BEDSIDE MANOR

ACT I

At rise, ROBERT is onstage, dry mopping the floor.

LISA is at nurse’s station shuffling papers.

HARVEY enters from LOBBY.

HARVEY

Good morning, my friends. As usual, you two are already hard at work when I come in the door. I see Robert brought in the paper and Lisa cranked up the coffee pot, so everything with my world is bright and shiny. Is everybody else already on board?

 LISA

Good morning, Mr. Masters. Robert was here when I came in but I haven’t seen any of the rest of the staff.

 ROBERT

Good morning, sir. When I came in the back door, the kitchen staff had breakfast all prepared and many of our residents were already in the dining room at their tables. The Doctor is in his lab. I think on your desk you will find a note from Nurse Stretcher that she has an appointment downtown this morning and expects to be in a bit late.

 HARVEY

Speaking of the kitchen, have we had any more complaints from the residents about the service or the food?

 ROBERT

No, sir, and it was really only Orwell who was fussing. He wasn’t happy about having to eat what he called “Rabbit Food.”

 HARVEY

Glad we got his problem taken care of. Out dietician showed him how to make broccoli a bit more tolerable by applying just a little blue cheese dressing. The only other complaint that I heard was about the newspaper.

 ROBERT

Yes, sir. A few of our residents felt it wasn’t fair they had to patiently wait their turn to get to the paper each morning. Unlike the young folks, they don’t get news and weather from the telephone. They like catch up on the day’s stories while enjoying their morning coffee.

 HARVEY

Well, I’m pretty sure I solved that one, and it was easy. Instead of just the one copy, I had the deliveryman bring us ten copies, seven days a week. I’ve seen a few of the men working on the Sudoku, and now each of them can have their own puzzle. Do you enjoy the paper, Lisa?

 LISA

Oh my, no. Mr. Masters. Whenever I look at the newspaper all I see are bad things happening to some poor people all over the world. Why can’t we have a paper that brings happy news and good stories every day?

 HARVEY

I think that’s been tried Lisa, but it must be hard to fill the first three sections with pleasantries from international, national, and local sources every day of the week. Most of us just want to know is my part of the world alright? Then we don’t have to worry too much about the rest of that stuff because it doesn’t hit home and we can’t do anything about it anyway.

 LISA

That makes sense, Mr. Masters. Thanks. I’ll try to read it that way and not let it upset me.

 HARVEY

Now, I’d better get to work myself. I’ll be in my office if anything comes up.

(HARVEY exits to DIRECTOR)

 ROBERT

Our Director is pretty smart, Lisa. President Jefferson told us a free and energetic press was more important to our democracy than any standing army. But we can’t let ugliness get us down. Just remember, most people are really trying hard to make their way in the world and still be kind and considerate, good citizens. In our own way, we can each make a little difference every day.

 LISA

That’s good advice, Robert. And right now I’d better get started making my part of this world better by checking in the mail that came in late yesterday afternoon.

(MARISA enters angrily from LOBBY.)

MARISA

Harvey, where are you?

 (HARVEY enters from DIRECTOR.)

 HARVEY

Why, hello dear. You told me you were going to be shopping. I didn’t expect to see you today.

 MARISA

Are you shitting me? You fixed my credit card so it doesn’t work, didn’t you?

 HARVEY

Do we have to discuss this here, in front of my staff?

 MARISA

Him? That old fart doesn’t count. And she doesn’t even know what I’m talking about. What counts is, when this damn credit card was rejected at the checkout I was embarrassed in front of a lot of people. You put a limit on my card, didn’t you?

(LISA exits to LAB)

 HARVEY

No, I didn’t. First of all, that’s not a credit card – it’s a debit card, and I didn’t put a limit on it. I just didn’t put any more money in it after you blew through our budget before the end of the week. I put in enough money for you to run the house for seven days. If you run out of money before you run out of week, we’ll just have to live on beans and rice until next Monday.

 MARISA

That’s so not fair. I need money for more than just household expenses.

 HARVEY

Like what? I’ll bet you were just trying to buy stuff you think will impress somebody.

 MARISA

It was not stuff. I found some really nice wine on sale, and I tried to buy a couple of bottles. But your goddamn card denied it. It’s just not fair.

 HARVEY

Let me try to explain it again. I put into the card what I believe is a generous amount to meet our legitimate expenses for a week. I allow for several bottles of twenty dollar wine, a couple of steaks, and all the usual groceries and supplies. I just don’t understand why you think you need to impress somebody with forty dollar wine.

 MARISA

Well, I’d like to have our friends and neighbors know we are more than just comfortably fixed. That we have good taste and nice things, and that we are accustomed to living the “good life.” What’s wrong with that?

 HARVEY

What’s wrong is your emphasis on “conspicuous consumption” to impress our friends and neighbors. Marisa, class is not for sale – you can’t buy it.

 MARISA

Well now you’ve fixed it so I can’t buy **anything!** And furthermore, you never told me about it, but I know you just gave yourself a big bonus. We shouldn’t have to scrimp and save. But you spend all your time and give all our money to that crackpot Doctor of yours with his ridiculous schemes. Why do you keep him around anyway? That’s a big salary you don’t need and he only comes in to sell you another outlandish idea.

 HARVEY

First of all, we need his license to be legal and keep the doors open. Furthermore, what you call those “ridiculous schemes” might make us wealthy someday. Who told you about that bonus, anyway? And in the meantime just buying expensive stuff makes no sense. How will you know when to stop? How much stuff is enough? A real goal is measurable and achievable. The opinions of shallow people don’t mean much to me.

 MARISA

You’re telling me you don’t care what people think. Well, I’ll tell you what I think – I think you are one mean spirited son-of-a-bitch of a control freak. You just don’t want me to be comfortable with nice things. I’m not going to live on just “groceries and supplies.”

 HARVEY

Honey, I told you – all you have to do is prove you can run our day-to-day financial affairs for three months on a reasonable budget. Heaven knows I don’t ask much of you. We haven’t had a love life in years, and we don’t do anything together anymore. Why can’t we just be good friends, live comfortably, and at the same time put away something for a graceful retirement?

 MARISA

I’ll tell you what’s wrong with that. I’m not ready to just plan to retire. I want to live now, and to be living with somebody who respects me and my needs, and my wants and my opinions too. So, if you’re just listening for once, you might pick up on a simple fact. I want a divorce.

 HARVEY

Now, honey. Don’t jump off the deep end. We can work this out. Money is at the center of most family problems, but it’s not an impossible situation. Let me bring in a financial counselor I know, who can help us prepare a sensible budget we can both live with. I don’t want an expensive court case where the only winners are a couple of lawyers, and everybody else loses. Love is grand, but divorce is a hundred grand.

 MARISA

That’s so much bullshit! I’m not going to live under some budget dreamed up by your friend. I’m going to find somebody who appreciates me and treats me like a lady of taste and refinement. And I think I know just who that somebody is.

(MARISA turns and continues over her shoulder)

And right now I’ve got an appointment with a pit bull of an attorney.

(MARISA exits thru LOBBY)

 HARVEY

Robert, I’m sorry you had to hear that, but I guess you’ve seen most families have a rough patch now and then.

 ROBERT

Mr. Harvey, if an “old fart” can offer an observation – a healthy relationship is built on mutual trust and respect. If a man has lost the respect of his woman, it’s all over. There is no going back.

 HARVEY

Robert, I’m sure you’re right, but I have to try to salvage this marriage. After all we have a lot invested in this union, with a business, and a daughter.

 ROBERT

Speaking of your daughter Mr. Harvey, I haven’t seen her in a while. Is she away at college?

 HARVEY

No. She drops by when she needs money, but I think she’s living with some guy. I don’t know anything about him except she won’t bring him home or introduce him to us. She must be ashamed of him for some reason. And as for college, she’s non campus mentis.

 ROBERT

I’m familiar with the term, “non compos mentis,” but you carefully pronounced the word campus. Did you coin a new phrase?

 HARVEY

Yep! We have to accept the fact that she’s not smart enough to make it in college. But she has good legs and nice boobs, so she’ll snag some poor slob … just like her mother did.

(TOM and LISA enter from LAB.)

 TOM

Harvey, listen to this. You know how we Doctors always have to put on fresh plastic gloves before we see each patient – and what a pain that is? Well, I came up with a better idea. I started with some sap from a rubber plant and made a clear plastic that we can store in a covered bowl. The Doctor takes the cover off, puts his hands in, pulls them out, lets them dry for 3 seconds, and he has two sterile, perfectly fitting, disposable gloves.

 LISA

That’s wonderful, Doctor. But tell me something – is that the way they make Trojans?

(after a beat, TOM takes his pen out of his breast pocket,

and writes on the palm of his hand.)

 TOM

Nobody’s ever made condoms that way before, but just wait. I’ll mix my rubber tree plastic with some sap from a Viagra bush. Eureka! We’ve got Fix-a-flat, and at the same time super safe sensational sex for senior citizens.

 OFFSTAGE MALE VOICE on intercom

Can’t we have some music on this thing? I mean like Ferrante and Teischer.

 HARVEY

Lisa, who the hell was that?

 LISA

Oh, Mr. Masters, that’s just Mr. Orwell. He’s always asking for what he calls Golden Oldies. He’s a sweet old soul and he really means well.

 HARVEY

Well, get him off the intercom. That’s just for staff to use.

 HARVEY continues

Now Tom, I’d like to know, how do you come up with precisely tailored solutions for so many real everyday problems?

 TOM

Many years ago I figured out that multi-tasking just doesn’t seem to work for me. I have to ignore all distractions and focus on the specifics of one thing at a time.

 TOM continues

Come on Lisa. First we’ll get to work on your idea and then I’ve just had a flash! How about if we put this liquid plastic to work for a woman with a saggy, baggy problem? Let her bend over and dunk one boob at a time in the same bowl the Doctors use, and then when they dry she’ll look like a teenager again. We can go to market with a catchy name like, “This is a Stick-up.”

(TOM and LISA exit to LAB.

HARVEY exits to DIRECTOR.

MILDRED peeps through RESIDENT door,

enters, ignores ROBERT, goes to counter,

reads from paper, picks up house ‘phone and dials.)

