

THE NORMA CONQUESTS

An unauthorized parody sequel to Sunset Blvd. in three parts

By Rom Watson

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2012

CAST:

Norma A, "a certain age"
Norma C, thirty-eight
Norma B, mid-thirties
Bud, forties
Tom, thirties
Peggy, thirties
Orson, late twenties-early thirties
Kitty, late thirties
Max, fifties to sixties
Announcer (voice over only)
Jeff Corey, fifty-two
Student # 1, male, age thirty-two
Student # 2, female, age twenty-one
Student # 3, female, age twenty-five
Student # 4, male, age twenty-five
The Governor, age fifty-seven
Mike, the Governor's aide/deputy chief of staff
Nancy, age forty-six
Sarah, in her eighties; from Virginia

With the exception of Norma and Max, all other roles may be doubled or tripled. Minimum cast requirement: 5 males and 4 females.

Norma Desmond should not look as old as she really is, which is sixty-seven. She should be played by an actress who is younger, or at least looks younger.

It is not necessary, nor is it even advisable, that the actors attempt to do an impression of the famous person they're portraying. It's more important that we see the character as opposed to a caricature. Unless the imitation is dead-on accurate, it will distract the audience from watching the character.

Each of the three acts requires its own set. Act I requires very little set other than 8 chairs. Act II requires only a table and 2 chairs. Act III requires a full living room set with walls, practical doors and furniture.

The setting: Los Angeles and surrounding environs.

The time: Mid to late June, 1967.

Act I

The Three Faces of Norma

(As the play begins, most of the stage is in shadow. NORMA A enters from up center. Sixteen years have passed since this character appeared in Sunset Boulevard. It is now 1967. NORMA A crosses down stage to a pool of light.)

NORMA A

I always knew how to find my light. I didn't need to be taught that. I just knew.

(NORMA C enters and joins NORMA A in the light.)

NORMA C

How does it feel to be a murderer?

NORMA A

Am I looking in a mirror?

NORMA C

I'm looking in a very cracked and dirty mirror.

(NORMA B enters and joins NORMA A and NORMA C.)

NORMA B

Ladies; let's try to remain civil, shall we?

(The three NORMAS do not stand in a straight line. All three are dressed appropriately for the character of Norma Desmond, but are not dressed alike. For example, NORMA C wears a turban, but the other two wear wigs.)

NORMA A

(To NORMA B.)

You look the way I used to look. It seems so long ago.

NORMA C
It was.

NORMA B
(To NORMA A.)
I'm not as pretty as you were.

NORMA A
You're still very attractive, in your own way.

NORMA C
(To NORMA A.)
And you're still a murderer.

NORMA A
Why must you harp on that?

NORMA B
Let her forget about the past.

NORMA A
As if I could.

NORMA C
Forget, maybe. Forgive, never.

NORMA B
Why? Can't you see that she's suff--

NORMA A
It's alright. She doesn't have to forgive me. I've never forgiven myself. Why should she?

NORMA B
I say we change the subject.

NORMA A
Good idea.

NORMA B
Remember the parties that Fatty Arbuckle used to give?

NORMA A
The gin flowed like a river.

NORMA B
Everyone in the business showed up at one of his parties, sooner or later.

NORMA C

Mabel Normand, Buster Keaton, D.W. Griffith, . . .

NORMA B

Vilma Banky, . . .

NORMA A

Everyone, except the Gish sisters.

NORMA B

Even Marion Davies and William Randolph Hearst.

NORMA C

I hated Marion Davies.

NORMA A

That's not true. Marion was a darling girl. She wasn't half the actress that I was, but she was funny and sweet. Everyone liked her. Even Garbo liked Marion, and Garbo didn't like many people.

NORMA B

Did Garbo really sleep with women?

NORMA A

So what if she did?

NORMA C

I slept with Charlie Chaplin.

NORMA B

(To NORMA C.)

You too?

NORMA A

We all slept with Charlie.

NORMA C

That never made the headlines.

NORMA A

The press never knew.

NORMA B

Those were the days when a public figure could have a private life.

NORMA A
Reporters used to be gentlemen. They understood discretion.

NORMA C
Not anymore.

NORMA B
After President Roosevelt died, the press degenerated into a pack of wild animals.

NORMA C
Still, they have their uses.

NORMA A
The way they behaved at the trial was abominable.

NORMA B
They were pushing, yelling, asking rude questions . . .

NORMA A
The flashbulbs going off in my face . . .

NORMA C
The glee with which they greeted the verdict.

NORMA A
Why did they dislike me so?

NORMA B
Vultures. No, they were worse than vultures. Vultures at least have the common courtesy to wait until you're dead.

NORMA A
Even the judge seemed to dislike me.

NORMA C
Perhaps if you treated people better . . .

NORMA A
I treat people just fine. Ask any of my servants.

NORMA C
You only have one servant.

NORMA A

Well, I used to have more. Max is the only one who was loyal.

NORMA B

I'm loyal.

NORMA C

Where *is* Max?

NORMA A

He should have been here half an hour ago.

NORMA C

Maybe he isn't coming.

(The lights begin to change, and all three NORMAS go off into their own private reveries.)

NORMA A

Why did they dislike me so?

NORMA C

You left me too soon.

NORMA B

Three, no trump.

NORMA A

Max.

NORMA C

Joe.

NORMA B

Norma.

(They snap out of their private reveries.)

NORMA C

How much longer do we have to wait?

NORMA B

It feels like time is standing still.

NORMA A

Time never stands still. For anyone.

NORMA C

(To NORMA A.)

Your time has just about run out.

ANNOUNCER (voice over)

Ladies, hit your marks.

NORMA A

(To NORMA B, suggestively.)

Meet me after the show.

(The three NORMAS stand in a straight line and face the audience. This is the first time we have seen the NORMAS in this configuration. NORMA A is stage right, NORMA B is center stage, and NORMA C is stage left. The lighting changes so that we see them in silhouette.)

ANNOUNCER (v. o.)

Rolling in five, four, three . . .

(Two seconds of silence.)

What is your name, please?

(A spot picks up NORMA A.)

NORMA A

My name is Norma Desmond.

(The spot moves to NORMA B.)

NORMA B

My name is Norma Desmond.

(The spot moves to NORMA C.)

NORMA C

My name is Norma Desmond.

ANNOUNCER (v. o.)

Only one of these ladies is the real Norma Desmond. The other two are impostors and will try to fool our panel as we play To Tell the Truth. And now, here's your host on To Tell the Truth, Bud Collyer.

(We hear the sound of applause as BUD COLLYER enters. He wears a dark suit and a bow tie. As he takes his place at the podium, which is up center, the lights rise to full and we see the entire set for the first time. It resembles the set of To Tell the Truth as much as space and budget will allow. Geritol is the sponsor of the program, and the word Geritol is prominently displayed on the front of BUD COLLYER's podium, and on the facade in front of the four panelists.)

BUD COLLYER

Thank you very much. Welcome to our game of deliberate misrepresentation, wherein our panel endeavors to figure out which one of three challengers is the genuine article. To Tell the Truth is brought to you each week by Geritol, America's number one tonic, the high potency tonic that helps you feel stronger, fast. And now let's meet our panel. Tom Poston . . .

(TOM POSTON enters. We hear applause as each of the four panelists enter. TOM POSTON wears a dark suit, a light shirt, a windsor tie and a handkerchief, which protrudes from his jacket pocket. He sits downstage right.)

Peggy Cass . . .

(PEGGY CASS enters and crosses to her seat, which is to the left of TOM POSTON. She wears a knee-length black dress, and her hairstyle is bouffant.)

Orson Bean . . .

(ORSON BEAN enters. He is dressed much the same as TOM POSTON. He crosses to his seat, which is left of PEGGY CASS.)

and Kitty Carlisle.

(KITTY CARLISLE enters and crosses to her seat, which is left of ORSON BEAN. She wears a simple,

knee-length white dress, with a string of pearls around her neck. Her hair is dark and chin-length. The four panelists are now seated in a row that is angled upstage, so that KITTY CARLISLE is the farthest upstage, and is also the panelist nearest BUD COLLYER. The three NORMAS take their seats on stage left, and are also angled upstage, with NORMA A the farthest upstage and NORMA C the farthest downstage.)

Panel, in front of you are copies of an affidavit. Please follow along while I read it.

(BUD COLLYER reads from the affidavit in front of him, and the four panelists silently read their copies. While he speaks, the lights dim on him and the panelists. All the focus is on the three NORMAS.)

"I, Norma Desmond, am a famous silent film star. I acted in many pictures, and was at one time the highest paid performer in Hollywood. I retired from films with the advent of talking pictures, and began to take young creative people under my wing and nurture them. I also turned my talents to screenwriting, and devoted many hours to my favorite pastime, bridge. I have spent the past sixteen years in prison for the murder of screenwriter Joe Gillis. I have four more years left to serve, and I am here today on To Tell the Truth as part of the prison's work-release program. Signed, Norma Desmond." Panel, these three ladies all claim to be Norma Desmond. Obviously only one is the real Norma Desmond, the other two have merely assumed that identity. We'll start the cross examination with Tom Poston. Question till you hear the signal. Tom?

(All four of the panelists speak quickly, as they are aware how little time is allotted them.)

TOM POSTON

Thank you, Bud. Number one, is today your first time out of prison as part of the work-release program?

NORMA A

No; I worked in a dress shop briefly, but that didn't work out.

TOM POSTON

Number one, do you have any children?

NORMA A

No--well, I did have a daughter, but I gave her up for adoption as soon as she was born.

TOM POSTON

What was her name?

NORMA A

I wouldn't know. I gave her up before she had a name.

TOM POSTON

Number two, did you ever work with Rudolph Valentino?

NORMA B

We made one picture together, in 1922. Beyond the Rocks. We used to go horseback riding together in the Hollywood hills.

TOM POSTON

Number three, how much did you earn in a week?

NORMA C

Seventeen thousand five hundred.

TOM POSTON

That's all?

NORMA C

What do you mean, "that's all?" That was top dollar in my day!

TOM POSTON

That's not much by today's standards.

NORMA C

I don't care much for today's standards.

TOM POSTON

Number two, in prison, do you ever have to clean out--

(BUD COLLYER rings a bell, indicating that TOM POSTON's time is up.)

PEGGY CASS

Number two, I know you were married; what was the name of your husband?

NORMA B

Which one?

PEGGY CASS

(Removing her glasses.)

How many have you had?

NORMA B

Three.

PEGGY CASS

Oh. I'm talking about your first husband. What was his name?

NORMA B

Max. Max Von Mayerling.

PEGGY CASS

Why did you divorce him?

NORMA B

I made a mistake.

PEGGY CASS

Number three, is it true that you once tried to kill yourself?

NORMA C

Yes, more than once as a matter of fact. Whenever I was desperate for some attention.

(NORMA A gives NORMA C a dirty look.)

PEGGY CASS

Number one, how did you try to kill yourself?

NORMA A

I never tried to kill myself. Why would I want to do that?

PEGGY CASS

Number two, did you ever try to kill yourself?

(Brief pause.)

NORMA B

No.

PEGGY CASS

Number one, --

(BUD COLLYER rings the bell,
indicating that PEGGY CASS's
time is up.)

ORSON BEAN

Number one, didn't I read that you used to have a
somewhat exotic pet animal? What kind of animal was it?

NORMA A

He wasn't exotic, he was a monkey.

ORSON BEAN

Number two, how come you never made the transition to
talkies?

NORMA B

Why should I lower myself to make a talking picture? I
can say anything I want to with my eyes.

ORSON BEAN

Number two, what kind of car do you drive?

NORMA B

I don't drive, my chauffeur drives it.

ORSON BEAN

What kind of car does your chauffeur drive?

NORMA B

An Isotta-Fraschini.

ORSON BEAN

Gesundheit. Number two, how many films did you make with
DeMille?

NORMA B

Six. It was a very happy time.

ORSON BEAN

Number three, did you ever work with Chaplin?

NORMA C

Once. I had a small part in a picture called His First
Job.

ORSON BEAN

Number three, do you make license plates in prison?

NORMA C

No. I work in the kitchen.

(BUD COLLYER rings the bell,
indicating that ORSON BEAN's
time is up.)

(KITTY CARLISLE speaks very
incisively and very
intelligently.)

KITTY CARLISLE

I read about your trial with enormous interest. Tell me,
number one, were you surprised that you were convicted?

NORMA A

I was disappointed, but I can't say I was surprised. I
did shoot him.

KITTY CARLISLE

So you pleaded guilty?

NORMA A

The plea was temporary insanity.

KITTY CARLISLE

Do you miss him?

NORMA A

Very much.

