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TRAFFIC JELLY

FARCE/SATIRE. It's the near future and the streets are so clogged with vehicles that traffic has only moved three inches in three days. As Portia gets ready for her big date, she realizes she is out of mascara and sends her brother-in-law, Carson, to buy some at a drugstore just three blocks away. Five hours later, Carson still has not returned. Worried, Portia and her sister, Liz, turn on the TV to get the latest traffic and smog alert. Reporter Stephanie Stevens, whose hair is disintegrating from the smog, reports that Carson has caused a 954-car pileup outside the drugstore. Bloodied and shaken from the accident, Carson hoofs it home through the thick smog to deliver the mascara only to find out he got the wrong color! An over-the-top romp!

Performance Time: Approximately 30 minutes.

CHARACTERS

(1 M, 3 F)

PORTIA: Waiting for her date to arrive but discovers she is out of mascara and wouldn't be caught dead without it; wears a nice outfit for her date with a plastic dry-cleaning bag over the top and an apron on top of the dry-cleaning bag, a shower cap over her hair, and a pair of large rubber gloves; her right eye is boldly outlined and shadowed and the fake eyelashes are heavily laden with mascara while the left eye is plain with no makeup; female.

LIZ: Portia's practical, older, married sister; wears comfortable leisure clothes; female.

CARSON: Liz's husband who can't wait for Portia to move out; wears torn, dirty, and "bloody" clothes; male.

STEPHANIE STEVENS: Intrepid ADHG-TV news reporter who smiles incessantly; wears TV newscaster attire; wears a blonde wig, a dark brown wig with baby powder sprinkled on it to look like dust; a black fright wig, and a bald cap; female. Note: If the black wig is not used, the brown wig may be dirtied up for her final entrance.

NOTE: Character names may be changed to reflect the ethnic makeup of the cast.

SETTING

Liz and Carson's kitchen, near future.

SET

Interior of Liz and Carson's kitchen. There is a dining table with chairs at left center, and a frame for a wide screen ADHG-TV set at right center that faces the audience. A door SL leads to another room; a door SR goes to the outside. On the table are two plates with utensils, some bread and other food, and a jar of grape jelly. A hand mirror lies on a small table at SL. The room is filled with overflowing garbage cans and/or bags.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The following should appear in the program.

ADHG-TV: Advanced Holographic Television

H.A.V.s: Heavily Armored Vehicles

PROPS

Coffee cup or mug, for Liz
Sandwich
Pile of papers
Hand mirror
Watch, for Portia
Microphone, for Stephanie
2 Plates
2 Sets of knives, forks, spoons
Bowl of sugar and one of cream
Coffee pot
1 Bottle of water
Half-empty jar of strawberry jelly
Partial loaf of bread
Napkins
A pile of 8 ½" x 11" sheets of paper (for download)
Several overflowing garbage cans and/or bags strewn about
Blonde wig, for Stephanie
Scraggly dirty dark brown wig with baby powder sprinkled
on it, for Stephanie
Greasy black fight wig, for Stephanie
Bald cap, for Stephanie
Clean handkerchief, for Stephanie
Filthy handkerchief, for Stephanie
Lipstick
Goggles
Dust mask
Mascara
Small drugstore bag

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Sound of traffic

Dust

Car crashes (There are three car crashes with each crash longer than the preceding one. These effects are usually available on the web for free. Download the wildest sounds, from soft to loud, to loudest and longest.)

ADHG-TV set (A frame large enough that people standing behind it appear to be on TV)

Spotlight on Stephanie when she appears on ADHG-TV

Fake blood

Smoke, opt. (Smoke on the ADHG-TV gets thicker each time Stephanie appears, and smoke wafts in when the front door is opened.)

