

SEEKING ASYLUM

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

By Jerry Rabushka

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CHARACTERS

MALE ROLES

MARK: A rather crazy character living in an altered reality; not sure if he wants to be cured or not.

THOR: Thinks he's an orderly, he's a bit crazy and a bit lonely, but lots of fun on a good day.

DRAKE: Thor's best friend, perhaps an inmate of the asylum, perhaps not.

DAD: Everybody's father (long story) with a really annoying sense of humor.

FEMALE ROLES

RENEE: Mark's wife, the only sane one of the bunch, and it annoys her to no end.

SHAMIKYA: (Shamikya Eritrea Britanya Arriaga de los Flores) A hip-hop girl who is a side effect of Mark's drugs.

PHYLLIS: A hip-hop girl, along with Shamikya, who is a side effect of Mark's drugs.

MOM: Everybody's mother (**long story again**) who just can't stand to see her children happy.

SHEREE: A distant cousin from Brooklyn who thinks she's sane.

DELORES: A more distant cousin, from the Bronx.

DOCTOR: Can be played by either male or female, it's a leading role, but open to many interpretations. DOCTOR takes care of the patients, often to his/her own advantage.

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ACT 1

SCENE 1

Most of the play takes place in an asylum somewhere in Texas, as well as in a TV studio set up for infomercials. The line between the two is very thin and crosses without much notice. The audience can figure out in their own mind which is which. The set can be very Spartan; just a few chairs, beanbags, or other places to sit are sufficient. A “concept” set, which emphasizes the mental more than the physical surroundings, would be effective here as well. Work with lighting for various effects, to show a commercial in progress, or to isolate characters at various dramatic moments. As the show opens, MARK is on stage, talking mainly to the audience. DOCTOR is listening off to one side until HE becomes more involved in the action.

MARK: *(showing some bottles of medicine)* I take these for my delusions, these for my nightmares, and these... *(grins, almost childish)* because I like the color. *(explains)* It all started about a year ago. Well maybe six months. Or was it last week? I can't remember, but I think it was that Wednesday after the family reunion. I'm not really sure. I tend to lose track after a family reunion.

DOCTOR: Nobody cares when it all started. Just get on with it.

MARK: I can't get on with it until I remember when it started. There's no point in going back a year if we've only got to deal with six months.

DOCTOR: I'd rather go back a year. I can charge you twice as much.

MARK: I used to remember exactly when it started. The nightmares, the delusions, the loneliness. Then they put me on these pills. Now, I feel crazy, but I don't know why.

DOCTOR: *(strolling more into the limelight, speaking authoritatively)* Mark has side effects. Lots of them. Nausea, headaches, cramps. Sometimes he thinks he's a fish.

MARK: My grandmother had plastic surgery and now she looks like LL Cool J. Grandpa doesn't mind. He just doesn't like rap.

DOCTOR: That's another side effect. He tends to ramble.

MARK: So did Grandma. That's why she had the surgery.

DOCTOR: But there's two side effects that he can't seem to get rid of.

MARK: Yeah. Nausea you can puke up. Headaches? Pop another pill.
Grandma, I can tune out.

(Enter SHAMIKYA and PHYLLIS. They're both trendy, colorful, and enjoy their own humor.)

SHAMIKYA: ***(introducing herself, with a flourish)*** I'm Shamikya
Eritrea Britanya Arriaga de Los Flores!

PHYLLIS: ***(not impressed, but we can tell they hang together a lot)***
Whatever. I'm Phyllis.

DOCTOR: Phyllis what?

PHYLLIS: Just Phyllis. Shamikya took all the names.

MARK: I can't get rid of them.

DOCTOR: ***(to the audience, regarding the girls)*** We've never seen them.

MARK: ***(can't believe that)*** They're standing right in front of you.

DOCTOR: Well, move them. I don't want them blocking anyone's view of me.

MARK: Shake it out, Shamikya.

(SHAMIKYA moves over, but with attitude.)

PHYLLIS: ***(stands right in front of DOCTOR)*** What about me? You always think of her first.

MARK: ***(moves her out of the way)*** That's because she always does everything first. She enters first, she talks first, she thinks first.

PHYLLIS: That's not true. See? I disagree – first.

MARK: Which one of these pills created them, Doc? Can't we - ***(sees GIRLS are miffed)*** oh, not that I would!

DOCTOR: Do you want to keep having those nightmares?

MARK: Now it's the same two nightmares over and over. Shamikya etcetera de Los Flores, and Phyllis. At the grocery store, they fight over prices. At dinner they fight over Grandma, particularly now that she looks like LL Cool J. At the mall they fight over lingerie.