KITTY CARLISLE

Number three, I've heard that one of your hobbies is
astrology. What sign is associated with the crab?

NORMA C

Sagittarius.

KITTY CARLISLE

Number one, do you agree with that?

NORMA A

No, the crab is the sign of Cancer.

KITTY CARLISLE

Number two, you said you worked with Cecil B. De Mille on six films. What was his nickname for you?

NORMA B

"Young fellow."

KITTY CARLISLE

Number one, what screenplay are you writing?

NORMA A

I gave up writing when Joe died.

KITTY CARLISLE

Before that, what screenplays did you write?

NORMA A

Just one. Suh-LOW-mee.

KITTY CARLISLE

Number two, what studio did you work for?

NORMA B

Paramount. Without me there wouldn't be any Paramount Studios.

(If it wasn't clear in the opening scene, by now it should be clear to the audience that NORMA A is the real NORMA DESMOND.)

(BUD COLLYER rings the bell three times.)

BUD COLLYER

That's it, time for you now to mark your ballots. So mark them if you will please, without any consultation whatsoever and of course without changing once you have marked. Vote now for, Norma Desmond number one . . . Norma Desmond number two . . . or Norma Desmond number three. And our team of challengers will of course receive the usual two hundred and fifty dollars for each incorrect vote. And if you've been feeling run down due to iron deficiencies, or as we call it, tired blood, try Geritol, either in liquid or tablet form. Your ballots all marked? Tom, for whom did you vote?

(As each of the four panelists speaks, they place their marked ballot on view.)

TOM POSTON

I voted for number two, Bud, because I believed her when she talked about her husband.

PEGGY CASS

I also voted for number two; she knew De Mille's nickname for Norma, and I don't think an imposter would know that.

ORSON BEAN

I voted for number two. Number three answered the astrology question incorrectly, so it was between one and two. And I thought number two was very glamorous, and movie stars are glamorous, so I voted for her.

KITTY CARLISLE

I voted for number one. She seemed to me to have that certain something, that star quality I think a silent movie star would have.

BUD COLLYER

Very well; the votes are all in, and the minds are made up. And now let's find out which one of these three ladies, in truth, is Norma Desmond. Will the real Norma Desmond please, stand up.

(The three NORMAS look at each other, and each in turn starts to stand, and then finally NORMA A stands up. Applause.)

BUD COLLYER

Tell us, Miss Desmond, what's next for you?

NORMA A

My ser--, my first husband might be able to get me a job where he works.

BUD COLLYER

That's great. I think it's wonderful that even though you're divorced, you're still friends. Where does he work?

NORMA A

I don't want to jinx it by talking about it. It isn't final.

BUD COLLYER

How do you think your challengers did?

NORMA A

Before the taping started, we spent a few minutes getting into character. They weren't bad. For amateurs.

BUD COLLYER

How do you spend your time in prison?

NORMA A

I watch a lot of television.

TOM POSTON

Any favorite shows?

NORMA A

As the World Turns. But I love all the soap operas. They're so . . . true to life.

KITTY CARLISLE

Do you have any plans to return to acting?

NORMA A

I thought I had put that part of my life behind me, but being here today . . .standing under the lights, in front of the cameras . . .I just want to tell you all how happy I am to be back in a studio again. You don't know how much I've missed all of this . . .there's nothing else like it. Perhaps those wonderful people out there in the dark, are ready for my return.

BUD COLLYER

Perhaps one day we'll turn on the television and see Norma Desmond on a soap opera. Any other long-term goals?

NORMA A

To be paroled.

BUD COLLYER

Of course, but what I meant was, what are your goals upon being released from prison?

NORMA A

I hope to one day marry again.

ORSON BEAN

Any prospective beaus?

NORMA A

(Looking at NORMA B.)

I'm working on that.

BUD COLLYER

Well, best of luck to you. Number two, what is your real name, and what do you really do?

NORMA B

My name is Brian Perkins.

(Applause. It is revealed here that a male actor has all along played NORMA B. This will be obvious to the audience, but is a surprise to BUD COLLYER and the four panelists.)

BUD COLLYER

Well well, not only are you not Norma Desmond, you're not even a woman. Tell me, sir, is this your first time impersonating a woman?

NORMA B

No. I have my own cabaret act that I do on weekends, where I impersonate Ethel Merman and Eartha Kitt.

BUD COLLYER

And what do you do during the week?

NORMA B

I'm a children's book editor.

BUD COLLYER

Number three, what--

NORMA A

This is an outrage. Three members of your panel picked a drag queen over *me*?

BUD COLLYER

Kitty Carlisle voted for you . . .

NORMA A

Naturally. "Breeding speaks to breeding." But these other morons can't even tell the difference between me and a man.

TOM POSTON

Now just a minute . . .

NORMA A

I knew he was a man the moment I laid eyes on him.

PEGGY CASS

He's very convincing.

ORSON BEAN

He looks better than you do.

BUD COLLYER

Come now, Miss Desmond, let's be a good sport about this.

NORMA A

I've never been a good sport in my life; I'm not going to start now.

BUD COLLYER

Well we thank you for joining us anyway. Number Three, what is your real name and what do you do?

NORMA C

My name is Shirley Moskowitz, and I'm a waitress at Canter's.

(Applause.)

BUD COLLYER

Well, in checking the score, sir, you did very well as a matter of fact, there were three incorrect votes and at three times two hundred and fifty dollars, is seven hundred fifty dollars you take along with you. And we thank you all very much for being with us tonight; we're terribly grateful. Hope it was a pleasant visit for you as it was for us. We'll meet our next team of challengers in just a minute after this message.

(Applause. The lights change, indicating that the show is no longer taping. Everyone relaxes, and all three NORMAs leave their seats. NORMA C slips away unnoticed, NORMA B crosses to speak to KITTY CARLISLE, and NORMA A crosses downstage as the lights dim on the rest of the stage. NORMA A is now in a pool of light, as she was at the beginning of the play.)

NORMA A

He does look better than I do.

(MAX VON MAYERLING enters.)

NORMA A

Max! Why are you so late? Why have you kept me waiting?

MAX

I had to take the bus. Shall I adjust your lighting now?

NORMA A

They've already finished taping my segment.

MAX

I'm sorry I missed it. I'm sure Madame was spectacular.

NORMA A

I only got one v-- . . . well of course I was.

MAX

Very good, Madame. At what time must Madame be back at the prison?

NORMA A

Six o'clock.

MAX

Then there is time for us to have a late lunch at Farmer's Market.

NORMA A

Yes, I suppose there is. But first I want to go to the stage door and see if there are any fans waiting for me.

(MAX lowers his head and says nothing.)

But of course. There are no fans. You don't even write me those fake fan letters anymore.

MAX

They were costing a fortune in postage.

NORMA A

How could you deceive me like that?

MAX

I was not deceiving you, I was protecting you.

NORMA A

Well I no longer need your protection. When I get paroled I'm going to replace you with a new manservant. Some eager young stallion.

MAX

By the time Madame is paroled, she will be put out to pasture like an old brood mare.

NORMA A

I'll still be able to be "ridden hard and put away wet."

(NORMA B crosses down stage to NORMA A.)

NORMA B

Norma, --

NORMA A

(Thinking it's NORMA C.)

What do you want?

(Realizing it's NORMA B, her tone changes completely.)

Oh, it's you.

NORMA B

Norma, please don't take offence at my impersonation of you.

NORMA A

Is that what you call it? An "impersonation"? Are you sure you don't mean "mockery"?

NORMA B

No, I wasn't mocking you--

NORMA A

I suppose now you're going to "impersonate" me in your act, so that audiences can laugh at me.

NORMA B

No! I am such a fan of yours, I would never hold you up for ridicule. My impersonation is meant to be a loving tribute.

MAX

Imitation is the most sincere form of flattery.

NORMA A

If you'd been on time, my *lighting* would have been flattering. Then they all would have voted for me.

NORMA B

It's not his fault. It's just that . . . I'm younger than you.

NORMA A

So?

NORMA B

You're a mature woman now. And in their minds, they still expect Norma Desmond to look like she did forty years ago.

NORMA A

I know that feeling.

NORMA B

You said it yourself before the taping started: I look like you used to look.

MAX

This is true. I saw the resemblance immediately. Perhaps Madame is jealous.

NORMA A

Max, go get my coat. I think I left it in the dressing room.

MAX

Yes, Madame.

(Max exits.)

NORMA A

So. What are you going to do with the money you've won?

NORMA B

I thought I'd buy some new wigs. Human hair this time. I've had it with Kanekalon.

NORMA A

(Suggestively.)

Yes, always go for the real thing.

NORMA B

Did you really know I was a man the moment you saw me?

NORMA A

Of course. Why do you think I flirted with you?

(Brief pause.)

Tell me, how did you know the answers to all of those questions about me?

NORMA B

I've idolized you for years. I have three scrapbooks filled with pictures and articles about you. I've even seen some of your movies.

NORMA A

You have?

NORMA B

I have a friend who works at Paramount, and he arranged a screening for me.

NORMA A

Did you like them?

NORMA B

You were wonderful in all of them.

NORMA A

Why thank you, dearest. You have good taste.

NORMA B

I also researched your trial. I read everything about you.

NORMA A

You know me very well.

NORMA B

As well as I can, for someone who'd never met you.

NORMA A

And now that you have met me?

NORMA B

You're . . . just like a movie star should be: bigger than life.

NORMA A

Would you like to get to know me even better?

NORMA B

Oh yes. Would you like me to visit you in prison?

NORMA A

I'm talking about getting to know me on a much more . . . intimate level.

NORMA B

Well I . . . I . . .

(NORMA A kisses NORMA B on the mouth.)

NORMA B

I'm not sure you want to do that.

NORMA A

Why not?

NORMA B

I . . . I've never told this to anyone.

NORMA A

You can say it to me. You can tell me anything.

(NORMA A kisses him again.
NORMA C enters, unseen by either of the other two NORMAS. She stays in the shadows and listens.)

NORMA B

There's something you don't know about me.

NORMA A

Don't worry about your past. I don't.

(She puts her arm around NORMA B's waist.)

Just because I'm perfect doesn't mean I expect others to be.

NORMA B

I . . . I have to tell you, I . . . I'm attracted to men.

NORMA A

I know. But I don't mind. My third husband was like that.

(She kisses him, even more passionately than before. Slowly he begins to respond. Their embrace becomes tighter. As they continue to kiss, NORMA B reaches up and pulls off his wig, revealing his own hair, which is cut rather short. NORMA A notices this, and pulls away.)

NORMA A

Don't do that! Put it back on.

NORMA B

It itches.

(NORMA B resumes kissing NORMA A, but she won't have any of it.)

NORMA A

Please, you have to put it back on.

(NORMA B is puzzled for a few seconds, then realizes why it's so important to her.)

NORMA B

Oh God; you don't want me, you just want to make love to yourself.

NORMA A

Wouldn't you?

No.

NORMA B

(NORMA B starts to exit.)

NORMA A

Norma, wait.

(NORMA B stops and turns back to NORMA A.)

NORMA B

My name is Brian.

(NORMA B exits. NORMA C steps forward from out of the shadows.)

NORMA C

He's a lot younger than you. Where do you get the nerve to make a pass at him?

NORMA A

I thought he found me attractive.

NORMA C

You were wrong.

NORMA A

I am never wrong. I merely made a mistake, that's all.

NORMA C

How could you think that anyone would find you attractive?

NORMA A

I am not without my charms.

NORMA C

Your charms are looking pretty tired. Like they could use some Geritol.

NORMA A

(Changing the subject.)

How dare you tell people that I tried to kill myself.

NORMA C

You did try to kill yourself.

NORMA A

I know that, but you had no right to say it on national television, even if it is true. Especially if it's true.

NORMA C

It's too late to complain about it now; once this episode hits the airwaves, everyone will know.

NORMA A

They won't believe it. I denied it, and so did the other Norma. They won't believe it because you're nothing but a waitress.

NORMA C

Drop that attitude.

NORMA A

I have an image to maintain. I can't let the public know that sometimes I'm . . . weak.

NORMA C

Don't worry about that. I don't. Just because I'm perfect doesn't mean I expect others to be.

NORMA A

How can you be so arrogant?

(NORMA C stands toe to toe with
NORMA A.)

NORMA C

Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who's the most arrogant one of all?

(NORMA A freezes momentarily as
she realizes that NORMA C is
merely reflecting back to her
something that she herself
said.)

NORMA A

Oh.

NORMA C

What?

NORMA A

Nothing. Go away.

NORMA C

Disconcerting, isn't it; seeing your reflection.

NORMA A

Get out!

(Brief pause. Then, to herself:)

Am I really like that? So . . . haughty, so . . . bossy?

