THE PENS WILL HAVE THEIR DAY:
A FULL-LENGTH PLAY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts in English

By

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Dedications

This work is dedicated to my grandparents Sam and Marguerite (Dolly) Barack, my parents Cheryl Barack-Gouger and Garry Gouger, and to my love, J. Alfred Prufrock.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Richard Mitchell for his assistance, guidance and support throughout this process; Dr. Leilani Hall for her endless wisdom and insight into the inner voice; and Dr. Leigh Kennicott for broadening my theatrical perspective.

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ABSTRACT

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A PLAY

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Alfred is an elderly playwright in declining mental and physical health. His inner voice, Anima, a trickster-esque young woman, is haunting him day and night. As his unhealthy lifestyle begins to take its toll on him, his play starts to become more and more bizarre and Anima is forced to make the tough writing choices he seems afraid to make. Between losing his wife, constant misunderstandings, drug and alcohol abuse, and general health problems, Alfred’s reality is slipping more and more. The characters in his play seem to have a life of their own and Anima’s level of control over the writing process is increasing by the minute. Even his real world exchanges are becoming more difficult to maneuver through. Will he finish his play before his life comes to an end?
The Pens Shall Have Their Day
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CAST LIST

ALFRED: An elderly playwright in declining mental and physical health

ANIMA: ALFRED’s inner voice/muse, a young woman, a trickster at heart, very physical
    Actor who plays ANIMA also plays:
    - NANA: SAM’s maternal grandmother
    - WAITER: A waiter

SUSAN: A ditsy shop clerk
    Actor who plays SUSAN also plays:
    - MARGUERITE: ALFRED’s lost love, a woman in a red dress

JERRY: The manager of a small shop
    Actor who plays JERRY also plays:
    - SAM: ALFRED’s imagined self, a writer/handyman with a flower growing out of his
      head (ages from teen to adult)

MR. LUI: ALFRED’s neighbor, a well-built Chinese man and health nut
    Actor who plays MR. LUI also plays:
    - MR. BO-BO: A snooty British bulldog with a red bow tie

JIM: ALFRED’s manager, a fast-talking ladies’ man
    Actor who plays JIM also plays:
    - DAD: SAM’s dad
SETTING:
Present day St. Louis.

NOTES:
* Except where noted, ALFRED should remain unconsciously aware of ANIMA at all times. He should respond to her comments and antics as if they are in his own head. Only characters in ALFRED’s play should notice or directly respond to her, unless otherwise stated.

* The set design should include a hidden hatch downstage center on the floor of the stage. When characters enter or exit from it, they should appear to be using stairs.

* When ANIMA plays other characters, she is always quintessentially herself.

* For additional insights, the playwright suggests reading T.S. Eliot’s poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.”
SCENE 1
IN THE BEGINNING

(Theatre is dark. The stage is split. ANIMA addresses the audience, still in the dark.)

ANIMA
In the beginning was the Voice. And from the Voice came forth all that is. Come forth the light!

(She lights a joint and inhales, then snaps her fingers. Spotlight on ANIMA, who is dressed in a top hat, magician’s jacket, ink-stained shirtsleeves and old-man trousers. She bows and directly addresses the audience.)

Ladies and gentlemen, friends and foes! May I present to you the Amazing Alfred!

(The lights rise on the rest of the stage. ANIMA frowns at seeing ALFRED asleep at his desk in his office chair. He is dressed like ANIMA in a matching ink-stained shirt and trousers. A brown coat hangs behind him. The apartment is cluttered with piles of books and papers everywhere, creating a kind of maze; ALFRED is a hoarder. His desk is set in the corner of the apartment next to a small plant stand. Many items are sprawled across his desk, including: a photograph of a woman in a red dress, stacks of paper, a rotary phone, a blinking answering machine, an old hammer, a coffee mug, and an ash tray. An antique radio sits on the floor by one of the piles. On the small plant stand rests a glass bowl in the shape of a fish with fresh flowers in it. There is an empty trashcan in front of it. Dusty awards, handwritten notes, etc. hang in the background behind his desk. As ALFRED sleeps, ANIMA thinks for a moment.)

Aha!

(ANIMA reaches into the hat and pulls out cymbals.)

For my first trick, I shall awaken our hero from his great slumber!

(She bangs them together loudly. ALFRED snores.)
Never fret for, as they say, in the face of opportunity lies great difficulty!

(pause)

Or something like that.

(She reaches into the hat and pulls out a bullhorn. She speaks into the horn.)

ALFRED! Wake up!

(Still ALFRED continues to sleep.)

It never used to be this way. But I stray…

(She reaches into the hat. Before removing another item, she pauses dramatically to speak her lines, hand still in the hat.)

Perhaps you think me cruel, to wake a feeble, elderly man from such a dreamy state. But a Muse is only a Muse if she’s amused.

(She winks at the audience. She feels around in the hat for the next object. With great difficulty, she finally removes from the hat an ordinary pen and an oversized notepad. She shows it to the audience.)

Only a simple pen and paper, no? Nothing unusual about these items.

(She writes the word “flowers” on the notepad, rips it off and shows it to the audience.)

Some silly little writing, yes? But add a bit of *shmabra kababra*—

(She holds the pen like a magic wand and waves it around in the air.)

and some magical fairy dust—

(She inhales the joint and blows smoke around the pen.)

and… Poof!
Pretty snazzy, eh? Now whaddayasa say we get this guy (gestures to ALFRED) into the show, huh? I learned my next trick from a Bedouin camel herder. This is ancient magic you’re about to see, folks, the real deal. But for it to work, we’ll have to get a bit closer.

(The spotlight follows her as she enters ALFRED’s apartment. With flair, she writes “Wake up” in big letters on the notepad, then shows it to the audience.)

_Shmabra kababra!

(She takes the notepad and whacks ALFRED over the head with it. Instantly, ALFRED wakes up and the spotlight goes out.)

Good morning, Alfie! Sleep well?

(ALFRED appears rather disoriented and does not notice the audience or ANIMA.)

ALFRED

Marguerite? (touching his head) Where are my flowers…?

(Confused, ALFRED looks around the room, trying to get his bearings. He wipes some drool away from his mouth, slowly becoming aware of his surroundings.)

Right.

(He rubs his eyes and then stares longingly for a while at the photograph on his desk.)

ANIMA

(clears throat, smiles and speaks to ALFRED through gritted teeth)

I’m trying to impress them (gestures to audience), Alfie. Best put dreary thoughts away and show them your skills.

(ALFRED sighs heavily. He eventually stops looking at the photo and grabs a sheet of paper from one of the stacks. ANIMA is elated.)

5
Marvelous!

(Pause. He scratches his head, chews his nails, sniffs loudly, and then gets up to put on some coffee. ANIMA tries to steer him back to the desk.)

Where ya goin’ Alfie? Your desk is back there.

(She continues to gesture wildly towards his desk, though ALFRED remains unaware. After he pours a cup of coffee, he leans against the wall, and tries to light a cigarette. ANIMA blows the lighter out each time he tries to light it. He shakes the lighter.)

ALFRED

Damn these cheap lighters.

ANIMA

This is not a productive use of our time, Alfie.

ALFRED

Fuck it.

(He gives up and returns to his desk. ANIMA beams, following behind.)

ANIMA

(to audience) Legend has it that Shakespeare’s Muse was the town whore. She’d spread his ink on any sheets available.

(ALFRED attempts to organize the desk’s chaos.)

Lucky for him (gestures to ALFRED), I’m not nearly as picky.

(ALFRED sits at the desk, holding the blank page in his hands. ANIMA becomes excited.)

Prepare to be amazed!

(Her excitement doesn’t last long, as ALFRED becomes once again distracted by the photograph on his desk. He puts the blank paper down and holds the photo in his hand, pouting and murmuring dejectedly. ANIMA sighs and thinks for a moment.)
ANIMA (cont’d)
Worry not, friends, for this abject stance is only an illusion! Perhaps you care for a demonstration!

(She holds up the pen dramatically.)

Clearly, you can see that this is no mere pen. I shall now perform the Grand Switcharoo!

(She waves the pen like a wand towards the radio.)

Shmabra kababra!

(The radio turns on. ANIMA’s voice is heard coming out of it.)

ALFRED
(looking at the radio) ANIMA (V.O.)
What the…? (like an advertisement)

Do you part your hair behind? Do you dare to eat a peach?

(With his attention on the radio, ANIMA swaps the photograph ALFRED is holding for the magic pen. ANIMA puts the photo back on his desk, turning it away from him and towards the audience.)

ANIMA (V.O.)
Do you enjoy white flannel trousers and walks upon the beach? Well then, look no further. “LoveFools.com” has all your dating needs.

