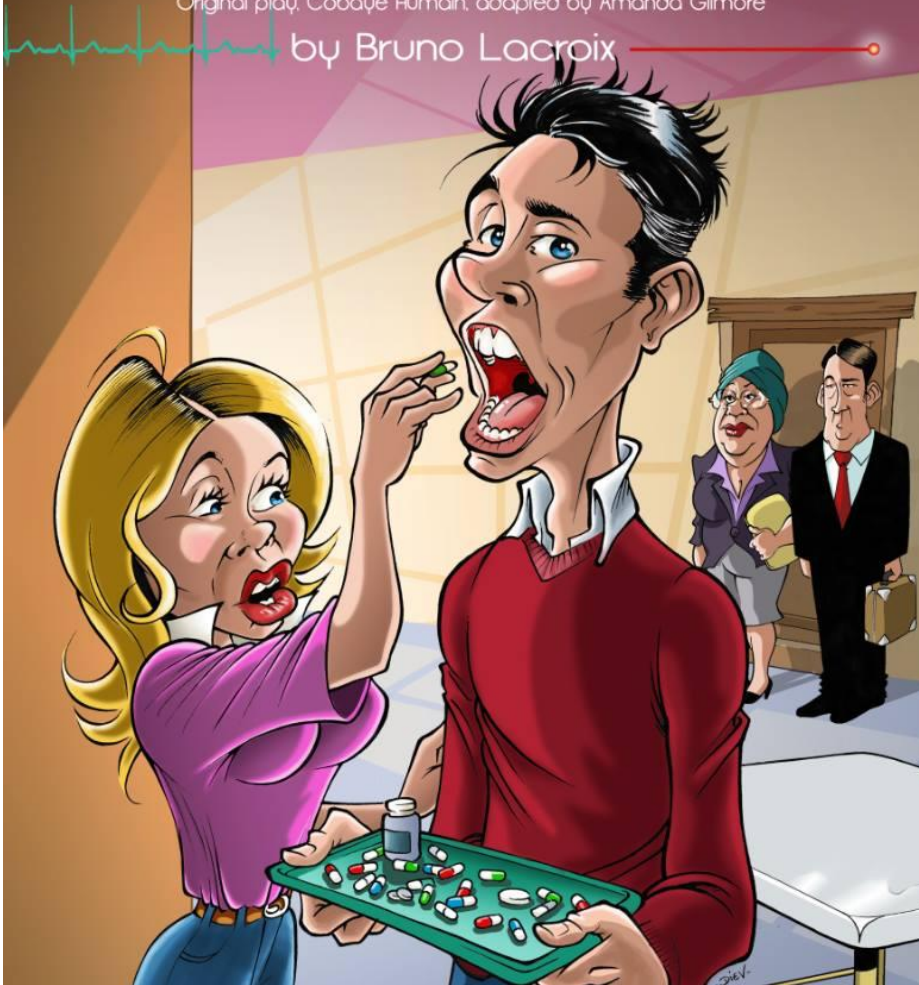


HUMAN RAT LAB

Original play, Cobaye Humain, adapted by Amanda Gilmore

by Bruno Lacroix





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CANADA**

Many thanks to Michelle Dontigny.

Cast of characters, in order of appearance:

ELYSE: Cleaning lady
CHARLES PICKET: Private investigator
GREG HASBINE: Actor
VALERIE ANNE BENNETT: Business woman

This story takes place well before *Lofty Larceny*. The character of **Greg Hasbine** appears in both comedies.

Act I

A private detective's office. On the garden side (stage left), there is a door that opens into a kitchenette. The main entrance is in the middle. On the hallway side (stage right), there is a window, and a bathroom door.

Scene 1

1 **ELYSE**, *looking at her watch*

9:14. Still not here. He's never on time. What am I supposed to do? (*Pacing the room*). If we lose this contract, then it's bye-bye business, that's for sure. But what could he be doing? The weather is mild. Traffic isn't any worse than usual. There's no valid reason for him not to be here. To have so little concern for punctuality, it's just beyond me. I can't wait much longer. (*The phone rings. She jumps.*) I'm sure that's his client. What do I do? (*She tries to fake a masculine voice.*) Hello, you've reached Detectives Picket & Son. (*She puts her hand over the mouthpiece.*)

The door opens. Charles enters wearing a raincoat and hat, and carrying a briefcase.

2 **CHARLES**, *rushing to the phone*

I'm here! I'm here!

3 **ELYSE**, *jumping again*

Ah!

4 **CHARLES**, *out of breath, but trying to sound calm and relaxed.*

Detectives Picket & Son, Charles Picket here. How may I help you? Oh, hello, Mr. Hasbine... oh no, you aren't bothering me. I was waiting on your call just now, sitting at my desk, totally relaxed. (*Looking at his watch.*) You are right on time. I like people who are punctual. It's a virtue. Yes, that's it. What's that? No, I'm not out of breath. I'm just very excited to be talking to you about this contract. What's that? You... you... Ah, yes, you prefer to talk about this in person? Yes, very good. I will be able to understand you better if we talk face-to-face. I mean, ummm... seeing you will help me get better idea of your needs. Yes, that's it. Do you know where we're located? What? Yes, that's it. I will wait on you. See... see... see you soon, as you say. (*He hangs up.*)

5 **ELYSE**, *exasperated*

Once more, by the skin of your ass.