 MILDRED

Hey, Alice. Listen to this. We gotta new man just been “Baker Acted” into this place. This says his first wife died of “unknown poison,” and his second wife just passed away from “blunt force trauma.” You got that? He’s SINGLE!

(LISA enters from LAB)

 LISA

Oh, my, Mildred. You know you’re not supposed to be in here and you musn’t use that telephone. Can I help you?

(MILDRED quickly hangs up)

 MILDRED

I just wanted to see if my prescription had come in yet. I know the Doctor ordered it but that was a week ago. Then I happened to notice this paper says we have a new resident coming, but he’s been Baker Acted. What’s that?

 LISA

It’s a law here in Florida which says a person can have their rights taken away if … Oh, it’s legal mumbo-jumbo. Let me get Nurse Stretcher. She’s been to college about that stuff and works with it every day. She can explain it much better than I could.

(LISA picks up ‘phone, dials and speaks on intercom)

Nurse Stretcher, please come to the pharmacy -- Nurse Stretcher to the PHARM.

(MILDRED goes to pharmacy shelves,

looks over bottles and picks up a can)

 MILDRED

What’re these cans doing in the middle of all these bottles?

 LISA

Those are a new weight-loss product we just got in. It looks and tastes just like a milk-shake. Some of you ladies might feel better and be more active if you could lose a few pounds.

 MILDRED

Well, I like that idea. I think I’ll drink this tonight with my dinner.

 LISA

Oh no, dear. That’s not the way it works. You drink that stuff **instead** of dinner.

(MILDRED gives it a beat, then

tosses can loudly into waste basket

as STRETCHER enters from RESIDENTS)

 STRETCHER

What’s she doing in here?

 LISA

She just wanted to check on her new meds.

 STRETCHER

Well, residents can’t be in here where we keep prescription drugs. Did you tell her she needs to stay in the resident’s quarters?

 LISA

Yes. I told her, but she had a question about the Baker Act. I said you could answer that better than I could, so I called you.

 STRETCHER

Mildred, where did you hear about the Baker Act?

 MILDRED

Well, I couldn’t help but notice that paper on the counter says we have a new resident coming and he was Baker Acted.

 STRETCHER

Lisa, it’s getting worse the more I hear. You know this is a violation of HIPAA regulations. Residents are not supposed to see that sort of information. And as for you Mildred, I’ll explain it to you this time but you can’t tell anyone else, and then you must get back to your room right away. Do you understand?

 MILDRED

Yes, ma’am.

 STRETCHER

Most states have a law to protect a person who can’t effectively manage his or her own affairs. In Florida we have the Baker Act and it can be invoked by a judge, a physician, or a mental health professional. They will be looking for psychoses, or potential for physical or financial harm to self or others.

 OFFSTAGE MALE VOICE on intercom

How do I get some music on this thing? Maybe Van Cliburn?

 STRETCHER

Lisa, is that Orwell again? Did you speak to him?

 LISA

Yes, but I guess I’ll have to tell him once more.

 STRETCHER

Sorry about the interruption, Mildred. Did I answer your question?

 MILDRED

Yes, I guess. But what does that mean to us, here?

 STRETCHER

Not to worry, Mildred. You won’t be affected. First, the person has to be examined by a physician or specially licensed nurse. Then they can be committed to a psychiatric hospital for confinement and a program of treatment including psychotherapy, medication, and even electroconvulsive shock therapy. Pretty serious business, but you can relax and go back to your room, before we all get in trouble.

(MILDRED exits to RESIDENTS)

 STRETCHER continues

Now, Lisa, I hope we won’t have any more residents at the nurses’ station. From now on we’ll keep that door locked so nobody can come in here without our knowing it. And if one of the residents has a question about their medications, you refer them to me. Speaking of that, did you give Mr. Orwell his meds like I told you?

 LISA

Yes, Ma’am. He managed to swallow all 10 pills at 2 o’clock, just like you said.

 STRETCHER

Well, you’d better call 911 and get some EMTs over here to check his vital signs. Then let’s see if he makes it through the night, and tomorrow morning try to get it straight and give him 2 pills at 10 o’clock. After you take care of all that you can help me in the pharmacy. I’ll show you how to make up our meds for tomorrow.

(STRETCHER exits to PHARM)

(LISA picks up ‘phone and dials)

LISA

Hello. Are you 911? Well good. This is Bedside Manor and it looks like we have a resident who overdosed on sleeping pills and you need to send over some EMTs to check his vitals. (…pause for a beat) How should I know why he would do a thing like that? How fast can you get here? … That’s right, Bedside Manor. He’ll be in a wheel chair at the front door. … It’s 135 Eucalyptus Avenue. … Can I spell that? Lemme see, I think it’s Y … E… W….. What do you mean you don’t think that’s right? Well you’re the one who couldn’t spell it in the first place! O.K. smart ass! I’ll just push him over to Pine Street. Let’s see if you can spell that.

(LISA slams the ‘phone down, starts to PHARM,

then stops, turns and addresses Robert.)

 LISA

Robert, can I speak with you confidentially? I don’t know what to do. You have so many years experience about things, and I’d like to get your advice. Nurse Stretcher is making my life so miserable. If only I could remember who it was I slept with to get this Nurse-In-Training gig, I’d sleep with him again just to get out of it.

 ROBERT

Lisa, I can only ask you to try to understand our nurse’s position. She has one task to teach you nursing skills, but at the same time her first responsibility is seeing to the health and well-being of our residents. If she seems to be tough on you it’s just that she is so conscientious concerning her primary responsibilities. I think you should …

 OFFSTAGE MALE VOICE interrupts on intercom

**Me – Me – Me! …**I put your name in Mr. Master’s ear. I told him you were young, attractive, a hard worker, and I thought you would be happy to get the job.

 LISA

Oh yeah, now I remember and I was happy, ……. but wait a minute Mr. Orwell! How do you know what we were talking about?

 OFFSTAGE MALE VOICE on intercom

I guess Mildred didn’t know how to hang up. She keyed it over to the intercom and we’ve all been hearing your conversation downstairs.

 LISA

Well, not everything I hope. But it’s true. I’d sleep with you again if I thought you could get me out of this without leaving a black mark on my resume.

 OFFSTAGE MALE VOICE on intercom

Sure I can get you out of this, but why? Is something wrong between you and Stretcher?

 LISA

Well to start with I don’t even know her first name --but she’s making my life miserable. She’s got me reading books, studying half the night, and working harder than I’ve ever worked at anything. And just now she just told me to help a resident who’s having trouble with BM.

OFFSTAGE MALE VOICE on intercom

Oh yeah! A bowel movement -- what’s wrong with that?

 LISA

How the hell was I supposed to know that I? I thought BM was Bedside Manor.

OFFSTAGE MALE VOICE on intercom

You’d better stick it out a little longer so you don’t look like a jumper.

 LISA

No. I’ve had enough. Just meet me later in my room.

OFFSTAGE MALE VOICE on intercom

Are you kidding? You don’t have your own room. So you come down here to my place. I seem to be sleeping a lot, so you’ll probably have to wake me up. In the meantime you’d better spend a few minutes learning how to hang up this intercom. I think it’s a good thing the residents are all taking their morning nap after breakfast, because our conversation has been going ‘most everywhere.

 LISA

Oh shit! … I mean shoot.

(LISA lays down ‘phone on desk, and exits to LAB.

ROBERT resumes puttering as HARVEY enters from DIRECTOR)

 HARVEY

Robert, I’m glad I have you around to keep me sane, and help me see things in manageable terms. You’re my sidekick like those old TV cowboys, Tonto and Festus. I feel like I can share things with you and that’s important. I don’t know what I would do without you.

(TOM enters from LAB)

 ROBERT

Mr. Harvey, I don’t know that I can do very much, but I’m glad to be a sounding board. You must know there are others here who respect you with affection – and here comes one of them now.

 TOM

Harvey, we tried to use my liquid plastic as an improvement on brassieres. Our own Alice was a very cooperative volunteer for the first attempt. But the result was, you’ll pardon the expression, a **bust**. Next time we won’t hike her up so high. She’ll be fun to dance with but only in a Conga Line.

 HARVEY

That’s alright, Tom. Nobody bats a thousand, but don’t let that discourage you from fixing common frustrations.

 TOM

Not to worry, Harvey. Everywhere I look I see problems, and even somebody’s fixes to their problems, and I find myself thinking I could do better. You know we humans have always solved some of our difficulties with creative solutions that turned out to bring a bigger problem than we started with.

 HARVEY

I don’t understand. Give me a “for instance.”

 TOM

First of all I am always cautious about doing anything that can’t be undone. I remember one example; to control noxious weeds in the islands we brought in rabbits, without thinking of their multiplication capability. Then we had to control the rabbit population by introducing snakes, which had no natural predator, so we had to import the mongoose, and so on.

 HARVEY

I see what you mean. And now I know what you’re talking about because I remember reading the Army Corps of Engineers decided the serpentine Kissimmee River was taking too long to carry heavy rains in central Florida down to Lake Okeechobee. So they built straight concrete walls down both sides of the river all the way to the big lake. It didn’t take long for interests in the lake to complain that active pesticides and fertilizers from our orange groves were arriving at the lake in just a few hours instead of days and fish were dying while choking weeds were thriving.

 TOM

Then you must know that now, at great expense, the Corps has destroyed much of those walls they built and restored the meandering flow that allows those chemicals to break down before they arrive at the lake.

 HARVEY

I guess nobody has ever calculated how much money was spent constructing and then tearing down a hundred miles of concrete ditch. In the meantime, have you gotten anywhere with the idea that would have you working with NASA?

 TOM

As a matter of fact, I have, but if they didn’t think of it first they call it – N.I.H. which means “not invented here.” That hubris makes it a challenge to deal with ‘em.

 HARVEY

What do you mean, Tom? I thought they were the brightest engineers on the planet.

