

The Two Faces of Helen

A Play in Two Acts

by

tdbarna

DEDICATED TO
JEAN STAPLETON

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PETER ROBBINS: 45, father, blue collar assembly line worker, slightly overweight, conservative

HELEN ROBBINS: 41, wife, high strung, traditional house wife. Has unexplained mental disorder, believing she is *Edith Bunker*. She talks, acts and reacts like the fictional television character.

ANDREA ROBBINS: 22, daughter, college graduate, liberal, lives at home

JAMES ROBBINS: 20, son, college drop-out, without ambition, lives at home

ALI: 23, Andrea's boyfriend, graduate school student, second generation Egyptian-American, conservative

DR. WHACK: 49, family physician, well dressed, conservative

SCENE

Minneapolis suburb,
Minnesota

TIME

Present

ACT 1

SETTING: *Simple living room of the Robbins' middle class home. Front door, stage left. Door to kitchen, stage right. Stairs leading to second floor, center upstage. Center stage; two Queen-Ann chairs separated by a small end table and lamp, sofa and coffee table center right. Old television, downstage center; facing the two chairs. Dining room table and chairs, stage right center.*

AT RISE: *Dark. Lights fade on to an empty setting. Humming and various appliance noises can be heard off stage in the kitchen; stage right!*

(Enter PETER stage left through the front door carrying a newspaper. He removes his jacket and hangs it on the wall-mounted coat hook. He looks about the room and hears the commotion from the kitchen as a pan drops.)

PETER

Honey, I'm home.

(PETER sits down in his chair, in front of the television and opens his paper.)

Helen, I'm home. Bring me a beer, will ya?

(PETER reads his paper as the commotion in the kitchen continues. He looks around the room.)

For god's sake, Helen, bring me a beer! I'm dying here.

ANDREA

(from off stage) Daddy, is that you?

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PETER

(to himself) Who else would it be?

ANDREA

(from off stage) Daddy, is that you? Are you home?

PETER

(to himself) No, it's the post man.

(Enter ANDREA upstage from the stairs)

ANDREA

Oh hi, daddy. Didn't you hear me yelling for you?

PETER

The whole neighborhood heard you, Andrea! Do me a favor and go into the kitchen and fetch your ol' man a beer.

ANDREA

Sure, Daddy. Have you spoken with Mom yet?

PETER

Not yet, darling. She appears too busy to welcome your ol' man home. Get me that beer, will ya?

ANDREA

Okay, but stay right there. I need to talk to you.

(ANDREA exits stage right, into the kitchen)

PETER

(to himself) Where else would I go? (reading the paper and grunting in disapproval) Damn deficit. If the government wants to trim the budget, it should begin by trimming the fat off some of those handout programs.

(Enter ANDREA stage right, carrying a beer. She places it on the table next to PETER)

ANDREA

Here you go, Daddy. So you haven't spoken with Mom yet?

PETER

(reading his paper) Not since this morning. (drinks his beer)
Did you tell her I was home? I expect her to be here when I
walk in the door.

ANDREA

No, Daddy. I wanted to talk to you first. (looking back at the
kitchen) Did she seem okay to you this morning?

PETER

No different than any other morning. Same old mundane crap about
the same old shit that no one cares about. Except your mother,
of course.

ANDREA

Something's wrong with Mom, Daddy. It really scared me. So I
called Dr. Whack. He was able to stop by the house on his way to
the medical center.

(PETER is not showing the least bit of interest)

ANDREA

He'll be coming by later to speak to you directly.

(PETER continues to read his paper)

ANDREA

Daddy!

PETER

What? Can't you see I'm busy?

ANDREA

I said, he'll be coming by to speak to you.

PETER

Who, darling? Who's coming by?

ANDREA

Dr. Whack!

PETER

Oh jeesh, Andrea! Not that quack... not tonight! I wanted to watch the Timberwolves. I got five dollars riding on the game. Do me a favor and call him up. Tell him to stop by next week, or better yet, have him call me next month.

ANDREA

Daddy! Aren't you even remotely concerned with what's wrong with Mom?

PETER

Well, sure. (reading his paper) What is it this week? Hemorrhoids? (laughs)

ANDREA

Daddy! Mom is having some serious issues. You should be more concerned.

PETER

Is this one of those "woman things?" Can't the two of you figure it out? I'm not really that interested in whatever it is...

ANDREA

Daddy!

PETER

...if you ask me, it's probably nothing more than that menopause thing.

ANDREA

Daddy!

PETER

What? (puts down the paper) I'm just joking, Andrea. What is it? What's wrong with your mother? Which disease is it this week?

ANDREA

I don't know, Daddy. That's why the doctor is coming over tonight. He said he needs to talk to you. (with disappointment) You might consider Mom a bit more important than some baseball game!

PETER

Basketball.

ANDREA

Whatever!

PETER

Okay, darling. What do you think is wrong with your mother?

(Enter HELEN from the kitchen, stage right)

HELEN

Oh Archie, I didn't hear you come in. Let me get your beer.

(HELEN exits to the kitchen, stage right)

PETER

Archie? Who the hell is Archie?

ANDREA

Exactly!

PETER

What? Who the hell is Archie?

ANDREA

You, Daddy. She thinks you're Archie.

PETER

(picks up the paper) Is that all? Well, I don't see anything wrong with that. Must be one of those memory loss things. Look at it this way—I'm getting another beer out of it. (finishes his beer)

ANDREA

Daddy! This is serious. I'm very worried about Mom.

PETER

So she thinks I'm this Archie fella. Seems pretty harmless to me. Maybe sack time just got a little more interesting.
(laughs)

(ANDREA rips the paper from PETER's hands)

ANDREA

Daddy, this is serious!

PETER

Alright, Andrea. Settle down. But this isn't the first time your mom lost her keys or forgot a phone number. You shouldn't worry yourself of this, I don't think it's *that* serious. (to himself)
And I don't see the harm in humoring the old lady.

ANDREA

Daddy!

PETER

Good god! Don't get so freaked out on me. (looks out towards the kitchen) So your mom is having a little forgetfulness. What's the big deal?

ANDREA

It's more than that, Daddy.

(Enter HELEN from the kitchen, stage right. She hands PETER a beer and kisses him on the cheek. ANDREA sits on the sofa. HELEN sits in the chair next to PETER.)

HELEN

How was your day at work, Archie? Any news on the walkout?

PETER

What walkout?

ANDREA

Daddy... (gives Peter a serious look)

PETER

Oh, yeah—the walkout. Well, we're not sure yet. The Spics are holding out for more money or something. Should know more tomorrow. (looks at ANDREA and shrugs his shoulders)

HELEN

That's nice, Archie. Did Gloria tell you about George?

PETER

Gloria? (looks at ANDREA)

(ANDREA signals to PETER that she, ANDREA, is "Gloria.")

PETER

Oh yeah, Gloria. Uh, no I don't think she mentioned anything about a George. (completely puzzled) Is he that colored fella next door?

ANDREA

I thought that you might like to tell Daddy the good news.

HELEN

Ohhh. (flustered) No, that's your job, Gloria.

ANDREA

It's okay, Mom. I'll tell him.

PETER

(changing the subject) Honey, when are we going to eat? I'm starved. I don't have to wait all night, do I? I mean, what else do you do all day? A man should come home and find a hot meal waiting on the table for him. It's the least you could do.

HELEN

(giggles) Oh, Archie! You're always hungry.

(HELEN sits there looking dumbfounded)

PETER

Well?

HELEN

Oh, yeah! Right away, Archie.

(HELEN gets up from her chair and heads to the kitchen)

HELEN

Gloria, set the table for me. Will you?

(HELEN exits stage right to the kitchen)

ANDREA

Sure, Mom. (to PETER) See, Dad!? Something is seriously wrong with Mom. She thinks my name is Gloria. You're Archie and Ali is someone named George.

(ANDREA begins to set the table)

PETER

(loudly) Who the hell is Ali? No wait, that's another of your mother's invisible friends, isn't it?

ANDREA

Shhhh! Not so loud.

PETER

(loud whisper) Okay, so who the hell is Ali?