6 **CHARLES**, *deposits his briefcase, and takes off his coat and hat, which he gives to Marianne*

At least, this way, I will be able to understand what he's trying to say.

7 **ELYSE**

Why do you say that?

- 8 **CHARLES**
This new client, Mr. Hasbine, he stutters like... like... like... like that.
- 9 **ELYSE**
Poor man. Well, good thing you weren't any later. You would have missed him.
- 10 **CHARLES**, *he takes his glasses out of his shirt pocket and puts them on.*
Did you make coffee? I need some.
- 11 **ELYSE**, *putting the coat and hat on the coat rack.*
You don't pay me to make coffee. You pay me to pick up your junk, mop the floor and clean up after you.
- 12 **CHARLES**
True. But in order to clean the coffee maker, you first need to get it dirty.
- 13 **ELYSE**
A scoop and a half of Columbian for each cup of water. That's all there is to it. But there isn't any coffee left, as usual. So, of course, I bought some, as usual. The bill is on your desk with all the others.
- 14 **CHARLES**
As usual. (*He kisses her on the cheek, with added emphasis.*) I knew I could count on you, my dear Elyse. You'll see – we are going to get this detective agency back on track. I have a feeling this man is going to bring us fortune and glory.
- 15 **ELYSE**
Mr. Picket, this habit that you've developed of always arriving late in the morning forces me to stay later in the morning. If you would like there to be someone here, to answer the telephone before you arrive, then I suggest you hire a secretary.
- 16 **CHARLES**
With what money?
- 17 **ELYSE**
I already told you that I have to take the 8 o'clock bus, in order to be at the house with my husband, before he leaves for work. If I'm not there, it creates a problem.
- 18 **CHARLES**
He really must learn to have more confidence in you.
- 19 **ELYSE**
Oh, he has plenty of confidence in me. It's in you that his confidence is lacking.
- 20 **CHARLES**
But, we've never even met!

- 21 ELYSE**
Exactly. It must be that everything I've told him about you does not reassure him.
- 22 CHARLES**
Well then, start telling him nicer things about me and you will soon see his opinion change. It's a simple equation.
- 23 ELYSE**
Are you asking me to lie?
- 24 CHARLES**
When you are acting in that theatre group of yours, do you call that lying?
- 25 ELYSE**
You want me to act for Jules?
- 26 CHARLES**
With a name like that, all you need is someone named Jim and you'd have a comedy duo. That would be fitting, wouldn't it?
- 27 ELYSE**
You don't have anything better to do than to say such stupid things? These days, I don't feel much like laughing.
- 28 CHARLES**
And why is that?
- 29 ELYSE**
Jules and I have been trying for several months now to have a baby, but...
- 30 CHARLES**
But?
- 31 ELYSE**
But ... it's not always easy to be on the same wavelength, at the same time. If you get what I'm trying to say.
- 32 CHARLES**
Not exactly, no.
- 33 ELYSE**
I am usually in the mood in the evening... and he... in the morning.
- 34 CHARLES**
And so?

- 35 ELYSE**
Well... since it's the morning, I want to take advantage of seeing him before he leaves for work. My uniform has a certain effect on him... usually.
- 36 CHARLES**
He waits for you before leaving for work to...
He rubs two fingers together.
- 37 ELYSE**
It's not just that. That would be too simple. Something is bothering him. He is just not the same man that I knew when we first met.
- 38 CHARLES**
I understand that completely.
- 39 ELYSE**
You are an old man. You couldn't understand.
- 40 CHARLES**
On the contrary, I understand very well. I happen to have some amorous trysts. I know what it's like to have to perform.
- 41 ELYSE**
You? Amorous trysts? With whom? I've never known you to have a flame.
- 42 CHARLES**
You don't know everything about me. I have an effect on the female persuasion. My spark is much sought after.
- 43 ELYSE**
By a certain type of woman... the matronly type, I imagine. But if I could ask, how do you manage to keep the flame alive?
- 44 CHARLES**
What?
- 45 ELYSE**
Oh, nothing. So, you don't have any worries?
- 46 CHARLES**
Of course I do! You know the state of my finances. I have worries much bigger than yours. The Revenue Ministry is chasing me. If I had the means to pay...
- 47 ELYSE**
Remember that the best is always yet to come.

- 48 CHARLES**
I think I need to get a new contract in order to give me the confidence I need to find a way to repay the Revenue Ministry. (*Elyse stares.*) And to pay you the salary that's long overdue. And yes, I know, I haven't forgotten about all the coffee bills. Without you, I don't know where I'd be.
- 49 ELYSE, putting on her coat**
Neither do I.
- 50 CHARLES**
"Neither do I," what?
- 51 ELYSE**
Neither do I know what you would do without me. The total coffee bill comes to \$75.10 and...
- 52 CHARLES, interrupting her**
Hurry up! You are going to miss your bus.
- 53 ELYSE**
... and that idea you had to be a human guinea pig. Crazy!
- 54 CHARLES**
At the time, it seemed like an excellent idea. And it certainly did put butter on my bread. I don't regret having done that. But the question that I still have is how the Revenue Ministry was able to trace that 10 years later? That just escapes me.
- 55 ELYSE**
If you want my advice, don't ever tell someone that something escapes you. That's not very promising for a detective.
- 56 CHARLES**
So what should I say?
- 57 ELYSE**
It doesn't matter, but not that it escapes you. Just pause for a moment, and look like you are deep in thought.
- 58 CHARLES**
I'm always deep in thought.

