

HEROES' COUCH

By Rob Frankel

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CHARACTERS

(6 males, 15 females, 8 either)

DR. JILL (F)	new psychiatrist
JUDGE FUDGE (E)	weary but fair judge
SHEILA (F)	high-energy fashion expert
SECRE-TERRY (F)	valley-girl type bored secretary of Dr. Jill
CLEOPATRA (F)	Goddess of the Nile
DR. JACK (M)	inventor of the time elevator
CALAMITY JANE (F)	herself
HERCULES (M)	himself
ABRAHAM LINCOLN (M)	himself
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (M)	himself
MARIE ANTOINETTE (F)	herself
FRIEDA (F)	patient of Dr. Jill
WILLY (M)	a patient of Dr. Jill
PATIENT #1, #2 (E)	psych patients of Dr. Jill
THREE ATTENDANTS (E)	Egyptian slave labor to Cleopatra
ALISHA (F)	a snobby shopper
ELIZABETH (F)	a snobby shopper
JUDY GARLAND (F)	as Dorothy from <i>The Wizard of Oz</i>
OFFICERS #1 and #2 (E)	the first is a novice and the second is an old hand at this
Other PATIENTS (E)	as desired

OTHER FAMOUS PEOPLE / OPTIONS (See Director's Notes)

THREE ANDREW SISTERS (F)	themselves
ISADORA DUNCAN (F)	herself
CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS (M)	himself
AMELIA EARHART (F)	herself

NOTE: There is plenty of room for double-casting. Roles like Willy, Frieda, Patients #1/#2, and Other Famous People can be double-cast. Conversely, additional police officers can be added, as well as Other Famous People. This cast can expand, contract, and switch genders with relative ease to fit your casting needs.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Style: This play should have the feeling of a snowball rolling down a hill – chaos and laughter building with each historical figure that enters. Actors should make a key distinguishing piece of their historical figure a part of their character – e.g. a twangy voice for Lincoln, a French accent for Marie, etc. – but then feel free to bring the character into the twenty-first century and really let them react to their surroundings with wonder, anger, amusement, and frustration. The Wal-mart fight scene should be uproarious chaos! Keep the balls throwing – it doesn't really matter at whom. And keep the *ad libs* flying – it should be noisy! Over the course of the rehearsal period, relationships – good and bad – may develop between the characters which will make more meaning out of who they throw at and why. That's exactly what will bring that scene to life and should be encouraged! There are several places where "offstage voices" are used, particularly in Act I. It's most important that these be heard, so some possibilities for doing this include miking the actors, having them talk very loudly, or having them onstage in darkness.

Set: The set has few major pieces. Generally, the SL area will be used for the group therapy scene in Act I. The SR area is used for the courtroom. The courtroom expands to use full stage when the time traveling occurs in the latter half of Act II. A small platform on wheels can be used, with a desk on it, to easily roll on and off the judge's dais. The other key set piece of course is "time elevator". You have lots of leeway here. Some examples are a large set of (sliding) doors representing the entrance to the elevator, a simple set of curtains, an actual large box with dials and lights on it, etc. Be imaginative not complex!

Sound/Light Effects: Sound effects can be used to good advantage during the time travel pieces. Simple recordings of static, motors running, even a xylophone glissade accompanying the time travel will help the effect. This works best if couple with, at least, some flickering light effects. Lighting changes are also helpful in moving from the courtroom to other scenes. If you can separately control SR and SL lights and/or US and DS lights, you can distinguish nicely between the courtroom scene and the scene in Wal-Mart. Otherwise, simply moving the judge's dais offstage and perhaps a brightening of stage lights will work fine. Once again, imaginative lighting as part of the "elevator's" operation nicely enhances the effect.

PROP LIST

Six rolling chairs
Pad of paper and pen
Reading glasses and book (perhaps local school yearbook)
Medium-sized box-like contraption – the "translator"
Nail file
A copy of each of the following magazine: Seventeen, People, Life, Home and Garden
Pad of paper and quill pen
Two officers pads of paper and papers
Gavel and gavel pad
Wind-up toy
Computer talking toy
Several perfume sprayer bottles
Several ladies' wigs on Styrofoam heads
Assorted other toys
Several pair of animal slippers
A dozen or more toy Nerf balls of assorted sizes, in a large container or basket
Chic purse with long straps
Stuffed dog
Clipboard
Binoculars
Large feather
Several dollar bills
A kazoo
Several spray perfume bottles
Bottle of aspirin

COSTUMES

NOTE: Costumes can be as simple as suggestive as merely a stovepipe hat for Lincoln, or as complex as full period clothing, depending on your ambitions. Also note that some costuming will obviously be based on the gender you choose for a given role. So consider the following list as simple a set of guidelines.

