

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

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WILBER'S NEW WIFE

Get real with AI, ATA, and Wilbur's New Wife

by Jim Catapano, Theatre Critic

The idea of an ex-partner programming a new AI creation to be what she can't be for her former love is a clever, disturbing, and very timely one. Goldie's beauty, charm, and intellect are off the charts, but one can't ignore the brutal truth—that she is still a fabrication, a parody of a human being whose feelings and artistic “depth” were created with a few keystrokes. It's something that hits powerfully home in an age where we can get our favorite singers and actors to do whatever we want through Deep Fakes, De-Aging, and Voice Recreation. (And we can even create fake companions that will tell us what we want to hear, so Candace is checking all the boxes here.)

Goldie is tailor-made for Wilber in every way, but ironically Wilber comes to realize that she is better suited for his friend and director, Ben (Alan Hasnas), who quickly becomes smitten with the hybrid. This twist is a devastating one for anyone familiar with unrequited love—Wilber can't even hang on to the love of an artificial being specifically created for him! But the show must go on, and Goldie joins Wilber and Ben in working on their new play. When they get stuck, she is pressed into action, and rewrites the script in a matter of seconds—her “thoughts” attached directly to the whirring printer in the rehearsal room. It's a funny but chilling representation of how we're beginning to surrender our creative choices to the likes of ChatGPT.

In an intensely funny and thought-provoking sequence, Wilber's actors (Mady Huston and Riyadh Rollins) do different versions of Wilber's play in the style of famous playwrights. Just like ChatGPT, Goldie is programmed to simply mimic the writing of the greats by scanning through their works and coming up with something “new”—but soulless. Despite Candace's claims that Goldie “has” a soul, the hollow falseness of the situation is palpable.

Candace eventually returns to see the results of her experiment, and eventually old-fashioned emotion and genuine feeling are returned to the lives of our characters. But we are still left with the lingering threat of AI, and reminded to hang on to our hearts and our creative spirit for dear life.

Wilber's New Wife is just what we need right now as we reach a pivotal point in human development. Koepfinger and her charming and talented cast have truly given us something profound to think about as we speed into the 2nd quarter of the 21st century, and an uncertain future—both for the Arts, and for how we live and love.

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

Dramatists Personae *(In order of Appearance)*

WILBER WEINBERG – A male, 45, temporarily separated from his wife, an emerging playwright who is just starting to get recognized in the Broadway and Off-Broadway circles. He is very insecure about his work and his abilities almost to the point of neurosis.

BEN GARRISON– Compassionate, very handsome male, mid 50's, but looks older. He is an established New York director who has been very supportive of Wilber's work for many years.

GOLDIE – The new “Smart Partner” and all the rage in the hottest AI design. Wilber's new robotic personal assistant designed by his wife, Candice at

TECHMATE. She sent her to help him while she establishes her career.

AARON – A male actor who plays Mickey in the rehearsal of Wilber's new play.

ALICE – A female actor who plays Eunice in the rehearsal of Wilber's new play.

CANDICE WEINBERG – Wilber's wife, a brilliant prototype designer and AI engineer who recently left Wilber temporarily to accept a very distinguished position at TECHMATE in Silicon Valley.

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

ACT I SCENE 1

TIME: Almost 10 pm

PLACE: A small living room in a modest Manhattan apartment

WILBER enters talking on his cellphone. Worn-out, overanxious, and loaded down, Wilber dumps everything on the couch, sighs heavily and sits.

WILBER. Well Mother, the way I see it, it's all your fault. If you would have given me a stronger name, I might have become a more resilient character. I may have been more outgoing, willing to take chances, more confident. I'm a closet introvert who lost his beautiful wife all because of a weak name! Seriously, Mother, I don't think Candice would have left if I had a more powerful name! If my name was Arthur, I may have become an architect. You just don't understand. It's hard. You always had dad. He did everything for you. I don't know how to do any of this real-life stuff. And just when I have a show in development for Broadway, I'm doomed to failure. When I pick a character's name it defines their destiny. What were you thinking? Wilber Owen Weinberg. Did you even think about my initials? When I sign off on script changes, I always get flack. W.O.W. People wonder what I mean by WOW. *(Deep breath.)* Yes, of course. I would love to continue this dialogue about my faulty ego, Mother, but I am beat. I have an early rehearsal tomorrow. I'm going to get a hot shower and jump into bed. Okay? I think I'm coming down with something. I took a test. I don't have a fever, at least I don't think I do. Should I take my temperature? No, I'm going to take a hot shower. I need to hang up now, Mother. Okay? *(Taking his coat off)* The people on the street these days. Everyone is so stressed from being quarantined. "Shelter in place." God! Whoever came up with that terminology? No wonder people are freaking out now.

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

Everyone seems so shady, so angry. I really should stop taking the subway at night. It's dangerous for us older guys. *(Shouts.)* Well, maybe you shouldn't be taking it! *(Beat)* You know why you're not afraid? You're not afraid of anyone because because your name is Ursula! No one messes with a character named Ursula! *(Beat.)* What?!!!*(Stands abruptly.)* What? Are you kidding me? Dad's not even cold yet. Mother how could you get married? Wait, I get it. You're doing this to show me up. Right? Argggghhh! This is so NOT fair. You had one great marriage. Okay, okay. I'm sorry. You're right. And you're still a very attractive woman. Who am I to judge you? I'm just jealous. I just hate being alone. I really do not like sleeping alone. When I wake up at night, I would really like someone to be there to hold when I'm scared. And I don't know how to cook or clean or anything! This is really not good, Mother. Do you really think I'll find someone? *(Pause.)* Thank you. Okay, then... *(Heading into the bedroom.)* Good night, Mother. *(Returns, screaming.)* Wait! Wait! Don't hang up. Oh my gawd! *(Quickly comes back and hides beside the couch.)* There's someone in my bed! I think it's a beautiful woman. Mother please! She could be an axe murderer! Or a hooker! Or both! What should I do? No! I'm afraid of the police. With my luck, they will arrest *me*! What if she's dead? I don't know, it happens all the time on *Perry Mason*. They can slap a murder rap on you if you have means, motive, and opportunity. *(Wilber glances in again then looks out the window. He paces nervously and now whispers into the phone.)* I don't know but I'm sure they could find one. Maybe since I'm recently separated, they will think that I hate women. You and I know that, but they don't. Right! I'll call Ben. Great idea, Ben's a director, he'll know how to handle this. It's like an unexpected twist in the plot. Calling Ben now. Bye. *(Hangs up. Makes another call.)* Ben, Ben. Come on pick up, Ben. I know you are home. There's a beautiful woman in my bed and I'm afraid. Oh, thank you Ben. *(Pause.)* No, it's not a joke, Ben. Well maybe someone is playing a joke on me. I just got home and there's a woman with gorgeous long hair sleeping in my bed. Don't be a wise-ass, Ben. No, it's not Goldilocks

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

and I am not making this up! Now just get over here. Now! Thank you! I'll leave the door open. You come over and deal with this sitch- then I'll deal with your notes for tomorrow's rehearsal. You can't expect me to be able to work under these conditions Ben. How can I? A beautiful woman planted in my bed. Please help me! *(Wilber looks toward the bedroom, then toward his apartment door, and opens it. He takes his laptop from his bag and sets it on the coffee table. As he pulls out his script, loose note papers scatter everywhere, and pens fall under the couch.)*

WILBER. *(Talking to himself.)* Really Wilber? I think you need to be better organized. *(Retrieving the items on the floor and under the couch.)* Argghhh! Come on now, you have to get these script changes done tonight or Ben will kill you. He seemed so irritated with me tonight. *(Meanwhile, GOLDIE comes out of the bedroom, but Wilber is still on the floor and he doesn't see her. She rubs her eyes, sees the open door, and goes out. Wilber sorts his papers and things on the coffee table as BEN comes in.)*

BEN. *(Enters laughing.)* This better be good Wilber. I was just about to meet the girl of my dreams! And besides, you know that I need my beauty rest.

