

BUYER & CELLAR

BY JONATHAN TOLINS

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DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

BUYER & CELLAR

In the dark, music: the opening phrase of a song associated with Barbra Streisand. [See Special Note on Songs and Recordings on copyrightpage.] Lights up on Alex More, somewhere north of 30, listening for a moment before he addresses the audience.

ALEX. "Memories light the corners of my mind:' Of course, the brain is basically round so technically it has no corners. At least if you go by the first definition of "corner" in the dictionary, "where two lines or edges meet to form an angle;' which is the first thing one generally thinks of when hearing the word "corner:' The metaphor only really works with the fifth definition, "a remote, secluded, or secret place:' which is probably what it means. And what she wanted. (*He thinks a moment, then gets down to business.*)

Before I tell you this story, we need to get a few things straight. First, this is a work of fiction. You know that, right? I mean, the premise is preposterous. What I'm going to tell you could not possibly have happened with a person as famous, talented, and litigious as Barbra Streisand. This is not journalism. There will be no excerpts on *This American Life*. I'm an actor. Perhaps you know my work. And this is a play written by a guy named Jon, who only met her once. She came to see another play he wrote, and before it started she offered him a piece of her Kit Kat bar. And to this day he regrets not taking it. He was afraid of making a mess. But enough about him, nobody cares.

The second thing you need to know is that I don't "do" her. I don't do impressions in general. And anyway, enough people do her - even some women - so you don't need me to. When I tell you about the conversations we had - which never really took place - I'll just *be* her and you can fill in the rest.

None of this is real. I don't exist. What does exist ... is this book. (*He hoists a copy of My Passion for Design by Barbra Streisand.*) *My Passion for Design* by Barbra Streisand. Published by Viking, out in time for Christmas, 2010. It says so right here in the back, under the photography credits that begin with "Principal Photography by Barbra Streisand:' I know, "How'd she get her?"

According to the front flap, *My Passion for Design* is Barbra's ... (*Reading.*) " ... account of the creation and construction of her newest home - the dream refuge she has longed for since the days when she shared a small Brooklyn apartment with her mother, brother,

and grandparents, and a culmination and reflection of her love of American architecture and design from the 18th to the 20th centuries:' This is some serious shit, and we'll get into it.

But what most concerns us begins on page 190. (*Reading.*) "Underground ... a Basement?? ... No ... a *Street*:' Here's the deal. After decades of fame and fortune and unbridled acquisition, Barbra has a lot of stuff. Who doesn't? But Barbra didn't want some run-of-the-mill basement to keep it all in. Barbra doesn't like run-of-the-mill anything, although she does, in fact, run a mill ... (*He shows the picture, pages 10-11, then cites the chapter on ...*) ... page 44. No, Barbra wanted something special. Let t1s quote the relevant passage ... (*Reading from the book.*) "I had another idea for this space. Why not do a street of shops like I had seen at Winterthur?" (*Looking up from the book.*) Jon had to look it up, too. Winterthur is some decorative arts museum in Delaware. We're supposed to know that. (*Back to the book.*) "In one section of the museum, they recreated all these little stores ... A china shop, a country store ... just the way they would have looked in the early 1800s. And then they used them to display various collections. Wouldn't it be fun to do something similar?" *Wouldn't it?*

So that's what she did. She built a shopping mall in her basement. (*Holding up the book.*) Remember, *this is the part that's real*. There's a doll shop. An Antiques store. A Gift Shoppe ... (*He pronounces it "shoppie."*) ... where they sell extra letter p's and e's, apparently. Even an Antique Clothes boutique where she keeps her old dresses. All of it displayed with totalitarian precision. It's as if your grandma designed the Apple Store.

Barbra's basement is just like any other mall, except for the total lack of customers or employees. Or, maybe not. What if somebody had to work down there? Jon, the playwright we don't care about, became obsessed with this idea. About an actor who gets the job. A character that I could play.

So. Here's what happened. (*The lights change, and Alex launches into his story.*) I was living the life of an actor in L.A., going to auditions, doing Equity-waiver shows, making money as a "Cast Member" at Disneyland. I was the Mayor of Toontown for a while, but there was a scandal. I was filling in for a friend as Roger Rabbit, and some eight-year-old kid eating a churro looked right at me through the giant mesh eyes and said, "Hot enough in there, loser?" So I threatened to shove a churro up his ass. Really quietly, but he told his mom, and she had, like, no sense of humor, and, well, I got fired. There's a reason they call it Mouse-schwitz. I had an acting teacher who said I need to demand respect, but it seems like if you do, you get fired. It's fine, I hated the drive to Anaheim anyway. I live in a studio apartment in Los Feliz, which is close to the 5, but still ...

And, hey, I thought, leaving the Magic Kingdom would give me more time to do L.A. theater! - which is exactly as tragic as it sounds. I dreamed of working at the Taper or the

Geffen, but that's like a totally closed whatever. Instead, I got offered a role in a new play at the Zephyr, you know, by the Johnny Rockets on Melrose. I would play a guy who comes out to his mother, who doesn't accept him. I know, but the director was in the same acting class - well, school - as Doris Roberts, and she was going to play the mom. So I had to say yes, because who knows who would come to see it? But then Doris Roberts ended up not doing it because she read the script, and my mom was played by Dee Wallace Stone. The mother in *E.T.* Totally nice. (*He sighs.*)

I was broke. I was uninsured. I was nowhere. I started to wonder why I ever left Wisconsin.

The day after my last performance in *Accepting Steven*, I got a call from Vincent in Human Resources at Disney. He felt bad about what went down in Toontown and wanted to help me out. We also had made out once on the Matterhorn, which was really hot because of the decapitation risk. I never told Barry about that. We'll get to him.

Vincent had gotten a weird call at the office. Somebody needed a person with Main Street, U.S.A., experience for a job on the west side. He remembered that I did some time stocking shelves at The Mad Hatter, and he knew I'd worked at Banana Republic. (He kept cracking jokes about getting into my Banana Republic, which is how we ended up on the Matterhorn.)

"But what's the job?" (*Throughout the play, Alex plays every role, performing both sides of conversations.*)

VINCENT. I'm not totally sure, but it's in Malibu.

ALEX. Shit, that's further than Anaheim. The gas alone ...

VINCENT. Hey, it's near the ocean with rich people. You said you wanted to get in good with the Geffen.

ALEX. The Geffen Playhouse. Not David Geffen himself. Do people actually refer to him as "The Geffen"?

VINCENT. I've heard it. So, can I tell them you're interested?

ALEX. I don't know ...

VINCENT. Come on. Let me help you. Whatever the job is, it's gotta be better than working the *Lilo & Stitch* Aloha Breakfast.

ALEX. They want me back?

VINCENT. No. But I do. And so does my Matterhorn.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) I know. Ick. But I needed money, and a job's a job. So what if it kept me from auditions, I never get any anyway. At least I could tell my agent I was busy. In

Malibu! (*Lights change. Music.*) Okay, there is no fast way to someplace in Malibu. Even from someplace else in Malibu. So I was in a really foul mood long before I found the address. I pulled my unwashed, used Jetta up to the gate that looked oddly like an old-fashioned but brand new barn door, and pushed the button on the intercom. (*He presses the button and waits.*) I hate gates at the end of people's driveways. I mean, who the fuck do you think you - ? (*A tone from the intercom.*)

SHARON. Yes?

ALEX. Hi, it's Alex More. I'm here for the interview.

SHARON. Oh, good, you're almost on time.

ALEX. Yeah, sorry, there was traffic.

SHARON. There's always traffic. Never say that again. Go to the barn, to the left, past the mill. (*Lights change. Music.*)

ALEX. And the gates opened. And suddenly, I was in another world, like when Dorothy steps from sepia into Technicolor. The grass was Irish golf course green. The leaves on the trees shimmered in the breeze like sequins on Liza Minnelli. A babbling brook slowly turned the giant red mill, while fish, all of them a tasteful black and white, swam happily but not too fast. I steered my Jetta along an irregular stone road, and yet the ride was smooth. It was like a dream until ... (*We hear the sound of chickens flapping their wings and clucking in alarm.*) I nearly ran over a chicken! Who has chickens in Malibu?

The house manager's name was Sharon, and she looked like she'd been through it. Picture Cloris Leachman right after she found out *Phyllis* was cancelled. She looked especially disgusted when she saw my dirty car and had me park it quickly behind some bushes, like we were hiding from the Nazis. Sharon then took me inside the enormous barn, to a tiny office off the gigantic kitchen.

SHARON. The lady of the house needs someone to work in the mall in her basement.

ALEX. I'm sorry?

SHARON. Downstairs. There's a mall with shops where she keeps her things. Sometimes she likes to go down there, but she doesn't like to be alone.

ALEX. So I would ...

SHARON. Take care of the inventory. Work the floor. Greet the customer. Just act normally. Vincent says you've worked retail.

ALEX. I have.

SHARON. Well, it's like that. It's all about making it feel real. The lady of the house likes every detail to be true. Truth is very important to her.

ALEX. To me, too.

SHARON. Good. So what happened in Toontown?

ALEX. *(To audience.)* This woman doesn't mess around. *(To Sharon.)* If you must know, something bad went down in Toontown. I forgot that I was working in an artificial environment. That takes a special kind of discipline, to never spoil the illusion. I won't make that mistake again. *(To audience.)* Sharon stared at me a long time, then pushed a huge stack of paper across the desk.

SHARON. Sign this.

ALEX. What is it?

SHARON. Confidentiality agreement.

ALEX. Should I talk to a lawyer?

SHARON. No.

ALEX. *(To audience.)* I picked up the pen and stared at the document. *(To Sharon.)* Look, before I sign anything, you gotta at least tell me who I'm working for. *(To audience.)* Sharon sighed and looked at me with a mix of conspiratorial wonder and fear of what lies ahead, the way Judi Dench looks at James Bond. Finally, she said, in almost a whisper ...

