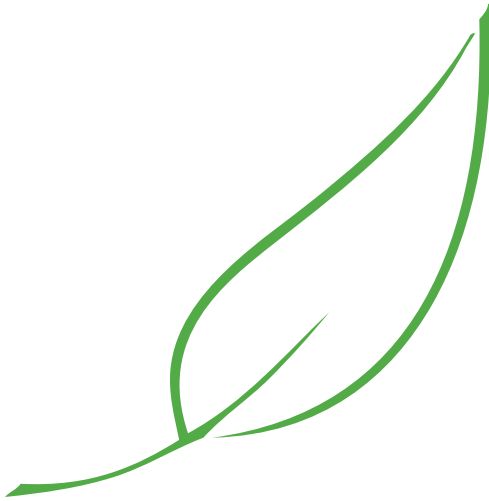


Stan's Addiction

By Jeffrey James Ircink



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STAN'S ADDICTION

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SYNOPSIS: Stan Ranik is the last nicotine smoker on planet Earth. The world's governments have banded together to offer cash incentives to individuals who quit smoking cigarettes. These operations are carried out exclusively by *SPONGE: The Council for Society's Prohibition and Obliteration of Nicotine through Growth in Efficient Living*, spearheaded by a man known only as The Chairman. Stan has no intention of giving up smoking. Patrick and Stu – Stan's closest friends – drive Stan absolutely nuts with their nervous, ex-smoker ticks, and are constantly trying to get him to kick the habit. Finally, Stan reluctantly attends a Nicotine Anonymous meeting, after which he gets a phone call from The Chairman, inviting him to SPONGE headquarters for a private tête-à-tête. Throw Stan's girlfriend, Aubrey, into the mix, along with a bit of political intrigue, and anything can happen in this black comedy with universal appeal.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 female, 4 male, 0-4 either; gender flexible, doubling available)

STAN RANIK (m).....	36, the last smoker on the planet; self-assured, charming and passionate; dry, sarcastic sense of humor; works in sales; regularly meets with friends, PATRICK and STU, for coffee at a local café; the most “normal” of the three. (499 lines)
PATRICK (m).....	37, STAN'S friend, has known STAN for twenty years, ex-smoker, opinionated, very aggressive personality – pushy and in-your-face; uses profanity when he gets excited or angry, somewhat eccentric. (257 lines)
STU (m)	41, STAN'S friend, ex-smoker; more eccentric than PATRICK, yet comes across seemingly normal;

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	very kind and caring; passive and more of a follower while in the company of others. (171 lines)
AUBREY SMITH (f).....	34, STAN'S girlfriend, lingerie/swimsuit model turned hand model, confident and independent but with a hidden vulnerability, can appear standoffish at first-glance; witty, a woman who can take care of herself. (159 lines)
THE CHAIRMAN (m)	60, head of SPONGE, a gentleman - charismatic, ability to get down to anyone's level, conniving, arrogant and self-righteous; he will do anything to further his agenda. (90 lines)
VOICE #1 (m/f)	Can be double cast from THE CHAIRMAN, STU, PATRICK and AUBREY. wear see-thru masks to cover their identity. They are motionless, but the articulation in their voices is animated and real. (26 lines)
VOICE #2 (m/f)	Can be double cast from THE CHAIRMAN, STU, PATRICK and AUBREY. wear see-thru masks to cover their identity. They are motionless, but the articulation in their voices is animated and real. (8 lines)
VOICE #3 (m/f)	Can be double cast from THE CHAIRMAN, STU, PATRICK and AUBREY. wear see-thru masks to cover their identity. They are motionless, but the articulation in their voices is animated and real. (9 lines)

VOICE #4 (m/f) Can be double cast from THE CHAIRMAN, STU, PATRICK and AUBREY. wear see-thru masks to cover their identity. They are motionless, but the articulation in their voices is animated and real. (6 lines)

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Stan Ranik is the last nicotine smoker on planet Earth. The world's governments have banned together to offer cash rewards to individuals who quit smoking cigarettes. These operations are carried out exclusively by SPONGE: the Council for Society's Prohibition and Obliteration of Nicotine through Growth in Efficient Living, headed up by a man known only as The Chairman. Stan has no intention of giving up smoking. Patrick and Stu – Stan's closest friends – drive Stan absolutely nuts with their nervous, ex-smoker ticks, and are constantly trying to get him to kick the habit. Finally, Stan reluctantly attends a nicotine anonymous meeting for ex-smokers, after which he gets a phone call from The Chairman, inviting him to SPONGE headquarters for a private tête-à-tête. Throw Stan's girlfriend, Aubrey, into the mix, along with a bit of political intrigue, and anything can happen in this black comedy with universal appeal.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

“Stan’s Addiction” was first work-shopped at the Urban Theater Project of Iowa in Cedar Rapids in May 2005. In April of 2006, it was the featured full-length play in an evening of stage readings at The Stray Dawg Theater Company in Belfast, Ireland.

The smoking issue is topical and affects all of us – we are all either smokers or non-smokers. California, Maine, Delaware, Florida, Boston, New York City, among other cities and states, have adopted some sort of smoking ban. Italy, the Republic of Ireland, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, Australia, The Netherlands, Sweden, Hong Kong, India, Iran and Russia have followed suit; Scotland and Northern Ireland in 2006; London by 2008. And most recently, the Westin Hotel chain has banned smoking from all its hotels throughout North America, Canada and the Caribbean.

Please pay special attention to the author’s notes that accompany the script regarding Stan’s scene entrances. Also, though some revisions were made for the publication of this play, you are welcome to be liberal with the use of obscenities. This, of course, will depend on the venue in which “Stan’s Addiction” is performing. Stan would like it that way.

One note on the set – it can be as simple or as elaborate as your budget affords. The supermarket, for instance, can be represented downstage center with Aubrey pushing a shopping cart and Stan holding a small tote. Use your imagination.

With regards to incidental music, I have included a list of songs whose subject matter – smoking and cigarettes – would fit nicely before and after the play, during intermission, or for scene changes. The final choice of any music; however, remains with the director. At the time of publication, I secured permission from the artists whose songs are noted with an asterisk(*). As always, each production is responsible for securing the rights to all other music used.

“Smoke Dreams”	- k.d. lang
“My Last Cigarette”	- k.d. lang
“Smoke Rings”	- k.d. lang

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"Love Is Like A Cigarette"	- k.d. lang
"Hymn for the Cigarette"	- Hefner
"Cigarette State"	- Robbie Fulks*
"Cigarette"	- Ben Folds Five
"Cigarettes and Chocolate Milk"	- Rufus Wainwright
"Smoke, Smoke, Smoke" (That Cigarette)	- Commander Cody*
"Make It Rain"	- Tom Waits
(To be used as audience exits the theater - after the ANNOUNCER fades out.)	

Both the song lyrics from Brian Wilson's "A Day In The Life Of A Tree" and the title song, "Aubrey" by David Gates have been given their legal copyright credit within the context of the play. It is the director's ultimate decision whether or not to play "Aubrey" as indicated in the script, and; therefore, the director will assume all Performance Rights and royalty responsibilities which may be forthcoming, for either song title.

I would appreciate ANY publicity – newspaper clippings, reviews, playbills - generated from the production of "Stan's Addiction". You are welcome to contact me via Heuer Publishing if you have any questions or concerns

Good luck with the show and have fun!

Dedication Page

To my family - Jim, Dee & Jason.

And to the girl who loves to run barefoot through wet grass.

ACT ONE, SCENE 1**AT RISE:**

Monday morning. The café. The only light comes from the burning end of a cigarette off-stage. SPOTLIGHT FADES UP to reveal STAN RANIK standing on stage, but out of the scene, smoking a cigarette. A second set of LIGHTS FADE UP to reveal PATRICK and STU, who are sitting at an outdoor café having coffee. The actors are "in character," each sucking on a Tootsie Roll Pop, reading a newspaper. The ANNOUNCER'S voice is heard over a loudspeaker as STAN finishes his cigarette, and makes his way to his starting position.

ANNOUNCER: "Good morning, humanity. Kunegunda¹ here, the voice of SPONGE. Well, the count is now at two. Only two citizens left until planet Earth is smoke-free. We've made great strides here at SPONGE in our efforts to reinvigorate our world for you, your children and future generations. And for you last two smokers out there - isn't it time you united with the rest of the world in our quest for a better planet Earth? We're waiting for you."

As lights reach their maximum level, STAN is in place with PATRICK and STU, and the scene begins.

STU: *(HIS head in the paper.)* Paper says it's supposed to be hot the rest of the week into next week.