"IF JAM AND JELLY WERE TRAFFIC,
JAM WOULD BE TOTAL GRIDLOCK
AND JELLY WOULD BE VERY CROWDED
BUT STILL MOVING"

—LIZ

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(AT RISE: Interior of Liz and Carson's kitchen, near future. The stage is dark. There is a dining table with chairs at LCS and a frame for a wide screen ADHG-TV set at RCS that faces the audience. A door SL leads to another room. A door SR goes to the outside. On the table are two plates with utensils, some bread and other food, and a jar of grape jelly [not jam]. A hand mirror lies on a small table SL. The room is filled with overflowing garbage cans and/or bags. Portia is wearing a plastic dry-cleaning bag over her clothes with an apron over it, a shower cap over her hair, and large rubber gloves on her hands. Peering into a hand mirror, she is standing SL, her profile to the audience. Her older sister, Liz, is sitting at the table drinking coffee, eating a sandwich, and trying to read from a pile of papers.)

PORTIA: *(Agitated, mournfully.)* I'm gonna die! *(Lights quickly fade up.)* I'm absolutely, totally gonna die!

LIZ: Portia, please. I'm trying to read today's download. *(Indicates the papers in her hand.)*

PORTIA: Oh, thanks, Liz. Some sister you are! I tell you I'm gonna die, and you tell me you're too busy to notice.

LIZ: When you collapse on the floor and stop breathing, I'll take note.

PORTIA: Don't you understand? I said, I'm gonna die...really...totally and absolutely...die...dead...in a coffin and everything.

LIZ: You don't die in a coffin. You die, and then they put you into a coffin.

PORTIA: I wouldn't be caught dead in a coffin... *(Slight pause.)* ...looking like this! *(Faces the audience. Her right eye is boldly outlined and shadowed and the fake eyelashes are heavily laden with mascara. Her eye is black from her brow to a quarter inch below her lower eyelid. Her left eye has no makeup. Note: It is important that the contrast between the eyes is stark. Pointing to the eye with heavy makeup.)* This eye is perfect. *(Pointing to*

her eye without makeup.) But this one is a catastrophe.
(*Whimpers.*) And all because I ran out of mascara.

LIZ: I offered you my mascara. You can use mine.

PORTIA: (*Angrily.*) I can't use yours! I told you...I can't.
What if you have some terrible disease or something?

LIZ: Disease?

PORTIA: Germs are very good at wiggling themselves into
your brain through your eyelashes.

LIZ: What disease?

PORTIA: I don't know. But with all these vehicles in the city
spewing fumes and noxious junk out of their tailpipes, new
diseases are popping up all the time. That stuff can linger in
the air until some unsuspecting pedestrian forgets his
mask...and gets poisoned on First Avenue and dies on
Second. It can cause heart disease, brain disease, and maybe
even athlete's foot. I'm sure it can get on your eyelids and
cause eye disease.

LIZ: (*Unconvinced.*) Oh, come on, Portia.

PORTIA: You could have lash-a-tosis, for all I know. I use
your mascara, and my lashes begin to stink. (*Pause.*) Or
maybe you have lash-a-noma. I get cancer of the eyelid, and
my nose falls off.

LIZ: I don't have any eyelash diseases.

PORTIA: How do you know?

LIZ: (*Sarcastically.*) I'll get a note from my doctor to prove it.

PORTIA: That would be helpful.

LIZ: Portia!

PORTIA: No, wait. That would take too long. Besides, I don't
like your color. I use deep brown. That's all. I can't use
anything else. You use... (*Examining Liz's eyes.*) Well,
whatever it is, it's too boring.

LIZ: It's called dark brown. How much difference can there
be between *deep* brown and *dark* brown?

PORTIA: I don't know, but your eyes always remind me of a
salad.

LIZ: A salad?

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PORTIA: Yeah. There's something there, but it's not enough to do any good.

LIZ: Well, that's better than having one eye painted and the other one bald as a peeled potato.

PORTIA: That's what I'm saying, Liz. I need my mascara. Roscoe is supposed to pick me up any time now. I think he's going to pop the question today, so I need to make an impression.

LIZ: Oh, you'll make an impression, all right.

PORTIA: Not that kind of impression! A good impression. I want to make a good impression, and I can't do it with only one eye.

LIZ: You have two eyes.

PORTIA: *I know I have two eyes, and you know I have two eyes, but Roscoe will look at me and ask, "Where's your other eye?" (Looking in her hand mirror.)* I look like a one-eyed raccoon.

LIZ: Porsh!

PORTIA: But I want to be a two-eyed raccoon.

