

HERBY ALICE COUNTS DOWN TO YESTERDAY

A one-act comedy by
Nicole B. Adkins

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

This play can be performed with as few as 10 actors (3 females, 3 males, 4 either), or there can be as many students and aliens as the producing company wishes.

The lines that belong to Aliens 1 and 2 could be distributed between a larger cast of Aliens.

All adult roles may be performed by youth.

STUDENTS:

ROSE PLUM, girl.

HERBY ALICE, boy.

CLARISSA, girl.

STUDENT 1, gender flexible.*

STUDENT 2, gender flexible.*

COOL STUDENT, boy.

DORKY STUDENT, boy.*

CAMERA GUY, gender flexible.

ADULTS AND ALIENS:

MRS. PRATTLE, female teacher.

DR. FARAWAY, gender flexible, principal/gym coach.

DR. TOMORROW, gender flexible, mad scientist.*

ALIEN 1, gender flexible.*

ALIEN 2, gender flexible.*

*Possible Doublings:

STUDENT 1/ALIEN 1

STUDENT 2/ALIEN 2

DORKY STUDENT/DR. TOMORROW

PRODUCTION NOTES

There should be no blackouts between scenes. Scene headings are only provided for the purpose of making larger beats clear. Action should flow smoothly and continually, building throughout the play all the way from "ten" to launch.

The spacecraft revealed at the end, as well as the pieces of it we see beforehand, can be as suggested or literal as the producing company wishes. Use your imagination—have fun with this!

SCENE 1

(DR. FARAWAY, School Principal and Gym Coach, enters decidedly. He steps into the empty frame of a full-length mirror. He addresses the audience.)

DR. FARAWAY: We are what we are, and we say what we say, speeding faster than light into yester-today...

(Dr. Faraway exits, as HERBY ALICE, a student and rocket scientist, enters. Herby wears a necktie as usual. He is completely focused on fixing a component of a high-tech contraption he is building. He stands in the mirror frame. CLARISSA, lead student reporter, enters. She is brushing her perfect hair and powdering her perfect nose. She is followed by two more students: CAMERA GUY, and media hopeful, ROSE PLUM. Rose takes notes.)

CLARISSA: *(To Rose:)* How do I look?

ROSE: Um...I would bet the thermal properties of your blazer are exceptionally beneficial in algid weather.

CLARISSA: *(Sighs:)* You *are* a fixer-upper, aren't you?

ROSE: I meant—

(Clarissa takes the microphone from Rose.)

CLARISSA: Rose, if it is really your plan to permanently join the ranks of our elite on-camera team, you are going to have to work on your delivery. Remember what happened the *first time*. Observe the following. Take notes. *(To Camera Guy:)* Let's roll!

(Clarissa stands next to Herby. Camera Guy trains his Camera on them.)

Good morning, studs and 'ents! Clarissa Stone here, your lead Times Daily Tribune Broadcast Blog and Live Journal

Television and Interweb Reporter. I'm here with pre-teen rocket scientist—read: Anti-social— *(Beat.)* Herby Alice!

(She holds the microphone out to Herby. Consumed by his work, he does not respond in any way.)

(Hisses:) Herby! *(Beat.)* HERBY! *(Beat.)* Well, folks, what do you expect from a prodigy? *(Beat.)* No really. We want to know! Word on the street: wonderboy's discoveries may put our town on the map! Do you think he will accomplish what he claims? Or will we all witness his humiliating, fiery, and spectacular failure? Be sure to text us your vote, and post *your* comments at

www.TimesDailyTribuneBroadcastBlogandLiveJournal.com.

(Beat.) Stay tuned, folks! And remember, you heard it here first. *(Beat.)* Count down to date of launch. TEN!

(Note: Each time a countdown number is given, it should be followed by an identifying sound—perhaps that of a rocket launching, or even a scale on the xylophone. This sound should stay the same for each number until noted at the end.)

(Camera Guy stops rolling.)

That's a wrap. *(Beat.)* Ughh! Herby, you are hopeless! This was supposed to be an interview! *(Beat.)* I'll just have to cobble something together. For now.