PATRICK: *(HIS head in the paper, fiddling with a pencil. Matter-of-factly.)* Easiest job in the world – being a weatherman. All you do is stick your head out the window and say, 'it's hot,' 'it's cold,' 'it's raining,' 'it's snowing.' Stick your head out the window every ten minutes for your updates, and there you go, you're a weatherman.

STU: I think there's a little more to it than that, Patrick.

PATRICK: *(Looks up from his paper.)* Well...I suppose there is that whole "lingo" thing. *(Beat.)*

STU: What about it?

PATRICK: You have to have a firm grasp of the lingo – jargon, vernacular – however you wanna refer to it. That's the gist of what being a weatherman's all about.

STU: I know that.

PATRICK: It's certainly not about the weather...or your knowledge of the weather, for that matter. It's all about the lingo.

STU: I'm aware of the lingo, Patrick.

PATRICK: Are you? *(Pause.)* So, how is your weather lingo, Stu? Fair to partly cloudy?

STU: It's adequate.

PATRICK: Let me hear what you got. Come on, I'll give you an honest critique. *(Beat.)* You wanna be a weather boy, don't ya? Come on.

STU: *(Thinking.)* High-pressure ridge.

PATRICK: *(Looks STAN'S way, then to STU.)* You're kidding me, right?

STU: You can do better?

PATRICK: That's pre-school level.

STU: If you think you know so much about it why don't you become a weatherman?

PATRICK: Because I don't want to be a weatherman, Stu. *(Thinking.)* Dew point.

STU: *Greenhouse effect.*

PATRICK: *Ozone layer.*

STU: *(Beat.)* *Rogue clouds.*

PATRICK: *Doppler radar.*

STU: My personal favorite - *coastal eddy.*

PATRICK: *Squall line.*

STU: *(Long pause.)* *Chilblain.*

PATRICK: *(Beat.)* What the hell is a *chilblain*?

STU: It's an old Middle English term meaning, "cold swelling." It refers to the distress of the skin due to extreme cold.

PATRICK: "Old Middle English"?

STU: It makes me more marketable.

PATRICK: Marketable for what?

STU: If I ever decide to go into weather forecasting.

PATRICK: You mean meteorology?

STU: No-o...that sounds too complicated. Weather forecasting is what I'm interested in.

PATRICK: Okay. So now you can forecast the weather from Sherwood Forest.

STU: It'd be easy enough. The weather in the British Isles is at a constant – a constant rain, a constant fog and a constant overcast.

PATRICK: And a constant blah, bla-blah, bla-blah. Don't forget chilblain.

STU: That's more of the effect of the weather, not a weather condition.

PATRICK: Right. Any other geographic Eden's you fancy?

STU: *(Thinking.)* Anywhere in South America. Australia. Wherever. Nepal's interesting.

PATRICK: Nepal. And when were you planning to delve into this new career?

STU: I'm not sure. I'm simply preparing myself in case I decide to venture into that foray.

PATRICK: Like your foray into the ham radio business?

STU pulls a small pamphlet from his pant pocket and throws it on the table.

STU: I have never lost interest in the ham radio business, thank you!

PATRICK: *(Reading from the pamphlet.)* The Wonderful World of Ham Radio: Your Guide to the Fascinating Ways Hams Communicate. My mistake.

Glancing away from his newspaper, STAN throws a couple of stir straws at PATRICK and STU.

STAN: Hey...Radio Free U.S. Calling Friar Tuck and Little John. Enough with the weather bullshit, alright? I'm trying to read.

PATRICK: You made the paper again, Stan.

STAN: I saw. I sorta wish they'd give me a more interesting moniker. "Sales executive from the U.S."? It's got no punch.

PATRICK: You're being particular for someone who appreciates anonymity, aren't you?

STU: Did they up the smoking bounty again?

PATRICK: Yeah, by 5%. That's not all. That retired tobacco executive in Virginia dropped out. That leaves just two: you and that performance artist in Paris. *(STAN'S confused.)* That's the woman I'm always telling you looks like a guy. God that is one damn ugly broad. You don't remember.

STAN: I remember. I always thought "the guy" and "the broad" were two different people. So what do you hate – her or her act?

PATRICK: Both.

STU: For someone who hates her so much, you talk about her a lot.

PATRICK: Well – I mean, you know...I find her sexually appealing.

STU: *(To STAN.)* That's because she performs in the nude.

STAN: You're saying even though you find her repulsive – you'd sleep with her?

PATRICK: *(Without hesitation.)* Yeah – so what? *(Pause.)* Look, I know she's one of the last two smokers in the world. Big deal. Stan here's one of the last two smokers and the world could give two-shits about him. *(STAN gives PATRICK a look.)* Whatever. I'm just saying that this chick - Eponine or Marie Antoinette or whatever the hell her name is – has become this – celebrity, and I think it's a crock because she's a pretentious, condescending, holier-than-thou little bitch whose "act" sucks - and she looks like a guy.

STAN: Have you ever thought that perhaps it's the ugly French woman's art that draws people to her?

PATRICK: Have you ever seen her act, Stan? She is her art.

STAN: Have you ever seen her act?

PATRICK: No, but I read about it in *Playboy*.

STAN: (*To STU.*) Did you tell him *Playboy* had text or did he figure that out on his own?

PATRICK: (*Ignoring STAN.*) She pours Elmer's glue all over herself, asks the audience to throw crap they find in their purses and pockets on stage and then rolls around in it. What the hell is that? And when she's finished, she prances around the audience like some coked up Twyla Tharp, coercing people into sticking dollar bills on her body. She's quoted in all these art house publications about how she suffers for her art and that she wouldn't have to go through all this – whatever she's doing - if the world would just "get it." Get what? That she's a fuckin' dipshit? I got that. I'm tellin' ya...the whole world's screwed up!

STAN: Patrick, do you realize you curse a lot when you get really angry?

PATRICK: What about it?

STAN: Nothing. I just never thought about it much before now.

PATRICK: Maybe the reason you haven't thought about it much, Stan, is because I only release my anger in spurts so it doesn't build up. And I don't get angry that often – except when I read shit about that dumb ass French bitch. (*Pause.*) All I'm saying is that I don't get what the big deal is about her, that's all.

STU: I think it's pretty self-explanatory. The rest of the world gets its kicks out of seeing people like her plucked from obscurity and thrown into the world of celebrity. What's there to get?

STAN: Or the rest of the world just wants to bang her like Patrick.

STU: I think her art is a metaphor for how we need to take stock of our lives and shed all the meaningless things that weigh us down. (*Pause.*) That's just my opinion.

PATRICK: See – she's already got Stewart sucked into her little scam.

STU: I didn't get sucked in. I'm just a little more open-minded than you are.

STAN: Atta boy, Stewart, always the diplomatic one.

PATRICK: Yeah, well...she should take stock of her own life and get a new act. And a facelift while she's at it.

STAN: Could we stop talking about the she-male for a minute, please?

STU: Hey-y...you're the last man standing, Stan! I mean, the last MAN standing. As opposed to the very last person –

PATRICK: We got it, Stu.

STU: (*To PATRICK.*) When did you say the tobacco executive dropped out?

PATRICK: Yesterday. Where the hell you been?

STU: Tobacco executive. *(Beat.)* You couldn't script that any better. I always thought it funny when that guy starting making the newspapers.

PATRICK: Everyone thought it was funny, Stu – he was a tobacco executive. So how long you figure on holding out, Stan?

STAN: Patrick, you ask me that every time someone bites on the government's smoking incentive. I'm not "holding out." I'm choosing not to participate.

PATRICK: How long are you gonna "choose not to participate"?

STU: Yeah...you got some sort of plan or something?

PATRICK: You gotta have a plan.

STAN: I don't gotta have anything.

PATRICK: No, you don't. But how long do you think the government's gonna sit around and watch you make a mockery of its program to improve the quality of life on earth? Stan, it's not like we're talking Greenpeace or PETA, here. You're flaunting this whole smoking thing right in the U.S. Government's face. The very top.

STU: The world government's face.

PATRICK: Yes. The United Nations' face. That's even worse.

STU: In SPONGE's face.

PATRICK: The Chairman's face.

STAN: What is it with that guy? The Chairman this. The Chairman that. 'Oh, don't wanna piss off The Chairman.' 'Bow to The Chairman, monarch of the nicotine-free world.'

PATRICK: That's because he is the monarch of the nicotine-free world.

STU: He's the head of SPONGE.

PATRICK: Council for Society's Prohibition and Obliteration of Nicotine through Growth in Efficient Living. You don't wanna mess with him, buddy.

STAN: So what? He puts his pants on the same way as everyone else.

STU: Maybe he has someone else put his pants on for him.

PATRICK: Wouldn't surprise me.

STAN: Listen to you guys. You talk about him like he's the pope.