He poses like Rodin's "The Thinker."
- 59 ELYSE**
A bit cliché, but effective.
- 60 CHARLES**
Hurry up, you don't want to do any more to keep your Pierrot pining for you.

- 61 ELYSE**
Pierrot? You mean Jules.
- 62 CHARLES**, *singing a familiar tune*
Under the moonlight/ My friend Pierrot
Lend me your pen/ So I can write a note
My candle is out/ I no longer have a light...
- 63 ELYSE**, *cutting him off*
Very funny. Despite all your worries, you have managed to maintain your sense of humor. I left a note on your desk. (*She leaves, and then quickly returns*). I wish you the ability to see clearly. Good day!

She leaves.

Scene 2

- 64 CHARLES**, *groping around on his desk*
Time to be serious. Third-generation detective... that's a heavy responsibility. But the widow and the orphan need me... (*Looking.*) My glasses. Where are my glasses? I told her more than once not to touch the things on my desk. I can't find anything when it's all organized. (*He finds a note on the desk.*) What's this? (*He reads the note.*) If you can read this, then you are wearing them. (*He tosses the note in the trash. The phone rings. He answers.*) Detectives Picket and Son, Charles Picket here. Hello, madam. No, you aren't bothering me. Yes, you can come see me this afternoon. I have an appointment in a few minutes, so right after that if you'd like. I don't know how long I'll be, but it shouldn't take too long. Probably just a few minutes. You can come by whenever you'd like, Mrs. ...? Mrs. Bennett. Very good, Mrs. Bennett. Until then... (*He hangs up.*) It gets better and better. Two new contracts on the same morning.

Someone bangs on the door, and it opens. Greg Hasbine enters with a large suitcase.

- 65 CHARLES**
Mr. Hasbine, I presume?
- 66 GREG**
Yes.
- 67 CHARLES**, *he shakes his hand and motions toward the suitcase*
I see that you have brought some things to help put me on the right track.
- 68 GREG**
Pa-pa... pa-pa... pa-pa... pardon?
- 69 CHARLES**
Let's start at the beginning. Please, make yourself comfortable. Would you like a cup of coffee? It's Colombian. Full-bodied.

- 70 GREG**
You like full-bodied co-co... co-co... co-co... Columbians?
- 71 CHARLES**
Only the coffee. The other Columbians, I prefer them not too full-bodied, and as far away from me as possible. At least those who are part of any drug cartel.
- 72 GREG**
OK.
- 73 CHARLES**
The other Colombians are generally a very welcoming people. Can I get you a coffee, Mr. Hasbine?
- 74 GREG**
No, thank you.
- 75 CHARLES**
Well, then, what can I do for you?
- 76 GREG**
I... I... I am responding to your ad.
- 77 CHARLES**
I assumed that. And what can I help you with?
- 78 GREG**
I need a jo... a jo... a jo...
- 79 CHARLES**
Oh, you call it joe? Yes, I will get you a cup.
- 80 GREG**
No, I want to say I need a jo... a jo... a jo... a job.
- 81 CHARLES**
Oh yes, the economic situation today is not easy. How can I help you with that?
- 82 GREG**
Ask me your... your... your questions.
- 83 CHARLES**
Well, let's start at the beginning. What is your objective?
- 84 GREG**
To help you to... to... to the best of my ca-ca... my ca-ca... my ca-ca... my capabilities.

- 85 CHARLES**
Um, okay... keep going. Each clue is useful.
- 86 GREG**
Have you been looking for some... for some... for someone for a long time?
- 87 CHARLES**
I am always looking for someone. That is the essence of my work. We ARE father and son detectives, after all.
- 88 GREG**
I mean... an employee.
- 89 CHARLES**
An employee? Oh no, no. I only have one employee and that's Elyse. And I don't have to look for her very long. She shows up every morning, right here, before the office opens.
- 90 GREG**
I see.
- 91 CHARLES**
In addition to being regulated like Swiss clockwork, she has this annoying habit of arranging everything to the point that I can no longer find what I need. But, she does possess one rare quality that I appreciate most of all: she makes the best coffee in the world. Which brings us back to where we started this conversation.
- 92 GREG**
Oh, but the ad... it said that...
- 93 CHARLES**
Oh, you saw my ad? I am always a bit surprised when someone sees it at the bottom of the page. It's not the most viewed part of the paper. Excuse me, I'm getting off topic again. Alright then, tell me everything. You can feel comfortable. It's just the two of us here.
- 94 GREG**
Well... it's just that I... I came to offer you my ser...my ser... my services.
- 95 CHARLES**
Why?
- 96 GREG**
It's up to you to-to... to-to... to-to... to tell me why. I am answering YOUR ad.
- 97 CHARLES**
Oh! Oh! I think there's been a mistake. You are answering my ad by offering me YOUR services? Perhaps I didn't do a good job with the wording. I no longer recall the exact text. But it was an ad to get people to offer me work, not vice versa.