SHARON. Her name is Barbra.

ALEX. I signed. *(Lights change to Barry's apartment.)*

BARRY. No fucking way!

ALEX. *(To audience.)* I had to tell Barry. How could I not tell my boyfriend?

BARRY. You're going to remember everything, you hear me? How many megapixels is the camera on your phone? Maybe we can wire you for sound ...

ALEX. *(To Barry.)* Barry, stop. I wasn't supposed to tell you.

BARRY. Well, thank God you did. Thank God, and I don't believe in God. You can't handle this alone.

ALEX. They made me sign a confidentiality agreement. *(Barry gasps.)* Sharon said it's standard for working with celebrities.

BARRY. Well, I can understand that, with the tabloids and all those idiots wanting to know private details. I feel for them.

ALEX. You wanted to wire me for sound.

BARRY. Totally different. I have an artistic and historical interest.

ALEX. *(To audience.)* I should mention that Barry is an under-employed screenwriter and habitual TCM watcher. So to him ...

BARRY. This is the greatest thing that has ever happened. Ever. *(Lights shift. Music.)*

ALEX. I started on a Monday. I arrived early, parked and camouflaged the Jetta, and then Sharon took me down the back staircase into the mall. Not having been to Winterthur, I could only compare it to the Paris hotel in Las Vegas. You know, where the shops are, on the way to the self-park garage? It's not as grand as the Forum at Caesars Palace, and it's not outside like Main Street, U.S.A., at Disney, or The Grove. (Do you ever shop at The Grove? I love The Grove. It totally transformed L.A. If anybody ever says, "Hey, let's go to The Grove:" I'm like, "Yes!" even though I can't afford anything they sell there.)

Anyway, the lack of natural light in the windowless basement makes it difficult to pull off the illusion that you're actually in a quaint European arcade. But then, she doesn't really go for that. There are no painted skies and clouds like on the ceiling at Caesars. No, the ceilings in Barbra's mall are a tasteful off-white - a little too gray to be cream and not as white as eggshell. Putty? Linen? Putty linen? It's very elegant for a basement mall. You can hardly see the smoke detectors.

SHARON. Do you feel claustrophobic?

ALEX. *(To Sharon.)* Not yet.

SHARON. You will. The days will pass slowly or quickly, that's up to you.

ALEX. I notice there are no clocks anywhere. Like a casino.

SHARON. She doesn't like to be confronted with how much time she spends down here. I doubt you will either.

ALEX. *(To audience.)* Sharon took me to the Antique Clothes Boutique - herringbone floors and lavender walls with gold trim. Mirrors on the closet doors, gold chandeliers, and brightly lit, full-size display cases. It was like a dress shop in *Gigi* stocked with clothes from *Funny Girl*. Including ... is that... ?

SHARON. She sang "People" in that one. Onstage. The one from the movie is not as good. *(Alex's eyes go wide. Music as he regards the dress as if it's the Holy Grail. He then breaks the mood. Music out.)*

ALEX. *(To audience.)* Okay, here's the thing. When I started this job, I was not that big a Barbra queen. Not into Judy either, although I did enjoy it when Barry would sit me down

for a tutorial. I appreciated this stuff as part of my gay birthright, my heritage. I felt about Barbra Streisand the way Jews feel about the Passover Seder. And Barbra Streisand. But at that moment, when I stood before the "People" dress, I felt a kind of rapture that could only be described as religious ecstasy. I was a little girl in Fatima, blinded by a vision of the eternal.

SHARON. Come here, I'll show you how to clean it.

ALEX. *(To audience.)* Steam, feather dusting, and a vinegar solution for the mirror and base.

SHARON. I'm going now. There are things to do in the main house. Good luck. *(A shop bell rings, marking Sharon's exit.)*

ALEX. And then I was alone, with the Irene Sharaffs and the Cecil Beatons, with outfits that looked vaguely familiar from album covers, movies, and television specials I didn't even know I saw. A sailor suit top with a tie, a mink hat for tugboat travel, a black velvet *Back to Broadway* number. If someone had told me the Ark of the Covenant was behind the chaise, I wouldn't have been the least bit surprised. It was thrilling.

For a minute. Then it got really boring, really fast. And quiet. You have no idea how quiet it is in Barbra Streisand's basement. Not a sound except your own breathing and the whirring of the frozen yogurt machine and the popcorn maker.

I checked my phone. No regular service, but the WiFi down there is first rate, like 75 bits per second. I texted Barry. I refused to do what he asked, which involved pornographic poses in the "People" dress.

And then, at four o'clock, I heard the door at the top of the spiral staircase open. *(We hear the door open and footsteps down the stairs.)* My heart was in my throat - just breathe! - I turned and saw ... *(The shop bell rings. To Sharon.)* Oh, Sharon.

SHARON. *(Wry.)* Expecting someone?

ALEX. I was just dusting the shoes in the peach and pink closet.

SHARON. Here, I almost forgot.

ALEX. *(To audience.)* She handed me a dry cleaning bag.

SHARON. Much as we appreciate the Banana Republic sale rack, this will be more appropriate to your surroundings.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) I opened the bag to find my costume - a white cotton shirt with no collar, silk garters to wear on the sleeves, and a short apron made of the softest leather I'd ever touched. I checked the label. Donna Karan. D'uh. There was also a hat. (*To Sharon.*) I'm not sure about the visor.

SHARON. I'm sorry, did someone ask you anything?

ALEX. It's just, I think it will make me look too much like a bank teller. (*As Jimmy Stewart in It's a Wonderful Life.*) I understand from Mr. Potter you'd like a loan for your feed store ...

SHARON. (*Cutting him off.*) All right, lose the hat. See you tomorrow. And wash your car! (*The lights shift. Music.*)

ALEX. I spent Tuesday in the Antiques Shop, where everything is meticulously arranged to look like it just happened to land there. Lace doilies hanging out of drawers just so, paintings and pillows on the floor. Mirrors and chamber pots. I put on my Mr. Hooper costume and dusted. Did she ever think for one second when she was buying all this stuff about how much dusting would be necessary? No. Of course not. Why would she?

On Wednesday I worked in Bee's Doll Shop. Nobody ever told me who Bee was, so I pretended I was Bea Arthur, sarcastically arranging dolls and giving them dirty looks. I did a lot of slow burns. (*He demonstrates a Bea Arthur slow burn.*) It passed the time, and helped me get over the weird feeling that the dolls were staring at me, especially the French automaton with the pipe that blows bubbles. Soon I was giving them all names and having conversations. I wasn't one of those boys who played with his sister's dolls, but I was making up for it now. And then I stopped and asked myself, "Is this what it's come to? Have I really sunk this low?" (*The shop bell rings as the door opens. A la Mrs. Lovett.*) A customer! (*Lights shift. Music: a voice humming the song from the top of the show. [See Special Note on Songs and Recordings on copyright page.] Alex turns and his eyes open wide.*) No, not a customer. The customer, browsing and humming to herself. And, man, this lady can *hum!* (*He listens a moment.*) Okay, okay, stay calm. Sharon said, "Just act normally." But what is normal in this situation? What is even next to normal? Just breathe. Say something! (*To Barbra.*) Good afternoon. (*To audience.*) She just nodded, barely acknowledging my presence in her basement. (*To Barbra.*) Please let me know if you need anything. (*To audience.*) I knew I was taking a chance but I wanted some connection. Isn't that what all of us want? Finally, she looked at me, blinked twice, and, with an ironic smile, whispered in one of history's most cherished and recorded voices ...

BARBRA. I don't need anything.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) Ice broken. She smiled to herself and went back to browsing and humming, granting me permission to stare.

The first thing you notice is the skin. It really is luminous, like she's lit from within. Actually, she does control the lighting wherever she goes, and this is her house, so who knows how she does it?

She's wearing black. Flowing pants with an elastic waistband - she calls them «clothes for eating" on page 180 - and a flowing black, jacket-like thingie over a burgundy blouse. Burgundy is her favorite color, and the jacket makes it impossible to see whatever the body is doing under there. The whole outfit looked like what Donna Karan might design special for her good friend Dorothy Zbornak.

The hair is in a classic Jennifer Aniston "Rachel" cut, circa 1995 but blonde and streaked and styled to look like hair always just pops out of sixty-eight-year-old heads that way. It works for her.

And then there are the nails. Sculpted and smooth with blushing pink polish, and long enough to make a statement - that statement being, "No, I don't play piano or type my own blog, so fuck *you*:'

And then ...

BARBRA. You have nice things here.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) She talked to me! She wants to engage. (*To Barbra.*) Thank you.

BARBRA. And the room is so gracefully proportioned.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) She's testing me. (*To Barbra.*) Yes, we love it.

BARBRA. Everything is very clean and well-arranged. (*She moves the chair an inch.*)

ALEX. (*To Barbra.*) Thank you. I work hard at getting everything just right. The dolls deserve that, don't you think? (*To audience.*) She looked at me, searching my face for the slightest hint of sarcasm. But I wouldn't let her find it.

BARBRA. That's a nice way to look at it. What can you tell me about them?

ALEX. (*To audience.*) Oh, so Mama wants to play. (*To Barbra.*) The stories are endless. So, so many. I wouldn't know where to begin. (*To audience.*) She nodded, looked around, and then pointed to the French automaton with the pipe.

BARBRA. Who is she?

ALEX. Ah, you mean Fifi. You have a good eye. (*To audience.*) Thank God I took that improv class at The Groundlings. (*To Barbra.*) Fifi was created by famed doll and clock

maker Julien de la Florscheim in Paris during the French Resistance. He worked on her every night to calm his nerves and entertain his two daughters, Yvette and Solange, while they hid from the Nazis.

BARBRA. Oh, my God. What happened?

