
*Life Matters --
Almost Heaven -- Nearly Hell*

A comedy in two acts

FIRST ACT – SAMPLE

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Setting

The road between Heaven and Hell.

CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
FREDDIE	Stand-up comedian, in casual dress	50-60	Male
ARNIE	Tabloid publisher, with small pail, in blue jean jacket, garden gloves	30-60	Male
TRIXIE	Prostitute, in sexy attire with boa	20-35	Female
MARY	CEO in dark business suit, white blouse, black tie, dark rimmed glasses	30-50	Female
JOE	Angel (<i>soft voice</i>) in white and	30-70	Male
OSCAR	Sin processor (<i>grating voice</i>), in black	30-70	Male
GREEK CHORUS	4 Singers	Any	2M 2F

M/A/F/T = MARY, ARNIE, FREDDIE and TRIXIE

The playwright would like the following read to the audience by the A.D. or his representative. “Welcome to our production of (*Life Matters – Almost Heaven, Nearly Hell*) at (*name of theatre or church*) on this (*the date*). The playwright has dedicated all productions of this play to Tony Jenkins, his friend and inspirer from long ago. Now please relax and enjoy the play. Children play during the day. Tonight (*or today*) is your time to forget your troubles and enjoy your play time. Please remember to have phones turned off or silent and recording of any kind is not permitted”.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

Place: Road between Heaven and Hell

Time: Daytime

SPOTLIGHT WITH CLOUD-LIKE EDGES LIGHTS THE CHORUS:

DC from SR to SL -- Mary, Freddie, Trixie and Arnie are in a line across the stage, at least arms-length apart, facing audience, motionless, frozen in place. Each appear stunned and look in a different direction.

MARY is in a dark business suit, slacks.

FREDDIE, in worn dark sport coat, colorful stained shirt, dark pants, with half full booze bottle, lays inebriated on his back, feet pointed DS. His face shows a week's beard, and he wears a bent out of shape hobo hat.

TRIXIE, cheap hooker attire, red boa, chews gum.

ARNIE wears a blue jean jacket, dark pants, solid coloured shirt, gardening gloves, holds a small pail.

DR is a "Heaven" sign with an arrow pointing SR which is covered by black cloth.

DL is a "Hell" sign with an arrow pointing SL which is covered by black cloth.

A Greek Chorus of four singers stand SR dressed like monks -- two with smiling masks and two with tragic masks. The order is first smiling, then tragic, then smiling, then tragic. As they sing, they look to the frozen actors.

During the ENTIRE PLAY, when the chorus sings the LIGHTS DIM on the actors and they freeze in place. A SPOTLIGHT with cloudy edges lights the chorus, then after the chorus sings, the spotlight goes out on the chorus and LIGHTS GO UP the four actors.

CHORUS Tonight four statues will animate, bring forth their version of reality, hand it to you, not willingly, but it will be done. Your idea of reality includes an open mind, or you wouldn't be here. Tonight you are reality shopping. Oh dear, we

noticed, there is one statue missing. It could be sitting silent, and temporarily inanimate, in a theatre seat. If you like, look around.

SPOTLIGHT OUT, LIGHTS UP:

Freddie sits up, looks around, disoriented, slurs.

FREDDIE What's this?

The other three animate, confused, look around.

Freddie guzzles a swig from the bottle, looks disparagingly at the others, takes another swig of booze, then to the bottle.

I gotta stop loving you 'cause you got me hallucinating.

Freddie shrugs, big smiles, takes a swig of booze, lays back.

Trixie looks around, disoriented.

TRIXIE What's happened?

Arnie looks around, disoriented.

ARNIE I was on my ladder, cleaning out the eavestrough, now I'm here?

FREDDIE *(sits up, confused)* Where's here?

Freddie lays down. Mary moves to SR a little, apart from the rest, registers surprise, looks around.

MARY I remember being on the sofa in my office, having my power snooze. *(amazed by her revelation)* That's it!! This is the most realistic dream I've ever had!

Mary looks to the others.

You three aren't real. You're in my dream, exist only in my dream.

FREDDIE *(sits up quickly)* I have some of what she's having!

MARY *(looks at the others and around)* It seems so real . . . but it has to be a dream.

LIGHTS OUT:

A SPOTLIGHT WITH CLOUD-LIKE EDGES LIGHTS THE CHORUS:

CHORUS *(from SR)* Who are these people? Samplings of semi-intelligent existences? We think you'll recognize one or more. Should you not, it could be you've been living in a shadow, a shallow life, oblivious to the temptations, the churnings of active living.