Takes the newspaper out of his briefcase.

98 GREG, concerned

Oh! You are certain you don't need any... any... anybody? I'm an act... I'm an act... I'm an act... I'm an actor, and I can play any role. I really need... some work. Even if it's just something small. Are you certain you don't have anything that I could... that I could ... that I could... that I could do?

99 CHARLES, putting the newspaper down on the desk

Please know that I sympathize with you. I would give me great pleasure to be able to help you. But, unfortunately, I am not in a position to do that. Have you gone to any auditions? There must be some producer out there looking for an act... for an actor. I am a detective, Mr. Hasbine. What use would I have for an actor?

100 GREG, crying

No one wants to-to... to-to... to-to hire me. The last director I auditioned for told me I was an ass... an ass... an ass... an asinine excuse for an actor!

101 CHARLES

Don't let yourself get knocked down like this, my friend. Everyone has something they are good at. I'm sure that director doesn't know what he's talking about.

102 GREG, crying even harder

I am at the end of my rope. All that's left is to jump... to jump... to jump... to jump off a bridge.

103 CHARLES

Now, now, let's not get so dramatic. I'm sure you are a very good actor.

104 GREG

You think so?

105 CHARLES

Certainly. There must be some roles out there for stutterers, right? Or perhaps the part of a mute? It's obvious you have a certain talent for the acting game. But you must put yourself out there – you must go all the way.

106 GREG

I also do some mi-mi... some mi-mi... some mi-mi... some mime on occasion. But there isn't a very... a very big demand for that.

107 CHARLES

With my keen detective eye, I see those are some crocodile tears you just shed. If you wish to be taken more seriously, you must be more convincing. Put some more passion into it.

108 GREG

Let me show you what I can... what I can... what I can...

109 CHARLES

What you can do? Perhaps another time. I have a meeting in just a few minutes. (*As an aside.*) I hope Mrs. Bennett is not coming to offer me her services, too.

110 GREG

You are just like all the rest. (*Crying even louder.*) Boohoo!

Someone bangs on the door.

111 CHARLES

It's her! (*Taking Greg by the arm and his briefcase in the other hand.*) Come this way, my friend. Dry your tears. This is not an audition. We will soon find a solution to your problem. (*Opening the door to the kitchenette.*) Take a few minutes to pull yourself together. I will come check on you shortly. But right now, I have a meeting.

He pushes him inside, throws in his briefcase and shuts the door.

Scene 3

Mrs. Bennett enters. She is dressed as a chic businesswoman.

112 CHARLES

Mrs. Bennett, I assume. ... Very pleased to meet you. (*He takes the tips of her fingers which she is holding out for him to kiss.*) Charles Picket, at your service.

113 MRS. BENNETT *looking all around, nervously*

Are we alone?

114 CHARLES

Yes, completely. (*He points to a chair.*) Please ... make yourself comfortable.

115 MRS. BENNETT, *sweeping off the chair with her hand*

You must know I am taking a huge risk by coming here. This is not a part of town that I visit frequently. I have no wish to catch whatever germs are living here. My health is of the utmost importance. (*She glances out the window.*) This neighborhood has a terrible reputation, and for good reason. On the sidewalk, I passed a prostitute who certainly looked like she hadn't slept all night. What if someone recognizes me and tells someone they saw me here? ... How in the world do you work in these horrible conditions?

116 CHARLES

That is exactly why I selected this neighborhood, Mrs. Bennett. It's very discreet. And for a private detective, discretion is priceless. A beautiful office in a skyscraper downtown, I wouldn't be able to think there. It would be contrary to our motto.

117 MRS. BENNETT

And just what is this motto?

118 CHARLES, *caught offguard*

Unseen and unknown!

119 MRS. BENNETT

Very appropriate. Actually, no one is likely to find us in such a shit hole. That's what I need in a detective agency... discreet, as you say. I saw your ad buried on the bottom of the page, so small and shabby that I said to myself, 'I doubt that anyone knows this place.' As it turns out, I think I'm right. The sign on the building's entrance doesn't even mention you.

120 CHARLES

Ah, yes. I have a few small problems with the managers of this building, so they just decided to remove my name from the sign. But it's temporary. My situation is about to change.

121 MRS. BENNETT

You are a few months behind on your rent?

122 CHARLES

How...

123 MRS. BENNETT

How did I know? Simple, really. (*Glancing around the room.*) I can play detective, just like you. How do you think I became such a successful businesswoman, such a formidable opponent? I have a knack for this sort of thing. Now, the reason I am here... I came to see you, Mr. Picket, because I need some professional help to clear up a delicate matter that I find I am unable to resolve by myself. And I'm running out of time.

124 CHARLES

I am doubly happy to hear that. First of all, I am happy that you did not come here to ask ME for a job, and secondly, I am happy that you need my professional help. There is no one more professional than me.