(Clarissa exits, Camera Guy on her heels. Rose finishes her notes, preparing to exit after Clarissa.)

HERBY: Sorry, did somebody say something?

ROSE: Who me? No! I—uh...have to go—

HERBY: Rose! I've been wanting to talk to you! I believe I'll be ready by the projected date, but I'm stuck on one of the final formulas. I could really use your mathematical acumen. Can you come by after school?

ROSE: I can't, Herby. I'm not—I uh, promised Clarissa I'd help edit blogs after school-

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HERBY: What about tomorrow?

ROSE: I'm not really working on that sort of thing very much lately, Herby.

HERBY: *(Beat.)* Oh. Too bad. *(Beat.)* If you change your mind-

ROSE: Yeah. Sure. See you around.

(Rose exits. Herby resumes his work. STUDENTS 1 AND 2 enter, speaking to the audience.)

STUDENT 1: *(Giggles:)* Dear Clarissa and Times Daily, all I have to say is: who wears a tie to school?

STUDENT 2: Dear Times. This whole thing is totally epic. I mean, talk about entertainment! What a freak. There's no way this is going to work. I mean, come on! Who does he think he is, NASA? *(Beat.)* I vote no. He can't do it.

(Students 1 and 2 exit. Herby carefully places the object upon which he has been working on the stage. It is the base of the machine he is building. He exits.)

SCENE 2

(Clarissa enters, followed by Rose and Camera Guy. Camera Guy points the camera at Clarissa.)

CLARISSA: NINE!

(Sound effect. Students set up desks to create a classroom. The mirror should remain on stage, becoming the blackboard. Herby Alice sits at the front of the classroom and we see there is a sign on his back, which reads "Kick me." Other students are throwing wads of paper at Herby and laughing. He is hard at work building a second component of the machine. Rose sits at a desk behind him. MRS. PRATTLE, the teacher, dressed in something ridiculous, enters. Clarissa takes her seat, motioning for the Camera Guy to train his camera on Herby.)

(In microphone:) Shhh! Let's observe our specimen in his natural habitat.

MRS. PRATTLE: Ding-dong! Can anyone tell me the capital of Bolivia? *(Beat.)* Or perhaps the market value of hedgehogs? *(Beat.)* Why are we here again?

(Mrs. Prattle consults her pocket watch.)

Gobbledy-gobbledy-gook. In 1978. And you weren't even born yet! But I had a Camaro. Or was it a canary? Either way it was yellow. Blah, blah, blah.

(Rose tries to get Herby's attention. Clarissa sees her.)

CLARISSA: *(To Rose:)* What are you doing?

ROSE: He's been wearing that neon orange sign all day...I have to say something.

CLARISSA: Have you never watched Animal Planet? Reporters do not interfere. NOT EVEN when the gazelle is being eaten by lions.

MRS. PRATTLE: Let me illustrate the principle for you on the chalkboard.

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(Mrs. Prattle writes on the "chalkboard." She turns back to the class.)

(Triumphant:) Do you see?

(Dr. Faraway, the principal, also wearing something ridiculous, enters. He stands in the mirror frame, wearing a large grin. Turning back to the chalkboard, Mrs. Prattle is shocked to see him.)

Dr. Faraway! I didn't mean that kind of principal.

DR. FARAWAY: I am what I am and I say what I say! Has anyone here ever traveled through space?

(Everyone giggles. Mrs. Prattle distributes withering looks.)

MRS. PRATTLE: As I was saying...

(Dr. Faraway exits.)

Herby Alice, why don't *you* show them what I mean.

(Herby Alice walks to the front of the classroom, stepping through the mirror. He attaches a second piece of the component to the growing machine. The class giggles and whispers behind his back. Herby then turns in the mirror frame to face the class. The students quiet. Something in his manner stills them.)

CLARISSA: *(Hisses to Camera Guy:)* Get this on tape!

HERBY: The theory of relativity tells us that the faster you travel through space, the slower you travel through time. If one of us were to run around this classroom-

(Mrs. Prattle runs around classroom illustrating his point. Herby picks up after Mrs. Prattle is sitting.)