NORMA C

That's why the reporters at the trial disliked you. That's why the judge disliked you. That's why Joe tried to leave you that night.

(NORMA A becomes suspicious. She grabs NORMA C's hands and looks at them.)

NORMA A

You're no waitress. You've never done any manual labor in your life. Who are you?

(NORMA C removes her turban.)

NORMA C

You don't remember me, do you. Understandable. Though we spoke on the phone, we never actually met.

NORMA A

Betty Schaefer.

NORMA C

You do remember.

NORMA A

How did you get on the program?

NORMA C

I knocked the real Shirley Moskowitz unconscious. I tied her up and put her in the janitor's closet with the brooms and mops. Fortunately, we're about the same size. Her Norma costume fits me pretty well, don't you think?

(NORMA C puts the turban back on.)

NORMA A

How did you get onto the lot?

NORMA C

My husband Artie is one of the producers of To Tell the Truth. That's how I got you on the program.

NORMA A

You got me on the program? What do you want?

NORMA C

You said that you've never forgiven yourself for Joe's death: well I've never forgiven you either.

(NORMA C pulls a gun from her pocket and points it at NORMA A.)

NORMA A

Don't do it, Betty. You don't want to go to prison. I've spent the past sixteen years locked up. It isn't worth it.

NORMA C

I won't go to prison. Shirley Moskowitz might, but I won't.

NORMA A

When the episode airs, the entire country will see you.

NORMA C

Of course they'll see me. But they won't recognize me. With this wig and costume and make-up, my own mother wouldn't recognize me. Even if the police realize that Shirley wasn't at the taping, they'll never connect your death with me.

(NORMA C cocks the gun.)

NORMA A

I was out of my mind when I shot Joe. I didn't know what I was doing.

NORMA C

The jury declared otherwise.

NORMA A

They were fools. Twelve angry imbeciles. I loved Joe.

NORMA C

I know. He told me. But you killed him anyway.

NORMA A

Then . . . he knew? Joe knew I loved him.

NORMA C

So?

NORMA A

Then he must surely forgive me. Thank you, Betty.

(NORMA A kicks the gun out of
NORMA C's hand and wrestles her
to the ground, where she
straddles NORMA C's chest.)

NORMA A

You twisted, pathetic bitch. This is for your inability
to forgive me.

(NORMA A slaps NORMA C.)

And this is for saying that I tried to kill myself.

(She slaps NORMA C again.)

And this is for-- oh hell, I don't need a reason.

(NORMA A slaps NORMA C for the
third time, just as NORMA B
enters.)

NORMA B

She wouldn't make love to you either?

NORMA A

It's not what it looks like. She tried to kill me. The
gun's over there.

(NORMA B looks around and sees
the gun. He picks it up off the
floor. Once NORMA A sees that
he has possession of it, she
climbs off of NORMA C and stands
up.)

I got it. Here. NORMA B

(NORMA B attempts to hand the gun to NORMA A, but she won't touch it.)

NORMA A
Don't give it to me. If they find my fingerprints on a gun, they'll never parole me. You keep it. And make sure it's pointed at Betty.

NORMA B
Betty?

NORMA A
Betty Schaefer. The real Shirley Moskowitz is tied up in a broom closet.

NORMA B
(To NORMA C.)
You're an imposter?

NORMA C
You're an imposter.

NORMA A
We're all impostors.
(To NORMA B.)
Thank you for denying it on the program, but the truth is, I did try to kill myself. More than once.

NORMA B
I'm so sorry.

NORMA A
It was a long time ago.
(Brief pause.)
Why did you come back?

NORMA B
I changed my mind.

NORMA A
About what?

NORMA C

(Sitting up.)
My husband Artie--

NORMA A

(To NORMA C.)
Shut up.
(To NORMA B.)
Changed your mind about what?

NORMA B

Why did she try to kill you?

NORMA A

She's a sore loser. What did you change your mind about?

(MAX enters, carrying NORMA's
coat over his arm.)

MAX

I have your coat, Madame.

NORMA A

Thank you, Max. Hand it to me. I need you to escort
Miss Schaefer to the police. She tried to kill me.

MAX

Shall I give her a taste of my riding crop?

NORMA A

No Max just escort her to the police.

MAX

Very well.

(MAX takes both of NORMA C's
arms and holds them behind her
back.)

NORMA A

(To NORMA B.)
You there. Put the gun in Max's pocket. I'm sure the
police will want that as evidence.

(NORMA B puts the gun in Max's
pocket.)

NORMA C

I hate you.

NORMA A

Get in line. Max, take her away.

NORMA C

My husband Artie may be dull as dirt, but he loves me, and he'll hire the best lawyer money can buy.

MAX

Come along, Miss Schaefer. Unless you want to give me the distinct pleasure of roughing you up.

(MAX and NORMA C exit.)

NORMA A

Now; you were saying?

(NORMA B kisses NORMA A.)

NORMA B

I'll wear whatever you want. I like the way you kiss.

(NORMA B again kisses NORMA A. She soon stops him.)

NORMA A

Wait.

NORMA B

What's wrong?

(NORMA A reaches up and removes NORMA B's wig.)

NORMA A

There. That's better. You look more like yourself now.

(NORMA A kisses NORMA B. They start to feel passionate, and then NORMA A comes up for air.)

If we let Shirley out of that broom closet, we can use it ourselves. Let's go find it.

(A moment later she adds his name.)

Brian.

(NORMA B smiles. He takes her by the hand and they exit. End of Act I.)

(The following speeches may be played over the sound system during intermission.)

BUD COLLYER (v. o.)

Be sure to stay tuned for I've Got a Secret. Panel, goodnight to you. You join us the same time next week on Monday night, when we will have our final episode. And in the meantime, don't you forget to tell the truth. Goodbye and God bless you.

ANNOUNCER (v. o.)

To Tell the Truth is a Mark Goodson, Arthur Green production. Miss Carlisle's dress by Bill Blass. This is Johnny Olsen speaking. Tonight's program was pre-recorded. To Tell the Truth was brought to you this evening by General Foods, makers of Dream Whip, whipped topping in a box; Awake, frozen breakfast orange concentrate; and by Geritol.

Act II

My Fair Norma

(The house lights are on. The stage is bare except for a table and some chairs. As the audience enters to take their seats, STUDENT #1, STUDENT #2, STUDENT #3 and STUDENT #4 enter and take seats either in the first row of the theatre, or else in chairs set up near the lip of the stage. These chairs face upstage. JEFF COREY enters and addresses not only these students, but the entire audience.)

JEFF

Could you all take your seats please? Break is over.

(Slight pause. The house lights dim.)

Thank you. I have an announcement to make.

(Slight pause.)

I got a call from my agent the other day. I have been cast in the film version of In Cold Blood. I'm playing Hickock's father.

(The four STUDENTS applaud.)

Thank you. The director, Richard Brooks, intends to make the film as factual as possible. So he is going to use many of the actual locations where the events took place. I'm sure this will add immeasurably to the verisimilitude of the film; but . . .it means that I'm going to be filming in Holcomb, Kansas.

STUDENT #3

For how long?

JEFF

Several weeks.

(The STUDENTS groan audibly.)

I had a feeling you might react that way. The last time I had to go on location many of you complained about class being postponed. So, this time, I'm going to find someone to fill in for me while I'm gone.

STUDENT #4

What about Lenny Nimoy?

JEFF

I thought of him, but he's too busy with that science fiction show. So, starting today, and for the next two classes, I'm bringing in someone to take over the last half-hour of class. You'll get to see how they work, and at the end of the third week I'll choose one of them to be my substitute. Are there any questions?

STUDENT #1

Who's playing the killers?

JEFF

Scott Wilson and Robert Blake. Scott Wilson is playing my son. Are there any questions about *the class*?

STUDENT #4

Jeff; do we still make the check out to you?

JEFF

Yes. Good question. I will be paying the substitute, so continue to make your checks out to me.

STUDENT #1

Who do we give them to?

JEFF

Marsha, would you mind collecting them?

STUDENT #3

I'd be happy to.

(JEFF scans the class/audience to see if there are any other questions. As there are none, he continues.)

JEFF

Well then; it is now my pleasure to introduce to you a screen legend from the era of silent film. Please welcome, Miss Norma Desmond.

(NORMA DESMOND enters. She is dressed in an outfit that is too glamorous for teaching an acting class.)

NORMA

I'm ready . . .to teach.

JEFF

Good. Would you like to tell the class a little bit about yourself first?

NORMA

They're all much too young to have seen any of my pictures. How could I possibly convey to them the colossal heights I achieved in my film career?

(MAX VON MAYERLING enters. He is dressed, as always, in his butler's uniform. He addresses the students and the audience.)

MAX

Madame is the greatest star of them all.

JEFF

Who are you?

NORMA

This is my manservant, Max. He accompanies me everywhere.

JEFF

Oh, I see. Well; shall we get started?

(MAX turns and crosses to an out-of-the-way position.)

NORMA

Mr. Corey, did you tell your students about my . . .situation?

JEFF

No. I wasn't sure if you wanted to reveal that.

NORMA

I think it's important that they know the truth, and that they hear it from me.

(She turns to the students.)

I am currently serving a prison sentence. Sixteen years ago, I was convicted of murdering my lover, Joe. It was temporary insanity, but the jury was swayed by fancy attorneys rather than the truth.

STUDENT #4

How did you manage to escape?

NORMA

I did not "escape." Have you never heard of the work release program?

(MAX steps forward.)

MAX

They let Madame out of prison during the day so she can learn to reintegrate into society.

NORMA

Thank you, Max.

(MAX steps back.)

JEFF

Well. Why don't we get started.

NORMA

Yes. Let's get to work.

(JEFF points to STUDENT #1 and STUDENT #2. THEY rise and move a table and two chairs into position for their scene.)

JEFF

I will be in the back, observing, but do your best to forget I'm here.

(JEFF exits to the rear of the class/theatre.)

NORMA

That should be easy.

(NORMA pulls MAX aside.)

Max, I've just got to get this job. It's only one day a week, but I can't stand being locked up in that prison.

MAX

Perhaps if Madame is successful at teaching this class, she will be paroled.

NORMA

That would be wonderful!

(Students #1 and #2 are in position.)

You there. What's your name?

STUDENT #2

Cher Bono.

NORMA

Bono? Where did you get a name like that?

STUDENT #2 (CHER BONO)

From my husband.

NORMA

You might want to reconsider that.

STUDENT #2 (CHER BONO)

My name or my husband?

NORMA

Whichever one is holding you back. How old are you?

STUDENT #2 (CHER BONO)

Twenty-one.

NORMA

And what is *your* name?

STUDENT #1

Sonny Bono.

NORMA

Oh. I see. And why are you two taking this class?

STUDENT #1 (SONNY BONO)

We're going to star in a movie soon, called Good Times, and I thought this class might make us better actors.

NORMA

Star in a picture? How did you get that opportunity?

STUDENT #2 (CHER BONO)

We're a singing duo. We've had a lot of number one hits.

NORMA

Really.

STUDENT #1 (SONNY BONO)

Yeah. Really. Most of which, I wrote.

NORMA

Sometimes musicians make good actors. They're in tune with their emotions. What scene are you going to perform?

STUDENT #2 (CHER BONO)

The final scene from A Doll's House. By Henrik Ibsen.

NORMA

I know who wrote it, I was performing Ibsen in the provinces before you were born.

STUDENT #2 (CHER BONO)

Did you ever play Nora?

NORMA

For two years straight, and I never missed a performance.

MAX

Her Nora was legendary.

NORMA

Thank you, Max.

(To Sonny and Cher.)

You may begin.

(NORMA crosses to an upstage chair, near Max. She sits and intently watches the following scene. STUDENT #1 and STUDENT #2 sit at the table. Sonny is not a very good actor. He declaims his lines, and doesn't connect on a personal level with the words he speaks. Cher is young and untrained, but even here we see her talent for acting.)

STUDENT #2 (CHER BONO)

Torvald, I must try and educate myself--you are not the man to help me with that. I must do that for myself. And that is why I am going to leave you.

STUDENT #1 (SONNY BONO)

(Springing up.)

What is this you say?

STUDENT #2 (CHER BONO)

I must stand alone if I am to understand myself.
Therefore I cannot remain with you any longer.

STUDENT #1 (SONNY BONO)

Nora, Nora!

NORMA

STOP!

(NORMA rises from her chair and approaches students #1 and #2.)

NORMA

First of all let me say, I can't tell you young people how refreshing it is to see this scene performed by a man and a woman.

STUDENT #2 (CHER BONO)

The scene is *written* to be performed by a man and a woman.

