

PRIMING THE PUMP

by Mark Bellusci

Copyright © 2003, 2004
by Mark Bellusci
104 Hemlock Drive
Stamford, CT 06902
(203) 363-0070 (Voice)
(203) 363-0072 (Fax)
mark@markbellusci.com

CHARACTERS

PHYLLIS. A Hollywood secretary type.

SOL. A Hollywood producer type.

HOLLINGSWORTH. A well dressed, erudite, reserved black man anywhere from mid-thirties on.

REBECCA. A well dressed, erudite, reserved white woman anywhere from mid-thirties on.

IRENE. A well dressed, erudite, reserved woman of any ethnicity, anywhere from mid-thirties on. She should be somewhat frail and timid.

JIMMY. A well dressed, erudite, reserved man of any ethnicity, anywhere from mid-thirties on.

TIME

Mid afternoon in the present.

SCENE

A tacky office, filled with shlocky, glitzy items. Stage right are two desks, which face five chairs that are stage left -- all are in profile to the audience.

AT RISE

PHYLLIS and SOL are standing by their desks.

PHYLLIS

So, what do you think?

SOL

Ah, who knows.

PHYLLIS

They can't be as bad as the last group.

SOL

You think so.

PHYLLIS
Well jeez, it's just not possible--

SOL
Yeah? When was the last time we had a good group?

PHYLLIS
But--

SOL
So what are --

PHYLLIS
It's just the last group--

SOL
Was the same as the group before that, and the group before that
and the group before--

PHYLLIS
I guess--

SOL
Fact is, there just aren't that many good people left.

PHYLLIS
We used to get such good ones.

SOL
Sure we did. Till we used 'em up.

PHYLLIS
Well I don't know about you, but I can't take much more.

SOL
Tell me about it.

PHYLLIS
I mean, with these people, it's blood from a stone.

SOL
These people, they're so--

PHYLLIS
So--

SOL
I ... I hate to say it -- and don't get me wrong, I'm not
prejudiced or anything -- but these people, they just don't want
to learn.

PHYLLIS
These people.

SOL
These people.

(Pause.)

SOL
(Sighing)
Well, bitching isn't going to change anything, so let's just get it done.

PHYLLIS
(She calls on the intercom.)
Send in the first three.

(In walk REBECCA, HOLLINGSWORTH AND IRENE. They are all well dressed in conservative business suits.)

SOL
(Sotto Voce, to PHYLLIS.)
Geez, another bunch of winners.

PHYLLIS
All right people. listen up. We all know why we're here, so let's try to be as cooperative as possible. Everyone understand?

REBECCA
Sure.

IRENE
Of course.

HOLLINGSWORTH
Seems straightforward enough.

SOL
(Sotto Voce, to PHYLLIS.)
We're in for a long afternoon.

(The following is recited by rote, with PHYLLIS and SOL basically finishing each other's sentences.)

PHYLLIS
So here's the drill. We're going to ask you a few questions, and we'll want good answers.

Damned good answers. SOL

And if we don't like 'em, PHYLLIS

We'll change 'em. SOL

Make 'em better. PHYLLIS

And if you don't like it? SOL

If you think we're too demanding. PHYLLIS

Or too authoritative SOL

Or too embarrassing PHYLLIS

Well, SOL

You know where the door is. PHYLLIS

(The students murmur.)

Excuse me, I don't think-- HOLLINGSWORTH

No, you don't think. SOL

We think. You do. PHYLLIS

Look, there's no need to-- WHITE CHICK

Oh, there's plenty of need. PHYLLIS

You're about the neediest lot I've ever seen. SOL

Hey, there's no call for -- HOLLINGSWORTH

WHITE CHICK

You're not talking to morons--

SOL

Not yet.

PHYLLIS

But with any luck...

REBECCA

(Incredulous.)

What?

SOL

All right, back to work. Don't want to be here all night ...

(Beat.)

PHYLLIS

Well don't just sit there, start interrupting.

HOLLINGSWORTH

What?

SOL

Start whooping--

PHYLLIS

And hollering--

SOL

And woofing--

PHYLLIS

And making dumb comments.

IRENE

Why?

SOL

No thinking, just doing.