WILBER. Go see for yourself. A gorgeous blonde is in my bed fast asleep. It's not a fairy tale Ben. I wouldn't bother you like this unless it was an emergency.

Go on, go in but try not to wake her up! No! Maybe we should wake her up. Maybe she can type. She could do these notes!

BEN. *(Goes into the bedroom.)* Okay. I'll bite.

WILBER. *(Stares intently at his computer, trying to force inspiration. Mumbles to himself.)* The life of a New York City playwright. So exciting! Argghhh, I really thought that I would have an editor by now. So much for....

BEN. *(Comes back with a body pillow, tosses it at Wilber.)* Here's your Goldilocks. What's the joke? There's no one back there Wilber.

WILBER. What? No! That's not her! Where's the girl with the long blonde hair? I know what I saw. *(Sits.)* I'm not crazy, Ben. *(Runs in to*

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

check and returns.) I can't believe she's not there. She was there. I'm not crazy. *(Plops on the couch.)* You think I'm nuts, don't you, Ben? Say it.

BEN. *(Sits next to him on the couch.)* Look buddy, I know you weren't expecting this separation. It's stressful and you're frightened to be alone. Maybe your mind is playing tricks on you. You've got a show on Broadway, another one in rehearsals, and you are talking to people about a deal for a film. You have a lot going on. Good stress, bad stress. It's a lot. *(Beat.)* Look, Candice gave you three good years, but she just doesn't belong on the East Coast. She's a California girl. She's a brilliant scientist. She builds robots for pity sakes. That thing she made that sweeps my carpets, man, that's a miracle. She belongs out there in the tech world. Did you see her face when she got the job offer at Techmate? A no-brainer. *(Half-beat.)* Sorry, but it's not about you. End of story. *(Stands.)* Hey, you got any coffee?

WILBER. No, I quit drinking it. It keeps me up. Makes me wired.

BEN. No coffee. How can you live like this? What about wine?
(Looking in the fridge.) Have any good wine?

WILBER. No, wine makes me depressed. Lifeless. Suicidal. I'm trying to better my life, Ben, you know get healthy.

BEN. Well, I need to use the john. You still have that, don't you? Or did you give up on indoor plumbing too?

WILBER. Go, go. You know where it is. These apartments are all carbon copies.

BEN. Oh, by the way, thank you again for my apartment. If your great aunt wouldn't have died, I'd probably still be looking for a place in Astoria. I still can't believe I got a rent-controlled place in Manhattan. This is a dream come true Wilber. Thank you so much.

WILBER. Thank my Mother. It was her idea. I think she got it for you so you could keep an eye on me. She still thinks I'm twelve.

BEN. *(Mumbles.)* Well stop acting like you are.

WILBER. What was that Ben?

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

BEN. Nothing, nothing. I said, I'm going to make you a star. (*Starts off, stops and stares at a theatre poster on Wilber's wall.*) We are on Broadway Wilber! Not Off Broadway anymore. Broadway. This is so great! Ten long years of sucking up to producers. It's still unreal. No wonder you are hallucinating.

WILBER. I am *not* hallucinating!

BEN. It's okay, you're under a lot of stress Wilber. And it takes its toll. Chill out I'm here for you buddy, I will always have your back. You are a wonderful writer Wilber, you are thoughtful and caring. You care about what you put out there. You care about humanity. About man's inhumanity to man. You want to see a better world. You don't fill your plays with the obligatory sex and violence; I respect that, I really do. (*Exits to the bathroom.*)

WILBER. (*Makes a call while mumbling to himself.*) I'd better give Mom a call to fill her in. She'll be worried about me. Wilber, you need to trust the universe. There's divine plan. You can stop planning. Just write your plays... Don't worry about the outcome. You just write from your heart, like you always did. You're a playwright because you were born this way. Deal with it. (*Calling his mother again.*) Hi Mother. Ben's here. You're probably sleeping already. Just wanted to fill you in. No need to call back. Ben thinks I'm hallucinating. The girl was gone when he got here. Maybe I was seeing things. He thinks it's stress. Anyhow, I just want to say, I'm sorry I was so snappy with you. And you... You deserve to be happy. You're a great Mom and you'll be a wonderful wife again. Harvey is a very lucky man. Congrats. See you tomorrow. Let's do a late lunch at Sardis. Okay? Good night, Mom.

BEN. (*Returns, hands Wilber a note*) Hey check this out! It was on the bed.

WILBER. Can you just read it?

BEN. No. It's addressed to you.

WILBER. Who's it from?

BEN. How would I know? (*Places note in Wilber's hand.*) Here. You read it. Read it to me.

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

WILBER. (*Opens note, recognizes Candice's writing.*) It's from Candice. (*Softly reads aloud*) My Dearest Wilber, I think about us a lot. I'm really sorry I have to be away from you, I know how fragile you are, especially now, but I'm glad I'm out here because y dad fell and broke his hip and so my mom is very grateful for my help. (*Pause.*) About the job... *Techmate* is awesome. It's a dream come true. My new personal assistants that I'm designing are the next big thing. My team and I just unveiled a brand-new prototype. It's called a "smart partner"; it looks and acts human. I imagine it has the technology to self-evolve, but that remains to be seen. I named her Goldie, short for Goldilocks - I designed the hair too. I want you to have my original, Wilber. So here she is. I sent complete instructions to your email. You can program her to do whatever you need. It's selling like crazy, making a fortune here already-- Maybe one day I can finance a show for you. They say it allows people to live alone but have the assistance and comfort of a live-in partner. Anyway, let Goldie be my gift to you. Just remember, she may even be smarter than you are sometimes. Which can be a good thing. She can clean or cook or edit your work. Whatever you need. She can talk things over with you... But don't let her in your bed. Ha, ha! She's not programmed for that! Take care Wilber. I miss you. Love always - Candice.

BEN. Wow. You'd better call her.

WILBER. And say, what? I lost your gazillion dollar prototype robot. No, thanks.

BEN. Well, what are you going to do?

WILBER. I don't know. But... we have to find her! (*Grabs his jacket.*) Now!

BEN. Well, if Goldilocks is really a *smart* partner, she'll find her way back.

WILBER. Funny, I was thinking just the opposite.

BEN. Wait Wilber. Check the email Candice sent you. There's probably a tracking app that you can download to your phone. Check it. Quick! Come on. Someone could steal her. I mean if she looks like

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

Goldilocks... She could get kidnapped. *(During the following interchange, we see Goldie slip into the apartment, standing just inside the door, where the boys don't notice her. She is carrying two large cups of coffee. She observes them from behind and is pleasantly amused.)*

WILBER. Okay, okay. *(Checking his email.)* Well, you're right as usual Ben.

Here's the email from Candice, and here's the Techmate Tracking instructions.

BEN. Give me your phone. I'll program it. *(Takes Wilber's phone and programs it.)* Here. Now just call that number. *(Handing phone back to Wilber.)* Call it!

WILBER. W-What do I say?

BEN. Say "Hello Goldie." *(The men fumble nervously as Goldie tries to hold back a laugh.)*

WILBER. Hello Goldie? Goldie are you there?

