

FOR BETTER OR WURST

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

By Craig Sodaro

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SYNOPSIS: Nick Noir, ace private eye, has just bought the wedding rings in preparation for his wedding to Selma, his devoted secretary. He's also all set to meet Selma's parents for the first time before he and Selma scoot off to Vegas for a quick wedding at the Little Chapel of Love.

Selma, however, has failed to fill Nick in on a few facts. For one thing, her father is Otto Meyer, who has made a fortune selling his famous hot dogs. Selma's family lives in a mansion with twenty-eight rooms, two swimming pools, and, well, you get the picture. It's a life Nick's not acquainted with. For another thing, her mother and father are planning a Big Wedding being coordinated by two very gushy coordinators, Lola Hart and Lila Soul. Even the three bridesmaids are planning to be at the mansion to meet Nick. And by the way, Selma has told her folks that she's marrying a doctor, and that she's the chief administrator at Johns Hopkins Medical Center.

To make the weekend jaunt even more interesting, the seductive Desiree Divine hires Nick to find a long-lost ex, whom she has traced to - - you guessed it - - Wurst mansion.

At the mansion, Otto's business manager, Cosmo, is frantically trying to find out what happened to millions of dollars he claims he sent to the IRS as a tax payment but the IRS says they never received. As the wedding expenses mount up, Otto becomes more and more nervous about how he'll make ends meet. Disaster strikes when Cosmo turns up dead, the victim of a blunt object to the back of his head.

“Dr.” Noir takes over, asking the usual questions and quickly finds that everybody in the house is a suspect. Ralph, Sissy’s lazy boyfriend has disappeared, so he becomes the prime suspect. When Desiree disappears as well, Nick decides he’d better mount an all-out offensive to find out who killed Cosmo and why. The why becomes quickly apparent - - Cosmo himself has stolen the money meant for the IRS. The cook who can’t cook turns out to be an IRS agent investigating the case. But a new question quickly emerges: where is Cosmo’s briefcase that must contain the money?

With the fancy footwork of a classic gumshoe, Nick pieces the puzzle together while patching up his differences with Selma. Just as he reveals who the killer is, Selma finally comes clean with her parents and explains Nick isn’t a doctor, but a detective. Otto couldn’t be happier, because he’s a big fan of Columbo.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 MALES, 10 FEMALES)

NICK NOIR (m)Thirties, a classic Bogart-like private eye. *(217 lines)*

SELMA MEYER (f)Twenties, Nick’s devoted secretary and now fiancée. *(141 lines)*

DESIREE DIVINE (f)Twenties, a femme fatale dressed to kill. *(92 lines)*

OTTO MEYER (m)Fifties, the hot dog king. *(102 lines)*

COSMO KREPPS (m)Fifties, Otto’s business manager. *(11 lines)*

RALPH ROONEY (m)Twenties, a couch potato with a secret. *(47 lines)*

SISSY MEYER (f)Twenties, Selma’s younger sister and Ralph’s main squeeze. *(57 lines)*

FOR BETTER OR WURST

ESTELLE GERKIN (f).....Forties, the cook who can't cook.
(29 lines)

MIMI MEYER (f).....Fifties, the mother of the bride.
(101 lines)

LILA SOUL (f).....Thirties, a pushy, gushy wedding coordinator. (53 lines)

LOLA HART (f).....Thirties, Lila's gushy, pushy partner.
(54 lines)

ANGEL DEVILLE (f).....Twenties, a bridesmaid. (39 lines)

CANDY STORR (f).....Twenties, another bridesmaid. (31 lines)

PETUNIA BLOSSOM (f).....Twenties, another bridesmaid. (27 lines)

GIBBONS (m).....Fifties, the perfect butler. (30 lines)

PRODUCTION NOTES

SETTING: Most of the play takes place in the great room of Wurst Mansion. Up center is a fireplace with a poster hanging above advertising "Otto Meyer Hot Dogs." A large window up left is flanked by floor to ceiling curtains. We can see trees and bushes outside. Couch or love seat left center with two chairs flanking a small table at right center. Desk with drawers against right wall. Hope chest against left wall. This can also be a nice-looking wooden box of any type, but it must be large enough to appear that someone could be lying inside. Wing entrance down right leads to outside and stairway to second floor (unseen). Wing entrance down left leads to dining room, kitchen, and other areas of the house.

The first scene of the play takes place in Nick's office, which is played before the curtain. A small desk and a chair behind it sit at right. A stack of envelopes sits on the desk.

Act Two, Scene 2 takes place in a hallway of Wurst Mansion. This scene is played before the curtain.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES:

ACT ONE

Scene 1Nick's office, Friday morning.

Scene 2The Great Room of Wurst Mansion, two hours later, just before lunch.

Scene 3The Great Room, just after lunch.

Scene 4The Great Room, a short time later.

ACT TWO

Scene 1The Great Room, a half hour later.

Scene 2A hallway in the mansion, a short time later.

Scene 3The Great Room, immediately after.

PROPERTIES:

- ☐ Stack of envelopes (preset on desk)
- ☐ Hot dog on bun (NICK)
- ☐ Two wedding rings (NICK)
- ☐ Photograph (DESIREE)
- ☐ Small video game (RALPH)
- ☐ Letter (OTTO)
- ☐ Briefcase (COSMO)
- ☐ Huge sandwich on plate (ESTELLE)
- ☐ Suitcase (GIBBONS)
- ☐ Pencil (NICK)
- ☐ Two hot dogs on buns (OTTO)
- ☐ Tray with two glasses of water (GIBBONS)
- ☐ Papers, envelopes, etc. preset in desk drawers
- ☐ Wedding dress (ANGEL)
- ☐ Bridesmaid dresses (CANDY, PETUNIA)
- ☐ Veil (SELMA)
- ☐ Calculator (LILA)
- ☐ Plastic bag holding ice cubes (ESTELLE)
- ☐ Handkerchief and fireplace poker (NICK)
- ☐ Bloody glove (GIBBONS)