SPOTLIGHT OUT, LIGHTS UP:

Freddie shoots a confused look to Mary.

FREDDIE *(stands, wobbly, to Mary)* Either I'm dreamin' or you're dreamin'? Which is it?

MARY *(to all)* My dreams help me make business decisions.

Trixie, aggressively chewing her gum, turns her attention to Mary, gets in Mary's face.

TRIXIE Oh yeah?!

Mary notices Trixie, turns away from her.

MARY *(disdain)* Tonight it's a nightmare.

ARNIE *(looking around)* I can't recall anything before reaching the top of my ladder, then . . .

Arnie looks around confused.

MARY *(to Arnie)* Ladder? Is there any more you want to tell me? *(to the others)* Anyone?

ARNIE *(confused)* I don't see anyone or anything I know. I'm on a barren road with strangers.

TRIXIE I'm in a line of of of . . .

Trixie looks the three over, new idea, smiles, throws boa around Arnie's head, pulls Arnie to her.

. . . potential clients?

MARY It's a very dirty dream.

Arnie smiles, takes the boa off, throws it over Trixie's shoulders.

. . . or not.

LIGHTS OUT:

A SPOTLIGHT WITH CLOUD-LIKE EDGES LIGHTS THE CHORUS:

CHORUS Why are they here? To discover something? . . . themselves? . . . others? . . .
Where they're going?

SPOTLIGHT OUT, LIGHTS UP:

On tip toes, Arnie looks over the rest toward SR, hand above eyes.

ARNIE It's the longest line of people I've ever seen, goes on forever.

Freddie stands, staggers, hand above eyes, down the line toward SL.

FREDDIE A line without end is un, un, unfath . . . fath . . .om . . . ish!

Trixie dances and plays with the boa around her neck tries to make herself attractive, glances down the line.

TRIXIE Nah, I fathom it. It's a cue, the line to get us into the next Star Wars openin'.

MARY *(new idea)* Star business wars?!

ARNIE I bent sideways, reaching for the last leaf.

MARY Leaf?

ARNIE Red maple leaf! I was pulling leaves into my pail. The last thing I remember!
The last thing!

LIGHTS OUT:

A SPOTLIGHT WITH CLOUD-LIKE EDGES LIGHTS THE CHORUS:

CHORUS Is this Mary's incredible dream . . . or something more . . . sin-is-ter? Now that
their days and nights are done, you may wonder . . . does it matter? . . . or not? .
. . ENTER an arbiter . . .

(MORE)

SPOTLIGHT OUT, LIGHTS UP:

JOE, wearing a long white cloak, white bowler hat, white pants, white shirt and sandals ENTERS from SR. The four remain frozen in place. Joe walks among the four people unseen by them, speaks with a soft voice.

Tonight’s arbiter takes pity . . . wants to help . . . but . . .

JOE *(to the inanimate people)* Hello. I’m Joe, a facilitator. I take care of matters on this end of the road. I see fear is in the eyes. Extreme fear. Sinners! A sinful life has consequences; however, a good life has consequences too. It’s a precarious balance – good versus sin.

LIGHTS OUT:

A SPOTLIGHT WITH CLOUD-LIKE EDGES LIGHTS THE CHORUS:

CHORUS The arbiter throws his light here, and occasionally . . . there, but will it help?

SPOTLIGHT OUT, LIGHTS UP:

Joe motions to the covered “Heaven” sign. A TINKLING SOUND causes the cover to fall from the “Heaven” sign.

The four unfreeze, snap-look to the “Heaven” sign as Joe EXITS SR.

MARY Heaven? *(thinks)* We’re on a road marked Heaven?

FREDDIE Street signs don’t have arrows.

TRIXIE It’s gotta be an ad for somethin’.

ARNIE *(new idea)* It’s pointing us to . . .

FREDDIE *(interrupting)* A bar!! An ad for a bar! Maybe a grand opening!

TRIXIE *(happily)* Music! Friendly people!!

FREDDIE A nice, happy bar. Talking makes me so, so *(tries to remember)* thirsty? I’ll buy.

ARNIE *(stands on toes, looks around)* I don’t see a bar!

FREDDIE *(disappointed)*_No?

Freddie collapses, lays flat out feet pointed DC.