ALEX. It's very sad. Julien was killed in the battle of the Third Arrondissement, but his family survived and Solange brought Fifi with her to relatives in Milwaukee, smuggled in a bag of old *tallises*. Fifi, not Solange.

BARBRA. But how did it end up here? I mean, how could they ever part with something that meant so much to them?

ALEX. Too many painful memories. Also neither woman had children of her own - Yvette was institutionalized for what we would now diagnose as extreme PTSD, and Solange was a lesbian. Solange wanted the doll to bring joy to others, joy that the de la Florscheims could no longer feel without their dearly departed, doll- and clock-making father.

BARBRA. That's very moving. Does Fifi do anything special?

ALEX. *(To audience.)* Like she doesn't know. *(To Barbra.)* But of course. I'm so glad you asked. *(To audience.)* And with that, I turned the crank. *(Tinkling music box music plays. Alex is surprised. To Barbra.)* Oh, she plays music, too. I'd forgotten that. *(To audience.)* Fifi cocked her head slightly, lifted the pipe to her lips and one after another, soap bubbles grew and lifted up into the air. Barbra watched each bubble float to the ceiling and I watched her. She must have seen this before, but her eyes were filled with wonder and some sadness I couldn't quite figure out. *(Barbra watches a moment, listening to the music from the music box.)*

BARBRA. She's so beautiful.

ALEX. *(To Barbra.)* Yes, she is. To de la Florscheim, the bubbles represented a lightness and form of escape from the horror of their everyday, imprisoned lives. *(To audience.)* Damn, I'm good. I must have hit the bullseye because ...

BARBRA. How much?

ALEX. What?

BARBRA. How much are you asking?

ALEX. *(To audience.)* Okay, I know I should have been prepared for this question, but I wasn't. *(To Barbra, fumbling.)* Oh, let's see, hmm, there doesn't seem to be a tag. Let me

check the book. (*To audience.*) I remembered seeing an old leather journal on the counter. I opened it and ran my finger down a blank page, pretending to find something. (*To Barbra.*) Eight hundred and fifty.

BARBRA. *What? Are you crazy? Thats ridiculous!*

ALEX. Actually, I think it's quite reasonable for a one-of-a-kind piece like this, with such a rich history ...

BARBRA. I'll give you five hundred.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) Is she kidding me? (*To Barbra.*) I'm sorry, the price is non-negotiable.

BARBRA. Six hundred.

ALEX. Fifi is like a member of my family. I wouldn't part with a member of my family for less than eight hundred and fifty. (*To audience.*) She sighed, but it came out more like a grunt.

BARBRA. I'll have to think about it.

ALEX. (*To Barbra.*) All right. Would you like me to place the item on hold?

BARBRA. Oh, that's good. Yes.

ALEX. Fine. What name should I put it under? (*To audience.*) She looked panicked for a second, as if, like me, she hadn't thought that far ahead. She wasn't used to letting in a stranger, even one she paid to spend five days a week in her basement. Finally, she lifted her chin and said, with a twinkle in her eye ...

BARBRA. Call me ((Sadie:' (*The shop bell rings, signaling Barbra's exit.*)

ALEX. And then she left. But I knew we'd meet again. (*Lights change. Alex is buoyant.*) And suddenly, I started to like this job. The 85-minute drive didn't seem to take as long. The "check engine" light didn't seem to glow as bright. I went over the story of Sadie in my shop so many times that Barry finally said something that no gay man in history had ever said before ...

BARRY. Stop! I don't want to hear another word about Barbra Streisand!

ALEX. Each day, I put on my *Music Man* costume and went through the entire mall, making sure the counters were clean, all the "merchandise" was properly displayed, that the flowers in the root cellar hadn't wilted. And then I'd stand in Bee's Doll Shop and wait.

And wait.

Yogurt machine. Popcorn maker. *Whirrr.* (*The doorbell rings. To Barbra.*) Sadie! Hello! I had a feeling you'd be back.

BARBRA. I wanted to show you something.

ALEX. *(To audience.)* She was in no mood for pleasantries. She opened an old L.L. Bean monogrammed tote and pulled out something fuzzy and odd.

BARBRA. When I was a little girl, living in Brooklyn, I didn't have any dolls to play with. We were too poor, and not just financially, you know what I mean? I had to sleep in the same bed with my mother but there was no warmth there. It was the coldest place I'd ever been, colder than Aspen.

Now, remember I was a smart, precocious little girl, always asking questions, always wanting to know why, but what could I play with? I had nothing.

So I used a hot water bottle. That was my only friend. I loved that hot water bottle and carried it around with me everywhere. Finally, my friend Irving's mother ...

ALEX. You just said you had no friends ...

BARBRA. Don't interrupt. Finally, my friend Irving's mother, Mrs. Borokow - she let me call her by her first name, Toby - she sewed a little hat and sweater that I could put on my hot water bottle to make it like a real doll. At least to me. God forbid my mother should lift a finger to make her little girl feel loved even for one second, but Toby, Mrs. Borokow, she did. She knitted a whole outfit for my hot water bottle. God, I loved that doll more than anything. It was so easy to make it pee.

ALEX. Is this the actual one?

BARBRA. No. My friend Maxine made this one for me a few years ago. We didn't have cashmere in Brooklyn. The original was lost. My mother probably threw it out with the trash.

ALEX. That's a sad story.

BARBRA. Isn't it? So you can see how much dolls mean to me. And how important it is when I see one that touches my heart the way my Shayna Bootle did. It's a miracle, really, that after all these years, I could find a new, perfect little friend.

ALEX. It's still eight-fifty.

BARBRA. *Arrgh! What is it with you?!*

ALEX. *(To audience.)* We stared at each other, a total standoff. And suddenly, I felt a special shiver of excitement, the almost erotic pleasure of not giving this woman what she wanted. It was little me against the tank in Tiananmen Square. And I saw something new flash in her eyes for just a second. Was it ... respect?

BARBRA. Keep it on hold. I'll be back. (*The doorbell marks her exit. Lights change to Barry's apartment.*)

BARRY. Oh, please. The hot water bottle doll? She's been telling that stupid story for decades.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) Barry had a shitty meeting at Paramount that afternoon and he was taking it out on her. (*To Barry.*) Hey, just because she's told it before doesn't mean it's not true.

BARRY. Oh, God. You fell for it.

ALEX. I did not! (*To audience.*) Okay, maybe I was a little sucked in. Not enough to lower the price, but moved and not bothered by the shameless manipulation, like *Prince of Tides*. (*To Barry.*) I don't know. I feel like she really opened up to me.

BARRY. Because you were thwarting her. And the minute you stood your ground - which makes me love you, by the way - she was out the door.

ALEX. Wait, did you just say you love me?

BARRY. What? No, in the context of the - don't change the subject.

ALEX. What's the subject?

BARRY. The fact that this incredibly privileged, powerful woman still acts like a Dickensian victim. Okay, yes, her father died, and that's terrible, and she lived in a cramped apartment and her stepfather, Louis Kind, never liked her, but she was famous and had the world at her feet by the time she was nineteen. At what point is that enough for her?

ALEX. (*To audience.*) I should mention at this point that Barry's last name is Rosenstock, and his parents grew up in Brooklyn.

BARRY. You have to remember that she wasn't the only one who grew up under unhappy circumstances in that borough. My grandmother had six sisters, and each one was as vicious and *farbissina* as you can imagine.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) It's a Yiddish word, it means bitter and resentful. Barry taught me - the word, not the feeling. I knew that already.

BARRY. Now, my dad grew up under those circumstances, not sleeping in his mom's bed, it's true, but just about. And he laughs it off now. He and the cousins sit around at Thanksgiving and trade funny stories about their parents - ((Remember when this one made me eat puke?" "Remember when that one locked me in a closet for seven hours?" - and they laugh and laugh, because they got the fuck over it. They're even, and I'm not making this up, *nostalgic* for the old days.

And that's healthy. Nobody has a "happy childhood;" not really. But we're supposed to believe that Barbra was so offended by the squalor and emotional emptiness of her surroundings ...

Ooh, you know who she was exactly like? Veda Pierce. Oh, my God! I can't believe I never thought of this before. She was just like Joan Crawford's daughter in *Mildred Pierce*, snotty little Veda who appreciates nothing and thinks everything is beneath her, to the point where you cheer when someone finally has the guts to slap her across the face.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) This was turning violent and ugly, and I felt the need to defend my best customer, Sadie. (*To Barry.*) Did you ever think that maybe you just don't like the way she denigrates Brooklyn?

BARRY. Okay, let me tell you something about Brooklyn. In the first half of the twentieth century, that place produced more talent, smarts, and *chutzpah* than any other place on earth. The *mensch*s that came out of there gave us the best books, the best TV, the best movies, the best theater, the best music, the best grandparents, you name it, the best of everything. And yes, Rona Jaffe, who wrote *The Best of Everything*, was born in Brooklyn. That place in that time was a miracle that has never been matched, and certainly not by the Park Slope lesbians who push their double strollers down Union Street these days. But does Miss S honor Brooklyn as the American cradle of invention, heart, humor, and moxie? No! To her it was the place she had to escape from as fast as possible, so she could make a movie every blue moon and live on a Malibu bluff in a colossal compound with a stranger dressed as Mr. Whipple in her basement.

Why are you smiling?

ALEX. I just love it when you get like this.

BARRY. Yeah?

ALEX. Yeah. (*To audience.*) After that we had the most amazing sex. And while we were doing it, I thought to myself, ((How can anyone not like Jews? I'll have to remember to ask my grandmother the next time I see her:')) (*Lights change, the estate.*) Sharon looked at me funny when I walked in for work the next morning. (*To Sharon.*) What?

SHARON. I hear you've made a friend.

ALEX. Oh, really? She said something?

SHARON. Just remember, the customer is always right. Especially down there.