(Old timey music plays in the background. ALFRED turns back to look at the photo and notices the pen now in his hand. He peers around the room confused.)

ALFRED
What was I just doing?

(ANIMA grabs his head and adjusts his attention to the blank sheet of paper in front of him, though he doesn’t notice her.)

Oh right!

(He stares at the blank sheet, then at the radio, as it continues playing old timey music softly. ANIMA whispers in his ear. He acknowledges the pen and
writes. Immediately, the lights rise on the split scene. DAD, in tie, and MR. BO-BO are sitting at a dinner table, waiting. Beside them on a plant stand [identical to ALFRED’s] rests a radio, again matching ALFRED’s, though in newer condition, and a fern. SAM, as a teenager, rushes in and takes a seat, leaving one chair still empty. He has a bushel of flowers growing out of his head. The flowers are out of control, with his eyes and face almost completely hidden by stems and blossoms instead of hair. He is dressed in clothing that matches ALFRED’s.)

DAD

Dinner started 10 minutes ago.

SAM

Sorry, Dad. I was just finishing a story.

DAD

I don’t want to hear your excuses, Sam.

(DAD serves them each a fish filet using an identical fish shaped dish to the one in ALFRED’s apartment. SAM looks at the food, disgusted.)

ANIMA

(tousling ALFRED’s hair)

Nice touch with the flowers.

(ALFRED smiles to himself.)

DAD

For the love of god, son, you’re getting petals all over the mashed potatoes!

MR.BO-BO

Indubitably.

(In synchronized movements, SAM and ALFRED go to brush the hair out of their faces.)

DAD

Put on a damn hat when you’re at the dinner table! How many times do I have to tell you, boy?
(SAM stands up. Out of courtesy, MR.BO-BO rises as well.)

DAD
And turn off that damn music while you’re up. I can’t hear myself think!

(SAM goes to turn off their radio. He fiddles with the knobs and the music coming from ALFRED’s radio stops. ALFRED stops writing and glances at it. The actors in the other scene freeze their actions and turn in unison. They stare at ANIMA and ALFRED, waiting.)

ANIMA
Forget the radio. Focus on the writing, Alfie.

(ALFRED takes a sip from his coffee.)

Not coffee, Alfie, writing. And what’s up with the empty seat? Where’s Nana?

ALFRED
(as if to himself)
Na…na?

ANIMA
Yeah, don’t cha remember, Nana? On your mom’s side?

ALFRED
(trying to remember)
Nana…Nana…

ANIMA
Nana, at the house even after the divorce? Nana, putting on lipstick before she went to bed? Nana, always going on about her crazy inventions?

(pause)

Nothing?

(ALFRED shakes his head.)

You know what, I got this one. Just let the pen do the work.

(ANIMA grabs a cane and scarf from one of ALFRED’s piles, quickly ties it around her head and hobbles into the scene, becoming NANA. She
sits in the empty seat. Pause. She pounds the cane on the floor. Immediately, ALFRED snaps back into action. He writes. The other actors resume their previous positions.)

ANIMA (as NANA)  
(grabbing SAM and pulling him down to the table)  
Sammy, sit down. We’re eatin’ our dinner now.

(SAM sits. MR. BO-BO sits. DAD huffs.)

DAD  
No, Nana. He’s getting his hat.

ANIMA (as NANA)  
(referring to dog)  
Fat? It’s cuz yer feedin him too much.

MR. BO-BO  
I beg your pardon, Ma’am?

DAD  
“Hat” Nana, HAT!

ANIMA (as NANA)  
Rat? Filthy animal, if you ask me. Sammy, now that yer up, get me my doohickey.

(SAM looks bewildered. He stands up. MR. BO-BO stands up.)

MR. BO-BO  
I’ll gladly take the rat if no one else is going to eat it—

ANIMA (as NANA)  
I need my doohickey! Where is it?

SAM  
Nana, you’re not at your workbench right now. We’re having dinner, remember?

ANIMA (as NANA)  
Again?

DAD  
Sam! Get your hat…and sit down!
(MR. BO-BO immediately sits, cowering. SAM looks for his hat.)

ANIMA (as NANA)
I’m already sitting, dear.

SAM
(looking for his hat, under his breath)
Mom never used to yell at me.

DAD
(patting NANA’s hand)
That’s right, Nana. That’s right.

DAD
What did you say about your mother?

SAM
Nothing.

ANIMA (as NANA)
Did you find it, Sammy?

SAM
(putting on his hat)
Here it is.

DAD
Do I have to remind you what she did to us?

ANIMA (as NANA)
You got my doohickey, Sammy?

SAM
 RETURNS WITH A HAMMER WHICH MATCHES ALFRED’S)
Uh… Here you go, Nana.

ANIMA (as NANA)
That’s a doodad, son. I wanted a doohickey. A doohickey!

(SAM looks helplessly at MR. BO-BO, who continues to gnaw at his bone.)

DAD
I can’t believe your mother. Walking out on us, leaving me to take care of this nutter-in-law!

SAM
(gestures to NANA)
You can’t just talk about her like she’s not here.
DAD

Well, I’m not the one who left.

SAM

Not Mom. Nana.

ANIMA (as NANA)

What’s that Sammy?

DAD

I’ve had just about enough of your lip, Stickhead –

MR. BO-BO

Stick? Stick?

(MR. BO-BO leaps across the table for the stick, knocking over the food, which splatters and spills all over DAD’s clothes.)

ANIMA (as NANA)
(continuing on in spite of the chaos)

Now Sammy, ya can tell ‘em apart cuz a doodad’s got a whatchamacallit on the side—

DAD
(to MR. BO-BO)

That’s it! You’re going outside.

(DAD grabs MR. BO-BO, who whimpers and howls, and drags the dog towards the center of the stage, where he opens up a hidden door on the stage floor. He shoves MR. BO-BO into it and exits with him, closing the hidden door as he leaves. NANA pays no attention to this, continuing on with her explanation. Moments later, there is a knock at ALFRED’s door. Engrossed in his writing, he doesn’t notice.)

ANIMA (as NANA)
—while a doohickey has a thingamabob instead.

(another knock)

SAM

Sure, Nana. Whatever you say.
(JIM, ALFRED’s fast talking manager opens the door, walking into ALFRED’s apartment as he says his lines. He is well-dressed in a suit and tie. ALFRED keeps writing.)

JIM

Alfred? Hello?

ANIMA (as NANA)

I’ve got just the thing to help ya remember.

(As JIM enters, ANIMA [as NANA] pulls out a chart from under the table and sets it up. It features lots of arrows, crudely drawn tools and nonsensical labels. It is mostly unreadable and very confusing. JIM is stunned at ALFRED’s mess. He trips over things as he enters. ALFRED still doesn’t notice him.)

JIM

Holy fuck balls! This place is a mess, dude.

ANIMA (as NANA) JIM

See now, this is a— Alfred? Dude! ALFRED!

(ALFRED finally hears him and looks up. ANIMA and SAM stop, turning their heads in unison toward the apartment.)

ALFRED

Jim?!

ANIMA

Uh-oh. (removing the scarf, to SAM) Listen, you better skedaddle. This might take a while.

(ANIMA opens the hidden door again and SAM exits through it. ANIMA then joins ALFRED in his apartment and the lights in the dinner scene go dark.)

ALFRED

How did you get in here?

JIM ANIMA

Uh, through the door. I knocked several times. Me?
ALFRED  
(suspiciously)

Uh-huh.

JIM  
Don’t be so paranoid, Alfred.

ANIMA  
It’s your mind, Alfie…

ALFRED  
Hardly.

JIM  
Love what you’ve done with the place, by the way. Very, uh…

ANIMA  
Stylish? Artistic?

JIM  
Eclectic.

ALFRED  
What are you doing here, Jim?

JIM  
To be honest, we’ve been, I’ve been a bit worried about you. Didn’t you get my messages?

(All three look at the blinking light on the answering machine.)

I guess not.

ALFRED  
(erasing the messages)
Yeah, I haven’t really been, um…checking them since Marguerite...

ANIMA  
That selfish little hussy—

ALFRED  
…well, you know.

MACHINE (V.O.)  
Messages erased. There are no new messages.

JIM  
Uh-huh… But, and I totally get your pain man, but wasn’t that like four months ago?
Thursday would have been our 20th anniversary.

JIM You’re better off without her.

ANIMA We’re better off without her.

(She plays with ALFRED’s hair, though neither he nor JIM notice.)

JIM (picking up the photo)
You really ought to put this thing away, dude. Nothing but bad memories.

(JIM puts the photo into ALFRED’s desk drawer.)

