

THE MECHANICAL CAT ©
A Musical Play in Two Acts

Contact information:

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Imagine this:

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

HEIDI HARDLY: Vocal: Soprano (Low G-High Eb). Average, meek woman forty-something years old. She dreams of having a big orange and white marmalade cat.

FOSTER HARDLY: Vocal: Baritone-(Low G-High D). Forty something. Heidi's husband. A bit rough and bulldoggish but ultimately good hearted. Likes to be served, likes to wear sleeveless t-shirts around the house. He dreams of fishing all day.

WHITLEY WILMERTONG: Vocal: Baritone (Low D-High C). A fifty-something, debonair, sharply dressed gentlemen. If a suave fairy god-father existed, it would be him. He facilitates making dreams come true.

HERMAN SPIVY: Vocal: Baritone (Low A-High E). Thirty something year old, thin, wiry, pallid, unshaven. Moves very languidly, with a cat-like indifference, but also cat-like curiosity. He does not like to wear clothes. He interprets dreams.

THE MARMALADE CAT: A dancer dressed as an orange and white striped cat, whose every move and expression is catlike as expressed through a dance mentality.

THE MECHANICAL CAT: A dancer dressed as a metallic looking, mechanical/robotic cat, whose every move and expression tries to be cat-like, but is, of course, robotic. A robot that desires to be a real cat, but cannot because it's a robot.

HANDYMAN: An older gentleman, retired, fatherly figure, wearing overalls. He knows from experience that Wilmertong can be trusted.

JANE: Late 20's, early 30's. She is someone who does not always grasp the obvious. Heidi's co-worker and friend from the pickle factory. Jane works side by side with Heidi in the "Pickling Station." Jane is oblivious to Benjamin's feelings for her, though she pines for love.

DARLA: Vocal: Alto (Low G-High C). Forties. Heidi's co-worker and friend from the pickle factory. Darla works right next to Heidi and Jane at the "Sorting Station." Street wise with a smidge of attitude. A bit jaded. She is between men at the moment, and happy to be so, though she loves love.

BENJAMIN: Heidi's co-worker from the pickle factory. Shy. Well muscled as he lifts boxes all day for the "Shipping Station." Jane is the girl of his dreams but he doesn't have the nerve to approach her directly.

MAJOR: Boss of the pickle factory, a mid-forties man. A man who is committed to his job and the people who work for him. A patriarchal sort of guy.

FACTORY WORKERS/CHORUS: 6-12 people including Heidi, Jane, Darla and Benjamin and Major.

DELIVERY PERSON

SETTING:

A time before cell phones.

The set is basically a cutaway side-view of Heidi's kitchen and Spivey's living room across stage from each other. Heidi can easily walk between her house and Spivey's house, going out her kitchen door, off the porch, and across some yard space, to Spivey's porch, front door, and into his living room. The stages become interactive or not through lighting etc.

HEIDI'S KITCHEN:

A modest kitchen with a cheery enough disposition. A kitchen table and three chairs. A stove and sink. Basic but comfortable. A doorway leads to the unseen inner rooms of the house. Another doorway leads out to the yard space between Heidi and Spivey's house.

SPIVEY'S LIVINGROOM:

There is a long couch in front of a window sill. The sill butts up to the edge of the couch so that the Marmalade Cat can dangle, perch, and rest just above Spivey as Spivey lies on the couch. There is a wooden chair, stacks of magazines, a coffee table or two. Basic and practical. Off to the corner is a work stool, a sculpting table with some tools, and a bucket of clay marked "clay."

THE YARD:

In between and in front of Heidi's house and Spivey's house is a yard/driveway/walkway area. Heidi's house has attempts at gardening with flowerpots and some bushes. Near the center of the yard there is an old tree stump with a twisted root. Spivey's side is plain. The house goes from looking unkempt, with loose boards and such, on the outside to maintained once the HANDYMAN visits.

THE PICKLE PACKING PLANT: Campy. The pickle packing plant can consists of 5 sturdy and large boxes ordered across the stage to serve as work stations, each station is labeled with a task: "Picking," "Sorting," "Pickling," "Packing," "Shipping." Each station has items to suggest the task, such as a bushel basket for the picking station; containers suggesting "gerkins" and "dills" at the sorting station; a vat with a giant thermometer and a giant spoon for the pickling station; pickle jars and boxes for the packing station; boxes and packing tape for the packing and shipping stations etc. all to suggest the production process moving systematically down the line of workers.

ACT I

ACT I
ACT I, SCENE I:

SETTING: Piper's Pickle Packing House. Workers stand in line over a sign that reads, "Sweet Baby Gerkins." The workers all wear gloves, smocks, and hair nets. At each station of the line, there are small signs: "Unload," "Inspect," "Pickle," "Process," "Pack," and "Ship." At the beginning of the line are a few peck bushels which the first two workers manipulate, appearing to be unloading pickles onto a table where two other workers appear to be inspecting the pickles, pass them on to two people working with two giant pressure pots, who pass them on to people with jars, who pass them on to people with shipping boxes etc. Heidi, Darla, and Jane are among the workers. There is a giant clock in the background marking the hour of 2:00. As the curtain opens and the music begins, the workers systematically pass pickles or jars, whichever the case may be, on to the next station, all the way down the line. Major walks along as the workers work, overseeing the operation.

Workers represent different attitudes—the over-achiever, the apathetic, the bored, the prankster, the pessimist, the gum-chewer . . . etc. Bottom line, it's just a job, and some workers are more enthusiastic about making pickles than others.

MAJOR: *(inspecting scrupulously as he walks the line, writes notes on his clipboard):*
(loudly)
Keep to the system, people!
Keep to the system!

(sings):
Up and at 'em
Pickle packing
Packing pickles
Systematically
From beginning to end
(Stops at each section as he sings. The employees proudly show their section and skill)
Ain't no time to dilly dally
We've got gerkins to send
To the grocers and the vendors
They're depending on you

To every person a position
To every position a person
It's a system to admire
Keep the system I require
We must satisfy our buyers
For the product that we send

(Each station sings for his or her particular station)

PICKING STATION:

We move

SORTING STATION:

We look

We sort

PICKLE STATION:

We pickle

PACKING STATION & SHIPPING STATION:

We pack
We ship all day

MAJOR:

If you want security
And aspire to work for me
I carefully hire and oversee
This pickle packing industry

CHORUS:

To every person a position
A position for every person
It's a system to admire
Keep the system he requires
We must satisfy our buyers
For the product that we . . .

MAJOR: *(back to business)*

Keep to the system!

CHORUS:

. . . send!

(As song winds down, the giant clock begins to speed up, spinning to the end of day. The workers pack up their stations for the day and prepare to go home.)

JANE:

Oh Heidi, wait. I got some pictures of the kittens to show you. *(she pulls a stack of photos from her smock pocket)*

HEIDI: *(instantly interested, they flip through them together)*

Oh! They are so sweet!

JANE:

I really gotta find homes for them, Heidi. Are you sure you can't take one?

HEIDI:

Oh, I wish I could. You know how I love cats . . .

DARLA: *(taking a semi-curious glance over Heidi and Jane's shoulders to get a look at the photos)*

They make pills for that, Heidi.

(Jane looks at Heidi hopefully)

HEIDI:

Not for me. The doctor told me it was the worst case of allergy he's ever seen.

(Major walks through the stations, chit chatting with his employees as he goes. He stops at Heidi, Jane, and Darla)

MAJOR:

Ladies, let me remind you to mark your calendars for the upcoming Pickle Packers Picnic!

(Darla and Jane turn to Major, humoring him with complete attention).

JANE:
Will do, Major.

MAJOR:
Community building! That's the name of the game at Pipers! We pickle packers need to stick together.

DARLA: *(looking from Heidi to Jane)*
Oh, we're stuck all right, Major.

JANE:
That's over a month away, Major.

MAJOR: *(Major waves Darla's comment away playfully)*
Time has a way of sneaking up on us, Jane, and if you aren't careful, it'll slip right through your hands. Good planning and focus are the keys to success. Mark your calendars now, and remember, loved ones are always welcome!

(Major steps away, but not far. Jane looks suddenly despondent, Darla rolls her eyes, and Heidi remains glued to the kitten photos.)

JANE:
Who are you going to bring this year Darla?

DARLA:
Nobody! I've given up on men. All they do is cause trouble.

(Benjamin approaches holding a giant thermometer. He first stops at Major as the girls talk, but then he and Major approach Heidi, Jane, and Darla again.)

HEIDI: *(holds out a photo for Jane, pointing to a kitten)*
This is the one I'd take. This is the cutest kitten!

JANE: *(Jane looks at the photo but continues talking to Darla)*
I wish I had a date.

(Benjamin stands behind the women, shyly, waiting for attention. Darla notices Benjamin immediately, but speaks so he can't hear.)

DARLA: *(looking between Benjamin and Jane)*
Well you don't have to look far. There are men everywhere. *(She looks at Benjamin and Major).* Too many men, I say.

BENJAMIN: *(with gathered courage)*
Jane, I found this thermometer over by the shipping table. Is it yours?

JANE: *(looks at the thermometer in Benjamin's hand)*
Oh, I was wondering where I put that. Thank you.

(She nods to Benjamin, all business, takes the thermometer, and instantly turns back to Heidi and Darla. Benjamin stands a moment, hopeful for more conversation, and becomes unable to move.)

(Darla looks between Jane and Benjamin. Her eyes and Major's eye meet and she shrugs. Major and Darla both raise their hands with disdain at the obvious pass and miss, and smile at each other, friendly and comfortable. Major walks toward giant keys on a ring, hanging on a hook across the stage. He makes his way back, jingling

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them at the workers. Darla watches Benjamin's sudden paralysis, amused at his obvious focus on Jane; Jane remains clueless to Benjamin's humble approach)

DARLA:

Well, Jane if you'd stop spending your time with all those cats, and look up every once in awhile, maybe you would see a date right in front of you.

(Jane frowns, dismissive).

HEIDI: *(butts in with a new photo, excitedly)*

No, no! I changed my mind! This is the cat I'd take.

(Darla gives a passing glance to the photo, but Jane points to the photo and nods, approvingly)

MAJOR: *(jingling keys at them. He stands next to Benjamin)*

Time to lock up, everyone. I know you're anxious to make more pickles, but tomorrow is another day.

Another opportunity.

(to Benjamin): Opportunity knocks here for you, son.

BENJAMIN:

Yes, sir.

(As the workers grab their purses, etc. and exit, Major gives the factory a good once over and motions to shut off lights as he exits. The stage goes black).

ACT I, SCENE II:

SETTING: A drab kitchen. Heidi is at the stove getting ready to serve dinner. Her hair is messily tied up. Foster, dressed in his work pants and an undershirt, sits at the kitchen table, hidden behind an open newspaper.

HEIDI: *(dreamily, more to herself than Foster)*

Jane showed me pictures at work today, and they're the cutest little kittens I've ever seen. There are four of them.

(Foster rattles the newspaper, turning the page, but doesn't respond. Heidi continues talking as she brings him a plate. He lowers the paper, focusing only on his breakfast.)

HEIDI:

There's an all black one, a black one with four white paws, a white one with black spots, *(She pours a cup of coffee and sets it on the table in front of him)*, and . . . the fourth one *(she looks up for a minute, trying to remember. As she does so, Foster picks up a piece of bread and reaches for a butter knife. When he discovers one isn't there, he drops the bread and holds up his palms in a helpless, irritated manner. Heidi sees him and turns immediately to the utensil drawer, continuing to speak without missing a beat and gets him a butter knife)* . . . oh, the fourth one is black, too—but it only has two white paws, not four like the other black kitten. *Foster looks satisfactorily at his dinner and immediately sets to buttering his bread. Heidi, still speaking, gets him a glass and some water. He takes it without acknowledgment and takes a sip, sets it down and keeps eating. Heidi gets the salt, gets the pepper, gets napkin, etc.)*.

FOSTER: *(not really listening)*

Hm.

HEIDI:

And, of course, she asked me to take one. How she'll find homes for four kittens, I don't know, but I'd take one in a heartbeat if I could. I can't get them out of my mind. Oh, if only I could! I would. I would bring one home and love it forever. *(Finally, Heidi sits at the table, and continues to ponder as she begins to attend her own dinner)* Of course, if it were possible for me to get one of those cats, I wouldn't. Instead, I'd get the cat of my dreams: a big, beautiful orange and white marmalade cat.

FOSTER: *(with mouth full, looks at his bread)*

Hm. I'll have some marmalade.

(Heidi automatically gets up, goes to the fridge and gets a jar of marmalade and a spoon, but remains dreamy as she speaks.)

HEIDI:

That's the cat for me. Wouldn't it be wonderful?

FOSTER:

You'd last for ten minutes. Be practical. *(He picks up the newspaper blocking himself from view again.)*

HEIDI: *(not paying Foster much attention)*

Still . . .

FOSTER: *(lowers the paper and rolls his eyes)*

Could you imagine such a thing? You with a cat?

(He shakes the newspaper dramatically as he mocks her sneezes) AHHH---AHHH---AHHHH—chmfph! (He laughs and goes back to his paper. Heidi frowns).

HEIDI: *(to herself more than to Foster)*

(Dejectedly) I suppose . . . Still, it's all I really want. If I could just have a big marmalade cat . . .
(dreaming again) I'd name him Herman, *(closes her eyes)* I'd be so happy . . . *(she opens her eyes, and folds her hands together in a sort of prayer).* Is that too much to ask?

(Foster's arm comes out from behind the newspaper, holding out a coffee cup in a silent demand. Heidi automatically, though still dreamy, goes to the counter, gets the coffee pot, and pours coffee into the waiting cup. Foster's arm disappears back behind the newspaper, where he remains. Heidi puts down the pot, turns, leans against the counter, and sighs. As she sings, she walks outside to the porch, and ends up in the yard. The lights dim on Foster until they go black.)

HEIDI: *(to herself, with deep yearning)*

Imagine that . . .

[IMAGINE THAT]

HEIDI:

(The stage goes black except for a spotlight on Heidi. She speaks to herself):

I could imagine

I could imagine all kinds of things

And all of them good . . .

But what are the chances

I'm here.

Here's where I'll probably always be.

Still . . . *(wistfully)*

(sings):

I'm wishing for an old tomcat

Imagine that

Standing near the alley just past the gate

Waiting for my baby at a quarter to eight

A marmalade cat that's big and fat

A cat that knows where the mice are at

A cat that's gone from the alleys by nine

And always makes it home on time

A cat that sits beside my knee

That would make me quite happy . . .

A marmalade cat

Big and fat

My old tomcat

And me

Heidi picks up a watering can by the porch and begins to water a pot of marigolds. She hums absently, but her hum trails off unhappily. She stands in a resigned posture.

HEIDI: *(speaks)*

Imagine that . . .

(We hear the sound of a car pulling up, and a door shutting. Heidi looks up absentmindedly, and is immediately curious by what she sees. Distracted, she keeps the watering can on the flowers)

HEIDI: *(to herself)*

What's a fancy car like that doing in a neighborhood like this?

(Whitley Wilmertong enters stage right. He is focused on and surveying the house across from Heidi's. Whitley turns and happily notices Heidi)

WHITLEY: (waving)
Hey there!

(Heidi remains motionless)

Oh girl! I said, "Hey there!"

(Whitley strides toward Heidi. Heidi looks behind her. Realizing he is addressing her, she straightens up and checks herself absently)

WHITLEY: *(pointing to the flowers)*

My goodness! It looks like you're drowning those poor little flowers.

(Heidi's mouth hangs open in confusion. She squints at the man, looks at the watering can, still hovering over the pot of flowers, and lifts it quickly)

I'm Whitley Wilmertong, and I've rented the cottage next door. It's a bit run down—at least on the outside, I see.

(He turns his back to Heidi and scratches his head as he considers the cottage, then turns back to Heidi)

Say, what's your name?

HEIDI:

Hei . . . *(clears throat)* Heidi.

WHITLEY:

Heidi . . . Heidi . . . Heidi-ho . . . Ah, ha! You've heard that before I bet!

(Heidi shakes her head yes, then no, then squints her eyes at Whitley in confusion, trying to understand him).

WHITLEY:

Say, you better stop watering those flowers there. I think they've had enough.

(Heidi looks down at the mud puddle she is making, then points the hose at the lawn)

WHITLEY:

Come now, Heidi. Won't you walk over to the house with me, so that you can give me your opinion?

(Whitley takes the watering can from her hand, sets it down, and takes her elbow and leads her to the house next door.)

HEIDI:

My opinion?

WHITLEY:

You see I'm quite sure the place would be the perfect thing for Spivey. Of course, it will need a little bit of spiffing, but I'm sure he will find it adequate.

HEIDI:

Spivey?

WHITELY:

I represent him, you know. I'm his agent.

Come on then, and watch your step. *(Whitley steps up onto the porch)* It looks as if the porch has some loose boards then, doesn't it . . . *(going back to his previous topic)* he's quite brilliant, you know, but also a bit off . . . not to worry, of course. Just a bit . . . you know, eccentric is all.

