

NEXT

Terrence McNally

Characters:

Marion Cheever
Sergeant Thech

*a man
, female*

SCENE: An examination room decorated in neutral colors; amonymously looking. Stage left there is an examination table, a scale and a cabinet filled with medical equipment. Stage right there is a desk and two chairs. The only bright color in the room is the American flag, center stage.

As the curtain rises, the room is empty.

SGT. THECH: [Offstage] Next

[MARION CHEEVER enters. He is a fat man in his late forties and he is nattily dressed. He carries a brief case]

MARION: Hello? I'm next!

[He looks around, puts down his brief case, takes out a cigarette case, lights one up, sits in front of the desk and waits somewhat impatiently]

SGT. THECH: [Entering] No smoking.

MARION: [Rising] Good morning. Good morning! [Briskly] Well! I think we can get this over with rather quickly.

SGT. THECH: No smoking.

MARION: [Snuffing out his cigarette] I'm sorry. Filthy habit. [He's put his hat on her desk. SGT. THECH hands it back to him.] Oh, my hat! I'm sorry!

[He looks for a place to put it. There is none, so he puts it on the floor]

SGT. THECH: [Already busy at her desk with papers and forms] Your card and bottle, please.

MARION: [Rummaging in his brief case] As I was starting to say, I think we can get this over with rather quickly. There's obviously been a mistake. [He laughs] I mean I—

SGT. THECH: The government does not make mistakes. If your country has called you it has its reasons. May I have your card and bottle, please?

MARION: [Still going through his brief case] I thought to myself, "My God! They can't mean me."

SGT. THECH: That's it.

MARION: Is that it? [Hands her the card. She begins to type] I thought to myself there must be someone else in my building with the same name because why else would I get a card to come down here?

SGT. THECH: Is your name Marion Cheever?

MARION: Yes, it is. But you know I just had a fortieth birthday and I thought to myself nobody sends a card like this to a man like me.

SGT. THECH: They're taking older men.

MARION: How old exactly?

SGT. THECH: It's inching up all the time. May I have your bottle, please?

MARION: [Looking in brief case] Inching up all the time, is it? The bottle, yes, here it is!

[He hands her his urine specimen]

SGT. THECH: Strip.

MARION: I didn't know that . . . the inching up all the time.

SGT. THECH: Remove all articles of clothing including your shoes and socks.

MARION: Who are you?

SGT. THECH: Your examining officer, Sergeant Thech. And by the authority vested in me by this government, I order you to strip.

MARION: A lady examining officer! Oh, that's funny! They must be pretty hard up these days.

SGT. THECH: And if you have not begun to strip in the next ten seconds I will complete these forms without further examination and report you to the board of examiners as fit for duty.

MARION: [As if coming out of a trance] Oh, my God, I'm sorry. I didn't hear one word you said. I don't know what I was thinking of. What did you say? That if I hadn't . . .

SGT. THECH: Begun to strip in the next ten seconds . . .

MARION: You will complete those forms . . .

SGT. TNECH: Without further examination . . .

MARION: And report me to the board of examiners? . . .

SGT. TNECH: As fit for duty.

MARION: [Biting his lip] Do you think that's fair?

SGT. TNECH: Would you prefer not to strip?

MARION: Indeed I would!

SGT. TNECH: Very well, then I will stamp these forms . . .

MARION: No, don't do that!

SGT. TNECH: Then you have ten seconds. [Timing him] One one-thousand, two one-thousand . . .

MARION: I'm going to strip! [While SGT. TNECH counts] I'm going to let you do it because not only am I over forty, I am not a healthy over forty and . . .

SGT. TNECH: Seven one-thousand.

MARION: [To make her stop] Where do I go?

SGT. TNECH: [Points to the center of the room] Right over there.

MARION: Right over there. Well! Everybody else is doing it, why not?

SGT. TNECH: [Filling out a questionnaire] Your name.

MARION: Do you have a little hanger?

SGT. TNECH: Use the stool. Your name.

MARION: Cheever. Marion Cheever.

SGT. TNECH: Do you spell Marion with an *o*?

MARION: I do, yes.

SGT. TNECH: Age.

MARION: Forty . . . eight! Forty-eight.

SGT. TNECH: Sex.

MARION: Did you put that down? I'm forty-eight years old.

SGT. TNECH: Sex.

MARION: Well, what do you think I am?