SHAMIKYA: ***(teasing, spinning around in front of MARK)*** What are you doing in the lingerie department, Mark?

MARK: ***(shouting, and stopping her spinning)*** I'm trying to keep you two quiet!

PHYLLIS: You can't. We're side effects. We're like a curse in Greek mythology. ***(explaining to MARK and the audience)*** In the old days, bad things happened through intervention and retaliation from Mount Olympus. Now, they happen through drug cocktails. Three thousand years ago, they would blame Aphrodite! ***(a bit hip-hop)***
Now we ascribe it to how we prescribe it.

SHAMIKYA: It's revenge for what you did to your wife.

MARK: **(defensive)** I didn't do anything to my wife!

PHYLLIS: **(aghast)** You ignored her?! The Goddess must strike back!
(SHE and SHAMIKYA “cast a spell” on MARK, who falls over in shock)

DOCTOR: **(not impressed, but picking MARK up and “presenting” him to the audience)** Mark was an experiment, of sorts. We tried hypnotherapy. We tried psychotherapy. We tried shock therapy.

MARK: That wasn't shock therapy. You made me listen to the soundtrack from *Grease* for 48 hours without a break.

SHAMIKYA: We like these pills. **(affectionately, hovering around MARK)** And we don't want you to ever stop taking them.

PHYLLIS: If he does, we disappear. Then he has to go back to his wife!

SHAMIKYA: Renee – the evil one.

PHYLLIS: She's not evil. She just can't help it.

SHAMIKYA: She won't support him. **(stands by MARK)** She won't stand by him. **(pulls PHYLLIS over to her)** That's why we're here. We're not as bad as he likes to pretend.

MARK: You're here because I'm loony! And you're making it worse. **(to audience, about SHAMIKYA)** In the morning, she's green, until the first set of pills wears off.

DOCTOR: Mark used to dream about being lost in outer space. About being caught on the wrong end of an interplanetary struggle. About having to press the button and blow up Earth. Then one day...

MARK: One day I had this dream that I was the only Republican at the Democratic National Convention. And they nominated me.

DOCTOR: What did you do?

MARK: I called the party headquarters. Now I'm on the ballot in 48 states.

DOCTOR: He's not really.

MARK: **(argumentative)** I am, really. Every state except Hawaii and Vermont.

DOCTOR: **(pushing him back)** He's not. Really, he's not.

MARK: **(threatening)** Did you have me removed? I'm on the Florida ballot in three different places. Just in case they miss. And our home state of Texas!

DOCTOR: Don't mention Texas.

PHYLLIS and SHAMIKYA: Texassssssssss.

MARK: Stop that!

PHYLLIS: Me? I didn't say anything.

PHYLLIS and SHAMIKYA: Texassssssssss.

MARK: I told you not to mention it! **(to DOCTOR)** Make them stop!

DOCTOR: I can't make them stop. I can't see or hear them. Only through your narrative. Then they're plain as day.

SHAMIKYA: Plain! I am not plain!

PHYLLIS: **(to DOCTOR, up in his face)** How would you know? You can't even see us!

MARK: **(wandering off)** I want a cure. I want to see Grandma the way she was.

PHYLLIS and SHAMIKYA: Texasssssssssss.

MARK: **(turns around to them)** Stop that!

DOCTOR: She never really had the surgery.

MARK: You mean...

DOCTOR: She aged like that naturally. She just didn't want to admit it.

MARK: If I knew when all this started, we could make some sense out of it. When did I first see you?

DOCTOR: You've been seeing me for a year. But you weren't this deluded in the beginning. You just thought you were.

MARK: What's the difference?

DOCTOR: **(indicates GIRLS)** This is the difference. Side effects.

SHAMIKYA: We're really incarnations from Ancient Greece. We just follow people around, and annoy them. In those days we were called "the furies". These days, people call us "issues."

PHYLLIS: We've been assigned to Mark to help him snap out of his illness.

SHAMIKYA: It's too bad, because, frankly, he's tiresome.

PHYLLIS: Same old nightmares.

SHAMIKYA: Same old visions. He needs the side effects.

PHYLLIS and SHAMIKYA: Texasssssssssss.

MARK: Stop that!

PHYLLIS: **(tickles him under the chin)** Only if you vote Democratic.

MARK: **(astounded)** In Texas? Isn't that a capital offense?

SHAMIKYA: Not if you're mentally ill.

(Enter THOR and DRAKE, dressed as orderlies. They're very energetic and upbeat for the moment, and they are a bit out of breath from a struggle.)

THOR: Doctor!

DOCTOR: **(a bit condescending)** Yes, Thor?

DRAKE: Doctor!

DOCTOR: Yes, Drake?

DRAKE: She's out of control.