HEIDI:

Eccentric? That isn't something . . . *(hesitantly and a bit horrified)* sexual is it?

WHITLEY: *(raises an eyebrow, but ignores the comment and continues to examine the porch)*

Do anything for you—well, in a way. You just wait and see.

(Peeks in window)

Yes, yes. This will do nicely for Spivey. His needs are really quite simple.

(Turns to Heidi. He motions his hand toward her, inviting her to join him on the porch)

Now. The thing is, Spivey will need some help as he doesn't tend to take the best care of himself as far as eating and bathing. *(Directly)* Let me ask you, Heidi, are you gainfully employed?

HEIDI:

Gainfully?

WHITLEY:

Yes, you know, adequately compensated for your services. What I mean is—do you work?

HEIDI:

Work . . . yes.

WHITLEY:

And what does a girl named Heidi do?

HEIDI:

I work at the pickle factory over on Dill Road

WHITLEY:

Pickles! How lovely! Do you mean to tell me you are responsible for those mammoth dill pickles one finds in the delicatessen?

HEIDI: *(timidly)*

Oh, well . . . *(modestly)* It's true I fill in for the big dills every once in awhile . . . but mostly I tend to the sweet baby gerkins.

WHITLEY:

Gerkins! Of course. And sweet ones at that. Well. How much does a pickle packer get paid? Hmm? You see, Heidi, I'm prepared to double . . . no . . . triple your hourly wage.

HEIDI:

Triple my wage?

WHITLEY:

Of course, Heidi. Let me get right to the point. Spivey—that is to say my client—is an artist of unearthly talent. Why, one of his most recent pieces of pottery fetched near thirty thousand dollars just last week! Extraordinary, really. Clay, as you may have guessed, is his medium.

And so, what he needs is to be in a place out of the public eye. He requires it, you see. And what he needs more than anything is a studio where he can work and sleep and just be. Do you see? He can't be bothered to cook and such. A real artist must be protected and looked after and given the time and place and freedom to create.

HEIDI:

You mean like a room of one's own *(unwittingly making an allusion to Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own")* . . .

WHITLEY:

Exactly! (*laughs and then says admonishing*) Only this is a man's room. I plan to put him here until he creates his next piece. So, Heidi, what I'm offering you is a wonderful opportunity. It would be on a temporary basis, of course—just until he finishes his next piece—but you see, you could make a solid living right next to your very own home.

(*Heidi stands silently, mouth open, confused, squinting*)

WHITLEY: (*looks at Heidi earnestly*)

Do we have a deal then?

HEIDI:

I'm . . .

WHITLEY:

Good! Do you have any questions?

HEIDI: (*still squinting*)

How . . . How long is temporary?

WHITLEY:

Well, now I can't quite be specific in that, can I? Who knows when the Muse will strike? It's completely unpredictable. Sometimes it's as little as two weeks. Other times it's been as much as two years. There's simply no telling.

HEIDI:

And you want me to cook for him?

WHITLEY:

Yes, of course. And perhaps clean a little and suggest a bath every now and then, you know, when you think he needs one.

HEIDI:

He doesn't bathe?

WHITLEY:

Oh, he does, it's just that, well . . . (*seriously interested*) do you have any nursing experience, Heidi?

HEIDI:

Nursing experience?

WHITLEY:

You know, like giving sponge baths and such.

HEIDI:

I . . . no.

WHITLEY: (*looks suddenly concerned*)

Hmmm.

HEIDI: (*Seeing Whitley's hesitation, Heidi says reassuringly*)

I do have to make sure the pickle jars get their warm processing bath when we pack them.

WHITLEY: (*Showing immediate relief*)
Oh! Excellent! Then you'll do it?

HEIDI: (*looking toward her house*)
I have to talk to Foster.

WHITLEY:
Foster?

HEIDI:
My husband.

WHITLEY:
Oh, quite right. Of course. Well, you tell Forrest that I'll offer a \$500--no \$1,000—personal bonus for him alone if he lets you take the job. Right?

HEIDI:
And you say triple my hourly wage?

WHITLEY:
Certainly.

HEIDI:
And I have to buy food and all for him out of that?

WHITLEY:
No, no. Of course not. I'll set up an account for you at the grocery.

HEIDI:
And when would I have to start this?

WHITLEY:
Well, Heidi, preferably today—right now. I mean, of course Spivey won't be here for a week or so, but if you could put a polish on the inside there, I'll be sending a man to fix up these loose boards and such. If all goes well, I believe Spivey would arrive a week from today. You could have it all ready for him. Would such an arrangement be agreeable with you, Heidi?

HEIDI:
But my job . . .

WHITLEY:
Surely a talented pickle packer like yourself will be able to get her old job back when the time comes.

HEIDI: (*thinking*)
I suppose . . .

WHITLEY:
Don't be modest. They know pickle packers like you don't grow on trees, now don't they.

HEIDI:
I guess.

WHITLEY:
Perfect, then! Oh, and one other thing--and this is imperative.

HEIDI:

Yes?

WHITLEY:

You are to phone me immediately when Spivey starts work on any project. I can't stress the importance of this.

HEIDI:

I'll have your number?

WHITLEY:

Absolutely. And you can call me day or night, Heidi. Day or night.

HEIDI: *(peeking in the window of the house)*

What about furniture?

WHITLEY:

Oh, don't worry, dear girl. I can tell I'm going to like you! You're a detail person. And you'll call me the minute you see him working?

(Heidi nods yes)

WHITLEY:

Good, good, good.

(Whitley turns and begins walking down the steps of the porch, gives Heidi a wave and goes off stage. We hear the sound of a car starting and then driving away)

HEIDI: *(Stands on the porch, still dumbfounded)*

Imagine that . . .

(Lights go to black)

End of scene

ACT 1, SCENE III:

SETTING: Lights raise in Heidi's kitchen. Morning. Foster sits at the kitchen table, reading the paper in his underwear and open robe, having a cup of coffee. Heidi walks in from the back room. She's in sweat clothes and carries a broom and dustpan in her hand. She empties the dustpan and starts sweeping the kitchen floor when she stops and turns to Foster in an earnest sort of way.

HEIDI: (*sings*)
He says artists need special care . . .

FOSTER: (*not looking up, speaks*)
I'll tell you who needs special care—me.

HEIDI: (*stops wiping, wrings the washcloth in her hands. Sings*)
He says that artists can't be bothered with things like cooking and cleaning.

FOSTER: (*waves a dismissive hand, speaks*)
Who can?

HEIDI: (*speaks*)
He says . . .

FOSTER: (*Impatient*)
Look, you're killing me here. (*mocking*) He says this. He says that. Where's my breakfast? I'm starving.

(*Heidi goes back to sweeping the floor. Foster goes back to his newspaper, holds it up to block her from sight and shakes it*)

FOSTER: (*sings*)
You can't believe every schmoe who comes knocking on your door, Heidi.

HEIDI: (*says*)
Actually, I was standing out front.

[NO NOBLER OBLIGATION]

FOSTER: (*sings*)
They'll promise you the moon
Wrapped up nice and neat
But what you need to understand is all of them are cheats.

HEIDI: (*says*)
He seemed quite honest.

FOSTER: (*puts down the paper, stands up and sings to Heidi*)
Don't take wooden nickels
Don't be anyone's fool
The world is cruel and full of crooks
I'm watching out for you.

HEIDI: (*says*)
He says art is important.

FOSTER: *(throws up his hands and says)*
Important? Important to who?

(sings)
You just pack your pickles
You just clean the floor
Why, I'll clean this fellow's clock
If he comes knocking on my . . . *(knock, knock, knock)*

(Heidi looks tremendously alarmed, but suddenly, there's a knock on the door. The music stops. Heidi and Foster look at each other and then look at the door. Foster frowns, clenches his fists, ready to fight, and walks to the door determinedly. Heidi follows close behind, reaching her arm out as if to stop him)

HEIDI:
Foster! No!
(Foster yanks the door open, and in walks a man in a delivery uniform)

DELIVERY MAN:
Delivery for a Mr. F. Hardly.

FOSTER:
I'm F. Hardly.

DELIVERY MAN:
Sign here, please.

(Foster signs and the man hands him an envelope, tips his hat, and walks out the door. Foster opens the envelope).

HEIDI:
What is it?

FOSTER: *(opens the letter and reads mechanically)*
It says:
Mr. Hardly,
You'll hardly be sorry for supporting the work of Mr. Spivey. Get it? Hardly. Ha. Ha.
Signed, W. Wilmertong

(Heidi sucks in her breath. Foster looks in the envelope again and pulls out a check. He looks at it. His eyes get wide; his mouth hangs open).

FOSTER:
It's a check for five thousand dollars! And it's a cashier's check. Why, that's as good as cash!
(He looks at Heidi, incredulously).
Five thousand bucks! Five thousand clams! Five thousand macaroones! Just like that?

HEIDI: *(excitedly)*
And it's all yours, Foster. He told me so. It's all for you.

FOSTER:
Five thousand . . .
(Stops speaking, collects his thoughts and sings grandly)

But once in awhile
There comes such a ship
A gentleman handing out

Marvelous tips

Him--you can trust
When he puts in your hands
A marvelous thing
Like five thousand clams . . .

HEIDI: (*says*)

So, it's all right, then? You think I should do it?

FOSTER: (*looks at Heidi earnestly, putting his hand on his heart he sings*)

It's our duty, after all
We've got to do our part
There is no nobler obligation
Than supporting art . . .

(*He looks at her skeptically and says*)

And you say he'll pay three times your hourly wage?

(*Heidi nods yes*)

(*Foster holds up the check and smiles. He takes Heidi's hands. He stops and says*)

I can support art
As long as art supports me . . .

(*He comes back to his senses and looks at Heidi. Says:*)

Now bring me my breakfast. I've got some thinking to do, and I can't do it on an empty stomach, now can I?

(*Heidi nods and hurries back to the stove. Foster sits back down at the table, still admiring the check.*)

FOSTER:

Spivey, Spivey, I'm glad you're alivey.

(*Lights go down*)

End of scene

ACT I, SCENE IV:

SETTING: The inside of the cottage next door. A side view of the front porch is stage right leading into the room. Heidi is inside the house. She is on her hands and knees scrubbing the floor. She is humming “Imagine That” as she works.

On the porch outside is a man in overalls fixing the floor-boards. Heidi looks up when she hears him hammering. She sits up and rubs her sore hands and looks around the cottage. The door opens and in walks the HANDYMAN.

HANDYMAN: (*holding his hammer*)

I suppose that’s nearly it for me. I haven’t missed anything in here, have I?

HEIDI: (*still kneeling*)

I believe that’s everything. How does the cleaning job look to you?

HANDYMAN: (*looking around*)

Fine. Just fine. I’ll be bringing Mr. Spivey’s furniture over later this afternoon.

HEIDI: (*still kneeling*)

You know, in all the years I’ve lived next door to this place, I’ve never even once looked inside the window.

HANDYMAN:

Not the curious type, are you?

HEIDI:

I guess I just never saw the point of looking. It’s nearly identical to my own—now that it’s cleaned up, that is.

Say, can I ask you something?

HANDYMAN:

Sure. Go ahead.

HEIDI:

Have you ever met this Mr. Spivey before?

HANDYMAN:

Who me? (*waves his hand*) I’m long gone before he ever comes onto the scene.

HEIDI: (*dreamily*)

It’s all so strange . . .

HANDYMAN: (*smiling, knowingly*)

What it is, (*walks to Heidi and offers his hand to help her up*) is a dream come true.

HEIDI:

Yes. I can hardly believe it.

HANDYMAN:

Believe it. It was like that for me, too, when Mr. Wilmtertong came walking through the door of the Handy-Dandy Hardware Store.

HEIDI: (*nods supportively*)

Everything he's promised so far has come true . . . the account at the grocery —Mr. Wilmertong sent me a list of Mr. Spivey's favorite foods (*pulls a list from her pocket and starts to read*): celery, peanut butter, raisins—not a pickle to be seen anywhere! (*She smiles at the Handyman, tucking the list away*). Then there's the check for Foster—(*she leans in conspiratorially*) he bought himself a fishing boat, you know. And me—just this morning the mailman brought my first paycheck.

[LONG LIVE MR. WILMERTONG]

HANDYMAN (*nods in understanding*)

Enjoy it while it lasts, ma'am, and know this:
Mr. Wilmertong is good for his word.

(*He holds up his hammer in honor*)
Long live Mr. Wilmertong!

HEIDI: (*agreeing vigorously*)
And Mr. Spivey, too!

(*music starts*)

HANDYMAN:

People like us (*pointing to himself and Heidi*)
We don't have it easy

HEIDI: (*agreeing*)

We work from dawn to dusk
That's just the way it is

HANDYMAN:

People like us
Simply play the hands we're dealt

HEIDI: (*agreeing*)

We scratch out our daily bread
That's just the way it is

HANDYMAN:

Then one day there comes a fellow
Who makes our dreams come true
Long live Mr. Wilmertong!
And Mr. Spivey too!

HEIDI:

People like us
We don't ask for much

HANDYMAN:

We tow the line that's drawn
That's just the way it is.

HEIDI:

People like us
Don't beg, steal or borrow

HANDYMAN:

We just live life from day to day
That's just the way it is

HEIDI:

Then one day there comes a fellow
Who makes our dreams come true
Long live Mr. Wilmertong!
And Mr. Spivey too!

HANDYMAN: (*Handyman extends a hand to Heidi in playful gallantry*)
My lady?

HEIDI: (*accepts his hand, at first hesitantly, but is then instantly pleased by the idea of elegant play*)
Why, thank you!

HEIDI: (*still holding Handyman's hand, she walks with an attitude*)
Now folks 'round here want to be like me

HANDYMAN:

(*bows to her knowingly*) You're not working in the factory!
And me? I couldn't ask for more!

HEIDI: (*curtsies in response*)

You're not working in the hardware store!

HANDYMAN:

Then one day their comes a fellow
Who makes our dreams come true

HANDYMAN:

Long live Mister

HEIDI:

Long live Mister

HANDYMAN:

Long live Mister

HEIDI:

Long live Mister

HEIDI & HANDYMAN together

Wilmertong . . . and Mr. Spivey too!

End of Scene

ACT I, SCENE V:

SETTING: Early morning. Foster is standing at the kitchen table, already in his waders, drinking a cup of coffee and organizing his tackle box. Heidi enters wearing her robe. She looks at Foster as she gets herself a cup of coffee.

HEIDI:

Fishing again?

FOSTER:

Just breaking in the new boat. You got to be careful about breaking in a new boat. The more times it's in the water early on, the better it'll handle.

HEIDI: *(yawns)*

I've never heard of such a thing. I've been in boats before. A boat is a boat.

FOSTER:

How many times have you been in a NEW boat? *(raises his eyebrows expectantly. When Heidi doesn't answer he nods and points to her)* Ah ha! You see? You know nothing about boats . . .

(Across the way, Spivey's house is dark, yet there is a shadow of moment there, a figure moving around that walks to a window and shuts it.)

HEIDI: *(sitting up straight)*

Did you hear that? *(She looks at Foster, then puts her hand up to silence him)* That's the second time I've heard that noise this morning.

FOSTER:

So?

HEIDI: *(stands up and walks to the door and peers in the direction of Spivey's house. She opens the door and cranes her neck)*

So, I think it's from the house next door. I think it's him. I think he's here.

(Foster ignores her, drains his cup, puts it on the counter, he closes his tackle box, picks up his pole and heads for the door, waiting for Heidi to step aside. Heidi does take a step aside, but then takes a step after him as well. Foster reaches for the doorknob, but then turns as if he's forgotten something. Heidi, hopeful for a kiss, offers her cheek. Foster looks past her to the table and starts searching the kitchen with his eyes.)

FOSTER:

Where's my hat? *(He looks on the table, looks at the counter, then feels the top of his head, looks sheepish upon the discovery.)*

Oh! It's already on my head! *(laughing at himself).*

See you, Heidi.

(Heidi leans forward and puckers her lips, obviously wanting a goodbye kiss, but Foster, now complete with his hat is too distracted and turns and walks out the door, leaving Heidi with lips still in the air. Disappointed, Heidi sighs.)

[THERE WAS A TIME]

HEIDI: (*sings*)

There was a time
When all the boys knew my name
I couldn't walk down the street
Without a whistle
I was a girl who got attention
And let me not forget to mention
It was attention that I certainly deserved.
Quite honestly?
I had my share of curves.

There was a day
When I had a lot to say
I could talk the latest
Fashion, fads, and trends
The boys, they listened for my voice
I was a girl with lots of choice
My opinions got respect, which they deserved
Quite honestly?
I had a reason to be heard.

I guess those days are gone forever
Now I'm just an old dove
A tired queen bee
Hardly heard, hardly noticed
Invisible

Used to be
Just getting a smile from me
Was a thrill to the male population
(They couldn't get enough)
I was the girl they worked hard to flatter
My affection was the thing that mattered
I gave them good reason to dote
Quite honestly?
I floated his boat.