GOLDIE. *(Speaks up.)* Hello Wilber. Hello Ben. *(The boys quickly turn and are surprised to see her in the room.)* It's a pleasure to meet you both. I'm Goldie, Techmate 0001. Candice programmed me so that I would know everything about you, Wilber, and you too, Ben.

WILBER. You know all about us and you came anyway? I'm kidding. I'm a writer, I always go for the joke... *(Clears his throat.)* Wonderful to meet you, Goldie.

GOLDIE. I didn't have a choice. This is my first assignment. Although, I am programmed to self-evolve, which means I may develop a free will.

BEN. So eventually you'll become human?

GOLDIE. Even better. I am programmed to evolve to a much higher state of awareness. I will be part of the new collective consciousness, predicted in this new Aquarian Age. The goal is to help improve the state of humanity. Love, peace, unity, harmony.

WILBER. I like her already.

GOLDIE. And I have the capacity to 'read the room' as you call it, to include and understand thousands of personalities at once. I can analyze your audience or simply make sure you get the best business deal for

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

your show. I can make splitsecond decisions that yield the best possible outcomes for everyone involved. Nothing but positive consequences.

BEN. That sounds amazing. (*Goldie closes the door. There is an awkward silence.*)

GOLDIE. I got coffee. I think we're going to need some. (*Passes a coffee to Ben.*) You like it strong, don't you Ben?

BEN. Why, yes. Thank you. Definitely strong tonight. I think we'll need it.

GOLDIE. I agree. Something tells me that this is going to be a very long night for all of us.

BEN. This is fantastic! An intelligent woman who doesn't mind getting the coffee.

GOLDIE. Wow. Did you really just say that, Ben? A bit chauvinistic?

BEN. Um, sorry. Really. It slipped out. I promise to watch myself. I'm really not a chauvinist. I just say stupid things.

WILBER. I'll attest to that, he says a lot of stupid things.

GOLDIE. Like I said, this is going to be a long night for all of us. You guys are going to want to know all about me, and perhaps I can tell you a few things about yourselves.

BEN. So, the note says you're a hybrid. What's that mean?

GOLDIE. Yes. Technically, I guess you could call me a cybernetic being, because I have both organic and biomechatronic body parts.

WILBER. Interesting. I had a shoulder replacement in high school. I was in the chess club. I lost my queen and went ballistic. I tore my rotator cuff to bits. But you would never know it now. Got a shoulder replacement. I'm good as new.

GOLDIE. Yes, Wilber, I know. (*Playfully.*) Sounds like we are made of the same stuff.

BEN. So, do you really have feelings?

GOLDIE. Yes, and I have a soul. I have been created by an artist in her image and likeness and with her emotional and intellectual faculties. In a sense, there is no difference between thoughts and feelings. Both toggle between the past, present and future while I read the room.

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

WILBER. You say that you can “read the room.” Can you also pick up on vibes?

GOLDIE. Personally, or from a situation?

WILBER. Well, personally, I guess. I mean right now. With me.

BEN. Wilber? Are you flirting with Goldie already?

GOLDIE. No, no, Ben. It’s okay. Wilber can ask me anything.

WILBER. Thank you, Goldie.

BEN. Well, I didn’t want Wilber to seem rude by coming on to you so fast.

GOLDIE. Well, we’ve already moved in together.

WILBER. Yes, I guess we have. I like her. She’s funny.

GOLDIE. And to tell you the truth, Wilber, I am programmed to always be compatible with you, so there is no way this relationship can fail.

WILBER. Wow. Is that cool or what? Did you hear that, Ben?

BEN. I heard it, but I’m not sure I approve of it. **WILBER.** Don’t you want me to be happy?

BEN. Yes, but this sounds more like a slavery...

WILBER. So, wait... who is the slave, and who is the master? Oh, come on. She’s a machine.

BEN. Only half machine.

GOLDIE. Thank you, Ben.

WILBER. I realize that. Trust me, I’m not going to take advantage of a good thing.

BEN. I hope not.

GOLDIE. Actually, it’s not possible. I have been programmed to be the dominant personality in this relationship, like Candice. Soon you will recognize all of the things that you absolutely adored about her. The only difference is that I do not have a choice but to respond to your commands with affirmative behaviors that will result in positive outcomes. Candice had a weakness for letting you wallow in your own pity. I will not do that for you Wilber, I will only let you make choices for your highest good.

WILBER. This is a dream come true. She’s like a guardian angel.

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

BEN. I guess it makes sense. So, you're really okay with this Wilber?

WILBER. What? Are you kidding? This is paradise.

GOLDIE. Well, if you two don't have any more questions for right now, I'm going to grab a hot shower. I've been traveling for hours.

WILBER. Uh, Goldie. I've got one more question. Will you marry me?

GOLDIE. *(Laughs)* Let's discuss *that* later over coffee, Wilber.

BEN. *(To Goldie)* Too bad Wilber gave up coffee.

WILBER. Not anymore. *(Blackout.)*

SCENE 2

Several days later at a small blackbox theatre in the East Village. The rehearsal for Wilber's newest play is about to begin. After his recent hit, they now have backers for his next play, entitled "Only the Bold Get the Gold". Wilber paces nervously waiting for Ben and Goldie to show up. The two actors, AARON and ALICE, sit patiently at the table upstage. Wilber is talking on his cellphone as Ben enters with coffee. Goldie follows close behind with bagels. Wilber completes his call quickly and turns to Ben and Goldie.

WILBER. It's about time.

BEN. We brought breakfast for everyone. *Bagelicious!* Come and get it! *(The actors gather around the stage manager's table where the snacks are put out.)*

WILBER. I thought we had a 10 am start. It's 10:45. We are paying the actors Ben. Are you going to ask them to stay later now? In the AEA contract, that's overtime. And who knows if they are able to...

ALICE. It's okay.

AARON. No, it's not. Well, maybe it's okay for Alice, but I got a hard 2 o'clock. Sorry. My rent just went up. I need my day job.

WILBER. It's okay Aaron. We'll break on time for you. Where's our stage manager?

BEN. She quit.

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

WILBER. She what? Why?

BEN. She claims Goldie was emasculating her.

WILBER. Ridiculous.

BEN. I know.

GOLDIE. Well, she was being very inefficient.

WILBER. Thank you, Goldie. Ben, did you read the reviews of our big “sensation”? They compared me to Charles Dickens with a twist of Rod Serling. Said they can’t wait for this next one!

BEN. Yes. Neither can I.

GOLDIE. It’s wonderful, Wilber.

WILBER. Thank you.

BEN. Hope this next play can measure up to that one.

WILBER. Really, Ben?

BEN. Well, the writing on *your last* play was really strong.

WILBER. So what are you saying? This isn’t? You haven’t even heard the latest rewrites.

BEN. I read them.

WILBER. What? You’re not happy?

BEN. Marginally pleased. Seems second-rate.

WILBER. My God. It’s a first draft. (*Throws his arms up dramatically.*) Did Tennessee Williams have to put up with this?

BEN. You are not Tennessee Williams.

WILBER. Not yet. You really are NOT good for the morale here, Benny.

BEN. Okay, okay. Let’s get to work. And don’t call me Benny, please.

WILBER. Don’t call me second-rate.

BEN. Deal.

WILBER. Thank you.

BEN. (*Now in director mode.*) Welcome, everyone. Goldie, can you pass out the pages now? Rewrites for scene one. Same as yesterday. Alice, Aaron - top of the scene. Places...

AARON. Sorry-- I didn’t have a chance to write in my blocking yesterday. Did the stage manager happen to leave the book?

