVADE OUR HAPPY HOME

NEWS GUY #2

HE WAS SPOTTED ON A MONDAY, NO SUNDAY
LEAVING BARNEY'S BAR AND GRILL
WITH A BROAD, NO LADY
YOU'D THINK THEY WERE FROM THAT
MOVIE WITH WARREN BEATTY
THE SIMILARITY DID GIVE US PAUSE
I KNOW THIS, JUST BECAUSE

MAYOR

I AM HERE TO TAKE BACK THE AWARD YOU CROOK

DONNY

WHY? MOVIE?
IT'S ALL LIES
I DID NOT DO WHAT THEY SAY
IT'S ALL LIES
WHERE ARE YOU ALL GOING?
COME BACK
I AM INNOCENT!
COME BACK
I AM INNOCENT!

NEWS GUY #3

HIS NAME IS REALLY GELLAR
AND HE AIN'T EVEN A FELAER

DONNY

NOW WAIT A MINUTE!

NEWS PEOPLE

THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD
THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD

HELEN

WE CAN'T AFFORD TERRIBLE PUBLICITY
MAY LEAD TO OUR COMPLICITY

TOM

I BELIEVE IN YOU DONNY AND MS. LAURA TOO
I REALLY DO

HELEN

COME ON TOM
WE ARE GOING DOWN THE STREET
TO THE K-MART PARKING LOT

NEWS PEOPLE

THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD!

(HELEN and YOUNG TOM are moving out with
their shopping bags.)

(The 4 KIDS walk on stage with picket
signs and then exit.)

(DONNY and LAURA are left alone on the
street.)

(Donny has the empty case that the award
came in. LAURA wrings her hair.)

LAURA

It could be worse.

DONNY

What's worse than this?

LAURA

I don't know... ahh.. Damn it Donny we can't just take this lying down. We have to fight back. This is our whole lives and...

(crying)

DONNY

There, there, we'll be fine you'll see.

(DONNY and LAURA walk off holding each other close.)

(FRENCHY KING and SHEILA ACER are both on their phones at opposite ends talking to each other.)

FRENCHY

Change in plans. Find out something good about that O'Connelly kid. Got that?

SHEILA

What... are you kidding?

FRENCHY

It's life and death doll.

SHEILA

What has come over you?

FRENCHY

Think good thoughts, happy thoughts. Reverse psychology. Didn't you learn that in school?

SHEILA

Did you forget to take your medication again?

FRENCHY

Smart ass.

SHEILA

First you want to bury him, now no. Yes, I'm worried.

FRENCHY

I'm the boss. Do as I ask please. It's my decision.

SHEILA

OK, OK ... I'll try...

FRENCHY

I gave up snacks, I'll stop watching TV. Ohh that's a tough one.

(They both hang up together. FRENCHY and SHEILA slink off in opposite directions.)

(TRENCH COAT BOB is singing and feeling carefree as he walks along down a dark path.)

TRENCH COAT BOB

MAN CHASES WOMAN
WOMAN RUNS FROM MAN
SUSIE ROBS THE TRUST FUND
MOMMY'S NOT AWARE
IT'S A LOT OF INTRIGUE
BUT REALLY DO I CARE

(GPS tracker begins to CHIRP)

TRENCH COAT BOB (CONT'D)

It must be here! But what's here?

(BOB comes to a place of dense bushes and vines.)

(He stands looking at the map, his back to the bushes.)

Nothing here.

(Silently the bushes give way, a door opens, an arm comes out grabs TRENCH COAT BOB and yanks him in. The door shuts. The bushes go back to where they were.)

(The bush fades into the darkness.)

NIGHT - HOMELESS HOUSE

(DONNY and LAURA huddles on the front steps of the Homeless House.)

(RHODA stands alone in the shadows.)

DONNY

So I wonder when the Feds will show up to haul us away.

LAURA

We haven't been alone like this in a long time, Donny. You know it's kind of nice.

DONNY

Yeah. So what do we sell off first? Your clunker or mine? Gee my school loans are due. So if we plead guilty will they be easier? Never been to jail.

LAURA

No. Stop this. Get up Donny grow some hair.

DONNY

I don't think that's the precise term. Will it be painful?

LAURA

Painful? What ever. Get up.

DONNY

Right.

LAURA

Right - you got it.

DONNY

Hey yeah... well if our future is a jail cell can't think of any one I'd rather share it with than you, Laura.

TABLOID

IN A TABLOID
 WHEN THEY TELL IT
 HOW WILL THEY SELL IT
 SPELL MY NAME RIGHT
 DID I CAVE OR DID I FIGHT?
 I'M JUST A WORKING GUY
 TOOK A CHANCE I WONT LIE
 IN A TABLOID
 WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT YOU
 YOU HOPE IT'S TRUE
 BUT WHAT CAN YOU DO

(RHODA echoes the song)

I WISH I KNEW...

(RHODA steps out of the shadows and wanders over to the park bench where BLAZE and HUBERT sit.

(SOUNDS OF A HOOT OWL somewhere.)

RHODA

(to them)

Ever read the stories about the Greeks?

HUBERT

Of course.. Which Greeks dear? Jimmy the Greek?

BLAZE

I know about Stavros Azintakis, a Greek shipping magnate. Came to my show once.

RHODA

Oh.

BLAZE

You know the one two years ago in Vegas. What a disaster that was. He blew in like hot wind, blew up my skirt. Well, not actually. Blaze, Blaze, I'm all ablaze, in Greek of course at least the drunk translator says. It was like an Olympic sport, well, I got a gold medal. Until his wife showed up.

