

MARIA IRENE FORNÉS

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*Two One-Act Plays*

*Tango Palace* and *The Successful Life of Three* by Maria Irene Fornés were presented on January 14, 15, 16, 22, 23, 28, 29, 30 and on February 4, 5, 6, 1965, at the Firehouse Theatre, Minneapolis.

*Tango Palace* was directed by Charles M. Morrison; *The Successful Life of Three* was directed by Miss Fornés.

*Cast of Characters for* TANGO PALACE

ISIDORE

Lionel Reid

LEOPOLD

Michael Devine

*Cast of Characters for* THE SUCCESSFUL LIFE OF THREE

HE

Jeff Moses

SHE

Carrie Bartlett

THREE

Mel Semler

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## *PLAYWRIGHT'S PREFACE*

**T**O SAY that a work of art is meaningful is to imply that the work is endowed with intelligence. That it is illuminating. But if we must inquire what the meaning of a work of art is, it becomes evident that the work has failed us; that we have not been inspired by it; that the work has not succeeded in breathing its life for us.

To approach a work of art with the wish to decipher its symbolism, and to extract the author's intentions from it, is to imply that the work can be something other than what it demonstrates, that the work can be treated as a code system which, when deciphered, reveals the true content of the work. A work of art should not be other than what it demonstrates. It should not be an intellectual puzzle, or at least not primarily. A true work of art is a magic thing. To comprehend magic we must be in a state of innocence, of credulity. If there is wisdom in the work it will come to us. But if we go after it, we become wary, watchful. We lose our ability to taste.

A work of art must have its function, like a car, a window, or a bridge. We all know how a car, or a window, or a bridge must function. We know whether the designer or engineer has succeeded. However, we are not too sure how art must function. Art must inspire us. That is its function.

If art is to inspire us, we must not be too eager to understand. If we understand too readily, our understanding will, most likely, be meaningless. It will have no consequences. We must be patient with ourselves.

We have learned to think of inspiration as the property of artists. It is not. Inspiration belongs to all of us. What the artist does with his in-

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spiration is quite clear. He creates his work of art. The product of his inspiration becomes public. The inspiration of the layman generates itself in his personal life. It enriches it, and ennobles it. Inspiration is a precious gift which we have relinquished without any struggle. We do not believe that it belongs to us.

Art is created by the artist for the layman. The layman must take possession of it. He must become familiar with it. He must make himself worthy of being its judge. He must love it.

I give my most sincere thanks to the John Hay Whitney Foundation for awarding me an Opportunity Fellowship in 1961 to write *Tango Palace* and to Herbert Blau and the San Francisco Actor's Workshop for its first production on November 29, 1963. I wish also to express my deep appreciation to Arthur Ballet and the Office for Advanced Drama Research and to Charles M. Morrison III and Marlow Hotchiss of the Firehouse Theatre for making possible the first production of *The Successful Life of Three*, along with a production of the revised version of *Tango Palace*, at the Firehouse Theatre on January 15, 1965.

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*New York City*  
*July 1965*

# TANGO PALACE

*to the memory of my father*

Carlos Fornés

1891–1945

### *Cast of Characters*

ISIDORE, an androgynous clown

LEOPOLD, an earnest youth

### *The Scene*

A room, the same throughout the play. The floor is carpeted. The door is bolted with an oversize padlock. There is a big filing cabinet, an armchair, a secretary, a wall mirror, a water jug, a radio, three porcelain teapots, a large vase, a blackboard. There is a large canvas sack on the floor. A recess in the back wall serves as a shrine. Within the recess, hanging from nails, are a guitar, a whip, a toy parrot, a Persian helmet, two swords, a cape, a compass, a muleta, a pair of bulls horns, six banderillas, two masks in the form of beetles' faces. The shrine is decorated with a string of flower-shaped light bulbs. Isidore sits in the shrine. His appearance is a mixture of man and woman. He is stout, has long hair, and is wearing rouge and lipstick; he wears a man's hat and pants, high-heeled shoes, and a silk shirt. There is a corsage of flowers pinned on his shirt. Sometimes his behavior is clearly masculine; other times he could be thought a woman. Leopold is inside the canvas sack. He is in his late twenties. He is handsome, and his movements are simple. He wears a business suit. Each time Isidore feels he has said something important, he takes a card from his pocket or from a drawer and flips it across the room in any direction. (The word "card" in the script indicates when a card should be flipped.) This action is automatic.

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# TANGO PALACE

## SCENE 1

*Isidore makes a gesture and his shrine is lit. He makes another gesture and chimes sound. One more gesture and the bulbs on his shrine light up. Leopold begins to move inside the canvas sack. Isidore notices the sack and cautiously approaches it.*

### ISIDORE

Look what the stork has brought me. (*Isidore opens the sack. Leopold begins to emerge. They stare at each other for a while. Isidore is delighted with what he has found. He goes to the shrine, takes the guitar and begins to sing "A Sleepy Lagoon" in an attempt to charm Leopold.*) Song and guitar accompaniment by Isidore. (*card*) (*Leopold has gotten out of the sack and walks curiously about the room. He stops in front of the armchair. Isidore, noticing Leopold's interest in the furniture, addresses him in the affected tones of a salesman in an exclusive shop.*) Queen Anne walnut armchair. Representing the acme of artistic craftsmanship of the Philadelphia school. Circa 1740. Original condition and finish. (*card*) (*Isidore steps down from the shrine, walks ostentatiously past Leopold, and runs his hand along the surface of the secretary*) Very rare, small, Louis Quinze secretary, representing the acme of artistic craftsmanship of the Parisian school. A pure Louis Quinze leg was never, under any conditions, straight. It was always curvilinear, generally in that shaping which we have come to know as the "cabriole." (*card*) (*taking little steps to the mirror*) Louis Quatorze carved and gilded mirror. (*card*) Bearing sprays of leafage and flowers. Circa 1700. Height sixty-four inches. Width thirty-six inches. (*Isidore walks close to Leo-*

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*pold and looks him over*) The choice of the examples here is influenced by their significance as distinct types representative of the best tradition, not only in the style and execution but in the choice of subject. (*card*) (*Isidore walks toward the shelf containing the porcelain objects*) Tea-pots of rarest Chinese export porcelain with American marine decoration. Circa 1740–1750. Left one shows American flag, right one American admiral’s insignia. The one in the center depicts the so-called “Governor Duff,” actually Diedrick Durven, governor general of the Dutch East India Company. Exquisite, isn’t it? This collection has been formed throughout a period of many years, and it is probably not an exaggeration to say that such a collection could not be formed again. (*Isidore waits for a reaction*) Did you say something? . . . Oh, well . . . Listen . . . Music . . . A tango . . . (*card*) (*Isidore begins to dance*) Do you know this step? Stomach in. Derrière out. Fingers gracefully curved. (*card*) A smile on your lips. Eyes full of stars. Dancing has well been called the poetry of motion. It is the art whereby the feelings of the mind are expressed by measured steps, regulated motions of the body, and graceful gestures. The German waltz, the Spanish fandango, the Polish mazurka, and last but not least the Argentine tango. One . . . two . . . three . . . dip and turn your head to show your profile. One . . . two . . . three . . . dip and swing your little foot back and forth. (*Leopold begins to imitate Isidore*) One . . . two . . . three . . . and rotate on one foot, taking little steps with the other. Watch me first. Now you made me lose my step. And a one and a two and a three. Stomach in. Derrière out. Fingers gracefully curved. A smile on your lips. Eyes full of stars. One . . . two . . . three . . . dip and profile. One . . . two . . . three . . . dip and swing your little foot. One . . . two . . . three . . . and rotate. (*Leopold’s attention is drawn by the shrine; he moves closer to it*) Don’t look there yet. Watch me . . . watch me. (*Leopold watches for a moment, then he turns to the shrine again and reaches for the whip. Isidore takes the whip and demonstrates its use.*) This is my whip. (*lashing Leopold*) And that is pain. (*card*) A souvenir of love. I loved her. She loved me. I gave her the whip. She gave me her cherry . . . All is fair in love and war. (*card*) (*taking the parrot*) This is my talking parrot. (*to the parrot*) Pretty parrot.

PARROT

Pretty parrot.

ISIDORE

Very smart. He knows everything.

PARROT

Very smart. He knows everything.



## TANGO PALACE

ISIDORE

Thank you.

PARROT

Thank you.

ISIDORE

(*putting on the Persian helmet*) And this is the genuine Persian helmet I wore when I fought in Salamis. (*card*) I killed two hundred and fifteen Athenians. Fourteen were captains, three were generals, and the rest foot soldiers. I'll show you. (*Isidore takes the sword and swings it while he screams, grunts, whirls, and hops. Leopold becomes frightened.*) That's how I killed them. Don't be afraid, I won't hurt you. (*touching Leopold's chest with the tip of the sword*) Do you have something to show me?

LEOPOLD

No. I don't have anything.

ISIDORE

Nothing at all?

LEOPOLD

No.

ISIDORE

Oh, that's too bad. Here, I'll show you my flying cape. (*Isidore puts on the cape, climbs on a chair, flips his arms, and jumps to the floor*) Extraordinary, isn't it? Would you like to see my joy compass? (*showing joy compass*) It's magic. I sent for it . . . It points to joy. Now you show me something.

