

# Queerly Speaking

By Lewis Routh

## Scene: On a stage in New Orleans

The stage is set with minimal props to represent a slave quarter apartment in New Orleans. There are shutters dead hung from the ceiling, an iron bed, a vanity/makeup table, and a chair. On the vanity are many papers (the poems), a dictionary, the book *7 Habits*, makeup, cigarettes, an ashtray and a lighter.

### ACTOR

*(Entering onto the stage, he is carrying a pack of cigarettes and a lighter, he stops in his tracks, he appears surprised to see the people.)*

Who opened the curtain?

### TECH

It was never closed.

### ACTOR

But I'm still setting props.

### TECH

Yeah, I can see that. The cigarettes and lighter go on the table.

### ACTOR

I know. I always put them there before the show starts.

### TECH

It's already started. It's Showtime!

### ACTOR

I don't have a watch. I didn't hear the call to places.

### TECH

Places.

### ACTOR

*(Actor addresses the audience.)*

I apologize to those of you who paid good money to see a new play. I'm not making excuses; but I'm a very good actor, and I'm used to a much more professional approach to theatre. There is no stage manager, for one. How can you have a production without a stage manager? You can't leave the whole show in the hands of some idiot "techno geek" and expect an actor to give an adequate

—

*(The lights go out. A beat)*

### TECH

I'm not a "techno geek" I'm a Lighting Technician.

**ACTOR**

*(Actor speaks in the dark.)*

I apologize to all Lighting Technician's everywhere, who so eloquently and sensitively illuminate the productions and performances in New Orleans.

*(The lights return)*

I thank you. Theatre is a communal art form. It takes everyone working together to make it art.

**TECH**

Do want anything? I'm going to the bar for another beer.

**ACTOR**

You can't just walk-out.

**TECH**

I'm not leaving the building, I'm just going to the bar for a beer.

**ACTOR**

This isn't dress rehearsal, you know?

**TECH**

I know — duh — dress rehearsal was last night — do you want anything?

**ACTOR**

Get me a *Bud Light*.

*(Actor addresses the audience)*

Would you all like anything since he's going?

**TECH**

Fuck that, I'm a Lighting Technician, not a waiter.

*The audience and the Actor watch as the lighting technician exits the room.  
Actor addresses the audience.)*

**ACTOR**

I have never had this kind of problem before. Usually the technical staff is brilliant — so knowledgeable — on the "cutting edge" of lighting equipment — not like this moron.

*(Lights go out, SOUND CUE: computer generated voice "Auto-pilot has been engaged due to a slanderous attack on the credibility or intelligence level of the Lighting Technician. To reactivate, please apologize" A beat — "and make me believe it." Actor speaks in the dark)*

The technical staff is brilliant — so knowledgeable — on the "cutting edge" of lighting equipment.

*(Waits for the lights to return. Actor, still in the dark.)*

No, I mean it. I've never heard of an "Auto-pilot" before; it takes a real genius to create something like that.

*(Lights return to normal.)*

Thank you. Now, let me —

*(SOUND CUE: "The lights have returned to the previous settings.")*

Now, let me —

*(SOUND CUE: "If you require the lights to change, you must first call a Lighting Technician.")*

No, they're fine. Now, let me —

*(SOUND CUE: "1-800-LITE-ME-UP." Actor waits for any additional information from the Auto pilot, speaks to audience.)*

Now, let me begin again.

*(Actor exits and re-enters )*

Welcome to my home — my apartment — my apartment in the French Quarter.

*(He waits for the applause that he hoped would come. Is disappointed by the response; becomes obviously nervous again.)*

Okay, I know, this is really a stage — a set on a stage — a few props to make you visualize an apartment in New Orleans — to be more specific, a slave quarter apartment. It has all the appropriate props to make you believe you're looking at a slave quarter apartment.

*(Crossing to each as he speaks)*

See? There's some shutters — very New Orleans — very French Quarter — except these are painted to look old. I paint to look young myself —

*(A nervous laugh, then suddenly realizes he may have said something more than he intended.)*

But these shutters — this is a *faux finish* — *Faux* — false — Not real — like me.