(HUBERT, RHODA raised eyebrows. RHODA fingers crossed)

RHODA

Under the radar...

HUBERT

Back to earth. Is this another let's consult the classics moment again?

RHODA

Do I detect a bit of sarcasm?

HUBERT

Just asking. It never hurts to ask. I never assume to know what is going on in that head of yours.

RHODA

Remember the one about the horse. You know da, da, da bearing gifts.

BLAZE

Horse? What da da da?

RHODA

You never got a horse. Hard to get a horse in a taxi. Up an elevator. Into a penthouse. So many things one sacrifices living in a high rise.

BLAZE

What the hell would I do with a horse?

HUBERT

Investment. Get to the point dear.

RHODA

I always get to the point even when it's miles away, like now, you'll see. Remember the back page between the crossword puzzle and that awful instant hair ad. It was an entertaining tale to say the least. The set-up and the double cross.

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE

ACT IISCENE 2

SETTING: KING MEDIA OFFICE

TIME: NEXT DAY

(FRENCHY KING paces nervously in his office, biting his nails. SHEILA enters. There is a news broadcast being held in another part of the floor that goes on that is clearly seen through a glass pane.)

SHEILA

What is wrong with you? We are all looking to find good things on Donny but he has stayed out of the public eye. When did you get a conscience? By the way, where is that no good nephew of yours. He is not anywhere to be found.

FRENCHY

What? You would not understand.

SHEILA

Naa... that would never happen.

(RHODA in disguise as a bag lady named MADGE, enters the reception area of the office. She has a bag with her. She approaches the RECEPTIONIST.)

MADGE

Oh hello. I am here to see Mr. King.

RECEPTIONIST

Ahhh. How did you get in here.

MADGE

Door. How did you get in here?

RECEPTIONIST

I work here. I am calling the guards.

MADGE

You looking for a story, I have one. That Donny person.

(The RECEPTIONIST enters FRENCHY'S office.)

RECEPTIONIST

Sorry to bother you but someone out here wants to talk to you about that O'Connelly situation.

FRENCHY

Oh? OK.

(A woman named MADGE enters. She stares at Frenchy she wants to strangle him but stays in character.)

FRENCHY (CONT'D)

What do you want? I gave last year. Come back next year.

MADGE

Mr. King, I know about you. I have read your various literary contributions to society.

FRENCHY

Oh really.

MADGE

I like the pictures. Say who is that nice looking family you got hanging on your wall there?

FRENCHY

Those are the Haynes nut cases. A bad writer, a stuck up singer and an old politician. Great family.

MADGE

Must be special to have such a place on your wall.

FRENCHY

We're in litigation. I keep their picture there so I can be reminded. But, go on, why are you here again?

MADGE

I live at the Happy Endings Homeless House. I know what goes on there. I know the real embezzler. Not Donny. He's a peach and would not hurt a fly.

FRENCHY

Oh, is that so. Got some evidence.

MADGE

Yes the culprit took a selfie.

(TV screen in office flashes a picture of
a GUY IN A CABLE MAN UNIFORM mugging.)

FRENCHY

Selfie? How'd you do that... in my office? Get the tech guy
up here and fix this screen.

MADGE

This is your embezzler. Not Donny.

SHEILA

Why's he wearing a cable guy uniform?

MADGE

A clever disguise. Who would suspect the cable man of
stealing money from a homeless shelter.

FRENCHY

Sheila get our guest a glass of milk. And some cologne.

SHEILA

We have girls for that.

FRENCHY

Go.

(SHEILA exits.)

FRENCHY (CONT'D)

Tell me more.

MADGE

Well it all started.....

FRENCHY

Yes.

MADGE

Just a minute...

(MADGE pulls food out of her bag and
starts eating.)

FRENCHY

Go right ahead. Not on the desk!

MADGE

I brought you a present because you are such a nice man. It's
cake. Come on, I know you want it.

(SHEILA enters with the milk.)

SHEILA
Here's the milk. I'll go.

FRENCHY
(longing)
Stay. Cake?

MADGE
I made this myself. By the way nice shoes, Babs.

(MADGE scratches herself and fiddles with bag. Picks up things on FRENCHY'S desk and studies them, in the broadcast area something has happened to cause a ruckus.)

FRENCHY
Go see what's going on out there.

(SHEILA exits.)

MADGE
Where were we? Oh yes well it all starts when I first moved in, lost my job cause my gout was kickin' up. The cable guy came to fix the TV on the fritz. I missed American Idol.

FRENCHY
People watch that?

MADGE
Yeah! We was like babes. Nobody ever really knew what he was doin' in the office. He was play'in with phones, tapping and hiding bugs under the rug.

FRENCHY
You know this how again?

MADGE
I know things. See things. Donny never did anything.

FRENCHY
So what is his?

SONG - "LOWER SLOBOVIA"

MADGE

TRODGE N. HASS
 NOT THAT GREEK THING
 SLAVIC FROM GLOOMY PLACES
 YOU READ ABOUT IN NAT GEO
 HE'S FROM LOWER SLABOVIA
 NOW WHERE IT ALL BEGAN
 POOR TRODGE WAS OUT IN THE COLD
 AND HIS PEOPLE WERE STARVING
 WHAT TO DO
 WELL THERE'S ALWAYS THOSE PEOPLE UP NORTH

FRENCHY

Up North?