- ☐ Flashlights (LILA, LOLA)
- ☐ Pistol (DESIREE)
- ☐ Rope to tie Desiree to chair
- ☐ Newspaper (SISSY)
- ☐ Bridal magazines in briefcase
- ☐ Second briefcase (SELMA)
- ☐ Three stiletto-heel shoes (ANGEL, CANDY, PETUNIA)
- ☐ Identification badge (ESTELLE)
- ☐ Large piece of fabric (LILA, LOLA)
- ☐ Handcuffs (NICK)

SOUND EFFECTS:

- ☐ Phone ringing
- ☐ Crash off left
- ☐ Noise off left (Crash, bang, etc)

COSTUMING: Modern, everyday dress for all characters. Nick should wear traditional trench coat and fedora for the first scene and when he arrives at Wurst Mansion. Desiree dresses very seductively. Cosmo wears a suit. Gibbons should wear a butler's outfit (dark suit, bow tie at least). Estelle should wear an apron throughout.

Note: Gibbons wears the wedding dress as a disguise. This can be the same dress seen earlier (being carried, not worn) or it can be different. Gibbons only has a few minutes to get into the dress, so it should open completely in the back so he can slip into it quickly. Velcro can secure the back. He also wears a bridal veil, which should cover his face.

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

SETTING:

NICK NOIR's office, Friday morning, played before the curtain. A desk with chair behind it right. A stack of envelopes on the desk.

AT RISE:

SELMA sits at desk licking the envelopes. She has a disgusted look on her face. After a moment, NICK enters left, a half-eaten hot dog in his hand. When NICK speaks to the audience, all on stage freeze.

NICK: *(To audience.)* Noir's the name. Nick Noir. You can call me a gumshoe, a private investigator, a detective, or just a plain old private eye. Just call me when you got a problem. I can find out who's been writing bad checks on your account. I can locate that long-lost love. I can trail your present love and find out if there's any hanky-panky going on. I can figure out who stole your bicycle, your cat or your mother-in-law. I can even get 'em back for you. . . . if you want And I can solve a murder quicker than the police can ask, "Where were you when the deceased got deceased?" Yeah . . . I'm that good. That's why my soon-to-be spousal unit, Selma, there has that stack of envelopes on the desk. Those are invoices for services rendered. Clients owe Nick and like it or not, they got to pay. *(To SELMA.)* Hey baby, how's my lady? *(NICK moves to SELMA and sits on edge of desk.)* You got a kiss for your number one fan?

SELMA: Gosh, Nick! My lips are so full of glue, we might get stuck 'n need the fire department to pull us apart.

NICK: When you're hot, you're hot, baby! *(NICK holds out hot dog.)* You wanna bite? It's an Otto Meyer all-beef wiener.

SELMA: *(Nervously.)* I'm not too hungry, Nick. I guess I'll . . . I'll . . . go mail these. *(SELMA stands and grabs letters.)*

NICK: What's the big rush, Selma?

SELMA: No rush, but we ought to be going soon if we're gonna get to my folks' before lunch.

NICK: Hey! I got something to show you.

SELMA: *(Nervously.)* Oh, yeah? What's that, Nick?

NICK: You sure you're all right? You look mighty pale.

SELMA: Yeah, sure, Nick. There just isn't much sun today.

NICK: Baby, if the sun were any hotter, you could fry a tortilla on my car hood. So here . . . take a look . . . I picked 'em up this morning. *(NICK hands SELMA two wedding rings.)*

SELMA: Oh, gosh, Nick! Our wedding rings!

NICK: Yeah! There's no turning back now, 'cause these are non-returnable on account of being on sale when we bought 'em.

SELMA: I . . . I'm glad there's no turning back, Nick.

NICK: You sound kind of worried.

SELMA: Well, it's just that, well . . . you haven't met my folks or anything yet.

NICK: Hey! They'll love me! What's not to love? And then we're off to Vegas and the Little Chapel of Love. Elvis does the ceremony, and the Four Seasons sing the wedding march.

SELMA: (*Starting to cry.*) Oh, Nick!

NICK: (*To audience.*) Right then I was pretty sure there was something wrong with Selma aside from a sticky tongue.

SELMA: There's something I haven't told you, Nick.

NICK: Hey! You know me, Mr. Easy. You remember when I first hired you? My office was behind Paulie's Pool Hall . . . in the alley. We used an umbrella for a roof. And some of those early cases . . . hey baby, if we could weather all that, whatever little secret you're about to tell me can't make much difference. (*Wincing a bit.*) Can it?

SELMA: Oh Nick, my . . . my folks really, really, really want to have a big wedding.

NICK: They wanna come with us to the Little Chapel of Love?

SELMA: Not exactly. They want to host the wedding.

NICK: They got some other little chapel picked out?

SELMA: Not exactly. They want it at their house.

NICK: Their little bungalow?

SELMA: It's not exactly a little bungalow.

NICK: What exactly is it?

SELMA: I guess I oughta start at the beginning.

NICK: (*To audience.*) Suddenly my stomach dropped like an elevator right to the basement and the last of the hot dog made a very ungraceful landing.. (*To SELMA.*) Maybe you oughta get it off your chest, baby.

SELMA: My . . . my daddy is . . . Otto Meyer.

NICK: Otto Meyer? Where'd I just hear that name?

SELMA: Your hot dog?

NICK: He's *the* Otto Meyer? (*Singing the jingle.*) Beefy, spicy, just tastes great . . . Meyer wieners really rate!

SELMA: He made that up himself.

NICK: *The* Otto Meyer?

SELMA: The one and only.

NICK: So I guess there's no little bungalow.

SELMA: Oh, Nick, I just didn't want to worry you.

NICK: How much do I have to worry?

SELMA: Twenty-eight rooms, a tennis court, two swimming pools, and a riding stable.