And if we were able to do so faster than the speed of light, first, you wouldn't even see the runner, but second, this individual would be an entire classroom revolution younger than they were before.

MRS. PRATTLE: Lovely! Any questions?

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(All hands raise.)

Good! Class dismissed.

(Bell rings. Mrs. Prattle exits running. Kids begin to exit the classroom, confused. Herby is last. Rose waits.)

ROSE: Herby!

HERBY: Yes?

ROSE: You have a —

HERBY: Yeah, I know. I put it there. *(Beat.)* Quietest day I've had in weeks! But thanks.

(Camera Guy tapes Clarissa.)

CLARISSA: EIGHT!

(Sound effect. Camera Guy stops rolling. Clarissa notices Rose.)

Rose!

ROSE: *(To Herby:)* Gotta go —

HERBY: Bye, Rose.

(He exits.)

CLARISSA: What was THAT?

ROSE: Oh—nothing. I just had a question about...an assignment. That's all.

CLARISSA: You two used to be friends, didn't you?

ROSE: No! Well, when we were little kids.

CLARISSA: Weren't you friends, like, last year?

ROSE: Um...uh...

CLARISSA: This is perfect. JUST the angle I need.

ROSE: What? What do you mean?

CLARISSA: He respects you. Likes you, even. I can tell these things. I'm a scholar of human behavior.

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ROSE: I don't understand.

CLARISSA: YOU can get me the interview I need.

ROSE: I don't think so, Clarissa –

CLARISSA: Alright. Fine. *(This is painful:)* I'll let you give the interview.

ROSE: You mean – you'll let me try again? On camera?

CLARISSA: But not live. And if you mess up, I'll edit you out. *(Beat.)* This is your chance.

ROSE: *(Takes a deep breath:)* Ok.

CLARISSA: You'll do it?

ROSE: Yes.

CLARISSA: Let's shake on it.

(They shake hands.)

But Rose, one thing?

ROSE: Yes?

CLARISSA: *(To Camera Guy:)* Get this on camera, please. I want a witness.

(Camera Guy rolls.)

I'm not going to have the Times Daily look like a bunch of yahoos.

ROSE: Um...okay?

CLARISSA: The media makes the story, Rose. Just like the historian writes the history. *(Beat.)* And let me be frank with you: the viewers make the ratings.

ROSE: Ratings? I thought only students and teachers watched our program.

CLARISSA: Today the school, tomorrow the world. *(Beat.)* Besides, we have to please The higher-ups. I promised. And I don't break my promises. *(Beat.)* Do you?

ROSE: No!

CLARISSA: Good. Now about the interview. Have you been reading the blogs?

ROSE: Of course! I've been editing them.

CLARISSA: Right. And you've been counting the votes?

ROSE: Yes.

CLARISSA: So you know that our viewers have certain expectations.

ROSE: They expect Herby to fail. Boy, are they going to be surprised when –

CLARISSA: Rose. Disappointing our viewers equals bad. Happy viewers equals good. Laughing at others makes the viewers feel better about themselves, and gives them a united purpose...thus bringing the community together and equaling happy viewers. Happy viewers equal happy executives. Happy executives mean happy Clarissa. Which means Rose gets to be somebody. And isn't that what you want? What you've been working toward?

ROSE: Yes...

CLARISSA: Then what am I asking from you?

ROSE: *(Beat.)* You want me to make Herby look like an idiot.

CLARISSA: Those are not my words, sweetie. The Times Daily would never say such a thing. It is our goal to deliver the news in the most impartial manner possible. *(To Camera Guy:)* Cut! *(She hands Rose the microphone.)* Go get me that interview. And it better be splashy.

ROSE: But – what if he doesn't fail? What if he succeeds?

CLARISSA: *(Beat.)* Well, we just need to make sure that doesn't happen, don't we? I'll leave that to you.

(Clarissa exits. Rose walks to mirror. She considers her outfit, her image. Unbeknownst to her, Camera Guy is still present. He starts rolling.)