PATRICK: If the pope could be The Chairman, he would, believe me.

STAN: Yeah, right. *(Pause.)* He's probably just some regular guy whose ass everyone's kissing for no particular reason.

PATRICK: Nobody's ever seen him – except, I suppose, the people who work for him. I heard he's a real prick. Sits in a dark room. Doesn't say much. A friend of mine told me he's a member of MENSA. *(To STAN.)* And by the way, Stan, I don't kiss anyone's ass.

STU: I heard he uses telepathy to order his subordinates around. Maybe that's why he doesn't say much.

STAN: Yeah, I'm sure. Get any messages from The Chairman lately, Stu?

STU: Nope. Nothing.

STAN: Well, if The Chairman ever came down from his ivory tower...

PATRICK: You would do what?

STAN: I don't know – I'd think of something though.

PATRICK: Better be careful what you wish for, Stan. You're one of two smokers left – and ripe for the pick'ins. If I were The Chairman, I'd start bringing out the big guns.

STAN: Let'em. I'm not afraid of him.

PATRICK: Well think what you may. I still say your flaunting's getting you in deep shit.

STAN: I am not flaunting anything in anyone's face. When have you ever heard me mock the government – or SPONGE, for that matter? When have you heard me do an interview on TV or seen me quoted in the paper? If anything, I've gone out of my way to avoid the spotlight. I was given an option and I decided against it. It's not rocket science, Patrick.

STU: Did you know that there's no such thing as a "rocket scientist"? There are aerospace engineers, chemical engineers, mechanical engineers, electrical engineers, chemists, physicists, and other people who work on the design and theory of rocket propulsion – but no rocket scientists.

STAN: (To PATRICK.) Now you know why I smoke.

PATRICK: Stu? He's a poor excuse.

STAN: And you're any better? Patrick, as soon as you got your greedy little hands on the government's incentive cash you threw away a perfectly worthwhile life, do you realize that? You had a wonderful wife...

STU: Justine.

STAN: Thank you, Stu.

PATRICK: We need to find you someone like Justine, Stan.

STU: With the personality of Justine.

PATRICK: She had a helluva personality. I wonder what she's up to.

STAN: I'm quite capable of finding my own girlfriends and let me finish. (Pause.) You quit your job in advertising – that was the job you had to have when we were in college, remember?

PATRICK: Guy can't make a career change? Besides, it frees me up for other things.

STAN: Other things? Please enlighten me as to what other career options you have?

PATRICK: For your information I've several irons in the fire. Won't be long before you see a "new and improved Patrick," thank you. *(Pause.)* I don't see you ripping Stu a new asshole. He doesn't have a real job.

STU: I do to.

PATRICK: What...selling merchandise over the Internet? You're a dot COM rummage salesman. That's not a job – it's a pastime.

STAN: Stu, you make money selling things on the Internet, don't you?

STU: Yeah.

STAN: If you could do something different, would you?

STU: Well, I enjoy it...sometimes. But, yeah, if I didn't feel I had to I wouldn't be doing it.

STAN: That's a job.

PATRICK: Whatdaya mean, 'feel if you have to'? You've got plenty of money. You don't have to do anything.

STAN: *(To PATRICK.)* Like you?

STU: It keeps me busy. Otherwise I'd get bored just sitting around.

STAN: *(To PATRICK.)* Like you.

PATRICK: Whatever.

STAN: Will this "new and improved Patrick" have a fitness regimen he'll be following?

PATRICK: What's that supposed to mean?

STAN: You've gained, oh-h, I don't know – maybe twenty pounds in the last two years?

PATRICK: Come on, Stan...it's about how I feel inside – that's what's important. *(Beat.)* What's wrong with the way I look? Weight gain's a given when you stop smoking.

STAN: That's original.

STU: You've always had that double chin.

PATRICK: I have not. You're not exactly a rail, Stu.

STU: I never said I was.

PATRICK: So I've got a double chin. I'll firm it up. But other than that—

STAN: 'Other than that' what? You have no job. Your wife left you. Your children won't talk to you. And you've gotten fat.

PATRICK: But I'm wealthy. And my children will talk to me – as soon as I find out where Justine fled to.

STU: And I'm wealthy. Lotta wealthy folk running around the world today because of the government, Stan.

STAN: There's a switch.

PATRICK: You could have what we have, Stan.

STU: Yeah, Stan. If you just gave up smoking, you could be just like us.

STAN: Two, unemployed, divorced, fat men?

PATRICK: Wealthy...

STU: ...unemployed, divorced fat men.

PATRICK: It's not all that bad, Stanny. It's healthier, for one. You get paid a lot of money to quit. And if you start having a nicotine fit – well, that's what the lollipops are for. Work's for Stewart and I, isn't that right, Stewart?

STU: It do.

STAN: (*Eyeing STU.*) Have either of you even considered what this smoking incentive has turned you into?

PATRICK: You lost me, Stan.

STAN: (*Sets his paper down.*) You're morons. All you guys do is sit around and talk about nothing and then expect me to take an interest in it. And if neither of you said a word – which wouldn't be a bad thing – you'd be swept into a dustpan and thrown out with the garbage.

PATRICK: Name-calling will get you no–

STAN: (*Abruptly.*) Stu here can recite the "Gettysburg Address" forwards and backwards while deliberating ad nauseum the premise that if Martin Luther King would've used that speech instead of his "I Have a Dream" speech, blacks would no longer be discriminated against because they would've, in fact, been freed – twice. (*Pause.*) Where he's going with that, I have no clue.

STU: The point to that speech–

STAN: (*Raising his hand to stop STU mid-sentence.*) But ask him to nail two pieces of wood together and he goes ape-shit because he doesn't know which piece of wood he should nail first.

STU: Like I'm the only one.

PATRICK: And me?

STAN: You're a sarcastic, foul-mouthed, know-it-all. (*Thinking.*) Course you've been a sarcastic, foul-mouthed, know-it-all for twenty years.

STAN goes back to reading his paper.

STU: Patrick, my sensor chip's starting to throb again.

PATRICK: (*Matter-of-factly.*) It'll go away, Stu. It always does.

STAN: That's another thing. How long's it been since the government said it would fix the kinks in that sensor chip, huh?

PATRICK: It's being worked on. Don't you see how bitter your frustration has made you, Stan? If you'd just consider the government's incentive program – I mean really considered it – you'd be a happier person. And nicer to me and Stewart.

STAN: I am nice to both of you – and no I wouldn't.

PATRICK: Yes you would.

STAN: Nope.

PATRICK: Yep. You would.

STAN: Patrick –

PATRICK: Fine.

PATRICK goes back to reading his paper.

STAN: *(Pause; puts his paper down.)* All I'm saying is that I have reservations about a smoking incentive that, in the end, does nothing but disrupts lives and turns people into walking imbeciles. You wanna quit? Quit on your own, without the government sticking it's nose where it doesn't belong. Be honest, Patrick – is the money really worth everything you've lost? *(Goes back to reading the paper.)* I'm not convinced.

PATRICK: You don't have to be. Only I have to be.

STAN: That's good. Keep kidding yourselves.

Silence.

STU: Aeolian sounds. *(Pause. PATRICK and STAN put their papers down and stare at STU.)* They're the sounds produced by the action or effect of the wind...like the humming of wires, the whispering of pine trees or the rustle of leaves down the sidewalk. That's my favorite weather word. *Aeolian sounds.*

PATRICK: I thought Aeolians were the Greek peoples that settled the island of Lesbos?

STU: They were. I said *Aeolian sounds*, not *Aeolians*.

PATRICK: Uh-huh.

STAN and PATRICK go back to reading their papers.

STU: *(Pause.)* I also like the word, jiblets. Or is it, giblets? *(Pause.)* Ever notice how words start to sound different when you say them repetitiously? *Jiblets. Jiblets. Jiblets. Jiblets. Jiblets. Jiblets.* It sounds different to me. *(Pause.)* Or like the word, gefilte fish. It's a Yiddish word for a Jewish fish dish. All you gotta do is say the word and you sound like an old Jewish guy. *Gefilte fish.* Old Jewish guy, right? Say it with me. *Gefilte fish.* Come on.

STAN: Promise to shut up if we do?

STU: Yeah.

STAN and PATRICK look at each other, then put their papers down.

ALL: Gefilte fish.

STU: *(SLOW FADE on lights.)* See. We sound like three old Jewish guys. *(STAN and PATRICK go back to reading their papers.)*

Pause.) Jiblets. Jiblets. Jiblets. *(Pause.)* Giblets. *(Pause.)* Giblets. Jiblets. Giblets. Giblets. Jiblets. Gefilte fish. Gefilte fish. Gefilte fish...