There's no use in pretending
Forever is, I admit, beginning to sound quite unending.

(*Heidi sits down, resignedly. Again she hears the sound of the window*).

HEIDI: (*sitting up—forgetting her melancholy*)

Spivey's here. I just know he is. (*She looks down at herself in her pajamas and becomes alarmed at her appearance*)

I've got to change!

(*Heidi runs back into her house to change. The lights on Heidi's house go dim. Spivey's house is in deep shadow so that we can see the outline of the room, furniture, etc. but Spivey is in black shadow. His shadow moves across the room, languidly, slowly, checking out his new digs, feeling the walls, stepping on a floor creak a time or two just to hear the sound, running his fingers along the top of the door jam, curious as a cat, looking high and low. Still in shadow, he winds his way to the long couch and sinks in, instantly relaxed, but still alert.*)

The lights rise on Heidi's house as she comes into the kitchen, goes out through the back door, crosses the yard, and stands in spotlight at Spivey's front door. Heidi's kitchen grows dark.

HEIDI: *(knocking tentatively)*

Hello? Mr. Spivey? Are you there?

(Heidi opens the door slowly as the lights in Spivey's house begin to rise. Heidi leans in and takes a step. We see Spivey sprawled on an old green couch, watching the door intently. Mr. Spivey wears only a pair of boxer shorts. His near nakedness jars and alarms Heidi)

Oh! *(seeing Spivey)*

Oh! I'm . . . *(turning away)*

I'm so sorry! I'm . . . *(she runs out the door and back onto the porch. She holds her chest, trying to catch her breath, trying to calm herself).*

Oh my! This is no way to start. What should I do? What should I do?

SPIVEY: *(from the couch, in a quiet, yet insistent voice)*

I'm hungry.

HEIDI: *(Heidi stops. She takes a deep breath and turns back toward the house putting her ear to the door crack)*

Mr. Spivey? Was that you? Did you say something?

SPIVEY:

Could you please make me some frogs on logs?

HEIDI: *(tentatively opens the door a crack, but covers her eyes with her hand)*

You need what? Mr. Spivey?

(She takes her hand from her eyes but keeps her eyes well averted and squinted partly shut)

SPIVEY: *(as if bored)*

You take celery and put peanut butter on it and then raisins on the peanut butter.

HEIDI: *(frowning, thinking. Her hand goes up, shielding Spivey from her view as she steps into the room)*

I . . . yes. Right away, Mr. Spivey. Right away.

(She goes to the kitchen doorway, making a wide arc around Spivey, averting her eyes deliberately. She pauses, noticing the pottery wheel, a bucket of clay, and a bucket of water—both marked accordingly. She mumbles as she makes her way offstage)

Oh my. Oh my.

(Heidi goes offstage.)

While Heidi is away, Spivey moves and stretches to cat-like music, sits up to get a magazine off the stack. Heidi comes back with a plate of frogs on a log. Still keeping her eyes averted)

HEIDI:

Mr. Spivey . . . *(holding out plate blindly)* . . . I'm Heidi. I'm here to take care of . . .

SPIVEY: *(voice purring as he takes the plate from Heidi and inspects his food)*

I love frogs on logs. Please bring this to me every morning. *(He frowns)* Only don't cut the celery into such short pieces.

HEIDI:

Oh, I'm sorry. I . . .

(Spivey crunches on a piece of celery and she looks toward him from the sides of her eyes. She still won't look at him directly. As he doesn't seem to notice, she becomes braver and takes a more direct look at Spivey. She studies his face. Spivey looks at her suddenly, curiously, without challenge or apology. Heidi, confused, turns to him fully.)

He stands up and they gaze into each other's eyes. Heidi is drawn to him. Spivey takes a bite of celery, but does not break the gaze. Suddenly, Heidi begins to feel a sneeze coming on)

HEIDI:

Achoo! Excuse me. Achoo! *(She begins to sneeze uncontrollably. Into the room there walks a big orange marmalade cat. The cat is cautious, sizing up the situation, sizing up Heidi, not getting too close, making its way around the room. It ends up, tentatively next to or beneath the pottery wheel).*

Oh! *(excitedly, wanting to reach out and go toward the cat, but holding herself back)*

Achoo!

A marmalade! achoo!

Cat!

But . . . achoo!

I'm horribly . . . achoo!

Horribly allergic . . . achoo! Achoo! Achoo!

(Spivey looks up at her languidly, a hint of a smile on his face. Heidi waves to Spivey as she walks toward the door, sneezing the whole way, and exits, and runs across the yard and into her house, and then offstage. Spivey and the cat look at each other. Spivey sets his plate down, scratches the cat on the top of the head, and begins a slow movement of readying a napping place for himself on the couch by facing it stretching out his arms and fingers as if he's needing the cushion as the cat climbs up to the windowsill and needs his spot on the windowsill. They pay no real attention to each other, but continue their movements in slow-paced, rhythmic unison. They both settle for their cat-naps, both curling into the identical position at exactly the same time. Lights go down).

End of scene

ACT I, SCENE VI:

SETTING: *Back in Heidi's kitchen. Heidi is making a plate of food to take over to Spivey. Foster comes through the yard and drops all of his fishing gear and a cooler by the porch, goes up into the kitchen, where Heidi is busy making a plate of food for Spivey.*

FOSTER: *(beaming, ear to ear with happiness, he bursts in the door. Seeing Heidi, he enthusiastically kisses her hello on the cheek)*

I have a whole cooler of fish! We'll have to have a fish fry if this kind of day keeps up.

HEIDI: *(she ignores the kiss and turns to Foster directly)*

He has a cat.

FOSTER: *(Foster's enthusiasm instantly changes. He is silent for a moment as the news settles in.)*

No.

HEIDI: *(dreamy about the cat and horrified about her allergies both at once)*

Yes. A big, beautiful, perfect, orange and white marmalade cat—the cat of my dreams, Foster.

FOSTER:

What happened?

HEIDI:

I sneezed.

FOSTER:

Very much?

HEIDI:

Continually.

FOSTER: *(looks around, thinking)*

Well . . . get over it.

HEIDI:

If only it were that simple *(wearily resting her head on her hand)*. *(Wistfully)*

He is such a beautiful cat.

FOSTER: *(not listening)*

Here's what you do. Be quick. In and out of there. Bing! Bang! Boom! A little sneezing? No problem.

Do your job and get out.

HEIDI:

I suppose . . .

(Heidi picks up the plate and heads for the door.)

HEIDI:

I'm going to go feed him his dinner.

FOSTER:

The cat?

HEIDI:

Mr. Spivey.

The lights dim on Foster as he goes to the fridge, grabs a beer, and then exits into the house interior. The lights simultaneously come up on Spivey's living room, where Spivey is on the couch, languidly reading a magazine. Magazines are scattered on the floor in front of him. The cat is perched on the couch back above Spivey. The cat lazily sprawls out, lazily paws at a spot of sun or a thread on the couch, and when Spivey absently tries to pet it, the cat paws at Spivey's hand. Heidi is walking across the yard. She trips on the tree root and nearly drops the plate. She goes up the porch and stands in front of Spivey's front door.

SPIVEY: *(to the cat)*

That's no way to behave. *(He gently pushes the cat away)*

(The cat jumps off the couch and sits for a moment on the floor, primping and preening and stretching and rubbing its face and the side of its body against the couch and the back of Spivey's hand. Spivey goes back to his reading.)

HEIDI: *(knocks lightly and opens the door a crack)*

Is it all right if I come in, Mr. Spivey.

SPIVEY:

It's always all right if you come in.

(Heidi enters the room. Her eyes glued to the cat. Spivey watches her, curiously, but does not move.)

I made you a nice dinner . . . achoo! It's tuna . . . achoo!

(The cat jumps, alarmed at her sneezes, and scampers out of the room. Heidi feels another sneeze coming on and tries with all of her might to stifle it. She seems to be succeeding)

It's chilled on a lettuce . . . Achoo! . . .

(She looks wearily toward the direction of the cat and collects herself again)

. . . on a lettuce leaf. *(She takes a breath and seems to feel confident that the sneezing fit is over.)*

I've been told that you really like tuna, Mr. Spivey.

(Spivey smiles at her in simple yet understated appreciation and goes back to his magazine. Heidi begins walking toward the front door. As she reaches for the knob, Spivey speaks quietly)

SPIVEY: *(looking at her)*

Please don't go.

HEIDI: *(stops and turns back)*

Did you say something Mr. Spivey? Is there something else I can do for you?

SPIVEY:

Please sit with me.

HEIDI: *(looks surprised)*

Sit with you? *(she looks around). I . . . where should I sit? (She spots a wooden chair in the corner. She walks toward the chair, looking at Mr. Spivey to see if he approves. She sits, but then looks toward the kitchen, where she knows the cat is. She picks up the chair and walks across the stage with it, and sets the chair right next to the front door. She sits tentatively, her hands folded in her lap, her back straight. She smooths her top nervously, then puts her hands back on her lap and waits).*

Is . . . is this all right, Mr. Spivey?

(Spivey sits up, his movements, slow, catlike, languid. He openly regards her)

SPIVEY: *(in a gentle voice)*

That's purrrfect. *(He purrs, turns, and settles back into the couch).*

(Heidi tries to remain calm and casual, but it is clear that she is quite uncomfortable and doesn't know what to do with herself. She crosses her legs, then uncrosses her legs. She looks around the room, looking for something to focus on. Her eyes land on Spivey, who is facing away from her. She makes a silent attempt to begin a conversation, leaning forward, reaching her hand forward to get attention, but is unsure. Her hand goes to her mouth, then to her lap, as she tries to get comfortable in what is to her an uncomfortable situation. She simply does not know what to do with herself, and Spivey now seems oblivious to her presence. She looks at the magazines on the floor in front of Spivey and bends forward, trying to look at their covers. She is just close enough to reach her foot out and quietly tries to capture the nearest magazine with her big toe to drag it toward her. She looks toward Spivey as she does this, unsure of what she's doing. Spivey seems to be paying no attention. She and begins to drag the magazine toward her bends down ever so slowly to pick it up. Just as her hand touches the cover, however, Spivey speaks without looking at her, without moving).

SPIVEY:

There is an article on string theory in the magazine Physics Today.

HEIDI: *(startled, Heidi sits bolt upright and places her hands innocently in her lap once again, and tries to act like she wasn't doing anything.)*

String . . .

SPIVEY:

It's a theory that tries to reconcile the biggest aspects of the universe with the smallest. It's quite interesting and perhaps you'd like to read it.

(The cat suddenly reappears from the kitchen, and stops just inside the room. Heidi becomes anxious at the sight of it. The cat sits, licking its paws and cleaning its face. Spivey, seemingly unconscious of all of this, continues speaking throughout this entrance and Heidi's reaction).

SPIVEY:

It suggests that perhaps there are more than four dimensions, that there are dimensions surrounding us that we simply cannot perceive, dimensions that could be mere millimeters away . . .

(Heidi tries to pay attention to Spivey, but her real focus is on the cat—both the admiration of it and dread of it.)

HEIDI: *(to herself)*

It's beautiful.

(She puts her hands over her nose and mouth in an effort to shield her from her allergic reaction)

SPIVEY: *(quietly, seemingly responding to Heidi's statement)*

Yes. It is beautiful. Perhaps life, like art, goes beyond what we see--beyond height, width, depth, and time.

(Heidi drops her hand and realizes that Spivey has responded to her directly. She is confused because she wasn't listening and doesn't understand what he's talking about anyway)

SPIVEY:

Where impossible things become possible.

HEIDI: *(her eyes are dreamily drawn again to the cat. She reaches out her hand, yearning. The cat stops its preening and looks her. She whispers)*

Like a dream . . .

(The cat begins to walk across the room toward Spivey and Heidi. Heidi's mouth opens in alarm. She holds her chest, both in hope and fear. With each step closer, Heidi feels a sneeze rising)

SPIVEY: *(to himself)*
What are dreams?

(Heidi begins to sneeze uncontrollably. The cat stops and watches her. Spivey, though he doesn't really move, turns his head, listening to her. She stands up quickly, nearly knocking the chair over and runs to the front door.

HEIDI:
Achoo! Achoo! I'm sorry. I can't sit! Achoo! *(she reaches for the door, but turns back, looking at the cat, looking at Spivey)* I'm sorry, Mr. Spivey *(and she rushes out onto the porch, still sneezing. She stands on the front porch of the house, gasping for breath, trying to regain her composure. Suddenly she begins to sob. She is caught between sobbing and sneezing and being able to breathe again. Music begins as she collects herself. Meanwhile, the cat walks to and sits just on the other side of the door and remains there as Heidi sings. The cat looks toward the door and Heidi looks toward the door at various times)*

[ONLY A FOOL WOULD DREAM]

HEIDI:

What are dreams?
Simply a yearning for something we lack *(looks toward the door and then looks away)*
Dreams make us fools
Yet we hope
We believe
In what? The impossible?
Only a fool would dream.

What are dreams?
Dreams are cruel and they're too much to ask
The fact that I want it
Seems to mean I can't have it
So close, yet so far out of reach
It's impossible
Only a fool would dream.

Never trust a glimmer of hope
It's a trick that's set up like a trap
Though it seems closer
It couldn't be farther
Though it looks different
It's just gotten harder
The truth is life doesn't change
How can it?

What are dreams?
Untouchable vapors that swirl in our minds
Mists that appear to be real for a time
Just stretch out your hand
It will all fade away
Is it even possible? *(looks toward the door)*
Only a fool would dream

(Heidi runs off the porch despondently, across the yard, into her own kitchen and then into the unseen interior of the house. The lights go down.)

End of scene

ACT I, SCENE VII:

SETTING: Back in Heidi's kitchen. Foster sits at the table, busily attaching a ridiculous number of lures to his fishing hat. Heidi comes in with a stack of mail and catalogues. She sits, and begins opening bills.

HEIDI:

Mail's here. *(she opens an envelope)* Bill. *(opens another envelope)*
Bill.

(Heidi looks at Foster who is putting the hat on, jiggling the lures to see if they stay in place, taking it off adjusting, putting it on, shaking . . . etc.)

Foster, don't you think maybe we should be careful with how we're spending this money? This job is not going to last forever. Remember what Mr. Wilmertong said.

FOSTER:

The guy hasn't even started working yet, has he? At this rate, we'll never have to worry, Heidi. Relax. Go buy yourself a nice dress or something.

HEIDI: *(as she continues looking at the mail)*

I don't need a new . . . *(picking up a fat, oversized envelope)*. What's this? It's from Mr. Wilmertong.

FOSTER: *(Foster puts down his tackle and leans forward)*

Another bonus, I hope.

HEIDI: *(She pulls out a package of blue surgical masks)*

Surgical masks? What's this? *(She looks in the package again and pulls out a note)*. There's a note. *(She looks at Foster who is interested to see if money is involved)*

FOSTER:

Well, read it.

HEIDI:

It says:

"Herman says you suffer dreadfully. Perhaps these masks will help. Remember to call just as soon as he begins to work! Heido-ho!

Sincerely,

Whitley Wilmertong"

(Heidi looks up in shock and wonder, while Foster, seeing that the note does not involve money, becomes disinterested and goes back to his hat)

HEIDI: *(to herself, incredulous)*

Oh my gosh!

FOSTER: *(not looking at her)*

What?

HEIDI:

His name is Herman.

FOSTER:

Whose name?

HEIDI:

Mr. Spivey. His name is Herman.

FOSTER:

Yeah? So?

HEIDI: (*trying to make sense of it, becoming overwhelmed*)

Herman, Foster. That's the name of my cat.

FOSTER: (*with a hint of exasperation*)

Your cat? What cat? You don't have a cat.

HEIDI: (*getting frustrated*)

The cat of my dreams, Foster. The big marmalade cat named Herman. The cat I want to live with me forever, Foster. Listen to me.

FOSTER: (*not listening closely*)

The cat's name is Herman?

HEIDI:

No, no. (*shaking her head*). But there's a cat over there . . . and then Mr. Spivey's name is Herman . . . well, I know they're not actually together in one being, but their both together and they're right next door. And then there's all this money! (*trying to make sense of it*) I know it isn't quite accurate—but it's so close! (*Heidi's eyes begin to fill with tears as she takes in the goodness of it all*). It can't be a coincidence, can it? (*Heidi looks off into space, dreaming. She whispers to herself*). It's almost perfect . . .

FOSTER: (*Preoccupied with his hat, Foster puts it on. One of the many, too big lures hangs right in his face*)

What are you talking about? Make sense, would you?

HEIDI: (*Heidi looks at Foster poignantly. She wants him to understand, to listen*)

It's the whole thing. The whole situation. The job. The cat. And now Mr. Spivey—Herman Spivey. I don't know what it means, but surely it means something. Our whole lives have changed. Look at us. Things that were impossible for us just a month ago are now possible. What does it mean?

