

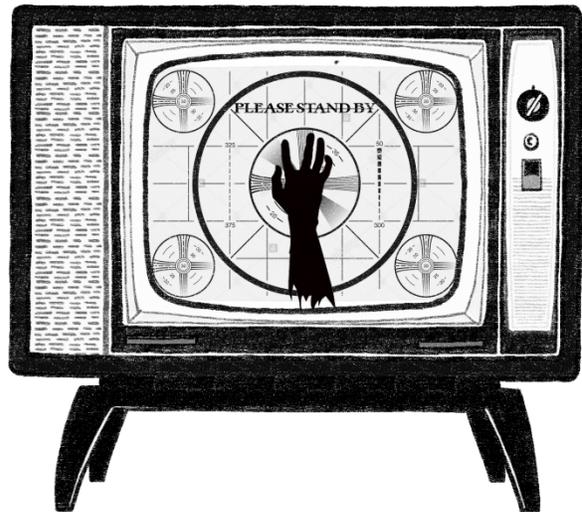
— ★ ★ ★ —

THE HAYS CODE

A COMEDY ABOUT ALL OF US in 3-2-1!

A PLAY BY BRAD STAGGS

THE BIGGEST TELEVISION STAR OF 1952.
A RIGGED SYSTEM, AND A MURDER...
HOW MUCH FUN CAN ONE NIGHT BE?
(OH, DID WE MENTION THE ZOMBIES?)



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Cast of Characters

June Burns.....The human star of the popular 1950's sitcom *I Love My Wife*.
Lucille Ball type.

Jimmy Teague.....June's real-life husband and co-star of *I Love My Wife*. Stage 1
Zombie.

Madeline "Maddie" Blonstein.....June's former real-life best friend and co-star on *I Love My Wife*.

Carl Cooper.....Head of the ZAU [Zombie Actors Union] who appears to be a
Stage 1 Zombie.

Sy Greenblaum.....A very popular former Vaudeville comedian who has his own
family variety show. Stage 2 Zombie.

Michael Eastman.....Human Assistant Director on *I Love My Wife*.

Gary.....Human Director of *I Love My Wife* who is heard as a voice only
from the booth.

Zombie Stage Hand.....A Stage 3 Zombie whose job is to move things.

Chief Detective Sam Cutty.....A police detective.

Zombie Crew.....Assorted Stage 3 Zombies who clear set and work on *I Love My
Wife*.

Scene: A Hollywood soundstage for *I Love My Wife*, Jimmy's Dressing Room, Maddie's Dressing Room,
an empty Warehouse.

Time: 1952

ACT I

Scene 1

*CURTAIN UP. The set is the living room sound stage of the biggest 1952 television show, I Love My Wife. The set is in the style of I Love Lucy. The set is bathed in amber light to give the appearance of a black and white TV show. **JUNE BURNS** is standing near the fireplace. While in character, June is lovably ditzy. Her co-star, **MADDIE BLONSTEIN**, is sitting on the couch.*

MADDIE

I just don't understand why you can't go to the show, June.

JUNE

Jimmy doesn't want me driving the car.

MADDIE

Why not?

JUNE

I can't drive.

CANNED LAUGHTER.

MADDIE

You still haven't learned? You were driving the entire time he was gone to war in Germany.

JUNE

I forgot since then.

MADDIE

June, it's just like riding a bike. It's--

JUNE

You mean it has pedals?

MADDIE

No, June, no pedals.

JUNE

That's too bad, Maddie. Jimmy would let me ride a bike.

JIMMY (OFFSTAGE)

I'm in love and nobody can change my mind...

JUNE

Oh, it's Jimmy! He's home!

MADDIE

Maybe he'll take you to the show, June!

JUNE

You think so?

***JIMMY** enters, singing.*

JIMMY

I have the best marriage a man can find! (*Speaking, to JUNE*) Hello, my little turtledove. (*to MADDIE, sarcastically*) Hello, pigeon.

MADDIE

James. You're looking... alive.

JUNE

Sweetie!

JUNE meets JIMMY and hugs him. She then leans forward and kisses him quickly on the lips. JIMMY and MADDIE look surprised.

JIMMY

June?

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

Cut!

*A **BUZZER** sounds. Lights change from amber to normal. Assistant Director **MICHAEL EASTMAN** enters with his clipboard and stopwatch he uses to time the scene. When JUNE is not in character, she is very much the woman in charge.*

MICHAEL

Back to one, everybody!

MADDIE

What the hell was that?

JUNE

I'm sorry, Maddie, I got carried away.

JIMMY

It's all right, it's only one take.

MADDIE

You two can have relations on camera, for all I care. You took my laugh line!

JUNE

There was a time when you thought it was cute when we kissed.

MADDIE

Really? Who told you that? Our drunk director?

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

Hey, I'm not drunk... yet.

JIMMY

Ladies, I don't think--

MADDIE

Stow it, sunburn.

MICHAEL

Miss Burns...

MADDIE

I'll be in my dressing room if Jimmy here doesn't go Stage Two before the next take. *(aside)* I turned down *Death Valley Days* for this. Dumb broad.

MADDIE exits. JUNE is hurt by her comments.

MICHAEL

Miss Burns--

JUNE

I know, Michael.

MICHAEL

Miss Burns, you know the Hays Code does not allow for any physical... uh... interaction between a normal such as yourself and a...

MICHAEL looks at JIMMY and freezes.

JIMMY

Zombie?

MICHAEL

Married or not, Mr. Teague, it's just not allowed on television.

JUNE

It's a stupid rule.

JIMMY

It's okay, June. Carl's people will find a cure soon, then we can get back to having a normal show.

MICHAEL

The cure is a myth.

JIMMY

I trust Carl. If he says the cure is just around the corner, you can bet it's true!

JUNE

It better be. I'm sick of being told what I can and can't do with my own husband. Even my best friend has turned against me.

JIMMY

The Hays Code is law.

JUNE

I know, I'm just tired of waiting for this magical cure.

CARL COOPER enters carrying a briefcase.

CARL

We are the magic makers, my dear.

JIMMY

(Shaking CARL's hand) Hello, Carl.

CARL

Hello, James! *(To JUNE)* June, my dear, you look simply delicious.

JUNE

Oh, you.

CARL

(Setting his briefcase down) I just got here. They told me back stage that there was a problem.

JIMMY

Nothing the head of the Z-A-U needs to worry himself about.

CARL

James, the Zombie Actor's Union is here for your protection.

As CARL speaks, **ZOMBIE STAGE HAND (ZSH)** brings a set piece onstage. CARL sees him.

CARL

Why, without us, Stage Ones like you and me might be treated like Stage Threes... all muscle and no brain.

MICHAEL sees ZSH and yells at him.

MICHAEL

Hey, you! That doesn't come out yet! *(ZSH is confused. MICHAEL yells slower.)* Take... off... set... not... here... Damn it, you worthless--

JUNE

(Angrily, at MICHAEL) That's enough!

MICHAEL

But, June, he was--

JUNE

As long as I am the producer of this show, you will address me as Miss Burns or Mrs. Teague, I don't care which. But if I ever catch you treating *anybody* on my sound stage like that again, the only job you will be able to get is hosting a yard sale! Do I make myself clear?

MICHAEL exits quickly in fear.

CARL

(To JUNE) Will you marry me?

JUNE

Absolutely. *(Puts her arm in JIMMY's)* Just as soon as you become half the man of my current husband.

JIMMY

Oh, honey, that was almost romantic!

JUNE

(Smiling at JIMMY) Don't tell anyone, especially the studio head. *(to ZSH)* Come on, you can put that behind sound stage two. *(ZSH sheepishly looks at JUNE)* Come on, it's okay.

ZSH exits with JUNE, taking the set piece with him.

CARL

I've said it before and I'll say it again... you are one lucky Zombie.

JIMMY

You mean "man," right? I am one lucky "man."

CARL

No, my friend, I mean "Zombie". You are what you are.

JIMMY

But not for long, right?

CARL

I have my best serologists working on it... you know that. With the donations from you and June, I feel that we're close.

JIMMY

How can you be sure, though?

CARL

James, do you know what happened this past February? For the first time, children were vaccinated en masse against polio. Soon, the world is going to be polio free because of one shot. If they can do it, we can do it!

JIMMY

I know, I just want to be able to kiss my wife and not get thrown in jail.

CARL

Is that what happened today?

JIMMY

Yeah, she kissed me in front of everybody.

CARL

Oh.

JIMMY

On camera.

CARL

Oh my god, the Hays Code!

JIMMY

Believe me, Michael already gave us a barrel's worth of grief. Spouted chapter and verse of the Hays Code at us.

CARL

Miscegenation...

JIMMY

"The prohibition of the mixing of different racial groups." That's why I need that cure, Carl! I want to have a normal life with my wife.

CARL

At least you've made the best of a bad situation, James. You still have a hit television show, you're married to the biggest female star in the world, and you're only a Stage One.

JIMMY

I'm lucky. We had a hit show before the Hirntot Protocol set in.

CARL

And you will continue having a hit show. Who else are they going to watch? Mickey Rooney? You'll outlive Jack Benny.

JIMMY

What will you do when there are no more Zombies? No Zombies means no more Z.A.U.

CARL

Diversification, my boy. That's the key to success. I've invested in the medical field for Zombie research, film labs, and even a baseball team in Brooklyn. Someday we'll have west coast baseball and I want to be front row for that.

JIMMY

West coast baseball? You're a dreamer, Carl. Stick with film. We'll be using that forever.

CARL

We'll see. Right now, I just have to make sure you're treated well.

JIMMY

As well as can be expected. I think the normals expect us to kill them and eat their brains or something stupid like that.

CARL

Hey, that might make a pretty good movie!

JIMMY

No, Carl, we already have enough problems getting people to take us seriously now. Nobody will want to be around a Zombie if we make that picture.

SY GREENBLAUM enters.

SY

(Yelling off-stage) I know you're curious and, yes, I am this sexy all over!

CARL

Sy, please, show some decorum. Leave the ladies alone.

SY

I was talking to Michael. He likes to stare... a lot. It does explain a lot about him, though.

CARL

What are you doing here, Sy?

SY

I actually came to talk to you, oh great union leader.

JIMMY

(Extending his hand) It's always great to see you, Sy.

SY

(Shaking JIMMY's hand) You say that now.

JIMMY

Of course! You're always welcome--

As JIMMY pulls away from the handshake, SY's hand comes with him.

JIMMY

(Dropping the hand) Aaaaugh!

SY

See? Even surprises other Zombies.

JIMMY picks up the hand and quickly gives it back to SY.

JIMMY

Sorry, Sy, I keep forgetting you're--

CARL

Stage Two.

SY

"Loss of limbs and extraneous body parts." That one keeps falling off. It gets harder to cover it up to stay on T.V., especially since I have a children's show.

CARL

Nobody from the network has seen this, have they?