 TOM

Sure they are. But you remember the Challenger disaster? That was the result of not listening to application engineers about the rubber O-rings on the solid fuel rockets. I suggested to NASA that now they should simply gut those vehicles of all the heavy 1960’s discrete component electronics and rebuild the Shuttles with 21st century technology -- computers, communications, navigation equipment, the whole works. The weight saved would have meant those upgraded Shuttles could still be the best heavy-lifters for putting something into orbit and would have worked for many more years. On top of that, it would have cost a helluva lot less than having to start from scratch on a whole new system. Instead, they scrapped the Shuttles and have to pay the Russians anytime they want to send a sandwich up to the Space Station.

 HARVEY

Did they have some other reason to retire the shuttles?

 TOM

I don’t know. They might have wanted the job security of having a new 20 year project. But you asked about my latest suggestion. I managed to get past their N.I.H. syndrome and sold NASA brass an idea that, when it soaked in, was met with wild enthusiasm. Turns out it will make them heroes to an appreciative population all over the planet.

 HARVEY

How is it possible for you to sit in our little lab and come up with something that will benefit everybody in the world?

 TOM

Remember I told you about thinking outside the box? Well, this time we are going to solve a problem that is troubling and even scaring people from pole to pole. Global warming is a big deal everywhere. It’s getting a lot of publicity and people aren’t happy about the solutions that scientists have been coming up with.

 HARVEY

I thought our earth has been going through cycles of heating and cooling for a few billion years. How can we humans do anything to change that?

 TOM

Well some people have proposed efforts to modify the current cycle -- like stopping production of all internal combustion engines, eliminating coal and coal mining all over the world, shutting down oil rigs and doing away with “fracking” for oil and natural gas. They don’t even want to burn natural, replaceable fuels like algae that could be grown in shallow pools everywhere. They would like to be deriving all the power for our grid directly from solar sources by capturing wind, and sunlight, and tidal forces.

 HARVEY

I guess that’s possible, but it’s going to take a lot of time and money to generate enough clean power for all the things we do, and that still won’t slow global warming.

 TOM

Exactly, and that’s where my idea solves all the problems and at the same time is ridiculously simple and relatively inexpensive. I proposed to NASA that we could simply reduce the amount of solar energy that makes it to the surface of the earth.

 HARVEY

Tom, wait a minute. Even if you had an umbrella that big, it could only cover a small area on the surface and the rest of the planet would still be baking in the sun.

 TOM

I’m not talking about an umbrella. I researched the solar energy striking the earth each day. Then I calculated the amount of B.T.U.s we need for food production and power. I found we could achieve a happy balance that would slow global warming while allowing sufficient energy to feed the world and all our other needs, if we reduce solar radiation striking the earth by precisely point 87%. So I proposed that we have NASA launch reflective material into an orbital belt around the equator. The matter would be cheap, small, lightweight, and shiny, and each piece would reside in geostationary orbit. I suggested that we could fine tune the reflection capability of the belt, and even eliminate it altogether, if we ever determined that the whole thing was a mistake.

 HARVEY

That’s incredible Tom, but what do you mean by geostationary orbit, how high does it have to be, and how are you ever going to undo this solution?

 TOM

Let me answer the second part of your question first. The belt will be exactly 22,236 miles above the earth’s surface, precisely over the equator. Each piece of the material will be in a gently oscillating orbit directly over a corresponding spot on the surface of the earth, and each piece will carry a trace of ferrous material.

 HARVEY

Ferrous -- that’s iron. Isn’t that heavy?

 TOM

 The ferric component is very small but necessary so that we can answer the last part of your question. We will be able to modify the size and shape of the orbiting belt any time the need arises. All we have to do is send up an army of small magnets above the orbiting belt and then decelerate them so they drop through the belt. They will latch onto some of the circulating iron particles and then burn up on reentry through earth’s atmosphere.

 HARVEY

That’s an elegant solution, Tom. You mean we can throw the belt up there and if there’s too much, or any problem at all, we can always take some of it or all of it down and tailor the answer to fit the problem. Robert, have you heard what Tom is proposing? You know it seems like a day doesn’t go by that I’m not amazed at something our Doctor has come up with. What do you think of this idea?

 ROBERT

Mr. Harvey, I still can’t understand a wireless telephone, and throwing anything up in the air that doesn’t come right back down is a complete mystery. But I have read that practical considerations about NASA launch operations have been related to the cost per pound injected into orbit, so I think our Doctor’s proposal to work with very small and lightweight material is a very important positive feature.

 TOM

He’s right about that. We also have to make sure these individual pieces don’t pose a threat to existing or future communications and navigation satellites. Furthermore, if we decide to bring them down we’ll have to make certain the Space Station and other objects in lower orbits will not suffer from collision with my magnets and particles.

 HARVEY

That’s wonderful Tom. But when can I have you back on your projects right here.

 TOM

The old grey heads at NASA are grinding out some numbers so they can present to congress a schedule of how much money is needed and when to make this happen. They are confident our elected representatives are going to be salivating over the prospect of taking world leadership on the issue of dealing effectively with the global warming crisis. As for my participation, I’ve done all I can do to get this thing started and I’m going to have to accept that I will get exactly zero credit or reward for giving birth to the idea.

 HARVEY

That’s just not fair, Tom. But I’m glad you can take comfort from the fact that you are making a significant contribution to the betterment of life for people all over the world. You and I have had the discussion before about what’s really important. It’s not about stuff you’ve accumulated, or places you’ve been, or people you’ve known, but is the world a better place for your having been here?

 TOM

Of course you’re right, and I’m already at work on my next idea. So many women have foot and ankle problems. Well, my reading on the subject finds the culprit is flip-flops. And it doesn’t matter if they cost $1.98 or $125.00 with sequins on snake skin, the damn things provide no support for the arch and no cushioning for the heel. My Philomena puts them on first thing in the morning and only takes them off when she goes to bed at night.

(STRETCHER enters from PHARM)

 HARVEY

Haven’t women always had a problem with shoes? They used to stuff a size 7 foot into a size 5 shoe. Now, the only time they aren’t in flip-flops is when they’re walking on stilts – monstrous platform things. I was just reading in a medical journal that between flip-flops and stilettos the lack of proper shoes is destroying women’s knees and ankles.

 TOM

Well, I have come up with a solution that provides the support and comfort they need, and at the same time makes women’s legs look 200% better. I created a rubber arch support with toe restraints. Then I coated the bottom with an adhesive so she just sticks it on her flip-flop and it gives her 3 inches of lift and keeps her foot from sliding forward. It’s ridiculously simple and we’d better get to market before somebody else figures it out.

 STRETCHER

How about me? Why don’t you idea guys come up with some comfortable, good-looking shoes for us nurses, who have to be on our feet all day? Shoemakers call these things “supportive,” but we nurses call ‘em FUGLY!

(STRETCHER exits to LOBBY, and holds door as FANCY enters)

 TOM

You know Harvey. She’s right. To be supportive a shoe has to distribute weight evenly on the foot. The best way to do that uses a wedge shape with toe support, and that’s what my after-market arch does for the flip-flop. But making that work for something that looks like those white army boots the nurses wear is a whole new problem. I’ll make a note about it, but right now I don’t have time to worry with that.

(TOM exits to LAB)

 FANCY

Hey, Father, you want to know anything about shoes just ask. I’ve got hundreds of ‘em, but I have to remember you know squat about style. And that reminds me what I wanted to ask—how about if I start putting some stuff in your closet? Mother tells me you are going to be moving out soon and you know my closet is overflowing.

 HARVEY

I don’t know where your mother got that idea. I’m not going anywhere. But yes, dear, if you need it I have plenty of room in my closet and I can make space for you.

 FANCY

I knew you didn’t have much in there, so it wouldn’t be a problem. Is Fred in the pharmacy?

 HARVEY

I believe he is, but you can’t go in there. Did you want to see him about something?

 FANCY

I guess it doesn’t make any difference anymore, so you might as well know – I love Fred and he loves me. Mother already said it’s O.K. with her so when you’re moved out, Fred will be moving in.

 HARVEY

Well, it seems your mother has even more going on that she hasn’t told me about. I thought you were involved with someone, but it never occurred to me that it might be somebody on my own staff. Wait here and I’ll get him for you.

(HARVEY exits to PHARM.

FANCY inspects bottles on shelf –

knocks a few off and puts them back carelessly.

HARVEY and FRED enter from PHARM.)

 HARVEY

Now Fancy, you can talk to Fred out here but please understand, he’s very busy right now preparing the annual report to the FDA on our handling of controlled substances.

(HARVEY exits to DIRECTOR.

FANCY ignores ROBERT)

 FANCY

Fred honey, you’ll be happy to know we don’t have to sneak around anymore. I told mother about us and she’s excited. She is already making arrangements to throw the old man out and set up the guest room and bath for us to live together.

 FRED

That sounds great, but are you sure? Things are moving so fast, I’m little uneasy.

 FANCY

What do you mean? I love you and I know you love me. I want us to be together.

 FRED

I want that too. It’s just I don’t have much experience with this sort of thing, and we need to be sure.

 FANCY

Well I’m sure about us. I’ve never lived with anybody before, but speaking of experience, I’d like to know how many women have you been with before me?

 FRED

Now, honey, let’s not go there. We don’t need to hash over old relationships. That’s just ancient history.

 FANCY

What’s the matter? What have you got to hide?

 FRED

I’m not hiding anything. I just don’t want to talk about old girl friends.

 FANCY

Well I do! I want to know how many women you’ve been with. Tell me!

 FRED

I don’t think this is healthy, but if you insist, let me see … one … two … three … four …you … Lisa … Stretcher… eight …

 FANCY

Wait – stop! You’ve been having sex after me – and especially with those two nurses?

 FRED

Not “having.” It was just once with each of ‘em, and I wouldn’t say I “had” sex with Stretcher. It was more like she took it.

 FANCY

What do you mean, “she took it?” Were you asleep?

 FRED

No, I wasn’t asleep, but I was strapped on a gurney in the kitchen.

 FANCY

What were you doing strapped on a gurney in the kitchen?

 FRED

I don’t know. Where should I have been strapped on a gurney? She had ordered a new-fangled one and asked me to help her set it up. Then she wanted to make sure the person would be securely strapped in so she asked me to get on it. She buckled me down, and then I was helpless.

 FANCY

Just a minute, I want to know just what you were doing with her. Climb up on this counter and let me see what was going on. I’m going to use the cord from this vacuum cleaner and tie you down right here. Undo that belt and start getting your pants off.