ROSE: So tired of being invisible...*(To self:)* This could be your only chance, Rose. *(Notices Camera Guy:)* Hey! Stop the tape! Please - you have to edit that out.

(Camera Guy runs off. Rose runs after him. UNPOPULAR STUDENT and POPULAR STUDENT enter.)

UNPOPULAR STUDENT: Dear Clarissa, you are...prettier than a proton viewed through the magnetic lens of a transmission electron microscope...*(Beat.)* What? Oh! Yes. Sorry. My vote. I for one, have faith in Herby. I vote yes.

POPULAR STUDENT: Would you still vote yes from inside a garbage can?

(Unpopular Student exits running. Popular Student chases after him.)

SCENE 3

(A gym whistle blows loudly. Dr. Faraway enters, blowing the whistle. Students follow at a jog. Popular Student has Unpopular Student in a headlock. Clarissa gestures for Rose to keep her sights on Herby. Herby, blind to the world, is working on another component of his machine. Rose holds the microphone. Camera Guy follows Rose. Mrs. Prattle enters running.)

MRS. PRATTLE: Getting younger and younger! I LOVE gym class!

(Mrs. Prattle exits running. The students line up and stretch. They are preparing for gym class to begin.)

CLARISSA: *(Whispers:)* Rose! Go for it.

(Clarissa moves off to stretch.)

ROSE: Herby!

HERBY: *(Without looking up from his work:)* Yes, Rose?

ROSE: *(Holds out the microphone:)* Um...do you think I could grab a few words—

HERBY: I don't do interviews, Rose.

ROSE: But—

HERBY: However, if you've changed your mind about math, I could still use your help.

ROSE: Look—how about this: I'll help you with your project—if you give me this interview.

HERBY: No, thank you.

POPULAR STUDENT: Hey Rose!

ROSE: *(Wonderingly:)* He knows my name!

HERBY: How many years have we all gone to school together?

POPULAR STUDENT: When you're done talking with Alien Boy there—why don't you come over here and interview me! I've got mad skills!

HERBY: (*To Rose:*) Alien Boy? Clearly those "skills" include creative, poetic expression.

ROSE: (*Dreamily contemplating Popular Student:*) Yeah...

HERBY: (*Beat.*) Well, don't let me keep you from your fans.

ROSE: Okay...see you...

(Rose approaches Popular Student.)

CLARISSA: (*Whispers:*) Rose!

DR. FARAWAY: (*Blowing whistle.*) Today, marshmallows, we run! From the truth! At the speed of light!

(Mrs. Prattle runs by again.)

MRS. PRATTLE: Wheeeeeeeee!

(Mrs. Prattle exits running.)

DR. FARAWAY: SEVEN!

(Sound effect.)

I am what I am, and I say what I say—no one in my class will escape our fun play! Now, Rose, tell us all, did you get the interview?

(All the students turn to look at Rose, who is busy admiring Popular Student.)

ROSE: Huh?

DR. FARAWAY: Brilliant! You are a bright one. Can't wait to see your name in lights.

POPULAR STUDENT: (*To Rose:*) Can we do the interview in profile? I look amazing in profile.

DR. FARAWAY: Time to run! Let's cha-cha! Hurry it up, pickles!

(Dr. Faraway exits, blowing the whistle. All students besides Herby take off running. Herby sits at a desk to work. Rose follows Popular Student. Clarissa breaks in.)

CLARISSA: Rose! Dump this bozo! Go get me that interview!

(Clarissa gestures for Rose and Camera Guy to keep after Herby. Clarissa exits. Herby walks to his machine, attaching the component he has just finished. Herby exits.)

SCENE 4

(Rose sneaks over to Herby's machine to examine it.)

ROSE: Let's get a few shots of this. *(Beat.)* Zoom in on the combustion chamber.

(Camera Guy is at a loss. Rose points.)