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

AT RISE:

Thursday evening. The grocery store. LIGHTS FADE UP. A woman is sorting through vegetables in the produce section. STAN is pacing, nervously smoking a cigarette on stage but out of the scene. Throughout the FADE UP, STAN finishes his cigarette, discards the coat he's wearing and enters the scene, grabbing a small shopping basket on the way in. When lights reach their maximum level, STAN is browsing in the produce section. He notices the woman and approaches her.

STAN: You know – that's kohlrabi.

AUBREY: I'm sorry?

STAN: That vegetable you're holding. It's called kohlrabi. It's in the cabbage family.

AUBREY: Oh. What does it taste like?

STAN: It tastes like, um...huh. I'm not exactly sure how to describe the taste. I know it's nothing like chicken though.

AUBREY: OK.

STAN: Personally, I like to eat it raw, with veggie dip...and salt. Or you can cook it like you would cauliflower, throw it in a salad – however you like. I spent a lot of time as a kid on my grandparent's farm. I know these things.

AUBREY: Any other vegetable recommendations?

STAN: I'm thinking.

AUBREY: Well...thanks.

She drops the kohlrabi in her cart, smiles and continues down the aisle. STAN grabs a rutabaga and runs after her.

STAN: How 'bout a rutabaga?

AUBREY: No...I'm pretty sure I'm good to go. *(Pause.)* You're not planning to follow me around the store, are you?

STAN throws the rutabaga back on the shelf.

STAN: I might.

AUBREY: In that case, got a name, or should I just call you "rutabaga man"?

STAN: (*Holding out his hand.*) Stan.

AUBREY: Just "Stan"?

STAN: (*Puts his hand back down.*) Yeah, for now.

AUBREY: Hi, Stan. (*Holding out her hand.*) Just "Aubrey."

STAN: (*Shaking her hand.*) Nice to meet you, Aubrey. I like that name..."Aubrey," it's uncommon.

AUBREY: Thank you, I think.

STAN: You know, there's a song called, "Aubrey"...from the 1970's.

AUBREY: I know. My mother used to sing it to me when I was little. It's pretty.

STAN: Yeah, it is.

AUBREY: (*Pause.*) Um...can you walk, talk and shop or is the vegetable aisle sorta your safety zone?

STAN: I can walk and talk...and shop and chew gum all at the same time.

AUBREY: A quadruple threat. (*She continues down the aisle. STAN follows.*) So, Stan. Are you a vegetable connoisseur or is that your method of hitting on women in the produce section of the supermarket?

STAN: I am not a vegetable connoisseur. As a matter of fact, I don't really care for vegetables – unless they're raw...with dip. And I've never actually "broken the ice" – that's what I like to call it – with a woman in the produce section of the supermarket but I've always wanted to try. So, no and no – but yes.

AUBREY: OK. (*Pause.*) So.

STAN: So.

AUBREY: Don't tell me we've run out of things to say to each other already?

STAN: No – I'm just feeling a little giddy.

AUBREY: You're pretty sure of yourself.

STAN: Well...we're still talking, aren't we?

AUBREY: Yes we are. (*Pause.*) I'm curious. Why me?

STAN: Ah-h...I was being polite?

AUBREY: I see.

STAN: Even pretty people need help once in a while. My mother taught me that.

AUBREY: So now I'm "pretty people." (*Looks in STAN'S grocery basket.*) Your basket's empty. You either have a short grocery list or a small refrigerator.

STAN: My needs are pretty basic.

AUBREY: Food, water and human contact?

STAN: I like to start from the back and work my way up.

AUBREY: Well you certainly don't disappoint.

STAN: Meaning?

AUBREY: It means you're not unlike most men.

STAN: That's a pretty quick assessment, don't you think?

AUBREY: That's what you were doing when you saw me floundering about in the produce section, wasn't it?

STAN: Maybe. Pretty observant for a woman who knows nothing about kohlrabi.

AUBREY: I know more about you than you think.

STAN: Oh, yeah? Like what?

AUBREY: Thick-skinned enough to hear a few of my on-the-fly observations?

STAN: Better than a few suggestions.

AUBREY: I haven't gotten that far. *(Pause.)* OK. One, you're a typical man who hates to shop and buys only the essentials. Your refrigerator's probably empty. You probably order takeout a couple times a week and you like to eat at home in front of the TV.

STAN: Sweet and sour pork, egg rolls and a little thing of ranch dressing on the side – in my apartment...watching the BBC.

AUBREY: Two. Your dry, sarcastic sense of humor is amusing, though I wonder how long it would be before you start to annoy people.

STAN: I've always thought myself court jester-like, who knows when to put a sock in it. Continue.

AUBREY: Three, you're either a smoker or a non-smoker – but you're not an ex-smoker.

STAN: *(Not following her.)* OK. And you derived this from?

AUBREY: Because you seem basically normal and every ex-smoker I know is maladjusted in some form or another.

STAN: I'm somewhat familiar with the type.

AUBREY: And if you are a smoker, then you're the guy that's always mentioned in the papers. *(Giving STAN a quick once-over.)* You sorta fit his description, too. Coincidence?

STAN: Finished?

AUBREY: Uh-huh.

STAN: Only three? That's all the kohlrabi and rutabaga shtick's worth?

AUBREY: I could continue shopping and leave you here all alone – with your kohlrabi and rutabaga . . .

STAN: That would make me sad.

AUBREY: So?

STAN: So what?

AUBREY: Are you the guy I've read about in the papers?

STAN: Does it matter?

AUBREY: Not really.

STAN: There we go. Besides, that's the sort of information I reserve for second dates.

AUBREY: Who said we had a first?

STAN: We met. We exchanged verbal barbs. You let me touch your kohlrabi. That's a first date.

AUBREY: *(Pause.)* Have it your way. *(She brings her grocery cart to a stop.)* This...is where we part company. I prefer shopping alone. *(Reaching into her purse, she hands STAN a business card.)* If you get tired of the BBC and sweet and sour pork, you can reach me at that number. Perhaps we could have a normal conversation sometime.

STAN: *(Looking over the card.)* A model. I'm feeling giddy all over again. *(Pause.)* I'm sorry...you were saying something about "normal."

AUBREY: I said –

STAN: Oh, yeah – so this wasn't normal for you?

AUBREY: If you're asking me do I normally have conversations with strange men about vegetables and songs from the 1970's in the supermarket – no.

STAN: OK. I promise. No more veggie talk. Really – I take direction well.

AUBREY: We'll see. *(She grabs the kohlrabi from her cart and tosses it into STAN'S basket.)* You can sing the song to me – the one with my name in it. Can you sing?

STAN: Would it make a difference?

AUBREY: Maybe. Bye, Stan Rutabaga.

STAN watches her leave, then grabs the kohlrabi. SLOW FADE on lights.

STAN: *(Yells after her.)* And I have a big refrigerator that's half-full! *(To himself.)* I knew there was a reason I liked kohlrabi. *(He takes a bite.)* Needs dip.

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

AT RISE:

Monday morning. The café. LIGHTS FADE UP. STU is sitting alone - reading a book, sucking on a lollipop, fiddling with a pencil and having coffee. Throughout FADE UP, STAN enters on stage but out of the scene, smoking a cigarette. He takes one last puff, and as

lights reach their maximum level, STAN enters the scene, throwing his newspaper on the table.

STAN: Morning, Stu.

STU: Morning, Stan.

STAN: I – uh...is that coffee –

STU: Take it. Brewed two seconds ago.

STAN: Thanks. *(He sits.)* Whatdaya reading?

STU: *(Showing STAN the cover.)* The History of Buddhism.

STAN: Thinking about becoming a Buddhist, Stu?

STU: No. I'm thinking about becoming a follower of Buddruidism though.

STAN: Bud-druidism?

STU: Yeah. It's a combination of the teachings of Buddhism and Druidism.

STAN: I'm not familiar with that religion.

STU: That because it doesn't exist - yet. You see I appreciate the principles outlined in Buddhism – like morality and developing my mind to gain wisdom – and I like trees, you know, like the ancient Celts. So, I figured, 'why not just throw'em both together into one religion'.

STAN: Why not. *(Looking around.)* Are there a lot of Druids around here?

STU: There's a few. Mostly underground. I don't believe everything the ancient Druids believed - like reincarnation - or cannibalism. But I think trees have spirits – and a heart. I think they feel. *(He takes a moment, then very seriously, recites verse from memory.)* 'One day I was full of life. My sap was rich and I was strong. From seed to tree I grew so tall. Through wind and rain I could not fall. But now my branches suffer and my leaves don't offer poetry to men of song...Oh, Lord I lay me down. No life's left to be found. There's nothing left for me.'¹

STAN: Did you write that?