SY

Not yet, but that's why I need to talk to my union rep. Can they really kick me off air because I'm a Stage Two?

CARL

That was part of the agreement to keep Zombies on-air after the change. Only Stage Ones. They're afraid a random body part falling off might hurt their bottom line.

SY

Yeah, imagine me doing a Pepsodent live spot and my teeth come out on the toothbrush! That would be funny.

JIMMY

And *this* is why we need the cure, Carl.

SY

(Pointing at JIMMY with his severed arm) Exactly!

JIMMY

Sy, put that back on before somebody sees you with it.

SY

Oh, yeah. Sorry.

SY turns around and makes a show of placing his arm back in his sleeve. When he turns back, he shows his hand with fingers wriggling.

SY

There we go.

JIMMY

How do you get it to stay in place?

SY

(Pulling duct tape or stapler from his pocket) Tape/Lots of staples.

MADDIE enters carrying her script and a drink. She sees the three, scowls, and heads to her spot on the couch.

MADDIE

Oh, look, it's the walking nightmares.

CARL

That's the name of the movie!

JIMMY

Stop...

SY

(Flirting with Maddie) Hi, there, hot stuff...

MADDIE

Not even if you were Kirk Douglas.

SY

Oh, come on, at one time, there was a fire between us.

SY positions himself close to her on the couch. MADDIE reaches to the end table. She opens a box and retrieves a cigarette and lighter.

MADDIE

Get any closer to me and something will be on fire.

MADDIE lights her cigarette.

SY

You're hot.

MADDIE

You have no idea, toad.

SY

(To JIMMY) She gave me a nickname!

CARL

I wouldn't get too excited about that.

MADDIE

I called you toad... that's not out of affection.

SY

Not yet, but it means you are thinking about me, my fragrant wild flower!

MADDIE

(Blowing smoke in his face) No, it means that I have no--

SY

And if you're thinking about me now, you'll be thinking about me later...

MADDIE

You're sitting right beside me, how could I not--

SY

And if you're thinking about me later, I'll be creeping into your thoughts when you're doing your shopping, eating your dinner, acting on this sound stage. Even when you're in your bath.

MADDIE

Get out of my bath!

MADDIE slaps SY who puts his hand over his eye. As he pulls his hand away, his eye comes with it. MADDIE sees this for a moment before SY turns away, embarrassed. MADDIE stares at SY as he quickly pops his eye back in, trying to keep himself turned from her. He turns back to her, smiling and blinking.

SY

Then, eventually, maybe tomorrow, maybe next week or maybe next year, you won't be able to stop thinking about me. And then, finally, this toad will become your handsome prince.

MADDIE and SY stare at each other for a moment. SY is smiling and MADDIE is speechless.

MADDIE

I have to get to make-up.

MADDIE quickly exits, leaving her drink behind. SY picks up the drink.

SY

And that, gentlemen, is how it starts.

SY gulps down the drink and exits. JIMMY and CARL follow. CARL grabs his briefcase and follows.

END OF SCENE

Scene 2

*JUNE enters, walking around the set and looking at the back wall.
She then yells to the director.*

JUNE

Gary? How does this back wall look in black and white?

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

Fine, June.

JUNE

Wouldn't red make it pop more on screen?

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

It would look strange to the actors and crew.

JUNE

Gary, 25 people live versus millions watching in glorious black and white at home?

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

I don't think that--

JUNE

Let me put it another way... red or unemployed?

Pause.

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

Red it is.

JUNE

I knew you'd make the right decision.

MADDIE enters.

MADDIE

June, you have to do something!

JUNE

About what?

MADDIE

That damn Zombie!

JUNE

When you talk about my husband--

MADDIE

No, not Jimmy. The other one, Sy!

JUNE

Oh, Sy. He's a hoot.

JUNE continues walking around the set, checking props, furniture, etc.

MADDIE

June! He's not a hoot, he's a menace! Why is he even allowed on this sound stage?

JUNE

I like having him around. He makes me laugh.

MADDIE

He makes me... uncomfortable.

JUNE

You need to loosen up, Maddie. You used to laugh with me about these things.

MADDIE

It's Madeline. June, would you stop? (*JUNE stops to listen.*) Sy has made... brazen overtures to me.

JUNE

Brazen overtures? What does that mean?

MADDIE

Well, as a lady of the stage, I don't want to go into the sordid details...

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

He was hitting on her.

MADDIE

Thank you, Gary. That was very helpful.

JUNE

What did he say to you?

MADDIE

He told me... he told me that... he likes me!

JUNE

He told you that he likes you?

MADDIE

(Choking back fake tears) Yes.

JUNE

Where?

MADDIE

Everywhere! He likes me everywhere!

JUNE

No, where were you when he said this?

MADDIE

(Pointing to the couch) Right there! Right out in public!

JUNE

And what did you do?

MADDIE

I am a lady, June! What do you think I did?

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

She slapped him.

MADDIE

Don't you have a home to go to?

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

No. I live here. In this booth.

JUNE

Well, that explains the clothesline.

MADDIE

June, I am quite upset by--

ZSH enters with a large wooden ladder which he proceeds to set up in front of the back wall. MADDIE pulls JUNE downstage.

MADDIE

I am quite upset by him. You know that he is... *(Glances at ZSH, then leans in closer to JUNE)* a Stage Two?

JUNE

(Playing with MADDIE) Really? A Stage Two? How can you tell?

MADDIE

When I slapped him, his eye popped out!

JUNE

You slapped his eye out?

MADDIE

Yes! Then he just put it back in like nothing happened.

JUNE

My, wouldn't that be a handy ability to have?

ZSH exits after setting up the ladder.

MADDIE

Would you be serious?

JUNE

Maddie, I've tried to be serious with you. I've tried to joke with you. I've tried to be your friend again. What is it that I need to do?

MADDIE

June--

JUNE

You and I were the first ladies of Vaudeville! Do you remember the Ramblin' Cowgirls?

MADDIE

I do, but—

JUNE

(Using a bad western accent) I reckon them there bad guys ain't gonna come lookin' for us, Two-Gun Sal!

MADDIE

June, that was a long time ago.

JUNE

(Trying again) I reckon them there bad guys ain't gonna come lookin' for us, Two-Gun Sal!

MADDIE

(Exasperated, knowing she has to play along) They won't find us anyways, Derringer Darlene.

JUNE

Why not?

MADDIE

(Relaxing and starting to enjoy herself) I didn't leave no forwardin' address!

JUNE

But how are we gonna know how to get back?

MADDIE

(Enjoying herself) I been leavin' a trail of bread crumbs for the last thousand miles!

JUNE and MADDIE laugh with each other as MICHAEL enters with his ever-present clipboard.

MICHAEL

Miss Burns, did you approve the use of red paint for the set?

MICHAEL stares at MADDIE as she sees him and stops laughing. JUNE notices and starts to say something just as ZSH enters with a paint bucket. MICHAEL runs in front of him to stop him but ZSH keeps moving as if MICHAEL is not there.

MICHAEL

No! No! We have not received official confirmation yet! *(Tries to take the paint bucket. Fails miserably.)* Miss Burns has not given me the approval for this!

JUNE

Michael—

MICHAEL

(Not hearing) Do **NOT** place one ounce of paint on that wall! That's an order!

ZSH pays no attention to MICHAEL, sets the paint can down and exits. MICHAEL believes he has been heard.

MICHAEL

(To June) There, I've stopped that. I don't know whose idiotic idea it was to paint a wall red. I mean, really, is somebody color blind around here?

MADDIE

Michael--

MICHAEL

Somebody should really do something about that stage hand, too. If I hadn't stopped him, he might paint the whole stage red, then we'd have--

MADDIE

Michael!

JUNE is furious. ZSH enters with a paint brush. MICHAEL realizes he has made a mistake. JUNE walks to ZSH, who smiles at her. She's good to him.

JUNE

(To ZSH) You need to take on a more supervisory role. *(JUNE takes the paintbrush from ZSH and places it in MICHAEL's hand)* I think that you need to paint the panels red, Michael. After all, I can't trust such an important job... *which I approved...* to just anybody.

MICHAEL

(Fearful) Miss Burns, I--

JUNE

And my friend *(Points to ZSH)* will be supervising you to make sure it gets done right.

ZSH exits.

MICHAEL

Miss Burns, I did not mean to disparage what is obviously a brilliant, forward-thinking idea that I am too ignorant to see for what it is.

JUNE

Do you know what it's like to be a woman in charge of her own television show?

ZSH enters carrying a folded-up drop cloth.

MICHAEL

No, ma'am.

JUNE

That's right, you don't. Don't forget who's in charge here.

JUNE gives a look to ZSH. ZSH thrusts the drop cloth at MICHAEL so hard, it knocks MICHAEL off his feet.

JUNE

You have work to do.

JUNE and ZSH exit.

MADDIE

Nice job, idiot. You almost got fired.

MICHAEL

(Catching his breath) How was I supposed to know?

MADDIE

If you would keep your mouth shut and let me handle things, we might have these Zombies out of our lives, but you just manage to bring them closer.

MADDIE sits on the couch, paying very little attention to MICHAEL.

MICHAEL

(Struggling to his feet) You know our instructions! Drive a wedge between the humans and the Zombies.

MADDIE

Of course I know our instructions. I've actually *met* Mr. Kaplan, have you?

MICHAEL

You've *met* him? When?

MADDIE

(Obviously lying) Well, of course he wanted to meet the nationally recognized celebrity who supports his cause.

MICHAEL

Wow. Nobody's ever met Mr. Kaplan. What's he like?

MADDIE

Um... tall, but not *too* tall... A beautiful head of... hair... of various colors...

MICHAEL

Various colors?

MADDIE

Well, yes, it was dark.

MICHAEL

Oh.

MADDIE

Piercing bluish, green-brown eyes... I would say in his thirt... fourt... fifties? Yes, definitely between thirty and fifty-fiveish.

MICHAEL

When was this? You never mentioned it.

MADDIE

I don't like to brag, but--

JIMMY enters in a gaudy, bright red smoking jacket and ascot.

JIMMY

You live to brag, Maddie.

MADDIE

It's Madeline... and *what* are you wearing?

JIMMY

It's for scene 2-A.

MADDIE

What is scene 2-A?

JIMMY

You're always walking around with a script. Don't you read it?

MADDIE

Read it? We're on T.V., James. Michael here tells me my lines before I come on and I repeat them. It's not like we're doing legitimate theater here.

JIMMY

Then why do you walk around with a script?

MADDIE

My second... no, third acting teacher told me to. He said that if I keep the script in my hands, the words will just fall off the page and into my head.

JIMMY

Was this before or after he cashed your check?

MADDIE

(Smiles briefly) You need a drummer to follow you around playing a rimshot.