MADGE

WELL THOSE PEOPLE UP NORTH
 AND ALL THEIR BIG MONEY
 SO THEY SENT TRODGE N.HASS
 ON A MISSION
 AND HERE IT GOES...
 LOWER SLABOVIA,
 LOWER SLABOVIA
 LAND OF STARVING SNOW BOUND SMUCKS
 HE BECAME A SPY FOR SLOBOVIA
 SO WHAT'S TO YA WHEN THE PEASANTS
 WANT TO MAKE A STUPID BUCK
 WHAT'S A LITTLE LARCENY WHRN YER DOWN ON THE LUCK
 DA DOO DA DOO
 WELL THAT'S HOW IT STARTED
 SO TRODGE WAS SENT TO UP THE NORTH
 TO FIND A GOOD MAN TO INVESTIGATE, INFILTRATE
 AND EMBEZZEL FROM
 WELL THERE'S ALWAYS THOSE PEOPLE AT THE
 HOMELESS SHELTER

FRENCHY

Homeless shelter?

MADGE

EVERYONE KNOWS ABOUT THE HOMELESS SHELTER
 WELL THEN THAT'S WHAT THEY DID
 LOWER SLOBOVIA, LOWER SLOBOVIA
 LAND OF STARVING SNOWBOUND SMUCKS
 HE WAS A SPY FOR SLOBOVIA

SO WHAT'S IT TO YA WHEN THE
 PEASANTS WANNA MAKE A BUCK?
 WHAT'S A LITTLE LARCENY
 WHEN YOU ARE DOWN ON THE LUCK?
 DA DOO DA
 HE WENT ON HIS MISSION
 AND IT WAS A HARD ONE
 BUT HE SUCEEDED IN BREAKING
 INTO THE HOMELESS SHELTER
 AND SETTING UP THIS STING FOR A RANSOM

FRENCHY

Ransom?

MADGE

WELL HE RISKED HIS LIFE FOR THE WOMEN
 AND CHILDREN OF SLOBOVIA
 IT WAS REALLY HARD BUT HE DID IT
 AND GOT BACK IN ONE PIECE
 OH THE HUMILIATION
 SO TRODGE WAS SENT TO SAVE HIS NATION
 THAT HOLE IN THE WALL
 YES THAT HOLE IN THE WALL
 WE CALL LOWER SLOBOVIA
 AND THAT'S HOW IT HAPPENED

FRENCHY

Terrible place. Well did he save his nation?

SHEILA

Everything is under control. What did I miss.

FRENCHY

Madge here gave me his name. Trodge N. Hass.

SHEILA

What kind of name is that?

FRENCHY

Lower Slabovian.

SHEILA

You buy this? But, but it's my story. Bob's story remember?
 The phone call? Find dirt etc, etc.

FRENCHY

Yes. Post the selfie with a headline. Finally I get a break.

SHEILA

Oh God, what are we coming to?

(SHEILA exits exasperated.)

MADGE

I hope they catch this crook. For sake of the women and girls.

FRENCHY

Poor things.

MADGE

We'll Send him back to slobovia. You and me!

FRENCHY

YES!

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE

ACT II

SCENE 3

TIME: THE NEXT DAY

(Big splashy front page of cable man's selfie and a headline on a TV screen - CROOKED CABLE MAN EXPOSED.)

(FRENCHY strolls in with SHEILA and past the RECEPTIONIST at the desk.)

(FRENCHY looks up at the screen.)

FRENCHY

There it is, my salvation from the poorhouse. Damn ghost anyway, what does it know about the world? What does it know about the future?

SHEILA

What are you mumbling?

FRENCHY

I love the smell of a trending headline.

SHEILA

No, that's the smell of our reputations going down in flames.

FRENCHY

No, this is news being made and innocent victims being exonerated. Journalism.

SHEILA

Well it helped the ratings and you're a hero to the homeless shelter.

(FRENCHY sits down at his desk and props up his feet.)

(Just then an older man named JOHN storms into the reception area.)

JOHN

Do you know who I am?

RECEPTIONIST

Ah No. How did you get in here?

JOHN

The doorman let me in. I need to see your boss... now!

RECEPTIONIST

OK.

(The RECEPTIONIST rushes FRENCHY'S office.)

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)

There's man here to see you and he looks mad.

SHEILA

Send him in.

(JOHN barges in and hovers over the desk.)

FRENCHY

Well John... so nice to see you. Been a long time.

JOHN

How dare you. You accuse my son of stealing money from a homeless shelter. That's low even for you. You are the master of excessive hyperbole.

FRENCHY

Your son?

JOHN

That boy in your headline is my son Jimmy. That picture is him at a frat house Halloween party. It's all over the place!

FRENCHY

Sheila!

SHEILA

You got it from that woman I told you. You have been punked!

JOHN

I'm suing you and your rags. Francis, you're some friend.

FRENCHY

John...Wait!

(JOHN storms out and leaves in a hurricane of confusion.)

SHEILA

See you never listen to me. Now we're screwed.

(SHEILA leaves crying.)

STREET

(RHODA, BLAZE and HUBERT are looking at the headlines on a row of flat screen TV sets in a store window, FRENCHY KING PULLS FAST ONE. CABLE GUY GATE.)

HUBERT

Interesting. The set-up and the double cross.

BLAZE

He got screwed that time.

HUBERT

I should say. Oh the web we weave...

Well. RHODA

And. HUBERT

RHODA
Well Hubert, he was given twenty-four hours but you know how it is. He was not up for the task. Things got in his way.

HUBERT
It doesn't seem very sportsman like.

RHODA
This should have been on the front page.

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE

ACT 1I

SCENE 4

SETTING - FRENCHY KING'S BEDROOM

TIME: NIGHT

(FRENCHY is in bed trying to sleep.)

(Suddenly a big billboard reading DONNY IS A NICE GUY - ACQUITTED - NEWS AT 11. Over that is another sign that reads NEVER MIND rolls into view.)