THOR: You have to do something.

DOCTOR: Who's out of control?

PHYLLIS: Who isn't? It's an asylum!

MARK: It is *not* an asylum.

SHAMIKYA: Grandma looks like LL Cool J and you think it's not an asylum. It's either an asylum or it's Jerry Springer.

THOR and DRAKE: (**chanting**) Jer-RY! Jer-RY! Jer-RY!

MARK: Make it stop. I can't take these voices.

DOCTOR: Those are for real.

MARK: Wait a minute! They can't be! (**indicates THOR and DRAKE**)

They can't hear Shamikya unless they're figments of my imagination.

THOR: Oh, we can. You're "doing" it.

MARK: I'm "doing" it?

DRAKE: (**mimicking MARK**) I'm Shamikya Eritrea Britanya Arriaga de los Flores.

DOCTOR: To the rest of us, you're doing it. Their voices are coming out through your mouth.

MARK: Oh my God! Then...

SHAMIKYA: That episode in the lingerie department? And no, they didn't fit you!

MARK: (**up to THOR, looking at him intently**) Yah know...!

THOR: (**tries to move away**) Get him away from me!

MARK: (**turns THOR back around**) Oh, like I'm the first crazy person you've ever met. (**looks him over closely**) You look just like... my... ex-girlfriend.

THOR: (**frightened, looking around embarrassed**) Dude! (**tries to run off, but MARK holds him at bay**)

MARK: (**big smile**) You do! That's why I dumped her! (**laughs hysterically**)

DRAKE: (**pushes MARK's hands down to his sides**) I think this fella needs a straight-jacket.

MARK: I need new medication.

RENEE: (**his wife, enters hysterically**) Mark! (**tries to get to MARK, but THOR and DRAKE hold her back**)

MARK: Who's that?

THOR: It's your wife! (**to the crowd, as SHE still struggles**) And someone better do something about her.

DRAKE: She's a drama queen. A diva! A prima donna! (**gasps with horror**) An... actress!

THOR: She thinks she's on stage.

RENEE: (**looking around the stage**) I *am* on stage. Do you think this is the lobby of the Ritz Carlton? (**breaks loose; THOR and DRAKE try to catch her, but can't**)

DRAKE: And she's out of control!

MARK: Especially when she sees me with-

RENEE: I have never seen you with Shamikya and Phyllis. Shamikya and Phyllis don't exist. I've *heard* you with them, but seen them?

No... no... no...! (**approaches DOCTOR**) Doctor, I'm tired of this whole setup.

DOCTOR: We're doing everything we can.

RENEE: Not for me. I want attention. I want medication. (**bigger, taking over**) I want to be the one with the problem.

DOCTOR: I'm beginning to think-

RENEE: (**to the audience, as well as various folks on stage**) Have you ever noticed how in every one of these dramas it's always the man with the problem? Every movie, play, TV series? It's always about the man. The leading lady doesn't have a "role." She's a support unit. She's commentary. She stands by her man, then about halfway through the movie she threatens to leave him because he finds something in life he'd rather do than spend time with her. Well duh! She's not a woman, she's a prop! But (**walking among the cast, taking control, pushing them haughtily out of her way**) not... any... more. From now on, the issues are mine! I want problems! I want answers! I want to be mentally ill!

THOR: I don't think that's a problem.

PHYLLIS: We thought Moesha was pretty cool. Watched her every week on the WB. *She* had issues.

RENEE: (**vehemently disagrees**) Moesha was not cool! (**catches herself**) Now I'm talking to *them*. Mark! Stop it!

MARK: I can't stop it. I'm on too many pills.

RENEE: I'm going to commit you.

DOCTOR: You already committed him.

RENEE: Don't let him know. I've been using it as a threat.

MARK: How did we get to the lingerie department if I'm committed?

RENEE: In your mind, you ignoramus.

SHAMIKYA: Yep. His mind is full of women's underwear.

PHYLLIS: (**to RENEE, who is scandalized**) On sale! You should see what we snapped up!

MARK: (**a bit to the audience**) When my grandma got home from the hospital, Grandpa didn't want to let her in at first. Then Grandma said she picked up an extra kidney for his bladder problem. Someone dropped it and she just scooped it up and put it in her cooler. Grandma always had a cooler. I think she's saving it for Grandpa. I'm not sure they're getting along.

DOCTOR: (**to the audience**) Um... we'll be right back.

SCENE 2

An advertisement or infomercial. On stage are DOCTOR, THOR, and DRAKE. THOR and DRAKE are playing characters in the infomercial, but eventually, they'll drift back into themselves, then back and forth, blurring the distinction.

THOR: Do you suffer?

DRAKE: From what?

THOR: Do you suffer from...