SGT. TNECH: Color of hair.

MARION: Brown. Black. Blackish brown.

SGT. TNECH: Eyes.

MARION: Two.

SGT. TNECH: Color of eyes . . .

MARION: I'm sorry! Blue. Blue-green. Aqua.

SGT. TNECH: Occupation.

MARION: [Still apologizing for the eyes] You rattled me.

SGT. TNECH: Occupation.

MARION: I don't know what's the matter with me.

SGT. TNECH: Your occupation, Mr. Cheever.

MARION: I'm a dancer.

SGT. TNECH: Toe or tap.

MARION: Oh, really! Toe or tap! I'm the assistant manager of the Fine Arts Theatre, 58th Street and Park Avenue. You've probably heard of us. Toe or tap! I was funning!

SGT. TNECH: How long.

MARION: Is what?

SGT. TNECH: How long have you been the assistant manager of the Fine Arts Theatre?

MARION: I'm sorry. How long have I been assistant manager of the Fine Arts Theatre? About twelve years.

[He has removed his shirt by now. His undershirt is torn and dirty. He's trying to find something to hide behind]

SGT. TNECH: Marital status.

MARION: [Eying the American flag] Single. Single now. Divorced I guess is what I'm supposed to say.

[He will use the flag to cover himself as he continues to strip. SGT. TNECH doesn't see all this, as he is behind her and she is busy trying in the questionnaire]

SGT. TNECH: How many times.

MARION: Twice.

SGT. TNECH: Number of dependents.

MARION: Three girls.

SGT. THECH: Sex.

MARION: I said three girls!

SGT. THECH: Ages.

MARION: Fourteen, twelve and two. Two with my first wife and one with my second.

SGT. THECH: Did you finish grammar school?

MARION: I certainly did.

SGT. THECH: High school.

MARION: You bet.

SGT. THECH: College.

MARION: No, I never got to college. I meant to but I never . . .

SGT. THECH: Do you belong to a church?

MARION: I just never got there. You know what I mean?

SGT. THECH: Do you belong to a church?

MARION: Oh, yes!

SGT. THECH: Which denomination.

MARION: The Sacred Heart of Jesus.

SGT. THECH: Which denomination.

MARION: Roman Catholic. What do you think with a name like that? It's a temple?

SGT. THECH: Do you attend church?

MARION: You bet.

SGT. THECH: Regularly or occasionally.

MARION: Yes, umh-umh, umh-umh!

SGT. THECH: Regularly or occasionally.

MARION: Yes, regularly on occasion.

SGT. THECH: Is your father living or deceased?

MARION: Living.

SGT. THECH: His age.

MARION: Seventy-two.

SGT. THECH: Is your mother living or deceased?

MARION: Deceased.

SGT. THECH: Age of death.

MARION: Thirty-one.

SGT. THECH: Cause of death.

MARION: Natural causes.

SGT. THECH: Be specific.

MARION: Heart.

SGT. THECH: Any brothers.

MARION: Yes.

SGT. THECH: How many?

MARION: One. He's alive.

SGT. THECH: Sisters.

MARION: Two. They're both alive. Both living.

SGT. THECH: Do you live alone?

MARION: At the present time I do. I get a lot of company, of course, but umh, officially, for the record, I live alone.

SGT. THECH: Do you own your own home?

MARION: No. It's a . . . you know . . . residential hotel for . . . umh . . . men. Single men.

[MARION has undressed now and is sitting on a low stool. The flag is draped across him]

SGT. THECH: [Turning to a new page] Measles.

MARION: What?

SGT. THECH: Have you ever had the measles?

MARION: Oh, measles! No, no I haven't.

SGT. THECH: Chicken pox.

MARION: No, I never had chicken pox.

SGT. THECH: Whooping cough.

MARION: I think it *might* have been. I was coughing an awful lot and I was very sick.

SGT. THECH: Yes or no.

MARION: No. It wasn't *exactly* whooping cough but . . .

SGT. TNECH: Rheumatic fever.

MARION: [Thinking hard] Unh! Did I have rheumatic fever? Is that what it was? No, no, I don't think so.

SGT. TNECH: Mumps.

MARION: [Jumping at this] Yes! Yes, yes, yes! Now just a minute on the mumps.

SGT. TNECH: Tuberculosis.

MARION: They weren't your ordinary mumps!

SGT. TNECH: Jaundice.