LIZ: Portia!

PORTIA: *(Looking in her hand mirror.)* I look lopsided. Do you think I look lopsided?

LIZ: Will you cut that out! You sent Carson to the store for your stupid mascara. He'll be back soon.

PORTIA: I didn't send him; he volunteered. In fact, he seemed unusually excited to go.

LIZ: *(Sarcastically.)* I can't imagine why.

PORTIA: I thought he hated me and wanted me out of your house as soon as possible.

LIZ: *(Sarcastically.)* Gee, Porsh, what would make you think that?

PORTIA: Oh, well, you know –

(Worried, Liz goes to the SR door and opens it. Smoke pours into the room, opt. Car traffic is heard.)

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LIZ: I shouldn't have let him go out in all that traffic. (*Starts coughing, waves away the smoke, and closes the door.*) It's too dangerous to be out there. I shouldn't have to lose a husband so you can gain one.

PORTIA: As long as he brings me a new hermetically sealed— for the prevention of eyelash disease— deep brown mascara, I'll be all right.

LIZ: Cars everywhere! People don't walk anymore; they drive. They drive to the store. They drive to school. They go out to jog, and they drive! (*Pause.*) There are so many cars going in so many directions, we can't even walk to our mailbox without getting run over. And our mailbox is on our front porch!

PORTIA: What are you worried about? Carson drove... (*Checks her watch.*) ...but he's been gone six hours.

LIZ: The traffic is thick today.

PORTIA: The drugstore is only three blocks away.

LIZ: The traffic is *very* thick today.

PORTIA: Maybe he should have walked.

LIZ: No! He would have been run over before he reached the sidewalk. I'm telling you, the streets are so clogged with traffic, drivers are using other people's yards for thoroughfares. Just yesterday, I saw two vehicles drive through our neighbor's swimming pool.

PORTIA: Did they survive?

LIZ: The first vehicle sank and the passengers drowned when the second vehicle parked on top of them.

PORTIA: The second vehicle parked on top of the first one?

LIZ: Well, if you park anywhere else, you get towed. (*Pause.*) Of course, they both got tickets.

PORTIA: Even the drowned driver?

LIZ: Well, he broke the law, didn't he? (*Pause.*) He could also die from the poisons in the air. You know that.

PORTIA: Who...the drowned driver?

LIZ: No, Porsh...Carson. Who are we talking about here?

PORTIA: I don't know. I lost track.

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LIZ: Carson. If he had walked, he could have died from inhaling the air.

PORTIA: Yeah, imagine dying from breathing.

LIZ: I hope he took his mask. Emissions are so thick, you need bottled oxygen to breathe and x-ray vision to see! *(Slight pause.)* And if he died from the air, he could still be run over.

PORTIA: I guess it's a good thing he drove.

LIZ: At least our car has one of those new air filter things.

PORTIA: What if he doesn't make it? What if he gets stuck in the traffic jelly?

LIZ: Traffic... *(Correcting.)* ...jam.

PORTIA: Traffic... *(Correcting.)* ...jelly. And never makes it back? Do you know what could happen?

LIZ: Yes, I could lose my Carson.

PORTIA: No, I mean something important.

LIZ: What?!

PORTIA: I would be embarrassed...embarrassed in front of Roscoe...for looking like a Cyclops! Can you imagine what that would be like? I would die! I would absolutely, totally die!

LIZ: Well, I'm sorry you have so little regard for my husband.

PORTIA: Roscoe is not your husband!

LIZ: Carson. I'm talking about Carson.

PORTIA: I'm talking about Roscoe.

LIZ: Well, they're both in danger as long as they're in that traffic. *(Pause.)* We really ought to do something about it.

PORTIA: About what?

LIZ: The traffic. We ought to do something about the traffic.

PORTIA: Like what?

LIZ: I don't know. Complain, maybe.

PORTIA: We do that every day.

LIZ: *(Shrugs.)* You're right. We do. We complain a lot.

PORTIA: *(Gesturing to the front door.)* It's crazy out there.

LIZ: Yeah, well, sometimes it's crazy in here, too.

PORTIA: What does that mean?

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LIZ: It means what it means. It's crazy out there, and sometimes it's crazy in here.