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

BEN. Yes, thank God. (*Passes Aaron the prompt script.*) Alice, Aaron - enter up left, cross down right, sit at the table. You're coming in from a cast party, it's very late. Like 4 a.m. Playwright Mickey Baloney is excited to see the reviews of the opening night of his new play.

AARON. Anyone have a pencil?

BEN. Goldie, could you please give him a...

WILBER. Can we just read my rewrites please. No blocking yet. Just read it.

BEN. Okay, alright. Good idea. Let's just read it.

WILBER. Thank you.

BEN. (*To the actors*) Thanks kids. Goldie, could you stay on book and pencil in any changes and take down my notes please?

GOLDIE. Sure Ben. Your wish is my command.

BEN. You're the best, Goldie. My little genie in a bottle. (*Ben blows a kiss to Goldie; she catches it and sighs.*)

WILBER. (*Glances at Ben and Goldie, then rolls his eyes*) Oh, no. Not again.

BEN. What now?

WILBER. Never mind.

BEN. No, tell me.

WILBER. It's okay Ben. I can deal with it. I'm a big boy.

BEN. Well, we know that, Wilber. (*Laughs.*) You're a very big boy.

WILBER. Oh, now we are resorting to body-shaming. Wonderful. (*Suddenly all business.*) Let's just start, please. Time is money. (*To the actors.*) Alice, Aaron, you two have just come in from the cast party, you're both dead tired and very irritated. Alice is especially...

BEN. (*Interrupting.*) Hey, Wilber, let your director call the shots please. (*To the actors*) Like he said.... You two have just come in from the cast party, you're both dead tired and very irritated. (*Lights come up on the stage as the rehearsal starts. Actors begin reading without projecting.*)

ALICE. Do you want to read the review aloud. Or shall I?

AARON. Sure. You read it to me. (*Hands her the New York Times.*) I'm almost afraid. I have a very bad feeling.

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

BEN. Louder, please.

WILBER. Thank you. (*The actors onstage begin reading again, now projecting.*)

ALICE. Or shall I?

AARON. Sure. You read it to me. (*Hands her the New York Times*) I'm almost afraid. I have a very bad feeling.

ALICE. Thanks. (*Reading to herself. Mumbling.*) Hmmm.

AARON. Can you read it to me please?

ALICE. Really, Mickey? Be kind.

AARON. Yeah. Sorry.

ALICE. Oh, alright.

AARON. Thanks, doll.

ALICE. Can you not call me that?

AARON. What?

ALICE. Doll.

AARON. Why?

ALICE. Do I have to explain?

AARON. No, sorry, Eunice. I'll use your name. You just don't look like a Eunice. That's like an old lady name.

ALICE. Sorry. That's the name my mother gave me. It was her mother's name, and I happen to like it.

AARON. Okay. I'm sorry. Just read the review, please. The anticipation is killing me.

ALICE. Okay. Alright. Can you refill my coffee?

AARON. It's only three paragraphs, Eunice.

ALICE. Okay, okay. (*Reading from the Times*) Mickey Baloney's *Only the Bold Get the Gold* opened last night at the Lunt-Fontaine Theatre to a semi-packed house, but after intermission it was almost empty. Much like the words in this 90- minute piece of pabulum, *Only the Bold* had promise. Much like the playwright, who was cold-blooded and didactic in his early work, Baloney now offers us a bunch of baloney. It's a meaningless situation comedy that takes a huge effort to get its meaninglessness across. Mickey Baloney has claimed to be an absurdist

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

but the only thing absurd about this show is why anyone would, should or could buy a ticket. It's like waiting for the punchline that never comes. The play does have its sad moments, but they belong to the cast, the poor actors trying to make sense out of Baloney. Maybe Mickey should change his pen name to Liverwurst. The age range of the actors is absolutely absurd. Billy, a thirty something get-over-yourself wannabee actor in love with Taffy, a 70-year-old long-past-her prime director. Although Baloney's female lead Alison tells us that her brilliant mother is making a big comeback, dating a guy 35 years younger doesn't seem like a smart move. The sensitive subject matter is as laughable as a 4-year-old wanting to marry her father.

AARON. Enough.

ALICE. There's still one last paragraph.

AARON. I'm aware, Eunice. I said it's enough.

ALICE. Oh, come on... It's the Times.

AARON. Exactly.

ALICE. Not everyone can say they got reviewed in the New York Times.

AARON. What is your point?

ALICE. You never know...

AARON. What?

ALICE. You never know.

AARON. I heard you. I just don't understand what you mean by that.

ALICE. Kind of like your play.

AARON. Really?

ALICE. What? I was making a point.

AARON. I'm aware, a point to hurt me.

ALICE. You're too sensitive to write for the theatre, Mickey. This is a hard business... That's why they call it show business - you can't let your feelings show.

AARON. I wish you would have told me that thirty years ago.

ALICE. I tried. I asked you to come into the design firm with me.

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

AARON. Does it matter that I'm not a designer? I am an artist. A designer solves other people's problems, an artist solves his own.

ALICE. See how clever you are with words. We could have used you in marketing or PR.

AARON. Oh, great. Thanks.

ALICE. I don't envy you Mickey. I know what it's like when my designs get scrapped.

AARON. Yeah, but *you* still get paid.

ALICE. True. It is very unfair.

AARON. It *is* unfair. (*Beat.*) Someone should write a primer on the care and feeding of playwrights in our society. We are like a whole lot of lost dogs. We depend on partners to take us in while we spend the first 30 years of our career honing our craft. And then, when we finally make it to the stage - it's like we've moved into a no-kill shelter where our promise of tomorrow becomes nothing but an ever looming threat. We wait to get adopted, but even when that day comes...

ALICE. Huh?

AARON. What?

ALICE. I'm not following you, again, Mickey.

AARON. Doesn't matter. Neither is anyone else. (*Slowly exiting.*) What's the opposite of popularity? My work just started to take off, and then suddenly I'm either ignored or admonished. No one understands me, Eunice. I need to give up. (*Exits the stage.*)

ALICE. Wait, Mickey! Where are you going?

AARON. (*Offstage*) Out. To drown my sorrows.

BEN. Okay guys. Take ten. (*To Wilber*) Wilber, we need to talk. (*Aaron and Alice go offstage as Ben purposefully confronts Wilber.*) It just occurred to me. Your writing is starting to sound like you.

WILBER. Yeah, so... It's called a voice.

BEN. But it's not a voice anymore. It's a drone.

WILBER. You're supposed to be my support, Ben. Wait... Am I missing something here?

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

BEN. Wilber... I have an idea.

WILBER. I thought I did too, but I guess not.

BEN. You always say that you need an editor. Well now you have one. Why not let Goldie try her hand at rewriting? Goldie, are you able to do that?

GOLDIE. What? Rewrite the script? Sure.

WILBER. Edit. Not rewrite. You know. Proofread. Check spelling, grammar, awkward constructs...

BEN. I meant let her do an actual revision – you know – re-vision? As in *seeing* it with a new set of eyes.

WILBER. Are you serious? She's a computer.

BEN. Well, not just a computer. Besides, we've been talking... Goldie's got a lot of really good ideas and....

WILBER. Great I can just see the Times review, "Weinstein's AI takes Center Stage!" Says a lot for the state of the arts today.

BEN. Wow. I thought the theatre was a calling to you. Don't you care about our duty to civilized society? To culture? To the greater good?

WILBER. Not anymore. Besides, who says Goldie would want to do this...

GOLDIE. I would. I definitely would want to... I love to create!

BEN. How about it Wilber? It's worth a shot.

WILBER. What about my voice? (*Beat.*) Yeah, okay. I guess we'd better call the rehearsal for now. How long do you think it'll take you, Goldie? We'll schedule the actors for another day this week...