NICK: I'm scared to death!

SELMA: Now, Nick, just take a deep breath. They're just people.

NICK: They're people who live in twenty-eight rooms, play tennis on their own courts, get to pick which swimming pool they want to take a dip in, and got a whole stable full of ponies!

SELMA: Now, don't worry. They're going to love you, Dr. Noir.

NICK: I hope so. Wait a second, what's this doctor bit?

SELMA: Well, Daddy's always said he wants his girls to marry somebody more successful than him.

NICK: More successful than the Hot Dog King?

SELMA: That's why I told him you're head of neurology at Johns Hopkins.

NICK: What? You lied about me?

SELMA: Oh, Nick, don't be angry!

NICK: I don't even know what neurology is!

SELMA: That's perfect! Neither do they! They won't ask any medical questions this weekend. They'll just want a few details about your yacht and why we drove up instead of taking your private jet.

NICK: *(To audience.)* I was beginning to see a new side of Selma. Her creative side!

SELMA: Just tell them the yacht's in dry dock and we wanted a romantic drive up to their place. Can you remember that?

NICK: I don't see why not!

SELMA: And since I'm the chief administrator at Johns Hopkins, we work together.

NICK: You're what?

SELMA: Chief administrator. That's how we met. I hired you.

DESIREE enters left. She is dressed very seductively.

DESIREE: Exactly what I'd like to do. You are Nick . . . Nick Noir . . . aren't you?

NICK: Well, well, well! *(To audience.)* Things are looking up. Who could have guessed Venus di Milo would walk into my office that day?

SELMA: *(Rudely, to DESIREE.)* Sorry, but the office is closed for the day.

DESIREE: Is that true, Nick . . . Nick Noir?

NICK: Not exactly.

SELMA: She doesn't have an appointment!

NICK: A lady who looks like that doesn't need . . . uh, I mean, must be in great need.

DESIREE: And I'm terribly distressed.

SELMA: You're terribly dressed, all right!

NICK: Don't you have some letters to mail, Chief Administrator?

SELMA: I can mail them later.

DESIREE: The mail goes out in five minutes.

SELMA: Maybe you'll need me to take notes.

DESIREE: Don't worry. I know the tune pretty well.

SELMA: I'll bet you wrote it!

NICK: We'll just be a minute, Selma. And then we need to have a little chat!

SELMA: Oh, forget it! If you . . . if you want me . . . I'll be at Daddy's! (*SELMA huffs off left.*)

DESIREE: Your Girl Friday seems a bit . . . jealous.

NICK: Does she have a good reason?

DESIREE: Not from me. I'm business. Strictly business.

NICK: And just what business is that, Ms. . . . Ms. . . . ?

DESIREE: Divine. Desiree Divine.

NICK: That's a pretty heavenly name.

DESIREE: But don't worry. I don't wear a halo.

NICK: (*To audience.*) I could tell this dame knew the score. The trouble was, I didn't know what game we were playing. (*To DESIREE.*) So what's the job?

DESIREE: I want to find this man.

DESIREE flips a photo in front of NICK.

NICK: If you don't mind my saying so, he doesn't look like he could keep up with you.

DESIREE: You don't think that he . . . and I . . . Mr. Noir, I hope you're a better detective than that. This man did a job for me . . . and I never paid him for it. And I always settle my debts.

NICK: Good to know. Any idea where we might find this guy?

DESIREE: An . . . associate . . . gave me an address I might try. (*DESIREE hands NICK a knife.*) Sorry . . . he didn't have anything else he could write it on.

NICK: (*To audience.*) I knew right then that something was fishy . . . real fishy. My instincts told me to give her the knife back and get out of there quick. But who ever listens to their instincts? I wanted to see what was at the bottom of this kettle of fish.

DESIREE: My car's waiting downstairs. Coming?

DESIREE exits left. NICK hesitates, then moves left. He turns to audience.

NICK: Hey, if she's driving, what do I got to lose?

NICK exits left. BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

SETTING:

The great room of Wurst Mansion, early afternoon. Up center is a fireplace with a poster advertising "Otto Meyer Hot Dogs" above the mantel. Large window up left with floor to ceiling curtains. We can see trees and bushes outside. Couch or love seat left center with two chairs flanking small table at right center. Desk with drawers on right wall. Hope chest on left wall. This can also be a nice-looking wooden box but must be large enough to appear that someone could be lying inside. Wing entrance down right leads to outside and stairway to second floor. Wing entrance down left leads to dining room, kitchen, and other areas of the house.

AT RISE:

RALPH is lying on the couch or love seat with his arms stretched straight up. In his hands he holds a small video game, which he is playing. Other than the movement of his thumbs, RALPH, the consummate slob, is completely immobile. A moment later, OTTO and COSMO enter right. OTTO holds a letter in his hand. COSMO carries a briefcase with him at all times.

OTTO: I don't understand it a bit, Cosmo! Not one single bit!

COSMO: I've explained it as clearly as possible, Mr. Meyer. They made a mistake!

OTTO: The Internal Revenue Service doesn't make mistakes! If they say they didn't get the money, they didn't get the money!

COSMO: I say they did!

OTTO: Oh, great . . . Cosmo Krepps, big shot business manager, is going to take on the IRS. That's like a mouse kicking an elephant!

COSMO: *(Moving to couch.)* Otto, come sit down. You need to relax. *(COSMO sits on RALPH, who doesn't move. COSMO screams and jumps up.)*

RALPH: Hey, dude, that seat's taken.

COSMO: Otto, is this . . . this . . . vagabond living here now?

OTTO: *(Sarcastically.)* No, Cosmo, Sissy just tossed a new cushion on the couch.

RALPH: Who're you calling a couch cushion, Pops?

OTTO: Don't you call me Pops again! You're no relation to me!

RALPH: Not yet!

OTTO: Sissy would never . . . ever . . . not in a million years . . . marry you!