ARNIE We're all . . .

FREDDIE (*interrupting*) . . . three sheets to the wind, hammered?!!

ARNIE I feel different, not normal. An out of body experience!!! Astral travel!

TRIXIE No, I can't be travelling! I need to be there for Wendy.

ARNIE Wendy?

TRIXIE My daughter! She's six years old, in school. I need to pick her up at three.

ARNIE Or we're dead!

FREDDIE (*sits up*) That's I call a negative attitude.

TRIXIE No!!

Freddie lays flat again.

LIGHTS OUT:

A SPOTLIGHT WITH CLOUD-LIKE EDGES LIGHTS THE CHORUS:

CHORUS The veil has begun to lift . . . thunderbolt realizations hit hard.

SPOTLIGHT OUT, LIGHTS UP:

Freddie sits up.

FREDDIE Okay, so if this is Heaven, where's the bar! No bar, I'm not goin' in!!

LIGHTS OUT:

A SPOTLIGHT WITH CLOUD-LIKE EDGES LIGHTS THE CHORUS:

CHORUS Some take longer than others.

SPOTLIGHT OUT, LIGHTS UP:

MARY (*breaks away*) Dreams can be scary. I'm scared too, but it's just a dream, not real!

Mary gets “Are You Crazy” stares from Trixie, Freddie and Arnie.

ARNIE I’m real! You’re real! We’re all real!

Freddie collapses with his bottle.

LIGHTS OUT:

A SPOTLIGHT WITH CLOUD-LIKE EDGES LIGHTS THE CHORUS:

CHORUS Enter the other arbiter . . . brim full of burning desire . . . enthusiasm for his task . . . hungers for sin and sinners.

SPOTLIGHT OUT, LIGHTS UP:

OSCAR ENTERS from SL dressed in a black cape, black bowler hat, black pants, and black shirt, carries a horn.

Oscar claps his hands causing the four sinners to freeze, walks among them.

Oscar waves his bowler hat toward the covered “Hell” sign that is SL. A horn GROANS. The sign uncovers and the sinners unfreeze.

Oscar EXITS SL.

All but Freddie snap their attention to the “Hell” sign with an arrow pointing SL.

A/T/M Ahhhhhh!

Startled, Freddie, jumps up, doesn’t see the “Hell” sign.

FREDDIE *(puts a thumb out)* I’m hitchin’ a ride.

Freddie sticks out his arm and thumb, moves, hitchhiking toward SL, sees the Hell sign, scared, turns and hitchhikes toward SR and the Heaven sign.

Freddie becomes tired, shrugs, lays down, falls asleep.

MARY Misfits on a road . . . which means . . . moving ahead business could be difficult. Trouble ahead.

TRIXIE *(looks SL)* It's a long, winding . . .

ARNIE . . . road . . .

TRIXIE . . . to . . .

ARNIE Hell!

ARNIE/
TRIXIE Ahhhhhh!

Freddie startles awake, leaves his bottle on road, jumps up swings and punches randomly, strikes out at imaginary targets, is exhausted, takes a slug of booze, collapses on the road.

MARY *(breaks away)* It must mean I need to fight harder to beat the competition. *(to the others)* Dreams seem scary. Each of you have an important message for me!

ARNIE We're stuck between Heaven and Hell with a dream imbecile!!

Freddie sits up.

FREDDIE I'm going to need a bigger bottle.

MARY Between Heaven and Hell? A fifty-fifty year, first good then . . .

FREDDIE *(sits up, holds up his bottle)* How about a drink?! Anybody?

No takers so Freddie takes a slug of booze, lays down.

TRIXIE Ahaaaaaaaaa!

MARY Everyone get a grip!

Freddie sits up, reaches toward Mary.

FREDDIE Yeah, on her throat!

MARY My subconscious is in control. I would like nothing more than to wake up, and rid myself of all of you, but my subconscious won't let me. I hate to admit it, but I need what each of you are about to tell me.

FREDDIE Wackoooo!

ARNIE *(to Mary)* That's absurd!

FREDDIE Does anyone feel it heating up? I feel it heating up!!!

ARNIE/
TRIXIE *(feeling the heat)* Ahhhhhh!

Freddie's startled, jumps up.

FREDDIE Ahhhhhh!

Mary breaks away from the others.

MARY Business will heat up! Growth!

ARNIE *(moves to Mary)* Business?!? What are you?