STU: No. Just some old song.

STAN: That's very – poetic. Huh. So-o...you'd be the leader of this new religion – I'm assuming.

STU: 'Course. I'd be the only person who knows the benefits of the two religions combined into one.

STAN: That's good, Stu. You'll do well...I think, getting people to follow...Buddruidism.

¹ BRIAN WILSON AND JACK RIELEY, FROM "A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A TREE" [1971], BROTHER PUBLISHING CO., (BMI)/WIXEN MUSIC PUBLISHING, INC. USED WITH PERMISSION.

STU: Well, that's the idea, in theory. New religions aren't the easiest thing to get off the ground. It's not like a book club or hosting a Tupperware® party.

STAN: I didn't know they still made Tupperware®.

STU: They don't. But I've got a ton of the old Tupperware® at my house. You should come over sometime, Stan. I've got doubles of everything.

STAN: Yeah...that'd be nice. *(Pause.)* So.

STU: Yeah.

STAN: Oh, heh...I, um...I met someone...a girl.

STU: You're dating a girl?

STAN: Well...not dating. I just—

STU: You never mentioned anything to me about a girl.

STAN: I just met her a few days ago, Stu.

STU: Oh. *(Pause.)* Well, that's nice. What's her name?

STAN: Aubrey.

STU: Nice name. *Aubrey.* It's a nice name to say, too. *Aubrey. Aubrey.* Yeah...I like it.

STAN: Me, too. You never know. She's, ah-h - *(Looking at his watch.)* - she's supposed to meet me here for a second on her way to some meeting.

STU: She's coming here?

STAN: Yeah. That's alright, isn't it?

STU: Sure. Course it is.

STAN: Good.

PATRICK approaches briskly.

STU: Heya, Patrick.

PATRICK: *(Overly perky.)* Morning, gentlemen.

STAN: Morning, Patrick. Stu was just enlightening me on the benefits of Buddruidhism.

PATRICK: Course he is. You're not gonna let me join his little cult all by myself, are you?

STAN: *(Ignoring PATRICK. Pause.)* You're a – wound up pretty tight this morning, there, Patrick. Have anything to do with the “new you” we're supposed to be looking out for?

PATRICK: Actually...no. But it does have something to do with the “new Stan.” Anyone seen today's paper?

STAN: Now why would you ask us that?

STU: *(In one breath.)* You know we always wait to read the paper until the last guy arrives because Stan's frequently the last guy and he's afraid one of us will blab the good headlines to him before he gets a chance to read the paper himself.

PATRICK: Very good, Stu – and in one breath, too. *(To STAN.)* That's what quitting will do for your lungs. *(To STAN and STU.)* Anyway, you're right – we do wait until the last person arrives. Except this morning. This morning I broke our little triumviral concord for a very auspicious occasion.

STAN: *(Pause. Looking at STU.)* Ah-h...OK. We give up.

PATRICK produces a newspaper from under his jacket.

PATRICK: Ready? Our man, Stan – you guys are gonna shit – our man Stan is the... last...smoker! *(He begins clapping and egging on other "patrons" to join in his celebration.)* That's right! Don't be shy, folks! Front page news! Stan Ranik is the last smoker...in the world! Come on! Give this man some lovin'! It's not everyday you have an international celebrity sipping coffee, doing... *(He looks to see what Stan is doing.)* paperwork, right next to you...on the street...for everyone to see! I don't hear you! Thank you! Thank you!

STAN: You're not gonna start selling tickets, are you?

PATRICK unwraps a lollipop and puts it in his mouth.

PATRICK: –Come on, Stan – you're not an organ grinder monkey. No-o siree...you're worth a lot more than that.

STAN: Yeah, so you were saying?

PATRICK tosses the paper onto the table and sits.

PATRICK: The French performance artist - bitch slipped on some Elmer's glue last night. Broke her leg in two places, fractured her collarbone and suffered a concussion. Hung up her act – for good...and, she quit smoking. Seems she was going broke pouring glue all over herself and needs the money for medical bills. She's being fitted for multiple casts and a sensor chip right now. *(Pause.)* Yes-s-s!

STAN: Don't get too elated over the poor girl's misfortune, Patrick.

PATRICK: Screw her. I'm sorry, call me an evil son-of-a-bitch but I love it when smug, little bastards get their just desserts. Now, that's not the Christian way, but karma is and will forever be, the great equalizer. It's like seeing some asshole get pulled over by the cops after coasting through a stop sign – right in front of you. I love it! *(Shouting.)* STAN IS THE MAN!! STAN IS THE MAN!!

STAN: Alright, Patrick. Calm down. We get that you're happy. What made you so sure Stu and I weren't gonna read the paper?

PATRICK: And break our pact? I knew Stu wouldn't because he's a teddy bear and would never think of such a thing. You're too honest and though the thought may cross your mind you'd never act on it. Which leaves me...I'm devious by nature. (*Motioning for a waiter.*) Waiter? (*A waiter enters.*) Excuse me. I'd like a medium café mocha and a biscotti, please? (*The waiter nods and turns.*) Wait...make that three biscotti's and extra whip cream on the mocha. No...just two biscotti's. (*To STAN.*) I'm watching my weight. (*To waiter.*) Thank you. (*To STAN.*) The last smoker. Oh-h...you've come a long way, baby. You know, I'm beginning to think it wasn't such a bad idea holding out until the end, Stan. That smoking bounty's sure to bust through the ceiling now. We should've held out longer, Stu.

STU: I told you.

PATRICK: Yes you did. So, Stanny...what's your next move?

STAN: What next move?

PATRICK: How much longer are you gonna buck the system? You've pretty much won.

STAN: I never looked at it as a contest.

PATRICK: There you go. So it's time to give it up. Quit smoking, get your cash and move on with life.

STAN: I am moving on with life, Patrick – my way...just like I've been doing.

PATRICK: Right. Well, if you didn't think you were living your life in a fishbowl before, stay tuned, buddy-boy.

STAN: Patrick...let me try and explain this to you one last time. I like smoking, OK? I enjoy "the puff." I like to just relax and let the cigarette dangle from my fingers like some pompous, bourgeois pig, piece of shit French guy at a little, seedy, outdoor cafe. (*The waiter enters, setting the coffee and biscotti on the table.*) I like the smell as the smoke wafts up in the air and circles around my head. I relish reading the Sunday paper over coffee and a cigarette. Smoking gives me something to do. It calms me. It's a nasty, little habit like picking your nose and I enjoy it. Now shut...the fuck...up!

Long pause. STAN and PATRICK go back to reading their papers. STU hands PATRICK his coffee and biscottis.

PATRICK: Oh...thanks, Stu. (*Beat.*) So – Stan.

STAN: Yes?

PATRICK: Where do you smoke anyway?

STU: There aren't any places to smoke – legally – anymore.

PATRICK: Ya gotta be smoking somewhere - I can smell it on your clothes.

STAN: Yeah. So?

PATRICK: So - you can't smoke in your apartment. You can't smoke in your car, outside, in any public or private building. I mean, where ya sneakin' off to?

STAN: If I told you, Patrick, I'd have to kill you. And then I'd have to kill Stu because he's an accessory. Do you want me to kill Stu, Patrick?

PATRICK: Well...I'm kidding, Stu. (*Pause.*) So where'ya getting your cigarettes from? (*STAN gives PATRICK a look.*) I know. (*Mocking STAN.*) 'You'd have to kill me'. Forget it.

STU: Stan was just telling me about his girlfriend.

PATRICK: (*To STAN.*) Girlfriend?

STAN: She's not my –

PATRICK: OK, I obviously missed something here. Who is this woman, how long have you been dating, why am I just finding out about this now -

STAN: Her name's Aubrey and I just met her a few days ago. I was gonna tell you.

PATRICK: Where'd you meet her?

STAN: The supermarket.

PATRICK: The supermarket.

STAN: Yeah, so what?

PATRICK: Choked back a little pride and decided to use the ole "produce section" pick-up, huh?

STAN: No. I happened to be in the produce section when I saw her.

PATRICK: (*To STU.*) I perfected the "produce section" pick-up. (*To STAN.*) Remember Marla Shepherd?

STAN: Who could forget her? (*To STU.*) Marla Shepherd was this excellent looking babe in college. I mean excellent. Jet black, straight hair – very...she looked like the woman in that Sir Walter Scott book.

STU: Rebecca, the raven-haired Jewish temptress in *Ivanhoe*?

STAN: Yeah, like that...but she wasn't Jewish. She always gave the impression that she was the unapproachable type – prudish, but not so uppity about being prudish – you know? Anyway, Patrick says he nailed her one night in the produce section at Shepherd's Grocery Store.