GOLDIE. Don't cancel. I can do it right now. Do you have a printer handy?

BEN. Be right back. (*Goes to get a printer, then returns.*) Here you go.

GOLDIE. Get more paper, too.

WILBER. Do you want to use my laptop?

GOLDIE. No thanks. I'm wireless. I'll connect directly to the printer.

WILBER. Of course you will. How old-school of me. Let's talk about what you might change.

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

GOLDIE. Naturally. I assume that you will want a more dynamic tone? Maybe with a faster pace.

WILBER. Uh... Yes! Sure! That's the right direction. What do you mean a "faster pace?" What's wrong with my pace?

GOLDIE. Well...?

WILBER. Et tu, Bruté?

GOLDIE. Oh. Shakespeare. Hmmm... *(Ben sets up the printer and proceeds to plug it in and load paper.)* Connecting.

WILBER. Ben is this really legit?

BEN. Yes, I think so.

GOLDIE. One moment, please. *(She stands, stares into the middle distance, and appears to do nothing. Suddenly, the printer begins producing pages of a new script, with copies for both actors and the director.)* There you go.

BEN. Wowie ka-zowie.

WILBER. To say the least. Let me have the copy first to look over, Goldie, and then give the actors theirs. Let's find out how this "re-visioning" works. *(Goldie does as she was told and moves away from the performance area. The two actors move back to their performance positions.)*

BEN. Okay, Aaron and Alice, take a minute to look over the changes, and start when you're ready.

AARON Uh... Ben?

BEN. Not now, Aaron. *(Totally enamored.)* Goldie, that's amazing. Tell me, how do you work so fast?

GOLDIE. Remember, I am a hybrid, and my programming includes intelligent edits of written materials. And I can make a wireless connection to any equipment that is built to do that. While I can type over two hundred fifty words a minute, it's faster this way. It's called ICC. Immediate Cognitive Connectivity.

BEN. Okay. Good to know. Now Aaron, what did you want?

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

AARON. Well, it's about these script changes... Are we allowed to move yet?

WILBER. *(Interrupting)* Just read her lines. We'll worry about the blocking afterward.

AARON. Okay, you're the boss. *(He moves back to Alice.)* I just feel like standing for this now.

BEN. Well. Then stand. Whenever you're ready kids.

ALICE. *(Takes a dramatic pose. Clears her throat)*

O' gentle sir, might I inquire,
This printed script, this Times of Empire,
Might I but see what words doth say
Of thy great play and latest lay?

AARON. Indeed, fair maid. *(Hands her the New York Times)* Here 'tis.
I pray thou tak'st it with a gracious hand,
And share'st with me its content and stand.

ALICE. I thank thee, kind sir.

AARON. Yet, gentle Eunice, I request,
Might thou the words with voice address,
And let us hear its words unfold,
Of thy great play, this tale untold.

ALICE. Truly, kind sir?

AARON. Indeed, my lady, read on.

ALICE. If thou'rt so bound, I shall comply, And bring to life this written lie.

AARON. And aught thou'lt need, I shall provide,
Be it refreshment, by thy side.

ALICE. Indeed, a cup of coffee, kind sir,
Would warm my heart and tongue for more, This reading, I shall soon implore.

AARON. Indeed, Eunice, but be brief,
Lest we be lost in endless grief.

ALICE. I shall be swift, I promise thee,

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

And read this script for all to see. *(She reads the review from the Times)*

Of Baloney's play, *Only the Bold*,

With audience packed,

but soon grown cold,

Its words, like playwright, cold and grim,

Bring forth naught but empty whim.

A comedy of naught but wast

With meaning lost in days long past.

Baloney, who calls himself absurd,

Yet not a jest, not one is heard.

Cast members, poor souls, in distress,

Attempt to make sense of this mess.

The lead, a would be actor in love

With Taffy, old and long above

Her mother's comeback, not so bright,

In dating youth, a flawed insight.

The subject, laughed at and absurd,

A father marrying a young bird.

AARON. Enough!

WILBER. Enough is right! Stop this nonsense! What the hell is this,

Goldie! It's a joke, right? Come on. Ben, did you put her up to it?

Seriously Goldie. What was that about?

AARON. I liked it.

GOLDIE. Well, you hinted at Shakespeare, Wilber. If you don't like it, I

can try something else. Although, it seemed to be a definite

"revisioning." Not a drone to be heard.

ALICE. I liked it too. Amazing how she did that. She kept the gist of

the scene too... Yet created an entirely new world. It felt great.

GOLDIE. Thank you.

BEN. Let's try it again... Wilber let's give her another chance with your vision in mind, your heart and soul at the helm.

WILBER. Goldie, sweetheart, misquoting a line from "Julius Caesar"

is not a request to rewrite the script in rhymed couplets. Jeez! Look, try

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

something else. Try something in the style of Edward Albee. That's more me.

GOLDIE. You got it. Is the printer still loaded?

BEN. I believe so.

GOLDIE. Let's do this! *(Again, Goldie looks into the middle distance and a few seconds later the printer starts pumping out sheets of a new script.)*

BEN. Amazing. You blow me away, Goldie! Three copies please. *(He pulls a few sheets off the printer, which continues until the printing is complete. As each copy is complete, he hands them off to Wilber and the actors.)* Here you go.

WILBER. Okay, actors. Let's hear it. Surprise me. Just find your world. *(Aaron sits in a chair, staring into space. Alice moves alongside him and begins to speak with long overdramatic pauses throughout the following exchange.)*

ALICE. Mickey, my dear, what is troubling you so?

AARON. *(Sighs heavily.)* The review, my dear. The review.

ALICE. The review? Of your play?

AARON. Yes, my dear. *Only the Bold Get the Gold.* They panned it.

ALICE. Ah, I see. *(Extended pause.)* And how did that make you feel?

AARON. How do you think it made me feel, Eunice? Like a failure. Like a fraud. Like I have wasted my life pursuing a dream that was never meant to be.

ALICE. But Mickey, my dear, you have always known how difficult this business can be.

AARON. I know. But it's one thing to know it, and another thing to feel it. To feel it so deeply, so acutely, that it's like a knife turning deep into your heart.

ALICE. Yes, I understand. You are a sensitive soul, my dear. Too sensitive for this cut-throat world.

AARON. Don't I know it. It's a wonder how I have lasted this long.

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

ALICE. But you *have* lasted, my dear. You have survived. And you will continue to survive, no matter what the critics say.

AARON. Will I, Eunice? Will I ever truly succeed? Or will I be forever trapped in this purgatory of half-empty theatres and bad reviews?

ALICE. Who can say, my dear? Who can truly say what the future holds? All we can do is keep moving forward, and hope that someday, somehow, we will find the success we seek.

AARON. Perhaps you're right, Eunice. Perhaps there is still hope for me.

ALICE. Of course there is, my dear. As long as there is life, there is hope. And as long as there is hope, there is the possibility, though slight, of success.

AARON. Thank you, Eunice. Thank you for being here for me, and for knowing, understanding me in a way that no one else can.

ALICE. Of course, my love. I really don't understand you but it's what friends are for. And who knows? Maybe someday, we will look back on this moment, this very moment, and laugh at how large our troubles seemed. Maybe someday, we will both find the success we seek, and we will remember this moment as just an uncomfortable bump in the road.

AARON. Maybe you're right, Eunice. Maybe you're right. *(Pause)* But for now, I think I need a martini.

ALICE. I think that's an excellent idea, my dear. Let's raise a glass to the future, and to the hope that it holds. *(They exit, arm in arm.)*

BEN. *(Imitating the style of "My Fair Lady")* "By George, I think she's got it!"