LEOPOLD

I don't own anything.

ISIDORE

Were your things taken away?

LEOPOLD

No, I never had anything, except . . .

ISIDORE

What?

LEOPOLD

A tattoo. (*Leopold opens his shirt*)

ISIDORE

Oh. How beautiful. (*reading*) "This is man. Heaven or bust." Oh, that's in bad taste. That's in terrible taste. (*card*) Just for that you can't touch any of my things. The only things you can touch are those cards. Those cards are yours. (*card*)

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LEOPOLD

*(picking up a card)* These cards are mine? *(reading)* "A tattoo." "Oh. How beautiful. This is man. Heaven or bust. Oh, that's in bad taste."

ISIDORE

You can put them there in that filing cabinet.

LEOPOLD

*(disturbed)* Why do you write what I say?

ISIDORE

First of all, I write what *we* say. And then I don't write, I print . . . with my magic printing press . . . if you'd like to know. File them in your filing cabinet. That cabinet is yours too.

LEOPOLD

What for?

ISIDORE

So you can find them when you need them. These cards contain wisdom. File them away. *(card)* Know where they are. *(card)* Have them at hand. *(card)* Be one upon whom nothing is lost. *(card)* Memorize them and you'll be where you were. *(card)* Be where you are. Then and now. Pick them up.

LEOPOLD

*(reading a card)* "All is fair in love and war."

ISIDORE

That's a good one.

LEOPOLD

Why?

ISIDORE

Because it teaches you that all is fair in love and war, and it teaches you that when someone is telling you a story about love and war, you are not to stand there and say . . . That's not fair . . . or you'll be considered a perfect fool. *(card)*

LEOPOLD

*(still disturbed)* I don't see why love in war should be different from love in anything else.

ISIDORE

*(pulling Leopold's ear and shouting)* Not love *in* war. Love *and* war! It has taken centuries . . . *(smack)* centuries, to arrive at this ethical insight and you say it isn't fair. *(smack)* All is fair. You hear? All is fair in love . . . *(smack)* and war. *(smack)*

LEOPOLD

I don't want your cards. I don't want to have anything to do with them.

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ISIDORE

These are not my cards. They are yours. It's you who need learning, not me. I've learned already. (*card*) I know all my cards by heart. (*card*) And I have never forgotten one of them. (*card*) I can recite them in chronological order and I don't leave one word out. (*card*) What's more I never say a thing which is not an exact quotation from one of my cards. (*card*) That's why I never hesitate. (*card*) I'm never short of an answer. (*card*) Or a question. (*card*) Or a remark (*card*) if a remark is more appropriate.

LEOPOLD

I don't want to learn that way.

ISIDORE

There is no other way.

LEOPOLD

Yes, there is. I hear a voice.

ISIDORE

What voice? That's me you hear. I am the only voice.

LEOPOLD

No, it's not you.

ISIDORE

It is so. (*in a falsetto voice*) Listen to me and always obey me . . . It's me . . . me . . . It's me . . . and only me . . . Leopold . . . Lippy . . . me . . . me . . .

LEOPOLD

No.

ISIDORE

Well, *Dime con quien andas y te dire quien eres* . . . (*card*) Spanish proverb meaning . . . You know what it means, and if you don't, go and ask that voice of yours . . . What does your voice say?

LEOPOLD

You speak like a parrot.

ISIDORE

No, I don't. (*Isidore considers for a moment*) My diction is better. Sally says she sells sea shells at the seashore. Have you ever heard a parrot say: Sally says she sells sea shells at the seashore?

LEOPOLD

That's not what I mean. (*Isidore considers for a moment*)

ISIDORE

I talk like a wise parrot. Study hard, learn your cards, and one day you too will be able to talk like a parrot.

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LEOPOLD

*(imitating a parrot)* Study hard, learn your cards, and one day you too will be able to talk like a parrot.

ISIDORE

What are you, a parrot? Do you want to be a moron for the rest of your life? Always being pushed around? *(Isidore pushes Leopold)* Are you mentally retarded? Do I have to tell you what should be obvious to a half-wit. *(smack)* It should be obvious *(smack)* even *(smack)* to a half-wit. *(Leopold throws a punch at Isidore. Isidore ducks, and kicks Leopold. Leopold falls. Isidore turns and thrusts his buttocks out.)* You bad, bad boy. You'll have to be punished. You tried to hit your loving teacher. Come. *(Isidore picks Leopold up)*

LEOPOLD

*(freeing himself from Isidore)* Take your hands off me. *(Leopold executes each of Isidore's commands at the same time as they are spoken, but as if he were acting spontaneously rather than obeying)*

ISIDORE

Walk to the door. *(card)* Notice the padlock. *(card)* Push the door. *(card)* You're locked in. *(card)* Stand there and think. *(card)* Why are you locked in? *(card)* Where are you locked in? *(card)* Turn to the door. *(card)* You know what to do. *(card)* Pull the padlock. *(card)* Push the door. *(card)* Force the padlock. *(card)* You are locked in. *(card)* Kick the door. *(card)* Bang the door. *(card)* Scream.

ISIDORE AND LEOPOLD

Anybody there! Anybody there! *(card)* Let me out. *(card)* Open up! *(card)*

ISIDORE

Kick the door. *(card)* Walk around the room restlessly. *(card)* Bite your thumbnails. *(card)* Get an idea. *(card)* You got an idea. *(card)* *(Leopold charges toward Isidore)* Violence does not pay. *(card)* Be sensible, stand still a moment being sensible. Have sensible thought. For every door there's a key. *(card)* The key must be in the room. Look for it in the obvious place first. Under the rare seventeenth-century needlework carpet depicting Elijah in the desert fed by ravens. It's not there. Look in Louis Quinze secretary, mahogany wood. Look in less obvious places. Magnificent marked Wedgwood vase in Rosso Antico ground. In flyleaf of my Gutenberg Bible. Look in places which are not obvious at all. Correction. All places are obvious places. *(card)* Look again in drawer of very rare, small, Louis Quinze secretary, representing the acme of artistic craftsmanship. Fall exhausted on Queen Anne chair. Have desperate thoughts.

## TANGO PALACE

*(Leopold kicks the chair. Isidore speaks soothingly, to regain control.)*  
Collect yourself, darling. You must collect yourself.

LEOPOLD

I must collect myself.

ISIDORE

You must collect yourself. You must think, dear. Let's think. Could you have enemies? Perhaps business associates? Perhaps people who envy you? Or could it be the others? The angry husbands? The spinsters? The barking dogs? The man whose toilet you dirtied?

LEOPOLD

Could it be you?

ISIDORE

Could it be you? It doesn't really matter. You might as well stay. Just tidy up your things, darling. Do as I said. File them away. *(Leopold picks up a card and reads it)*

LEOPOLD

And that is pain.

ISIDORE

Be where you were. *(card)*

LEOPOLD

*(reading another card)* Pretty parrot. Very smart. He knows everything.

ISIDORE

Then and now. *(card)*

LEOPOLD

*(reading another card)* Were your things taken away?

ISIDORE

Nothing is lost. *(card)*

LEOPOLD

Nothing is lost?

ISIDORE

Nothing. Come, it's time for your drawing lesson. *(Isidore rings the bell and walks to the blackboard to illustrate the lesson)* How to draw a portrait. *(making a mark at the top of the blackboard)* This is the divine. Cleopatra for example. *(making a mark at the bottom of the blackboard)* This down here is the despicable. The werewolf. Now we're going to place the person whose portrait we're drawing. Where shall we put him? Close to the divine? Not so close. Halfway down? Close to the despicable? No. Here. *(Isidore makes a mark to the left and halfway between the other two marks)* Now you join the points with lines. This is the portrait of a

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mediocre person. You can draw a mouth on it. And an eye. But it isn't necessary. Because what counts is the nose.

*The figure Isidore has drawn looks like this:*



LEOPOLD

Draw my portrait.

ISIDORE

Unfortunately this system doesn't do you any good, since all we can establish is that I am at the top. And way down at the bottom is you. There is no other point. We therefore can't have an angle. We only have a vertical line. The space around us is infinite, enclosed as it may be, because there is not a third person. And if the space around us is infinite, so is, necessarily, the space between us.

LEOPOLD

Who says you're at the top?

ISIDORE

I.

LEOPOLD

I say you're not at the top.

ISIDORE

But I am.

LEOPOLD

How do you know?

ISIDORE

Because I know everything. I know my cards. I know everything.

LEOPOLD

I'm going to burn those cards.

ISIDORE

You'll die if you burn them . . . Don't take my word for it. Try it. (*Leopold sets fire to a card*) What in the world are you doing? Are you crazy? (*Isidore puts the fire out*) Are you out of your mind? You're going to die. Are you dying? Do you feel awful? (*Isidore trips Leopold*) There! You died.

LEOPOLD

(*springing to his feet*) No, I tripped. I think I tripped.

ISIDORE

See? You tripped because you burned that card. If I hadn't put the fire out you would have died.

LEOPOLD

I don't believe you.

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ISIDORE

You don't believe me? You could have broken your neck. All right, I don't care what you think. You just stop burning things.

LEOPOLD

You're lying to me, aren't you?