REBECCA

What are we supposed to say?

SOL

(To PHYLLIS)
Better make it a remedial course.

PHYLLIS

Individual tutoring?

SOL

Not much choice.

PHYLLIS

(To HOLLINGSWORTH.)
All right. You, black guy.

HOLLINGSWORTH

(Annoyed.)
My name is--

PHYLLIS

Come on up.

HOLLINGSWORTH

My name is--

SOL

Your name is black guy until we call you something else.

HOLLINGSWORTH

I don't need--

SOL

Yes you do, or you wouldn't be here.

(HOLLINGSWORTH reluctantly goes to the front.)

PHYLLIS

Now, what did you do before you were fired?

HOLLINGSWORTH

I wasn't fired, I was laid off--

SOL

Borrerring.

PHYLLIS

Firings are much more intriguing.

HOLLINGSWORTH

But that's not what happened.

SOL

You think we're here to talk about the truth?

PHYLLIS

Now, what job were you *fired* from?

HOLLINGSWORTH
I was vice president at a bank.

SOL
Why'd you get fired?

HOLLINGSWORTH
I got laid off -- uh, "fired" -- because we merged with another bank, and --

(PHYLLIS starts snoring to indicate her boredom.)

SOL
All right, so let's fix it.

PHYLLIS
Hmmm. Man's in a bank --

SOL
Gets fired on the spot.

PHYLLIS
Why?

SOL
He did something--

PHYLLIS
Something wicked.

SOL
Something nasty.

HOLLINGSWORTH
Hey, I have my reputation--

PHYLLIS
Violent?

SOL
Nah, save the violence for the women.

PHYLLIS
Idiotic?

SOL
Got too many idiots already.

PHYLLIS
Perverted?

HOLLINGSWORTH

Perverted?!

SOL
Perverted. Hmmmm. Perverted in a bank. Now you got something.

PHYLLIS
What did he do?

SOL
And with whom?

HOLLINGSWORTH
What are you--

PHYLLIS
A young girl teller?

SOL
A young boy teller?

PHYLLIS
Both?

HOLLINGSWORTH
You're both out of your--

SOL
Hey, what if we keep this guy solo? I mean, the affair with an under-ager is always big, but I think we could do something special here.

PHYLLIS
You mean, a Pee Wee Hermanism?

HOLLINGSWORTH
A what?

PHYLLIS
A perverted act that stays in our minds forever.

HOLLINGSWORTH
Hey, I'm not--

PHYLLIS
Okay, okay. So what --

SOL
So here's our guy, in a bank: quiet, reserved, a family man. But he has this thing -- this, this fetish.

(Next two lines are said simultaneously.)

PHYLLIS
I'm with you --

HOLLINGSWORTH

I don't have --

SOL

This fetish, it's gotta do with money

PHYLLIS

Sure, sure--

SOL

And what he does with this money, he--

PHYLLIS

Rolling in the dough!

SOL

Hmm?

PHYLLIS

He gets his rocks off by rolling in the dough.

SOL

Ahhhh!

HOLLINGSWORTH

I will never--

PHYLLIS

See, he goes into the safe deposit vault after hours, he lays all the money on the floor.

SOL

Then he gets totally naked.

PHYLLIS

No, not naked. He strips down to a ... a diaper.

SOL

A diaper?

PHYLLIS

A diaper.

SOL

A diaper!

HOLLINGSWORTH

If you think--

PHYLLIS

And then, he -- he covers himself with honey, and -- stay with me here -- he dives into the money, where he --

SOL
He squeals like a pig in --

PHYLLIS
Ooooooh.

HOLLINGSWORTH
(Shocked, almost faint.)
Ohhhh.

SOL
Then he takes a shower at the corporate gym and goes home. Bing bang boom, nobody knows nothing.

HOLLINGSWORTH
Oh no, please--

PHYLLIS
Okay. Okay and the -- the guilt of it all makes him confess--
-

SOL
Confess? Who confesses anymore?

PHYLLIS
So how does he get caught?

SOL
The old secret video camera.

(The following 2 lines are said simultaneously.)

PHYLLIS
Ahhhhh--

HOLLINGSWORTH
You can't tape--

SOL
It was set up in the vault after the bank got suspicious when customers complained their money was ... attracting bees!