(FRED takes his pants off.

FANCY ties FRED to the counter with vacuum cleaner cord.)

 FRED

Wait – wait. We can’t be doing this, right here in the great room – in front of Robert.

 FANCY

Forget about him. We not only can, we’re going to, right here – right now in Daddy’s big room, and that will make it all the more exciting. Just you and me …

(voices off – from behind LOBBY door,

MARISA speaks loudly.)

 MARISA

Those are resident’s quarters. There’s the dining room and this is the great room with pharmacy and nurse’s station … and

(MARISA rattles door)

MARISA continues

Well, damn. They’ve locked this door…. HEY, ANYBODY IN THERE? OPEN THIS DOOR.

 OFFSTAGE MALE VOICE on intercom

Hot Diggity Dog! I wish I could be there to see this, … but I keep falling asleep.

 FANCY

Oh shit! That’s mother. Quick get down off there and get your pants on. We’ve got to get out of here, but we’re not done. We’re going to talk about this later.

 FANCY continues loudly

Hold on, Mother. Can you wait just a minute?

 MARISA still offstage

What are you doing in there, Fancy? You open this door, RIGHT NOW!

 FANCY loudly

I’m coming – I’m coming.

 FANCY continues

Hurry up Fred. Get out of here.

 FRED

I can’t. You’ve got me tied up. Undo this cord.

 FANCY

No time for that. Just lie down here behind the counter – and be quiet!

(FRED hides behind counter, as

FANCY kicks his pants through PHARM door)

 FANCY loudly

I’m coming – I’m coming. Just a minute.

(FANCY crosses and opens LOBBY)

 FANCY

There! Now, what’s the rush?

(MARISA and ABE enter)

 MARISA

I’ll tell you, what’s the rush. I’m an owner in this place and nobody can keep me out. That door’s never been locked before. Who locked it and why?

 FANCY

How should I know? I was just leaving, anyway.

(FRED reacts with panic – shakes his head NO!)

 FANCY continues

I just came in to tell Fred the good news, and he’s ready to move in, right now.

(FRED shakes his head NO!)

 FANCY continues

But first, I have to get busy getting things ready – like Daddy’s closet. But wait. Who did you bring in here?

 MARISA

This is my new friend, Abe. Abe, this is my daughter Fancy.

 ABE

My pleasure to meet you, Fancy. Your mother has been telling me all about you, and your relationship with the pharmacist. It sounds like he is a very nice young man.

(FRED agrees with a nod)

 ABE continues

And your mother tells me you two are going to get married and start having babies.

(FRED disagrees with energetic head shaking)

 FANCY

That’s right. I know Fred will want to meet you. But, I’ve got to start making plans, so I’ll be going now.

(FRED disagrees emphatically, with wide-eyed head shaking)

 FANCY continues

Nice meeting you, Abe. And, mother, I’ll be home soon. We need to talk.

 MARISA

Yes. And I’ll be seeing more of Fred.

(FRED disagrees, with head shaking

as FANCY exits LOBBY)

 MARISA ignoring ROBERT

So, here is the nurse’s station. That is Harvey’s office. There’s the lab where that crackpot hangs out and the pharmacy is over there. Wait here while I get Harvey out of his hidey-hole.

(MARISA starts to DIRECTOR but

before she can knock HARVEY enters)

 HARVEY

Why hello dear. I didn’t expect to find you here. Who’s this?

 MARISA

This is my attorney, Abe. Abe, this is my husband Harvey. Harvey, Abe wants to talk to you.

 HARVEY

So, we’re on a first name basis. Well good afternoon, Abe. I’m pleased to meet you but I believe you’ll find we have no need for your services. Marisa and I are working through a difficult patch, but it’s not anything we can’t handle. We have 23 years invested in this relationship and I am committed to smoothing things out.

 ABE

Well, you may find yourself committed to more than “smoothing.” Mrs. Masters tells me you have denied her participation in family financial planning, have restricted her access to normal living and operating funds, have squandered family resources on questionable projects by an unproven experimenter, and as an overarching concern, have consistently exhibited irrational and irresponsible handling of the only moneys available for family welfare. What is your response?

 HARVEY

Well, my first response is amazement – that Marisa has already taken things to this extreme and has been talking to an attorney. I think we should be working with the county’s family guidance counselor, who by the way helps people with problems like this for free.

 MARISA

Harvey, that may be the way you think, but I think any help for our problems that costs nothing is probably going to be worth just about nothing.

(ROBERT quietly crosses to behind counter

and opens PHARM door for FRED.

FRED exits without being seen by

MARISA, ABE and HARVEY)

 HARVEY

Honey, I’ve already been in touch with the lady who serves in that capacity and we have an appointment to meet with her Monday. I have every confidence she can steer us through any concerns you may have, without the need for an expensive attorney.

 MARISA

Well, Harvey, you may have confidence but I’m not buying it. Abe assures me that our problems have been too serious for too long, and can be documented to the satisfaction of the courts so I can successfully file for divorce.

 ABE

In fact, Mr. Masters, you would be wise to accede to Mrs. Masters’ reasonable demands in this matter. If you persist in frustrating her legitimate quest, I am prepared, with the support of a member of your staff, to pursue relief for your wife in the form of commitment for you under the Baker Act.

 HARVEY

Baker Act! Do you even know what the hell you’re talking about?

 ABE

I’m very familiar with the Baker Act and I know such commitment would remove you from civil life as well as from any capacity in the management of this institution. At the same time you won’t be mismanaging family financial affairs. Furthermore, commitment would immediately serve as reasonable justification in a court of law for divorce, with, I might add, appropriate financial awards for Mrs. Masters.

 HARVEY

That’s crazy. I’m not a candidate for commitment. In fact, I run this institution where we house and treat people who have been Baker Acted. And where in the hell did you find somebody on my staff who would testify about my ability to manage my affairs?

 ABE

I believe you have a nurse on staff accredited by the State of Florida as an expert witness on matters of mental health and clinical psychology.

 HARVEY

You mean Nurse Stretcher? Yes, of course she’s certified as a mental health practitioner and her ticket, along with Dr. Medicine’s, is required by the state. But you must be mistaken. She would never testify against me – I don’t think.

 ABE

To the contrary, I have assurances Nurse Stretcher would happily provide the testimony we require. She not only has observed irregularities in your management of affairs, both private and professional, but will vigorously support our contentions that you have been for some years demonstrating irresponsible behavior in these matters.

(STRETCHER from RESIDENT and

LISA from PHARM enter unobserved)

 ABE continues

As a matter of fact, Nurse Stretcher has in my opinion proven beyond any reasonable doubt her own ability to fill the vacancy left by your confinement, and she will capably assume leadership of this institution.

 HARVEY

Why that unappreciative bitch. After all I’ve done for her. I know she complained about the “glass ceiling” in health care, but I helped her and even paid for credit hours and expenses at college for her to get the degrees to meet state requirements for … oh, there she is now. Is that true, Stretcher? Would you really testify against me?

 STRETCHER

You bet your ass I would. You know I’ve been ambitious about advancement. If I want to move up in this world, where could I go and what could I do? As long as you’re director, there’s no opportunity for me around here. So I’ll spill all the beans I know. I’ll admit a few of those beans you’re not directly responsible for, and may not even be aware of, but you’re the director so you’re going to have to take the heat.

 HARVEY

Damn it! I encouraged you and helped you to qualify for bigger and better jobs, and I told you I would find a way to give you more responsibility and a higher salary around here. I’m sorry, it never occurred to me you wanted my job. And another thing, are you the one who told my wife about the bonus I earned?

 STRETCHER

No, I didn’t, but I know who did, and I encouraged that person to tell her because I felt sorry for Marisa. You micro-manage things around here, maybe that’s your job, but it’s another dimension of control-freaking when you micro-manage at home. And with that, Lisa and I will be getting back to work.

(STRETCHER and LISA exit to LOBBY)

 HARVEY

Well, I don’t think it could have been any of the usual suspects – my staff wouldn’t betray me like that, and none of the residents know our financial affairs.

OFFSTAGE MALE VOICE on intercom

That’s what you think. Lisa doesn’t know how to turn this thing off and everybody down here is hanging on very word. This is a whole lot better than daytime TV.

 HARVEY

Damn! Do I have to hire somebody to come down here and turn this thing completely off?

(TOM enters from LAB)

 TOM

Oh good, Harvey, you’re here. My latest invention is fantastic but I feel the need to run it past you.

 HARVEY

This is not a good time, Tom. Can we talk about it later?

 ABE

No! This is a perfect time. I’d like to hear an example of the ideas your Doctor has been coming up with.

 TOM

Who’s he?

 HARVEY

He’s nobody. My wife brought him in here to harass me.

 ABE

Nonsense! I’m helping Mr. and Mrs. Masters come to satisfactory resolution of their differences.

 TOM

Harvey, I have some good news about an even more promising idea, really! This will generate more excitement than all of my patents put together. Do you remember you asked me to think about our kitchen operations and what we are feeding our residents?

 HARVEY

Yeah, I remember. Some of our men complained the food was too bland, and some of the ladies thought it was too spicy, and then everybody thought they were seeing too much of the same stuff.

 TOM

Well, I have never spent a lot of time in that arena so I started reading everything I could find on the subject – and there’s a mountain of material to go through. But it rather quickly seemed obvious to me that all of it was wrong. All those presumed experts were seriously mistaken, and everything they had to say on the subject was off the mark.

 ABE

Marisa, I’m beginning to understand your concerns about “crackpot” schemes. How could this supposed scientist, who was admittedly inexperienced in matters of nutrition, come forth with accusations against people who had been working in the area of human health and well-being for years?

 TOM

Let me explain. There were too many experts selling different ideas on what we should be eating and very few of them could agree on much of anything. Most of the advertisers on TV that aren’t selling cars are selling weight loss schemes. There’s no single trustworthy source on the subject.

 MARISA

Nonsense. I’m reading a book right now, that’s full of good advice. It’s called, “Fork it Over,” and it’s all about the junk that’s in the foods we’re eating every day.