This is where the chemical reaction takes place. I mean, I think that's, uh, where stuff happens? But wait a minute...this is a change from the plans I saw. In...class. Not like—at his house or anything. I mean we used to be friends when we were really little. But we don't run in the same, uh, crowd anymore. Since last—uh, kindergarten...and Herby didn't even start building interstellar rockets until first grade. *(Beat.)* Can you edit that out? *(Beat.)* Anyway...this doesn't look like it's just built to go to the moon, as he claims. This is built for something else. I don't even recognize this component. I wonder what this does—

(She accidentally bends or breaks off a piece. She tries to fix it. She can't.)

Uh-oh. Turn off the camera. We have to get out of here.

(They start to sneak out. Herby enters, carrying another component.)

HERBY! I was...we were...just looking for you!

HERBY: Hello, Rose. Camera Guy.

ROSE: Um...just wanted to see if, you would, maybe reconsider the interview?

(Herby begins to attach the new piece to the machine. Camera Guy starts taping.)

HERBY: Wait a minute...that's not right...

ROSE: *(Quickly:)* Looks fine to me! Looks great!

(Rose steps in front of the machine.)

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I heard that a professional scientist might show up at your launch?

HERBY: That's the rumor. We'll see.

(Herby tries to get around her.)

ROSE: That's really Cool, Herby. How do you feel about that?

(Rose points the microphone at Herby.)

HERBY: *(To Camera Guy:)* No cameras. *(Beat.)* I have work to do, Rose.

ROSE: *(To Camera Guy:)* You heard him!

(Camera Guy looks confused.)

No cameras! You'd better go see if you can help Clarissa.

(While Herby is working on the machine, Rose gestures for the Camera Guy to hide and keep rolling. He does so.)

HERBY: I know you aren't—participating—in "this sort of thing" right now, but if you could just hold up this screen while I screw in the bolt...*(Beat.)* Rose?

ROSE: Nothing—I...

HERBY: I'm about to drop this—you think you could—

ROSE: Okay. Yeah.

(She goes to help him.)

HERBY: Thank you, Rose. Thanks so much.

(She nods. Awkward silence.)

ROSE: So...is this part of your—

HERBY: Yes. This is the steering unit.

ROSE: Steering is good.

(Awkward silence.)

HERBY: (*Beat.*) Thanks. For helping.

ROSE: (*Beat.*) You...really think this...thing will...work?

HERBY: Well, if I can get that last pesky calculation worked out – the one I asked you about –

ROSE: Yeah...

HERBY: (*Beat.*) And if each and every piece is configured exactly to my original plan specifications, with no wire out of place. (*Beat.*) One off-kilter placement and – kablooeey! My rocket and I will be sky kibble. Raining down like little squishy falling stars.

ROSE: Yuck.

HERBY: (*Beat.*) But I'm sure it will all work out just fine. (*Long beat.*) Something wrong?

ROSE: (*Squeaks.*) No! Just fine! (*Beat.*) But, do you...think it's a good idea to keep this here at school?

HERBY: Well, yes! It's the launch site!

ROSE: But what if...something happened to it?

HERBY: Oh, no one will touch it. They're all too afraid it will blow up or something.

(He laughs maniacally. She joins in, awkwardly.)

What do you think of it?

ROSE: Uh...it looks like you've made a lot of progress.

HERBY: Civilian space travel technology is advancing at the speed of light, Rose. I don't want to be left behind. Imagine – colonies on Mars, exploring extra solar planetary bodies, other celestial locales!

ROSE: (*Beat.*) This doesn't just look like your typical interstellar rocket, Herby. What are you really making here?

HERBY: I knew you'd pick up on that. *(Beat.)* But you wouldn't believe it if I told you.

ROSE: Try me.

(Herby Alice steps into the mirror frame. Enter ALIENS. Alien 1 approaches him, holding up the microphone. Enter eager cluster of additional aliens. One Alien holds a neon orange sign which reads "Welcome, Herby." He/she posts it on the front of Herby's shirt with a sense of ceremony.)

ALIENS: Bee bop boo bop beep. Beep. Beep. Boop.

ALIEN 1: In other words: Welcome, Herby!

ALIEN 2: We thought you'd never arrive!