JIMMY

(Smiling back) I'll take that up with the producer, Miss Blonstein.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry to interrupt, sir, *(MADDIE realizes she was smiling and pulls back)* but Miss Blonstein and I were just going over her lines in 1-C.

JIMMY

1-C? She has one line in 1-C.

MADDIE

But it's the line the entire scene hinges on.

JIMMY

The line is "What kind of shellfish?"

MADDIE

But I haven't figured out my motivation yet.

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

It's... shellfish.

MADDIE

(to the booth) I loathe you.

JIMMY

I'll leave you to it, but don't worry too much about it. I wrote this episode and it's not really an important line. After all, you're not the woman people tune in to watch.

JIMMY exits, leaving MADDIE fuming.

MADDIE

Not the woman people tune in to watch? *(to MICHAEL)* I received over a dozen letters last week alone from adoring fans! People who love me! How many fan letters do you think his precious June received?

MICHAEL

Over two million.

Pause.

MADDIE

In a week?

MICHAEL

(Realizing his mistake) Well, your fans aren't exactly the letter writing kind.

MADDIE

Are you saying my fans are illiterate?

MICHAEL

No, ma'am! *(Trying to change the subject)* Look at what's happening to us! Remember what Mr. Kaplan wrote in his book? "Do not let the Zombies divide us. Remain united."

MADDIE

(Calming down) You're right, Michael. That's why I keep his book with me at all times. *(Picks up the script, opens it, and begins reading.)* "Keep the Zombie Horde off-balance, don't let them know your true motivations." *(Holds the script close to her chest)* He's an amazing man.

MICHAEL

You were brilliant to put it inside a script cover.

MADDIE

I know. Nobody ever reads the scripts anyway.

MICHAEL

Did he autograph it for you?

MADDIE

What?

MICHAEL

Mr. Kaplan, did he sign your book?

MADDIE

When?

MICHAEL

When you met him.

MADDIE

Why, yes, he did.

MICHAEL

Can I see?

MADDIE

Can you see... what?

MICHAEL

His signature.

MADDIE

His signature?

MICHAEL

Yes, can I see his signature?

MADDIE

(Thinking quickly) You know, Michael, it's such a personal thing between Mr. Kaplan and myself that I would rather keep it that way.

MICHAEL

Oh, I understand. There's a little--

ZSH enters carrying a chair. He sets it down closely to MICHAEL, sits in the chair and stares at MICHAEL.

MICHAEL

You're joking? *(ZSH stares)* Oh God, you're not joking! *(ZSH stands and stares at both)* I was just working with Miss Blonstein on--

MADDIE

We're done.

Maddie starts to exit as Michael begs.

MICHAEL

But Miss Blonstein, what should I do?

MADDIE

Nice, even brush strokes.

Maddie exits.

MICHAEL

Well, then... I guess I should just put this down. *(Has problems letting go of his clipboard and stopwatch as they are his lifeline)* All right, putting it down... now... *(Finally lets it go)* Okay, step one complete. Now, I've seen you do this. What if I just...

MICHAEL moves to the ladder, looking to ZSH for confirmation, but he remains motionless. MICHAEL looks around and picks up the paint brush, looking for confirmation. Again, nothing. He picks up the paint bucket and, again, no response. He sets the brush and bucket behind the couch.

MICHAEL

I give up, what's first? *(ZSH looks to the drop cloth)* Oh, of course, I was just testing you. *(Tries to pick up the drop cloth and fails.)* Wow, this is heavy. *(Finally picks up the drop cloth and moves toward the back wall, passing behind the couch.)* This will get done in record--

*MICHAEL slips on the paintbrush behind the couch and falls down.
ZSH continues staring.*

MICHAEL

Ow.

*If ZSH can, he can pick MICHAEL up and sling him over one shoulder
to carry him off. Otherwise, he needs to help MICHAEL exit.*

END OF SCENE

Scene 3

JUNE enters as the lights stay up and scene change to JIMMY's dressing room.

JUNE

Jim? Jimmy?

JIMMY enters from the bathroom wearing a robe and carrying a towel.

JIMMY

Hello, love.

JUNE

I thought you'd be dressed by now.

JIMMY

I thought we had another hour before meeting with the sponsors.

JUNE

Michael didn't tell you? The meeting was moved up.

JIMMY

Really? No, he didn't say a word. Well, it won't take me long. Can't keep the sponsor waiting. After all, cigarettes are the future!

JUNE

Four out of five doctors agree!

JUNE/JIMMY

(Singing a commercial jingle together) A menthol smile in every pack.

They laugh easily together.

JIMMY

All right, give me a minute.

JUNE

You have thirty seconds.

JIMMY

Thirty it is!

JIMMY exits to the bathroom. JUNE notices a rack of suits and costumes.

JUNE

Jim, where did this come from?

JIMMY (OFFSTAGE)

What?

JUNE

This rack of clothes?

JIMMY (OFFSTAGE)

I unpacked one of our old show trunks. I was hoping we could pull out some of our old bits for the show. (*JUNE's face brightens*) Do you remember the bits we did when we toured with Burns and Allen?

JUNE

Do I...

JUNE takes a dinner jacket on its hanger off the rack. She smiles, holds it up, and curtsies to it. She is remembering another time as she holds the jacket as a dance partner and dances around the room with it. She ends with another curtsy and places the jacket back on the rack.

JUNE

I haven't seen these in years.

JIMMY enters dressed sharply.

JIMMY

You're not old enough to have years behind you... and you're always the most beautiful woman in the room.

JIMMY takes JUNE by the hands and positions them both to dance. He then begins humming or singing Ludwig van Beethoven's Sonata No. 8 in C Minor Pathetique, Op. 13. The pair dance around the set together in their own world. JIMMY finishes singing and bows to JUNE, who curtsies back. She kisses him softly.

JUNE

I think I remember.

JIMMY

Yes, my dear, you do.

Sy enters, carrying a newspaper.

SY

June! Jimmy! Have you seen this?

JIMMY

Sy, don't you knock?

SY

Nope. Too scared to.

JUNE

Too scared to knock?

SY

Yeah, I lost a finger ringing a doorbell the other day. Had to chase a squirrel up six blocks and two trees to get it back, but it's all mine. At least, I think it's mine.

JIMMY

But what does that have to do with knocking?

SY

If I lost a finger pushing a button, I'm afraid to see what I would lose knocking on a door!

JUNE

He has a point, dear.

JIMMY

What are you so fired up about?

SY

Oh, yeah, have you seen today's paper?

JIMMY

Variety?

JUNE

Hollywood Reporter?

SY

No, the *actual* newspaper!

JIMMY

Not for years.

JUNE

Why?

SY

Our friend wrote an editorial.

SY opens the paper and hands it to JIMMY and JUNE.

JIMMY

Would you look at that...

SY

See what I mean?

JIMMY

Studebaker's making trucks now!

JUNE

Oh, they come in yellow!

SY

They do? I need a new-- Now wait a minute, that's not what I'm talking about!

JUNE

(Laughing) We know, Sy, we just don't care what Kaplan writes.

JIMMY

He's a blowhard who will disappear soon enough.

SY

You don't care what he writes?

JUNE

No, why should I? He's a kook with a self-published pamphlet. Probably just likes getting high from the mimeograph ink.

SY

He's writing about you.

JUNE

He is? *(Looks closer at the paper)* What's it say?

JIMMY

Here it is! *(Reading)* "Of all of the horrible examples of Zombie love is the television show *I Love My Wife*. Once a funny way to wile away the minutes, normal television star June Burns refuses to fire Stage One Zombie Jimmy Teague..."

JUNE

Who happens to be her *actual* husband! Where's that?

JIMMY

(Reading) "An inside source..."

JUNE

Michael...

JIMMY

"...tells me that there is daily, on-set cursing..."

JUNE/SY

Michael...

JIMMY

"...and drinking..."

JUNE/SY/JIMMY

Michael...

JIMMY

"...and actual, physical romantic contact between a normal and a Zombie."

JUNE

(Happily) That's us!

SY

Someday, it will be me and Maddie.

JUNE

Why? She been brain-washed by this crap and hates you now!

SY

I like a challenge.

JIMMY

(Folds the paper and lays it aside) This is much ado about nothing.

JUNE

Nice reference.

JIMMY

Thank you. There's no reason to fear this. We're the golden couple. America loved us before I turned and America loves us now. I was just talking to Carl about this earlier.

SY

Yeah, but how much longer will they love you?

JUNE

Don't let this get to you, Sy. This sells papers, that's all.

SY

Exactly! Who do you think is buying these papers?

JUNE

People with no lives of their own?

JIMMY

People who hate big words?

SY

While both are true, there are a lot of those people!

JUNE

Don't worry about us, Sy, we'll be fine.

SY

I know, June. You will both always be loved. But look at me... I'm a Stage Two Zombie with a variety show. Somebody I'll be tap dancing and my foot will end up in the front row, then people will find out I'm Stage Two and turn on me, I know it!

JIMMY

If your foot ended up in my lap, I would turn on you, too. Carl's people will find a cure soon, I can feel it.

SY

I think that's indigestion.

CARL enters quickly with a newspaper in his hand.

CARL

Have you two... (Notices SY) ...three seen this?

JUNE

I'm already planning my solo show.

CARL

I'm seriously thinking about suing this newspaper!

JIMMY

For what?

CARL

For printing this pabulum, of course!

SY

Here, here!

JIMMY

And what good will that do? We don't even know who Kaplan is.

JUNE

It's true, nobody's ever seen the guy.

SY

I heard that he lives on a boat in international waters, sailing to seedy ports of call to have his way with seedy women.

Everybody stares at SY for a moment.

CARL

And who told you this?

SY

A... guy.

CARL

A seedy guy, no doubt.

SY

Maybe.

JIMMY

Look, both of you need to stop and take a breath. Trouble makers like this raise the ire of a segment of the populace quickly and then are forgotten just as quickly.

JUNE

Someday, people won't fall for this overblown fiction disguised as knowledge. *(Gets a far-away look in her eyes)* We'll have the best and brightest in positions of power who we can trust and who will tell us the truth through our 20 inch television, while we drink our coffee made in less than a minute and eat our instant meals.

SY

Wow, can I go there?

CARL

(Laughing) Now that is your best gag yet! One minute coffee and instant meals? Next thing you're going to say is that we'll be able to throw away the dinner dishes instead of washing them.

JIMMY

Come on, Carl, you deal in the future. Don't you have any hope for it?

CARL

Okay, let's suppose that, somehow, we survive these attacks in the press intact. Then let's suppose America accepts the mixing of normals and Zombies. Then, let's suppose further that my researchers find a cure for all of us. To what end? Instant meals and one minute coffee in front of a giant 20 inch television? What will that get us? How does that move humanity forward?

JUNE

Carl, just think of the time we'll have. More time to spend with our families talking rather than cooking and cleaning...

JIMMY

More time to fish and relax...

SY

More time to... hey, I can't think of anything I need more time for.