(Frenchy sits up and stares at the sign.)

FRENCHY
What the hey!!

(The GHOST appears holding a sand timer. The sand runs down in the sand timer. She points to it.)

GHOST

Times up. Though the billboard was a nice touch and news at 11 was nice but he is not cleared and they are still hounding him.

FRENCHY

Hey! I did my best. It's Madge's fault.

GHOST

Why is it the lady always gets blamed. Let's go. We are going on a field trip.

(GHOST drags FRENCHY into darkness.
Suddenly, face the wall of bushes.

Silently, the bushes give way, a door opens, an arm comes out grabs FRENCHY and yanks him in. The door shuts.

The bushes recede into darkness to forboding music of STURM UND DRANG.)

GHOST

Goodbye Mr. King.

FRENCHY

(muffled off stage)

Aehh what is that smell?

DARK STREET

(RHODA stands in the shadow)

RHODA

And then there were these two. Oil and water.

(SHEILA walks nervously. Behind her LAURA walks.)

LAURA

You and that blood sucking boss of yours ruined me.

(SHEILA turns around.)

SHEILA

What do you want? Don't hurt me. He's not that bad.

LAURA

What are you two an item? Gag me... puke. Don't you have any respect for yourself? And why? Why us? Why not some rich guy or a rap singer. We're nobodies.

SHEILA

Mr. King has vanished. He called me and told me to find something good on your boyfriend that his life depended on it. Then he just disappeared. Do you know anything about this?

LAURA

Donny, I can't find him either. You know I can't even face my friends or go outta the house without some creepy news guy chasing me because of you.

SHEILA

Could Donny be, you know dangerous? I have to find him. Frenchy and I went too far this time.

(LAURA faces SHEILA)

LAURA

No kidding.

SONG - "I WANT MY LIFE BACK"

LAURA (CONT'D)

I WISH BUT NO. YOU KNOW I HATE YOU

SHEILA

AND I DON'T BLAME YOU TOO

LAURA

WHEN DOES THIS WAR BETWEEN US EVER END

SHEILA

I DIDN'T PICK YOU - YOU KNOW ABOUT THESE GRUDGES

LAURA

I WANT MY LIFE BACK

SHEILA

I WANT WHAT YOU HAVE

LAURA

I WANT MY LIFE BACK
HE IS MY LIFE

SHEILA
 I DON'T KNOW
 I DON'T KNOW WHERE HE'S AT

LAURA
 I WANT MY LIFE BACK

SHEILA
 I WANT WHAT YOU HAVE
 SOMEONE WHO'D LOVE ME
 I'D GIVE ANYTHING FOR THAT
 WHEN I WAS YOUNG I WAS SO NAIVE
 HE CAME ALONG
 MADE ME BELIEVE
 HE MADE ME BELIEVE

LAURA
 I WANT MY LIFE BACK

SHEILA
 I WANT WHAT YOU HAVE

LAURA
 I WANT MY LIFE BACK
 HE IS MY LIFE

SHEILA
 I DON'T KNOW
 I DON'T KNOW WHERE HE'S AT

LAURA
 I WANT MY LIFE BACK

SHEILA
 STANDING IN THE BILTMORE IN 1995
 HE WAS A PICTURE,
 SHORT BUT NOT TOO SHORT
 HE WAS THE EDITOR, I AN INTERN
 AT THE DAILY NEWS IN NEW YORK

(Laura slowly comes over and sits next to
 Sheila on a park bench in her plain
 clothes and loafers.)

LAURA
 WE MET AT COLLEGE IN 2005
 HE WAS A PICTURE
 TALL BUT NOT TOO TALL

HE WAS A STUDENT, I WAS TOO
AT AN IVY LEAGUE IN NEW YORK

SHEILA

LIFE IS A PUZZLE
I CAN'T COMPLETE

LAURA

IT WAS SWEET

SHEILA

BUT THERE WAS ALWAYS
SOMETHING MISSING

LAURA

I REALLY LOVE THE ONE
I'M MISSING

SHEILA

BUT IT ALL WENT WRONG

LAURA

WITH HIM I BELONG

SHEILA/LAURA

ALL BECAUSE
OF THE DAILY NEWS
OF THE DAILY NEWS
IN NEW YORK

LAURA

You're still wearing those damn shoes.

SHEILA

You're still wearing those boring loafers.

(Laura takes off her shoes.)

LAURA

Now, your turn.

(Sheila takes off her shoes.)

SHEILA

Try em.

(Laura slips on the shoes. They fit.
Sheila tries on the loafers.)

LAURA

Not so big after all are you?

(Laura and Sheila take off the shoes and
stand up. Barefoot they are the same
height. They walk off in opposite
directions.)

SPOTLIGHT ON RHODA

RHODA

Then there was him. You had to hand it to him he had guts.

(DONNY stands alone and RHODA comes out
of the shadow.)

DONNY

I can't stand to see Laura so defeated. Mr. King has
disappeared. I feel bad but why? I can't help but wonder why
and what made this guy so mean and deceitful. Who are you?

RHODA

Your muse and guardian angel. Your benefactor.

DONNY

You look familiar. Aren't You Rhoda Haynes?

RHODA

You are Donny O'Connelly. The infamous March issue. One fine
day our eyes met gazing on those slug lines. There were some
good ones. "Bigfoot claims Refugee Asylum - Steals Car". "On
the Lam from Feds."

DONNY

I liked the ones about the cavemen and the News Bot robot
writing a story called Memoirs of a Meme. I read until I
starting choking. The next column was about me.

RHODA

Oh I know the feeling.