 TOM

I’m sure that’s an interesting book, but it sounds like it’s telling us what to avoid. That doesn’t help much when we’re looking for advice on what we should be eating. Our USDA has “Guidelines for Seniors,” and “Guidelines for Children.” There are numerous diets for “Weight Loss,” and a few for “Weight Gain.” There’s a “Mediterranean Diet,” and an “Okinawa Diet.” There’s an “Apple Cider Diet,” and then the “Paleo diet.” One plan even recommends eating only the things that are grown in the latitude in which you are living. And every one of them dictated that the four basic food groups should be on the plate. Some of them wanted four different colors, but it amounted to the same thing. It occurred to me that every one of them is missing what is surely the essential factor.

 ABE

Here it comes. This expert who admits to ignorance is going to revolutionize our eating habits. Maybe he’s going to tell me to give up steak and scotch.

 HARVEY

Better be careful Abe. Don’t speak with derision about our Doctor. You may find your diet consists mainly of eating your own words.

 TOM

I found that nobody took into account what I believe must be the most important consideration – the humanoid digestive system – that tract down which we send all that we eat and drink. We must remember that tubular affair evolved over many generations and many thousands of years, during which time it was developing inside people who were “hunter- gatherers.”

 ABE

I suppose you’re going to tell us Darwin had some important advice on diet.

 TOM

 We can assume that when they killed an elk, the whole tribe ate elk for three days. Then perhaps they found some root vegetables which sustained them for a couple of days. And then maybe clams or oysters were available. Melons would be welcome. And later tree nuts, and the day after that they caught some fish. Finally they found some grains, like rice or corn. But, never did they consume anything like a balanced diet at any one meal. They achieved balance of course, but it was over weeks, driven by chance and the urges from their bodily systems.

 HARVEY

Holy Toledo, Tom – your analysis is amazing. It must be true, and yet I don’t see how we profit from your intuition. If this is a breakthrough in thinking, how do we use this strategy to our benefit?

 TOM

We must proceed carefully, Harvey. We have five senses, and for this discussion the most important two and smell and taste. They can protect us from harmful things and at the same time control the digestive processes to ensure we get the benefits of the healthful foods we send down. Those functions are ensured by our olfactory sense and the taste buds in our tongues. Our taste buds recognize bitter, sweet, sour, salty, and delicious – the last is properly called *umami,* from the Japanese. A few of those sensations trigger rejection, while the others provide for complete digestion. Those taste buds are not there just to enhance our appreciation of chocolate.

 MARISA

Now I know you’re full of it. That’s sure as hell what my taste buds are all about -- chocolate and fine wine.

 TOM (ignoring MARISA)

They send a message upstairs about what is coming down and the brain is then able to instruct the glands in our stomach to release the specific enzymes, acids, and mucus, in the proper quantities and strengths for complete digestion of proteins or animal fats or plant fibers or sugars. The result is a soup-like mass called chyme. The pancreas gets instructions to provide special enzymes to digest carbs, and the liver and gallbladder are alerted to contribute bile as an emulsifier. This chyme is then propelled downstream, where the intestines pull out sugars, amino acids, fatty acids, vitamins, and minerals which are the nutrients for growth and repair of our systems.

 ABE

That’s all very interesting but what does this have to do with the color of what’s on my plate?

 HARVEY

I’m sorry Tom, but I kind of agree with Abe. I think I’m following you here, but so far I don’t see what’s wrong with the balanced diet.

 TOM

The balanced diet is fine. It’s just that we can’t handle it all at once. The problem is that having balance all on one plate confounds the system. Let’s start with that elk I told you about. One group of taste sensors tells the brain, “OK, Get ready. I recognize a piece of animal tissue. So first release salivary juices into the mouth, get the molars working on mastication, send some hydrochloric acid to the stomach, and start peristalsis in the intestine.”

 HARVEY

I followed that up to the last part. Perry… what?

 TOM

Peristalsis is the means of pushing foodstuff through the intestine by sequential contractions of the walls of that tube. The timing of that sequence is determined by the nature of the material being processed. Now, back to the taste buds talking to the brain. Everything started out just fine and then, all of a sudden, the brain says, “Wait – hold on. I just got the message that here comes some potato. That means go easy on the hydrochloric and instead release a little enzyme Number One, until I get … Aw damn! Fresh data says spinach is on its way down. I give up! Just do the best you can.” And the result is incomplete digestion and less benefit from the food we’ve eaten.

 HARVEY

I’ve got to admit, Tom. It sounds like you’ve identified a real problem, but what can we do with your analysis?

 TOM

Well, first we have to recognize something like pizza combines wheat, tomatoes, cheese, and animal tissue all in one indigestible package. The happiest solution is what we used to do many years ago. Eat dinner in courses. Ideally, each course would consist of foods that can be digested together, in a satisfying sequence. However, that doesn’t work for fast food, TV dinners, and most restaurants. So that’s where I come in with a solution for our residents that ensures complete appropriate digestion, and at the same time can be presented in an elegant and time-honored tradition.

 HARVEY

Elegant sounds nice but how do you do that?

 TOM

We can present meals in the manner of European cultures which have for generations made meal-time an opportunity for slowing down and enjoying their repast to the fullest, while providing for nutrition. They recognize our other legitimate needs such as the pleasantries of social intercourse.

 MARISA

Do you understand you’re trying to talk “culture” to an imbecile?

 TOM (Ignoring MARISA)

We in the western world have for much too long yielded to the urges of a competitive society in which accomplishment in pursuit of the dollar trumps everything else. We can’t afford to appreciate convivial conversation. Instead we text – or simply forego talk as an inefficient waste of time. Meals should be presented attractively in courses consisting of foods which can be digested together, and then processed by our systems effectively. We will encourage eating slowly to enable the function as it has evolved, and at the same time stimulating friendly conversation. We probably should discourage current politics as a topic because today that seems to generate more hate and smoke than exchange of pleasantries.

 HARVEY

I like your idea of encouraging more convivial social contact at mealtime. Our residents spend too much time alone in their rooms, only to come out and choke down a meal in 10 or 15 minutes. They might be happier if they invested a little time in getting to know their neighbors and learning about the life voyages that brought them to Bedside Manor.

 TOM

Exactly! My hope is that we can all come to more fully appreciate the delightful community we have here, and enjoy our relationships here in this quiet part of the real world. At the same time, we will be getting all the benefit of complete digestion and better utilization of the foods put before us.

 HARVEY

Tom, I like where I think you’re going with this. We can analyze the nutritional needs of our residents at this stage of their lives, and after considering their activity level, we can tailor their diet for health and interesting foods, while ensuring proper and complete digestion. But, how are we going to sell your idea to them?

 TOM

We’re going to have to be careful, Harvey, but I think I can make the dining hour an appealing part of their regular day. First of all, we won’t be having “three square meals” anymore. We won’t serve them a shovel-full of anything just before bedtime. Instead, I think we need to offer at least five meals each day, sometimes six. Each plate to be carefully prepared as a single course of compatible foods, easily digested, and attractively presented. We’ll have “golden oldies” playing softly in the background, and we will be encouraging the experience as an opportunity to better know your neighbors.

 MARISA

That’ll be an easy sell. I see most of these people talking with their mouth full anyway.

 TOM

Our dietician will also be instructed to introduce variation in our menu in recognition of seasonal considerations. In winter, our ancestors craved soups, nuts, warm grains, and other high-fat and protein foods such as fish and meat. In spring they wanted a naturally low-fat diet such as salads, berries, and leafy greens. And in the longer days of summer, they looked for fruits, vegetables, starches, and other high-carbohydrate foods for energy.

 ABE

And in the fall they probably drank bock beer.

 TOM

One more thing, Harvey, I’d like to bring in someone who can help us all learn the power of *being in the now*. Eckhart Tolle, his book on that very subject says, “Have a successful relationship with the moment and be fully present in whatever you are doing.” We all can benefit from shutting down the nonsense of this 21st century pace we’re living.

 HARVEY

I already like your program. Our residents, as a group, certainly don’t need to be in a hurry about anything. They will be happier and healthier if they can just slow down, turn off the world outside, and appreciate what we have for them right here.

 TOM

Exactly – I see our residents at the dinner table wolfing down a plateful of they don’t even know what so they can hurry back to the TV, to catch a rerun of something that wasn’t worth watching in the first place. Philly used to try to get me to slow down and enjoy the moment, every moment, of every day. I never understood before. Now I’m beginning to appreciate her wisdom.

 HARVEY

How is Philomena, Tom? I haven’t seen her in months, and you haven’ mentioned her. Is she alright?

 TOM

We’ve had some problems. Everybody has problems, but I can’t discuss family matters here -- maybe later. But now, back to my proposal. I believe all our residents can more fully enjoy the “here and now,” So I have contacted an inspirational speaker who can explain to them Tolle’s ideas. She also speaks from deep inside the teaching of the eastern thinkers who emphasize that practice. Buddha said, “When you are washing the dishes, washing the dishes must be the most important thing in your life.”

 MARISA

Now, there’s a dose of bullshit! Washing dishes is important? I’ve got a better idea – let’s use paper plates!

 ABE

I agree. I could certainly wrap my mind around a sirloin, but I don’t see how Buddha’s going to help my ulcers.

 TOM

“Beer” and “paper plates” reminds me, I have another answer to a worsening problem --plastic accumulation in the ocean. We’re going to eliminate straws from the dining room. Encourage our residents to drink everything the way they drink beer and coffee. Pick it up and sip it down. Straws no longer have an essential purpose.

 HARVEY

Of course, you’re right Tom, Anything we can do to retire plastic is a step in the right direction.

 TOM

And when you speak of the right direction, I have another axiom. Pace is the answer – slow down is the formula -- and I’ve developed the pill that can do that for all of us.

 HARVEY

A pill? I’m always ready to be amazed, Tom, with your ability to cut through noise and distractions to find a cure for a problem. But how is any pill going to help us slow down?

 TOM

For some time, I’ve been fascinated with the means some mammals have found to solve difficulties like seasonal shortages of food, unfavorable weather, long periods of no sunlight, and so forth. They developed their own ability to slow down -- they learned to find a cave and hibernate for weeks or months until the environment was less threatening or more hospitable.