125 MRS. BENNETT

I am so pleased that you are so happy.

126 CHARLES

You've come to the right man. What is this matter that you need help with?

127 MRS. BENNETT, *she hands him a letter*

Read this. I received it this morning.

128 CHARLES, *reading*

"Mrs. Bennett, I know your secret. Deposit \$100,000 in this Swiss account by Friday or you will make the headlines this weekend."

Silence, and then he assumes "The Thinker" pose.

- 129 MRS. BENNETT**
It's vital that you find this man for me before Friday.
- 130 CHARLES**
That is a very short time frame. I need much more information. What is he alluding to? What secret is he talking about?
- 131 MRS. BENNETT**
I have no idea. If I wanted to make a confession, I would have gone to a psychiatrist, or a priest. I am not to blame in this.
- 132 CHARLES**
A successful business woman who is not to blame for something? Then why are you so bothered by this letter?
- 133 MRS. BENNETT**
Someone is trying to blackmail someone else... you find that acceptable, do you?
- 134 CHARLES**
Of course not, but...
- 135 MRS. BENNETT**
You find me this mother fucker by Friday or you will find your name in the newspapers under the headline "Disappeared!" I don't care HOW you do it – just do it. (*She throws a bundle of bills on his desk.*) That ought to motivate you.
- 136 CHARLES, worried**
Let's think about this for a minute. Isn't it possible that somehow, on your ascent up the ladder to the top of the business world, that you might have pissed off some worthy adversary?
- 137 MRS. BENNETT**
If I had to worry about every little S.O.B. that got in my way, I would be just like you, Mr. Picket. I have no worthy adversary. There are only faceless people who got in my way.
- 138 CHARLES**
Alrighty then... so let's see... is this letter the only clue you have?
- 139 MRS. BENNETT**
Yes and no. I also received an anonymous phone call yesterday. At least, I think that's what it was.
- 140 CHARLES**
What do you mean?

141 MRS. BENNETT

Well, no one said anything, but I could hear someone breathing. Tell me, Mr. Picket, do you recognize me? Do you know who I am?

142 CHARLES

Not even your first name.

143 MRS. BENNETT

It's Valerie Anne Bennett. Mrs. Bennett to my friends. I am the head of a successful international company, and I don't need some idiot to bring down the value of all my hard work right before a huge acquisition. Your job is to find this man and bring him to me. I will make him understand that he is far better off remaining silent.

144 CHARLES

What tells you that it's a man? Why couldn't it be a woman? A jealous woman, maybe?

145 MRS. BENNETT

Maybe. But I really don't see how that could be it. You're the expert, though. It's up to you to discover my blackmailer. I've left you enough money to accomplish that. Keep me posted on your activities and your progress. *(She hands him a piece of paper, and starts being very seductive.)* You can reach me at this number any time of the day... or night. Don't worry about bothering me. I live alone. I will make sure I'm available if you have something tangible to... reveal. The bigger and juicier the item, the better.

146 CHARLES, uncomfortable

You will see, I will use all available means.

147 MRS. BENNETT, suggestive

Yes, that's it. Use all your tricks.

148 CHARLES

I am going to need to know a bit more about you. Your company, your associates, your habits...

149 MRS. BENNETT

Start by reading today's newspaper. I am going to be late for a board meeting. *(She turns to leave.)* Don't disappoint me.

She leaves.

Scene 4

- 150 CHARLES**, *reading from the newspaper on his desk*
“Valerie Anne Bennett, named Entrepreneur of the Year. Mrs. Bennett received the highly coveted award, Entrepreneur of the Year, from James Wagner, Federal Minister of Industry. Centrifab, the company she runs, posted record profits of \$14 million this year, barely 10 years after she founded it. (*Interrupting his reading.*) Holy moly! (*Resumes his reading.*) This company, which specializes in the inspection and approval of the use of generic medicines on human volunteers, has proven that it is possible to bring down the cost of pharmaceuticals for Canadian consumers. A good example of this is... blah, blah, blah. Ah, well... what do you know? It’s a small world.
- 151 GREG**, *comes out of the kitchenette in a suit and tie*
It is because of her that I stu-stu... that I stu-stu... that I stu-stu... that I stutter.
- 152 CHARLES**
I almost forgot you were here! You know her? Did you hear our conversation?
- 153 GREG**
Given my con-con... my con-con... given my condition, one question at a time is better.
- 154 CHARLES**
Very well. First of all, why did you change clothes?
- 155 GREG**, *he swallows a pill and pauses a moment with his eyes closed*
For my new job.
- 156 CHARLES**
What job? Did you find one while you were in the kitchen? And how is Mrs. Bennett responsible for your condition?
- 157 GREG**, *a slight tick of the head*
Is it always your habit to ask more than one question at a time?
- 158 CHARLES**
You overheard a confidential conversation between myself and a client. You must forget everything you just heard.
- 159 GREG**
I wasn’t trying to hear the conversation. The walls are very thin. I know Mrs. Bennett by reputation only. I was a human guinea pig for Centrifab, these past few years. (*A tick of the head.*)
- 160 CHARLES**
You, too? They said there were many of us. Wait... you aren’t stuttering anymore?

