

Tighten Your Borscht Belt

A full-length play

By

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CHARACTERS:

HATTIE ZELIG: 30, is a Jewish stand-up comedian, working in and around NYC and the Catskill resorts. She was born and raised in New York City, and has a slight Yiddish accent, which is stronger when around family.

ZEB ZELIG: 32, is Hattie's husband and manager. Prior to going overseas during WWII, he and Hattie had a vaudeville act, so he knows the ins and outs of entertainment. He also manages several other entertainers.

LILLIAN (LIL) STERN: 30, also Jewish, is Hattie's best friend since childhood. Her husband passed away in 1944, fighting in WWII. Lillian had a steady career as a comedic Hollywood actress, but in 1950 became blacklisted. She is now a stand-up comedian, working primarily in the Catskills.

RUTH: 52, is Hattie's mother. She was born in Germany, but has lived in the US since she was 6. She speaks with a Yiddish accent. Ruth's husband abandoned her and her two daughters (Hattie and Sophie) when they were teenagers, but she has never given up hope that he will return. Ruth has devoted her whole life to raising her daughters, supporting them as a seamstress. She watches Hattie and Zeb's 8-year-old daughter, Frieda, when Hattie is performing.

TIME:

SUMMER 1952

PLACE:

From the 1920s to the 1980s an area of about 250 square miles in the Catskill Mountains of New York was home to hundreds of resorts, hotels, motels and bungalow colonies frequented by vacationing Jews from New York City who, due to anti-Semitism, were denied accommodations elsewhere. Many famous comedians, musicians and other entertainers got their start in this area known as the Borscht Belt. The play takes place in one of these motel rooms. Scenes where Hattie is doing stand-up occur downstage with only a spotlight.

GLOSSARY FOR THE GOYIM

A bissel - Not enough
 Babka - Why we have cellulite
 Bubby - The inventor of guilt
 Bubkes - Really not enough
 Du farkirts mir di yorn - You'll be the death of me
 Farbicina punim - That look when you've been waiting all day to eat that last piece of chocolate cake, only to find that someone else ate it.
 Farbondget - A Jew at a Quinceanera
 Farkakte - Wearing plaid and stripes together
 Feggalah - The unmarried uncle who's lived with his "roommate" for 25 years
 Feh - You don't know what you're talking about
 Gai in drerd arein - Go to hell!
 Gai kaken oifen yam - Get lost!
 Gai mit dein kop in drerd - Stick your head in the mud
 Gai trenzich - A really bad word
 Goyim - Those who pays retail
 Groyser tzuleyger - Owner of a summer home in the Hamptons
 Gunisht - What's left in your bank account after a trip to Costco
 Latke - Potato pancake
 L'chaim - To life
 Macher - One who wears a pinky ring
 Meshugena - Naked bungee jumping
 Mohel - Someone who takes a little off the top
 Oy - The cable going out
 Oy gevult - Dropping the turkey on Thanksgiving
 Putz - Someone who leaves an empty milk carton in the fridge
 Shiksa - A Kappa Delta
 Shiva - When your son marries a shiksa
 Shmooz - Discussing really important gossip
 Shmuck - The guy who cut you off in traffic then flipped you off
 Shmutz - Cause for licking your thumb and wiping your kid's face with it
 Shneken - Fruit and nut coffee rolls
 Shtup - Roll in the hay
 Shtyfer mogen - Hiding from your kids in the bathroom
 Shvanger - The second reason your mother would get all verklempt, after marrying a doctor
 Shvartze - Your Moroccan cousin
 S'teitsh - How is that possible?
 Tuches - Portable seat cushion
 Vasser - Water

ACT I

SCENE 1

HATTIE enters, holding a ukulele, microphone and stand, with spot light down center stage. She addresses the audience.

HATTIE

Thank you so much ladies and gentlemen. It's so good to be back in the Catskills this summer. As my husband, Zeb, and I were driving up here, we were listening to the radio. Mostly so we wouldn't have to talk to each other. There are quite a lot of wonderful songs that are popular these days. But these song writers, I'm a little worried about them. Like that Jo Stafford song, you belong to me.

Takes out ukulele, and sings very dramatically.

Ba, ba, ba, be, be, be, boobe, boobe.

Stops playing.

Now don't go thinking whatever it is you're thinking. These are the lyrics. I swear.

Continues playing and singing.

Ba, ba, ba, be, be, be, boobe, boobe.

"See the pyramids along the Nile
Watch the sun rise on a tropic isle
But just remember, darling, all the while
You belong to me"

Sounds pretty sweet, huh? And so international!

"See the marketplace in old Algiers
Send me photographs and souvenirs
Just remember when a dream appears
You belong to me"

This woman is following this guy all over the world. She needs to be stopped. Doesn't she know he's trying to get away from her? And then there's that lovely Patti Page song.

Hattie plays ukulele and sings.

"I went to your wedding
 Although I was dreading
 The thought of losing you
 The organ was playing
 My poor heart kept saying
 "Your dreams, your dreams are through"
 You came down the aisle
 Wearing a smile
 A vision of loveliness
 I uttered a sigh
 Whispered goodbye
 Goodbye to my happiness"

Hattie stops playing and singing.

How sad. I don't think she was even invited to the wedding. Ladies, you need to stop hunting down these men. You'll get arrested. Or at least stop writing songs about it. I would never do what these ladies do. I'm much more secretive about my male pursuits. Ask my husband. I knew him for years...before we met.

Did you hear that song all over the radio last Christmas? I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus. It's horrible. That kid should have been in bed hours ago! Everyone knows that many of these Christmas songs were written by Jews, Irving Berlin wrote White Christmas and Mel Torme wrote the one with "Chestnuts roasting on an open fire." We Jews have our hands in everything, except when it's time to pay the check.

What I want to know is why there aren't any Jewish country and western songs? We've suffered enough to write a song or two. What kind of songs could come from that? (In Southern Dialect) Divorce is Meshugena. My Momma's Drunk Again on Maneshevitz. My Cheatin' Husband is a Putz...and I'm Gonna Git that Shiksa. I suppose grits and schmaltz don't mix.

I know you'd love to hear me continue singing, but if I did, I'd have to join another union. As a female comedian, I can't afford the dues. As it is, I get paid bubkes. Okay, I get a bissel. You know what the difference is? How much you kvetch. Unless you're shtupping the macher, and you get a bissel shvanger.

(motions a pregnant belly)

I'm not complaining. The resort is very wonderful to me. They give me a free room and everything. Too bad it's only during in the winter. Even that offer, Zeb almost lost for us. He was sealing the deal of my booking, and Mr. Brown said, why don't we celebrate. Do you know Dom Perignon? And Zeb said! Do I? That schmuck nearly cut me off on the 17 going through Ellenville.

Afterwards I asked him, “Zeb, what were you thinking?” He said, “what, Hattie. I’m just shmoozing. Making small talk.” And I said, Zeb, you’re farbondget, everyone knows the 17 doesn’t go through Ellenville.”

Hattie exits and then stage lights come up as she and ZEB enter their room at the Motel Royal, a modest and modern room with art deco decor. Center stage are two double beds with wooden headboards and matching night stands and lamps on either side. There are portraits of Catskill mountain scenes above each bed. Stage left is the motel room door and window. In front of the window is a table and two chairs. Stage right leads to the bathroom and a small closet.

HATTIE

(entering)

Motel Royal wouldn’t be the same without Mr. Brown’s farbicina punim.

Zeb follows Hattie with two large suitcases. He places them in the closet and collapses onto the bed closest.

One would think that summer would bring out a smile from that man.

ZEB

One would think.

HATTIE

Perhaps his face would crack. Oooh. Where’s my notebook? Zeb, write that one down. There’s a joke in there somewhere.

Zeb looks through his suit pockets for a pen and paper.

ZEB

There’s a pad and pen on the table.

Zeb takes a flask from one of his pockets and drinks a large gulp. Hattie’s finds the pen and pad of paper and writes.

HATTIE

Mr. Brown’s face will crack.

Hattie pauses for a moment, trying to come up with a joke.

I've got nothing. Gunisht. You?

ZEB

Me?

HATTIE

No, the mountain man hiding in the cave in the painting behind you. Of course you.

ZEB

Don't be sarcastic, Hattie. I'm tired from the drive.

HATTIE

I'm not being sarcastic, I'm being funny. Well, it's not funny if I have to explain myself.

ZEB

Then maybe it's not funny at all.

HATTIE

Of course it is. What happened to your sense of humor, Zeb? You were a drip the whole ride.

ZEB

Get off my back. I'm here aren't I.

HATTIE

Sheesh. Get a load of your attitude. Come on. Stop being such a crumb. It's nice that they give us the same room for the summer every year.

ZEB

They don't give us the same room, I request it.

HATTIE

Oh, Zeb, that's so romantic.

ZEB

It's not romantic, it's practical. At the end of each summer, I book the same rooms for next summer. That way it's done, and I don't have to think about it.

HATTIE

There's got to be some nostalgic reason why you book the same motel for us every summer.

ZEB

It's cheap, and it's centrally located.

HATTIE

I could say the same about you.

ZEB

I think you just did.

HATTIE

Well, I still think it's romantic, regardless of your true intention.

ZEB

You can believe what you want.

HATTIE

I certainly will. (Pause) Let's go out tonight! Lil and I were thinking of getting Chinese food at Corey's.

ZEB

You know Chinese food doesn't sit right with me. Why not Feinstein's?

HATTIE

Their egg salad is runny.

ZEB

You don't like egg salad.

HATTIE

That's beside the point.

ZEB

Well, I'm tired.

HATTIE

Tired! It's only 7:00. The night is young.

ZEB

And I'm old.

HATTIE

Well, I'll give you that.

ZEB

Ha ha.

HATTIE

See, I made you laugh. Now give me a kiss.

Hattie climbs up on the bed to kiss Zeb.

ZEB

Just one. I don't want to give you the wrong idea.

HATTIE

Oh, it's too late for that. You gave me the wrong idea ten years ago.

ZEB

Fourteen if you count the time before we were married.

HATTIE

Then you have to subtract three when you were deployed.

ZEB

Those three years count.

HATTIE

You're right, they do. Wanna talk about it?

ZEB

You can't just do that, just flippantly ask to talk about the war.

HATTIE

I didn't mean--

ZEB

You never mean... never mind. Just subtract the three, and make it eleven.

HATTIE

Eh, who's counting?

ZEB

You are. Especially, every year on our anniversary.

HATTIE

That's different.

ZEB

It's not different.

HATTIE

Sure it is. Because anniversaries involve presents.

ZEB

I do not understand your logic.

HATTIE

You don't have to understand it. Just nod and agree.

ZEB

Oh, I learned that fourteen years ago, give or take.

HATTIE

Then why is it that I always have to remind you?

ZEB

Because I continue to be baffled and amazed.

HATTIE

My logic makes perfect sense to me, and that's all that matters.

ZEB

As long as one of us is happy.

HATTIE

As long as the one of us is me.

ZEB

If you're happy, I'm happy.

HATTIE

So give me the run down. What's my schedule this week?

ZEB

I told you in the car. You wrote it down.