NORMA

I know. But for the past eight months I've been teaching an acting class in prison. So all the roles, both male and female, have been played by women. Some of them actually relish playing the men's roles. More than a few of them are . . .how shall I say this . . .quite convincing as men. The last time I saw this scene, Torvald was played by a two-hundred pound woman who calls herself Spike. So it's nice to see Torvald played by a man.

STUDENT #1 (SONNY BONO)

What else did you like about my performance?

(A long pause. STUDENT #1 gives her a look.)

NORMA

I'm thinking.

STUDENT #2 (CHER BONO)

You know what I can't figure out? Why did Nora marry Torvald in the first place? I mean, he's just like her father.

NORMA

Precisely. You've answered your own question. I like that. It means less work for me.

STUDENT #2 (CHER BONO)

But how could she be so blind?

NORMA

Lots of women marry men who are just like their fathers. They don't do it deliberately. But that's why they're attracted to them. They let the man dominate them and dictate their lives.

(NORMA looks at Max.)

I know I did.

STUDENT #1 (SONNY BONO)

You don't seem the type to let a man boss you around.

NORMA

I'm not. Anymore. But my first husband was just like my father. Controlling, demanding, stern. And underneath that: insecure.

STUDENT #2 (CHER BONO)

I would never marry a man that patriarchal.

NORMA

Well, even if you do, it doesn't mean you can't turn the situation around.

(Glancing at Max.)

Why, you could even make your husband your slave.

STUDENT #2 (CHER BONO)

How did you cope in that situation?

NORMA

Much like Nora. I rebelled.

STUDENT #1 (SONNY BONO)

What did you do?

NORMA

First I left him. Then I took on many lovers.

MAX

It was the other way around.

STUDENT #2 (CHER BONO)

So if I see my father when. . .I mean if Torvald's behavior stirs up Nora's anger toward her father, . . .can we do the scene again?

STUDENT #1 (SONNY BONO)

Again? We didn't even finish it the first time.

NORMA

Of course you're going to do it again.

(To Cher.)

This time I want to see not only fear of your impending freedom, but also relief.

STUDENT #1 (SONNY BONO)

How should I act?

NORMA

Don't act. Just say the words. Say them as if you were saying them in real life. Pretend that this scene is happening to you. Not some character in Norway. To you.

(NORMA crosses to her chair and sits. SONNY and CHER perform their scene, and this time Norma does not interrupt them. CHER is even better this time. SONNY, though still woefully inadequate, has made adjustments in his performance and his improvement is noticeable.)

STUDENT #2 (CHER BONO)

Torvald, I must try and educate myself--you are not the man to help me with that. I must do that for myself. And that is why I am going to leave you.

STUDENT #1 (SONNY BONO)

What is this you say?

STUDENT #2 (CHER BONO)

I must stand alone if I am to understand myself.
Therefore I cannot remain with you any longer.

STUDENT #1 (SONNY BONO)

You are out of your mind! I won't allow it! I forbid
you!

STUDENT #2 (CHER BONO)

It's no use forbidding me anything any longer. I will
take with me only what belongs to me. I will take
nothing from you, either now or later.

STUDENT #1 (SONNY BONO)

You would neglect your most sacred duties, to your
husband and your children?

STUDENT #2 (CHER BONO)

I have other duties just as sacred. Duties to myself.

(Their scene ends.)

MAX

And . . .cut.

(The actors break character, and
the other students applaud.
NORMA rises and crosses to Sonny
and Cher.)

NORMA

(To Sonny.)

You're hopeless. You're all wrong for the acting
profession. "Sit down."

(To Cher.)

Nora. What a woman--what a part. But it's not the right
part for you. However, you do have talent. There's
something about your personality.

(Short pause.)

I like it.

STUDENT #1 (SONNY BONO)

Don't you think I can improve if I keep working at it?

NORMA

No. Even Spike made a more convincing Torvald than you
do. "Be off with you. I don't want you."

(SONNY crosses to his chair and sits. CHER remains, staring at Norma.)
You may sit down.

STUDENT #2 (CHER BONO)
Wait a minute. That's it? Aren't you going to give me any advice as an actress?

NORMA
Advice?
(She pauses to think.)
Never get old.
(CHER BONO crosses to her chair and sits.)
Now then. Who's next?

STUDENT #3
We are.

(STUDENT #3 jumps up and crosses to center stage.)

NORMA
Your name?

STUDENT #3
Marsha Mason.

NORMA
How old are you?

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)
Twenty-five years old.

(STUDENT #4 rises and crosses to center stage. He stands on the other side of Norma. NORMA doesn't pay attention to him because she's busy questioning Marsha.)

NORMA
Are you a musician too?

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)
No, I'm just an actress. I recently made my film debut. It was a small part, but . . .

NORMA

What picture was it?

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

(Pretends to cough and mumbles inaudibly behind her hand.)

Hahh - Raah - Uh - oo.

NORMA

What was that? Speak up, dear. You'll never be a successful actor if you mumble.

(Slight pause.)

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

Hot Rod Hullabaloo.

NORMA

I don't approve of pornography.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

It is not pornography! It's about drag racing.

NORMA

All the same, you might want to leave it off your resume.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

I think you owe me an apology.

NORMA

An apology? Hah! I never apologize. Besides, if you want to be an actress, you'd better start developing a thicker skin when it comes to criticism.

(NORMA turns to Student #4.)

What's your--

(NORMA notices Student #4 for the first time. He is tall and handsome. SHE is momentarily taken aback by his attractiveness.)

You remind me of someone. What's your name?

STUDENT #4

Harrison Ford.

NORMA

Harrison. I like that name. And your age?

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Twenty-five.

NORMA

Any recent film work?

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Last fall I worked on a western called The Long Ride Home. It wasn't much of a part. It wasn't much of a movie.

NORMA

Why are you taking this class?

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

I was a contract player at Columbia for three years, but they just let me go. They said I was a bad actor.

NORMA

Do you believe them?

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

No.

NORMA

Let's see what you've got. I mean, what scene have you prepared?

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

It's a scene from Oscar Wilde's Salomé.

NORMA

Good choice. That story is one of my favorites. Whenever you're ready.

(NORMA returns to the chair near Max. SHE watches the students intently as they perform the scene. In 1967, Harrison Ford "wore his hair long, often sported a shaggy beard, and had adopted jeans and a working shirt as his uniform." Someone described him as, "Prickly, but not a prick." HARRISON FORD is a bit stiff in his acting, but it is apparent that he has talent. MARSHA MASON is even better. You can tell that she doesn't grasp the underlying

sexual tension in the scene, but she's vivacious. They perform this scene more successfully than the Bonos performed their scene.)

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Who is this woman who is looking at me? Bid her begone. I will not speak to her.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

I am Salomé, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judaea.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Daughter of Babylon! Come not near the chosen of the lord. The news of thy mother's sinning hath come up even to the ears of God.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

Speak again, thy voice is music to mine ear. Tell me what I must do.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

I hear in the palace the beating wings of the angel of death.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

It is thy mouth that I desire. There is nothing in the world that is so red as thy mouth. Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.

NORMA

STOP!

(NORMA rises from her chair and approaches students #3 and #4.)

NORMA

You there. Marta. When you say to him, "Tell me what I must do," what do you mean?

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

"Marsha." I mean that . . .I want to know what I have to do to . . .atone for the sins of my mother.

NORMA

Well, that's the obvious choice . . .but there's more to it than that. Your choice to play the scene as written

. . .is bloodless. Always make the bloodiest choice.
(NORMA turns to Harrison.)
And you. Harrison. Why are you so adamant that she not
come near you?

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)
Because I'm attracted to her.

NORMA
Exactly. So let us feel your passion for her. Loosen
up. Light a fire under yourself.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)
Does she mean "Tell me what I must do in order for you to
find me attractive?"

NORMA
That's a much better choice, don't you agree?

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)
But she just met him. How could she be so
. . .obsessed with him, so soon?

NORMA
I wouldn't necessarily call it "obsession." Some people
simply know what they want.
(NORMA looks at Harrison.)
As soon as they see it.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)
Since we've stopped, let me ask you something. In the
second half of this scene, I keep saying the same two
lines over and over again. How do I make that feel
natural?

NORMA
Natural? It's not supposed to feel natural. As a matter
of fact, that's what's wrong with your acting: you're too
natural.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)
Isn't acting supposed to be natural?

NORMA
No, it's supposed to be real.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)
Aren't they the same thing?

NORMA

You haven't been taught the difference between naturalism and realism?

(STUDENT #3 shakes her head "no." NORMA looks to STUDENT #4, who also shakes his head "no." NORMA crosses downstage to address the entire class.)

Realism is the careful selection and organization of truthful moments into a pattern of refinement, omission, and intensification. *Naturalism*, on the other hand, is . . . boring. So never be natural. Unless you're doing Chekhov. *Realism* is what all actors should strive for.

(NORMA makes a grand, theatrical gesture.)

Suit the action to the word,

(SHE makes a second grand, theatrical gesture.)

the word to the action.

(SHE makes a third grand, theatrical gesture.)

And let your own discretion be your tutor.

(Slight pause after she finishes quoting Shakespeare.)

That's what acting is all about. Being true to life.

(With a sweeping, movie-star flourish, NORMA turns and crosses back to STUDENT #3.)

You there. Stop being naturalistic; I don't want to see photographic imitation. Be realistic; show me truthful moments. And as for those lines you have to say over and over again: each time you say them, make the picture in your mind a little sharper. A little clearer.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

What picture?

NORMA

The picture of his head on a silver platter.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

Oh but she doesn't think of having him beheaded until later.

NORMA

Why?

(Pause.)

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

She's already decided to ask for his head.

(Slight pause.)

That's why she refuses to dance at first. She's scared of the horrible thing she's about to do.

NORMA

I was beginning to think you didn't have what it takes to play this part. I'm glad to see you prove me wrong.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

"Always make the bloodiest choice."

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Let's do the scene again.

NORMA

Yes, let's see if you can get through it without me stopping you this time.

(MARSHA MASON and HARRISON FORD perform their scene. Norma does not interrupt them, as the scene is much better this time. HARRISON FORD loosens up, and even from her first line MARSHA MASON is noticeably better. We see HER capture the essence of Salomé.)

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Who is this woman who is looking at me? Bid her begone. I will not speak to her.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

I am Salomé, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judaea.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Daughter of Babylon! Come not near the chosen of the lord. The news of thy mother's sinning hath come up even to the ears of God.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

Speak again, thy voice is music to mine ear. Tell me what I must do.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

I hear in the palace the beating wings of the angel of death.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

It is thy mouth that I desire. There is nothing in the world that is so red as thy mouth. Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Never!

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

There is but one who can save thee. He is on the Sea of Galilee. Bow thyself at his feet and ask him the forgiveness of thy sins.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Cursed be thou, daughter of an incestuous mother!

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

I will kiss thy mouth.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

I will not look at thee, thou art accursed, Salomé.

(HE exits to the side of the stage.)

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

I will kiss thy mouth, John the Baptist. I will kiss thy mouth.

(This is the end of their scene.)

MAX

And . . .cut.

(The other STUDENTS applaud.
NORMA stands.)

NORMA

That was much better.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

I felt as though I . . . "flew."

NORMA

If you learn to follow your deepest intuition, you'll be much better off.

(JEFF enters from the back of the audience.)

JEFF

That was marvelous. Nice job, Norma.

NORMA

"I'm glad it met with your approval."

JEFF

Kids: good work.

NORMA

Yes. Much improved. Even you, Marla.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

"Marsha."

JEFF

I loved what you said: "Always make the bloodiest choice." Do you mind if I use that line in my classes?

NORMA

Go right ahead. There's no copyright on the truth.

JEFF

(To the class.)

Since everyone got a chance to work today, I'm going to dismiss class a few minutes early so that I can have a word with Miss Desmond. See you all next week.

(SONNY and CHER rise and exit. On the sound system we hear the sounds of other students leaving.)

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

Harrison, a bunch of us are going to Dupar's for a bite to eat. Do you want to join us?

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Sure, I'm starving.

NORMA

Mr. Ford, I have something I want to ask you.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Oh; alright.

(To Marsha.)

I'll meet you there.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

Great; see you there.

(MARSHA exits.)

NORMA

Mr. Corey. You said you wanted a word with me?

JEFF

Norma, I don't feel I need to audition any other teachers. As far as I'm concerned, I've found my substitute.

NORMA

Oh thank you! Max: I got the job.

(Back to Jeff.)

This is wonderful. You won't regret it.

JEFF

Since I won't be seeing you again before I leave for Kansas, let me give you a spare set of keys to the theatre.

(HE reaches into his pocket and takes out a key ring with two keys on it.)