161 GREG, *he shows him his pill container*

The green pills. They are only effective for a few minutes, but they make me lose my stutter. (*He has an enormous tick of the head.*) But, there are some secondary effects.

162 CHARLES

Oh!

163 GREG

If you were part of this human rat lab, too, you should consider yourself lucky that you don't stutter.

164 CHARLES

Why is that?

165 GREG

It was right after one of these studies that I developed this speech impediment. (*Tick of the head.*) For an actor, that's pretty inconvenient.

166 CHARLES

It most certainly is.

167 GREG

So, now I have to take these green pills if I want to pronounce more than just a few words correctly. But, as you can see, I am substituting one problem for another.

Greg has a tick of the head.

168 CHARLES

What bad luck! Have you spoken to those in charge at Centrifab?

169 GREG

They are quite up-to-date on my case. They say that this is part of the risk associated with taking part in a clinical trial (*Tick of the head.*) and that the contract that I signed included a waiver of liability. They have washed their hands of it. I spoke to a lawyer and there is nothing I can do.

170 CHARLES

A waiver that prevents someone from going after them, even if they have permanent damage? Why! That's awful!

171 GREG

That woman is the devil. Her company makes millions in profits off of human lab rats like us. And the drugs that we test are absolutely unsafe.

Greg has a tick of the head.

172 CHARLES

Yes, I know. I guess I should consider myself fortunate for not having developed any side effects.

173 GREG

Are you sure you haven't?

174 CHARLES, *worried*

Well... Uh... I... I... I...

175 GREG

I'm kidi-kidi-kidi... I'm kidi-kidi-kidi... I'm kidding. You would have noticed by now if you had any.

Greg has a tick of the head.

176 CHARLES

Yes, definitely. I think the big question is how and why the government has spent all this time and energy to bother with us, the poor human guinea pigs?

177 GREG

I've been asking myself that same question.

Greg has a tick of the head.

178 CHARLES

Do you think the Revenue Minister really wants to waste his time sniffing around some laboratories running clinical trials to uncover the small amount of money that the participants forgot to declare? If I remember correctly, none of the people in our test group declared that money.

179 GREG

Of course not.

180 CHARLES

Doesn't it make more sense, and wouldn't it be more profitable for the government to go after the big fish? Like all the businessmen and women who hide their profits in overseas accounts... or those who encourage trade in the black market.

181 GREG

Everyone knows that goes on. (*Tick of the head.*) But they don't do anything about it! Who knows why? Instead, it's us that they target.

182 CHARLES

And what sacrifices we've made! To the point of developing serious side effects, like in your case. How could they claim these hard-earned funds, with added penalties and interest? That would just be adding insult to injury.

183 GREG

I cannot tell you.

184 CHARLES

It must be a gold mine for the government to go back and get money from all the volunteers who participated in the past 10 years.

185 GREG

I completely agree with you. If we had known that the money had to be declared, not a single person would have agreed to test those drugs. We weren't paid enough for that.

186 CHARLES

Exactly. And that's why they called it "financial compensation" instead of "remuneration."

187 GREG

When you look at it this way, I'm not surprised that someone is trying to blackmail this woman.

Greg has a tick of the head.

188 CHARLES

Do you think it's a participant from one of the studies who wants revenge? Perhaps someone who's had some lingering side effects?

189 GREG

That's possible.

190 CHARLES, brandishing Mrs. Bennett's letter

You swear that you have nothing to do with this letter?

191 GREG, shaking his head

It's not me, I swear. Can you imagine me trying to cut up the magazines and paste those little pieces of paper to make an anonymous note? (*Tick of the head.*) With all my ticks... that would be dangerous.

192 CHARLES

I had to ask.

193 GREG

I am more of a direct type of person. Strangulation, poisoning... But I could never do it. Though... (*Tick of the head.*)... karma can definitely be a bitch.

194 CHARLES

I understand. But this letter is definitely real, and I must figure out who sent it.

195 GREG

I know. And we only have until Friday to figure it out. That is why I am beginning right now.

Greg has a tick of the head.

196 CHARLES

What do you mean, "we"? And begin what?

197 GREG

There's that habit of yours to always ask more than one question at a time. I don't know if that's really effective when conducting an investigation. (*Tick of the head. He takes several bills from the pile of money on the desk.*) This ought to be enough to purchase our supplies.

198 CHARLES

What are you talking about?

199 GREG

You have a contract to complete. And the time has come to make this woman pay. She doesn't know me. We are going to kill two birds with one stone: we are going to discover what she is hiding AND reveal her blackmailer.

Greg has a tick of the head.

200 CHARLES

But ...

201 GREG, cutting him off

She mentioned a pending acquisition. You need an actor to make her talk.

Greg has a tick of the head.

202 CHARLES

How?

203 GREG

By playing attacks... attacks... attacks... a tax collector.

204 CHARLES

Are you capable of that?

205 GREG, head tick

I am ca-ca... I am ca-ca... I am capable of playing the role of a cult... of a cult... of a cult... of a cultured man! I told you that the effects of the gr-gr... of the gr-gr... of the gr-gr... of the green pill were only temporary.