HATTIE

I never read what I write. That's what you're for. Besides, what's the point of keeping track when it changes?

ZEB

Du farkirtst mir di yorn. Alright. Let's see, I arranged it by town so you can do three shows a night.

HATTIE

Except for Sunday.

ZEB

Of course. And you're only doing two shows on Friday and Saturday nights. That's 16 shows, with me as your chauffeur. See why cheap and central are so important? It would be helpful if you could drive yourself.

HATTIE

Well I can't.

ZEB

I've offered to teach you at least a dozen times.

HATTIE

And at least a dozen times I've said no. There's no point. I get around perfectly fine.

ZEB

By me.

HATTIE

Exactly. See, now who's the practical one? Don't answer that. Any bungalows?

ZEB

About half.

HATTIE

The hot dressing rooms with people peeking through the broken windows. I don't understand why they all smell like chicken soup.

ZEB

We all gotta pay our dues. I wonder if the owner of the Edgewood is going to wear shoes this summer.

HATTIE

Probably not. Their motto, why fix what's so severely broken it's hopeless. Plus, we have an Olympic-size pool.

ZEB

Too bad it's filled with swamp water.

HATTIE

Minor detail. (Pause). One day the Rawley is going to book me as their in-house, and we won't have to do three gigs a night all over the Catskills, running ourselves ragged all summer. We'll live like royalty, served first at dinner, the perfect pool-side spot each afternoon, 10AM tee time with drinks waiting for us at the 9th and 18th holes.

ZEB

You don't play golf.

HATTIE

I know that, but they don't. I suppose what you've booked for me is the best you can do.

ZEB

Well, not quite.

HATTIE

What do you mean, "not quite?"

ZEB

I mean, I wasn't able to get you a headliner spot.

HATTIE

That can't be right. I'm in no mood for jokes.

ZEB

You were all jokes a minute ago. No, Hattie, this isn't a joke. The resorts, well, they didn't want a woman headlining.

HATTIE

That's anti-Semitic! Well, not that, whatever the anti-woman word is for anti-Semitic. Mis-something. I don't know, it's meshugena!

ZEB

It's not meshugena. What do you expect?

HATTIE

I expect the resort owners to understand that I'm just as funny as any man. No, funnier.

ZEB

Of course you are.

HATTIE

Don't patronize me.

ZEB

I'm not. You are.

HATTIE

Darn right I am. So what gives?

ZEB

I'm not in charge Hattie, I'm just your lowly ole husband.

HATTIE

And manager. So manage to get me a headlining gig.

ZEB

You are way out of line. I'm doing the best I can.

HATTIE

So am I!

ZEB

Of course you are.

HATTIE

I work just as hard as any of these men comedians. Harder. I live and breathe jokes.

ZEB

Believe me, I know.

HATTIE

Most people work nine to five, and when they leave the office, they're done. Caput. But not me, I'm working all the time. All day. Even in my sleep I'm thinking up jokes.

ZEB

You don't have to tell me.

HATTIE

Tell me I'm funny.

ZEB

You're the funniest person I know.

HATTIE

Do you mean it? Or are you just saying it as my husband?

ZEB

I can't say it any other way.

HATTIE

Well just pretend. Pretend you're some guy off the street.

ZEB

Hey, did ya get a load of that dame, Hattie Zelig? She's far out! Hilarious! She makes me laugh so hard my sides ache.

HATTIE

Ach. Thanks for trying.

Hattie slumps onto the other bed.

It's unfair.

ZEB

It's just the way it is.

HATTIE

Maybe we should pair up again. Like the old days. Wouldn't that be swell? Revive the old vaudeville act. I bet it would go over great here. It's been long enough that it would seem new again.

ZEB

You're much better without me Hattie, and you know it. I'd just bring you down.

HATTIE

I know.

ZEB

Gee, thanks.

HATTIE

You know what I mean. I was just thinking that if there was a man in my act, maybe we could headline.

ZEB

Is it really all that important?

HATTIE

All that important? Of course it is! I can't think of anything more important. It's what I live for.

ZEB

I won't disagree with that.

HATTIE

Well, you and Frieda too. That goes without saying.

ZEB

I know we're second fiddle to your career. I can live with that.

HATTIE

That's not true at all. It's just that, standing on stage, and making people laugh. There's nothing else like it. I can take everything I've experienced in my life, from my messed up childhood, to meeting a bum on the street, and make people laugh about it. It's all funny, all of it, if you look at it from the right angle. And somehow, when I'm talking about my crazy mother, or my husband who drinks too much--

ZEB

Hey!

HATTIE

--and I'm able to make people see it from that same angle, and then they laugh. They laugh Zeb! At what I said. What I came up with from right here (points to her head). It's magic. And I mean something. In those few minutes I'm on stage, nothing else matters but what I have to say. And it's funny, and joyful, and I make that happen. But then you tell me that at Grossinger's and Rawley's or even Kutcher's, none of that matters because I'm a woman. If I'm not booked at places, I don't mean anything. I might as well not exist.

ZEB

It's not exactly that.

HATTIE

It is exactly that.

ZEB

It's not just the resort owners, it's just the way it is. People pay good money to come to these resorts, and they want to see big names, Hennie and Shecky and Milton. It is a business after all.

HATTIE

People. You mean Jews. Well I'm Jewish too, and there's one thing I learned is that we Jews have had our fair share of us versus them. Yet we do it to ourselves? That makes no sense.

ZEB

If there's one thing I've learned, there's a lot that makes no sense.

HATTIE

You can say that again.

ZEB

You're fighting a battle you can't win. And there's too much at stake. You make waves, and they could blacklist you all together.

HATTIE

That won't happen.

ZEB

You don't want to find out.

Beat.

HATTIE

I don't want to admit it, but I suppose you're right.

ZEB

Can you say that again?

HATTIE

Not on your life. Well, when you go down to the city on Sunday to do the bookings, could you try to get me just one headlining gig? Even if it's at the Tamarack or someplace like that. Bungalows don't count.

ZEB

I'll see what I can do.

HATTIE

You're a mensch.

ZEB

As are you.

HATTIE

I'm going to go to Lillian's room, and see if she wants to get dinner.

Hattie puts on her coat and hat, and heads to the door.

Are you sure you don't want to come?

ZEB

I'm sure. I had enough of you two gabbing on the ride up.

HATTIE

We don't gab. That's very important stuff we gossip about. You know you really are a mensch to book her up here.

ZEB

It's strictly for the money.

HATTIE

I know it's not. I really thought she was going to make it out in Hollywood. Doing singles in the Catskills is a very far step down from the direction she was heading in.

ZEB

I thought she was just doing walk-ons.

HATTIE

Why would they bother blacklisting someone who was just doing walk-ons? She was signed with Columbia to do two pictures a year. I mean they weren't big parts, but still, next thing you know, Columbia fires her, and she can't even get a walk-on.

ZEB

I still don't understand why she's blacklisted. She doesn't look communist to me.

HATTIE

And what does a communist look like?

ZEB

Not Lillian.

HATTIE

You know, it was Moe's fault.

ZEB

How so?

HATTIE

He was the one who registered her as a communist. She didn't even know. I mean she knew, but I don't think she knew what it meant. She was in love, and trusted him. And back then it meant something different than it does now.

ZEB

I know that. I even went to a meeting with Moe a couple of times. But you know I'm not very political.

HATTIE

You never told me that.

ZEB

There's nothing really to tell. It was at someone's house. They served potatoes and vodka. Everyone called each other comrade.

HATTIE

Really?

ZEB

No. It was just to promote some guy who was running for office. Assemblyman or something. I don't think I even voted for the guy, or at all. You know I'm not political.

HATTIE

Neither is Lillian. I don't think she knows the first thing about politics. She just did what Moe asked of her. He was good guy. It's so sad.

ZEB

A lot of fellows died in the war.

HATTIE

It's different when you know them.

ZEB

Ain't that the truth.

HATTIE

Sorry, sweetie. I forgot you don't wanna talk about it.

ZEB

It's not that I don't...nevermind...you don't get it.

Zeb sighs in frustration.

HATTIE

I get it.

ZEB

You don't. It's fine. (Pause) Who do you think termed the name blacklist?

HATTIE

I don't know, but I'm sure there's a joke in there. Write that down.

ZEB

You have a pad of paper in your hand.

HATTIE

Oh, silly me.

She writes and says aloud.

Joke about the blacklist. (*She thinks*). I've got nothing. Oh, well. Come out with us.

ZEB

I'm tired, from the trip.

HATTIE

You are an old fuddy-duddy.

ZEB

First I'm a mensch, then I'm a fuddy-duddy.

HATTIE

Those two aren't mutually exclusive.

ZEB

You just make things up as you go along.

HATTIE

I certainly do.

ZEB

Have a good time.

HATTIE

I won't be out too late.

ZEB

That's fine. But don't come home early on my account.

Hattie contemplates Zeb's last statement, while
Zeb plays innocent.

HATTIE

Well...Ta-ta!

Hattie Exits. Zeb watches the door shut and waits
for a moment before picking up the phone on the
nightstand.

ZEB

...Good evening to you too. Would you please connect me to room 17?...Thank
you....Hello darling. It's me.....yes, I'm here....yes, she went out....at least a couple
hours....Now?.....Fine. I'll be right over.

Zeb hangs up the phone, grabs his coat and hat,
and exits.

END SCENE

SCENE TWO

Hattie enters with a microphone and stand and addresses the audience. Spotlight downstage.

HATTIE

If you can't tell, I'm Jewish, and my mother's Jewish. I'll tell you a little secret, if you're dating a Jewish woman, and you want to break up with her, tell her that she's acting like her mother.

The best thing I learned from my mother was what not to do. For instance, she never judges people. She just assumes they'll disappoint her.

For my birthday, the only thing my mother gave me was a headache. I said "that's fine, because instead of cake, I'm giving you a piece of my mind."

I said, "ma, aren't you going to give me a present?" She said, "if I hadn't birthed you, you wouldn't be present."

My mother wasn't feeling well, so I suggested she take some aspirin. She said, "that would interfere with my suffering."

When I was a girl, I had curly hair like I do now, only littler. And my mother didn't know how to take care of it because she had straight hair. She'd brush it, and I'd end up with a collection of knots. Then she'd take the collection and gather it at the top of my head, like a big nest. Birds and small animals would gather in it. For the school play, I played the role of Autumn!

I was never kidnapped as a child, unfortunately. My mother warned me constantly that it could happen. "Hattie, don't stay out after dark. You'll get kidnapped!" It never happened. It gave me a low self esteem. What's wrong with me? I'm kidnap worthy.

Also against her warnings, I never caught my death. All those years of wearing a sweater when my mother was cold. Wasted.

When I first started dating my husband I called my mother up to let her know. The first thing she asks is, "is he's Jewish?" I said yes. She said "thank God!" But he's atheist, she said "God forbid!" When we got married, I called my mother up and told her we eloped.

She says to me, “eh, that’s nice.” When I got pregnant I told her said, “ma, I’m pregnant, you’re going to be a bubby!” She said, “eh, good for you.” Then when my daughter was born, I called her up and told her that she was the grandmother to a beautiful and healthy baby girl. She said, “nu?” I said, “ma, I call you up to share all these exciting things with you, and you’re not very enthusiastic. Why?” And she said sure, these are all wonderful things you call me up to tell me. But Sheila’s daughter calls her every day!