ANDREA

He's my boyfriend, Daddy. And we feel quite serious about each other. He's coming by tonight to meet the family.

PETER

Ali? What kind of name is that?

ANDREA

It's his first name, Daddy.

PETER

You know what I meant! Is he local? If you catch my drift...

ANDREA

He's from St Paul—if that's what you mean by local.

PETER

Don't get so high and mighty with me. Is he American?

ANDREA

(sarcastically) Yes, father. If you consider Minnesota to be America, then yes I guess he's American.

(ANDREA comes into the living room and sits on the sofa)

PETER

With a name like, Ali? That doesn't sound American to me. Where did you meet him?

ANDREA

You can ask him yourself, Daddy. He'll be here shortly. But promise me, Daddy.

PETER

What?

ANDREA

Promise me you'll be nice.

PETER

I'm always nice. (returns to reading his paper) On the other hand, do you think that maybe tonight is not such a good idea? I mean, with your mother's illness and Dr. Quack...

ANDREA

(interrupting) Whack! His name is Dr. Whack.

PETER

Whatever. (pausing to ponder) And what kind of name is Whack anyway? Must be short for something. Maybe... whackadoodle. (laughs) Get it ... shrink, crazy, whackadoodle! (laughs harder, (putting down the paper and speaking directly to ANDREA). Anyway, isn't there enough stress on your mother already without Ali Baba coming over?

ANDREA

His name is Ali. Just Ali! But, maybe you're right, Daddy. I guess I could give him..

(Enter HELEN stage right, carrying a food platter and placing it on the dining room table.)

HELEN

Here you go, Archie. I made your favorite.

PETER

It's about time. I'm practically starving here.

(PETER and ANDREA get up and move towards the dining room table)

PETER

(looking surprised) Meatloaf? Are you serious? For god sakes, meatloaf?

(PETER sits at the head of the table)

ANDREA

(covering for Peter) What's the occasion, Mom? You only make meatloaf for Daddy on special occasions.

HELEN

(giggling) Oh, it's nothing special.

(HELEN sits down at the table)

Gloria, tell Michael dinner is ready.

PETER

Michael?

ANDREA

Sure, Mom. I'll go get him. I think he's in his room taking a nap.

PETER

Michael?

ANDREA

(to Peter) James is Michael.

PETER

Huh?

HELEN

Thanks, dear. Please hurry. You know how your father hates cold meatloaf.

(ANDREA exits upstage center to the stairs)

PETER

Michael?

HELEN

Michael what, Archie? Oh, I forgot the dinner rolls, Archie. I'll be right back.

(HELEN exits stage right into the kitchen. PETER sits alone at the dinner table)

PETER

(to himself) James is Michael? Andrea is Gloria? And I'm Archie? (yelling out to the kitchen) Helen, bring me another beer, will ya?

(PETER nibbles at the meatloaf and cringes)

I hate meatloaf. (yelling again out to the kitchen) And bring some catsup.

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(HELEN pokes her head through the kitchen door)

HELEN

Did you say something, Archie?

PETER

(sarcastically) Would you bring me some catsup and beer?

HELEN

Sure, Archie. Would you like a glass?

PETER

(sarcastically) Yes, dear. That would be really nice. But could you do it before hell freezes over?

HELEN

Oh my! I forgot to pick up my winter coat from the cleaners.

PETER

(frustrated) The beer? Can you get me a beer?

HELEN

Do you still want the catsup?

PETER

(frustrated) Just get me the beer! The beer, the beer!

HELEN

Right away, Archie.

(HELEN closes the kitchen door)

(Enter ANDREA. She sits at the dining room table)

ANDREA

James will be right down. What's wrong, daddy? Your face is all red.

PETER

Your mother is going to need a real doctor if she keeps up this madness.

ANDREA

Daddy! Be patient. Anyway, James will be down in a minute. Remember to call him Michael.

PETER

Yeah, I get it. I get it! I'm Archie, you're Gloria and he's Michael. And she's loonytoons. (to himself) There's something strangely familiar about all this. (to Andrea) Does James know about this stuff with your mom?

ANDREA

Yeah, sort of.

PETER

What do you mean, sort of?

ANDREA

You know Michael. He doesn't really focus much unless it's about him. (laughs) Which means in his world—if it's not about him, he doesn't really care. (to herself) Takes after his father.

PETER

What was that?

ANDREA

Nothing, Daddy. Just making chit chat.

HELEN

(from the kitchen) Do you want a beer, Archie?

PETER

For crying out loud! May you can find a rope so that I can hang myself. Yes! A beer, a beer...

ANDREA

I'll get it for you, Daddy.

(ANDREA exits to the kitchen. Enter JAMES. He sits at the table with PETER)

JAMES

Hey Pops! When did you get home?

PETER

(sarcastically to himself) It seems like days ago. (to JAMES)
What are you doing up in that room of yours?

JAMES

Just chillin'.

PETER

I don't suppose you've found a job yet? Not that Obama cares.
Not that the government cares. Not that anyone other than me
cares!

JAMES

Still lookin', Pops.

PETER

(smells the air) What the hell!? That better not be what I
think it is!

JAMES

(feigning surprise) What? Oh, you must mean the English
Leather.

PETER

You know what I'm talking about! There will be no drugs in this
house. Those are my rules. I'll have no hippy freaks living
under this roof! We didn't raise you to be a damn liberal! God
lives in this house, and I'll be damned if I'm gonna...

JAMES

(interrupts) Cool it, Pops. You're gonna blow a gasket or
something. I don't do drugs.

PETER

I know what I smell. Don't take me for a fool, boy. I know what
you're doing. I wasn't born yesterday. (looking to the
kitchen) Where's my damn beer!

JAMES

Even if I was... how would you know what it smells like? Don't tell me you and Mom are toking in the bathroom! (laughs)

PETER

This is no joking matter, James.

JAMES

No, really... How do you know what "drugs" smell like?

PETER

I saw it on 20:20. I know what I know.

JAMES

You know what pot smells like because you watched some show on TV? Wow! When did we get smell-a-vision?

(Enter stage right ANDREA with PETER's beer. She sits at the table)

PETER

(to James) We'll talk about this later. (to Andrea) Thanks, honey. Is your mother going to join us? Or do I have to pretend I love meatloaf all by myself.

(JAMES scoops out some meatloaf from the platter and makes a sandwich)

JAMES

Awesome! Is Edith going to join us?

ANDREA

She's taking the rolls out of the oven.

JAMES

Edith. Edith? Edith. It has a strange vibe, doesn't it? I kinda like it.

PETER

What the hell are you babbling about?

JAMES

Edith! It sounds very retro.

PETER

Who the hell is Edith?

JAMES

Your woman, Pops!

PETER

Huh?

ANDREA

Mom thinks her name is Edith.

HELEN

(from the kitchen) Do you want a beer, Archie?

PETER

(yelling out to the kitchen) No, dear. Let's just eat! (to ANDREA) She thinks her name is Edith?

JAMES

Yeah, and you're Archie. It's like one of those old comic books in the attic. When do we get to meet Veronica and Jughead? And Mr. Witherbee? (laughs)

ANDREA

(to James) Take a chill pill, will you? This isn't funny!

PETER

So I'm Archie and she's Edith.

JAMES

Exactly!

PETER

Why would she think that?

JAMES

I think Mom is...

PETER

(interrupting) I feel like I'm living through a Twilight Zone episode or something.

JAMES

Will Mr. Witherbee be joining us for dinner? (laughs)

PETER

(curtly) James, you don't have to be here if you're not that hungry.

(JAMES jumps up from table with sandwich in hand)

JAMES

Awesome! I think I'll head over to Betty's. (laughs) (to ANDREA) Text me if I'm needed.

(Exit JAMES stage left, through the front door)

(Enter HELEN stage right; with a plate of rolls)

HELEN

Here we go...(observes JAMES exiting) Hey, where's Michael going? Isn't he hungry, Archie?

(PETER picking through his meatloaf)

PETER

He's ummm... looking for a job. Has an interview or something...

ANDREA

Everything looks great, Mom.

HELEN

Thank you, Gloria.

(PETER begins to serve himself)

HELEN

Shouldn't we say grace, Archie?