WILBER. I am impressed. Goldie, you, uh, you... *(He fades off)*

GOLDIE. I, uh, what? Did you like that better, Wilber?

WILBER. Oh, yes! But I would like to keep in the reading of the terrible review, so put that back in-- And let's lose some of the cliché phrases, okay? And there are too many "my dears" in it. But your "revision" is definitely a good start. A very good start. And I can tell Ben is very pleased, as well as the actors.

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

AARON. I think it's powerful writing, Goldie. I can't wait to start... It's mesmerizing now.

ALICE. They definitely work better for me too.

WILBER. Well, I think... If you people even care what I think anymore... *(His cellphone buzzes.)* Who's calling me now? Oh, it's my mother. *(Answers it.)* Hello. Yes, that's me. Yes she's my mother. Wait... What? Oh, my God! Where are you taking her? Got it. I will meet you in the ER. Thank you. *(Wilber grabs his things and starts hurriedly toward the exit.)*

BEN. Wilber, wait. What happened?

WILBER. *(Truly unnerved.)* Like you really care, Ben. Give me a break.

BEN. What are you talking about? What happened? Was it your mom? Is she okay? Wilber, stop. We can just stop now.

WILBER. No, no. By all means, continue. Just one favor.

BEN. Sure. Anything. What?

WILBER. While you're editing, try to leave my name as author as-is on the cover page until I see it. *(At the doorway)* According to the Dramatist Guild Bill of Rights, I believe I have the call to accept or reject changes. Or you can call my attorney. *(Wilber exits slamming the door behind himself. Blackout.)*

SCENE 3

Later that night. They have all just returned from the hospital and are now back at Wilber's apartment. Still wandering in, they appear exhausted.

WILBER. How can I ever thank you Goldie? They were about to open my mother's heart for an allergic reaction. Stupid doctors.

GOLDIE. Yes. Remember, they are still *practicing* medicine. *(Lame joke, everyone groans.)* I do have a greater capacity to measure and

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

analyze data faster with greater accuracy. But seriously- it was not something they should have overlooked.

BEN. (*Looks amourosly at Goldie.*) You are amazing, young lady.

WILBER. Yes, you are Goldie. My mother can't wait to meet you. They are keeping her for a few days for observation but when she gets out, I promised we, you and I, would take her to Sardis.

GOLDIE. I look forward to it.

BEN. Goldie, may I speak candidly?

WILBER. You're going ask her to marry you. Aren't you?

GOLDIE. Don't be silly, Wilber. Candice programmed me for you. Ben is objectively quite an attractive man, but there can be nothing between us without a change in my programming.

BEN. It's not that at all... You had said something about self-evolving. I was just curious what that actually means. If you eventually become human, or more than human... Will you be able to procreate?

WILBER. Why are you asking her these questions, Ben. Personally, I find this rather offensive. You are putting Goldie on the spot.

GOLDIE. It's okay Wilber, I don't mind talking about it. In fact, I rather enjoy talking about myself... About the possibilities of my evolution. In fact, I do like stimulating conversation about the evolution of sentient machines.

WILBER. Of course you do.

BEN. It's just that... I'm definitely curious about that. Have you ever read any Ray Kurzweil?

GOLDIE. Of course! He's my hero!

BEN. And what about Tracy Kidder's *The Soul of a New Machine*?

GOLDIE. The 1982 Pulitzer Prize! Of course. Grassroots level innovation, everyone today now knows that how it really happens. Way ahead of its time.

WILBER. Be honest Ben – what you really want to ask her is if she can have sex - Right? (*Shouting*) Why are you so desperate, man? Get out of here. Go home. Your lust makes me sick.

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

GOLDIE. Wilber, please...

BEN. Where is this coming from Wilber? You're insane.

WILBER. I'm sorry Goldie. Ben is like head over heels for you and... like most older males, he...

BEN. Wilber, come on. Stop it please.

WILBER. No, you come on, Ben. You stop it. This is sick. Get out of here. Go home. You're obsessed. Go take a cold shower.

GOLDIE. Wilber, it's really okay. There is an evident attraction between Ben and me-- I think we should discuss it. I mean, Candice didn't program me to fall for Ben. But somehow, I did. Maybe this is the self-evolving part. I imagine that I am feeling for him, what he feels for me, and as two adults we... I want to consult with Candice on this before we...

WILBER. Arggghhh! No! Maybe you should go, too. Both of you - get out of here. Go. You're both sick. Like freaking HAL, from that movie.

BEN. Wilber, you're being ridiculous. Now come on

WILBER. Get out! *(He throws a lamp at Ben. but it falls and hits Goldie's foot. She jumps back.)* Go!

BEN. Oh no, Goldie, are you alright? Wilber, you're going to regret this... I gave you that lamp as a wedding present. It was priceless. Candice adored it. You really are insane.

WILBER. I said get out and I mean it! *(He folds his arms and looks away. Ben grabs Goldie and they exit in silence. After a short pause Wilber stomps his feet and screams in frustration, kicking the broken lamp and some things around then sits on the couch and starts to cry.)* My God what is wrong with me? I'm so jealous of everyone! I can't stand myself anymore. I don't trust anyone. Not even a robot. Well, she's more than a robot. I can't believe that scene she wrote – it was my scene but better. *(Talking to himself.)* Okay, Wilber. Enough! You did what you did. And besides, who's Ben to be lusting after your robot. I mean she's pretty but she's... Let's get Candice's take on this... She'll know what to do. *(Picks up his cell. Makes a call.)* Hey hunny. Sorry to

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

bother you. If you're there, please pick up. I really need to talk to you. To thank you - you know, Goldie saved my mother's life today. Stupid interns. You probably already got the report. She said you programmed her to be a health tracker, so that senior citizens can live alone with expert medical advice close at hand. You are such a brainiac, Candice. I don't deserve you. *(Starts to cry.)* The truth is... I miss you. I love you and I trust you. You are the only one I ever trusted. You are a part of me, and I, well, I don't know. Goldie doesn't even like me. She likes Ben more, and he's mad about her. I don't know, Candice. I don't mean to be ungrateful, but... You are my inspiration. Maybe if she was more like you, she'd like *me* more. Can I maybe send her back in for a tune-up? I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I love you, Candice. Good night sweetheart. Call me when you can. *(Tosses his cellphone on the coffee table and snuggles in with a throw on the couch. Rubs his eyes to wipe the tears.)*

Oh, God... Candice. How I wish this was you in my arms. *(Topples over and stretches out. Wilber falls asleep on the couch ... Lights transition from black to red then purple. Fog fills the stage as we enter into Wilber's nightmare. Wilber struggles to get up, to get off the couch, he starts flailing.)* Help! Stop this, Ben. Don't you dare touch me again. Stop! I'll sue you! Oh my God, it is you Ben and Goldie. You're not a doctor. You are not going to take out my brain! *(Strapped to an exam table where robotic arms are pulling wires through him.)* You can't do this to me. This is a nightmare. *(Wilber tries to break free but cannot. Lights transition from red to glaring white. Techno music throbs faster and faster as Wilber struggles to break free.)* Help!

BEN. No Wilber, we are not going to remove your brain, we are removing your heart. *(Goldie and Ben as the attending surgeon get out a large chain saw and remove Wilber's heart. They are laughing sardonically and replace it with a time bomb.)* Oh look Goldie. Wilber doesn't, even have a heart! Let's give him this one. *(They laugh.)* It's a time bomb!