When my father was on his deathbed, my mother sat next to him crying and holding his hand. She asked him if there’s anything she could do to make him more comfortable He turns to her and says, “can I have some of that babka you made?” And she said “I’d love to, but I’m saving it for the shiva.”

I saw a billboard advertisement for a cemetery. Do they really need to advertise? I was just going to bury my mother in the backyard, but then I saw this cemetery advertisement...

Blackout and then lights up. Ruth, Hattie’s mother is sitting on one of the motel room beds. Hattie’s is off stage in what is assumed to be the bathroom.

RUTH

Vos iz taking so long, Hattie? Are you a shtyfer mogen?

HATTIE (O.S.)

I’m not constipated. I’m getting dressed.

RUTH

I might have something for it. You’re not drinking enough vasser. Oy, ve’re going to be late.

HATTIE (O.S.)

We’re going to a restaurant. We can’t be late.

RUTH

You said ve vere going to eat at noon, it’s half past.

HATTIE (O.S.)

I said noonish. Jewish standard time allows for at least an hour.

RUTH

An hour! Oy gevault. It’s going to throw off my whole schedule.

HATTIE (O.S.)

What schedule? It's summer. You have no schedule.

RUTH

I'm not going to be hungry for dinner at four if I don't eat lunch until one.

HATTIE (O.S.)

No one eats lunch at four except old people.

RUTH

I'm old.

HATTIE (O.S.)

You're not old. You just act old.

Hattie enters wearing a green summer dress.

RUTH

Nu? You're not wearing the yellow dress I bought you?

HATTIE

No, I'm wearing this.

RUTH

Vos? You don't like the dress?

HATTIE

I like the dress, just not the color.

RUTH

Vos iz wrong vis yellow?

HATTIE

There's nothing wrong with yellow. I just don't look good in it.

RUTH

It's your favorite color.

HATTIE

No, Ma, it's your favorite color.

RUTH

But you look so good in it. It brings out your hazel eyes.

HATTIE

Sophie has hazel eyes. Mine are brown.

RUTH

I could have sworn you have hazel eyes.

HATTIE

Nope. Brown.

RUTH

Come here. Let me look.

HATTIE

Don't you think I know the color of my own eyes.

Hattie gets close to Ruth and shows her her eyes.

See. Brown.

RUTH

Let me get my glasses. Hand me my pocket book. It's on the table.

HATTIE

Really? (Pause) Fine.

Hattie gets Ruth's pocket book and hands it to her. Ruth fumbles around in it, looking for her glasses. In the meantime, Hattie gets her coat, hat and purse.

Are you ready? You're the one who was so worried about being late.

RUTH

Hang on a second. I can't find my glasses.

HATTIE

Let me look.

Hattie rummages through Ruth's pocket book pulling out things. She pulls out a stack of bills.

Oy, ma, you should have mailed these bills in the city. The mail's so slow here.

RUTH

I forgot.

Hattie pulls out several pill bottles. She examines one of the bottles.

HATTIE

I hope one of these is for memory.

RUTH

I tsink so, but I can't remember.

HATTIE

See! You do have sense of humor.

RUTH

You had to get it from somewhere.

HATTIE

I did. It's on loan from the bank. My savings account is a joke... I'll work on that one.

(holding up a bottle)

I can't even pronounce the name on this.

RUTH

It's for my nerves.

HATTIE

I thought you were on your last nerve 20 years ago.

RUTH

I don't understand.

HATTIE

It was a joke.

RUTH

I couldn't tell.

HATTIE

I've never even seen you take these.

RUTH

I take them. Ven I have nervous headaches.

HATTIE

I doubt it. They would interfere with your suffering.

Hattie pulls out several more items, such as a stack of pictures, several handkerchiefs, some make up, an address book, a box of crayons.

HATTIE

A box of crayons?

RUTH

Frieda was coloring in the car, and I took them so they wouldn't melt in the back seat.

HATTIE

You're going to bring that up again?

RUTH

Bring vos up?

HATTIE

With the crayons, and how I ruined the back seat.

RUTH

I didn't bring it up. You did.

HATTIE

You're just so. That way.

RUTH

I'm not being any way. Vos iz vay am I being?

HATTIE

Critical.

RUTH

You art the vone examining the contents of my pocket book.

HATTIE

I'm trying to help you find your glasses, so you can see what color my eyes are. Because of course I have no idea what color my own eyes are. Just like I don't know what color dress I look good in.

RUTH

Vell would you look at that. They've been in my hand the whole time.

Ruth holds up a pair of glasses that were in her hand.

HATTIE

Are you kidding me?

RUTH

Come here.

Ruth puts on her glasses. Hattie once again shows Ruth her eyes.

Nu?	HATTIE
Brown. Just like I said.	RUTH
You are something else. I can't win with you.	HATTIE
There's nothing to win.	RUTH
I'm just being funny, Ma.	HATTIE
It's not funny to me.	RUTH
Of course not. I'm never funny to you.	HATTIE
I just don't understand your sense of humor.	RUTH
There's nothing to understand. It's just jokes.	HATTIE
You're very talented, Hattie, you're just not funny.	RUTH
That makes no sense. My talent is that I'm funny.	HATTIE
Maybe you should just be a mother.	RUTH
I am a mother. And a comedian.	HATTIE
That's vos I mean. You should just be a mother. Frieda needs you.	RUTH
I am a perfectly good mother.	HATTIE

RUTH

You are. You're a vonderful mother to Frieda. I just tsink that you should not be gallivanting around.

HATTIE

I'm not gallivanting. I'm working.

RUTH

I know. But if you had a normal job.

HATTIE

Like you. What? I should hem pants for 50 cents? That will make me happy?

RUTH

Yes.

HATTIE

I promise you, Ma, that if I were a seamstress like you, I would not be happy.

RUTH

I vas perfectly happy.

HATTIE

You were not. You just pretended.

RUTH

It vosn't about my happiness anyway. It vos about being a good mother to you and your sister.

HATTIE

Here we go again with you saying I'm not a good mother.

RUTH

That's not vos I said.

HATTIE

But that's what you meant.

RUTH

Don't put words in my mouth.

HATTIE

I'm not. You were miserable, and I can't do anything right, and I'm not a good mother.

RUTH

I'm not miserable, and you're a wonderful mother.

HATTIE

Not until today have you ever said those words.

RUTH

I've said it lots of times.

HATTIE

No. I would remember.

RUTH

Of course I've said it.

HATTIE

I should probably take one of your memory pills. Got a spare?

RUTH

I just think that you would set a better example for Frieda if you were doing a job that was, I don't know the word.

HATTIE

Not a man's job.

RUTH

Yes. Men are comedians.

HATTIE

So are women.

RUTH

I don't know of any famous woman comedians.

HATTIE

There are loads! In the movies. In theater. On television.

RUTH

Yes, but not travelling around telling jokes.

HATTIE

Okay, so maybe there are only a handful of us. And maybe we're not all that famous. Yet.

RUTH

Vos iz yet? You've been doing this for ten years. When are you going to give up and stay home?

HATTIE

Never.

RUTH

Oy, Hattie. I hate to burst your bubble.

HATTIE

Oh, it's too late for that. I grew up without a self-esteem, thanks to you.

RUTH

Vos iz zat supposed to mean?

HATTIE

Nevermind. It's pointless.

RUTH

Forget lunch. I've lost my appetite.

HATTIE

Great. Now the guilt.

RUTH

You go on without me.

HATTIE

I'm not going to lunch alone. Let's just go.

RUTH

I'm not hungry. I ate in the car.

HATTIE

You didn't eat in the car.

RUTH

Sure I did. A sandwich I had in my purse. I wrapped in in wax paper, so it would keep.

HATTIE

Fine. I'll go by myself.

RUTH

And leave me here alone?

HATTIE

You really are something. Put on your coat.

Ruth puts on her coat and they head for the door.

RUTH

Let's not go to Feinstein's this time. The service is very slow, and their corned beef is very fatty.

HATTIE

You don't like corned beef.

RUTH

I'm just saying, it's fatty.

They exit. Lights fade.

END OF SCENE

SCENE THREE

Hattie enters with a microphone and stand, and addresses the audience. Spotlight downstage.

HATTIE

I got together with a friend of mine, well she's not really a friend, we just talk behind each other's backs a lot. We went out for coffee, and she's bragging about her son and how he's out of diapers. He's 20. And she's always complaining, poor me, my life is so hard. My husband left me. Yeah, he left you the house, and the summer house. And honestly, you're better off anyway, seeing how he's a feggalah.

There are so many Jews blacklisted in Hollywood they should call it the plague of darkness. Jews can't be communists. We can't have everything equal and still be the chosen ones.

I went on a date once with a communist. After the meal, he wanted to split the check. I said all right, but on one condition. If we end up getting married, we'll split all the household chores. He said that was fine. So, we'll take turns doing the laundry? He said yes. And we'll take turns cooking, ironing, vacuuming, taking care of the children? He said yes. And we'll take turns choosing what to watch on television? I never saw him again.

Two Russian men were waiting in a very long line to get their weekly loaf of bread. One of them was Jewish. The other wasn't. The non-Jew said to the Jew, "Irving, isn't in Passover?"

Why are you in line to get bread?" And Irving said, (in a Yiddish accent), "I met a man. He offered me such a deal. He's going to trade me this loaf of bread for a ham!" And the non-Jew said, "But Irving, don't you keep kosher? What are you going to do with a ham?" And Irving said, (in a Yiddish accent), "I met another man. He offered me a tremendous deal. He's going to trade me the ham for a single shoe." "A single shoe! What could you possibly do with a single shoe?" "Well. I met a man. And this man, what a deal! Such a bargain! He offered to trade just a single shoe for a whole loaf of bread!" "But Irving, you're in line to get a loaf of bread." "Who am I to pass up a deal?"

Blackout and then lights up. Lillian, Hattie's best friend, is sitting on one of the motel room beds. Hattie's is off stage in the bathroom.

LILLIAN

We're going to be late.

HATTIE (O.S.)

What's the rush. We're fine.

LILLIAN

You know I like to get there early, warm up a bit. Scan the crowd.

HATTIE (O.S.)

We'll be there with plenty of time. What is it with you two?

LILLIAN

Who two?

HATTIE (O.S.)

You and my mother, with the time. Always rushing to be early.

LILLIAN

It's because you're always late.

HATTIE (O.S.)

I'm very punctual.

LILLIAN

Oh, is that what you call it these days?

HATTIE (O.S.)

It's not what I call it. It's what it is.

LILLIAN

What what is?

HATTIE (O.S.)

Being fashionably late is being on time.

LILLIAN

I'm very confused.

Hattie enters wearing a yellow dress.

HATTIE

You often are.

LILLIAN

Oh, that's lovely!

HATTIE

My mother got it for me. It brings out my eyes, don't you think?

LILLIAN

She has good taste.

HATTIE

She does, but god-forbid I'd deny her the opportunity to be a martyr and let her know.