ALEX. Thanks for the tip. (*To audience.*) I had plenty of time to mull that over, because Sadie didn't show for days. She was testing me again, toying with my affection. Or maybe she was out of town.

I realized ours was a somewhat ... unequal relationship, but now it really started to hurt.
Yogurt machine. Popcorn maker. *Whirrr*.

Sadness. Self-loathing. And then ... (*The doorbell rings again.*) Hello, Sadie. What can I do for you?

BARBRA. I found a coupon.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) She looked triumphant as she pulled from some secret pocket a piece of paper with the words "Bee's Doll Shop, First Anniversary Sale" printed at the top. I recognized the template from AppleWorks. Who still has AppleWorks? It's like seven operating systems behind.

BARBRA. See? It's a coupon and it's still good, I checked the date.

ALEX. Was this done on a dot-matrix printer?

BARBRA. I must have gotten it in an e-mail and printed it out. It's still good.

ALEX. (*Reading.*) Three hundred and fifty dollars off. Wow, how lucky for you. That would take the price of Fifi down to five hundred, just like you wanted.

BARBRA. I know, it's an amazing coincidence. It's like I must have remembered the coupon somewhere in the back of my mind.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) Sharon's words were ringing in my ears. (*To Barbra.*) I guess I have no choice but to honor this.

BARBRA. (*Shrugging innocently.*) No, I guess you don't.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) I picked up Fifi and felt sad. I would miss her. As much as Yvette and Solange did when they were forced to say, "*Au revoir, mon amie.*" (*To Barbra.*) Would you like me to gift wrap it for you? There's a wrapping station in the Gift Shoppe next door.

BARBRA. No, I'll just take it.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) She grabbed it from me like it was already hers.

BARBRA. So, how much is the total?

ALEX. (*To Barbra.*) What?

BARBRA. With tax and everything. (*He sighs and goes back to the book.*)

ALEX. (*To audience.*) I opened the leather book and pretended to do the calculations while she waited impatiently, tapping her famous fingernails on the counter. (*To Barbra.*) Five thirty-six twenty-five.

BARBRA. I brought cash.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) She handed me five hundred and forty dollars, and I had no idea what to do. There was no cash register anywhere. I took out my wallet but there was only a twenty plus about fifteen cents in my pocket. I charge everything. Everyone does. (*To Barbra.*) I'm sorry, I don't have change.

BARBRA. *What?* What do you mean you don't have change? What kind of a place is this?

ALEX. I ... I don't know how to answer that.

BARBRA. You sell these beautiful things, but what's the point if you don't know how to run a business? I mean, this is ridiculous. No wonder I never see anybody else in here.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) I had no idea what to say, so I did what I usually do. I apologized.

BARBRA. Well, I suppose that makes it all better then.

ALEX. Apparently it didn't. Because she went on like that, chewing me out for almost an hour. I stood there and took it, beet red but fascinated by how important this seemed to her, how important *everything* seems to her. How disappointed she was in me, in ... everything really. I let her go on, releasing all the anger that lived somewhere deep inside her, that lives inside everyone in show business. And I promised to do better. "*Good:*" she said ...

BARBRA. I just want you to care as much as I do. (*The doorbell rings as Barbra exits.*)

ALEX. If she were a man, I'd call her a perfectionist.

Sharon stopped me on the way to my car by the rose bushes.

SHARON. Five-forty, hand it over. Or we can take it out of your pay.

ALEX. (*To Sharon.*) Do that. And I'll change these for smaller bills.

SHARON. Sounds like a plan.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) Sharon laughed grimly as she walked back to her office, guzzling a Pellegrino from the walk-in fridge.

The next morning, I walked into Bee's Doll Shop and found Fifi staring at me from her usual spot, as if it had all been a dream.

Was that it? Was it all over? Would I never see ... (*The doorbell rings. To Barbra.*) Good afternoon, Sadie. How may I help you? (*To audience.*) She gave me a cockeyed smile and said something I didn't expect.

BARBRA. Please. Call me Barbra.

ALEX. Okay. Nice to meet you ... Barbra.

BARBRA. I like the way you say it. Some people still pronounce the middle A, the one I took out. Hey, I need to get something from the gift shop. Wanna come?

ALEX. *(To audience.)* I said yes. *(Music. Lights change as Barbra leads Alex through the mall.)* She took my hand and led me out the door. Her hand was soft and I surreptitiously brushed one of her nails with the pad of my thumb, to feel its lacquered shell. It felt smooth as glass, but easily breakable. "Tough as nails" must mean the other kind.

BARBRA. It was so fun playing with you that way. I love doing that. That's all acting and directing is, you know. It's a form of play, you know what I mean?

ALEX. *(To Barbra.)* Absolutely, *Barbra.* *(To audience.)* She stopped at the door to the Gift Shoppe and looked right at me, and blushed.

BARBRA. Oh, my god. What do I call you? I mean, it's so awful, I don't remember your name.

ALEX. *(To Barbra.)* Oh, don't worry about it. It's Alex. Alex More.

BARBRA. Alex. That's a nice name. Reminds me of *Jeopardy!* I love that show.

ALEX. *(To audience.)* She ushered me into the Gift Shoppe and started rummaging through cabinets. *(To Barbra.)* What are we looking for?

BARBRA. Oh, Barbara Boxer's coming for dinner. I want to put fancy soaps in the powder room. She's one of the most powerful women in the world, right? She deserves to smell something nice on her hands after she goes to the bathroom.

ALEX. I totally agree.

BARBRA. I like to get things the way I think they should be.

ALEX. No kidding. *(He laughs. She squints at him.)*

BARBRA. What does that mean?

ALEX. *(On the spot.)* Oh. I just, I mean, from before. You're one tough customer.

BARBRA. Everyone says I'm demanding. Well, let me tell you something, Alex More. It's good to be demanding. Because in this world, especially when you're a woman, nobody just gives you anything. Remember that.

ALEX. I will. Especially when I'm a woman. *(He chuckles at his joke. Beat.)*

BARBRA. You're gay.

ALEX. Yeah.

BARBRA. God, there are so many of you. I know it's supposed to be ten percent of the population, but not in my life. Feels more like seventy. Why do you think that is?

ALEX. We have good taste. (*To audience.*) That made her smile.

BARBRA. I'd say don't brown-nose, but you're right. The gays get everything first. (*Then.*) Hey, do you know Jason?

ALEX. No. I saw him once at a party.

BARBRA. He's cute, right?

ALEX. Very handsome. And he was terrific in *Prince of Tides*.

BARBRA. Yes, he was, wasn't he? I wanted him to keep acting after that, and he tried film school, but ... what can you do? He's so shy, I don't know why. (*She thinks, then.*) Yes, I do. Of course I do. It can't be easy coming from all this. But he's a good man. A *mensch*.

ALEX. That's what I hear.

BARBRA. (*Suspicious.*) Oh, you hear that, do you? Well, good. Maybe you'll meet him down here one day.

ALEX. Oh, um, that would be great. Although, I should probably tell you I have a boyfriend.

BARBRA. I wasn't trying to fix yo11 up. Jesus Christ, just because I'm a Jewish mother doesn't mean I'm a Jewish mother. You're not even a doctor. (*She laughs and laughs, then recovers.*) So, you have a boyfriend. What's his name?

ALEX. Um, Barry.

BARBRA. Barry! My first boyfriend's name was Barry.

ALEX. Oh, well, I'm sure he was nothing like my Barry.

BARBRA. You'd be surprised. I know I was. My Barry had excellent taste. He could find three *shmattas* in a thrift store and make you look like something. Good taste is very important.

ALEX. (*To Barbra.*) Where do you think it comes from?

BARBRA. God. Maybe. Although if that were true, Israelis would dress better. I don't know, *where is it written?* You just have to really look at things and have a nose for details. I have a nose for everything, always did, and I wouldn't get it fixed. (*Barbra laughs again.*)

ALEX. (*To audience.*) Another disproportionate laugh, but completely charming.

BARBRA. So few people truly open their eyes and *look* at what's around them. I love the color of your hair.

ALEX. What? Oh, thanks.

BARBRA. I was thinking of having pillows made that color for the couch in the family room, but I wasn't sure. It's a pleasing shade. Do you color it?

ALEX. Not yet.

BARBRA. Good for you, Alex More.

ALEX. Is the family room upstairs?

BARBRA. No, it's in the main house.

ALEX. I'd love to see it sometime.

BARBRA. (*Suddenly sharp.*) Why? So you can tell all your friends?

ALEX. (*To audience.*) There was a sudden fury in her eyes. (*To Barbra.*) No, of course not. I'm not like that. I don't have that many friends.

BARBRA. Me neither. Not the real kind.

I'm sorry. I'm a little nervous. Everybody has an opinion about me, nobody's neutral, you know? I'm too this or too that. They talk about me on Fox. It wears me down. Plus, I'm putting myself out there again with my book.

ALEX. Oh? You wrote a book?

BARBRA. (*Brightening immediately.*) It's my first one. And it's not an autobiography, what's left to say, right? No, it's called *My Passion for Design*. It's all about this place. How I put it together, how it reflects my aesthetic, my passion ... for design.

ALEX. That sounds amazing. I can't wait to read it.

BARBRA. I'm also the principal photographer.

I was thinking of giving Senator Boxer a little gift. What do you think of these old jade earrings?

ALEX. Those'll look great with her short haircut on *Rachel Maddow*.

BARBRA. That's what *I* thought. Looks like you have good taste, too. Tell me something, Alex More. Do you know how to gift wrap? (*Holding up her nails.*) It's a little hard for me.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) As a matter of fact, I do know how to gift wrap. But I worked slowly, to make the moment last. Since Senator Boxer was her guest, we talked politics. And let me say something to all the haters out there. My Sadie is *very* well-informed. Or at least as informed as I am, and I read *Salon* and *HuffPo*.

