

ACT 2

DR. PECKSNIFF'S office, the following morning. MRS. FLAGG is reclining on the chaise-longue, her handbag in her lap. Next to her is the small table, on top of which has been placed an upturned cardboard box. On the floor near her feet is a black leather holdall.

As the lights come up, DR. PECKSNIFF is found leaning back against the front of his desk, already in full discourse.

PECKSNIFF

And so, as you can see, Mrs. F., in order for us to stem the rampant excesses of your sexual drive mechanism, it is necessary to employ the use of a process that we in the medical community refer to as aversion therapy. In this process, the patient – you – is repeatedly exposed to a melange of experience that relate directly to his or her particular abnormality, whilst simultaneously receiving a carefully monitored degree of painful or discomfoting stimuli, thus neutralizing the offending evil by nature of the equation.

MRS. FLAGG

I see. Well, you certainly seem to know your onions, Doctor, I'll say that.

PECKSNIFF

(Insidiously.)

Onions? Why, you flatter me, Mrs. F. I'm surely not deserving of such superlatives?

MRS. FLAGG

The point is though, Doctor, when all's said and done, what does it all mean?

PECKSNIFF

Ah! Of course – you don't understand. How insensitive of me. You must think me quite the vulgarian, Mrs. F., flouncing around here, lording my vastly superior intellect all over you. I feel flushed with shame. Ah, well... 'Humanum est errare', I suppose.

MRS. FLAGG

Sorry?

To err is human. PECKSNIFF

Sorry, not with you? MRS. FLAGG

Over your head? PECKSNIFF

What is? MRS. FLAGG

(MRS. FLAGG begins swiping at the air above her head.)

Now, to continue— PECKSNIFF

A fly? MRS. FLAGG

...you were expressing some confusion as to the practical ramifications of my rather impressive dictum. PECKSNIFF

Your what? MRS. FLAGG

My dictum, Mrs. F., dictum. My modus operandi, my plan of action. PECKSNIFF

Oh, yes. MRS. FLAGG

(As he approaches her.) PECKSNIFF
What, you may ask yourself, is propagating in that catacomb of knowledge...

(Tapping his head.)
...that living, breathing think-tank of ingenuity? What could it be? What?
(Beat.)

Well, Mrs. F., the wait is almost over.
(Becoming buoyant.)

You will soon be a witness to one of the greatest achievements ever to have been introduced into the field of psychiatric medicine! A breakthrough, Mrs. F.! A giant leap forward! A technological miracle!

MRS. FLAGG

Ooh, I say!

PECKSNIFF

(Almost beside himself.)

Yes, Mrs. F.! Rejoice! Rejoice! Share the excitement! Feel the wonder! Medical history in our midst! Right here!

(PECKSNIFF points to the cardboard box.)

MRS. FLAGG

Saints be praised!

PECKSNIFF

(With grave assertion.)

And only I could have created it, Mrs. F. Only from a mind breathtaking in both magnitude and scope could such staggering results have been accomplished. Think of it – your life’s most profound and perplexing dilemma laid waste by the sheer beauty of simplicity.

MRS. FLAGG

Oh, Doctor, you’re a marvel! Let me see it! What is it?

(MRS. FLAGG reaches for the box.)

PECKSNIFF

Not yet! Wait!

(Beat.)

Something is missing. Something is wrong. What is it, Mrs. F.?

(He puts his finger to his temple, affectedly.)

What could it be? What?

MRS. FLAGG

(At a loss.)

I don’t know?

PECKSNIFF

Think, Mrs. F., think!

MRS. FLAGG

Mmmmm...

PECKSNIFF

Ah! I have it!

MRS. FLAGG

What?

PECKSNIFF

My fee!

MRS. FLAGG

Oh...yes, of course.

PECKSNIFF

Well?

MRS. FLAGG

(Pointing to the holdall.)
It's in that bag.

PECKSNIFF

All of it?

MRS. FLAGG

(Indignant.)
Certainly all of it. I'm not asking for tick. It's all up-front, like we agreed.

PECKSNIFF

Splendid, Mrs. F., splendid! I can sense our relationship reaching a new plateau. A higher, more ennobled plane of understanding.