Greg has a pelvic tick.

206 CHARLES

You have a new tick.

207 GREG

Oh, that... yes, it's bad, but I can't do... anything about it. I can-can... I can-can... I can-can... I can take another green pill and my stut-stut... my stut-stut... my stut-stut... my stutter will go away again, but the ticks will get worse.

Greg has head and pelvic ticks.

208 CHARLES

I see. You are the one who knows best how to handle your situation. And who's to say that a tax collector can't have a few ticks? It IS a stressful job.

209 GREG

Exactly! But I have something else in mind.

210 CHARLES

Well, be careful. How are you going to introduce yourself to her?

211 GREG

Actually, it's you who are going to in-in... who are going to in-in... who are going to in-in... introduce me. In a manner of speaking.

212 CHARLES

What do you mean?

213 GREG

You are going to tell her that you have a sus-sus... a sus-sus... a sus-sus (*Pelvic tick*)... a suspect. (*Head tick*.) That he is very refined and sex-sex... sex-sex... sex-sex... sexy. That ought to get her here in a jif-jif... jif-jif...

214 CHARLES, interrupting him

In a jiffy, I get it.

215 GREG

Exactly! And then we will find out what she has to be ashamed of, the dam-dam... the dam-dam... the dam-dam...

216 CHARLES, interrupting him

The dame?

217 GREG

No, the damn bitch!

Greg has head and pelvic ticks.

218 CHARLES

I'll call her right away.

219 GREG

Set up a meeting here at 7 tomorrow morning. That will give me time to prepare my care-care... my care-care... my care-care...

220 CHARLES, interrupting him

Your character?

221 GREG

No. My charisma.

Greg has a pelvic tick.

222 CHARLES

I hope you know what you're doing.

223 GREG

We will find out what she is hi-hi... what she is hi-hi... what she is hiding. The bull... the bull... the bull...

224 CHARLES, interrupting him

The bully?

225 GREG

No, the bullshit.

Greg has head and pelvic ticks.

Blackout.

Scene 5

The next morning. Elyse is cleaning the office. Charles and Greg enter. Greg is still wearing the suit and tie, and carrying a suitcase.

226 CHARLES

Good morning, Elyse!

227 ELYSE

Good morning.

228 CHARLES

May I present, Mr. ...

- 229 GREG**, *extending his hand*
Si... Si... Si... Sirius Brown. As in "The situation is serious."
- 230 ELYSE**
Nice to meet you. (*Addressing Charles.*) What are you doing here so early? It's barely 6:30. I haven't even started most of the cleaning yet.
- 231 GREG**
Don't worry about that, Ely-Ely... Ely-Ely... Ely-Ely...
- 232 ELYSE**
Elyse.
- 233 GREG**, *forcing himself not to stutter*
Delighted to meet you.
- 234 CHARLES**
Don't worry about any of that. That will be enough cleaning for today. Besides, having everything too neat makes me uncomfortable.
- 235 ELYSE**
Oh, I see.
- 236 GREG**
Put down your duh-duh... your duh-duh... your duh-duh... your dust rag. We need something else from you.
- 237 ELYSE**
Like what?
- 238 CHARLES**, *removing his raincoat and hat, and putting them on the coat rack*
Mr. Brown will explain it to you. We have brought some clothes for you to change into. Elyse, for some time now you have been wanting to get more involved in this firm. Well, today is the day!
- 239 ELYSE**
What do I have to do? Tail someone?
- 240 GREG**, *giving her the suitcase*
Start by put-put... put-put... put-put... putting on the clothes that are in this bag. I will explain what we need you to do... after.
- 241 CHARLES**
Please go and change in the bathroom right away.
- 242 ELYSE**, *to Charles*
Are you sure about what you're doing?

243 CHARLES
You are always telling me to trust my instincts. That's what I'm doing. You can finally put all those acting classes you took this past year to some good use. (*Looking at his watch.*) We don't have much time. Hurry!

244 ELYSE
Do I have anything to say in this plan? Can I use an accent?

245 CHARLES
Yes, yes. Now, scoot!

246 ELYSE
Okay.

Elyse goes to the bathroom with the suitcase.

Scene 6

247 CHARLES, *pacing*
Your plan makes me nervous.

248 GREG
That's no-no... that's no-no... that's no-no... that's normal. But everything will be... fine.

249 CHARLES
You don't think our story is a bit far-fetched?

250 GREG
You fo-for... you fo-for... you fo-for... you forget that she is hiding something. We must come up with something ex... ex... ex... extreme in order to make her talk.

251 CHARLES
I just hope you have all your pills with you.

252 GREG, *taking five bottles out of his pockets and showing them*
Yes, I have them all he-he... he-he... he-he...

253 CHARLES
Why are you laughing?

254 GREG
Here.

255 CHARLES

Oh! Sorry. Yes, the green ones I know. Those are the ones that stop the stuttering, but give you a tick in your head and other places. But the reds, the yellows, the whites and the blues? What do those do?