LILLIAN

That bad?

HATTIE

Worse.

LILLIAN

Well, you're lucky to have a mother to fight with.

HATTIE

I'm sorry Lil. I didn't mean--

LILLIAN

It's nothing.

HATTIE

I'm so glad we have similar schedules this time.

LILLIAN

I know. Last summer we barely saw each other.

HATTIE

I ask Zeb every time to have us working the same circuit. He said it's better to split us women up. Too many female acts on the line up isn't good.

LILLIAN

I guess that makes sense.

HATTIE

Well, there isn't an issue if the entire line up is made up of men.

LILLIAN

I never thought of it that way.

HATTIE

No one does. That's the problem.

LILLIAN

The schedule so far has been great. Better than last year. I'm only doing the bungalows on weekends.

HATTIE

I think it's dreadful.

LILLIAN

You do?

HATTIE

We should be headlining. Both of us. At the resorts.

LILLIAN

Hattie, you know that's not going to happen.

HATTIE

I don't know that.

LILLIAN

Now don't get all full of yourself.

HATTIE

No one else I'd rather be full of.

LILLIAN

You know what I mean.

HATTIE

You are so easy to tease.

LILLIAN

It's to give you something to do. Otherwise, you'd be bored to tears.

HATTIE

I know! Thanks Lil. You're the best.

LILLIAN

No you're the best.

HATTIE

I know.

LILLIAN

I know you know.

HATTIE

I know you know I know.

LILLIAN

I know you know I know you know.

HATTIE

It's not funny after the third one.

LILLIAN

That's a matter of opinion.

HATTIE

My opinion. And I'm the best, remember?

LILLIAN

So am I. So it's a stale still.

HATTIE

A what still?

LILLIAN

You know. Like in chess.

HATTIE

Oh! That's a stalemate.

LILLIAN

Then what's a stale still?

HATTIE

Being out of whiskey.

LILLIAN

That's just terrible.

HATTIE

It certainly is.

LILLIAN

I meant the joke.

HATTIE

It's no joke to be out of whisky.

LILLIAN

Stop it, Hattie. So what's your beef with the schedule?

HATTIE

I told you, I'm not headlining. And neither are you, for that matter.

LILLIAN

Honestly, I'm grateful for what I've got. It's just how it is.

HATTIE

Did Cleopatra say it's just how it is? Did Joan of Arc say it's just how it is?

LILLIAN

No.

HATTIE

Did Sacagawea say it's just how it is?

LILLIAN

Sacagawhooza?

HATTIE

The Indian.

LILLIAN

Probably not, at least not in English. But none of them are comics.

HATTIE

Did Lucille Ball? Mae West?

LILLIAN

They're comedic actresses, not comics.

HATTIE

It doesn't disprove my point.

LILLIAN

It's a battle I'm not willing to take on.

HATTIE

We'll pave the way for other female comedians.

LILLIAN

You're not doing this to pave the way.

HATTIE

Sure I am. (Pause) And for selfish reasons of course.

LILLIAN

There's the Hattie that I know.

HATTIE

But seriously.

LILLIAN

You're not serious about anything.

HATTIE

I have it in me...sometimes...on occasion.

LILLIAN

I really can't help you with this Hattie. I'm lucky to have what I have.

HATTIE

Because of the communism thing.

LILLIAN

Shhhhh.

HATTIE
(whispering loudly)

Because of the communism thing.

LILLIAN

Yes, because of that.

HATTIE

You're not a (whispers) "communist."

LILLIAN

You and I knowing I'm not a communist, hasn't made one bit of difference. I haven't had even a walk-on in two years.

HATTIE

I'm sure this whole thing will blow over in no time.

LILLIAN

I'm not holding my breath.

HATTIE

Either way, you have a brilliant career as a comic.

LILLIAN

It's not quite paying the bills though. That blow over better come sooner than later.

HATTIE

That's another reason why we need to be headlining.

LILLIAN

I don't see the connection.

HATTIE

It'll just show 'em.

LILLIAN

That makes no sense Hattie.

HATTIE

It does to me.

LILLIAN

I wish I had your positive attitude. (Pause) So, where's Zeb? Shouldn't he be here right now?

HATTIE

We'll have to take a car service. He's said he'll meet us at the first stop.

LILLIAN

What's he doing?

HATTIE

Don't you mean, who's he doing?

LILLIAN

What? No!

HATTIE

Don't be so naive, Lil.

LILLIAN

S'teits! I had no idea! What are you going to do? Divorce him?

HATTIE

It's no big deal.

LILLIAN

No big deal!? I can't believe I'm hearing this Hattie. Do you know who he's...you know?

HATTIE

I have my suspicions.

LILLIAN

I don't know how you live with this.

HATTIE

It's really part of the culture here. I can't believe you don't know.

LILLIAN

Well, I knew other men. But not Zeb.

HATTIE

Sure. I think he needs to feel like part of the in crowd. The inner circle. He thinks he's a groyser tzuleyger.

LILLIAN

A groyser what-tzger?

HATTIE

A big shot.

LILLIAN

That can't be a requirement.

HATTIE

Not really a requirement, but, how do I explain. These men, they come up here from the city, and they put their girlfriends up for the summer. Sometimes they'll stay in the same hotel as their wives.

LILLIAN

Right under their noses! The nerve of them. They're so shameless. Men are such shmucks.

HATTIE

And they think with them too.

LILLIAN

That's what gets them into trouble.

HATTIE

It seems that doesn't get them into trouble at all.

LILLIAN

But that's the thing. I thought Zeb was a nice guy, he works so hard for you.

HATTIE

He does. But it's really because he sees my success as his success. He thinks he made me, but really he's jealous. I think it's hard for him to see me up on stage, and him watching from the audience. He would never admit it, of course. But I know that's the case.

LILLIAN

Have you thought about teaming up again?

HATTIE

I've tried. Many times. But he just says that I'm much better without him. And honestly, I am. And that's not just the arrogant me talking. It's just true. His timing was awful. And he knows it. He just can't stand to see me successful, but at the same time he thinks I owe all my success to him.

LILLIAN

What are you going to do?

HATTIE

Nothing. Make the best of it. You're right, he's a nice guy, drinks a bit too much, but otherwise... And he's a good manager, aside from not getting me a headlining spot. But what can I do? I divorce him, and I might as well be blacklisted too.

LILLIAN

I suppose you're right. Right now the Catskills are all I've got.

HATTIE

It's much of what I got too. They'll put up with a lot, but a divorcee, forget about it.

There's a car horn heard.

That must be the car service. (She opens the door and shouts) We'll be right out!

LILLIAN

(glancing at her watch)

Look at the time! We're barely gonna make it.

HATTIE

We'll be fine.

LILLIAN

You always are.

Lillian and Hattie grab their coats, hats and purses and exit. Light fade.

END OF SCENE

SCENE FOUR

Hattie enters with microphone down stage. There is just a spotlight on her. She addresses the audience.

HATTIE

At these resorts, they take good care of everybody. Yet, the guests, they're all very possessive of everything, from their spot near the pool, to which table they sit at in the dining room. One time I opened my mouth and a fly flew in. Apparently I had eaten his pickled herring.

Some of these guests take a little too much for granted. The other day it was raining, and I overheard a woman say to her husband, "thank god it's raining: we don't have to sit in the sun anymore."

And another wife said to her husband, “another meal? We’ve got to have another meal?” And he said, “you don’t have to eat it.” The wife says, “but I have to, we’re paying for it.” The children too are very spoiled. Some kids were playing a game of baseball, and a kid got a hit. But instead of running to first base, his mother drove him there.

Everyone really overdoes it here at these resorts. One couple checked into a hotel, and they made the most of all the activities. They went to breakfast, then played a round of golf, Simon Says, ice skating, lunch, laid around the pool, rowed on the lake, then after dinner went to the early show, the late show and then the late late show. Finally at four in the morning, the wife says, “let’s go to bed.” “Why?” The husband asks, “who’s appearing there?”

Spotlight out, and then lights up as Hattie and Lillian enter the motel room, still in the same clothes as in scene three. They are laughing.

LILLIAN

Boy, you told him. All of them. I know I already told you in the car, but you sure have chutzpah, Hattie.

HATTIE

I couldn’t help myself.

LILLIAN

What was it you said?

HATTIE

Oh, I don’t remember exactly.

LILLIAN

Yes you do.

HATTIE

He said something like, a woman comedian is like a woman rabbi. They don’t exist. And I said, good thing I’m not a woman mohel (gesture scissors near “penis”).

LILLIAN

The look on his face!

HATTIE

The look on all their faces.

LILLIAN

I'm so glad you don't put up with their chauvinism. You really are an inspiration.

HATTIE

Thanks. I don't have a choice.

LILLIAN

I just ignore it. But it's mean. It's like they have a special club.

HATTIE

It's not so special. And not a club I want to be a part of.

LILLIAN

It is. They all help each other out. Support each other.

HATTIE

You think that they do, but they don't. Behind their backs, it's every man for himself.

LILLIAN

You'd think that we'd stick together. We've been oppressed and excluded from everything for so long that all we have is each other.

HATTIE

Yeah, you'd think. But no.

Ruth enters carrying a babka.

Ma! What are you doing up so late?

RUTH

It's not so late.

LILLIAN

It's 2am.

RUTH

See, it's early not late. Besides, I couldn't sleep. The walls are so thin here, you and Lillian woke me up. I brought babka.

LILLIAN

Yum!

HATTIE

Thin walls, right. What's wrong?

RUTH

I was worrying.

HATTIE

Here we go. I walked right into that one.

RUTH

I was worrying about you.

HATTIE

There's nothing to worry about.

LILLIAN

Can I have a slice? Do you have a knife in here.

Lillian looks around the room for a knife.

RUTH

There's always something to worry about.

HATTIE

With you, ain't that the truth.

LILLIAN

You don't have to worry about Hattie. She killed tonight. I haven't heard an audience laugh like that in a long time. Tell her about the news.

RUTH

I have a knife in my pocket book.

Ruth pulls out some plates, forks, paper napkins and a knife and hands them to Lillian.

LILLIAN

You brought the whole kitchen. What else do you have in there?

HATTIE

You mean, what doesn't she have in there. I mailed those bills by the way. What is the Metropolitan Life?

RUTH

It's nothing.

HATTIE

What nothing? Nothing's ever nothing with you.

LILLIAN

This is delicious. Tell her the news, Hattie.

HATTIE

All right. So, I got a headlining spot.

RUTH

You did? That's vonderful! Vos iz this headlining?

HATTIE

Well, it's Thursday night, the late spot, which is the best time. It's not the weekend, but almost.

LILLIAN

There's often just as much of a crowd on Thursday.

HATTIE

Sometimes more.

LILLIAN

Sure! Tell her how you got it.

HATTIE

I just asked.

RUTH

Not Zeb? You did.

HATTIE

He wasn't around after the show.

LILLIAN

I think he had some important business to take care of.

RUTH

Vos business iz more important?

HATTIE

I don't know. He just wasn't there. The show was so great, and Mr. Gold watched the whole thing. He's not always around. But tonight he was, and then he was shmoozing with us afterwards. Usually, when he's around, he's shmoozing with the guests. It was the perfect opportunity. I didn't really think about it. It just came out.