PETER

Grace? What the hell for?

HELEN

(ignoring Peter) Yes, we should say grace.

(HELEN reaches out to hold the hands of both ANDREA and PETER)

PETER

Uh...

(PETER looks to ANDREA for support)

ANDREA

Yes, that would be nice, Mother. Let's say grace. Daddy, would you like to begin? (giggles)

PETER

Uh, yeah. Dear, God...

HELEN

(interrupting)...everyone should bow their heads.

(HELEN and ANDREA bow their heads. PETER looks around as if embarrassed.)

HELEN

Bow your head, Archie.

ANDREA

(smiling) Yeah, Daddy. Bow your head.

(PETER bows his head)

PETER

(pause) Rub a dub dub. Thanks for the grub. Now let's eat.

ANDREA

Very deep, Daddy!

HELEN

I thought it was nice, Archie. Did you notice that the words rhymed?

PETER

Really? I hadn't noticed. Pass the potatoes, would you Helen?

(HELEN passes the bowl)

HELEN

Who's Helen, Archie?

(ANDREA gives PETER a very intent stare)

PETER

Those rolls look great, sweetheart.

HELEN

Ohhh! I forgot the margarine.

(Exit HELEN to the kitchen)

PETER

I'm not gonna call her Edith. This is ridiculous. I ain't playing games. She needs a whack upside the head if you ask me.

ANDREA

But Daddy!

PETER

"But Daddy" nothing! She's not Edith, I'm not Archie and you're not Gloria. We're not that crazy. For god sakes, we're not the Bunkers.

ANDREA

Who's the Bunkers?

PETER

You've never heard of Edith and Archie Bunker?

ANDREA

No... Who are they...

(Enter HELEN from stage right; from the kitchen)

HELEN

Here's the margarine, Archie.

(HELEN sits at the table)

HELEN

Maybe we should say grace.

PETER

What? Again? How many times do I have to thank God for this frickin' meatloaf?

HELEN

(giggles) Oh yeah, I forgot. Let's eat before it gets cold.

(HELEN becomes preoccupied with her dinner)

PETER

Honey.

(HELEN doesn't seem to hear him)

Honey?

ANDREA

Mom.

PETER

Honey!

HELEN

Yes, Archie? Do you like the meatloaf? I put those green olives you like...

PETER

(interrupting) Yeah, that's nice. (looks at ANDREA) I want to tell you something. (looks at HELEN) But, you have to pay attention to me. Okay?

HELEN

Some people prefer black olives. But I think the green olives taste better. Don't you agree, Gloria?

PETER

Honey, I'm trying to talk to you.

HELEN

Oh! Sure, Archie. What did you want to say? Did I add too much salt?

PETER

(frustrated) It's fine, honey. It's perfect! I love it! I'm trying to tell you something.

ANDREA

Mom, Dad has something he wants to tell you.

HELEN

Ohhhh! Go ahead, Archie. Is something wrong? You seem upset.

PETER

I'm not Archie.

(HELEN looks puzzled)

And she's not Gloria. And you my dear, your name is Helen. Not Edith.

(HELEN continues to eat her dinner)

ANDREA

Mom, did you hear Daddy?

HELEN

Of course, Gloria. I think your father had a few too many beers. (giggles)

PETER

(frustrated) Put your fork down and look at me, honey.
(pleading) Please.

HELEN

Okay, Archie. (looks about the table) Don't you like the meatloaf?

PETER

It's great, honey. Now look at me. Right here, into my eyes.

(HELEN looks into PETER's eyes)

HELEN

You have such a nice face, Archie.

PETER

I'm not Archie.

HELEN

Ohhh, I see.

(HELEN begins to eat her dinner, again)

PETER

Honey, in all the years we've been married, have I ever lied to you?

(HELEN ignores PETER)

Please honey, put the fork down and listen to me.

(HELEN puts down her fork)

HELEN

What is it, Archie?

PETER

In all the years we've been married, have I ever misled you?

HELEN

(pauses to ponder) Why, yes. Yes, you have.

PETER

I mean, have I ever tricked you or given you bad advice on something important?

HELEN

(pauses to ponder) Yes.

PETER

(frustrated) This week! This week have I confused you or ignored your feelings?

HELEN

(pauses to ponder) Yes.

PETER

Okay, forget that stuff. What I'm trying to tell you is you're not Edith and I'm not Archie. I'm Peter, you're Helen and this is Andrea. Our son's name is James. We've been married for 30 years and we've lived in this house most our lives. You're my wife and you love me. You do love me, right?

HELEN

I don't know who Peter is... but I do love you, Archie. (pausing to consider something of consequence and hands to face) Ohh! Oh, my god...

PETER

Yes, what is it? You figured it out, right?

HELEN

I forgot the catsup.

(Exit HELEN to the kitchen)

PETER

(to Andrea) Jesus H Christ! This is ridiculous. I'm not going to play these silly games all night. What time is that quack coming over?

ANDREA

He didn't say, Daddy. We'll just have to be patient; for Mother's sake.

PETER

Well, I ain't eating this meatloaf.

(PETER gets up from the table and proceeds to exit upstage)

Tell your mother I'm in the library reading.

ANDREA

(puzzled) We don't have a library.

PETER

I'll be in the can, Andrea! Do I have to spell it out for you?

(Exit PETER)

ANDREA

(shouting to the kitchen) Mom, are you alright?

(Enter HELEN stage right from the kitchen)

HELEN

Oh, no. I'm fine, Gloria. Where's Archie?

ANDREA

I think he has a headache, Mom. Went upstairs to look for some aspirin.

HELEN

Oh my. I think it's the beer. I tell him all the time to stop drinking so much beer, but he never listens. (giggles)

ANDREA

The meatloaf is great, Mom. Don't forget that Ali is coming over tonight.

HELEN

Who?

ANDREA

Ali, Mom. I told you.

HELEN

Oh. What happened to George?

ANDREA

Yeah, his name is George.

HELEN

So why do you call him Ollie? Your father is going to get confused.

ANDREA

He goes by both names, Mom. He prefers Ali.

HELEN

Oh. Your father won't like that. Maybe we shouldn't tell him that George has two names. (looking into space) Although your father likes that comedian with the same name. Now what was his name?

ANDREA

Who mother?

HELEN

Yeah, I think his real name was Oliver, but everyone called him Ollie. Anyway, he was with that other comedian. (staring into space) Yeah, Laurel and Hardy. That Ollie fella really makes your father laugh.

ANDREA

No, Mom. His name is Ali. Not Ollie.

HELEN

Huh? I don't understand.

ANDREA

Ali spells his name "A" "L" "I" not "O" "L" "L" "I" "E"

HELEN

I still don't understand, Gloria. His name is Ollie, right?

ANDREA

(frustrated) Let's call him George.

HELEN

I like that.

ANDREA

Maybe we should clean up the table, Mom. He'll be here soon.

HELEN

Who, dear?

ANDREA

(frustrated) It's a surprise.

HELEN

Oh, I like surprises. But, not your father. We should tell him.

ANDREA

I will, Mom.

(Both women begin cleaning off the table)

HELEN

I'll take those, Gloria. You check on your father.

(Exit HELEN stage right into the kitchen with the dishes)

(ANDREA goes to the living room and sits in PETER's chair)

(Enter PETER from upstage stairs)

PETER

Hmmmmm.

ANDREA

(looks around) Oh, yeah. Sorry, Dad.

(ANDREA moves to the sofa and PETER sits in his chair)

PETER

Where's your mother?

ANDREA

She's in the kitchen. That gives us a few moments to discuss Ali.

PETER

Ali?

ANDREA

Dad! I told you earlier. He's my B F.

PETER

B F?

ANDREA

Boyfriend, Dad. Ali's my boyfriend and he's coming over to meet you and Mom.

PETER

I thought we decided that wasn't such a good time, with your Mom and all.

ANDREA

I really want you guys to meet him. He'll understand.

PETER

(picking his teeth) He'll understand what, that your mother's a loony tune? Crazy, a bit off kilter, a dimwit, fruit loops?

ANDREA

Dad!

PETER

What does this Ali do, anyway?