*(Another nervous laugh. Crosses to the bed)*

And see here's an old iron [wicker, whatever] bed — just the sort of thing one would have in an apartment in the French Quarter — unless they're masculine. If they're masculine — the bed is different — If they're masculine the bed is always wood — unless they're into leather — then it's some Naugahyde knock-off that cleans easy. But my bed isn't wood — it's iron — which is just as sturdy as wood but prettier. And here's my vanity. You know, I have always hated that word, "vanity." This is where I put on my make-up to go out — to some special function where I would need to wear make up — not to *Robert's* or anything. I put on makeup for drag shows, — and plays and other non-paying gigs that make me happy. So, this is not my "vanity," it's my make-up table. This is also where I do a bit of writing.

*(wistful)*

To leave a little legacy that proves I was here — something besides a dirty sheet for someone to remember me by. I write poetry — well I used to — mostly when I was young and didn't know any better — and now I write and perform plays — when I'm not busy waiting tables. No matter how perfect we built this stage set, it would still be a set and we could never ever make you forget you're watching a play, so — fuck, why bother?

*(Instantly regrets saying, "fuck")*

I am so sorry I used the "F-word" just now. This isn't one of those "artsy-fartsy plays" where it's filled with a slew of foul language to make it seem "real." It just slipped out 'cause I'm — an actor, on this stage, with a minimum budget set and this requires you to use your imaginations. I don't mean that in a bad way. It's

good that you get to use your imaginations. The way I look at it — using your imaginations is your contribution to making this play an “art form.” Let’s face it, you can imagine a much better set than we could actually build. By imagining a New Orleans slave quarter apartment, you’re making this play Art. We just put a couple of props out here, to assist you in imagining an apartment in the French Quarter. So, use your imaginations and pretend that this is one of those fabulous slave-quarter apartments in New Orleans. Lots of exposed brick, no insulation; but it’s beautiful. With a little Barbie-doll sized stove and a ‘fridge under the counter and a sink just large enough to hold a one-person meal’s worth of *Fiestaware*.

*(Caught .You might as well confess.)*

*Fiestaware.*

*(Resigning himself to the inevitable.)*

I’m gay. *Fiestaware* is a dead give away, you know? I mean, even a straight man can perform in drag; but *Fiestaware*?

#### **TECH**

*(Lighting Technician enters, bringing cocktail to Actor)*

Here’s your drink.

#### **ACTOR**

*(Actor takes drink and downs it, as Lighting Technician goes to booth.)*

So, imagine, if you will, this is one of those fabulous slave quarter apartments in the French Quarter where a queen lives. A queen who puts on make-up to go — out — at a make-up table — not a vanity — because this queen is stylish; not vain.

*(Thinking he’s screwing it up, decides to have another cigarette)*

How can I perform a play about myself that doesn’t appear vain? That’s rhetorical, I’m not really wanting an answer. This is art — and art doesn’t lower itself to audience participation.

*(Rolls his eyes.)*

Let’s begin anew; shall we?

*(Picks up the framed photo.)*

I was born into a heterosexual environment. I had two parents — both straight — two brothers and one sister — also straight. I am unlike most gay people because my family still talks to me. When I came out to my folks they weren’t in the least surprised — or upset. They had lots of gay friends. They were more concerned that I would be unhappy. In fact, they named me for two of their best friends, a husband and wife — both of them gay — who had married each other to hide their sexuality. I think that’s really cool — I have a fairy god mother; for real! I have made it my goal to prove to Mom and Dad that I can be happy. Even when I’m not, I try to appear that I am — so they won’t worry.

*(Thinks he’s not entertaining.)*

I am so sorry. Let me start over — I know there’s something in my life that you’ll find interesting.

*(Tries to think of what to say now. Sees the book 7 HABITS laying on the vanity)*

Have you read this book? Steven Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* says that you should “begin with the end in mind.”