DONNY

So what happened to Mr. King?

RHODA

So everyone has been wondering about the Poorhouse story what it is, where, why. Don't you want to see if it really exists. Let's go see.

DONNY

That's weird. Twilight Zone. I need to talk to him.

RHODA

I am at a loss. He fires you, slanders you and you want to do what?

DONNY

Well...

RHODA

There's a door I imagine

DONNY

I want to find Frenchy King, look into that bastard's face. He needs to apologize for destroying my life.

RHODA

And mine.

DONNY

Is it dangerous? How bad can a door be?

RHODA

Depends on who's writing about it.

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE

ACT IISCENE 5

SETTING: INSIDE OF PERRY'S POORHOUSE

TIME: SAME TIME

(FRENCHY stands in the living room of PERRY'S POORHOUSE, a mishmash of bad interior decorating. "Don Giovanni" meets "Married with Children".)

FRENCHY

What the hell is this? Ohhhh, who died?

(Two ragtag INMATES in striped jumpsuits are trying to put out a fire at a kitchen stove.)

(Other INMATES are arguing and fighting over things. A TV is on.)

INMATE #1

You burned our dinner again. Perry!!!

FRENCHY

Who the hell are you people? What is this?

(An ominous silver haired man named MR. PERRY in sport coat enters and walks up to FRENCHY.)

(FRENCHY recoils)

(MR. PERRY follows him)

SONG - "MR. PERRY"

MR. PERRY

CAN IT BE REAL?
THIS DREAD YOU FEEL
OH YES, ITS REAL, OH BOY
WELCOME TO PERRY'S POORHOUSE
I'M MR. PERRY AND THIS IS MY INN
WELCOME TO MY DOMINION

WHERE THE RICH GO TO LIVE
 WHEN THEIR POCKETS GET THIN
 WELCOME YOU UNBELIEVERS
 OVERACHIEVERS, CROOKS ON THE RUN
 FOLKS WITH BAD MANNERS
 OH AND THAT HYGIENE
 ALL UNDER ONE ROOF
 WON'T IT BE FUN
 IT'S NOT A HOTEL CUZ
 YOU NEVER CHECK OUT
 A REALLY BAD DREAM
 ITS AS BAD AS IT SEEMS
 A REALLY BAD DREAM
 ITS AS BAD AS IT SEEMS
 WELCOME TO PERRY'S POORHOUSE
 I'M MR. PERRY AND THIS IS MY INN
 WELCOME TO MY DOMINION
 WHERE THE RICH GO TO LIVE
 WHEN THEIR POCKETS GET THIN
 WELCOME YOU MEDIA MOGUL
 DRIPPING WITH INK ON YOUR HANDS
 YOU CAN DINE WITH YOUR VICTIMS
 AHHH... WON'T IT BE GRAND
 WON'T IT BE FUN
 SPEND YOUR DAYS HERE
 KEEPING UP WITH THE
 UNHAPPY REMINDERS
 SO TURN IN THEM GUCCIS
 AND ALL THEM NICE TOYS
 GET IN LINE
 GET IN THE LINE....

MR. PERRY (CONT'D)

Welcome to Perry's Poorhouse. I own this joint. Maybe you did something? Well we are very happy to have you. Babs, we gotta another one.

(BABS comes over in her striped jumper.
Tall blond in boots.)

FRENCHY

Wow. You some kind of guard? Are you going to interrogate me?

BABS

Maybe, I'm the Social Worker. Frances P. King II? That is your name? Any secrets, phobias, skeletons, switched at birth, abducted by green guys. Dark web accounts, strange bedtime practices. Or... rejection letters?

(MORE)

BABS (CONT'D)

So do you have any skills? You could be here a long time and everyone has to work to keep up this fine establishment.

FRENCHY

What do you mean do I have any skills? That's a ridiculous question.. This is a bad dream.

BABS

Wanna touch me and find out?

MR. PERRY

No chance.

BABS

He's going to be difficult.

MR. PERRY

You are so impressed with yourself. All these folks here are here because of you. Victims of character assassinations, scandals or other nefarious activities. They lost their shirts, their reputations. Might be a few literary critics here too.

FRENCHY

What?

MR. PERRY

It's your punishment to live here with them for all time, ha ha, ha.

FRENCHY

Sheila... help me.

(Just then TRENCH COAT BOB appears.)

FRENCHY (CONT'D)

(dumbfounded)

What are you doing here?

TRENCH COAT BOB

I found it... I found Hell or something like that. It's not so bad. You wrote about it in the last issue, Uncle Frenchy.

FRENCHY

I made that up. What idiot would go looking for Hell and find it? You, of course. You're fired!

TRENCH COAT BOB

Fine. Anyway I have a new boss. Him.

FRENCHY

Sheila help!

FADE OUT

STREET

(A streetlight flickers on. DONNY walking with RHODA one way and LAURA and SHEILA walking the opposite way.)

END OF SCENE

ACT 1I

SCENE 6

SETTING: PERRY'S POORHOUSE

(DONNY and RHODA enter. FRENCHY is sweeping as MR. PERRY supervises. TRENCH COAT BOB hangs out with the other INMATES.)

(FRENCHY stops when he sees DONNY. He does not at first realize who RHODA is.)

DONNY

Wow what is that smell? This is not what I expected.

FRENCHY

(growling)

You?!!

RHODA

Broom looks good on you. You lying coward.

FRENCHY

Get me outa here!

DONNY

Oh yeah, what with that broom? So, this is the Poorhouse, always imagined it like in the stories, real dirty, creepy and people fighting over oatmeal.