DRAKE: Thor! What!

THOR: From feeling...

DRAKE: What??

THOR: Incomplete?

DRAKE: Now I do.

THOR: But you didn't before. ***(playing "gotcha!")*** You're making up a malady to try out medication you have no business using.

DRAKE: No, you're driving me crazy.

THOR: But there is something missing.

DRAKE: ***(arm around THOR)*** We do everything together.

THOR: We do. Everything. Usually if I start a sentence...

DRAKE: I finish it.

THOR: Drake majored in microbiology with a minor in Japanese history.

He took a job at the asylum because he couldn't bear-

DRAKE: I can bear it.

THOR: No, you couldn't. And you still can't.

DRAKE: What is it?

THOR: ***(backing off)*** You're afraid to be alone.

DRAKE: I'm starting to look forward to it.

DOCTOR: ***(to the audience)*** Does this kind of thing happen in your home?

DRAKE: All the time!

THOR: I wouldn't know. He won't invite me over.

DRAKE: We spend eight hours a day together taking care of the asylum. It's my solace.

THOR: You live here.

DRAKE: You're nuts.

THOR: I like it that way.

DOCTOR: ***(walking between them and addressing the audience)*** We have a new treatment for people just like this. People who make your life impossible. People who talk, but *you* don't know what they're saying. People who you just wish would shut up. We have a solution.

THOR: Earplugs? ***(takes some out and sticks them in his ears)***

DOCTOR: **(goes up behind THOR and takes them out)** That would be too easy. And it won't make me any money. Instead, we have a new tranquilizer. You'll relax. You'll be happy. Nagging wife? Who's to know? Husband out drinking? Whatever. Remember, drugs are bad for you, unless you have a doctor's prescription. **(to THOR)** Here, Thor. Have one.

THOR: I don't want one.

DOCTOR: This is a commercial. It's only effective till we get back to the real show. **(insistent)** Have one.

THOR: This is an asylum. No one knows when the commercial ends and the play begins. **(DOCTOR shoves a pill in THOR's mouth, THOR swallows it with a loud gulp and a wide eyed look.)**

DOCTOR: Now, Drake. Try to exasperate him. Annoy him. Make him squirm.

DRAKE: What should I do?

DOCTOR: Just be yourself.

DRAKE: How do I do that? It's an asylum, you know. I've hidden my personality under years of having to impress my parents, look good on dates, make my boss think I'm industrious, and using a false identity that, incidentally, got me a perfect score on the SAT test. I'm totally bogus. **(overly dramatic)** I don't know who I am anymore. **(back to normal)** Maybe I should take one.

THOR: Drake! **(looking at him closely)** Did you know... that you look like... LL Cool J?

DRAKE: **(finger in THOR's face, goofy)** You look like Mark's ex-girlfriend.

THOR: Oh, I don't care. I don't care what I look like because... **(looks out into the crowd for a mirror)** there's no mirror. But I know one thing. I don't look like you. And I'm really really glad.

DRAKE: **(can't think of anything else to say, so HE approaches THOR and smiles sheepishly)** I ate your lunch.

THOR: **(back to being friends, smiles a bit, innocently)** Well I hope you liked it. Next time, tell me what you want, and I'll have my mom make it for you.

DRAKE: **(can't believe it)** You live with your mom?

THOR: **(this hits a nerve, and HE gets depressed for a short while)** I don't know. I used to, when I was a boy. **(happy, remembering)** She made me lunch sometimes, and it was... good. It was a sandwich, and chips, and carrot sticks. **(unhappy)** Then she dumped me off here and left me to rot. So I probably don't live with her now. You better get lunch from the kitchen help.

DOCTOR: So, **(presents THOR to the audience)** if you want to be just like that – take... **(presents a bottle)** this! **(official)** Side effects include nausea, diarrhea, constipation-

DRAKE: Both?

DOCTOR: At the same time. It evens out. It also includes a spontaneous religious conversion and voting Libertarian.

DRAKE: Even in Texas?

DOCTOR: Especially in Texas. So you'd better be careful.

THOR: I can't vote anyway. I'm not 18.

DRAKE: You're a college graduate!

THOR: Oh. Well then I'm not 18, am I? **(to the audience)** When I was younger, I really wanted to go into politics, but my mom taught me to tell the truth. And truth be known... these pills are really weird.

SHAMIKYA: **(enters with PHYLLIS)** You forgot something.

DOCTOR: What?

PHYLLIS: Us! The Shamikya-Phyllis syndrome. Can't get us out of your head.

MARK: **(enters, runs across the stage, but PHYLLIS and SHAMIKA each catch one of his arms and pull him back)** Make them go away!