RALPH: She's up there reading Bride magazine right now.

OTTO: That's it! I'm canceling her subscription. Now go on and get outside! Get some exercise.

RALPH: I'm getting all the exercise I need right here. And you know something? How about getting a nice HDTV in here? I'm bored with this thing.

OTTO: On one condition.

RALPH: *(Suddenly sitting up, smiling.)* Really?

OTTO: You get a job. In Antarctica! C'mon, Cosmo. We're going to my study to hash this out.

OTTO and COSMO exit left. SISSY enters right.

SISSY: Ralph! Ralph, what's wrong?

RALPH: Your father is so mean!

SISSY: What'd he do now?

RALPH: He all but told me to get a job!

SISSY: Oh, I'm sure he doesn't mean it.

RALPH: Yes, he does! He always says that, and he has no idea how it makes me feel!

RALPH buries his head in SISSY'S shoulder.

SISSY: Oh, poor Ralphy! I know just the thing to make you feel better. Take me shopping!

RALPH: I'm too tired! I'm going to take a nap.

SISSY: You just got up!

RALPH: Are you going to start on me now?

ESTELLE enters left carrying a huge sandwich on a plate.

RALPH: Well, it's about time! I'm practically wasting away to nothing here!

ESTELLE: You're the fattest nothing I've ever seen.

RALPH: Sissy, are you going to let the help talk to me like that?

SISSY: Oh, Ralph, you know Estelle is just a replacement cook . . . Mrs. Beanly would never talk to you like that.

ESTELLE: How is Mrs. Beanly doing?

SISSY: She's almost completely over her nervous breakdown. Except that she still screams and cries when she sees a hot dog.

ESTELLE: At least the wurst is over!

ESTELLE exits left as RALPH bites into the sandwich.

SISSY: Are you coming, Ralph?

RALPH: *(His mouth full.)* I told you, I'm taking a nap!

SISSY: Okay. Bye bye!

SISSY blows RALPH a kiss. RALPH gets ready to blow her a kiss, but she puts her hand up to stop him.

SISSY: Not a good idea with our mouth full! Tata!

SISSY exits left. RALPH sprawls out on couch and takes another bite of the sandwich. He then falls asleep and begins to snore. A moment later, MIMI enters right followed by LILA and LOLA.

MIMI: And this is the great room!

LILA: Lovely! Simply lovely, don't you think so, Lola?

LOLA: Mauve! Mauve curtains, mauve balloons, bouquets of mauve roses!

LILA: Jasmine scented candles, the guest book here . . . the receiving line there.

LOLA: Oh Mrs. Meyer, this is absolutely splendid! You almost don't need a wedding coordinator!

LILA: But we're glad you chose Hart and Soul to do the job, aren't we, Lola?

LOLA: Oh, yes! Of course! We will enhance, enlighten, empower so you can enjoy!

MIMI: And that's just what I intend to do. Enjoy.

MIMI bursts into tears and drops into chair right.

LILA: Oh, Mrs. Meyer . . .

LOLA: We know what you're going through.

LILA: Your firstborn getting married is a momentous occasion.

LOLA: It's natural for you to shed a tear or two.

MIMI: I'm not crying because of the wedding . . .

LILA: What's wrong, then?

MIMI: *(Pointing to RALPH.)* He's still here!

LOLA: Oh, dear! I thought that was a couch cushion.

MIMI: At the rate things are going, he'll be lying on that couch the day of the wedding.

LILA: We could get some mauve brocade and toss it over him.

LOLA: I'd say move the couch somewhere else.

LILA: Where?

MIMI: Antarctica?

LOLA: Is he a member of the family?

MIMI: I hope not. He's been dating Sissy . . . and we only hope she comes to her senses soon!

LILA: What do you think, Lola? Groomsman?

LOLA: (*Shaking her head.*) I'd say a vase. We can stuff him with begonias!

ANGEL, CANDY, and PETUNIA enter right, giggling.

ANGEL: You didn't!

CANDY: I did!

PETUNIA: Shut up!

MIMI: Oh, ladies! You made it.

ANGEL: We wouldn't miss this for the world!

CANDY: Yeah! None of us have met Prince Charming yet!

PETUNIA: Ooooo . . . he looks a little tired.

MIMI: That? Oh no, that's not Selma's young man. They haven't arrived yet.

ANGEL: Oh, good. I thought for a minute Selma'd lost her mind.

CANDY: Or at least her good taste.

MIMI: Now, ladies, allow me to introduce our wedding coordinators, Lila Hart and Lola Soul. These are Selma's bridesmaids, Angel, Candy, and Petunia.

LILA: We can do something with that, can't we, Lola?

LOLA: Table favors! Angels holding a dish of candy surrounded by petunias!

PETUNIA: You guys are real good!

LILA: We're the best!

GIBBONS enters right carrying a suitcase.

GIBBONS: Madame . . .

MIMI: Yes, Gibbons?

LILA: A butler?

LOLA: A real, live butler?

They approach GIBBONS. LILA touches GIBBON'S lapel. He slaps her hands away.

GIBBONS: Please, Madam! You might leave fingerprints!

MIMI: What did you need, Gibbons?

GIBBONS: Miss Selma has arrived.

ANGEL: Oh, good! We can finally meet her hunk.

GIBBONS: She has arrived hunk-less.

SELMA enters sadly. MIMI moves to SELMA.

MIMI: Selma, honey! You made it!

SELMA: Hi, Mummy!

CANDY: Gosh, Selma, aren't you missing something?

PETUNIA: Where are you hiding Mr. Right?

MIMI: Yes, where is Dr. Noir?

SELMA bursts into tears, running off left.

LILA: Oh, dear!

LOLA: We do have a wonderful price on a broken engagement party.

LILA: Really helps to smooth out ruffled feathers.

MIMI: Selma! Selma, honey!

MIMI runs off left.