FOSTER: (*takes the hat off and stares at her, mouth open, not really understanding nor even caring to understand*)

HEIDI: (*to herself*)

It's almost perfect . . . (*she stares at Foster. When he does not respond, she sighs, collects herself, and looks down at the package of masks. Says to herself*). If all of this is possible, what else is possible? (*She takes one of the masks out of the package and puts it on, feeling it on her face with both hands. Muffled, through the mask*) How do I look?

FOSTER: (*looks at her and laughs*)

What?

(*Heidi lifts the mask, lifting it to her forehead*)

HEIDI:

I said, "How do I look?" (*she replaces the mask*)

FOSTER: (*He laughs through the sentence*)

You look ridiculous!

(*He puts on his ridiculous fishing hat, fully overloaded with lures and shakes his head to see if any lures fall loose.*)

HEIDI: (*lifts the mask, having been preoccupied with the sight of his hat*)

I what?

FOSTER: *(speaking to her this time enunciating his words)*

I said, you look ridiculous.

(Heidi scowls and stares at him, not amused. This job is important to her. They stand regarding each other for a moment—he in his ridiculous fishing hat, she in her ridiculous mask. Heidi's shoulders slump. She raises the mask to rest on her forehead and walks dejectedly toward the kitchen door. Foster, still wearing his hat, stares after her. She throws a hurt glance back toward Foster and reaches for the doorknob. As she opens the door, Foster speaks)

FOSTER: *(quietly. It's difficult for him to be humble)*

Heidi . . .

(Heidi stops but doesn't turn)

FOSTER:

You look . . . *(Heidi raises her head to listen)*

You look very . . . professional . . .

(Heidi stands there for a minute, taking in his comment. She turns partially back to him, but looks at the floor. Foster remains still, watching her, suddenly alert to something—to the idea that he may have hurt Heidi's feelings)

HEIDI: *(to herself, pondering)*

Almost perfect. *(she places the mask back over her mouth and opens the door wider)*

(The lights go out on everything except Foster as he watches Heidi walk out the door. At the sound of the door shutting, the stage goes black)

End of scene

ACT I, SCENE: VIII:

SETTING: Spivey's house. We hear the sound of running water. Spivey is, as usual, lying on the couch. The cat is lying above him on the couch back. A giant piece of clay is now sitting on the top of the table. Heidi steps into the room. She is wearing her surgical mask.

HEIDI: *(lifting the mask just long enough to speak)*
Mr. Spivey, your bath is ready.

(Heidi stands tentatively and watches silently as Spivey gets up languidly. As he does so, the cat begins to move as well, slowly following Spivey in a general sort of way. Mr. Spivey walks slowly past Heidi. She steps aside shyly to let him pass, and he goes offstage. The cat winds its way, around the room. Heidi moves with the cat in an odd sort of distant slow dance)

HEIDI: *(lifts her mask long enough to sing, but is careful to keep her distance, cautiously, as the cat does a gentle dance)*

[YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL]

HEIDI:

You are beautiful
You are my dream come true
What I wouldn't do for you,
My love *(The cat moves dangerously close to Heidi, who
moves away)*
If I could

You are beautiful
You are a beaming shaft of starlight
Shining in a darkened sky
Oh my love *(The cat is making its way toward offstage in Spivey's direction, and as
it moves away, Heidi follows cautiously behind it)*

If I could live a life of dreams
I would live it with you
(The cat exits, leaving Heidi alone)

(All is quiet. Heidi looks around the room. She walks around it aimlessly. She picks up a magazine from the floor and reads its title, but then drops it disinterestedly. She goes to Spivey's work table and regards it. She sees tools laying there. She picks them up and examines them. She looks at the big hunk of clay and touches it, looking in Spivey's direction every so often to be sure she's still alone. She sits at the kick wheel and gives it a kick. She gets up and walks toward her chair, but stoops and picks up a magazine off the floor. She sits in her chair and opens the magazine and begins to read, but then looks at the couch and looks in Spivey's direction. She stands back up, dropping the magazine, and goes to the couch, regarding it, yet looking over her shoulder. A long, relaxed sigh comes from the bathroom. Heidi sits tentatively, then lies on the couch, carefully at first, unsure, but after a minute, she stretches out and begins to relax. The lights slowly dim)

HEIDI: (obviously getting sleepy, she raises the mask long enough to say)
It's like a dream . . .

(Heidi is asleep. The lights continue to dim. The stage is suddenly covered in smoke. Dream-like music begins. Spivey walks into the room, fully dressed and groomed and unusually alert. He regards Heidi and sings to her. He is attentive and tender toward her as he sings)

[DREAMER]

SPIVEY:

Dreamer
It's taken some time to get to know you
As you wonder and you ponder the impossible
But what is that?
Something as simple as having a cat?
It's not so hard.
There is a way
I have it and can offer it to you *(Heidi, still lying on the couch, opens her eyes)*

Dreamer
Life is full of challenges and obstacles *(he stands very close to her and gently takes off her mask and sets it on the table. He takes off her shoes and sets them on the floor. Heidi looks a tad concerned, but he nods her concern away, reassuring her)*
If you look and you consider what is possible
You will find
Miracles happen all of the time *(Spivey reaches his hand out to Heidi, who sits up and takes it, and stands with Spivey)*
It's not too grand
The path is here
Walk with me and see it all appear

(The cat walks in. Heidi becomes alarmed and tries to pull away from Spivey, but he puts his arm around her waist and dances with her. The cat, across stage, does the same dance. Suddenly, another cat walks on stage. This cat, however, seems to be made of metal. It moves in a fully robotic yet smooth and appealing way and walks up to and moves along with the other cat)

Just look in another direction
Make an exception
Consider a different stance
Take a chance
A new perspective
Be receptive
To think anything

To think everything
Before you give up and turn away

(Heidi reaches out her hand toward the mechanical cat. Spivey and the real cat step aside; Spivey rests his hand on the cat's shoulder, and they both stand, looking pleased as they watch Heidi and the mechanical cat come together. The cat dances for Heidi and moves toward her, wanting her to pet it, wanting to rub itself against her in a cat-like, yet mechanical way, and she regards it with amazement and wonder and pleasure. Heidi and the mechanical cat dance together for two steps. Heidi

It's not so hard
There is a way
I have it and can offer it to you

The mechanical cat glides itself off stage. The marmalade cat goes to the back of the couch and lies on the couch back. Heidi looks around, smiles dreamily at Spivey as he backs out of the room, his voice turning into echo. Heidi returns to her spot on the couch, the cat lying above her, looking down. The lights dim way down for a moment. Silence. Spivey reenters. He is once again in his underwear. He gently picks up the remnants of the tune, humming, half speaking the last lines. He sits at his work table and gets busy, working the clay. The lights rise slowly to Heidi's waking groan.

The marmalade cat lazily pays attention to her as she sleeps. It is in her face, touching her in a light and playful way, caressing her hair, blowing kisses at her etc. Heidi smiles in her sleep, as if she's dreaming. She wakes slowly, opening her eyes. The cat becomes absolutely still. For a moment, Heidi doesn't know where she is. She becomes alarmed when she realizes she has fallen asleep on Spivey's couch. She looks toward Spivey, whose back is to her.)

HEIDI: *(She puts her hand to her mouth. She is surprise to realize that she is not wearing her mask)*
My mask!

(She looks at the cat, which is still and quiet on the couch back above her. The cat waves at her demurely. Heidi is nonplussed)

What has happened here? What is going on?

(She looks at the cat again and looks toward Spivey, caught between delight and panic. However, her delight and awe over being so close to the cat momentarily wins her attention. She reaches out her hand tentatively and in disbelief. The cat playfully pulls back from her, keeping itself just out of reach. Disappointed by the rejection, Heidi begins to take her hand away and the cat relents, grudgingly allowing her a light touch of its paw. Heidi is once again delighted, but just as she is about to make contact with the cat's paw, she feels a sneeze coming on)

Oh, no!

(She looks toward Spivey in a panic, putting a hand to her face like a mask as she blindly reaches toward the mask that sits all the way across the room, next to Spivey. Spivey cocks his head, listening to her, but does not turn around. He continues serenely working with the clay as he listens to the commotion behind him. Heidi is all at once trying to back away from the cat, collect her shoes, get off the couch, grab her mask and get out the door)

HEIDI:

Oh! I knew it! I knew . . . ah . . . ah . . . I knew it was too good ah . . . ah . . . to be true! I . . . achoo!

(The cat, startled, jumps off the couch during this commotion and goes to Spivey and sits next to him. Still sneezing, Heidi gives one final look back as she struggles to hold her shoes and hold the mask to her face and get out the door. When she finally does, all is quiet for a minute. Spivey turns partially toward the door, and then turns to the cat. He scratches the cat's head)

SPIVEY:

Imagine that.

(Meanwhile, Heidi, runs across the yard. The lights come up on Foster who is at kitchen table eating a bowl of Captain Crunch. Heidi scrambles in the door, dropping her shoes and the mask on the floor. Foster watches her in silence, holding the spoon in mid-air. Heidi scrambles toward the telephone. She looks back and sees the mask on the floor. She runs back and picks it up and hurriedly places it on the table. She is in such a rush that the mask doesn't quite make it to the table and falls to the floor twice. She picks it up both times, becoming increasingly agitated as she does so. She slams the mask down defiantly and scrambles around the room. Foster stares at her in shock. She runs to the telephone and looks in a book by the table, talking to herself as she looks for a number.

HEIDI:

Where did I put it! Where did I put it!

(She grabs the telephone and places it to her ear, holding it with her shoulder while she continues to locate the number, struggling not to drop the receiver. She finds a scrap of paper sticking out of her address book and holds it up triumphantly)

Here it is! Here it is!

(Her fingers fumble as she dials the phone, and when she messes up, she hangs up and has to start over).

No! No! Come on! Come on!

(She's terribly impatient. We hear the phone ring once, twice, three times. Heidi paces back and forth as far as the phone cord will let her)

WHITLEY'S VOICE:

Wilmertong, here.

HEIDI:

Hello! Hello! Mr. Wilmertong? Mr. Wilmertong!

WHITLEY'S VOICE:

Yes, Heidi, is that you?

HEIDI:

Mr. Whilmertong—He's working!

(Spotlight on Foster. His jaw drops. He drops his spoon. The lights go black)

End of scene

END OF ACT I

ACT II

ACT II, SCENE I

SETTING: The pickle factory with everyone, minus Heidi, hard at work. Above the station where Heidi used to work is a sign with an arrow pointed straight down that reads, “Heidi worked here.” The place is humming, mechanical music reminiscent of “Up and At ‘Em” plays. The workers move in a business like way. Major walks around with his clipboard, inspecting the line. He stops at the processing part and dips a huge thermometer into an open pressure pot. The two workers at this station look at each other nervously. Major reads the thermometer.

MAJOR:

Hold on just one pickle packing minute!

(The whole place comes to a standstill)

MAJOR:

This thermometer reads 237 degrees Fahrenheit. It’s supposed to read 240 degrees Fahrenheit!
(Everyone gasps. Major looks sternly at the workers. He sets down his clipboard and faces his crew)

MAJOR: *(stepping to center stage and motioning the Chorus to follow)*

A word . . .

(The Chorus, knowing the drill, come forward and fall into line. The Chorus is politely attentive through both a sense of employee obligation and a sense of sincere loyalty to Major. The Chorus is comprised of members fitting the cast of any proverbial classroom, i.e. class-clown, overachiever, underachiever, gossip, gum-chewer, attention seeker, flirt, smart aleck, slob, nerd, bully etc.)

[CLOSTRIDIUM BOTULINUM]

MAJOR: *(Sings)*

Understand this . . .

(Now entering a serious lecture, Major looks at the floor as he paces back and forth in front of his crew and says)

If a pickle we have picked is processed and packed without particular procedure, without precision, without knowing the possibility of susceptible situations that can result in the growth of dangerous bacterium

(Major picks up a nearby wastebasket as he passes by it, and holds it in front of the gum-chewer as he passes. The gum-chewer, chagrined, dutifully spits it out)—why then we may as well call it quits!

(Major slams the wastebasket to the floor and faces the Chorus full on, who stand at even greater attention under his no nonsense scrutiny)

MAJOR: *(sings)*

It is imperative that you possess
An understanding of this risk:
Clostridium Botulinum is our enemy!

CHORUS: *(in obedient repetition, sing)*

Clostridium Botulinum is our enemy!

(Major nods in affirmation, locks his hands behind his back, resumes looking at the floor, and begins walking away. The Chorus start to disperse, assuming the lecture is over. When Major continues, however, the Chorus snaps back

to attention, though not without some knowing, sidelong glances, eye rolling, and snickering between some, while others work to shush and discourage their peers from disrespect, gesturing to give Major his due. The mis-attenders repent and check themselves, trying their best to straighten up.)

(Major paces again before the Chorus, still looking down, completely focused on conducting his message with moments of strong gesture, points, and emphasis. This time as he paces before the line of workers, two or so of the more feisty Chorus members take turns following closely behind him in playful imitation and quickly shuffle back into line before Major turns and sees them. This game elicits the mild disapproval of some Chorus members and the cautious-to-daring approval of others. Though Major remains relatively unaware, he does pause a time or two in suspicion, but as the Chorus looks attentive upon inspections, he continues with his lecture.)

MAJOR: *(sings)*

We must pride ourselves on perfection
Every detail must be right
Just one degree can be the difference between
Death and between life!
Though commonly found in vegetables and meats,
Though harmless unless it finds an environment that's sweet
If the temperature is wrong
If acidity is low
If there's a partial vacuum seal
This bacterium will grow!

(faces Chorus and sings)

It is imperative that you possess
An understanding of this risk

(Major lifts his arms, eliciting their proper reply)

CHORUS and MAJOR:

Clostridium Botulinum is our enemy!

MAJOR: *(satisfied, speaks)*

Well done.

(Major strokes his chin and begins to turn away in deep thought. Again, the Chorus moves to disband. However, Major begins to speak again, turning back to the Chorus, and again, the Chorus fall into line, though their sense of polite obligation is beginning to fade. Some saunter back, some slouch. Darla checks her fingernails. The gum-chewer pulls a fresh piece from his/her pocket. Even those who were initially chastising the others begin showing their disinterest, looking at their watches, looking at the ceiling, etc.)

MAJOR: *(raising his arms in emphasis)*

I know that now and then
We make botulism our friend
To fix the wrinkles and the crinkles in our faces *(At the idea of "WE" using botox, the women in the chorus look at each other questioningly. Darla holds up her hand, rubbing her thumb to her fingers to indicate big bucks, and with looks and nods they commiserate over the cost of such a thing)*

But of these toxins we must be wary
In the pickle packing area
The bacterium is a danger to all animals and men!

It is imperative that you possess
An understanding of this risk

CHORUS: *(with less than full enthusiasm)*

Clostridium Botulinum is our enemy.

(Major looks at his crew sternly, walking the line and examining them one by one, concerned with their waning level of their commitment)

MAJOR:

I said . . . *(gets ready to sing it again when the Chorus cuts in)*

CHORUS: *(mustering enthusiasm to show their complete understanding of the issue at hand and to stop Major from going on)*

Under poor conditions
The bacterium can grow!
We have a responsibility
To be sure this isn't so!

MAJOR: *(pauses, assessing them for a moment before singing)*

And now that you've had this instruction
There is one thing you should know

CHORUS and MAJOR:

Clostridium Botulinum—

MAJOR:

—that dirty rotten toxin . . .

CHORUS and MAJOR:

Clostridium Botulinum is our enemy!

(Major nods at them, affirming their understanding. Major walks back toward the pressure pot and turns. When he sees the workers still standing at attention, he waves his arms at them).

MAJOR:

Well? What are you waiting for? Get back to your stations!

(The Chorus scramble back to their positions. As the two workers come back to the pressure pot, Major points to it)

MAJOR:

Fix this unfortunate situation immediately.

WORKERS:

Yes, sir. Right away, sir!

MAJOR: *(picking up his clipboard)*

Keep to the system, people! Keep to the system!

(Major goes back to his inspecting. Heidi walks into the factory, tentatively. Jane, who is working in the packing area at the end of the production line along with Darla, sees Heidi first. Seeing Heidi, Jane runs to her, leaving Darla to continue working. Darla regards Heidi with an unimpressed expression and keeps working. The other workers, as well as Major, are busy in their respective places of the pickle production, unaware of Heidi's presence. Major remains near the pressure pots, working to solve the pressure pot temperature problem, as well as inspecting the other workers at the beginning of the production line.)

JANE: *(excitedly)*

Oh! There she is! Heidi! Oh, Heidi! It's so good to see you.

HEIDI:

Jane! *(genuinely happy to see her)* Oh! It's good to see you, too!

JANE:

Oh, I bet you're happy to be back here (*playfully*). Why, you're like a celebrity around here, Heidi! Oh! How are you? You must tell me everything.