LILLIAN

She was so confident. Just came right out and asked.

HATTIE

I just came right out and asked. I said, Mr. Gold, how about you put me on an headlining spot.

RUTH

And just like that, he said yes.

LILLIAN

Just like that.

HATTIE

Well, sort of. He said that this week he had a cancellation on Thursday, and he would put me in.

RUTH

So it's not permanent.

HATTIE

Well it will be. I'm sure of it.

RUTH

How can you be so sure?

HATTIE

I just am.

RUTH

But you didn't ask Zeb first.

HATTIE

He wasn't around. I told you.

RUTH

But he's going to be angry with you.

HATTIE

Why would he be angry? This is great. He's going to be thrilled. Right, Lil?

LILLIAN

Oh, for sure. He's going to be thrilled.

RUTH

I don't know.

HATTIE

Why are you such a downer, ma? You always know how to ruin a good time.

RUTH

I'm just being practical.

HATTIE

No you're not. You have this farbissina punim, like the world is ending.

RUTH

My punim is fine.

HATTIE

You can never be happy for me.

RUTH

I'm very happy for you.

HATTIE

Then why all the questions?

RUTH

I'm not asking questions.

HATTIE

It's not permanent. I didn't run it by Zeb.

RUTH

Zoz aren't questions.

HATTIE

You know what I mean.

LILLIAN

This sure is good babka. You should have some Hattie.

RUTH

I'm just trying to be cautious.

HATTIE

But why? I just shared some really great news, and you have to find the bad in it.

RUTH

I just worry.

HATTIE

You worry so much that your worries come true.

RUTH

It's my job, as a mother.

HATTIE

Then stop.

RUTH

Being a mother? Doing my job?

HATTIE

You know what I mean. Sucking the joy out of everything.

RUTH

I don't do zat.

HATTIE

You do! All the time. That's probably why Papa left.

LILLIAN

Hattie!

Long beat.

RUTH

Perhaps I should go.

LILLIAN

Ruth, don't go. Hattie, tell her not to go.

RUTH

No, I'll go. I'll go back to the city. You don't want me around.

HATTIE

Stop being so dramatic.

RUTH

Who am I to upstage you?

HATTIE

Oh please.

RUTH

I'll just pack up my things. I'll take Frieda so you don't have to worry about her.

LILLIAN

Ruth, stop. This is ridiculous. Hattie, tell her it's ridiculous.

HATTIE

It's ridiculous that she ruins everything.

LILLIAN

That's not what I meant. Just apologize to her.

HATTIE

Me, apologize to her? She's the one--

LILLIAN

I know. Just apologize.

HATTIE

For what?

LILLIAN

To get along.

HATTIE

Fine. I'm sorry, Ma.

RUTH

Okay.

LILLIAN

Let's have some champagne. To celebrate.

RUTH

I might have some in my pocket book.

LILLIAN

You do?

RUTH

No.

LILLIAN

(to Hattie) Now I know where you get it.

HATTIE

I think Zeb has some wine in the closet.

Hattie gets a bottle of wine from the closet and 3 glasses from the bathroom.

LILLIAN

You know, it's a good thing you don't go to many of Hattie's shows anymore. Half her jokes are about you.

HATTIE

It's true. You give me a lot of material.

RUTH

I'm glad I'm good for somezing.

HATTIE

I wouldn't be half as funny without you.

RUTH

See, all my worrying is to give you jokes.

HATTIE

Then I'll never run out of jokes.

Lillian raises her glass.

LILLIAN

To never running out of jokes.

Ruth and Hattie raise their glasses and they all clink.

HATTIE

To never running out of jokes.

RUTH

L'chaim.

HATTIE AND LILLIAN

L'chaim.

They all drink and laugh. Zeb enters.

ZEB

You started the party without me? Ma, what are you doing up so late?

RUTH

I couldn't sleep. I brought babka.

ZEB

My favorite.

Zeb helps himself to some babka.

Where'd you get the babka?

RUTH

Vos you mean, where'd I get the babka? I made it.

LILLIAN

Here, at the motel?

RUTH

Of course. I'm not going to eat somevone else's babka.

HATTIE

Leave it to ma, to take over the kitchen.

RUTH

I didn't take over I vas just showing ze cooks how to bake babka. Zees shvartzes in ze kitchen, zey don't know babka from zeir tuches. Zey make it so dry, so I went into ze kitchen and showed them how to make it. Zey ver very grateful.

HATTIE

Oh, I'm sure.

ZEB

So what's the occasion?

LILLIAN

We're celebrating. Tell him Hattie.

HATTIE

Well--

LILLIAN

Hattie got a headlining spot. On Thursday.

HATTIE

Thanks for stealing my thunder.

LILLIAN

Any time.

ZEB

No she didn't.

HATTIE

Actually, I did.

RUTH

It's true.

HATTIE

The timing was just right, and Mr. Gold said there was a cancellation.

ZEB

So it's not permanent.

HATTIE

But it will be.

ZEB

So just like that he gave you the spot.

HATTIE

Just like that.

ZEB

And is he paying you more?

HATTIE

I didn't ask.

ZEB

Didn't ask!? Headliners get twice as much.

HATTIE

It's not about the money.

ZEB

It is about the money. You never think before you speak.

HATTIE

Why ruin the surprise?

ZEB

This is not a joke, Hattie.

HATTIE

This could be my big break.

ZEB

This is why I'm the manager.

HATTIE

You weren't there.

LILLIAN

Yeah, you weren't there. In fact I didn't see you the whole night.

ZEB

This is none of your business, Lil.

LILLIAN

I think it is. Hattie's my best friend.

ZEB

What's that supposed to mean?

LILLIAN

I think you know what I mean.

RUTH

I don't know what any of this means.

HATTIE

It's nothing, Ma.

ZEB

That's right it's nothing.

LILLIAN

Or she's nothing.

RUTH

Who is zis she?

HATTIE

Like Zeb said, it's nothing.

LILLIAN

Really Hattie?

HATTIE

I appreciate what you're doing. This is not the time.

ZEB

Sure as hell it's not.

HATTIE

We all know about the elephant in the room.

RUTH

I don't know about an elephant. I'm so confused.

HATTIE

But maybe if you were doing your job--.

ZEB

My job?? My job? You'd be nothing if I wasn't doing my job.

HATTIE

Nothing?

ZEB

That's right. I work my tuchas off every summer for you, and Lillian, and half the acts in the Catskills.

HATTIE

Half the acts?

ZEB

Well, a lot.

HATTIE

Then how come you haven't booked me as a headliner.

LILLIAN

Me too?

ZEB

Because you're women, and the resorts are businesses that make money. And they need to book the big acts that will bring in the money.

HATTIE

And we won't bring in the money?

ZEB

No, you won't.

HATTIE

I see how it is.

ZEB

Good.

HATTIE

You're jealous.

ZEB

Don't be ridiculous.

LILLIAN

Maybe we should go. Come on Ruth.

RUTH

I want to know about zee voman and zee elephant.

LILLIAN

I'll explain it to you later.

Ruth takes the bottle of wine and sticks it in her pocket book. They exit.

ZEB

You've made a big mistake, trying to do my job.

HATTIE

Maybe if you weren't off with, I don't want to know, and doing your job.

Ruth comes back in.

Ma!

Ruth grabs the babka off the table.

RUTH

What? I forgot zee babka.

HATTIE

We'll be fine, ma.

RUTH

Are you sure?

ZEB

Yes, we're fine.

Ruth exits.

HATTIE

Are we fine?

ZEB

Of course we're fine. I'll leave the comedy act to you, and you leave the booking to me.

HATTIE

I'm still doing the show on Thursday.

ZEB

I'll have to rearrange everything.

HATTIE

What are you saying? That it's too much work for you?

ZEB

No, I'll make it work. Just don't do this again.

HATTIE

Of course not.

ZEB

Good. I'm going to bed.

Zeb exits into the bathroom.

HATTIE

Zeb?

ZEB (O.S.)

What?

HATTIE

About tonight--

ZEB (O.S.)

I can't hear you. The water's running.

HATTIE

Never mind.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE FIVE

Hattie enters with a microphone. There is a spotlight on her. She addresses the audience.

HATTIE

I go to a restaurant with my mother, and she orders the latke special. The waiter arrives with 3 latkes, applesauce and sour cream. My mother says, this is a special, only 3 latkes? So the waiter takes the plate back to the kitchen and tells the chef about the complaint. The chef makes up more latkes and the waiter brings my mother a plate, this time with 4 latkes. My mother says, some special, 4 latkes, and they're so small. The waiter takes the plate, and again tells the chef. This time the waiter brings back one giant latke. It barely fits on the plate. And my mother says, what? Only one latke?

My husband came home drunk the other day. He fumbled with the key and finally got the door open. Once inside, I accused him of being drunk. He said, just because I fumbled to get the door open doesn't mean I'm drunk. It's because it's dark out. I said, perhaps then you should first get up off the floor, and find your pants.

Spot light fades and then stage lights go up on to the same hotel room. Hattie is pacing while Lillian is smoking a cigarette.

LILLIAN

It's half past.

HATTIE

That's not helping.

LILLIAN

Sorry.

Hattie continues to pace. She checks herself in the mirror, and then paces again.

You're wearing a path in the carpet.

HATTIE

Still not helping.

Hattie takes a puff of Lillian's cigarette, and hands it back to her.

LILLIAN

He said he was going to be here at 6:00, right?

HATTIE

Why are you doing this to me?

LILLIAN

I just want to make sure he wasn't confused about the time.

HATTIE

He's confused about a lot of things, but unlike me, he's rarely late.

LILLIAN

Should we worry?

HATTIE

Oh, I'm way past worrying and have gone straight to anger.

LILLIAN

You don't think he did this on purpose do you?

HATTIE

The thought crossed my mind. But, (Pause) no. My career means too much to him....I think. Now you have me second guessing. I don't know now.

LILLIAN

I'm sure he just got stuck somewhere. Where did he say he was going?

HATTIE

He said he was going to play tennis with Lou. He even brought a change of clothes so he could take a shower at the club and be back in time to take us to dinner before the show.

LILLIAN

Well at this point we've missed dinner and we'll have to go straight to the show.

HATTIE

Don't you think I know that.

LILLIAN

Sheesh, you don't have to snap.

HATTIE

I'm sorry. I'm just worried. No, angry. This has really thrown me off.

LILLIAN

Well, I'm starving. I haven't eaten since breakfast. Are you starving? You must be hungry.

HATTIE

I can't even think about eating now.

LILLIAN

Well I'm starving.

Lillian rummages through her purse and pulls out a dusty jordan almond.

Want a Jordan almond?

She cleans off the almond by blowing on it then rubbing it on her skirt.

I'll give you half.

She bites into the almond.

(offering some to Hattie) The bigger half is in my mouth. But you can have the rest.

HATTIE

I'll pass.

LILLIAN

Suit yourself.

She eats the other half.

HATTIE

Actually, I think I have a half a cheese sandwich in my pocket book. Let me check.