ANDREA

He's a graduate student. He's earning his Masters in advanced engineering. On the side, he's a writer. Some say he's quite good.

PETER

Another freeloader. I'm guessing he's a democrat.

ANDREA

Dad! He's not a freeloader. And I don't think he's a democrat.

PETER

What kind of money does he make?

ANDREA

Well, not much yet. But I'm sure he will, eventually.

PETER

Like I said, a freeloader.

ANDREA

Dad, you're impossible. Remember, you promised to be nice to him.

PETER

I never said that, little girl. (laughs)

ANDREA

Little girl? Oh dad, you haven't called me that in years...

PETER

(interrupting) Where do his parents live?

ANDREA

Cairo, I think.

PETER

Cairo? He's a damn Arab! I thought you said he was American. Sorry honey, but this changes everything... I'm not having any of his kind here in my house. Call him right now and cancel.

ANDREA

If you recall, I told you he was born in St Paul.

PETER

So how come his folks live in Iran?

ANDREA

Egypt. His parents live in Egypt.

PETER

Same thing.

ANDREA

(frustrated) His dad owns an import-export company. They travel quite extensively. They have homes in St Paul *and* Cairo.

PETER

Whatever. How on earth did you hook up with an Arab?

ANDREA

You're impossible, Daddy. Anyway, remember that Mom calls him George.

PETER

I'm beginning to like how your mom thinks. If we call him George, no one will know he's from Iran.

ANDREA

Yeah, right. You just be nice to him, Daddy. I really like him. He's very special to me. He might be the one.

PETER

I ain't making no promises, little girl...(to himself)I mean Andrea. But hear me straight, if he comes in here trying to badmouth our government or anything like that... then all bets are off.

ANDREA

(angry) You'd *better* be nice, Dad! Don't embarrass me. Try to be respectful.

PETER

Respectful of what? This is my house and I don't have to let Arabs or coloreds or faggots into my house if I don't want them. Don't try to tell me little girl, what I can and can't do. I don't have to respect no one I don't like. He needs to show me a little respect. This is my castle and I'm the king.

ANDREA

(sternly) He's Muslim, Daddy.

PETER

Hell no! You call him right now and tell him he's not welcome in this house. Damn terrorists! Call him now, Andrea!

ANDREA

I will not! And I don't get you! He's not a terrorist. He's a Muslim.

PETER

Same thing!

ANDREA

No, it's not!

(**Enter** HELEN from stage right)

HELEN

Oh my! What are the two of you fighting about? The neighbors will hear.

(HELEN sits in her chair, next to PETER)

PETER

Our little girl is dating a terrorist.

ANDREA

He is not a terrorist! I swear, Daddy! If you aren't nice to him, I'll never talk to you again.

HELEN

Oh, dear. A terrorist?

ANDREA

No, Mom. Ali is a Muslim. Not a terrorist. He's a very nice boy. I *really* like him, Mom.

HELEN

Who's Ollie?

ANDREA

George, Mom! Remember we talked about this?

HELEN

Oh, that comedian.

PETER

So now he's a comedian. I thought you said he was a writer or something. You better get your story straight, little girl!

ANDREA

(to Peter) Ali and George are the same person. (to Helen) Mom, this is very important to me. Tell Daddy to be nice when Ali arrives.

HELEN

I think we should be nice, Archie. Gloria is very serious about this young man. Although I'm not sure why he has two names. But, you should be nice, Archie.

PETER

(frustrated) Would someone please tell me when Rod Serling arrives?

HELEN

Oh my! Another guest? I better put on some coffee. No one told me we were having a party. I should have made a cake.

(HELEN exit stage right into the kitchen)

PETER

Fruitcake.

ANDREA

Daddy!

PETER

This is getting out of hand. I had plans for tonight. I was gonna watch the Wolves—but obviously that ain't gonna happen—that's for sure. We've got a quack, a fruitcake and a terrorist all converging in my living room. Only thing missing is my no good for nothing son.

(Enter JAMES stage left through the front door)

JAMES

Hi ya, Pops. Oh hi, Andrea. Or is it Gloria? I can't keep track.

PETER

I thought you were out looking for a job?

JAMES

Nah. I don't have time.

(JAMES sits on the sofa with ANDREA)

ANDREA

You're not sticking around here tonight, are you?

JAMES

Well, I hadn't planned to...

ANDREA

Good!

JAMES

But, since I'm not welcome, I think I'll stay. So what's the plan, Pops? The Wolves are playing.

PETER

We're having a party.

JAMES

Really? What are we celebrating?

PETER

Your sister wants us to meet her Arab friend.

JAMES

(feinting drama) O M G!

PETER

O M G? (holds his hand up) Never mind, I don't want to know.

JAMES

Is this that Egyptian fella?

ANDREA

Yes, his name is Ali. He's only going to be here for two minutes to meet Dad.

PETER

I thought he was coming over to meet me and your mom?

ANDREA

Clearly it would be best if he just shakes your hand, and then he and I can get the hell out of here.

PETER

Watch your language, little girl. There'll be no swearing in my house.

ANDREA

Whatever.

JAMES

Does your new lover know about Edith?

ANDREA

He's my B F, not my lover.

PETER

(to James) *Boyfriend.*

JAMES

I know what B F means, Dad. Although I'm surprised you do.

ANDREA

And no, he doesn't know about Mom. I haven't had a chance to tell him, yet.

(HELEN pokes her head in from the kitchen door)

HELEN

Archie, do you still want the catsup?

PETER

No, dear. Thank you.

HELEN

Oh, hi Michael. Are you hungry?

JAMES

No thanks, Mom. I'm fine.

HELEN

We have meatloaf, if you want any. Archie, what time is Mr. Serling going to be here?

PETER

I don't know dear. He's in another time zone. (laughs)

HELEN

Okay, Archie. I'll just keep the coffee hot.

(HELEN closes the door and can be heard making noises in the kitchen)

JAMES

Mr. Serling?

PETER

Don't ask.

ANDREA

(to Peter) When Dr. Whack arrives, I think the two of you should speak privately.

JAMES

If he recommends that Mom should take valium, let me know—I'd be happy to run down to Walgreens and pick it up for her. Just get me the prescription.

ANDREA

Yeah, right! Anyway, I think this is more serious than valium.

PETER

Does your mother know he's coming back?

ANDREA

(pondering) I don't know. Mom was a little spaced out when he was here this morning.

(Long pause as everyone looks at each other, and then erupts in uncontrollable laughter)

ANDREA

We shouldn't be laughing.

JAMES

Then why are **you**?

PETER

Oh god, that felt good.

(Enter HELEN from stage right)

HELEN

Here's the catsup, Archie.

(HELEN sits down in her chair. Complete silence as everyone looks nervously about. A knock at the door startles everyone.)

Oh my, I wonder who that could be?

PETER

It's either Ahab the Arab, Dr. Whack the Quack, or...

HELEN

(interrupting) Or that Mr. Serling fella.

(Another knock at the door. PETER gets up from his chair to answer the door)

PETER

(to his family) And now the fun begins..

HELEN

(interrupting) Oh Archie, I forgot to tell you... your cousin Maude called and she's planning to stop by tonight.

PETER

(sarcastically) Oh great! Just what we need; an uppity lesbian trying to convert all the women folk.

(PETER peers through the peep hole of the door)

You have got to be kidding me!! Someone get my gun!

(LIGHTS FADE)

(CURTAIN)

(END OF ACT I)

INTERMISSION

ACT 2

SETTING:

Same as Act 1. Simple living room of the Robbins' middle class home. Front door, stage left. Door to kitchen, stage right. Stairs leading to second floor, center upstage. Center stage; two Queen-Ann chairs separated by a small end table and lamp, sofa and coffee table center right. Old television, downstage center; facing the two chairs. Dining room table and chairs, stage right center.

AT RISE:

Peter is standing at the front door. Helen is seated in her chair. Andrea and James are seated on the sofa. Someone is knocking at the door and ringing the bell incessantly. In this act, Peter begins to gradually take on all the mannerisms of Archie Bunker.