MARION: Will you please let me tell you about my mumps! I was in bed for months. I practically had last rites!

SGT. TNECH: Venereal disease.

MARION: I don't think you realize how serious my mumps were.

SGT. TNECH: Venereal disease.

MARION: Not yet! I just wish you'd let me tell you about my mumps.

SGT. TNECH: Allergies.

MARION: What about allergies?

SGT. TNECH: Are you allergic to anything?

MARION: Yes, yes, as a matter of fact I am.

SGT. TNECH: Go on, explain.

MARION: I know this sounds silly but I'm allergic to peach fuzz. I swell up like a balloon.

SGT. TNECH: Anything else?

MARION: No, but I can't even go near a fruit stand. All I have to do is look at a peach and . . .

SGT. TNECH: Any history of epilepsy.

MARION: Me and peach fuzz is no joke!

SGT. TNECH: Have you a family history of diabetes?

MARION: Diabetes? Well, why not. Somebody must have had it.

SGT. TNECH: Heart attacks.

MARION: I told you about that.

SGT. TNECH: Cancer.

MARION: Bite your tongue!

SGT. TNECH: Nervous or mental disorders.

MARION: I'm a nervous wreck!

SGT. TNECH: Do you smoke?

MARION: You saw me. Remember? When you came in here, the first thing you said . . .

SGT. TNECH: How much.

MARION: Three packs a day. Twenty cigarettes to a pack, that's sixty cigarettes. That's a lot of smoking.

SGT. TNECH: Do you drink?

MARION: That, too, oh yes!

SGT. TNECH: How much?

MARION: Whenever I smoke. Smoking makes me want to drink, and drinking makes me want to smoke. It's a vicious circle.

SGT. TNECH: Do you take any drugs?

MARION: Anything! Give it to me and I'll take it.

SGT. TNECH: Name the drugs.

MARION: Aspirins and Bromo Seltzers for the hangovers, Nikoban for the smoking. And Miltown! I take lots of Miltown.

SGT. TNECH: For what purpose?

MARION: Because I am a nervous wreck. For what purpose!

SGT. TNECH: All right, Mr. Cheever, on the scale now, please. [She turns and sees him draped in the American flag] Drop that flag.

MARION: I was just admiring it! I have one just like it at home. [SGT. TNECH returns the flag to its proper place. MARION all the while walks along with it, unwilling to give up its protection.] The same colors, the same shape. It's amazing how similar they are! [SGT. TNECH is pulling the flag away from him.] Then could I have a little robe or something? I mean I don't know if it's of any interest to you, but I'm right on the verge of another bad cold. [SGT. TNECH slides the flag, then makes ready to examine MARION.] I'm going to write somebody a letter about this.

SGT. TNECH: On the scale.

MARION: [Wrapping the sheet around himself] I'll refuse to go, you know. You're just wasting your time, I hope you understand.

SGT. TNECH: On the scale, Mr. Cheever.

[MARION gets on the scale and plays with the weights]

MARION: You know something? It's wrong. At least ten pounds off. Easily that.

SGT. TNECH: Don't tamper. [She is washing her hands]

MARION: What are you going to do? Operate? [SGT. TNECH comes to the scale and weighs him. Next, she makes ready to measure him. When she raises up the measuring pole, MARION starts and backs off the scale] Would you warn someone before you do that? You know you could put someone's eye out with that thing.

SGT. TNECH: Step back onto the scale.

[MARION gets back onto scale while SGT. TNECH measures him. When she swings the pole back into place MARION jumps off again]

MARION: You missed me by that much!

SGT. TNECH: [At the examining table] Sit at the edge of the table.

MARION: [Under his breath] I hate this whole day! It's goddamn humiliating, that's what it is. Calling a man in here and . . .

SGT. TNECH: On the table, Mr. Cheever.

MARION: [Trying a new approach] I'm sorry I'm not cooperating. You have your job to do, and I'll try to help in every way I can.

SGT. TNECH: [At his back, listening with a stethoscope] Breathe. In, out. In, out.

MARION: In, out. See when you ask me how simple it is? [SGT. TNECH's stethoscope is at his chest now. MARION is very ticklish.] Don't do that!

[He laughs while SGT. TNECH listens to his heart]

SGT. TNECH: Unh-hunh!

MARION: What did that mean? "Unh-hunh?" You heard something you didn't like?