So…have you done any writing since last we spoke?

ALFRED I’ve got a lot of ideas—

JIM Anything on paper, though?

(ALFRED looks around at the stacks, helplessly.)

ALFRED Was just, uh, working on a scene when you came in.

JIM For the Missouri Playwrights festival?

ALFRED (uncertainly)
Uh-huh. Yeah.

JIM Because that’s what we want, Alfred. That’s what we agreed upon.

ALFRED No, I mean, yeah, it’s coming along…

JIM Is that it?

(JIM gestures to the paper ALFRED has been
writing on.)

ALFRED
(protectively)
Yeah. But, I mean, it’s still in the beginning stages. You know, it’s not—

(JIM grabs the paper out of ALFRED’s hands and reads, pacing around the room. ALFRED watches nervously at his desk, while ANIMA follows behind JIM. She parodies JIM, over-exaggerating his movements.)

JIM
A talking dog?

ALFRED
I know it’s experimental, but—

JIM
This is not what the agency asked for.

(continues reading)

ANIMA
Fuck the agency—

ALFRED
As I said, I mean, it’s still in the—

JIM
I said grounded, Alfred.

ALFRED
It is grounded—

JIM
This kid’s got flowers growing out of his fuckin’ head, man!

ALFRED
I thought it would be more theatrical if—

JIM
Flowers! Out of his head!

ANIMA
Whatcha got against flowers?
(JIM tosses the paper into the trash. ANIMA fumes. ALFRED takes out an inhaler and uses it.)

JIM
It’s supposed to be about you, Alfred, you! That’s the only reason the agency agreed to advance you money on this project, especially after the, uh, debacle with your last piece.

ALFRED
It was a difficult play. But it got some good reviews.

JIM
One good review, Alfred. One. And it wasn’t even that good.

ALFRED
Well…

ANIMA
(mockingly)
Missouri reviewers. They think good theatre is “Titanic: The Musical.”

JIM
Listen, man, this festival is about highlighting our best writers from the state. I had to do a lot of convincing to get you in there. They want autobiographical pieces—

ALFRED
(getting up and heading towards the trash)
But it is autobiographical. I mean, the kid, Sam, he is me…well, was me…metaphorically—

JIM
No, no, no. You’re not listening to me. This is it, man. You understand?

ALFRED
/removing the paper from the trash and dusting it off/
Yeah, yeah.

JIM
I say this as a friend, okay, because we’ve had a long history together you and I, okay? They want a realistic portrayal of your life, not some fantastic, surreal, hippidity bibbity boo shit. You get me?

ALFRED
Okay, okay. I got it.
JIM
Because I really put my neck out on the line for you this time. I’ve pulled every string I had to get you into this festival. It wasn’t easy.

ALFRED
I understand, Jim. I’ll get you something in the next week or so.

JIM
Good, because you’re already too far behind as it is.

ALFRED
It’s a process. You know.

JIM
It needs to be a faster process, Alfred.

ALFRED
Anyway, you didn’t, by any chance, get that, uh, other stuff I asked you about?

(JIM sighs, reluctantly reaches into his pocket and hands ALFRED a bag of weed. ALFRED takes it happily and returns to his desk to roll a joint. ANIMA wanders around the apartment looking at various items.)

JIM
I can’t be doing that anymore either.

ALFRED
Save the lectures.

JIM
Also, we need to talk about your manuscripts. Karleen’s having trouble reading your handwriting, so—

ALFRED
What happened to Tricia?

JIM
She just, uh…didn’t have the, uh, qualities I, we wanted. Anyways, Karleen’s been great—

ALFRED
I’m sure.
JIM
She’s gonna be helping me out with this client down in Costa Rica next week—

ALFRED
Costa Rica?

JIM
Yeah, ever been?

ALFRED
Uh, no.

JIM
You really should, great place… So anyway, the agency bought you a laptop. It’ll be delivered later in the week—

ALFRED
You know Tricia, your old secretary—

JIM
Administrative assistant.

ALFRED
Right. Well, she could read my handwriting just fine. And besides, I don’t really like computers.

JIM
Well, then you’re gonna have to learn to like them, old man cuz—

(JIM’s cell phone chimes. He checks it.)

Aw fuck. Listen, dude, I gotta take care of this.

(He starts heading towards the door.)

Now, you stay focused, alright? We need solid work from ya, okay? Nothing too...fancy.

(ALFRED nods, lighting the joint. ANIMA sits on ALFRED’s desk, posing in fancy ways.)

And no more wallowing in self-pity. Clean this place up a bit, maybe try opening up the curtains or something. Something…

(ANIMA flicks JIM off multiple times as he exits.)
ANIMA

Dick.

(ALFRED sits at his desk, smoking and coughing, as the lights fade out.)

SCENE 2
SHOPPING ORDEALS

(ALFRED waits in line at a general store pushing a shopping cart full of items. He wears a long brown coat and dress shoes. ANIMA sits in the cart, annoyed, dressed the same. SUSAN, a ditsy and busty shop clerk in her 20's, thumbs his cantaloupe and very slowly places it into a bag. She is easily distracted from her duties. SUSAN remains unaware of ANIMA throughout the scene. ALFRED notices her unconsciously, as before.)

ANIMA
(tapping at her wrist as if wearing a watch)
Tick tock, sweetie. We got work to do.

SUSAN
This is a good one.

(ALFRED stares at SUSAN’s breasts.)

ALFRED
Uh-huh.

ANIMA
(gets out of the cart and pretends to caress SUSAN’s face)
She’s not rail-thin skinny like Marguerite was. But she is equally pale, as though her skin has been doused in baby powder.

SUSAN
Hard to find ripe melons this time of year.

(ALIMA makes groping gestures towards SUSAN’s breasts.)

ALFRED
Yeah.
I mean, if you look…

Don't you want to look, Alfie?

Sure.

This store has everything!

Would you like to make a $1 donation to “Save the Children”?

Look, she's a humanitarian.

What for?

What for what?

And bright too.

Have you ever been to India?

Excuse me?

You know, the country?

As opposed to...

Uh, no. I haven't.

My friend Marcie said that Indian people like to leave fruit by their teepees so that their dead relatives won't come back and haunt them.
ANIMA
We should really get out of the house more often.

ALFRED
I think your friend has got something wrong with her facts.

SUSAN
I don't think Marcie has a fax machine.

ALFRED
I mean, she seems confused.

ANIMA
Come on, Alfie. Let’s just get out of here already.

SUSAN
Are you like a teacher or something?

ALFRED
No. I'm a writer.

ANIMA
Since when?

(She humps the checkout stand.)

SUSAN
That's so cool! It's what I want to do!

ALFRED
Really?

SUSAN
I just, like, work here part-time, you know. This isn't my career or anything.

ANIMA
Well, that's a relief.

ALFRED
I see.

SUSAN
I mean, it's okay...like working here and all. But I really want to be a journal writer.

ALFRED
You mean a journal-ist?
SUSAN
Well, yeah. I want to post blogs.

ANIMA
She's goal oriented.

ALFRED
Blogs?

SUSAN
On the internet. Like, be famous and all.

ALFRED
Sure. Why not?

ANIMA
You guys will be so happy together.

SUSAN
Don't tell my boss I said that, though. You know how it is.

ANIMA
You know how it is, Alfie.

ALFRED
Yeah, I know how it is.

(SUSAN hands ALFRED his bags. They are too heavy for him and he struggles to hold them.)

SUSAN
Do you need some assistance, Sir?

ALFRED
Uh, no. I, um…

ANIMA
Poor widdle Alfie. No wonder you can’t keep a woman, with those widdy biddy arms.

(He drops one of the bags and the cantaloupes roll out. SUSAN reaches down to grab them for him.)

(to audience) Do I dare?
ANIMA grins, then pushes the cart into ALFRED, causing him to stumble. He reaches out to steady his fall, but the closest thing available is SUSAN’s butt. He grabs it reluctantly.)

SUSAN

Sir!

(Embarrassed, ALFRED steadies himself and pulls out his inhaler. Breathing heavily, he exits, without the bag. ANIMA follows behind, blowing kisses to SUSAN, who does not notice. SUSAN cleans up the mess, confused, as the lights fade out.)

SCENE 3
ANNOYING NEIGHBORS

(ALFRED is once again at his desk. He is looking worse for wear, as though he hasn’t slept for days. His hands are shaking. He smokes a cigarette, coughs and then takes uses his inhaler to steady his breathing. Several butts fill the ashtray, coffee mugs cover his desk, the flowers wilt in the fish dish and several crumpled sheets of paper overflow the trash bin. ANIMA paces around his apartment, fuming, as ALFRED stares at a crooked award on the wall.)