DOCTOR: Wait a minute! **(tries to push MARK off stage)** Get out of my commercial!

MARK: Are you a TV doctor? I don't think you're for real. You put me on TV medication. My wife thinks this is a TV show.

RENEE: **(enters as well)** I do not! I just want to be...

SHAMIKYA: **(taking center stage and upstaging RENEE)** The center of attention.

PHYLLIS: **(to RENEE, with mock sympathy)** But you can't, unless you get us out of his head.

RENEE: **(to THOR and DRAKE)** Do something! Get rid of them.

THOR: **(pretending, with a big smile)** I don't know what you're talking about.

DRAKE: **(nodding in agreement, kind of snide)** I know *exactly* what she's talking about.

THOR: What's that?

DRAKE: Phyllis! And Shamikya! In concert.

THOR: **(goes to MARK)** This is a man with multiple personalities. If you destroy them, he'll only be a third the man he used to be. Think of all the extra cooking and cleaning you can get done if he's got two female personalities lurking behind his brutish, masculine soul!

PHYLLIS: Cook?

SHAMIKYA: Clean?

PHYLLIS: **(up in THOR's face)** Boy, who you talking about?

SHAMIKYA: Don't even mention windows.

THOR: I think it's time for Mark to develop some new personalities. Docile and cooperative.

RENEE: I want them gone! **(over the top)** I want my husband back.

DOCTOR: Here! (**pushes MARK in her direction**)

RENEE: Not like that! I want him cured.

DOCTOR: You want him cured so *you* can appropriate the problem. (**to the audience**) It's a common issue here. People think their loved ones are faking mental illness to get attention. They think their loved one can snap out of it. (**everyone but MARK snaps their fingers and looks to MARK, who shrugs**) It doesn't work. Mark needs help, support, and a woman beside him to see him through.

RENEE: He's got two already, who don't want to see him cured.

DOCTOR: Which is why he needs you.

PHYLLIS: We don't need... (**with a sneer**) Renee.

SHAMIKYA: That hoochie mama!

RENEE: So I have no choice.

DOCTOR: Not really. You have to stand by your man.

RENEE: Can't I just kick him in the-

THOR: Halls? You'll get arrested for assault.

RENEE: I think what he needs is a good-

SHAMIKYA: (**waving a finger at RENEE**) Uh, uh, girlfriend. That is spousal abuse, no matter who the spouse is.

RENEE: Well have him take something else! Something that won't make him so delusional.

MARK: The truth? (**frightened, and insistent**) Don't make me see the truth.

SHAMIKYA: (**to RENEE**) The truth that he's married to *your* puddin' butt, and he wants to stay in denial. It's healthier.

DOCTOR: It's not that easy. He's addicted.

RENEE: (**demanding**) I want him off the medication. I want him to go cold turkey. I want my husband back!

PHYLLIS: I don't think he wants you.

DOCTOR: See, we might think of him as insane, but in his mind, such as it is, he's irrevocably wedded to Shamikya etcetera de Los Flores, and to Phyllis. He doesn't really want to get rid of them.

SHAMIKYA: What's with this etcetera? It's (**announcing**) Shamikya Eritrea Britanya Arriaga de Los Flores. Either learn it, or change it.

DOCTOR: Ok. From now on I'll call you-

SHAMIKYA: (**"talk to the hand!"**) I don't recall giving you my number, honey!

RENEE: (**insistent**) Cold turkey.

THOR: (**approaches RENEE and lays a hand on her**) I'll say.

DRAKE: Stop that. You're touching the merchandise.

THOR: It's clammy. And it needs defrosting.

DRAKE: What did you expect? It's a turkey. (**they laugh together**)

RENEE: Doctor! Control your orderlies.

THOR: Not very orderly, are we? You should see us out on the town.

We are wild! Me and Drake, we tear it up good! Don't we, boy?

DRAKE: Yep. Tear it up!

DOCTOR: Another delusion. They haven't been out of the ward in months. They think they're orderlies. They're locked up, and they work their tails off. It's good for me, and good for payroll.

DRAKE: Thor is my best friend. When I had those side effects, he cleaned all of it up.

RENEE: Why don't you wipe those girls out of Mark's head?

THOR: That would make them dirty girls. My mother-

DRAKE: See? He still lives with his mother!

DOCTOR: He thinks he does. He shares a room with Drake.

THOR: I have never been to Drake's house! He won't invite me!

DRAKE: Why should I invite you? You live with me.

DOCTOR: **(to the audience)** You try keeping all this straight!

RENEE: **(goes to MARK and takes his pills away)** From now on, it's reality. Harsh, cold, ugly, brutal, impossible, revolting-

PHYLLIS: Will ya can it with the adjectives already?