SGT. TNECH: Open.

[She has a tongue depressor down his throat]

MARION: Just ask me and I'll open! You don't have to lunge at me like that! [SGT. TNECH checks his eyes with a light] It's on, it's on! [SGT. TNECH looks into his ears with a light] I hate this. I hate it a lot. [While SGT. TNECH checks his ears] When you were examining my heart, did you hear something I should know about? It wasn't very subtle, going "unh-hunh" like that. It's my ticker, so if there's anything wrong I'd like to know about it. [SGT. TNECH has crossed the room. She turns to face him and speaks very softly. We just see her lips moving] What? What did you say?

SGT. TNECH: Your hearing is perfect.

MARION: Now just a minute. I will not be railroaded.

SGT. TNECH: [Holding up an eye chart] Read this chart.

MARION: All of it?

SGT. TNECH: The third line.

MARION: [Running all the letters together] rozdy!

SGT. TNECH: The second line.

MARION: The second line's a little fuzzy.

SGT. TNECH: Try the top line, Mr. Cheever.

MARION: [With much squinting] The top line's a real problem. Let's see . . . it's a . . . no . . . Z!

SGT. TNECH: Excellent.

MARION: Now just a minute. It's an E. I said it was a Z. Now I failed that test. You give me credit for failing.

SGT. TNECH: Failure is relative in any case, private.

MARION: Private?

SGT. TNECH: [Back at the examining table] Lie down.

MARION: You called me private.

SGT. TNECH: Lie down.

MARION: You've got me inducted already when I haven't even been given a full opportunity to fail yet.

SGT. TNECH: This is your opportunity, Mr. Cheever, don't pass it up. [Timing him until he obeys] One one-thousand, two one-thousand . . .

MARION: [Getting onto the table] All right, I'm lying! Just stop all that counting. [SGT. TNECH begins to take his blood pressure] I've heard of shapghaining but this little episode is really a lulu. It's white slavery if

you think I'm passing this test. Out and out kidnapping. I simply won't go. You can't just take a man out of civilian life and plop him into the army. So there's a war on, I didn't start it. [*Lifts his head up a moment*] I think you'll find I have a labile blood pressure. It can rocket at a moment's notice.

SGT. TNECH: Keep your head down.

MARION: What do they want with me anyway? I'm on the verge of my big break. Do you know what that means to a civilian? I've stood in the back of that lousy theatre for eleven years, and they are going to promote me next winter. I am going to be the manager at quite a substantial raise in salary, thank you. Unh-humh, sergeant, I'm not going into any army, war or peace!

SGT. TNECH: [*While she makes ready to take a blood sample*] I want you to close your eyes and count to ten slowly and then touch the tip of your nose with your left index finger.

MARION: Oh, all right, that sounds easy. I don't mind this part at all. One, two, three, four . . . this is very restful . . . five, six—[*Suddenly sitting up*] Wait! Wait, wait, wait, wait! I saw it. [SGT. TNECH is holding a syringe] I hate needles. I'm not afraid of them, I just don't like them.

SGT. TNECH: Shall I complete the forms, Mr. Cheever, or will you let me continue with the examination?

MARION: I know you must do your job, but please be very careful. I have very small veins. Don't be nervous.

SGT. TNECH: Lie down.

MARION: You have all the time in the world. And no air bubbles! [SGT. TNECH is drawing blood] Oh, my God! I'm going to have a heart attack right on this table. [SGT. TNECH finishes, empties his blood from the syringe into a test tube] I'm bleeding. Look at this. I'm bleeding. [SGT. TNECH's hands go under the sheet as she checks his spleen, liver, kidneys, etc.] Just tell me what it is you're looking for and I'll tell you where it's at!

SGT. TNECH: In.

MARION: In!

SGT. TNECH: Out.

MARION: It's out!

SGT. TNECH: In.

MARION: In! In! Oh, my God, oh!

SGT. TNECH: On your feet.

MARION: On my feet! Bleed someone to death and tell him on his feet. Sure, why not? Here I go, sergeant, on my feet!

SGT. TNECH: Drop your shorts.

MARION: What?

SGT. TNECH: You heard me. [*Timing him*] One one-thousand, two one-thousand . . .

MARION: Drop my shorts? Oh no, sergeant, that I flatly refuse.

SGT. TNECH: You are a candidate for national service. I am your examining officer and I am ordering you to drop your shorts.