JUNE

More time to find a girl?

SY

That's it! Speaking of which, I have a very attractive co-star of yours to woo so that she doesn't forget me before I leave. *(Looks around the dressing room and picks up a vase of flowers)* If you will excuse me, I have flowers to deliver.

JUNE

You're giving my flowers to a woman who hates you?

SY

Cheap, yet effective.

SY exits with the flowers.

CARL

Okay, I understand why he's not worried, but what about you two?

JIMMY

Carl, Sy's more worried about everything than all of us put together.

CARL

Really? He doesn't show it.

JUNE

Sy's a vaudeville comedian, Carl, of course he doesn't show it. He's good at two things; making people laugh and gambling. Okay, he's good at one thing.

CARL

Which one?

JUNE

Depends on the night.

JIMMY

The truth is, I'm praying for your scientists to find that cure. It will be great for people like you and me who have a bad rash. But what about the Stage Twos like Sy?

CARL

What about them? They'll be cured!

JUNE

Yes, but what about their body parts?

CARL

What about them?

JUNE

When Sy loses a body part, it's still alive. He tapes his hand back on and it eventually repairs itself. Will those body parts still be healed when he is?

CARL

The research is inconclusive at this point.

JIMMY

(Worried, not angry) And what about the Stage Threes? Will their minds be fixed as well or is this as good as it gets for them?

JUNE

And the Stage Fours, Carl? What about the Stage Fours in internment camps across the country? After their bodies are healed, will they still be mindless killers? Or will they heal and remember what they've done? Could you imagine living like that?

CARL

I don't know, June. The truth is that we just don't know. We have no case studies, we don't even know if we'll be able to help anybody past Stage One. But we're trying... at least we're trying. Don't you want Jimmy back?

JUNE

I have my Jimmy.

CARL

A lot of people don't feel that way. (*Showing the newspaper*) A lot of people think we should *all* be put into camps. This guy turned your own best friend against you.

JIMMY

You know I want my life and myself back worse than anybody... for both June and myself. But until that time comes, June and I have the responsibility to show the world that we're no different.

CARL

That's fine for us as long as we are Stage Ones, but what happens when we devolve into Stage Twos?

JUNE

That kind of change hasn't happened to anybody--

CARL

Yet. Just three years ago, nobody in America had ever heard of the Zombie virus.

JIMMY

We have to have hope, Carl. June and I do.

CARL

But what if my people fail?

JIMMY

Then we go on showing the public that we're still June and Jimmy...

JUNE

The greatest husband and wife comedy team since Samson and Delilah!

CARL

Samson and Delilah?

JIMMY

Didn't I tell you that one? It's my favorite joke.

CARL

No but I'm sure you will.

SY enters carrying a vase full of bare stems and covered in flower petals.

SY

I think I'm getting through to her.

JIMMY

Come on, my friend. We need to discuss your taste in women over dinner.

All exit.

END OF SCENE

Scene 4

LIGHTS UP on MADDIE's dressing room. There is a knocking at the door. No answer. More knocking. No answer. The door opens and MICHAEL enters.

MICHAEL

Miss Blonstein? *(No answer)* Miss Blonstein, are you alive? *(No answer)* Miss Blonstein, are you here?

MICHAEL looks around the room with his back to the second door. MADDIE enters dressed like a true diva with matching robe and head wrap and her face covered with a green anti-wrinkle cream mask.

MADDIE

Oh, Michael, it's only you.

MICHAEL

Yes, Miss Blon-- *(MICHAEL turns to see her and screams like a girl.)* Aaaaagh! Oh my God, Miss Blonstein, you're turning into one of them!

MADDIE

Michael, this is--

MICHAEL

It's all right, Ma'am, nobody has to know!

MADDIE

Michael--

MICHAEL

We can sneak you out the back way to a waiting car which will whisk you to a small farm upstate where you will live out your days while I wait on you--

MADDIE

Michael! *(Rubs part of the mask off)* It's simply my beauty regimen.

MICHAEL

Oh, thank God. You would have hated the farm.

MADDIE

(Sitting at a mirror) Would you believe that idiot Stage Two Sy showed up here today? With flowers, no less!

MICHAEL

Flowers?

MADDIE

Yes, flowers! They looked just like the crap from June's dressing room. I couldn't believe it! I beat him with the flowers and sent him packing.

MICHAEL

Flowers are nice.

MADDIE

(Softening) They are, aren't they? *(Hardening)* No matter, he had a lot of gall.

MICHAEL

Yes, he did.

MADDIE

Why are you in my dressing room?

MICHAEL

Oh, yes, I have incredible news for you...

MADDIE

My agent called?

MICHAEL

No--

MADDIE

My manager called?

MICHAEL

No--

MADDIE

Not that manager, the other one.

MICHAEL

Not him, either.

MADDIE

Then what's more important than my career?

MICHAEL

I'm meeting him.

MADDIE

Him who?

MICHAEL

Mr. Kaplan.

MADDIE stands, stunned.

MADDIE

How?

MICHAEL

I received this in my mailbox today.

MICHAEL hands her an envelope.

MADDIE

No address? No stamp?

MICHAEL

Somebody put it in my mailbox.

MADDIE opens the letter inside.

MADDIE

(Reading) "Dear Mr. Eastman..." *(To MICHAEL)* Who's Mr. Eastman?

MICHAEL

I am!

MADDIE

I didn't even know you had a last name.

MICHAEL

(Proudly) Mr. Kaplan does.

MADDIE

(Continues reading) "I have taken great interest in your career and even greater interest in your personal feelings toward those creatures which have infected our land. I would like to meet with you tonight to discuss how we may move forward with the separation of the undesirables. I will send a car for you. Sincerely, Mr. Kaplan." *(Amazed)* I don't believe this.

MICHAEL

Did you tell him?

MADDIE

What?

MICHAEL

When you met Mr. Kaplan, did you tell him about me?

MADDIE

Uh, no, Michael, I did not.

MICHAEL

Then how does he know about my personal feelings?

MADDIE

They say he has people everywhere watching.

MICHAEL

Did you get a letter, Miss Blonstein?

MADDIE

What?

MICHAEL

Are you meeting with him tonight?

MADDIE

No, Michael, I'm not.

MICHAEL

Oh, so this is just man talk, then.

MADDIE

That's right, "Man Talk."

MICHAEL

Can you tell me what to expect?

MADDIE

What to expect?

MICHAEL

Out of meeting him tonight.

MADDIE

Oh, it will change your life, Michael.

MICHAEL

I understand. Thank you, Miss Blonstein. I'll say hello for you!

MICHAEL exits. MADDIE is obviously hurt. She puts the letter in a vanity drawer.

MADDIE

Why him? Why him and not me? I've been faithful to you... I've followed you since the beginning... I've dreamed of you. *(She takes her poster off the wall, looking at it.)* It's me, isn't it? I'm not good enough... I'm not what you need. *(Shouting)* I'm not what you want!

MADDIE smashes her poster in a fit of rage. She then runs off into the bathroom.

END OF SCENE

Scene 5

*LIGHTS UP on an abandoned factory floor with a single crate.
MICHAEL enters, carefully looking around.*

MICHAEL

Hello? Hello, Mr. Kaplan? Your driver told me to come straight up here. I hope that's okay. *(The sound of a rat scurrying across the floor startles THOMAS.)*
Aaaaugh! Okay, Thomas, get ahold of yourself. Be a man, dammit!

CARL (OFFSTAGE)

That's very good advice, Mr. Eastman.

MICHAEL

(Not seeing CARL) Mr. Kaplan? Sir? Where are you?

CARL

(Enters) Good evening, Mr. Eastman.

MICHAEL is surprised.

MICHAEL

Mr. Cooper? Sir? What are you doing here?

CARL

Same as you, Michael.

MICHAEL

I doubt that, sir.

CARL

Aren't you here to meet somebody? Who is it?

MICHAEL

Sir, I really can't--

CARL

Mr. Kaplan, perhaps?

MICHAEL

(Nervously) Sir, this is my personal time and I--

CARL

You need to relax, Michael. Really, relax. I'm going to tell you a little secret.

MICHAEL

Sir, Mr. Kaplan will be here any moment and I don't think it would be a good idea for you to be here.

CARL

Michael, I need you to tell me the truth. How do you feel about my research into curing Zombyism?

MICHAEL

I think it's an admirable use of your money--

CARL

Cut the crap, Michael. Tell me how you really feel.

MICHAEL

(Letting loose) It's a waste of time and resources, Mr. Cooper. Zombyism is irreversible and everybody knows it.

CARL

And what is your answer to the Zombie problem?

MICHAEL

Separation and, in some extreme cases, eradication.

MICHAEL has now said what he always wanted to. He stares at CARL who does not break his gaze. Finally, MICHAEL looks away.

CARL

So, you are a separatist?

MICHAEL

Yes, sir.

CARL

Well, here's my little secret... I couldn't agree with you more.

MICHAEL

Excuse me?

CARL

I said you're right. Does that surprise you?

MICHAEL

A bit more shocked than surprised.

CARL

Did you know that there are several forward-thinking Zombies who want separation, as well?

MICHAEL

I'd heard rumors, but--

CARL

It's true. We believe that Stage One Zombies should be free to govern themselves, away from the meddling hand of the normals. Separate.

MICHAEL

But what of Stages Two through Four?

CARL

Complete eradication. They cannot be controlled or trusted.

MICHAEL

And when the time comes that Stage Ones become Stage Twos?

CARL

In the unlikely event that happens, they will be purged.

MICHAEL

We're on the same side.

CARL

Same coin, two sides, one goal.

MICHAEL

Mr. Cooper, I can't tell you how happy I am to hear this, but I might ask you to leave. Mr. Kaplan will be here any moment and he is more radical than I.

CARL pulls a couple of typewritten pages from his jacket pocket.

CARL

Michael, I want you to read this.

MICHAEL takes the papers and opens them to read.

MICHAEL

(Reading) "The time has come, my faithful. The Zombie undesirables must be rounded up and exterminated before their disease affects us all." *(MICHAEL quickly scans the rest of the pages and flips to the back page)* "Yours in this time of turmoil... Mr. Kaplan." *(MICHAEL looks at CARL with surprise)* This is an editorial by Mr. Kaplan that I haven't read!

CARL

Uh-huh.

MICHAEL

How do you have it?

CARL

And now it's time for surprise number two, Michael. I AM Mr. Kaplan.

MICHAEL

No...

CARL

Oh, yes.

MICHAEL

You can't be! Mr. Kaplan writes of *total* eradication of the Zombie species--

CARL

In order to preserve the purity of the human race.

MICHAEL

Exactly.

CARL

Michael, the only way to get anything done today is to jump start it with some good, old-fashioned radicalism.

MICHAEL

But to call for the wiping out of your own species is... madness.