She talked for so long, and since there are no windows, Sharon had to call down on the intercom. It was already five o'clock, and the stylists had arrived.

BARBRA. Oh, my God, I can't believe I've spent so much time down here! And it's all your fault. This was so much fun. You're fun.

ALEX. *(To Barbra.)* Oh, thanks. All I did was listen.

BARBRA. Well, that's fun for me.

ALEX. *(To audience.)* She took the soaps and the impeccably gift-wrapped earrings and headed to the door. But then she stopped.

BARBRA. Say, Alex. What are you doing tonight?

ALEX. Me? No plans. *(To audience.)* Mental note: Text Barry, can't watch *Idol*. *(To Barbra.)* Totally free. *(To audience.)* I tried desperately to remember what clothes I came in. Was I presentable for Senator Boxer? Does Jason keep anything upstairs? What size is he?

BARBRA. It's just, people might want some frozen yogurt later. Maybe you could man the Sweet Shop.

ALEX. *(To Barbra, hiding his disappointment.)* Oh. Um, sure. That would be ... great. My first overtime.

BARBRA. *(Squinting.)* What did you say?

ALEX. *(To Barbra, deer in headlights.)* Nothing.

BARBRA. *(Exasperated.)* No, I heard. There's that word again. "Overtime! Overtime!" That's all I hear when I'm directing. The minute I want something extra, to get the perfect light or put leaves back on the trees, the first word out of everybody's mouth is "overtime." Jesus. Is that all I am to people?

ALEX. Of course not ...

BARBRA. Then why is everything dollars and cents? It isn't to me. Why can't people care as much as I care?

ALEX. I do. I care a lot. *(To audience.)* Mental note: Ask Sharon for overtime. *(To Barbra.)* I'll be here. As long as you need. You can count on me.

BARBRA. Yeah. I have a feeling I can. *(Lights change. Evening at the mall. Faint sounds of a party upstairs.)*

ALEX. *(To audience.)* So I stayed. I was surprised to find out that the lights do change in the mall at nighttime. They become softer, with a twilight glow. I could faintly hear the party upstairs, rich and famous people laughing and talking. One booming voice might have been Rob Reiner. I couldn't wait to meet everybody. "They're gonna love me!"

But no one ever came down. Of course not. They must be serving real dessert upstairs. No one's going to want frozen yogurt.

Ten-fifteen. That's it, I'm out of here. (*The shop bell rings.*)

BARBRA. Oh good, you're still here, I was afraid you might have left by now.

ALEX. (*To Barbra.*) No. How was the party?

BARBRA. That Barbara Boxer thinks she knows everything. How was it down here?

ALEX. Fine. Uneventful.

BARBRA. Good. So, can I get some frozen yogurt?

ALEX. Wasn't there dessert upstairs?

BARBRA. Why are you asking me that?

ALEX. No reason. What flavor would you like?

BARBRA. Coffee. In the bigger-size cup. With sprinkles.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) As I filled the cup, I saw for the first and only time an expression of pure pleasure on Barbra's face.

BARBRA. (*Re: the yogurt.*) More! And don't leave a lot of air in the center.

ALEX. I went to pour rainbow sprinkles on top using a plastic spoon but she grabbed my wrist, took the cup away from me, and pressed the whole thing down into the sprinkle bin, turning the cup in her hand until the yogurt was caked with them.

BARBRA. This is how they do it at Carvel.

ALEX. She started to eat right in front of me, moaning with every spoonful.

BARBRA. Mmm, mmm, this is so *good!*

ALEX. But then she got embarrassed.

BARBRA. I better go back up. Jim is waiting for me. I'll give him a taste. Thank you, you do such a good job down here!

ALEX. (*To Barbra.*) Thank *you*. So is that it? Am I done for the night? (*Barbra thinks, then ...*)

BARBRA. Stay a little longer, is that okay? Another fifteen, twenty minutes? You don't have anywhere to be, do you?

ALEX. Oh. No, that's fine.

BARBRA. Good. Good night, Alex. (*Eating as she goes.*) Mmm, this is so *good!*

ALEX. *(To audience.)* She didn't tell me why she wanted me to stay, but it all became clear after about ten minutes when ... *(The bell rings. He stands a little taller and squints to become ...)*

JAMES. I'm looking for Alex who works down here? Is that you?

ALEX. James Brolin is a very handsome man, still. Tall, with a thick head of white hair, and deep-set eyes in a permanent, questing squint. *(He demonstrates.)* Everything about him just seems ... thick. *(To James Brolin.)* What can I do for you?

JAMES. I just felt like some frozen yogurt.

ALEX. Sure thing. What kind would you like?

JAMES. *(Remembering his lines.)* Uh, let's see. I think I'd like coffee flavor, in the bigger-sized cup, with rainbow sprinkles. And make sure you don't leave a lot of air in the center. You got that? *(Alex smiles. He understands perfectly.)*

ALEX. Yes, sir, coming right up.

JAMES. So, you're the man who's been hanging around my wife. Should I be jealous?

ALEX. Ha! No, sir. We're just friends. I mean, she's a steady customer.

JAMES. That she is.

ALEX. *(To audience.)* He smiled that manly, crinkly smile that made my mother swoon when he was Dr. Steven Kiley on *Marcus Welby, M.D.* *(Alex stares and smiles until ...)*

JAMES. Uh, the yogurt?

ALEX. *(To James.)* Right. *(Preparing the yogurt.)* You know, I'm a big fan of yours.

JAMES *(Surprised and pleased.)* Oh, gosh, really?

ALEX. *(To audience.)* They always act surprised. *(To James.)* Yeah, when I was a kid, *Capricorn One* was one of my favorite movies.

JAMES. No kidding.

ALEX. Yeah, I had the VHS tape, and I watched it over and over.

JAMES. Well, we had a lot of fun making that, pretending to be astronauts, in the suits and everything. You know, for years people thought the government had actually faked the moon landing, all because of that movie. It's wonderful to be part of something that has that kind of impact.

ALEX. I'll bet.

JAMES. A lot of people went back and looked at that movie again in the nineties, because it was probably O.J. Simpson's best work on film. It's a shame he had to give up acting. And you know who else was in that movie, who was really the biggest star at the time?

ALEX. Oh, God, right! Elliott Gould!

JAMES. The former Mr. Streisand. I guess we both landed on Barbra.

ALEX. *(To audience.)* I handed him the fro-yo, caked with sprinkles, with a napkin and a plastic spoon. He didn't even taste it. I didn't expect him to.

JAMES. Thanks, I'll, uh, eat this upstairs. How much do I owe you?

ALEX. *(To James.)* It's on the house.

JAMES. Okay. Oh, and you can go home now. Good night, Alex. Thank you for doing such a good job. Things have been nice around here.

ALEX. I'm glad. Good night, Mr. B. *(To audience.)* I sounded like Shirley Booth as *Hazel*, but it felt right. *(Lights shift, morning.)* I was actually whistling a happy tune when I walked into the barn the next morning, when Sharon appeared from nowhere.

SHARON. What time did you get home last night?

ALEX. *(To Sharon.)* Not too late. The traffic wasn't bad, and KCRW was playing the Santa Monica City Council meeting, which always makes the trip go fast. People care so much about parking. Oh, and since I was here an extra five hours, I was wondering if maybe ...

SHARON. Here.

ALEX. *(To audience.)* She handed me a check. My overtime, paid in full.

SHARON. I also have a message. She forgot to tell you she was leaving town today, to promote her book. She'll be back next week. She didn't want you to be waiting for her.

ALEX. *(To Sharon.)* Oh. Does that mean I'm off this week?

SHARON. *(Harsh.)* There is plenty for you to do.

ALEX. Right. Sure. But, so, wait. Barbra arranged my check and gave you a message, just for me, while preparing for a big publicity trip? That was really thoughtful. *(To audience.)* Sharon just smirked and walked away. I heard her mumble ...

SHARON. She's got that one in her pocket.

ALEX. Barbra was gone the whole next week. Yogurt machine. Popcorn maker. *Whirrrr.*

On Friday, Sharon invited me upstairs to the kitchen - and only the kitchen - to join the rest of the staff watching the lady of the house on *Oprah*. There was a box of books on

the island, one copy for each of us, unsigned, but still, it was a nice gesture. We all watched as Oprah and Barbra shared a relaxed, gracious hour together, just two old friends with enormous coastal houses comparing notes.

And then Oprah gave *My Passion for Design* her best, non-Book Club blessing. Even though few people can have a house like Barbra's, she said, this book is very "aspirational:' Barry hears that term a lot in meetings. Books, movies, TV shows are supposed to be "aspirational" now, giving people something to shoot for, providing what Barry calls "the special comfort of the totally impossible:'

When the show was over, I carried my copy downstairs and read it cover to cover. I wonder if anybody else did. Ever. Anywhere.

That weekend, I took my Jetta in for service. The "check engine" light wasn't lying. All those trips to Malibu had exacerbated problems I'd been ignoring for months, and the bill was fourteen hundred dollars. I thought about asking Barbra for help, I did. I was doing a good job and putting in extra effort. Even Jim said things were "nice around here:' But it felt too soon. The woman was just coming back from a book tour. She might have forgotten all about me. (*The shop bell rings.*)

BARBRA. Alex, thank God, I've missed you!

ALEX. (*To audience.*) Ha! I knew there was a connection! (*To Barbra.*) Welcome home. How was your book tour?

BARBRA. *Ach*, fine, if you like other people. I'd much rather be home in my pajamas, eating and trading stocks online. The whole time I was gone, I kept thinking of things to do down here with you. Here, come with me to the Dress Shop!

ALEX. (*To audience.*) She had come up with a project for the two of us, sorting and rearranging every article of clothing. She said it was for the season, but she never wears any of the stuff down there, so I interpreted it as a flimsy excuse to spend more time with me.