(*During this exchange, Darla, though trying to act unimpressed by Heidi's appearance, strains to hear what the two women are saying, moving closer and closer until she is standing, unnoticed, right behind them*).

JANE: (*taking Heidi's hands in hers*)

So tell us, Heidi. How's everything? It ain't the same without you at the factory. You been gone for what—two weeks now?

HEIDI:

Nearly four.

DARLA:

Is it four weeks already?

HEIDI:

Yes . . . it's all so odd.

DARLA:

I'll say. You be careful, Heidi. I don't trust it.

(*Benjamin is transporting a stack of pickle boxes across stage by hand-dolly, and slows down, admiring Jane as he goes by*).

JANE:

So, what's he like? Is he cute? Hey! Do you think he's interested in dating? Maybe you could introduce us. Just think! Me! Married to an artiste!

(*Benjamin overhears and, alarmed, stops actively eavesdrops*).

DARLA:

Dreamer.

JANE:

Come on, Heidi! I want every detail. What's his name?

HEIDI: (*hesitantly, glancing warily over at Darla*)

Well . . . His name is Mr. Spivey . . . and . . . he's very quiet.

JANE: (*leaning in*)

Go on. What else?

DARLA: (*looking at her nails as if she's bored*)

Do tell.

JANE: (*waves a hand toward Darla*)

Don't pay any attention to Darla. She's jealous because you've been rescued from this god-awful place and we're stuck here, slaving away. (*Darla concedes with a shrug and a nod*).

"Keep to the system! Keep to the system!" (*She mocks Major. Major looks up from what he is doing, suspiciously, thinking he's heard something. Jane covers her mouth with her hands and takes a step back, pulling Heidi with her so that they are out of sight. Darla and Heidi cover for Jane as Major frowns in their general direction. Benjamin makes himself look busy in checking the boxes on the dolly. Major*

stares for a minute, not really looking at them in particular, but then goes back to his work, throwing suspicious glances over his shoulders now and then.)

JANE: *(clasping Heidi's hands again)*

I'm so happy for you, Heidi. It's a dream come true, and if it can happen to you, maybe one day it can happen to me too. So go on. Tell me all about him.

(Benjamin looks at Jane longingly, smiling at the idea of making Jane's dreams come true)

HEIDI:

Well . . . he reads a lot.

JANE: *(dreamily)*

Oh! An intellectual! What does he read?

HEIDI:

Magazines mostly. I never saw so many subscriptions before. I think at least four new ones come in the mail everyday. All sorts. Science and gardening and Hollywood and, of course, art magazines. There's a big stack next to the couch already.

DARLA:

Maybe he can't read at all and just looks at the pictures. *(Jane and Heidi scowl at Darla. Darla throws her hands up in defense).* I'm just saying, if a full-grown man needs someone to take care of him like that, he ain't all there *(taps her forehead).*

JANE:

Nonsense. Plenty of men have women taking care of their every need. Why, look how Heidi takes care of Foster.

DARLA: *(teasing)*

Oh, there's a good example.

(Heidi frowns)

JANE:

Is he cute? What color is his hair? And what about his eyes? Is he tall or short? Fat or thin? On a scale from one to ten—one being a real bow-wow, ten being the man of my dreams—where would you put him?

(Benjamin frowns and assesses his own looks as Jane talks. He touches his head when she talks about hair. He measures his height with his hand against another worker who walks by. He assesses the size of his belly. He is worried.)

HEIDI: *(taken aback, but pondering the question)*

I've never thought about it. . . an eight? I . . .

JANE:

An eight! Oh! This is exciting!

DARLA: *(raising an eyebrow)*

Oh, well hold on. A dumb handsome man is a different story entirely. This is interesting.

HEIDI: *(defensively)*

He is not dumb! And I don't think about his looks . . .

DARLA: *(teasing)*

No, of course not. Not when you have such a fine specimen back home.

(Heidi frowns)

JANE: *(pulling Heidi a few steps away from Darla)*
What sort of clothes does he wear? Is he a fancy dresser?

HEIDI: *(panic rising)*
Oh! He's sort of . . . a . . . "natural" dresser, I guess.

JANE:
A natural dresser? Oh! Like he wears sexy blue jeans with holes ripped in the knees? *(she growls, daydreaming)* Oh, I bet that looks good.

(Jealous, Benjamin frowns and crosses his arms over his chest, sulking)

HEIDI: *(shaking her head back and forth, but still nervous)*
No . . . uh . . . he's a little more natural than that . . .

JANE:
Heidi, my imagination is running wild. Tell me more. What's he making? Tell me all about his work.

HEIDI: *(trying to become un-upset)*
Well, he's really only now just sort of started . . .

DARLA:
Oh, just what the world needs. Another "working" artist who doesn't "work" at all *(makes quote signs with her hands as she speaks)*. What a crock.

JANE:
(Glaring at Darla) Darla, stop. *(Darla throws up her hands in surrender)*. Come on Heidi. I'm listening. Seriously now.

HEIDI: *(tentatively at first, but with more confidence as Jane encourages her.)*
What can I say . . .

JANE:
Say anything.

HEIDI:
It's hard to explain

JANE:
Try.

HEIDI:
He's a puzzling person
I don't know him—yet I do . . .
He doesn't know me—yet he does . . .

(As the girls sing, Benjamin, discouraged, takes the dolly and walks offstage, going on with his work)

[HE IS AWARE OF ME]

JANE: (*sings*)
It's so dreamy
So romantic

DARLA: (*sings*)
Foster must be frantic

JANE: (*disagreeing with Darla*)
It's a dream come true

DARLA:
Dreaming is for fools

HEIDI:
He's quiet, yet oddly attentive
He's like a whisper without a care
He eats and sleeps and reads all day
Lying on the couch in his underwear

(Jane and Darla exchange surprised looks, but turn back to Heidi immediately as she continues. The chorus members, who seem to be passively listening, exchange shocked, interested, curious glances to each other).

JANE:
A fantasy through and through.

DARLA:
It's too good to be true
I'd watch out if I were you

HEIDI:
As I sit quietly on a chair
He sees me there and seems to care
Not to talk, not to listen
But just to be aware of me

JANE:
Just what every girl desires
A man who's there
A man who cares

DARLA:
A man who sees beyond the veil
Of pickle juice and pickle smell

HEIDI:
He doesn't say much at all
But I know he prefers me there
He is aware of me
He is aware

And it's . . . lovely
To be recognized

To feel so lively
(says) Like he sees the very insides of my heart
This Mr. Spivey . . .
and I feel lovely, and lucky, and alive

(Major, walking down the line, suddenly notices Heidi. As he walks toward her, Jane and Darla look at each other and rush back to their stations)

MAJOR: (businesslike but friendly)
Heidi, what brings you here?

HEIDI:
Hello Mr. Major. I was just in the neighborhood and . . .

MAJOR:
Coming back to work soon, I hope.

HEIDI:
Well, I'm really not sure, sir, I . . .

MAJOR:
I don't want to lose you forever, Heidi. You're a good employee. You have a grasp on the finer aspects of pickle packing that frankly (*leans in conspiratorily*) many of these other people simply do not (*nods his head toward Darla who slams a jar of pickles roughly into a box, alarming Jane*). People don't realize the delicacy of this operation. You are one of the few who truly understand the system.

HEIDI: (*humbly*)
Oh, thank you, Mr. Major. It's true I have been here for quite a long time.

MAJOR:
Indeed, Heidi, indeed. I'm happy for your good fortune, of course, but I can't lie. I'd be happier if this situation never occurred. Of course, Mr. Wilmertong was very generous . . .

HEIDI: (*Surprised*)
Mr. Wilmertong?

MAJOR:
Why yes, Heidi . . . I assumed you were aware of his visit here. He's ensured that your place here is safe—and quite generously, too, I must say.

HEIDI:
He what?

MAJOR: (*pats her on the shoulder*)
All is well here, Heidi. All is well.

HEIDI: (*more to herself than to Major, who is turning away back toward the workers*)
Is it really?

MAJOR:
Why of course. And let me remind you that our 3rd Annual Pickle Packing Picnic is coming up very soon. I do hope you'll be there, Heidi.

HEIDI:
Oh, I wouldn't dream of missing it, Mr. Major. And where is it going to be this year?

MAJOR: (*frowning*)

Ah, sadly, that's a detail I have yet to work out. The parks are booked. I suppose I'll have to impose on the kindness of one of our generous and talented employees. I'd do it myself, but since the divorce, I don't have a yard. Do you have any suggestions?

HEIDI:

No, sir, but I'll put my mind to it.

MAJOR:

Excellent.

(*Major turns to the workers at large*)

Keep to the system, people!

HEIDI: (*still doubtful, but hopeful, pinches herself*)

I must be dreaming.

End of scene

ACT II, SCENE II

SETTING: Heidi's kitchen. Jane and Heidi are sitting at the kitchen table, enjoying beers together.

HEIDI: (*finishing her beer*)

Hey, but this is nice, isn't it, Jane? When's the last time we had a beer together?

JANE: (*stands up and gets another two beers out of the fridge*)

It's been forever. Hey! You and I should go out to dinner tonight. Just the two of us. What do you say? Do you think Foster would mind?

HEIDI: (*takes the beer*)

Foster? (*instantly irritated*) He won't mind one bit. Matter of fact, he probably won't even know I'm gone. He's off in his boat, fishing. It's all he ever thinks about, all he ever does. Fish, fish, fish.

JANE: (*sitting down*)

Well, at least he's out of your hair and not making his usual demands on you, right?

HEIDI:

I suppose . . . (*lifts her beer to Jane as if to cheer, drinks, then looks off into the distance and sighs*)

JANE:

Well, everything is different with you. I'm sure Foster is feeling it, too.

HEIDI:

I guess. But I have the feeling I'll be back at work soon enough. (*looks at Jane confidentially*) Mr. Spivey is working, you know.

JANE: (*raising her eyebrows*)

He's working? What's he making?

HEIDI:

I'm not quite sure, but . . . (*shakes her head as if to shake away a crazy thought*)

JANE:

But what?

HEIDI: (*timidly*)

I think it has to do with me.

JANE:

With you? What do you mean? Are you modeling for him?

HEIDI: (*shocked, then laughing*)

Me? Modeling? No!

JANE:

Then what?

HEIDI:

It sounds so ridiculous . . .

JANE:

What? Tell me.

HEIDI:

Well, the other day, I fell asleep on his couch.

JANE: (*Stops mid-drink and stares at Heidi, intrigued*).

Oh my.

HEIDI: (*not paying attention to Jane's reaction, but talking more to herself*)

And I had this dream . . . about this cat . . . and it was perfect. I mean it wasn't a normal cat. It was made out of metal and it moved . . . like a machine.

JANE:

A machine?

HEIDI:

Yes! Mechanically. Like . . . like a mechanical cat. That's exactly what it was. And it was . . . beautiful in its own way . . . and I wasn't allergic to it or anything . . . no sneezes, no suffering, and in my dream I thought it was just about the most perfect cat I could ever hope for . . . and then . . . and then I woke up, and the real cat was right beside me and for a minute I didn't sneeze at all, and then I looked up and there he was—working.

JANE:

The cat was working?

HEIDI:

No, no. Mr. Spivey was working.

JANE:

In your dream?

HEIDI:

No. When I woke up . . . when I woke up Mr. Spivey was at his table working and . . . I don't know for sure, but . . .

JANE:

But what?

HEIDI:

But I think he's making that cat.

JANE:

What cat?

HEIDI:

The mechanical cat! Aren't you listening? (*to herself*) Oh, I know it sounds crazy . . .

JANE:

Did you tell him about it?

HEIDI:

Tell who about what?

JANE:

Spivey—did you tell him about your dream?

HEIDI:

No. That's just it. I never told him anything, but somehow I think he knows . . . it's like he knows my dreams.

JANE:

How could he?

HEIDI:

I don't know. I only know he does—at least I think he does.

JANE:

But you said he makes things out of clay and the cat in your dreams is metal.

HEIDI:

I know, I know . . . (*looking confused and somewhat frustrated*). He does work in clay. (*Shaking her head*) I know that what I'm saying doesn't make sense. But the truth is, nothing seems to quite make sense lately. Everything is different. Everything has changed.

JANE:

What do you mean?

(*There is a knock on the door, and Heidi opens it to Whitley Wilmertong*).

HEIDI: (*surprised*)

Mr. Wilmertong!

WHITLEY:

Hello, Heidi! Hello! May I join you for a moment? (*He looks at Jane*) I say, (*charmingly*) hello there. (*Jane's mouth opens in surprise*)

HEIDI:

This is my friend Jane.

WHITLEY:

Jane, Jane. How lovely to meet you. (*He reaches down, takes Jane's hand and kisses it. (Jane is charmed into a stunned, blushing silence)*). Any friend of Heidi's is a friend of mine, right, Heidi-ho?

HEIDI: (*hesitating*)

Would you like a . . . beer, Mr. Wilmertong?

WHITLEY: (*delighted*)

Beer! How wonderful! Thank you, no. (*He holds up his hand to decline*).

HEIDI:

Is everything all right, Mr. Wilmertong? I was next door just a little while ago and everything seemed . . .

WHITLEY:

Why everything is right as rain, dear girl. Right as rain. As a matter of fact, things couldn't be much better, now could they? Spivey's working, after all, and there's nothing terrible about that, is there?

HEIDI:

I suppose not . . .

WHITLEY:

I'll just take a moment of your time, dear girl. (*Turns squarely to Jane*) Please forgive my interruption, won't you?

JANE: (*demurely*)

Certainly.

WHITLEY: (*continues*)

You see, Heidi, now that Spivey is working, I'm afraid things will become a little more . . . complicated for you, which is why I've come to see you in person. But first, let me tell you that you've been doing a simply marvelous job with Mr. Spivey. He's quite content from the looks of everything, and I say that is a direct result of your absolutely magnificent care.

May we sit? (*He holds out a chair for Heidi and then takes the chair between the two women. Jane leans in toward Whitley, resting her palm on her hand, completely taken by Whitley's polished presence*)

Dear girl, (*folding his hands in front of him and leaning toward Heidi*) it is imperative for me to know whether or not you are happy in this position. (*waits for an answer*) Are you? Happy, that is?

HEIDI: (*looks down at her hands folded in her lap, grateful*)

I . . . of course, Mr. Wilmertong. I couldn't be happier. (*trying to convince herself*) In fact, I think I'm just about as happy as a girl in my position can be.

WHITLEY: (*nodding, listening carefully and attentively*)

And Forrest?

JANE: (*touching him tentatively on the arm and getting a thrill from the contact*)

You mean Foster.

WHITLEY: (*looking at Jane, patting her hand and looking into her eyes*)

So kind of you, dear girl. That's exactly what I meant. How did you know? (*Jane can barely contain her delight at his attention*)

WHITLEY:

(*turning back to Heidi*)

And so how are things in this regard?

HEIDI: (*not understanding*)

This regard?

WHITLEY:

I trust Forrest is quite all right with you taking care of Mr. Spivey.

HEIDI:

Oh, yes, sir. He's very happy. You've been so generous.

WHITLEY: (*waving off the compliment*)

Nonsense, dear girl. I'm simply taking care of business, and my business is to keep Mr. Spivey happy, and in order to keep Mr. Spivey happy, it is necessary to keep those people who care for him—people such as your dear self—happy as well because if you're not happy, Heidi, why then that's a true fly in the ointment, isn't it.

HEIDI: (*confused*)

A fly in the . . .

JANE: (*nodding, she takes on Whitley's grand way of speaking*)

Ointment, Heidi. Ointment (*she looks at Whitley to show she follows him completely.*)

WHITLEY: (*Whitley, who has been ignoring Jane for the moment, suddenly becomes aware of her again, looks at her directly and smiles charmingly*)

Why, you are a most charming creature, are you not?

(*Jane likens to swoon*)

WHITLEY: (*turning back to Heidi, he continues*)

In all seriousness, Heidi. It is important for me to be sure that this commitment you've made is having no unduly negative repercussions on the marital institution which exists within the bounds of this premises.

(*Heidi stares at Whitley for a moment, trying to understand what he just said, and not understanding, turns to Jane for interpretation*)

JANE: (*trying to act as if she understands*)

What he means is . . . institutions of . . . repercussions . . .

WHITLEY: (*directly*)

How is your marriage faring, Heidi?

HEIDI:

My . . . my marriage?

WHITLEY:

Yes. (*Whitley nods, waiting patiently and attentively. Heidi ponders the question and becomes slightly troubled*)

HEIDI:

My marriage. (*She sighs*).

WHITLEY:

Is it all you that dreamed it would be?

HEIDI:

All that I . . . (*she looks around her surroundings, sans Foster*) I guess I never dreamed at all . . .

WHITLEY:

Well, perhaps not recently—but you have dreamed, correct?

HEIDI: (*utterly confused, becoming upset*)

Well, yes. I've dreamed, it's true (*looking at Whitley quizzically*) but my marriage? I don't know what you're talking about. I'll . . . (*squints at the floor in confusion*). I've been married for twenty one years and I'm . . . well, I'm married.