Hattie rummages through her purse pulling out all sorts of stuff, and then a half sandwich wrapped in wax paper.

See. I did have one. Here you go.

Lillian stares, but doesn't take the sandwich.

It's fine. I wrapped it in wax paper so it would keep.

Hattie unwraps the sandwich, and offers it to Lillian.

It's just from lunch. I didn't bite into this half, unlike the almond. It's a perfectly good sandwich. I just wasn't that hungry.

Lillian slowly takes the sandwich.

LILLIAN

Thanks Ruth.

HATTIE

Oh, now, don't you dare.

LILLIAN

(in a Yiddish accent) Thanks for the nosh, you wouldn't vant that I should starve to death.

HATTIE

I am not like my mother.

LILLIAN

(still in a Yiddish accent) If you zay zo. But vould it kill you to call?

HATTIE

(in a Yiddish accent) Vould it kill you to marry a doctor?

LILLIAN

I'm marrying a goy.

HATTIE

Kill me now. You're dead to me.

LILLIAN

Vitch von?

HATTIE

Vitch von vos?

Kill you or I'm dead.

LILLIAN

I'm sitting shiva for both of us.

HATTIE

Oy!

LILLIAN

Oy!

HATTIE

Oy gevult!

LILLIAN

That bad?

HATTIE

Vorse.

LILLIAN

(in normal voice) I'm calling a car.

HATTIE

Why dis car?

LILLIAN

It's really late. I'm calling a car.

HATTIE

Oh! Yeah, you should. (in a yiddish accent) I don't tsink he's coming. I can't stop vit ze accent.

LILLIAN

It's very addictive.

HATTIE

Hattie picks up the motel phone and dials.
 Good evening. I'd like to order a car to take us to Gold's Resort... Yes, I know it's late.... Busy night? But you do have a car.... Yes, please check, I'll hold. (to Lillian) He said that his car's are all out, but he's checking with a nearby motel.

LILLIAN

Oish.

HATTIE

....Yes, I see...I guess that will have to do....Room 14....thank you very much. (to Lillian)
He said that there's one out, but it should be returning shortly, and he'll send it right over.

LILLIAN

Danken Got!

HATTIE

Zeb better be dead, because if he's not, I'll kill him.

Fumbling with keys is heard outside the door. It is apparent that whoever is outside is having great difficulty getting the door unlocked and opened. Finally, Zeb enters, drunk and still in his tennis clothes. He throws down his tennis gear and collapses in a chair. Seeing Hattie and Lillian watching him, he unzips his tennis bag, pulls out a flask, unscrews it, and drinks what's left in the flask.

ZEB

Hello ladies.

HATTIE

Hello ladies?

ZEB

Pardon me. Hello ladies and gentlemen. For my first act, I will do a little dance number.

Zeb gets up, attempts to dance, and stumbles, landing practically on Lillian, who is sitting on the bed.

My aren't we feisty today.

LILLIAN

(pushing Zeb off of her)

We are not feisty today.

ZEB

Perhaps tomorrow then.

Zeb rolls to get off the bed and sees Hattie's ukulele. He picks it up.

ZEB

Aha! For my next number, I'll...ba, ba, ba, be, be, be, boobie, boobie. Now don't go thinking what you're thinking.

HATTIE

I'm thinking that you're drunk.

Hattie takes the ukulele away from Zeb.

ZEB

Then you shouldn't be thinking, because I'm not drunk. I'm perfectly sober.

HATTIE

You are neither perfect nor sober.

ZEB

I had one drink hours ago.

HATTIE

And several after that.

ZEB

You know me too well. (to Lillian) Doesn't she know me too well?

LILLIAN

I'm not getting in the middle of this.

ZEB

Now wouldn't that be cozy.

LILLIAN

He's something else.

HATTIE

What that something is, I have no idea.

LILLIAN

Now that Zeb's here, let's just take the car and go.

HATTIE

I hope he didn't drive in this condition.

ZEB

Don't leave now, the party's just starting.

HATTIE

This party is leaving.

ZEB

Come on Hattie. Stay.

Zeb takes a hold of Hattie, but she struggles to get away from him.

HATTIE

We're late, Zeb. Let go of me. You smell like cheap perfume.

Hattie breaks free.

ZEB

That perfume was not cheap.

HATTIE

Yeah, I bet.

ZEB

You used to be the fun one. We're not late. The night is young.

HATTIE

For my show. The one I'm headlining.

LILLIAN

He didn't forget, did he?

HATTIE

He didn't forget. That's why he's acting this way.

ZEB

I am not acting.

HATTIE

We'll if you were, it would be one of your worst performances.

LILLIAN

I'm so sorry you have to put up with this.

HATTIE

I'm not putting up, I'm putting down, although badly. By the way, Zeb, where is the car?

ZEB

Right where I left it.

HATTIE

And where is that?

ZEB

Somewhere.

LILLIAN

He has no idea.

HATTIE

You can say that again.

LILLIAN

He has--

HATTIE

--don't. And how did you get back to the motel?

ZEB

I was dropped off.

HATTIE

I see. By Lou?

ZEB

What's with the interrogation? (in German accent) Ya vohl! You vill give me ze information I vant. Ve have vays of making you talk.

The sound of a car horn is heard.

LILLIAN

That must be the car.

HATTIE

Oh, good.

Lillian opens the door and yells to the driver.

LILLIAN

We'll be right out!

Both Lillian and Hattie put on their coats and hats and get their purses. Hattie takes the ukulele.

HATTIE

(to Lillian) You go, I'll be out in a minute.

LILLIAN

Don't be too long. We're barely going to make it.

HATTIE

You can say that again.

LILLIAN

Don't be too long--

HATTIE

...oy gevult!

Lillian exits. Hattie stares at Zeb but doesn't say anything.

ZEB

What?

HATTIE

We used to be something.

ZEB

You're something. I'm--

HATTIE

A schmuck.

ZEB

That's not quite what I was going to say.

HATTIE

Then what were you going to say?

ZEB

I was going to say. (Pause) I don't know.

HATTIE

You're my husband, and Frieda's father.

ZEB

It's not enough.

HATTIE

We're not enough for you?

ZEB

You are. I just. I'm the man.

HATTIE

Then act like one.

ZEB

See what you do?

HATTIE

What I do? Me? Don't you dare blame me.

ZEB

I don't. I blame me.

HATTIE

Good. I can't have this conversation right now. I'm late. This could be my big break. Don't you even care?

ZEB

You're kidding yourself Hattie.

HATTIE

Maybe, but that's all I know how to do.

Hattie exits. Lights fade.

END SCENE

SCENE SIX

Hattie enters with a microphone and a magazine.
There is a spotlight on her. She addresses the audience.

HATTIE

In May of this year, Housekeeping Monthly published an article entitled, "The Good Wife's Guide." The article gives grand advice by detailing all the ways that a wife should act and how best she can be a partner to her husband and a mother to her children. Unfortunately, Housekeeping Monthly didn't ask for my input, which I would have gladly given. Here are a few suggestions from the article.

(Reading those in quotes) "Have dinner ready. Plan ahead, even the night before, to have a delicious meal ready, on time for his return." My idea of planning is making reservations. "Prepare yourself. Take 15 minutes to rest so you'll be refreshed when he arrives." Just enough time for a trip to the toilet, leaving the seat nice and warm for him. Aren't I thoughtful?

"Touch up your makeup, put a ribbon in your hair and be fresh-looking." In other words, look like a poodle coming home from the groomer. Men like that.

"Be a little gay and a little more interesting for him. His boring day may need a lift and one of your duties is to provide it." This is where you can get creative with the ribbons, some places may give him a lift more than others.

"Clear away the clutter. Make one last trip through the main part of the house just before your husband arrives." I think that last trip is how I got this bruise on my leg.

"Your husband will feel he has reached a haven of rest and order, and it will give you a lift too." In the Jewish religion, not giving your wife a lift can be grounds for divorce.

"Children are little treasures and he would like to see them playing the part." As soon as I locate the treasure map, I'll try and find them.

"Never complain if he comes home late or goes out to dinner, or other places of entertainment without you." Other places of entertainment. Nu? I'm sure the writer means bowling.

"Don't complain if he's late home for dinner or even if he stays out all night. Count this as minor compared to what he might have gone through that day." If he's out all night, he won't ask about where I've been...bowling, of course.

"Arrange his pillow and offer to take off his shoes. Speak in a low, soothing and pleasant voice." (in a low, soothing and pleasant voice) You are getting sleepy. You will not ask me about the charges on the credit card.

"Be happy to see him. Free him with a warm smile and show sincerity in your desire to please him. Listen to him." I had no idea Housekeeping Monthly was such a filthy magazine. I need to get a subscription.

Spotlight out, and then lights up onto the motel room. Hattie and Lillian are sitting at the table. Zeb is passed out on one of the beds, still in his tennis clothes.

HATTIE

My head is still reeling.

LILLIAN

Mine too, and it's not even happening to me.

HATTIE

Me, on television. I can't believe it. It's like a dream. Pinch me.

Lillian pinches Hattie.

Ouch! I didn't mean it. You're so literal.

LILLIAN

It's what I do.

HATTIE

Can you believe it?

LILLIAN

Yes, I can believe it. I knew something like this would happen to you.

HATTIE

Well I didn't.

LILLIAN

Yes, you did.

HATTIE

Well, I was hoping. But I didn't really. Not like this.

LILLIAN

I've known all along. And if anyone deserves it, it's you.

HATTIE

Thanks Lil. One minute I'm fighting to be a headliner at a resort in the Catskills mountains, and the next I might be on television.

LILLIAN

Not just on television. Your own show.

HATTIE

I like the way that sounds. My own show.

LILLIAN

What do you think they'll call it?

HATTIE

The Hattie Zelig show of course.

LILLIAN

Oh, of course.

HATTIE

It is my show.

LILLIAN

All that humility was a bit out of character. I suppose they wouldn't call it, The friend of Lillian Stern show.

HATTIE

No, but you should.

LILLIAN

I should what?

HATTIE

Be my best friend.

LILLIAN

I am your best friend.

HATTIE

I mean on the show.

LILLIAN

You know that's not going to happen.

HATTIE

I'll demand it.

LILLIAN

You don't want to shoot yourself in the foot. I'm blacklisted, you know that.

HATTIE

I know. I was just thinking that--

LILLIAN

Not going to happen.

HATTIE

Then I'll tell them I won't do the show without you.

LILLIAN

You're not in a position to make demands like that. They haven't even said it's a sure thing. It's just a possibility right now

HATTIE

Why else would a producer from Desilu studios approach me?

LILLIAN

Be realistic Hattie.

HATTIE

I am.

LILLIAN

Oh, I forgot. You're constitutionally incapable.

HATTIE

Well, I could ask.

LILLIAN

Just be careful. You haven't even had that first meeting or made a pilot yet.

HATTIE

Oooh! Is he handsome?

LILLIAN

Everything really is a joke to you.

HATTIE

There's no other way to live.

LILLIAN

So, what do you think the show's about?

HATTIE

Me.

LILLIAN

Well of course you.

HATTIE

I didn't tell you? He said that they want to create a show about a female comedian. She's married, and has a child, and on the side she does comedy. It sounds like it's based on me, but different. You know, wacky things happen, and there are guest appearances.