*(Proud of this, he surveys the audience as if it may take a moment for them to comprehend this)*

“Begin with the end in mind.” Ooo. That sounds nasty! I’m certain there are many of you out there wondering how this will end — or if not how — when. I don’t really know what Steven Covey meant when he said, “Begin with the end in mind,” but it sounded like an excellent plan at the time. I don’t read self-help books. A man from Iowa with the Professional Speakers Bureau left this here. I am certain there are many self-help books that I could benefit from — this one in particular seems to be popular with businessmen from the Midwest who erroneously thought — when you come to New Orleans for a convention — you should bring along a book. Some of these Midwestern men who I’ve had the occasion to meet — at least the conventioners with day-runners — most of them were *7 Habits* fans. One of these conventioners — I’ll call him Fred — found his way into the French Quarter — to my favorite watering-hole — Fred started-up a lively conversation, which I was compelled to show interest in — since Fred was buying — and Fred thought it was necessary to explain the *7 Habits* to me as if he alone held the key to understanding. I don’t remember Fred’s real name — but a friend of mine, who saw us together, said we looked like Fred and Ethel Mertz. Which, despite Fred’s oratory, was the highlight of my evening. The next morning, in his haste to depart, Fred forgot his book. I almost got all dolled-up in drag to go to the Hyatt and return it, instead, I tried to read it. I found it very intriguing.

*(On his way to setting the book on the vanity, find a little headline and read.)*

I think I’ll wait for the movie. After reading about a third of it, I was more screwed-up than when I started. At least before I started reading the book, I had never encountered a “Paradigm.” In fact the moment I saw the word “Paradigm” I thought to myself, “That’s a great word — a PAIR-A-DIG-EM” Then I looked it up in my *Funk and Wagnall’s*.

*(Looks it up in his dictionary on the vanity; reads aloud)*

“Paradigm — A set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that constitutes a way of viewing reality for the community that shares them, especially in an intellectual discipline.” Well, that’s me; isn’t it? I mean after all I’m an actor — I’m a walking paradigm. A person who — onstage — can show you — yourselves.

*(Smiles, as if this is the answer. The smile fades.)*

Provided of course that you are a homosexual living in a slave quarter apartment in New Orleans with a sink full *Fiestaware* and a habit of picking up conventioners. Ever since I read that book — *The 7 Habits* — I started seeing paradigms everywhere. You know, that’s the problem with self-help books, they make you aware of stuff you never knew before. Paradigms were everywhere.

Like those people that drive around with their music so loud you can hear them three blocks away. Does anybody really like that? Doesn't everybody find that annoying? If you find those loud-speaker-filled cars annoying then clap.

*(Encourage the audience to clap.)*

A Tinkebell LIVES! So, if everybody finds those "boomer cars" annoying, then why are there so many of them? That's a paradigm. Well, to me it's a paradigm. To you it's just a bunch of assholes who crave attention. I always want to shout at them, "Turn your fucking music down, you insensitive moron!" But I never do. And that's a paradigm, too. No one ever does. We just let them go around fucking up our tranquility. I remember my father saying, when he heard Rock-N-Roll for the first time, "That's not music; that's noise," and I thought, "What an dork." Now, I find myself thinking the same thing about those morons with their "boomer cars" and it makes me even angrier at them.

*(Whine)*

Those assholes are turning me into my father!

*(Lights another cigarette.)*

I'm sorry. I don't know how I got into all that. I had no intention of talking about loud music — or my father. And other things that piss me off. It's the beginning of a play that's always the hardest.

*(Hates the word "hardest." "Chastises himself.)*

Never use the word "hardest" in a play about a homosexual. They'll think it's a *double-entendre* and laugh at inappropriate places.

*(Starting over.)*

It's the beginning of a play that's always the most difficult. I really am trying to clean up my language. It's the beginning of a play that's the most difficult. When you're in a play, you get to be someone else and that's the easy part. You stride onto the stage and have some marvelous opening line.

*(He demonstrates by crossing to the wing, turns and strides to center stage, cigarette making circles and says — ala Bette Davis)*

"What a dump."

*(Instantly disappointed)*

Oh, I apologize for that. A queer doing Bette Davis impressions — that's original. Never seen that before have you? How unique! How brilliant! Let me get out my records and lip-sync *Stand By Your Man!* You know that's something else that really pisses me off. Drag queens who don't know the words to their songs. I mean, how can you not know the words to a song you've heard every Friday and Saturday night since you discovered they make dresses in your size? And then people line up to hand them tips. Well, I tell you what, I'll stand here for the next three minutes and pretend to forget my lines, if you suckers will come up here and give me a dollar. And that's a paradigm, too. We all do it; even though those bitches never will learn their words. Feel free to tip whenever the spirit moves you. I may be an artist; but I'm not above accepting cash.

