Hester
There's so many things we need. Food. New shoes. A regular dinner
with meat and salad and bread.

Reverend D.
I should give you some money right now. As a promise to you that I'll
keep my word. But I'm short of cash.

Hester
Oh.

Reverend D.
Come back in 2 days. Late, I'll have some then.

Hester
You don't got no food or nothing do ya?

Reverend D.
Come back in 2 days. Not early. Late. And a word to no one. Okay?

Hester
-K.

Reverend D.
Hester
Reverend D.
Hester
(Rest)
Reverend D.
You better go.

Hester enters.

Welfare
Where's your mommic?

Beauty
Inside.

Jabber
Mommie! Welfares here.

Welfare
Thank you.

Hester
You all go inside.

Welfare
Hands clean?

Hester
Yes, Maam.

Welfare
Wash them again.

Hester washes her hands again. Dries them.

Welfare
The welfare of the world.

Hester
Maam?

Welfare
Come on over, come on.

Hester stands behind Welfare, giving her a shoulder rub.

Welfare
The welfare of the world weighs on these shoulders, Hester.

(Rest)
We at Welfare are at the end of our rope with you. We put you in a job
and you quit. We put you in a shelter and you walk. We put you in
school and you drop out. Yr children are also truant. Word is they
steal. Stealing is a gateway crime, Hester. Perhaps your young daugh-
ter is pregnant. Who knows. We build bridges you burn them. We sew
safety nets, rub harder, good strong safety nets and you slip through
the weave.
Hester
We was getting by all right, then I dunno, I been tired lately. Like something in me broke.

Welfare
You and yr children live, who knows where.

Hester
Here, Maam, under the Main Bridge.

Welfare
This is not the country, Hester. You cannot simply—live off the land. If yr hungry you go to the shelter and get a hot meal.

Hester
The shelter hassles me. Always prying in my business. Stealing my shit. Touching my kids. We was making ends meet all right then—ends got further apart.

Welfare
“Ends got further apart.” God!
(Rest)
I care because it is my job to care. I am paid to stretch out these hands, Hester. Stretch out these hands. To you.

Hester
I gave you the names of 4 daddys: Jabbers and Bullys and Troubles and Beautys. You was gonna find them. Garnish they wages.

Welfare
No luck as yet but we’re looking. Sometimes these searches take years.

Hester
It’s been years.

Welfare
Lifetime then. Sometimes they take that long. These men of yours, they’re deadbeats. They don’t want to be found. They’re probably all in Mexico wearing false mustaches. Ha ha ha.
(Rest)
What about the newest child?

Hester
Baby.

Welfare
What about “Babys” father?

Hester
—I dunno.

Welfare
Don’t know or don’t remember?

Hester
You think I’m doing it with mens I don’t know?

Welfare
No need to raise your voice no need of that at all. You have to help me help you, Hester.
(Rest)
Run yr fingers through my hair. Go on. Feel it. Silky isn’t it?

Hester
Yes, Maam.

Welfare
Comes from a balanced diet. Three meals a day. Strict adherence to the food pyramid. Money in my pocket, clothes on my back, teeth in my mouth, womanly parts where they should be, hair on my head, husband in my bed.

Hester combs Welfare’s hair.

Welfare
Yr doctor recommends that you get a hysterectomy. Take out yr woman’s parts. A spay.

Hester
Spay.

Welfare
I hope things will come to that. I will do what I can. But you have to help me, Hester.

Hester
((Dont make me hurt you.))

Welfare
What?

Hester
I didn’t mean it. Just slipped out.

Welfare
Remember yr manners. We worked good and hard on yr manners. Remember? Remember that afternoon over at my house? That afternoon with the teacups?

Hester
Manners, Maam?
Welfare
Yes. Manners.

Hester
Welfare

Welfare
Babys daddy. Whats his name?

Hester
You wont find him no how.

Welfare
We could get lucky. He could be right around the corner and I could walk out and there he would be and then we at Welfare would wrestle him to the ground and turn him upside down and let you and yr Baby grab all the money that falls from Deadbeat Daddys pockets. I speak metaphorically. We would garnish his wages.

Hester
How much would that put in my pocket?

Welfare
Depends how much he earns. Maybe 100. Maybe. We take our finders fee. Whats his name?

Hester
I dunno.

Welfare
You dont have to say it out loud. Write it down.

She gives Hester pencil and paper.
Hester writes. Welfare looks at the paper.

Welfare
“A.”

(Rest)
Adam, Andrew, Archie, Arthur, Aloysius, “A” what?

Hester
Looks good dont it?

Welfare
You havent learned yr letters yet, have you?

Hester
I want my leg up is all.

Welfare
You wont get something for nothing.
My dear husband.
The hours he keeps.
The money he brings home.
Our wonderful children.
The vacations we go on.
My dear husband he needed
a little spice.
And I agreed. We both needed spice.
We both hold very demanding jobs.
We put an ad in the paper: “Husband and Bi-Curious Wife, seeking—”
But the women we got:
Hookers. Neurotics. Gold diggers!
“Bring one of those gals home from work,” Hubby said. And Hester,
she came to tea.
(Rest)
She came over and we had tea.
From my mothers china.
And marzipan on matching china plates.
Hubby sat opposite in the recliner
hard as Gibraltar. He told us what he wanted and we did it.
We were his little puppets.
She was surprised, but consented.
Her body is better than mine.
Not a single stretchmark on her.
In a looker too dont get me wrong just in a different way and
Hubby liked the contrast.
Just light petting at first.
Running our hands on each other
then Hubby joined in
and while she and I kissed
Hubby did her and me alternately.
The thrill of—
(Rest)
I was so afraid I’d catch something
but I was swept away and couldn’t stop.
She stuck her tongue down my throat
and Hubby doing his thing on top
my skin shivered.
She let me slap her across the face
and I crossed the line.
(Rest)
I was my first threesome
And it won’t happen again.
And I should emphasize that