MARION: [*While SGT. TNECH counts*] Now wait just a minute. Let me explain something. I'm not wearing shorts. I have this . . . well, *problem* . . . and I have to wear this . . . well sort of a *girdle* and . . .

SGT. TNECH: Drop your girdle.

MARION: [*As SGT. TNECH is nearing the count of ten*] Yes! Yes, of course, I'll drop it. I just thought I should explain about my back problem and the abdominal muscles. I thought you'd want to know about them. [*MARION has worked off the girdle. It drops to the floor. SGT. TNECH is approaching him*] It's off! I swear to God it's off!

[SGT. TNECH has her hand under sheet and at his groin]

SGT. TNECH: Turn your head and cough.

MARION: Oh, really!

SGT. TNECH: Cough.

MARION: Cough!

SGT. TNECH: Again.

MARION: Cough!

SGT. TNECH: Again.

MARION: How many hernias are you checking for? Two's about average, you know. Cough!

SGT. TNECH: Well done, Cheever. Now sit.

MARION: [*Sits on the edge of the examining table while SGT. TNECH checks him for reflexes*] You're terrific you are! You and Peggen ought

to team up. She was my first wife. Talk about your lady wrestlers and roller-derby queens! But next to you, she was Snow White. But I foxed her. Just when she thought she had me where she wanted me, I sprang the divorce on her. "On what grounds, may I ask?" she growled, fat hands on her fat hips . . . Dutch Cleanser I used to call her. "On exactly what grounds?" [SGT. THENEN is busy completing some forms] "Mental cruelty," I smiled, and boy did that answer ever throw her for a loop! She begged me to change it to adultery but I held firm. You should have seen the look on that judge's face in Juarez when I dropped that little bombshell. Mental cruelty!

SGT. THENEN: All right, Mr. Cheever, you can get dressed now. Your physical examination is over.

MARION: [*Caught in midair*] Oh. It's over. Well, that wasn't so bad. How did I do? Am I 4-F?

SGT. THENEN: You have nothing to worry about. I found no evidence of physical abnormality.

MARION: [*Agghast*] You found no evidence of physical abnormality? Now wait a minute. What about my labile blood pressure? Oh no, sergeant, I'm not done in here. Not yet. I want more testing. You're not convinced. I'm not leaving until I get a better verdict. What about my sinus condition? Did you know I had one? Of course not, you didn't look up my nose. What kind of examination is it without looking up a person's nose? A lot of things could be wrong up there. I can't breathe seven months out of the year. Would you write that down, please? And what about my eye test? I know I failed my eye test!

SGT. THENEN: [*Busy at her desk tabulating the examination results*] If you won't cooperate, I have to judge you on the basis of objective evidence. You do not squint, you do not wear glasses and you saw my lips moving at a distance of over fifteen feet away. We have ways of evaluating the condition of a subject whether the subject cooperates or not. You'd have to be a lot smarter and better rehearsed than you are to fool an examining officer.

MARION: [*Triumphant*] All right, then what about my feet? You didn't even make me take my socks off. That's all right, I'll do it myself. Here. Now look at this. They're flat. I'm not ashamed. See how flat they are? Do you see any arch? Of course you don't. You call that normal? And see, see all those corns? My feet are covered with corns. And I'll tell you something, something highly abnormal: I was born with all these

corns. That's right, sergeant, I was born with corns. They are hereditary. Ask yourself, is that normal? [SGT. THENEN continues working at desk] And look! [*He shakes his arms in front of her*] No muscle tone. All flab! See how the skin just hangs there? And it's not a question of diet. I've dieted all my life. I simply don't burn fat! [*Now showing her his teeth*] And teeth! My teeth. They're full of decay. If I have a candy bar I have to have an inlay. I swear to God I do. My gums are very spongy. I mean I'll probably have a coronary in five years . . . if I live very carefully. [*Desperately trying to attract SGT. THENEN'S attention*] And sergeant, here, watch this, look now, sergeant, over here, see this? . . . [*He removes his toupee*] You didn't know that, did you? It fools lots of people but there it is. I lost all of my hair in a period of thirteen months after my last divorce. It just went! Right out by the roots it came. Is that normal, to lose so much hair in thirteen months? And that's not hereditary, sergeant. My father still has every hair in his head. You know what my kind of hair loss is? Nerves, sergeant, plain old-fashioned nerves! It's highly irregular he should have all his and I don't have mine! And what about my mind? You haven't asked me one single question about my mind. For all you know I could be a raving lunatic. I could be a . . .