256 GREG

The reds are to stop the effect... of an overdose of greens. They give me a whole other kind of sec-sec... of sec-sec... of sec-sec... of secondary effect. But at least they get rid of the head and pelvic ticks. The yellow ones halt the effect of the reds, but they take me ba-ba... take me ba-ba... take me ba-ba... take me back to square one. And the whites... well, those help me sleep.

257 CHARLES

And the blue ones?

258 GREG

Um... I think that ev-ev... that ev-ev... that ev-ev... that everyone knows what the blue ones are for.

259 CHARLES

Well, I am not sure I understood everything you just explained, but I am sure that you won't be needing the blue ones for this. The important thing is that YOU know what they are all for.

260 GREG

Yes, yes. Exactly.

261 CHARLES, *walking toward the bathroom door*

Everything going okay, Elyse?

262 GREG

Have they... confirmed the meeting?

263 CHARLES, *to Greg*

Yes, the delivery people should arrive at 8. That should give us enough time with Mrs. Bennett.

264 GREG

But-but... but-but... but-but... but why not tell Elyse who I am... really?

265 CHARLES

The less she knows, the better. If this goes badly, then she can say that we took advantage of her innocence.

266 GREG

True.

267 CHARLES, *speaking loudly in the direction of the bathroom door*
Elyse, have you finished getting dressed? *(To Greg.)* Mrs. Bennett should be arriving any minute. *(Pointing toward the bathroom.)* You need to go tell her what we want her to do. *(He eyes the bathroom door.)* Elyse?

There is knocking at the front door.

268 GREG
The door! She is al-al... she is al-al... she is al-al... she is already here!

269 CHARLES, *taking Greg by the shoulders and pushing him toward the bathroom*
Quickly, go in there. Don't forget to take one of those green pills to put a stop to your stuttering.

270 GREG, *taking a pill*
No, no. Yes, yes.

He swallows it. He has a big head tick.

271 CHARLES, *opening the bathroom door*
Go! I am going to take her into the kitchen. When you are ready, then you can both come out and pretend as if you've just arrived.

272 GREG
Good idea, my friend. *(Being suggestive.)* Don't forget to play up your charm!

Greg has a pelvic tick. He rushes into the bathroom. Charles goes to open the front door.

Scene 7

Mrs. Bennett enters. She is dressed very fashionably. The collar of her suit is a removable fur piece.

273 MRS. BENNETT
Where is he?

274 CHARLES
Hello, Mrs. Bennett.

275 MRS. BENNETT
I don't see him.

- 276 CHARLES**
You are a little early.
- 277 MRS. BENNETT**
I came alone. I wanted to find a safe place to park. The last time I came, there were some men who tried to steal the tires off my car.
- 278 CHARLES**
I'm so sorry to hear that. Were you able to chase them off?
- 279 MRS. BENNETT**
Do you remember me telling about the unknown soldiers who died in combat?
- 280 CHARLES**
Yes, I remember.
- 281 MRS. BENNETT**
You can add two to that.
- 282 CHARLES**
You killed them?
- 283 MRS. BENNETT**
No, no. (*Gesturing.*) Bang, bang... two teaser shots and, voila. As it turns out, I'm starting to enjoy the far west end of your neighborhood.
- 284 CHARLES**
That's good. Now, as I told you yesterday on the phone, I have brought in a suspect this morning – one I think we should take very seriously.
- 285 MRS. BENNETT**
How did you manage to flush him out in such a short time? Do you think he is the one who sent me that letter?
- 286 CHARLES**
It's a long story.
- 287 MRS. BENNETT**
Give me the condensed version.
- 288 CHARLES**
What would you say to a nice cup of coffee?
- 289 MRS. BENNETT**
No, thank you. No stimulant for me. I have enough energy as it is. You don't want to see me when I am stimulated, Mr. Pickett. (*Suggestively.*) Or, maybe I'm wrong about that?

- 290 CHARLES**, *moving away from her*
I think I will have a cup. The kitchen is through here. Would you come with me? We can continue our conversation in there.
- 291 MRS. BENNETT**
I'll stay here. Go ahead, but be quick about it. I want to know everything before he gets here.
- 292 CHARLES**
Oh - how silly of me. My cleaning lady always makes the coffee. I'm not sure how to operate the damn thing. Would you mind to show me?
- 293 MRS. BENNETT**
I have to wonder if you are resourceful enough to make an effective detective?
- 294 CHARLES**
Of course I am.
- 295 MRS. BENNETT**
Listen, Charles! Do you know my motto?
- 296 CHARLES**
No.
- 297 MRS. BENNETT**
You have to strike while the iron is hot.
- Charles goes to the window and looks out.*
- 298 CHARLES**
Is that your fancy car that I see out there? Are you sure that it's a good idea to...
- 299 MRS. BENNETT**
Quit stalling. I have so many thoughts in my head. If you knew...
- 300 CHARLES**
Can I offer you something to eat?
- 301 MRS. BENNETT**
No! Come sit next to me. Don't be afraid. I won't eat you. Not at the moment, anyway. I'm not a morning person when it comes to that.
- 302 CHARLES**, *sitting next to her*
Fine.
- 303 MRS. BENNETT**
Look at me. What do you see?