BARBRA. "Isn't this fun?"

ALEX. (*To audience.*) ... she said, trying on hats.

BARBRA. It's like being locked in a costume shop, imagining all the different characters you could play, if only you had the time, and better representation.

ALEX. (*To Barbra.*) I totally agree. I used to do this a lot when I was younger.

BARBRA. In your mommy's closet?

ALEX. No, not ... In the costume shop at school. At Northwestern.

BARBRA. Oh. So you're an actor, too. Why didn't you tell me?

ALEX. I guess you never asked. And I figured you'd read it on my resume.

BARBRA. Oh, maybe I did. But that's very interesting.

ALEX. *(To audience.)* She didn't *seem* interested.

BARBRA. So, what parts did you play in school?

ALEX. *(Pleased to be asked.)* Oh ... I got cast in all the nerdy parts. I was always ('the *schmendrick:*' *(To audience.)* She laughed and admired my pronunciation. *(To Barbra.)* I was Seymour in *Little Shop*, Motel in *Fiddler*, which is why I know the word '*(schmendrick;*' Herbie in *Gypsy* ...

BARBRA. Ah! *Gypsy*. What a great show. I always thought that would be a good part for me.

ALEX. Oh, my God, it totally would! So why don't you do it on Broadway?

BARBRA. Please, I can barely face the 405. And eight times a week? I swore never again. It gets so *boring*, the same thing every night, and if you're really ('in the moment" and try new things, the other people look at you funny.

ALEX. Well, what about a movie? There hasn't been a definitive version. You could direct it, too. *(To audience.)* I have no idea why I was saying all this. I guess I was just caught up ((in the *moment:*' But it looked like Barbra was taking me seriously. Her eyebrows raised, and she ran her fingernails slowly down a velvet drop-waisted tunic that wouldn't be wrong for Momma Rose. She had a dream ...

BARBRA. No, it's crazy. It's too late now. It would be ridiculous. I'm too old.

ALEX. *(To Barbra.)* Too old? What does that even mean? It's a movie. That's like saying you were too old for *Yentl*.

BARBRA. You're good for me. Maybe I'll talk to Arthur. He'll laugh. And insult me and give me books I'll never read. But thank you for putting the fantasy in my head.

ALEX. You're welcome. *(Lights change. Music. To audience.)* We spent several days playing dress-up in the dress shop. She had created her own little world and welcomed me to it. Her own utopia. Which reminded me ... *(To Barbra.)* You know, my family is related to him.

BARBRA. Who?

ALEX. Sir Thomas More, the guy who wrote *Utopia*. Supposedly. I like to think it's true, that I have his blood in my veins, that someday I can invent a perfect world that I can live in.

BARBRA. Make sure you thoroughly vet the architects.

ALEX. I'll make a note. Sometimes I think that's what we're all doing, all day long. Even if we're not involved in politics or city planning, we're all just struggling to make a perfect little world to fit our life into. To design it and cast it with the right people. It's why we do theater and found religions and watch HGTV. We're all "aspirational." That's what I got from your book.

BARBRA. You actually read it?

ALEX. Every word. I liked it a lot. The pictures are mind-blowing - I can't imagine what upstairs looks like in person - and your writing is just like you talking. But mostly, I thought it was so sad.

BARBRA. Sad? What do you mean sad?

ALEX. It's just, you worked so hard, for so long. You fired so many people. But it's never quite perfect, is it? (*Barbra thinks a moment.*)

BARBRA. No. It never is. And you're always afraid someone's going to get dirt on the Aubusson rugs.

ALEX. I need a new rug. Mine's from Home Depot.

BARBRA. (*She winces slightly.*) Well, the process is what's fun, right? I guess you'd call the whole thing bittersweet.

ALEX. Yeah. Bittersweet. (*To audience.*) Our time together was almost done for the day. We were sitting on the floor surrounded by old clothes, and the talk of utopias had made her wistful. (*To Barbra.*) Barbra, if you could live in your own utopia, what would it be? Mine would be a place where I had the talent and the resources to make things - shows, songs, paintings, anything - all day long, and never stop. And people would love them, and I'd think they're good, too.

BARBRA. I like that.

ALEX. Thanks. But what would yours be? I mean, I know, we're in it right now, but I'm not talking about the estate. I mean that fantasy you have deep down. (*To audience.*) She lowered her eyes, took a deep breath, and finally said ...

BARBRA. I'd be pretty. Isn't that stupid? But that's what it is. I'd be pretty, and everyone would know it, and I'd think so, too. My mother never told me I was pretty. No one did.

ALEX. (*To Barbra.*) My father used to tell me I was pretty, but he didn't mean it as a compliment.

BARBRA. You see what they do to us? Maybe if my father had lived, but, *ach* ... My stepfather used to say I couldn't have ice cream because I was too ugly.

ALEX. Well, now you have your own frozen yogurt machine, so fuck him.

BARBRA. It's a terrible thing to be a little girl who never gets told she's pretty. It's something you never get over.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) I wanted to do something for her, to show her I sympathize. Without thinking, I put my hand on hers. She looked up at me suddenly, shocked, ready to scream at me, like I was a masseuse who'd taken liberties, but I spoke before she could. (*To Barbra.*) I'm so sorry that happened to you. (*To audience.*) Her eyes softened, and she nodded. She squeezed my hand once and then released it right away.

BARBRA. You should go. I'm supposed to have dinner and watch that *Twilight* movie at Sandy Gallin's new house. He flips them so fast.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) She rose quickly, without looking at me, and left. As the door to the dress shop swung closed, I heard her say quietly ...

BARBRA. Thank you, for what you said.

BARRY. Oh, give me a fucking break. (*Lights shift to Barry's apartment.*)

ALEX. (*To audience.*) Barry had a shitty meeting at Universal.

BARRY. Nobody told her she was pretty? Well, maybe she wasn't.

ALEX. (*To Barry.*) Barry! How can you say that about a little girl? That's horrible!

BARRY. I can say that because that little girl went on to grace the cover of every magazine in the world! That ugly little girl became a symbol of unconventional beauty for an entire era and was clothed and photographed by Cecil fucking Beaton! That little girl had well-documented love affairs with Omar Sharif, Ryan O'Neal, Kris Kristofferson, Don Johnson, Richard Gere, Liam Neeson, Peter Jennings, and Andre Agassi, for God's sake. With one proud, notable exception, there wasn't a single co-star who didn't drown in those crossed blue eyes. She *shtupped* Pierre Trudeau and almost became First Lady of Canada. I won't even mention the rumored assignations with Bill Clinton and Prince Charles.

ALEX. How do you know all this?

BARRY. I've been reading. The point is, even Elliott Gould was hot when she married him, and now she's sleeping with James Brolin. At what point does she look back and say, "You know what, for a *meeskite*, I did okay"?

ALEX. (*To audience.*) I thought Barry had made his point pretty effectively, but he wasn't finished. He ran to his DVD collection and put on *The Mirror Has Two Faces*. (*Music: something like the soundtrack of The Mirror Has Two Faces. [See Special Note on Songs and Recordings on copyright page.]*)

BARRY. Now pay attention. She didn't write the screenplay - she only stars, produces, directs, and takes credit for the love theme - but it's all her, so don't even blink.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) I had seen *The Mirror Has Two Faces* before on cable, and thought it was a harmless piece of fluff. But watching it now, with Barry's Criterion Collection of snark as commentary, was painful for me. Even in a silly rom-com, Barbra's real agenda kept seeping through in disturbing ways, like an episode of *Top Chef* hosted by Hannibal Lecter. Barbra plays Rose, an unattractive but popular professor at Columbia, teaching ... well, we're not quite sure what she's teaching but we know she's good at it because she writes "Foucault" on a blackboard. Rose is a spinster, living with her withholding mother (Sound familiar?), played by Oscar-nominee Lauren Bacall. But then her sexy sister, Mimi Rogers (Perfect casting - *what?*) answers a personal ad as Rose, and Rose ends up in a strictly platonic marriage with Jeff Bridges, a clumsy mathematics professor who wants something deeper than the purely physical connection he had with his first wife, supermodel Elle Macpherson. Because that's how straight men are.

Eventually, Rose wants sex, so she hops on a Life Cycle for thirty seconds, eats a carrot and *poof*, transforms into Claudia Draper, the crazy hooker-with-a-perm in *Nuts*.

Barry points out how all the mind-boggling sexual politics are in service to the last ten minutes, in which every character is required to apologize to Barbra and tell her how gorgeous she is. And I have to admit, Lauren Bacall's bleary-eyed delivery of the speech in which she assures Barbra that she, not Mimi Rogers, was "the pretty one;" has the terrified sincerity of a hostage video.

But the real climax of the movie comes when Barbra ends up canoodling on a couch with Pierce Brosnan, her former brother-in-law. Pierce is horny as hell for post-makeover Rose, and she finds herself getting what she always thought she wanted. But then Rose shakes her perm and scrambles to the door. All those years she thought she wasn't good enough for him. "You are, you are:" Pierce shouts, rearranging his boner. "I know, I know;" Barbra says with a laugh. "But you're not good enough for *me!*" I thought, "You go, girl!" but Barry grabbed the remote out of my hand ...

BARRY. Pause it! (*Lecturing.*) There? You see that? In porn, this is what's known as "the money shot:" On opening night, when Barbra said that line, cineplexes around the country erupted with the ecstatic cheers of every local Hadassah chapter in attendance. That line is

the topic sentence of her entire career. Pierce Brosnan, like every other man in every other Streisand film, is unworthy of her. And so, by extension, are we.

ALEX. (*To Barry.*) Well ... aren't we? (*To audience.*) Barry threw up his hands and switched the TV back to HDMI 1. *Summer Stock* with Judy Garland was just starting on TCM.