PORTIA: *(Taken aback.)* Are you talking about me?

LIZ: Well, face it, Porsh. It is a little unusual to be wearing a dry-cleaning bag over your clothes.

PORTIA: It's to protect my outfit from the poisons in the air.

LIZ: And your robe wouldn't do that?

PORTIA: And any diseases that may appear to be innocently wafting about.

LIZ: And then there's the apron.

PORTIA: That's to protect the dry-cleaning bag.

LIZ: Like I said...sometimes it's crazy in here. But not you. Oh, no. Not you.

PORTIA: *(Glances at her watch.)* What's keeping him? The traffic can't be that bad.

LIZ: Well, turn on the Super ten A-D-H-G-T-V and see what they have to say.

PORTIA: Oh, come on, Liz. All they broadcast these days are traffic updates and toxic smog alerts.

LIZ: Well, Porsh, isn't that what we want to hear?

PORTIA: Oh, yeah. I guess so. *(To ADHG-TV.)* ADHG-TV, channel 36618 on. *(Snaps her fingers. Stephanie Stevens appears inside the TV screen facing the audience. Note: Stephanie may also appear in a spotlight. She is holding a microphone to her mouth and smiles incessantly. To Stephanie.)* Just a traffic update, please.

STEPHANIE: Hello, everyone. I'm the vivacious and beautiful blonde WKPYFRZ ADHG-TV reporter, Stephanie Stevens, with your up-to-the-minute morning traffic report and smog alert.

PORTIA: *(To Liz.)* Morning? This is afternoon.

LIZ: Just listen.

STEPHANIE: *(Smiling broadly.)* Actually, since the heavy city traffic has moved only about three inches in the last three days, we are simply rerunning an earlier traffic update.

LIZ: *(To Portia.)* At the rate of an inch a day, Carson should be back from the store in about... *(Calculates.)* ...oh, six months.

PORTIA: Hush, Liz.

LIZ: But that won't matter because Roscoe won't be here until two months after that.

PORTIA: I still have to be ready when he arrives.

STEPHANIE: *(Smiling broadly.)* Two years ago, the mayor recognized that cars were overwhelming the city, so he declared that all buildings in the downtown area would be torn down—

LIZ: Even the statue of himself?

STEPHANIE: Especially the—. No. Not the mayor. And replaced by a single, gigantic slab of concrete that serves as a super highway.

LIZ: *(To Portia.)* I'm glad we live outside that area.

PORTIA: Well, that's one good thing about living in the suburbs.

STEPHANIE: *(Smiling broadly.)* Now all vehicles can go in any direction at any time and at any speed. True, there has been a big increase in serious accidents, but that keeps the tow trucks and hearses busy while increasing traffic fines for the city.

PORTIA: I'm going to turn it off.

LIZ: Not yet.

STEPHANIE: Sadly, the mayor neglected to factor in parking, so the vehicles must keep moving at all times, even if they are disabled.

PORTIA: I don't want to hear any more of this. *(Goes to snap her fingers at the ADHG-TV set.)*

STEPHANIE: *(Smiling broadly.)* Oh, wait! I have to give my signature sign-off first.

PORTIA: You have two seconds.

STEPHANIE: *(Smiling broadly.)* This is your vivacious and beautiful blonde reporter, Stephanie Stevens, with her patented signature sign-off.

(Stephanie leans toward the "camera," puckers up, and gives a loud, sloppy kiss.)

PORTIA: *(Snaps her fingers.)* Off. *(Stephanie disappears from the "screen." To Liz.)* I don't know how she does it.

LIZ: What? She just puckers up and sucks on her lips like this... *(Demonstrates.)*

PORTIA: No, I mean a beautiful blonde standing on one of these toxic corners and giving traffic updates. In two hours, her blonde hair will be brown. In six hours, it will be black. In 12 hours, it will fall out. She'll be bald.

LIZ: Possibly.

PORTIA: And now you know why I wear a dry-cleaning bag over my clothes.

LIZ: So your hair won't fall out?

PORTIA: So my clothes won't fall off. If all that vehicle smog can turn your hair to dust, just imagine what it can do to your clothes.