CARL

Then who would ever suspect me? At first, I will admit, I was simply trying to get people riled up. After all, we exist in a Zombie state because the last dictator who wanted to wipe out an entire race changed us with one genetic bomb. I didn't think that people would follow another madman.

MICHAEL

(Realizing the truth) But we did.

CARL

And do. Oh, don't feel bad about it, Michael. The loudest and most extreme voice will shout down the rational mind every time.

MICHAEL

Why am I here, Mr. Cooper?

CARL

Please, call me Carl. I think we're past the formalities.

MICHAEL

Why am I here, Carl?

CARL

You and our diva, Maddie, aren't very good at picking private spots to espouse your personal views.

MICHAEL

What?

CARL

I overheard your conversation on the sound stage.

MICHAEL

Oh.

CARL

That's when I knew that you could be an asset. Michael, we could work together to achieve our common goal... separation.

MICHAEL

But how do the radical writings of Mr. Kaplan lead us to separation?

CARL

Have you ever haggled over anything, Michael?

MICHAEL

Only salary.

CARL

If both sides start with their final offer, then there is no room to haggle. But if the normals start from a position of total eradication and the Zombies want total freedom, the answer is somewhere in the middle.

MICHAEL

Separation freedom for the Zombies with partial eradication of the extremes for the normals.

CARL

Now you see it! Stage Ones don't want the Twos, Threes, or Fours any more than you do.

MICHAEL

But what about couples like June and Jimmy? He's a Stage One who will fight us.

CARL

Sacrifices must be made, Michael.

MICHAEL smiles.

MICHAEL

There's just one thing I still don't understand.

CARL

What's that?

MICHAEL

Miss Blonstein bragged to me that she met Mr. Kap... you... but she never mentioned who you really are.

CARL

Michael, you really must learn that actors, especially actors like Maddie Blonstein, lie. Quite literally. For a living. *Never* trust an actor.

MICHAEL

Maybe the others, but not Miss Blonstein. *(Holding the editorial)* What do you want me to do with this?

CARL

Keep it. It will appear in the paper tomorrow morning.

MICHAEL puts it in his inside jacket pocket.

MICHAEL

Thank you, Carl. What now?

CARL

Inside that crate are some anti-Zombie pamphlets and pro-freedom flyers that need to make their way into the hands of the public.

MICHAEL

Can I see them?

CARL

Certainly. Just open the lid.

As MICHAEL opens the crate, CARL pulls a black pipe from his jacket.

MICHAEL

(Puzzled, picks a hammer up from the crate) Carl, there's nothing but a hammer and some nails in here.

CARL hits MICHAEL in the back of the head with the pipe, causing him to fall into the crate. He then hits MICHAEL twice more in the crate to ensure he's dead. CARL tosses the pipe casually into the crate and pulls a piece of zombie skin out of his pocket, tossing it in as well. He picks up the hammer and nails, closes the crate, and hammers a couple of nails into it to seal it. He then lays the hammer on top and stands back.

CARL

Sacrifices must be made... Mr. Kaplan.

CARL exits.

LIGHTS DOWN

END OF ACT I. INTERMISSION.

ACT II

Scene 1

*LIGHTS UP on the I Love My Wife sound stage.
JIMMY stands near the fireplace, JUNE is sitting in the chair,
and MADDIE is at her place on the couch. They are at the end
of filming an episode and the lighting is an amber wash.*

JIMMY

Well, June, I hope you have learned your lesson.

JUNE

I sure did, Jimmy.

JIMMY

And what is it?

MADDIE

The "R" doesn't stand for "Really Fast".

CANNED LAUGHTER.

JUNE

And next time I want to go to the show, you'll take me.

JIMMY

I learned a lesson, too.

JUNE

What's that?

JIMMY

The next time you want to go to the show, I'm putting a chain on that door!

All three laugh exaggeratedly.

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

Cut!

*The actors stop laughing. MADDIE immediately lights a cigarette.
ZOMBIE STAGE HAND immediately comes in to start tearing
down lights, etc.*

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

That's a wrap. Have a good weekend.

JUNE

(to booth) Thank you, Gary. Thank you, everybody. Have a great weekend!

MADDIE

(to booth) Gary, have you heard from Michael yet?

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

No. But then, nobody ever talks to me, anyway.

MADDIE

Damn.

MADDIE exits quickly.

JIMMY

I wonder what's wrong with her?

JUNE

Michael's been gone all day. I heard that she actually had to tell herself how good she looked today.

JIMMY

Michael's never been sick before. There must be something bad going around.

JUNE

He's probably recovering from a long night of reframing her photos. Hey, I have a great idea for next season!

JIMMY

I'll bite. What is it?

JUNE

A live audience right here in the studio!

JIMMY

I don't know, June, a live audience? Here?

JUNE

Why not? We used to do it all the time.

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

Sounds miserable.

JIMMY

Sure we did, but you have to remember, that was before I turned.

JUNE

So what? They'll come for the comedy!

JIMMY

And leave when they see me in living color! Going into millions of homes in black and white is a blessing right now.

JUNE

Jim, nobody is going to leave and, if they do, we didn't need them here anyway.

JIMMY

(Going to JUNE) Have I told you how lucky I am to have such a strong-willed woman on my side?

JUNE

(Smiling at him) Not today. It never hurts to keep saying it, though.

SY enters with newspaper in hand.

SY

Well, my two favorite criminals, time to make our leave and head for the hills!

JUNE

Criminals? What are you talking about, Sy?

SY

I see you haven't read today's Kaplan editorial.

JIMMY

You know we don't read that crap, Sy. It doesn't--

SY

(Seriously) Read it.

JIMMY

All right. *(Takes the paper and begins reading)* "The time has come, my faithful. The Zombie undesirables must be rounded up and exterminated before their disease affects us all."

JIMMY and JUNE are shocked and look at each other.

SY

He just called for war.

JUNE

Nobody could take this seriously--

SY

Skip to the fifth paragraph.

JUNE

(Looking at the newspaper) Let me see... *(Reading)* "Television must be taken to task for their attempts to brainwash the people of this country into the forced acceptance of the lowest form of life through the shows such as the popular *I Love My Wife* and *Funtime with Uncle Sy*, the latter a show aimed at younger viewers and hosted by Sy Greenblum, himself a secret Stage Two Zombie!" *(To SY)* Oh my God...

SY

(Smiles weakly) Yeah, outed at the height of my popularity!

JUNE

What happened?

SY

I was called to the network office. They asked me if it's true. What could I say?

JIMMY

Was Carl there?

SY

Oh, yeah, he was fantastic! He pleaded for me on the basis of my talent, said a lot of words in Latin, even threw a pencil holder across the room. He couldn't do anything, though. They got me for breach of contract because I didn't disclose that I'm a Stage Two. I don't think my arm falling off in the middle of the meeting helped much.

JUNE

Sy, you're not--

SY

Fired. Canned. Kaput. Put out to pasture...

JIMMY

Okay--

SY

A laughing stock, let go...

JUNE

We got it--

SY

Summarily discharged. Told to hit the bricks. *(Singing low and bluesy)* I got no life no more--

JUNE/JIMMY

Sy!

SY

Come on, I practiced that!

JIMMY

There's a reason you're more Jerry Lewis than Dean Martin.

SY

Hateful. True, but hateful.

JUNE

There has to be something we can do to--

MADDIE enters, smoking and drinking, and plops down on the couch.

JUNE

Maddie? I thought you would be 20 miles away from here and three sheets to the wind by now.

MADDIE

(Looking at the glass) Well, you're half right.

JUNE

What are you doing here?

MADDIE

I would be gone by now if you hadn't called this damn meeting.

JUNE

Meeting? I didn't call for any meeting.

MADDIE

Well, somebody did. I was told to be on the sound stage now.

JUNE

(To booth) Gary, did you call a meeting?

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

Right. As if anybody would come to that.

JUNE

Good point. Then who called the meeting?

DETECTIVE SAM CUTTY enters.

CUTTY

I did, Mrs. Teague.

JUNE

And you are?

CUTTY

Detective Sam Cutty.

JIMMY

Detective?

MADDIE

Oh, I love cops... and handcuffs...

All look at MADDIE for a moment.

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

I have handcuffs here in the booth.

MADDIE shrugs her shoulders and starts to get up.

CUTTY

Sit down, Miss Blonstein.

MADDIE

(Sitting) Okay.

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

Damn.

JUNE

How can we help you, Detective?

CUTTY

I would appreciate it if everybody would take a seat.

SY quickly goes to the couch and sits by MADDIE, smiling. MADDIE smiles until she realizes who it is and tries to scoot away, but is trapped by the arm of the couch. JUNE sits in the chair and JIMMY sits on the arm next to her.

JIMMY

All right, Detective, we're all sitting. Now what is this all about?

CUTTY

In a moment. We're just waiting for one more--

CARL enters quickly carrying his briefcase.

CARL

I got here as quickly as I could. Is everybody all right?

JUNE

Yes, we're fine, Carl.

CARL

I was told there was an emergency.

CUTTY

That would be me, Mr. Cooper.

CARL

And you are?

CUTTY

Detective Sam Cutty. Please take a seat. There seems to be plenty of room next to Mr. Greenblaum.

CARL

Do you know who I am, Detective?

CUTTY

I am *very* aware of who you are, Mr. Cooper. President of the Zombie Actors Union, Philanthropist to Zombie causes, etcetera. Now sit... please. (*CARL places his briefcase beside the couch and sits*) Obviously, I know who all of you are. June Burns and Jimmy Teague... highly rated weekly comedy television show and stage partners.

JUNE

(*Brightly*) Are you a fan of the show?

CUTTY

Never seen it.

JUNE

(*Disappointed*) Oh.

CUTTY

I believe television is a fad. What responsible parent is going to let their child sit in front of a 13 inch television when there's work to be done? No, I look forward to it going the way of the dinosaur.

MADDIE

(Toasting with her glass) Here, here!

CUTTY

Miss Madeline Blonstein.

MADDIE

Oh, that sounds sexy when you say it.

CUTTY takes MADDIE's glass away from her.

CUTTY

An actress who only has a career because Mrs. Teague hasn't fired you... yet.

MADDIE

Hey, Bucko! I've performed Shakespeare at the Old Vic!

CUTTY

You understudied Villager Number Two at the Old Victory Beer Garden during the annual Syosset Shakespeare and Wiener schnitzel Festival.

SY

Now, there's no reason to pick on poor Maddie.

JUNE

Poor Maddie?

SY

Yes, poor Maddie! She has legions of adoring fans who love her.

MADDIE

I do?

SY

Yes, you do. Why, I'm sure she gets thousands of fan letters--

JUNE coughs. SY sees her shake her head "no."

SY

Hundreds of fan letters... (*JUNE and JIMMY shake their heads "no."*) Dozens? (*JUNE, JIMMY, and CARL shake their heads "no."*) A dozen? (*JUNE, JIMMY, CARL, and MADDIE shrug.*) Oh.