*(Smiles and surveys the crowd)*

You know something else that pisses me off? I play a homosexual in this play, right? And no one is thinking, "How odd!" "How unusual." See, if this was a play

about a sadistic killer who cut-up his victims and saved the good parts in his freezer; none of you would think that I was a killer in real life — and if I invited you over after the play — which could happen to a select few — you wouldn't go run to my freezer to see if you recognize anybody — but, the minute I say I'm playing a homosexual, everybody's going, "Tell me something I don't know, Miss Thing." Well, just remember, honey, this is a play — and maybe I'm just an incredible actress!

*(Caught again)*

Actor. Fuck. Who am I kidding? They clocked me when I was a child in elementary school. In grade school they knew I was a queen, before I did. This was many years ago; when "playground teasing" wasn't a reason to load-up your UZI and take out a few insensitive bullies.

*(SOUND CUE: children's voices, "Queer." "Faggot!" "You big homo!" "You big fat sissy!")*

"Fat sissy" was the only one I really understood — and could relate to. I was fat. I was the only second grader who under-set the "zero-mark" on his bathroom scale. My mother gave me a bathroom scale for my seventh birthday. How thoughtful — and that picture of the hippo on the 'fridge really helped, too. Thanks. I was shy and introverted and it wasn't until I was in high school and actually found out what "queer" and "faggot" meant — that I realized those kids saw something in me that must have been extremely obvious — which I still find distressing. Boy, that's a paradigm! I mean, I don't think of myself as being "obvious."

*(Caught again.)*

Okay, maybe now I'm obvious; 'cause I've been practicing for a long time — but as a child — well, I wasn't thinking about "homosexuality" when I was seven! I didn't wear my mother's beaded gown to school for *Show-N-Tell*. I was just — timid — and prone to cry if I broke a nail. I didn't start thinking about boys — in a sexual way — until I was — well — at least eight — and I never wore make-up — except once in junior high school ...

*(He goes to put on the wig at the vanity.)*

...when they had a Halloween Party and I went as my homeroom teacher, Miss Beverly. God, she was beautiful. And so was I! Big red hair, full bosom, bright red lips and green eye shadow. The boys thought they'd tease me by saying, "Ooh, kiss me, Miss Beverly. Kiss me." And I had to feign reluctance; but deep down inside, I sure did want to kiss those boys. Especially Marvin Conroy — who I did eventually kiss — and then some — but that was many years later when I discovered the thrill of a Boy Scout Jamboree. They may not let homosexuals in the Boy Scouts any more; but when I was young — honey, if they weren't gay when they came in — they were when they came out.

*(Lost in the beautiful memory of that moment in time. Embarrassed, removes the wig.)*

I am certainly telling you more than I originally intended. Imagine this is a slave quarter apartment in the French Quarter in New Orleans and I'm the tired old ex-

Boy Scout who lives there. Perhaps, if I read some of my poetry, that might be a good way to begin. I haven't written anything since I was — younger.

*(Rummages through a drawer in the vanity)*

Oh, here's one. I wrote this about my apartment building that had been vandalized.

She sits, fading in the sun.

Her blemishes obvious in the light of day.

Her beauty stolen, stripped — gone.

Her dreams packed-up and moved away.

*(She surveys the crowd.)*

This really is about my apartment building. I came home one morning — I'd been out drinking with friends — and the sun came up early that day — I hate coming home when the sun is already up — and someone had stolen the "corbels" and the shutters off the front of the apartment house. I mean she wasn't much to look at before — but now. Let me read it again:

She sits, fading in the sun.

Her blemishes obvious in the light of day.

Her beauty stolen, stripped — gone.

Her dreams packed-up and moved away.

This poem isn't about me. The play is about me. This play. That's why it's so — difficult [I almost said "hard" again] That's why it's so difficult for me to begin. How do I tell you about myself? Who is this big queen on stage and what does she have to impart to you? I'm gay. But that's not my whole life — being gay isn't my passion! Being gay doesn't define who I am. What defines me? Being an actor is thrilling. As an actor, all I have to remember is my lines and to "speak queerly" — er, "clearly" — "Speak Clearly." — but being an actor doesn't define who I am. Neither does writing — neither poetry or plays — I'm a writer — I love to write — but it's not my passion; writing doesn't define who I am.