MARY I'm Mary Simmons, Esquirette, CEO of Everything-Mart Inc. *(inc. sounds ink)*

FREDDIE Is esquirette a word?

ARNIE She made it up.

MARY I said it's a word, so it is!!!

LIGHTS OUT:

A SPOTLIGHT WITH CLOUD-LIKE EDGES LIGHTS THE CHORUS:

CHORUS To know all, one needs pay attention. We will listen to a few of the challenges ahead, and marvel or shudder at the result. Choices will be made. Choices become facts, and, over time, facts, on reflection, brighten or tarnish one's time spent.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF ACT ONE SCENE ONE

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

Time: Night

Place: Board Room

A SPOTLIGHT WITH CLOUD-LIKE EDGES LIGHTS THE SCENE:

Mary stands at the head of a board meeting – long table, six dummies or silent people, male and female, dressed in business attire sit around the table facing her (two will be people). Mary faces the board members and DS.

There are sounds of discord among men and women.

MARY Order!! I need order!!! The emergency board meeting of Everything-Mart Inc. will commence!

The discordant sounds dimmish, but do not subside.

As chief executive officer of Everything-Mart Inc., I suggest you listen carefully. Without order there can be no meeting! Without meeting there will be a different board!!!!

Silence prevails.

I know some of you are opposed to my proposal, that is fine with me, however, if we as a company, want to succeed, push forward in retail, we need to move with the times. We are playing catchup here! We need to fight for our place in the market!

There are some discordant sounds, but they subside.

Companies that don't expand, die! It's a fact of business. Expansion requires capital, capital we don't currently have, so, as you've already heard, we need to take it from other sources, one being the employees' pension fund. The alternative, which a minority favour, is issuing further shares or share splitting. Both would diminish dividends, which could scare the market, which, in turn, could initiate a frenzied price drop, making expansion out of the question. An outlandish ill-informed proposal has been presented to me. It would solve the funding problem but would see a reduction in income to all officers of the company which obviously includes all of you. Sixty percent! How does that sound?!

(MORE)

There are some discordant sounds.

SILENCE!!!

Discordant sounds abate.

I understand your concern, but in business, it is either sink or swim, and I'm not sinking. Is the income reduction proposal for officers of the company what you want? *(silent pause)* No, I think not! We need to take it to a vote. Anyone not in favour of dipping into the employees' pension fund to enable the European expansion are required to raise their hand and propose a different solution.

One hand is raised. Mary moves to the board member who raised their hand, takes the chair he/she are sitting on and moves it off stage SR, then returns with an empty chair, leaves it where it was at the table.

VOICE (O.S.) I wanted permission to use he bathroom.

MARY *(to the board)* It's unanimous! Congratulations, your . . .

One of the board members raises a hand.

(to the raised hand) Bathroom?

MEMBER 1 No.

MARY Dissent?

MEMBER 1 Yes.

MARY What is your alternate proposal to fund the expansion?

MEMBER 1 I surveyed the employees. They are eighty-five percent in favour of purchasing preferred shares if we were to offer it to them.

MARY You're suggesting we have workers run the company?!

MEMBER 1 That is an over-reaction. Giving employees a stake in the company gives them a reason to be loyal. Employees having shares in the company allows them to feel valued. They will be working for themselves. Employees wouldn't mind putting off other purchases – new cars, furniture, swimming pool, etc. -- to secure shares in the company they work for. They will become our best customers.

MARY Does anyone have other thoughts?

MEMBER 2 Offering shares to employees will dilute the value of the shares presently held weakening our position. It would initiate the end of business as we've come to know it. Besides, the amount we pay employees needs to be reduced. At present employees' expense is not proportionate to our returns. Severing employees and reducing wages is a must if this company is going to survive, let alone expand. Expansion can be accomplished, but sacrifices must be made! Expansion can work with less employees. After the thinning, employees remaining work smarter, harder, more shifts.

MARY Yes, I agree. I put the original proposal forward. Anyone opposed to it raise a hand.

Member 1 raises a hand.

The motion is carried by a majority vote. Employee pensions will fund the expansion. Also employee numbers and wages will be re-assessed – both of which I expect will result in a boon to our European expansion plans.

Member 1 and Member 2 turn, face DS. Member 1 is Joe and Member 2 is Oscar.

SPOTLIGHT OUT:

A SPOTLIGHT WITH CLOUD-LIKE EDGES LIGHTS THE CHORUS:

CHORUS The die has been cast. A memory rekindled, now back to our four travellers.