PHYLLIS
Genius. Pure genius!

HOLLINGSWORTH
(Looking to the heavens.)
What did I do wrong?

SOL
(To PHYLLIS.)
We still got those Depends?

PHYLLIS

In the props room.

SOL

Go.

HOLLINGSWORTH

I am not --

SOL

You don't, there's a million who will.

HOLLINGSWORTH

But why--

PHYLLIS

Because that's the business, sweetie.

HOLLINGSWORTH

I'm ... I'll--

SOL

Show him the dressing room. And get the monopoly money and the grainy black-and-white surveillance tape. We got honey?

PHYLLIS

Left over from the lesbian midget mud wrestling match.

SOL

Get it.

(They start to walk off).

SOL

Hey, wait a minute. Scream in ecstasy.

HOLLINGSWORTH

Don't make me--

SOL

Come on, come on!

HOLLINGSWORTH

(Listlessly.)
Ooooh. Ahh.

SOL

I said ecstasy, not excrement. And wiggle around a bit.

HOLLINGSWORTH

(He does so, listlessly.)
Ooooh. Ahhhhh!

SOL

Work on it.

(PHYLLIS escorts him offstage, then PHYLLIS returns.)

SOL

All right, sloppy white chick--

REBECCA

WHAT?--

PHYLLIS

Come on.

REBECCA

How dare you--

SOL

(To PHYLLIS)

They never learn, do they?

PHYLLIS

Get with the program, honey.

(She hesitates, then reluctantly goes forward.)

SOL

Whoa whoa whoa, the hell kind of outfit is that?

REBECCA

I have worn this suit to corporate meetings--

SOL

(To PHYLLIS)

They still think they're in the boardroom.

(To REBECCA)

All right, what did you do before?

REBECCA

I was the top salesperson for typography services--

SOL

And when that dead industry makes a miraculous recovery, you can wear that. In the meantime--

(To PHYLLIS)

get her the end-of-the-line ensemble.

(PHYLLIS goes offstage to get the clothing.)

REBECCA

(Scared.)

What exactly is--

SOL

(He yells offstage.)

And set her up with a beer and barbecued ribs --

REBECCA

Oh, that's okay, I'm a vegetarian.

SOL

Who cares?

(He yells offstage to PHYLLIS.)
And no napkins!

REBECCA

Who do you think I am?

SOL

We'll work on that later.

(PHYLLIS returns with clothing and hands them to REBECCA,
who reluctantly goes offstage to change.)

SOL

Okay, Puerto Rican chick.

(They look to IRENE, who does not acknowledge them because
she's is looking for this Puerto Rican woman of whom they
speak. Finally, she notices them staring at her.)

IRENE

Who, me-- oh no, I'm not Puerto Rican, I'm part English, part
Indian, part Italian. I'm a laid off librarian from--

SOL

You're Puerto Rican now.

IRENE

Excuse me--

PHYLLIS

No no no. You said that wrong.

IRENE

What?

PHYLLIS

Say:

(With bad Spanish accent.)
"Ekk-cuuuuse me."

IRENE

I'm not doing some cheap, fake --

PHYLLIS

And when you say it, shake your finger with one hand, and put your
other hand on your hip. Like this.

(SHE demonstrates.)

SOL

You have kids?

IRENE

No.

SOL

You got 'em now.

(To PHYLLIS)

Call Rent-a-Tot. See if they can get us five kids, all under five.

PHYLLIS

You got it.

SOL

And get her the ethnic ensemble.

PHYLLIS

Uh huh.

SOL

All right. Now honey, when you get into the outfit, you become Estrella Sanchez Ruiz Cordonez.

IRENE

What--

SOL

And those five kids? You got them from five different fathers. And the last one, you claim is from our diaper-wearing money pervert.

IRENE

Oh my God.

(PHYLLIS returns.)

PHYLLIS

Kids on the way, clothes in the back.

SOL

Good. Estrella?

IRENE

But my family, when they see--

PHYLLIS

They won't even recognize you.

IRENE

Can't I just--

SOL

Let's go, go, go.