The larger key is for the stage door. The smaller key is for the light booth.

(He hands her the keys.)

NORMA

I'll take good care of them.

(Suddenly vulnerable.)

You don't know what this job means to me.

JEFF

Oh I think I do, Norma. I was blacklisted.

NORMA

You're a communist?

JEFF

No. But I did dabble in it. And for that they took away my acting career. So I know what it's like to lose everything and start over.

NORMA

What did you do?

JEFF

(Gesturing to the room.)

This. I became a teacher.

NORMA

Well I thank you. I appreciate your help more than I can say.

JEFF

You're welcome.

NORMA

You'll be in touch?

JEFF

Yes, Norma; I'll be in touch.

(JEFF crosses to Max. THEY have a brief conversation that we do not hear. JEFF then exits through the audience. In the meantime, NORMA turns to Harrison.)

NORMA

Harrison, I think you have enormous . . .potential. You could be big. Real big.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Thanks.

NORMA

How--

(NORMA waits for JEFF to complete his exit.)

How would you like to study with me? Privately.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Oh. Well, I hadn't thought--

NORMA

Think about it. Don't you want to make it in this business?

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Of course.

NORMA

Well, you have what it takes to be a real star. Not like this new Hollywood trash.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

I don't have much money.

NORMA

I'm not worried about the money.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

I am. How will I pay you?

NORMA

Let's not be small about such matters. We won't keep books. You can pay me whatever you're paying Mr. Corey.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

I can't afford to pay double what I'm paying now.

NORMA

You won't be paying double if you drop Mr. Corey's class.

(Pause.)

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

How many of his other students are you going to try to lure away?

NORMA

I'm not interested in his other students.

(SHE steps closer.)

I'm only interested in you.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Thanks, but I'm not interested in you.

NORMA

You should be. I can make you a better actor than Jeff can. Here, let me demonstrate. We'll do your scene again, and this time I'll play Suh-LOW-me.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

You? But you're . . .you don't know the part.

NORMA

That's not true. I may not know the role as written by Oscar Wilde, but I know the character very well.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Oh yeah?

NORMA

When I first went to prison I more or less became the character. For a while. Until I came to my senses. Then I learned that Joe was dead. And that I was the one who shot him. So I know what it's like to destroy the thing you desire.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

I'm sorry.

NORMA

I am too. Max, see what you can do about this lighting.

(MAX takes Norma by the arm and pulls her aside. Harrison cannot hear their conversation.)

MAX

Don't make the same mistake you made in the dress shop.

NORMA

I know what I'm doing. This young man is going to be a star. When I get out of prison, he can open up all sorts of doors for me, doors that will lead me straight back into the spotlight.

(NORMA pulls her arm out of Max's grip and crosses back to Harrison.)

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Here. You can use my script.

(NORMA takes the script and scans it. MAX adjusts the lighting, making it more flattering to Norma. NORMA takes a moment, and then nods to Student #4 to begin the scene. Though she's decades too old for the part of Salomé, she's enthralling, and totally committed to the scene. Her acting is a bit . . .larger than life, just like she is herself. In fact, that's what Norma presents: herself. She doesn't transform into Salomé, she kicks the character aside and inserts Norma Desmond into the scene. Though her acting is larger than life, it is obvious that she is a good actress. We see why she was a silent film star: she's a captivating performer who holds the attention of the audience.)

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Who is this woman who is looking at me? Bid her begone.
I will not speak to her.

NORMA

I am Suh-LOW-me, daughter of Herodias, Princess of
Judaea.

(HARRISON FORD becomes a little angry at Norma for making him play this scene with her. His anger makes his acting better.)

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Daughter of Babylon! Come not near the chosen of the
lord. The news of thy mother's sinning hath come up even
to the ears of God.

NORMA

Speak again, thy voice is music to mine ear. Tell me
what I must do.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

I hear in the palace the beating wings of the angel of death.

NORMA

It is thy mouth that I desire. There is nothing in the world that is so red as thy mouth. Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Never!

NORMA

Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

There is but one who can save thee. He is on--

NORMA

Talk talk talk.

(NORMA tosses the script aside.)

Let's play this scene the way it *should* be played. Without words.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Without words? This scene is nothing *but* words.

NORMA

The words are merely the tip of the iceberg. I want you to act the rest of the iceberg, the part that's underneath.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

What do I say?

NORMA

You don't say anything. Aren't you listening to me?

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

But how do--

NORMA

You act your intentions, your emotions. Think your lines, but don't say them out loud. Let the audience see what you're thinking. Let them imagine the dialogue based on what they see on your face.

(Slight pause.)

Pick up where you left off.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Art thou not afraid, daughter of--

NORMA

Uh-uh: no words.

(HARRISON takes a breath and applies himself to the task. As he starts to silently think his lines, we see him begin to convey his feelings. The lines the actors think are printed below in strikeout.)

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

~~Art thou not afraid, daughter of Herodias? Did I not tell thee that I had heard in the palace the beating of the wings of the angel of death?~~

NORMA

~~Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.~~

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

~~There is but one who can save thee. He is on the Sea of Galilee. Bow thyself at his feet and ask him the forgiveness of thy sins.~~

NORMA

~~Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.~~

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

~~Cursed be thou, daughter of an incestuous mother!~~

NORMA

~~I will kiss thy mouth.~~

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

~~I will not look at thee, thou art accursed, Salomé, thou art accursed.~~

NORMA

~~I will kiss thy mouth, John the Baptist. I will kiss thy mouth.~~

(During this scene we see NORMA become more passionate. When SHE can't control herself any

longer, SHE kisses him on the mouth, long and hard. HER hands are all over him. HARRISON realizes that Norma is no longer acting, and he pushes her away.)

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Hey. You crossed the line.

NORMA

"Here. Have a chocolate."

(SHE takes a piece of chocolate from her pocket and pops it into his mouth before he can object.)

Your performance was much better that time. Of course, that's due in some part to having a better scene partner. I'm a much better actress than Mirna. But most of it is due to my teaching abilities. So you see I am a better acting coach than Jeff. You're a diamond in the rough, Harrison, but I know how to polish you.

(HARRISON tries to say something, but his mouth is still full of chocolate.)

"It's almost irresistible." Mind you it won't be easy, I can be demanding. But without my help you'll never make it as an actor. Under my supervision: you'll become the greatest leading man in Hollywood.

(We hear one person applauding from the back of the theatre. MARSHA MASON enters from the audience.)

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

Nice work, Norma.

NORMA

I thought you left.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

I did. I came back to tell Harrison not to meet us at Dupar's. We decided to go to Canter's.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Thanks.

NORMA

How long were you back there?

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

Long enough to see you for what you are.

NORMA

What do you mean by that?

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

Not only are you underhanded, trying to get Harrison to study with you instead of Jeff, but you've deluded yourself into believ--

MAX

Madame is not interested in your opinions.

NORMA

Max, be quiet. I want to hear what this young woman has to say. Go on. How have I deluded myself?

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

Well first of all you've deluded yourself into believing that you're some sort of Pygmalion, or Svengali. Are you a good acting coach? Yes; you're good enough to substitute for Jeff. But you're no Stella Adler. You're no Uta Hagen. Your own acting is much too broad for film or television, which is what most of Jeff's students are training for. And secondly, you've deluded yourself into thinking that a woman of . . . God only knows how old you are, would be attractive to a man of twenty-five. Where does that kind of ego come from?

NORMA

Great stars have great pride. Besides, how do you know Harrison doesn't find me attractive?

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

You're a grotesque, creepy old woman.

(NORMA grabs Marsha's jaw with one hand and holds her face very still.)

NORMA

I am not OLD!!

(NORMA pushes her away.)

What does age matter anyway? So what if I'm old enough to be his mother?

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

Norma, you're old enough to be his *grandmother*. I'm sure Harrison has no interest in . . .geezer love.

(MARSHA MASON turns and starts to exit.)

NORMA

Where are you going?

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

To get Jeff.

NORMA

You'll never catch up with him, he left ages ago.

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

He's standing out on the sidewalk, talking to Sally Kirkland.

(MARSHA exits. STUDENT #4 picks up the script that Norma tossed aside.)

NORMA

Harrison, you find me attractive, don't you?

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

(Diplomatic.)

You're not my type.

(NORMA is shocked that Harrison doesn't find her attractive.)

NORMA

Did kissing me disgust you?

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

No. You're not . . .repulsive.

NORMA

(Sarcastic.)

How gallant of you to say so.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Listen Granny, I don't appreciate you using an acting scene to take advantage of me.

NORMA

He called me Granny. Oh Max, she's right. I am a geezer!

(NORMA starts to cry.)

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

Please don't cry. I'm sorry for what I said.

NORMA

And Myrtle's going to get me fired and . . . I have nothing to offer anyone!

(More crying.)

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

I'm sorry! I take it back!

(JEFF enters from the audience,
followed by MARSHA.)

JEFF

You haven't even started the job, and you're already trying to steal my students from me.

(NORMA pulls herself together.)

NORMA

Who are you going to believe? Me, or someone whose biggest claim to fame is Hot Rod Hullabaloo?

JEFF

Well, since I trust Marsha, and since you're a convicted murderer who I never met before today, I'm going to believe Marsha. Besides, that lipstick on Harrison's mouth matches yours exactly.

(HARRISON FORD wipes the
lipstick off his mouth with the
back of his hand.)

NORMA

Jeff, I'm not trying to steal your students. I'm only interested in helping Harrison.

JEFF

Helping him into your bed.

NORMA

Don't be crude.

JEFF

Norma, you're a good acting teacher, but I can't hire someone who tries to seduce my students. I'll take those keys back.

NORMA

(To herself.)

This is worse than prison. At least there I never get my hopes up.

(JEFF crosses to NORMA and holds out his hand.)

JEFF

The keys.

(NORMA's heart sinks, and she hands the keys over to Jeff.)

Now I think you owe Mr. Ford an apology.

NORMA

An apology? I never--

(Pause. SHE looks at Harrison.)

Harrison, I wasn't trying to take advantage of you. I just . . .couldn't help myself. You're so handsome, and the way you looked at me during the scene . . .it reminded me of when Joe was still alive. I apol-
. . . I apol--apol--

(This is difficult for her to say.)

I . . .apologize, for saying that you need my help. You don't. I think you'll be the greatest leading man in Hollywood even without my supervision.

STUDENT #4 (HARRISON FORD)

The hell with acting. I'm going to become a carpenter.

(HARRISON exits.)

JEFF

Oh that's great. One of my promising students has now given up acting, and it's all thanks to you. Don't you ever think of anyone but yourself?

(JEFF exits.)

NORMA

"I think of other people's futures; but I never think of my own."

STUDENT #3 (MARSHA MASON)

Maybe that's because you don't have one.

(MARSHA exits.)

NORMA

Of course I have a future. That's one thing I've learned in prison; there's always one more day. Maybe being a geezer isn't so bad after all. I have a lifetime of experiences and memories. And dreams. Once I get paroled there's no limit to what I can accomplish. I'll show them. I'll be back on top again, so help me!

(This last line is accompanied by the same pose Norma strikes in Sunset Blvd. while watching one of her old films.)

NORMA

Max. Any word about that job where you work?

MAX

Not yet, Madame. My employer is out of town until Friday night.

NORMA

Talk to him about it again, would you Max?

MAX

Of course, Madame. I will speak to him about you first thing Saturday morning.

NORMA

Thank you, Max.

(Slight pause.)

You're a good friend.

MAX

I'm your only friend.

NORMA

Don't rub it in.

(Over the sound system, perhaps we hear Sonny and Cher's recording of I Got You, Babe. The lights fade to black. End of Act II.)

Act III

The Importance of Being Norma

(The lights rise on the living room of a beautiful home in Pacific Palisades, CA. Built in 1955 on the southern slope of the Santa Monica mountains, it was designed by architect William R. Stephenson, A.I.A., and has been described as a modern ranch house. The interior walls feature much stone and glass. The carpeting is a plush grey. Red is the favorite color of the home's owners, and can be seen in the draperies and the upholstery. The furnishings are contemporary for the time. The couch is large, as are the two armchairs. The coffee table is made of ebony and glass. On the coffee table are a few issues of The Thoroughbred magazine, and two apothecary jars, one filled with jellybeans and one filled with roasted almonds. The front door of the home is stage right. Up stage right is a coat closet, and stage left of the coat closet is the guest bathroom. The hallway that leads to the rest of the house is up stage left. Down stage left is the dining room, part of which can be seen. The large picture windows are on the "fourth wall"; when talking about the view the actors face the audience. Perhaps a recording of Frank Sinatra is playing before the play starts, but it fades out as MAX VON MAYERLING enters from up stage left. He wears his butler's uniform. He is followed by NORMA DESMOND.