DR. JILL	Pants suit or other tailored, conservative dress
JUDGE FUDGE	Judge's robe, white shirt, tie
SHEILA	Loud, trendy clothes and sunglasses
SECRE-TERRY	Very faddish with cheap jewelry
CLEOPATRA	White toga-like dress with diamond earrings, necklace and sandals
DR. JACK	Lab coat, glasses, loosened tie, ruffled shirt, black pants, goggles
CALAMITY JANE	Cowboy hat, holsters, western shirt, blue jeans, boots
HERCULES	"Muscle costume" or filler under t-shirt and shorts with sandals
ABRAHAM LINCOLN	Stovepipe hat, beard, black suit with bow tie
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE	Wig, tuxedo-like garb with knickers, perhaps reading glasses
MARIE ANTOINETTE	Queenly dress, tiara, necklace and long white gloves
FRIEDA	Comfortable, modern garb
WILLY	Comfortable, modern garb
PATIENT #1, #2	Comfortable, modern garb

THREE ATTENDANTS	Sleeveless shirts over satin-looking knickers and sandals
ALISHA	Smart looking, comfortable clothes
ELIZABETH	Smart looking, comfortable
JUDY GARLAND	Simple dress (perhaps checkered),
OFFICERS #1 and #2	Standard police wear, no guns

OTHER FAMOUS PEOPLE / OPTIONS

THREE ANDREW SISTERS	Conservative dresses, lots of make up, hair-up
ISADORA DUNCAN	Ballerina garb
CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS	Trademark captain's hat, if possible
AMELIA EARHART	Aviator goggles (swimming goggles can work), shirt, pants

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To Rick, the Blues Group, the rest of our gang at S.T., and the Tuesday afternoon group, with love.

ACT I

SETTING: *Courtroom. The only set suggestion of this is a judge's dais DSR facing the Audience.*

At Rise: *Upstage is semi-dark. We see anywhere from 6-12 people standing in the dark, unrecognizable, murmuring unintelligibly. Lights are up SR. JUDGE FUDGE sits stern-faced behind his table with a gavel. Two POLICE OFFICERS stand DSR of JUDGE.*

JUDGE: Alright let's settle down here! I am Judge Fudge and you will obey me! **(Bangs gavel. ALL hush. JUDGE looks slowly around at the unseen faces in the crowd on stage, reacting with astonishment and bewilderment and frustration. After a few moments of this)** This is quite a scene. Quite a scene. Chaos. It's just chaos and bedlam. I can certainly see why you officers have...er...handled this with care.

OFFICER #1: **(a rookie and nervous)** Thank you, Mr. Fudge, Judge Fudge, my honor...

OFFICER #2: **(aside to OFFICER #1)**...his honor...

OFFICER #1: His honor...

OFFICER #2: No, your honor!

OFFICER #1: My honor?

OFFICER #2: No! Uh... **(to JUDGE)** Judge, this officer here is a rookie so forgive us the, uh, the nerves. Please.

JUDGE: Alright, alright now. Nothing to be nervous about. You've brought a group of people in here that...well frankly that can't possibly be here. What are the charges?

(OFFICERS each pull out a similar pad and paper and read quickly in overlapping style.)

OFFICER #2: We've got your trespassing...

OFFICER #1: ...trespassing, and reckless endanger –

OFFICER #2: ...reckless endangerment, a bunch o' slander and libel...

OFFICER #1: ...*slander* and *libel*, not to mention *resisting* –

TOGETHER: ...*arrest* and *bodily* –

JUDGE: Okay, okay, I get the idea, and I *don't* need it in stereo! Now, is there someone here who can possibly explain to me what in the heck happened today, and how...well how it is possible for these...people to be here, if indeed they *are* here?

(There is murmuring among the onstage actors, then DR. JILL steps out to talk with JUDGE.)

DR. JILL: Oh they're here all right, your honor.

JUDGE: And you are?

DR. JILL: I'm...uh...Dr. Jill Harthberg. I'm a psychiatrist? My, uh, my patients just call me Dr. Jill. Like "Dr. Phil"? They seem to get a kick out of that.