(She goes offstage. HOLLINGSWORTH returns wearing a diaper and REBECCA returns wearing stretch pants and a stained DisneyWorld tee-shirt. She is holding ribs and has barbecue sauce all over her hands and face.)

PHYLLIS

Hmmm, may be hope for this group yet.

SOL

(A revelation.)

All right, it's coming to me.

PHYLLIS

(She pulls out a notebook.)

Go.

SOL

So these two are married.

PHYLLIS

Yeah?

SOL

But not officially married. Common law.

PHYLLIS

Of course.

SOL

And he's impotent with her.

(HOLLINGSWORTH groans.)

PHYLLIS

You mean, impotent, like a limp noodle in his shorts? Or im-potent like "I's a im-poh-tent main?"

SOL

The limp noodle variety.

(To HOLLINGSWORTH.)

But not because she's a slob -- you like them that way. It's because you love your money so much.

(To PHYLLIS)

You getting all this?

PHYLLIS

(Writing.)

As fast as I can. Mm. Hmm. Hey, how about

(With fanfare.)

"He dumped her for funny honey money."

SOL

That's a keeper.

Can I ask--

HOLLINGSWORTH

"Axe."

PHYLLIS

What?

HOLLINGSWORTH

Don't "ask" me. "Axe" me.

PHYLLIS

But that's not how I speak.

HOLLINGSWORTH

It is now.

SOL

That's racist.

HOLLINGSWORTH

That's ratings.

SOL

All right, can I ask -- axe -- why you're doing this?

HOLLINGSWORTH

Not "why are we doing." "Why we *be* doing."

PHYLLIS

Then why you *be* doing this?

HOLLINGSWORTH

That *be* the job, baby. You want to get paid, give us something we can sell.

SOL

This ain't --

PHYLLIS

Isn't

HOLLINGSWORTH

Ain't no charity we're running.

PHYLLIS

All right, so you *be* impotent. With her. Because you loves the funny honey money.

SOL

Say it.

PHYLLIS

HOLLINGSWORTH

I love money.

PHYLLIS

Noooo. "Ah loves ta squeam in da green!"

HOLLINGSWORTH

(Listlessly.)

"I loves to squeam in the green."

PHYLLIS

"You hear what I'm sayingggggg?"

HOLLINGSWORTH

Yes.

PHYLLIS

Nooo. That's what you say.

HOLLINGSWORTH

(Listlessly again.)

"You hear what I'm saying?"

PHYLLIS

We'll ... work on it.

SOL

So you're not giving her the goods and she's pissed.

PHYLLIS

(To REBECCA.)

Now you say, "A hot little momma like me needs her good thang.

SOL

And when you say it, put your hands behind your head and shake it.
(He demonstrates.)

(IRENE listlessly returns wearing a slinky orange tube top, pumps and a lime green mini skirt. She is wheeling a stroller.)

SOL

Whoa! Now that's what I'm talking about.

IRENE

I feel ridiculous.

SOL

You look wonderful.

PHYLLIS

So you claim that kid is the son of Diaper Boy, here. But Diaper boy says the only people he's been sleeping with are George Washington, Abe Lincoln and a bunch of other dead presidents.

IRENE

I knew I should've taken that air conditioning repair course.

HOLLINGSWORTH

At least you get to wear grown-up clothes.

SOL

Now you're pissed. You use that Latino temper--

PHYLLIS

Say, "Wha jew talking 'bout, mang?"

IRENE

What are you talking about, man--

PHYLLIS

No no no. The finger, the hips, remember?

IRENE

(She listlessly puts it all together.)
"Wha jew talking 'bout, mang?"

SOL

Ooooochee Mamma.

PHYLLIS

(To REBECCA)
Now you don't believe her.

SOL

So what you do is: first, take a nice big bite of a rib, and smear it around good.

(WHITE CHICK does so reluctantly.)

PHYLLIS

Now, you come up to her. You say, "Why would he settle for greasy dark meat, when he's got choice white meat right here?"

(Both women object violently.)

SOL

Save it for the performance!

(To IRENE)

Now this gets your Latino blood up.

IRENE

No--

PHYLLIS

You say, "Who Jew talkeeng to like that, jew trailer trash tramp."