RENEE: When I'm finished, I'll can the adjectives. Till then, the can is open and they pop out like a snake in an Indiana Jones movie. I'm going to modify until you-

PHYLLIS: Till we what? Go crazy? Try crossing that line and see who notices!

RENEE: Here's the truth, Mark. Grandma doesn't look like LL Cool J. She's been dead for five years.

DOCTOR: Then who is she?

RENEE: That's Aunt Betty. She thinks she's Grandma. She thinks she's getting Grandma's money, too.

DOCTOR: She still looks like LL Cool J.

RENEE: And the other truth is... **(goes up to MARK)** I'm your wife. And you love me.

SHAMIKYA: The sad truth.

RENEE: **(to SHAMIKYA)** Honest to gizzards. **(to MARK, more sympathetic)** I want to have the place in your life I had before they came along! I want to be your wife again! I want to be important! I want to be-

DOCTOR: **(tosses her a bottle of pills)** Medicated. Take one of these, and you won't want any of that. You'll want to lie down and go to sleep.

RENEE: **(tosses them back)** Not on your life, buster. You've overmedicated everyone in this cast. Someone has to keep a semblance of reality around here.

DOCTOR: **(points to RENEE, aside)** She has a room here too.

RENEE: **(bursts out, angrily)** I do *not* have a room here. You're the sick one! You're the one who created all this to test out some silly medical theory that-

THOR: **(HE and DRAKE spin RENEE back and forth between them, while SHE tries to escape)** A theory? Did she say theory?

DRAKE: I am not a theory. A postulation perhaps, **(insulted)** but a theory!

THOR: Surely, Renee, you can't be "theor-ius."

DRAKE: And surely she can't be Shirley, if she's Renee.

THOR: I'm in perfect shape. And cute too, don't you think. Cute, handsome, good looking, hot, striking, dashing, you name it. You could use a drug for that.

RENEE: I had a dog that looked like you.

THOR: You're one sick lady.

RENEE: I'm the only one who isn't! Umm... We'll be right back. **(RENEE exits, lights change a bit for a new infomercial, as MARK strolls up into a place of prominence)**

MARK: There was a time when I saw life for what it was. I had a wife...

RENEE: **(comes back in, but stays by the side of the stage)** You still do.

MARK: She's not really my wife. She's a cafeteria worker who's mad because I don't like her pot roast.

RENEE: That's a lie! Everyone likes my pot roast.

THOR: I hated her pot roast.

RENEE: **(barrels up to THOR)** You never had it.

MARK: **(pushes her back)** Excuse me, Renee! I have the spotlight!

DOCTOR: **(stands next to MARK)** And we're sharing it.

MARK: We are?

DOCTOR: We are.

MARK: But I have issues!

DOCTOR: I have a license to practice medicine!

MARK: I have issues!

DOCTOR: **(giving in)** Ok. Share your issues.

MARK: I was seeing life for real, but my wife! My friends! They didn't understand. We had to keep up appearances. We had to be things we weren't.

DOCTOR: It's Texas, you know.

MARK: Yes, I know.

DOCTOR: You can't be what you want unless you live in Austin. And no one can afford the rent.

MARK: Soon I was totally what I wasn't. My mind wanted to go back. But it started without me. I would go to the family reunion, and I'd say "Cousin Maude, you look lovely!" and I'd see visions of her

decomposed body – but with purse and shoes to match. I'd say "Uncle Barlow, that's a great pot roast!"

RENEE: I made the pot roast!

MARK: Well it sucked! And whatever Uncle Barlow made? I *said* I liked it. But I didn't. And then I had to eat a whole plate of it to prove my devotion. Then seconds, then thirds, then...

RENEE: Then you had side effects!

MARK: Side effects. Right there on the dining room table. But I met the doctor...

DOCTOR: That would be me!

MARK: ...and he took care of me.

DOCTOR: I took him in, and performed experiments.

MARK: I created Shamikya, and Phyllis.

DOCTOR: Actually, we took them out of Thor's mind.

THOR: Drake had Phyllis. I had Shamikya.

SHAMIKYA: **(snappy)** We are bettah togethah!

DOCTOR: If we take you off the drugs, you lose Shamikya and Phyllis. **(points to RENEE)** And you get that.

THOR: What about us? We'll miss you, Mark. We'll miss your mind.

DRAKE: Actually, we'll miss Shamikya and Phyllis.

THOR: **(comes up next to DRAKE, scared)** We won't have anything.

DRAKE: Just me and Thor and no illusions. I don't think we can let it happen. It's how we have our fun. Thor's my best friend, you know.

RENEE: You have to let it happen.

THOR: Why? For you? What joy do you bring to anybody's life? You make a lousy pot roast and you have no sense of humor.