(PETER opens the door. **Enter** ALI, standing in the doorway, still outside the house, wearing a keffiyeh—Arabic head-dress)

ALI

Praise Allah.

PETER

You have got to be kidding me! We don't cater to no stinkin desert jockeys!

(PETER pushes ALI back and slams the door in the face of ALI)

ANDREA

Daddy!

(ANDREA gets up from the sofa and rushes to the door as PETER takes his seat next to HELEN)

ANDREA

I can't believe you did that!

PETER

Don't tell me that's your flippin' boy friend. I thought I told you we don't do sheiks in this house.

(ANDREA opens the door)

ANDREA

Ali, I am so sorry. Daddy doesn't have a sense of humor.

(Enter ALI walks in and removes his head dress, holding it in his hand)

ALI

I was just joking, Mr. Robbins. I don't really wear this. Andrea told me you were a bit paranoid. We thought it might be funny if you saw me with the *keffiyeh*. Obviously, not so funny.

PETER

I thought it was pretty funny when I slammed the door in your face. (laughs)

HELEN

Archie! We should be more polite with our guests. Come in George and have a seat. Archie didn't mean it.

ALI

My name is Ali, Mrs. Robbins. Not George.

ANDREA

(to Ali) Shhh! Just go with it. I'll explain it to you later.

ALI

Oh yeah. Thank you Mrs.—

HELEN

Just call me Edith. Would you like some coffee?

(ALI and ANDREA sit on the sofa with James)

ALI

No, thanks. Hi James.

JAMES

How's it going? Your head dress is a gas. Can I borrow it?

HELEN

How about some soda?

PETER

His kind don't drink caffeine. What exactly do you drink?
Goat's milk?

ANDREA

Daddy!

ALI

Actually, I drink whatever I want. How about a beer?

PETER

I thought your people didn't drink beer?

ALI

My people?

PETER

You know... Arabs.

ALI

Although there are many Arabs who refrain from certain practices because of their Muslim faith, I for one am not a Muslim. I am a Southern Baptist. And I am an American—not an Arab.

JAMES

(to Ali) You're wasting your breath.

ANDREA

Southern Baptist? You never told me that. I thought you were a Muslim?

ALI

(to Andrea) Shh. I'll explain it to you later. (laughs nervously)

PETER

A beer sounds good about now. (turns to Helen) Grab one for me, would you Helen. (to Ali) Are you sure you're not an Arab? You certainly look like one. Not too sure I like the idea of my little girl dating a heathen.

ALI

Heathen?

ANDREA

Daddy thinks all Muslims are heathens.

ALI

My uncle is a Muslim. Are you saying he's a heathen?

PETER

If he doesn't believe in *our* God, he's a heathen.

ALI

I see. Did you know Muslims believe in the same god as you and your wife?

PETER

I thought they believed in Allah or something.

ALI

Allah is god.

PETER

Yeah, but which god? Don't you worship cows and golden statues?

ALI

They worship the same one god as you. God has had many names... Yahweh or Abba. Allah is just another name for god.

PETER

Not my god. I think you're confused, boy!

ALI

Ahh, yes... I must be. (looks at Andrea with a roll of the eyes)

PETER

If you're not Arab, why on earth did your parents name you Ali?

ALI

I'm named after my uncle. Actually, Ali is one of the top 200 most popular names in the U.S.

PETER

I doubt that. (turns to Helen) Where's that beer, Helen? Are you waiting for a personal invitation or something?

HELEN

Helen?

PETER

(to himself) Oh, I forgot. (looks about the room) 'Edith', grab me a beer will ya?

(HELEN stays seated and looks into space)

JAMES

I'll take one, too.

PETER

Not in my house you won't. You can have a soda. Well, Edith, are you gonna sit there all day or what?

HELEN

Oh, yeah.

*(HELEN gets up from her chair and **exits** stage right, into the kitchen)*

ANDREA

Daddy, I think you should speak to Mom a bit more respectfully. It's really getting old. She may not care that you treat her like dirt, but I do!

PETER

You're mom doesn't care. And don't start lecturing me about how I treat your mom. Ask Ali Baba how they treat women in his country.

ALI

(to Andrea) So what's up with your mom? She okay?

ANDREA

She thinks her name is Edith and daddy's Archie, I'm Gloria, James' Michael and you're George or Ollie, I'm not sure.

ALI

Wow, that sounds serious.

ANDREA

Her doctor was here this morning.

ALI

What did he say? What was his diagnosis?

ANDREA

Said he'd be back tonight with something... not really sure. Anyway, he's due here any moment now.

PETER

He's making two trips so he can charge us more.

ALI

(to Andrea) I'm sure everything will be all right.

PETER

So you say your people are Christians, now? I didn't realize your kind did that sort of thing...

ANDREA

Your kind? Dad, really? Your shtick is beginning to piss me off.

ALI

(looking to get a rise out of PETER) Did you know that the whole Jesus story took place in the Middle East? Many of the original Christians were Arabs.

PETER

Don't be besmirching my faith, young man!

ALI

(looking back and forth between James and Andrea) Of course, all the first Christians were Jews.

PETER

I've heard enough! Don't think I don't realize what you're doing.

ALI

Doing?

PETER

You'll never convert me. I'm a true blood Christian!

ANDREA

Daddy! (to Ali) Maybe we should talk about something else. Better yet, let's go to a movie.

PETER

Oh no, little girl. You're staying right here until that Dr. Quack arrives.

ANDREA

(to PETER) Whack. (to Ali) His name is Dr. Whack.

(HELEN pokes her head out from the kitchen)

HELEN

Archie, do you still need some catsup?

PETER

No, dear. Just bring us a couple beers will ya. (to himself)
This must be Hell.

ALI

Do you drink your beer with catsup, Mr. Robbins?

ANDREA

(to Ali) It's a long story. Let it drop.

PETER

So what do you do, Ollie?

ALI

It's actually pronounced "All-ee."

PETER

What's the difference?

ANDREA

I told you already, Daddy. He's a grad student at the U.

PETER

Ever gonna get a real job?

ANDREA

Daddy!

ALI

I'm studying advanced horticultural engineering. Hope to
develop some new methods for improving agricultural yields..

PETER

(interrupting) Fascinating, I'm sure. (yelling out to the kitchen) Helen, where are those beers?

ANDREA

Has it ever occurred to you to get off your butt and get your own beer? Is it possible you're intentionally trying to be a...

JAMES

(interrupting) Pretty cool stuff, Ali. I'm guessing you have access to lots of interesting chemicals.

ALI

Yes, I do. But, not the chemicals that would interest you.

JAMES

Bummer.

(HELEN enters with a beer for ALI and hands it to him)

ALI

Thank you, Edith.

PETER

(to Helen) And?

HELEN

Did you want a beer, Archie?

PETER

(sarcastically) No honey, I couldn't possibly want a beer. Maybe I could have another slab of that incredible meatloaf.

HELEN

Oh sure, Archie. Anyone else want something from the kitchen?

PETER

(interrupting) For god's sake, Edith! Get me a beer. Get me a beer!

HELEN

Right away, Archie.

(HELEN exits right; returns to the kitchen)

PETER

This is killing me. Please, someone just nail me to a cross. I'm dying here.

ALI

Maybe it's some form of Alzheimer's.

ANDREA

That's what I was thinking. But it came on so suddenly. She was fine one moment and then out of nowhere, she starts calling us by different names. It's been very scary.

PETER

If I don't get a beer in the next minute, I'll show you something really scary.

ANDREA

Maybe there's an open bar down the street. I hear they serve beer there. (expecting a response—the room is silent) For god's sake, I'll check on Mom.

(ANDREA exits right; storms into the kitchen)

ALI

(to James) I thought I saw you downtown last week.

JAMES

Where at?

ALI

At the HyVee on main. You were with someone.

JAMES

Oh yeah. That was probably Andy. He's my new partner.

PETER

Your what?

JAMES

My new partner. You'd really like him, Dad. He's a lot like me.

PETER

A lot like you? What is he, unemployed?

JAMES

I guess you didn't hear me, Pops. He's my new 'partner.'

PETER

Your *what*?

(HELEN and ANDREA enter stage right from the kitchen. HELEN is carrying a platter of sandwiches and offers them to everyone in the room.)