*(Suddenly realizes — quietly)*

Nothing defines who I am. Nothing. Now that's a paradigm. No, actually, that's a "paradigm shift!" A moment when your whole perspective changes and you see with renewed vision. I sure have come a long way to become nothing. Oh, I have a slew of friends who would just love to come to this play and tell me how fabulous I am in it — and then "dish me" behind my back.

*(Becoming his "dishy friends. Unflattering. With an evil, contemptible face.)*

Girl! Did you see her, she wore this big, red wig!

And I even have a small select few "fans" who will come, as long as I do drag at least once.

*(Becoming his "fan" friends. Flattering. With an admiring, in awe face.)*

Girl! Did you see her, she wore this big, red wig!

*(Alarmed)*

Oh, God. Oh, no! Please tell me doing drag doesn't define me. I mean, I love drag-queens; but I wouldn't want my next ex-husband to marry one. I'm just a little mind-fucked over the fact that nothing defines me. And I fucking meant to curse that time.

*(Calming down.)*

You know what I think? I think I've been on stage too God-damned long now to worry about how to begin this fucking play about me and my fucking life. I need a cigarette.

*(Crosses to the vanity, lights a cigarette, spots someone on the opposite side and crosses down stage right to the person.)*

Get me a cocktail. Get me a [tell someone what you want to drink]

*(Realizing they are not going to get you a drink.)*

Okay. Fine. Imagine that I'm much younger and you thought of buying me a drink without me having to ask for it; shall we? That's a good beginning. Let's all have a drink and imagine me much younger — prettier. The more you drink, the prettier I become. By closing time, I'm fucking beautiful!

*(Crosses to the vanity)*

Sometimes, you just can't ask an audience to imagine the impossible — so I'll add a little extra make-up and gel the lights with "follies pink" and dim them... a lot — and "MAGIC!" — she's beautiful.

*(Crosses to down right.)*

And while I'm waiting for my drink, let's imagine that I just performed this really fabulous opening number. A real 1940's Judy Garland MGM musical kind of thing! You know what I mean, one of those big production numbers that is so amazing, there is no way in hell it could ever be actually performed on a stage. With an invisible orchestra and chorus of hunky men in tuxedos [but no shirts] and I was in sequins and rhinestones and singing some fabulous song — *Rock-A-Bye Your Rock-A-Bye Baby*.

*(He belts out the finish with an amazingly clear, deliberate, impersonation of Judy Garland, "With a Dixie melody!")*

And you gave me a standing ovation and I was so happy because someone loved me — enough to show it — enough to stand up and be counted. Let's just pretend that that happened.

*(Resigned to reality.)*

Sometimes you just can't imagine everything — even in theatre. That's what makes this particular play so difficult. On stage I am somebody. Off stage I'm wondering, "Who am I?" And this play is about me — and everybody's looking at me going, "What the fuck?"

*(Searches and finds another poem — reads aloud)*

He smiled at me and bought me a drink,

I wanted to date he wanted to screw.

Am I leading him on when I see him and wink?

I want to be "Us" not just "me" not just "you."

*(Disgusted with the poem, wads up the poem and tosses it into a trash can — several feet away)*

Why couldn't I do that in school? [If you miss the trash can, say, "I couldn't do that in school either."] That's the whole problem with my life. I never "fit in." I never "belonged." In school I was too obviously a fag to "fit in." They kept me outside their circle; because I wasn't like them. When I finally embraced my homosexuality, I didn't fit into the gay world either! I wanted to date. I thought promiscuity made me cheap — a whore — and I didn't fit in. They called me "prick tease" — just because I refused to sleep with someone for the price of cocktail. Oh, I don't mean to imply that I never slept with someone on the first date. But I wanted more. To go to movies with someone; maybe dinner — at some romantic spot with a candle-lit table for two.

*(In this next section, we hear the tears in his voice.)*

I wanted to be courted. To have someone love me so much they wanted to wear me like a bracelet on their arm. To show me off to their friends — as if to say, "Look what I found! Look how happy I am!"

*(Sits, looks in the mirror of the vanity)*

And I wanted it to happen before I needed makeup to be pretty. Is love so distant — so out of reach for me? Look at me! I'm a prize! I'm funny. I'm talented. I'm intelligent. I'm a good conversationalist. I have wonderful anecdotes.