MRS. FLAGG

Why else do you think the bag's so big? It's jam-packed with medical expenses.

PECKSNIFF

Then we shall proceed in complete accordance. But one final request, Mrs. F., before we do.

MRS. FLAGG

What's that?

PECKSNIFF

That you trust me implicitly; that you put your complete faith in my ability to lead you from the brink of total moral degeneration – to purge the vile contagion that festers within you. Without this assurance I fear that you may fall victim to your own sense of inadequacy – buckle to the overwhelming miracle of science!

MRS. FLAGG

Doctor, rest assured – my confidence in you is rock solid, without doubt.

PECKSNIFF

Very well, then. I think it is time.

(With great sense of occasion.)

The moment has arrived, my dear lady – prepare yourself to be astonished! Here is your key to freedom!

(He lifts the box.)

MRS. FLAGG

(With a shriek.)

Urghh! It's a vibrator!

PECKSNIFF

(Enraged.)

Don't be ridiculous! Of course it isn't a vibrator!

MRS. FLAGG

Yes it is! It's a dirty, filthy vibrator – with a piece of wire wrapped-round it!

PECKSNIFF

(Emphatically.)

It is not a vibrator! Really, Mrs. Flagg, I would have hoped for a little more delicacy and appreciation from a woman of your standing!

MRS. FLAGG

(Turning away.)

It's disgusting!

PECKSNIFF

It is neither disgusting, nor a vibrator! It is...an electrically charged...synthetic rubber...penile formulation...specifically designed for the purpose of treating libidinal profusion.

MRS. FLAGG

Well, it certainly looks like a vibrator.

PECKSNIFF

Well, it isn't. This...scientifically formulated...response neutraliser is the culmination of a lifetimes research and development, and, as such, represents a powerful ally in our treatment of your affliction.

MRS. FLAGG

And what's that next to it? Looks like a car battery!

PECKSNIFF

Of course it isn't a car battery!

MRS. FLAGG

Well, what is it, then?

PECKSNIFF

It's a...multiple power cell...resource conductor.

MRS. FLAGG

A what?

PECKSNIFF

A highly complex piece of hardware, Mrs. F., and it would take far too long to explain its workings. Now, I really must ask you to apply a little more dedication to the task at hand. This is hardly an appropriate time for tasteless commentaries.

(PECKSNIFF removes his spectacles and begins to polish them with his tie.)

MRS. FLAGG

I'm sorry, Doctor, I was just – surprised, I suppose. It's...an unusual looking thing. Not quite what I was expecting.

PECKSNIFF

(Replacing his spectacles.)

Seldom in life ever is, Mrs. F., but we must transcend. Now, perhaps we can continue with the treatment. I trust you brought the requested literature of choice?

MRS. FLAGG

Yes, I did. Now, where did I put it?

(Rummaging through her handbag.)

Oh, here it is! It's the latest from Antonia Thornbush – you said to bring a favourite.

PECKSNIFF

(Superciliously.)

Antonia Thornbush?

MRS. FLAGG

Yes, have you read her? She's very gifted. Some favour Miriam Floodgate, but I don't think so. I don't think she has quite the same touch.

PECKSNIFF

I must confess to being unfamiliar with the works of Ms. Thornbush.

(Smiling, insolently.)

Plainly a loophole in Saint Augustine's undergraduate curriculum.

PECKSNIFF (Cont'd.)

(Taking the book and reading the title aloud.)
“In Awe of His Prominence.”

MRS. FLAGG

Yes. It's very moving. It's the tempestuous tale of a poor young servant girl torn between her strict Christian morals and the eye-catching attributes of her upper-crust employer, Lord Mastodon.

PECKSNIFF

It sounds ideal.

MRS. FLAGG

Well, I've read just about everything by Ms. Thornbush, but I'd say this one's by far her best. It really puts you in the moment.

PECKSNIFF

Perfect!

(Flicking a switch by the side of the battery.)
Say farewell to self-disgust, Mrs. F. – sanctity is on its way!

MRS. FLAGG

Oh, I do hope so, Doctor.