PATRICK: I did. Her father owned the store and it was after closing. I think it was all those gourds and cucumbers that finally uncorked her libido. I told Stan but he didn't believe me. So he said.

STAN: Aubrey's a nice girl.

PATRICK: Uh-huh. That's what we thought about Marla Shepherd.

STAN: Hey, remember that girl you dated in college who always wore scarves and turtlenecks?

PATRICK: Stacy Redling?

STAN: Yeah. What was with all the neckwear?

PATRICK: She had to wear something to cover up the goiter on her neck.

STAN: I'll be damned. *(Pause.)* She did a good job. Pretty girl.

PATRICK: She was – except for the goiter. And I didn't date her – we were friends. *(To Stu.)* She tutored me in Economics.

STAN: Anyway-y...we had a succinct but eventful talk at the supermarket and – I don't know...this could be the one.

PATRICK: The one? How do ya get from hitting on her in the supermarket to a house with a white picket fence and golden retriever?

STAN: I'm smitten...what can I say?

STU: I thought you were animal ambivalent?

STAN: I've softened. I know I'm jumping off the deep end, but I like her. First girl in a long time that's made me feel this way.

STU: She's on her way over here right now.

PATRICK: She's coming here now?!

STAN: I'm sorry – did I forget to ask your permission?

PATRICK: A little warning would've been nice.

STAN: What's with you two? You guys bitch when I don't mention her, then you bitch because she's coming over here.

PATRICK: Well, Stan, this is sort of a big moment. We have to prepare ourselves - mentally, you know.

STAN: No, I don't know – and she's only stopping for a minute. She's gonna say "hi." You guys are gonna say, "hi." And she's gonna bolt with minimal damage done. Comprene?

PATRICK: You're right. *(To STU.)* Stan's right. So when's the next formal date – not counting this dropping by bullshit today?

STAN: We're having dinner at her place Wednesday. Why? You wanna come along?

PATRICK: Just asking. What's her last name?

STAN: I don't remember her telling me.

PATRICK: And you're gonna marry this girl? I'd do a thorough FBI and CIA background check before I got married again, believe me.

STAN: Which is why you probably won't get married again.

PATRICK: Hey-y...I've had the white picket fence and dog and two-and-a-half kids, remember?

STU: I'm happy for you, Stan.

STAN: We'll see.

PATRICK: Well if how you're feeling is true – which, for your sake, I hope it is – it's just another reason to quit smoking.

STAN: Patrick –

PATRICK: Now wait a second, hear me out. What's a pretty woman like Aubrey – I'm assuming she's pretty?

STAN: She's a model.

STU: A model, huh?

STAN: Yeah. She's been modeling for...

PATRICK: Alright, I got it – Aubrey's a model. What's she gonna think when you two are at some fancy soiree and you're wining and dining her and she's putting on that model charm and suddenly she has to explain to whomever that you're the last smoker? All the attention's gonna shift from her to you.

STAN: We –

PATRICK: And...how's she gonna deal with kissing a mouth every day that tastes like the bottom of an ashtray or the constant smell of smoke in the house? Now – I understand all that might seem fairly mundane between two people who are madly in love with each other but, you know, welcome to the real world.

STAN: We didn't really get into all that.

PATRICK: You didn't get into it? When do you think you will broach that subject?

STAN: I don't know. But I'm sure I'll bring it up when the time's right.

PATRICK: When? While you're in the middle of some phlegmy, wheezy, hacking smoker's cough? Oh that's really attractive.

STAN: It's my choice.

PATRICK: Now you're just being stubborn.

STAN: That's my choice, too.

STU: *(Talking without trying to move his mouth while motioning with his head toward AUBREY as she approaches the group.)* Um-m, Stan? I think this is her walking toward us. In back of you.

STU pulls a lighter from his pocket and reaches to light a candle on the table, but PATRICK grabs the lighter away.

PATRICK: Gimme that! *(Stuffs it into his pocket.)* You know better than that.

STU: What? I thought it would be a nice touch.

STAN: *(STAN turns. To AUBREY.)* Hello-o.

AUBREY: Hi. I hope I'm not interrupting.

STAN: No. We were just...talking. Your meeting's still –

AUBREY: Uh-huh. In about fifteen minutes. *(To STU and PATRICK.)* Stan told me you guys would be here so I wanted to come and say hello.

STU/PATRICK: Hello.

STAN: Aubrey, this is Patrick.

AUBREY: Nice to meet you, Patrick.

PATRICK: Charmed.

STAN: And this is Stu.

STU: *(Nervously.)* Hello, Audrey.

STAN: Aubrey.

STU: Aubrey. Sorry. I've never met a real model before.

AUBREY: Well I hope I don't disappoint. Stu, is it?

STU: Stu, yes. Short for Stewart.

PATRICK: Sit down and take a load off, Aub. We were just talking about you.

AUBREY: *(She sits.)* You were? I hope Stan embellished in all the right places.

PATRICK: He didn't have to. So...our little boy Stanny seems to be quite taken with you. He was telling us about the wedding plans and the children – various farm animals and such...the whole kit and caboodle.

STAN kicks PATRICK under the table.

AUBREY: *(To STAN. Playfully.)* You didn't mention anything about farm animals.

STAN: The thought just occurred to me. I thought we could keep some as pets and eat the rest.

AUBREY: That's a nice thought.

STU: There's this little place about a half hour north of here that sells all sorts of animals: goats, chickens, donkeys, peccary, llamas, food, cages, toys – everything you can imagine...if you were thinking about raising farm animals.

PATRICK: So Stan tells us you went to school for...modeling, was it?

STAN: No, I said—

AUBREY: Actually, I sort of fell into modeling while attending college.

PATRICK: An educated model? Wow. What did you study?

AUBREY: I got my undergraduate in art studies and my masters in psychology.

STU: The human mind is a fascinating – um...it's fascinating to study the human mind.

AUBREY: It comes in handy when trying to get into the heads of people – *(She feels PATRICK staring at her, turns and looks at him.)* - who are trying to get into yours. *(Pause.)* What about you guys? What do you do - besides the coffee and newspaper thing?

PATRICK: Oh-h...she's a pip, Stan. I think I'm gonna like you, Aubrey.

STU: We're still trying to find ourselves...sorta.

AUBREY: At your ages?

PATRICK: Self-discovery can occur at any age. I would think a master in psychology should know that.

AUBREY: That's very true. I guess it depends on what you consider "self-discovery."

STAN: Self-discovery came courtesy of The Chairman of SPONGE.

AUBREY: Oh-h, right. Stan told me. Ex-smokers who took the plunge with SPONGE. Well – aren't we the perfect citizens?

STU: Took the plunge with SPONGE. That's a good one, Aubrey.

PATRICK: Yeah, so we have a bit more leisure time on our hands for, you know, reading the paper and sucking down espressos.

STU: We spend most of our time observing human nature and commenting on what we see.

PATRICK: (*To AUBREY.*) The human condition is fascinating, wouldn't you say?

AUBREY: The human condition. The human mind. Humanity. It's all fascinating to me, Patrick.

STU: Patrick and I are both single.

AUBREY: Oh?

STU: I just thought...maybe you could introduce us to some models – if you knew some. Then all three of us would be dating models – hey, Stan?

PATRICK: Yeah, Aubrey. What do you say about hooking Stu and I up with some comparable eye candy?

STAN: (*STAN rises.*) OK. So...

AUBREY: (*Rising.*) Yeah. I better get going.

STU: (*Rising.*) So soon?

AUBREY: I know. I have to –

STU: (*Fumbling in his pocket.*) I was just gonna show you this pamphlet I had printed up outlining my new religious –

STAN: Another time, Stu.

PATRICK: Stu, we don't wanna seem too overanxious. It's not befitting us ne'er-do-wells – tripping over our tongues like schoolboys.

AUBREY: I don't have anything against schoolboys. It was nice to finally meet you both – gave me a chance to put the names with the faces – and personalities. We'll have to do this again sometime soon.

STU: Anytime, Aubrey. Goodbye.

PATRICK: (*Rising.*) Adios. Arrivederci. Au revoir. Auf wiedersehen.

STU: Kochac. (*PATRICK gives STU a look.*)

AUBREY: *(To STU and Patrick.)* Bye. *(To STAN.)* I'll see you... Wednesday. *(In an awkward but smitten moment, they kiss.)*

STAN: I'll call you. Thanks for coming by.

AUBREY: *(So STU and PATRICK can hear.)* The pleasure was all mine.

AUBREY exits. STAN, PATRICK and STU sit down.

PATRICK: So-o...you guys...ah-h...

STAN: Not yet. I don't intend on screwing this one up.