ISIDORE

Go on, burn them if you want to. I won't stop you. (*Leopold moves to burn a card but then stops himself. Isidore flips a card at Leopold.*) Wisdom. (*card*) (*Isidore begins to dance*)

LEOPOLD

(*holding Isidore to stop him from dancing*) I beg you.

ISIDORE

Don't put your hands on me, ever, ever, ever, *ari, ari, ari*. That's Bengali, you know. (*card*) It's you who need learning. (*card*) Very smart. He knows everything. (*card*) A souvenir of love. She gave me her cherry. (*card*) I killed two hundred and fifteen Athenians. (*card*) That's a good one. (*card*) A sleepy lagoon. (*card*) What does your voice say? (*card*)

LEOPOLD

Stop flipping those things at me . . . I beg you . . . Don't . . . Please . . . I beg you. (*kneels at Isidore's feet*)

ISIDORE

And a one and a two. One, two, three, dip and turn . . . You still have to be punished. Don't think I forgot. (*Isidore takes Leopold by the hand and walks him to a corner. Leopold leans against the wall.*) Straighten yourself up. Are you hearing things again? I'm jealous. I want to hear too. (*putting his ear against Leopold's ear*) Where is it? I can't hear a thing. (*talking into Leopold's ear*) Yoo hoo. Where are you? Say something. Talk to me. It won't talk to me. (*to Leopold*) Tell me what it says. I'm angry. (*Isidore sits on the shrine, crosses his legs and his arms, and turns his head away from Leopold*) I'm angry. Don't talk to me. I said don't talk to me. Don't you see I'm in the typical position of anger? . . . Do you want to say something to me?

LEOPOLD

No.

ISIDORE

Well, I want you to tell me what that awful voice was telling you.

LEOPOLD

It said, "Isidore deceives you." It said, "Don't listen to Isidore."

ISIDORE

Oh. Horrible. Horrible. Treason in my own house.

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LEOPOLD

Let me tell you . . .

ISIDORE

Oh. Don't say any more, treason. Oh.

LEOPOLD

Let me tell you what I think, Isidore.

ISIDORE

No.

LEOPOLD

Please.

ISIDORE

You've said enough.

LEOPOLD

I haven't said . . .

ISIDORE

Treason!

LEOPOLD

Isidore!

ISIDORE

*(in a whisper)* Don't talk so loud.

LEOPOLD

*(in a whisper)* I haven't said . . .

ISIDORE

I heard you already. Treason!

LEOPOLD

I want to leave.

ISIDORE

Bye, bye, butterfly.

LEOPOLD

I want to get out.

ISIDORE

See you later, alligator.

LEOPOLD

Give me the key.

ISIDORE

Pretty parrot.

PARROT

Pretty parrot.

LEOPOLD

I want the key.



## TANGO PALACE

ISIDORE

He wants the key.

PARROT

He wants the key.

ISIDORE

There is no key.

PARROT

No key.

LEOPOLD

You're lying.

ISIDORE

I always tell the truth. I worship truth and truth worships me. Don't be so stubborn. There is no key.

LEOPOLD

There must be a key.

ISIDORE

I see what possesses you. It's faith!

LEOPOLD

So what?

ISIDORE

Faith is a disgusting thing. It's treacherous and destructive. Mountains are moved from place to place. You can't find them. I won't have any of that.

LEOPOLD

Well, I do have faith.

ISIDORE

Infidel. I'm too upset. I can't take any more of this. (*covering his face*) It's the devil. I can't look at you. Tell me you'll give it up. Tell me you have no faith.

LEOPOLD

But I do.

ISIDORE

Well, I'm a mountain. *Move me.*

LEOPOLD

I know there is a way out because there have been moments when I have been away from here.

ISIDORE

That's not true. You get ten demerits for telling lies.

LEOPOLD

It is true. There are moments when you have just vanished . . .

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ISIDORE

Vanished? I have never vanished.

LEOPOLD

I don't mean vanished . . . exactly . . . I mean there are moments when I've felt this is not all there is.

ISIDORE

What else is there?

LEOPOLD

Close your eyes . . . Imagine . . . that all is calm.

ISIDORE

I don't like playing childish games. I'm supposed to sit there imagining a field of orange blossoms and then you're going to pour a bucket of water on my head. Let me tell you, young man, that I played that game when I was five. Let me tell you that it was I who invented that game. And let me tell you that I didn't invent it to sit there like a fool and get the water on *my* head. I invented it to pour the water on the fool's head. Let me tell you that. You're not smart enough . . . not for old Izzy. (*card*)

LEOPOLD

I wasn't going to throw water on you.

ISIDORE

You weren't? Hm . . . All right. Go on.

LEOPOLD

Don't imagine anything in particular. Don't imagine orange groves or anything. Make your mind a blank. Just imagine that you are in perfect harmony with everything around you . . .

ISIDORE

Wait, I have to erase the orange grove.

LEOPOLD

Forget about the orange grove.

ISIDORE

I can't forget the orange grove. It's planted in my mind. I have to uproot it. You put things in my mind and then it's I who have to get rid of them. At least leave me in peace for a moment, while I do the work.

LEOPOLD

I didn't put anything in your mind.

ISIDORE

You said, "Don't think of an orange grove." You did, didn't you?

LEOPOLD

Yes . . .

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ISIDORE

Well, the moment you said that, an orange grove popped into my head. Now give me time while I get rid of it. (*Isidore moves about the room as if he were picking up oranges and throwing them over a fence with his eyes closed. Leopold's impatience increases.*) First I'll throw this orange over the fence. Then, this little orange. Then this orange orange. Now this rotten orange. Now I pull this whole branch off the tree. Oh, oh, it's hard. Now I pull this other orange off the tree. Oh, oh, there are so many. There are thousands and thousands and I think millions and trillions. Oh, I'm tired. No, no, I must not rest. I can't take a moment's rest until I clear away all this mess of oranges. Thousands and thousands of acres, and then I have to clear the other side of the fence, and then the other, and then the other, and then dismantle the fence, and then the other fence, and then . . . (*Leopold reaches for the pitcher of water and empties it on Isidore. They remain motionless for a moment. Isidore goes to his shrine and sits in his typical angry position. Leopold walks to the opposite end of the room and sits down.*) I'll never trust you again. (*The lights fade out. Isidore laughs out loud as the curtain falls.*)

## SCENE 2

*The curtain rises with Isidore and Leopold in the same position as at the end of the first scene.*

ISIDORE

Isidore I beg you.  
Have you no heart?  
You play games,  
And I'm so earnest.  
Isidore I beg you.  
Can't you see  
You're breaking my heart?  
'Cause while I'm so earnest,  
You're still playing games.

Sung and composed by Isidore. Sixteen years old. (*card*) (*Leopold looks at Isidore*) Stop looking at me like that.

LEOPOLD

Like what?

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ISIDORE

*(accompanying himself with the guitar)* Like a lover. Transfigured by the presence of the beloved. Looking as though you want to breathe the minute bubbles of air imprisoned in each of my pores. *(card)* Or like a drug addict who imagines specks of heroin concealed in those beloved dimples. *(card)*

LEOPOLD

And you think that's how I'm looking at you, you slob?

ISIDORE

I'm offended. *(pause)* Come and make up with old Isidore.

LEOPOLD

Leave me alone.

ISIDORE

You'd die of boredom if I left you alone . . . *(pause)* You'd have to come to me sooner or later. Come now. *(pause)* What if I don't take you later?

LEOPOLD

The better for me.

ISIDORE

I'll count up to ten.

LEOPOLD

Count up to ten.

ISIDORE

Don't be a stubborn brat.

LEOPOLD

Leave me alone.

ISIDORE

*(takes the Persian helmet and sets it on Leopold's head)* I'll let you wear it for a while. There's my baby. Isn't he cute. *(Leopold takes the helmet off)* See how contradictory you are? When I wouldn't lend it to you, you wanted it. Now that I'm willing to lend it to you, you don't want it.

LEOPOLD

Oh, go to hell. You twist everything.

ISIDORE

Now you're being rude.

LEOPOLD

Go back to your hole. *(Leopold picks up some cards and begins to sort them)*

ISIDORE

My hole. My hole? *(Isidore looks through his cards)* He means my shrine.

## TANGO PALACE

I think I will. (*Isidore goes to the shrine doing a dance step*) Peekaboo.  
(*Leopold stands in front of Isidore*)

LEOPOLD

Listen to me.

ISIDORE

Yes.

LEOPOLD

You're going to start behaving from now on. (*Isidore nods in consent*)  
OK. That's all. (*Leopold goes back to the cards. Isidore passes wind through his lips.*)

ISIDORE

So I'm going to start behaving from now on. Then what? . . . Stop being silly. What is the matter with you, young man? You should be ashamed of yourself. What is life without humor here and there? A little bit of humor . . . Look at him sorting out his little cards. He's a good boy.

LEOPOLD

I'm not sorting them. I just don't want to listen to you.

ISIDORE

You can't tear yourself away from them. Can you? . . . You think I haven't seen you running to your cards the moment you think I'm not looking?

LEOPOLD

That's a lie. I've never . . .

ISIDORE

I never lie. I have never lied in my life. (*card*) (*Isidore crosses himself, then covers his head as if to protect himself from lightning*) So what if I'm a liar. Do you think truth matters? Well, it doesn't. (*card*) Does that confound your infantile mind? It is order that matters, whether there's order or disorder. (*card*) A sloppy liar is despicable (*card*), as despicable as a sloppy truth teller. (*card*) Now, what do you deduce from that?