PECKSNIFF

(Moving back to his desk.)
Faith, Mrs. F., is all that is required.
(From behind the desk he produces a large megaphone.)
Just do as I say and hallowed shall be thy name. Now, please place your hand near the penis.

(Hesitantly, MRS. FLAGG places her hand on the edge of the table.)

MRS. FLAGG

Like this?

PECKSNIFF

Precisely.

(Polishing the megaphone's mouthpiece.)
Now, I must ask you to relax and do exactly as I tell you.

MRS. FLAGG

I see.

(Indicating the megaphone.)
And what's that when it's at home, then?

PECKSNIFF

This? A megaphone, of course. What did you think it was? Now, please, no more questions.

(Leaning against the front of the desk, PECKSNIFF studiously peruses the book. Lost in thought, and evidently growing more accustomed to its presence, MRS. FLAGG stares curiously at the contraption. Pause.)

MRS. FLAGG

Funny, really, isn't it?

PECKSNIFF

(Without looking up, a little impatient.)

What?

MRS. FLAGG

Life.

PECKSNIFF

Shh! I must have quiet.

(Both are silent as PECKSNIFF skims through the pages of the book.)

PECKSNIFF

Absolutely astonishing...

MRS. FLAGG

You see, I told you.

PECKSNIFF

...A flimsy premise, barely a semblance of a plot, with characters that are little more than sketched out caricatures, and yet...so many seduced by its cheap, torrid allure.

MRS. FLAGG

I knew you'd like it once you took a peek.

(PECKSNIFF continues to peruse the book.)

PECKSNIFF

Let me see...Ah, yes, here we are!

(Looking up.)

Are we ready, Mrs. F.?

MRS. FLAGG

Yes, I think so.

PECKSNIFF

Very well. Empty your mind to all but the sound of my voice

(MRS. FLAGG reclines a little further on the chaise-longue, tucking in her dress as she does so. Clearing his throat and putting the megaphone to his mouth, PECKSNIFF, in full voice, begins to pace the room reading a passage from the book, investing it with full theatrical verve and intensity.)

PECKSNIFF

“...and though a thrill of pleasure shot through her taut, ripe flesh, Jasmine knew she could allow his hand no further...”

MRS. FLAGG

(To herself.)

Ooh! The best part.

PECKSNIFF

(Continuing.)

“ ‘This must not be!’ she pleaded, her voice somewhat lacking conviction, and in a tone so hoarse and guttural that she did not recognise it as her own. ‘ ‘Tis sinful folly, my Lord, and will surely provoke the wrath of the Almighty.’ ”

“ ‘But at that moment it was clearly Lord Mastodon, not the Heavenly Father, who had been provoked. His hand, with willful impropriety, continued its quest along her trim, young thighs...’ ”

MRS. FLAGG

(In a low murmur.)

Ooh...

PECKSNIFF

“ ‘Lord Mastodon, you cannot, you must not!’ she implored, her voice ever more urgent and rasping. ‘I beg of you,’ she continued, ‘Restrain yourself. I am young and foolish, ‘tis true, but not so simple that I do not know the purpose of your finger prods.’ ”

“ ‘But his hand, brusque of manner, was unrelenting...’ ”

MRS. FLAGG

Mmm!

PECKSNIFF

(Moving around the room, embellishing the text with great zeal.)
“Again and again his index finger would poke and prod at the very core of her faith. Time after time she was forced to repel the delicious thrills that surged from within, all the while knowing her resistance was but a hairs breadth from total collapse.”

MRS. FLAGG

Oh, God!

PECKSNIFF

“Then, in a moment of sheer bravura, Lord Mastodon reared before her and unleashed a weapon of such magnificent persuasion that she knew the eye of defeat was upon her...”

MRS. FLAGG

(Trembling.)
Yes!

PECKSNIFF

(Voice booming, the megaphone pointed directly at her.)
“This was no meek appendage to be humbled by a fig leaf. This was a monumental organ that answered to none but itself!”

MRS. FLAGG

(Exultant.)
Oh, God, yes!

PECKSNIFF

(Wrenching the megaphone from his mouth.)
Now! Touch the penis, Mrs. F.! Touch it! Touch it now!

MRS. FLAGG

Yes!