LIZ: I've never heard of anyone's clothes falling off because of the grime in the air.

PORTIA: Oh, no? Two weeks ago, you hung some of your panties on the clothesline out back. A day later, they were gone.

LIZ: Some weirdo probably stole them.

PORTIA: It's more likely they disintegrated in the smog.

LIZ: We have way too many cars.

PORTIA: What cars?! Forget cars! These days, most people are driving bulldozers, H.A.V.'s, and even army tanks with loaded cannons. Roscoe won't go anywhere without a full complement of ammunition for his personal tank. The only way to get through an intersection is to blast your way through it.

LIZ: Then why are you going out?

PORTIA: *(Smiles.)* Because Roscoe is so much fun when he's blasting away. And, you know, he painted his tank purple and pink just for me.

LIZ: (*Sarcastically.*) Aren't you thrilled!

PORTIA: And he even let me fire the cannon once. That's the time I lost hearing in my right ear, but it was great fun!

LIZ: You could invite him inside.

PORTIA: And watch him blow up your living room? I don't think so. No, I don't want to make Carson any madder than he already is.

LIZ: I mean, he would have to leave his tank outside in the front yard.

PORTIA: And get a ticket for illegal parking?

LIZ: You're right. Could happen.

PORTIA: Would happen.

LIZ: I think the city is planning to level this area next. Our one-way and two-way streets will become any-way highways just like downtown. Then what'll we do?

PORTIA: Get hit and killed by ten vehicles instead of just one. That's why I want to have as much fun as I can...before I die.

LIZ: There you go again. You're not going to die.

PORTIA: Liz, I am.

LIZ: All right, look, what's the biggest cause of death these days?

PORTIA: Lack of breathing?

LIZ: No. I mean, what causes people to stop breathing?

PORTIA: Death.

LIZ: Getting run over, Portia! Hit-and-runs are the biggest cause of death in the U.S. now. I mean, just yesterday 32 people in this city alone were run over while taking out their garbage.

PORTIA: (*Indicating the trash in the room.*) Which we don't do anymore.

LIZ: Too dangerous. And six were crushed in their backyards when they went outside to feed their dogs.

PORTIA: Dogs have to eat.

LIZ: The pets were already dead.

PORTIA: Poor beasts.

LIZ: Having been squashed under vehicles using backyards as shortcuts.

PORTIA: Which proves what?

LIZ: That those who remain inside don't get run over, and thus don't die...at least not right away.

PORTIA: Liz, yesterday, Stephanie Stevens reported that three housewives were victims of hit-and-runs in their own kitchens.

LIZ: That's impossible.

PORTIA: The drivers were fighting over parking spaces.

LIZ: In someone else's kitchen?

PORTIA: They were desperate.

(Liz ponders this.)

LIZ: Well, that's possible...I guess.

PORTIA: You *know*.

LIZ: Still, the chances of being killed are a lot less here in the house than they are on the roadways.

PORTIA: As long as the toxic clouds from all the emissions don't waft their way inside and poison us.

LIZ: Okay, Portia, I give up. You are going to die. You said it, and you were right. You are going to die!

PORTIA: *(Shocked.)* You mean today?! Oh, Liz, I don't want to die today! *(Grabs Liz's arm, pleading.)* Not on the day Roscoe proposes! *(Pause.)* You've got to do something! You can't let me die today!

LIZ: Good heavens, Porsh, I was just agreeing with you.

PORTIA: *(Confused.)* Agreeing with me?

LIZ: That you're going to die.

PORTIA: But I didn't say anything about *today*!

LIZ: Well, sorry.

PORTIA: I hate it when you agree with me.

LIZ: All right, all right. Calm down. How about something to eat...a jelly sandwich?

PORTIA: What flavor jelly?

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LIZ: Grape. *(Holds up a jar of grape jelly.)*

PORTIA: Can't. I like strawberry.

LIZ: I've only got grape.

(Pause.)

PORTIA: All right, grape.

LIZ: Grape jelly sandwich, coming up. *(Starts to make the sandwich.)*

PORTIA: Oh, wait. Jelly?

LIZ: Yes, jelly.