LEOPOLD

That you're rotten. (*Leopold flips a card to Isidore. Isidore sniffs himself.*)

ISIDORE

A systematic liar, a man with a goal, a man with a style is the best sort. (*card*) The most reliable. You'll never amount to anything until you learn that. No, you'll never amount to anything. You'll never make it in the army, the navy, politics, business, stardom. You're worthless. I'm almost tempted to give you the key.

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LEOPOLD

Give it to me.

ISIDORE

Never mind that. Come here. I'm about to forgive you . . . Come now. You really don't want me to forgive you?

LEOPOLD

Where is it, Isidore?

ISIDORE

Oh, here, in my heart.

LEOPOLD

Where is it?

ISIDORE

Oh, you're so insistent. I'll tell you what. (*Isidore takes the horns and the cape*) I'll answer all the questions you want if you do a little thing for me. Be a good bull and charge. Then I'll answer your question.

LEOPOLD

You'll tell me where the key is?

ISIDORE

Yes. Charge six times and I'll give you the key . . . But you won't be satisfied with the key. On the contrary, it's when you have the key that you'll start asking questions. You'll start wondering about the mysteries of the universe. (*counting the banderillas*) One, two, three, four, five, six mysteries has the universe. As I stick each banderilla on your back I'll reveal the answer to a mystery. And then . . . (*taking the sword*) the moment of truth. Right through the back of your neck . . . Oh, beautiful transgressions. While I'm answering your last question you'll be expiring your last breath. As eternal verity is revealed to you, darkness will come upon your eyes . . . Fair? Fair. Charge.

LEOPOLD

Are you kidding?

ISIDORE

I am not kidding. I am proposing the most poetic diversion ever enjoyed by man. You mean to say you're not willing to die for the truth? (*Isidore rubs his fingers to indicate "shame"*)

LEOPOLD

And when I'm crawling and bleeding to death begging you to answer my questions you'll say something like . . . Ha, ha.

ISIDORE

You want to play or you don't want to play?

## TANGO PALACE

LEOPOLD

I'll play. But I'll only charge six times. Six passes. I only want one answer. No mysteries.

ISIDORE

All right. Ask your question.

LEOPOLD

Where is the key?

ISIDORE

Charge.

LEOPOLD

Answer first.

ISIDORE

The answer after you charge. (*Leopold begins to charge*) Wait. I lost the mood. I need preparation. (*Isidore kneels in front of the shrine and crosses himself. He makes a trumpet with his hand and toots a bullfighter's march. Isidore performs the passes as he calls out the passes' names.*) Toro and bull. Fearless, confident, and dominant, without altering the composure of his figure. Isidore lifts the spectators from their seats as he receives his enemy with "Veronica."

LEOPOLD

One. (*Isidore turns his back toward the audience*)

ISIDORE

Turning his back to the planks below the box occupied by the Isidore Fan Club to whom he has dedicated this bull. He performs a dangerous "Revolera." Marvelous both in its planning and development.

LEOPOLD

Two.

ISIDORE

"Faroles." And the embellishment.

LEOPOLD

Four.

ISIDORE

Three. A punishing pass. "Pase de castigo." All of Isidore's passes have identical depth and majestic sobriety.

LEOPOLD

Four.

ISIDORE

"Manoletina." Astounding elegance and smoothness. The music breaks out and competes with the deafening clamor of the multitude.

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LEOPOLD

Five. (*Isidore bows, Leopold charges*)

ISIDORE

Then, with authentic domination, he performs the "Isidorina." (*Isidore circles the stage and bows*) Ovation. One ear. Turn. And cheers.

LEOPOLD

Six. Answer.

ISIDORE

Gore me.

LEOPOLD

Answer.

ISIDORE

Gore me. That's the answer. (*Leopold charges against Isidore, this time determined to get him. Isidore avoids him with a banderillero's turn while he thrusts a banderilla into Leopold's back.*) Saint Sebastian! (*Leopold falls to the floor. Isidore kneels beside him and holds him in his arms.*) Good bull. He attacked nobly and bravely. His killer made him take fifty-one passes and he would have continued charging, following docilely the course marked by deceit. He was cheered as he was hauled out, but less than he deserved. (*Isidore pulls out the banderilla from Leopold's back and caresses him tenderly. Leopold looks at Isidore imploringly. Isidore kisses Leopold.*) I have no alternative.

LEOPOLD

Don't tell me that, Isidore. I can't believe that.

ISIDORE

I have no alternative, Leopold.

LEOPOLD

No alternative? The alternative is simple.

ISIDORE

It isn't simple. I can't be good to you.

LEOPOLD

Just try.

ISIDORE

It's not within my power.

LEOPOLD

Have you no will then?

ISIDORE

No, I don't will it.

LEOPOLD

Who wills it?



## TANGO PALACE

ISIDORE

You, Leopold.

LEOPOLD

Me? It is not me, Isidore. You can't be right.

ISIDORE

It is you, Leopold.

LEOPOLD

I have never provoked you. I have never wished for anything but kindness from you. I have never tried but for your love.

ISIDORE

Yes, and maybe it is just that. Maybe you have been too patient, too good-natured. (*Leopold is astounded. There is a moment's pause. He then struggles with Isidore to break from his embrace.*)

LEOPOLD

You are rotten . . . What are you? What are you that you must have rottenness around you? I am too patient? Too good-natured? I will not become rotten for you. I will not become rotten for you. (*Leopold holds Isidore by the neck and tries to strangle him*)

ISIDORE

(*gasping for air*) Son . . . son . . . let me tell you . . . let me tell you . . . a story . . . There was once a man . . . who . . . (*Leopold covers his ears*) It's very important. You must listen. There was once a man whose only companion was a white rat. He loved this white rat dearly. And one day the rat disappeared. The rat couldn't have left the room, because there were no doors, or windows, or even cracks on the walls or floor. Then the man, thinking that the rat could have hidden in some nook or cranny unknown to him, took his axe and wrecked everything he owned . . . The rat was nowhere in the room. He then turned to a picture of the rat which was hanging on the wall, and was about to wield his axe against it . . . but he stopped himself . . . He said, "This is the only thing I have left of my rat. If I destroy the picture, I will have nothing to remind me of him." And from that moment on, he began to speak to the picture of the rat and to caress it, and even feed it. Eventually, though, his loneliness brought him to such a state of melancholia that he no longer cared whether he was happy or not. He did not even care whether he lived or died. And as if he were summoning his own death, he picked up his axe and smashed the picture of the rat. There, trapped in the wires that supported the picture, was his beloved rat, who had died of starvation. The dead rat turned his head to face the man and said (*as if imitating a ghost*) "If you had not been

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satisfied with my picture you could have had me. You chicken-hearted bastard,” and then disintegrated into dust.

LEOPOLD

(*frightened*) A fairytale.

ISIDORE

There is a moral to it, Leopold. Try to understand it.

LEOPOLD

The dead don't speak.

ISIDORE

Yes, they do. You'll see, you'll see. Understand the story, Leopold. You must relinquish what you want or you will never have it.

LEOPOLD

I understand one thing. There is something that moves you. There is something that makes you tender and loving, only one thing: nastiness . . . and meanness and abuse.

ISIDORE

Those are three things, Leopold.

LEOPOLD

They're all the same.

ISIDORE

It's our fate.

LEOPOLD

Not mine . . . I love . . .

ISIDORE

You don't love. Don't you see that all you do is whine? (*Leopold cries*)  
I had to tell you.

LEOPOLD

It's time you answer my question, Isidore.

ISIDORE

I answered it.

LEOPOLD

You told me to gore you.

ISIDORE

Yes, I did.

LEOPOLD

Is that the answer?

ISIDORE

That was my answer.

LEOPOLD

You stabbed me. I want my answer.

## TANGO PALACE

ISIDORE

There is a way, Leopold, but only one. You must find it yourself.

LEOPOLD

That's no answer. You wounded me.

ISIDORE

You tried to gore me. I had to defend myself.

LEOPOLD

You told me to gore you.

ISIDORE

That was part of the game.