ANGEL: Gosh! What do you suppose happened?

CANDY: She probably read his e-mails!

PETUNIA: Or the detective found out something . . . you know.

ANGEL: What detective?

CANDY: Angel, you've got to hire a detective these days.

PETUNIA: Standard background check!

ANGEL, PETUNIA, and CANDY exit left.

LILA: What are we going to do, Lola?

LOLA: Stay put! We need this wedding.

LILA: But what if there is no wedding . . . ?

LOLA: I have a feeling it'll turn into a funeral, and we can use one of those, too!

LILA and LOLA exit left. Knock off right. GIBBONS exits right. He enters a moment later followed by NICK and DESIREE.

NICK: Your name's Gibbons? Like one of them monkeys from Asia, right? And this monkey suit (*Touching lapel.*) . . . fun . . . ny.

GIBBONS: (*Slapping his hand away and in a condescending tone.*) The order is mammal and the species is hylobate, which technically makes them gorillas, sir. I shall let Madam know you have arrived.

GIBBONS picks up suitcase and moves left.

NICK: (*To audience.*) I knew from the get-go I was out of my league. The butler wore a getup that made an undertaker look shabby. The room was like somethin' out of a Travel Channel special. And the whole place reeked of somethin' I knew nothin' about . . . money.

GIBBONS exits left.

DESIREE: Gosh, Nick! You ever seen such a place?

RALPH sits up suddenly, horrified.

NICK: Never knew people liked hot dogs so much!

RALPH slips off the couch and hides behind it.

DESIREE: They must have the market cornered.

NICK: Yeah, with plenty of spicy mustard. And to think . . . these could have been my in-laws . . . if Selma hadn't told them lies!

DESIREE: You know something, Nick?

NICK: What's that, Ms. Divine?

DESIREE: There's a familiar smell in this room.

NICK: How do you mean familiar?

RALPH crawls on all fours from behind the couch to right exit during next dialogue. NICK and DESIREE move to left so they don't see him.

DESIREE: I don't know . . .

NICK: (*Picking up sandwich remains.*) Maybe it's the sandwich.

DESIREE: Salami and sardines?

NICK: How'd you know?

DESIREE: Who else would eat such a thing?

NICK: He's gotta be around someplace then.

DESIREE: How do you know?

NICK: (*To audience.*) It wasn't very pretty, but she had to know. Facts is facts and slime is slime. (*To DESIREE.*) Look where he bit the sandwich. It's still slimy.

DESIREE: I think I need some fresh air.

As DESIREE exits right, MIMI enters left.

MIMI: Oh, Gibbons said you arrived.

NICK: (*To audience.*) I didn't know who this dame was, but her eyes were red, her mascara was running, and she looked like she was about ready to pitch a hissy. (*To MIMI.*) The name's Noir. Nick Noir.

MIMI: (*Brightening.*) Dr. Noir? Oh, my! Well, I am happy to see you! I am Mimi Meyers, Selma's mother. Welcome to Wurst Mansion!

NICK: I've seen worse.

MIMI: Somehow, from what Selma said when she arrived . . . I didn't exactly expect you.

NICK: (*To audience.*) So Selma's lies were catchin' up to her, huh? 'Course, I didn't tell the old lady that. (*To MIMI.*) I was just delayed . . .

MIMI: I know. A patient who desperately needed your expert hands in surgery.

NICK: Yeah, well, somethin' like that.

SELMA enters left.

SELMA: Oh, Mummy, I need another box of tissues! (*SELMA halts when she sees NICK.*)

MIMI: Look who just arrived, Selma.

NICK: Hiya, Selma.

SELMA: Nick? (*Pause.*) Oh, Nick, you came!

SELMA rushes to NICK and embraces him.

NICK: 'Course I came! I just . . . just . . . had a couple of things to tidy up . . .

SELMA: At the hospital.

NICK: Yeah . . . you know how messy the operating room gets.

FOR BETTER OR WURST

MIMI: Oh, I'll get those tissues now, Selma.

SELMA: I don't think I'll need them now that Nick's here.

NICK: *(To audience.)* Was the room getting hot, or was it just me? *(To SELMA.)*

Oh, Selma, baby . . . you know you're the only one for me!

DESIREE enters right.

DESIREE: Gee, Nick, I feel a whole lot better now that I caught my breath.

SELMA pushes NICK away.

SELMA: Nick! Nick, how could you?

MIMI: Now, Selma, honey, this must be Dr. Noir's patient.

NICK: Right! Right, this is Miss Divine.

DESIREE: Pleased to meet ya!

MIMI: It must be wonderful to have a doctor who's so concerned about his patients that he brings them along on his weekend getaways.

DESIREE: Doctor?

NICK: Yes, Miss Divine. I think we'd better take your temperature.

NICK sticks a pencil into DESIREE'S mouth.

MIMI: I thought you use a thermometer for that.

SELMA: Oh, oh, Mummy . . . I do need those tissues!

SELMA bursts into tears and races off left.

MIMI: *(Following SELMA.)* I'll get them, honey! Mummy's coming!

MIMI's gone.

DESIREE: *(Pulling out the pencil.)* What's with this, Sherlock?

NICK: It's a long story. Just play sick.

DESIREE: I don't get sick, Nick. I get even!

NICK: Yeah, well, 'til the job's done, we're playin' doctor.

DESIREE: I used to do that with the kid next door 'til he decided brain surgery was gonna be his specialty.

COSMO and OTTO enter left. OTTO holds two hot dogs on buns.

COSMO: You see, Otto? The books are in great shape! And these new jalapeno hot dogs are gonna cover any losses, (*Snaps his fingers.*) just like that!

OTTO: We'll see. Looks like two suckers just walked in from the candy store. (*To NICK and DESIREE.*) Say, you two look hungry. How about trying a new kind of hot dog?

He hands NICK and DESIREE each a hot dog.