JAMES

My new partner. Ever since we hooked up, we're practically inseparable.

(JAMES grabs a sandwich)

PETER

(to James) Partner? What do you mean he's your new partner?
(to Helen) And where the hell is my damn beer?

ANDREA

Oh, I forgot it on the kitchen cabinet.

PETER

And?

ANDREA

Fine! I'll get it.

(ANDREA exits stage right; rushes back into the kitchen)

PETER

I can't believe what I'm hearing. Do you believe this, Helen?

(HELEN ignores PETER)

Helen! For crying out loud--Edith! Are you listening to this boy of yours?

HELEN

What is it, Archie?

(ANDREA enters stage right, with beer in hand, gives the beer to PETER)

ANDREA

Did I miss anything?

HELEN

Your dad wants a beer.

(ANDREA looks puzzled and sits on the sofa)

PETER

(to Helen) Your son has a new "partner." And don't think I don't know what that means! That's what they call it these days. Thanks to that democratic president, the country's gone to liberals, pot and fairies. (to James) Read my lips, boy. I don't care what you're doing in those discos, but I'm not gonna have that sort of thing going on under this roof. Do you hear me, boy? (to himself) I was too soft on that boy! (to God) What have I done to deserve this? I'm surrounded by Arabs, fruitcakes and fairy queens. Am I the only normal person here tonight?

(The room sits silent until JAMES breaks out in laughter)

JAMES

(laughing) He's my new 'business' partner, Dad.

(Everyone except PETER and HELEN laugh)

PETER

What? I don't understand.

JAMES

Andy and I are working out new concepts for some software gaming ideas we have. We've decided to form a small company. Andy is my *business* partner. (turns to Peter) I thought you'd be excited, Pops.

ANDREA

That's fantastic news, James.

ALI

Congratulations. Make sure you check out online some of those new government business grants...

PETER

(interrupting) Business partner? What are you talking about?

JAMES

We're going into business together. 'Business.'

PETER

Oh... business partner. (laughs nervously) I get it now. (laughs louder) When you said you had a new partner...

JAMES

(interrupting) Yeah, Pops, you must have confused Andy with David.

PETER

David? Who's David?

JAMES

David is my *life* partner. We have sex almost every night.

(dead silence)

(ANDREA, ALI and JAMES start laughing)

PETER

Very funny. You had me going there for a second.

HELEN

I think it's wonderful. You should bring him around next week for dinner so we can meet him.

PETER

He's joking, Edith. There is no David. James is just pulling my leg... (to James) You are pulling my leg, right?

JAMES

(ignoring Peter) Thanks for the sandwiches, Mom.

PETER

You are pulling my leg, right?

(Knock at the door, stage left)

ANDREA

I hope that's the doctor.

PETER

James, you are kidding, right?

(Another knock at the door)

JAMES

I'll get it.

(JAMES answers the front door)

JAMES

Hello.

(Dr. WHACK enters stage left)

DR. WHACK

Hello. I am here to see Mr. Robbins.

JAMES

That would be me.

DR.

Really? I expected someone a bit older.

ANDREA

Come in, doctor. My brother's strange sense of humor evades us all.

JAMES

Well, my name *is* Mr. Robbins.

(ANDREA gets off the sofa to greet the doctor)

ANDREA

May I take your coat, doctor?

DR.

No, thank you. I can't stay that long. Is your father home?

(Noticing everyone in the room)

Oh, good evening everyone.

HELEN

Hello, doctor. You look very familiar.

PETER

He should, Helen. He was here this morning to see you.

HELEN

No, I think I would remember that. Would you like something to drink, doctor?

DR.

Perhaps a glass of water.

HELEN

Okay. I'll be right back. Please have a seat here (points to her chair).

DR.

Thank you.

*(HELEN **exits** to the kitchen and the doctor sits next to PETER)*

I'll assume that you're Mr. Robbins?

PETER

Only if it don't cost me nothin.' (laughs)

DR.

I would like to share with you some thoughts I have about your wife. (looking back towards the kitchen) But, I'd rather not do so in front of her.

PETER

Believe me, doctor. She'll be lost in that kitchen for hours. We're fine here.

DR.

And what about everyone else? Wouldn't you prefer some privacy?

PETER

Everyone here knows she's a fruitcake, doctor. We have nothing to hide.

ANDREA

Daddy!

PETER

What? It's true. Tell me I'm right, doctor.

DR.

Actually, Mr. Robbins, I think her condition is a result of a recent traumatic event. Her mind, faced with something terrible, has chosen to escape to another reality. It's a type of defense mechanism. It protects her from having to face the trauma.

ANDREA

Oh my God! What would have caused this, Doctor? She was fine this morning.

DR.

It's hard to say without further examination. I would like to schedule her for some tests and interviews with some of my colleagues. The sooner the better.

JAMES

Will she be alright?

DR.

One never really knows, when it comes to the mind. Here is my card. Please call my receptionist for an appointment. Like I said, the sooner the better. Please give Mrs. Robbins my apologies for leaving. My wife and I have tickets for the theater tonight.

PETER

Yeah, Doctor. Helen probably won't even remember you were here. Does my insurance cover me for house visits?

ANDREA

Daddy, does that really matter?

PETER

How do you think he can afford tickets to expensive Broadway plays?

DR.

Actually, the tickets were a gift from one of my clients. As far as the house call is concerned, don't worry about it. I won't bill you for either visit. Mrs. Robbins is a sweet lady.

PETER

Well, thank you doctor. I always said you were a fine physician.

DR.

(a bit sarcastically) I'm sure you do, Mr. Robbins.

PETER

What does that mean?

DR.

Anyway, bring her in as soon as possible and we'll figure out what's causing these manifestations.

PETER

Rats? Are you saying we have rats in the house?

DR.

Huh?

ALI

Manifestations, Mr. Robbins. Not *infestations*.

(JAMES laughs)

PETER

(embarrassed) All the same to me. Thanks, Doc. We'll call your secretary tomorrow.

(Andrea walks the DOCTOR to the door)

ANDREA

Thank you, Doctor. You have been very kind. Enjoy the show.

*(DOCTOR **exits** stage left. Andrea returns to the sofa)*

PETER

A doctor who makes free house calls! Go figure. I'm not sure I trust him. Probably not a real doctor.

ANDREA

Do you want me to call to set the appointment, Daddy?

PETER

No. I think I can handle it.

ANDREA

I just don't want you to forget.

PETER

I said I'll make the call.

(HELEN enters stage right from the kitchen with a glass of water)

HELEN

Here you go, Archie.

PETER

Huh?

(PETER looks at the others in the room, shrugs his shoulders and places the water on the table. HELEN sits in her chair.)

ALI

Thank you for the sandwiches, Edith. Andrea and I need to get going. We're gonna see a movie.

HELEN

I wish you could stay longer. It's nice having visitors.

PETER

(sarcastically) If you ask me, it's been a regular three ring circus around here. *(to Andrea)* Maybe you could take your brother with you. I could use a little peace and quiet.

HELEN

Archie, you should be nice. I like having the kids over. *(to ALI)* Would you like some more sandwiches? It's no bother.

PETER

(to ALI) Assuming you have time to wait around for a week or so.
(laughs)

ANDREA

Daddy! That's quite enough! You're endless rudeness is...

PETER

(feigning surprise and interrupting) What?

HELEN

Oh, it's okay, Gloria.

ANDREA

No it's not, Mom. Dad is a self-centered, egotistical pig!

(stunned silence in the room)

PETER

What?

ANDREA

I said you're a pig, Daddy.

PETER

(slightly hurt) What did I do to deserve that?

ANDREA

(to ALI and JAMES) Maybe we should go.

JAMES

Hell, no! This is just about to get interesting.

(HELEN gets up from her chair and paces nervously about the room)

HELEN

You're father doesn't mean to be so hurtful, Gloria. It's just his way.

PETER

My way? What do you mean by that, Helen?

HELEN

My name is Edith. Why do you keep on calling me by some other woman's name? Oh my! Are you seeing someone else, Archie?

PETER

What? No! Of course not!