LEOPOLD

Stinking bastard. Can you bear your own rottenness? You must atone for your wickedness sometime. You cannot go on and on without a purge. Do you ever pray? Do you beat your fist against your chest and ask for forgiveness? If not to redeem yourself, at least to be able to go on with your viciousness. You could not endure it without a purge . . . Do you spend your nights covering your ears to keep away the sound of my moans? Do you cry then? . . . Could it be that you do it out of stupidity, that you don't know the difference between right and wrong? Oh no. Let it be anything but that. Let it be malice. If you do it out of a decision to be harmful, I can convince you that it's best to be good. But if you don't know the difference between right and wrong, is there anything I can do? Maybe you must be vicious in spite of yourself. Maybe you have to do it . . . to protect me from something worse? . . . for my own good? (*Leopold throws himself on his knees with his head on Isidore's lap*) Give me a sign, a smile, a look. Tell me you love me. (*Isidore pouts innocently. He makes a circle with his arm and places his hand on Leopold's head. The lights fade.*)

### SCENE 3

*Isidore and Leopold are in the same position. Isidore stretches himself and yawns. He jerks his thighs slightly to make Leopold's head roll and fall to the floor. Isidore looks at Leopold who is waking up and smiles. Isidore stands up, stretches again, and does a dance step.*

ISIDORE

Cheery-uppy, Leopold. (*The following scene is to have a nightmarish quality. Isidore and Leopold dance in a ritualistic manner. Isidore puts on one of the two beetle masks, the one which is wingless, and gives the*

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*other to Leopold. Leopold should behave like a sleepwalker.*) Beetles are versatile little animals. For great numbers, the end of autumn does not mean the end of their lives. There are more beetles by far than any other kind of insect. Over a quarter of a million beetle species have been described. Beetles are in constant conflict with man because there are few of the organic commodities that man has learned to use that do not also interest some beetle. Some spend their life in the thick flesh of century-plant leaves and when caught make an excellent salad, tasting something like shrimp salad. Other notable varieties are: The clavicornia, the segments of whose tarse are variable in number and whose antennae are equipped with a more or less (*Isidore does a bump and grind*) distinct club, the terminal segments being broader than the others. The Hydrophilidae (*Isidore places his arms in arabesque position*), Silphidae, Staphylinidae, Nitidulidae (*convulsing*), Histeridae, Coccinellidae, Ebdonnychidae (*holding his breasts*), Erotylidae, Languiridae, and Dermestidae . . . The literature of beetles is enormous.

LEOPOLD

*(crawling on the floor)* When things are in disorder and I move, I feel like I'm crawling. As if with every movement I have to drag along with me the things that are in disorder. As if I had grown brooms on my sides that extend as far as the wall, to sweep the junk . . . the dust. (*Leopold picks up some of the cards. Looks at Isidore and smiles sadly.*)

ISIDORE

They are for your own good. Ingrate. Don't you know? Come, do me a pretty beetle.

LEOPOLD

Dirt, my dear sir, comes to us from everywhere. And it comes out from within us. It comes out through each pore. Then we wash it away, we flush it away, we drown it, we bury it, we incinerate it, and then we perfume ourselves. We put odors in our toilets, medicinal odors, terrible odors, but all these odors seem sweet next to our own. What I want, sir, is to live with that loathsomeness near me, not to flush it away. To live with it for all those who throw perfume on it. To be so dirty for those who want to be so clean. To do them that favor. I wanted to drop it in the pot and leave it there for days, and live with it.

ISIDORE

Sometimes you touch the realm of romance.

LEOPOLD

In the latter part of the afternoon I feel cold. I feel the stuff in my bowels.

## TANGO PALACE

And I feel downcast. The open air is in my mind, but my eyes wander around this cave. I feel such pain for being here.

ISIDORE

The contrast between your poet's taste for languid amusement and my unconventional pageantry sends such fresh impetus throbbing through my veins . . .

LEOPOLD

I see a light in you. The only light. I see it through a tunnel lower than myself. Attempting to go through it and hoping to be invited, I crawl.

ISIDORE

Crawl then. Crawl then. (*Leopold crawls*)

LEOPOLD

I liked to think I was an exception, of course, I pretended I was not one more snake. And to prove I was an exception, I tried to stand erect, and to stand erect I needed you to support me, and when you refused me I had to beg, and to beg I had to crawl, and snakes crawl, and I am a snake. When crawling tires me, I stand erect. It is to exhaustion and disillusion that I owe my dignity . . . not to pride . . . Oh . . . I cannot make your eyes turn to me with love.

ISIDORE

Give me a pretty smile, pretty beetle. (*Leopold opens his mouth wide*)

LEOPOLD

To make dirt come out through the mouth you have to close your holes very tight, and let the dirt rot inside. Then it will come out through any opening.

ISIDORE

The prophet, the prophet. Come and hear the dirty prophet.

LEOPOLD

(*taking off his mask*) Oh, Isidore, you are my enemy and yet I love you.

ISIDORE

I am not your enemy.

LEOPOLD

Come here. Let me see you. (*Isidore moves near Leopold*) Take that mask off. (*Isidore takes the mask off*) You are my enemy.

ISIDORE

What makes you say that?

LEOPOLD

Your smell . . .

ISIDORE

How do I smell?

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LEOPOLD

You stink.

ISIDORE

Not true. What you smell is your own stink. You are putrid.

LEOPOLD

I'm going to kill you.

ISIDORE

Don't, you're trying to scare me. You're trying to scare me so I'll be good to you.

LEOPOLD

No . . . I know nothing can make you change. No . . . If I were to frighten you you'd behave for a while, but then you would get to like it, and you'd want more and more of it.

ISIDORE

And you wouldn't do it just to please your old friend?

LEOPOLD

No, I wouldn't. I have already played too many of your games. I have become as corrupt as you intended me to be. But . . . no more.

ISIDORE

You can't stop now. It's too late.

LEOPOLD

I know. That's why I've decided to kill you.

ISIDORE

You have? (*Leopold goes to the shrine and gets the knife. Isidore hides behind a piece of furniture and begins to tremble.*)

LEOPOLD

Where are you?

ISIDORE

(*waving a white handkerchief*). Here.

LEOPOLD

Get up, Isidore.

ISIDORE

No. (*Leopold lifts the knife and holds it up for a moment, then lowers it slowly*)

LEOPOLD

If I killed you what would I be?

ISIDORE

A murderer . . . that's what you'd be . . . a murderer. A dirty ratty murderer.

## TANGO PALACE

LEOPOLD

There will be no one to judge me.

ISIDORE

Yourself . . . you'll judge yourself. You'll die of guilt.

LEOPOLD

Guilt . . . ? Is that what it is?

ISIDORE

Yes. And then you'll be all alone. You don't know what it is to be alone. It's horribly . . . lonely.

LEOPOLD

I am afraid of my own death. I see myself dead.

ISIDORE

You're not going to do it then?

LEOPOLD

You're disappointed.

ISIDORE

Yes, I thought I was going to have some thrills and suspense, never knowing when you would strike . . . having to sleep with one eye open. But as usual you are a party pooper . . . You could never kill me, Leopold. Don't you see? You are just what I want you to be. You only know what I have taught you. And I haven't taught you how to kill.

LEOPOLD

You have offended me. If you died I still would be offended.

ISIDORE

I have offended you and you haven't challenged me to a duel? Challenge me to a duel immediately . . . What kind of mouse are you . . . I have offended you. I am offending you right now. You mouse. (*smack*) You mouse. (*smack*) You misbegotten mouse. You misbegotten lifeless mouse.

LEOPOLD

If I killed you the offense would not be undone. If you died, you would not be able to atone for it.

ISIDORE

Don't worry, there isn't a chance of that. I'll kill you and be done with you. (*Isidore puts the sword in Leopold's hand*)

LEOPOLD

If you killed me you would be convinced that you had the right to offend me.

ISIDORE

Beautiful, beautiful. Let's duel. You'll fight for your offended pride. I, for the right to offend you. Come on. Come on.

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LEOPOLD

Please stop, Isidore.

ISIDORE

No, this is fun. It's fun. *En garde.*

LEOPOLD

*(poking different objects with his sword)* What are these things . . . Leopold? Leopold? Are you Leopold? Are you . . . They don't strike back. You are Leopold.

ISIDORE

Too much reflection. *(Isidore pokes Leopold with the sword. Leopold shrinks back.)*

LEOPOLD

Each time I hold back I die a little.

ISIDORE

That's why you stink, you're putrid with death. Cleanliness is close to godliness. *(card)* I still have a lot to teach you.

LEOPOLD

*(swaying)* I feel faint. If only I could find a spot to fix on and steady myself.

ISIDORE

*(swaying and lurching)* Look at me. Let me be the spot. Look, everything is moving. But I am steady as a rock.

LEOPOLD

Come here, Isidore. *(Isidore obeys)* Open your arms. *(Isidore obeys. Leopold lifts the sword slowly, points it to Isidore's heart, and pushes it into his body. Isidore falls to the floor.)*

ISIDORE

How could you do this? *(Leopold holds Isidore in his arms. He doesn't answer.)* Say you're sorry and my wound will heal.

LEOPOLD

I know.

ISIDORE

Say you're sorry.

LEOPOLD

If I do you'll curse me.

ISIDORE

I beg you, Leopold. I'm dying.

LEOPOLD

Die, Isidore . . . I understand now . . . You made it clear enough . . .



## TANGO PALACE

*(Isidore dies)* It is done. All the thought and preparation did not help me do it. It is done. And I don't know what made me do it. The moment came. The only moment when it could be done. It possessed me and I let it take me.

*The stage darkens. The door opens. The sound of harps is heard outside. There is a blue sky. Isidore appears among the clouds dressed as an angel. He carries stacks of cards. He beckons Leopold to follow him. Leopold picks up a few cards, then the sword, then a few more cards. Isidore shakes his head, and shows Leopold the cards he carries. Leopold walks through the door slowly, but with determination. He is ready for the next stage of their battle.*

THE END

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**THE SUCCESSFUL LIFE OF  
THREE: A Skit for Vaudeville**

**To Susan Sontag**

*Cast of Characters*

**THREE**, a plump, middle-aged man

**HE**, a handsome young man

**SHE**, a sexy young lady

**BODYGUARDS**

**POLICEMEN**

**NOTE.** Three asterisks following a character's name indicate, for **She**, that **She** thinks with a stupid expression (the others watch her); for **He**, that **He** looks disdainful (the others watch him); and for **Three**, that **Three** looks with intense curiosity (the others watch him). Very deadpan.