PORTIA: I only eat jam.

LIZ: Jam? This is jelly. Jelly, jam...they're the same thing.

PORTIA: Oh, Liz, they are not! Jelly and jam are not the same thing at all.

LIZ: They are.

PORTIA: Are not. Jelly is thin jam. You shake it and it wobbles. It practically sloshes.

LIZ: Sloshes?

PORTIA: Like Jell-O. But jam is thick and tight. You shake it, and it remains absolutely still. It's tough. It's strong.

LIZ: Sounds more like a slab of concrete.

PORTIA: If jam and jelly were traffic, jam would be total gridlock and jelly would be very crowded but still moving. I prefer jam...because it's less dangerous. Do you have any jam?

LIZ: No.

(Slight pause.)

PORTIA: I'll take the jelly.

LIZ: *(Slathering grape jelly on a piece of bread.)* You sure are hard to please.

PORTIA: Except when I'm hungry.

(Portia grabs the sandwich and starts to take a big bite but is interrupted when Stephanie appears in the ADHG-TV screen.)

Stephanie's hair is now a scraggly dirty dark-brown. Smoke rises inside the ADHG-TV screen, opt. Speaking with more urgency, Stephanie holds a handkerchief over her mouth between sentences and coughs lightly. Note: Coughing must not drown out other lines.)

STEPHANIE: We interrupt your jelly eating to bring you this important bulletin. *(Coughs.)*

PORTIA: Can't I eat and listen at the same time?

STEPHANIE: *(Appears to read something below the TV screen.)*

From what I know of your I.Q.—which is now appearing on my computer screen—no.

PORTIA: But—

STEPHANIE: Don't talk; just listen.

(Stephanie coughs. Portia puts her sandwich down.)

PORTIA: All right. Go ahead.

LIZ: Did you turn on the TV?

PORTIA: No, it was on automatic. *(To Stephanie.)* Just get on with it.

(Stephanie gathers herself and smiles broadly, though her smile looks strained.)

STEPHANIE: Hi. I'm the vivacious and beautiful blonde—

PORTIA: Blonde? Your hair is brown.

STEPHANIE: Brown? *(Looks at a monitor offstage, gasps, and brushes her hair with her hand. Dust flies up from her hair.)*

PORTIA: Dusty brown. Ugly brown.

STEPHANIE: Aeeiii! *(Coughs.)* It's turned dark from all the grit in the air. A few more hours of this, and I won't even be vivacious anymore! *(Faces the camera with a look of terror in her eyes.)* This is a special hair... *(Realizes.)* ...I mean, traffic...bulletin. *(Coughs.)* As you can probably tell from my... *(Coughs.)* ...coughing, I'm not well.

LIZ: The toxic air is getting to you.

PORTIA: *(To Stephanie.)* Use your oxygen tube.

STEPHANIE: I packed my lipstick by mistake. *(Holds up a lipstick and coughs.)*

LIZ: They do look alike.

PORTIA: *(To Stephanie.)* Well, what's the news?

STEPHANIE: Just a few hours ago, there was a 952-car pileup here at... *(Car crash is heard off SR.)* ...make that a 953 car pileup here at the Willy Wally Drugstore parking lot. *(Shocked.)* Yes. Nine hundred and fifty... *(Another car crash is heard off SR.)* ...four vehicles rammed into each other from all directions, blocking off the streets and starting six fires. Fortunately, there were only three fatalities because only two of the vehicles were occupied. *(Coughs.)* According to the police, most of the drivers had given up weeks ago, abandoning their vehicles and setting out on foot. Those drivers have not been heard from since. *(Coughs. Looks off SR.)* Here's a witness to the accident. What's your name, sir?

(Carson limps on and steps into the screen with Stephanie. Carson is wearing a dust mask over his nose and mouth, goggles, and a cap. Carson removes his dust mask, goggles, and cap. He coughs and waves the smog away. His face is bloody, his hair and clothes are a mess, and his voice is shaky.)

CARSON: Carson. Carson Dolittle.

PORTIA: Oh, my gosh! It's Carson! Liz, it's Carson!

(Liz rushes to the ADHG-TV to watch.)

[END OF FREEVEIW]