IRENE

(Sighs, then speaks listlessly.)

"Who Jew talkeeng to like that--

PHYLLIS

The hips! The finger!

IRENE

"Jew trailer trash tramp."

SOL

(To REBECCA.)

Now you push her away.

(She does so, listlessly.)

PHYLLIS

(To IRENE)

Then you steal her rib.

(She does so.)

SOL

Now the mandatory fight. White, make sure to pull her top down.

IRENE

I am not going topless on --

PHYLLIS

Don't worry, we'll put the black bar over them ... till the video comes out.

(To SOL.)

Should we have diaper boy get in the middle of it?

SOL

Yeah -- No. No, let's --

(To HOLLINGSWORTH.)

While they're fighting, I want you to pull a dollar from your diaper, and rub yourself with it.

HOLLINGSWORTH

Please don't make me--

PHYLLIS

Okay, he's playing with his money and the women are fighting. Stage hands break up the fight and take the dollar away. Then what?

(The three participants whimper and try to comfort each other.)

SOL

We need a closing.

Exactly. PHYLLIS

A -- SOL

A kicker. PHYLLIS

We got anybody left out there? SOL

One more laid off middle manager. PHYLLIS

Get him. SOL

(PHYLLIS runs offstage. SOL addresses the rest.)

SOL
So here's the schedule. You start with the Sally Jessy Rafael Show. Week after that, Montel Williams. Then the Broadway of sleaze shows, Jerry Springer. Then--

HOLLINGSWORTH
Our lives are over.

SOL
Then you come in, switch roles, adjust perversions, and start all over.

(PHYLLIS returns with JIMMY.)

PHYLLIS
His name is Jimmy.

JIMMY
It's James Mac-

SOL
Yeah, yeah, yeah. Phyllis, call the Big & Tall He/She shop.

Gotcha.

PHYLLIS

Tell them we want a sultry negligee for a guy his size.

SOL

No--

JIMMY

You know, bra, falsies--

SOL

I won't--

JIMMY

The works.

SOL

There's no way--

JIMMY

You ever shave your legs?

PHYLLIS

I'm telling you--

JIMMY

Our way or no way.

SOL

You forgot the third way.

JIMMY

(JAMES pulls out a gun. The other middle managers cheer him on.)

REBECCA

Shoot them. Shoot them!

HOLLINGSWORTH

You go, boy.

SOL

But babe, you don't know--

JIMMY

Oh, I do know, because I've been there. Don't you remember me?

SOL

Uhhh--

JIMMY

Let me refresh your memory.
(He barks and howls like a dog.)

SOL

(Happily reminiscing.)

Of course! Episode 432: The fatherless fascist fetishist who fondled his ferret.

JIMMY

I have a father, I'm not a fascist and I've never even seen a ferret.

PHYLLIS

The audience loved it.

JIMMY

My wife left me.

HOLLINGSWORTH

Mine will too when she sees this outfit.

JIMMY

She said no sane person could ever be *that* desperate for a paycheck.

REBECCA

Shoot 'em in the kneecaps!

JIMMY

But the thing is, if we're no longer sane, we don't have to follow your rules.

(The other middle managers now naturally start to fall into their "roles.")

HOLLINGSWORTH

Yeah, we crazy!

IRENE

Loco!

REBECCA

Kill them!

JIMMY

Oh, there's no rush. I don't think they're scared enough.

IRENE

Give 'em a taste, mang.

(JIMMY shoots at SOL and PHYLLIS'S feet They dance to avoid the bullets, and neither is hit. There is a long pause after the gunfire burst, as JIMMY and the other middle managers seemed shocked at what they've done. SOL and PHYLLIS are unfazed. SOL then ponders.)

SOL

You know, it could work.

JIMMY

Who said you could talk?

PHYLLIS

(To SOL, ignoring JIMMY.)
You're right!

JIMMY

Shut up!

SOL

Congratulations, kid. You've made white collar discards exciting enough for daytime talk shows.

JIMMY

I'm not going back--

SOL

Sure you are.

PHYLLIS

But this time as yourself.

IRENE

Please, shoot the gringos!

(JIMMY aims the gun at them.)

SOL

(Laughing.)
Okay, okay, I'm scared already, will ya?