(*Whitley and Jane stare at Heidi, compassionately, yet silently. Heidi looks from one to the other and adds as an afterthought*)

Happily. I am (*trying to convince herself*). And Foster has never been happier with me and . . . (*biting her lip, she looks helplessly at Jane and then Whitley*)

WHITLEY: (*gently, tenderly, nodding his understanding, yet getting back to the business of Spivey*)

Forgive me, Heidi, but what you must understand is that your work with Mr. Spivey is about to take a new turn, and it is for this reason that I ask. I am asking that you give unconditional commitment to Mr. Spivey . . .

(*Heidi doesn't respond, but seems lost in her own thoughts. Whitley continues gently*)

Heidi, is it true that Mr. Spivey works only when you're there?

HEIDI: *(surprised)*

How did you know that?

WHITLEY: *(smiling, knowingly)*

I know Spivey, dear girl. *(He takes Heidi's hand)*. And this means that you must stay with him from now on, until he finishes the piece he's working on.

(Heidi stares at him in disbelief, but Whitley merely nods earnestly)

You must stay there day and night.

HEIDI:

Day and night? But what about Foster?

(Whitley looks at Jane, and shakes his head)

WHITLEY:

There's the rub. I'm afraid, dear girl, that Forrest will be required to fend for himself—temporarily, of course—but I realize, Heidi, that I'm suddenly asking quite a lot of you and that your other half may not be happy with this turn of events. I have tried to compensate Forrest adequately for the sacrifices he is making

...

(Jane and Heidi respond at the same time, Heidi to the idea of Foster sacrificing, and Jane trying to get Whitley's attention on her again)

JANE:

You mean Foster.

(Whitley smiles at Jane)

HEIDI: *(somewhat indignant)*

Sacrifices? What sacrifices?

WHITLEY: *(looking at Heidi)*.

Of course, in the beginning of these situations, it's always easy. Nevertheless, there ultimately comes a time when the iron must be put to the fire, as it were, and I'm happy yet afraid to say that such a time as this has come upon us—whether Forrest is ready or not. And so, *(he pulls an envelope from his lapel)* of course, I am prepared to compensate your husband for your continued—and now round the clock—dedication to Mr. Spivey. It is my hope that he will not too desperately miss your presence for whatever length of time it requires Mr. Spivey to fully and truly capture his vision. Do you believe Forrest will find this acceptable?

HEIDI: *(with a hint of bitterness, she takes the envelope that Whitley holds out to her)*

Forrest will be quite happy, I'm sure. In fact, he probably won't even know I'm gone.

WHITLEY: *(clearing his throat, he stands up)*

All right, then.

(He turns his attention to Jane)

And you, charming creature, you have been most generous in sharing Heidi with me. I shall leave you now so that you may continue your . . . aperitif *(the women look confused)* . . . that is to say your pre-dinner drink. *(Jane holds out her hand and Whitley takes it in his and kisses it gallantly then heads back across the yard from where he came)*.

JANE: *(staring after Whitley as he makes his way)*

Did you hear what he called me? An aperitif. I think that's French for fairy. Oh, Heidi, that man is a dream.

(Heidi stares at the envelope in her hands, clearly troubled).

HEIDI: *(absently)*
Yes, a dream.

End of scene

ACT II SCENE III

SETTING: Heidi's kitchen. The kitchen is dark except for a spotlight that shines on a note that sits on the table. Foster enters the darkened kitchen. He's dragging a couple of his fishing poles and a small cooler. He looks around, wondering why it's dark, wondering where Heidi is. He turns on the light and lights go up in the kitchen, but the note still remains in spotlight.

FOSTER:

Heidi!

(He walks across the room and calls offstage)

Gone again? No dinner again? *(to the air)* What? Am I supposed to just sit over here by myself and starve to death?

(He crosses his arms and looks at the table. He sees the note)

What's this?

(He walks over and picks up the note and reads. We hear Heidi's voice saying:)

"Dear Foster,

I must stay with Mr. Spivey until he finishes the piece he is working on. He needs me. I hope you understand."

(Foster looks up, confused)

He needs her?

(He pulls up a chair, center stage, and addresses the audience directly)

Another man needs my wife? What does that mean? *(He shakes the note)* What does this mean?

[WHAT DOES IT MEAN?]

FOSTER *(sings)*:

Wait just a minute
Something seems fishy
Hold on a second
Something's not right
All of the sudden
My girl isn't with me
What does it mean?
What does it mean?

Who will take care of me?
Who will be here for me?
Washing the dishes and filling my coffee cup
Doing the laundry and all of that other stuff
What does it mean?
What does it mean?

It ain't asking too much to be cared for, is it?
It ain't asking too much to be served
It's my right after all I'm the man of the household
The king of my castle
The chief
The head-honcho
That's the order of things around here
I have been patient

But if you ask me
Caring for me
That's the way it should be

Something is shady here
This isn't right.
Wait just a second
She's not here and it's night
All of the sudden
I'm starting to doubt
I've been so tolerant
What's this about?

Who will take care of me
Who will be there for me
Who will prepare for me
What about me?
What about me?

(growing angry, he walks back to the table and slams the note onto it, and clenches his fists)

What about me?
What about me?

(Foster walks angrily to the door, looks at the audience angrily for a second before storming out, slamming the door behind him. He walks across the yard toward Spivey's house. Meanwhile, the lights have come up on Spivey's living room. Spivey is busy working. The cat is sitting next to Spivey. Heidi, wearing her mask, is lying quite casually on the couch, reading a magazine.)

FOSTER: *(banging on the door)*
Heidi!

(Heidi jumps up, alarmed, looking toward the door. The magazine flies up into the air. The cat jumps, alarmed by the sudden movement. Spivey keeps working, though he does turn his head to see what's up. Heidi springs from the couch, straightens her dress and hair, retrieves the magazine and sets it on the couch, goes for the door, then looks toward Spivey and goes away from the door, caught in dilemma. Foster bangs again.)

FOSTER:
Heidi! I know you're in there!

HEIDI:
I . . . *(flustered, lifting the mask just long enough to speak)* I'm coming! I . . . *(stands at the door, reaches for the knob, but looks toward Spivey, considering the situation. Spivey, though passively curious, does not stop working. The cat, also passively curious, begins making its way across the floor toward Heidi in a nonchalant way. Heidi speaks through the closed door)*
Foster, I'm right here.

FOSTER:
Open up. I want in.

HEIDI: *(She looks over her shoulder at the nearly naked artist who is now standing, raising his arms over his head and stretching his back muscles. She looks at the audience then looks at the door, then looks at the audience again, shaking her head no. Spivey resumes his work)*
I . . . I can't let you in, Foster. I'm sorry. Mr. Spivey is working.

FOSTER:

Baloney! What's going on here, Heidi? Why aren't you at home? It's one thing to be here during the day, but if you think you're going to spend the night in another man's house you've got another think coming. What are you doing in there? What are you up to?

HEIDI: (*lifting the mask*)
Stop yelling.

FOSTER:

Let me in!

(*Heidi opens the door, but just a crack*)

HEIDI: (*Lifts the mask and speaks through the crack*)

You can't come in, Foster. I'm sorry. I really am. It's . . . I'm not doing anything over here. (*as she speaks, the cat is making its way ever closer to her. It ends up at her feet begins to playfully tug on her dress hem, distracting her as she talks to Foster. She is, of course, charmed by the attention of the cat, but tries to shoo it away with her free hand as she speaks. To the cat, gently*) Now, now. Stop that . . . (*to Foster*) I'm just sitting here.

FOSTER:

Stop what? Who are you talking to? What's going on in there!

HEIDI: (*turning back to Foster and continuing where she left off*)

I'm talking to the cat! (*The cat persists and she suddenly giggles*). Oh!

FOSTER: (*enraged*)

Heidi! (*he tries to push the door open, but Heidi immediately holds her hand out against the door*)

HEIDI: (*puts her face to the crack in the door*)

I'm just sitting here reading a magazine, Foster.

(*the cat now begins to tug on the bottom of the door, trying to get it open. Heidi slams the door accidentally on Foster, who immediately reaches for the knob. Heidi tries to shoo the cat away, which is pawing at the door trying to open it, while Foster is also trying to open it. She opens it but must work against Foster and the cat—which is causing chaos for its own mere amusement—to not let the door open too widely. Everyone's movements here are exaggerated so that the door is comically opened and slammed a number of times before the cat relents and wanders back to Spivey, leaving Heidi and Foster a chance to settle back into their conversation with the closed door between them*)

I'm just doing my job. It's my job, Foster. You have to understand.

FOSTER:

Understand what? That you don't come home? That I have to starve over there all alone, all by myself?

HEIDI:

I left you a note, and a meatloaf sandwich in the refrigerator.

FOSTER:

Open the door and let me in!

HEIDI: (*looks toward Spivey who has been simply at work, but who now stands, stretches, and walks out of the room. The cat follows*)

That's impossible, Foster. You have to believe me. If I open this door . . . (*She shakes her head and says more to herself than to Foster*) . . . everything will end.

(*She looks at the door and speaks with a bit of firmness here*)

Foster, listen to me. I left you a meatloaf sandwich in the refrigerator. I even used that nice hard bread you like so much. And I didn't put the ketchup on it yet because I didn't want the bread to get all mushy. I know how you hate a mushy sandwich. So all you have to do is open the ketchup . . .

FOSTER:

You call that dinner? A meatloaf sandwich on mushy bread?

HEIDI:

The bread isn't mushy. I've taken care of you.

FOSTER:

You call that care? You call leaving me by myself care?

HEIDI: (*beginning to get a bit impatient, a bit irritated*)

I have cared for you every day for twenty-one years. And now . . .

[ALL BECAUSE OF ME]

HEIDI:

You got your boat.
You got your lures
You got your fish
You got your wish
And all because of me!

You have it all
And always have
Your every whim
Your every need
You're taken care of
To a T
And all because of me!

I have been more than generous
Giving you all that I am—
I give and I give
And you take it
For granted
And give me nothing in return.
How I yearn
To be anything
To be anyone
To be anywhere

I think it's time for me to learn
There is something in store for me
I think it's time for me to remember
All that I long to be
Why is that so terrible?
Why is that so wrong?
Why, oh why, oh why, oh why
Can't you see this is where I belong?

(*Foster takes a step back from the door, not used to Heidi speaking to him this way*)

HEIDI: *(takes a step back, too, surprised at herself, but then musters up courage and continues)*

I have dreams too, you know. There are things that I want. There are things that I need. *(getting angry)*
And all you ever do is laugh. *(mocking Foster)* Imagine you with a cat. Imagine you with a cat. *(full angry)*
What's so hard to imagine? Why I'd rather live my whole life over here wearing this ridiculous blue mask
on my face, at least pretending that my dreams can come true too, than to spend the rest of my life with . . .
(stops herself short).

(There is a deep silence as Heidi and Foster each stare at the door between them. Foster turns from the door and sits on the top step of the porch, mulling a thought he's never had before).

HEIDI: *(still through the door)*

This won't last forever, Foster. But I see something for the first time in a very long time.

(Foster still has his back to the door, but turns his head. He is listening).

I can't go back to the way things were. I can't go back to just working in the pickle factory and taking care
of your every need at home. There has to be something for me, too. And it isn't something to be laughed
at. It isn't something to be mocked. It's something I need. And it's something that I can't live without
anymore.

(Silence, but Foster is thinking hard).

HEIDI:

Foster?

(Foster stands up and faces the door, looks at the ground, scratches his head. He is upset, but unsure what to do. He starts to walk toward the door, but then stops, ponders a second, then turns and slowly walks down the stairs, looking back once, and then begins walking across the yard. Heidi lays her palm on the door, but it is too late. Foster is gone. As he walks into his house, his stage goes black. Heidi is left in spotlight with silence, then her stage goes black too.)

End of scene

ACT II, SCENE IV

SETTING: Lights come up. Foster is in a lawn chair outside sitting next to his boat. Foster looks more unkempt than ever—unshaven, hair a mess, clothes wrinkled. We hear the sound of Wilmertong's car pull up. Foster looks up and watches as Wilmertong enters and walks toward Spivey's front porch.

FOSTER:
Hey! Hey!

(Whitley stops momentarily, raises his eyebrows in question, then tips his hat and begins walking toward the house again.)

FOSTER:
Hey, you! Stop! *(He rushes toward Whitley and stands face to face with him).*

WHITLEY:
Good morning to you, sir. My, you're looking a bit poorly maintained this morning.

FOSTER:
Maintained? You call this maintained? I haven't even had my coffee this morning. You know why?
(Whitley takes a step back).
Because my wife is in there!

WHITLEY:
Your wife? Do you mean that glorious angel from heaven, Heidi Hardly? My very own Spivey-watcher? You must be Forrest! What a lucky man you are. What a munificent meeting this is. Why, I regard your lovely bride so highly, I should have a sky writer fly up into the air and write her name in large letters!
(Whitley fans his arm toward the sky)

(Foster is taken aback by Whitley's warmth and effusion and looks toward the sky in confusion, as if the words are actually up there. He is unsure in how to proceed).

FOSTER:
My wife is in there! *(He waves toward the house).* Not up there! *(He waves toward the sky, exasperated).*

WHITLEY:
Yes, I know. *(He pulls an envelope from inside his jacket).* I was just coming to deliver this—another bonus. *(He hands the envelope to Foster congenially).* Such a wonderful job she's doing. Having a gem like that in your life is no small thing.

FOSTER:
A gem?

WHITLEY:
Why, a gem like that? You must have her packed in crushed velvet each night to keep that sparkle so bright!

FOSTER: *(completely confused, looking at the envelope and then Whitley)*
Velvet? *(getting irritated)* Look here, if anybody's crushing anybody, it's going to be me. She's *mine* and she should be in *my* house! Not over there with some . . . some fruitloop artist!

WHITLEY:
Oh, now, I'd hardly call Mr. Spivey a fruitloop, Mr. Hardly. Eccentric, perhaps, but a fruitloop is . . .

FOSTER:

Look you. I want my wife back and I want her back now.

WHITLEY: *(looks at the envelope in Foster's hand)*

I see.

(Foster looks down at the envelope. There is a moment of silence.)

FOSTER: *(matter of fact)*

I want her here with me.

WHITLEY: *(thoughtful)*

Is that where she ought to be?

FOSTER:

Yes. She ought to be here with me.

WHITLEY:

You've got trouble, then.

FOSTER: *(He tries to hand the envelope back to Whitley.)*

Look, you take this back and we'll call the whole thing off.

WHITLEY: *(Whitley takes a step back and holds up his hands, refusing to take the envelope).*

Ah, dear fellow. It's too late for that. You've bought into the situation as much as anyone.

(He walks toward the boat, admiringly). Why look here. What's this? A power driven vessel. Is it yours?

FOSTER: *(momentarily drawn by his love for his boat)*

Yes! She's all mine.

WHITLEY:

Quite a craft.

FOSTER: *(manly, proudly)*

A Pristine Crestline 1780 25 horse power outboard fishing boat and trailer.

WHITLEY: *(dead level)*

A gem.

(Foster stares at him. Whitley stares back).

FOSTER:

What's your game, mister?

WHITLEY:

You know my game, good fellow. I've been nothing but forthright with you regarding my intentions and expectations. The more important question, Mr. Hardly, is what is your game?

[IT'S RELATIVE]

WHITLEY: (*Sings:*)

When an apple falls off a tree
We call it a windfall
But depending on where it happens to fall
It may not feel like a windfall at all
It's relative.
And I can tell by the bruise on your brow,
That windfalls don't only endow

When you take out your lovely new vessel
To spend your day out in fresh air
The fish on your line may be special
But the burn from the sun quite severe
It's relative
And I can tell by the red on the back of your neck
That the day held some kind of regret

When you're pulled off the bench and thrown into the game
Your adrenaline pumps—it's a thrill
Til the guy on your right pounds you into the ground
And you're left eating grass on the field.
It's relative
And I can tell by the stain on your shirt
You've been spending some time in the dirt.

It sounds like you have a decision to make
A new plan to write
A claim to re-stake
A gem to polish
A boat to float
A wrong to abolish
A right to re-note
It's positive that there will be negative.
In any given situation
You can't pick and choose
Both sides come to you
And there's always a chance that you may lose
It's relative

When you get all the things you've been wanting
Life takes on a grand sort of view
But be careful of losing the thing you love most
That's always been right there beside you.
It's relative
I can tell by your standing alone
That something is missing at home.

(Whitley tips his hat and goes to into Spivey's house, leaving Foster standing there with his boat and the envelope of money).