ALIEN 1: Please, Herby, share your plans with your fans! The universe wants to know.

HERBY: First, we need independent interplanetary explorers. That's where I come in. If things go my way, the Magnum Stellar Z-T3 Hubber-Valley Alice Spacecraft Kit will be available online within 3-5 years. But first I have to get this baby off the ground.

ALIEN 1: But how will you...I mean...and isn't it, like, dangerous?

HERBY: Sure! But I know what I'm doing.

ALIEN 2: And your parents are okay with this.

HERBY: They're just sad there's not room for three passengers!

ALIEN 1: What about school?

HERBY: Well, if I travel as fast as I think I will, I'll be back before I left.

(Beat. Sound of explosion, either from offstage or recorded.)

ROSE: I think my brain just exploded. Did...you just say that you'll be back before you left?

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HERBY: That's the plan!

ALIEN 1: Celestians, you heard it here first. Herby plans to be back before he leaves. *(Beat.)* Any questions?

(Explosion sounds again. Herby steps back through the mirror, sitting to resume work on his spacecraft.)

ROSE: So...this isn't just a rocket. It's...*(Reverentially:)* A time machine.

ALIENS: SIX!

(SOUND EFFECT.)

HERBY: The problem with colonizing other planets is NOT just an issue of atmosphere, or livable environs...we're finding plenty of planets we think might be quite comparable to our own. But—

ROSE: They are too far away.

HERBY: RIGHT! My machine would travel faster than the speed of light, utilizing wormholes for further shortcuts.

ROSE: But this has far-reaching implications! I mean—this could totally change the world as we know it! I mean—time machines? Worm holes? Space-time continuum! If things went wrong—couldn't time collapse in on itself, thus rendering us non-existent and destroying us all?

HERBY: Which is why this information can't fall into the wrong hands.

ROSE: That's why you won't do interviews.

HERBY: You got it.

(Camera Guy turns off his camera. He's got what he needs. He sneaks out. Rose sees him, but Herby doesn't.)

ROSE: But—don't you think people deserve to know about such life-altering scientific discoveries?

HERBY: Rose, I'm not even sure yet if it will work.

ROSE: Well, if it does, it changes everything.

ALIENS: Herby, Herby, he's our man! He'll change the Universe, fast as he can! Be bop! Boop beep bop boop beep!

ROSE: *(Beat.)* Herby. You should hear the things kids say about you. I mean actually – you shouldn't, I guess.

HERBY: What do I care?

ROSE: Well – I mean, with an interview, you could set things straight –

HERBY: Does it really matter what they think? In the greater scheme of things?

ROSE: *(Beat.)* Yes. No. I don't know...they can sure make life hard in the meantime.

(Herby sits on his desk, looking thoughtfully up at the sky.)

HERBY: Some nights when I can't sleep I carry my telescope outside to my tree house.

(The Aliens sit, mimicking Herby's position, also looking thoughtfully up at the sky.)

I spend hours...just looking into space. And you know something? As long as I stay, I never see any more than the smallest portion of what's out there.

(Rose looks thoughtfully up at the sky.)

ROSE: *(Beat.)* Herby, I –

HERBY: I'm sorry I pressured you about helping me. We're on different paths now. I understand that. I guess...I just – miss the way it was, you know, when we were kids? Last year? You've always been my best friend. But now...well, I guess you're pretty busy with the media circus. You've got your new friends. Your extracurricular activities. Your new – look.

ROSE: *(She adjusts her outfit self-consciously.)* It was Clarissa's idea. She thought it'd be more—camera friendly. *(Long beat, defensively.)* I was tired of feeling invisible all the time!

HERBY: You have never been invisible to me. *(Beat.)* You'll be great at broadcasting. Just like you are at everything. And I won't tell anybody that you still get straight As in math and science.

(They laugh.)

ROSE: Thanks. *(Beat.)* Um, Herby? I, uh...that piece on your machine?

(She points to it.)

HERBY: Yeah, I noticed.

ROSE: I'm really sorry. I should have told you.