At least that's what I'm guessing. And I'm not Jewish in it, or it would be too much like The Goldbergs.

LILLIAN

I wonder who would play your husband. You don't think--?

Lillian points to Zeb.

HATTIE

No. But if I could suggest a few names. Ozzie Nelson, Charles Farrell. I wish it were Phil Loeb. But he's in the same boat as you.

LILLIAN

Yeah, I know.

HATTIE

I don't know what they have against us. We Jews have had enough. First Hitler and the Nazis, then that Red Channels list come out.

LILLIAN

It's not only Jews.

HATTIE

But mostly. It just makes me so mad. I swear, I'm going to find a way to expose this for what it is. At the very least, put it in my comedy act. I need to write it down. I can never find a pen and paper when I need one.

Hattie gets up to look for a pen and paper. Lillian picks up a small pad of paper and a pen that were sitting on the table.

LILLIAN

There's one right here.

HATTIE

Thanks. Ok, joke about the red channels. Hmmm. (Pause) Wait a minute, I'm going to have a television show. I'll have writers.

LILLIAN

I'm sure you'll have a lot of input. It's your jokes that got you here to begin with.

HATTIE

It's going to be so great, Lil. I'm going to have to move. To Los Angeles.

Oh, you'll love it.

LILLIAN

Tell me what it's like.

HATTIE

Let's see, it's sunny all the time.

LILLIAN

All the time?

HATTIE

Pretty much. There's no snow.

LILLIAN

Never?

HATTIE

Never.

LILLIAN

I could get used to that.

HATTIE

And everything's new and clean. And there are palm trees lining the streets. And there's the beach.

LILLIAN

So it's a lot like Florida.

HATTIE

Except less humidity and more glamor. And there's Hollywood. It's lovely.

LILLIAN

Ma's going to hate it.

HATTIE

You're taking your mom?

LILLIAN

How can I not? I can't just leave her in New York.

HATTIE

She could go live with your sister.

LILLIAN

HATTIE

Soph? Are you kidding? As soon as she could, she got married and moved to Connecticut. She always has one excuse after another as to why she can never make it into the city to visit. If ma moved in with her, they'd kill each other.

LILLIAN

She'll drive you crazy.

HATTIE

And this is different how?

LILLIAN

I'm telling you, she's going to hate it.

Ruth enters, carrying a plate of rugelach.

RUTH

Who's going to hate what?

HATTIE

Oy ma, you never knock.

RUTH

Why knock? I heard you two talking, and I have rugelach.

LILLIAN

Yum! I'm starving.

RUTH

Of course you're starving. You're all skin and bones.

Lillian eats a rugelach.

LILLIAN

These are delicious! You should have one Hattie.

HATTIE

I need to keep my figure now that I'm going to be a star.

RUTH

I'm so confused. Hate vos? And vos is zis star? Is zere anozer elephant?

HATTIE

We're moving to Los Angeles.

LILLIAN

Now don't get ahead of yourself, Hattie.

RUTH

Who is ve?

HATTIE

Me, you, Zeb, Frieda.

RUTH

Vonderful! I'll pack my bags.

HATTIE

Just like that?

RUTH

Sure. Vhy not?

HATTIE

You've lived in New York City you're whole life, and you're ready to pick up and leave for Los Angeles on a moment's notice.

RUTH

I'm as adventurous as the next one.

HATTIE

You are not.

RUTH

Is it too late to start?

HATTIE

I suppose not.

LILLIAN

But you love New York.

RUTH

Since when? There's the schmutz and the cold, and everyone's so close together.

HATTIE

Who knew?

LILLIAN

That went well.

HATTIE

Don't you want to know why we're moving?

RUTH

Eh. I suppose. Go ahead.

LILLIAN

Hattie's getting her own show.

HATTIE

Lil! I might be getting my own show.

RUTH

You have a show. You do the comedy.

HATTIE

Exactly.

LILLIAN

Hattie was discovered.

RUTH

She doesn't need to be discovered. She's not lost.

HATTIE

What Lillian means is that a producer from Desilu studios approached me tonight and discussed the possibility of a television show. It's not a done deal, but considering that the show is pretty much about me, I think I have a good shot.

RUTH

I don't know.

HATTIE

What's there not to know?

RUTH

The television. I don't think it's good for Frieda.

HATTIE

What are you talking about? Of course it's good for Frieda.

RUTH

You're just tinkering about yourself. It's going to be bad for her. Her mother on television.

HATTIE

It's going to be good for her because it will be good for me.

RUTH

I just don't know.

HATTIE

Why do you do this ma? You ruin everything. This is what I've been working towards my whole life. I'm going to be famous.

RUTH

Fame is not all it's cracked up to be. It's not everything.

HATTIE

Of course it's not everything. But it's what I want.

RUTH

Let me tell you something. Your father, he wanted to be famous too. And look what it got him.

HATTIE

What are you talking about? He was a house painter, and then when I was fourteen years old, he left. And we never saw him again.

RUTH

Yes, he was a painter. But he was also a musician. Oy, how he could play the violin. So beautiful. It would make people cry tears of joy.

HATTIE

I remember.

RUTH

He knew he could not support a family as a musician. So, he painted houses. But in his heart he was a violinist. He was not happy.

HATTIE

So you think he left to pursue music.

RUTH

I know he did.

HATTIE

And you think that if I pursue my dream, I'll leave too.

RUTH

Perhaps.

HATTIE

But I'm taking you with me, to Los Angeles.

RUTH

I don't know.

HATTIE

What is there to know?

RUTH

I've been meaning to tell you.

HATTIE

Not again with the drama.

RUTH

No drama Hattie. That Metropolitan Life thing.

HATTIE

Oh, that letter that was nothing.

RUTH

It's from your father. Well, not from him, about him. Life insurance from his death.

HATTIE

Papa died? I didn't know he was still alive to then die.

RUTH

I didn't know until I got the letter.

HATTIE

I feel like I should be sad, but I'm not.

RUTH

In the end, he took care of us. But it's too late. I don't know if I even want it.

HATTIE

Don't be a martyr, Ma. You deserve the money. It doesn't make up for sixteen years, but it's something.

RUTH

I'll just give it to you and Zeb and Frieda.

HATTIE

Oh...Ma. (Pause) I'm not him. I'm not going to leave you for television or ever, and then turn up dead. I'm not leaving anyone.

LILLIAN

She has to take you with. How else is she going to get homemade babka and rugelach?

RUTH

If zats zee case, you'll have to come too.

LILLIAN

I'm in.

Zeb awakens and sits up. He's hung over.

ZEB

What time is it?

LILLIAN

Sleeping beauty awakens.

HATTIE

It's 2AM, go back to sleep.

ZEB

I'm up now. Oh, my head hurts.

RUTH

I might have sometsing in my pocket book.

She rummages through her purse.

HATTIE

He just needs water and an aspirin, Ma. Not that he deserves it.

ZEB

You're angry.

HATTIE

(sarcastically)

Oh, no.

RUTH

(pulling out a jar of pickles)

Here, drink zis.

LILLIAN

You have a jar of pickles in your purse.

RUTH

You never know when you'll want a good pickle.

LILLIAN

That's so true, you never know.

HATTIE

Better than being in a pickle.

ZEB

No thanks. I'm not in the mood for a pickle right now.

RUTH

No, drink zee juice.

ZEB

That's disgusting.

RUTH

It's for zee hangover. Drink it.

HATTIE

I'd prefer that he suffer.

LILLIAN

I've heard it works. You should drink it.

ZEB

I don't think I can.

RUTH

Zeb don't. If you want to suffer, who am I to say?

HATTIE

See what you've done. Just drink it.

Zeb takes a big gulp of the pickle juice, and hands the jar back to Ruth, who eats a pickle. She offers it to Lillian and Hattie.

No thanks. I'm trying to cut back.

LILLIAN

I'm good with the rugelach.

ZEB

There's rugelach?

HATTIE

Ma brought it.

Zeb gets up and take a rugelach off the plate on the table.

ZEB

I didn't know you could get it up here.

He takes a bite.

This is delicious.

RUTH

Of course.

HATTIE

Ma took over the kitchen again.

ZEB

You made this?

RUTH

You don't tsink I'd eat the farkakte shneken they serve here, do you?

HATTIE

Nothing's ever good enough. Why do you get her started?

LILLIAN

I think we're all benefitting from Ruth's dissatisfaction.

HATTIE

Speak for yourself.

ZEB

Someone's in a mood.

HATTIE

I was in a good mood, until someone woke up.

ZEB

Someone woke me up.

HATTIE

Well, someone got drunk, miraculously arrived back at the hotel, passed out and missed my show.

LILLIAN

It always gets interesting when they talk in the third person.

RUTH

Enough with ze bickering. Why don't you tell him about your little television ting.

HATTIE

It's not little. It's kind of a big deal.

ZEB

What did you do this time, Hattie?

HATTIE

You automatically assume I did something.

ZEB

With good reason.

HATTIE

You are not allowed to turn the tables.

LILLIAN

Hattie was approached by a producer.

ZEB

I hope you told him that you're married.

LILLIAN

Not that kind of approach.

HATTIE

And what if I was? I'm smart and funny. I'm surprised it doesn't happen.

ZEB

I've never heard a man say, gee, those are a great set of brains you have.

HATTIE

I've never heard a man say that of you either.

ZEB

Gai tren zich.

HATTIE

Gai in drerd arein!

ZEB

Gai mit dein kop in drerd.

HATTIE

Gai kaken oifen yam!

LILLIAN

Enough! I don't even know what you're saying, but I can't stand to hear it anymore.

RUTH

Vell, she said go fuck yourself, and he said go to hell, then he said that she should stick her head in the mud, and then she told him to get lost but it really means to shit in the ocean, which makes no sense because there is no ocean nearby.

HATTIE

Ma!

RUTH

What? I'm just explaining. It's an expression, Lillian. See yam is ocean...

HATTIE

No one wants to hear your explanation.

LILLIAN

I do.

ZEB

Me too.

HATTIE

Is it gang up on Hattie day? Cause I'm not going to let any of you ruin it for me. I'll just go to the lounge to celebrate.

Hattie grabs her coat to leave.

LILLIAN

I'm sorry hun. Forgive me. You're right. It's your day.

RUTH

Why would you want to ruin a good guilt trip. She learned from the best.

HATTIE

It's not a guilt trip. Although I could use a vacation from you right about now. All of you.

ZEB

Just tell me about this producer. I'm dying to know. Can't you see I'm dying?

HATTIE

The last thing I need is sarcasm. Speaking of dying, I could have killed you earlier tonight. Just placed a pillow over your face as you lay there passed out. But no, I spared you from a painless death.

LILLIAN

Hattie!

HATTIE

Oh, I'm just joking.

RUTH

See, I don't understand your joking.

LILLIAN

Just tell him, or I will.

HATTIE

Perhaps he should tell me first why he got so drunk that he came home too late to drive me and Lil to the show.

ZEB

I just had a few drinks. So what?

RUTH

Jews don't drink too much. It's not what we do.

HATTIE

You keep telling yourself that, Ma.