[HOME IS WHERE SHE OUGHT TO BE]

FOSTER: *(looks at the boat, looks at the envelope, looks toward the house that now houses his wife. He rubs his hand along the boat, caressing it, and it's difficult for a minute, to tell exactly whether he is singing about his wife or the boat).*

(sings:)

I want her here with me
That's where she ought to be
It's something I've known from the start of it
At the heart of it
Home is where she ought to be

(Foster looks toward Spivey's house, turns his back on the boat and walks toward the house and stands outside looking in)

If I could see her I'd make her believe
That I am the person that she ought to see
It's something I've known from the start of it
At the heart of it
Home is where she ought to be

Why didn't I see
That if I want to keep her with me
Where she ought to be . . .
That I've got to give as much as I take
That I've got to show her there's something at stake
That if she loses me, something is lost
But what will it cost, and who am I fooling?
It's me who is losing, and I'm the undoing.

Oh, I want her here with me
That's where she ought to be
It's something I've known from the start of it
At the heart of it
Home is where she ought to be

(says):

But what if I'm too late?
What if she doesn't want me?

(The stage goes black)

ACT II, SCENE V

SETTING: The lights grow on Heidi's kitchen. Heidi is finishing unpacking a bag of groceries. Another full bag sits on the kitchen table. Heidi picks up the full grocery bag when she is surprised by the sudden sound of banging. She looks around, but when the banging comes again, she walks toward the door. Lights grow on Foster, who is in the yard, standing at a work-table strewn with mechanical parts. There is a toolbox nearby. He is working intently, holding up pieces and trying to put them together, then taking them apart again and shaking his head in frustration.

FOSTER:

Damn, damn, damn! What am I doing? This is impossible!

(He takes a hammer and begins banging again. Heidi opens the door and walks onto the porch)

HEIDI:

Foster?

FOSTER: *(startled, Foster looks at the array of materials in front of him in a panic, drops everything and grabs a nearby cover and throws it over everything. He stands up straight and slaps his hands together as if dusting them off. He steps in front of his covered pile in order to block Heidi's view of it)*

HEIDI: *(walking down the steps to Foster)*

You're not out fishing.

FOSTER: *(he is casual, yet careful and humble)*

Oh, I hardly have time for that any more.

(Heidi gives him a surprised look)

I got a bigger fish to fry right now . . . *(glances toward the table, but then becomes businesslike).* I'm fixing up the lawnmower.

HEIDI: *(tries to see behind Foster to what's on the table, but Foster leans to prevent her.)*

I don't see any lawnmower.

FOSTER: *(clears throat)*

I'm just working on one part right now.

HEIDI: *(doubtful and a bit dejected)*

Oh.

(They stand in thick silence, both lingering, both wanting to communicate, yet both reticent).

HEIDI:

Mr. Spivey is nearly finished with his sculpture yesterday. He's firing it in the kiln that's in the basement.

FOSTER: *(shrugs)*

Yeah, so? What do I care what that jerk does.

HEIDI: *(sadly)*

He's not a jerk, Foster.

FOSTER:

Says you. *(He turns away, picks up a rag and starts wiping his hands with too much care. He is waiting for something, but he doesn't know what.)*

HEIDI: *(conciliatory)*

My job will be over soon. And I guess I'll be going back to the pickle plant . . .

(Foster nods and murmurs in a non-committal way. They are two people struggling to communicate).

HEIDI: *(looking at the bag of groceries in her arms)*

I got everything to make macaroni and cheese for dinner. I'll bring you some.

FOSTER:

That's all right. *(He is civil, trying to balance his hurt with his guilt)*. I'll just make myself an egg sandwich like I did last night. *(He looks at her)*. I can take care of myself, you know.

HEIDI: *(a bit offended, guilty, and surprised)*

Oh.

(She nods and starts toward Spivey's house but turns back).

Foster?

FOSTER: *(head down, back to wiping his hands, but looking at her from under his brow)*

Yeah?

(Heidi stands looking at him for a minute).

HEIDI:

Nothing.

(She turns and starts walking away).

FOSTER: *(conciliatory, yet still civil)*

Nice of you to stop by.

(Heidi goes into Spivey's house. Foster lifts the sheet and looks at the parts).

FOSTER: *(sadly)*

Damn.

End of scene

ACT II, SCENE VI:

SETTING: Heidi's back yard. Festive outdoor barbeque set-up: picnic tables, a grill, lawn chairs, etc. A banner that reads, "3rd Annual Pickle Packers Picnic." Foster is just finishing stringing festive lights. Heidi spreads tablecloths on a number of picnic tables, setting out stacks of plates and forks and napkins and condiments and such. Foster plugs in the lights and assesses the yard.

HEIDI:

Thank you for helping me set up, Foster.

FOSTER:

(trying to be conciliatory) You're welcome. *(scratches his head)* I have to say, though, I don't know why you volunteered to do something like this.

HEIDI: *(Heidi straightens)*

I wanted to do it, Foster. These people are our friends.

FOSTER:

Well, you got to admit, we don't do things like . . . this *(he gestures to the party)*.

HEIDI:

I miss everyone. I wanted to do something nice. Is that so bad?

FOSTER:

You'll be back there every day soon enough, seeing them whether you want to or not.

(Mr. Spivey's door opens long enough to let out the marmalade cat, who sits on the porch alert for awhile, but then settles in for a cat nap. The cat moves, comes, and goes along stage with little disruption aside from people periodically scratching it between the ears etc. It simply hangs around, cautiously and curiously, as cats do.)

HEIDI:

Well, we don't really know that, Foster. It all depends on Mr. . . .
(as she gestures toward Spivey's house, Major and Benjamin enter from Heidi's side of the house. Benjamin is all dressed up and carries a big cooler. Major is dressed in his finest leisurewear and carries barbequing utensils and an apron.)

MAJOR: *(introducing Benjamin and the cooler)*

Compliments of Piper's Pickle Packers Local 73. We've got serious linkage here. We've got the bratwursts, the I-talian sausage, and let's not forget the humble but oh-so-delicious hotdog!

(Benjamin drops the heavy cooler in front of Heidi and Foster).

BENJAMIN: *(flexing his muscles)*

Don't forget the hamburgers.

MAJOR: *(offended at the thought)*

Of course. Hamburgers, too! *(nudging Benjamin)* After all, a hamburger is the perfect little platter for our deliciously packed pickles!

(turning to Heidi, Major gives her a professional, yet warm hug)

Heidi, it's so nice of you to host our picnic!

HEIDI:

Nice to see you, Major. Benjamin, you sure clean up nice.

MAJOR: *(reaches out his hand and shakes Foster's hand vigorously.)*
And Foster! *(Major looks at the cooler)*. I have enough meat in here to feed an army! I'll need to get cracking right away! *(rubs his hands together eagerly)*

HEIDI: *(gesturing to work space)*
We've got everything set up right over there, Major. There's the barbecue pit and a nice worktable.

MAJOR: *(appreciatively)*
That's why you are good at your job, Heidi. You're a detail person.

HEIDI: *(flattered)*
Thank you, Major. And of course, Foster will help.

FOSTER: *(not without irritation)*
Of course.

(A few of the pickle packers and pickle packing family members begin to arrive, each carrying an assortment of picnic fare: covered casseroles, pies, cakes, small coolers, lawn chairs etc.)

HEIDI: *(She turns from the men and goes across the yard to greet the arriving guests)*
Hello! Everyone make yourselves at home.

(She motions to the tables and the picnickers place their wears here and there and settle into picnic behavior, getting drinks, mingling etc. Meanwhile Major follows Foster to the barbecue pit. Benjamin picks up the cooler and follows them. Major puts on his cooking apron, and brandishes his long barbecue spatula.)

MAJOR: *(taking his duty of cooking the meat very seriously)*
Well, I'm ready to get cooking!

(Across stage, Darla and Jane enter noisily, also carrying dishes. Benjamin immediately takes notice of Jane. His eyes don't leave her as he walks partway across the yard as if drawn toward Jane in a daydream. He stops short, though, coming to his senses, trying to contain his amorous feelings and instead act nonchalant.

Major nudges Foster to direct his attention to Benjamin. The men continue working. Darla sees Benjamin in the middle of the yard, walks toward him, glancing over her shoulder back towards Jane and then gives a friendly nod toward Benjamin. She watches, amused, from her place as Benjamin continues his furtive attention to Jane. Jane, clueless, admires the festive lights and walks right past both of them).

DARLA: *(smiling, as she passes Benjamin)*
Well look at you, Benjamin.

(Benjamin dramatically tries to look more manly)

JANE: *(lights up when she sees Heidi)*
Heidi! I couldn't believe it when Major announced to us that you would be hosting the picnic this year! How come you didn't tell me? I'm your best friend!

DARLA:
Yeah, what gives?

JANE:
It's so unlike you, Heidi.

HEIDI:

I don't know, I just . . . I guess I just wanted to do something nice, something surprising, something . . . different.

DARLA: *(looking around the party, sighing)*

Where's a good man when you need one?

(Heidi and Jane look confused by the sudden switch of topic)

JANE:

A man? What are you talking about?

HEIDI: *(agreeing with Jane)*

Yeah.

DARLA:

Oh, I don't mean for you, Heidi. You have Foster. I mean for people like me and Jane. Right Jane?

JANE:

I thought you gave up on men.

DARLA:

I did for now, but let me tell you something, Jane, you have to always be on the lookout. If a good man does happen your way, you've got to be able to recognize him, or at least his potential. A girl never knows *where* Mister Right will show up. *(she gestures generously in the vicinity of where Benjamin and other men are gathered)*

JANE: *(Jane turns to follow, but looks at the sky instead, dreamily, missing what's right in front of her)*

Oh, I'd recognize if a man happened my way, believe you me.

DARLA: *(rolling her eyes, under her breath and walking toward a picnic table to get a drink)*

Don't be too sure, sweetie.

(at the barbeque pit):

MAJOR: *(to Foster as they continue tending the meat and watch Benjamin as he watches Jane)*

Look at him. *(gesturing toward Benjamin)*. Poor kid. He has it bad, huh?

FOSTER: *(looks at Benjamin)*

Yeah. Another one bites the dust.

MAJOR:

You and Heidi have been married for what? Twenty years?

FOSTER:

Something like that.

MAJOR:

Quite a feat. What's your secret?

FOSTER:

No secret. We just stay together.

MAJOR: *(flipping burgers)*

Ah, it can't be as easy as all that. I was married once. I know. If you don't take care of them, they won't take care of you. (*directly*) So how do you keep the spark alive?

FOSTER:

Spark? (*Foster frowns*). I don't really think about it like that . . . (*uncomfortable with the conversation*).

Um. Excuse me. I gotta check on something.

(*Foster hands a spatula to Major and walks off stage*)

DARLA: (*indicating Spivey's house next door*)

So, Heidi, is *he* coming?

(*The surrounding crowd turn curious attention toward Spivey's house. A couple of men approach Benjamin off to the side and offer him a cigar. They move toward the general buzz of curiosity about the house next door. Benjamin lights his cigar and starts puffing.*)

JANE:

Oh my gosh! Please tell me he is. Did you ask him? I'm dying to see him.

(*The cigar—or Jane's remark—catches Benjamin off guard and he coughs dramatically, but tries to regain his manliness and composure. He and the other two men step forward and listen to the conversation. They take negative note of the special, unsolicited reaction the artist next door gets from the women. Led by Benjamin, the three men walk toward Spivey's house, privately assessing the outside of his house and the situation.*)

DARLA:

We all are.

(*The crowd agrees, and the women cast furtive glances toward Spivey's house.*)

HEIDI:

Oh, well, Mr. Spivey is very shy . . .

BENJAMIN: (*talking to the other guys*)

What's so great about him anyway?

What's he got that we ain't got?

(*The guys grumble their agreement*)

I mean, what are we? Chopped liver?

(*At the same time a couple of pickle workers are looking over the condiment table and appear to be troubled by something. A problem is brewing and they discuss it silently, rather secretly, stealthily bringing an issue to the attention of a number of other nearby pickle packers. One of the pickle packers approaches Heidi and whispers in her ear.*)

HEIDI: (*alarmed*)

What? Are you sure?

(*The pickle packer nods and pulls Heidi toward the table*)

HEIDI: (*examines the table where the other concerned picnickers have assembled*)

Nowhere? Not one?

(*The pickle packers in the know shake their heads in dismay*)

Not a gherkin?

Not a chip?

(*all who are aware of the situation are concerned*)

HEIDI:

How could this be?

I thought . . . (*looking from one person to another*) . . . surely you . . .

(*People nearby begin looking at each other questioningly*).

Didn't you . . . ?

(*Heidi begins questioning each one of her guests, who nod no, shaking their shoulders, raising their hands in dismay*).

(*Major, aware that something is amiss, hands off his spatula to an approaching Benjamin, makes his way over to the crowd, and inserts himself in the center*)

MAJOR:

It won't be long now, folks!

HEIDI:

Major . . . I . . . we have a problem.

MAJOR: (*soothingly*)

Oh, there can be no true problems today, Heidi! Why it's a beautiful day. The sun is shining! The birds are singing, what can possibly go wrong at our 3rd annual Pickle Packers Picnic?

HEIDI: (*directly*)

We have no pickles.

MAJOR:

(*laughing*) Preposterous! (*Instantly alarmed*) What?

HEIDI: (*distraught*)

It's true.

MAJOR:

How can this be? We are a pickle packing professionals! This is a travesty if ever a travesty there was. We can't have a proper picnic without pickles!

HEIDI: (*trying to calm him*)

It's all right, Major. I'll just have Foster go and get some right away (*turns to find Foster*) . . . and everything will be . . . (*she is perplexed by his absence*).

Foster?

(*She moves around the yard, looking for him, becoming increasingly irritated at his absence*). It figures he would disappear right now. (*She stomps toward the house*). Right when I need him the most. (*Heidi goes into the house, looks in the kitchen, then goes through the door to search the inner portion of the house*).

MAJOR: (*continuing to himself in disbelief*)

Not a gerkin?

Not a relish? (*looks to the crowd, who shakes their heads, sadly and ashamedly*)

This is hellish!

MAJOR: (*marching back to the barbecue pit*)

Benjamin! Here! Hurry, man! We have a situation.

BENJAMIN: (*confused*)

A situation?

MAJOR: (*Major digs into his pocket, pulls out the keys to the pickle plant and hands them to Benjamin*).

It's up to you, young man. Take these keys and go to Pipers right away.

(Benjamin looks at the keys and then looks around, trying to figure out what the problem is)

Listen, man! This is an emergency!

(Benjamin snaps to attention)

Look in Production Locker number E—that's E for emergency! There you will find a perfectly packed assortment of our finest products, ready to serve at a moments notice. I'll stall as long as I can, but in approximately 17 minutes those brats and burgers are going to be piping hot and ready to eat, and, darn it, our pickles have got to be there!

(Realizing he has an opportunity to give a company pep talk, he turns to the crowd and rallies).

Pipers Pickles will never let you down!

(The crowd cheers enthusiastically. Major takes Benjamin by the shoulders and leads him out)

Take some help, young man. This is not an opportunity to waste.

BENJAMIN:

Help?

MAJOR:

Yes, son. Someone who can get the job done.

(Benjamin begins walking toward the other men when he sees Jane, who is in the middle of a conversation. He stops abruptly, looking from the men to Jane, realizing his opportunity, indeed. He summons his courage in the face of the emergency and approaches her).

BENJAMIN: *(smoothing hair and the front of his shirt)*

Hello, Jane.

JANE: *(saying something to the group as Benjamin approaches)*

. . . well, I simply I wasn't aware . . .

(She turns at Benjamin's voice, and when she sees him all dressed up, it's as if she were seeing him for the first time. She steps away from the group and smiles)

Well, hi Benjamin.

BENJAMIN:

I don't know if you are aware of this, but we're in the middle of a crisis.

JANE: *(looking concerned, but also suddenly not unable to look away from Benjamin)*

Oh, yes, I've heard. It's quite serious.

BENJAMIN: *(nods to great seriousness)*

Well, I'm the man to solve it, and I . . . well, I can't do it alone . . . and I need someone . . . I need . . .

JANE: *(giving him her full attention)*

Yes? You need what, Benjamin?

BENJAMIN:

I need you!

JANE: *(surprised)*

Me!

BENJAMIN: *(blurting)*

Yes. There's no one else.

JANE:

What for?

BENJAMIN:

Well, isn't it obvious?

JANE:

Well, something is becoming obvious, but I'm not sure what.

BENJAMIN:

I'd like for you to go with me . . .

JANE: (*gasps, astonished*)

Go with you?

BENJAMIN:

Yes. You and I can make the whole world spin right again if we go get the pickles. (*Benjamin holds out his hand meaningfully*). Are you in?

JANE: (*looking deeply into his eyes, smiles and takes his hand*)

I'm in.

(*They exit*)

(*Darla and Major are at the barbecue pit. Picnickers are picnicking. Wilmertong walks in the yard from Spivey's side. He is carrying an ice bucket with a bottle of champagne. He is instantly enthralled by the festivities. Heidi walks back out of the house at this same time. They see each other from across the yard and Heidi makes her way over.*)

WHITLEY: (*bows in greeting*)

Heidi-ho! My goodness what is this merriment? It looks marvelous.