ANIMA
Alfred, it’s been like three days! I’m going crazy over here!

(ALFRED gets up and walks over to the award.)

What are you doing?

(He tries level out the award, unsuccessfully.)

Seriously?

(He goes back to his desk.)

Alright, good, good.

(He doesn’t sit down, to ANIMA’s disappointment, but instead grabs the hammer and returns to the award.)
ANIMA (cont’d)

You can’t write with a hammer, Alfie.

(He removes the award and tries to pull the nail out with the hammer. He yanks too hard and smacks himself in the head.)

ALFRED
(seething in pain)

Mother fuckin—

(He drops the hammer and walks back to his desk, cradling his injured head.)

ANIMA

Quite the handyman, aren’t ya?

(He removes a 7-day pill container from his desk and ANIMA rushes over to him.)

No, no! Don’t take those. You’ll just fall asleep again!

(He removes a flask from his coat pocket, sips at it and then takes a handful of the pills. ANIMA pouts. He sits in his chair, rubbing his head. Pause.)

This just won’t do. Shmabra kababra!

(She snaps her fingers and suddenly ALFRED’s pen appears to stand up and float into the air directly in front of him. ALFRED looks at it in disbelief.)

ALFRED

What the?

(He rubs his eyes. When he stops, the pen is once again resting on the desk. He picks up the pill container and tries to read the label.)

Take as directed. Yeah, yeah. No more than 2 pills every… What does that say? May cause diarrhea…vomiting…paralysis?

(He throws the pills at the trash can, but misses.)

ALFRED

Pathetic.

25
ANIMA
No, no, Alfie. Think of the good times.

(She rubs his shoulders.)

Remember the European women from the theatre tours? Can you see them? Sucking down oysters and champagne?

(He drinks from his flask.)

False eyelashes, penciled-in brows? Black negligees peeking out from skirts? Beauty parlor hairdos? And this…and so much more.

(ANIMA makes sexual gestures.)

ALFRED
(to himself)

It’s been so long…

ANIMA
(whispering)

What's wrong, Alfie? Mind getting mushy? A little...cloudy, perhaps?

(ALFRED slumps over in his chair.)

ANIMA

You're on thin sheets of ice. Hear those crackly sounds echoing in your ears...your ears...your ears. Even your eyes are growing thin. Go on, now. Dissolve...

ALFRED
(tapping his fingers against his head)

There’s still more in here; I can almost see it.

(touching the stubble on his face)

How did it come to this? Such filth.

(mimes the act of shaving, hands shaking wildly)

If I just...go slow enough...

ALFRED

Maybe the barber can squeeze me in.

ANIMA

So afraid now...little Alfred.
ANIMA
(mockingly)
Afraid that the razor will cut your wrinkly skin, afraid to lean too far back in your chair and... (she snaps the chair back) Crack!

(ALFRED sits up quickly in terror.)

Afraid of the doorbell, the newspaper, the pitiful stares. Your pens are out to get you, Alfred. You are right to be afraid.

ALFRED
I just need some…inspiration. Yeah.

(He lights a pipe, but inhales too deeply, which causes him to break out into a coughing fit. He tries to get up to get a glass of water and becomes dizzy.)

ANIMA
The toxins are fighting to get out. Waltz with the room, Alfie! Hear the music!

(She snaps her fingers and the radio once again turns on. Waltzing music is heard. ANIMA grabs ALFRED and forces him to dance, spinning him around the room.)

All of existence is a ball, pulling you into it, into that oneness.

(They continue spinning. ALFRED faints in her arms. She dances with his limp body.)

Roll up, squeeze into the whole.

(pause)

The footman is coming. He will be here very soon.

(There is a knock at the door. ANIMA drops ALFRED to the floor. [Chinese pronunciation in brackets.])

MR. LUI
(offstage)
Mister Alfred?

(ALFRED stirs. MR. LUI continues knocking.)
MR. LUI
I am Mister Lui! Have a package here for you. Yao bu yao [yow boo yow]? You want me to leave it?

(ALKRED comes to.)

I am knocking! Hallo?

(Dazed, ALFRED gets up and opens the door. MR. LUI is dressed in a tracksuit with the look of having just come from a jog. He carries a laptop-shaped package. ALFRED rubs his eyes. ANIMA rushes over, admiring MR. LUI’s build, though he remains unaware of her. She playfully mimes grabbing his arm muscles and makes sexual gestures towards him.)

ALKRED
(mumbling and using his inhaler)

Hello?

MR. LUI
Ja yo, I woke you up! I forget that this is so early. It is good to run in the morning! Get the blood to flow, you know? Maybe you should try some time. I will teach you.

PACKAGE?

ANIMA
I'd say so.

MR. LUI
Here you go. Kind of a heavy package, yes?

ANIMA
(pretending to grope MR. LUI, who does not notice)

Indeed!

MR. LUI
And look! Little kitty stickers. Something from your sweetie?

(tries to hand it to ALFRED)

Unlikely.

ALKRED
MR. LUI
The landlady say you not come out of house for many days. She think maybe you die. And now I see you, she right.

(MR. LUI continues to hold out the package in dutiful pose.)

You like Chinese herbs?

ANIMA
I like Chinese everything!

MR. LUI
Very natural. Get your cir-Q-lation moving again, yes?

ALFRED
There must be some mistake.

MR. LUI
No, it says here: “For Mister Alfred.” See?

ANIMA
See! See!

(ALFRED looks at the package.)

ALFRED
Yes, I guess so.

(Reluctantly, ALFRED takes the package.)

MR. LUI
Hen hao [how]! I will bring them for you!

ALFRED
What?

MR. LUI
For your cir-Q-lation.

ALFRED
Huh? Oh, no don't bother. I have my own stuff.

MR. LUI
Okay. I will bring them later then.
(MR. LUI exits. ALFRED walks back towards his desk, eying the package suspiciously. ANIMA follows behind.)

ANIMA
Are we gonna write now, huh? Huh?

(ALFRED sits on the edge of his desk. One of the legs goes out and the desk slants, ALFRED slanting with it.)

ALFRED
Perfect.

(He drops the package and then slowly rises. He looks around the room for a moment, then grabs a hardcover book from one of the piles and shoves it under the broken desk leg. The desk is still at a slight angle. He steps back, observing his work.)

ANIMA
A real Jack-of-all-trades, aren’t ya?

(Suddenly, something clicks for ALFRED. He rushes to his office chair, grabs the magic pen and some paper, and writes.)

Finally!

(Lights up on the other sides of the stage. SAM enters carrying a tool box and sits at a small table in a cafe, his flower hair now pulled back into a pony tail. He wears a brown coat over clothing which matches ALFRED’s. SAM looks at a menu and waits. Moments later, MARGUERITE enters, wearing a red dress to match the one in ALFRED’s photo. She pauses at the door to apply some lipstick. SAM looks up and they smile at one another.)

Not to be a nag, but Marguerite didn’t look like that.

(ALFRED waves his free hand in the air, as if shooing away an unpleasant thought. ANIMA dodges it with perfect timing.)
ANIMA (cont’d)
Seriously, this girl’s got way bigger breasts. But I digress…

MARGUERITE
(approaching SAM’s table)
Mind if I join you? All the other tables are full.

SAM
Please.

(She sits and looks at the menu. She waves and calls to someone offstage.)

MARGUERITE
Oh waiter! Coffee please!

(MR.BO-BO enters dressed like a waiter, but with his dog ears and tail. He carries a coffee pot and two cups.)

MR. BO-BO
Coffee?

(They nod. He pours them each a cup. As he is putting the cups down, the table wobbles.)

SAM
Not to worry. I can fix that!

(SAM opens his toolbox and removes a piece of slanted wood, which he slides under the wobbly table leg. MARGUERITE smiles.)

MARGUERITE
My hero.

SAM
Well…

MARGUERITE
What else you got in there?

(MARGUERITE and MR. BO-BO look in curiously.)
SAM
(removing items)
Oh, you know, this and that. A doodad, a doohickey.

(As SAM takes out various tools, MR. BO-BO looks at them disgusted. He dabs his nose with a handkerchief and mutters under his breath. The others pay him no mind.)

MR. BO-BO
Filthy.

MARGUERITE
I never could tell those apart.

SAM
It’s funny. I used to have the same problem.

Really?

SAM
Uh-huh. Until I saw this…

(MARGUERITE looks worried.)

(He reaches into his toolbox and pulls out the absurd chart from the dinner scene. MR. BO-BO guffaws.)

MR. BO-BO
I’ll come back—

MARGUERITE
Walloping begonias!