RUTH

It's zee goyim who drink too much. Not us. Give him a break.

ZEB

Yeah, give me a break.

HATTIE

Yeah, I'll give you a break all right.

ZEB

I'm going back to sleep.

HATTIE

Fine, I'll tell you.

LILLIAN

Finally.

HATTIE

A producer from Desilu was at the show tonight. The one I headlined, and you missed.

ZEB

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

HATTIE

And after the show he approached me about a television show they want to make. It's about a female comedian.

ZEB

And they want you to be the female comedian?

HATTIE

Yeah, well it's not a sure thing.

ZEB

See, you make this big deal about nothing.

HATTIE

It's not nothing. It sounds like the show was made for me.

RUTH

I told her that television is not good for her.

ZEB

I just want to know if you made any arrangements with the guy.

HATTIE

Well, not really.

ZEB

Good, and don't.

HATTIE

What is that supposed to mean?

ZEB

It means that I'm your manager, and I'll do all the negotiating.

HATTIE

Well, I think I should have some say in all this.

ZEB

Yeah, of course.

HATTIE

He wants me to meet with his people in the city on Monday at noon. We could go down together when you usually go on Sunday to do the bookings, and be back up in time for the Monday shows. You'll watch Frieda when I go down to the city, Ma, right?

RUTH

It's what I do.

ZEB

I suppose that could work. I'll have to rearrange a few things. But you're not meeting with this guy without me. If they hire you, I'll do the contract negotiations, or you'll end up giving them money to work for them.

HATTIE

That's not true.

ZEB

This is not just some opportunity for you to be famous Hattie. You should get paid what you're worth.

HATTIE

And how much is that?

ZEB

Oh, I just walked right into that one.

HATTIE

You sure did.

ZEB

I'll have to think about it. Do some research.

LILLIAN

This is so exciting! Aren't you all excited?

HATTIE

I'm trying not to get my hopes up, but I can't help myself.

RUTH

Feh!

ZEB

We shall see.

HATTIE

We shall.

END SCENE

SCENE SEVEN

Spotlight up and Lillian enters with a microphone. She addresses the audience.

LILLIAN

My husband died in the war, and I finally decided to try and meet someone new. And, guess what, I did. Thank you. Let me tell you, it's hard to find a good man. My boyfriend and I had our first date a year after we met. That's when he got out of prison. When we first met in person, he said to me "don't look down at me." I said I can't help it, you're only 5 feet tall. We went out to eat, and that's when I noticed he had some quirks. I mean, I've seen people eat with their hands, but not soup. Money meant nothing to him, he didn't have any. Really, he's the sweetest guy, and smart! I know because he reminds me every day. But he left. I haven't seen him in months. Last time I saw him I went over to his house, and he said he was going out for a candy bar. I guess I should've known something was up when he took suitcases with him. Oh, and he's diabetic.

Spotlight out. Lights up on Zeb and Hattie in the motel room packing.

HATTIE

After we're finished packing, I'm going to head next door to see how Ma and Frieda are doing. I doubt they've even started.

ZEB

That's fine. I need to take care of a few things before we head out.

HATTIE

What things?

ZEB

Just things.

HATTIE

I can't do this anymore.

ZEB

We don't have that much more to pack.

HATTIE

No. I mean the pretending everything is fine when it isn't.

ZEB

Everything is fine. Great actually. Having your own television show isn't fine? I worked some magic getting you a good deal, and you're not happy? You're just like your mother.

HATTIE

Don't you (pause), you know what. I'm going to take that as a compliment. (Pause) I meant the woman.

ZEB

I have no idea what you're talking about, as usual. Stop being so cryptic.

HATTIE

I know. And you know that I know. I mean, I don't know the specifics. But it's obvious to me, and everyone else for that matter that you've been with other women.

ZEB

Again, I have no idea what you're talking about.

HATTIE

Stop it Zeb. We've been pretending for a long time. I can't even say when. Maybe even as far back as when you came back from the war. (Pause) I know you're sleeping around. I just need to hear it. I'm ready to hear it.

Beat.

ZEB

Yes, I've been sleeping with other women.

Beat.

HATTIE

Well, I thought I was ready.

ZEB

You asked me to say it. We were fine.

HATTIE

No, we weren't.

ZEB

You know they don't mean anything to me.

HATTIE

Oh god. Don't say that. They do. Otherwise you wouldn't keep doing it.

ZEB

I come home to you and Frieda every night.

HATTIE

Sometimes so late, and drunk, and smelling of them and their perfumes. You don't even hide it very well anymore. You've gotten lazy and you don't care, about me, how I feel.

ZEB

I care.

HATTIE

No, no you don't.

ZEB

Why else would I still be here with you?

HATTIE

Because you don't know any different. Because you think you're doing the right thing.

ZEB

I am doing the right thing. I'm doing all of this for you.

HATTIE

For me! For me! How is sleeping with other women for me? Cause I'd like to know.

ZEB

I have to. I have a reputation to uphold. To be respected, so I can get you bookings at the resorts. I do it for you really.

HATTIE

For me. (Long pause) Let me get this straight. You need to sleep with a bunch of women, to be seen as a macher and get me gigs, because otherwise you wouldn't be respected?

ZEB

You don't get it.

HATTIE

I certainly don't.

ZEB

You're a woman.

HATTIE

And this is news?

ZEB

You're a woman comedian, and I'm your husband.

Hattie pauses and takes this in.

HATTIE

I see. Because I'm the one on stage, the one making a name for herself, because I'm successful, you have to have sex with lots of women in order to make a name for yourself. How pathetic.

ZEB

You make it sound pathetic, but it's not like that.

HATTIE

No? Then how is it?

ZEB

That war. The things I witnessed, burned into my mind forever. And the only thing that kept me from losing my mind is knowing that I helped. I helped save some lives Hattie. Some people even called me a hero.

HATTIE

You were a hero.

ZEB

Was. Because I came back, and I saw that after three years, you went on without me.

HATTIE

I had to.

ZEB

You could have waited. You didn't have to perform right away.

HATTIE

I didn't. I waited a couple of years. You know that. I couldn't imagine doing an act without you. We were the Zelig's. But I had all these jokes. I needed to share them. I needed to get on stage and hear people laugh. I needed to know that they were laughing because of me. Me. I had no idea I'd be good at it. But I was. I am. In fact good enough that I'm going to have my own television show. I had no idea that it would come to this. I mean I dreamt of it, but never really thought. But I deserve it. I've worked really hard most of my life to get here. To get to a place where I can call myself a comedian. Not just a woman comedian, but a comedian. And you encouraged me too.

ZEB

I did. I saw that you were good. That you had something that I didn't have. So yeah, I encouraged you. But I didn't know that it would be like this either. I'm not Zeb Zelig. I'm Hattie's husband. Hattie's manager.

HATTIE

You manage a lot of other people. And you do a good job of it too.

ZEB

But none of them are like you, and they're not my wife. You're my wife. And I'm the one who's supposed to be the breadwinner.

HATTIE

We got here together. You know I wouldn't have gotten here without you. We've been a team this whole time.

ZEB

No, you didn't need me. Not really.

HATTIE

That's just not true. You know I'm not good at managing things. Negotiating. Keeping things straight.

ZEB

You'd probably do just fine. I just told you so many times that you believed me.

HATTIE

You are the best manager in the Catskills. No one comes close.

ZEB

They only give me the time of day because of you. You have no idea how hard it is to be a man but not be the man of the family.

HATTIE

No. I don't. But I'm not going to feel sorry for you. You are who you are, not because of me being a comedian. You are not a consequence of my success. You chose who you are and how you want people to see you. People will respect you because you earn their respect. Not because you sleep with a bunch of women. In fact, getting drunk and having sex is not what makes you a man at all.

ZEB

Then you have a lot to learn Hattie. Because it is. It's what men do.

HATTIE

Not all men. I'm sure that when I get to Hollywood, I'll be proven right. There are a lot of women out there who've made names for themselves and have husbands who support them. And by support, I mean being faithful.

ZEB

You are so naive.

HATTIE

Perhaps I am. But I'd rather be naive than the wife of a man who thinks that treating woman as a means for being one of the guys leads to success. You could have been a success just by being you.

ZEB

By being Hattie Zelig's husband.

HATTIE

Is that all you think you are?

ZEB

That's all they think I am.

HATTIE

That's not true. You could have been so much more than that. But I think you left him in Germany. I want him back.

ZEB

This is all I've got.

HATTIE

I can't. I can't stay in a marriage knowing all this. Knowing that you will continue to justify having sex with other women as long as you come home to me. No. You can't come home to me anymore. I want a divorce. (Pause) Wow. That was easier to say than I thought. I want a divorce Zeb.

ZEB

You can't.

HATTIE

I just said it. What, you're going to not give me one?

ZEB

Your television show. The show is about a comedian and her family. Her happy family, including a husband and child. There's no way the executives at Desilu are going to allow a divorcee to be the star of a show that involves a happily married woman.

HATTIE

Sure they are. The show is about me.

ZEB

It's about who they think you are, which includes being happily married. In Hollywood, there's no separating out your private life from your life on television. Especially in this case. Look at Lucy and Ricky. Do you think they'd have a show if they got divorced?

HATTIE

It's their studio. They can do whatever they want.

ZEB

And who's going to back that? What company is going to advertise on that show? You never think things through. You divorce me, and you give up television.

HATTIE

I'll have them re-write the show. It'll be about a divorced comedian and her daughter.

ZEB

In denial. Just like your mother!

HATTIE

Good!(Pause) Then I'll kill you off. I mean on the show. I'll be a widow.

ZEB

You're going to have to choose Hattie, marriage and television, or giving up show business all together. I mean, maybe you can do shows for the retired Jews in Florida.

They'll love you in Boca Raton. But that's not what you really want. Face it Hattie, you need me a lot more than I need you.

Beat.

HATTIE

You want me to choose. Fine. Then I choose me.

Lights Fade. Spot light down center stage. Hattie enters with a microphone and ukulele.

HATTIE

Thank you ladies and gentlemen. It's good to be in Boca this summer. The mosquitoes are sure glad to see me.

I left my husband a couple years ago. I wish I knew where.

I told my ex I had a few thoughts to share with him, he was badly in need of one.

He said that a thought crossed his mind, and I said that's the most action your brain has had in weeks.

I'm pretty sure the only reason he still calls me Honey is because he forgot my name.

The other day he gave me my alimony check and asked for change. What he really needs is sense.

After I moved to Florida, I decided to learn how to drive. I never needed to when I lived in NYC. So I took my first lesson, and I was terrified. Right away I said to the instructor, "I don't think this is working." And he said, "why don't you get into the car first?" So I did, and then I said, "I still don't think this is going to work," and he said, "Miss Zelig, please get in front driver's seat."

Finally, I got the hang of it. I was driving and next thing you know, I got into an on purpose. Running over my ex certainly wasn't an accident.

I had to. He took my pocket book, and it was the only way I was going to get it back. When he took it he said he was borrowing it. Borrowing a pocket book is like borrowing a feminine sanitary pad. You're never going to get it back, at least not in the same condition.

Lights fade to black.

END OF PLAY