HELEN

Then why do you call me Helen? We've been married for almost 30 years. You'd think by now you would've learned my name.

ANDREA

He's a pig.

PETER

I am not a pig. Stop saying that.

ANDREA

Pig! Pig! Pig!

PETER

Help me out, Helen. I'm dying here. Tell your daughter I'm not a pig.

HELEN

Gloria, your father is not a pig.

(HELEN sits down in her chair)

ANDREA

You treat Mom like dirt. She's your wife, not your slave.

PETER

Huh?

JAMES

You tell him, Sis!

The Two Faces of Helen

ANDREA

Mom, next time Dad wants a beer, tell him to get off his butt and get it himself.

HELEN

Oh no, Gloria. I could never say that.

ANDREA

Well then, I will! (to PETER) If you want a beer, get up off your fat ass and get it yourself!

JAMES

Way to go, Sis!

PETER

(to JAMES) You stay out of this. Maybe you kids should go.

HELEN

No! They can stay. I like having them here. And maybe Gloria has something else to say.

PETER

(surprised) What? Hasn't she said enough?

ANDREA

You're a bigot. You're hateful.

JAMES

You're judgmental and...

PETER

Yes? By all means don't stop there. You're all on a roll.

(Helen stands up from her chair)

HELEN

...you're overweight and lazy.

JAMES

Way to go, Mom!

HELEN

Oh my, did I really say that? I'm sorry, Archie.

PETER

Really? Anything else?

(HELEN walks about the room. Andrea stands up and joins HELEN)

ANDREA

If you ask me, Mom has put up with your crap for too long. You're not a nice man, Daddy. Your disdain for anyone or anything not to your liking is over the top.

PETER

I have no idea what you're talking about. And I'm not sure I want to...

ANDREA

Women are not whores, Daddy. Blacks and Hispanics are not freeloaders and Polish jokes aren't funny.

PETER

I... ah...

ANDREA

No one is ever good enough for you.

PETER

(stands up) Hey—I don't have to take this from the likes of any of you. You're all nothing but ingrates. Maybe you should leave. Really! Leave!

ANDREA

Oh no... I'm just getting started. You hate anyone who's a Democrat or a liberal. And you hate our president...

PETER

Hey, it's not my fault if he's...

ANDREA

(interrupts) Black? That's why you hate him, because he's Black.

PETER

I was gonna say liberal...

ANDREA

(interrupts) Whatever.

JAMES

You hate the Jews and the Muslims...

PETER

(interrupting) Hey, a lot of them are terrorists.

ANDREA

(interrupting) No Daddy... Most of them are *not* terrorists. The problem with you is your small mind. You blame everyone for everything. But it's you, Daddy. You don't do shit...

HELEN

Gloria!

JAMES

Awesome!

PETER

Enough!

HELEN

(softly) It's true, Archie. You don't really like anyone.

PETER

(sadly) Oh, Edith. Even you? Do you think I'm such a monster?

(Silence fills the room)

HELEN

I don't know, Archie. Sometimes you are difficult to be with. I can't help but want to remember you the way you were when we were young. You're weren't always so...

ANDREA

Vulgar?

JAMES

Racist?

HELEN

Insensitive. There was a time when you seemed more loving.

PETER

Well, if it's so damn awful around here, why are you all still here? If this is such a living hell for you, don't let me hold you back. Freeload somewhere else.

ANDREA

Maybe we should. I don't know you any more, Daddy. To put it more frankly, I don't think I want to know you.

PETER

Go, woman! Don't let me stop you! And don't let the screen door hit your ass on the way out!

HELEN

Archie!

(ANDREA hurriedly exits stage right into the kitchen. Crying. ALI exits stage right behind her, glancing back at PETER)

HELEN

Oh, Archie!

PETER

My name is NOT Archie! I'm Peter. Stop calling me Archie. I must be going insane. I woke up this morning actually feeling good. All I wanted was to sit here tonight, watch the game, have a few beers and a little peace and quiet. Clearly that's not gonna happen.

(ALI enters stage right)

ALI

She's pretty upset. She's talking about leaving and never coming back. I think she means it.

HELEN

We need to fix things, Archie. We can't let her leave like this.

PETER

(with emotion) I say let her go. If she's that unhappy, we don't need her stinkin' up the joint. I work my fingers to the bone for 30 years and do I ever get an ounce of appreciation? Do I? No! Who do you think puts the food on the table? Who do you think paid for the clothes you kids wear? Where is my parade? No one gives a shit about me.

(Everyone in the room is silent. ANDREA enters stage right, sniffing. She sits down next to ALI)

ALI

(shyly) I think we should all sit down and try to work things out.

PETER

(interrupts) If I want advice from a rag head, I'll ask.

(PETER puts up his hand to stop ANDREA in mid-sentence)

Don't say it, little girl. Don't say it.

(HELEN moves towards the stairs)

PETER

Now, if you all don't mind, I'd like to be left alone. It wouldn't bother me in the slightest if you all just left.

ANDREA

Is that it, Daddy? You just wave your wand and poof, we all just leave? Nothing solved. Everything remains the same?

PETER

It works for me.

ANDREA

Well it doesn't work for me anymore. If I walk out that door, I'm never coming back.

ALI

No, hon... You're upset. You don't mean that.

ANDREA

Yes, I do.

JAMES

I feel the same way.

PETER

Fine! How many times do I have to say it? Just get the hell out of here.

(ANDREA, JAMES and ALI stand up and begin walking towards the front door)

HELEN

(HELEN stands up) I'll just go upstairs and pack a bag. James, will you call me a cab?

PETER

Honey, I didn't mean you.

HELEN

No Archie. Deep down, I think you did.

*(HELEN exits up the stairs, ANDREA runs after her.
JAMES pulls out his cell phone.)*

JAMES

Hello, Yellow Cab...

(JAMES exits stage right; into the kitchen)

(ALI and PETER sit silently in the room)

ALI

Mr. Robbins, are you alright?

(PETER continues to sit in silence)

Mr. Robbins?

PETER

Sorry about that rag head comment. Things are a little nuts today. It's not usually like this around here.

ALI

Don't worry about it, Mr. Robbins. (after an uncomfortable pause) For the record, I don't like terrorists either.

PETER

Yeah.

ALI

Maybe you should go upstairs and speak to Helen in private. I'll try to smooth things out with Andrea.

PETER

I don't think it matters anymore. How can you speak to someone you don't even know?

ALI

You've known Helen for over 30 years.

PETER

Yeah, but her name is Edith now. Obviously I'm that 'traumatic event' the doctor was speaking about. I've driven my own wife crazy. I'm not sure who's the real loony tune—her... or me.

(JAMES enters stage right and sits on the sofa)

JAMES

The cab will be here in 30 minutes.

(uncomfortable silence)

You know, Pops. (pause) Maybe you and Mom should talk things out. Unfortunately, I'm not sure you can fix things with Andrea. To be honest, I'm not too sure where I stand with you either. But I think you should try to set things straight with Mom.

PETER

Maybe she's been Edith all along.

JAMES

What?

PETER

(thinking aloud) Maybe 'Helen' isn't really 'Helen.' Think about it... What if I'm really married to Edith Bunker. (pause) My god. That would make me Archie...

JAMES

This is crazy. You're not Archie and she's not Edith. Helen is my mom. She's just confused, Pops. Hell, I think we're all a little confused tonight.

(Uncomfortable silence)

Can I get you another beer?

PETER

No. I think I've had enough beer.

*(ANDREA **enters** and sits on the sofa next to ALI.
ANDREA and PETER exchange cold glances. PETER gets up
and walks about the room)*

ANDREA

Mom's lying down for now. She said to come get her when the cab arrives. We'll stay until she leaves.

JAMES

I'm not sure it's such a good idea to let her leave.

ALI

Where would your mom go?

ANDREA

I don't know. She was talking about staying with someone named 'Maude.' (to Ali) Maybe me and Mom could stay with you tonight.

JAMES

Okay... This is getting a little out of hand. Mom can't go.

(PETER is not paying attention)

ANDREA

I think Mom leaving is the best thing for all concerned.

JAMES

Really? (points to PETER)

ANDREA

Please...