 ABE

That doesn’t sound like slowing down – that sounds like shutting down.

 TOM

Not a shut down. In the early stages of a bear’s hibernation respiration, heart rate, and digestive processes are retarded in a condition called torpor. We can take advantage of that effect to produce a few hours of calm and quiet for our residents. After sufficient time for digestion of the simple meal I have prescribed, my pill will induce torpor for a temporary period of peaceful repose before the next meal. I believe the long-term effects will be stress reduction and even a possible extension of normal life span.

 MARISA

Are you sure your want these people hanging around even longer?

 TOM

In addition to the original benefit of slowing down for a brief period every day, my pill does something even more important. Recognizing that Americans expect to have a pill to fix anything, I have included ingredients which really solve the original problem we started out with – digestion.

 ABE

Now, you’re going too far. You want me to believe a simple pill can digest everything.

 TOM

No. The pill itself doesn’t digest anything. If what appears in the gustatory system is a digestible mix, we can handle it. But if something isn’t compatible with the other foods coming down, then we will recognize that fact and simply speed up peristalsis to send all that material on its way to the anus.

 HARVEY

A pill! I should have known you’d come up with the ideal answer. Did you patent this, so your interests are protected?

 TOM

Of course, but first understand it’s in **our** interests. It all started when you gave me the job of working on nutrition for our residents, so you’re part of this team. But for now, I have to get back to the lab for something more important.

 HARVEY

Tom, I’m glad you’re leaving. Let’s consider who’s listening to all this. He’s a lawyer, with all the moral fiber and integrity of a rattlesnake. For now go back to the lab.

(TOM exits to LAB)

 HARVEY continues as TOM leaves

When the climate out here is free of uninvited intruders, we’ll take this up and …

 ABE

Mr. Masters, that is quite enough out of you.

 HARVEY

Wait a minute. Where the hell do you come off telling me when to speak and when not to here in my own establishment?

 ABE

When I walked through that door I immediately realized I was the smartest person in the room, that’s usually the case no matter what room I walk into. As such, I have not only the moral authority but the civic responsibility to control things in my presence – and that means you!

 HARVEY

Bullshit! You have no such responsibility or authority in here, so right now I’m going to throw your ass out in the street.

(HARVEY takes ABE by the shoulders and pushes him toward LOBBY.)

 ABE

Here – here. Take your hands off me. I will be leaving now, but first I must give you this legal document already signed by Mrs. Masters and preliminarily filed with the court. It stipulates terms of divorce including: a) exclusive ownership of the domicile previously registered in both your names, and b) payment by you to Mrs. Masters of the sum of $350,000.00. These conditions are firm and not subject to negotiation.

 HARVEY

Now who’s shitting who? I can’t afford that and she knows it. If she led you to believe I had that much cash lying around, or that I would pay it even if I did, she has been seriously misleading you. I don’t know what your fee is for this kind of lawyering, but it has been a waste of your time. Even if I sold the Manor it wouldn’t bring such a price in this market. You’re going to have to chase some other ambulance to make money like that.

 MARISA

Don’t believe him, Abe. I told you how much money he’s been throwing at the schemes of that crackpot, Doctor. He could afford it. He might have to give himself another bonus, but he could afford it.

 HARVEY

That reminds me. You never did give me an answer – who told you about my bonus?

 MARISA

Well, if you must know it was our daughter, Fancy. She and Fred are in love and they share things and talk to each other, something you might learn from them.

 HARVEY

I should have known -- it had to be him. He’s the only one who has access to the checkbook so he can buy pharmaceuticals without pestering me all the time.

 ABE

That’s neither here nor there. Please understand Mr. Masters, in light of the information I have received from those around you, and the behavior I have witnessed today, upon return to my office I will prepare the documents necessary to have you committed to this institution under the Baker Act. Here you will be confined and will receive appropriate treatments, to be administered by Nurse Stretcher.

 HARVEY

You can’t be serious. You’re going to have me committed to my own Bedside Manor so
Stretcher can do whatever she wants to me, and it will be legal? No judge in any court would ever hand down a decision like that.

 ABE

Mr. Masters, I may say I have earned the confidence of the circuit court judge who will be hearing this case, and he is empowered by the State of Florida to hand down just such a decision. Accordingly the Baker commitment, and in view of the seriousness of that act the divorce decree as well, will certainly be approved. You have 72 hours to avail yourself of legal counsel. Either fully comply with the terms as I explained them to you, or be prepared to argue the merits of this case in court. And with that admonition I shall take my leave.

 MARISA

Abe, wait for me. As for you Harvey, you’ve brought this divorce business on yourself. For years I’ve tried to tell you I wasn’t going to put up with you spending all your time and all our money with that crackpot and his crazy schemes. Now Abe has seen to it that you need to get all your stuff out of what will be my house, and you can also start paying toward that alimony and maintenance settlement he set up. Goodbye and good riddance.

(ABE and MARISA exit through LOBBY)

 HARVEY

Well Robert, how’s this for a “revoltin’ development.” My wife’s leaving me and taking the house with her … she’s finally showing some **housekeeping** skills, …my daughter’s running away with my pharmacist, I’ve got another less than loyal employee on my staff, now our court system is threatening to Baker Act me into my own Bedside Manor, and that comes with an open-ended commitment for treatment by the nurse who hates me. Talk about things turning black!

(on that last syllable, stage goes black)

END ACT 1

INTERMISSION

ACT II

(ROBERT and LISA are at busy work.

LISA is wearing neoprene gloves.

HARVEY enters from DIRECTOR)

 HARVEY

Well, this feels good. You two are perhaps the only people around I can trust. It would be unseemly of me to take meals with the residents, so I’m reduced to sleeping on the couch in my office and eating whatever I can cook on the Bunsen burner in Tom’s lab. Oh wait, I almost forgot, I’m sure I can trust Tom although he’s in a different world most of the time. So that makes four of us – and I’ve got a coffee pot – although Stretcher is probably going to take that away as soon as this Baker Act business is approved.

(TOM and his wife enter from LOBBY.

PHILOMENA is expressionless and does not speak.)

 HARVEY

Oh, speak of the devil, here’s Tom now, and he has brought his wife in to see us. Good morning, Philomena.

 TOM

Good morning, all. I’ll be bringing Philly in for a while to spend some time with me in the lab. Please excuse us … I’m going to fix her a cup of coffee and then I’ll be back. I need to speak with you, Harvey.

(TOM and PHILOMENA exit to LAB)

 HARVEY

That’s strange. I can’t remember the last time Tom brought his wife to the Lab. And she has always been so happy and outgoing -- I hope she’s O.K.

 ROBERT

You’re right, Mr. Harvey. It’s been several years since I’ve seen her, but she was always so attractive. Perhaps she has been taken ill and Dr. Medicine is just being cautious.

 LISA

Don’t worry, Mr. Masters. Our Doctor is the smartest person I’ve ever met and I’m sure he is doing what he knows is best for his wife. You’re a good person too, and the Doctor and Robert and I will always be in your corner, so don’t worry. But I’ve wanted to ask you something.

 HARVEY

I’m not sure I can help anybody right now, Lisa, but I’ll try. What’s the problem?

 LISA

Nurse asked me to put some woolen things in storage and then she gave me a box of moth balls. I was amazed at the size of those things. I didn’t know moths got that big, and I still can’t figure out how they can fly with those things hanging down between their little legs. Then I got really upset when I began feeling sorry for Mrs. Moth. …But what is troubling me right now is, on that box it said, “Wear neoprene gloves and do not eat.” Gosh, that was Tuesday and now I’m getting really hungry.

 HARVEY

Lisa, honey, don’t worry about that. As soon as we can get out of here, I’ll take you to the grill next door. I’m more than ready for a nice lunch with a pretty young lady. But first, you’d better see if Stretcher needs help with anything.

(LISA exits to RESIDENTS, ROBERT returns to puttering,

TOM enters from LAB)

 TOM

Harvey, I need to explain what’s going on but please don’t tell anybody what I’m going to share with you. You have enough of your own problems with your wife leaving you, but I have pretty much the same situation. My Philly is leaving me too. Not in the same way maybe, but even more troubling. She’s leaving a little bit every day, and has been slowly going away for more than a year. It’s full-blown Alzheimer’s.

 HARVEY

Oh, my God, Tom. I’m so sorry to see you and our wife going through all this after all the wonderful years you two have had together. Everybody in town knows her as an easy touch to work with their latest project or to take on one of the thankless jobs administering our charities. She’s always been steady as a rock.

 TOM

She’s coming in to the Lab because I’ve told her I need her help with my latest project. We’re producing a new line of reversible men’s underwear, either boxers or briefs. She’s creating the message “yadnoM” to be printed on the front of the first pair, so that when you put them on in the morning and look in the mirror, it says ”Monday.”

 HARVEY

“yadnoM” – Oh, I get it. Monday spelled backward.

 TOM

Yes, but that’s not even half of the story. On the inside of that pair she is printing “yadseuT.” The next day, you turn them inside out, put them on and look in the mirror, it says “Tuesday.” The second pair is printed “yadsendeW” and “yadsruhT,” while the third pair is labeled “yadirF” and “yadrutaS.” So we’ve got Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday all taken care of.

 HARVEY

That’s certainly clever Tom, but I’m not sure a set of this underwear will be a practical item for the market. How are you going to encourage women to buy these things for their husband or boy friend, and even then have their man wear each one of them for two days before they send them to the laundry? And one more important consideration – there’s still another day you haven’t accounted for.

 TOM

It was never intended to be a practical item, but I’m confident they’ll make a humorous birthday or Christmas gift. And as for Sunday, that’s part of the gag. Sunday is a free day. “On Sunday, we don’t **need** no stinkin’ scivvies!”

 HARVEY

O.K. – that’s funny! But you and Philomena can’t produce these things all by yourselves. Who’s going to build them?

 TOM

No problem. I’ve already got a factory in China ready to go into production as soon as I can send them the designs for the legends. They don’t understand the “words” they are going to be printing, but then they don’t understand most of the English I’m sending them anyway. The big advantage is they are cheap and fast. Quality is not a concern because most of these sets are going to get a big laugh and then they’ll be thrown out anyway.