RENEE: You're all living in a land of make believe.

MARK: I think *you* are. I think... you mapped out a world that you think is best, and now you think we all have to be part of that world. Build it, and they will come! The whole family is that way.

RENEE: I can't believe you'd want *this*.

MARK: I can't believe you don't.

THOR: You came on here screaming that you wanted issues. **(smiling, kind of spooky)** Now you have issues.

DRAKE: I hope you're happy.

THOR: We're happy. **(arm around DRAKE)** Me and Drake. Fabulously happy!

DRAKE: I don't really have a microbiology major. Microbiology is too small. But I have my friends. **(to RENEE, angry)** And you're taking them away.

MARK: **(to DOCTOR)** Yeah, give her something. Then she'll get it.

DOCTOR: Well, Renee? What's it gonna be?

RENEE: This is too...

DOCTOR: Too what? I can make you an infomercial star in no time flat!

PHYLLIS: She's jealous because she's not the crazy one.

SHAMIKYA: She's miserable because we understand him.

PHYLLIS: Renee will never understand him.

RENEE: **(insistent)** Cold turkey.

THOR: **(touches her, giggles)** I'll say.

RENEE: You already did that.

THOR: I know. But it's still funny.

RENEE: I want something done! Now!

DOCTOR: **(giving in)** All right. You're Mark's wife. You're in charge.

After all, **(not sure HE believes this)** you're the sane one in the family.

RENEE: It didn't take much, as you can see.

(DOCTOR takes MARK's bottles away, and THOR and DRAKE escort SHAMIKYA and PHYLLIS off stage. GIRLS shrug and wave goodbye. MARK fights this, but HE's held back by RENEE and the DOCTOR. RENEE addresses MARK affectionately, but HE's in shock.)

Come on, Mark. We're going home.

MARK: **(protesting)** I am home. Where are they going? Where's everybody going? **(breaks free and runs to the edge of the stage, where everyone just left)** Hey! **(looks back to DOCTOR and RENEE, who are ready to take him to a new life, then off stage and back again)** Those are the only friends I have!

RENEE: **(after a pause, SHE takes MARK's hand. HE's scared and disoriented)** We have a lot of catching up to do. Let's go. There's a family reunion coming up. They can't wait to see you. **(leads him off stage)**

SCENE 3

THOR, DRAKE, SHAMIKYA, PHYLLIS.

THOR: **(to the audience)** I know what you're thinking.

DRAKE: I know what *you're* thinking.

THOR: I'm not surprised. But *them!* I know what they're thinking. **(proud, indicating himself)** How did this many good looks get rolled into one hot man?

SHAMIKYA: I don't think anyone's thinking that.

THOR: Oh, yes they are.

PHYLLIS: **(asks the audience)** Anyone? **(doesn't give them a chance to answer)** See? No.

THOR: Don't you need someone else to parasite off of?

DRAKE: They just wither up and die without a brain to host them.

PHYLLIS: Mark's going to need us again.

SHAMIKYA: But 'til then, we need to find a new set of neuroses.

PHYLLIS: I just want to be needed.

SHAMIKYA: It's hard to be a side effect.

PHYLLIS: You never know which side.

SHAMIKYA: Or which effect. Hey, I liked your brain too, Thor.

DRAKE: Don't forget *me*.

PHYLLIS: I can't forget you. But this working together thing? That's cool.

THOR: Yeah. Drake's my best friend. We do everything together.

DRAKE: Everything.

(Enter DAD and MOM, who for the time being are THOR's parents.)

THOR: **(can't believe what HE sees)** Mom? Dad?

MOM: Thor!

THOR: It's been so long.

DAD: We couldn't find you. We thought you were lost.

THOR: No. I've been here. But I couldn't find you. **(pause, as HE remembers)** You put me here! **(pause again)** This is my friend Drake. We do everything together.

MOM: That's what we came about.

THOR: **(happy)** You want to meet Drake? He's my best friend.

DAD: There is no Drake.

THOR: **(pulls DRAKE to him)** What do you mean?

MOM: You made him up. He's keeping you sick. If you're going to get better, you have to let him go. **(moves DRAKE away)**

THOR: **(tries to run away)** No! I saw what they did to Mark.

MOM: **(explaining, far too motherly)** Mark went home to his wife and family. And Drake has to go home to his, too.

THOR: I am his family!

MOM: Nope. We're your family. Drake's just an imaginary friend. You don't work here, either. You're not an orderly, you're a patient. And we need to cure you.

DAD: And quickly. Your insurance is running out.