CUTTY

Sy Greenblum. "Uncle" Sy to your fans. Vaudeville legend and medic during the war. Stage Two Zombie and, just today, fired by the network.

MADDIE

(*Actual surprise/concern*) What?

SY

It's okay, my dear. I'll bounce back. No reason to be concerned.

MADDIE

(*Unconvincingly*) Concerned? Me? Good riddance.

CUTTY

And... (*Looking at his notes*) Gary? The Director?

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

Hello.

CUTTY

Gary is... (*Looking through his notebook*) Uh... What is your last name, Gary?

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

Just Gary...

CUTTY

No last name?

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

I used to have one, I think. I've been up here so long, I forget.

CUTTY

I hope it doesn't catch on.

JIMMY

Now that role-call is complete, why did you bring us here, Detective?

CUTTY

Can anybody tell me the whereabouts of your Assistant Director, Mr. Michael Eastman?

JUNE

No, he hasn't been here all day. We assumed he was sick.

MADDIE looks very worried.

CUTTY

Miss Blonstein, do you have anything to say?

MADDIE

Me? No, nothing.

CARL

Is there a problem, Detective?

CUTTY

You could say that. I happen to know where young Mr. Eastman is right now... the City Morgue.

Shocked looks all around.

ALL

(Overlapping) What? What happened? Oh my God! Are you joking? How awful!

CARL

Please, everybody. *(Everybody quiets down)* What happened, Detective?

CUTTY

That's an interesting question, for which I have no answer... yet. He was found in a shipping crate in the Old Chair Factory off the Garment District.

JUNE

What was he doing there?

MADDIE looks worried and shocked.

CUTTY

Did anybody here see him last night? *(Nothing)* Anyone? *(Nothing)* Miss Blonstein?

MADDIE

Why would you automatically assume that--

MADDIE falls apart.

CUTTY

What is it you're not telling me, Miss Blonstein?

MADDIE

Michael came to my dressing room last night...

SY

(Scooting away from MADDIE) I see how it is...

MADDIE

To tell me something.

SY

(Smiling and scooting back) Oh, in that case...

MADDIE

That he was going to meet Mr. Kaplan.

JUNE

The Mr. Kaplan?

MADDIE

Yes. He showed me a letter he received from Mr. Kaplan.

JIMMY

Wait a minute... Michael got a letter from Mr. Kaplan?

MADDIE

You know, Mr. Kaplan, the writer.

CARL

Oh yes, we know who Mr. Kaplan is.

CUTTY

Maybe you don't.

CARL

What is that supposed to mean?

CUTTY

What I'm about to tell you does not leave this room, understood?

ALL

Okay. All right. Got ya. Sure. No problem.

CUTTY

When we found Mr. Eastman, he had a copy of today's Kaplan editorial in his inside jacket pocket.

JUNE

But we've all read that now.

CUTTY

His was an original typed version, signed by Kaplan himself. He was killed several hours *before* the newspapers were printed. We believe that Michael Eastman was Mr. Kaplan.

ALL

What? Really?! That can't be! (*etc*)

CUTTY

And we have reason to believe that's what got him killed.

CARL

How's that?

CUTTY

The murder weapon was found next to him, sealed into the crate. Attached to the murder weapon, we found a piece of skin... Zombie skin. We've surmised that a Zombie figured out who Michael secretly was and killed him for his incendiary writing.

CARL

A brilliant deduction, Detective.

CUTTY

(*Looking at CARL*) Yes, maybe, but there are still elements of this case to deal with. Such as, where were you last night, Mr. Cooper?

CARL

Me? Why, I was at home all evening pouring over the reports I received from my medical team.

CUTTY

Can anybody verify that?

CARL

Only my bottle of 18 year-old scotch.

JIMMY

(*To CARL*) And you didn't call me?

CARL

It was only one bottle.

MADDIE

(Angrily) Stop joking! Michael is dead!

MADDIE's outburst surprises everyone.

JIMMY

I'm sorry, Maddie. It's my natural defense mechanism.

CARL

I apologize, as well.

CUTTY

Miss Blonstein, you seem abnormally upset by this.

MADDIE

He was a friend, Detective.

CUTTY

So, if I ask where you were last night?

MADDIE

(Embarrassed) I don't remember.

CUTTY

Excuse me?

MADDIE

I... don't... remember...

CUTTY

Why not?

MADDIE

(Pause) Because, when I drink too much, I don't remember what happened.

CUTTY

So you don't know where you were or what you did?

SY

Detective, if you are implying that Madeline Blonstein had anything to do with Michael's death, I can assure you that this woman is *not* a killer!

MADDIE stares at SY.

CUTTY

Miss Blonstein, Mr. Greenblaum is a Stage Two Zombie, so he, legally, cannot be used as a character witness unless you agree. Do you accept his opinion of your character?

MADDIE

(Taken aback, pause) Yes. Yes, I do.

CUTTY

And you, Mr. Greenblaum?

SY

What about me?

CUTTY

You had a pretty good reason to want Mr. Eastman dead.

SY

Why would I want Michael dead? I'm a pacifist!

CUTTY

Even a pacifist might turn to violence when he's being outed as a Stage Two in the press. I believe you were just fired, weren't you?

SY

But I just read that editorial today. How was I supposed to know last night what would come out today?

CUTTY

Maybe you snuck a peek at the letter he showed to Miss Blonstein. Or maybe you saw the editorial yesterday. He had the master copy in his pocket.

SY

Detective, I am many things... an actor, a juggler, a comedian, and a professed coward... but I am not a spy or a killer!

CUTTY

Then you can tell me where you were last night?

JUNE

He was having dinner with us, Detective.

JIMMY

That's true. We could still get into the Brown Derby as of last night.

CUTTY

After that editorial today and the news of Mr. Eastman's death comes out tonight, I wouldn't try going to a restaurant anytime soon.

JUNE

I'm sure our appetites won't be returning for a few days.

JIMMY

...Or weeks.

MADDIE

...Or months.

CUTTY

(To booth) And you, Gary. Where were you last night?

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

Right here.

CUTTY

Right here? At the studio?

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

In this booth.

CUTTY

What were you doing?

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

Let me check my calender... *(pause)* Solitaire.

CUTTY

Can anybody here verify that?

ALL

Yes.

CUTTY

Miss Blonstein, do you still have the letter that Mr. Eastman showed you last night?

MADDIE

(Nervously) Um... no, I don't believe so.

CUTTY

You don't "believe so"?

MADDIE

No, I mean I don't have it.

CUTTY

Are you sure?

SY

Detective, if she says she doesn't have it, she doesn't have it.

CUTTY

And if I asked to see your dressing room?

CARL

Detective, this where I must insist that you have a search warrant.

CUTTY

You must insist? Miss Blonstein is not a Zombie, therefore not under your jurisdiction.

JUNE

(Stands) But she is under mine. She is an employee of my production company and, as such, is afforded my protection. You will not look through one inch of this studio without a search warrant.

CUTTY

All right, it's a deal. And here's the most cliché thing you will hear today... don't leave town. I'll return with the warrant.

CUTTY exits. Everybody except JUNE relaxes into their seats.

SY

Now what do we do?

JUNE

Sy, do you know how to use a pen?

SY

What?

JUNE

Do you know how to type?

SY

Sure, in a comical manner.

JUNE

Carl, can a Stage Two Zombie work in Hollywood at all according to union agreements?

CARL

Well, sure, as long as they are not seen on camera.

JUNE

Sy, you are now a writer on *I Love My Wife*.

JIMMY

June, what a great idea!

SY

I already have three episodes in my head!

JUNE

Great! We need to tell--

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

June, the big office just called.

Smiles fade.

JUNE

What do they want?

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

They want to see you and Jimmy right away.

They all look at each other.

JUNE

Tell them we're on our way up.

GARY (OFFSTAGE)

I live to serve.

JUNE

Listen, everybody. We're going up, but we're going up there to sell them the next season, not beg for our jobs now. We'll take our newest writer with the newest ideas...

SY

(Excited) That's me!

JUNE

And we'll talk about how this show will be bigger and better. *(Turns to Jimmy)* Are you with me?

JIMMY

'Til death do us part.

CARL

Let's hope that doesn't include torches and pitchforks.

JIMMY

I'll extinguish the torches and fight the pitchforks!

JUNE

How Shakespearean! I must buy you some tights.

JIMMY

Only for special occasions.

JUNE

Come on, let's go conquer the network boys, Sy!

SY

I get to be the faithful sidekick!

JIMMY

You always have been.

JUNE

Carl, we need a union rep there, as well.

CARL

Of course.

JUNE, JIMMY, SY, and CARL start to leave.

MADDIE

(Weakly) Good luck.

This makes them all stop. SY returns, takes her hand and kisses it. They all smile and turn to leave. CARL stops.

CARL

(Calling to them) I'll catch up to you. I forgot my briefcase.

CARL returns to the couch where MADDIE now has her head in her hands. He grabs his briefcase and slowly circles behind MADDIE.

CARL

Madeline, I need to ask you a question.

MADDIE

(Composing herself) Yes? What is it?

CARL

The letter that Michael showed you last night, do you still have it?

MADDIE

Why?

CARL

Oh, professional curiosity. Do you?

MADDIE

You heard what I told the Detective...

CARL

Oh, yes, I heard, but I also heard the hesitation in your voice. Do you have the letter, Madeline?

MADDIE

(Getting suspicious) No, I don't.

CARL

Now, Madeline, this is very important... do you have the letter?

MADDIE

(Stands and backs away) I told you I don't.

CARL

(Closing on her) I know what you told me and I know what you told the Detective, but somehow, I don't quite believe you.

MADDIE backs against a wall next to the door.

MADDIE

Carl, you're scaring me.

CARL gets right up in her face.

CARL

Now we're on a first name basis? Isn't that nice? I know you still have that letter, Maddie. Where is it? (*Screaming*) Tell me!

MADDIE runs away from CARL and out the door. CARL straightens his tie and exits to join the others.

END OF SCENE

Scene 2

JUNE enters, looking angry.

JUNE

They can't treat us like this!

JIMMY enters followed by SY and CARL.

JIMMY

Honey, they didn't fire us.

JUNE

But we only have two more shows under current contract!

CARL

And personal appearances...

JUNE

They do not want me out there talking to people!

JUNE is pacing around the set as JIMMY tries to calm her down.

JIMMY

June, we'll finish the current contract and then we'll do what they asked--

JUNE

No!

JIMMY

I'll leave the show quietly and you can do the next season as a solo with Maddie.

JUNE

I will *not* do a season without you!

JIMMY

You won't be! Sy and I can be your secret writers from home. We just can't... be here...

JUNE

Why didn't you just let me quit?

CARL

Breaking your contract would cost you--

JUNE

I don't give a damn about the money!

CARL

I'm going to... uh... look into filing a lawsuit over this. *(To Jimmy)* Are you okay?