BARRY. Sit back down, we're watching. Let's see an icon with some vulnerability for a change.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) Judy was in and out of rehab while making this MGM semi-classic, so it opens with her singing in the shower weighing 200 pounds and ends with her singing "Get Happy" weighing 10. The opening shot is of Judy's farm - a charming New England clapboard house with a red barn to one side and chickens strutting by ... "Oh my God! Pause it!"

There on the screen was the spitting soundstage image of the place I work. So that's where she got it! My mind's eye flashed to young Barbra sitting in the darkened Loew's Kings Theater on Flatbush Avenue, memorizing Louis B. Mayer's vision of an Americana wonderland, complete with red barns, blue skies, and small noses. "Someday:" she thought to herself, "I'll make my own Connecticut, far from Brooklyn, and far from the actual Connecticut:" She saw her future home in *Summer Stock*. She also saw that a great star's weight can fluctuate wildly, sometimes in the same scene. And she learned.

And I felt for her. And I turned on Barry. (*To Barry.*) Okay, yes, maybe she's ridiculous and lucky, and maybe she doesn't have the right to complain about anything. But maybe you don't have the right to complain about anything either. Ever think of that? Maybe you're both getting exactly what you deserve. (*To audience.*) I felt bad for a second, afraid I'd gone too far, but Barry just laughed. And I thought of how terrible he would be at my job in the basement. (*To Barry.*) Barry, I'm sorry. I just ... I don't understand why you're so against her.

BARRY. Maybe because she's trying to steal my boyfriend.

ALEX. Come on, that's just silly. (*To audience.*) Though I admit I found the idea a little exciting. (*To Barry.*) What do you want me to do?

BARRY. I want you to resist her. The way Robert Redford did.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) I stayed over, but we didn't have sex. Barry watched the rest of *Summer Stock*. I barely slept. (*Lights change. The basement. The bell rings.*)

BARBRA. Oy, what happened to you?

ALEX. Oh. Nothing. Rough night, that's all.

BARBRA. Well, this will cheer you up. I talked to Arthur.

ALEX. Arthur who?

BARBRA. Laurents. Miller died, Laurents won't. Listen to what I'm telling you! He loved your idea! Well, he didn't hate it. He didn't hate your idea, and I told him it was mine.

ALEX. My idea?

BARBRA. *Gypsy!* With me as Momma Rose.

ALEX. Oh. *Wow.*

BARBRA. But I won't direct. I mean, I'll get somebody else to do it, technically. I'll have too many other things to think about. (Maybe I'll take a co-director credit, we'll see.) Isn't it exciting? We have so much work to do!

ALEX. *We* do? What do you mean "we"?

BARBRA. You were Herbie, right? So, we can practice together. You can be my coach.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) This was all moving so fast. (*To Barbra.*) I don't know if that's a good idea. I mean, I work for you, and things are going so well ...

BARBRA. I'll pay you! And we'll keep it separate, totally professional. That way, if it doesn't work out, you can quit one job but keep the other.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) I thought of the Volkswagen bill on my kitchen table. How could I say no? (*Music: something like the overture to Gypsy. [See Special Note on Songs and Recordings on copyright page.]*) We got to work right away. Barbra called Arthur on the phone and had me listen in. He would scream at her one minute - "*Why are you so stupid?*" - and praise her, in his way, the next, - "Of course you're appropriate for the role, because Rose is a monster!",

And then Barbra and I worked through the show line by line. She picked apart every sentence, every word, every syllable. "Why does she say it like that? What does she *mean?*" Now, *Gypsy* is a masterpiece and can withstand that kind of scrutiny, but how did she ever make it through the script of *Little Packers*?

When our analysis of the text was complete, and Barbra's script was overrun with notes and highlights and Post-Its of every color, we put the pages down and began to play.

We ran through the scenes with Barbra as Rose and me as everybody else. She didn't like my Louise or Dainty June, saying they were "tentative" and "lacked girlishness" (I know), but she saw promise in my Herbie, saying I reminded her of Tom Hanks, who was already on her list.

Emboldened by her praise, I threw myself into the role. This Herbie wasn't going to let Rose walk all over him. This Herbie was ready to rumble.

We raged, we cajoled, we toyed with each other. We sang, well, mostly she sang. Yes, she *sang*, alone in the room with me, for my ears only, she sang! "What is *that* like?" you may wonder. The voice isn't huge, and her diction is a little weird - she adds "m's" to the end of everything, as in "You'll Never Get Away From Meem" - but the sheer beauty and throbbing intensity of that sound still took my breath away.

And then we danced. (*Music: a song like "You'll Never Get Away from Me" from Gypsy. [See Special Note on Songs and Recordings on copyright page.] Alex dances with his unseen partner, gliding along and having a marvelous time. He continues to narrate as he dances.*) I was hired to be her coach, and I took my job seriously, but every comment was met with such a torrent of questions and demands for clarification, that pretty soon I was just telling her how good she was, which, let's face it, is what all acting coaches do if they really want the check.

And you know something? I didn't mind because she *was* good. No, she was *great*. After over-thinking everything, she was spontaneous, warm, hilarious. And I was the only person seeing it. Maybe that's why she was able to let go and be so free. But I knew, and I told her, if the camera catches one half the performance I saw in her basement, there wouldn't be enough Oscars to throw at her.

She liked that. Who wouldn't? (*The music ends. Lights change to Barry's apartment.*)

BARRY. Oh, my fucking God, I cannot wait to see her Grandma Rose!

ALEX. (*To audience.*) Barry thought he'd had a good meeting at Warner Brothers, but then later his agent called and told him it was actually a shitty meeting.

BARRY. I hope you don't mind, but I put myself up for the adaptation. It's a big job. I mean, sure, the screenplay will stay faithful to the original musical, but there will have to be adjustments made to help explain a few things, like how a seventy-year-old woman is the mother of *a five-year-old*.

Of course, the script won't have to do all the work. I hear they're developing experimental technology to photograph Barbra via ultrasound through seven layers of sheetrock. You know, to smooth lines.

Anyway, here's my pitch. We open with a flashback: Seattle 1910. We see how Rose Hovick pioneered in-vitro fertilization and surrogacy, to her father's taunts of, «You ain't getting ten eggs out of that, Rose!" She shows him, by stealing his prized Victorian-era pornography and using it to pay off a shady local obstetrician.

But just when the surrogate - played by Miley Cyrus in an uncredited cameo, to bring in the young people - is about to deliver, the doctor demands further payment in the form of a hand job, and a defiant Rose pushes him out a fifth-story hospital window and delivers the twins herself! (Oh, I forgot to mention, Louise and June are now twins, played as adults

by Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen and then, in a moving epilogue, by Olivia deHavilland and Joan Fontaine, to help age Barbra down.) Something for everybody!

What do you think, Alex? You're close to her. Can you get me a meeting?

ALEX. (*To Barry.*) Barry, why are you like this?

BARRY. The real question is, why aren't you? I'm sure it's exciting to be in Her Majesty's presence, but she's not a real person!

ALEX. Yes, she is. I know her. She's my friend.

BARRY. Really? Then call her up. Get her on the phone, invite her over. I'll make popcorn and we can watch *Project Runway*. Isn't that what you do with friends? Isn't that the least you expect? Face it. She's not your friend. You're not real to her. She buys things and puts them in her basement and you are her latest acquisition, like something out of Edgar Allen Poe. She hasn't even invited you upstairs. You've never been in the main house, you're kept in the barn. I'm embarrassed for you.

ALEX. Yeah, well, don't be. I'm doing real work down there now, work I can be proud of.

BARRY. Is she paying you extra?

ALEX. Not yet, but she said she will. I don't want to ask again, I want to show her that I trust her.

BARRY. My God, you're pathetic.

ALEX. Stop it! Stop being so mean to me! And don't make me choose between you and her because you might not like the answer. (*Beat. They've reached a dangerous place.*)

BARRY. Then I should know that. You do have to choose, Alex. You can be her slave in fantasy land or you can be my boyfriend in the real world. But you can't be both. What's it gonna be?

ALEX. (*To audience.*) My chest felt tight and my head felt hot. (*To Barry.*) I'm sorry, Barry. But I choose Barbra. I don't want to be a cynic. I don't want to spend my life as a less talented person making fun of more talented people. I don't want to see other people's success as some kind of personal attack on me. It doesn't do me any good. When there is someone like her in the world, someone that extraordinary, and I get to spend my days in her presence, then the only legitimate response is "thank you:" (*To audience.*) Barry's eyes looked very sad, sadder than I'd ever seen them.

BARRY. Is that what you think of me? Don't answer. Goodbye, Alex.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) And suddenly, I was single again. (*Lights change.*) That's okay, I thought. I'll focus on my work.

I returned to the basement, to dusting, and to *Gypsy*. I wanted to tell Barbra what had happened, how my heart was hurting, but I wanted her to ask me first, like any real friend would. So I just went about my business as if nothing was wrong. I managed to keep it together the whole day, until the Rose and Herbie dance break. (*Music: the same song from the previous dance sequence. [See Special Note on Songs and Recordings on copyright page.] Alex dances again, a shorter version, only this time, he does so glumly, demonstrating how depressed he is with every step.*)

BARBRA. Okay, is something bothering you? (*Music out abruptly.*)

ALEX. (*To Barbra.*) Oh, God, is it noticeable? I'm sorry. I didn't want to be one of those people who brings their personal problems into the office, but ... Barry and I broke up.

BARBRA. (*Matter-of-fact.*) Oh. Well, there are plenty of fish in the sea, right? You'll finally find someone.

ALEX. Thank you. I appreciate that. You're a good friend, and I really need a friend right now. (*To audience.*) She reached out and touched me on the arm. She didn't seem sure whether to pat or squeeze, so she gave me a pat that ended with a sort of pinch, and then she pulled her hand away like she needed Purell.