HEIDI: (*looking at the champagne, curious*)

Oh, yes. It's Pipers 3rd Annual Pickle Packing Picnic.

WHITLEY:

How fortunate—as always. Perfect, in fact.

HEIDI:

Perfect?

WHITLEY:

Why yes! (*He hefts the champagne bucket*). Mr. Spivey has called me over to see the unveiling of his new piece! It's a celebration all around!

HEIDI: (*eyes growing wide, she sucks in her breath*)

He's unveiling his piece today?

WHITLEY:

That's right.

HEIDI:

You mean he's finished?

WHITLEY:

I do, indeed.

Dear Heidi, can I steal you away for a moment?

(He reaches out a free arm and gallantly offers it. Heidi takes it and he leads her to Mr. Spivey's house. The marmalade cat is aware of them moving toward the house and follows them up the porch. The lights go on in Mr. Spivey's house. The cat darts through their legs, through the door, and tears through the house, disappearing off stage. The lights dim on the party outside. Whitley sets the bucket down next to three champagne flutes on the table. There is also one of Heidi's masks. Whitley motions for Heidi to sit down.

Heidi looks around. Spivey's worktable is clean and the room is very tidy.)

WHITLEY: *(opening the bottle)*

While we're waiting for Spivey, won't you join me? We'll have a celebratory toast together. A toast to accomplishment!

HEIDI:

Well how nice!

WHITLEY: *(pouring champagne into two flutes, notices the mask)*

Why, you haven't put on your mask. Have your allergies cleared up?

HEIDI:

Oh, no. Not really. I only suffer when the cat is actually in the room . . . which is too bad. *(dreamily)* It's such a lovely cat. *(She comes back to reality)*. It's probably in the basement with Mr. Spivey. If he comes up, I'll know. I'll start sneezing immediately and have to put it on.

(She takes the flute)

Thank you

WHITLEY: *(sitting beside her)*

No, Heidi, thank you. *(He raises a glass to her)*. You've been marvelous to Mr. Spivey. Your work has simply been stunning, and I thank you for everything. *(They clink glasses. He takes a drink and then Heidi, feeling special, follows)*

WHITLEY: *(leaning forward)*

So, Heidi, have you seen the finished piece yet?

HEIDI:

No. Not finished. He took it downstairs last week and was very clear that I was not go into the basement.

WHITLEY: *(nodding)*

Yes, that's his way. When he's close to finished he becomes quite secretive. Personally, I enjoy all the covert fanfare. Makes it more of an extravaganza extraordinaire. Adds excitement. Adds flair. *(He leans in again)*.

Tell me, Heidi. Do you know what it is?

HEIDI:

I think so.

WHITLEY:

Do tell.

HEIDI:

I thought you wanted to be surprised.

WHITLEY:

Dear Heidi, surprises come in all shapes and sizes. I'd never dream of putting limits on surprise. Knowing anything simply raises the possibilities. Surprise awaits. That's always the truth.

HEIDI:

Well, I think—no—I know: it's a cat.

WHITLEY: (*intrigued*)

A cat! How interesting. How charming. Spivey has never made an animal before!

HEIDI:

It's not an ordinary cat.

WHITLEY:

Spivey rarely does anything ordinary.

HEIDI:

It's mechanical.

WHITLEY:

Mechanical, you say? Well, that is unusual.

HEIDI: (*struggling*)

Yes. Well, it's hard to explain. I mean it's clay, but it looks mechanical, like it's supposed to be metal and bolts, and it has wheels instead of feet and . . .

WHITLEY:

Wheels instead of feet? How interesting.

HEIDI: (*puts her champagne flute down*).

Mr. Wilmertong . . .

WHITLEY: (*puts his flute down as well*)

Darling Heidi, must you call me Mr. Wilmertong after all this time? Am I not familiar enough for you to use my given name? Whitley, dear. Please, call me Whitley.

HEIDI:

I'm sorry. (*She forces herself to use his first name*) Whitley. (*Wilmertong pats her hand encouragingly, and Heidi begins her sentence again*). Whitley, do you believe dreams can come true?

WHITLEY: (*seriously*)

I do.

HEIDI:

No. I mean, real dreams. Like the sleeping kind of dreams.

WHITLEY:

The sleeping kind? Give me an example.

HEIDI:

I know this will sound crazy, but early on, before Mr. Spivey was working, I fell asleep on this very couch, and I had this dream about a cat . . .

WHITLEY:

A cat?

HEIDI:

A mechanical cat (*remembers the dream*) and it was odd, but it was also beautiful. It was a cat, but it wasn't ordinary, and it didn't make me sneeze, and it didn't make my eyes water. It wasn't a perfect cat, but it was a perfect cat for me—because of my allergies. You see?

WHITLEY:

I do. Please, go on.

HEIDI:

And when I woke, Mr. Spivey was working. And it was like I knew exactly what he was going to make. Somehow, I knew in my heart that Mr. Spivey was going to make the cat of my dreams. And he did!

WHITLEY:

You mean to say that Mr. Spivey has made your dreams come true?

HEIDI:

Yes! Well, no! Not exactly. But it's close. In fact, it's almost exactly right. I've never felt so . . . understood or appreciated before in all my life.

WHITLEY:

Well, dear girl, that's saying something. But almost perfect? How could it be more perfect?

HEIDI:

Well, (*thinking*) if it truly were a mechanical cat—that would be perfect.
(*The lights on the party outside slowly begin to rise*)

WHITLEY:

Truly mechanical? How amusing you are, Heidi-ho. How can art truly be anything? Art only represents the truth; it can't become the truth itself.

(*Foster enters, pulling a large covered cart into the yard. He leaves it, looks and asks around for Heidi. All the while the lights grow brighter. Someone points toward Spivey's house.*)

HEIDI:

Then where does truth come from?

WHITLEY:

Why, from life.

HEIDI: (*dejected*)

That's what I thought.

(*Foster is at the door and bangs on it, making Heidi and Whitley jump. Heidi stands. From outside the door we hear Foster's voice.*)

FOSTER:

Heidi! (*he bangs*)

HEIDI:

Oh dear. (*She begins walking toward the door but turns back to Whitley.*)

WHITLEY: (*looking at the audience*)

Why, who could it be?

HEIDI:

It's my husband.

WHITLEY:

Your husband! How marvelous!

HEIDI:

Marvelous? *(She speaks to Foster through the door).* Please go away, Foster. I can't talk to you right now.

FOSTER:

Heidi, it's important.

WHITLEY: *(seems surprised by Heidi's reaction).*

Why, dear girl, this is your husband, is it not? Why would you not open the door for him?
(Now Heidi is the one who seems surprised)

HEIDI:

I can't let him in here! He would never understand this.

WHITLEY:

Understand what?

HEIDI: *(motions around her)*

This. Here. Me. All of it. Any of it. He doesn't understand.

FOSTER:

Heidi! I know you can hear me.

WHITLEY:

Doesn't understand? Why how could this be? He is your husband. You are his wife. You are soul mates. Does he not hold your being in the palm of his hand? Do you not draw every breath for him and him alone?

HEIDI:

I thought so once—

WHITLEY:

I see . . .

FOSTER:

Come on, Heidi. Open up.

(Whitley stands, walks to the door and opens it, much to Heidi's shock and dismay. Foster, ready to pound on the door again, falls inward, nearly into Whitley's arms).

I say, Mr. Hardly, you hardly need to be pounding like that upon this innocent door. I daresay it's ever done anything to you. Please, come in. You're right on time.

(Foster stands up and tries to collect himself, confused at suddenly being welcomed into the house he's been shut away from for so long. He takes a good look around and a long look at Heidi who is making sure that Whitley stands between them).

FOSTER:

On time for what?

WHITLEY:

Why, the unveiling, of course. Mr. Spivey is showing us his finished piece today.

FOSTER:

Oh, yeah? Well, who cares? *(He waves his hand dismissively)*

WHITLEY:

I would think that you would care, Mr. Hardly, seeing as Mr. Spivey's talent has had such a monumental impact on your life. *(Whitley moves away from Foster, retrieves his champagne and takes a sip)* Consider, after all, your Pristine Crestline 1780 25 horse power outboard fishing boat and trailer. *(He sits down)*

FOSTER: *(scowls, but then remembers why he's there. He turns to Heidi)*

Heidi, I need to talk to you.

(There is a sound of feet climbing stairs. Whitley and Heidi both turn toward the sound. The cat suddenly appears, entering the room with stylish nonchalance).

HEIDI:

Mr. Spivey's coming!

(A spotlight appears near the doorway where Spivey will enter. The cat walks to Whitley, who scratches it between the ears affectionately, and then heads toward Heidi, who is charmed, as usual, by the sight of him. The cat rubs against Heidi's leg, and as she begins to reach down, she begins to sneeze. She grabs the mask from the table and puts it up to her face, but it's too late. She is caught in sneeze and must lift the mask long enough to let the sneeze out. The cat is not affected by her sneezing and continues to walk around the room, inspecting people and things as cats do, lazily and in its own time and way)

FOSTER: *(ignoring the cat, trying to get Heidi's attention)*

Heidi, I mean it. I got something to say.

(Heidi holds her finger up to Foster, asking for one minute, and sneezes three more times).

FOSTER: *(ignores her request for time and speaks over the sneezing)*

I know I haven't been the best husband in the world. *(She sneezes)*. I know I have to change. *(She sneezes)*. And I been thinking about what you said, about me laughing at your dreams, and I don't. I mean I did, but I don't. I mean I won't anymore. *(She sneezes.)* And if you want a cat, you should have a cat. You deserve a cat. *(She sneezes)*.

(Heidi is trying to listen to him, is trying to react, but keeps getting distracted by the sneezing so that the gravity of what Foster is saying is somewhat lost. Foster is beginning to get frustrated by her lack of reaction. Whitley seems to be enjoying the entire scene before him with a calm sense of dignity and understanding. He interacts with the cat whenever the cat comes near him, but is not inattentive, and in fact amused, by the scene before him).

FOSTER: *(Throws up his hands)*

Oh. I just . . . *(He walks out the front door and stomps across the yard to his cart. The marmalade cat follows him out the door. Heidi tries to follow, but she is upon another round of sneezing, which stops her in her tracks.*

Mr. Spivey walks into the waiting spotlight. All attention in the room goes to him. He is dressed in the very way he was in Heidi's dream. He is groomed, alert, and pleased. He carries the covered piece of art in his hands. Heidi sneezes two more times and puts her mask firmly on her face).

WHITLEY: *(getting an idea)*

Herman, dear man! *(walks to Spivey)* Let's unveil it in the yard! After all, these quaint and delightful people have made sacrifices for this piece, living without their dear Heidi *(gestures to Heidi, who blushes.)* I'm sure they'll appreciate the monumental outcome of this one-of-a-kind experience.

SPIVEY: *(amenable)*

All right.

(Heidi and Wilmertong stay on the porch as Spivey goes into the yard among a curious and gathering crowd. Spivey places his covered art piece on a center table.)

WHITLEY: *(announcing from the porch)*

Ladies and gentlemen, I present Mr. Herman Spivey and his latest piece de resistance!

(Spivey nods to Wilmertong, bows to Heidi who stands attentive, though she periodically scans the yard for Foster. Spivey turns and smiles proudly at the crowd. Spivey steps to the piece of art, removes the cover, and bows. The crowd reacts to the art as crowds tend to do—gasps, oohs and ahhs, titters, shrugs, questioning glances etc. An emphatic “meow” of appreciation from within the crowd makes everyone laugh.)

WHITLEY:

Remarkable.

HEIDI: *(wistfully, emotionally)*

It's beautiful.

(Suddenly, a clanking noise draws attention from Heidi's side of the yard. Foster is pulling his covered cart. The marmalade cat is close beside him, curious about the cloth and what's beneath it.)

FOSTER: *(looking to the porch where Heidi stands)*

Heidi . . . For you.

HEIDI:

For me? From you?

WHITLEY:

A gift for you, Heidi!

(Foster nods, humbly, motioning for her to come to him. Spivey and Wilmertong follow her. As the crowd separates to let her through, Foster removes the cover, revealing the very same mechanical cat of Heidi's dream. Everyone gasps. In a moment of stunned silence, Heidi, Whitley, and Mr. Spivey, walk around the mechanical cat, checking it out, taking it in, appreciating its splendor. The real cat, however, arches its back in alarm and backs away with a hiss, staring at the mechanical cat with great distrust.)

HEIDI:

Oh my gosh! It's the cat of my dreams!

WHITLEY:

It's extraordinary! But the cat of your dreams, Heidi? I thought Mr. Spivey's cat was the cat of your dreams.

(Heidi looks toward Mr. Spivey's piece of art)

HEIDI: *(not without a bit of apology)*

I thought so too . . . and in a way, I'm sure it is, *(she looks at Mr. Spivey, who nods his understanding)*, but it isn't quite . . .

(She turns back to Foster's mechanical cat. The real cat, startled by everyone's approach, hides behind Spivey's legs for a moment, but then re-approaches the mechanical cat becoming increasingly brave).

This cat is *exactly* the cat of my dreams *(overwhelmed)*.

MR. SPIVEY: *(admiring Foster's cat appreciatively)*

It is beautiful.

MARMALADE CAT:

Meow.

HEIDI: *(emotionally)*

How is any of this possible? *(She looks at Foster)* Is this really possible?

WHITLEY:

Dear girl, don't you know by now? Anything is possible.

FOSTER: *(turns the cat around to reveal an on/off button on the its back.)*

Try it.

(Hesitantly, Heidi pushes the button. The mechanical cat comes to life and seems to be taking in its surroundings. It walks around the room robotically, stopping at each person and sort of scanning them or taking them in. The real cat, meanwhile, follows the cat, both alarmed and captivated. It bats at the mechanical cat playfully, though the mechanical cat doesn't notice. The real cat tries to sort of mimic the mechanical cat in its own way. Whitley is absolutely captivated by this mechanical cat and is doing all he can to respect their moment, though he, too, tries to inspect the mechanical cat.)

WHITLEY:

My God, man. This is a remarkable piece of work. *(We can see Whitley is getting some kind of idea)*

(The mechanical cat stops at Heidi. Heidi begins to reach out her hand, but then pulls it back, holding it in amazement, wonder, and awe. She smiles at the cat, twirls once, and curtsies. The cat lifts its front paw and licks it, mechanically. Everyone laughs, delighted.)

As Heidi fawns over the cat, Jane and Benjamin enter. The chorus from "He's Aware of Me" begins to swell in the background. Benjamin carries a box marked "Emergency Pickle Pack." He is grinning ear to ear with bright red kiss mark on his cheek. The crowd sees them, and gives a cheer—for pickles, it is supposed, though perhaps it is for Benjamin and Jane's newfound mutual awareness. Up and At 'Em begins to play as picnickers approach and help unpack the pickles, laughing, dancing, goofing off and singing at the appropriate time)

[REPRISE MUSIC-UP AND AT 'EM]

CHORUS

We pick
We sort
We move
We pickle

MAJOR:

If you want security, and aspire to work for me

CHORUS:

He carefully hires and oversees

EVERYONE:

This pickle packing industry!

(Great laughter and merriment all around—around Major at the barbecue, around Foster and Heidi and the cats, around Benjamin and Jane . . . as the music floats through, it softens, and slows. The lights dim as “Dreamer Reprise” begins. Spivey moves to centerstage in spotlight. A flourish of dream smoke covers the stage, everyone moves in slow, quiet motions).

[REPRISE-DREAMER]

SPIVEY: *(sings)*

Something as simple as . . . *(motions toward the stage)*
It’s not so hard
There is a way

(Whitley gathers Heidi and Foster and brings them to center light with Spivey. They stand there a moment. Appreciative. As the dream smoke clears, Foster and Heidi turn to each other. Spivey and Whitley step out of the spotlight. Foster and Heidi stand very close. Foster gently removes the mask that hangs around Heidi’s neck and puts his arm around her waist. The real cat has, meanwhile been cozying up to the mechanical cat and a dim light shines on them, though the mechanical cat remains just that-mechanical). Heidi and Foster sway back and forth, looking into each others eyes).

[REPRISE-YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL]

HEIDI:

You are beautiful
You are my dream come true
What I wouldn’t do for you
My love
You are beautiful
You are a beaming shaft of starlight
Shining in a darkened sky
Oh my love
If I could live a life of dreams
I would live it with you

[REPRISE-IMAGINE THAT]

FOSTER:

I want to make your dreams come true
Just like I used to do
When we were young and open
And I looked in your eyes
I saw someone special
So it’s not a surprise
I fell for you
I fell for you
And now I know what I must do
Take my hand, and walk with me

FOSTER AND HEIDI:

(sing) You and I can be . . . *(say)* happy

Heidi and Foster, holding hands look at each other earnestly.

HEIDI & FOSTER (*sing*):
Imagine that.

(They kiss, the stage goes black).

THE END