HERBY: *(Smiling.)* It's fine. I can fix it.

ROSE: *(Beat.)* Herby—I—

HERBY: Yes?

ROSE: I uh—I...I'll let you get back to work.

HERBY: *(Beat.)* See you.

(Dr. Faraway and Mrs. Prattle enter running as Rose exits.)

DR. FARAWAY: Run from the truth as fast as you can! At the speed of light, you can't be outran! *(Calling encouragingly after Herby.)* Through the wormhole!

MRS. PRATTLE AND DR. FARAWAY: FIVE!

(SOUND EFFECT.)

MRS. PRATTLE: We're halfway there!

(Mrs. Prattle exits running.)

SCENE 5

(Clarissa enters holding a video. Mrs. Prattle re-enters running. She stops, out of breath.)

CLARISSA: Rose! I got the video of your interview! I can't wait to watch it. From what I understand, it's brilliant! Maybe you aren't a total waste of time after all!

ROSE: Um...thanks.

CLARISSA: And Alien Boy didn't even know you were interviewing him!

ROSE: No. He didn't.

CLARISSA: Hidden camera!? Didn't know you had it in you. Maybe... I'll even let you cover the launch on Friday.

ROSE: Me? Live?

DR. FARAWAY: Big news! The whole school will be watching!

MRS. PRATTLE: Even one second can be eternity in front of a crowd! Hopefully you won't fall flat on your face.

ROSE: In front of a crowd...?

MRS. PRATTLE: –Faint dead away –

DR. FARAWAY: –like the student at the beginning of the year.

MRS. PRATTLE: Oh yes. There she stood...blabbering on about the crisis in Oblivia, or was it Alabama? Remember how terribly she froze? The students in the control room laughing and laughing –

(Beat while RECORDED OR OFFSTAGE LAUGHTER bubbles up. It ends abruptly when Rose speaks.)

ROSE: That was me, Mrs. Prattle.

MRS. PRATTLE: Ooooooh! Dear. How embarrassing for us all.

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CLARISSA: I had to fight the establishment tooth and nail after that to keep student control of the Times Daily.

MRS. PRATTLE: Bravo!! You really stuck it to us!

DR. FARAWAY: Well, I'm certain this time you will comport yourself with dignity and deviled eggs.

CLARISSA: You'd better.

DR. FARAWAY: I am what I am, and I say what I say —

MRS. PRATTLE: Rose Plum is a peach of a pumpkin tea tray!

CLARISSA: This could lead to a beautiful partnership, Rose.

(Clarissa exits.)

ROSE: Wait! Clarissa! Can I watch the video before you air it? I'm not so sure —

MRS. PRATTLE: *(Advancing menacingly:)* No pressure —

DR. FARAWAY: But the fate of the world rests in your hands.

MRS. PRATTLE: IF your interview fails to deliver, you will be de-pantsed in the cafeteria at high noon.

DR. FARAWAY: *(Terribly worried:)* What if she doesn't wear pants? What if she wears a dress? Or a skirt?

MRS. PRATTLE: *(Shocked:)* For all we know she won't even be carrying an umbrella!

(Dr. Faraway blows twice on his gym whistle.)

DR. FARAWAY: Come now, Dearie-Do! Weren't we running from the truth?

MRS. PRATTLE: How delightful!

DR. FARAWAY: No ifs, ands, or elbows about it. Let's fly!

(Dr. Faraway and Mrs. Prattle exit running.)

SCENE 6

(Rose sits at her desk, preparing for her next class, and for the tape to air. Aliens enter, circling Rose in a menacing fashion.)

ALIENS: *(Threateningly:)* Be bop boop bop beep boooooop bip bip BIP!

ALIEN 1: Everyone deserves to know the truth.

ALIEN 2: What choice did you have?

ALIEN 1: Sure the information might fall into the wrong hands...

ALIEN 2: But don't worry. Who is even going to believe it?

ALIEN 1: He's going to be a laughing stock.

ALIEN 2: What's a laughing stalk? Is it anything like a beanstalk?

ROSE: Uh...