JIMMY

Yeah, go ahead.

CARL exits quickly.

SY

Junebug, listen to me.

JUNE

Sy, not now, I'm trying to--

SY

Yes, now, June. *(JUNE backs down.)* Did Jimmy ever tell you what happened in Germany in '45?

JUNE

Of course. He told me that you saved his life.

SY

But did he tell you how?

JUNE

I appreciate you trying to distract me, but--

SY

I'm not trying to distract you, June. There's a purpose to this story.

JUNE

Okay, then. Since Jimmy doesn't like to talk about the war, you tell me.

SY

You have to know that I was the worst corpsman ever. I was a stage comedian and they made me a corpsman? Who thought that was a good idea?

JIMMY

They could have given you a rifle and made you walk behind a tank.

SY

That would not have ended well. *(They laugh)* I started out being the corpsman who could cheer up the tent. I could make anybody laugh.

JIMMY

Not MacArthur.

SY

No sense of humor in that man. Here's what you didn't see in all the newsreels, though... all the blood. All the dead. All the men going home with fewer body parts than they arrived with. A sense of humor can't survive that, even for a professional. I lost it. I couldn't smile. I couldn't even fake it.

JUNE

You?

SY

Yeah, me and just about every other corpsman. The sad thing is that we knew the war was coming to an end, but that didn't help. People still died. Then, one afternoon, men started showing up covered in what we thought was ash or soot. It was a big battle, lots of casualties. A lot of wounded on litters.

JUNE

The Hirntot Protocol.

JIMMY

Hitler's true final solution. Chemical warfare at its worst. We thought the fog we were walking into was just smoke.

SY

I was walking past one when a hand reached out and grabbed my leg. I looked down and there was this Captain. How he conned the Army out of Captain's bars, I'll never know.

JIMMY

Cost me 20 boxtops.

SY

I believe it. So I bend down and his first question was how his men were doing. I told him they were pretty banged up, but gave better than they got. He seemed to relax, but I noticed he was holding his side. He was literally holding his wound shut where he got shot.

JUNE

What? Why?

JIMMY

There were a lot of guys hurt worse than me.

SY

No, there weren't. He just didn't want anybody to know. When I reached down to look at it, he ordered me not to!

JUNE

He ordered you?

SY

That's right. Luckily, I'm not very good at following orders. I put pressure on the wound, called for help, and told him he needed to stay awake and alert. He needed to talk to me. Now, when I told other soldiers that they needed to talk to me to stay alert, we would talk about their girl or their hometown or their mom, but you know what your idiot husband said?

JUNE

What?

SY

"Tell me a joke." That was it. He wanted a damn joke. I told him I didn't know any, but he insisted. So, for the first time in months, I told a joke.

JUNE

Do you remember what it was?

SY

Why was Samson Delilah's favorite comic? Because Samson always brought down the house.

JIMMY laughs.

JIMMY

Still gets me.

SY

He laughed so hard that I had to tell him to settle down. I kept telling him jokes and then started doing bits and gags to keep him awake until they took him to surgery. He was still laughing as he was taken away. For the first time, I looked around and others were laughing... and smiling. In the middle of the blood and death and missing body parts, all covered in that Hirntot powder, people laughed. Some for the last time. Jimmy's been saying for years that I saved his life because I kept him from bleeding to death, but the truth is, he saved me.

JUNE hugs SY. She then turns and slugs JIMMY in the arm.

JIMMY

Ow! What was that for?

JUNE

Why didn't you ever tell me that?

JIMMY

He tells it better.

SY

The point is, Jimmy saved my life, I saved his, it doesn't matter. We've been best friends ever since. Except when he tried to set me up with his date's much older sister in Des Moines.

JUNE

He what?

JIMMY

Before we met. Story for another time.

JUNE

Oh, yes, it is.

SY

What I'm trying to say is we're a team. You need writers, we'll make your solo show amazing... even when writing from home.

JIMMY

At least you'll still have Maddie.

JUNE

I don't know if she'll stick around without her partner in crime.

JIMMY

They were like two peas in a pod.

JUNE

But I don't get it. Michael just didn't seem like an instigator like Kaplan.

SY

It's true. Michael was more of a... bully and a wimp. Forgive me for talking ill of the dead.

JIMMY

Truth is truth... alive or dead.

JUNE

Do you *really* think he was Mr. Kaplan?

SY

Why would he show my future wife a letter from himself? They were best friends, he would have told her.

JUNE

(Getting an idea) Meet me at Maddie's dressing room in five minutes.

JUNE exits.

JIMMY

(Calling after her) Why five minutes? *(To SY)* She scares me sometimes.

SY

There is a mystery to solve! My beloved's dressing room in five minutes!

Sy exits.

JIMMY

(Calling after him) Really? You, too? *(To himself)* Five minutes. Guess I'll get some coffee.

JIMMY exits.

END OF SCENE

Scene 3

LIGHTS UP on MADDIE's dressing room, dim. CARL enters and searches the room, dumping clothes on the floor and emptying the drawers from the vanity. He searches the clothes on her clothes rack and moves the couch as he looks for the Kaplan letter. CARL gets frustrated with not finding the letter in MADDIE's dressing room and angrily exits.

There is a light knocking on the door to MADDIE's dressing room. No answer. Knocking again. Still no answer. The door opens slowly. JIMMY's head peeks in. Under him, JUNE peeks in. She is wearing a black beret and the lower half of her face is covered by a black scarf. Under her, SY peeks in. He is wearing a deer stalker (Sherlock Holmes) hat, is holding a magnifying glass, and a pipe hangs from his mouth. Each has a flashlight.

JIMMY

(Stage whisper) Looks clear.

JIMMY opens the door and JUNE and SY fall into the room. They quickly get up, shushing each other. JIMMY quickly enters and shuts the door and locks it. JUNE is in black from head to toe and SY is dressed as Sherlock Holmes. Once the door closes, they speak in regular volume.

JIMMY

You two make enough noise to wake the dead! Why are you dressed like that?

JUNE

(Mumbles) I don't want anybody to recognize me.

JIMMY

What?

JUNE pulls her scarf down to speak.

JUNE

I don't want anybody to recognize me!

JUNE pulls her scarf back up.

SY

Good plan!

JIMMY

How would people *not* recognize you? This is the studio for *your* show! All of these people work for you! And that's the costume you wore in the first season, episode 8, when we had to break into the club.

JUNE

(pulling down her scarf) I knew it would come in handy again. You know how the Lone Ranger has a mask and Superman has a pair of glasses?

JIMMY

Yeah?

JUNE

This is my alter ego disguise that makes me unrecognizable.

JUNE pulls her scarf back up.

JIMMY

No, no it doesn't. It makes you look like a French train robber who uses a mime gun.

SY

(Laughing) He's right, June.

JIMMY

You're laughing at her, Sherlock?

SY

This is a mystery. We are searching for a clue. These are my mystery solving clothes.

JIMMY

And just how many mysteries have you solved in these clothes to date?

Pause.

SY

I solved an average of a mystery a night every night for six months.

JIMMY

You were doing a stage show and it was in the script!

SY

I will have you know that Basil Rathbone himself gave me this deer stalker.

JIMMY

Basil Rathbone left it behind in a taxi and you grabbed it before he returned.

SY

He knew I wanted it!

JIMMY

Basil Rathbone is an actor, not an actual detective.

SY

It's still a nice hat.

JIMMY

First, we need to split up and look for that letter.

JUNE

(Mumbles) What do you think it looks like?

JIMMY

What?

JUNE

(Pulls her scarf down) What do you think it looks like?

JUNE pulls her scarf back up.

JIMMY

If I had to guess, I would say a piece of paper with writing on it.

JUNE

(Mumbles) What?

JIMMY pulls down her scarf and leaves it down.

JIMMY

A piece of paper with writing on it.

JUNE

Oh.

*The three turn to face the room and see its condition for the first time.
They freeze.*

SY

Wow.

JUNE

We are, obviously, not the first ones here.

JIMMY

How do you know Maddie didn't get drunk and do this herself before she left?

JUNE

She would never let her underwear hit the floor.

SY picks them up and looks at them through the magnifying glass.

JIMMY

What are you doing?

SY

Um... looking for clues. None here.

As soon as JIMMY turns his back, SY pockets the underwear. Each of the three go to a different area. JUNE searches around the vanity, SY searches around the clothes rack, and JIMMY searches the back wall and couch area.

JUNE

(Holding up a piece of paper) I found it! *(JIMMY and SY rush to her)* It was behind the vanity.

SY

What's it say?

JUNE

(Reading via flashlight) "Dear Miss Blonstein, me and the Missus thinks that you's the bestest part o' that show you's on."

SY

Isn't that sweet? His wife signed with her "X".

JIMMY

Of course she keeps a letter from her only fan in here.

SY

You know where I think it is?

JUNE

Where?

SY

I think she ate it.

JIMMY

What?

SY

Sure! I was an extra on a picture once where the killer ate the evidence.

JIMMY

Why would she eat the letter?

JUNE

So she'd always know where it is!

SY

Yeah!

JIMMY

Remind me never to let you two have coffee after three again.

They hear keys at the door and freeze. Finally, SY runs to the couch, pulls it away from the wall, and gets behind it. JUNE and JIMMY follow. The door opens and MADDIE enters. She closes the door, turns on the light, and freezes.

MADDIE

Oh, no!

MADDIE walks around the room, looking on in horror, until she ends up at the couch. She sits on the couch, puts her head in her hands, and cries. JUNE, JIMMY, and SY's heads pop up behind her. SY looks sad for MADDIE and starts to say something until JUNE and JIMMY stop him. JIMMY mimes crawling out. JUNE and SY nod affirmatively. They drop down behind the couch and JUNE begins crawling out. MADDIE suddenly raises her head from her hands.

MADDIE

(Yelling) Why?

JUNE crawls back in reverse. MADDIE gets up and the three heads pop up to see what she is doing. MADDIE picks up random clothes and throws them in anger. The three have to duck when she throws at the back wall. MADDIE ends up at the vanity. She picks up the chair as if to throw it, but loses steam and sets it down instead. She sits and looks at herself in the mirror.

MADDIE

You did this to yourself, you old lush. You got yourself into this mess with your high and mighty, better-than-thou attitude and you know it.

JUNE, JIMMY, and SY lean on the back of the couch as if watching a movie.

MADDIE

Why did you suddenly start hating Jimmy? Because he changed? And Sy... he's been nothing but nice to you. You, Madeline Blonstein, are an idiot!

SY

(Standing) No!

JUNE and JIMMY pull him down behind the couch as MADDIE stands quickly and turns their way.

MADDIE

Who's there? Come out now! I have a... *(Grabs a knitting needle or banana from the vanity)* ...gun! A big one, too!

Three sets of hands come up from behind the couch.

JUNE

Don't shoot!

MADDIE

June?