---

## THE SUCCESSFUL LIFE OF THREE

### SCENE 1

*The Doctor's Office. Three and He sit. He is combing his hair. Three takes a shoe off and drops it. At the sound of the shoe, He becomes motionless, his arms suspended in the air. Three looks at He, and freezes for a moment.*

THREE

What are you doing?

HE

Waiting.

THREE

What for?

HE

For the other shoe to drop.

THREE

Ah, and I was wondering what you were doing. If I hadn't asked, we would have stayed like that forever. You waiting and me wondering . . . That's the kind of person I am. I ask . . . That's good, you know.

HE

Why?

THREE

\* \* \*

HE

Why?

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MARIA IRENE FORNÉS

THREE

It starts action.

HE

What action did you start?

THREE

We're talking.

HE

That's nothing. We could as well be waiting for the shoe to drop. (*He suspends his arms in the air again. Three stares at He. They remain motionless for a while.*)

THREE

Sorry . . . I'm going to do my sewing.

HE

First take the other shoe off. Get it over with.

THREE

(*taking his shoe off*) I wasn't going to take it off. (*Three takes needle and thread and sews a button on his shirt*) You see? If I do it now I don't have to do it later.

HE

What?

THREE

The sewing.

HE

And what are you going to do later?

THREE

\* \* \* (*puts the needle and thread away*) Look, there are advantages to being optimistic.

HE

Sure.

THREE

What are they?

HE

You tell me.

THREE

Well, it makes one feel happier.

HE

You don't look happy to me.

THREE

Oh, no?

## THE SUCCESSFUL LIFE OF THREE

HE

No.

THREE

Well, things are not what they appear to the eye.

HE

They aren't?

THREE

Are they?

HE

Sometimes . . . sometimes they are just what they appear to the eye . . .  
Don't generalize.

THREE

Why?

HE

Because there are always exceptions. There's always one that isn't like  
the others.

THREE

If it's just one, it can be thrown in with the rest. It doesn't matter.

HE

It matters.

THREE

Perhaps you can exclude it in your mind. Without mentioning it.

HE

You have to mention it . . . You're splitting hairs anyway.

THREE

I like splitting hairs.

HE

Well, do it when I'm not around.

THREE

I was just joking.

HE

*(correcting him)* Being facetious.

THREE

*(takes an apple from his pocket)* Want an apple?

HE

No.

THREE

An apple a day keeps the doctor away.

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HE

I knew you were going to say that. (*She enters wearing a nurse's uniform*)  
Miss, you're a fine dish.

SHE

Thanks. (*exits and re-enters*)

HE

Miss, I would like to bounce on you.

SHE

Thank you. (*to Three*) Come in, please. (*Three and She exit; She re-enters*)

HE

Miss, I would like to bang you.

SHE

Your friend just did.

HE

Well, I'm next.

SHE

I only do it once a day.

HE

I get you all worked up and you do it with him instead?

SHE

\* \* \*

HE

I'm handsome and sexy and I get you all worked up, and you go and do it with him? . . . Answer now.

SHE

What?

HE

Is that natural?

SHE

I don't know. (*Three enters*)

HE

A moment ago I was thinking of marrying you.

SHE

You just saw me for the first time.

THREE

He figured he'd see you a few more times if he married you.

HE

Don't speak for me after you ruined everything . . . Let me try again.  
Miss, would you go to the movies with me after work?



THE SUCCESSFUL LIFE OF THREE

SHE

OK, I like the movies.

HE

Everybody likes the movies.

SHE

I never liked them until a few months ago.

HE

What made you like them then?

SHE

I saw a movie with the Lane sisters.

HE

You like them?

SHE

Yes, they're all right.

HE

What do they do?

SHE

Stupid things.

HE

Like what?

SHE

They cry and laugh.

HE

That doesn't sound so great.

SHE

I like it. It's all right if you like sisters.

THREE

I like movies about marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

SHE

I like sisters.

HE

I don't have any particular preference. I just like good movies . . . with action and a lot of killing.

SHE

I couldn't go to the movies if I didn't have a preference.

THREE

Neither could I. (*takes She by the hand and exits; She re-enters*)

HE

Did you make it with him again?

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SHE

Yes.

HE

How long are you going to keep this up?

SHE

I don't know. (*Three re-enters*)

HE

Listen, I was even thinking of marrying you.

SHE

You'd have to give me a ring for that. Two rings. An engagement ring and a wedding band.

THREE

I'll give the bride away.

HE

From the looks of it you're not leaving anything to give away.

THREE

And I'm not through yet.

HE

I didn't say you were.

THREE

You didn't say I was but you sure wish I were.

SHE

Me too.

HE

I never wish.

SHE

In my profession you have to wish.

THREE

For what?

SHE

\* \* \*

HE

I don't have a profession.

SHE

How are you going to support me?

HE

I'll find a way.

THREE

He sure does have to support you. Doesn't he?

## THE SUCCESSFUL LIFE OF THREE

SHE

Yeah, my parents pay for the wedding and he supports me.

THREE

I'll pay for the wedding.

HE

He doesn't have any money. Get your parents to pay for the wedding.

SHE

Weddings are a pain in the neck.

THREE

Why do you want one then?

SHE

\* \* \*

HE

Don't you see she doesn't know?

THREE

Yes, I see.

SHE

The Andrew sisters are all married.

HE

Do you like brothers too?

SHE

Not so much.

HE

Did you see the Corsican brothers?

SHE

That's not brothers. That's just Douglas Fairbanks playing twins. It's not the same.

HE

What brothers do you like?

SHE

I don't know any.

HE

How do you know you like them?

SHE

\* \* \*

THREE

She didn't say she liked them.

HE

Didn't you say you liked them?

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SHE

No, I said "Not so much" . . . I don't think I'm going to marry you.

THREE

Why?

HE

I can ask my own questions, if you please. (*to She*) Why?

SHE

You're too picky.

HE

That's all right. Are we going to the movies or not?

SHE

Sure.

THREE

If you find a sister movie.

SHE

That's all right. I'll try another kind.

THREE

Let's go in for a quickie before you leave. (*Three and She exit; She re-enters wearing a hat*)

HE

Ready?

SHE

Yes.

HE

Hey, didn't you say you only do it once a day?

SHE

Yes.

HE

How come you did it with him three times already?

SHE

\* \* \*

HE

You're not a liar, are you?

SHE

No.

HE

You better not be, because I can't stand liars. (*Three re-enters; He and She exit*)

THREE

Wait for me. (*exits*)

## SCENE 2

*The Movies. A few minutes later. The lights go down and flicker. He, Three, and She enter. They sit — Three in the middle, She and He at his sides.*

HE

Hey, what do you mean by sitting next to her? Change with me. She's my date.

THREE

I can't feel her up from there.

HE

You don't have to feel her up. (*Three and He change seats*)

THREE

How about some popcorn?

SHE

I'll go.

THREE

Don't go. Let him go.

HE

You go.

THREE

I can't. (*He exits; Three moves next to She; He re-enters*)

HE

Move back to your seat.

THREE

I already moved once. I'm not moving twice. Let's have some popcorn. (*He offers popcorn to Three*) I'll hold it because I'm in the middle. (*Three tries to hold the bag, eat popcorn, and feel She up*) You hold the bag. I can't feel her up and eat at the same time if I hold the bag.

HE

(*takes the bag*) At least wait till the feature starts.

## SCENE 3

*The Porch. Ten years later. He dozes. She peels potatoes. Three sews.*

SHE

I'm going to divorce him.

THREE

Give him another chance.

SHE

Him?

MARIA IRENE FORNÉS

THREE

He's not bad.

SHE

Yes, he is.

THREE

There are worse.

SHE

No, there aren't.

THREE

Wouldn't it be worse if you were married to me?

SHE

What difference would it make?

THREE

It would make a difference.

SHE

No, it wouldn't.

THREE

Yes, it would.

SHE

What difference?

THREE

\* \* \*

SHE

What difference?

THREE

I'll ask him. (*shakes He*) Hey, would it make any difference if she was married to me instead of you?

HE

Yeah.

THREE

What difference?

HE

Ask her. She ought to know.

THREE

She doesn't know.

HE

She never knows anything.

THREE

Actually, this time she knows. She said it wouldn't make any difference.

THE SUCCESSFUL LIFE OF THREE

HE

She's probably right, because she usually doesn't know anything.

SHE

I'm going to divorce him whether I'm right or wrong.

THREE

Marry a worse one for a while . . . then remarry him and you'll be happier.

HE

That would be like wearing tight shoes so it feels better when you take them off.

THREE

That's the idea. Do it.

SHE

You can't do that.

THREE

Why not?

SHE

I don't know.

THREE

(to He) Do you know why you can't wear tight shoes so it feels better when you take them off?

HE

No.

SHE

But isn't it true that you're not supposed to?

HE

Yeah.

SHE

I knew it.

THREE

Well, you'd be happier if you did it.

SHE

You're not supposed to.

HE

(to Three) Get off that chair. I want to put my feet up. (*Three moves to another chair*)

THREE

Rivalry.