THOR: Mom! **(frightened)** I am cured! I'm fine! I'm happy! **(RENEE and DOCTOR come on to escort DRAKE out, THOR tries to stop it but MOM and DAD hold him back as DRAKE struggles as well.)** This can't happen to me! I'm not even a major player. I'm not really anybody. You can't give me these kinds of issues! **(DRAKE's taken off stage.)** Drake!

MOM: **(MOM and DAD grab THOR firmly)** You'll be fine.

DAD: We're going to get you off the pills! And back to normal. There's a new drug. It will get you off the old ones. **(to MOM)** Come on, honey, let's go fill out the papers. **(MOM and DAD exit.)**

THOR: Drake! **(turns around to see PHYLLIS and SHAMIKYA just at the entrance)** Hey! **(tries to approach them)** Please!

SHAMIKYA: Sorry. The doctor has other plans for us. **(They exit.)**

THOR: But I'm all alone! These were the only... **(runs to the back of the stage and looks out the door after everyone, as we have blackout. HE finishes in the darkness)** friends I had.

SCENE 4

MARK, THOR, DOCTOR sitting, talking to a camera, and eventually to each other.

MARK: We tried.

THOR: We tried hard.

MARK: It turned out our entire personalities were in a bottle.

DOCTOR: Yep. I've remade them through the magic of prescription drugs. They *do* come with side effects, but at least they know the difference between illusion and reality.

MARK: No we don't.

THOR: I wanna be like I was, and not have to take any pills to do it.

DOCTOR: I don't think that's possible.

THOR: Then...

DOCTOR: Yep. I made you what you are today.

THOR: I liked that. You were so funny, Mark, when you did those women.

MARK: You were funny when you did Drake.

THOR: We've lost our whole world.

DOCTOR: Not exactly.

(Enter RENEE, with MOM and DAD.)

RENEE: Honey, are you ready to go?

MARK: I need a clean shirt.

RENEE: Not really.

THOR: Mom?

MARK: Grandma?

RENEE: What?

MARK: Behind you. She looks like LL Cool J.

THOR: My mom does not look like LL Cool J.

DOCTOR: Perhaps I should explain.

RENEE: Perhaps you should.

DOCTOR: ***(annoyed with her)*** Will you get a life?

RENEE: I'm trying, but you keep standing in my way.

DOCTOR: It's no wonder that people want to escape reality if they keep running into the likes of you!

RENEE: Sorry, reality isn't always pretty.

DOCTOR: ***(pointing to RENEE)*** I'll say.

MOM: Mark, I'm not your grandmother. I'm your cousin Becky.

MARK: Does this whole family look like LL Cool J?

RENEE: I don't know. I don't even know what LL Cool J looks like.

MARK: ***(points to MOM)*** Kind of like that.

DAD: Mark, we want you to come to the reunion. A welcome home party. No white coats, either. *(laughs)*

MARK: I can't go without the girls.

DAD: What girls?

MARK: Shamikya and Phyllis. They went everywhere with me.

THOR: Yeah. This is weird. We used to share our imaginary friends. Now we have the same parents. I still hate them.

DAD: We're not *your* parents.

THOR: Then what did you come in for and take away my-

DAD: We *were* your parents, now we're his. There aren't that many parents to go around.

THOR: Good. You ruined everything.

MOM: We have to do the things no one else has the guts to do. That's why we're parents.

MARK: Everything was fine, until authority imposed itself for no reason.

DOCTOR: I was authority.

RENEE: You're a quack. An experimental, power hungry quack. Quack, quack, quack. *(THOR takes a duck whistle out of his pocket and blows it.)* What?

THOR: See? It works. *(pockets the whistle)*

MARK: Still, he gets us good drugs. I miss the side effects.

RENEE: You miss the girls. I'm supposed to be the most important woman in your life.

MARK: You couldn't take having me sick! You were just annoyed because I was getting more attention.

RENEE: Because my support should get the attention. Without that, you'd be nothing. It's just as important as the disease.

DOCTOR: But you are important, Renee. Anyone can be sick. Not just anyone can support. It's just that you operate behind the scenes. You're more stage manager than diva.

RENEE: I don't know about that. I can be just as sick as you. *(pops a few pills out of a bottle)* We'll see who gets center stage now.

MOM: Look. *(with disapproval)* We raised our daughter to be a pill popping lush.

MARK: You're *her* parents now?

DAD: Sure. We like kids with problems. We need the *tsuris*. *(Tsuris is a Yiddish word for "stress" or "trouble.")*

(They exit, and DRAKE, PHYLLIS, and SHAMIKYA enter from another part of the stage.)

DOCTOR: *(happily observing)* This should be good.

THOR: What's so good about it?

DOCTOR: I can study like side effects in different people.

RENEE: Whoa! This is... weird.

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