*(Sharing an anecdote which proves his intelligence and how funny he is.)*

Once this straight, girlfriend of mine and I were talking. It was one of those wonderfully engaging conversations about life and love and sharing — and she looks at me, all seriously and says, "You know you are really intelligent for a homosexual." No, I swear, she did! She immediately realized her *faux pax* and added, "Of course, I've never talked to anyone abnormal before." Abnormal! Me!

*(Satisfied with this example.)*

See how funny I am? So why doesn't some man snatch me right up and make me his — his what? Wife? Longtime companion? Better half? Oh, there's another paradigm — or maybe this is an epiphany. What homosexuals need is a way to express their relationship. I mean look at our choices: "Lover?" That sounds like some adulterous affair, "I'm his lover — for the weekend." "Longtime companion?" Please. That's what they call you in the obituaries. "Mister Nilla was survived by his sister, Selma and his longtime companion, Van." "Better half" implies one of you is less than the other — so that is completely out of the question, at least from my perspective. "Wife" is close; but then you're expected to look like June Cleaver. And I don't want a "husband" 'cause sometimes I like to be on top! Homosexuals need a word or phrase that defines this special relationship. And until we find that specific word — they'll never let us get married — legally. Maybe that's what really keeps us from the "sanctity of marriage," the word that completes the phrase, "I now pronounce you man and wife." I mean, "I now pronounce you man and man?" "Man and longtime companion?" "Man and better half?" "I now pronounce you Men?" Somehow that wedding ceremony needs a gay ending.

*(Returning to the 7 Habits.)*

Begin with the end in mind. “I now pronounce you together — until one of you gets sick of the sight of the other one.” “I now pronounce you together until a younger man comes along.” “I now pronounce you together until he’s caught you in the hot tub with the pool boy — which was much more innocent than it first appeared.” Maybe we’ll never know how “I now pronounce you” will end until we are given the right to marry. When the federal government finally gets its shit together and allows same-sex couples to marry, we’ll finally discover “I now pronounce you — the happy couple.” But until that time, it’s hide and go-seek! And what the fuck am I worried about? Do I really think some man is going to whisk me off my feet and make an honest woman of me? I’ve had many “relationships.” I can’t call it “being married,” — ‘cause that would imply there was some kind of ceremony that marked the occasion of our union — and that never happened for me.

*(Surveys the crowd)*

But the night is young, who knows what may happen? No, marriage has never happened for me. Wait. Does “almost” count? I almost got married one Mardi Gras day when I wore a one hundred year old wedding dress and the manager of this gay bar on Saint Ann almost married us.

*(Delighted to share this story, he becomes so animated.)*

Oh, this is a great story. My “partner” at the time — “Partner” — There’s another one that wouldn’t work. Unless we’re some Country-Western couple. “Howdy, Partner.” Anyway, my “partner” at the time was this wonderfully funny and sweet bartender. Eddie Day. But everyone called him “Happy.” It was my first Mardi Gras and “Happy” had told me that everything is legal on Mardi Gras day. So, I said, “Let’s get married.” It was destined to be a momentous occasion. All the regular alcoholics were thrilled to be my bridesmaids. I was walking down Dauphine Street one day and in the window of this second-hand clothing store, was the most beautiful wedding dress I’d ever seen. I just stopped and stared at it for — I don’t know — five minutes maybe. It was fate that brought me to it! It was over a hundred years old with the most beautiful, delicate lace over an antique white satin dress. I bought it immediately and it wasn’t until I got home that I realized it was a size three. Honey, I’ve never been a size three. Ever. I knew it wouldn’t fit me; but it had about a thousand tiny pearl buttons all the way down the back — from the neck to the knees — so I could put it on; but it was open — all the way down my back — wide open. But the front was beautiful. All white satin, covered with lace — the white satin dress was sleeveless; but the lace came all the way down the arms — it was stunning! At first I thought, the back is wide open, but that’s okay — as long as I don’t go into Lafitte’s.