SHE

What?

MARIA IRENE FORNÉS

THREE

Rivalry.

SHE

\* \* \*

THREE

Masculine rivalry.

SHE

\* \* \*

THREE

Masculine rivalry. (*points to He and to himself*)

SHE

Whoever heard of such a thing.

THREE

What?

SHE

What you said.

THREE

Rivalry?

SHE

Yeah.

THREE

You haven't heard of it?

SHE

No.

THREE

I bet you he has. (*to He*) Have you heard of rivalry?

HE

Sure.

THREE

See?

SHE

I mean the other.

THREE

Masculine?

SHE

Both, both together.

THREE

(*to He*) Have you heard of masculine rivalry?

HE

Yeah.



THE SUCCESSFUL LIFE OF THREE

SHE

So he has. (*Three looks She over*)

THREE

I don't desire you any more.

SHE

Thank God.

THREE

Don't thank God. Thank me.

SHE

Stop picking on me.

HE

Are you picking on her again?

THREE

I can't help it.

HE

Stop picking on her.

THREE

Masculine rivalry.

HE

What are you talking about? There's no comparison. I'm sexy and you're slimy.

SHE

That's the only thing I like about him.

HE

You like *that*?

SHE

It's all right . . . But I'm tired of having children.

HE

That's not true. You told me you like children.

SHE

Not that many.

THREE

How many are there?

SHE

I don't know.

THREE

How do you know there are too many?

SHE

\* \* \*

MARIA IRENE FORNÉS

THREE

I'll go count them. (*exits*)

HE

Listen, you can't one day say you like babies and the next day say you don't.

SHE

Why not?

HE

You have to make up your mind.

SHE

\* \* \*

HE

Well?

SHE

I can't stand the twins.

HE

Why not?

SHE

They look too much alike.

HE

Twins always do.

SHE

I didn't say they didn't.

HE

You didn't say they did either.

SHE

No, all I said was that I didn't like them.

HE

Why?

SHE

I don't see why they have to dress alike.

HE

Twins always do.

SHE

I didn't say they didn't.

HE

Bring the food out.

## THE SUCCESSFUL LIFE OF THREE

SHE

There's no food.

HE

How come?

SHE

You know how come.

HE

No, I don't.

SHE

You're supposed to provide for me, but you don't.

HE

Don't I get you all the potatoes?

SHE

I'm going, I can't stand peeling potatoes all the time. (*exits; Three enters*)

HE

She left.

THREE

Oh.

HE

That's all right. I never want what I don't have.

THREE

I missed it.

HE

What?

THREE

Her leaving. I've been waiting around to see her leave, and now she does it when I'm not looking. How did she go?

## SCENE 4

*The Porch. Three years later, He peels potatoes. Three sews.*

THREE

I'm going into business. I can't stand this home life any longer.

HE

You wouldn't be any good at it.

THREE

I might as well try it.

HE

You would just lose all your money.

MARIA IRENE FORNÉS

THREE

I don't have any money.

HE

How're you going to go into business?

THREE

I'll put a bid on some nylon rope, go south, convince the fishermen to use nylon instead of whatever they use, and take them for all they got.

HE

They probably use nylon.

THREE

Then I'll sell it to them cheap and still make a fortune.

HE

It wouldn't work.

THREE

No? . . . Well, I can make a sandwich with peanut butter and Ritz crackers, dip it in chocolate, call it Tootsie Tootsie and sell it.

HE

You're better off with the nylon rope.

THREE

I thought so too. I'll go try it.

HE

OK.

THREE

Good-bye. Give my love to Ruth if you see her. Have you seen her?

HE

Yes, she's happily married.

THREE

Who to?

HE

I don't know.

THREE

Well, if you see her tell her I would still like a roll in the hay with her, even if she's getting old and decrepit.

HE

OK, I'll tell her.

THREE

Good-bye. You do think it will work.

HE

Sure.

THE SUCCESSFUL LIFE OF THREE

THREE

Good-bye then. (*exits*)

HE

Just said that to get rid of him. (*Three re-enters wearing top hat and furs*)

THREE

It worked.

HE

Don't tell me it worked.

THREE

(*respectfully*) Oh, sorry.

HE

What do you mean it worked?

THREE

I put a bid on some nylon rope, went south, convinced the fishermen to use nylon instead of whatever they were using, and took them for all they had. D'you know rope is sold by the weight, not the measure?

HE

Don't get smart with me, Arthur. I'm very annoyed. I have all the brains and the looks and it's you who go south with your squeaky voice and sweaty hands and make all the money.

THREE

And I'm not finished yet. I'm going to make that peanut butter sandwich and make another mint.

HE

You're making me sick.

THREE

Don't get sick yet. I'm just starting. You think Ruth likes money?

HE

Sure.

THREE

Perhaps she'll come live with us for the money. It'll be good for the children.

HE

I'm the husband and the father. I'll make my own decisions.

THREE

Yeah, but I do all the screwing and make all the money.

HE

Don't rub it in.

MARIA IRENE FORNÉS

THREE

Sorry.

HE

You may make all the money and all that but you have no manners.

THREE

Teach me manners. (*He puts on a top hat and furs; She enters*)

SHE

OK, I came back.

HE

Because of the money.

SHE

I like money.

HE

Everybody likes money. You say it as if it was something special.

SHE

It is special. I like money very much.

THREE

More than sisters?

SHE

\* \* \*

HE

Never mind.

THREE

I have a present for you. (*gives She three men's hats*)

SHE

These are men's hats. What's the matter with you?

THREE

Nothing.

HE

He doesn't know his ass from his elbow.

THREE

I do. (*points to his buttocks and his elbow*) I only didn't know what kind of hat to buy.

SHE

Where's the money?

THREE

In the bank.

SHE

Oh, damnit. I came for the money and you put it away.

## THE SUCCESSFUL LIFE OF THREE

HE

You didn't come for that. You didn't come for that. You came for me and for the children.

SHE

You said I came for the money.

HE

I was just accusing you.

SHE

And what was I supposed to say?

HE

"I didn't. I didn't. I came for you and the children." Defend yourself.

SHE

Well, I didn't.

HE

I don't have to stay here while you come back for his money. I'm sexy and bright and you're a bunch of morons. I'm leaving. (*Three puts his arms around She*) You don't have to jump on her the moment I turn my back. (*Three lets go of She*)

SHE

I'm glad he caught you.

HE

You can do what you want. I'm leaving. Good-bye. (*exits*)

SHE

What are we going to do without him?

THREE

Wait for him.

## SCENE 5

*The Store. Three years later. He is standing. Three enters and steals a pipe.*

HE

Arthur!

THREE

What are you doing here?

HE

I'm a store detective.

THREE

How long have you been a store detective?

MARIA IRENE FORNÉS

HE

Since I left the house.

THREE

Is the pay good?

HE

Not for the risk you take.

THREE

What risk?

HE

You might get hit or knifed.

THREE

Who would do that?

HE

The thief. You see, I grab him like this. I identify myself and I tell him to go with me to the office. Then he either becomes frightened and comes along quietly, or becomes violent and attacks me. (*Three punches He and runs*)

SCENE 6

*The Porch. A few minutes later. She peels potatoes. Three enters smoking the pipe.*

THREE

I just saw him. He's a detective.

SHE

I don't like detectives.

THREE

Why?

SHE

I can't understand them.

THREE

Why not?

SHE

They talk too fast.

THREE

He's a store detective. They don't talk fast.

SHE

A store detective is not a real detective.



THE SUCCESSFUL LIFE OF THREE

THREE

Someone stole something though.

SHE

Did he figure out who did it?

THREE

I don't know. I hit him and ran.

SHE

You didn't run so fast. You're late for dinner . . . Did you figure out who did it?

THREE

Yeah, I did it.

SHE

What did you do?

THREE

*(showing her the pipe)* Stole it. *(He enters)*

HE

Why did you hit me?

SHE

Is that a way to come in after you've been gone for three years? Can't you say hello?

HE

I don't feel like saying hello.

SHE

You could at least pretend.

HE

Why did you hit me?

THREE

Because I had to.

HE

Why?

THREE

Because I'm the thief and you're the detective.

HE

What did you steal?

THREE

Guess?

HE

I give up.

THREE

The pipe.

MARIA IRENE FORNÉS

HE

Now I have to take you in.

THREE

You have to identify yourself.

HE

Don't be silly. You know me. Come on.

THREE

Good-bye, Ruth.

SHE

Good-bye.

SCENE 7

*The Porch. Three days later. She and He are sitting.*

SHE

How come you came back now?

HE

Because he's away . . . Masculine rivalry.

SHE

That's what he always says.

HE

So what. It's true.

SHE

How come he was stealing?

HE

He didn't know he could take the money out of the bank.

SHE

Can he?

HE

Yeah. (*Three enters wearing a prisoner's uniform*)

THREE

I organized a revolt and got out.

HE

Can't you stay put in one place?

THREE

Can't I?

HE

No, you're always jumping from place to place.

## THE SUCCESSFUL LIFE OF THREE

THREE

I'll stay put now. Ruth, even if you're getting old and decrepit, I still want you. Jail makes a man want a woman.

HE

You disgust me. You spend three days in jail and you don't learn anything.