PATRICK: By screwing her too early. Look at Stu. He's enamored with her - aren't you, Stu?

STU: Yes.

PATRICK: There you go.

STAN: Stu, what's with the 'we're single...can you fix us up?' shit?

STU: I was just asking.

PATRICK: Which brings me back to what we were discussing. Isn't it possible that most women today have come to appreciate men who don't smoke? I mean, what are the odds that a gorgeous model would pick the last smoker on the planet when she can have any guy in the world – even if you tell her you're a smoker and she says she's alright with that?

STU: The odds gotta be millions to one.

PATRICK: Try billions. Shit, the odds are against you and Aubrey lasting, whether you quit smoking or not – sorry, Stan. Why not give yourself a fighting chance with her and at least try quitting? *(Under his breath.)* I don't know why you just don't go to a nicotine anonymous meeting and get it over with.

STAN: What was that?

PATRICK: Nothing.

STAN: I'm not going to one of those stupid support group meetings. *(PATRICK gets up.)* Where you going?

PATRICK: I'll be right back.

PATRICK exits.

STU: I hope you don't think we're running this kick-the-habit thing into the ground, Stan? Deep down, I think, Patrick really cares – in his own way. Me, too.

STAN: I know you do, Stu. Patrick's just being Patrick. *(PATRICK returns with the yellow pages and begins paging through it.)* What are you doing?

PATRICK: Ah-h...nothing. Just...you know...letting my fingers do the walking.

STAN: Patrick, come on...

PATRICK: What? Oh, now – just listen. Wait...we're just looking, OK? If we don't find any interesting support groups, I'll drop it.
STAN: No.
PATRICK: Support groups are filled with smokers just like you...who got smart.
STU: They understand what you're going through, Stan.

PATRICK: Now, Stu and I understand what you're going through and we've tried on several occasions to...sorta...point you in the right direction, haven't we, Stu? But you patronize and goad us and I don't think you respect our stance; therefore, you don't respect what we have to say.

STAN: Patrick -

PATRICK: Stan. Listen to me. I'll make you a bet. One meeting...

STAN: I said no –

PATRICK: - and I'll never bother you about smoking again.

STAN: But you're devious by nature, Patrick, remember?

PATRICK: I swear. Stu's my witness. Stu?

STU: Duly noted.

PATRICK: Stan – it's Stu...come on.

STAN: I go to this meeting –

Menacing pointing to PATRICK.

PATRICK: Swear.

STAN: You've got a deal.

They shake hands.

PATRICK: Alright. Let's see..."Smoker's Anonymous." That's sounds pretty tame. (Pause.) Stan? "Smoker's Anonymous"?

STAN: Boring tame. Next.

PATRICK: "Smoker's Trying Outwardly not to Panic." "STOP."

STAN: Go. I'm kidding. I mean, I'm not kidding about STOP. Seems a little...unstable. I can't believe I'm doing this.

PATRICK: Think of it as an adventure in self-discovery. We know Aubrey's turned on by self-discovery, right? OK. There's "CO-OP." "Carcinogens Out. Opportunity and Productivity In."

STAN: Sounds too radical.

STU: Sounds like one of those hippie groups from back in the 1960s – like the Weathermen or Yippies. Sounds communist, too.

PATRICK: Um-m...

STU leans over to read out of the yellow pages.

STU: Here's two: "Nicotine Inhibits Productivity" or "Nicotine Incites Passivity." Different contact numbers.

STAN: "NIP 1" and "NIP 2"? Ah-h...not politically correct.

PATRICK: (*Reading.*) "Butt Out" – (*Pause.*) Wait a second. What's with the "too radical" and "politically correct" crap?

STAN: I'm just saying–

PATRICK: Stan, you're the last smoker on the planet. While you've been puffing your brains out all these years the government's probably been stuffing surveillance bugs so far up your ass you couldn't shit 'em out if you wanted to. Now all of sudden you're afraid of pushing the envelope a little?

STAN: All I'm saying is–

PATRICK: They're names of support groups, for Christ's sake! Do you really think Aubrey gives a rat's ass which group you attend?! Just fucking pick one!

STAN: You're swearing again, Patrick.

PATRICK: Come on! We're trying to help you.

STAN: Fine. Was "Butt Out" an actually choice?

PATRICK: Please. May I continue?

STAN: I said fine.

PATRICK: (*Reading.*) Thank you. And yes, "Butt Out" was listed. Are you interested in that one?

STAN: No. I just liked the name.

PATRICK: Where was I? There's "NIP IT!"...with an exclamation point. "Nicotine Inhibits Productivity, Incites Trepidation!" Now, I could be wrong, Stan, but I don't see any problems with this name. What do you think?

STAN: There's too much emphasis on the negative. "*Inhibits.*" "*Incites.*" I'm not comfortable with that.

STU: I like "Co-op"...even though it sounds communist.

STAN: I know I said it sounded radical, but "Co-op" – I mean that has a friendly sounding...resonance. It's positive - like "cooperation."

STU: Co-op is short for cooperative. Even though a word sounds communist, it can still have good timbre.

PATRICK: There you go. If Stu here says it's got good timbre, then "Co-op" it is. Stan, my friend, get ready for a life-changing experience. I'll give'em a call and find out the details.

STAN: You won't mind if I reserve judgment until after I've kicked the habit, will you?

PATRICK: You can reserve judgment for whenever you'd like. But when the subject does come up and you tell Aubrey you've been attending "CO-OP" meetings...forget about it. Women can't resist guys with kinks in their armor. The fact that a guy admits his faults

and makes an attempt to fly straight – shit, you'll have her eating outta your hands in no time.

STAN: Yeah, well...I'm not asking her to eat outta my hand. Holding hands would be nice, though.

STU giggles.

PATRICK: You're getting Stu all worked up. *(Pause.)* So, Stan...you want me to start that FBI check - while I got the yellow pages handy?

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 4

AT RISE:

Wednesday evening. AUBREY'S home. LIGHTS FADE UP. AUBREY'S in the kitchen preparing appetizers. Throughout the FADE UP, STAN enters the stage - out of the scene. He stops before entering the scene, reaches into his pocket and pulls out some breath spray. He takes a couple quick spurts and as lights reach their maximum level, STAN is in place, sitting in the living room with a glass of wine, listening to the stereo.

STAN: You don't mind if I light a few candles, do you?

AUBREY: No, go ahead. There's a book of matches on the coffee table. So...what's the story with Stu and Patrick?

STAN: *(Lighting candles.)* They're harmless. Stu wouldn't hurt a fly. Patrick can be a bit abrasive, but they're good people.

AUBREY: Yeah. They seem...interesting.

STAN: You need some help?

AUBREY: No, thanks. I'm all set.

AUBREY enters with a bottle of wine and appetizers.

STAN: So what type of modeling do you do... 'cause, I've never seen you in anything. I mean, I'm not – you know...it's just that I don't recognize you from anything...I might have seen...before.

AUBREY: Do you purchase a lot of bras?

STAN: Ah-h...not in the last six months.

AUBREY: Maybe that's why you haven't seen me in anything – unless you page through magazines looking at the women modeling bras. *(Pause.)* Do you do that?

STAN: Course not.

AUBREY: Let's see. I started modeling swimsuits just before I got out of college – that led to a few national contracts which had me traveling all over the world lounging in five-star cabanas sipping umbrella drinks and getting pedicures on the beach.

STAN: Sounds more like a permanent vacation than work.

AUBREY: Oh-h it was fun. But I got tired of the traveling, so I started doing department store print ads - underwear, sleepwear, some lingerie. Quick, one-day shoots.

STAN: So I won't be seeing you on the cover of *Vogue*™ or *Cosmo*™ anytime soon?

AUBREY: Nope. Not my cup of tea. I know it sounds dramatic; people laugh at it, but modeling's not as easy as people think. If you're not tough-skinned... there's girls who love to bitch about everything, drugs are everywhere, runway work sucks—

STAN: - and it's filled with shallow, self-absorbed people who would sooner stab you in the back then scratch it, right?

AUBREY: Something like that. If I had a dime for every time I heard, 'honey, just sleep with the guy and the contract's yours' - that's not my style. I like staying under the radar.

STAN: It looks like you've done pretty well for yourself...taking the moral road less traveled.

AUBREY: Yeah. It's given me freedom to do what I want. I'm independent that way.

STAN: No.

AUBREY: Whatever. I restored a triplex from top to bottom – that's my little nest egg – and sunk everything else into refurbishing this place. Had a duplex and sold that. I'm lucky. I still travel but it's not like the old days - it's get to the airport, fly off to God knows where – or drive, depending on where the shoot's at – get to the hotel, wake up at 4:30, do the shoot, fly home and do it all over again.