END OF ACT ONE SCENE TWO

ACT ONE, SCENE THREE

Time: Night

Place: Road between Heaven and Hell

LIGHTS UP:

DC from SR to SL -- Mary, Freddie, Trixie and Arnie are frozen still in a line across the stage, arms-length apart, facing audience. Freddie sits on the road with his bottle. Freddie stands, approaches Mary.

FREDDIE *(toward Mary's ear)* Hello Mary's Wacko Weird Subconscious, you in there?!!

All unfreeze. Mary pushes Freddie away. Freddie staggers back, shadow boxes in front of Mary.

Come out and fight.

MARY *(pulls away from Freddie)* How dare you! I'm the most powerful woman in the world! Everything-Mart Inc., the company I founded, has become the ultra retail outlet, the largest retailer on the planet. Online it's www.everythingmartinc.com. We sell everything. I'm the world's ultra retailer.

TRIXIE Not every *(pause)* thing. My customers get the ultra-important, ultra-worthy, ultra-physical experience. Something you know nothing about.

FREDDIE *(staggers)* One more ultra and I'll heave.

TRIXIE *(up close with Freddie)* Says the ultra-pissed drunk!

Freddie staggers away, US, looks and sounds like he's heaving. Trixie gets up close with Mary.

People from all walks of life, want my company, Trixie Inc.

MARY My subconscious has dug deep and dark tonight.

Mary pushes Trixie away.

(to all) Subconsciously I need all of you. Consciously I'm staying indifferent.

ARNIE Bull!

(MORE)

Arnie moves between Freddie and Trixie.

(to Freddie) You are?

FREDDIE Freddie Friendly. Stand-up comic. *(staggers)* Let's see. Oh, yeah. Here's one.

Freddie strides to DC.

It's nice to see a young couple get together and fall in love. There are stages to love. The first stage is physical attraction, then mental attraction, next comes infatuation, next they enjoy true love, then, there's . . . you've guessed it . . . straight to the last step . . . alimony payments.

All laugh.

LIGHTS OUT:

A SPOTLIGHT WITH CLOUD-LIKE EDGES LIGHTS THE CHORUS:

CHORUS There have been considerable challenges for Freddie. Today we look at the entire being, not just to know his present truth, but feel it. It's raw, but it is as it is. You might want to look away, however, to do so would be unwise, as it will impede growth.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF ACT ONE SCENE THREE

ACT ONE, SCENE FOUR

Time: Night

Place: Freddie's Room

A SPOTLIGHT WITH CLOUD-LIKE EDGES LIGHTS THE SCENE:

There is a sofa and a table with an open letter and a bottle of rum on the table. There is a blanket at the end of the sofa.

CONSTANCE, Freddie's wife, wears a sad robe, lays on the sofa with face buried in it's back and WAILS. Loud sobs, and screeches. (Could be the character playing Trixie in wig, robe.)

Freddie, in clean, casual clothes, with hair slicked back, ENTERS with his lunch pail, moves to a table that has an open letter, silently reads it and addresses Constance.

FREDDIE You read the letter?

Her sobs are louder to indicate she has read the letter.

I tried to be home before . . .

Beaten, Freddie shrugs as he drops the letter on table.

I begged them to keep me, but they said they had no alternative, had to cut jobs to cut expenses, so, after twenty-five years, I suddenly became expendable. I told them our medical plan covered your treatments and without the treatments you'd be lost. They said they couldn't do anything. Truth is they could have helped but chose not to.

Louder sobs. Freddie paces.

One last sob and Constance dies, arm falls limp to the side of the sofa.

Freddie takes Constance's arm, moves it along side her body, takes the blanket and covers her up entirely.

Freddie takes the bottle, opens it.

(MORE)

My wife is dead. I'm alone, completely alone.

Freddie sits at the table, tears up the letter, hangs his head.

Life's a joke, a long, oh so long . . . bad joke!

Freddie takes a large swig from the bottle.

SPOTLIGHT OUT:

A SPOTLIGHT WITH CLOUD-LIKE EDGES LIGHTS THE CHORUS:

CHORUS One's circumstances can be dire, difficult to absorb. Some chose to dull pain by what they know, with whatever works. Too bad. We return you to the four sinners on their road.