MR. PERRY

Oatmeal is too good for these bastards. They only get it at Christmas, which we don't celebrate if you get my drift.

FRENCHY

That's fine with me. I hate the stuff. Do I know you? Oh no, not you my bane of existence, Rhoda Haynes.
(stares at RHODA)

RHODA

No kidding sport. Rhoda Haynes, New York playwright caught in career killing scandal. News at Eleven. You ruined me with your phony stories. There's not enough darts in the world for you, King. I hope you ring up a lawyer bill to stretch to the moon and back.

FRENCHY

Darts? I never liked your plays. I did not ruin you, your bad writing did that.

RHODA

I never liked your plays. Geez everyone's a critic. It was a bore, a real snooze, highbrow without the eyebrows. Bloodless dribble, and on and on.

(RHODA points to an OLD MAN.)

RHODA (CONT'D)

His words. He was a critic. One of yours.

(RHODA points to TRENCH COAT BOB)

Nepotism.

TRENCH COAT BOB

(impressed with himself)

Now wait a minute.

DONNY

(to Mr. Perry)

You know we have something in common.

MR. PERRY

Oh, what's that?

DONNY

We both run a home for the economically disadvantaged. I could give you some pointers.

MR. PERRY

(annoyed by the comment)

Oh, you could, could you? Go to Hell. Sorry... you're already here.

DONNY

Ahh, yeah. I guess... but that doesn't mean it can't be the best version of Hell, or something like that.

MR. PERRY

How?

DONNY

You have to give people hope. Something to look forward to? Better living conditions, activities, trips, free speech.

INMATE #1

Yeah. I vote we keep Donny as our cook and butler.

MR. PERRY

Shut up.

DONNY

I think people should know you exist. Come out of the shadows.

FRENCHY

Well, I could run a story.

TRENCH COAT BOB

You already did. Your urban legend.

FRENCHY

Oh, yeah.

INMATES

Don't forget us. By the way what's for dinner?

BABS

BOUILLABAISSSE!!

(FRENCHY GASPS)

(The INMATES pick up OBJECTS and proceed to beat out a rhythm.)

Using every table and chair they
choreograph a lively dance.)

SONG - "PERRY'S POORHOUSE"

INMATE #1

IT'S NOT THE BILTMORE
IT'S NOT MIAMI
THERE'S NO SUN
AND BIKINI CLAD DAMES
WE ARE HAPPY WITH OUR TV
FINDING STUFF IN POKEMON GAMES

INMATE #2

WE AINT TELLING TALES BELIEVE ME
COME TOMORROW ITS MORE OF THE SAME
BUT...

ALL

PERRY'S POORHOUSE IS THE PLACE TO BE
PERRY'S POORHOUSE IS THE PLACE TO BE
WHEN YOU NEED A RE-ADJUSTMENT
ARE SICK OF NOTORIETY
PERRY'S POORHOUSE IS THE PLACE TO BE

INMATE #3

WE DON'T KNOW WHERE WE ARE
OR HOW WE GOT HERE

INMATE #4

DID WE COME BY MOTOR BIKE
OR ON A TRAIN

INMATE #5

WHAT YEAR IS IT?
WILL SOMEONE EXPLAIN?
BUT...

ALL

PERRY'S POORHOUSE IS THE PLACE TO BE
PERRY'S POORHOUSE IS THE PLACE TO BE
WHEN YOU NEED A RE-ADJUSTMENT AND
ARE SICK OF NOTORIETY PERRY'S POORHOUSE

IS THE PLACE TO BE

MR. PERRY
 IN EVERY LIFE THERE'S A LITTLE RAINBOW
 LITTLE BIRDS HAPPY LITTLE WORDS
 WE HOLD THEM SO DEAR.
 SO SORRY TO TELL YOU
 YOU WONT FIND THEM HERE!

ALL
 PERRY'S POORHOUSE IS THE PLACE TO BE
 PERRY'S POORHOUSE IS THE PLACE TO BE
 WHEN YOU NEED A RE-ADJUSTMENT AND
 ARE SICK OF NOTORIETY
 PERRY'S POORHOUSE IS THE PLACE TO BE!

INMATE #1
 Yeah, how did he get here?

(The INMATES stare longingly at a candy
 bar DONNY is holding.)

OOOHHH...
 INMATES

(FRENCHY thinks they are looking at him
 and GASPS again)

(DONNY breaks off a piece and gives it to
 a young INMATE GIRL in a junior striped
 jumpsuit.)

(She eats it fast and then she holds her
 hands out please sir can I have some
 more?)

DONNY
 You're pretty young. Why are you here?

INMATE GIRL
 He said I cheated on a spelling bee.

(The song comes to an abrupt halt.
 Everyone glares at FRENCHY.)

(DONNY glares at FRENCHY.)

RHODA

Hey Mr. Finger Pointer, don't YOU have any secrets? I bet Sheila would know.

DONNY

So who are you?

FRENCHY

Rhoda?

INMATES

Yeah we all wanna know.

RHODA

Everyone wants to go to the Poorhouse at least once in their lives. Come on Izzy. Fess up.

ALL INMATES

Izzy?

(General confusion and agitation)

FRENCHY

Cut it out! OK I'm Izzy Snodgrass. That's my name. Not King.

RHODA

Did you get a rejection letter maybe sent you over the edge, took a tumble into the dark side?

FRENCHY

(nauseous)

OK OK I am not a King. I am a Snodgrass and a playwright. I was young. It was the lure of easy money. I was such a terrible writer and this was perfect for me.

(The agitation of the INMATES simmers up)

DONNY

I just want to know how you got my personal stuff.