 HARVEY

I like the idea, especially the part that has Philomena engaged in an activity with you. That has her mind working in the “here and now,” rather than stressing about the disease that’s taking her away.

 TOM

We’ve been to our family physician and to his referrals and they offer suggestions about trying to make her more comfortable, but they don’t have any answers about curing or even controlling the gradually worsening symptoms. I’m not sure how we’re going to handle it but in the meantime, I’m not comfortable leaving her alone anymore, so if you don’t mind I’ll be bringing her with me to the lab.

 HARVEY

Of course, Tom, we’ll be happy to have her here safe with us and you can take all the time you want.

 TOM

I haven’t been able to accept it and I certainly can’t discuss it with anybody else. This Alzheimer’s is slowly stealing the love of my life. Her personality is changing. She gets angry over the littlest things. She struggles to cover up embarrassments when she doesn’t recognize people who come on like old friends.

 HARVEY

Those are classis symptoms, Tom. Has she tried to get out of the house and roam?

 TOM

Thankfully, no. She has withdrawn into moodiness but she hasn’t been comfortable leaving the house at all. What’s killing me is that I’m helpless. I can’t seem to do anything for her. And I’m telling you now only because you’ll be seeing less of me. I’ll be devoting more time to learning about the disease and who on earth has been making any progress or showing any promise with research on the subject.

 HARVEY

Tell me anything at all I could do to help. I have professional friends and contacts from college and medical associations all over the world. I could make a few ‘phone calls and find out who’s working in the field and see if any research is showing promise.

 TOM

I’d just like to see everything that’s been published on the subject.

 HARVEY

I’ll get prints for you of whatever has appeared in periodicals. I know it’s getting a lot of attention now that more people are living longer and exhibiting symptoms that were almost unheard of before. And in the meantime, if you like I could call in a special companion nurse who will work with her here or back at your house if you prefer.

 TOM

Thanks for the offer, Harvey, but I’d rather not get anybody else involved just yet. I’ll be working on some ideas of my own. But since we soundproofed my lab it provides another benefit. You know, when I first met her she was singing professionally – had a booking agent and a very nice career.

 HARVEY

I remember she entertained at several charity functions, and the audiences kept calling her back for more.

 TOM

Now she can still sing like a bird but the shame is she no longer remembers the words. It’s so frustrating. But in the lab I may have some recorded accompaniment and she can enjoy just humming the melodies. Or! – you know what? I could have her hum some tunes into the intercom for old man Orwell.

 HARVEY

Great idea! Of course, that’ll be fine. And nobody will bother either of you in there. I’ll tell the staff or anyone who asks that you are on special assignment and won’t be available until further notice. I’m sure Philomena needs you now more than ever.

 TOM

I knew you’d understand. Now just let me try to deal with it the best I can. I’ll keep you up to date, but I don’t want anyone else to know. She deserves that much at least.

 HARVEY

Certainly Tom, I won’t breathe a word of it, but please understand you’re not in this alone. After all the years we’ve been together, you’ve been closer and more important to me than most blood brothers. I will be there for you through anything and for as long as you need.

 TOM

I know and I appreciate that, but right now I’m going back to be with her. I’ll let you know what I’m doing, but don’t count on me for anything for a while, O.K.?

 HARVEY

Of course, Tom, not to worry. Nobody will disturb you.

(TOM exits to LAB,

HARVEY sits in chair at nurse’s station

and holds his head in his hands.

After a beat, MARISA rattles door and calls out)

MARISA

Harvey, are you in there?

(HARVEY gets up and opens door)

 HARVEY

Hello, wifey dear. We haven’t seen much of each other of late. How may I help you?

(MARISA enters)

 MARISA

Harvey , I have a problem – maybe I should say I have an opportunity, and you can help.

 HARVEY

Honey, you know you can count on me to help if I can. What’s up?

 MARISA

Well, I have been invited to this year’s Hospital Ball, and I need a few things.

 HARVEY

Like what?

 MARISA

Like a gown.

 HARVEY

Wait, a minute. Don’t you have a closet full of gowns? Why don’t you wear one of those?

 MARISA

For the simple reason that I have already worn each of the three gowns I have in there to the annual ball.

 HARVEY

I think I remember each of those dresses cost several hundred dollars and you’ve worn them only once. How can you be sure other people are going to remember everything you’ve ever worn? Anyway, how about renting a gown, or borrowing from one of your friends? Maybe you could ask whoever is taking you to the ball to come up with some money for a dress.

 MARISA

Harvey, get real. Abe has invited me and he has already arranged for the tickets, a nice dinner, and a limousine for the evening. I’m certainly not going to be seen stepping out of his limo’ in something borrowed or rented.

 HARVEY

What do you think a dress is going to cost?

 MARISA

It’s not just a dress – it’s a gown – and I’ll need shoes to go with it, and of course a clutch to match the shoes – and then an appointment for a facial and hair at the salon. So, I suppose all together I’ll need 15 or16 hundred.

 HARVEY

Well, honey, “I suppose all together” you’ll just have to keep looking, ‘cause I can’t come up with that kind of money, especially when you’re already expecting me to start paying alimony and household expenses when we’re not even divorced yet.

(MARISA increasingly agitated)

 MARISA

Dammit, Harvey, you know this Hospital Gala comes up this time every year. You could afford it if you hadn’t pissed away all that bonus money for some cockamamie idea from the nutcase you call doctor.

(MARISA swings her purse

at HARVEY and misses)

 MARISA continues

You bastard, all society is going to be there and you know I look forward to this every year. Do I have to get Abe to ask the court to move a little faster on this divorce so you’ll find a way to give me the money I need, right now?

 HARVEY

Marisa, honey, you’ll just have to do whatever you think you need to. Me, I’m going to hang on to the little money I have so I can hire my own attorney, even though we both know I can’t afford it.

 MARISA

All right! You cheap bastard, maybe you can get a “pro bono” attorney from the county, just like the money manager you thought could solve our problems. You’ll be hearing from Abe, and you’d better pay attention this time.

(MARISA exits)

(HARVEY sits in nurse’s chair,

and holds his head in his hands)

END ACT II

ACT III

ROBERT & LISA are at busy work.

HARVEY enters from DIRECTOR.

 HARVEY

Well, it’s comforting to find my staff attending to the business of Bedside Manor with smiling faces. I’m happy to report that I’m doing rather well myself. I cope with living in my office by appreciating the positives -- like no commute, no roommate, and no interference while I catch up on my to-do-list around here.

 LISA

Mr. Masters, I hope you and Robert can help me about our names. Mostly we just use first names, except for the other nurse. I’ve never known her first name but her last name rhymes with “treacher,” as in treacherous. Then there’s Fred. His last name is Nisown, so together it’s FredNisown, and I can remember that because it rhymes with prednisone.

 HARVEY

That’s pretty clever, Lisa

 LISA

Now for the Doctor – you told me that when he decided to go to medical school he kept his first name of Thomas, but changed his last name to Medicine. Did he mean for people to say his first and last names together real fast – TomMedicine? That sounds like a different famous person, but our Doctor must have more patents than that man.

 HARVEY

Good for you, Lisa. That’s very observant. And yes, I do believe our Doctor was pleased to have people identify him with the most prodigious inventor or our time. Mr. Edison has made significant differences in all our lives and in truth I believe he has filed even more patents than our Doctor Medicine.

 LISA

Well Mr. Harvey, you’ve made a significant difference in my life. You’ve made the Manor a happy place for me, and for Robert, and for the residents as well. We all want you to be happy too.

 ROBERT

Mr. Harvey, that’s a perfect intro. I’ve been hesitant to speak of something prematurely, but you’ve been suffering under a bigger boulder than Sisyphus ever faced. Now might be a good time to share some good news with you.

 HARVEY

Your right Robert, I’d love to hear something positive for a change.

 ROBERT

Mr. Harvey, you’ve been good to me – keeping me around here all these years when you might have hired a younger man who could have been doing everything I do and more. You even made stock options in the Manor available to me, when you didn’t offer that to anyone else.

 HARVEY

Robert, over the years you’ve certainly earned everything we’ve given you. You have made a big difference in the health and well-being of our residents, and at the same time you’ve contributed to the happiness of our staff.

 ROBERT

Well, I have lived rather frugally and put away some money, but mostly I managed to put my son through college and law school. He graduated with honors and has done very well. Today he is a prosecuting attorney in Tallahassee.

 HARVEY

That’s splendid, Robert, and I couldn’t be more proud of you and your son.

 ROBERT

I believe I may have more good news to share with you, Mr. Harvey. In my regular rounds of cleaning the offices and disposing of trash, I came across some loose papers that looked important so I glanced over them. They were receipts issued by several overseas pharmaceutical companies for payments they had received from our Manor for drugs and chemicals.

 HARVEY

Overseas? I never authorized purchases from those uncontrolled foreign sources. We have to comply with very strict procurement regulations as to where we obtain our drugs.

 ROBERT

I thought that was the case. So I stashed those papers in one of my boxes of cleaning supplies. Then I told Mr. Nisown I had disposed of them and I hoped I hadn’t done wrong. At first he looked very nervous and then he calmed down and told me destroying them was exactly the right thing to do. He said he had asked your daughter to shred those things, but she must have been saving them up to shred all at once.

 HARVEY

I should have known I couldn’t trust that son-of-a-bitch. He’s been dealing with the black market for those materials, then stiffing the Manor full retail from legitimate sources and pocketing the difference. How long do you suppose he’s been doing that?

 ROBERT

I couldn’t tell, Mr. Harvey, but some of the receipts I found had transaction numbers indicating there had been several hundred sales to the Manor.

 HARVEY

Well, no matter, my friend. For now I’ll keep the checkbook in my car and I’ll speak to our C.P.A. and see what he thinks we should do. Anything else, Robert?

 ROBERT

As a matter of fact, Mr. Harvey, there is. My son knows how good you have been to me, and how I have been concerned about your troubles, so he asked more than a few questions in all the right places.

 HARVEY

What are you getting at, Robert. I hope I’m not going to take him down with me.