END OF ACT ONE SCENE FOUR

ACT ONE, SCENE FIVE

Time: Night

Place: Road between Heaven and Hell

LIGHTS UP:

DC from SR to SL -- Mary, Trixie and Arnie are frozen still in a line across the stage, arms-length apart, facing audience. Freddie, as he was in the first scene, lays on the road with his bottle. They unfreeze.

ARNIE *(to Trixie)* And your name?

TRIXIE *(playful)* Trixie Tina. I'm in . . . public relations . . . highly personal . . . physical . . . relations. You could say my public love me.

MARY *(to Trixie)* You disgust me.

TRIXIE I don't use dreams to tell me what to do! I take care of myself.

MARY I can't look at you. You nauseate me!

Trixie takes her boa and puts it around Mary's neck, pulls Mary to her.

TRIXIE Another word about me and you'll be picking your teeth off the road.

Mary throws the boa off, steps away from Trixie.

LIGHTS OUT:

A SPOTLIGHT WITH CLOUD-LIKE EDGES LIGHTS THE CHORUS:

CHORUS We're back again, with our faces of life.

The two chorus members with smiling faces step forward.

Fun!

The two chorus members with smiling faces step back and the two with tragic faces step forward.

(MORE)

Tragedy!

The two chorus members with tragic faces step back.

The two faces of life. You have lived those faces. We can laugh or cry with our four subjects. Now we need to know everything. One other will shed light in our direction. Though life can be difficult, it is good to be informed regarding challenges that arise. We eavesdrop on Trixie Tina's past.

LIGHTS OUT"

END OF ACT ONE SCENE FIVE

ACT ONE, SCENE SIX

Time: Night

Place: Trixie's room

A SPOTLIGHT WITH CLOUD-LIKE EDGES LIGHTS THE SCENE:

Trixie, not made up, dressed in worn clothes, talks on a phone while sitting on a bed. There is the muted sound of a baby crying in another room.

TRIXIE Jill, I don't know what to do. The kid won't stop crying, and I'm out of money. *(pause)* You know my mom is dying in hospital and my dad's funeral took care of what we had saved, so can you lend me a few dollars to get me by? *(a long pause)* Wendy's father? He's long gone. Good thing too. *(a long pause)* Okay, I understand. *(pause)* No, my dad's pension dried up six months ago. Something about the company making a bad investment and Dad's pension fund took the hit. *(pause)* It was the stress that killed him. *(pause)* I'd rather take a bullet to the heart instead of having to deal with ongoing poverty, mom dying, debt, my depression and my crying kid but I don't have a gun. *(pause)* Okay. Thanks, I'll come right over with Wendy. *(pause)* No, she won't cry. I'll feed her before leaving. Thanks. *(pause)* You think I could work the street? I'll take anything. Wendy deserves a future.

SPOTLIGHT OUT:

A SPOTLIGHT WITH CLOUD-LIKE EDGES LIGHTS THE CHORUS:

CHORUS A difficult choice, but a necessary one, all as the result of a business decision. Dominos fall on and on. The four are waiting for you to see them, still on the road moving toward their destiny, each secretly harboring a slim hope of . . . redemption.

END OF ACT ONE SCENE SIX

ACT ONE, SCENE SEVEN

Time: Night

Place: Road between Heaven and Hell

LIGHTS UP:

DC from SR to SL -- Mary, Trixie and Arnie are frozen still in a line across the stage, arms-length apart, facing audience. Freddie is laying on the road.

They unfreeze.

Freddie stands, approaches Mary, about to say something to Mary. His booze breath causes her to turn away and push Freddie away.

MARY *(to Arnie)* What about you?

ARNIE *(superior)* Arnie McMaster, publisher of a prominent newspaper.

Mary moves between Arnie and Freddie.

MARY *(condemning)* Not the same McMaster who publishes that trash tabloid?

ARNIE *(defensive)* Tabloid news is the future of news. My publication, Dirty Secrets, has the highest circulation of all the tabloids.

MARY You and your Dirty Secrets mock real news!

LIGHTS OUT:

A SPOTLIGHT WITH CLOUD-LIKE EDGES LIGHTS THE CHORUS:

CHORUS We have the scoop on Arnie, the intrepid purveyor of common literature – the newspaper! For many, the ones who cherish truth, this, our last visit, will be the most difficult to endure. Try not to look away with mind or body, as for some, it will be challenging, but all need to keep focused.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF ACT ONE SCENE SEVEN

ACT ONE, SCENE EIGHT

Time: Night

Place: Board Room

A SPOTLIGHT WITH CLOUD-LIKE EDGES LIGHTS THE SCENE:

Arnie stands at the head of a board meeting table facing DS – six dummies or people, male and female face Arnie.