MR. BO-BO
(walking away and speaking under his breath)
So pedestrian…

(He stands at the back of the stage, waiting and watching the scene, shaking his head in repulsion.)

SAM
It’s a bit overwhelming at first, but once you get the hang of it…

(MARGUERITE looks worried.)
SAM (cont’d)

You know what, I’ve got an idea.

(SAM reaches into his toolbox again and pulls out a handheld radio. He tries to turn it on, but nothing happens. He tries again, still nothing. MARGUERITE begins to look less and less impressed.)

It’s just old, give it a sec—

(ALFRED and SAM wipe their foreheads in unison.)

MARGUERITE
(standing up)
I think I see another table opening up—

(SAM grabs her hand, pulling her back down.)

SAM
Wait, just, wait.

(Reluctantly, she sits down again.)

(looking up and clasping his hands in prayer-like pose) A little help?

ANIMA
You only gotta ask once!

(ANIMA runs over to the radio in ALFRED’s apartment. SAM tries again. In unison, they turn the knobs and the music plays, though it is only heard through ALFRED’s radio.)

SAM
See, just needs to warm up.

(It plays the music for The Doohickey Song to follow. ALFRED glances at his radio, shrugs, and then goes back to writing. SAM pulls a pointer out from his toolbox.)

Now how’s about a song to help you remember?
(SAM then proceeds to sing, loudly and excitedly, pointing to the chart throughout the song. His energy level only increases. Embarrassed, MARGUERITE tries hiding behind her menu. This does not deter SAM at all. He sings.)

**SAM**

*I HOPE A BROKEN TABLE TOP  
WILL NEVER EVER MAKE YOU STOP  
FROM SERVING UP A MOST DELICIOUS MEAL*

**MARGUERITE**

(trying to get MR. BO-BO’s attention)

Uh, waiter—

(Annoyed, MR. BO-BO slowly walks back over to them.)

**SAM**

*A KAJIGGER’S WHAT YOU NEED  
YOU CAN FIX IT WITH SOME SPEED  
YOU CAN EAT YOUR FISHY FEAST JUST LIKE A SEAL*

(SAM points at MR. BO-BO, who groans and rolls his eyes, but then barks and claps his paws like a seal.)

**MARGUERITE**

Could you just bring me the check, please?

(MR. BO-BO exits.)

**SAM**

(taking various items out of his toolbox and handing them to MARGUERITE)

*I’VE A WIDGET AND A WHATSIS  
A DOOJIGGER AND A WHATSIT  
(NOT TO MENTION, A DOO-HICKEY AND DOO-BOB)*

**MARGUERITE**

Um, I—

**SAM**

*LET’S NOT FORGET THE GUBBINS  
AND THESE GIZMOS FROM MY COUSINS  
I’M SURE I’VE GOT THE STUFF HERE FOR THE JOB*
(At this point, her arms are overflowing with tools. SAM then proceeds to pour her coffee on the table.)

MARGUERITE

What are you—?

(MR. BO-BO reenters with the check. He puts it on top of the tools in her arms.)

SAM
SO YOU’VE GOT A DRIPPY LEAK
CUZ YOUR PIPING IS TOO WEAK
AND YOUR LIVINGROOM HAS TURNED INTO A POOL

(She drops the tools on the floor. They crash with a loud bang. BO-BO waits for her to pay.)

SAM
ALL YOU GOTTA DO IS GRAB

(SAM grabs her and starts dancing with her.)

FOR THAT GOOD OLE THING-MA-BAB
TO SAVE YOURSELF FROM LOOKING LIKE A FOOL

(He dips her. She blushes. He takes a flower from his hair and gives it to her. Then quickly twirls her around as he sings. MR. BO-BO watches, shocked.)

(Chorus)
I’VE A WIDGET AND A WHATSIS
A DOOJIGGER AND A WHATSIT
(NOT TO MENTION, A DOO-HICKEY AND DOO-BOB)

MARGUERITE

Oh my!

SAM
LET’S NOT FORGET THIS WHATSTER
OR THIS WHO-FLAP FROM MY SISTER
I’M SURE I’VE GOT THE STUFF HERE FOR THE JOB

(He passes off the pointer to MARGUERITE.)

Now you!
(He stops singing and points to MARGUERITE excitedly. She is silent, though the music keeps playing. SAM encouragingly gestures for her to sing. Finally, MARGUERITE catches the beat and jumps in.)

MARGUERITE
(still uncertain)
YOU NO LONGER NEED BE WOKEN?

SAM
Sing it!

MARGUERITE
BY A SQUEEKY DOOR THAT’S…BROKEN?

SAM
Own it!

MARGUERITE
WHEN THE FIX IS JUST SO SIMPLE AND SO FUN!

SAM
Indeed!

(Fed up, MR. BO-BO rifles through MARGUERITE’s purse for her money.)

MARGUERITE
(starting to enjoy it)
HAND ME THE HOOJAMAFLIP
WHICH SHOULD HELP ME GET A GRIP

(MR. BO-BO pulls out MARGUERITE’s credit card triumphantly. He starts to walk away to charge the card.)

AND NOW THOSE SLEEPLESS NIGHTS WILL ALL BE DONE!

SAM
Everyone!

(SAM throws his arms around MARGUERITE and MR. BO-BO, in a friendly manner, pulling them close to him. Everyone but MR. BO-BO sings, even
ALFRED, who is appearing quite vivacious the more he writes.)

ALL (except BO-BO)

(Chorus)
WE’VE A WIDGET AND A WHATSIT
A DOOJIGGER AND A WHATSIS
(NOT TO MENTION, A DOO-HICKEY AND DOO-BOB)

MARGUERITE
LET’S NOT FORGET THE KARBUNKLE

SAM
GIVEN ME BY NANA’S UNCLE

(SAM points to MR. BO-BO, who sings, but is clearly not enjoying it.)

MR. BO-BO
I’M SURE I’VE GOT THE STUFF HERE FOR THE JOB

ANIMA
Once more!

ALL
WE’RE SURE WE’VE GOT THE STUFF HERE FOR THE JOB

(MARGUERITE grabs SAM and kisses him feverishly as the song ends and the radio turns to static. MR. BO-BO turns off the handheld radio and immediately, ALFRED’s radio goes silent. He looks at it and shrugs. MR. BO-BO then exits to take care of the bill. Moments later, there is a knock at ALFRED’s door. MR. LUI enters, still knocking. SAM and MARGUERITE continue making out throughout the scene.)

MR. LUI
(entering and carrying a shake)
Mister Alfred? Ni hao ma? [knee how ma] Hallo?

ANIMA
So many distractions! But at least this one is cute.

MR. LUI
I am Mister Lui! I bring delish-us shake for you?
(ALFRED stumbles out of his seat, infuriated and still holding the pen. The lights on the coffee scene dim, as SAM and MARGUERITE stop kissing, though continue embracing, and then turn in unison towards the apartment. They watch ALFRED, waiting.)

ALFRED
You can’t just…(out of breath) get out of here!

MR. LUI
“Get out-t-a here!” Ha ha, Mister Alfred, you are very funny, you know! Like teenager. “Get out-t-a here, doooood!”

ALFRED
(using his inhaler)
What?

MR. LUI
No, no. I really have shake for you. No joke.

ALFRED
Listen, it’s real nice of you to—

MR. LUI
Ancient Chinese recipe. Good for the long living. Here, try it!

(MR. LUI forces ALFRED to take the shake, waiting expectantly.)

ANIMA
(to SAM and MARGUERITE)
Feel free to carry on.

(SAM and MARGUERITE resume their make-out session, lights still dimmed. They pull the clothes off each other. ALFRED takes a small sip and wincses.)

ALFRED
It’s very, uh…

MR. LUI
Is tasty, yes? You like kiwi? I can make with kiwi, no problem.
ALFRED

Uh-huh. Well, thanks…

(ALFRED tries to lead MR. LUI to the door.)

MR. LUI
Maybe add some fuh-lax seeds, yes? Give you good bowel movement. Very important for old men like us, eh?

(MR. LUI laughs. SAM leads MARGUERITE, both of them now in underclothes, down the hidden hatch. The lights in the coffee scene go out.)

ALFRED
Yeah.

(ALFRED manages to shuffle MR. LUI out, locking and chaining the door behind him.)

What a loon!

(ANIMA makes loon noises and flaps around on the stage as ALFRED tosses the shake into the garbage and returns to his desk. He takes out his pipe and smokes. Once again, he erupts into a coughing fit. ANIMA rushes over to him.)

ANIMA
Oh Alfie… See, you should never have stopped writing.

(She pats him gently on the back.)

Head between the knees, old man.