She is dressed in a glamorous outfit that dates back to an earlier decade.)

MAX

This is the living room.

NORMA

What a wonderful view!

MAX

Hmm? Oh. Yes. The view is spectacular. I had forgotten.

NORMA

How could you forget?

MAX

I have worked here for over two years. After awhile, you take the view for granted.

NORMA

After spending the past sixteen years in prison, I'll never take this view for granted.

(NORMA continues to gaze out the window. MAX crosses to the coat closet and opens the door. He removes a maid's uniform on a hanger. Starched and pressed, it is black with a white apron.)

MAX

Here is your uniform.

NORMA

I'm not going to wear that.

MAX

Does Madame want to spend the next four years in prison, or working in the Governor's home?

NORMA

But Max--

MAX

Suppose you make up your mind. Do you want this job or don't you?

(NORMA reluctantly takes the uniform from him, but holds it away from herself in disgust.)

NORMA

At least there's not one of those ridiculous little hats to go with it.

MAX

I almost forgot.

(MAX reaches into the closet and pulls out the ridiculous little hat that is part of the maid's uniform. He hands it to NORMA, and then closes the closet door.)

NORMA

I spoke too soon.

MAX

You often do.

NORMA

So tell me, Max; when is the Governor due back?

MAX

You are not to speak to the Governor unless spoken to.

NORMA

How can he grant me a pardon if I can't speak to him?

MAX

Do not ask the Governor for a pardon.

NORMA

Max, you don't know what it's like in that prison. I can't take it for another four years.

MAX

Then you should be glad they finally accepted you into the work-release program.

NORMA

I am glad. And I appreciate you getting me this job--

MAX

Good. Then you won't embarrass me by making a nuisance of yourself.

NORMA

I am never a nuisance. I merely have a strong personality, that's all.

MAX

Some would say too strong.

NORMA

There's no such thing.

MAX

Yes, Madame.

NORMA

Whenever I do meet the Governor, you can be sure that I will handle myself with grace and dignity.

MAX

I'm sure you would. However, I doubt that you will meet him anytime soon.

NORMA

Isn't this his home?

MAX

Yes, but the Governor spends most of his time in Sacramento. He is only here on the weekends, and you work Mondays through Fridays.

NORMA

So I'll never get to meet him? Then why did you get me this job?

MAX

So that we could be together.

NORMA

How sweet of you to say that.

(Slight pause.)

But I want my *freedom*.

MAX

You have now seen the entire house. Your job is to keep it clean. Don't answer the door, that is my job. And do not answer the phone.

NORMA

You were never this bossy when we were married.

MAX

Perhaps that was my mistake.

NORMA

Do I really have to wear this awful get-up?

MAX

You will put it on. You can change in the guest bathroom.

NORMA

I don't know if I can take this for four years.

(NORMA exits up stage into the guest bathroom, carrying the uniform.)

MAX

I don't know if *I* can take this for four years.

(The front door opens, and RONALD REAGAN enters. He is tall, with a full head of brown hair. His shirt has French cuffs, and he wears his wristwatch with the face on the underside of his wrist. He is followed by NANCY REAGAN. She is a petite woman, well dressed and impeccable in her appearance. She is followed by MIKE DEEVER, REAGAN's deputy chief of staff. In appearance, Mike resembles Bob Newhart.)

MAX

Governor. Mrs. Reagan. We were not expecting you until tomorrow.

REAGAN

Well, we came back a day early so that Nancy could visit with someone who's flying back to Virginia tonight.

(REAGAN turns his back to MAX so that MAX can help him off with his overcoat.)

MIKE

Is there a problem?

MAX

I'm training a new maid today. But it is not a problem. I will see to it that she stays out of the way.

(NANCY turns her back to MAX so that MAX can help her off with her coat.)

NANCY

Make sure she doesn't overfeed the dog.

MAX

Yes, Mrs. Reagan.

NANCY

And Max, call Julius and see if you can get my appointment changed. I want my hair done today instead of tomorrow.

MAX

Yes, Mrs. Reagan.

NANCY

Ronnie, I'm going to talk to Mary about the menu for tonight's dinner. Is there anything in particular you want?

REAGAN

Nothing spicy. My stomach is acting up.

NANCY

Poor Ronnie. I'll have her make some tapioca pudding for dessert.

REAGAN

Did you know that tapioca is the starch extracted from both the sweet cassava and the bitter cassava?

NANCY

I didn't know that. But I do know it will help settle your stomach.

REAGAN

Thank you, Mommie.

(NANCY exits stage left. During the following dialogue, MAX hangs the coats in the coat closet.)

REAGAN

Mike, cancel anything scheduled for this afternoon. I'm going to that funeral.

MIKE

Lyn said he thought that was a bad idea.

REAGAN

Maybe it is, but it will get me out of the house for a couple of hours.

MIKE

Is Sarah really that awful?

REAGAN

Only once you get to know her.

MIKE

When is she due to arrive?

(REAGAN reacts to a pain in his stomach.)

MIKE

What's wrong?

REAGAN

Stomach pains. Do you have any antacid?

MIKE

No, but I'll find you some.

REAGAN

Bring it to me in my office. And see to it that I'm not disturbed.

(REAGAN and MIKE exit stage left. NORMA enters from the guest bathroom. She is wearing the maid's uniform, including the hat.)

NORMA

This outfit does nothing for me.

MAX

It's better than wearing a prison uniform.

NORMA

I'm not so sure. Being a criminal has a certain aura of glamour.

MAX

So does being dead, but it's nothing to brag about.

(MAX opens the coat closet and removes an upright vacuum cleaner.)

NORMA

I heard voices while I was getting into costume, was that--

MAX

It's not a costume, it's a uniform.

NORMA

Same thing. Was that the Governor?

MAX

Yes. He and Mrs. Reagan and Mr. Deaver just arrived.

NORMA

What luck!

MAX

You are not to speak to the Governor. You are to stay out of the way. Try to make yourself invisible.

NORMA

I'm Norma Desmond. I could never be invisible.

MAX

If Madame does not keep a low profile, she will be fired.

NORMA

Point taken.

(MAX pushes the vacuum cleaner to NORMA and offers her the handle.)

NORMA

What's this for?

MAX

It's a vacuum cleaner.

NORMA

I know that, I've seen pictures of them in magazines. But why are you giv-- you mean . . .me?

MAX

Start with this room, proceed to the dining room, and so on. With the exception of the Governor's office, you are to vacuum the entire house. Call me when you have finished, and I will show you where we keep the ironing board.

(MAX exits up stage left. NORMA glares at the vacuum cleaner. She starts to push it along the floor, but realizes that something is not right. We see her get the idea to plug it in. She unwraps the electrical cord from around the vacuum cleaner and surveys the room for a wall socket. She finds one and plugs it in. The on/off switch on the vacuum cleaner has been turned on, so when she plugs it in it roars to life, scaring NORMA. She calms herself down and approaches the vacuum cleaner warily. She takes hold of the handle and begins to push it back and forth. When she sees that this contraption actually

picks up the dirt, she becomes intrigued by the possibilities and begins to vacuum in earnest. Shortly thereafter, NANCY REAGAN enters from stage left. NORMA sees her, and, after finding the on/off switch, turns the vacuum cleaner off.)

NANCY

Be sure to get every dog hair off of this couch. Ronnie hates it when dog hair gets on his clothes.

NORMA

Yes.

NANCY

Yes *what?*

NORMA

Yes I'll get the dog hair off the couch.

NANCY

Yes "ma'am".

NORMA

Don't call me ma'am. You may address me as, "Madame."

NANCY

I mean that you are to respond "yes ma'am" when addressing me.

NORMA

Oh. I see. Yes . . . ma'am.

NANCY

That's better.

(NANCY starts to exit.)

NORMA

Mrs. Reagan?

NANCY

What is it?

NORMA

I was wondering if I might speak with the Governor.

NANCY

Not today. We're expecting a visitor.

NORMA

But it has to be today. I'm not here on the weekends, and you and the Governor are not here during the week.

NANCY

Then you'll have to write the Governor a letter.

NORMA

Don't talk to me in that condescending tone.

NANCY

You're a servant. That's how people talk to servants. If you'd ever had a servant of your own, you'd know that.

NORMA

I have a . . . had a servant.

NANCY

Well then you know what I'm talking about.

NORMA

I suppose I do.

NANCY

What's your name?

NORMA

Norma Desmond.

NANCY

Tell me Norma, how-- . . .did you say *Norma Desmond*?--oh my, you *are* Norma Desmond. I didn't recognize you at first.

NORMA

They say prison changes a woman.

NANCY

And not for the better. Tell me Norma, how long have you been a maid?

NORMA

About eight and a half minutes.

NANCY

Max has his work cut out for him.

(The house contains an intercom in every room, courtesy of General Electric, RONALD REAGAN's employer in the years before he was elected the thirty-third governor of California. NANCY crosses to the intercom and presses a button.)

NANCY

Max?

MAX (voice over)

Yes ma'am?

NANCY

Would you come into the living room? Norma needs some instruction on how to be a good maid.

MAX (v.o.)

Certainly, Mrs. Reagan.

NANCY

(To NORMA.)

Isn't it funny how life turns out? Who'd have thought my carpet would be vacuumed by a great big movie star like Norma Desmond?

(A beat.)

Don't forget about the dog hair.

(NANCY exits. MAX enters.)

MAX

What have you done now?

NORMA

I told her not to speak to me in that condescending tone.

MAX

Norma, this is not the way to keep a low profile.

NORMA

Max, all those years that you were my butler; why did you allow me to treat you the way I did?

MAX

I wanted to be near you. A servant was the only role in your life you would allow me to play.

NORMA

You played it very well. Better than I ever will.

MAX

I'm sure if Madame will apply herself, she will master the art of being a servant.

NORMA

How?

MAX

It helps to think of others before thinking of one's self.

(MAX exits.)

NORMA

This is going to be harder than I thought.

(NORMA bends down and looks closely at the couch. Then she looks at the vacuum cleaner. She removes one of the cushions from the couch and tosses it onto the floor. Then she lifts the vacuum cleaner onto the cushion and begins to vacuum it. MIKE enters from stage left. He crosses to NORMA and gets her attention. She switches the vacuum cleaner off.)

MIKE

What do you think you're doing?

NORMA

Mrs. Reagan wants me to get the dog hair off the couch.

MIKE

Then use one of the attachments. Don't let her catch you putting cushions on the floor; she'll have a fit.

NORMA

I'm afraid I'm not very good at being a servant.

MIKE

You'll get the hang of it.

NORMA

Will I? I've always been rather imperious. I don't want to be fired before I've even had a chance to . . . I can't afford to lose this job.

MIKE

I'm sure you'll be fine. Everyone is nervous on their first day.

NORMA

Are you Mr. Deaver?

MIKE

Yes, but you can call me Mike.

NORMA

Tell me, Mike, how do you do it?

MIKE

Do what?

NORMA

Serve others.

MIKE

Well, . . . in order to serve Governor Reagan, . . . I put myself into his mindset. Every morning after I get up I make believe I am him and ask what he should do and where he should go. I try to anticipate his every need. I sublimate my own personality, and eventually, I *am* Ronald Reagan.

NORMA

Then it's just like acting. You become the character, you become the other person in order to think the way they think.

MIKE

Exactly.

NORMA

You're too young to have seen my movies, but I'm a wonderful actress. If I approach this job as though it were an acting role, I know I'll be a good servant. Thank you, Mike.

MIKE

No need to thank me. I'm glad I could be of service.

NORMA

There, you did it again.

MIKE

What?

NORMA

Serving others. You're so good at your job, you don't even know when you're doing it. I wonder if you can help me with something else.

MIKE

What is it?

NORMA

I need to speak with the Governor today.

MIKE

The Governor's very busy this morning, and this afternoon he's attending a funeral. I'm afraid it's out of the question.

NORMA

If I don't speak to him today I may never get another chance.

MIKE

What's it about?

NORMA

I need him to grant me a pardon.

MIKE

You're a convict?

NORMA

Yes. You wouldn't know it to look at me, but I killed a man.

MIKE

What happened?

NORMA

Temporary insanity. But the jury didn't believe me.

MIKE

What does the parole board say?

NORMA

They don't know what it's like to live in a cell day after day after day.

MIKE

Were you really insane?

NORMA

I was out of my mind.

MIKE

And . . .now?

NORMA

I'm perfectly fine.

MIKE

Maybe if you talk to the warden--

NORMA

No, the Governor is the only one who can grant me a pardon.

REAGAN (voice over on the intercom)

Mike?

(MIKE crosses to the intercom and presses a button.)