NICK: Say, you must be Otto Meyer.

OTTO: Guilty as charged!

NICK: Nick. Nick Noir.

DESIREE: Dr. Nick . . . right?

OTTO: Why, you're Selma's fiancé! Hmm . . .

He walks around NICK.

OTTO: You don't look like a doctor.

DESIREE: Oh, let me assure you, he operates just fine!

COSMO: And who are you?

DESIREE: Desiree Divine.

COSMO: Mmmm, you certainly are!

NICK: She's my patient.

OTTO: Your patient? What's wrong with her?

NICK: Well, ah . . . we think right now it's . . . it's . . .

DESIREE: Adenoids!

NICK: (*Looks shocked.*) Adenoids? (*Looking at the hot dogs and changing the subject quickly.*) Say, these look mighty tasty.

DESIREE: Mmmm, there is one thing I really love and it's a juicy hot dog!

NICK and DESIREE bite into the hot dogs.

OTTO: Whaddaya think?

NICK and DESIREE'S eyes bug out. They begin to jump around and fan their mouths, as the heat is way too much for them. NICK grabs OTTO.

NICK: Wa . . . Wa . . . Wa . . . !

COSMO: I think they want water.

FOR BETTER OR WURST

OTTO: Gibbons! Gibbons! Quickly!

DESIREE: Wa . . . Wa . . . Wa . . . !

GIBBONS enters left and with a touch of disdain:

GIBBONS: You bellowed, sir?

OTTO: Get some water, would you?

GIBBONS: Your wish is my command.

GIBBONS exits left.

OTTO: *(To NICK.)* A bit too much jalapeno?

NICK nods vigorously.

COSMO: But people want something with a punch to it!

OTTO: This looks more like a mule's kick.

GIBBONS enters carrying a tray with two glasses of water on it.

GIBBONS: Your water, sir!

NICK and DESIREE rush to GIBBONS, grabbing the glasses. They gulp some of the water.

NICK: Thanks, Gorilla.

GIBBONS: Gibbons, if you please, sir!

NICK: Right!

DESIREE: What're you trying to do to us?

NICK: Now, Miss Divine, that kind of heat might just cure those adenoids.

GIBBONS: Is that all, sir?

OTTO: Yes, Gibbons. Thank you.

GIBBONS bows, exits left.

OTTO: I don't know, Cosmo. Looks like we still have some problems . . .

COSMO: I suppose so . . .

OTTO: Now I want to see last quarter's report.

COSMO: It's in my car . . .

OTTO: (*Grabbing his arm.*) Let's go together, shall we? No fast getaways.

COSMO and OTTO exit right.

NICK: (*To audience.*) Even through the jalapeno-induced heat, I could sense the tension between Otto and the other guy, Cosmo . . . and if experience serves me right, I am certain that water is no cure.

DESIREE: Oh, Nick! I . . . I feel faint . . .

DESIREE falls onto the couch.

DESIREE: Oh, please . . . feel if I've got a pulse!

NICK: Desiree, if you can talk, you got a pulse.

DESIREE throws her arm up. NICK stands behind couch.

NICK: (*To audience.*) When a lady offers you her wrist, how can you turn it down? It's a tough job, but someone's got to do it.

NICK gently takes DESIREE'S wrist. He sniffs.

NICK: I don't think I'd ever smelled a wrist quite like that! What's that scent?

DESIREE: Seduction! So tell me, Dr. Noir . . . do I have a pulse?

NICK: Oh, yeah . . . and it's really revvin' up!

MIMI, SELMA, LOLA, LILA, ANGEL, CANDY, and PETUNIA enter left.

MIMI: Now, it's all just your imagination, Selma!

SELMA: (*Upon seeing NICK.*) Imagination, is it!

NICK throws DESIREE'S arm down.

SELMA: Treating your patient, I see?

LOLA: Well, she does look a bit peaked.

LILA: Flushed, I'd say.

ANGEL: And her breathing's a bit . . . breathy . . .

SELMA: It sure is! And I can only guess why!

NICK: (*Moving to SELMA.*) Selma, baby! You got the wrong idea . . . thanks to your backup crew here. You should introduce me.

MIMI: Well, Lola and Lila are our wedding coordinators.

LILA: Hart and Soul Weddings . . .

LOLA: Incorporated. You must be the groom.

NICK: Guilty as charged!

MIMI: And these are Selma's bridesmaids . . . Angel, Candy, and Petunia.

NICK: *(To audience.)* I felt like a deer starin' at the headlights of an oncoming semi. Should I run or hope that impending doom somehow avoids me. *(To the women.)* Glad to meet you all.

ANGEL: *(Angrily.)* Selma's told us a lot about you.

CANDY: *(Also angrily.)* Especially in the last five minutes.

PETUNIA: *(Also angrily.)* And it looks like it's all true!

OTTO and COSMO enter right.

OTTO: Well, we'll just see about that!

MIMI: Oh, Otto, dear, have you met Selma's fiancé?

OTTO: And his patient. How is she, Doctor?

NICK: Improving.

SELMA: And I know why!

GIBBONS enters left.

GIBBONS: Excuse me, Madam, but lunch is served.

MIMI: Thank you, Gibbons. This way, everyone . . .

COSMOS: Well, I for one am starved!

OTTO: *(Glaring at COSMOS and saying so that only he can hear.)* And so's our bank balance!

DESIREE lounges on couch as ALL move left. As SELMA is about to exit, NICK grabs her arm to prevent her from leaving.

NICK: *(Looking back at DESIREE.)* I think you should go fill your plate too, Miss Divine!

DESIREE: But Dr. Noir, I'm not exactly hungry . . . and I still feel a little faint.

NICK: You need to keep your strength up. So beat it!

DESIREE follows ALL others off left.

NICK: *(To audience.)* There is a time in everyone's life where well-chosen words means the difference between life and death. And this was one of those times.