THREE

I did so. I organized the prisoners and now I'm the head of the mob. If you want I'll make you my bodyguard.

HE

You call that a body?

THREE

I know. I have to do some exercise. But in the meantime it's all right to call it a body.

HE

It is not all right with me. I'm leaving.

SHE

He's always leaving.

THREE

Like Shane . . . Stay and have some fun. The guys are coming presently.

HE

What kind of idiot are you that says presently?

THREE

No idiot. I'm the Alec Guinness type gangster.

HE

Goddamnit. I'm getting fed up. You have no style, no looks, you act like an old housewife, and it's you who get to go to jail and become the head of the mob.

SHE

Let's eat.

HE

OK, but if you want me to be your bodyguard, you have to give me a good salary . . . No. I don't care if you get slugged. Good-bye. (*exits*)

THREE

You be my bodyguard, Ruth.

SHE

OK, but I don't move from this chair.

THREE

You have to move. You have to keep an eye on me.

MARIA IRENE FORNÉS

SHE

Skip it. Who wants to look at you all the time.

THREE

OK, don't be my bodyguard. I'll get the guys to look after me.

SCENE 8

*The Porch. Six months later. Three and She sit. Three is armed to the teeth. Bodyguards surround him.*

THREE

I have a sweet streak in me.

SHE

Where?

THREE

\* \* \*

SHE

What did you say?

THREE

I have a sweet streak in me.

SHE

Me too.

THREE

I'm tired of the life of crime.

SHE

Why don't you stop stealing?

THREE

I like stealing.

SHE

I thought you said you were tired of crime.

THREE

Yes, but not of stealing.

SHE

You're not supposed to steal.

THREE

Says who?

SHE

\* \* \*

THREE

You don't know anything. I'm going to steal from the rich and give to the poor.

## THE SUCCESSFUL LIFE OF THREE

SHE

I came back for the money and you're going to give it to the poor? I'm leaving.

THREE

Where are you going?

SHE

I'll go find a Joan Fontaine movie.

THREE

What good would that do you?

SHE

She's Olivia de Havilland's sister.

THREE

No, she's not.

SHE

Yes, she is.

THREE

They don't look alike.

SHE

The Lane sisters don't look alike either.

THREE

No, but they act like sisters.

SHE

\* \* \* (*Three exits; She stands puzzled*)

## SCENE 9

*The Store. A few minutes later. He is standing. Three walks by surrounded by bodyguards.*

HE

Come with me to the office. You penny-pinching son-of-a-bitch hoodlum. I finally caught you.

THREE

What for? I just came to get a Zorro costume. (*Three puts on a Zorro costume*)

HE

You look like an idiot, like you always did. Did you steal it?

THREE

I bought it.

MARIA IRENE FORNÉS

HE

Show me the sales slip.

THREE

I lost it.

HE

You stole it. (*to the bodyguards*) Did he steal it?

BODYGUARDS

Yeah.

HE

Come with me.

THREE

Don't be silly. If I'm Zorro and the store is rich, I have to steal from it. Now I have to give something to the poor. Here's a penny.

HE

I'm turning you in anyway. I'll get fired if I don't catch someone soon. I haven't caught anyone since the last time I caught you. Get moving.

THREE

No, I won't. I have better things to do, like ride around the pampas with my mask on. Come with me and you can ride too.

HE

What kind of idiot do you think I am. You'll make me do all the riding and cut all the Z's and you'll get all the credit. You do your own dirty work.

THREE

No, I won't . . . I'm getting too old to ride around like an idiot.

HE

You used to do your own dirty work.

THREE

Yeah. But now I'm rich and lazy. (*to a bodyguard*) Can you ride? (*the bodyguard shakes his head*) Can you ride? (*the second bodyguard shakes his head*) Can you ride? (*the third bodyguard shakes his head*) Get out of my way. I don't need you anymore. (*to He*) Can Ruth ride?

HE

No, she can't do anything.

THREE

That's all right. I'll go to some rodeo and get myself a double. (*exits*)

## SCENE 10

*The Porch. Three days later. He sits. Three enters panting.*

THREE

Hide me.

HE

What from?

THREE

I'm being followed.

HE

What did you do?

THREE

I got tired of stealing from the rich and giving to the poor and started stealing from the rich and the poor. Hide me.

HE

I won't hide you, I don't care if they catch you.

THREE

Hide my *antifaz* then.

HE

What's that?

THREE

My mask. Do you know that Zorro means fox in Spanish?

HE

Never mind. I don't care if Zorro means fox. I can't hide your *antifaz*. I'll lose my job if I get caught with stolen goods.

THREE

I thought they were going to fire you.

HE

I caught a girl who didn't do anything and they let me stay.

THREE

That's not nice. Where's Ruth?

HE

She went to see Joan Fontaine and never came back.

THREE

Did she take any money with her?

HE

She doesn't need any money. She married the guy who owns the movie.

THREE

How're the children?

MARIA IRENE FORNÉS

HE

They're all right. They're always playing doctor.

THREE

Are they sick?

HE

No, they just play doctor. (*the policemen enter and grab Three*)

THREE

Where're you taking me?

POLICEMEN

To the scaffold.

THREE

Oh! Merciful God. (*The policemen take Three away. Three re-enters. He carries a bouquet.*)

HE

I thought they were going to hang you.

THREE

I got out of it. Here's Ruth. She must have broken up with that movie man. (*She enters; Three gives her the flowers*)

SHE

How did you know that I was coming?

THREE

I didn't.

HE

How did you get out?

THREE

I told them you did it.

HE

I'll lose my job at the store.

THREE

Don't let that worry you. You won't need a job anymore. They're coming to get you any minute. (*to She*) What made you come back?

SHE

I'm old and tired and I've had too many men. I'm just going to sit here and rest for the rest of my life.

THREE

Oh, no, you won't. You have to work for your keep. Scrub the floor.

HE

I'm going to the store. I can't stand seeing my wife scrubbing floors.



## THE SUCCESSFUL LIFE OF THREE

SHE

Don't go. I'm not going to scrub floors. You've become a mean old son of a bitch, Arthur.

THREE

I was always mean. I just didn't know it.

SHE

You're not supposed to be mean.

THREE

Why not?

SHE

\* \* \*

HE

She's right. You're not supposed to be mean.

SHE

I knew it.

THREE

Well, perhaps I just have a mean streak in me.

SHE

Yeah, like the Grand Canyon.

HE

The Grand Canyon is not a streak.

SHE

What is it?

THREE

It's a ditch.

SHE

Same thing.

THREE

Well, here are the cops anyway. They're coming to get you.

HE

You're disgusting. You go around being a son of a bitch and then you pin it on me. What am I going to do now?

THREE

\* \* \*

SHE

\* \* \*

HE

You're a bunch of morons. (*the policemen enter and grab Three*)

THREE

Where are you taking me?

MARIA IRENE FORNÉS

POLICEMEN

To the scaffold.

THREE

I just came from there. (*the policemen take Three away*)

SHE

Are you going to miss him?

HE

No, he's a son of a bitch . . . are you?

SHE

What?

HE

Going to miss him?

SHE

\* \* \* (*Three enters with a bouquet of flowers and gives them to She*)

HE

How come you always come back with flowers?

THREE

They have them there.

SHE

What for?

THREE

For the grave.

HE

Did you steal them?

THREE

No, they give them to you.

SHE

They go bad if they don't use them.

HE

How did you get away this time?

THREE

They caught the real Zorro.

SHE

I thought you were the real Zorro.

THREE

No, I'm too young.

HE

Bring in the food, Ruth.

THE SUCCESSFUL LIFE OF THREE

SHE

What food?

THREE

I have some Tootsie Tootsies. (*They eat Tootsie Tootsies. A policeman enters. Three shoots him dead.*) I'm not armed to the teeth for nothing. (*They freeze for a moment. Then they sing the song to Ignorance.*)

SHE, HE, AND THREE

Let me be wrong.  
But also not know it.  
Be wrong,  
Be wrong,  
And, oh, not to know it.  
Oh! Let me be wrong.

THREE

One day while walking  
Down the street,  
I found a petunia  
And took it.  
I took it.  
Oh! Let me be wrong.

SHE, HE, AND THREE

Let me be wrong.  
But also not know it.  
Be wrong,  
Be wrong,  
And, oh, not to know it.  
Oh! Let me be wrong.

SHE

I went from here

HE

To where?

SHE

I don't know where.  
I called a parasol an umbrella.  
Yes, an umbrella.  
Oh, let me be wrong.  
I don't care.

SHE, HE, AND THREE

Let me be wrong.  
But also not know it.

MARIA IRENE FORNÉS

Be wrong,  
Be wrong,  
And, oh, not to know it.  
Oh! Let me be wrong.

HE

I sprechen Sie Deutsch very well  
I said to Herr Auber;  
Herr Auber, I sprechen Sie  
Deutsch very well, Herr Auber.  
Oh! Let me be wrong.

SHE, HE, AND THREE

Let me be wrong.  
But also not know it.  
Be wrong,  
Be wrong,  
And, oh, not to know it.  
Oh! Let me be wrong.  
Oh! Let me be wrong.  
Oh! Let me be wrong.  
I want to be wrong!

*They repeat the song as they walk the aisles selling Tootsie Tootsies.*

THE END