JUNE stands slowly.

JUNE

Oh, hi, Maddie...

MADDIE

Who else is back there?

JIMMY stands.

JIMMY

Hi, Maddie.

SY is trying to crawl to the door. MADDIE sees him plainly.

MADDIE

Sy Greenblaum!

SY stands, terrified.

SY

Yes, well, right, Jim, I don't see any signs of mold in these baseboards, either. I'll just--

MADDIE

Don't move another step!

SY

...not move another step.

JUNE

I thought you said you had a gun?

MADDIE

I didn't say it was here.

JUNE

Touché.

MADDIE

I have three questions... Number one, what are you doing here? Number two, did you do this to my dressing room? And number three, why are you two dressed like it's Halloween?

JUNE and JIMMY move out from behind the couch.

JIMMY

First, you don't want to know about the Halloween costumes...

MADDIE

Fair enough.

JUNE

The room was like this when we got here, Maddie.

MADDIE

What happened?

JUNE

Obviously, somebody's looking for something.

MADDIE

Is that what you're doing here? Looking for something?

JIMMY

Yes, Maddie.

MADDIE

Why didn't you say something to me instead of... *(Looks at JUNE and SY's outfits)*
...this?

SY

You were gone by the time we got back from the network meeting.

MADDIE

(Sadly) You didn't ask me to go to the network meeting... and I'm your co-star...

JUNE

Oh, honey, I didn't think you wanted to go.

JIMMY

We thought you wanted off the show.

MADDIE

I just wanted the show to be what it was before...

JIMMY

...Before the change.

MADDIE

(Weakly) Yes.

JUNE

And now?

MADDIE

Michael was my best friend after you started dealing with his change, you know.

JUNE

I know.

MADDIE

He didn't have to die.

JUNE

I know.

MADDIE

I don't want to die.

SY

(Takes her hands in his) I would never let that happen to you.

MADDIE

(Touches his face) Why have you always been so nice to me?

SY

I could never be nice enough to you.

MADDIE

(To JUNE) You know that Michael was *not* Kaplan, don't you?

JUNE

We don't think so, Maddie, but how could you prove that?

MADDIE

I stupidly bragged to him one time that I had met Mr. Kaplan.

SY

You met Kaplan?

MADDIE

No, but I told him that I had. I had to be the one who knew his hero.

JUNE

So?

MADDIE

Don't you see? When I told him I met Kaplan, he was impressed and asked me all kinds of questions about him.

JIMMY

Why wouldn't he have told you right then and there if he was Kaplan?

MADDIE

And then he was so proud when he showed me his letter from Kaplan. He asked me if I had put in a good word for him when I met Kaplan.

JUNE

He wasn't Kaplan.

MADDIE

No. He just got caught up in a cause. He felt needed and wanted.

JIMMY

You know, Maddie, whoever made this mess was probably looking for the same thing we were.

MADDIE

The Kaplan letter.

JIMMY

Yes.

MADDIE pauses and then slowly reaches into her top and pulls a folded up piece of paper from her bra.

SY

I've never been so jealous of a piece of paper.

MADDIE stares at it for a moment.

MADDIE

I was afraid to give it to the police. It's the last thing Michael left for me. Now I just want to find Michael's killer.

*She hands the paper to JUNE who opens it and reads.
JIMMY looks over her shoulder.*

JUNE

"I have taken great interest in your career..." *(She mumbles as she reads until the end)* "Sincerely, Mr. Kaplan"? This is the letter that got Michael killed?

JIMMY

(Taking the letter) Let me see this...

MADDIE

He was going to finally meet his hero. I'm so sorry, Michael.

JIMMY

There's something about this letter...

SY

What?

JIMMY's eyes go wide as he remembers.

JIMMY

Oh my God...

JUNE

What is it?

JIMMY

An emergency!

JIMMY rushes out. SY follows him and JUNE grabs MADDIE and exits with her.

END OF SCENE

Scene 4

LIGHTS UP on JIMMY's dressing room. CARL bursts through the door into the room carrying his ever-present briefcase.

CARL

James? James, where are you? (*Sets his briefcase down*) James, are you all right?

JIMMY (OFFSTAGE)

Go away, Carl.

CARL moves to the bathroom door.

CARL

James, June called to tell me you have an emergency and I should come right over. She didn't want to talk about it on the phone.

JIMMY (OFFSTAGE)

Damn it, I told her *not* to call you!

CARL

James, whatever it is, we can talk about it.

JIMMY (OFFSTAGE)

Go away!

JUNE enters.

JUNE

Carl, thank God you're here!

CARL

What is going on, June?

JUNE

I tried to find a key for that door, but nobody has one!

CARL grabs JUNE by the arms to stop her.

CARL

What is wrong?

JUNE looks concerned for a moment and then goes to the couch. She reaches under the cushion and retrieves a Zombie arm.

JUNE

This.

She hands it to CARL who is surprised.

CARL

Jim's?

JUNE shakes her head "yes."

JUNE

You try to talk to him, I'm going to find an axe or something to get through that door.

JUNE exits, closing the door. CARL stares at the arm and goes to the bathroom door.

CARL

James? (No answer) Jimmy?

JIMMY (OFFSTAGE)

Go away.

CARL

Jimmy... I have your arm.

*Sound of the **DOOR UNLOCKING**. JIMMY enters from the bathroom and closes the door behind him. He looks like a drug addict going through withdrawal... sweaty, sick, and feverish. He leans against the door frame holding his armless sleeve.*

CARL

My God, you look like hell.

JIMMY

It's happened, Carl. I'm a Stage Two.

CARL helps him to the chair.

CARL

When?

JIMMY

Today. Not long ago. It just started happening. I felt dizzy and nauseous, then my arm came off. I didn't even feel it until I looked down. It's everything we worried about, Carl! We *can* change!

CARL

(Staring at the arm) I guess we can.

JIMMY

Carl, I need to know... when will the cure be done? I need it before the network finds out I'm Stage Two and fires me like Sy!

CARL

Yes, that would be too bad.

JIMMY

Come on, Carl, just tell me how much longer!

CARL begins laughing. Just a little at first.

JIMMY

What's so funny?

CARL laughs harder.

JIMMY

What's so damn funny, Carl?

CARL stops laughing and gets right in JIMMY's face.

CARL

You are, Jimmy-Boy! You have just made my day!

JIMMY

What?

CARL

I have been waiting for three years for the day when you would become a Stage Two...

JIMMY

Why?

CARL

Are you kidding? The most popular Stage One Zombie on Earth finally de-evolves into a Stage Two? This will prove to the normals that *anybody* can get worse! They will panic!

JIMMY

But the cure--

CARL

(Shouting) Wake up, Jimmy-Boy, *there is no cure!*

JIMMY

But your research, your scientists... we gave you thousands of dollars to--

CARL

Oh, research... scientists... blah, blah, blah... *There is no research! There are no scientists! And your money has helped keep me in a lifestyle I prefer.*

JIMMY

Why? For God's sake, you'll become a Stage Two without that cure just like me!

CARL

I have a little secret for you, Jimmy-Boy...

CARL reaches up and pulls Zombie make-up off of his face. He is a normal. If he is wearing a wig, he takes that off, too. JIMMY looks on in horror.

CARL

That's right, Jimmy-Boy! You can just call me Mr. Kaplan.

JIMMY

How...?

CARL

It has been so easy! *(CARL opens the briefcase. Inside is a complete make-up set.)* Just carry all the touch-up I need with me. I've been right under your nose the entire time! *(Pulls a medicine bottle out of the briefcase)* And now, I will say that my magical, miracle serum cured me before it was too late. Unfortunately, when I gave it to you, my good friend, to try to save you after discovering you turned into a Stage Two, it killed you. Unfortunately, the serum only works on Stage Ones, and not all of them, of course... only me.

JIMMY

(Getting weaker) Why?

CARL

Why? Why, Jimmy-Boy? Isn't it obvious? You... don't... belong... You are a disease. There is only one cure... total eradication. And, thanks to you, I can prove that all of the Zombies will de-evolve and everybody will be glad you're dead. Nobody wants to take the chance of a bunch of Stage Fours walking around.

CARL turns to his briefcase and takes out a bottle and syringe. He begins filling the syringe.

CARL

I will be a hero, having gotten the "cure" just in time. Congratulations, my friend, you will be a martyr.

Behind CARL, JIMMY stands up straight, no longer pretending to be in pain. He pulls his arm out of the sleeve of his robe. He is extremely pissed and is staring a hole through CARL.

CARL

The rest of you will disappear one-by-one. *(Turns back to JIMMY)* Sorry, my--

CARL is surprised.

JIMMY

When we first met years ago, you said something I will never forget... "I have taken great interest in your career." I thought it sounded cool, but you knew how to play to somebody's ego, didn't you? *(Holds up the Kaplan letter)* And the Kaplan letter is in your handwriting.

The bathroom door opens and CUTTY, with gun in hand, enters with ZOMBIE STAGE HAND. CARL starts to move toward the dressing room door.

CARL

(Holding out the syringe) Stay back!

The dressing room door opens and JUNE, SY, and MADDIE enter. SY is missing an arm.

CUTTY

Drop the needle, Mr. Cooper.

CARL

Detective, you're a normal. You must see what I'm trying to do here.

CUTTY

If it were up to me, I'd let my friend here break you into so many pieces, they would have to sweep you up with a broom.

ZSH looks like he is ready to pounce. CARL lays the syringe back in the briefcase, crestfallen. MADDIE walks up to Carl. She looks him in the eye and slaps him. She then picks up the Zombie arm and hands it to SY, who puts it back on. CUTTY puts his gun away and handcuffs CARL.

JIMMY

I can't wait to see tomorrow's headlines about the man who tried to kill off an entire race. The American people don't have a lot of patience for that. Then I'm going to take my wife to dinner at the Brown Derby while you are getting to know your new cellmate. Detective...

CUTTY

Gladly.

JUNE

Just a moment... (*CUTTY stops. JUNE moves directly in front of CARL*) You tried to destroy my family... you tried to destroy my friends... and you tried to destroy our lives. I will spend every cent this show brings in making sure that you die in prison. I promise. (*JUNE starts to walk away*) Oh, and...

*JUNE kicks CARL squarely in the crotch. CARL crumples.
JUNE hugs JIMMY. CUTTY picks CARL up off the floor,
gets him to the door, and pushes him out.*

JIMMY

Let's go home.

JUNE

I thought you would never ask. (*To SY and MADDIE*) Come on, kids, we need a drink.

MADDIE

Not me... I've had enough to last a while.

JUNE

(*Reaching out for her*) Then just come with us as a friend.

JUNE and JIMMY exit smiling followed by MADDIE and SY.

SY

(*To MADDIE as he exits*) Have I ever told you the one about Samson and Delilah?

On his way out, Sy's arm drops to the floor.

LIGHTS DOWN

THE END