MIKE

Yes Governor?

REAGAN (v.o.)

Have you found any antacid? My stomach is killing me.

MIKE

I'm still looking.

(MIKE crosses to exit.)

NORMA

Mike, is there . . .

MIKE

I'm sorry Norma, but you're not going to get to talk to the Governor today.

(MIKE exits stage left. NORMA picks up the cushion from the floor and puts it back on the couch. She resumes vacuuming. The doorbell rings, but NORMA doesn't hear it because of the noise from the vacuum cleaner. The front door opens stage right, and SARAH enters. In her eighties, SARAH is from Virginia. SARAH sees NORMA and freezes. NORMA does not realize that anyone is in the room until she vacuums up to SARAH's shoes. Surprised, she looks from the shoes up to SARAH's face. NORMA is shocked. She turns off the vacuum cleaner.)

NORMA

Mother!

SARAH

Keep your voice down.

NORMA

What are you doing here, Mother?

SARAH

(SHE looks around make sure they are alone.)
Call me Sarah.

NORMA

It's been forty years.

SARAH

Forty-six.

NORMA
How did you find me?

SARAH
Well . . .I . . .

NORMA
Why are you here?

SARAH
Me? Why are *you* here? Get out.

NORMA
I can't leave, I work here.

SARAH
I see by your uniform that you've finally found a job befitting your station in life.

NORMA
You haven't changed.

SARAH
You have. The older you get, the more you look like your father.

NORMA
Why thank you, Mother.

SARAH
That was not a compliment.

NORMA
Considering that the other alternative is to look more like you, that was a great compliment indeed. --I can't believe I'm seeing you after all this time.

SARAH
I thought you were still in jail.

NORMA
I am. They let me out during the day to come to work.

SARAH
I suppose the jails are too crowded to keep *all* the murderers locked up.

NORMA

Mother, I'd like to put the past behind me. Why don't we both forgive each other and get on with our lives? Can we do that?

SARAH

Why should I forgive you for givin' up your own child?

NORMA

I gave my baby up because--

SARAH

You gave up your child because bein' an actress was more important to you than bein' a mother.

NORMA

I gave up my baby because I didn't want to make the same mistakes with my child that you made with me.

SARAH

I didn't make any mistakes with you. Except havin' you. Oh look, jellybeans. I have always had a soft spot for jellybeans.

NORMA

Help yourself.

SARAH

Don't mind if I do.

NORMA

(Aside.)

I hope you choke on them.

SARAH

(Picking out a jellybean from the jar.)

What was that?

NORMA

Mother, why didn't you ever hug me as a child?

SARAH

I didn't want to get stung.

(SARAH pops the jellybean into her mouth. She immediately begins to choke, but NORMA is facing downstage and doesn't

notice. During the following speech, NORMA continues to face downstage while SARAH's attempts at getting a breath become progressively more exaggerated and more comic.)

NORMA

I probably should thank you for not loving me like you loved your other children. If I hadn't had such a desperate need for love and attention, I wouldn't have strived so hard to become a movie star. In your own demented way, you helped make me a success. Thank you, Mother. But you never answered my question: what are you doing here?

(NORMA turns around and sees that SARAH is choking. SHE runs to SARAH, reaches her arms around her from behind and performs the Heimlich Maneuver. The jellybean flies out of SARAH's mouth. NORMA helps SARAH to the couch, and they both sit. SARAH closes her eyes and concentrates on her breathing. She extends a hand towards NORMA, and NORMA takes it and holds it. The two women sit like this as SARAH takes a moment to compose herself. When SARAH speaks, she is noticeably humbler.)

SARAH

What was that you just did?

NORMA

A little maneuver I learned in prison.

SARAH

Norma, I want you to know that I never blamed you for the way you turned out. I always blamed myself.

NORMA

I always blamed you, too.

SARAH

You could have let me die, you know.

NORMA

I know.

SARAH

When you were younger, that's exactly what you would have done.

NORMA

True. When I was young I was terribly practical.

SARAH

Why didn't you?

NORMA

Oh Mama, I've lost everyone else I've ever loved. I don't want to lose you, too.

SARAH

Ahhh. That's so sweet.

NORMA

Besides. No one leaves a star.

SARAH

Well, Norma . . .Honey . . .I just want to say thank you. Is there anything I can do to repay you for savin' my life?

(NORMA thinks a moment.)

NORMA

Do you have any antacid?

SARAH

I have a roll of Tums in my purse.

(NORMA holds out her hand. SARAH gets the roll of Tums from her purse and hands it to Norma.)

NORMA

Thank you.

SARAH

Is that all you think my life is worth? A roll of Tums?

NORMA

This roll of Tums may get me out of jail.

(NORMA crosses to the intercom
and presses a button.)

NORMA

Hello?

MIKE (v.o.)

This is Mike.

NORMA

Mike, I've found some antacid. Tell the Governor that if
he wants any, he has to come talk to me.

SARAH

Where's the bathroom? I'd like to freshen up.

NORMA

Through that door.

(SARAH exits into the guest
bathroom. Though SARAH is in
her early eighties, for the
purposes of this play the
actress playing the role does
not have to be that old. What
matters is that she look old
enough to be Norma's mother,
regardless of her real age.)

(MAX enters.)

MAX

I heard you on the intercom. What do you think you are
doing?

NORMA

Being a good servant.

(REAGAN enters from stage left.)

REAGAN

Mike tells me you have some antacid?

NORMA

Yes.

(SHE hands him the roll of Tums.)

Help yourself.

REAGAN

Thank you very much.

NORMA

I'm glad I could be of service.

REAGAN

So you're the new maid.

(REAGAN takes a tablet from the roll and chews on it.)

NORMA

I am not a maid! I'm a . . . domestic.

(Brief pause.)

Oh, who am I kidding. I'm a maid.

MAX

Sir, this is Norma.

REAGAN

How do you do, Norma. Welcome aboard. Max, tell Dale to have the car ready by two o'clock. I've decided to go to that funeral after all.

MAX

Yes, sir. If I may ask, who has died?

REAGAN

My simian co-star.

NORMA

Pat O'Brien is dead?

REAGAN

No. Bonzo.

NORMA

The chimpanzee in Bedtime for Bonzo?

MAX

My condolences. Norma, continue vacuuming.

(MAX exits. REAGAN moves to exit, but NORMA asks him a question.)

NORMA

What was the chimpanzee's real name?

REAGAN

Bonzo.

NORMA

Oh. I didn't realize he played *himself* in the movie.

REAGAN

(Defensively.)

There's nothing wrong with playing yourself in the movies.

NORMA

I had a chimp once.

REAGAN

Do they make good pets?

NORMA

He wasn't a pet, he was more of a friend.

REAGAN

What happened to him?

NORMA

He died. A sudden illness.

REAGAN

I'm sorry to hear that.

NORMA

It was many years ago, but I still remember him with such fondness.

REAGAN

Did you know that in the wild, a chimp can live as long as sixty years?

NORMA

I didn't know that. How interesting. Governor, I too used to work in pictures.

REAGAN

I'm not surprised. You *carry* yourself like an actress. Were you in any pictures that I would-- my God, you're . . . you're Norma *Desmond*.

NORMA

Yes.

REAGAN

I didn't recognize you in that uniform.

NORMA

Thank God.

REAGAN

I remember some of your movies.

NORMA

You're too young to remember any of my pictures.

REAGAN

You sound like you miss it.

NORMA

I miss it like I miss my youth: it was great while it lasted, but life moves on.

REAGAN

One of the things that I've learned is that there is life after being a movie star.

NORMA

"I'm coming around to your outlook on life."

(Brief pause.)

REAGAN

That was one of my lines in Bedtime for Bonzo.

NORMA

They show that one a lot in prison.

REAGAN

Really. I had no idea the prisoners were being tortured.

(NORMA laughs.)

NORMA

Come now. The picture's not *that* bad. It's rather . . . cute.

REAGAN

You're too kind.

NORMA

Governor, since we're both former actors, I was wondering if perhaps you could do me a professional courtesy.

REAGAN

Such as?

NORMA

I'm sure Max has told you that my working here is due to the prison's work-release program.

REAGAN

Yes, . . .

NORMA

And it's provided me with some wonderful opportunities. But, having already paid my debt to society, I don't need to serve the remainder of my sentence. I was wondering if you would grant me a pardon.

REAGAN

When were you born?

NORMA

How dare you. My age is none of your business.

REAGAN

Norma, I'm not trying to determine your age, I want to know what sign you were born under.

NORMA

Oh. You follow astrology too? I'm Scorpio. What sign are you?

REAGAN

I'm an Aquarius.

NORMA

I knew you were a water sign. Well, Governor, how about it?

REAGAN
I'm afraid I cannot grant you a pardon.

NORMA
Why not?

REAGAN
You're a Scorpio.

NORMA
So?

REAGAN
So you probably deserve to be in jail.

NORMA
How can you say that?

REAGAN
You're guilty, aren't you?

NORMA
Yes.

REAGAN
Well then, unless you can prove you're rehabilitated, you need to serve your full sentence.

(REAGAN exits. NORMA grabs a pillow off the couch and flings it across the room in frustration. SARAH enters.)

SARAH
I thought he'd never leave.

NORMA
How do you know the Governor?

SARAH
Well . . .I . . .um . . .

(The phone rings. NORMA moves to answer it, but hesitates when she remembers Max's instructions. She turns away. It rings again. She glances off stage left. It rings a third

time. Unable to stop herself,
NORMA picks up the phone.)

NORMA

Governor's residence . . . what? . . . oh yes . . . no,
he can't reschedule, he's flying back to Sacramento on
Monday. We'll have it here . . . So send it over. The
address is sixteen sixty-nine San Onofre Drive . . .
When? As soon as possible.

(NORMA hangs up the phone.)

The Governor should be quite pleased with me when he
hears how I handled that call.

(NORMA picks the pillow up off the floor and returns
it to the couch.)

Mother, why have you--

SARAH

(Looking around.)

Ssh; I told you to call me Sarah.

NORMA

Sarah,--

SARAH

When is your shift over?

NORMA

Not till five.

SARAH

Why don't I take you to lunch?

(SARAH takes Norma by the arm and begins to lead her
to the door.)

We'll catch up.

NORMA

I can't go to lunch yet; and I certainly can't go dressed
like this.

SARAH

Of course you can, you look fine.

NORMA

I am not going out in public dressed as a maid. What if
someone recognizes me?

REAGAN (offstage)

I'll be right there, Mommie. I'm just going to get some jellybeans.

NORMA

He's coming back. Quick. Get in the bathroom. I must be alone with him.

(NORMA pushes SARAH into the guest bathroom and closes the door. REAGAN enters from stage left. He is wearing his glasses. HE crosses directly to the jar of jellybeans and eats some.)

NORMA

Governor. You look so different with those glasses.

REAGAN

I had to take my contacts out. They were really bothering me today. Thank you again for the antacid.

NORMA

I'm glad I could help.

REAGAN

Did you know that some antacids buffer gastric acid and raise the pH to reduce acid damage, while others block the secretion of gastric acid?

NORMA

I didn't know that. How interesting.

(REAGAN clutches his stomach in pain.)

REAGAN

I think I may be getting an ulcer.

NORMA

Sit down, Governor.

(NORMA leads him to the couch. He sits.)

REAGAN

I'll be alright.

NORMA

Of course you will. But that doesn't mean we can't make you more . . . comfortable.

(NORMA stands behind the couch and begins to massage REAGAN's shoulders.)

REAGAN

That does feel good, actually. Are you sure this isn't putting you out?

(NORMA leans over so that her face is next to his.)

NORMA

(Very seductively.)

I'd do anything to get out of prison.

REAGAN

(Moving away.)

Aren't you a little old for me?

NORMA

What difference does five or ten years make between consenting adults?

REAGAN

You assume too much.

NORMA

You're not an adult?

REAGAN

I'm not consenting.

(NORMA removes REAGAN's glasses.)

What are you doing?

NORMA

You're much more attractive without those glasses.

REAGAN

I'm very nearsighted. Please. Give them back.

NORMA

You don't need to see, you need to feel. Feel the chemistry between us.

REAGAN

All I feel right now is uncomfortable.

NORMA

Then let me loosen your tie.

(NORMA begins to undo his necktie.)

REAGAN

No. Please.

(REAGAN stands and bumps into the coffee table. NORMA sits on the couch in a seductive pose.)

NORMA

Sit down, let Norma work her magic.

REAGAN

(Calling.)
Mike?

NORMA

Don't call Mike. He can't serve you the way I can.

(REAGAN takes a step or two away from NORMA and bumps into one of the armchairs. NORMA reaches out and grabs his hand. She pulls him towards her and he falls onto the couch. NORMA immediately puts her arms around him.)