ALFRED
(to himself)
I’ll be…fine…just…fine.

(His breathing is completely erratic. He tries to stand, but is too dizzy and falls into his chair. ANIMA hands him a paper bag to steady his breathing. He takes it, still directly unaware of her.)

ANIMA
(whispering to ALFRED)
Can you hear the mermaids singing? They are singing for you Alfred.
(The lights fade with him breathing into the bag.)

SCENE 4
A LOSING BATTLE

(Lights up to reveal ALFRED asleep at his desk. Much time has passed, as ALFRED now has a full beard. He is wearing old-man pajamas and slippers. An oxygen tank hums next to him and tubes sprawl around the apartment in all directions. The package is still unopened and gaining dust on the floor in front of his crooked desk. The answering machine is blinking again and a storm rages outside. ANIMA, dressed the same as ALFRED, addresses the audience dramatically.)

ANIMA
He has of late lost all his mirth, forgone all custom of exercises (pats her belly). And indeed, it goes so heavily with his disposition that this goodly frame, this desk, this pen, seem to him a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy... (she coughs) the thick Missouri air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, (thunder booms and she jumps back) this majestical... (wiping her fingers across a dusty pile, she wrinkles her nose) roof fretted with golden fire. Why, it appeareth no other thing to him (gestures to ALFRED) than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors (mimes smoking from a bong). (sarcastically) What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculties! In form and moving... (mimes the act using a walker) How express and admirable! In action... (makes thrusting gestures) How like an angel! In apprehension...

(ALFRED snores loudly ANIMA grabs the hair on the back of his head and pulls his face up, caressing it with the other hand.)

...how like a god! the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals!

(She drops his head against the desk and the thunder booms in synch. He wakes suddenly.)

ALFRED
What the...? Where am...? Who are...?

(As he comes to, he notices the blinking light on the machine.)

ANIMA
I wouldn’t if I were you...
(ALFRED rubs his eyes as he listens to the message.)

JIM (V.O)
Alfred, my man! Dude, you really gotta change that message. You sound like you’re dyin’. Anywho... Look, buddy. I hate to say this, but we've gotta let cha go.

(In his frustration, ALFRED knocks over his coffee. ANIMA hands him a towel. He takes it without looking at her and wipes up the spill as the message plays.)

JIM (V.O.)
The agency has reached its limits, bro. Your play is like, 6 months late, and I haven’t heard from you in ages.

ALFRED
Bastard! I knew you’d screw in me in the end, Jim.

(A giggling girl is heard in the background of the message. JIM shushes her.)

JIM (V.O.)
I stopped by a few times, but there was no answer. I'm uber sorry bro, but it's out of my hands. I fought for ya, believe you me! Told em’ that you’re a goddam chunk of fuckin' gold. Almost lost my job over you. But times are tough, man. I mean, we gotta think about what's best for the biz, ya know?

ALFRED
What does he know about tough times—?

(ALFRED takes a long swig from the flask. ANIMA puts fingers to nose and then stumbles down an imaginary line, as if taking a sobriety test.)

JIM (V.O.)
It's been a great ride, but… (more giggling) Karleen, knock it off. I'm on the phone...

ANIMA
(hiccupping)
I’m sotely tober ocifer—

JIM (V.O.)
Anyways, give me a call and we'll do lunch.

(The message ends.)
I can haz write, no problem!

(ALFRED begins thrashing about.)

ANIMA

After all these years...a fuckin' message on the—

ANIMA

Dirt licking cocksucker—

ALFRED

Arrogant prick—

ANIMA

With his snazzy little wiener cars—

ALFRED

And his mini-skirt whore secretary—

ANIMA

Administrative assistant—

ALFRED

Her stupid fuckin’ stickers. What does she know about art?

ANIMA

I kinda liked the stickers.

ALFRED

(directly addressing her)

Of course you did.

ANIMA

(confused)

Are you talking to me…?

ALFRED

(ignoring her previous comment)

That damn festival!

ANIMA

Cuz for a second there, I thought…

ALFRED

I knew it’d be the end of me.
ANIMA
Now, that’s a bit much, don’t you think?

ALFRED
Fuck off.

(He takes the tubes out of his nose, lights a pipe and
smokes.)

ANIMA
(surprised)
You are talking to me! Alright, alright. Let’s just calm down, now—

ALFRED
(mocking her and blowing smoke out as he speaks)
Calm down, Alfie. Do some more writing, Alfie. It’s love or the page, Alfie.

(He coughs, then puts the tubes back in.)

ANIMA
You weren’t complaining when the money was rollin’ in—

ALFRED
Money? What money?

ANIMA
Well, we’ve done alright, I mean, look around.

(The thunder booms.)

ALFRED
(picking up objects and tossing things around)
Right, right. Living in this shit-hole apartment in East St. Louis—

ANIMA
U-City is not East St. Louis, Alfred.

ALFRED
Those nosey neighbors always barging in...Yep, the Ritz fuckin’ Carlton.

(ALFRED comes across the photograph again. He
goes to grab it, but ANIMA gets to it first.)

ANIMA
Oh no! Not again! When are you gonna learn, Alfie? She’s gone. Gone!
(He tries to get the photo from ANIMA. They struggle.)

ALFRED

Give me that!

ANIMA

You need to let her go!

ALFRED

Stop telling me what to do!

(They continue to struggle. The thunder booms again and the lights flash off, then back on for just a moment. ALFRED is now alone and thrashing about by himself. Again the thunder booms and the lights go out for just a second and then immediately come back on. ANIMA is back and the two are struggling as before over the photo.)

Let go!

(Finally, ANIMA gets the upper hand and she slams the photo down on the table, shattering the frame. A folded note falls to the floor. ALFRED does not notice it. ANIMA picks it up as he tries, unsuccessfully, to put the glass pieces of the frame back together.)

What have you done? Marguerite! Marguerite!

(referring to the photo)

She left! She left because of you!

ANIMA

Hardly. Besides, it could’ve been worse.

ALFRED

How? How could it be any worse than this?

ANIMA

(pauses)

You could have been a poet?
(He throws the answering machine at her. ANIMA jumps out of the way just in time. The machine crashes to the floor and ALFRED’s outgoing message is heard.)

ALFRED (V.O)
(depressingly)
This is Alfred. Apparently, I am out. I know it’s hard to believe. Leave me a messssaaa…

(The recording slows and finally dies out.)

ANIMA
Oh, you want to get rough, eh? Maybe throw me around a bit?

(Having given up his attempts at fixing the frame, ALFRED carefully removes the photograph and dusts it off.)

ALFRED
Leave me alone. I’m tired of your nonsense.

ANIMA
My nonsense? My nonsense! You would be dead in gutter if it weren’t for me!

ALFRED
Whatever.

ANIMA
I gave you a voice, Alfred! What did that bitch ever do but leave?

ALFRED
Don’t call her that. She has a name.

ANIMA
(mockingly)
Marguerite, go wash your feet.
The fire department’s across the street.

ALFRED
She’s my wife, god dammit!

ANIMA
Was your wife, Alfie, was. Or have you forgotten?

(ANIMA opens the note that fell from the photo and begins reading from it, dramatically.)
My dearest Alfred—

ALFRED

Where’d you get that?

ANIMA

I know this will come as a surprise at our age, but—

ALFRED

Don’t you dare—

ANIMA

I’ve met someone else—

ALFRED

Give it back—

ANIMA

I just couldn’t compete with your work—

ALFRED

Stop it! Stop it!

ANIMA

I need a real man, Alfred—

ALFRED

What? That’s not what she wro—

ANIMA

A guy who can get his dick up once in a while—

(The thunder booms, as ALFRED rushes at her, knocking over piles of junk in the process. His movements are clumsy and chaotic. She moves out of the way with relative ease, which only infuriates him more.)

(mockingly) Be careful, Alfie. You’re libel to break your widdle necky-poo.

ALFRED

(panting)

Shut your fucking—

(He tries to chase her around, as she tosses objects...
in his path. The lights flicker on and off.)

ANIMA

Such a dirty mouth you got there, Alfie.

(As he's chasing her, he trips on the oxygen tubes, causing them to be yanked from his nose. Struggling for breath, he collapses onto the piles. ANIMA dangles the tubes over him, tauntingly.)

ALFRED

Just...give...them...

ANIMA

Spit it out, Alfie.

ALFRED

The tubes...can't...

ANIMA

What's a-matta, widdie Alfie? Havin' twubble bweethin?

ALFRED

(crying and heaving)

I'm sorry...please...

ANIMA

Are we gonna play nicey nice now?

ALFRED

No more... I can’t...take it.

(ANIMA bends over as if giving into his request, but pulls back at the last second.)