SGT. THENEN: [*She's into the psychological and intelligence tests*] I have twelve apples.

MARION: [*Thrown*] You have what?

SGT. THENEN: You have twelve apples. Together we have . . .

MARION: [*Involuntarily*] Twenty-four apples.

[*He realizes what he's done and groans*]

SGT. THENEN: I have a pie which I wish to divide as follows: one-fourth of the pie to Fred, one-fourth of the pie to Phyllis, one-fourth of the pie to you. How much pie will I have left for myself?

MARION: [*Thinks a moment*] Who are Fred and Phyllis? I mean maybe Phyllis didn't finish all her piece and then there'd be more for you. A quarter and a half!

SGT. THENEN: You are on a train going sixty miles an hour. Your destination is a hundred and twenty away. How many hours will it take you to get to your destination?

MARION: I would say three days. But then I don't take trains. I really wouldn't swear to that answer.

SGT. THENCH: Who was the first President of the United States?

MARION: George Washington. Was that right?

SGT. THENCH: Who were the allies of the United States in the Second World War?

MARION: The good people.

SGT. THENCH: Who were its enemies?

MARION: No one. We had no enemies.

SGT. THENCH: Who are the allies of the United States now?

MARION: Just about everyone.

SGT. THENCH: Who are its enemies?

MARION: Who can tell?

SGT. THENCH: Name three of the twelve Apostles.

MARION: Joseph . . . and his brother . . . and his sister!

SGT. THENCH: In what year did Columbus discover America?

MARION: 1776. No, wait, it was 1775!

SGT. THENCH: What is the great pox and how does it differ from the small pox?

MARION: The great pox is greater than the small pox. However, both are poxes.

SGT. THENCH: If you found an unopened letter lying on the sidewalk, fully addressed and stamped, what would you do?

MARION: I would probably step on it. I mean who wouldn't? You're walking along, you'd be surprised what you step on!

SGT. THENCH: If you were seated in a theatre and you saw a fire break out nearby before the rest of the audience noticed it—what would you do?

MARION: That one's right up my alley. As a theatre manager I know about this. The main thing is I wouldn't want to start a panic. So I'd very quietly leave and go home.

SGT. THENCH: If you found a wallet lying on the sidewalk—what would you do?

MARION: I'd be delighted. I never find anything.

SGT. THENCH: What is the similarity between a chair and a couch?

MARION: A chair and a couch? You can sit on them.

SGT. THENCH: A rabbit and a squirrel.

MARION: [*Reasonably*] You could sit on a rabbit and a squirrel. The rabbit might even like it.

SGT. THENCH: What is the difference between a giant and a dwarf?

MARION: The difference? I see the similarity all right but the difference is tricky.

SGT. THENCH: A profit and a loss.

MARION: A profit is when the loss is greater than the sum. It's exactly like giants and dwarfs.

SGT. THENCH: A man and a gorilla.

MARION: Hair. Lots of hair.

SGT. THENCH: Complete the following sentences. People obey the law because . . .

MARION: Because! Because they have to obey it.

SGT. THENCH: I am happiest when my family is . . .

MARION: Yes! I think we all are. Well, aren't you?

SGT. THENCH: What is the meaning of the following proverbs. He who laughs last laughs best.

MARION: Yes . . . well . . . that means that *he* who laughs *last* laughs *best*.

SGT. THENCH: A rolling stone gathers no moss.

MARION: That's one of my favorites. It means that a rolling stone . . . gathers no moss!

SGT. THENCH: I am going to say a word.

MARION: Did I get that one right?

SGT. THENCH: After I say it I want you to say the first word that comes to your mind without thinking.

MARION: Are you sure?

SGT. THENCH: You have one second. Tree. Tree!

MARION: I'm sorry. I was thinking. I couldn't help myself.

SGT. THENCH: House.

MARION: House. The first word that comes to mind when you say house is house.

SGT. THENCH: Father.

MARION: [*Drawing a blank*] Father . . . father . . .

SGT. THECH: Grass.

MARION: Green. There, I got one!

SGT. THECH: Shower.

MARION: Tree. When it showers you stand under a tree with your father.

SGT. THECH: Snake.