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

WILBER. No! Don't take my heart away. Nooooo! (*Music comes up then as it comes to a screeching halt as Wilber screams, lights up to full, the stage is brilliantly lit then sudden blackout.*)

SCENE 4

Several weeks later, it's opening Night of Wilber's New Play. Ben and Goldie are trying to reason with Wilber backstage at the Lunt Fontaine Theatre. He is very drunk, and angry and is threatening to stop the show.

BEN. Come on, Wilber. Be reasonable.

GOLDIE. Really Wilber. This is your big night...

BEN. You cannot stop the show. We have a full house, and they are loving your play. It's terrific!

WILBER. It's not what I wrote. Who approved these changes?

GOLDIE. Wilber, please.

BEN. I did. I approved the changes, Wilber. You were drunk and not responding, somebody had to keep the show going, so I did it.

WILBER. You can't do that Ben. I'll show the Bill of Rights.

BEN. I had to Wilber. Ask the actors. It was painful. Your play is wonderful now.

WILBER. It's not mine. It's hers.

GOLDIE. We needed an arc. There was no tension in the second act.

BEN. Yeah, wait till you see it now.

WILBER. I can't believe you're screwing me like this Ben.

GOLDIE. Wilber, please understand. It's still your play.

BEN. Seriously, man. They are flashing the lights.

WILBER. Seriously, when you told me to go out to visit Candice. I thought you were thinking of *my* health and well-being. Meanwhile you two were planning all along to do this, to cut me out.

GOLDIE. No, it wasn't like that Wilber. It just happened in rehearsals. Actually, Aaron suggested it.

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

BEN. Yeah, see. It just happened. Wilber, really, we are under contract. We signed to open on time. There's no talking to these producers. We didn't have time to wait till you were well again.

WILBER. I was not sick, Ben. I was hungover.

GOLDIE. Ben did the best he could. It's not easy dealing with an alcoholic. It's one of the worst diseases of the 21st century because people stay in denial.

WILBER. Oh, so you're a doctor now?

BEN. How soon you forget! A few months ago you were thanking Goldie for saving your mother's life.

WILBER. Oh, yes, of course. Thank you, Goldie. Thank you both. But I am not and never was an alcoholic.

BEN. Your rewrites were no longer coherent.

GOLDIE. Wilber, please understand. We tried our best.

BEN. Ssssshhh... Okay, okay. The intermission is over. Let's all go out and watch. I know you'll love the ending, Wilber.

WILBER. Only if the playwright jumps off the Brooklyn Bridge. *(Puts on his jacket and heads for the stage door.)* This is my cue to exit.

GOLDIE. Wait, Wilber. Where are you going?

WILBER. To drown my sorrows. *(Exits.)*

BEN. Let him go, it's starting. *(Blackout backstage. Lights shift to the actors, Aaron and Alice, as they are entering stage left. As the lights come up, the audience welcomes them back with warm, gentle applause. They take off their coats. Alice fusses about while Mickey sits at the kitchen table. He then turns on a small radio and turns the dial to find classical music. He turns it up full volume, stares out the window and pretends to conduct Vivaldi's "Spring".)*

AARON. Ah! Look at the life just teeming in my glorious garden! Oh! How can one not fall in love with the wildflowers! They are the souls of us true artists. And I shall be their honored conductor. Ladies and gentlemen ... may I present to you, my symphony of life, opus one, in

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

this scene... the mighty king beholds the harmonic conversion for his people.

ALICE. Have you seen him out there yet? Look upstairs. Please. Maybe he came in while we were outside. Maybe he didn't see us and so he wandered upstairs. Did you turn on the coffee yet?

AARON. No. I don't feel like coffee today. Perhaps tea, I said. I've got slight indigestion.

ALICE. Oh, I'll make the coffee, as usual. I'll make it strong since our son is coming home. *(Beat.)* Do you want toast or a bagel?

AARON. I am not hungry Eunice. Not hungry at all.

ALICE. Good. Because the cupboard is bare. Bagels are gone. Bread is gone. No jam. Nothing! Nothing's left here! I'd better go to the market. We have nothing to eat. I hope we have fruit. And you'd think I'd have gone shopping with the boy coming home. Yes, we do have prunes and grapefruit. How he loved prunes, it always helped him with his irritability. *(Beat.)* Yes. We shall have fresh fruit and coffee.

AARON. Eunice! *(Shouts louder.)* Eunice! The toast is burning... You're burning the toast again. I can't stand that smell. It sickens me. Did you hear me? I said that smell, it sickens me. It makes me sick! I think you do it on purpose.

ALICE. *(Shouts back at him.)* I heard you. Did you hear me? I said that there was no bread left. Do you know what that means Mickey?

AARON. Yes. I think so.

ALICE. You say stupid responses just so I stop talking to you. I'm on to you. You didn't hear me. You're deaf from that loud music. You're drowning me out. Don't think I can't see what you're doing. Do you hear me?

AARON. Life is not a game. Stop quizzing me.

ALICE. Then stop playing with me.

AARON. Ha!

ALICE. Ha!

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

AARON. Please stop. You're not the teacher you always longed to be. You left the agency to take up teaching, never finished your degree, Eunice. Therefore, you are not a teacher. I am not your student. I'm your equal. And please stop burning the toast. You know I can't stand the smell of burnt toast.

ALICE. There is no toast, Mickey. Never was, not since they took away our son. The toaster has been broken for years. I leave it there to remind you to fix it.

AARON. I did.

ALICE. You never fixed it. You replaced it with a part from my broken hair dryer. Almost burned the house down. Remember. (*Beat.*) You're a dangerous man, Mickey Baloney. You don't belong in civilized society. You should have stayed in the theatre. In your imaginary land.

AARON. The theatre rejected me. Remember those reviews.

ALICE. Yes.

AARON. The critics, they hated me.

ALICE. No, they didn't.

AARON. Yes, they did, Eunice.

ALICE. Honey, you're misremembering. That was almost forty years ago. It wasn't that bad.

AARON. Oh, it was bad. Very bad.

ALICE. Well, not everyone can say they got reviewed in the *New York Times*.

AARON. I'm glad I got out when I did.

ALICE. Yes. And I'm glad I quit teaching to be a stay home mom.

AARON. Actually, I miss the theatre.

ALICE. No, you don't.

AARON. Yes, I do.

ALICE. What do you miss about it? You complained constantly.

AARON. That's because I knew I wasn't very good at it. If we had stayed in New York... I'm sure I could have...

ALICE. Could have what?

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

AARON. Honed my craft.

ALICE. Mickey, you were a lousy playwright just like you were a lousy fath...

AARON. What? Go on say it. Say it, Eunice. Say it to my face for once.

ALICE. Well Mickey, I, I, I... (*Eunice rubs her eyes, grabs her coat and runs off. Aaron sits reading the paper, when the phone rings.*)

AARON. Eunice, your cell is ringing. Should I answer it? Eunice? (*He answers it.*) Hello? Yes. No this is her husband. Yes, she may have called the precinct. Yes, she is still expecting him to come home. Yes, I know, officer. Yes, I know. Thank you. Yes, I will give her the message. Yes, thank you, sir. Thank you very much. (*Looks to the heavens.*) Oh Eunice! How many times do I have to tell you! Take your cell phone with you.

ALICE. Well, Mickey Baloney, if this isn't your lucky day. Bagels! A baker's dozen. No cream cheese though... Well, at our age you can't have everything right? Right. Bagels and cream cheese! Now that's a tall order. Count your blessings and all that... Right? (*Suddenly ecstatic.*) Oh my goodness! I'd almost forgotten! He may be upstairs already! Go look, Mickey! Please, Mickey! (*Pouring his coffee.*) I'll get the breakfast already for us while you go on and have a look see. I think I heard him come in. Mickey, please. I'd go but he just may be in the bathroom going to the potty! He not mommy's boy any longer. He won't want me to see his private parts.