ANIMA

What are the magic words?

ALFRED

What?

ANIMA

Manners, my dear!

ALFRED

I...hate...you.
ANIMA
That's a good boy. Nothin' like a bit of self-loathing to brighten your day.

(She leans over and pushes the tubes hard into his nose. He gasps. The thunder booms and the lights go out. Blackout.)

SCENE 5
DISOREINTED

(Back at the general store, ALFRED pushes a cart, which holds ANIMA and some rope. He looks awful and is wearing a bathrobe, with only one slipper. ANIMA is dressed the same. MR. LUI shops in the background in the meat section, a leash around his neck. SUSAN sits at her register, looking into a compact as she applies lipstick and wearing a red dress that matches MARGUERITE’s. She smacks her lips and then addresses ALFRED.)

SUSAN
Did you find everything you were looking for, sir?

ANIMA
How about it, Alfie? Did you find what you were…

(gestures a blow job)

looking for?

(ALFRED doesn't respond.)

SUSAN
(scanning the rope, whispering)
You know, I shouldn't tell you this, but the tool store down the road has rope for, like, way cheaper.

ANIMA
(parodies SUSAN)
Like way cheaper.

SUSAN
I know how people like you are about discounts, so it's, like, totally cool if you just wanna go there instead. I won't say anything.
People like me?

ANIMA

She means guys with little—

(ALFRED shushes her.)

SUSAN

Sorry?

ALFRED

Not you.

SUSAN

What?

ALFRED

Never mind.

(pause)

SUSAN

(pointing to the rope)

So, is it for your dog?

ALFRED

I don’t have a dog.

SUSAN

ActualAge.com says dogs make you live longer.

ANIMA

Excellent! She's quoting the internet now.

ALFRED

You shouldn't believe everything you read, Marguerite.

SUSAN

(looking around confused)

Huh?

ANIMA

Look at those tiny little hips! Don't you just want to—?
(She jumps out of the cart and makes humping gestures behind SUSAN. ALFRED tries to ignore her.)

SUSAN
Anyways, I really wanna get a dog, you know? A little 5 pound Chihuahua.

ALFRED
Uh-huh.

SUSAN
I could, like, put in him in my purse and walk around…

(ANIMA gestures the act of tonguing SUSAN’s nipples. ALFRED notices, but tries to shake it off.)

Take him on the Metro and stuff.

ALFRED
You’re gonna take your dog on the Metro?

SUSAN
Oh, no. I don’t have a dog. My landlord doesn’t allow pets in our building.

ANIMA
This is what we’re doing instead of writing?

ALFRED
I see.

SUSAN
I had a hamster when I was growing up. It died though.

(ANIMA runs as though in a hamster wheel. Then she dramatically pretends to die by stabbing an imaginary knife into her chest, Hari-Kari style.)

ALFRED
That's too bad.

ANIMA
Tragic, really.

SUSAN
Yeah. He escaped and got stuck in the wall.
ALFRED
Stuck in the wall?

ANIMA
Stuck in the wall! Stuck in the wall!

SUSAN
Like where the pipes are. I guess it was warm in there...or something.

ANIMA
(mimics SUSAN)
Or, like, something.

ALFRED
I guess.

SUSAN
My dad found it when he was fixing the humidor.

ALFRED
Your dad smoked cigars?

SUSAN
No. Why?

ALFRED
You said he was fixing his humidor.

SUSAN
Yeah, you know that thing for the heater.

ALFRED
Oh. Humidifier.

ANIMA
(gestures to her ass)
Humidify this, bitches!

SUSAN
Yeah, that's it. Anyway, he was fixing his humi-fier when he found Mr. Wriggles all curled up and dead.

ALFRED
Humid-ifier.
SUSAN
Uh-huh. It was really sad. I cried for weeks.

(ANIMA sobs and wails, throwing herself to the floor in despair.)

ANIMA
No, no, no! Not Mr. Wriggles! Anything but that! Take me instead!

ALFRED
(to ANIMA)
Enough already!

(ANIMA makes a cat hissing noise and swipes at ALFRED as if she has claws. MR. LUI growls at her, showing his teeth and looking fierce. She flicks him off. He whimpers and then returns to shopping.)

SUSAN
(bagging his items)
Oh, was I being too chatty, sir? My boss is always saying, “I'm not payin' you to talk, Susan.” “Focus on the customers, Susan.” “This isn't your therapy session, Susan.”

“Do me in the butt, Susan.”

(ALFRED sighs. JERRY enters wearing a hat with the shop’s logo on it and carrying SAM’s toolbox. The Doohickey Song music starts playing through the store’s loudspeaker system. JERRY sets to fixing a broken shelf. ALFRED sings along to the music, poorly.)

ALFRED
I’VE A WIDGET AND A WHATSIT

(SUSAN looks around helplessly.)

Come on Marguerite, sing with me!

SUSAN
I’m sorry sir, but I don’t know this song.
ALFRED

Of course you do. Remember? From the coffee shop?

(ALFRED sings, as SUSAN looks at him confused.)

A DOOHICKEY AND A SOMETHING

ANIMA
(wildly)
Coo-coo, coo-coo!

ALFRED

Cut it out!

MARGUERITE

‘Scuse me?

ALFRED

No, no, Marguerite. I wasn’t talking to you.

SUSAN
(pointing to her nametag)
It’s Susan, sir. Susan.

ANIMA
(pointing to SUSAN’s nametag)
It’s Susan, Alfie. Susan!

ALFRED
(shouting)
I know what her name is!

(JERRY and MR. LUI glance in ALFRED’s direction. JERRY walks over towards them.)

JERRY

Is everything alright over here?

SUSAN
(primping her hair)
I think he’s, like, sick or something.

JERRY
(speaking louder and slowly)
Do you need some help, sir?

ALFRED

ANIMA

Very convincing, Alfie.

SUSAN

(gently ALFRED’s arm)

There, there.

ANIMA

Her touch giving you a hard on?

(ANIMA tries to peek under his bathrobe. He shoos her away.)

ANIMA (cont’d)

Guess not.

ALFRED

LEAVE ME ALONE!

(ALFRED tries to smack ANIMA with his bag, but misses, hitting SUSAN instead, who starts crying. ANIMA breaks out into wild laughter.)

ALFRED

(waving the bagged rope in his hand)

Oh! I'm so sorry. It's just... you see, I wasn't aiming for you... I—

ANIMA

(cheering him on)

That's it! Give it to her! Give it to her good!

JERRY

(embracing SUSAN)

Susan! Are you alright? Sir, please put down the weapon.

ALFRED

Weapon? No, no, this isn't... It's just for my...um...my dog?

SUSAN

(crying into his chest)

Oh, Jerry! He hit me! Call the police!

ALFRED

It was an accident. Really, I was trying to—

JERRY

(to SUSAN) Don’t worry, babe. It’s gonna be okay. Sir, I'm going to have to confiscate your weapon. Please put the bag on the counter and step back slowly.
ALFRED
This isn't a weapon—

ANIMA
(yanks off ALFRED’s robe tie, causing him to flash everyone in the shop)
You're right. Not much of a weapon at all.

JERRY
Sir! This is a public establishment! Cover yourself up!

SUSAN
Pervert!

ALFRED
(tying the robe again)
I'm not a pervert!... This is all a big misunder—

(JERRY tries to take the bag from ALFRED.)
What are you doing? That's mine! I paid for it!

JERRY
Please just give me the weapon. There's no need for trouble.

ALFRED
I told you. This isn't a weapon!

(JERRY reaches behind the counter and grabs a hammer. He aims it like a gun at ALFRED. SUSAN rushes to his side.)

SUSAN
(to JERRY)
My hero!

(JERRY puts an arm around her, still aiming the hammer at ALFRED. MR. LUI, still shopping, comes across MR. BO-BO’s dog ears and tail. He puts them on and looks at himself in a mirror.)

ALFRED
Get your hands off my wife!
(ALFRED tries to pull JERRY off of SUSAN, who screams. In the struggle, JERRY’s hat gets knocked off revealing SAM’s flowers overflowing from his head. ALFRED immediately backs off.)

Sam? What are you doing here?

JERRY
(protecting SUSAN)
Sir, I’m gonna have to ask you to leave the store!

ALFRED
(waving the bag around)
Sammy, you’re getting petals all over the place!

JERRY
(much louder)
Lower your weapon, sir! This is my final warning!

SUSAN
Don’t hurt him, Jerry. He’s just an old man.

ANIMA
Break his bones!

(MR. LUI rushes towards her, excitedly.)

MR.LUI
Bones? Did somebody say bones?