(To SELMA.) Selma, now do you see the trouble your lies have got us into?

SELMA: Why did you bring that . . . that . . . patient here?

NICK: 'Cause apparently this is where the job has led me to!

SELMA: What are you talking about?

NICK: I'm trackin' down some creep for Miss Divine!

SELMA: Why track him down? I'm looking at him right now!

NICK: Nice. But it's somebody else this time! Somebody who made off with a chunk of change! It's a job, Selma, just a job.

SELMA: And when it's through, then what?

NICK: I dunno! You're the one who made up Dr. Nick! Why don't you talk to him about it?

SELMA: Personally, I don't care if I ever see Dr. Nick or you again!

SELMA flounces off left.

NICK: *(To audience.)* And I thought that was as bad as it could get!

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

SETTING:

The great room, an hour later.

AT RISE:

ESTELLE is searching through the drawers of the desk right. She pulls out several papers and envelopes, looks them over carefully, then lays them atop the desk. All the while she is humming or singing "We're in the Money" - off-key, of course. After a few moments, RALPH sneaks on right, unseen by ESTELLE, who has her hands full of papers.

RALPH: Hey!

ESTELLE screams and tosses the papers into the air.

RALPH: What're you doin'?

ESTELLE: How . . . how dare you scare me like that?

RALPH: I asked you what you were doin'!

ESTELLE: I'm an old woman. You could have given me a heart attack.

ESTELLE now begins to quickly - - and spryly - - pick up the papers.

RALPH: You're snoopin', aren't you?

ESTELLE: I have had a history of heart problems. If I were to have had a heart attack, you'd be to blame.

RALPH: Don't put yourself out. He doesn't keep any cash in that desk.

ESTELLE: How do you know?

RALPH: I already looked.

ESTELLE: Well, for your information, Mr. Rooney, I am not looking for cash.

RALPH: Oh, yeah? What exactly are you looking for?

ESTELLE shoves the majority of papers and files back into the desk but leaves a few on top.

ESTELLE: My butcher knife. The big, sharp one. The one about that long.

RALPH: *(Suddenly nervous.)* Butcher knife? Haven't seen it.

ESTELLE: If you do find it, be careful. It can do some serious damage.

ESTELLE exits left, a wicked smile on her face. RALPH wipes his forehead on his sleeve, then is about to sit on the couch when he hears:

DESIREE: *(Off left.)* Gee, Nick, I don't know what you want me to say!

RALPH, terrified, slips behind the curtains upstage just as DESIREE, NICK, and SELMA enter left.

NICK: Tell Selma you're just a client, okay? This is just a job.

DESIREE: *(Sighing, not meaning it.)* I'm just a client. This is just a job. Okay?

SELMA: I've seen better acting at a first grade spring pageant!

NICK: It's true, Selma! Truer than any of the lies you've told your family.

SELMA: I already explained that, Nick. You see how it is here.

NICK: All I see is everybody here seems to be lying about something!

SELMA: No, it's just me. And you. And her!

DESIREE: Say, Nick . . . I hate to change the subject, but I think . . . *(DESIREE sniffs about.)* I think he's been in this room . . . and not too long ago!

SELMA: Who's she talking about?

NICK: The creep who owes her money. The one we're looking for.

DESIREE: I'm going to slip into some dark corner and keep my eyes open. He has to come back.

SELMA: You already got enough dark corners, lady!

OTTO enters left, glumly.

SELMA: Daddy? Daddy, what's wrong?

OTTO: (*Crumbling onto couch.*) I just don't understand it. I don't understand it at all.

SELMA: You don't understand what?

NICK: (*To audience.*) Oh, boy! I figured this was it! Otto Meyer, the king of hot dogs, the man who could crush anyone financially, had found out I really wasn't a doctor at all.

OTTO: Where all that money went!

NICK: (*To audience.*) Boy, was I relieved when he said that!

OTTO: I've never felt so helpless and sick in all my life.

DESIREE: Good thing Dr. Noir's here. He'll prescribe something for you. He always knows just what to do to make me feel better.

Furiously, SELMA picks up a couch pillow and is about ready to hurl it at DESIREE, but NICK grabs it.

OTTO: Can you, Dr. Noir? I need something to clear my head so I can think clearly. I've got to come up with a plan or . . . or . . .

SELMA: Or what, Daddy?

OTTO: Or the IRS is going to visit Otto Meyer Hot Dogs and grill us good!

SELMA: Oh, Nick! Nick, you've got to do something!

NICK: (*To audience.*) That was it. The pleading look in Selma's eyes was always too powerful. It melted my heart and there was nothing I wouldn't do.

NICK takes SELMA'S hands in his.

NICK: Oh, Selma, baby, when you look at me like that, how can I refuse? I'll get Vinnie the Worm and Morris the Snake on the case right away!

OTTO: Are Vinnie the Worm and Morris the Snake members of the American Medical Association?

NICK: Charter members! C'mon, Selma!

SELMA: Where? To find your patient?

NICK: *(To audience.)* Right about then my patience about my patient was wearin' mighty thin. *(To SELMA.)* No! She's doin' much better! You're the one who needs some treatment!

NICK takes SELMA'S hand and hauls her off right just as MIMI, LILA, and LOLA enter left.

LILA: Your kitchen is definitely not big enough.

LOLA: That counter won't hold the wedding cake, let alone five hundred hors d'oeuvres, three hundred glasses of champagne, and sixteen barons of beef!

OTTO: Oh, Mimi, we aren't inviting royalty, are we?

MIMI: Oh, no, dear, she means the roasts.

LILA: I'd suggest knocking the west wall out.

LOLA: We can recommend a very good contractor.

LILA: He's dependable and extremely - -

OTTO: Cheap? Please say cheap?

MIMI: Otto!

LOLA: One thing you don't want on your baby's big day is to scrimp. It's a day you all want to remember for the rest of your lives.

OTTO: Yeah . . . behind bars.