FRENCHY

From Sheila and that knucklehead nephew in the ugly coat. You ruined me with your goody, goody whistle-blower bit. Stories, it's all about stories.

Yes stories.

RHODA

FRENCHY

I don't do bad things. It's just bidness. You know bidness.

RHODA

Business. Is too.

FRENCHY

Is not.

RHODA

Well I am sure you'll be very happy here... wherever this is.

(RHODA starts to walk away)

FRENCHY

No wait!

(FRENCHY looks around. MR. PERRY is motioning no, don't go. The INMATES are motioning yes, go.)

(DONNY walks away)

DONNY

Well I am sure you'll be very happy here.

INMATES

No!

(There's a melee and the INMATES go after FRENCHY. A riot ensues.)

RHODA

HOLD IT!

INMATES

Where!

RHODA

Hold your horses.

THE FRONT DOOR

(Front door swings open. HUBERT and BLAZE stumble in. MR. PERRY gets annoyed.)

MR. PERRY

It's like a train station here. Now, who are YOU people?

HUBERT

Pardon us, we're with her.

RHODA

Oh Hubert. Nice to see you.

(Everyone in the poorhouse is listening intently. FRENCHY takes notes on a napkin. MR. PERRY glares at him.)

(BLAZE sniffs around the place, poking and prodding the decor.)

BLAZE

This is the most hideous interior decorating I have ever seen. TV sitcom and Goth, weird. What's with the jumpsuits?

HUBERT

Well what did we miss? Not what I expected. Actually.

(Suddenly there's a knock at the door. The door opens and in walks a LAWYER, well-dressed woman in a suit and carrying a briefcase labeled ACME CONFLICT.)

LAWYER

Did someone call for help to mediate an issue?

RHODA/FRENCHY

Lawyers? We hate lawyers!!

INMATES

Who's that?

HUBERT

Deux ex machina. Yes I did. I can sling trash too.

INMATES

Do what?

LAWYER

I am not one of those. I am an conflict analyst. OK then let's review the pros and cons of your conflict. You big mouth and you gentle lady. So have your day and let's play find the ending.

FRENCHY

Analist? What is an analist?

LAWYER

The word is analyst. I am not a proctologist. Imbecile.

FRENCHY

Hey!

(The LAWYER takes FRENCHY and RHODA and separates them so they face each other.

(HUBERT stands with FRENCHY and BLAZE stands with RHODA. DONNY watches with the INMATES and MR. PERRY.)

LAWYER

May I proceed?

HUBERT

Fire away.

SPOKEN SONG- "FIND THE ENDING"

LAWYER

IS IT REAL OR IS IT NOT
AM I DEAD OR JUST FORGOT
IS IT WRONG OR IS IT RIGHT
I WISH I MAY, I WISH I MIGHT
FIND AN ENDING THAT IS RIGHT

FRENCHY

SHOW ME SOME MERCY, RHODA

RHODA

MERCY, SHMERCY

CAN I MAKE A DEAL?
FRENCHY

ARE YOU FOR REAL?
RHODA

WE HAVE SO MUCH SO MUCH IN COMMON
WE MAKE OUR LIVING WITH WORDS
FRENCHY

YEAH RIGHT
RHODA

WHEN YOU HAVE SUCH IN COMMON
BICKERING SEEMS UNDESERVED
FRENCHY

YOU HAVE NERVE!
RHODA

WELL I GET MORE TWITTER HITS THAN YOU
AND I LOOK BETTER IN A SUIT, TOO
FRENCHY

SO DOES A KANGAROO!
RHODA

SO I GET CARRIED AWAY WITH THE HMMM TRUTH
BETTER THAN YOU
FRENCHY

YEAH SIR YOU GET AWAY WITH IT TOO
I'VE BEEN DREAMING OF THIS DAY
WHAT CAN I SAY
I DON'T LIKE TO ENGAGE IN MENTAL COMBAT
WITH AN UNARMED MAN
RHODA

YEAH...IF YOUR BRAINS WERE DYNAMITE,
THERE WOULDN'T BE ENOUGH TO BLOW YOUR HAT OFF
FRENCHY

BEFORE YOU WERE BORN SOMEBODY
SHOULD HAVE SHOT THE STORK
RHODA

FRENCHY

LOW BLOW
WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE ME DO?

RHODA

SOMETHING THAT DOESN'T INVOLVE WORDS
TV MEDIA NEWS OR OTHER PEOPLES AFFAIRS,
TAXIDERMY

FRENCHY

TAXIDERMY?

RHODA

BEING A HEADLINE IS THAT ALL
I AM GOOD FOR, I WANT MORE!

(thinking)

You will have to pass a test.

Incontrovertible.

FRENCHY

Inaconvertable? OK what's the test?

RHODA

That was it. You failed ha ha.

LAWYER

OK, OK, I've heard enough.

HUBERT

So what do you conclude?

LAWYER

Mr. King must pay for his misdeeds. News at eleven.

(The LAWYER pulls out a roll of paper and
unrolls it and places it in front of
FRENCHY as he sits at the dining table.)

LAWYER (CONT'D)

Frenchy King you are sentenced to be thrown into the PIT OF
HELL. Effective immediately.

ALL

GASP!!

(The PIT OF HELL appears.)

FRENCHY is shoved towards the RED FIERY
LOOKING HOLE)

DONNY

Well hold on now.

LAWYER

It's a fair decision.

DONNY

Well sure he did me wrong and all that but maybe there's
another way?

RHODA

That's just like you kid. What do you have in mind?

DONNY

It him where it hurts.

LAWYER

The contract and bill of sale for one King Media. There must
be a monetary exchange. Donny must buy the goods so as to
avoid the gift tax.