(MR.LUI, now as MR. BO-BO, runs circles around them, barking and searching for the bone, eventually running into the audience. SUSAN chases after him.)

SUSAN
Naughty boy! Come back here!

ALFRED
Marguerite! Don’t leave!

(ALFRED tries to go after her, but JERRY blocks him. ALFRED struggles to get past.)

She’s leaving! Please, please! We’ve got to stop her!
JERRY

Calm down, sir!

(ALFRED collapses to the floor, weeping in despair, and knocking several items off the shelves.)

ALFRED

She’s gone, gone! Marguerite…I’m sorry, please! I’m so sorry!

JERRY

It’s okay, sir. Just take a deep breath. Nice and slow.

(ALFRED continues sobbing as JERRY tries to calm him down and SUSAN still chases the dog. Suddenly, the hidden hatch bursts open and JIM stumbles out of it. He is half-naked, with his tie undone and his pants around his ankles. His shirt and face are covered in lipstick and his hair is a mess.)

JIM

Woah, woah, relax, Trish.

(A heel comes flying out of the hatch at him.)

Karleen! I meant Karleen!

(A lady’s hand reaches up and pulls the hatch shut.)

JIM

(pulling up his pants and straightening himself up)

Fuck.

ANIMA

(to audience)

Ah, the theatre!

(ANIMA stands to the side, watching the scene unravel excitedly. JIM suddenly notices ALFRED and starts walking towards him.)

JIM

Oh hey, Alfred—

(JIM stops, having now fully taken in the scene. He reconsiders, grabs a magazine off a nearby shelf without looking, and uses it to cover his face as he
exits across the stage. The magazine features a scantily clad young woman on the cover in schoolgirl attire and legs spread.)

SUSAN
(moving through the audience)
Excuse me, pardon me.

(MR. LUI [now MR. BO-BO] growls and barks at an audience member.)

SUSAN
No! No! Don't worry. He won't bite.

ANIMA
Alfie, you should really be writing this stuff down!

(MR. LUI attacks SUSAN, biting at her dress. ALFRED continues to sob and struggles to breathe, while JERRY tries to calm him down. SUSAN attempts to free herself from the dog’s grasp.)

SUSAN
Get off me, you stupid mutt! Jerry, Jerry!

(JERRY gets up, leaving ALFRED to his own despair and rushes towards SUSAN to help her. In his haste, JERRY trips on the tubes, unknowingly yanking them out of ALFRED’s nose. ALFRED gasps for breath, though no one notices.)

ANIMA
My kingdom for a pen!

(ANIMA feels around in her pockets for the pen, but it is not there. She goes over to ALFRED, who reaches out to her, gesturing to the tubes.)

JERRY
(to the dog)
Down! Down!

(The dog does not obey. JERRY grabs a dog toy from one of the shelves and squeaks it.)

You wanna play?
(The dog wags its tail, dropping SUSAN’s dress.)

Go get it!

(JERRY tosses the toy offstage and MR. LUI races off after it. JERRY goes to comfort SUSAN. ANIMA leans down, as if about to help ALFRED, but instead reaches into his pocket and pulls out the magic pen. ALFRED gasps for air.)

ANIMA

Well whaddya know?

(She waves it in the air.)

*Shmabra kababra!*

(A burst of smoke emits from the tip with a loud bang, causing everyone to freeze. ANIMA addresses the audience.)

Ladies and gentlemen, please hold your applause. There is still more to come.

(SUSAN, now free from the dog, helps ALFRED with his tubes and JERRY escorts him out of the store, with ANIMA bringing up the rear. She grabs the oxygen tank and rope, as SUSAN begins cleaning up the mess. ALFRED mumbles indiscriminately as he is lead away and the lights fade.).

**SCENE 6**

**THE PENS SHALL HAVE THEIR DAY**

(Lights up. Back in his apartment, ALFRED stands on his office chair, the oxygen tubes draped around him, unsuccessfully trying to tie the rope to the ceiling. He is now dressed in white boxers and a white undershirt. He hands are shaking out of control. ANIMA stands below steadying the chair, dressed in matching attire. The flowers in the fish dish are completely dead.)

ANIMA

Come on, Alfie. This is ridiculous.
(He mumbles incoherently.)

Just get down and we’ll do some writing together.

ALFRED

It’s over. I’m finished.

ANIMA

Don’t be so dramatic. It’s just a little set back.

ALFRED

I’ve got nothing left.

ANIMA

Aw. Does widdy Alfie need a huggy?

ALFRED

(shaking the rope at her)

Listen, you stupid little... You’ve driven away my love, destroyed my manhood, ruined my life. What more do you want from me?

ANIMA

Oh, Alfie. The only thing I’ve ever wanted: Every little bit of you.

(She reaches into a pocket in her shorts and pulls out the magic pen.)

ALFRED

Put that thing away!

ANIMA

You gonna make me?

ALFRED

(climbing down, hands shaking)

Maybe I will!

(As he climbs down, he loses his balance and drops the ropes as he tries to steady himself.)

ANIMA

(sarcastically)

I’m sooooo scared!

(She cackles and then waves the pen in the air.)
(to audience) And now, ladies and gentleman, I shall perform my last and final trick of the evening.

ALFRED
(looking around the apartment)
Who are you talking to? What’s going on?

ANIMA
Shmabra kababra!

(She waves the pen in the air and instantly, the lights rise on the other side of the stage. The package, from earlier, rests on the floor, with flower petals littered around it. For the first time, ALFRED notices the other scene.)

What the…?
(Drawn to the light, ALFRED wanders towards it.)

What’s this doing here?
(He bends down to pick up the package. ANIMA snaps her fingers. Suddenly, tons of pens on strings begin dropping from above. The actors portraying SAM, MARGERITE, MR.BO-BO and DAD enter from all sides, marching and dressed head-to-foot in all blue, wearing army boots and giant pen caps as hats. Carrying oversized markers like swords across their hips, they toss flower petals at their feet as they march towards ALFRED. They hum to the tune of the old children’s song “Old Abram Brown.” ALFRED looks up at them, startled. They salute ALFRED and then swarm around him.)

What’s happening? Who are you?
(In unison, they draw their sword markers, remove their caps and begin stabbing him, humming all the while. A fan blows confetti, covering the stage in blue. ALFRED tries to get away, but he gets tangled up in the descending pens. As ALFRED thrashes about, his clothing and body become covered in blue ink. He falls to the ground.)

(to ANIMA) Marguerite, I’m scared! Please, help me. I don’t want to die alone!
(They continue stabbing him. ANIMA, pen in hand, enters the scene. The lights dim on the stage, as a spotlight follows ANIMA. The pen actors part a path for her, saluting as she walks past, still humming. She rushes to ALFRED, cradling him in her arms, emulating the La Pieta scene from Michelangelo’s sculpture. The others form a half circle around the two of them, pen caps lowered in mournful pose.)

ANIMA

She’s gone, Alfie. It’s just us now.

(ALFRED weeps. The pen actors quietly begin singing an altered version of the song they’ve been humming in eerie tones, softly beating their feet against the stage to create a pounding rhythm.)

DAD, SAM, MARGUERITE and MR. BO-BO
OLD ALFIE, HE IS DEAD AND GONE
YOU’LL NEVER SEE HIM MORE

(Ink-stained and gasping for breath, ALFRED collapses into ANIMA. The others continue singing softly.)

HE USED TO WEAR A LONG BROWN COAT
THAT BUTTONED DOWN BEFORE

ANIMA

Was it worth it, after all? Was it worthwhile?

(The others repeat the song, slightly louder than before as ALFRED struggles for breath.)

DAD, SAM, MARGUERITE and MR. BO-BO
OLD ALFIE, HE IS DEAD AND GONE
YOU’LL NEVER SEE HIM MORE
HE USED TO WEAR A LONG BROWN COAT
THAT BUTTONED DOWN BEFORE

ALFRED

I answer…without…infamy.

(He dies. The others continue to sing the song in
rounds, getting louder each time, and continuing to pound the stage with their boots to create the beat. They slowly close the circle around him, so that both he and ANIMA are blocked from the audience’s view. The final verse they sing together building to a crescendo.

DAD, SAM, MARGUERITE and MR. BO-BO
OLD ALFIE, HE IS DEAD AND GONE
YOU’LL NEVER SEE HIM MORE

(After the word “more,” they all pound on the stage in unison and stop singing. A burst of flames erupts from the middle of their circle and the spotlight immediately goes out, covering the theatre darkness. Moments later, the lights rise. The stage is still covered in blue confetti and pens, but the actors are all gone. A handwritten manuscript rests in the very spot that ALFRED died.)

BLACKOUT

THE END