Arnie's hat and gloves are gone, and his blue jean jacket is replaced by a business suit jacket with possible tie.

ARNIE Yes, I understand there are some who would rather we play by the rules of yesterday. "Dirty Secrets" doesn't live by those rules.

There are sounds of discord among men and women.

You need to hear this!

The sounds of discord among men and women lessens then goes silent.

Among us are dyed-in-the-wool newspaper people, people who have spent their lives rooting out truth and seeing it displayed in print and felt they have accomplished something of value. That was the truth of yesterday. Today we live in a world where one universal truth does not exist.

There are sounds of discord among men and women.

My words have hit pay dirt. Dissent! Bare with me.

The sounds of discord among men and women lessens then goes silent.

Truth for one nation is not truth for another. Truth for Christians isn't the truth Muslims adhere to. Truth is not universal. There is a polarization of truth. Media needs to inform our readers what we believe truth to be. We interpret truth and call it news!!! We give the readers what they want to believe!! It gives them pleasure and pays our bills. Brilliant!

SPOTLIGHT OUT

A SPOTLIGHT WITH CLOUD-LIKE EDGES LIGHTS THE CHORUS:

CHORUS The power to turn truth into falsehoods and falsehoods into truth. Oh, that is a choice of a low nature. Something must be done. We will see the scope of everything. We return you to our sad sinners.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF ACT ONE SCENE EIGHT

ACT ONE, SCENE NINE

Time: Night

Place: Road between Heaven and Hell

LIGHTS UP:

DC from SR to SL -- Mary, Trixie and Arnie are frozen still in a line across the stage, arms-length apart, facing audience. Freddie lays on the road with his bottle.

They unfreeze.

ARNIE I say my Dirty Secrets newspaper is a brilliant publication!

Freddie stands, approaches Mary with amorous intentions. She pushes him away. Freddie turns to Arnie.

FREDDIE That's it! "Dirty Secrets" is where I read aliens control what the President says.

Freddie collapses on the floor after taking a swig from his booze bottle, bounces up.

FREDDIE I know all about aliens.

The three look to Freddie.

They're here in my bottle.

Freddie collapses on the floor.

MARY The control the President? *(a maybe shrug)* Not real presidents.

ARNIE Who are?

MARY Presidents of corporations, real world leaders! Without us, average citizens would be grovelling in filth.

FREDDIE *(struggles to sit up)* What?

MARY *(motions to Freddie)* Behold, the average citizen.

Freddie struggles up, takes a swig of booze from his bottle, wipes his mouth and nose with his sleeve, collapses on the floor.

TRIXIE I read the story in “Dirty Secrets” about the movie star, don’t remember her name, but she went camping and came across (*bug-eyed emphasis*) Big Foot!

MARY Which is a complete fabrication.

Disheartened, Arnie waves Mary away wanders toward SR.

TRIXIE She spent the night with Big Foot in his cave.

FREDDIE (*struggles to sit up*) Did you get Big Foot jokes from him? I need more material.

MARY (*to Trixie*) You believe this woman slept with Bigfoot?! Ridiculous!

FREDDIE No-one ever mentions his sock. Always his foot, but never his sock. How come?

TRIXIE (*to Mary*) There’s proof.

MARY And you’d believe a photoshopped image?! It’s all hype, fake! Fake! Fake! So fake!

TRIXIE (*putting Mary down*) You’re wrong, all wrong!

Mary gives Trixie a look of disgust.

(*superior tone*) The story says proof will arrive in nine months.

Arnie returns to the group with a big smile.

MARY (*deflated disgust*) So your gullible public will buy your rag every month for the next nine months waiting for the arrival of a Little Foot.

ARNIE Brilliant!

MARY Pathetic. A Little Foot? It’s absurd! Your “Dirty Secrets” will give it three heads and a tale.

ARNIE Can I recruit you to write for us? Your imagination intrigues me.

MARY (*takes a swing at Arnie, he ducks, she misses*) Ahaaaa!

ARNIE People need relief from the tortures of reality! Subscribing to my “Dirty Secrets” is better than taking drugs.

MARY Your idea of a “newspaper” is a joke!