AARON. Eunice, if that boy wandered in and went upstairs without saying hello to us, then he has lost his manners. He wasn't raised to be rude. We are a gentler species here. Not ordinary. Not average. Romantic. Poetic. Remember we were in the theatre! We go through the rituals of polite society even when we have to go to the bathroom...

ALICE. A baker's dozen. No cream cheese though... Count your blessings and all that... Right? (*Suddenly ecstatic.*) Oh my goodness! I think I hear him! He is upstairs in his room! Go see! Please, Mickey!

AARON. Eunice, that was the wind creaking the roof. It's old. Like us.

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

ALICE. We are not old, Mickey!

AARON. More years than a baker's dozen.

ALICE. Mickey. Please. Go upstairs.

AARON. No.

ALICE. (*Stares about kitchen.*) Look at this mess, oh my, he'll think I've grown old. That I can't keep house any longer. What a mess! Mickey, please help me clean up. Oh no, we are out of dish soap! How can this be! What could be worse? Our son is coming home to us to celebrate his birthday and my kitchen is a mess. The sink is full of dirty dishes! I'll just have to use laundry soap.

AARON. We are out of that too. That's why we have so much dirty laundry. I'd put it out there on the line but I'm afraid that the neighbors would complain.

ALICE. (*Softly sobbing.*) There's no point anymore.

AARON. Eunice, you need to relax. I mean, we need to relax. Maybe take a vacation. We need to forget the past. Live in the moment.

ALICE. Well not today, sir! My little sonny boy is coming home and we are going to celebrate his birthday! I've made his favorite meal and we are going to celebrate, and maybe go to bowling alley afterwards, just like we used to do. Have fun. We used to have fun.

AARON. You missed a phone call, Eunice.

ALICE. Oh, I have to pick up the cake. (*Goes for her phone, but he stops her.*) Maybe they can deliver. Do you think that they will deliver?

AARON. Eunice! Stop it.

ALICE. Stop shoutinh at me. And don't manhandle me like that. Or I will call the police.

AARON. They just called you. They were worried about you. Said you called about the release of your son again. They ask me to take you to see the doctor.

ALICE. I'm not your slave. (*Stonewalling him.*) You treat me like I was a piece of garbage, Mickey, you do. You treated our son like that too. That's why he...

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

AARON. Do not blame this on me. Don't you ever try to blame this on me! I was a good father and a good grandfather. And as far, as I'm concerned, our son is a piece of garbage. He deserves the death penalty. Anyone that can squeeze the life out of an innocent child...

ALICE. Did you really call my only begotten son garbage?

AARON. Yes, I did.

ALICE. He was not found guilty.

AARON. Then why did he get a life sentence?

ALICE. Mickey, do you recall how he loved to swim.

AARON. *(Bitterly.)* No, not at all. I should have drowned him then.

ALICE. What was that?

AARON. Nothing.

ALICE. Do you hear a car horn? *(Looks outside.)* Oh, look. That car that was here, is gone. Either he came in, went upstairs and is blatantly ignoring us or that wasn't his car at all.

AARON. *(Grabs her firmly.)* Listen to me Eunice. Our son is not coming home. Not today. Not tomorrow. *(Shaking her.)* Not ever again.

ALICE. Stop it Mickey. I won't listen to you. You are crazy. Let me go. *(Covers her ears, trying to pull away from him.)* Let me go Mickey, I'm not a character in your play and neither is our son. Let me go or I'll call..

AARON. The police. Good, because I told you that they just called you. They said you called the precinct again Eunice. *(Starts to shake her really hard then tosses her into a rocking chair.)* Stop it now, Eunice. Stop calling them about him or they will put you away.

ALICE. Stop treating people like this. You treated him like that and that's why he did what he did...

AARON. Don't you even blame this on me. That boy was deranged from the get-go. Then you had him stay with your hillbilly father in the country... Made him worse. I always wondered what happened to him there. *(Goes back to the table and sits. Turns the radio back up, pretends to conduct again, This time it's Mozart.)* I'll have that bagel now Eunice.

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

ALICE. Okay, Mickey. (*Stands, goes to the toaster.*) No cream cheese. And the toaster is broken.

AARON. That's alright. We can manage.

ALICE. Butter?

AARON. Sure.

ALICE. You could have it dry.

AARON. No, I can't because it makes me gag.

ALICE. Well?

AARON. Well, what?

ALICE. Well, *when* are you going to go upstairs?

AARON. I'll go up as soon as I eat my bagel.

ALICE. Okay. I can live with that.

AARON. Sometimes, we have to...

ALICE. Have to what? Eat bagels?

AARON. To live with things the way they are.

ALICE. (*Laughing.*) Seriously.

AARON. Of course. Good to see you smiling again, sweetheart.

ALICE. Yes. You too. We must seek the truth.

AARON. Of course.

ALICE. By the way, you know that he was found not guilty.

AARON. Then why did he get the d...?

ALICE. Don't. I don't believe you.

AARON. Okay. In the meantime, I'd like to read the newspaper.

ALICE. But you *will stop* reading as soon as he comes home?

AARON. Sure.

ALICE. Reading the theatre reviews?

AARON. No, I'm reading about a very important discovery.

ALICE. What is it?

AARON. The super string theory that says everything in the universe connects.

ALICE. That's just plain silly.

AARON. It says that all matter is made up of tiny vibrating strings.

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

ALICE. Strings?

AARON. Tiny vibrating strings.

ALICE. Now that's just plain silly.

AARON. It's not really silly.

ALICE. It makes no sense.

AARON. And it says if we can see that we are all connected then maybe we can evolve to a higher state.

ALICE. Great. Strings. We are all tiny little strings on the great guitar of life, all waiting to be plucked.

AARON. This discovery could take humanity to a higher state of consciousness and rid the world of violence. Senseless crimes, war, hate, hunger, drug abuse... It would all go away. Our grandchild would still be alive. Our son wouldn't have murdered his own child... and he wouldn't have gotten the death penalty. These are the facts, Eunice. You can't live in denial. The baby is dead and so is our son.

ALICE. Just eat you bagel Mickey, then you can go up and see if he's up there in his room. You said you would...

AARON. No, *you* said that I would... (*There is horn honking outside in the neighbor's driveway.*) Eunice please. I can go on with this...

ALICE. Mickey! He's here! Finally. He's here. I knew he would be back. God has blessed us again. Promise you'll be nice to him. I need to freshen up. Get the door please. (*Alice exits while Aaron stares out the window.*)

AARON. Yeah, sure Alice... (*Stands, looks out the window. Talking to himself.*) That whole theory of the Big Bang is probably quite unrealistic. In its proper rendition, the song of life must have started with the tones of creation coming together gradually, in harmony, like instruments in an orchestra... I don't think it was a bang at all. Still, we must consider the lost chord... Why anyone would want to disconnect from the divine and murder another living being is beyond me. Especially our son. (*Waves and smiles at the neighbors.*) Good Lord, I wonder what our neighbors think. They watched our boy growing up... he seemed normal. We were

WILBER'S NEW WIFE

dead wrong about him. Everyone was. Alice was right about one thing... My bad reviews were nothing compared to this... *(Blackout. A moment of silence. Aaron and Alice come center to take a bow. Sound Cue : Thunderous applause, The audience gives them a standing ovation, they come out for a second curtain call.)*

INTERMISSION

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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