BARBRA. (*Proffering a Kit Kat candy bar ...*) You want some of my Kit Kat?

ALEX. (*To Barbra.*) Sure. (*They share the candy bar.*)

BARBRA. Men.

ALEX. (*To Barbra.*) Yeah, men.

BARBRA. Listen, it's getting late, I gave Sharon and the others the night off (somebody's wife had a baby), and Jim is in Vancouver doing a few days on a movie. I was wondering, would you like to see the rest of the house?

ALEX. Oh, God, I just got a chill. Yes! God, yes! (*Regaining his cool.*) I mean, sure, yeah, that would be nice. (*Lights shift. Music. To audience.*) This was it. Up a circular and very narrow stairway, and I was in. Barry would never believe it.

Barbra gave me the full tour, and it took *forever*. I thought there was a lot of shit in the basement but there was even more crap upstairs. Tiffany lamps and leather re-bound books and artwork and little kiddie antique furniture. *Tchotchkes* that rendered the upstairs gym unusable, which may have been the point. This was *Hoarders* on a higher plane. And that was just the barn.

Later, when she led me outside and across to the main house in the cool, early evening, Malibu air, I thought, "She makes this trip to see me every day. Or is there a secret tunnel she'll show me later?"

BARBRA. You'll need to take off your shoes.

ALEX. (*To Barbra, doing so.*) Like at the airport.

BARBRA. What do you mean?

ALEX. Never mind. (*To audience.*) The main house is all Early American, like Monticello if Thomas Jefferson had real money. But even though we'd whisked through at least two centuries of design, the effect of every room was the same. The relentless good taste combined with the total lack of financial constraint was overwhelming. I felt like a fly being swatted with back issues of *Architectural Digest*. The really thick ones. Finally, as we stood in the long formal dining room, and Barbra explained where she got each individual piece of vintage cranberry glass that glistened in the setting sun, I started to laugh. (*Alex laughs.*)

BARBRA. What? What's so funny?

ALEX. (*To Barbra.*) It's all so beautiful. There's so much to take in. I don't know how to process it. (*To audience.*) She stood quietly, a little embarrassed maybe, as I pulled myself together. (*To Barbra.*) I'm sorry. You have a beautiful home.

BARBRA. (*Softly, with a shrug.*) Thank you.

ALEX. What's it like? To have so much. To have done more than just about anyone ever. To have been at the top of the mountain for so long. What's that like?

BARBRA. It's fun. When you're in the thick of it, it's fun. But it's also scary. Everyone wants something from you or expects something of you and you expect more and more and you find yourself acting crazy but you don't know how to stop without the whole thing crashing down ... But it's fun. It's good. But ...

ALEX. But? But what?

BARBRA. All the excitement and the *mishigas*? It makes the rest of life go slower. It makes the rest of life seem interminable.

ALEX. Huh. I guess that makes sense.

BARBRA. That's why I was with Jon so long. You know, Peters. Everyone thought I was nuts, that he was a bully and a pain in the ass. But he knew what to do on Sundays. I could never figure out what to do on a Sunday. He always could. (*Beat. Then ...*) Come, I really want to show you the family room.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) According to *My Passion for Design*, the family room is where Barbra and Jim hang out with their laptops watching TV. A tan chenille sectional and a giant screen that descends from the coffered ceiling. This one looks like an actual room in a house where people could actually live. Or at least a hotel where people could actually stay. But then, so does the White House. I guess no matter how high up you go, from a trailer park to Candy Spelling's, you're still dealing with couches, lamps, and tables. One plateaus so early.

BARBRA. Sit. Make yourself comfortable. Put your feet up on the chaise, that's what it's there for.

ALEX. Her instructions to relax sounded like an order, and I obeyed. I was in the casual space. In the book, Barbra says it's okay in the family room to leave drink rings on the pine wood tables. But I didn't see any. (*To Barbra.*) Wow, this couch is really comfortable.

BARBRA. It better be. I sent the first four of them back. *Uch*, the lights are so bright in here.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) She walked over to a switch on the wall and dimmed the lamps to a warm glow. And I think she put on music. (*Soft, sexy music plays.*)

BARBRA. That's so much better.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) She smiled and walked over to the couch and sat down next to me. Close. Uncomfortably close.

BARBRA. This is nice, "hanging out" with you. People don't come by and visit me too often. Nobody "pops *by:*" I spend a lot of time alone.

ALEX. (*To Barbra.*) You don't have to if you don't want to. (*To audience.*) She stared for a moment at the pine coffee table. Looking for rings?

BARBRA. Here, lie down some more. Let your head rest on the cushion, it's more comfortable.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) I did as I was told. She smiled, and the next thing I knew, I could feel her fingers running through my hair. (*His hand becomes Barbra's, playing with his hair.*) Ever so gently, her nails grazing my scalp. I remembered my elementary school nurse checking my head for lice with a number 2 pencil. (*To Barbra.*) That feels nice (*To audience.*) ... I murmured. And I thought to myself, "What the fuck is happening?" Is Barbra Streisand putting the moves on me? Is she about to kiss me? Is she my Mrs. Robinson? And do I have the balls to say yes? She kept staring at the top of my head, stroking my hair ...

And then all at once, it happened. In one terrible rush of insight, I understood. (*To Barbra.*) You're shopping for throw pillows! (*Music out abruptly. Lights up.*)

BARBRA. What? What are you talking about?

ALEX. You said when you met me, you were thinking of having pillows made the color of my hair to go with the couch in the family room, but you weren't sure.

BARBRA. I don't remember telling you that.

ALEX. That's why you brought me in here! That's why you "really wanted to show me the family *room*:" You were checking my hair against the chenille!

BARBRA. That's ridiculous. I may have thought, since you were sitting right there, and it is hard to find the right shade ...

ALEX. My God! Barry was right about you! I thought we were friends. I thought I mattered to you. Foolish of me, because you care about nothing. (*To audience, still ranting.*) I knew I was quoting *Sunday in the Park with George* but I just kept going. (*To Barbra.*) Just what am I to you? A surrogate for Jason? For the gay guys who fixed you up fifty years ago? Or just another useless thing you bought and keep in your basement?

BARBRA. I thought you were my coach.

ALEX. Yeah, well, for that to be true, you would have to pay me, like you promised. And you haven't. (*To audience.*) Her face turned bright red, and she glared at me the way she glared at her abusive father in *Nuts*, played by Karl Malden, another former Herbie in *Gypsy*. I thought we were going to really fight now, get everything out and become closer than we ever were before. But I was wrong.

BARBRA. I think you should leave, Alex More.

ALEX. (*To Barbra.*) Am I fired?

BARBRA. Is that what you think of me? Is that all you can think about?

ALEX. I think it's a fair question.

BARBRA. You can go now.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) I let myself out. (*Lights change.*) I drove home in a daze. The Santa Monica City Council was discussing a possible new Panera Bread. Maybe it would blow over. Maybe we'd laugh about it tomorrow.

I didn't sleep a wink. I thought of calling Barry, but I couldn't take hearing him say, "I told you so" or, worse, "You blew it;" so I curled up in my sheets from Target and stuck it out.

Sharon was waiting for me the next morning, standing in the driveway with her arms crossed.

SHARON. No need to hide the car. You won't be staying.

ALEX. (*To Sharon.*) Oh. Did she give you a reason?

SHARON. You clash.

ALEX. With what?

SHARON. With everything.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) She handed me two envelopes, each with a check, one for mall employee and one for acting coach, both extremely generous. I'm ashamed to admit it, but I started to cry.

SHARON. Oh, pull yourself together. How did you expect it to end?

ALEX. (*To audience.*) I didn't answer. I asked if I could go inside one last time. I lied and said I'd left something in the Gift Shoppe. The lady of the house was out at a meeting about a Seth Rogen road movie, so Sharon looked the other way.

I descended the circular staircase for last looks. I touched the face of Fifi, the doll who blows bubbles. I listened to the whirr of the frozen yogurt machine.

On my way out, I slipped inside the grand foyer of the barn. "What's she gonna do, fire me?" I stood in the very center of the room and took in the museum-after-hours stillness in the air. All that effort, all those *things*.

I don't know why, but I lifted my arms and stretched them out as far as I could, and then I spun around. (*He does.*) A person's arm span is roughly the same as their height. And that circle you make when you spin around is the extent to which you take up space in the universe. It seems to me, the stuff inside that circle is more important than all the stuff you put around it.

I was depressed for weeks.

As far as I know, her *Gypsy* is still in the works, though in May of 2011, Arthur Laurents surprised everyone by actually dying at the age of 93. I thought of sending Barbra my condolences, but ...

I don't know if I was ever replaced in the mall. I tried not to think about it. (*A phone rings. Into phone.*) Hello?

BARRY. It's Barry. Don't hang up. I'm sorry I was so mean to you, and to ... her. It's just, you're a good person, and I see that and I'm sure she saw that, and ... I miss you. What are you doing on Sunday? I was thinking maybe we could go hike Runyon Canyon then have dinner and see a movie at The Grove. The weather's supposed to be nice and there's a new Almodovar. Does that sound good?

ALEX. (*To audience.*) I had to admit, I didn't know what I was going to do on Sunday.

It was time to start living again, before the parade passes by. I looked around at my crummy apartment and thought ... *(In Barbra's voice ...)* ((This won't do:'

I took some of the extra money I made and Barry and I went straight to Crate and Barrel, at The Grove. When my pricey new sisal rug arrived, we rolled it out and arranged my furniture six different ways. Something wasn't right. It just wasn't how I'd pictured it in my head. I took a tape measure and, sure enough, the rug was two-thirds of an inch shorter than it was supposed to be. Nobody would ever notice, but I would always know.

So I sent it back.

And it felt good. *(Music. The lights slowly fade.)*

End of Play