JUDGE: Well the court does not. Now Dr. Jill, can you tell me what this is all about?

DR. JILL: I, uh, I think so, Judge Fudge. ***(pause)*** Do you...do you want me to do that? Now?

JUDGE: I would be *thrilled* if you *would*!

DR. JILL: Well... ***(takes a deep breath)*** ...it all started just four little weeks ago...actually it feels like a year ago...!

(As SHE talks, CROWD recedes off SL. They leave behind them a single rolling chair CS with a pad of paper and a pen on it. The stage is now dark except for a spot on psychiatrist DR. JILL. SHE sits, takes pad of paper and pen, and is taking notes while listening to an unseen voice coming from SL. Depending on your sound system, this may need to be miked.)

ABE LINCOLN: ***(sitting SL, unseen and out of the darkness, talking to DR. JILL in a grumbling, plodding voice with a twang to it)*** ...and so I feel I do not know how to put so much as the next foot forward. Today I stepped off of the stone carpet you call a...uh...

DR. JILL: ***(unseen, responding to him)*** A sidewalk...

ABE LINCOLN: Yes, the side...walk...and a large rolling carriage, moving as fast as any horse I have ever witnessed and bellowing like an out of tune trumpet, crossed my path and knocked me to the ground!

DR. JILL: A taxi! Oh dear...

ABE LINCOLN: Yes, yes! But I...I wasn't hurt. ***(begins to chuckle to himself)***

DR. JILL: Why are you laughing? You could have been killed.

ABE LINCOLN: No. I...the incident put me in mind of a joke that...that that curmudgeon, Stephen Douglas, told me before a certain debate... **(chuckling; HE is not a good joke-teller)** It began, "Why did a *chicken*...cross a *boulevard*?"

(Chuckling increases into hearty laugh. Spotlight up CS as DR. JILL steps into it.)

DR. JILL: **(to audience, sheepishly)** Until recently I didn't have a lot of them. Patients, that is. I'm fresh out of college and...But then I met Jack... **(laughs to herself)** ...my patients refer to *him* as "Jumping Jack" because he's so...jumpy. But he's good. I mean, a good scientist...and a nice guy...and...well... **(takes a deep breath, then, in a rush to get it all out)** ...he invented this sort of time machine only it's not a time machine it's just more of a transporter well he calls it an "elevator" only with a supersonic doohickey that somehow doesn't just go up and down and open and close, but it, well, when it closes it's *empty* but when it opens it's...there's a...well *people* from the *past*, from history, I mean, they uh...they *appear* in this elevator gadget and...

ABE LINCOLN: **(still unseen)** To get to the *other side*!

(LINCOLN stands, steps forward from USL into SPOT still laughing.)

DR. JILL: **(still to audience)** Uh. Well. May I introduce... Abe... Abraham. *President* Abraham. Lincoln. The uh... president.

ABE LINCOLN: **(stops laughing, peers out at audience, astounded that they're there)** Ohhhh...myyyy. I didn't know there would be a constituency here. But perhaps I can make a few opening remarks. **(clearing throat, and removing stove-top hat)** It seems there was this *chicken* and uh the uh... **(chuckles)**...the questions is: *Why* did this, uh, this *chicken*... **(chuckles, and shakes head)**...you see, why did this chicken cross over a certain, uh, thoroughfare? **(chuckles)**

DR. JILL: Uh, Abe would you mind returning to, uh...? **(gestures to USL)** And waiting for the, uh...?

ABE LINCOLN: Ahh, yes, yes of course. I'll, uh...I'll just wait for the group to arrive. **(bows, then meanders USL into the dark, suddenly stops and turns to audience)** To get onto the other side of the avenue! **(roars with laughter, exits)**

DR. JILL: **(to audience again)** Yeah. I know. *Abe Lincoln! The Abe Lincoln.* Wow! Not very good with jokes, you know, but... wow! **(takes deep breath, composes herself)** Now you may be asking,

why is *the* Abe Lincoln *here* in the twenty-first century. You also may be asking, why is he *here* in a psychiatrist's...in *my* office. **(sighs)** Well, you see it all started one day as I was taking my "group" – well, *one* of my groups - you know, my Anger Management and Depression therapy group that meets on Tuesday afternoons? Well no, I guess you wouldn't know. But I was taking them on a tour of the Science and Technology Museum – to work on their socialization skills...and that's...uh *that's* when I, well *we*, ran into Jumping Jack...I mean Dr. Jack James... **(scene starts to create itself SR, members of the group appear as SHE talks about them)** That day, as I recall, Frieda was there...