NORMA

I'll make you forget all about your stomach.

(NANCY enters from stage left.)

NANCY

Get your hands off my husband.

REAGAN

(Moving away from NORMA.)
Mommie, she took my glasses.

NANCY

I know she did, I've been listening on the intercom.

NORMA

How dare you eavesdrop on a private conversation.

NANCY

How dare you try to seduce my husband.

NORMA

I wasn't trying to seduce him. I was merely making him more receptive to the idea of granting me a pardon.

NANCY

I hope you rot in that prison.

NORMA

Are you going to fire me?

NANCY

No, I'm not going to fire you.

NORMA

Thank you.

NANCY

I'm going to have Mike fire you.

NORMA

You mustn't do that. I need this job.

NANCY

But we don't need a maid. We only took you on as a favor to Max.

NORMA

Max?

NANCY

Yes. And this is how you repay him.

NORMA

Why should I care what Max thinks?

NANCY

He certainly cares about you. God knows why. You're nothing but a murdering slut.

(NORMA lunges at NANCY and the two women fight. REAGAN tries to leave the room to avoid the conflict, but all he manages to do is stumble around and bump into things. During their altercation, SARAH pokes her head out of the bathroom. MAX enters and breaks up the fight.)

MAX

Enough!

REAGAN

Where are my glasses?

MAX

Norma, give the Governor his glasses.

(NORMA retrieves the glasses from the coffee table and hands them to him.)

REAGAN

Thank you.

(REAGAN puts on his glasses.)

Max, tell Dale to get the car ready.

(REAGAN exits stage left.)

MAX

Norma, you are a disgrace to that uniform.

NORMA

This uniform is a disgrace to-- . . . I'm sorry, Max. I should have listened to you.

MAX

Mrs. Reagan, I don't know how to even begin to apologize for Norma's behavior.

(NANCY notices SARAH.)

NANCY

Grams!

(She crosses to SARAH, who reluctantly steps out from behind the bathroom door. NANCY gives her a kiss on the cheek.)

When did you get here? I didn't hear the doorbell ring.

NORMA

"Grams?"

(Speaking to SARAH, but looking at NANCY.)

Is this . . . is this her?

SARAH

I prayed this day would never come.

NORMA

I'm sure you did.

NANCY

You know each other?

NORMA

Tell her.

SARAH

Nancy, . . . this woman is my daughter.

NANCY

What? What are you talking about?

SARAH

I didn't have seven children. I gave birth to eight.

NANCY

You're my aunt?

SARAH

Nancy, this woman is your mother.

NANCY

No.

NORMA

It's true.

NANCY

It can't be true. My mother is Edith Lockett Davis.

SARAH

Deede adopted you when you were a babe in arms. Your birth mother . . . is Norma Desmond.

(In the ensuing scene, NORMA, NANCY and SARAH all display behavior that leaves no doubt that they are three generations of the same family. If there is a "Norma Desmond gene", all three of these women have it. It has made them self-dramatizing and theatrical.)

NANCY

I don't believe it.

NORMA

Deede wanted a child in the worst way, but she was barren. When I became pregnant, well . . . I knew I couldn't keep it, and a woman in those days had very few options. It seemed the right thing to do.

NANCY

No, no; Mother never spoke of having a sister named Norma.

SARAH

No one ever spoke of Norma again. I made sure of that.

NANCY

Why?

(No one speaks for a moment.)

NORMA

I was asked to leave the family and never come ba--
(She is about to say "comeback", but stops herself.)
. . .never return. You see, at the time of your birth, your father and I had not yet married.

NANCY

Then I'm--

NORMA

Yes, I'm afraid so. Technically, you're illegitimate.

NANCY

You're lying. Tell me you're lying.

SARAH

Why would we make this up?

(NANCY slumps into a chair.)

NANCY

Was Kenneth Robbins my birth father?

NORMA

No.

NANCY

Who was my birth father?

MAX

(Stepping forward.)

I am your birth father.

(NORMA takes MAX's hand, and together they stand gazing down at NANCY as she sinks even further into the armchair. She turns away to avoid their gaze.)

NORMA

We're reunited at last.

SARAH

(Sarcastically.)

One big happy family.

NORMA

Max, our little baby is all grown up.

NANCY

I'm not your little baby. We're practically strangers. You shouldn't . . . I mean, after all this time . . .

NORMA

What you're trying to say is that you don't want me to love you.

NANCY

Did you ever love me?

NORMA

I *always* loved you. I just resented having to take care of you.

NANCY

I can understand that.

NORMA

Can you?

NANCY

More than you know.

SARAH

Nancy doesn't have any more maternal instinct than you do.

NORMA

So you never had children?

SARAH

She had two of them. Poor things.

NORMA

Then I'm . . . a grandmother. Max . . . we have grandchildren.

MAX

Very good, Madame. The seed of our loins has multiplied.

NANCY

Sorry I called you a murdering slut.

NORMA

Sorry I made a pass at your husband.

MAX

Ah, family.

NANCY

I'm never going to be able to think of you as my mother. Even when you're not wearing a maid's uniform.

NORMA

I'm just happy I finally got to meet you. Why don't you think of me as your sister? We look more like sisters than mother and daughter.

NANCY

This can't be happening to me.

MAX

It must be quite a shock.

NORMA

Not as big a shock as when her husband, the Governor of California, finds out that his wife is a bas--

NANCY

You mustn't tell him!

NORMA

I have to tell him. How else can I make him grant me a pardon?

MAX

You would do that to your own daughter?

NORMA

I'd do anything to get out of prison.

SARAH

I was right to never love you.

NANCY

You are a piece of work.

SARAH

How typical of a Scorpio.

NANCY

She's a Scorpio? Grams, how could you?

SARAH

It's not my fault. She was supposed to be a Sagittarius. She was born premature.

(NORMA crosses to the intercom.)

NORMA

(Pressing a button.)

Governor?

REAGAN (voice over)

Yes?

NORMA

Step into the living room, would you? I have something important to say.

NANCY

Norma, you can't tell him. I don't know what he'll do if he finds out.

NORMA

What choice do I have?

MAX

You often told me you never wanted to be like your mother.

NORMA

So?

MAX

That is exactly what you have become.

(REAGAN enters, followed by
MIKE.)

REAGAN

Yes? Oh, hello Sarah. How are you?

SARAH

I'm . . . glad I live in Virginia.

NORMA

Governor Reagan, I need to speak to you. I am . . .

(NORMA trails off without
finishing her sentence.)

REAGAN

Yes?

NORMA

I am . . . very lucky. To be working for you and Mrs. Reagan. You have a lovely home, and I'll do my best to keep it clean for the next . . .four years.

REAGAN

Thank you, Norma. I'm glad you feel that way.

MAX

Norma, I'm very proud of you.

(There is a knock at the front
door. MAX crosses stage right

and opens it. He steps out, and then immediately returns and closes the door. He holds an urn.)

MAX

That was the man from the animal mortuary. He has delivered the ashes of Bonzo.

NORMA

Bonzo died in a fire? How awful.

MIKE

Who told them to bring the remains here?

NORMA

I did. The mortuary had to postpone Bonzo's funeral until next week. I told them the Governor was a very busy man, and that the service had to be today.

NANCY

You have no authority to make those kinds of decisions.

NORMA

I have every-- . . . I apologize for over-stepping my bounds. It won't happen again.

MIKE

Why did they have to postpone?

NORMA

Apparently they're swamped with dead animals. There was an explosion at a testing facility for cosmetics.

REAGAN

Well, as long as his ashes are already here, we might as well say a prayer.

NORMA

Governor, may I say a few words?

REAGAN

You never even met Bonzo.

NORMA

Please. It would mean a lot to me. I never had a proper service for my own chimpanzee.

REAGAN

Well, I don't see any harm in it. Go ahead if you feel so moved.

NORMA

Thank you, Governor.

(NORMA crosses to MAX and takes the urn from him. She moves to center stage. Everyone takes a seat and faces NORMA.)

NORMA

Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to pay our last respects to a performer we all had a great fondness for: Bonzo. Though I saw him on the screen many times, I can't say that I knew him. The way we appear in pictures is seldom who we truly are. But even though I didn't know him personally, I also lost someone small and furry. The way he used to look up at me, with those big, brown eyes . . .the way he used to check my scalp for lice . . .but then I divorced my second husband and bought a chimpanzee. I tried to teach him to be more like a human, but I realize now that I should have tried to be more like him. No, I don't mean throwing feces around, or scratching ones privates in public. I mean giving love without expecting, without demanding, that it be returned. If only we could learn that from our loved ones, . . . Then all those times we cleaned up their excrement will have been worth it.

MAX

Yes.

NORMA

So Bonzo: we salute you. Long live Bonzo.

REAGAN

Amen.

(A moment of silence.)

Norma, I believe that you are rehabilitated. I'm going to grant you that pardon.

NORMA

Oh thank you! You . . . you don't know what this means to me. Max! Did you hear that? I'm free!

MAX

(Not at all pleased.)
Yes. I heard.

NANCY

Norma, that's wonderful news. Congratulations.

NORMA

Do you really mean that?

NANCY

Yes I do. You got what you wanted without . . . without doing any harm.

NORMA

Nancy, my lips are sealed. Sisters?

NANCY

Sisters.

(NORMA and NANCY give each other superficial kisses on the cheek. NANCY then moves to REAGAN and NORMA turns to MAX, handing him the urn.)

NORMA

Max, why aren't you happy for me?

MAX

I was looking forward to the next four years.

NORMA

You want me to be a maid?

MAX

No. I just like ordering you around.

NORMA

Max. You're so German.

MAX

Ja-wohl.

(MAX sets the urn down.)

REAGAN

Mike, put on some music, would you?

(MIKE exits stage left.)

NANCY

Your ulcer must be feeling better.

REAGAN

"By golly, I'm the richest man in six counties."

SARAH

(To NORMA.)

Maybe you haven't turned out to be so bad after all.

NORMA

Why can't you ever--

MAX

(Aside to Norma.)

It's the closest thing to a compliment that you're ever going to get from her. Take it.

NORMA

Thank you, Mother.

(NORMA and SARAH clasp hands, and then SARAH crosses to a chair and sits. NORMA moves downstage, followed by MAX.)

Max, you always have my best interests at heart.

MAX

Now that you are a free woman, what are you going to do with your life?

NORMA

Do? I'm a convicted murderer. There's not much I can do.

MAX

Perhaps a return to the screen?

NORMA

No . . .the spotlight is wonderfully warm at the beginning, but it grows increasingly cold.

MAX

You could write your memoirs.

NORMA

No, I'm through dwelling in the past. Besides, who would want to read about my life?

MAX

You're still Norma Desmond, the greatest star of them all.

NORMA

I'm through being Norma Desmond.

MAX

You're going back to being Norma Lockett?

NORMA

No. How do you feel about my going back to being Norma Von Mayerling?

MAX

I would be honored.

(MAX and NORMA kiss. Music begins to play over the sound system, perhaps a Frank Sinatra song. MAX and NORMA begin to dance. Upstage, REAGAN and NANCY begin to dance. MIKE enters, sees the two couples dancing, crosses to SARAH and asks her to dance. While all three couples dance, the lights fade, leaving Norma and Max dancing in a pool of light, the same pool of light Norma stood in at the top of the first act. After a moment, this light fades to black. End of play. During the bows, perhaps the Supreme's recording of Love Child is heard over the sound system.)

(Possible tag: After the bows, NORMA and MAX remain on stage while the other actors exit. NORMA and MAX then sing, in character, I Got You Babe, with NORMA singing Cher's part and MAX singing Sonny's part. If the theatre is unable to obtain the rights to this song, this tag is omitted, and all the actors exit after the bows.)

Bibliography for Act II:

Harrison Ford: Imperfect Hero by Garry Jenkins.
c. 1998. Published by Carol Publishing Group.

Journey: A Personal Odyssey, by Marsha Mason.
c. 2000. Published by Simon & Schuster.

Acting: In Person and in Style, by Jerry L. Crawford and
Joan Snyder.
c. 1976. Published by Wm. C. Brown Co.

Those lines of Norma's that appear in quotation marks are
lines from Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw.

Note:

The passages from A Doll's House are taken from The Dover
Thrift Edition. The preface to this edition reads:

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unabridged, slightly corrected republication of an
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Bibliography for Act III:

Early Reagan, by Anne Edwards. c. 1987. Published by
William Morrow and Company, Inc.

Nancy Reagan, by Kitty Kelley. c. 1991. Published by
Simon & Schuster.

A Different Drummer, by Michael K. Deaver. c. 2001.
Published by HarperCollins Publishers.