FRENCHY

What the hell now wait just one minute!! God I hate lawyers.

DONNY

Does anybody have some money I can borrow?

INMATES

(together)

Hell no, it's a poorhouse!

MR. PERRY

We'll look.

(Everyone starts digging in the furniture
and corners and the floor.)

MR. PERRY (CONT'D)

I found a quarter. Hey here's my stuff! Who's been riffling
in my stuff??????

INMATES

GASP!!

MR. PERRY

We found ninety-nine cents and this bag of marbles.

LAWYER

Excellent. Donny make your ninety-nine cent offer to Mr. King, Mr. King you accept the offer and we'll seal the deal.

(FRENCHY looks pale but everyone around him is ready to kill him with a look. He signs the paper.)

FRENCHY

I accept. Ninety-nine cents is a fair price for a one hundred and seventy-five million dollar company.

DONNY

One hundred and seventy-five million?

FRENCHY

That's right. You can't count it on your fingers. But if it gets me out of this place, I will take your offer of ninety-nine cents and bag of marbles.

(FRENCHY gives the contract to the LAWYER. He's in a cold sweat.)

LAWYER

Well that's wraps it up for me.

MR. PERRY

Say, do you ever make personal appointments? I could use a little counseling.

LAWYER

(flirting)

It's only Hell anyway.

MR. PERRY

Everybody scram.

(There is a rush to the door. The INMATES flop down on the couch and watch "Married with Children" and PERRY and LAWYER proceed to a back room.)

OTHER SIDE OF DOOR

The bush and vine covered door CREAKS open. DONNY, FRENCHY, HUBERT, RHODA AND BLAZE fall over each other to get out.)

HUBERT

That was an ordeal.

BLAZE

Some weird mind thought up that place.

HUBERT

That is an understatement.

FRENCHY

I think I'm going to be sick.
(looking green)

RHODA

Not even big guy. Or is that Izzy Snodgrassss?? Say it.

FRENCHY

God I hate that name. Say what.

RHODA puts her face in FRENCHY'S face.
The others stand aside.)

RHODA

Got anything to say?

FRENCHY

Like what?

RHODA

You are a faker a coward and you can't write a decent sentence.

DONNY

Come on...

FRENCHY

Now that is hitting below the belt.

RHODA

You are dense.

FRENCHY

No, give me a hint.

Not even big guy. Say it.

RHODA

Say what.

FRENCHY

RHODA puts her face in FRENCHY'S face.
The others stand aside.)

Got anything to say?

RHODA

Like what?

FRENCHY

Do you have anything to say to ME? To us? Now that I have you here, after all you did to my family.

RHODA

Come on...

DONNY

Say what?

FRENCHY

You are dense.

RHODA

No, give me a hint.

FRENCHY

Sounds like... starts with an s ... rhymes with safari.

DONNY

That's too hard give me another clue.

FRENCHY

Say, you're sorry, OK?

DONNY/RHODA

Ahhhh, sssssssss, now can I buy me company back?

FRENCHY

No!

DONNY/RHODA

Please, please I have money and these marbles.

FRENCHY

(Suddenly, SHEILA, and two KING MEDIA REPORTERS rush at them.)

SHEILA

Frenchy! What are you wearing?

REPORTERS

Mr. King, Mr. O'Connelly, did he kidnap you? Were you in any danger?

FRENCHY

No and no. Unless you consider a hot blonde in boots dangerous.

REPORTERS

So what happened?

(Everyone gets closer.)

FRENCHY

Well, if you wanna know the truth.. Well, it all started with the visit from the three ghosts.

SHEILA

Come on Frenchy can't you for once play straight?

REPORTERS

Hasn't that been done before? I'm going for the alien angle.

FRENCHY

Shut up! It was that ghost... that weird ghost with the New York accent and crazy hair dragged me to the Poorhouse and Rhoda Haynes and her awful family were there!

REPORTERS

Where? We need an address.

FRENCHY

It was awful. It always smelled like burnt spam. They made me sweep the floor!

REPORTERS

Oh come on... you, Ha ah.

FRENCHY

No it's true. Donny O'Connelly came along and he was with the same ghost and some old man and a redhead. They tortured me. Made me sell the company to him for my freedom. God that pit of Hell.

REPORTERS

You did what? I think we got us a ghost story! Maybe a psychotic breakdown in the works. Don't forget Izzy Snodgrass. Well the March issue will be one doozy. Let's go.

(REPORTERS gleefully run off)

FRENCHY

If I had to apologize for everything I ever wrote about, every last person.

(RHODA enters)

RHODA

Now that would be hell.

SONG - TABLOID FINALE

RHODA

SOONER OR LATER
IT ALL RUNS TOGETHER
INTO ONE RED AND YELLOW
BOXY ALL CAPS STATEMENT
WITH EXCLAMATION POINT

ALL

YOU CAN READ ABOUT BIG FOOT, BIG HAIR
HOT BABE, GOT IT MADE
YOU CAN READ ABOUT THE BAD GUY
OH MY, WE CRY

HUBERT

POLITICIANS AND THEIR IMPOSITIONS

BLAZE

HERE TODAY AND GONE TOO SOON

HUBERT

THE HIGHER WE RISE
THE FARTHER WE FALL

WE'RE ONLY HUMAN AFTER ALL

BLAZE

NO MATTER WHAT YOU SAY
NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO
IN A TABLOID...

RHODA

THEY'LL BE COMING FOR YOU!
THEY'LL BE COMING FOR YOU!

ALL

(BIG FOOT chases Frenchy King off stage)

THE END