STAN: I fly about twice a month and every time it's one big pain in the ass.

AUBREY: A couple of Valium and you'll forget the pain in the ass part. Anyway...I'm contemplating a change into a different sort of modeling.

She sets her wine glass down and holds up her hands, turning them so STAN gets a view of both sides. He doesn't know what to do, so he hits them like he's playing "pattycake."

STAN: What?

AUBREY: Hand modeling. My agent said it would prolong my career – I've finally come to the realization that I'm getting a little old to model lingerie - don't you think?

STAN: Not really. Never met a hand model, before.

AUBREY: Yeah. I've had a few assignments – watch ads, hand lotion commercials.

STAN: Let me see those hands.

AUBREY: Be careful. Don't wanna end up in the unemployment line.

STAN: Very nice. Smooth. Like a baby's butt. Stan likey.

AUBREY: You're not the only one - I'm booked solid for the next month.

STAN: You must be good.

AUBREY: I give good hand. More wine?

STAN: Yes, please.

AUBREY: (*Pouring wine.*) What about you? What does Stan – (*Laughs.*) Oh, my God. I don't even know your last name...

STAN: "Ranik."

AUBREY: ...I mean you could be some sort of deviant or a rapist, or a...

STAN: I said, "Ranik." R-A-N-I-K. It's Czech. You know women can be deviants and rapists just as easily as men. Besides, you never told me your last name either.

AUBREY: "Smith." Aubrey Smith. It's common...and it hardly sounds like a miscreant.

STAN: And "Ranik" does?

AUBREY: Um-m...uh-huh.

STAN: Is that your real name or your hand model name?

AUBREY: Both.

STAN: I don't know too many "Smith's", so maybe the name's not as common as you think.

AUBREY: Then maybe you'd better watch your back the rest of the evening, Mr. Ranik.

STAN: So where you from originally?

AUBREY: Iowa.

STAN: Iowa - land of corn and flatness.

AUBREY: You've been there.

STAN: I dated a girl from Iowa once. Sorta had to make up your own fun, as I recall.

AUBREY: A college friend from Indiana used to say Iowa stood for -

STAN: I've been through Indiana and let me say, it's not a whoop and a holler.

AUBREY: How about you?

STAN: Where I'm from? Oh-h, everywhere. My father was a consultant for one of the auto manufacturers and we moved around a lot – Detroit, Chicago, St. Paul...

AUBREY: Where were you born?

STAN: Milwaukee. So-o...I consider myself a Midwesterner. Good family. Great childhood. No regrets. Now I'm here. What about you? Are your parents still around?

AUBREY: Uh-huh. They live here now. Um...Sam – that's my mother...short for Samantha – she's a housewife, and my dad – Laird – is a businessman.

STAN: Laird?

AUBREY: Don't laugh.

STAN: I wasn't gonna laugh. It's just an odd-sounding name – not in a bad way. Not in a good way either, but –

AUBREY: It's a family name. There was a "Laird" in every generation since the 1600s. My mother didn't like it either, so she started calling him "Norman."

STAN: (*Raising his glass.*) To La...to Norman and Sam.

AUBREY: To a good childhood and no regrets. (*She raises her glass.*) To the Midwest.

STAN: The Midwest.

They toast.

AUBREY: Oh – I'm sorry. I started to ask you what you did for a living.

STAN: It's nothing like modeling bras in five-star cabanas and getting pedicures on the beaches every day.

AUBREY: Stop it. Hand model, remember?

STAN: Oh, that's right. I sell labels for a company called Kawon, Ltd.

AUBREY: What kind of labels? Aubrey needs more information.

STAN: Prime labels...like the labels you see on products in the grocery store, peel-off rebate stickers or special contest giveaway stickers - scratch-off gaming cards.

AUBREY: You know, just once I'd love to get one of those tickets that reads, 'Aubrey Smith's a winner', and not, 'sorry, try again'.

STAN: I just market and sell'em – I don't set the odds.

AUBREY: The last smoker, the guy in the paper, he's a salesman. Another coincidence?

STAN: I didn't know there was a first coincidence.

AUBREY: In the grocery store? When I said you were either a smoker or a non-smoker?

STAN: Yeah. But I never answered you.

AUBREY: OK. So are you a non-smoker?

STAN: Nope.

AUBREY: And I said I didn't think you were an ex-smoker.

STAN: Because I'm so well-adjusted.

AUBREY: Right. So you're a...

STAN/AUBREY: (*AUBREY states with enthusiasm, STAN doesn't*)...a well-adjusted smoker.

AUBREY: I knew it! I knew it.

STAN: You did not. You were fishing the entire time.

AUBREY: I was on the right track. (*Playfully tossing a pillow at him.*) You lied to me!

STAN: I did not! I didn't say a word!

AUBREY: It's the same thing. (*Pause.*) Oh-h, relax...I'm kidding.

STAN: I didn't know it was such a big deal to you.

AUBREY: It's not. (*Pause.*) A celebrity...in my home. I should've laid out the red carpet.

STAN: (*Holding up a napkin.*) Red napkins.

AUBREY: So how does it feel to be the last smoker?

STAN: Just like it felt be the five millionth. Or the hundredth. It's no big deal.

AUBREY: Oh, come on. How can you say that?

STAN: What do you want me to say? I'm honored? Thrilled by the notoriety? Who should I thank? My mother? No, she hates it that I smoke. My agent? Don't have one. How 'bout the millions who got me here who quit smoking and are now leading healthier lives? Thank you. Thank you. No, thank you.

AUBREY: Come on. You're telling me that with the government breathing down your neck like you're some...

STAN: Miscreant?

AUBREY: You know what I mean. Why not take the cash, get your implant like everyone else and be rid of the pressure - be a "good citizen"?

STAN: Because I don't want to be a "good citizen." (*Pause.*) Were you a smoker or non-smoker?

AUBREY: Non.

STAN: Does your sensor chip throb?

AUBREY: No.

STAN: Huh. Must be just ex-smokers.

AUBREY: OK, so...are you holding out for more money? I mean, you're definitely in the driver's seat. You could probably up the ante now if you wanted.

STAN: It's not about the money. (*Whimsically.*) You certainly know what buttons to push, don't you? It's bad enough I get the non-stop chorus line from Stu and Patrick - 'kick the habit, join SPONGE, kick the habit, join SPONGE'.

AUBREY: I'm not pushing but - you're the only smoker in the world who's holding out. That doesn't strike you as odd?

STAN: Not any odder than every smoker in the world cathartically throwing up their hands and running to SPONGE for an act of contrition. (*Pause.*) It's about making my own decisions in life and

not leaving those decisions up to someone else. *(Pause.)* It's about my freedom to do what I want. If I give in now, I'm no different than everyone else.

AUBREY: Makes sense to me – even though it sounds a little convoluted.

STAN: Besides, I don't trust SPONGE – or The Chairman. I think he's up to something but I can't prove it. *(Pause.)* I've already compromised my entire value system by agreeing to go to nicotine anonymous meeting next Thursday...compliments of Stu and Patrick.

AUBREY: Good for them. At least it shows you're somewhat open to hearing other points of view. You never know – it may do you some good.

STAN: We'll see.

AUBREY: Well, if SPONGE is as shady as you believe it to be, it certainly pulled the wool over the entire world's eyes.

STAN: Exactly my point. How 'bout we change the subject, hmm?

AUBREY: Scared?

STAN: Of what?

AUBREY: I don't know. It's natural to want to avoid discussing things that make you feel uncomfortable...sometimes the real truth and your truth don't mesh. Not your truth, necessarily...people's, in general.

STAN: Hey you can't switch from Hand-model Aubrey to Aubrey the master of psychology without warning me.

AUBREY: I never get to use that psychoanalytic crap on people anymore. Sorry.

STAN: Fair enough. So what should I be scared of?

AUBREY: Oh-h...scared of taking the money and then not being able to kick the habit. Scared of backing down from your honorable position of "SPONGEBUSTER." *(Pause.)* Scared that maybe you might be wrong about SPONGE. How's my analysis?

STAN: How about scared of not making good date conversation?

AUBREY: Now you're just being considerate.

STAN: It's my one vice – oh...and the smoking, of course...and the wine. I thought we were changing the subject?

AUBREY: That's a good vice, being considerate, *(She pours STAN some more wine.)* and the wine. Alright...the subject is officially changed. *(Pause.)* Oh, I almost forgot. I wanted to play that song for you. *(AUBREY jumps up, runs to the stereo and sorts through record albums.)* Now if I can just find it.

STAN: *(Turning toward AUBREY.)* Record albums? Don't tell me you have a turntable?

AUBREY: Alright - I won't.

STAN: I haven't seen one of those in years.



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