(As her hand makes contact with the vibrator, a loud electrical charge zaps from the device, causing her to recoil sharply.)

MRS. FLAGG

Arghh!

PECKSNIFF

Yes, Mrs. F., be strong! Show it how strong you are!
(Putting the megaphone back to his mouth, he continues from the book.)
“As he stood before her, proud and majestic, a look of wonder spread across her flushed complexion. ‘This,’ she thought, ‘This graven image that now beckons me is

PECKSNIFF (Cont'd.)

too powerful to resist.' Then, as if conscious of her weakening resolve, the vision began to bob and weave through the air, thrashing to-and-fro with impatience..."

MRS. FLAGG

Oh, Lord!

PECKSNIFF

" 'Come to me, Jasmine,' it seemed to be saying, 'Sooth my restless yearning.' "

MRS. FLAGG

(With urgency.)

Yes, Jasmine, yes!

PECKSNIFF

"Obediently she rose to face her captor. Her hands, small and winsome, clasped the full girth of his wayward grandeur and began, slowly and rhythmically, to pay their fleshy homage."

MRS. FLAGG

Oh, yes!

PECKSNIFF

(Snatching the megaphone from his mouth.)

Touch the penis, Mrs. F.! Go on – touch it!

MRS. FLAGG

Yes...

(She starts to reach out her hand.)

No!

PECKSNIFF

Don't be a fool! Touch it now! Touch it and show it you're not afraid!

MRS. FLAGG

Yes – I – I'm not afraid.

(She touches the device.)

ARGHH!

PECKSNIFF

(Agitated.)

Again, Mrs. F.! Touch it again!

MRS. FLAGG

I can't!

PECKSNIFF

Of course you can! Be firm with it! You want to touch it! Repeat, “I can and I will.”

MRS. FLAGG

I...I...

(She touches it.)

ARGHH!

PECKSNIFF

(Ecstatic.)

Splendid!

(Continuing with the megaphone.)

“ ‘Lay back, Jasmine,’ cried Lord Mastodon, his heritage now primed and juicy, ‘Let me thrall thee with my magnitude.’ ”

MRS. FLAGG

Mmm!

PECKSNIFF

“ ‘My Lord, you must not!’ cried she, feverishly. But her actions betrayed her. Instinctively she reclined into the soft warm hay of the stable and hoist her skirt.”

MRS. FLAGG

Oo!

PECKSNIFF

“Her legs, with a swift, caliper-like motion, parted themselves in readiness. The smell of defeat wafted by her nostrils – the curious, bittersweet odour of heathen secretions. ‘Forgive me, Father,’ she gasped, tugging at the strings of her bodice, ‘The temptation is too strong.’ ”

“And there he was, crouched above her in all his Herculean splendour, his handsome gland now swollen to equestrian proportions.”

MRS. FLAGG

(With a shudder.)

Oh-dear-God!

PECKSNIFF

“Jasmine, moist and frenzied, could wait no more. ‘Now!’ she begged, ‘Run me through! Ply me with thy shaft of might! Enter me! Have me! Erupt in me!’ ”

MRS. FLAGG

Yes! Yes! Yes!

PECKSNIFF

(Lowering the megaphone.)
Yes, now touch the penis!

MRS. FLAGG

Oh, yes, the...No! No, I can't!

PECKSNIFF

Nonsense! There's no such word. Now touch it!

MRS. FLAGG

(Protesting.)
But it hurts!

PECKSNIFF

(With fanatical insistence.)
Of course it hurts! Show any sign of fear or weakness and it can sense it in a second. It's cunning is formidable. But you are stronger, Mrs. F. Look the beast in the eye, grasp it firmly by the neck, and say "I am a lady, sir!"

(MRS. FLAGG hesitates.)

PECKSNIFF

Go on! Say it!

MRS. FLAGG

I...I...

PECKSNIFF

(Maniacally.)
Do it!

(Sounds of a commotion are heard, off.)

MISS CHIVERS

(Off.)
No, I really must insist. The Doctor's busy. You'll have to make an appoint-

EDWIN

(Off.)
Out of my way! I've a right to see him this instant!

PECKSNIFF

(Hysterical.)
Say it! Do it!