(PHYLLIS does a loud, fake shudder, jokingly pretending to be scared. JIMMY is befuddled and lowers the gun.)

HOLLINGSWORTH

No! No! Don't listen--

IRENE

(Emphasizing each word.)
Turn- away- from- the- voice.

SOL

Man, what a team!

JIMMY

There is no team--

(He threatens by aiming the gun at them.)

I am not here to star in your freak talk shows. I am here to make a point -- maybe the last point I ever make. We devoted our whole lives to reaching the middle. We took paths of hard work and courtesy and following the rules and not making waves, only to find ourselves on dead ends. And now? Now we're just scrap heap. Human detritus in a middle manager junkyard. Well, let me tell you something: when you throw something out, you better make sure it's not combustible. Because what seemed like a tidy disposal can blow up right in your face.

(Pause. Then, SOL and PHYLLIS applaud.)

SOL

Brilliant!--

PHYLLIS

Wonderful!--

JIMMY

You're not listening--

SOL

Did you write that yourself?

JIMMY

Shut up--

SOL

Can you do it again on Ricki Lake?

JIMMY

(Tensing to shoot.)

You forced me to --

(Wavers, then slowly lowers the gun.)

Ricki Lake?

SOL

Next week. Nationwide.

JIMMY

You didn't say anything about Ricki Lake.

PHYLLIS

And that's just the start of it.

SOL

You'll be a talk show star -- as yourself.

PHYLLIS

The middle manager--

SOL

And his magnum.

IRENE

Oy me con Dios, look what they're doing--

REBECCA

TURN- AWAY- FROM- THE- VOICE!

SOL

And you'll all be on with him.

PHYLLIS

His posse!

(Beat as they consider it.)

JIMMY

But I get top billing!

SOL

Of course!

PHYLLIS

And you can all go back to your dull business suits.

(Beat, then slowly, there are murmurs of agreement.)

REBECCA

But ... why do we have to back him up? We're just as crazy as he is --

JIMMY

Yeah, but I brought the gun.

REBECCA

But--

SOL

Look, the backup thing doesn't have to be permanent.

PHYLLIS

Haven't you ever heard of spin-offs?

SOL

A few shows as backup, then whammo! You do something outrageous on your own -- like showing your hooters.

PHYLLIS

Then you'll be the star.

HOLLINGSWORTH

Regular paycheck?

SOL

Every week. More than you'd ever make from the bank.

IRENE

Then let's get it on, mang.

(She starts wiggling out of her top, while the other managers start woofing like a true talk show audience. SOL & PHYLLIS stop her before she goes too far.)

PHYLLIS

Whoa Whoa Whoa. Save it for the real thing.

HOLLINGSWORTH

I'll speak in tongues.

REBECCA

I'll tongue a Chihuahua.

IRENE

I'll moon the audience.

JIMMY

I'll *shoot* the audience.

SOL

NOW! Now we got a show!

PHYLLIS

All right people, save that energy for the performances. You can all get dressed now.

SOL

See the secretary on the way out. She'll give you show assignments.

PHYLLIS

And remember. You are no longer chronically unemployed middle managers, you are gainfully employed daytime TV trash stars.

(They cheer as they exit the stage. There is a pause as the two watch the exiting new stars. SOL wipes tears from his eyes. PHYLLIS then notices.)

PHYLLIS

Sol? Sol? You --

SOL

I'm fine. It's just -- I don't know --

PHYLLIS

What?

SOL

Just ... just when you think there's nothing left. That you've been in this business too long. That you can no longer turn these dull, gray protoplasms into real people. Just when you think all that, out of the blue you get a group like this. It's like that great daytime talk show host in the sky saying, "It's a special episode of life today, kid."

(He breaks down in tears. They hug.)

SOL

All right, enough of the love thing. Who's next?

(They slowly start walking offstage. Dialog continues until they get offstage.)

PHYLLIS

A bunch of nuns raising money for starving kids in ... some Godforsaken country.

SOL

Okay, here's what I want: Set up a mud wrestling ring -- no, better make it Jell-O -- cleaner for the nuns -- then tell 'em to get into their nun bikinis....

(They exit.)

END