ARNIE *(to Mary)* If this is your dream, then you have a need for me and my “Dirty Secrets”. Mary, listen, me and my “Dirty Secrets” are here for you. Go ahead, tell “Dirty Secrets” your horrible, filthy . . . dirty secret. You like the dames more than the gents?

MARY I’ll sue you for slander! Libel!

ARNIE Bull!! *(desperate to Freddie and Tina)* To get out of our nightmare we need to think back to our last action before coming here. I told you about cleaning out my eavestrough. Freddie, what’s your last recollection?

FREDDIE I was doing my stand-up routine at the Fun Shack in Fort Worth, Texas, then blank, nothing. Passed out? I donno.

ARNIE *(to Trixie)* What’s the last thing you remember?

TRIXIE Me? *(pause, recollecting)* I’d gotten to my no parking sign. It’s mine, you know, my place on the strip. I was solicitin’, flexin’ my stuff on it, like a pole dancer, to scare up some business. This blue Ford came roarin’ by, slammed on the brakes, threw it into reverse, and backed smack into my sign. What’s it mean?

ARNIE I’d like to think we are Heaven bound, but truly, it’s likely we’re all going straight to Hell!

FREDDIE *(laughs)* This is a joke. A big joke. *(laughs)* Another one. Now listen, this is very important. One morning, when I got to my car, I found my car door swung open. A thief had gotten into my car, left my papers scattered around and my valuables, my radio, CDs, GPS, umbrella, Blue Jays hat, two pair of sunglasses, all my car stuff was . . . still there! *(almost crying)* I felt violated.

They laugh.

Freddie staggers, hangs on Mary for support, breaths into her face. She’s repulsed, pushes Freddie away.

MARY Memo to subconscious -- leave drunken comedians out of dreams.

TRIXIE I’m thinkin’ that over-sexed, bad driver, backed into my no parking sign, and it killed me while I was flexin’. The sign might have brained me.

MARY It couldn’t have.

TRIXIE Why?

MARY You were born brain dead.

TRIXIE Ahaaaaaaa!

Trixie moves strikes at Mary but Mary ducks, then Arnie stops Trixie from pursuing Mary.

ARNIE That red maple leaf caused me to fall and die, then the wack from the no parking sign hit Trixie, sent us both here.

FREDDIE (*alarmed*) I know why I didn't finish my set! Because, because . . . (*stressed*) of the groupie I had a no-strings-attached, one-night stand with.

TRIXIE So?

FREDDIE Just before I went on, she told me her boyfriend would be in the audience.

ARNIE So?

FREDDIE She told him how much she loved me. Just before going on she told me he's a gun lover with an impulsive nature! Why can't hot women think of consequences? (*checks his body*) Any holes?!

TRIXIE (*steps away from Freddie*) Ouch!

Trixie turns to Mary.

What about Miss Mary Two Consciousnesses?

MARY (*irritated*) If I wake up now, you'll all disappear – be gone!

TRIXIE (*to Mary*) Do you sleep with a husband, boyfriend . . . girlfriend?

MARY I don't sleep with . . . others. I'm a dedicated, career-oriented, business individual.

TRIXIE Terrific sex clears the mental cobwebs.

MARY I like my cobwebs! I own my cobwebs! Not like you sex obsessed weirdos! Oh, this is my worst nightmare. Why can't I wake up?! Ahhhhhhhhhh!

ARNIE I'm on my way to Hell and I'm liking it. Us being here, our joint situation, would make a terrific story for "Dirty Secrets".

Freddie staggers, about to fall, regains balance.

FREDDIE (*laughs, staggers*) Isn't the road moving? (*laughs*) Or I'm hallucinating, which is . . .

TRIXIE *(alarmed)* No! the road is moving!

FREDDIE *(dismayed)* Really?!

All steady themselves.

MARY Moving road means . . .!!

All four simultaneously fall toward SR, struggle to stand, regain balance, but do.

ARNIE We're being pulled into Hell!

FREDDIE Halleluiah! Where's the bar?

The four run on the spot facing SR. The "Hell" sign slides toward them and stops beside the four and the "Heaven" sign moves off stage SR. Freddie's exhausted, collapses.

OSCAR *(O.S. booming grating voice)* Welcome to Club Hell! *(a maniacal laugh)*

M/A/F/T Ahhhhhh!

LIGHTS OUT

END OF ACT ONE – END OF SAMPLE