(FRIEDA, in braids and glasses with an apparently very sunny disposition and smile, enters SR.)

FRIEDA: Hiya, Doctor Jill! I am ready as rain for our trip today! Got my gym shoes on for all that walking! Got my hair done! Brought my binoculars so I could see all the animals! What a great day at the zoo this is going to be!

DR. JILL: That's a wonderful attitude, Frieda. But we're going to the Science and Technology Museum today. Not the zoo.

FRIEDA: **(immediately becomes pouty, hunched, sits down on her haunches upset)** Oh poop! I knew it! Oh poop, poop, POOP! The whole day is shot. Just SHOT!

DR. JILL: And there was Willy...

(WILLY enters shuffling, shy but kind.)

WILLY: Heya, Frieda.

FRIEDA: POOOOOP!

WILLY: No, I just went, thanks.

DR. JILL: And...others in the group. **(A rag tag group of four or more other PATIENTS join JILL and WILLY, DSR, murmuring quietly to each other.)** And there we were, at the museum, when Dr. Jack, well –

(Full lights up on stage. DR. JACK, with wild hair and lab coat, races on from US, very excited and holding a strange gizmo with a long electrical cord that continues offstage)

DR. JACK: **(looking around wildly)** Ooh. OOOHH! I've done it. I've done it! I just need a little help! OOOHH!!

FRIEDA: **(to JACK)** Knock it off, monkey-boy! This isn't a zoo, ya know!

DR. JACK: Ooh! I just -

PATIENT #1: Dr. Jill – this man is YELL-ing!

DR. JILL: Yes, yes, everyone calm down.

PATIENT #1: **(writing on a pad, and shaking head)** Using his “loud voice”, that’s minus *ten* points.

DR. JILL: **(to JACK)** Can I help you with –

DR. JACK: Yes! I need your help! Quick!

WILLY: Like, *she’s a doctor*. “Help” is, like, her middle name.

DR. JACK: No, no, no! Not “help”, I need *help!*

WILLY: Uh, yeah.

DR. JACK: I’m *this* close to finalizing my time elevator! Do you realize what that means?

FRIEDA: **(raising hand, suddenly ecstatic)** Oh! OH! It means you’re building this *time elevator* and you’re, well, you’re very close?! Am I right? Am I?!!

DR. JACK: Exactly!

FRIEDA: **(clapping for herself)** Oh, goodie!

DR. JACK: And I just need a little help, a few assistants to –

PATIENT #2: An elevator? Hey boss, sorry to break it to you but that’s been invented already!

PATIENT #1: Maybe *he’s* Otis the Elevator Man!

(PATIENTS laugh and nudge each other.)

DR. JILL: If you’ll excuse us, we were –

DR. JACK: I’ll pay you each ten bucks!

DR. JILL: No, I’m afraid we can’t -

WILLY: Woah, I’m in.

PATIENT #1: Me too!

PATIENT #2: Count me in.

FRIEDA: It’s probably a rip-off but –

(Other PATIENTS ad lib “I’m in. Sounds good. Wow, ten bucks!”)

DR. JILL: Now wait just a minute. People! Just –

DR. JACK: Good, good! Now quickly, quickly everyone! Come with me! **(Starts heading USL with PATIENTS following him. Starts handing lengths of the long electrical cord to each PATIENT, and perhaps other gizmos, while PATIENTS ad lib)** Here, take this! Hold this. You, grab onto that. Quickly everyone! **(They all exit, leaving DR. JILL standing alone, sheepishly, CS)**

DR. JILL: And *that’s* how I lost my first group...and in a way, how my, uh, current group unofficially began.

CALAMITY JANE: **(offstage, in southern accent)** Heya Abe!

ABE LINCOLN: (*offstage*) Good day to you, Jane. Hello, Cleo.

CLEOPATRA: (*offstage, sensuous voice, with perhaps an Egyptian accent*) Well, hello there, big boy.

DR. JILL: (*calling to offstage*) I'll be there in a minute, group (*to audience*) You see the first group in the museum did help Jack – oh nothing big, holding wires, handing him doohickeys. But by the end, well it was about the time I finally found my group and walked in, that the experiment was ready to run...and, uh, *boy* did it run!

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