 ROBERT

Oh no, sir, he’s just fine, But, through his connections in the legal community, he found several things you should know. For example, your wife has been having an affair for almost a year now. Then she engaged the services of an attorney several months ago, and now they have taken the Baker Act business before a judge. My son’s sources told him that your wife’s lover, and her attorney Abe, and Judge Mendl are all the same person.

 HARVEY

My God, Robert. How can that be fair if she’s in bed with the lawyer and the judge?

 ROBERT

Not to worry, Mr. Harvey. I encouraged my son to proceed. He has already filed with the Florida Bar to have Mendl removed from the bench for not recusing himself from the Baker hearing, and the Florida Supreme Court has agreed to hear the petition to have him disbarred for perpetrating a fraud in his own self-interest in the divorce awards. My son explained that your wife is going to be charged as co-conspirator in the commission of that crime, and is specifically disallowed from any claim to your assets. In all likelihood both are going to be spending time as guests of the state in Raiford.

 HARVEY

Oh, I’m sorry to hear Marisa might be put away. She really isn’t a bad person … and she certainly has been unhappy. I guess I’ve never been easy to live with.

 ROBERT

Well sir, you may find all this easier to accept when I tell you what another man named Harvey would call “the rest of the story.” My son pursued the information I gave him about the irregularities in purchasing drugs by Mr. Nisown. Buying wasn’t illegal, but it was certainly fraud to bill you and the Manor for full price. More importantly, to administer those illegal drugs from uncontrolled sources to our residents was a very serious federal crime. He, and your daughter as his accomplice, may for the foreseeable future occupy adjoining cells at the correctional facility in Sumterville.

 HARVEY

Robert, would you please come with me and explain to Tom what you’ve been telling us? He’s been upset since he heard about the mess that lawyer’s been stirring up.

(ROBERT and HARVEY exit to LAB.

LISA exits to LOBBY, before that door can close

MILDRED peeks thru, then enters,

goes to ‘phone and dials intercom.)

(MILDRED holds kazoo up high)

 MILDRED

Anybody who can guess what I’m holding over my head can sleep with me tonight.

 OFFSTAGE MALE VOICE

A piano?

 MILDRED ( blows a few notes on kazoo)

Close enough!

OFFSTAGE MALE VOICE

It ain’t Liberace, but close enough!

(STRETCHER storms in from PHARM,

takes ‘phone from MILDRED

and speaks into it.)

 STRETCHER

Orwell, is that you on this intercom again?

 OFFSTAGE MALE VOICE

Yeah, it’s me. What’re you gonna do about it?

 STRETCHER

I’m going to take away your ‘phone and lock you in your room for two weeks, that’s what. And another thing, you’re going to eat pizza three meals a day for the whole two weeks.

 OFFSTAGE MALE VOICE

Wait, that’s not fair. I don’t even like pizza. How come I gotta eat pizza three meals a day?

 STRETCHER

‘Cause that’s the only damned food I can push under your door!

(HARVEY and TOM enter from LAB)

 STRETCHER

Mildred, why are you in here? Do I have to lock everybody in their room? Come with me right now, and don’t let me catch you in here again?

(STRETCHER leads MILDRED through LOBBY)

 TOM

Harvey, that’s amazing what Robert and his son have been up to. Now, I have some news that might be almost as good. In the past I have focused on everyday problems with an eye toward possible commercial exploitation. On the other hand, I have never considered selling anything resulting from my work on Alzheimer’s. My interests have been selfish and narrow – specifically aimed at helping Philly.

 HARVEY

That’s certainly easy to understand.

 TOM

Well, in research I found a clinical team that has been working exclusively on Alzheimer’s. To provide living specimens for ongoing study, they had implanted the amyloid plaque tissue that is associated with Alzheimer’s in the brains of some laboratory mice. One of their experiments involved exposing a group of these mice to a light source which was being strobed at the rate of 40 pulses per second. Almost all of the mice in that study exhibited a significant reduction of plaque in the affected areas of the brain.

 HARVEY

Are you telling me some real progress with Alzheimer’s may be coming from simply sitting under a blinking light?

 TOM

That may be an over-simplification, but wait ‘til you hear what I have done with that information. Studies of educational practices have proven different people learn with different means and at different rates. Some learn best by just reading the material. Others absorb new information by hearing it repeated even while they are sleeping. Still others learn better by doing something and feeling it for themselves.

 HARVEY

That’s true. We find it every day with our residents here.

 TOM

I decided to play by those rules. I modified a pair of reading glasses to hold a pulsing LED which is focused on material 14 inches off the wearer’s nose. Then I mounted a tiny speaker from a hearing aid so the auditory nerve could hear the sounds and the physical vibrations could be felt on the back of the ear. I had three modes of stimulation accounted for, but not yet taste or smell. That may have to wait for another day.

 HARVEY

That’s incredible, Tom. Surely you’re in uncharted territory with this business.

 TOM

Yes, but there’s more. Those other experimenters had been working with 40 pulses per second, and I wasn’t sure why. Mammalian circadian rhythms have evolved in relation to the 24 hour cycle. Curiously, a different study suggested short periods of exposure to stimulus at 25 pulses per second had beneficial and curative effects on all tissues in the body. So I selected some new LEDs which emit the natural spectrum of sunlight, and strobed them with a short pulse 25 times each second. To the human eye this light appears to shine continuously at a comfortably low level.

 HARVEY

Tom, you’re amazing. You come up with solutions to problems that have frustrated specialists in different sciences for years. Have you tried your new glasses on Philomena?

 TOM

The hardest part was getting her to put them on. I had to bribe her with some ice cream. She developed a sweet tooth as the disease came on. I found some light fiction I knew she would find interesting and she has been reading with my glasses in 15 minute intervals six times a day for about two weeks now.

 HARVEY

Are you telling me your glasses are working?

 TOM

 I’m telling you the results have been dramatic by any standard. Her personality is returning, little by little every day. She is showing more interest in her appearance, and in her food. Now she is even engaging in small conversations with me -- although she is still uncomfortable around others.

 HARVEY

That’s wonderful, Tom. Do you have any way to measure the residual plaque?

 TOM

Not in the clinical manner, because I have none of the essential equipment. But I may have news even more encouraging than any measurement. Excuse me for a minute.

(TOM exits to Lab)

 HARVEY

Robert, do you see what I think is significant. Our Doctor is almost cheerful for the first time in months. I wonder what he’s up to.

 ROBERT

Yes, Mr. Harvey, you’re right. He certainly is happier. Maybe that’s just because he’s so engrossed in one of his projects.

(TOM opens the door from the Lab)

 TOM

Harvey, I want you to witness the most promising response I’ve ever had so quickly and so dramatically from any of my experiments.

(TOM speaks to PHILOMENA in the LAB)

 TOM

Philly honey, would you please sing that song you’ve been working on – only now sing into that microphone.

 PHILOMENA

(PHILOMENA hums softly “a cappella” on intercom,

something that is copyright free and everybody knows,

such as “When You and I Were Young, Maggie”.

Gradually, she sings more confidently the last few words.)

When You and I Were Young!

 HARVEY

That’s more than beautiful – it’s incredible. She’s even remembering the words.

(LISA enters from LOBBY.

TOM closes LAB door

and comes down stage.)

 TOM

Harvey, I wanted you to hear what I’ve been hearing for a few days now. It’s so much more than I could ever have hoped for. When it occurred to me this system might have application in the real world, I shared the story with a colleague in one of the international pharmaceuticals and I guess, in excitement, he leaked it to some other folks. Now several drug companies, I call ‘em pharmers with a “ph,” are in a bidding war with medical manufacturers to buy all my product. They want to get their hands on my patents, sketches, and scribbles. They are especially interested in my work on Alzheimer’s, and are anxious to begin clinical trials right away. Hold your breath and look at this latest bid.

(TOM holds paper for HARVEY

 and ROBERT to read.)

 HARVEY

Holy shit, Tom! Are they serious? Tell me that’s not a typo. It says 124 million dollars, in one lump. No installments – not waiting for proof of anything.

 LISA

Millions? Oh, Mr. Harvey, we are going to be so good for each other and I am going to make you so happy.

 HARVEY

Come here, Lisa. You too, Tom, and Robert gather ‘round. We can finally see through all the black and now we’ve got something beautiful to celebrate.

(HARVEY, LISA, TOM, and ROBERT

hold arms and dance excitedly around.)

 LISA

Wait a minute -- you don’t have aids, do you?

 HARVEY

Certainly not, Lisa, but where did that question come from?

 LISA

I just don’t ever want to catch that again.

 HARVEY

That’s surely an original thought, Lisa, but don’t worry about it anymore. You never had AIDS, You had indigestion after eating Mexican ice dream, and I gave you some aids … **ROL**AIDS for relief.

 HARVEY continues

Robert, did you hear what the good Doctor has come up with? Dr. Medicine and I will be retiring, and as a stockholder you will also be getting a nice sum of money. But before that I’m giving you the deed to Bedside Manor. You have always been the “smartest person in this room” and I know you’ll keep Bedside Manor’s residents safe and happy. And that reminds me -- the notion of soft and soothing music makes sense, so I have ordered some new equipment for the intercom system. I suggest you let Mr. Orwell be the custodian. Now, thanks to you and your son, and to Tom, the four of us right here are also going to be much happier and a helluva lot richer.

 HARVEY continues

Here, Tom. Don’t waste any time thinking about it. Robert and I are your partners and we heartily approve the sale of the rights to all your inventions, patents, and supporting documentation. Hurry up and sign that paper.

 TOM

I guess you’re right. You and Robert can be witnesses and I’ll sign right now.

(TOM pulls instrument from shirt pocket.)

 TOM

Aw, shoot! Would you look at that – a **rectal thermometer**. You know what that means, don’t you. Right now somewhere, my ball point is signing on a bottom line.

(black out)

CURTAIN

(As applause recedes, intercom comes on)

OFFSTAGE MALE VOICE

May the farce be with you!

(ORWELL with microphone enters

from the wing and takes a bow.)

 ORWELL speaks on intercom

And now, I hope you’ll excuse me … I’m going to spend the night with Lisa -- and **Mildred too!** Ha, ha, forgot about that didn’t you?

(ORWELL exits)

FIN