*(Relish the story)*

Honey, trust me. You do not want to go into Lafitte’s on Mardi Gras day with your ass exposed, unless for your honeymoon, you’re planning a *manage-a-crowd*. But you just have to go to Lafitte’s on Mardi Gras day, it’s some kind of gay law or something. So, I sewed a big “pregnant panel” — a big wide band of elastic — sewed it right in the back by hand — it took me three days to sew it in — I am so

NOT domestic. And those stitches were not what you'd call delicate. From the front, the dress was beautiful; from the back it was the Bride of Frankenstein. So I had to cover it up somehow and I found a lace curtain at a thrift store and fashioned a veil out of it, using a head-band and some plastic daisies. I dyed it with tea, so it would match the dress. It hung all the way down my back and hid the "pregnant panel" perfectly. It sounds kind of tacky; but I was beautiful. Coming and going. The elastic band snugged that dress and made it appear tailor-made for me. The dress had this magnificent fifteen-foot train — I had to tilt my full-length mirror just to see it all. My hair was long back then — and I was young — and doing LSD — which everyone did back then. I used a curling iron and fashioned soft curls to frame my face. In my youth, I didn't require as much makeup as I do today — just a hint of blush, a little eye shadow, eye-liner, and lipstick.

*(Sees himself in the mirror of his youth. Standing, facing the audience. Motionless.)*

And there I was, standing in front of a mirror, wearing a tailored, one hundred year old wedding dress with a fifteen-foot train, with my eyes dilated like saucers and looking beautiful — soon to be married — and I started to cry. Not enough to ruin my makeup — just a single tear on my rouged cheek — resting there like a diamond — as if to say, "Look how happy you are." I started out the door onto Royal Street. I had this wonderful little slave quarter then, right on Royal — just two blocks from the bar — and I hadn't gone two feet when some drunk college boy steps on my train. I had to let him "kiss the bride" before he'd get off. It never occurred to me to get one of my brides-maids to come over and carry my train for me — and at first, I thought it was kind of a "perk." I hadn't gone a half a block until I realized I'm hauling tourists with every step and mopping my way to the bar. It quickly became clear, if I ever plan to make it to the wedding, I'm going to have to carry the train. By this time the train has mopped-up about a gallon of wine, beer, puke, piss and dirt. It's black from my knees down; but I sling it over my arm and I kiss my way to the wedding. Now, I mentioned that this dress was over one hundred years old; right? And I told you it's covered in lace? Well, lace that's over a hundred years old just doesn't have the resiliency that it had in the 1800's — and when it's stretched to its limits around a drag-queen, it's brittle and dry and begins to shred. First one string gives way and a hole opens up — then it just disintegrates and I'm fighting to keep it attached. By the time I make it to the bar, I look like Miss Havesham and I start to cry. Now, my makeup IS running. My almost soon-to-be-husband-bartender-boyfriend-partner starts feeding me liquor — gin and tonic didn't calm me down — so he interspersed a half-dozen shots of tequila and a Quaalude or two — then someone bought champagne for the "Happy Couple". The wedding pictures are a constant reminder of the occasion — there I was sprawled in a back booth — my nasty, stinking, tattered dress slung up over my head — thank God you couldn't see my face. And that's as close as I ever got to a real wedding.

*(A sigh accompanies this memory.)*

But that's not as close as I've gotten to love. Love.

*(Wistful, but emphatic.)*

It's not difficult to imagine someone loving me is it? I haven't always looked like this. I was young once. I've been in love lots of times. Sometimes for a month or two, once for more than a year, and occasionally for a long weekend. Lately I've been feeling kind of left out of the Love Department and feeling more like a sperm receptacle.

*(Find the "chief" words and play them!)*

You know, it's really not so difficult to find someone to love. What's difficult is finding someone who can accept the kind of love you have to offer. I mean I can show you I love you just by doing the laundry.

*(Earnestly)*

No, I mean it! I absolutely hate doing the laundry. So, if I spend twenty minutes Spot Treating the skid-marks in your boxer shorts, you can damn well bet I'm in love with you. The problem most gay men have with love is that only one of you gets to be in charge. With me, well I act all feminine and I pretend I want a real strong man to take charge; but in fact, I want to be the one who calls the shots. That's been my whole problem. Just because he's the one bringing home the bacon, he expects me to stay in the pig pen which he decorated long before this old sow joined the sty. Which I guess is fair; but it leaves me feeling kind of left out of all the fabric choices. My only hope of finding happiness was to find a man who lived in his car; but had lots of money in the trunk. And that's all I was ever looking for — no, not a man with lots of money — I was looking for happiness. I had a friend once who was always crying in his beer 'cause he couldn't find a mate.