MARION: Juicy. Juicy snake.

SGT. THECH: House.

MARION: Whores. No, no! That's not right.

SGT. THECH: Mother.

MARION: None. I mean . . .

SGT. THECH: Green.

MARION: Colors. Green colors.

SGT. THECH: Floor.

MARION: Me. Really! I'm on my feet all day.

SGT. THECH: Purse.

MARION: Snatch. Purse snatcher.

SGT. THECH: Have you ever suffered from night terrors?

MARION: Terribly.

SGT. THECH: Insomnia.

MARION: Of course insomnia! Because of the night terrors.

SGT. THECH: Sleepwalking.

MARION: Absolutely! In the morning my ankles are so swollen!

SGT. THECH: Anxiety states.

MARION: This is so good in here this part! Keep on.

SGT. THECH: Hallucinations.

MARION: Of grandeur. Of course terrible grandeur!

SGT. THECH: Delusions.

MARION: They're not the same thing? Listen, can't we go back to the anxiety states?

SGT. THECH: Compulsive eating.

MARION: No, I've never been bothered by that. About my anxiety states . . . !

SGT. THECH: Have you ever indulged in homosexual activities.

MARION: They have been very good to me.

SGT. THECH: When did you stop?

MARION: Who said anything about stopping? They're a small but vital minority. The Fine Arts Theatre welcomes them.

SGT. THECH: Did you have a normal relationship with your mother?

MARION: I'm sure she thought so!

SGT. THECH: Did you have a normal relationship with your father?

MARION: After we stopped dating the same girl, everything was fine.

SGT. THECH: Do you have any history of bedwetting?

MARION: Even my top sheet is rubber.

SGT. THECH: Have you ever attempted suicide?

MARION: No, but I've thought of murder.

SGT. THECH: Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist party?

MARION: I wouldn't be surprised. I mean you join anything nowadays and next thing you know it's pinko.

SGT. THECH: What is your responsibility to your community?

MARION: Uh . . . to shovel the snow.

SGT. THECH: What is your responsibility to your family?

MARION: To be there.

SGT. THECH: What is your responsibility to your country?

MARION: To be there.

SGT. THECH: [Abruptly] All right, Mr. Cheever, you may go now. The examination is over.

MARION: The whole thing?

SGT. THECH: That's right.

MARION: Well? How did I do? Am I 4-F yet?

SGT. THECH: I don't think you have anything to worry about. I doubt if they would find someone like you acceptable.

MARION: [Sings, but hiding it] Oh well, good. Good. Based on what? The last two answers?

SGT. THECH: The entire psychological examination.

MARION: I see. Well, then I am 4-F?

SGT. TNECH: You'll get your classification in the mail.

MARION: I can hardly wait.

SGT. TNECH: You may go now. I'm through with you.

[SGT. TNECH turns her back to him and begins typing up his test results]

MARION: [Beginning to dress] Oh, don't worry, I'm going. Nothing in the world could make me stay here. Granted, I've enjoyed all this. I mean you've been just wonderful. It must be difficult examining someone while they're still alive and breathing! And your attention has been so flattering. I'm not used to so much fuss. You're great, just great. The way you concentrated on me. I never distracted you from me once. I'm sure you have a big future ahead of you. [SGT. TNECH types] Now you're through with me and would like me to go. You have taken my time, you have taken my blood, you have taken my urine, you have taken my secrets and now you would like me out of here so you can digest them in private. Isn't that right? Well, I'm not going. If I go I take all of me with me. I'd like my blood and my urine back! I mean I'm 4-F, you can't have any use for them. [SGT. TNECH types] You know I am not simply the sum total of my parts. I am someone. I am a citizen. I have my rights! I pay my taxes, I serve my jury duty, I buy American. I don't make trouble. I support the administration. I keep my mouth shut. I believe everything I read. I do all that and that gives me rights! I want my blood and my urine back and I . . . I demand an apology! I have given everything to everyone and now I want something back! Don't tell me about responsibilities. I visit my kids, I bring them presents; I visit my father, I bring him presents; I visit my sisters, their kids get presents, too. I pay my rent; I pay my alimony; I meet my car payments—a hot red Mustang I can hardly fit behind the wheel of, but I'm meeting those payments! I do everything I'm supposed to do . . . I'm never late for work . . . and now I demand a reward! I want a reward. You owe me something. My country owes me something. Somebody owes me something. Because I have nothing! My big break? A lousy twenty-bucks raise. Big deal, crap! My children don't give a damn. What do I get on Father's Day? A lot of crap from Woolworth's their mothers picked out. My father doesn't recognize my voice on the telephone. My mother is dead. I've been married twice. You think