JAMES

No, I'm not saying we should take back what we said, I'm just not sure any of us thought it would end this way.

ALI

What would you propose we do?

JAMES

Let's talk things out.

ANDREA

You don't honestly...

JAMES

(interrupts) Bear with me. Okay?

(Andrea doesn't answer)

Okay?

ANDREA

Okay. Get on with it. But I don't see the value.

JAMES

(Methodically) Let's see... Mom thinks Dad is Archie. We think Archie is Peter. Peter thinks Helen is Helen, but Helen thinks she's Edith. Edith, who's really Helen, thinks you're Gloria, but we think you're Andrea. Andrea thinks Ali is Ali who thinks you're Andrea and not Gloria who thought Ali, not Ollie, was an agnostic but as things turn out, is actually a Southern Baptist. Edith, who's really Helen thinks I'm Michael but you all know I'm James. Peter, who isn't Archie, thinks Whack is quack but Edith thinks Whack is Serling and thinks Ollie is George though George is Ali. Hell, I'm beginning to think I'm the one who's nuts.

ANDREA

What? Say that again.

(PETER returns to his chair)

JAMES

Yeah, right. Anyway, this all began when Mom became Edith.

*(Unbeknownst to the family, HELEN has slowly **entered** and is listening to the conversation)*

PETER

No.

JAMES

No?

PETER

No, this didn't begin when Mom became Edith. It began with me. Somewhere along the line *I'm* the one who changed. One night Helen went to bed with Peter and woke up the next morning with Archie. Who could blame your mom for going a little nuts? Who could blame any of you kids for the way you feel about me. I'm not sure how to fix these things... but one thing I know for sure...

JAMES

What's that, Dad?

PETER

I don't want your mom to leave. And I don't want you kids to storm out of here tonight with the chance of never seeing you again.

ANDREA

Things would have to change.

PETER

I'm not gonna promise you kids anything, but maybe I have been a bit extreme. Maybe I've been watching too much of the Fox News Channel (nervously chuckles). No, that's not it. I'll need time to figure these things out. To be honest, I might even be a little sick of myself.

(PETER reaches down to grab his stomach)

And look at this fat...

HELEN

And I love every inch of you.

(Everyone looks up to see HELEN. PETER stands up to face HELEN. They gaze at each other.)

PETER

Honey, I'm sorry.

HELEN

Archie...

PETER,

(interrupts) Please, let me finish. At times, I'm **not** a very nice person. I admit that. And I treat you like crap. You don't deserve it. I should do better. I should try harder. I wasn't always like this. (to ANDREA) It took a lot of courage, little girl, I mean...

ANDREA

(interrupts) No easy outs, Dad.

PETER

Are you (to JAMES) willing to give your ol' man one more chance?

(JAMES and ANDREA

look at each other, pause and then nod affirmatively)

HELEN

Archie...

PETER

(interrupts) I only hope you might also give me just one more chance. I don't deserve it... but if you could find it in your heart.

HELEN

I love you, Archie. And I don't take back any of those things I said...

PETER

(laughs) And you shouldn't. I can be better. I know it.

HELEN

It won't be easy, Archie.

PETER

I know.

HELEN

But, if you're serious...

PETER

(interrupting) I am. I promise. I am.

(PETER reaches out to HELEN. HELEN pauses and then moves to embrace PETER)

HELEN

I believe you, Archie.

PETER

I love you... Edith.

HELEN

And I love you, Archie.

(PETER and HELEN kiss)

PETER

Forgive me.

HELEN

I do. (to JAMES and ANDREA, while still in embrace with PETER)
Don't you kids have something else you should be doing?

ANDREA

Oh yeah... a movie, or something.

(ANDREA, ALI and JAMES stand up)

HELEN

How about a beer, Archie?

PETER

How about a soda?

HELEN

Good idea.

ANDREA

I'll get it. You two stay put.

(ANDREA exits stage right, to the kitchen)

ALI

Would you two love birds like to join Andrea and I at the movies? I'll buy the popcorn.

HELEN

No... I think me and Archie will watch that baseball game. (PETER and HELEN begin to kiss again, HELEN pulls away) Oh, wait. I've got a discount coupon I can give you for the movie. It's in the coupon drawer...

(HELEN begins to exit stage right through the door to the kitchen. At the same time, ANDREA is entering stage right through the same door. HELEN and ANDREA collide into the door from opposite sides. HELEN hits her head on the door. HELEN falls to the floor. JAMES, ALI and PETER rush to the aid of HELEN. ANDREA slowly opens the door and enters stage right)

ANDREA

Oh my god. Is Mom okay?

PETER

Honey, are you alright? Dear, speak to me. (to JAMES) Rush upstairs and get that compress from the bathroom. I think your mother hit her head!

(JAMES exits up the stairs)

HELEN

Oh my! I think I hit my head on the door.

PETER

It's okay. You'll be fine. Michael's getting a compress for your head.

HELEN

Who's Michael?

PETER

What, dear?

HELEN

You said Michael's getting me a compress. Who's Michael, dear?

(ALI and PETER look at each other in puzzlement. JAMES enters with the compress)

JAMES

Here, Dad.

PETER

Thanks.

(PETER gingerly and lovingly applies the compress to HELEN's forehead)

HELEN

Thanks, James. You're a good son. (pause) Peter?

PETER

Huh?

HELEN

Peter, maybe we should get me off the floor. I think I can sit in my chair.

PETER

What? Oh, yeah—right. What did you call me?

HELEN

Help me up, dear.

The Two Faces of Helen

(PETER helps HELEN up from the floor and walk her to her chair. ALI and JAMES sit on the sofa.)

HELEN

There. Much better. (pause) Honey?

PETER

Yes, dear?

HELEN

Why is everyone staring at me in such a funny way? Is there a bump on my head or something?

PETER

No dear. I think we were all just a bit worried about you.

HELEN

(to ALI) Oh, hello! I don't think we've been formally introduced. I'm Helen. You must be Andrea's friend.

ALI

Yes, I am. I'm Ali. Nice to meet you.

HELEN

Sorry you had to see me this way. I don't normally end up on the floor in front of guests. (pause)

PETER

What was the last thing you remember, dear?

HELEN

I was just about to wash the breakfast dishes and... I think I might have hit my head on something. (pausing to remember)
Peter, why aren't you at work? Is everything okay?

PETER

You think I'm Peter?

HELEN

That's a funny question... Who else would you be, dear? Come here and let me smell your breath.

PETER

And you think he's James?

HELEN

Of course. What's going on?

PETER

I'll explain it to you later, dear.

HELEN

Okay. My head hurts. Maybe I should sit here a spell.

PETER

Absolutely, dear. I don't want you to worry about a thing.

(pause) Helen?

HELEN

Yes.

PETER

Helen?

HELEN

Yes, dear.

PETER

It's wonderful to have you back.

(PETER bends down to kiss and embrace HELEN)

HELEN

Peter, not in front of our guests.

(PETER looks around the room as everyone except HELEN continues to laugh. Realizing what has happened,

PETER begins to laugh. JAMES and ANDREA sit on the sofa)

PETER

Can I get you anything, honey?

HELEN

Oh no. How about you? Can I get you something from the kitchen?

PETER

From now on dear, when I want something, I'll get up off my fat ass and get it myself.

(Everyone except HELEN laughs)

HELEN

That's nice, Peter. But you're not really that fat...

(Everyone laughs)

PETER

What do you say we watch the end of the Wolves game?

JAMES

Yeah, I got five bucks riding on it.

(PETER grabs for the remote control, turns on the TV. PETER reaches for the newspaper on the coffee table)

PETER

(looking in the paper) Let me see what channel the game is on.

ANDREA

Dad!

PETER

Yeah?

ANDREA

Dad, don't change the channel. Look what's on...

(Everyone stares at the television in disbelief)

ANDREA

Turn it up, Dad.

HELEN

Yeah, turn it up honey. I love this show. That woman is such a dingbat.

(The theme song to All In The Family begins to play.)

(Everyone stares at the television and then breaks out in laughter)

What? What?

(LIGHTS FADE)

(CURTAIN)

(END OF PLAY)