*(Here's another of those words!)*

Mate! I absolutely hate that term! "I now pronounce you man and mate!" — "Mate?" What am I? A pirate?

*(As a pirate)*

Arrg, Matey, you may now blow the man down!

*(Laughs at this)*

Anyway, this friend was always crying in his beer 'cause he couldn't find a man. And if he did find someone who liked him for a moment, he'd latch on so tight, he'd suffocate him and weep and wail when the guy pried himself loose. And then he'd start crying again about how lonely he was. I finally had all I could take — I'd listen to him piss and moan — "I don't have a lover." Boo hoo. "Nobody loves me." "I'm so incomplete." And I finally told him,

*(To his friend, earnestly.)*

"Listen. Nobody's ever going to love you. Nobody. There isn't a man on this earth who could love an unhappy person and you're the most miserable wretch I've ever seen."

*(To the audience.)*

It didn't help him — which surprised me. I thought that was very good advice. But it did help ME. It made me realize if I ever expect someone to love me, I need to be a happier person. Now, that's a "paradigm shift!"

*(A realization)*

I think I really changed that day. I set my goals on becoming happy — well, I was always a “happy person” — at least that’s the appearance I gave my parents — so I guess, I set my goals on becoming more happy —

*(Skips across the stage.)*

— happier. And do you know what I discovered?

*(A secret you are sharing with the audience.)*

The secret of real happiness is to make other people believe they are the cause of it. But, being happy didn’t bring men clamoring to my door; however it made me realize that life is short and you need to make the best of it while you’re here. And I also discovered, it doesn’t take another person to make you happy. For me, it just takes a stage, a spotlight and an appreciative audience. And a good review!

*(Searches the vanity and pulls out a clipping.)*

The reviewer is talking about me here: “...proves himself a clever, adept writer-actor, who gets laughs with just about everything he does ...and my God, is it funny!” Oh, that’s so me — isn’t it? I’m usually right at home on stage. All I need is a little makeup, some dimmable lights, and a set. And I am so at home. Oh, that’s how this whole thing started; isn’t it?

*(Crosses and sits on the bed)*

At night I get into my bed and dream that it’s going to get better. When I dream, I am always young again — so alive and vibrant — and not feigning happiness; but really happy. It’s funny. I don’t know when I suddenly realized how old I was becoming. When I was a teenager, I couldn’t wait to be twenty-one — and it seemed an eternity for that day to arrive. And then I hit twenty-one and time suddenly sped-up — and one day I woke up and I was [give exact age here]. And let me tell you, when you’re [exact age] you either have to be extremely masculine, or have a job that pays really well — so I’m fucked!

*(Surveys the crowd.)*

I’ve probably told you more than I intended. I wanted to have a one-man show, because it’s so difficult for me to be cast in plays. No one is looking for an aging, overweight, slightly feminine actor with a penchant for excessive makeup and gestures. I mean, once you’ve played Snoopy in *You’re A Good Man, Charlie Brown* what do you do next? No one wants to hire an old queen — No matter how happy he appears — Is it an act? Is that smile genuine? Are those tears welling up in those mascara-ed eyes? I’m sorry that I wasn’t better prepared. I wish you could have seen me when I was younger — when I was beautiful — standing there in the mirror in my wedding dress with plastic daisies in my hair — before the lace had disintegrated.

She sits, fading in the sun.

Her blemishes obvious in the light of day.

Her beauty stolen, stripped — gone.

Her dreams packed-up and moved away.

That poem isn't about me. My dreams haven't packed-up and moved away — I still have dreams. And I'm always young again in my dreams.

*(Frantically searching through the papers and poems for the perfect evidence)*

The secret of real happiness is to make other people believe they are the cause of it.

*(Surveys the crowd.)*

You are the cause of my happiness.

*(Ala Gloria Swanson as Norma Desmond.)*

All you wonderful people — out there — in the dark!

*(A sly smile, shyly, reluctantly, gives in to the moment.)*

You make me happy. You keep me happy. You keep me young. And — when its all over — you show me how much you love me — and I know that I am loved.

*(A paradigm)*

Ah! Begin with the end in mind!

*(Lights fade out)*