ANGEL, CANDY, and PETUNIA rush on left, ANGEL is holding a wedding dress, CANDY and PETUNIA holding garish bridesmaid dresses.

ANGEL: Oh my gosh! We found Selma's wedding dress! Isn't it to die for?

OTTO: And I might!

MIMI: Oh, poor Otto . . . is something upsetting your tummy?

MIMI sits next to OTTO.

CANDY: And look at our bridesmaid dresses!

PETUNIA: Aren't they the living end?

OTTO: Why are they so preoccupied with death?

ANGEL: Gee, Mr. Meyer, you're supposed to be happy!

CANDY: Don't you like the colors?

PETUNIA: And how about these necklines?

ANGEL: I can see a diamond necklace with that, Petunia.

CANDY: I was thinking pearls.

LILA: How about both?

ANGEL: Mr. Meyer, can we take your credit card and pick up a few accessories?

OTTO moans loudly and buries his head in his hands.

LOLA: Oh dear, Lila . . .

MIMI: Girls, why don't you find Selma and show her the dresses? She hasn't even had time to take a look at them.

CANDY: Is Mr. Meyer going to be okay?

LILA: He'll be fine.

LOLA: Run along!

ANGEL, CANDY, and PETUNIA exit right, nervously looking back as OTTO moans again.

MIMI: Otto, where does it hurt?

LILA: Oh, Mrs. Meyer, this is a common affliction with fathers of the bride.

LOLA: We've seen it at every wedding we've coordinated.

LILA: We thought Mr. Meyer might be spared because he . . . well, he sells so many hot dogs.

OTTO moans.

LOLA: It must be a male gene or something that causes the pain.

MIMI: Maybe some Bengay will help.

LILA: I don't think so.

MIMI: Well, where is this pain?

LOLA: In his wallet.

LILA and LOLA tiptoe off left.

MIMI: Oh, Otto, we've talked about the expense. We can afford Selma's wedding.

OTTO moans loudly.

MIMI: Can't we?

OTTO: We could before . . . before . . .

MIMI: Before what?

The phone rings. MIMI answers it.

MIMI: Hello? Yes, it is. Whom shall I say is calling? *(Covering the mouthpiece.*
Otto, it's a Mr. Crankshaft from the IRS. Are you at home?

OTTO runs off left screaming.

MIMI: I'm sorry, Mr. Crankshaft, but he . . . he had a few errands to run. I'll tell him
you called. *(MIMI hangs up.)* Otto! Otto, what's wrong?

MIMI exits left. RALPH peeks out from behind the curtains and tiptoes to left. He hears.

DESIREE: *(Off right.)* He's got to be in here! The smell is overpowering!

RALPH lifts the hope chest lid and is lifting his foot to get in when he suddenly screams in terror. He slams the lid and dives behind the couch just as DESIREE and NICK enter right.

NICK: It came from in here!

DESIREE: It sounded like somebody was getting - -

NICK: Spare me the gory details!

DESIREE: You're supposed to be used to gory details, Doctor.

NICK: Just because I'm a doctor doesn't mean I like the sight of blood.

DESIREE: Well, whoever screamed must have scared the bum off! And he didn't
come out that door! *(DESIREE points right, then moves left.)*

NICK: *(To audience.)* I was beginning to wonder why Desiree needed a detective.
She seemed pretty good at calling the shots all by herself!

DESIREE: I'm not paying you to stand there! C'mon!

MIMI, OTTO, LILA, and LOLA enter left.

MIMI: Did we hear someone scream?

NICK: A scream?

LILA: A scream of sheer terror.

DESIREE: It was me. Dr. Noir was going to give me a shot, and I'm afraid of
needles!

NICK reaches in his pocket. DESIREE lets out a piercing scream.

LOLA: Oh, be careful! You could shatter all the crystal goblets, and then what will we toast with?

SELMA, ANGEL, CANDY, and PETUNIA run on right, still holding the dresses. SELMA wears her veil.

SELMA: What happened, Mummy?

MIMI: It's quite all right. Miss Divine is afraid of shots, that's all.

SELMA: Now who would have figured?

NICK: (*Melting.*) Selma! You look . . . you look . . . (*To audience.*) I wanted to get real mushy and tell her she looked like the girl I'd always dreamed of marrying. But with all those eyes plastered on me, I just couldn't get those words out. I opted for something a little less . . . gooey. (*To SELMA.*) You look like a bride.

OTTO: (*Noticing the desk.*) Say! What're those papers doing on top of the desk?

NICK: They're not supposed to be there, sir?

OTTO: (*Moving to desk. NICK follows him.*) Those are company files. Somebody's been snooping!

MIMI: Oh, Otto, nobody would bother with your old papers. Now girls, I think you need to go upstairs and try on your dresses to make sure they're perfect fits!

ANGEL: Good idea!

LILA: And Lola, we need to get the fabric for the tablecloths.

MIMI: Where'd you put it?

LOLA: In the hope chest, where else?

LILA and LOLA giggle as they move to hope chest.

CANDY: Come on, Selma! I can't wait to see how that dress looks on you!

LILA opens hope chest. She screams.

LOLA: What's wrong?

LILA points into hope chest. LOLA screams.

NICK: (*To audience.*) Now, Lila is a woman with a lot of heart and an eye for fashion, but I figured the color of the tablecloths couldn't be that awful. (*To LILA.*) What's is it?

LILA and LOLA both scream.

NICK: Geez Louise! It can't be all that bad! (*NICK looks into hope chest.*) On the other hand . . .

OTTO is now behind NICK.

OTTO: It's Cosmo!

MIMI: What's he doing in the hope chest? Cosmo! We have plenty of couches to lie down on.

NICK: I don't think he can hear you, Mrs. Meyer.

DESIREE: What's wrong with him, Dr. Noir?

SELMA: Yes, Doctor?

NICK: In my expert medical opinion, he croaked.

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