ALIEN 2: You'll be the one who brought him down.

ALIEN 1: And he still thinks of you as his best friend!

ALIENS: HILARIOUS! *(Alien laughter:)* Beep beep beep!

ALIEN 2: What's one measly human, in the scheme of things?

ALIEN 1: Especially when you are SO close to the life you want!

ALIEN 2: If you want to be somebody, you've got to be willing to draw blood.

ALIEN 1: Gross!

ALIEN 2: I meant that metaphorically.

ALIEN 1: Oh! Thank goodness.

ALIEN 2: I mean unless this rocket thing doesn't work right, and Herby *does* end up exploding into a million tiny pieces.

ALIEN 1: OPTION C: say someone DOES believe him...and say it's the worst kind of person...and say they get a hold of his time travel discoveries and use them for evil gain...she could be responsible for the destruction of the entire universe and everything in it.

ALIEN 2: Well, you win some, you lose some.

ALIENS: Rose the Destroyer!

(Alien laughter, either live or boosted by sound effects.)

(Herby enters, carrying another component of the machine. He attaches it.)

HERBY: Hi, Rose!

(Dr. Faraway enters running. He and Mrs. Prattle are racing. Mrs. Prattle pulls ahead.)

MRS. PRATTLE: FOUR!

(Sound effect. Mrs. Prattle exits, leaving Dr. Faraway in the dust.)

DR. FARAWAY: That canary flies faster than moon rocks! By now she must be 20 years younger than me! If I could turn back time...

(Dr. Faraway exits. Popular Student enters, with Unpopular Student still in a headlock. He sits at his desk [with Unpopular Student still in a headlock].)

POPULAR STUDENT: You know, everybody is going to be listening on Friday.

ALIENS 1 AND 2: The whole universe.

UNPOPULAR STUDENT: This is your chance, Rose! Do it for the little guy! Show us we can escape our lowly circumstances. *(To POPULAR Student:)* Ouch! Could you let up a little? You're twisting my retainer...

(Enter Dr. Faraway, very out of breath, but still running.)

DR. FARAWAY: Oh, the sport! I am what I am. Say what I say, we'd better get moving without a delay! Let's move, lobsters! Remember, Rose—through the wormhole!

(He exits, still running. Clarissa enters and sits at her desk. Herby stands in the mirror frame, addressing the class.)

CLARISSA: Just picture it.

HERBY: *(Envisioning:)* The wormhole. The absolute dark unknown. A tunnel of space-time that maybe, just maybe, will connect you to the farthest stretch of the universe, possibly even whole other universes. Then. Deciding. To take the plunge. It's so...astrophysical.

POPULAR STUDENT: *(Laughing uproariously:)* OMG! He's better than reality TV! And the comedy channel! Rolled into one! *(To Unpopular Student:)* Go get me some popcorn.

(Unpopular Student exits running. On Herby's next line, the loud SOUND OF A CLOCK TICKING should begin. It speeds up, getting faster and faster.)

HERBY: *(To Audience:)* Fact: a perfectly functional atomic clock traveling at an extreme velocity has been measured to move more slowly than a perfectly functional atomic clock at rest.

(The Aliens advance upon Rose.)

ALIENS: BEE BOP BEEP! What's it gonna be, Rose? BEE BOP BEEP!

ALIEN 1: You could still stop the tape from airing—

ALIEN 2: *(Sing-song:)* No decision is still a decision, Rose...

(Unpopular Student enters with popcorn. He whispers in Clarissa's ear. Popular Student puts him back in a headlock and begins eating the popcorn.)

CLARISSA: Oh, guess what! Too late! Just in: the button has been pushed. And that button, was play...So let's sit back, and enjoy the ride! Arms and legs inside the vehicle. Buckle your seatbelts, friends. You're about to see the interview of your life!

ROSE: But wait – what if the wrong person gets a hold of this information? What if the machine blows up? What if –

HERBY: What if we could determine the time...instead of the time determining us?

CLARISSA: Just concentrate on your job, Rose. If you play things right...You will be...

ALIENS: A star!

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