it's fun, a man my age going home alone at night? Who looks at men like me after a while? I know what I look like! I'm no fool! [SGT. TNECH continues typing] You know what the ushers at the theatre call me behind my back? Falso. Yeah! that hurts. But when I become the manager I am going to fire those ushers and hire new ushers and they will call me Falso behind my back. Because that is exactly what I am. A falso. I am nothing but what I eat. But I feed myself. Nobody feeds me. And I eat everything I want. When I want candy, I eat candy. When I want a pizza at two a.m., I call up and order pizza. I'm going to get older and fatter and someday I'm going to die from overweight and smoking. But when I go, I'm paying for my own funeral and I'm going to give myself the best funeral that money can buy. Because dead or alive I pay my own way! Those niggers on relief, can they say that? They cannot! And they get to do everything. They get to riot, they get to loot, they get to yell, they get to hate, they get to kill! They get in the papers, they get on television and everybody pays attention. Everybody cares. And what do I get? There's nothing on television about me. My name's not in the Sunday papers. And I'm the one who does everything he should. I'm the one who never makes trouble. I'm the good citizen. But everybody else gets to do everything! You see those teen-age girls with their skirts up to here strutting around with their hair all piled up and diving a man crazy. And those men all like fags with that hair and those pants. They do anything they want. They have anything they want. And I get shit! [He bangs on SGT. TNECH's desk with his fist. SGT. TNECH goes on typing] How dare you call me in here, examine me, ignore me, dismiss me and tell me I'm not acceptable. You are not acceptable! I want my orange juice. You took my blood and I want my orange juice. I know my rights. I want my radiator fixed. I want those people next door to turn their radio down when I bang on the wall. I want quiet. I want my sleep. I want them to stop all those parties upstairs. I want people to listen to me when I call up and make complaints. Not just sit there and type. Stop it. And listen to me! [SGT. TNECH has finished typing up her report] I said stop! [He puts his hands over the typewriter keys] Good. Very good! [Now MARION will describe everything SGT. TNECH does while she is doing it—as if he were giving her the orders to do it] That's right. Fold the paper. Open the drawer. Put it away. Close it. Now you're doing exactly as you're told. Get up. Fold the sheet. Check the instruments. Make sure you've got everything. One final check now. Excellent. Now out you go. Close the door. There! [SGT. TNECH has left the room, closing the door behind

her] All right, on the scale now, Cheever! Do I have to? Why not? There's nothing to be afraid of. [MARION gets on the scale] You're the perfect weight, just right for your height. You're an excellent physical specimen, Cheever. Am I? You're in very good shape. You're very acceptable. [MARION steps off the scale] On the table now. [MARION crosses to the examination table] Lie down. [MARION obeys] Give me your arm. Will it hurt? Not you, Cheever. You're very brave. [MARION moves his lips silently: "Can you hear what I'm saying?"] Yes, you said, "Can you hear what I'm saying?" Your hearing is perfect. I know. Now read the chart. The last line, the smallest letters, "A-W-G-H-L." Excellent, you have perfect vision. Rest now. Thank you. [MARION lets his head drop on the table] Tell me about it. I was thirteen years old. Yes, go on. I came home and she wasn't there. Yes. It was so sudden. None of us knew. We all thought she would always be there and then when she wasn't . . . [His voice trails off in tears] You must have been very sad. I was, I was. I felt so cold. Didn't you tell anyone how you felt? Nobody asked me. I'm asking you. I never got to say good-bye. I understand. [Short pause] On your feet now. I don't think I can. Yes, Cheever, you can do it. You're very strong now and very brave and very acceptable. [MARION gets up off the table] Up now, shoulders back, walk tall. That's it. You're doing fine. [MARION goes to SGT. THORN'S desk, puts on her white examination coat which she has left over her chair, sits, types a moment, then looks up] You have ten seconds to order you to remove all articles of clothing. One one-thousand, two one-thousand, three one-thousand, four one-thousand. Sorry. You are not acceptable. [His head spins around as he looks straight ahead into the audience] NEXT!

[The lights snap off]

CURTAIN